

# War as an archetype towards Human Evolution, in David Gemmell's *Troy series*

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War has been inevitable and unpredictable since the inception of human life on earth. War brings with it waves of hatred, destruction and unimaginable horror. War purges and refines Men as would fire, silver or gold. Men come out of the war either despicable and loathsome creatures or people of substance who can be counted to trust one's lives with. But all through the war and after the calamities caused, there remain among the people a sense of purpose to build a city, the determination to renew life and the ability to become rejuvenated. All these qualities are spread among the people, filling their minds with hope that the world will move on for the better. While some men change from good to bad there are seemingly hopeless men, men of scum and people of shady characters who change from bad to good. These men startle the society by their actions and act as catalysts to bring resilience and a flicker of hope among the populace. If not for war, these qualities of Men might never come out. War, apart from the chaos and destruction that it wrecks among humans, also serves to evolve humanity to a better position than it was before, restoring faith in humans.

Banokles is a soldier in the Mykene army. He is a valiant warrior capable of only three things. He fights without a care in the world, seeks wine to drown his sorrows and uses all his bounty on whores. He is fiercely loyal to his friend and sword brother, Kalliades. The first book of the *Troy series*, *Lord of the Silver Bow* sees Banokles and Kalliades part of the invading Mykene army. Banokles complains about everything that happens or does not happen. He is unhappy that he is forced to wait in the dark rather than allowed to go and fight the Trojans. It does not dawn on his mind that he is part of a secretive, treacherous and surprise operation to overthrow the reign of Priam, King of Troy. His friend Kalliades, the tall and lean fighter from Mykene, tries to explain that it is of utmost importance to use stealth. However, Banokles dismisses it with a shrug and wishes that he is allowed to kill some Trojans at once. Such is the nature of the man. He has no regard for the surroundings or for strategies. He is a fighting machine raring to fight.

*Shield of Thunder*, the second book in the *Troy series* helps the reader explore more of the character of Banokles. Having been outlawed by the Mykene King Agamemnon for the invasion that turned awry in Troy and the murder of Kolanos the cowardly general of Mykene, Banokles

## War as an archetype towards Human Evolution, in David Gemmell's *Troy series*

– July – September - 2018

and Kalliades find themselves in the mercy of pirates wandering the Great Green. They board a ship with the pirates and beach on an island. The nature of Banokles remains unchanged even then. He constantly thinks of the one thing that makes his stomach grumble.

‘I’d like to be rich,’ said Banokles. ‘I could buy a slave girl.’

‘If you were rich you could buy a hundred slave girls.’

‘Not sure if I could handle a hundred. Five maybe.’ He chuckled. ‘Yes, five would be good. Five plump, dark-haired girls. With big eyes.’ Banokles drank some more, then belched. ‘Ah, I can feel the spirit of Dionysus seeping into my bones. I wish one of those plump girls was here now.’

Kalliades had laughed. ‘Your mind is always occupied by either drink or sex. Does nothing else interest you?’

‘Food. A good meal, jug of wine, followed by a plump woman squealing beneath me.’

‘With your weight on her no wonder she’d be squealing.’ (P30)

David Gemmell has skilfully portrayed the character of Banokles in such a way as to think of him as an overgrown man with almost no brains. As Red, a whore of Troy, later to wed Banokles proclaims in *Shield of Thunder*, witnessing the actions of Banokles, ‘Built like an ox, brain like a sparrow,’ she said. (P251)

The typical nature of Banokles not even attempting to do any deed other than fighting is brought to light by another incident. Kalliades and Banokles defy the might of pirates and try to rescue Piria, a run-away priestess from the island of Thera. The small island they are caught in is infested by pirates, searching for the trio. Kalliades stands alone, thinking of a way to divert the pirates and rescue the girl. Piria sits alone, frightened of her life. Banokles grumbles about not having food to eat. He does not bother even to think, to save his own skin. This also shows his reluctance to take responsibility towards any action. He believes that if there were no responsibilities, he could just eat, drink and whore to his heart’s content.

‘We are on a small island,’ replied Banokles. ‘We have no gold, and no ship. Angry men will come looking for us tomorrow. Now, we are great warriors, Kalliades and I. None better. Well ... not now Argurios is dead. Between us I reckon we could survive against seven or eight warriors. There are around sixty fighting men in the pirate crews. And not one soft-bellied puker among them.’

‘You have no plans of escape?’

‘Oh, I do not make plans, woman. I drink, I whore, I fight.’ Kalliades makes plans.’

## War as an archetype towards Human Evolution, in David Gemmell's *Troy series*

– July – September - 2018

Another incident shows Banokles and Kalliades talking about the impending clash with the pirates the following day. Banokles wants to escape and run if possible, but without showing the world his nature of leading a life without responsibilities.

‘I’ll grant our luck has not been *all* bad. But fashion something good *now*. A single ship – and not a warship – facing four pirate vessels tomorrow. What chance do we have?’

‘We could stay on this island and let the *Penelope* sail without us.’

‘Wouldn’t that be cowardly?’ asked Banokles, suddenly hopeful.

‘Yes.’

‘What do you mean yes? You’re a clever man. Couldn’t you find a reason to stay behind that *wasn’t* cowardly?’ (P101)

Banokles crawls through the novels initially as this big oaf of a man, highly irresponsible, given to mouthing sarcastic and vulgar comments at the most improper time and devoting his energies wholly to think about food, drink and women. If it were not for his fighting skills and absolute loyalty to Kalliades, he would truly be a despicable character not worth being mentioned. But as the novels lengthen and the war prolongs, there come upon him changes that he abhors, but is helpless to fight against. Against all his wishes and odds, circumstances force him to take up responsibilities; something absolutely unimaginable for him in normal days. Ursos, the leader of a part of Troy’s army in which Banokles is a member, is forced to leave a rear guard and warn Hektor, the prince of Troy about the enemy’s whereabouts. As fate would have it, Banokles is given charge of five soldiers. He has no option, but to accept.

Ursos turned to Banokles. ‘You stay here with five men and watch where the enemy march. I’ll take the rest of the troop back to Hektor and stop the advance. Once the enemy are on the move you head north to join us as fast as you can.’

‘Why don’t *you* stay behind?’ asked Banokles.

‘Because I’m the bastard general – as you keep pointing out. I am leaving you in charge, Banokles. Don’t do anything reckless. Just gather the information and move out when you have it.’ (P386)

Though Banokles accepts his role with disinclination, the war spurs him to actions he would not have considered hitherto. He appears to his men, an inspiring leader, always surprising others by his daring deeds. He starts caring for others. When there was seemingly no necessity for him to save a fourteen year old Prince fleeing for his life with his younger brother and his old

## War as an archetype towards Human Evolution, in David Gemmell's *Troy series*

– July – September - 2018

nurse, he charges headlong into the chasing party and saves the young Prince; and that too despite being ordered not to have battle with the enemy.

Three other men, similarly armoured, came into view. Myrine watched as a warrior strode across to the man who had saved them.

‘The orders were to avoid battle,’ said the newcomer, dragging off his helm. He was young, his hair dark and curly.

‘Gods, Olganos, that wasn’t a battle! That was a ... a skirmish!’ (P395)

The actions of Banokles raise him high among the members of his party. Burdened with two little children and an old nurse suffering from infirmity, Banokles and his men try to make the best of flight on the five tired horses they have, with the murderous Idonoi army giving chase through the forest. Banokles wants to cut off the burden and slip away in the cover of darkness with his men. He does not like the role of leadership and knows in his heart that the reason he attacked the Idonoi was to relieve his stress. But unknown to him, his men are in awe of him and decide to stand with him against the Idonoi to save the princes, despite the odds. Unbeknownst to him, Banokles inspires men with his courage, though his actions are done purely on a selfish note. War, in its destructive path, uses a selfish man like Banokles, changes the perspectives of men and helps them evolve as better human beings than they were before, shaping humanity.

‘You have a plan?’

‘Yes, but you won’t like it. We need to ride fast. We cannot do that unless we lose our pursuers. We need to move on alone – unencumbered.’

‘You want to leave the children?’ asked Banokles, his mood lifting.

‘No, I don’t want to. Listen to me Banokles. I know you have the reputation of a great hero. You fought pirates to rescue a princess, and you fought off twenty men who were trying to kill Hektor’s wife. But this situation is different ... It no longer matters that the children are royal. They have no army, no leverage, and no value. All they can do now is slow us down.’

‘They will indeed ... began Banokles, but Olagnos cut him off.

‘I know what you are going to say. So let me say it first. Yes, they will slow us, but heroes do not abandon those in need...’ (P399)

‘Now you are just trying to make me feel better about my cowardice,’ he said. Then he sighed. ‘Heroes shouldn’t be frightened of dying for what is right. I couldn’t see that last night, when you risked your life for those children.’ The young man looked Banokles in the eye. ‘Forget what I said. I’ll stand with you.’

## War as an archetype towards Human Evolution, in David Gemmell's *Troy series*

– July – September - 2018

Banokles was lost for words. (P400)

‘We’ve been talking about it, Banokles. We want you to know we are with you.’

‘With me?’

Ennion looked uneasy. ‘I know we joke with you, and appear to mock, but we are all proud to fight alongside you. None of us would have rescued those children the way you did...

Banokles glanced at the other men. ‘You want to keep the children with us?’

Skorpios nodded, but Justinos looked doubtful. ‘We’ll probably not make it with them. But, yes, I am with you, Banokles. We’ll bring the children to Hektor – or die trying.’

It was like a bad dream. Banokles swung towards Kerio. ‘What do you say?’

‘You don’t need to worry about me,’ answered Kerio. ‘I’ll stand.’ (P401)

Things move from good to better for the Trojans because of Banokles’ leadership, reluctant though it might have been accepted by Banokles. Victory after victory against the Mykene follows, the number of men under his command growing. Banokles tries his best to shirk off his role of a leader and pass it to Kalliades. But Kalliades’ injury to his head prevents him from taking it over. The men under Banokles’ command see his ruthless bravery in each of the battle that he leads them, and before he realizes, all men are in adoration of their new leader, their thoughts pleasant and noble. However, Banokles is completely unaware of the change wrought in the soldiers because of his actions, and certainly unhappy that he is not able to pass on the role of a leader to someone else.

‘He has already led you into battle,’ said Periklos. ‘And to a victory. More than this, though, when I stood alone in a forest, surrounded by Idonoi warriors who were ready to kill me, this man walked out and risked his life for me. I have seen him now in three fights. Each one should have been lost, but Banokles is a great warrior and a fine leader.’

Banokles walked away, hungry and confused. No-one had bothered to ask *him* whether he wanted to be a general, and no-one had mentioned payment of any kind. Not that it mattered, since when they reached Carpea he would happily pass on the problem to real officers. (P433)

The days pass on and the size of Banokles’ army grows in size and might. Hektor is battling the army of King Peleus, in Carpea. The battle is all but lost for Hektor who faces defeat staring at him. As King Peleus waits with his elite bodyguards to charge at Hektor during the breaking point of the battle, Banokles leads his army from the rear in a suicidal charge against King Peleus. The elite of Thessaly are routed by the unexpected assault. No man in his right mind would have done this. Yet, Banokles charges with no shield, and a sword in each hand. He

## War as an archetype towards Human Evolution, in David Gemmell's *Troy series*

– July – September - 2018

manages to chase King Peleus, bring him down and order his death, unmindful of the ransom pleas coming out of the king's mouth. Hektor is overjoyed by the victory and gives charge of the army to Banokles, much to his dismay.

It is in *Fall of Kings*, that Banokles feels the change that he has brought about in his men, and surprisingly starts feeling the change in himself, for the better. He is not able to comprehend how the change has come over him. But David Gemmell shows through his writings that war while taking its toll on people, including Banokles, also brings about a sea change in his character. Banokles is a clear example that war also edifies and helps in evolving humanity. Banokles makes a deep impact, a positive one, on hundreds of battle hardened men, who before then had no objective other than to kill and whore.

The city of Troy is defended by the last of the Trojans. In an ironic twist to the tale, it is Banokles and Kalliades, two Mykene soldiers who are in charge of the defence of Troy, with King Priam and all his sons killed. Helikaon comes and rescues Andromache and their two sons. Banokles lets down Helikaon, Andromache, the little boys and Kalliades to help them, through a rope, down a window, as the Eagles of King Priam defend the doorway. Banokles promises to pull Kalliades up after he lets the children down safely. Kalliades lets the children down safely, sends Helikaon with a wave, to realise that the rope is slack. Banokles has cut the rope making it impossible for Kalliades to climb up again. In the last possible moment, Banokles reveals the nature of man that the war has turned him into. He knows that he cannot survive the onslaught of King Agamemnon and his allies. He gives a lease of life to his life-long friend Kalliades.

The Banokles of old would not have done that. He would have probably died along with Kalliades, but not made him escape. The escapades from war and the method in which Kalliades tries to save him previously during the war teach Banokles many valuable lessons. War makes Banokles a caretaker of men. Even at the last moment, he tries to save the healer, a young boy, and asks him to leave the palace by the hanging rope. Never in his wildest dreams does he think of leaving the palace himself, though the battle is not his, nor his countries. No one forces him or asks him to fight. He fights knowing that he would not eat food again, get drunk on wine or have any plump women squealing beneath him. Yet, Banokles decides to fight and act as a decoy while the little children and the queen reach the safety of the mighty ship *Xanthos* waiting in the harbour. War teaches him all these in the midst of all its oddities and bloodshed. War edifies Banokles and turns him from a vagabond to an evolved human being. The memories of Banokles carried by Queen Andromache, King Helikaon of Dardania and Kalliades further strengthen their resolve to lead a life worthy of Banokles' sacrifice. All due to War.

War as an archetype towards Human Evolution, in David Gemmell's *Troy series*  
– July – September - 2018

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