

Crossing the Chasm

A Myth Conceptions Fable

By David Keener

Once upon a time, a lone warrior trudged along a trail next to a chasm both deep and wide. Up ahead, he could see a narrow rope bridge crossing the chasm. As in most fables, though, he didn't think crossing the bridge was going to be particularly easy.

He was, of course, proven right.

As he reached the bridge, a sphinx stepped out of hiding and said in a booming voice, "Foolish mortal! You must answer three riddles or I shall spill your blood all over this rocky ground!"

The warrior stopped, a look of disgust on his face. "Seriously? A sphinx? And you're going to make me answer some riddles? What a cliché."

"Taunt me at your risk, you barbarian. The rocks cry out for your blood!"

"Whatever. Ask me your damn riddle."

"As you wish," said the sphinx. "What walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs in the evening?"

"Seriously? That is so 1980's," the warrior said. "The answer is a man. When he's an infant, he crawls on all fours. As a grown adult, he walks on two legs. And as an old man, he uses a cane so he walks with three legs."

"Your answer is correct, but I like not your attitude," the sphinx sneered. "Perhaps I should just kill you for your insolence."

The warrior quickly drew his sword in his right hand, and said, "This is a +3 Vorpal Sword, the sharpest thing you'll ever see. My chain mail is mithril, and enchanted by elves to be nearly invincible. And do you see these gauntlets?" The warrior raised both hands showing that he had silver gauntlets on both wrists.

"They're Gauntlets of Giant Strength." He paused, and then said

calmly, “The only reason I haven’t wasted you yet is I’d rather not wake up the dragon that lives across the chasm – I’m here to defeat him and take his treasure.”

The sphinx looked at him, moderately impressed, then pointed to his collar. “Collar of Super Speed, so you can’t escape me.” He held up his right hand, showing a single gold gauntlet. “Gauntlet of Mini-Thermonuclear Destruction. If you kill me, you die in a big explosion.”

“That’s MAD!” the warrior exclaimed.

“Yeah, I know. It’s crazy.”

“No, I meant M.A.D. Mutually Assured Destruction,” the warrior said. “With our skills and magic items, the only way we both live is if I answer all three riddles.”

“Oh. I never thought of it like that,” the sphinx replied.

“Well let’s get it over with. Hit me with your second riddle.”

“What is the air-speed velocity of an unladen swallow?” asked the sphinx.

“Seriously? That’s your riddle?” The warrior sheathed his sword, then pulled a small, rectangular object from his belt. “Let me Google it. Looking up Monty Python...hold on a second,” he said as he began pressing both thumbs repetitively against the object’s flat surface.

“What do you mean? An African or European swallow?” the warrior asked.

“Why, the European swallow, of course.”

“Aren’t you supposed to throw yourself off the cliff now?”

“No. I clarified the riddle for you. I’m allowed to do that.”

“If you say so,” said the warrior. He held up the rectangle and began reading, “The European swallow has been clocked at speeds as high as 37 miles per hour.”

“Argh!” cried the sphinx. “We’re doomed! That is not the right answer.”

The warrior shouted, “WAIT!” He beckoned to the sphinx to approach him, and showed him the rectangular device. It had

words on its flat face. “Look, it says it right here on Wikipedia, plus they’ve even got video. And look at all the references.”

“That’s extraordinary,” exclaimed the sphinx. “All that information. It all seems very authoritative. I guess I’m going to have to accept your answer after all, despite the fact that my master told me the answer was 35.” He added, “What is that clever device?”

“It’s a gPhone,” answered the warrior. “No 3D immersive game world is complete unless you have a gPhone. We live in a connected world, dude.”

“It’s quite nice. It must be quite entertaining to have such a device.” The sphinx paused, appearing deep in thought for a moment. “The last riddle is a multiple-choice question. Can I have your gPhone?”

The warrior looked surprised, then he laughed. “Let me guess what the correct answer is...would it be...yes?”

“Indeed it is, fine sir.”

The warrior handed his gPhone to the sphinx, then walked six paces past the sphinx to the bridge. He paused at the end of the bridge, then turned and trudged back. “Hey sphinx, let me show you how to use the gPhone. I’ll give you a lesson on all the major features.” He added, “My name’s Crusher, by the way. What’s yours?”

“I don’t actually have a name. I was never assigned one,” said the sphinx in a small voice.

“How about Tiberius, then? It’s the middle name of one of my favorite characters.”

“Why, that has a nice ring to it. Almost imperial, I’d say. Thank you.”

The warrior proceeded to give the sphinx a lesson on how to use his new toy. It took about thirty minutes, during which the sphinx became even more impressed with his new possession.

As the warrior turned to make his way across the bridge, the sphinx called him, “Crusher, how were you intending to attack the dragon?”

“Well, I’m going to try to sneak up on him in his lair and kill him before he suspects a thing.”

“Um, I don’t think that’ll work. His lair is layered with traps. You’ll never sneak up on him. Plus, he’s got a magic item in his lair that nullifies other magic items. I think you should make as much noise as possible to wake him up, and then get him angry enough to come out of his lair and attack you.”

“Thanks, Tiberius.” replied the warrior. “But what if he doesn’t want to come out of his lair?”

“Oh, that’s easy. Just call him a cowardly little garden snake, and he’ll come out.” said the sphinx. “There was this incident when he was young...he once ran from a squire, not even a knight. He’s real sensitive about the issue.”

The warrior grinned at the sphinx. “Let’s do this thing,” he said, as he stepped onto the swaying bridge and began to cross the chasm.

Someone once decided that fables should have morals. This one has two. First, no matter how different you are from someone else, you may be surprised by how much you have in common.

Second, an act of kindness always benefits the giver, one way or another – Crusher didn’t have to teach the sphinx how to use his new device, but he thought it was the right thing to do. And the sphinx repaid him.