

Homer's *Iliad* in Brief

Book Summaries

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

BOOK 1 ▪ ANGER AND FRUSTRATION — ACHILLES & AGAMEMNON, ZEUS & HERA Wrath! Agamemnon refuses to return the battle captive Chryseis to her father Chryses, the priest of Apollo. His refusal causes Apollo, now angry, to cast a plague upon the Achaeans. When Achilles calls on Agamemnon to return the girl in order to appease the god's wrath, Agamemnon agrees. Yet in recompense for his loss, and fuming, he demands Achilles' own honor-prize, Briseis, for himself. In response, Achilles moves to slay him in anger. Although Athena prevents the murder, the goddess doesn't stop Achilles from calling on his divine mother, Thetis, for revenge. Thetis talks to Zeus, who promises to restore her son's honor. To this end the god will help the Trojans against the Achaeans—all contrary to his wife Hera's ardent war objectives. And now Hera is troubled—frustrated! Nevertheless, she can do nothing about it, nothing against Zeus' power and plans. Knowing this, her wise son Hephaestus advises Hera to be gentle with her husband and obey him. And that's what happens. And so it is that the divine feast goes on.

BOOK 2 ▪ TO BATTLE MEN! — THE CATALOGUE OF THE BEST Carrying out his plan to honor Achilles, Zeus sends a dream to Agamemnon. Waking up, Agamemnon calls the men together to test them. Do you want to go

home? he asks. We do! they respond—all but for Odysseus and Nestor. They shouldn't go home until each has a Trojan wife to avenge Helen! After feasting, the multitudes assemble by the ships like—as Homer has it—flies around a pail of milk. The poet catalogues the Achaean ships and leaders, offering an extended glory report. He lists various Achaean bests before panning over to the Trojans to do the same.

BOOK 3 ▪ THE BATTLE FOR HELEN—PARIS, MENELAUS & THE CHIEF ACHAEANS The armies line up. Hector schools Paris (Alexander) for shrinking back before Menelaus. In response, Paris suggests single combat with Menelaus. The winner will take Helen and all her wealth. Both sides agree to the proposal, performing pre-combat rites and swearing oaths. Meanwhile, from atop the walls of Troy, Helen introduces Priam to the big actors of the Achaean cast, including Agamemnon, Odysseus, Telamonian Ajax, and Idomeneus. Finally, the two step forward to fight. After throwing spears, Menelaus dashes forward to take hold of Paris. But just as he's dragging him off, Aphrodite spirits Paris away to make love with Helen. Agamemnon assumes the Achaeans have won and will therefore recover Helen, her possessions, and a revenge-penalty to top it off. How wrong he is!

BOOK 4 ▪ THE GODS IN COUNCIL—AGAMEMNON & THE ARMY The gods in council on Mount Olympus consider what to do with the Achaeans and Trojans. Athena is furious with Zeus. Hera and Zeus are at odds. They eventually agree that Troy will fall. This means the Trojans must break the oath they swore before Menelaus and Paris battled. At the prompting of Athena, therefore, Pandarus shoots Menelaus with an arrow. Agamemnon is angry at this, and so he stirs his men to action. The armies clash and many men die.

BOOK 5 ▪ THE RAGING RIVER DIOMEDES—AGAINST MEN & GODS Before withdrawing with Ares from the fight to sit on the banks of the Scamander, Athena assists Diomedes in order to give him glory. The Achaean leaders dominate the Trojans. Diomedes slaughters many and rages over the Trojan army like a swollen winter river. After Pandarus shoots Diomedes with an arrow, and Athena heals him, he fights like a lion. Pandarus wonders if he is a god or a man. Diomedes goes on fighting, slaughtering numerous men, including, eventually, Pandarus himself, who fights from Aeneas' chariot. Next, he slams Aeneas to the ground with a giant stone. Near to death, Aeneas is saved by his mother, Aphrodite. Diomedes' comrade Sthenelus rides away with Aeneas' horses. Finally, Diomedes goes up against the gods Aphrodite, Apollo, and Ares. He wounds Aphrodite, who zips off to her loving mother and the gentle reproach of Zeus. Apollo warns him off. And with the help of Athena, he drives a spear into Ares's stomach. Meanwhile, led on by Hector, the Trojans face the Achaeans, and Agamemnon inspires his men to fight. Zeus scolds his son Ares, who whines to him after being wounded. Paieon heals him.

BOOK 6 ▪ HECTOR RETURNS TO THE CITY—DIOMEDES & GLAUCUS, HECTOR & ANDROMACHE The battle continues. The Trojan warrior Helenus encourages Hector to return to Troy in order to propitiate Athena. While Hector is making his way inside the city walls, Diomedes encounters Glaucus, and they realize they are guest-friends. Within Troy, Hector commands his mother, Hecuba, to offer Athena a gift. She does, but the goddess refuses to be appeased. Otherwise, Hector rebukes Paris for lounging around with Helen. He must fight! he admonishes. Thereafter, he meets up with Andromache and Astyanax atop the Scaean gates. His wife tearfully begs him not to go out again. He must fight, he counters. He holds his son and prays for him. Finally, Hector returns to the battle with Paris.

BOOK 7 ▪ HECTOR FIGHTS TELAMONIAN AJAX—THE TRUCE TO BURY THE DEAD After Hector and Paris go out to fight, the battling finishes for the day with single combat matching Hector and Telamonian Ajax. Night

falls and both sides join in assembly. The Trojans ask for a truce to gather and burn the dead. The Achaeans agree, using the opportunity to build a wall and trench around their ships.

BOOK 8 ▪ ZEUS' GREAT MIGHT—THE BACK AND FORTH OF BATTLE Zeus forbids divine participation in the struggle for Troy. The gods are astonished but obey. There are various battles back and forth. The scales of fate favor the Trojans. Many Achaean leaders flee. Hector pursues Nestor and Diomedes. Hera arouses Agamemnon. The Achaean Teucer shoots many Trojan men, and nearly Hector, but Hector first hits him with a stone. The Achaeans fall back once again. Hera and Athena want to help but are not allowed to—Zeus sends Iris to prevent their riding out to battle. When Zeus returns to Olympus, they sulk as he exults in his own strength. He explains what must happen before Achilles returns to battle. As night falls, Hector calls together a Trojan assembly. Their fires burn as stars in the dark sky.

BOOK 9 ▪ THE EMBASSY TO ACHILLES—ODYSSEUS, PHOENIX & TELAMONIAN AJAX Nestor reprimands Agamemnon for taking Briseis. Agamemnon admits his foolish behavior and agrees to make things right with Achilles by sending an embassy made up of Odysseus, Phoenix, and Telamonian Ajax, with the offer of many gifts, Briseis, and the hand of one of his own daughters in marriage. Despite the offer of generous compensation, and the speeches of the three ambassadors, Achilles rejects the proposal. He's still angry! Agamemnon treated him like a dishonored homeless man, he explains. The ambassadors return without success.

BOOK 10 ▪ AGAMEMNON'S WORRY—DIOMEDES' MISSION WITH ODYSSEUS Held in the vice-grip of anxiety, Agamemnon cannot sleep. He therefore assembles the chief men. Nestor suggests a reconnaissance mission. Diomedes volunteers, and Odysseus goes along with him. The two capture and slay Dolon who has likewise responded to Hector's request for a spy. They later kill king Rhesus and many other Thracians before racing back to camp.

BOOK 11 ▪ AGAMEMNON'S GLORY—THE ACHAEANS FALL BACK The goddess Strife (Eris) stirs up the Achaeans to fight. Agamemnon fights out front and Homer gives him a glory report. Zeus orders Iris to tell Hector to wait until Agamemnon is wounded. Then it will be his turn to triumph. Finally, Coön hits Agamemnon, and the Achaean leader retreats, but not before slaying and decapitating Coön. Now Hector fires up his own men. Homer gives him a glory report as he slaughters many Achaeans. The Trojans wound many others—Diomedes, Eurypylus, Machaon, and Odysseus (who, at one point, is left all alone, though he stands his ground and kills Socus). Menelaus and Telamonian Ajax fly to help Odysseus. Ajax fights and kills many Trojans. Seeing his work of slaughter, Cebriones and Hector speed over to help them. Achilles sends Patroclus to find out what is happening. Nestor gives him a report. Given the fact that many of the Achaean leaders have been wounded, things are not looking well. He counsels Patroclus to ask Achilles for his consent to fight at the head of the Myrmidons in Achilles' battle gear. Patroclus agrees to this—but first he works to heal Eurypylus.

BOOK 12 ▪ THE TROJANS ATTACK THE WALL—ASIOUS & HECTOR, SARPEDON & GLAUCUS Like a whirlwind, Hector and the Trojans work to cross the trench and break through the enemy's wall into the Achaean camp—and this after Polydamas advises Hector to retreat. As for the Achaeans, the two Ajaxes cheer on their fellow warriors. Be men! On the other side, Sarpedon tells Glaucus they must fight. Hector throws a massive stone that bursts the Achaean wall. They're in!

BOOK 13 ▪ THE ACHAEANS FIGHT BACK—IDOMENEUS' GLORY When Zeus glances away from the battle for a

moment, Poseidon fires up the Achaeans under various guises. There's fighting back and forth, and Homer sings the Cretan leader, Idomeneus, a glory report. Menelaus prays that the Trojans will be punished. Polydamas advises momentary retreat in order to plan with the other Trojan leaders. But most of them are dead. Ajax taunts Hector. Nevertheless, Hector and his men rush the ships as the Achaeans stand firmly against the onslaught.

BOOK 14 ▪ HERA TRICKS ZEUS—HECTOR FALLS AND THE ACHAEANS ATTACK Nestor ventures out to see what is going on. On the Achaean side, there is word of slipping away at night. Odysseus can't believe Agamemnon's word! Wounded as we are, we must return to the battle! he says. Diomedes advises the wounded leaders to go out and urge everyone on. Poseidon reassures Agamemnon. His superhuman shout rouses the Achaeans. Hera considers how to turn Zeus' attention away from the war. With the help of Aphrodite, she seduces him atop Mount Ida, with the goal of tricking him into falling asleep. He does. Now her side, the Achaeans, can fight. Hector is taken out when Telamonian Ajax hurls a huge anchor stone at him. Now the Trojans are winning! Now the Achaeans! The battle and revenge rages back and forth. Given his speed, Ajax, the son of Oileus, kills the most.

BOOK 15 ▪ THE BATTLE AT THE SHIPS—ZEUS & POSEIDON The Trojans retreat. Zeus wakes up angry, and Hera swears she didn't mean to trick him. He relents and smiles before foretelling what will happen—including Patroclus' and Hector's deaths and the sack of Troy. Hera is afraid. Through the messenger Iris, Zeus orders Poseidon to stop fighting for the Achaeans. Poseidon balks, citing the three equal portions of each brother—the sky, the sea, and the underworld. Apollo heals Hector. The fight goes on, the Trojans advancing. Hector battle rages. He commands his men to set the Achaean ships afire. Ajax urges on the Achaeans.

BOOK 16 ▪ PATROCLUS FIGHTS—TWO HEROES DIE Patroclus chastises Achilles for his anger and asks permission to go out and fight in Achilles' armor. Achilles agrees, but only after he recounts Agamemnon's offensive behavior once more. As they speak, the Trojans finally cast fire upon the Achaean ships. Observing this, Achilles knows it is time to act. He sends Patroclus with the Myrmidons out to fight. Achilles prays to Zeus, but Zeus fulfills only half the prayer—that Patroclus and the rest will push back the Trojans. During the fight, Sarpedon perishes. There's an epic fight for his body before Apollo zips him off to Lycia. As for the other half of the prayer, that Patroclus would return safely, Patroclus dies after scrumming before the city walls. He foretells Hector's death before perishing.

BOOK 17 ▪ THE BATTLE FOR PATROCLUS' BODY—MENELAUS' DILEMMA AND COURAGE Now the struggle is over Patroclus' body. Menelaus stands over it in defense. When he moves off to get help, Hector strips it of Achilles' armor. Ajax arrives to defend it. Apollo spurs on the Trojans and many die. There's a great battle around Patroclus' corpse. The Trojans nearly retreat but for the encouragement of Aeneas. The fight rages on. The attempt is made to capture Achilles' immortal horses. Antilochus is sent to report Patroclus' death to Achilles. The action ends with some of the Achaeans retreating with Patroclus' body in tow, the others battling the Trojans.

BOOK 18 ▪ ACHILLES' GREAT SORROW AND SHOUT—HEPHAESTUS, THE SHIELD AND ARMOR OF ACHILLES Achilles learns of Patroclus' death and mourns. Out of his mind with grief, and near to suicide, he vows revenge. But he needs new armor. Thetis speeds off to Olympus to ask Hephaestus to make it. The Trojans nearly retake Patroclus. Hector's goal: his head on a stake! Achilles comes out, and with a goddess-supple-

mented shout, he drives off the Trojans. Ahhh! The sun sinks and the battle ends for the day. In the Trojan assembly, Polydamas advises retreat. Hector refuses. He'll fight Achilles tomorrow! The Achaeans wash and mourn Patroclus. Achilles promises a hero-sized sendoff, including a great fire, Hector's head, and twelve young Trojan males. Meanwhile, Thetis is sipping nectar with Charis, asking Hephaestus for new armor. He makes it, including Achilles' famous shield.

BOOK 19 ▪ THE GREAT RECONCILIATION—ACHILLES & AGAMEMNON Thetis gives Achilles his new shield and the rest of the armor. Achilles "unsays" his anger against Agamemnon. The latter man accepts, declaring that it was not his—Agamemnon's—fault. He claims that divine Bewilderment and other gods made him do it. Nevertheless, he offers Achilles gifts to make up for the wrong done. After admonishing Agamemnon, Odysseus suggests they should feast. Achilles counters, saying they should fight instead. The Achaeans move ahead with Odysseus' plan. They feast and drag in Agamemnon's compensatory gifts, including Briseis, who weeps for Patroclus. When Achilles refuses food, Athena gives him ambrosia and nectar. He likes his new arms. When the immortal horse Xanthus prophesizes his death, he is disturbed. Still, they ride off to fight.

BOOK 20 ▪ THE GODS FIGHT—ACHILLES FIGHTS AENEAS & HECTOR The gods assemble, and Zeus gives them permission to fight as they wish. As for Zeus, he will stay and watch the battle from Olympus. Hera, Athena, Poseidon, Hermes, and Hephaestus aid the Achaeans. The Trojans have Ares, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Leto, and the divine river Xanthus. Achilles encounters Aeneas and fights him until Aeneas is spirited away. Achilles goes on a slaughtering rampage, killing Polydorus, among others. He fights Hector, who is saved by Apollo.

BOOK 21 ▪ ACHILLES AND THE RIVER XANTHUS—AGENOR FACES ACHILLES Achilles kills so many that the river Xanthus (known to mortals as the Scamander) fills up with corpses, those of Lycaon and Asteropaeus included. The river commands him to stop, but Achilles refuses. Xanthus thus begins to drown Achilles. When he voices concern, Poseidon and Athena assure him that he will not be conquered by the river. Finally, Hera sends Hephaestus to fight and defeat the river—fire against water! He does. The gods battle one another. Priam calls for the gates of Troy to be opened wide. The Trojans flee into the city as Agenor debates whether to stand his ground or flee. He faces Achilles and Apollo saves him.

BOOK 22 ▪ HECTOR BATTLES ACHILLES—ATHENA'S DECEPTION Priam and Hecuba beg Hector to fight from a safe distance. The Trojan hero debates back and forth in his own mind. Achilles chases him. Disguised as Deiphobus, Athena fools Hector into fighting Achilles. They finally face each other. And after trading taunts, bargaining for and refusing deals, and throwing spears, the Achaean hero kills him by means of a spear through his throat. He strips Hector, glory-boasts over him, and drags him behind his chariot. Witnessing all this from atop Troy's walls, the Trojans mourn their hero—Priam, Hecuba, and Andromache most of all.

BOOK 23 ▪ THE FUNERAL GAMES—THE ACHAEANS MOURN PATROCLUS Patroclus appears to Achilles while he is sleeping. Though his friend speaks to him, Achilles cannot touch him. The Myrmidons mourn the loss of Patroclus, honoring him, sending him off with a great funeral pyre. Achilles holds funeral games in honor of him: a chariot race, boxing, wrestling, a footrace, single armed combat, the iron-weight throw, archery, and a spear throw. Prizes are distributed after each contest. Antilochus reconciles with Menelaus after wronging him.

BOOK 24 ▪ PRIAM MEETS ACHILLES—HECTOR'S BODY Achilles can't sleep. He abuses Hector's body by drag-

ging it in honor of Patroclus. Although Apollo protects the body, many of the gods are upset about Achilles' behavior. They pity Hector. They want Hermes to get his body by stealing it. Zeus, however, through Thetis, arranges it so that Achilles will give up the body to Priam for a ransom. Iris informs Priam of the plan, and he, contrary to Hecuba's wishes, goes to fetch the corpse of his dead son. He is escorted by Hermes in the form of a young prince. Achilles and Priam mourn together; they admire each other. After he agrees to return him, the Achaean hero promises enough time to bury Hector before the two sides fight again. Once Priam returns to Troy, the Trojans mourn Hector, burn his corpse, and make for him a funeral mound with stones.

So ends "Homer's *Iliad* in Brief—Book Summaries." **See you in the next item**, "A (Possible) Timeline of the *Iliad*."

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