When Helen, queen of Sparta, was taken across the sea to the city of Troy by its prince Paris, her husband Menelaus raised a large Achaean (Greek) force, led by his brother King Agamemnon, to bring her back. In the war's ninth year, Agamemnon offended proud Achilles, so he, their greatest hero of war, vowed to fight no more till the matter was redressed. His goddess-mother Thetis persuaded Zeus, king of the gods, to favor the Trojans in battle, though the Immortals knew Troy (also called Ilium) was eventually doomed to fall.

Paris and Menelaus met in single combat to decide claims to Helen and her treasure. But when Paris lost, the goddesses Hera and Athena caused the fighting to resume. The Olympians took sides—Apollo and Aphrodite favoring the Trojans, Hera and Athena the Argives (Greeks), and the war god Ares first one side, then the other. At last Zeus forbade any gods to take part in the war, and he himself turned the tide in favor of Troy and her allies. The Achaeans were driven behind their shipwall, and the Trojans encamped on the plain outside their city. With the dawn, says Hector, Troy's greatest warrior, they will destroy the fortifications—and the Achaeans....
Thus did the Trojans watch as the night wore on. But panic, corroded by blood-stained rout, had taken hold of the Achaeans, and their princes were all of them in despair.

Agamemnon summoned his chiefs to a council and spoke to them amid heavy sighs...

My friends, the hand of heaven has been laid heavily upon me.

Now, therefore, let us all sail back to Argos...

Cruel Zeus swore that I should sack Troy... but he has played me false.

For we shall never take that wide-walled city!
Son of Atreus, do you truly think the Achaeans so unwarlike—so cowardly?

If your own mind is set upon going home—go! The way is open to you. But the rest of us will stay here till we have sacked Troy!

Though young, Diomedes, you have spoken wisely.

I was wrong in what I did, Nestor... I admit it.

Agamemnon— I urged you not to take the girl Briseis from Achilles, but in your pride you dishonored our mightiest warrior.

Let us now appease him, with gifts and fair words.

I will send to Achilles an embassy composed of Ajax and Odysseus—and led by Phoenix here, whom he loves.

Erëlong, the three emissaries approached the ships and tents of the Myrmidons...

See, Patroclus, three who are dearest to me of the Achaeans draw near.

All hail and welcome! You must come upon some great matter.
Every man shall have his full cup of wine.

We lack no food or drink, Achilles... but we are in the face of a great disaster.

The Trojans believe nothing can prevent them from burning our fleet.

You will repent bitterly if you do not save the Achaeans now.

Put away your anger and forgive Agamemnon...

...and he will give you ten talents of gold... twelve strong horses... and much besides.

Your choice for a wife among his three daughters...

...and seven cities with her.

He will restore Briseis - whom he swears he has never taken to his couch -
And when Troy falls, you may take her twenty loveliest women after Helen herself.

Odysseus, I'll not fight for hated Agamemnon... not even to gain glory by slaying Hector.

Tomorrow morning, if you care to look, you will see my ships rowing out to sea.

If Poseidon grant me fair passage, in three days I shall be in Phthia.
My mother, divine Thetis, tells me there are two ways I may meet my end.

If I stay here and fight, I'll not return alive, but my name will live forever.

If I go home, my name will die, but it will be long ere death shall take me.

To all of you, I say--"Go home, for you will not take Ilion!"

Noble Achilles, I reared you and trained you, when your father, Peleus, cast you out.

If you are now minded to return, how can I remain here without you?

But I beg you to take Agamemnon's gifts and return to the fray...

...for then the Achaeans will honor you as a god.

Phoenix, old Friend, I've no need of such honor, for I have honor from Zeus himself.

Stay here, and at daybreak we will consider whether to remain or leave.

Odysseus, let us be gone...

...for I see that our journey here has been made in vain.
When Agamemnon learned Achilles arrived, he again called his chiefs...

I stand in need of shrewd counsel to save the Argives and our ships.

Is there any man bold enough to venture among the Trojans and bring us news of what the enemy mean to do?

I will go... but better if there were two of us.

Diomede, man after my own heart... choose your companion, for all have offered.

I will take Odysseus, for he is quick to see and understand... and Athena loves him well.

Together we should pass safely through fire itself.

When the pair had armed...

Let us be going... for two-thirds of the night are already spent.
Piomedes—someone it may be a spy—or some thief who would plunder the dead. Let us lie down among the corpses and let him get a little past us...

NOR DID HECTOR LET THE TROJANS SLEEP, FOR HE TOO CALLED A COUNCIL...

Is there one who will go find whether the Achaeans mean to rise in their ships... or perhaps by sheer exhaustion fail to keep their watches? He who dares will win infinite honor... and the Argives' fleetest horses.

I, Hector! I, Dolon, will go to the ships...

...if you swear to give me the chariot and horses of Achilles himself?

May Zeus bear witness that no Trojan but you shall mount those steeds!

MEANWHILE, DIOMEDES AND ODYSSEUS PROVOLED LIKE TWO LIONS AMID THE ARMOR AND BLOOD-STAINED BODIES OF THOSE WHO HAD FALLEN...

I hear the cry of a herald upon our right hands—a sign from Athena.

If she guard us now, I will sacrifice a young child to her.

Diomedes—someone comes! It may be a spy—or some thief who would plunder the dead.

Let us lie down among the corpses and let him get a little past us...
Tell us--do all the Trojan camps have watchfires?

Behind me--

Be you friends from the Trojan camp?

No! You are Achaeans!

Take me alive, I beg you--and my father will satisfy you with a very large ransom!

Aye! But our Thracian allies, only lately arrived under King Khesus, leave it to the Trojans to keep guard while they sleep.

Tell me here, till you have proved if my words be false or true.

If we ransom you, you will come a second time to spy or as an open enemy--
But if I make an end of you...

...you will give me no more trouble.

Soon Diomede and Odysseus came to the sleeping Thracian soldiers, tired out with their days toil...

...with their king sleeping in their midst... his fine horses hard by.

Athena put courage into the heart of Diomede...

...and he shot right and left, killing twelve of them...

...and Theseus was the thirteenth...
Meanwhile, Odysseus had made fast the horses, one to another...

...and now he and P涅ades flew onward to the ships of the Achaeans.

Soon, at the camp of Nestor...

I never saw or heard of horses such as those you brought back.

Surely some god has met you and given them to you.

Heaven, if it willed, could give us even better horses... but these are freshly brought from Thrace by the king we killed.

And, as dawn brought light alike to mortals and immortals, Zeus sent forth the fierce goddess Discord, with the ensign of war in her hands...

Get thee to the ships of Odysseus, in the middle of the Achaeus line...

...that your voice may carry to the tents of Ajax and Achilles on the nether ends.
Argives! Gird yourselves for combat!

Let every man now let his charioteer hold his horses in readiness...

...while you go forward into battle on foot!

...and she raised a cry both loud and shrill.

It filled the Achaeans with courage, giving them heart to fight on.

And Agamemnon, son of Atreus, shouted aloud as he donned his armor...

By the ships come from Ithaca, Discord took her stand...
The Trojans, on the rising slope of the plain, were gathered round great Hector, Polydamus, Menelaus, and the sons of Antenor...

...and now, as a band of reapers now swathes of wheat... so did the Trojans and Achaeans fall upon one another.

Discord was glad as she beheld them.

They fought like wolves...

...until, at midday, Agamemnon led the way in breaking the battalions of the enemy...

Onward, Achaeans...
For surely, Zeus means us to take Troy itself this day!

But as the king of Argos was about to reach the high-walled city...

...the King of gods called his divine messenger to the crest of Mount Ida.

Go, fleet Iris...

...and speak thus to Hector...

Son of Priam... so long as you see Agamemnon pressing forward, let others bear the brunt of the battle.

But when he is wounded, Zeus will give you strength to play till night falls again.

'Behold how Iphidamas, son of Antenor—a brave man of great stature—now confronts the Argives' commander...'

With twelve ships I set sail from fertile Trachinian land—

But I left them at Percote and came here by land—
--so I could fight you Achaeans the sooner!

While you prattle, your spear is turned aside by my belt of silver--

And your own weapon draws you--

---within reach of my sword!

---you have killed my brother, Agamemnon--

But I will revenge his fall--and rescue his body!

And who will rescue yours--

---when I've sent two sons of Antenor down into the house of Hades!
Yet, when Hector saw wounded Agamemnon quit the field, he plunged in among the foremost...

Trojans—Lycians—Pandinians! Be men, and acquit yourself bravely! Their king has left them—and Zeus has promised me a great triumph!

Then, when he spied two fierce Achaeans wreaking havoc amongst the Trojans...

Diomedes! Odysseus!

Great Hector is bearing down upon us!

We must stand firm against his onset!

But Hector fell to his knees...for darkness had fallen upon his eyes...

Dog! You will not escape from death this time!

Lord Apollo, who saved our Hector from Diomedes' spear—
--let not the arrow of Paris speed in vain!

Come, brother! Would I had hit him in the belly!

Then the Trojans would have had a truce from evil!

I will draw the arrow forth.

Hah! It pierces his foot—fixing itself in the ground!

Paris! Without your bow you are nothing but a seducer!

When I strike a man—vultures, not women, gather round him!

As Diomedes was driven to the ships and Argives fled in panic, Odysseus faced the Trojans alone.

Even when wounded, he fought on...

...for Athena had not suffered the spear to pierce his entrails.
Meanwhile, Achilles saw it all and took note, as he stood on the stern of his ship...

I shall now have the Argives praying at my knees—

For they are in great straits, retreating through the great doors of their ships.

Peroclus—go ask Nestor if that is Mechos, son of the healer Aesculapius, that he is bearing wounded in his chariot.

Aye, cousin.

I shall now have the Argives praying at my knees—

For they are in great straits, retreating through the great doors of their ships.

Peroclus! It is good to see you.

Achilles sent me to learn if it was Mechos you brought from the field.

I see that it is, and must go tell him.

Why should Achilles care to know how many Achaians may be wounded?

Will he wait till our ships are in a blaze before he acts?

You know what a vengeful man he is.
Aye. The Achaeans may thus have time to catch their breath.

If Achilles will not fight, then let him send his Myrmidons!

Let him send you into battle clad in his armor, so the Trojans think you are he.

And they might leave off fighting?

Nestor—you have moved my heart.

BATTLE AND TURMOIL RAGED ROUND THE LOOMING WOODEN WALL AND SHARP-STAKED TRENCH...

...AND THE ARGIVES WERE HEMMED IN AT THEIR SHIPS IN FEAR OF NEKTOR, WHO FOUGHT WITH THE FORCE AND FURY OF A WHIRLWIND.

AND THE TROJAN HOST, EXHORTED BY THE NIGHTIEST SON OF PRIAM, MOVED FORWARD TO BRAVE THE YAWNING TRENCH...
Yet their horses could neither jump it nor cross it...

...but stood neighing frightened upon its wide brink...

"As combat raged at the wall like burning fire..."

Hector sprang from his chariot, that the other Trojans might do the same.

Follow me on foot, Paris—all of you—

And if the day of their doom is at hand, the Achaeans will not be able to withstand us!

Raising a loud cry of battle, the warriors of Ilium made straight for the wooden ramparts...

...the shields above their heads warding off the Argives' thunderstorm of stones.

But even as they sought to scale the trench...

--a soaring eagle skirted their left wing—a monstrous blood-red snake struggling in its talons...

--and writhing till it struck the bird that held it...
AND WAS DROPPED INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE HOST.

Hector—just as the eagle loosed her hold, so will it be with ourselves.

It is a sign we must not fight the Achaeans at their ships!

Has fear robbed you of your reason, Polydamus?

There is one omen, and one only—

—that a man should fight for his country!

THEN, AS ZEUS SENT A MIGHTY WIND FROM MOUNT IDA, THE TROJANS TORE DOWN THE BREASTWORKS FROM THE ARGIVES' WALLS...

AND UPHAVED THE BUTTRESSES BEFORE THEM.

AJAK WENT ABOUT EVERYWHERE ON THE WALLS...

...WHILE TEUKER RAINED DOWN ARROWS ON THE ATTACKERS.

Argives! Let no man turn in flight—but press forward!
May Zeus grant us to repel our foes—

—and drive them back towards the city!

The Trojan Epicles, his helmet and the Bones of his skull crushed by Ajax's jagged stone—

fell from the high wall as though he were dying, with no more life left in him.

And then came the time when the father of gods gave the greater glory to Hector...

Up, Trojans!

Let us break the ramparts of the Argives—
--as almighty Zeus makes light this boulder in my hands!

YEEAAAHHH!!
Now in, all you sons of Ilium—
--and fling fire upon their ships!

NEXT:
WHEN THE GODS MAKE WAR...
The Glossary of the Iliad

**Appease** – to bring to a state of peace, quiet, ease or calm

**Charioteer** – driver of a light, two-wheeled vehicle for one person, usually drawn by two horses and driven from a standing position

**Embassy** – a body of persons entrusted with a mission to a sovereign or government not their own

**Ensign** – a flag or banner

**Entrails** – internal parts, intestines

**Ere** – before

**Fertile** – bearing, producing, or capable of producing vegetation, crops, etc.

**Fray** – a fight or battle

**Gird** – to prepare (oneself) for action

**Heifer** – a young cow over one year old that has not produced a calf

**Hemmed** – enclosed or confined

**Heron** – a bird characterized by being long-legged, long-necked and usually long-billed

**Onset** – an assault or attack

**Play** – to use or manipulate, especially for one’s own interests

**Plunder** – to rob or steal

**Prattle** – to talk in a foolish or simple-minded way

**Rampart** – a broad embankment raised as a fortification; a protective barrier

**Repent** – to feel sorry or regret past conduct

**Sack** – to pillage or loot after capture; plunder

**Seducer** – a person who leads others astray usually by persuasion or false promises

**Shrewd** – of a practical or sharp intelligence

**Shrill** – a loud, piercing sound

**Smote** – past tense of *smite*, meaning to strike or hit hard, with or as if with the hand, a stick, or other weapon

**Stern** – the rear part of a ship or boat

**Straits** – a position of difficulty, perplexity, distress, or need

**Swath** – the width of a scythe stroke or a mowing-machine blade

**Talent** – a variable unit of weight and money used in ancient Greece, Rome, and the Middle East