

So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by  
and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness.  
We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns.

*The Danes have legends about their warrior kings. The most famous was Shield Sheafson, who founded the ruling house*

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There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes,  
a wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.  
This terror of the hall-troops had come far.  
A founding to start with, he would flourish later on  
as his powers waxed and his worth was proved.  
In the end each clan on the outlying coasts  
beyond the whale-road had to yield to him  
and begin to pay tribute. That was one good king.

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Afterwards a boy-child was born to Shield,  
a cub in the yard, a comfort sent  
by God to that nation. He knew what they had toled,  
the long times and troubles they'd come through  
without a leader; so the Lord of Life,  
the glorious Almighty, made this man renowned.  
Shield had fathered a famous son:  
Beow's name was known through the north.  
And a young prince must be prudent like that,  
giving freely while his father lives  
so that afterwards in age when fighting starts

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steadfast companions will stand by him  
and hold the line. Behaviour that's admired  
is the path to power among people everywhere.

*Shield's fierce*

Shield was still thriving when his time came  
and he crossed over into the Lord's keeping.  
His warrior band did what he bade them  
when he laid down the law among the Danes:  
they shouldered him out to the sea's flood,  
the chief they revered who had long ruled them.  
A ring-whorled prow rode in the harbour,  
ice-clad, outbound, a craft for a prince.

They stretched their beloved lord in his boat,  
laid out by the mast, amidships,  
the great ring-giver. Far-fetched treasures  
were piled upon him, and precious gear.  
I never heard before of a ship so well furnished  
with battle tackle, bladed weapons  
and coats of mail. The massed treasure  
was loaded on top of him: it would travel far  
on out into the ocean's sway.

They decked his body no less bountifully  
with offerings than those first ones did  
who cast him away when he was a child  
and launched him alone out over the waves.  
And they set a gold standard up  
high above his head and let him drift  
to wind and tide, bewailing him  
and mourning their loss. No man can tell,  
no wise man in hall or weathered veteran  
knows for certain who salvaged that load.

Then it fell to Beow to keep the forts.

He was well regarded and ruled the Danes  
for a long time after his father took leave  
of his life on earth. And then his heir,  
the great Halfdane, held sway  
for as long as he lived, their elder and warlord.  
He was four times a father, this fighter prince:  
one by one they entered the world,  
Heorogar, Hirothgar, the good Halga  
and a daughter, I have heard, who was Onela's queen,  
a balm in bed to the battle-scarred Swede.

*Shield's heirs: his  
son Beow succeeded  
by Halfdane,  
Halfdane by  
Hrothgar*

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The fortunes of war favoured Hirothgar.  
Friends and kinsmen flocked to his ranks,  
young followers, a force that grew  
to be a mighty army. So his mind turned  
to hall-building: he handed down orders  
for men to work on a great mead-hall  
meant to be a wonder of the world forever;

*King Hrothgar  
builds Heorot Hall*

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it would be his throne-room and there he would dispense  
his God-given goods to young and old—  
but not the common land or people's lives.  
Far and wide through the world, I have heard,  
orders for work to adorn that wallstead  
were sent to many peoples. And soon it stood there,  
finished and ready, in full view,  
the hall of halls. Heorot was the name  
he had settled on it, whose utterance was law.  
Nor did he renege, but doled out rings  
and torques at the table. The hall towered,  
its gables wide and high and awaiting  
a barbarous burning. That doom abided,  
but in time it would come: the killer instinct  
unleashed among in-laws, the blood-just rampant.

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Then a powerful demon, a prowler through the dark,  
nursed a hard grievance. It harrowed him  
to hear the din of the loud banquet  
every day in the hall, the harp being struck  
and the clear song of a skilled poet  
telling with mastery of man's beginnings,  
how the Almighty had made the earth  
a gleaming plain girdled with waters;  
in His splendour He set the sun and the moon  
to be earth's lamplight, lanterns for men,  
and filled the broad lap of the world  
with branches and leaves; and quickened life  
in every other thing that moved.

*Heorot is threatened*

*Grendel, a monster  
descended from  
"Cain's clan,"  
begins to prowl*

So times were pleasant for the people there  
until finally one, a fiend out of hell,  
began to work his evil in the world.  
Grendel was the name of this grim demon  
haunting the marches, marauding round the heath  
and the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time  
in misery among the banished monsters,  
Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed  
and condemned as outcasts. For the killing of Abel  
the Eternal Lord had exacted a price:  
Cain got no good from committing that murder  
because the Almighty made him anathema  
and out of the curse of his exile there sprang  
ogres and elves and evil phantoms  
and the giants too who strove with God  
time and again until He gave them their reward.

So, after nightfall, Grendel set out  
for the lofty house, to see how the Ring-Danes

*Grendel attacks  
Heorot*

were settling into it after their drink,  
and there he came upon them, a company of the best  
asleep from their feasting, insensible to pain  
and human sorrow. Suddenly then  
the God-cursed brute was creating havoc:  
greedy and grim, he grabbed thirty men  
from their resting places and rushed to his lair,  
flushed up and inflamed from the raid,  
blundering back with the butchered corpses.

Then as dawn brightened and the day broke  
Grendel's powers of destruction were plain:  
their wassail was over, they wept to heaven  
and mourned under morning. Their mighty prince,  
the storied leader, sat stricken and helpless,  
humiliated by the loss of his guard,  
bewildered and stunned, staring aghast  
at the demon's trail, in deep distress.  
He was numb with grief, but got no respite  
for one night later merciless Grendel  
struck again with more gruesome murders.  
Malignant by nature, he never showed remorse.  
It was easy then to meet with a man  
shifting himself to a safer distance  
to bed in the bothies, for who could be blind  
to the evidence of his eyes, the obviousness  
of that hall-watcher's hate? Whoever escaped  
kept a weather-eye open and moved away.

So Grendel ruled in defiance of right,  
one against all, until the greatest house  
in the world stood empty, a deserted wallstead.  
For twelve winters, seasons of woe,

King Hrothgar's  
distress and  
helplessness

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the Lord of the Shieldings suffered under  
his load of sorrow; and so, before long,  
the news was known over the whole world.  
Sad lays were sung about the beset king,  
the vicious raids and ravages of Grendel,  
his long and unrelenting feud,  
nothing but war; how he would never  
parley or make peace with any Dane  
nor stop his death-dealing nor pay the death-price.  
No counsellor could ever expect  
fair reparation from those rabid hands.  
All were endangered; young and old  
were hunted down by that dark death-shadow  
who lurked and swooped in the long nights  
on the misty moors; nobody knows  
where these reavers from hell roam on their errands.

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So Grendel waged his lonely war,  
inflicting constant cruelties on the people,  
atrocious hurt. He took over Heorot,  
haunted the glittering hall after dark,  
but the throne itself, the treasure-seat,  
he was kept from approaching; he was the Lord's outcast.

These were hard times, heart-breaking  
for the prince of the Shieldings; powerful counsellors,  
the highest in the land, would lend advice,  
plotting how best the bold defenders  
might resist and beat off sudden attacks.  
Sometimes at pagan shrines they vowed  
offerings to idols, swore oaths  
that the killer of souls might come to their aid  
and save the people. That was their way,

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The Danes, hard-  
pressed, turn for  
help to heathen gods

their heathenish hope; deep in their hearts  
they remembered hell. The Almighty Judge  
of good deeds and bad, the Lord God,  
Head of the Heavens and High King of the World,  
was unknown to them. Oh, cursed is he  
who in time of trouble has to thrust his soul  
in the fire's embrace, forfeiting help;  
he has nowhere to turn. But blessed is he  
who after death can approach the Lord  
and find friendship in the Father's embrace.

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The hero and his  
troop sail from the  
land of the Geats

So that troubled time continued, woe  
that never stopped, steady affliction  
for Haldane's son, too hard an ordeal.  
There was panic after dark, people endured  
raids in the night, riven by the terror.

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At the court of King  
Hygelac, a Geat  
warrior prepares to  
help Hrothgar

When he heard about Grendel, Hygelac's thane  
was on home ground, over in Geatland.  
There was no one else like him alive.  
In his day, he was the mightiest man on earth,  
high-born and powerful. He ordered a boat  
that would ply the waves. He announced his plan:  
to sail the swan's road and search out that king,  
the famous prince who needed defenders.  
Nobody tried to keep him from going,  
no elder denied him, dear as he was to them.  
Instead, they inspected omens and spurred  
his ambition to go, whilst he moved about  
like the leader he was, enlisting men,  
the best he could find; with fourteen others  
the warrior boarded the boat as captain,  
a canny pilot along coast and currents.

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Time went by, the boat was on water,  
in close under the cliffs.  
Men climbed eagerly up the gangplank,  
sand churned in surf, warriors loaded  
a cargo of weapons, shining war-gear  
in the vessel's hold, then heaved out,  
away with a will in their wood-wreathed ship.  
Over the waves, with the wind behind her  
and foam at her neck, she flew like a bird  
until her curved prow had covered the distance  
and on the following day, at the due hour,  
those seafarers sighted land,  
sunlit cliffs, sheer crags  
and looming headlands, the landfall they sought.  
It was the end of their voyage and the Geats vaulted  
over the side, out on to the sand,  
and moored their ship. There was a clash of mail  
and a thresh of gear. They thanked God  
for that easy crossing on a calm sea.

The Danish coast-  
guard challenges the  
outsiders

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When the watchman on the wall, the Shieldings' lookout  
whose job it was to guard the sea-cliffs,  
saw shields glittering on the gangplank  
and battle-equipment being unloaded  
he had to find out who and what  
the arrivals were. So he rode to the shore,  
this horseman of Hrothgar's, and challenged them  
in formal terms, flourishing his spear:  
"What kind of men are you who arrive  
rigged out for combat in coats of mail,  
sailing here over the sea-lanes  
in your steep-hulled boat? I have been stationed

as lookout on this coast for a long time.  
My job is to watch the waves for raiders,  
any danger to the Danish shore.  
Never before has a force under arms  
disembarked so openly—not bothering to ask  
if the sentries allowed them safe passage  
or the clan had consented. Nor have I seen  
a nightier man-at-arms on this earth  
than the one standing here: unless I am mistaken,  
he is truly noble. This is no mere  
hanger-on in a hero's armour.  
So now, before you fare inland  
as interlopers, I have to be informed  
about who you are and where you hail from.  
Outsiders from across the water,  
I say it again: the sooner you tell  
where you come from and why, the better."

The leader of the troop unlocked his word-hoard;  
the distinguished one delivered this answer:  
"We belong by birth to the Geat people  
and owe allegiance to Lord Hygelac.  
In his day, my father was a famous man,  
a noble warrior-lord named Ecgtheow.  
He outlasted many a long winter  
and went on his way. All over the world  
men wise in counsel continue to remember him.  
We come in good faith to find your lord  
and nation's shield, the son of Haldane.  
Give us the right advice and direction.  
We have arrived here on a great errand  
to the lord of the Danes, and I believe therefore  
there should be nothing hidden or withheld between us.

*The Geat hero  
announces hims  
and explains his  
mission*

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So tell us if what we have heard is true  
about this threat, whatever it is,  
this danger abroad in the dark nights,  
this corpse-maker mongering death  
in the Shieldings' country. I come to proffer  
my wholehearted help and counsel.  
I can show the wise Hirothgar a way  
to defeat his enemy and find respite—  
if any respite is to reach him, ever.  
I can calm the turmoil and terror in his mind.  
Otherwise, he must endure woes  
and live with grief for as long as his hall  
stands at the horizon, on its high ground."

Undaunted, sitting astride his horse,  
the coast-guard answered, "Anyone with gumption  
and a sharp mind will take the measure  
of two things: what's said and what's done.  
I believe what you have told me: that you are a troop  
loyal to our king. So come ahead  
with your arms and your gear, and I will guide you.  
What's more, I'll order my own comrades  
on their word of honour to watch your boat  
down there on the strand—keep her safe  
in her fresh tar, until the time comes  
for her curved prow to preen on the waves  
and bear this hero back to Geatland.  
May one so valiant and venturesome  
come unharmed through the clash of battle."

300  
So they went on their way. The ship rode the water,  
broad-beamed, bound by its hawsers  
and anchored fast. Boar-shapes flashed

*The coast-guard  
allows the Geats to  
pass*

above their cheek-guards, the brightly forged  
work of goldsmiths, watching over  
those stern-faced men. They marched in step,  
hurrying on till the timbered hall  
rose before them, radiant with gold.  
Nobody on earth knew of another  
building like it. Majesty lodged there,  
its light shone over many lands.  
So their gallant escort guided them  
to that dazzling stronghold and indicated  
the shortest way to it; then the noble warrior  
wheeled on his horse and spoke these words:  
"It is time for me to go. May the Almighty  
Father keep you and in His kindness  
watch over your exploits. I'm away to the sea,  
back on alert against enemy raiders."

*They arrive at  
Haven!*

It was a paved track, a path that kept them  
in marching order. Their mail-shirts glistened,  
hard and hand-linked; the high-gloss iron  
of their armour rang. So they duly arrived  
in their grim war-graith and gear at the hall,  
and, weary from the sea, stacked wide shields  
of the toughest hardwood against the wall,  
then collapsed on the benches; battle-dress  
and weapons clashed. They collected their spears  
in a seafarers' stook, a stand of greyish  
tapering ash. And the troops themselves  
were as good as their weapons.

Then a proud warrior  
questioned the men concerning their origins:  
"Where do you come from, carrying these  
decorated shields and shirts of mail,

these cheek-hinged helmets and javelins?  
I am Hrothgar's herald and officer.  
I have never seen so impressive or large  
an assembly of strangers. Stoutness of heart,  
bravery not banishment, must have brought you to  
Hrothgar."

The man whose name was known for courage,  
the Geat leader, resolute in his helmet,  
answered in return: "We are retainers  
from Hygelac's band. Beowulf is my name.  
If your lord and master, the most renowned  
son of Halldane, will hear me out  
and graciously allow me to greet him in person,  
I am ready and willing to report my errand."

Wulfgar replied, a Wendel chief  
renowned as a warrior, well known for his wisdom  
and the temper of his mind: "I will take this message,  
in accordance with your wish, to our noble king,  
our dear lord, friend of the Danes,  
the giver of rings. I will go and ask him  
about your coming here, then hurry back  
with whatever reply it pleases him to give."

With that he turned to where Hrothgar sat,  
an old man among retainers;  
the valiant follower stood four-square  
in front of his king: he knew the courtesies.  
Wulfgar addressed his dear lord:  
"People from Geatland have put ashore.  
They have sailed far over the wide sea.  
They call the chief in charge of their band

Beowulf  
his name

Formic  
obsert