Noble Kinsmen from Lycia

Part 1: Homer

Iliad II (876–77)
Sarpedon and matchless Glaucus were leaders of the Lycians, who came from distant Lycia, by the eddying Xanthus.

SCENE 1

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Glaucus and Tydeus’ son met between the armies, eager to fight. And when they were close, Diomedes of the famous war-cry spoke first.

DIOMEDES. Who are you, mighty among mortal men? I have not seen you in battle before, but now you boldly stand forth defying my long-shadowed spear.

Unlucky are those whose sons confront me. If you are a god I will not fight you, but if you are a man, come closer, the better to meet destruction.

GLAUCUS. Great son of Tydeus, why ask my lineage? Human generations are blown away like leaves, but new leaves come in spring and young men spring up when old ones pass.

But hear this, so you may know my lineage: many others know it too.

A royal daughter of Lycia bore three children to warlike Bellerophon: Isander, Hippolochus, Laodameia.

Laodameia lay with Zeus and bore Sarpedon the bronze-armoured warrior. Hippolochus begot me: from him am I sprung.

He sent me to Troy and charged me always to be the bravest and the best and not bring shame on my fathers’ race, the best in Ephyre and in wide Lycia. This is my lineage, from this blood I spring.

HOMER. So he spoke, and Diomede rejoiced. He fixed his spear in the earth and with mild words spoke to the prince.
DIOMEDES. Then you are a guest-friend of my father’s house. For Oeneus once received great Bellerophon in his hall and kept him twenty days as his guest.

And they exchanged splendid guest-gifts, Oeneus gave a rich scarlet belt, Bellerophon a gold two-handled cup which I left behind when I came to Troy.

I do not remember Tydeus: I was very young when he left to join the Achaeans who fell at Thebes. But I am your guest-friend in Argos and you are mine when I come to Lycia.

So let us each avoid the other’s spear: there are many Trojans and their allies for me to kill, and many Greeks for you.

And let us exchange armour, so these men know also that we declare guest-friendship from the days of our fathers.

HOMER. So they jumped from their chariots, clasped hands and pledged their loyalty.

But Zeus drove Glaucus mad, for he exchanged his gold armour for Diomedes’ bronze — the gold worth a hundred oxen, the bronze only nine.

SCENE 2

NEAR-DEATH

HOMER. Apollo then took Aeneas to the citadel of Troy where his temple stood.

There Leto and the archer Artemis healed him in the shrine and gave him glory. Then Phoebus Apollo spoke to furious Ares.

APOLLO. Ares, fierce enemy of men, will you not drag the son of Tydeus from the battle? Now he would attack Zeus!

First he cut Aphrodite on the hand, then like a god he even rushed at me.

HOMER. Then Apollo remained on Pergamus and fierce Ares encouraged the Trojans
in the guise of Acomas the Thracian.  
He called out to the sons of Priam:

ARES. Sons of Priam, how long  
will you let your army be killed by Greeks?  
Until they’re at our gates?

Aeneas, great Anchises’ son, is wounded,  
he whom we honoured as much as Hector.  
Come, save our comrade from the conflict.

HOMER. With these words he stirred all spirits  
and Sarpedon fiercely reproached Hector:

SARPEDON. Hector, where has your strength gone?  
You thought you could hold the city alone,  
you, your sisters’ husbands, your brothers,  
without troops or allies.

I don’t see those brothers now, they cower  
like dogs afraid of a lion; and we,  
mere allies, are doing the fighting.

Here as an ally, I have come  
from far away. Far away is Lycia,  
by eddying Xanthus, where I left my wife  
and baby son, and wealth such as all desire.

Yet I urge on the Lycians  
and am eager to fight my man.

But you stand there, not even urging  
your men to defend their own wives.

Beware! You could all be trapped and destroyed.  
They will raze your fine city. Think of this  
day and night. Beg your allies  
to stand firm. Avoid this shame.

HOMER. Sarpedon’s words cut Hector to the heart.  
He leapt to the ground. Brandishing his spears  
he went through the army, urging them  
to fight, rousing the clamour of war.

They rallied and faced the Greeks  
and the Greeks closed ranks and did not flee.

So they laboured on in battle  
and Tlepolemus, son of Heracles,  
tall and strong, was driven by fate  
against the godlike Sarpedon.
Head to head they met, the son and grandson of Zeus, lord of the storms. Tlepolemus was the first to speak:

**TLEPOLEMUS.** Sarpedon, the Lycians’ leader, why are you cowering here, as if you were a novice in war? You have a coward’s heart, your men are dying.

Your coming from Lycia will not help the Trojans, however strong you are; struck down by me, you will go through the gates of Hades.

**SARPEDON.** Tlepolemus, I say to you that death and a dark fate await you here at my hands. Pierced by my spear, you will give glory to me, and your soul to Hades.

**HOMER.** Tlepolemus raised his spear and both men hurled their weapons at the same instant.

Sarpedon’s spear pierced Tlepolemus’ neck, passed right through, and darkness engulfed him.

Tlepolemus’ spear had struck Sarpedon on the left thigh, and cut him to the bone.

But his Father kept death away from him.

His friends carried Sarpedon away, the long spear dragging heavily.
No-one thought to pull it out.
They hurried to carry him to where they could help him.

Noble Odysseus would have killed many more Lycians, but for Hector, who, in his gleaming helmet, strode through the fight, filling the Greeks with fear.

Sarpedon rejoiced to see him coming and pleaded with him:

**SARPEDON.** Son of Priam, do not leave me here a prey for the Greeks, but save me. Let me die in your city, if die I must, if I may not go home to wife and child.

**HOMER.** Hector in his gleaming helmet made no answer. He hurried by,
eager to drive back the Greeks
and to kill many of them.

Then Sarpedon's comrades placed him
under an oak tree, and his dear friend
Pelagon pulled the spear from his thigh.

His breath fled. Mist covered his eyes.

Then he drew breath again, as the north wind
blew on him, bringing him back to life
after he had gasped out his spirit.

SCENE 3

TRIUMPH

_Hector is leading the attack to breach
the wall defending the Greek ships._
_The Trojans and their allies are divided
into five companies. The fifth
is headed by Sarpedon._

_Homer. Some went with Hector and Polydamas:
greatest in number, they were the best
and the most eager to break the wall
and fight beside the hollow ships._

_Aeneas, Anchises’ son, led the fourth band
with Antenor’s two sons, Archelochus
and Acamas, skilled fighters both._

_Sarpedon led the allies and chose
Glaucus and Asteropaeus
as his comrades, for he judged them
second only to himself._

_Now volleys of stones flew from both sides,
some thrown at Trojans, some by Trojans
at Greeks, and along the whole wall
there rose the clamour of war._

_The Trojans and famous Hector
could not have breached the wall, had Zeus
not roused his son Sarpedon against
the Greeks, like a lion attacking cattle._

_Then Sarpedon’s heart urged him to rush
to the wall and tear down the palisade._
_He called to Glaucus, Hippolochus’ son:_

_Sarpedon. Glaucus, are we not honoured in Lycia
and looked on as gods?
Have we not lands by the Xanthus,
lovely orchards and wheat-bearing fields?

That is why we must lead the Lycian troops
and face the blaze of battle,
so that the Lycians will say:

‘These rulers of Lycia, our kings,
are not without fame; they eat and drink well;
but their strength is great and they fight
in the front rank of the Lycians.’

Ah friend, if we could escape from battle
and live ageless and immortal
I would not fight in the front line
nor send you into battle to win fame.

But now, since we are mortal
and cannot escape our fate, let us
go forward, to bring fame to another,
or to ourselves at another’s cost.

HOMER. Glaucus did not turn back nor disobey
but both charged, leading the Lycian force.

Then the Lycian leaders went climbing up
to the palisade like a black storm
and flung themselves into the fight
and the war-cry rose up.

Ajax was the first to kill his man,
Sarpedon’s comrade, the brave Epicles.
He struck him with a jagged lump of marble.

As Glaucus charged the wall
Teucer saw his arm uncovered,
struck him with an arrow,
and made him leave the fight.

Glaucus jumped quietly from the wall
so that no Greek would know he was hurt
and boast about it.

Sarpedon grieved to know that Glaucus
had gone, but kept his mind on the fight.

He struck Alcmaon, Thestor’s son, with
a sure stroke of his spear, then pulled it out.

Alcmaon fell as the spear was withdrawn
and his bronze armour clashed against him.
Sarpedon grasped the palisade and pulled: the whole top gave way, the wall lay bare and he had opened a path for many.

Ajax and Teucer attacked him together. Teucer’s arrow struck his shield-belt but Zeus held off the fates so that his son should not be struck down beside the ships.

Ajax leapt at him but his spear did not pierce Sarpedon’s shield, only made him falter slightly in his onrush.

He did not give much ground, for his heart hoped to win glory. And he turned and shouted to the noble Lycians:

SARPEDON. Lycians, why are you fighting so feebly? Strong as I am, it is hard for me to breach this wall on my own and make a path to the ships. Come here and help – the more men, the better the work will go.

HOMER. The Lycians, fearing his scorn, pressed close about their king, but the Greeks closed ranks inside the wall and a great struggle sprang up between the two sides.

For the Lycians could not break through the Greek wall to get to the ships, nor could the Greek spearmen drive back the Lycians thronging close to the wall.

SCENE 4

DEATH

HOMER. When Patroclus had cut off the front lines he forced them back towards the ships and would not let them make for the city.

He slew many between the ships, the river, and the high wall, avenging dead comrades.

When Sarpedon saw his friends overpowered by Patroclus, he shouted in reproach at the Lycians:

SARPEDON. For shame, Lycians, where are you running? Fight on, and I will meet this man to learn who has done so much harm to Troy, killing many fine men.
HOMER. He leapt down from his chariot and Patroclus too sprang down when he saw him.

As two vultures with hooked talons and curved beaks fight on a high rock with loud cries, so these two rushed at each other, shouting.

Zeus the son of wily Cronos felt pity when he saw them, and spoke to Hera, his sister and his wife:

ZEUS. Alas, Sarpedon whom I love is fated to be struck down by Patroclus.

And I cannot decide whether to snatch him to safety in Lycia or let him be vanquished now.

HERA. Dread son of Cronos, would you free from death a mortal, long since doomed?

Do it, but other gods will not approve. Think: if you send Sarpedon home alive some other god may save his son.

For many sons of gods are fighting here and you will cause anger among immortals.

If you love him and grieve for him, let him lose his fight with Patroclus and when he dies, send Death and Sleep to bear him away to Lycia.

There his brothers and kinsmen will give him burial with grave-mound and pillar. Thus do men honour the dead.

HOMER. The father of gods and men complied but he showered the earth with bloody rain to honour his son, about to die by Patroclus’ hand, at Troy, far from home.

When they got near each other, Sarpedon missed his stroke, and his spear flew over Patroclus’ shoulder without hitting him.

Then Patroclus attacked with his spear which did not miss but struck close to the beating heart.

So, felled by Patroclus, the leader of the Lycians struggled in death and called his dear companion by name:
SARPEDON. Friend Glaucus, warrior among warriors, 
now prove yourself a spearman, 
a bold warrior. Let cruel war 
be your passion.

First urge the Lycian leaders to fight 
for Sarpedon: and then you, too, defend me.

I shall be a reproach to you 
for ever if the Greeks strip my body 
now that I’ve fallen by the ships. 
But hold your ground, urge all the army on.

HOMER. As he spoke, death covered his eyes 
and stopped his breath.

Patroclus with a heel on his chest 
pulled out the spear – the flesh came with it, 
so that he dragged out spear 
and life together.

Nearby the Myrmidons restrained 
the snorting horses, which tried to bolt, 
freed from their masters’ chariot.

SCENE 5

REPATRIATION

HOMER. Glaucus heard the voice. Grief filled him, 
that he had not been able to help.

He pressed the painful wound on his arm 
made by Teucer’s arrow when Glauce 
charged the wall, then prayed to Apollo:

GLAUCUS. Hear me, Lord: whether in Lycia 
or in Troy, you always hear 
a man in pain, as I am now.

I am wounded, my arm is throbbing, 
and still bleeding, my shoulder hangs useless, 
I cannot hold my spear, nor fight.

The best of us, Sarpedon, is dead:
Zeus does not protect even his own son.

Lord, heal this wound, ease the pain, 
make me strong, and I’ll urge the Lycians 
to fight, and myself defend the body 
of the one who has fallen.
HOMER. Apollo heard his prayer and at once stopped the pain and the bleeding and filled his heart with courage.

Glaucus knew the great god had heard his prayer and he rejoiced. He went everywhere, urging the Lycians to defend Sarpedon’s body.

He strode to the Trojans, Polydamas, Agenor, Aeneas, and Hector to whom he spoke winged words:

GLAUCUS. Hector, you forget your allies: it is for your sake they lose their lives so far from home, but you do not think to defend them.

Sarpedon has fallen, leader of the Lycian spearmen, protector of Lycia. Ares laid him low with Patroclus’ spear.

Friends, stand firm beside him. Shame on us if the Myrmidons strip his armour off dishonouring his corpse to avenge the Greeks whom we killed beside the swift ships.

HOMER. The Trojans were overcome by grief, unbearable and overwhelming. Sarpedon, though a stranger, had been a great defender of their city; and he led a great force of allies, and was the chief among them.

Eagerly the Trojans charged the Greeks, Hector first, angry at Sarpedon’s death.

Both armies now closed their ranks, Trojans and Lycians, Myrmidons and Achaeans, to fight for the body, with war-cries and the loud clash of men’s weapons.

Zeus hid the battle in cruel darkness, to let fierce fighting rage round his dear son.

They thronged about the body and Zeus watched the whole combat intently.

He filled Hector with fear so that he leapt into his chariot to escape
and ordered the Trojans to flee,
for he knew that Zeus had tipped the scales.

The Lycians fled too, when they saw their king dead, under a heap of bodies,
for many had died there when Zeus pulled tight the cords of battle.

The Greeks stripped Sarpedon’s armour off
and Patroclus gave it to his friends
to carry to the ships. Then Zeus
the cloud-gatherer spoke to Apollo:

ZEUS. Dear Phoebus, clean the blood from Sarpedon
when you have carried him to safety.
Bathe him, anoint him with ambrosia,
clothe him in immortal garments.

Give him to swift escorts, the brothers
Sleep and Death. They will bear him speedily
to Lycia’s broad, rich land.

There his brothers and kinsmen will give him burial with grave-mound and pillar.
Thus do men honour the dead.

HOMER. Apollo obeyed, went down from Ida into the battle, lifted Sarpedon into safety, and took him far away.

He bathed him, anointed him with ambrosia and clothed him in immortal garments.

He gave him to swift escorts, the brothers Sleep and Death, who bore him speedily to Lycia’s broad, rich land.