

Book 10

Hard by their ships all the other Achaian leaders
slept the night through, overcome by gentle slumber;
but on Atreus's son Agamemnōn, the shepherd of his people,
sweet sleep got no hold, as he thrashed over much in his heart.
Just as fair-haired Hērē's husband flashes his lightning 5
when preparing a fearful rainstorm, or ungodly hail,
or driving snow, when snowflakes blanket the plowland—
or somewhere yawns the great mouth of piercing war,
so often, within his breast, Agamemnōn would groan aloud,
from the depths of his heart, and his inner reason trembled. 10
Indeed, when he gazed out towards the Trojan plain,
he marveled at all the fires that now burned before Ilion,
at the sound of flutes and pipes, at the clamor of men;
but when he looked at the ships, and the Achaian forces,
many hairs he tore from his head by the very roots 15
while appealing to Zeus on high; loud groaned his mighty heart.
And this, to his mind, now seemed to be the best plan:
to go first of all to Nestōr, the son of Nēleus,
to see if with him he might fashion some sure device
that would serve to ward off disaster from all the Danaāns. 20
So up he got, shrugged a tunic on over his chest,
strapped on a pair of fine sandals under his shining feet,
wrapped himself round in the tawny hide of a lion—
huge, swarthy—that reached his ankles, and picked out a spear.
Tremors likewise beset Menelaōs, nor on his eyelids 25
had sleep settled either, out of fear that some harm might
befall
the Argives, who for his sake had crossed the wide waters,
and had made their way to Troy, minds set on daring warfare.
First he draped his broad shoulders with the skin of a spotted
leopard; next he picked out and set on his head 30
a helmet of bronze, grasped a spear in his brawny fist,
then set off to rouse his brother (who held great sway
over the Argives, was honored by his people like a god),

and found him, setting his fine armor about his shoulders,
 by his ship's stern. His brother's arrival pleased him. 35
 Menelaös, of the good war cry, was the first to speak:
 "Why are you arming thus, brother? To urge some comrade
 to go and spy on the Trojans? I very much fear
 that no one will undertake this duty on your behalf:
 setting off out there alone to keep watch on the enemy 40
 through the ambrosial night—that calls for special courage."

 Then in answer to him lord Agamemnōn declared:
 "Both you and I need a plan, Menelaös, Zeus's nursing—
 a cunning plan, one that will rescue and protect
 the Argives and their ships, now Zeus has abandoned us, 45
 his mind rather favoring Hektōr's sacrifices:
 for I myself never saw—nor heard from another—how
 one man in one day could create such fearful havoc
 as Hektōr, Zeus's favorite, wrought on the Achaians' sons
 alone, though himself the son of neither god nor goddess. 50
 Long, long will the Argives be troubled, I tell you, by the deeds
 he's already achieved, such damage they did the Achaians!
 But off with you now, bring here Idomeneus and Aias—
 run quickly by the ships—while I'll go to noble Nestōr,
 and urge him to rouse himself up, find out if he's willing 55
 to inspect the guards on duty, issue them orders.
 He's the man they'd obey most readily, since his son's
 the guard commander—he, and Idomeneus's comrade
 Mēriōnēs: to them we especially gave this duty."

 To him then Menelaös, good at the war cry, replied: 60
 "What do you mean by this order? Are you telling me I should
 stay there with them and wait until you arrive,
 or hurry back here, once I've told them your requirements?"

 To him then Agamemnōn, lord of men, replied:
 "Stay there, in case we fail to meet each other 65
 as we go: there are many paths running right through the camp.
 And wherever you go, call out, tell the troops to stay awake;
 address each man, cite his lineage and his father's name,
 treating all with respect. And don't put on airs, but rather
 let's join the hard work ourselves, for this, it would seem, 70
 is the burden of evil that Zeus laid on us at our birth."

So saying, he sent off his brother, having briefed him well,
 and himself went in search of Nestōr, his people's shepherd.
 Him he found by his hut and his black ship, lying on
 his soft bed, and beside him, laid out, his well-wrought gear: 75
 his shield, his two spears, his gleaming helmet, and
 at his side the bright-polished belt with which the old man
 would gird himself when arming for murderous battle
 at the head of his troops, since he never deferred to grim old age.
 He raised himself on one elbow, lifted up his head, 80
 and addressing the son of Atreus, questioned him thus:
 "Who is this, walking alone by the ships, through the camp,
 in the dark of the night, when other mortals are sleeping?
 Is it one of your mules you're looking for? Or some comrade? Speak!
 Don't sneak up on me silently! What are you after?" 85

To him then answered the lord of men, Agamemnōn:
 "Ah, Nestōr, son of Nēleus, great glory of the Achaians,
 you should know Atreus's son Agamemnōn, whom beyond all
 others
 Zeus has set amid endless troubles, as long as the breath
 still remains in my body, while my knees can still respond! 90
 I am driven to wander thus, since on my eyes sweet sleep
 will not settle: the war, and the Achaians' woes, obsess me.
 I fear terribly for the Danaāns, my mind refuses
 to stay quiet, I'm distraught, my heart leaps pounding
 out of my breast, my bright limbs tremble beneath me. 95
 But if you too want action—since sleep won't visit you either—
 we could both go check on the sentries, make an inspection,
 just in case, worn out by toil, exhausted and drowsy,
 they've fallen asleep, their guard duties all forgotten.
 Enemy troops are encamped close by, and for all 100
 we know they may well mean to fight us, even at night.'

To him then answered Nestōr, Gerēnian horseman:
 "Most glorious son of Atreus, Agamemnōn, lord of men,
 surely not all his plans for Hektōr will Zeus of the counsels
 fulfill: not all, I'd guess, he now hopes for. No, I think 105
 he'll have troubles redoubled to cope with, should Achilles
 chance to turn his spirit away from destructive wrath!
 I'll gladly come with you—but let's also rouse some others:
 that famed spearman, the son of Tydeus, and Odysseus,

together with swift Aias, and Phyleus's valiant son— 110
 and someone should also go summon, as well as these,
 Aias the godlike and lordly Idomeneus,
 since their ships lie furthest off, not close at hand.
 But—dear man though he is, and well-liked—I have to reproach
 Menelaös: it may make you angry, but I can't hide my feelings! 115
 He's sleeping, has left the difficult work to you alone,
 when he should have been working hard on all our leaders,
 imploring them, now unbearable need is upon us."

To him then answered the lord of men, Agamemnōn:
 "Old sir, at another time I'd agree you should blame him, 120
 since he does leave much undone, is unwilling to shoulder work—
 not because of inertness or indifference of mind, but since
 he's always looking to me, awaiting my lead.
 But this time he woke before I did, and came to find me,
 and I sent him off to summon those about whom you ask. 125
 Now let's be going: we'll find them in front of the gates,
 with the guards. That's where I told them to assemble."

To him responded Nestōr, the Gerēnian horseman:
 "Then not one man of the Argives will either contradict
 or ignore him, whenever he exhorts them or gives them orders." 130

This said, he shrugged on a tunic over his chest,
 strapped a pair of fine sandals under his shining feet,
 flung round him a purple cloak, held fast with a buckle,
 of double-weave broadcloth, the napped wool thick upon it,
 picked up a mighty spear, tipped with sharp bronze, and then 135
 set out down the line of the bronze-clad Achaians' ships.
 Odysseus it was, Zeus's equal in counsel, whom
 the Gerēnian horseman Nestōr first aroused from his sleep,
 calling to him. At once the shout rippled round his senses,
 and out he came from his hut, and spoke to them, saying: 140
 "Why are you wandering round the camp, alone, by the ships,
 in the ambrosial night? What's your great urgency?"

To him responded Nestōr, the Gerēnian horseman:
 "Son of Laertēs, scion of Zeus, resourceful Odysseus,
 do not be angry! Great grief has overwhelmed the Achaians: 145
 so come, there's one more to wake, a man well suited
 to offer advice on whether to run for it or fight."

So he spoke, and resourceful Odysseus went back to his hut,
 shouldered an inlaid shield, and accompanied them. They now
 went looking for Tydeus's son Diomēdēs, and came upon him 150
 outside his hut with his battle gear. Round him his comrades
 were sleeping, shields under their heads. Their spears stood upright,
 rammed in on their butt-spikes, bronze gleaming bright and far
 like Zeus the Father's lightning. The hero himself
 was asleep too: spread beneath him was the hide of a field ox, 155
 and under his head a rolled-up bright-colored blanket.
 So Nestōr, Gerēnian horseman, went over and woke him
 with a kick of his foot, aroused him, chided him to his face:
 "Wake up, son of Tydeus! Will you slumber all night through?
 Don't you see that the Trojans are now encamped on the rise 160
 of the plain, right by the ships, hardly any distance from us?"

So he spoke. Diomēdēs suddenly started up from sleep,
 found utterance, addressed him then with winged words:
 "What a tough old bird you are! Do you never stop working?
 Are there no other, younger, sons of the Achaians 165
 who could rouse up each one of the princes, bustling around
 throughout the camp? Old man, you're impossible!"

To him responded Nestōr, the Gerēnian horseman:
 "Ah yes, friend, all that you say is fairly spoken:
 well-mannered sons I have, I have men under me, 170
 many men, any of whom could be sent to summon people;
 but a very great need has overwhelmed the Achaians,
 and now, indeed, matters stand on the razor's edge:
 vile destruction for the Achaians, all of them—or survival.
 So go now, wake up swift Aias, and Phyleus's son, 175
 if you feel sorry for me—you being the younger man."

So he spoke. Diomēdēs flung a lion-skin about his shoulders—
 huge, tawny, reaching his ankles—grasped his spear,
 went off, got these two men up, brought them back with him.

When they met with the sentries at their assembly point, 180
 the guard commanders, they found, were far from asleep:
 rather sitting awake and vigilant, their arms beside them.
 Just as dogs keep stressful watch on the flocks in a steading
 when they hear some fierce wild beast come down from the hills
 through the timber, and there's a loud clamor of men and dogs 185

going after it, and their sleep is all lost: so too for these
 sweet sleep from their eyelids perished, as they kept
 vigilant through this bad night, eyes fixed on the plain
 to catch any sound of a Trojan advance. At the sight of them
 the old man rejoiced, and gave them encouragement: 190
 [and spoke out then, addressed them with winged words.]¹
 “Keep watch as you’re doing, dear children; don’t let sleep
 overtake any one of you, make a sport of us to our foes.”

That said, he hurried across the ditch, and was followed
 by those Argive princes who’d been summoned to the council, 195
 and Mērionēs and Nestōr’s fine son went with them,
 since the princes themselves had asked them to contribute.
 So they crossed the dug ditch and settled themselves down
 in an open space where the ground was seen to be clear
 of the corpses of the fallen, the point at which mighty Hektōr 200
 had turned back from killing Argives, when night embraced him.
 There they sat down, and debated one with another,
 and the first to speak was Nestōr, the Gerēnian horseman:
 “My friends, is there really no man who’d trust his own daring
 spirit enough to venture among the great-hearted 205
 Trojans, in case he might catch some enemy straggler,
 or perhaps overhear some rumor among the Trojans,
 or what they’re planning between themselves—do they mean
 to remain out here by the ships, or will they withdraw
 back to the city, now they’ve defeated the Achaians? 210
 All this he might learn, and make his way back to us
 unscathed—and great, under high heaven, would be
 his renown among all men, with a noble gift besides;
 for of all our leaders, who lord it over their ships,
 every one will make him a gift of a black ewe 215
 with a suckling lamb—there’s no comparable possession,
 and he’ll always have a place at our feasts and banquets.”

So he spoke, and they all became quiet and silent. Then
 amongst them there spoke Diomēdēs of the great war cry:
 “Nestōr, my own heart and proud spirit urge me on 220
 to enter the camp of these hostile men close by,

1. A number of MSS omit this verse as an interpolation inserted merely to provide a specific verb of speaking.

these Trojans: but if some other man were to follow
 with me, there'd be greater comfort and greater confidence.
 When two go together, one reasons ahead of the other
 what's for the best; alone, he may figure the odds,
 but his mind has a shorter range, his judgment is slighter." 225

So he spoke, and many were eager to join Diomedēs:
 Eager were both Aiases, henchmen of Arēs; eager
 was Mērionēs; very eager was Nestōr's son; eager too
 Menelaös the son of Atreus, the far-famed spearman;
 eager was steadfast Odysseus to enter among the throng
 of the Trojans, since ever daring was the spirit in his breast.
 Then there spoke among them the lord of men, Agamemnōn:
 "Diomēdēs son of Tydeus, delight of my heart,
 choose whichever man you prefer as your companion,
 the best one of those here present, since many are eager. 230
 And don't, through unspoken respect, leave the better man
 unchosen, and take the worse, with an eye to his ancestry—
 however much more kingly he may happen to be."

So he spoke, alarmed on behalf of fair-haired Menelaös. 240
 But Diomēdēs of the great war cry once more responded:
 "If you honestly want me to choose my own companion,
 how then could I fail to call on godlike Odysseus,
 whose heart and gallant spirit are ready and willing
 for all manner of ventures—and Pallas Athēnē loves him! 245
 If this man goes with me, we two might come back unscathed
 from a blazing fire, such his unmatched quick-wittedness!"

To him then replied much-enduring noble Odysseus:
 "Son of Tydeus, don't over-praise me—or fault me, either:
 you're telling the Argives what they know well already. 250
 Let's be off now: night's nearly over, dawn is near,
 the stars have advanced in their courses, more than two-thirds
 of the night is gone; the third watch is all that's left us."

So they both spoke, and put on their fearsome gear.
 To Tydeus's son that staunch fighter Thrasymēdēs 255
 gave a two-edged sword—his own had been left by his ship—
 and a shield; on his head he settled a helmet of bull's hide,
 lacking both boss and crest, the kind that's known
 as a skullcap: the favored guard for the heads of lusty youths.

Mērionēs gave Odysseus a bow and a quiver, 260
 a sword too; and on his head he settled a helmet
 made out of leather: inside it many laces were tightly stretched,
 while on the outside a boar's white gleaming tusks
 were patterned this way and that, packed close together
 with consummate skill; it was lined with felt inside. This cap, 265
 long ago, from Ormenos's son Amyntōr in Eleōn
 Autolykos stole, breaking into his solid house, and gave it
 to Kytheran Amphidamas to take to Skandeia,
 but Amphidamas gave it to Molos as a guest-gift, and he
 gave it to Mērionēs, his own son, to wear; and now 270
 it was set on Odysseus's head and fitted it closely.²

So when the two had put on their fearsome gear,
 they set out, leaving all the leading men there behind them;
 and for them, on the right, a heron was sent, close beside
 their path, by Pallas Athēnē. Though they could not see it 275
 through the dark of the night, they still heard its sharp cry,
 and Odysseus, glad at the omen, now prayed to Athēnē:

"Hear me, child of Zeus of the aegis, you who always
 stand by me in all my ventures—nor am I forgotten
 when I move into action—now above all, Athēnē, 280
 favor me, let us enjoy a heroic return to the ships
 after carrying out some great feat to trouble the Trojans."

Then Diomēdēs of the great war cry prayed in his turn:
 "Hear me now too, child of Zeus, unwearying one!
 Accompany me as you once did my father, noble Tydeus, 285
 to Thēbē, when he went there as the Achaians' envoy: them—
 the bronze-corseleted Achaians—he left beside the Asōpos
 while he carried a friendly message to the Kadmeians
 in Thēbē; but while returning he did some fearsome deeds
 with you, bright goddess: you were ready to stand at his side. 290
 So now stand willingly by me too, and protect me,
 and to you I'll sacrifice in return a yearling heifer,

2. It was "common epic practice to identify an object by its history," Hainsworth observes (180–81): cf. Agamemnon's scepter (2.101–8) and Megēs' corselet (15.529–34). The convention of the guest-gift tended to keep valuable objects circulating in the heroic world. The boar's tusk helmet (one example survives) was a genuine early Bronze Age item, which later fell out of use.

broad-browed, unbroken, that no man's yet brought under
the yoke: I'll offer her up to you, horns sheathed in gold."

Such were their prayers, and Pallas Athênē heard them; 295
and when they'd finished praying to great Zeus's daughter,
they set off like two lions through the black night, amidst
the carnage and corpses, through the war gear, the black blood.

Nor were the proud Trojans left to sleep undisturbed
by Hektôr; he summoned the best of them in a body, 300
all those that were leaders and overlords of the Trojans,
and when he had them assembled he outlined a smart plan:
"Who'll take on a task for me, and carry it out
for a big reward, his recompense guaranteed?
I'll present a chariot and a pair of high-necked horses— 305
the best there are around the ships of the Achaians—
to anyone who'll dare—and win himself glory, too—
to steal up to those swift-sailing ships, and find out for us
if said swift ships are still being guarded as in the past,
or if, after taking a drubbing from us, these people 310
are planning amongst themselves to pull out, and don't now care
to keep watch all night, worn out by all their toil."

So he spoke, and they all became quiet and silent. Now
among the Trojans there was one Dolôn, a son of Eumêdēs
the sacred herald, a man of much gold, much bronze, 315
and ugly to look at, but nevertheless a swift runner,
the only son of the family, among five sisters.
He it was who now addressed the Trojans and Hektôr:
"Hektôr, my heart and my proud spirit urge me
to steal up to those swift-sailing ships, find out about them. 320
But come, raise your scepter before me, swear me an oath
that you'll truly give me these horses, this bronze-inlaid
chariot, that now carry Pêleus's peerless son!
And for you I'll be no idle scout, nor fail your expectations,
since I'll make straight for the camp, until I reach 325
Agamemnôn's ship, where I guess the leaders will be
deciding in council whether to pull out, or fight."

So he spoke: Hektôr held up the scepter and swore to him:
"Let Zeus himself, Hērē's loud-thundering spouse, bear witness

that no other Trojan man shall mount behind those horses,
but you, I declare, will have the joy of them for ever.” 330

So he spoke, and swore: a vain oath, but it heartened Dolōn.
At once he slung over his shoulders his back-bent bow,
and above that draped the skin of a grey wolf,
donned a marten-skin cap, and took a sharp javelin, 335
and moved off towards the ships from the camp, but was never
to return from the ships, or bring back word to Hektōr.
So when he left behind him the throng of men and horses
he pressed eagerly on his way, but was noticed approaching
by Odysseus, scion of Zeus, who then spoke to Diomēdēs: 340
“Here’s some man, Diomēdēs, coming out from the camp—
I don’t know whether he’s planning to spy on our ships,
or means to rob one of these battlefield corpses. We should
first let him get a little ahead of us on the plain,
and then we can make a quick rush and pounce upon him; 345
but if he’s quick on his feet, and outruns us both, then keep
herding him with your spear towards the ships, well away
from the camp—don’t let him somehow escape to the city!”

That said, they both left the path, lay down among
the cadavers, and in his folly Dolōn ran quickly past them. 350
When he’d gone as far beyond them as the range of a mule
plowing—and they’re far preferable to oxen
for drawing the jointed plow through deep and fallow ground—
then they both went after him. He, on hearing their footsteps,
stopped, hoping that they were comrades come from Troy 355
to turn him back, that Hektōr had ordered his withdrawal.
But when they were distant a spear’s throw, or even less,
he knew them for enemy warriors, moved his swift limbs
into precipitous flight. They at once set off after him.
As when two keen-fanged hounds, well-practiced hunters, 360
sprint close in on the heels of a doe or hare
through some wooded tract, and it runs screaming from them,
so now did Tydeus’s son and Odysseus the city-sacker
in their close relentless pursuit cut him off from his people.
But when he was on the point of coming among the sentries 365
as he fled toward the ships, then Athēnē put force
into Tydeus’s son, so that no bronze-corseleted Achaian
might boast of being first to hit Dolōn, leaving Tydeus’s son behind.

Rushing on him with his spear strong Diomēdēs cried:
“Stop, or my spear will nail you! Then, believe you me,
you’d not long escape sheer destruction at my hands.” 370

With that he let fly his spear, but deliberately missed: above
Dolōn’s right shoulder passed the polished spear’s keen point,
and stuck fast in the ground. He froze, stood there terrified,
stammering. In his mouth the teeth began to chatter, 375
he turned pale with fright. Panting, the two came up
and caught hold of his arms. He burst into tears and cried:
“Take me alive! I can ransom myself! Back home there’s stored
bronze, gold, and iron worked with much toil: from these
my father would gladly pay you ransom past counting 380
should he learn I am still alive by the Achaians’ ships.”

Then in answer to him resourceful Odysseus said:
“Take heart, remove the idea of death from your mind!
Now come, tell me this, and give me a true account:
Where are you off to, alone, from your camp, towards the ships, 385
in the dark night, when other mortals are sleeping?
Would it be to strip the gear from one of these dead men?
Did Hektōr send you out to discover what was afoot
by the hollow ships? Or was it some impulse of your own?”

To him then Dolōn replied, legs trembling beneath him: 390
“My mind was seduced by all Hektōr’s deceptive tricks—
the whole-hoofed horses of Pēleus’s lordly son
he promised me, along with his bronze-inlaid chariot,
and told me to make my way through the swift dark night,
steal up to the enemy troops, and find out whether 395
the swift ships are still being guarded as in the past,
or if, after taking a drubbing from us, these people
are planning amongst themselves to pull out, and don’t care
to keep watch all night, worn down by all their toil.”

Then, smiling at him, resourceful Odysseus replied: 400
“To great rewards indeed did your heart aspire—the horses
of the warrior grandson of Aiaikos! But they’re a hard challenge
for mortals to master or drive, excepting only
Achilles—and he was born of an immortal mother.
But come now, tell me this, and give me a true account: 405
Where, just before coming here, did you leave Hektōr,

his people's shepherd? Where's his battle gear, where his horses?
 How are the Trojans' watches arranged? Where do they sleep?
 And what are they planning among themselves? Do they intend
 to remain out here by the ships, or will they withdraw 410
 back to the city, now that they've defeated the Achaians?"

Then Dolōn son of Eumēdēs answered him thus:
 "Very well, I'll give you a true account of these things.
 Hektōr, together with all his advisers, is holding
 a council beside the tomb of Ilos the godlike, 415
 well away from the din. But as for the sentries, hero,
 you ask about, no special guard watches over the camp.
 By every Trojan watch fire there are those who must
 stay awake themselves, and order one another
 to keep the watch; but the allies, fetched in from many countries, 420
 are all asleep—they leave guard duty to the Trojans,
 seeing that their own wives and children are nowhere near."

In answer to him resourceful Odysseus now asked:
 "Where are they now? Do they sleep by the Trojan horse breakers,
 or somewhere apart? Tell me clearly, I need to know." 425

Then Dolōn son of Eumēdēs answered him thus:
 "Yes, I'll give you a true account of these things also.
 Down by the sea lie the Karians, the bent-bowed Païōnians,
 the Leleges, the Kaukōnes, and the noble Pelasgians;
 the Lycians and proud Mysians occupy a site towards Thymbrē, 430
 with the Phrygian chariot fighters and Maiōnian horse marshals.
 But why do you question me about all these matters?

If you're so hot to get in among the Trojan forces,
 here, off apart, just arrived, beyond the rest, are the Thracians,
 and with them Rhēsos, their king, son of Eioneus. 435

His horses are the finest and largest that ever I saw:
 They're whiter than snow, and run as fast as the winds.
 His chariot's skillfully inlaid with gold and silver, and gold's
 the huge battle gear he arrived in, a marvel to look at—
 such armor this as should never even be worn 440

by us mere mortals, but only by the immortal gods!
 And now either take me with you to the swift-travelling ships,
 or truss me up firmly and leave me here while you go
 and make trial of my information, find out whether or not
 what I've told you is accurate."

Then with a stern glance 445
 Powerful Diomēdēs addressed him in these words: “Dolōn,
 “I tell you, nurse no thoughts of escape in your heart,
 though you’ve told us useful facts since you came into our
 hands.
 For if we release you for ransom, or let you go free now,
 you’ll make your way back later to the Achaians’ swift ships, 450
 either, again, as a spy, or fight in the open against us;
 but if, overcome by my hands, you give up your life,
 never again will you make any trouble to the Argives.”

At that, Dolōn tried to touch his chin with one stout hand
 and implore him, but Diomēdēs came at him with his sword 455
 and hit his neck squarely, slashing through both sinews,
 and while he still spoke his head fell in the dust.

Then they took the marten-skin cap from his head, along with
 the wolf’s pelt, the back-bent bow, and the long spear,
 and these things to Athēnē the spoil-driver noble Odysseus 460
 lifted high in his hand and prayed, addressing her thus:
 “Hail, goddess! These are for you. On you, first of all, we’ll call,
 of all the immortals up on Olympos! Now help us once more,
 guide us towards the Thracians’ horses and sleeping quarters.”

So he spoke, and raised high the spoils, and hung them up 465
 on a tamarisk bush, and made a conspicuous marker
 beside them, bundling up reeds and leafy tamarisk branches,
 so as not to miss the spot coming back through the swift black
 night.

Then they both went on, through the war gear, the black blood,
 and quickly arrived at the Thracian warriors’ post. 470
 These they found sleeping, exhausted, with their fine battle gear
 neatly piled on the ground beside them, all in order,
 in three rows, and by each man was his yoke of horses.
 Rhēsos slept in their midst, and close to him his swift horses
 were hitched by their reins to the top of the chariot rail. 475
 Odysseus saw him first, pointed him out to Diomēdēs:
 “That’s the man, Diomēdēs, and those are his horses—
 as Dolōn described to us, he whom we just slew!
 Come on, then: use your great strength, don’t stand around
 idly, not using your weapons! Untether the horses— 480
 or else I’ll see to the horses, you kill the men.”

He spoke: **into Diomēdēs grey-eyed Athēnē breathed force.**
 To and fro he went killing, and hideous groans went up from
 those struck by his sword: the ground grew red with blood.
 Just as a lion comes upon unshepherded flocks, 485
 sheep or goats, and with grim intent springs at them,
 so at these Thracian warriors went the son of Tydeus
 till he'd slain a dozen. But resourceful Odysseus,
 each time that Tydeus's son squared up and used his sword,
 came from behind and, catching the corpse by one foot, 490
 dragged it aside, concerned that the fine-maned horses
 should have easy passage through, and not take fright
 from treading upon dead men, being as yet unused to them.
When the son of Tydeus came to the Thracian king,
this was the thirteenth man that he robbed of honey-sweet life, 495
gasping, because a bad dream stood over his head that night:
the grandson of Oineus, brought there by Athēnē's wiles.³
 Now steadfast Odysseus untethered the whole-hoofed horses,
 used their reins to tie them together, drove them out of the camp,
 whipping them with his bow, because he hadn't remembered 500
 to grab himself the bright whip from the inlaid chariot.
 Now he whistled, giving a signal to noble Diomēdēs,
 who, still back there, was debating the most outrageous action
 he could perform: take the chariot, with its inlaid war gear?
 Haul it out by its pole? Or heft it and carry it? Or 505
 should he rather take the lives of still more Thracians?
 While he was debating all this in his mind, Athēnē came up,
 stood close, and spoke thus to noble Diomēdēs:
"Think about your return now, great-hearted son of Tydeus,
to the hollow ships, lest maybe in headlong flight you come there, 510
if it chance that some other god should awaken the Trojans."
 So she spoke, and he knew it for the voice of a goddess,
 and quickly mounted. Odysseus slashed the horses with his bow,
 and they flew on their way towards the Achaians' swift ships.
But no blind watch was that kept by silver-bowed Apollo: 515
he sighted Athēnē attending to Tydeus's son: enraged
against her he went down into the great mass of the Trojans,

3. Oineus's grandson, of course, was Diomēdēs himself: thus the bad dream became a horrific reality.

and woke one of the Thracians' counselors, Hippokoōn,
 a noble cousin of Rhēsos. He started up from sleep,
 and when he saw the bare space where their swift steeds had been, 520
 and men gasping their last amid that bloody shambles,
 then he groaned aloud, and called his dear comrade by name,
 and the Trojans, clamoring loudly, in boundless confusion,
 came crowding round, to stare at all the horrific deeds
 done by those men before they returned to the hollow ships. 525

But when they got back to where they'd killed off Hektōr's spy,
 then Odysseus, dear to Zeus, reined in the swift horses,
 while Tydeus's son jumped down, seized the bloodstained spoils
 to place in Odysseus's hands, and then remounted.
 He whipped the horses, and they, nothing loath, sped on 530
 [to the hollow ships, where their hearts desired to be.]⁴
 First to catch the sound of their hoofbeats was Nestōr. He exclaimed:
 "My friends, leaders and rulers of the Argives,
 am I mistaken, or right? My heart bids me speak!
 The hoofbeats of galloping horses beat on my ears! 535
 How I hope that this is Odysseus and powerful Diomēdēs
 back from among the Trojans, driving whole-hoofed steeds—
 yet I dreadfully fear in my heart that they've suffered some hurt,
 these valiant Argives, caught in turmoil with the Trojans."

The words were not out of his mouth when the two arrived, 540
 and stepped down onto the ground, while the rest, rejoicing,
 greeted them with handshakes and words of welcome.
 Nestōr, Gerēnian horseman, was the first to question them:
 "Come, tell me, storied Odysseus, great glory of the Achaians,
 how you two took these horses—by confronting the mass 545
 of the Trojan army? Or did you encounter some god
 who gave them you? They're amazing, like the rays of the sun!
 I've long been fighting Trojans—and I can assure you
 I don't hang back by the ships, old warrior though I am—
 but never yet have I seen, or imagined, such horses! So, 550
 I do think it must be a god that met you, gave you them,
 since both of you are loved by Zeus the cloud-gatherer,
 and the daughter of Zeus of the aegis, grey-eyed Athēnē."

4. Some MSS omit this formulaic line as being an interpolation here: why should Rhēsos's Thracian horses long to be among the Greek ships?

In answer to him resourceful Odysseus now declared:
 “Nestōr, Nēleus’s son, great glory of the Achaians, 555
 easily could a god, if he wanted, have given us even
 better horses than these, since gods are far mightier than us.
 No, these horses, old sir, about which you’re enquiring,
 are Thracian, new arrivals; brave Diomēdēs slew
 their king, with his comrades—twelve in all, and those the best! 560
 The thirteenth man was a scout we caught near the ships,
 who’d been sent out as an observer to spy on our camp
 by Hektōr and the rest of the noble Trojans.”

That said,

across the ditch he then drove the whole-hoofed horses,
 laughing, and happily with him went the other Achaians. 565
 When they came to the strong-built hut of Tydeus’s son,
 the horses they tethered by their fine-cut leather reins
 at the same manger where Diomēdēs’ own swift-footed
 horses stood, munching away at honey-sweet grain; and on
 the stern of his ship Odysseus set Dolōn’s bloodstained spoils, 570
 to be prepared as a sacred offering to Athēnē.
 Then they plunged in the sea, wiped off the abundant sweat
 that had gathered upon their shins and necks and thighs;
 and when the waves of the sea had washed away all that sweat
 from their skin, and their hearts were refreshed, then they went 575
 and climbed into polished bathtubs and bathed themselves.
 Having bathed, they massaged their bodies with oil, and then
 sat down to a meal and from the full mixing bowl
 drew honey-sweet wine to make their offering to Athēnē.