

If I screw it up, classicists around the world will issue a fatwa and assassinate me with bronze daggers.

— David Benioff (*Troy* screenwriter), 2003

TROY STORIES

SOME LINKS

shooting script (version dated 21/2/03):

http://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/troy_by_david_benioff.pdf

Michael Tabb's discarded alternative *Troilus & Cressida* version (needs Final Draft Viewer):

<http://www.dailyscript.com/scripts/Tabb'sTROY-Final.fdr>

Troy in 15 Minutes (from Cleolinda Jones' Short Attention Span Theater):

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/cleolinda/99710.html>

TLS review:

http://www.the-ils.co.uk/this_week/story.aspx?story_id=2107498

<http://nmeyer.pxl.net>

Nicholas Meyer's *Odyssey*:

"Beware Greeks Bearing Gifts": <http://www.whoosh.org/epguide/greeks.html>

DAVID BENIOFF: THE CV

Books: *The 25th Hour* (novel, 2001); *When the Nines Roll Over* (collection, 2004)

Screenplays: *25th Hour* (Spike Lee, 2002); *Troy* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2004); *Stay* (Marc Forster, 2005); *The Kite Runner* (Sam Mendes, 2006; from the novel by Khaled Hosseini);

Ender's Game (Wolfgang Petersen, 2007; from the novel by Orson Scott Card); *Wolverine*

(2007); *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (from Hemingway, in development for Christopher Nolan);

Right as Rain (from the novel by George Pelecanos, in development for Curtis Hanson);

Alpha (in development for Marc Forster); *When the Nines Roll Over* (in development to

direct as short)

Producer credit (with Wolfgang Petersen & Diane Rathbun): *A Spell for Chameleon* (Tim

McCarthy, 2006); *Ender's Game* (Wolfgang Petersen, 2007)

THE CUTTING-ROOM FLOOR

- opening scene showing the aftermath of an earlier Thessalian battle
- scene between Menelaus and Hector at the banquet
- night scene in Sparta between Paris and Hector
- the recruitment of Odysseus
- scene between Priam and Hector explaining Priam's weakness for supersatiation
- montage of second-unit scenes showing the preparations for war
- scene of Patroclus on Achilles' ship during the landing
- dialogue for Ajax
- more Hector in the attack on the Temple of Apollo
- Andromache's brothers
- more and longer scenes between Achilles and Patroclus
- Achilles prepares to sail back to Lanius with Briseis (some of scene relocated to Achilles' tent)
- more Andromache from books 6, 22
- substitution of Agamemnon for Achilles in the horse dialogue with Odysseus
- revelation that the Greek "plague" corpses are faked
- the Trojan scout makes it back to Troy from the Hellespont
- deleted final scene

OTHER 2004 RETELLINGS

Charles Rowan Beye, *Odysseus: A Life* (scholarly belle-lettristic "biography")

Lindsay Clarke, *The War at Troy* (as told by Phemius)

Judith Hand, *The Amazon and the Warrior* (Penthesilea)

Valerio Massimo Manfredi, *The Talisman of Troy* (Diomedes after Troy)

Jackie Rose, *Warrior's Captive: I, Briseis* (erotica; e-book)

Eric Shanower, *Age of Bronze II: Sacrifice* (graphic novel)

and note:

Greg Tobin (ed.), *The Siege of Troy (Iliad translation packaged as a fantasy-novel "retelling")*
Dan Simmons, *Iliad* (2003), *Olympus* (2005) – SF..

[For more see www.rhul.ac.uk/Classics/NJL/novels.html.]

SOME MOMENTS OF DIVINE INTERVENTION

book **divine action** **substitute**

- i Athene prevents Achilles killing Agamemnon Briseis
- iii Aphrodite saves Paris from Menelaus Hector
- xviii Thetis mourns Patroclus Briseis
- xxiv Hermes prompts Priam to leave Achilles' tent by night Achilles

THE FOUR-DAY ILIAD (extra-Homeric events in italics)

<i>Troy</i> day	events	≈ <i>Iliad</i> day
1	<i>landing</i> ; quarrel of Agamemnon & Achilles	10
2	duel of Menelaus & Paris, Hector & Ajax	22
3	embassy; death of Patroclus	26
5	death of Hector	27
6–17	truce; <i>building of horse</i>	40–50
18	<i>sack of Troy</i>	—

SURPRISE!

Menelaus killed in book 3!

Ajax killed by Hector in book 7!

Glauceus killed during the sack by Odysseus!

Priam killed during the sack by Agamemnon!

Agamemnon killed during the sack by Briseis!

Achilles killed during the sack by Paris!

Briseis

Andromache

Astyanax

Paris

Helen

escape with Aeneas & Anchises to Mt Ida!

(Glauceus was killed by Ajax in the *Aethiopis*. There's no extant tradition about Briseis' fate.)

BENIOFF ON TROY: some selections

¹BBC Web Access, n.d. (early 2003):

http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/webaccess/david_benioff_1.shtml

²Devin Faraci for CHUD, 10 May 2004: <http://chud.com/news/may04/may11troy3.php3>

³Daniel Epstein for Screenwriter's Monthly, 1 June 2004:

<http://www.screenwritersutopia.com/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=2686>

⁴Daniel Epstein at suicidegirls.com, n.d. (late 2004):

<http://suicidegirls.com/words/David+Benioff/>

(i) the seed

The *Iliad* has always been my favorite book –

You read it in school?

Actually I heard it first from my mother. When I was a little kid my mother was bedridden and she would read me whatever she was reading at the time. When I was six she read me the *Iliad*. Of course the book was composed to be spoken, and in a good translation it has this great rhythm. Even before I understood what was going on I was swept up in the rhythm of it. Hector and Achilles were heroes of mine even before I began reading comic books. Before Spider-Man and the X-Men I was obsessed with these two. When I got older I thought it was weird that they hadn't made the big movie of it.³

(ii) the pitch

I sold *Troy* as a pitch, and the first thing I said in that pitch was, 'I am proposing a ruthlessly stripped-down version of the Trojan War, concentrating on the two dominant heroes of either side – Hector and Achilles.' I don't remember the second thing I said in the pitch, because it was my first pitch and I was sweating through my jacket.¹

(iii) the drafts

So is it true you were the only screenwriter on Troy?

That's true [abem – NJL] but it doesn't mean that every word on screen was mine.⁴

How many changes were made from the actual script?

I went through maybe 30 different drafts. I think the first draft was turned in January of 2002, and they started shooting in April of 2003. On my computer I've got the *Troy* folder with literally 32 different drafts, and it's kind of funny because you'll see the first draft and the second draft are very different. Then, maybe by the 10th draft, it's kind of closer to the first again.³

(iv) the sources

I can't measure up to Homer. His composition has survived for nearly three millennia and remains the world's most beautiful and mournful depiction of war. But the story of the Trojan War does not belong to Homer. The characters he employs were legendary long before he was born. Dozens of different versions of the War have been told, and my script ransacks ideas from several of them. The script is not, truly, an adaptation of *The Iliad*. It is a retelling of the entire Trojan War story. So I'm not worried about desecrating a classic – Homer will survive Hollywood.¹

We wanted to tell the entire story from before the beginning when Paris seduces Helen and triggers the entire war through to the fall of Troy, and you don't get all of that in *The Iliad*, so some of it comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and some of it comes from *The Odyssey*, actually. There are little bits from *Aeneid*. There are bits of things from *Bulfinch's Mythology*, and some of it was just imagined.⁴

Other than The Iliad, what sources are you using for the Troy screenplay?

The Odyssey, *The Aeneid*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths* and a good detail of critical literature, particularly the work of Bernard Knox, whose introduction to

Robert Fagles' superb translation of *The Iliad* is probably my single favourite work of Homeric analysis.¹

(v) the gods

Can you talk about the idea of leaving the gods out of the movie?

That was the original idea from the beginning, from the pitch. This was my first pitch ever. When I was talking about why the movie had never been made, it's because it's so massive, there are so many plotlines. And that's just if you're talking about the *Iliad*, which starts in the ninth year of the war. I wanted to tell the story of the Trojan War from the beginning, from Paris' seduction of Helen, and if I was going to spend sufficient time on these characters, particularly Achilles and Hector, something would have to go. Part of it was for time efficiency. But part of it was that I wanted to concentrate on the humans, and everything changes when you have the gods in there.

I also had this real terror of an actor in a Toga on top of a CGI Mount Olympus throwing CGI thunderbolts down. It becomes *Clash of the Titans*. I like *Clash of the Titans*, but I didn't want to remake *Clash of the Titans*. Also certain scenes – when Paris fights Menelaus, in the *Iliad* at the end of the fight when Paris is about to get killed he is magically teleported from the battlefield into Helen's chamber. It just changes everything, I wanted to see the human thing, see the human fear. Not just have him disappear in a puff of smoke.²

I was wondering why The Gods of Olympus were excluded from Troy, as they all played a big part in The Iliad.

Troy is an adaptation of the Trojan War myth in its entirety, not *The Iliad* alone. *The Iliad* begins with the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon over the slave girl Briseis, nine days into the war. The equivalent scene occurs halfway through my script. Meanwhile, *The Iliad* ends after Priam returns from Achilles' shelter with his grim cargo – long before the construction of the Trojan Horse, and a good 20 pages before my script ends.

This is a massive story that we're trying to tell in two-and-a-half hours. The narrative is crammed with some of literature's most intriguing characters: Achilles, Hector, Helen, Paris, Priam, Odysseus, Agamemnon, Patroclus, etc. All these characters have to emerge on screen as fully realized human beings. The battle scenes have to mirror the epic confrontations Homer described. The journey of the thousand ships from Greece to Troy has to be depicted. Everything takes time, and we're not making a 12-hour miniseries. We're not making a trilogy of three-hour movies.

There is no such thing as a faithful adaptation. Even when I adapted my own (very slim, very un-epic) novel, I had to eliminate one of my favorite characters, because there simply wasn't enough time to tell his story along with everyone else's. Every adaptation requires that the screenwriter make difficult choices – and in particular, difficult cuts. In the case of *Troy*, I chose to tell the human story: the story of Helen's love for Paris, of Achilles' epic duel with Hector, of the fatal trap that Odysseus sprung on the Trojans.

The gods do not appear on screen but their presence is everywhere and their influence profound.¹

(vi) the ending

Were there any other endings?

Yeah, from the original pitch, it was meant to be the story of Achilles and Hector, these two great heroes. Hector is killed 25 or 30 minutes before the end, and then Achilles is killed. Once your two main guys are dead, there's not much more story to tell there. I think we could have an eight-hour miniseries that goes through all the different phases of the characters, but if you're going to try to do it as a feature, you really have to cut many different things. The ending we have now was pretty much always the ending, and we are lucky in that we have Sean Bean doing that final voiceover with his magnificent voice. This is a tragic story in many ways, and I love the image of the ending with the smoke rising to the skies. I don't know if that was originally in the script or if it was Wolfgang's idea.³