



BEOWULF: PART I

CAST

HROTHGAR	<i>King of the Danes</i>
GRENDDEL	<i>Demonic Monster</i>
WARRIOR 1	<i>Hrothgar's Warrior</i>
WARRIOR 2	<i>Hrothgar's Warrior</i>
GUARD	<i>Coastline Guard</i>
BEOWULF	<i>Warrior of Geatland</i>
UNFERTH	<i>Noble of Denmark</i>
WULFGAR	<i>Noble of Denmark</i>
WELTHOW	<i>Queen of the Danes</i>
GEAT 1	<i>Warrior of Beowulf</i>
GEAT 2	<i>Warrior of Beowulf</i>

NARRATOR: In the olden days when men had courage and greatness, Old King Hrothgar of the Ring-Danes built for himself a great hall, covered with gold. It was bigger than any hall men had ever seen and was meant to be a wonder to the world forever.

HROTHGAR: The fortunes of war have favored me. I have drawn many warriors to my tribe. Now we will feast here day after day in this greatest of mead-halls! Behold Heorot!

(cheers from Hrothgar's men)

NARRATOR: Some said that the King named it Heorot or "the Hart" because of the many antlers that hung in the hall. Others said that it was for the massive horn-like gables that resembled those of the stag.

HROTHGAR: In this hall all my warriors are welcome. Its powerful walls will offer you protection from all things that prowl the night. You need never fear again!

(cheers from Hrothgar's men)

NARRATOR: In his golden hall Hrothgar sat on his throne and doled out rings to his loyal warriors. He shared with his men all the good things God had given him. He and his band of brave warriors lived together in peace and joy.

Every day in the hall the harp was struck and the skilled poet sang songs of God's creation of the world. And these sounds carried far. They reached the ears of a powerful demon, a wicked monster, named Grendel. From his den he heard their feasting up in Heorot, and it tormented him to hear them sing of safety and the power of God. Every note and every word was like a wound in Grendel's mind.

GRENDDEL: *(snarling and growling)*

NARRATOR: Grendel was a fiend out of hell—a beast too evil to describe—and he

haunted the moors near Heorot. He came from a brood of cursed creatures.

GRENDDEL: (*growling*) My brothers are ogres, giants, and evil spirits! We are all the descendants of Cain—the one whom God Almighty turned into an outcast. Our forefather dared murder his brother, and we, his children, delight in murder as well. It is in our nature to struggle against God. I am tired of this singing I hear in Heorot—praise to God Almighty. It is time for a new sound to be heard in Hrothgar’s hall! Woe and wailing!

NARRATOR: When the sun was sunken, Grendel set out to visit the lofty hall-building. The Ring-Danes used the hall for beds and benches when the feasting was over. There the monster found many noble warriors reposing, sleeping deep from too much ale.

GRENDDEL: (*hissing*)

NARRATOR: The monster, greedy and cruel, went into his work at once.

GRENDDEL: (*snarling*) Rarr!

NARRATOR: Frantically forced from their slumbers, thirty men were snatched up. (*muffled cries*) The powerful arms of the monster dragged his victims from the hall and devoured them. (*dying sounds from thirty men*)

GRENDDEL: There will be a new song in Heorot now! (*beastly laugh*)

NARRATOR: Grendel, patting his full stomach, returned, leaping and laughing, to his lair.

In the dawning light Grendel’s deeds were revealed to the warriors of Heorot.

WARRIOR 1: Thirty brave warriors are missing. Where have they gone?

NARRATOR: A trail of gore was discovered outside the hall, leading away toward Grendel’s lair. A cry of agony went up, a moan was uplifted, when they saw this. (*cries of sadness*)

WARRIOR 2: It must be that accursed fiend, Grendel! It is said that he prowls the marshes.

WARRIOR 1: Then our comrades are lost for sure! What shall we do, our king?

NARRATOR: But King Hrothgar only stared at Grendel’s trail in deep distress. His sorrow was too crushing for him to speak.

WARRIOR 1: Perhaps this demon has had his fill and will not trouble us again.

NARRATOR: Greedy Grendel did not even give them one night of rest. The next night, in deep darkness, he struck again with more gruesome murders. (*warriors dying*)

WARRIOR 1: Argh!

WARRIOR 2: Argh!

GRENDDEL: (*beastlike*) Now Hrothgar’s happy hall will be filled with nothing but mourning.

NARRATOR: From that time on many of Hrothgar’s warriors no longer dared to sleep in their master’s hall. Instead they fled

to the outlying huts of the village, avoiding all contact with the golden hall which had once offered them safety.

GRENDDEL: (*bestly laughter*)

NARRATOR: So Grendel ruled in defiance of right. And the greatest hall in the world stood empty and deserted. None could do battle with the monster. He was too strong, too horrible for anyone to conquer.

For twelve winters, seasons of woe, Grendel plagued Hrothgar. Like a dark shadow of death Grendel lay in wait for the king's men on the misty moors. At night the monster haunted the hall, polluting that place with his unholy presence. But there was one thing within he could not touch, and that was the King's sacred throne, for it had been blessed by God.

These were heartbreaking times for Hrothgar and his people. Some of the Danes did not know God, and hell was in their hearts. They made vows at the old pagan shrines, praying for the Devil to come to their aid. Even he was better than Grendel.

Long-reaching laments were sung of this tragic king, and news of him even reached across the seas. Now there lived in the far-off land of the Geats a young warrior named Beowulf, who had the strength of many men. He heard of the wicked deeds of Grendel, and the sorrow of the good King Hrothgar.

BEOWULF: I have decided! We will go to this famed king, who needs our aid. I will chose the mightiest men—the best and bravest of the Geats—to accompany me.

NARRATOR: Beowulf was beloved by all the Geats, but none of them spoke against his going. They knew his strength—

strength of body and will—and the omens were good, so they urged the adventure on.

So Beowulf had made ready a strong ship, and with fourteen friends set sail to Denmark. The good ship flew over the swelling ocean like a bird, till in due time the voyagers saw shining white cliffs before them. Then they knew their journey was at an end. They made fast their ship, grasped their weapons, and thanked God that they had had a safe voyage.

There Hrothgar's guard, who watched the seas from his tall tower, spied them. He set off to the shore, riding on horseback, and brandishing a huge spear.

GUARD: (*forcefully*) Who are you bearing arms and openly landing here? Before you take a step forward, I am bound to know from whence you came. Listen to my plain words, and hasten to answer me.

BEOWULF: We come here as friends. We come to rid good king Hrothgar from his wicked enemy, the monster Grendel.

GUARD: Then it is good that you have come, but I am afraid that death is all that you will find here.

NARRATOR: The guard led them on to the King's palace. Downhill they marched together, with a rushing sound of voices and armed tread, until they saw the hall shining like gold against the sky.

BEOWULF: Heorot! I have heard many tales about its beauty.

GUARD: And now you see it. These dark days it is a place of misery and woe, but once it leapt with life. Head for the main doors. It is time for me to go. May the

Father of All keep you in safety. For myself, I must return to my tower and guard the coast.

NARRATOR: The street was paved with stone, and Beowulf's men marched along, following it to the hall, their armor shining in the sun and clanging as they went. The mead-hall guards stopped Beowulf and his men and sent word of his arrival inside to the king. A noble returned with the king's answer.

WULFGAR: My king commands me to tell you that he knows of your noble birth. You have come bravely over the sea-road, and you are welcome. Now go to him as you are, in your armor and helmets, but leave your battle-shields and your spears behind.

GEAT 1: You would have us go in without our weapons?

WULFGAR: Let them lie here waiting for the promises your words may make.

BEOWULF: A few of you stay here with the weapons.

NARRATOR: They entered the great hall with measured tread, Beowulf leading the way. His armor shone like a golden net, and his look was high and noble. He greeted the Lord of the Danes.

BEOWULF: Hail, Hrothgar! Higlac is my cousin and my king. All the days of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel's name has echoed all the way to our land. I see it as my duty to come to your aid.

HROTHGAR: Hail, Beowulf. My tongue grows heavy and my heart heavier when I try to speak of the sorrow that Grendel has brought us. You can see for yourself how much smaller our ranks have become. If you face Grendel, why will you not die like all the others?

BEOWULF: Time and time again, I have risen from the darkness of war with my enemies' blood dripping from my sword. I have driven five great giants into chains and eradicated their race from the earth. I swam in the blackness of night, hunting monsters in the ocean deeps—killing them one by one. Death was my errand, and I gave them the reward for their dark deeds. Now Grendel and I are called together, and I've come.

HROTHGAR: (*humorless laugh*) Many times have I heard words such as these. My own men have gained courage from too much ale and sworn to stay in this hall after dark. But then the morning light shows the tables and benches drenched with blood.

BEOWULF: Noble king, since I have come so far, grant me a single request. Let my men and I alone purge this hall of its evil beast.

HROTHGAR: Many have tried. Many have failed. No one can stand against the claws of Grendel.

BEOWULF: I will stand. And I have heard that the monster's scorn of men is so great that he fears no weapon and neither does he need a weapon to accomplish his killing.

HROTHGAR: It is true.

BEOWULF: Then neither do I.

(gasps of surprise)

BEOWULF: My king might think less of me if I let my sword do my killing for me, and I hid behind a shield. My hands alone shall fight for me. God must decide who shall be given up to death.

NARRATOR: These words impressed the old king.

HROTHGAR: These are brave words. You do not fear death.

BEOWULF: If it is my time, the monster can carry my bloody flesh to his den and crunch upon my bones. There will be no body to bury, no corpse to mourn over. My only request is that you send the hammered mail of my armor to Higlac. Fate will unwind as it must.

HROTHGAR: *(loudly)* We shall have a banquet in Beowulf's honor. We will toast his victories and talk of the future. Tonight he faces the mighty foe.

(cheers from Hrothgar's men)

NARRATOR: The keeper of the mead came carrying out carved flasks and poured out the bright sweetness. A poet sang in a clear, pure voice. The Danes and Geats celebrated as one. *(loud celebrating)*

But one was vexed with Beowulf. He was Unferth, a noble who sat at the feet of Hrothgar's throne. He was angry that someone had acquired glory and fame greater than his own on this earth.

UNFERTH: You are Beowulf, are you? That is the name of a boastful fool who undertook a famous swimming match with a man named Brecca.

NARRATOR: The hall grew silent.

BEOWULF: That was I, my friend, but I was young then.

UNFERTH: And foolish, too. Risking your lives for no good reason. Brecca vowed that he could outswim you. I heard that you two swam far out into the sea-paths. Seven long nights you two swam—but in the end, victory was his—not yours.

BEOWULF: You speak the truth. But what does that matter now?

UNFERTH: I think you've been lucky in your battles. You can boast all you want, but your luck will change when you come against Grendel.

BEOWULF: Ah! Unferth, is it? I can tell that your face is hot with ale. Your tongue has tried to speak of this great race, but the truth is simple: No man can swim as I, and no strength can match mine. Brecca and I were both young, full of boasts. We risked our lives at sea. Both of us swam with a naked sword, prepared for the whales and the sharp teeth of needlefish. But as much as he tried, he could never leave me behind. I *chose* to remain at his side.

UNFERTH: Ha! Did you choose to lose as well?

BEOWULF: Five nights I swam by his side, but then a mighty wave swept us apart, and the sea became savage. The storm stirred up

the creatures that sleep deep in the sea. A sea monster seized me and pulled me deep toward the bottom. Only my mail shirt saved me from its cruel hooks. But fate let me find the beast's heart with my sword. I hacked myself free.

UNFERTH: A sea monster! Ha! Probably nothing more than a large tuna.

BEOWULF: That was not all. With the lifeless body of one monster floating on the waves, its blood drew others. I had guests, so I treated them politely—offering them the edge of my sword. They came looking for a meal. They did not like what I gave them. I upset their stomachs and split them open.

UNFERTH: Ha! Listen to these lies! So how many sea monsters did you slay?

BEOWULF: Nine sea-monsters I slew. Then I swam home from my journey. Yes, I had lost the contest, but what man has ever been harder pressed than I was? I made the seas safe. Today sailors can cross the sea-road and not fear what lies in the deep.

UNFERTH: Will your boasting ever cease?

BEOWULF: It is no boast. It is what I know to be true. No warrior can match me.

UNFERTH: We shall see!

BEOWULF: What about your mighty battles, Unferth? I have heard no tales of your bravery.

(laughter from the men)

NARRATOR: The noble scowled and began to turn away.

BEOWULF: But I will tell you what I have heard. You, Unferth, are a cruel man and have murdered your brothers, your close kin. You are no better than that monster I will face tonight. All your haughty words won't save your soul from hellfire.

NARRATOR: Unferth's eyes grew wide with fear.

BEOWULF: Tonight the Geats will show Grendel true courage. When the sun rises, his evil stench will be gone from this hall forever.

HROTHGAR: Well-spoken, Beowulf! Not until now was I sure that Grendel could be killed. You have proved your strength and firmness of spirit. Let us continue our feast!

NARRATOR: Welthow the Queen, in cloth of gold, moved down the hall and handed the jeweled cup of mead to the King and all the warriors, old and young. At the right moment, with gracious words, she brought it to Beowulf.

WELTHOW: Great prince, you are the answer to our prayers. You are the hero to help our afflicted people. I thank God for sending you hither and allowing my happy hands to offer you this cup.

NARRATOR: Full of pride and high purpose, the warrior drank from the splendid cup.

BEOWULF: I will conquer my enemy or die in his fierce grip. Let me live in

greatness and courage, or here in this hall meet my death.

NARRATOR: When the sun sank in the west, all the guests arose to leave. The King embraced Beowulf and bade him guard the house and watch for the foe.

HROTHGAR: Fight with glory in your heart! Not a wish of yours shall be left unfulfilled if you perform this mighty deed. Your ship will sail home with its treasure holds full.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are some heroic qualities that Beowulf has?
- How is Beowulf larger-than-life?
- Grendel's physical appearance is barely described. What do you think the monster looks like?