

“The Twelve Traps in John Gardner’s *Grendel*” by Barry Fawcett and Elizabeth Jones
 (Shared by Nancy Sanders nnsanders@sbcglobal.net who added information from other scholars as well)

“Somewhere in our cavernous hearts the old heroic ideals continue to haunt and illumine us.
 Grendel’s conflict, as he holds fast to skepticism yet sways toward vision,
 turning and twisting between mockery and anguish, poetry and black humor,
 continually ironizing his ironies, is our own as inhabitants of the twentieth century.”

Chapter	Astrology*	Planets & House*	Heroic Ideal**	Philosophy	Symbol	Story
1	Aries the Ram	Mars, God of War	Life a) The individual self & its potential b) Celebration of the cycle of life and death	Orphism	Ram Proliferation of Life	a) Grendel deals death in war with Hrothgar; b) Faces his potential: his death c) Longs for meaning, but rejects it as meaningless d) Funeral scene: celebrants of the cycle
2	Taurus the Bull	Venus, Goddess of Love Fortune & Possessions	Love: practical, caring, love for living things	Solipism: I alone exist; I create the whole universe blink by blink	Bull, Grendel’s Mother Young Hrothgar	a) Bull attacks for a calf that may not be his b) Grendel’s mother = Venus protecting son c) Young Hrothgar = conservationist: trees & horses & having Grendel fed
3	Gemini the Twins	Mercury, Messenger of Gods kindred, journeys, education, invented lyre, patron of liars & thieves	Poetry & Art	Sophism	Twin Sheep & Goats	Grendel is Two-minded
4	Cancer the Crab	Moon treasure, the home, one’s roots	Generosity	Old Testament basic values: good vs. evil; vengeful God	Crab and Home are synonymous	a) Hart = house of treasure b) Medieval society synonymous with Hart c) Sign of glory and justice d) Great, generous civilization e) But it will wane, like the moon. Its cancer: lover’s indifference to a man murdered in the forest
5	Leo the Lion	Sun children, childbirth, hobbies, creativity	True Knowledge (especially from oracle, seer, mentor)	Nihilism	Dragon	Grendel (like Odysseus & Aeneas) goes to the underworld for advice but returns armored with despair

6	Virgo the Virgin	Mercury, Messenger of the Gods servants, hard work, sickness, health	Heroism, Energy	Egoism (Rand)	Sun	a) Unferth (untried virgin) wants to fight Grendel, but is concerned only with himself b) Black sun (terrifying nothingness) he sees deep within the dragon's eye c) Dragon is golden and fiery as a lion d) Quest for knowledge is meaningless; nothing will remain in the end but a silent universe e) Time & Space = process & connectedness of all
7	Libra the Scales	Venus, Goddess of Love marriage, partnership, enemies	Balance, Forgiveness	Scepticism (chaos) vs. New Testament (order)	Wealtheow	a) Wealtheow marries Hrothgar b) Balance between enemies c) Self-sacrificial love d) (Mid-way through the twelfth year = balance)
8	Scorpio the Scorpion	Mars (older system); Pluto (modern system) fear, death, inheritance	Loyalty	Machiavellianism & Anarchism	Hrothulf & Red Horse	a) Hrothulf (sweet scorpion) plots to inherit the kingdom b) Red Horse talks to Hrothulf c) Violence and demagoguery d) Contrast: Hrothgar's loyalty to Hrothulf & Wealtheow's loyalty to Hrothgar
9	Sagittarius, the Archer	Jupiter dreams, intellect, religion	Religion	Whitehead's Process	Priest	a) Organized religion b) Priest talks of the nature of the king of gods c) Grendel is awed by Ork's depth of feeling d) Children in snow: angel wings e) Hart's antlers: like wings, filled with otherworldly light f) Grendel: dreams, omens, portent of archer & hart, restless expectation for something to happen
10	Capricorn the Goat	Saturn kings, career, conduct of life	Hope	Nietzsche	Hrothgar & Shaper, End of an epoch	a) Goat perseveres in his climb b) Shaper, even in death, is visionary c) Hrothgar's kingdom is weakened by Grendel's raids

						d) Shaper's assistance anticipates a new era e) Old woman predicts to children the coming of Beowulf & hope for the future
11	Aquarius the Water-Bearer	Saturn, deposed King of gods (older system of 7 planets); Pluto, altruism & brotherly love (modern system) friendship, ideals & worthy causes	Friendship	Existentialism (absurdism)	Beowulf	a) Beowulf comes in friendship b) Passing of old order, Hrothgar
12	Pisces the Fish	Jupiter, Sky god; Neptune, Sea god private enemies, betrayals	Hero (for others)	Empiricism	Christ as Savior	a) Beowulf is champion of faith b) Grendel clings to oak of Jupiter & feels a dark power (Neptune) moving in him like a current - takes a leap of faith c) Though Grendel has an "accident," he experiences himself as himself but also something greater than himself, begins to apprehend the whole universe: life and death, his own death, and becomes the Shaper's real successor

* Associating heroic ideals with sun, moon, planets named after gods, and constellations, he [Gardner] gives them an archetypal, mythic, cosmic dimension . . . ideals pertain not just to a particular time and place but to all cycles of human life.

** Though one part of Grendel sees heroic ideals as traps set to catch his individual consciousness, another part of him is stirred by the imaginative vision of the self as connected with something other and larger than the self.

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