

A MYTH IS AS GOOD AS A MILE

By Fred Hobbs

Okay. Go ahead and groan at the title of this piece. No apologies, though. Under the doctrine of irresistible impulse, no judge or jury in any court in the land would convict me on a charge of “excessively bad pun purveying.”

Truth is, that many false and fanciful stories (aka, myths) are as good as they are phony, not just by a mile, but a country mile.

Myths have been around a long time, back to antiquity in the times of the ancient Greeks and Chinese. And they still exist. A favorite in Greek mythology centers on a really, really bad guy: Sisyphus, the legendary rogue who cheated death not once, but twice. He was called “the craftiest of men” by Homer, author of the “best sellers” *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

Legend tells us that in his time on earth, Sisyphus killed, raped and stole with abandon. Among the denizens of the Underworld, Sisyphus was not just noted and hated for his crimes against mere mortals, but for his cunning treachery in his relations with the gods. In one scenario more complicated than an episode of “As the World Turns”, Sisyphus named Zeus as the abductor of the daughter of a fellow god. Zeus, not a very nice guy himself, had in fact committed the dirty deed. To punish Sisyphus for his betrayal, Zeus “sicked” Thanatos (Death) on him. Sisyphus somehow managed to entrap Death, slapped him in heavy chains, and kept him prisoner in Sisyphus’ house. The god Ares later set Death free, but Sisyphus managed to elude Death’s punishment by manipulating the prescribed protocol for entry into Hades (Hell.)

On a much more contemporary take on myths, here are a few common, popular and interesting ones, largely debunked, taken from a list printed on *Wikipedia*:

A penny dropped from the top of a tall building could kill a pedestrian. Actual tests show that with a combination of its shape and wind friction, a penny when tossed from the 1,250-foot Empire State Building, would travel fast enough merely to sting an unlucky pedestrian.

Humans use only 10 percent of their brains. “This media darling has been around for at least a century” says the *Wikipedia* article. It’s just not true. MRI imaging clearly demonstrates that humans put most of their cerebral cortex to good use, even while dozing.

Animals can predict natural disasters. No evidence of this. Keen senses of smell, hearing and sharp instincts alone are enough to send them scattering for the hillsides or shelter during a hurricane, tsunami or even a hailstorm.

There is no gravity in space. Blame the term “zero gravity” for this common misconception, advises the write-up on the subject of myths. Gravity is everywhere even in space. Astronauts appear weightless because they are in continuous freefall toward the Earth, staying aloft

because of their horizontal motion.

And finally, this well-worn, but persistently reported myth: *Men think about sex every seven seconds*. There is no scientific proof of this. I can only reveal my own thoughts on this subject, but I'm not going to.