

# The Iliad — Cast of Characters

The Iliad's cast divides, for the most part, into two camps — the Greeks (called Achaeans, Argives, or Danaans in the poem) besieging the city, and the Trojans defending it — with the gods of Olympus taking sides above them. The names can be unfamiliar, and they shift spelling from one translation to another; older English versions (Pope, Chapman, Butler) often use the Roman names of the gods, so Zeus becomes Jove, Hera becomes Juno, Athena becomes Minerva, and Ares becomes Mars. The list below groups the principal figures by allegiance. Keep it within reach for the first few books; the names settle quickly once the two sides come into focus.

## The Greeks (Achaeans) — Leaders & Heroes

### **Achilles** *uh-KIL-eez*

The greatest warrior of the Greek army and the poem's central figure. Half-divine, son of the sea-nymph Thetis, he is fated to win undying glory at the cost of a short life. His wrath — first at Agamemnon, then, after Patroclus's death, at Hector — drives the whole poem.

### **Agamemnon** *ag-uh-MEM-non*

Commander-in-chief of the Greek forces and king of Mycenae. His seizure of Achilles' prize, Briseis, ignites the quarrel that opens the epic. Proud and often overbearing, he embodies the tensions of authority.

### **Patroclus** *puh-TROH-klus · also Patroklos*

Achilles' closest and most beloved companion. When he enters battle in Achilles' armor and is killed by Hector, his death becomes the hinge of the poem, transforming Achilles' wounded pride into vengeful grief.

### **Menelaus** *men-uh-LAY-us*

King of Sparta and brother of Agamemnon. Helen was his wife; her flight to Troy with Paris is the war's cause.

### **Odysseus** *oh-DISS-yoos · Lat. Ulysses*

King of Ithaca, famed for cunning and eloquence; a steadying voice in the Greek council. The hero of Homer's other epic, the Odyssey.

### **Nestor** *NESS-tor*

The aged king of Pylos, revered for wisdom and long-winded counsel drawn from a lifetime of war.

### **Ajax** *AY-jax · Gk. Aias*

An enormous, stalwart Greek warrior, second only to Achilles in strength — the army's bulwark in defense.

### **Diomedes** *dy-oh-MEE-deez*

A bold young Greek champion who, with Athena's help, even wounds gods on the battlefield in his great day of fighting.

## The Trojans — Leaders & Heroes

### **Hector** *HEK-tor*

Prince of Troy and its greatest defender, eldest son of King Priam. Brave, dutiful, and devoted to his family and city, he is the poem's other tragic center. His death at Achilles' hands and his father's plea for his body bring the epic to its close.

**Priam** *PRY-am*

The aged king of Troy, father of Hector and Paris. His journey alone into the enemy camp to ransom Hector's body — and Achilles' mercy in granting it — form the poem's final movement.

**Paris** *PAIR-iss · also Alexander*

Trojan prince whose abduction of Helen sparked the war. Handsome and skilled with the bow, but widely regarded within the poem as lacking his brother Hector's courage.

**Helen** *HEL-en*

The most beautiful woman in the world, wife of Menelaus, carried to Troy by Paris. Living within the besieged city, she voices grief and self-reproach at the war fought over her.

**Andromache** *an-DROM-uh-kee*

Hector's wife. Her tender farewell to him at the city gate, holding their infant son, is one of the most affecting scenes in all of Homer.

**Aeneas** *ih-NEE-us*

A Trojan noble and warrior, son of Aphrodite, destined (in later tradition) to survive the war and found the line that leads to Rome.

**Hecuba** *HEK-yoo-buh*

Queen of Troy, wife of Priam and mother of Hector — a voice of maternal grief as the city's champions fall.

## The Gods — Favoring the Greeks

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**Hera** *HEER-uh · Lat. Juno*

Queen of the gods and Zeus's wife; a fierce partisan of the Greeks who schemes relentlessly for Troy's destruction.

**Athena** *uh-THEE-nuh · Lat. Minerva*

Goddess of wisdom and war-craft; the most active divine champion of the Greeks, guiding heroes like Diomedes and Odysseus.

**Poseidon** *poh-SY-dun · Lat. Neptune*

God of the sea, who favors the Greeks and intervenes for them despite Zeus's restraints.

**Thetis** *THEE-tis*

A sea-nymph, the divine mother of Achilles. She pleads his cause with Zeus and later brings him new armor forged by Hephaestus.

## The Gods — Favoring the Trojans

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**Apollo** *uh-POL-oh*

God of prophecy, plague, and the bow; the most powerful divine defender of Troy. He opens the poem by sending a plague on the Greeks and guards Hector's body at its close.

**Aphrodite** *af-roh-DY-tee · Lat. Venus*

Goddess of love and mother of Aeneas; protector of Paris, whom she once rescued from the battlefield.

**Ares** *AIR-eez · Lat. Mars*

God of war in its raw, bloody aspect; fights on the Trojan side and is even wounded by the Greek Diomedes.

## The God Who Holds the Balance

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**Zeus** *ZOOSS · Lat. Jove or Jupiter*

King of the gods, who enforces fate and holds the balance between the two sides. He grants Thetis's plea to let the Greeks suffer without Achilles, and ultimately ensures the poem's ordained course — including the return of Hector's body.

## The Cause & the Prizes

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**Briseis** *bry-SEE-iss*

The captive woman awarded to Achilles, then taken by Agamemnon — the immediate trigger of Achilles' wrath and withdrawal.

**Chryseis** *kry-SEE-iss*

A captive awarded to Agamemnon; her father, a priest of Apollo, prays for the plague that opens the poem when Agamemnon refuses to return her.

**Calchas** *KAL-kas*

The Greek seer who reveals that the plague will lift only if Chryseis is returned, forcing the quarrel into the open.