

The *Iliad* of Homer

Book 5

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Book 5

The Raging River Diomedes Against Men & Gods

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

AND NOW, ONCE again, Pallas Athena gave courage and battle might to the son of Tydeus, Diomedes, so that he would stand out among all the Argives and be elevated upon the wings of noble glory. Therefore, she made a stream of fire flare from his shield and burst from his helmet like the star that shines most brilliantly in summer after its bath in the streaming waters of Oceanus. It was with a fire like this, brilliant upon his head and shoulders, that she sent him rushing into the thickest of the fight.

Now among the Trojans, there was a certain rich and blameless man, [10] a priest of Hephaestus, and his name was Dares. He had two sons, Phegeus and

Idaeus, both skilled in all the arts of war. These two came forward from the crowd of Trojans and went up against Diomedes, who fought on foot upon the ground, while they battled from their rolling chariot. When they were close to him, Phegeus took aim and cast first, but the spear whizzed over Diomedes' left shoulder without hitting him. Diomedes was next. He threw. And with success! The bronze spear sped until it slammed into Phegeus' chest right between the nipples. The force of the throw was so hard that it blasted him from his chariot.

[20] Observing Diomedes' might, Idaeus didn't hope or dare to stand over his brother's body to guard

it. Instead, he jumped down from the beautiful chariot and took off. If he hadn't, he would have surely shared his brother's fate that day. Not only that, but Hephaestus saved him by wrapping him in a cloud of darkness so that his old father wouldn't be totally overwhelmed with grief. Even so, the son of Tydeus drove off with the chariot and horses and ordered his followers to take them to the ships. The great-hearted Trojans were horrified when they saw the two sons of Dares—one of them in flight and shunning battle and the other lying dead by his chariot.

Bright-eyed Athena, therefore, [30] took the war god by the hand and said, "Ares, Ares! You miserable bane of mortals and bloodstained stormer of cities! Should we not allow the Trojans and Achaeans to do battle in order to see which side father Zeus will grant glory? Let's fall back and dodge Zeus' anger."

Finishing her speech, she led raging Ares away from the fight, and they sat down upon the steep banks of the Scamander. And the Danaans drove the Trojans back, and each one of their leaders killed his man.

38-83 Homer pans across the field of battle where we witness the Achaean leaders dominating the Trojans, each one dropping one of the enemy men. Agamemnon spears a fleeing man called Odius. Idomeneus kills and strips Phaestus. Menelaus drives a spear through Scamandrius' back. Meriones slays Phereclus. Meges drops Pedaeus. And Eurypylos completely severs Hypsenor's arm so that he meets his fate in death.

84-94 So it was that all the leading men labored in mighty combat. As for the son of Tydeus, Diomedes, . . . he rushed across the plain like a late winter river swollen by rain and snow—one that smashes into the retaining barricade piled high with earth and breaks it up with its surging flow. This earthen mound is meant to defend against attack, but it doesn't hold back the flooding river, [90] nor do the stone walls of the luxuriant vineyard restrain the river's sudden coming when the heavy rain of Zeus falls in torrents. Rather, before its torrential surge, the many beautiful and strong works of men collapse. Just like this, then,

were the dense battle lines of the Trojans driven in rout by the son of Tydeus. Despite their numbers, they couldn't hold him back.

95-273 Just then, Pandarus, the son of Lycaon, sees Diomedes battle raging. (Recall, Pandarus is the Trojan man who shot Menelaus with an arrow after Aphrodite saved Paris.) Straightaway, he fires an arrow that punches into Diomedes' shoulder. Ecstatic, Pandarus boasts that Diomedes will soon be dead. But the wound isn't fatal. Instead, Diomedes' comrade Sthenelus removes the arrow while the hero prays to Athena for revenge. Healing the wound, she saves him from death, giving Diomedes the courage and might of his father. She also gives him the power to perceive the presence of the gods in battle, and permission to fight Aphrodite.

If Diomedes was a raging river before, Homer tells us he's now like a furious lion in a sheepfold! Hunting for Pandarus along the way, he slaughters many Trojan men—Astynous, Hypeiron, Abas, Polyidus, Xanthus, Thoon, Echemmon, and Chromius. Observing him battle raging among the Trojans, Aeneas, the son of Anchises and Aphrodite, finds Pandarus and urgently speaks to him about Diomedes. Pandarus says he's already wounded him with an arrow, and that he doesn't know if he's a god or a man. He laments the uselessness of his bow, having only wounded Menelaus and Diomedes, and wishes he had followed his father's advice to ride into battle mounted upon a chariot. Aeneas quiets him and orders him into his own chariot. They turn and go after battle-raging Diomedes.

Seeing this, Sthenelus warns Diomedes and advises him to flee. The latter balks at this suggestion, proposing rather that they should capture Aeneas' horses, the best of all horses beneath the sun, he says, which were Zeus' present to Tros, the father of Ganymede. If they do, they'll win noble glory.

274-317 That's how Diomedes and Sthenelus spoke to each other. And as they were talking, Pandarus and Aeneas quickly came near to them, driving the swift horses.

Nearing them, Pandarus, the son of Lycaon, spoke first. "Ah, great and mighty son of noble Tydeus—I see that my arrow failed to drop you to the ground.

I'll try now with my spear." [280] Saying this, he poised his spear as he spoke and hurled it. Humming through the air, it struck the son of Tydeus' shield, the bronze point piercing it and passing on until it reached Diomedes' breastplate.

The son of Lycaon shouted out and said, "You're hit! I hit you through the belly! And I don't think you'll be standing for very long. No, you've granted me a great glory-boast!"

Yet without alarm, powerful Diomedes said, "You've missed! You didn't hit me! And I predict that by the end of this one of you will glut Ares with his blood!" [290] Saying this, Diomedes hurled his spear, and Athena guided it up in an arch and straight down into Pandarus' nose just below his eye. The bronze spearhead sliced through his cheek and crashed through his white teeth until it cut through his tongue and exited his chin. His armor rattled around him as he fell from the chariot to the ground. The horses jumped with fear. It was right then that Pandarus let go of his battle might and life.

Aeneas sprang from the chariot armed with his shield and long spear. He was afraid that the Achaeans would carry off the corpse. Therefore, he stood over it as a proud and strong lion. [300] And with his shield and spear before him and a battle cry on his lips, he resolved to kill the first man that dared to face him. But the son of Tydeus picked up a mighty stone so huge and great that it would now take two men to lift it. With this he struck Aeneas on the hip, and the jagged stone crushed him there, breaking the sinews and tearing away all the flesh. The hero fell to his knees, struggling to prop himself up with his hands on [310] the ground. Then the darkness of night fell upon his eyes.

And now the lord of men Aeneas would have perished if not for his mother, the daughter of Zeus, Aphrodite, who had conceived him with Anchises when he was out herding cattle. Quickly noticing his plight, she threw her two white arms around the body of her dear son and protected him by covering him with a fold of her own radiant robe. If not for this, some Danaan would have speared and killed him.

318-333 *While Aphrodite spirits Aeneas away from the fight, Diomedes' comrade Sthenelus takes off with Aeneas' horses and chariot. As for Diomedes, he goes in pursuit of Aphrodite. He knows she's weak in battle. She's no Athena or Enyo, sacker of cities.*

334-352 When, after a long chase, Diomedes caught up with Aphrodite, the great-hearted son of Tydeus flew at her and thrust his spear into the flesh of her delicate hand. The point tore through the ambrosial robe, which the Graces had woven for her, and pierced the skin between her wrist and the palm of her hand. Following this wounding, the immortal blood, [340] or ichor that flows in the veins of the blessed gods, came pouring from the wound—for the gods do not eat bread nor do they drink wine; therefore, they have no blood such as mortal men do, and so they are called immortals.

Feeling the wound, Aphrodite screamed aloud and let her son fall. But Phoebus Apollo caught him in his arms and hid him in a cloud of darkness so that no man among the Danaans would spear and kill him.

Then Diomedes, good at the battle cry, cried out to Aphrodite, "Run off, daughter of Zeus, from the fight and the battle-strife! Is it not enough for you to deceive feeble-minded women? [350] But if you frequently enter the battle and know the fight, then I think you'll shudder to learn about it from the inside."

This is what Diomedes said, and the goddess felt ill and flew off suffering dreadfully.

353-369 *With the horses and chariot of Ares and the help of Iris, Aphrodite speeds to the abode of the gods.*

370-384 Aphrodite flung herself onto the lap of her mother, Dione, who threw her arms around her and caressed her, saying, "Dear child, which of the false heavenly ones has been treating you this way as though you've openly been doing evil?"

And laughter-loving Aphrodite answered, "The son of Tydeus, proud Diomedes, wounded me because I was caring for my dear son, Aeneas, whom I love most of all. I was carrying him from the battle,

for the war is no longer one between the Trojans and the Achaeans alone; [380] rather, the Danaans have now begun fighting with the immortals.”

Then the heavenly goddess Dione replied to her, “Endure, my child, and bear all your troubling distress. For many of us who have our homes on Olympus endure pain from men when, on their account, we fight with one another and cause one another to suffer pains.”

385-427 Dione goes on to catalogue these pains. Ares, she says, put up with Otus and Ephialtes, and Hera and Hades both endured Heracles. And now, she goes on, you suffer thanks to your siding with Aeneas against Athena and Diomedes. After explaining this, Dione heals her daughter while Hera and Athena make fun of Aphrodite and laugh at her, and Zeus scolds her for joining in the fray.

428-430 “Not to you, my child, are granted warlike deeds. But attend to your own lovely matrimonial duties [430] and leave all this fighting business to swift Ares and Athena.”

431-439 Down on the battlefield, Diomedes keeps up his battle rage by repeatedly rushing Apollo who is hiding Aeneas. Upon the fourth advance, Apollo warns him off.

440-442 “Consider what I have to say, son of Tydeus, and fall back. You shouldn’t think of yourself as equal to the gods. You’re not. The immortal gods and men who walk the earth are not the same kind of tribe or being.”

443-527 Diomedes obeys and backs off. Apollo then spirits Aeneas away to be healed by Leto and Artemis. Afterward, Apollo encourages Ares to enter the battle to help the Trojans. He does. And urged on by Ares, Sarpedon turns to Hector and challenges him to do more than he is doing. The challenge works! Hector spurs the Trojans on to fight, and so they line up with renewed vigor against the Achaeans. Finally, Aeneas rejoins his comrades. On the opposite side of the battle, the Achaean leaders inspire their own men to fight.

528-532 And the son of Atreus ranged among the throng of men and called out, “Be men, friends! Have a brave heart! [530] And feel shame before one another when you’re fighting. More men live when there’s such shame. But when men shamelessly flee, there’s neither glory nor strength to avert danger.”

533-849 Saying this, Agamemnon throws and kills Deicoon, the son of Pergasus. Aeneas does likewise, slaying two Achaeans, Crethon and Orsilochus. In response, Menelaus comes out against Aeneas. The latter withdraws when Antilochus, the son of Nestor, joins the Achaean leader. Menelaus kills Pylaemenes, and Antilochus kills Mydon. Seeing them at work, Hector rushes forward. Diomedes falls back, noticing Ares by his side. Hector slays Menesthes and Anchialus. In response, Telamonian Ajax drops Amphius, the son of Selagus.

Eventually, the son of Heracles, Tlepolemus, and the son of Zeus, Sarpedon, face each other, first trading insults and vowing to win glory from each other’s death. They both cast at the same moment. Tlepolemus’ spear flies and wounds Sarpedon’s leg; Sarpedon’s spear punches through Tlepolemus’ neck, killing him. The Achaeans haul their comrade’s corpse from the battlefield while Sarpedon’s friends do the same for him, helping him to safety. For a moment, Odysseus considers running after Sarpedon to see if he can kill him. Instead, he turns to cutting down Sarpedon’s Lycian men—seven total.

Observing Odysseus at work, Hector joins in the fray to knock the Achaeans back. Homer offers a glory report for Hector and Ares. “Who, then, was the first and who last to be slain by bronze-tipped Ares and Hector, the son of Priam? They were . . .” One man dies, then two, three, four, five, and six men—Teuthras, Orestes, Trechus, Eonomaus, Helenus, and Oresbius. About this time, Hera notices what’s happening and suggests to Athena that they join in battle against Ares and the Trojans. Zeus nods his permission, and they go.

Hera first shames the Argives into fighting with greater force. Athena then makes fun of Diomedes, who is now holding back thanks to his wound and because he thought Ares was fighting alongside Hector. But now with Athena by his side, they go to attack Ares. The goddess is wearing the cap of Hades that makes her invisible.

850-863 As soon as they were nearby, Ares thrust his bronze spear at Diomedes, hoping to take his life away, but Athena caught it in her hand and hurled it backwards. Diomedes then turned toward Ares and cast his spear. Pallas Athena took hold of it and drove the spear into the depths of Ares' stomach. There Diomedes wounded him. He tore his fair flesh and drew the spear out again, and Ares roared [860] as loudly as nine or ten thousand warriors when they join in the battle strife of the war god. Hearing him, the Achaeans and Trojans were struck with panic, so terrible was the insatiable war god's mighty roar.

864-887 *In pain, and like a dark cloud, Ares speeds off to Olympus where he complains to Zeus about Diomedes and Athena.*

888-909 Cloud-gathering Zeus looked angrily at him and said, "Don't come by me to sit and whine, you fickle god who says one thing but does another. [890] Of all the gods who live on Olympus, I hate you most

because strife is the only thing you care about, and strife's battles and fights. You have the intolerably stubborn spirit of your mother, Hera—and it is all I can do to dominate and control her with words alone. I imagine she's behind your suffering too. Still, I won't let you remain in pain. No, you are my own offspring, and it was by me that your mother conceived you. If, however, you had been the son of any other god, I would have tossed you down from Olympus so that you would have fallen lower than the Titans."

That's what Zeus said. He then asked Paieon to heal Ares, [900] and so Paieon sprinkled pain-killing herbs upon his wound and cured him, for Ares was not made like a mortal. . . . Then Hebe washed him and clothed him in beautiful clothing, and he took his seat by his father, Zeus, exulting in his glory.

Now that they had stopped Ares' slaughter, Ares the bane of mortals, Argive Hera and Athena the defender returned to great Zeus' house.

So ends Book 5. **See you in Book 6, "Hector Returns to the City."**

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