

of gods, monsters & men

Athena

Goddess of wisdom and war, Athena is the patron goddess of Odysseus. She favours his wit and cunning nature, and helps him on his journey home.

Odysseus

Played by Matt Damon (right) in the 2026 film, Odysseus is the king of Ithaca. A cunning tactician and powerful warrior, he will do anything to return home to his wife Penelope and son Telemachus.

Start here to trace Odysseus' journey home

Zeus

The god of thunder and king of gods. A key theme in *Odyssey* is the ancient Greek concept of *xenia*, the hospitality between hosts and guests. Odysseus' desire for glory results in him and his crew disrespecting the *xenia* code several times. Thus, the extraordinarily protracted odyssey is seen as punishment by Zeus, who is also the patron god of foreigners.

Points and beings of interest in Homer's *Odyssey*:

1 Ilium

Location: Troy (north-west Turkey)

A besieged city tricked into opening its gates to a wooden horse by Odysseus. Upon winning the 10-year Trojan War, he begins his journey home with 600 men on 12 ships.

2 Cicones

Location: Ismarus (western Thrace)

Casualties: 72

Odysseus and his men raid this village unsuccessfully.

3 Lotus-Eaters

Location: Djerba, an island off coastal Tunisia

Unique flora: The lotus fruit is a small berry as sweet as honey that makes anyone who eats it stay and forget all else.

Several men consume the fruit and have to be forced back onto the ship.

4 Polyphemus, son of Poseidon

Location: Sicily

Unique wildlife: Cyclopes, giant one-eyed primitive man-eating shepherds

Casualties: Six

Odysseus and his men are trapped in Polyphemus' cave, but escape by trickery.

5 Aeolus, the god of the winds

Location: Floating island Aeolia

Odysseus is blown off course when the crew opens a bag that contains winds.

6 Laestrygonians

Location: Telepylus, near Sicily

Unique wildlife: Cannibal giants descended from Poseidon

Casualties: Estimated 472

With his men attacked and eaten by the Laestrygonians, only Odysseus' ship escapes as it was anchored beyond the harbour.

7 Circe, a witch goddess

Location: Aeaea, an island off Italy

Unique wildlife: Lions and wolves that are oddly tame.

Casualties: One

Protected by the Moly herb, Odysseus rescues his men from Circe and leaves after a year.

8 Entry to the Underworld

Location: End of the world

Inhabitants: Undead shades

Odysseus summons the shade of Tiresias, the seer for advice on safe passage.

9 Sirens

Location: Sirenum Scopuli, three rocky islands off Capri, Italy

Unique wildlife: Sirens, birds with the heads of women who lure men's ships to crash into rocks with their songs

While his men block their ears with beeswax, Odysseus binds himself to the ship's mast, allowing him to hear the song yet survive, with his ship steered to safety.

10 Scylla and Charybdis

Location: Strait of Messina

Unique wildlife: Scylla, a female monster with 12 feet and baying dog heads at her waist, and Charybdis, the personification of a whirlpool.

Casualties: Six, one to each of Scylla's dog heads. Odysseus chooses to sacrifice some of his crew rather than lose their ship to the whirlpool.

11 Cattle of Helios

Location: Thrinacia (Sicily)

Unique wildlife: White cattle with gold horns

Casualties: 43

Although warned by Circe and Tiresias not to do so, Odysseus' men kill the cattle for food, and are eventually slain by Zeus.

12 Calypso, daughter of the titan Atlas

Location: Ogygia, an island in the Maltese archipelago

Inhabitant: The nymph Calypso

Odysseus is rescued by Calypso, who traps him on the island for seven years, hoping he will marry her. Athena eventually negotiates for his release.

13 Phaeacians

Location: Scheria (Corfu, Greece)

Denizens: Phaeacians, a utopian society with great naval technology

Barely surviving Poseidon's storm, Odysseus seeks the Phaeacians' help to return home.

14 Ithaca

Location: Ionian islands, Greece

Disguised as a beggar, Odysseus is greeted by 108 hostile suitors; his faithful wife Penelope who has been keeping them at bay for the last decade; and Telemachus, the fully grown son he no longer recognises.

Tale as old as time

Here are some other cinematic and musical takes on Homer's *Odyssey* over the years.

Ulysses (1954)

Starring Kirk Douglas as the title character, this sword-and-sandals adventure flick is one of the most classic versions of the tale. It uses the Roman name of Ulysses rather than the Greek Odysseus.

O Brother, Where Art Thou? (2000)

A loose interpretation set in the American South of the 1930s, this satirical comedy-drama musical from the Coen brothers revolves around three convicts (George Clooney, John Turturro and Tim Blake Nelson) on a journey of their own who face monsters inspired by the original.

Troy (2004)

The epic blockbuster based on Homer's *Iliad* details the Trojan War and the events that occurred right before *Odyssey*. Starring Brad Pitt as Achilles and Sean Bean as Odysseus, *Troy* is an enjoyable way to get a quick summary in preparation for Nolan's *The Odyssey*.

Epic: The Musical (2025)

The sung-through concept album by Puerto Rican actor and singer-songwriter Jorge Rivera-Herrans went viral on TikTok, where it was first released. It was picked up by Hollywood producer Jerry Bruckheimer in 2026 and will be made into an animated film.