VIII

AENEAS IN ANCIENT ROME

Will Diomedes Help?

Soon as Turnus hoisted flags of war from Laurentine heights and a hoarse trumpet sounded its warning, soon as he slapped his high-strung horse and clanged on his armor, every heart in Latium instantly shuddered: young men swore oaths of tumult and terror, raging madly. The main leaders, Ufens, Messapus and God-scorning Mezentius, organized forces; every broad field was emptied of farmhands. Venulus, sent to the city of great Diomedes,

10 asked for help: Trojans had settled in Latium, Aeneas’ fleet had arrived, bringing their conquered House-Gods and claims, in accord with Fates, that Aeneas would rule. Scores of clans had joined with the Trojan leader and spread his name widely through Latium. What end he desired from that start, if Fortune approved him, what war he’d wage, Diomedes might fathom clearer than either King Latinus or Turnus.

Confusion

So much for Latium. Aeneas, the Laomedontian leader, could see it all. A wide sea of anxiety tossed him.

20 His mind restlessly shifted this way and that way, taken in different directions, everything turning—just as the light from a bronze bowl of water will sparkle
when struck by the sun or the moon’s radiant image—
quickly it flies through the air in every direction,
reaching the highest ceiling and striking the panels.

_A Vision of the God Tiber_

Night came. The depths of sleep held the surrounding
country and creatures, tired birds and the livestock.
Aeneas lay on a bank under the chilly
taxle-tree of the sky, disturbed like a father
by grim war-scenes. His body relaxed in the small hours.
A God himself appeared: the beautiful Tiber
River rose like an old man in the poplar
leaves, face thinly veiled in some blue-grey
linen, hair covered by shadowy marsh-reed.
Each word, when he spoke, eased the concern of Aeneas.
“Son of divine stock, savior of ancient
Troy from Greece, you’ve brought your city back to our country:
Laurentine soil and Latin fields have been waiting!
Don’t leave: this home is truly your own and your House-Gods’.
Don’t feel threatened by war: all of the swollen
anger of Gods will subside.
And lest you think this dreamlike vision is empty,
you’ll find a huge white sow by a riverbank oak-grove,
a litter of thirty young ones lying around her—
white piglets there on the ground taking her nipples.
There’s the site for your city and sure rest from your labor.
After a thirty-year cycle Iulus
will found right there the renowned city of Alba.
My word is not to be doubted. Now, this pressure you’re under:
I’ll briefly teach you how to emerge as the winner.
Arcadians rule the coast. Descendants of Pallas,
they follow the flag of a friend and ruler, Evander.
They chose a site among hills for founding their city
and named it after an ancestor—Pallanteum.
They wage constant war with Latium’s people.
Take them as friends of your camp: join in a treaty.
I’ll lead you myself to their bank upstream on my river:
I’ll help your crew overcome the current’s resistance.
Up then, son of Venus! Soon, when the starlight is fading,
offer Juno the right prayers and master
her angry threats with lowly vows. You may honor
my flow when you’ve won: I’m the full current you see here,
trimming the bank, cutting through beautiful farmland:
the blue-green Tiber, a river loved by the Sky-Gods. My home is widest here; my headwaters rise among hill towns.”

**Thanks to the Gods**

The River-God stopped, dove down in a deeper pool and vanished. Sleep and nighttime were ending: Aeneas rose and watched the glow of the rising sun in the sky. Cupping his palms, ritually holding river water, he poured out prayer to heaven: “Nymphs of Laurentum, Nymphs at the source of our water, and you, sacred River, fatherly Tiber, accept Aeneas finally, protect him from danger. Whatever lake or fountain contains you now, may you pity our setbacks, whatever soil you gracefully spring from. I’ll offer you gifts always, praise you forever. Horned River, King of Hesperian waters, just stay close—closer to firm up your power.”

**Sacrifice of the White Sow**

When finished he picked two ships from the fleet and equipped them with oars, manned them with friends and armed them with weapons. But look: an omen suddenly jolted his vision: he saw a white sow in some bushes with piglets, all in white—they lay in a riverbank thicket. Aeneas reverently carried and placed mother and litter on Juno’s altar—yours, powerful Juno—and killed them.

**Upstream on a Still River**

All that long night, Tiber diminished his full flow. The current moved slower and stopped there: it lay like a still pond, resembling a peaceful lake or watery field—reducing the labor of rowing. The journey began with hurrying shouts of approval, well-oiled keels glided along the marveling water. The woods marveled as well, unaccustomed to brilliant shields of men and painted hulls on the surface. The oarsmen pulled all day and night. They grew weary of rounding wide bends, watching the varied forest cover, and slicing through weeds in the quiet water. A hot sun had climbed halfway to heaven when walls were seen in the distance, a citadel, scattered
buildings and homes. Rome much later would equal
the heavens' power; but now Evander's holdings were meager.
Prows were swung in quickly to make for the city.

*A Greeting from a Young Prince*

By chance that day the Arcadian king was rendering yearly
tribute to Gods, to Hercules' name, in a spacious
grove outside the wall. Together with Pallas,
his son, all the best young men and a senate—not wealthy—
he burned incense. Warm blood steamed on an altar.
But now, when tall ships were seen in the shady
foliage, gliding with oars at rest for a landing,
men took fright at the scene and turned in a hurry
to leave their table. Pallas boldly forbade them
to break up the rites. Personally seizing a weapon,
he ran to a hill and called from a distance: "You strangers—
what makes you travel this less known way? Where is your
homeland?"

What course did you set? Have you come for peace or a battle?"
High on the stern Aeneas spoke like a father,
his hand extending peaceful branches of olive.
"Troy bore us. The swords you see are unfriendly
to Latins: their pride and aggression forced us to flee here.
We look for Evander. Bring him a message that chosen
Dardan leaders have come looking for friends in a conflict."
Struck by the great name of Troy, Pallas responded,
"Step out, whoever you are. Speak to my Father
in person, enter our house, a guest of our House-Gods."
He took the man's right hand and firmly embraced him.
They walked along, the grove and river behind them.

*Common High Bloodlines*

Soon Aeneas spoke to the king as a friend would:
"Best man born of the Greeks: Fortune has willed me
to seek your help and hold out branches plaited with fillets.
I don't fear you, in fact, as Arcadian leader
of Greeks, with roots joined to both of Atreus' children.
Rather my own stature, holy signs from the Sky-Gods,
our Fathers' close blood, the world-wide scope of your honor
and Fates have all compelled me freely to join you.
Dardanus, Ilium's first founder and Father,
born, in the Greek account, of Atlas' daughter Electra,
sailed to Troy—the same Atlas who fathered Electra,
who greatly supports the sky’s globe on his shoulders.  
Your own father was Mercury: glorious Maia 
conceived him on cold Cyllene’s ridgeline and bore him;

and Atlas, the same sky- and zodiac-lifter, 
fathered—if things we hear can be credited—Maia. 
So. A single bloodline splits into each of our households. 
Sure of all that, I made no clever initial 
test through an envoy. I offer my body in person: 
I’m here myself, a humble man at your threshold. 
A single Daunian nation threatens us both with a cruel 
war. If we’re expelled they anticipate nothing 
can stop them from bringing all of Hesperia under 
their yoke: they’ll rule from the northern sea to the southern. 

Accept our trust. Give yours. Our men are the staunchest 
fighters: young spirits, but toughened by action.”

Evander’s Warm Welcome

Aeneas was done. All the time he had spoken 
the king had searched his eyes and face, all of his body. 
Now he answered briefly. “Bravest of Trojans, 
how gladly I welcome and know you! How well I remember 
the words and face of your great father, Anchises! 
I still recall the son of Laomedon, Priam, 
heading for Salamis, seeking the realm of a sister, 
Hesione. From there he left for cool Arcadian country.

I was a boy then, cheeks the color of blossoms. 
I marveled at Troy’s leaders, I marveled at Priam 
himself; but the tallest figure of all was Anchises. 
My boyish heart and mind burned with a longing 
to speak to the man, to join my hand to his own hand. 
I went to him eagerly. I led him to Pheneus’ city. 
When leaving he gave me a rare quiver with Lycian 
arrows, he gave me a chlamys with gold interwoven, 
and two gold bridles—now they’re owned by my Pallas. 
So: the hand you want will join in your treaty.

When first light returns to our country tomorrow 
you’ll leave here pleased with my help—my resources will aid you. 
Celebrate, meanwhile: because you’ve come here in friendship, 
Grace our annual rites. It’s wrong to postpone them. 
Now is the time to get used to the fare of your ally.”
Feasting

He ordered cups and food brought back when he finished. He settled the Trojans himself on a grassy embankment. He offered Aeneas a seat especially inviting: a maple throne spread with the hide of a lion. Hand-picked youths competed at bringing the roasted flesh of bulls from the priest’s altar, loading the labor and gifts of Ceres in baskets, and serving the Wine-God. Aeneas and all his Trojan following feasted on lustral innards and long chines from the bullocks.

Monster and Half Man

After their hunger dwindled and appetite settled, King Evander said, “This annual worship, our banquet custom and deeply numinous altar, are not the result of ignorance, flat superstition or aging Gods. My Trojan guest, we were rescued from great danger: we keep up rites for one who deserves them.

First look at that cliff with ledge overhanging and widely scattered boulders. A home in the cliff-wall stands empty where rocks collapsed, a massive destruction. A cave had been there, a hole deep in the hillside: the den of Cacus, a frightful monster and half-man. Untouched by the sun’s rays, that soil was reheated often by fresh blood. Brashly fixed to the entrance were men’s wan heads that hung there pale and decaying. Fathered by Vulcan the Fire-God, the monster could cough up black smoke from his mouth, and his bulk was enormous.

Cacus Provokes Hercules

“Time eventually brought us the arrival we’d longed for—a God’s help. One of the greatest avengers, proud of killing and plundering Geryon’s triple form, Hercules came here driving cattle in triumph. His huge bulls occupied valley and stream-bed. But Cacus’ wild, mad spirit would never leave some crime or deceit untried or untested. He pulled from their stalls four superbly proportioned bulls and the same number of beautiful heifers. Then, to prevent the tracks from pointing correctly, he dragged them tail-first, reversing signs of the movement. He hid them far back in the stone dark of his cavern.
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He'd left no trail to the cave for anyone searching.

The Thief is Exposed

"When Hercules meanwhile moved his herd from the stable after they’d fed enough and were ready to leave there, some cows mooed on leaving—in fact they were filling all the hillside and grove, complaining and moaning. And one of the cows in Cacus’ horrible dungeon mooed back—wrecking the hopes of her jailer. Was Hercules burned and galled—he actually darkened with anger! Quickly he grabbed a heavily knotted club and made for the windy, steep side of the mountain. Now for the first time our people were seeing Cacus afraid. Faster than Eastwind he ran off to hide in the cave with panic winging his footsteps. Once inside he snapped the chain on a giant rock designed by his father the Fire-God to hang there in iron: it dropped and blocked the entrance entirely.

Final Vengeance

"Imagine: Hercules gets there, spirited, raging: he glares at the entrance, turning this way and that way, teeth grinding. Three times, furiously sweating, he circles the whole Aventine hillside and batters the stone entrance. In vain. Tired, he sits in a gulley. A sheer granite spire, eroded on all sides, rose on top of the cave. A lofty perspective, it offered nesting at times to hideous vultures. Its peak leaned to the left, over the river. Hercules pushed against it: he cracked it and loosened the deep base. Suddenly all of it toppled: the great sky rumbled back at that cracking, the startled river jumped its banks, and its current reversed: the huge den of Cacus was roofless! His home lay bare, the cave’s deep shadows uncovered, as though the earth had quaked violently downward disclosing a grey realm below, the Underworld region repugnant to Gods, who peer from above at the monstrous chasm where dead men cringe at the downrushing sunlight. Caught in the sudden glare, unexpectedly cornered now in the scooped-out cave, Cacus howled—what an eerie cry!—while Hercules pelted him hard from the cave-top with sundry
250 weapons and missiles. He struck him with big tree-limbs and boulders.
Then, with no escape from the danger, that monster’s mouth heaved up dense cloud—it’s amazing to speak of—and quickly the whole den roiled in a blinding smoke. Vision dwindled, a fog-heavy midnight formed in the cave, and fire mixed with the darkness. Nonetheless a spirited Hercules jumped down himself through the fire, leaping headlong where densest smoke billowed and black fog seethed in the cavern. In darkness he seized Cacus who coughed out his futile flames, he held him knot-tight, squeezed till he emptied the throat of blood, and forced the eyes from their sockets. The entry stone pulled back, the dark cavern lay open. Dragged-off bulls which Cacus denied he had stolen came to light. The deformed cadaver was hauled out feet first. Our hearts could not get enough: we inspected the horrible eye-holes and face, the savage’s bristled and hairy chest, the throat whose fire was extinguished.

Rites in Remembrance

“Since then our people have gladly offered this tribute and kept a feast-day. Potitus started the service;
270 Pinarius’ family kept up Hercules’ worship, placing the altar himself in this grove—we are used to calling it Maxima—may it be Maxima always! Come then, gentlemen. To praise and honor such power, circle your hair with leaves and lift up your goblets. Call on our common God. Freely offer libations.” He stopped and covered his hair in shadowy poplar, Hercules’ two-toned leaves, hanging like pendants. He filled a ritual cup and everyone quickly and gladly called on Gods, pouring libations.

Songs in Remembrance

280 Meanwhile Evening approached, borne down from Olympus. Priests were walking now, Potitus leading, dressed in the proper pelts and carrying torches. They started feasting again. They carried the welcome gifts to tables and piled a full plate on each altar. The Salian family approached and sang at a smoking shrine, their temples ringed by leaflets of poplar. One group younger, another older, they honored
Hercules’ actions in song: crushing and tearing
two big snakes when a child (a stepmother’s monsters),
290 wrecking by hand outstanding cities in wartime
(like Troy and Oechalia), then completing a thousand
hard tasks (at the word of unscrupulous Juno)
for King Eurystheus. “You,” they sang, “are unbeaten:
you slaughtered the cloud-born Centaurs, Hylaeus and Pholus,
the monster at Crete, the huge, rock-sheltered Nemean lion.
Lakes of the Styx feared you, the watchdog of Orcus
kept to his bloody cave with bones he had half chewed.
No one’s form scared you, not even the tallest,
Typhoeus, grasping a spear. Your thinking was steady
300 when Lynna’s Hydra, that mob of heads, had you surrounded.
We greet you, Jupiter’s true son, adding your beauty
to God’s: graciously walk with us all in your worship.”
That was the song they sang, especially calling
to mind the fire exhaled by Cacus himself in the cavern.
The whole forest echoed with song: hillsides re-echoed.

Rome’s Hard Beginnings

From there they all moved back to the city,
divine matters done with. The king, burdened with old age,
walked by a friendly Aeneas while leaning on Pallas,
his son. He eased the walk with mixed conversation.
310 Aeneas gazed in open wonder at all the surroundings,
the place absorbed him, he gladly inquired about every
detail and listened to stories of old generations.
King Evander, the Roman citadel’s founder,
told him, “Native Nymphs and Fauns lived in our forest
with hard trunk-like men born of the oatrees,
who knew nothing of custom and culture, the teaming
of oxen, storing food and dividing resources.
They lived on pungent bark and scraps from their hunting.

A Brief Golden Age

“Saturn first arrived from the sky of Olympus,
320 an exile. He’d lost a realm and fled from Jupiter’s weapons.
He gathered the untaught people scattered on mountain
heights and gave them laws. He wanted the country
called Latium, since he’d ‘lain’ safe on our sea-coast.
They call it a Golden Age under that monarch,
he ruled so calmly. The whole nation was peaceful.
The Aeneid

The Curse of War and Greed

"Later times were soon discolored and poorer
due to war's madness and love of possessions.
Ausonian bands arrived and Sicilian people.
Names in Saturn's land were often discarded.

330 Harsh kings like Thybris, in form like a monster,
gave his name to Italy's river, the Tiber.
(It lost the old true name, the Albula River.)
Irresistible Fates, an all-powerful Fortune,
drove me from native land and chased me through utmost
seas to place me here. The Nymph Carmentis, my Mother,
urged me on, with fearsome warnings begun by Apollo."

Place-names of Rome

He'd scarcely finished and come to a shrine when he pointed
straight at a gate which Romans call the Carmental—
a name that honors the ancient Song-Nymph, Carmentis.

340 A future-predictor, she'd first sung of Aeneas'
coming greatness and Pallanteum's distinction.
He showed where Romulus briskly restored the Asylum,
a large grove. And under a cool cliff was a grotto,
the Lupercal—after Pan's usual name on Lycaeus.
The king noted the sacred trees of Argiletum,
recalling the "death of Argus," a guest of Evander.
He showed the Tarpeian Rock and Capitol hillside,
later in gold, now a tangle of thickets.
Primal awe of the place already had troubled

350 country people; they trembled near the rockpile and bushes.
Evander said, "The brush and forested hilltop
are home for a God but which is uncertain. Arcadians
think they've often seen Jupiter shaking
a dark shield in his hand and massings the stormclouds.
And there, do you see that pair of towns with their jumbled
walls? An older people's reminders and remnants:
this one built by our Father Janus, that one by Saturn;
one we call the Janiculum, the other, Saturnian."

Simple Shelter

After he said all that they entered the modest

360 home of Evander. They'd noticed cattle were dotting
the Roman Forum—moos in our elegant Ship's-Keels!—
before they came to the throne-room. The king: "Hercules entered
this room accepting a plain house in his triumph.  
Be daring, my guest: scorn wealth, imagine you’re worthy of God as well! Don’t visit the poor with unkindness.”  
He stopped and led the way under the crowding structure’s roof. He showed the tall Aeneas some bedding: a leaf support covered by Libyan bear skin.  

*Venus and Vulcan*  
A rush of her dark wings: Night mantled the country.  
370 But motherly Venus fretted. With plenty of reason: Laurentians threatened, a harsh tumult had stirred up. She turned in her golden bed to Vulcan, her husband. With airs of divine love she began to address him.  
“While Greek kings were wrecking Troy in that conflict—a citadel destined to fall to enemy burning— 
I asked for no help, none of your skillful maneuvers or arms for my wretched people. I never intended, my dearest husband, to use your labor for nothing, although I owed Priam’s children a great deal  
and often wept at Aeneas’ arduous struggle.  
Now by Jupiter’s order he holds a Rutulian beachhead.  
*Now* I ask you humbly for weapons and sacred strength. I ask it mother for son: Nereus’ daughter could move you with tears; so could the wife of Tithonus. Look at those tribes gather, the barring of city gates, the sharp swords that could slaughter my people.””  

*Divine Persuasion*  
The Goddess finished. Vulcan paused. She caressed him here and there, a white arm gently embracing.  
The fire he caught was quick and familiar, a well-known 390 warmth that spread through his marrow and caused him to shudder,  
as flame will often run through a fissure in stormcloud and flash light with a burst of shuddering thunder.  
His wife smiled, aware of her lovely beguiling;  
Her lord answered, won by the Goddess’s passion,  
“Why look for a distant pretext? Faith in your husband, Goddess—where has it gone? Had you cared in the same way, my arming Troy had also been right in the old days.  
Neither your all-powerful Father nor Fates could have stopped it: Troy would have stood for ten more years, Priam surviving.  
But now if you’re ready for war and determined to try it, whatever concern my skill can show I will offer—
things I can make with molten iron and alloy
strengthened by fire and bellows. No more of your pleading—
or doubting your own force.” “The words he had spoken
yielded now to a lover’s embrace, and the restful
sleep he desired, at peace on the breast of his consort.

Like a Roman Wife

In time the need for sleep abated. The journey
of Night was half over: the hour when a woman
might rise for Minerva to earn a living with slender
spindle, stirring drowsy sparks at a fireplace,
adding night to her work-hours, tiring the servants
with long shifts by firelight, keeping her husband’s
bed chaste and providing for small sons’ education.
The Fire-God rose in the same brisk way at that early
hour from a soft bed to work at the forges.

Naked Cyclops

An island rises close to Sicily’s coastline,
next to Aeolian Lipari: smoldering, steep-sided, rocky.
A cave is cut out below for the forges of Cyclops.
Etna’s caves drum from that strong pounding of anvils.

A moan sounds and resounds in the cavern with noises
from steel bars and fired furnaces’ breathing.
They call it Vulcan’s home—Vulcania Island.
The Fire-God came down here from the heights of Olympus.
Cyclops worked in the huge cave at their iron—
Brontes, Pyracmon, Steropes—all of them naked.
Their hands had formed in part the forks of a polished
lightning such as Jupiter hurls by the hundred
to earth from the broad sky. Part was unfinished:
they added three swirling spokes of a rainstorm,
three of wet cloud, red fire, and quick-flying Southwind.
They mixed dread and noise next in the lightning,
awe-filled brilliance and angry following firestorms.
Elsewhere they rushed work on the bird-quick wheels of a chariot,
used by Mars to terrify people in cities.
They worked on a shocking breastplate, the armor of furious
Pallas:
they struggled to polish the gold, scaly like snakeskin,
a twisted serpents’ design, with Gorgon herself on the Goddess’s
chest—the neck was cut but the eyeballs were rolling.
New Arms for Aeneas

"Put all the work you've started aside, Cyclops of Etna,"

Vulcan told them. "Give me all your attention.
Build arms for a strong-willed man with your powerful, dexterous hands. Now for that masterful knowledge, quickly, no dawdling!" He said no more and the Cyclops nimbly set to work, all of them sharing
by lot. Gold and bronze flowed in the channels.
Wound-inflicting steel melted in mountain-size forges.
They formed an immense shield, in itself a protection against each Latin weapon: a welding of seven round layers. While air was pumped by a bellows

that inhaled and exhaled, bronze was tempered in hissing tanks of water. The cavern groaned with the banging,
Cyclops raising their strong arms in a cadence,
turning the bronze with gripping tongs while pounding together.

Morning Colloquy

While Lemnos' Lord rushed his work on the Aeolian shoreline, nourishing light stirred the lowly house of Evander.
Birds warbled and cooed under the roof-eaves.
The old king rose, put on a tunic
and wrapped the soles of his feet in Tuscany sandals.
He tied a Tegean sword to one side and a shoulder.

He flung back on his left side the hide of a panther.
A pair of guard-dogs that stayed by the doorway preceded him now, keeping pace with their master.
He made for the private room of his house-guest, Aeneas.
The king remembered their talk, the help he had promised.
Aeneas had also risen early that morning.
His friend Achates joined him; his son Pallas, Evander.
They all met, joined hands and sat in a central room to enjoy an open lengthy discussion.

Tyranny and Torture

The king spoke first.

"Greatest Trojan leader! I'll never acknowledge Troy's kingdom really lost while you're living.
Our help and power in war are feeble in contrast with your great name. The Tiber crowds us on one side;
aimed Rutulians press and rattle our walls on the other.
Still I'm ready to send large clans to your campsite,
wealthy people from where chance unexpectedly offers you safety: Fates brought you here and demand it. Not far away is a city founded on ancient bedrock—Agylline homes—where Lydian people, superb fighters, formerly lived on the Tuscan ridge. They flourished for years till a tyrant, Mezentius, finally ruled them proudly. The arms of a savage—but why dwell on the crimes of a despot, the doings of madmen? Let God dispose of that head and his household! The man in fact would force a dead body on living flesh, mouth to mouth, finger in finger—his kind of torment. Running with poisonous slaver, embraced horribly, slowly the victim was murdered. People wearied at last of the criminal madness.

They armed, surrounded the king's house and attacked it, butchered his toadies and hurled flames at the rooftop. The man escaped the slaughter. He fled to some friendly Rutulian soil, where the army of Turnus protects him. So all of Etruria rose in justified fury, led by the War-God, demanding the tyrant be punished.

New Leadership

"Aeneas, I'll make you leader myself of their thousands. The whole shore jostles with ships, with crewmen who murmur and call for war-flags. An old prophet restrains them, singing the God's word: 'You chosen Maeonian people, prime strength of the men of old: justified rancor supports your fighting; Mezentius merits your fury. But no Italian, by right, may rule your assembly: choose a foreign leader.' So now the Etruscan army slumps in the field, alarmed by word from the Sky-God. Tarchon himself sent me a king's delegation with scepter and crown, asking I take up the ensigns: 'Come to our camp, seize the throne of the Tuscans!' But cold and age have slowed me, drained me for decades. Faded strength prevents me from ruling with courage.

I'd urge my son but a Sabine woman's his mother: he's part Italian by birth. But you, with your Trojan bloodline and youth, with Fates' will in your favor, you step forward: lead Troy and Italy strongly! I'll also unite you here with my hope and my comfort, Pallas. Let him get used to the burden of battle with you teaching, doing the grave work of the War-God:
to see and admire from his youth the acts of Aeneas.  
I’ll give my son two hundred Arcadian horsemen, 
oak-hard, hand-picked; Pallas will bring you as many in his  
name.”

**Thunder and Weapons in the Sky**

520 He’d scarcely finished—Aeneas, the son of Anchises,  
looking downcast along with trusted Achates,  
mulling with sad hearts the oncoming struggle—  
when Venus his mother gave them a sign from the open  
sky suddenly: a flash and shudder of thunder  
came through the air, everything seemed to be sinking  
abruptly, a Tuscan trumpet blared on the air-waves.  
They looked up: thunder crashed over and over,  
they saw in a clear expanse of heaven some weapons  
that reddened clouds in the sky and hammered like thunder.

530 Many were struck dumb. But the Trojan commander  
recognized the sound his Goddess-Mother had promised.  
Now he said, “My friend, you certainly need not  
ask what change that sign portends: Olympus demands me.  
My Goddess-Mother promised to send me an omen  
if war threatened: she’d bring me weapons from Vulcan,  
help from the sky.  
But oh, what slaughter of sad Laurentians will follow!  
You’ll pay me dearly, Turnus. Dozens of shields in the water,  
helmets and strong bodies of men will roll in the lordly  
Tiber. Let them call up troops and shatter the peace-pact.”

**Departures**

No sooner done he raised himself from the high-ranked  
chair and stirred the sleepy embers at Hercules’ altar  
first, then gladly visited yesterday’s Hearth-God  
and little House-Gods. Evander, according to custom,  
picked and sacrificed full-grown sheep; so did the Trojans.  
Aeneas walked to the ships next, rejoining companions.  
He chose a number of men who’d follow in battle—  
the specially brave ones. The rest of the company floated  
downstream slowly on flat, welcoming water:  
they told Iulus of future events, his father’s arrangements.  
Trojans heading for Tuscan fields were presented  
with mounts—a special breed was led to Aeneas, a lion’s  
tan hide on its back, the claws golden and shiny.  
Rumor instantly spread and flew through the village:
horsemen had rushed to the shore of the king of the Tuscans. Fretful mothers doubled their prayers, anxiety drew closer to danger, the War-God’s image was growing. Soon the father, Evander, hugged his departing son. He could not weep enough as he spoke out:

560 “If only Jupiter now would bring back my past years— the time I cut down front-line troops at Praeneste itself and piled up shields and triumphantly burned them! This hand sent King Euryalus down to the Hell-God. His mother Feronia gave him three lives when she bore him— a frightening story—triple armor to get through: he had to be killed three times. Still I deprived him of all three lives. This hand stripped him of armor! If then were now, I’d never be pulled from your pleasant embrace, my son. Our neighbor Mezentius never would throw scorn on my head or widow our city’s women, cruelly killing scores of our people. But all you Gods and you, greatest Ruler off Sky-Gods, Jupiter: I ask that you pity an Arcadian monarch: hear a father’s plea. If Pallas can come back safely thanks to your power—if Fates can preserve him so I might see him alive, returning to join me— I beg to live. I’ll suffer, be hard, whatever the burden. But Goddess of Luck, if you plan some unthinkable downfall, let me be torn right now from bitter existence

580 while hope is unsure, concern for the future uncertain: while you, my dear son, my only and final joy, hold me. May no graver message be wounding my ear.” The father poured out words at this final parting, and fainted. Servants took him to shelter.

Off to War

Shortly men on horseback rode through the open gates, Aeneas in front with trusted Achates and other Trojan leaders. Pallas, surrounded by men, striking in chlamys and colorful armor, looked like the Morning Star rising from Ocean’s depths, more loved by Venus than all of the star-fires, lifting that sacred head, scattering darkness. Mothers who stood on the wall anxiously followed the cloud of dust and gleaming brass of each column. Well-armed men pushed through scrub, taking the shortest path, raising shouts when lines were assembled.
Chariots drummed on the dust-ridden flats with their hoofbeats.

_Tarchon’s Camp_

A large grove lay by a cool river at Caere, widely revered by faith-filled fathers. Hills were around it, a circle of dark and surrounding evergreen forest.

600 The story goes that the first people to settle in Latium’s country, ancient Pelasgians, offered a festal day and this grove to their God of pasture and livestock, Silvanus. Not far from here Tarchon had quartered the Tuscans in camp safely. Every corps could be surveyed now from a high hill, their tents filling the farmland. A lordly Aeneas approached with the men he had chosen for war. Tired, they looked to themselves and their horses.

_Weapons from the Sky-Gods_

Ah, but Venus appeared, a radiant Goddess in aery cloud, carrying presents. Soon as she spotted her son in a valley apart, alone by a chilly stream, she abruptly appeared before him and told him, “Look: my skilled husband’s work which I promised: it’s finished, my son. You’ll soon have no hesitation: challenge proud Laurentians and fierce Turnus in combat.” After speaking she reached for her son to embrace him. She set the brilliant arms by an oaktree before him.

_Vulcan the Designer_

Glad to be greatly honored by gifts from the Goddess, unable to relish the weapons enough by mere looking, he marveled and turned each piece with a hand or an arm-swing:

620 the crested and fearsome helmet throwing up fire-horns, the death-carrying sword, the bronze-stiff and blood-red breastplate, massive as blue-black thunderheads reddened by hot rays of the sun and reflecting them far off, greaves of polished gold and purified silver, a spear, and all the shield’s indescribable plaiting. The Fire-God had worked events in Italy and Roman triumphs there on the shield. Aware of the coming age, knowing the prophets, he’d carved Ascanius’ future family tree, what wars would be waged in what order.

630 He’d also designed the moss-green cave of the War-God: a wolf lay there with twin boys at her nipples, playfully tugging and fearlessly licking their mother.
The wolf bent her neck gracefully backwards
to stroke them in turn, her tongue grooming their bodies.
The artist had added Rome nearby and the lawless
rape of the Sabine women attending the rounded
Circus’ great games when war suddenly broke out:
Tatius’ vigorous Cureans fought with Romulus’ people.
Later the same two kings ended the conflict:

standing armed by Jupiter’s altar and holding
ritual bowls, they killed swine and joined in a treaty.
Nearby on the shield was Mettus, drawn into pieces
by four-horse teams. (Alban, stick to your promise!)
Tullus dragged the liar’s guts through the forest,
dotting leaves of bushes with dew-looking blood-drops.
Porsenna was here too commanding that Tarquin
return from exile. He laid massive siege to the city.
Future sons of Aeneas fell on swords for their freedom.
Porsenna seemed like an outraged man or a menace,
what with Cocles daring to damage the bridges
and Cloelia breaking her chains and swimming the river.

Rome’s Future on the Shield of Aeneas

On top of the shield was Manlius, guarding Tarpeian
heights, holding the Capitol’s hilltop while standing
before the temple. Romulus’ palace bristled with recent
thatching and here, flying through gold-plaited columns,
a silver goose warned of Gauls at the entrance.
And Gauls arrived: protected by forest at nighttime,
the gift of a covering darkness, they captured the fortress.
Their hair on the shield was gold, gold as their clothing,

their striped coats gleamed and gold had encircled
their white necks. Every man brandished an Alpine
pair of spears. Long shields guarded their bodies.
Vulcan had carved in relief the Saliens dancing,
bare Lupercans with wool-ringèd helmets and shields which had fallen

(they say) from the sky, and chaste mothers conducting
relics on gentle coaches through Rome. He had added
distant thrones of Tartarus, high gates of the Hell-God,
crime and punishment: you, Cataline, dangling
from overhanging rock and dreading looks from the Furies.

The just were apart, Cato giving them statutes.
Civil War at Sea

The central design was a sea-scape in rising and far-flung gold, though a sky-blue sea was foaming and white-capped. Glistening dolphins careered in circles of silver, tales thrashing the waves and cutting through sea-froth. Two fleets in bronze were visible there in the center. The Battle of Actium, look: Mars had aligned them, all of Leucate's golden water seething and glowing, Caesar Augustus leading Italians in battle: joined by people and elders, House-Gods and Great Gods, he stood high on the stern. His fine temples emitting twin flames, he bore a crest displaying the star of his father. Nearby Agrippa was proudly launching a squadron, wind and God behind him, a sign of his war-pride gleaming from temples—a crown studded with ship’s-beaks. Antony came with foreign wealth and a mélange of weapons: he’d conquered Dawn’s people on ruddy shores and sailed with Eastern forces from Egypt and farthest Bactra. That curse, an Egyptian wife, was behind him.

They all charged at once—the water completely roiled, torn by pulling oars and three-pointed rammers. They headed for deep water. You’d think the Cyclades Islands were loose and swimming, or high mountains colliding with mountains: the towered, manned and attacking ships were that massive. They hurled flaming hemp and fast-flying missiles of iron. Neptune’s fields turned red from the slaughter. The queen, dead center, not yet seeing the serpents who’d kill her, called on her men with a rattle of Isis. Prodigy-Gods of every kind, like the dog’s-head, Anubis, held out weapons against Venus, Minerva and Neptune. Mars raged in the midst of the action, engraved in iron, with grim Furies above him. Discord roved and gloated, her mantle in tatters. Bellona, with bloodied whips, followed behind her. Watching Actium, arching a bow, was Apollo, high overhead—every Egyptian and Arab, all the Sabaeans and Indians turned in a panic. The queen herself seemed to be calling for sea-wind, for more sail now, for loosening mainsheets.
Vulcan had made her blanch at all the carnage around her and coming death. She rode on the water with Northwind. Facing the queen, the grief-struck form of a splendid Nile-God opened all the folds of his clothing: that sea-blue lap with its hidden streams called to the losers.

**Triumph in Rome**

Caesar rode through Rome, the city of triumph. A triple victor, he vowed to Italy’s Gods an eternal gift: three hundred superb shrines through the city. Streets were a clamor of games, rejoicing and cheering. At every temple and altar mothers were dancing; bulls were sprawled on the ground or killed at an altar.

Caesar sat by the white portal of Phoebus acknowledging people’s gifts attached to majestic door-posts. A long line of conquered subjects filed past—a welter of languages, dress-styles and weapons. Vulcan had formed Nomads here and the loose-robbed Africans, Leleges, Carians, arrow-bearing Gelonians. He’d formed the Euphrates, now flowing more gently, Morins from far north, the Rhine with its double fork, wild Scythians, the Araxes, offended by bridges.

**Shouldering the Future**

Admiring the shield by Vulcan, this gift from his mother, Aeneas enjoyed the design, unsure of its meaning. He raised and shouldered the fame and fate of his children.