

beowulf

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1 Section 1

1.1 Opening

1.1.1 The book opens with Scyld Shefing's funeral

People mourn his death, because he was a great king.

Scyld was a great king because he was good at leading in battle, he had sons (which allowed the lineage to continue,) and he came up from nothing. He was obeyed, because he was feared (Machiavellian ideals long before Machiavelli.) He was especially feared by his enemies, but by his followers as well.

He treated his followers fairly and rewarded them for their work. He distributed the treasure to the warriors after battles.

Being good enough at battle to be feared saves him lives and helps establishing peace. He used violence and war for the sake of peace. With peace in his land, his people could prosper. Their needs would be met.

Scyld is the benchmark for a good king, and these qualities are what all other kings are compared to.

1.1.2 Hrothgar builds a hall

This is a mead-hall, for drinking. The men would come home, and they would come to the hall and drink mead. It was a place of eating, and drinking, partying, and where the unmarried male warriors slept.

Hrothgar wanted his mead hall to be the biggest and best building, to let his men know that he thought they were the best. Hrothgar was proud, but not arrogant. Pride is justifiable. The Anglo-saxons were not huge fans of humility.

The people have a good time until the attack of Grendel.

1.1.3 Grendel attacks

Grendel is a demon, evil for the sake of evil, and has great bloodlust. A descendant of Cain, and he's angry that he wasn't invited. He's been excluded, and laughed at, and kills 30 men (daily.)

This has been going on for 12 years, but after the second night they started moving away from the mead hall. This made Grendel successful in destroying the community, but only at night and he could not touch the throne.

A weirgild is a way of making reparations in the Anglo-Saxon way of doing things. This was common within a tribe, and it was a way of making a reparation and stop the bloodshed. In battle, this happened to go to the winning tribe. They offer one to Grendel, who refuses the offer on account of his bloodlust.

Hrothgar doesn't fight Grendel because it would be foolish and bad for his people. **Despite his pride, he puts the sake of his people first.**

1.1.4 Enter Beowulf

Beowulf, like Grendel, has the strength of 30 men. He has a reputation, and comes to help.

Beowulf helps Hrothgar for two reasons:

- Credentials, to add to his reputation. Glory. (Notably, the Anglo-Saxons didn't have an afterlife. To live on, one must be remembered by the Scopes.)

- Beowulf's father did something, and went to Hrothgar's kingdom. Since Hrothgar paid Beowulf's father's Weirgild, Beowulf feels a debt of honor. Even though he doesn't technically owe Hrothgar a thing, he wants to help.

The people of his clan read the omens and believe Beowulf will have fate on his side. The omens are good.

Beowulf knows it will be equal, and things are looking good.

1.1.5 Beowulf arrives

Immediately Beowulf's group are dressed well and in warrior's clothing, but are open about it. Beowulf has the "Head of a Hero" meaning he has charisma and presence.

Beowulf wasn't always a part of his clan's best. He started from nothing, much like Scyfling. He was now going on a glorious quest of honor.

2 Section 2

3 Section 3