



## Olympic Games

**Leslie What**

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In the humorous style of Tom Robbins, this novel tells an amusing yet wise story about love and power. Its quirky, recognizable characters act out a comedy of errors, replaying the old roles and conflicts of Greek myths within a twenty-first-century setting where gods and goddesses no longer have the power they once did.

Zeus, god of thunder and lightning, first appears as a buffed-up construction worker on the prowl for unsuspecting virgins in New York City. When he stops to consult the homeless Oracle, he is warned, “beware of scorned women.” But the god’s own hubris—“It’s them that should beware of me”—leads him into turmoil and, as in the old myths, creates trouble for everyone else along the way.

While Zeus and Hera, who is pregnant by a beetle (yes, a beetle), continue their mythic struggle, Penelope, the young naiad seduced by Zeus a thousand years ago and then turned into a cherry tree, thinks she has found true love at last with Possum, the artistic hermit. Unable to travel anywhere without walking backwards, Possum tenderly cares for Penelope when she discovers she is unable to walk at all after freeing herself from the tree.

Just when a happy ending appears possible for Penelope and Possum, Zeus, not satisfied with his newly-established mountaintop cult of rich, wolf-howling executives (a great bit of satire on New Age movements), finally discovers Penelope and kidnaps her. Possum heads to the mountaintop to rescue Penelope, accompanied by Eddie, a thirty-year-old man with a twelve-year-old mind. Hera goes seeking Zeus, too, dragging along her mutant-winged son, Igor, along with an architect-turned-cook and a spa masseuse, and she confronts her errant husband with unexpected results.

*For the first time in a thousand years, Hera started to question whether things were twisted around. Zeus was a terrible leader. Who put him in charge, anyway? Come to think of it, the answer was Zeus. Well, maybe her husband ought to take his turn and follow her around for a change, instead of vice versa.*

The author, who won a Nebula Award for her short story, *The Cost of Doing Business*, is also an artist and a journalist, and manages to combine the wacky and whimsical with the tender and serious to great success. Though her story may be of gods and goddesses and the truly weird, the foibles, challenges, and failures of her characters, and her effective use of satire, effectively catch the reader up into the author’s created world. By the end of *Olympic Games*, a story that crosses categories and genres, the reader is as apt to be wiping a tear from the eye as smiling at Hera’s new understanding.

PAULA SCARDAMALIA (August 18, 2009)

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