

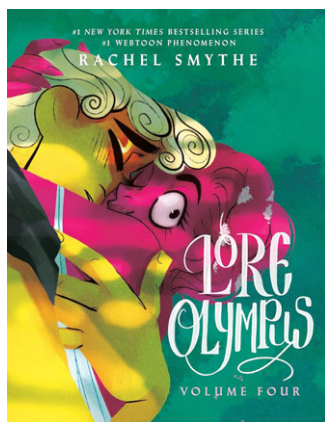
Book Review

Lore Olympus, Volume Four

Smythe (R.), Pp. 416, b/w & colour ill. London: Del Rey, 2023. Cased, £22. ISBN: 978-1-5299-0988-3

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Lore Olympus: Volume Four is the fourth volume collecting comics originally posted to the comic-sharing Webtoon website, telling a story inspired by various Greek myths, most notably the story of the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*. The comic's author, Rachel Smythe, first began releasing the comic in 2018 and eventually concluded the story in 2024. As of the time of writing, in early September 2024, the

comic has been viewed around 1.4 billion times. Undoubtedly, then, *Lore Olympus* was a very popular series which clearly garnered a large following. It is entirely possible, therefore, that the reader of this review might have fans of the series amongst their own students!

Whilst this review is specifically about the fourth volume of *Lore Olympus*, I will be making reference throughout this review to themes of the comic more generally. The story of *Lore Olympus* is lengthy, spanning 280 chapters, or 'episodes', with only episodes 76-102 being collected in Volume Four. In order to offer a review of this volume, therefore, it is necessary for me to in part discuss the comic more broadly.

The story of *Lore Olympus* primarily focuses upon the life of the goddess Persephone as she develops a relationship with the god Hades. A wide cast of gods is featured throughout the story, with some of these gods even starring in their own side-stories - for instance, a sub-plot involved Hera discovering that Zeus has been using his smart phone to send nude images of himself to other goddesses. The very contemporary nature of *Lore Olympus* should be apparent from the previous sentence. The gods in the story are members of a company. They drive cars, use smart phones, and wear 21st century outfits. This is far from a traditional depiction of the gods of Ancient Greek religion.

Similarly untraditional is the role which Hades seems to play in the story. Whereas, in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, Hades plays the role of an aggressor, snatching Persephone away from her

flower collecting whilst she screams for help, in *Lore Olympus* Hades is more withdrawn and substantially more considerate of Persephone's feelings. In Volume 4, we see instead Apollo take on a role similar to that of Hades in the source material. It is through Apollo's actions, as well as those of other characters such as Hades' girlfriend Minthe, in the narrative that Smythe uses Greek mythology to explore complex and difficult themes such as abusive relationships and sexual assault. It is for its sensitive but honest treatment of such difficult topics that *Lore Olympus* and its author deserve praise. Unfortunately, in spite of the positives outlined above, it is difficult to recommend *Lore Olympus: Volume 4* as a resource for a teacher. Although discussions pertaining to contemporary reception of Classical mythology can be a valid and useful method to encourage engagement and critical thinking in regards to ancient material, the length and complexity of *Lore Olympus'* story will make the narrative difficult to integrate into any syllabus which doesn't have considerable room to breathe. That said, there might be room for analysis of individual moments and discussions of them in relation to comparative moments from a Classical source (for instance, the aforementioned characterisation of Hades). Nevertheless, *Lore Olympus* was one, continuous narrative told over six years, with characters fairly regularly referencing past events and responding to present ones with their previous experiences in mind. Even those individual moments which could be extracted for analysis are therefore likely to be embedded in a much wider context which might make viewing them in isolation tricky. Another barrier to *Lore Olympus'* use is how it is clearly designed to be read by a relatively mature audience. Strong language is used at various points, as are lewd remarks, and, as noted above, the story deals with difficult and upsetting themes which might not be appropriate for a younger audience. Discussions of sex also feature throughout. Finally, it has to be stressed that *Lore Olympus* is less of an adaptation of primary Classical sources and more of an original work which uses Classical mythology and religion as inspiration. Moreover, at points the narrative reads as a deconstruction of Greek mythology, most notably in its dealing with sexual assault in the context of the gods, offering an opportunity to explore the nature of consent in mythology through an analysis of the text. *Lore Olympus*, therefore, is probably not at all best utilised as a means of reinforcing knowledge of Greek mythology or even as acting as an introduction to it. As a pedagogical tool, it is best suited to being used as a vehicle through which to explore the reception and relevance of Greek mythology to a modern audience with a group who are already very knowledgeable about Greek mythology. This, combined with the aforementioned issues, will undoubtedly make it difficult to be utilised in a classroom setting. However, in an extracurricular context, for instance as part of a reading group populated by students of an appropriate age given the subject matters mentioned prior, this text may prove to be an inspiring and engaging subject of discourse.

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