

## Beowulf

*This is a story of a time long ago, of terrifying monsters and Beowulf, the hero, who kills them and brings to an end their reign of terror. In this scene, a runaway SLAVE comes across a group of Geats, members of Beowulf's own tribe, and tells them how, quite by chance, as he was running from his master, he discovered a sleeping dragon and hidden treasure.*

**SLAVE:** I didn't mean to wake it. I was on the run. A slave, running from his master. I had no reason to run. My master's not a bad man. But it just got into me. Like a voice, nagging at me, day and night. Run, it said. Break loose. Be a free man. Those words, burning in me, like a fever. The only way to stop it was to run. So I ran, and I kept on running. I left behind the places where people lived, made for the wastes, where I wouldn't be found. Crag and boulders. Waves crashing over cliffs. And there, on the cliff top, a hill. Smooth and round. And a huge rock set in one side. There was a hole in the rock, just big enough to squeeze through. I crept inside, followed a low passageway sloping downwards. Then I saw a dim light ahead, glimmering in the dark. I went towards it, came to a stone doorway. The light came from beyond it, so I stepped through. And I was in a vast cavern and it was filled with gold.

It lay there before me. A huge creature, coiled beside the treasure. Its scales shone in the light of the gold. Or did the gold shine in the light of the scales? It didn't move. Its eyes were closed. It seemed to be sleeping. I crept closer. The heat that came off it! Like it was some kind of furnace. Water dripping from the roof rose up in clouds of steam. I reached my hand out towards it. I felt the power, the energy packed inside it. A little nearer and I could have touched it. My fingertips just that far off. I didn't touch it. I drew my hand back, crept out of the cavern, made my way back to the entrance.

*Continued* ▶

I was outside again, in sunlight and fresh air. I stood on the clifftop. I heard the sea below. And it was only then that I realised what I'd done. When I looked down I saw it. I swear I don't know how it got there. I don't remember taking it. But there it was, in my hand. A golden cup.

And the Dragon woke...

*by David Calcutt*