

Juggler in the Wind

by Wim Coleman and Pat Perrin

Words about Mythology

Myths are ancient stories that call on heroes—sometimes reluctant heroes—to have courage, take risks, face the seemingly impossible. Those stories are still told today because they entertain and inform us. We can explore ways to interpret those tales in relation to our own lives, and discover what it means to experience grand adventures in our own world.

The following is excerpted from “What is Mythology?” an essay by Wim Coleman, published in his collection of plays, *Nine Muses: Modern Plays from Classic Myths*, Logan, Iowa: Perfection Learning, 2001:

Myths explain things. Long ago, when life was full of mysteries, myths helped people make sense of a perplexing world. For example, winter comes when the grain goddess grieves for her daughter’s death. Spring comes when the goddess rejoices over her daughter’s rebirth.

Myths also explain deeper questions. For example, how did the world itself come to be? How did life begin? How were human beings created—and why? And why is there suffering and death in the world?...

But if myths do nothing more than explain, why do they still inspire our imaginations? We have science to explain things now....

So why do we still seem to need myths?

For one thing, the world is still more mysterious than we often admit. And mythology still addresses that mystery.

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If a myth has influenced anyone’s life,
then in some sense it “happened”—
and is therefore history.

—*Eye of the Macaw*
(forthcoming from Plays on Ideas)



THE WAND BEARER TRILOGY
PART ONE



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The following was originally written as a guest blog for The Page Flipper:

Greek Gods Now?

Wim Coleman and Pat Perrin

What if the Greek gods had been real? If gods are immortal, doesn't that mean that they're still among us somehow? As novelists, one of our most common themes is story itself, and how stories affect our lives. So back in the late 1980s, these questions got us started working on *The Wand Bearer Trilogy* (of which *Juggler in the Wind* is part one), a saga about the Greek gods in our own time and a teenage boy's adventures among them.

We were partly inspired by the ending of Robert Graves's book *Greek Gods and Heroes*. Graves proposes that reign of these deities ended in A.D. 363. "The Olympians were forced to hide in woods and caves," he writes in his final sentence, "and have not been seen for centuries." So what might we expect if they turned up again?

We got a clue from Tom Robbins's novel *Jitterbug Perfume*. One of its characters is the Greek goat-god Pan, who says, "True, we art immune to the chills and accidents that swallow up humanity, but gods can die. We live only so long as people believe in us." Well, hardly anybody has believed in the Olympian gods for a long, long time. And yet, people still enjoy their stories. So are they still alive? If so, how are they doing?

A key bit of inspiration came when we attended a 1987 performance of *Cirque du Soleil* in Los Angeles—their first engagement in the U.S., if we remember right. Back then, *Cirque* was not the grand spectacle it is now, but a much smaller, more intimate show. As we walked toward the fairly modest circus tent, the idea hit us—the Olympians are now a traveling circus! And they're not a big, prosperous circus, either, but one that barely gets by—and is, in fact, on the run from the law.

Since we started working on *The Wand Bearer Trilogy* all those years ago, we've wrestled with all sorts of questions. We decided that our gods/circus performers are showing their remarkable age and aren't in ideal shape for the rigors their occupation. We also realized that their memories aren't all that great, either. They don't quite recall their earlier divinity, or that they ruled the known universe—and yet hints of their ancient powers keep cropping up.

At the center of it all is our teenage hero, Randy Carmichael, who senses a mysterious connection to the performers. And mortal though he may be (or thinks he is), he begins to discover powers of his own. His adventure raises a question for all of us: If the gods can grow old and all-too-human, might we mortals have the capacity to grow the other way—to become something more than human? We don't know the answer yet; writing, for us, is a way of finding out things. We hope you'll join us in this journey of discovery.



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