

The Trojan War

BY JUDY VOLEM

The soldiers of Troy gathered on the towers of their city and looked down upon the strange creature that stood at the gate. An enormous wooden horse appeared ready to enter. But for what purpose?

Helen stood alone, gazing at the remains of the deserted Greek camp. The sleek wooden ships that had been beached on the shore nearby were gone. Smoke rose from the huts the Greeks had burned when they left. Dogs sniffed around the ashes. Helen wondered if this truly meant the end of the war that had dragged on for ten years.

People and Terms to Know

Helen—In Homer's *Iliad*, she is the wife of the king of Sparta. The Trojan War is said to have started because of her.



This is how an artist of the 1800s pictured Paris, the Trojan prince, carrying off Helen, the Greek queen of Sparta.

As she looked upon the plain and the sea beyond, Helen's thoughts drifted into the past. At which moment had all the troubles begun? She felt great sorrow and responsibility for the long suffering.

It started at a wedding many years ago with a quarrel among the gods. The goddess of discord had not been invited. To make trouble, she threw a golden apple among the guests. Written on it were the words "For the fairest." She knew that would stir up competition among the three most glorious goddesses, Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite. Indeed, each saw herself as the obvious owner of the apple. That was the seed of all the troubles to follow.

Not even Zeus, the ruler of the gods, wanted to choose the fairest for fear of angering the other two. So he set the task of judgment to handsome young Paris of Troy.

People and Terms to Know

Athena (uh•THEE•nuh)—goddess of wisdom and warfare.

Hera (HEER•uh)—wife of Zeus, ruler of the gods.

Aphrodite (AF•ruh•DY•tee)—goddess of love and beauty.

Zeus (zoos)—in Greek mythology, god of the sky and king of the gods and human beings.

Paris (PAIR•ihs)—son of the king of Troy. When he ran off with Helen, the Trojan War started.

Each goddess tried to bribe the young prince to get the golden apple. Athena pledged that he would be the wisest of men. Hera promised Paris that he would be the most powerful ruler of all. Aphrodite offered him the love of the most beautiful woman in the world.

Paris, young and foolish, chose Aphrodite's gift. All agreed that Helen was the most beautiful woman on earth. It wasn't important to Aphrodite that Helen was already married to Menelaus, king of Sparta. Aphrodite cast a spell that caused Helen to fall in love with Paris and run away with him to Troy.

Helen remembered the seasick feeling of her love for Paris. She couldn't deny him. She wondered now how she could have left her child and broken her marriage promise to Menelaus.

When Menelaus realized Helen's betrayal, he gathered together the great warriors of Greece. With 1,000 black ships, Menelaus set off to get back his wife and destroy the city of Troy. He believed he would be

*Each goddess
tried to bribe the
young prince
to get the golden
apple.*

People and Terms to Know

Menelaus (MEHN•uh•LAY•uhs)—in Greek mythology, the king of Sparta at the time of the Trojan War and husband of Helen.

victorious. His brother Agamemnon could gather and lead the Greek army. Not only did Menelaus have the support of such great warriors as Odysseus and

The Greek soldiers prepared to conquer the city that held the beautiful Helen.

Achilles, he had the help of Hera and Athena as well. The goddesses would take their revenge on Paris.

Many rowers pulled the ships through stormy seas.

They landed on the beaches and saw the city of Troy towering above the plain. The Greek soldiers prepared to conquer the city that held the beautiful Helen. Lines of men in polished armor and holding heavy spears and shields ran forward to attack. They couldn't break through the thick walls and well-guarded gates. The soldiers retreated from the showers of arrows.

When the Greeks realized they would not easily destroy Troy, they settled down for a long siege. They listened to clever Odysseus and raided neighboring

People and Terms to Know

Agamemnon (AG•uh•MEHM•nahn)—in Greek mythology, king of the Greek city of Mycenae (my•SEE•nee).

Odysseus (oh•DIHS•yoos)—in Greek mythology, the king of Ithaca. The story of his adventures after the Trojan War is told in Homer's *Odyssey*.

Achilles (uh•KIHL•eez)—hero of Homer's *Iliad* and the killer of Hector, the greatest Trojan warrior.

siege (seej)—surrounding of a city by an army trying to capture it.

towns. For nine long years they invaded villages along the coast. They gathered supplies for themselves and weakened Troy's allies.

For nine long years, they camped outside Troy. In the tenth year the Greeks again prepared to face the Trojans. However, the greatest Greek fighter, mighty Achilles, refused to take part. After an argument with Agamemnon, Achilles had retreated to his ships. His absence gave the Trojans hope of victory, and they welcomed a battle with the Greeks.

It could have ended there, thought Helen, if Aphrodite had not interfered. Hector convinced his brother Paris to face Menelaus alone on the field of battle. Their duel would have decided my fate.

But when it looked as if Paris would be struck down by Menelaus's sword, Aphrodite made him invisible. She spirited Paris away back to Troy.

Helen remembered the disgust she had felt for his cowardice. She might have left Paris then, if Aphrodite hadn't again cast her love spell.

The war did not end then. Fierce fighting continued. Men died while the gods took sides and helped their favorites. The Trojans swarmed toward

People and Terms to Know

Hector—son of Priam, king of Troy; the greatest of the Trojan warriors.

the Greek ships, fighting spear to spear. Fire started among the Greek ships. A Trojan victory seemed likely.

Through all of this, Achilles remained apart and refused to join the battle. Then his best friend, Patroclus (puh•TROH•kluhs), put on Achilles's

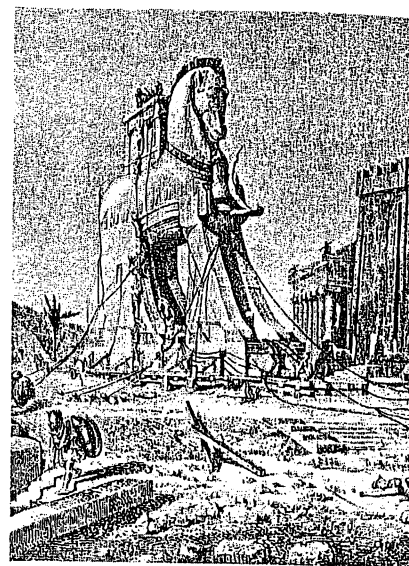
*Hector stopped
and faced
Achilles's
fearful spear.*

armor and went into battle. Patroclus hoped the Trojans would think that Achilles had returned. But Hector killed Patroclus with a quick thrust of his spear. Now Achilles was ready to carry the rage of a thousand men in his own spear.

Achilles rode into battle, destroying everything in his way. He leaped from his chariot when he saw Hector on the bloody battlefield. Brave Hector stood fast until Achilles rushed at him. Suddenly, Hector's courage vanished. He turned and ran. He ran swiftly around the walls of Troy with Achilles close upon him.

As suddenly as he'd started to run, Hector stopped and faced Achilles's fearful spear. He died with honor.

In anger, Achilles dragged Hector's naked body behind his chariot through the dust and blood of the battlefield and then left him unburied. This was the worst possible insult to a hero. Priam himself, king of Troy and Hector's father, went to Achilles. On bended knee he begged for the return of his son's body. Achilles's heart was touched. He agreed, and



◀ French painting done in the 1800s shows Greek soldiers climbing out of the Trojan Horse to open the gates of Troy to the other Greeks waiting outside.

Priam returned to Troy with Hector's body and gave his son a proper burial.

The war continued with many losses on both sides. An arrow shot by Paris struck Achilles in the heel, the only place on his body where he could be wounded. Paris, too, met his death from a swift and poisonous arrow.

Now, Helen hoped, the war must be over. The Greeks hadn't broken through the walls of Troy. They had sailed off in the night, leaving the great wooden horse as an offering to the goddess Athena.

But what was all the noise? Helen wondered. Princess Cassandra was shouting to make herself heard over the

People and Terms to Know

Cassandra (kuh•SAN•druh)—in Greek mythology, a daughter of King Priam of Troy. She could foresee the future, but no one ever believed her predictions.

rejoicing of the Trojans. "The wooden horse is a trick of the Greeks!" It was said that Cassandra could see the future, but no one listened to her.

The Trojans should have paid attention to Cassandra's words, for she was right. The Trojans brought the horse in through the gates and up to the temple of Athena. Hidden inside the belly of the giant horse were the bravest of the Greek soldiers. In the middle of the night, they climbed down quietly and opened the gates for their comrades. The Greeks killed all within their reach and finally, in the tenth year, destroyed the city of Troy.

Fair Helen was spared the fate of other women who were carried off as slaves. Odysseus bargained for her life, and she sailed away with Menelaus. As she stood on the deck of the ship, she watched the dark smoke rise from the ruins of Troy.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

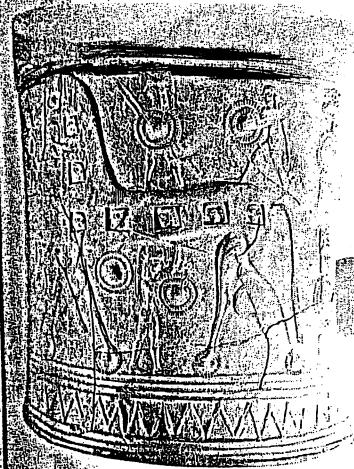
1. What was the cause of the Trojan War according to the story?
2. What part did Aphrodite play in the war?
3. Why do you think the people of Troy were tricked by the Trojan Horse?
4. Why do you think the story of the Trojan War continues to interest people?

Greek Tradition

Homer and History Homer composed his epic poems about the Trojan War around 750 B.C.

The Greeks of his time believed that their ancestors had fought a ten-year war against the Trojans about 500 years earlier, that is, around 1250 B.C. For many years, historians thought that the legendary stories of the Trojan War were totally fictional. Beginning around 1870 with the work of Heinrich

Schliemann, archaeological discoveries suggested that the stories of the Trojan War may have been based on real cities, people, and events.



▲ This carving from an ancient Greek storage jar is the earliest surviving image of the Trojan Horse. It dates from around the time of Homer.