

Heroes of Troy by Neil Richards. Part 4

So here we are at last. The moment that every Greek warrior dreams of. The moment when Fate lies in the hands not of blundering idiots like me but of Heroes.

The two great armies are facing each other across the dust-blown plains of Troy. The hot sun is burning down. At stake a whole city, the lives of thousands and the destiny of one beautiful woman. I've never known such an awful silence... From where I stand, I can see the two of them, motionless in the baking heat, sweat running down their faces. I can feel their fear.

Paris readies himself – and throws. The spear carves the air towards our lines, good and true, straight for Menelaus's heart. But the old fella grasps his shield tight and parries the spear neatly to one side. Brilliant! Now we're all shouting and chanting. Menelaus plays to the crowd a bit, gives us a wee pause and a look - then lifts his spear, readies himself and hurls it back at Paris: it slams into the traitor's shield and rips through it.

Paris falls to the ground, but - oh no! - the spear's just gashed his armour. The boy still lives. He dusts himself down, then smiles – oh big mistake – never, never smile at Menelaus... Because Menelaus, his heart burning with hatred is already flying across the sand towards him, sword punching through the air. Paris looks surprised, shocked – then with a great smash the two men collide, sword on sword, armour on armour.





The boss is all over him - but then suddenly his sword breaks in two! So he grabs Paris by his helmet and starts to drag him towards our lines. To a man we're baying ourselves hoarse for the traitor's blood and surely Paris is now being strangled by his helmet strap and then – and then – in a flash the boy's gone! Disappeared! Taken by the gods no less! We're all looking at each other – what the heck just happened...?

We reckon we've won. But so do the Trojans. It's a right mess (course, it often is when the gods get involved). Then one of the Trojans – fella called Pandarus – let's go a sneaky arrow and hits Menelaus right in the gut. Doesn't kill him – but puts paid to the truce.

Agamemnon's now roaring at us to destroy the treacherous lying cheats, Odysseus is already slaying Trojans by the score, Ajax is fighting like he's just come back from his holidays and pretty soon we're all up to our necks in war again.

Just a shame we don't have Achilles, I'm thinking, as dusk comes and we're still battling away. Then word goes out – pull back! And I'm thinking this is bad, very bad...And we're pouring back through the stockade walls to safety – or so we think because suddenly Hector's there and he means business. He picks up a stone the size of my house and smashes it into our gates and then wallop – the Trojans are through and they are destroying us!

Suddenly I spy Patroclus in the chaos – he's Achilles young cousin and best mate from way back – and I swear he's reading my mind. We need a hero and we know where to find one...And before you can say Springtime in Hades we're on a chariot together and racing to Achilles' camp just up the coast.



When we pile into Achilles tent, a wee while later, the Hero himself is having a spot of lunch. Which is fair enough I guess. Heroes have to eat like the rest of us. I take a seat in the corner while Patroclus gives the big fella the rundown on the mess that we're in. Course, Achilles does the 'what do you mean, we?' bit and I can see he's still miffed by the way Agamemnon's treated him.

The argument goes back and forth till Achilles surprises both of us. He grabs his special Heroes' Golden Armour from the rack - and hands it to Patroclus. Tells him to put it on, and go sort out the Trojans himself. Well you can imagine - there's no stopping Patroclus. He's out of his own kit and into the golden stuff like he's powered by lightning. And while I'm there thinking - hang on a minute son - Patroclus has climbed into the old Golden Chariot and he's off. Leaving me standing there looking like a right lemon. So I hop into the broken down chariot we came in and get ready to follow.

Achilles appears outside the tent. He gives me a nod (which is nice, cos Heroes don't normally do that kind of thing) and then he rubs his heroic chin a bit - and heads back into the tent.

All the while I'm following young Patroclus back into battle I'm still thinking - this is not going to work. You do not muck around with the whole notion of Heroes. Either you are one. Or you're not. And if you get spotted pretending, it's not just the blokes on the battle field are going to be fed up - it's the gods themselves.

And you do NOT want to get on the wrong side of the Gods. Gods are bad news...