

The Cast of Gods and Men

A Quick Reference

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"My father had me learn every word of Homer ... to see me develop into a good man." —Niceratus of Athens

"Homer enthusiasts say that Homer has been the educator of Greece, and for the education and government of humans, we should build up our entire lives with the assistance of this poet." —Socrates of Athens

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The following comes from the Cave's
The Best of Homer's Iliad.

GENERAL CATEGORIES OF BEINGS

GODS are human-like beings that are immortal and ageless because of their consumption of wine-like nectar and bread-like ambrosia. In general, the gods are more powerful than humans. They are glorious beings who live an easy and blessed life without care.

HUMAN BEINGS are mortals (their defining attribute). They age and die (in part at least) because they drink wine and eat bread. Although some humans live a relatively easy life, human existence is generally marked by toil and struggle, misfortune and wretchedness.

IMMORTAL GODS AND GODDESSES

Achaean-favoring gods and goddesses

ATHENA: daughter of Zeus (and Metis), Athena was born from her father's head. She appears as a wise warrior goddess in the *Iliad*, assisting and fighting on behalf of Diomedes, Odysseus, and Achilles, among others. She

defeats Ares and Aphrodite during the battle of the gods. Finally, disguised as the Trojan Deiphobus, Athena convinces Hector to stand and fight against Achilles.

HEPHAESTUS: son of Zeus and Hera, husband of Charis in the *Iliad*. (Aphrodite shows up as his wife in the *Odyssey*.) The smith god and consummate craftsman, Hephaestus skillfully makes Achilles' shield and armor at Thetis' request. Limited by various bodily disabilities, including disabled legs and feet, Hephaestus is a wise god, who gives advice and outsmarts other gods. As fire, he fights against and defeats the divine river Xanthus during the battle of the gods.

HERA: daughter of Cronus and Rhea, sister-wife of Zeus. Of all the immortals in the *Iliad*, Hera most demands the ruin of Troy. She does thanks to Paris' judgment against her and Athena—and in favor of Aphrodite—in the beauty pageant held at Thetis and Peleus' wedding. To secure Troy's utter destruction, Hera jealously follows the course of the Trojan war and even deceives Zeus with love and sleep to get her way. Hera thrashes Artemis in the battle of the gods.

HERMES: son of Zeus and Maia. In the guise of a young nobleman, the cunning god Hermes guides Priam and his herald, Idaeus, to Achilles' shelter to retrieve Hector's corpse. During the battle of the gods, he backs out of a fight with Leto.

POSEIDON: son of Cronus and Rhea, brother of Zeus. God of the sea, Poseidon is the Earth-shaker. He fights against the Trojans because of a long-held grudge against Priam's father, Laomedon. He claims equality with his brothers Zeus and Hades on account of the prior three-fold division of the world—accomplished by lot—when Zeus won the sky, Poseidon the sea, and Hades the underworld. Poseidon lines up against Apollo in the battle of the gods, though they never actually fight.

Trojan-favoring gods and goddesses

ARES: son of Zeus and Hera. As the handsome though terrible god of war, Ares is surprisingly and even comically weak and foolish, defeated by Athena and Diomedes twice. (In the *Odyssey*, Ares, strong and quick, is outplayed by the intelligence and craft of the slow and disabled Hephaestus, when he has an affair with Hephaestus' wife, Aphrodite.) Ares is hated by his own father as well as his father's daughter, Athena, who bowls him over in the battle of the gods.

APOLLO: son of Zeus and Leto, twin brother of Artemis. The archer god, "far-shooting" and furious Apollo is responsible for the disease that plagues the Achaeans at the opening of the *Iliad*. He's the chief male divinity in favor of the Trojans. During the battle of the gods, Apollo suggests to Poseidon that they should not fight over miserable mortals who come and go like the leaves, alive one moment and dead the next.

APHRODITE: daughter of Zeus and Dione. (In Homer's *Odyssey*, she appears as the wife of Hephaestus and lover of Ares.) Goddess of marriage and love, Aphrodite plays many roles in the *Iliad*. She defends her favorites Paris, who judged her most beautiful, and Aeneas, her son, by spiriting them away from the battle at different times. She also provides a love charm to Hera, who uses it to seduce Zeus. After being wounded by Diomedes while helping Aeneas, her mother tells Aphrodite to endure, and her father says that her work is love not war. Athena defeats Aphrodite in the battle of the gods.

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ARTEMIS: daughter of Zeus and Leto. Like her twin brother, Apollo, Artemis is an archer goddess. After Diomedes wounds Aeneas with a great stone, she assists her mother in healing him. In the great and comic battle between the gods, Hera challenges Artemis and thrashes her, dashing her weapons to the ground.

LETO: daughter of the Titans Coeus and Phoebe, mother of Apollo and Artemis by Zeus. With the help of Artemis, Leto heals Aeneas after Diomedes wounds him with a stone. In the battle of the gods, she faces Hermes, who backs down from her without a fight.

XANTHUS: the divine river flowing nearby Troy that is called the Scamander by mortals. Xanthus nearly drowns Achilles when the latter stops up his flow with Trojan corpses. As fire, the smith god Hephaestus defeats watery Xanthus during the battle of the gods.

Other gods and goddesses in brief

ATĒ OR BEWILDERMENT: Bewilderment personified; she is the blindness sent by the gods.

CHARIS: wife of Hephaestus (in the *Iliad*). She is one of the Graces or *Charites*. Charis hosts Thetis when the latter goddess comes to Olympus to obtain new armor for Achilles.

ERINYES (Furies): goddesses of retribution, the Erinyes make the gods and men pay for wrongdoing.

ERIS (STRIFE): sister and comrade of Ares, she is the goddess of strife. Eris loves nothing more than any kind of competition—particularly war—fueled by anger or jealousy. She “starts small and grows bigger and taller until her head is sky-high and her feet drag along the earth.”

IRIS: messenger of the gods, particularly of Zeus and Hera.

OCEANUS (Okeanos): Titan son of Gaia and Ouranos, brother-husband of Tethys. He is the great river that surrounds the world.

THETIS: daughter of Nereus, the so-called “old man of the sea,” mother of Achilles by Peleus. She asks Zeus to honor Achilles by helping the Trojans. The goal is to harm Agamemnon, who insulted Achilles’ honor. Going to Olympus, she fetches Achilles’ newly-crafted armor from the smith god Hephaestus.

ZEUS: son of Cronus and Rhea, brother-husband of Hera. Zeus is the “father of men and gods” and claims to be the most powerful and best of the gods. Although neutral in many ways, Zeus nevertheless helps the Trojans due to Thetis’ request to honor Achilles. It is Zeus who dispenses good and bad fortune to humans from the two jars that sit on the floor of his house on Olympus.

HUMAN BEINGS

The Achaeans

ACHILLES: son of the mortal man Peleus and the immortal goddess Thetis, father of Neoptolemus. Achilles leads the Myrmidons. The *Iliad* is largely about Achilles’ anger. When Agamemnon takes his honor-prize Briseis and

thereby dishonors him, Achilles begs his mother to help him get revenge. This revenge leads to much Achaean suffering, and, ultimately, to his friend Patroclus' death. Achilles slays Hector because he killed Patroclus. After abusing Hector's corpse, Achilles returns his body to his father, Priam.

AGAMEMNON: son of Atreus, brother of Menelaus, husband of Clytemnestra, father of Orestes and other children. Agamemnon is the leader of the Mycenaeans and the chief leader of the Achaean army at Troy. It is his refusal to return the girl Chryseis to her father that leads an angry Apollo to cast a plague down on the Achaeans. When the seer Calchas blames him for the plague, and when Achilles suggests he return Chryseis to her father, Agamemnon angrily demands another girl to take her place. Consequently, he seizes Briseis from Achilles. He later regrets his "reckless blindness" and makes amends.

AJAX (THE LESSER OR LITTLE): son of Oileus. The lesser Ajax leads the Locrians. Fast on his feet and a great warrior, Ajax argues with Idomeneus over who is in first place in the chariot race during Patroclus' funeral games.

AJAX (TELAMONIAN): son of Telamon, half-brother of Teucer the archer. One of the Achaeans' best warriors, Telamonian Ajax is the leader of the men from Salamis. Early on, he duels with Hector to a draw. He later drops him in battle with a great stone. Ajax's signature defense is a tall shield. Alongside Odysseus and Phoenix, he serves as part of the embassy to Achilles.

DIOMEDES: son of Tydeus. Along with Sthenelus and Euryalus, Diomedes leads the men from Argos, Tiryns, and the surrounding cities and land. Among the greatest of the Achaean warriors, Diomedes is sometimes paired up with Odysseus. Diomedes fights both men and the gods in Book 5 of the *Iliad*. During battle he discovers that he is the guest-friend of the Trojan ally Glaucus of Lycia.

IDOMENEUS: son of Deucalion. Eager for battle, Idomeneus leads the men from the island of Crete. He disputes with the Lesser Ajax during Patroclus' funeral games. His best friend is Meriones.

MENELAUS: son of Atreus, brother of Agamemnon, former husband of Helen. He leads the Spartans or Lacedaemonians. The Achaeans venture to Troy to retake Helen and restore Menelaus' pride. Early in the *Iliad*, he fights Paris in single combat.

MERIONES: son of Molus. Meriones is Idomeneus' dear friend and comrade in arms. Next to Idomeneus, he is second in command over the Cretan contingent of men.

NESTOR: son of Neleus, father of Antilochus and Thrasymedes. Wise Nestor leads the men from Pylos. The oldest of the Achaean leaders, he frequently gives counsel during assemblies and at other times to the Achaeans as a whole and to specific individuals. He is enormously proud of his past athletic and military achievements.

ODYSSEUS: son of Laertes, father of Telemachus, husband of Penelope. Odysseus leads the Cephallenians, the men from Ithaca and its neighboring islands. He often serves to spur on the Achaeans throughout the *Iliad*. He is part of the embassy to Achilles and later goes with Diomedes on a reconnaissance mission to observe the Trojan camp. Odysseus is the chief hero of Homer's *Odyssey*.

PATROCLUS: son of Menoetius. Patroclus ventures to Troy with Achilles, his dear friend and comrade in arms.

Fighting in Achilles' original armor, Patroclus battles all the way to the walls of Troy before Apollo, Euphorbus, and Hector kill him.

The Trojans and Trojan Allies

AENEAS: son of the mortal man Anchises and the goddess Aphrodite. He leads the Dardanians and is destined to be the future king of the Trojans. As a result, he is not fated to die in the Trojan War but is saved several times. Virgil, the Roman author of the first century BC epic poem the *Aeneid*, makes Aeneas the forefather of Rome.

ANTENOR: counselor of king Priam. He is in some ways parallel to Nestor of Pylos.

DEIPHOBUS: son of Priam, brother of Hector. The goddess Athena chooses to appear as Deiphobus when she tricks Hector into fighting Achilles.

GLAUCUS: son of Hippolochus. Glaucus is Sarpedon's dear friend and co-leads the Lycians with him. During battle he learns that he is the Achaean Diomedes' guest-friend.

HECTOR: son of Priam and Hecuba, brother of Paris, father of Astyanax (Scamandrius), husband of Andromache. The best of the Trojans, Hector is their chief leader in battle. In addition to many other Achaeans, Hector slays Patroclus (with the help of others). Because of this death, his final act is to fight Achilles, who kills him.

PANDARUS: son of Lycaon. Pandarus leads the Trojans from Zeleia. He fires the arrow that hits Menelaus and breaks the truce between the Achaeans and Trojans. Diomedes eventually kills him.

PARIS (ALEXANDER): son of Priam and Hecuba, brother of Hector, present husband of Helen. After Aphrodite rewards him with Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, Paris takes Helen from Menelaus and thereby causes the Trojan War. He duels with Menelaus early in the *Iliad*.

POLYDAMAS: son of Panthous. With Hector, Polydamas is second in command over the Trojans. When he advises Hector to retreat behind the walls of Troy, Hector does not listen.

PRIAM: son of Laomedon, father of Hector, Paris, and many others, husband of Hecuba. Priam is the ruler of Troy. Before the Achaean attack some nine years before, Priam and his kingdom were very wealthy and happy. Now, in the tenth year of the war, his kingdom is much reduced. At the end of the *Iliad*, and by command of the gods, Priam goes to retrieve Hector's body from Achilles.

SARPEDON: son of the god Zeus and the mortal woman Laodamia. Sarpedon is the chief leader of the Lycians and friend of Glaucus. He is killed by Patroclus.

Other Men

CHRYSES: priest of Apollo, father of Chryseis. Agamemnon refuses to return his daughter Chryseis to him. Consequently, Chryses prays to Apollo to send a plague on the Achaeans. He ultimately wins Chryseis' return.

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Achaean and Trojan Women

ANDROMACHE: wife of Hector, mother of Astyanax. She leads the mourning for Hector when Priam returns with his corpse to Troy.

BRISEIS: woman given to Achilles as an honor-prize. Agamemnon takes her to replace his own lost honor-prize, Chryseis. In the end, he returns her to Achilles. She mourns for Patroclus.

CHRYSEIS: daughter of the priest of Apollo, Chryses. Though she was given to Agamemnon as his honor-prize, her father demands and eventually wins her return.

HECUBA: wife of Priam, mother of Hector. She is the queen of the Trojans.

HELEN: daughter of Zeus (or the mortal man Tyndareus) and Leda, former wife of Menelaus, and present wife of Paris. Her abduction by the Trojan Paris leads to the Achaean invasion of Troy and therefore the Trojan War.

So ends "The Cast of Gods and Men—A Quick Reference." **See you in the next item,** "Homer's *Iliad* in Brief—Book Summaries."

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