



THE *Hollywood* REPORTER

Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief— Film Review

By Ethan Alter, February 10, 2010 09:10 EST



Bottom Line: While this Greek mythology-themed adventure might appeal to younger viewers, “Percy Jackson” ultimately doesn’t have the goods to become the next “Harry Potter.” Besides possessing the young year’s lengthiest and most ungainly title, “Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief” is also notable for being Hollywood’s latest attempt to turn a series of popular kid-friendly fantasy novels into the next “Harry Potter”-like film franchise...

So has “Percy Jackson” successfully cracked the “Potter” code? In terms of overall quality, not even close. Still, the film’s carefully calibrated mixture of CGI-enhanced spectacle, diverting (and blood-free) action sequences and adolescent angst could make it a modest hit with the eight to 12-year-old set. Where Harry’s exploits attract audiences of all ages, though, Percy’s appeal seems strictly limited to the family moviegoing crowd; anyone outside of that demo is better off waiting for part one of “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,” due in theatres in November.

Adhering to the same “hero’s journey” narrative that has driven almost every cinematic fantasy-adventure since “Star Wars,” the inaugural installment of this would-be franchise introduces viewers to Percy Jackson, a surly teenager who discovers that he is actually the offspring of the Greek god Poseidon. This news couldn’t come at a more difficult time; a war is brewing amongst the gods over Zeus’ stolen lightning bolt and Percy is widely assumed to be the thief.

Spirited away to a demigod boot camp with the inelegant name Camp Half Blood, the novice hero is trained in the art of war and allies himself with a wisecracking Satyr... and the goddess Athena’s butt-kicking daughter Annabeth. Together, the trio head back out into the real world to save Percy’s human mother from the clutches of Hades and find a way to avert the coming clash of the titans.

“The Lightning Thief” is at its best when director Chris Columbus and screenwriter Craig Titley find ways to put a fun contemporary spin on some of the familiar names and storylines from Greek mythology. In his battle with snake-haired Medusa for example, Percy relies on the reflective surface on the back of his iPod in place of a mirror. The island of the Lotus Eaters, meanwhile, has been transformed into a lavish Las Vegas nightclub where time literally stands still. But the film’s haphazard plotting and bland characterizations often undermine these clever conceits...

What’s really lacking in “The Lightning Thief” is a genuine sense of wonder, the same thing that brings viewers back to Hogwarts over and over again. Percy’s world seems like a decent place to visit, but it’s just not magical enough to make you want to live there.

TM & © Scholastic Inc. All rights reserved. Review: © 2010 by The Hollywood Reporter. Photo: © 20th Century Fox, courtesy Everett Collection. Used by permission. SCHOLASTIC, TRAITS WRITING, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc. Other company names, brand names, and product names are the property and/or trademarks of their respective owners. Scholastic does not endorse any product or business entity mentioned herein. The original spelling, grammar, and word usage of the actual product shown are reproduced here. TRG-02

SCHOLASTIC

Traits
Writing™

Unit 2: Week 1 • Ideas: Finding a Topic • Narrative