

## **S2 E39: Asterism: Percy Jackson & The Olympians TV Show**

Jordan: Hi, I'm Jordan.

Kit: And I'm Kit.

Jordan: Welcome to Starry Time

Kit: Asterisms Edition.

Jordan: Where stars plus lines equal stories

Kit: With an asterisk.

Jordan: In these episodes, we'll explore ideas, concepts, or people that didn't make it into the main show.

Kit: Yeah, so we had talked about watching the show that's the topic for our episode for today, before our Perseus episodes, but we hadn't gotten around to it. And so, since I brought this series up on our pop culture episode, we decided that now is the exact right time to dive into the world of Disney's version of Percy Jackson and the Olympians.

Jordan: And we've done a couple of these pilot episodes this season, including Gene Rodberry's Andromeda, as well as Hercules the animated series.

Kit: Do not sleep on Hercules the animated series. Uh, we all loved it. It was delightful. It

was on Disney Plus. Yeah, you want to watch that one, for sure.

Jordan: We went from having no idea it existed to demanding more, like those episodes. We'll start out with the background on the show. We'll recap some of the major plot points and end with our reactions and thoughts. It should probably go without saying, but there are spoilers ahead for the first episode of Disney's Percy Jackson and the Olympians. And Kit might throw in a first book spoiler or two, so be warned.

Kit: So this show is based on a series of middle grade slash young adult books written by Rick Riordan which I gave a little bit of background on in our last episode on the pop culture of Perseus.

Jordan: Yes, Kit, you brought that up last week, of course. So, everybody get into our back catalog, starting with pop culture, Perseus.

Kit: So today we're going to be talking specifically about, as I said, Disney's version of Percy Jackson and the Olympians, the television show, a television series. It premiered in December 2023 on DisneyPlus, and the first season has now ended, and all eight episodes are, uh, available for streaming.

Jordan: The season has a 92% on Rotten Tomatoes. Pretty, pretty good. And the consensus was mostly about how faithful this representation was to the first book of the Percy Jackson series.

Kit: This is particularly notable because before this current television show, there was a film named after the first book released in 2010, as well as a second film named after the second book released in 2013. And this should tell you something, there was a third

film that was in development but was never made, and the Rotten Tomatoes score for the first movie in 2010 was a brutal 49%. And the script was publicly critiqued by Rick Riordan, the author of the book.

Jordan: Yeah, it's not great when the author of the book pretty much completely disowns it.

Kit: Mhm.

Jordan: I mean, in fact, I read that Riordan didn't even want to promote the movie, currently doesn't even list it on his website, so 49% probably reflects about how he felt about the adaptation as well.

Kit: Meanwhile, Rick Riordan is an executive producer on this DisneyPlus show. Um, and there are some other adaptations of this first book in the Percy Jackson and the Olympian series, which is called the Lightning Thief. And, uh, it includes a video game and also a musical.

Jordan: Yes, there is lots more Percy content out there if you are interested. And Disney has already renewed a second season of Percy Jackson and the Olympians, which will shockingly be focused on the second book of the series.

Kit: Great. Let's talk about the plot of this first episode, which was titled "I Accidentally Vaporized my Pre-Algebra Teacher," teacher,

Jordan: Kit, who hasn't, right?

Kit: So we start with a voiceover from our main character, Perseus, aka Percy Jackson.

Jordan: Who is portrayed by a 15 year old actor named Walker Scobell, who you may know from a movie called the Adam Project.

Kit: Percy, unlike Walker, is only twelve. Um, and in this voiceover, we sort of get a snapshot of his life. You know, his quote unquote before life.

Jordan: Yes. Before the action really picks up, Percy always seems to have been a bit different. He sees all kind of hidden myths or hidden mythies throughout the world that other people just can't seem to see. Uh, we get a brief shot of Pegasus

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Jordan: as an example of this sort of these visions that he would have consistently through his past.

Kit: And lest we forget that Pegasus is the child of Medusa, somehow.

Jordan: Well, yeah, one of two that she had, but only one of them was a horse.

Kit: Horse, yeah, right

Jordan: All right. No doubt. So Perseus is picked on. He's bullied in part because he seems a bit different. He's able to see things that other people can't, but also because he seems to have a lot of difficulty reading and focusing.

Kit: Yeah, and so we mentioned this last week, but canonically, Percy has dyslexia and ADHD. But lucky for Perseus, at some point along the way and through his childhood, he makes a best friend. He has a best friend who likes the same stuff that he likes and who just, like, really gets him.

Jordan: He even mentions in the show, yes, his life changed once he meets Grover, his new BFF, who introduces him to these really cool mythological Magic Cards. And Grover is portrayed by Aryan Simhadri, who has also been in a few Netflix and DisneyPlus shows.

Kit: So with all that backstory in place, with our introduction to Percy, we are on a school field trip at the Met museum, in New York City. And Perseus and the class are looking at the ancient Greek statues, and he's given a worksheet that he has to complete.

Jordan: Yeah. And they had a really great scene here where they do a nice visualization of Percy's dyslexia as he's looking on the worksheet and the letters are sort of blurry and all moving around.

Kit: Yeah, I liked that. Like, there's no point in the first episode where they're like, I have dyslexia or I have ADHD. It's just this way of sort of showing instead of telling and also making it sort of part, just like, part of who he is. Okay, so Percy is looking up at the statue of Perseus holding the head of Medusa. And he conveniently just has a little flashback to being at the Met Museum with his mom, who basically just gives us a rundown of the Danae myth. So remembering that Danae is the mother of Perseus and telling Perseus what that myth was about.

Jordan: Yeah, I thought this was also a very effective scene, a quick flashback. And they

set up the mom to ask some important questions of younger Perseus. Like, how does he know Medusa is the monster and Perseus is the hero? And how is he able to tell which is which and to not always be so certain that he can tell. And she gives him some pushback about not judging based on appearances. And we're able to see that there's a very close relationship between Percy and his mom.

Kit: Yeah. So I think part of the reason she's telling this story about Danae and Perseus is about this sort of, like, bond that they have. Um, yeah, we get this sense that Perseus and his mom are sort of a unit. It's them versus everyone else, but also this feeling that he has a lot of responsibility. Maybe he's taken care of his mom, um, which I think is more present in the book than we see here. So I might be projecting a little bit onto the first episode, but there's certainly that, um, that idea of closeness about their relationship, for sure.

Jordan: Moving forward with the plot, Percy's little flashback gets him teased by the school bully, Nancy Boba Fett? Bob--bo

Kit: It did sound like Boba Fett, but I can't remember what it is.

Jordan: Nancy. I had the CC on and it is Bobafit but, uh, b o b a f i t t. But in my head, I was calling her Nancy Boba Fett the whole episode. And we see Percy and Grover talking about how Nancy is a bully. And Grover does a very self referential sort of meta commentary on why bullies are bullies, and somehow Percy magics Nancy into a fountain

Kit: So he doesn't touch her, and that's important. But the moment he magics Nancy into the fountain, his pre algebra teacher, presumably, Mrs. Dobbs, who's portrayed by

Megan Mullaly, whose name we both struggled to come up with, her last name and how it was spelled as we were watching.

Jordan: Yep.

Kit: She turns into a very scary fury, uh, which looked more like a harpy, but I believe is a fury from ancient Greek mythology and attacks Percy.

Jordan: Percy stabs her with his magic pen, and she, like, disappears or turns into this dust thing. And no one seems to believe once Percy returns back to the present or once this incident is over, that she's ever even existed in the first place, which confuses Percy, leaves him second guessing himself and what just happened.

Kit: Yeah, absolutely. So he gets called into the principal's office with Grover for pushing Nancy into a fountain. And again, nobody remembers. Mrs. Dobbs. She never existed. And basically, Grover throws Percy under the bus. He's like,

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Kit: I saw Percy push her in, which, of course, technically, he didn't push her in.

Jordan: But he definitely did force project her or magic her to get into the fountain. So anyways, Percy's pretty mad. Grover lied, threw him under the bus. But maybe he didn't really, really lie, did he?

Kit: Yeah, definitely a technicality. But one way or another, one push into the fountain and Percy is expelled from what appears to be a very fancy, like, private school called

Yancy. And he goes back home to New York City, where he lives. And we meet his stepdad, Gabe. I believe it's his stepdad. It's either his stepdad or his mother's boyfriend, Gabe.

Jordan: And right off the bat, we don't like Gabe. We are pretty, pretty out on Gabe. He's pretty bossy, extremely annoying, doesn't have a job, really seems inconsiderate and, um, inebriated and angry. And right off the bat, we're pretty out on stepdad/ Mom's boyfriend, Gabe.

Kit: Yeah. In the book, he I remember him being a lot scarier and, like, more overtly abusive, but they really dialed that back in this episode, which I liked in terms of just making it a little bit of an easier thing to watch. But it does make Percy's adultification a little harder to understand because Percy does not really act like a twelve year old in a lot of ways. And part of that, I think, in the book, makes more sense since it seems like he's sort of in the role of protector for his mother. And he's sort of a person that's lived under, um, somebody who's been abusive. And so it's a little harder to understand in this context. But I liked how they portrayed Gabe. But we're still out on Gabe without it having to be necessarily explicit.

Jordan: Percy tries to avoid a confrontation here with Gabe, though he talks back a little bit, but he's mostly interested in figuring out what's going on with his mom, who is hanging out on the fire escape in a downpour. And Percy's adultification does seem to come in, in this scene a little bit where he seems to be taking care of her. She seems a little bit lost or far away, but she tells Percy that she will be taking him to Montauk. And they leave Gabe, they go on this long car ride, and Percy has a very scary dream vision. And after finally arriving at Montauk, they're in this very cozy cabin, and mom decides it is the time to give Percy his dramatic backstory after not telling him anything,



seemingly his whole life.

Kit: Yeah, this scene is a lot of information. Information one, Percy is a demigod.

Information two, his dad was a god.

Jordan: But not God or Jesus, which is probably the funniest line in this episode. Uh, I wouldn't say humor was really its strong selling point.

Kit: Yeah, humor's not the strong point here. Um, so his mom describes his dad as wise, brave, kind and noble. So we know it's not Zeus, but she doesn't say who the dad is either. So that's sort of left up in the air. And as Percy is trying to sort of dispel this idea and sort of tell his mom that this doesn't really make sense, Grover shows up at the cabin.

Jordan: Except something is a little bit different about Grover. He has goat legs. Cause guess what? Grover's been a satyr this whole time. Mom really left a lot on the table, uh, in terms of disclosing to Percy, um, pretty much anything.

Kit: Right. So then we are into the darkest ten to 15 minutes of television I've seen in quite some time. Percy, mom, Grover, all in the car. Uh, they're being chased by a minotaur, maybe. I don't know. My eyes were not young enough for this scene.

Jordan: So I personally would love to know the CGI budget for this episode, because, yes, it is very, very, very dark. Maybe that was a choice. In the car, we get more information while the Minotaur is chasing them, by the way, that Percy needs to get to Camp Halfblood behind the mist, which is a supernatural element that shields the mythological realm from the rest of us. But if he gets to Camp Half Blood, that will keep

him safe. As a demigod, he will be attacked by monsters here in our realm, and a battle ensues under the cloak of near, um, darkness.

Kit: It is so dark.

Jordan: And we're led to believe, as far as I can tell, mom is killed and Perseus kills the Minotaur. But again, not really. It's pretty dark. Kind of hard to tell.

Kit: It was so hard to tell. Um, and so the episode ends with Percy seeing the shadow of a centaur and waking

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Kit: up with sort of people around him, presumably at Camp Halfblood.

Jordan: Then the end credits roll, and we have one of my favorite parts of the whole episode, which is a very beautiful animation of Greek mythology and elements thereof. And, yeah, I kept watching it all the way to the end.

Kit: Yeah, the end animations were really beautiful. And we do get a little cutscene showing us some scenes from camp, sort of like, uh, on this season of, um. And then that's the end.

Jordan: All right, Kit. That's the pilot. What do you think about this one?

Kit: So, first episodes are just generally hard. This is one where there is a lot of exposition and background building. I think that the beginning of the episode had some

really good showing with the hidden mythies, but there's a lot of talk, which, since I read the book, wasn't upsetting. Right. I was like, well, I know what's going on, and, like, this is not new information to me. I don't need to be taking it in, but I'll be curious to hear your thoughts. Um, I was sort of surprised that we didn't make it to camp or meet any of the other characters, except for Grover, that end up being sort of central to the plot. So, yeah, so, for me, I'm like, I would definitely watch the next episode because I want to see those other characters that I know. Um, but I wonder if it maybe would have been better off as combining the first two episodes. I know they were released on the same date, but maybe it would have better to just roll you right in. But I don't know. I overall liked it. It did feel very faithful to the book in many ways. But I wonder what you think of somebody who hasn't read the book. How did you take this all in and what did you think about the show in general?

Jordan: Like you said, I don't really have any idea what's going on. I'm pretty unfamiliar with this franchise, and I've never read any of the books. Um, pilots are hard, like you said. I definitely agree with you there. We're being introduced to the main characters and the world that the story will take place in. But again, I think the target audience is for families and for people a little bit younger than me. So maybe it helps just to get everything out there laid out plainly. And then that's all the pilot can really do.

Kit: BoP did watch this one with us, so I'll offer up, um, his opinions. He didn't abandon it, which he did about 20 minutes into Andromeda, as some of you may remember. Um, however, he did say that he preferred the Hercules animated series. He was, like, weirdly taken by the working at the mall premise of the first Hercules. Like literally was like, oh, I love that episode of them in the mall, which, you know, okay. Um, but he did say he'd be willing to watch another of these episodes, and so we'll probably keep watching. Um, which I think is a good review.

Jordan: I think I'd love to watch another episode, for sure, and I'd rather have them just err to the side of heavy exposition than sheer incoherence. And as we saw at Andromeda, where the first 20 minutes of the plot had basically nothing to do with the next 20 minutes, uh, sometimes shorter is better, but I was definitely intrigued. I'm ready to watch more. I hope the CGI budget is increased, um, as well as the lighting for future episodes. Kit, do you have any other final thoughts on this adaptation before we wrap it up?

Kit: Certainly willing to watch another. And if this is a series that you enjoy or a genre you enjoy, then you might like this.

Jordan: Thank you for joining us today for our asterism on the pilot episode of Disney's Percy Jackson and the Olympians.

Kit: This has been Kit

Jordan: And Jordan.

Kit: Sisters, lovers of stars and stories.

Jordan: And we'll see you next time

Kit: On Starry Time.

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