The Sacrifice at Thermopylae by Thomas Shields  
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Week 4 Battle of Thermopylae Slant Narrative – Told by a Fictitious Spartan

We Spartans are fighters. We do not tell stories, we live them. Yet I will do my best to preserve my account of the last stand at Thermopylae for the next generation. To be clear, I am a soldier, not a politician. I was as confused as the next man by the strategic interworking of the politics surrounding the battle, yet I do know that the oracles of Delphi and elsewhere were not heartening. The interpretations were confusing at best, and despairing at worst. Eventually a retreat across the sea was planned, and I was allotted to the troops that would stay behind in an overlarge rearguard. Though we were to block off and hold the narrow pass at Thermopylae, our spies reported armies of hundreds of thousands of Persians, of many types and costume. Our phalanxes are skilled, but to face a wide array of tactics, weapons, and men would not ease our task. Thankfully, until we gave way, we would not need to face the cruel hoofs of their cavalry.

Four days we waited at Thermopylae, until Xerxes sent his Medes and Kissians at us. We lost many, yet killed more. We guarded the passage consistently and drove them back, even when they refreshed their attacks with the native Persians. Our long pikes outfought the short stabbing spears of the enemy, and clever ruses such as feigned retreats helped us greatly. Though our numbers were few, the mountain passage was narrow and only needed guarding by a few companies at a time.

Late on the second day, we were betrayed by one Epialtes, who revealed to the Persian king a route by which he might break through the Phokian guard. Our beloved Leonidas wasted no time, but sent off the remainder of the army, leaving only us Spartans as a final rearguard. So, resolved to do our duty to the full, we advanced beyond the narrow pass and fought until our long spears were broken and we must draw our swords. It was then that Leonidas fell. We drew his body back from the snatches of the enemy, and fell back to a hillock. Armed only with what weapons we had concealed about our person, we defended our chieftain and our ground. The cowardly Persians thinned our ranks by arrows and missiles, until our defenses were so much diminished as to allow them to finish us off. I slipped away and joined the Thebans, who gave themselves over to the enemy, yet I made good my escape soon afterwards. May my tale benefit the reader. Tyche[[1]](#footnote-1) be with you!

1. Tyche was the Greek god of good fortune. ;-) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)