

The Iliad

Book Ten A Night Raid

[Agamemnon's worries about the state of his army; he and Menelaus set off to summon the chief leaders; at the meeting Nestor suggests someone spy out the Trojan position; Diomedes volunteers but asks for a second man; Diomedes selects Odysseus to go with him; Hector calls for a volunteer to spy out the Achaean ships, promises Achilles' horses and chariot; Dolon volunteers and set off; Odysseus and Diomedes catch and interrogate Dolon; Diomedes kills Dolon; Odysseus and Diomedes attack the Thracian camp, kill many men, and take the horses of king Rhesus; Odysseus and Diomedes return in triumph to the ships]

By their ships, Achaea's most important leaders
slept through the night, overpowered by soft sleep,
all except Agamemnon, son of Atreus. Sweet slumber
did not embrace this shepherd of his people,
for his mind was disturbed with many worries.
Just as when Zeus, husband of fair-haired Hera,
flashes lightning to announce a massive rain storm,
an immense downpour of hail or snow, when fields
are sprinkled white, or to foretell some bitter warfare,
[10] the gaping jaws of battle—in just that way then
the groans reverberated in Agamemnon's chest,
deep in his heart, making his whole body tremble.
Every time he looked out on the Trojan plain
he was overcome at the sight of countless fires
burning in front of Ilion, at the sound of flutes,
pipes, the loud noise all those soldiers made. Looking back
at the Achaean army and the ships, he tugged
many tufts of hair out of his scalp, roots and all,
praying to high Zeus above, his brave heart groaning.
[20] To him the best plan seemed to be to go to Nestor,
son of Neleus, before seeing anybody else,
to check if he could come up with some good advice,
some plan to save all the Danaans. So he got up,
slipped a tunic on over his chest, laced up
fine sandals over his sleek feet, and then put on
a tawny lion's skin, large and fiery red,

extending to his feet. Then he got his spear.

Menelaus, too, was troubled with anxieties.

No sleep sat on his eyelids either. He was afraid

[30] Argives would be hurt, those who on his account
had crossed wide seas to Troy, planning to make war.
He covered his broad back with a spotted leopard skin,
picked up his bronze helmet, set it on his head,
then picked a spear up in his powerful fist.
Next he went to rouse his brother, commander
of the Argives, who worshiped him just like a god.
Menelaus found him putting his fine armour on
by his ship's stern. Agamemnon welcomed him,
as he approached. Menelaus, skilled in war cries,
spoke first:

[40] "Brother, you're arming yourself. Why?
Are you going to encourage some companion
to scout the Trojans out? I really doubt
that anyone will do that for you,
set off to spy against a hostile force
under the cover of immortal night.
Such work would require a courageous heart."

Mighty Agamemnon answered Menelaus:

"You and I, lord Menelaus, need advice,
some shrewd plan to protect or save the Argives,
[50] together with their ships. Zeus' mind has changed.
His heart prefers Hector's sacrifices
more than ours. For I've never witnessed yet,
nor heard anyone report, how one man
made so much havoc in a single day,
as Hector, Zeus' friend, has brought upon us,
Achaean's sons, all by himself. He's not a god,
nor even a god's son. But he's damaged
Argives in a major way, with actions

they'll remember for many years to come.
[60] That's how badly Hector's harmed Achaeans.
But, come, why don't you run quickly by the ships
to summon Ajax and Idomeneus.
I'll go for godlike Nestor, to rouse him,
see if he wants to check our watchmen
and tell that strong contingent what to do.
They'll attend to him ahead of anyone,
because his son is captain of the sentries,
along with Meriones, an officer
of Idomeneus. We entrusted them,
[70] above all others, with this special work."

Menelaus, expert at war cries, then replied:

"How do you want me to carry out
your orders? Shall I stay there with them,
wait for you to come, or hurry back to you,
once I've told them your instructions?"

Agamemnon, king of men, answered Menelaus:

"Stay there, in case we somehow miss each other
as we go, for there are many pathway
through the camp. But make sure you call out
[80] each place you pass, telling troops to stay awake.
Call each soldier by his father's name,
complimenting all of them. Don't make a show
of your own proud heart. We must work hard, too—
that's what Zeus charged us with when we were born,
a heavy burden of responsibility."

Agamemnon spoke, sending his brother off
with detailed orders. Then he set out to find Nestor,
shepherd of his people. He came across him
beside his hut and his black ship, on a soft bed.
[90] His fine armour lay there with him—shield, two spears,

his glittering helmet, and that shining belt
which the old man strapped around him every time
he armed himself to lead his troops in battles
which destroy men's lives. Nestor made no concessions
to the infirmities of age. Sitting up there,
head resting on his arm, he spoke to Agamemnon,
questioning him:

“Why are you alone like this,
wandering among the ships throughout the camp
in the pitch dark night, while others sleep?
[100] What are you looking for? A mule? Some comrade?
Tell me. Don't approach in silence. What do you need?”

Agamemnon, king of men, replied:

“O Nestor,
son of Neleus, great glory of Achaeans.
You should recognize me—Agamemnon,
son of Atreus, the one whom Zeus
always loads with miserable fortune,
more so than other men, so long as breath
stays in my chest and movement in my limbs.
I'm wandering like this because sweet sleep
[110] won't sit upon my eyelids. Instead, this war,
this danger to Achaeans, has me worried.
I'm dreadfully afraid for the Danaans.
My spirit isn't resolute. It wavers.
My heart's about to burst outside my chest.
My fine limbs tremble. If you want some action,
since sleep hasn't come to you here either,
go with me. We'll walk down to the sentries
and check if they're exhausted and asleep,
worn out, forgetting to maintain a watch.
[120] Hostile troops are camped close by. We don't know
if somehow they may be keen to fight at night.”

Geranian horseman Nestor then said in reply:

“Glorious son of Atreus, king of men,
Agamemnon—Counsellor Zeus won’t fulfil
all the things that Hector has in mind,
all his present hopes. In my opinion,
Hector will be struggling with more troubles
than you face, if Achilles changes his fond heart
from its hard anger. Yes, I’ll come with you.

[130] And let’s get other leaders stirring also—
Tydeus’ son, famous for his spear,
Odysseus, swift Ajax, and Phyleus’ brave son.
Someone should go summon two more men,
godlike Ajax and lord Idomeneus.
Their ships aren’t near here—they’re a long way off.
But I have some harsh words for Menelaus,
although he’s a friend and I respect him.
I won’t hide that, even if I anger you.
For he’s still sleeping, leaving you alone
[140] to do the work. Right now he should be active,
working on all the finest men, begging them
to help us. The need confronting us is urgent.”

Agamemnon, king of men, replied to Nestor:

“Old man, at other times I’d urge you on
to criticize him, for often he holds back,
reluctant to carry out the heavy tasks,
not because he’s lazy or soft in the head,
but because he’s looking for my signal,
waiting for me to make a move. But this time,
[150] he was up and roaming well ahead of me.
He came to see me. I sent him off
to summon those very men you mention.
Let’s go. We’ll find them right before the gates,
where I ordered them to meet the sentries.”

Geranian horseman Nestor then replied:

“If that’s the case, none of the Argives
will say bad things of him or disobey,
when he stirs them on or issues orders.”

With these words, Nestor put a tunic on his chest,
[160] laced lovely sandals over his sleek feet. Around him
he buckled on a purple cloak in a double fold,
one thickly lined with wool. Selecting a strong spear
with a sharp bronze point, he set off on his way
down to the bronze-clad Achaeans’ ships. The first person
Geranian horseman Nestor roused from sleep
was Odysseus, equal to the gods for wise advice.
Nestor called out to him. His voice entered
Odysseus’ mind at once. He came out of his hut,
then questioned Nestor:

“What are you doing here,
[170] going around alone like this among the ships,
in the immortal night? Is there something urgent?”

Geranian horseman Nestor answered Odysseus:

“Divinely bred son of Laertes,
resourceful Odysseus, don’t be angry.
Achaeans are experiencing much suffering.
But come now, so we may rouse another man
someone who should be there when we discuss
our plans, whether we should flee or battle on.”

Nestor finished speaking. Resourceful Odysseus
[180] went into his hut, then slung across his shoulder
his finely decorated shield and set off with them,
to find noble Diomedes, son of Tydeus.
They came across him with his weapons outside his hut.
His comrades were asleep around him, their shields

under their heads, spears driven upright in the ground
by the butt spike. Their bronze spear points glittered
like Father Zeus' lightning. Diomedes slept
with the hide of a field ox spread out under him
and a bright rug underneath his head. Approaching him,
[190] Geranian horseman Nestor shoved him with his foot,
waking him up. Nestor then said teasingly:

“Wake up, son of Tydeus. Why sleep
all night long? Aren't you aware that Trojans
are encamped here on the edges of the plain,
near the ships, only a short distance off?”

Nestor spoke. Diomedes woke up quickly,
then answered him—his words had wings:

“Old man,
you're a hard one. You never stop working.
What about Achaea's other sons,
[200] the younger ones? Can't each of them go round
waking up the kings? You old man,
we can't do anything to check you.”

Geranian horseman Nestor answered Diomedes:

“My friend, everything you say is true enough
I have excellent sons and many soldiers.
Any of them could go round with orders.
But Achaeans here are in their greatest need.
For now things stand upon a razor's edge—
miserable destruction for Achaeans
[210] or their salvation. You're a younger man,
so if you feel compassion for me,
set off and wake up Meges and swift Ajax.”

Nestor spoke. Diomedes threw a lion's skin
around his shoulders, a huge red pelt which reached his feet.

Then Diomedes grabbed a spear and went away.
He woke those warriors and brought them back with him.
When they joined up with the company of sentries,
they did not find the captains of the watchmen sleeping.
They were all sitting with their weapons, wide awake.

[220] Just as dogs maintain a tired watch over their sheep
in some farm yard, when they hear a savage beast,
who's just moved down from wooded hills, men and dogs
raising a din around it, so those dogs get no rest,
that's how sweet sleep had left those sentries' eyelids,
as they kept guard that wretched night, always turning
towards the plain, in case they heard the Trojans coming.
Old man Nestor was pleased to see them. He called out,
speaking winged words of encouragement.

“That's the way, dear friends, to keep good watch.

[230] Don't let sleep seize on any one of you,
so we don't bring pleasure to our enemies.”

With these words, Nestor hurried through the ditch. Argive kings,
those who'd been called to council, accompanied him.
Meriones went, as did Thrasymedes, too,
Nestor's noble son, who'd been asked to join the group.
They went through the scooped-out ditch. Then in an open spot
they sat down where there seemed to be no corpses,
no bodies of the slain. It was where fearful Hector
turned back from killing Argives, once night hid everything.

[240] Sitting down there, they talked to one another.
Then Geranian horseman Nestor began to speak.

“My friends, is there some man confident enough
of his own daring spirit to venture out
among stout-hearted Trojans, to see
if he can trap an enemy soldier,
some straggler, or catch wind of some report
of what the Trojans say among themselves,
whether they are keen to stay beside the ships,

away from home, or to go back to the city,
[250] now that they have beaten the Achaeans?
A man who could find out these things,
return to us unharmed, would be famous
among all men living under heaven,
and get rich gifts, as well. For our best men,
those commanding every ship, will give him
a black sheep with suckling lamb. Compared to that,
there's no possession finer. At banquets
and our drinking parties, he'll be always there."

Nestor spoke. The others were quiet, saying nothing.
[260] Then Diomedes, expert in war cries, spoke up:

"Nestor, my heart and my proud spirit prompt me
to infiltrate the hostile Trojans' camp,
which stands close by. But another man
should come with me. Things would go much better.
We'd have more confidence. When two set out,
one may see something good before the other.
A man alone might notice it, but his mind
is less perceptive, less resourceful, than two."

Diomedes spoke. Many men wished to volunteer.
[270] The two Ajaxes, attendants of the war god Ares,
were willing, Meriones, too. And Nestor's son
was really eager. Famous spearman Menelaus,
son of Atreus, was ready, and brave Odysseus
was keen to steal into the Trojan army,
for the spirit in his chest was always daring.
Then, Agamemnon, king of men, spoke up:

"Diomedes, son of Tydeus,
you delight my heart. But you must choose
the other man. Take the one you want,
[280] the best of those in view. Many are keen.
Don't reject the better man, following

a sense of duty in your mind, taking
someone less worthy as your comrade,
thinking only of his birth. Don't do that,
even if the second is the greater king."

Agamemnon spoke, afraid for fair-haired Menelaus.
Diomedes, skilled in war cries, spoke to them again:

"If you bid me choose a comrade for myself,
how could I reject godlike Odysseus,
[290] his heart and daring spirit always keen
for every challenge? Pallas Athena loves him.
With Odysseus at my side, we'd both return,
even from blazing fire. For he knows,
better than other men, how to use his mind."

Odysseus, that long-suffering, godlike man, replied:

"Son of Tydeus, don't over-praise me,
or censure me. You're speaking to the Argives,
who know everything about me. Let's go.
Night is passing quickly. Dawn approaches.
[300] The stars have shifted forward. Most of the night
has passed, two thirds of it, with one third left."

This said, the two men pulled on fearful armour.
Warlike Thrasymedes gave a two-edged sword
to the son of Tydeus, for he'd left his own
beside the ships, and a shield as well. On his head he put
a helmet made of leather, without crest or plume,
what people call a skull-cap. It protected heads
of brave young men. Meriones gave Odysseus
bow, quiver, and a sword. On his head Odysseus set
[310] a hide cap, on the inside skilfully reinforced
with leather thongs. Outside, wild boars' white teeth
were placed here and there, strategically and well.
In between these layers was a piece of felt.

This cap had once been stolen by Autolycus,
from Amyntor, Ormenus' son. He'd broken in
his well-built home in Eleon. Some time later,
Autolycus gave it to Amphidamas of Cythera,
to take back home to Scandeia. Amphidamas
then gave the cap to Molus, as a present
[320] for his hospitality. Molus later gave it
to his son Meriones. And now it sat there,
covering Odysseus' head.*

The two men,
having put their fearful armour on, set off,
leaving behind there all the most important chiefs.
On their right, close to the path, Pallas Athena
sent them a heron. In the darkness of the night
they didn't see it with their eyes, but they heard its cry.
Odysseus was pleased with this omen of the bird.
He prayed then to Athena:

"Child of aegis-bearing Zeus,
[330] untiring goddess, hear me. You've always stood
beside me in all sorts of troubles.
I don't move without you watching me.
But now especially be my friend, Athena.
Grant that we two come back to the ships
covered in glory, after doing something great,
something the Trojans will regret."

Then noble Diomedes, skilled in war cries, prayed:

"Child of Zeus, invincible goddess, hear me.
Stand by me as you did my father,
[340] lord Tydeus, at Thebes, that time he went
as messenger, sent there by Achaeans.
He'd left bronze-clad Achaeans at the Asopus,
taking peace proposals to Cadmeans.
On his way back, he did some fearful things,

with keen support from you, divine goddess.
Be willing now to stand by me like that,
protect me, and I'll sacrifice to you
an unbroken yearling ox with a broad head
which no man yet has put beneath the yoke.
[350] I'll make that sacrifice to you, and more—
on that beast I'll plate both horns with gold."

So they prayed, and Pallas Athena heard them.
Their prayers to the daughter of great Zeus complete,
they continued on their way, like two lions,
in the darkness of night, through the slaughter,
through corpses, armour, through black pools of blood.

For his part,
Hector did not let his proud Trojans go to sleep.
He called their finest men together, all the ones
who commanded Trojans troops, with all their rulers.
[360] To those assembled, he laid out a shrewd idea:

"Is there someone who'll undertake for me
an exploit, who'll do it for a worthy gift?
I guarantee he'll get a fine reward.
I'll give a chariot and two strong-necked horses,
the finest ones there are by those fast ships
of the Achaeans, to any man who dares,
who's fit to seize the glory for himself,
by approaching close to those swift ships,
to find out whether they're being guarded,
[370] as before, or whether those men, beaten
at our hands, plan among themselves to flee,
and no longer wish to keep alert at night,
exhausted by their desperate efforts."

Hector finished. They all sat there in silence,
saying nothing. Now, among the Trojans
was a man called Dolon, son of Eumedes,

a sacred herald, a man rich in gold and bronze.

Dolon wasn't much to look at, but he ran fast.

He was the only male child, with five sisters.

[380] At that point he spoke up to Hector and the Trojans:

“Hector, my heart and my proud spirit prompt me

to volunteer to sneak up to those fast ships

and find out what I can. Come, raise your sceptre,

swear to me that you'll give me those horses

and that chariot decorated all in bronze

which carry the fine son of Peleus.

I'll not be a useless scout or disappoint you.

I'll go straight through the army, till I reach

Agamemnon's ship, where their best men

[390] must be in council talking of their plans,

whether to flee or to continue fighting.”

Dolon spoke. Holding up his sceptre, Hector swore

“Let Zeus himself, Hera's loud-thundering husband,

be my witness, that no other Trojan

will be carried by those horses. I affirm

that you will glory in them all your life.”

Hector spoke. He'd sworn an empty oath, but Dolon

was encouraged. At once, he slung across his shoulder

his curved bow, then threw a grey wolf skin on it.

[400] On his head he set a cap of marten skin,

grabbed a sharp spear, and set off, going from the camp

towards the ships. He would not be coming back,

bringing Hector information from the ships.

But when he left the crowd of men and horses,

he went eagerly along the path. As he moved,

noble Odysseus saw him and said to Diomedes:

“Diomedes, someone's coming from the camp.

I don't know if he's going to scout our ships

or strip some dead man's corpse. Let's let him
[410] at first get past us on the plain, just a bit.
Then we can go after him and catch him fast.
If his feet outrun ours, we'll keep following him
and chase him from his camp towards our ships.
Keep brandishing your spear behind him,
so he doesn't make it to the city."

After these words, the two men lay down beside the road,
among the corpses. Dolon ran past them quickly,
quite unaware. When he'd gone about as far
as mules plough in a single day—and in deep fields
[420] they outwork oxen pulling double-jointed ploughs—
the two men ran after him. When he heard their noise,
Dolon stopped, hoping in his heart they were comrades
coming from the Trojans to get him to turn back,
Hector having changed the orders. But when they came
within the distance of a spear throw or even less,
he saw that they were enemies and started running,
to get away as quickly as his legs could carry him.
They set off chasing him with speed. Just as when two dogs,
skilled hunting hounds with sharp fangs, harass some doe
[430] or hare relentlessly across a wooded country,
the prey screaming as it runs, that's how Tydeus' son
and Odysseus, destroyer of cities, pursued him,
keeping Dolon from his people with their constant chase.
When Dolon was about to run into the sentries
in his flight towards the ships, at that point
Athena put fighting power into Tydeus' son,
so no bronze-clad Achaean could make the boast
that he'd hit Dolon first and that Diomedes
had come up later. Springing forward with his spear,
powerful Diomedes yelled:

[440] "Stop!
Or I'll hit you with my spear. I don't think
you'll long escape complete destruction at my hands."

Diomedes shouted this, then threw the spear,
deliberately missing Dolon. The polished spear point
sailed over his right shoulder, then stuck in the ground.
Dolon just stood there terrified, stammering, pale with fear—
his teeth were chattering in his mouth. The two men ran up,
panting, and grabbed his hands. Dolon began to cry and beg:

“Take me alive, and I’ll ransom myself.
[450] At home there is bronze, gold, well-wrought iron.
My father will give lots of it to you—
an immense ransom—if he once finds out
I’m at Achaean ships and still alive.”

Crafty Odysseus smiled at him and said:

“Don’t worry. Don’t let death weigh down your heart.
Come now, tell me—and be sure to speak the truth.
Why are you going like this to the ships alone,
away from your army in the dead of night,
when other warriors are fast asleep?
[460] Are you going to strip some dead man’s body,
or has Hector sent you out as a spy,
to learn something about the hollow ships?
Or did your own spirit prompt you to this?”

Dolon answered Odysseus, his limbs trembling.

“Hector led my mind astray with foolish hopes,
lots of them. He promised he’d give me
the sure-footed horses of Achilles,
Peleus’ excellent son, and his chariot
with its bronze decoration. He told me
[470] to venture out into the swift dark night,
get close to hostile troops, and then find out
if they were guarding their swift ships as before,
or whether, now we have defeated them,

they were planning flight among themselves,
unwilling to keep up watch at night,
exhausted by their desperate efforts.”

Shrewd Odysseus, still smiling, then continued:

“Your heart has been ambitious for big gifts.
Those horses of warrior Achilles,
[480] descendant of Aeacus, are hard to manage
or control for any mortal person,
except Achilles, son of an immortal mother.
Tell me, now, and be sure to speak the truth.
When you came here, where did you leave Hector,
shepherd to his people? Where’s his armour?
Where are his horses? How are the sentries
of the other Trojans set? Where are they sleeping?
Tell me what they talk of amongst themselves,
whether they’re keen to stay beside the ships,
[490] quite far from home, or whether they’ll return
to the city, with Achaeans beaten.”

Dolon, son of Eumedes, answered Odysseus:

“I’ll answer you in this quite truthfully.
Right now Hector is with his advisors,
holding a council meeting by the tomb
of godlike Ilus, some distance from the noise.
As for the guards you asked about, noble sir,
there’s nothing special to protect the troops,
or keep lookout. By all Trojan watch fires,
[500] as necessity requires, there are men
who stay awake, calling to each other,
to keep up their guard. But the allied force,
which comes from many lands, is sleeping.
They leave it to Trojans to stay on watch,
for their wives and children aren’t close by.”

Crafty Odysseus, with a smile, then asked Dolon:

“Now, those allies—are they intermingled
with horse-taming Trojans where they sleep
or separate from them? Tell me. I need to know.”

[510] Dolon, son of Eumedes, answered Odysseus:

“I can reveal the truth of this as well.
By the sea lie Carians, Paeonians,
with their curved bows, Lelegians, Caucones,
god-like Pelasgians. Around Thymbre
are positioned Lycians, Mysians,
impetuous fighters, and the Phrygians,
who fight on horseback, and from Maeonia
there are charioteers. But why ask me details
of these matters? If you’re keen to infiltrate

[520] the Trojan army, over there are Thracians,
fresh troops, new arrivals, furthest distant
from the rest, among them their king Rhesus,
son of Eioneus. His horses are the best,
the finest and largest ones I’ve ever seen,
whiter than snow, as fast as the winds.
His chariot is finely built—with gold
and silver. He came here with his armour—
an amazing sight—huge and made of gold.
It’s not appropriate for mortal men

[530] to wear such armour, only deathless gods.
But take me now to your fast ships, or else
tie me up, leave me here in painful fetters,
so you can go and check my story out,
see whether I have told the truth or not.”

Mighty Diomedes scowled at Dolon and said:

“Don’t fill your heart with thoughts you’ll get away,
Dolon, even though your news is good.

You've fallen in our hands. Now, if we
released you or set you free for ransom,
[540] you'd come back to the swift Achaean ships,
either to spy or fight us openly.
But if my hands subdue you and you die,
you'll pose no problems for the Argives later."

As Diomedes finished, Dolon was intending
to cup his chin with his strong hand in supplication.
But with his sword Diomedes jumped at him,
slashed him across the middle of his neck, slicing
through both tendons. Dolon's head rolled in the dust,
as he was speaking. They stripped the cap of marten skin,
[550] then took the wolf hide, long spear, and his curved bow.
Lord Odysseus held these objects high above him
for Athena, goddess of battle spoils, and prayed:

"Goddess, these are for you, to bring you joy.
We invoke you first of all immortal gods
living on Olympus. Send us on again
to where Thracians sleep and to those horses."

So Odysseus prayed. He lifted the loot up high,
placed it on a tamarisk bush, then set there
a clear marker, grabbing up reeds and branches
[560] of tamarisk in full bloom, so they wouldn't miss
finding the spoils in the dark night, when they returned.
The two proceeded on through weapons and black blood.
They quickly reached the camp of Thracian soldiers.
The men were sleeping, worn out by their hard work.
Their lovely armour lay on the ground beside them,
properly arranged in triple rows. Beside each man
stood his yoked horses. In the middle Rhesus slept,
close by him his swift horses, tethered with their straps
to the chariot's top rail. Odysseus saw him first.
He pointed him out to Diomedes.

[570] “There’s our man,
Diomedes. And these are the horses
which Dolon told us of, the man we killed.
Come now, let’s see that mighty strength of yours.
It’s not right for you to stand there idly
with your weapons. So loose those horses.
Or else kill the men, while I take care of them.”

Odysseus spoke. Athena with her glittering eyes
breathed fighting power into Diomedes.
Moving around everywhere, he began the killing.

[580] Agonizing groans came from those his sword then butchered.
The earth grew soggy with their blood. Just as a lion
comes across an unguarded flock of sheep or goats
and leaps on them, heart thirsting for the kill,
so Tydeus’ son went at those Thracian soldiers,
until he’d slaughtered twelve. Whenever Diomedes
stood over some man he’d just killed with his sword,
crafty Odysseus, from behind, would grab his feet
and drag the body clear. For his mind was planning
how he might steal the fine-maned horses easily,

[590] if he didn’t frighten them by forcing them to step
on dead men’s bodies, for they were not used to that.
Tydeus’ son came across the king, the thirteenth man
whose sweet life he had taken. Rhesus lay there,
in his last gasp. A bad dream had stood beside his head
that night, a device sent by Athena—and that dream
was the son of Tydeus. Meanwhile, bold Odysseus
untied the sure-footed horses, roped them together,
and drove them from the camp, prodding with his bow,
for he’d forgotten to pick up the shining whip

[600] from the ornate chariot. Then he gave a whistle,
to signal noble Diomedes. But he just stayed there,
wondering how he could do something really bold.
Should he take away the chariot, which contained
the king’s finely decorated armour, pull it
by the pole, or lift it up above his head

and carry it like that? Or should he take the lives
of still more Thracians? While Diomedes turned over
these matters in his mind, Athena came, stood by him,
then said to noble Diomedes:

“Think of going back,
[610] to the hollow ships, son of great-hearted Tydeus,
in case you get driven there in quick retreat,
if some other god wakes up the Trojans.”

She spoke. He recognized the goddess by her voice.
He quickly climbed up on one of the horses.
Odysseus smacked them with his bow. They raced ahead,
in a rush to reach the swift Achaean ships.

But Apollo of the silver bow had not been
unvigilant, once he'd perceived Athena
taking care of Tydeus' son. Angry with her,
[620] he went down into that huge crowd of Trojans
and woke up Hippocoön, a Thracian counsellor,
one of noble Rhesus' family. Roused from sleep
he saw that where the horses stood was empty,
the fearful carnage with men gasping in their death throes.
He screamed in grief, crying out for his companion,
calling him by name. Trojans created a commotion,
totally confused, as they rushed in all at once,
to gaze astonished at the terrible destruction
those two men did before returning to the hollow ships.

[630] When the pair came to where they'd slaughtered Hector's spy,
Odysseus, dear to Zeus, pulled their swift horses up.
The son of Tydeus jumped down onto the ground,
handed over to Odysseus their bloodstained spoils,
then got back on his horse. They whipped the horses on,
racing willingly towards the hollow ships
with eager hearts. Nestor was the first to hear them.
He spoke up:

“Friends, Argive leaders and counsellors—
my spirit prompts me to speak. But will I say
something true or false? A sound beats in my ear,
[640] fast-moving horses’ hooves. Perhaps, as we speak,
Odysseus and mighty Diomedes are driving
sure-footed horses back from Trojans. But I fear,
in my anxious heart, that Achaea’s best
are in trouble from pursuing Trojan forces.”

Before Nestor could finish, the two men arrived.
They dismounted and were welcomed joyfully.
Men shook their hands, with warm congratulations.
Geranian horseman Nestor was the first with questions:

“Renowned Odysseus, great glory of Achaeans,
[650] tell me how you two obtained these horses.
Did you sneak into that crowd of Trojans?
Or did you meet some god who gave them to you?
They’re astonishing, like rays of the sun.
I’m always going in among the Trojans,
and I claim I don’t mangle by the ships,
although I’m an old man for a warrior.
But I’ve never seen, never imagined
horses like these. I think some god met you
and gave them to you. For cloud-gathering Zeus
[660] loves both of you, as does bright-eyed Athena,
daughter of aegis-bearing Zeus.”

Odysseus grinned at Nestor and answered him:

“O Nestor, son of Neleus, great glory
of Achaeans, if a god wanted to,
he’d easily give even better horses,
for gods are much more powerful than us.
But these horses which you ask about,
old man, are from Thrace, new arrivals.

Brave Diomedes killed their master,
[670] along with all twelve of his companions,
their finest men. There was a thirteenth killed,
a spy we captured near the ships, sent there
by Hector and the other haughty Trojans,
to scout around our camp.”*

Odysseus finished. Then he laughed with triumph,
driving the sure-footed horses past the ditch.
Other Achaeans came after him, rejoicing.
When they reached Diomedes’ well-constructed hut,
they tethered the horses with cut straps in the stall
[680] where Diomedes’ own swift horses stood, munching
their sweet grain. Odysseus put the bloodstained loot
from Dolon into his ship’s stern, until they’d made
an offering to Athena. Then the two men waded
into the sea, washed off their legs and necks and thighs,
removing all the sweat. Once the surf had taken
layers of sweat from off their skin and their hearts
had been refreshed, they stepped in shining tubs and bathed.
They washed, rubbing lots of smooth oil on themselves,
then sat down to eat. From the brimming wine bowl
they drew off sweet wine and poured libations to Athena.