

ILIAD: BOOK SUMMARIES BETWEEN READINGS

Books 2–5

Book 2: Zeus sends a dream commanding Agamemnon to attack Troy. Agamemnon feigns a desire to return home as a test of the Achaeans; failing the test, the mass of Greeks rush towards their ships to return home, but Odysseus and Nestor rally the troops. Thersites, the ugliest Greek, rails against the leaders, but is beaten into silence. A fresh invocation of the Muses precedes account of Greek strength in the *Catalogue of Ships*, which is followed by a shorter catalogue of the *Trojan Forces*.

Book 3: As the battle rages below, Iris takes human form and tells Helen to go to the wall, where Priam and the elders are gazing onto the plain. At Priam's request she names and points out the greatest warriors of the Achaeans. Paris agrees to a duel with Menelaus to settle his transgression. As the fight begins, Menelaus' sword breaks on Paris' helmet. Then, he seizes Paris by the chinstrap and drags him towards the Achaean lines. Paris' fate seems sealed, but Aphrodite makes the strap break, and rescues Paris in a cloud, taking him back to his own bedchamber. Taking the shape of an old woman, she bullies Helen and drives her into Paris' arms. Agamemnon claims victory for his brother and the return of Helen and the booty: the war, he declares, is at an end.

Book 4: On Olympus, Hera and Athena demand the destruction of Troy. At Hera's request Zeus agrees to send Athena to the Trojan field, where she provokes Pandarus to break the armistice by shooting Menelaus. The latter is wounded, but speedily healed by Machaon, son of Asclepius and physician to the army. Agamemnon urges on the heroes with words of praise or censure. Last to be addressed is Diomedes, whom Agamemnon singles out for reproach. Unlike Achilles, Diomedes takes rebuke patiently. The battle begins again.

Book 5: Diomedes, the son of King Tydeus, fights at the front of the battle lines in his *aristeia*. Athena helps him wound Aphrodite as that goddess is bearing her Trojan son Aeneas off the battlefield. Apollo's warning voice keeps Diomedes from attacking him too. Hera and Athena plunge into the fray; the latter even serves as Diomedes' charioteer. With their help he wounds Ares, who flees to Olympus. The goddesses finally withdraw.

Books 7–8

Book 7: Hector wreaks havoc, and Apollo keeps Athena from helping the Greeks. Ajax is chosen to face Hector in single combat; they fight till night without result. Priam's brother-in-law Antenor advises the Trojans to give up Helen, but Paris refuses. The Greeks build a wall and dig a moat to protect their ships.

Book 8: Zeus forbids the gods to take part in the battle, which he surveys from the summit of Mount Ida. At midday Zeus weighs the lots of the opposing armies: the scales decide for the Trojans. Hera is obstinate in her determination to break the commands of Zeus: she tries unsuccessfully to persuade Poseidon to intervene in the fighting and gives fresh courage to Agamemnon. Zeus appears and explains his plan for the future: the next day is to bring even more misfortune to the Greeks, and Hector will remain unchecked until Achilles takes the field in defense of the ships and fighting rages round the corpse of Patroclus. At nightfall, the Trojans remain camped on the plain.

Book 10–21

Book 10: While others sleep Agamemnon and Menelaus, who wander anxiously about the camp. They decide to send Odysseus and Diomedes to reconnoiter. Hector also has sent out a spy, Dolon, promising him the horses of Achilles. Odysseus and Diomedes capture Dolon, and before killing him learn of the arrival of the Thracian king Rhesus with his splendid horses. They kill Rhesus and twelve of his followers, and ride back to camp with the horses.

Book 11: The next day's fighting begins with the *aristeia* of Agamemnon. Zeus sends Iris to Hector, telling him to hold back while Agamemnon is fighting. Many Greeks wounded, including Agamemnon and Diomedes. Achilles, viewing the battle from the prow of his ship, wants to know whom Nestor is rescuing, and sends Patroclus to find out. The old man holds Patroclus long in conversation and urges him to persuade Achilles to fight, or alternatively to give his arms to Patroclus and send him into the fray. Patroclus, moved by this appeal, hurries back; on his way he meets the wounded Eurypylus, who needs medical help and gives a poor account of Greek prospects.

Book 12: The Achaeans fight to defend the wall round their ships. Hector's first proposal, to drive at it headlong in their chariots, is opposed by Polydamas, who wishes to leave the chariots at the edge of the ditch. The fate of Asius, who assaults the wall single-handedly in his chariot, shows that Polydamas cannot be disregarded. The Trojans, attacking in five companies, are appalled by an evil omen, and Polydamas counsels withdrawal. Hector rejects the warning and renews the attack. Sarpedon breaks down part of the palisade, and Hector shatters one of the gates with a great stone.

Book 13: Despite the commands of Zeus, a disguised Poseidon encourages the Achaeans to fight bravely. In the long drawn-out battle that follows the Achaean resistance grows stiffer. Polydamas calls for a concentration of the Trojan force and warns

Hector that Achilles will not remain idle much longer. Hector accepts the advice to call his men together, but disregards the reference to Achilles. The battle continues.

Book 14: Nestor leaves the wounded Machaon, to find how the battle is going. He meets Diomedes, Odysseus, and Agamemnon, all returning wounded from the fray. For the third time Agamemnon speaks of withdrawal, now in terms of flight under cover of darkness. Odysseus and Diomedes disagree. Poseidon encourages the king, and his voice puts heart into the army. Hera borrows Aphrodite's enchanted girdle and distracts Zeus. Poseidon vigorously encourages the Achaeans, and soon a stone from Ajax lays Hector low. He is long senseless, and meanwhile the Trojans suffer other setbacks.

Book 15: The Trojans have been driven back over the ditch when Zeus wakes up and sees how he has been deceived. Zeus orders Apollo to heal Hector. Poseidon unwillingly obeys the command brought by Iris. Hector, with renewed strength drives the Greeks back into their camp. Apollo himself levels the ditch and breaches the wall. As the Trojans enter, Patroclus leaves the wounded Eurypylos and runs to Achilles. Already the Trojans bearing firebrands are approaching the nearest ships, and only Ajax offers effective resistance.

Book 16: Patroclus' tearful entreaties are wasted on Achilles, who still cannot forget the injustice done him. Nevertheless he sends Patroclus with the Myrmidons and lends him his own armor, telling him to repel the Trojans from the ships, but to go no further, lest he diminish Achilles' reputation or meet some god who favors the Trojans. Patroclus drives back the Trojans from the ships and kills Sarpedon, a son of Zeus. Patroclus forgets his friend's warning and attacks the very walls of Troy. Apollo repulses him and takes the form of Asius, summoning Hector to fight Patroclus. As the sun sinks, the god himself comes behind Patroclus and strikes him between the shoulders so that his arms fall from him. Euphorbus wounds him from behind with a spear, and Hector transfixes him with his lance. Patroclus predicts Hector's demise.

Book 17: A furious battle rages round Patroclus' corpse. The Achaeans defend the body, led by Menelaus and Ajax. Thick darkness overtakes the combatants. Athena and Apollo add further fury to the fight around the corpse. At the prayer of Ajax, Zeus takes away the darkness: Menelaus sends Antilochus, the son of Nestor, to Achilles with the fatal tidings. Menelaus and Meriones drag away the body but this fight continues.

Book 18: Achilles is seized with such violent grief that Thetis and the Nereids come from the sea to comfort him. She reminds him that Hector's death must shortly be followed by his own. The body of Patroclus is still in danger, and Achilles, directed by Iris and endowed with fearful stature by Athena, runs to the ditch, where his war cry stuns the Trojans. Hera hastily makes the sun set, and the battle ends. Polydamas repeats his warning, but Hector makes the Trojans camp in the field so as to renew the battle next day. Achilles bewails his dead friend while Hephaestus, at Thetis' entreaty, makes new arms for him. The divine smith forges a wondrous shield with metal inlays displaying all the scenes of human life.

Book 19: At dawn Thetis brings these arms to her son, and preserves Patroclus' body with ambrosia. Achilles calls for a meeting of the host, briefly renouncing his resentment, while Agamemnon in a long speech laments the folly that Zeus had sent upon him and promises reparation. He also swears that he has never touched Briseis. Achilles' impatience will hardly brook delay while the army eats. The forces are marshaled and Achilles arms himself. His horse speaks, prophesying his death.

Book 20: For the last battle, the most ferocious of all in the Iliad, Zeus leaves the gods free to do what they will. As they enter the lists, Zeus thunders and Poseidon sends an earthquake, but as yet they are spectators. The Greeks are supported by Hera, Athena, Poseidon, Hermes, and Hephaestus; the Trojans, by Apollo, Artemis, Ares, and Aphrodite. Achilles first meets Aeneas, whom Poseidon rescues. Apollo saves Hector from death once again. Achilles rages like a forest fire in dry woods.

Book 21: Achilles fills the Scamander with corpses, and takes twelve youths prisoner to be sacrificed for Patroclus. Lycaon, Priam's son, pleads in vain for his life; he, too, is slain and thrown into the river. The river god protests, but Achilles rages on unheeding. Scamander now threatens him with his waters. The gods briefly but inconclusively among themselves. Agenor posts himself before the gate to withstand Achilles' assault, but Apollo rescues him, takes his shape, and lures Achilles away, so that the fleeing Trojans can withdraw within the walls.

Book 23: A funeral feast held for Patroclus. His shade appears to Achilles and prays for speedy cremation. Next morning the pyre is made ready: the flames are fed with sumptuous offerings, among them the twelve Trojan captives. The next day the bones of Patroclus are gathered together, and elaborate funeral games with costly prizes are celebrated. In the various contests Odysseus and Ajax are pitted against each other—craft against strength. The indecisive wrestling-match is a foretaste of the later 'judgment of arms'—a theme probably known to Homer. It is significant that Achilles plays the part of the peacemaker in a dispute over the chariot-race. Here we have an anticipation of the Achilles of the ransom scenes.