BEOWULF
THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

Stern • Steininger • Studabaker

Carlos Barrera (order #4973052)
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Beowulf: The Graphic Novel created by Stephen L. Stern & Christopher Steininger,
based on the translation of the classic poem by Francis Gummere

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Writing *Beowulf: The Graphic Novel* has been one of the most fulfilling experiences of my career. I was captivated by the poem when I first read it decades ago. The translation was by Francis Gummere, and it was a truly masterful work, retaining all of the spirit that the anonymous author (or authors) invested in it while making it accessible to modern readers. “Modern” is, of course, a relative term. The Gummere translation was published in 1910. Yet it held up wonderfully, and over 60 years later, when I came upon it, my imagination was captivated by its powerful descriptions of life in a distant place and time. To be sure, there were other translations over the years, but it wasn’t until 1999, and the landmark “interpretation” by Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney, that I was once again reminded of just how timeless and epic a poem *Beowulf* was. Heaney’s work was, indeed, the inspiration for this Graphic Novel.

What many readers encountering *Beowulf* for the first time are surprised to learn is that, although a work of fiction, the poem incorporates a number of historic events and figures. Many of the characters are also mentioned in early Scandinavian sources, and events such as King Hygelac’s raid into Frisia are referenced. As a result of careful study, including that of archeological excavations, scholars have concluded that much of the story is based in the factual history of Denmark and southern Sweden, during the period between 450 and 600 AD. The manuscript itself is believed to have been written by one or more authors, probably around the year 1000. The latest scholarship theorizes that a Christian scribe probably was the last to copy the text, influencing this bloody tale of paganism, monsters and vengeance with his own sensibilities.

Which brings us to no less an Old English scholar than J.R.R. Tolkien whose 1936 lecture entitled “Beowulf: the monsters and the critics” has arguably done more for establishing *Beowulf* as a literary masterwork than all of the criticism that has come before or since. Before Tolkien, the work was looked upon as an interesting, but certainly incidental, vestige of early literature; after Tolkien, it had earned its place alongside the greatest of the Latin and Greek heroic epics.

Tolkien paid perhaps his greatest tribute to *Beowulf* by setting his own heroic tales that have captured the imagination of countless millions in the land known as Middle Earth. For it is indeed in *Beowulf* that Middle Earth makes its first appearance in all of literature. To quote Tolkien: “Middle Earth came from Midgard which was the common English transliteration of Old Norse Miogzror... Middangeard (Old English), and Mittilagart...
(Old High German)...and as a result, is an old Germanic name for our world, the places inhabited by men, with the literal meaning ‘middle enclosure.’"

Simply put, Midgard—the realm of the humans in Norse mythology—is mentioned no less than six times in the epic poem that Tolkien so assiduously studied and was so obviously influenced by, not only in terms of his settings, but in terms of the archetypes he would employ. It can confidently be said that, without Beowulf, there would be no Lord of the Rings. And it is just as true to say that Beowulf was the first true champion of Middle Earth.

In creating this adaptation, artist Christopher Steininger and I have attempted to remain as faithful as possible to the original as the graphic novel form allows. But as in any retelling of an old myth, the key is to be rewarded with the discovery that its meaning is still very much alive today. If you are encountering Beowulf here in these pages for the first time, I hope it will inspire you, as it did me.

—Stephen L. Stern
London, September 2007
PROLOGUE

The Sixth Century

The Land of the Danes
HO!

A SAILING SHIP
AY--BUT WITH NO SAILS.

OR SAILORS. STRANGE.

NOT STRANGE, A MIRACLE! THIS IS ODIN'S DOING.
LOOK--A BABY! AT LAST, GOOD ODIN HAS SENT US A KING!

I AM SURE HE IS A PRINCE!

WE NEED A KING, AND ODIN SENDS US THIS CHILD FROM ACROSS THE SEA.

OF COURSE HE IS ROYAL. LOOK HOW HE SMILES IN HIS DREAMS.

SWORDS AND GOLD!

THIS IS ODIN'S WORK, FOR CERTAIN.

WHAT SHALL WE CALL HIM?

WHAT NAME BEFITS A KING?
SHIELD SHEAFSON. LOOK HOW HE GROWS. NOT YET A MAN, BUT TALLER THAN MOST.

THE SON OF ODIN WILL BE A TRUE GIANT WHEN HE REACHES MATURITY.

SOON HE WILL BE READY TO LEAD US IN BATTLE.

FOR VICTORY—OR DEATH!
FOR THE KING OF THE DANES!
All pay tribute to shield Sheafson!

Our treasury knows no bounds.

None dare fight an army led by our warrior king.

Now come!

I thank you for these riches, and pledge to keep peace in our lands.

Let us enjoy a royal feast!

All hail the king!

All hail the king!
Many years later...

THE KING GROWS OLD.

WE ALL GROW OLD.

I FEAR FOR WHY HE HAS SUMMONED US.

...I REQUIRE YOUR ASSISTANCE ONCE MORE. MY TIME APPROACHES.

MY GOOD AND LOYAL FRIENDS, THOSE OF YOU WHO STILL LIVE...

H ave built for me a great ship...
"It must have a tall mast, but no sails.

"Hang my shield in the prow.

"Let the decks be strewn with gold. Then stack swords upon the gold.

"In the heart of the ship, prepare a bed for me.

"Upon the bed, lay many sheaves of corn."
HELP ME...

I RETURN AS I HAD COME.
Many decades later,

**King Hrothgar, Grandson of Shield Sheafson.**

I had a dream, and in it I saw a hall that was bigger than any other. Let us build it, with shining floors and roofs of gold.

“And we shall call it Heorot.”

I am pleased. My dream has come true. Send an invitation to all of the noble lords and ladies in the land.

We shall hold a banquet to celebrate the opening of Heorot!

Long live King Hrothgar!

And long may Heorot stand!

Take thirty of your best men, and stand guard while the rest of us sleep.

Yes, my lord.

A magnificent feast, my lord.

Methinks we all drank too much.

Carlos Barrena (order #4973052)
A slaughterhouse! Necrot has become a slaughterhouse!

Who can have done this vile deed?

I do not know, Wealthow. But when I find the culprits, they will pay with their blood!

As mighty as you are, my king, you will never have your revenge.

Because this was no mortal deed.

Why say you that, Unferth?

Eaten?!

For certain, Grendel was here.

I’ve never believed in Grendel. It’s just a tale to frighten children.

I agree.

No. Grendel lives. He hides in the mists with the wolves.

He will be back. And next time it will be worse.

It’s obvious what has happened. They were eaten.
The court of Hrothgar, King of the Danes.

AND NONE VENTURE INTO HEOROT AFTER NIGHTFALL.

FOR FEAR OF GRENDEL.

YES, SIRE... FOR FEAR OF GRENDEL.

Even across the seas, we have heard of the great hall Heorot.

'TIS A SHAME WHAT THIS MONSTER HAS DONE.

'TIS MORE THAN A SHAME. 'TIS A WRONG WHICH MUST BE RIGHTED.

My nephew, Beowulf, and perhaps you have heard of him in the land of the Danes?

Indeed we have. His reputation for bravery precedes him.

Then let me prove my worth by aiding your most noble king.

Are you certain? It is said that Grendel is descended from Cain himself. He is evil incarnate.

In all sincerity— I fear neither man nor monster.

It is true. My nephew is a warrior among warriors.

I shall gather several of my bravest friends, and we will set sail for the land of the Danes.

Hrothgar thanks both you and your king, Beowulf.

You have my word; Grendel shall be destroyed.
Three days later...

I am Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow. Lead us to King Hrothgar.

State your purpose, sir. We come to destroy the demon Grendel.

Grendel? Ha! You think you can defeat him, with so few men? Take my advice and return to your own land. Otherwise you are doomed.

As you wish. Come, you are either the bravest men in the world—or the most foolish!

My men and I appreciate your concern... ...but nonetheless, we wish to see King Hrothgar. Now take us to him.
I knew your father. Young Beowulf, he was a noble warrior.

But even so, I would have thought twice before battling Grendel.

I do not wish to see you perish.

I try to live up to his example.

What pride! What overconfidence for such a young man!

Unferth! Why do you speak to our guest with such a sharp tongue?

Forgive him, Beowulf.

Nor do I, but I trust in my skill and that of my men.

I have one word for this "hero": Breca!

Yes. I have heard the story. Breca was your friend—until you tried to drown him!

BRECA?

How dare you accuse Beowulf of such a thing?!

HOLD! Stories have a way of traveling...and changing as they do so. We cannot blame Unferth for what he may have heard.

Let me explain the simple truth. When I was a boy, I had a friend named Breca.

More than anything else, we both loved swimming.
“One day, as boys will, we made a dare with one another. Together we would enter the sea, sword in hand...

“...and we would keep swimming until one of us gave up.

“...until a terrible storm drove us apart.

“For five days and five nights we swam side-by-side, neither of us willing to admit defeat...

“The creatures of the deep were driven mad by the raging waters. Nine sea-monsters attacked me...

“...and I killed them all.

“Afterwards, I lost all consciousness. And when I awoke, I was on Lapland shore.

“When I returned home, Breca was nowhere to be found. The rumor arose that I had killed him.

“But in truth, Breca was a much stronger swimmer than I. He swam the distance to Norway, and returned home many months later. Safe and sound.”
WELL SAID, BEOWULF! WELL SAID!!

YOU ARE A SOLDIER, IS IT NOT SO?

THEN IF YOU WERE TRULY AS COURAGEOUS AS YOU CLAIM TO BE, GRENDEL WOULD NEVER HAVE GOTTEN AWAY WITH SUCH ATROCITIES. BUT--!

UNLIKE YOURSELF, UNFERTH, I DO NOT BELIEVE IN RICCLUDING MY FELLOWS IN PUBLIC... SO LET ME SAY THIS TO YOU IN PRIVATE...

HE KNOWS HE CAN TRAMPLE YOU DOWN, AND MURDER WITHOUT FEAR OF REPRISAL.

BUT HE WILL FIND ME DIFFERENT.

NOW DRINK FROM THE ROYAL CUP, BEOWULF, SON OF ECSCHEOW, AND ACCEPT OUR THANKS IN ADVANCE OF YOUR ACTIONS.

I THANK YOU AND YOUR KING, M’LADY...

...AND KNOW THAT I SHALL FULFILL MY PURPOSE--OR MEET DEATH HERE IN HEORDOT!
THE SKIES GROW DARK. IT IS TIME WE TAKE OUR LEAVE.

I SALUTE ALL OF YOU.

YOU ARE THE BRAVEST MAN I HAVE EVER KNOWN. I SALUTE YOU.

I TRUST WE WILL SEE YOU ON THE MORROW... WHEN A NEW DAY WILL DAWN FOR OUR PEOPLE.

WE SHALL SEE...

WHERE IS YOUR SWORD?

I HAVE PLACED IT AWAY, OLAF. AWAY--? BUT GRENDEL--

GRENDEL HAS NO SWORD, AND NOR SHALL I.

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND.

ALL I NEED--

--ARE THESE.
STAND BACK, FIEND!

CLANG

CRUNCH

ENOUGH!

I DO NOT FEAR YOU, GRENDIEL!
HOLD HIM, BEOWULF, AND I WILL DELIVER THE DEATH-BLOW!

His hide is too thick! There is nothing we can do!

NOT SO!

I CAN HOLD HIM UNTIL HE TIRES... THEN HE WILL BE AT OUR MERCY!

GRRROWWWRRRR

I DO NOT FIGHT YOU, MONSTER! ONLY HOLD STEADFAST--WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS AS MY STRENGTH.

AGGH!

STAY AWAY FROM HIM! THIS IS NOW MY FIGHT ALONE.

GO AS YOU WILL, GRENDEL--MY GRIP SHALL NOT FALTER!
GRRRRR

UFF!

RRRRRR!

I WILL NOT YIELD!

K-RAK

LOOK!
NO! LET HIM GO!

EAAAAMAAAAHHH!

LET HIM DIE AWAY FROM HERE, IN HIS OWN Foul LAIR.

HAROOOOO!

IT IS DONE.
TODAY IS A DAY OF CELEBRATION! TODAY THE MONSTER'S RULE HAS ENDED! ALL HAIL BEOWULF!

ALL HAIL BEOWULF!

ALL HAIL BEOWULF!

AND FOR ALL OF THE HEROES WHO SAILED FORTH WITH HIM AND RISKED THEIR LIVES AS WELL--A GOLDEN BOUNTY.

NEVER HAVE I SEEN SUCH RICHES!

THEY ARE YOURS, NOBLE WARRIORS.

TO WEALHTHEOW!

TO WEALHTHEOW!

TONIGHT, YOU WILL ALL SLEEP IN THE ROYAL CHAMBERS. COME AND AVOID YOURSELVES OF THE PLEASURES YOU SO RIGHTFULLY DESERVE.
HECROTH WILL ONCE MORE BE GUARDED BY GAHES, EH UNFERTH?

YES, THE SOONER THESE GUARDS LEAVE OUR COUNTRY, THE BETTER.

BUT HAD THEY NOT COME--

ENOUGH! GO ABOUT YOUR STATION, MAN.

Y-YES, SIR.

WHO... ARE YOU?

A MOTHER WHO GRIEVES FOR HER SON.
YOU KNOW WHO KILLED HIM.
I--I DO.
TELL ME!

His name... is Beowulf.
And you, my newfound friend... you will help bring him to me.

How can I not... help a grieving mother?

My son shall be buried whole. You will help me retrieve his arm.

Who--?!

I have come to take what is rightfully mine.

Stand back, woman.

Ugh--!

Quickly, now.
Carlos Barrera (order #4973052)

But why?—?

This was not just Unfearth's doing. Someone—or someone thing—came here in vengeance.

Then I am fearful. I know who it is. Long there have been stories of two creatures prowling the moors.

One of them was no doubt Grendel. The other had the shape of a woman. It is she who has no name—Grendel's mother.

I guarantee you, dear lady... she will not get away. There is nowhere his mother will be able to hide from me.

Take good care, Beowulf...
"...It is said she was the wife of Cain. She is a thousand times more dangerous than her son."

LOOK--

-- THE HEAD OF UNFERTH.

I WOULD SAY HE MET THE END HE DESERVED.

LOOK HOW THE LIGHT REFLECTS OFF THAT POOL. ITS WATERS ARE BLOODED.

...SHE HAS GONE DOWN INTO IT.
You murdered my son! Now you shall pay!

Your sword is of no use to you here. It is time you joined Grendel in death!
NEVER!

YOU CAN NOT ESCAPE A MOTHER'S RAGE, MURDERER!

I DID NOT FEAR YOUR SON, HAG--

--AND I DO NOT FEAR YOU!

NOW REST IN HELL WITH YOUR SON.
Losing your arm was not enough, fiend!

By all that is holy—!
The Land of the Geats

Two days later...

WE BRING YOU GIFTS, KING HYGELAC.

SINCE WHEN DO YOU NO LONGER CALL ME UNCLE, BEOWULF?

TWAS ONLY A FORMALITY—UNCLE.

COME FORTH AND GIVE US A KISS, NEPHEW.

THESE RICHES CAN ONLY MEAN THAT YOU WERE SUCCESSFUL IN YOUR QUEST?

YES, TELL US OF YOUR ADVENTURES...

...AND I RETURNED TO HEOROT WITH THE MONSTER’S HEAD. HROTHGAR AND WEALTHEOW WERE MOST GRATIFYING.

AS ARE WE. YOU DO THE GEAT PEOPLE PLEASING, AND WE WISH TO SHOW YOU OUR GRATITUDE.

FIRST—THE FINEST OF ALL SWORDS IN THE ROYAL ARMORY.

AND SECOND, A DEED TO LAND THAT IS LARGER THAN THAT OF ANYONE SAVE THE KING HIMSELF.

THANK YOU, MY LORD.

KNOW, TOO, NEPHEW, THAT ONE DAY WHEN I AM NO LONGER HERE...
"...you shall rule the Geats."

LONG LIVE KING BEOWULF!

LONG LIVE KING BEOWULF!

LONG LIVE KING BEOWULF!
They won’t -Huff- find me here...

-Huff Huff-

I will no longer -Huff Huff- be any man’s slave.

What’s this?

By the gods---! Treasure beyond all imagining!

I am rich! Rich!

Who---?

N-No...
NOOOO!

AEEEE!

FWOOSH!

-HUFF HUFF-

RRROWRRRRR
Why does this happen now, my lord?

It matters not, good Wiglaf. Our sole concern is that the dragon be slain.

Then let me be the one to confront him!

No, this will be my battle. Your king will confront this scourge.

You remind me of myself, Wiglaf. When I was younger, but you are too young.

We pray thee, Beowulf—let us accompany you. You must not face him alone.

So be it.

And I shall be among them.

As you wish.
 THERE HE IS!

Fwooom

RUN! RUN!

Cowards! How dare you leave your king's side!

I will stand by you, my lord!

My shield...
STAND BACK, WIGLAF!

DIE, MONSTER!

ARRRGH!

MY LORD!

I SEE WHERE I CAN STRIKE HIM.

THEN YOU MUST... DO SO...
HAWRRR

While I have... strength left in me...

...Let me... end this pestilence!
IT...IS...DONE...

WE MUST TEND TO YOUR WOUNDS.

IT IS...TOO LATE...FOR THAT...

IT CANNOT BE--!

COME CLOSER, WIGLAF...SO THAT YOU MAY HEAR MY WORDS...

YOU MUST NOW LEAD OUR PEOPLE...

LISTEN...I KNOW WHY THE DRAGON CAME DOWN FROM THE MOUNTAIN...

IT IS SAID THAT HE GUARDED A VAST TREASURE. I HAVE NO DOUBT SOMEONE STOLE FROM HIM...WHICH CAUSED HIS ANGER.

SEND YOUR MEN UP THE MOUNTAIN AND BRING DOWN THE TREASURE FOR OUR PEOPLE.

FOR YOUR PEOPLE.
THIS IS NOW YOURS...

...KING WIGLAF.

YOU ARE THE LAST OF OUR CLAN. FATE SWEPT THEM AWAY...

...TO THEIR FINAL RUEM.

NOW I MUST FOLLOW THEM.
KING BEOWULF...

HE IS GONE.

WHEN HE REQUIRED YOUR AID--YOU FLED! YOU--OUR BRAVEST WARRIORS!

KING... KING WIGLAF.

FORGIVE US, MY LORD.

GET ON YOUR FEET. WE HAVE MUCH TO DO.

THIS IS THE SADDEST DAY IN THE HISTORY OF THE GEATS.
"Go upon the mountain and search until you find the 
*treasure* that the dragon hoarded."

"Bring all of the gold and jewels down with you..."

"...and place them in the village square."

---

"This is the final gift that your great leader 
estowed upon you, at the price of his life."

"Even in death, his generosity knows no bounds."
"He was the **bravest** and most **noble** leader we shall ever have."

"No man ever did more for his people."
Farewell, my friend...

Remember him!
“We will construct a barrow on a headland at the coast.

“It will be so high that sailors can see it from afar...

“...and we will fill it with many treasures.

“In times to come, crews under sail will call it Beowulf’s Barrow, as they steer ships across the shrouded waters.”
"We shall never forget you, Beowulf. Gracious and fair-minded... the most glorious of all warrior-kings upon the earth."
Creator Biographies

Stephen L. Stern

Stephen L. Stern is the writer/creator of the independent comic *Zen Intergalactic Ninja*, which has sold over 3 million copies and been licensed for everything from video games to action figures. He is also the author of the *War of the Worlds* and *Shy Girl* graphic novels, as well as the official comic-book adaptation of the animated TV classic *Mr. Magoo’s Christmas Carol*. His stories have been illustrated by such luminaries as Michael William Kaluta and Jeffrey Jones. His upcoming projects include *Majestic Comics* and *Wonder Man*.

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Christopher Steininger

Christopher Steininger’s comic credits include the critically acclaimed *The White Elephant* (Alternative Comics), the upcoming *Kill the Revisionist!* (Ape Entertainment) and *Windows*, a graphic novel collaboration with performance artist Joe Frank. When he isn’t drawing comics, he’s working in various creative capacities in the film/animation industry while actively painting and exhibiting his art. Christopher currently lives on Cape Breton Island.

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Chris Studabaker

Chris Studabaker is a letterer and writer working in Indianapolis, Indiana. Having lettered for a variety of publishers, he currently works as Production Manager and Letterer for Bluewater Productions. He has recently been excited to letter Bluewater’s entire *Ray Harryhausen Presents* line of comics.

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IN FINER COMIC SHOPS AND BOOKSTORES EVERYWHERE
Before The Lord of the Rings and Conan the Barbarian, there was Beowulf, the epic tale of the world's first and greatest sword-and-sorcery hero.

Inspired by Seamus Heaney's landmark translation of the longest-surviving Anglo-Saxon poem, Beowulf: The Graphic Novel brings the classic legend to cinematic life for contemporary readers.

Written by Stephen L. Stern (Zen: Intergalactic Ninja, War of the Worlds) with art by Christopher Steininger (Kill the Revisionist, The White Elephant), Beowulf: The Graphic Novel is the story of the fearless Norse hero who defeats both the man-ogre Grendel and his avenging mother, only to meet his fate in combat with a fire-breathing dragon.

This masterful adaptation captures the mythic time in which man and supernatural forces co-existed, and celebrates the endurance of the human spirit in an ever-changing, often dangerous world.