

Chapter 7

It is now mid-way through the twelfth year in Grendel's war with the humans. Grendel thinks that his enemies do define themselves against him, just as the dragon said. He could kill all of Hrothgar's men in one night, but he restrains himself, realizing that he needs the humans, as well. He asks, "What will we call the Hrothgar-Wrecker when Hrothgar has been wrecked?"

Grendel sings, influenced by the language of the Shaper. He thinks he might be crazy but keeps singing. He narrates in third-person how he scares a human out in the wilderness. He has killed his quota of men for the season. Following from his self-imposed quota, Grendel formulates what he calls Grendel's law: "There is no limit to desire but desire's needs."

As Grendel's stream of consciousness continues to alternate with third-person narration, he thinks of Hrothgar's queen, Wealtheow, and tries to define her geometrically and physically as a cross-section of time-space.

Grendel remembers how Wealtheow first appeared, during the second year of his raids. Hrothgar had gathered all of his army to fight a new rival king. Grendel watched the army gather and march, eager for bloodshed.

Hrothgar met with the other king. Grendel anticipated a battle, but the king asked for a truce and offered Hrothgar gifts. Hrothgar was skeptical, but then the king brought out a beautiful woman, his sister, and offered her in marriage to Hrothgar. Grendel was fascinated by the woman. She caused him pain in the same way that the Shaper's songs once did.

All that winter, Grendel refrained from raiding Hart. He spent much time in his cave, thinking of Wealtheow and observing his mindless mother. At times Grendel would go to the mead hall and watch Wealtheow serve all the tables, charming Hrothgar like the Shaper. She softened tempers and mediated arguments, her beauty resolving men's disputes. She calmed Unferth when other men teased him about having killed his own brother.

Grendel spent much time pondering the power of Wealtheow's beauty. He often saw her cry at night, missing her old home. Once that winter, Wealtheow's brother came to Hart. All the men ate, drank, and listened to the Shaper. Grendel watched through the crack in the wall. The humans were all merry, though Grendel noticed some underlying tension between Hrothgar's men and Wealtheow's brother and his men. Back in his cave, Grendel was frustrated by the humans' merriment. Although he had met the dragon and knew that the world was meaningless, he was tempted by the humans' arrogant self-importance and happiness. Grendel was tortured by Wealtheow as he once was by the Shaper.

The next night, Grendel raided the mead hall, killing men on his way to the queen's bedroom. Finding Wealtheow, he picked her up and examined her. He resolved to kill her, but then changed his mind, since killing her would be pointless. He let her go, noting that doing so disproved the humans' theories about him. Grendel ran back to his cave, thinking that he had "cured himself" of his recent melancholy, though part of him was still troubled by Wealtheow's beauty. He decided to kill himself but then changed his mind.

Chapter 8

Imitating an epic, heroic style, Grendel tells of how Hrothgar's brother was murdered and so his young nephew Hrothulf came to live at Hart. Grendel's narration starts to alternate with dramatic scenes of dialogue. In the first scene, Wealtheow welcomes Hrothulf to Hart. Grendel thinks the boy may already have thoughts of challenging Hrothgar's authority. Grendel presents a theorem that he ascribes to the Shaper: "Any action of the human heart must trigger an equal and opposite reaction."

In the next scene, Hrothulf is in the yard, thinking about all of the peasants that toil in Hrothgar's kingdom. Hrothulf is frustrated that the entire kingdom is predicated on the violence that is deemed legitimate.

The next scene presents Hrothulf enjoying the shade of a tree in the woods and philosophizing. He debates whether the tree could be called tyrannical, since it doesn't allow other plants to grow where it is, and then thinks of Wealtheow and her kind love.

In the next scene, Wealtheow is beside Hrothulf's bed and asks him why he is so sad at his young age. She speaks of future generations inheriting Hrothgar's riches. She says that she used to love unthinkingly, but has now had more life experience and often cannot sleep.

The novel returns to Grendel's narration, as he describes how he saw Hrothulf increasingly take to the idea of violence. Hrothulf was generally quiet and sullen and spent much time with an old man named Red Horse, who advised him. Grendel followed the pair once and overheard them theorizing about rebellion and whether such violence could be legitimate. Red Horse claimed that the power structure of the kingdom protected those in power and oppressed others. Hrothulf agreed that the system was a fraud.

Red Horse proposed revolution as a simple act of violence, seeing all systems and states as equally evil. But Hrothulf disagreed, saying that he wanted a state with more freedom and that only a crazy person would praise violence for the sake of violence.

Grendel notes that Hrothgar is no longer physically strong and is aware of the scheming of his various relatives and children who are eager to take over the kingdom. Grendel wonders why he continues to

terrorize Hrothgar, despite all the king's problems. His answer to himself is simple: why not? Grendel sees Hrothgar's realm as the product of his own work since it was he, Grendel, who drove the humans to improve and build their kingdom.

Grendel thinks of a dream to "impute" to Hrothgar. Hrothgar then narrates the dream he has: he is alone standing in a thicket. There are two trees that have grown into one, winding around each other. There is the flash of a blade striking the tree.

Chapter 9

It is now December, dark and cold. Children in town make snow angels, which Grendel notices as he goes to the mead hall at night. He feels that some event is coming and feels afraid. Grendel watches one of Hrothgar's bowmen hunt a deer. He watches the deer die and the image sticks in his mind. He says he senses "some riddle in it."

Grendel observes some priests near the mead hall praying to a ring of icons of their gods. They sacrifice a calf. Grendel sees the priests' rituals as mere showmanship. He notes that the weak humans observe the rituals, while the strong ones ignore them. He recalls once having destroyed the images of the gods. Only the priests were upset, and the icons were rebuilt.

One dark night, at midnight, Grendel sits in the center of the circle of the icons. The humans are all asleep, but an old priest comes near and hears Grendel. He asks who Grendel is, and Grendel responds that he is the priest's god. The priest is terrified and bows down to pray, introducing himself as Ork. Grendel asks him what he knows about the king of the gods. The priest offers his ideas about the gods and goes on and on with his theories, weeping, to the amusement of Grendel.

Ork moans, shaking violently, and presents two axioms: "things fade" and "alternatives exclude." He continues to preach and theorize, while Grendel thinks of what to do with him.

Three other priests arrive. Grendel narrates a dramatic dialogue of what follows. The priests ask what Ork is doing. Ork tells them that he has talked with the king of the gods. The other priests don't believe him and try to get Ork to go back to sleep. A younger priest arrives, who believes Ork and is persuaded that Ork's beliefs are correct, but Ork ignores him. Grendel's bloodlust is put off by the priests' conversation.

All the men but Unferth are asleep. As Grendel doesn't usually raid in the winter, he heads back to his home. He has a vision of himself hanging by the roots of an oak, looking down into an abyss, but then he is in the woods again and reasons that it was only a dream.

Chapter 10

This chapter begins with an important declaration by Grendel: "Tedium is the worst pain." He is profoundly bored and sick of the scent of the dragon that is around him, accompanying his protective charm. He watches a goat climb the rock cliffs near his lair. He shouts at the goat to leave but it keeps climbing mindlessly. He hurls a boulder at it, but it keeps climbing. Grendel is annoyed by the animal's mindless stupidity. He rips up a tree and rolls the log down at the goat. The log trips the goat and Grendel pelts it with stones. The goat, bleeding and injured, still climbs on.

At dusk, Grendel watches Hrothgar's men going about their business. There are guards posted throughout the realm, though there is no danger. Grendel overhears a woman telling children that an extremely strong man will come from far away one day. Grendel eats some children who stay out after dark. As spring approaches, Grendel is still bored.

The Shaper is sick. Grendel watches as Hrothgar, Wealtheow, and Hrothulf go to visit the Shaper's sickbed. Grendel laughs, asking "Where are all his fine phrases now?" The Shaper dies. Grendel sees a messenger go announce the death to a woman the Shaper was particularly fond of. Grendel considers taking the woman, but thinks better of it. He watches men put coins on the Shaper's closed eyelids and then returns home.

Back in the cave, Grendel continues to feel bored. His mother begins to block the entrance to the cave, trying to stop Grendel from leaving. When they sleep, she buries him under her fur. Prompted by the death of the Shaper, Grendel ponders the impossibility of going back to the past and remembers his youth.

In my cave the tedium is worse, of course. My mother no longer shows any sign of sanity, hurrying back and forth, wall to wall, sometimes on two legs, sometimes on four, dark forehead furrowed like a new-plowed field, her eyes glittering and crazy as a captured eagle's. Each time I come in she gets between me and the door, as if to lock me up with her forever. (pg. 145)

Grendel decides to attend the Shaper's funeral. His mother attempts to prevent him from leaving the cave. Grendel considers that she might know something he doesn't. He pushes her aside and goes to the funeral, where the Shaper's assistant sings. Men light the Shaper's funeral pyre and priests say prayers. Grendel feels that it is the end of an epoch.

Back in his lair, he awakes from a deep sleep, imagining that he still hears the goat climbing up the cliff. He gets up and leaves the cave. He reflects that he should put off war with the humans until spring.

Chapter 11

Grendel is overjoyed because **a new group of humans has arrived by boat.**

I am mad with joy -- At least I think it's joy. Strangers have come, and it's a whole new game. (pg. 151)

He sensed their arrival in his cave and went to go see them come ashore. They got off the boat, decked out in armor, and met one of Hrothgar's guards. Grendel particularly noticed the strangers' leader, a huge, strong man (who is never named but can be inferred to be Beowulf). The leader told the guard that they were the Geats and had come as friends to Hrothgar. Grendel was entranced by Beowulf's muscles and was simultaneously frightened and excited by him. The Geats went to Hrothgar's mead hall.

Back in his cave, Grendel wonders if he is afraid of the Geats. In any case, he is excited by their arrival. He reflects on the unexplainable actions of humans: once, he saw a man with a family cheat on his wife for no reason. Grendel is pained by his boredom, which the Geats might dispel. He thinks that all order is only theoretical and unreal.

Grendel decides to go to the mead hall, reflecting on the facts that he alone exists and his mother does not truly love him for himself but only as something that is hers. He considers that he could delay his raids until the Geats leave and continues to debate what he should do even as he approaches Hart. When he arrives, he peers through the crack in the mead hall's wall.

Grendel sees that Hrothgar's Danes are embarrassed and frustrated that foreigners have come to save them. It offends their sense of honor. Ork, in particular, looks frustrated, as the Geats, and not the gods, have come to their rescue. Grendel thinks that he will kill the strangers for Hrothgar's honor because he sees that while Hrothgar is also upset, the king knows he needs the Geats' help to defeat Grendel.

You could see pretty well what advice he'd give. His chest was as wide as an oven. His arms were like beams. "Come ahead," I whispered. "Make your play. Do your worst." But I was less sure of myself than I pretended. (pg.155)

Unferth rises and asks Beowulf if he is the one who supposedly swam for seven nights in the middle of the winter in a contest with another man because of a boast. Unferth says that Beowulf lost the contest and predicts that he will be defeated by Grendel. Hrothgar's men laugh. Beowulf responds that he actually won the swimming contest, in which he swam through a storm and killed sea-monsters. He alludes to Unferth's killing his brother, saying he'll go to Hell for the deed. Hrothgar calls for Wealtheow, who enters and eases the tension in the hall.

Grendel watches Beowulf and is transfixed by the warrior's mouth as he speaks and by his muscular shoulders. He has a momentary vision of himself hanging by the roots of an oak tree over an abyss. But Grendel reasons that he has no reason to fear the strangers. He watches as Unferth leaves the hall, clearly upset, and continues to spy on Beowulf, more and more frightened of him and yet more and more excited to encounter him.

The Geats wait in the hall for Grendel as the new shaper sings. Grendel reflects that all beings obey the mechanics of time. Grendel and Beowulf both await their encounter, as other men go to sleep. Grendel says, "it is time."

Chapter 12

Grendel forces open the doors of the mead hall and laughs. Everyone is asleep, so he seizes and devours a man. He reaches for another but is mistaken: it is Beowulf, who is actually awake, waiting for Grendel. Beowulf grabs Grendel's hand with a strong grip and doesn't let go. Grendel screams and imagines that Beowulf has fiery wings, but tells himself to hold onto reality: it is only a man.

Grendel tries to kick but feels as though he is falling, clutching at the oak's roots from his vision. He falls and slips on the bloody floor. Beowulf is talking but Grendel refuses to listen, as Beowulf's words hurt him like "chilly fire." Grendel recalls the dragon's words about the insignificance of individual lives. Beowulf says that Grendel's time has come and that he will kill him.

Grendel calls out for his mother and tells Beowulf that if he wins it is only because of "mindless chance" since he was tricked and then slipped by accident. Beowulf twists Grendel's arm and hurls him into a table. He whispers that Grendel makes the world what it is and orders Grendel to sing of the wall he is thrown against. Grendel resists Beowulf's idea that he creates the wall by imagining it, but obeys and sings. Beowulf laughs.

Grendel thinks Beowulf is crazy with his insane ideas. He maintains that it was chance and accident that caused Beowulf's victory. Beowulf tears off Grendel's arm. Grendel shrieks in pain. Beowulf appears to have white wings and to breathe out fire. Grendel sees winged men all around him but then comes out of his vision, now aware that he will die.

Grendel cries out for his mother and flees into the woods, crying out that Beowulf's victory was an accident. Suddenly he is looking down into the abyss from his vision. He comes to in the middle of the forest. Animals have gathered around to watch him die with "mindless, indifferent eyes." Grendel dies; with his last words, he says that he has had an accident and spitefully tells the rest of the world, "So may you all."