



BEOWULF

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL



STERN · STEININGER · STUDABAKER

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Beowulf: The Graphic Novel created by Stephen L. Stern & Christopher Steinger,
based on the translation of the classic poem by Francis Gummere

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Beowulf: The Graphic Novel

An Introduction by Stephen L. Stern

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.

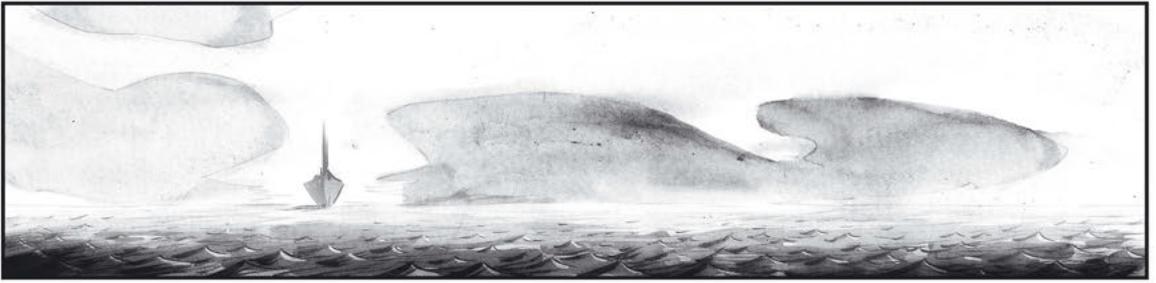
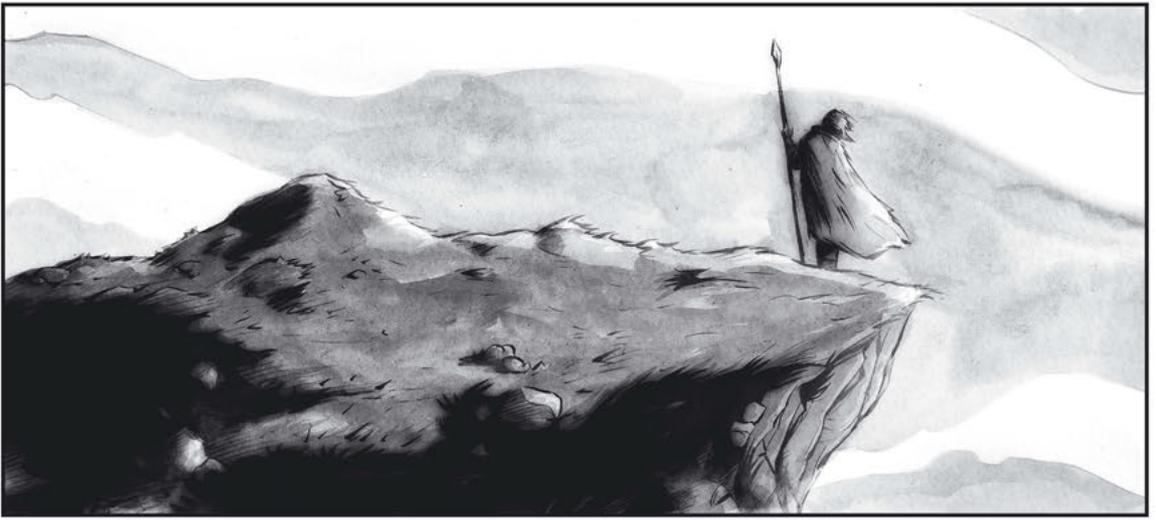
—**Stephen L. Stern**
London, September 2007

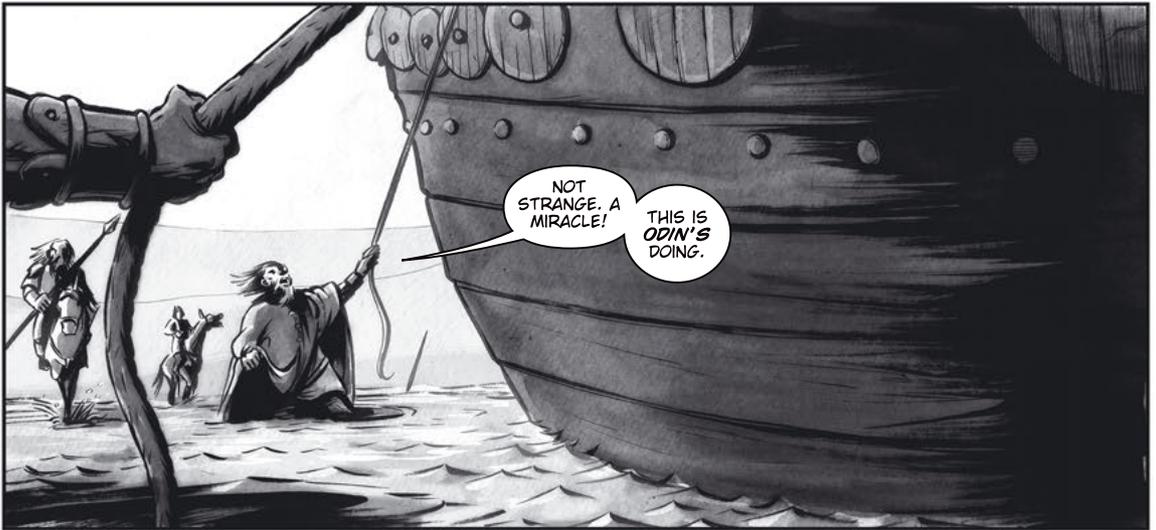
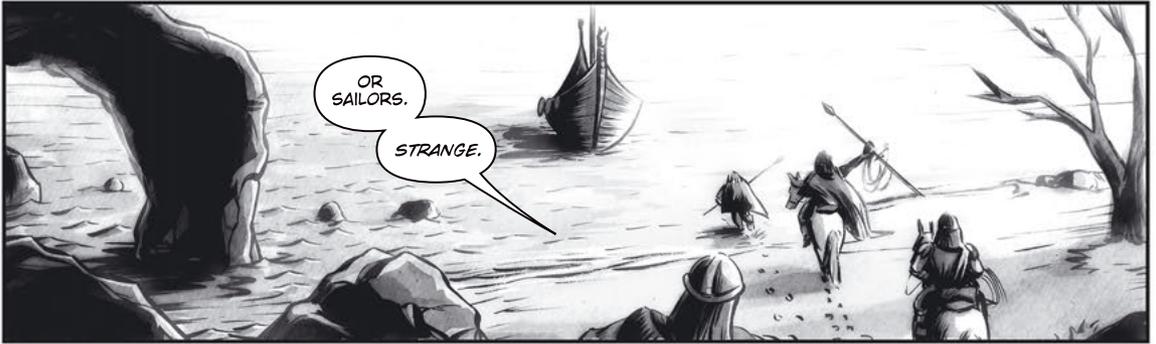
PROLOGUE

The Sixth Century

The Land of the Danes











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.



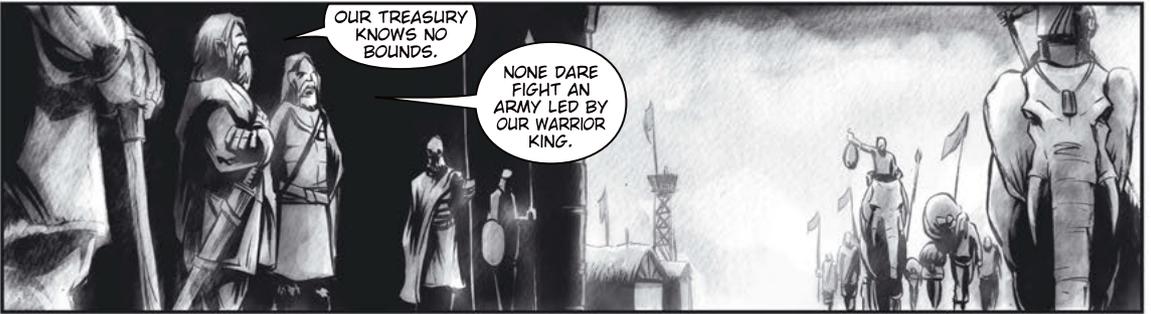
SOON
HE WILL
BE READY TO
LEAD US IN
BATTLE.

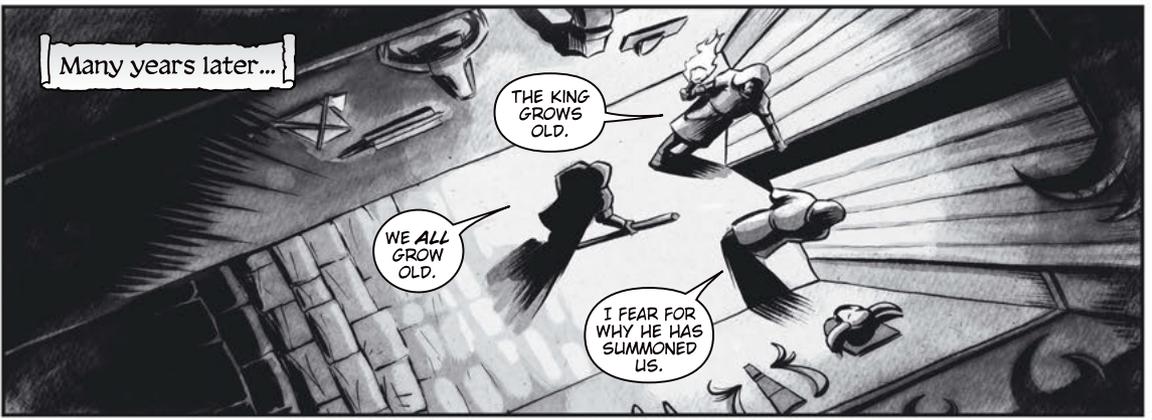


FOR
VICTORY--OR
DEATH!



FOR THE KING
OF THE DANES!





Many years later...

THE KING GROWS OLD.

WE ALL GROW OLD.

I FEAR FOR WHY HE HAS SUMMONED US.



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



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



HAVE 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."







END PROLOGUE

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!

A
MAGNIFICENT
FEAST, MY
LORD.



YES, MY
LORD.

TAKE THIRTY
OF YOUR BEST
MEN, AND STAND
GUARD WHILE
THE REST OF
US SLEEP.



METHINKS
WE ALL
DRANK TOO
MUCH.









NOOOO!



A SLAUGHTER-HOUSE! HEOROT HAS BECOME A SLAUGHTER-HOUSE!

WHO CAN HAVE DONE THIS VILE DEED?



I DO NOT KNOW, WEALTHEOW. 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.

WHY SAY YOU THAT, UNFERTH?

BECAUSE THIS WAS NO MORTAL DEED.



IT'S OBVIOUS WHAT HAS HAPPENED. THEY WERE EATEN.



EATEN?!

FOR CERTAIN. GREDEL WAS HERE.

I'VE NEVER BELIEVED IN GREDEL. IT'S JUST A TALE TO FRIGHTEN CHILDREN.

I AGREE.



NO. GREDEL LIVES. HE HIDES IN THE MISTS WITH THE WOLVES.

HE WILL BE BACK. AND NEXT TIME IT WILL BE WORSE.

The court of Hygelac,
King of the Geats.

...AND NONE
VENTURE INTO
HEOROT AFTER
NIGHTFALL.

FOR
FEAR OF
GREDEL.

YES,
SIRE...FOR
FEAR OF
GREDEL.



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 GREDEL IS
DESCENDED FROM **CAIN**
HIMSELF. HE IS EVIL
INCARNATE.

IN ALL
SINCERITY--I FEAR
NEITHER **MAN** NOR
MONSTER.

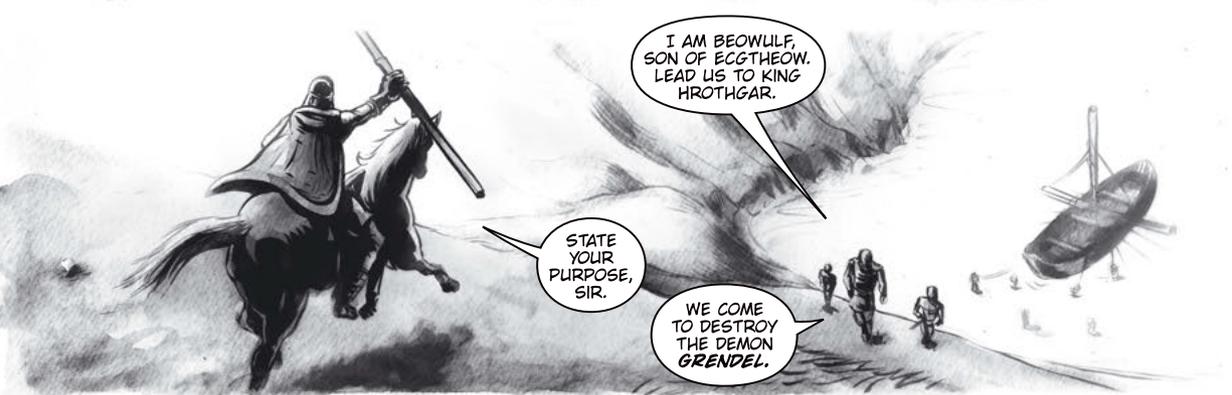
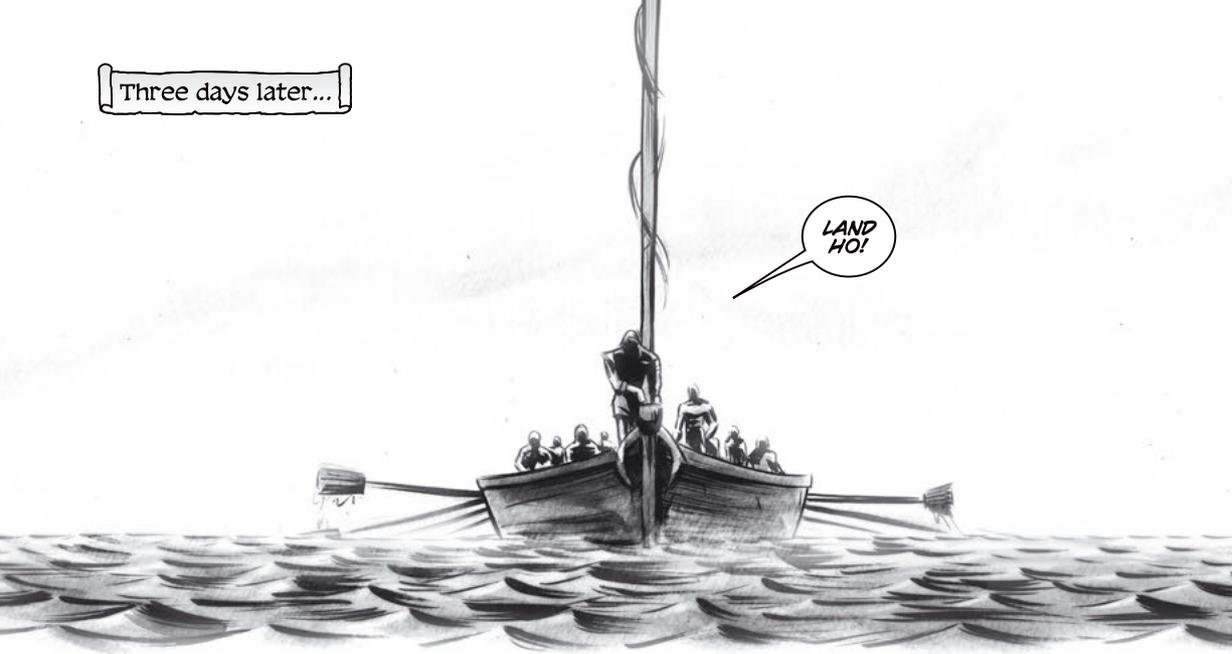
IT IS **TRUE**.
MY NEPHEW IS A
WARRIOR AMONG
WARRIORS.

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**:
GREDEL
SHALL BE
DESTROYED.

Three days later...





Hrothgar's Castle

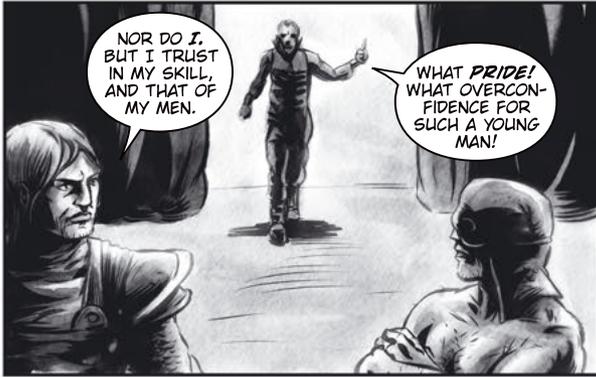
I KNEW YOUR FATHER, YOUNG BEOWULF. HE WAS A NOBLE WARRIOR.

I TRY TO LIVE UP TO HIS EXAMPLE.



BUT EVEN ECGTHEOW WOULD HAVE THOUGHT TWICE BEFORE BATTLING GRENDEL.

I DO NOT WISH TO SEE YOU PERISH.



NOR DO I, BUT I TRUST IN MY SKILL, AND THAT OF MY MEN.

WHAT PRIDE! WHAT OVERCONFIDENCE FOR SUCH A YOUNG MAN!



LINFERTH! WHY DO YOU SPEAK TO OUR GUEST WITH SO SHARP A TONGUE?!

FORGIVE HIM, BEOWULF.

I HAVE ONE WORD FOR THIS "HERO": BRECA!



BRECA?

YES. I HAVE HEARD THE STORY. BRECA WAS YOUR FRIEND--UNTIL YOU TRIED TO DROWN HIM!



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 LINFERTH 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."

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

kra-
KOOM

"...until a terrible *storm* drove us apart."

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

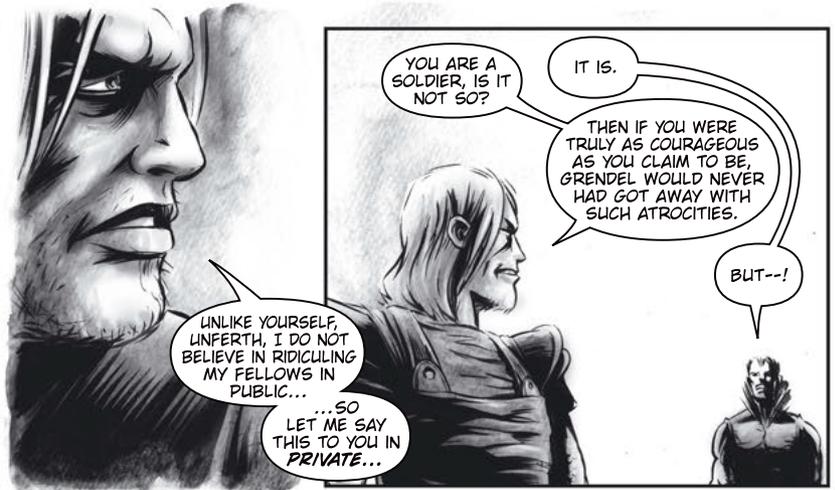
"...and I killed them *all*."

"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*."

YOU MAY SEE HIM NOW, UNPERTH, SIMPLY BY VISITING THE LAND OF THE GEATS. SO MUCH FOR YOUR RUMORS.





THE SKIES GROW DARK. IT IS TIME WE TAKE OUR LEAVE.



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



I SALUTE ALL OF 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 GRENDL--



GRENDL HAS NO SWORD. AND NOR SHALL I.

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND.

ALL I NEED--



--ARE THESE.



RRRONNWR!



FOLL
MONSTER!





STAND
BACK,
FIEND!



CLANG



KRUNCH



ENOUGH!



I DO NOT
FEAR YOU,
GRENDEL!



HOLD HIM, BEOWULF, AND I WILL DELIVER THE DEATH-BLOW!

BAM

NOT SO!

HIS HIDE IS TOO THICK! THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO!



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



GRRROWWWRRRR

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



AGGH!



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

DO AS YOU WILL, **GREDEL**--MY GRIP SHALL NOT FALTER!







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

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 WEALTH-EOW!

TO WEALTH-EOW!



TONIGHT, YOU WILL ALL SLEEP IN THE ROYAL CHAMBERS. COME AND AVOID YOURSELVES OF THE PLEASURES YOU SO RIGHTFULLY DESERVE.



HEOROT WILL
ONCE MORE BE
GUARDED BY
DANES, EH
UNFERTH?

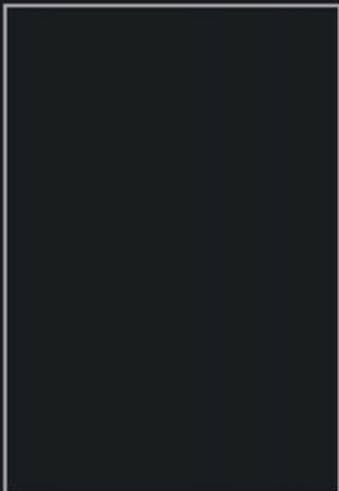
YES.
THE **SOONER**
THESE GEATS LEAVE
OUR COUNTRY, THE
BETTER.

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.



UHH--!



QUICKLY, NOW.



"...it is said she was the wife of *Cain*. She is a *thousand* times more dangerous than her son."





AND I MUST FOLLOW-- ALONE.

NO--!

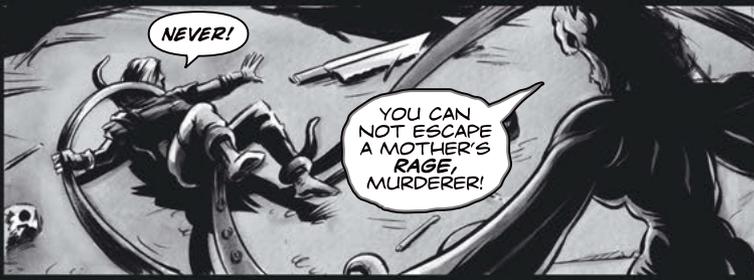
HAVE NO FEAR, MY FRIEND. THIS TIME MY SWORD SHALL BE WITH ME.



AS IT IS SENSELESS TO ARGUE WITH YOU--I WISH YOU GOOD LUCK!











The next day...

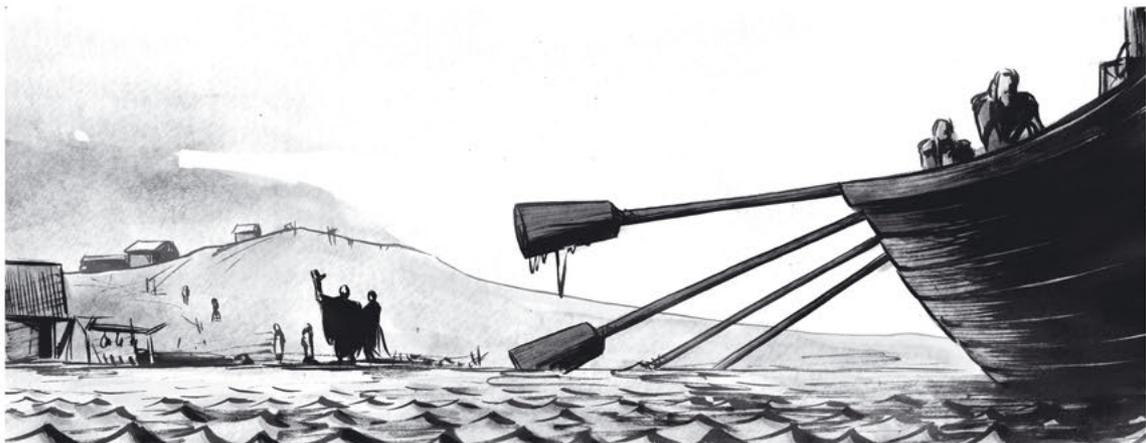


AS WELL YOU SHOULD. GO NOW...

...WITH OUR THANKS AND OUR BLESSINGS.



I PRAY FOR YOUR SAFE VOYAGE... MY SON.



The Land of the Geats

Two days later...

WE
BRING YOU
GIFTS, KING
HYGELAC.

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

'T WAS ONLY
A FORMALITY
--**UNCLE**.



"...*you* shall rule
the Geats."



LONG
LIVE KING
BEOWULF!

LONG
LIVE KING
BEOWULF!

LONG
LIVE KING
BEOWULF!



->HUFF
HUFF-<

I WILL NO
LONGER ->HUFF
HUFF-< BE ANY
MAN'S SLAVE.



THEY WON'T
->HUFF-< FIND
ME HERE...



WHAT'S
THIS?



BY THE
GODS--!
TREASURE
BEYOND ALL
IMAGINING!



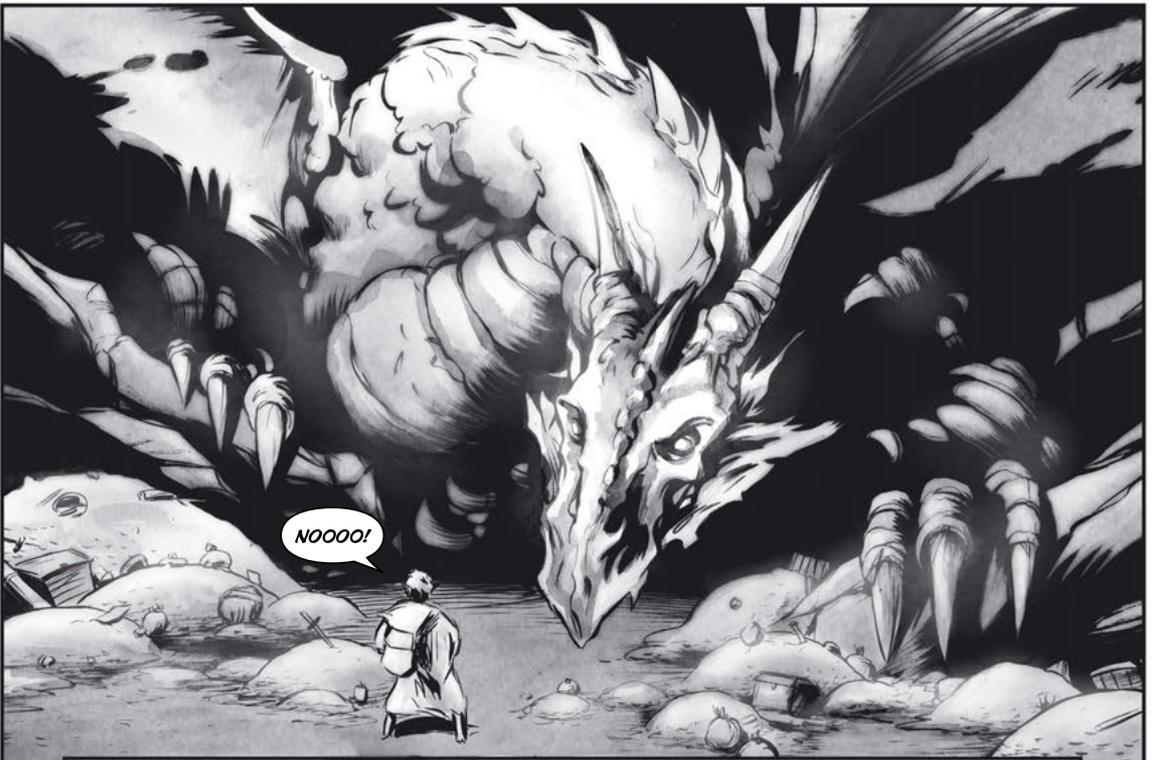
I AM
RICH!
RICH!



WHO--?



N-NO...



NOOOO!



AIEEEE!

FWOOSH



=>HUFF
HUFF<=



RRROWWRRR





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!



YOU REMIND ME OF MYSELF, WIGLAF, WHEN I WAS YOUNGER. BUT YOU ARE TOO YOUNG.

NO. THIS WILL BE MY BATTLE. YOUR KING WILL CONFRONT THIS SCOURGE.



WE PRAY THEE, BEOWULF—LET US ACCOMPANY YOU. YOU MUST NOT FACE HIM ALONE.

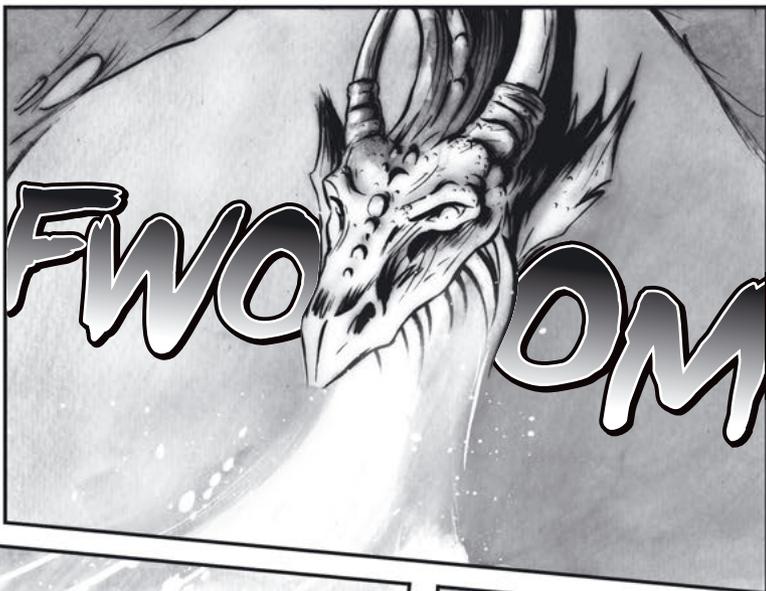
SO BE IT.

AND I SHALL BE AMONG THEM.



AS YOU WISH.











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 SOME-
ONE 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...



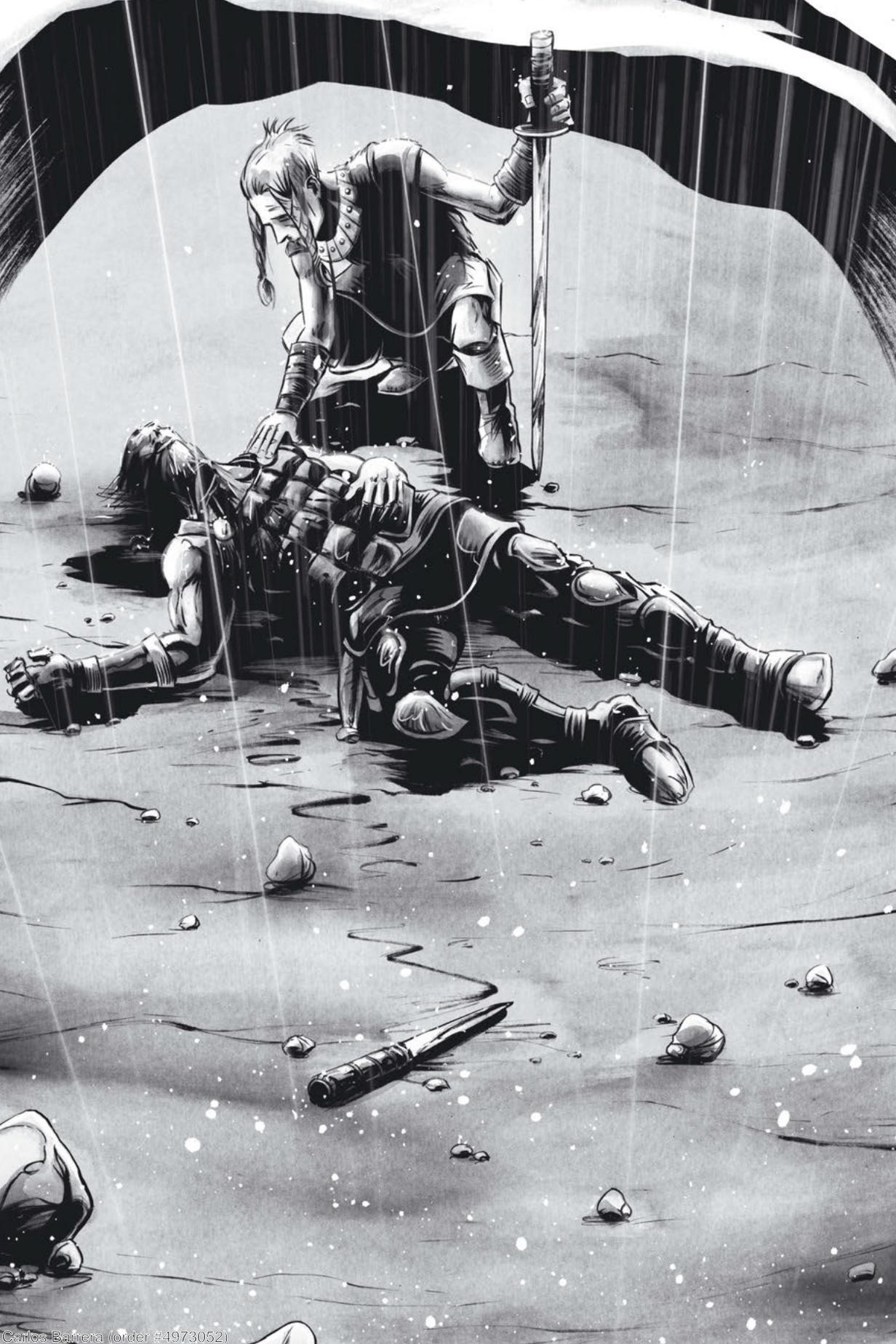
...KING WIGLAF.



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

...TO THEIR FINAL DOOM.

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."



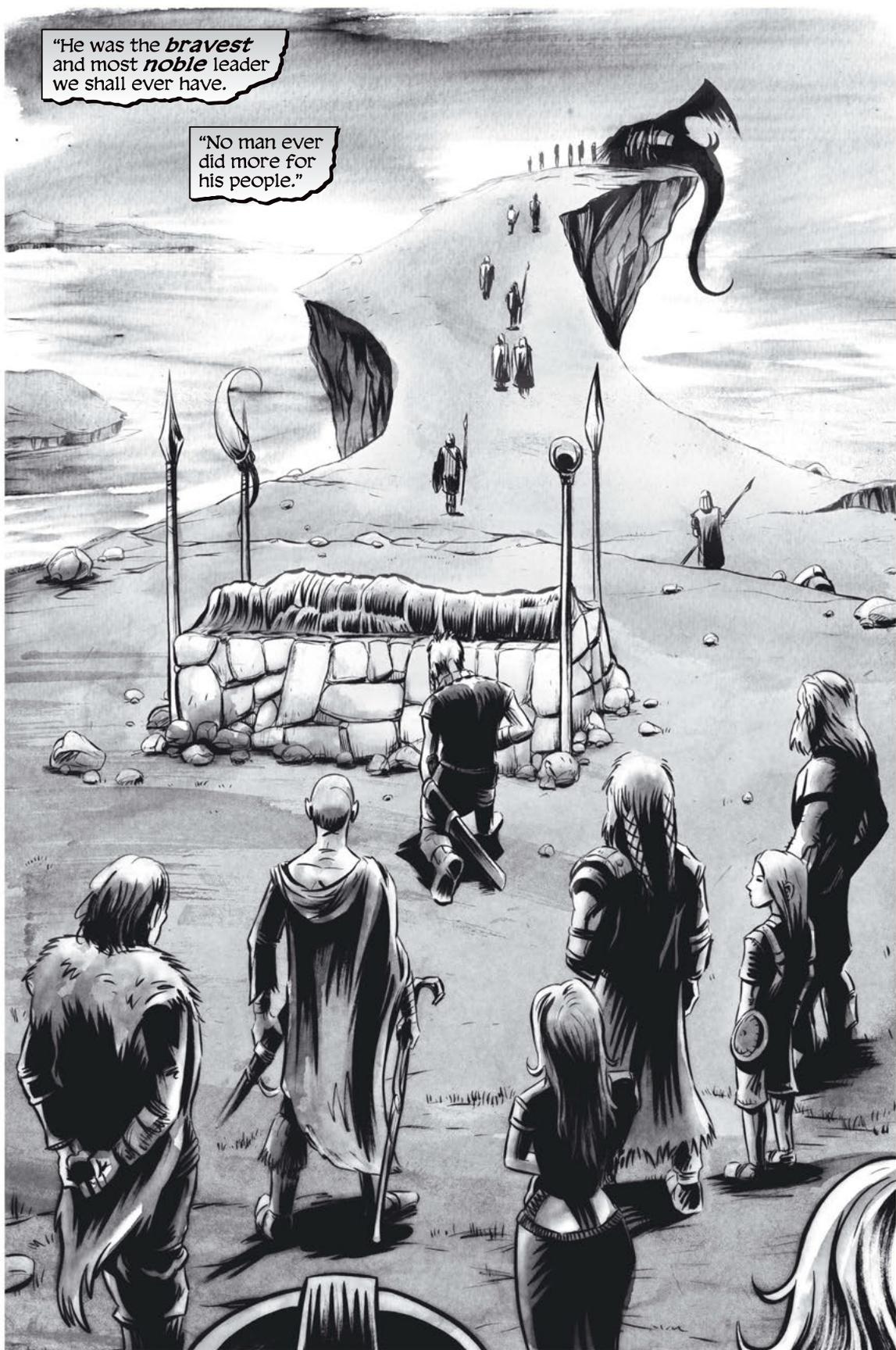
THIS IS THE FINAL *GIFT* THAT YOUR GREAT LEADER BESTOWED UPON YOU, AT THE PRICE OF HIS LIFE.

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."







*REMEMBER
HIM!*

*FAREWELL,
MY FRIEND...*



"We will construct a **barrow** on a headland at the coast.

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

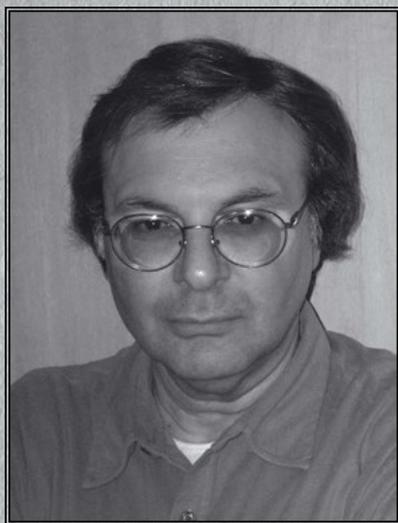
"...and we will fill it with many treasures.

"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

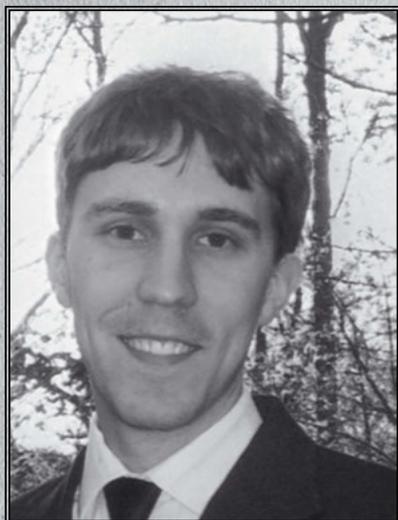
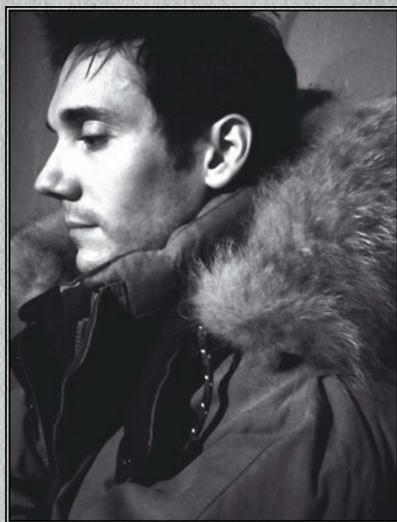
Stephen L. Stern is the writer/creator of the independent comic *Zen Intergalactic Ninja*, which has sold over 3 million copies and been licensed for everything from video games to action figures. He is also the author of the *War of the Worlds* and *Shy Girl* graphic novels, as well as the official 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*.

www.stephensternblog.blogspot.com

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.

www.christophersteininger.com

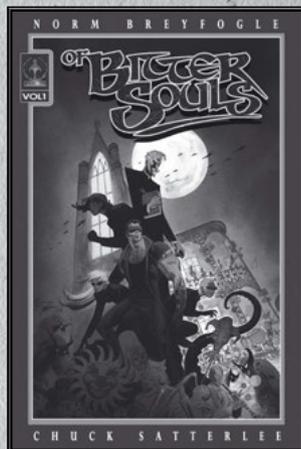
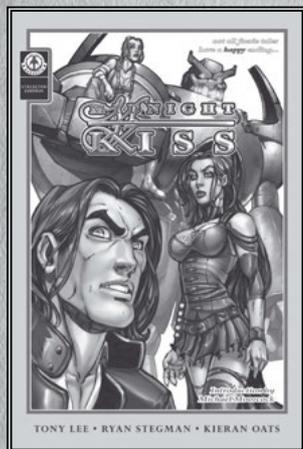


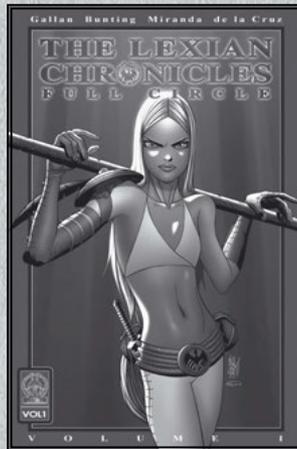
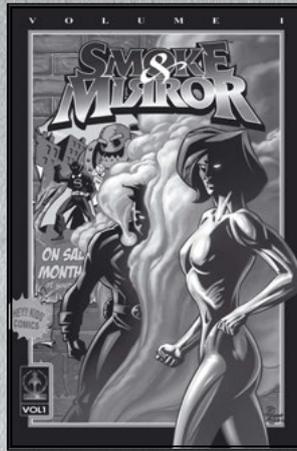
Chris Studabaker

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.

www.chrisstudabaker.com

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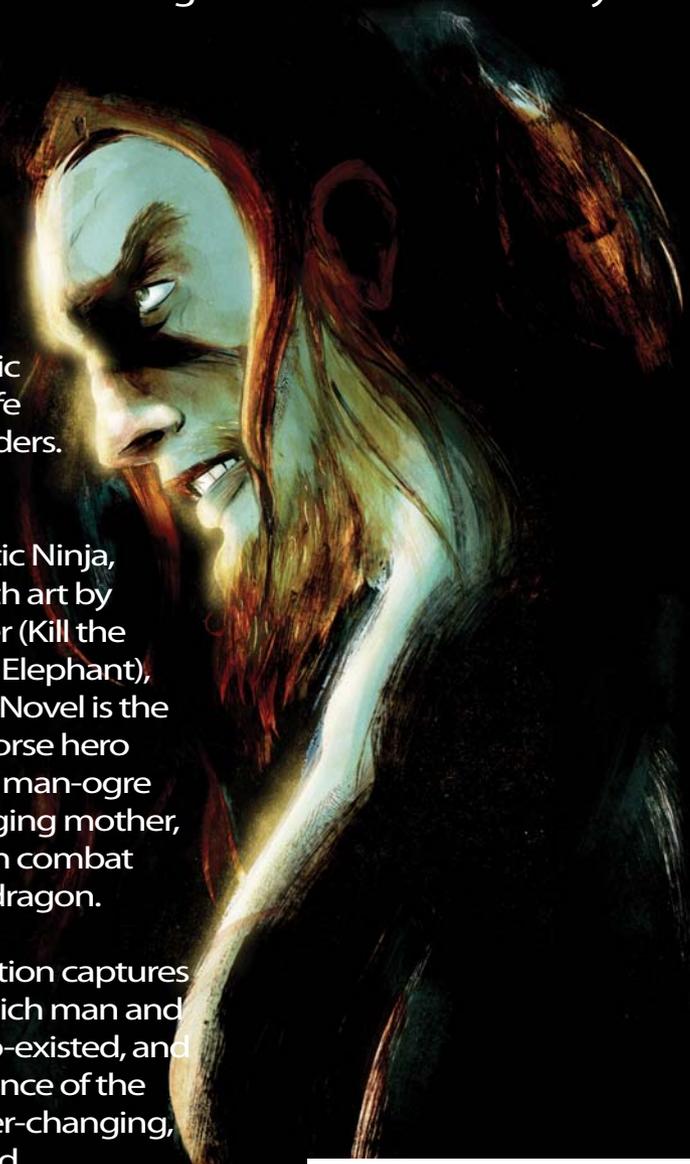
THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

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 Steinger (*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.



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