**Birth and Early Life of Oedipus**

**Reference: http://www.ancientgreece.com/s/GreekMyths/Oedipus/**

Oedipus was the child of Laius and Jocasta, the ruling couple of Thebes. Eager for future-knowledge, Laius journeyed to the oracle at Delphi who gave him the most unwelcome news that his newborn son would grow up to kill his father and marry his mother. Perturbed by this news, Laius gave his new son to a herdsman and ordered him to be killed. A spike was driven through baby Oedipus' ankles (causing his ankles to become inflamed and earn him his name, which literally translates as 'swollen-footed') and the herdsman was instructed to leave the baby on the slopes of Mt. Cithearon to die. However, the herdsman took pity on the poor baby and gave the injured boy to another herdsman from a far off kingdom of Corinth instead. This second herdsman, a peasant, took the infant to his master, who adopted him gratefully since he and his wife Merope had been unable to conceive. King Polybus and Queen Merope raised Oedipus as their own, but one night at a public feast, a drunken man shouted at Oedipus that he had no idea who his father was. Although his adoptive parents implored Oedipus to ignore the man's ravings, he could not put his mind to rest, and Oedipus resolved to travel to the Oracle at Delphi and ask her the identity of his parents. The Oracle, however, did not tell Oedipus who his parents were, and rather revealed the disturbing prophecy that he would couple with his mother and kill his father. Resolving that this should never come to pass, Oedipus did not go back to Corinth, to those he believed to be his parents, but rather headed for Thebes. On his journey, Oedipus came to a crossroads and was faced with a carriage driving the opposite direction. The driver struck Oedipus to get him to move out of the way, but this enraged the young man, who proceeded to fight and kill the driver and the man he was transporting - King Laius. Having unwittingly fulfilled half of the prophecy, Oedipus carried on to Thebes.

**The Sphinx**

The Sphinx, a terrible monster with the body of a lion, wings of an eagle and head of a woman had been sent by the gods to terrorize Thebes as punishment for Laius' misdeeds concerning the rape of a prince of a neighboring kingdom. This fiend would ask any passing traveler her riddle, and if they were unable to answer correctly, she would devour them. Since no man had been able to guess the answer, Thebes was effectively cut off from the outside world. When Oedipus came to Thebes, the Sphinx asked him her riddle, which he was able to solve. The story goes that she went mad and threw herself off a cliff, thus freeing Thebes from her fearsome influence. The people of Thebes were so grateful to Oedipus that they proclaimed him their king, since Laius had been mysteriously killed on the road. They also suggested that he marry his widow, Jocasta, to solidify his position as ruler of the city. Thus the prophecy of the Delphic oracle came to pass.

Although the riddle the Sphinx asked is not specified in any early Greek texts, late tradition states that the question she asked was: 'What has four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon and three legs in the evening?'

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