Beowulf’s List of Characters

Geats

Beowulf—Higlac’s follower and nephew by marriage; a great warrior; comes to Denmark with a band of 14 followers to help Hrothgar defeat Grendel since Hrothgar had ended a feud for Beowulf’s father, Edgetho, when it threatened to cause war between the Geats and the Wulfings (a Germanic tribe); after the death of his king, Higlac, and Higlac’s son, Herdred, was the Geat king for 50 years; also killed Grendel’s mother; mortally wounded in battle with a third dragon when an old man.

Edgetho—Beowulf’s father; married Hrethel’s daughter, becoming Higlac’s brother-in-law; fled to Hrothgar’s Denmark after beginning a feud which resulted in his exile, since the people feared this feud would become a war.

Efor—Killed the Swedish king, Ongentho; given Higlac’s daughter as a reward, making him Beowulf’s cousin by marriage.

Hathcyn—Hrethel’s son; accidentally killed his elder brother, Herbald, in a hunting accident which led to his father’s dying of grief; became the Geat king with his brother, Higlac, upon Hrethel’s death; killed in a battle with Sweden by the Swedish king, Ongentho.

Herdred—Son of Higlac; Geat king; killed by the Swedish king, Onela.

Higd—Higlac’s wife.

Higlac—The young king of the Geats; married to Higd; Beowulf’s uncle and lord; youngest son of Hrethel; father of Herdred; father-in-law to Efor; brother of Hathcyn and Herbald.

Hondshew—The young Geat soldier eaten by the monster, Grendel, in Herot (the hall built by the Danish king, Hrothgar, to house and celebrate his growing and victorious troops) during the first night the Geats sleep there when they arrive to conquer Grendel.

Hrethel—Father of Higlac, Hathcyn, and Herbald; married his daughter to Edgetho; Beowulf’s grandfather; took Beowulf to live with him at age seven and loved him as a son; king of the Geats.

Wiglaf—Wexstan’s son; a former Swede; the only soldier who accompanies Beowulf into his last and fatal battle with the dragon.

Danes

Beo—Shild’s son; Healfdane’s father; became the Danish king upon Shild’s death; long-reigning and popular king.

Esher—Hrothgar’s closest friend and most trusted counselor; carried off by Grendel’s mother (along with her son’s claw) in retaliation for Grendel’s death the first night the Danes return to Herot.

Healfdane—Son of Beo; father to Hergar, Hrothgar, Halga the good, and Yrs, who was married to the king of the Swedes, Onela.

Hermod—A Danish king who had ruled poorly and uncaringly, alienating his people.

Hrothgar—Son of Healfdane; builder of Herot; king of the Danes after his brother Hergar’s death; ended Edgetho’s feud; welcomed Beowulf and his band of 14 when they came to defeat Grendel; married to Welthow; father of Hrethric, Hrothmund, and Freaw (who married Ingeld).
Shild—Beo’s father; Healfdane’s grandfather; Hrothgar’s great-grandfather; another long reigning, popular Danish king.

Unferth—Ecglaf’s son; Hrothgar’s courtier (attendant at the royal court); greets Beowulf joyfully when he arrives in Denmark but is afraid to join him in battling Grendel’s mother; loans Beowulf Hrunting (his sword) to kill Grendel’s mother.

Welthow—Hrothgar’s queen.

**Others**

Dagref—Killed Beowulf’s lord, Higlac; was in turn killed by Beowulf.

Finn—Sung of as an example of bad character. He attacked his wife’s people without warning, killing her son and brother. He was later murdered by enemies he had forced into a peace treaty.

Grendel—The monster who attacks Herot and murders Hrothgar’s men, which results in Herot standing empty for twelve years; eats Hondshew the first night the Geats sleep in Herot; killed by Beowulf.

Grendel’s Mother—Another monster; seeks revenge upon Beowulf for his having murdered her son; flees Herot when she sees she is losing the battle but takes her son’s claw (which had been hang-ing on the wall as a trophy of his defeat) and Esher, Hrothgar’s closest friend and advisor; eventually killed by Beowulf.

Offa—King of the Angles who did not migrate to what is now England, but rather stayed on the European continent.

Onela—Younger son of Ongentho; married to Healfdane’s daughter; became the Swedish king by seizing the throne after his older brother’s death; invaded the Geats to kill Herdred and the older of his two nephews who was heir to the Swedish throne; after returning home, permitted Beowulf to rule the Geats; killed by Beowulf during the invasion of Sweden by the surviving nephew.

Ongentho—The Swedish king who kills Hathcyn, the Geatish king and Hrethel’s son, after Hrethel’s death; killed by Higlac; Onela’s father.

Siegmund—Successfully fought against a dragon, earning treasures; greatly glorified in the poems which were later sung.

Wexstan—Wiglaf’s father; killed the older of Onela’s nephews during the Swedish invasion of the Geats.

Wulfgar—A Swedish prince serving the Danish king, Hrothgar.