

Beowulf

There are 2 podiums onstage that remain onstage throughout the play. A throne sits between them, slightly upstage. One podium is DR, the other DL.

Sound Cue #1 (IN): *A drum beat begins as Narrator 1 and Narrator 2 enter L & R and walk to podiums DR & DL. Each carries a script, bound in a black binder. They speak with crisp solemnity.*

Narrator 1 *(Arriving at podium DR, meets eye of Narrator 2 who has arrived at podium DL – they nod to each other, then simultaneously place their binders on their podiums, open them and begin ... this is a choreographed series of movements, setting the tone for what is to come.)*

Verse 1: You should know there was a king named Hrothgar.

Narrator 2 A Danish king.

Narrator 1 As celebrated for his wisdom as for bravery.

Narrator 2 As loved by those he ruled as any king.

Narrator 1 In any land.

Narrator 2 Anywhere in the world. *(both Narrators turn page)*

Narrator 1 *Verse 2: You should know that Hrothgar built a great hall and named the hall Heorot.*

Narrator 2 A massive, shining hall.

Narrator 1 Larger and more beautiful than any other.

Narrator 2 In a kingdom as secure as any kingdom.

Narrator 1 In any land.

Narrator 2 Anywhere in the world. *(turn page)*

Narrator 1 *Verse 3: And you should know that Hrothgar had ruled the Danes for many years. His warriors had kept the borders of his kingdom safe. His great hall had been the site of many feasts, the subject of many songs.*

Narrator 2 When word of his good fortune ...

Narrator 1 His *great* good fortune ...

Narrator 2 Spread far and wide ... *(turn page)*

Narrator 1 *Verse 4: Spread even to the place where the water, black with serpents by day, burned fiery red by the light of the moon.*

Narrator 2 A place where no natural creature dared go.

Narrator 1 Reindeer and wolves alike, fleeing the huntsman's arrow, would stop at the edge of this place, turn and take the arrow willingly.

Narrator 2 Better the arrow than to trespass.

Narrator 1 To trespass ... where *Grendel* lived.

Sound Cue #1 (OUT)

Hrothgar and his men burst on the scene, entering from all directions. They greet each other and all are greeted warmly by Hrothgar who indicates that they should be seated on the floor. Servants pantomime serving mead to those onstage.

Hrothgar My men, my men! Comrades in arms, companions in peace, raise your cups and mark me well. *(All do so)* To courage!

Warrior 1 Courage! *(shouts and rumbles)*

Hrothgar Good fortune!

Warrior 2 Fortune! *(reactions as before)*

Hrothgar And victory!

Warriors Victory! *(much back slapping and toasting)*

Hrothgar Mighty God, in whose name we have struck down our enemies, now makes the grape grow heavy on the vine. *(cheer)* He fattens our sheep. He shields us from sickness and every day He gives us reason to rejoice. *(cheer)* Scop! Sing us a song. *(cheer as Scop steps forward)*

Warriors Song! Song! Song! Song! Song! *(chanting tapers off once the scop is in position – he sings a cappella ... the warriors ad lib approval of his lyrics during the song, so he should pause appropriately after certain lines)*

Scop When God Almighty made the earth, he laid the land just so,
He stacked the mountains high and dug the ocean deep below.
He flung the birds into the air and grew the forest tall
And then created man to whom he freely gave it all.

Warriors He flung the birds into the air and grew the forest tall
And then created man to whom he freely gave it all.

Scop Tonight we gather in this place to celebrate again
How we are favored most among God's creatures, how we men,
In battle's bloody furnace forged a peace of purest gold
Which we intend to last until our children have grown old.

Warriors In battle's bloody furnace forged a peace of purest gold
Which we intend to last until our children have grown old.

Scop Fists of iron, cunning minds and senses sharp as steel -
Advantages for which each Dane assembled here should kneel *(all kneel)*
In thanks for God's philanthropy, and thanks that he was willing
When wartime came to see to it that we did all the killing. *(all cheer)*

Warriors In thanks for God's philanthropy, and thanks that he was willing
When wartime came to see to it that we did all the killing. *(cheering, laughter)*

Scop *(raising his cup to quell the noise)* To Hrothgar!

Warriors Hrothgar! *(a great cheer, laughter, then the revelry fades quickly into a silent pantomime depicting the end of the evening and retiring to quarters)*

Narrator 1 Their celebration lasted late into the evening.

Narrator 2 Many stories were told. Many songs were sung.

Narrator 1 Then the time came for sleep.

Narrator 2 So Hrothgar bid his warriors good night and retired to his chambers.

Sound Cue #2 (IN): *Grendel attacks*

Narrator 1 *(spoken over drumbeat)* Some of Hrothgar's warriors then returned to their homes in the village. Others, as was the custom, lay down to sleep in the great hall.

Narrator 2 Lay down to sleep in Heorot.

(Four or five warriors remain to pantomime in semi-silence moving benches away, spreading out bedding and going to sleep, acting as distant background noise.)

Narrator 1 Lay down to sleep their last sleep on this earth. *(Narrators turn page and glance momentarily at the place where Grendel enters calmly from back of house.)*

Narrator 2 *Verse 1:* For as you know, word of Hrothgar's good fortune ...

Narrator 1 His *great* good fortune ...

Narrator 2 Had reached the cave where Grendel lived.

Narrator 1 Had reached the cave beneath the water, black with serpents.

Narrator 2 Where Grendel.

Narrator 1 The demon Grendel.

Narrator 2 Could bear his pain no longer. *(turn page, Grendel sniffs the air.)*

Narrator 1 *Verse 2:* Where Grendel, last son of a race of demons exiled by God.

Narrator 2 Rose up.

Narrator 1 And, moving irresistibly through the dead of night, came to Heorot. *(Grendel has arrived at the edge of the apron, DC, and faces UC.)*

Narrator 2 Where he had only to touch the door *(Grendel holds out his hand, fingers stretched wide.)* to make its lock fall away. *(turn page, Grendel steps "inside".)*

Narrator 1 *Verse 3:* And once inside the hall, seeing the men whose laughter he despised.

Narrator 2 He took them in his hands. *(Grendel "lifts" a warrior up from sleeping position. The warrior struggles, but Grendel breaks his neck with ease and pantomimes ripping open the warrior's side with his teeth. This is done in slow motion and should be precisely choreographed. All warriors drop into grotesque "slaughtered" positions when Grendel is finished with them.)*

Narrator 1 And killed them one by one. *(Other warriors have awakened, and pantomime attacking Grendel with swords, but the swords have absolutely no effect on Grendel. Some warriors might grab Grendel's arms or legs, but he continues to move freely, despite their struggle. We see that he is unaffected by their resistance.)*

Narrator 2 Devouring them. *(Grendel takes a savage "bite" out of another warrior, killing him in the process.)*

Narrator 1 Deaf to their cries. *(Warriors pantomime cries in the midst of a frenzied bloodbath.)*

Narrator 2 Immune to their battle-hardened blades.

Narrator 1 He moved through them like a fire.

Narrator 2 Like an unholy, all-consuming flame. *(turn page)*

Narrator 1 *Verse 4:* They saw that Grendel could not be harmed by any weapon.

Narrator 2 Or moved by any plea. *(The last warrior, seeing that he is about to die, pleads for his life before Grendel dispatches him.)*

Narrator 1 And when he let the last one fall. *(Grendel begins his exit.)*

Narrator 2 Thirty warriors lay dead.

Narrator 1 And Hrothgar's hall lay open like a wound that would not heal. *(Grendel is gone.)*

Sound Cue #2 (OUT)

Narrator 2 *(pauses, then speaks almost in a whisper)* A thousand years hence, no man knows whether Grendel came to Heorot that night of his own accord.

Narrator 1 Or whether he was sent.

Narrator 2 Whether he was a judgment.

Narrator 1 Or a curse.

Narrator 2 Or a test.

Hrothgar *(enters, sees the destruction, rushes to one warrior whose head he lifts up, then backs away as he begins to comprehend what has happened... he then goes to a second warrior, then a third, muttering "No! No!" all the while, then looks at his hands, sees they are covered with blood and falls to his knees, crying out – an agonized primal scream) Ahhhh! (attendants rush in and, taken aback by the scene, surround Hrothgar) What monster has visited my kingdom this night? What beast has savaged these good men? (composes himself somewhat, though still stunned. reaches warrior DR)*

Narrator 1 One by one, Hrothgar bid his warriors a last goodbye as their souls departed.

Hrothgar *(speaking to corpse)* Sigfried, noble heart. You rode with me against the Wylfings. And fought bravely then, as always. Go you now to wait for me with God. *(Siegfried stands and walks DC as Hrothgar moves on to the next fallen warrior. Hrothgar does not see the warriors rise, of course, since they are now "souls". As soon as Hrothgar moves away from each warrior, that warrior rises and walks DC to join the conversation where they behave as their old raucous selves, not as ghosts.)*

Siegfried *(arriving DC)* So *that* is what it's like to die.

Ingvar *(arriving)* It could have been much worse, I guess.

Siegfried It could have been much better.

Ivar *(arriving in a hurry, looking back)* What in the name of Hamlet's ghost was *that*?

Gotfred *(arriving)* That was something sent from Hell, I'd say.

Ingvar Something very, *very* rotten in the state of Denmark is what *that* was.

Ivar *(arriving)* All the battles, all the planning and praying and pious fasting...

Siegfried *(surprised incredulity)* Fasting?

Ivar *(ending the argument)* I meant feasting. *(others laugh, but he continues earnestly)* All come to this.

Tolvar *(arriving DC)* And it doesn't stop. *(the commotion ends at this)*

Siegfried *(realizing he can see the future, too)* No. It doesn't, does it? *(the lines that follow have a tone of concerned wonder ... a bleak future lies ahead)*

Tolvar They sink right down under the weight of it.

Ivar And raise an altar to the same Devil who sent it trying to get him to take it back again.

Ingvar But ... it doesn't stop.

Ivar No.

Tolvar Not for years and years.

Sigfried *(There is a pause during which they consider this.)* My friends, I tell you truly, though we will miss our wives and children and the pleasures of the flesh, we could not have picked a better time to die. *(Another pause. All laugh, then exit amidst much horseplay. Hrothgar, facing upstage, X's to throne, turns and sits looking very old, staring straight ahead & not reacting to the vignettes that follow.)*

Narrator 1 For one dozen years, Grendel bore down on Heorot.

Narrator 2 No lock could resist him.

Narrator 1 No sword could bite his skin.

Narrator 2 Yet warrior upon warrior rose up to greet him.

Narrator 1 Deaf to reason.

Narrator 2 Blind to carnage.

Narrator 1 Ambitious, brash and boastful.

Narrator 2 *(beat)* He shattered their weapons.

Narrator 1 Tore their bodies.

Narrator 2 And, in their desperation, Hrothgar's people renounced their God. *(Outlander enters from R – he is cheerful, energetic)*

Narrator 1 Renounced each other. *(Farmer enters from L, meeting Outlander DC)*

Narrator 2 And renounced the world, as far as the eye could see.

Farmer You there!

Outlander Yes, friend.

Farmer I am not your friend, outlander. What's your business here?

Outlander I am a traveler, bound for the western shore.

Farmer Well, you'll not reach the shore through here. This field is mine and outlanders may not pass.

Outlander What is your quarrel with me, sire? I'll not disturb your wheat. Let me pass and it will be a blessing for both of us. You'll not hear from me again.

Farmer Of that you may be sure. Hans! Jacob! *(Hans and Jacob enter quickly from R)* This outlander came from the forest.

Outlander *(as Hans and Jacob pin the Outlander's arms behind his back)* What forest? *(struggling)* I came through the mountains there. And I carry no possession worth dying for. Take what you will and let me pass.

Farmer *(punches Outlander in the stomach)* Tell us who sent you.

Outlander *(gasping)* I am ... sent by ... no man.

Farmer No man? Is that what his henchmen call him? Fitting enough, for surely he is no man born of woman.

Outlander Who is it you speak of?

Farmer *(yelling in the Outlander's face)* Grendel! *(stomach punch)*

Outlander *(Hans and Jacob release him and he drops to his knees, doubled over in pain)* Grendel? I know no ...

Hans *(mad with fear, he screams Grendel's name)* Grendel!! ... *(kicks Outlander, then brief pause as Outlander writhes, wheezing, then Hans delivers a series of savage kicks, one kick dealt with each mention of Grendel's name ...)* Grendel! Grendel! Grendel! Grendel! *That is who Grendel is!!*

Outlander *(haltingly, pleading, barely able to speak)* I ... I have told you what I am ... and where I am going. Please. I do not know this ... Grendel.

Jacob *(flatly)* He lies.

Farmer *(lashing out at Jacob)* I *know* he lies! *(then calmly)* Kill him. *(Hans and Jacob grab the Outlander roughly and drag him off UR – we hear weak protests from the Outlander. The Farmer spits on the ground, then stalks off L as ...)*

Ilse *(entering from back of house with Inge – their conversation will carry them onto the apron where they'll pause briefly, then continue talking as they make their way diagonally off stage R)* ... but I'd seen her *with my own eyes* gathering berries at the forest's edge.

Inge What did you do?

Ilse I confronted her, of course!

Inge And did she admit it?

Ilse Yes!

Inge No!

Ilse Yes! I had seen her *with my own eyes*, I tell you, she could not deny it. She looked positively wretched, besides. She said her children were starving and then - *then* she said, "*Berries are berries, Grendel or no!*"

Inge No!

Ilse Yes!

Inge What did you do?

Ilse I told my husband.

Inge What did *he* do?

Ilse He told *her* husband.

Inge And then?

Ilse *(pause, glance around, then conspiratorially)* I cannot say for sure, but no one has seen her for a week and her children cry inconsolably.

Inge Imagine! "Berries are berries!"

Ilse "Grendel or no." Indeed! *(they are gone)*

Narrator 1 So darkness descended over Heorot.

Narrator 2 Descended on the massive, brooding hall.

Narrator 1 Larger and more desolate than any other.

Narrator 2 In a kingdom as forlorn as any kingdom.

Narrator 1 In any land.

Narrator 2 Anywhere in the world. *(Hrothgar stands, surveys the stage, hangs head, exits)*

Narrator 1 And word of Hrothgar's misfortune.

Narrator 2 His *great* misfortune.

Narrator 1 Spread far and wide.

Narrator 2 Spread even to the land where Hygalac ruled, far across the sea.

Narrator 1 At that time, there lived in Hygelac's kingdom – the Geat nation it was called – a man named Beowulf.

Narrator 2 Whose father's life Hrothgar once had ransomed from an enemy.

Narrator 1 Whose father's life Hrothgar had shielded from a vengeance years before.

Narrator 2 So when the news of Hrothgar's troubles reached Beowulf, he remembered his father's debt.

Narrator 1 He remembered and he gathered together fourteen men.

Narrator 2 Outfitted one tall ship.

Narrator 1 And set sail across the ocean. (*sentry enters from UL, X's DC and looks out into audience where he sees Beowulf's ship approaching*)

Narrator 2 And one day later, he landed on Denmark's weary shore where a sentry was observing their approach. (*Beowulf and his men appear at back of house.*)

Sentry (*gazing intently into the distance, thinking aloud as Beowulf's party advances to the stage*) These are warriors who advance upon our shore. These are ... *unusually large* warriors. Come to pillage us, I'll warrant! Is it not always so in times of trouble? (*gazes more intently*) A leader ... and one, two .. fourteen behind him. And I alone! (*turns and begins to exit*)

Narrator 1 But the sentry held his ground. (*Sentry looks at Narrator, back at advancing warriors, back at Narrator*) Held it bravely. (*Sentry returns to his post*)

Sentry I must ... hold my ground. (*glance back at Narrator 1, who nods approvingly, then out to warriors*) You there! Identify yourselves! I am the sentry on this shore. You have landed in Denmark, sirs, and boldly so, and I am charged with defending ... with preventing ... (*Beowulf stands front of Sentry and warriors fan out. Sentry is intimidated.*) Though now I look upon you properly, I see you are no common thieves. Your ship is richly outfitted, as is your armor ... your weapons are ... (*faltering*) If it pleases you, your grace might tell me why he's come.

Beowulf To cast out the enemy.

Sentry The enemy?

Beowulf Your enemy.

Sentry You mean ...

Beowulf I am Beowulf, son of Edgetheow, hearth-companion of Hygelac of the Geats. These men and I have come to purge your kingdom of the demon you call Grendel.

Sentry (*aved pause*) I see. Well ... I ... I will inform Hrothgar of your arrival. (*starts to leave, comes back*) I will ... I will tell him you are here! (*runs UL where Wulfgar appears ... they confer briefly, then Wulfgar X's to Beowulf as the Sentry exits*)

Wulfgar I am Wulfgar of the Wendla tribe and attendant to Hrothgar. Our sentry has informed me of your quest and, if you are what you say you are, welcome.

Beowulf Your king bestowed a kindness on my father years ago. God willing, I will repay that kindness now.

Narrator 1 (*Hrothgar enters UL, followed by the Sentry, Unferth & others – Hrothgar settles stiffly into his throne*) Leaving their weapons at the door, as they were asked to do, Beowulf and his men entered Heorot.

Narrator 2 And Hrothgar received them. Not the Hrothgar of twelve summers past, but a Hrothgar ravaged by despair, grown old beyond his years.

Wulfgar (*Crowd forms path for Beowulf to Hrothgar.*) My king, these men are Geats. They have journeyed here from Hygelac's court to battle Grendel. This man is their leader. He calls himself Beowulf. (*Beowulf kneels*)

Hrothgar (*After regarding Beowulf for a moment, he stands, reaches down and lifts Beowulf up, then speaks with proud solemnity*) Beowulf.

Beowulf Hrothgar.

Hrothgar *(slowly, a smile spreads across his face, then he laughs and claps Beowulf shoulders with his hands.)* I see your father's stubborn brow. And I see in your eyes his strength of purpose. Welcome, though I fear Heorot is not what it once was. We who dwell within it have known unceasing dread these ten and two years and I am weary because of it.

Beowulf Mark me, Hrothgar, and take heart in what I say. I am known throughout my own land as a warrior without equal. A destroyer of giants am I, feared by my enemies, revered by all the Geat nation and loved by Hygelac whose hearth and honor I defend. I ask of you only that you not refuse one who has traveled so far to drive a monster from your midst..

Hrothgar I will not refuse you, Beowulf. Nay, I *welcome* you. *(claps hands, servants and attendants enter.)* Clear a table and treat these warriors well, as befits the deed which they intend to do. *(to Beowulf)* Sit beside me and let us talk together. Your men, too, honored guests all. Know that Hrothgar bids you God's protection. *(all take their position "at table" and pantomime feast, servants distribute food)*

Thorvald *(one of the fourteen Geats)* It is Grendel who will need God's protection this night. *(other Geats laugh)*

Unferth I think you underestimate the task at hand.

Elof *(another Geat)* Or is it *you* who underestimate the Geats ... or Beowulf ... or both? *(general agreement from Geats)* We are a force of nature, we Geatish sea farers, do not doubt it! *(defiant cheers from Geats)*

Unferth *(topping cheers, to Beowulf)* My doubts don't lie with nature, but with you.

Hrothgar *(defusing the situation)* Unferth means you no dishonor. He is a warrior in his own right, but Grendel's campaign against us has exceeded anything he or I or any of my men imagined possible.

Aeschere *(one of Hrothgar's attendants)* We find it hard to hope for better when every new day is like the last. Though we do *try* to hope, it is very hard.

Beowulf *(conciliatory tone)* God willing, we will change that. And we *thank* you, Hrothgar ... *(glancing toward Thorvald)* for your blessing *(Thorvald looks contrite)* ... and for the opportunity to repay my father's debt. *(mood of those at table lightens somewhat ... several gruff agreements from the Geats)*

Hrothgar *(waxing nostalgic)* I was a young king then, a youth, when your father and I met. He had killed a man named Heatholaf. Heotholaf was a *Wylfing*, you see. And the Wylfings, well ... you know how the Wylfings are. *(all acknowledge the infamous Wylfings)* Other kings had refused your father sanctuary for fear of war with the Wylfings. I cannot blame them. I trust there are none here tonight who call a Wylfing friend. *(general grumbling at the idea of a Wylfing friend)*

Edlef Nay, but I sometimes clean my boot with a scrap of Wylfing hide. *(all laugh)*

Hrothgar Well, I granted your father's request, as you know. I sent gold to the Wylfings, which settled the dispute. He was a good man, your father. *(raising his cup)* To Edgetheow, father of Beowulf.

All *(raising their cups)* Edgetheow!

Hrothgar And as we used to do ... *(raises cup again ... all do the same)* To courage!

Aeschere *(pause, then defiantly optimistic)* Courage.

Hrothgar Good fortune!

Danes Fortune!

Hrothgar And victory!

All Victory! *(revelry continues sotto voce under narration ...)*

Narrator 1 A kind of happiness settled over Heorot that night.

Narrator 2 Hrothgar's warriors and attendants marveled at the confidence of the Geats.

Narrator 1 Which was understandable.

Narrator 2 And the Geats, for their part, marveled at the pessimism of Hrothgar's men.

Narrator 1 Which was understandable as well.

Beowulf ... but if Grendel takes me, send my armor back to Hygelac. It is the work of Weland, an inheritance from Hrethel.

Hrothgar I will do *at least* that, but tell us, Beowulf, how do you intend to conquer what has killed so many men before you?

Beowulf A fair question. Grendel, so the story goes, kills without weapon or shield. What say you? *(Danes and Hrothgar voice confirmation)* Then I will do the same. I will not arm myself against him. I will kill him with my hands.

Narrator 1 There was a silence as the Danes regarded Beowulf in disbelief.

Narrator 2 No sword? No shield?

Unferth Hah!

Thorvald Unferth again.

Beowulf He's a skeptic and skeptics scoff at things they do not understand. But I bear Unferth no ill will because tomorrow morning he will believe.

Unferth That will be as it will be. You've told us much this evening about your skill in battle, about your conquests and adventures. But there's one story you've omitted, Beowulf. One that isn't quite so flattering as the rest.

Beowulf There are a *hundred* stories I've omitted. But their endings are all the same.

Thorvald His enemy dies.

Dag *(a Geat)* And Beowulf lives to fight another day. *(Geats laugh)*

Unferth He lives, true enough. But he does not always win. I have heard it said that when he was young – before becoming the proud man of war we see before us – he accepted a challenge from a rival named Brecca.

Beowulf *(laughing)* I know the story well.

Unferth Then tell it to us, Beowulf.

Beowulf Gladly.

Unferth *(with great irony)* Tell us how you and Brecca swam into the ocean, how you and he struggled, one against the other, for seven days and seven nights and how, at the end of that time, Brecca bested you. *(Geats begin to grumble)* Do I lie? Brecca swam back to shore *alone*, did he not, leaving you behind, spent and ... how should I describe what you were then? Defeated? *(more grumbling, but Unferth shouts over it)* Yes, I think *defeated* is *exactly* the word I should use. Beowulf cuts a fine figure, I grant you, and his accomplishments are considerable, but he is *not* immortal. He is *not* invincible, and I, for one, doubt he will live to boast of his encounter with Grendel.

Beowulf *(stands and all fall silent, Xs to Unferth who is intimidated, but stands his ground as Beowulf faces him ... there is a pause, then Beowulf turns to address the rest)* Unferth is a man of many words. *(Geats chuckle)* A student of history, too, I gather, but not a very *good* student. *(laughter)*

Unferth *(topping laughter)* Do I lie?

Beowulf You omit!

Unferth What have I omitted?

Ilse *(all on stage freeze as Ilse and Inge enter from UR)* I saw him *with my own eyes* this very morning. He is the man they call Beowulf.

Inge No!

Ilse Yes!

Inge The Geat?

Ilse The very one, come from Hygelac's court to smite our Grendel. His ship is in our harbor even as we speak. He and his companions went up to Heorot and have remained there all the day.

Inge I've heard it said the Geatish warriors are quite beautiful.

Ilse As beautiful as women and as muscular as bulls. Never have I seen such fair and powerful men. *(Ilse and Inge freeze far DL, well clear of other players)*

Beowulf My friend Brecca and I were evenly matched at sea, but the sea itself did not receive us equally. For the first five days of our seven day contest, neither of us could best the other. Then the sky grew angry and the waves grew tall. We were separated in the storm. Brecca swam back to shore, but I was pulled down by something I could not see. *(all freeze as the dead warriors enter)*

Sigfried Half of heaven and most of Hell, I believe, is populated with men dispatched by Beowulf.

Ingvar Yet they speak highly of him, now that they are dead.

Gotfred Even the sea serpents sing his praises.

Ivar Serpents?

Gotfred Aye. It seems he killed a swarm of serpents when he was but a boy. *(freeze)*

Ilse I've heard it said that once, when he was young, he swam a solid week upon the sea and there he fought and killed a giant serpent.

Inge *I've* heard it said he killed a dozen serpents – *every one* a giant – and he spent a *month* at sea. *(freeze)*

Tolvar Of course, the serpents say they'd hardly slept at all the night before, so they were feeling rather puny. And they say they numbered only three. *(freeze)*

Farmer *(entering quickly from back of house with Hans and Jacob, they proceed as they talk to their exit upstage ... while the Danish and Geatish warriors in Heorot remain frozen, the two women, the dead warriors and the farmer with his sons all move continuously toward their exits during the sequence that follows)* He kills them daily by the hundreds, legend has it, and he does it with his teeth.

Jacob So I have heard it said.

Hans *(has fallen behind Farmer and Jacob, speaks to member of audience)* You there, outlander! *(Farmer X's back to Hans)*

Gotfred Only three of them, the serpents say, *all* half-asleep and *one* near death already.

Farmer *(pulling Hans away from audience member)* No time for that, Hans. It's getting dark.

Hans *(looking back as Farmer pulls him on)* But there's something of the forest about him, father, I can smell the stink of it!

Ilse Enough of serpents! Let us go down to the ship ... to see if we can catch a glimpse of Geatish thigh! *(they are gone)*

Jacob Heed him, father. When it comes to stink, my brother knows whereof he speaks. *(Hans runs after Jacob)*

Father *(yelling after them)* Hans! *(Hans & Jacob are gone)*

Sigfried Though serpents can't be trusted, living or deceased. The Geat may be exactly what he seems.

Farmer *(arriving at wing)* Jacob! *(exiting)* We must stay together! *(he is gone)*

Ivar He *seems* to be a very busy man, judging from the looks of the afterlife. *(exeunt)*

Beowulf *(Wealththeow enters, but remains back a bit, overhearing Beowulf's story)* Some hungry denizen of the deep had pulled me down and meant to make a meal of me. But my coat of mail held fast and my sword struck true and I bested him. Eight more creatures took their turn with me – eight! – and those same creatures soon lay dead upon the ocean floor. Has any man here fought harder for his life than I did that day? *(all nod and/ or mumble "No")* Unferth? Have you survived such a struggle?

Wealththeow Unferth's struggles are mostly with his pride, I think. *(all turn to Wealththeow, who speaks to Unferth)* Or do I miss the point? *(all look at Unferth, who shoots a nasty look at Beowulf, then turns and exits ... all laugh)*

Hrothgar *(rising)* The queen is here, her tongue as sharp as ever. *(all rise)*

Wealththeow So this is Beowulf. All the village is abuzz with talk of beauteous, powerful Geats and coats of armor glinting in the sun. *(to Beowulf)* Tell me, sir, are you as magnificent as they say you are?

Beowulf I ... keep my armor polished. *(all laugh)*

Hrothgar *(to Beowulf)* This fearless woman here is Wealththeow, my wife and queen.

Beowulf *(bowing, takes her hand)* I'd heard it said that Grendel had snuffed out the sun in Heorot. But I see the sun has risen, as radiant and warm as ever. *(approving murmurs from crowd, applause for Beowulf's gallantry)*

Wealththeow If this man fights as well as he flatters, Grendel is as good as dead. *(crowd laughs, Wealththeow then speaks seriously)* May you live to see tomorrow, sir – you and your companions, too – and when we look back on this day, let it be in memory of the day our troubles ended. *(holding up her cup)* God be with us!

All *(all raise their cups)* God be with us!

During Narrator's lines: In quiet pantomime, players clear the stage, Geats and Danes exchanging friendly gestures, Hrothgar & Wealththeow bidding Beowulf good-night, the Danes then bedding down for the evening. After the others have gone to sleep, Beowulf X's DC to contemplate the distance, listening. Hrothgar & Wealththeow X DL.

Narrator 1 They passed the cup of fellowship among them one last time.

Narrator 2 Giving thanks for Beowulf.

Narrator 1 And then, because the hour was late, they took their leave of him as each and every Dane departed.

Narrator 2 Each to their own chambers or their place of sleep.

Wealththeow Is he the one I've prayed would come?

Hrothgar I pray he is.

Wealththeow How many have we entertained, just as boastful and self-assured, promising to purge Heorot of Grendel?

Hrothgar *(dismally)* I cannot say.

Wealththeow Yet we find them in the morning dead or dying ... or completely gone.

Hrothgar Come, my love. Fate will be as it will be. We must sleep.

Narrator 1 So they left Heorot to Beowulf's defense. *(dead warriors enter and X to Beowulf, talking around him.*

Narrator 2 Hoping against hope.

Narrator 1 As they had not allowed themselves to do for quite some time.

Ivar I tell you, man, the afterlife is *overflowing* with his victims – trolls and ogres, bears and lions ...

Gotfred Serpents.

Ivar Aye, the serpents, too. And every manner of man.

Ingvar But none like Grendel.

Sigfried No.

Ivar The outcome of it isn't clear to me.

Tolvar *(studying Beowulf closely)* This Beowulf, does he feel fear?

Ingvar He should.

Tolvar Outwardly, he doesn't seem at all afraid.

Sigfried He feels it.

Gotfred *(walking among sleeping Geats)* And his companions?

Sigfried They feel it, too.

Tolvar And when they die, will they feel pain?

Sigfried If there is pain to feel. *(pause)* But they will not despair.

Ivar *(another pause, all dead warriors looks out)* Grendel's coming.

Sigfried *(looks out, silently concurs)* And souls depart. *(they leave)*

Hans *(running on – he is livid with fear)* Grendel's coming!

Farmer *(entering with Jacob)* Come inside, boy. It isn't safe outside.

Jacob Let him be, father. Let Grendel take the idiot.

Farmer *(as Hans lurches toward front row of audience)* Hans, come here!

Hans *(to audience member – desperate now, not threatening)* You there!

Farmer *(rushing after him)* Hans!

Hans Grendel's coming!

Farmer *(slaps Hans, who begins to sob – speaks to Jacob roughly)* Take his other arm.

Hans *(to another audience member)* You there!

Farmer Take it! *(Jacob does and, together, they begin to carry Hans back off)*

Hans *(being dragged away)* Grendel coming through the forest!

Farmer *(to same members of audience)* It isn't safe outside. My boy is ill. *(to Jacob as Hans struggles to break free)* Hold him tight! *(exit, Hans muttering; Inge enters, gazing up at stars; Beowulf begins to bed down)*

Ilse *(entering)* Here you are! What are you doing outside?

Inge Do the stars seem any different to you tonight?

Ilse *(looks up, considers)* No.

Inge Not a little brighter?

Ilse *(looks up again, considers)* No.

Inge *(pause, she looks elsewhere in the sky)* How about the moon?

Ilse *(losing patience)* What are you up to, woman?

Inge I'm looking for signs.

Ilse Signs? Hah! I believe what I can see *with my own eyes*, that's what *I* believe. There's no such thing as signs.

Inge There are signs, too! And wonders and miracles!

Ilse You've seen miracles?

Inge Maybe not directly, no, but ...

Ilse *(derisively)* Not directly or at all, but it *will* be a miracle if you don't catch your death of cold out here craning your neck like a goose.

Inge *(pause)* Do you think he'll do it?

Ilse Kill Grendel? *(Inge nods)* He may. *That* would be a sign.

Inge It would, wouldn't it?

Ilse A sign that Grendel's dead. *(laughs at her own joke, but Ilse only looks unsmilingly at her then back up to the sky ... Ilse loses interest and begins to move off)* This is nonsense. Go home, woman. You have a husband to cook for. *(she is gone)*

Inge *(calling off)* I think it *would* be a miracle, *(exiting in a different direction, now talking loudly to herself)* that *anybody* could see *(at her exit, calling back)* if her *own eyes* were open! *(she is gone)*

Sound Cue #3 (IN): *Grendel returns*

Narrator 1 *(spoken over drumbeat)* So as the farmer and his sons, the doubter and the seeker of signs lay down to sleep, Beowulf lay down as well.

Narrator 2 Lay down to sleep in Heorot.

Narrator 1 Lay down to sleep and wait for Grendel. *(Narrators glance up to place where Grendel enters from back of house.)*

Narrator 2 *Verse 1:* And Grendel came, as Grendel always did.

Narrator 1 As Hrothgar said he would.

Narrator 2 Anticipating human blood.

Narrator 1 He strode beneath the clouds across the fen toward Heorot.

Narrator 2 *(at "door")* And reaching it, he touched the door as he had done ten thousand times.

Narrator 1 *Verse 2:* Its locks flew open.

Narrator 2 Its hinges moved..

Narrator 1 And Grendel found the warriors asleep inside. *("steps inside", slowly surveys the scene)*

Narrator 2 The banquet laid before him.

Narrator 1 *Verse 3:* Now, Beowulf awoke, but did not stir.

Narrator 2 He watched to see what way the demon would begin, but Grendel quickly fell upon a sleeper there.

Narrator 1 *(This first murder is entirely pantomime – no other player is involved.)* And in an instant, snatched him up, devoured him and stretched a bloody claw toward Beowulf. *(reaches toward Beowulf)*

Narrator 2 *Verse 4:* But Grendel found to his surprise that Beowulf was reaching up to meet him. *(Beowulf reaches up suddenly and grasps Grendel's arm – begin strobe effect here, if available)*

Narrator 1 And each of them, the monster and the man, locked down upon each other's arms. *(Beowulf stands slowly, never releasing Grendel's arm, and Grendel slowly sinks)*

Narrator 2 Locked in mortal struggle.

Narrator 1 Then Grendel felt the might of what he'd taken in his hand and his eyes grew wide.

Narrator 2 *Verse 5:* The strength ran out of Grendel then, a panic rising in his chest. *(Grendel on his knees)*

Narrator 1 And for the first time in that hall, he struggled. *(Grendel lashes back and forth. We might hear his gasps and hisses)*

Narrator 2 Struggled wildly as he tried to understand what he had done.

Narrator 1 What he had touched.

Narrator 2 But he could not – no matter how he tried – could not break free.

Narrator 1 *Verse 6:* Perhaps he thought:

Grendel *(crying out angrily)* This isn't possible!

Narrator 2 Or wondered:

Grendel *(gasping aside)* What is happening?

Narrator 1 Or perhaps his mind went blank.

Narrator 2 When slowly Grendel's bones began to break. *(Grendel utters a sharp, wailing cry. This awakens the warriors who leap up and pantomime striking him with swords. As the scene goes on, Beowulf, who now may hold Grendel's arm with both hands, hangs onto Grendel, who constantly thrashes to break free, while the warriors attack Grendel on all sides – striking his body, head and limbs ... Grendel doesn't care about them, however. At some times, Grendel is up and Beowulf is down – at other times Beowulf is up and Grendel is down)*

Narrator 1 Verse 7: A wretched cry escaped him then, and in the village people feared the worst.

Narrator 2 They heard the massive wooden tables overturned.

Narrator 1 Felt the ground beneath them tremble.

Narrator 2 Heard the swords crash and splinter vainly on the monster's back.

Narrator 1 For, as you know, no sword could bite his skin.

Narrator 2 No spear disturb his side. *(Geats realize that something is happening to Grendel at this point and they stop striking him)*

Narrator 1 Verse 8: But in the hall he felt his sinews snap and, to his horror, saw his shoulder open wide. *(grunting and crying out, Grendel falls to his knees, Beowulf above him)*

Narrator 2 His bones laid bare

Narrator 1 And then his arm. *(Grendel grunts)*

Narrator 2 Grendel's arm. *(grunts again)*

Narrator 1 Clutched firmly hand-in-hand by Beowulf, tore free. *(Grendel cries out)*

Narrator 2 Completely ... free *(Grendel cries out more loudly and falls back.)*

Narrator 1 Verse 9: Thus Grendel was released. *(At this point, Grendel must hold the arm he has "lost" tightly against his side to indicate the loss. Beowulf now pantomimes holding in both his hands the arm he just tore off. Strobe effect ends.)*

Narrator 2 Perhaps he thought:

Grendel This is a dream.

Narrator 1 Or perhaps he wondered:

Grendel Am I dying?

Narrator 1 Or perhaps his mind went blank. *(Grendel stands)*

Narrator 2 As he *did* begin to die.

Narrator 1 Verse 10: So Grendel fled. *(Grendel begins his disorderly exit, panting, sobbing, etc.... he may stumble a few times en route ... he must be very careful, however, not to use the arm he has just lost. It must remain tightly beside him)*

Narrator 2 Fled the place he'd troubled for a dozen years

Narrator 1 Fled the hall he'd desecrated.

Narrator 2 The people he had terrorized.

Narrator 1 Back and back across the fen he stumbled.

Narrator 2 Blood trailing from his ragged wound.

Narrator 1 Under the clouded sky.

Narrator 2 To where the water, black with serpents by day

Narrator 1 Burned fiery red by the light of the moon. *(Grendel is gone)*

(Beowulf carries Grendel's arm DC, placing it there. He is on one knee. The arm should seem to make contact with the floor on the last boom of the drum)

Sound Cue #3 (OUT)

Thorvald *(approaching Beowulf from behind with Dag, speaks amazed at the sight of the arm)* You bested him.

Beowulf Strange to think that, though I never let him go, he isn't here.

Dag *(looking at the arm)* Not entirely, no.

Thorvald The monster's run off to die, Beowulf! You bested him!

Beowulf So it seems. *(Hrothgar runs on with Wealhtheow)*

Thorvald So it is!

Hrothgar So it's true! *(X's DC where Beowulf stands and steps aside so Hrothgar can view the arm, drops to one knee at it)* Grendel's arm! Wealhtheow, look! *(she comes to him)* Grendel is dead!

Wealhtheow *(regarding the arm, drops to both knees beside Hrothgar, her eyes well up with tears)* This grisly thing is as beautiful to me as new gold. *(covers her face as she cries, Hrothgar puts his arm over her)*

Narrator 1 Word spread quickly then about what Beowulf had done. *(a number of Danish warriors appear at back of house, moving toward stage.)*

Narrator 2 And warriors from far and wide came riding up to Heorot to see the demon's arm. *(three Danes leave the stage, "tracking" Grendel)*

Lavritz *(arriving Dane)* Torn completely off, I tell you! That's what they are saying!

Leck *(arriving Dane)* But by a man? *(they continue, pantomiming their conversation)*

Narrator 1 Others followed Grendel's bloody footprints back across the fen.

Narrator 2 Marveling at how the monster's flight had scored the ground..

Eskil *(Danish tracker)* Mark the length of his stride!

Ian *(Danish tracker)* And look here! He fell! ... and broke the fall with his hand! *(trackers laugh - this should occur a place where Grendel actually did fall)*

Eskil He was bleeding like a fountain! *(pressing his hands to the ground)* The earth is soaked with it! *(holding up hands)* Look!

Eno *(Danish tracker)* Come! His body may be near! *(all trackers exit excitedly at back of house as Hrothgar rises and pantomimes calling out)*

Narrator 1 *(Hrothgar's attendants and other Danes enter, including the Danes from the back of the house, who merge with the crowd - Hrothgar and Wealhtheow mingle)* Heorot filled up with men and women overcome with joy.

Narrator 2 Come to dote upon the hero and the trophy he had won.

Narrator 1 Gentlemen and ladies, otherwise who might have cringed at such a sight, bent down and patted Grendel's stiff and bloody arm. And then, assured that it was real and confident of what it meant, they laughed and danced as if it were a most delightful thing.

Narrator 2 And, of course, they sought out Beowulf, to celebrate the man who'd given them their honor back.

Narrator 1 The other Geats, as well, were greeted warmly and the morning wore into the afternoon, a steady stream of visitors and exclamations, praise and thanksgiving.

Narrator 2 The tables and the chairs were set aright.

Narrator 1 All evidence of battle – except the arm – was swept away and Heorot was decorated for a feast. *(tracking Danes re-enter excitedly from back of house)*

Narrator 2 And when the men who'd followed Grendel's footprints had returned.

Narrator 1 They spoke in breathless, wondering tones of what they had discovered.

Eskil *(panting)* My king, we went for quite a ways, and everywhere we looked it was the same.

Hrothgar The same? Is he alive?

Ian No, my lord, no! Not alive at all! As far as eye could see the ground was stained with Grendel's blood!

Eno The creature's gore was everywhere! It was as if ... as if he'd simply flown to pieces as he ran. *(relieved laughter and cheering from the crowd)*

Hrothgar *(to all)* So there can be no doubt that Grendel's dead! *(more cheers, Hrothgar signals for quiet)* One day ago, I would not have believed it possible. Every night the monster came and every morning widows wept and there was nothing – nothing – I could do to stop it. My wisest men assured me our nightmare would continue unabated. *(pause, brightening)* But look at us today. Look what wonders God has wrought! *(on a lighter note)* My wisest men should try to be a little wiser. *(all laugh)*

Unferth *(stepping forward)* Hrothgar, Beowulf ... you know I doubted. And you know I was proud. I spoke against you when I should have cheered you on. Now, by your leave, I will make amends. *(to all)* Let it be known that nowhere in Denmark is there a better warrior, one more skillful, more courageous or more deserving of glory than this Geatish seaman, Beowulf. *(extending hand to Beowulf)* I salute you, sir.

Beowulf *(clasping Unferth's arm, speaks to him)* And for my part, I bear no ill will toward any one among you. *(releases Unferth, speaks to rest)* What I did was done for the Glory of God, and done because He deemed it right that your oppression should end. But let me say that it was my intention to deliver up the monster's body in one piece, except that his desire to get away was stronger than my ability to keep him down.

Hrothgar *(smiling)* Do I hear modesty? Is this the same Beowulf of yesterday? Is this the same *(imitating Beowulf's first self-introduction)* "destroyer of giants, feared by his enemies and revered by all the Geat nation?" *(all laugh)* Nay, Beowulf. Self-effacement doesn't suit you. *(more laughter)*

Beowulf *(a little embarrassed)* Of course, however much of him he left behind – or took with him, the fact remains that Grendel *is* dead. *(all laugh loudly at this)*

Narrator 1 And Heorot, though it had been abused the night before, shone like a beacon all that day.

Narrator 2 Once again, the cup of fellowship was passed among them by the queen.

Narrator 1 And Hrothgar said:

Hrothgar *(to Beowulf)* Nothing within my power will be denied you, Beowulf. You are as dear to me as my own son.

Narrator 1 Then Hrothgar opened up his treasure room and brought out Beowulf's reward.

(attendants pantomime handing these to Hrothgar, who presents them to Beowulf, who might pass them on to the other Geats)

Narrator 2 A gilded banner, helmet, armor and a precious sword.

Narrator 1 Shirts of mail, rings and other gifts..

Narrator 2 Then eight of Hrothgar's finest horses, one saddled with jewels, all bridled with gold, were led into the hall and given there to Beowulf.

Narrator 1 Then Hrothgar called for music and the clever Scop, who'd been composing since the crack of dawn, began his song.

Scop *(crowd parts, and settles about the stage for the performance)*
Beowulf, the Geat, came calling, Grendel for to kill.
Unferth said, "I think you won't". The Geat replied, "I will."
But when he said, "I will fight him leaving shield and sword behind."
Not a few of us feared he had up and lost his Geatish mind.

Grendel, Grendel run the other way,
The Geat is come to fight with you today.
(speaking) Sing!

All Grendel, Grendel run the other way,
The Geat is come to fight with you today.

Scop For Grendel had cut down a legion of the bravest Danes
Twelve long years he'd run amok among us unrestrained
By our most courageous efforts, fiercely though we prayed and fought.
Not a few of us feared we had seen the last of Heorot.

All Grendel, Grendel run the other way,
The Geat is come to fight with you today.

Scop But Beowulf met Grendel smartly, shaking Grendel's hand,
Which Grendel, to his horror, found too terrible to stand,
Because the Geat who shook his hand in painful grip did lock it
And Grendel screamed to feel his arm ripped cleanly from the socket.

All Grendel, Grendel run the other way,
The Geat is come to fight with you today.

Scop Beowulf then said to Grendel, "We are both unarmed,
But you seem rather more upset about it. Have I harmed
The mighty Grendel?" But instead of answering poor Grendel fled
And now we've ev'ry reason to believe poor Grendel's dead.

All Grendel, Grendel run the other way,
The Geat is come to fight with you today.

Scop So sing we now a song of Grendel, lately run away,
Without his arm to meet his maker, and let no man say
It's wrong to shake a monster's hand, nor at the practice scoff.
It's good to shake a monster's hand if you can shake the hand right off.

All Grendel, Grendel run the other way,
The Geat is come to fight with you today. *(Repeat refrain)*

Sound Cue #4 (IN/OUT): *Dance – This is a raucous 1-minute dance – lots of stomping and clapping should accompany the music. Considerable applause and cheering erupts when the dance is over.*

Narrator 1 *(as crowd disperses)* So each of them, assured of their renewed good fortune – yes, their *great* good fortune, stepped into the evening air quite unafraid. *(we see Beowulf leaving with several people)*

Narrator 2 Some, like Beowulf, went on to other celebrations which continued until morning.

Narrator 1 Others to their homes to talk excitedly about the day's events.

Narrator 2 But some of them remained. *(several of the Geats are preparing their places for sleep as the last of the crowd exits)*

Narrator 1 They were weary from the day's adventure and desired nothing more than rest.

Narrator 2 So they laid down among the gifts the king had heaped around them.

Narrator 1 And they drifted off to sleep. *(all Geats are asleep)*

Sound Cue #5 (IN): Grendel's mother attacks

Narrator 2 *Verse 1:* Now, Grendel had gone home to die, it's true. *(Grendel lopes in from wing & crumples extreme DL – he is back home in his cave. Grendel's Mother appears beside him, kneeling – she might cradle his head in her arms or lap.)*

Narrator 1 And die he did.

Narrator 2 But Grendel did not die alone.

Narrator 1 For Grendel had been born of something like a woman, a female creature every bit as vile as he had ever been.

Narrator 2 *Verse 2:* And so when Grendel breathed his last.

Narrator 1 When the monster's life slipped out of him, that other creature, Grendel's mother, grieved. Grieved as any mother would for any slaughtered son.

Narrator 2 For any child she'd nurtured and protected.

Narrator 1 *Verse 3:* Perhaps she thought:

Mother *(melancholy)* He was a good and faithful boy.

Narrator 2 Or perhaps she wondered:

Mother Who did this to you?

Narrator 1 *(as she gently lays Grendel's head down and stands up)* Or perhaps her mind was blank, a crucible of rage and vengeful fantasies.

Narrator 2 *Verse 4:* So she left his body in the cave where he had died.

Narrator 1 The cave where she had given birth to him.

Narrator 2 Where they had feasted on the men he'd killed and carried back to her from Heorot. *(She begins her journey to Heorot: she walks directly downstage, possibly into audience, makes a hard right to DC – possibly the center of the front row, then makes another hard right straight up to the invisible "door", DC, where Grendel made his entrances to Heorot. Grendel, who is lying on a cloth that extends under a side curtain, is pulled on the cloth through the curtain and out of sight. A low wagon, disguised as rocky debris, might be used also.)*

Narrator 1 Grendel's mother rose up through the water, black with serpents.

Narrator 2 And raced across the fen like wings of death. *(at "door")*

Narrator 1 *Verse 5:* And, just like her son before her, she had but to touch the lock to make it fall away.

Narrator 2 And like her son before her, she was burning up with hate.

Narrator 1 Hate for *any* man alive, but most of all for those who'd killed her son.

Narrator 2 And Grendel's mother stepped inside.

Narrator 1 Verse 6: Perhaps she thought: *(she walks among the sleeping warriors)*

Mother So this is how they live. They sleep on stacks of gold!

Narrator 2 Perhaps she asked:

Mother *(hissing to the sleeping warriors)* Are you the creatures who cut down my son?

Narrator 1 Or perhaps her mind went blank when she discovered Grendel's arm. *(she kneels at the arm, touching it gingerly, lovingly)*

Narrator 2 The evidence of Grendel's struggle.

Narrator 1 Grendel's suffering and sad retreat.

Mother *(mournful whisper)* Oh, my boy. My precious boy. *(looking around her)* What savages are these?

Narrator 1 So Grendel's mother walked among the warriors.

Narrator 2 Searching for the one who'd killed her son.

Sound Cue #5 (OUT)

Mother *(hissing at the sleeping warriors)* Which of you do I repay? *(stopping at a warrior)* You? *(crouches on all fours, speaking close to the warrior)* Did you know him? Grendel? Did you know my boy?

Narrator 1 *(warrior wakes up, springs to his feet, alerts others, all of whom spring up, grabbing and brandishing their weapons)* But another warrior awakened, and then all of them were up. *(Mother grabs the warrior she was inspecting - Aeschere, holding him by the neck in the crook of her arm from behind)*

Narrator 2 Swords were pulled from benches, spears and shields arrayed. *(During the next several lines, the warriors surround her, but can't attack her directly because she's got a "hostage" by the neck. There's a good deal of jabbing and evading, hissing and growling as she skitters from one place to another.)* And Grendel's mother held the one she'd taken tightly in her grip.

Dag There were *two* of them!

Hektor It's strangling Aeschere!

Dag *(to Aeschere)* Don't struggle. You'll just make it angry.

Aeschere *(brave humor)* How would you describe it now? *(she yanks his neck and he cries out in pain)* Aye!

Thorvald But look at it! It's ... it's like a woman!

Mother Which one of you did it?!!

Dag *(covering one ear with his free hand - others wince)* Dear Lord, the sound is terrible! No doubt it is a woman as you say.

Hektor Do you think it tries to talk to us?

Mother Which one of you killed my boy?

Isegrim Not in any language I've heard.

Aeschere Tell it we are married men. I fear it seeks a mate! *(she yanks his neck again)* Aye! *(he begins to cough ... she's strangling him)*

Dag Thorvald, summon Beowulf! Tell him Grendel has a sister ... or a mother or a wife, we know not which, and she is here!

Thorvald Aye! He'll know the way to deal with her! (*exits running*)

Dag Hurry!

Mother (*having made her way back to the arm*) This is his *arm* you took from him!!

Aeschere Its claws are cutting into me like knives! Kill it! Kill it *now!*

Mother (*reaching down, she picks up Grendel's arm with her free hand, holds it up, and screams*) Which one of you did this?!! (*she gives Aeschere's neck a violent yank and he falls limp, which stops the warriors for an instant –she lets his body fall to the floor and runs out back of house – the warriors rush to Aeschere, who is dead – their action continues in pantomime as dead warriors enter and circulate among them*)

Ivar (*entering*) So now it's back to how it was before. (*semi-silent pantomime – Beowulf arrives, sees Aeschere's body*)

Gotfred No, this time it's different –the creature is some kind of woman. (*Beowulf kneels at Aeschere's body*)

Ivar (*indicating Aeschere*) The effect was just the same.

Ingvar (*Beowulf orders other Geats to carry Aeschere's body off – they position themselves on either end of him and then pantomime carrying his body off as Aeschere's "soul" steps into the dead warrior's conversation.*) Not the same at all. Grendel was a lion in a stable. This one – at the first sign of resistance – simply ran away.

Ilse (*entering extreme DR with Inge*) And I don't doubt that *more* of them are running 'round inside that evil place.

Inge Some say there's a *rave* of them, all sharpening their claws and setting up to punish us for killing Grendel.

Sigfried (*as Aeschere approaches*) Not the kind of death you were expecting?

Aeschere (*looks at Sigfried, then looks back at Geats carrying his "body" away*) No. (*other dead warriors laugh*) I was *expecting* not to have to die *at all* this morning. (*more laughter*)

Farmer (*entering from back of house with Hans and Jacob*) This morning we'll root out the ones who did this – outlanders! Filthy, scheming outlanders!

Jacob What do we do, father? (*Hrothgar & Wealhtheow join silent action onstage*)

Farmer We do the right thing, boy. We hunt them down and kill them!

Hans (*to someone on the other side of the house*) You there! (*they begin to make their way toward the audience member*)

Tolvar Here's the part where Beowulf tells Hrothgar what has happened.

Sigfried (*Hrothgar storms around the stage*) He takes it badly.

Aeschere (*speaking for himself and Hrothgar*) So was *anything* accomplished?

Ilse Nothing was accomplished! Beowulf just whacked the hornets' nest, that's all, and now they're swarming at us. (*Beowulf calms Hrothgar*)

Inge We were better off with Grendel. We *knew* Grendel.

Farmer (*making his way with sons in tow across audience*) We know what you're about. You aren't the first one we've discovered plotting mischief.

Inge The second creature is a sign.

Ilse Oh, for pity sake, leave off your talk of signs!

Farmer (*arriving at the audience member*) It's a pity when a man goes over to the enemy. Do you even feel remorse?

Hans *(bearing something)* What was that?

Jacob *(accusing audience member)* He's trying to confuse us, father.

Farmer *(hears something, too)* Shhh! *(all three of them look around fearfully)*

Gotfred Surely *something* is accomplished any time an evil is defeated.

Aeschere Even if a another evil takes its place?

Inge I'm only saying sometimes evil happens for a reason.

Farmer Something's out there! *(Hans & Jacob are totally spooked)*

Tolvar The Geat will have to take the battle out *to her*.

Jacob *(backing out with other two)* We're out here in the open. They can see us, father. We're too close to where the forest ends.

Sigfried Aye, if it's to end, he'll do exactly that.

Ilse But in the end, what difference does it make if there's a reason? The best that we can do is lock our door! *(exits as she entered, Inge following)*

Farmer *(retreating to back of house with sons)* I think it's best that we go home now.

Jacob *(retreating also)* Aye, and that we lock the door!

Hans *(calling back to audience member)* Don't be here when we return! *(exeunt)*
(By this time, the dead warriors have moved DR, Grendel is still lying DL. All the Danes, except Hrothgar and Unferth, have left. He accompanies Beowulf DC. The warriors – both Geats & Danes – remain UC, pantomiming preparations for battle)

Beowulf She *will* return if we do nothing.

Hrothgar *(at the end of his rope)* In exchange for countless Danish lives, you murdered Grendel. We rejoiced and thought the war was won, but now the pestilence is loose again. One life for another. One life for another. How many such exchanges do you propose?

Beowulf No more exchanges, Hrothgar. I propose we end it.

Hrothgar *(not liking what he's bearing)* How ... end it?

Beowulf By going there.

Hrothgar *(taken aback, panicked)* The way to Grendel's lair is unexplored ... and the place is cursed somehow. It's said the water writhes with serpents – dragons – and, by night, the water burns. Sometimes, it's said, the water rises up to meet black clouds driven through the sky by foul winds. *(suddenly remembering)* I myself, while hunting once, pursued a stag most nearly to the edge of it. Mark you, Beowulf, the stag would *not* go in. Not to save its very life!

Beowulf *(calm resolution)* Now, to save our own lives, I believe it's *we* who must go in.

Hrothgar One life for another.

Beowulf I promise you that she will not retreat this day – not into the earth or forest, not into the sea. Have patience in your sorrow, Hrothgar, and we'll avenge the dead. We'll have an end to it! On my life, I swear it. On my father's life.

Hrothgar *(considers, sees Beowulf's determination, realizes there's no other way, steels himself)* Let us go together, then. To have an end to it, for better or for worse. *(calling off)* Horses! Weapons!

Narrator 1 *(The Geats come downstage and slowly array to Beowulf's right and left during next several lines)* So Beowulf and his companions, with Hrothgar and a company of Danes, mounted up and rode across the fen.

Narrator 2 Across the fen and well beyond, braving many narrow passes, stony slopes and bluffs,

Narrator 1 Until they came at last to water's edge.

Narrator 2 The boiling corridor to Grendel's resting place.

Narrator 1 Where, all around, the warriors could see the teeth and tails of ocean dragons whipping in the blood and gore. *(all warriors at edge of apron, staring into audience, some pointing, others pantomiming conversation among themselves)*

Narrator 2 And on the other side could see the grim remains of kinsmen.

Hrothgar *(looking at opposite shore)* Doubtless, this is where the monster lives ... and I suspect she lives alone. *(Beowulf looks questioningly at Hrothgar)* It has long been said that two such creatures dwelled here – one the likeness of a man, the other of a woman. But only two of them, and so, now only one.

Beowulf And, God willing, there will be one less than that when I have finished. I put my faith in Him, *(warrior pantomimes handing him shirt of mail, then helps him with clasps)* and in this shirt of mail, so finely wrought no sword can bite the skin beneath it. *(banded helmet)* And this helmet. *(admiring it)* Crafted by the ancient weapon smiths. Splendid chains encircling the wearer's head. *(puts it on)*

Unferth Beowulf!

Beowulf *(battle humor)* Unferth, come to reconsider your allegiance?

Unferth Nay, Beowulf. *(pantomimes extending sword)* Take this. It is my sword, the sword called Hrunting. An ancient treasure, this. Edges cast in iron, hardened in blood and skillfully adorned with poison. It has never failed the hand that wielded it. May it bring you back to us alive. *(Beowulf takes sword, Unferth steps away – attendants pantomime tightening and adjusting Beowulf's battle gear)*

Narrator 1 A few more preparations then were made.

Narrator 2 And one of Beowulf's companions, eager for the fight, shot and killed a serpent with his arrow.

Narrator 1 Battle horns were blown and oaths were sworn.

Narrator 2 Then preparations ended.

Narrator 1 And Beowulf was ready to begin.

Beowulf *(to Hrothgar)* If death should overtake me, all I ask is that you remember me as your son. And send my armor and your many gifts back across the sea to Hygelac. Do this so that he might know how Beowulf – and Grendel – died.

Narrator 1 And then, not waiting for an answer, Beowulf stepped out into the water and was gone. *(Beowulf steps into audience. As soon as he's completely gone from the stage, we realize the players onstage have lost sight of him. Hrothgar then pantomimes scanning the surface, somewhat panicked, as the others do.)*

Narrator 2 The water swallowed Beowulf.

Narrator 1 And those along the shore lost sight of him.

Hrothgar *(to others onstage as Beowulf moves slowly "underwater" through the audience)* Keep a careful watch. Be prepared to swim to his assistance.

Unferth It could be that an undertow has pulled him out of sight.

Hrothgar Undertow or serpent or the monster's kin. *(pointing R)* Take a company of men to scout the

shore in that direction. *(to rest, pointing L)* The rest of you go back the other way. *(all exit hurriedly, leaving Hrothgar peering out DC – he calls back to men)* And sound a horn if he is seen! *(continues to scan the water)*

Narrator 1 But Beowulf did not come up, nor was he seen. To this day, no man knows if he was given air to breathe by God *(Beowulf inhales suddenly, as one who's been holding his breath – we see his surprise at not drowning)* or if he somehow learned to breathe the water.

Narrator 2 It was quite some time that passed, though – this is certain.

Narrator 1 And Hrothgar, as did all the rest, assumed the worst for Beowulf.

Narrator 2 *(Hrothgar begins exit)* So, heavy hearted, all of them withdrew, cursing fate and swearing to avenge. *(Hrothgar is gone)* Yet in the murky depths, the Geat persisted. *(Beowulf swings his sword about – if serpents are present, he strikes at them)*

Narrator 1 Swimming strongly through a host of angry predators.

Narrator 2 They harried him with teeth and talons bared.

Narrator 1 Perhaps he thought:

Beowulf These are the most amazingly ungainly things, most offensive to the eye!

Narrator 2 Perhaps he wondered:

Beowulf *(two Dragons move toward him from seats in the audience)* What are these crude, unfinished spectacles that crowd around me?

Narrator 1 Or perhaps he focused on the task that lay ahead. *(Beowulf brandishes sword at Dragons)*

Dragon Ak It points a tooth at us.

Dragon Ek It is deformed!

Dragon Ak *(whacked by Beowulf)* And dangerous!

Dragon Ek The groundlings drown their weakest ones, you know.

Dragon Ak *(whacked by Beowulf again)* Ow! This one isn't weak!

Dragon Ek *(incredulous laughter)* It only has one tooth ... and how it swims! It flaps just like a turtle!

Dragon Ak Bite the wretch and stop inspecting it!

Dragon Ek *(whacked by Beowulf)* Ooo! Its tooth is *bard*.

Dragon Ak *(whacked again)* And sharp! I say we let *her* deal with it. *(swimming away)*

Dragon Ek *(swimming away also)* Excellent idea! As we move on to weaker prey. *(they are gone or seated)*

Narrator 1 *(Beowulf gets ready to be attacked again)* Then, sensing unfamiliar movement in the water, Grendel's mother *did* swim out.

Narrator 2 *(Grendel's mother enters. Beowulf sees her and they square off)* And Beowulf attempted to engage her with his sword. *(He tries to strike at her and at him.)*

Narrator 1 But, though his armor guarded him against her scrapes, she was the faster swimmer and she quickly overcame him, sword and all.

Narrator 2 Clutching Beowulf in talons black and hard like iron, Grendel's mother carried him back to her cave. (*she takes him from behind, and "drags" him onstage, into her "cave"*)

Narrator 1 Back to the cave where she had given birth to Grendel.

Narrator 2 Where they'd feasted on the bones of men.

Narrator 1 And where, at last, her son had come to die.

Narrator 2 (*Beowulf coughs like someone who has almost drowned and stands, looking quickly around.*) Beowulf recovered quickly and he raised his sword again to finish her. Straight down upon her head he brought the battle-hardened blade. (*Beowulf pantomimes striking her head with sword – she staggers back, but isn't harmed.*)

Narrator 1 But to no avail.

Beowulf (*a bit amazed*) The creature's charmed, just like the other one. My sword is useless here. (*recovering nerve*) So I'll deal with her the same as with the one before. (*tossing sword aside*) ... With my hands. (*On the word "hands", he locks with her, arm-on-arm, in the same way he did with Grendel.*)

Mother (*circling with Beowulf, locked arm-on-arm*) You! You're the one who killed my son! I smell him on you!

Beowulf The noise it makes is almost like a language!

Mother So you've come do *me* damage, have you? Well, the damage done *already* will suffice. (*on "already" and "suffice", she gives Beowulf two hard yanks that bring him down to the floor ... she's winning ... pulls a "dagger" from her belt*) (*shouting*) Have you any inkling where you are or what you've done?

Beowulf (*straining, in great pain*) This one ... is stronger than the other.

Mother (*almost laughs*) Have you any inkling who or what I am? (*raises dagger*) This you understand, though, don't you? (*raises dagger, Beowulf's struggle intensifies*) Oh, yes. The killer understands the dagger, doesn't it? Understands it very well indeed! (*on "indeed", she stabs, but misses as Beowulf rolls away*)

Beowulf (*springing up, he pantomimes finding another sword against the wall*) What's this? (*picks it up & Mother backs off*) I've heard of swords like this – the work of giants, forged in furnaces superior to those of men. (*she snarls and sees she fears the sword – speaks to Mother*) This one, is it? (*she lunges, but retreats from the weapon when he brandishes it*) Is this the one you fear? (*she snarls*) So be it, then. (*raises sword – speaks to Mother*) So be it, then – and this time for the Danes, (*charging her*) for glory and for God! (*on "God", he strikes her on her neck – she nails, then, for a moment, she is frozen and silent, then she falls to her knees*)

Mother (*almost whisper*) Have you any inkling ...? (*falls dead*)

Beowulf (*panting heavily*) So be it, then. (*steps wearily to edge of stage and falls to one knee, exhausted*)

Narrator 1 So Beowulf defeated Grendel's mother, too, whose body, we'll assume, was eaten up by other demons. (*other demons - enter to remove her body*)

Narrator 2 And as for Grendel's body, that was found by Beowulf, and he removed the head of it as proof of what he'd done.

Narrator 1 Removed the head with that same sword he'd used to fell the other.

Narrator 2 And although Grendel's blood reduced the blade to dust, the hilt he carried proudly back to Hrothgar. (*Hrothgar enters UL, crosses quickly to Beowulf*)

Narrator 1 And that hilt, with Grendel's head, was the last that Hrothgar ever saw of Grendel's kind.

Narrator 2 (*as Hrothgar embraces Beowulf in a manly, back-slapping sort of way*) Of course, much gold was heaped on Beowulf again, his praises sung again, as well ... most likely louder than before.

Narrator 1 *(as Hrothgar & Beowulf separate, Hrothgar holding Beowulf by shoulders as he did when they first met – a sort of “let me have one last look at you gesture”) But when the revelry was ended and the many speeches done (Hrothgar releases Beowulf) the time for parting came. (Hrothgar turns and exits, leaving Beowulf alone on stage. He ambles to edge of stage and, if a raised stage, sits on edge, dangling one foot off. If the stage is flush with the audience floor, He kneels on one knee again. In either event, he stares contemplatively into the distance as ALL THE PLAYERS, ENTERING ON THEIR LINES, RETURN TO END THE PLAY, SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO THE AUDIENCE. It’s suggested that the players enter from as many places on the stage and in the house as possible.)*

Ilse And Beowulf returned to Hygelac,

Inge Whose hearth and honor he continued to defend.

Farmer And, when Hygelac was king no more,

Hans When his long life ended,

Jacob Beowulf assumed the Geatish crown.

Outlander Fifty years he ruled,

Thorvald Accumulating victories and honors,

Scop For his country and himself.

Ivar Fifty years it was,

Sigfried And then, in battle with a dragon –

Ingvar One which he defeated, by the way –

Aeschere Beowulf sustained a mortal wound,

Gotfred A battle scar that would not heal,

Tolvar And thus he traded his life

Sentry For the safety of his people.

Unferth For as the dragon breathed its last,

Wulfgar Beowulf departed this life, too.

Wealththeow And when the angels came,

Hrothgar He went up willingly ... nay, *joyfully* ... to be with God.

Narrator 1 *(stepping from behind podium, Xing DR) Yes, you should know, when all is said and done, there was a king.*

Narrator 2 *(stepping from behind podium, Xing DL) Named Beowulf.*

Narrator 1 A Geatish king.

Narrator 2 As celebrated for his wisdom as for bravery.

Narrator 1 As loved by those he ruled as any king.

Narrator 2 In any land.

Narrator 1 Anywhere in the world. *(Narrators both turn to watch final scene)*

Thorvald *(entering quickly) The ship and men are ready, sire.*

Beowulf *(briefest pause as he returns from thought) Then I’d say it’s time to go.*

Thorvald Aye, my lord. *(Beowulf reaches up to let Thorvald help him stand. They begin to leave)*

Beowulf *(stops, looks out and around at various people who are all looking at the audience, then speaks with some amusement) I think I’ll miss this place.*

Thorvald *(chuckling) I think they’ll miss you more. (They laugh, exit.)*

Sound Cue #6 (IN/OUT): *Bow music*

Curtain