



## Heroes of Troy by Neil Richards. Part 6

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Days go by. And eventually, after all the doom and gloom, me and the fellas get bored sitting around moping and that and we head back to fighting.

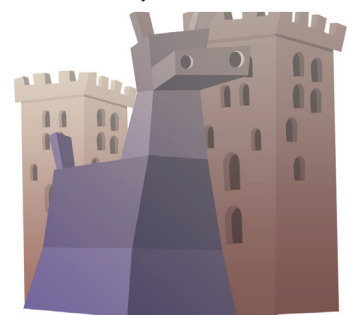
There's only one problem: the prophesy. The ancient prophesy that the Greeks will only win at Troy if Achilles himself is dead. Killed by Paris no less. Now, as we all know, Paris is no world champion. And Achilles is immortal because his mum dipped him into the River Styx when he was a wee baby and the sacred water totally protects him.

So how is it that just a few days after Hector pops his clogs I'm standing in front of another funeral boat, this time watching Achilles sailing off in flames to the Other World. It's all in the small print, that's how.

Yes - Achilles had the sacred dip. But mum held him by the heel and she didn't notice that the heel stayed dry. And yes - Paris can't fight for toffee. But he can let go a fluke arrow that hits Achilles right on that heel and drops the Big Man for good. You see what I mean by small print? These gods and sooth-sayers, they've got the whole thing covered every which way you look.

Overnight we go from favourites to rank outsiders – and I'm kicking myself for ever thinking this war is coming to an end. You see, without Achilles we're down to our last major Hero – Odysseus. The quiet one.

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But first – a wee bit of news from Troy. Our old friend Paris picks up an arrow through the chest in a skirmish – and he goes and dies, just like that. Hooray, about time too. Now that leaves Helen without much reason to hang on in Troy. It turns out she was bewitched by the gods into loving Paris in the first place (I know, very convenient, eh?) so now he's gone the spell's broken. Seems she's now dead keen for us to beat Troy and take her home. But how?

Well - one night, Odysseus calls a secret meeting with Agamemnon and the other chiefs. He reckons we're crazy just to keep throwing men at the Trojan walls in the hope that one day the thing will break and we'll be able to pour through. He says the only answer is to get the Trojans to open the gates themselves and let us in. Now at this point I'm standing at the back of the tent watching all the big guys watching him and I'm thinking oh boy Odysseus this is going to have to be very good or your world Hero ranking is going straight down the pan...

But when he explains a wee bit more about his idea for an extraordinary secret weapon - I'm not just thinking this guy's a genius I'm signing up for his operation myself.

Next morning Odysseus's big plan swings into action. First we build a workshop all tucked away secret-like. Then, as the carpenters set to work on the new weapon we head out as usual, raiding and pillaging Trojans.

Meanwhile, orders go out round the Greek camp to pack everything up and prepare the boats for sea because we're heading out. Now this confuses everyone no end, but hey who's gonna argue?



After a couple of weeks, Agamemnon orders the whole army over to the workshop for the big moment. Odysseus is there on a stage in front of a giant curtain looking kinda proud but humble, clever but casual as he does. Agamemnon calls for quiet and explains that we're all going to be part of a secret plan which is going to win the war. Nobody says a word but every one of them's thinking – oh yeah, let's hear it then, surprise me. Then Odysseus steps back and pulls a cord and the curtain drops and there is the biggest wooden horse you ever saw. Yeah, wooden horse. Fifty foot high it must have been, with a big head and giant wheels and a wee, sticky-out tail.

Now if you've ever heard the sound of a hundred thousand jaws dropping you'll know how the Greek army reacted. Secret weapon – giant wooden horse? And this works – how?

Odysseus explains. Dead simple. Greek army heads for home tonight. All of us. We abandon the camp, get in the boats, sail away. Leaving nothing - except this horse here. Trojans wake tomorrow morning, think – hang about, what's going on here? They come down to the shore, see we've gone and they work it out – how about that, they say, we won! War's over! Then they look at the horse, think it's a leaving present from yours truly and they wheel it back into Troy and slam the gates shut after it. Then like any normal army they start to celebrate. And celebrate. And celebrate. All day long.

Then Odysseus steps back and he taps on the horse with a stick. And after a second a trapdoor opens and a wee ladder drops down. And then, one by one, thirty of the meanest, nastiest blokes in the Greek army, in full fighting gear slip quietly down the ladder, tiptoe over to the workshop doors and open them wide...



Odysseus pulls out his sword and says – doors of Troy open, Greek army runs in, biff baff bosh, war over. Simple!

For a second we're quiet. Then we go wild. We go crazy, we're cheering, we're laughing we are lifting Odysseus on our shoulders because we know in just a more few days we are going to win this war and we are going home for good.

Brilliant.