

# The Iliad

## Book Eighteen The Arms of Achilles

*[Antilochus brings the news to Achilles of Patroclus' death; Achilles collapses in grief; Thetis hears his grief, talks to her sister Nereids, then visits Achilles, promises to bring him new armour from Hephaestus; Iris visits Achilles with a message from Hera; Achilles displays himself to the Trojans by the ditch and wall; Trojans debate what to do; Polydamas advises retreat; Hector opposes him; Achaeans take Patroclus' body back to the ships, begin their laments over Patroclus; Thetis visits Hephaestus, requests new armour for Achilles; Hephaestus makes new armour, especially a new shield; Thetis leaves with the armour]*

As the men fought on like a blazing fire raging,  
swift-footed Antilochus came to Achilles  
with his news. He found Achilles by his beaked ship,  
sensing in himself what had already happened,  
speaking with a troubled mind to his own great heart:

“Why are long-haired Achaeans once again  
retreating to their ships, being beaten back  
across the plain in terror? I hope the gods  
have not done something that will break my heart.

[10] My mother told me once they'd do that,  
when she told me that while I was alive  
the best man of the Myrmidons would leave  
the sun's light at the hands of Trojans.  
So it must be the case that the fine son  
of Menoetius is dead, that reckless man.  
I told him to return back to the ships,  
once he'd saved them from consuming fire,  
and not face up to Hector man to man.”

As Achilles in his mind and heart was thinking this,  
[20] noble Nestor's son approached, shedding warm tears.  
He told him the agonizing truth:

“Son of warlike Peleus,  
you must hear this dreadful news—something

I wish weren't so—Patroclus lies dead.  
Men are fighting now around the body.  
He's stripped. Hector with his gleaming helmet  
has the armour."

Antilochus finished speaking.  
A black cloud of grief swallowed up Achilles.  
With both hands he scooped up soot and dust and poured it  
on his head, covering his handsome face with dirt,  
[30] covering his sweet-smelling tunic with black ash.  
He lay sprawling—his mighty warrior's massive body  
collapsed and stretched out in the dust. With his hands,  
he tugged at his own hair, disfiguring himself.  
The women slaves acquired as battle trophies  
by Achilles and Patroclus, hearts overwhelmed  
with anguish, began to scream aloud. They rushed outside  
and beat their breasts around warlike Achilles.  
Then all the women's legs gave way, and they fell down.  
Across from them, Antilochus lamented,  
[40] eyes full of tears, as he held Achilles by the hand.  
Achilles' noble heart moaned aloud. Antilochus  
feared he might hurt himself or slit his throat  
with his own sword. Achilles gave a huge cry of grief.  
His noble mother heard it from the ocean depths  
where she was sitting by her ancient father.  
She began to wail. Then around her gathered  
all the divine daughters of Nereus deep in the sea—  
Glauce, Thaleia, Cymodoce, Nesaea,  
Speio, Thoe, ox-eyed Halië, Cymothoë,  
[50] Actaia, Limnoreia, Melite, Iaira,  
Amphithoe, Agave, Doto, Proto,  
Pherousa, Dynamene, Dexamene,  
Amphinome, Callianeira, Doris, Panope,  
lovely Galatea, Nemertes, Apseudes,  
Callianassa. Also there were Clymene,  
Ianeira, Ianassa, Maera, Orithyia,  
Amatheia with her lovely hair, and others,

Nereus' daughters living in the ocean depths.  
They filled the glistening cave, beating their breasts.  
Thetis led them all in their laments:

[60] "Sister Nereids, listen,  
so all of you, hearing what I say,  
will understand my heart's enormous sorrow.  
Alas, for my unhappy misery,  
that to my grief I bore the best of men.  
For when I gave birth to a fine strong boy  
to be an excellent heroic warrior,  
when he'd grown as tall as some young sapling,  
for I'd raised him like a lovely orchard tree,  
I sent him out in the beaked ships to Ilion,  
[70] to war against the Trojans. But now,  
I'll never welcome him back home again,  
returning to the house of Peleus.  
While he's still alive and sees the sunlight,  
he lives in sorrow. When I go to him,  
I can provide no help. But I shall go  
to look on my dear child, to hear what grief  
has overtaken him while he remains  
detached from all the fighting."

With these words,  
Thetis left the cave. Her sisters went with her in tears.  
[80] Around them sea waves parted, until they came  
to fertile Troy. They emerged, climbing up on shore,  
one after another, right where the Myrmidons  
had dragged up their ships in close-packed formation  
near swift Achilles. Then his noble mother moved  
beside him, as he was groaning bitterly.  
With a sharp cry, she cradled her son's head, then spoke.  
As she grieved, she talked to him—her words had wings:

"My child, why are you crying? What sorrow now  
has come into your heart? Speak out. Hide nothing.

[90] Zeus has given you what you begged him to  
when you stretched your hands out to him—  
all Achaea's sons by their ships' sterns  
are hemmed in there, desperate for your help,  
suffering a terrible ordeal."

With a heavy groan,  
swift-footed Achilles then answered Thetis:

"Yes, Mother,  
Olympian Zeus has indeed accomplished  
what I asked. But what pleasure's there for me,  
when Patroclus, my beloved companion,  
has been destroyed, the man I honoured  
[100] as my equal, above all my comrades.  
I've lost him and the armour, which Hector took,  
once he'd killed him, that massive armour,  
so wonderful to look at, which the gods  
gave as a priceless gift to Peleus  
on that day they placed you in the bed  
of a mortal man. If only you had stayed  
among the eternal maidens of the sea  
and Peleus had married a mortal wife.  
But now there'll be innumerable sorrows  
[110] waiting for your heart, once your child is killed.  
You won't be welcoming him back home again.  
My own heart has no desire to live on,  
to continue living among men,  
unless Hector is hit by my spear first,  
losing his life and paying me compensation  
for killing Menoetius' son, Patroclus."

Through her tears, Thetis then answered Achilles:

"My son, from what you've just been saying,  
you're fated to an early death, for your doom  
[120] comes quickly as soon as Hector dies."

Swift-footed Achilles answered her with passion:

“Then let me die, since I could not prevent  
the death of my companion. He’s fallen  
far from his homeland. He needed me there  
to protect him from destruction. So now,  
since I’m not returning to my own dear land,  
and for Patroclus was no saving light  
or for my many other comrades,  
all those killed by godlike Hector while I sat  
[130] here by the ships, a useless burden  
on the earth—and I’m unmatched in warfare  
by any other Achaean armed in bronze,  
although in council other men are better—  
so let wars disappear from gods and men  
and passionate anger, too, which incites  
even the prudent man to that sweet rage,  
sweeter than trickling honey in men’s throats,  
which builds up like smoke inside their chests,  
as Agamemnon, king of men, just now,  
[140] made me enraged. But we’ll let that pass.  
For all the pain I feel, I’ll suppress the heart  
within my chest, as I must. So now I’ll go  
to meet Hector, killer of the man I loved.  
As for my own fate, let it come to me  
when Zeus and the other deathless gods  
determine. For not even strong Hercules,  
the man lord Zeus, son of Cronos, loved the most,  
escaped his death. He was destroyed by Fate  
and by malicious Hera’s anger, too.  
[150] And so for me. If a like fate has been set,  
then once I’m dead, I’ll just lie there. But for now,  
let me seize great glory—let me make  
so many Trojan and Dardan matrons weep,  
and with both hands wipe tears from their soft cheeks,  
and set them on to constant lamentation,

so that they'll know I've long refrained from war.  
Don't keep me from battle. Though you love me,  
you'll not convince me."

Silver-footed Thetis  
then said to Achilles:

"My child, what you say is true—  
[160] it's no bad thing to protect companions  
when they're in trouble from complete disaster.  
But now the Trojans have your lovely armour,  
all your glittering bronze. It's on the shoulders  
of Hector with the shining helmet—  
he boasts about it. But I don't think  
his triumph will last long, since his death  
is coming closer. But you must not rejoin  
Ares' conflict until with your own eyes  
you see me in the morning here again.  
[170] I'll return at sunrise, and I'll bring you  
lovely armour made by lord Hephaestus."

Saying this, Thetis turned away from her own son  
to address her ocean sisters:

"Now you must plunge  
into the broad lap of Ocean and go find  
the Old Man of the Sea in our father's house.  
Tell him everything. I'll go to high Olympus,  
to that famous artisan Hephaestus,  
to see if he is willing to give my son  
some splendid glittering armour."

Thetis spoke.

[180] Her sisters quickly plunged under the waves.  
Then the silver-footed goddess Thetis went away  
to fetch that lovely armour from Olympus  
for her beloved son.

As Thetis' feet carried her  
towards Olympus, Achaeans were running back,  
with a huge noise, fleeing man-killing Hector,  
until they reached their ships beside the Hellespont.  
But those well-armed Achaeans couldn't extricate  
Achilles' comrade, dead Patroclus, from the spears,  
for they'd been overtaken by Trojan warriors  
[190] and chariots once again, with Hector, Priam's son,  
as furious as fire. Three times glorious Hector,  
from behind, seized the corpse's feet, keen to drag it off,  
shouting furiously to his Trojans. Three times,  
the two Ajaxes, clothed in their full battle strength,  
beat him from the corpse. But Hector kept on coming  
without a pause, confident of his fighting power.  
Sometimes he charged right at them in the frenzied crowd.  
Sometimes he just stood there and gave a mighty yell,  
but he never yielded any ground. Just as shepherds  
[200] are unable to drive off from their farmyard  
a tawny ravenous lion by some carcass—  
so the two warrior Ajaxes could not push Hector,  
Priam's son, back from that body. And now Hector  
would have seized that corpse, winning infinite glory,  
if swift Iris with feet like wind had not come down,  
speeding from Olympus to the son of Peleus,  
with a message that he should arm himself for war.  
Hera had sent her, unknown to Zeus and other gods.  
Standing by Achilles, Iris spoke—her words had wings:  
  
[210] "Rouse yourself, son of Peleus, most feared of men.  
Defend Patroclus. For on his behalf  
a deadly conflict rages by the ships—  
men are butchering each other, some trying  
to protect the dead man's corpse, while others,  
the Trojans, charge in to carry it away  
to windy Ilion. The one most eager  
to haul the body off is glorious Hector,

whose heart is set on hacking off the head  
from its soft neck. He'll fix it on a stake  
[220] set in the wall. So get up. No more lying here.  
Your heart will be disgraced if Patroclus  
becomes a plaything for the dogs of Troy—  
his mutilated corpse will be your shame.”

Swift-footed godlike Achilles then asked her:

“Goddess Iris, which of the gods sent you  
with this message to me?”

Swift Iris,  
with feet like wind, then said to Achilles:

“Hera sent me, Zeus’ glorious wife.  
Cronos’ son, who sits on high, doesn’t know,  
[230] nor do any other immortal gods  
inhabiting snow-capped Olympus.”

Swift-footed Achilles then questioned Iris:

“But how can I rejoin that conflict?  
Those men have my armour. My dear mother  
has told me not to arm myself for war,  
not until my own eyes see that she’s come back.  
She promised to bring me splendid armour  
from Hephaestus. I don’t know anyone  
whose glorious equipment I could use,  
[240] with the exception of the shield of Ajax,  
son of Telamon. But I expect he’s out there  
with his spear among the front-line warriors  
in that conflict over dead Patroclus.”

Wind-swift Iris then answered Achilles:

“We know well enough your lovely armour



is in Trojan hands. But you should go now,  
just as you are, to the ditch. Show yourself  
to Trojans. It may happen that the Trojans,  
afraid of you, will pull back from battle,  
[250] giving Achaea's exhausted warlike sons  
a breathing space. For rests in war are rare."

With these words, swift-footed Iris went away.  
Then Achilles, loved by Zeus, moved into action.  
Around his powerful shoulders Athena set  
her tasselled aegis. Then the lovely goddess  
wrapped his head up in a golden cloud, so from him  
a fiery light blazed out. Just like those times when smoke  
from a city stretches all the way to heaven,  
rising in the distance from an island under siege  
[260] by an enemy, where men fight all day long  
in Ares' hateful war, struggling for their city—  
then at sunset, they light fires one by one,  
beacons flaming upwards to attract attention  
from those on near-by islands, so their ships will come  
to save them from destruction—that's how the light  
blazed then from Achilles' head right up to heaven.  
He strode from the wall, then stood there by the ditch.  
But recalling what his mother had said to him,  
he didn't mingle with Achaeans. As he stood there,  
[270] he cried out. From far away, Pallas Athena  
added her voice, too, causing great consternation  
among the Trojans. As thrilling as a trumpet's note  
when it rings clearly, when rapacious enemies  
besiege a city—that's how sharp and piercing  
Achilles' voice was then. When the Trojans heard it,  
that brazen shout Achilles gave, all their hearts  
were shaken. Their horses with the lovely manes  
turned back the chariots, anticipating trouble  
in their hearts. Charioteers were terrified, seeing  
[280] the fearful inextinguishable fire blazing  
from the head of the great-hearted son of Peleus.

For Athena, goddess with the glittering eyes,  
kept it burning. Three times godlike Achilles yelled  
across that ditch. Three times Trojans and their allies  
were thrown into confusion. At that moment,  
twelve of their best men were killed by their own chariots  
and their own spears. Achaeans then, with stronger hearts,  
pulled Patroclus out of spear range and laid him on a cot.  
His dear companions gathered mourning round him,  
[290] Achilles with them, shedding hot tears when he saw  
his loyal companion lying on a death bed,  
mutilated by sharp bronze. He'd sent him out to war  
with chariot and horses, but never welcomed him  
at his return.

Then ox-eyed queen Hera  
made the unwearied sun, against his will, go down  
into the stream of Ocean. So the sun set.  
Godlike Achaeans now could pause for some relief  
from the destructive killing of impartial war.

For their part, once Trojans drew back from that harsh fight,  
[300] they untied swift horses from their chariots and then,  
before they thought of food, called for a meeting.  
There everyone stayed standing. No one dared sit down,  
all terrified because Achilles had appeared,  
after his long absence from that savage conflict.  
The first to speak was Polydamas, Panthous' son,  
a prudent man, the only one who weighed with care  
the past and future. He was Hector's comrade,  
both born on the same night. As a public speaker,  
he was the better of the two, but Hector  
[310] far surpassed him with a spear. Bearing in mind  
their common good, Polydamas addressed them:

"My friends, consider both sides of this issue.  
For my part, I advise us to return  
into the city—we should not stay here,

on the plain, waiting for dawn beside the ships.  
Our walls are far away. While Achilles  
kept up his anger at lord Agamemnon,  
Achaeans were easier to fight against.  
Personally, I was glad to spend the night  
[320] by their swift ships, hoping then we'd capture  
those curved vessels. But now I really have  
a dreadful fear of Peleus' swift-footed son.  
He has a reckless heart—he's not a man  
to rest content in the middle of the plain,  
where Trojans and Achaeans have a share  
of Ares' battle fury. No, he'll fight on  
for our city and our women. So let's go back,  
return into the city. Trust me when I say  
that's how things will go. For now, sacred night  
[330] has stopped the swift-footed son of Peleus.  
But if tomorrow he moves into action  
fully armed and encounters us still here,  
we'll recognize him well enough. Anyone  
who gets away and makes it back to Ilion  
will be a happy man. For dogs and vultures  
will eat many Trojans. I don't want to hear  
that such events have happened. If we all  
follow my advice, although reluctantly,  
tonight we'll collect our forces in one group.  
[340] Walls, high gates, and doors with fitted planks,  
polished and bolted shut, will guard the city.  
But in the morning early, we'll arm ourselves,  
then take up our positions on the walls.  
If Achilles comes from the ships keen to fight  
for our walls, then he'll be disappointed.  
He'll go back to his ships, once he's worn out  
his strong-necked horses with too much running,  
scampering around below our city wall.  
His heart won't let him force his way inside,  
[350] and he'll not lay waste our city, not before  
our swift dogs eat him up for dinner."

With a scowl, Hector of the flashing helmet then replied:

“Polydamas, what you say displeases me—  
you tell us to run back to the city  
and stay inside it. Haven’t you already  
been cooped up long enough within those walls?  
In earlier days, all mortal men would claim  
that Priam’s city was rich in gold and bronze.  
But now those splendid treasures are all gone.

[360] Many goods from our own homes we’ve sold.  
They went to Phrygia or fair Maeonia,  
once great Zeus, in anger, turned against us.  
But now, when crooked-minded Cronos’ son  
allows me to win glory by the ships,  
hemming the Achaeans in beside the sea,  
this is no time, you fool, to say such things  
before the people. Not a single Trojan  
will take your advice. I won’t permit it.  
But come, let’s all follow now what I suggest.

[370] You must take your dinner at your stations  
all through the army, making sure you watch,  
with every man awake. Any Trojan  
too concerned about his property  
should gather it up and give it to the men  
for common use. Better that one of us  
gets use from it than that Achaeans do.  
Tomorrow morning early, right at dawn,  
we’ll fully arm ourselves with weapons,  
then take keen battle to those hollow ships.

[380] If indeed it’s true that lord Achilles  
is returning to that battle by the ships,  
if he wants that, so much the worse for him.  
I won’t run from him in painful battle,  
but stand against him, fighting face to face,  
whether great victory goes to him or me.  
In war the odds are equal, and the man

who seeks to kill may well be killed himself.”

Hector spoke. The Trojans roared out in response.

The fools! Pallas Athena had robbed them of their wits.

[390] They all applauded Hector’s disastrous tactics.

No one praised Polydamas, who’d advised them well.

Then throughout the army they ate their dinner.

Meanwhile, Achaeans mourned Patroclus all night long

with their elegies. Among them, Peleus’ son

began the urgent lamentations, placing

his murderous hands on the chest of his companion,

with frequent heavy groans, like a bearded lion,

when a deer hunter in dense forest steals its cubs—

the lion comes back later, then sick at heart

[400] roams through the many clearings in the forest,

tracking the man’s footprints, in hopes of finding him,

as bitter anger overwhelms the beast—just like that

Achilles, amid his groans, addressed his Myrmidons:

“Alas, what a useless promise I made then,

the day I tried to cheer Menoetius up

at home, telling him when I’d sacked Ilion,

I’d bring his splendid son back there to him,

in Opoeis, and with his share of trophies.

But Zeus does not bring to fulfilment

[410] all things which men propose. Now both of us

share a common fate, to redden the same earth

right here in Troy. Old horseman Peleus

will not be welcoming me at my return

back to his home, nor will my mother Thetis.

For in this place the earth will cover me.

And now, Patroclus, since I’m journeying

under the earth after you, I’ll postpone

your burial till I bring here Hector’s head,

his armour, too, the man who slaughtered you,

[420] you courageous man. I’ll cut the throats

of twelve fine Trojan children on your pyre,  
in my anger at your killing. Till that time,  
you'll lie like this with me by my beaked ships,  
and round you Trojan and Dardanian women  
will keep lamenting night and day, shedding tears,  
the very women we two worked hard to win  
with our strength and our long spears, by looting  
prosperous cities of mortal men."

After these words, godlike Achilles told his comrades  
[430] to place a large tripod on the fire, so they could wash  
the blood clots from his comrade's corpse. On the blazing fire,  
they set a cauldron with three legs, poured water in it,  
then brought split wood to burn below the water.  
Fire licked the cauldron's belly and made the water hot.  
Once it had boiled inside the shining bronze,  
they washed him, rubbed oil thickly over him,  
and filled his wounds with ointment nine years old.  
Then they placed Patroclus on a bed, covering him  
with a fine woollen cloth from head to foot  
[440] and a white cloak on the cloth. Then all night long,  
the Myrmidons around swift-footed Achilles  
mourned Patroclus with their lamentations.

Then Zeus spoke to Hera, his sister and his wife:

"You've got what you wanted, ox-eyed queen Hera.  
Swift-footed Achilles you've spurred into action.  
From your own womb you must have given birth  
to these long-haired Achaeans."

Ox-eyed queen Hera  
then replied to Zeus:

"Most dread son of Cronos,  
what are you saying? Even a human man,  
[450] though mortal and ignorant of what I know,

can achieve what he intends for someone else.  
And men say I'm the finest of all goddesses  
in a double sense—both by my lineage  
and my marriage to the ruler of the gods.  
So why should I not bring an evil fortune  
on these Trojans when they've made me angry?"

Thus these two conversed with one another then.

Meanwhile, silver-footed Thetis reached Hephaestus' home.  
Made of eternal bronze and gleaming like a star,  
[460] it stood out among the homes of the immortals.  
The crippled god had constructed it himself.  
She found him working with his bellows, moving round,  
sweating in his eager haste. He was forging  
twenty tripods in all, to stand along the walls  
of his well-built house. Under the legs of each one  
he had fitted golden wheels, so every tripod  
might move all on its own into a gathering of the gods  
at his command and then return to his own house.  
They were wonderful to look at. His work on them  
[470] had reached the stage where finely crafted handles  
had still not been attached. He was making these,  
forging the rivets. As he was working on them  
with his great skill, silver-footed goddess Thetis  
approached more closely. Noticing her, Charis,  
lovely goddess with the splendid veil, came forward—  
she was wife to the celebrated crippled god.  
Taking Thetis by the hand, she called her name, and said:

"Long-robed Thetis, why visit our house now?  
You're a welcome and respected guest, but to this point  
[480] you haven't come by very much. Do step inside.  
Let me show you our hospitality."

With these words, the goddess led her inside the house.  
She asked Thetis to sit in a silver-studded chair,

beautifully finished, with a footstool under it.  
Then she called the famous artisan Hephaestus:

“Come here, Hephaestus. Thetis needs to see you.”

The celebrated lame god then replied to Charis:

“Here’s a fearful honoured goddess in my home,  
the one who saved me when I was in pain,  
[490] after my great fall, thanks to my mother,  
that shameless one, eager to conceal me,  
because I was a cripple. At that time,  
I would have suffered heartfelt agonies,  
if Thetis and Eurynome, daughter  
of circling Ocean stream, had not taken me  
into their hearts. With those two, for nine years  
I made many lovely things—brooches,  
spiral bracelets, earrings, necklaces—  
inside their hollow cave. The Ocean stream  
[500] flowed round me, always with the roar of surf.  
No one else knew, neither god nor mortal man.  
But Thetis and Eurynome—the ones  
who rescued me—they knew.\* And now Thetis  
has come into my home. So I must give her  
full recompense—fair-haired Thetis saved my life.  
But Charis, show her now our hospitality.  
I’ll put away my bellows and my tools.”

Huge god Hephaestus got up from the anvil block  
[510] with laboured breathing. He was lame, but his thin legs  
moved quickly under him. He placed his bellows  
far from the fire and collected all his work tools,  
then stored them in a silver chest. With a sponge,  
he wiped his face, both hands, thick neck, and hairy chest.  
Then he pulled on a tunic and came limping out,  
gripping a sturdy staff. At once he was helped along  
by female servants made of gold, who moved to him.



They look like living servant girls, possessing minds,  
hearts with intelligence, vocal chords, and strength.  
[520] They learned to work from the immortal gods.  
These women served to give their master detailed help.  
Hephaestus came limping up to Thetis and sat down  
in a shining chair. Then, clasping her hand, he spoke:

“Long-robed Thetis, why have you come here,  
to our house, an honoured welcome guest?  
To this point, you haven’t come here often.  
But say what’s on your mind. My heart tells me  
I shall do it, if I can accomplish it,  
if it’s something that can be carried out.”

Thetis answered him in tears:

[530] “Oh, Hephaestus,  
is there any goddess on Olympus  
who’s suffered so much painful sorrow  
in her heart to equal the unhappiness  
that Zeus, son of Cronos, loads on me  
more than any other god? Of all goddesses  
living in the sea, he made me subject  
to a mortal man, Peleus, son of Aeacus.  
So I had to put up with a man in bed,  
though much against my will. Now he lies there,  
[540] in his home, worn out by harsh old age.  
And I have still more pain. He gave me a son  
to bear and raise as an outstanding warrior.  
The boy grew up as quickly as a sapling.  
Then, when I had reared him like a tree  
in a fertile garden, I sent him off  
in the beaked ships to fight at Ilion  
against the Trojans. I’ll never welcome him  
returning home to the house of Peleus.  
And while he still lives to glimpse the sunlight,  
[550] he lives in sorrow. When I visit him,

I cannot help him. Achaea's sons chose for him  
as his prize a girl, whom great Agamemnon  
seized right out of his arms. In grief for her,  
his heart has pined away. Then the Trojans  
penned Achaeans in by their ships' sterns,  
not letting them come out. The senior men  
among the Argives pleaded with my son.  
They promised splendid gifts. But he refused,  
declining to protect them from disaster.

[560] But then he sent Patroclus to the war,  
dressing him in his own armour, providing  
a force of many men. They fought all day  
around the Scaean Gates, and that very day  
would have utterly destroyed the city,  
if Apollo had not killed Menoetius' son,  
after he'd inflicted bloody carnage.  
He killed him at the front, giving Hector  
all the glory. That's why I've come here now,  
asking at your knees if you'd be willing  
[570] to give my son, who is fated to die soon,  
a shield, helmet, good leg armour fitted  
with ankle clasps, and body armour, too.  
His previous equipment was all taken  
when Trojans killed his loyal companion.  
Now my son lies in the dust, heart filled with pain."

The famous crippled god then answered Thetis:

"Cheer up. Don't let these things afflict your heart.  
I wish I could hide him from distressful death,  
when his cruel fate arrives, as surely  
[580] as I know there'll be fine armour for him—  
such splendid armour that it will astound  
all the many men who chance to see it."

With these words, Hephaestus left her there, going to start  
his bellows. He directed them right at the fire,

then told them to start working. So the bellows,  
twenty in all, started blowing on the crucibles,  
each one emitting just the right amount of air,  
sometimes blowing hard to help when he was busy,  
sometimes gently, whatever way Hephaestus wished,  
[590] so his work could go ahead. He threw on the fire  
enduring bronze and tin, precious gold and silver.  
Next, he placed the great anvil on its block, took up  
a massive hammer in one hand and in the other his tongs.

The first thing he created was a huge and sturdy shield,  
all wonderfully crafted. Around its outer edge,  
he fixed a triple rim, glittering in the light,  
attaching to it a silver carrying strap.  
The shield had five layers. On the outer one,  
with his great skill he fashioned many rich designs.  
[600] There he hammered out the earth, the heavens, the sea,  
the untiring sun, the moon at the full, along with  
every constellation which crowns the heavens—  
the Pleiades, the Hyades, mighty Orion,  
and the Bear, which some people call the Wain,  
always circling in the same position, watching Orion,  
the only stars that never bathe in Ocean stream.\*

Then he created two splendid cities of mortal men.  
In one, there were feasts and weddings. By the light  
of blazing torches, people were leading the brides  
[610] out from their homes and through the town to loud music  
of the bridal song. There were young lads dancing,  
whirling to the constant tunes of flutes and lyres,  
while all the women stood beside their doors, staring  
in admiration.

Then the people gathered  
in the assembly, for a dispute had taken place.  
Two men were arguing about blood-money owed  
for a murdered man. One claimed he'd paid in full,

setting out his case before the people, but the other  
was refusing any compensation. Both were keen  
[620] to receive the judgment from an arbitration.

The crowd there cheered them on, some supporting one,  
some the other, while heralds kept the throng controlled.  
Meanwhile, elders were sitting there on polished stones  
in the sacred circle, holding in their hands  
the staffs they'd taken from the clear-voiced heralds.  
With those they'd stand up there and render judgment,  
each in his turn. In the centre lay two golden talents,  
to be awarded to the one among them all  
who would deliver the most righteous verdict.

[630] The second city was surrounded by two armies,  
soldiers with glittering weapons. They were discussing  
two alternatives, each one pleasing some of them—  
whether to attack that city and plunder it,  
or to accept as payment half of all the goods  
contained in that fair town. But those under siege  
who disagreed were arming for a secret ambush.  
Their dear wives and children stood up on the walls  
as a defence, along with those too old to fight.  
The rest were leaving, led on by Pallas Athena  
[640] and Ares, both made of gold, dressed in golden clothes,  
large, beautiful, and armed—as is suitable for gods.  
They stood out above the smaller people with them.  
When the soldiers reached a spot which seemed all right  
for ambush, a place beside a river where the cattle  
came to drink, they stopped there, covered in shining bronze.  
Two scouts were stationed some distance from that army,  
waiting to catch sight of sheep and short-horned cattle.  
These soon appeared, followed by two herdsmen  
playing their flutes and not anticipating any danger.  
[650] But those lying in ambush saw them and rushed out,  
quickly cutting off the herds of cattle and fine flocks  
of white-fleeced sheep, killing the herdsmen with them.  
When the besiegers sitting in their meeting place

heard the great commotion coming from the cattle,  
they quickly climbed up behind their prancing horses  
and set out. They soon caught up with those attackers.  
Then they organized themselves for battle and fought  
along the river banks, men hitting one another  
with bronze-tipped spears. Strife and Confusion joined the fight,  
[660] along with cruel Death, who seized one wounded man  
while still alive and then another man without a wound,  
while pulling the feet of one more corpse from the fight.  
The clothes Death wore around her shoulders were dyed red  
with human blood. They even joined the slaughter  
as living mortals, fighting there and hauling off  
the bodies of dead men which each of them had killed.

On that shield Hephaestus next set a soft and fallow field,  
fertile spacious farmland, which had been ploughed three times.  
Many labourers were wheeling ploughs across it,  
[670] moving back and forth. As they reached the field's edge,  
they turned, and a man came up to offer them  
a cup of wine as sweet as honey. Then they'd turn back,  
down the furrow, eager to move through that deep soil  
and reach the field's edge once again. The land behind them  
was black, looking as though it had just been ploughed,  
though it was made of gold—an amazing piece of work!

Then he pictured on the shield a king's landed estate,  
where harvesters were reaping corn, using sharp sickles.  
Armfuls of corn were falling on the ground in rows,  
[680] one after the other. Binders were tying them up  
in sheaves with twisted straw. Three binders stood there.  
Behind the reapers, boys were gathering the crop,  
bringing it to sheaf-binders, keeping them busy  
Among them stood the king, a sceptre in his hand,  
there by the stubble, saying nothing, but with pleasure  
in his heart. Some distance off, under an oak tree,  
heralds were setting up a feast, dressing a huge ox  
which they'd just killed. Women were sprinkling white barley

on the meat in large amounts for the workers' meal.

[690] Next, Hephaestus placed on that shield a vineyard,  
full of grapes made of splendid gold. The grapes were black,  
the poles supporting vines throughout were silver.  
Around it, he made a ditch of blue enamel,  
around that, a fence of tin. A single path led in,  
where the grape pickers came and went at harvest time.  
Young girls and carefree lads with wicker baskets  
were carrying off a crop as sweet as honey.  
In the middle of them all, a boy with a clear-toned lyre  
played pleasant music, singing the Song of Linos,  
[700] in his delicate fine voice. His comrades kept time,  
beating the ground behind him, singing and dancing.\*

Then he set on the shield a herd of straight-horned cattle,  
with cows crafted out of gold and tin. They were lowing  
as they hurried out from farm to pasture land,  
beside a rippling river lined with waving reeds.  
The herdsmen walking by the cattle, four of them,  
were also made of gold. Nine swift-footed dogs  
ran on behind. But there, at the front of the herd,  
two fearful lions had seized a bellowing bull.  
[710] They were dragging him off, as he roared aloud.  
The dogs and young men were chasing after them.  
The lions, after ripping open the great ox's hide,  
were gorging on its entrails, on its black blood,  
as herdsmen kept trying in vain to chase them off,  
setting their swift dogs on them. But, fearing the lions,  
the dogs kept turning back before they nipped them,  
and stood there barking, close by but out of reach.

Then the famous crippled god created there a pasture  
in a lovely valley bottom, an open ground  
[720] for white-fleeced sheep, sheep folds, roofed huts, and pens.

Next on that shield, the celebrated lame god made

an elaborately crafted dancing floor, like the one  
Daedalus created long ago in spacious Cnossus,  
for Ariadne with the lovely hair.\* On that floor,  
young men and women whose bride price would require  
many cattle were dancing, holding onto one another  
by the wrists. The girls wore fine linen dresses,  
the men lightly rubbed with oil wore woven tunics.  
On their heads the girls had lovely flower garlands.  
[730] The men were carrying gold daggers on silver straps.  
They turned with such a graceful ease on skilful feet,  
just as a potter sits with a wheel between his hands,  
testing it, to make sure that it runs smoothly.  
Then they would line up and run towards each other.  
A large crowd stood around, enjoying the dancing magic,  
as in the middle two acrobats led on the dance,  
springing, and whirling, and tumbling.

On that shield, Hephaestus then depicted Ocean,  
the mighty river, flowing all around the outer edge.

[740] When he'd created that great and sturdy shield,  
he fashioned body armour brighter than blazing fire,  
a heavy helmet shaped to fit Achilles' temples,  
beautiful and finely worked, with a gold crest on top.  
Then he made him leg guards of finely hammered tin.

When the famous lame god had made all the armour,  
he took it and set it there before Achilles' mother.  
Then, like a hawk, she sped down from Olympus,  
carrying the gleaming armour of Hephaestus.