







THE GIFT THAT HID A NASTY SURPRISE

The war between the Greek and Trojan armies finally ended last week when the Greeks used a cunning trick to mount a surprise attack.

This ends a drama that began nearly a decade ago with, of all things, a wedding.

Sparta, a powerful city in Greece, had a beautiful princess named Helen.

A former winner of the Miss Universe beauty pageant — who has also been named on Sparta Magazine's 50 Most Beautiful People list — she had many royal suitors.

There was so much rivalry between them that to avoid war, they made a pact: whoever she finally wed, the rest would support and defend.

"This way, once I get married, the others won't get angry and try to kill my new husband," Helen explained when she announced the decision.

In the end, the lucky man was a prince called Menelaus.

But not long after the wedding, Prince Paris of Troy, a Turkish city, came to Sparta on an official visit.

No one can agree on what happened next.

Some say Paris and Helen fell in love and that she followed him home to Troy, while others insist he kidnapped her.

Once she was discovered missing, however, the Spartan king gathered all the princes who had agreed to defend her marriage to Menelaus.

In the end, a fleet of 1,000 ships and a large army set sail for Troy to get her back. The Trojans, who were expecting a fight, also gathered a large coalition of forces.

When the fleet landed at Troy, the Greeks found the Trojans had barricaded themselves within the walls of their fortress-like city, refusing to give Helen up.

The two sides waged a long and brutal war that lasted nine years and covered the beaches of Troy in blood. Each side saw dramatic victories, losses and its bravest men killed.

Paris and Menelaus almost fought one on one, but Paris became afraid and backed out, though he later killed the Greeks' strongest warrior, Achilles, by shooting him in the heel with an arrow.

The stalemate continued, however, with neither side giving in. Finally, the Greeks came up with a plan to deceive the Trojans. They built a giant wooden horse — an animal regarded as sacred in Troy — but left it hollow, so that Greek soldiers could hide inside.

The Greeks then left the horse outside the gates of Troy and pretended to surrender and leave.

The Trojans thought they had won the war. They accepted the horse as a peace offering and wheeled it into their city, where a night of mad, drunken celebration followed.

That night, when the Trojans were asleep, the Greeks emerged from the horse and opened the gates to let the rest of the army in.

The element of surprise gave them the upper hand. They killed every man and boy, enslaved every woman and girl, and stole everything of value. Troy was reduced to a pile of burning rubble.

Paris was killed in the fighting and Helen returned to Sparta with her husband Menelaus. The royal couple are now said to be undergoing marriage counselling.

BACKGROUND

The Trojan War was a fictional battle recounted in two poems, the Iliad and the Odyssey, written in the 8th century.

These poems were epics — long stories with many characters, settings and events taking place over a long period of time, a bit like a long-running soap opera.

The Iliad and the Odyssey tell the story of an ancient Greek army who followed their king, Agamemnon, to attack the city of Troy, and of their subsequent return to their homeland.

Many fascinating characters are introduced to us in these tales, including the great but proud warrior Achilles, the cowardly Prince Paris, the beautiful Queen Helen and the cunning hero Odysseus.

And the man who dreamt them up? He is thought to have been the poet Homer, though some scholars believe "Homer" was not one person but several.

Today, however, the term "Trojan horse" refers to anything that seems innocent but is really harmful — such as a malicious computer program.

FAB VOCAB

SURPRISE ATTACK

An attack on an unprepared or unsuspecting target

ROYAL SUITORS

Princes or kings who wish to marry someone

MADE A PACT

Entered into an agreement

COALITION OF FORCES

A combination of people from different groups, united to achieve a common goal

BARRICADED

Blocked off

DRAMATIC

Thrilling and exciting

STALEMATE

A situation in which neither side can gain an advantage

PEACE OFFERING

A gift that one side gives the other to try and resolve their differences

ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

The advantage a side has when it attacks unexpectedly

REDUCED TO A PILE OF BURNING RUBBLE

Destroyed completely

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