

War is a force that  
gives us meaning



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Chris Hedges would view the movie *Troy* as being an example of nearly everything he discusses in the final chapter of *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*. It is a movie that glorifies the battles of war, while also showing the toil it takes on the survivors. It also fits into what Hedges calls “war as a spectacle, war as entertainment,” (Hedges 143) since this is a film about a war that people paid \$10 to watch in a theater while eating popcorn. In chapter 7, Hedges discusses Freud’s theory of Eros and Thanatos – the idea that there are two forces at work inside each person. Eros is the force that pushes us towards life and self-preservation, while Thanatos is “the impulse that works towards the annihilation of all living things, including ourselves” (Hedges 158). Thanatos is the best way to describe Brad Pitt’s character of Achilles in *Troy*. He is, as he explains, a born warrior. When Amemnon and Nestor are plotting their invasion of Troy, Nestor says he wants Achilles because “That man was born to end lives” (*Troy*). He lives his life moving from one battle to the next, with little care what cause he is fighting for. It is just the thrill of the fight that keeps him alive. In this way, Achilles is also a lot like many of the war correspondents Hedges mentions. Achilles knows that every battle could be his last, yet he thrives on them. He needs the rush that battle brings him. When asked why he is a warrior, he says simply, “I was born. That’s what I am” (*Troy*). Achilles also lives by a noble warrior-like code, as seen when he allows Priam to take back the body of his son Hector. Priam wants to wash his son’s body and give him a proper burial. Hedges would see this as what he calls “the constant act of remembering and honoring the fallen during war” (145). By creating a hero out of Hector, the Trojans have their purpose renewed to continue fighting. Hedges would say this is just another way that we force meaning and a sense of “right” and “

wrong” into the wars we wage, when in reality, it is all simply killing. Hedges says that “ War is necrophilia” (165) that it is a “ fatal and seductive embrace” (166). Achilles seems to act this way. He tells Briseis that “ the gods envy us because we are mortal. Because we are doomed, everything is more beautiful” (Troy). Briseis tells him that she has met many soldiers and she has come to think that “ peace confuses them” (Troy). When Briseis has the chance to kill him with a sword, she pauses, unable to do it. She speaks her mind out loud saying that by killing Achilles, many lives could be saved. Achilles calmly agrees and says, “ Do it. There is nothing easier” (Troy). He sees death as something that is inescapable for all humans. He embraces it – as someone who is surrounded by the constant violence and horror of war always does, according to Hedges. Of course, Briseis does not kill Achilles and he falls in love with her. Eros takes over and he stays in bed with Briseis, avoiding a battle that kills many of his men, including a favorite cousin. This defeat snaps Achilles back towards battle, although we do later see him fighting to save Briseis from the Trojans, something Hedges would probably consider giving the war some initial meaning to Achilles. I also think Hedges would have problems with the way in which battle is portrayed in Troy. “ To say the least, killing is almost always a sordid affair,” he writes, adding, “ Moreover, those who are killed do not die the clean death we see on television or film” (Hedges 173). Troy is very much guilty of that. The battle scenes are intense, but are filmed so that we feel excited by what is happening on screen. It’s killing for entertainment. There aren’t any of the “ spastic convulsions” or “ rattles” that Hedges mentions (Hedges 175). And while watching the film, I knew I could easily forget a lot of what I saw; unlike if I had been in actual battle, Hedges would argue.