

Achilles then went after matchless Rhigmus who had come from fertile Thrace. He threw at him and hit him in the middle. The bronze javelin stuck in his lung, and he crashed from his chariot. Areithous, Rhigmus' attendant, immediately turned the horses round, but Achilles stabbed him in the back with his sharp spear and knocked him out of the chariot. The horses panicked.

490 As fire from the skies rages through deep gullies on a scorched mountain-side, a great forest is consumed and everywhere a driving wind sends the flames billowing, so Achilles ran amok with his spear like something superhuman, killing as he went, and the black earth ran with blood. As a farmer yokes a pair of broad-browed oxen to trample the white barley on a well-built threshing-floor, and the grain is shelled out under the hooves of the lowing animals, so the horses under great-hearted Achilles' command trampled dead men and shields alike. The whole axle of the chariot and the rails that ran round it were sprayed with the blood thrown up by the horses' hooves and the wheel-rims. And the son of Peleus pressed on in search of glory, spattering his unconquerable hands with gore.

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## 21

ACHILLES FIGHTS  
THE RIVER

When the River Scamander speaks and acts, it does so as the River-god.

1-204: Achilles slaughters *Trojans* hiding in the River *Scamander*, including *Lycæon* and *Asteropæus*.

205-382: The River-god of *SCAMANDER* tells Achilles to desist and pursues him with a massive flood. *HERA*, terrified for Achilles, tells *HEPHAESTUS* to turn his fire on the plain and burn up the River. *SCAMANDER* gives up.

383-513: The gods now take sides and fight each other. *ARES* takes on *ATHENE* and is flattened, as is *APHRODITE*. *APOLLO* refuses to fight *POSEIDON* over mere mortals. *HERA* boxes *ARTEMIS*' ears. *HERMES* refuses to fight *LETO*. *ARTEMIS* goes sobbing to *ZEUS*.

514-611: The gods return to Olympus, but *APOLLO* enters *Ilium* to protect it. *Priam* orders the gates to be opened. *APOLLO* in disguise leads Achilles away from the town while the relieved *Trojan* army floods back in.

When the Greeks reached the ford of the sweetly flowing river, eddying Scamander whose father is immortal Zeus, Achilles cut the Trojan force in two. One half he drove towards the town across the plain, where the Greeks had stam-peded off in panic on the previous day when glorious Hector was creating havoc. Here the Trojans poured across the plain in flight; and to hamper their escape, Hera confronted them with a dense fog.

The rest were herded into deep-flowing Scamander with its silvery eddies. They fell into the water with resounding splashes, the rushing river roared and, as they swam about whirled round in the eddies, the banks on either side threw back their cries. As a cloud of locusts lifts off to make for a river because of a raging fire which has suddenly sprung up and burns furiously, while the locusts huddle in the water; so the echoing current of deep-eddy Scamander was filled by Achilles with a medley of men and horses.

But Olympian-born Achilles, leaving his spear propped against a tamarisk bush on the bank and taking nothing but his sword, leapt in like something superhuman, with murder in his heart, and laid about him right and left. Hideous groans went up from men being hacked to death by his sword, and the water was reddened with their blood. As fish dart away in terror before a huge dolphin and crowd into the corners of a sheltered cove — where it consumes whatever it catches — so the Trojans cowered under the overhanging banks of that terrible river. When the work of slaughtering them had tired his arms, Achilles selected twelve young men and took them alive from the river to be a blood-price for Patroclus' death. He drove them, bewildered like fawns, on to the bank and tied their hands behind them with the well-cut leather belts with which their strongly-woven tunics were equipped. Then he left them for his followers to take down to the hollow ships and in his eagerness for slaughter threw himself at the enemy again.

There he encountered Lycaon, one of Priam's sons, who was making his escape from the river. He had met this man once before in a night raid and taken him unwilling captive from his father's orchard, where Lycaon was trimming the young shoots of a fig-tree with a sharp knife to make chariot rails, when godlike Achilles descended on him like a bolt from the blue. On that occasion, Achilles had put him on board ship and transported him for sale to well-built Lemnos — it was Jason's son who bought him. From Lemnos he was ransomed at a high price by a man whose hospitality he had once enjoyed, Eëtion from Imbros, who sent him to bright Arisbe; but

Lycaon slipped away from his protectors there to return home to Troy.

However, he enjoyed the company of his friends for no more than eleven days after his return from Lemnos, since on the twelfth the god landed him once more in the hands of Achilles, who this time was going to send him on a journey he did not wish to make — to the halls of Hades. Swift-footed godlike Achilles recognized him easily, since he was quite unarmed, with neither helmet, shield nor spear, having discarded his equipment on the ground, limp and exhausted as he was after the sweat and struggle of escaping from the river. Achilles angrily reflected on the situation:

'Well, well, what an astonishing sight! I suppose I shall have every Trojan I killed looming up at me from under the western gloom, if this fellow is anything to go by: I sold him into slavery on sacred Lemnos and now he has escaped that harsh fate and turned up here again. The deep of the grey sea restrains many against their will but it could not hold him. Well then, he can taste the point of my spear. I want to satisfy myself and see whether he will return as easily from that journey as well or whether the life-giving earth, that holds down even the powerful, will hold him too.'

As he paused and considered the matter, Lycaon approached him and tried to seize his knees, bewildered and possessed by one desire, to avoid dark destiny and escape a dreadful death. Godlike Achilles raised his long spear to stab him, but Lycaon ducked under the thrust, ran in and grasped his knees, and the spear passed over his back to stick in the ground, still hungering for human flesh. Laying one hand on Achilles' knees to supplicate him and with the other gripping the sharp spear and refusing to let go, Lycaon spoke winged words:

'Achilles, I am at your knees: respect me and have pity. I already have the claims of a suppliant on you — and suppliants command respect — because you were the first Greek whose bread I tasted when you captured me in our well-built orchard, carried me off from my father and friends and sold me on sacred Lemnos. I fetched you a good price — a hundred cattle — but I

80 was ransomed for three times as much, and after many hardships I returned to Ilium twelve days ago. Now deadly destiny has brought me into your hands again.

'How Father Zeus must hate me, to have made me your prisoner twice over! I am the short-lived son of Laothoe and she is a daughter of old Altes, lord of the warlike Leleges, who lives in the high fortress of Pedasus on the banks of the River Satniois. Priam made this daughter of Altes one of his many wives and she had two sons, both of whom you will have butchered, since godlike Polydorus fell to you and your sharp spear in the front line, and now an evil end awaits me here. For I have little hope of escaping, now that a divinity has delivered me into your hands. But I will tell you something else, and you bear it in mind. I was not borne by the same mother as Hector, who killed your brave and gentle companion. Don't kill me.'

So the glorious son of Priam spoke in supplication. But there was no mercy in the voice that answered him:

90 'You innocent, don't talk to me of ransom. Don't give me your speeches. Before Patroclus met his destined end, I was not disinclined to spare the Trojans; I took many alive and sold them abroad. But now not a single man the god delivers into my hands in front of Ilium is going to live; and that holds good for all the Trojans, the sons of Priam above all.

100 'Yes, my friend, you die too. Why make such a song about it? Even Patroclus died, who was a better man than you by far. And look at me. Don't you see how big and handsome I am? I am the son of a great man. A goddess was my mother. Yet death and inexorable destiny are waiting for me as well. A morning is coming, or maybe an evening or noon, when someone is going to kill me too in battle, with a throw of his spear or an arrow from his bow.'

Death of  
*Lycaon*  
So he spoke, and then and there Lycaon's spirit failed him, and he collapsed. Letting go of the spear, he sank back, stretching out both his hands. But Achilles drew his sharp sword and struck him on the collar bone beside the neck. The two-edged blade was buried in his flesh; he pitched forward headlong and lay there, stretched out on the

120 ground, and the dark blood ran out of him and drenched the earth. Achilles took him by the foot, hurled him into the river to be carried away and in triumph spoke winged words:

'Now lie there among the fish, where they can lick clean the blood from your wound without a second thought. Your mother will not lay you on a bier and mourn you, but eddying Scamander will roll you out into the broad bosom of the sea, where many a fish will dart through the waves to the dark ripples on the top to eat Lycaon's white fat.

130 'Die, all of you, till we reach the citadel of sacred Ilium, you in rout, I killing from behind. Nothing shall save you, not even sweetly flowing Scamander with its silver eddies, to whom for years you have been sacrificing bulls and into whose swirling pools you throw living horses. No: one by one you shall die an evil death, till you have all paid for the killing of Patroclus and the death of the Greeks you slaughtered down by their swift ships when I was away.'

So he spoke, and the River-god became extremely angry and began to consider ways of bringing Achilles' exploits to an end and saving the Trojans

Achilles kills  
*Asteropaeus*

140 from disaster. Meanwhile the son of Peleus, bent on slaughter, hurled himself with his long-shadowed spear at Asteropaeus. This man was the son of Pelegon, who was a love-child of Periboea and the broad River Axios with its swirling stream. When Achilles attacked him, Asteropaeus had just emerged from the river and stood facing him with two spears in his hands, emboldened by the River-god Scamander who resented the slaughter of the youths Achilles was mercilessly butchering up and down his stream. When they had come within range of each other, swift-footed godlike Achilles spoke first:

150 'Who on earth are you that dare to face me? And where do you come from? Pity those fathers whose sons face me in my fury!'

The glorious son of Pelegon said:

'Great-hearted Achilles, why do you ask after my family? I come from distant, fertile Paeonia, which I left for Ilium eleven days ago at the head of my long-speared Paeonian troops. I am descended from broad-flowing River Axios, Axios, source of

the loveliest water in the land. Axius was the father of the famous spearman Pelegon and I, they say, am Pelegon's son. But enough now, glorious Achilles! Let us fight.'

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So, defiantly, he spoke, and godlike Achilles raised his ash spear from Mount Pelion. But the warrior Asteropæus, who was ambidextrous, threw both his spears at once. With one he hit Achilles' shield but failed to pierce it; the point was stopped by the gold that Hephaestus had put in as a gift. With the other he grazed Achilles' right elbow, causing the dark blood to flow; but the spear passed over him and stuck in the ground, still hungering for flesh.

Now Achilles hurled his straight-flying ash shaft at Asteropæus, determined to kill him. He missed his man and hit the high riverbank instead with such force that he buried half the length of the ash spear in it. Drawing his sharp sword from his side, the son of Peleus launched himself furiously at Asteropæus, who was now trying in vain to wrestle the spear out of the bank with his great hand. Three times, in his desperation to retrieve the spear, he shifted it a little, three times he gave up the struggle. The fourth time he tried again to bend and break Peleus' ash shaft, but before he could do so Achilles was on him and killed him with his sword. He hit him in the belly by the navel and all his innards gushed out on the ground. He lay there gasping, and darkness engulfed his eyes. Achilles, trampling on his chest, removed his armour and spoke in triumph:

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'Lie there, and learn how difficult it is, even for children of a River-god, to fight the offspring of almighty Zeus. You said you were descended from a broad-flowing River, but I can trace my ancestry to Zeus himself. Peleus son of Aeacus, leader of many Myrmidons, is my father; Aeacus was a son of Zeus; and a descendant of Zeus is greater than the son of a River by as much as Zeus himself is greater than all rivers that run murmuring down to the sea.'

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'Look at the River that is flowing past you now, Scamander. He is a mighty one, if that is any use to you. But there is no fighting against Zeus son of Cronus. Even Achelous lord of Rivers is no match for Zeus. Nor is the deep and potent Stream

of Ocean, the source of all rivers, every sea and all the springs and deep wells that there are. Even Ocean is afraid of almighty Zeus' lightning-bolt and his terrible thunder when it peals from the skies.'

He spoke, pulled his bronze spear out of the bank and left the man he had killed lying where he was on the sand, lapped by the dark water and busily attended by the swarming eels and fish, who tore at his kidneys and devoured his fat.

Then Achilles went after the Paeonians in their plumed helmets, who had been left in a state of panic beside the swirling river when they saw their leader fall in the thick of the action to the sword and strength of the son of Peleus. He killed Thersilochus, Mydon and Astypylus, Mnesus, Thrasius, Aenius and Ophelestes.

Indeed swift Achilles would have slaughtered even more Paeonians, had it not been for the eddying River-god Scamander, who in his anger took human form and addressed him, speaking from one of his deep pools:

The River-

god's anger at

the killings

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'Achilles, you are supreme among men both in your strength and your outrageous deeds. And the gods themselves are always at your side. If Zeus really means you to kill all the Trojans, at least drive them away from me here and do your dirty work on the plain. My lovely channels are full of dead men's bodies. I am so choked with bodies that I cannot pour my waters into the bright sea, and you blindly kill on. Enough! Call a halt! I am appalled, commander.'

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Swift-footed Achilles replied and said:

'Scamander, child of Zeus, your will shall be done. But I'm not going to stop killing these arrogant Trojans till I've penned them in their town and tested Hector face to face, whether he kills me or I him.'

With these words he fell on the Trojans like something super-human. Then deep-eddying Scamander addressed Phoebus Apollo:

'For shame, god of the silver bow, son of Zeus! You have ignored the orders of Zeus, who has told you many times to stand by the Trojans and protect them till the evening sun falls and throw its shadows over the fruitful fields.'

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The River tries  
to drown  
Achilles

He spoke, and the famous spearman Achilles leapt from the bank and plunged into the middle of the stream. The River-god Scamander rushed on him in spate. He stirred up all his lovely streams, made them rise and, roaring like a bull, flung up on dry land the many bodies of Achilles' victims that had choked him, protecting the survivors by hiding them in the large, deep pools along his beautiful course. The waters rose terrifyingly and seethed around Achilles; they beat down on his shield and overwhelmed him. Unable to maintain his footing, he grabbed hold of a full-grown elm. But the tree came out by the roots, brought the whole bank away and fell into the river, which it dammed from side to side, clogging the stream with a tangle of branches. Achilles struggled out of the current and in his terror made a dash to reach the plain as fast as he could.

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But the great god had not done with him yet — he meant to bring his exploits to an end and save the Trojans from disaster. He rose over him in a darkening crest of water. The son of Peleus fled, getting a spear-thrower's start by swooping away with the speed of the black eagle, that great hunter which is both the strongest and the fastest thing on wings. That was how he sprinted away, and his bronze armour rang frighteningly on his shoulders. But as he slipped away from under the overhanging wave and made his escape, Scamander surged after him in pursuit, roaring and rumbling. Like a gardener making a channel in order to run water from a dark spring through his garden and its plants; mattock in hand, he clears obstructions from the trench; as the water starts flowing, all the pebbles are swept out of the way, and very soon it runs singing down the slope, outstripping its guide — so the wave was always catching up with Achilles, quick though he was. Gods are stronger than men. Sometimes swift-footed godlike Achilles tried to make a stand against it and find out whether every god that inhabits the broad sky was chasing him. But when ever he stopped, a mighty wave from the sky-fed river came crashing down on his shoulders. Exasperated, he would try to jump clear. But the water, racing madly beneath him, would unbalance him and eat the loose earth away from under any

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foothold. The son of Peleus groaned aloud, looking up to the broad skies:

'O Father Zeus, to think that none of the gods promised to have compassion and save me from the River! I should welcome any other fate but this. Not that I blame the other Sky-gods so much as my own mother, whose false predictions deceived me. She said I should fall to Apollo and his flying weapons under the walls of the Trojan warriors. If only Hector could have killed me! He's the best warrior they have bred in Ilium, and the killer would have been as good as the killed. But now it seems I've been destined to die a wretched death, caught in a great river, like a boy in charge of pigs who is swept away by a mountain stream he has tried to cross in winter.'

So he spoke, and Poseidon and Athene immediately came and stood beside him. Adopting human form, they took his hands in theirs and uttered reassuring words. Poseidon began and spoke his mind:

ATHENE and  
POSEIDON  
reassure Achilles

'Achilles, don't be unduly afraid or alarmed when two such allies as myself and Pallas Athene have come down to help you, and with the approval of Zeus too. Believe me, you are not destined to be overcome by any river. This one will soon subside, as you will see for yourself. And here is some good advice from us, if you will take it. Do not desist from war the great leveller, till you have every Trojan who escapes you penned up inside the famous walls of Ilium. And do not go back to your ships till you have taken Hector's life. We guarantee you this triumph.'

With these words the two gods departed to rejoin the immortals while Achilles, greatly heartened by the gods' encouragement, went on across the plain. It was completely inundated and afloat with the fine armour and bodies of the butchered men. But stepping high, Achilles fought his way on against the current, and Athene so increased his strength that the spreading waters could not hold him back. Not that Scamander was relaxing his efforts either, but in a fresh onset of rage with Achilles he reared up his mighty wave in a curling crest and called aloud to the River Simois:

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310 'Dear brother, let's unite to overpower this man or he will soon be sacking lord Priam's great town without a Trojan to stop him. Come quickly to my help! Fill your channels with water from the springs, replenish all your mountain streams, lift up a great breaker and send it down, seething with logs and boulders, so we can stop this savage who is carrying all before him. He thinks himself a match for the gods.

*Scamander*  
asks River  
*Simois* to help

320 'But I say his strength and beauty will not save him now, nor that splendid armour. It will lie deep in the slime beneath my flood; and as for him, the sand will be his winding-sheet, with shingle piled high above him. The Greeks will not know where to find his bones, I will bury him so deep in silt. His burial-mound will be ready-made for him and there will be no need to build him another when the Greeks hold his funeral!

He spoke and, boiling up, rushed upon Achilles with a towering surge, seething with foam, blood and bodies. A dark wave from the sky-fed River hung high above the son of Peleus and was threatening to engulf him, when Hera in her terror for Achilles, whom she thought the great deep-eddying River was about to sweep away, gave a scream of alarm and immediately addressed her son Hephaestus:

HEPH-  
AESTUS  
to dry River

330 'Into action, little club-foot god, my child! It's you we've been counting on to deal with Scamander in this fight. Quick, to the rescue, and bring your flames into action, while I go and rouse the west wind and the bright south to blow up a fierce gale from the sea and spread the blaze till the bodies and armour of the dead Trojans are consumed. You burn the trees on Scamander' banks and set the very river on fire. Don't let his gentle entreaties or threats put you off and don't lessen your fury till you hear a shout from me. Then you can let your inexhaustible fires die down.'

340 So she spoke, and Hephaestus produced a supernatural conflagration which started on the plain and consumed the bodies of Achilles' many victims that were scattered there. The shimmering flood was stemmed, and the whole plain was dried up. As the north wind dries up an irrigated orchard in autumn, and the man who tills it is delighted, so the whole plain was dried

and the dead consumed. Hephaestus then turned his dazzling flames on the river. The elms, willows and tamarisks caught fire; and the lotus, reeds and galingale that grew in profusion by the lovely stream were burnt. In the very depths of the pools even the eels and fish were tormented by ingenious Hephaestus' torrid blasts and plunged about this way and that in agony along the lovely stream. The mighty river himself was scalded and spoke out:

350 'Hephaestus! You're more than a match for any god. I can't cope with this blazing fire of yours. The fight's off. Let godlike Achilles go straight in and drive the Trojans from their town. Why should I get mixed up in other people's quarrels?'

360 He spoke with the fire rising round him, and his lovely stream began to bubble up. As a cauldron is brought rapidly to the boil by a roaring fire and dry logs burning underneath, and melts down the fat of a well-fed pig while the fat spits up all round – so his lovely stream was consumed by fire and its waters boiled. Overcome by the blast delivered by the might of inventive Hephaestus, he lost heart and ceased to flow. He turned in supplication to Hera and spoke winged words:

370 'Hera, why has your son picked on my stream for persecution? Compared with all the others who are fighting on the Trojan side, I've done little to deserve it. However, if you tell me to, I will stop – but so must Hephaestus. I will do more: I will undertake on oath to make no attempt to save the Trojans from their doom, not even on the day when their whole town is consumed by the devastating fires that will be lit there by the warlike Greeks.'

When the goddess white-armed Hera heard this from Scamander, she immediately spoke to Hephaestus her dear son: 'Enough, Hephaestus, glorious child! It is not right to ill-treat a god like this merely to help mortals.'

380 So she spoke, and Hephaestus put out the supernatural fire and the river began to flow back again along his lovely course. There was no more fighting between these two after Scamander's energies had been tamed. Hera, though still resentful, saw to that. But now the feud between the other gods, driven as they were by their loyalties into opposing camps, came to

The River  
gives up

a head in a momentous and painful conflict, and they fell on each other with a thunderous crash which made the great skies trumpet and the broad earth groan again.

Zeus, sitting on Olympus, heard the din. He laughed to himself in delight when he saw the immortals come to grips and hold back no longer. Ares piercer of shields began the fight by making for Athene, bronze spear in hand and shouting abuse as he came:

'You dog-flea, why have you set the gods at each other's throats again, you and your mad bravado? What have your obsessions pushed you into this time? Don't you remember when you encouraged Diomedes to stab me? You made no secret of it. You took his spear in your own hand; you drove it straight at me and cut my fine flesh. Now I'm going to make you pay for what you did to me then.'

With these words he stabbed at Athene's fringed aegis, the terrifying aegis that can withstand even the thunderbolt of Zeus. Here the murderous Ares lunged with his long spear. Athene drew back and with her great hand picked up a rock that was lying on the ground, a big, black, rough boulder which men of an earlier age had set up in the fields to mark a boundary. She threw this and struck wild Ares on the neck, bringing him down. There with a great clatter of armour he fell, covering seven acres, with his hair in the dust. Pallas Athene laughed and, triumphing over him, spoke winged words:

'You stupid fool! It never occurred to you, before you matched yourself with me, to consider how much stronger I was. Think of yourself, then, as paying off the price of your mother Hera's curses: she has wished you ill ever since you angered her by deserting the Greeks to fight for the proud Trojans.'

With these words Athene turned her brilliant eyes away, and Aphrodite took Ares by the arm and led him from the battlefield. He had scarcely recovered his senses and was groaning all the time. But the goddess white-armed Hera noticed this move on Aphrodite's part and immediately spoke to Athene with winged words:

'Look sharp, Atrytone, child of Zeus who drives the storm-cloud! There goes that dog-flea again, leading the butcher Ares through the mayhem and away from the battlefield. After her, quick!'

So she spoke, and Athene, delighted, sped after Aphrodite, closed with her and struck her on the breast with her fist. Then and there Aphrodite gave up and collapsed. She and Ares lay together on the bountiful earth, and Athene triumphing over them spoke winged words:

'May everyone who helps the Trojans in their fight against the Greeks acquit themselves like these and show as much daring and resolution as Aphrodite, when she ran to Ares' side and found herself face to face with me in my fury! Then we should soon have finished with this war and sacked the well-built town of Ilium.'

So she spoke, and the goddess white-armed Hera smiled. And now the lord earthshaker Poseidon addressed Apollo:

'Phoebus, why are we two standing apart? That is not right when others have already begun. We ought to be ashamed to go back to Olympus and Zeus' bronze-floored palace without a fight. You begin. You are my junior, and with my greater age and experience, it would not be honourable for me to start.'

'You fool, you must have lost your senses when you decided to help the Trojans. You seem to have forgotten all the hardships you and I endured at Ilium when we were segregated from the gods and sent by Zeus to serve Troy's haughty lord Laomedon for a year. We were on a fixed wage, and he gave the orders. I built a wall for the Trojans round their town, a broad and splendid one to make the place impregnable; while you, Phoebus, herded the shambling cattle with their crooked horns on the spurs of wooded Mount Ida with its many ridges.'

'But when the joyful seasons brought round the time for settlement, impetuous Laomedon refused outright to give us anything and packed us off, threatening to tie our feet and hands together and send us for sale to some distant island. He even talked of lopping our ears off! So home we came in a rage, furious with Laomedon about the offer he had promised and