

The Trojan War: Part One

An epic poem is a long narrative that relates the deeds of heroes. Many of the stories of the Trojan War were compiled in an epic poem called the *Iliad* by the author Homer. They are among the oldest stories in literature.

While these tales are clearly mythological, historians believe there really was a Trojan war and that it took place about 1200 B.C. near the coast of Turkey. It might have been a trade war between different groups of Greek-speaking people for control of waters leading into the Black Sea.

The Apple of Discord

The struggle began when Eris [AIR-is], goddess of discord and quarreling, was not invited to the wedding of the hero Peleus [PEE-lee-uhs] and the sea-nymph Thetis [THEE-tis]. Eris threw among the revelers a golden apple inscribed "for the fairest." It rolled right up to where three goddesses were sitting: Hera [HEE-ruh], Athena [uh-THEEN-uh], and Aphrodite [af-roh-DIE-tee]. Of course, each goddess claimed it. Zeus [ZOOS] refused to be the judge of this Olympian beauty contest. He knew no matter how he decided he would never hear the end of it from the others. He told the goddesses to have Hermes [HER-meez] escort them to a mountain near Troy where Paris [PAIR-uhs], a son of King Priam [PRY-uhm], was watching the sheep. The king had sent him away because he had been warned that someday this boy would bring grief and ruin on his country. Paris was supposed to be a good judge of feminine beauty. The

Hera = Juno
Athena = Minerva
Aphrodite = Venus
Zeus = Jupiter, Jove

Hermes = Mercury



goddesses agreed, and Zeus warned them to abide by Paris's choice, however it went. Hermes escorted them to the high pastures of Troy where the shepherd-prince watched his flocks.

Each goddess promised Paris something if he would favor her. Hera offered him kingly power, Athena promised wisdom and glory in war, but Aphrodite, the Love Goddess, offered him the most beautiful woman in the world for his wife. Paris cared nothing for power and glory and, least of all, wisdom. He was young and shallow-minded. He awarded the golden apple to Aphrodite.

Aphrodite promised Paris the most beautiful woman in the world if he would give her the golden apple.

Helen of Sparta

The most beautiful woman in the

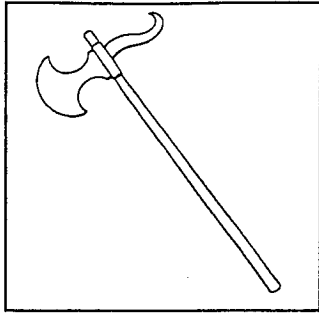
world, Helen of Sparta, was the daughter of Zeus and Princess Leda [LEE-duh]. Of course, every prince in Greece wanted to marry her. Her mother's new husband, King Tyndareus [tin-DAR-ee-uhs] of Sparta, had to choose among the suitors. He was afraid that whoever he chose would have to fight for Helen against all the rest. To prevent this, he made them all take an oath that they would accept his decision and support the cause of Helen's husband if any wrong were committed against him because of this marriage. The suitors, each thinking he might be the one chosen, swore the oath and promised solemnly to punish any man who interfered with the marriage. Tyndareus then chose Menelaus [men-eh-LAY-uhs], brother of Agamemnon [ag-uh-MEM-non], King of Mycenae, and made Menelaus a king of Sparta, too.

Meanwhile, Aphrodite led Paris directly to Sparta. Menelaus and Helen received the Trojan prince graciously. They trusted him so completely that Menelaus went off on an expedition to Crete, leaving his wife to entertain their guest. The ties between host and guest among the Greeks were sacred, but Paris violated that trust, with the help of Aphrodite, who turned her arts on Helen and made her fall madly in love with the boy. When Menelaus got back he found his guest gone and his wife with him.

Here the oath and pact of the suitors went into effect. The brother of the injured husband, King Agamemnon of Mycenae, as commander in chief, was able to rally nearly all of the Greek kings to bring Helen back.



Helen of Sparta



The Trojan War: Part Two

Valiant Warriors

Agamemnon gathered together hundreds of ships and set sail for Troy. The ships carried many men brave in battle and some wise in counsel.

Chief among them was Achilles [uh-KILL-eez], the greatest warrior and champion of all the Greeks.

The Greek kings and army were strong, but so were the defenders of Troy. King Priam [PRY-uhm] and Queen Hecuba [HEH-kue-buh] had many valiant sons ready both for attack and defense. But first and foremost there was Prince Hector [HEK-ter]. He was not only brave but noble—in every way a match for Achilles. In a sense, the whole outcome of the war hung on when, where, and how these two might meet. The Fates had revealed that each would die before Troy would be overthrown. Both heroes lived and fought under the shadow of certain death.

The gods, as they always do, took sides: Hera [HEE-ruh] and Athena [uh-THEEN-uh], who had lost out in the “beauty contest” were naturally for the Greeks. Poseidon [poh-SIE-don], Sea God, also favored the Greeks. Aphrodite [af-roh-DIE-tee], Artemis [AR-tem-is], and Ares [AIR-eez] were for the Trojans. Zeus [ZOOS] and Apollo [uh-PAW-loh], who as a healer and physician did not favor war, were neutral.

And so the Trojan War would shake both heaven and earth.

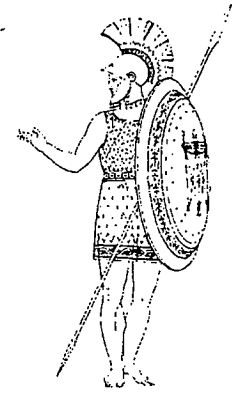
It went on for nine years, the fighting swaying back and forth—a stalemate. The Greeks could not take Troy, and the Trojans could not drive out the Greeks.

The Death of Patroclus and the Rousing of Achilles

One evening Achilles waited by his tent for his friend Patroclus [PAT-roh-kluhs] to come back from the day's fighting. He had loaned Patroclus his armor. But when he saw Antilochus [an-tee-LO-kuhs] running toward him, tears running down his face, he knew something was terribly wrong.

“Bad news, oh, bad news!” cried Antilochus. “Patroclus is slain; Hector has his armor.”

Wild grief seized Achilles. He was filled with rage and anger at the death of his dearest friend. So black and bitter was his



Greek Warrior

Hera = Juno

Athena = Minerva

Poseidon = Neptune

Aphrodite = Venus

Artemis = Diana

Ares = Mars

Zeus = Jupiter, Jove

Apollo = Apollo



Heroes of the Trojan War: Odysseus, Hector, and Achilles

mood that those around him feared for his life. Down in the sea caves his mother, Thetis [THEE-tis], heard his lament and came up to comfort him. He told her that if he could not avenge his comrade he was no longer worthy to live among men. "Remember," she said, "you are fated to die after Hector." "I care not," he replied. "I did not help my friend when he needed me. I will slay his destroyer. Then I can accept my own death without remorse."

Hephaestus = Vulcan



Hephaestus [hee-FES-tuhs], at the request of Thetis, forged a new suit of mail and new weapons for Achilles. The shield was a marvel. The blacksmith god made it a work of art, with pictures and engravings of the earth and high heavens, the sea, sun, and moon, and the signs of the Zodiac and major constellations: the Pleiades and Orion and the Big Bear (Callisto). Also engraved on the shield were two beautiful cities, showing all the life of a Greek city of that time, with marriage feasts and dancing and law courts. It was a marvelous shield, indeed. When Thetis presented it to her son, Achilles was filled with great joy.

The Trojan War: Part Three



Athena = Minerva
Ares = Mars
Hera = Juno
Artemis = Diana
Poseidon = Neptune
Apollo = Apollo

Zeus = Jupiter, Jove

The Death of Hector and the Ransoming of His Body

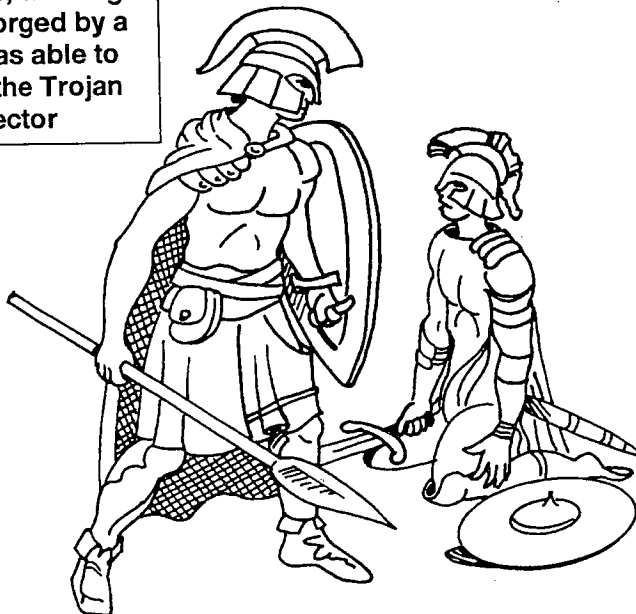
Achilles [uh-KILL-eez], wearing his new armor, left his tent and went to where his comrades and special troops, the Myrmidons, were waiting. They gazed at him with admiration and awe. Their need for him was desperate. Many of the soldiers were either wounded or exhausted.

The Trojans, under Hector [HEK-ter], fought gallantly, desperately, and madly. Even the great river of Troy, called Xanthus or Scamander, took part and tried to drown Achilles as he crossed it. But it was all in vain—the Champion of the Greeks came on, killing all who stood in his way, looking for Hector. The gods were fighting too. Athena [uh-THEEN-uh], War Goddess, knocked down Ares [AIR-eez], War God. Hera [HEE-ruh] grabbed Artemis's [AR-tem-is-iz] bow away from the Huntress and boxed her ears with it, as she had wanted to do for some time. Poseidon [poh-SIE-don] jeered at Apollo [uh-PAW-loh] and dared him to strike first, but Apollo wisely refused. He knew what Fate had in store for Hector—why struggle?

Zeus [ZOOS] watched the fracas from above and chuckled to see god fighting god, civil war within his Olympian family. How he had tried to keep them in order!

By now the great Scaean gates of Troy were thrown open, and the people—soldiers and citizens—were streaming into the town. Only Hector, bound by Fate, took his stand before the walls. From the top of the gate, his old father, Priam [PRY-uhm], and mother, Hecuba [HEH-kue-buh], called down to him to save himself and come inside, but he wouldn't listen. He had a task to perform for the honor of his country, regardless of the danger to himself.

Achilles, wearing armor forged by a god, was able to defeat the Trojan Hector



Achilles threw his spear. Hector crouched and it flew over his head.

Hector threw his spear and missed. Athena brought Achilles a fresh spear. Hector, drawing his sword, the only weapon he had, rushed his foe. It was no contest. Achilles wore armor, wrought by a god, which could not be pierced. Hector wore the armor he had taken from Patroclus that had once belonged to Achilles. The Greek champion knew of a small open spot in the neck of that armor. He drove his spearpoint into Hector's throat. Falling and dying, the Trojan hero begged that his body be returned to his parents. But Achilles steadfastly refused, and the valiant soul of Hector took flight for Hades.

Most of the gods, watching from above, were shocked and appalled by Achilles' refusal to return Hector's body to his family. Zeus was especially displeased. He sent Iris [I-ris], his rainbow-messenger, to poor, old Priam to tell this tragic king of Troy that he must ransom and redeem the body of his son. She was to tell the old man that Achilles was not really evil, but was overwrought by the death of his friend, Patroclus. If Priam went to him as humble petitioner, a suppliant, Achilles would receive him with courtesy and hear his plea.

Heeding the god's words, Priam filled a chariot with treasure and went to the Greek camp with Hermes [HER-meez] as his guide. Meanwhile, the funeral rites for Patroclus had been performed. These religious ceremonies had softened the heart of Achilles and cured him of his rage and grief. He now felt bad for not returning Hector's corpse, so he was in the right mood when Priam came into his presence, knelt down, embraced his knees, and kissed the hands that had killed his son.

Achilles' heart grew tender with grief. He received the old man with all kindness and respect. He guaranteed a truce for Hector's funeral rites and returned his body to Priam. He told his servants to anoint Hector's body with fragrant oil and cover it with a downy robe.

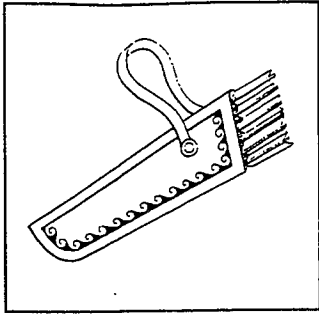
The mourning went on for nine days. Then they laid him on a high funeral pyre. When all was reduced to ashes, they put out the fire with wine and placed the bones in a golden funeral urn, then covered it in a purple shroud. They dug a grave and set the urn in it and covered it with big stones.

Hermes = Mercury



Hermes

The Trojan War: Part Four



The Wooden Horse and the Fall of Troy

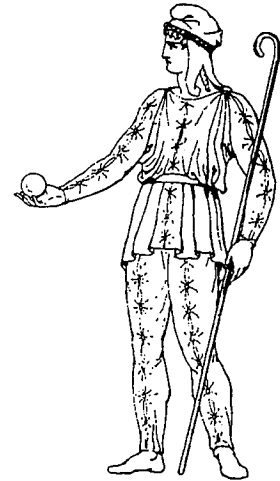
Even the longest wars must end sometime. The war between the Greeks and the Trojans ended finally after ten years—not by a decisive military victory, but by a strategic trick.

Hector [HEK-ter] was dead, and Achilles [uh-KILL-eez] knew his own end was near. He fought on and won more glory. But then, as the Greeks laid siege again to the city of Troy, Paris [PAIR-is], whose “judgment” had started the war, shot an arrow at him. Guided by Apollo [uh-PAW-loh], it flew true to the one spot where Achilles could be hurt—his heel. When he was a baby, his mother, Thetis [THEE-tis], had dipped him in the River Styx to make him invulnerable to weapons. She neglected, however, to dip the part of his foot by which she held him. So the Champion of the Greeks died of an infected, festering wound in the heel.

The only way to gain a victory would be to take the town of Troy by surprise. The great Greek warrior Odysseus [oh-DIS-see-uhs] developed the strategy of the wooden horse. He found a skilled artisan, a woodcarver, to make a wooden horse, hollow and big enough to hold a whole squad of men inside, including himself. The plan was for the other Greeks to dismantle the camp, take to the ships, and pretend to be sailing off for home. Instead, they would hide behind the nearest islands and headlands. A single Greek would be left behind with a story made up to persuade the Trojans to take the horse into the city without inspecting it too closely. In the darkest part of the night, the Greeks hidden in the horse would come out and open the city gates. Meanwhile, the main part of the army would come back and be ready by the wall.

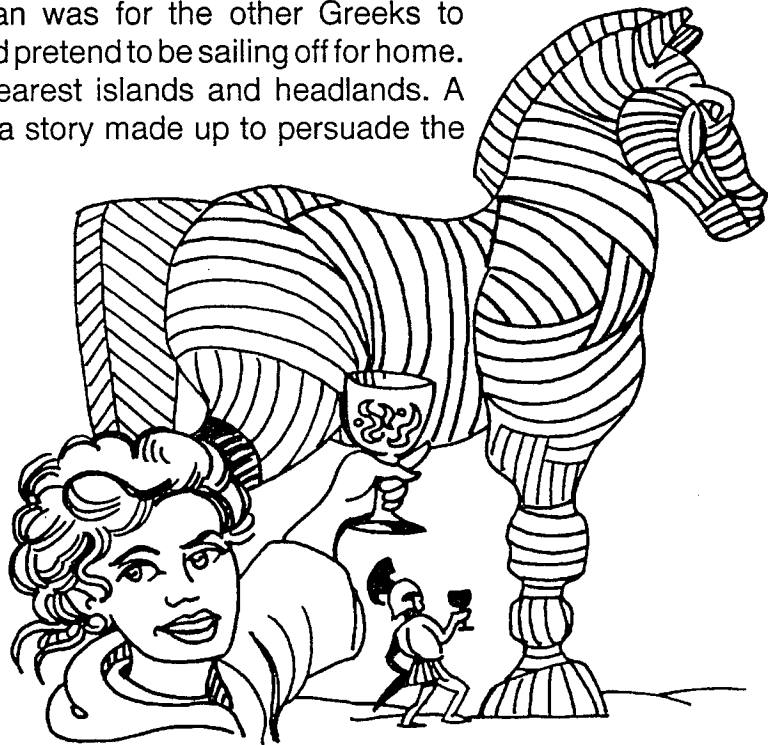
When dawn came, the last day for Troy, the Trojans beheld two sights that amazed them: the deserted Greek camp and the enormous wooden horse by the Scaean gates. The horse rather frightened them, but the departure of the Greeks filled them with joy, and they began to feast and celebrate. The long, cruel war was over at last!

Then the Greek left behind, Sinon [SIE-non], appeared. They



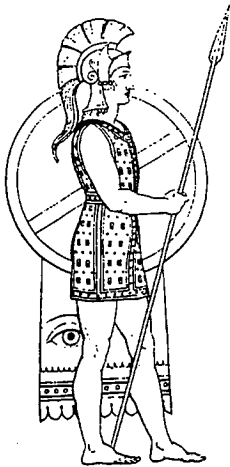
Paris

Odysseus = Ulysses



Greek warriors hid inside the wooden horse until the Trojans let down their guard.

Athena = Minerva



Greek Warrior

dragged him to King Priam [PRY-uhm] where, under questioning, he groaned and cried that he was a Greek no more. Athena [uh-THEEN-uh], he said, had been greatly angered by the theft of one of her statues by the Greek soldiers. An oracle had told the Greeks she could only be appeased with blood sacrifice. Poor Sinon had been chosen for the sacrifice, but at night he had escaped and hidden out in the marshes along the river until the ships sailed off. (Odysseus had invented this story.)

The Trojans, exhilarated by the end of the war, showed compassion to Sinon and brought him food and drink. Sinon went on to explain about the horse. It had been made as an offering to Athena, he told them. It had been made big so that the Trojans would find it hard to take it into the city. The Greeks hoped the Trojans would destroy it, bringing down the wrath of Athena upon them. But if somehow it could be taken into the city, it would win the favor of the goddess.

They dragged the horse to the gate and even knocked down part of the wall to give it more room. Once they had set it up inside they went on their way, feasting and rejoicing, feeling both exhilaration and exhaustion after ten years of war and siege.

At midnight, as the city slept, Odysseus and the other chiefs crept out of the horse and dropped down into the street. They threw the gates open wide; the Greek army waiting outside rushed in. They lit fires. They stationed small bands of warriors by each house. By the time the Trojans woke up and discovered the terrible truth, Troy was burning. In utter confusion, as they struggled out, putting on their armor, they were met by Greeks who cut them down.

By morning King Priam and all the Trojan princes and chieftains were dead except Aeneas [ee-NEE-uhs], saved by his mother, Aphrodite [af-roh-DIE-tee], the only god who helped a Trojan that day. Aeneas fought as long as he could, then he went to see to the safety of his own family: his father, his wife, and their little son. Guided by Aphrodite, the four of them

Aphrodite = Venus



Trojans ran for their lives as the Greeks burned and looted the city.

ran quickly through the flaming streets, Aeneas carrying his father on his back, clasping his son's hand, his wife hurrying along by their side. But in the fear and panic of that awful time, his wife was separated from the rest and lost. Aeneas got his father and son away through the gates and out into the open fields. Though he mourned the loss of his wife, he would live long and have many adventures, and his descendants would be the founders of a great city—Rome.

Aphrodite saved Helen, too. Menelaus [men-eh-LAY-ohs] had been looking for her through the streets of the burning city, his sword poised to kill her and avenge his honor. But when the Love Goddess brought her to him, his love for her overwhelmed him. Gladly he took her into his arms, and soon they would sail away together, back to Sparta.

So it happened that Troy—the fortress city that had withstood the attacks of the Greek heroes for ten years—was conquered by deceit and treachery.



Aphrodite Leading
Aeneas to Safety