Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro): *The Aeneid*  
Summary by Michael McGoodwin, prepared 1999

**Acknowledgement:** This work has been summarized using the Penguin 1991 prose edition translated David West 1990. Quotations are for the most part taken from that work, as are paraphrases of its commentary.

**Notes from the Penguin Edition and Alan Rawn:** Virgil wrote in dactylic hexameter and used epic poem conventions in conscious imitation of the master, Homer. Books I-VI are Odyssean and the remainder Iliadic. His public voice provides a founding myth that glorifies Caesar Augustus and the peace hard-won by him-- unlike as in Homer, the Aeneid incorporates a vision of history and destiny. But his private voice depicts the suffering and heavy price paid by the conquered peoples, particularly as illustrated by Dido. The work was written 29-19 BC and was incomplete at the time of his death--Augustus overrode Virgil's request that it be destroyed.

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**Book I**  
**The Trojans Land near Carthage**

Virgil opens with an appeal to the muse of poetry. Aeneas is a Trojan leader, son of Venus and the mortal Anchises. He suffers as did the other Trojans from the wrath of Juno, after the judgment of Paris favored Venus [and the desecration of her temple]. The book begins with the Trojan fleet sailing from Sicily and now near Carthage, 7 years after the fall of Troy. Juno bribes Aeolus to unleash storm winds on them, and they founder near Carthage. Venus appeals to Jupiter for their salvation and he reassures her of their glorious future and a golden age to come (the first of many prophecies and futurity scenes). Venus appears to Aeneas disguised as a Carthaginian huntress, tells him of Queen Dido and the settlers from Tyre who have formed the colony at Carthage, surrounded by potentially hostile peoples. A scouting party led by the visible Ilioneus observes the temple under construction (Aeneas is hidden by a shield of invisibility provided by Venus). Dido reassures and hospitably welcomes them and Aeneas eventually appears. Venus arranges for her son Cupid, in the form of Aeneas' son Ascanius, to cause A. and Dido to fall in love, to ensure his safety. Dido puts on a feast and her passion rises.

**Book II**  
**Recounting the Fall of Troy**

At Dido's request, A. recounts the fall of Troy. The Trojan Horse. A "captured" Greek Sinon deludes them about the reason why the horse was constructed to appease Minerva [Athena] after their attack on her temple. Laocoön, a priest who spears the horse, is attacked by two serpents,
along with his sons. The Trojans break down their wall to get the horse inside. At night, the Greeks sail back to the shore and Sinon releases the men in the horse. A vision of Hector appears to A. telling him to flee the ensuing destruction and found a new city. The palace is attacked, Priam slain by Pyrrhus (Achilles’ son). A. considers killing Helen but Venus deters him. A divine portent appears over the head of Iulus (Ascanius), Aeneas’ son. Anchises refuses to flee at first but is persuaded, and A. carries him on his shoulders. His wife Creusus becomes separated and dies--her spirit comes to him and prophesies his great future.

**Book III**

**The Wanderings of Aeneas**

After sailing from Troy, they sailed north to Thrace and founded Aeneadae. But the ghost of Polydorus warns them to leave. After consulting with the Delian oracle, Anchises misinterprets the advice to seek the land that first bore the Trojan race. They sail to Crete, again try to found a settlement, but a pestilence ensues. A. dreams that Hesperia (the land of the west, or Italy) is their ultimate goal, and they sail west. They encounter the Harpies led by Celeano at the Strophades, west of Greece. After they kill her cattle, they attack the Trojans. Celeano prophesies his future. They sail on to Leucas in W. Greece and stay a year. At Buthrotum in Chaonia (now part of Epirus), they are welcomed by the former Trojan Helenus, who was enslaved by the Greeks but has been freed and made a king, married to Andromache. Helenus prophesies the Italian future and the route to take, including going to the Sibyl at Cumae. A. departs and sails across the Ionian sea to the boot of Italy and on to Sicily. They encounter the stranded Greek, Achaimenides, who tells them his story about the Cyclops. They all have to flee Polyphemus when he appears, and end up at Drepanum on the west coast of Sicily where Anchises dies.

**Book IV**

**Dido and Aeneas**

Though bound by a vow to her husband Sychaeus (killed by his brother Pygmalion), Dido has a rising passion for Aeneas, which her sister Anna encourages. Juno gets Venus to agree to the union, and arranges a hunt and a storm to bring them together in a cave. After their tryst, rumors fly through Carthage. Her former suitor, King Iarbus is jealous. Jupiter sends Mercury to chastise Aeneas and to remind him of his destiny, which does not lie with Dido. Dido rebukes A., but A. explains to her his duty without emotion, as prompted by Jupiter, and denies that they were in fact married. Dido is angered at him and swears vengeance. She tries to get Anna to delay their departure, then received bad omens and realizes she is doomed. Mercury warns A. to flee and they hastily depart in their ships. Dido orders an attack on them and curses them, pledging eternal war with the Carthaginians. She ascends to the pyre and kills herself with a sword.
Book V
The Funeral Games for Anchises

As they sail back to Eryx in Sicily, they see the flames in the distance. King Acestes receives them hospitably. He and Aeneas decide to hold funeral games, in the manner of book XXIII of the Iliad, to honor Anchises who died one year ago. They have a race of ships (won by Cloanthus), foot races (Euryalus), boxing (won by Entellus), archery, and equestrian maneuvers. Iris, disguised as the old Trojan woman Beroe, is sent by Juno to stir up trouble—she incites the women to set many of the ships on fire. Jupiter douses the fires. Nautes advises them to divide the group up, leaving the old and weary to found the settlement of Acesta near Eryx there on Sicily. The image of Anchises appears to A., asking to come to him in the underworld. Venus appeals to Neptune and is reassured that only one man will die as they sail to Italy. The helmsman Palinurus is put to sleep by the god of sleep and falls in to the water—an example of "double determination" where a person's actions are influenced by the gods as well as his own will.

Book VI
The Lower World

The ships land at Cumae on the west coast of Italy. A. seeks the Cumaean Sibyl (prophetess) at Apollo's temple, which was founded by Daedalus. The sibyl prophesies war and the trials ahead. A. asks her help in visiting his father. She him to bring a golden bough for Proserpina in order to gain admittance. He learns also that one of his men newly deceased, Misenus, must be buried. They proceed with the cremation. A. prepares to enter the cavern, by the lake Avernus, leading to the underworld. Hecate nears, but Sibyl warns her away. They pass many personified evils and monsters: Briareus, Chimaera, Scyllas, etc. He encounters Palinurus, who cannot yet cross the Styx into the underworld because his body was not buried. Charon is appeased by the golden bough and they sedate Cerberus. They pass the infants, the Fields of Mourning. He encounters Dido, and offers her more excuses—she turns away from him to her husband Sychaeus. They also encounter Trojans and also Greeks, including Deiophobus, the 3rd husband of Helen. We learn how Helen betrayed Troy. Tartarus, on the road to the left, is described, a place of suffering and punishment for those found guilty by the judge Rhadamanthus for a variety of enumerated punishable sins. Instead, they turn right. A. places the bough at the threshold of Proserpine, and finally enters Elysium. There, he encounters Anchises. There are spirits there awaiting reincarnation after drinking of Lethe to induce forgetfulness. Anchises predicts the future: the Alban kings, other kings, Romulus, Iulus, Numa, etc. Anchises says that Rome's fame will be for its leadership and contribution to government rather than for its artistic contributions. He ends with a panegyric to Augustus' deceased son, Marcellus. A. reemerges to the world of the living.
Book VII
Italy and the Outbreak of War

They sail pass Circe's island and land near the Tiber's mouth in Latium. The Laurentians (or Latians, Latins) are ruled by King Latinus. The spirit of Faunus tells Latinus that his daughter Lavinia should marry a foreigner. More omens. The Trojans come to see the king, who treats them generously and offers A. his daughter in marriage. Juno is angered by this tranquil scene and sends the Fury Allecto to stir up discord and war. In a remarkably poetic description, she infects Queen Amata with resentment at her husbands decision. Amata hides Lavinia and goes into a frenzied rage with some Bacchantes (a simile of a top describes her). Allecto also stirs up the Rutulians, in particular Turnus their king, who has been the chief suitor of Lavinia. Turnus seems to plan to march on both the Trojans and the Laurentines. Allecto also causes Iulus (Ascanius), A.'s son, to wound a deer or stag kept as a royal pet by Tyrrhus--this is the precipitating event and war breaks out. Allecto gloats and Latinus is powerless to stop the preparations. The people arm for war and the gates of war are thrown open by Juno after Latinus refuses. A catalog of combatants against Troy is given, as in the Iliad, including the tyrant Mezentius, Messapus, Virbius, and the Volscian warrior-maiden Camilla.

Book VIII
Aeneas at the Site of Rome

Confusion reigns. A. is compared to a bowl of water. Tiber the river-god appears to A. in a dream and encourages Aeneas. A. prays to Tiber, who assists his ships upstream, and advises him to ally with Evander, son of Mercury and therefore kin. He is the leader of Arcadians living on the site of current Rome, Pallanteum (on the Palantine Hill). He sees the white sow that had been prophesied, and encounters Evander's beloved son Pallas. Evander agrees to ally. He tells of Hercules victory over the half-man monster Cacus, a civilizing action. There is a local cult of Hercules worshippers. Evander recites other local history. Saturn (Cronos) gave local law and order and the name of Latium. There was a golden age. They tour the landmarks of the future Rome. Evander lives simply and exemplifies the simple virtues admired by the future Roman state. Venus appeals to her husband Vulcan to make armor for Aeneas. His Cyclops get right to work on this at their forges on the island of Vulcano. Evander tells of Agylla in Etruria and suggests Aeneas ally with them as well. He also describes the sadistic leader Mezentius. Evander nobly and unselfishly turns his beloved son Pallas over to Aeneas to become a warrior, along with many of his warriors and horsemen. Evander recalls his heroic past, then prays for his son. Venus delivers the armor to A. and tells him to not fear war. His shield is decorated with depictions of future Roman triumphs.
Book IX

Attack on the Trojan Camp in the Absence of Aeneas

With Aeneas still away with Evander, Juno sends Iris to mobilize Turnus to action. The enemy marches on the Trojan camp, which is alongside the river. The Trojans stay behind their walls as Aeneas had instructed them. After they do not respond to Turnus' challenge, he tries to set their ships afire. The goddess Cybele (Rhea) is worried about the Trojan ships, which had been constructed out of her sacred grove, and had previously appealed to her son Jupiter to save them. He now acts, and the ships are turned into sea nymphs, leaving the Trojans no alternative but to stay on the land and fight. Turnus goads on the Rutulians, and the fort is surrounded (except the side open to the river). Nisus and Euryalus, close friends, heroically resolve to try to get word to Aeneas at Pallanteum of the siege. Their companions know how risky this is and praise their bravery. Euryalus refuses gifts and only asks that his mother be looked after. They set out at night and begin killing many of the Rutulians lying in their way. But Euryalus foolishly dons the armor and helmet of one he has killed [they seem to have forgotten the main purpose of their mission]. He is spotted by Volcens and his men and subsequently captured and killed despite Nisus' efforts to save him. Nisus kills Volcens and then falls dying over his friend. At dawn, the Trojans see the heads of these brave men impaled on enemy spears. Euryalus' mother arrives at the walls and laments her son's death. The Volscians or Rutulians charge the fort and major fighting breaks out. Iulus takes up his bow and kills young Remulus/Numanus with an arrow, his first taste of combat. Apollo blesses Iulus, and asks him to desist from further killing for the time being. Pandarus and Bitias, both Trojans and caught up in the rage of fighting, open the gates to the fort, and the Rutulians rush in. Pandarus finally closes the gates, but Turnus is there with them and kills many including Pandarus before he retreats and escapes via the river.

Book X

Aeneas at War

With the Trojan camp under siege, the gods debate the conflict. Venus appeals to Jupiter to at least spare Iulus, to which Juno angrily counters. Jupiter responds that he will be neutral and that the fates will determine the outcome. Aeneas sails back with Tarchon's men (Etruscans and former subjects of the evil Mezentius)-- at some point Pallas has taken charge of a cavalry contingent that travels on horseback. A catalog of the Trojan allies is given. The sea-nymphs (recently transformed from their ships) alert Aeneas to the siege and help them to be quickly transported to the site, dumbfounding Turnus and his men. A. invokes Cybele to bless their undertaking. They land and are immediately attacked by the Rutulians. Pallas leads the attack of the contingent on horseback and is sought out by Turnus. Pallas responds bravely. His prayer to Jupiter is answered with affirmation of Jupiter's intention to stay neutral. Pallas is speared and killed by Turnus. A. comes after him after rounding up four sacrificial victims for Pallas' pyre. He goes on a rampage of killing and shows no mercy. Juno appeals to Jupiter to intervene and
spare Turnus. She then disguises herself as Aeneas and lures Turnus aboard a ship in pursuit of him—the ship promptly sails away, temporarily saving Turnus. Mezentius joins the battle, offers to give captured armor to his son Lausus (a sacrilege), and is wounded by A. Lausus defends his wounded father and is slain by A. A. takes pity on Lausus and shows respect for his body and the necessary burial rituals. Mezentius laments his son’s death, then charges A. on his horse Rhaebus and is slain.

**Book XI**

**The Despair of the Latins**

The battle pauses for funeral rites for the numerous victims. A. mourns the death of Pallas. His body is taken to King Evander—even Pallas' horse Aethon weeps! The Latins petition for a peace to bury the dead. A. wonders how destiny has brought about this unexpected war. Evander mourns the death of Pallas, and calls for Turnus' death. Pyres consume the bodies, which are then buried. The Latins receive word via Venulus that Diomede, now living in Arpi, is not willing to join in fighting once again with the Trojans, saying that he has no quarrel with them anymore, that he has suffered enough punishment for his past actions, and that he expects further retribution for his attack on Venus. He advises the Latins to make a treaty with the Trojans. In a council of the Latins, the crafty Drances (who is hostile to Turnus) offers suggestions for ending the conflict including that Turnus go into single combat as he is largely responsible for it. Turnus angrily responds that he is not ready to concede defeat, wants more war, and accepts the challenge to engage in single combat with Aeneas. The council is interrupted by the news that the Trojans and Etruscans are advancing. Turnus calls the men to arms. The noble female warrior Camilla tells Turnus she wishes to lead her Volscians against the Etruscan riders without Turnus' assistance—he praises her but says they will fight together. (Camilla's story: Her father Metabus lived in exile after escaping from the Volscians. When forced to cross a river, he tied her to a spear and consecrated her to Diana, then hurled her safely across and swam himself. Camilla grew up to cherish Diana's weapons.) The battle begins. Camilla fights heroically, Tarchon rallies his horsemen, and Arruns stalks Camilla. She is distracted by Chloreus' shining armor, which she wants to capture, and is slain by Arruns who awaits her in ambush. Opis, Diana's sentinel, kills Arruns. The Latins flee in disarray. Turnus, who had staked out an ambush for Aeneas, leaves the spot just before A. comes by, as all are converging on the city of Laurentum.

**Book XII**

**The Final Combat**

Turnus meets with Latinus, and indicates he expects Lavinia's hand if he wins. Latinus advises him his request cannot be granted because she is destined to marry a foreigner, and asks him to relent and break off the combat, sparing them all further needless deaths. But Queen Amata is adamant that she will not accept Aeneas as her son-in-law. Turnus issues a challenge to Aeneas for single combat, the victor to receive Lavinia's hand. At dawn, the Latins and Trojans gather on the plain outside the city [?Laurentum]. Juno plots with Turnus' sister Juturna, now a sea-nymph,
to save him. Aeneas prays and makes a pledge that his victory will lead to peaceful coexistence and equality and that if he is defeated, the Trojan’s will depart. Latinus also makes a pledge to honor the terms of the single combat. Juturna arrives among the assembled Latins disguised as Tolumnius. An omen of an eagle and other birds suggests that the Trojans can be defeated and Juturna/Tolumnius precipitates the battle. Aeneas tries to stop the fighting, is wounded by an arrow, and is hastily taken away. Iapys, a healer favored by Apollo, tries to heal A. and is surprised to find himself successful, thanks to herbs Venus adds unseen to the balm. A. speaks with Iulus, then rushes into battle, seeking Turnus. Juturna assumes the disguise of Turnus’ chariot driver Metiscus, keeping him away from serious threats. Many are slain by the two heroes before their final confrontation. Aeneas considers destroying Latinus’ city with fire. Queen Amata has lost her mind and hangs herself. Turnus confronts his disguised sister and spurns her aid, preferring a heroic death. He jumps from his chariot and calls to his men to allow him to seek single combat with Aeneas, which Aeneas accepts--the two armies draw back. The combatants are both larger than life. They fight, Turnus’ sword breaks against Aeneas’ armor, Juturna provides a replacement. Juno and Jupiter conference--he asks that she cease her meddling with the destined outcome, and at last she relents. She asks only that "Troy" be forgotten, the Ausonian customs remain, and that the language of the conquered and commingled peoples shall remain Latin. Jupiter sends a Fury disguised as a screech-owl as an omen to Turnus. Juturna laments the portent against her brother. Turnus tries to throw a large boulder at A. but his strength is flagging, he has no escape, and A. finally spears him in his thigh. Turnus concedes defeat and asks that his body be given a proper burial, even that his life be spared. But Aeneas sees Pallas' swordbelt around Turnus and in a final rage exacts his vengeance, slaying Turnus with his sword.