

# Grendel

Author **John Gardner** 

Year Published 1971

Original Language **English** 

**THEMES** 

# What Does It Mean to Be a

Grendel reimagines the terrible monster from the Old English Beowulf epic as a thinking and feeling being struggling to understand his place in the world. How is he defined by being a monster? What is the nature of the world? After encountering many possible answers, Grendel comes full circle when he encounters Beowulf.

# Monster?

### Isolation

Grendel is a monster alone—separated from humans, animals, and even his mother.

Fate vs. Free Will

Grendel's end is never in doubt; it is unclear whether he has any control.



### Monsters & Humans

The monster isn't always monstrous; the humans are not always humane.



# Main Characters



Dragon Teaches Grendel;

greedy and cold



Grendel Monster searching

for meaning



**Grendel's Mother** 

Monster without the power of speech



Hrothgar King of the Danes;

Grendel's adversary



**Hrothulf** Hrothgar's nephew;

wants to rule



Queen; brings

balance to Danes



Shaper Singer of stories

that define Danes



**Unferth** Frustrated hero whom Grendel

lets live



## **Zodiac**

Each chapter connects to one of the signs of the zodiac, another yearly cycle.



echoes Grendel's journey through the novel.

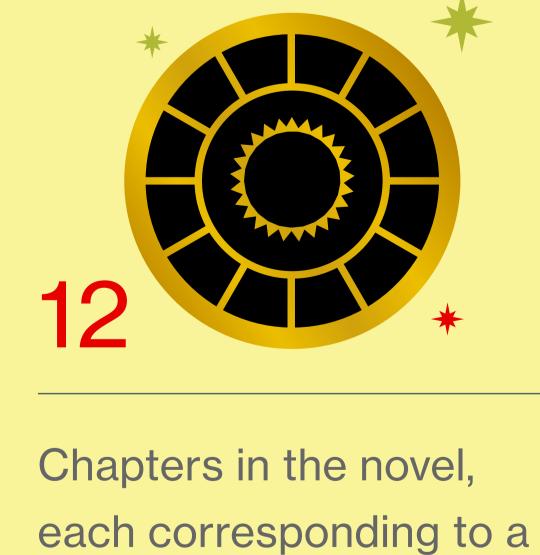


### Grendel often compares

mindless behavior to the mechanics of a machine.

# by the Numbers

Grendel



sign of the zodiac



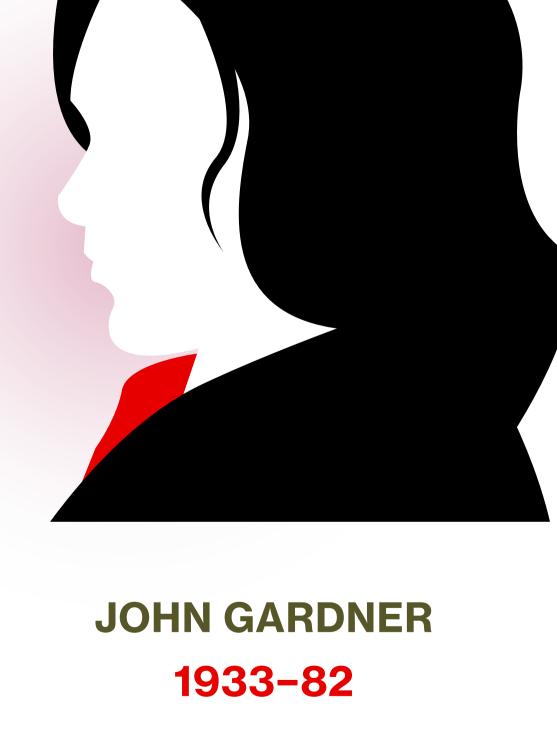
to focus on writing

Year the animated film adaptation Grendel Grendel Grendel was released

1981



Author



Grendel was the first in a

string of critical and

commercial successes for American writer Gardner, including The Sunlight Dialogues and award-winning October Light. He was also a scholar of Old and Middle English who had a reputation for holding controversial views and for introducing the young to complicated literature.



was Grendel, Ruiner of Meadhalls, Wrecker of Kings! But also, as never before, I was alone.

Grendel, Chapter 6

Sources: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Matt Wagner Comics, Pennsylvania Center for the Book, Philosophy Now, "The Twelve Chapters of Grendel" by Craig J. Stromme, Understanding John Gardner by John Michael Howell, University of Rochester—

River Campus Libraries, The Washington Post

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