

Episode 1 - The Lightning Thief Ch. 1-2

w/ Jackson Bird

If there is a mistake or mis-translation in this transcript please feel free to reach out to Mike for clarification! (thenewestolympian@gmail.com)

MIKE: Okay, so we've already gotten two different pronunciations. I-, ugh, I'll figure it out. Rick, come on the pod and please tell me how to pronounce your name.

[INTRO MUSIC]

MIKE: What's good? Hello, everyone. Welcome to the first episode of the brand new podcast covering Percy Jackson and all the related things to come, The Newest Olympian. My name is Mike Schubert, I'm the Newest Olympian. At the time of recording, I am a 29-year-old boy that doesn't know anything. I know nothing at all about Percy Jackson and The Olympians, except for the first few chapters that I've read now. If you want to know exactly where I stand on knowledge of this book series, and the things related, I would recommend listening to Episode 0 of the show, where I kind of give more explanation into that, but we're going to get going with The Lightning Thief, and we're going to talk about Chapters 1 and 2. My guest joining me today is the author of Sorted and the host of the Kottke Ride Home, it's Jackson Bird. Jackson, how's it going?

JACKSON: Hi, thanks for having me on. I'm very honored to be, like, the first guest.

MIKE: Look, you are knowledgeable in the subject and your name is Jackson. There was no one else to pick.

JACKSON: Oh, good point. That's how I got the gig, right. The name.

MIKE: Yes. It was the name and then, okay, fine, I guess credentials and the fact that we've done a lot of podcasts together, and they've all gone swimmingly well, but like, really, it's the name.

JACKSON: But yeah, I'm really excited. I read the original five books back when the movie came out, kind of, wanted to read them before I saw the movie. Honestly, that was 10 years ago, I don't super remember them at all. I started reading the first few chapters too, and was just like, "Oh, Oh, I forgot about that." Or like, "Oh, we didn't know that? Okay."

MIKE: That is what I've gathered from the people who I have started to bring in as the guests is that, I think I'm just a little too old for this series. So, this first book came out in 2005. So, I would have already been 13. So, I guess not too old.

JACKSON: Yeah, I'm older than you, actually. So.

MIKE: Oh, wow. Woah-ho-ho!

JACKSON: I read these in college just because I was like, "Oh. Like, I hear the younger people like these. There's a movie coming out. I'm curious." I also did the "reading them as an adult" thing.

MIKE: Nice. Cool. Well, yeah, I'm glad that you're in one version of reading as an adult. I'm in the super version where I know nothing that's going on. I know a tiny sliver about the mythology stuff in it because I took Latin in high school, as is well documented. But also, I played a lot of the video game Hades, which gives me a limited, but somewhat thorough knowledge of Greek Mythology to where I knew some of the stuff that was talked about in these first few chapters.

JACKSON: Yeah. It's definitely helpful to, like, have a little bit of a basis. Like, you can understand it if you don't know. But if you kind of know, like, who the main cast of characters in Greek Mythology is, it's very fun to sort of get Rick Riordan's almost Easter Eggs.

MIKE: Yes. So, I do know some and I am happy to announce that we will have a Greek Mythology correspondent for the show to fill in any sort of blanks or questions that I may have that my silly video game doesn't answer for me. But that will come later on. That was going to be my first question. Is it Rick Riordan? Is that it? I want to nip as many things in the bud right off the bat and I want to make sure I pronounce Rick's name properly.

JACKSON: Oh, I don't know you might need like, a young adult literature correspondent for that one. I just always said Riordan but I'm, I'm not really positive. What would the other way be of pronouncing it?

MIKE: Like Riordan? but I-.

JACKSON: Rior-. Riordan.

MIKE: Oh, okay. So, Google now has pronunciation guides with a big picture of a mouth which is fun. And apparently, it's like Rick Riordan, according to Google, but I'm going to click play and see if it'll play it.

MIKE: Riordan.

JACKSON: Riordan.

MIKE: That feels too Southern, but he's from San Antonio. So, maybe, maybe it's Rick Riordan. There's a lot of different YouTube videos about it. Ugh. I'll figure it out. Rick, come on the pod—

JACKSON: That's what I was going to say.

MIKE: —then please tell me how to pronounce your name.

JACKSON: You gotta have him on, and make him say his name. You make the guest introduce themselves, you know, like you do at a party when you have a friend there and you forgot someone's name? So, you make your guests introduce them.

MIKE: Oh, gosh. It is May of 202. Haven't been to a party since my wedding in February of 2020.

JACKSON: Wow.

MIKE: So, I've forgotten a little bit, but man, I am so bad with names. I have become an expert in the find-an-excuse-to introduce-two-people-at-the-party just so that they can say their name to each other, kind of deal.

JACKSON: That's my M.O.

MIKE: Gosh, expertise in there. So yeah, this first book, *The Lightning Thief*. It came out in 2005 and I have not Googled a lot of stuff about it because I didn't want to spoil anything, since I know legitimately nothing. But do you have any sort of expertise as to this first book, its release, its reception, stuff like that? The general vibes I got is that people love these books and after reading these first couple of chapters, I see why, because they're tremendous. This book is so good! IT'S SO GOOD!

JACKSON: Yeah, no, seriously. I don't remember when it came out. I was 15. I don't really remember, I think because I was too old for it. So, I didn't or you know, *too old*, but like, it's kind of geared towards, like, younger teens pre-teens. So, I don't think I heard much about it really, until the movie, but then in subsequent years, so I used to work for the Harry Potter Alliance, a non-profit that kind of uses pop culture and fandom and stuff to mobilize fans toward social good. And I remember a lot of the like, younger Millennials, and like, Millennials on the cusp with Gen Z, were so into

Percy Jackson. And I was like, "Whoa." I remember that being like, not a great movie.

MIKE: Yeah.

JACKSON: And the books were pretty good, but I just didn't realize the enthusiasm among, kind of the younger generation. So, that's sort of been more of my perception, not so much when it came out. But just sort of what I've realized since then, like, I think it's, you know, what Harry Potter was for our generation, kind of like older millennials, for younger millennials, it's Percy Jackson, for sure.

MIKE: Yeah, that's what I've gathered. And I will say, from a demographic of my past podcast's perspective, my audience is younger millennials. So, I think this is right in everyone's wheelhouse. But also, I think there's a lot of people who have not read them but have always wanted some sort of excuse to read them.

JACKSON: Mmh-hmm.

MIKE: And I think there's going to be a lot of people from what people have messaged me, that they are going to use this podcast, kind of like a book club, which is very fun.

JACKSON: Yeah.

MIKE: We're going to have a Discord attached to the Patreon, where you can have, like, a book club that will have a separate channel for people who know the spoilers, people who are reading along with the show. So, I think that more so than with Potterless, which is if anyone's unaware, a podcast that I ran, where I went through the Harry Potter series for the first time as an adult, couple chapters at a time, I'm taking that similar format and adapting it here for The Percy Jackson Series. I think the audience will be comprised more of people reading it for the first time, which I think is going to be fun and make this a little bit of a different experience.

JACKSON: Yeah, I think that will be really cool because I do think there's definitely a lot of people kind of our age who, like, heard a lot about it, because people a little bit younger, keep talking about it. Yeah, and need that excuse to read it. That'll be really fun to have other people's, like, live reactions.

MIKE: Yeah, it'll be really cool rather than everyone just laughing at me for predicting things wrong, which is still going to happen. But now, maybe some other people will put themselves into my shoes and get stuff wrong as well. I do know that the general vibe around the movie is that it is bad and people don't like it except for people like the actor who played the main character, Percy Jackson.

JACKSON: Mmh-hmm.

MIKE: So, I think that's my gist of the movie. People are just very upset because apparently the movie is just very different from the book. And I also gathered this because on Rick Riordan, Rick Riordan, Rick Riordan, Rick, on [Rick's website](#), he has an FAQ section, which is very cool. But one of the number one questions is, "I didn't make the movie stop yelling at me," basically.

JACKSON: Aw!

MIKE: And he did phrase it as, "All I know," and he said it was directed by Chris Columbus.

JACKSON: Yup.

MIKE: Of course.

JACKSON: I know, right?

MIKE: OF COURSE!!! In this little Q&A, he says, "All I can say about the movie is that it is loosely based on my book." So, even Rick is trying to distance himself. I do know that the Disney+ show is coming out sometime soon, and Rick is apparently heavily involved in that. So, got higher hopes for that. Especially because the vibe

that I've gotten from Rick is that he's a super chill dude unlike a certain author from a book franchise that I've covered previously.

JACKSON: I think you and I coincidentally referred to him by the same nickname of the Anti-JK Rowling.

MIKE: Yes, and in more ways than just him being nice, and I don't know, apologizing for missteps. There's many things in these chapters that JK would never, ever, ever do. And I'm excited to get into those. So, shall we get into Chapter 1? Which is called "I Accidentally Vaporize My Pre-algebra Teacher."

JACKSON: That's the thing that I really like about these books, we won't make this whole thing compared to Harry Potter thing.

MIKE: It's gonna happen. Look, it's totally gonna happen.

JACKSON: Yeah, it's gonna happen because that's where we're both coming from.

MIKE: Yeah.

JACKSON: And a lot of your audiences too.

MIKE: 100%.

JACKSON: And I think it gets compared a lot to Harry Potter and culture as well.

MIKE: Totally.

JACKSON: You know, they're the two big ones. But you know, this one is in first person and it's very much more of a, like, typical kind of bridging the middle grade to young adult kind of book. Where it's like, this is a pre-teen boy, talking in pre-teen boy kind of language. It's not this sort of, like, more formal literature that Harry Potter is sometimes.

MIKE: Yes.

JACKSON: I think it's really cool, but it is a completely different vibe.

MIKE: Yes. A 100%. The chapter title being in present tense is very different. The whole thing being in first person, like you said, is very different and just the whole vibe feels completely different. It feels more wholesome. I read every page with an ear-to-ear smile, and it's just very fun. And even the first page at least I am reading the paperback Disney Hyperion box set thing because that was the cheapest on the used books website that I got, but the first page is so powerful. I don't know if this is the same first page on every edition of the book. Once I finished the first page I was so in. I was just ready to go and I'm fully committed to loving this right off the jump. I mean, the first line is, *"Look, I didn't choose to be half-blooded. If you're reading this because you think you might be one, my advice is: close this book right now."* Amazing! Right off the bat, he's like, "Don't read this book." Like, yeah! I'm here, dude!

JACKSON: It's big Lemony Snicket vibes. I feel like everyone-

MIKE: Yes.

JACKSON: -of those books he was like, "Put this down. What are you doing? Don't read this book. It's horrible."

MIKE: Shout out to Lemony Snicket who made the best joke I've ever seen in the book. I don't remember which of the Unfortunate Events books it's in, but in one of them, the baby has to put a fork in an outlet to, like, kill the electricity in a building. And it ends the page with saying, "Now, kids don't ever," and then you turn to the next page. And it's just two full pages of the word "Ever." Ever, ever, ever, ever. And I, gosh! I just remember laughing so hard at that in my little reading chair in my bedroom in suburban New Jersey when I was reading this book. What quality! So yeah, I like how fun this is.

JACKSON: Yeah, I feel like that both of those authors, they, like, get kid humor.

MIKE: Mmh-hmm.

JACKSON: They're going to be a bit transgressive, even with the medium of the book of, like, breaking the rules in a way that will make kids think it's, like, brilliant and funny and want to actually read it.

MIKE: Yes. It makes sense that Rick would be hip with the times, because clearly he is hip with the kids and knows how to very convincingly talk and write like a 12-year-old, which wasn't always the case with JK in Harry Potter, where all of the children have the wit and cunning comebacks of fully grown sassy British adults.

JACKSON: I mean, maybe that's just how British children or I don't know, but in America—

MIKE: Yeah, maybe.

JACKSON: —we talk more like a Captain Underpants book.

MIKE: Oh! I love those books! Gosh, quality, quality books! But yeah, I like that Percy does things like, say horrible comebacks to people. His insults are so bad.

JACKSON: Mmh-hmm.

MIKE: It's so cute. So, yes. First page, absolutely perfect. He goes on to say, *"If you are a normal kid who has had the privilege of thinking that this is fiction, good for you. But if you start to see yourself in the story, take warning because they will find you if you are a half-blood."* So, just a powerful, powerful opening to this book. I was locked in from the jump. Here's a couple things that I learned. First off, Percy Jackson is in fact, the main character, which I did not know for 100% certain before reading this book. I thought he was but I was not positive.

JACKSON: Well, who did you think he was if it wasn't?

MIKE: I was *pretty* sure, but I wasn't 1,000% sure. Maybe it was a, a Zelda thing where Percy Jackson is somebody else that someone's got to save. I don't know,

JACKSON: I'll give you that. I'll give you the Zelda comparison.

MIKE: I've also learned that Percy Jackson is 12, and he used to go to a boarding school called Yancy Academy for Troubled Youths in Upstate New York. And I did know that this took place in New York, which I am very excited about as someone that grew up in New Jersey, and now lives in New York, when they talk about things, I know what they're talking about, which is the opposite of what I did in Potterless, where I didn't know any British things and British people got to yell at me all of the time for me messing things up all over the place. I'm not going to mess anything up here and I'm going to even call Rick out, because bless Rick's heart, but he is from Texas and sometimes it shows.

JACKSON: Maybe we'll get to it. I don't remember what it was, but there were one or two things where I was like, "I don't know that that's totally accurate." I grew up in Texas and so actually the first time I read these I was studying abroad in the Netherlands, but I didn't live in New York yet. I have now lived in New York for the past 10 years, 11 years? I don't know. I've been here a while. So, rereading it is fun, because now I'm like, "Oh, I know where this is. I know what he's talking about."

MIKE: Mmhmm. I'm very excited to do things like, on the Instagram for this podcast, just take photos of places where that chapter happens and be like, "Hey, this episode is about Chapter 5. I'm in, I don't know if there's a chapter in Grand Central." like...

JACKSON: Great social media strategy.

MIKE: I'm ready for it. That's what's going to be so fun about doing this podcast, is from a podcasting perspective and everything else. Now that I've done Potterless and I did it for five years, and it's my full-time job, I know what I'm doing now, we're starting at such a different level than when I started Potterless in a very echoey loft apartment in Houston that sounded like butt, and I added GarageBand Vocal Effects

because I thought it was EQ but it was EQ for singing which adds reverb. So, I made the echo even worse. The times have changed.

JACKSON: Yeah, you've learned a lot.

MIKE: I really have. I've grown. Percy says he went to this academy for troubled youths, and he ends the first page by saying, "*Am I a troubled kid? Yeah, you could say that.*" End of the first page. My god! Amazing! Oh! I'm so in. Percy begins this tale saying that things went bad starting on a sixth grade field trip to the Met, "*To look at ancient Greek and Roman stuff,*" which I do feel like is classic Met. If someone was to say, "What's at the Met?" I would say, "That and then also the big Egyptian Room." That's what initially comes to mind for me.

JACKSON: Right. Just stuff. I wish I had more to say about the Met. I really do, but that's it.

MIKE: It's old stuff. I love going to the museum, but I also love being a goofball at the museum, and just making fun of the paintings and stuff like that. There is a particular audience who would enjoy going to the museum with me, and if you're a Die Hard art history person, do not go because I'm just going to make *shamanamana* jokes the whole time.

JACKSON: There's like a they call it like, museum hack or something that's like this company and they do tours of museums that are specifically just, like, funny. Like, they mostly employ, like, comedians and stuff. And so they'll show you like, all of them like most sexual or gross things in the museum. You would be perfect. You should work for them.

MIKE: I have joked but not really joked with my buddy, Johnny, about making an app that would give you an audio guided tour of a museum, but it would just make jokes, silly dad jokes and stuff about every painting. So, you're walking through and rather than the audio tour tell you who painted it, and in what year and etc. It would just be like, "Pfft! Look at this guy's hat!" We've always wanted to do it.

JACKSON: Oh, that's really good!

MIKE: I know. We just gotta figure it out. I've annoyed my friends who work in Silicon Valley enough about this. If you actually know how to make this a reality, you can email me about this. We want to call it Art Slobs instead of Art Snobs.

JACKSON: Good name.

MIKE: But the problem is, museums move all of their paintings around and stuff, it would be hard.

JACKSON: Yeah.

MIKE: But this is one of those, like, dream like, oh, we would love to do this and I do think it, it has legs. It would be very fun.

JACKSON: Yeah, there's a way to do it. More and more museums are using, like, that geo-tagging, whatever. So that like, when you have the audio experience, it knows where you are. And like, if you stop for a bit, it pauses. So, you would just have to figure out how to do that as a third party.

MIKE: Okay, all right. Silicon Valley, hit me up. Let's do it. Let's get VC funding baby.

JACKSON: But unfortunately, Percy Jackson did not have that cool app when he, when he went with his class.

MIKE: No, he didn't. He was not excited for this trip at all, but his *LATIN TEACHER*, very excited as a boy who took Latin in high school. Very stoked about this, his Latin teacher, Mr. Brunner is leading it so PJ has hope. Mr. Brunner is a middle-aged guy in a wheelchair. JK Rowling would never! She would never do this! Someone with an ailment of any sort? IMPOSSIBLE. And then, Percy goes on to describe him as, "*He had thinning hair and a scruffy beard and a frayed tweed jacket, which always*

smelled like coffee. You wouldn't think he was cool." And I put the book down because Percy just described the coolest person ever, and then said you wouldn't think he was cool.

JACKSON: Yeah, I know. It was like, did the tweed jacket have elbow patches? Give us the deets!

MIKE: Yeah! Well, yeah. Was it plaid? What color was it? I need to know everything.

JACKSON: Also, I like that you've decided to call him PJ.

MIKE: Oh, it has to be. I mean, when I take notes for my various podcasts, I always give people acronyms because I'm not going to take the time to type "Percy" out a million times. But yes, he's PJ going forward, HP was HP, Encyclopedia Brown is EB. Everybody goes to acronym land when I'm taking notes for podcasts.

JACKSON: PJ really works though, that's an actual name like that.-

MIKE: Yeah, right?

JACKSON: -I could see people, actually, maybe they do call him that later.

MIKE: The *youths* already do call him PJ. Yeah, it's also just funny because I'm going from Harry Potter, a book where I hate Percy Weasley—

JACKSON: Oh, yeah.

MIKE: —so, so, so, so much, and now, Percy is very cool and the main character. It's very funny to go from awful-Percy to good-Percy. And one of the names I floated in my brainstorming session of coming up with the name for the podcast was, "What if I called this one, 'The Good Percy?'" But alas, it went into the pile of the other ones that got passed on. So, Mr. Brunner apparently tells jokes and stories and he lets the kids play games in class and he's got a collection of Roman armor and weapons, and he's the only teacher that doesn't put Percy to sleep.

JACKSON: I love just even that detail like, lets us play games in class. Like, that's such a real thing to actually have that written in a book by an, probably at the time middle-aged author to like, that shows he knows what kids are into.

MIKE: 100%. It's very refreshing. So, PJ just hoped that on the trip for once, he wouldn't get in trouble, but he was wrong. So, bad things apparently happen to Percy on field trips. He accidentally hit a school bus with a Revolutionary Era cannon and got expelled in the fifth grade which is *the* coolest way to get expelled ever, so fantastic. In fourth grade, he hit a lever at marine world, which is my favorite alternate reality Sea World that hopefully doesn't mistreat animals, and the entire class ended up taking a swim. So, PJ is just a menace and I'm loving it.

JACKSON: Although, they're, you know, accidents.

MIKE: Right, yeah.

JACKSON: They're all accidents, and he's getting expelled over accidents, which is kind of sad.

MIKE: That is unfortunate. I can't see the cannon one being worthy of expulsion, but hitting a lever in an aquarium does not feel like you deserve to get expelled. But yeah, he's just bringing chaotic energy wherever he goes and it's fun. So, on the bus to the Met, there is a character named Nancy Bobofit. Very fun name. She hits Percy's best friend Grover in the back of his head with pieces of a peanut butter and ketchup sandwich.

JACKSON: Which we never get more details about.

MIKE: I could not trust Nancy less, that is nightmare fuel. Peanut butter and ketchup?

JACKSON: Like, where does that even come from?

MIKE: I don't know.

JACKSON: It sounds so gross.

MIKE: And I've heard of some wild combinations of peanut butter and other things, and I'll forgive some of them. And I've even heard of strange uses of ketchup that I don't do, but I'm not gonna poopoo. Like, ketchup on eggs, I'm not going to do it, but I kind of get it. I put hot sauce on eggs, so I understand. But peanut butter and ketchup? The texture is bad. Everything's bad.

JACKSON: Ugh

MIKE: I don't like it at all. I couldn't trust Nancy less from the jump and then she becomes just a progressively worse person. So, my instincts were correct here.

JACKSON: The only thing I'll give her is I'm realizing now her last name kind of sounds like Boba Fett, which is cool.

MIKE: Yep, that was one of the first connections I drew was she does have a cool sounding last name, but she is not a cool person. So, Grover apparently gets picked on a lot for being older. Percy thinks he was held back and he's got acne, which I don't like, as someone who had acne and still does, even though I'm **29**! And he also apparently has some sort of muscle disease in his legs that affected his walking, and this just makes me love Percy even more, because he's not a terrible sixth-grader that refuses to be friends with the easy target kid to pick on. He stands up for him, and I think that's great. And it's also just making me like this book more, because right off the bat, we've got some representation that is not seen in a particular other book franchise, and it's just refreshing. It's really nice, and it gives me high hopes for the whole series to come.

JACKSON: Yeah, absolutely. Maybe it's because he kind of feels like he's been the underdog. He gets picked on and expelled for accidents and stuff, but he really has a way of approaching people based on their quality of character and not who or what they are. You know, what particular parts of their identities they have. Maybe we'll get to it later. I can't remember, but somewhere in one of these first few chapters I read, or I think it happens repeatedly, like, you know, spoiler-warning, there are going to be some supernatural elements to the story.

MIKE: Mm hmm, What?

JACKSON: And he describes people like, you know, they're not human in the way he thinks of humans. And it's usually the second or third thing he describes about them.

MIKE: Yes!

JACKSON: He'll say something else, about like, oh, like, cool muscles or cool hair. Or said this thing and then be like, oh, and also like, it wasn't human on the bottom-half.

MIKE: Yes. Yeah.

JACKSON: Like, even when he's shocked. He's not judgmental. It's really cool to see.

MIKE: Yeah, I really, really enjoy it a lot. The other note that PJ gives about Grover is that he does run very fast for Enchilada Day. This just makes me love Grover more because if there was ever a reason to run, it would be for Mexican food. Because god! It's so good. Percy can't step in to stop Nancy because he's currently on probation and he will get "*Death by in school suspension*," if he pulls anything on this trip. And as someone that had to fear in-school suspensions in my own K-8 school, I completely understand because I never got it but it was always the fear. That was always the looming, "Oh, no—

JACKSON: Oh, yeah.

MIKE: —I don't want to get stuck with this." Grover says it's no big deal but after another sandwich toss, Percy just gets ready to attack Nancy but Grover stops him.

Now, Narrator Percy says that he wish he went through with decking Nancy because what was about to happen was worse. And I will say, Narrator Percy is *so good* at building suspense. So incredible. It continues to happen throughout all these chapters, where he just gives you the little tiny, little, little teaser carrot dangling and, Oh, man. He's very skilled at it.

CURRENTLY UNNAMED MIDROLL BREAK

[24:32 - 28:48]

MIKE: They're on the tour, Percy tells the kids around him to shut up so that he can hear Mr. Brunner better and I just love that Percy is a cute little nerd! He's a little nerd and I like it. At one point later on, he does this to Nancy and it ends up coming out louder than he had planned. And Brunner does the classic Put the Kid on the Spot Move but Percy holds his own. He basically has to give an explanation on this carving of Kronos and I didn't know this until it explained it. My only knowledge of Kronos, isn't that the main character from God of War? Isn't that his name? Or no, that's Kratos. Just kidding. That's different. But Kronos was the King Titan, and he didn't trust his kids who were the gods, so he ate them. But his wife hid baby Zeus and gave Kronos a rock instead. And then later on, Zeus tricked Kronos into barfing up his kids, nice. And this sparked a fight between the gods and the Titans, and the gods won. And I realized that the only way the Titans could have lost is if Denzel Washington wasn't their coach yet. So, clearly that was their fault there. I did know a little bit about this story, because they talked about it in Hades. But I didn't know that Kronos was King of the Titans. So, that was a fun learning experience for me.

JACKSON: Yeah, nice way to weave it in there for, you know, kids to learn if they didn't know.

MIKE: Yeah, and this is, again, this is something that just, I continue to see happen. I'm continually jealous of younger kids, how school is easier because like, learning is fun and cool now. Like, Crash Course came out the year after I took all my AP History exams and all that kind of stuff. Like, I think it came out my senior year of high school and I was very upset, because man, I would have loved to have John Green explaining history to me, instead of me burning my eyes reading books until two in the morning.

JACKSON: Gosh.

MIKE: In high school.

JACKSON: Yeah.

MIKE: But also, Spotify just announced, and they're not paying me to say this, they have free audio books of literary classics. Things like Jane Eyre, and other books that you probably will have to read in high school. Those are just, like, free audio books on Spotify now.

JACKSON: Huh.

MIKE: And I'm furious. I would have loved that. Are you kidding me? Ah. So even this, like, if I had this book and I was reading it as a kid, and I had to take Greek History at some point in schooling this is such a fun way to learn useful stuff. And not a knock on Harry Potter but it's kind of cool that this has roots in something that is actually applicable to real life. Like a real thing that exists rather than just being good in Harry Potter trivia.

JACKSON: Yeah, I mean, I completely agree. I also do think it's funny that you're saying how this has real life applications when literally the scene that you're discussing is the kids being like, "This doesn't matter in real life."

MIKE: It's great. So yes, Brunner confirms what Percy said, and then adds that the gods sliced Chronos into pieces and scattered his remains in Tartarus, which I do know about because that's a level in Hades, woohoo! So, Brunner has Percy stay back while the rest of the class goes off to eat lunch and he says that Percy needs to be able to answer why this stuff matters in real life. This was something that Brunner brought up because Nancy kind of murmured, "What's the point of knowing this?" And then, Brunner asked Percy, "What is the point?" And Percy says, "I don't know." And Brunner says, "It's important," which is some foreshadowing that we'll learn later. And Percy shows his internal struggle here because Brunner pushes him hard, despite Percy having ADHD and Dyslexia, again, cool representation. Six pages into the book, and we're getting a lot of different representations here, which is awesome. And also, the fact that Percy has just never gotten above a C minus in any class. Brunner just wants Percy not only to be good, though, he wants Percy to be better than the rest. And man, I love Brunner a lot and I'm pretty sure he's going to stick around as a character based on what I've seen in the couple of chapters that I've read so far, but he's so great. He's reminding me of every good teacher I've ever had.

JACKSON: Yeah.

MIKE: It's super cool. Especially because one of my favorite teachers in high school did wear tweed jackets and always smelled like coffee. So, I'm getting big Mr. Fuchs vibes. Shout out to Mr. Fuchs. If you're listening, thank you for being the best Math teacher in my entire high school career. Outside, a storm is brewing and Percy goes out to eat lunch. He notes that the weather has been very strange of late. And then, he also says that Nancy tries to pickpocket someone while they're eating lunch.

JACKSON: Wild.

MIKE: Nancy, what the hell? What a terrible person.

JACKSON: She's all hopped up on peanut butter and ketchup sandwiches.

MIKE: I guess. I mean, not trying to pass judgment about her family, but if you can't pack Nancy a real meal, maybe you also can't teach her to not do things like pickpocket strangers in New York.

JACKSON: I was also confused, like, that some of them have packed lunches because it appears to be a boarding school. I guess maybe it's one of those, like, boarding and or day schools.

MIKE: Maybe also, it was like a field trip so you have to pack a lunch just for field trip day.

JACKSON: But like, if you're all living together at the boarding school.

MIKE: Right, then I retract my Nancy parent thing. Nancy decided on her own, unless it is a day school thing. I don't know. I've never gone to a, a school fancy enough to know what that is.

JACKSON: Yeah.

MIKE: But if Nancy made this on her own, My god. So, Percy says he misses his mom who lives just a bit uptown of the Met, which my initial thought here was, "Okay, Mrs. Jackson. You live near Central Park? My goodness." The Met is right in the middle of Central Park, so to be just a bit uptown of that? Upper East Side Miss Jackson? Okay.

JACKSON: Yeah. Like, that sounds super fancy.

MIKE: Right.

JACKSON: I feel like this is kind of a classic, like, people who don't live in New York. Like, not quite getting neighborhoods kind of thing of like, "Oh, you know, the five neighborhoods. Okay, they live near Central Park." That sounds accurate, right?

MIKE: Yes, we will get into later where Mrs. Jackson actually lives, but at the time when I was reading this, I thought Mrs. Jackson was, incredibly fancy woman, but, uh, she's a bit more down to earth as we will see. So, Nancy approaches Percy with "Her ugly friends." And this is the first moment I was like, "Eh," but I mean, 12 year old kid, 2005.

JACKSON: Yeah.

MIKE: Yeah. Like, it's going to happen and I know that there are some other, I don't know exactly. I think the only big picture kind of not aged well thing that Rick did in the books is I think there's, like, bad Native American representation at some point. But I think he has apologized for it. I'm not 100% sure. That's like the only red flag of stuff that I know.

JACKSON: Yeah, because there's a bunch of other books, like, in the same universe.

MIKE: Right. Yeah, I know there's other spinoff books and stuff.

JACKSON: It sounds vaguely familiar now. I don't remember what it was. Yeah, but that, you know, that's part of it is like, we're not saying that this original series that came out in 2005 is perfect, but the way that he has responded to things and grown over time, because also like, I don't know that there's explicitly any, like LGBTQ+ representation in these five, but oh man is there in the other books that he's written.

MIKE: Oh, cool.

JACKSON: Which is so cool for a book for this age level.

MIKE: That's awesome. And I think even recently, on Twitter, I saw someone say, they shipped some pairing that would have been some sort of non-straight shipping. And Rick, quote tweeted it basically saying, "That's not what I had in mind, but I also understand that a book is for the audience and if you thought that, then yeah. Sure they were dating." Like, he's just so accepting and I think that's very fun, and I know he's even done things like, some of the spin-off books that are about other mythologies are written by people who are more knowledgeable in those areas.

JACKSON: Oh, great.

MIKE: I don't know if this is exactly the case, but I think there might be a spin-off book about African Mythology written by a black woman, or Asian mythology written by an Asian author. I think Rick Riordan also recognizes, "Hello, I'm a white dude." So, he's not going to write about things that would feel off and I appreciate that so much. I'm very excited. Rick, come on the pod. Let's chat. She comes up with her friends, and she then drops her half eaten lunch on Grover, which, come on! Ugh! Percy describes her as having curly red hair, crooked teeth, and "her freckles were orange as if someone spray painted her face with liquid Cheetos." Yes! Yes!

JACKSON: I mean, that is when you're in seventh grade, and your English teacher is like, "Okay, we're gonna practice writing similes." That's what you wrote.

MIKE: Yeah, yeah, yeah! That's a good insult. Like, that is good and not unnecessarily mean. It's, it's just funny. So, PJ gets enraged and then he doesn't remember touching her but the next thing you know, Nancy is in the fountain and Mrs. Dodds, who is this new math teacher, who is 50 years old, but rocks a leather jacket. I liked that the school exclusively hires the coolest people on earth.

JACKSON: I think their interview process is, "So what jackets do you wear on a daily basis?"

MIKE: It's a very jacket heavy book so far. Even Percy later on has a red rain jacket, which also sounds nice. Very jacket forward series that we're dealing with and I'm here for it.

JACKSON: You know what I just realized? I used to have a red rain jacket. You know where I lost it? Long Island.

MIKE: Oh, wait a second. Percy Jackson Bird? What? So, apparently Mrs. Dodds *hates* Percy Jackson, is always mean to him, always happens to find him in the wrong place at the wrong time, gives him detention, all that good stuff. So, she comes over and while she is doing so there's some whispering by the kids nearby. And this is very exciting because the whispering quotes include, "Did you see?" "the water" and, "like it grabbed her." So, does Percy Jackson have water powers? This was, as I explained in Episode 0, I took a couple of guesses about Percy Jackson and all I knew about it based on the cover of the book is that he's in the water. It looks like he's in the East River with a sword and a horn and the book is *The Lightning Thief*. So, I figured either this dude's got water powers or lightning powers. So, I was like, "I don't know. What is this guy like? The son of Poseidon? Is he related to Poseidon? Does Poseidon become a friend of his?" And, uh, we will soon see that. I think my Percy being the Son of Poseidon stuff has some credence. I was very excited when water powers came into play, or at least the potential of them. So, Grover tries to take the blame for this, which gosh. I love Grover even more now, but Dodds does not fall for it. And what's extra special about this is that Grover is straight up *terrified* of Dodds. And the fact that Grover would try to step in the face of her anger is huge, and it warms Percy's heart and my heart. So, Percy then has a bit of an "ADHD moment," or at least according to what the school counselor says, where he kind of zones out for a second, and then, all of a sudden comes to. He describes it like, someone took away a puzzle piece, and he doesn't know where it went, which I thought was an interesting way to put it. But basically, Dodds is just at the top of the stairs of the Met and Percy didn't recognize this happening. Then it kind of happens again, because he goes further in and then she's already down the hall. My thought here was, "Did she do this? Did you have this moment? Or did she teleport because she's the descendant of Hermes." We'll learn what Mrs. Dodds is, but I was like, "Does Mrs. Dodds have superspeed powers?" She does the disappearing thing, "again," and then goes deeper inside the museum. And at this point, I realized, "Oh, wait a second. The chapter title is 'I Vaporize My Pre-algebra teacher.'" So I thought, "Oh, Percy is about to vaporize Dodds." This will be fun. So, she's in front of a marble. Is it frieze? Frieze? I have no idea how to pronounce this word.

JACKSON: Frieze. Frieze.

MIKE: I know what this thing is. I just  *Google so the Greek people don't yell at me.* 

JACKSON: That is like, what was great about reading this on Kindle is I just press the word and I get a definition.

MIKE: The Google tells me it's 'frieze' is the pronunciation. It's one of those, "I know what it is. I just never had to say it out loud because I'm not fancy enough to talk to people about friezes."

JACKSON: You don't go to cocktail parties where there's just big Greek marble friezes in the background.

MIKE: No, and I would probably just be a heathen and say things like, "Oh, statue," and I would be so incorrect.

JACKSON: Kick out.

MIKE: This buffoon.

JACKSON: What an art slob.

MIKE: TM, TM, TM, TM. No one's allowed to steal this idea, I will sue you. So, it's a frieze of Greek gods, and then she starts growling and I didn't know what's going to

happen. I thought, "Is she going to awake the gods? Are they going to come to life out of this frieze?" But Dodds is then incredibly ominous by saying, "Confess, and you will suffer less pain." And Percy's first thought is, "Aw, beans. They found out about my secret candy stash that I'm selling out of my dorm." So, Percy is a wholesome drug dealer and this is very fun. Selling contraband in the boarding school, I'm so here for this. Now, his second thought is that they found out his Tom Sawyer paper was plagiarized from the internet, and he thinks they'll take away his grade, or worse make me read the book. He is my guy. Like just my, ugh! I love this! He's so likable.

JACKSON: I love when characters in books hate reading books.

MIKE: Yes. It's so fun. It's just great. It took me a very long time to like Harry Potter. It wasn't until the end of Book 7 when he really puts a whole lot on his plate and just rolls with it that I grew to love Harry.

JACKSON: Oh, you mean the character? I was like, "You went that far not liking the book?"

MIKE: Oh, no, no, no, no. No. It was like halfway through Book Three where I fell in love, but as far as Harry Potter the character, I was always frustrated with him until he has to, you know, sacrifice himself for the good of humanity. Then I gained a lot of respect.

JACKSON: So, that's what it takes to be your friend apparently.

MIKE: No. I mean, either that or just say, Tom Sawyer was a bad book. Different things can win me over for you. I'm already head over heels for Percy. It's great. So, Dodds then hisses, "Your time is up," and then she turns into a winged creature of sort. She becomes yellow. She's got these bat wings and these razor sharp teeth and then Brunner comes in and he tosses a pen to Percy, but when he catches it, it's a bronze sword! And it's specifically the bronze sword from Brunner's collection of armor and weapons. So, Dodds then flies towards Percy, and in self-defense, he swings the sword at her. It passes through her shoulder like water, and then she vaporizes instantly into yellow powder. Percy, when he kind of snaps back to reality, oop! There goes gravity. Percy is then just alone with a pen in his hand, and he wonders if his lunch was laced with psychedelic mushrooms. It's so good. So, he goes back outside, not really sure if this actually happened, or if he just envisioned all of this and now it is raining. Nancy says that she hopes Mrs. Kerr whooped his butt, and Percy is obviously confused because Mrs. Kerr doesn't exist. I don't know who Mrs. Kerr is. And Grover then doesn't talk to Percy, which Percy finds weird. He then goes over to Brunner, who accepts his pen back. And when Percy asks where's Mrs. Dodds, Brunner says, "There's never been a Mrs. Dodds at Yancy ever." And that's the end of the first chapter and I am left VERY CONFUSED!

JACKSON: Just like PJ.

MIKE: I know, it's very good. The book does a very good job of putting you in the mindset of the character because I don't know what the hell is going on, but I'm very intrigued and I'm very excited to get into Chapter 2, which we'll be covering now, which is called "Three Old Ladies Knit the Socks of Death." These chapter titles are so good!

JACKSON: It's like, in some ways, it tells you exactly what's going to happen but it's so confusing when you start it that it means nothing to you.

MIKE: Right. They sound ridiculous off the jump, and then about 75% of the way through the chapter, you know, oh, the chapter title, I get it. And Harry Potter did a good job of this but Harry Potter's were more creatively subtle, whereas these are

more like, okay, I'm assuming at some point, there's going to be some old ladies that knit the socks of death, but what is this?

JACKSON: Like, this is the clickbait version of, of an article title.

MIKE: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. *Physical Trainers Hate Him*. So, absolutely no one at the school knows Dodds, but Grover is the only one that shows an inkling because he hesitates a bit anytime Percy asks him about Dodds. Now, at this point I wondered, is Grover in on it? Is he also somehow Greek god-like? Because Brunner seems very into it that he threw him a pen that turned into a sword. But now, I'm starting to get some suspicions about Grover.

JACKSON: Mmm

MIKE: The weather is still absolutely wilding. Percy's mood and his grades are getting worse. Obviously, he's bothered by this ridiculous experience and the worst of this was Percy lashing out at his English teacher in response to his English teacher asking, "Why are you too lazy to study for spelling tests," and Percy called him an old sot. And as the narrator says, "Wasn't sure what that meant, but it sounded good," which is a very big middle-school insult vibe. You just kind of say it and hope it works.

JACKSON: Yeah, very real.

MIKE: The headmaster mailed Percy's mom to say that Percy will not be coming back next year and here's where we learned that Percy has a stepfather who hosts obnoxious poker parties, which yes, is obnoxious. I am clearly not the right demographic to think that playing poker is fun, but my poker experience is very limited. I tried to avoid it at all costs and I remember most recently, I played poker with some friends in New York. And once I started to make some money, I found an excuse to leave and it was great. I paid \$20 and made \$50. And then I was like, "Oh, got to go," and that was Poker Night.

JACKSON: That's pretty much how I do it. Not into gambling. I don't mind the game. I like the gameplay.

MIKE: Right.

JACKSON: If we're just going to do chips that mean nothing. I'm down.

MIKE: Right. It's more of just when you play with money, it just makes stopping so much harder and you can't just play for 20 minutes. It becomes just hours of hours of stuff, and I am always one to try to vote for not gambling so that I could just, whenever I get bored, I can just go all in and then leave, which I've done before and is great. But if there's money involved, I can't do that because, you know, can't just lose money. So, Percy is conflicted because he's homesick but there are things about Yancy that he's going to miss, like Grover and Brunner, etc. So, the only class that Percy studies for when finals come around is Latin, because Brunner warned that it's a life or death for Percy and this is some extreme foreshadowing. Now, Percy is frustrated studying for his Latin final. He's mixing up things like Chiron and Charon, which I also ran into because those are both characters/things you have to know in Hades, the video game. So, I could relate to this exact situation. So, Percy heads downstairs to ask Brunner for advice. When Percy gets close to his office, he overhears Grover in there saying, "...worried about Percy". So, ooo, very excited at this.

JACKSON: Yeah, overhearing people talking about you doesn't happen too much in real life. So, very curious and suspicious when it does.

MIKE: And Percy very aptly points out, "Now, I know eavesdropping is bad, but I challenge you to not stick around when you overhear people talking about you," which yeah, 1,000% which has been very hard in my life as a person named Mike,

because many times I'll hear people talking about Mike and the odds are that there's someone else seeing that everyone in the world born in 1992 was named Michael. They go on to mention something about a, "Kindly One," which is a very interesting turn of phrase, being in the school. So, my initial thought here was of course, maybe this is what Dodds is. Brunner goes on to say that Percy needs more time and he can't be rushed. Grover, though, mentions a Summer Solstice deadline, and Brunner says it will happen without him. Grover says, "No, Percy saw her," and Brunner says, "The Mist over the students will convince him that it was his imagination." So, we are slowly learning about what's going on, but we're learning just enough, but also just not enough. And I got to say, Rick is *good* at writing. Rick is very good at this because he gives you just enough, but also not enough where you don't really have any idea what is happening.

JACKSON: I got to say a lot of like, young adult authors are so much better at the page turner than like, adult literature authors.

MIKE: Oh, yes.

JACKSON: Because they know, they got to keep a kid's attention, you know?

MIKE: Mmh-hmm. Mmh-hmm. And it's done in a way in this book where it doesn't feel gimmicky. It doesn't feel like, oh, every chapter has got to end on some ridiculous cliffhanger. The pacing of it is just so well done, they yada yada over the parts that don't matter that much, and they go into detail about the interesting things and I like it. So, Grover says that he can't fail his duties again, and he should have protected Percy. Brunner says, "No, it's on me. I should have noticed." And says that they should just focus on keeping Percy alive until next Fall. Now at this point, I was very shocked and so is Percy the character because he drops his textbook and then he's got to scurry away, but he sees the shadow of something larger than his normal wheelchair bound professor, and he thinks he sees the shadow of a bow and arrow. He starts to hear hooves, and my thought was, "Is Brunner a centaur?" Like, all signs are pointing to yes here. Whoever chases him in the hallway, I wasn't sure if this is Brunner or Grover because later on we learn that Grover may fit this description a bit more, but I don't know about Brunner. One of them thinks that nothing is there, and Brunner says that his nerves have been wonky ever since the Winter Solstice. Grover agrees, and then they leave. So, Percy waits until it's enough time to be safe, he also leaves. He returns to the dorm after a while and Grover is in there studying acting like nothing happened. So, the next day after the three-hour long Latin final, which at first I was like, "Wow, that was long," and then I remembered, "Oh, yeah. I had to take very long finals in high school as well." I think some of my finals were three hours which, ugh.

JACKSON: I mean, AP tests, but that does seem really long for like, seventh grade.

MIKE: Yeah, for sixth grade language class that feels excessive. I'm pretty sure my school, it was like an hour and a half for the most part. But then yeah, the AP tests were definitely three hours but that's just rough. So, after the final, Brunner has Percy stay back, and he tells him, "Don't worry about leaving the school," says it's probably for the best and it was only a matter of time because it wasn't a good fit, and Percy is just crushed.

JACKSON: Mmh-hmm.

MIKE: Understandably so. Brunner tries to save it but fails dramatically by saying Percy isn't normal and Percy says, "Thanks a lot, sir, for reminding me." And if you say "sir," in New York, that is explicitly trying to insult someone. If you say sir, in the South, it could just be like, that's what you're supposed to say to people. But in New

York, if you say sir, that is 1,000% a dig and man, Percy just leaves and oh, I felt so bad for him here.

JACKSON: Mmh-hmm. Even though we don't know what's going on, we still kind of got what Mr. Brunner was trying to say.

MIKE: Mmh-hmm. Mmh-hmm.

JACKSON: So it's gut wrenching that Percy, just heartbroken there.

MIKE: You understand where Brunner was coming from. You also understand that he totally messed up here, and you also understand from Percy's perspective of not knowing what's really going on, why he is so hurt by it because it sucks. So, get to the point where Percy's leaving the school, Grover's on the same Greyhound bus to the city as Percy and Grover keeps looking nervous and checking down the aisle on the bus. Percy then realizes that oh yeah, Grover's always like this when they're not at Yancy, as if someone was going to attack. Hmmm-mmm! So, Percy decides to say, "Ah screw it," and he asks Grover, "Are you looking for the Kindly Ones?" And Grover just with no poker face at all, cannot save it. So, Percy then reveals the eavesdropping. Grover gives him a business card then that says, "Grover Underwood: Keeper. Half Blood Hill, Long Island, New York. 800 0090009." And yeah, if Grover is from Long Island, of course, he's sketchy! Obviously! Huge red flag!

JACKSON: Burn, you're just gonna set off all the rivalries now.

MIKE: Yeah, whatever. I'm a Manhattan boy true and true. So, come at me every other borough. Grover reveals that he has to protect Percy and then of course, the bus breaks down. So, everyone gets off the bus and there's a fruit stand nearby with three ladies knitting the biggest socks that Percy Jackson has ever seen. And I remembered at this point from the chapter title, "Oh, yeah. Old Ladies Knitting the Socks of Death." So, Grover is super, super nervous and he's just praying that those three old ladies are not looking at Percy. And Percy jokes and asks, "Hey, do you think these socks will fit me?" And Grover is like, "That's not funny. Don't joke about this." That's great. And I mean, from Grover's perspective, yeah, these are the socks of death. Did you not read the chapter title? Percy, you should be afraid of these socks.

JACKSON: Do the reading.

MIKE: Come on, Percy. I know you don't like reading but come on. The old lady in the middle then busts out some huge silver and gold scissors and Grover says, "Okay, get back on the bus right now." The socks are described as being Electric Blue, which makes me very excited because early on in Potterless, I decided the official color was Violently Purple. Electric Blue feels like it could be the color of The Newest Olympian, and I think that's great. Blue comes into play in the next chapter.

JACKSON: Oh, yeah.

MIKE: So, I wonder if this will be a recurring thing or whatever, but I like that we've already got a fun color description of Electric Blue. So, the driver then is able to fix the bus. Everyone gets back in, but Percy and Grover feel rough. They, they do not feel good at all. Grover asks Percy what he saw because Percy's stayed outside a little bit later, Grover got in the bus immediately. Percy explains that he saw the middle one cut the yarn, and Grover says, "You saw her snip the cord?" and Percy confirms. Grover is mad nervous, saying that he doesn't want this to be like last time and then he says, "It's always sixth-grade." So, Grover insists that he walks Percy home from the bus when they get back into town. Percy agrees, and he asks if the snipping means someone is going to die and Grover doesn't answer, but that is definitely an answer enough in itself. And on this ominous note, the chapter ends

and so does the first episode of The Newest Olympian. Ho-ho! So, Jackson, thank you so much for joining. Do you have any thoughts of Chapters 1 and 2? Without spoiling me, which, like clearly, I'm a very small percentage done with even this first book, let alone the series.

JACKSON: Yeah, I know. I'm really glad I did reread, because I think I mentioned to you like, "Oh, there's a really major spoiler that I thought was just a known thing." Like, I forgot that there was like, a build up to it. So, I will not spoil that. Glad I did not accidentally spoil it.

MIKE: Yes, that's gonna be a big concern of the listeners for sure.

JACKSON: No, I mean, this is great. It's a really good series and it is fun to kind of like, peel back all the layers, the very oniony layers here that PJ is exploring as well and try to figure out and put together the puzzle pieces with him.

MIKE: Yeah, it's very fun. And it's a fun thing to have the character narrator who doesn't know what's going on, and I am also that so there's just a lot of confusion. And it's very fun, and I'm really enjoying it. And I'm excited to continue on with this podcast. So, you will be back for the next episode, which is very exciting, but in the meantime, if people want to find you doing stuff on the internet and beyond, where can they do so?

JACKSON: Oh, yeah. I'm [@JackIsNotABird](#) on social media generally. And I host a daily podcast called the [Kottke Ride Home](#). That's just 15 minutes of the coolest headlines in the news that day. And also wrote a book called [Sorted](#), about my life and kind of Harry Potter, which is awkward now.

MIKE: Yep, well, you know, it's all a growing experience. Both you and I are very familiar with Harry Potter being formative in our careers and now moving on a bit, and here we are. So, thank you again, for joining. Listeners, thank you for listening. I don't have a cute catchy ending phrase like I did with "Wizard On!" I'm going to let it happen naturally. So, I'm not going to try to force it. I don't want to commit to a bad one. So, I will just say thank you all so much for listening to this first episode of the podcast and I hope you continue to listen to all of the episodes. Whether you are listening to this the day it came out or years after the fact. Thank you so much for listening and I hope you continue this journey with me.

[OUTRO] [58:16 - 1:00:31]

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