

The Song of Achilles Book Summary, by Madeline Miller

by Allen Cheng

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1-Page Summary of The Song of Achilles

Overall Summary

The Song of Achilles is a book that retells the events of Homer's Iliad. The author, Madeline Miller, published this book in 2012 and it has become very popular since then. The story is narrated by Patroclus who explores themes such as fate and glory throughout his narrative.

The novel begins with Patroclus narrating his birth and early childhood. He is the son of King Menoitius, who did not raise him well because he was a disappointment to his father. His father brought him to court when he was 9 years old as a suitor for Helen's hand in marriage. However, she rejected him because they were too young to get married.

When Patroclus was 10, he accidentally killed a nobleman's son. He was exiled for this and went to Phthia where he met Achilles, the son of King Peleus and Thetis. Although the two were very close friends, they had feelings for each other that went beyond friendship. They studied together with Chiron who is renowned as having trained many Greek heroes including Heracles (Hercules).

Achilles is 16 when his father Peleus asks him to join the Greek army in a war against Troy. However, Thetis knows that Achilles will die if he goes to Troy. She takes him away and disguises him as a woman. Still determined to keep Achilles from going to war, she marries him off but eventually becomes pregnant

with their child.

When Patroclus finds out that his lover, Achilles, has left to fight in the Trojan War without him, he goes to find him. When they are found together by Odysseus and Diomedes, Peleus refuses to tell them where Achilles is. He then tells them about a prophecy that says if Hector dies before Achilles does, then Achilles will die soon after. In order for this not to happen, he will not go into battle against any of the Trojans except for Hector because it would mean his death.

Achilles is an excellent soldier. However, he's not a leader. He clashes with Agamemnon after the latter announces that Achilles will be marrying his daughter Iphigenia as part of a plan to get them to Troy. The winds are bad and they need to sail there in order for the war to happen. To solve this issue, Agamemnon sacrifices his own daughter at Aulis so that the winds would blow again and allow them all to go on their journey towards Troy. This sacrifice angers Achilles because he doesn't want any human sacrifices going on during this time period due to how barbaric it is considered by most people today.

The Greeks begin their siege of Troy, a city crafted by Apollo and protected by impenetrable walls. They conduct raids on nearby farms to starve out the population and flood it with refugees. In the process, they take local women as slaves to be used as sex slaves for warriors who need them. Patroclus helps Achilles claim Briseis from another warrior in order to save her from that fate. Meanwhile, Achilles revels in his battle skill while Patroclus works at tending to wounded soldiers in the infirmary even though he is horrified by what happens during battles.

Agamemnon takes Chryseis, a priestess of Apollo. He does this because he wants her to be his slave and not her father's. Her father is furious at Agamemnon for taking his daughter away from him. He goes to the Greeks and tries to get them to help him retrieve Chryseis but they ignore him and mock him instead. Therefore, he prays to Apollo who sends a plague upon the Greek army as punishment for their actions against Chryseis' father. Achilles calls an assembly so that Agamemnon can return Chryseis back to her father but in retaliation, Agamemnon takes Briseis from Achilles which makes Achilles even more angry than before. Eventually Thetis convinces Zeus (the King of Gods) that it would be better if the Trojans beat the Greeks and win this war so they will regret what they did with respect towards Achilles by disrespecting his honor further when they refused to give back Chryseis in response for having taken Briseis from him earlier on in the story.

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