The Trojan War

The Trojan War is often talked about, one way or another. Even though it happened at least 3,000 years ago.

For example, we still talk about a *Trojan horse*. We still talk about an *odyssey*. We still talk about the *Achilles tendon*. And we still talk about an *Achilles heel*.

All of these ideas come from the story of the Trojan War.

The Trojan War was between Troy and Greece. For many years the story was not written down. It was told, over and over again, by storytellers. It got changed a lot, in all that telling. (Storytellers like to make stories more and more dramatic, don’t they?) So we don’t really know how much of it is true. It’s a good story, all the same.

The story was eventually written down. It was called the Iliad. The Iliad is very famous. It is one of the oldest stories there is. (3,000 is old!)

Why did the Trojan War start? What was it about?

Well, it seems to have been about a woman called Helen. She became known as Helen of Troy. When the story starts, though, she was married to a Greek king. This was the problem, as we shall soon see.

Helen was very beautiful. The story says she was the most beautiful woman in the world. So the Greek king was very angry when she suddenly left. Helen ran away to Troy one day, with a prince from there. His name was Paris.

Why did she do that?

It’s a good question, and the answer is we don’t know. She may have been kidnapped by Paris. On the other hand she may have run away with him because she was in love.

Anyway, she left Greece and became Helen of Troy. This made the Greek king cross, of course. So he went to war with Troy. The way you do.

Troy was a small city right by the sea. The Trojans locked the city gates when they saw the Greek army coming. So the Greeks camped outside. The walls of Troy were high and strong. So were the gates. The Greek army could not break into Troy. So they camped outside and tried to starve the Trojans out. It was a siege.

But Troy backed onto mountains, so food and water could get into the city from there. The Trojans could not be starved out. On the other hand, the Greek army was large and fierce, so the Trojan army could not drive it away.

So there was a stalemate. A complete stalemate. The Greek army sat outside Troy and the Trojans sat inside Troy. This went on for ten years. Or so the story says.

There were two Greek warriors who were really famous. One was Achilles and the other was Odysseus.

Achilles was killed by a Trojan arrow. It hit him in the heel. This is why we call the tendon at the back of our heel the *Achilles tendon*. It was Achilles’ only weak point. This is why we still call someone’s weak point their “*Achilles heel*”.

Odysseus was not killed outside Troy. In fact it was Odysseus who thought of a plan to get the Greek army inside Troy.

The plan involved an enormous wooden horse. The Greeks made a huge wooden horse. 30 Greek warriors hid inside it. Then the Greek army sailed away. The Trojans thought the horse was a parting gift. They rolled it into the city. Then they celebrated peace. They partied all night. They danced, they ate and they drank until they were dog tired. Then they slept. When the whole city slept, the Greek warriors crept out of the wooden horse through a secret door and opened the city gates from inside. That’s how Greek warriors got into Troy. Hidden inside the Trojan Horse.

Once the gates were open, the Greek army sailed back and rushed into the city. There was a lot of fighting. Troy was sacked. Helen of Troy was captured, and taken away to Greece again.

We still talk about a ‘*Trojan horse*’, today. Computer people talk about ‘Trojan horse viruses’, for example. By a Trojan horse we mean something which looks OK on the outside. But it isn’t OK at all. Something dangerous is hiding inside.

So a Trojan horse virus might be a link in an email which looks interesting and innocent. It has dangerous nasties in it, though. When you open it, it lets a virus programme into your computer. The link looks OK from the outside, but inside there is a virus. When you open the link, out comes the virus to attack your computer.

Beware of Trojan horses! Beware of good-looking links in an email.

The *Iliad* is one very famous old story. Another one is the *Odyssey.* This is the story of how Odysseus got home from the Trojan War. He had many adventures on the way. We still talk about *an odyssey* today, when we mean a long and dangerous journey.

But that’s another story altogether!

Hugo Kerr 030514