

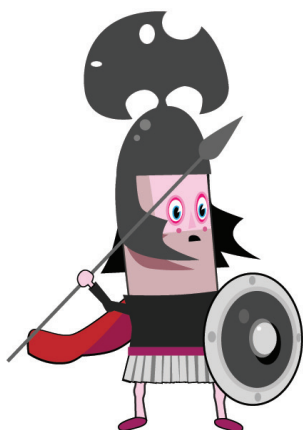
Heroes of Troy by Neil Richards. Part 3

It's one thing taking a wee boat out on the pond with your mates. It's quite another being stuffed into an open galley in rough seas for two weeks knowing that when you arrive you're going to jump out in full armour onto wet sand and get a spear stuck in your guts by some nasty Trojan with a big grin on his face.

So on the way to Troy I'm making sure I'm not going to be first off the boat – no way. When we arrive, as far as the eye can see that beach is wall to wall Trojan soldiers and I am feeling very, very nervous indeed.

But then I look across at the other boats and it is one awesome sight: hundreds of sails bursting with wind, all the oars flashing, horns blowing, thousands of blokes shouting – HELEN! HELEN! - all our Heroes up on the prows waving their spears and roaring away like good-uns, and then – whoosh! - as we hit the beach a great volley of Greek arrows and spears enough to make the sky go dark.

And suddenly I'm up to my waist in water and I've got my sword out and I'm racing at that beach full of enemy and a little voice inside of me starts up – we can DO THIS we are GOING TO WIN!!!



I



Aye, what a day that was as we fought our way frantically up the sand, a long and bloody day which seemed to go on for ever until finally at dusk the Trojans retreat and me and the other guys fall on the sand in a big heap all tired and numb and wasted and trying to figure out did we just win or did we lose and does anybody care and can we please just sleep, sleep, sleep...?

Course, a soldier's lot is not to sleep. Agamemnon and Odysseus and Achilles and Menelaus and Ajax and all the other top brass are soon getting everyone up on their feet – to dig graves. Aye, graves. All night. And we realise we are going to be here on this Trojan shore fighting these fellas for a very, very long time. And some of us might be here for ever...

Next day the Trojans come back at us and the whole thing repeats itself and the next day and the next day too. And then suddenly the Trojans hot foot it back to Troy and they shut the gates and we don't get a peep out of them for weeks!

So, we pull all the ships up onto the sands and line them up. And we build trenches, and huts, and stores and great big buildings to live in.

And from our new wooden city we can see the towers and the walls and the battlements of Troy – and every now and then I see Helen herself up on those walls looking down upon us. And I'm thinking to myself – I bet you feel a bit silly now girl, with your husband out here and all this fuss and dying going on in your name.

Anyhow, I'm kinda getting used to the idea that might take a few months to sort – but do you know what? It takes YEARS AND YEARS AND YEARS!



The Trojans come out every now and then, we have a bit of a battle, then they shoot back into Troy and we carry on as usual. In between times we loot and destroy all the other cities we can find within miles. Well what else are we supposed to do? When you've got heroes like Achilles and Ajax on the team you have to give them a run out every now and then.

But we just can't break Troy. Truth is, they've got great defences. Tons of food and water. And the place is sprawling so it's easy for their allies to get reinforcements through. And we're sitting there without a clue how to break the deadlock. Anyhow, after ten years – yes folks, ten years – it's not surprising that the odd argument starts to break out.

First of all we get a bout of plague in the camp. So Agamemnon asks his sooth-sayer what's the problem. And the soothsayer says the gods have sent the plague because they're angry about Chryseis. Chryseis is this very pretty servant girl that Agamemnon stole on one of the looting raids. Seems the gods want Agamemnon to hand her back.

So he gets all uppity but in the end says all right then off she goes. But in exchange he wants the servant girl Briseis that Achilles stole. So now Achilles is all fed up and shouting his head off and Agamemnon pulls rank and before you know it Achilles is storming off to his tent saying that's it, you can stuff your war, I'm not playing any more (or words to that effect).

You can imagine how us lot feel about that – I mean, Achilles is the main man. Anyhow, no sooner has it happened than big bad Hector over in the Trojan camp gets to hear about it and before you can say Hades Freezes Over – the Trojan army's out there on the plain ready for action.



Only guess what? They don't want a fight. They want the Heroes to do combat – man to man. Paris (!) of all people steps forward and says – gimme your best and I'll take him down. Good timing eh, with Achilles back in his tent with his feet up.

Anyhow up pops my dear old boss King Menelaus which you have to admire cos he's no spring chicken – and he says to Paris I'm your man.

So they sort out a truce and both armies go deadly quiet. Then the two warriors step forward – the two men right at the heart of the whole war. Winner take all. Big stakes eh? And as I look up to the walls of Troy I see Helen dash to the battlements to look down upon the fight, and King Priam step forward to wipe away her tears...