

Homer's Iliad - Summary

Book 1

The poet invokes a muse to aid him in telling the story of the rage of Achilles, the greatest Greek hero to fight in the Trojan War. The narrative begins nine years after the start of the war, as the Achaeans sack a Trojan-allied town and capture two beautiful maidens, Chryseis and Briseis. Agamemnon, commander-in-chief of the Achaean army, takes Chryseis as his prize. Achilles, one of the Achaeans' most valuable warriors, claims Briseis. Chryseis's father, a man named Chryses who serves as a priest of the god Apollo, begs Agamemnon to return his daughter and offers to pay an enormous ransom. When Agamemnon refuses, Chryses prays to Apollo for help.

Apollo sends a plague upon the Greek camp, causing the death of many soldiers. After ten days of suffering, Achilles calls an assembly of the Achaean army and asks for a soothsayer to reveal the cause of the plague. Calchas, a powerful seer, stands up and offers his services. Though he fears retribution from Agamemnon, Calchas reveals the plague as a vengeful and strategic move by Chryses and Apollo. Agamemnon flies into a rage and says that he will return Chryseis only if Achilles gives him Briseis as compensation.

Agamemnon's demand humiliates and infuriates the proud Achilles. The men argue, and Achilles threatens to withdraw from battle and take his people, the Myrmidons, back home to Phthia. Agamemnon threatens to go to Achilles' tent in the army's camp and take Briseis himself. Achilles stands poised to draw his sword and kill the Achaean commander when the goddess Athena, sent by Hera, the queen of the gods, appears to him and checks his anger. Athena's guidance, along with a speech by the wise advisor Nestor, finally succeeds in preventing the duel.

That night, Agamemnon puts Chryseis on a ship back to her father and sends heralds to have Briseis escorted from Achilles' tent. Achilles prays to his mother, the sea-nymph Thetis, to ask Zeus, king of the gods, to punish the Achaeans. He relates to her the tale of his quarrel with Agamemnon, and she promises to take the matter up with Zeus—who owes her a favor—as soon as he returns from a thirteen-day period of feasting with the Aethiopians. Meanwhile, the Achaean commander Odysseus is navigating the ship that Chryseis has boarded. When he lands, he returns the maiden and makes sacrifices to Apollo. Chryses, overjoyed to see his daughter, prays to the god to lift the plague from the Achaean camp. Apollo acknowledges his prayer, and Odysseus returns to his comrades.

But the end of the plague on the Achaeans only marks the beginning of worse suffering. Ever since his quarrel with Agamemnon, Achilles has refused to participate in battle, and, after twelve days, Thetis makes her appeal to Zeus, as promised. Zeus is reluctant to help the Trojans, for his wife, Hera, favors the Greeks, but he finally agrees. Hera becomes livid when she discovers that Zeus is helping the Trojans, but her son Hephaestus persuades her not to plunge the gods into conflict over the mortals.

Book 2

To help the Trojans, as promised, Zeus sends a false dream to Agamemnon in which a figure in the form of Nestor persuades Agamemnon that he can take Troy if he launches a full-scale assault on the city's walls. The next day, Agamemnon gathers his troops for attack, but, to test their courage, he lies and tells them that he has decided to give up the war and return to Greece. To his dismay, they eagerly run to their ships.

When Hera sees the Achaeans fleeing, she alerts Athena, who inspires Odysseus, the most eloquent of the Achaeans, to call the men back. He shouts words of encouragement and insult to goad their pride and restore their confidence. He reminds them of the prophecy that the soothsayer Calchas gave when the Achaeans were first mustering their soldiers back in Greece: a water snake had slithered to shore and devoured a nest of nine sparrows, and Calchas interpreted the sign to mean that nine years would pass before the Achaeans would finally take Troy. As Odysseus reminds them, they vowed at that time that they would not abandon their struggle until the city fell. Nestor now encourages Agamemnon to arrange his troops by city and clan so that they can fight side by side with their friends and kin. The poet takes this opportunity to enter into a catalog of the army. After invoking the muses to aid his memory, he details the cities that have contributed troops to the Greek cause, the number of troops that each has contributed, and who leads each contingent. At the end of the list, the poet singles out the bravest of the Achaeans, Achilles and Ajax among them. When Zeus sends a messenger to the Trojan court, telling them of the

Greeks' awesome formation, the Trojans muster their own troops under the command of Priam's son Hector. The poet then catalogs the Trojan forces.

Book 3-4

The Trojan army marches from the city gates and advances to meet the Achaeans. Paris, the Trojan prince who precipitated the war by stealing the beautiful Helen from her husband, Menelaus, challenges the Achaeans to single combat with any of their warriors. When Menelaus steps forward, however, Paris loses heart and shrinks back into the Trojan ranks. Hector, Paris's brother and the leader of the Trojan forces, chastises Paris for his cowardice. Stung by Hector's insult, Paris finally agrees to a duel with Menelaus, declaring that the contest will establish peace between Trojans and Achaeans by deciding once and for all which man shall have Helen as his wife. Hector presents the terms to Menelaus, who accepts. Both armies look forward to ending the war at last.

As Paris and Menelaus prepare for combat, the goddess Iris, disguised as Hector's sister Laodice, visits Helen in Priam's palace. Iris urges Helen to go to the city gates and witness the battle about to be fought over her. Helen finds the city's elders, including Priam, gathered there. Priam asks Helen about the strapping young Achaeans he sees, and she identifies Agamemnon, Ajax, and Odysseus. Priam marvels at their strength and splendor but eventually leaves the scene, unable to bear watching Paris fight to the death.

Paris and Menelaus arm themselves and begin their duel. Neither is able to fell the other with his spear. Menelaus breaks his sword over Paris's helmet. He then grabs Paris by the helmet and begins dragging him through the dirt, but Aphrodite, an ally of the Trojans, snaps the strap of the helmet so that it breaks off in Menelaus's hands. Frustrated, Menelaus retrieves his spear and is about to drive it home into Paris when Aphrodite whisks Paris away to his room in Priam's palace. She summons Helen there too. Helen, after upbraiding Paris for his cowardice, lies down in bed with him. Back on the battlefield, both the Trojans and the Greeks search for Paris, who seems to have magically disappeared. Agamemnon insists that Menelaus has won the duel, and he demands Helen back.

Meanwhile, the gods engage in their own duels. Zeus argues that Menelaus has lost the duel and that the war should end as the mortals had agreed. But Hera, who has invested much in the Achaean cause, wants nothing less than the complete destruction of Troy. In the end, Zeus gives way and sends Athena to the battlefield to rekindle the fighting. Disguised as a Trojan soldier, Athena convinces the archer Pandarus to take aim at Menelaus. Pandarus fires, but Athena, who wants merely to give the Achaeans a pretext for fighting, deflects the arrow so that it only wounds Menelaus.

Agamemnon now rallies the Achaean ranks. He meets Nestor, Odysseus, and Diomedes, among others, and spurs them on by challenging their pride or recounting the great deeds of their fathers. Battle breaks out, and the blood flows freely. None of the major characters is killed or wounded, but Odysseus and Great Ajax kill a number of minor Trojan figures. The gods also become involved, with Athena helping the Achaeans and Apollo helping the Trojans. The efforts toward a truce have failed utterly.

Books 5-6

As the battle rages, Pandarus wounds the Achaean hero Diomedes. Diomedes prays to Athena for revenge, and the goddess endows him with superhuman strength and the extraordinary power to discern gods on the field of battle. She warns him, however, not to challenge any of them except Aphrodite. Diomedes fights like a man possessed, slaughtering all Trojans he meets. The overconfident Pandarus meets a gruesome death at the end of Diomedes' spear, and Aeneas, the noble Trojan hero immortalized in Virgil's Aeneid, likewise receives a wounding at the hands of the divinely assisted Diomedes. When Aeneas's mother, Aphrodite, comes to his aid, Diomedes wounds her too, cutting her wrist and sending her back to Mount Olympus. Aphrodite's mother, Dione, heals her, and Zeus warns Aphrodite not to try her hand at warfare again. When Apollo goes to tend to Aeneas in Aphrodite's stead, Diomedes attacks him as well. This act of aggression breaches Diomedes' agreement with Athena, who had limited him to challenging Aphrodite alone among the gods. Apollo, issuing a stern warning to Diomedes, effortlessly pushes him aside and whisks Aeneas off of the field. Aiming to enflame the passions of Aeneas's comrades, he leaves a replica of Aeneas's body on the ground. He also rouses Ares, god of war, to fight on the Trojan side.

With the help of the gods, the Trojans begin to take the upper hand in battle. Hector and Ares prove too much for the Achaeans; the sight of a hero and god battling side by side frightens even Diomedes. The Trojan Sarpedon kills the Achaean Tlepolemus. Odysseus responds by slaughtering entire lines of Trojans, but Hector cuts down still more Greeks. Finally, Hera and Athena appeal to Zeus, who gives them permission to intervene on the Achaeans' behalf. Hera rallies the rest of the Achaean troops, while Athena encourages Diomedes. She withdraws her earlier injunction not to attack any of the gods except Aphrodite and even jumps in the chariot with him to challenge Ares. The divinely driven chariot charges Ares, and, in the seismic collision that follows, Diomedes wounds Ares. Ares immediately flies to Mount Olympus and complains to Zeus, but Zeus counters that Ares deserved his injury. Athena and Hera also depart the scene of the battle.

With the gods absent, the Achaean forces again overwhelm the Trojans, who draw back toward the city. Menelaus considers accepting a ransom in return for the life of Adrestus, a Trojan he has subdued, but Agamemnon persuades him to kill the man outright. Nestor senses the Trojans weakening and urges the Achaeans not to bother stripping their fallen enemies of their weapons but to focus instead on killing as many as possible while they still have the upper hand. The Trojans anticipate downfall, and the soothsayer Helenus urges Hector to return to Troy to ask his mother, Queen Hecuba, along with her noblewomen, to pray for mercy at the temple of Athena. Hector follows Helenus's advice and gives his mother and the other women their instructions. He then visits his brother Paris, who has withdrawn from battle, claiming he is too grief-stricken to participate. Hector and Helen heap scorn on him for not fighting, and at last he arms himself and returns to battle. Hector also prepares to return but first visits his wife, Andromache, whom he finds nursing their son Astyanax by the walls of the city. As she cradles the child, she anxiously watches the struggle in the plain below. Andromache begs Hector not to go back, but he insists that he cannot escape his fate, whatever it may be. He kisses Astyanax, who, although initially frightened by the crest on Hector's helmet, greets his father happily. Hector then departs. Andromache, convinced that he will soon die, begins to mourn his death. Hector meets Paris on his way out of the city, and the brothers prepare to rejoin the battle.

Book 7-8

With the return of Hector and Paris the battle escalates, but Apollo and Athena soon decide to end the battle for the day. They plan a duel to stop the present bout of fighting: Hector approaches the Achaean line and offers himself to anyone who will fight him. Only Menelaus has the courage to step forward, but Agamemnon talks him out of it, knowing full well that Menelaus is no match for Hector. Nestor, too old to fight Hector himself, passionately exhorts his comrades to respond to the challenge. Nine Achaeans finally step forward. A lottery is held, and Great Ajax wins.

Hector and Ajax begin their duel by tossing spears, but neither proves successful. They then use their lances, and Ajax draws Hector's blood. The two are about to clash with swords when heralds, spurred by Zeus, call off the fight on account of nightfall. The two heroes exchange gifts and end their duel with a pact of friendship.

That night, Nestor gives a speech urging the Achaeans to ask for a day to bury their dead. He also advises them to build fortifications around their camp. Meanwhile, in the Trojan camp, King Priam makes a similar proposal regarding the Trojan dead. In addition, his advisor Antenor asks Paris to give up Helen and thereby end the war. Paris refuses but offers to return all of the loot that he took with her from Sparta. But when the Trojans present this offer to the Achaeans the next day, the Achaeans sense the Trojans' desperation and reject the compromise. Both sides agree, however, to observe a day of respite to bury their respective dead. Zeus and Poseidon watch the Achaeans as they build their fortifications, planning to tear them down as soon as the men leave.

Summary: Book 8

After prohibiting the other gods from interfering in the course of the war, Zeus travels to Mount Ida, overlooking the Trojan plain. There he weighs the fates of Troy and Achaea in his scale, and the Achaean side sinks down. With a shower of lightning upon the Achaean army, Zeus turns the tide of battle in the Trojans' favor, and the Greeks retreat in terror. Riding the Trojans' surge in power, Hector seeks out Nestor, who stands stranded in the middle of the battlefield. Diomedes scoops Nestor into his chariot just in time, and Hector pursues the two of them, intent on driving them all the way to the Greek fortifications, where he plans to set fire to their ships. Hera, seeing the Achaean army collapsing, inspires Agamemnon to rouse his troops. He stirs up their pride, begs them to have heart,

and prays for relief from Zeus, who finally sends a sign—an eagle carrying a fawn in its talons. The divine symbol inspires the Achaeans to fight back.

As the Achaeans struggle to regain their power, the archer Teucer fells many Trojans. But Hector finally wounds him, reversing the tide of battle yet again. Hector drives the Greeks behind their fortifications, all the way to their ships. Athena and Hera, unable to bear any further suffering on the part of their favored Greeks, prepare to enter the fray, but Zeus sends the goddess Iris to warn them of the consequences of interfering. Knowing that they cannot compete with Zeus, Athena and Hera relent and return to Mount Olympus. When Zeus returns, he tells them that the next morning will provide their last chance to save the Achaeans. He notes that only Achilles can prevent the Greeks' destruction.

That night, the Trojans, confident in their dominance, camp outside their city's walls, and Hector orders his men to light hundreds of campfires so that the Greeks cannot escape unobserved. Nightfall has saved the Greeks for now, but Hector plans to finish them off the next day.

Books 9-10

With the Trojans poised to drive the Achaeans back to their ships, the Achaean troops sit brokenhearted in their camp. Standing before them, Agamemnon weeps and declares the war a failure. He proposes returning to Greece in disgrace. Diomedes rises and insists that he will stay and fight even if everyone else leaves. He buoys the soldiers by reminding them that Troy is fated to fall. Nestor urges perseverance as well, and suggests reconciliation with Achilles. Seeing the wisdom of this idea, Agamemnon decides to offer Achilles a great stockpile of gifts on the condition that he return to the Achaean lines. The king selects some of the Achaeans' best men, including Odysseus, Great Ajax, and Phoenix, to communicate the proposal to Achilles.

The embassy finds Achilles playing the lyre in his tent with his dear friend Patroclus. Odysseus presents Agamemnon's offer, but Achilles rejects it directly. He announces that he intends to return to his homeland of Phthia, where he can live a long, prosaic life instead of the short, glorious one that he is fated to live if he stays. Achilles offers to take Phoenix, who helped rear him in Phthia, with him, but Phoenix launches into his own lengthy, emotional plea for Achilles to stay. He uses the ancient story of Meleager, another warrior who, in an episode of rage, refused to fight, to illustrate the importance of responding to the pleas of helpless friends. But Achilles stands firm, still feeling the sting of Agamemnon's insult. The embassy returns unsuccessful, and the army again sinks into despair.

The Greek commanders sleep well that night, with the exception of Agamemnon and Menelaus. Eventually, they rise and wake the others. They convene on open ground, on the Trojan side of their fortifications, to plan their next move. Nestor suggests sending a spy to infiltrate the Trojan ranks, and Diomedes quickly volunteers for the role. He asks for support, and Odysseus steps forward. The two men arm themselves and set off for the Trojan camp. A heron sent by Athena calls out on their right-hand side, and they pray to Athena for protection.

Meanwhile, the Trojans devise their own acts of reconnaissance. Hector wants to know if the Achaeans plan an escape. He selects Dolon, an unattractive but lightning-quick man, to serve as his scout, and promises to reward him with Achilles' chariot and horses once the Achaeans fall. Dolon sets out and soon encounters Diomedes and Odysseus. The two men interrogate Dolon, and he, hoping to save his life, tells them the positions of the Trojans and all of their allies. He reveals to them that the Thracians, newly arrived, are especially vulnerable to attack. Diomedes then kills Dolon and strips him of his armor.

The two Achaean spies proceed to the Thracian camp, where they kill twelve soldiers and their king, Rhesus. They also steal Rhesus's chariot and horses. Athena warns them that some angry god may wake the other soldiers; Diomedes and Odysseus thus ride Rhesus's chariot back to the Achaean camp. Nestor and the other Greeks, worried that their comrades had been killed, greet them warmly.

Books 11-12

The next morning, Zeus rains blood upon the Achaean lines, filling them with panic; they suffer a massacre during the first part of the day. But, by afternoon, they have begun to make progress. Agamemnon, splendidly armed, cuts down man after man and beats the Trojans back to the city's gates. Zeus sends Iris to tell Hector that he must wait until Agamemnon is wounded and then begin his attack. Agamemnon soon receives his wound at the hands of

Coon, Antenor's son, just after killing Coon's brother. The injured Agamemnon continues fighting and kills Coon, but his pain eventually forces him from the field.

Hector recognizes his cue and charges the Achaean line, driving it back. The Achaeans panic and stand poised to retreat, but the words of Odysseus and Diomedes imbue them with fresh courage. Diomedes then hurls a spear that hits Hector's helmet. This brush with death stuns Hector and forces him to retreat. Paris answers the Achaeans' act by wounding Diomedes with an arrow, thus sidelining the great warrior for the rest of the epic. Trojans now encircle Odysseus, left to fight alone. He beats them all off, but not before a man named Socus gives him a wound through the ribs. Great Ajax carries Odysseus back to camp before the Trojans can harm him further.

Hector resumes his assault on another part of the Achaean line. The Greeks initially hold him off, but they panic when the healer Machaon receives wounds at Paris's hands. Hector and his men force Ajax to retreat as Nestor conveys Machaon back to his tent. Meanwhile, behind the lines, Achilles sees the injured Machaon fly by in a chariot and sends his companion Patroclus to inquire into Machaon's status. Nestor tells Patroclus about all of the wounds that the Trojans have inflicted upon the Achaean commanders. He begs Patroclus to persuade Achilles to rejoin the battle—or at least enter the battle himself disguised in Achilles' armor. This ruse would at least give the Achaeans the benefit of Achilles' terrifying aura. Patroclus agrees to appeal to Achilles and dresses the wound of a man named Eurypylus, who has been injured fighting alongside Ajax.

We learn that the Achaean fortifications are doomed to be destroyed by the gods when Troy falls. They continue to hold for now, however, and the trench dug in front of them blocks the Trojan chariots. Undaunted, Hector, acting on the advice of the young commander Polydamas, orders his men to disembark from their chariots and storm the ramparts. Just as the Trojans prepare to cross the trenches, an eagle flies to the left-hand side of the Trojan line and drops a serpent in the soldiers' midst. Polydamas interprets this event as a sign that their charge will fail, but Hector refuses to retreat.

The Trojans Glaucus and Sarpedon now charge the ramparts, and Menestheus, aided by Great Ajax and Teucer, struggles to hold them back. Sarpedon makes the first breach, and Hector follows by shattering one of the gates with a boulder. The Trojans pour through the fortifications as the Achaeans, terrified, shrink back against the ships.

Books 13-14

Zeus, happy with the war's progress, takes his leave of the battlefield. Poseidon, eager to help the Achaeans and realizing that Zeus has gone, visits Little Ajax and Great Ajax in the form of Calchas and gives them confidence to resist the Trojan assault. He also rouses the rest of the Achaeans, who have withdrawn in tears to the sides of the ships. Their spirits restored, the Achaeans again stand up to the Trojans, and the two Aeantes (the plural of Ajax) prove successful in driving Hector back. When Hector throws his lance at Teucer, Teucer dodges out of the way, and the weapon pierces and kills Poseidon's grandson Amphimachus. As an act of vengeance, Poseidon imbues Idomeneus with a raging power. Idomeneus then joins Meriones in leading a charge against the Trojans at the Achaeans' left wing. Idomeneus cuts down a number of Trojan soldiers but hopes most of all to kill the warrior Deiphobus. Finding him on the battlefield, he taunts the Trojan, who summons Aeneas and other comrades to his assistance. In the long skirmish that ensues, Deiphobus is wounded, and Menelaus cuts down several Trojans.

Meanwhile, on the right, Hector continues his assault, but the Trojans who accompany him, having been mercilessly battered by the two Aeantes, have lost their vigor. Some have returned to the Trojan side of the fortifications, while those who remain fight from scattered positions. Polydamas persuades Hector to regroup his forces. Hector fetches Paris and tries to gather his comrades from the left end of the line—only to find them all wounded or dead. Great Ajax insults Hector, and an eagle appears on Ajax's right, a favorable omen for the Achaeans.

Nestor leaves the wounded Machaon in his tent and goes to meet the other wounded Achaean commanders out by the ships. The men scan the battlefield and realize the terrible extent of their losses. Agamemnon proposes giving up and setting sail for home. Odysseus wheels on him and declares this notion cowardly and disgraceful. Diomedes urges them all to the line to rally their troops. As they set out, Poseidon encourages Agamemnon and gives added strength to the Achaean army.

Hera spots Zeus on Mount Ida, overlooking Troy, and devises a plan to distract him so that she may help the Achaeans behind his back. She visits Aphrodite and tricks her into giving her an enchanted breastband into which the powers of Love and Longing are woven, forceful enough to make the sanest man go mad. She then visits the embodiment of Sleep, and by promising him one of her daughters in marriage, persuades him to lull Zeus to sleep. Sleep follows her to the peak of Mount Ida; disguised as a bird, he hides in a tree. Zeus sees Hera, and the enchanted band seizes him with passion. He makes love to Hera and, as planned, soon falls asleep. Hera then calls to Poseidon, telling him that he now has free reign to steer the Achaeans to victory. Poseidon regroups them, and they charge the Trojans. In the ensuing scuffle, Great Ajax knocks Hector to the ground with a boulder, and the Trojans must carry the hero back to Troy. With Hector gone, the Achaeans soon trounce their enemies, and Trojans die in great numbers as the army flees back to the city.

Books 15-16

Zeus wakes and sees the havoc that Hera and Poseidon have wreaked while he dozed in his enchanted sleep. Hera tries to blame Poseidon, but Zeus comforts her by making clear that he has no personal interest in a Trojan victory over the Achaeans. He tells her that he will again come to their aid, but that Troy is still fated to fall and that Hector will die after he kills Patroclus. He then asks Hera to summon Iris and Apollo. Iris goes to order Poseidon to leave the battlefield, which Poseidon reluctantly agrees to do, while Apollo seeks out Hector and fills him and his comrades with fresh strength. Hector leads a charge against the Achaeans, and while their leaders initially hold their ground, they retreat in terror when Apollo himself enters the battle. Apollo covers over the trench in front of the Greek fortifications, allowing the Trojans to beat down the ramparts once again.

The armies fight all the way to the ships and very nearly into the Greek camp. At the base of the ships, furious hand-to-hand fighting breaks out. Great Ajax and Hector again tangle. The archer Teucer fells several Trojans, but Zeus snaps his bowstring when he takes aim at Hector. Ajax encourages his troops from the decks of the ships, but Hector rallies the Trojans, and inch by inch the Trojans advance until Hector is close enough to touch a ship.

Meanwhile, Patroclus goes to Achilles' tent and begs to be allowed to wear Achilles' armor if Achilles still refuses to rejoin the battle himself. Achilles declines to fight but agrees to the exchange of armor, with the understanding that Patroclus will fight only long enough to save the ships. As Patroclus arms himself, the first ship goes up in flames. Achilles sends his Myrmidon soldiers, who have not been fighting during their commander's absence, out to accompany Patroclus. He then prays to Zeus that Patroclus may return with both himself and the ships unharmed. The poet reveals, however, that Zeus will grant only one of these prayers.

With the appearance of Patroclus in Achilles' armor the battle quickly turns, and the Trojans retreat from the Achaean ships. At first, the line holds together, but when Hector retreats, the rest of the Trojans become trapped in the trenches. Patroclus now slaughters every Trojan he encounters. Zeus considers saving his son Sarpedon, but Hera persuades him that the other gods would either look down upon him for it or try to save their own mortal offspring in turn. Zeus resigns himself to Sarpedon's mortality. Patroclus soon spears Sarpedon, and both sides fight over his armor. Hector returns briefly to the front in an attempt to retrieve the armor.

Zeus decides to kill Patroclus for slaying Sarpedon, but first he lets him rout the Trojans. Zeus then imbues Hector with a temporary cowardice, and Hector leads the retreat. Patroclus, disobeying Achilles, pursues the Trojans all the way to the gates of Troy. Homer explains that the city might have fallen at this moment had Apollo not intervened and driven Patroclus back from the gates. Apollo persuades Hector to charge Patroclus, but Patroclus kills Cebriones, the driver of Hector's chariot. Trojans and Achaeans fight for Cebriones' armor. Amid the chaos, Apollo sneaks up behind Patroclus and wounds him, and Hector easily finishes him off. Hector taunts the fallen man, but with his dying words Patroclus foretells Hector's own death.

Books 17-18

A fight breaks out over Patroclus's body. Euphorbus, the Trojan who first speared him, tries to strip him of Achilles' armor but is killed by Menelaus. Hector, spurred on by Apollo, sees Euphorbus's fall and comes to help. Menelaus enlists the help of Great Ajax, who forces Hector to back down and prevents the body from being removed or desecrated. He arrives too late to save the armor, however, which Hector dons himself. Glaucus rebukes

Hector for leaving Patroclus's body behind and suggests that they might have traded it for Sarpedon's. Hector reenters the fray, promising to give half of the war's spoils to any Trojan who drags Patroclus's corpse away.

Aware of Hector's impending doom and perhaps pitying it, Zeus temporarily gives Hector great power. Ajax and Menelaus summon more Achaeans to help them, and they soon force the Trojans, including mighty Hector, to run for the city's walls. Aeneas, invigorated by Apollo, rallies the fleeing men to return to the fight, but after much effort they remain unable to take the corpse. Achilles' charioteer, Automedon, becomes involved in the fighting as Zeus imbues his team with fresh strength. Hector tries to kill Automedon so that he can steal the chariot, but Automedon dodges Hector's spear and brings a Trojan down in the process. He strips the Trojan of his armor, claiming that in doing so he eases the grief of Patroclus's spirit, though this present victim could hardly compare to the great Patroclus.

Athena, disguised as Phoenix, gives fresh strength to Menelaus, while Apollo, himself disguised as a Trojan, lends encouragement to Hector. Menelaus sends Antilochus for help from Achilles, who still doesn't know of Patroclus's death. Zeus begins moving the battle in the Trojans' favor but relents long enough for Menelaus and Meriones to carry away Patroclus's body.

When Antilochus brings word to Achilles of Patroclus's death, Achilles loses control of himself. He weeps and beats the ground with his fists and covers his face with dirt. He utters a "terrible, wrenching cry" so profound that Thetis hears him and comes with her water-nymph sisters from the ocean to learn what troubles her son (18.39). Achilles tells her of the tragedy and insists that he shall avenge himself on Hector, despite his knowledge that, should he choose to live the life of a warrior, he is fated to die young. Thetis responds that since Hector now wears Achilles' armor, she will have the divine metalsmith Hephaestus make him a new set, if Achilles will delay exacting his revenge for one day.

Thetis departs, and Iris, sent by Hera, comes to tell Achilles that he must go outside and make an appearance on the battlefield. This appearance alone will scare the Trojans into abandoning the fight for Patroclus's body. Achilles leaves his tent, accompanied by Athena, and lets loose an enormous cry that does indeed send the Trojans fleeing.

That night, each army holds an assembly to plan its next move. In the Trojan camp, Polydamas urges his comrades to retreat to the city now that Achilles has decided to return to battle. Hector dismisses the idea as cowardly and insists on repeating the previous day's assault. His foolhardy plan wins the support of the Trojans, for Athena has robbed them of their wits. Meanwhile, in the Achaean camp, the men begin their mourning for Patroclus. Achilles has men clean Patroclus's wounds to prepare him for burial, though he vows not to bury him until he has slain Hector. Thetis goes to Hephaestus's mansion and begs him to make Achilles a new set of armor. Hephaestus forges a breastplate, a helmet, and an extraordinary shield embossed with the images of constellations, pastures, dancing children, and cities of men.

Book 19-20

Thetis presents Achilles with the armor that Hephaestus has forged for him. She promises to look after Patroclus's body and keep it from rotting while Achilles goes to battle. Achilles walks along the shore, calling his men to an assembly. At the meeting, Agamemnon and Achilles reconcile with each other, and Agamemnon gives Achilles the gifts that he promised him should Achilles ever return to battle. He also returns Briseis.

Achilles announces his intention to go to war at once. Odysseus persuades him to let the army eat first, but Achilles himself refuses to eat until he has slain Hector. All through breakfast, he sits mourning his dear friend Patroclus and reminiscing. Even Briseis mourns, for Patroclus had treated her kindly when she was first led away from her homeland. Zeus finds the scene emotionally moving and sends Athena down to fill Achilles' stomach with nectar and ambrosia, keeping his hunger at bay. Achilles then dons his armor and mounts his chariot. As he does so, he chastises his horses, Roan Beauty and Charger, for leaving Patroclus on the battlefield to die. Roan Beauty replies that it was not he but a god who let Patroclus die and that the same is fated for Achilles. But Achilles needs no reminders of his fate; he knows his fate already, and knows that by entering battle for his friend he seals his destiny.

While the Achaeans and Trojans prepare for battle, Zeus summons the gods to Mount Olympus. He knows that if Achilles enters the battlefield unchecked, he will decimate the Trojans and maybe even bring the city down before its fated time. Accordingly, he thus removes his previous injunction against divine interference in the battle, and the gods stream down to earth. But the gods soon decide to watch the fighting rather than involve themselves in it, and they take their seats on opposite hills overlooking the battlefield, interested to see how their mortal teams will fare on their own.

Before he resigns himself to a passive role, however, Apollo encourages Aeneas to challenge Achilles. The two heroes meet on the battlefield and exchange insults. Achilles is about to stab Aeneas fatally when Poseidon, in a burst of sympathy for the Trojan—and much to the chagrin of the other, pro-Greek gods—whisks Aeneas away. Hector then approaches, but Apollo persuades him not to strike up a duel in front of the ranks but rather to wait with the other soldiers until Achilles comes to him. Hector initially obeys, but when he sees Achilles so smoothly slaughtering the Trojans, among them one of Hector's brothers, he again challenges Achilles. The fight goes poorly for Hector, and Apollo is forced to save him a second time.

Books 21-22

Achilles routs the Trojans and splits their ranks, pursuing half of them into the river known to the gods as Xanthus and to the mortals as Scamander. On the riverbank, Achilles mercilessly slaughters Lycaon, a son of Priam. The Trojan Asteropaeus, given fresh strength by the god of the river, makes a valiant stand, but Achilles kills him as well. The vengeful Achilles has no intention of sparing any Trojans now that they have killed Patroclus. He throws so many corpses into the river that its channels become clogged. The river god rises up and protests, and Achilles agrees to stop throwing people into the water but not to stop killing them. The river, sympathetic to the Trojans, calls for help from Apollo, but when Achilles hears the river's plea, he attacks the river. The river gets the upper hand and drags Achilles all the way downstream to a floodplain. He very nearly kills Achilles, but the gods intervene. Hephaestus, sent by Hera, sets the plain on fire and boils the river until he relents.

A great commotion now breaks out among the gods as they watch and argue over the human warfare. Athena defeats Ares and Aphrodite. Poseidon challenges Apollo, but Apollo refuses to fight over mere mortals. His sister Artemis taunts him and tries to encourage him to fight, but Hera overhears her and pounces on her.

Meanwhile, Priam sees the human carnage on the battlefield and opens the gates of Troy to his fleeing troops. Achilles pursues them and very nearly takes the city, but the Trojan prince Aeneas challenges him to single combat. Achilles' fight with Aeneas—and with Apollo disguised as Aeneas after Aeneas himself has been whisked to safety—allows the Trojans enough time to scurry back to Troy.

Hector now stands as the only Trojan left outside Troy. Priam, overlooking the battlefield from the Trojan ramparts, begs him to come inside, but Hector, having given the overconfident order for the Trojans to camp outside their gates the night before, now feels too ashamed to join them in their retreat. When Achilles finally returns from chasing Apollo (disguised as Aeneas), Hector confronts him. At first, the mighty Trojan considers trying to negotiate with Achilles, but he soon realizes the hopelessness of his cause and flees. He runs around the city three times, with Achilles at his heels. Zeus considers saving Hector, but Athena persuades him that the mortal's time has come. Zeus places Hector's and Achilles' respective fates on a golden scale, and, indeed, Hector's sinks to the ground.

During Hector's fourth circle around the city walls, Athena appears before him, disguised as his ally Deiphobus, and convinces him that together they can take Achilles. Hector stops running and turns to face his opponent. He and Achilles exchange spear throws, but neither scores a hit. Hector turns to Deiphobus to ask him for a lance; when he finds his friend gone, he realizes that the gods have betrayed him. In a desperate bid for glory, he charges Achilles. However, he still wears Achilles' old armor—stolen from Patroclus's dead body—and Achilles knows the armor's weak points intimately. With a perfectly timed thrust he puts his spear through Hector's throat. Near death, Hector pleads with Achilles to return his body to the Trojans for burial, but Achilles resolves to let the dogs and scavenger birds maul the Trojan hero.

The other Achaeans gather round and exultantly stab Hector's corpse. Achilles ties Hector's body to the back of his chariot and drags it through the dirt. Meanwhile, up above on the city's walls, King Priam and Queen Hecuba

witness the devastation of their son's body and wail with grief. Andromache hears them from her chamber and runs outside. When she sees her husband's corpse being dragged through the dirt, she too collapses and weeps.

Books 23-24

At the Achaean camp, Achilles and the Myrmidons continue their mourning for Patroclus. Achilles finally begins to accept food, but he still refuses to wash until he has buried Patroclus. That night, his dead companion appears to him in a dream, begging Achilles to hold his funeral soon so that his soul can enter the land of the dead. The next day, after an elaborate ceremony in which he sacrifices the Achaeans' twelve Trojan captives, Achilles prays for assistance from the winds and lights Patroclus's funeral pyre.

The day after, following the burial of Patroclus's bones, Achilles holds a series of competitions in Patroclus's honor. Marvelous prizes are offered, and both the commanders and the soldiers compete. The events include boxing, wrestling, archery, and a chariot race, which Diomedes wins with some help from Athena. Afterward, Achilles considers stripping the prize from the second-place finisher, Antilochus, to give as consolation to the last-place finisher, whom Athena has robbed of victory so that Diomedes would win. But Antilochus becomes furious at the idea of having his prize taken from him. Menelaus then adds to the argument, declaring that Antilochus committed a foul during the race. After some heated words, the men reconcile with one another.

Achilles continues mourning Patroclus and abusing Hector's body, dragging it around his dead companion's tomb. Apollo, meanwhile, protects Hector's corpse from damage and rot and staves off dogs and scavengers. Finally, on the twelfth day after Hector's death, Apollo persuades Zeus that Achilles must let Hector's body be ransomed. Zeus sends Thetis to bring the news to Achilles, while Iris goes to Priam to instruct him to initiate the ransom. Hecuba fears that Achilles will kill her husband, but Zeus reassures her by sending an eagle as a good omen. Priam sets out with his driver, Idaeus, and a chariot full of treasure. Zeus sends Hermes, disguised as a benevolent Myrmidon soldier, to guide Priam through the Achaean camp. When the chariot arrives at Achilles' tent, Hermes reveals himself and then leaves Priam alone with Achilles. Priam tearfully supplicates Achilles, begging for Hector's body. He asks Achilles to think of his own father, Peleus, and the love between them. Achilles weeps for his father and for Patroclus. He accepts the ransom and agrees to give the corpse back.

That night, Priam sleeps in Achilles' tent, but Hermes comes to him in the middle of the night and rouses him, warning him that he must not sleep among the enemy. Priam and Idaeus wake, place Hector in their chariot, and slip out of the camp unnoticed. All of the women in Troy, from Andromache to Helen, cry out in grief when they first see Hector's body. For nine days the Trojans prepare Hector's funeral pyre—Achilles has given them a reprieve from battle. The Trojans light Hector's pyre on the tenth day.

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