

## Heroes of Troy by Neil Richards. Part 7

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Here's a word of advice. If anyone ever asks you to sit in a wooden horse for 24 hours just make sure you go to the bathroom first. Especially if your life depends on it.

Now, as it happens, wooden-horse day (or W-Day as we like to call it) starts off very pleasantly indeed. All the guys that are going in the horse get a cracking breakfast, morning off, special lunch and that. Around tea-time there's a bit more speechifying, lots of shaking hands and then we all climb up the ladder and into the horse. There's about thirty of us altogether with the odd Hero like Odysseus and my old boss Menelaus thrown in. For him of course, this is personal.

It's kinda cramped but I get a good spot up inside one of the ears. Soon as we're settled everyone hunkers down to get a spot of sleep. And as dusk becomes night, I set to thinking about this whole long adventure. Seems so long ago that I'm at old Menelaus's banquet cheering away as Helen and Paris do a wee dance for him. And that day we set off for Troy – we all thought war would be over in months. And I remember all those good fellas that I knew at the beginning who'll never be going back – ever.

And Hector, and Achilles and Patroclus, and Ajax (oh, he bought it too) – all the Heroes that were supposed to be invincible and the gods that did their god-thing and...



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Suddenly I'm wide awake and there's bright sunshine burning in through the horse's earhole right into my eyes. I pull myself up and look out and blow me – the beach is empty. For miles. The whole army's gone and left nothing behind – except us. I scan the horizon – not a thing. Zilch. Course, that's the plan.

They've whizzed off to hide behind an island, ready for us to do the business next night so they can come back and take the city.

Still – it's a scary, lonely sight. But soon the other lads are awake and Odysseus is cheering everyone up by telling clever little stories. After a wee while a bunch of Trojans turn up to have a shifty. Then they scoot back to Troy and soon they're back in strength with all the top brass – King Priam, Queen Hecabe, the lot. They all wander round prodding and pushing and chatting away. Then one of them reads something out – 'For our safe journey home, we the Greeks offer this horse as a gift to the goddess Athena'.

And I look over at Odysseus and I swear he's trying to stop himself giggling and I don't blame him – that is one classy touch.

Oh it's a beauty and they fall for it. The Trojans start cheering and shouting – the Greeks have gone! We've won! It's over! Meanwhile all of us fellas in the horse are laughing our heads off cos what a bunch of idiots. But laughing quietly like. And pretty soon they've rigged up ropes and tackle and we're being pulled all the way back into Troy. Through the ear I can see the great gates open, then we're dragged through and the gates close behind us. With a very loud and ominous slam. Then the pulling stops, the ropes are let go and there's a general feeling of arrival.



Within minutes though, every kid in Troy is crawling all over the horse and fiddling with it and kicking it. And we're not giggling now, oh no. But the kids get bored and the Trojans have a party to organise and pretty soon we're forgotten and the whole city is one giant celebration.

We're all sitting quiet in the horse listening to this, sweating away like good-uns and looking at Odysseus and waiting for him to give us the green light. But he says he's having a nap and can we wake him when it gets quiet. Heroes eh?

The party goes on nearly all night. Just before dawn, Odysseus wakes up, and has a yawn. By now the whole city is quiet as a temple. He gives Menelaus a nudge and the two of them have a little natter together and then Odysseus says right then, let's get this war over. We open the wee trap-door and we all drop out onto the ground. As I thought, we're in the main square. But everyone's either fast asleep or drunk so nobody notices as we slip down to the gates to deal with the guards. It only takes a minute to sort them out and then, quiet as mice, we slowly open the city gates.

Now I'm as ready as the next man to own up to being frightened – but I can tell you that what I saw that morning would scare even a Hero. In the half-light, the whole Greek army is standing there lined up behind Agamemnon, waiting. From the city itself right back down to the sea where the boats is all lined up again – thousands and thousands of soldiers. And as soon as those gates open Agamemnon raises his sword and they give one heck of a nasty roar – and they're piling into Troy like they're late for the big game. Since I've already done my bit, I nip behind the gates for a call of nature and wait for the whole thing to be over.



You see the truth is, this last bit of my story is not one I'm proud of. It's not exactly... heroic. I'm not making excuses – well I am, aren't I – but to be honest there's only a handful of Trojans walk out of that city alive. You have to remember we've been fighting this war for more than ten years and there's a lot of our guys have bought it, and there's been a lot of dirty dealing and treachery on both sides. Anyhow, let's not dwell on the dark side. Suffice to say we burn the city of Troy and we leave the place in ruins – job done - and we get back in our boats and we head home.

And here's a funny thing...As we pull away from the shore we're all a bit shaky and quiet. But as soon as Troy slips over the horizon and a nice breeze picks up and we have ourselves a drink or two then things don't seem half as bad as we thought and pretty soon we're having ourselves a good old sing-song. That's the odd thing with war – you're with your mates and you can't hang out with your mates for long without having a laugh, can you? And after all – we had won, hadn't we?

I've got one last memory to share with you. I'm sitting in the warm sun on that crowded boat, with my back against the side and the water all foamy and blue and I'm looking up at the deck where the top guys stand. And there's Odysseus, quietly chuffed, having a nice drop of wine and nibbling olives, chatting away to the other surviving Heroes. And there next to him is my old boss King Menelaus with his arm around Helen (oh yes, I forgot to say, she survived the unpleasantness and went all sorry, sorry, let's forget all about it, won't happen again to Menelaus and he bought it cos after all she's the most beautiful woman in the world and it wasn't her fault bla bla bla). And I'm looking at them and I'm thinking of the lads we left behind and I'm thinking – what was that all about then?

And to this day, I don't know.