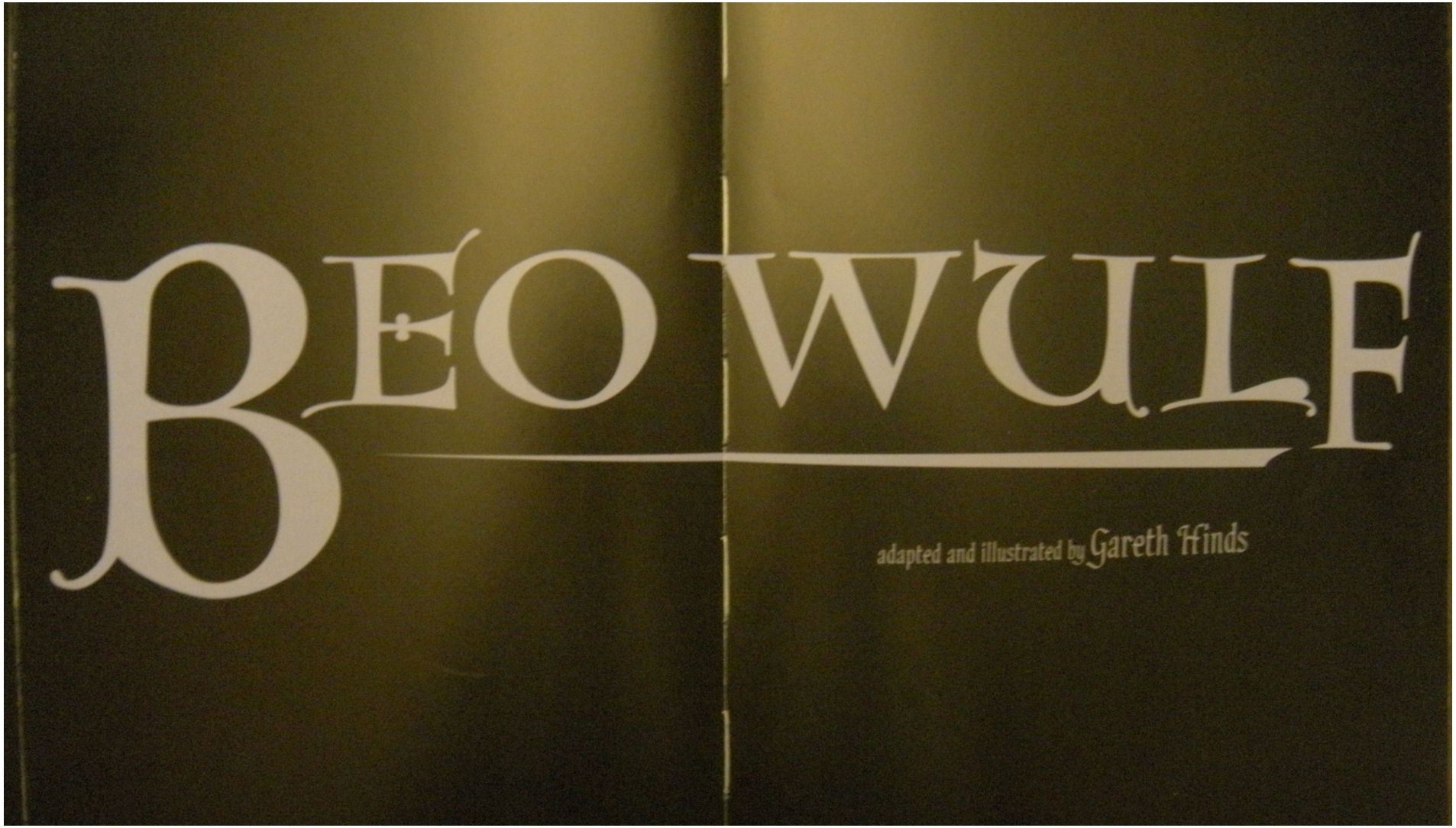
BEOWULF

GARETH HINDS

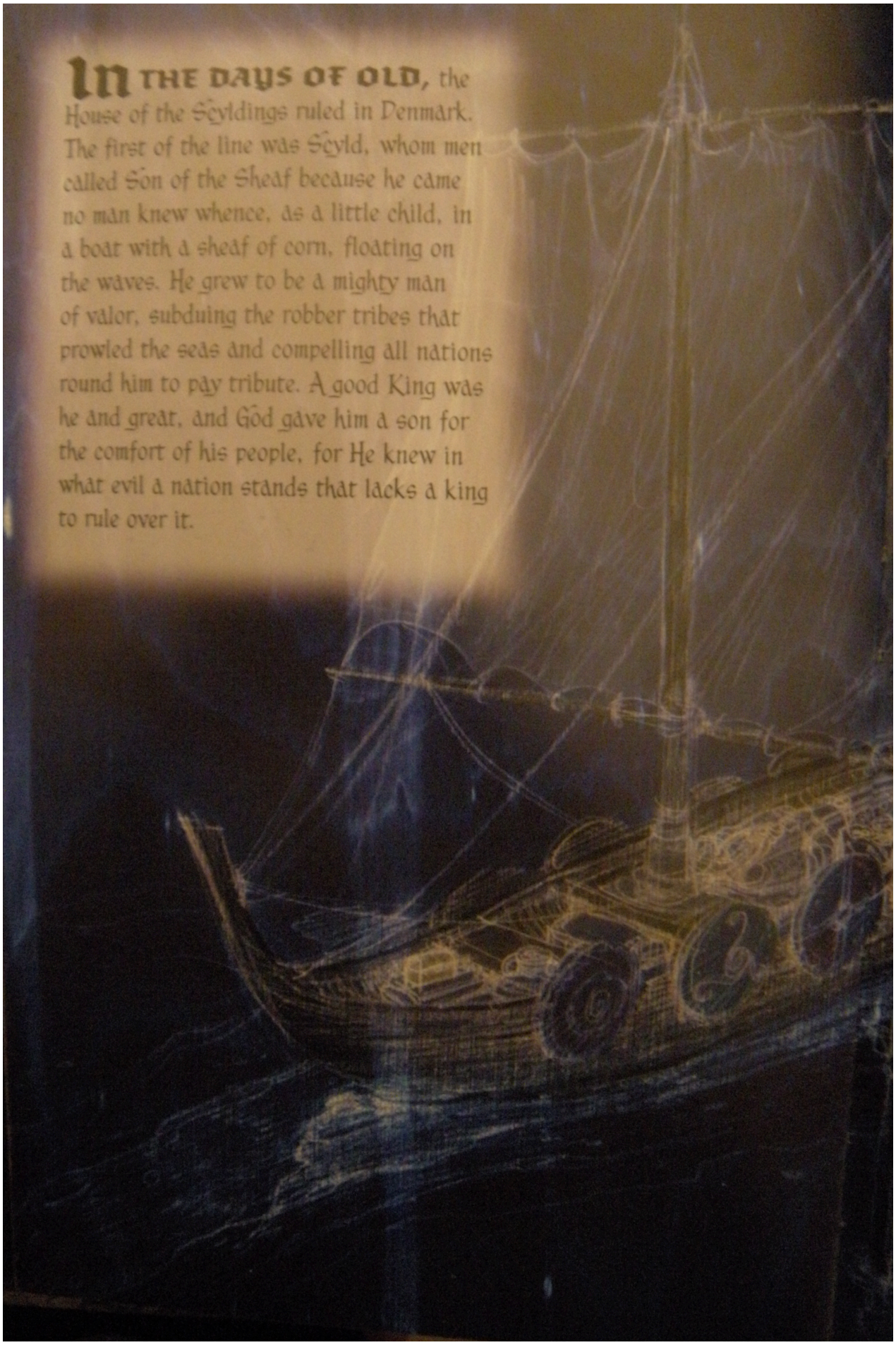
NOVEL

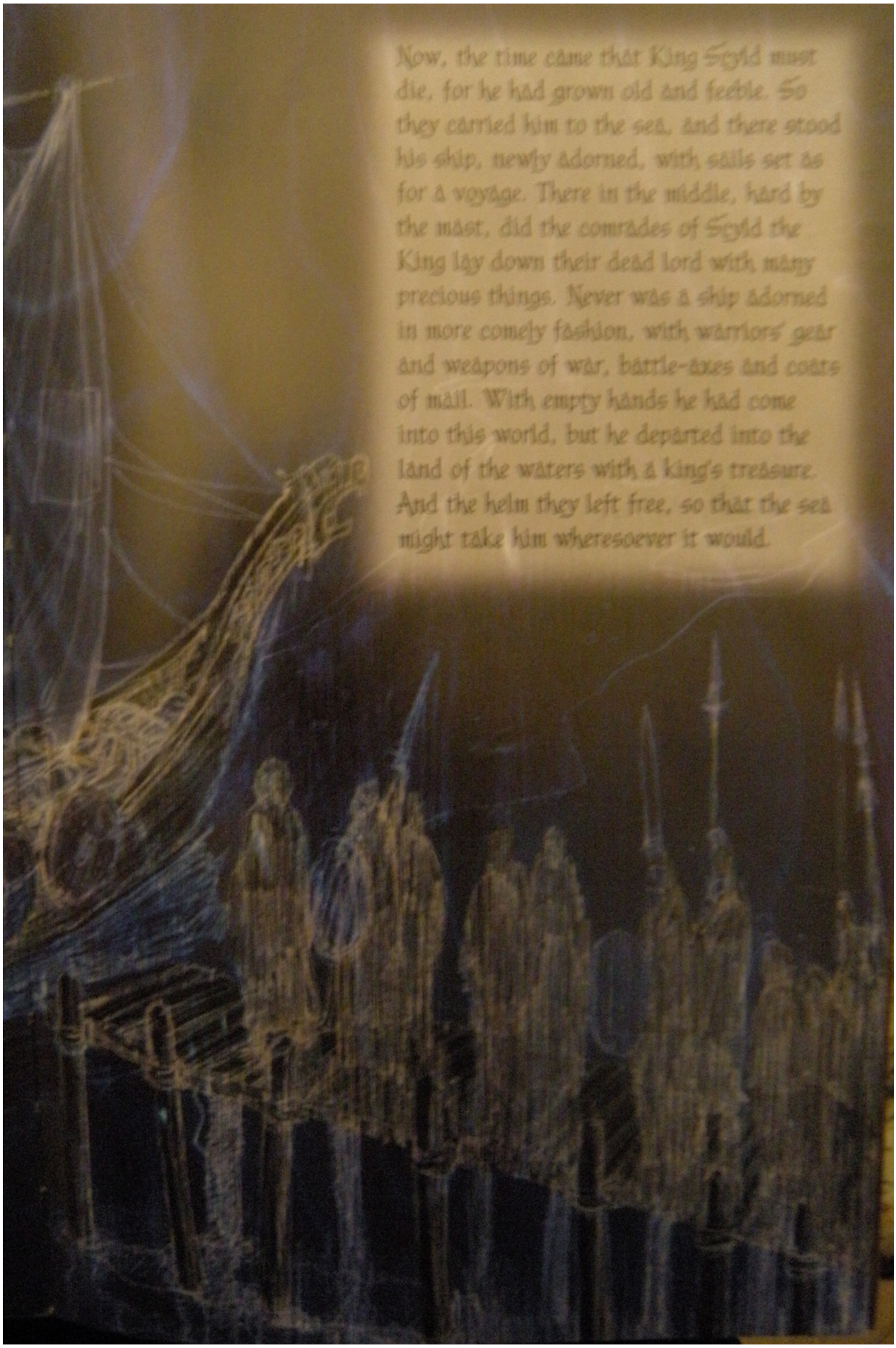

BEOWULF
adapted and illustrated by Gareth Hinds

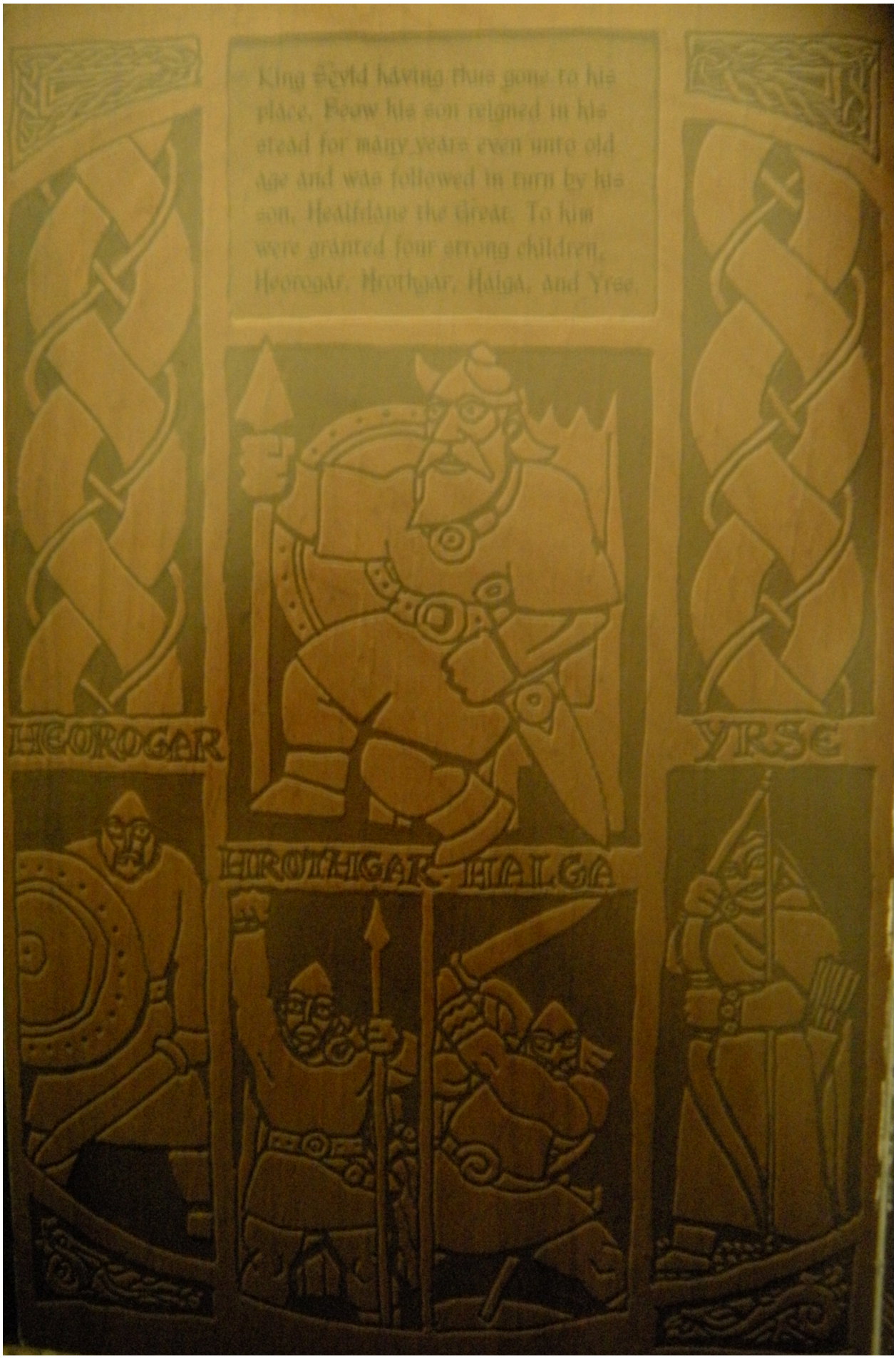
AUTHOR'S NOTE

The exact date of the composition of *Beowulf* is not known. It is an epic poem that was passed down orally for many generations before it was recorded. The first existing manuscript dates to around 1000 AD. The death of Hygelac, Beowulf's lord, is recorded in 521 AD in the Frankish annals. The most probable date of *Beowulf*'s composition, then, is thought to be around 700 to 850 AD. And yet it still resonates today, and indeed has much in common with our modern superhero stories.

For this edition, the author and editors have prepared a new text, based on the translation by A. J. Church published by Seeley & Co. in 1904. This is a colloquial translation, and we have attempted to strike a balance between easy readability and the poetic drama found in our favorite verse translations (particularly that of Francis Gummere, which appeared in the original, self-published edition of this book).


IN THE DAYS OF OLD, the House of the Scyldings ruled in Denmark. The first of the line was Scyld, whom men called Son of the Sheaf because he came no man knew whence, as a little child, in a boat with a sheaf of corn, floating on the waves. He grew to be a mighty man of valor, subduing the robber tribes that prowled the seas and compelling all nations round him to pay tribute. A good King was he and great, and God gave him a son for the comfort of his people, for He knew in what evil a nation stands that lacks a king to rule over it.

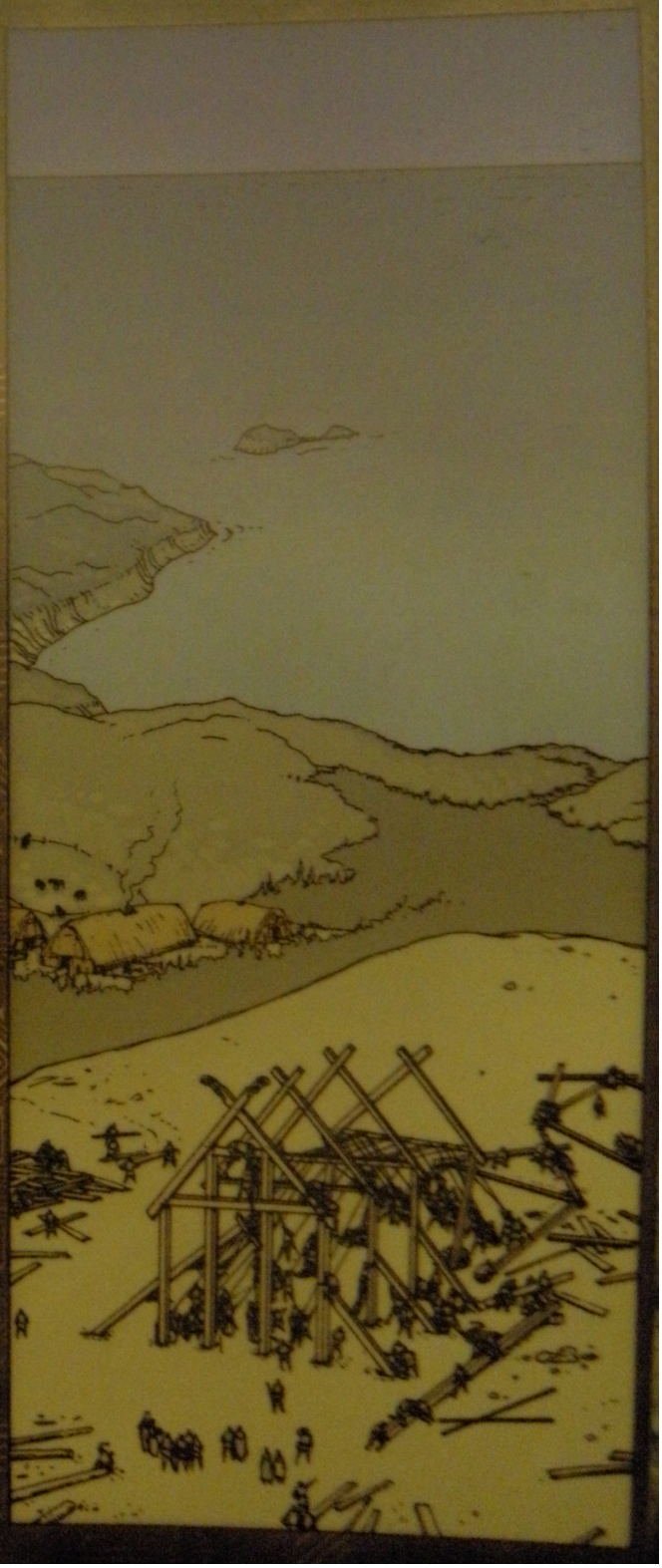

Now, the time came that King Scyld must die, for he had grown old and feeble. So they carried him to the sea, and there stood his ship, newly adorned, with sails set as for a voyage. There in the middle, hard by the mast, did the comrades of Scyld the King lay down their dead lord with many precious things. Never was a ship adorned in more comely fashion, with warriors' gear and weapons of war, battle-axes and coats of mail. With empty hands he had come into this world, but he departed into the land of the waters with a king's treasure. And the helm they left free, so that the sea might take him wheresoever it would.


King Scyld having thus gone to his place, Beow his son reigned in his stead for many years even unto old age and was followed in turn by his son, Healfdane the Great. To him were granted four strong children, Heorogar, Hrothgar, Halga, and Yrse.
HEOROGAR
HROTHGAR · HALGA
YRSE

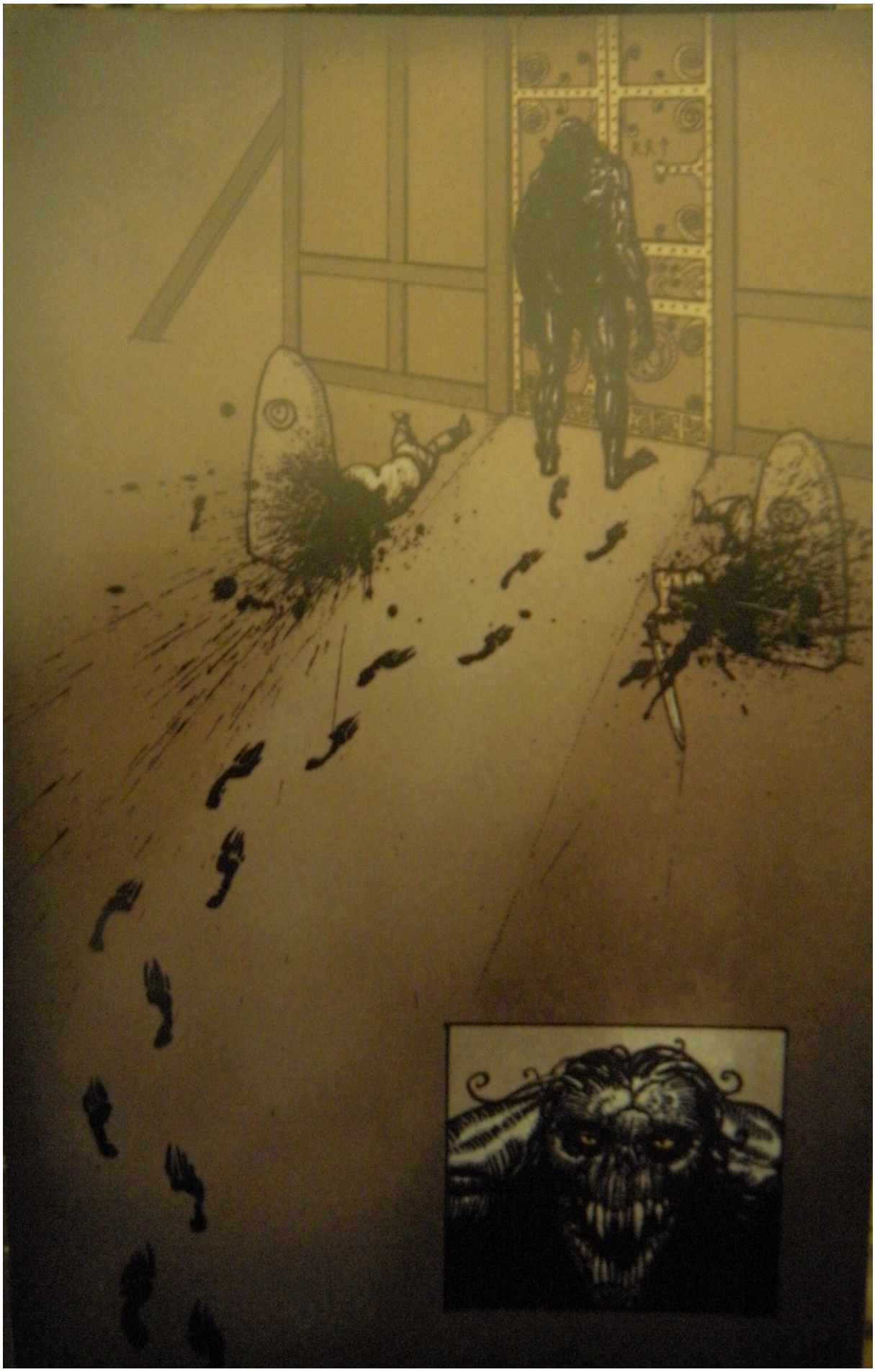
BOOK ONE

HROTHGAR

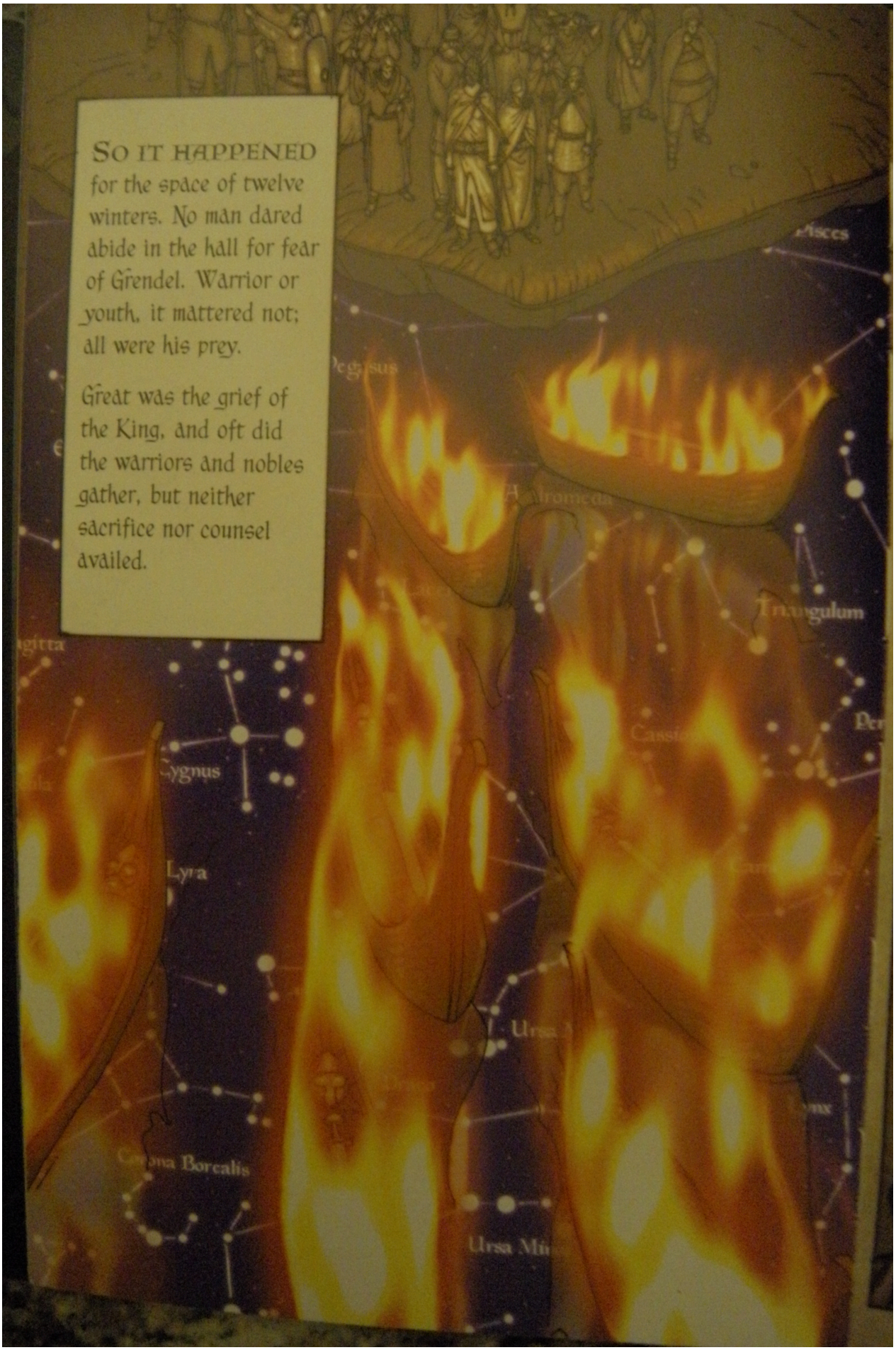
excelled all that had gone before him in valiant deeds. It came into his mind that he would build a banquet hall greater than man had ever heard tell of. And as he purposed, so he did. Quickly was the hall set up, and when it was finished, it was the stateliest in all the lands of men, a home of peace, towering high. Nor did any that beheld it dream that there should ever be strife within.

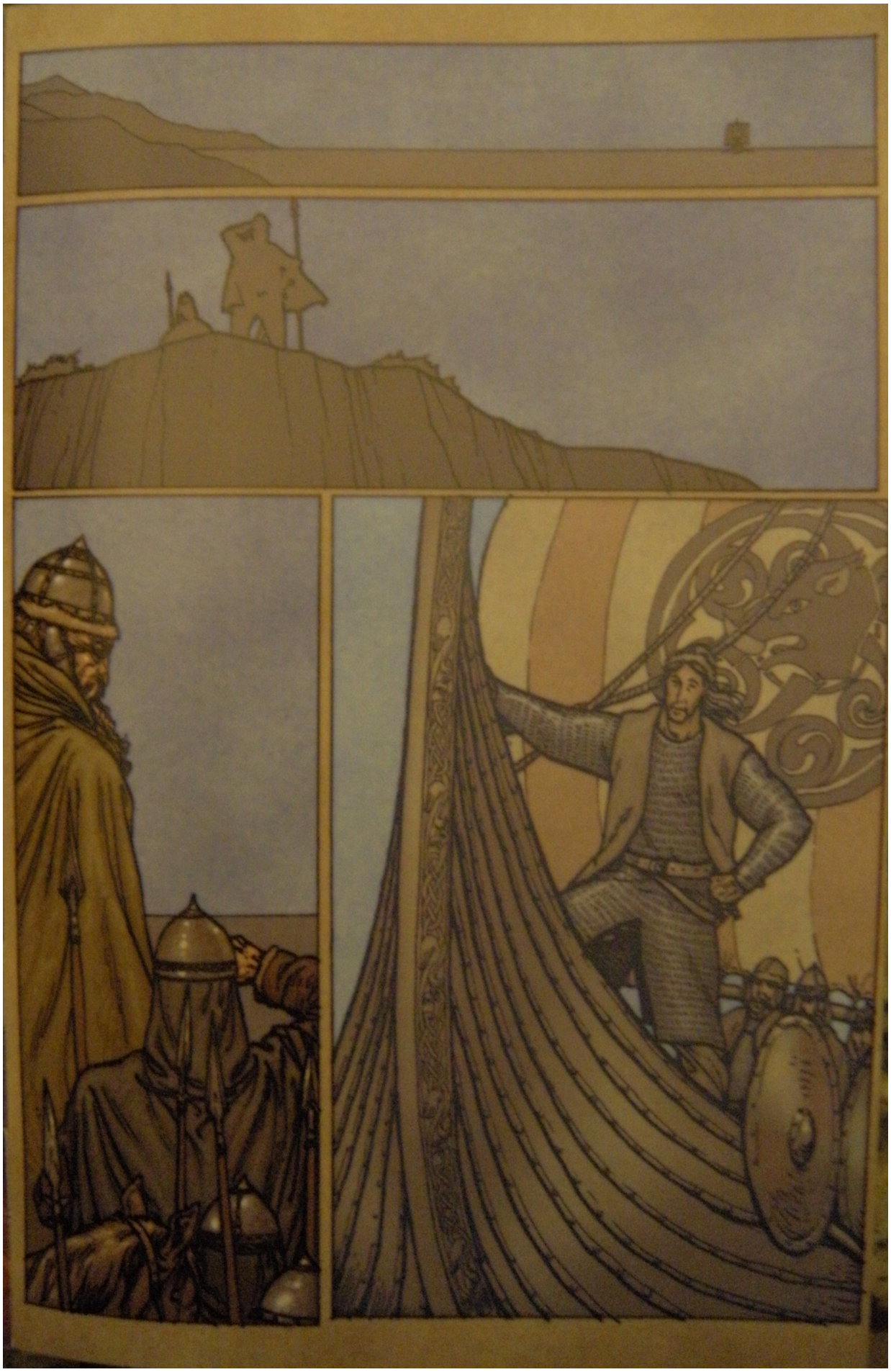


HEOROT this hall was named, and many an hour the clansmen spent there in cheer and revel, till there came an evil guest within its walls.
GRENDEL was his name, and he dwelt among the moors and fens. He was of an accursed race, and he had long lived in jealous exile from the lands of men.



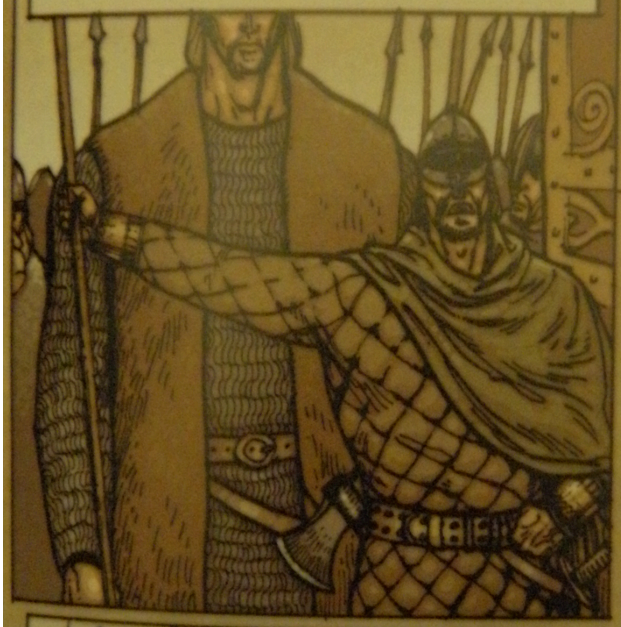
Grendel searched out this lofty hall, and there he ruled in rage, devoured all who dared abide there, until empty stood the hall at night.


So it happened for the space of twelve winters. No man dared abide in the hall for fear of Grendel. Warrior or youth, it mattered not; all were his prey.
Great was the grief of the King, and oft did the warriors and nobles gather, but neither sacrifice nor counsel availed.
Pisces
Pegasus
Andromeda
Triangulum
Cygnus
Lyra
Ursa
Corona Borealis
Ursa Mi

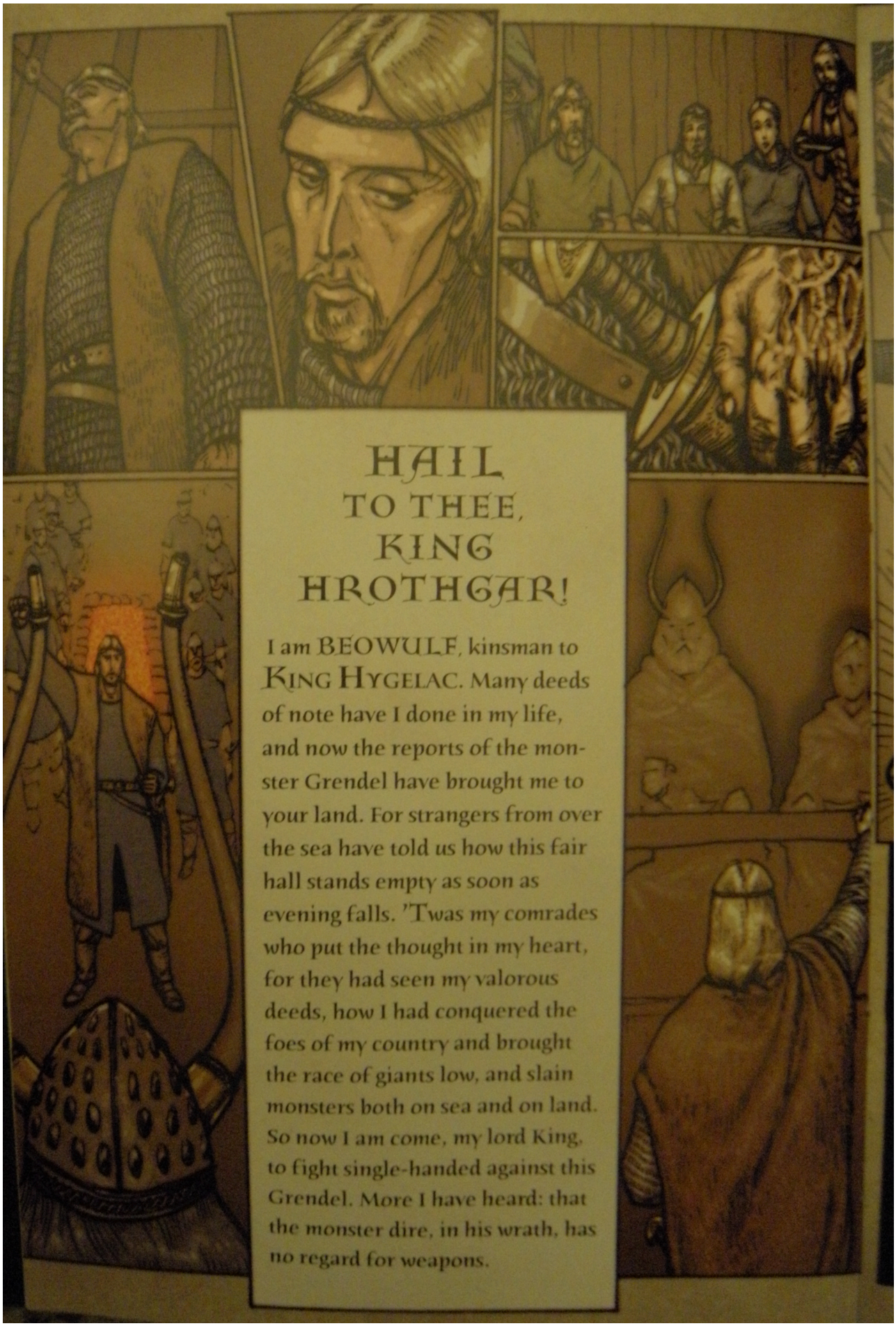


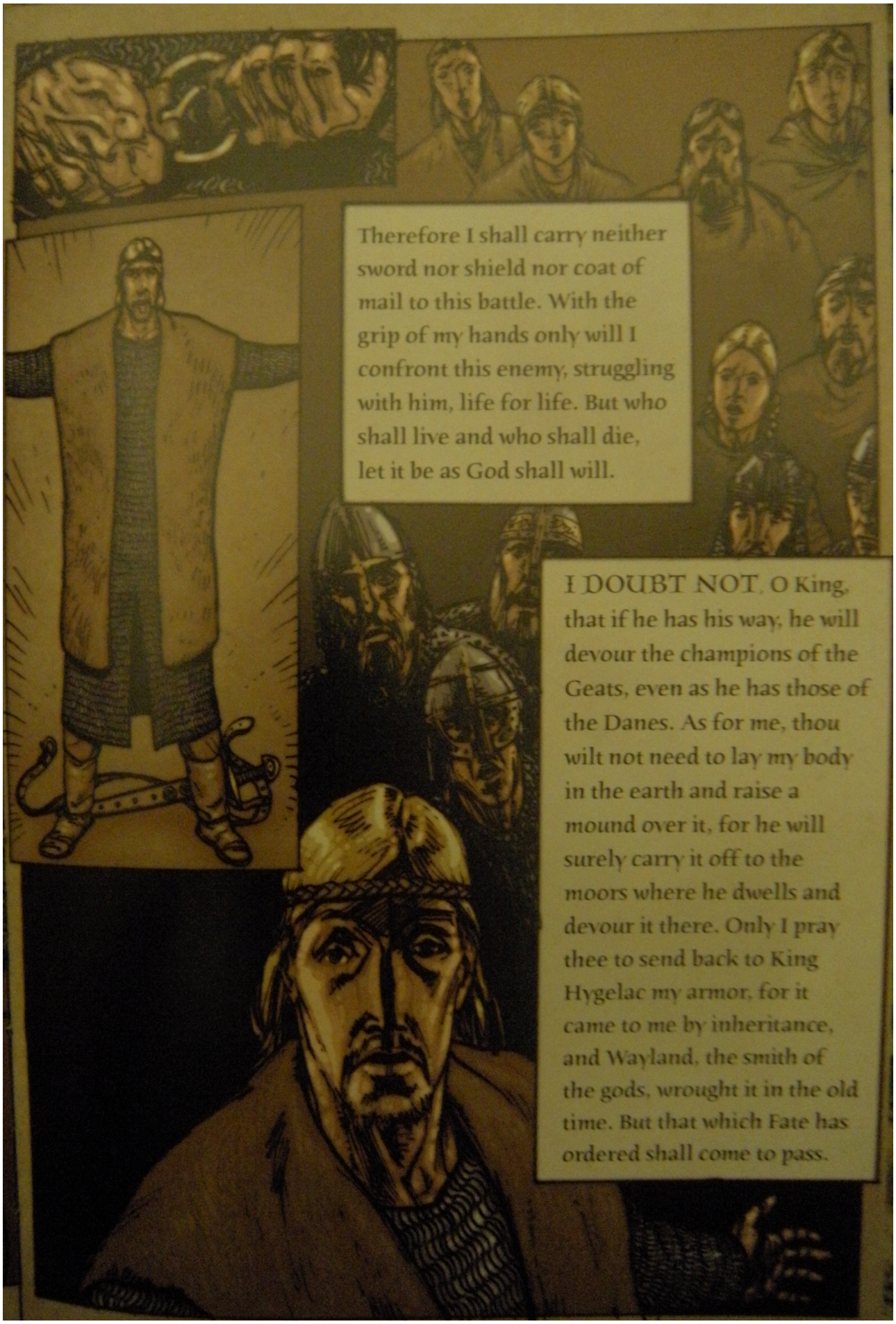
BOOM

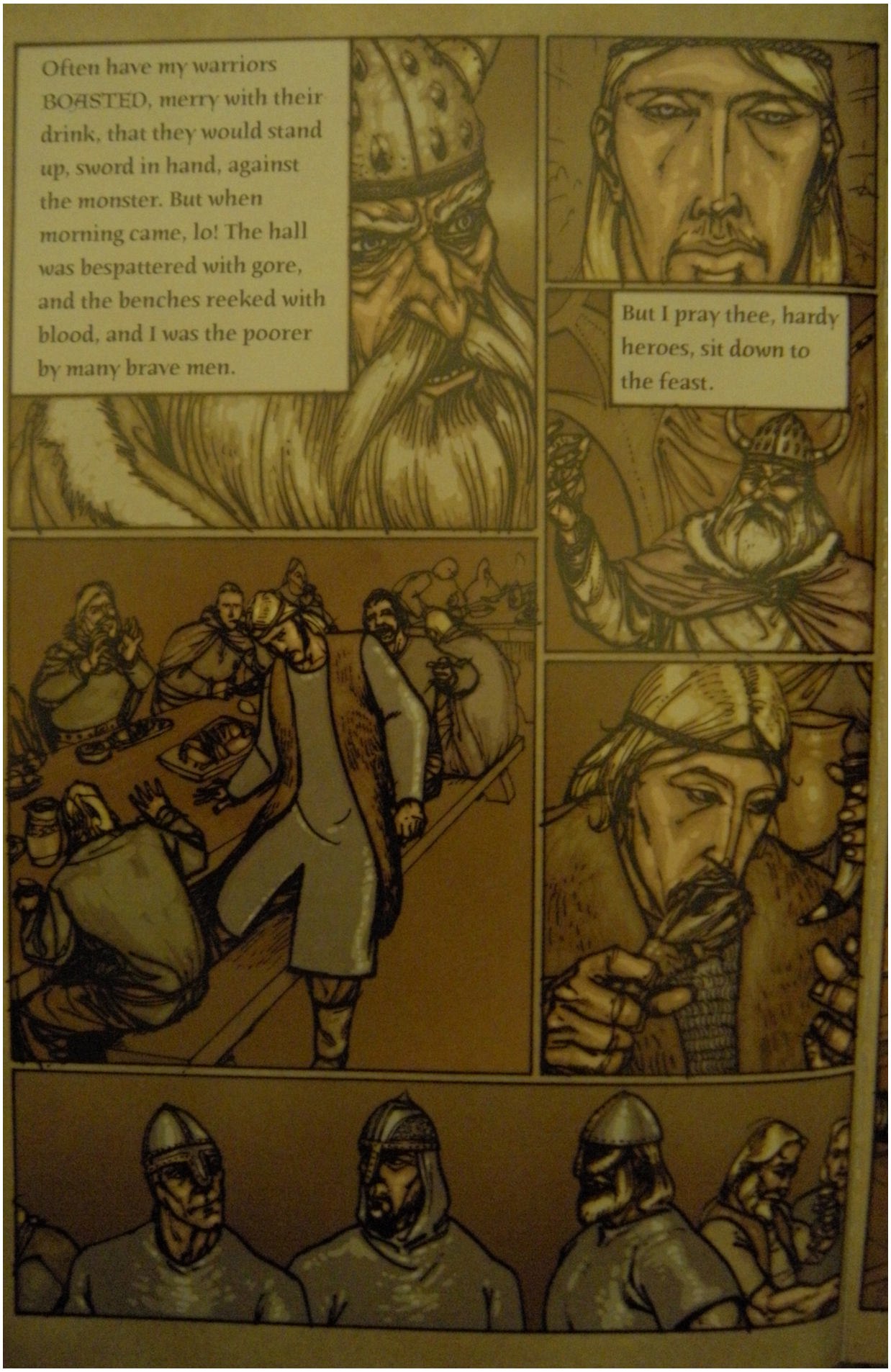
Certain men are newly come, my lord, far across the sea from the land of the Geats, and the name of their chief is BEOWULF. They make petition that they may speak with thee, and I would counsel that thou refuse not their request, for their gear is that of worthy men and their chief is a noble prince.

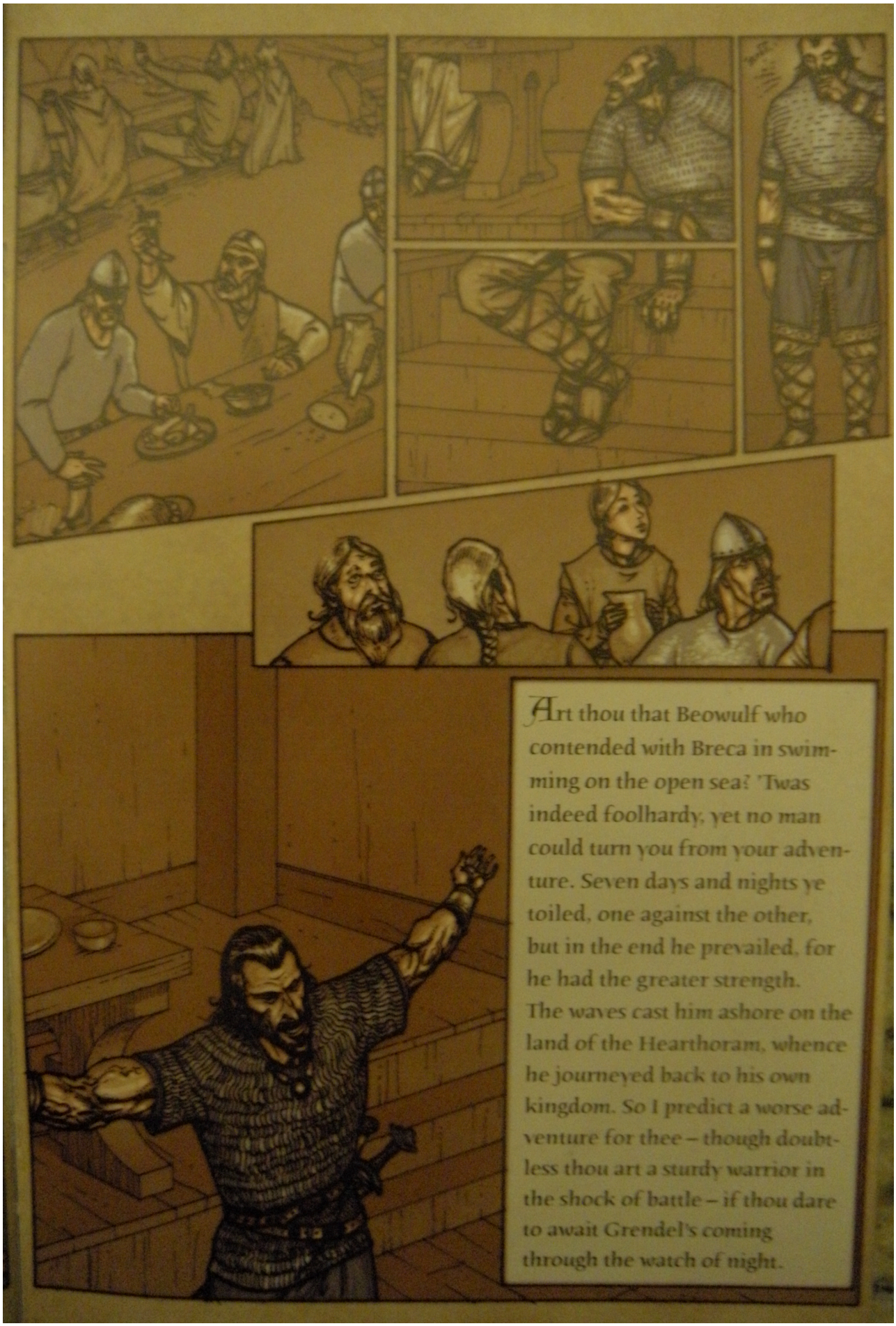


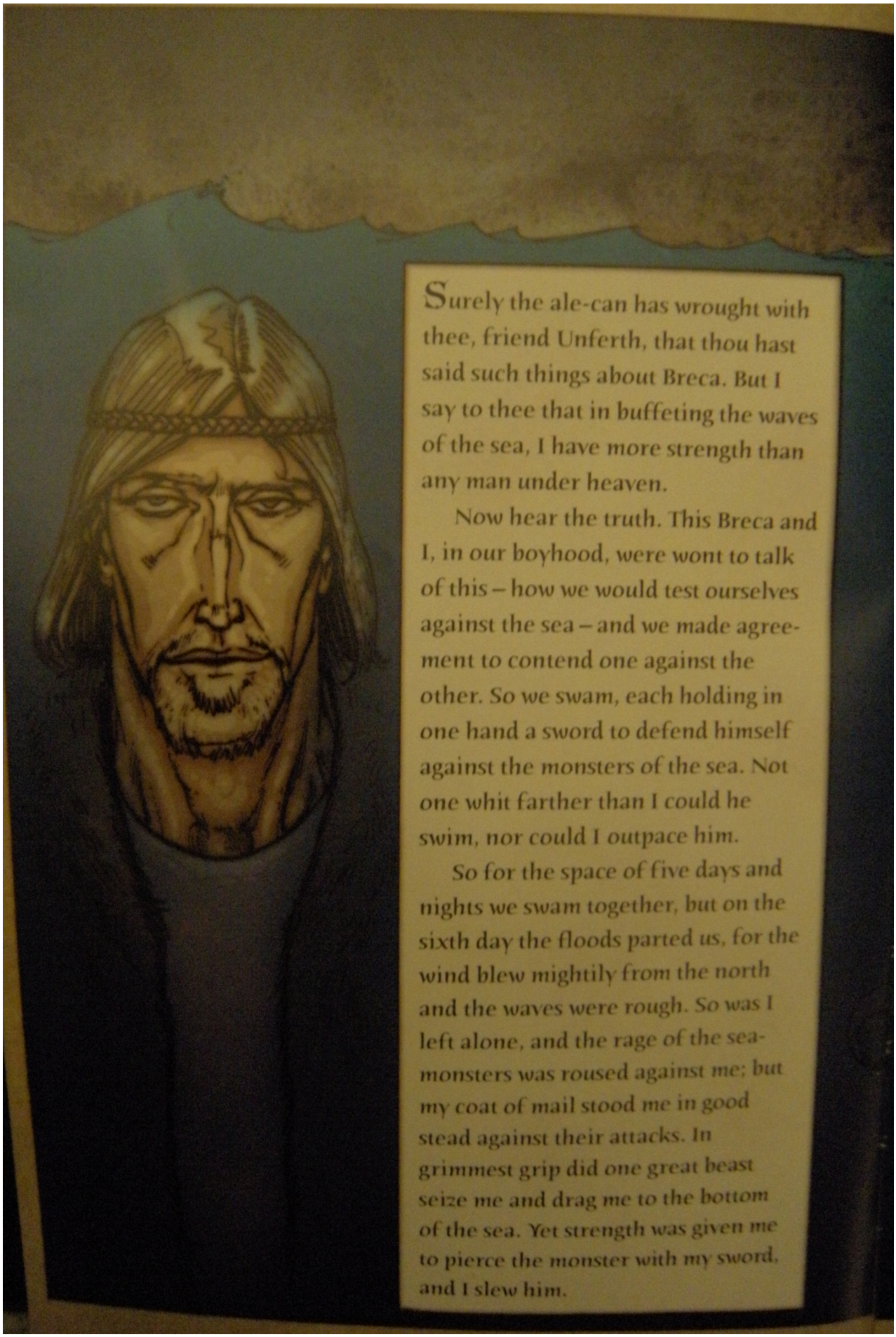
I knew him well when he was yet a boy. His father was Ecgtheow, to whom Hrethel the Geat gave his only daughter in marriage. And now that he has grown to man's estate, he is come to visit us. And indeed it is well, for they who carried our gifts over the seas to the Geats say that he has in his grip the strength of thirty men.


HAIL
TO THEE,
KING
HROTHGAR!
I am BEOWULF, kinsman to KING HYGELAC. Many deeds of note have I done in my life, and now the reports of the monster Grendel have brought me to your land. For strangers from over the sea have told us how this fair hall stands empty as soon as evening falls. 'Twas my comrades who put the thought in my heart, for they had seen my valorous deeds, how I had conquered the foes of my country and brought the race of giants low, and slain monsters both on sea and on land. So now I am come, my lord King, to fight single-handed against this Grendel. More I have heard: that the monster dire, in his wrath, has no regard for weapons.


Therefore I shall carry neither sword nor shield nor coat of mail to this battle. With the grip of my hands only will I confront this enemy, struggling with him, life for life. But who shall live and who shall die, let it be as God shall will.
I DOUBT NOT, O King, that if he has his way, he will devour the champions of the Geats, even as he has those of the Danes. As for me, thou wilt not need to lay my body in the earth and raise a mound over it, for he will surely carry it off to the moors where he dwells and devour it there. Only I pray thee to send back to King Hygelac my armor, for it came to me by inheritance, and Wayland, the smith of the gods, wrought it in the old time. But that which Fate has ordered shall come to pass.


Often have my warriors BOASTED, merry with their drink, that they would stand up, sword in hand, against the monster. But when morning came, lo! The hall was bespattered with gore, and the benches reeked with blood, and I was the poorer by many brave men.
But I pray thee, hardy heroes, sit down to the feast.

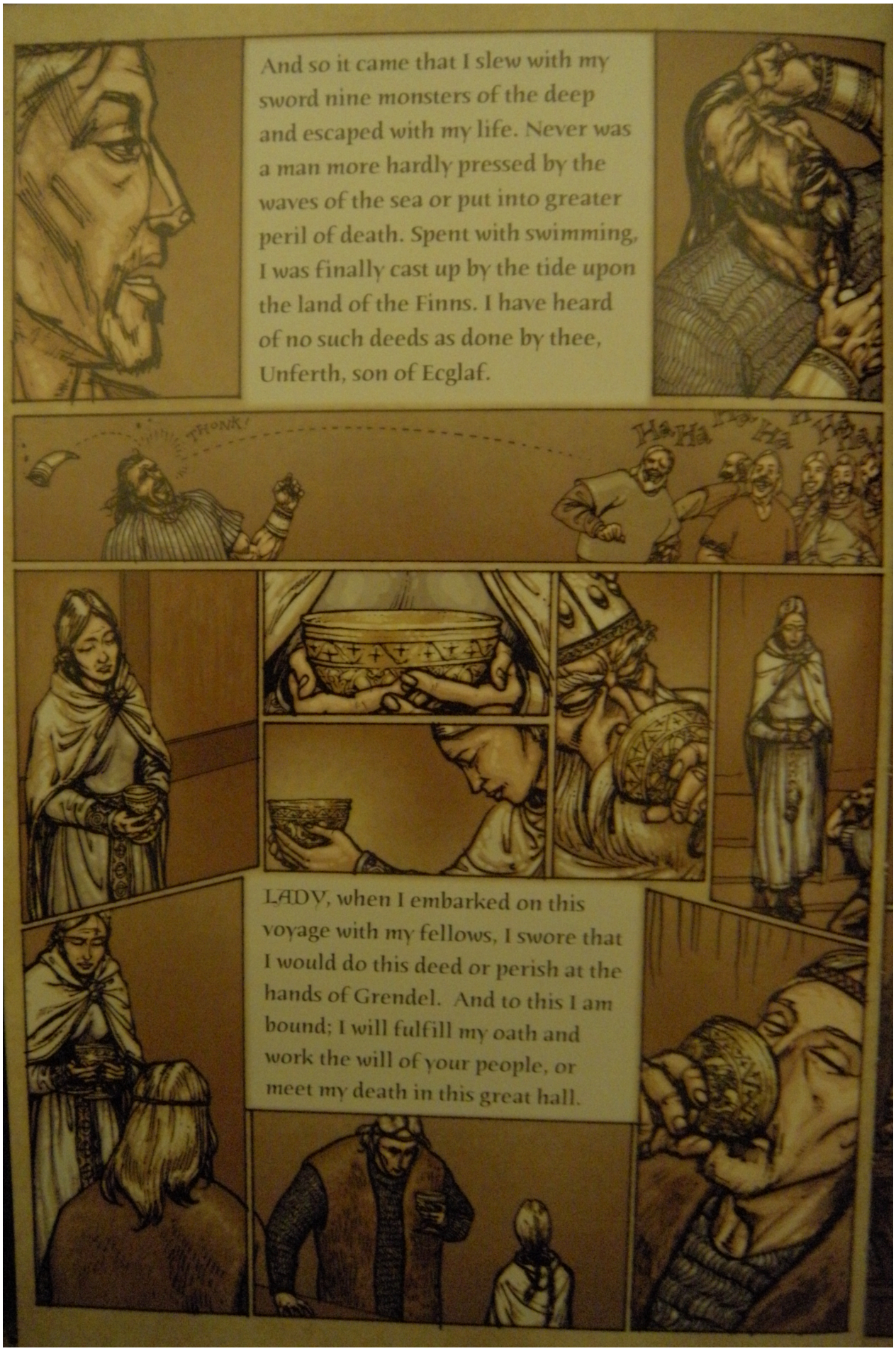

Art thou that Beowulf who contended with Breca in swimming on the open sea? 'Twas indeed foolhardy, yet no man could turn you from your adventure. Seven days and nights ye toiled, one against the other, but in the end he prevailed, for he had the greater strength. The waves cast him ashore on the land of the Hearthoram, whence he journeyed back to his own kingdom. So I predict a worse adventure for thee – though doubtless thou art a sturdy warrior in the shock of battle – if thou dare to await Grendel's coming through the watch of night.

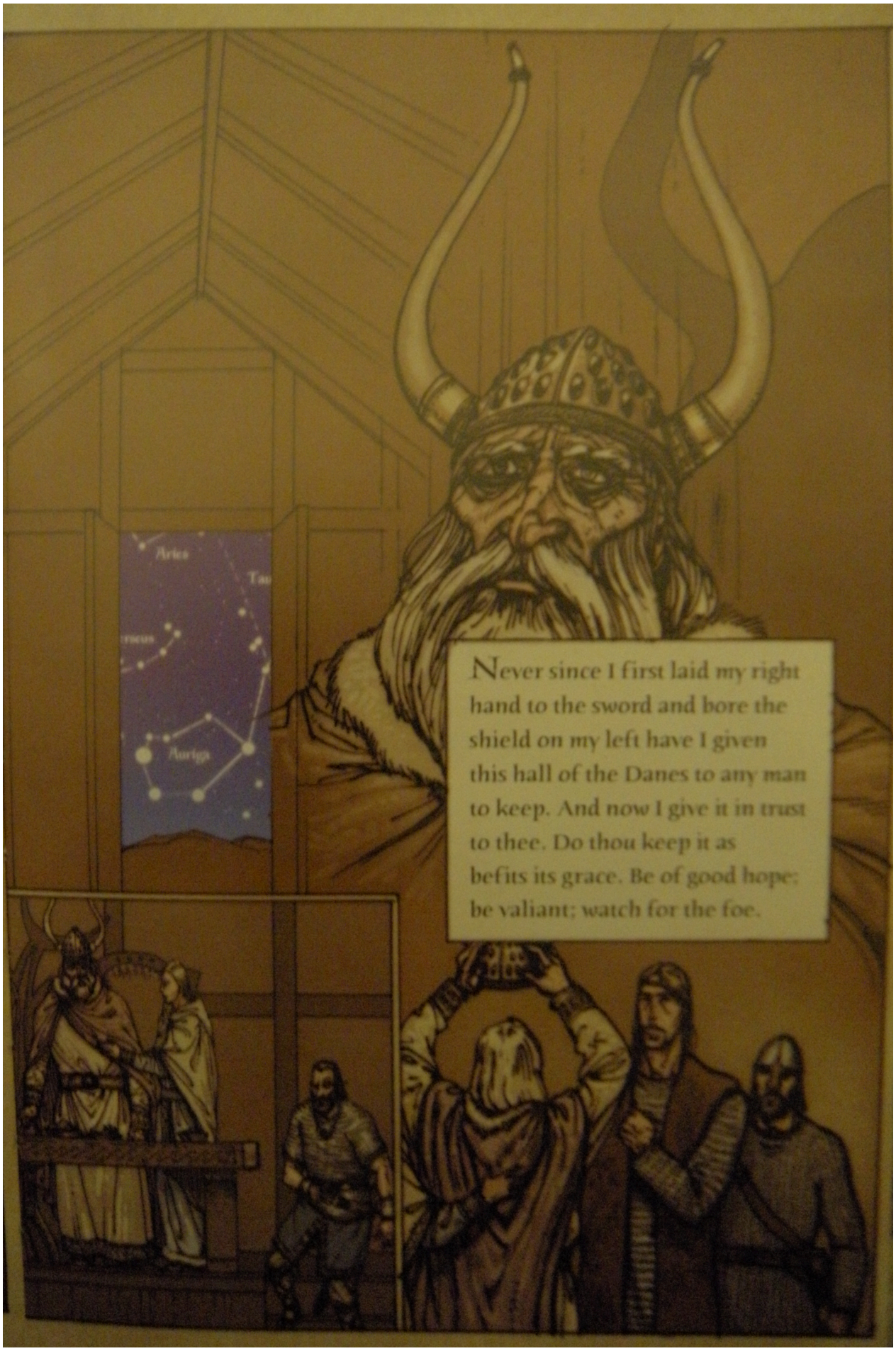


Surely the ale-can has wrought with thee, friend Unferth, that thou hast said such things about Breca. But I say to thee that in buffeting the waves of the sea, I have more strength than any man under heaven.

Now hear the truth. This Breca and I, in our boyhood, were wont to talk of this – how we would test ourselves against the sea – and we made agreement to contend one against the other. So we swam, each holding in one hand a sword to defend himself against the monsters of the sea. Not one whit farther than I could he swim, nor could I outpace him.

So for the space of five days and nights we swam together, but on the sixth day the floods parted us, for the wind blew mightily from the north and the waves were rough. So was I left alone, and the rage of the sea-monsters was roused against me; but my coat of mail stood me in good stead against their attacks. In grimmest grip did one great beast seize me and drag me to the bottom of the sea. Yet strength was given me to pierce the monster with my sword, and I slew him.


And so it came that I slew with my sword nine monsters of the deep and escaped with my life. Never was a man more hardly pressed by the waves of the sea or put into greater peril of death. Spent with swimming, I was finally cast up by the tide upon the land of the Finns. I have heard of no such deeds as done by thee, Unferth, son of Ecglaf.
THONK!
Ha Ha Ha Ha
LADY, when I embarked on this voyage with my fellows, I swore that I would do this deed or perish at the hands of Grendel. And to this I am bound; I will fulfill my oath and work the will of your people, or meet my death in this great hall.


Aries
Auriga
Never since I first laid my right hand to the sword and bore the shield on my left have I given this hall of the Danes to any man to keep. And now I give it in trust to thee. Do thou keep it as befits its grace. Be of good hope; be valiant; watch for the foe.

Lacerta
Aquila
Sagitta
Mirror
Venatic
Coma Beren

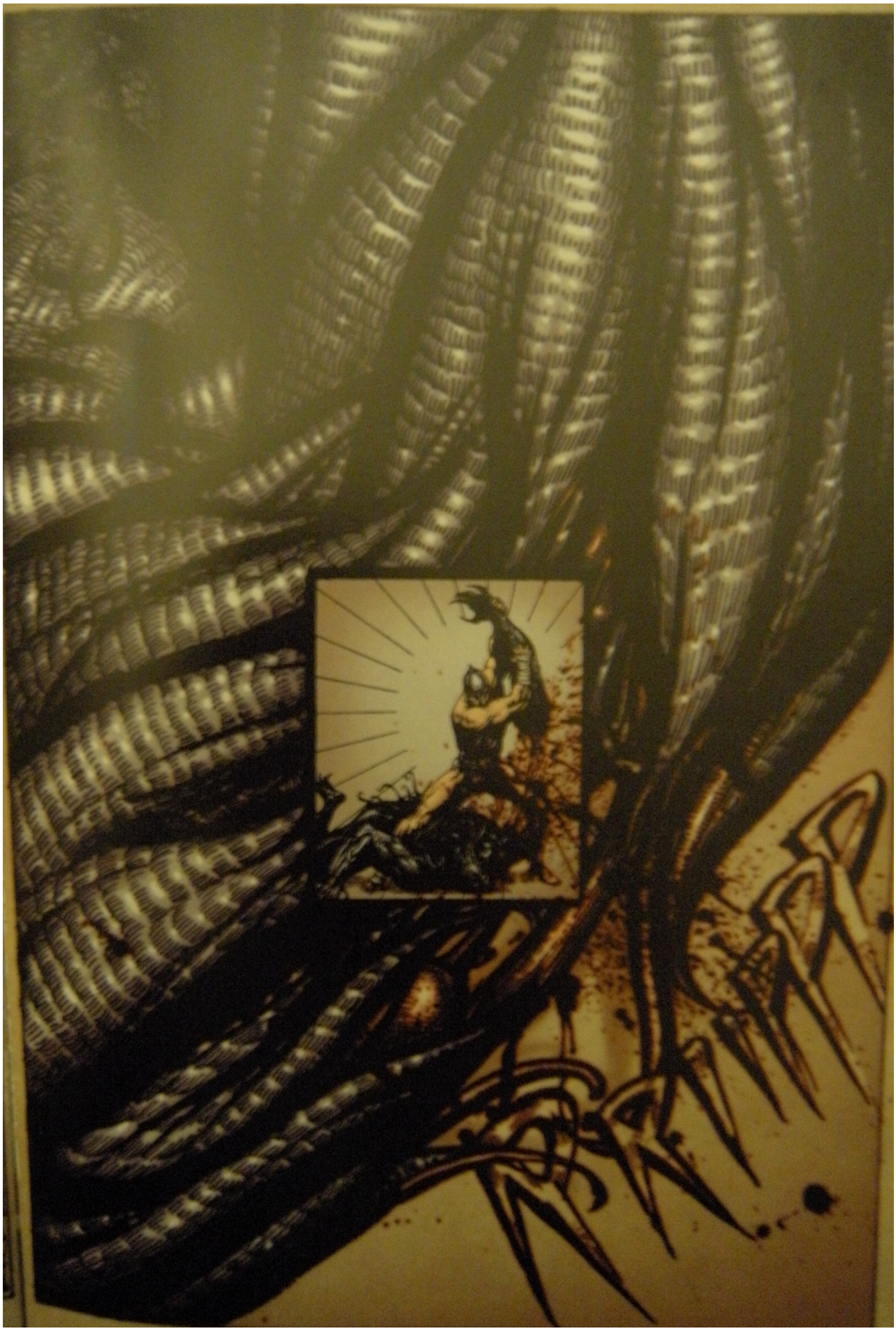
Pegasus
Andromeda
Lacerta
Lyra

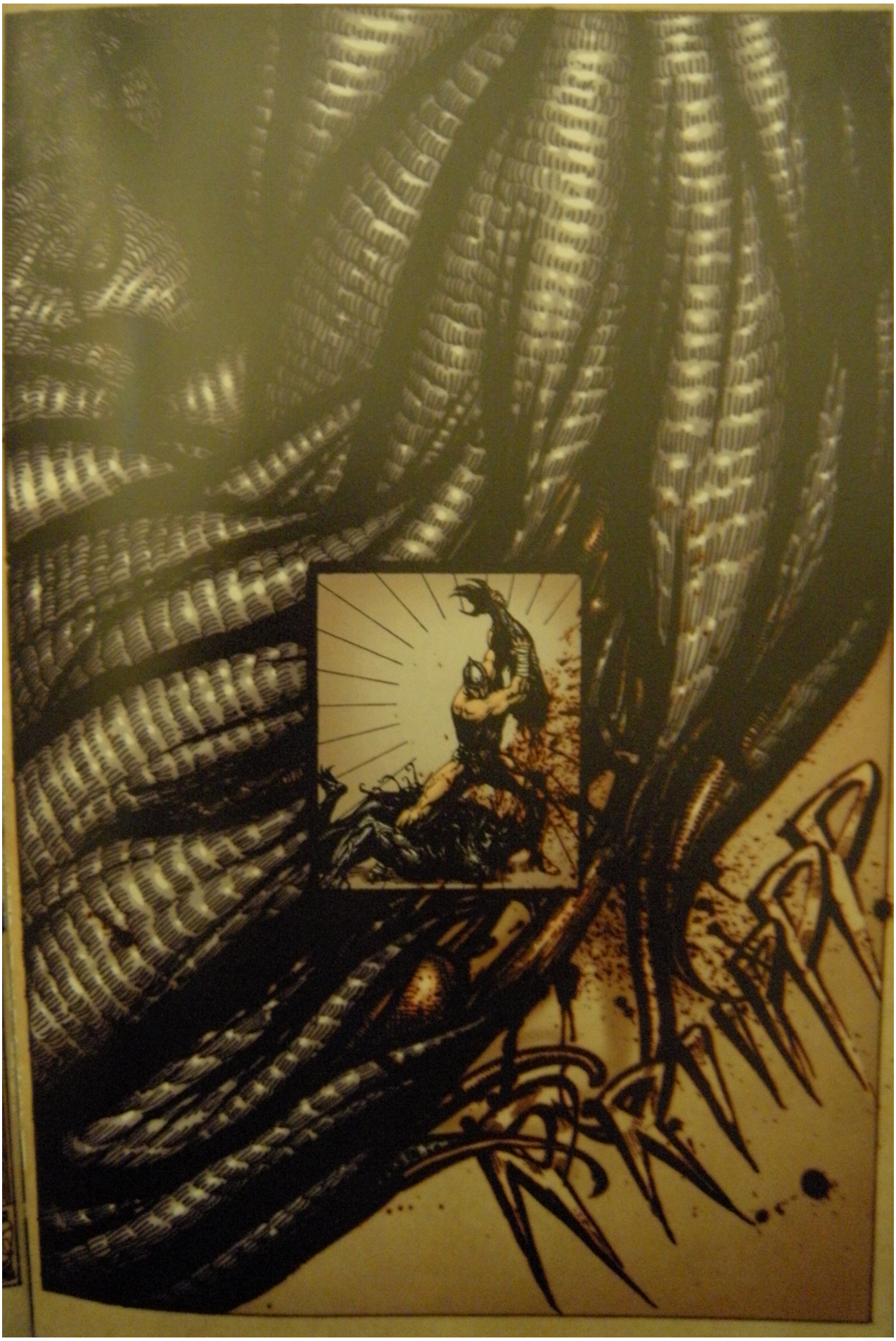
SPALUK

PLOP

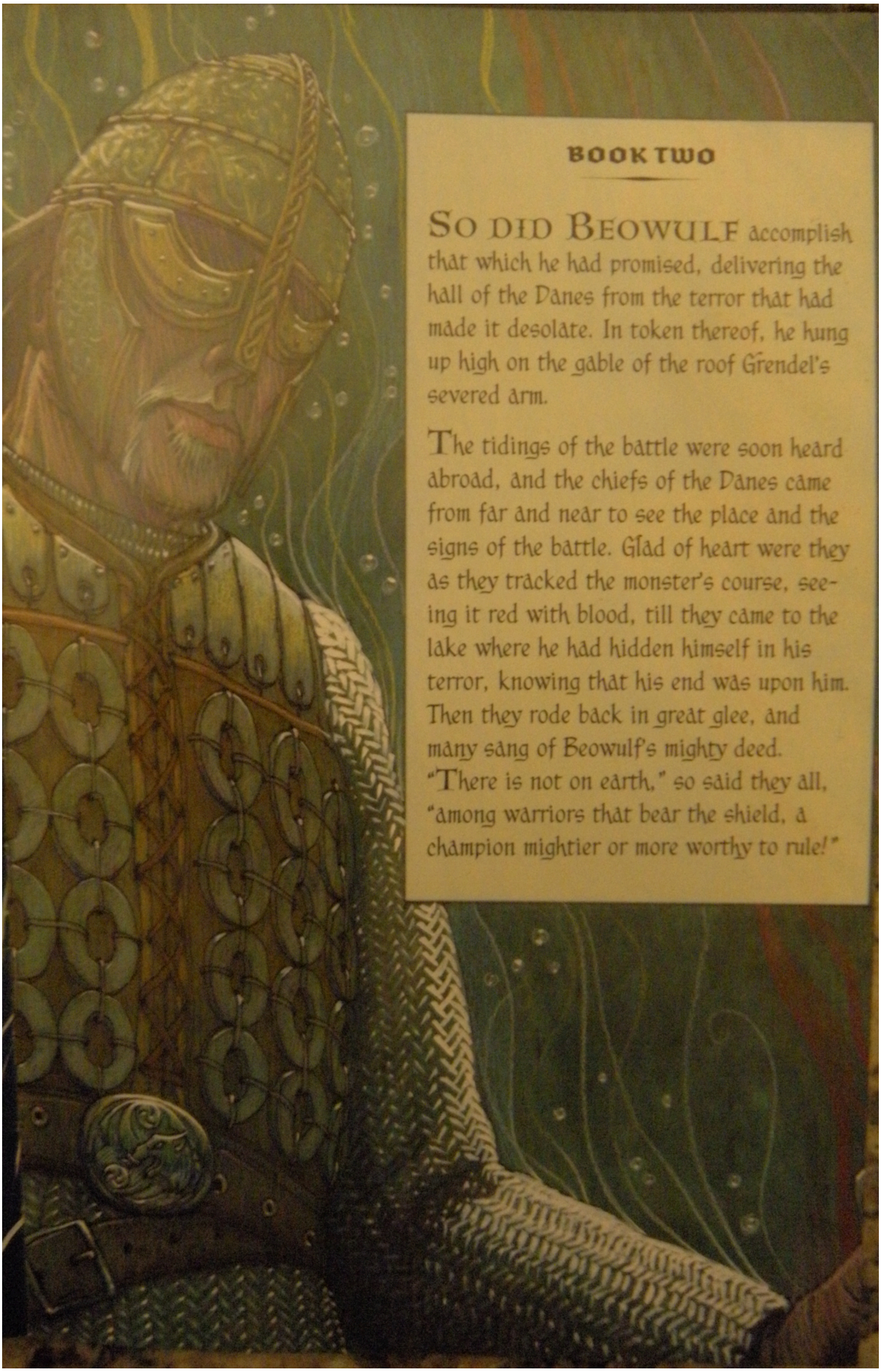
KYUTCH-P

CRUNCH





Aquarius
Leo

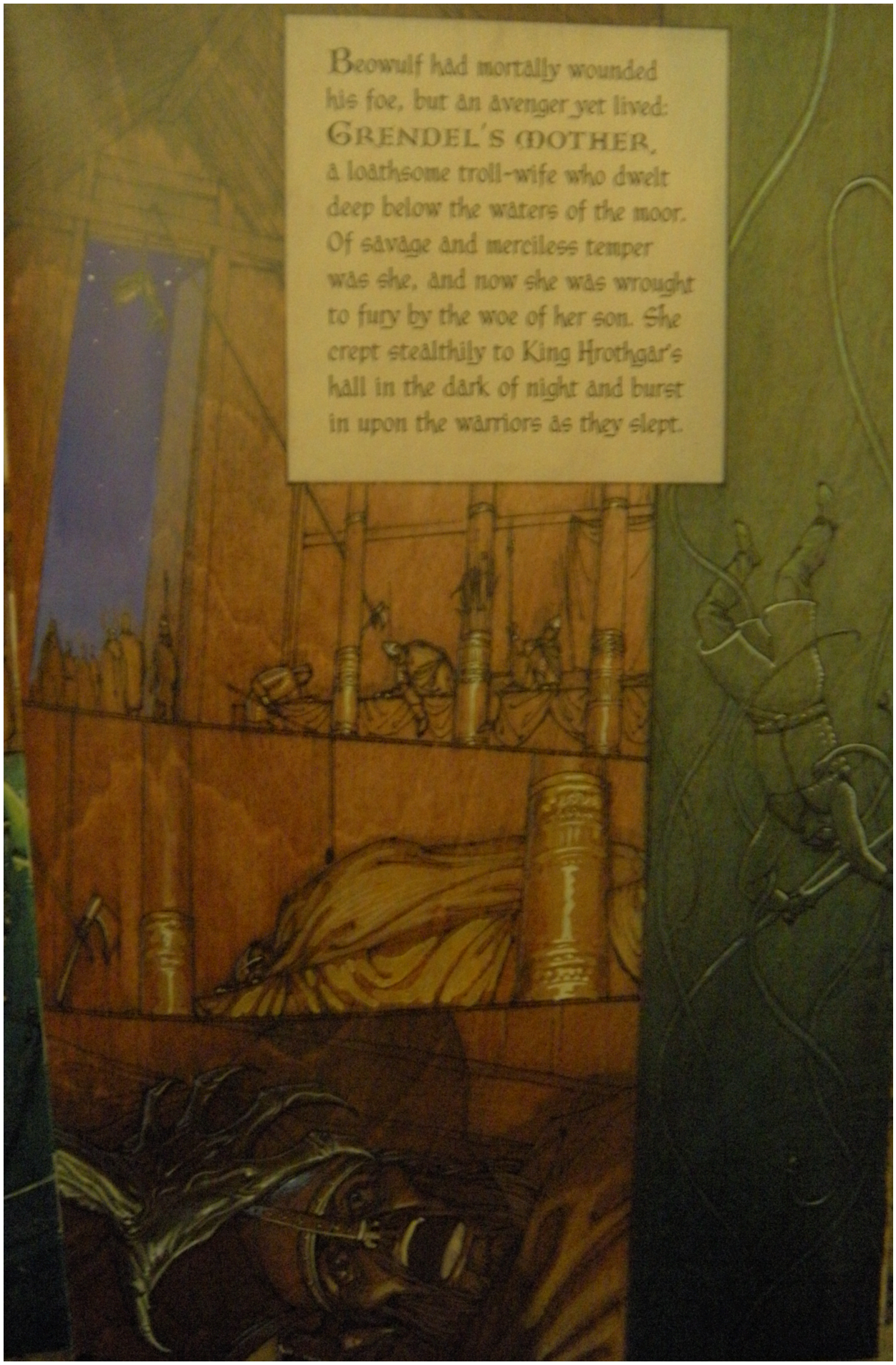


BOOK TWO

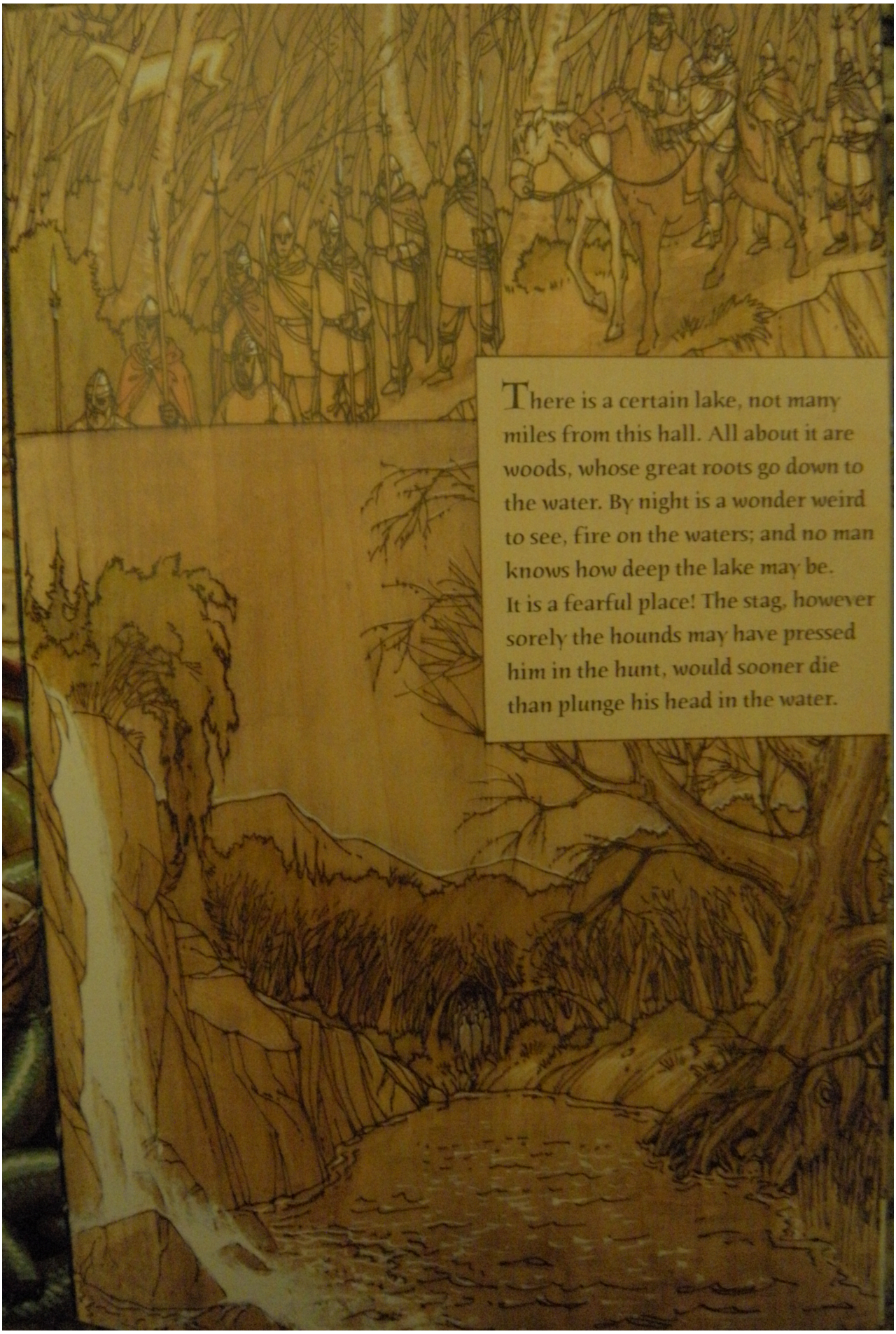
SO DID BEOWULF accomplish that which he had promised, delivering the hall of the Danes from the terror that had made it desolate. In token thereof, he hung up high on the gable of the roof Grendel's severed arm.

The tidings of the battle were soon heard abroad, and the chiefs of the Danes came from far and near to see the place and the signs of the battle. Glad of heart were they as they tracked the monster's course, seeing it red with blood, till they came to the lake where he had hidden himself in his terror, knowing that his end was upon him. Then they rode back in great glee, and many sang of Beowulf's mighty deed. "There is not on earth," so said they all, "among warriors that bear the shield, a champion mightier or more worthy to rule!"

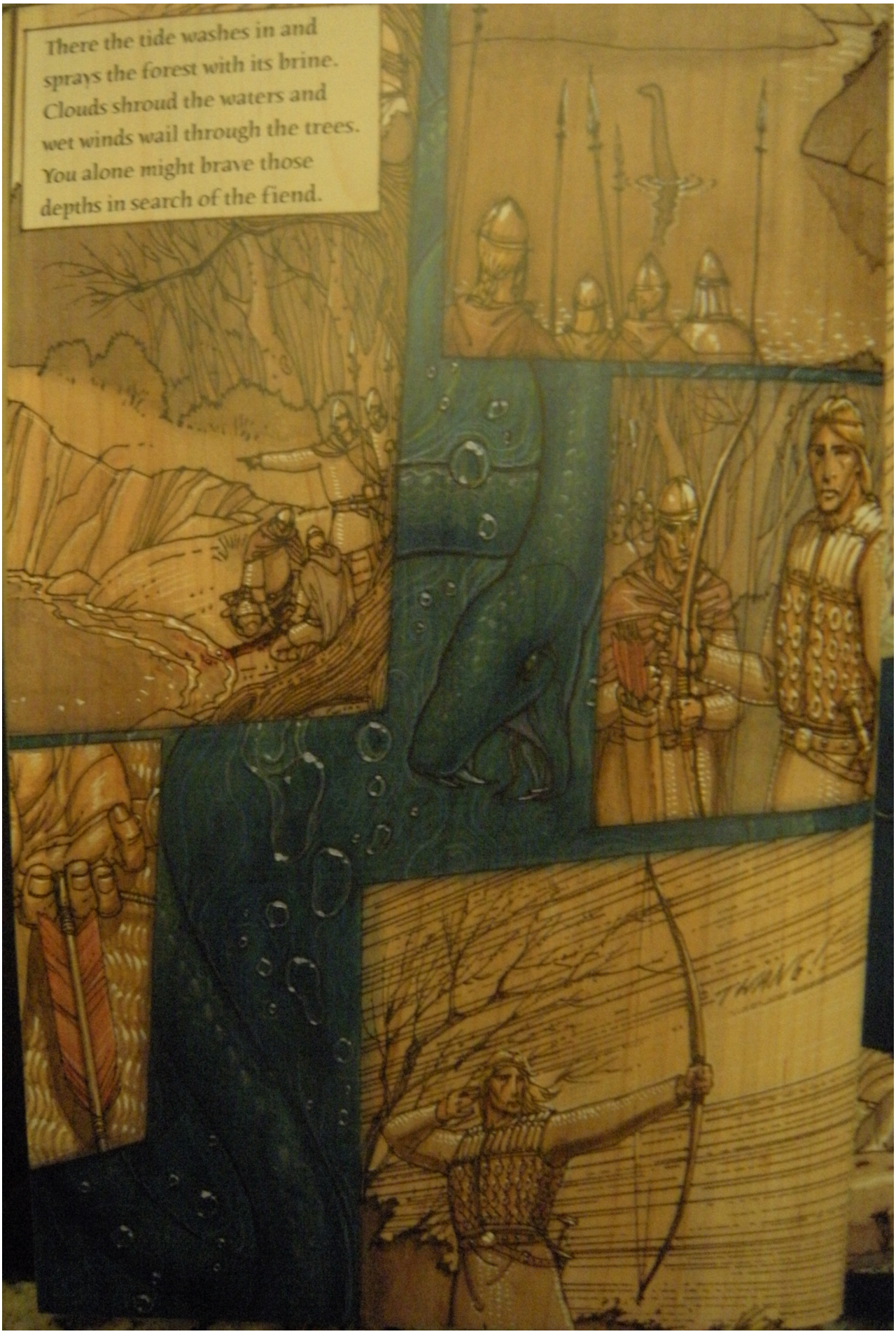
King Hrothgar then gave to Beowulf many costly gifts. In great cheer the warriors laid themselves down to sleep, but there was one among them who was doomed to pay dearly for his rest.


Beowulf had mortally wounded his foe, but an avenger yet lived: GRENDEL'S MOTHER, a loathsome troll-wife who dwelt deep below the waters of the moor. Of savage and merciless temper was she, and now she was wrought to fury by the woe of her son. She crept stealthily to King Hrothgar's hall in the dark of night and burst in upon the warriors as they slept.

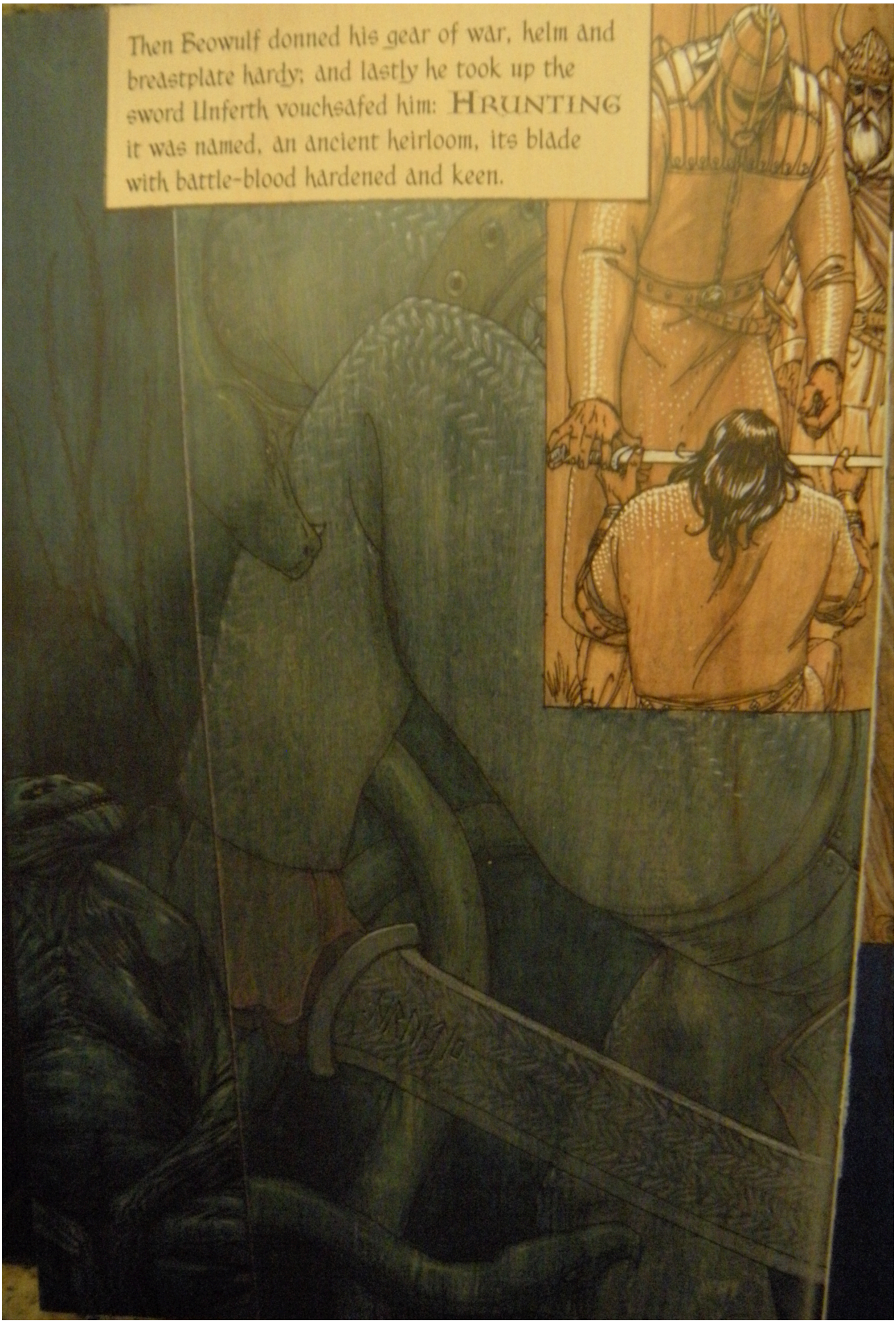
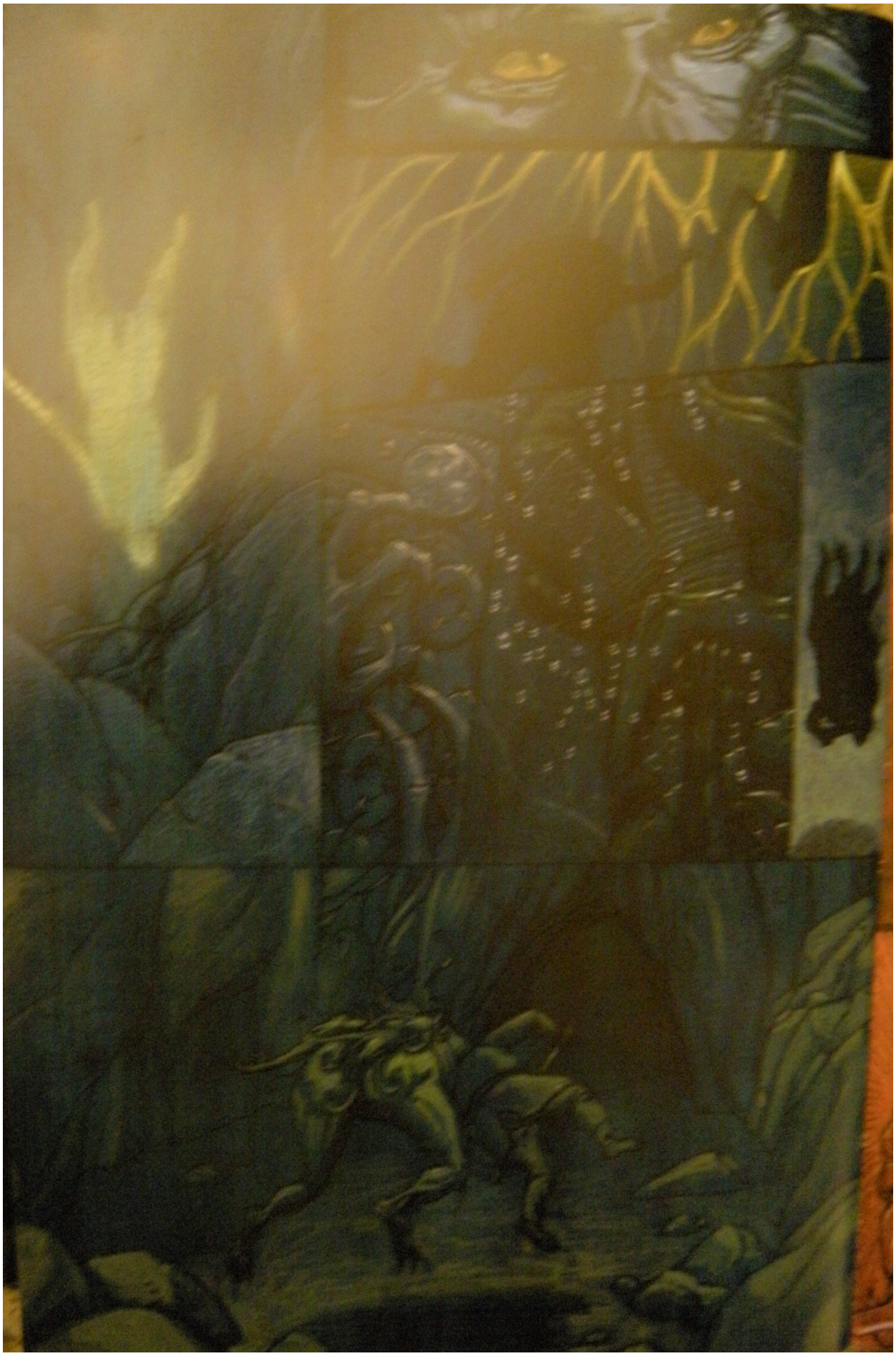
Ask not of pleasure! Pain is come again to Danish folk. Dead is Aeschere, my sage adviser and ally in council, shoulder-comrade in the shock of battle.
Be of good comfort, my lord King. 'Tis better for a man to avenge his friends than to spend his days lamenting. Verily for every one of us there is an ordained end; let us therefore take such occasion as God may give us of winning renown while life remains to us. Come, then, let us go and track this foul creature to her lair.



There is a certain lake, not many miles from this hall. All about it are woods, whose great roots go down to the water. By night is a wonder weird to see, fire on the waters; and no man knows how deep the lake may be. It is a fearful place! The stag, however sorely the hounds may have pressed him in the hunt, would sooner die than plunge his head in the water.


There the tide washes in and
sprays the forest with its brine.
Clouds shroud the waters and
wet winds wail through the trees.
You alone might brave those
depths in search of the fiend.

THWOK!


Then Beowulf donned his gear of war, helm and breastplate hardy; and lastly he took up the sword Unferth vouchsafed him: HRUNTING it was named, an ancient heirloom, its blade with battle-blood hardened and keen.

With Hrunting I seek doom of glory,
or death shall take me!