

## EPISODE 4 – First Blood

CD1 tracks 11-12  
total running time: 9:49

### *The Trojans' secret weapon* (⊕ 4:23)

From the city walls of Troy, the people, ranged along the walls on turrets and towers, saw a darkening on the horizon. They rubbed their eyes. They looked again and now they could see a thousand flecks of mast, each one with its little coloured rag of sail. They rubbed their eyes. They looked again and now they could see ships, a thousand ships slicing through the waves,  
5 each ship crammed with warriors.

And the Trojans wasted no time then. There was a harnessing of horses to chariots. There was a sharpening of swords. There was a buckling of breastplates and belts and greaves. There was a seizing of helmets and shields. The great bronze Scaean gates were thrown open and, with a whirring of wheels and a creaking of chariots and a neighing of horses, a shouting  
10 of men, a thundering of hooves and feet, the Trojan army poured across the plain. And with a crash of bronze against bronze, the Trojans met the Greeks wading ashore, as two rivers in full spate, each one with a flotsam of uprooted trees, might crash into one another. So it was the Trojans met the Greeks.

And, if I could sing now, I would sing of the Trojans' secret weapon – a warrior, whose name  
15 was Cygnus, standing head and shoulders above all other men. Cygnus, a son of Poseidon, the god of the sea – white-skinned, white-tongued, white-lipped, white-haired Cygnus – as white as sea foam, as white as the seventh wave of the sea. I would sing of Cygnus, whose skin was charmed against the striking of sword, dagger, spear, arrow or battleaxe. Cutting down Greeks with every stroke of his sword, with every thrust of his spear, while the Greek  
20 swords buckled against his skin, and the Greeks' spears glanced from him as if glancing from stone. I would sing of tremendous Cygnus, leaving a wake of dead behind himself as he fought.

One ship had yet to yield her cargo. From his ship Achilles watched, his heart in turmoil. From his ship Achilles watched the savage Cygnus cutting a path through the Greek ranks, like a  
25 plough through moist earth.

Aboard his ship, tethered to the mast, the four wonderful white horses that had been the gifts of Poseidon. Now one of them, Beauty, lifted his long head and said, "Son of Peleus, you know the fate that hovers over you. You know if you set foot on these shores, yours will be a short life. Not for you the stretching shadow, not for you the ripening grape, not for you the joy  
30 of children. You are matchless in the field of battle. No man could ever harm you. But a god could."

As Achilles listened, his face began to tingle, and then he said, "My dear horse, you speak so rarely and yet you waste your words. I choose death! I choose death so that my name will live for ever on the tongues of men and women!" And, with a cry, he drew his sword, he stabbed  
35 the air and he leapt from his ship.

***Achilles makes his mark*** (☺ 5:26)

The Trojans saw him like a dancer, leaping through the air, and they saw him land, striking the sand with his foot. And, where he landed, a spring burst out of the ground. And then, as though running through long grass, he ran across the battlefield until he was standing in front of Cygnus.

5 “Know it was Achilles who killed you!” And, with all the strength of his arm, he hurled his spear at Cygnus. But the spear struck Cygnus and it clattered down to the ground at his feet, as though it was a reed that had been thrown by a little boy. And Cygnus lifted his arms and he laughed. And he said, “Throw another one, my little friend. I know who you are. You are Thetis’ son. But I’m no more afraid of you than of a mosquito that I might smear across my arm. From  
10 head to foot I’m charmed against the striking of all weapons.”

And Achilles drew his bronze sword then and, leaping and dancing and slashing to the left and the right, he attacked Cygnus with terrible ferocity, until Cygnus’ armour was hanging from his body like a shattered eggshell. But still Cygnus was unscratched. And, laughing, he lifted his own spear and he hurled it at Achilles. And he struck Achilles’ shield with such force that  
15 the point of the spear penetrated the gold and nine layers of hardened ox hide. And Achilles staggered backwards with the strength of the stroke.

But then he caught his balance and, with an expression of terrible, inhuman ferocity, his lips curled back from his teeth, he leapt at Cygnus. He smashed his shield into Cygnus’ face. He ground the boss of the shield to the left and the right until Cygnus’ nose was smeared across  
20 his cheek and his teeth were shattered.

And, as Cygnus staggered backwards, Achilles knelt on his shoulders. “If weapons won’t harm you, what will armour do?” He tore the helmet from Cygnus’ head. He wrapped the helmet straps around his neck, twisting and tugging and tightening the tourniquet until Cygnus’ head was half-torn from his body and every last shudder of life was gone from him.

25 And Achilles leapt to his feet, splattered with blood, shrieking with laughter. And the Trojan army stood and they stared, appalled, mesmerised.

And then a strange thing. The twisted, broken neck of Cygnus began to stretch and to curve. And his face narrowed and his lips stretched and hardened and out of his skin white feathers. His father Poseidon had taken pity on him and had transformed him into a swan. And now he  
30 was lifting his feathered arms and the shattered eggshell armour was falling away from him. He was beating his wings against the air. He lifted himself high and high and high into the sky. And three times he circled round. And the only sound was the sighing and the sawing of his wings. And then he flew over the sea, over the masts of the ships and he was gone.

And Achilles ran towards the Trojans, with his Myrmidons behind him. Achilles ran towards the  
35 Trojans, screaming and screaming. And the Trojans’ hearts turned to water and they fled. They ran and they ran through the great bronze Scaean gates. The gates were closed behind them.

And, from that day onwards, to any Trojan warrior the name Achilles was like a cold shudder from the nape of the neck to the root of the spine.

And, as for the Greeks, they loosed a few lazy arrows after the retreating Trojans and then  
40 they set about dragging their ships high onto the white sand.