

# The Iliad

## Book Fifteen The Battle at the Ships

*[Trojans are being driven in retreat; Zeus wakes up on Ida, turns on Hera; Zeus instructs Hera to send Iris and Apollo to him; Hera returns to Olympus, gets Ares angry at Zeus; Athena restrains Ares; Iris and Apollo go to Zeus on Ida; Iris goes to Poseidon with Zeus' orders; Poseidon's resentment of Zeus; Poseidon withdraws from battle; Zeus sends Apollo to Hector; Apollo helps Hector recover; the battle starts again with Apollo leading the Trojans and pushing the Achaeans back; Apollo knocks down the wall and fills in the ditch; the armies fight around the ships; Ajax plays a leading role in defending the Achaeans; Hector seizes the stern of a ship, but Ajax holds Achaeans off with a long pike]*

Trojans, in full retreat, passed the wall and ditch,  
with many slaughtered by Danaans. Then they stopped,  
regrouping by their chariots, pale with fear, terrified.  
At that point Zeus, lying on the peaks of Ida  
alongside Hera of the golden throne, woke up.  
He stood up quickly, looked at Trojans and Achaeans,  
saw Trojans running off with Argives driving them  
from the back, among them god Poseidon.  
He saw Hector lying on the plain, his companions  
[10] sitting round him. Hector was gagging painfully,  
dazed and vomiting blood. The warrior who'd struck him  
was not the weakest of Achaeans. Watching him,  
the father of gods and men pitied Hector.  
Looking at Hera with a fearful scowl, Zeus said:

“You’re impossible to deal with, Hera,  
devising such deceitful tricks to get  
lord Hector from the fight and make the army  
run away. But I think you may be the first  
to get rewarded for your wretched scheme,  
[20] when I flog you with my whip. Don’t you recall  
the time I strung you up on high, putting  
two anvils on your feet, tying your wrists  
with unbreakable gold rope? You hung there,  
in the air among the clouds. Other gods,

all through Olympus, were very anxious,  
but just stood there, unable to untie you.  
If I'd caught one trying, I'd have grabbed him,  
tossed him from the threshold so he hit ground,  
his strength all gone. But even with all that,  
[30] I couldn't ease the constant pain I felt  
for god-like Hercules. You and North Wind  
drove him with storm blasts over restless seas.  
Your evil scheming later carried him  
to well-settled Cos. I rescued him from there  
and brought him back to horse-breeding Argos,  
but only after he'd endured too much.  
I'll remind you of these things once more,  
so you'll stop your malicious trickery,  
so you'll see the advantages you get  
[40] from this seduction, this couch where you lay  
to have sex with me, when you came from the gods  
intending to deceive me."

Zeus spoke. Ox-eyed queen Hera  
trembled as she answered—her words had wings:

"Let earth and wide heaven above be witnesses,  
with the flowing waters of the river Styx,  
on which the most binding, most fearful oaths  
are made by blessed gods—let your sacred head,  
our marriage bed as well, stand witnesses,  
things on which I'd never swear untruthfully—  
[5] O the harm that Earthshaker Poseidon did  
to Hector and the Trojans, to help Argives—  
in all that I had no part. His own heart  
pushed and drove him on. He saw Achaeans  
being beaten by their ships and pitied them.  
I'd not advise him to go against you,  
lord of the dark cloud, but to follow you,  
wherever you might lead."

Hera finished.

The father of gods and men smiled and then replied—  
his words had wings:

“Ox-eyed queen Hera,  
[60] if from now on you and I were of one mind,  
as you took your seat among immortals,  
then, no matter how much Poseidon’s views  
differed from our own, he’d quickly bring them  
into line with yours and mine. If you’re being frank,  
speaking the truth, go now to that group of gods,  
and order Iris to come here with Apollo,  
the famous archer, so she may visit  
bronze-armed Achaean soldiers and instruct  
lord Poseidon to stop fighting and return  
[70] to his own house. And Phoebus Apollo,  
after reviving Hector for the fight,  
will breathe new strength into him. He’ll forget  
that pain which now weighs down his spirit.  
He’ll drive Achaeans back a second time,  
once he’s turned them into cowards. They’ll run  
back to Achilles’ ships with many oars.  
The son of Peleus will send out his companion,  
Patroclus, whom glorious Hector will then kill  
in a spear fight right in front of Ilion,  
[80] after many other young men have gone down,  
killed by Patroclus, including my own son,  
godlike Sarpedon. Then, in his anger  
at Patroclus’ death, godlike Achilles  
will slaughter Hector. From that moment on,  
I’ll make the Trojans steadily fall back,  
leaving the ships, until Achaeans take  
steep Ilion, with Athena’s guidance.  
Until that time, I’ll not restrain my anger,  
nor let any other immortal god  
[90] assist Achaeans here, not before  
Achilles’ wishes have been carried out,

as I first promised, nodding my assent,  
that day when goddess Thetis held my knee  
and begged me to bring honour to Achilles,  
destroyer of cities.”

Zeus finished speaking.

White-armed goddess Hera obeyed him, leaving  
Mount Ida for high Olympus. Just as the mind  
races in a man who’s voyaged to many lands,  
when in his fertile head he recalls everything,

[100] and thinks “I wish I were here! I wish I were there!”—

that’s how fast queen Hera hurried in her eagerness.

Reaching steep Olympus, she found immortal gods  
together at Zeus’ palace in a meeting.

Seeing her, they all stood up and offered her  
their cups in welcome. Ignoring all the others,

Hera took the cup of fair-cheeked Themis, the first  
who came running up to meet her. Themis spoke to her—  
her words had wings:

“Hera, why have you come?

You look upset. Perhaps your husband,

[110] the son of Cronos, has frightened you?”

Ox-eyed queen Hera then replied:

“Goddess Themis,

don’t question me like this. You know his moods,  
how he can be so harsh and overbearing.

You should start the communal banquet now,  
here in the palace. You’ll learn about these things

when all the immortals do—the evil plans

Zeus is proposing, something, in my view,

which won’t please all hearts alike, in gods or men,  
although some may still enjoy our feast.”

[120] Hera finished speaking. Then she sat down.

In Zeus' palace gods were angry. Hera's lips smiled,  
but above her dark eyebrows her forehead frowned.  
Irritated with them all, Hera then burst out:

“What fools we are to get incensed at Zeus  
so stupidly! We're still keen to get close to him,  
so we can hold him back with words or force.  
But he sits there, all by himself, without a care,  
without a worry, claiming he's supreme  
among immortal gods, manifestly so,  
[130] for strength and power. So you just accept  
whatever trouble he sends each of you.  
In fact, I think bad trouble has now come  
to Ares—in that fight his son's been killed,  
his favourite man, Ascalaphus, whom Ares,  
mighty war god, acknowledges as his.”

Once Hera finished, Ares struck his sturdy thighs  
with the flat of his hands and, in his grief, burst out:

“Don't blame me, you dwellers on Olympus,  
if I go down now to Achaean ships,  
[140] to avenge my son's slaughter, even if  
it's my fate to be struck by Zeus' lighting,  
to lie there with the dead in blood and dust.”

Ares finished. Then he told Terror and Flight  
to yoke up his horses, while he dressed himself  
in his glittering armour. Now, at that moment,  
feelings between Zeus and other immortal gods  
could have become much harsher, more incensed,  
if Athena, fearing what might happen to the gods,  
hadn't jumped up from the throne where she'd been sitting,  
[150] rushed out the door, seized Ares' helmet from his head,  
grabbed the shield from off his shoulders and the spear  
out of his mighty fist, and thrown them to one side.  
Then with these words Athena went at raging Ares:

“You idiot! Have you lost your mind, gone mad?  
Do those ears of yours hear anything at all?  
Where’s your common sense or your discretion?  
Did not you get what Hera said just now,  
the white-armed goddess who’s come straight from Zeus?  
Do you want a belly full of trouble,  
[160] forced to come back to Olympus, though in pain,  
sowing seeds of danger for the rest of us?  
For Zeus will abandon men immediately—  
those proud Trojans and Achaeans—and come here,  
to Olympus, then start to go at us.  
He’ll lay his hands on each one of us in turn,  
guilty or innocent. So I’m telling you—  
set aside that anger for your son.  
Better men with stronger hands than his  
have already been destroyed and will be.  
[170] It’s hard to keep the families and children  
safe for everyone.”

Athena finished.

Then she made angry Ares sit down on his throne.  
Hera called Apollo from the house with Iris,  
messenger for the immortal deities.  
Hera addressed them both—her words had wings:

“Zeus is ordering you two to go to Ida,  
as fast as possible. Once you get there,  
look in Zeus’ face, do what he commands.”

Having said this, queen Hera went inside the house,  
[180] sat on her throne. Flying off in a rush, the two gods  
reached Ida with its many springs, mother of wild beasts.  
They found all-seeing Zeus sitting on Gargarus,  
wrapped in a finely scented cloud. The two approached,  
came up, and stood there before cloud-gatherer Zeus.  
Seeing them, Zeus’ heart felt no anger. They’d been quick

obeying his dear wife. Zeus spoke first to Iris—  
his words had wings:

“Go now, swift Iris,  
convey to lord Poseidon these instructions,  
report it all precisely—he’s to stop,  
[190] to leave the battle strife, and go away  
to the group of gods or to his sacred sea.  
If he won’t obey my orders and ignores them,  
he should consider in his mind and heart  
this point—no matter how mighty he may be,  
he can’t stand up to me if I attack him.  
For I can say I’m stronger than he is,  
more powerful. And I’m the first born.  
Yet his fond heart thinks it’s all right to claim  
equality with me, whom all others fear.”

[200] Zeus spoke. Swift Iris, with feet like wind, obeyed.  
She set off from Mount Ida for sacred Ilion.  
Just as snow or icy hail flies down from clouds, swept on  
by gales from North Wind, child of the upper sky,  
that’s how quickly swift and eager Iris moved.  
She stood close by the famous Earthshaker and said:

“A message for you, Encircler of Earth,  
dark-haired god—I’ve brought it here from Zeus,  
who holds the aegis. He orders you to stop,  
to leave the battle strife. You’re to go away,  
[210] to the crowd of gods or to your sacred sea.  
If you ignore and disobey his orders,  
he threatens you he’ll come in person,  
to stand in war against you. And Zeus says  
you should avoid his hands, asserting  
he’s a stronger god than you, more powerful,  
and was born first. Yet your fond heart  
thinks nothing of claiming equality  
with him, whom other gods all fear.”

The famous Earthshaker, enraged, replied:

“It’s unjust!

- [220] He may be best, but he speaks too proudly,  
if he restrains me by force against my will,  
for I’m as worthy of respect as he is.  
We are three brothers, sons of Cronos,  
born from Rhea—Zeus, myself, and Hades,  
third brother, ruler of the dead. The whole world  
was divided in three parts, and each of us  
received one share. Once the lots were shaken,  
I won the blue-grey sea as mine to live in  
for ever. Hades got the gloomy darkness,  
[230] Zeus wide heaven, with the upper air and clouds.  
But earth and high Olympus still remained  
to all of us in common. So I won’t go.  
I won’t follow Zeus’ will. Let him stay,  
for all his strength, happy with his third.  
Let him not try to scare me with the power  
of his hands, as if I were some coward.  
It would be better if he’d use his threats,  
his bluster, on those sons and daughters  
which he himself produced. They, at least,  
[240] will have to listen to his orders.”

Swift Iris, with feet like the wind, replied:

“Dark-haired Earthshaker, is that the message  
I’m to take from you to Zeus, these harsh,  
defiant words? Or will you change your mind?  
For the finest hearts can change. The Furies,  
as you know, always serve the elder one.”

Earthshaker Poseidon then said:

“Goddess Iris,



what you say is right. It's commendable  
when a messenger understands things well.  
[250] But this business brings harsh pain into my heart,  
my spirit, when the deity whose share  
is the same as mine and who's been given  
a common destiny, wants to abuse me  
with angry words. However, for now  
I'll concede, for all my indignation.  
But I'll tell you—this threat comes from my heart—  
if, despite me, Athena, goddess of spoils,  
Hera and Hermes and lord Hephaestus,  
Zeus spares steep Ilion, if he's unwilling  
[260] to destroy it and to give great power  
to the Argives, let him know that with us  
an anger will arise that no one can appease.”

With these words the Earthshaker left Achaean troops.  
Going to the sea, he plunged in. Achaeans troops  
missed his presence there among them.

Cloud-gatherer Zeus then spoke to Apollo:

“Dear Phoebus,  
go down to bronze-armed Hector. Poseidon,  
who encircles and shakes the earth, has gone  
back to the sacred sea and thus avoided  
[270] my harsh anger. If he'd fought it out with me,  
others would certainly have heard about it,  
even gods below, down there with Cronos.  
But for me this is much better, and for him, too,  
that before we came to blows he backed off,  
away from my hands, despite his anger.  
We'd have had to sweat it out to end it.  
But take this tasselled aegis in your hand  
and shake it well to scare Achaean warriors.  
And Apollo, far-shooting god, make Hector  
[280] your special care. Infuse him with great strength,

until Achaeans run back to their ships  
and reach the Hellespont. From that point on,  
I'll figure out how in word and deed  
Achaeans may get new relief from war."

Zeus spoke. Apollo did not disobey his father.  
Swooping down from Mount Ida like some swift hawk  
killing pigeons, the fastest of all flying creatures,  
he found lord Hector, wise Priam's son, sitting up,  
no longer prone. He was just starting to recover,  
[290] to recognize his comrades round him. He'd stopped  
gasping and sweating, for aegis-bearing Zeus  
had revived his mind. Apollo, the far worker,  
stood close to him and said:

"Hector, son of Priam,  
why are you having fainting spells right here,  
away from all the others? Are you in trouble?"

Hector of the shining helmet, still weak, replied:

"Which of the mighty gods are you, my lord,  
questioning me face to face? Don't you know  
that Ajax, skilled at war cries, hit me,  
[300] as I was slaughtering his companions  
by the ships' sterns? He got me in the chest  
with a rock and stopped my frenzied fighting.  
I thought today my heart would breathe its last,  
that I'd be seeing the dead in Hades' house."

Lord Apollo, son of Zeus, then answered Hector:

"Take courage now. Cronos' son has sent you  
a powerful defender from Mount Ida,  
to stand beside you as your protector,  
Phoebus Apollo with his golden sword,  
[310] who's helped you before, you and your city.

But come now, tell your many charioteers  
to charge the hollow ships with their swift horses.  
I'll go ahead and smooth the horses' path.  
I'll turn back these Achaeon warriors."

With these words Apollo breathed power into Hector,  
his people's shepherd. Just as some horse in a stall  
who at the manger has eaten well, then breaks his halter  
and runs off across the plain at a thundering gallop,  
eager for its usual bath in the flowing river,  
[320] exulting as it goes, with head held high, its mane  
flowing across its shoulders, fully confident  
of its own splendour, limbs carrying it lightly  
to places where the mares are in the pasture,  
that's how quickly Hector moved his feet and limbs,  
as he urged on his charioteers, once he'd heard  
Apollo's voice.

Just as dogs and country farmers  
chase a horned stag or wild goat, but the creature  
saves itself in a sheer rock face or dark underbrush,  
and men have no luck finding it, but their shouts  
[330] attract a bearded lion to their path, who scatters them,  
despite their eagerness—that's how Danaans  
for a while continued to press on in groups,  
thrusting away with swords and double-bladed spears.  
But when they saw Hector moving among the ranks,  
they were afraid. Each man's heart sank to his feet.  
Then Thoas, Andraemon's son, spoke out, the best man,  
by far, among Aetolians, expert in the spear throw,  
good at fighting hand to hand, and in assemblies  
few Achaeans could beat him when young men argued.  
Thinking of their situation, Thoas said:

[340] "Here's something—  
My eyes are watching an amazing sight.  
Hector's got up again, evading death.

In our hearts we all hoped that he'd been killed  
at the hands of Ajax, son of Telamon.  
But some god has once more rescued Hector,  
saved the man who's drained strength from many limbs  
among Danaans. That will continue now,  
I think, for he's not standing there like that,  
so keen to fight, against the will of Zeus,  
[350] the thunderer. But come, let's all follow  
what I propose. Let's tell most of the men  
to move back to the ships. Those among us  
who claim to be the best men in the army  
will make a stand. If we can reach him first  
and hold him off with our extended spears,  
for all his fury I think his heart will fear  
to mingle with this Danaan company."

Thoas spoke. The others heard him and readily agreed.  
Those with Ajax, lord Idomeneus, Teucer,  
[360] Meriones, and Meges, like the war god Ares,  
summoning the best men, recommenced the battle,  
confronting Hector and his Trojans. Behind them,  
most of the troops went back to the Achaean ships.

Trojans charged in a mass assault, led by Hector,  
moving with huge strides. Phoebus Apollo marched  
in front of Hector, his shoulders covered up in clouds,  
holding the fearful aegis, with its double fringe  
glittering ominously. The smith Hephaestus  
had given it to Zeus to make men run from war.  
[370] Apollo now held this aegis in his hands,  
as he lead on the army. The Argives, closely packed,  
stood their ground. Shrill war cries came from either side,  
arrows flew from bowstrings, many spears were thrown.  
Some impaled themselves in the flesh of quick young men.  
Many fell halfway before they reached white skin,  
skewered in the earth, still longing to taste flesh.  
As long as Phoebus Apollo held the aegis steady

in his hands, on both sides weapons hit their mark—  
men kept on dying. But when Apollo stared directly  
[380] at the swift Danaans and then shook the aegis,  
howling a horrific roar, he bewitched them all—  
the spirit in their chests then lost the will to fight.  
Just as two wild beasts stampede a herd of cattle  
or large flock of sheep, coming suddenly in dark night,  
with no herdsman present, that's how Achaeans,  
in their weakness, were then put to flight. Apollo  
sent the panic, glorifying Hector and his Trojans.

Then, as men killed each other, the battle front collapsed.  
Hector slew Stichius and Arcesilaus—  
[390] one a leader of bronze-armed Boeotians,  
one a trusted comrade of brave Menestheus.  
Aeneas slaughtered Medon and Iasus.  
Medon was a bastard son of noble Oïleus,  
thus brother to Ajax, but lived in Phylace,  
far from his native land. For he'd killed someone,  
a relative of his step-mother Eriopis,  
wife to Oïleus. Iasus, a commander  
of Athenians, was known as a son of Sphelus,  
son of Bucolus. Polydamas killed Mecistus,  
[400] and Polites killed Echius fighting at the front.  
Then lord Agenor slew Clonius, and from behind  
Paris struck Deïochus just below the shoulder,  
as the latter fled from soldiers fighting in the front.  
He drove the bronze spear straight through the man.

While Trojans were stripping armour from the corpses,  
Achaeans jumped in the ditch they'd dug, on the stakes,  
running to and fro, forced to withdraw behind their wall.  
Hector then gave a great shout to his Trojans:

“Charge the ships. Leave the blood-stained spoils alone.  
[410] Whoever I see not moving to the ships  
on the other side, I'll make sure he dies

right there. His relatives, men and women,  
won't be burying him, once he's dead,  
with the proper rites of fire. Instead,  
the dogs will rip him up before our city."

Saying this, Hector swung his whip down from his shoulders,  
lashing on his horses, calling Trojans in the ranks.  
They all shouted with him, then drove the horses  
pulling chariots. A tremendous noise arose.

[420] In front, Phoebus Apollo easily knocked down  
the banks of the steep trench—with his feet he pushed dirt  
into the middle, making a long broad causeway,  
as wide as the distance a man can throw his spear  
when he's showing off his strength. Trojans poured through,  
wave after wave of them, with Apollo leading on,  
holding up the priceless aegis. The Achaean wall  
he easily demolished, as a child will scatter sand—  
in a childish game beside the sea he builds a sand wall,  
then with his hands and feet flattens it for fun.

[430] That's how you, archer Phoebus, at that time knocked down  
what the Achaeans had built with so much effort,  
such hard work. You sent them flying back in panic.  
The Danaans halted to regroup beside their ships,  
shouting to each other, lifting up their hands  
to all the gods, with each man praying fervently.  
Geranian Nestor, Achaea's guardian,  
prayed most of all, hands stretched to starry heaven:

"Father Zeus, if, in wheat-yielding Argos,  
any man has ever burned fat thighs

[440] of bulls or sheep in sacrifice to you,  
praying for his return, and you answered him,  
nodding your head and promising assent,  
Olympian god, remember that. Protect us  
from a pitiful doom. Don't let Trojans  
destroy Achaeans in this way."

Nestor prayed.  
Counsellor Zeus, hearing the prayers of that old man,  
son of Neleus, gave a great clap of thunder.  
When Trojans heard aegis-bearing Zeus' thunder,  
they attacked the Argives all the more, drawing on  
[450] their battle fury. Just as a great wave crashes  
from the wide sea onto the planking of a ship,  
driven by forceful winds whipping up the waves—  
that's how Trojans, with tremendous shouts, came down,  
through the wall, driving their chariots to the fighting,  
the hand-to-hand combat with double bladed spears  
by the ships' sterns. Trojans battled from their chariots,  
Achaean from high up on the planks of their black ships.  
They'd climbed up on the decks to fight there with long pikes  
lying in place for battles out at sea, jointed weapons  
with forged bronze at the tip.

[460] As long as Trojans and Achaeans  
were fighting by the wall away from the swift ships,  
Patroclus stayed sitting in Eurypylus' hut,  
cheering him up with pleasant conversation,  
relieving his black pain by spreading ointments  
on his painful wound. But when he realized  
Trojans were capturing the wall, while Danaans  
were crying out and in retreat, Patroclus groaned.  
Striking his thighs with the flat of his hands, he spoke  
in evident distress:

“Eurypylus, I can't stay  
[470] with you any longer here, though you need help.  
For a fierce battle has begun. Your companion  
must look after you. I'll run to Achilles,  
to urge him on to fight. Who know? With god's help,  
I may rouse his spirit with my words.  
A friend's persuasion perhaps can do some good.”

Patroclus finished speaking and went off on foot.

Achaeans, with fewer numbers, still held firm  
against advancing Trojans, but could not push them back  
or dislodge them from the ships. Trojans could not break through,  
[480] get past Danaan ranks to assault the ships and huts.  
Just as a carpenter's line makes ship's timber straight,  
when a craftsman's hand applies it, a skilled expert  
in all facets of his trade, inspired by Athena—  
that's how tensely poised the fighting in that battle stood.  
Men fought in various groups from one ship to the next.

Hector went straight for glorious Ajax, both men  
struggling over the same ship. Hector was unable  
to push Ajax back and burn the ship, while Ajax  
could not drive Hector off, now that Apollo  
[490] had brought him so far. Noble Ajax hurled his spear.  
He hit Caletor, son of Clytius, in the chest,  
as he was bringing fire to the ships. With a crash,  
he collapsed, and the burning torch dropped from his hands.  
When Hector saw his cousin fall there in the dirt  
by the black ship, right before his eyes, he called out  
to his Trojans and Lycians with a powerful shout:

“Trojans, Lycians, Dardan spearmen,  
don't hold back from battle in this danger.  
Save the son of Clytius, just in case  
[500] Achaeans strip his armour now he's fallen  
among this group of ships.”

Saying this,  
Hector threw his bright spear at Ajax, but missed.  
Instead he hit Lycophron, son of Mastor,  
from Cythera, one those attending Ajax.  
Since he'd killed someone in holy Cythera,  
he lived with Ajax. Hector's sharp bronze struck him  
on the head, above his ear, as he stood near Ajax.  
He fell into the dust, tumbling from the stern  
down to the ground. Then his limbs went slack.



Ajax shuddered and cried out to his brother:

[510] “Teucer, my friend,

Mastor’s son, our worthy comrade, has been killed.

He lived with us when he arrived from Cythera.

In our house we honoured him just as we did

our parents. Proud Hector has now killed him.

Where are your swift lethal arrows and the bow

Phoebus Apollo gave you?”

Ajax finished.

Teucer heard him and came up running to stand there,

beside Ajax, with his curved bow in his hand

and a quiver full of arrows. He began to shoot,

[520] loosing arrows in quick succession at the Trojans.

He hit Cleitus, fine son of Peisenor, a companion

of Polydamas, noble son of Panthous,

who was holding chariot reins. He’d been busy

managing his horses, which he’d been driving

to where the ranks were most confused, as a favour

to Hector and his Trojans. But he was struck

by that evil no man can defend himself against,

no matter how much he desires. The painful arrow

lodged behind his neck. He tumbled from the chariot,

[530] forcing his horses to swerve aside—that made

the empty chariot rattle. Polydamas

saw this right away and was the first to rush

into the horses’ path. He then handed them

to Astynous, Protiaon’s son, firmly telling him

to keep them close and watch. Then Polydamas

went back to join those fighting at the front.

Taking out another arrow, Teucer tried to hit

bronze-armed Hector. That would have stilled his heart

and stopped his fighting at Achaean ships, if Teucer

[540] had hit him as he was showing off how brave he was.

But the perceptive mind of Zeus guarding Hector

was paying attention. He robbed Teucer of that triumph  
by snapping the fine bow's tightly twisted string,  
just as Teucer was lining up a shot at Hector.  
The heavy bronze-pointed arrow flew awry.  
The bow fell from his hands. Teucer, with a shudder,  
spoke out to his brother Ajax:

“Look at that!  
Some god is thwarting all our efforts in this fight.  
He's knocked the bow out of my hands and snapped  
[550] my freshly twisted bowstring. I strung it  
just this morning so it would last a while  
and I could shoot scores of arrows with it.”

Great Telamonian Ajax then answered Teucer:

“My friend, leave your arrows and your bow—  
set them down, since some god has broken them  
to spite Danaans. Take hold of a long spear,  
set a shield against your shoulder—fight the Trojans.  
Encourage other troops to do the same.  
They won't take our well-decked ships without a fight,  
[560] even though they're overpowering us,  
so let's concentrate our minds on battle.”

Ajax spoke. Teucer took his bow into his hut,  
then slung a four-layered shield against his shoulder.  
On his strong head he set a well-made helmet,  
with a horsehair crest which nodded menacingly.  
He took a strong spear with a sharp point and set off,  
running quickly to take his place by Ajax.

When Hector saw that Teucer's arrow shot had missed,  
he called in a loud voice to Trojans and to Lycians:

[570] “Trojans, Lycians, Dardan spearmen,  
be men, my friends. Recall your warlike power

among these hollow ships. For I've witnessed  
with my own eyes how Zeus has cancelled out  
an arrow shot at us by their best man.  
It's easy to see how Zeus assists men,  
those to whom he grants great victories,  
or how he drains men's strength, refusing  
to protect them, as he now saps the power  
among the Argives and works to help us,  
[580] as we fight by the ships. So stay together.  
Should one of you meet his fate and die,  
stabbed by a spear or cut down with a sword,  
let the man die. To be killed defending  
one's own native land is no ignoble act.  
The man's wife is safe, his children live,  
his house and land remain, if Achaeans leave,  
returning to their country in their ships."

With these words, Hector roused each man's fighting spirit.  
On the other side, Ajax called out to his companions:

[590] "For shame, Argives. Now the issue's clear—  
either we'll be killed or we'll be saved,  
if we can push the danger from our ships.  
Are you expecting, if the ships are taken  
by Hector of the shining helmet,  
you'll all get to your native land on foot?  
Don't you hear frenzied Hector urging on  
his men. He's frantic now to burn the ships.  
He's inviting them to fight, not to a dance.  
For us there's no better choice or tactic  
[600] than to bring our arms and warrior strength  
against them and keep fighting hand to hand.  
It's better to settle this once and for all—  
whether we live or die—than be hemmed in,  
fighting a long grim battle, as we are now,  
among our ships against inferior men."

Ajax's words rallied the fighting spirit in each man.

Hector then killed Schedius, son of Perimedes,  
leader of Phocians. Ajax slew Laodamas,  
noble Antenor's son, who led up troops on foot.

- [610] Polydamas slaughtered Otus of Cyllene,  
comrade of Phyleus' son, who led brave Epeians.  
Seeing this death, Meges then attacked Polydamas,  
who slipped away from him, eluding Meges' charge.  
Apollo would not let Panthous' son be killed  
among those fighting in the front. But Meges  
thrust his spear into Croesmus, right in his chest.  
He fell with a crash. Meges started stripping armour  
from his shoulders, but Dolops charged at him,  
the bravest son of Lampus, son of Laomedon,
- [620] a skilled spear-fighter, who knew all there was to know  
about fighting close in. Dolops moved up to Meges,  
then with his spear struck the centre of his shield.  
Meges' thick armour with fitted breastplates saved him.  
Phyleus had brought this armour from Ephyre,  
from the river Selleis. A guest of his there,  
Euphetes, ruler of men, had given it to him  
to wear in war, protection from his enemies.  
Now this armour saved his son's flesh from destruction.  
Meges then thrust his sharp spear at Dolops' helmet,
- [630] striking it on top, on the bronze ridge, which held in place  
the horsehair plume. He sheared it off. The whole plume,  
a bright fresh purple, fell onto the dusty ground.  
While Meges fought on, still expecting victory,  
warlike Menelaus came to his assistance.  
Standing to one side, out of Dolops' line of sight,  
Menelaus speared his shoulder from behind.  
The eager spear kept going, driving into Dolops' chest.  
He fell on his face. The two men hurried forward  
to strip bronze armour from his shoulders. But Hector
- [640] shouted to his kinsmen one and all. The first man  
he yelled at was strong Melanippus, Hicetaon's son,

who used to graze his shambling herds in Percote,  
when enemies were far away. Once Danaans  
arrived in their curved ships, he'd gone back to Ilion,  
where Trojans held him in respect. He lived with Priam,  
who honoured him as if he were a child of his.  
Hector called to him, speaking some angry words:

“Melanippus, why are you so feeble?  
Is that fond heart in you not worried  
[650] for your slain relative? Do you not see  
how they're busy stripping Dolops' armour?  
Come on, we can't fight Argives from a distance.  
We've got to stay with them until we kill them off,  
or they capture Ilion completely,  
butchering her people.”

Hector finished,  
then led on. Godlike Melanippus followed.

Then great Telamonian Ajax roused the Argives:

“Friends, be men. In your hearts remember shame.  
In the killing zone let each man shame the rest.  
[660] That sense of shame saves more men than it kills.  
Those who flee help no one, and they get no glory.”

Ajax spoke. The men were already keen to fight,  
but they took his words to heart and fenced in the ships  
within a hedge of bronze. Zeus drove the Trojans at them.  
Then Menelaus, skilled at war shouts, urged Antilochus:

“Antilochus, no other Achaean warrior  
is as young as you or quicker on his feet,  
or as brave in battle. So jump out there—  
see if you can hit one of the Trojans.”

[670] Menelaus finished speaking and moved back again.

But his words aroused Antilochus. He stepped forward,  
ahead of those fighting at the front, glanced around,  
and threw his shining spear. Trojans moved back,  
as he made his throw. The spear wasn't thrown in vain.  
It hit proud Melanippus, Hicetaon's son,  
in the chest, as he was moving up to fight,  
right beside his nipple. He collapsed with a crash,  
and darkness fell upon his eyes. Then Antilochus  
pounced on him, like a dog leaping on a wounded fawn,  
[680] which some hunter hits as it rushes from its den,  
loosening its limbs. That how bold Antilochus  
went after you, Melanippus, to strip your armour.  
But Hector noticed him. He came up on the run  
to face Antilochus directly. But the latter,  
though an impetuous warrior, did not stand his ground.  
He ran back, like some wild beast intent on mischief,  
one that's killed a dog or herder with the cattle,  
and scampers off before a crowd of people gather.  
That's how Nestor's son scurried back. Trojans and Hector,  
[690] shouting loudly, showered him with lethal weapons.  
When he reached the crowd of his companions,  
Antilochus turned round and made a stand there.

Trojans attacked the ships like ravenous lions,  
fulfilling Zeus' will. He kept on giving them  
great fighting strength, while he drained Achaean hearts,  
denying them glory, as he drove the Trojans forward.  
Zeus' heart was set on glorifying Hector,  
son of Priam, so he might throw onto the ships  
a blazing tireless fire and thus fulfil completely  
[700] that disastrous request from Thetis. Counsellor Zeus  
was waiting to glimpse with his own eyes the blaze  
from a burning ship, for that would be the moment  
he was going to push the Trojans from the ships  
and give the glory to Danaans. With this in mind,  
Zeus drove Hector, son of Priam, against those ships,  
something Hector was furiously keen to do.

He raged like spear-fighting Ares or deadly fire  
in the thickets of deep mountain forests.

He was foaming at the mouth. Below his eyebrows  
[710] the eyes were raging fire. The helmet round his temples  
shook with menace, as Hector battled on, for Zeus,  
the god of heaven, was his protector, giving him  
glory and honour, though he was but one man  
among so many, for Hector's life would soon cease.  
Already Pallas Athena was pushing forward  
that fated day when he'd die at the mighty hand  
of Achilles, son of Peleus.

But now Hector  
was striving to break through the warriors' ranks,  
probing them wherever he saw the largest groups,  
[720] the finest armour. But he could not break through,  
for all his eagerness. In their defensive wall,  
Achaeans held their ground. Just as a huge stone cliff  
by the blue-grey sea stands firm against the wind  
howling straight at it or the surging surf which pounds it—  
that's how Danaans stood up to the Trojans then,  
firmly with no falling back. But then Hector,  
blazing all over like some fire, charged the throng,  
falling on them as a fierce wave whipped up by a storm  
crashes against a ship, which gets hidden in the foam,  
[730] blasts of wind shrieking past the sail, and sailors' hearts  
tremble with fear as they are carried off from death  
inch by inch—that's how hearts in those Achaean chests  
were cracking. Hector charged them like a vicious lion  
going at cattle grazing in huge numbers  
in the bottom wetlands of a spacious meadow,  
guarded by a herdsman who still lacks the skills  
to fight a wild beast for the mangled carcass  
of some short-horn heifer—with the herd he goes  
always beside the first or last ones of the group,  
[740] but the lion leaps into the middle and devours a cow,  
as all the others scatter—that's how Achaeans then

were all driven back in awe-struck terror by Hector and Father Zeus.

But Hector killed only one man—  
Periphetes of Mycenae, dear son of Copreus,  
who used to take messages from king Eurystheus  
to mighty Hercules.\* This dishonourable man  
had a son with much more virtuous qualities—  
he could run fast and was an excellent fighter,  
and for his mind among the best in Mycenae.

[750] But this man then gave Hector even greater glory.  
For as he turned, he tripped against a shield rim,  
the one he carried, which extended to his feet  
and protected him from spears. He stumbled and fell.  
The helmet round his temples gave a dreadful clang,  
as he went down. Hector saw this at once, ran up,  
stood by Periphetes, and struck him with his spear  
in the chest, killing him beside his dear companions.  
Those men were sorry for their comrade, but could not help—  
they were too afraid of godlike Hector.

[760] By now they were in among the ships, encircled  
by the outer row of those they'd dragged up first.  
But Trojans kept on pouring in. So Argives were forced  
to move back from the ships' first row. But they stayed  
in a single group beside the huts, not scattering  
throughout the camp, held there by shame and fear.  
They called out to one another continually,  
especially Geranian Nestor, Achaea's guardian.  
He kept appealing to each man's parents, saying:

“Friends, be men. Let sense of shame from all men  
[770] fill your hearts. Remember, each of you,  
your children, wives, possessions, and your parents—  
whether alive or dead. They're not here,  
but, on their behalf, I beg you to stand firm.  
Don't let yourselves turn round and run away.”



With these words, Nestor boosted each man's spirit.  
Then Athena removed the strange cloudy mist  
and cleared their eyes, so on both sides light streamed in,  
back to the ships and out towards the battle groups.  
They saw Hector, skilled at war cries, his companions,  
[780] all the soldiers standing idle in the rear,  
all those warriors battling on by their swift ships.

The spirit in great-hearted Ajax could not bear  
to take up a position with Achaea's sons  
where there was no fighting. So with his huge strides,  
he kept moving up and down the decks along the ships.  
In his fists he held a long pike used in sea fights,  
one with fitted with sockets—thirty feet in length.  
Just as a man well skilled in guiding horses  
harnesses together four chosen out of many,  
[790] then drives them at a gallop from the plain  
to some large city on a public highway,  
while many men and women look at him amazed,  
as he keeps leaping from one horse to another,  
landing firmly, never slipping as they race ahead—  
that's how Ajax, with huge strides, kept on moving  
over many decks on those swift ships, shouting  
so his voice reached heaven, telling Danaans  
in fearsome yells to defend their ships and huts.

Hector did not stay in the well-armed Trojan group,  
[800] but, like an eagle swooping down upon some flock  
of winged birds feeding by a river bank—  
wild geese or cranes or long-necked swans, he rushed  
straight at the dark-prowed ships to take on Ajax.  
With his mighty hand Zeus pushed him from the back,  
while urging other warriors to accompany him.

The brutal fight began again among the ships.  
You'd think they weren't tired at all, but only starting—

they went at each other with such ferocity,  
as they faced each other in that battle. Each side  
[810] fought for different reasons—Achaeans thought  
they'd never escape that danger and would be destroyed—  
for Trojans, the heart in each man's chest was hoping  
they'd fire the ships and kill Achaean warriors.  
That's what they thought as they fought one another.

Hector grabbed hold of a seaworthy ship, at the stern,  
the fine fast boat which brought Protesilaus to Troy,  
though it didn't take him back to his own native land.\*  
In close combat by this ship, Achaeans and Trojans  
were hacking at each other. By this point, the battle  
[820] was no more a matter of standing at some distance,  
enduring showers of spears and arrows, but of fighting  
at close quarters—united by a common spirit—  
battling with sharp axes, hatchets, long swords,  
and double-bladed spears. Many lovely swords,  
with dark mountings, fell to earth, from hands and shoulders  
of those fighting warriors. Earth flowed black with blood.  
Hector seized hold of that ship and would not let go—  
gripping the ornamental marker on the stern,  
yelling to his Trojans:

“Bring fire. Raise a general shout.  
[830] Now Zeus has given us a day that makes up  
for everything—to seize the ships that came here,  
contravening the gods' will, creating  
many troubles for us, because our elders  
in their cowardice restrained me, held back  
my troops, when I was keen to fight it out  
at the ships' sterns. But if all-seeing Zeus  
dulled our minds then, now he commands us,  
now he drives us forward.”

Hector shouted.  
Then Trojans attacked the Argives even more intensely.

[840] Ajax could not hold his position any longer.

Assailed by flying spears, he backed off a little,  
abandoning the deck on that well-balanced ship.  
He moved to the raised platform, seven feet high,  
and looked for Trojans, always jabbing with his pike,  
pushing from the ship any Trojan bearing tireless fire,  
always yelling fearful shouts at the Danaans:

“Friends,  
Danaan warriors, companions of Ares,  
be men, my friends. Recall your battle fury.  
Do we think we’ve got people to help out  
[850] somewhere behind us or some stronger wall  
which will hold off our men’s destruction?  
There’s no nearby city fenced with walls,  
where we can defend ourselves or with many men  
turn the tide of battle. No, we’re here,  
on this plain crammed with well-armed Trojans,  
our backs to the sea, far from our native land.  
The light that’ll save us lies in our hands,  
not in holding back from battle.”

Saying this, Ajax kept on jabbing ferociously  
[860] with his sharp pike. Any Trojan who charged the ships  
with blazing fire, seeking to please Hector,  
found Ajax waiting to slice him with his pike.  
He wounded twelve men in close fighting by the ships.