

## It All Started With an Apple...

According to legend, the chain of events that led to the Trojan War started at a royal wedding. Peleus, king of the Myrmidons (a race of people created from ants!), was marrying a sea nymph named Thetis. Many gods attended the wedding, but Eris, daughter of Zeus, king of the gods, wasn't invited because she was the goddess of strife or discord and bound to cause trouble.

Angry at being excluded, Eris decided to disrupt the wedding banquet. So she went to the blacksmith of the gods, Hephaestus and had him create a golden apple for her with an inscription on it. She threw a golden apple marked "for the fairest" among the guests. The goddesses Hera, Athena and Aphrodite were there, and each thought that she was the fairest of them all. They bickered for a while about who deserved the apple, then asked Zeus to decide the matter.

But Zeus didn't want to get involved, so he sent them to a prince named Paris. The goddesses tried to rig the contest by bribing Paris. Athena promised to help him lead Troy to victory in a war against the Greeks. Hera promised to make him the king of all Europe and Asia. And Aphrodite, the goddess of love, promised to give Paris the most beautiful woman in the world. The beautiful woman sounded better to Paris than power and glory, so he awarded the Apple of Discord to Aphrodite.

She sent him to Sparta to collect his prize. There was just one problem. The most beautiful woman in the world was already married.

## The Face That Launched a Thousand Ships

She was Helen, a half-mortal daughter of Zeus. Many powerful men had wanted to marry her, and her step-father, King of Sparta, was afraid this would lead to war. Her father convinced Helen's suitors to swear an oath that they would protect her and her husband, whoever he might be. Then Helen married Menelaus, the brother of Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae. After her father's death Helen's husband became the king of Sparta.

When Paris showed up in Sparta, Menelaus and Helen welcomed him as a guest. Then Menelaus left Sparta for a while. When he returned, Helen was gone. She had eloped with Paris. Menelaus was furious. Determined to win his wife back, he summoned the princes who had promised to protect Helen, and they agreed to help him attack Troy. Menelaus's brother Agamemnon was the leader of the expedition

At first the Greek army couldn't set sail because there was no wind. Then the winds turned favorable and one thousand Greek ships set sail for Troy.

## The Seige of Troy

The Greeks beseiged Troy for ten years. According to legend, the gods took great interest in the war. Hera and Athena still resented Paris for not giving them the Apple of Discord, so they helped the Greek side. Aphrodite assisted the Trojans. Zeus also favored the Trojans, but tried to remain impartial. Eris and her brother Ares helped both sides because they loved war!

After the deaths of Achilles and another hero, Ajax, the Greeks wanted to give up and go home. But the king of Ithaca, Odysseus, came up with a plan to get the Greek army into Troy. The Greeks built an immense wooden horse and Odysseus, Menelaus, and other warriors hid inside it. After leaving the horse at the gates of Troy, the Greek army sailed away. The Trojans thought the Greeks had given up and had left the horse as a gift.

## The Fall of Troy

That night, while the Trojans were sleeping, the Greek ships quietly returned. The soldiers in the horse slipped out and opened the city gates, and the Greek army quietly entered Troy. They started fires all over the city. The Trojans awoke to find their city burning. When they tried to flee, they were massacred by Greek soldiers. King Priam and almost all of the other Trojan chiefs were killed. Only Aeneas - the son of Aphrodite and a Trojan royal named Anchises - escaped. The Aeneid, by the Roman writer Virgil, is about Aeneas's travels after the Trojan war. (Homer's Odyssey is about the Greek hero Odysseus's travels after the war.)