Kimberly MacNeill, "Entry on: Percy Jackson and the Olympians (Series): The Lightning Thief by Chris Columbus , Rick Riordan, Chris Titley", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/370. Entry version as of September 14, 2026.

Chris Columbus , Rick Riordan , Chris Titley

Percy Jackson and the Olympians (Series): The Lightning Thief

United States (2010)

TAGS: Athena Chiron / Cheiron Dionysus / Dionysos Gods Hades Hero(es) Katabasis Lotus Eaters / Lotophagoi Medusa Minotaur Persephone Poseidon Satyr(s) Underworld Zeus

We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Percy Jackson and the Olympians (Series): The Lightning Thief
Studio/Production Company	Fox 2000
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2010
First Edition Details	*Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*. Directed by Chris Columbus, Written by Chris Titley, Fox 2000, 2010.
Running time	118 min
Date of the First DVD or VHS	2010 (DVD: United States, Canada)
Available Onllne	Trailer (accessed: May 25, 2018).
Awards	2010 – MTV Movie and TV Awards – nominated; 2010 – Teen Choice Awards – nominated.
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Adaptations, Alternative histories (Fiction), Fantasy fiction, Magic realist fiction, Motion picture, Mythological fiction
Target Audience	Crossover (Children with parental guidance)

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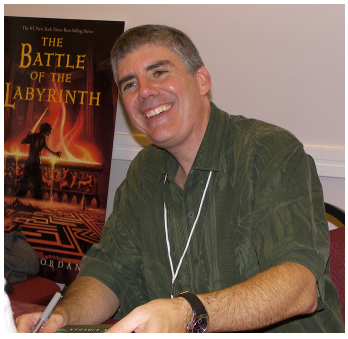
Creators

Chris Columbus , b. 1958
(Director)

Chris Columbus is an American film director, screen writer and producer. A graduate of the prestigious New York University Film and Television School his career was launched when Steven Spielberg purchased his screenplay for *Gremlins*. Columbus went on to write two further screenplays for Spielberg (*The Goonies* and *Young Sherlock Holmes*) before progressing to directing. In a thirty-four year career, despite little acknowledgement in the form of awards, his films have been great commercial and often cult successes. His previous films demonstrate Columbus is deft at using the fantastical to explore family dynamics, and in particular the parent-child relationship. A common motif is of adults being inept and the children saving the day. A further common theme of his work is exploring the sense of home and community. Examples of his work are: *The Goonies*, *Gremlins*, *Home Alone*, *Mrs Doubtfire* and more recently the *Harry Potter* Films. For the first two in the series Columbus holds directing credentials, and he has acted as a producer for the rest of the series. Much of his work has involved working on adaptations from literary sources.

Bio prepared by Kimberly MacNeill, University of Roehampton, macneilk@roehampton.ac.uk



Rick Riordan by Larry D.

Rick Riordan , b. 1964
(Author)

Rick Riordan previously taught History and English at middle school in the American education system. He began writing mystery novels for adult readers before creating the *Percy Jackson* series, which began as a bedtime story for his son. Prior to *Percy Jackson*, his adult crime novels the *Tres Navarre* series received numerous nominations and awards. Most notably the final novel in the series, *Rebel Island*,

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Moore, 2007. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0 (accessed: December 22, 2021).

won the Anthony Award, Shamus Award and The Edgar Allan Poe Award – the "big three" of the mystery genre. Though it is through the success of *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* and its subsequent purchase by Disney which has led Riordan to leave teaching to pursue writing as a full-time career. He is now one of the *New York Times* bestselling authors.

Source:

Q&A with the Author (accessed: January 10, 2018).

Bio prepared by Kimberly MacNeill, University of Roehampton, macneilk@roehampton.ac.uk

Chris Titley (Screenwriter)

Craig Titley is an American producer and writer. He began his career as an assistant on films such as the Joe Dante directed *Matinee*. Before writing the screenplay for *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* he wrote the screenplays for the *Scooby-doo* film adaptation and the *Cheaper by the Dozen* franchise. His producer credentials include *Agents of Shield* and *The Cape*. Just prior to working on *Percy Jackson* Titley completed his PhD in Mythological Studies from the Pacifica Institute in Santa Barbara.

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Additional information

Casting	Percy Jackson – Logan Lerman (1992–), Annabeth Chase – Alexandra Daddario (1986–), Grover Underwood – Brandon T. Jackson (1984–), Luke Castellen – Jake Abel (1987–), Chiron – Pierce Brosnan (1953–), Poseidon – Kevin McKidd (1973–), Zeus – Sean Bean (1959–).
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	*Percy Jackson and The Sea of Monsters* (2013).
Summary	The film opens with a meeting between Poseidon and Zeus on the observation deck of the Empire State Building. Zeus reveals that his lightning bolt has been stolen and believes Poseidon's son to be the thief. It must be returned within fourteen days in time for the summer solstice or Zeus will declare war. During a school trip to a museum, Percy Jackson is attacked by his English teacher Mrs Dodds, who transforms into a Fury and demands that Percy return the lightning bolt. Percy's Latin teacher, Mr Brunner, and best friend, Grover, rescue Percy, both of whom are not perplexed by her appearance. Mr Brunner gives Percy a pen, describing it as a powerful weapon. A confused Percy is taken home by Grover who explains the situation to Percy's mother Sally and the three travel to Camp Half-blood. Sally and Grover explain to Percy that he is a demigod and that the gods and monsters of ancient Greece are real. Percy also discovers that Grover is in fact a satyr sent to protect him. The car is then attacked by a Minotaur whom Percy manages to defeat, discovering that the pen turns into a sword when clicked. However, before the Minotaur is killed, he seizes Sally, and she is vapourised. Exhausted from the encounter, Percy faints.

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A few days later, Percy wakes up in an old-fashioned military infirmary and is greeted by Grover who is now dressed in Ancient Greek military uniform. Grover then takes him around the camp, explaining that it is a safe place for demigods to live and train. Percy discovers that his Latin teacher, Mr Brunner, is in fact the centaur Chiron, who informs him that Percy is the son of Poseidon and that he should go to Olympus and plead his innocence to Zeus, whom Chiron believes to be reasonable. Percy is then invited to a game of Capture the Flag in which Annabeth (daughter of Athena) and Luke (son of Hermes) are the team captains. Percy, on Luke's team, is badly injured by Annabeth before he stumbles in the river discovering that water not only revives him, but increases his strength. This enables Percy to defeat Annabeth and win the game. The celebration cookout is interrupted by Hades appearing in the camp as a winged demon. Hades reveals that Percy's mother is alive and captive in the Underworld and that he is willing to release her in exchange for the lightning bolt, which he also presumes is in Percy's procession.

When everyone is in bed, Percy sets out to the Underworld accompanied by Annabeth and Grover. Luke gives them a pair of winged basketball shoes and a map to the Underworld with the locations of three special pearls, which will enable them to return. On the journey to retrieve the pearls, they discover that all three are guarded by monsters from Greek myths, the first being Medusa whom Percy defeats by using his iPhone to see her reflection. The trio take the head and use it to defeat the Hydra, who guards the second pearl. The final pearl is in the roulette wheel at the Lotus Casino. Poseidon speaks to Percy in his thoughts, enabling Percy to break from the Lotus Eaters' magic and escape. The three head to the Underworld, the entrance to which is located in the Hollywood sign. Charon delivers them to the place of Hades where they first meet a disgruntled Persephone. Luke's betrayal is revealed when the lightning bolt appears in the shield given by him to Percy. Hades seizes the bolt declaring that he will use it to overthrow Zeus, but is overpowered by Persephone, who zaps him unconscious allowing the heroes to escape. With only three pearls, Grover stays in the Underworld whilst Percy, Annabeth and his mother head to the Empire State Building. There they encounter Luke and he and Percy do battle. Luke is defeated when Percy is able to command the water in a water tower and Poseidon's trident appears to him. With time running out, Percy returns the bolt to Zeus who commends him on his actions, Percy reveals Luke's plot and asks that Grover be returned

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from the Underworld.

Percy returns to Camp Half-blood and finds that Zeus has honoured his request and Grover is back from the Underworld. On approaching Annabeth, what seems like a kiss is a trick and the two spar. Percy in voiceover declares that he is home. A post-credits scene sees Gabe, now kicked out of the apartment, opening a fridge to find the head of Medusa which wakes up and turns him to stone.

Analysis

At the centre of the story are three characters dealing with the absence of one or both parents and how they resolve this as individuals. Percy refers to his mythical heritage in terms of "the other" and, although he is also an outcast in the "real" world, he initially identifies himself only via his mortal parent. In contrast, Annabeth notes that she has spent most of her life at Camp Half-blood away from the mortal world and seeks to gain her mother's approval and reach her own potential by excelling in the traits associated with Athena. For Luke, it manifests itself as a consuming rage as he feels rejected by both worlds and seeks to destroy them, though in his plans for revenge he inadvertently displays a trait of his father Hermes: that of trickery. The final exchange between Percy and Poseidon is the paradigm of the American father-son relationship: Percy missed out on a father to play ball with; the godly nature of his father is irrelevant.

In this adaptation of the novel, the protagonist's age is increased from twelve to sixteen. The change in age facilitates a romantic angle in the relationship between Annabeth and Percy. Annabeth questions whether they can even be friends due to the rivalry between their parents, during which she recounts the myth of the founding of Athens to an ignorant Percy. The lustful nature of the satyr is also alluded to with interactions between Grover and the daughters of Aphrodite and his sexualised encounter with Persephone in the Underworld. The older ages of the trio also help facilitate the story as they can undertake their own road trip rather than relying on buses or lifts.

Major themes in the film are loyalty, betrayal and sacrifice. Chiron recounts the story of the defeat of Kronos at the hands of his sons, accomplished only by the brothers working together. This is in contrast to the strained relationship between Zeus and Poseidon and the bitterness directed towards them by Hades in the modern world. Percy's mother, Sally, is willing to sacrifice her own happiness in

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order to protect her son, demonstrated by her marriage to his abusive stepfather Gabe. The reasoning is that Gabe has an overwhelming body odour which prevents Percy's demigod scent from being detected by any gods or monsters who would wish to harm him.

From the start, Percy is set as the innocent pawn in a greater plot, flagged by a quote from Othello. Percy, like Desdemona, is falsely accused of a crime (the theft of the thunderbolt) and must face the wrath of the gods. Luke acts similarly to Iago, disguising himself as a friend, whilst actually using Percy to start a war in Olympus. However, unlike Desdemona, Percy, with knowledge of the plot, then acts with his own agency to defeat Luke and return the thunderbolt to Zeus.

At the climax of the film, Percy begins to accept Poseidon's role in his life and identity, which culminates in the appearance of the trident in his hand. Percy's final words in a voiceover state that he is home, referring to Camp Half-blood; this contrasts to his feelings on arrival. Percy's natural abilities in sword play are explained by his high birth as the son of Poseidon. Annabeth, despite being the daughter of a key Olympian god, is not a child of the "big three" and is shown as training vigorously. Percy, on the other hand, defeats Annabeth on his arrival to the camp with very little training, using only the natural powers given to him by his father – a nod, perhaps, to the idea of privilege and advantage due to social status.

In an change from the novel, the hydra appears as a monster to defeat on the quest (the hydra appears in the second book rather than the first). This is potentially due to the audience being visually familiar with it from other films such as Ray Harryhausen's *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963). Cerberus has been changed from a three headed dog to three hellhounds; it is worth noting that this change might be due to the use of a three-headed dog in the first Harry Potter film, also directed by Columbus – in an attempt at distancing from an already heavily compared series. The dead are depicted as living in flames which visually is more associated with the Christian Hell than the Greek Underworld and Hades himself appears in his 'god form' as a giant, fiery devil-like creature.

Like the book, the film incorporates iconography and locations relevant to American culture. For example, the trio drive a Ford Pickup truck and Hermes' winged shoes are high top sneakers. The Land of the Lotus Eaters is now residing in a Las Vegas Casino and the heroes visit a real location where the Ancient has been merged

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	with the modern: the Athena statue at the Parthenon in Nashville. These references and inclusions fuse the modern world with ancient mythology, as may be especially well exemplified when, to complete his quest, Percy uses an iPhone to defeat Medusa rather than a shield. As in the book, the idea of a disability being a hidden strength is explored via Grover and Chiron, whose perceived disabilities hide their true forms. Grover chides Percy for his dismissal of Grover as a guardian referring to his crutches, commenting that Percy shouldn't underestimate his capabilities. Percy's own disabilities – dyslexia and ADHD – are actually his predisposition to read Ancient Greek and battle reflexes.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Athena Chiron / Cheiron Dionysus / Dionysos Gods Hades Hero(es) Katabasis Lotus Eaters / Lotophagoi Medusa Minotaur Persephone Poseidon Satyr(s) Underworld Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Coming of age Emotions Family Friendship Humanity Love Sacrifice
Further Reading	Lancelyn Green, Roger, *Tales of the Greek Heroes*. Reprinted in 2010 as a film tie-in with a foreword by Rick Riordan. The front cover is a still from the film. Paul, Joanna, "Percy Jackson and Myth-making in the Twenty-First Century", in *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology.* Riordan, Rick. *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief*.
Addenda	Subtitles region 2 dvd: English (hearing impaired), Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, Swedish.

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