

## Book 14

Nestōr was drinking, but still picked up the sounds of battle,  
and so addressed winged words to the son of Asklēpios:  
“Consider, noble Machaōn, how this business will turn out:  
the clamor of lusty young fighters around the ships is louder!  
Now you just sit where you are, and drink your fire-bright wine 5  
till fair-tressed Hekamēdē heats you a warm bath  
and washes you clean of all that dried blood! I myself  
am off to a vantage point to see what’s going on.”

So saying, he took the well-made shield of his son,  
Thrasymēdēs the horse breaker, that was lying there in the hut, 10  
all gleaming with bronze—his own shield his son had taken—  
and selected a solid spear, tipped with keen-edged bronze.  
Standing outside the hut, he at once saw a wretched scene:  
his own side in disarray, with the enemy, the high-hearted  
Trojans, in hot pursuit, and the Achaians’ wall torn down. 15  
As when the vast deep darkens up with a silent comber,  
vaguely foretelling the shrill winds’ rapid courses—  
the waves don’t roll forward towards one side or the other  
until some decisive gale comes down from Zeus—  
just so the old man meditated, pondering in his mind 20  
this way and that: join the swift-colted Danaäns’ throng?  
or seek Atreus’s son Agamemnōn, shepherd of the people?  
and as he debated, this struck him as being the better way:  
to go after Atreus’s son. But meanwhile the rest fought on,  
killing each other; the tireless bronze sheathing their bodies 25  
clanged as they thrust with their swords and twin-edged spears.

Now Nestōr encountered those kings, Zeus’s nurslings, who’d been  
maimed by the bronze, as they made their way back from the ships:  
the son of Tydeus, Odysseus, and Atreus’s son Agamemnōn.  
Far distant from the fighting the ships of these were drawn up 30  
on the shore of the grey sea: they’d been the first to be dragged  
up to the plain, and the wall was built well beyond their sterns.  
For wide though the beach was, there was no way that it could  
contain all the ships, and the army was short of camp space.

So they hauled up the ships row by row, and filled the entire shore the two headlands enclosed.<sup>1</sup> So these kings were going, together, to witness the uproar and the fighting, each leaning on his spear; and sorrow afflicted the spirit in the breasts of them all. It was thus that the old man, Nestōr, met them, alarming the hearts in the breasts of these Achaians, and the lord Agamemnōn now addressed him, saying: 35  
 “Ah, Nestōr, son of Nēleus, great glory of the Achaians, why have you left the murderous conflict to come here? I fear mighty Hektōr’s fulfilling the promise he made me— those threats that he issued when speaking before the Trojans— 40  
 that he wouldn’t go back to Ilion from our ships until he’d set fire to the ships and killed their defenders too: such were his words, and now all this is being accomplished! Curse it, it must be that the other well-greaved Achaians are storing a grudge against me, as is Achillēs, 50  
 and don’t mean to make a fight of it by the sterns of our vessels!”

Then Nestōr, Gerēnian horseman, answered him as follows:  
 “Yes, indeed, these things have happened, are on us: not even high-thundering Zeus himself could have ordered them differently. The wall indeed is down that we put our trust in 55  
 to be an unbreakable bulwark for our vessels and ourselves, while those at the swift ships fight on ceaselessly, without end: you could no longer tell, even by watching closely, from which side the Achaians are being driven in flight, so mingled their deaths, as the battle cry rises to heaven. 60  
 We need to consider how this business will turn out— Is there any plan can affect it? But I’m against our joining the battle: a wounded man is in no position to fight.”

Then once more spoke in response the king of men, Agamemnōn:  
 “Nestōr, since they are fighting now by the sterns of the ships, 65  
 and neither the wall we built, nor the ditch, has helped us at all— though the Danaäns labored hard at them, hoped in their hearts

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1. This agrees well with the geography. The two headlands, of Rhoiteion in the east and Sigeion in the west, are “some two and a half miles apart as the crow flies” (Hainsworth 154). The beach was not large enough for the whole fleet, so the ships were drawn up “in rows in a curve round the entire shore”. A logistics expert might calculate how far the available space is compatible with the traditional number of Homeric galleys (Casson 43–48).

that they'd be an unbreakable bulwark for the ships and  
 themselves—  
 this, I think, must be the pleasure of all-powerful Zeus, 70  
 that we Achaians should perish here, namelessly, far from Argos.  
 I knew it when he was prompt in support of the Danaäns,  
 and I know it now, when he honors our foes as he would  
 the blessed gods, and has shackled our strength and hands.  
 So, let us now all agree to the action that I propose:  
 all the vessels drawn up in the first line, close to the sea, 75  
 we should haul down into the bright brine, set them afloat,  
 and moor them with anchor stones, until the coming  
 of immortal night—if even then these Trojans take a break  
 from the fighting! Later we could relaunch the whole fleet.  
 There's no blame in fleeing disaster, even at night: 80  
 Escape by flight is better than getting caught.”

Angrily eyeing him, resourceful Odysseus responded:  
 “Son of Atreus, what words have escaped the barrier of your teeth!  
 Accursed man, you should be in command of some other  
 miserable ragtag army, not lord over us, to whom Zeus 85  
 has given the task, from youth to old age, of winding  
 the skein of grim war, till we perish, every last man!  
 Are you really so eager to leave the Trojans' spacious city,  
 for which we've endured so much hardship? Be silent,  
 in case some other Achaian hears this statement 90  
 that you've just made, words no man should ever utter,  
 let alone one who knows in his mind what's proper to say,  
 who's a sceptered king, to whom as many owe their allegiance  
 as the number of Argives over whom you have lordship!  
 I wholly despise your thinking, in what you just said, 95  
 for telling us, when warfare and combat are in progress,  
 to relaunch our well-benched vessels, so that the Trojans,  
 with the upper hand already, may win yet more of their hopes,  
 while we suffer sheer destruction! The Achaians won't pursue  
 this war any further once our vessels are seaborne; 100  
 they'll be looking elsewhere, disengaging from the conflict,  
 and it's then your advice will destroy us, commander in chief!”

To him then the king of men, Agamemnōn, made his answer:  
 “Ah, Odysseus, you've pierced my heart with this reproof of yours,  
 it's so harsh! I would never tell the sons of the Achaians 105

to haul our benched vessels seaward against their will!  
 I wish there was someone to offer us better advice than mine,  
 either young man or old: this is what I'd really welcome."

Among them now spoke Diomēdēs, good at the war cry:  
 "Such a man is close by: we'll not need to seek him long— 110  
 that is, if you'll listen, if you're not, each one of you, angry  
 because in years I'm the youngest among you. Even so,  
 I too can boast of my lineage, have an excellent father,  
 Tydeus, whom now in Thēbē the heaped earth covers.  
 For to Portheus were born three peerless sons, who had 115  
 their home in Pleurōn and mountainous Kalydōn:  
 Melas and Agrios, and, third, the horseman Oineus,  
 my father's father, who in valor outshone them all.  
 He stayed there; my father wandered, settled in Argos—  
 such, I suppose, was the will of Zeus and the other gods.<sup>2</sup> 120  
 He married one of Adrēstos's daughters, dwelt in a house  
 rich in possessions, owned abundant wheat-bearing  
 plowland, with numerous orchards round about,  
 and plentiful flocks, besides excelling every Achaian  
 as a spearman. All this you'll have heard, and know the truth of it. 125  
 So you can't say that by descent I'm a coward or weakling,  
 and therefore scorn any good advice I give you!  
 Come then, let's to the battle, though wounded: go we must.  
 Ourselves we'll hold back from the conflict, out of the range  
 of missiles, lest one of us suffer a wound upon his wound; 130  
 but the others we'll urge into combat, those who till now,  
 nursing their mood, have held back, stayed out of the fighting."

So he spoke. They willingly heard him out, and obeyed:  
 set forth and went, Agamemnōn, the king of men, leading them.

No blind watch did the far-famed Earth-Shaker keep, 135  
 but accompanied them in the likeness of an old man,  
 and grasped the right hand of Atreus's son Agamemnōn  
 and spoke to him, uttering winged words: "Son of Atreus,  
 now, I fancy, Achilles' baneful heart must be rejoicing

2. Diomēdēs here tactfully skates over a piece of murderous family feuding: his father Tydeus, traditionally not only short but short-tempered, in fact fled Aitōlia after killing a relative, probably an uncle. "[N]obody [in Homer] 'wanders' save perforce and 'by the gods' will', a euphemism for 'by necessity,'" Hainsworth remarks (164).

in his breast as he watches this slaughter and pursuit 140  
 of the Achaeans, since there's no sense in him, not a scrap—  
 so may he perish, so may some god undo him!  
 But with you the blessed gods are in no way angered:  
 even yet the leaders and rulers of the Trojans  
 may raise dust clouds on the wide plain, and you'll see them 145  
 fleeing back to the city from the ships and huts.”

So saying, he bellowed aloud as he charged across the plain:  
 as loud was the shout that nine—no, ten—thousand men  
 utter in wartime as they engage in Arēs' strife—  
 so great was the cry that the lord, the Earth-Shaker, sent forth 150  
 from his chest, putting great strength in every last Achaian's  
 heart to engage in warfare and battle without cease.

Hērē the golden-throned now observed him from where  
 she stood on a peak of Olympos: she recognized him at once  
 as he hustled about in the battle that wins men glory, 155  
 her own and her husband's brother; and she rejoiced at heart.  
 Zeus too she observed, ensconced on the topmost peak  
 of spring-rich Ida; and hateful he was to her heart.  
 So the ox-eyed lady Hērē now took thought as to how  
 she could best delude the mind of Zeus of the aegis, 160  
 and this to her way of thinking seemed the best plan:  
 to beautify herself nicely, then make her way to Ida,  
 and see if he might desire to embrace her body  
 in love, and she might then shed a warm and peaceful  
 sleep on his eyelids and his sharp and devious mind. 165  
 So she went to the private chamber that her dear son  
 Hēphaistos had built her, fitting strong doors to the door frame,  
 with a secret key, to be opened by no other god.  
 In there she went, and shut the shining doors.  
 First with ambrosia she cleaned off the whole of her lovely 170  
 body; then she gave it a massage it with olive oil,  
 specially perfumed for her ambrosial robe,<sup>3</sup>  
 and which, merely shaken in Zeus's bronze-built abode,  
 would spread its aroma out to both earth and heaven.  
 With this she anointed her sweet flesh, then combed out 175  
 her hair, and with her hands plaited the shining tresses,

3. Text uncertain: here I follow Hainsworth 174–75.

fine and ambrosial,<sup>4</sup> from her immortal head;  
 put on an ambrosial robe, that Athēnē had skilfully  
 made for her, and adorned with many embroideries;  
 this with golden brooches she pinned at the breast, 180  
 and round her waist tied a sash with a hundred tassels,  
 and in her pierced ears put earrings, embellished with triple  
 mulberry clusters, that shone in an alluring fashion.  
 Over all this Hērē, bright among goddesses, spread  
 a fine glistening veil, as white as the very sun, 185  
 and under her gleaming feet bound her beautiful sandals.  
 Now, having decked out her body with every adornment,  
 she emerged from her chamber, and called to her Aphroditē,  
 away from the other gods, and had this to say to her:  
 “Will you listen now, dear child, to what I shall ask you, 190  
 or refuse me, out of vexation at heart, because  
 I give support to the Danaäns, you to the Trojans?”  
  
 Then answered her Aphroditē, daughter of Zeus:  
 “Hērē, elder goddess, daughter of mighty Kronos,  
 tell me what you’ve in mind—my heart says I should do it 195  
 if do it I can and it’s something that can be done.”  
  
 To her the lady Hērē, deception in mind, replied:  
 “Give me now love and passion, those things with which  
 you vanquish all men, both mortals and the immortal:  
 for I’m going to visit the ends of the bounteous earth, 200  
 and Ocean, who gave gods their being, and Tethys my mother,  
 who brought me up well and cared for me in their home  
 after taking me over from Rhea when Zeus, the far-seeing,  
 thrust Kronos down under the earth and the unharvested<sup>5</sup> sea.  
 Them I am going to visit, to resolve their unsettled quarrel: 205

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4. The epithet “ambrosial” (ἀμβρόσιος, *ambrosios*) has been variously identified as meaning “immortal”, “beautiful”, and “fragrant” or “sweet-scented”, while “ambrosia” (ἀμβροσίη, *ambrosiē*), as a noun, can signify either the food of the gods (and divine horses, 5.777), an unguent (presumably scented), a cleaning agent (either as cosmetic, or for corpses), or even immortality. In the circumstances I have chosen to keep the original term, and let its original associations speak for themselves.
5. “Unharvested” (ἀτρύγετος, *atrygetos*, formed from *a-* privative and τρύγη, grain crop or vintage) was the scholiasts’ convincing interpretation of this formulaic epithet, accepted by scholars until comparatively recently, when linguists decided that it meant either “restless” or “murmuring”, thus (on highly speculative grounds) changing a striking and original epithet into a mere cliché. I have preferred to stick with the scholiasts.

for too long they've held aloof each from the other  
 in love and the marriage bed, since anger's filled their hearts.  
 If I could talk those two over, bring their hearts back  
 to bed, to be reunited in love together, then I'd  
 forever known be as their friend, one worth their respect." 210

To her then replied laughter-loving Aphrodītē:  
 "It's not possible, nor is it seemly, that I should deny  
 this request from you, who sleep in almighty Zeus's embrace."

With that she undid from her bosom the embroidered breast band,  
 intricately worked, with all kinds of allurements set in it— 215  
 therein were love, and desire, and dalliance: beguilement  
 that steals away the sharp wits of even sensible people.  
 She put this in Hērē's hands, and addressed her, saying:  
 "Here, take this breast band, lay it up in your bosom,  
 intricately worked, and in it all kinds of things set: you'll not, 220  
 I tell you, return with your heart's wish unaccomplished."

So she spoke, and Hērē, the ox-eyed lady, smiled,  
 and with that smile laid the breast band up in her bosom.

The daughter of Zeus, Aphrodītē, now went to her house;  
 but Hērē darted down, leaving the heights of Olympos,<sup>6</sup> 225  
 traversed Pieria and lovely Emathia, flew over  
 the snowclad mountains of the horse-herding Thracians—  
 their topmost peaks, her feet never catching the ground;  
 from Athos she moved on over the wave-swept deep,  
 and came to Lēmnos, the city of godlike Thoas. 230  
 Here she encountered Sleep, the brother of Death,  
 whom she took by the hand, and addressed in the following words:  
 "Sleep, you lord over all gods and all mankind,  
 if you ever listened to words of mine, so now once more  
 obey me—I'll be in your debt for all my days! 235  
 Make drowsy for me Zeus's bright eyes beneath his brows  
 the moment I'm through with lying beside him in love,  
 and gifts I'll give you—a fine throne that'll last for ever,

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6. The goddess's flight plan, followed on a map, looks somewhat roundabout until one realizes that, as Graziosi 2011 (432) points out, "she avoids open water, just as real-life sailors did." Greek sailors in particular steered from island to island, unlike the Phoenicians of the Eastern Mediterranean, who in that vast expanse had to learn true navigation the hard way, by the stars or dead reckoning.

of gold, too, skillfully made for me by my own son,  
Hēphaistos, lame of both legs, and he'll add a footstool to it, 240  
on which you can rest your sleek feet while you sit and feast."

In answer to her soothing Sleep had this to say:  
"Hērē, elder goddess, daughter of mighty Kronos,  
some other one of the gods that live on for ever  
I might easily lull to sleep—yes, even the streams of the river 245  
Ocean, that established genesis of them all;  
but to Zeus, son of Kronos, I'd never come too close,  
nor would I lull him to sleep, unless he so ordered me;  
for once in the past another such order of yours  
taught me a lesson, the day when that arrogant son of Zeus 250  
sailed from Ilion, after he'd sacked the Trojans' city.<sup>7</sup>  
Then indeed I beguiled the mind of Zeus of the aegis,  
swirling gently about him, while for his son you plotted  
trouble, stirred over the deep a gale of dangerous winds,  
and sent him out of his way to well-populated Kōs, 255  
far from his kin. Zeus woke, was enraged, strong-armed  
the other gods in his palace, sought me especially, would have  
hurled me from heaven into the deep, to be lost for ever,  
had Night not saved me, who lays low both gods and men.  
To her I came in my flight, and Zeus, though enraged, held off me, 260  
to avoid displeasing swift Night, whom he revered. And now  
you're telling me to perform this other task! Out of the question."

Then the ox-eyed lady Hērē once more addressed him:  
"Sleep, why are you brooding over all these things in your heart?  
Do you think far-seeing Zeus would help the Trojans, 265  
be enraged for them as he was for his own son Hēraklēs?  
Look, I'll make you a present of one of the younger Graces  
to take in wedlock, and to be known as your wife—  
Pasithēē, whom you've yearned for your whole life."

So she spoke, 270  
and Sleep, delighted, replied to her in these words:

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7. Sleep is recalling another incident, when he got in trouble with Zeus for performing a very similar service for Hērē to that which she is now soliciting. This earlier request had to do with the aftermath of a previous sacking of Troy by 'that arrogant son of Zeus,' i.e. Hēraklēs (cf. 15.18–30 for Zeus's version of the same episode, and 19.106–34 for Hērē's rooted dislike of Hēraklēs), after which Zeus was lulled to sleep while Hērē disposed of Hēraklēs to the island of Kōs.



“Come, then, swear to me by Styx’s sacrosanct waters,  
 with one hand laying hold of the nurturing earth, and the other  
 the glistening main, that between us two they may all  
 bear witness, all the gods that are below with Kronos,  
 that you will make me a present of one of the younger Graces, 275  
 Pasithēē, whom I’ve longed for my whole life.”

So he spoke,  
 and the goddess, white-armed Hērē, did not ignore him,  
 but swore as he wanted, invoked by name all the gods  
 that dwell under Tartaros, and are known as Titans.  
 When she’d sworn the oath, accomplished it fully, they both 280  
 went on their way, left the townships of Lēmnos and Imbros,  
 shrouded in mist, and swiftly followed their chosen path.  
 To spring-rich Ida they came, the mother of wild creatures,  
 and Lekton, where first they left the sea, and together  
 went on over land, and the treetops rippled beneath their feet. 285  
 There Sleep stopped, before the eyes of Zeus perceived him,  
 and climbed a very tall fir tree, the highest then on Ida,  
 reaching up through the mist to the clear air above.  
 Here he sat, well hidden by the fir tree’s crowding branches,  
 like that sharp-voiced bird in the mountains, called by the gods 290  
 Chalkis, but mortal men refer to it as Kymindis.<sup>8</sup>

But Hērē pressed on swiftly, came to Gargaros, the topmost  
 peak of high Ida; and Zeus the cloud-gatherer saw her.  
 The moment he did so, passion eclipsed his reasoned thinking,  
 such as he’d felt the first time they went to bed 295  
 and made love together, unseen by their own dear parents.<sup>9</sup>  
 Now he stood before her, and addressed her in these words:  
 “Hērē, with what in mind are you come here, down from Olympos?  
 Your horses are not here, nor your chariot to ride in.”

To him, with deception in mind, the lady Hērē replied: 300  
 “I’m going to visit the ends of the bounteous earth,  
 and Ocean, who gave gods their being, and Tethys my mother,

8. The *kymindis* was in fact some kind of Ionian owl: most probably the eagle owl (*Strix bubo*), but possibly either the hawk owl (*Strix uralensis*) or the long-eared owl (*Asio otus*). See Janko 196–97.

9. A gentle indirect reminder by Homer that this was no ordinary teenage experiment. That they shared the same parents meant, of course, that they were brother and sister: the coupling was incestuous.

who brought me up well and cared for me in their halls.  
 Them am I going to visit, to resolve their unsettled quarrel:  
 for too long now they've held aloof each from the other 305  
 in love and the marriage bed, since anger has filled their hearts.  
 As for my horses, they're waiting in spring-rich Ida's  
 foothills, to carry me over dry land and the watery deep.  
 But now it's because of you I've come here, down from Olympus,  
 since you might be annoyed with me later, if I departed, 310  
 without saying a word, for the home of deep-flowing Ocean."

In answer to her then Zeus the cloud-gatherer said:  
 "Hērē, you can go there at some later time: let us both  
 now take our pleasure in bed, since never before  
 has so strong a passion for goddess or mortal woman 315  
 encompassed my body and mastered the spirit in my breast—  
 not when I was making love with the wife of Ixiōn,  
 who bore me Peirithoös, the gods' own equal in counsel,<sup>10</sup>  
 nor when I had neat-ankled Danaë, Akrisios's daughter,  
 who gave birth to Perseus, most prestigious of warriors, 320  
 nor when I loved the daughter of far-famed Phoinix,  
 who bore me both Mīnōs and godlike Rhadamanthys,  
 nor when it was Semelē, or Alkmēnē in Thēbē—  
 she it was that bore Hēraklēs, my stouthearted son,  
 while Semelē bore Dionysos, the delight of mortals— 325  
 nor when it was Dēmētēr, that fair-tressed queen,  
 nor glorious Lētō, no, nor even yourself, as now  
 I'm enamoured of you, and possessed by sweet desire."

To him, with deception in mind, the lady Hērē replied:  
 'Most dread son of Kronos, what's this that you're telling me? 330  
 Is what you want to go to bed now and make love  
 here on the peaks of Ida, where everything's in plain view?  
 How would it be if a god, one of those who live for ever,  
 should see us in bed, and tell tales when he got back among

10. Aristophanes and Aristarchos both athetized 317–18; Plato (*Rep.* 390c) did not have these lines. I suspect prurience here. There is no reason to doubt their genuineness: the whole episode is full of such embarrassing oddities. Zeus sounds like an adulterer; and as a Homeric audience would well have known, not only did Ixion—in one tradition a son of Zeus—try to rape Hērē (? tit for tat?), but both he and Peirithoös, also Zeus's offspring, by Ixion's wife Dia (Gantz 278, 718), were (Janko 203, with a string of lurid examples) "notorious rapists" (like father, like son?).

all the other gods? Then, I tell you, I'd not be able to go 335  
 from bed here back to your house: I'd feel too ashamed.  
 But if that's what you want, if it's your heart's desire,  
 you have a bedchamber that your dear son Hēphaistos  
 built for you, fitting solid doors into the door frame:  
 let's go there and lie down, since bed is now your pleasure."<sup>11</sup> 340

In answer to her then Zeus the cloud-gatherer said:  
 "Hērē, you need not fear that either god or mortal  
 may see us, with such a cloud I shall wrap you about,  
 of gold, through which not even Hēlios could discern us,  
 whose vision is unsurpassed for keenness of perception." 345

With that the son of Kronos clasped his wife in his arms,  
 and beneath them the noble earth made fresh grass spring up,  
 and dewy trefoil and crocus and hyacinth, soft and thick,  
 that cushioned them from the ground. On these they lay,  
 and were wrapped about in a cloud, lovely and golden, 350  
 and from it drops of glistening dew rained down.

So the Father slumbered in peace, on the summit of Gargaros,  
 by sleep and love-making vanquished, his wife in his embrace.  
 But soothing Sleep ran off to the ships of the Achaians  
 with a message for the Earth-Shaker and Earth-Enfolder, 355  
 and standing beside him addressed him in winged words:  
 "Readily now, Poseidōn, you can succor the Danaäns  
 and grant them glory, if but for a little, as long as Zeus  
 remains asleep—since on him I've shed soft oblivion,  
 when Hērē beguiled him, made him lie with her in love." 360

So saying, he went on his way to the famous tribes of men,  
 but Poseidōn was stirred yet further to rescue the Danaäns.  
 At once, dashing up to the front ranks, he called out loudly:  
 "Argives! Must we again cede the victory to Hektōr,  
 Priam's son, allow him to take the ships, to win glory? 365  
 This he says, thus he boasts it will be, on account of Achilles  
 staying back by the hollow ships, enraged at heart.

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11. There is more than ladylike modesty involved here. As a scholiast points out (Hainsworth 205), had Zeus acceded to his sister-wife's request, he would not only have been lured well away from Troy, but would have also risked imprisonment in her private room, since (166–68) it had been fitted by Hēphaistos with a secret key, so that only she could open or shut its door.

But we'll not miss his presence too much so long as the rest of us  
 rouse ourselves now and lend support to one another!  
 Come then, let's all of us do what I suggest: 370  
 Let's find the biggest and best shields in the army,  
 cover our heads with gleaming helmets, and take  
 in our hands the longest lances, and so arrayed  
 go forth! I shall be the leader, nor do I anticipate  
 that Priam's son Hektōr, however eager, will face us! 375  
 And any tough warrior, a small shield on his shoulder,  
 should now exchange that for a lesser man's bigger one."<sup>12</sup>

So he spoke: they heard him out readily, and obeyed,  
 and the kings themselves, though wounded, joined the array:  
 Tydeus's son, and Odysseus, Agamemnōn, son of Atreus, 380  
 and going throughout the ranks they made an exchange of armor:  
 good fighters donned the good gear, gave the less good to lesser men.  
 Then, when they'd sheathed their bodies in gleaming bronze,  
 they set out, under the leadership of Poseidōn the Earth-Shaker,  
 in his strong hand a fearsome sword, long and keen-edged, 385  
 like the lightning, with which it's forbidden that men should meddle  
 in grim war: sheer terror holds warriors back from it.  
 On the other side illustrious Hektōr arrayed the Trojans:  
 now indeed war's most terrible strife was stretched out taut  
 by dark-maned Poseidōn and illustrious Hektōr, 390  
 bringing aid the one to the Trojans, the other to the Argives,  
 and the sea surged up towards the huts and the ships  
 of the Argives, and with a great shout the sides engaged.  
 No wave rolling in on the shore, driven up from the deep  
 by the North Wind's fierce blast, thunders so mightily, 395  
 no blazing fire in the mountains roars so loud  
 when it leaps from a glen to burn up the forest, no wind  
 howls so fiercely among the high crests of the oaks,  
 even the gale that's the noisiest in its fury—as then  
 was the roar of Achaians and Trojans, raising a fearsome 400  
 clamor in their assault, one side against the other.

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12. Suspension of disbelief (as commentators on this passage have noted from antiquity to the present day) can go only so far. Presumably Poseidōn plans to drop his old-man disguise and lead the charge as himself. But not even Homeric military convention extends to everyone hurrying back to the huts during a Trojan attack to get a bigger shield, a bronze (rather than leather) helmet, or a longer lance.

At Aias illustrious Hektōr first let fly his spear,  
 when Aias was turned full towards him; he did not miss,  
 but hit him where the two baldrics crossed on his breast—  
 the one of his shield, the other of his silver-studded sword— 405  
 and they guarded his delicate flesh. Now Hektōr was enraged  
 at the swift shaft having been flighted in vain from his hand,  
 and drew back to the ranks of his comrades, avoiding fate.  
 But as he backed off, great Aias, Telamōn's son, picked up  
 a large rock—of which there were many, props of the swift ships, 410  
 that rolled under the feet of the combatants as they fought—  
 and flung it, hitting Hektōr high on his chest, near the neck,  
 over his shield rim: the blow spun him round like a whipped top.  
 As when an oak struck by Zeus, the Father, is laid low,  
 uprooted, and from it there drifts the mephitic reek 415  
 of brimstone, and courage drains from the man who witnesses it  
 standing nearby, so fearsome is great Zeus's thunderbolt—  
 thus instantly fell mighty Hektōr to the ground in the dust,  
 and the spear dropped from his hand, but his shield fell with him  
 and his helmet, while round him his inlaid bronze gear rattled. 420  
 Then, shouting loudly, the Achaians' sons ran up,  
 hoping to drag him off, and letting fly their spears  
 thick and fast; yet none of them managed to stab or shoot  
 the people's shepherd—before that, the best men surrounded  
 him:  
 Aineias, Poulydamas, and the noble Agēnōr, 425  
 the Lycians' leader Sarpēdōn, the peerless Glaukos;  
 of the rest no man failed to heed him, they all held out  
 their round shields before him. His comrades lifted him up  
 and carried him out of the conflict, till he reached the swift horses  
 that were waiting for him out back, at the rear of the fighting, 430  
 along with their driver and his richly wrought chariot.  
 These bore him off to the city, heavily groaning.  
 But when they came to the ford of the swift-flowing river,  
 eddying Xanthos, whom immortal Zeus begot,  
 they lifted him from his chariot to the ground, poured water 435  
 on him, and he revived, opened his eyes, looked up,  
 and, kneeling, vomited up dark blood, but then  
 sank back on the ground, and both his eyes were shrouded  
 in black night: the missile still overwhelmed his spirit.

When the Argives saw that Hektōr had quit the field 440  
 they pressed the Trojans still harder, their minds on battle.  
 Then, out and away the first, swift Aias, Oileus's son,  
 sprang at Satnios, wounded him with his keen-edged spear—  
 Satnios, sired on a blameless nymph, a Naiad,  
 by Ēnōps while he was herding near the Satnioeis river. 445  
 Him Oileus's son, famed spearman, met at close quarters,  
 and stabbed in the flank: he fell on his back, and around him  
 Trojans and Danaäns contested the grind of battle.  
 Poulydamas, son of Pánthoös, spear-wielder, now appeared  
 to his rescue, and hit Prothoēnōr on the right shoulder— 450  
 Areilykos's son, and the heavy spear drove its way through  
 his shoulder: he fell in the dust, clawed the earth with his hand,  
 and Poulydamas shouted loudly, in vehement exultation:  
 "Ah, once again, not in vain, I think, a spear's  
 leapt from the strong hand of Pánthoös's doughty son! 455  
 Some Argive has got it stuck in his flesh, and I think he'll  
 go down to the house of Hādēs leaning on it as a staff."  
  
 So he spoke, and his exulting brought grief to the Argives,  
 and most of all stirred the fiery heart of Aias,  
 Telamōn's son, who was nearest the man when he fell. 460  
 Quickly he let fly at Poulydamas his bright spear  
 as he backed off: Poulydamas escaped the black death-spirit,  
 jumping aside; but the spear struck Antēnōr's son,  
 Archelochos, since the gods intended that he should perish.  
 It caught him where head and neck meet, at the highest 465  
 joint of the spine, and sheared clean through both tendons:  
 head, mouth, and nose got to the ground much quicker  
 than his thighs and knees as he fell. Then Aias in his turn  
 called out in a loud voice to blameless Poulydamas:  
 "Think about it, Poulydamas, and tell me truly: 470  
 Isn't this man fit to die in return for Prothoēnōr?  
 No mean fellow I find him, nor one of mean ancestry,  
 but a brother perhaps of Antēnōr, breaker of horses,  
 or a son: in appearance they're much alike."  
  
 Thus he spoke,  
 well aware of the truth; and grief struck the Trojans' hearts. 475  
 Then Akamas, standing over his brother, speared Boiōtian

Promachos as he was dragging the body away by the feet,  
and shouted aloud at him, in vehement exultation:  
“You Argive arrow-fanciers, with your never-ending threats!  
There will be toil and sorrow, oh, yes, but it won’t be only 480  
for us: a day will come when you too will be killed this way!  
Just ponder on how your Promachos sleeps, laid low  
by my spear—to make sure that the blood-price for my brother  
does not go for long unpaid, which is why any man will pray  
that a kinsman be left in his halls, a protector against ruin.” 485

So he spoke, and his exulting brought grief to the Argives,  
and most of all touched Pēneleōs’s fiery heart:  
at Akamas he charged, who did not await the attack  
of the lordly Pēneleōs, and instead he hit Ilioneus,  
the son of flock-rich Phorbas, he whom Hermēs loved 490  
best of all the Trojans, and endowed with much wealth;  
and Ilioneus was the sole son his mother bore to Phorbas.  
Him then he struck beneath the brow, at the eye’s base,  
drove the eyeball out of its socket: the spear went clean through  
his eye and the neck’s tendons. Arms outstretched, he sank, 495  
and then Pēneleōs, drawing his keen-edged sword,  
slashed through his mid-neck, striking off to the ground  
helmet and head together; and still the heavy spear  
stuck firm in the eye-socket. He held it aloft, displayed it  
like a poppy head to the Trojans, and spoke exultingly: 500  
“Trojans, tell the dear father and mother of the lordly  
Ilioneus, from me, to begin mourning in their halls;  
for the wife of Alegēnōr’s son Promachos will never  
welcome back her dear husband with joy when we youthful  
Achaians return with our ships out of the land of Troy.” 505

So he spoke: trembling seized the limbs of them all: each man  
glanced around, for some way that he might escape sheer ruin.

Tell me now, you Muses who have abodes on Olympos,  
who was the first Achaian to bear off the bloodstained spoils  
of a slain foe, once the battle was turned by the famed Earth-Shaker? 510  
Aias, Telamōn’s son, was the first, who wounded Hyrtios,  
Gyrtios’s son, the leader of the stout-hearted Mysians;  
Antilochos stripped off the gear of Phalkēs and Mermeros,  
Hippotiōn and Morys were cut down by Mērionēs,

and Teukros dispatched Prothoōn and Periphētēs; 515  
Atreus's son stabbed Hyperēnōr, shepherd of the people,  
in the flank, and the bronze, shearing through, spilled out  
his innards, and his soul now burst through the open wound,  
fled away fast, and darkness shrouded his eyes.  
But Aias, the swift son of Oileus, laid low the most men, 520  
for there was no one to match him in the pursuit on foot  
of fugitive fighters when Zeus had stirred them to flight.