

TROJAN WAR: A QUICK CHEAT SHEET

For a long time, scholars used to think that "Troy" was an imaginary city. Because of the mythological elements to the story, it is easy to see why they thought so. However, an amateur archeologist named Heinrich Schliemann actually uncovered the ruins of this city. It apparently was sacked and destroyed sometime around 1200 BCE.

Sometime around 800 BCE, Homer writes his version of the city's fall in *The Iliad*. (The title we use today comes from "Ilium," a Latin term for Troy.) In Homer's account, the conflict begins as a squabble among the gods.

At the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, the goddesses attending the wedding decide not to invite the goddess Discord. (Her name means "Trouble"; she is also called Eris or sometimes Chaos.) Enraged at this snub, Discord creates a beautiful golden apple and labels it with a tag that reads, "For the fairest." She then tosses this apple into the middle of the wedding party.

Hera, Aphroditê, and Athena each proclaim that this beautiful gift must be intended for herself alone, since she is obviously the most beautiful one. The fight gets out of hand, so they decide to find a judge.

They settle upon a handsome Trojan shepherd-prince named Paris and ask him to decide who is most beautiful. The goddesses come and parade their bodies before him. They also try to bribe him. Respected Hera offers him prestige, honor, and power in the community where he lives. Clever Athena offers him wisdom in military matters so he could become a great conqueror. Sexy Aphroditê offers him the most beautiful woman in the world as his lover. Paris settles on Aphroditê. Unfortunately, the most beautiful woman in the world is already married: Helen.

As a girl several years earlier, Helen had been cursed with such beauty that every man who saw her lusted after her. Fifty powerful princes, generals, and warriors had competed for her hand. When she refused them all, they ended up drawing lots for her hand in marriage, making a vow to abide by this lottery and promising to gang up and attack any man who tried to steal Helen away from the man who won her.

Menelaus, king of Sparta, wins the game, and he takes Helen away to Lacedemonia. Aphroditê arranges for Paris to visit Menelaus' palace, where he betrays his host by abducting Helen. The couple flees back to Troy, where King Priam and Queen Hecuba reluctantly agree to give Helen shelter for Paris's sake.

Menelaus immediately calls upon his brother (the general Agamemnon) and the other suitors to aid him in his war to retrieve Helen from Troy. All of them come forward except Achilles (who has been warned by the gods not to get involved) and Odysseus, who has just married Penelope and is happy at home with his new baby

son. These two try to scheme their way out from their duty, but eventually they join with the others to attack Troy.

It takes two years for the Greeks to assemble the fleet, and Agamemnon sacrifices his own daughter Iphigenia to the gods to win good weather for his journey. The heroes fighting on the Greek side initially include Achilles (a fierce, cruel warrior who was nearly invulnerable except for one spot on his ankle), Patroclus (Achilles' best friend and sidekick), Ajax (a strong but rather stupid giant of a man), Diomedes (a courteous and handsome prince), Odysseus (a trickster famous for his cunning plans and clever lies), Stentor (a man with a deafeningly loud voice), and Nestor and Mentor (two of the eldest and most experienced warriors). On the Trojan side several men serve the aged King Priam and Queen Hecuba. Prince Paris (Helen's lover) fights alongside Hector (a family man who deeply loves his children), Aeneas (one of the few survivors of the war), Deiphobus, Glaucus, and Sarpedon. The gods also squabble and take sides. Hera and Athena and Poseidon help the Greeks, while Aphroditê and Ares help the Trojans. Apollo and Zeus are either impartial or vacillate in their support between one side and the other.

The battle is largely a stalemate, and the siege lasts for another eight years (making the expedition take ten years long in total). When the Greeks begin arguing among themselves over treasure and slave-girls, Achilles feels insulted and refuses to fight any more. In his absence, Hector kills Patroclus in battle. Angered and grieved by the death, and feeling guilty for his selfishness, Achilles turns to his mother Thetis. She talks the god Hephaestus into building a magic shield and enchanted armor for him. (Patroclus had been wearing Achilles' old armor when he died in battle.) With this new armor, Achilles seeks out Hector and kills him, then mutilates the body and drags it around the city behind his chariot to humiliate the Trojans and old King Priam. His barbarism completely demoralizes Troy, but Achilles dies when an arrow hits his heel.

Since neither army can gain the upper hand, Odysseus suggests a clever trick. He has the Greeks build a giant wooden idol of a horse containing a secret entrance where soldiers can hide. The Greeks sail away, pretending to give up battle, but actually anchor their boats just out of sight from Troy. When the Trojans send scouts and discover the Greeks are gone, they take the beautifully carved wooden horse as plunder and bring it inside their city--thinking it must surely be a holy item to Athena. Only the priest Laocoön and the prophet Cassandra warn against this action, but hostile gods shut them up before their warnings can take hold. After the Trojans fall asleep, exhausted by their victory celebrations, the secret panel in the Trojan horse opens up. Out creeps Odysseus and several other Greek soldiers, and they cut the gatekeepers' throats and throw open the city gates for the invading Greek army before setting the city on fire. The city is completely sacked and burned, old King Priam and his wife are ruthlessly slaughtered along with his grandchildren, and the civilization of Troy is utterly destroyed. Now it's all over but the journey home. Unfortunately, for Odysseus that voyage is trickier than it first appears. . . .