



DAS
DIBELINGENLIED

SONG OF THE DIBELINGS

Translated by

BURTON RAFFEL

Introduction by EDWARD THYMES

Foreword by MICHAEL DIRKH

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*to the memory of RICHARD WAGNER—
narcissist, anti-Semite, and profoundly great musician*

*and to ELI SAGAN,
so profoundly a lover of the poem that,
even in prose translation, he has read it three times*

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FOREWORD

Michael Dirda

The great literary works of the Middle Ages—and *Das Nibelungenlied* is one of the very greatest—are as exciting as they are often desolate and heartbreaking. In stark beauty and sudden violence, the brooding *Njal Saga* can be readily likened to a Sergio Leone spaghetti western, on ice. *The Song of Roland*, especially the last stand of its isolated and betrayed heroes at Roncevaux, perfectly represents W. P. Ker’s classic definition of the heroic epic as “the defense of a narrow place, against odds.” The *Nibelungenlied* itself could be easily updated to describe the downfall of a Mafia crime family, something like *The Godfather*, with swords.

Recited in great halls as the evening’s entertainment, medieval poetry couldn’t afford to be dreary. A romance or epic, no matter how moralistic, still needed to entertain a provincial court, beguile its sleepy duke, flatter his lady, and keep everyone not only hanging on every word but also thinking, “Hey, this is as good as Tolkien”—if, of course, anyone back then had known who J. R. R. Tolkien was.

It’s widely recognized that *The Lord of the Rings* draws many of its special effects from the packed storehouse of medieval saga and especially from poems like the *Nibelungenlied*. As an eminent linguist and student of what one might call the northern world, Tolkien naturally gravitated to the work he loved most, borrowing themes and motifs from Anglo-Saxon poetry, Norse myth, Teutonic history, and Celtic romance. Magical artifacts and enchanted

weapons, ancient alliances, doomed battles, journeys to the Other World, monsters, women-warriors and weakling kings, scenes of tenderness and beauty as well as moments of cold brutality and horror—all these can first be found in “The Battle of Maldon,” *Grettir Saga*, *The Mabinogion*, *Beowulf*, and many other wonder-filled tales of fated and glorious heroes.

In its plot the *Nibelungenlied* moves inexorably from romance (at times almost tall tale) through tragedy to holocaust. It is fundamentally a story about the consequence of lies, of the heartbreaking disconnect between words and reality. The great hero Sifried decides he wants to marry Krimhild, the beautiful sister of King Gunter of Burgundy. To this end, he supports Gunter in war, then helps the king to win, through trickery and subterfuge, a formidable bride. This is Brunhild, an Amazon-like beauty who possesses astonishing, even supernatural strength and who would seem more properly matched with Sifried himself (as is the case in other versions of the story).

The two couples do marry, yet at the wedding dinner a puzzled Brunhild notes the high degree of honor awarded to Sifried, supposedly a mere vassal of her seemingly indomitable husband. She’s also suspicious about why Gunter is giving his only sister as a bride to this underling. Only temporarily allayed by further trickery, Brunhild’s suspicions continue to gnaw at her. She must learn the truth, no matter what the consequences. As the reader gradually discovers, those consequences prove widespread and bloody.

But why? Because in a feudal world, where society stands or founders on personal relations, you need to be able to trust those who give you their pledge. But in the *Nibelungenlied*, everyone lies to those who count most on their truthfulness. Sifried pretends to be Gunter’s vassal, Gunter and Sifried trick Brunhild into marriage, Brunhild discovers she has been living with an illusion, Gunter’s adviser Hagen betrays Krimhild’s confidences, and on and on. Slowly, an edifice built on personal honor starts to crumble and finally comes crashing down into complete and devastating ruin.

Of course, any summary of its motivating action leaves out the artistry that gives the *Nibelungenlied* its life. Not only is this the great national poem of Germany and one of the masterworks of medieval literature, it is also, in a memorable sentence by scholar A. T. Hatto, “the world’s best heroic epic, bar one.” Moreover, like Homer’s *Iliad*, it repays all the attention you bring to it.

Composed around the year 1200, the *Nibelungenlied* draws on stories that go back to the fifth or sixth century, the period when Germanic tribes wandered through northern Europe. Its main characters appear to be based

on actual historical figures, though they are obviously much fictionalized: For example, Krimhild's second husband, Etzel, is none other than Attila the Hun. Much of Sifried's early life remains only hinted at in the Middle High German poem, but his youthful adventures—with the Nibelung hoard and Brunhild—are more fully elaborated in the *Volsunga Saga* and other Icelandic works. The unknown German poet has, however, altered later developments significantly, especially in his portrayal of Krimhild's deep love, indeed obsession, with Sifried and her subsequent determination to avenge his murder at any cost. Finally the wintry, Teutonic starkness of this family tragedy is regularly softened by a courtliness drawn from twelfth-century French romance, those suave Arthurian tales of *amour courtois* and chivalry.

As a poem, the *Nibelungenlied* is built on four-line stanzas, each line divided in half, with the final half-line of each stanza being slightly longer than the seven others. This gives a particular lilt or syncopation to the narrative. The epic thus moves cleanly along, avoiding similes, keeping the syntax as clear and stark as Hemingway. Burton Raffel's translation closely emulates the original's structure and language.

Much of the poem's considerable suspense derives, oddly enough, from a pervasive use of foreshadowing. The reader is always being told that this or that action will eventually bring tears and sorrow. Such asides create readerly eagerness, a longing for the moment when these flashes of the future will be finally and fully played out. Krimhild's prophetic dreams—of her marriage and Sifried's death—perform a similar predictive function. At the same time, the narrator's occasional recourse to phrases like “as we are told,” reminds us that the general outline of the story was probably as well known to its audience as were the plots of the Greek tragedies to the ancient Athenians. Thus the reader—roughly aware of what's bound to happen—can better appreciate the delineation of character, the play of language, the poem's overall polish.

While these stylistic elements keep the narrative tightly knit and flowing right along, others slow it down to reveal the underlying sociology of the times. For instance, much of the *Nibelungenlied* hangs on questions of status and protocol. In any encounter between approximate equals, there is always a jockeying for position, and usually an attempt to outshine the possible rival. Thus Brunhild and Krimhild, along with their respective maids-in-waiting, repeatedly try to outclass each other in the sheer gorgeousness of their dresses. The disastrous quarrel that leads to the destruction of a whole nation starts with the two queens attempting to determine who should first enter a

church. Similarly, the unspoken issue between warriors is always: Who is the greater fighter, hunter, king? Who, ultimately, is the lord and who the vassal?

In this light, the poem's unfolding tragedy initially hinges on that mystery of social hierarchy: Brunhild just can't figure out exactly where to place Sifried in relationship to Gunter. She's told he's her husband's liegeman, and yet the man behaves like Gunter's equal, and proud Krimhild claims he's actually Gunter's superior. What is the truth? All this uncertainty is particularly grating to Brunhild because her tests of strength and courage had been instituted so that she could marry the best warrior in the world. Like nearly everyone else in the poem, Brunhild discovers that she has trusted too much in appearances.

For in the end, the *Nibelungenlied* isn't primarily about battles and magic cloaks and treasure. Though starting like a fairy tale about a beautiful princess and a great warrior, it deepens into a study of human psychology. As we read, we learn more and more about the inner nature of its men and women, just as we gradually recognize how their respective strengths and weaknesses lead to their respective dooms. In these pages, character really is destiny.

The most interesting figures are, in fact, not the celebrated Sifried and Brunhild—so familiar to us from Richard Wagner's quite different conception of their relationship in the four-part opera *The Ring of the Nibelung*—but rather Krimhild and Gunter's adviser Hagen, who actually dominate the second half of the poem. (Some scholars have even thought Hagen the work's true hero.) Krimhild neatly evolves from docile daughter and sister to money- and-prestige-obsessed queen, from passionate wife to Medea-like harpy. But Hagen is even more artfully portrayed. Whereas Gunter consistently displays weakness and vacillation, his loyal lieutenant reveals rare courage and almost Machiavellian political acumen. He will perform the "necessary murder" for the presumed good of the commonwealth. But as time passes, Hagen grows ever more profound and clear-eyed about the fatality that dogs everyone, yet firm in resolve, and heroic to the end. Throughout this poem we marvel that the contradictory human heart can be so full of both good and evil.

Edward Haymes, the distinguished Germanist, further elucidates the historical background of the *Nibelungenlied* in his informative and scholarly introduction. Yet what matters most in the following pages is surely the crisp, clear English translation of the epic itself. Certainly Burton Raffel's *Nibelungenlied* deserves many enthralled readers and should, I hope, entice at least some of them to explore further the riches of medieval literature.

INTRODUCTION

Edward R. Haymes

The *Nibelungenlied* stands at the midpoint between the historical events it reflects and our own time. The earliest events we can associate with the medieval Nibelung legend lie almost eight hundred years before its literary formation in our epic. In the year 436 a Burgundian army of twenty thousand was defeated and destroyed by an army of Huns and Romans somewhere west of the Rhine. Some sources give the names of three kings who died at that time as Gundaharius, Gislaharius, and Godomarus. The first two are clearly recognizable as the Gunther and Giselher of the *Nibelungenlied*. The third name is found in some Norse versions as Gottorm. The defeat of the Burgundians in this battle led to their being resettled as tributary allies of the Romans in western Switzerland and southern France in the region we know today as Burgundy.

Attila was not involved in the battle with the Burgundians, but his death may have contributed to the legend, since he died of a hemorrhage in the course of a night with a Germanic bride (or concubine) name Ildico. Scholars have connected this name with a Germanic Hilde and seen in her the origin of the epic's Kriemhilde. Within a hundred years of the event, it was being reported that she had killed Attila in revenge for his having killed her father. As far as the battle with the Burgundians is concerned, it was only natural that oral heroic legend would include Attila in any military action of the Huns, even one in which he was historically uninvolved.

Gregory of Tours and his successor, known as Fredegar, record the story of the Frank king Sigibert who married a Gothic princess named Brunichildis. His brother Chilperic set aside his wife, Fredegund, and married Brunichildis's sister Galswintha. Fredegund had her killed and later had Sigibert assassinated. Fredegund and Brunichildis embarked on a rivalry that extended even beyond Fredegund's death in 597. This rivalry was carried out by the soldiers of their successive husbands until Fredegund's son managed to have Brunichildis captured. Finally she was drawn and quartered in 613. Brunichildis is supposed to have been older than seventy at this time. These events have little similarity except for the names and the recurrent level of intrafamilial strife to the events of the Nibelung legend, but it is probable that they added some Merovingian Frank flavor to the mix that was blending in the cauldron of oral transmission.

All of the historical events took place before the end of the sixth century (except for the death of Brunichildis in 613), and they are recorded in roughly contemporary sources. With the exception of the *Beowulf* passage mentioned below, the Nibelung legend then went underground for some six hundred years. When we next encounter the story of the murder of Siegfried and the revenge for his death it is in high medieval garb, wearing the clothing and following the social and literary mores of the late twelfth century. We know from depictions in stone carvings in Scandinavia that the story was being told in the meantime, but we do not really have the texts to tell us in what form this took place.

Because of its treatment of contemporary literary and social issues the *Nibelungenlied* must be called the most "modern" of the medieval versions of the Nibelung legend. It is also the oldest, since it was written (probably in Passau) around the year 1200. We know nothing about the author or the circumstances of its composition. There may have been earlier literary versions of the tale, but they have all been lost. The closest thing to an earlier literary version surviving today is a mention of Sigmund (whom we know only as Siegfried's father) in the Old English *Beowulf*. There *he* is the dragon-slayer and there is no mention of a son Siegfried. The versions from Iceland, in particular, seem to preserve older, more primitive versions of the tale than our epic, but none is a direct ancestor of the *Nibelungenlied*. Although there is a reference to "old stories" as a source in the first stanza, the Middle High German epic is told as if it were taking place in the world contemporary with its composition.

The poet of the *Nibelungenlied* drew on the traditional story known to all of his contemporaries to make a thoroughly contemporary object lesson for his expected audience. The motivation for the actions taken in the epic is sought in the literary and political problems of that time and not in the traditional patterns of family feud. The relationship between Siegfried and Kriemhild has been remodeled to reflect the literary conventions of love in high medieval literature. The relationship between Gunther and Hagen also reflects serious concerns about vassalage and the obligations of kingship. The medieval audience would probably have been shocked by the contrast between the traditional story and the epic.

Much of our knowledge of the Nibelung tradition in the Middle Ages outside of the *Nibelungenlied* comes from those versions of the story transmitted in Icelandic and Norwegian versions of the later thirteenth century. The story is treated in several songs of the so-called *Poetic Edda*, a collection of mythological and heroic poems written down in Iceland during the second half of the thirteenth century. This collection derives its name from an earlier work (ca. 1230) on traditional poetry by Snorri Sturluson which he called *Edda* for reasons that are still debated. This work also contains a version of the Nibelung story. Later in the same century an anonymous Icelander retold the stories of Sigmund and Sigurd in prose in the *Völsungasaga*, which contains the fullest retelling of the story from the Icelandic perspective. Closer in some ways to the story we find in the *Nibelungenlied* is the Norwegian *Piðrekssaga af Bern* (The Saga of Thidrek of Bern), also composed around the middle of the thirteenth century and based, according to statements in the text, on the songs of German men. The section narrating the Fall of the Burgundians (here called *Niflunga saga*) shares so many details with the *Nibelungenlied* that many scholars assume a common written source for both.

The literary *Nibelungenlied* seems to have forced other versions of the story in Germany into a subliterate existence until almost the end of the Middle Ages. The dating of the surviving thirty-five manuscripts suggests a peak in popularity during the later thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. It was last copied in the early sixteenth century in a manuscript (the Ambras *Heldenbuch*) that deliberately chose materials from the high Middle Ages and attempted to re-create the look and feel of a sumptuous medieval manuscript to the point of using fine parchment instead of the cheaper paper used in most books of the period. The epic did not find its way into any of the printed collections or chapbooks that begin to be produced in the second half of the

fourteenth century. In fact it was not printed at all until a portion of it was “discovered” and printed in Switzerland in the eighteenth century.

The Nibelung story did not go out of the public eye during that interval, however. Beginning in the early sixteenth century there was a chapbook version of the story, *Das Lied vom hürnen Seyfrid* (The Song of Horned Siegfried—the horn mentioned here is the horny skin he gains from the dragon’s blood), which was full of the dwarves, giants, dragons, and maidens in distress we miss in the sober *Nibelungenlied*. This story was so popular that Hans Sachs developed a seven-act tragedy from it in 1557. The chapbook was reprinted until 1642.

The Enlightenment did not find the *Nibelungenlied* attractive when it finally appeared in print. The Prussian king Frederick the Great famously said that the epic was not worth “a shot of gunpowder.” The following generation, however, found it much more to its taste. The Romantics were naturally attracted to the Middle Ages, and when their concerns were married to the German nationalism that arose against Napoleon in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the role of the *Nibelungenlied* was magnified. Searching for a work of great art to set off against the literature of classical antiquity on which they had all been raised, they hit upon the anonymous epic as a “German *Iliad*.” Much of the energy of the new science of Germanistics was devoted to the so-called Nibelung Dispute. In the nineteenth century this consisted largely of a dispute over the unity of the poem. The classicist and Germanist Karl Lachmann dissected the poem into twenty “Lieder” that had been put together by an “editor” to form the epic we know. His edition separates these songs and marks the work of the “editor” with italics, explaining that these portions are “not genuine.” Other scholars argued for the essential unity of the work, although they sometimes held that some passages should be excluded as spurious.

An early hero in the Nibelung wars was the first professor of Germanistics anywhere, Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen. His “editions” of the epic were largely more or less modernized transcriptions of individual manuscripts. He became infamous for these editions as fashion veered toward more “critical” editions, but he must be credited with making the *Nibelungenlied* available to many readers. He also translated the Icelandic and Norwegian texts in a collection published between 1814 and 1816. Other scholars translated the Norse texts over the next few decades, but von der Hagen’s remained the only German translations of the *Völsungasaga* and the *Þiðreks-*

saga available at midcentury. His translations of the *Edda* and the *Nibelungenlied*, however, were largely superseded by the popular modern German versions by Karl Simrock published in the 1840s.

In this nationalistic atmosphere, the story of Siegfried in all of its medieval forms excited artists to produce modern retellings. Already in 1810 Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué published a dramatic poem entitled *Der Held des Nordens* (The Hero of the North), which is based largely on the Icelandic and Norwegian sources but which makes an occasional bow to the *Nibelungenlied*. The dramatist Friedrich Hebbel produced a three-part play (to be performed on two evenings) called *Die Nibelungen*. His version, published in 1862, is based tightly on the *Nibelungenlied* with many verbal echoes of the epic. The first part bears a title that echoes the chapbook: “The horned Siegfried,” but its content is derived largely from the *Nibelungenlied*. The second and third parts carry titles that echo the usual divisions of the epic: “Siegfried’s Death” and “Kriemhild’s Revenge.” There were many other versions of the Nibelung legend for the stage as well as treatments in collections of German legends for young readers, but none of these has the temporal priority of de la Motte Fouqué or the literary quality of Hebbel.

Hebbel may have been inspired by rumors of a dramatic version by the leading German opera composer of the day, Richard Wagner. Wagner began his project with a drama also called “Siegfried’s Death,” which was based to a considerable extent on the *Nibelungenlied*. He drafted the opera in 1848 but was unable to compose it. At the same time he wrote a scenario based on his understanding of the entire Nibelungen “myth,” which he felt was behind all the medieval versions. Although the original opera has many echoes of the *Nibelungenlied* in it, the scenario shows that he had already transformed the myth into something much closer to the Norse versions he knew from translations by von der Hagen, Ludwig Ettmüller, and Karl Simrock. He also worked under the influence of synthesizers of Germanic myth like Wilhelm Grimm, his brother Jakob, and the historian Franz Josef Mone. When he got through with the myth it made a new kind of sense, but not one any medieval person would have recognized.

His dissatisfaction with the original opera project led him to compose a comic treatment of “Young Siegfried,” which he hoped to pair with “Siegfried’s Death.” His realization that this opera still required the listener to understand far too much “back story” led him to draft and versify another full-length opera, “Die Walküre,” and to introduce the whole with a prelude

entitled “Das Rheingold.” Only when he had revised the later operas to agree with the new earlier ones was he able to begin work on what had become a gigantic musical score, which he composed in the “right” order. After several false starts he settled on the title *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Ring of the Nibelung) and set about composing the music (with *Das Rheingold*) in 1853. He did not retitl e his first two operas until 1856, when they became *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*. He interrupted composition on the cycle after the second act of *Siegfried* and did not return to it for twelve years. The last note of *Götterdämmerung* was finally composed in 1874, and the complete cycle was presented in the house Wagner had built for the purpose in Bayreuth in the summer of 1876.

After 1876 the history of the reception of the *Nibelungenlied* becomes inextricably mixed with the reception of Wagner. There have been numerous fictional and poetic treatments of the material over the years, but none has been able to enter the popular consciousness like the unholy alliance of Wagner and the *Nibelungenlied*. There are educated people who think Wagner’s cycle is somehow called the *Nibelungenlied*. Whenever the epic is mentioned outside of specialist circles, the conversation usually turns to Wagner. If one asked an educated German, who may well have read at least a modern German translation of the epic, to recount the story of the *Nibelungenlied*, one can be sure that some aspects of Wagner’s *Ring* will sneak in, even if the informant has never seen a single opera from the cycle.

Many medievalists have echoed the concern of R. G. Finch, who felt (quite correctly) that Wagner was a poor guide to medieval myth, but Wagner has much in common with the anonymous author of our Nibelung epic. He took old stories and combined them with his own political, social, and philosophical concerns, using a special form of the language of his own day to do it. The results were, in both cases, unlike anything that had gone before and remain important works of art, while other versions of similar stories have faded into being interesting only to specialists. It is Wagner who has kept the name Nibelung before the public, even for those who loathe him and his music.

There has been one work of art since Wagner that has more or less escaped this trap: the two-part film *Die Nibelungen* by Fritz Lang. This silent film of 1924 presents a version of the story that is much closer to the *Nibelungenlied* than it is to Wagner. In fact, it is to some extent an anti-Wagnerian conception of the material although many scenes are based on Wagner either

in imitation or in reaction. The opening scene, for example, in which Siegfried forges his sword under the suspicious eyes of Mime, a dwarf, are clearly modeled on Wagner. On the other hand, the image of Siegfried the dragon-slayer and his bath in the dragon's blood are derived from the *Nibelungenlied*, making it much more explicit than it had been in Hagen's narrative in the epic. Lang followed the Middle High German epic in many scenes, profiting from the almost cinematic scenic depictions in the old text. Reflecting the fact that our epic naturally falls into two almost equal halves, Lang made two full-length films, *Siegfried* and *Kriemhild's Revenge*. Those who know the epic will be disappointed at the end when Hildebrand, who is clearly available, does not strike Kriemhild down. She simply dies as a result of having fulfilled her need for revenge. Fritz Lang obviously wished his film to replace Wagner's *Ring* as the popular representation of the Nibelung legend for the German public.

It would be remiss of me to ignore the use made of the Nibelung legend in the German popular consciousness and then in propaganda in the periods leading up to and during the so-called Third Reich. In 1909 the expression "Nibelungentreue" (Nibelungen loyalty) was introduced into political discourse by Reichskanzler von Bülow to characterize the German support of Austria-Hungary in a question of Balkan politics. I have always found this expression problematic because most of the epic is about "untreue," or violated loyalty. Only the support of the knights for the kings and the eventual support of the kings for Hagen can qualify for this positive epithet. Hagen repays this by dragging all his comrades in arms and his kings into his own heroic death. Siegfried was a symbol for the youthful, manly spirit the National Socialists wished to engender in their fighting men, but they generally ignored his ignominious death when using this picture. Profiting from the mixture of the *Nibelungenlied* with Wagner's *Ring*, the racist propaganda machine found a fertile ground in the depiction of the "lower" races, particularly the Nibelungs in Wagner's cycle. Perhaps the most appropriate use of Nibelungen imagery during the Third Reich was when Hermann Göring compared the German forces besieged in Stalingrad with the Burgundians in their final tragic battle in the hall of the Huns. At least this imagery, though designed to arouse sympathy for the tragic heroism of the fighters, did not falsify the fatal conclusion of the epic. Even though it was largely based on ignorance and has been exaggerated in recent histories, the use of Germanic heroic legends and the notion of a "Germanic" past by the National Socialists

has cast a pall over the *Nibelungenlied* and the scholarship dealing with it from which it has only emerged in the past two or three decades.

There have been innumerable fictional treatments of the Nibelung story in novels, films, television shows, and comic books. These bear testimony to the enduring appeal of the story, even if it is usually in a form that bears little resemblance to the greatest narrative treatment of the story, the *Nibelungenlied*. It should perhaps be noted that the best-known adapter of medieval Germanic myth in our time, J. R. R. Tolkien, resisted the temptation to model any significant part of his narrative on the *Nibelungenlied* or even on the Nibelung legend as reflected in the Norse sources, although he knew them well and used other aspects of these texts, particularly the names, throughout his mythology.

Although the mass of *Nibelungenlied* scholarship has taken place in German, there is a fair amount of material in English, and the list that follows is intended to make it easier to find some of the most important studies. I have also included translations of the major Icelandic and Norwegian texts. There is, as far as I can determine, no published English translation of *Das Lied vom hürnen Seyfrid*.

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TO THE READER

Burton Raffel

No translation is or ever can be the original which it attempts to translate. This must be said again and again, for it is both basic and controlling, and not at all well understood.

Consider: in Indonesia the word *amok*, which we translate as “amuck,” embodies a centuries-old cultural statement almost totally alien to Western societies. *Amok* describes a frenzied, totally irrational fit of violence caused by intense and irresistible emotional pressure. But it also expresses the cultural resignation that exempts such fits from punishment. A person who goes *amok* and kills is not perceived as in any sense guilty of a criminal act. (A recent legislative act declares this perception to be changed.) The medieval German culture which gave us *Das Nibelungenlied* uses terms we translate as “worthy warriors, heroes, knights.” Can we thereby convey what *rechen* and *degen* actually meant in that culture? Can *lant*, which we translate as “land,” or *künincg*, which we translate as “king,” or *mâge*, which we translate as “kinsmen/family/relations,” express how those terms resonated in the Germany of A.D. 1200? Even the word *man*, which we translate as “man,” in fact refers only to fighting men, which in turn includes only those of elevated social status.

For words are only the beginning of a translator’s problems. The meaningful grouping of words, which we call “syntax,” is vastly different in every language. The linking of concepts, emotions, value judgments, and the like, is

vastly different in every language. All the elements of human existence that impinge on a language are, of necessity, expressed in each language and in each time: how else could a man of Germany in the year 1200 speak to another man of Germany in the year 1200? But will all those aspects of language enable a man of the West in the year 2000 to understand a man of Germany in the year 1200? Reverse the situation: give a thirteenth-century German a twenty-first-century computer. How can comprehension be expected, much less achieved?

And *Das Nibelungenlied* is a poem, a very great poem. It makes powerful and beautiful use of the sounds and rhythms of Mittelhochdeutsch (Middle High German). It weaves spells with stanzaic form, and with insistent rhyming. But even twenty-first-century Germans usually read the poem in a modern German translation. How then does a translator into twenty-first-century English present to his audience a viable simulacrum of the original, something essentially true to what *Das Nibelungenlied* meant and means?

The much-used term “fidelity,” plainly, is as widely misunderstood as the word “translation” itself. All translations are only attempts, always incomplete, every translation different. Every age of each language must retranslate for itself, and every translation necessarily differs from every other translation.

DAS
NIBELUNGENLIED

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

- Albericht* (Nibelung dwarf, guardian of the great Nibelung treasure)
Bloedelin (Etzel's brother, royal duke)
Brunbild (Icelandic queen)
Dancwart (Hagen's brother)
Dietelind (Rudiger and Gotelind's daughter)
Dietrich (ruler of Berne, famous knight)
Eckewart (nonroyal Burgundian nobleman)
Elza (Gelpfrat's brother)
Etzel (king of the Huns)
Gelpfrat (Bavarian count)
Gera (nonroyal Burgundian nobleman)
Gernot (second-ranking Burgundian king)
Giselher (third-ranking and youngest Burgundian king)
Gotelind (Rudiger's wife)
Gunter (senior—because oldest—Burgundian king)
Hagen (nonroyal Burgundian nobleman)
Hildebrand (Dietrich's teacher, master swordsman)
Irinc (nonroyal Danish count at Etzel's court)
Krimbild (Burgundian princess, daughter of Dancrat and Otta)
Ludegast (king of Denmark)
Ludiger (Saxon lord)
Ortliep (Etzel and Krimhild's son)
Ortwin (nonroyal Burgundian nobleman)
Otta (dowager Burgundian queen, mother of Gunter, Gernot, Giselher, and Krimhild)
Pilgrim (bishop of Passau, Otta's brother)
Rudiger (nonroyal Hunnish lord, count of Bechalaren)
Rumolt (nonroyal Hunnish nobleman, a famous cook)
Sifried (Netherlands prince, later king)
Sigelind (Netherlands queen, Sifried's mother)
Sigemund (Netherlands king, Sifried's father)
Swemmeline (court musician to Etzel)
Volker (nonroyal Burgundian nobleman and musician)
Warbel (court musician to Etzel)
Wolfhart (knight, in service to Dietrich; Hildebrand's nephew)

ADVENTURE 1

KRIMHILD'S CHILDHOOD AT THE BURGUNDIAN COURT

- 1 We know from ancient stories filled with wondrous names
how heroes fought for glory, won their fight for fame,
their flowing feasts and pleasures, their tears, their moans, their mourning,
their noble quarrels and courage, and here once more is more of the same.
- 2 In Burgundy there lived an incredibly noble girl,
more beautiful than any you'll see here on this earth.
Her name was Krimhild, born to be someone's lovely wife.
And yet, because of her many warriors lost their lives.
- 3 She seemed perfectly made for every man to win,
but though she was rude to no one everyone wooed in vain.
Her beauty was hard to believe, her virtues hard to achieve.
Hers were virtues other women should surely strive to attain.
- 4 The girl grew up protected by three powerful kings
who were brothers: Gunter and Gernot, known for their strength and courage,
and Giselher the young, whose fame had begun to ring.
They guarded Krimhild, their sister; she put her faith and her trust in them.
- 5 These knights were generous nobles, lords and leaders born,
masters of men, and brave, wonderfully tall and strong,
and the land they lived in and ruled was a kingdom everywhere known
as Burgundy. Later, in Etzel's land, they fought like the giants they were.
- 6 They lived at Wurms, along the Rhine, proud of their might,
loyally served and followed by many haughty men
who faithfully fought beside them until the very end.
Their deaths were wretched, caused by noble women's hate and spite.
- 7 These were the children of Lady Otta, a powerful princess.
Their father's name had been Dancrat. He'd gone to his grave proud

and famous, that noble knight, leaving his family rich,
holding all the lands, enjoying all the wealth he'd won.

- 8 Now these three brothers, as I have told you once already,
could not have been braver men. And those who served these kings
were also fighters as famous as any alive or dead,
strong and eager for battle, daring, fierce, wholly unyielding.
- 9 Hagen of Troneg was one, and also his brother Dancwart
of high and glorious fame, and Ortwin who came from Metz,
and that pair of noble counts, Gera and Eckewart,
and Volker from Alzei, graced with enormous strength and a valiant heart.
- 10 And Rumolt, master cook known for his feats in war,
Sindolt and Hunolt, who fought to protect their masters' fame—
noble and known, and all of them serving the same three kings.
And there were many more, but no one now can tell you their names.
- 11 Dancwart was the kings' head groom, and Dancwart's brother's son,
Ortwin, who came from Metz, was steward of halls and hoards.
Sindolt, a marvelous fighter, filled their cups with wine.
Hunolt guarded their gold. And all of them were shields for their lords.
- 12 But to tell the height of their glory, and what they did with their might,
how it was seen and known, and their grace and goodness as knights,
the joyful lives they led, serving at honor's call,
no one can put into words, no one ever describe it all.
- 13 Living surrounded by splendor Krimhild dreamed a dream:
she had trained a falcon, glorious, strong-winged, fierce, and wild,
and a pair of eagles tore it apart in front of her eyes.
No pain, no sorrow in all the world could be worse than what she'd seen.
- 14 She went to Lady Otta and told her mother the dream.
Otta could only find a single truthful meaning:
"The falcon you train must be some noble heroic man,
but if God will not protect him, you will be sure to lose him soon."

ABOUT SIFRIED

- 15 “Mother, my lovely mother, why do you speak about men?
Men mean nothing to me, I’ll never care about them.
I want to keep my beauty until the day of my death,
I see no use for their love, no need for the pain they always bring.”
- 16 “Don’t say such bitter things,” her mother answered. “If ever
you hope to be happy, here in this world, only a man’s
love can bring you that joy. You’ll become a beautiful woman
if God grants you the love of a hero, an honest, faithful husband.”
- 17 “You’re wasting words on me, my Lady,” the girl declared.
“Love becomes great sorrow, and soon, for too many wives,
for woman after woman. I want nothing marriage
can give me, I’ll keep myself for myself, and nothing will ever go wrong.”
- 18 Thus Krimhild set her mind against all thought of love.
She lived loveless through many happy days, no one
troubling her heart. And yet, in the end, her heart would be won
by a brave and courteous knight, and she’d become his faithful wife.
- 19 He was indeed the falcon she’d seen that night in her dream,
just as her mother said. And then the revenge that was done
against her nearest kin for killing that husband! One death
caused more, and many, many weeping mothers lost their sons.

ADVENTURE 2

ABOUT SIFRIED

- 20 In the Netherlands, meanwhile, a son was born to a noble prince
named Sigemund and a queen named Sigelind. They lived
in a wealthy town stretching wide across the hinter-
land of the River Rhine, and in the prince’s castle, Santen.

- 21 The boy was Sifried, a nimble, strong young fighter. His courage served him well, in many different lands. His wonderful vigor led him to journey through many kingdoms, until one day the fine young man rode with his men to Burgundy!
- 22 Before he'd reached the height of his strength, in his younger days, men were telling stories of all that Sifried could do, and much he'd already done. The boy was so handsome he dazed women, and many noble ladies desperately longed for his love.
- 23 It was clear the young man's rearing required the deftest hands, yet equally plain how much he was able to learn by himself! No one doubted he'd be a proper prince for his land, for everything he did was correct, courageous, and incredibly strong.
- 24 He'd grown enough to attend his father's court, where ladies and courtiers alike were glad to see him. Many maidens and many ladies wished he'd stay forever, as the brave young man was well aware, knowing the fine impression he made.
- 25 Most of the time, an attendant rode beside their son, Sigemund's and Sigelind's. The boy wore beautiful clothes. Wise men were gathered around him, who knew what honor was, and so he learned how kingdoms, lands and peoples, were meant to be won.
- 26 And when he was strong enough to handle swords and shields, he showed he was more than ready, had been born for the battlefield. Developing an interest in women, he bore himself so well that ladies were honored to make his powerful heart beat fast.
- 27 And so his father, Sigemund, announced for all to hear there'd be a celebration, and his closest friends would attend. Men from other kingdoms heard and hurried there. He gave each one a splendid horse and fine new clothes to wear.
- 28 And wherever anyone found a younger warrior in families as noble as Sigemund's son, they brought these fledgling fighters

- with them, from far and near, to join the celebration.
 Together with Sigemund's son all were finally anointed knights.
- 29 Magnificent tales could be told of Sigemund's celebration.
 The king and queen were both well and truly rewarded,
 honored for the gifts they gave, for their hands were always open.
 Both foreign knights and Sigemund's own declared that nothing was hoarded.
- 30 Four hundred apprentice knights, along with the king's young son,
 had to be dressed for that rite, and many pretty girls
 set to the task, not in the least unhappy to work.
 They decorated clothing with many bands of precious stones,
 31 sewing gold and jewels everywhere they might,
 for each of these young men. They did what had to be done.
 And the king had benches built for the many heroic fathers
 who watched, that shining day, as their sons were anointed full-fledged knights.
- 32 Hundreds of noble youngsters went to the great cathedral
 and many righteous knights, who did what was always done,
 served the young and untried as their elders had for them.
 They came expecting a day of sports and games and all sorts of fun.
- 33 Then they heard a holy mass, after which
 great crowds of people milled about, as one by one
 swords of knighthood were given, each by ancient, well-fixed
 rules, wonderfully rich, in splendor not many would see again.
- 34 Then leaving there they hurried to hordes of saddled horses.
 Sigemund's well-packed courtyard shook with unheard-of noise
 as groups of new knights jostled hard, and hall and palace
 rang, highborn youngsters equally accomplished and boisterous.
- 35 But old as well as young banged and crashed and slashed,
 spear smashing on spear, the air heavy with sound.
 Bits of splintered wood went flying in front of the palace,
 as weapons broke in their hands. These were truly serious poundings.

- 36 They were finally asked to stop, the horses were led away.
 Dozens of broken shield-straps lay on the trampled ground,
 for many precious stones had tumbled onto the grass,
 powerful horses hurling shields straight into shields all day.
- 37 Then worthy guests were shown to their places and seated. Dish
 after dish of excellent food, game and fowl and fish
 and flowing cups of wine helped them forget fatigue.
 Men from elsewhere, and men far from home, relished that meal.
- 38 Many of those who'd come to sing and dance in the hall,
 who'd worked so hard that day, refused to rest, paying
 with music and song for the rich gifts they'd been given, and had earned.
 Cheerful praise was poured on the king and people of Sigemund's land.
- 39 And Sigemund allowed his proud young son to make rich grants
 of castles, land, and fiefs, as Sigemund's father had done.
 Those who'd risen to knighthood (along with Sifried) won
 such generous treasure, they left endlessly pleased at having come.
- 40 The celebration lasted for seven nights and days.
 Sigelind followed ancient customs, giving good
 red gold, knowing she'd win her son both love and praise.
 His people would serve the boy, having been treated as servants should.
- 41 Not a single singer or dancer left with an empty purse.
 Horses and clothing flowed like water from royal lands,
 exactly as if the family's rule would end the next day.
 I know of no royal house that ever gave with such open hands.
- 42 The celebration ended in courtesy and honor.
 The powerful visitors were clearly heard to declare
 they wanted their own lord and master to be Sifried.
 But though they were many, and mighty, the prince himself would not agree.
- 43 As long as Sigemund and Sigelind were alive
 their dearly beloved son had no desire for a crown.

The only forces he longed to control were fear and rising
violence, brewing higher and harder in all the lands around.

ADVENTURE 3

HOW SIFRIED CAME TO WURMS

- 44 Sifried had hardly ever suffered pain in his heart.
But now he heard reports of a lovely woman, a maiden
in Burgundy, well worthy of any man's dreams and ardor,
certain to bring him delight and certainly also a measure of pain.
- 45 Her matchless beauty was praised by many men's mouths, though no one
tried to deny the girl's firm and somewhat frosty
disposition, as many knights had found to their cost.
She brought a host of guests to her oldest brother Gunter's court.
- 46 But no matter how many came seeking to win her hand
Krimhild would never let herself be drawn to a man,
and never needing a lover she chose to remain alone.
The lover she'd finally choose had not as yet made himself known.
- 47 Sifried's mind had turned to thoughts of heartfelt passion.
Her other suitors became mere breaths of wind. Beautiful
women belonged to him, loving him was their duty.
Krimhild would soon be wed to Sigelind's very handsome son!
- 48 His family wanted to see him deeply loved, and truly,
so they advised—as did many of his men—he must choose
himself the worthiest wife and court her as his heart demanded.
Sifried boldly assured them all: "Krimhild's the one I want,
49 "that wonderful beauty who lives in Burgundy land. I've often
heard how brightly she shines. Everyone knows her name.

- No king could rise so high that a wife like her would shame
 him, and even an emperor might choose so great and mighty a queen.”
- 50 Stories about this choice came to Sigemund’s ears.
 He heard his advisers talking. Nor was he happy to learn
 what his son was determined to do. It gave him great pain, hearing
 that Sifried might travel to Wurms in order to court the beautiful girl.
- 51 And Sigelind, his mother, was also deeply grieved,
 keenly regretting the beautiful wife her son would pursue,
 for Gunter’s pride and power were things she very well knew.
 This courtship might bring results that Sifried could never be brought to believe.
- 52 Then young Sifried declared: “My dearly beloved father,
 I’ve always longed for love that was noble, deep, and strong,
 but I’d rather have nothing and no one if the one I want is wrong.
 No wisdom will ever change me, words will never sweep me along.”
- 53 “I know you won’t turn back,” his father answered, “so I
 respectfully take your word, and believe you know what you want.
 I’ll do whatever I can to help you. But remember, might
 establishes right, and Gunter is served by a host of mighty men,
- 54 “just one of whom, Hagen, might serve, just him alone,
 to block your path, for he’s too proud ever to yield.
 I know we might be sorry if men like him take the field
 against us, if you come to claim this beautiful girl you want as your own.”
- 55 “What can stand in our way?” Sifried replied. “I’ll make
 my request as civilly as any man could, and take
 my sword in hand, if the answer he gives me is no. I’m afraid
 of no one. If it ever comes to that, I’ll win his kingdom away.”
- 56 To which King Sigemund answered, “That I am sorry to hear.
 If anyone there along the Rhine had heard you, you’d hardly
 dare go riding into their land. I’ve known these kings,
 Gunter and Gernot, a long, long time. They’re strong, and also fierce.

- 57 “No one will win this woman away from them by force,”
 King Sigemund pronounced. “This is what I’ve heard.
 Still, my son, if you need knights to go riding there
 I’ll send for them at once. We have more than friends enough to escort you.”
- 58 “I have no need for escorts,” Sifried replied. “I see
 no need for armies to follow me across the Rhine.
 That’s never been my plan. Indeed, it would suit me fine
 to claim the beautiful girl alone. And that might very well be
- 59 what I’ll do. But Father Sigemund, I’ll gladly accept at your hand
 a dozen good knights to go riding with me to Gunter’s land.
 That help would be very welcome.” And immediately twelve knights
 were given garments of fur, some gray, some variegated and bright.
- 60 When his mother, Sigelind the queen, heard what her son had planned,
 she was filled with sorrow and grief for the dearly beloved young man,
 fearing he would be killed in Gunter’s bloody land.
 The worthy noblewoman shed a flood of bitter tears.
- 61 Then Sifried, brave young knight, went to seek his mother,
 and spoke these kindly, courteous words: “Lady, you should
 not weep on my account, no one ever could
 defeat me in battle, I expect no sorrow there where I am going.
- 62 “Help me prepare for this happy journey to Burgundy land,
 so these twelve knights and I will all be properly dressed,
 presenting ourselves like honored heroes clothed at our best.
 And then I’ll thank you, Mother, with all the honest grace I can.”
- 63 “You will not change your mind,” Lady Sigelind replied,
 “so yes, my only child, I’ll help you dress your men
 and you yourself in the finest, best-made, handsome garments
 women’s hands can fashion. You’ll all have more than enough when you ride.”
- 64 Then Sifried bowed his head to his mother the queen, and told her:
 “I mean to make this journey with neither more nor less

- than twelve knights at my side. This I think will be best.
 I'm eager to learn much more of my future wife, and finally behold her.”
- 65 Then lovely ladies sat working day and also night,
 none of them resting for even as long as a single hour,
 till every bit of clothing was made for the prince and his knights.
 By then nothing in the world could ever have kept him waiting longer.
- 66 His noble father had ordered costly adornment fixed
 to Sifried's garments, before the prince rode off from their land,
 and breastplates of hammered armor were made for every man,
 and well-made helmets, and handsome shields, that glimmered bright and rich.
- 67 They soon would start their journey, riding to Burgundy land.
 People high and low, no matter woman or man,
 grieved for their going, not knowing if any would come home again.
 The travelers ordered mules loaded with all their clothing and weapons.
- 68 The horses were large and handsome, their harnesses trimmed with gold.
 No one who saw the heroes could think them less than bold,
 Sifried and every one of his dozen men. Then Sifried
 formally asked the king his father for royal permission to leave.
- 69 Sadly the king and queen gave him leave to go.
 He offered loving comfort to mother and father both,
 Saying: “You should not weep for me, my lord, my lady.
 Never let yourselves be worried, or even the least afraid
- 70 for me.” The knights were sad, and many women wept.
 People felt in their hearts, and as they would learn had sensed
 correctly, that many good friends would die (though not the prince).
 They were right to weep and wail, but death was a fact they had to accept.
- 71 Seven mornings later Sifried and his men rode
 on the sands outside Wurms. Their clothes were splendid, gold
 glistening in sunlight, on garments and warriors' gear. Their steeds
 stepped smoothly ahead, bearing on their backs warriors who numbered thirteen.

- 72 Their shields were shining new, easy to handle, and broad.
 And how their helmets glittered as the knights and their noble lord,
 Sifried, came like the heroes they were, to Gunter's land!
 Gunter's people had never seen such garments on any man.
- 73 Their sharp sword blades reached as far as their spurs, and the long
 lances were, as always, carefully sharpened like knives.
 Sifried's lance was flanged more than a full foot wide,
 with a razored cutting edge able to cut right through to the heart.
- 74 They held the gold-embroidered reins high in their hands,
 the horses' breast-straps were silk. And thus they entered that land.
 Right and left, the people gathered, standing with open
 mouths, and many of Gunter's men came running to view them closer.
- 75 Pages and knights, Burgundian men of arms, received
 their guests, approached and gave them greetings in Gunter's name
 (as courtesy required), politely taking reins
 in welcoming hands, correctly carrying warriors' shining shields.
- 76 And then they meant to simply lead the horses away.
 But Sifried, boldest of heroes, quickly ordered a halt:
 "Leave our horses here, mine and my men's. We'll all
 be making the shortest of visits. I haven't the least intention of staying.
- 77 "But tell me this, whoever knows the answer and will speak:
 where can I find your king? That's what I want to learn.
 Burgundy's mighty Gunter is the man I've come to seek."
 Then someone standing nearby told him which way he needed to turn:
- 78 "If all you want is to find our king, you won't have to seek him.
 I saw him, just now, right in that hall over there, he
 and most of his mightiest men, and you can go and greet him.
 Whoever wants to see him, it's there we always know he'll be."
- 79 Now the king was very well aware, for he of course
 had been told, that splendid noble knights had come to his land,

- wearing shining clothes, with the brightest armor, horses
and men, all completely unknown to any Burgundian man.
- 80 The king was deeply confused, trying to puzzle out
who these visitors were and where they were from, with their dazzling
clothes and gleaming weapons and shields. He was not happy
when no one could tell him more of this visit and what it was all about.
- 81 At last, Ortwin from Metz, one of Burgundy's finest
knights, and bravest, gave the king this wise advice:
"Since they're unknown to us, let someone go and fetch
my uncle Hagen, so he can have a look at these foreign men.
- 82 "He knows a great many kingdoms, and many different lands.
Let's see if he knows our guests, and what he understands."
The king commanded that Hagen and all his men be called,
and soon they were seen, proudly coming to greet the king in his hall.
- 83 Then Hagen asked the king just what was wanted from him.
"Unknown men have arrived here in this house of mine,
completely unknown. I'd like you, Hagen, to look at them
and tell me, please, who they are and what they may have in mind."
- 84 "That's what I'll do," said Hagen, who walked to a window and looked,
glancing from one to the other, inspecting the visiting group,
considering weapons and horses, pondering men and their clothes.
Nothing he saw was familiar, none of the faces were readily known,
85 but he liked what he saw. He did not know where they came from, he said,
but to him they seemed like princes or men that princes had sent:
"I like the look of their horses, their clothes are finely made.
Wherever they may be from, they're men of rank, bold, unafraid."
- 86 And then he went on. "I've never set eyes on Sifried, but all
the same I'm tempted to say that this might well be him,
I'm almost convinced it is, knowing how fierce he's been
and seeing how nobly that knight out there walks in front of your hall.

- 87 “He’ll bring new tales to this land, adventures truly rare.
This is the hero who killed the Nibelungen pair,
Shilbunk and Nibelung, sons of a mighty king.
He’s gifted with enormous strength, and so his hands can do great things.
- 88 “He was going along, one day, at the foot of a giant mountain,
riding completely alone (or so I’ve heard the tale),
when he found the Nibelung treasure, and around it many men.
At first they were total strangers, but strangers they did not long remain.
- 89 “They’d hidden this Nibelung hoard in a cave, buried it deep
in the mountain. And now they’d carried it out. This is hard to believe,
but they clearly meant to divide it, share and share alike.
Sifried could see their intention, but did not understand just why
- 90 “they’d do it. He rode up closer, wanting to learn who they were,
but then they saw him approach. One of them said to the rest:
'Here comes Sifried the strong, from the Netherlands, best
of heroes.' His strange adventure with the Nibelungen began right there.
- 91 Shilbunk and Nibelung gave him a hearty welcome.
Then they, and all the others, begged the hero to assist them,
asked the hero if he would help them divide their treasure,
which Sifried swore he would do, and truly with enormous pleasure.
- 92 “They say he saw so many precious stones that a hundred
four-wheeled hauling wagons couldn’t hold so heavy a load,
and the gold in the Nibelungen hoard was yet more wonderful
still. And mighty Sifried’s hands had been asked to share out this lode.
- 93 “They gave the prince their Nibelung sword, to pay for his work.
Yet the gift accomplished nothing, brought them no good return,
for Sifried the noble hero used this weapon in earnest,
after he could not complete his labor* and Nibelung anger was fired.

* We are not told what keeps Sifried from finishing his task

- 94 “Among the Nibelungs’ allies were twelve courageous men,
bold and powerful giants. But what good were these mighty friends?
They made bold Sifried angry and died at his furious hands,
along with seven hundred warriors from other Nibelung lands.
- 95 “Swinging his fine new sword (Balmung was the name it bore),
he terrified vast numbers of knights, young men and frightened,
who saw that deadly sword and the strength of the man who wore it,
and bought him off with land and castles, bribed him with gifts he liked.
- 96 “After those wealthy Nibelung kings had both been slain,
crafty Albericht attacked Sifried, forced him to work.
The dwarf intended to punish the prince with horrible pain,
but soon discovered at sword point just what Sifried’s strength was worth.
- 97 “He was surely strong, this dwarf, but couldn’t possibly win.
And when like lions they ran deep in the mountain rocks
Sifried wrestled away the threefold magic cloak
the dwarf was wearing, and then those magic powers belonged to him.
- 98 “Those who’d fought with Sifried were stretched on the ground and dead.
Those who hadn’t fought were ordered to bring the treasure
back to the mountain and store it where it had long been hid.
Albericht the strong had survived; he was given the pleasure
- 99 “of guarding it all, once he’d sworn to be Sifried’s man.
Whatever Sifried wanted the dwarf was ready to do.”
Hagen of Troneg went on: “So that’s what Sifried’s been up to.
No knight has either strength or courage to do what this man can.
- 100 “I know another tale of what Sifried has done.
He killed a dragon-swan and washed himself in its gore,
which made his human skin like hard impervious horn.
No blade can ever cut through it. He’s already proved that more than once.
- 101 “We’d do very well to greet this young man warmly, and win
a fearsome hero’s goodwill. Favor is better than wrath

in dealing with men like him. That's much the safer path.
His strength and skill have let him accomplish many wonderful things."

- 102 Gunter the powerful king replied. "You may be right.
Let's see how hard he works at being a proper knight,
he and also his men, this immensely daring man.
We ought to go out and greet him. That will be my initial plan."
- 103 "That would be perfectly proper," said Hagen, "the right thing to do.
He comes from a well-born race, son of a mighty king.
I'd guess, by God, observing the way he's standing, too,
he hasn't ridden this far for any trivial, trifling thing."
- 104 The king of Burgundy answered: "So we will go and greet him.
He's a well-bred man, and bold, you've made that totally clear.
Let's learn what this prince of heroes has come for, riding here."
Then the king and attendant lords left the hall and went to meet him.
- 105 The king and all his court greeted their guest so well
that no one could have questioned their courteous grace. And now
the stately Netherlands prince inclined his back in a bow,
pleased to be given that welcome and showing the satisfied pleasure he felt.
- 106 "I'm curious," declared the king, the first who spoke,
"just why, brave Sifried, you've ridden here to these lands of mine,
and what you wish to accomplish at Wurms along the Rhine."
His guest answered the king: "There's nothing I wish or need to hide.
- 107 "There in my father's kingdom I've heard unending stories
(which made me long to see for myself) of Burgundy's knights
and how superb they were. I've listened many a night
to how they serve at your court. And so I've come to see their glories.
- 108 "And I have also heard what courage rules this land,
how you yourself were king and the bravest man to be seen.
People everywhere say this. I have come to see,
nor will I leave until I've learned the living truth firsthand.

- 109 “For I am also a knight, and worthy to hold a throne.
I want it said as widely as I can arrange that I
too have earned the right to be a king on my own.
I’m ready to risk my name and my head, prepared to wager my life.
- 110 “Since they say your courage is greater than any known,
let me tell you this: no matter what anyone’s said
I propose to take away everything you own,
your castles, your lands. I’ll make myself the lord of all you have.”
- 111 The king was thunderstruck, and so were all his men,
hearing the bold words Sifried had spoken to them,
declaring his intention of taking all the king’s lands.
Gunter’s men, listening, were angry, hearing these wild demands.
- 112 “Have I deserved to hear,” said Gunter the brave, at length,
“that what my father fought so long and well to save
is now to be taken away by any man’s raw strength?
You’d certainly show what knights we were, how strong, how bold, how brave.”
- 113 “I’ve spoken, I won’t turn back,” said Sifried, that mighty man.
“Either you keep your lands by fighting as well as you can,
or all you own is mine. Whatever I may inherit
is also yours for the taking— but only, by fighting, if you merit it.
- 114 “Your lands are mine, or mine will come to you instead.
Whichever one of us defeats the other will end
with everything combined, the people and also the lands.”
Hagen and Gernot were as one, rejecting Sifried’s demands.
- 115 “We haven’t the slightest interest,” Gernot said at once,
“in taking anyone’s lands or striking anyone dead
by any hero’s hands. We hold lands in abundance,
ours by right. No one’s title could ever be any better.”
- 116 Those who’d come with Gernot stood grim and angry at his side,
among them Ortwin from Metz, who said: “To answer this knight

so tamely hurts my heart, offends against my pride.
Mighty Sifried's challenge is against all reason, against all right.

- 117 “Were you, my king, you and your brothers, unable to fight,
and Sifried was here with an army, riding with many strong knights,
I'd lift my weapons against him and force him on the defense
until such arrogant talk was done and he had come to his senses.”
- 118 Sifried grew red with fury, hearing Ortwin's words.
“Who do you think you are,” he said, “to stand against me?
I'm a powerful prince, and you're a prince's servant.*
Twelve of your kind, fighting together, could never make me flee.”
- 119 At this, Ortwin was ready to fight him then and there.
He was truly Hagen's sister's son. But the king was aware,
and worried, that Hagen himself had not said a thing.
The one who intervened was mild-mannered Gernot, assisting his king.
- 120 And he said to Ortwin: “Calm yourself. Anger's not useful.
No one's honor has yet been hurt by our noble guest.
Discussion is not over, wisdom can still be fruitful
in settling all disputes, and compromise is always best.”
- 121 Then Hagen finally spoke: “I think we ought to regret,
I and all of you, that Sifried rode to our hall
carrying warlike thoughts across the Rhine. When all
is said and done, my lords, this isn't a path that we would have set.”
- 122 Then mighty Sifried, speaking from strength, replied: “Lord Hagen,
I'm sorry if well and carefully chosen words upset you.
I have not spoken idly, and at need will be forced to let
my hands explain that I am well determined to enforce this bargain.”
- 123 “I cannot permit such talk,” Gernot interrupted,
advising all his men that none would be allowed

* That is, anyone lower in social standing *serves* his superiors

to anger their guest. No one, he warned, could talk so proud.
 And Sifried, too, reminded himself of the beautiful woman he wanted.

124 “How could we think of combat with you?” Gernot then said.
 “Too many noble warriors would have to be sent to their deaths.
 We’d pay a heavy price, you’d find your winnings light.”
 Sifried, King Sigemund’s son, answered, the boldest of living knights:

125 “Why has Hagen turned shy, and Ortwin too? They ought
 to run right into combat, with all the warriors they’ve got.
 Burgundy’s bursting with battle-hardened famous knights.”
 No one was able to answer, for Gernot forbade them to speak or fight.

126 “We should be welcoming you,” said Gernot, Otta’s son,
 “and the battle-tested men who rode here at your side.
 We stand here at your service, my many kinfolk and I.”
 He ordered that Sifried and all his men be treated to Gunter’s wine.

127 The lord of the land agreed. “I offer you any thing
 we have, so far as honor and courtesy permit,
 for you to do as you wish with any or all of it.”
 And bold-hearted Sifried began to be calmer, slowly, bit by bit.

128 Servants took the visitors’ clothes, and stored them away.
 Beds and blankets were brought to the very same warm place
 for each of Sifried’s knights, lodged as men like best,
 as Burgundy’s stalwart warriors began to truly welcome their guest.

129 They celebrated Sifried’s coming for many long days,
 a thousand times more than I could ever find words to say.
 His courage made this happen. No one should have any doubt.
 He was not a man men hated, once they had truly found him out.

130 The king and his men worked hard at entertaining their guest.
 In every contest they held Sifried was always the best.
 No one could ever defeat a man of Sifried’s strength,
 whether they played at throwing great stones or hurling heavy spears.

- 131 Whenever knights put on displays for ladies, to show
 their skill and entertain, it didn't take long to know
 which man was watched most closely. It was brave heroic Sifried,
 striving to bend his mind to love's high practice and love's beliefs.
- 132 He was always ready for any sport that any one
 began. But secretly his heart was already won,
 although he'd not yet seen his lady. She for her part
 had already spoken of him to her women, in words warm from the heart.
- 133 Whenever noble men and boys were playing outside,
 Krimhild would often come to a window (as a queen of pride
 and majesty) and watch as never before. She paid
 attention, now, no longer ignoring the sight of men at play.
- 134 If he had known she was there, that he had a place in her heart,
 he would not have needed pleasure of any other sort.
 And if he'd actually seen her, I know beyond any question
 that nothing here on this earth could give him better or more satisfaction.
- 135 Whenever he stood at court, alongside other knights
 (as people at court still do, wiling away their time),
 Sigelind's brave son made such a handsome sight
 that love thoughts grew in many women's more than willing minds.
- 136 He often said to himself: "How can it be arranged
 that I finally see this lovely girl with my very own eyes,
 this girl I love so much, as I have for so long a time?
 I'll stay this sad forever, while she and I remain such strangers."
- 137 Whenever kings go riding across their far-flung lands
 their knights of course go with them, and so it was for Sifried,
 as a member of Gunter's court. This left his lady grieving,
 as also it grieved the prince, often thus required to leave her.
- 138 And that was how he lived in Gunter's land, as knights
 must always live, and stayed perhaps an entire year,

never seeing the woman he loved, who never appeared,
 she who would bring him such love, she who would finally bring him such tears.

ADVENTURE 4

HE FIGHTS AGAINST THE SAXONS

- 139 Now startling news suddenly reached Gunter's land,
 messages sent there from strange and far-off places,
 from unknown knights who clearly acted with malice and hatred.
 The men of Wurms received this news, and sorrow flooded their faces.
- 140 I'll tell you who sent that news: Ludiger, lord of the Saxons,
 a powerful prince and a rich and noble man, and also
 Ludegast, king of Denmark. Their armies were backed
 by many fighting men from other lands, all hot to attack
- 141 the Rhine men. Messengers came to Gunter's land in advance
 of invading enemy armies, bearing their leaders' words.
 These strangers were asked what news they carried, and were brought to be heard
 at once by the king himself, Gunter, that proud and mighty man.
- 142 The king received them well, saying: "You're welcome here.
 We've no idea who sent you, so far as I'm aware.
 We'd welcome your information," concluded the king with good cheer.
 Knowing Gunter's fame, the messengers' hearts were filled with fear.
- 143 "My lord, if you wish to know our news, we'll speak at once,
 tell you what brought us here, no longer hold our tongues.
 Here are our masters' names: Ludegast is one
 and Ludiger the other. In truth, they mean to invade your kingdom.
- 144 "They're terribly angry at you. We've heard enough to know
 both have sworn your destruction, both are determined foes.

They've raised a vast new army aimed at Wurms on the Rhine.
 Many knights have joined them, and that's God's truth, as you will find.

145 "Another three months, or less, and this army will be at your door.
 You'll soon discover, indeed, how many good friends there are
 who'll help you protect your lands, your castles, and all your treasure.
 Many helmets and shields will be cut to bits, in this coming war.

146 "But should you want to buy them off, send them that word.
 And if you do, nothing will bring this dangerous horde
 of powerful enemies here to your peaceful land,
 and many excellent knights will not be obliged to die at their hands."

147 "Wait a little while," the good king told his guests,
 "I need to consider my choices, and then inform you what's best.
 The loyal knights who serve me must be told, and the rest
 of whatever good friends I have should hear the serious message you bring."

148 Mighty Gunter felt heaviness deep in his heart.
 He kept his news to himself, secret, silent, dark,
 and sent for Hagen and others among his knights, and made sure
 that Gernot could quickly be found and alerted to come and play his part.

149 And so they came, the best of all who were there to hear.
 And he said: "A powerful enemy army will soon be here
 in this land. These facts are new. They ought to make you grieve."
 Then Gernot answered, a famous fighter whose words were always believed:

150 "Swords are made for defense," Gernot declared. "Fate
 takes whoever it wants. Let them lie where they fall.
 Those who are doomed will never take my honor away.
 Welcome our enemies here! These are the words I have to say."

151 Then Hagen of Troneg spoke: "That's not advice I favor.
 Ludegast is mighty, Ludiger is strong.
 We haven't time enough to rouse our friendly neighbors."
 Then Hagen added these words: "Should mighty Sifried be notified?"

- 152 The messengers were quartered with people in the town.
Even enemies, said Gunter, strong and proud,
deserved an honored welcome. This was worthily done.
The king intended to measure support abroad and also at home.
- 153 But still the king remained shaken, sober and sad.
A certain carefree knight, seeing Gunter so worried,
wondered what might have happened in Wurms, not knowing what had.
So Sifried asked for a share of their troubles, as Sifried had shared his gladness.
- 154 “It seems so strange to me,” Sifried said to the king,
“how changed your face has become from the happy one we’ve seen
all this long time, enjoying pleasures your court can bring.”
Then Gunter gave his answer, a mighty warrior, wise and keen:
- 155 “Not all the many sorrows I bear, dark and deep
in my breast, are ever widely known, or known to all men.
Only this kingdom’s friends can share the secrets I keep.”
First Sifried’s face turned pale, then red, hot with disbelief.
- 156 And so he spoke to the king: “I’ve never said no to you.
I’m willing to help with any sorrows, and that’s what I’ll do.
If friends are what you’re seeking, then let me be your friend.
I’ll be your friend forever, I won’t desert you. This is plain truth.”
- 157 “God give you joy, Sifried. I’m happy to hear your words.
Whether or not I need to seek your help, my burden
is bettered, learning how well you think of me. If my days
continue long enough, believe me, this won’t be wasted praise.
- 158 “And now I’ll let you hear the sorrow weighing upon me.
Messengers have come from enemies of mine
saying they’ll bring great armies into Burgundy.
Nothing like this has ever happened, here in Wurms on the Rhine.”
- 159 “That’s no cause for concern,” Sifried answered at once.
“Let me ease your sorrow. I’ll tell you what to do,

and bring you praise and honor, joy and comfort too.
So tell your knights we'll fight this war—they against me and you.”

160 “If an enemy army of even thirty thousand swords
invaded Burgundy land, I'd fight them with nothing more
than a thousand men at my side. Let me take care of this war.”
King Gunter said: “Know this: I'll now forever stand in your debt.”

161 “Arrange for a thousand men drawn from this threatened land,
since those who rode here at my side form just a band
of twelve. But just a thousand more is all I'll need.
Burgundy and Gunter can trust in Sifried's capable hands.

162 “Hagen will surely help, and so will Ortwin from Metz,
and Dancwart and Sindolt, brave and deeply loyal men.
And Volker, too, courageous knight, will come, and bear
our army's banner high: no one deserves that honor more.

163 “Release your messengers, send them back to their masters.
Let it be said we're coming, riding to meet them as fast
as we can, so peace may return to our lands, to our towns and castles.”
The king sent for his men and his family and all his many friends.

164 The Saxon messengers came when Gunter called,
delighted to learn the king was about to send them back.
As a good king should, he offered them gifts to stow in their packs,
and provided an escort to guard them. They were relieved, on hearing that.

165 “And now,” the king declared, “inform these enemy lords
they'll find easier fighting than what Burgundy offers.
But if they choose to invade us, we'll teach their savage hordes
a bit about hardship and death, as long as my worthy friends stand fast.”

166 Rich and welcome presents were offered, and were theirs to take,
for Gunter's wealth allowed costly gifts to be made.
They accepted gifts, Ludiger's men, too much afraid
to refuse. But when they left, they rode away with their hearts happy.

- 167 They traveled north to Denmark, to Ludegast the king,
and when he heard their report, the news they'd been given to bring
from Wurms along the Rhine, it was nothing he wanted to hear.
Burgundy's confident stance alarmed him, filled him with doubt and fear.
- 168 They told him how many splendid knights they had seen in that land,
and one among many, they said, was a strong and towering man,
"whose name, they'd heard, was Sifried, a knight from the Netherlands."
This was not welcome news, for he knew at once just what it meant.
- 169 And then the Danes, warned by these pressing words, hurriedly
urged their friends to send as many more men as they might,
until King Ludegast, who still was deeply worried,
found he could bring the invading army twenty thousand knights.
- 170 And Ludiger, too, the Saxon king, called for aid
both far and wide, until between the Saxons and Danes
an invasion army of forty thousand men had been raised.
Gunter was also scouring for help everywhere he could,
- 171 calling on friends and family, and on his brothers' men,
to lead them all in desperate battle, along with Hagen's
knights. How many men would be needed, before this was done!
How many men would die before the war was finished and gone?
- 172 The troops were ready to fight. Their battle banner was borne
by Volker, heroic man, going in front as they rode
away from Wurms on Rhine, prepared for furious war.
And Hagen of Troneg would manage the men, once the waiting was over.
- 173 Sindolt rode with his friends, and Hunolt, both of them bold,
more than ready to win rewards of Gunter's gold.
Dancwart, Hagen's brother, and Ortwin, too, from Metz,
brave and faithful knights able to fight among the best.
- 174 Then Sifried said to the king: "Please stay home, my lord,
as long as your proven knights are willing to let me lead.

Stay and guard your women, and trust my worthy sword.
 Let me maintain your honor, protecting your land and treasure from thieves.

- 175 “I’ll stop them where they stand, these men who want to invade
 Wurms along the Rhine. They won’t get very far.
 We’ll drive them back right down the paths they rode here on,
 and all their threats and boasts will die in pain and desperate fear.”
- 176 Sifried led his army off, led them across
 to Hesse and Saxon lands. And there the war would be fought.
 They pillaged and they burned from one place to the next,
 wanting the enemy leaders to hear what Sifried’s men had wrought.
- 177 They reached the Saxon border. Peasants fled for their lives.
 And mighty Sifried turned to the other heroes and asked:
 “Who shall we leave to protect our horses, our food and supplies?”
 (Saxon and Danish kings were about to receive a great surprise.)
- 178 They told him: “Allow our fierce Dancwart to lead the less
 than battle-hardened men, for he is one of the best.
 Ludiger’s knights won’t do much damage when he’s in charge.
 Let him and Ortwin from Metz pick and choose and lead our rearguard.”
- 179 “So be it,” Sifried said. “Now I’ll ride on alone
 and try, if I can, to see ahead and learn just where
 our enemies have sentries. They’re still close to home.”
 Servants hurried to buckle armor on lovely Sigelind’s son.
- 180 And when he was ready to leave, he entrusted the army to Hagen,
 and also to Gernot, two of the very best knights he had.
 And then he rode directly across into Saxon land.
 How many helmets, that day, were smashed and hacked to bits at his hands!
- 181 He saw hordes of knights camped in the open fields,
 rows and rows of warriors waiting to challenge his might,
 forty thousand at least. He could not contain his delight,
 Sifried the bold, seeing so wildly exciting a battlefield sight.

- 182 One of the Saxon knights appeared, prepared to fight,
 watching to see what the men of Burgundy meant to do.
 He saw brave Sifried, and hero Sifried saw him too.
 They stared hard at one another. Anger and hatred brewed.
- 183 I'll tell you who it was, riding out to explore,
 holding a golden shield in front of his breast: it was Denmark's
 Ludegast, a king protecting his army at war.
 The foreign knight who'd been watching spurred his horse at this noble target.
- 184 Ludegast could see him coming, and hurried to greet him,
 both men digging sharpened spurs in their horses' sides,
 pointing heavy spears, shields held low for the meeting.
 Only a moment more, and the king had reason to regret his ride.
- 185 Two powerful purebred horses drove the two together,
 then swept them apart, like wind scattering leaves over heather.
 These were experienced knights, who swung their steeds around
 and drew their swords, hurrying back across the battleground.
- 186 Sifried swung his blade down on the other's head,
 struck so hard that the sound echoed in the countryside,
 the king's helmet throwing sparks both far and wide.
 Each fighter found a worthy opponent, a man to warfare bred.
- 187 Ludegast, too, swung a mighty sword. Their shields
 were battered hard by mighty blows. Thirty of the king's
 knights came riding to their leader's side, but before they could wield
 weapons in his defense, their king was brutally forced to yield.
- 188 Sifried struck so hard against his shining armor
 that iron was broken through, a blow that only brass
 —if that—might ever have blocked, and blood spattered the grass
 and Ludegast was lost, suffering sharp, deadly harm.
- 189 He begged Sifried to let him live, explaining who
 he was, and offering all his lands in exchange for his life.

And then his knights rode up. They'd seen the end of the strife,
and what had happened was hardly a secret. In short, they saw and they knew.

190 Then Sifried, about to lead his worthy captive away,
was attacked by those thirty men. Defending his prize, that day,
he slaughtered twenty-nine, allowing one to run
and tell the tale, showing a broken helmet to prove who'd won.

191 Sifried hurt these knights more than he'd hurt their king.
He kept the captive his sword had earned him, hands swinging
mortal blows no shield could hold, no armored plate
withstand, no warrior known could survive. The king's relief was too late

192 and too little. Knowing their king was captured, defeated, the Danes
sorrowed, one and all, but even more than the rest
the king's own brother, hearing the fearful news, raged
with anger, terribly shamed that Ludegast had been thus bested.

193 The captive Danish king, conquered by Sifried's might,
was led to Gunter's men, a welcome, wealthy prize.
He was taken to Hagen, who felt no great regret, when told
how they had made a prisoner of such a noble, worthy knight.

194 Burgundy's army was ordered to raise its banners and ride.
"Let's go," bold Sifried declared. "Before this day is ended
there's work waiting to be done. As long as I'm alive,
many Saxon women will have the best of reasons to cry.

195 "Listen to me, you noble warriors who come from the Rhine.
I'm going to lead you straight to the center of Ludiger's might.
You'll see an army of helmets smashing under your swords.
By the time we turn and come back, they'll understand the meaning of sorrow."

196 Gernot and every one of his men mounted their horses.
And noble Volker, powerful maker of music and corpses,
hurried to lift the banner. They rode at the enemy forces,
all of Gunter's army eager and more than ready to fight.

- 197 And still, those who dashed across the field were barely
a thousand, plus twelve. Dust went swirling into the air,
pounded by thousands of hooves. They rode over the land.
Beautiful shields and shining blades shimmered and gleamed in their hands.
- 198 Then the Saxons appeared, swords and lances steady,
sharp as weapons are made, and fighters, I'm told, quite ready.
These were dangerous tools, held in heroes' hands.
They meant to defend their towns, their castles, their lord's good people and lands.
- 199 Noble leaders of men brought the armies together.
The dozen who'd come with Sifried from far-off Netherlands
were there, and so was their lord. No prince, no hero, was better.
After the battle, that day, blood would cover many a man.
- 200 Sindolt and Hunolt, and Gernot too, took the lives
of many bold knights, who lay dead on the ground before
they understood the strength of those who fought in that war.
This was a battle that brought sorrow to many weeping wives.
- 201 Volker and also Hagen, and Ortwin from Metz as well,
left many gleaming helmets broken, in furious fighting.
Blood dripped to the ground because of those hardened knights.
And Dancwart went on working wonders everywhere he could ride.
- 202 The men from Denmark proved they knew what weapons were for.
Shield came clanging on shield, ringing sounds of war,
and sharpened swords brought men to the earth, over and over.
And mighty Saxon warriors slaughtered many, more than their share.
- 203 Burgundy's warlike men drove into the fight,
hacking and slashing fearsome wounds wherever their knights
would go. Blood was pouring down from saddles and reins.
This is how honor is won when serious fighters hunger for fame.
- 204 The crashing clamor of swords and spears swung in heroic
hands was heard in the Saxon ranks, as brave Sifried

cut through, and his dozen chosen knights followed his lead.
 As warriors should, they were careful to stay close behind his heels.

- 205 None of the Rhineland men were ever seen behind him.
 Rivers of red ran from his blade in a bloody line,
 for where his sword came down helmets cracked with the blow.
 And then he saw Ludiger, marshaling men, row after row.
- 206 Sifried had slashed across the Saxon army, three times
 through, and back. Hagen fought his way to his side,
 helping him achieve the total carnage his pride
 demanded. Many good men fell at these fighters' feet, that day.
- 207 When mighty Ludiger saw Sifried, how high he raised
 his Nibelungen sword, Balmung, how lethally
 he swung that blade at outmanned warriors, killing enemy
 knights, the Saxon lord was overwhelmed by implacable rage.
- 208 Hordes of battling men drove hard against each other,
 furious clanging sounds rolled through the air. Each
 of the armies hungry for blood, every man within reach
 was a target. Ludiger and Sifried struggled toward one another.
- 209 The Saxon prince learned that now his own young brother
 was taken prisoner, word that made his heart feel sore.
 He could have guessed Sigelind's son had done this and more,
 but was told it was Gernot's doing. He soon found out the truth, to his sorrow.
- 210 Ludiger's mighty sword delivered crushing blows.
 Sifried's horse was staggered and very nearly fell.
 The horse recovered his footing, but Sifried's face glowed
 with a truly fearful glare. Hagen had quickly come to his help,
- 211 as Gernot also had done. Dancwart came as well,
 and Volker too. There were heaps of corpses around them all.
 Sindolt was there, and Hunolt, and Ortwin, from Gunter's hall.
 Many Saxon warriors lay on the ground, dead where they'd fallen.

- 212 The two princes battled on. Gashes sprung
on helmets everywhere, shields showed gouges long
and wide, still held in heroes' hands. And all along
the blood of many men's bodies came raining down on the thirsty ground.
- 213 In the heat of combat, many knights were forced to dismount,
their horses straying off. As Sifried fought with mighty
Ludiger, spears were hurled around and all about them
and sharp-pointed shafts dropped to the earth, sword strokes crashed like lightning.
- 214 Shields were split as Sifried's blade hammered home.
The hero from Netherlands could see the battle's end
was near, so weakened from wounds had the Saxon knights become.
Dancwart's blows were tearing apart armor and Saxon men!
- 215 Then Ludiger, the Saxon lord, recognized
the symbol painted across the shield in Sifried's hands,
knew it at once and quickly was able to understand
with whom they were trying to fight. He hurriedly shouted above the battle:
- 216 "All my men, give up this brave but hopeless war!
Sigemund's mighty son is leading the enemy forces.
I see the mighty Sifried himself, Devil-sent
to kill my Saxon warriors, a man too strong for normal men."
- 217 He ordered Saxon banners lowered, and the fighting stopped.
He surrendered, and begged for peace. The men from Wurms accepted,
provided that Ludiger come to the Rhine as their hostage.
And he agreed, beaten by Sifried's hands and Sifried's weapons.
- 218 No voice was raised to continue combat. The war was over.
Every man set down his battered shield, took off
his helmet full of holes. The battlefield was covered
with blood from both armies, but Saxony's men had clearly shed the most.
- 219 Hostage-taking could have no limits, Gunter's men
could take whatever captives they wanted. Gernot and Hagen

ordered enemy wounded set on stretchers, in wagons,
then started back to Wurms with half a thousand strapping Saxons.

- 220 Downhearted Danish warriors went riding slowly home.
And sadness hung in Saxon hearts, knowing they'd done
little to earn high honor. Nothing at all had been won.
They also remembered, and mourned, slaughtered friends who were left behind.
- 221 Now Gunter's army could ride without weapons (they were carted back
to the Rhine). Sifried's men, and Sifried, had done exactly
what Sifried expected, completed well a difficult task.
Every one of Gunter's men agreed on these obvious facts.
- 222 Noble Gernot sent messengers to Wurms,
informing all his friends that the Saxon army had been turned
away, defeated, routed, and peace had now returned.
Many happy knights had earned the highest honor for themselves.
- 223 Happy squires and pages hurried home with this news.
And those who had feared the worst fairly burst with joy
when welcome messages were brought to Wurms by these boys.
Noble women asked them questions, wanting to hear their stories
- 224 of just what each of mighty Gunter's men had dared.
One of the messengers whispered in Krimhild's ear.
His words were spoken in secret, she did not want them shared,
for much that she longed to know concerned a hero who had moved her to tears.
- 225 The messenger reached her rooms, and beautiful Krimhild saw him
coming, and spoke at once, her words gracious and clear:
"Tell me cheerful news, and gold will be your reward.
Tell me only the truth, and I will always hold you dear.
- 226 "How well did my brother Gernot fight in this bloody war,
and all my other friends? How many deaths have we borne?
Who was the best of all? Tell me the whole story."
The messenger spoke at once: "No man hung back, everyone fought,

- 227 “and well. But since you ask, my noble princess, no one
shone so bright on the battle field as our honored guest
from Netherlands. He was definitely the best.
Wonders and marvels were worked by his hands, greatness was his alone.
- 228 “Whatever other warriors did and were able to do,
Dancwart and Hagen and many courageous, accomplished knights,
however heroic they were, princess, it still remains true
their deeds were nothing at all compared to noble Sifried’s might.
- 229 “Others in Gunter’s army surely killed their share.
But no one now alive will ever tell the daring,
unbelievable marvels Sifried performed in this war.
Many women are weeping, now, for the pain he’s made them bear.
- 230 “How many women’s lovers fell at this hero’s hands!
You could hear his sword blade smashing warriors’ helmets, see
blood come spurting freely out on the field, as he
rode on, the living, breathing model of a masterful fighting man.
- 231 “And mighty Ortwin of Metz, slaughtering Saxon knights
(and every one he reached with his sword was staggered and bled,
and most of those he encountered fell among the dead),
your noble brother, Gernot, struck tremendous blows, fighting
- 232 “as fiercely as war can become, wherever you look in this world.
Each and all of our heroes demonstrated their worth.
Warriors from Wurms on the Rhine are as good as any on earth,
careful to keep their honor safe from the shame that battle can bring.
- 233 “Everywhere you looked they were sweeping men from the saddle,
the sounds of heavy swords ringing hard on the ear.
No one could doubt, seeing them ride, that Burgundy’s heroes
made our enemies feel their planned invasion was a poor idea.
- 234 “Warriors from Troneg made the Saxons regret
they’d come to join their army, fought with Gunter’s best.

Hagen the brave joined the slaughter, along with the rest.
 What mighty tales we can tell of our heroes, here in Burgundy land!

- 235 “Sindolt and Hunolt, your brother Gernot’s men, and Rumolt,
 courageous as knights can be, created such havoc and tumult
 that Ludiger is likely to feel long-lasting sorrow
 for throwing so rash a challenge in the face of fighters who come from the Rhine.
- 236 “But still, the highest honors earned on this battlefield
 belong, by common consent, to the glorious deeds of Sifried,
 whose towering strength was never weary, whose heart was forever
 eager. He returns with worthy trophies as rich as war can yield.
- 237 “That ever-courageous man, single-handed, alone,
 forced the mighty king of Denmark to shameful submission,
 and also his Saxon comrade, Ludiger, obliged to disown
 ambition. Please note the best, princess, note the best. Listen.
- 238 “Sifried captured both this king and the powerful prince.
 No one has ever brought us prizes so rich, not since
 the beginning of time has Wurms on Rhine possessed what Sifried
 brings here.” Deep and passionate joy was what she found herself feeling.
- 239 “My princess, they’re bringing back half a thousand captives,
 and possibly even more, and eighty wounded men
 on stretchers, leading them all, the fruits of this glorious business,
 to Wurms. Most of this is Sifried’s work, let me say again.
- 240 “Those over-reaching lords who dared invade our land
 will now be Gunter’s captives, but caught by Sifried’s hands.
 Their escorts lead them proudly, a pleased and happy band.”
 His words went to her heart, her cheeks were rosy-hued and flushed.
- 241 That beautiful face became red as a blooming rose,
 hearing how Sifried, that young and noble hero, was saved
 from the fearful danger of death. He was still alive, that brave
 warrior, like all her family and friends. Not everyone who goes

- 242 returns. Delighted, she said: “You’ve given me much pleasure.
 Let me reward your words with rich and handsome clothes
 and ten great golden marks. They’ll come to you at your leisure.”
 Bringing good news to ladies is always delightful, as everyone knows.
- 243 His bounty was brought, the gold and also the clothing. Many,
 many beautiful girls stood at their windows, watching
 the high road into Wurms. At last, the heroes came,
 mighty, proud, riding back to victorious Burgundy land.
- 244 Healthy and whole, or wounded, all returned the same,
 accepting greetings from friends, none of them feeling shamed.
 The happy king was there to welcome those who had turned
 events that began in sorrow to triumph, that glorious day in Wurms.
- 245 No matter where they were from, he welcomed them the same.
 How could the mighty king have chosen a different course,
 giving his gracious thanks to the gallant men on horses
 who’d come to his country’s aid and splendidly fought in honor’s name?
- 246 Gunter inquired after the many friends who’d been fighting,
 asking how many had fallen in battle, there on that far-off
 field. They told him not more than sixty had died in the war.
 The dead would have to be mourned, for heroes always deserve such rites.
- 247 Those who returned healthy to Gunter’s land carried
 many broken shields and helmets plentifully battered.
 They rode close to the king’s great hall, and there dismounted.
 Families and friends, greeting their own, rejoiced with happy sounds.
- 248 Knights who were not from Wurms were lodged all over the town.
 Gunter commanded their hosts to house them with open hands.
 Wounded men were cared for as well as anyone can.
 The king behaved with honor toward those who’d come from enemy lands.
- 249 To Ludegast he said, “I bid you welcome in Wurms.
 You and yours have brought me immense harm and pain.

Unless I'm much mistaken I'll now be well repaid.
 May God reward my loyal friends, who've made me happy again."

- 250 Ludiger replied: "Those thanks are well deserved.
 "Taking so many captives has never occurred in this world.
 And we will pay good gold for pleasant treatment here,
 encouraging you to show mercy to men who brought you needless fear."
- 251 "You both," King Gunter said, "are free to walk unchained,
 as long as you remain my guests and wards, and you stay
 right where you are. You need to promise that no one will stray
 from this town without permission." In silence, Ludiger shook his hand.
- 252 The Rhine men led them to their rooms, made sure that all was in order.
 Saxon and Danish wounded were carefully put to bed.
 The healthy were given good wine and well and comfortably fed.
 No soldier could ask for more, they were cheerful, hearty, contented boarders.
- 253 Gunter's weary men gave up their battered shields.
 There were many bloody saddles to be taken away, hidden
 where women's eyes could be spared the sight. These men had ridden
 hard to Wurms, they'd won but were tired of war and battlefields.
- 254 Gunter had always treated guests as a good king will.
 His land was full of strangers from everywhere on earth.
 He ordered the badly wounded helped with the greatest skill
 he could find, knowing the dark misery felt by those who were ill.
- 255 He offered good physicians the highest rewards, all
 the silver they could deserve, and also shining gold,
 if they could cure the damage war had done to the bold.
 And he gave his guests generous gifts, not being a man to withhold
- 256 his overflowing hands. Guests who were ready to leave
 were asked to stay, as good men always say to their friends.
 The king asked his advisers how best to reward his men,
 who did his work so well and brought him kingly honor again.

- 257 Lord Gernot spoke: "Your guests must be free to go.
 But ask them all to return after six weeks have past,
 for a happy celebration and feast. Let everyone know.
 By then, many wounded men will be on their feet at last."
- 258 And then Sifried also requested permission to leave.
 When Gunter heard that this guest wished to go home, he asked,
 warmly, that Sifried prolong his stay. That only happened
 because of Krimhild, the king's sister, for nothing else could keep him.
- 259 Sifried was far too rich and noble for any reward.
 He'd earned the king's affection, fully and freely offered.
 And the king's kin approved of him, seeing for themselves
 what he could accomplish, sword in hand, and what he was worth in war.
- 260 But the only reason he stayed was the beautiful woman, still
 hoping for the sight of her, if he waited as long as he could.
 And thus in fact it happened, just as he'd hoped it would.
 And then he knew he could ride back home, his deepest wish fulfilled.
- 261 Gunter, the Burgundy king, commanded games of knightly
 sport, and young men came, proud to show their skill.
 Benches were set near Wurms, in the sand along the Rhine,
 for all the guests expected at his happy celebration. And while
- 262 the king was patiently waiting for the games to begin, Krimhild
 learned how many great and noble men he'd invited,
 friends from all over the world, who'd share this joy with him.
 She and every lady in Wurms was filled with high excitement,
- 263 unwrapping precious scarves and the other things they'd be wearing.
 Hearing the news, even Otta began to prepare
 herself and her costly garments for the festival and all
 the knights and nobles coming, and the joy and happiness they'd share.
- 264 To please her royal sons, she ordered clothing sewn
 for many girls, and many women, and many half-grown

knights across the length and breadth of Burgundy land.
 And stores of beautiful clothes were readied for whatever guests would come.

ADVENTURE 5

SIFRIED'S FIRST SIGHT OF KRIMHILD

- 265 Every day you could see people riding to the Rhine,
 all of them drawn to the feast, a massive, exciting affair.
 And those who came for love of the king were given fine,
 expensive horses to ride and costly, noble clothes to wear.
- 266 Places to sit were provided for most of Gunter's guests,
 those of higher rank, the noblest and the best,
 thirty-two of them princes, the highest among the high.
 Clothing wars erupted, as lovely girls and ladies vied
- 267 for attention. Giselher (Dancrat and Otta's young son)
 was tireless, greeting guests warmly, again and again,
 he and his brother, Gernot and all their squires and men.
 They welcomed noble warriors with the honor noble guests had won—
- 268 men riding on gorgeous saddles, encrusted with hammered gold,
 carrying shining shields and wearing the finest clothes.
 These were the kinds of guests invited to visit the Rhine.
 And many among the badly wounded, confined to bed and cold
- 269 in heart, began to feel better, putting aside their pain
 and the homes they feared they might not live to see again.
 The time for mourning their sixty honored dead was proclaimed
 complete. Their days would now be given to joyous celebration,
- 270 the glory of Gunter's feast, when everyone would know
 endless happiness, a peacefulness that flowed

to high and low, nobles and knights, those who had rode
to Wurms and those from the Rhine, all in Gunter's smiling land.

271 Pouring into the streets, one morning during the feast,
people saw a horde of warriors in shining clothes,
dressed in their brightest and best, five thousand men or more.
And all over Wurms, right then, contests and games of war could be seen.

272 The king was fully aware, by now, of the love their guest,
great hero from Netherlands, felt for Gunter's sister,
though Sifried had still not seen the girl, known as the best,
most beautiful of women, lovelier far than any of the rest.

273 Then noble Ortwin of Metz spoke these words to the king:
"If you wish to have this feast exalted and honored, bring it
the wonderful sight of all the glorious women and girls
who dwell among us, in Wurms, unknown to other men in the world.

274 "Where do you find all men's delight, the joy of their lives,
if not in beautiful girls and noble loving wives?
And let our many guests see your wondrous sister."
Many of Gunter's knights approved of noble Ortwin's advice.

275 "Counsel I gladly accept," the king quickly replied.
And everyone who heard him was deeply satisfied.
He sent a message, commanding Lady Otta and her daughter
that they and all their women were now to come to the hall at his side.

276 Wardrobe chests were opened, finest clothing removed,
along with scarves and rings, bracelets and braids and the other
shining things women adore, adorning smooth
and glowing faces and shapes with whatever their hands are able to choose.

277 And many inexperienced knights would wonder, that day,
if beautiful women might look approvingly their way.
To the young, such glances mean more than winning mighty wars.
They waited eagerly to see what they had not seen before.

- 278 The king came to the hall, bringing his beautiful sister
and all her attendant women, and a hundred men of his own,
picked knights who served at his court, marching with swords in hand—
the honor of Wurms on Rhine, the greatest glories of Burgundy land.
- 279 And they saw Lady Otta approach, wealthy and proud,
with more than a hundred beautiful women there to surround
the mightiest lady in Wurms. All were gorgeously gowned.
And many pretty girls followed Otta's lovely daughter.
- 280 And all these girls and women came to the hall together.
Eager knights crowded around, hoping to catch
a glimpse of noble Krimhild, each man trying to watch
for that beautiful maiden, hoping to see a sight none had ever
- 281 seen before. Then there she was, as lovely as sunrise
breaking out of clouds. And she rewarded his eyes,
he who had held that unknown image close to his heart.
She stood like a queen, and sorrow vanished. This was Sifried's prize!
- 282 Many precious jewels shone on her beautiful dress.
A charming rosy hue glowed on the girl. No living
man could ever have said, no matter how hard he pressed
himself, that other women on earth could boast such loveliness.
- 283 Like the gleaming moon, seen when it's framed against the stars—
pure bright beauty shining as it passes through high clouds—
so she appeared, though many other fine women stood round her.
And the noble knights watching for her felt happiness fill their hearts.
- 284 Stately court officials led the way. But crowding,
excited warriors would not let them pass, surrounding
the beautiful girl, each man desperate to see her face.
Sifried was swept by pleasure and sadness both, standing in that place.
- 285 Silently he said to her: "How can I
expect to win your love? What a stupid idea!"

But still, I'd sooner be dead than separated from you."
 And at that thought he felt his heart grow hot, then cold and dry.

286 And yet Sigemund's handsome son looked so fine
 he might have been a portrait on parchment, drawn by some master's
 elegant, learned hand. Anyone passing by
 could see that here was a hero— or at least, anyone born with eyes.

287 The court officials guiding Krimhild commanded the men
 in their way to move aside, and most immediately did.
 Warriors' hearts beat hard at the sight of so much hidden
 beauty, elegant women, lovely, and each of them nobly bred.

288 Then Gernot, noble prince of Burgundy, declared:
 "Gunter, dearest brother, consider this knight who dared
 so much for you. Why not repay him, here in the sight
 of all your court? This, I think, is sound advice. It might

289 "be useful to invite noble Sifried to meet our sister,
 let her bid him welcome. This could work out well.
 Krimhild has never greeted a knight. Her words will help
 maintain this mighty warrior's friendship, and strengthen our position."

290 The king ordered his men to bring that message to Sifried.
 They approached Sigemund's son, the Netherlands hero, and said:
 "The king has done you the honor to request your presence. A greeting,
 he says, will be bestowed by his sister. This is an honor indeed!"

291 The hero's heart glowed with the purest happiness.
 He did not feel the least bit sorry at this request,
 this invitation to meet Lady Otta's daughter.
 And so Sifried was greeted with all the warmth the girl possessed.

292 Seeing the noble knight standing there before her,
 her face grew warm and flushed. The beautiful girl spoke:
 "Be welcome, my lord Sifried, fine and honorable warrior."
 Hearing so courteous a greeting, how high his heart went suddenly soaring!

- 293 His bow was deep and impressive. She offered her hand and he clasped it.
How happily he walked, the lady at his side!
How lovingly they glanced at one another, man
and girl, their eyes expressing things that could not yet be asked.
- 294 It may have been—who knows?— that her white hand was pressed,
warmly, gently. It seems a highly probable gesture.
I cannot believe the chance was overlooked, or missed.
However it was, she lost no time showing just what she wished.
- 295 Summer coming close, and even lovely May,
could never fill his heart so high, so brimming over
with joy, as what he knew, walking in Wurms that day,
her hand in his, she he had dreamed of, now become his lover.
- 296 Other warriors thought, “Lord, I wish that were me,
walking next to that girl just the way he is—
or lying near her, too! I wouldn’t mind that business.”
But Sifried had worked so hard to win himself this beautiful princess.
- 297 The guests who’d come to Wurms from all across the world
could not take their eyes from the knight and the beautiful girl.
She was permitted to grant him a ceremonial kiss.
Nothing he’d known had ever pleased him more profoundly than this.
- 298 The king of Denmark watched and then immediately said:
“This noble welcome was earned at the cost of many dead
(as I have reason to know), fallen at Sifried’s hands.
May God above now keep him far away from my Danish lands!”
- 299 Court officials cleared a path through crowded rows
of guests, so Krimhild could leave. She went to church, followed
by many worthy knights, walking behind her, slowly
and quiet. She and handsome Sifried were separated, now.
- 300 Accompanied by women, she entered the church, all eyes
watching. That lovely dress on her beautiful form shone

so bright that noble hearts burned with helpless desire.
 Many knights were feasting, hungering over this gleaming sight.

301 Impatiently, Sifried waited for the singing to stop,
 thankful, over and over, that through the workings of fate
 she who had captured his heart had been so warm, so gracious.
 He was acutely aware for just how much he ought to be grateful.

302 Waiting outside, when mass was done, he was invited
 to meet with the girl again. And she began by kindly
 expressing gratitude, the charming young woman, for the fighting
 he'd done for Wurts and her family, nobly defending her native land.

303 “Now God be praised,” she said, “my lord Sifried, that the men
 of Burgundy have given you, from what I hear,
 their trust and loyalty. You have earned their affection.”
 He looked at her, and the love that lit his eyes was perfectly clear.

304 “And so I will serve forever,” the hero replied, “never
 setting my mind to rest and laying devotion aside,
 seeking to do as they wish as long as I am alive,
 hoping to please you, Lady Krimhild, win you to my side.”

305 And then for twelve whole days, each and every day,
 the beautiful girl could be seen with many friends around her
 attending her brother's court, where Sifried too could be found.
 This was loving attention she gave the hero, and for this he stayed.

306 Every day you could see and hear the happiness
 in Gunter's hall, find it inside and out, as men
 of war enjoyed themselves in celebrating. Ortwin
 and Hagen worked cheerful wonders, over and over again.

307 Whatever anyone wanted these two were always there,
 happily eager to help, answering all requests.
 Visitors from every land knew them best.
 And thus they earned Gunter's kingdom the favor of Gunter's guests.

- 308 And then the wounded rose from their beds and began to walk,
 wanting a share of pleasures all healthy men have known,
 handling shields again, hefting spears and throwing.
 Many warriors helped them, heroes who'd hunted men like hawks.
- 309 All through the celebration Gunter made sure to serve
 only the very best food, deeply determined to preserve
 his rule from the many errors other kings had made.
 He walked among his guests, attentive to everything they deserved,
- 310 saying: "My welcome friends, before you leave the Rhine
 allow me to give you gifts. No one, I hope, will mind
 accepting these things, given along with warmth and genuine
 appreciation. I am now and always will be at your service."
- 311 The king of Denmark responded immediately: "Before
 we ride off homeward, we ask that you give us a firm and clear
 statement of how much we owe. In fact, we cannot leave here
 without this. We lost a host of our very dearest friends in this war."
- 312 Ludegast had long been healed of his wounds, and the Saxon
 lord had recovered, as well. But many Danish warriors,
 and Saxons too, were lying dead on the ground. Before
 he answered, Gunter thought it best to consult Sifried, ask him
- 313 for his advice: "Tell me what you think I should do.
 Our enemies are ready to start their journey home,
 but first they want a statement of how much gold they owe.
 Now tell me, noble Sifried, what course may seem the best to you.
- 314 "Here is what these lords have already said they will offer:
 all the gold carried by full five hundred horses,
 willingly paid in return for letting them leave this land."
 "No, that will never do," said the mighty prince of Netherlands.
- 315 "Let them all be free and ride away to their homes.
 But let these two great lords swear that never again

will they dare come to the Rhine with armies of hostile men.
This must be sworn, they must shake your hand, so everyone can know.”

- 316 “That is what I will do,” said Gunter, and went to let
his enemies know exactly what had been decided.
The gold they offered him would have to be declined.
Their friends at home had waited long enough. They were free to ride.
- 317 Shields turned upside down were used to bring in stores
of treasure, and Gunter’s friends got all that they might need—
some, five hundred marks in gold, and others still more.
Wise and noble Gernot had thought of this, and the king agreed.
- 318 Feasting was over, this was the time to take their leave.
Krimhild gave an audience to all the many guests,
as did the Lady Otta. And so they left on the best
of terms. Their farewells, like their visits, had been no cause for grief.
- 319 They left their lodgings empty, riding from Burgundy.
But Gunter stayed home, the king and his beautiful sister, Lady
Krimhild, with many noble warriors, the bravest of knights.
Every day the girl was seen at court, to all men’s delight.
- 320 Then mighty Sifried, too, asked leave to go, not
entirely sure he would have what was neither promised nor won.
King Gunter heard this news. Then Giseler the young
approached the uncertain hero, and his plan for departure was deftly stopped.
- 321 “Why would you want to leave us, heroic Sifried? Stay
in Wurms on the Rhine, let your good friends have their way.
Remain at Gunter’s court, and be at one with his men.
Burgundy is full of lovely women you’ve never seen.”
- 322 Mighty Sifried replied: “I’ll turn my horse around.
I meant to ride away, but that I’ll forget for now.
I’ll carry back my shield. I’d thought of going home,
but the great good faith of a lord like Giseler can’t be disowned.”

- 323 And so he stayed in Wurms, to please the Rhineland warriors.
 No other country, no other place, could give him more
 pleasure, or relieve his love, for here, at the of each day,
 he'd had the chance to see beautiful Krimhild. And so he stayed.
- 324 It was her amazing beauty that kept him at Gunter's court.
 Burgundy's noble warriors entertained him with sport
 and games, and he could have been happy. But his heart was deeply wrenched.
 And in the end the hero's love would bring him a painful death.

ADVENTURE 6

GUNTER GOES TO ICELAND, IN SEARCH OF BRUNHILD

- 325 Many brand-new songs were sung in the Rhine, stories
 of beautiful girls. And to good King Gunter the thought occurred
 that he might seek some lovely maiden and try to win her.
 This plan excited the noble king, seemed grand to him, and glorious.
- 326 The tale of one particular princess, living right
 across the sea, portrayed a woman completely unlike
 all others. Beautiful to see, she could handle a spear
 like a man, for love of the sport competing with heroes and feeling no fear.
- 327 She could heft great rocks, hurl them far, then leap where they fell.
 Whoever wanted to win her love would have to beat her
 three times over in just such games, each time defeat her
 or have his head cut off if he failed. No one so far had done well.
- 328 The girl was the winner, every time. All who tried
 had lost. Now one fine warrior along the Rhine decided
 he was the one to win himself this lovely bride.
 And yet, this sudden decision would cost so many others their lives.

- 329 The lord of the Rhine declared: “I plan to cross the sea
in pursuit of lovely Brunhild, whatever may happen to me.
I’ll gladly risk my life trying to win her, and then
as gladly lose it, for if she’s not my wife my life must end.”
- 330 “I think you should think again,” Sifried said to the king.
“This warrior queen has proved herself ferocious, and cruel.
Anyone who courts her does a dangerous thing.
Truly, it’s my opinion you’ll be much better off not going.”
- 331 “And my advice,” said Hagen, “is not to go alone.
“Ask our noble Sifried, strong as a man can be,
to make the journey with you. That seems best to me.
He certainly seems to know a lot about Brunhild that no one here knows.”
- 332 The king replied: “Noble Sifried, will you help me
win this woman’s hand? If you will pledge yourself
to my cause, and I return with Brunhild as my wife,
I promise you my service for all the days left in my life.”
- 333 Then Sifried answered, mighty warrior, Sigemund’s son:
“Let me have your sister, and then consider it done.
Give me beautiful Krimhild, queen of all lovely queens,
and this, no matter what, is all the reward I’ll ever need.”
- 334 “You have my word,” said Gunter. “Sifried, give me your hand.
When lovely princess Brunhild arrives here in my land,
my sister becomes your wife. This we both understand.
And may you live with her forever in peace and happiness.”
- 335 Then both proud knights swore to the bargain they had made,
an oath that added infinite trouble and pain to their labors,
before they brought the princess to Wurms along the Rhine.
Eventually, they thought their bargain very much less fine.
- 336 Sifried took along his threefold magic cloak,
which he had won, but only after hard, ferocious

fighting, from Albericht, the strong and clever dwarf.
The two brave knights prepared for their journey and whatever it might offer.

337 The threefold magic cloak Sifried had fought for, and won,
possessed incredible magic power. Whenever he wore it
the strength of twelve strong hands was added to the strength of his own.
Brunhild could therefore be courted safely and wisely, or else be fought for.

338 The cloak had other powers. Worn on any man's back,
it made that man, whoever he was, invisible
to any human eyes, no matter how hard they looked.
This would defeat Brunhild, and later make Sifried desperately sad.

339 "Tell me, noble Sifried, before my journey begins,
how many men should I bring, blown to Iceland by winds?
How many knights will be needed, to land on Brunhild's shores?
Thirty thousand are ready, but should I plan on taking more?"

340 "No matter how great the army," Sifried said, "Brunhild
will fight so fiercely, proud and cruel, that none you bring
will be enough, they'll fall in battle, they'll all be killed.
Let me give you better advice, O brave and noble king.

341 "We'll travel down the Rhine as adventure-seeking knights.
I'll tell you exactly who we ought to bring, and why.
Four of us should be on your ship, whenever we sail
to seek your lady, whatever happens, and come whatever may.

342 "The first of the four will be me, the second, my king, will be you.
The third will be Hagen (this is how we'll stay alive).
The fourth will be Dancwart, that noble, finely courageous knight.
We four can defeat a thousand attackers, and put them all to flight."

343 "I've been anxious to have your advice," Gunter said, "Truly,
I long to know what kind of clothing we ought to bring,
traveling to Brunhild's land. Looking our best, I think,
is very important. I await your word as to what is proper and due her."

- 344 “The best clothing any man has ever seen
is always worn, there in Brunhild’s land. Which means
we’ll need our richest garments, to appear before that queen,
to keep from being shamed whenever stories are told of us.”
- 345 Gunter replied: “I myself will make a visit
to my dearly beloved mother, and ask if in this business
the hands of her lovely maidens can help us be prepared,
bringing proper clothing for the beautiful queen to see when we’re there.”
- 346 Then Hagen, knight from Troneg, spoke in his haughty way:
“Why disturb your mother for such a simple request?
Just let your sister know whatever you think is best
and she can help you ready yourself for this royal marriage quest.”
- 347 So Gunter sent word to his sister, saying he meant to come
to her, along with Sifried. Before they arrived, the lovely
girl adorned herself in the prettiest clothes she owned.
A visit from two such noble knights was hardly a dismal omen.
- 348 And when her attendant maids, as well, were properly dressed,
and both the mighty princes knew the women were ready,
they came. She rose from her chair and went to welcome her guests,
the proud Netherlands hero and the king, with proper ceremony.
- 349 “I welcome you, my brother, and also your noble friend.
I’m eager to hear your words,” she said, “to learn your errand
and why I have the pleasure and honor of a royal visit.
Tell me, please, the purpose and urgency of my king’s high business.”
- 350 Her brother Gunter replied: “Lady, I’ll tell you why.
We cheerfully find ourselves facing fearsome hardship.
We’re riding to foreign lands on an errand of kingly courtship.
And we need, before we can make this journey, clothes of a splendid kind.”
- 351 “Be seated, beloved brother,” the princess gently replied,
“and tell me who these women are, for whom you ride

so far, led by love to a distant and different kingdom.”

Then Krimhild took both knights by the hand, conducting them inside

352 to where she'd been sitting before, while waiting for them, on golden
upholstered couches (let me assure you of that) of fabrics
embroidered in beautiful scenes, and all wonderfully rich.
Her hospitality was gracious, not hard for men to behold.

353 Affectionate glances, warmth and kindness, were passed between
heroic Sifried and the woman he'd chosen to be his queen.
He carried her in his heart, to her he seemed life
itself. And soon the lovely Krimhild would become the hero's wife.

354 Then rich and powerful Gunter spoke: “My dearest sister,
without your help we couldn't possibly make this visit.
We're leaving soon for Brunhild's land. And in that distant
place, women must see us handsomely dressed to be suitable suitors.”

355 The girl replied: “My dearest noble brother, whatever
you need from me is always yours for the asking, forever
ready whenever you want. I'll never feel forced to comply,
but I'd be heavy at heart should any other woman deny you

356 “your wish. Don't feel, heroic king, the least regret
at asking. You have the right to command me, as lord of this land.
Whatever you want is yours, I'm glad to give it. Expect
only the best that I can.” The beautiful princess was sweetly grand.

357 “My good dear sister, we need clothes that are handsome and fine,
and to have your help will be both heartening and kind.
So set your maids to work, make these garments shine.
Once we go so far we can't turn back, and we won't give up.”

358 And Krimhild answered: “Pay attention to what I tell you.
I have the silk. Arrange to have a supply of gems
brought to us on shields. These clothes will surely need them.”
This, both Gunter and Sifried agreed, at once, they would certainly do.

- 359 “Who else among your knights,” the princess asked, “will need
such handsome clothes, for wearing in Brunhild’s court?” Gunter
then said: “Counting me, the number is four. Two
of my men, Dancwart and Hagen, will be making the trip along with me.
- 360 “Lady, you must mark the words I now will say.
Each of the four of us will spend four days at Brunhild’s
court, so all of us will need to change clothes daily,
three times over, to keep from being shamed in that distant place.”
- 361 And so, with pleasant farewells, Gunter and Sifried departed.
Then Krimhild quickly ordered thirty of her maids, highly
skillful seamstresses, to come to her apartments,
leaving their rooms so all could work together, all close by.
- 362 They worked with Arabian silk, white as snow, and with silk
from Zazamanac, green as grass fresh in the spring,
and sewed on precious jewels. These were garments to sing of!
Beautiful Krimhild cut them out herself, with her royal fingers.
- 363 They fashioned linings out of the skins of strange sea-creatures,
fit, when Gunter wore them, for foreigners to see,
covered with shining silk, ready for the king to wear.
Listen, now, as I tell you what wonderful clothes these women prepared.
- 364 The silks they sewed on came from Libya, and from
Morocco, the very finest fabric for making stunning,
kingly clothes, bolts and bolts of gleaming cloth.
Lovely Krimhild surely proved how much her brother was worth
- 365 to her. Once these noble knights committed themselves
to their journey, snow-white ermine was no longer thought attractive.
Coal-black velvet wool was draped on every back—
clothes they each could wear, today, at any festival.
- 366 Gemstones glistened out of genuine Arab gold.
The work of Krimhild’s women took seven weeks all told—

no lightly managed labor. Then sewing was finished and done,
and warriors' weapons were ready to be carried and, if needed, swung.

367 And then a small but sturdy ship was launched, floated
out on the waves of the Rhine, and this was how they would go
from Burgundy to Brunhild's land, on far-off shores.
Krimhild's women, and Krimhild, were wonderfully weary, their fingers sore.

368 As soon as the travelers were told their clothes were sewn,
their costly garments ready to wear, completed, done
exactly to order by thirty women working as one,
they all were ready to start their journey away from Wurms on the Rhine.

369 A messenger came from Krimhild, asking the four brave men
if they wanted to see their brand-new clothing, and so they went
to be sure nothing was made too short or too long. The work
was perfect, and the grateful knights gave the women the thanks they had earned.

370 And all who were gathered there, come to watch, declared
no one had ever seen garments better prepared.
The four bold warriors said they hardly could wait to wear
these clothes at court. And all agreed that nothing like them was known.

371 They thanked the women over and over, and then like the courteous
knights they were, asked permission to leave. Worthy
warriors are always gracious in the presence of ladies. Shining
eyes grew dim, blurred and wet with tears, that day on the Rhine.

372 And Krimhild said: "Belovèd brother, you can still
stay and court some other woman (and I hope you will),
without setting your life so seriously in danger.
Ladies just as noble live near here. Why seek some stranger?"

373 I wonder how much the hearts of these Burgundy women knew?
All of them wept, no matter what anyone tried to say.
The gold they wore on their breast was salty wet, that day.
Tears ran from their eyes, flowing more like rain than dew.

- 374 Krimhild spoke again: “Lord Sifried, now I place
 my brother in your strong and always loyal hands.
 Keep him safe, there in far-off Brunhild’s land.”
 Sifried took her hand in his, and then carefully said:
- 375 “As long as I survive, my lady, keep sorrow out of
 your heart. This is my advice and my pledge. Don’t doubt
 my word. I’ll bring him, healthy and well, back to the Rhine.
 You have my promise.” The beautiful girl was silent, her head was bowed.
- 376 Their golden shields were carried down to the riverbank,
 and also all their fine new clothing. Their horses were led
 across the sand to their ship. They were ready to leave. Anxious
 women sobbed as they watched them go, worried women wept.
- 377 Pretty girls stood in windows, looking on.
 A briskly blowing wind filled their ship’s white sail.
 Four proud warriors watched as the water swept them along.
 Then Gunter said: “Now who will be our captain, keep us safe?”
- 378 “I will,” said Sifried, “I know this river all the way
 from here to there, I know this sea, courageous friends.
 Believe me, I’ve sailed these ocean currents, their twists and bends.”
 Happy at heart, they sailed away from Burgundy that day.
- 379 Sifried took a pole and began pushing the ship
 away from the shore, and his strength carried them out on the river.
 Warrior Gunter picked up an oar, and began to row.
 It was all easy, that day, as these four knights sailed off in their boat.
- 380 They’d brought good food, for eating, for drink they’d brought good wine
 (no one could have found better anywhere on the Rhine).
 Their horses stood in peaceful comfort, waiting their time.
 The ship went straight ahead, nothing strange or alarming took place.
- 381 The ropes holding their sail were stretched out firm and tight,
 a steady wind blew them straight down to the sea.

Twenty miles went by before the coming of night.
They worked hard, and happily, not knowing the suffering they soon would see.

382 The twelfth day, in the morning, as the tale has always been told,
the wind had carried them across the waves as far
as Eisenstein, in Brunhild's land. Sifried the bold
recognized it, but none of the others on board had been there before.

383 King Gunter saw how many castles there were, and then
the many carefully tended fields, and quickly said:
"Tell me, Sifried my friend, if you know, to what brave men
these castles belong, and all these lands I see, so far outspread."

384 And Sifried answered him: "I know this very well.
These are Brunhild's lands, and Brunhild's people, and the city
is Eisenstein, which no one can conquer, as I've tried to tell you.
Perhaps tomorrow you'll see many women, all of them pretty.

385 "Hear my counsel. Each of us must know our story.
All stories must be the same. Remember this tomorrow,
in case we're taken to see the queen, or we'll be sorry
we came. So let this be our tale, my friends, exactly as told.

386 "When we're actually at court, and meet Brunhild,
Gunter must be my lord and I be nothing more
than one of his men. Remember my words, heroic warriors,
and what will come to your king will be what he longs and wishes for."

387 The others cheerfully assented to every word,
no one too arrogant to rank his knightly worth
exactly as Sifried wanted. And Sifried was clearly right,
as they saw when Gunter first laid eyes on Brunhild, his hoped-for bride.

388 "Nor have I journeyed this far," said Sifried, "simply for you.
I'm making this journey because of beautiful Krimhild. To me
she's simply my soul, my life, just as I hope it will be.
Marriage to that beautiful girl is why I will seem to serve, not rule."

ADVENTURE 7

HOW GUNTER WON BRUNHILD

- 389 While they talked, their ship grew closer and closer to land,
and to Eisenstein. Now Gunter could see women standing
in windows and watching them, many beautiful girls,
but none were women he knew, which filled his heart with enormous sadness.
- 390 He turned to his good companion, Sifried, and asked: "Do you
know anything about these pretty girls, looking
down at us, watching our ship and its warrior crew?
Whoever their lord may be, these are proud and confident women."
- 391 Noble Sifried answered: "Look as carefully
as you can at all the pretty girls up there, and see
if any might interest you, if her heart and hand were free."
"All right, I will," said Gunter, as bold a knight as lives in this world.
- 392 "There's one I see, in clothes as white as snow, standing
high in a window up there. Her body holds my eyes,
so that's the one I'd like to have, if God will grant it.
If I were able to carry her off, I'd gladly make her my wife."
- 393 "Your eyes have lit your path, shown you what you should see.
That is noble Brunhild, your wished-for, beautiful lady,
the woman commanding your service, holding your heart, your mind."
The way she looked and stood struck Gunter as what his wife should be.
- 394 And then the queen ordered her noble maids to come
away from the windows, nor stand in open view, to be seen
so clearly by foreign eyes. Of course, they obeyed at once.
What then did her women do? They went to their rooms and hurriedly preened,
395 washed and combed, dressing themselves as well as they might
for unknown foreign guests, as women have always done.

And then they went to narrow slits in the wall, where light
shone through and they could look out and watch the foreigners, one by one.

- 396 Only four came off the ship and on to the land.
Sifried the brave led a horse up to the sand,
and the curious watching women followed him with their eyes.
But Gunter the king could feel his sense of himself steadily rise.
- 397 Sifried held the bridle of the king's great horse, fine
and strong, powerful, well-deserving his rider's
trust, until King Gunter sat in the saddle. So Sifried
served his newfound lord, who offered no thanks nor remembered the deed.
- 398 Then Sifried brought his own horse across to the shore.
Standing and waiting beside another man's horse, patient
and still, was not something he'd ever done before.
And the proud and beautiful women watched it all, from their secret stations.
- 399 Riding next to one another, a pair of gleaming
warriors white as snow, riders, horses, clothing,
everything alike, holding well-made shields
that glittered bright in the sun: these two were mightily imposing.
- 400 Saddles studded with gems, horses' breast-straps narrow
and hung with bells of hammered gold, that sparkled while
they rode, they reached the queen's great halls, came straight as arrows,
carried to Brunhild's land by courage, ambition, and heroic pride.
- 401 Their swords were finely made, their freshly polished spears,
broad and sharp, reached as far as the shining spurs
worn by these brave and noble men. And their appearance,
these practiced warriors, was plain to Brunhild, and all the folk who were hers.
- 402 Dancwart rode behind them, and Hagen as well. We're told
these two were dressed completely in black, adorned with gold
and gems. Their shields shone like the sun, their spears were long
and sharp, the heavy-hammered points flanged out, broad and hard.

- 403 The jewels they wore, which came from far off India, glittered
upon the warriors' clothing, rippling while they rode.
Not waiting for any watchman, they left their ship floating
near the shore, and headed straight to the castle, thus far unhindered.
- 404 They noted eighty-six tall towers, and underneath these
three great palaces and one large hall, sheathed
in purest marble, green as grass, and there inside,
they knew, was the queen, Brunhild, with all her court and maids beside her.
- 405 Now the heavy castle gates were thrown wide open,
and quickly Brunhild's men emerged, sent to lead
these unexpected guests inside, and then to their queen.
Some took hold of the horses' bridles, some reached for the warriors' shields.
- 406 One of the stewards said: "You'll need to give us your swords
and remove your shining armor." Swiftly answering these words,
said Hagen: "No, we won't, we'll carry them ourselves."
Then Sifried the brave assured him that these were queenly Brunhild's laws.
- 407 "This is the custom here, and must be obeyed. No guests
can carry weapons or armor inside the castle. It's best
to let them take everything away, without protesting."
This did not please good Hagen, Gunter's man, but of course he did it.
- 408 The visitors were given wine to drink, and welcomed.
They noted many knights in princely clothing, strolling
up and down the castle walks, watching their unknown
guests, clearly men well fitted for war, strong and bold.
- 409 Word had been brought to Brunhild about the unknown men
who'd come across the sea to their land, battle-hardened
warriors wearing noble and beautiful clothes. And then
lovely Brunhild began asking questions of her messenger guard.
- 410 "I should like to hear," the queen declared, "just who these unknown
heroes are, if anyone knows—these nameless warriors

standing inside my castle walls—and the reason for
their visit. Why have they journeyed so far, what do they want that we own?”

- 411 One of her men replied: “My lady, I don’t believe
I’ve ever seen any of them before, except
that one of the four looks a lot like Sifried. He
should have a cordial welcome. Truly, so it seems to me.
- 412 “A second one appears extremely noble, a man
worthy of ruling men, if he happened to have the chance
and held that power, governing princes and princely lands.
He stands majestic among the others, exactly like a king.
- 413 “The third of our guests is fierce, burning with anger and pride,
and yet quite handsome, my powerful queen. His piercing eyes
are always watching, glancing around from side to side.
I suspect his heart inside is just as grim as his bitter face.
- 414 “The fourth and youngest of all stands like a worthy prince.
Clearly a wonderful warrior, he looks like an innocent,
a charming boy, loving and worthy of love. But men
would do well to fear him, if any man should give him cause for offense.
- 415 “However cheerful and gentle he seems, and equally handsome,
he’s perfectly able to bring hot tears to any woman’s
eyes, if once he’s angry. He’s strongly built, and tall,
lacking in nothing he needs to make him dangerous, bold and fearsome.”
- 416 And then the queen spoke: “Bring me clothing. If mighty
Sifried thinks he can come in safety to Brunhild’s land,
peacefully hunting my love, he’d better watch for his life.
I’m not so afraid of his strength that I’d tamely let him make me his wife.”
- 417 Quickly, beautiful Brunhild’s maids dressed her. And then
she and many lovely girls, a hundred or more,
all in handsome clothing, went to greet their guests,
anxious to meet these unknown handsome men, these noble warriors.

- 418 Along with many maids, Brunhild brought with her
 five hundred or even more Icelandic knights, men
 of her guard, swords in hand. The guests rose from their benches,
 stood in greeting, unhappy to see their welcome troubled again.
- 419 And now I'll tell you what the beautiful princess said,
 the moment she saw Sifried: "You're welcome, mighty Sifried,
 here in this land. Let me ask you why you've made
 this journey, all the way from Netherlands? I stand awaiting
- 420 your answer." "My Lady Brunhild, I much appreciate
 your courtesy, speaking to me and not to this great
 and noble knight I stand behind, as he deserves,
 for he is my lord, I come here duty bound and pledged to his service.
- 421 "This truly mighty man was born along the Rhine.
 We've sailed this long sea-road entirely for love.
 You are the wife he wants. Whatever happens, his mind
 is fixed and settled. My lord is a famous fighter, he won't resign.
- 422 "His name is Gunter. He stands like a king, for a king he is.
 If he wins your love, that will be the end of his business
 here. He ordered me to make this journey with him.
 Had I been able to choose, I would have made a different decision."
- 423 Brunhild said: "If he's your lord, and you're his man,
 let him take part in my games, compete as best he can,
 and if he beats me, gladly I'll become his wife.
 But if I win, all four of you are going to lose your lives."
- 424 Then Hagen from Troneg spoke: "Lady, let us see
 these difficult games of yours. I find it hard to believe
 that Gunter, my lord, will find it truly hard to defeat
 a beautiful woman like you, no matter the kind of contests you choose."
- 425 "He'll need to hurl great rocks, then leap wherever they fall.
 We'll each of us throw a spear. Don't hurry yourselves, my friends.

First, you may lose your honor, and then your lives will end.
Think before you decide,” the lovely princess said to them all.

- 426 Bold and powerful Sifried approached the king: “Tell her nothing has changed, you’ve come to make her your wife. God willing, that is what you will do. Don’t let this talk of killing us disturb you. I can ward her off with secret spells.”
- 427 Then Gunter spoke: “Noble princess, queen of this land, I’ll do whatever you wish. No matter what you demand, I’ve been so charmed by your beauty that nothing could make me refuse. I either win you, or else my life is not too much to lose.”
- 428 Hearing what Gunter said, the queen directed that games be swiftly readied, which greatly pleased her. To help her change to proper battle costume, she ordered her maids to bring a red-gold armored breastplate and also a wonderfully sturdy shield.
- 429 Beneath the armor, she wore a silken undershirt woven in far-off Libya, a garment never pierced in battle by the point of any weapon, wonderfully sewn, edges embroidered all around, catching the light and glowing.
- 430 Meanwhile Brunhild’s guests were sneered at, proudly provoked. Neither Dancwart nor Hagen liked the sound of these jokes, which threatened their king’s safety and sat sour in their throats. They thought to themselves: “This journey starts to seem like a bad mistake.”
- 431 No one noticed that noble Sifried had quietly walked away from this noisy scene, gone down to their unguarded ship and gotten his threefold magic cloak. Once it was slipped lightly across his shoulders he became completely invisible.
- 432 And then he hurried back, joined the crowd of warriors come to enjoy Brunhild’s games, in the place she had ordered made ready. Wrapped in his cloak he could walk among them, unseen, surrounded by men who never suspected his presence, awaiting their queen.

- 433 The circle was carefully measured out, the field was cleared
for all the many watchers. And even more had appeared,
seven hundred at least, bearing weapons. Once
the games began, these men were the judges, deciding who'd lost, who'd won.
- 434 Then royal Brunhild came, armed and armored as if
prepared to fight the kings of the world for all they owned,
wearing girdled around her wreaths of solid gold,
multiple serpentine rings. And how her beautiful body shone!
- 435 Servants followed after, carrying in careful hands
her circular shield, hammered gold, red and gleaming,
a great broad shield with buckles of shining steel, planned
for the lovely woman's protection, though she'd never been defeated.
- 436 The strap with which she grasped the shield was supple leather,
spangled over with gems as green as grass, spread
bright against a field of golden studs, embedded
along the band. Only the very brave could hope to wed her!
- 437 The lovely girl would carry (as we've been told the tale)
a shield that through the center was three feet thick, at least,
and massive, with quantities of shining gold and steel.
Four strong men, with Brunhild's steward, staggered under its weight.
- 438 As soon as mighty Hagen saw the shield brought in,
the warrior from Troneg spoke to Gunter, and his voice was grim:
"What comes next? Your love is about to cost us our lives.
This is not some pretty girl, but the black-faced Devil's wife!"
- 439 But back to Brunhild's clothes. Much remains to be told.
Her battle tunic was silk from Azagoc, woven
nobly and well, and set from top to bottom with boldly
gleaming gems of every kind, fit to be worn by a queen.
- 440 And then they brought Brunhild a monstrous spear, heavy,
fiercely sharp, a weapon she loved to use, deadly,

strong, its length tremendous, its broad and polished metal
point cruelly honed, a murderous weapon meant for battle.

441 Let me tell you how they'd made this spear. They melted
half a ton of iron ingots, then had it smelted
and hammered hard. Three of Brunhild's men bore
it in. And at the sight Gunter's heart grew terribly sore.

442 He thought to himself: "Where is all this going to end?
Who could survive it? Not the Devil out of Hell!
If I were in Burgundy, still alive and well,
she'd wait a very long time before I'd bother her again."

443 Then warrior Dancwart, Hagen's brother, spoke: "How
I regret, with all my heart, beginning this horrible journey.
We always spoke of ourselves as heroes, but we won't return
from this! Are we to die at women's hands? It can't be allowed!

444 "Just being here in this place makes my soul feel sore.
If only Hagen, my brother, had his sword in his hand,
and I had mine, perhaps Brunhild's haughty warriors
would have to give up a bit of the boasting they like to do in this land.

445 "One thing I know for sure: they'd have to hold their tongues.
If I had sworn a thousand oaths never to fight,
and saw my dearest lord about to lose his life,
I'd kill that beautiful girl before my beloved king would die."

446 "We'd leave this land quite soon enough," added his brother,
Hagen, "if only we were wearing battle armor
and held our good sharp swords in our hands. She'd need some other
game to play, this haughty over-confident queen of sorrow."

447 Noble Brunhild had no trouble hearing their words.
Smiling over her shoulder, she spoke to her men: "Return
their armor, let these men, who think themselves such warriors,
have their shields, and also give them back their good sharp swords."

- 448 Once they had their swords in their hands, just as the queen
 ordered, mighty Dancwart's face went red with pleasure.
 "Now let them have the games they want," he said. "Whatever
 they do, Gunter's safe, we have our weapons, we'll fight together."
- 449 Then Brunhild made it terribly clear how strong she was.
 Twelve of her men carried into the battle circle
 a huge round stone, so heavy they barely could do their work,
 staggering under the weight until they let it fall to the earth.
- 450 After she'd hurled her spear, this was the stone she liked
 to throw. All the men from Burgundy gasped and sighed.
 "Dear Lord!" Hagen exclaimed. "The king has chosen a wife!
 She ought to be down in Hell instead, wed to the Devil himself."
- 451 Quickly, she rolled her sleeves up her clear white arms,
 clasped one hand in her shield, then raised her great spear high
 in the air. The games were about to begin. And the look in her eyes
 worried Gunter and Sifried. The king was facing deadly harm.
- 452 And true enough, without Sifried's aid, plainly
 Gunter would have been killed. But Sifried gave the king's
 hand the lightest touch, making Gunter shrink
 away, completely confused. Brunhild was taking careful aim.
- 453 "What could have touched my hand?" Gunter said to himself,
 seeing nothing, nor anyone standing beside him there.
 "It's me, Sifried," he heard, "your dearest friend. I'm here
 to save you. Have no fear of the queen, so long as you have my help.
- 454 "Quickly, let me have your shield and let it stay
 in my hands. Be careful, do exactly what I say.
 You go through all the motions, but leave the work to me."
 Then Gunter understood and his heart swelled with immense relief.
- 455 "Don't give me away," said Sifried, "stay silent about my magic
 and Brunhild won't defeat you, or win the high renown

she thinks she deserves. She isn't expecting my secret tricks.
Just see how cheerfully she's standing there and looking down

- 456 "at you!" Using all her strength, the noble girl
threw her spear straight at Gunter's shield, hurled
so hard that, held steady in Sifried's hand, sparks
of fire flew from the steel, blown like wood burning in darkness.
- 457 Razor-sharp, the spear point pierced the broadest, roundest
part of the shield, and Sifried's armor gave off a rain
of fire. The blow almost forced both men to the ground.
The magic cloak kept them alive, saved them from going down.
- 458 Blood came gushing from mighty Sifried's mouth. But then
he straightened, wrenched the spear free of his shield, and threw it,
meant as it was for the king, hurled it straight at the beautiful
girl with Sifried's strength behind it, and back to Brunhild it went.
- 459 He thought: "It wouldn't be good to kill this lovely girl."
He swung the spear around, the shaft now its head,
and carefully aimed the polished wood at her armor, instead
of her face, throwing this less than deadly weapon as hard as he could.
- 460 It hit her armor, and sparks flew as if from a wind.
No one could doubt the might and power of Siegmund and Sigelind's
son. For all her strength, Brunhild was knocked on her back.
Gunter the king was strong, but this was power he notably lacked.
- 461 But beautiful Brunhild quickly jumped to her feet. "I thank you,
noble Gunter, mighty knight, for that throw." Frankly,
she really thought he had hurled it. But a man of greater strength
had secretly, unseen, been the man who made her suddenly anxious.
- 462 Furious, now, she fairly ran to the massive stone.
She raised the rock high in her hand, the lovely girl,
and using every bit of her strength, made it whirl
through the air, then quickly jumped to where it had landed. Her armor groaned.

- 463 The stone had gone at least seventy feet, and the gentle
maiden had jumped even further. Sifried went
to the fallen rock, letting Gunter the king pretend
to bend and lift it, while Sigemund's son got himself ready to throw.
- 464 Sifried was tall and very strong, nothing frightened
him. The stone flew over Brunhild's starting mark,
and he jumped further still. The magic cloak had heightened
his powers, so he could leap so far, holding Gunter in his arms.
- 465 He'd thrown the massive rock, everyone saw it fall.
He and the king had jumped beyond the stone. And all
anyone could see was Gunter. Brunhild was red with anger.
Sifried had saved the king from certain death, from mortal danger.
- 466 Seeing Gunter safe and sound at the other end
of the circle, Brunhild raised her voice and called to her men:
"Quick, come closer, kinsmen, warriors, everyone!
Gunter is now your lord and mine. The games are over. He's won."
- 467 Then all her men let their weapons fall from their hands,
offering their loyalty to the king who'd conquered their land.
Many mighty warriors bent their knees to the man
who now would rule them, sure that only his strength had let him win.
- 468 He gave her a charming greeting, aware what courtesy
required. She took him by the hand, most properly
admitting that her power was gone, had been passed to him.
Hagen the bold and brave, now quiet, rejoiced, beholding this.
- 469 The queen invited noble Gunter and also his men
to her royal palace. And once the girl and her guests had entered,
her knights began to behave just as they should, which meant
Hagen and Dancwart had to forgive and forget their former resentment.
- 470 Sifried was more than clever enough to know what to do.
He brought his threefold magic cloak back to the ship.

Then he returned and sat where all the ladies were sitting.
 Next, he addressed the king, inventing a fine excuse that fit

471 his situation: "What are you waiting for, my lord?
 When will they start, these many games the queen has ordered?
 We need to see what sort of battles you'll be fighting."
 He played his own little game, pretending to badly need enlightening.

472 Then Brunhild asked: "Noble Sifried, how can it be
 that everyone else saw our sport, now over and done,
 but not you? Gunter, your king, was too strong for me, and he won."
 Hagen from far on the Rhine answered, before Sifried could speak:

473 "You left us still uncertain, lady, what was in order.
 Like the excellent warrior he is, Sifried had gone to our boat
 and was standing there when our ruler made himself your lord.
 And so," said Gunter's clever man, "till now he has not known."

474 "How happy I am," said mighty Sifried, "to hear that pride
 as overwhelming as yours has now been brought to earth,
 and there is someone living who's mastered you with his worth.
 So now, my noble mistress, you have no choice but to come to the Rhine."

475 She answered swiftly: "No, I will not go so soon.
 I need to fully inform my family and all my men.
 It won't be easy, leaving this land, my city and home.
 My dearest friends must come to Eisenstein. I'll send for them."

476 Her men went riding hard in all directions, to summon
 loyal warrior knights, family members and friends,
 telling them to hurry to Eisenstein at once,
 promising worthy gifts and noble clothing for everyone.

477 And how they came! Crowds of people hurried, day
 and night, at any and every hour, to Brunhild's castle.
 "O Lord," said Hagen, "what have we done! We were insane
 to stay here, waiting while the beautiful queen's great armies came.

- 478 “So now they’ve arriving, always more and more—and we
 have not the least idea what she has in mind.
 What if she’s raging mad and intends to kill us, this time?
 This noble girl was truly born simply to bring us grief.”
- 479 Then mighty Sifried spoke: “I know what would save our lives.
 I won’t allow disaster to fall on our heads. I’ll find us
 help, I’ll bring to this land, from across the sea, warriors
 the like of whom none of you has ever seen before.
- 480 “But ask me no questions. I’ll leave this place at once, and while
 I’m away, your honor will have to rest in the hands of God.
 I won’t be long, and when I return I’ll bring squadrons
 a thousand strong of the best fighters you could hope to find.”
- 481 “Try not to be too long,” the king declared. “Indeed,
 we worry when we know we can’t rely on your help.”
 “I’ll come in a very few days,” said Sifried. “Protect yourselves
 by telling the queen you’ve sent me off to fetch something you need.”

ADVENTURE 8

HOW SIFRIED BRINGS HIS MEN TO ICELAND

- 482 Wearing his magic cloak, Sifried went to the harbor
 side, and there he found a little boat with oars.
 Sigemund’s son climbed in and began to row, and the little
 craft flew across the waves as if it were caught by the wind.
- 483 The boat was empty, to everyone’s eyes, but Sifried’s arms
 were pushing it along, and Sifried was very strong.
 They thought the wind was blowing extremely hard. They were wrong.
 The only power moving the boat was Sigelind’s handsome son.

- 484 He rowed for the length of one day and then the length of a night,
and reached a distant shore. Rowing with all his might
he covered at least a hundred miles, or even more,
and it was Nibelung he came to, where he'd kept his hoard.
- 485 The happy hero, completely alone, rowed to a wide
peninsula, and left his boat securely tied.
And then, as tired travelers tend to do, he climbed
to a hilltop castle, hunting a well-earned bed to sleep in that night.
- 486 He came to the castle gate, which was closed and locked, since here
(as everywhere) good people prefer to keep thieves out.
Sifried banged and banged on the gate, not prepared
for the massive fellow guarding the castle, who gave an angry shout
- 487 and taking up his weapons (always ready for use),
called out: "Who are you, making all that noise
in the darkness, knocking on my door?" Changing his voice
so no one would know him, Sifried answered, sounding very annoyed:
- 488 "I'm a good knight. Now hurry up and open this gate,
or before this day is done some people will be awake
and angry, who'd rather be lying warm and happy in bed."
The doorman was not pleased by what this knightly stranger said.
- 489 By now the giant guard had buckled on his armor,
put on his helmet, and was ready. Fearfully strong, he quickly
lifted his shield, and swung the gate wide open. How hard
a time he began to give Sifried, intending to do him harm!
- 490 He had his nerve, this stranger, daring to wake so many
good men! He swung his heavy pole like a club, raining
blows on his guest. Sifried did not yet fight back.
But when the giant guard's heavy hammering smashed the clasps
- 491 of his shield, then the brave knight knew it was time for action.
He started to wonder if maybe this boorish fellow could kill him,

cracking blows at his guest in this wild and threatening fashion
(although the knight was the giant's lord, and appreciated his passion).

- 492 They fought so hard that soon the entire castle was awake.
The battle sound could be heard inside the Nibelungs' mountain!
Sifried finally knocked the giant down, and bound him.
Swiftly, the story spread all across the mountain around them.
- 493 Albericht, the mighty dwarf, hearing harsh sounds
ringing through the mountain, noises of battle resounding,
had quickly reached for his weapons, and come on the run to where
the unknown noble knight had just defeated the giant, and bound him.
- 494 Albericht was very angry, and more than strong
enough. His helmet set on his head, and wearing armor,
in his hand he held a golden whip, with long
and waving lashes. He rushed at Sifried, excited and eager to harm him.
- 495 At the end of each of the lashes hung a metal weight.
Fiercely he swung the whip and the knight's broad shield shattered
right in his hand, crumpled to broken bits. Battered
hard, Sifried wondered if this time he might have met his fate.
- 496 He threw away his splintered, useless shield. He thrust
his long, sharp sword back in its sheath. This was his trusted
treasurer. Why kill the dwarf for protecting this land?
As a noble knight (which he was), Sifried fought like a courteous man.
- 497 He caught the dwarf with his mighty hands, his fingers deep
in Albericht's gray hair and beard, pulling him up
and down, the terrified dwarf shrieking in pain, screaming,
until that small bold fighter felt he had surely suffered enough.
- 498 The beaten warrior cried: "Spare my life! If I
could swear to follow you, and keep myself alive,
I would. But I've sworn to serve my master until I die.
Let me have my life!" So spoke the foxlike, cunning dwarf.

- 499 Sifried bound him up, just as he had the other,
 tightening bonds so taut that Albericht's body ached
 and he began asking questions: "Please tell me your name."
 The knight replied: "I'm Sifried. You didn't know me? I think that's strange."
- 500 "How happy I am to hear it," Albericht exclaimed.
 "Now I truly know how strong you are. Your fame
 is well deserved. You have a right to rule this land.
 Let me live, I'll always obey you," promised the little man.
- 501 Sifried answered: "Go and quickly find me fighters,
 the best we have, a thousand Nibelungen knights.
 Hurry, and them here." Just who he meant to fight,
 and where, and why, he never said, so no one heard a word.
- 502 The minute Albericht was free, his knots untied,
 he jumped to his feet and scurried off to fetch his master's
 warriors. Watching these fighters asleep, he faltered, sighed,
 then called: "Wake up, you hear? Sifried wants you. Faster, faster!"
- 503 They leapt out of their beds and started to make themselves ready.
 Three thousand warriors were quickly dressed. Then this army
 of battle-hardened fighters ran through the mountain at a steady
 pace. They came to Sifried, greeting their lord and master warmly,
- 504 and with more than words. Torches were lit, and wine was poured.
 He thanked them all for coming so quickly. And then he told them:
 "We sail across the sea tomorrow, you and your lord."
 They said they were ready to go, good men and true, loyal and bold.
- 505 They'd come to him, three thousand strong. But he wanted no more
 than a thousand, so he carefully chose the best. And then he ordered
 equipment brought, helmets and clothing, everything needed
 there where they'd go, in Brunhild's country, far across the sea.
- 506 "You worthy knights," he said, "let me tell you this:
 You all will be required to dress in rich and handsome

clothes, for we'll be seen by many women, grand
and very beautiful. So bring the best you possibly can."

- 507 They left early in the morning, everyone happy. What
a splendid company of men Sifried had gotten!
They brought excellent horses, they wore magnificent clothes,
as they sailed to Brunhild's country, no better warriors ever known.
- 508 The queen and her pretty girls stood on the castle walls,
watching. "Does anyone know," said Brunhild, "who that can be,
so far away, coming here across the sea?
Their sails are white as snow, certainly cut from costly cloth."
- 509 Said Gunter, king of the Rhine: "These are my men. I told them
to wait along the way, not far from here. I sent
for them, and now, lady, as you have seen, my bold
warriors have come." The king's remarks caught everyone's attention.
- 510 And then they saw Sifried standing on the bow of a ship,
richly dressed, and plainly many knights were with him.
Brunhild asked: "Tell me, my king, whether I
should welcome these guests to Iceland or ignore their unexpected arrival?"
- 511 Said Gunter: "Greet them warmly, right in front of the palace.
Let no one doubt our pleasure at having guests like these."
The queen then did exactly what her lord had asked,
but did not single out Sifried. She simply let them know she was pleased.
- 512 Lodgings were found for them, their clothes were safely stored.
But so many strangers had come to Eisenstein that the hordes
of people began to bother Gunter's men, who longed
for peace and quiet, the pleasures of being at home in Wurms along
- 513 the Rhine. Then Brunhild said: "How grateful I'd be to any
man who'd help me share my gold and also my silver
with Gunter's guests and mine. I'm overwhelmed by so many
friends." Then Giselher's faithful man, Dancwart the mighty, spoke:

- 514 “Noble queen, give me the key to your treasure chests,”
the brave warrior suggested. “I think I know how best
to do it. I alone will take the blame for any
mistakes.” He meant to give freely, showering gifts on all their guests.
- 515 Hagen’s brother took the key, heaped the queen’s money,
gold and silver, and her cloth, in eager warriors’ hands.
Whoever needed coins got them, and every man
went off happy, sure he’d now be living on milk and honey.
- 516 He gave enormous sums to enormous numbers of men.
Costly clothing was carried out of the hall, often
by those who’d never before, in all their lives, worn
such garments. And when she heard of this, the queen was angry again.
- 517 She said to Gunter: “My royal lord, it makes me sad,
seeing your treasurer give away all I’ve had,
leaving nothing whatever. He’s throwing away my gold.
I’d much appreciate some masterful, noble hand holding him
- 518 back. He’s giving so freely, rewarding everyone here,
I feel as if I’m attending my funeral. I fear
for the future. I know I can spend my father’s gold by myself.”
What treasurer had ever been so free with royal wealth?
- 519 Then Hagen from Troneg spoke: “Lady, let me say,
the king of the Rhine has so much clothing and gold that no one
ever need worry about giving him gifts. And so
Brunhild need not bring trunks of clothes when she comes to stay.”
- 520 “O no, no,” replied the queen. “Let me, for
my pleasure, fill up twenty traveling chests of gold
and silken stuffs, so when we cross the Rhineland border
I can freely give them away in the land of Gunter the bold.”
- 521 The chests were filled, bags of precious gems were put in.
But only the treasurer of Brunhild’s land was allowed

to pack them. Giselher's good man was strictly forbidden
to help. Gunter and Hagen could not stop from laughing out loud.

522 Then Brunhild asked: "Who should I leave in charge of my lands?
You and I must agree on that, before we sail."
Noble Gunter answered: "Whoever you care to command.
Name him and we will set him in charge, put everything in his hands."

523 The lady saw, nearby, one of the lords of her family
(he was her mother's brother), and said to him: "Now
I leave you in charge of this city and all the lands around,
until King Gunter comes to rule. Then he will wear the crown."

524 Next she chose two thousand men from her guard, to go
with her to Wurms on the Rhine in Burgundy, along
with the thousand Nibelung warriors Sifried had brought, strong
and brave. Then everything was ready, and they rode down to the shore.

525 She'd taken women with her, eighty-six or so,
and at least a hundred maids, extremely beautiful girls.
By then they were more than ready, anxious for sails to unfurl.
Weeping and wailing was left for those who hadn't been chosen to go!

526 Brunhild left her homeland, eyes quite dry and head
held high. She kissed her nearest and dearest, and said her farewells,
then over the water she went, all her good-byes well said.
She'd never return, though no one could have known it, there and then.

527 They sailed along to music, played by many hands.
Everyone on board laughed and sang and danced.
A brisk and cheerful wind blew them away from land,
and those who were leaving, and those who returned, were happy, woman and man.

528 And while they sailed, Brunhild would not sleep with the king.
This was a pleasure to save, she said, for when they arrived
at Wurms, her husband's home, and she'd been made his wife.
And so with all their treasures they entered Gunter's castle, and his life.

ADVENTURE 9

SIFRIED IS SENT TO WURMS

- 529 They'd traveled a full nine days, and Hagen said to the king:
 "Now hear what I have to say. The news we mean to bring
 should long ago have reached Wurms along the Rhine.
 Truly, messengers from you should have been there by this time."
- 530 King Gunter said: "Of course, you're absolutely right.
 And who, my good friend Hagen, is better suited to carry
 our words than you? So quickly ride across my lands
 and let my people know the king returns, soon to be married."
- 531 Hagen replied: "I'm not good at message-bearing.*
 Let me protect your treasure. I'll stay here on the ship
 and be in charge of the ladies, guard the jewels they're wearing,
 until we bring them safe to Wurms, and reach the end of this trip."
- 532 "Send Sifried out to carry your good news home. He
 can do this nobly, perform it cleverly and well.
 If he's unwilling, say it's for your sister, tell him
 most politely that Krimhild must be anxious, and he can help her."
- 533 The king sent for Sifried, who came as soon as he heard.
 Said Gunter: "Now we're not too far from my lands. It's time
 to send my dearest sister, and also my mother, some word
 of our arrival, our coming home to Wurms along the Rhine."
- 534 "I'm asking this of you, Sifried. Do as I ask
 and I will be forever in your service." But the task
 wasn't welcome to the mighty warrior, and Gunter began
 imploring him to accept, begging favor from the hero's hands.

* That is, a knight is not a mere message-bearer

- 535 “Ride because I ask you to, but also on
 behalf of my beautiful sister, do it so Krimhild and I
 can both be bound to you in gratitude.” This won
 Sifried at once. Hearing these well-chosen words, he was ready to ride.
- 536 “Give me the messages you want delivered,” he cried.
 “For the sake of that lovely girl, I’m always willing. How hard
 it would be to refuse her, she who lives here in my heart!
 Ask on her behalf, and you will never be denied!”
- 537 “Then tell my mother, Lady Otta, the queen, that we’ve
 accomplished this journey with honor. Let my brothers hear
 of everything we’ve done. Let all our friends, near
 and far, be told the tale of what we found, across the sea.
- 538 “Tell my beautiful sister everything, bring her
 courteous words from Brunhild and myself, and also bear
 good greetings to my servants and all my faithful men.
 Tell them how my every wish came true, while I was there!
- 539 “And say to Ortwin, my beloved nephew, that he
 must find good lodgings for my many guests. And see
 to it my family knows that Queen Brunhild and I
 have planned a mighty feast, and they are each and all invited.
- 540 “And also ask my sister, as soon as she has heard
 we’re coming—all my guests and I—to make a fine
 reception for my dearest Brunhild, in Wurms on the Rhine.
 Tell her I’ll be in her debt forever, for serving my beautiful bride.”
- 541 Sifried quickly said a courteous farewell
 to Lady Brunhild and to those attending her,
 maids and men. And then he rode to the Rhine, to tell
 his news. No messenger in all the world could have served so well.
- 542 Riding at his side were twenty-four knights. Seeing
 him approaching Wurms without the king, the people

of Gunter's household felt a deep and painful grief,
convinced their lord had died in Eisenstein across the sea.

- 543 Sifried and his men dismounted, clearly in excellent spirits.
Along with Gernot, his brother, young Giselper the prince
hurried to greet them, trying to locate Gunter. He could not
find the king, and quickly questioned noble Sifried. "How good
- 544 "to have you back. Welcome. But tell me, please, where
you've left my brother, Gunter our noble king? I fear
that Brunhild's strength may well have overcome him. If so,
his mighty love has brought him death, and given us great sorrow."
- 545 "There's nothing to worry about. I bring you greetings, you
and all your family, from my royal traveling companion. Truly,
I left him in the best of health. He made me his messenger,
And sent me here to bring his news to the Rhine. I could not refuse.
- 546 "Please consider, now, how you might readily bring
about a meeting with your mother the queen and also your sister.
I carry messages for both, from Gunter the king
and Brunhild of Eisenstein, to which they will be pleased to listen."
- 547 Young Giselper replied: "Then go right in and see them.
Your news, I know, will make my sister very happy.
Our brother's absence has worried her. And she'll be pleased,
as well, at the sight of you. And that, my friend, I guarantee."
- 548 Noble Sifried answered: "I'm always glad to do her
any service I can, at any time I'm able.
Who will announce my coming to the ladies?" "I'm capable
of bearing that message," said her bold and handsome younger brother.
- 549 Quickly, Giselper sought out both ladies, finding
his mother and sister sitting together. "Sifried, the hero
from Netherlands, has come to us again, arriving
just now, sent by my brother, Gunter, here to Wurms on the Rhine.

- 550 “He carries messages from our brother, telling how
 he’s done. Give him permission to enter here and now.
 He can give you full and truthful news of his trip.”
 The noble ladies had long been kept in fear and worry’s grip.
- 551 They leaped to their feet, hurried to adorn their clothing. Once dressed
 as they should be, they asked Sifried to come right in. The request
 was gladly granted, eager as he was to see them both.
 Noble Krimhild spoke cordial words to the man she loved best:
- 552 “Lord Sifried, worthy, perfect knight, you are welcome. Tell us,
 please, about my beloved brother, our mighty king.
 I worry that Brunhild proved too strong, and my brother fell.
 How miserable a girl I’ll be, hearing the news you bring.”
- 553 Sifried said: “Now I’ll earn a messenger’s pay!
 You’ve nothing to weep for, beautiful ladies. When I rode away,
 on my word of honor the king was in excellent health.
 Indeed, he sent me here himself, to let you know how well
- 554 “he’s done. I bring you both greetings from Gunter and his wife.
 They come, my noble princess, with warm and cordial affection.
 Neither of you need shed a tear. He and his bride
 will be here soon.” No better news had been heard in a very long time.
- 555 Lifting the hem of her snow-white skirt, she wiped the tears
 from her eyes. Then she began to thank the messenger
 for bringing her, and her mother, such welcome news. Her fears
 and sorrows left her, all at once, as soon as she’d said those words.
- 556 First, Sifried was asked to seat himself. He was more
 than ready. “I’d never regret,” said lovely Krimhild, “rewarding
 such a message-bearer with gold. But you are a mighty
 prince. I’ll always be grateful for the joyous news your coming provides.”
- 557 “Were I the king of thirty lands,” he said, “I’d still
 be eager to have any gift that came from your hands.”

Krimhild replied: "Let it be just as you will,"
and sent her steward to bring the gifts a message-bearer commanded.

558 As his reward, she gave Sifried twenty-four
bracelets set with costly jewels. His noble nature
would not let him keep them, and he proceeded to give them
to the next of her attendants who happened to walk through Krimhild's door.

559 Then Otta, the queen, offered to help the hero in whatever
way she might. "Let me tell you," he said, "what your son
wished you to do when he reaches the Rhine. He swore he'd never
forget your kindness if you'll consent, lady, to have this done.

560 "His words were these: as soon as his highborn guests arrive,
he hopes you'll give them all the warmest welcome you can,
riding out from Wurms to greet them, woman and man.
The king hopes his heartfelt request for your favor will not be denied."

561 The worthy woman answered: "I gladly grant his request.
Whatever he asks, I'll always comply. His noble guests
will be welcomed as friends of the family, warmly and with my best
attention." And as she spoke, her face was flushed with happiness.

562 No message-bearer had ever known a better reception.
If she had dared, Krimhild might have kissed him. And what
high courtesy was displayed as he left them! Without exception,
all of Burgundy set out to do what the king had requested.

563 Sindolt and Hunolt, as well as Rumolt the brave, were obliged
to labor long and hard at festive preparation,
setting places to sit along the shore of the Rhine.
Making all the king's arrangements required cooperation!

564 Ortwin and Gera were careful to send out invitations
to all of Burgundy's friends, announcing the celebration
soon to take place in Wurms on the Rhine. Pretty maidens
everywhere began preparing themselves with beautiful clothes.

- 565 The castle walls, and the palace as well, were decorated
to please their guests, and Gunter's hall was renovated,
filled with everything a host of strangers would need.
And so they readied themselves for a thoroughly splendid, joyous feast.
- 566 Kinsmen of all three Rhineland kings came riding across
the land, summoned to attend, and also to assist as hosts
for the great number of guests expected to come. Storage
chests were opened and vast quantities of clothing removed.
- 567 And when the Rhinesmen heard that Brunhild's men had been seen
riding up toward Wurms, hordes of people streamed
through the streets, pushing and shouting, making all kinds of noise.
How many noble knights there were, more than anyone dreamed!
- 568 Then lovely Krimhild spoke: "Whoever among my maids
wishes to come with me and join the reception, find
the finest clothes you have in your wardrobe chests, so praise
will come to us, and honor, too, here in Wurms on the Rhine."
- 569 Knights came to attend them, bringing out the red-
gold saddles kept for all the women of Gunter's court,
when they came riding out to greet the king's important
guests. Nothing better has ever been made for ladies on horseback.
- 570 How the gentle mares stood shining in the sun!
How the precious gems set in their bridles gleamed!
Golden footstools were brought, and positioned down upon
the softest silk. How pleased the ladies were, to be climbing on
- 571 their steeds, noble young women gleeful, delighted to find
the little horses waiting (as I have already noted),
wearing harness collars stitched from the best silk woven
anywhere, patient gentle mares for ladies of the Rhine.
- 572 Lovely young women indeed, eighty-six in all,
came from their private quarters, beautifully dressed in shining

clothes, joining Krimhild in front of her brother's hall.
Then many pretty girls appeared, fifty-four as fine

573 and nobly raised as any young women ever seen.
They'd come to Wurms on the Rhine from Gunter's Burgundy lands.
Their golden hair was braided, circled round in bands.
Everything the king had asked or desired was perfectly planned.

574 Their clothes were costly silk, as good as men could buy.
When they appeared in front of noble visitors
their beauty was obviously well suited for strangers' eyes.
Men who could not see such beauty might very well be blind.

575 Sable and ermine clothing seemed common, everyday things.
And everywhere men looked they saw bracelets and rings
on arms and hands, closely fitted over silk.
But who could possibly know the artful devices women think of?

576 How many ornate belts there were, long rich bands,
wound by hardworking fingers around these lovely garments,
woven together of wool and silk from Arabian lands.
No noble women ever experienced more pleasant moments.

577 Pretty girls were laced in brightly shining clothes,
for pretty girls will never miss a chance to show
themselves. But none permitted silk or wool to glow
more than their faces. No court had ever seen such beautiful women.

578 As soon as all these charming girls were finished dressing,
vast numbers of eager knights suddenly appeared,
bold and bustling warriors with shields and ash-wood spears,
ready and willing to escort pretty women to the festival.

ADVENTURE 10

BRUNHILD'S WELCOME TO WURMS

- 579 Approaching down the other side of the Rhine, they could see
the king and his men, and his guests, a vast host nearing
the shore. Girls on horseback were led by the bridle. Greeting
them all would be simple. Wurms was well prepared and had nothing to fear.
- 580 Visitors from Iceland, and the Nibelungs, led
by Sifried, came across the river in boats, rowing
swiftly until they reached the opposite bank, where their hosts
eagerly waited for their guests to land, anxious to welcome them.
- 581 But first, listen to how Otta, the mighty queen,
rode out of Wurms in state, the queen herself leading
all her attendant girls to greet their guests. Young women
and knights enjoyed many fine and cheerful chances for meeting.
- 582 Gera, the noble count, held the horse's bridle
for Princess Krimhild, but only as far as the city gates.
After that it was Sifried's duty. The beautiful maiden
later rewarded his assistance and all his arduous labor.
- 583 Ortwin the brave rode alongside Otta, together
with many girls and knights in pleasant pairs. Never
before, I solemnly swear, were so many women assembled
in such a great and glorious act of welcoming attention.
- 584 As they rode away from Wurms, noble warriors
fought in fighting games (considered highly important)
for lovely Krimhild to behold, before they came to the boats.
Then many knights were busy helping ladies down from their horses.
- 585 The king came crossing over, along with his worthy guests.
O the sturdy spears that were broken for women to see!

And the clashing of shields as they came clanging together! The best
brave warriors crashing metal and wood as they rode along the fields!

586 Many lovely ladies came and stood at the pier.
Gunter and his guests climbed from the boats. He offered Brunhild
a courteous helping hand. Clothes and jewels glittered
so bright, no one could say which lovely lady had the finest appearance.

587 Then, with absolute correctness, Krimhild went
with all her women to welcome the queen from Eisenstein.
Before the two ladies kissed, you could see their hands, so white
and fine, sliding back their garlands, as courtesy required.

588 Then most respectfully, Krimhild said to Brunhild:
“Let me welcome you here to this land, in my name
and my mother’s, and also the many worthy and trusted, faithful
friends we have.” Brunhild made a gracious bow, and the ladies

589 wrapped their arms around each other, standing as close
as they could. No one had ever seen a bride receive
so warm a welcome as Krimhild and Lady Otta greeted
Brunhild with. Both ladies kissed her sweet lips over and over.

590 And then, as soon as they had reached the shore, the many
women who’d come with Brunhild were welcomed, and each of the many
pretty girls were taken by the hand by many
noble knights. Then the ladies crowded around their queen.

591 It took a very long time before they were done, for Krimhild
had to place a kiss on a host of rosy lips.
The daughters of two such mighty kings were standing hip
to hip, and many handsome knights took great pleasure in the sight.

592 Measuring all the beautiful girls with their eyes, they stared
and murmured that never in their lives had anyone seen a pair
of prettier girls, lovely and without deception. Their words
declared truths they now could see but before had only heard of.

- 593 Those who admired many women took much pride
in favoring Brunhild's beauty, struck by Gunter's bride.
But those who looked more closely, and saw with more than eyes,
said Krimhild, not fair Brunhild, should be the choice of the truly wise.
- 594 Girls and women, ladies and maids, were all together.
Observant men had many beautiful bodies to see.
Colored silken tents stood everywhere. Never
was the countryside of Wurms filled so full or so pleasingly.
- 595 Then all the King's great household came crowding around. Men
suggested that Brunhild and Krimhild and all their pretty ladies
leave the open fields and seek shelter in the shade.
Noble knights escorted women into the quiet tents.
- 596 By this point all the guests had ridden in from town.
Splendid battle games took place, up and down.
Everywhere the dust went whirling, covering the ground
with what looked like spreading fire. Warriors fought, and won renown.
- 597 Surely a lot of pretty girls were anxious to see them.
And I suspect that Sifried rode from tent to tent,
back and forth, leading his band of fighting men,
the Nibelungs, a thousand handsome knights from his mountain kingdom.
- 598 Then Hagen from Troneg came, sent by the king, politely
ending the fighting games, so pretty girls would not
be covered from head to toe by dust. Their guests, and the knights
from Wurms on the Rhine, were graciously willing to have their war games stopped.
- 599 Then noble Gernot spoke: "Now let the horses stay
right where they are, until the day grows cooler. That way
we'll ride into town, with the lovely ladies, straight to the gates
of the palace. The king will announce just when he's ready for us to leave."
- 600 Their war games having vanished off the far-flung plain,
the knights sought entertainment under high-roofed tents,

along with many ladies, all waiting to ride again.
They wiled away the hours until the king's message was sent.

- 601 Later on in the day, when the sun was going down
and the air had begun to cool, the knights could wait no more,
and together with many ladies started riding toward town.
Most of the pretty women were very actively adored.
- 602 The strong and dedicated knights, obeying Rhineland
custom, played at war the whole way to the palace,
until the king was at the gate and dismounted. The gallant
warriors were strong, and clothing was slashed and torn on every man.
- 603 Then the princesses were separated. Lady
Otta and Krimhild, along with their attendant maids,
went to a large apartment. Happy laughter and noise
arose from everywhere, from palaces and halls, that day.
- 604 Benches were set together, for the king wanted to be
at table with his guests. Beautiful Brunhild stood beside him,
wearing a crown, there in Gunter's land, entitled
as she was, by wealth and birth, to every sign of royalty.
- 605 There were many places to sit, and many strong-legged tables
loaded high with food (as the story's been handed down).
Everyone ate freely and as much as they were able!
Many noble guests approached the king, as they walked around.
- 606 Gunter's excellent stewards carried golden flasks
of washing water from table to table. No one could ask
for better service at any princely feast. A man
who says I'm wrong will never convince me. There's no one living who can.
- 607 But before Burgundy's lord could dip his hands in the bowl,
Sifried reminded him (as was of course his right)
of what the king had promised he'd do, if ever he might
see Brunhild here in Wurms on the Rhine, ready to be his bride.

- 608 “Please remember,” he said, “that you were to give me your sister’s
hand, whenever Brunhild arrived in Burgundy.
What’s become of that oath? And let me remind you, that journey
depended heavily on me, and I worked hard to assist you.”
- 609 The king answered his guest: “You’re right to remind me. I won’t
go back on my word, and what I promised, you will receive.
I’ll do my best to help you win her. May you succeed!”
Then Gunter sent Krimhild a message, saying her presence was needed.
- 610 Along with her very pretty girls, she approached the hall.
Giselher came running down the stairs: “All
your girls will have to return. Only you, my sister,
have been asked to appear before the king, no one else has been called.”
- 611 Meanwhile Brunhild had come and seated herself beside
the king. Noble knights from many lands stood by.
The king ordered his stewards to command silence, and as soon
as all was still, his sister approached him, walking across the room.
- 612 Then Gunter spoke: “My beautiful sister, in honor and virtue
I ask you, here, to fulfill the oath I’ve made. I vowed
to a noble knight that you would become his wife. Now
my wish, in all good faith, is to see you do as I will urge you.”
- 613 The noble girl replied: “My very dearest brother,
you never need to ask me, I’ll always be whatever
you tell me to be, and do whatever you tell me to.
I’ll gladly accept a man you’ve chosen, my lord, no matter who.”
- 614 Her beautiful eyes were turned toward Sifried, who blushed bright red.
The mighty hero pledged himself to her service forever.
They were told to stand in a circle, facing the king, and the girl
was asked if this handsome man was the husband she would choose to wed.
- 615 She had to overcome her maiden modesty.
But luckily for Sifried’s happiness, she

was quite unable to speak a negative word. He
was overjoyed, the glorious prince, to have her for his wife.

616 Once they had sworn their faith, and joined their loving hands,
he was more than ready to take her in his arms,
the strong young man, the hero from far-off Netherlands.
With everyone watching, he kissed the beautiful Rhineland princess from Wurms.

617 She and Brunhild were seated across from one another,
each with their husbands,* and Sifried surrounded by many loyal
men from Nibelung land, for he too was a ruler,
only son of a powerful king and a mother proud and royal.

618 Gunter sat beside his beautiful Brunhild, who glanced
across the hall and in that moment, seeing Krimhild
seated next to Sifried, began to weep. Passionate
sorrow made the tears come running down her cheeks. He asked her,

619 Rhineland's ruler, to tell him what she was crying about.
"What trouble, my lovely wife, causes your eyes to cloud
so sadly? You should be wonderfully happy, finding yourself
queen of my lands and my castle and all my many warriors, so proud

620 and strong." "How can I help but cry," she told him, "seeing
what's become of your sister? How can I stop from weeping,
watching her sitting beside a slave, a bondman, a worthless
fellow?"** I can't stop crying, knowing her shamed by such a being."

621 Then Gunter the king replied: "We can't discuss this now.
Some other time and place, I'll tell you the story of how
I came to give my sister to Sifried, and why I know
Krimhild will live in love and peace forever. I swear this is so."

* Marriage publicly pledged amounted to marriage finalized; in-church consecration would follow

** Though she exaggerates, Brunhild's complaint has a legal basis, for she has heard Sifried declare himself subservient to Gunter

- 622 “I have to grieve, seeing such highborn beauty wasted.
 If I had a place to go, I’d gladly leave,” she said,
 “and never be found lying next to you in your bed,
 unless you tell me why this fellow Sifried and Krimhild are wed.”
- 623 Noble Gunter answered: “I’ll tell you everything.
 In fact, he rules lands and castles exactly like mine.
 Rest assured, this Sifried is truly a mighty king.
 That’s why he’s a perfect match for her, equally rich and fine.”
- 624 In spite of everything he told her,* Brunhild sat grieving.
 Then many eager knights went rushing away from the table,
 anxious for war games. They filled the castle with the noise of their gleeful
 battles. Gunter was not well pleased, thinking what he’d be able
- 625 to do, now, with his wife, things he would like much better.
 It seemed distinctly likely that once they were lying together
 he’d find her truly delightful, providing wonderful pleasures.
 He began to give her loving glances, his beautiful wife, his treasure.
- 626 And so his guests were asked to stop their knightly games.
 The king was anxious to spend the night in bed with his bride.
 As everyone was going, Brunhild and Krimhild were side
 by side, on the stairs. They had not quarreled, not yet, and so they smiled.
- 627 The noble warriors, too, those attending their lords,
 went to their sleeping rooms. Stewards brought them torches.
 Kings and everyone with them were separated. It was clear
 that those who followed Sifried formed a truly mighty horde.
- 628 Gunter and Sifried came to where their beds were waiting.
 Each was thinking to himself what pleasures he would win
 from his wife, each was filled with eager anticipation.
 And Sifried’s happiness ran high as joy has ever run.

* A statement of high significance, though the meaning is deliberately ambiguous

- 629 When he and Krimhild came together, the beautiful girl
gave him such delight, shared his love with so much
tenderness, that she became at once the world
and all to him, he'd never exchange her for anyone on earth.
- 630 Let me say no more of Sifried and Krimhild, that night.
I'll tell you, now, what happened to Gunter, that handsome knight,
when he lay down with Brunhild, that loveliest of wives.
He'd known much better times before, lying with other ladies.
- 631 All the serving maids and men had left. He planned
to take possession of her as soon as he could, enjoying
to the full her beautiful body. Unfortunately, enjoyment
was still far off. She was his wife, he was not yet her man.
- 632 Wearing a gown of snow-white linen, she approached the bed.
Noble Gunter thought "Everything I've ever
wanted, all my life, is here, right here." Never
was any man delighted by sights more pleasing than he now had.
- 633 One by one, the king extinguished all the lights.
And then the mighty warrior came to join his wife.
He lay himself beside her, breathing in delight.
He wrapped her in his loving arms, and held her very tight.
- 634 He could have begun a night of loving and caressing,
if the noble lady had been prepared to let him. Expressing
love and desire, he expected to find himself rewarded.
But she lay rigid, cold, very plainly uninterested.
- 635 She told him: "Noble knight, you'd better forget all this.
I know exactly what you want, but you will not get it.
I plan to remain a virgin— pay attention: listen!—
until I know what Sifried did." Then Gunter got very angry.
- 636 He turned and none too gently ripped away her clothes.
Then the highborn girl took the belt she'd worn

around her delicate waist and gave him serious trouble,
 much more painful grief than anything he'd ever borne.

637 She tied his feet together, and then she tied his hands,
 and hung him high from a nail on the wall. No passionate man
 was going to stop her from sleeping! "No more nonsense," she warned him.
 Given the strength she possessed, he was very lucky to escape unharmed.

638 He who had meant to be master began to implore her. "Set
 me free, noble princess and queen, please, I beg you.
 I swear, O beautiful lady, I know I'll never defeat you,
 and let me tell you, too, I have no plan to come anywhere near you."

639 She left him right where he was, for she slept better alone,
 and there he stayed, hanging all night, until it was dawn,
 and morning broke, and daylight through the window shone.
 Whatever great strength he possessed, none whatever had yet been shown.

640 "Now tell me, noble Gunter, would you be somewhat displeased
 if anyone saw you bound?" asked the beautiful girl.
 "If one of your servants knew a woman had done this deed?"
 He answered, "Lady, it wouldn't accomplish much for you, either,

641 "and very little for me," observed the courageous warrior.
 "Why not let me back to bed, for the sake of your own
 good name? You clearly want to be left strictly alone,
 so I won't so much as let my hands touch the edge of your gown."

642 She soon untied him, and once she'd set him back on his feet
 he proceeded to climb into bed and so, too, did she.
 He lay himself down so far away that even her pretty
 gown could not possibly reach him. Not that she would have let it.

643 And then the servants came, bringing fresh clean garments
 laid out the previous night. No matter how well things went,
 or the fact that he wore his crown all through the day, beside
 his queen, the lord of the land celebrated but wept inside.

- 644 Custom and law require newly married couples
to prove that two have been made as one. A marriage mass was sung
in church, and Gunter and Brunhild, faithful to law, had come,
along with many others, Sifried and Krimhild both among them.
- 645 Wise and knowing hands* made all the preparations,
took care that things were readied, crowns as well as clothes.
Their marriages were blessed, their kingships consecrated.
Everyone saw these four queens and princes celebrated.
- 646 To honor the king (you need to know), many noble
squires were knighted, six hundred or even more. All over
Gunter's lands the sound of playful swords and spears
rose in the air, as Rhineland people were joyful everywhere.
- 647 Pretty girls were perched in windows, peering down
at sparkling shields and the brave and handsome knights who bore them.
But Gunter the king had left his men, and was standing alone.
In the middle of much rejoicing, he kept to himself, and only frowned.
- 648 Their characters were very different, but Sifried
understood exactly what the king was feeling.
He came to Gunter's side and quickly asked: "How
did everything go, last night? You need to tell me what happened, now."
- 649 The king replied: "I've shamed and disgraced myself. I've brought
the Devil out of Hell home to my house. I thought
I'd won a woman, but when I tried to take her she fought me
off, tied my hands and feet, and hung me high on the wall.
- 650 "And there I had to hang the whole night long, until
day came and she untied me. How comfortably she lay there!
I tell you this in friendship, as a sign of personal favor."
Mighty Sifried said: "This is painful news to hear.

* Priests (the poet may well have been a priest)

- 651 “But I know what to do, if you will let me do it.
 Leave me alone with her tonight, and I will prove it.
 You’ll never be stopped again, she’ll long to lie in your bed.”
 It was not difficult for Gunter to relish what Sifried said.
- 652 Sifried continued: “You can be free from this devil’s might.
 It’s clear to me that your first night and mine were very
 different. Your sister Krimhild is dearer to me than life
 itself. Brunhild must become truly your wife tonight.”
- 653 Sifried went on: “I’ll come to your room, walking behind
 your servants, invisible because of my magic cloak.
 No one’s going to know the trick I have in mind.
 Be sure you release your servants, send them off where sleep will find them.
- 654 “You won’t see me, but you’ll know I’m there as soon as I snuff
 the lights they hold in their hands. You’ll know I’m ready enough
 when you see that sign. I’ll wait to serve you. Either I lose
 my life trying, or else your wife will never again refuse you.”
- 655 “But please, don’t make love to my wife,” the king replied,
 “and I’ll be more than happy with anything else you happen
 to do. Maybe you’ll have to kill her. I won’t mind
 if that’s what it comes to. The woman’s fierce, I find her terrifying.”
- 656 “I promise,” said Sifried, “you have my word. I’ve no desire
 to possess her. For me, your beautiful sister is first and foremost
 and best of all the women I’ve ever seen in my life.”
 Gunter believed him, fully convinced by Sifried’s passionate oath.
- 657 Knightly games bring endless pleasure. But now all noisy
 sports were over, men were told to put away
 their swords, their spears, their shields, so ladies could make their way
 to the hall. Stewards cleared a path, and people had to obey.
- 658 The courtyard was emptied out of men, and also horses.
 Each group of ladies was led by a bishop, instructed to bring

the women to their proper tables, seated in front of the king.
Many handsome warriors followed the ladies, helped escort them.

- 659 The king sat in the hall, full of excited hope,
thinking of Sifried's promise and enjoying what he thought.
A day now seemed to him thirty slow days long.
All his mind could hold were images of the girl who'd fought him.
- 660 He was barely able to endure the length of their endless meal.
Beautiful Brunhild had been brought to the hall, and Krimhild as well,
and the two ladies were comfortably seated, like the queens
they were. And O! the nimble knights surrounding and wanting to help
- 661 them both! Sifried sat beside his pretty wife,
looking just as joyous as in truth he was. Her white
and beautiful hand rested lovingly in his—
and all at once, in silence, he was gone, as if he no longer existed.
- 662 She'd been caressing his hand, and now her eyes couldn't see him.
She turned to one of her maids, and said: "I wonder where
my lord could possibly have gone to? Where could he be?
Who could have swiftly taken his loving hand away from me?"
- 663 She said no more and did nothing. He'd followed behind
a group of servants carrying candles. And when they arrived
at their destination, he snuffed the lights in their hands, so the king
could know Sifried was there in the room, though totally out of sight.
- 664 And Gunter was well aware why Sifried was there. He ordered
the serving ladies out of his room, then locked the door
behind them, a mighty king his own true servant. He pulled
two thick and solid bolts in place, so no one could possibly force it,
- 665 and quickly moved what lights remained under the heavy
curtains of the bed. Brunhild and Sifried began a game
they couldn't avoid, mighty man and beautiful maiden.
Gunter stood there, feeling happy and sad, all one and the same.

- 666 Sifried lay himself down in the dark, next to the lady.
 She said: "Stop it, Gunter. You won't get what you want.
 Nothing's different, whatever happened will happen again."
 She guaranteed that the man would suffer, would lose rather than gain.
- 667 He swallowed his voice, spoke not a single word. The king
 could easily hear (though unable to truly see a thing)
 that what gets done in darkness was not going on.
 Not much they did in that bed was either comforting or calm.
- 668 He acted just as if he truly was Gunter the king,
 putting his arms around the pretty girl. She threw him
 out of bed and across a nearby bench, winging
 his head against a wooden stool so hard his ears were ringing.
- 669 He jumped right up, untroubled, brave and strong, determined
 to try again, and harder. He meant to force her, make her
 yield, but the moment he started, pretending he meant to take her,
 she fought him fiercely, far more savage than any living woman.
- 670 When he refused to give up, the girl jumped out of bed.
 "Get your fingers off my lovely snow-white gown.
 You're just a boor, a pig. I'll make you sorry, you clown,"
 the pretty maiden declared. "I'll give you what you deserve," she said.
- 671 She put her arms around the noble warrior, intending
 to tie up his hands and feet just as she had the king,
 setting her free to enjoy her bed and sleep in peace.
 He'd pay for rumpling her clothes, revenge would be the sweetest thing.
- 672 What good did it do him, being so strong, having such powers?
 She easily handled the hero, demonstrating her strength
 as she picked him up, roughly (it wasn't that he allowed it),
 and shoved him between the wall and a cupboard, completely helpless, pent.
- 673 "God help me," the hero thought, "if I'm about to surrender
 my life to a girl. That would show all wives around

the world that nothing husbands tell them can make them bound
to listen or obey, women who otherwise would never

674 “think such things.” Gunter could hear them, and feared for the man’s
life. Sifried was deeply ashamed of himself, and began
to grow angry. Suddenly drawing on buried strength, he seized her
again, desperate, struggling to force the mighty girl to release him.

675 They wrestled, it seemed to Gunter, a very long time. She squeezed
the hero’s hands so hard that blood spurted from under
his nails. This was so extremely painful to Sifried
that he suddenly broke right through the noble maiden’s terrible need

676 to resist, and made her abandon her plan to hang him high
on the wall. The king could hear it all, though no one spoke.
She was forced down on the bed so fiercely she uttered a cry.
The time had come for her to suffer his strength, try as she might.

677 He held her so hard that she tried to grope for the belt with which
she’d meant to tie him, but her arms and legs wouldn’t work, all
the bones in her body began to crack. No longer fit
for fighting, she gave it up. And at that moment a wife was born.

678 She said: “O noble Gunter, I want to remain alive.
I’ll make amends, I’ll pay you back for everything
I’ve done. Never again will I shrink from being your wife.
I’ve learned, at last, that you know how to be a woman’s king.”

679 Sifried rose from the bed, leaving her lying still
a girl, as though he meant to remove his clothes. Softly,
without her knowing, he drew a golden ring from off
her finger—Brunhild, the noble queen, ready to do as he willed.

680 He also took her belt, beautifully made. But why
he took it I’ve no idea. Perhaps his spirits were high.
He gave them as gifts (which he later regretted) to his lovely wife.
And then King Gunter came to lie, at last, with his lovely wife.

- 681 He lay with her as he'd wanted, and had the right to do.
 She had to give up her fury and surrender her sense of shame.
 These first encounters with love left her distinctly pale.
 And O! how utterly useless her mighty strength had now become.
- 682 Now she'd become no stronger than any other woman.
 Now he could caress her soft and lovely body.
 Even had she tried, what good could it do her? Human
 love had overwhelmed her, she was woman and Gunter was man.
- 683 How lovingly she lay beside him, now, held him
 in her arms until the night was over and day
 returned! Noble Sifried had long since gone away,
 warmly welcomed by a very different but no less lovely woman.
- 684 She wondered where he'd been, but Sifried dodged the questions.
 She did not know, for a very long time, what gifts he'd brought her,
 until he took her to his home and only after she'd ascended
 his Netherlands throne. He never suspected how much his gifts would cost her!
- 685 That morning the king arose, feeling much better than the day
 before. He invited many noble knights to come
 to his court from all across his widespread lands, and gave them
 rich and costly gifts, making them welcome, well waited upon.
- 686 This was a celebration that lasted fourteen nights
 and days, its cheerful sound not stopping in all that time,
 guests made happy in many ways, however they liked.
 Everyone knew the cost was immense, and immensely appreciated.
- 687 Gunter's noble family joined him in generous giving,
 cordial gifts of good red gold and expensive clothing,
 and horses, and hammered silver, bestowed on wandering minstrels.
 Whoever came, hoping to receive, left well pleased with their outing.
- 688 All the well-made clothes that Sifried had carried with him
 when first he came to the Rhine, and the clothes of his thousand men,

were given away, every single thing, including
horses along with their saddles. Some men could not understand them.

689 People planning to leave thought these magnificent gifts
would never be finished, it seemed to them to last forever.
No guests in any land had ever been treated better.
And at last the celebration was over, exactly as Gunter wished.

ADVENTURE 11

HOW SIFRIED WENT HOME WITH HIS WIFE

690 And when the guests had gone, riding in all directions,
Sigemund's son spoke to his men: "Now we must also
prepare ourselves, get ready to leave for home." Knowing
the time had come, his wife was pleased to hear that at last they were going.

691 She said to her husband: "When do you think we ought to depart?
I'd like to keep us from going too soon. Before I leave,
my brothers will have to divide our lands, and for that they'll need
some time." Hearing Krimhild's words, her husband was far from pleased.

692 Gunter and his two brothers came to him: "Now
we wish to say, Lord Sifried, that until the day we die
we'll always be ready to serve you." At this, Sifried bowed
his head, happy to hear these royal men praise him so highly.

693 "We also need to divide our land and castles with you,
and everything else we own," said Giseller, the youngest.
"And whatever distant kingdoms we rule, Krimhild and you
deserve a healthy share. This is nothing more than your due."

694 Sigemund's son replied to the three princes, as soon
as he heard and understood their intention: "May God allow

all of you to enjoy forever your family's fortune,
 you and also your people. But I am forced to tell you, now,

695 "how little the wife I love needs what you wish to give her.
 There where she'll wear a crown (provided I still live),
 she cannot help but become mistress of very great wealth.
 I place myself at your service, should you desire anything else."

696 Then his wife, Krimhild, spoke: "Refuse this wealth, to be sure,
 but Burgundy's noble warriors are worth a great deal more,
 and a king might well be glad to lead such men to his land.
 And my beloved brothers are supposed to give their sister her share."

697 Then Lord Gernot spoke: "Choose whoever you like. Many
 Rhineland men might want to ride along behind you.
 You can have a third of our thousands of knights. You'll find
 them useful in setting up a brand-new household." Krimhild decided

698 to send for Hagen of Troneg, and also for Ortwin, inquiring
 if they and their families would want to be ruled by her. Fiery
 Hagen was furious, the moment he heard this message, and said:
 "We are not gifts that Gunter can give to anyone he likes.

699 "You'll have to find yourself others of Gunter's men. You know
 perfectly well how the knights of Troneg do these things.
 We always stay with our lords, and our lord is always the king.
 We'll go on serving those, and only those, we've served until now."

700 Nothing more was said or done. They prepared to depart.
 All of Krimhild's household would leave with their mistress, half
 a thousand men and thirty-two maids. And Eckewart,
 the noble count, would follow Krimhild, become one of her guard.

701 Everyone said good-bye, knights and servants alike,
 young girls and ladies in waiting. It was done exactly right.
 Farewell kisses were freely and quickly exchanged. Leaving
 Gunter's land was a happy affair, as yet no one was grieving.

- 702 Family members rode beside the travelers a very
 long way. Wherever they chose to use them, beds were ready,
 and food, all across King Gunter's land. Once
 they'd sent swift messengers ahead, to Sigemund, letting
- 703 him know they were coming, he and Sigelind his queen
 knew their son would be home, with Lady Otta's child,
 beautiful Krimhild, sister of Gunter, king of the Rhine.
 Father and mother both were as joyously happy as ever they'd been.
- 704 "How fortunate I am," said Sigemund, "to still be alive
 and hear that lovely Krimhild will wear a crown, his wife
 and queen. The inheritance I leave will grow for her coming.
 Sifried returns, my noble son, and I will make him king."
- 705 Then Lady Sigelind gave the messengers
 crimson velvet cloth, and silver and gold. These were
 rewards for bringing happy news that was good to hear.
 Her ladies in waiting worked to make them new clothing fit to wear.
- 706 The king let it be known just who would be with his son,
 and seats were quickly set along the road he would ride,
 he and Krimhild, so people could see the new king and his wife.
 Then Sigemund's own men rode out to welcome Sifried home.
- 707 No one was ever given a welcome warmer, to the best
 of my knowledge, than that these heroes received, arriving in
 King Sigemund's land. Krimhild was welcomed by Sigelind,
 who rode, with many handsome ladies and knights, to greet their guests.
- 708 They rode an entire day before they saw them. Then
 together they journeyed back, everyone ready to dismount,
 until they reached a towering castle, known as Santen,
 where Sifried and Krimhild later ruled, once they'd both been crowned.
- 709 Laughing with joy, over and over, lovingly
 Sigemund and Sigelind kept kissing Krimhild, and also

their son, Sifried. Whatever sorrow they'd suffered had flown away. All who'd come were warmly welcomed with joy and love.

- 710 The king ordered his men to lead the guests to his hall.
Pretty young girls were helped down from their easy-riding mares, and enormous numbers of excited men rivaled one another, anxious to serve these maidens, who might become wives.
- 711 Despite the fame of the feast they'd seen, at Wurms on the Rhine, no one had ever given guests clothes so fine, better than anything these knights had worn in their lives. You could not help amazement, hearing what riches they received.
- 712 And so they were seated, covered with honor, rewarded with plenty, golden skirt-hems worn by their servants, adorned with many precious stones, carefully worked deep in the cloth! No one could doubt how nobly Sigelind had cared for them all.
- 713 Then in front of his friends, Sigemund, lord of the land, spoke: "Let me declare to Sifried's family, and the men sitting in front of me: Sifried will now assume command of this kingdom." Everyone heard this news with eager, excited attention.
- 714 Sigemund gave him the crown, entrusted him with rule of the land, made him absolute master. Whoever was due to come before him, for justice, learned he would not bend old laws, and people feared Krimhild's husband, lord of men.
- 715 And in truth Sifried lived in that exalted state, ruled his kingdom well, for ten good years, and then his lovely wife presented him with a son, which made his entire far-flung family truly happy, and him content.
- 716 They hurried to baptize the child, and gave him Gunter as his name, after his mother's brother. This could not bring him shame. He'd do quite well, indeed, to follow where his uncle had gone. The boy was carefully raised, whatever needed doing was done.

- 717 And exactly at this same time Lady Sigelind died.
 All the old queen's power now rested in Otta's child—
 well deserved for a woman so wealthy, with so much land.
 Sigelind's people sadly mourned her, when death swept her aside.
- 718 And far away, along the Rhine, we're told that King
 Gunter, mighty ruler of Burgundy, also
 welcomed a son, from beautiful Brunhild. And Gunter showed
 his love by naming his child Sifried, a hero much to his liking.
- 719 How they fretted and fussed over this little child!
 Noble Gunter brought him special tutors, trained
 to help the boy become a bold and decent kind
 of man. But O! how he mourned, later, as his family faded!
- 720 News arrived all the time, telling how well life went
 in Sigemund's land, what noble successes warriors knew,
 day after day, year after year. Gunter too
 sent word across the Rhine that he and his family were happy men.
- 721 Sifried was also lord of the Nibelungs. Thus
 his family were richer and stronger than any Netherlands kings
 before him. He ruled the Shilbunk, too, and knew he was trusted
 and loved. He relished his kingly state, the pleasures power could bring.
- 722 The greatest of treasure hoards was also his, for him
 to guard and deal with exactly as he and he alone wanted,
 for he had single-handedly fought for it and won,
 in front of a towering mountain, slaughtering many mighty men.
- 723 No man could want more honor. And even had that not
 been true, who could rightly deny that of all the world's
 great heroes he was one of the best who ever rode
 a horse? His strength was widely feared, and very rightly so.

ADVENTURE 12

HOW GUNTER INVITED SIFRIED TO A CELEBRATION

- 724 Gunter's wife was always asking herself: "How
 does Lady Krimhild manage to act so terribly proud?
 After all, her husband Sifried is simply one
 of our servants. How long it's been since any service for us was done!"
- 725 She held this sour thought in her heart, but kept it hidden,
 deeply depressed that Sifried never paid them a visit
 of duty, that she and Gunter were totally disregarded.
 She desperately yearned to know just why this sort of thing was permitted.
- 726 She tried to learn from the king how it came about
 that she and Krimhild never saw each other, now.
 She spoke to him when they were alone, hoping that
 might help, but his answers gave her very little satisfaction.
- 727 "How can we bring them here?" replied the mighty king,
 "ask them to come to the Rhine? It's really out of the question.
 They live so far away. How rude it would be to vex them."
 Still, his words inspired her to make another suggestion:
- 728 "No matter how mighty a king's servant may be, when his lord
 commands him, an underling never enjoys the right to decline."
 Gunter smiled, hearing these proud and haughty words.
 Whatever Sifried had done for him had never seemed of that kind.
- 729 She went on: "My dearest lord, what I hope you're willing to do
 for me is make it possible for Sifried, and your sister, too,
 to visit here in the Rhine, so I can see them. Believe me,
 nothing else in all the world could ever so much please me.
- 730 "Your elegant sister and I have always been on good terms.
 Whenever I think of how we first became acquainted

it fills me with pleasure. Remember, that was here in Wurms,
and I was newly your wife! Marriage to her was surely no taint

- 731 “on him.” She pushed at him so hard that at last he said:
“Of course, as you know, there are no guests I’d rather see.
Indeed, there’s no need to beg. Messengers will be sent
to them both, asking if they might like to visit us again.”
- 732 His wife replied: “So now you mustn’t forget to tell me
when your messengers leave, and how many days it will be
before our dearly beloved friends can join us here.
And tell me, too, your messengers’ names, so I’ll be well prepared.”
- 733 “I’ll do that,” answered the king. “I’ll send thirty of my men
and have them leave at once.” Thirty warriors were sent for,
and he made them his messengers to Sifried’s land. And Brunhild
presented them with noble clothes, which pleased them all immensely.
- 734 Gunter declared: “You knights should say (leaving out
nothing I’m telling you now), speaking as if from my mouth,
that no one in all the world will ever be so well
beloved as mighty Sifried and my sister, without the slightest doubt.
- 735 “Ask them if they would kindly come here to us, on the Rhine.
Tell them we would be forever indebted. He’ll find,
if he visits before next summer, he and his men, the highest
honors paid to all of them, as they and Sifried deserve.
- 736 “Speak words of great respect for Sigemund, the king,
express the regard my friends and I have always held
him in. And tell Krimhild she must not wait past spring
to see her friends again. No one adorns a feast so well
- 737 “as my sister.” Brunhild and Lady Otta, and all the ladies,
sent their best regards to the charming women in far-off
Sifried’s land, and to many warriors, bold and brave.
The king’s good friends were consulted, and then the messengers departed.

- 738 Preparations had been thorough. The things they had to bring,
 from horses to clothes, were ready, so they said their good-byes and rode
 as fast as they could, knowing their journey had far to go.
 Protection along the road was arranged by the ever careful king.
- 739 Riding for three straight weeks brought these knights to the land
 of the Nibelungs, and then to the castle the king had commanded
 they come to. Yet Sifried had gone to Norway. From the Rhine
 to there was a long long way, but they went, although their horses were tired.
- 740 Sifried and Krimhild were both informed that knights had arrived,
 dressed in exactly the clothes Burgundy men had long
 been known to wear. Lady Krimhild was peacefully lying
 in bed, but the moment she heard this news she leapt right up, smiling,
- 741 and asked one of her maids to walk to the window and see.
 And what she discovered was Gera, standing out in the courtyard
 along with the other brave warriors who'd ridden beside him to Sifried.
 Krimhild's saddened, homesick heart began to beat fast and hard.
- 742 She said to her powerful husband: "Do you see who's standing down there,
 along with other brave knights? It's Gera, fresh from the Rhine,
 sent to us by my brother, Gunter." Sifried declared:
 "We need to welcome them warmly, noble warriors who've traveled so far."
- 743 All the servants were happy, seeing men from the Rhine.
 Every single one of them had a pleasant word
 for someone they knew, among the messengers. And Lord
 Sigemund was especially glad, seeing just who had arrived.
- 744 Lodgings were found for Gera and those who'd ridden with him.
 Their horses were led to the stables. The messengers were led
 to where Lord Sifried and Lady Krimhild were seated, waiting
 eagerly to greet and welcome Gunter's visiting men.
- 745 The mighty Netherlands king and his wife rose at once,
 warmly welcoming Gera, fresh from Burgundy land,

and all his fellow warriors, men they knew had come
from Gunter. The king and queen invited Gera to sit with them.

746 “Allow me to give you my message, before we sit and talk.
Standing does us no harm, we aren’t weary from walking.
Our task is to give you the news Gunter and Brunhild requested
we bring, and I can report that both of them remain at their best.

747 “We’ve also brought messages from Lady Otta, your mother,
and Giseller the young and Gernot, your noble brothers,
and others of your family. These are the people who greet you
through us, telling us the words to bring to your land, and to speak.”

748 “Now God reward them,” Sifried said, “there’s not a doubt
in my heart, or in my wife’s, that they are loyal and virtuous,
as a man’s good friends should be. Please tell us more about
our beloved friends on the Rhine, and if their excellent spirits hold out.

749 “Has anyone, since we left there, done anything
to hurt my wife’s good family? I’d very much like to know.
My unchanging vow of good faith means I will always bring
my sword to their side—and let their enemies beware if I go.”

750 Count Gera, a noble warrior, replied: “Your friends on the Rhine
are one and all completely content, their spirits are high.
They’re having a celebration, and you, my lord, are invited.
Please be absolutely sure that they will be delighted

751 “to see you, and your wife as well, who they hope, of course, will join you.
When winter time is over, and snow and frosts have gone,
they wish to see you in Wurms before next summer comes.”
Mighty Sifried answered: “I don’t believe I could come so soon.”

752 Then Gera, from faraway Rhineland, spoke again: “Lady
Otta, your mother, desperately wants you to come, as do
Gernot and Giseller. How can you refuse them?
You live so far away that I have heard them weeping for you,

- 753 “day after day. My Lady Brunhild and all her maids
would be happy to have good news. And seeing you and your wife
again, that will make them truly delighted.” It made
lovely Krimhild happy to hear what Gera had to say.
- 754 Gera was the queen’s cousin. Sifried asked him to be seated,
and ordered drinks for his guests. This was attended to
at once. Then Lord Sigemund appeared, wanting to meet
their guests. He spoke to the men from Burgundy, gave them good greetings:
- 755 “You’re very welcome, heroes, good Gunter’s men. Once
Sifried, my son, won your beautiful princess as queen,
you men from the Rhine might have been expected to come
and visit us more often, if you found our friendship truly appealing.”
- 756 Whenever he wanted, said Gera, they’d be glad to come again.
The weary horsemen plainly felt like happier men.
The Rhinemen were urged to be seated, food was soon brought in,
and Sifried made sure his guests were given more than enough to eat.
- 757 And then they had to wait a full nine days, which truly
made these energetic knights feel like complaining,
impatient to mount their horses and head back home again.
Sifried summoned his friends to help him decide what he ought to do.
- 758 He asked for their advice: should he go to the Rhine?
“My good friend Gunter, and all his family, too, would like me
to attend a celebration. And I would be eager to go
if only Burgundy were closer, and not so long a ride.
- 759 “And they ask that Krimhild also come as their welcome guest.
Counsel me, my dearest friends. How will she get there?
If they asked me to fight a war, battling in thirty lands,
they’d find Sifried ready and willing to help them with eager hands.”
- 760 The bold warriors answered: “We think you ought to attend.
Take this journey. That is our best advice. Ride

with a thousand knights and let them escort you down the Rhine.
That will ensure your honor from the very moment you arrive.”

- 761 Then Lord Sigemund spoke, once the Netherlands king:
“If you decide to attend this feast, why don’t you bring
your father? I’m not yet feeble, I haven’t forgotten how
to ride. And I’ll provide a hundred knights to add to your power.”
- 762 “Knowing you want to ride with us, dear father,” mighty
Sifried said, “persuades me to go. I find it delightful!
In another twelve days, or less, I plan to leave my land.”
Those who’d given advice received gifts as a matter of right.
- 763 Now that noble Sifried meant to make the journey,
the Rhineland messengers could leave for home, bearing
the word to his relatives by marriage, in far-off Wurms,
that he’d be happy to come to the celebration they were preparing.
- 764 Sifried and Krimhild (says the story, as we’ve been told it)
gave Gera and his men so many costly gifts, the load
was too much to carry. This was a wealthy man, they said,
happily strapping their hoard on the backs of sturdy packing horses.
- 765 Sifried and Sigemund gave clothes to those who were going with them.
Count Eckewart went hunting all over the Netherlands
for the finest women’s clothing fashioned by human hands,
there or anywhere. He’d come from Burgundy with Krimhild.
- 766 All the warriors readied their saddles and also their shields.
Knights who were making the journey were given whatever they needed,
as were the ladies riding along. Thus nothing was missing.
Many noble guests would visit his Rhineland friends with Sifried.
- 767 The messengers went even faster, when riding home.
So Gera and the heroes with him came back to Wurms on the Rhine.
They were given the warmest of welcomes, but stayed on their horses, finding
themselves at last in front of Gunter’s hall, and that was the time

- 768 to dismount. Young and old crowded around, as men
will do, asking for news. Gera announced to them:
“Once I’ve told the king, you’ll all be quickly informed.”
And then the messengers went in to the hall, to make their report.
- 769 The king was so delighted he leaped up from his chair.
And beautiful Brunhild thanked them, happy they were back
so quickly. Gunter spoke to his messengers: “I ask you,
at once, to tell me how Sifried (to whom I owe so much) has been faring.”
- 770 Brave Gera spoke: “He could not keep from flushing with pleasure,
as did your sister. No one’s friend, I think, has ever
sent an answer so honest and loyal as that I bring you
from mighty Sifried, and as his father joins with him in sending.”
- 771 Then noble Gunter’s wife spoke to the count: “Tell me,
will Krimhild be coming too? And has that pretty woman
kept the gracious manners that went so well with her beauty?”
“Yes, she’s certainly coming,” said Gera, that battle-worthy man.
- 772 Lady Otta asked the messengers to wait
on her at once. Her questions clearly indicated
anxious interest in Krimhild’s health. Gera told her
exactly what he’d seen, and assured her she would shortly know
- 773 for herself. Nor did Gera forget to tell the court
the things they’d gotten from Sifried. Gold and clothing were brought
and displayed for all the men serving Burgundy’s rulers,
generous gifts for which grateful thanks had been given, as they ought.
- 774 “He can easily afford it,” said Hagen, “and more.
He couldn’t give it all away, if he lived forever.
He’s managed to get his hands on the Nibelungen hoard.
Don’t expect to see it soon, anywhere near this court!”
- 775 Everyone in the household was truly happy to hear
Sifried and Krimhild were coming. Late and early, men

serving the three Rhineland rulers were busy at work,
 setting up tables and benches for all the guests soon to appear.

776 Heroic Hunolt, and Sindolt, that other brave knight, hurried
 from place to place, arranging, supervising, worried
 that some of the busy workers might make mistakes. They were helped
 by Ortwin, for which Gunter was grateful. He thanked Ortwin himself.

777 That master cook, Rumolt, knew exactly how
 to deal with his men! They had so many pots on their hands,
 so many kettles and pans, there seemed to be no end!
 But they set to work, preparing food for more than a thousand men.

ADVENTURE 13

SIFRIED AND HIS WIFE COME TO THE CELEBRATION

778 But now let's leave them all right where they are, and tell
 how Lady Krimhild, and also her maids, managed to travel
 from Netherlands, and down the Rhine to Burgundy.
 No one had ever carried clothes so splendid, in quantities

779 so great, neither had heavy-footed horses been bent
 by such burdens. Mighty Sifried rode with his friends and with
 his queen, all riding toward the pleasures they expected
 to enjoy. But what they'd find was misery and suffering instead.

780 Sifried and Krimhild's son, their only child and heir,
 had to be left at home. There was no other way,
 wanting as much as they did to make this journey. The day
 they left was the last the little boy saw of his father and mother.

781 And Sigemund was riding with them, noble lord and king.
 But had he known, then, what that noble feast

would bring him, all the sorrow, pain, and the suffering
 this banquet would cause, he'd never have gone anywhere near the thing.

- 782 They sent messengers ahead, to announce their arrival.
 A large and happy crowd came riding out to meet them.
 Some were Otta's friends, some were Gunter's men.
 The king was deeply concerned to keep his mighty guests contented.
- 783 He went to where he knew Brunhild was seated. "Do
 you remember how my sister welcomed you when you reached
 this land? That's how Sifried's wife should be welcomed by you."
 "And I certainly will," she answered, "I've every reason for wanting to please her."
- 784 To which the king replied: "They'll be here early tomorrow.
 You'll need to begin getting ready, if you want to greet them,
 or with wasting time in the castle we'll never ride out to meet them.
 My love for them requires that they be eagerly received."
- 785 She quickly set her ladies in waiting, and her maids, searching
 out the finest clothes they could find, the prettiest in the world
 for displaying the women who served her in front of their noble guests.
 Who needs to be told how well they listened, anxious to look their best?
- 786 And Gunter's men also hurried to show their respect.
 The king made sure his warriors, too, were looking their best.
 Brunhild, majestically mounted, rode beside them. And the guests
 received a host of the warmest greetings, regard and affection mixed.
- 787 How happy Burgundy's people were, in welcoming them!
 They felt, in looking back, that Krimhild's greeting to Brunhild,
 when the woman now queen first came, paled in comparison.
 Those who'd never seen proud Brunhild before were virtually stunned.
- 788 Now Sifried came, surrounded by men he'd brought to the Rhine.
 Heroic warriors were seen all over the fields, riding
 rapidly this way and that, galloping hard, stirring up
 clouds of dust that fell on everyone there, in equal shares.

- 789 When Gunter the king caught sight of Sifried, and also Sigemund,
 how affectionately the powerful lord of the Rhine spoke!
 “Accept my heartiest greetings, you and all my friends.
 Your journey here lifts our hearts, happy to see you again.”
- 790 “Let God reward you,” said Sigemund, a man devoted to honor.
 “Ever since my son became your friend, my heart’s
 been urging me to come and meet you.” And then for his part
 Gunter replied: “How glad I am that at last it’s come to pass.”
- 791 Sifried received the welcome a hero deserves, honored
 on every hand, no one there wishing him harm.
 Gernot and Giselper were models of courtly charm.
 I doubt that many guests are greeted with such open arms.
- 792 And then the queens acknowledged one another’s presence.
 One by one the other pretty ladies were handed
 out of their saddles and set down on the grass. No man
 fond of waiting on ladies needed to hunt up such attention.
- 793 Beautiful Brunhild and lovely Krimhild approached each other,
 delighting many watching knights with their friendly greeting,
 accomplished with ease and grace. Knights stood happily
 by, many already newly paired with pretty ladies.
- 794 The noble company were holding hands as they waited,
 showing courtly manners by bowing deeply to left
 and right, while many well-bred women showed their respect
 by kissing. Gunter’s and Sifried’s people displayed their friendly relations.
- 795 Then waiting no longer, everyone rode to town. Gunter
 asked that his guests be shown how welcome all of them were,
 how Rhineland people were pleased to see their visitors there.
 Many warriors played at war, knowing ladies were watching.
- 796 That Hagen of Troneg, and Ortwin too, possessed immense
 power, was easily seen. Whatever they ordered the men

to do was done, for no one dared to disobey them.
 Thus they performed many services for their welcome guests.

- 797 The happy crashing of shields could be heard, the banging of spears,
 as they frolicked in front of the gates of Wurms. Gunter stayed
 with his guests for hours, until the games were over and they came
 back in. Time goes quickly when entertainment is such pure play.
- 798 Cheerfully, they rode to the king's great hall. Wherever
 you looked there were leather straps, beautifully woven and finely
 crafted, dangling from lovely ladies' saddles. They arrived
 at Gunter's hall with the king's warriors riding close behind them.
- 799 Immediately, the noble guests were shown to their rooms.
 Sometimes Brunhild was glimpsed glancing over at Krimhild,
 who every man could tell was a sight worth seeing. The bloom
 of her skin shone against the golden fabric she wore so well.
- 800 Everywhere in Wurms you could hear the happy sounds
 of those who followed Krimhild and her husband. Gunter ordered
 his head groom, Dancwart, to care for them. So Dancwart accorded
 the guests devoted attention, not often found in a bustling town.
- 801 Visitors could dine in the fields or inside the hall.
 No guests from other lands were ever treated
 better. Everything they wanted, they received.
 The king was so rich that no refusal was ever thought of, or needed.
- 802 Guests were dealt with as friends, no one could feel disliked.
 At every meal the king ate with them all. And Sifried
 was given the place of honor he'd had before, leading
 many brave knights to the table, where they sat and dined at Sifried's side.
- 803 A thousand two hundred men were seated around him. The lady
 of the Rhineland, beautiful Brunhild, could not imagine an under-
 lord so richly attended. She liked him well enough,
 as yet, so thoughts of his death were impossible, and had not occurred.

- 804 One evening the king could see, from where he was seated, handsome
 clothing soaking up a great deal of wine, as man
 after man came bearing brimful cups. The king's command
 had been, as ever, to give his guests as much as they wanted to drink.
- 805 Those were his customary orders at feasts like these.
 Wherever anyone came from, in Wurms they were well received,
 served with abundant honor, and nothing else would matter.
 By now the ladies and girls had been lodged with a careful desire to please.
- 806 By the time night had ended and the sun began to glow,
 ladies took from their luggage emeralds, rubies, and gold,
 now gleaming on their costly clothes, and tried to show
 their precious gems to splendid effect by what they chose to wear.
- 807 And as the day wore on many knights and their squires
 met in front of the hall, assembled to hear a mass
 soon to be sung in honor of Burgundy's king. The clash
 of weapons resounded, as younger men competed hard for high
- 808 approval. Bright clear trumpet calls resounded, and blaring
 trombones and piping flutes filled the Rhineland air
 until all Wurms appeared to echo with happy sounds.
 Heroic warriors mounted their horses, and rode all through the town.
- 809 Many battle-ready knights participated
 in fighting games, and fields in every direction were filled
 with the combat of eager hearts, all highly motivated
 for victory. Under many shields one saw garments created
- 810 for war. Many noble women, and noble girls,
 were watching from windows, a pretty sight. But here their servants
 were knights, many crowded around them, eager to please.
 The king himself, and many friends, came riding out to see.
- 811 And so they wiled away the time (which seemed to pass
 quite quickly), until they heard the sound of cathedral bells.

Ladies mounted their palfreys and came to hear the mass.
 Each of the noble queens was followed by many excellent men.

812 They stood in front of the church, assembled in friendly fashion.
 Brunhild was better disposed to her guests than ever before.
 Kings and queens were wearing their crowns, none at war
 with the other. But Brunhild's love was about to be lost in storming passion.

813 They heard the mass, and emerged to stand on the grass, men
 and women of the highest honor. And then they were seated once more,
 happily feasting together. Their happy celebration
 lasted eleven days, then vanished, not to be seen again.

ADVENTURE 14

HOW THE QUEENS ATTACKED EACH OTHER

814 Late one afternoon, many of the knights at court
 were feeling extremely restless. They began to play at warrior
 games, hunting good cheer, hoping healthy sport
 would help. Men and women together hurried over to watch.

815 The two great queens were sitting together, each of them thinking
 about a handsome knight, but not the same one. "Mine,"
 said lovely Krimhild, "is a man so mighty he might be king
 of this land, and who could be a worthier ruler, here on the Rhine?"

816 Lady Brunhild answered: "How could that ever happen?
 Of course, if you and yours were the only ones on earth,
 he'd do quite well ruling this kingdom, or even the world.
 But as long as Gunter's alive Burgundy's very glad to have him."

817 Krimhild quickly replied: "Just look at him standing there!
 Who else deserves to lead the heroes assembled here,

shining as bright as the moon against the flickering stars?
I ought to be happy, and I can say I am, without any fear.”

- 818 Lady Brunhild said: “However handsome your man,
however clever and good, Gunter must command
these warrior men, the only one who does, or can.
Indeed, your brother’s the mightiest king the world has ever known.”
- 819 Krimhild swiftly answered: “There is no better man
than mine, nor would I praise him without the best of reasons.
He’s won great honors in many lands and every season.
Believe me, Brunhild, he’s easily Gunter’s equal in merit and rank.”
- 820 “You mustn’t misunderstand, Krimhild, there’s nothing mean
in my words. I too would not have spoken without good reason.
I heard both of them say so, the very day I met them,
and the night he forced me to love him, royal Gunter said it again.
- 821 “After he made me his, won my love with his might,
he agreed with Sifried’s words: your man was one of his knights.
He belongs to Gunter, and to me. You can’t deny what’s right.”
Krimhild said: “I’m afraid that seems to me not right, but disgraceful.”
- 822 “My three brothers are kings. It truly makes no sense
that they would have me marry someone who belonged to them.
So let me ask you, Brunhild, in friendship’s name, and regard
for me, please put this subject aside. Do let the matter rest.”
- 823 “How can I put it to rest?” answered King Gunter’s wife,
“How could you imagine I’d give up all the knights
bound to our service, along with this one warrior of yours?”
At this point, lovely Krimhild’s face began to flush and grow warm:
- 824 “Yet what you’ll have to give up, because it will never happen,
is expecting him to serve you. Sifried, my noble hero,
is worth a good deal more than my brother the king. I fear
you would have done better not to say these words you’ve made me hear.

- 825 “It strikes me as very strange, if Sifried belongs to you,
and you claim that power over both of us is your due,
that it’s taken so very long to make us pay this debt.
These high and mighty views are really claims you’d better forget.”
- 826 “Talk about high and mighty!” said Brunhild, wife of the king.
“I hope you’d notice if anyone here showed you the respect
and homage they all show me.” By now both queens were red
in the face, each deeply angered by what the other had angrily said.
- 827 Krimhild answered: “That you’ll see for yourself, I think.
Now that you claim my man is someone you own, two kings
and all their men will soon be seeing how I like
walking straight into church ahead of any other king’s wife.
- 828 “And you’ll discover, today, that I am no one’s slave,
and my man’s truly worth more than yours will ever be.
I will allow no one to freely insult me.
Tonight you’ll know for certain that I owe you nothing, when you’re forced to see
- 829 “this serving maid of yours going to court attended
by heroes. And no one will doubt that I myself enjoy honors
higher than any queen crowned among living men.”
Bitter jealousy and hatred was utterly open, by then.
- 830 But Brunhild answered: “If you refuse to serve me, you
and all your women may not walk with me and mine.
Separate yourselves when we near the church.” “Fine,”
Krimhild replied, “that is exactly what we’re going to do.”
- 831 “Now dress yourselves, my girls,” Krimhild told her attendants,
“No one here will disgrace me, when we go to church tonight.
I want you all to look your best, I want you to shine.
If you’re aglow, Brunhild will have to renounce her futile pretense.”
- 832 How eagerly they obliged, wearing their costliest clothes.
Her many girls and ladies truly gleamed and glowed.

Noble Krimhild, too, made sure that what she wore
was royally rich. And then they joined the others who followed their queen.

833 Krimhild had brought forty-three girls, when she came to the Rhine,
and these, and all the others, were dressed in Arabian silk.
Then they went to the church, these pretty girls in their finest
clothes, and all of Sifried's men were waiting to walk behind them.

834 People were terribly startled, seeing how each of the queens,
and all their men and women, kept completely to themselves,
no longer, now, walking together. This would bring
deep and painful sorrow to many heroes serving each king.

835 Gunter's wife was already standing in front of the church.
Many knights in her service had been busy with love's high work,
paying careful attention to pretty ladies they liked.
Then Lady Krimhild appeared, with a noble host around and beside her.

836 However honored knights had ever been dressed, before,
now made as little difference as a puff of wandering air.
Krimhild owned such enormous treasure that thirty or more
king's wives could not have displayed the elegant wealth she showed them there.

837 No matter how anyone wanted to boast, surely no one
could possibly claim they'd ever beheld costlier clothes
than those on the backs of these young and beautiful girls, for exactly
what Krimhild wanted was to put Gunter's arrogant wife to shame.

838 The two powerful ladies met in front of the church.
The queen of Burgundy, quivering with hate,
rudely ordered Krimhild to stay where she was. "No maid
in waiting is allowed to walk in front of a great king's very own lady."

839 Krimhild quickly answered (easily as angry):
"You'd be much better off holding your tongue. Your shame
is selling your beautiful body to acquire a lady's name.
How can a whore transform herself to a queen, when she's been so shamed?"

- 840 “How do you dare call me such names?” said the queen of the Rhine.
 “That’s how you acted,” said Krimhild. “The man who first possessed you
 was Sifried, my own beloved lord. Next in line
 for your body was Gunter, and you had ceased to be a virgin by that time.
- 841 “Don’t tell me you didn’t know? What a disgusting trick
 on my brother! How could you do that if Sifried were simply your slave?
 So why do you complain when I call you a whore?”
 “This,” said Brunhild, “rest assured, I’ll certainly tell Gunter today.”
- 842 “Why should I care what you say?” said Krimhild. “The person betraying
 you is you. You’ve gone too far, claiming I
 was your servant. How could I not resent it? I’d live in pain
 forever. Why in the world should I protect your dirty secrets?”
- 843 Brunhild wept and wailed. Krimhild delayed no longer,
 she and all her people proceeded into the church,
 leaving Brunhild behind. Enormous hate got to work,
 and many sparkling eyes would be dim and dark, wet with sorrow.
- 844 As others sat and worshipped, or raised their voices in song,
 the service seemed to Brunhild endlessly too long,
 because her heart had gone dark, like the sadness filling her mind.
 Many worthy heroes would have to pay for her miserable time.
- 845 Brunhild led her ladies out of the church. She sighed
 and thought: “I ought to get Krimhild, that sharp-tongued woman,
 to tell me more about these things she says I’ve done.
 If Sifried whispered such secrets, then wretched Sifried has to die.”
- 846 Now Krimhild came out, in the midst of all her men. And Brunhild
 spoke to her: “Stay where you are, for just a minute.
 You called me a whore. Show me some proof of your words. And let
 me warn you, what you said I’m not likely soon to forget.”
- 847 Lady Krimhild answered: “You’d better let me walk on.
 For I can prove what I’ve said by this gold I wear on my hand.

My husband brought it, that night you did what I said you'd done."
 Never in all her life had Brunhild known such suffering as then.

- 848 She said: "Someone stole that noble ring and hid it
 away, all this long, long time. How much I've missed it!
 Now I see where it's been, now I know who stole it."
 Neither woman knew any longer, or cared, where this was headed.
- 849 But Krimhild answered: "I won't allow you to call me a thief.
 You might have thought of that, if you'd known what honor's made of.
 Let me show you this belt, worn around my waist.
 I've told you no lies. Sifried gave me this as a gift to keep."
- 850 She was wearing a belt woven of Nineveh silk,
 set all over with gems, and more than lovely to see.
 The moment Brunhild saw it, she could not keep from weeping.
 Gunter and every Rhineland man would have to be told this secret.
- 851 Brunhild said: "I require the king of the Rhine to come
 immediately. He needs to hear, and I want him to know
 these things from my mouth, just what his sister's lips have spoken.
 Krimhild has said, in public, that I'm her husband Sifried's whore."
- 852 Gunter came, with his men. He saw his beloved wife
 crying, and spoke to her most tenderly: "Tell me,
 dearest lady, who has caused this?" Brunhild replied:
 "I have the very best reasons for standing before you like this, weeping.
- 853 "Your sister wants to strip away every shred
 of honor I have. Hear my complaint: Krimhild has said,
 I swear, that I am her husband Sifried's whore." The king
 immediately said: "That would be a very wicked thing."
- 854 "She's wearing, now, the silken belt I lost, and my red-
 gold ring is on her finger. I'd wish I'd never been born,
 my king, and live eternally sorry, unless you restore
 my honor, free me from this utterly gross and ghastly slander."

- 855 Gunter answered: "Sifried must come to us, here
in my hall. The Netherlands here will either freely declare
and justify the truth of this, or else deny it."
And Lady Krimhild, too, was called to come to the hall, and appear
- 856 at once. When Sifried (knowing nothing of what was going
on) beheld the tear-stained faces, he quickly said:
"Why are these ladies weeping? I'm very eager to know.
And why has my lord the king requested that I be urgently sent for?"
- 857 Gunter replied: "This is deeply painful. My lady
Brunhild complains of a tale she swears was told today
by Krimhild—my sister, your wife. She says you've boasted of taking
possession of Brunhild's body before her husband had his way."
- 858 Mighty Sifried replied: "If that was what she said
I deny it completely, and Krimhild must tell me what she meant.
Here and now, in the presence of all your worthy men,
and my bold warriors, I declare that no such words were ever spoken."
- 859 Then Gunter the king said: "This declaration must be tested.
Repeat as a solemn oath that no such boast was made
and I will declare you free of all such lying suggestions."
Quickly, the Burgundy knights assembled around them, in a circular shape.
- 860 Mighty Sifried raised his hand, completing the oath.
Then Gunter spoke: "You are a man I've come to know
so well, I hereby declare your innocence. You've no
responsibility for what my sister accused you of saying."
- 861 But Sifried said: "I deeply regret my wife's false words,
and the pain and sorrow brought to Brunhild's heart. Truly,
I assure you I'm saddened that such a thing could happen." The rulers
of the Rhine and Netherlands looked at one another in that certain
- 862 way. "Men should make certain," heroic Sifried went on,
"that women's tongues are checked, kept from wagging loose."

You control your wife, and I will try to make sure
of mine. I'm thoroughly ashamed of such disgraceful behavior."

863 Many pretty ladies were separated from friends,
because of what had been said. Brunhild was so depressed
that many of Gunter's men gave her their sympathy.
And then Hagen from Troneg came to visit his sovereign lady.

864 Finding her in tears, he asked what might be wrong.
She told him the entire story. He promptly promised that he
would make sure Krimhild's husband paid for what he'd done.
He swore he'd never be happy until he himself had righted her wrong.

865 Ortwin and Gernot joined the conversation, and these
heroic knights began discussing Sifried's death.
Then Otta's noble son, young Giselher, questioned
the words he heard them saying, speaking (as always) frankly and free:

866 "Why are you worthy knights thinking of killing this man?
What has Sifried ever done to any one
of you to make you think he deserves to die? Women
are easily angered, and then they cry. We're all aware of that."

867 "Do you want this cuckoo to foul our nests?" said Hagen. "A good
warrior should know you never earn honor that way. He shouldn't
have boasted he made a whore of Brunhild, my dearest lady.
I'd rather die myself than let him go on living, saying

868 such things." Then the king himself spoke: "All that he's given
us is gold and honor. I think I'm able to forgive him
that. What's the point of turning love to hate?
He's always been loyal to us, and freely helped us, and never been paid."

869 Noble Ortwin from Metz answered: "Even his
great strength won't be enough to save him, after this.
Say the word, my lord, and I'll make sure he suffers."
So friendship was canceled in favor of a feud, an unhappy, fatal business.

- 870 But no one acted, except Hagen, who never stopped
 prodding Gunter, on every possible occasion,
 for Sifried's death could give the king good expectations
 for governing new lands. Gunter was silent, contemplating.
- 871 Everything stayed as it was. The knights practiced their games.
 And O, with Krimhild watching, everywhere they played,
 in front of the church or the hall, how many lances Sifried
 shattered! Gunter's warriors grew increasingly dismayed.
- 872 The king declared: "This zeal for murder must be put aside.
 He's brought us good fortune and nothing else but honor. No pride
 could justify opposing so overwhelming, so mighty
 a man in combat. Who would dare it? What if he learns what you long
- 873 to do?" "He won't," said Hagen. "You can stay as still
 as you please. Trust me in this. I'll work completely in secret,
 so Brunhild's tears can at last be paid for in blood. He
 has Hagen, now, as his eternal righteous enemy."
- 874 "But what can you do?" asked Gunter the king. Hagen answered
 at once: "Let me tell you how I have this planned.
 We order riders not known to anyone in this land
 to publicly declare a war against the men of the Rhine.
- 875 "Then you'll announce in front of all your guests that you
 and yours are forced to fight. As soon as he hears this news,
 Sifried will offer to help. That will cost him his life.
 I'll learn everything I need to know from Sifried's wife."
- 876 The king listened to evil Hagen, his trusted man.
 Burgundy's faithless knights set to work on their plan,
 worthy warriors preparing hidden betrayal and death.
 So just two women quarreled but many heroes would breathe their last.

ADVENTURE 15

HOW SIFRIED WAS BETRAYED

- 877 On the fourth morning thereafter, thirty-two men could be seen
riding up to the hall. And Gunter, the powerful king,
made known that war against the Rhine had been proclaimed.
This lie created the greatest sorrow any woman could name.
- 878 Gunter gave the riders permission to enter his hall,
where they declared themselves messengers who'd come
from Ludiger, defeated by Sifried's hand and once
held hostage in Wurms. The war had been fought, they said, but nothing was won.
- 879 Gunter greeted the men and invited them to be seated,
but one of them said: "Lord, allow us to stay on our feet
until you're given the message we've been ordered to bring you.
You need to know that many mothers' sons are still your enemies.
- 880 "Ludegast and also Ludiger were beaten
by you, and made to suffer cruelly for that defeat.
They're coming back for revenge, riding into your land."
The king pretended anger, hearing these words from the bold-voiced man.
- 881 The treacherous messengers were told to find their own lodging.
How could Sifried protect himself against betrayal,
he or anyone else, not knowing his friends were traitors?
Indeed, the men of the Rhine injured themselves with their crooked logic.
- 882 The king conferred in secret, together with his friends.
Hagen of Troneg never allowed their plotting to end.
Many among them were ready to drop the entire scheme,
But Hagen was so committed, that no one's objections ever bent him.
- 883 Finally, one day, Sifried found them in secret conference.
The Netherlands hero went to the king and asked: "What sense

does it make for the king and his knights to be so troubled? If men are threatening this land, you know I'm always willing to help."

884 Gunter answered: "I have heavy news to deal with.

Ludegast and his ally Ludiger have combined on a war. Their armies will soon be riding against the Rhine." The loyal hero replied: "Whatever your honor may require

885 "Sifried's hand is always prepared to undertake.

I'll deal with these attackers just as I did before, I'll tear their towns and castles apart, I'll devastate their land, they'll have to surrender. These are solemn pledges I make.

886 "You and your worthy knights can stay right here at home.

Let me ride against them with the men I brought. I'll show you what can be done, and I'll do it for you most eagerly. Your enemies will feel the weight of my hand, and this time they'll know

887 "they're beaten." "This is excellent news," Gunter replied,

acting as though he was truly much relieved. The liar bent his head in a deep, respectful bow, the king of traitors. Sifried informed him: "You needn't worry about a thing."

888 Burgundy readied its marching men (its noble knights

were not going). Sifried's people could see the preparations, and theirs too were completed, though the only riders would be Sifried's. Armor and weapons were all ready for war once again.

889 Sifried said to Sigemund: "My father, remain with our friends,

that will be better. We won't be gone very long, if the Lord grants us good fortune and lets us return to the Rhine. You ought to pleasure yourself right here. Enjoy the king's bountiful board."

890 The Rhinemen readied their flags, as if they meant to leave.

More than a few of Gunter's soldiers had no idea what these preparations were really meant for. They were busy watching the many mighty knights surrounding noble Sifried.

- 891 Their helmets and also their armor were tied on packhorses' backs,
powerful warriors engaged in equipping themselves for battle.
Then Hagen of Troneg went to pay his respects to Krimhild,
just as he might have done were Burgundy's soldiers riding with him.
- 892 "How glad I am," Krimhild said, "to have a husband
able to protect my dearest friends so wonderfully well.
This is how a man like Sifried always helps.
It does my heart good," the princess declared, "to know the good things he does.
- 893 "Hagen, my friend, let me ask you to remember this.
I've always been happy to serve you, never begrudged you a bit.
Please return the favor by helping my man. He
is not responsible for whatever I may have done to displease
- 894 "Brunhild. I'm sorry I did," the noble lady explained.
"Besides, he's beaten me for making such a mistake.
If I've been guilty of causing her pain, my body's paid
her back, thanks to my noble husband, resplendent warrior and man."
- 895 "You and she will make it up, one of these days.
Krimhild, beloved lady, tell me how I'm able
to be of service to you, helping your man. Lady,
I'd gladly do it, there's no one anywhere I'd rather serve."
- 896 "I'm not the least bit afraid," the noble woman replied,
"that anyone could take his life on the battlefield,
so long as Sifried isn't carried away by belief
in himself. My worthy hero will manage. But I worry about his pride."
- 897 "Lady," Hagen answered, "if you think that somehow he might
receive a wound, you need to let me know, so I
can watch where I ought to watch, and do what I can. Riding
or walking, believe me, I won't ever let him out of my sight."
- 898 "You are one of my family," she said, "as I am one
of yours. I entrust my loving husband to your loyal hands.

Do what you can to guard him, my well-belovèd man.”
 And then she did something it would have been better to leave undone.

899 She said: “My man is courageous, and more than strong enough.
 For when he killed the dragon, high on the mountain side,
 he bathed himself in its blood and made his skin so tough
 that forever after no weapon could hurt him, all blades and points turn aside.

900 “But even so I worry, whenever he’s off to war,
 with heroic warriors hurling spears from all directions,
 that I could lose my well belovèd man. O Lord,
 how often I’m terrified that Sifried will not return from war.

901 “Knowing your loyal heart, my dearest friend, sure
 you’ll never betray me, but keep my secrets safe, you’re
 the only one I’ll tell just how my man can be hurt.
 I speak only to you, and only in absolute confidence.

902 “When Sifried struck the dragon and its boiling blood came splashing
 out, my bold heroic man bathed in that flood,
 but a single shiny lime leaf drifted down on his back.
 That spot is where he’d be hurt, the only place the blood didn’t touch.”

903 Then Hagen of Troneg spoke: “Mark a little cross
 on his clothes, something to guide me. That way I’ll stay as close
 as I can, and protect him, knowing where it’s always best
 to be.” She meant Sifried well, but what she bought was his death.

904 Krimhild said: “I’ll secretly sew a silken mark
 on the back of his clothes. And then, heroic Hagen, your hand
 can always be ready, in battle, to help protect my man
 in the midst of his enemies, whenever the fiercest fighting starts.”

905 “And that’s what I’ll do,” said Hagen, “my well belovèd lady.”
 This was precisely the moment, hoping to keep him safe,
 when Krimhild guaranteed her husband’s fatal betrayal.
 Hagen made his farewells and left her. His heart was light and gay.

- 906 Those who served King Gunter were pleased by his morning's work.
 No noble knight has ever committed himself to worse,
 more foul, and less deserved betrayal than Hagen did,
 that day, when Krimhild, Sifried's queen, put her trust in his word.
- 907 The following morning a happy Sifried went riding off,
 followed by a thousand of his eager fighting men.
 It seemed to him his friends' deep sorrow would soon be ended.
 Just behind him, and near, rode Hagen, observing the back of his clothes.
- 908 As soon as he saw the cross, he secretly sent a pair
 of his men to Wurms, bringing Gunter different news.
 Ludiger would not be invading. Instead of renewing
 war, he'd turned around and left. Peace would be good to hear.
- 909 But Sifried was not in the mood to turn and ride right back,
 unable to earn the pleasure of stopping his friends' disaster!
 Gunter's men had trouble getting him turned around.
 He rode straight to the king, who was careful to thank him most profoundly:
- 910 "My good friend Sifried, may God forever smile on you.
 How wonderful it was, seeing how willingly
 you sought to help us. I'll always serve you, as I ought to do.
 You are my friend of friends, always to be trusted eternally.
- 911 "Now that we've been freed of the threat of war, I plan
 to hunt for boars and bears in the Wasken forest, where
 I've ridden after game many times before."
 This was Hagen's idea, that deeply deceitful, traitorous man.
- 912 "All my guests have been invited. I need to know
 which of them will be riding with me, coming to hunt,
 if they want to hunt. Those who aren't ready to go,
 who'd rather be here with the ladies, are welcome to stay. Would you like to go?"
- 913 Lord Sifried replied, with a deeply formal bow: "If the king
 intends to hunt, of course I plan to join him. Bring me

a beater—one is all I need—and a dog with a nose.
Wherever there's forest hunting, you know that Sifried always goes.”

914 “One beater is all you need?” the king immediately asked.
“I'll give you four, if you like, men who truly know
the forest, can always track wherever the good game goes,
and will not lead you astray when you come to pitch your hunting camp.”

915 Pleased to be going, confident Sifried rode to his wife.
Hagen was careful to tell the king exactly how
he meant to kill the best and worthiest knight alive.
No man should ever think so faithlessly, not then, not now.

ADVENTURE 16

HOW SIFRIED WAS KILLED

916 Usually bold, now brazen, Gunter and Hagen set
their treacherous trap, pretending a hunting trip to the woods.
Their knife-sharp spears were meant for boars and bears, they said,
and great-horned forest oxen. Clearly, these were courageous men!

917 Noble Sifried rode with them. Their saddlebags
were filled with everything they needed, all sorts of supplies.
Later, along a fresh-flowing brook, Sifried would die.
But all that happened began with Brunhild, noble Gunter's wife.

918 The hero said farewell to Krimhild, before he left.
His elegant hunting clothes were packed, and those who were riding
with him were ready. They'd start by crossing the mighty Rhine.
For the rest of her life, Krimhild would never feel such sorrow again.

919 He kissed his loving wife on the lips. “God grant,” he declared,
“that you and I, my lady, will find each other safe

and sound, when I see you again. Let me ask that you stay
with your loving family and friends, for as long as your husband can't be here."

920 Reminding herself of the secret she'd told to Hagen (although
she didn't dare admit it), suddenly the noble
queen began to bewail the day she'd ever been born.
Tears were falling from Krimhild's eyes in a sweeping, miserable storm.

921 And then she said: "Give up this hunting trip, stay here.
I dreamt a terrible dream. You were being hunted
by a pair of savage boars. Flowers were turning red.
So I have good reasons, these are not a weak-minded woman's tears.

922 "I'm afraid that someone might be plotting, angry—who knows?—
because he feels offended, someone who hates us and chose
the forest as a field for revenge. Believe me, beloved lord,
listen to my advice, I speak these words with a truthful tongue."

923 He said: "My dearest wife, I won't be gone for long.
Here in Burgundy, who could I find who hates me? Strong
and pleasant ties connect me to all your family—and should,
considering how I've helped them, always done whatever I could."

924 "No, no, dearest Sifried, I fear you go to your death.
In a horrible dream I dreamt last night, two tall cliffs
fell on top of you. And I never saw you again.
Please don't leave me, after hearing what sadness all of this is."

925 He wrapped his arms around his wonderful wife, pressed
kiss after loving kiss against her beautiful lips,
then said a rapid farewell and not much later was gone.
Alas, I have to tell you she never saw him alive again.

926 In search of recreation, the hunters rode until
they reached a deep, dense wood. Many of Burgundy's bravest
remained with Giselper and Gernot, who chose to stay
at home rather than follow Gunter and Hagen on the path they'd made.

- 927 Lines of heavily loaded horses were first to cross
the Rhine, bearing beaters and hunting supplies, meat
and fish, bread and wine, and other provisions important
to every man who wears a crown and thinks of his kingly needs.
- 928 They ordered a campsite struck, these bold, courageous hunters,
in the wildest part of the great green wood, so they'd be ready
to hunt, knowing the savage boars would burst from under
trees. Then Gunter learned for sure that Sifried too had come
- 929 to the camp. Beaters were hidden in hunting blinds, placed
around the forest. Then mighty Sifried spoke, brave
and strong as any man alive: "Which of you
courageous knights will decide where we should stand and hunt our game?"
- 930 Then Hagen said: "I think we ought to separate
before the hunting starts. That will let us make
plainer comparisons, give us, my friends, a clear
account of who are the better huntsmen among those gathered here.
- 931 "Each of us will have his share of hounds and beaters,
and all of us can hunt in any direction we please.
Then those who hunt the best, can earn the honor they've
deserved." It wasn't long before the hunters went their ways.
- 932 Lord Sifried declared: "I can do without a pack
of dogs, just one good hunting hound, so long as he's had
some recent running in the forest and the scent of game is fresh
in his nose. That's all I need," he said, sure he knew what was best.
- 933 An experienced servant chose him a fine bloodhound, then
quickly conducted all the noble hunters to where
they'd find the animals they sought. Pursued to their lairs,
every single beast was killed (as huntsmen still do, when
- 934 they know what they're doing). Whatever his excellent dog flushed
from hiding, Sifried chased and quickly killed, rushing

so fast on his good strong horse that nothing could escape.
Sifried's expert hunting won him universal praise.

- 935 Indeed, whatever he did Sifried was always the best.
He was the first of the hunters to kill a beast, a strong
half-grown boar he slew with a stroke. And then he found
himself pursuing a snarling mountain lion, led by his hound,
- 936 who ran behind the prey, keeping his nose to the ground.
The lion was killed by an arrow, propelled by Sifried's bow,
so sharp a point that the beast took three more steps and dropped.
Sifried's fellow hunters loudly applauded so fine a shot.
- 937 Right after that he killed a bison, and then an elk,
then four enormous oxen, and then an antlered stag.
His horse was so fast and fearless that beastly speed did not help.
No deer could move that quickly, nor anything else that ran on legs.
- 938 The bloodhound caught the scent of a massive boar. The beast
began to flee, but the hero, greatest hunter of his day,
swiftly placed himself directly in the boar's way.
The fiercely angry beast swung around and charged at Sifried.
- 939 Krimhild's husband killed the boar with a single swing
of his sword. No other hunter could make it so simple a thing.
Once the boar was dead, they called the bloodhound back.
Burgundy's hunters could see what incredible game Sifried had bagged.
- 940 And they said to the hero: "Perhaps, if we ask politely, Lord Sifried,
you'll leave some beasts alive for the rest of us to hunt?"
In less than a single day, the woods and hills will be empty."
Sifried, mighty and brave, smiled at their cheerful, pleasant fun.
- 941 Then everyone heard the loudest baying and bawling sounds,
men and dogs making such noise that the hills around,
and the forest as well, echoed their roaring cries. Huntsmen
had suddenly unleashed no less than twenty-four packs of hounds.

- 942 Many fresh-killed beasts were slaughtered by knowing hands.
Some among the Rhineland men had once been thinking
of winning the hunting prize, but knew that wouldn't happen,
as soon as they'd seen the mighty Sifried come riding into camp.
- 943 Hunting was over and done, and that was the end of that.
But those who came to the waiting fires carried back
many excellent hides, and skins, and plenty of meat.
And O were men busily cooking. Soon there'd be lots to eat!
- 944 Then Gunter ordered all the hunters to be informed
that he was hungry and wished to eat. A host of horns
were sounded all together, and so the hunters were told
their noble king was back in camp, and that was where they should be.
- 945 Said one of Sifried's servants: "The sound of those horns, my lord,
should make us understand it's time to return to camp.
And I will answer that summons." Then he and the other servants
blew a series of calls on the horns they carried, to inform their comrades.
- 946 Sifried said: "We ourselves must leave the forest!"
He rode hurriedly along. They did their best
to follow. But all their noise and bustle disturbed a ferocious
bear, and the mighty hero shouted out to those behind him:
- 947 "I smell a little fun for us, my friends. Unleash
the hound. I see an enormous bear in there, who needs
to come to camp with us. Unless he runs faster
than I think he can, he'll ride with us, but on a horse's back."
- 948 The dog was set free, and the bear began to run, trying
to keep the galloping horse and Krimhild's bold man from riding
him down. The ground suddenly sloped away, and the horse
foundered. The bear expected to make his escape, as a matter of course.
- 949 But the proud rider quickly jumped from his saddle, and began
to chase the beast on foot. The bear was careless, the man

was almost gone from his mind. A minute, and Sifried caught it,
and without a single wound from the fight, had it bound up taut.

950 It could not scratch the warrior, could not bite him. He crammed
the bear behind his saddle, tied it, then leaped onto
his horse. To amuse himself, he rode straight into camp,
the splendid hero, his spirits high, delighted with what he'd done.

951 What a noble sight he was, riding there!
His spear was enormously long and shining, strong as a tree.
His sword was a perfect weapon, hanging down to his spurs,
his lordly hunting horn was hammered gold, and good to see.

952 His costly hunting clothes were the best that ever were seen.
His coat was woven of pure black silk, and he wore it well,
along with a sable hat fit for the king you could tell
he was. And his gorgeous quiver, embroidered all over, was sewn by a queen!

953 The skin of a panther covered his quiver, because its fine
scent attracted game. And the huge bow he used
could not be bent by hand, except by him. Winding it
slowly back with a winch was all that anyone else could do.

954 His jacket was made of otter skin. The fur had been dyed
from top to bottom with patches of many different hues,
and up and down the shining coat, along both sides,
the master huntsman wore buckles of gold, attached to the hide.

955 And he also carried Balmung, his handsome magic blade,
a shining weapon so keen it cut right through every
helmet it fell on, its edge so razor sharp it never
needed sharpening. This royal rider was pleased with the hunt he'd made!

956 Because I must not omit a single part of this tale,
I'll tell you his noble quiver carried the straightest arrows,
with golden heads, the bare points gleaming. Impaled
by blades like these, lives could not endure, were quickly cut short.

- 957 And so the mighty hunter rode without a care.
 Gunter's men could see him coming into camp.
 They hurried out to greet him, and took the reins in their hands.
 He jumped from the saddle, and they saw riding behind him a living bear.
- 958 And as Sifried dismounted he pulled away the ropes
 tying its feet and mouth. The bear quickly discovered
 many large hounds were there, and decided forests were
 a better place to be, but understood he could not go.
- 959 The men's great noise drove the bear into the kitchen.
 O how the cooking fellows ran from their seats by the fire!
 Pots and kettles fell over, scattering burning sticks.
 O the good food they found covered in ashes and glowing cinders!
- 960 Then Gunter quickly leaped from his chair, as did his men.
 The bear was growing angry, and so the king had packs
 of dogs unleashed. How happy a day this might have been
 had morning's beginning carried over to such a happy end.
- 961 Braver knights came chasing the bear with bows, with staffs,
 not wanting to wait for the beast to leave, but dogs were dashing
 everywhere and none of them could safely take
 a shot. All the hills around rang with the noise they made.
- 962 With dogs yapping behind him, now, the bear began to run
 to the wood, and only Krimhild's fleet-footed man could keep up.
 He caught the bear, killed him with a swing of his sword, and once
 it was dead they brought the beast back to the fire, and prepared him for eating.
- 963 Those who had watched Sifried in action found him impressive.
 Then the noble hunters were told to come to their tables,
 set in a beautiful meadow. And O the food they were able
 to eat, these happy hungry men, fresh meat cooked at its best!
- 964 Certainly, servants to bring them wine were missing, but aside
 from that no warrior heroes were ever better served.

These were truly noble men: treacherous pride
was perhaps the only stain of dishonor their reputation deserves.

- 965 Lord Sifried spoke: “It’s hard for me to understand,
seeing our kitchen men supply us so well, why hands
employed for beating game couldn’t be bothered pouring
us our wine. Hunters ought to be served as well as warriors.
- 966 “Kings are accustomed to service, and royal hunters are kings.”
Gunter looked up from his table, and answered with a lying tongue:
“Whatever’s lacking now, next time we’ll surely bring.
Hagen’s the man to blame: he’ll dry us up, before too long.”
- 967 Hagen of Troneg spoke: “My dearly beloved lord,
I thought we were hunting, today, in another part of the forest,
and so I had the wine sent there, a mistaken order.
We may not drink tonight— but never again!” And Hagen swore it.
- 968 Lord Sifried spoke: “Words do very little for my thirst.
Seven packhorse loads of meat and good red wine
were supposed to be my dinner. If that can’t be done, this time
or ever, none of us should ever have bothered crossing the Rhine.”
- 969 Hagen of Troneg spoke: “Let me inform each
of you thirsty knights that I know a nearby fresh-running stream.
Anger won’t help. But good cold water’s in easy reach.”
Many worthy warriors would pay for Hagen’s treacherous speech.
- 970 Mighty Sifried was tortured by dreadful thirst. He was eager
to see their dinner done and all the tables cleared.
He planned to head for a brook near the base of the mountain.
But Hagen’s disloyal advice suggested a very different fountain.
- 971 They loaded into carts the many animals
Sifried’s hands had slaughtered, and brought them back to Wurms.
Whoever saw them knew the honor Sifried deserved.
But the trust he’d placed in Hagen was never even remotely returned.

- 972 The stream Hagen suggested ran beneath a linden tree, and Hagen said: “The legendary speed of Krimhild’s husband is often reported. It’s hard to believe. So those who want to run, now’s the chance to see if it’s real!”
- 973 Courageous Sifried, hero from Netherlands, replied: “It won’t be hard to see, for anyone deciding to run along from here to the brook. It’s as good as done. Once we’re there, you’ll know for yourselves which of us has won.”
- 974 “All right, let’s have a race,” warrior Hagen answered. Sifried spoke again: “And if you win, I swear I’ll lie at your feet in the grass.” These words were sweet to the ear of noble Gunter, king and ruler over Burgundy land.
- 975 Sifried spoke again: “I’ll venture even more. I’ll carry my clothing with me, and my shield, and also my spear, I’ll even carry every bit of my hunting gear.” He quickly tied on his quiver, and added Balmung, his magic sword.
- 976 They stripped themselves down, Hagen and Sifried, until they both were standing, each one wearing only his good white shirt. Like a pair of leaping panthers they ran over grass and dirt—and there was Sifried at the brook, he’d clearly indeed reached it first.
- 977 Whatever he did was always better than anyone else. He untied his sword, and lay his quiver down in the grass. He rested his mighty sword against a linden branch. He stood and waited, Gunter’s strong and noble, kingly guest.
- 978 Sifried’s character was always immensely good. He carefully set his shield right at the edge of the brook. Although his thirst was great, he would not let himself drink before the king, and that was an in-bred courtesy he could not
- 979 afford. The water was cool, running clear and fresh. Gunter came and kneeled at the bank, bending to drink,

then stood aside, as Sifried might have done himself,
eagerly and politely, if he'd been given the slightest chance.

980 His courtesy betrayed him. Hagen hurled away
Sifried's bow and sword, when Sifried's back was turned.
Quickly, Hagen snatched his own spear, looked at the shirt,
and immediately saw the mark Krimhild had carefully sewn in place.

981 And while Sifried was drinking deep, bending over
the water, Hagen's spear ran him through, aimed
at the cross. Heart's blood spurted, Hagen's clothes were stained.
No hero ever committed a more atrocious, evil crime.

982 Hagen's spear had reached the heart, and there it stayed.
Hagen had never run so fast as he did that day,
more terrified than ever before in all his life.
When noble Sifried felt the fatal thrust of that fearsome knife,

983 he leaped back from the brook, mad with savage rage.
He could see the sharp-edged blade protruding through his heart,
and tried to find his bow or his sword, neither placed,
now, where he'd left them, thanks to Hagen, who'd already discarded

984 them both. Without a sword, badly wounded Sifried
had nothing more than his shield. He picked it up from the ground
and ran after the fleeing traitor. Hagen found,
King Gunter's man, that no matter how fearfully fast he fled, no speed

985 was enough. Sifried struck fiercely enough to kill,
smashing at Hagen with his shield so hard that its jewels spilled
on the grass, and the shield shattered to bits. He was eager to finish
the job, the bleeding, noble guest, complete his final revenge.

986 He'd managed to strike Hagen with tremendous force. The blow
echoed across the forest. If he'd had his sword, Hagen
would have been as good as dead. A man as bold
as Sifried had to be overwhelmed with rage—and he was.

- 987 But the color had bled from his face. He could not stand much longer.
All the strength in his body had ebbed away. Strong
signs of death, its pallor, its weakness, began to appear.
He would soon be mourned by many beautiful women everywhere.
- 988 Then Krimhild's husband fell among the flowers. The Burgundy
men saw blood pouring out of his wound. He burst
(no one had ever had more reason) into bitter curses
against the men who'd brought him death by their false-mouthed treachery.
- 989 These were Sifried's words: "Ah, disgusting cowards,
what did I ever do to deserve so awful a death?
I was always loyal, I gave you success and wealth.
My dying wish for you and your kinsmen is an end equally foul.
- 990 "You've shamed the people born to the Rhine, from this day forth.
They're stained by what you've done. I gave you affection, concern.
You've paid me back with an angry death. A fine return
for my love! This dark disgrace will drive you out of the knightly world."
- 991 Knights came running to murdered Sifried, to where he lay
on the ground. For many of them this was a miserable day.
His death would be mourned by those who'd truly deserved his trust.
Noble Sifried had earned their faith, served as a good knight must.
- 992 Gunter, Burgundy's king, mourned the hero's death.
Sifried said: "Don't bother with that, save your breath.
It makes no sense to be crying for something you so much desired.
You've earned your share of shame, Gunter, now hold your peace, be quiet."
- 993 Then savage Hagen spoke: "Why are you others complaining?
Now we're finished with sorrow, we're done with grief. Just how
many men will dare oppose us, try to stop us, now?
Me, I'm glad his Mightiness will not be able to afflict us again."
- 994 "Boasting is easy enough," Sifried said. "Had I
been able to see your murderous heart, how hard would it be

to protect myself? My greatest sorrow is for my wife.
Surely, Lady Krimhild will weep streams of tears for me.

995 “If only God had kept me from giving her a son
who from now till the end of time will hear men say he comes
from a family guilty of murdering one of its very own.
That,” said Sifried, “that I would deeply mourn, if only I could.”

996 And then, speaking in bitter sorrow and pain, he went on:
“O noble king, if you’re to be faithful to anyone
here on this earth, I hope there’s mercy enough in your heart
to offer your protection to your sister, my beloved wife.

997 “Let her live to enjoy the pleasure it ought to be,
born your sister. In the name of royal virtue, take care
of her. My father and all my men will be waiting for me
in vain. No husband brought his wife more pain, none anywhere.”

998 The flowers all around him were soaked in blood. Death
took him in its ruthless grip, and he fought it, but not for long,
for death’s cold weapons are far too sharp. He had no breath
to speak with, the bravest hero, he who’d been so proud and strong.

999 Those who were watching could see the hero had died. They laid
him softly on a shining shield of the brightest, reddest gold,
discussing with each other what kind of tale could be told
to hide Hagen’s guilt, to conceal Hagen’s bold betrayal.

1000 Many among them said: “We’ve done an evil deed.
It must be kept a secret, no one here must speak
except to explain that Krimhild’s husband went hunting by
himself, and bandits must have found him, and he fought with them, and died.”

1001 Hagen of Troneg spoke: “I’ll bring him back to Wurms.
It makes no difference to me what anyone knows, or doesn’t.
She caused such pain and sorrow for Brunhild, queen of our land,
that Krimhild can cry as much as she likes, weeping for this dead man.”

ADVENTURE 17

HOW KRIMHILD MOURNED HER HUSBAND, AND
HOW HE WAS BURIED

- 1002 They waited to cross the Rhine until the darkness of night.
No hunt had ever ended in such complete disaster.
The children of kings wept for the game they'd hunted after,
and many other warriors died for the death of that one knight.
- 1003 Now you'll have to hear a tale of arrogance
and horrible revenge. Sifried was carried back
to Wurms, and then, on Hagen's orders, his corpse was dropped
in front of Lady Krimhild's rooms. They left the body propped
- 1004 against the door, so she would have to find it, bright
and early next morning, when she left for matin prayers, a rite
she never missed, attending every single day
of her life. Matin bells were rung in the morning, in the usual way,
- 1005 and beautiful Lady Krimhild awoke and went to rouse
the many women who served her. One of the maids in her house
was ordered to bring her mistress a candle, and also her clothes.
Another servant, outside the door, stumbled onto the corpse.
- 1006 He could see the dead man bloody, see how his garments were soaked,
but could not tell, in the morning light, just who it was.
He carried in his candle, and brought the grisly news
to Lady Krimhild, knowing she would be shocked, but not how much.
- 1007 Mistress and maids were ready to leave for church. He said:
"You must not leave, wait, stay where you are. A knight
is lying outside the room, against the door, he's dead."
Krimhild screamed, almost sure she knew just who was meant.

- 1008 She could not know for certain whose body the servant had found,
but she thought of Hagen's questions, when he had said he was bound
and sworn to protect her husband. And then she understood grief.
Sifried's death would take away all the joy in her life.
- 1009 She sank to the ground, never having said a word.
Beautiful and joyless, she lay there, silent, still.
But once she came to her senses, her sorrow was pitiful
to see, her helpless cries were ghastly, horrible to hear.
- 1010 Her servants said: "Suppose it's only one of the guests."
Sorrow was driving blood out of her heart and through
her lips. She said: "It's Sifried, the man of all men I love best.
Brunhild wanted him dead, and this is a deed Hagen would do."
- 1011 She had them bring her to where the body lay. Her lovely
white hand quickly lifted up his head. Covered
with blood as he was, she knew him at once. Broken and helpless,
now, he had been the glorious hero she'd married and always loved.
- 1012 Always open-handed to others, the good queen grieved
for herself: "O Lord, the pain! No sword cut through your shield
to kill you, you're lying here a murdered man. Once
I know whose work this was, I swear his life will be over and done."
- 1013 The whole household wailed and wept along with their lady,
so dearly beloved. Sorrow was heavy on their hearts, for their brave
and noble lord was gone, and he'd been dear to them.
Hagen had managed well, Brunhild's insult was fully revenged.
- 1014 The sorrow-stricken lady said: "Go and quickly
waken Sifried's men. And Sigemund must at once
be told this bitter grief of mine, so he can assist me
in mourning the death of Sifried, his noble, royal, courageous son."
- 1015 A servant ran to where the men were sleeping, warriors
brought by Sifried from the land of the Nibelungen. Before

he'd finished his miserable tale, sorrow had gripped them all.
They found it hard to believe, until they heard the women wailing.

- 1016 And then he hurried to where King Sigemund was lying.
Sigemund was not asleep. Perhaps his heart had been telling
him what was about to happen, perhaps he felt
he'd never see his beloved son again, alive and well.
- 1017 "Wake up, Sigemund my lord. Lady Krimhild has sent me
to you. Something very bad has happened, the worst,
most terrible grief her heart will ever know. Please
come and help her mourn, for your heart too will soon be bursting."
- 1018 Sigemund rose from his bed. "Tell me, just what grief
has, as you say, come to beautiful Krimhild?" Weeping,
the messenger answered: "I cannot keep the truth from you.
Sifried the brave, the mighty has been killed, we do not know by whom."
- 1019 Lord Sigemund replied: "For my sake, please, you shouldn't
play these games, tell these wicked tales. You couldn't
bring more horrible news, pretending Sifried's been killed.
If this were true, I'd mourn forever. And if it is, I will."
- 1020 "If you choose not to believe what you've heard me say, go
for yourself and listen to Krimhild, and all of those who serve her,
mourning the death of Sifried their lord." The old lord showed
the deepest pain and sorrow, he cried out loud, receiving this blow.
- 1021 He and a hundred of his men sprang from their beds, their hands
took up their long, sharp spears, and then, swiftly, they ran
to where they heard the wailing voices. And they arrived
just as a thousand of Sifried's men came running to their dead lord's wife.
- 1022 Hearing the women weeping, crying so hard, some
among them wondered if better clothing should have been worn.
The grief wrenching their souls had been too strong, they were torn
by too much sorrow, the weight of sadness was hard on minds and hearts.

- 1023 King Sigemund also arrived at Krimhild's rooms. He said:
 "This was a cursèd journey, coming here to this land.
 Who among our great good friends, what Rhineland man,
 murdered my only son, your husband? Why is Sifried dead?"
- 1024 "O if only I knew," declared the noble princess,
 "I'd hate him with my heart and soul and hand. I'd hit him
 such a terrible blow that simply hearing my name
 would make his friends shudder and weep, I'd hunt him into his grave."
- 1025 Noble Sigemund embraced his son's dead body. The sound
 of their friends' cries of mourning grew tremendously loud,
 echoing harsh and stark across the hall and palace
 and even over all of Wurms, now a hostile town.
- 1026 No one could possibly comfort Sifried's wife. They stripped
 the blood-stained clothing off the handsome body. They bathed
 the deadly wounds, and lifted the corpse onto the litter.
 The hero's friends screamed still louder, mourning in frenzied ways.
- 1027 The thousand warriors he'd brought from Nibelungen land
 declared: "We must be ready and willing to raise our hands
 in revenge. Whoever killed him is here, and must be found."
 They hurried to fetch their shields and weapons, and buckled their armor on.
- 1028 Eleven hundred heroes fully prepared to fight
 came surging out to the courtyard. Sifried's father stood
 as their leader, eager (no one ought to be surprised)
 for revenge against whoever had killed his son—if only he could.
- 1029 But no one could say who they ought to attack. Their only
 targets were Gunter and the other men who were known to ride
 on the hunt with mighty Sifried, and who were there when he died.
 Krimhild could see the men milling about and knew they wanted to fight.
- 1030 However profound her pain, however strong her grief,
 she shrank from seeing her brothers' men slaughter Sifried's

Nibelungen knights, and made up her mind to block them.
And so she warned them, as loving friend to friends, trying to stop them.

1031 She spoke to the sorrowing king: “Noble Sigemund, my lord,
what is it you want to begin? This is a sad mistake.
Gunter, the Rhineland king, has many, many warriors.
You and every one of your men would die, attacking these hordes.”

1032 Their helmets were fastened on, the men were hungry for a fight.
The noble queen first asked, and then demanded, that there be
an end to foolishness from such experienced knights.
They would not listen, and Krimhild suffered the keenest misery.

1033 She spoke: “Sigemund my lord, let this go,
we surely can do this better. I am completely determined
to have my revenge. Once I’m certain, once I know
for sure just who he is, he’ll meet a properly shameful end.

1034 “Right now, we can’t defeat this number of confident Rhineland
warriors. So my advice, for now, is to bide our time.
For every one of you there are thirty or more of them.
For now, let it be God who gives them, from Him, what they deserve.

1035 “Stay here, remain with me, share my grief. And heroic
knights, when daylight comes, help me lay my beloved
husband down in his grave.” Eleven hundred heroes
replied as one: “This, my lady, this is what will be done.”

1036 No one could ever describe the extraordinary weeping
and wailing they made, knights and ladies both, mournful
cries resounding all across the town of Wurms.
Noble citizens came running, and they too loudly mourned,

1037 along with their guests, for they were pained by Sifried’s death.
They’d never heard the least evil about the best
of heroes, and knew nothing at all of how he had died.
Weeping alongside Krimhild’s women were many citizens’ wives.

- 1038 Hurriedly, goldsmiths were set to work, making a coffin
of silver and gold, strong as well as large, bound
around by broad straps of hammered steel. Crowded
streets were filled with saddened people, weeping loud and often.
- 1039 They could see the night was over, daylight had come. Sifried's
royal widow commanded the hero's body, her deeply
belovèd man, be carried to church, and through the streets
of the town they went, followed by Sifried's friends, all of them weeping.
- 1040 Approaching the church, they heard funeral bells and solemn
songs and chanting inside. They stood outside and were joined
by Gunter, the king, followed by many of his fighting men,
and savage Hagen, too, had come to attend the holy service.
- 1041 Gunter spoke: "Alas, dear sister, for all your sorrow
and pain. If only this sad disaster had never happened.
But we will always mourn your Sifried's death." "Don't bother,"
replied the grief-stricken woman, "I'm well aware this doesn't matter
- 1042 "to you. For if it had, Sifried would never have died.
Let me tell you, brother, I wasn't on your mind
when my dear man was taken from me forever. I wish
to God," said Krimhild, "you'd chosen me, not him, as the one to kill."
- 1043 They strongly denied it, over and over. Krimhild declared:
"If none of you are guilty, allow us to see if you're lying.
Here in front of these people, stand in front of his bier.
It won't take long for the truth to make itself known. Go stand up there!"
- 1044 These are truly miraculous things. How often we've seen
that when a murderer stands by the corpse of the man he's killed
(it's been proven time and again) the dead man's wounds will bleed.
And as soon as Hagen stood by the bier, Sifried's wounds were filled
- 1045 with blood. He bled exactly the way he did when he died.
The sounds of mourning doubled, grew greater than ever before.

King Gunter declared: "Let me repeat, no one has lied!
Sifried was killed by bandits, it's nothing Hagen's responsible for!"

1046 "Ah, I know these bandits," said Krimhild, "they're very well known.
May God allow my husband's friends their revenge. Hagen
and Gunter, it's you who did this, you two and you alone."
Sifried's warriors stirred: if fighting began, no one would stop them.

1047 But Krimhild said: "For now, I need to be patient." And then
a pair who hadn't seen the body came forward, her brothers
Giselher the young and Gernot. They and other
honest mourners truly regretted noble Sifried's death,

1048 weeping heavily and long for Krimhild's man.
A mass was about to be sung, and they entered the church, women
and men and children. There were some who didn't care what had happened,
but all the people shed tears together, weeping for Sifried, then.

1049 Gernot and Giselher both spoke: "Our sister, believe us,
death must always come. Try to soften your grief.
To the day we die, we'll do whatever we can to help."
But no one in all the world could offer consolation to Krimhild.

1050 Just about noon, Sifried's coffin was ready. They raised him
off the bier and set him down inside. But his wife
was still not ready to have him laid in the ground. The day,
and with it everyone's pain and sorrow, stretched on and on and on.

1051 Costly silken cloth was wound around the body.
Everyone was weeping, no one's eyes were dry.
Lady Otta, Krimhild's mother, and all her household,
mourned the loss of such a wonderful warrior, brave and bold.

1052 When people heard the mass for the dead, sung inside
the church, and saw the body set in the coffin, a crowd

assembled, bringing salvation offerings* from far and wide.
 There were enemies among them, but friends of whom he could be proud.

- 1053 Miserable Krimhild spoke to the stewards in charge of her gold:
 “Those who suffer along with me, ought to discover
 my love. Let them be given gifts to prove that I know.
 For the sake of Sifried’s soul let all such mourners share his treasure.”
- 1054 Every child who was not too young to understand
 had to attend the offering. A hundred masses were chanted
 that day, before he was buried (there may well have been more).
 Sifried’s faithful friends were there in numbers too great to be counted.
- 1055 When every mass had been sung the crowds departed. Then Lady
 Krimhild said: “Please don’t leave me alone tonight,
 as I stay here, watching over this hero’s body.
 All my happiness is here in this coffin, lying inside it.
- 1056 “I’ll let it stay where it is three days and also three nights,
 so I will have this final joy from my beloved
 man. Who knows if God will take me to join him on high?
 That would be a fitting end for Krimhild as well as her love.”
- 1057 The citizens of Wurms went quietly off to their beds.
 Krimhild asked that priests and nuns remain, as well
 as those of her own household, joining her vigil for the dead.
 Their nights were long and hard, the days they endured were equally bad.
- 1058 Many neither ate nor drank for three whole days.
 Those who asked for food were assured they’d eat and drink
 as much as they liked, later, at noble Sigemund’s table.
 His Nibelung men suffered many sharp and painful stings.
- 1059 The burden fell, as the story goes, through all that time,
 mostly on those who knew the holy songs. With no

* Offerings designed to ensure that the dead person’s soul would be accepted in heaven

interruption, their voices stayed at work. But the hours brought in costly offerings! Many poor men turned rich in a single night.

- 1060 Those among the poor who did not want these gifts were given gold by the stewards (Sifried's as well as Krimhild's). The hero having lost his life on earth, these men were giving thousands of marks for the sake of his eternal existence.
- 1061 Krimhild gave the rents she'd earned all over the land, donating part to the churches and part to the sick of good standing. The poor were given silver and well-sewn clothes that were warm. It was easy enough to see how much Krimhild had loved her man.
- 1062 When mass was said, on the third morning, not long after noon, both the church and the square outside it were packed with mourners, many weeping. Now that Sifried was dead, he'd earned the warm friendship of those who'd never really loved him before.
- 1063 Through the whole four days, we've heard it said, the sum of thirty thousand marks, or even more, was given to the poor, to ensure Sifried's soul its place in heaven. Nothing else was left of his life and all the battles he'd won.
- 1064 And when the holy service and also the singing were done, many of those who'd listened were gripped by a terrible grief. Sifried's coffin was carried off toward the grave. People sorry to lose him went on mourning, their weeping never ceased.
- 1065 Those who went with the corpse shrieked as they walked along. No one's face bore a smile, neither man nor woman. And as he was buried, people sang, and a service was read. What wonderful priests attended, as Sifried was sent to join the dead.
- 1066 Finally, Sifried's wife made herself come to the grave, her faithful heart shaking with such enormous grief that over and over she needed reviving, with water from a spring. She was overcome with despair, sorrow almost beyond belief.

- 1067 How she survived, no one watching could have told.
 Most of the women who served her were sobbing. Then Lady Krimhild
 spoke: "You men who served with Sifried, I must impose
 on your loyalty to him and ask for myself one final gift.
- 1068 "Let me temper my heavy sorrow with a sprinkling of love,
 let me see my beloved man just one more time."
 She begged in such unending distress, so hard and long,
 that at last they had to open up the noble coffin, and show him.
- 1069 She was led to the casket and given one final desperate chance
 to lift his handsome head with her delicate white hand.
 And even though he was dead, she kissed her noble man.
 Her brilliant eyes, from her sorrowful weeping, were shedding tears of blood.
- 1070 The miserable final parting was difficult to bear.
 She had to be carried away, unable to stand or walk.
 They lifted this royal woman, now weak beyond compare.
 A magnificent queen, almost dead with a grief she could not share.
- 1071 They ordered noble Sifried covered with earthly dust,
 and some forgot their manly manners and wept like women,
 especially the Nibelung, who'd come to the Rhineland with him.
 No one had ever seen Sigemund so completely lost.
- 1072 And there were some, as I've said, who neither drank nor ate
 for three long days, afflicted with so much burning grief.
 But what their bodies wanted were inescapable needs,
 and as men must they swallowed their sorrow and lived for other days.

ADVENTURE 18

HOW SIGEMUND WENT HOME

- 1073 Then Krimhild's father-in-law approached her, and said to the queen:
 "We ought to be at home. Neither of us can feel
 like welcome guests, here in Wurms along the Rhine.
 My dear Krimhild, now we need to return to my land. It's time.
- 1074 "You and I have suffered enough, losing proud
 Sifried to treacherous hands. They cannot be allowed
 to turn their hatred on you. Let me remain your friend,
 in the name of love for my son. You need not have the smallest doubts.
- 1075 "There in the Netherlands you'll rule as you did before,
 with all the power that bold Sifried awarded you.
 I promise you the land as well as your crown. Warriors
 faithful to Sifried will be eager to offer everything you're due."
- 1076 The servants were told they'd soon be leaving. Men were running
 up and down, getting the horses ready. No one
 wanted to stay with powerful enemies. No one opposed
 their going. Girls and ladies were told to pack up all their clothing.
- 1077 When Sigemund was ready to mount his horse and ride,
 Krimhild's family started pressing her to stay
 with Lady Otta, her mother. They urged her to change her mind.
 The noble woman answered: "How can I possibly remain?"
- 1078 "How could I endure always having to see
 with my very own eyes the man who did such things to me?"
 Young Giseller replied: "Belovèd sister, stay
 with your mother. That's what you ought to do, with a daughter's love and good faith.
- 1079 "You do not need to depend on those who afflicted you,
 betrayed you, and darkened your life. My property will do

for us both.” She answered him: “I couldn’t ever endure it. I’d die of the pain, Hagen’s loathsome presence would certainly kill me.”

- 1080 “My dear sister, accept the good advice I give you. Stay here with Giselher, your faithful brother. I’ll do everything I can to comfort you for your husband’s death.” She answered sadly: “That can’t be done by any man.”
- 1081 Then while the young man spoke such kindly words, Lady Otta and Gernot began to beg and implore, and family members urged her to change her mind and stay with them. No one else of her blood lived with Sigemund and Sifried’s men.
- 1082 “Only Sigemund knows you, there,” Gernot said. “But no man alive is strong enough to live forever. Consider, dear sister, seek the place where comfort will never cease. Remain with your family and friends. You’ll truly be glad you stayed.”
- 1083 Giselher kept talking, trying to change her stand. Sigemund’s men had led the horses out of their stalls. They wanted to start their journey to far-off Netherlands. The warriors’ clothing was tightly tied to packhorses’ sturdy backs.
- 1084 Then Sigemund approached and said to Lady Krimhild: “Sifried’s men are ready, they’re standing beside the horses, waiting for you. We ought to be starting, we have a long trip, and I’m not eager to stay in Burgundy longer than I must.”
- 1085 Lady Krimhild replied: “My family, the faithful ones still left me, say I should remain where I am. Once I leave, you’re the only friend I’ll have there, and none are my family.” Sigemund was pained to hear Krimhild speak these words.
- 1086 Sigemund replied: “No one ought to tell you such things. You will receive your crown in front of all my people, and rule in Netherlands as I did, when I was king. No one there will blame you for what was done here, the shame, the evil.

- 1087 “And because of your son, too, you ought to come with me.
Why would you want to leave him an orphan? Lady, when he
has grown and become a man, your son will surely give you
comfort. Till then, many splendid warriors are eager to serve you.”
- 1088 Krimhild said: “Lord Sigemund, I cannot leave with you,
I must stay here. Whatever finally happens to me,
my family is always where I belong. They’ll help me endure
my mourning.” The brave heroes serving Sigemund grew very unhappy.
- 1089 They spoke as one: “It seems to us, lady, that we
will be making an anxious journey, if you’ve decided to stay
in Wurms, with those who’ve shown themselves our enemies.
No visitors to a court have ever left in a sadder way.”
- 1090 She said: “You worthy knights will have no need to worry.
From Burgundy to Sigemund’s lands (I guarantee it)
you’re safe. I trust my dearest child to your great mercy,
and your heroic hands will guide him where he has to be.”
- 1091 Understanding, then, that Krimhild would not be going
with them, all of Sigemund’s men began to weep.
And Sigemund, deeply upset, raised his voice to the woman!
Krimhild put the king in a startling, harsh, and bad-tempered mood.
- 1092 “The Devil with Burgundy’s feast!” noble Sigemund said.
“All this celebration accomplished is ensuring that neither
Burgundy’s king nor a single one in his family will see
this king or a single one of his people ever, ever again.”
- 1093 But some of Sifried’s men murmured, in voices meant
to be heard: “Some day, we might be riding to this land again,
when we discover for certain who it was that slaughtered
our lord. Sifried’s family will hunt up other angry men.”
- 1094 Then Sigemund gave Krimhild a farewell kiss, aware that nothing
would change her mind about leaving. Sadly, he said: “So now

we need to ride back home unhappy. I'm learning how
the sorrow that I'll bring home with me is only just beginning."

- 1095 Riding slowly and sad, they left Wurms on the Rhine.
They knew they'd make the journey safely, confident
that brave Nibelung hands could very well defend them,
were any enemies brave and foolish enough to defy them.
- 1096 Apart from Krimhild, they said farewell words to no one.
But Gernot and Giselher rode up, before they were gone,
and said soothing things to Sigemund. He saw they were truly
sorry, as these good-hearted brothers fully intended he should.
- 1097 Showing deft, respectful manners, Gernot said:
"All-seeing God in heaven knows I had no hand
at all in Sifried's death. And no one here in this land
hated him, so far as I know. I mourn as an honest man."
- 1098 Young Giselher made sure that Sigemund's men could ride
in peace. He gave them an escort that led them out of his land,
King Sigemund and all, and then to their home in Netherlands.
No one who made that dismal journey came home a happy man!
- 1099 I cannot tell you more than that about their trip.
In Wurms, Krimhild never stopped complaining that if
anyone in her family could comfort her grieving heart
it was Giselher. He'd played in good faith a decent, honest part.
- 1100 Brunhild felt immense and satisfying pride.
It made no difference to her, now, how Krimhild cried,
for whatever bond there had been was broken forever. But the time
would come when Lady Krimhild would make beautiful Brunhild cry.

ADVENTURE 19

HOW THE NIBELUNGEN TREASURE WAS BROUGHT TO WURMS

- 1101 Now that noble Krimhild was widowed and alone, her high
 steward, Count Eckewart, had come to be at her side,
 always at her service, he and all his men.
 He helped her painful mourning for the never forgotten lord who'd died.
- 1102 Next to the church in Wurms, they built a house for her,
 white and very large, splendid and beautifully worked,
 and there she lived, endlessly mourning, she and her household.
 She found peace in the church, almost happy when she was there.
- 1103 That was where they'd buried Sifried, and she never left it
 for long, sadly staring at her husband's grave. She wept
 and prayed that God would accept and care for Sifried's soul.
 She shed such faithful tears often enough, for the hero now dead.
- 1104 Lady Otta and her maids always offered comfort.
 But her heart had been so terribly hurt that nothing could help,
 no one's consoling kisses mattered, no one's words.
 Her agony of longing for the man she deeply loved was worse,
- 1105 by far, than any living woman had ever known.
 Her noble nature, her stainless soul, were clearly shown
 to the world. As long as she lived, her mourning never ended.
 But bold Sifried's wife gave herself a brave revenge.
- 1106 And so she lived with her grief (this is the simple truth)
 for three and a half long years after her husband's death,
 never speaking a word to the king, Gunter her brother,
 and never setting her eyes on Hagen, hated like no other.
- 1107 Then Hagen said to the king: "Don't you think you could win
 your sister over, earn her affection once again?"

That would be the way to get the Nibelungen
gold. We'd have it all, once we stood in her good graces."

1108 Gunter said: "We can try. My brothers are always with her.
We'll get them to intervene, see if she wants to be friendly,
or even just allow us to bring the treasure here."
"I doubt it," Hagen answered. "It isn't likely, never fear."

1109 The king had Ortwin called to court, and also Count Gera.
His servants brought them the king's command, and also brought
young Giselher and Gernot, Gunter's royal brothers.
They went to visit Krimhild, anxious to know what the lady thought.

1110 Gernot the brave was the first of the Burgundy men to speak:
"Lady, you've mourned a very long time for the death of Sifried.
Allow the king to swear, on oath, that he wasn't the one
who did it. Everyone hears your weeping, it's never been a secret."

1111 She said: "No one's accused Gunter. The murderer
was Hagen. He came to save him, he said, learning Sifried's
unguarded spot. Why was I blind enough to believe him?
I cannot ever forget," she said, "that Hagen was able to hurt him

1112 "only because I betrayed him, Sifried, my beautiful man.
I might abandon my tears, miserable woman as I am.
But I cannot ever forgive those who committed the murder."
Then Giselher the young, that handsome man, began to beseech her:

1113 "I will welcome the king," she said to them. Then he
paid her a visit, joined by the best among his friends.
But Hagen did not dare come with them, knowing perfectly
well how guilty he was, and all that she had suffered since then.

1114 Gunter would have liked to kiss his sister, had that
been possible. It would have been a friendlier meeting.
But he was not entirely sure she'd welcome the greeting.
Not being truly a fearless man, he chose to rely on tact.

- 1115 No friends had ever known a reconciliation
 in the midst of so much weeping. Her face was wet with tears.
 She was able to forgive these men, all except for one.
 Hagen alone could have killed her man, he was the traitor who'd done it.
- 1116 Afterwards, it wasn't long before they decided,
 with Lady Krimhild's consent, to have the Nibelungen
 gold taken from its mountain home and brought to the Rhine.
 This was her wedding-morning gift, it belonged to her by right.
- 1117 Giselher and Gernot went to claim the treasure.
 A full eight thousand bearers were necessary to haul
 it down from its buried hiding place, guarded by the dwarf,
 brave Albericht, and also by a well-armed host of his very best friends.
- 1118 As soon as they saw the Rhinemen coming to get the hoard,
 Albericht the bold said to the men of his guard:
 "We cannot keep this treasure any longer. It was part
 of the lovely queen's wedding gift. We have no right to hold it.
- 1119 "None of this would ever have happened," said the dwarf,
 "if we hadn't suffered wicked misfortune, losing the magic
 cloak, taken away from us by Sifried. He kept it
 with him all the time, beautiful Krimhild's mighty darling.
- 1120 "Now Sifried's suffered a worse misfortune, though the hero
 possessed the magic cloak and it helped him conquer all
 these lands. It didn't do him much good, in the end." Knowing
 his guardian role was over, the dwarf went to open the vault.
- 1121 Krimhild's people stood facing the mountain. Many
 of her family were there. Orders were given, the treasure came down
 the slopes, to where the Burgundy ships were anchored. Now
 these boats would carry gold and silver along the Rhine, to the town
- 1122 of Wurms. Let me tell you the marvelous tale of what happened
 next. It took twelve hundred heavy hauling wagons,

and four whole days and nights, to bring the treasure down.
Each wagon made three trips a day, up and down the mountain.

- 1123 All they carried, on every trip, was jewels and gold.
And if every man in the world were given a share, the whole
of the hoard would not be smaller by even half a pound.
Hagen surely had good reason to want it all for his own.
- 1124 The hoard's most precious object was a magic wand of gold.
He who knew how to use it could well have made himself
master of every single man alive in the world.
When Gernot's people set sail, many of Albericht's men came with them.
- 1125 Once the Rhineland men had gotten the hoard in their hands
and began to store it safely away, in Gunter's land,
towers and treasure houses were quickly filled to the brim.
No one who walks this world would see such treasure ever again.
- 1126 But even had there been a thousand times as much,
she would have chosen to live completely without wealth,
if only Sifried could have been alive and well.
No hero's wife could be more faithful than beautiful, mournful Krimhild.
- 1127 Word of this incredible treasure brought knights from other
lands. Indeed, generous Lady Krimhild shared
with her visitors whole handfuls lifted out of this hoard.
Men said of this lovely queen that here was a woman who truly cared.
- 1128 She gave so freely to rich and poor alike that Hagen
protested, telling the king if only her life were long
enough, she'd have so many loyal knights won
to her service, she would be able, whenever she liked, to make trouble for them.
- 1129 King Gunter replied: "Her life and her wealth belong to her.
What sort of intervention could I possibly take?
All I could ever do would bring me trouble, or worse.
Let's not bother ourselves with how many costly gifts she makes."

- 1130 To which Hagen answered: “No sensible man would place
any woman whatever in charge of so rich a treasure.
All of us will be sorry, one of these fine days,
if she’s allowed to continue with all these foolish, wasteful ways.”
- 1131 Then Gunter said: “I swore a solemn oath never,
as long as she and I lived, to cause her sorrow again.
I cannot break my oath. This is my sister, remember
that.” But Hagen said: “Let me be the one who’s guilty, then.”
- 1132 So both of them, once more, broke their solemn word.
They took the enormous treasure out of the widow’s control.
Hagen collected the keys, and Hagen kept them all.
Gernot, her royal brother, was wild with anger when this news was heard.
- 1133 Lord Giselher declared: “Hagen has given my sister
too much sorrow. I have no choice, this must be prevented.
If Hagen did not share our blood, he’d have to be killed.”
And Sifried’s wife sat weeping bitter tears all over again.
- 1134 Then Gernot said: “Rather than having endless problems
because of all this gold, we would do better by far
placing this treasure deep in the Rhine. It couldn’t bother
anyone, then.” Then Krimhild came complaining to Giselher,
- 1135 and said: “My dearest brother, I thought you’d take care of me.
Only your love and goodwill can be my protector.”
And so he said to her: “That is what I will be,
as soon as we return from a trip the king has just projected.”
- 1136 So the king and all his people rode away.
The only one of his family remaining in Wurms was Hagen,
who hated Krimhild so fiercely he did not object to staying,
as long as he was sure he could keep from seeing her again.
- 1137 And before the king and all his people returned, Hagen
of Troneg decided to take the entire massive hoard

and sink it as deep as he could under the flowing waters
of the Rhine. He'd hoped to use it. His hope sank with the silver and gold.

- 1138 Burgundy's kings returned, and all their many men.
Lady Krimhild began to bewail her latest loss
to her attendant women. They all were deeply saddened.
Giselher assured her he'd gladly help, whatever the cost.
- 1139 Everyone said: "What Hagen's done was a thing of evil."
But Hagen stayed away from the angry princes until
he'd helped with other problems and earned the kings' goodwill.
Krimhild's hate and her thirst for revenge grew greater, but stayed unfulfilled.
- 1140 Even before Hagen disposed of the treasure, the family
all had sworn the strongest oaths to keep it hidden,
so no one could possibly use it while any of them were living.
But now, neither they nor anyone would own it again.
- 1141 Heavy grief descended, once more, on Krimhild's heart,
not only for her husband's death but also the waste
of the wonderful treasure he'd won. She mourned it all as hard
and harder than ever before, and went on mourning the rest of her days.
- 1142 After Sifried's death (this tale is completely true)
she lived in enormous pain for thirteen long years, forever
unable to give up her memory of the hero's death. Never
was she unfaithful to him: that much has always been her due.

ADVENTURE 20

KING ETZEL SENDS A MESSENGER TO KRIMHILD

- 1143 Now it happened that Lady Helcha died, and then
the Huns' King Etzel wondered how he could find another

such wife. His friends in far-off Burgundy suggested
a proud widow named Lady Krimhild. Gunter the king was her brother.

- 1144 Now that beautiful Lady Helcha was dead, his advisers
said: "If the wife you want is to be the noblest, highest,
best of all the women any king has had,
this is exactly the one for you. Mighty Sifried was her husband."
- 1145 The great king replied: "How in the world would that ever happen,
since I'm a heathen, a man who's never been baptized? She's Christian,
this lady. She wouldn't be willing to marry outside the bounds
of her faith. A miracle is what we'd need to bring her around!"
- 1146 They gave him a rapid answer: "Why wouldn't she marry someone
with your high reputation, your might, and all you own?
Let the noble lady be visited. We hope
you'll find yourself prepared to love a beauty so well known."
- 1147 The noble king then asked: "Are any of you acquainted
with this land along the Rhine and the people there?" The great
count of Bechalaren, Rudiger, replied:
"I've known the Lady Krimhild as long as I have been alive.
- 1148 "The princes, Gunter and Gernot, are excellent, worthy knights.
Their brother, Giselher, is another. They're men likely
to do whatever they can to preserve their honor and mighty
station, just as all their fathers and fathers' fathers have done."
- 1149 Then Etzel answered: "My friend, now you need to tell me
if she's the kind of woman who ought to be queen of my lands.
If she is truly the beauty all of you are saying,
none of my friends will ever regret my offering her my hand."
- 1150 Rudiger answered: "I think her beauty is very like
that of Lady Helcha. No king in the world has a wife
(so far as I'm aware) more beautiful to see.
Happiness will be certain for the man she finally chooses to marry."

- 1151 Said Etzel: “Rudiger, for love for me, do this.
And if I ever come to lie with Lady Krimhild,
you’ll be richly rewarded with the best of all I possess,
for truly you will have done for me what I most deeply wish.
- 1152 “You and any man who rides with you will have
everything you need or want from my store of treasure,
be it horses or be it clothes, take whatever
you like. For you are now my messenger, my wealth’s at your pleasure.”
- 1153 Possessed of his own wealth, Count Rudiger replied:
“It would make no sense, were I to accept such gifts from you.
I’ll gladly serve your interests, there on the banks of the Rhine,
at my own expense. You’ve given me so much, it’s no more than your due.”
- 1154 The mighty king declared: “All right, when do you think
you’ll leave, in search of the beautiful lady? May God guide
and protect you, preserve your honor and that of my future wife.
May fortune smile on your mission, and the beautiful lady smile on your king.”
- 1155 Rudiger responded: “Before we can start the journey,
we need to prepare our weapons and armor, and also our clothes,
so we can walk with honor in the presence of princely warriors.
I plan to take five hundred handsome men along with me.
- 1156 “When we arrive on the Rhine, and they see how many we are
and how we look, I want them all to say no king
has ever before come to Burgundy, bringing
so many mighty warriors with him, and traveling so far.
- 1157 “Yet one thing more, my lord, I must fully report.
Do not forget that Sigemund’s son, mighty Sifried,
held this lady’s love. You’ve seen him, here at your court.
He was a man who earned every honor he ever received.”
- 1158 King Etzel replied: “Yes, she was that hero’s wife,
but he was a prince of such great worth and wealth that I

think nothing at all is shameful in taking her for myself.
 What pleases me is her beauty. So lovely a woman is a precious prize.”

1159 Then Rudiger declared: “I can tell you, now, we’ll leave
 in exactly four and twenty days. But let me first
 explain to Gotelind, my dearest wife, that you need
 an emissary to Krimhild and I have been picked to bring her your words.”

1160 So Rudiger sent a message to Bechalaren, his castle.
 Gotelind was pleased, but also deeply saddened.
 The king required a wife, it was common sense that he have one.
 And yet her loving thoughts turned to the beautiful queen he had had.

1161 The moment she heard the message, Countess Gotelind
 began to weep, not sure the queen she would have could ever
 match the wonderful queen she’d recently lost. She never
 thought of Helcha, now, without regretting how good she’d been.

1162 Rudiger rode away from Hungary in seven
 days. Etzel was glad, pleased to the point of elation.
 The clothing his emissary needed was being made
 in Vienna. Why wait any longer? What would be gained by further delay?

1163 Off in Bechalaren, Gotelind was waiting.
 She and her daughter were always eager to have the husband
 and father return, bringing with him hundreds of men.
 All the pretty girls of the castle were gay in anticipation.

1164 Noble Rudiger rode from Vienna, brand-
 new clothing packed up high and carefully on the backs
 of many horses, strapped down tight, so thieving hands
 could never tug or tear any away. And when they were at

1165 Bechalaren, the careful, considerate count spent
 his very first hours at home ensuring that those who’d ridden
 with him were properly housed in excellent lodgings, and then
 he rode in search of his countess, who was overjoyed to see him again.

- 1166 As was his loving daughter, Dietelind. Her joy
 at his coming had never before been so intense. The sight
 of the Hunnish warriors who'd traveled with him brought such delight!
 Greeting them all with happy laughter, the noble young lady said:
- 1167 "I offer the warmest of welcomes to my father and all his men."
 But while the worthy knights were thanking her, eager
 to smile in response to smiles, Countess Gotelind
 was very well aware her courteous husband had things to tell her.
- 1168 That night, lying next to noble Rudiger,
 she asked him, pleasantly, just where the Hunnish king
 might be sending him as a royal message bearer.
 "Dear Lady Gotelind," he said, "I'll gladly tell you where.
- 1169 "My task is to seek another wife for my mighty king,
 now that beautiful Helcha's dead. I'm asked to ride
 to the Rhine, and seek out Krimhild, once great Sifried's wife.
 My Hunnish master wishes to make that beautiful lady his queen."
- 1170 "May it be God's will," she said, "and may it come
 to pass, for all the noble things we've heard of her.
 And may her presence make our old age easier,
 with my lady gone. We will do well, with Krimhild wearing the crown."
- 1171 Rudiger replied: "My dearest wife, let
 your openhandedness reward most graciously
 those who go to the Rhine at my side. Heroic men
 who travel wealthily will always travel with spirits high."
- 1172 She said: "Anyone willing to take gifts from my hand
 will have whatever they want, each and every man,
 before you ride away. Even your own good knights."
 The count declared: "Your words fill my heart with joy and delight."
- 1173 O the silken riches she drew from her treasure chests!
 Each of the count's chosen companions received the costliest

clothing, carefully lined with fur from neck to spurs.
 For this great journey, Rudiger knew just who would serve him best.

- 1174 Seven mornings later, Rudiger and his noble
 knights left Bechalaren. Displaying weapons and war gear
 they crossed Bavaria, rich in thieves, but rode
 almost as peaceful as if at home, for the robbers left them alone.
- 1175 It took them twelve more days to reach the Rhine. And their
 arrival was not the kind of news that no one shared!
 King Gunter and all his men were quickly made aware
 that guests had come from other lands. And then the lord of the Rhine
- 1176 asked that anyone who knew them, should tell him at once.
 It was easy to see how heavily loaded their packhorses were.
 No one doubted the wealth of these unknown visitors.
 The great city of Wurms quickly opened its arms, and its rooms.
- 1177 Rudiger's men accepted their lodgings. People eyed them,
 trying to use their clothing and gear and horses as clues.
 Where were they from, these knights so newly arrived on the Rhine?
 Gunter sent for Hagen, wondering if these were men he knew.
- 1178 The warrior from Troneg said: "I haven't seen them at all.
 But I can swear to this: once they're seen in your hall,
 the place where their journey started will have to be a long
 way off if I can't tell the minute I see them where they're from."
- 1179 And now the guests arrived, fresh from their lodgings. Whoever
 he was, their lord was dressed in wonderfully costly clothes,
 and so were his men. Straight to Gunter's hall they rode,
 their gleaming garments expertly shaped and even more expertly sewn.
- 1180 Then bold Hagen declared: "I can't be completely sure,
 it's been so long since I saw the mighty lord, who I served
 at his court, but he looks exactly like noble Rudiger,
 that brave, distinguished knight who serves in far-off Hunnish lands."

- 1181 “Why do you suppose,” Gunter asked at once,
 “he’s come from Bechalaren all the way to Wurms?”
 But even as Gunter uttered these words, Hagen went running
 to where Count Rudiger was handing his horse’s reins to a servant.
- 1182 Hagen and all his friends hurried to greet the count
 as so noble a knight deserved. Five hundred men dismounted.
 And all of them were given joyous, elaborate welcomes.
 No messengers had ever come, wearing such splendid robes.
- 1183 Then Hagen of Troneg’s voice was heard, loud and clear:
 “In the name of Almighty God, welcome to everyone here,
 the prince of Bechalaren and all who came with him!”
 So warm a greeting did great honor to all the hard-riding Huns.
- 1184 The closest relatives of Gunter greeted the guests.
 Ortwin of Metz said to Rudiger: “I don’t
 remember visitors ever received with such warmth,
 such eagerness. This is the simple truth. You have our best
- 1185 “greeting.” The Hunnish knights thanked them, one and all,
 then followed Rudiger into Gunter’s hall.
 There they found the king, surrounded by brave-hearted knights.
 Gunter rose to greet them (a most extraordinary sight),
- 1186 approaching the messengers with polished courtesy.
 With Gernot at his side, he welcomed the mighty count
 and his men with high politeness, completely proper to see.
 Rudiger extended his hand, which Gunter clasped in his own,
- 1187 then led the count to where he himself had been seated.
 Drinks were poured for the guests (and much appreciated),
 full-measured flagons of the very best good wine
 Burgundy had to offer, or anywhere else along the Rhine.
- 1188 By then both Giselher and Gera arrived, and Dancwart,
 the king’s head groom, and Volker from Alzei, all of them come

on account of their Hunnish guests, happy to make them welcome
as all the visiting knights presented themselves in front of the king.

- 1189 Then Hagen of Troneg spoke, declaring to his lords:
“All of Burgundy’s heroes, assembled here in this hall,
gladly pledge their service to the count of Bechalaren.
Gotelind’s good husband surely deserves some high reward.”
- 1190 King Gunter spoke: “I cannot keep myself from wondering.
I hope you’ll tell me, good count, how Etzel, your glorious king
has fared, and Helcha, his queen on the Hunnish throne.” The count
immediately replied: “I’ll gladly give you a full account.”
- 1191 Then Rudiger and his men, who’d been sitting near Gunter, rose
from their places and, standing now, the count declared: “With your
permission, prince, let me make no secret of the message
I bring, warm words which I’m more than happy to speak in your mighty presence.”
- 1192 Then Gunter said: “Whatever your message may be, I need
no consultation before I hear it, you have complete
permission to speak. My men and I will listen, sure
your words proceed from honor and seek nothing at all impure.”
- 1193 The honest messenger answered: “My mighty emperor sends
his honest and open greetings to you and all your friends
everywhere across the Rhine. He wishes you
to know, as well, that my errand here is indeed blamelessly meant.
- 1194 “My honored ruler asks you to join him in lamenting his fate.
He and his people are in mourning: Helcha, his noble mate
and beautiful queen, is dead. Young women all over his lands
have lost a mother-protector, the daughters of princes of high estate,
- 1195 “deprived of her regal presence. Now there is weeping and wailing,
and many tears are being shed for their loss, and for his.
There’s no one, now, to be for these girls what Helcha was.
And this, alas, is likely to keep his sorrow from going away.”

- 1196 “God be praised,” said Gunter, “that in the midst of such grief
he takes the trouble to pay his respects to me and my friends.
I welcome so warm a greeting with the greatest pleasure, and send
your lord the assurance of service from me, my men, and all my family.”
- 1197 Then Gernot spoke, heroic leader of Burgundy men:
“The world will always mourn beautiful Helcha’s death,
and the many kindnesses bestowed on those girls.” Hagen
voiced his agreement, and so did many other Burgundians.
- 1198 Then Rudiger, noble messenger, spoke
again: “If I may, King Gunter, my dearest master told me
more than I needed to tell you, concerning his grief and woe,
the sorrows and sadness he has known since noble Helcha died.
- 1199 “It is said, my lord, that your sister Krimhild has no husband,
Lord Sifried having died. If these are indeed the facts,
with your approval my master wishes me to ask
that Krimhild become his queen. That, in a word, my lord, is my task.”
- 1200 As ever polite but correct, King Gunter replied: “If she’s
prepared to listen, I’ll give her my views, and then in three
more days I can let you have an answer. How could I
respond to Etzel before learning the thoughts in my sister’s mind?”
- 1201 While they waited, Gunter’s guests were carefully cared for,
so well attended, indeed, that Rudiger was heard
to say he and his men couldn’t help but be aware
their hosts were their friends, especially Hagen, who had served the count before.
- 1202 So Rudiger waited through three long days. The king
of the Rhine had sought advice from his family (a very wise thing),
cautiously inquiring if any of them had doubts
or objections to a possible marriage of Krimhild and the Hunnish king.
- 1203 Everyone approved, except for Hagen. He spoke
to Gunter, warrior to warrior: “Have you now taken leave

of your senses, forgotten how to protect yourself? Even
if she agrees, her marriage to Etzel is sure to bring us grief.”

1204 “But why?” Gunter replied. “I cannot see an excuse
for not permitting it. The queen should be allowed to marry
whenever she pleases. We ought to consent. My sister can choose
for herself. To be Etzel’s wife is an honor not to be lightly refused.”

1205 But Hagen answered: “That honor is one we’d have to pay for.
If only you knew Etzel as well as I do! The day
Krimhild marries him, as you’re suggesting she may,
Burgundy’s troubles will truly start, your sorrows will begin.”

1206 “But why?” Gunter replied. “I’ve sought the best advice.
I’ll guard against all troubles, make sure no quarrels arise,
if in the end Krimhild’s willing to be his wife.”
But Hagen only answered: “I’ll never approve, not on my life!”

1207 They sent for Giselher and Gernot, but both those noble
warriors thought it a very fine thing for Krimhild to accept
Etzel, the mighty king of the Huns, as her husband and lord.
Hagen strongly warned against it, but no one else was opposed.

1208 Then bold young Giselher spoke, leader of Burgundy’s men:
“This is a time when you might well decide, Hagen
my friend, to pay her back for all the pain you’ve caused her.
Whatever might do her good you ought to be very glad to support.

1209 “You’ve brought my sister much of the bitterest sorrow,” declared
Giselher, an excellent warrior, a confident prince.
“That’s more than good enough reason for her to hate you. Where
in the world will you find a man who’s cost a woman more happiness?”

1210 “I want you to hear,” said Hagen, “what I know well. That’s all.
Once she’s married to Etzel, sooner or later, however
long she lives, she’ll manage to cause us pain. She’ll never
give up. Thousands of fighting men will be at her beck and call.”

- 1211 Giselher's brother, courageous Gernot, answered: "It may
well be that we won't ride to Etzel's land until
both he and she have died. We need to keep our faith
with her. Decent conduct earns us honor. But not betrayal."
- 1212 But Hagen answered: "No one knows enough to say
I'm wrong. If noble Krimhild takes Queen Helcha's place,
she'll cause us pain, no matter what you do or don't.
You ought to give it up, you'll all live longer if Krimhild stays
- 1213 "where she is." Then Giselher, Otta's handsome son,
grew angry: "It's hard to be as good as you are at treason.
We ought to be overjoyed, seeing the honor she's offered.
Say what you like, Hagen. I owe her support, and I'll give it to her."
- 1214 Hearing all this, Hagen was not overly pleased.
The two proud warriors, Gernot and Giselher,
together with Gunter, king of the Rhine, at last agreed
that if Krimhild chose to accept the offer, they would not interfere.
- 1215 Count Gera spoke: "What I'll want to say to the lady
is simply to look warmly on Etzel. He has so many
knights sworn to his service, men who obey and fear him,
that life at his side might well free her of living with sighs and tears."
- 1216 Gera hurried to visit beautiful Krimhild. She greeted
him warmly. And how he began to talk to her! "If you please,
my lady, I've come expecting all the rewards a message
bearer deserves for bringing good news, good luck, and an end to grief.
- 1217 "One of the greatest and best kings in the world has sent
an ambassador, seeking your hand in marriage. You'll ascend
his throne and share his crown, you'll rule beside him. A noble
lord has come with this offer, and I have come at your brothers' command."
- 1218 Then Krimhild answered, deeply distressed: "God forbid!
And may He keep my friends from making fun of a miserable

woman like me. What kind of man, once happily wed,
could ever imagine loving someone eternally dreary and sad?"

- 1219 She fiercely rejected Etzel's proposal. But then her brother
Gernot came, and her younger brother, Giselher.
They offered Krimhild their loving comfort, promising her
that accepting Etzel would truly help her forget her sadness and sorrow.
- 1220 But nothing anyone said persuaded the grief-stricken woman
that she could love another man. And at last they asked her:
"Let the ambassador be seen. Whether you do it
or not, courtesy requires that you let the messenger visit."
- 1221 "I couldn't refuse to see him," the noble lady replied.
"No man as good as the count, living so virtuous a life,
should have to turn from my door. Only a messenger
like him deserves such favor. Anyone else would be denied.
- 1222 "Tell him," she said, "I'll receive him here in my rooms, tomorrow
morning. Let him hear for himself, from my own mouth,
how absolutely determined I am to refuse this offer."
Then she began to moan and weep again, lost in her sorrow.
- 1223 Noble Rudiger expected he would convince her,
once the highborn lady agreed to see him. The princess,
he was confident, could never resist his wise
persuasion, all his honest charms, his deft and pleasing style.
- 1224 Early the following morning, when mass was about to be sung,
Rudiger appeared, splendidly dressed, along
with those who had ridden to Wurms beside him. When they reached the court
everyone saw what stately clothing these emissaries wore.
- 1225 Krimhild awaited the noble messenger, her heart
heavy. She did not change from the simple, unadorned garments
she wore day after day, although the ladies and girls
who served her dressed themselves as they thought the visitor deserved.

- 1226 She welcomed Rudiger, standing at her door.
 Etzel's messenger was received with courteous warmth.
 He came with only eleven others, but those who served her
 showed him great respect. They'd never seen such a man before.
- 1227 Rudiger and his men were invited to seat themselves.
 They saw Counts Eckewart and Gera, two noble knights,
 standing beside the lady. To honor the dismal depth
 of her sadness, no face in the room showed even the faintest, dimmest smile.
- 1228 A host of pretty women sat in front of Krimhild.
 The lady herself did nothing but silently weep. The entire
 front of her dress was soaking wet with bitter tears.
 Count Rudiger could very plainly hear her sorrowful sighs.
- 1229 Then Rudiger spoke: "Daughter of mighty kings, Princess
 Krimhild, we seek your permission, I and those you see
 here with me, to speak the words we were sent to say, deliver
 the message my master meant for you, in front of this company."
- 1230 "I grant you my permission," queenly Krimhild replied,
 "say whatever you wish. I eagerly await
 whatever words I will hear from such a lord of state."
 But everyone there could tell from her voice how unwillingly she waited.
- 1231 Then the count of Bechalaren, Rudiger, was heard:
 "Mighty Etzel, my king, extends a cordial greeting,
 and charges me with a message, lady, to speak to you here.
 He hopes to win your love: that, in a word, is the point of this meeting.
- 1232 "He wishes to change your sorrow to the deepest joy of the heart.
 He wants to tie himself to you in the tightest bond
 of friendship, exactly as he was with Helcha, now gone.
 He's known a great many dismal days, since he and Helcha were parted."
- 1233 Queenly Krimhild responded: "Noble Rudiger,
 no one who truly knew the burning grief I suffer

could ask me, now, to love and marry another man,
having lost one of the very best a woman ever

- 1234 “had.” “How else can sorrow be driven away?” the knight
replied. “Only by love and trust, if a woman can find them,
discover someone to share with, a man who suits her heart.
Nothing helps such pain like honest love, with its healing art.
- 1235 “Accept the love my noble master offers, and you’ll win
a dozen mighty kingdoms. And more: my master commands me
to offer you lands he won himself from thirty princes,
conquered in person with all the strength of his bold and daring hands.
- 1236 “And you would become the ruler of many excellent knights
who loyally served my Lady Helcha, as well as many
women who waited on her, all of highborn rank,”
said noble Rudiger, himself a faithful, courageous fighter.
- 1237 “My lord has also commanded me to say, if you
agree to share his throne, that all the authority
and power exercised by Helcha will come to you,
and all of Etzel’s men will bow to you and your decrees.”
- 1238 Queenly Krimhild answered: “Why on earth would I long
to ever again become a hero’s wife? One
man’s death has ruined my life, left me sorrows so strong
that until the day I die my time for happiness has gone.”
- 1239 But Rudiger replied: “Princess Krimhild, your life
with Etzel would be supremely good, elegant, fine,
flowing with happiness (once you had it). My mighty
master enjoys the trust and obedience of many knights,
- 1240 “and the lovely ladies who served Helcha, and her pretty girls,
would join with all the women who now attend you—and could
you imagine knights unhappy finding themselves in service
at such a court? Think, my lady. This marriage will do you good.”

- 1241 She told him most politely: “Let our conversation
end here, and resume tomorrow morning, when you come again.
I promise you an answer, if you’ll be patient till then.”
Of course, the twelve Hunnish knights could offer no objection.
- 1242 And once they’d all returned to their lodgings in Wurms, noble
Krimhild hurriedly sent for Giselher, and Lady
Otta, and told them both that all she was suited for
was a life of constant weeping, nothing less and nothing more.
- 1243 Then Giselher spoke: “My dear sister, Rudiger
assures me, and I believe him, that your sorrows will disappear
if you accept King Etzel’s offer and become his wife.
No matter what anyone else may say, this choice seems to me right.
- 1244 “What’s more,” Giselher added, “he’s just the man you need.
No king in the world can match him. His realm extends from the Rhine
all the way to the Rhone, and everywhere in between.
His offer of marriage, I think, is truly guaranteed to please you.”
- 1245 Krimhild said: “My dearly beloved brother, why
do you say such things? I only need to moan and cry.
How could I ever face the knights at Etzel’s court?
Whatever beauty I had, as you see, is now forever lost.”
- 1246 Then Lady Otta addressed her beloved daughter: “The path
your brother suggested, my dearest child, is the path to be taken.
Be guided by your friends, and learn how to be happy.
For far too long I’ve watched you bent with grief. Find joy at last.”
- 1247 Krimhild prayed to God, begging to be again
as once she was, her husband still alive and at
her side, able to give away her gold to men
in need. She’d never know another time as happy as that.
- 1248 She thought to herself: “If I, a Christian woman, surrender
my body to a heathen’s arms, for however long I live

the world will see me as shamed and disgraced. Suppose he'd give me every kingdom there was, I could not do it, it would be the end."

- 1249 And there she let the matter rest. She lay in bed the whole night long, mind whirling, heart tormented, her beautiful bright eyes never dry, and then at dawn she rose and went where holy matin service was read.
- 1250 The three kings of the Rhine were at church, but not for the service. They came to discuss the marriage proposal with their sad-eyed sister, declaring, just as before, that she ought to accept King Etzel. But none of them could see the slightest change in her position.
- 1251 Messengers were sent for Rudiger and his men, anxious by now to have whatever sort of answer Gunter was going to give them, and take themselves and that answer home. They came to court completely, firmly decided, by then,
- 1252 that they had to have, just as soon as they might, some final decision. All twelve of Etzel's men were fully agreed. They'd make a very long journey, coming home from the Rhine. Then Rudiger was brought to where Krimhild had said she would see him.
- 1253 The noble knight inquired, most amiably, if the noble princess would mind informing him what answer he'd be bringing back to Etzel's land. And then, I believe, she simply repeated what she had already said, that she
- 1254 would never again love any man whatever. But Rudiger replied: "That would be a mistake. Why should a lovely woman renounce what surely would make her happy? Marriage with honor cannot ever come too late."
- 1255 Nothing helped persuade her, until Count Rudiger spoke to the highborn princess in private (where only four eyes could see), promising her that whatever wrongs she had suffered he would amend. And suddenly the heavy weight of her sorrow broke

- 1256 a little. Rudiger said: “Put your weeping behind you.
Even if the only Huns you were able to lean and rely on
were me, my loyal family, and all my warrior men,
you may be sure that a man who wrongs you will have to endure revenge.”
- 1257 Then the lady’s spirits truly lightened. Krimhild
said: “Swear a solemn oath that if I’m wronged
you and yours will be the first to right that wrong.”
Count Rudiger replied: “I’m quite prepared to solemnly swear it.”
- 1258 Rudiger and all his men then swore an oath
to always be at her service. None of the worthy knights
from Etzel’s lands would ever refuse her any rightful
request she made. The count gave her his hand, and pledged his troth.
- 1259 The faithful woman thought: “Now that I’ve won so many
friends, why on earth do I need to worry what anyone
says? Who knows? Perhaps I’ll find a way, at last,
to revenge the malicious murder that took away my magnificent man.”
- 1260 She thought: “Since Etzel’s served by so many worthy knights,
whenever they’re mine to command I can do whatever I like.
And Etzel’s wealth is immense, gifts can flow from my hands.
It won’t matter a bit how Hagen stole my gold and my lands.”
- 1261 She spoke to Rudiger: “If only you hadn’t said
that Etzel was still a heathen, I would have eagerly pledged
to do as he wished, and make myself his wife.” The count
replied: “Don’t say another word, that’s not of any account.
- 1262 “So many knights around him are Christians, now, that living
at Etzel’s court presents no problem at all. Suppose
that once you’re married, my king decides he’d like to be baptized?
My noble lord’s religion is no reason not to become his wife.”
- 1263 And then her brothers said: “Say you’ll do it, sweetest
sister, cast away your dismal, sour-faced mood.”

They kept insisting she accept, the sad-eyed woman,
and at last, with all of them around her, Krimhild said she would.

- 1264 She said: "I'll do as you say, miserable queen that I am.
I'll travel to Etzel's court as soon as I possibly can—
whenever I find friends able to take me to his land."
And as a sign of good faith, beautiful Krimhild gave them her hand.
- 1265 Then Rudiger spoke: "You need no more than two of your own,
since I can supply the rest. We need to bring you across
the Rhine with all the honor a queen deserves. Your home
is no longer Wurms, my lady. Come where your crown is, as well as your throne.
- 1266 "I came with half a thousand men, and some of my family,
and all of them will serve you, both here and later at court,
as I myself will do. Whenever you choose to remind me
of it, lady, may I never regret the oath I swore.
- 1267 "So have the servants put your travel gear in order.
You'll never be sorry, lady, that you listened to Rudiger.
And make up your mind which of your women you choose to journey
with you. Tell them that on the way they'll meet heroes galore!"
- 1268 These lady travelers could use well-made gear left over
from Sifried's time. They all would travel honorably,
no matter how many Krimhild chose. O what lovely
saddles there were, superbly fit for the use of beautiful ladies!
- 1269 They busied themselves, sewing such an abundance of costly
clothes, in honor of the king they'd heard so much about,
it seemed as if they'd never owned an expensive gown!
They unlocked all the chests they always kept so tightly closed.
- 1270 It took them four and a half full days to carefully
examine all the beautiful things they took from the chests.
Then Krimhild's steward was ordered to open wide her treasure
coffers, distributing gold to Rudiger's men and those of his family.

- 1271 There still was gold remaining from her Nibelungen hoard.
 She wanted to take it with her and give it away, in Etzel's
 land, but even a hundred horses couldn't carry it all.
 Hagen heard what Krimhild meant to do with her leftover wealth,
- 1272 and said: "Since Lady Krimhild has no use for me,
 I've got to keep Sifried's gold in Burgundy.
 Why should I put such treasure in enemy hands? I'm well
 aware what Krimhild wanted to do with all of Sifried's wealth.
- 1273 "And if I let her take some away, I haven't a doubt
 she'll find a way to use it against me, parcel it out
 for the sake of hatred. And how could she carry so much so far?
 Let them tell the lady Hagen intends to keep what's here."
- 1274 When Krimhild heard this report, she felt fiercely unhappy.
 The three Rhineland kings had heard, and wanted very
 much to stop Hagen. Noble Rudiger
 saw that nothing could be done, and cheerfully said to her:
- 1275 "Mighty queen, why mourn for some pieces of gold?
 The moment my king sets eyes on you, his heart will fill
 with love and he will give you gifts of gold and silver—
 more than you'll ever use. For this too, lady, you have my oath."
- 1276 Krimhild answered: "Noble Rudiger, no king's
 daughter has ever possessed more treasure than Hagen has stolen
 from me." But then her brother Gernot appeared and went
 straight to the treasure house where the last of the Nibelung gold was kept.
- 1277 He set a key in the lock, in the name of Burgundy's mighty
 rulers, and Krimhold's gold, thirty thousand marks
 or more, was carried out. Royal Gunter was delighted.
 Gernot invited all their guests to take whatever they liked.
- 1278 Gotelind's husband, the count of Bechalaren, declared:
 "Even if Lady Krimhild could take away with her

all that was once contained in the Nibelungen hoard,
I wouldn't so much as touch it, and neither, Gernot my friend, would she.

- 1279 “Tell them to put it back in its storage house. I can't accept it. I brought so much treasure, coming here, that all we'll need on our journey is already safe in my hands, and our lives will be luxurious, traveling back to Etzel's land.”
- 1280 During all this time, Krimhild's eager women were busy filling boxes, twelve in all, with the best gold you'll ever see. They took handfuls of perfect gems, and everything was carted off, to be taken with them.
- 1281 Savage Hagen's power intimidated the lady, who had no more than a thousand marks to spend on prayers said for Sifried's soul, money left over from burial gifts. The count was impressed by Krimhild's loving loyalty.
- 1282 The mournful lady wondered: “Where will I ever find those who love me enough to leave their homes and travel to foreign lands? Who will ride with me to Etzel's home? So let them take my gold and buy horses and clothes for themselves.”
- 1283 Faithful Eckewart replied to the queen: “Ever since I was honored, chosen to join your household, my service has always been true to you.” The trustworthy warrior said. “I mean to serve you, lady, until the very day of my death.
- 1284 “I will ride with you and bring five hundred men, whose loyalty I pledge to you. And I say, again, that the bond between us, lady, will be broken only by death.” To acknowledge these words she bent her head, for she truly needed his help.
- 1285 The horses were brought around, they were all ready to leave. Many among their friends and families were weeping. Lady Otta and many of the pretty women who served her showed how sad they were, losing Krimhild, perhaps forever.

- 1286 A hundred experienced maids were going with her, every
 one of them dressed as beautiful women ought to be.
 Their lovely eyes were bright with flowing tears. They'd see
 much happiness when their journey ended, and they reached King Etzel's court.
- 1287 Then noble Giselher, and also Gernot, and many
 of their men, acting with all the breeding and courtesy
 they knew so well, came to escort their sister on her way.
 There must have been a thousand knights, riding with them that day.
- 1288 Courageous Gera was there, and Ortwin, too. Rumolt,
 master of kitchens, could also be seen. They arranged lodgings
 for the night, all the way from Wurms to the River Danube.
 But Gunter rode only a little way outside the town.
- 1289 Before they left the Rhineland, they sent quick-riding men
 hurrying far ahead, all the way to Etzel's
 land, informing the king that Rudiger had won
 the noble queen as his wife, and they would soon be bringing her home.

ADVENTURE 21

KRIMHILD'S JOURNEY TO THE LAND OF THE HUNS

- 1290 Let those riders gallop ahead. Now let's consider
 how Krimhild traveled across the land, and just when
 her brothers, Giselher and Gernot, turned and left her.
 They'd served her faithfully, exactly as they'd sworn they would.
- 1291 They rode with her to Vergen on the Danube. And then
 they asked their sister's leave, permission to start the journey
 back to far-off Wurms along the Rhine. They wept
 at parting, the three of them, sad as departing friends must be.

- 1292 Warrior Giselher declared: “On my oath,
 lady, if ever you want my help, or anyone
 or anything oppresses you, let me know,
 and I will ride to Etzel’s land and do what needs to be done.”
- 1293 She kissed them both on the mouth and said her farewells. Noble
 Rhineland men and those in service to Rudiger
 left one another on friendly terms. Many girls
 followed Krimhild’s path— she’d taken a hundred and four in all,
- 1294 wearing costly clothes made of richly colored
 silk, elaborately embroidered. Many gleaming
 shields were carried along behind these maidens. And other
 warriors, as many, as good, returned to Würms with two of their kings.
- 1295 Krimhild’s party rode across Bavaria
 as fast as they could. News of unexpected strangers
 hurrying through the land reached a monastery
 near where the River Enns merges with the mighty Danube.
- 1296 The city of Passau was home to a bishop. But all who lived
 in the bishop’s palace and every house in town had given
 themselves the pleasure of rushing to greet the visitors.
 And in Passau Bishop Pilgrim first met his niece, beautiful Krimhild.
- 1297 The knights of Bavaria were not the least bit sorry
 to see so many pretty girls. Their eyes caressed
 these daughters of other worthy warriors, before they hurried
 to find suitable lodging for the noble guests they’d just been blessed with.
- 1298 Lady Otta’s brother, the bishop, was riding next to
 his niece. And when the merchants of Passau learned that this
 was Princess Krimhild, no matter how rich or hard, close-fisted
 they were, they warmly welcomed the highborn prelate’s royal guest.
- 1299 The bishop, of course, hoped their stay would be a long one.
 But noble Eckewart told him at once: “It can’t be done.

We need to keep on traveling across to Rudiger's land,
 where many worthy knights are waiting, alerted to our coming.”

- 1300 One who certainly knew was Lady Gotelind.
 She and her noble daughter had carefully readied their welcome.
 Count Rudiger had asked her to do whatever she could
 to offer Krimhild comfort, especially riding out with his men
- 1301 to greet them, coming along the Danube as far as the River
 Enns. And this was exactly what his wife had done,
 so everywhere you looked the roads were packed, all coming
 (some on foot) to greet the guests who were quickly drawing nearer.
- 1302 And now the queen had reached the town of Efferding.
 Bavarians were known for robbing anyone
 who tried to travel along their roads, and might have done
 serious harm to these strangers (as many surely wanted to do).
- 1303 Count Rudiger was well aware of Bavarian customs.
 He brought with him at least a thousand well-armed warriors.
 And soon his wife, charming Gotelind, had also
 come to Efferding, bringing soldiers by the score.
- 1304 She crossed the River Traun to open fields along
 the Enns, and saw men setting up pavilions and tents
 where guests would sleep that night. This was a gift from the noble
 count, a generous gesture of high respect for his visitors.
- 1305 Gotelind went past the tents, and soon had left them
 behind her. She and her people rode to the clinking sound
 of harness bells, ringing over the dusty ground.
 It made a wonderful welcome, and Rudiger their host was proud.
- 1306 Knights of the worthiest kind came riding happily
 from both directions. The fields were filled with warriors,
 who began to play at battle games, watched by many
 women. Those who served Krimhild, she saw, were not the worst.

- 1307 Men from Bechalaren castle joined their guests.
 Then splinters from shattered spears went flying through the air,
 broken in heroic hands by knights at their best.
 The women appreciated these shows of skill, and art, and flair.
- 1308 And then they broke away from their games, turned, and greeted
 one another warmly. Gotelind's men rode
 with the countess, bringing her to where she could see the queen.
 Those who waited on women found themselves with more than enough
- 1309 to do. Count Rudiger came riding toward his wife.
 Noble Gotelind had worried, when he'd gone to the Rhine,
 but started to feel more cheerful, seeing him approach.
 Knowing he was alive and well, her concern gave way to smiles.
- 1310 After she'd greeted him, he helped her off her horse.
 She joined the other women already assisted down
 and the many noble men hurrying back and forth,
 constantly busy serving ladies standing on grassy ground.
- 1311 When Lady Krimhild saw that Gotelind had dismounted
 and stood with her ladies around her, she too wished to come down.
 She pulled hard on the reins and, holding her horse still,
 asked the energetic warriors to assist her out of the saddle.
- 1312 Bishop Pilgrim, along with Eckewart, quickly
 led his sister's child to Lady Gotelind.
 Those who stood in her path stepped back to let her by.
 The exile approached and promptly kissed the countess on the lips.
- 1313 Then Rudiger's sweet-tempered wife spoke most amiably:
 "My very dear lady, let me tell you how happy it makes me
 to see your charming person here in this land. My eyes
 could not be thus delighted, now, by any other sight."
- 1314 "May God bless you, Lady Gotelind," said the queen.
 "If Etzel, Botelung's great son, and I live long,

you may well come to rejoice indeed, having seen me.”

Neither lady had any idea what was still to come.

- 1315 Many young women met with one another, together
with all the many knights always ready to serve them.
They were seated everywhere, grouped on the soft green clover.
Strangers became acquainted, many soon became good friends.
- 1316 Men kept pouring wine. Morning turned to noon.
They rose from the grass and rode in search of shelter. Pavilions
and tents were waiting, well prepared, high and roomy.
Noble guests discovered elegant comfort, and all were glad.
- 1317 They spent a peaceful night and woke at dawn. The count
of Bechalaren's men were busy making arrangements
for their many welcome guests. Rudiger was plainly
ready to do whatever was needed to find them all a place.
- 1318 The windows in his castle walls were all wide open.
Nothing in all the great fortress was allowed to stay closed.
The guests rode up and were warmly greeted by their eager hosts.
The noble lord of the castle had very clearly done his best.
- 1319 Then Rudiger's daughter came, with all her attendants, and sweetly
welcomed exiled Krimhild. Rudiger's wife was with
her child. Many girls and women offered greetings
of honest affection, and received them, too, from the royal Rhineland princess.
- 1320 They took her by the hand and led her into the massive
palace, where everything was handsomely arranged.
The stately Danube flowed underneath the castle.
They sat in the open air, and all were nicely entertained.
- 1321 Whatever else took place on this visit, I cannot say.
Krimhild's knights grew restless, and many were heard complaining
their stay had lasted too long, they'd traveled much too slowly.
But O, when they left, Rudiger's best bold warriors also rode!

- 1322 Rudiger cheerfully offered to ride with them. Krimhild gave Gotelind's daughter twelve bracelets of bright red gold, and gave her, too, some of the finest dresses she'd brought with her, traveling the long road from Wurms to Eztel's land.
- 1323 Although she'd lost most of the Nibelungen hoard, everyone came to love her, seeing how openhanded she was with what she had left, and the little she could afford. All of Rudiger's people had gifts from the exiled princess's hands.
- 1324 Gotelind gave Krimhild's attendants costly rewards, returning honor for honor to her guests from the distant Rhine. Almost all the strangers left Bechalaren with fine bright jewels or brand-new clothes worn on their backs. And when the time
- 1325 for departing came, after they'd shared a final meal, the lady of Bechalaren promised ever-faithful service to good King Etsel's wife. Krimhild stayed a little longer, holding Gotelind's daughter in a tight embrace.
- 1326 Then the girl told her: "If you want me to, I'll come. I'm truly sure my dearest father will let me pay a visit to you, and gladly send me to the land of the Huns." Krimhild could see quite clearly just what a loyal girl she was.
- 1327 The horses were harnessed and ready, and brought to the castle gates. Noble Krimhild asked the good count's wife and daughter to send her on her way. The formal farewell was over. Courteous good-byes were exchanged by both ladies and girls.
- 1328 After that day, they never saw one another again. As they rode past Medelik, people came to the road, bearing gifts of wine in gleaming cups of gold, which they handed up to the guests. These were cordial-hearted men.
- 1329 A lord named Astolt lived nearby. He told them the way they needed to go, across to Austria and along

the Danube, traveling to Mutauren, a town where, later
 on, Krimhild received a royal welcome and won much favor.

- 1330 Bishop Pilgrim left her there, parting with grace
 and affection. He strongly urged on her the kind of behavior
 Helcha had always been known for, earning herself much honor.
 And O what honor Krimhild went on to win in the land of the Huns!
- 1331 Rudiger's men brought her as far as the River Treisen,
 courteously caring for the queen until King Etzel's men
 could ride across to Passau land. The king of the Huns
 possessed a castle, broad and finely built, along the Treisen,
- 1332 known far and wide by the name of Treisenmur. Here
 the welcome Krimhild received was more than resplendent. This
 was a place where Lady Helcha had lived, and been most dearly
 loved for her goodness and gentle nature, never to be known any more
- 1333 unless equaled by Krimhild, who was just as openhanded
 and would know very well, after all the sorrow she'd had,
 how to appreciate the glory she found in that land,
 later, when she came to live among its noble, heroic men.
- 1334 Etzel's supreme powers were known all over the world,
 so many of the greatest warriors eagerly sought to serve him,
 and in his court one saw knights who were Christian and men
 who clearly were pagan, all united, all loyal to their noble lord.
- 1335 And each man kept his faith to God just as he had
 before, heathen and Christian alike. (When will we see this
 again?) They lived truly in fellowship, and their prince
 rewarded men as men deserved, and all equally well.

ADVENTURE 22

HOW ETZEL WELCOMED HIS BRIDE

- 1336 She spent a full four days at Treisenmur. Never
 once did the dust in the roads have time to settle, swirled
 in the air as if the streets were burning everywhere.
 Men who served King Etzel were riding over Austrian lands.
- 1337 Etzel himself, by now, was fully aware she'd arrived.
 The thoughts of grief and sorrow afflicting his heart had vanished
 at news of Krimhild's rapid journey through foreign lands.
 He was hurrying toward the Treisen, anxious to greet his fine new wife.
- 1338 Riding in front of Etzel were many courageous knights,
 men who came from many lands and spoke in many
 tongues, warrior hordes Christian and pagan alike.
 They gathered to honor the lady assuming their throne and ruling their might.
- 1339 Men from Russia came among them, and men from Greece.
 Men from Romania and men from Poland could be seen
 mounted on excellent horses which they rode with wonderful skill,
 dressed and behaving however their customs required that they be.
- 1340 Many heroes came from Kiev, in Ukraine, and men
 of the Turkish Petchnegs, wild-haired hunters who shot and killed
 birds as they rode, with bows and arrows, stretching bowstrings
 as taut as they were able, so a little more would surely break them.
- 1341 There is a town along the Danube, in Austria,
 called Tulln. And there Krimhild encountered customs new
 and strange, things she'd never seen before. She knew
 they welcomed her; but she did not know what suffering she'd bring them.
- 1342 A splendid band came riding into Tulln, before
 Etzel, enthusiastic proud and merry men,

twenty-four respected princes, and even more,
 who only wanted to see their brand-new queen, and nothing more.

- 1343 Ramunk the duke came dashing out of Romania,
 with seven hundred of his men, their horses flying along
 for all the world like a flock of birds. And then came Gibsha,
 a prince, accompanied by a notable crowd of first-rate lordly
- 1344 fighters. Quick-handed Hornbow came, with at least a thousand
 men, and split away from Etzel's road, to arrive
 in Tulln sooner. According to custom, they crowded around,
 noisy and rough, like all the wild and tumbling Hunnish tribes.
- 1345 Courageous Hawart came from Denmark, and bold Erink,
 furiously brave, but faithful, never known to lie,
 and from Thuringia, in German lands, came Ernfrid, shining,
 handsome—all dashing toward Tulln, to honor Krimhild, now their queen,
- 1346 bringing with them twelve hundred bustling warriors.
 Lord Bloedelin, Etzel's brother, the ruler of frontier
 Hunnish lands, appeared with no less than three thousand men.
 He rode, happy and proud, straight toward Krimhild, waiting in Tulln.
- 1347 And last of all came Etzel himself, with Dietrich of Berne,
 with all their many attendants. This was a huge assembly
 of noble knights, upright, honest, all of them worthy.
 Krimhild felt the excitement, and her saddened heart forgot its yearning.
- 1348 Then the count of Bechalaren spoke to her: "Lady,
 now my Lord Etzel will have you welcomed here.
 Do not kiss anyone but those I tell you to.
 Not all of Etzel's men ought to be honored in equal terms."
- 1349 Then Krimhild was helped down from her horse. Majestic chief
 of the Huns, Etzel waited no longer, dismounted and along
 with many of his bold warriors went swift and joyously
 to where the exiled queen had happily come to stand and receive him.

- 1350 A pair of powerful princes, the story tells us, proceeded
with her, holding up the long train of her skirt,
as Etzel the king approached. Noble Krimhild greeted
her new husband with a kiss, bestowed with warmth and very sweetly.
- 1351 She lifted the veil of her headdress, and her white skin shone
against the gold of her hair. Many men agreed
that even Lady Helcha, fairest of the fair, had seemed
no fairer. The king's brother, Bloedelin, stood close beside her,
- 1352 and Rudiger directed her to kiss him as well,
and also Gibsha the king. Dietrich of Berne stood waiting,
and she kissed him, and twelve of Etzel's knights in all.
And then she greeted many others, each in the proper way.
- 1353 Meanwhile, as Etzel stood beside his wife, the younger
men, each according to his native custom, played
as young men always do, even today, at games
of war, some of them Christian, others (and just as many) pagan.
- 1354 How expertly, with practiced warriors' hands, Dietrich's
men maneuvered shields so flying spears shattered
and bits of splintered wood flew through the air! Shields
were punctured and fell apart when powerful German lances smashed them.
- 1355 The clatter of cracking spears was everywhere. And then,
when all of Ezel's men, and the host of worthy guests
from many lands, had made their way to the field, Etzel
(who'd waited patiently) at last led Lady Krimhild away.
- 1356 Not far from where they'd been they saw a vast array
of pavilions and tents, covering all the ground in sight,
allowing everyone to rest, after their labors.
Solicitous knights escorted pretty girls they'd found on the way,
- 1357 took them to sit in these shelters. Krimhild was shown to royal
quarters fitted for her pleasure. Rudiger, forever loyal

and always concerned, had taken care of these arrangements,
 which much to Etzel's great delight were universally praised.

- 1358 While Etzel sat with her there, exactly what he said
 I've no idea. Her snow-white hand lay peacefully
 in his, while Rudiger sat with them, his presence meant
 to help the king abstain from any improper intimacies.
- 1359 Battle games were now completely over, ending
 in jubilation and a huge outburst of noise. The king's
 good men, as Etzel had, sought out restful tents.
 It grew increasingly dark, and everyone found a suitable bed.
- 1360 Then it was night, and all across the fields they slept.
 In the morning, as soon as the sun came up and they saw its light,
 they rose and leaped on their horses, and O what a host of knights,
 honoring King Etzel, began playing war games again.
- 1361 The king urged his warriors to the highest levels of strife.
 Afterwards, they rode from Tulln to Vienna, where
 they found crowds of well-dressed women, all prepared
 to receive with the highest honor the king's beautiful, noble wife.
- 1362 Everything they wanted was ready for them, exactly
 as it ought to be. Enormous numbers of heroic men
 were already celebrating. When darkness came, they slept.
 And then, in the morning, Etzel's wedding feast would truly begin.
- 1363 Even this great city did not have room enough.
 Rudiger had to ask that those who'd ridden up
 uninvited search for lodgings outside Vienna.
 I doubt if Dietrich (and many other knights) actually went
- 1364 to bed unless they had to, staying near Krimhild's side,
 sacrificing rest to entertain the bride
 and guarantee the guest a pleasant, cheerful time.
 Rudiger and his friends celebrated the entire night.

- 1365 Whitsuntide was the date of the wedding, shortly after
Easter. Etzel lay at Krimhild's side, then,
in great Vienna. She'd never had so many men
in her service, at any time in Wurms or the years of her earlier marriage.
- 1366 She gave so many gifts that many went to people
she never saw, and some of them told the guests: "We're really
amazed that Lady Krimhild, who's said not to be wealthy,
can here perform such wonders of glowing liberality."
- 1367 The wedding feast went on for seventeen full days.
No king has ever had a longer celebration
in all the history of the world (according to my information).
Everyone in Vienna wore brand-new clothes the entire time.
- 1368 I don't believe that Krimhild, living in the Netherlands,
got to sit with so many knights. Nor did Sifried,
wonderfully rich as he was, ever have the command
of so many worthy heroes as Krimhild saw at Etzel's hand.
- 1369 Nor, in celebrating his own marriage, has a groom
ever given away such costly cloaks and shawls,
such clothing of every kind, as Etzel presented to all
the men and women there, in honor of lovely Krimhild, his queen.
- 1370 But not only Etzel: their friends and guests refused to wait,
making gifts of all the things they owned. Whatever
anyone said they wanted was freely handed over,
and even the clothes they wore were stripped right off and given away.
- 1371 Krimhild could not help remembering how once, she
and her noble husband lived on the Rhine. Her eyes grew moist.
It was hard to do, but still she kept her tears unseen.
She'd suffered very great pain, and now she knew great honor and glory.
- 1372 But all the open hands in Vienna were nothing compared
to the bounty Dietrich gave. Everything that Etzel

had given him (and that was a lot) now disappeared.
 And the generosity of Rudiger was almost as stunning.

- 1373 Prince Bloedelin, who ruled in Hungary, ordered many heavy treasure chests, stuffed with gold and silver, to be emptied out, and all of it given away. Those who served the king were very glad to be there, that day.
- 1374 The king's musicians, Warbel and Swemmeline, on the day when lovely Krimhild had a crown like Etzel's placed on her head, surely came away from the celebration with at least a thousand golden marks apiece, or even more.
- 1375 And then on the eighteenth morning they left Vienna. Knights were playing warrior games while they rode, expert hands cracking and splitting shields as their heavy spears came flying. And so King Etzel journeyed home to his own Hunnish lands.
- 1376 They stopped to sleep in the ancient city of Heimberg. Such numbers of powerful knights came riding out of the fields that no one could even hope to count them. And O did they make it known how very happy it made them to see so many pretty women!
- 1377 At Misenberg, on the Danube, the travelers boarded ships. So many horses and so many men covered the river that wherever anyone looked they thought they were seeing dry earth. Road-weary women finally found both comfort and much-needed rest.
- 1378 They lashed together numbers of excellent, strong-bottomed ships so accidents wouldn't happen and none of the boats could go down. Tents were stretched across the decks. It was almost as if they were not floating along on water, but grass and solid ground.
- 1379 About that time, news of the happy wedding reached Etzel's great castle, and its men and women rejoiced. Each and all in service to Helcha, deeply mourning her loss, could now look forward, with Krimhild, to regain the happiness they'd lost.

- 1380 Many noble girls stood waiting, when Krimhild arrived,
 young women Helcha had helped and taken care of, including
 the daughters of seven kings, anxious to embrace the wife
 Etzel had married and was bringing. Of all these girls, they were the prize.
- 1381 Herrat, the daughter of noble King Nantwin and Helcha's sister,
 had taken charge of the household. Graceful and courteous,
 she'd long been pledged to marry mighty Dietrich, and would win
 endless honors, as we should expect from a family so justly famous.
- 1382 Aware that many guests were coming, she was pleased at heart.
 Careful preparations were made, and the scale was large.
 Who could truly tell you the splendors they'd conceived?
 The Hunnish court enjoyed more pleasures than you would ever believe.
- 1383 And then the king and his wife left their ship and rode
 to the castle, and every single attendant was introduced
 to noble Krimhild, who repeated every name she was told.
 How gracious she was, earning honor as Helcha had of old!
- 1384 They vowed their faithful service to this courteous queen, who gave them
 clothing in return and much good gold, as well as gems
 and silver—for everything that came with her from the Rhine,
 carried to Etzel's land, to her mind had to be given away.
- 1385 And all the members of the king's family, as well as each
 of his men, bound themselves to Krimhild's service. She received
 what even Lady Helcha had never held or known,
 pledged to Krimhild as they were until her death, by solemn oaths.
- 1386 This was the glorious state of the Hunnish kingdom and court,
 in which all sources of pleasure could be pursued by every
 one whose heart was moved to seek them, and all because
 of the king's great love, and the loving nature of Krimhild, his noble queen.

ADVENTURE 23

HOW KRIMHILD'S SORROWS LEAD HER TO SEEK REVENGE

- 1387 They shared their lives, each with the other, for seven happy
 years, earning (without a doubt) the very highest
 honor. During this time the queen gave birth to a child,
 a son. Etzel had never enjoyed such perfect serenity.
- 1388 Krimhild absolutely insisted that Etzel's young son
 had to be baptized and reared according to the true
 and Christian faith. He was given the name Ortliep. All through
 King Etzel's land his people rejoiced to hear of the child who'd come.
- 1389 Lady Helcha had been beloved for qualities
 that during this long time Lady Krimhild now displayed.
 She was helped by another exile, the girl Herrat, still gravely
 mourning, though silently, for Helcha, inwardly heavy with grief.
- 1390 Krimhild became a very well known woman, far
 and near. Everyone said no better or kinder queen
 had ever lived, and what they said was what they believed.
 This was her reputation among the Huns, till the thirteenth year.
- 1391 By then she'd understood that no one would risk opposing
 her (an advantage still enjoyed by princes' wives).
 Krimhild became accustomed to having twelve kings close
 to her throne. She started thinking of what she'd suffered in Wurms on the Rhine.
- 1392 She thought of all the honors she'd known in Nibelungen
 land, and how Hagen's cruel hand had stolen
 every single thing she loved, by killing Sifried,
 and whether she would ever be able to bring Hagen to grief.
- 1393 "If I could bring him here, I might be able to do it."
 She daydreamed, often, of walking hand in hand with her brother

Giselher, and always remembered kissing him
as he lay softly asleep. That childhood peace had turned to trouble.

- 1394 I suspect the Devil, prince of evil, had caused her break
with whatever relationship was left with Gunter, after
they'd kissed and reconciled in Burgundy. She began
to weep, and bitter tears came flooding down her beautiful face.
- 1395 Early and late, her heart beat heavy in her breast, grieving
at how she'd been forced, without the slightest wrong on her part,
to give her love to a pagan man. The only reason
for sending her here was Gunter's desire, not to mention Hagen's.
- 1396 Her need would never leave her, the urge to revenge kept burning.
She thought: "I have such great power and wealth, it's time
I made my enemies suffer as I did. It's now their turn.
The one I'm truly ready to hunt is Hagen, his moment has arrived.
- 1397 "How often I long for the few who remained faithful, on the Rhine.
But if only I had them here, those who brought me sorrow,
O, I'd know just how to avenge my beloved! Tomorrow
could not come too soon," reflected Etzel's troubled wife.
- 1398 All the king's knights, as well as those who were pledged to her,
obeyed Krimhild. This was a very useful fact.
Her own Eckewart was now Etzel's treasurer,
making many friends. Who could deny her whatever she asked?
- 1399 She kept saying to herself: "I need to approach my husband,"
prepare him to look with favor on what she wanted done,
having her friends and relations come to Hunnish lands.
But no one should be allowed to suspect her secret motivation.
- 1400 One night, as she lay in Etzel's bed, he began an embrace,
winding his arms around her as he did when he wanted to make
love to his charming wife (who'd long since taken her place
in his heart). The noble lady remembered her enemies, and said

- 1401 to the king: "My dearly beloved lord, I'd like to beg
a favor of you, a thing I've very long desired
(if you consider me deserving). I hope your wife
can ask you to show your love for my so distant family and friends."
- 1402 The mighty king answered (his heart was honest and open):
"How pleased I'd be to show you! If wonderful things come
to those far-off knights, could I keep myself from being happy?
Marriage never brought a man better friends than them."
- 1403 His queen replied: "I know you respect my noble family
and its generous nature. I find it deeply painful, seeing
so very little of them. I often hear the people
here referring to me as an exile, and truly that's how I feel."
- 1404 And then King Etzel said: "My dearly beloved wife,
if the distance did not seem so great, I'd gladly invite
whoever you wanted to see to travel here from the Rhine."
Krimhild was overjoyed, but carefully kept her thoughts to herself.
- 1405 She said: "Truly, my lord, if I have earned your trust,
let me ask you to send messages to the Rhine.
Then I can let my family know they're much on my mind.
We might well have a host of battle-worthy knights come riding
- 1406 from Wurms." Etzel spoke: "You ask, so let it be done.
You cannot be more eager to see your family than I
will be, meeting Otta's children for the very first time.
It hurts to have them strangers, for so many years, to the land of the Huns.
- 1407 "If you approve, my dearest wife, the messengers
I'd like to send to your family in far-off Burgundy
are my musicians, Warbel and Swemmeline." And then
he ordered those fine fiddlers to be sent for just as fast as could be.
- 1408 They hurried to where the king was seated near his queen,
and Etzel told them both they were going to Burgundy

as his royal messengers. Orders were issued to ready
costly clothes for the pair, stately enough for them to be seen

1409 on the Rhine as his men. Garments were then prepared for twenty-four
warriors. Then all of them came to the king, in his court.
He instructed them to invite Gunter and his men as his guests.
Then Krimhild took the musicians aside and told them what she expected.

1410 Mighty Etzel declared: "I'll tell you my commands.
Send them my affection, my hope that life goes well.
And then you must inquire if riding here to my land
would please them. Make it clear no guests could ever be more welcome.

1411 "And if my Krimhild's family truly wants to please me,
tell them no time is any better than immediately,
let them arrive this very summer, and enjoy my feast,
for much of my enjoyment will depend on their being here with us."

1412 Then Swemmeline, the proud musician, spoke: "My lord,
tell us the days you intend for your summer feast, so we
can let your relatives know when to arrive at your court."
Etzel replied: "Whitsun Sunday next is when it will be."

1413 Said Warbel: "We'll carefully obey your royal orders."
And then the queen, as I said, took the messengers
aside and gave them secret instructions, words regretted,
later, by the many warriors for whom they caused such consequences.

1414 Krimhild declared: "Serve me faithfully, do
exactly as I say and do it well, and you
will both become rich men, wearing noble clothes.
But the invitation you give, on the Rhine, must be carefully spoken.

1415 "Do not say to either my family or friends, in faraway
Wurms, that anyone ever saw me, in Etzel's land,
looking the least bit sad or sorrowful at heart.
Simply tell the brave, bold knights I send them my regards.

- 1416 “Ask them to accept King Etzel’s invitation. It would make me
extremely happy to drive ancient troubles away.
Tell them the Huns are starting to think I have no family.
If only I were a knight, I’d ride to them, I’d find a way!
- 1417 “And tell Gernot, my noble brother, that no one in all
the world could cherish him more than his sister. Call
on him to bring the best of our relations as guests
in the land of the Huns. Our family would win much honor from such a visit.
- 1418 “And also tell Giselher how clearly I understand
that none of what I suffered came at his loving hands.
My eyes are terribly hungry to see him again, for no one
in all the world has ever been so faithful, so noble a man.
- 1419 “Tell my mother, too, what honors I’ve won in this land.
And if Hagen from Troneg says he’d rather stay behind,
let him know there’s no one better fitted to guide them.
He knows the roads from Wurms to here, learned them when merely a child.”
- 1420 Neither messenger knew her reasons for wanting
Hagen not to remain behind, if Rhinemen went
on this visit. They learned quite well enough what his presence brought
when many Hunnish warriors met with bitter, painful deaths.
- 1421 The messengers had now received instructions and letters.
They’d been given gold enough to travel in worthy style.
Etzel and Krimhild bade them farewell. No travelers better
dressed could ever have taken leave of a king and his beautiful wife.

ADVENTURE 24

HOW WARBEL AND SWEMMELINE BROUGHT THEIR MESSAGES

- 1422 When Etzel's messengers left for the far-off Rhine,
 news about his feast fairly flew from land
 to Hunnish land, swiftly spread by royal command
 and invitation. Many who came never returned alive.
- 1423 Meanwhile his messengers proceeded over Hunnish
 lands toward Burgundy, told to bring back home
 three noble kings, along with knights serving that kingdom.
 If they were to come to Etzel, his messengers would have to hurry.
- 1424 Riding hard, they reached the castle at Bechalaren,
 where they were warmly welcomed and given whatever they wanted.
 Both Rudiger and his wife gave the messengers
 warm regards for those on the Rhine, as did their pretty daughter.
- 1425 The two musicians were not permitted to leave until
 Gotelind and her husband had given them gifts for their journey,
 and also gave them words for Lady Otta and her children,
 stating no noble count thought better of them in all the known world.
- 1426 They also sent regards to Brunhild, and the best of wishes,
 expressing eternal good faith and cordiality.
 Once they had these letters, the messengers wanted to leave.
 Rudiger blessed their departure, hoping God on high would protect them.
- 1427 As they were passing through Bavaria, Warbel, that bold
 and brave musician, paid a visit to Bishop Pilgrim.
 The bishop wrote to his friends on the Rhine. I was never told
 what he said, but I know he gave the messengers much good red gold
- 1428 as a mark of his affection and his thanks for coming to see him.
 Bishop Pilgrim said: "If ever I have them here,

my sister's three fine sons, my heart will be much pleased.
It isn't very often I'm able to travel there and see them."

- 1429 I cannot tell you, either, what roads they took to the Rhine,
but I know they lost no silver or costly clothes on the way.
Robbers were afraid of their lord, knowing wherever they
might live he'd easily reach them, his power extending far and wide.
- 1430 It took no more than twelve brief days for Swemmeline
and Warbel to arrive at the Rhine and ride to the gates of Wurms.
King Gunter and his men were advised that foreign riders
had come, carrying news. The king began to question his knights.
- 1431 The ruler of the Rhine said: "Who among us knows
where these messengers come from, riding into our land?"
But no one knew, until Hagen of Troneg happened
to see the well-dressed foreign riders and said to Gunter, at once:
- 1432 "We'll have some interesting news, I'll tell you that, my friend.
These fellows are Etzel's fiddlers, I know them both at sight.
They're surely messengers that Krimhild, your sister, sent.
They require a pleasant welcome, to honor their royal master's might."
- 1433 By then, Etzel's musicians had ridden up to the hall.
No pair of fiddlers had ever arrived in such noble fashion.
King Gunter's servants ran out to assist them, carrying all
their baggage to the rooms quickly readied and placed at their disposal.
- 1434 Their traveling clothes were costly and so well sewn and adorned
they could have appeared at once, in front of the king, and with honor.
But they said these garments would not be used or even worn
again. Anyone who wanted them had only to ask.
- 1435 This task of finding men who would condescend to accept
the offer was not, to be sure, particularly hard, and the clothes
were given away. And then the musicians got themselves dressed
far better, and went to the king in a show of truly magnificent splendor.

- 1436 The king had requested that Etzel's servants come to him
in his court. All were pleased at such courtesy. When
the messengers appeared, Hagen greeted them
with warmth, rising from his place. They thanked him politely, aware
- 1437 they were not knights. Wanting information, Hagen
inquired after Etzel's health, and his people. The fiddlers
answered: "The land has never known such riches, and our men
have never in their lives been happier. Rest assured, all are content."
- 1438 A good many men were in the hall. They made their way
through crowds, all of whom welcomed these messengers from another
land as they ought to be received, with grace and honor.
Warbel saw that the king was well attended by excellent warriors.
- 1439 The king's greeting to the two messengers was courteous:
"Both of you are welcome here, you Hunnish musicians,
and also your companions. May I assume that mighty
Etzel sent you across so many lands to Burgundy?"
- 1440 They bowed to the king, very politely. Then Warbel said:
"My dearly cherished lord sends his high respects
to the Rhine, as does your sister Krimhild. In great good faith
we, his messengers, have come to you and your worthy knights."
- 1441 The powerful ruler of the Rhine replied: "I'm pleased to hear this.
What news do you bring us of Etzel," Gunter then inquired,
"coming so far to this land? And what of my sister Krimhild?"
The musician answered: "It gives me pleasure to tell you what you desire.
- 1442 "I'm charged to say, and I know, that no two people have ever
enjoyed greater good fortune. I think you'd also like
to know that all their knights, their family, and their servants
were happy to see us riding here, bearing our king's good words."
- 1443 "I thank you for bringing cordial regards, of the kind you carry
from Etzel and also my sister, along with such welcome tidings

of both. We're happy to hear how well the king and his lady
have fared. My question was anxious, but now I'm deeply satisfied."

- 1444 Both the Rhineland's younger kings had now arrived,
having only just heard. Giselher, inspired
by love of his sister, was thrilled to see the messengers,
and spoke excitedly, expressing his joy and profound delight:
- 1445 "I want to welcome you both in the strongest possible terms.
Truly, you ought to ride to the Rhine more often. Wurms
will show you genuine friendship, we'll always be glad to see you.
Burgundy will bring you no sorrow. That I can safely affirm!"
- 1446 "We have the greatest faith in your honor," said Swemmeline.
"My tongue's not clever enough to repeat all the fine
and loving words King Etzel used, in speaking of you,
as did your noble sister, surrounded in honor all the time.
- 1447 "The king's good wife wishes you to remember the kindness
and great good faith and love you've shown her, all her life.
But most and first of all we're messengers to your lord
from ours, urging you to come as his guests, crossing the borders
- 1448 "of his land. We've both been told most seriously to ask you.
Mighty Etzel hereby invites you all to come,
adding that even if seeing your sister might not
excite you, he can't understand what he himself has said or done
- 1449 "to keep you, all this time, strangers to his home.
Even if you'd never met his queen, knew little
of her, he thinks he deserves your interest, quite on his own.
If this can be brought to pass he would be happy—and not him alone."
- 1450 King Gunter answered: "Seven nights from now I'll tell you,
after consultation with family and friends, what we
will be able to do. In the meantime, return to your rooms
and enjoy the peaceful rest you deserve, traveling so long and so well."

- 1451 But Warbel spoke: "Might we be received, tonight,
before we take our rest, by Lady Otta, mighty
queen and mother to you and your brothers, and our Lady Krimhild?"
Noble Giselher answered them most courteously:
- 1452 "No one ought to stop you, if that is what you wish.
Visiting my mother tonight will make her happy,
knowing this is just what Lady Krimhild, my sister,
would like her to do. I think she'll welcome you most eagerly."
- 1453 Giselher conducted the messengers to his mother's
rooms. Their welcome was a pleasant one. Warbel
and Swemmeline were warmly received, for that was Otta's
nature. The pair of courtly musicians proceeded to tell her their news:
- 1454 "My lady sends you her faithful regards," said Swemmeline.
"She dearly wishes she could see you much more often.
That would make her very happy indeed, if only
it were possible." Lady Otta at once replied:
- 1455 "It isn't possible, of course. But how eagerly
I always dream of seeing my dearest daughter. Your queen
being so far from the Rhine is terribly sad for me.
May her life with Etzel, your lord, continue to be blessed by heaven.
- 1456 "You must be sure to tell me, before you leave, just when
you're likely to come again. No messengers I've seen
in a very long time have been so welcome. I'm truly pleased."
They carefully assured her that she would know when they meant to leave.
- 1457 The visitors from Hunnish lands then went to their rooms.
Gunter had his friends sent for. The king informed them
of Etzel's invitation and asked that each man present
give his advice. No one hesitated to give his opinion,
- 1458 and virtually all of those he trusted the most favored
accepting the invitation and going to Etzel's land.

Only Hagen objected, taking a very firm stand,
and whispering in Gunter's ear: "You'd be committing suicide.

1459 "Surely you haven't forgotten the things we've done. We need
to be forever wary, where Krimhild's concerned. Me,
I killed her husband, his blood drained by my own hands.
How could you risk a journey, now, to dangerous Hunnish lands?"

1460 Gunter answered: "My sister has put away her anger.
We kissed and reconciled, there won't be any danger.
She gave me her forgiveness for everything we did.
You're the only one, Hagen, she clearly did not forgive."

1461 "Don't let yourself be tricked," said Hagen, "by anything
the messengers have told you. If you visit Krimhild, my king,
you'll probably surrender your honor, and perhaps your life.
She's fierce and full of revenge, your sister, King Etzel's clever wife."

1462 Then Gernot spoke, the second oldest king of the Rhine:
"Hagen, you're deeply shamed by your guilt, and terrified
of being killed in Hunnish lands, and you're probably right.
For the rest of us to shun our sister would be a wicked thing."

1463 Then Giselper, the youngest king, spoke: "Hagen,
my friend, since you're so keenly aware of your guilt, you need
to stay right here and take good care of yourself, and let
the rest of us, willing to risk it, visit my sister the queen."

1464 Hagen from Troneg grew quite angry, hearing this:
"Where do you think you'll find anyone less afraid
than me, riding from here to Etzel's court? Unless
you come to your senses and change your minds, I'll prove it by leading the way."

1465 Then Rumolt, heroic kitchen master, spoke: "At home
it's easy to deal with strangers or friends, or anyone else.
You stay in charge, you've got whatever you want. There's sense
is Hagen's argument. Why should you put your head in a noose?"

- 1466 “You’ve listened to him before, and no one’s died. But listen to Rumolt, if not to him. Rumolt’s done you good service, he’s faithful, and what he says, right now, is stay where you are. Let King Etzel stay with beautiful Krimhild, way out there.
- 1467 “Tell me where in the world you’ll find a better place to be? Your enemies might come, but you’d be ready. Dress yourself in handsome clothes, and feed your face. Drink good wine, and find pretty women you want to chase.
- 1468 “You eat the best food any kings in the world have ever enjoyed. And even if you didn’t, you still should stay right where you are, on account of your beautiful wives. Never risk your lives unless you have to. This isn’t a game you ought to play.
- 1469 “So that’s my advice. Stay here. Harvests really grow, right here. If you get yourself in trouble, we can bail you out. But not where Etzel is. How do you know what’s really out there? Stay, my lords. That’s what Rumolt says.”
- 1470 Then Gernot said: “We don’t intend to stay. Now that my sister has sent us such a cordial invitation, seconded by Etzel, why should we say no? Anyone can stay right here, who doesn’t want to go.”
- 1471 To which Hagen replied: “Don’t take my advice as foolish, whatever you do. I’ve given you honest warning. It makes good sense, if you’re determined to go, to travel fully prepared, armed to the teeth, ready to fight, if that’s what you face.
- 1472 “Bring the very best warriors you’re able to find, from the Rhine or anywhere else. I myself promise to furnish a thousand excellent knights. This is a serious business. We need a show of strength that can put a stop to Krimhild’s bile.”
- 1473 “An excellent plan, I accept it,” the king said quickly. He ordered men to ride across his lands, collecting warriors.

They brought three thousand back, and probably even more,
no one expecting the pain and suffering they soon would undergo.

- 1474 Riding happy to Wurms the warriors came, and those
chosen for Etzel's land received good clothes and horses
for the long journey ahead. Gunter had no trouble
putting together a large and well-armed, very formidable force.
- 1475 Hagen of Troneg asked Dancwart, his brother, to send for
eighty heroes, to come to the Rhine, magnificent men
who rode like the knights they were. Their horses were beautifully harnessed,
their backs were covered with the best clothing seen in Gunter's land.
- 1476 Courageous Volker came, experienced fighter and maker
of music, riding in front of thirty well-equipped men,
ready to travel with Gunter if he chose to visit the Huns.
He and his knights promptly set themselves at the king's command.
- 1477 Let me tell you who this Volker was—a noble
lord served by many excellent Rhineland knights,
and a master musician, famous all across the Rhine
as a fighting fiddle player second to none for music or war.
- 1478 Hagen himself chose a thousand for Etzel's land,
knowing them all, well aware what quick strong hands
could do, powerful men he had watched in war and peace.
No one could doubt their courage, or question their warlike ability.
- 1479 Krimhild's messengers, meanwhile, were growing restless,
afflicted with overwhelming fear of their lord and master.
Day after day they kept on asking when they could leave.
But Hagen would not permit it, always thinking well ahead.
- 1480 He told the king his plan: "We need to be extremely
careful. Don't let them leave until just seven days
before we start for Etzel's land ourselves. That way,
there won't be time to hide hostile movements and angry feelings.

- 1481 “And Lady Krimhild, if she tries to arrange a trap
for us, won’t have the time. And even if she does,
it will not do her any good, since we’ll be coming
to the Hunnish land with so many hand-picked, battle-hardened men.”
- 1482 And now those excellent knights were ready. Saddles and shields,
and the clothes they knew they would need, had been prepared for the journey
deep into Etzel’s land. So Gunter said he’d receive
Krimhild’s messengers in his court, assure them that they could leave.
- 1483 And when the messengers came, Gernot spoke: “The king
is now prepared to accept the invitation brought
to us by Etzel’s envoys. We will attend the feast
and visit with our sister. This is settled beyond all doubt.”
- 1484 Then Gunter himself spoke: “Now please give us some
idea of the feast’s probable date and, accordingly,
when we’re expected to come.” Swemmeline said: “Whitsun
Sunday, this next summer, is when the feasting will begin.”
- 1485 The king then granted them permission to visit Brunhild,
which they had long been anxious to do, but for which visit
royal approval had been withheld. But Count Volker,
from Alzei, out of concern for the queen, intervened and stopped them.
- 1486 “Lady Brunhild, I’m sorry to say, will not at the moment
be able to receive you,” said considerate Volker. “Wait
until tomorrow morning, and then she may be able.”
But still, the very next morning she either could or would not see them.
- 1487 And then the ruler, to show the messengers how highly
he thought of them, ordered glittering shields brought in,
loaded high with his gold. They could take what they liked.
Other shining gifts were given by his family and friends.
- 1488 Giselper and Gernot, and Gera, and also Ortwin,
demonstrated, once again, that they were open-

handed, giving both musicians costly gifts,
but still in fear of their lord they said they did not dare accept.

1489 Warbel said to the king: “Respected lord, let
your gifts remain right here in this land. We cannot take them
with us, our mighty lord commanded us to accept
nothing. Nor, in truth, are either of us in any need.”

1490 But the mighty lord of the Rhine was not the least bit pleased
to hear them speaking this way, when he had offered royal
gold. They had to accept, Gunter left them no choice.
Every single gift went with them when they came to leave.

1491 The messengers then wanted to say farewell to Lady
Otta, so Giselher escorted them to his mother’s
rooms. Otta told them that Lady Krimhild’s honors
were also gifts given to her, and she wished the messengers well.

1492 Then she ordered gold brought in, in the name of Krimhild
(deeply loved by her mother), and carried to the land of the Huns,
gifts for mighty Etzel and also the two musicians.
These they accepted freely, knowing they were given in great good faith.

1493 And now the messengers said happy farewells to men
and women alike, pleased especially to be given
an armed escort as far as Hunnish Swabia, sent
by Gernot to protect Etzel’s court musicians from all attack.

1494 And even after the Rhinemen turned back, the envoys traveled
on in safety, sheltered, no matter what the road
they took, by Etzel’s enormous power, losing no clothes
or anything else while they hurried toward their Hunnish home.

1495 And friends along the way were told, whenever they could be,
that very soon indeed the men of Burgundy
would take the same long trip from Wurms to the land of the Huns.
They also informed good Bishop Pilgrim that welcome guests were coming.

- 1496 Riding down the road past Bechalaren, they stopped
to tell Count Rudiger (too important to be forgotten)
and gracious Gotelind, his wife. And when she heard
their news, the lady was thrilled that guests so noble would soon be there.
- 1497 Etzel's musicians rode on across the land. Waiting
for them was Etzel, in his castle at Gran, along the Danube.
They gave him all the greetings and told him all the praise
the Burgundy kings had spoken. Etzel's happy face turned red.
- 1498 And Etzel's queen, when she heard the good news spoken, and knew
her brothers would soon be with her, there in Hunnish lands,
felt her sad heart soar. She heaped gifts on the two
musicians, her gracious giving earning honor for her open hands.
- 1499 She spoke: "Swemmeline and Warbel, now tell me which
of all my family and friends plan to attend our feast?
Who of all we invited intend to please us best
by coming? What did Hagen say, when he heard the king had accepted?"
- 1500 They said: "Lady, he came to the council and spoke, one morning,
saying nothing pleasant but giving terrible warnings.
The journey they meant to make, from Wurms on the Rhine to here,
so far as he could see was a trip that would end in danger and fear.
- 1501 "But your brothers, the three kings of the Rhine, are all coming
with joy in their hearts. We cannot give you a full account
of just who else will be here, but we know that Volker, the court
musician, certainly means to make the trip past your Passau home."
- 1502 "The bishop's not important to me," Krimhild replied.
"I don't much care if I see Volker or not. But Hagen's
one I truly love, a hero in whom I take pride.
Knowing he'll come to visit us lifts my spirits higher."
- 1503 And then the contented queen went to look for the king.
She spoke the gentlest, most loving words. "My dearest lord,

how do you like the news your messengers have brought?
Everything I've wanted for years will now be happening."

1504 "Whatever you wish is what I want," the king replied.
"No visit from my own family could make me so satisfied.
I've never so much looked forward to guests. No matter what sadness
I might be feeling, the thought of your people's coming turns it to gladness."

1505 The king's attendants hurried about, making the royal
palace fit for a visit from eagerly awaited,
deeply beloved guests. Everyone was joyful,
ready to welcome those their king had invited, who would try to destroy him.

ADVENTURE 25

HOW THE NIBELUNGEN* CAME TO THE HUNS

1506 Let us leave them dashing about, preparing the castle.
Let's look, instead, at the noblest assemblage of men you're likely
to see entering a distant king's realm, heads held high,
weapons and armor gleaming, dazzling people as they passed by.

1507 The lord of the Rhine had dressed his men ready for the feast,
a thousand and sixty knights (according to the tally I've seen)
and a full nine thousand warriors ready for battle or fun.
Those they left behind would weep and mourn them, when the day had come.

1508 As saddles were carried through the hall in Wurms, an old
bishop of Speyer had nodded, turning slowly to Lady
Otta, and saying: "Our people require a very long journey
to attend this feast. May God protect their honor in that far-off fold."

* For reasons no one has been able to explain, from this point onward the poet (or some later scribe?) often labels the Burgundians "Nibelungen," though the Nibelungen of the poem's earlier pages are a very different people, and these warriors' Burgundy homeland is repeatedly mentioned

- 1509 And Lady Otta, the mother of all three kings, said
to her sons: "I'd rather you stayed right here, my worthy children.
I dreamed, last night, of fearful things, bewilderment,
and every bird flying on the Rhine suddenly cold and dead."
- 1510 "Whoever runs his life according to dreams," said Hagen,
"is wasting his time on useless information. Men
must know for themselves how to care for their sacred honor.
I'd like it better if the king made his farewells faster and shorter.
- 1511 "We ought to be excited, riding to Etzel's land.
Those who serve your sons will get to use their hands
as much as they like, once we get to Krimhild's feast."
Hagen was now in favor of going. Later, he'd not be pleased.
- 1512 He might have continued against it, if Gernot had not spoken
hostile words, reminding Hagen what he'd done
to Sifried, Lady Krimhild's beloved: "You still can run
away, my friend, if it bothers you to go where you're not much welcome."
- 1513 Hagen of Troneg declared: "I do nothing out of fear.
As soon as you're ready, my lord, you can give the order to leave
and I'll gladly ride along to Etzel's land, if you need me."
Indeed, on Hunnish soil he'd smash in many helmets and shields.
- 1514 The ships were ready and waiting to carry them over the Rhine.
All the clothing, the weapons and equipment, were loaded on board.
Bringing their goods to the boats took from dawn till night.
They all left their homes in confidence and great delight.
- 1515 From the shore near Wurms one saw tents and pavilions set
on the other side of the river. And now the king requested
his beautiful wife's presence, so she could have the pleasure
of his handsome body for this uninterrupted, joyful night.
- 1516 Fanfares of flutes and horns woke them, early next morning,
letting them know it was time to leave. They made themselves ready,

belovèd wives embracing husbands they thought they would see
again. But Etzel's wife left them only bitter mourning.

- 1517 Noble Otta's sons had a brave and highly trusted
knight in their service, who told them, as they were about to depart,
the troubling thoughts held deep his mind and heart:
"I cannot keep from sadness, seeing you make this long and dusty
- 1518 "journey." This was Rumolt, a hero of decent ways.
He said: "Who in all the world will take care of your people
and land? But no one can ever dent your knightly conceit!
Your taking Krimhild's word for this trip I find completely amazing."
- 1519 Said Gunter: "Land and children I leave in your protection.
I place our women in your hands. Those are my instructions.
Whenever you see them weeping, give them what comfort you can.
We expect to have no sorrow because of Krimhild or her new man."
- 1520 Horses were harnessed and saddled, ready for king and men.
Many heartfelt kisses were given and taken. They went
away in high good spirits. It was hardly a sad good-bye.
Many beautiful women, remembering this day, couldn't keep from crying.
- 1521 Bold warriors went to fetch their horses, and all the women
could do, faithfully standing off to the side, was ponder
the long separation they knew was coming, and helplessly wonder
what new sorrow and shame might come as well, instead of their men.
- 1522 The brave Burgundians began their journey. The land they left
behind was bustling, busy with work that had to be done.
Watching from high in the hills, men and women wept.
The people surely were sad. Those who were leaving were the happy ones.
- 1523 A thousand Nibelung knights rode along beside them:
the many beautiful women staying in homes they left
would never see a single one of them again.
Krimhild would never forget or cease to bleed from Sifried's wounds.

- 1524 Heavy-footed horses beat on the ground from there
to the River Meune, across from Franconia land. Gunter's
men were led by Hagen, who knew the roads wherever
they traveled. Dancwart managed all their equipment, their food and supplies.
- 1525 After Franconia land they rode through Swallafelt,
and no one could doubt how high in their saddles these heroes rode,
the princes and men of their family, noteworthy knights. The twelfth
morning, King Gunter saw (for the very first time) the Danube flowing.
- 1526 Hagen of Troneg was still leading the way, very
well trusted by Nibelungen warriors. But not a ferry
boat could be seen. Hagen tied his horse to the trunk
of a tree, and stood on the sand, watching the river flowing along,
- 1527 its waters rising high on the banks. Where were the ships?
The Rhineland warriors sat on their horses, wondering if
they'd get themselves across such gleaming wide water. Many
first-rate fighters dropped from their horses and stood looking for any
- 1528 possible help. "Damn," said Hagen. "King of the Rhine,
it isn't hard to see what's happened. Look for yourself.
The river's swelling onto its banks, the current's rising.
We'll lose a lot of good men, if we try to cross without some help."
- 1529 "How could I have known, Hagen?" the king replied.
"Instead of discouraging us, why not do something about it?
Go find a boat, or a ford, so we can cross this river
and bring our clothes and weapons and all our horses to the other side."
- 1530 "Still, life does not seem so very unpleasant," said Hagen,
"that I'm prepared to drown in such a swollen flood.
Besides, my hands are anxious to kill a good many men
in Etzel's land—a good deal better than dying here in this mud.
- 1531 "So all the rest of you stay where you are. I'll make
my way along the river and find someone to take us

across, and put us ashore on the other side, in Gelpfrat's land." Then powerful Hagen strapped his shield across his back,

1532 more than ready to make this expedition, his helmet gleaming in the sun, as did his glittering chain-mail coat and his shining double-bladed sword, either edge honed to such a fearsome sharpness it could kill at a stroke.

1533 He hunted up and down, searching for a ferry man, then heard water splashing. He listened carefully. In a pretty little pool two water spirits, very wise and knowing, were bathing, refreshing themselves in the good cool water.

1534 Hagen knew what they were, and tried to approach unseen. They knew at once he was there and hurriedly swam off. He was pleased, knowing now they could not escape. And meaning them no harm, but wanting their wisdom, he merely stole their clothes.

1535 One of the water spirits, named Hadaberg, spoke: "Noble Hagen, if you give us back our clothes, courageous knight, we in return will tell you how this journey will end for you, there in the far-off land of the Huns."

1536 They wavered over the water in front of him, like birds. Seeing this, he knew beyond any doubt their powers were real. Whatever they told him would be true. But knowing how he wanted the future to be, they spoke with reassuring words:

1537 "Proceed right on ahead to Etzel's land! Without a single pause or doubt, I'm able to promise, truly, that no knight come to a foreign land has received such fruits of honor and glory as you'll find there. This is the simple truth."

1538 Hagen's heart, as he listened, leapt with joy. Not waiting for more, he gave them both their fairy clothes, wonderfully lovely garments, and they put them on. But once they'd dressed themselves, they told him the honest truth he hadn't gotten

- 1539 before. The second water spirit, named Sigilint,
 declared: "Let me warn you, Hagen, Aldrian's child.
 My mother's sister lied, but only to get back our raiment.
 When you reach the Hunnish land, treachery is what you'll find.
- 1540 "You need to turn around and go home, while you have time.
 All you noble warriors have been invited to Etzel's
 land only to bring you, each and all, to your death.
 Whoever continues this journey will only cause himself to die."
- 1541 But Hagen answered: "Surely, you're telling a different tale.
 But why should I believe this version? Who could hate
 Rhinemmen so much that all of us will meet our deaths?"
 She began to tell him the story in clear and more than abundant detail,
- 1542 saying: "First, you need to understand that none
 of this can be changed by you. We know without a doubt
 that the priest accompanying the king, and he alone,
 will live to return to Gunter's land. No one else will come out
- 1543 "alive." Hagen replied, his heart now grim and bleak:
 "You don't really expect me to turn and go back to my lords
 bringing only this sort of news? Unless you're weaker
 than I think you are, just tell me how this raging river can be crossed."
- 1544 She said: "As long as you're determined to finish your journey,
 know this: in a house high on a hill there lives the only
 ferryman for miles in any direction. There is
 no other." Hagen turned away, wanting to hear no more,
- 1545 asking no further questions of either shimmering fairy.
 "Just a minute, Hagen, don't be in such a hurry.
 We haven't finished explaining how you can make the ferry-
 man assist you to cross the river. Count Elza is the name of his lord,
- 1546 "whose brother is a heroic count named Gelpfrat, lord
 of our Bavarian kingdom. You'll find that crossing his land

will not be an easy matter. I feel it my duty to warn you:
 proceed with very great care, in dealing with him or his ferryman.

- 1547 “The boatman is terribly fierce, likely to try to kill you.
 You’ll have to talk him around, turn him friendly. He will
 not help you, in any case, unless you pay him well.
 He watches over this place, completely loyal to Gelpfrat, his lord.
- 1548 “He may not show his face, when you call from down on the river,
 so tell him Amelricht is your name. (He used to live
 nearby, a good man involved in a feud, who had to leave.)
 The ferryman will surely come, if that’s the name you give.”
- 1549 Hagen was angry and left, bowing to the water spirits
 as soon as they finished speaking, not saying a word of thanks.
 He climbed to higher ground and walked along the bank
 until he saw a house across on the other side of the river.
- 1550 And then he raised his voice and bellowed all the way over
 the water: “Come get me across, ferryman! I’ll give you
 a ring of good red gold, if you take me over the river.
 I tell you, getting across is worth that much to me, and more.”
- 1551 But the ferryman was neither poor nor agreeable.
 He did not usually work for the money, no matter who came.
 Even his servants snarled and swore. Hagen could see
 he wasn’t dealing with a man that even good red gold could tame.
- 1552 This time he bellowed with the full strength of his lungs (and he
 was a very large man, as strong as men are likely to be):
 “Now come get Amelricht, Elza’s trusty man,
 who had to run away from here, when that deadly feud began.”
- 1553 He set the ring on the point of his sword, and held it high
 in the air, so the gold would glitter and catch the ferryman’s eye,
 who then might help them across the river to Gelpfrat’s land.
 The haughty ferryman got into his boat, oars in hand.

- 1554 It happened that this same boatman had only recently married.
 How often greed confuses the soul, and plans miscarry!
 He was not willing to serve, he only wanted the gold.
 So he worked to earn his own death on the bitter edge of Hagen's sword.
- 1555 The ferryman had brought his boat to the edge of the sand,
 rowing hard. But seeing a stranger, not the man
 he expected, his face went red with anger and, looking at Hagen,
 he swore in the sternest language, cursing the stranger again and again:
- 1556 "Maybe your name is really Amelricht, God damn you,
 but you aren't the fellow I had in mind, I've never seen you
 before. He's my brother. I never should have believed you.
 But now that I know you're a liar, you can stay and rot just where you stand."
- 1557 "Never, in the name of God!" Hagen quickly replied.
 "I am a knight from another land, I've men in my charge.
 Accept this ring, in the name of friendship, and do what I want.
 Bring me across the river. Gratitude should satisfy pride."
- 1558 But the ferryman declared: "That isn't going to happen.
 My lord has enemies, he worries what they might do.
 I'm not allowed to ferry strangers—and that includes you.
 If you want to go on living, get out of my boat, go back on the sand."
- 1559 "I can't do that," said Hagen. "I've plenty of other troubles.
 Just take this gold as a friendly payment and bring a thousand
 men and their horses over the river and safely to land."
 The ferryman swore even harder: "I'll see you in Hell first, my man!"
- 1560 He picked up one of his oars, broad and extremely heavy,
 and struck Hagen (who could have done without it) on the head,
 driving him down on his knees in the bottom of the boat. The knight
 from Troneg had never met a ferryman so savagely violent.
- 1561 Nor was the boatman finished beating his offensive guest.
 He hit him again, so hard this time that the oar snapped

when it landed on Hagen's helmet. This was a very strong man.
But now Count Elza's man had to accept Hagen's thanks.

1562 Feeling distinctly ferocious himself, Hagen drew
his sword and swung it swift and strong, but only once.
Then picking up the boatman's severed head, he flung it
into the water. Other Rhineland warriors soon learned this news.

1563 During this brief battle the rudderless boat drifted
downstream. He had to struggle extremely hard to position
the craft back in the direction it had faced, but still he did it,
even having only a single oar to work it with.

1564 And having turned the boat around, he began to row
with truly powerful strokes, until the oar broke off
in his hands. Anxious to join the others waiting on shore,
he had to leave the boat, get out and walk—but hey! he tore

1565 a narrow strip from his shield and used it to tie up the craft.
And then he walked to the wood where the Rhinelanders were waiting.
Gunter came down to the shore and many knights came after
him, everyone deeply concerned with crossing over safely.

1566 Hagen was greeted warmly, at least until they noticed
blood all over the boat (although they did not know it,
the ferryman had died there). And then more than just one
Rhineland warrior began asking more than a single question.

1567 And when King Gunter saw the hot red blood swishing
about in the boat, he too began to wonder at this:
“Tell me, Hagen my friend, what's happened to the ferryman?
It looks as if his life was swept away by your powerful hand.”

1568 But Hagen quickly denied it: “I found this boat the way
you see it, tied near a wild willow. All I did
was untie it. I've seen no ferryman on these shores today.
No one's been harmed by my hands. I think that's all I need to say.”

- 1569 Then another of Burgundy's kings, noble Gernot, said:
 "I think I'll need to mourn many good friends, before
 this day is over, unless we find a boatman, or more
 than one, to take us across. My heart is feeling sadly torn."
- 1570 But Hagen shouted to their servants: "You there! Bring our equipment
 down to the shore! Lord Gernot," he added, "I once was considered
 the very best ferryman all along the Rhine.
 I think I'll have you across, and in Gelpfrat's land, in plenty of time."
- 1571 They got the animals over the river in rapid style,
 beating them on their backs. The horses were excellent swimmers,
 and not a single one drowned in the water. Some drifted
 a little before they landed, for long-distance swimming made them tired.
- 1572 There was no question, now, of turning back, so they loaded
 their clothing into the boat, and the chests that held their gold.
 Hagen remained in charge, and got them across, band
 after band, safely ashore in Gelpfrat's dangerous unknown land.
- 1573 First he ferried over a thousand courageous knights,
 and then the men of his own. But more were waiting in line.
 By the time he was done, he'd ferried men to the number of nine
 thousand—an excellent working day for stalwart Hagen's hands.
- 1574 Then, when he'd brought them safely across the river, he reminded
 himself, quite suddenly, of the strange prediction he had
 been given by the water spirit: only the priest would survive
 their journey. That memory nearly cost the poor priest his life.
- 1575 Hagen found him standing beside the holy goods
 his religious duties required, his hand resting on wrapped-up
 chalices and altars. But nothing sacred could
 have saved him from Hagen's silent, deadly, merciless attack.
- 1576 Wasting no time, he threw the priest out of the boat.
 Burgundy men were shouting, "Grab hold, sir, grab hold!"

Giselher was angry, but Hagen refused to show
the slightest mercy, pushing the priest's clutching hands back off.

1577 Then Lord Gernot spoke, the second king of the Rhine:
"What good will it do you, Hagen, to cause this priest to die?
If this were anyone else but you, he'd live to regret it!
What has the priest done to you, to turn you so crazily wild?"

1578 The priest was trying to swim, to save himself if he could.
But no one was allowed to help him, and without help he would drown,
which was just what Hagen wanted. Fiercely, he pushed him down
in the water. None of the others liked this behavior, none thought it good.

1579 The poor priest saw, at last, that help was not to be had.
Despairing, because he could not swim, he struggled to turn
himself around and head for the shore. He splashed and churned
until God's hand reached down and, still alive, he was back on land.

1580 The priest just stood there, trying to shake the water out
of his clothes. And seeing this, Hagen realized
that nothing was going to change, the story was true, no doubt
remained: "All of these excellent fighting men will lose their lives."

1581 After the craft had been unloaded, and everything
the kings had brought was carried to safety high on the shore,
Hagen smashed the boat and scattered its boards on the water.
No one could understand, warriors were gaping at what they saw.

1582 Dancwart spoke: "My brother, why are you doing this?
For when we're heading back, riding away from the Huns
and heading home, we'll need to cross this river once
again." Later, Hagen would tell him no one was going home.

1583 But now the Troneg warrior said: "I did it simply
to prove to any cowards, tempted to turn around,
that all they'll find, if they run, is death by bitter drowning,
which cowards deserve. Let them die. The rest of us will win."

1584 One of the best of the knights who'd come on this journey, a man
 who always said what he thought, was Volker, a fine musician
 and a brave warrior, forever ready to fiddle or fight.
 As far as he was concerned, Hagen of Troneg was bound to be right.

1585 Their horses were ready to ride, the mules had all been loaded.
 As far as they had come, no disasters had taken
 place to depress their spirits, except for the priest's sad fate.
 Left alone, and horseless, he had to go walking all the way home.

ADVENTURE 26

HOW DANCWART KILLED GELPFRAT

1586 When they had assembled, ready to leave the shore, Gunter
 asked: "Who will be leading us across this land,
 keeping us from wandering off the proper path?"
 Mighty Volker answered: "I'll be making sure of that."

1587 "Wait a minute," said Hagen. "Friends must behave as one.
 All you knights and excellent warriors will say you agree.
 I've got unfortunate news, and I need to share it. None
 of us will ever go home to our beloved Burgundy.

1588 "Early this morning, a pair of water spirits made
 this prediction. None of us will come back. All I can say
 is keep your weapons ready. And I must warn you: we
 have powerful enemies, here in this land. We've got to travel warily.

1589 "I wanted to prove the water spirits were lying. They said
 the only man to come back home alive would be
 the priest—him and only him. So I wanted the priest
 to die right now, and make them wrong. They're not, he isn't dead."

- 1590 His words were passed along from man to man. Ten thousand
mighty fighting men turned pale with terrible fear,
and rightly, hearing that all of them would die, somewhere
along this journey. How could they survive this treacherous land?
- 1591 Mering, a town on the Danube, was where they'd come across
and where the ferryman was killed. Hagen said:
"I know I've made us many enemies along
this road. We'll be attacked, we'll have to fight, and some will be dead.
- 1592 "I killed the ferryman, this morning, and took his boat.
They'll surely have that news by now, those who rule
this land, Gelpfrat and Elza. Don't let yourselves be fooled.
Every one of you should be expecting trouble, and soon.
- 1593 "I know these Bavarians, they're far too brave to let
us off. Don't push your horses hard, let them trot
along so no one thinks we're running away." "I've got
to agree," said Giselher the young. That's good advice, I'll follow it."
- 1594 "Is Volker still intending to guide us across this land?"
they asked. "By all means, let him, he knows each of the paths
and every road from here to there, our fiddler man!"
Before they'd finished speaking, Volker had his sword in hand
- 1595 and like the gallant knight he was, had buckled his helmet
on. His battle gear glittered in many hues.
He tied a bright red scarf at the end of his spear, for meeting
a bitter fate that he and the three Rhine kings could not refuse.
- 1596 By now Gelpfrat had indeed been told the story
of his ferryman's death. Mighty Elza had also been
informed. Neither ruler was the least bit pleased. Their warriors
were summoned, and soon they had a band of ready fighting men.
- 1597 And let me tell you, once they'd come at their rulers' call,
it didn't take long for this band of seven hundred or more,

strong and battle-hard and angry, to ride to war,
 anxious to find whoever it was that had insulted them all.

- 1598 They rode rapidly, led by Gelpfrat and Elza, and quickly
 found the fierce Rhinemen they were hunting. Had
 they been a bit less angry, and ridden not so swiftly,
 fewer of those who rode behind their lords would have been dead.
- 1599 For Hagen of Troneg had shaped a careful battle plan—
 which is, in fact, exactly what a hero should do
 for his friends, guarding their rear with his very own men and Dancwart,
 his brother. He'd acted wisely, done all a first-rate fighter can.
- 1600 Daylight was fading away, no one could see who was coming.
 Hagen was worried that some of the Rhinemen might suffer. Terribly
 quiet, shields at the ready, they rode across the land,
 and before much time had passed the rearguard was indeed attacked.
- 1601 They heard the hoofbeats, first, coming from both sides
 of the road, and also behind them. The attackers were riding fast.
 Brave Dancwart spoke: "In just a moment they'll be attacking.
 Get your helmets on. That's my best and only advice."
- 1602 Having no choice, they themselves pulled up their horses.
 Even in deepest darkness they could see shields gleaming.
 Hagen had no interest in keeping silent any longer:
 "Who are you, dashing down the road?" Then Gelpfrat had to speak.
- 1603 The haughty Bavarian count answered: "It's enemies
 we're hunting. We've followed them right to this place. We still
 don't know just who it was, early today, who killed
 my ferryman, a first-rate warrior. His death has caused me grief."
- 1604 Hagen of Troneg replied: "That was your ferryman, eh?
 He wouldn't ferry us. I'll take the blame, if there's any
 deserved for killing the fellow. I had no choice. He wouldn't
 have hesitated, let me tell you, at killing me, if he could.

- 1605 “I offered to pay him in gold and clothing, and pay him well,
my friend, for bringing us over the river, here to your land.
This made him so exceedingly angry he hit me on the helmet
with a heavy oar. Truly, he wasn’t a very pleasant man.
- 1606 “He wanted to make me angry. He did. I drew my sword
and struck as hard as I could. That was the end of his life.
Tell me how much you want, and I’ll pay you a decent man-price.”
That was enough, between two stubborn men, to start the fighting.
- 1607 Gelpfrat said: “As soon as I saw Gunter and his men
come riding by, I knew that Hagen, once again,
would cause me trouble. Well, this time he won’t get away.
Hagen’s going to give me more than words, this time he’ll pay.”
- 1608 Their shields were lowered, Hagen and Gelpfrat. Over the rims
their spears were poised, each man eager to get at the other.
Elza and Dancwart, too, rode into battle, grimly
determined, noble knights fiercely hunting one another.
- 1609 Where could you look, to see more heroic combat?
In one mighty encounter, Hagen went flying backward
completely off his horse, Gelpfrat’s hand beating him
down, breaking the animal’s harness. Then he knew the battle
- 1610 had truly begun. Crashing shields were all around him.
Hagen had a good rest, stretched on the grassy ground
where the blow had sent him, slowly coming back to his senses.
He did not think Gelpfrat was knighthood at its courteous best.
- 1611 Hagen and Gelpfrat were fighting again, now on the ground,
on foot. I do not know who was looking after
their horses or whether Gelpfrat had willingly come down.
But both good knights were being helped by others all around them.
- 1612 This was savage combat indeed. The Rhineland knight
drove as hard as he could at Gelpfrat, and the noble count

promptly cut a good-sized chunk from Hagen's rounded
shield. The blow came very close to killing Gunter's mighty

- 1613 vassal, who began to call Dancwart to come to his side.
"Help me, my dear brother, I've got my hands more
than full with this fierce fellow. He'll never let me go."
Brave Dancwart said: "Don't worry, I can deal with Bavarian pride."
- 1614 Dancwart rode up close and dealt Gelpfrat a blow
with his sharp spear, and the count fell to the earth, dead.
Elza would have dearly liked to avenge his older
brother, but he and his men had to retreat, badly beaten.
- 1615 Gelpfrat lay dead on the ground, and Elza was terribly wounded.
At least eighty Bavarian men, along with their count,
were lying dead, and Elza knew it was no use
fighting on, they had no choice but to break away and run.
- 1616 All the Bavarians who could, broke and fled.
Behind them they could hear the sound of horrible blows.
Hagen's men pursued them, driving after those
who were slowest. Most Bavarians ran, preferring that to death.
- 1617 But as they were hunting the hindmost, noble Dancwart called:
"We need to go in the other direction, as fast as we can.
Let these bloodstained fellows run. We must get back
to our friends. That's by far the most important thing of all."
- 1618 As soon as they returned to where the fight had been fought,
Hagen of Troneg spoke: "We need to learn which
of us is wounded, and who might have been lost, brought
to death by this savage battle, born in Gelpfrat's raging thought."
- 1619 Four of their men were gone, and would have to be mourned. Their deaths
were already well revenged. The pile of Bavarian dead
added up to a hundred or more, and Hagen's men
carried marks on their shields, now soaking wet with enemy blood.

- 1620 The moon kept breaking through the clouds, but there wasn't much light
Hagen said: "No one must tell my dearest lords
a word of what his men have done in this place, tonight.
Don't bother them with sorrow until the sun is shining bright."
- 1621 Then those who had just been fighting rode until they joined
the other Rhinemen. Fatigue and weary spirits rode with them.
"How long must we keep on riding?" was heard from many men.
Said noble Dancwart: "We can't allow ourselves to stop and rest.
- 1622 "All of us have to ride until the sun comes up."
But brave Volker, whose task was care of the Rhineland warriors,
sent Dancwart a message: "When will we be allowed to stop?
We have to rest our horses, and also my weary royal lords."
- 1623 Noble Dancwart replied: "I cannot tell you when.
We must not let ourselves rest in the dangerous darkness of night.
By morning, as soon as a suitable place appears, we can lie
on the grass." A good many men were saddened, hearing these words spoken.
- 1624 Until the morning sun came climbing over the hills,
its bright light shining down, Hagen and his knights were still
able to keep their blood-covered clothing secret, but when
the king saw they'd been fighting, angrily he spoke to his man:
- 1625 "What are you up to now, friend Hagen? You seem to think it
nothing to ride along beside me, your armor clearly
soaked in blood. Whose blood was splashed on you, and why?"
Said Hagen: "Elza did it. He hunted us down in the darkness, my king.
- 1626 "We were attacked because his ferryman was dead.
In the course of the battle, my brother killed Count Gelpfrat. We beat
at them so hard that Elza had no choice but to flee.
A hundred of them, and four of us, will lie forever on that field.'
- 1627 No one knows just where, at last, they rested their weary
heads. Later, when people in nearby lands heard

that noble Otta's sons were coming to visit the court
in Passau, a royal welcome was staged for Gunter's entire force.

- 1628 Bishop Pilgrim, the noble ruler's uncle, felt
immensely happy, seeing his nephew and many Rhineland
men riding through his own Bavarian lands.
No one could doubt his pleasure, certainly easy to understand.
- 1629 The roads to Passau were fairly lined with welcoming friends.
The town itself did not have room enough for guests
in such number. They had to cross the river and camp in fields,
where they set up their pavilions and tents, and where they could truly sleep.
- 1630 And there they all remained for only a single day
and a night. But Passau's people managed to work out ways
of treating them well! Then they had to leave for Rudiger's
land, the very next place where they were being expected to stay.
- 1631 They took what rest they could, and then, deeply tired
from riding so long, headed off to the borderlands.
Right along the frontier they found a sleeping man,
from whom Hagen of Troneg stole the mighty sword at his side.
- 1632 The man was Eckewart, a noble knight we know of.
Courageous count as he was, he felt unhappy, losing
his sword just when men had reached the border. No one
could say that Rudiger's lands were guarded well, or well patrolled.
- 1633 "Now I've disgraced myself," Eckewart cried. "I'm sorry
you Burgundian men chose to make this journey.
I lost my happiness forever, once Sifried was gone.
And O, lord Rudiger, my God, just see what I have done
- 1634 to you!" Hagen could see the noble knight's distress,
and gave him back his weapon, adding six pieces of gold.
"Accept these, knight, as a token, and let us both be friends.
You are a bold and courageous man, even asleep on the border."

- 1635 “May God reward you for your gift,” Eckewart said. “I deeply
regret your journey into Hunnish lands. Sifried
died at your hands. Hate is what those people feel
for you. Watch yourself, be careful. This is what I believe.”
- 1636 “Then God will have to protect us,” said Hagen. “What these knights
are worried about, my kings and all their fighting men,
is nothing more than where to lay their heads and rest.
Is there some place in all this land where we might sleep tonight?”
- 1637 “We’ve run our horses into the ground, riding this far,
and used up all our food,” said Hagen the bold. “Where,
we’d like to know, can supplies be bought? What we want
the most is someone to give us shelter, from the deep warmth of his heart.”
- 1638 Then Eckewart replied: “I can take you, now, to a lord
whose house is always open to guests, who’ll make you welcome
and treat you better, I promise, than you’ve been treated before,
if you brave warriors will follow me to Count Rudiger’s door.
- 1639 “His castle is near the road and he’s the very best lord
anyone ever turned to. His heart is as overflowing
as fields in the sweet days of May are full of blooming flowers.
Serving heroes gives him the greatest pleasure life can hold.”
- 1640 Then Gunter spoke: “Would you become our messenger
and ask my dearest friend Count Rudiger to give us
shelter, my warriors here, my family, and me?
I offer him in return a solemn promise of eternal service.”
- 1641 “I’ll gladly bear that message,” Eckewart said at once.
He hurried off, eager to tell Count Rudiger
all that these visitors had told him, all he’d learned.
And it had been long since the count heard any news more truly welcome.
- 1642 Soon people saw a knight come running to Bechalaren,
a man well known to the count. “Here comes Eckewart,

one of Krimhild's men, hurrying down the road."
 It looked as if some hostile fighters might have done him harm.

1643 Then Rudiger went to the castle gate, to receive his knight,
 who was just unbuckling his sword and laying it on the ground.
 It was not proper to speak to his lord, the noble count,
 and his people, blurting out his news before his weapon was down.

1644 And then he said: "I come from Gunter, Burgundy's lordly
 king, sent by him and his royal brothers, Gernot
 and Giselher. These highborn knights wish to offer you
 their respect, and each of them pledges service, good faith, and duty.

1645 "And they are joined by Hagen of Troneg, and also Volker,
 speaking most politely. But they said a good deal more,
 and Dancwart, Gunter's chief groom, asked that I come and implore
 from you, in goodness of heart, the kind of welcome they very much need."

1646 Rudiger laughed with pleasure, and quickly replied: "Give
 the noble king this answer: I absolutely beg him
 to accept my house as his own, not waiting another second.
 He and his men are welcome here, they're guests I'm happy to have."

1647 "Chief groom Dancwart wanted you to know in advance
 just what the Rhinelanders were bringing here to your castle:
 sixty noble lords, a thousand excellent knights,
 nine thousand other men." But Rudiger was still delighted:

1648 "I'm eager to have such guests," the count continued. "Men
 from the Rhine aren't often here in my land, and when
 they are it's a splendid chance for me to do them service.
 I'll ask my family members, and also my men, to go and greet them."

1649 So servants and noble knights got on their horses and rode.
 The lord of the castle had given commands, they did as he told them,
 riding fast, hoping to do much more than he'd asked for.
 High in her castle rooms, Lady Gotelind knew nothing at all.

ADVENTURE 27

HOW THEY CAME TO BECHALAREN

- 1650 Rudiger went to visit the women of the house, his daughter
and his wife, quickly sharing with them the pleasant tidings,
which he himself had just learned, that Lady Krimhild's brothers
were even now approaching the castle and would stay with them that night.
- 1651 "My dearly beloved ladies," Rudiger said, "I want you
to give these noble kings as warm a welcome as you can,
when they and their companions present themselves here
in my court. Welcome, too, Hagen from Troneg, Gunter's man.
- 1652 "There'll be another, whose name is Dancwart, and still another
whose name is Volker. Both deserve your special attention.
Dear wife, and you, my daughter, please kiss these six I've mentioned,
and show the other knights respect, according to polite convention."
- 1653 His women were very pleased and more than willing to agree.
They starting searching through their clothing chests, to see
what they could wear, when the guests had arrived and were ready for greetings.
All the pretty women in the castle were happily doing the same.
- 1654 A little touching up of facial color was all
they required. Their hair gleamed, clasped by golden bands
(for protection against the wind), richly worked bright garlands
to adorn their loveliness. (This is the truth, please understand.)
- 1655 Now we have to leave the ladies busy at their work.
Instead, let's watch Rudiger and his people gallop across
the fields, hurrying to find their kingly visitors
and welcome the weary Rhineland men to the reassuring shelter
- 1656 of a castle. And when Rudiger finally saw his guests,
how happily the brave count saluted them!

“How welcome you are, my lords, you and all your men.
We are truly delighted to see you in my land, and offer you rest.”

- 1657 The travelers bowed to him in pleasant, courteous form.
He'd let them know, in the plainest terms, how much he liked them.
He gave particular greetings to Hagen, known from before,
and also Volker, musician and knight from Burgundy and the Rhine.
- 1658 And he also greeted Dancwart by name, who promptly said:
“Since you're so willing to care for us, I wonder who
will care for our comrades, men we've brought from their homes and their beds?”
Then the count declared: “I offer shelter to all of you,
1659 “you'll all sleep well tonight. I'll gladly assume the care
of whatever you've brought to my land, your horses and also your clothes.
To ensure that nothing is stolen, I'll have good watchmen posted
and none of you will lose a thing you own, not so much as a spur.
- 1660 “Now have a lot of tents put up, my boys! Don't worry,
I'll pay for anything that's lost, in good gold money.
Get these horses out of harness, let them run free.”
It isn't very often that a noble host thinks of these things.
- 1661 And it pleased his guests. Then the well-born folk went off
to Rudiger's castle, and the men of ordinary birth
threw themselves on the grass— a bed quite good enough.
Along the road, I think, no treatment they'd gotten had ever been worth
1662 so much. Lady Gotelind met the Rhineland lords
at the castle gate, with her pretty daughter. They also saw
many beautiful ladies and pretty girls by the score,
decorated with jewels and wearing truly splendid clothes.
- 1663 Glittering bright against the costly fabrics, precious
gems could be seen from far away: a fine effect!
Then guests rode up and quickly dismounted. Deeply decorous
in bearing and speech, these Burgundy men had manners that won them respect.

- 1664 Thirty-six pretty girls, and many other ladies,
 as beautiful as any women a man might see,
 came forward to welcome their guests, and with them many men.
 The Rhinelanders received noble greetings from noble women!
- 1665 The countess's daughter kissed all three of the Rhineland kings
 (so too did her courteous mother), then glimpsed bold Hagen's face.
 Her father said she should kiss him too, but she was afraid.
 She finally did it, not quite readily, but knowing her place.
- 1666 Then Dancwart was given a kiss, and Volker too. She passed
 from one to the other as her father had told her to, the color
 going red and then white in her gentle cheeks. (Surpassingly
 brave, the noble musician had earned this honor in stalwart fashion.)
- 1667 Then Giselher, knight from far Burgundy, clasped
 the pretty young countess's hand, and kingly Gunter grasped
 her noble mother's. The ladies happily walked away
 with their escorts, royal guests who'd ridden far from their distant land.
- 1668 Rudiger and Gernot walked together, entering
 a spacious hall, where seating for knights and ladies was provided.
 Serving men came quickly, pouring everyone wine.
 I doubt that noble guests in any castle have been treated better.
- 1669 Many men were looking admiringly at Rudiger's
 daughter, who was well worth the appreciative glances she got.
 Good knights all over the hall caressed the girl in their hearts.
 She was well aware of their attention, and pleased at the thought.
- 1670 Their thoughts did as they wished, but those who thought them could not.
 Men's eyes kept moving from here to there, staring at all
 the ladies and girls. And there were plenty to see, in that hall.
 Volker, the noble fiddler, was grateful to his host for whatever he got.
- 1671 Then, as the custom was, the company separated
 for dinner, the men sitting in one place, all the ladies

in another. Trestles and boards were brought and tables raised
across the hall, and foreign guests were given a noble feast.

- 1672 Countess Gotelind honored her guests by going
from table to table. But now her daughter, however pretty,
stayed with the other children, where she of course belonged.
No longer able to see her, visiting knights thought it a pity.
- 1673 When every man had eaten and drunk his fill, pretty
Dietelind was once again to be seen in the hall.
A jolly conversation started up, begun
and carried especially by Volker, most confident of them all.
- 1674 The noble fiddler spoke quite openly: "My excellent
host, without a doubt God has been most gracious,
granting you a noble, beautiful wife, a spacious
castle, lands, and wealth, and a cheerful, fine, resplendent existence.
- 1675 "If I were a king, and I'm not," the fiddler declared, "but if
I wore a crown, the wife I know I'd want for myself
would be your pretty daughter. That would be nice indeed.
She's wonderful to look at, with manners to match, well worth our esteem."
- 1676 The count replied: "But why, I wonder, do you suppose
a king might ever want to marry a daughter of mine?
Here in this land, my wife and I are strangers. Proposals
of marriage require far more than beauty (which I know she has) or desire."
- 1677 Modest, respectful Gernot gave the count his reply:
"If I were allowed the choice of who I chose to marry,
I'd surely pick a wife exactly like her." "And I,"
said Hagen pleasantly, "consider that now is an excellent time
- 1678 "for Giselher the young to take himself a wife.
Your daughter's as pretty a girl as any young man will find,
and I would gladly serve her, as would his other knights,
if she came to our Burgundy and wore a crown, by marriage and right."

- 1679 Talk like this was something Rudiger much liked,
 and so did Gotelind. It made them very happy.
 And in the end, because the girl would be a wife
 well suited for Giselher, the men decided to make her his bride.
- 1680 When things can seem so right, who on earth can prevent them?
 They sent servants to fetch the girl, she was brought to the hall,
 and oaths were solemnly sworn that this prize of a girl would be given
 to him. And Giselher swore that he would love the prize he'd been given.
- 1681 Burgundy castles and lands were set aside for her.
 Noble Gunter solemnly swore that she would have them,
 and Gernot, too, as a Rhineland king, said he'd ensure
 that it happened. Then Rudiger said: "Since I do not have castles to give them,
- 1682 "and I deeply appreciate the honors we've been shown,
 I hereby pledge my daughter's bridal gift in gold
 and silver, as much as a hundred horses, fully loaded,
 can carry. May this please her future husband's noble family."
- 1683 Then the two young people, according to custom, were told
 to stand in a ring, directly facing youngsters no older
 than themselves, every one of them smiling happily,
 minds filled with thoughts that inexperienced youngsters long
- 1684 to think. And then the charming girl was asked if she
 accepted Giselher as her husband-to-be. Still
 no more than a girl, it was hard for her to say "I will."
 She felt embarrassed, as girls have often been and often will.
- 1685 Her father gently suggested that all she needed to say
 was yes, and she was glad to. Then quickly Giselher
 the young was holding her, his strong white hands around her.
 But in the event, she received little enough to show for that day.
- 1686 Then Rudiger spoke: "Noble kings, when the time arrives
 that you come here again, journeying on your ride

back home to Burgundy, I'll have you take my daughter. The bride will go with her husband's family." This was the custom, and all agreed.

- 1687 Their night had been long and noisy, and now it was time for bed. The bride-to-be was sent to her room, and then the guests were urged to sleep. Tomorrow would be another day. A late night meal was provided. Their host made sure they could eat with zest.
- 1688 They ate in the morning, and then were ready to resume the journey to Etzel's land. "But how can I allow that?" declared their noble host. "It's much too soon to be going there. How often have I had such welcome guests, friendly and dear?"
- 1689 Then Dancwart answered him: "We really have to go. Where would you find the food, the bread, and even the wine to feed as many men as we have brought from the Rhine?" But hearing this, the count replied: "I cannot let you say no.
- 1690 "My lords, and very dear friends, I cannot let you depart. Indeed, I've food enough to last for fourteen days, feeding every single one of you. All praise to Etzel, my king, who's left me so very well provided for!"
- 1691 No matter how hard they tried to avoid it, they had to stay until the fourth morning. And even then, their host was incredibly openhanded (it's talked of, still, today). He gave his guests both excellent horses and rich and beautiful clothes.
- 1692 They could not stay any longer, they had to travel on. Brave Rudiger refused to let his gifts be measured, his hands remained wide open. If they said a word, it was done, whatever they wanted they got, and no one was able to deny him his pleasure.
- 1693 The noble strangers had their horses led to the castle gates, harnessed and saddled. Rank after rank of knights and warriors prepared to ride, holding their shields on high, waiting for their Rhineland lords to give the signal it was time to ride.

- 1694 And still, before his noble guests were allowed to depart,
 Count Rudiger went on showering gifts on them all.
 Openhandedness was his way of opening hearts—
 just as he'd given away his daughter, that very first night in the hall.
- 1695 Even Gunter the mighty, a wealthy king who seldom
 accepted gifts, wore with a sense of honor a suit
 of battle armor given him by the count, bending
 over Rudiger's hand as he left, in silent gratitude.
- 1696 And Rudiger presented Gernot with a handsome sword
 that, later, Gernot proudly carried into battle.
 Gotelind was pleased, though guests were leaving the castle.
 But later, Rudiger's gift was the weapon Gernot used to kill him.
- 1697 Gotelind felt that Hagen well deserved a share
 of the giving, and offered him gifts, seeing that he was one
 of Gunter's foremost men, and wanting to be as careful
 as she could not to offend him. But Hagen refused, accepting none
- 1698 of her presents. "Of all I've seen in your castle," Hagen replied,
 "there's nothing I'd prefer to carry away than the shield
 I see, that's hanging high on the wall. That's what I really
 wish I could have with me at the end of this long and weary ride."
- 1699 Hearing these words, lovely Gotelind remembered
 bitter sorrow, and could not stop herself from weeping.
 This had been Nodung's shield, her dearest brother, now dead.
 Witega had killed him, and his death had caused her enormous grief.
- 1700 And then she answered Hagen: "Yes, I'll give you that shield.
 If only God in heaven had allowed the man who bore it
 to still be alive! He was my brother, killed in war,
 and I will mourn him forever, just as many women weep
- 1701 "for lost men." The countess rose from her chair and with her two
 white hands unhooked the shield and took it down, then brought

the precious gift to Hagen. He stood a moment, knowing
what a prize it was and how much honor he'd been shown.

- 1702 A cover of lightweight silk, adorned with colored gemstones,
hid the natural hue of the wood. No better shield
had ever seen the light of day. And anyone
wanting to buy it would have paid a thousand marks in gold.
- 1703 Hagen handed the shield to a page, who set it near
his horse. Then noble Dancwart entered the hall, where
he received beautiful clothes from the hands of the count's own daughter.
He took them proudly to Etzel's land, and proudly wore them there.
- 1704 And all these costly gifts, carried off by Rhineland
men, would never have dropped into their happy hands
except for Rudiger, who wanted to show his love.
Later, they met him in battle, and savagely killed him, in Etzel's land.
- 1705 Courageous Volker was next to appear, holding his fiddle.
Standing respectfully in front of the countess, he played
some charming tunes and sang her one of the songs he'd written.
This was how he said farewell, leaving the castle that day.
- 1706 The countess ordered a treasure box brought to the fiddler,
an affectionate gift to show how moving his music had been.
Then she removed twelve rings and set them all on his fingers.
"Bring these with you to Etzel's land, and wear them when you sing
- 1707 "at his court, so later on others can tell me, after
you're gone, how well you served me, there in that splendid place,
celebrating Etzel's feast by singing and playing."
The lady wanted to hear good news, but the news she got was no laughing
- 1708 matter. Then Rudiger spoke: "To be sure your journey's a safe one,
I offer myself as your guide. Our presence, my men and I,
will guarantee that no one will harm you, along the way."
He ordered packhorses loaded, at once, with all the needed supplies

- 1709 for himself and a full five hundred men—weapons, food,
shields, and riding gear. They knew they'd attend the high
celebration in Etzel's land, so they left in an excellent mood.
No one who rode that day ever returned, dead or alive.
- 1710 Rudiger left with his wife's kisses fresh in his mind.
And so did Giselher, whose heart was honest and clear.
The men were hugging pretty women, left behind
with nothing but lamentation and mourning, wailing and endless tears.
- 1711 Women waved from the windows of Bechalaren castle.
The lord and his happy warriors mounted their horses and went.
Perhaps these women knew in their hearts what soon would happen,
for many girls and ladies embraced each other and freely wept.
- 1712 Happy as they were, the men were sad at leaving their friends,
those who remained in the castle, never to be seen again.
But all the same, they rode gaily along the Danube's
shore, led by their lord himself straight into Hunnish lands.
- 1713 Then noble Rudiger, confident leader and knight,
said to the Rhineland men: "My friends, it wouldn't be right
not to advise our Hunnish friends we're on our way.
The news will cheer King Etzel more than he's known in many a day."
- 1714 At once, a messenger went galloping over Austria,
spreading far and wide the news that noble knights
from Wurms along the Rhine were even now riding
their way. Etzel's people received this message with great delight.
- 1715 A second messenger went straight across to the land
of the Huns, carrying word that the Nibelungen men
were coming. "Welcome them well, Krimhild, my dearest lady.
Your beloved brothers bring with them honor of the highest standing."
- 1716 Lady Krimhild stood at a window, watching, waiting,
as friends have always watched for friends, and family for family.

And then she saw a host of men from her homeland, and exclaimed
to the king that they'd arrived, and Etzel laughed most happily.

- 1717 "At last I have my family here," Krimhild declared.
"I see them bearing brand-new Rhineland shields, wearing
gleaming Rhineland armor. Whoever wants to earn
my gold need only remember my pain and sorrow. I'll love him forever."

ADVENTURE 28

HOW THE BURGUNDIANS CAME TO THE HUNS

- 1718 Old Hildebrand of Berne, mighty Dietrich's teacher,
went to tell his lord, as soon as he heard that the men
of Burgundy were coming. Dietrich was not pleased,
but ordered Hildebrand to welcome these knights for their rank and merit.
- 1719 Bold young Wolfhart had the horses readied, then rode
across the fields with Dietrich, as he went to welcome the men
of Wurms, bringing with him many powerful warriors.
The Rhinelanders had broken camp and were busy packing their tents.
- 1720 Seeing them riding up, though still in the distance, Hagen
of Troneg went to his kings and properly advised:
"I think you ought to dismount and welcome these noble knights,
who clearly are coming to greet you. This is a clan I recognize
- 1721 "and know quite well, a family that hails from Switzerland.
Their reputation is noble, they understand how to fight.
They've traveled here from Berne, these highly wellborn knights.
They're not people to offend. Offer them honor however you can."
- 1722 Dietrich's men dismounted (as of course they ought to do),
many noble knights, and cheerful pages too,

and approached the guests as men to whom respect was due.
The Rhineland visitors received a warm and courteous welcome.

1723 I'll tell you exactly what noble Dietrich said,
seeing Lady Otta's sons, good Burgundy men,
coming toward him. He told them their journey shouldn't have been made,
and wondered why Rudiger hadn't warned them to stay away.

1724 "I bid you welcome, lords, Gunter and Giselher,
Gernot, and also Hagen. I extend my hand to Volker,
and to Dancwart the wonderfully brave. But don't you understand?
Krimhild is still in the deepest mourning for the hero from Netherlands."

1725 "She's wept a very long time," Hagen replied. "It's already
far too many years since Sifried died and was buried.
She ought to be busy loving her husband, the king of the Huns.
Sifried won't be coming back. Men are buried just once."

1726 "We needn't worry ourselves with Sifried's wounds. But as long
as Lady Krimhild's alive, the threat of danger is strong."
These were the words of the lord of Berne, Dietrich the mighty.
"Rhineland's king and protector, protect yourself and all your knights."

1727 "Protect myself against what?" said proud and noble Gunter.
"Etzel asked us to come (that's all I needed to hear).
He sent us messengers inviting us to attend
his feast, and Krimhild, my sister, sent us news of him and his men."

1728 "But let me tell you, most emphatically," said Hagen,
"you need to find out more of what Lord Dietrich and
his fighting men have learned, staying here in this land,
about my Lady Krimhild and the dangerous things that may be on

1729 "her mind." Then three of them went to talk alone,
mighty Dietrich and two kings of the Rhine, Gunter and Gernot.
"So tell us, noble knight from Berne, whatever you know
of Etzel's queen, our sister from far-off Wurms on the Rhine, our home."

- 1730 The ruler of Berne replied: “What is there left to say?
Every morning I hear the lady moan and weep,
Etzel’s wife forever torn by pain and grief
because the Lord of Heaven took all-powerful Sifried away.”
- 1731 “Whatever must be, must be,” said Volker, courageous knight
and musician. “You’ve told us what you know, and we have listened.
Now we need to ride to Etzel’s castle and find
the fate awaiting Rhinemen who’ve come to his court as visitors.”
- 1732 The brave Burgundy men rode to the court, noble,
distinguished knights, as men from the Rhine were known to be.
Many among the Huns wondered, wanting to see
what manner of man Hagen of Troneg was, of whom they’d been told
- 1733 so many, many tales, all of them claiming he’d slain
the Netherlands hero Sifried, strongest man who’d ever
lived. And Sifried had been the husband of Krimhild, their queen.
No one knew what stories were false and what were true. Seeing
- 1734 the man himself, they found he was burly, big and strong,
with a deep and powerful chest. His hair was heavily streaked
with gray, his glance was probing, his legs were very long.
This was a man who moved with the power of high authority.
- 1735 Lodging was then arranged for all the Burgundy men.
Gunter and those who served him were given separate quarters.
The queen herself wanted him isolated, her orders
were clear. Her motive was hate. Burgundians left alone could be slaughtered.
- 1736 Dancwart, Hagen’s brother, was the Rhinemen’s head groom, leader
of all the men. Gunter, before he left them, directed
that they be properly housed, and given whatever they needed.
The Burgundy king thought of his men, as he knew that they expected.
- 1737 Krimhild, Etzel’s queen, with all her attendant ladies,
greeted her countrymen with lying smiles and graces.

She kissed young Giselher and held him by the hand.
Hagen of Troneg was watching and quickly tightened his helmet band.

1738 “This is the kind of welcome,” Hagen observed, “knights
who are less than noble should never even think of. Here,
kings and those who only fight for kings are different.
We might have saved ourselves the trouble of coming, and stayed on the Rhine.”

1739 Krimhild replied: “Anyone glad to see you can make you
welcome. Did you think I wanted you to come for the sake
of friendship? What have you brought me, all the way from the Rhine,
to change how I regard you, or welcome you as a friend of mine?”

1740 “Had I known you wanted warrior gifts,” Hagen said,
“I’m sure I could have found you something or other. Men
like me are wealthy enough, if only I could have known
in advance that here it’s knights, not kings, who give away their gold.”

1741 “At least,” she said, “you might have brought me interesting news.
What have you done, by now, with the Nibelungen hoard?
That used to belong to me, you know. Can you give me some word?
You might have thought of bringing it here. It’s not a gift I’d refuse.”

1742 “Honestly, my dear great lady, I haven’t had news
of the Nibelungen hoard in many a long, long day.
My lords, the kings of the Rhine, ordered it thrown away,
deep in the river. It’s there, and there till the Day of Doom it will stay.”

1743 Krimhild answered: “That is just what I thought I’d hear.
You haven’t brought me the least small bit of that wonderful treasure,
even though it used to be mine, and was nice to have.
No wonder I’ve so much sadness, here in this land, and so little pleasure.”

1744 “What the Devil should I bring you?” Hagen responded. “My shield
is a load that’s more than heavy enough, and this armor I wear
is even heavier. My helmet, of course, is as light as my hair.
But I also carry this sword, and how much more could I carry here?”

- 1745 Then Krimhild called to all the Rhineland knights: “No one
is allowed to carry weapons into King Etzel’s hall.
I’ll have them stored, hand them over to me at once!”
“Never,” Hagen answered. “Those are rules intended for dunces.
- 1746 “I’d never dream of asking such labor of you, my lady.
For you to assume the burden of carting off my shield
and all my other weapons— no, that’s not for a queen.
I’ll be my own steward, my father had me too well raised
- 1747 “for that.” “By God in heaven,” said Krimhild. “Why on earth
would you and my brother want to stand in King Eztel’s court
holding on to your shields? Someone’s been giving you warnings.
If I ever find out who spoke such words, I’d have his head cut off.”
- 1748 Fiercely angry, Dietrich answered the queen: “Those words
were spoken by me, I warned these noble visiting princes,
and also courageous Hagen— and all our Rhineland visitors.
Now, you devil, would you like to try sweeping me off the earth?”
- 1749 Etzel’s wife was deeply embarrassed. Dietrich was also
a man she very much feared. Quickly, she turned away
and left them, saying not a single word. But though
her lips were still, her eyes reflected burning, bitter hate.
- 1750 The two brave knights, Dietrich and Hagen, quietly
shook hands, and like the courteous men they were, began
to chat, speaking soft and confidentially:
“I told you, Hagen, it made me sad to see you come to this land.
- 1751 “You heard what the queen just said. That was what concerned me.”
Hagen of Troneg answered: “Things might yet become clear.”
And then the two bold warriors stood together, talking.
Seeing Hagen, King Etzel began to inquire, wanting to learn
- 1752 his name. “Can you tell me,” asked the mighty emperor,
“who that knight is, standing next to Dietrich, who seems

to like him well enough? He certainly appears
a noble man, no matter who his father might have been.”*

- 1753 One of Krimhild’s men answered the king: “He comes
from Troneg, his father’s name was Aldrian. No one
would think it, seeing him peaceful and calm, but he’s terribly fierce.
I tell you no tales, my lord, but only what this man has done.”
- 1754 “Why should I need to know how fierce a man he’s been?”
He had not learned, as yet, all that his lovely queen
had planned, by lies and deceit, to do to her family and friends,
or how many Huns would die before the story reached its end.
- 1755 “I knew Aldrian well, he spent years in my service.
He earned endless praise and honor for all his works.
I dubbed him knight myself, and gave him gold. Honest
Helcha liked him, too, and she was kind as well as modest.
- 1756 “That’s how I came to know so much of Hagen. I held
him as a hostage, along with Spanish Walther, children
as fine as they come. They grew into men, here at my court.
I sent young Hagen home, but Walther ran off with Hildegund.”**
- 1757 He sat for a time, remembering times now dead and gone.
He’d seen his young friend Hagen again, who’d served him wonderfully
well when he’d been young himself. That said and done,
his friend was back, and killing the king’s best loved was why he had come.

* His nobility is not a matter of birth, though as Hagen well knows, his status is forever less than that of a “proper” nobleman

** A woman of exotic birth, differently described in different tales

ADVENTURE 29

HOW KRIMHILD ACCUSES HAGEN,
WHO TREATS HER DISRESPECTFULLY

- 1758 The worthy knights, Hagen of Troneg and mighty Dietrich,
men who'd been widely praised, parted on excellent terms.
Hagen glanced about, hunting some warrior from Wurms,
and did not have to look too far before he found a friend.
- 1759 He saw Volker the fiddler standing near Giselher
and asked the musician to come with him as he walked away,
keenly aware of just how fierce a fighter Volker
could be, and what an excellent knight he was in every way.
- 1760 The Rhineland kings were still in the hall, talking with other
nobles. All alone, the two bold knights went walking
across the courtyard as far as a shining white palace, not bothering
who might see them, and not afraid that anyone would stalk them.
- 1761 They seated themselves on a bench in front of the building, which happened
to face Krimhild's hall. The sun shone down, dazzling
bright, on their splendid armor and colorful clothes. Passing
by them, many wondered, deeply impressed, just who they were.
- 1762 Every Hun who saw this pair of arrogant fighters
stared like people in a forest, watching the wild animals.
And looking through a window, Etzel's wife saw them as well,
a sight that made the lovely lady mourn for her own dead knight.
- 1763 Then she remembered it all, and began to weep. And this,
in turn, deeply surprised the Huns who served her, wishing
to understand what was affecting their queen. She told them:
"You good and faithful knights, the man who makes me weep is Hagen."

- 1764 And then they said to her: “But what has caused these violent tears? For just a moment ago we saw you smiling and happy. No matter how brave the knight, no one’s entitled to hurt our beloved queen. Give us the word, and we’ll take his life.”
- 1765 “I’d be eternally grateful to whoever revenges my grief! Whatever my savior asks for, I’m ready to give him. I beg you, on bended knees,” exclaimed King Etzel’s wife, “don’t leave this man alive, kill this Hagen, give my pain relief!”
- 1766 Then sixty well-trained knights swiftly made themselves ready. If their beloved Krimhild wanted the warrior dead, they’d go and kill him. None of them would hesitate. Volker too, who was sitting beside him, would also be sent to his grave.
- 1767 But seeing what a tiny band they made, with only sixty men, Krimhild told them, speaking boldly: “Don’t even bother trying to do what you said you would. Sixty men will never kill him, Hagen’s far too good
- 1768 “a knight. He can easily fight off sixty, and the man sitting beside him is even stronger. Volker the fiddler is truly an evil man. So pitifully small a band cannot expect to hold its own, not with either man.”
- 1769 Hearing this, they gathered up four hundred more, equally ready to fight. The noble queen was desperately eager to make Hagen and Volker suffer, but she was setting her faithful knights a fearsome task, creating sorrow
- 1770 for everyone. As soon as she saw them properly armed, she spoke to them again: “Let me ask you to pause a moment. Come with me but stand quite still. Because I am a queen, I myself will first approach my foes.
- 1771 “Listen as I accuse King Gunter’s man, Hagen of Troneg, and hear the things he’s done to me. You’ll find

a knight so arrogant he won't bother denying
a thing. Whatever you'll do to him is no concern of mine."

- 1772 Then the brilliant musician and noble knight saw
Krimhild, queen of the realm, coming down the palace
steps, and toward them. Fiddler Volker turned to the man
sitting beside him, and quietly said to Hagen of Burgundy land:
- 1773 "Notice, my friend and companion in arms, that here she is,
the treacherous lady who lied to lead us here to this land.
I've never seen so many men with swords in their hands
walking along with a queen, or a queen so hungry for bloody business.
- 1774 "Do you think, my good friend Hagen, she might intend to hurt you?
I'd like to advise you, just in case, to show more concern
for your honor, and also your life. I don't propose to desert you,
but she seems to me, unless I'm very wrong, to be fairly burning
- 1775 "with anger. I also seem to see something bulging
under these fellows' clothes, which might turn out, in time,
to be armor worn under that silk. How it does shine!
Who knows what all of this might mean? They might get around to divulging
- 1776 their plans." Courageous Hagen gave him an angry answer:
"I'm perfectly well aware they're coming after me.
It's exactly why they've got gleaming swords in their hands.
I could cut these fellows to bits and then ride home to Burgundy.
- 1777 "Just tell me, Volker my friend, if you'd like to be at my side
when fighting with a crowd of Krimhild's men just might be required?
I think of you as a friend, so I'd much appreciate knowing.
I'll never forget your help, if helping me is what you decide."
- 1778 "Of course I'll help you fight," the fiddler said. "If I saw
Etsel and all his knights attacking the two of us,
I'd do exactly the same. It isn't a question of choice:
once I tell you I'll fight, I'll fight. Don't wait to hear any more."

- 1779 “God in heaven be praised, wonderfully noble Volker!
With you standing beside me, why would I need to have more?
Let these fellows attack whenever they please. As long
as you and I are together, Krimhild’s men will need to be strong!”
- 1780 “Shouldn’t we rise from this bench?” Volker wondered. “After
all, she’s still a queen, and she’ll be walking by us.
Let’s prove we know our place. She is a noble wife,
and we can demonstrate what honor means to us, and pride.”
- 1781 “Not on my life!” Hagen declared at once. “Her men
will think we’re standing up because we’re afraid of them,
and that, by God, I’m not, and never would have been.
I’m staying where I am, no matter who comes strolling by.
- 1782 “Whoever wants to walk right past us, let them do it.
Should I be honoring someone who hates my very guts?
As long as I’m alive, I’ll never give her that pleasure.
It isn’t going to bother me if Etzel’s wife resents it.”
- 1783 Then arrogant Hagen set across his lap a brightly
shining sword. A glittering jasper shone at the tip
of the handle, a gem greener than grass. Etzel’s wife
knew it at once. This was Balmung, Sifried’s sword when he died.
- 1784 Recognizing the weapon, sorrow hurt her heart.
Balmung’s hilt was gold, its scabbard red. She started
remembering it all and could not stop herself from weeping.
Hagen must have intended that, or so at least it seems.
- 1785 Volker the bold reached out and pulled his fiddle bow
closer—as thick as a club, broad and very long,
shaped like a sword and almost as heavy and sharp. Knowing
they might be attacked, it was clear, did not concern these two a bit.
- 1786 Just as plainly, neither man felt humble enough
to rise from the bench in anyone’s presence, even a queen.

They were afraid of no one. Facing her enemies,
Krimhild stopped and spoke, her voice and her manner equally rough:

- 1787 “Hagen, how do you come to be here? Who invited
you to come riding all the way to Etzel’s home,
well aware as you are of all the things you’ve done
to me? If your mind were sound, you would have stayed where you belong.”
- 1788 “No one invited me,” Hagen replied. “Someone
invited three great kings to come to Etzel’s land,
and they happen to be my lords, and I am simply their man.
When they go riding to court, I’m not permitted to stay at home.”
- 1789 She said: “Then tell me, too, though I was respectful of you,
why you acted as you did and turned my love to hate?
You killed Sifried, my dearest man, my love, my mate,
for whom I will weep and mourn all the rest of my lifelong days.”
- 1790 He answered: “Why waste our words? Surely enough’s been said.
Yes, I’m Hagen, who killed Sifried. The hero’s dead,
I killed him with these same hands. He paid with his life for the shame
that Lady Krimhild cast on beautiful Brunhild’s innocent head!
- 1791 “I don’t deny a thing, mighty, potent queen,
it’s all my fault, your pain, everything you lost.
Whoever wants to can take revenge, it’s their own choice.
How could I pretend I haven’t caused you suffering and grief?”
- 1792 She said: “Now listen, warriors, he doesn’t deny that all
my sorrow comes from him! Etzel’s knights, I
don’t care what happens to him, you can do what you like.”
The two arrogant Rhinemen looked at each other, and quietly yawned.
- 1793 Had anyone lifted a hand, the odds would appear to have favored
the two comrades seated on the bench, two patient neighbors
who’d fought in battles before and always won. No one
dared to test them. Etzel’s knights were frightened, overwhelmed.

- 1794 One of them finally said: “Don’t bother looking at me.
 Whatever I may have promised, I feel no interest in doing.
 There’s no reward rich enough to make me lose
 my life. Good King Etzel’s wife can’t be allowed to seduce
- 1795 “his knights.” Another one said: “My thoughts are just the same.
 Even if you gave me towers of good red gold,
 I’m not fighting with this fiddler, I’ve heard enough of his fame,
 and I’ve seen more than enough of his terrible eyes not to feel bold.
- 1796 “And I know enough of Hagen, too, from his younger days.
 No one needs to tell me a thing about this knight.
 I’ve seen him at work in more than twenty tremendous fights,
 after which many married women slept alone at night.
- 1797 “He and Walther of Spain cut their way through all sorts
 of armies, in many lands, when both were here with Etzel,
 and won him honor in battle. Everyone knows those stories.
 His reputation can’t be denied, his honors are well deserved.
- 1798 “What’s more, back in those times he wasn’t more than a child.
 If that’s what he did as a boy, think what he’ll be as a graybeard!
 He knows what he’s doing, now, he’ll fight with us like a wild
 boar—and he’s armed with Balmung, won by well-known evil work.”
- 1799 There was nothing more to say, no one was willing to fight.
 The queen was bitter, sad, and disappointed. Her warriors
 turned around and left her, afflicted with terrible fright,
 facing Hagen and Volker. Who can say they weren’t right?
- 1800 Volker said to his friend: “Well, now we know it’s true,
 we’ve got some enemies here, just as they all declared.
 We’d better go back to the hall, before anyone dares
 to attack our lords the kings, as some of these people here might do.
- 1801 “How often men will shrink away from a fight, finding
 friends they know are standing together. They’d be out of their minds

to think it's worth the risk and the effort. They shouldn't try it.
Men don't need to be shamed, if they're ready to hear the thoughts in their heads."

- 1802 "You lead, I'll follow along," was all Hagen said.
They found their handsome lords still receiving a splendid
welcome at court, many nobles milling about.
Volker the brave began to question the kings, his voice quite loud:
- 1803 "Tell me, my lords, how long you intend to stand like this,
letting yourselves be flattered? You need to pay a visit
to the Huns' great king and hear from his mouth what the next move is."
At this the Hunnish lords and those who came from the Rhine paired off,
- 1804 Dietrich, ruler of Berne, taking by the hand
Gunter the mighty king from far-off Burgundy land,
and Irnfrit of Thuringia in Germany taking Gernot.
And then, appropriately, Rudiger took his daughter's man,
- 1805 young Giselher. Wherever they went, and even at court,
no one separated Hagen and Volker ever
again. Until the final battle, they were never
apart. This tight-spun knightly friendship cut many marriages short.
- 1806 The three kings came to Etzel's court with a thousand knights,
honored followers who'd made the journey with them,
and sixty more of Hagen's choice, selected fighters
also brought from home. These warriors were the most faithful of men.
- 1807 Hawart, and Irinc too, who came from Denmark and were
illustrious knights, walked beside the Rhineland princes.
Dancwart, and Dietrich's young knight, Wolfhart, both of them peerless
fighters, were doing their best to act like proper, courtly visitors.
- 1808 Then the Rhineland rulers entered the emperor's court,
and mighty Etzel did not hesitate a moment,
but rose the very minute he saw the kings come in.
No ruler has ever greeted men from abroad with greater warmth.

- 1809 “You’re welcome, my lord Gunter, my lord Gernot too,
and also Giselher your brother. My respect for you
you’ve known, from the messengers I long since sent to Würms.
Let me offer my greetings, as well, to all your retinue.
- 1810 “My wife and I would like to welcome, especially,
two courageous knights, Volker and Hagen my friend,
one of them new to this land, one not—both notable men.
Messages from my queen, I know, have very often been sent you.”
- 1811 Hagen from Troneg answered: “They’ve often been received.
If I hadn’t followed my lords, in riding here to your land,
I’d surely have come to honor Etzel, who has honored me.”
Then the Huns’ high ruler took each of his welcome guests by the hand,
- 1812 and led them to waiting chairs, near where he’d been seated.
Then his attendants (with grace and obvious caring) poured out,
in great gold cups, wine and good malt beer and mead,
wanting to show how welcome they were, and leaving no great doubt.
- 1813 Then Etzel spoke: “I very much want to tell you this.
Nothing anywhere in the world could possibly
have made me happier than having you here and seated with me.
Your coming will surely help in making my beautiful queen quite free
- 1814 “of her sadness. I’ve often wondered what I might have done
to offend you, knowing how many noble guests have come
to my land, while you great warriors have never been to my home.
And now that I’ve finally met you, at last my happiness is complete.”
- 1815 Rudiger answered, his words warm with noble spirit:
“That happiness is deserved. Your queen’s great family
has a reputation for the highest faith and honor. We
are well aware how many noble warriors have come to visit.”
- 1816 It was Whitsun Eve when the three Burgundy kings came
to Etzel’s magnificent court. No knights of wealth and fame

have ever been made to feel more welcome. Soon enough
it was time to eat, and Etzel sat at table along with his guests.

- 1817 No ruler has ever dined with his guests in greater splendor.
Everyone drank as much as they liked, and the food was endless.
Everything requested was immediately brought out.
The reputation of Burgundy's knights was never at all in doubt.

ADVENTURE 30

HOW HAGEN AND VOLKER STOOD GUARD

- 1818 And now daylight had ended and darkness was dropping down.
The Rhineland men were exhausted from all the traveling they'd done,
wondering when they could rest and finally get some sleep.
Hagen raised this question with his king, who quickly addressed the Huns'
- 1819 great ruler: "Pray God will save you all," he said. "My men
and I are now in need of sleep. Please excuse us.
With your permission we will return in the morning, if you
desire." Etzel happily sent his guests off to their beds.
- 1820 Huns were crowding around the guests, as they left the hall.
Volker, always bold, spoke to them sharply: "What makes
you think stepping all over our feet is decent behavior?
Unless you stop it right now, someone will suffer a painful mistake.
- 1821 "I'll have to hit somebody or other with this fiddle of mine,
and maybe so hard that those who love him will end up crying.
Stand back, get out of our way! I'm giving you good advice.
All of you think you're warriors, but some don't look like fighters to me."
- 1822 Hearing the fiddler's angry words, heavy-handed
Hagen turned around, glanced back, and then declared:

“You’d better listen to what the brave musician said.
Krimhild’s men belong back in their rooms, safe in bed.

1823 “There’s nothing you can accomplish, not here, not now. Any
of you who really long for a fight, come see us tomorrow
morning, after these tired men have rested. Honored
warriors act that way, and these are rules you ought to follow.”

1824 The Huns then led their guests into a spacious hall,
already well prepared with beds enough for them all,
costly, broad, and long, excellent sleeping quarters
for guests who were meant, in Krimhild’s careful plan, never to wake

1825 again. They saw quilts that had come from Arab lands,
stuffed with softest feathers, and many coverlets
of fine Arabian silk. No one had ever seen better.
Strips of gleaming cloth glistened across these lovely beds.

1826 They saw many ermine blankets, and also many
of sable, piled up high for the Rhinelanders to use.
Soldiers could burrow deep and rest till sunlight came.
No king with his attendants had ever slept in a nobler place.

1827 “O what a sleeping palace!” young Giseler declared.
“And O, my friends, that we should find ourselves in here.
This is my sister’s doing, and no matter how she pretends,
these things may be meant to fool us, and will bring us bitter, bloody ends.”

1828 “For now, don’t worry yourself,” Hagen replied. “Tonight
I myself will stand guard, and you’ll wake up to the light
of morning, I promise you that. You’ll all live till tomorrow.
After that you’re on your own. Then will be time to worry.”

1829 Everyone bowed to Hagen, and gave him heartfelt thanks.
And then they went to their beds. It wasn’t very long
before they each and all were lying under their blankets.
Hagen began to buckle on his armor, then took up his sword.

- 1830 Then a second warrior spoke, Volker the brave musician:
 “Perhaps you will not think yourself disgraced, Hagen,
 if I offer to share your watch till morning comes again.”
 Hagen thanked the fiddler most feelingly, and said to his friend:
- 1831 “May God in heaven reward you, Volker, the best of all friends.
 No matter what sorrows I may be facing, it’s fine whenever
 I’m pushed to the wall to have you there, no one better.
 I’ll be in your debt forever, until the very day of my death.”
- 1832 So the number of guards was doubled, both in gleaming
 armor. Each took up his shield and, weapons in hand,
 stepped through the door at the front of the hall, to where they would stand
 watching over their comrades, proving their word was as good as their deed.
- 1833 And then brave Volker leaned his shield against a stone
 and quietly went in again and picked up his fiddle,
 setting it under his chin. There were many more ways than one,
 he knew, to help his friends, and this was what he had always done.
- 1834 He sat on a threshold stone, at the inner edge of the roof.
 There’s never been a braver fiddler here on this earth.
 And then the sweetest violin music began to be heard,
 giving his travel-weary comrades plain and audible proof
- 1835 of his presence. The sound of the strings filled the entire hall.
 This was bravura playing, elegant and fine.
 And then the music softened to a gentle lullaby,
 lulling to sleep men listening in silence, lying in bed, exhausted.
- 1836 And when the last of the Rhinemen had finally fallen asleep,
 Volker stepped back out the door, took up his shield again,
 and together with Hagen stood on guard, protecting the men
 inside, well aware that Krimhild’s knights were likely to keep
- 1837 on trying. Just about at midnight, or a little before,
 Volker caught a fleeting glimpse of a helmet, flashing

just for a moment, out in the darkness. Krimhild's warriors
were out there, intending to harm their guests as much as they might be able.

1838 The fiddler spoke to his friend: "Noble Hagen, we'd better
share the bad news, and face it together. I saw a glittering
light flashing off a helmet, in the darkness out there.
Unless I'm mistaken, they plan an attack, and we need to be prepared."

1839 "Keep your voice low," said Hagen, "let them come as they like.
And before they know we're watching, we'll batter in their nice
round helmets with these good swords we have in our hands. And home
to Lady Krimhild they'll go, not looking quite so shiny and bright."

1840 But soon a Hunnish knight saw just who was waiting
on guard outside the door. He spoke at once, complaining:
"Whatever we planned to do cannot now be done.
I see the fiddler standing watch. I see he's got a gleaming

1841 "helmet completely covering his head, and it's hard as steel,
and nothing known to man can crack it. I also see
his armor shining bright as fire. And standing near him
I also see Hagen of Troneg. Our guests don't have a thing to fear!"

1842 They quickly turned and left. And seeing they were going
away, Volker turned to his comrade and angrily spoke:
"Now let me just go over to Lady Krimhild's folks,
before they're gone. I have a couple of questions I'd like to ask them."

1843 "I'd rather you stayed where you are," Hagen answered. "If you
approach them, they might be able to use their swords sufficiently
well to give you trouble, and then what I'd have to do
is help you, and with both of us out there, they might come inside, too,

1844 "a couple of knights sneaking around behind us, swords
in hand. They could do a lot of damage to our men,
lying fast asleep, thinking we were on guard.
You and I, my friend, would never forgive ourselves, not then,

1845 “not ever.” Volker replied: “But I have to let them know,
at least, that I saw them. It’s important not to let them lie,
these Krimhild warriors, and claim they weren’t planning to try
the treacherous tricks they long to commit. They’d like us all to die.”

1846 And Volker immediately called out, into the darkness:
“Why did you come here, fully armed, you brave warriors?
You soldiers of Krimhild, are you out there, intending to rob
someone? Why not invite my friend and me to come along?”

1847 No one answered, and that made Volker angry, too:
“You’re sneaking miserable cowards, that’s what you are,” he called.
“Did you mean to murder us, asleep in your fancy hall?
These are things that decent warriors would never think of doing.”

1848 The queen had to be told that her ambassadors
had accomplished nothing at all, which naturally caused her sorrow.
Different methods were required. Krimhild’s mood was grim.
Many excellent warriors were destined to die, before she was finished.

ADVENTURE 31

HOW THEY WENT TO CHURCH

1849 “My armor’s turning cold,” Volker declared. “The night
is well along, I think, and almost over. It might
be morning soon, I can feel dawn in the air.” Most
of the men were still asleep, so they went inside and quickly woke them.

1850 Morning light shone down on the Huns’ guests. Hagen
went around the hall, waking the sleeping men
and asking who would like to attend morning mass.
Plainly, everyone did not follow Christian custom.

- 1851 It isn't hard to observe the different songs that pagans
and Christians sing, the service isn't at all the same.
Gunter's men were so anxious to be at church that they all
quickly got up, then dressed and soon were ready to leave the hall.
- 1852 They were careful to wear the finest clothes they'd brought with them,
garments no traveling warriors, riding anywhere
in the world, had ever carried. Hagen looked at his men
and disapproved: "You need to put on armor and be prepared
"to fight. More than a few of you know what's going
on. You'll need swords in your hands, not petals of roses,
and shining helmets on your head, not hats covered with jewels.
We've learned what bitter things Lady Krimhild is capable of.
- 1854 "Let me tell you, we'll certainly be in a fight today.
You'll want chain-link metal for your chests, not silken shirts,
instead of a cloak on your back you'll need a shield. That way
if someone gets angry and swings a sword, you'll give him what he deserves.
- 1855 "My family, my friends, my men, my dearest comrades and lords,
be glad you're able to go to church on a day like this,
and complain to Almighty God on account of your worries and sorrows.
Never forget what you've long since known: we're all close to our deaths.
- 1856 "Confess whatever you've done, leave nothing out, for men
must stand respectful and straight in the mighty presence of God.
And one thing more: let me warn you, good knights and lords,
without the help of heaven none of us will hear mass again."
- 1857 And so the princes, along with their men, went to church.
Hagen instructed them to stay silent, after they reached
the holy grounds, for only by standing together could they keep
from harm. "Who can say what the Huns will try to do?" he observed.
- 1858 "Your shields should always be ready, close to your feet, in case
anyone tries to offer you an insult. Pay them

back at once with a deadly blow. That's Hagen's advice.
Your honor as Rhinemens requires a swift response of just this kind."

- 1859 And then both Volker and Hagen proceeded to stand right
in front of the great church doors. They knew that in that place
Etzel's wife could not help but see them. She'd have to face
them down. Both brave warriors were angry and clearly wanted a fight.
- 1860 The ruler of the land and beautiful Krimhild also arrived.
The dashing knights who rode behind Etzel's wife
were handsomely dressed, clearly wearing expensive clothes.
Her warriors were raising clouds of dust, making a splendid sight.
- 1861 The powerful king, seeing that Gunter and all his men
had weapons in hand and were wearing armor, immediately said:
"Why do I see my friends coming to church as if
to battle? If any harm has been done, my own good faith has been broken.
- 1862 "I'll promptly compensate my guests, however they wish,
for any kind of affliction or any offensive remarks.
I want them to know how much I'd regret such things, and how hard
I take this. Whoever has hurt them will, if they like, be severely punished."
- 1863 But Hagen answered proudly: "No one has done a thing.
It's long been a holiday custom among my noble kings
to carry arms and armor for three whole days. We'd bring
our good friend Etzel news of offenses, were there any to tell him."
- 1864 Krimhild clearly heard what Hagen said, and her eyes
glared at him in anger. She could not criticize
the customs of her native land, although she knew they'd never
done such things on the Rhine, neither in her life or ever
- 1865 before. No matter how fixed her hatred, had anyone told
Etzel the truth, he surely would have acted, preventing
all that later happened. The Rhinelanders were too bold
and proud to confess problems they could not deal with as fighting men.

- 1866 The queen was accompanied by many knights, who pressed forward, but no matter how hard they tried, neither Volker nor Hagen would yield an inch, which made the Huns grow restless. It did not please them, letting Burgundy warriors get the best
- 1867 of them. Etzel's court officials were not happy, either, and might have allowed their men to take some action, except that the king was watching and they did not dare. So all that happened was a lot of pushing and shoving, and not a great deal more.
- 1868 After the holy service, as people began to leave, most of the Hunnish warriors hurried out to their horses. Many of Krimhild's pretty ladies were with her. All told, the number of men riding with her was seven thousand or more.
- 1869 And then the queen and all her women sat at the windows of mighty Etzel's palace (a sight which Etzel enjoyed), watching excellent warriors play at war games, below. And O the foreign knights swarmed through the courtyard in a dazzling show!
- 1870 Dancwart, Gunter's courageous head groom was there, as well as other Rhineland fighting men, for Dancwart had taken charge of those who'd journeyed along with their lord. The brave knights on their beautifully saddled horses created a fine display.
- 1871 When the three kings, and all their men, had mounted their horses, one of the best Burgundian knights, Volker, advised the Rhineland men to fight in these games as they fought at home. Following his suggestion, which wasn't hard for them (they liked
- 1872 his advice), the Burgundy knights fought with great success. The clashing of shields and weapons was wild, the noise was immense, as the courtyard quickly filled with crowds of eager men. Etzel and Krimhild looked down, following fighters with attentive eyes.
- 1873 Six hundred of Dietrich's knights came riding up, expecting fun when they set themselves against the Rhineland guests.

They were quite as ready as Gunter's men to show at their best,
eager to play at war, had they been allowed to participate.

- 1874 And O that would have been a merry time, with fighters
as good as those who followed Dietrich! But their lord was too wise
to let them make the attempt. He feared he would lose some knights,
the way the Rhinelanders looked, and as it turned out, Dietrich was right.
- 1875 Once the riders from Berne had gone away, Rudiger's
men from Bechalaren took the field, half
a thousand knights, shields at the ready, awaiting their turn.
But Rudiger, too, was anxious not to see these war games happen.
- 1876 He was riding up and down among his men, saying
they could easily see for themselves how irritated
Gunter's men, the Burgundy knights, appeared to be,
and told them clearly he much preferred they do no fighting that day.
- 1877 And when this second band of ready warriors withdrew
from the field, everyone saw Thuringia's knights approach,
along with a thousand brave men from Denmark. Spears then flew
across the courtyard, and in a shower of splinters, many broke.
- 1878 Thuringia's Irnfrit and Denmark's Hawart took to the field.
The proud Rhineland knights met them with flashing blades.
Cracks began to appear in many Thuringian shields,
and many were sliced right through, great gaping holes began to be made.
- 1879 Then Etzel's brother Bloedelin came, leading three thousand
men. Neither Etzel nor Krimhild, staring down
at the courtyard below, could miss the daring deeds that were done.
The queen was especially eager, not expecting the games would be won
- 1880 by men from Wurms. Gibsha and Scrutan came riding in,
along with Hornbow and Ramunk, Hungarians, on the Hunnish side.
They galloped hard and straight at the men from Burgundy land.
Spears were thrown so high that they sailed right over the courtyard walls.

- 1881 The noise was tremendous, no matter which knights were fighting. The sound of breaking shields rang in the courtyard, and just as loud throughout the palace. And Gunter's men were winning, proudly earning for themselves and their native land a hard-fought glory.
- 1882 Indeed, they fought so long and so extremely hard that you could see the bright sweat pouring down the horses' saddlecloths. The Rhineland men pounded away at the Hunnish knights with almost contemptuous force of arms.
- 1883 Then Volker, the fighting musician, spoke to his comrades: "None of these fellows seem to have a heart for fighting. I've heard it said, often enough, that we are hated by the Huns. I can't imagine a better time and place for quarreling with us.
- 1884 "So let them bring our horses back to the stable," he went on, "since no one wants to fight. Later, we can ride them out again, if the men have changed and the time seems right. Maybe the queen will find herself giving us the prize."
- 1885 And then they saw a knight come riding out on the field, a Hun, but looking nobler by far than any they'd seen. Perhaps the woman who loved him was watching, up in the castle. He was dressed in such high fashion he could have been some warrior's bride.
- 1886 Then Volker spoke again: "But how can we let *him* ride off? This sweetheart boy needs his love torch dimmed. Nothing can stop me, he's got to feel this on his skin! And why should I be bothered if clobbering him makes Krimhild angry?"
- 1887 "No, for my sake don't," Gunter said at once. "If we begin it, we'll soon be fighting all the Huns. You'd better let the quarreling start with them, not us." He did not add, but could have: and don't forget, King Etzel's watching.
- 1888 "I think I'll enter the lists," Hagen suddenly said. "Let the women know, and all their warriors, too,

exactly how we can fight. It seems the right thing to do.
They won't be giving prizes to Gunter's men, not any time soon."

- 1889 Then bold Volker rode out on the field. Later,
many women would mourn his coming back to the games.
He ran his sharp-tipped spear right through the well-dressed Hun.
Both the women and girls began to mourn, they wept and they wailed.
- 1890 Hagen and sixty of his men came galloping onto the field,
following Volker the fiddler, and riding hard, this way
and that, taking complete control of the warrior game.
Etzel and Krimhild were still sitting on high and viewing the scene.
- 1891 By then the Rhineland kings, not wanting to leave their fiddler
alone, surrounded by hordes of enemy knights, had ridden
out at the head of a thousand battle-hardened fighters,
showing the Huns how much they thought of themselves, and how well they could ride.
- 1892 After the well-dressed Hun died on Volker's spear,
all his family members were heard screaming their grief.
Those who followed the dead man demanded: "Who did this thing?"
"The killer was Volker the fiddler, a fine musician, a finer fighter."
- 1893 The Hun had been a count. His friends and family, shouting
at the top of their lungs, raised their swords and shields, intending
to rush at Volker and stab him dead, as he had their friend.
Etzel the king, high at his window, began to run down
- 1894 to the courtyard. All the people were yelling and screaming at once.
The Rhineland kings quickly dismounted and hurried out
on the field, and all the Burgundy men pushed and shoved
toward Volker. Then Etzel arrived and began to break up the noisy crowd.
- 1895 One of the dead man's family, standing close nearby,
carried a heavy sword. Etzel pulled it from his hand
and drove all of the Huns back, fire in his eyes:
"What a host I would be, letting you kill a guest in my land!"

- 1896 “I saw it all myself, watching from my window,”
 Etzel declared. “The count was killed by accident.
 I saw the brave musician fighting with him. No one
 was guilty of murder, that was not at all our guest’s intention.
- 1897 “I tell you, here and now, leave my guests alone!”
 He made sure the Rhinemens were safe. Their horses were taken away
 and led back to their stalls by some of the many stable
 hands, ready and willing to serve such warriors, far from home.
- 1898 Then Etzel escorted his Rhineland friends into the palace.
 He was very angry and deeply determined such things ought
 to be stopped at once. He had tables set up, and water brought.
 But even here, Gunter’s men had enemies enough.
- 1899 They did not quickly seat themselves, it took them time.
 Krimhild’s sorrow tore her heart most violently.
 She said to Hildebrand: “Prince, I seek your advice,
 your help, your kindness. Dreadful things are happening to me.”
- 1900 But Hildebrand, a wonderful warrior, only replied:
 “Whoever is paid to kill our Rhineland friends can’t count
 on me, no matter how much is offered. He’ll have to decide
 for himself. It may not be worth it, these Rhineland knights won’t lie down.”
- 1901 Then Dietrich spoke to her, in his usual courteous way:
 “My queen, I think you’d better let this whole thing stay
 as it is. Your family’s never injured or insulted me,
 these knights have given me no cause for deadly hostility.
- 1902 “Noble royal princess, neither does it seem
 honorable for you to seek the death of your own
 family. They came to this land in good faith, and only on
 your invitation. Dietrich won’t take revenge for Sifried, my queen.”
- 1903 Unable to make the men of Berne be traitors, she tried
 Bloedelin, promptly offering him the lands

Nodung's* triumphs had won. They hadn't stayed in his hands
for long. Dancwart had killed him** before there was time to enjoy his prize.

- 1904 She said: "Lord Bloedelin, you have to help me. This castle
now holds a host of men who are enemies of mine,
men who murdered Sifried, my beloved man.
Whoever helps me will have my love until the end of time."
- 1905 Bloedelin replied: "Lady, you must understand
what keeps me from seeking proper revenge is my brother's hand.
He truly enjoys having your family here in this land.
If I offended Etzel in this, I'd never be forgiven."
- 1906 "No, no, Lord Bloedelin, I'll be in your debt forever.
I'll give you silver and gold, of course, but I'll do much better,
I'll give you that beautiful girl you want, Nodung's wife.
That lovely woman held in your arms will be the joy of your life.
- 1907 "And then the land he conquered, the towns and castles—you'll have
it all, my noble knight, and be happy forever after,
earning yourself every castle he ever owned.
My promise is absolute. Believe me, you'll have it all for your own."
- 1908 Hearing the fabulous price she'd pay, and that she'd give him
the beautiful girl, who pleased him very much indeed,
Lord Bloedelin decided to win her by fighting the queen's
battles. The price was truly high, for death was what he received.
- 1909 "Go back into the hall," he told her. "Before anyone
knows what's going on, I'll pick a fight with someone.
Hagan will have to accept the reward for what he's done.
He'll pay, I'll bring you Gunter's man tied around with rope."
- 1910 "On with your armor, my men!" he called. "Swords in hand!
We have some enemies to deal with, they're here where we live.

* Countess Gotelind's brother, killed in war; Hagen has been given Nodung's fine shield

** Stanza 1699 states that Witega killed Nodung

This is a debt of honor I owe the queen, who commands it,
and we are the warriors who need to risk our lives for what she gives us.”

- 1911 Now that Krimhild had brought Lord Bloedelin to the edge
of battle, she went back in and sat at table with Etzel,
surrounded by his men. Her horrible revenge,
long in the making, was almost ready to burst on her husband’s guests.
- 1912 Wanting war, and knowing no other road toward it
(ancient sorrows remained buried deep in her heart),
Krimhild ordered Etzel’s son brought to their table.
Could many women commit such horrors just for revenge? She was able
- 1913 to do this, and more. Four of Etzel’s men, whose task
it was, carried in the Huns’ young prince, who sat
at the table where Hagen too was seated. The child was later
slaughtered because of Hagen’s thirst for blood and his murderous hate.
- 1914 When mighty Etzel saw his son, he addressed those
of his wife’s family seated around him, and pleasantly cried:
“Now, my friends, you can see my son, the only child
your sister and I have had. He’ll be of use to you all, I hope.
- 1915 “If he grows as his roots suggest he will, he’ll surely become
a courageous man, wealthy and noble, good and strong.
He’ll rule in twelve great countries, if I live to do as I plan,
so this young Ortliep here will serve my friends in their vast lands.
- 1916 “And what I want to do right now, good friends of mine,
is ask you to take him with you when you go home to the Rhine,
so you can properly train and educate your sister’s
son.* I know you’ll treat him well, rear him in body and mind

* C. M. Woolgar notes, of aristocratic children in late medieval England: “As they became older, children, both male and female, were placed in other households to learn courtesy. . . . [Y]oung persons of rank helped to promote the magnificence of the household in which they lodged.” Woolgar, *The Great Household in Late Medieval England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 101–2.

- 1917 “and teach him what honor means, until he becomes a man.
If any of you are wronged by someone in another land,
my son will have the will and the strength to help.” The boy’s
mother, Krimhild, Etzel’s wife, listened in silence to this plan.
- 1918 “I’m sure he’ll deserve the trust of all your knights, if
he lives to become a man,” Hagen declared. “If he lives.
But this young prince doesn’t seem to me that strong.
I doubt I’ll ever be presented to Ortliep, here in this court.”
- 1919 King Etzel sat staring at Hagen, saddened by his words.
He made no answer, showed no great concern, but it hurt
to hear such things from a man he respected. His heart was sore.
Clearly, Hagen was not in the mood to be pleased by whatever he heard.
- 1920 All the nobles at Etzel’s court shared the king’s
distress, listening to Hagen’s unkind, unfriendly remarks.
The deeds that Gunter’s man would do were as yet undone.
They had no way of knowing the sorrowful deaths Hagen would bring.

ADVENTURE 32

HOW BLOEDELIN WAS KILLED

- 1921 Bloedelin’s men had finished arming themselves, and were ready.
With a thousand well-trained knights, Bloedelin hurried to where
Dancwart (along with his squires) was sitting at table. And then
he started the greatest war history records was fought by men.
- 1922 As soon as Bloedelin approached the table, Dancwart,
Gunter’s head groom, greeted him warmly: “Welcome, my Lord
Bloedelin, here in this house—although it’s hard,
I admit, not to ask, in some surprise, just why you’ve come.”

- 1923 “There’s absolutely no need to greet me,” Bloedelin said.
 “My coming here, in fact, announces your coming death,
 because of Hagen, your brother, who ended Sifried’s life.
 You and many other warriors will have to pay for that strife.”
- 1924 “No, no, Lord Bloedelin,” Dancwart said. “You might
 make us Rhinemen regret we ever came to this court.
 I was no more than a child when Sifried lost his life.
 Why should King Etzel’s wife think that I was somehow at fault?”
- 1925 “There’s nothing else I want to say, I’ve nothing to reply.
 It was done by your family, by Hagen and Gunter, too. And you’re
 as good as exiles, here. You won’t escape alive.
 Krimhild’s oath demands your death, so you will have to die.”
- 1926 “I see you won’t turn back,” said Dancwart. “You make me sorry
 I bothered wasting breath on someone who can’t be talked to.”
 And then, always light on his feet, he quickly rose
 and drew his razor-sharp sword, a terrible weapon, long and broad.
- 1927 He struck at Bloedelin, a single furious stroke
 that cut his neck right through. His head fell to the ground.
 “That can be your bridal gift,” Dancwart shouted,
 “for Nodung’s wife! Just try making love to anyone now!
- 1928 “Tomorrow morning she can marry a different man,
 and if he would like the gift you gave, just send him to us.”
 An honest Hun had told Dancwart Krimhild’s plan.
 Her merciless plot to wipe out all the Rhinemen had been known in advance.
- 1929 Bloedelin’s men had seen their lord slain. That
 was more than enough, they would not tolerate more from these guests.
 They charged at Dancwart’s squires, swords upraised, intending
 slaughter. But many of them were soon sorry they’d made that decision.
- 1930 Dancwart called to his men, who heard him clearly shouting:
 “Noble youngsters, see what they mean to do! Show them

you too are warriors, this is when they need to know it.
Krimhild's invitation brought us here, we'll fight our way out!"

- 1931 Squires who had no swords picked up footrests (great flat boards) from under the benches, and also three-legged stools. These Burgundy youngsters would not give up, would not retreat. Hunnish heads were knocked around, despite their helmet shields.
- 1932 Courageous Rhineland squires fought like lions, their backs to the wall. They finally drove the armored warriors out. But inside, half a thousand Huns lay dead on the ground. All the Burgundy youngsters were wet with blood, splashed and splattered.
- 1933 News of this bitter battle spread through the ranks of Etzel's knights, who heard the grim report with anger and sorrow, learning that Bloedelin and most of his men were dead. They knew the guilty parties were a band of squires led by Dancwart.
- 1934 The Huns' hatred was so intense that before their king knew what was going on, two thousand knights, or more, put on their armor and attacked the hall. What followed was slaughter, not battle. When they were done, no Rhineland youngsters were left alive.
- 1935 Breaking their oaths to the king, they sent an army against children. The squires fought bravely, but even the boldest courage could not save them, and soon they all lay dead. The Huns wasted no time, quickly creating destruction and death.
- 1936 But here let me tell you a wonder hard to understand. Nine thousand Rhineland squires were stretched on the ground, beside a dozen of Dancwart's knights. But Dancwart himself was fighting on, standing alone against a huge enemy band.
- 1937 No one was shouting, now, the clashing of weapons was gone. Dancwart the brave turned and looked around him, then said: "Alas, my friends! I've lost so many, all of them dead! Surrounded by enemies, sad at heart and standing alone."

- 1938 There was no shortage of swords trying to end his life.
 Hunnish warriors still alive would soon be lost to their wives.
 He tightened on his shield-strap, raised his shield up high, and worked
 at splashing Hunnish blood on all the Hunnish armor on earth.
- 1939 “You’ve made me terribly sad,” said Aldrian’s son. “At least
 stand back a bit, you Hunnish knights, and let me catch
 my breath. Let the cool air refresh a battle-battered
 man.” And as he spoke, he drove at them, as heroes can.
- 1940 Battle weary, he leaped out of the hall, but met
 a wave of fresh-swung swords, clanking against his helmet!
 Men who had not seen the wonders he’d worked inside
 came charging at him, hundreds beating away at one lone knight.
- 1941 “I wish to God,” Dancwart exclaimed, “that I knew how
 to send a message to Hagen, my brother, letting him know
 the trouble I’m in, besieged by all this angry crowd.
 He’d either help me escape or be clubbed to death, like me, blow
- 1942 “by blow.” The Huns yelled back: “You’ll carry the message in your hands!
 We’ll bring him your bloody corpse and let him feel for himself
 the sorrow you and he have already brought to this land,
 the great disgrace and suffering you’ve forced on our king, our mighty Etzel.”
- 1943 Dancwart answered: “Stop threatening and take a step
 back, or I’ll have to splatter blood on more bright armor.
 I’ll carry the message myself, and I’ll tell the Burgundy men
 in the hall, and my Rhineland kings, the whole sorrowful tale and the harm
- 1944 “you’ve done.” He made staying alive so difficult
 for Etzel’s men that they stopped coming close enough
 for sword fights, sticking so many spears in his shield that he could not
 hold it in his hand, shield and spears together weighing too much.
- 1945 They thought they had him beaten, now that he had no shield.
 But O the heavy slices he cut from Hunnish helmets!

And brave Hunnish knights continued to fall on the field,
as bold, courageous Dancwart won eternal praise for himself.

1946 From left and right they kept attacking the solitary
warrior, dancing into his keen-edged sword, unwary.
He cut his way through Hunnish ranks like a sharp-tusked boar
in the forest, escaping dogs. What single knight has ever done more?

1947 He was walking, step by step, along a path of bitter
blood. No knight in all the world has ever ripped
and chopped his way against all enemies much better.
Hagen's brother proudly forged a pathway, a road for himself.

1948 Hunnish stewards and bearers of wine heard the swords
clanking, and many carrying cups threw them down
on the ground, dropped the food they bore, and hurried out
the door, presenting Dancwart with enemies at front and rear.

1949 "Stewards, what do you think you're doing?" he said, wearily.
"Go back inside and serve your guests as well as you can,
bring food and wine to each and every foreign man,
and let me bring my dearest lords news for their waiting ears."

1950 Whatever stewards and bearers of cups jumped in his way
were met with mighty sword strokes, swung by a mighty hand.
These Huns decided that higher steps were safer to stand on.
Such were the wonders Dancwart worked all that glorious day.

ADVENTURE 33

HOW THE MEN OF BURGUNDY FOUGHT WITH THE HUNS

1951 As soon as courageous Dancwart came through the door, he ordered
Etsel's startled men to keep their distance. His clothing

was dripping blood on the floor, and in his hand he bore
a deadly bloodstained sword. Standing just inside the door,

1952 he shouted across the room: “It seems to me you’ve been seated
much too long, brother Hagen. I call to God
in heaven, and I call on you, in this our time of need.
Knights and squires are lying dead, in the hall where they used to sleep.”

1953 Hagen shouted back: “Who are the guilty people?”
“Lord Bloedelin, King Eztel’s brother, and all his men.
But I also ought to tell you, Hagen, the brother’s debt
is paid, I killed him. With these two hands, and this sword, I cut off his head.”

1954 “Truly, that isn’t much of a payment,” Hagen said.
“When you talk about a warrior’s death, but say some better
knight took away his life, who needs to mourn him?
There won’t be many pretty women troubled, now that he’s dead.

1955 “But tell me, brother Dancwart, why are you dripping so much
blood? Your wounds must be quite painful, many and deep.
If anyone here in this land is the cause of all this trouble,
unless the Devil decides to save him, I’ll kill him before I sleep.”

1956 “You see me perfectly healthy. The blood is on my clothes.
It comes from other men’s wounds, which bled all over me.
I’ve killed a lot of men, today. Who knows how many?
I couldn’t count them, even if you asked me to swear on oath.”

1957 Hagen said: “Brother Dancwart, guard the door,
see that no one comes on through, not a single
Hun. The ones in here and I have important things
to discuss. Our people are lying dead, and I’d like to know what for.”

1958 “If I’m official keeper of doors,” Dancwart replied,
“I’ve served wealthy kings before, I can say with pride.
So on my honor, no one goes out or comes inside.”
The sight of such a bloody porter made Krimhild’s warriors writhe.

- 1959 “It seems remarkable to me,” Hagen declared,
 “seeing the Huns in this hall unhappy to see you there.
 I can’t believe they’re sorry to lose their recent porter,
 always careful to bring special news to us, from their court.
- 1960 “He kept telling us, over and over, of Krimhild whining
 because the pain in her heart would never go away.
 So now let’s toast goodwill, and pay the king for his wine.
 And why not give the Huns’ young prince the very first chance to pay?”
- 1961 And then Hagen, the Rhineland knight, struck the child
 with his sword. Ortliep’s blood gushed on Hagen’s hands
 and the child’s head came tumbling down in his mother’s lap.
 And then the fiercest fighting broke out, savage, intense, and wild.
- 1962 Using both hands, Hagen immediately swung at the child’s
 tutor, who had been with him from birth, a stroke so violent
 his head was cut right off and fell under the table.
 This was a sorry return for years of service both good and capable.
- 1963 Then Hagen saw a fiddler in front of Etzel’s table,
 still standing where he’d been playing. Caught up in his murderous rage,
 Hagen rushed over and chopped away the man’s right hand.
 “There’s a reward for the message you brought us, in far-off Burgundy land!”
- 1964 “O God, O God, my hand!” cried Warbel, in shock and pain.
 “What have I done to you, Lord Hagen of Troneg? I came
 to your Rhineland kings in pure good faith. I’ll never play
 songs for you, never again, now that I’ve lost my hand.”
- 1965 It made no difference to Hagen, whether he ever played
 again or not. He turned away to the serious business
 of killing Etzel’s knights, and his sword struck so many
 that he alone had almost filled King Etzel’s hall with corpses.
- 1966 Volker the bold joined him, jumping up from his place,
 his huge fiddle bow smashing from right to left.

Gunter's brave musician had horrible music to play.
 O not too many Huns appreciated the music he made!

1967 Three noble Rhineland kings also rose from their tables,
 eager to avoid a complete disaster, if they were still able.
 But even royal wisdom and prudence could no longer
 stop bold Hagen and Volker, whose battle fury had grown too strong.

1968 And Gunter, lord of the Rhine, seeing that compromise
 could not occur, killed a good many Huns himself,
 smashing enemy shields with his sword, joining the fight
 like the bold warrior he was, clearly a shining warlike presence.

1969 And mighty Gernot, too, fought at his countrymen's side,
 killing many Hunnish warriors with the sharp-edged sword
 Rudiger had given him as a gift. The bright
 blade was doing great damage among the ranks of Etzel's knights.

1970 And Giselher, Lady Otta's youngest son,
 did not sit and wait till the fight was over and done,
 but sprang into the battle, banging on Hunnish helmets.
 Royal Giselher's skillful hands were busy working wonders.

1971 The Burgundy men were active, kings and men alike,
 yet Giselher stood out especially bold and bright
 in this struggle against the Huns. He was a very fine knight.
 He wounded many enemy warriors, who fell to the bloody ground.

1972 But Etzel's men also proved themselves good fighters.
 The men from Burgundy attacked, the Hunnish knights
 defended. All across the hall, swords shone bright,
 and everywhere one heard loud shouts and screams, high wails of pain.

1973 The Huns outside tried to come to their comrades' aid.
 No one succeeded in breaking through the blockaded door.
 Those inside were just as desperate to make their escape,
 but whether they came up the stairs or down, Dancwart prevailed.

- 1974 Those outside got help, their numbers grew, better
 fighters came and swung their swords with greater strength.
 Dancwart was brave, but the Huns began to help him themselves,
 and Hagen, as he'd promised to do, took care of his struggling brother,
- 1975 bellowing across the hall to his good friend Volker:
 "Comrade, have a look over there, my brother's managed
 to take more blows from these Huns than even my brother can handle.
 Go help him, my friend, or else we're going to lose that valiant man."
- 1976 "Glad to be of assistance," replied the brave musician.
 He fiddled his way straight through the hall, his hard-edged sword
 in his hands, clanging loud against hard Hunnish men.
 Every Burgundy man in sight gave him a thankful word.
- 1977 And when he got to the door, and Dancwart, he said: "You're starting
 to have some trouble, here. It's been a very long day.
 Your brother asked me to lend a hand, so I've come to stay.
 You stop the Huns who want to get in, I'll keep the others where they are."
- 1978 So Dancwart stepped outside and stood in front of the door.
 Whoever came up the steps and tried to make his way in,
 had to fight looking up at Dancwart's mighty sword.
 Meanwhile, standing inside, Volker slashed at Hunnish men.
- 1979 Then Volker called to Hagen, over the warriors' heads:
 "The hall is closed and locked, Hagen my worthy friend.
 We're keeping Etzel's door well shut—a full two thousand
 iron bolts, held in a pair of Rhineland warrior hands."
- 1980 When Hagen saw how well guarded they had the door,
 the worthy knight set his shield high on his back,
 finally able to finish the task he'd started before.
 Now his enemies had no chance to escape death in this war.
- 1981 Dietrich, ruler of Berne, saw how the Rhineland knight
 was smashing helmet after helmet. He jumped up

on a bench, saying: "Hagen is serving terrible wine,
no one wants to drink what his strong sword pours in their cups."

1982 King Etzel was deeply troubled, as anyone would be,
seeing beloved friends slaughtered in front of his eyes,
wondering what his enemy's rage would do when he
himself was a target. He sat, tormented. What good was a crown, what prize

1983 a kingdom? Krimhild, his queen, cried to Dietrich: "Help me,
noble knight, ruler of Amelung* land! In the name
of princely courtesy, O mighty Dietrich, save
my life! You know what he will do, the deadly revenge he'll take."

1984 "How in the world can I help you, noble queen?" Dietrich
replied. "I'm worried enough for myself. Your visitors
are now so angry, so savage, that I cannot be protector
of anyone here in this hall. Who knows what Gunter's men will do?"

1985 "Please, please, Lord Dietrich! O noble knight, O worthy
ruler, in the name of all that's holy, do whatever
a good man can to save me, or else I'm as good as dead."
Krimhild's terrified tears were not by any means foolishly shed.

1986 "Who knows if I can help? I'll see what I'm able to do.
It's been a very long time since I've seen so many men,
such worthy knights, enraged so bitterly. You
see blood leaping from helmets, swords striking again and again."

1987 Standing high on a table, Dietrich bellowed as loud
as he could (and his voice had the strength of a blast from a buffalo horn).
The whole great castle seemed to shake with the force of the sound.
Dietrich was truly a bull of a man, extraordinarily strong.

1988 Through all the horrendous noise Gunter was able to hear
the echoing rumble. He stopped fighting, stood still and listened,

* In northern Italy, where Dietrich unsuccessfully tried to re-create a kingdom

then said: "That is Dietrich's voice filling my ear.
I think we may have killed one of his men, by accident.

- 1989 "I see him, he's up on a table. He's signaling with his hand.
Dietrich is one of our friends, as well as one of my family.
We must break off the battle and hear what this valiant man
needs to report, what his kingly words will turn out to be."
- 1990 Gunter, Rhineland king, quickly gave the order
that no matter how sharp the battle, swords should now be withdrawn.
The fact that the fighting stopped showed his absolute power.
Then Gunter inquired of Dietrich what the ruler of Berne might want:
- 1991 "Wonderfully noble Dietrich, what wrong do you need to complain of,
what have my people done? Whatever grief or pain
we've caused you, I will gladly make immediate
amends. Harming you would cause me sorrow I'd deeply regret."
- 1992 Lord Dietrich answered: "Nothing whatever has been done to me.
But let me ask permission for all of those who follow
me to leave this house and the fighting here. Allow us
to go. I'll be forever in your debt, Gunter, if you will agree."
- 1993 "Why are you running away?" young Wolfhart asked his lord.
"Fiddler Volker hasn't got the door so closed
that we can't get it open as wide as ever we like."
"Be quiet," Dietrich commanded. "You never think, you only fight."
- 1994 King Gunter then declared: "Indeed, I'll let you leave
this house, however many or few you happen to be.
But not my enemies. They must remain with me.
The Huns have already caused me and mine too much grief."
- 1995 Hearing this, Dietrich placed Lady Krimhild
under a protective arm. The woman was terrified.
He also brought King Etzel with him, to walk at his side
as he left the house, taking six hundred splendid warriors with him.

- 1996 Then noble Rudiger spoke, count of Bechalaren:
 “Let me ask if you mean to allow more of those
 long in your service to walk freely out of this house.
 Faithful friends and peace work together, hand in hand.”
- 1997 His answer came from the youngest king, Giselher:
 “You’ve shown us only peace and friendliness, it’s true.
 Rudiger and his men have proved their good faith. You
 and all those with you may leave whenever you like, and with no fear.”
- 1998 So noble Rudiger, Bechalaren’s friendly
 lord, was allowed to leave the hall, followed by
 a good five hundred men or even more. These
 were warriors who, later on, caused Gunter’s forces serious harm.
- 1999 One of the Hunnish knights caught sight of Etzel walking
 away, next to Dietrich, and tried to go along.
 But fiddler Volker struck him such a blow that his head
 came off and rolled to Etzel’s feet, along the bloody floor.
- 2000 When Etzel, king of the Huns, was out of the house, he turned
 and looked in Volker’s direction: “O what have I done to deserve
 such welcome guests, who make my hall a house of death
 where all my noble knights are thrown to the floor and lie there dead.
- 2001 “O this wretched feast!” said the noble king.
 “There’s a man fighting in there, his cursed name is Volker,
 and he’s a musician, a fiddler, who fights like the wildest boar
 in the woods. I thank my stars I’ve now escaped from that fiddling fiend.
- 2002 “All his songs are evil, his bowing is bathed in blood.
 His music’s already left many good warriors dead.
 Why this fiddler hates us is a mystery to me. No guest
 so grim has ever before crossed this threshold, or darkened my door.”
- 2003 The Rhineland men had freed all who would ever leave.
 Battle noise began again, inside the hall,

as Etzel's guests took revenge for losses and grief.
And courageous Volker—O he beat out tunes on the helmets he saw!

2004 Noble Gunter, king of the Rhineland, was watching these things.
“Do you hear those tunes, Hagen, that Volker over there
is fiddling on Hunnish men who try to reach the door?
That fiddle bow of his is strung with truly bloody strings.”

2005 “What truly bothers me,” Hagen answered, “is how
I could have held a higher place in the hall than that hero
there. He and I have fought together, now,
as equals, and if we come home again, that's what the world will see.

2006 “Just note, my king, Volker's fervent loyalty,
how eager he is to earn your silver and gold! His fiddle
bow is cutting hardened steel, and shining metal
insignia come flying from these Hunnish helmets like melodies!

2007 “I've never seen a fiddler fight with tremendous force,
as heroic Volker has done today, in this hall. His songs
have penetrated helmets and gleaming armor. He belongs
on a splendid horse, wearing only costly noble clothes.”

2008 However many Huns had been in that hall, not
a single one was still alive. Battle noise
had faded down to nothing, there was no one left to fight.
Burgundy men lowered shields and swords, their hands were quiet.

ADVENTURE 34

HOW THE DEAD ARE THROWN FROM THE HALL

2009 The Rhineland warriors, weary, seated themselves and rested.
Volker and Hagen both walked in front of the hall.

This pair of confident knights leaned on their shields and talked.
The conversation was exceedingly sharp and full of pleasant remarks.

- 2110 Then Giselher the young came out and spoke to his men:
“My very dear friends, we can’t allow ourselves to relax.
We have to clear the hall of all the many dead.
We’ll soon be fighting again, I have no doubt we’ll be attacked.
- 2111 “We can’t afford bodies lying under foot.
Before the Huns can claim victory in battle,
we’ll get to chop them up again, which makes me happy.
And I intend,” said he, “to have as good a time as I can.”
- 2112 “Now that’s the kind of ruler I like having,” Hagen
said. “Only a real warrior talks that way,
gives you the kind of advice my prince has given today.
All you Burgundy men should rejoice. That’s all I have to say!”
- 2113 They did as the prince advised, and carried seven thousand
bodies out the door of the hall. Then they dropped
the corpses down the stairs, and left them where they stopped
rolling. The dead men’s families wept and cried, and wrung their hands.
- 2114 Some of the wounded men were still alive, at the start,
and could have been completely healed, if cared for. The jarring
fall had killed them, every single one. Their friends
and families wailed in sorrow for such a bitter, painful end.
- 2115 Then musician Volker, a worthy knight, declared:
“Now I can see it’s true, what I have always heard.
These Huns are all cowards, they weep exactly like women.
Why don’t they shut their mouths and begin to bury their honored dead?”
- 2116 A noble Hunnish count took him at his word.
Seeing one of his family stretched out, covered in gore,
he put his arms round the corpse, preparing to carry it off,
but bold Volker ran him through with his spear, dropped him to the earth.

- 2117 Seeing what he'd done, the other Huns panicked
and ran, loudly swearing and hurling curses. It happened
that someone had thrown a spear, exceedingly sharp. Volker
bent down, silently picked up the deadly weapon and threw it so far
- 2118 it flew out of the courtyard and beyond the fleeing crowd.
Volker had sent the Huns a message: even walls
offer you no safety, stay away from this hall.
The Hunnish people were afraid of his strength, which terrified them all.
- 2119 By now thousands of Huns had come, including the king,
followed by warriors. Hagen and Volker, afraid of nothing,
began to tell King Etzel exactly what they were thinking
of him. Later, the two bold knights paid dearly for their words.
- 2020 "Perhaps your people would trust you more," Hagen said,
"if you and the other lords could always be seen by your men,
fighting as they do—and kings on the Rhine have always done.
Use your sword to hack at bloody helmets, and not for show."
- 2021 Old as he was, Etzel instantly reached for his shield.
"Be careful," Lady Krimhild said, "don't take to the field
yourself. Offer your warriors shield-gold to stir them to battle.
If Hagen gets his hands on you, your death is guaranteed."
- 2022 Etzel was very brave, and not about to yield
(not many wealthy kings use their swords and shields).
The Huns held him back, grasping at buckles and straps.
Ferocious Hagen taunted the king with loud and bitter laughter:
- 2023 "There isn't much connection," the heroic fighter said,
"between Etzel, alive, and Sifried, long since dead.
He loved Krimhild long before she set eyes on you.
Wicked, cowardly king, what evil things do you plan to do
- 2024 "to me?" Etzel's noble wife heard these words,
and was deeply offended, as Hagen intended. He'd had the nerve

to speak against her in front of Etzel's men. She yearned
to have the Rhinelanders dead and gone, and said to her husband's knights:

- 2025 "Whoever kills Hagen of Troneg, and brings me his head,
I hereby pledge this reward: King Etzel's shield, filled
to the brim with good red gold. And even more: I will
bestow on him many splendid castles, and lands that spread
- 2026 "in all directions." "What are they waiting for?" said Volker.
"I've never ever seen knights standing around in fear
when such a huge reward was offered. They're surely aware
Etzel can not approve of cowardly knightly conduct so close
- 2027 "to home. They lounge around, eating their master's bread,
and now when they see he truly needs their help, there
they are, doing nothing. What more could their king have said?
These fellows think themselves brave. They'll be forever shamed by this fear."

ADVENTURE 35

HOW IRINC WAS KILLED

- 2028 Then Count Irinc, who came from Denmark, exclaimed: "I
have always lived my life by the code of honor, and led
my people's armies in battle, there where my fame was bred.
Bring me my weapons and armor. Hagen's a man I intend to fight."
- 2029 "Let me try to persuade you against it," Hagen said.
"But if you'd like to, first convince these Huns to move back.
If two or three of them attempt a rush for the steps
to our hall, I'll knock them right back down again, wounded or dead."
- 2030 "You will not frighten me with such words," Irinc replied.
"I've long since done more dangerous things than that, in my time."

And I propose to fight you alone, my sword in my hand.
 What good will boasting and bluster do you, then? Just fight like a man.”

- 2031 Count Irinc quickly got his armor on, as did
 Irnvrit from Thuringia, a noble young knight, and strong
 Prince Hawart, also from Denmark, and a thousand other warriors.
 Wherever Irinc went, whatever he did, they followed along.
- 2032 Then fiddler Volker saw approaching, not Irinc alone,
 but a huge crowd of armored men along with him,
 their metal helmets strapped firmly in place. Strong
 Volker was somewhat distressed, and very angry, seeing them.
- 2033 “Look, Hagen my friend. Isn’t that Irinc over
 there, who said he would fight with you alone, sword
 in hand? Lying is not for knights. I think it’s wrong.
 He’s got armed knights coming with him, a thousand men or more.”
- 2034 “Don’t turn me into a liar,” said Irinc, Hawart’s knight,
 to his men. “Keeping my word has always been my desire.
 I will not run away, I’m not afraid to fight.
 However fierce Hagen may be, I’ll meet him face to face.”
- 2035 Irinc sank to his knees, begging his family members
 and his men to let him fight this battle all by himself.
 It was hard for them to consent, for they knew very well
 the confident reputation, so fully deserved, of the knight from Troneg.
- 2036 He begged so long and hard that, in the end, they agreed.
 Seeing his passion, knowing what he sought was fame
 and honor, his family and followers let the fight proceed.
 And then these two bold knights went at it, a battle grim indeed.
- 2037 Irinc from Denmark raised his spear high in the air,
 and like the distinguished warrior he was, held his shield
 in place as he rushed at Hagen in front of the hall. There
 had been silence, before, but now battle noises were everywhere.

- 2038 Each of them knew exactly how to hurl a spear
to make it pierce a shield and strike the shining armor,
making wooden shafts go bouncing high in the air.
And then both strong, ferocious men drew their massive swords.
- 2039 Courageous Hagen was powerfully built, and very strong.
Irinck struck at him and his heavy blows rung
in the courtyard, and through the castle, up to the highest towers,
but nothing he did succeeded in winning any advantage on powerful
- 2040 Hagen. So Irinck left his untouched enemy
and turned toward fiddler Volker instead. He fancied he
might force the musician down with his great, hammering strokes.
But courteous Volker was easily able to handle the Dane's hard blows.
- 2041 Then the fiddler swung his sword, and sent parts
of the clasps on Irinck's shield whirling up in the air.
The Dane then turned away, the fiddler was far too sharp
an opponent. Next, he threw himself at Gunter, who seemed less hard
- 2042 to defeat. But the king, too, proved a fierce opponent.
Irinck struck, and Gunter struck back. Both were strong,
but neither caused any blood to flow, or wounds to open,
for both were protected by excellent armor, well made and meant to last long.
- 2043 So Irinck hurried away from Gunter, attacking Gernot
next, sending showers of sparks from his chain-mail coat.
Yet strong Gernot's stroke, had bold Irinck stayed still,
would have given the Burgundy knight yet another kill.
- 2044 But the Danish warrior, a very agile man, jumped
away. He struck quickly, leaping aside, then swung—
one! two! three! four! And that many Rhinemans
lay dead. This was more than an angry Giselher could abide.
- 2045 "In the name of God, Lord Irinck," young Giselher declared,
"you'll have to pay me back for the dead men lying there,

killed with no swords in their hands.” He ran at the noble Dane
and hit him so strong a stroke that Irinc could neither move nor complain,

2046 but sank down on the bloody ground. No one thought
the stalwart knight would ever stand or fight again,
never lift his sword or even his head. The blow
on his helmet had stunned, not wounded him. The only thing hurt was his brain.

2047 The strength of Giselher’s arm had stretched him out on the field,
no longer knowing where he was or what had happened.
As still as a stone, and as much aware, he had left the battle
behind him, motionless, lying just as if dead or asleep.

2048 After a while, his head slowly began to clear.
He remembered where he was, and how Giselher swung.
He thought: “I’m still alive, I haven’t even been wounded.
This was only a lesson in what Giselher could have done.”

2049 He heard the conversation of enemies all around him.
If they knew he was still alive, they’d kill him right where they found him.
He also became aware that Giselher stood right near him.
He tried to imagine how he might escape, half sick with fear.

2050 Covered with blood and gore, he suddenly jumped to his feet,
counting on his quickness. He started to run, found
he was facing Hagen again, and without making a sound
swung a mighty sword-stroke with his agile hands. The surprise was complete.

2051 Hagen thought to himself: “This time you’ll have to die.
If the Devil won’t protect you, you don’t have a chance to survive.”
Irin’s sudden blow had cut through Hagen’s helmet.
(His sword was named Wasken, very well forged, of fine design.)

2052 Hagen was well aware of the wound, high on his neck.
But now his sword seemed to move all by itself.
Hawart’s knight was forced to give up ground, move back,
and Hagen followed after, relentless. The Dane was unable to help

- 2053 himself except by running. He raised his shield over
his head, and then, as Hagen's sword struck him again
and again, barely managed to turn and run for cover.
O the red sparks that flew from his helmet, that soundly defeated man!
- 2054 But still healthy and sound, he bolted across the field
and rejoined his men. Krimhild heard a full report
of his expedition, and what his aborted attempt had yielded.
Krimhild praised his effort, and promised he would not go unrewarded:
- 2055 "Thanks to God, Irinc, splendid knight and hero!
You've lifted up my spirits and warmed my heart. We are
for the first time able to see red blood on Hagen's armor."
And she herself gratefully took in her hand the shield he bore.
- 2056 "Don't offer him more thanks than you need to," Hagen declared.
"A worthy warrior would surely try again. If he dares me
once more, and lives, then he'll be an honest brave man.
The scratch he gave me won't help you, queen, carry out your plan.
- 2057 "This blood you see dripping down my armor only
makes me even more eager to kill as many men
as I can. Hawart's knight has made me angry again.
I haven't yet had a chance to smash Irinc's precious bones."
- 2058 Meanwhile, Irinc from Denmark stood and faced the wind,
letting the air cool his armor, though his helmet was off.
All his men were telling him what a hero he'd been.
Count Irinc began to think himself able to fight and win.
- 2059 And so he said: "My friends, help me arm myself
as fast as you can. I want to try this fellow once more.
Maybe, this time, I can send him where he belongs."
His shield had been hacked to bits, and a better one was quickly found.
- 2060 It did not take them long to have him fully prepared.
He carried a heavier spear, as if to boldly declare

how completely ready he was to deal with arrogant Hagen.
But in that deadly savage warrior, hatred began to darken.

- 2061 He could not wait for the man to walk across the field,
but came charging right out, beating and slashing at the shield
as he ran directly at Irinc, his wild anger driving
him on. How could the Dane deal with such overwhelming might?
- 2062 They smashed at each other's shields until the fiery sparks
were flying high on the wind. Then Hagen's powerful sword
came crashing through bold Irinc's shield, and through his armor.
This was a mortal wound, from which no man could ever recover.
- 2063 And Irinc knew it at once. He lifted his shield high
above the rim of his helmet, thinking that everything
was over for him, all he had to do was die.
But Hagen was not done with this knight pledged to an enemy king.
- 2064 He picked up someone's spear, lying near his feet,
and hurled it hard, straight at the Danish warrior's face.
The point pierced him through, sticking out at the base
of his skull. Hagen had dealt him a savage end, his revenge complete.
- 2065 Irinc was driven back to the Danish lines, where
his men swiftly removed his helmet, but only after
breaking off the protruding spear. Death would be there
soon. His family wept and wailed for the loss of their lord and master.
- 2066 The queen came and stood above the dying man,
mourning for powerful Irinc. She wept and wrung her hands,
her tears were wet for his wounds, her sorrow deep and intense.
Looking up at his queen, Irinc spoke twice, then never again:
- 2067 "Let your mourning be over, noble lady. What good
is weeping, now? Because of this wound, my life too
is over, my time is done. Death has decided I won't
serve any longer, neither Etzel, our noble king, or you."

- 2068 And then he spoke to the men from Denmark and from Thuringia:
 “The gifts the queen gives you, the gleaming red gold she puts
 in your hands, you’ve eagerly embraced. But Hagen’s too much
 for any man here, and facing him in battle you’ll take your last breath.”
- 2069 His face went very pale and the mark of death fell
 on brave Irinc. Danish sorrow was universal.
 But Hawart’s man lay still, without a sign of life,
 and all the other Danes could do was take up weapons and fight.
- 2070 Irnfrit and Hawart, leading a thousand men, went charging
 toward the hall, shouting and screaming, raising an unholy
 din, completely eclipsing all other sounds. And O
 the heavy shower of spears that fell on the helmets of Rhineland warriors!
- 2071 Then bold Irnfrit ran at Volker the fiddler, but what
 he won for his eager efforts was horrible pain. The noble
 musician’s sword smashed right through Irnfrit’s metal
 helmet, doing the damage meant by the noble fiddler’s blow.
- 2072 Then Irnfrit struck him back so savagely that he opened
 the knitted chain-mail armor across the musician’s breast.
 Red sparks went shooting high in the air. But that was the best
 Irnfrit could do, and despite the fireworks he was slashed to death.
- 2073 Then Hawart and Hagen clashed in the fiercest battle. Such stunning
 swordplay would truly be a marvelous sight to behold!
 Both the mighty warriors fought with passion and cunning
 skill. But Hawart finally fell in front of Hagen the bold.
- 2074 Knights from Thuringia and Denmark, seeing their lords
 struck down, launched a grim struggle to gain control
 of the hall, fighting bravely until they had reached the door.
 Shields and helmets were being cracked and broken by powerful strokes.
- 2075 “Stand back,” Volker advised, “let them go right in.
 What do they think they’re doing? What do they think they’ll win?”

Once we've got them in there, it won't take long to kill them.
They'll earn the queen's golden gifts by paying us their lives."

- 2076 The overconfident Danes went rushing into the hall,
and then, surrounded and held in place by four stout walls,
the Burgundy men cut them down, and all of them fell.
Bold Gernot was fighting hard. Giselher did more than his share.
- 2077 A thousand and four Danes had entered the hall. Swords
flickered and slashed, and man by man they disappeared.
A thousand and four died, all the Danish warriors.
Burgundy's knights had worked wonders to tell the world for years.
- 2078 A deep silence followed, as the sounds of battle faded
away. So much blood flowed from the corpses that the drains
ran red, and gutters were full as if there'd been a rain.
These were the noble deeds of the Huns' Rhineland visitors.
- 2079 For now, Burgundy's men set themselves down, and rested.
Shields and weapons dropped quietly out of their hands.
But still, in front of the hall, they saw Volker standing,
waiting to see if others meant to start the fighting again.
- 2080 Etzel mourned these battles, and so did Krimhild, his queen.
Girls and women tore at their flesh, in anguish and pain.
I believe they felt that Death had taken a vow against them.
And still, the Huns' bold guests were not finished killing their men.

ADVENTURE 36

HOW THE QUEEN BURNED DOWN THE HALL

- 2081 "Take your helmets off," Hagen said to the Rhineland
men. "Volker and I will watch and stay on guard.

If we catch sight of approaching Hunnish men, our lords
will be warned just as quickly as Volker and I together can.”

- 2082 Then most of these excellent knights put down their helmets and sat
on the only seats they had, the dead bodies of Huns
their hands had just been cutting and beating to death. No wonder
the hospitality of Etzel’s land seemed to be lacking!
- 2083 Etzel and his queen were busy, almost till that night,
making arrangements for more Hunnish warriors to fight
their ferocious guests. By then they’d gathered twenty thousand
knights, armed and ready. Now they could cleanse the blight on their land.
- 2084 Waves of warriors attacked the Rhineland guests. Dancwart,
Hagen’s brother, ran outside to protect the door
and keep his comrades safe. Everyone thought that before
too long he would be dead, but he got to his post, safe and sound.
- 2085 The hard fighting lasted until darkness fell.
The guests were incredible warriors, battling as long as summer
light lasted with the many thousands of Etzel’s men.
And O the piles of corpses grew in front of them again!
- 2086 All this bitter slaughter took place on just the length
of a single summer day, when Lady Krimhild avenged
her sorrow on her own family and many other
men. And Etzel’s peace and happiness were gone forever.
- 2087 The day was over, but pain for the men in the hall just grew.
It seemed to them that a swift death was better than
the long torment of such a hopeless struggle. A truce,
if one could be had, appeared to these brave fighters the best they could do.
- 2088 Covered with blood, the three noble kings emerged
from the hall, still wearing their heavily stained armor, and urged
the Huns to bring Etzel there for a final serious
discussion. Who else could they hope to turn to, standing, weary, on the verge

- 2089 of death? Etzel came, but Lady Krimhild came too.
 (The Huns were fighting at home; their army steadily grew.)
 Etzel spoke to his guests: “Tell me, what do you want?
 Do you think peace can be bought? Perhaps you do, but I tell you it can’t.
- 2090 “After the injuries I’ve suffered at your hands
 (for which you’ll never be forgiven, as long as I live),
 the slaughter of my son and many more of my family,
 reconciliation and peace are impossible favors to give.”
- 2091 Gunter replied: “Your people pressed us terribly hard.
 Almost ten thousand squires were killed, here in this hall,
 by knights in your service. What had I done to deserve this? I call
 heaven to witness I came in good faith, because you said you wanted
- 2092 “our visit.” Then Giselher the young spoke for the Burgundy
 men: “King Etzel’s brave knights, those who are still alive,
 what have I done to you? What do you have against me?
 I came here as a friend, making this long and difficult ride.”
- 2093 They answered: “We see your kindness everywhere in this castle,
 misery all over our land. It would have been better for us
 if none of you had come from Wurms in Burgundy land.
 You’ve brought us desolation, wrought by you and your brothers’ hands.”
- 2094 Angry, now, brave, bold Gunter spoke: “All
 you need to do is stop the bitter hatred that’s formed
 in our hearts and yours, and then this wild warfare will be over.
 What reason does Etzel truly have, to treat his guests like this?”
- 2095 The ruler of the Huns replied: “You cannot compare what you’re
 suffering to what I’ve known. All the pain you’ve poured
 on me, first one disgrace, then another, sorrow laid on sorrow,
 ensures that none of you will ever be able to leave here alive.”
- 2096 Then mighty Gernot spoke to the king: “May God give you
 the grace to show us at least this much compassion. Simply

kill us all, but let it be somewhere out in the air,
let us leave this place. That would be mercy beyond compare.

2097 “However you choose to kill us, let it be quick, and soon.
You have so many fresh, untired men, we cannot
win if they want to fight. All of us are as good
as dead. How long must we carry on, even if we could?”

2098 Etzel was clearly on the verge of giving orders
to his men. He would have let them leave the hall. But his queen
was listening, and mercy to Hagen’s people was sorrow to her.
She quickly made sure that Etzel’s brave knights offered them no peace:

2099 “No, no, Hunnish warriors, the thing you have in mind
I tell you most sincerely you must not do! You’ll find,
if you let these death-dealing men walk away from this place,
everyone in your family will die. I see it in their faces,

2100 “for I am Otta’s child as well, I know these men,
my noble brothers. Let even my brothers come out again,
and recover their calm, and rest, and all your people will be dead.
The world has never seen bolder warriors than these deadly men.”

2101 Young Giselher then said: “O my beautiful sister,
how wrong I was to trust you, pressing us to visit
you and your king in this land. You led us into disaster.
And how have I deserved death at the hands of Hunnish men?”

2102 “I was always faithful to you, I caused you no sorrow.
All I ever thought, when I rode away from the Rhine,
was that you’d always loved me, noble sister mine.
Grant us mercy. That’s the only thing we still desire.”

2103 “Why do I owe you mercy? Unkindness is what I’ve known.
Your brave Hagen of Troneg has brought me so much sorrow
that nothing can set things right as long as I’m alive.
All of you will have to pay,” declared King Etzel’s wife.

- 2104 “Now if you’re willing to give me Hagen as a captive, who knows?
I might be willing, in exchange, to let you go on living.
You are my brother, born of the mother I love. Given
that, I’ll talk to these warriors here, once you’ve said you’re willing.”
- 2105 “By the living God in heaven,” Gernot exclaimed, “even
if every Rhinelanders here were one of your family, we’d rather
die on the spot than deliver any man as a captive.
None of us will ever bestow on a comrade such savage grief.”
- 2106 “And so we have to die,” Giselher said. “But no one
can ever stop us from living as knights are supposed to live.
Whoever’s anxious to fight with us, here we are.
I don’t break trust with friends, or act like a traitor to anyone.”
- 2107 Then bold Dancwart spoke (silence would have been wrong):
“My brother Hagen isn’t facing you by himself.
Those who refuse peace with us may live to regret it.
We’ll show you that. You’ll know how truly I speak, before much longer.”
- 2108 Then Krimhild spoke: “You bold knights of Etzel’s land,
charge into that hall and avenge the wrongs they’ve done me,
and I will be forever grateful for what you’ve won me.
Arrogant Hagen will truly be paid for all the work of his hands.
- 2109 “Drive them into the hall, let none of them escape.
Then I will order fires set in all four corners,
and you’ll have given me brave vengeance for all my wrongs.”
Etzel’s warriors quickly did whatever was needed to make
- 2110 the assault. Whatever Rhinemen were standing outside were driven
back with swords and spears. The roar of battle was immense.
None of the kings allowed themselves to be separated
from their men. Trust and respect among them were never annihilated.
- 2111 Then Etzel’s wife ordered all the fires lit.
The Huns intended the flames to swallow up their lives.

A wind blew up, and soon the building was one great fire.
Fear spread among the Burgundy men packed inside.

2112 You could hear their cries: “O God, what agony! We’d rather
have a spear or a sword cut us down in battle.
Dear God, have mercy on us! We’ll die in here like cattle!
This furious queen is taking monstrous revenge on innocent men.”

2113 Someone was heard saying: “We’re all going to die.
What good has it ever done us that the Huns’ great king invited
us here? This flaming heat and burning thirst are awful,
it feels as if I’m melting to death, which is just around the corner.”

2114 Then Hagen of Troneg spoke: “Noble knights, listen:
when thirst grips you like that, drink up some of the blood.
It’s very much better than wine, in burning heat like this.
And where we are right now, by God, it’s the only drink there is.”

2115 One Rhineland warrior walked straight to a corpse, kneeled
on the ground, took off his helmet, and drank right from the wounds,
taking the blood as it flowed out of the motionless body.
It wasn’t what he was used to, but to him it tasted very good.

2116 “May God repay you, Lord Hagen,” the weary man declared,
“for teaching me a way to satisfy my thirst.
I haven’t often drunk a better wine, I swear it!
As long as I’m alive, I’ll appreciate your help and kindness.”

2117 And hearing this, another man also found it
good, then many more, then all of them drank blood.
Life and strength were restored by following Hagen’s advice.
Many lovely women had paid for these drinks with their dear friends’ lives.

2118 Burning wood kept falling down on them, but as
it fell the Burgundy men deflected brands with their shields.
The smoke, as well as the heat, caused them enormous anguish.
I suspect the pain they endured no other knights will ever feel.

- 2119 Then Hagen of Troneg spoke: “Stay standing close to the walls
so your helmets don’t receive the burning brands as they fall.
Stamp those fires out in the blood under your feet.
This is a celebration of evil, Lady Krimhild’s treat.”
- 2120 That was the sort of pain they endured the entire night.
And then, at dawn, there were Hagen and his fellow fighter,
Volker the brave musician, leaning on their shields
in front of the hall. They knew just what would be coming, now it was light.
- 2121 Then the fiddler spoke: “Let’s go back in the hall.
The Huns will probably think we Burgundy men have all
been killed, burned to death in the terror trap they created.
They’ll find us more than ready to fight, when they start their celebration.”
- 2122 Then Giselper the young declared: “I think it will be
a beautiful day. I feel a lovely cool breeze beginning.
May God in heaven give us a better time to live in,
instead of this bitter feast my sister Krimhild hopes we’ll eat.”
- 2123 Someone else spoke up: “Now I can see it’s dawn.
But why should that be any better for us? On
with your armor, warriors, get yourselves ready to fight.
We can expect an early visit from good King Etzel’s wife.”
- 2124 The Huns had been hoping their guests were already dead and gone,
killed by the dreadful fire and everything else they’d done.
But inside the burned-out building six hundred men were alive,
warriors as good and brave as any a king could hope to find.
- 2125 But the guards set by the Huns, who had stayed and watched the hall,
knew perfectly well their guests had lived through the night, many
men and lords surviving heat and suffering and pain.
The guards saw them standing, unharmed, looking through burned-down walls.
- 2126 Lady Krimhild was told her guests were healthy and well.
The queen replied that no such thing could ever have happened,

since no one must have lived through the flames and fires of Hell.
 “I think it’s far more likely they’re lying dead, charred and collapsed.”

- 2127 The Rhineland kings and their men also hoped for some mercy,
 but no one offered them any. Mercy did not appear
 to flourish in the hearts of Hunnish men. If they had to die,
 Burgundy’s knights would make their enemies pay a terrible price.
- 2128 The start of another day brought them, in greeting, a heavy,
 pitiless assault. Rhineland hearts felt leaden.
 Well-thrown deadly spears were raining down from the heavens.
 Burgundian warriors fought on bravely, lords and men together.
- 2129 King Etzel’s knights could not keep from high excitement,
 sure, by now, that Krimhild’s gold was almost in
 their hands. And the king commanded them they had to win.
 Many Rhineland warriors would be lying dead before it was night.
- 2130 Krimhild’s promises and Krimhild’s gifts were wondrous
 things. She had good gold carried in on shields.
 It was handed out, freely, to any man who wanted it.
 Nothing like this had ever happened, no soldier had ever seen it.
- 2131 Rhineland men could see their enemy’s massive strength.
 Then bold Volker declared: “We seem to be just
 where we were. I’ve never seen such eager fighting men.
 All these knights have taken their king’s good gold, just to kill us.”
- 2132 His comrades started shouting: “Come nearer, you fellows, come close,
 so we can quickly do our job, and this will be over.
 No one here knows when he’s supposed to die.”
 And then, at once, Burgundy shields were struck, as spears came flying.
- 2133 What more can I possibly tell you? There must have been a good
 twelve hundred men struggling to capture the hall. Rhineland
 hearts felt satisfied when others died at their hands.
 No one could stop the battle, men were bleeding from mortal wounds,

2134 and blood was pouring down. Death was running wild.
 Every single man heard his friends crying
 out. Honest servants of all the kings were dying.
 How miserable their families would be, when all the dead were counted.

ADVENTURE 37

HOW COUNT RUDIGER WAS KILLED

2135 The exile knights had been hard at work, by the end of the morning,
 when Gotelind's husband came to the courtyard. He saw that both
 sides had suffered enormous losses and pain. Honest
 Rudiger's heart was sore at the terrible sight. "Alas, alas,"

2136 the good knight said, "that I was ever born on this earth.
 Is no one able to stop this horror, bring peace to the world?
 I would be glad to try for a truce, but the king, I know,
 will never allow it, now that he sees his sorrows grow and grow."

2137 Then honest Rudiger sent a message to Dietrich,
 asking if something couldn't be done for the three kings
 of the Rhineland. Dietrich answered: "Who on earth could step in
 between them, since Etzel will not permit that anyone intervene?"

2138 One of the Hunnish knights saw Rudiger there, standing
 with tears in his eyes, weeping as he watched the battle. The man
 turned to Krimhild and said: "Just look at that, will you?
 Here's the most powerful man in the land, after your mighty husband,

2139 "served by thousands of people, rewarded with land, given
 an incredible number of castles, straight from the royal hand,
 all of which he's accepted and made himself so grand!
 He hasn't fought in this war, swung a sword or thrown a spear.

- 2140 “It seems to me he doesn’t really care. He’s had everything he wants, and now he can’t be bothered. I’ve heard it said he’s brave and his fighting isn’t bad. That may be true, but nothing here seems to make him mad
- 2141 “enough to contribute.” Honest Rudiger, terribly sad at hearing this, glanced around to see who’d said it. He thought: “You’re going to pay for speaking those words, brash and loud and spoken in public, accusing me of cowardice.”
- 2142 The count of Bechalaren rushed over and hit him so hard that the Hunnish warrior dropped to the ground, falling at Rudiger’s feet, dead before he reached the earth, adding one more corpse to those King Etzel already had to mourn.
- 2143 “Enough, you angry coward,” Rudiger declared. “I’ve suffered too much pain and grief. I was not prepared to fight in this war, but did you have any idea just why? I had enough reason to hate these men as anyone here,
- 2144 “and would have gladly done whatever I could, except that I was the one who brought Burgundy’s knights to this land, I was their safe-conduct from Wurms on the Rhine. My hand could not be raised against them, no matter which cause I thought the best.”
- 2145 Then Etzel, his lord, addressed these words to the noble count: “Is this the way you help us, honest Rudiger? We have enough corpses already. Did you think that more were needed? You’ve done a wicked deed, for which you’ll be held to account.”
- 2146 Noble Rudiger answered: “I’m not to blame, he provoked my anger, reproaching me for the many gifts you offered me, and I have freely accepted from your gracious hands. Here lies a liar, forced to swallow some of the lies he spoke.”
- 2147 The queen approached, her eyes filled with tears because the count in his anger had slain one of their own. She wept

most bitterly and long, mourning the Hun's quick death.
And then she spoke to Rudiger: "Have we given you any cause,

- 2148 "the king and I, to add this to all our sorrow?
Haven't you always sworn to us, O noble lord,
that for our sakes you would risk your life and honor?
Everything I've heard from Hunnish knights praises your worth.
- 2149 "Let me call to your mind the kindness you showed me, and the promise
you made, that if I came to Etzel's land, O peerless
knight, you would serve me till death descended upon us.
I'm a poor woman who's never needed your help as right now I do."
- 2150 "There's not the slightest doubt, noble lady, of the oath
I swore to you, that I would risk my life and honor
for your sake. But I never swore to risk my eternal soul,
and I am the one who brought these well-born princes here to your feast."
- 2151 She said: "Now think, Rudiger, of the loyalty you've shown us,
and the firm constancy of your oath that if anyone
should ever hurt me, you would avenge me and ease the many
sorrows I'd know." He said: "But what can I do that I have not done?"
- 2152 Then mighty Etzel began to beg for his help. The queen
and the king dropped to the ground and both begged on their knees.
The noble count clearly did not know what to say.
His distress was plain, for the honest man burst into frantic speech:
- 2153 "O how wretched I am to be alive! I will live
to surrender the honor I've earned, the pride and respect I've been given,
by the grace of God. O Lord on high, why can't death
approach right now and save my soul by snuffing out my breath!
- 2154 "Whichever road I choose, whichever road I abandon,
mischief is what I will do, evil is what I must plan on.
And if I decide on neither, both will hate me forever.
Look down, O Lord, you who gave me life, set your hands on

- 2155 “my heart.” The king, and his wife as well, begged and insisted.
 Later, many knights would lose their lives at Rudiger’s
 hands, and he himself would die in this awful business.
 No wonder, no cause for surprise, that he loudly lamented this dreadful decision.
- 2156 Honor, he knew, would be lost and greater sorrow won.
 He wished most powerfully to deny both the king
 and the queen, struck with a desperate fear that killing just one
 of the guests would make the entire world hate him for what he’d done.
- 2157 Brave man as Rudiger was, he said to the king: “My lord,
 let me give you back everything I have,
 lands and castles and all. I need no other reward.
 I will become a beggar and walk on foot till I reach my grave.”
- 2158 King Etzel replied: “Who will help me, if you leave?
 Let me assign those castles and lands to you forever,
 if only you’ll take revenge for me on my enemies.
 You will be made a powerful king, second only to me.”
- 2159 But Rudiger responded: “How could I do such a thing?
 I led these people home to my house, I asked them to drink
 my wine, I gladly offered them food and beds to rest in,
 I gave them gifts. How can I set about causing their deaths?
- 2160 “Your people think I’m a coward, refusing you out of fear.
 But they were my guests, I gave these Rhineland men, princes
 and warriors alike, whatever they said they needed. My service
 was entirely theirs. How I regret this friendship, so readily given!
- 2161 “And I gave Giselher my daughter, my only child.
 Where in all this world would my daughter ever find
 a nobler man, of higher honor, richer, finer?
 I’ve never seen so young a prince more graceful, of a nature more mild.”
- 2162 But Krimhild replied: “Noble Rudiger, your king
 and I now need from you both pity and active deeds,

your help in our misfortune. Consider this terrible thing:
no ruler's ever been plagued by guests who brought such sorrow and grief."

2163 Then Rudiger gave the queen this answer: "So now it's decided.
The love I've freely given my lord the king and his wife
will now be redeemed, today, by giving them my life.
This last day of my life cannot be postponed or evaded.

2164 "I know perfectly well that today one of these knights
or another will kill me, and all I possess will belong to the crown.
Let me commend to your mercy my wife and my only child,
and also all the many exiles in Bechalaren town."

2165 "Rudiger, may God reward you," the king declared,
and the queen echoed his prayer, both of them very happy.
"We promise you complete protection for everyone there.
My faith in this cause is profound. I think you cannot predict what will happen."

2166 And so Rudiger set both his life and his soul
at stake. King Etzel's wife began to weep, as he said:
"I must be loyal to both of you, come life or death.
But alas for the friends I attack, for there as well good faith is owed."

2167 And then he walked away from the king, slowly and sadly.
He spoke to his knights, standing beside him: "You all must clad
yourselves in armor. And have your weapons and shields ready.
My heart is heavy, for now I must attack my Burgundy friends."

2168 At Rudiger's command, all his warriors ordered
their pages to run and fetch helmets and weapons and shields.
The young men hurried off and brought back what they needed.
But when the hard-pressed exiles heard this news, it brought them sorrow.

2169 Count Rudiger and his five hundred men were ready.
Twelve bold knights had joined them, eager for honor won
on the field of battle. Death was a distant thought that none
of them had contemplated, but all their lives were almost done.

- 2170 Wearing his helmet, the count led his men toward battle.
All of them carried sharp-edged swords, all of them held
brightly gleaming shields in their hands. Volker happened
to see them coming, and his already saddened spirits fell.
- 2171 When Giselher the young saw his father-in-law
appear, helmet buckled on, what could he think
except a sign of good news, not something truly awful?
He felt a vast and happy excitement, this noble, youthful king.
- 2172 “At last I appreciate,” Giselher declared,
“the fine friendships we made while we were traveling here.
What a blessing for us my marriage was celebrated!
How thankful I am to have her, my beautiful bride. Our love was fated.”
- 2173 “What are you celebrating now?” the fiddler asked.
“Have you ever seen so many warriors wearing their helmets
and carrying swords in their hands, sent on a peaceful errand?
Rudiger will make us pay for the land and castles he’s had.”
- 2174 Proving Volker’s words, they saw the noble count
appear in front of the hall. He put his shield on the ground,
setting it at his feet. Thus he was forced to refuse
his friends either his aid or the cordial greeting to which they were used.
- 2175 Rudiger called to the men in the hall: “You brave knights
from the Rhine, it’s now time to defend yourselves. I might
have helped you, but I’m here to bring you nothing but suffering.
We were indeed friends, but now I have to tell you our friendship is ending.”
- 2176 His words frightened the weary warriors inside the hall.
How could they have been pleased or satisfied, hearing
that someone with whom they had ties of affection meant to fight
against them? They’d suffered more than enough at the hands of enemy knights.
- 2177 “How in the name of God could that happen,” Gunter called back.
“After the kindness and pleasure we have shared with you,

and all the pledges of eternal trust we took as our due,
I cannot believe you'd suddenly break those bonds. How could you do it?"

- 2178 "I cannot help myself," answered the noble count.
"I have to fight with you because of the oath I've sworn.
If you value your lives, stand on guard, good warriors.
King Etzel's wife commands my service, my loyalty is bound."
- 2179 "The time for breaking trust has passed," King Gunter said.
"God will reward good faith and honor, noble knight,
and all the affection and caring you've shared with me and my men,
if you let these hard-pressed Burgundy warriors live, and act like a friend.
- 2180 "We are forever pledged to your service, in fair return
for all you've given my family and me, if only you'll let us
live, you who've treated us so well, who led us
in all good faith here to this land. Reflect on what that meant."
- 2181 "How I wish I could," Rudiger replied.
"If only I could give you with full and open hands
all the wonderful gifts my heart had always planned
you were to have! That would be something I could reflect on with pride."
- 2182 "Noble Rudiger, turn back," Gernot replied.
"No host I've heard of ever willingly gave his guests
so warm a welcome, offered such care as you provided.
These are things we will cherish forever, if you'll let us keep our lives."
- 2183 "O many times noble Gernot," said Rudiger, "I would
to God that all of you were back on the Rhine, and I
had died an honorable death, now that I'm forced to fight
with you. Friends have never treated good knights in ways so frightful."
- 2184 "Lord Rudiger," Gernot answered, "may God reward you
for all the many gifts you've given. I would deeply
regret your death, and the loss of so warm and generous a heart.
This sword I hold in my hand, good knight, is one you gave me to keep.

- 2185 “This weapon has never failed me, never in all this danger.
 Many knights have died on the point of its blade. It remains
 dependable, wholly undamaged, strong and good.
 Not many knights have given such splendid gifts, not many could.
- 2186 “And if you won’t turn back, but attack us here and kill
 any of my friends, I regret to say that then I will
 be forced to use your sword to put an end to your life.
 How sad that deed would make me, Rudiger, for you and your wife.”
- 2187 “I wish to God, Lord Gernot, the deed were already done,
 and all your battles were fought already, finished and won,
 and the lives of all your friends were preserved, safe and sound!
 My wife and daughter could trust in you, when I am in the ground.”
- 2188 Then Giselper the young spoke from the Burgundy side:
 “But how can you do this, my lord? All who made the long ride
 from the Rhine think of you as a friend. How very wrong!
 Why should your daughter be widowed without having been a wife for long?”
- 2189 “If you and all your knights attack this hall, and me,
 how truly unnatural such an assault would be—
 you for whom I feel more trust than any other
 man, a trust I showed in making a wife of your only daughter.”
- 2190 “Keep your good faith in mind, O noble prince, and God
 send you his goodwill,” Rudiger replied.
 “Don’t make the girl answer for sins that are strictly mine.
 Let your own sense of mercy and kindness guide you as you go on.”
- 2191 “That I would do as a matter of course,” Giselper said.
 “But many of the highest-ranking members of my family are inside
 this hall, and thus if any of them should meet their death
 at your hands, all ties of friendship with you, and also your daughter, will end.”
- 2192 Then Rudiger said: “May God have mercy on us all.”
 He and his men raised their shields and prepared to fight

against the guests awaiting them in Etzel's hall.
 With a powerful shout, Hagen suddenly called to the noble knight:

- 2193 "Wait a minute, noble Rudiger. We still
 have other things to say, both my lords and I,
 things that press on us. All of us are exiles:
 what possible good can it do Etzel if the men in here are to die?"
- 2194 "And I myself have a personal sorrow," Hagen went on.
 "The wonderful shield that was given me by Gotelind,
 your wife, has now been hacked to bits by the swords of your Huns.
 I brought it here in friendship, carried it peacefully into this land.
- 2195 "O noble Rudiger! May God on high move you
 to give me the bright and shining shield you hold in your hands,
 so if we are forced to fight each other, I'll have that true
 protection. And having that shield, I'll need no iron mail-shirt or armor."
- 2196 "I'd very gladly give you this shining shield, if I dared
 oppose my Lady Krimhild's urgent commands. But take it
 anyway, Hagen, and may you carry it high in your hands.
 But O, if only you could carry it back to Burgundy land!"
- 2197 Many eyes were red with tears, seeing that
 he gladly surrendered his shield, simply because he was asked to.
 This was the very last gift the knight of Bechalaren,
 noble Rudiger, was able to give to any warrior.
- 2198 So fierce a man as Hagen, with such a ferocious heart,
 was deeply moved by this gift made by a noble knight
 even as he approached so near to the end of his life.
 Nor was he alone among the men who shared that sight:
- 2199 "May God reward you, worthy, noble Rudiger.
 Never again will there be another knight like you,
 giving exiles such shining gifts. If you have your true
 reward, God will let you live forever. I hope you do.

- 2200 “This is a miserable business,” Hagen went on. “So many heavy burdens have been loaded onto our backs—and any man who’s forced to fight with his friends has suffered too much, by God!” “To me, too, this is a sorrow greater than any.”
- 2201 “And yet, I’m still able to pay you back,” Hagen declared. “However any of my comrades treat you, here, I’ll never lift my hand against you, I solemnly swear, not even if you kill all the other Burgundy men.”
- 2202 Rudiger, always courteous, acknowledged this with a bow. No one could keep from weeping, for every heart was filled, knowing that no one could stop this. It was truly terrible, now. The father of knightly virtue would perish, when Rudiger was killed.
- 2203 And then the musician, Volker, spoke from inside the hall: “Now that my comrade Hagen has declared that kind of truce, let me also say that I owe the same to you. You served us wonderfully well, from the moment we walked inside your walls.
- 2204 “Noble count, I hereby make you my messenger. These red rings you can see were presents from your wife, who instructed me to wear them to the high festival here. You can be my witness that I wore them right to the end of my life.”
- 2205 “I wish to God on high,” Rudiger replied, “my wife would someday be able to give you more! I’ll gladly carry your message, provided I leave here still alive. Have no doubt, good fiddler. Your gracious words are safe with me.”
- 2206 As soon as this promise was uttered, Rudiger threw himself forward, fighting furiously, finished with hesitation and delay, swinging his sword at the guests with heroic impatience, the mighty nobleman laying about him with terrible, deadly strokes.
- 2207 Volker and Hagen were standing back, the two brave knights careful to keep the pledge they’d made. But at the doorway

Rudiger found many Rhinememen ready to fight,
 swinging swords of their own and showing they knew what weapons were for.

- 2208 Gunter and Gernot let the count come rushing through,
 thinking murderous thoughts as excellent warriors do.
 But Giseler hung back, still exceedingly sad.
 Hoping he might survive, and avoiding any possible clash.
- 2209 Then Rudiger's men followed their lord and joined the battle.
 They came and stood at his side, not only warding off blows
 but cutting and slashing with the weapons they held in their hands.
 They crashed in many helmets, many noble shields were cracked.
- 2210 Burgundy's weary warriors swung tremendous blows
 at the men of Bechalaren. Slicing hard and deep,
 they cut through shining armor and made true heart-blood flow,
 still performing noble battle work and causing great grief.
- 2211 Now that Rudiger's men had joined him in the hall,
 Volker and Hagen quickly sprang into action. All
 their enemies, with one exception, were targets for blows.
 Both were slashing helmets and shields so hard that blood was flowing.
- 2212 How truly fierce and savage sword rang against sword!
 Metal straps were falling, cut away from shields,
 precious gems came dropping down into pools of blood.
 Men have never fought more fiercely, on any battlefield.
- 2213 The lord of Bechalaren kept moving back and forth,
 bravely fighting against warrior after warrior,
 showing by example what a knight can be
 and demonstrating, once again, his perfect gallantry.
- 2214 Gunter and Gernot fought together, side by side.
 Many Bechalaren men faced them, and died.
 Giseler and Dancwart, totally unafraid,
 were busily showing many men the last of their earthly days.

- 2215 Powerful Rudiger, brave and very well armed,
 was clearly a capable knight. O how many he killed!
 One of the Burgundy men watched him, and was angry still.
 He began to work his way toward Rudiger, to do him harm.
- 2216 This was Gernot the strong. He called to the noble knight:
 “You won’t leave a single man of mine alive, will you?
 Noble count, this sort of slaughter doesn’t seem right.
 It’s hard for me to look at. Someone, I think, will have to kill you.
- 2217 “Turn your eyes in my direction. I bring you danger.
 You’ve taken away too many of my good friends. I’m angry.
 Come a little closer, worthy knight. Give me
 the opportunity to test my skill with the sword you gave me.”
- 2218 Although the count was more than willing to confront him, first
 a good many shining armor shirts had to be bloodied.
 He reached him at last, and they sprang at one another, thirsting
 for honor and glory, but trying to keep themselves from being wounded.
- 2219 Their swords were too sharp, nothing could stop the powerful blows.
 Rudiger’s weapon sliced through Gernot’s steel-hard helmet,
 and blood came running down. The Burgundy prince showed
 no great reluctance to pay Rudiger back for this mortal stroke.
- 2220 Wounded as he was, Gernot raised the sword
 the count had given him and swung it at Rudiger’s shield,
 cutting through and into his neck, and cutting deep.
 Lovely Gotelind’s husband staggered and fell, without a word.
- 2221 No costly gift had ever so bitterly served the giver.
 Gernot too dropped to the ground. They died together,
 each good warrior had killed the other, each man’s hand
 superb in battle. Hagen was wildly angry at this loss to their lands.
- 2222 The worthy knight from Troneg declared: “This is disaster.
 Both our peoples will suffer so terribly that, after

this day, they'll never recover. We Burgundy men must pledge
that Rudiger's guilty knights must die, all must fall at the edge

2223 "of our swords." Giselher said: "Alas, my brother, sent
to your death. These sorrowful things will never come to an end!
I grieve for the other death as well. O Rudiger.
My mourning runs in both directions, each of you was my friend."

2224 While Giselher was thus mourning his slain brother,
the situation inside the hall grew worse for others.
Death went stalking wherever Rudiger's men could be found.
It did not take very long for them to follow the noble count.

2225 Gunter and Giselher, and Hagen of Troneg as well,
Dancwart and Volker, and many other good knights, came
to the place where Rudiger and Gernot lay where they fell.
All the survivors stood and wept, wrenched by sorrow and pain.

2226 "Yes, death is stealing us away," said Giselher.
"But now is not a time for weeping. Let's go outside
and let our battle-weary men cool their armor.
We are not meant by God to linger here, and remain alive."

2227 Many bent their heads and rested, many sat down.
They could afford to be still, for nothing was making a sound,
now that Rudiger's men were all dead on the ground.
The silence lasted so long that Etzel's warriors grew concerned.

2228 "Alas, they haven't done what they should," said Etzel's wife.
"Rudiger is not a man you can count on. The lives
of Hagen and all his friends won't suffer at Rudiger's hands.
He'd like to see them returning safe and sound to Burgundy's lands.

2229 "What good did it do, Etzel my king, allowing that man
to have whatever he wanted? He's up to some nasty business.
Instead of avenging us, he's taking care of what's his."
But Volker heard her, and sterling knight that he was, gave her this answer:

HOW HUNDREDS OF WARRIORS DIED

- 2230 “Alas, you’re very wrong, my noble queen. If I dared
tell so lofty a lady she lied in her teeth, I’d say,
in fact, you’ve vilely slandered a virtuous knight. They declared
no peaceful intentions, he and his men, and peace was not what they made.
- 2231 “He obeyed his king’s command so faithfully, with so full
a heart, that every single one of them lies dead.
Cast your eyes around, Krimhild, for another bred
to such virtue. Count Rudiger did his duty to the very end.
- 2232 “In case you don’t believe it, we’ll let you see for yourself.”
And then, with heavy hearts, they did exactly that,
bringing out the battered corpse for the king’s inspection.
Etsel’s warriors had never known a sorrow more intense.
- 2233 Seeing the noble count’s dead body produced such keen
lamenting, from many men as well as women, that even
a trained recorder of great events could not set down
in words the welling sorrow that burst from the throats of all who’d seen him.
- 2234 Etsel’s grief swelled equally intense,
the mighty king bellowing loud as a lion, wailing
his heart’s heavy sorrow. He and his wife, immensely
sad, gave way to mourning uncontrolled, for the good count’s death.

ADVENTURE 38

HOW HUNDREDS OF WARRIORS DIED

- 2235 Everywhere around the castle, and high in the towers,
people heard this awful sound of wailing sorrow.
One of the men who served Dietrich, lord of Berne,
turned and hurried back to his master, bearing this striking news.

- 2236 He said to the prince: “Listen, noble Dietrich. In all
my life I’ve never imagined howling lamentation
anything like what I’ve just heard. Who knows? Bawling
like this may mean that Etzel himself has come to terrible harm.
- 2237 “What else explains so many voices crying so loud?
Either the king or Krimhild, one of them must have fallen
before the swords and spears of our guests. This caterwauling
and weeping clearly comes from many good knights beyond control.”
- 2238 Mighty Dietrich replied: “My dear fellow, don’t rush
to hasty conclusions. Whatever these brave exiles have done,
remember they have been pushed to desperate extremes. A truce
is what I promised them, and it must be confirmed, though sorely won
- 2239 “as it was.” Then eager Wolfhart spoke: “Let me go
and ask some questions, learning more about what’s happened,
after which, my dear good master, I’ll be back
to tell you everything I’ve heard about this tearful mourning.”
- 2240 Lord Dietrich answered: “An angry man troubled with questions
may easily grow excited, unless he’s carefully asked.
Grieving warriors often find intruders vexing.
I do not think it wise, Wolfhart, for you to attempt this task.”
- 2241 Then he ordered Helpfricht to hurry straight to the hall
and discover, either from Etzel’s men or else the guests
themselves, what had truly happened. An incredibly messy
scene was what he found, people wild-eyed and out of breath.
- 2242 He began asking questions: “What has happened here?”
One of them told him: “Joy has now completely vanished
out of our Hunnish land. Lying on his bier
is Rudiger, killed by our guests, the men from Burgundy.
- 2243 “And everyone who entered that hall with Rudiger
is dead as well.” Helpfricht was desolated, hearing

those words. No message he'd ever brought to his lord and master
was delivered with such reluctance. He stood before Dietrich, weeping hot tears.

2244 “What have you learned?” Dietrich inquired. “Tell me why
you’re weeping like this, good warrior Helfricht?” The worthy knight
replied: “My lord, I needed to mourn, I have the right
to wail. Good Rudiger has been killed by the men from Burgundy.”

2245 Then Dietrich of Berne spoke: “This was not God’s will,
but a dreadful revenge and something to please only the Devil.
What had Rudiger done to deserve death at their hands?
I know perfectly well his affection for all the men of the Rhineland.”

2246 Then Wolfhart spoke once more: “If in fact they caused
his death, then all of them must die. Were we to close
our eyes to this, our honor and reputation is lost.
Good Rudiger was always kind and generous to us.”

2247 The ruler of Berne needed many more details
before he acted. He sent old Hildebrand to ask
the guests the entire story of what had truly happened.
And then, deeply concerned, Dietrich sat in his window and waited.

2248 A veteran of many battles, Hildebrand
decided to visit the guests with no sword or shield in hand.
This seemed to him respectful, less likely to antagonize.
But Wolfhart, his sister’s son, quickly and loudly criticized him.

2249 Ferocious Wolfhart declared: “Going with empty hands
will make it easy for them to say whatever they like
and insult you. You’ll come back home disgraced, if you go like that.
Go there properly armed, and these people are sure to treat you right.”

2250 And then the wise old warrior took the impulsive young man’s
advice. Before he knew what was going on, all
of Dietrich’s knights were standing ready, swords in hand.
The good old man was upset and very much wanted to hold them back.

- 2251 He asked them where they were going. “We’re going there with you.
If Hagen of Troneg feels malicious, as he’s likely to do,
he’ll hold his tongue when he sees you haven’t come alone.”
Hearing this, the old man desisted, making no more objections.
- 2252 When brave Volker saw Dietrich’s men approaching,
all of them in armor, helmets on their heads,
swords in their hands, and shields held high in front, he spoke
to his lords, the two kings of the Rhine (one now lying dead).
- 2253 The fiddler said: “I see many of Dietrich’s knights
approaching, armed to the teeth and helmets on. Fighting
is what they seem to have in mind. They’re here to attack us.
Nothing appears to be going well for our miserable band of exiles.”
- 2254 Even as he spoke, Hildebrand arrived.
He set his shield on the ground in front of his feet, and started
questioning Gunter’s men: “Alas, you very good knights,
what had the noble count of Bechalaren done to harm you?”
- 2255 “My Lord Dietrich has sent me here to inquire. We’re told,
but find it hard to believe, that one of your men was so bold
as to kill that noble man. If this is indeed what happened,
how shall we recover from the sorrow of a loss so truly tragic?”
- 2256 Hagen of Troneg answered: “Unfortunately, it’s true.
I wish I were able to tell you that your messenger spoke no truth,
and noble Count Rudiger, so well beloved, was alive.
His death will be mourned forever by many good warriors, by men and their wives.”
- 2257 Hearing that their news had been correct, and the lord
of Bechalaren was dead, Dietrich’s loyal knights
began to lament. Tears came flooding down, pouring
onto their beards and chins. Sorrowfully, they stood and mourned.
- 2258 Sigstap, Dietrich’s beloved nephew, spoke: “Peace
and comfort have gone, and all the days of pain banished

by the hands of that noble prince will return, now, and increase.
 Whatever happiness exiles may have has died with him, has vanished.”

- 2259 Then Wolfwin spoke, another of Dietrich’s loyal knights:
 “Had I experienced my own father’s death,
 I could not be more troubled than by the loss of this life.
 And who, alas, can comfort Gotelind, the count’s good wife?”
- 2260 Then Wolfhart spoke again, angrier than before:
 “Now who will lead our men onto the field of war,
 as the brave count has done so many times? Your loss,
 O noble Rudiger, occurring like this, is a sad affair!”
- 2261 Wolfprant and Helpfricht, and Helmnot as well, with all their friends,
 wept for Rudiger’s death. Good old Hildebrand
 was sighing so deeply he could no longer ask his questions.
 He said: “Well now, you men from Burgundy, give us his corpse.
- 2262 “My master wishes his body, dead as he is. Bring
 Rudiger out of the hall. Our happiness died with him.
 Allow us to serve him, now, with the same complete good faith
 he always and everywhere showed in all his dealings with other men.
- 2263 “For we are exiles, too, just as Rudiger was.
 Why do you keep us waiting? Let us take him away
 so we can repay him, in death, as honorable warriors must.
 What now is only proper would please us more if he could have stayed
- 2264 “among us.” King Gunter said: “Nothing one man can do
 for another is nobler than what friends do for the dead.
 That is the highest good faith, to which high praise is due.
 You owe him these honors, for all the glorious things he’s done for you.”
- 2265 “How many times must we ask you?” Wolfhart said. “You men
 of Burgundy have taken away our comfort, killed
 the best we had, and we will never have him again.
 So let us carry him off and bury him, as we must, as we will.”

- 2266 Volker replied: “No one is going to fetch him for you.
Go on into the hall where the body is lying, wounded
and bleeding, there among the other dead and their gore.
That would be genuine service you could do for his corpse.”
- 2267 Wolfhart answered him back: “God knows, noble fiddler,
you shouldn’t try to annoy us. You’ve caused a great deal of pain.
If only my master had let us, we’d knock on your door in a different
way. We’re not allowed to, knowing just what our lord would say.”
- 2268 Volker replied: “A man who only acts on command,
afraid of displeasing his master, isn’t much of a man.
Genuine warriors only fight because they can.”
This speech delighted Hagen, who relished his comrade’s biting words.
- 2269 But Wolfhart quickly answered: “Fiddler, don’t unwind
too fast. I’ll twist your strings around and make such a mess
of you, you’ll have a story to tell when you’re back on the Rhine.
How much of your arrogance do you think an honorable man can abide?”
- 2270 Volker replied: “If you wring the cheerful melodies out
of my strings, why then I’ll have to bang holes in your helmet and smear
mud on your shining armor, before I can ride from here
all the way back to the Rhineland. Fellow, you’d better watch your mouth.”
- 2271 Wolfhart was starting to charge the fiddler, but Hildebrand,
his uncle, quickly stopped him, holding him tight with his hands.
“How can you let yourself surrender to foolish anger?
Your master, and mine, would never forgive you for putting us all in danger.”
- 2272 “Hildebrand, let the lion loose, if he’s really so fierce.
Let him run to my hands,” warrior Volker said.
“But even had he slaughtered most of the world, my spear
will greet him, whenever he gets too close, and then his roaring will end.”
- 2273 By now, Dietrich’s knight was truly enraged. He took up
his shield, the fiery young warrior, and ran straight toward Volker,

charging like a savage lion. The other Huns
fell in line behind Wolfhart, Dietrich's men attacking.

- 2274 As fast as Wolfhart ran, swiftly covering ground,
old Hildebrand arrived at the steps of the hall before him,
unwilling that anyone should outrace him, when it came to war.
The Burgundy men promptly gave them what they were looking for.
- 2275 Old Hildebrand came running directly at Hagen. Both
their swords clanged like bells, striking together, each
(as anyone could see) as angry as the other.
The sharp steel blades quickly turned red, sprinkling sparks as they heated.
- 2276 Then the surging combat pushed them apart, as Dietrich's
men, fighting fiercely, forced the Rhinemen back.
Hildebrand abandoned Hagen and turned with the battle's
flow, as powerful Wolfhart found brave Volker and rushed to attack him.
- 2277 He struck a powerful blow on the fiddler's helmet, and his blade
went slicing through the clasps that held it together. The brave
musician immediately returned the favor, striking
at Wolfhart with furious strength, until his sword was glowing bright.
- 2278 Each man struck with such intense hatred that sparks
went flying in all directions from both their busy blades.
And then Wolfwin of Berne obliged them to separate.
Only a hero could come between two men fighting so hard.
- 2279 The warrior king, Gunter, received the proud band
of Dietrich's knights with well-prepared and eager hands.
Giseller the young hammered heavy blows
on helmets, and many men staggered as blood spouted and ran.
- 2280 Dancwart, Hagen's brother, was a truly ferocious man.
However he had fought in the battle with Etzel's knights
was like a gentle breeze, compared to this day's fighting.
This was a warrior fierce with rage, wild as thunder and lightning.

- 2281 Richart and Gerbart, Helfricht and Wichart, were warriors with vast experience, who never slowed their pace in battle, and they made sure that Gunter's men learned this fast. Nor was Wolfbrand lazy in combat, now. He fought to the last.
- 2282 Hildebrand was old, but his violent sword worked wonders. Wolfhart's heavy hand struck at many good men, dropping them dead on the ground, where they lay in pools of blood. This was how Dietrich's knights revenged themselves for Rudiger's death.
- 2283 Noble Sigstap fought as knightly courage always requires. And O, how Dietrich's sister's son was cracking enemy helmets, fighting hard in this furious battle! However he had fought before, he fought better that day.
- 2284 Mighty Volker, seeing what damage the knight was doing, making blood come pouring out of every helmet he struck, came springing toward him, determined to stop these savage blows. Overwhelming anger made Volker even a better,
- 2285 fiercer fighter, and Sigstap had no chance against him. Volker's swordplay made such magic music that the knight from Berne was soon lying dead on the ground. But then Hildebrand avenged his death. His brave old heart was wrenched
- 2286 with sorrow: "Alas, my dear lord," Master Hildebrand cried, "cut down so quickly by vicious Volker's hand! It's time the fiddler's music ended, it's time that Volker died." No one had ever seen Hildebrand the bold more furious.
- 2287 He slashed at Volker's helmet and shield with so violent a blow that pieces went flying against all that was left of the wall behind him, and that was the end of the brave musician. Brawling Volker would never fight again. He fell to the ground like a stone.
- 2288 And then Dietrich's men fairly leaped into action. Their heavy strokes made pieces of shining armor fly

through the air, and their gleaming swords could be seen flashing on high.
Streams of blood came spurting from helmets, flowing in all directions.

- 2289 Hagen of Troneg saw his comrade Volker dead.
This was the worst loss he had suffered yet, in Etzel's
land, greater than any of his family, or any other
man. How furiously he revenged the man he loved like a brother!
- 2290 "For this, old Hildebrand deserves to die. He
who always stood beside me is dead, slain by Hildebrand's
hand. He's gone, the best assistant I ever had."
He raised his shield still higher and hacked away at every man
he met. Then mighty Helpfricht struck Dancwart down. Gunter
and Giselher, already steeped in sorrow, stared
in horror as Hagen's powerful brother was hit and went under.
But before he died, Dancwart had long since killed more than his share.
- 2292 All this time Wolfhart went up and down the battle
lines, slaughtering Gunter's men like so many cattle.
He'd worked the hall from end to end, three times in all,
cutting and slashing away, and making weary warriors fall.
- 2293 And then prince Giselher called to Wolfhart: "Milder
enemies are better game, and you are wilder
than most. But such as I am, try your sword against me.
Let me help you end this slaughter, this endless butchery."
- 2294 Wolfhart began to fight his way toward Giselher.
They wounded the warriors around them, struck out right and left.
Wolfhart fought so hard to reach the prince, that death
went walking with him, spraying blood so high it splashed on his head.
- 2295 Then Otta's handsome son welcomed Wolfhart, that brave
knight, with fierce and furious blows of his sword. Saving
himself, strong as he was, was too much for Dietrich's man.
No one had ever seen so young a ruler attack with such grace

- 2296 and power. He struck a blow through Wolfhart's steel breastplate,
and the heart-deep wound gushed hot blood onto the ground.
Dietrich's man had suffered an injury clearly fatal.
No other knight in the world could cut so strong a fighter down.
- 2297 The moment courageous Wolfhart felt that blow, he let
his shield fall, but raised his sword high in the air.
His final stroke was more than enough. It slashed through the helmet,
cracked the armor, and killed young Giselher, right then and there.
- 2298 These two knights had succeeded in killing one another.
Wolfhart too had fallen onto the ground. And old
Hildebrand could see him dropping down. The bold
battle-hardened knight felt pain he'd never feel again.
- 2299 Almost no one on either side was still alive,
anywhere in the hall. Then Hildebrand slowly walked
to where Wolfhart had fallen, covered over with gore.
Carefully, he put his arms around the courageous knight.
- 2300 He meant to lift him up and carry him out of the hall.
But his wounds were too severe, he had to leave him where
he lay. The dying knight opened his eyes and saw
his uncle bending down, eager to help him, stricken with care.
- 2301 Half dead already, he spoke: "My very dearest uncle,
It's no use, now, fretting any more about me.
Protect yourself against Hagen. He's the one to worry
about. He has the blackest, fiercest heart I've ever seen.
- 2302 "Tell my family, those nearest and dearest to me,
if anyone wants to lament my death, no tears should be shed,
there's absolutely no need for weeping, because my death
came at the hands of a king, as noble a death as death can be.
- 2303 "Fighting here in this hall I haven't given away
my life. Many good women should mourn my death today,

- but only because I fought so well. If anyone asks,
tell them at least a hundred warriors fell to the ground as my prey.”
- 2304 Then Hagen, thinking how old Hildebrand had killed
Volker, the brave musician, resolved to kill the old man.
So Hagen declared: “Now it’s your turn, Hildebrand.
Pay us back for all the Burgundy knights who died at your hand.”
- 2305 Hagen had killed Sifried, and taken Balmung, that hero’s
sword. Sifried’s incredible weapon was what he swung,
now, against the old man, his strokes ringing clear
and loud. Hildebrand, a master swordsman, was no longer young.
- 2306 Dietrich’s old retainer struck his gleaming blade,
sharp as a headsman’s ax, at Hagen of Troneg’s helmet.
But the blow was futile, not even a single dent was made.
Then Hagen swung again and broke right through the old man’s breastplate.
- 2307 Hildebrand knew at once this was no petty stroke.
Another such blow from Hagen’s hand, and he would not survive.
Twisting his shield around to cover his back, sorely
wounded, the old man turned and ran from Hagen, to save his life.
- 2308 And then the only living warriors left, standing
alone, were two Rhineland men, Gunter the king and Hagen.
Bloodied all over but running fast, old Hildebrand
hurried to bring the terrible news to Dietrich, his lord and master,
- 2309 still sitting at his window, lost in sadness and grief.
But the prince of Berne had more suffering in store. Seeing
Hildebrand’s breastplate covered with blood, he asked his teacher
and friend to give him whatever sorrowful news he surely brought:
- 2310 “Tell me, my old master, why there’s blood still running
down your breastplate? Who struck you such a stunning
blow? I think perhaps you had a fight with our guests, after
all, although I very clearly and strictly forbade all that.”

- 2311 Hildebrand answered his lord: “This was a blow from Hagen.
 We fought in the burned-down hall, and that was where he struck me.
 I ran away before Hagen could strike me again.
 I ran for my life, escaped that devil, and thought myself most lucky.”
- 2312 Then Dietrich said: “But you deserved whatever happened.
 I warned you not to break the truce I promised our guests,
 to respect the vows of friendship I exchanged with them. Old master,
 if it weren’t a shame and a scandal, by God I’d have you put to death”
- 2313 “My very good lord, don’t be so very angry with me.
 My friends and I have suffered more than enough already.
 We wanted to bring Rudiger’s body away, but King
 Gunter and his men flatly refused to allow any such thing.”
- 2314 “I hadn’t been sure of that dreadful news. He’s truly lost!
 Whatever other sorrows I have are nothing at all!
 Gotelind, his noble wife, is my cousin’s daughter.
 And O the deserted orphans, homeless, left at Bechalaren.”
- 2315 The certainty of Rudiger’s death brought memories back,
 and Dietrich wept a torrent of tears at his good friend’s fate.
 “O such a trustworthy friend forever lost. Alas!
 How will I overcome so desperate a loss as Rudiger’s passing?”
- 2316 “Hildebrand, do you know who killed him? Can you give me exact
 details of his death?” The old man answered: “I know the man.
 It was mighty Gernot who skillfully struck him down. His hand
 no sooner struck the blow, than Rudiger, dying, paid him back
- 2317 “in full.” Then Dietrich said: “Now tell my faithful men
 to quickly bring me my armor. I plan to go to the hall.
 Tell them I want the best battle clothing I own.
 I mean to pose some questions to these worthy warriors, our Burgundy guests.”
- 2318 But Master Hildebrand answered: “To whom can I bring that message?
 The only soldier you have is here, standing in front of you.

All the others are dead, I'm the only one left."
Dietrich was deeply shocked at this news, and no one could possibly wonder

- 2319 why, for never in all his life could this be expected.
He said: "If all my soldiers are dead, downtrodden Dietrich
has been deserted by God on high. You see before you
a man who used to be a noble lord, a powerful prince.
- 2320 "But still, tell me how so complete a disaster could happen?
Every one of them dead, these men experienced in battle,
killed by the weary swords of those weary knights from the Rhineland?
Fate has turned against me, their deaths fall on my miserable hands.
- 2321 "But if my unlucky knights are all of them dead and gone,
tell me, who among our guests still live on?"
Master Hildebrand answered: "By the name of God, only
Hagen himself, and also noble Gunter, Burgundy's king."
- 2322 "Alas, my cherished Wolfhart dead, I've lost him too!
How can I help regretting that I was born a man?
And noble Sigstab? Wolfwin? Wolfbrand as well? Who
is left to serve me, there in far-off, lovely Amelung land?
- 2323 "Wonderfully brave Helffricht: even he is dead?
Gerbart and Wichart. How can I mourn so many with the breath
of just one man? Today my friends have gone to their deaths.
Alas, alas, that no one ever dies only from grief!"

ADVENTURE 39

HOW GUNTER, HAGEN, AND KRIMHILD WERE KILLED

- 2324 Lord Dietrich fetched his armor himself, and Hildebrand
helped him put it on and got his weapons in order.

Mighty Dietrich continued his lament, the warrior's
loud and fervent cries echoing down the palace walls.

- 2325 Slowly he regained his courage, and his strength returned.
Wearing armor, sword in hand, his heart burned
with anger. He chose a strong shield, and then he turned
to go to the burned-down hall, Hildebrand walking still at his side.
- 2326 Then Hagen of Troneg said: "I see coming this way
Lord Dietrich himself. His losses here have been so fearful,
his sorrow so great, he's sure to pick a fight with us.
Who gets to win this war is going to be decided today.
- 2327 "Dietrich may be the powerful ruler of Berne, but he's neither
fierce enough nor possessed of such mighty strength, that if
revenge is on his mind, victory will come as a gift
he can take whenever he likes," Hagen declared. "He can't beat me."
- 2328 They heard these words, Dietrich and Hildebrand, as they walked
to the hall. The Burgundy knights stood waiting, both of them now
leaning against whatever was left of the burned-down walls.
Dietrich set his shining, unstained shield on the bloody ground.
- 2329 Speaking in slow and sorrowful tones, Dietrich said:
"Gunter, O mighty ruler, why have you been doing
me harm, here in my exile? What have I done to you?
All my consolations have been stolen away, along with my men.
- 2330 "Now it appears the great pain you inflicted, murdering
noble Rudiger, was not enough for you.
Now you even begrudge me the men I thought were my due.
How could you two imagine something like this could ever be worthy
- 2331 "of noblemen and kings? Think of how much you're grieving
over, your own friends' deaths, the hardships you've endured,
how heavy your hearts have been, good warriors deeply bereaved.
Alas, how sick I feel, knowing Rudiger is no more!

- 2332 “No man in this world has ever been forced to feel so alone.
 You never gave a thought to my pain, or even your own.
 Whatever happiness I’ve had, you butchered, threw dead
 on the ground. Mourning my late friends and relations will never be ended.”
- 2333 “Surely we’re not as much to blame as you say,” said Hagen.
 “Your warriors came to this hall wearing armor and helmets,
 a horde of fighting men, weapons in every hand.
 I think you haven’t heard it all, and don’t quite understand.”
- 2334 “Who do you think I should trust? My news is from Hildebrand.
 When my brave knights from Amelung land asked that the count’s
 body be brought to them from the hall, your bold band
 of heroes mocked and jeered, stood on the steps and threw insults down.”
- 2335 The king of the Rhine answered: “They told us what they meant
 to do was take him away. I refused their request, but only
 to make Etzel unhappy, certainly not your men.
 Then Wolfhart started insulting us, and one thing led to another.”
- 2336 Dietrich replied: “None of that is important. Gunter,
 noble king, respect and decency require
 you to compensate my loss. You’ve stolen my men.
 You and your royal family owe me payment, now, in return.
- 2337 “You and the knight beside you must surrender yourselves to me,
 become my captives. I promise I’ll see as best I can
 that nothing is done to you by any Hunnish man.
 I’m known as a man of my word. You’ll be as safe as a prisoner can be.”
- 2338 “May God in heaven prevent it,” Hagen declared. “Two
 living, well-armed warriors should never surrender themselves
 to a single knight, as long as they can mount a defense
 against attack, and are free to do as they like, with no one’s consent.”
- 2339 “You would do better not to refuse me, Gunter and Hagen,”
 Dietrich responded. “Both of you have done me so much

damage, deep in my heart and also my spirit, that justice
demands you pay me back for everything you two have done.

2340 “I offer you my word, and gladly confirm with my hand,
that I will ride with you when you return to your land.
I pledge myself to your safety, and I’ll die before I break
that promise. My own sorrows will be second to this guarantee I’m making.”

2341 But Hagen replied: “You mustn’t bother asking again.
No one will ever be able to tell such stories of us,
two brave warriors still on their feet, but giving up.
The only help you have is Hildebrand. What other men

2342 “have you got?” Hildebrand declared: “By God, Hagen,
you’ve been freely offered a truce. The day will come
when you’ll be sorry you turned it down, and wish you hadn’t.
If I were you, I’d think long and hard. You’ll live to regret it.”

2343 “I’d sooner accept that offer,” Hagen answered, “than turn
my back and flee from a serious fight, old Hildebrand,
the way you did, not very long ago. Old man,
I never thought you a coward, but a brave soldier, with a heart too firm

2344 “to go running away.” Master Hildebrand replied:
“You’re scornful? Who sat on his shield, on Wasgenstein’s broad slopes,
watching Spanish Walter kill his friends by the score?*

You’ve done a lot of dirty work, friend Hagen, all through your time.”

2345 Lord Dietrich spoke again: “Courageous men should never
be heard exchanging foul-mouthed words, like a pair of old women.
Hildebrand, no more of this, it’s strictly forbidden.
My pain and sorrow, here in my exile, are more than enough to bear.

2346 “Remember, warrior Hagen,” Dietrich said, “what you
and Gunter were saying, not long ago, when you saw me coming

* A legendary battle in which Hagen persistently refuses to fight Walter, his friend and fellow hostage at Etzel’s court, even though Walter is killing the warriors of Hagen’s lord, Gunter

to the hall, armed and ready for battle? What you said you'd do was fight with me, single combat, man against man in a duel."

- 2347 "That's what I said and what I'll do," Hagen declared. "and I'll be hitting heavy strokes, unless this Nibelung sword of mine decides to break in my hand. Prepare yourself. All this talk of us surrendering was more than enough
- 2348 "to get me angry." As soon as Dietrich saw fierce Hagen's scowl, the worthy knight lifted up his shield. Then Hagen came leaping down the steps, and attacked at once! He swung Balmung hard and it rang loud against cold steel.
- 2349 Dietrich could not doubt the furious warrior's grim and deadly mood. Careful to keep himself safe, Berne's good lord parried Hagen's tremendous blows. He knew Hagen very well, and what one stroke from him could do.
- 2350 He was also afraid of Balmung, a weapon with magic power. Cunningly, from time to time he managed a well-placed stroke, slowly wearing tired Hagen down. He saw a sudden opening and struck a blow that was almost fatal.
- 2351 And Dietrich thought to himself: "Too much fighting has worn you out. Killing you would bring me little honor. Let's see if I can conquer you without my sword, and take you prisoner." This was risky, but indeed it worked.
- 2352 He dropped his shield and quickly grappled Hagen with his powerful arms, and then Hagen of Troneg was conquered at last, a brave warrior beaten by too much war and battle. Noble Gunter was shocked to see his mighty knight had been captured.
- 2353 Dietrich bound his prisoner's arms and immediately led him off to the queen, putting into her hands the fiercest knight ever to swing a sword in those lands. Krimhild's desperate sorrow was thus transformed to delirious glee.

- 2354 Eztel's wife greeted Dietrich with great affection.
 "May you be forever blessed in body and heart!
 You've given me compensation for all the misery I've known.
 However long I live, I'll always be grateful for what you've done."
- 2355 Then Lord Dietrich said: "Noble queen, you need
 to let him live. The knowledge of all his grave misdeeds
 will lead him to serve you well and repay the pain and grief
 he's caused. You mustn't make him suffer, now that he's roped and tied."
- 2356 She ordered Hagen taken away, locked in a dungeon,
 put in chains, and kept utterly alone.
 Then Gunter, the noble king, was heard shouting outside:
 "Where is Dietrich from Berne? He must requite me for what he's done."
- 2357 Then Dietrich took his sword and his shield, and went out to the king.
 Gunter had always enjoyed a high reputation for courage.
 Without another word, he came charging from the hall,
 and immediately a loud and violent crashing of swords arose.
- 2358 Even though Lord Dietrich was a warrior of great experience,
 Gunter was so enraged, so wild with anger, and driven
 by such despair at his loss, that Dietrich could barely defend
 himself, and many who watched could hardly believe he preserved his life.
- 2359 Both of them were brave, and both were very strong.
 Their sword strokes echoed through the palace, and high in the towers,
 as they hacked away at helmets and shields and shining armor.
 In all his life, Gunter had never fought so hard and so long.
- 2360 But in the end, the lord of Berne triumphed, as he had
 with Hagen. The king's mail shirt was cracked, and blood ran fast
 from the blows of Dietrich's sharp sword, swung by his crafty hand.
 Gunter had fought quite well, despite how worn and weary he was.
- 2361 Then Dietrich bound the king's defenseless arms, though kings
 are said to be immune from such indignities.

Dietrich felt concern that Gunter and Hagen, left free,
would promptly attack and kill everyone they found to fight.

- 2362 So Dietrich led his captive by the hand, and took him,
roped and tied, to where Krimhild was waiting. Her sorrow
fell away, seeing Gunter brought so low.
She said: "I bid you welcome, Gunter, from your and my homeland."
- 2363 He said: "I confess I'd feel happy to greet you, my sister,
if only your welcoming words sounded a little bit kinder.
I'm well aware, queen of this realm, of what welcome we find,
Hagen and I, when you speak in terms so careful, so sinister."
- 2364 Dietrich of Berne declared: "Noble wife of a noble
king, no captive knights were ever worthier men
than these two prisoners. In duty bound, I've led them
to you. Lady, let these exiles be saved by my protection."
- 2365 That was agreeable, she said. Lord Dietrich left her,
his eyes filled with tears for these two fighting men.
But Etzel's wife took a grim revenge, after
he'd gone. She ordered the worthy knights sent to the block, their heads
2366 chopped off. And even before the execution, she kept them
hidden away from one another, and had her brother's
head brought in, to show to unrelenting Hagen.
So Krimhild finally had the bitter revenge she'd always wanted.
- 2367 But first she ordered Hagen brought to her, and addressed
that excellent warrior in fierce and angry terms: "Give
me back all you've stolen from me, and you just might live
to return home to Burgundy's land. Decide what suits you best."
- 2368 Hagen was equally grim: "Honored noble queen,
why are you wasting words? I've long since solemnly sworn
that so long as even one of my Rhineland lords lives on,
no one will ever hear that information spoken by me."

- 2369 “I can take care of that,” the noble lady declared.
 And that was when she ordered her brother killed. Her men
 promptly cut off his head. She held it up by the hair
 and showed it to Hagen of Troneg. He grieved for the last of his lords. Then,
- 2370 after the worthy warrior had seen the bloody head,
 Hagen of Troneg spoke to Krimhild once again:
 “So now you’ve gotten exactly what you’ve always wanted,
 and everything has happened just as I always thought it would.
- 2371 “So now Burgundy’s noble king is dead, and also
 Giselher the young, and also my Lord Gernot.
 Now no one knows the treasure’s hiding place but God
 and me—and you, you fiend from Hell, will never see it again.”
- 2372 She said: “And this is all you offer, guilty as you stand?
 All right. In that case, let me reclaim Sifried’s sword.
 The very last time I saw my sweetest, dearest man,
 he wore it. But then you brought endless grief to my heart, you tore him
- 2373 “away.” Slowly, she drew the sword from its sheath. He could not
 stop her. She meant to take the warrior’s life, and she did.
 Lifting the sword in her hand, she quickly cut off his head.
 King Etzel saw it all, and all he saw he deeply regretted.
- 2374 “Good God!” the king exclaimed. “A beautiful woman’s hand
 has now slain the very best and bravest man
 of war ever to bear a sword or carry a shield!
 He was my enemy, but oh the terrible grief I feel!”
- 2375 Then old Hildebrand spoke: “How can she dare to kill
 a knight like that! No matter what he did to me,
 in spite of all the pain I had at his hands, I will
 avenge the death of such a brave knight as I know Hagen to be!”
- 2376 The old man sprang at the queen, fiercely angry, and began
 striking at her with savage strokes of his sword. Her hands

were unable to hold him off, she screamed in utter terror.
What good could it do, making so much noise as he came at her?

2377 And so the entire doomed but noble Burgundy band
was dead, and Krimhild too, hacked by Hildebrand's hands.
Both Etzel, the king, and Dietrich began to wail and cry,
mourning passionately for their friends and relatives who'd died.

2378 All their once enormous honor was dead and gone.
People everywhere shared the pain and grief.
Etzel's celebration ended in heavy sorrow,
as love and joy have a way of doing, today becoming tomorrow.

2379 I've nothing left to tell you of whatever happened next.
All I know is that knights and women wailed and wept,
and so did many children, mourning those now dead.
Here my story ends, with the fate that fell on the Nibelungs.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

Burton Raffel

NOTA BENE These are working notes, jotted down along the way, rather than a connected essay. Not intending to join in scholarly debate, I have neither identified nor provided citations to the few critical or historical judgments discussed. The sole point to quoting professional commentators in these notes is to better establish literary perspective. Footnote-type information is given in the only two instances (textually embedded) for which credit seems indispensable.

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

We do not know when *Das Nibelungenlied* was written, or where, or by whom. Dating medieval manuscripts, which are usually copied from other, earlier manuscripts, is a conjectural process at best. But even when we know the exact date of a particular manuscript, it only tells us the point after which that copy could *not* have been made. When the text *was* written has no necessary or provable connection to such a terminal date.

There are many manuscripts of *Das Nibelungenlied*, and they vary a good deal in date, as well as in content. It has been assumed, I think incorrectly, that this necessarily indicates multiple authorship. Whatever the process of composition—for this as for other long narrative poems—it cannot have been

brief. *Das Nibelungenlied* has 9,516 lines, which is not much less than *The Odyssey* (11,925) or even than *The Iliad* (15,963), and roughly three times that of *Beowulf* (3,182). The longest of the surviving *romans* of Chrétien de Troyes, who just might have been an older contemporary of the *Nibelungenlied* poet, is *Perceval*, broken off (by the poet's death, ca. A.D. 1185) at 9,325 lines. Should we assume that masterful poets, capable of conceiving, structuring, and vitalizing so massive a work with strong, beautiful language, are ignorant of rethinking—and rewriting? And copies of works in progress, or in revision (even constant revision), can be and in fact are often made at any point in literary composition.

There is also a tonal and stylistic unity to all of the poems just mentioned. *Beowulf*'s author is unknown, and its date is disputed—most likely A.D. 800–850—but any close reader of the Old English text will find it hard to believe it is not the work of a single author. *Beowulf* survives in only one manuscript, so we have no knowledge of what differing versions may have existed. But whether or not this manuscript's utterly consistent style existed in any other version, its stylistic unity is intrinsically convincing. There is no such stylistic unity in Chrétien de Troyes's 7,121-line *Lancelot*, but that is because, for reasons we do not know, another poet finished Chrétien's poem. At approximately line 6146, the soaring sophistication of Chrétien gives way to the plodding dullness of Godfrey of Lagny, who names and explains himself in lines 7107–21. "Chrétien himself was willing / To let me accomplish the task," we are told (quoted from my translation, *Lancelot: The Knight of the Cart* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997]).

One cup does not a barrel make, and one such example does not preclude other possibilities in other situations and other poems. But this is, for all that, an example more or less contemporary with *Das Nibelungenlied*; it ought to be at least persuasive, if not conclusory. "Given the conditions" of ancient authorship, says Robert Fitzgerald, in the "Postscript" to his translation of *The Odyssey*, "we can no longer take inconsistencies in the poems [that is, differing manuscripts] as proof of multiple authorship" (*The Odyssey* [Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1961], 486).

NAMES

Although I have not closely transliterated some of the Middle High German names, I have never strayed any significant distance. Kriemhild as Krimhild is

about as drastic a change as I have made. To preserve the tone of the original, and to avoid confusion with the most deeply Wagnerized names, *Das Nibelungenlied*'s Sifried has remained Sifried, just as his mother, Queen Sigelinde (tetrasyllabic), has become Sigilind (trisyllabic), and his father, King Sigemund (trisyllabic), has remained Sigemund. Note that initial "S" in Middle High German, like initial "S" in modern German, is voiced ("Z") rather than, as it is in modern English, unvoiced.

It might be argued that the bewildering substitution of "Nibelungs" for "Burgundians" or "Rhinemen," which begins in quatrain 1523 and continues to the end of the poem, is of historical or literary significance. I do not know, nor does anyone else. In spite of the distinct identity created, earlier, for the Nibelungs, and their clear identification with Sifried and his father (in firm opposition to Gunter's regime in Wurms), I feel obliged to retain this bewildering substitution in the translation. I have however marked the substitution with a footnote; it would otherwise be narratively disruptive.

FORM, METER, AND RHYME

The original poem is written in quatrains. Each line is divided, visually as well as metrically, into two half-lines. The first seven half-lines of each quatrain (that is, the first three and a half lines) have three metrical feet; the last half-line usually, but not always, has four feet. I have followed this pattern very closely. Although iambic tetrameter is, in English verse, emphatically not a metric meant for long narrative poems, that fact becomes almost irrelevant in a structural pattern that uses this meter only once in every eighth half-line.

Some quatrains in the original are not end-stopped: that is, the fourth line of one quatrain is syntactically part of the first line of the following quatrain. I believe the percentage of such enjambed quatrains (if such a term means anything) in the translation is roughly the same, though perhaps somewhat higher than that of the original. Again, I have not counted.

The rhyming of the original is completely regular: *A A B B* in every quatrain. The translation too is fully rhymed, but the pattern necessarily varies. A few quatrains of the translation adhere to the original pattern; most deviate, employing either (1) three rhymed lines and one unrhymed line, though not always in the same order, or (2) two pairs of rhymes, again not always in the same order. Occasionally, though not often, a translated line that is meant to complete a second pair of rhymes does not even pretend to rhyme.

A very few quatrains have four identically rhymed lines. And even fewer quatrains employ totally identical rhyming words—a tactic employed in later literatures, and in many languages, but which I do not find anywhere in the Middle High German original.

The rhymes in this translation do not, however, entirely match the standards established in the original poem, some eight hundred years ago. *Das Nibelungenlied* employs only full or complete rhyme, what the French call *rime riche*. Working in the more limited linguistic environment of modern English, which has lost virtually all of the case endings on which the older poet often relies for his rhymes, I have used *rime riche* as often as possible. But I have also used, because I have had to, partial rhyme, *rime faible*; I have sometimes used assonantal rhyme; and as I have noted, I have (in desperation, I admit) in a few instances simply ducked for cover and run.

But the impact of close rhyming is an important part of *Das Nibelungenlied*.

Do sah man Ruedegere under helme gan.
 Ez truogen swert diu scarpfen des marcgraven man.
 Dar zuo vor ir handen die liechten schilde breit.
 Daz sach der videlære: ez was im groezliche leit.

[QUATRAIN 2170]

Wearing his helmet, Rudiger led his men toward battle.
 All of them carried sharp-edged swords, all of them held
 Brightly gleaming shields in their hands. Volker happened
 To see them coming, and his already saddened spirits fell.

[THIS TRANSLATION]

Both meter and rhyme in *Das Nibelungenlied* are completely intrinsic—fundamental, indispensable. This becomes even more apparent when we look at another poem of roughly the same period, Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot*:

Maintenant qu'il fu deschauciez
 El lit, qui fu lons et hauciez
 Plus des autres deus demie aune,
 Se couche soz un samir jaune,
 Un covertor d'or estelé.

N'estoit mie de veir pelé
 La forreure, ainz ert de sables,
 Bien fust a oés un roi metables
 Li covertors qu'il ot sor lui,
 Li liz ne fu mie de glui,
 Ne de paile, ne de viez nates.

[LINES 503–13]

The bed was almost a yard
 Longer than the others, and as soon
 As his armor was off he stretched himself
 Out on the yellow satin,
 Embroidered with gold. That bed
 Hadn't been lined with wornout
 Squirrel pelts but with deep,
 Thick sable, worthy of warming
 A king. The mattress he lay on
 Wasn't mere hay or reeds
 Or old straw mats!

[MY 1997 TRANSLATION]

Chrétien's rhymes are cheerful decorations, not essential to either the story or the poetry in which that story is cast. There are no strophic structures in Chrétien's poems; the pace is quick, the octosyllabic couplets flow one into the other. Of course, I had to "invent" a regular metric for my translations of Chrétien's poetry: verse rhythm is virtually always intrinsic, and a free modern prosody would have been completely inappropriate. One cannot transfer metrics any more than one can transfer syntax, but I think the steady three-stress beat I have used carries the sense, the feeling of the original Old French. But *Das Nibelungenlied* is a totally different poem and must therefore be handled differently.

And without question, *Das Nibelungenlied* had to have been recited, or read aloud. So far as we know, all medieval narrative poetry (and most poetry of any sort) was presented in some such manner, and there is evidence that the narration was often quasi-musical. Melodic chants are notated for other Mittelhochdeutsch poems of roughly the same period. An audience accustomed to exclusively aural presentation (no matter whether read, chanted, or wholly or

partly sung) expects and draws satisfaction from steady regularity of form, meter, and rhyme. Contemporary readers, and even contemporary listeners at poetry readings, tend to find such absolute regularity dulling. Accordingly, not only have I employed the sort of deviations from the original patterns already mentioned, but in the interests of readability I have deliberately lessened the Middle High German's absolute predictability in these matters. I have also introduced subtler, less significant variations in internal enjambment—that is, how lines flow one into the other, instead of continually pausing in exactly the same places. Significant amounts of alliteration are a constant in all Germanic poetry (and are dominating in Old English verse). But I have varied the translation's degree of alliteration, so that the contemporary reader can experience something like the minor *frisson* (shiver, thrill) that comes with things mildly unexpected. I have used much the same sorts of variations in the syntactical patterning of half-lines. Probably no one but a poet-translator will much notice these small tricks of the trade. But I think reader comfort will be increased, and that, as A. A. Milne liked to say, is plainly A Good Thing.

TONE AND RHETORIC

The original poem makes very few flourishes, uses few highly demonstrative or colorful adjectives, and virtually never indulges in either impassioned or even closely detailed descriptions of the characters. The tone is immensely steady (like the rhyming). The reader is quickly made aware that the poet has no great interest in tonal variation. More or less set patterns of phrasing occur and reoccur, perhaps because of the oral nature of the poet's and the poem's background. (This is deliberate fudging: we do not know whether the poem was initially woven on an oral web, like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, or—as seems more likely—it was first written and then performed.)

The poem's excitement is therefore based on many things that have no large foundation in what we, eight hundred years after *Das Nibelungenlied*'s composition, like to think of as style.

I have been as scrupulous as possible in adhering to the original's tone. The original has only a sprinkling of similes; the translation employs them rarely, and only slightly more often than does the original. There is nothing gaudy about the Middle High German; I have worked hard to eliminate all such tempting excesses from the translation. One of the great craftsmen of modern music, Maurice Ravel, once played, for a friend, a gorgeously beauti-

ful piece he had just composed. The friend was wonderfully enthusiastic. “No,” said Ravel decisively, “it’s too pretty, that’s all wrong. That was not in fact what I was after. I am going to destroy it and start again.” And he did. I have thrown away more “good” phrases and lines than I can count. Good phrases, in our modern sense of the words, do not belong in this poem.

Linguistic arrangement, or syntax, is plainly a large factor in establishing literary tone. Yet Modern English syntax cannot replicate the straightforward syntax of Middle High German. Our language now governs itself mostly by the positioning of words (a linguistic feature known as “analytical” syntax) and by morphology (that is, changes between singular and plural forms, differing forms for different tenses, possessive apostrophe use, and so on). *Mittelhochdeutsch*, though it too can use a kind of analytical syntax, relies heavily on an abundance of case endings—lost or virtually lost in modern English. (We can find case endings in much fuller, though already decaying form, in Old English texts. By Chaucer’s time, they were essentially as moribund as they are today.) Longer sentences in an analytical syntax are inevitably structurally more complex. I have tried to match sentence-length in the translation with sentence-length in the original, but some loss of straightforwardness cannot be avoided.

RELIGION AND MAGIC

Dietrich of Berne, a nobleman of high and well-known significance, makes his appearance in other German poems of this period. He plays a minor but important role in *Das Nibelungenlied*. When Dietrich hears of the death of Count Rudiger of Bechalaren, universally admired by men and women on every side of the poem’s various conflicts, he immediately declares, “Daz ensol niht wellen got” (“This was not God’s will”) (2245.1). And then he adds, “daz waere ein starkiu rache und ouch des tiuvels spot” (“but a dreadful revenge and something to please only the Devil”). These are words spoken by a nobleman of indisputable standing and must be taken with great seriousness. But what, in religious terms, does this statement tell us? Are these meaningful expressions of religious feeling or little more than automatic responses? Indeed, later in the same penultimate *aventure*, Dietrich wails that “downtrodden Dietrich / has been deserted by God” (2319.2, 3). Why? Not for any reason even remotely connected to Christianity, but simply because all his soldiers have been killed.

There is no question that the poem's author is Christian and writes positively of medieval Christianity—when, that is, he writes of it at all. But neither is there any doubt that *Das Nibelungenlied* is a fundamentally secular poem. References to attendance at masses are relatively frequent, but indications that this was something more than customary attendance are close to nonexistent. Krimhild is described as more concerned with religion than anyone else in the poem, most especially during her protracted and extremely intense mourning after Sifried's violent death. But Krimhild is also depicted, from the poem's first pages, as considerably more neurasthenic than any other character in the poem, male or female.

Brunhild appears to have no marked concern with any aspect of religion: she attends church more or less as, once, she ruled her people or fought in competition. Religion is for her, as it appears to be for virtually all the characters, neither more nor less important than any other of life's basic proprieties. Indeed, courtly manners are made to seem distinctly more important than religion, as are clothes and the maintenance of weapons. Clerics are rarely mentioned; no priest (other than Krimhild's uncle, the bishop of Passau) has a significant role, with the passing exception of Gunter's priest, unnamed, on the trip to Etzel's land. But even this brief episode focuses on Hagen's desire to disprove (by attempting, unsuccessfully, to kill the priest) the dismal prophecy that, of all the Burgundians making the trip, only the priest will survive and return home. Sifried's funeral rites necessarily involve priests, but they remain anonymous functionaries. Hagen has a sudden, transitory outburst of religiosity, when the Burgundians arrive in Etzel's land, but it soon passes and seems largely a case of what, in modern times, is known as the "No atheists in foxholes" syndrome.

The poet also makes clear his firm tolerance for other religions, and Islam in particular. Etzel, a Muslim and king of the Huns (a people of Asian origin), is highly and repeatedly praised for his willingness, not only to coexist with, but to freely take into his service, Christians as well as Muslims. Indeed, his closest and most respected follower, Count Rudiger, is Christian.

Das Nibelungenlied is a profoundly moral poem, intensely analytical and philosophical, as well as deeply depressing in its view of human nature. A religious poem would have turned these considerations to religious use. This simply does not happen, not at any point in the poem.

Although magic is a good deal more prominent in the poem, and there-

fore more significant, it too remains a relatively minor aspect of *Das Nibelungenlied*. Sifried is the only character deeply affected by magic. Both his almost-total immunity to injury, derived from washing himself in the blood of a dragon he has killed, and the magical cloak he wrests from the dwarf Albericht, are narratively important. So too are the water witches encountered, much later in the poem, by Hagen. But the poet handles magic exactly as he does war, and bravery, treachery, and deceit. All are part of the natural order of things, intrinsically no more remarkable than Krimhild's beauty or Hagen's arrogance. There are no magicians in the poem: magic is not presented as a special process or gift but, like human nature and grass growing in the fields, is simply a fact of worldly existence. These are things that, in the poem's view, have always been there and always will be. One can rely on magic as one relies on rain or snow. It happens, it will go on happening.

NARRATIVE AND CHARACTERIZATION

Like all great storytellers, the poet is both infinitely patient and absolutely authoritative. Human nature seen utterly without rose-colored glasses—sympathetically, compassionately, yet always straightforwardly, even starkly—is his untiring concern. This, it seems to me, is the controlling epicenter of *Das Nibelungenlied*, and what most profoundly connects it to the tradition of narrative poetry (sometimes “epic,” sometimes not) of which it is a stellar and remarkable part.

Long narrative poems often tell us, from the start, both what tradition they adhere to and what their approach will be. For extraordinarily fine poets, often the first lines can give us such information:

Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum,
 þeodcyniga, þrym gefrunon,
 hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.

[*BEOWULF*, CA. A.D. 850, LINES 1–3]

Hear me! We've heard of Danish heroes,
 Ancient kings and the glory they cut
 For themselves, swinging mighty swords!

[MY 1963 TRANSLATION]

Honor and glory, war and kings, are here announced in unmistakable terms. The existence of a long tradition (“We’ve heard of . . . Ancient”) is both asserted and given deep respect. Note the Germanic half-line verse tradition, still in use four centuries later, in *Das Nibelungenlied*, though much about the verse per se has of course changed.

Although at first sight a long poem cut from as completely dissimilar a mode as can be, Lord Byron’s long narrative poem *Don Juan* (“Juan” rhyming with “chew on”), begun in 1818 and left unfinished at his death in 1824, provides us with pretty much the same information:

I want a hero: an uncommon want,
 When every year and month sends forth a new one,
 Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
 The age discovers he is not the true one;
 Of such as these I should not care to vaunt,
 I’ll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan—
 We all have seen him, in the pantomime,
 Sent to the devil somewhat ere his time.

[CANTO 1, STANZA 1]

A tradition is plainly announced, again of “ancient” origins. It is paid a degree of respect, but its modern incarnations are firmly disapproved of. The tone is rollicking; the strict form, rhyming, and iambic pentameter meter are exploited, rather than simply deployed; and the intentions are clearly handsomely satirical.

John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, first printed in 1667, makes a grand and glorious initial statement of both theme and approach, just as its striking rejection of rhyme, along with its equally strong affirmation of the iambic pentameter metric, tells us an immense amount about what we can expect:

Of Man’s first disobedience, and the fruit
 Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
 Brought death into the World, and all our woe,
 With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
 Restore us and regain the blissful seat,
 Sing, Heavenly Muse . . .

[BOOK 1, LINES 1–6]

The emphatically Christian purposes of the poem, or its intensely celebratory nature, could not have been made more clearly. The profoundly respectful use of the classical tradition also tells us much, both about the poet's roots and about the high rhetorical road he proposes to follow.

And all of these testimonials to great poets' consistency, and their unconcealed declarations of literary loyalty (or disloyalty), can be found, equally clear and emphatic, in the first two adventures of *Das Nibelungenlied*. (Since those reading these comments will have the translation readily available, in this book, I quote therefrom only if particular attention to the text is required.) Note how punctiliously and in what detail the first quatrain's connection to tradition is made. Note as well how the poet seamlessly manages to interweave the joyous and the mournful events he will depict, so that listeners (or readers) can at this point only know that both sides of life will be presented. And indeed they are.

Quatrain 2 presents us with the beauty of Krimhild. But there is a subtle departure, here, from tradition, which as quatrain 1 demonstrates is concerned with heroes. The first character specified is a woman, who can never be a hero, no matter how remarkable she is. We are being told, more or less subliminally, that this poem is going to be different.

And quatrain 3 continues the exclusive focus on Krimhild, her courtesies, her virtues.

Quatrain 4 introduces us to the three "powerful kings," her brothers, the first two her elders, the last-named, Giselher "the young," distinctly her junior. But a male is a male, and though she has helped raise him, he is now like the others her protector. Quatrain 5 tells us fairly predictable things about these three kings, and ends by telling us—mysteriously, to a modern audience, but quite possibly readily comprehensible to the poet's contemporaries—that they "fought like the giants they were," in "Etzel's land." This strikes an odd note, uncertainly either high praise (to an almost mythological level) or else posthumously celebratory. It turns out to be both.

Quatrain 6 adds to this deftly handled aura of uncertainty by telling us, first, how proud and well served these kings were, and second, how their deaths were "wretched, caused by noble women's hate and spite." This remains unexplained (again, at least for our time) for a large part of the poem. Once more, the poet's narrative approach works beautifully back and forth between straightforward exposition and somewhat hair-raising suggestions.

Quatrain 7 is straightforwardly genealogical; quatrain 8 begins the pro-

cess of introducing us to the knights who served the three kings. This introduction lasts through quatrain 12, for there are of course a great many such knights. The highly compressed information we are given is useful, but becomes fully comprehensible only later. The poet ends this biographical mini-series with a typical observation: “no one [can] ever describe it all.”

And then, without any preparation, we are taken, not only back to Krimhild, but to a dream she has had. It must be understood that medieval minds knew perfectly well that some dreams, notably nightmares and apparitions, were caused by the dreamer's own mind. But as Carolly Erickson puts it, in *The Medieval Vision*, “Medieval perception was characterized by an all-inclusive awareness of simultaneous realities. The bounds of reality were bent to embrace—and often to localize, the unseen.” Oracular, prophetic, and enigmatic dreams were one of the prime other realities, originating outside the dreamer's mind. They were seen as “a crucial guide to conduct. . . . Prophetic visions are glimpses of the future itself, while in enigmatic dreams a particular message is conveyed, though concealed with strange shapes and veiled with ambiguity” (*The Medieval Vision: Essays in History and Perception* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1976], 27, 36–37). These latter words are directly applicable to Krimhild's dream, in which a beloved falcon, trained by her own hands, is torn apart “in front of her eyes” by two eagles.

Concerned, Krimhild seeks help from her mother. (Women, or at least women of high social standing, were rigidly isolated; only an older woman—and who better than a mother?—could be turned to for such help.) Krimhild is given her mother's reading; they discuss marriage; and like many young, isolated women, Krimhild recoils. But quatrain 18 tells us that she is to be courted and won by “a brave and courteous knight.” And the last quatrain in this brief opening adventure says, bluntly, that her husband was “indeed the falcon she'd seen that night in her dream.” The last three lines of the quatrain, subtly and inconclusively, suggest a connection with that husband's death and the deaths of Krimhild's brothers, in revenge, as predicted in quatrain 6, line 4.

This introductory material communicates a great deal about the poet's narrative methods. The second adventure does not need detailed commentary. Having lingered over the young woman at the heart of the story, we seem ready to be—and we then are—introduced to the young man of the story. This is relatively straightforward exposition. What is notable, however, is the poet's way of dropping one topic, referring to another, and then spending line after line on yet a new subject. Some of this seeming abruptness may be part

of *Das Nibelungenlied*'s underlying tradition, about which we are not well informed. But it is also the way the poem develops its narrative, over and over again.

It has been frequently said, and with much truth, that a good plot keeps characters in motion. What is less often said is that the better the characters, the better the plot—because what largely drives the plot is in fact the characters. Many inferior stories and films have rattling plots, stuffed with high-powered action. It has also been said, by people in the film industry, that for a movie to be successful every eight minutes *something* has to happen to “knock the theater audience’s heads back.” Audiences do indeed prefer action to inaction. But action for the sake of action provides only transitory satisfaction. Films or stories based on such unmotivated activity do not linger in the mind or give rise to the urge to again read or view. When characters are impelled simply by the need for action, *any* action, plots are merely busy, not moving. All great stories are impelled by good characters.

But what is meant by “good” characters? The bedrock requirement, given the eternally unchanging fallibility of all human beings, is that characters be (as we all are) demonstrably out of balance. This does not mean lunatic behavior or thought, nor does it involve any negative aspects beyond what, for better or worse, all humans already display. Perfection is not only unattainable, it is in narrative terms fatally boring. “Good news,” the old saying accurately declares, “is no news.” A story about God, if by some miracle we were capable of telling it, would be no story at all. In Exodus 3:14, God describes himself as “I AM THAT I AM.” Milton’s *Paradise Lost* makes a gallant attempt to turn God into a viable story character but succeeds only in trivializing him. It is no accident that the true “hero” of the poem is usually said to be Satan. A consummate villain can indeed be an excellent character, if not a hero. No longer a “perfect” angel, Satan displays gaping flaws, shows whirling insecurities and doubts, even wishing he were in fact “good” (as by definition he cannot be). Seeing Earth for the first time, Satan muses:

“O Earth,

.
 With what delight could I have walked thee round
 (If I could joy in aught) . . .

 . . . But I in none of these

Find place or refuge; and the more I see
 Pleasures about me, so much more I feel
 Torment within me, as from the hateful siege
 Of contraries.

[BOOK 9, LINES 99, 114–15, 118–22]

Generous and compassionate though he is, the *Nibelungenlied* poet seems incapable of creating a character without flaws, a human being who is not in some way out of balance. Shakespeare has the same utter devotion to human truth. This is the ultimate source of all narrative immortality.

HUMOR AND WIT

Just as humor has significant variations, from one culture to another, so too humor tends to shift, over time, within a given culture. When we read of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, we are fully prepared for heroes and heroic exploits. But we are so unprepared for knightly cowardice and weak-minded shame that, even seeing them on the page, we often fail to recognize what they are. The Green Knight, in the late-fourteenth-century poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, so terrifies the Knights of the Round Table with his challenge that not one of them dares accept it. When Arthur himself volunteers, Gawain—to save the king—asks that he be permitted to take it on. As the first and easiest part of the challenge, Gawain cuts off the Green Knight's head:

The blade
 Cut through bones and skin and fair
 White flesh, split the green man's neck
 So swiftly that its edge slashed the ground.
 And the head fell to the earth, rolled
 On the floor, and the knights kicked it with their feet.

(BOOK 1, LINES 423–28, IN MY 1970 TRANSLATION)

This is perhaps (to us) grisly humor, but it seems clearly satirical and even hilarious. Professional commentary, however, tends to say of this scene things like “The fact that when the head bounced over the floor, the ‘folk there with their feet thrust at it like a ball’ is not merely a matter of revulsion or vicious-

ness: the people are behaving in accordance with the tradition that a be-headed supernatural creature can be killed finally only if he can be kept apart from his head." Not only is there no "viciousness" in the knights' reaction, neither is there the slightest indication *in the poem* that anything but horror and either fright or cowardice motivate the knights' frantic kicking.

So too with the frequent *Narrheit* (foolishness, stupidity) of King Gunter, in *Das Nibelungenlied*. One professional commentator, again, must here stand for a great many more: "Gunter is, at least initially, better in tune [than is Sifried] with this world of stable structures and traditional values. He bases his claim to power on heredity and not on the strength of his right arm. He seeks to preserve his power through persuasions and the following of good advice. Only when his desire to win Brunhild enters the picture does he begin to leave this secure foundation behind." Consider, however, some of the more readily excerptible instances of what the poem in fact conveys to us about Gunter, before Brunhild is so much as mentioned:

- [King Sigemund speaks:] "I've known these kings, / Gunter and Gernot, a long, long time. They're strong, and also fierce" (56.3, 4).
- [Of Gunter, when Sifried first appears in Burgundy land:] "The king was deeply confused, trying to puzzle out / who these visitors were and where they were from, with their dazzling / clothes and gleaming weapon and shields. He was not happy / that no one could tell him more of this visit and what it was all about" (80).
- [Hearing Sifried's challenge:] "Have I deserved to hear," said Gunter the brave, [!], at length, "that what my father sought so long and well to save / is now to be taken away by any man's raw strength?" (112.1-3).
- "The king himself, Gunter, that proud and mighty man" (141.4).
- "Knowing Gunter's fame, the messengers' hearts were filled with fear" (142.4).

Either the poet is confused about Gunter or, in the scholarly comment reproduced just above, the poet is being misunderstood. I have far too much respect for this poet to believe him so totally confused about one of his poem's major characters. Gunter (a) the ditherer and whiner, and Gunter (b) the strong and fierce, can only be one and the same if, indeed, the poet is speaking plainly in the first case but in the second (1) conventionally, with the deference then considered due to all kings, and also (2) satirically. Not only is there an enormous amount to support this perspective, but the fatuousness of a foolish Gunter in idiotic pursuit of Brunhild makes infinitely better sense if

we understand that this is who Gunter has been all along. The poet, in his subtle, complex craft, unravels the strings of his story slowly and with immense care. We feel the king's *Narrbeit* long before we are sure this is something we are meant to perceive. Or at least some part of what we are meant to perceive: Gunter remains a nobleman, a king, and in A.D. 1200 these are not matters to be sneered at.

Sifried is not a comic character. He is young, naive, and at times distinctly bumptious, and the poet handles his flaws with remarkable delicacy and considerable dry wit.

The same observations cannot be made of that strange character, Brunhild, wooed and conquered (not once, but twice) by Sifried, yet married to Gunter. When Sifried, courteous knight that he is, carefully turns her spear butt-end first, before throwing it back at her, "For all her strength, Brunhild was knocked on her back" (460.3). What did the poet's audience think of this? So far as we can tell, they thought it entirely proper. As Sifried puts it, speaking directly to Brunhild, "How happy I am . . . to hear that pride / as overwhelming as yours has now been brought to earth, / and there is someone living who's mastered you with his worth" (474.1–3). Sifried himself is, of course, quite as proud. But he is also entitled to be proud, being very powerful—and a man. She is very nearly his equal, in strength—but she is not a man and cannot be similarly entitled. One way or another, women had to be subordinated (as the men of A.D. 1200 thought they were manifestly meant to be). Brunhild is neither a man nor, for much of the poem, strictly speaking a woman. When Sifried's spear-throw knocks her down, accordingly, one can almost hear the audience's grunts of approval.

But Brunhild is not so easily tamed. As quickly as she goes down, she bounces right up. The poet tells us that "beautiful Brunhild quickly jumped to her feet," and we are not surprised as, more than probably, neither was the audience. It is what she then says, however, which would I suspect have elicited horselaughs from that audience. Speaking as would a courteous, well-mannered knight, floored by an opponent, she says, "I thank you, / noble Gunter, mighty knight, for that throw.' Frankly," the poet adds, "she really thought he had hurled it" (461.1–3). The audience would not I think have been able to react except by an immediate "*Lächerlich!* Ridiculous!" A woman displaying knightly courtesy could not have seemed to them even remotely proper. Or entirely real (though in an age dominated, still, by magic, all things were possible).

Recall that “four strong men” carry in her shield, and “staggered under its weight” (437.4); that three men carry her spear, for which the smiths had “melted / half a ton of iron” (441.1, 2); and that it takes “twelve of her men” to carry in the huge rock she liked to throw—and “they could barely do their work” (449.2, 3). Against these monstrous proportions, the poet almost immediately juxtaposes the incontrovertible fact of “her clear white arms” (451.1). He reminds us, too, that when she is knocked off her feet, she is “furious,” as she rises—and “she fairly ran to the massive stone” (462.1). She could not wait to heft the boulder and toss it—knowing, let me remind you, that if Gunter could not match her throw, he and his three companions forfeited their lives. “She ought to be down in Hell . . . ,” as Hagen exclaims, “wed to the Devil himself” (450.4).

These are not scenes from an Abbot and Costello skit or from Walt Disney’s *Fantasia*. Yet just as there are protracted comic aspects to *Fantasia*, so too there are intensely serious dimensions to that famous Abbot and Costello routine, “Who’s on First.” Brunhild is neither a simple nor a simplistic characterization. The thirteenth-century man had to take her seriously, because there she was, defeating all but the absolutely strongest. The thirteenth-century man, at the same moment, would I think have been obliged to mock her, because just as surely as she was there, she was a woman. Rather like Sifried, she is bumptious, proud, utterly cocksure of herself. Unlike Sifried, these qualities do not make her lovable. Did the poet join in the laughter at her ridiculous antics? It was he who described them, was it not, and created that derision? Still, if he were to have been, as many have speculated, an aristocrat of a lower rank, and a cleric, we might be a bit more certain of what he truly thought. We do not know.

All of these matters come to a head in quatrain 682:

Done was ouch si niht sterken dann’ ein ander wip.
 er trute minneliche den ir vil schoenen lip.
 ob siz versuochte mere, waz kunde daz vervan?
 daz het ir allez Gunter mit sinen minnen getan.

Now she’d become no stronger than any other woman.
 Now he could caress her soft and lovely body.
 Even had she tried, what good would it do her? Human
 love had overwhelmed her, she was woman and Gunter was man.

The first three lines of the translation present no problem. But the *words* of the fourth line, in *Mittelhochdeutsch*, do not, in and of themselves, supply the twenty-first-century reader with the entire meaning. Translating the words alone would produce something like “Gunter had accomplished all this with his capacity for love-making.” Yet Gunter is, to say the least, not an extraordinary *man*, any more than he is an extraordinary king—and that is, indeed, the nub of it. Brunhild, ineluctably female, has for reasons unknown tried not to be female. The source of her incredible strength lies, murkily but inescapably, in that denial of the inevitable. We might say (though the poem does not) that by perverting her female and sexual energies, she has made herself into the kind of quasi-monstrous person she has become. She is distinctly successful at her “masculinity,” ruling a kingdom (as only males are supposed and created to do) and defeating—as well as killing—genuine males in warlike competition.

And once committed to this unnatural path, Brunhild can only be diverted from it, and restored to her true nature, by a man who is also, in his way, unnatural. That is, she can be changed only by a man sufficiently—and exaggeratedly—masculine to shock her into proper adjustment. We see that process beginning quickly. As soon as she is defeated in martial competition, Brunhild renounces her “kingly” role and unequivocally hands over ruling power to Gunter, exactly as she should, believing that he has defeated her. The Burgundians are pointedly uncomfortable. Has she truly handed over power? Is the delay she requests, most reasonably, only an excuse to restore herself to power by gathering her adherents? Nothing of the sort is in fact attempted. Brunhild has indeed taken the first step.

But Brunhild is plainly no fool, and though she cannot understand just what has gone wrong in this business, she smells a rat. Accordingly, she declares that she will not sleep with her husband until he has clarified matters. He hedges. She persists—and when he tries to assert his masculinity, her uncompleted transformation into full womanhood allows her to revert to power-mode. When Gunter too persists, she handily repels and totally humiliates him. He is, in short, insufficiently masculine in the sexual sense (for her, at least), just as he is insufficiently powerful in military matters. Always reliant on others, a desperate, despairing Gunter seeks Sifried’s help. Sifried cockily assures him that he will pretend to be Gunter and get the job done. He will not have sexual intercourse with Brunhild, but he will ready her for it. All

Gunter will have to do is be physically present and ready to step in once the woman has been subdued.

Though Sifried is barely more powerful than the untransformed Brunhild, he is decisively—and articulately—male, concerned not only about his own standing but about male and female relationships generally. She seems to be defeating him. What will happen, he worries, if all the women in the world find out, as they surely will, that such unnatural female power has prevailed? Sifried summons his last and highest degree of strength and, at the end of a long and brutal battle, he forces Brunhild down and compels her to say “uncle.” “She gave it up. And at that moment a wife was born.”

Brunhild’s reversion to nature is, in the next quatrain, made explicit:

She said: “O noble Gunter, I want to remain alive.
I’ll make amends, I’ll pay you back for everything
I’ve done. Never again will I shrink from being your wife.
I’ve learned, at last, that you know how to be a woman’s king.

[QUATRAIN 678]

This reaction would have been both welcomed and fully comprehended by the poem’s audiences. “O! how utterly useless her mighty strength had now become.” Never again does she act like anything but what, in truth, she has been all along, a woman. The poet views this, not as an inferior status, but simply as a God-given different one. And once she is prepared to be like all other women, Gunter, like any other sexually potent male, serves the purpose. The translation thus acknowledges his generic masculinity, but does not credit him with any sort of individualized potency.

From this point on, not only does Brunhild enjoy being a woman (later, she becomes a mother), but she never again tries, in even the slightest fashion, to be anything but a woman. There are of course drawbacks to being female, as there are to being male. Sifried’s male cockiness, along with Krimhild’s female manipulative imperatives, is what ultimately kills him—and Brunhild’s jealousy is certainly a prominent causative assistant. For better or worse, we are what we are, and what we were made to be.

Having served to set in motion Krimhild’s enduring sorrow, and then her utterly dominating need for vengeance, Brunhild virtually disappears from the poem. The night before he leaves on the journey to Etzel’s kingdom, her

husband summons her to the Burgundians' encampment, not far outside Wurms, so that he (and she) can have one last night of sexual pleasure. Brunhild's complete compliance with this wish is so taken for granted, by this point, that the poet does not so much as acknowledge it. Her husband calls, as he has a right to do, and she comes, as she must, and also, we gather, with pleasure (though polite people do not talk too much about such things).

TEXTS

I have worked from, and had constantly open in front of me, two of Karl Bartsch's justly famous editions, both monolingual. The earliest is the eighth edition, published in Leipzig in 1886 by F. A. Brockhaus. The more recent has been corrected and re-edited by Helmut de Boor, and was published in 1956, in Wiesbaden, again by F. A. Brockhaus. I have at times cross-checked these monolingual volumes with de Boor's helpful bilingual edition, as published in 2003, in Cologne, by Parkland Verlag.

I have of course occasionally relied on other volumes, both historical and interpretative. However, the only other book I have regularly consulted is *Matthias Lexers Mittelhochdeutsches Taschenwörterbuch*, first published in 1882, as supplemented in 1981 by Ulrich Pretzel, and published in Stuttgart by S. Hirzel Verlag.

THEORY OF TRANSLATION

I have written three books on these matters (*The Forked Tongue*, *The Art of Translating Poetry*, and *The Art of Translating Prose*). Every translation is of course different; there is no hard, inflexible truth to follow, except for the fact that "literal" translation, as I have stated many times before, is a linguistic impossibility, a will-o'-the-wisp. It has also been wisely said that the utter unachievability of complete translation is no reason not to make the attempt.

There are things accomplished by poetry that prose cannot match, and vice versa. Poetry and prose are not genres dropped from heaven, nor are their respective histories (poetry's is much longer) or their development either strictly logical or even self-aware. I do not think anyone has ever contemplated turning Marcel Proust's magnificent *A la recherche du temps perdu* into verse. Or Franz Kafka's stories, or Anton Chekhov's. Yet prose translations of poetry both long and short may be fairly said to abound. This seems to me a

gross, even a fatal error. Can a tone-deaf person reproduce a recognizable melody? Clearly not. Prose can be ranked, *ad libitum*, in an immense number of gradations, from ghastly to great; so too can its writers, and by necessity its translators. And so too with poetry. I might argue (though I will not) that a bad verse translation gives us more of the original's *poetry* than even a very good prose translation possibly can. But just as good translations of prose give us a good deal of the original, and bad translations of prose often give us remarkably little, so too good verse translations of poetry give us much of the original, and bad verse translations give us remarkably little.

No translation, by definition, can or ever does give us everything. A translation cannot pretend to *be* the original which, at best, it tries to recreate. Though a translation is, again by definition, subordinate to the original from which it works, it is necessarily and inescapably different. Readers are plainly better off when they can read, and have the background to understand, the original. But who can read every one of the languages humans have employed? And where would we be, for better or worse, without translation?

My "theory" here, accordingly, is to offer the best verse translation I can produce. *Das Nibelungenlied* deserves nothing less, though to date it has had, in the way of English renderings, astonishingly little. For so great, so moving a poem to have so small a presence in our widely spoken and even more widely read language seems to me remarkable in the extreme. Whether I have been able to improve so appalling a situation is not for me to say. But I have been meditating this translation for thirty years or more, and I have tried, consciously and very, very hard, to do it well. I do not for a moment aspire to perfection, which probably does not exist, either in translation or in anything else we humans do.