

EPISODE 8 – New armour for Achilles

CD 2 tracks 6-7

total running time: 10:53

Patroclus' success upsets Zeus (⊙ 4:38)

Patroclus, dressed in Achilles' armour – Patroclus, dressed as Achilles – rode out against the Trojans then. Death rode a chariot that day and the Myrmidons fastened on the Trojans, as when a little boy hears a strange sound from within a dead, hollow tree and picks up a stick and pushes the stick into the shadows, and the wasps who have nested inside come pouring
5 out – a seething, black cloud of frenzied rage.

So the Myrmidons fell upon the Trojans. They tumbled to the ground with jolting groans, splintered teeth, shattered bones. Like a hawk swooping from the sky into starlings, Patroclus drove them out of the camp, across the blasted battlefield, until he saw the walls of Troy rising before him, until he saw Hector, man-killing Hector, prince of Troy, fleeing before his charge.

10 Patroclus, mother's son, did you forget? Did the blur of battle, the clamour of kills, befuddle your mind? Or did you decide to try the last, despite Achilles' warning? You went too far.

On the rocky crag on Mount Ida, Zeus woke up. And he smiled and he stretched and he yawned, and then he looked down at the battlefield and he saw the Trojans in full retreat. He saw Patroclus in Achilles' armour, driving the Trojans before him. And, behind Patroclus, the
15 Myrmidons and behind the Myrmidons the whole Greek army, pouring across the battlefield.

And among the Greeks he saw his wife, Hera, and his daughter, Athene, invisible, screeching and screaming with delight, splattered with blood and gore. And Zeus began to tremble with fury. He lifted his hands to his mouth and he bellowed, "Hera!"

And Hera stopped and she turned and she stared. And she would have been destroyed. She
20 would have been annihilated by the fury of Zeus' gaze, had she not still been wearing that belt of love and desire, which softened Zeus' heart towards her.

He said, "Hera! Athene! Go to Mount Olympus now and send me Apollo!" And, scuttling up into the sky, shaking, quaking with fear, the two goddesses disappeared.

And it wasn't long before Apollo, golden Apollo, was standing in front of Zeus. And Zeus said,
25 "Apollo, go to Hector and help him all you can."

And Trojan-loving Apollo wasted no time. As swift as thought, he flew into the city, and there on the battlements was Hector. He was driving down the Greeks. He was in the thick of the battle. Three times the golden-armoured one had clambered up the city walls. Three times they had driven him down with spears. And, suddenly, as Hector was fighting, he heard a voice
30 beside himself.

"Tut, tut, tut, tut, tut." He turned and there was a warrior he'd never seen before. And the warrior said, "Hector, why do you stay inside the city walls? Why do you not go out and fight that golden-armoured one? Who knows, perhaps Apollo would help you?"

And suddenly the warrior vanished, and, where he'd been standing there was a golden light
35 hanging on the air. And Hector was filled with spirit and awe in the knowledge he'd been in the presence of one of the mighty gods.

He ran down the stone steps. He leapt into the car of his chariot. His charioteer whipped the horses to a gallop. The great bronze gates of the city were thrown open and Hector rode out of Troy.

***Hephaestus replaces Achilles' armour* (© 6:15)**

Back in the Greek camp, Achilles was waiting for his friend Patroclus to return. He was pacing back and forth. He heard a sound, a thousand Trojan voices crying out as one, crying out with joy. And then a strange thing. His hand, Achilles' hand was wet and sticky. He lifted it to his face. The ring, the golden ring of Aphrodite, the golden ring carved in the shape of a curling
5 arrow whose sharp point touched its feathered tail, the golden ring Patroclus had entrusted to Achilles for safe keeping – that ring was bleeding. Blood was weeping from it down his finger, down the back of his hand, down the back of his arm, dropping from his elbow into the mud. And he knew, Achilles knew, what had happened.

King Odysseus made his way from the battlefield, knowing he'd have to break the awful
10 news to Achilles of Patroclus' death. He made his way through the camp, down to where the breakers suck and drag. He opened the door of Achilles' hut and he saw he was too late.

Achilles was naked on all fours, convulsing. His skin smeared with filth and ash, streaked with his own tears. In his fists, clumps of his own hair that he had torn from his head. His eyes, bulging red and bloodshot. He was grinding together his teeth with an awful guttural sound.
15 And then he threw back his head and he loosed such a scream of fury and sorrow Odysseus ran from the hut. He could not bear to see such sights. He could not bear to hear such sounds.

Thetis heard the scream. She came at once. She stood over her son. "Mother, my best friend, Patroclus, has been taken from me. Hector killed him and he stripped my burnished armour from his back! Before I die, I'll see that Hector crawling, coughing up his own bubbling blood! I
20 will fight him naked if need be!"

"My son," she said, "I will win you armour. Promise me you'll not go into battle until I return." And she was gone into the heavens.

She rose up and up through the clouds, high and high, until she came to the slopes of Mount Olympus. And she made her way across the mountain until she came to the palace of
25 Hephaestus, the crippled god of metalwork. And she made her way into his workshop. And there he was, fashioning a golden tripod.

And when he saw Thetis, he got up to his feet, and he pulled the nose of the bellows out of the embers, and he washed his hands on a dripping sponge. He said, "Thetis, Thetis, what brings you here?"

30 And Thetis said, "Patroclus, Patroclus has been killed and my son Achilles' armour has been torn from his back. Man-slaying Hector has stolen Achilles' armour. And now my son has nothing to wear. Hephaestus, I beg you please, make him a new suit of armour."

And Hephaestus said, "I wish I could make him a suit of armour that would protect him from his fate, but I can make him a suit of armour that will fill his heart with joy, and will fill the eyes of
35 all men and women with wonder."

And Hephaestus put gold and silver and tin and bronze into melting vats, and he began to shape a suit of armour. And such a suit of armour it was: beautiful greaves of pliant tin; a breastplate of bronze that shone like the sun itself; a golden helmet with golden plume and golden tassels. And then he fashioned a shield, a magnificent shield. And on that shield he
40 wrought the earth and the sky, with all the stars, all the constellations. And the earth as two countries: one at peace, with a wedding dance and purple clusters of grapes and a trickling stream and grazing cattle; and the other country at war, with a city under siege and all the terrible tumult of the battlefield.

And, when the precious pieces were ready, Hephaestus gave them to Thetis and she seized
45 them in her hands and she thanked him with all of her heart. And then she descended down and down from the heavens to the earth.