

THE HERO TRILOGY

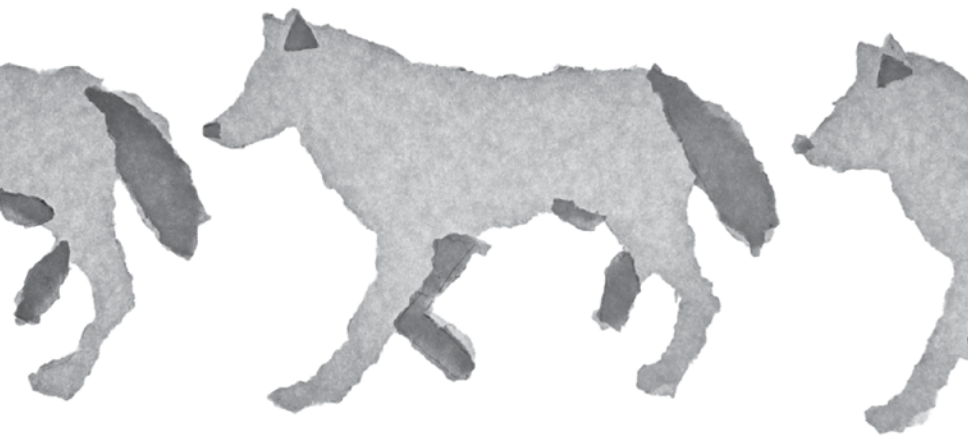
CHASING ODYSSEUS



S.D. GENTILL

CHASING ODYSSEUS

S.D GENTILL



 **PanteraPress**
good books doing good things™



First published in 2011 by Pantera Press Pty Limited
www. PanteraPress.com

Text Copyright © S.D. Gentill, 2011
S.D. Gentill has asserted her moral rights to be identified as the author of this work.

Design and typography Copyright © Pantera Press Pty Limited, 2011
PanteraPress, three-slashes colophon device, *good books doing good things* and
a great new home for Australia's next generation of best-loved authors are trademarks
of Pantera Press Pty Limited

This book is copyright, and all rights are reserved.
We welcome your support of the author's rights, so please only buy authorised
editions.

This work is based on Homer's *The Odyssey* and is a work of fiction. Any
resemblance to actual people, living or dead, is coincidental.

Without the publisher's prior written permission, and without limiting the rights
reserved under copyright, none of this book may be scanned, reproduced, stored
in, uploaded to or introduced into a retrieval or distribution system, including the
internet, or transmitted, copied or made available in any form or by any means
(including digital, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, sound or audio recording,
and text-to-voice). This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way
of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated in any form
of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar
condition being imposed on the subsequent recipient.

Please send all permission queries to:
Pantera Press, P.O. Box 357 Seaforth, NSW Australia 2092 or info@PanteraPress.com

A Cataloguing-in-Publication entry for this book is available from the National
Library of Australia.

ISBN: 978-0-9807418-6-5

Cover and internal design: Xou Creative www.xou.com.au
Typesetting: Xou Creative
Printed and bound in Australia by McPherson's Printing Group
Author Photo by J.C. Henry, Lime Photography

Pantera Press policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and
recyclable products made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and
manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations
of the country of origin.

To my boys, who are part wolf...

And my gentle Oggford,
shaggy protector, loyal friend
and writer's companion.

A note from the publisher

Dear Reader,

If you enjoy riveting stories with true-to-life characters and strong writing, as I do, you'll love *Chasing Odysseus*.

It's a truly captivating read and a great escape. To my mind *Chasing Odysseus* is to Homer's *The Odyssey* what Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* is to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

S.D. Gentill takes some minor characters from *The Odyssey* and creates a whole new adventure story. *Chasing Odysseus* is more than a retelling of a Greek classic. I couldn't put it down ...

If you haven't picked up a *Pantera Press* book before, you should know that simply by enjoying our books, you'll also be contributing to our unique approach: *good books doing good things*TM

We're passionate about discovering the next generation of Australia's best-loved authors, and nurturing their writing careers. We've also given our business a strong 'profits for philanthropy' foundation, focussed on literacy, quality writing, the joys of reading and fostering debate.

Let me mention one program we're thrilled to support: *Let's Read*. It's already helping 100,000 pre-schoolers across Australia develop a love of books and the building

blocks for learning how to read and write. We're excited that *Let's Read* now also operates in remote Indigenous communities in Far North Queensland, Cape York, and Torres Strait. *Let's Read* was developed by the *Centre for Community Child Health* and is being implemented in partnership with *The Smith Family*.

Simply buying this book will help us support these kids. Thank you.

Want to do more? Visit www.PanteraPress.com/Donate. You can personally donate to help *The Smith Family* expand *Let's Read*, find out more about this great program, and also more on the other programs *Pantera Press* supports.

Please enjoy *Chasing Odysseus*.

And for news about our other books, sample chapters, author interviews and much more, please visit our website: www.PanteraPress.com

Happy reading,

Alison Green



PROLOGUE

“THE CHILD IS FLAWED.”

Pentheselia’s words were stark and free of grief. In the quiet, grey light that preceded the dawn, she had come to the mountain to abandon her child.

Agelaus knelt down to look closely at the small girl who stood no higher than his thigh. He regarded her kindly. She could not have been more than five. Her eyes were bronze, beautiful, though feeble. The gentle Herdsman took the girl’s hand carefully, slowly, for she trembled like new deer.

“I have called her Hero.” Pentheselia, champion of the Amazons, stood apart from her child already. “She is of my womb.”

Agelaus rose and met the woman’s gaze. She had brought him children before, but this was a daughter. It was only

their sons whom the war-like Amazons could not love.

“Hero is a boy’s name.” Agelaus murmured.

“The child is flawed,” Pentheselia said again. “We cannot allow her to keep her true name. She may as well be a boy.”

The child, Hero, began to cry. She was old enough to sense the finality in her mother’s words. Agelaus pulled the girl to him, wondering briefly if she had ever been embraced before.

“You cannot mean to leave her, surely?” He looked for some sign of sorrow in Pentheselia’s hard blue eyes.

“She cannot guide an arrow or read the stars. Among my people she can only be a slave.”

“Gods Penny, you are their queen! This is your child!” Agelaus shook his head. The ways of the Amazons bewildered him. “Will you not look upon our son, Penny?” he asked quietly, hopefully. Machaon was a fine boy — how could she not take joy in the child she had borne him.

“He means no more to me than the others,” she replied.

Agelaus sighed. Pentheselia had brought him three boys, though only the first had been their natural child. The younger two were the offspring of her Amazonian sisters.

He tried again to reach her. “Come now, Penny, you must care.”

Pentheselia flared. “I am Queen of the Amazons,” she spat. “Who are you, shepherd, to tell me what I must do?” Her hand went to the hilt of her sword.

Agelaus laughed. “I have known you, Penny, I am not afraid of you. You brought Machaon to me, then Cadmus

and Lycon. You risked much to find my boys a father. I have known you.”

Pentheselia smiled tightly. She let her hand drop. “Your heart is soft, Agelaus. Maybe this war will harden it. The Greeks have united behind Agamemnon to bring Priam’s brat to heel.”

Agelaus was silent. Paris, the child whom Priam, King of Troy, had left to die, had been the first of his acquired sons. He had raised the prince until Priam had reclaimed him. He knew what Paris had done.

“Paris acted out of love,” he said slowly. “His is a passionate heart.”

“He stole the wife of a king! No Greek ally will stand for so vile an insult. Thousands will die for this passion of his.”

Agelaus had no answer to her words. They were true. “The Herdsmen will see out this war,” he told her, instead. “Odysseus has sought council with me already. We have made arrangements.”

He felt the piercing chill of her scrutiny.

“Odysseus? You have spoken with the King of Ithaca?”

“Indeed. Odysseus negotiates for all the invading Greek kings ... some say he thinks for them as well.” Agelaus smiled. The Herdsman’s life was simple, but his mind was not.

“Why have the Greeks not destroyed your people?” Pentheselia persisted. “Why is your mountain not ablaze?”

Agelaus trusted Pentheselia. The Amazons, like the Herdsmen, were allies of Priam; they would fight for Troy.

“I have agreed to slaughter one third of our herd in each

year of the war, to feed the Greeks,” he said.

“Then how will you feed Troy?”

“Odysseus believes our herds and flocks to be poor. This is the land of our fathers, Penny. We know well those places that others think inaccessible. We will hide our cattle in the mountain, and the small number we give to the Greeks, will not deprive Troy.”

Pentheselia laughed, loud and girlish. “And so a common shepherd has bested the legendary wit of Odysseus, King of Ithaca.”

Agelaus’ heart warmed. She was so enchanting when she laughed. The girl, Hero, looked startled, as if the sound was strange.

“Troy has been besieged before,” he said, “and may well be again. We will not neglect our duty. For generations the Herdsmen of Mount Ida have ensured the Trojans were fed.”

“But you do not fight,” Pentheselia challenged.

“The secret ways and passages we use to enter Troy are known to us alone,” Agelaus replied patiently. “We do as much to sustain the lives within Troy as the soldiers who fight the Greeks.”

“And does Troy appreciate your labours, Agelaus? I have heard them call you wild, uncivilised. When this war is over will they remember that you served them?”

“Our roots are Trojan, Penny, though we live by our own customs. Troy does not always understand. But we will serve her nevertheless.”

Pentheselia's eyes softened. She opened her mouth to speak but no words came.

Agelaus was certain, that despite herself, she thought of the boy child who was forbidden her.

"Machaon will be a man soon," he said gently.

"The Amazons do not tolerate men to live among them."

"I know, Penny, but surely you can stand to hear of him. He is an able boy, clear-minded and kind. He laughs easily and his word is strong. Like his mother, he does what he must. The walls of Troy will never contain our son but he will be faithful."

For a time Pentheselia said nothing, but then she spoke fiercely, "I do not care Agelaus — the boy is nothing to me."

Agelaus held her gaze. "You may never know Machaon, Penny, but he will be worthy of you, and he will honour you, regardless."

For a fleeting moment, Pentheselia's face was uncertain. Agelaus squeezed Hero's hand.

"The gods have chosen to bless me with three sons I had no right to claim, as well as one who was mine. I will take your daughter, Penny, and she too, will be my own child."

Pentheselia nodded. "This ... you are the best I can do for her."

The slim ruby fingers of Eos, the gleaming goddess of sunrise, stroked the eastern horizon and cast the world in a mantle of burning gold. Pentheselia mounted and turned her horse back towards the dawn. She did not look upon the girl again.

“Oh, the memories stirred
by the name of Troy! The
hardship and misery we
fierce Achaeans faced, raid
after raid across the smoky
seas seeking glory and
plunder at Achilles’ behest,
battle after battle around
the great walls of royal
Priam’s city.”

The Odyssey Book III



BOOK I

THE WALL LOOMED ABOVE him, ancient, impenetrable.

Its surface was cool, bleached white by a thousand years in the sun. Lycon pressed his ear to the hewn rock. Legend had it that you could hear the heart of Troy beating within the wall. He laughed at himself. It was just a story, but Lycon had always liked stories, and sometimes he fancied he could sense a faint pulse in the stone.

He worked quickly, making his marks with the purple pigment he'd taken from his father's supplies. The moon was full, but low and so the night's shadows concealed him. He made his letters large so the Greek allies would see the words from across the plain when they charged in for battle the next day. He stood back a little, admiring his work.

“Ly, you idiot!” The words were whispered but fierce.

A forearm locked about his neck. Lycon wrested free and turned to face his brothers.

Machaon was shaking his head. Cadmus was staring at the words on the wall.

“We’re at war, you fool!” Machaon shoved Lycon. “The Greeks are everywhere and you risk everything to deface the wall!”

Lycon tried to look shamefaced.

Cadmus chuckled softly and nudged Machaon. “Have a look, Mac,” he said nodding towards the wall. “The Greeks aren’t going to like it.”

Machaon read the words, barely discernible in the darkness. Huge letters in royal purple: “Helen of Troy”.

He smiled. “I guess that gets to the heart of the matter.” The Greeks had launched a thousand ships to besiege Troy and retrieve beautiful Helen who the Trojan prince, Paris, had seduced away from Menelaus, the King of Sparta. Machaon looked up at the words again. Possession of Helen was at the heart of this war.

Lycon grinned.

“Gods Ly,” Machaon tried to look stern. “You’re nearly a man. You’re a bit old for this aren’t you?”

Machaon’s censure was half-hearted, and delivered merely because he was the eldest of them.

“Paris would have liked it,” Lycon added quietly.

Machaon glanced at Cadmus. Lycon had done this for Paris. The Trojan prince had been their brother.

“Paris is not here to read it, Ly.”

“But Helen chose him,” Lycon replied defiantly. “Helen chose Troy.”

“Of course she did,” Cadmus placed his hand on Lycon’s shoulder. “And you’re right — stolen or not, Paris made Helen a Trojan princess. She no longer belongs to the Greeks.”

Machaon laughed. “Helen of Troy ... it may catch on.”

“Come on, we’d better head back,” Cadmus said, still gazing appreciatively at his brother’s work. “We don’t want to be walking through the Greek camps once it’s light.”

Machaon nodded, turning his eyes to the mountain. Ida, home of the Herdsmen. He could make out the tents of the allied Greek forces that had formed a village on the seashore at the mountain’s base. From there the invaders had waged war on Troy for ten long years.

Machaon and his brothers were Herdsmen, not Trojans, but being discovered in the Greek camp would mean death regardless. Still, they were not overly concerned. The Herdsmen of Ida were skilled at moving unnoticed among men, and the Greeks had, after ten years of war, become less vigilant.

The brothers walked quickly, with silent footfall, confident that on casual glance they would be mistaken for soldiers from one of the invading Greek kingdoms. They dressed like warriors and though the Herdsmen were by custom beardless, there were many soldiers who bladed their faces. The besiegers of Troy were so numerous and disparate that even after a decade,

unfamiliar faces would not alarm them.

Lycon looked about as he kept step with his brothers: the large tents, the various flags and emblems all planted together, jockeying for space and supremacy. The Greeks were not a single force but a collection of bickering kingdoms united under the banner of Agamemnon, who had rallied them to reclaim Helen and punish Troy.

Machaon raised his hand to slow his brothers. The camp was not still, as it had been when he and Cadmus had come through it to find Lycon. There was activity in and about the large silk-draped tent of Agamemnon.

“What’s going on?” Cadmus whispered.

“Some kind of council I think. Wait here — I’ll try to get closer.” Machaon handed his staff to Lycon and moved towards the elaborate pavilion which bore the colours of Agamemnon. He stayed well within the flickering shadows cast by the torchlight.

“Do you know how long it takes to gather enough shellfish to make purple pigment, Ly?” Cadmus murmured to his younger brother as they waited. “You should have taken another colour.”

“Do you think Father will be angry?”

Cadmus shrugged. “You spelled ‘Helen’ correctly ... he’ll be delighted.”

Lycon smiled. He had considered writing something rude about the Greek leader but he had no idea how to spell Agamemnon.

Machaon returned. His dark eyes were bright.

“What?”

“Get down — they’re coming out.”

The Herdsmen retreated quickly behind a line of chariots. They watched as one by one the surviving Greek kings emerged from Agamemnon’s tent. The last to appear was a man of particular stature. Well-built and straight-backed despite the visible grey at his temples. The Herdsmen knew his face, and his reputation. Odysseus, King of Ithaca. The cleverest of all the Greek kings, it was Odysseus’ wit and strategy which had manoeuvred those who laid siege to Troy.

Machaon warned his brothers into silence with a finger upon his lips and they waited. Gradually the Greeks dispersed back to their tents. Soon only a few drowsy sentinels remained awake. For ten years the Trojans had retreated behind the wall after sunset. The Greeks slept securely at night.

The Herdsmen continued unseen out of the tent city into the woodlands where the land started to rise sharply. It was only here on the slopes of Mount Ida that they would begin to run, risking the occasional sound in a terrain that they knew so much better than the invaders.

Cadmus grabbed Machaon’s shoulder and pulled his elder brother to halt.

His breath was heavy but controlled. The Herdsmen were used to running the mountain paths. “What did you hear, Mac? What are the Greeks planning?”

Machaon smiled. He had been ten when the Greeks

had arrived on their shores, Cadmus just nine and Lycon a child of barely six. The war had been waged most of their lives. “The Greeks are talking of going home,” he said, grinning. “Odysseus was speaking of Ithaca, of the wife he left there, and the newborn son who would now be tall. The other kings too. The Greeks have finally grown tired of this war.”

“They’re going? Really?”

Machaon nodded. “Soon, I think. Odysseus said it would all be over before the next full moon.”

Lycon hardly dared to believe his brother’s words. They had grown accustomed to living beside the battles that took place between the beaches and the gates of the Trojan citadel; they had come to accept that the plains outside the gates of Troy would be soaked with blood.

Cadmus laughed. “Think what we could do if we weren’t bound to spend our lives feeding Troy!” He clapped Machaon on the back. “Think what we could see, where we could go!”

Machaon glanced back towards the fortress of Troy. They had watched over the city all the years of the siege, ensuring her citizens were fed. The end of the war would mean freedom for them all.

