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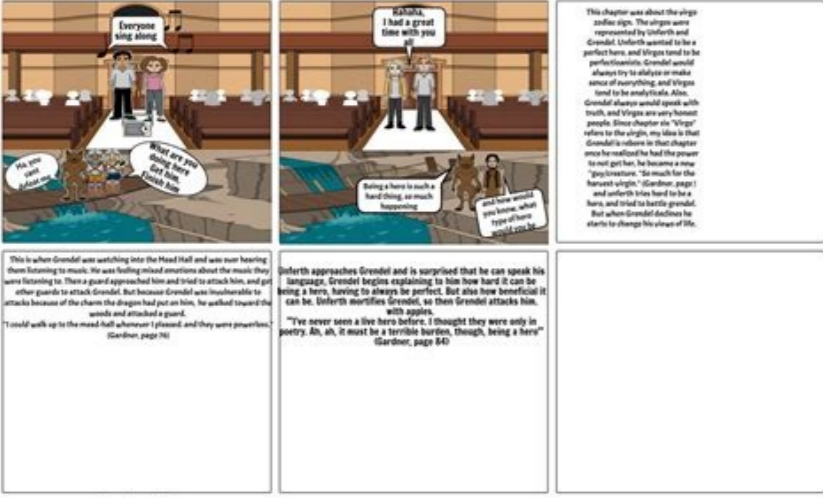
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In his novel *Grendel* (1971), the American writer John Gardner (1933–1982) retells part of *Beowulf* from the point of view of the monster. In this excerpt, Grendel tells his own version of one of his raids on Hrothgar's hall.

from **Grendel**
John Gardner

Citation: Gardner, John. "Grendel." *Elements of Literature*, 6th Course. Austin: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 2005.

And so I come through trees and towns to the lights of Hrothgar's meadhall. I am no stranger here. A respected guest. Eleven years now and going on twelve I have come up this clean-mown central hill, dark shadow out of the woods below, and have knocked politely on the high oak door, bursting its hinges and sending the shock of my greeting inward like a cold blast out of a cave. "Grendel!" they squeal, and I smile like exploding spring. The old Shaper, a man I cannot help but admire, goes out the back window with his harp at a single bound, though blind as a bat. The drunkest of Hrothgar's thanes come reeling and clanking down from their walling beds, all shouting their meads, outrageous boasts, their heavy swords arowl like eagles' wings. "Woe, woe, woe!" cries Hrothgar, hoary with winters, peeling in, wide-eyed, from his bedroom in back. His wife, looking in behind him, makes a scene. The thanes in the meadhall blow out the lights and cover the wide stone fireplace with shields. I laugh, crumple over, I can't help myself. In the darkness, I alone see clear as day. While they squeal and screech and bump into each other, I silently sack up my dead and withdraw to the woods. I eat and laugh and eat until I can barely walk, my chest-hair matted with dribbled blood, and then the roosters on the hill crow, and dawn comes over the roofs of the houses, and all at once I am filled with gloom again.

"This is some punishment sent us," I hear them bawling from the hill.
My head aches. Morning salts my eyes.
"Some god is angry," I hear a woman keen. "The people of Scyld and Herogar and Hrothgar are mired in sin!"
My belly rumbles, sick on their sour meat. I crawl through bloodstained leaves to the eaves of the forest, and there peak out. The dogs fall silent at the edge of my spell, and where the king's hall surmounts the town, the blind old Shaper, harp clutched tight to his fragile chest, stares futilely down, straight at me. Otherwise nothing. A figroot dilly at the posts of a wooden fence. A rumples-knotted ox lies chewing in dew and shade. A few men, lean, wearing animal skins, look up at the gables of the king's hall, or at the vultures circling casually beyond. Hrothgar says nothing, hoarfrost-bearded, his features cracked and crusted inside. I hear the people praying—whispering, whining, mumbling, pleading—to their numerous sticks and stones. He doesn't go in. The king has lofty theories of his own.

"Theories," I whisper to the bloodstained ground. So the dragon once spoke. ("They'd map out roads through Hell with their crooked theories!" I recall his laughs.)
Then the groaning and praying stop, and on the side of the hill the dirge-slow shoveling begins.

The Hero's Journey	
Hero's Journey	1. The Hero's Journey is a story of a hero who goes on a quest to save the world.
Hero's Journey	2. The hero is called to adventure by a mentor.
Hero's Journey	3. The hero goes on a journey to a new world.
Hero's Journey	4. The hero meets a mentor who helps him.
Hero's Journey	5. The hero goes through a series of trials and tribulations.
Hero's Journey	6. The hero reaches a point of no return.
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Sirius putting his hair up in a messy sloppy bun while studying with Remus and the poor guy loses the plot bc Sirius has ink on his cheekbone and he's frowning a lil bit n biting his lip and Remus just wants to kiss him but he can't because Sirius is his Best Bro, right and it's not what they do.

Sirius watching Remus out of the corner of his eye whenever Remus gets stuck on a research question and nips at the end of his quill while he tries to think, and Sirius is So Close to just leaning over and giving Remus a nip of his own but he can't do that cuz Remus is his best friend, and he doesn't wanna risk losing him, not right after the mess they just patched up between them.

Remus watches Sirius get frustrated and insists they take a break. Sirius - ever the tactile person - flops down and rests his head on Remus' thigh, or stomach, or wherever he can reach, really. Remus always laughs at his dramatics. Sirius whines til Remus gives in and untangles Sirius' hair.

They both spend a lot of time laughing it off and explaining it away. "It's not like that. Sirius is just stupidly needy all the time-" / "Shove it, Moony!"

It takes them way too long to realise they're into each other. But once they realise, oooohhhh boy, you thought they were inseparable before? At least before they had clothes on.

The men in the meadhall laugh at first, then realize Beowulf is crazy--he actually believes what he is saying. Off to the meadhall he goes. Grendel feels compelled, but he wants to make it a choice, out of his own free will. She loves him because he is her son. Grendel knows that it is his place to fight Beowulf, just as it is Beowulf's place to fight him. It's something men use to navigate between self and the world. Um, what does that mean? Well, if it's Grendel talking, you know everything's totally going to relate back to identity issues. She is mighty happy to have a real hero in her hall. As Beowulf talks, Grendel keeps having that horrible feeling that this dude isn't what he appears to be. He does love the chaos. Sure enough, the Danes are not crazy about the newcomers. He knows he will go to the meadhall, though it might be safer to stay home. So basically, there's lots of personal struggling here. Grendel remembers the dragon's vision, about how everything will come to blackness and nothingness. More identity struggles follow. Yet he feels less sure of himself than he usually does. His father was famous. Hrothgar already has too many potential heirs. Hrothgar decides to lay all his bad plans on the table. He brings up a legendary swimming contest between Beowulf and a friend called Breca. He could feel them coming: a strange feeling he had never experienced before. He knows he isn't free. His thoughts wander from subject to subject. Strangers have come, and it's a whole new game. Then he abruptly abandons the fear: he has easily killed bulls as strong as Beowulf. He toys with the idea of staying in his cave, but the idea of confrontation is too delicious. He feels the danger, but it also excites him. And, as Grendel watches the stranger, something really freaky happens: the guy seems to be possessed by something horrible. Suddenly Unferth speaks up. The guard asked who they were and why they were there, but they just looked at him. He talks about marrying his daughter Freawaru off as a peace offering. Beowulf knows a dying dynasty when he sees it. As the party goes on, the Shaper sings about the inevitability of time--seasons changing and things die and get restored. The king goes to bed, and everything drops into darkness. Grendel wanted to follow them to the meadhall, but he was afraid that, during the day, he might be seen. "Only in a world where everything is patently being lost can a priest stir men's hearts as a poet would by maintaining that nothing is in vain." Chapter 11, pg. One by one, everyone goes to bed. It's an honor thing. The priests don't like any of this--it's not good for business if human effort is rewarded with victory. "Heroes" from across the sea have just arrived by boat. x I am mad with joy.--At least I think it's joy. He goes to the meadhall to see how Beowulf and his companions were received. In the same calm, almost indifferent voice, Beowulf reminds Unferth that he murdered his brothers, and tells him he's going to hell. LitCharts assigns a color and icon to each theme in Grendel, which you can use to track the themes throughout the work. They move together, like a machine. Everyone is shocked into silence. It's like his lips don't match the words he's saying. The whole pack of warriors gives Grendel the creeps. Unferth is overcome with shame, and tries to feel hopeful for Beowulf's success, as a true hero would. Grendel knows it's show time. Grendel's boredom has been broken: strangers have come. He fought whales and sea monsters those seven nights, and beat them all. He asks Beowulf if he was the man who swam for seven nights against another man, on a dare. He can't beat Grendel alone. Grendel feels what he thinks is joy: something exciting is happening. Unferth slyly proclaims that Beowulf lost the bet, and predicts that he will lose against Grendel tonight. The big question: which category do these new guys fall into? Either way, Grendel wants to see all the chest-beating going on in Hart. He went back to the cave and pondered the heroes, confused. Ouch. But Hrothgar is tickled by the stranger's single-mindedness and calls in the queen to start pouring out mead. Wealthow greets the stranger. Grendel listens to all this, confused. On top of that, he killed nine sea monsters with his sword. The Danes stop laughing now, and Grendel realizes that the new stranger is insane. And then it happens: Beowulf calls Unferth out for killing his own brothers. Honor is very big with them; they'd rather be eaten alive than be bailed out by strangers, and just in time, too, because Hrothgar goes right over the top and tells everyone that this stranger is like a son to him. He doesn't know what it means. He's been pretty bored lately, and at least as far as that goes, he feels kind of human. Oh, boy. Wealthow freaks out a little bit. The Danes are ashamed that they are being "saved" by strangers. Well, no truer word has been spoken about Grendel, anyway. Grendel does know himself pretty well. It is as if he can't hear or understand anything anymore. He believes he could destroy Hrothgar's kingdom if he wanted to--but then what would he do? Beowulf calls Unferth out in a big way. The mind lays out the world in blocks, and the hushed blood waits for revenge. He is afraid. Though the man acted self-important, Grendel could see that if these men wanted to fight, the coastguard was doomed. Grendel is more afraid of him, and at the same time wants to fight him even more. He's murdered bigger things. Unferth leaves the meadhall, crying... He certainly isn't normal--it takes a monster to know. Grendel has that vision of the twisted oak roots and the abyss, but he can't remember what it all means. As a killing machine, Grendel doesn't know why he's so terrified. If you want to know yourself, he thinks, it usually results in violence, chaos. He's seen what humans do when they are bored (they cheat on their wives), so he gets it. But all this gets Grendel thinking philosophically (surprise, surprise): order is an illusion, he thinks. He would have no purpose. Whether or not he actually killed sea monsters, the men are afraid of Beowulf now, just because of the things he says. He senses it. Grendel watches as the "coast guard" confronts the fifteen warriors. Tedium is the worst pain. Hrothgar is pleased, though: this crazy man might be able to use his madness on Grendel. Here he is. Grendel whispers, "Bring it on!" Well, something pretty close to that, anyway. The Danes were not pleased, to say the least, that the Geats had come to save them. Beowulf calmly tells Unferth that he in fact won the bet. He could just hibernate until the strangers leave, but he knows he won't. Grendel makes it to Hart, even though he's still potentially afraid of the newcomers. There are two kinds of things in the world, Grendel decides: things to be murdered and things that stop you from murdering. He heard it coming steadily, the oars moving almost mechanically, and finally he saw the

sail of the boat. He went out to wait for the boat, and his mother does not stop him. He's definitely excited, though. He watched them arrive, and a coastguard rode up to question them. He came to kill Grendel. He couldn't tell whether he was afraid or not. Grendel, listening to all this, pretended to be confident, but he was nervous. Grendel muses that religion thrives on inaction and decay. He said all this politely, but there was something unfeeling and mocking in his tone. Philosophy, Theory, and Belief The priests are unhappy because they have always said that God will save them. He recalls seeing an otherwise rational, ordinary man, father of seven, travel one night to another woman's bed. Maybe. Let's face it: he's pretty much right. Beowulf explains that the contest was kind of a draw. He calls the queen out to serve them, and she too praises Beowulf. He's not an individual on his own. So Grendel's on his way to the meadhall, but he still continues to debate with himself. He sees that while the Danes would like to fight these strangers, Hrothgar is resigned to the fact that he needs the Geats. He cannot do it, and leaves the room quickly, upset. He felt like he was part of nature, as thoughtless and mechanical as a cave or a tree. Grendel believes that all sense of order in the world is just created by humankind. It's better for the priests if humans suffer. Grendel decides to kill the stranger, since the stranger is upsetting his peeps. Unferth speaks first, hoping to dishonor Beowulf. Grendel has to think it all over. Yet he was also excited--suddenly, looking at Beowulf, he felt alive. 159 Grendel decides to kill Beowulf, to protect the honor of the priest, and Hrothgar's men. He says that is the only "glorious deed" Unferth has ever done. The leader, Beowulf, calmly told the guard that they were Geats. They are like the mountain goat, who climbs by instinct. Did you know you can highlight text to take a note? Grendel sees that Beowulf knows that the kingdom is doomed. Hrothgar is friendly with Beowulf, telling him about his plans for the future. Unferth taunts him by saying that he lost the contest. But Grendel knows, at the end of the day, that he is nothing more than a hole in the universe or one thing relative to another (like a son to his mother). Only one of those two things can really exist. A bit egocentric? He thinks about the time when he decided that since if the world exists, he is the negative half of the world--the dark half--then the world must not be real. Maybe he's a shape-shifter or a wraith. They seem like "walking dead men" in their mechanical movements. The leader explains that they have come as friends to Hrothgar--and they have come to get rid of Grendel. Remember that giant with the strength of 30 men? He's not sure if he's afraid of the strangers. He says that Unferth is drunk and talking trash. Grendel reaches the same conclusion every time: it's the universe or him. Grendel can't make sense of this.

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