Thrall

My game Thrall is based on the minor character of the slave that accidently finds the barrow where the Dragon is sleeping and steals one of the treasures there. This sole action starts the finale to Beowulf’s life. Thrall is one of the terms for a slave.

This character is mentioned briefly in Beowulf, ll. 2215-2230 when he discovers the “heathen trove” (l. 2216) and steals a cup. This starts the dragon’s search for the missing goblet and the harrowing of the land. The slave reappears in ll. 2280-2286 when he shows the cup to his master and the ‘vault was rifled, the ring-hoard robbed’ (ll.2283-2284) and this really angers the dragon and news of the monster spreads to Beowulf. The slave lastly appears as the guide to Beowulf and his band of warriors taking them to the dragon’s lair.

I wanted to explore a little of the history of Viking slaves into the game and show the point of view of someone who is not a king or high borne noble, not a warrior, and kills someone by mistake and is generally a coward. I wondered what it must be like to be a nobody in the world of Beowulf.

The main character’s name is Skáld and is an Old Norse name and often associated with a poet or storyteller. The narrative is framed as a story being retold by the main character well after the history of Beowulf. We find Skáld now discarded as a slave and begging. He will tell us his story for food.

His story takes us to the time leading up to the discovery of the buried treasure and the player is allowed to find out more about Skáld’s tattoo, given choices as to whether to enter the lair, and what he might do afterwards rather than perhaps go back to his master. The gameplay however pushes the player to follow the Beowulf narrative to its finale and there a small reward in that Skáld discovers possibly his own history.

Finally, once the story is told Skáld begs for more food. If you give him some, he may tell you another one… or at least the beginning of one.

The aesthetics of the game are modern and I have tried to create a visual sensitivity to some of the more dramatic points in the game’s story. The voice of Skáld is very straightforward and as present as possible. There are “news” passages that echo what a modern tabloid might have on its front page. The original text is used sparingly as Beowulf starts to declaim before facing the dragon. From the point of view of the slave, he is more interested in sneaking away.

I was trying more for a dramatic story although I did research a number of short articles on Slaves in the Old Scandinavian era.