

Alyssa M. Checkai. The Function of Gods in Modern Children's Literature: A Content Analysis of the Gods' Roles in Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson and the Olympians Series. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. August, 2009. 62 pages. Advisor: Brian Sturm.

This study examines the function of ancient gods in modern children's literature. Latent content analysis was used to determine the roles gods play in Riordan's Percy Jackson and the Olympians series. Five roles were identified: helper, opponent, manipulator, enabler, and beneficiary. The gods were found to embody intangible concepts, raise the level of the action and increase the mortals' own powers, and ultimately prove the power and importance of humanity.

#### Headings:

Folk literature – Evaluation

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THE FUNCTION OF GODS IN MODERN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE:  
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE GODS' ROLES IN RICK RIORDAN'S PERCY  
JACKSON AND THE OLYMPIANS SERIES

by  
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## **Introduction**

There is a power intrinsic in the stories of myth that man recognizes. These are stories that have lasted since early civilizations and that different cultures have invented independently of each other. Myths encompass some of the most basic emotions and experiences that man has, and it is no wonder that they reappear again and again in modern literature, as man grapples with many of the same issues that confronted his ancestors.

Authors do not stop at borrowing themes and symbols from mythology, however. There is an increasing trend, especially in children's books, of borrowing whole characters from myths. Here I am not discussing retellings of the original myths, but rather the use of mythical characters in modern popular fiction, juxtaposing the ancient gods, heroes, or monsters with a new, modern protagonist and a 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century world. While there is a great deal of scholarly work on the original myths, their function in society, and what they offer readers, there is much less on the roles of ancient mythical characters in modern fiction. What exactly is the purpose of these characters in contemporary children's literature? Do they offer something that original characters cannot?

Gods are often the central characters in myths. Indeed, Joseph Campbell states that "The dictionary definition of a myth would be stories about gods" (22). Therefore, I will focus on the roles of gods, looking specifically at the popular Percy Jackson and the

Olympians series. This study will explore the question: What are the roles the gods play in Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series and do they change over the course of the series?

## Literature Review

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a god as “A superhuman person...who is worshipped as having power over nature and the fortunes of mankind” (“god”). This definition highlights the control that gods exhibit over the world. It also shows the inherent relationship between gods and mortals. A god is defined as one who is worshipped. He may have superhuman powers over the world and the beings that inhabit it, but those powers come from the minds of his worshippers.

Discussing contextual modifications of the word “god,” the entry continues: “in speaking of Greek mythology, we distinguish the *gods* from the *daemons* or supernatural powers of inferior rank, and from the *heroes* or *demigods*, who, though objects of worship, and considered as immortal, were not regarded as having ceased to be men” (“god”). This comparison identifies the importance of the superhuman aspect of gods. They are something other than human, something greater—more powerful than even other supernatural forces.

Elaborating on the powers described in the dictionary definition, Austin writes that “The gods are at the first level the representations of the forces of nature, autonomous and arbitrary” (Austin 6). When man created gods, he was in part trying to find answers to scientific wonders he could not explain and to the harshness of the world around him. Hence, Poseidon makes storms at sea and Zeus throws lightning bolts from the sky. The gods give physical embodiment to the wonder and fear that nature inspires. Myth “translates the ineffable forms of nature into structures and images so that the ineffable may become articulated in consciousness” (Austin 5-6). Creating gods allows men to visualize what they may not otherwise be able to express, or understand.

Gods also represent different cultures' views of the world:

The god of the desert is not the god of the plains...When [one is] out in the desert with one sky and one world, then [he] might have one deity, but in a jungle, where there's no horizon and [one] never [sees] anything more than ten or twelve yards away from [himself, he doesn't] have that idea anymore (Campbell 101).

The gods are formed out of man's ideas of the world—what he sees and what makes sense to him. They are visualizations of the inexplicable, but they are also representations of a given society's philosophies, providing common images of what a culture knows to be true. The gods help to link a society together by creating physical icons of collectively held beliefs.

Gods can help man understand not only the world around him, but also that within him. Campbell states that “A god is a personification of a motivating power or a value system that functions in human life and in the universe—the powers of [one's] own body and of nature. The myths are metaphorical of spiritual potentiality in the human being” (Campbell 22). The gods are representations of the forces of nature, but also of the powers and potential that humans themselves have. They allow man to look inward at himself, making self-exploration easier by creating a mirror. This mirror does not show an exact reflection, but rather an enlarged image, augmenting man's assets and failings. Austin repeats this sentiment, writing that “gods are...archetypes of our own selves—projections to account for the inexplicable, problematic, or demonic in our own behavior; and also exemplars of our higher self (6). And just as the gods illustrate man's strengths and weaknesses on a larger scale, everything about them is augmented:

The behavior of the gods is usually all too human. Zeus in garb resembled an early king of a Greek city-state...Gods reside in structures which are human dwellings giganticized like Valhalla. The food and drink of deities resemble but quite surpass those of humans (Day 171).

The gods dress, live, and eat like humans, but as the best humans imaginable. In this, man can recognize himself, but still stand in awe of the gods' superiority. By presenting an improved image of what man could be, gods push humans to strive to become better themselves. The superhuman events that occur in myths "[oblige man] to take his place with the Gods and the mythical Heroes so that he can perform their deeds (Eliade 145). In the myths, gods perform feats that man could never accomplish, but hearing about them makes man want to try.

Gods express man's strengths and weaknesses, and these are often both illustrated in one god. "The same deity can be radiantly beatific and viciously cruel, as archaic man pragmatically observed woe and weal inextricably mixed in his world" (Day 172). This makes sense, going back to the arbitrariness of nature. Man never knows when a fire, flood, or other force will strike, and these dangers are beneficial, and even necessary, in smaller quantities. So this dichotomy within characters recreates the realities man sees around him quite well. In this way, gods give name to and express the uncertainty that exists in the world.

Much of the gods' role in myth is to represent the world and the humans in it so that man can step back and better see what is going on right in front of him. Yet as "Human as the gods frequently seem, they are the 'other'" (Day 172). The gods do not only mirror human life, or even enhance it, but they offer something beyond human understanding, allowing man's imagination to run wild. Myth "carries with it a promise of another mode of existence entirely, to be realised just beyond the present time and place" (Coupe 9), and it is the gods that symbolize this otherness.



Gods exist in mythology, but they have also been used to various extents in literature for centuries. Sometimes the gods are not characters in their own right, but rather literary devices. When Joseph of Exeter wrote an epic poem chronicling the Trojan War, he added Greek gods to the historical description. However Hugh C. Parker writes the gods do not actually act in this story. For instance, he writes that Thetis seems to push Orontes to his death in the sea, but that this is an illusion, citing the fact that if Thetis were actually there, she would appear to witness her son's death (Parker). Her name only, not the goddess herself, is invoked to represent the sea. Joseph "personifies the waves as Thetis for rhetorical reasons – to interject some pathos into his description of the aftermath of the battle. Thetis has no effect on the events of the story in the way that she does in classical Trojan epics" (Parker). Here the gods perhaps add slight humanization or emotionality to the events, but because they are not fleshed out as full characters, they do little else to add to the literary work.

Similarly, Frey disparages novels that are written to turn ancient myths modern, still using the names and trappings of the original. He states that such fiction "[asks] the reader to leave the story world of his or her imagination and to enter into a game of guess-where-the-mythological-symbol-is-hiding" (Frey 8). This game does afford the reader a certain level of enjoyment. In the original myths, "Gods frequently appear in human guise, but usually their divinity displays some distinctive badge" (Day 172). Athena's gray eyes, for instance, often give her away. Just as these clues identify hidden gods in mythology, if the reader knows his myths, they can tip him off to the gods' appearances. Indeed it is part of the fun of a modern novel like this to figure out who the mythical characters are before they are named, to pick up the clues and recognize the

mythology. However, without using their whole characters, the gods cannot ultimately add a great deal to the story.

However, when authors allow gods to actually interact in a modern story and play out their roles from the original myths or develop new functions, these deities have more to offer. Fredericks describes a science fiction story, “After the Myths Went Home,” wherein men have advanced to the point that they think they do not need gods anymore, and so they send them away, only realizing afterwards what they have given up (1-3). Analyzing this story, he asks, “Even in a technologically accomplished paradise of the far future, gods and demi-gods are a necessity. Why? Because the decadent race...[has] isolated [itself] from a universe that still contains a large number of ‘unknowns’” (Fredericks 3). By getting rid of the gods, these future men have also gotten rid of their ability to understand anything outside of their realm of experiences or manage hardships. This goes back to the “neo-Kantian theme that the gods are ‘imaginary figures by means of whom the ancients attempted to give structure to the universe’” (Fredericks 4). Gods provide structure because they explain the unknowns and connect man to the universe around him.

This search for understanding that gods facilitate is especially important for children, who are still questioning the world around them. So perhaps it is good that authors incorporate these characters into modern stories. Susan Cooper realizes the importance of myth (and the gods that inhabit it), writing, “A storyteller has to be irrational, indirect, in order to help young readers cope with this eternally puzzling world—because facts alone are not going to resolve the riddles for them, not without the help of the imagination” (Cooper 272); however, she believes that myth has now passed

this function to fantasy (Cooper 272-273). There is certainly a correlation between myths and fantasy, and, indeed, many fantasy stories incorporate aspects from myth into their narrative.

However the mythical gods must offer something that original fantasy characters do not, as authors continue to use these ancient characters. Laurie Halse Anderson remembers another author's words, saying, "David Almond talked about the need children have for myth. He talked about how sometimes, especially with really hard life issues, kids can see something more clearly in a myth than they can in their own experiences" (Horning 33). Myth allows children to step back from their personal problems and see them more clearly in an archetypal tale, where they are not as overwhelming. Colin Falck looks specifically at the gods' role within children's stories. He "links the emergence of myth to a child's gradual discovery of its bodily capacities and limitations, and he sees the attribution of 'gods' as satisfying the need to give form and comprehension to powers that cannot yet be fully conceptualized" (Sellers 4). Using gods in modern stories allows children to examine and understand their own world in contexts they can recognize, much as their ancestors did with the original myths. Seeing intangible concepts and powers embodied in physical characters allows children to better visualize and understand their own abilities.

## **Methodology**

This study uses latent content analysis to examine the roles gods play in Riordan's Percy Jackson and the Olympians series. This series has garnered many awards from librarians and the public alike, and it stands as a prime example of the modern mythical fiction that I wish to examine, as Riordan creates new, mortal characters that interact with numerous gods from the original Greek myths.

Ole R. Holsti defines content analysis as "any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages" (14). There are two main types of content analysis: manifest, that examines "the visible, surface content (Babbie 325), and latent, that looks at a communication's "underlying meaning" (Babbie 325). For the purposes of this study I have used the latter technique.

Because there are rarely standard categories when conducting a content analysis, "the investigator often finds himself in the position of having to develop his own for the question at hand. Hence, before constructing categories he may want to read over a sample of his data to get a 'feel' for the types of relevant symbols or themes" (Holsti 11). With this in mind, before beginning my analysis, I read the first book in the series and came up with the following five roles:

Helper: Provide aid to facilitate others' lives

Opponent: Act negatively towards others

Manipulator: Control the actions of others

Enabler: Empower others to help themselves

Beneficiary: Receive help from others

I then read *The Lightning Thief*, *The Sea of Monsters*, *The Titan's Curse*, *The Battle of the Labryinth*, and *The Last Olympian*, identifying and recording the gods' speech and actions from each book. I included the minor gods, such as Janus and Morpheus, in this search because although they do not have the power of the Olympians, the text identifies them as gods. However I did not include other supernatural beings, like the Fates, the Titans, or old sea spirits, because they belong to a separate order. With these guidelines in place, I categorized the gods' words and acts using the roles specified above. Finally, I analyzed this data, examining the roles these characters play in Riordan's series and looking for commonalities and trends.

## Analysis

### *Helper*

The gods' role of helper is the most recurrent and wide-ranging in the series. The prevalence of this role is understandable, because throughout the books, mortal heroes are delving into the realm of the gods, trying to accomplish feats that use all of, and sometimes exceed, their own powers. In such extreme difficulty, it is natural that heroes require help from the gods to succeed. However as the heroes grow into their own powers and increase their abilities they require less assistance, and so this is also the role that changes the most over the course of the series.

Half-bloods (described both as mortals and demigods, half-bloods are children with one human and one divine parent) are constantly in peril because monsters are attracted to them (*Lightning Thief* 96-97). Until they have had training to fight these monsters, the demigods are in mortal danger from attacks, often dying before they finish sixth grade (*Lightning Thief* 28). So the gods set up Camp Half-Blood which, as Annabeth tells Percy, "is the only safe place on earth for kids like us" (*Lightning Thief* 94). Zeus placed Dionysus as camp director (*Lightning Thief* 70), and his mission at the camp is, in his own words, "to keep [the] little brats safe from harm" (*Lightning Thief* 132). The camp provides a safe haven from monsters and other perils and at the same time trains heroes to fight those dangers. Poseidon wants to send Percy to the camp to protect him (*Lightning Thief* 40), and Annabeth admits that when she ran away from home as a child, "a seven-year-old half-blood wouldn't have made it very far alone. Athena guided me toward help" (*Lightning Thief* 248). Athena watches over Annabeth (*Lightning Thief* 201) and makes sure that she finds other demigods and her way to Half-

Blood Hill. The gods not only provide a refuge for half-bloods, but they also facilitate their arrival, rescuing their children from imminent dangers and protecting them until they learn enough to take care of themselves.

However, even with training, heroes sometimes still need the gods to save them. In Percy's first adventure he is trapped between a 630 foot drop and a rampaging monster, so, with the knowledge that even water would kill him as easily as cement from that height (*Lightning Thief* 210), Percy jumps from the Gateway Arch, praying to Poseidon to save him (*Lightning Thief* 211). After he lands, Percy realizes, "I should've been dead. The fact that I wasn't seemed like...well, a miracle" (*Lightning Thief* 213) and, after prodding from one of Poseidon's messengers, he thanks his father for this (*Lightning Thief* 213).

In similarly dire situations, the gods will often step in to save heroes, especially their own children. For instance, Artemis saves Percy and his companions from an attacking manticore and an armed helicopter (*Titan's Curse* 24, 26-27) and Annabeth from the deadly weight of the sky (*Titan's Curse* 107). (Unlike the others, this latter protection requires a sacrifice on Artemis' part, for though the goddess saves Annabeth from certain death, to do so Artemis must trap herself in her place.) Zeus animates two statues to save his daughter and her companions from a group of skeleton warriors that surround them (*Titan's Curse* 218). And when the manticore again attacks Percy and his friends, this time with the help of enemy mercenaries, Dionysus steps in to save them, driving the guards insane and disintegrating the manticore under a mass of vines and grapes (*Titan's Curse* 238-239). Finally, Hades shields his demigod children from the explosion when Zeus sends a lightning blast to destroy them (*Last Olympian* 208-209).

In all of these cases, the gods use their superior powers to protect heroes when their own abilities are not sufficient.

But not all of the mortals that gods protect are heroes. Percy fights the monster Antaeus, but when Percy strikes a blow on him, instead of dissolving into sand like monsters do: “where blood should’ve come out there was a spout of sand, like I’d busted the side of an hourglass. It spilled into the dirt floor, and the dirt collected around his leg, almost like a cast. When the dirt fell away, the wound was gone” (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 264). Percy is confused until he realizes that Antaeus’ mother is Gaea, the goddess of the earth, and she is continually saving him (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 265).

So on multiple occasions in this series the gods save mortals whom they care about or are sworn to protect. Coming from a non-divine character, these recurring rescues would probably seem like an overuse of *deus ex machina*. However, the fact that these characters *are* gods means that their last minute saves do not seem out of place or staged. This allows the heroes to go up against impossibly large enemies and situations, raising the entire scale of the books and the stakes in the end. Ultimately the heroes must defeat their enemies or face the unraveling of all of Western civilization (*Last Olympian* 268), but this does not seem extreme, because of what comes before it.

Even when the gods are not able to save the lives of these mortals, they can sometimes grant them something better than death. When Hades sends his forces after Thalia, she tries to make it to Camp Half-Blood, but the monsters defeat her just at the camp’s borders (*Lightning Thief* 114). She died protecting the other half-bloods who were with her, and “As she died, Zeus took pity on her. He turned her into [a] pine tree. Her spirit still helps protect the borders of the valley” (*Lightning Thief* 115). So Thalia



lives on in some capacity and offers protection to her friends and the other half-bloods. Further, because Zeus transforms Thalia before she died, she is later able to become human again and live out the rest of her life (*Sea of Monsters* 277-279).

Similarly, when Zoë, Artemis' lead Huntress, falls in battle, Artemis cannot save her, but she does transform Zoë's body into a silver dust that she sends into the sky. The dust forms "a gleaming constellation that looked a lot like a girl's figure—a girl with a bow, running across the sky. 'Let the world honor you, my Huntress,' Artemis said. 'Live forever in the stars'" (*Titan's Curse* 278-279). The gods have great powers and they can often influence mortals or save them from deadly situations, but at times, the Fates have more control. When Percy asks Artemis if she can help Zoë, the goddess answers, "Life is a fragile thing, Percy. If the Fates will the string to be cut, there is little I can do" (*Titan's Curse* 277). A prophecy foretold Zoë's death (*Titan's Curse* 277) and so she dies, but thanks to Artemis she is immortalized in the stars forever.

In all of these examples the gods actively save the lives or essences of the mortals involved. This is the highest form of help that the gods provide—saving a mortal from danger when he can no longer save himself. However, while the gods continue to help mortals throughout the entire series, they only outright save Percy and his friends during the first three books (with the exception of Hades shielding his children from the explosion, since this is a flashback). And by the beginning of the fifth book, Percy seems to have outgrown that level of protection. When Poseidon tells Tyson that he is needed in the armory, Percy speaks up:

"You should let him fight," I told my father. "He hates being stuck in the armory. Can't you tell?"  
Poseidon shook his head. "It is bad enough I must send you into danger. Tyson is too young. I must protect him."

“You should trust him,” I said. “Not try to protect him” (*Last Olympian* 42).

By this time, Percy knows his own powers and so relies less on the gods. Poseidon responds to this self-reliance and steps back some from the aspect of protection, and by the end of the book Tyson is no longer buried in the armory, but instead he leads the Cyclopes to battle the Titan army (*Last Olympian* 345).

However, without totally rescuing them, the gods continue to provide aid and protection to mortals throughout all five books, especially during a hero's quest. Most of the main half-bloods in this series have magical gifts from their parents, like Percy's sword (that always returns to him and turns into a pen when not in use) from Poseidon (*Lightning Thief* 153) and Annabeth's Yankee cap (that turns the wearer invisible) from Athena (*Lightning Thief* 149). These gifts help Annabeth and Percy save themselves on many of their missions.

A god's gift may also be geared at a hero's specific task. For example, before Percy goes to the Underworld, Poseidon gives him three white pearls that, when smashed, return the bearers to the sea (*Lightning Thief* 273), allowing Percy, Annabeth, and Grover to escape Hades (*Lightning Thief* 318) and complete their quest. Similarly, when Hermes packs Percy on his quest to the Sea of Monsters, he gives him a thermos of winds and vitamins with “everything [one needs] to feel like [one's self] again” (*Sea of Monsters* 104). These gifts help prove very useful: when the ship the heroes are travelling on breaks apart, Percy uses the winds to get their lifeboats past Scylla and Charybdis (*Sea of Monsters* 162-163), and when Circe turns Percy into a guinea pig, the vitamins change him back into a human again (*Sea of Monsters* 182). Without doing it for him, these gifts

allow Percy to save his friends, himself, and (by allowing him to complete his mission and retrieve the Golden Fleece) Camp Half-Blood.

The gods offer transportation to heroes to speed them on their quests in the form of trucks (*Lightning Thief* 242-243), marine animals (*Sea of Monsters* 109), their own chariots (*Titan's Curse* 48, 274-275), pegasi (*Titan's Curse* 185, 280), magically swift trains (*Titan's Curse* 150), wild boars (*Titan's Curse* 174), and animated statues (*Titan's Curse* 222). Transportation is an effective aid, especially within the confines of a story, where getting from one point to another is necessary, but not necessarily entertaining.

Hera also helps Percy and Annabeth extensively on their quest through the Labyrinth. She not only gets rid of Janus when he is antagonizing Annabeth (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 101), offers the heroes a wish (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 105), and pays their way through Geryon's ranch (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 350), but she also tells Percy, "I guided you more than you know in the maze. I was at your side when you faced Geryon. I let your arrow fly straight. I sent you to Calypso's island. I opened the way to the Titan's mountain" (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 350). Much of what Percy accomplishes during the quest is due to Hera. But while she makes the heroes' tasks easier, she does not accomplish them for them. Annabeth still has to make a difficult choice, Percy still has to fight Geryon and the other dangers in the Labyrinth, and when Annabeth wishes for a way to navigate the maze, Hera gives them a puzzle instead of any direct help, saying, "The means is already within your grasp...Percy knows the answer" (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 105). So what should have been a great and helpful gift remains for much of this book a puzzling message. She gives Percy the answer to a problem, but presents it vaguely, almost as a riddle, so he must make the connections for himself.

Many of the gods take this tack when giving heroes instructions, like Athena who, rather than rescuing Percy from the skeleton warriors that are chasing him, or even showing him an exit, tells him, “There is always a way out for those clever enough to find it” (*Titan’s Curse* 211). This advice does not help Percy at the moment but, remembering her words later, it does help him construct a plan to escape (*Titan’s Curse* 217-219). Hestia, too, gives Percy advice that he must work out for himself. She provides the hero with the knowledge that he needs to defeat Kronos, explaining, “Not all powers are spectacular...Sometimes the hardest power to master is the power of yielding...When Dionysus was made a god, I gave up my throne for him...I keep the peace. I yield when necessary. Can you do this?” (*Last Olympian* 102-103). Percy does not understand her words at the time, but in the moment that this advice matters, when Percy stands ready to attack Kronos (inhabiting Luke’s body) and be the hero of the hour, he yields, giving the knife to Luke so that he can stab himself and expel Kronos, vanquished, from his body (*Last Olympian* 336-337). Luke is the only one who can defeat Kronos (*Last Olympian* 336), and so if Percy had attacked instead of yielding, the Titan might well have killed all of them and destroyed Olympus. But Hestia’s lesson, along with Percy’s friend Rachel’s revelation to the same effect (“*You are not the hero...It will affect what you do*” (*Last Olympian* 336)), leads Percy to save the day by allowing Luke to save it for him. The gods lead heroes to solutions they probably never would have thought of, allowing them to find their way through a constantly changing labyrinth, escape from enemies when there are no visible exits, and defeat the king of the Titans. By giving Percy the information to do these things himself, the gods are help

almost as much as if they had performed the feats, but in this way they also let heroes use their own intelligence and powers.

The gods demand allegiance, but most truly care for their children and feel some level of devotion to those that actively honor them. Poseidon claims his Cyclops son, Tyson, just after Tantalus asks, “The monster may be able to do some menial chores. Any suggestions as to where such a beast should be kenneled?” (*Sea of Monsters* 64). Because of this action, Tyson is ultimately treated as a hero instead of a monster or an animal. Indeed, Poseidon helps both of his sons, though they feel abandoned by him and for some time do not appreciate how much he does for them. When Percy is still angry, Hermes explains to him why gods often have to act indirectly when it comes to mortals and tells him, “But I believe if you give it some thought, you will see that Poseidon *has* been paying attention to you. He has answered your prayers” (*Sea of Monsters* 258). Percy thinks about this, remembers the help Poseidon has given him on his two quests, and asks, “And there was Tyson. Had Poseidon brought us together on purpose? How many times had Tyson saved my life this summer?” (*Sea of Monsters* 259). Tyson makes a similar realization, telling Percy, “Poseidon did care for me after all...He sent you to help me. Just what I asked for...a friend. Young Cyclopes grow up alone on the streets...Makes us appreciate blessings...But I got scared...I prayed to [Poseidon] for help...Sorry I said Poseidon was mean. He sent me a brother” (*Sea of Monsters* 263-264).

Artemis has no children, but she feels much the same way towards young maidens as the other gods do toward their offspring. The goddess offers Bianca a place as one of her Hunters (*Titan’s Curse* 40). In this, Artemis gives Bianca what she needs most,

telling her, “You can see [your brother] from time to time...But you will be free of responsibility. He will have the camp counselors to take care of him. And you will have a new family. Us” (*Titan’s Curse* 42). Because the gods do not raise their half-blood children directly, these heroes often feel an absence of family, especially those whose mortal parent is deceased, as Bianca’s is. Artemis offers her a future of familial security that she has not felt in years.

Even Ares, who threatens his daughter and seems to treat her callously, helps her achieve importance and fame by making sure she receives the quest for the Golden Fleece (*Sea of Monsters* 155). Ares also helps his son, Eurytion, by granting him immortality. But though Ares presumably meant this to benefit his son (Zeus describes immortality as “The greatest gift of all” (*Last Olympian* 350) when he offers it to Percy), it grows to be a curse. Eurytion says, “I chose immortality when my dad offered it. Worst mistake I ever made. Now I’m stuck here at this ranch. I can’t leave. I can’t quit. I just tend the cows and fight Geryon’s fights. We’re kinda tied together” (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 160). So even the gods’ best intentions can go astray, as time turns a gift into a punishment. Perhaps Hermes is correct when he says that trying to help one’s children too often only causes more problems (*Sea of Monsters* 258).

Though it tears him apart to do so (*Last Olympian* 225), Hermes stands by these words when it comes to his son Luke. Hermes loves his son, but he also knows Luke’s terrible destiny (*Last Olympian* 226) and that not even gods can change fate (*Last Olympian* 357). While Zeus forbids direct interference on mortal quests (*Titan’s Curse* 156), he and the other gods do bend this rule when they like. However, though the gods may try to avoid a prophecy’s outcome (as when Hades places Nico and Bianca in the

Lotus Hotel so they will not turn sixteen or when Artemis makes Thalia a Hunter so she too, will stop aging before she reaches that prophetic year), divinations from the Oracle are fated and ultimately come true. Hermes tells Luke, ““gods must not interfere directly in mortal affairs. It is one of our Ancient Laws. Especially when your destiny...’ His voice trailed off” (*Last Olympian* 224). In the end, Luke is the child of the prophecy who must either save or destroy the gods (*Last Olympian* 340) and Hermes knows this (*Last Olympian* 356-357). So while it may be problematic for the gods to meddle, beneficially or otherwise, in mortals’ lives, it could be drastic for Hermes to intervene in Luke’s. Unable to give Luke the help he really wants to, Hermes promises his son, “I do love you. Go to camp. I will see that you get a quest soon. Perhaps you can defeat the Hydra, or steal the apples of Hesperides. You will get a chance to be a great hero before...” (*Last Olympian* 225). Hermes cannot help Luke in the way he desperately wants to, so he offers him some small help. When Luke dies, Hermes stops the burial proceedings: “Hermes unwrapped Luke’s face and kissed his forehead. He murmured some words in Ancient Greek—a final blessing. ‘Farewell,’ he whispered. Then he nodded and allowed the Fates to carry away his son’s body” (*Last Olympian* 340). Hermes was unable to help his son during his life, but in his death, he is finally able to grant him some protection.

The gods help by advancing heroes on their quests or by making their lives, or deaths, better. They are more powerful than the mortals they help and so can look down at them and advance their goals or save them from danger. They have control of the situation. But the gods’ role of helper shifts as the Titans gather power and the danger to the gods themselves grows greater. Though they help Percy through all of his quests, the gods are not able to do much for him as he and the other heroes prepare to take on

Kronos and save Olympus. Dionysus tells Percy that the gods cannot do this themselves (*Last Olympian* 268). They still offer information and advice (*Last Olympian* 39, 41, 148-152, 157, 269-270) (most notably Hestia's lesson on yielding (*Last Olympian* 102-103), as well as minor protection for Olympus (*Last Olympian* 100, 155, 180, 322). But the gods cannot give Percy the powers to beat Kronos, as earlier they help him accomplish so many things, because they do not have the power themselves.

So the most important help that the gods give in the last book is on another front. Dionysus tells Percy, "You must save Olympus...Leave Typhon to the Olympians and save our own seats of power. It must be done" (*Last Olympian* 269). The Titan threat is two-pronged: Typhon, a Titan so powerful that even the gods ran from him in the last war (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 193), and Kronos, the leader of the Titans, whose victory would destroy all of western civilization (*Last Olympian* 267-268, 270). Both of these enemies must be defeated, but neither the gods nor the heroes have the ability to beat them both. So the gods help mortals in this last book by fighting Typhon (*Last Olympian* 60-61, 128-129, 262-263, 330-333) and other Titans (*Last Olympian* 315-317, 329), while the heroes take on Kronos. They are fighting two fronts of the same war, and though the gods cannot actively help the heroes with their task, both gods and mortals are attacking different parts of the same problem, helping each other achieve a common goal. While most of the gods' help seems like that of a superior aiding a subordinate, here the gods work in a partnership with the heroes, each saving the other.

In addition to the general aid and protection they offer, the gods teach and advise mortals. When Percy first arrives at Camp Half-Blood, he does not believe in the existence of the Greek gods, and acts accordingly. This flippant attitude could easily



result in serious trouble for Percy, and Dionysus gives him some advice to that effect, telling him, “Oh, you’d better [believe in gods]...Before one of them incinerates you” (*Lightning Thief* 69). When Percy still takes the notion lightly, Dionysus shows him a vision of his true power, getting Percy to take the idea of gods seriously for the first time and teaching him that he would not want to cross one (*Lightning Thief* 70-71). Chiron, a centaur who works at Camp Half-Blood, gives Percy more detailed information about the gods’ place in the modern world and the layout and workings of the camp, acting as informant to the reader as much as to Percy himself. Chiron explains the rules of the world that Riordan has created for his story, but Dionysus tells Percy the information that will keep him alive and out of serious harm. Though they often lack the details (like Dionysus, who cannot be bothered to remember “all those ancient monsters and dusty titans” (*Titan’s Curse* 96)), the gods provide much of the most important information that heroes acquire.

When Tyson is disillusioned by one of his heroes, he asks Hephaestus about it. The god tells the group of heroes, “people, monsters, even gods change...Believe me, young Cyclops...you can’t trust others. All you can trust is the work of your own hands” (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 190-191). This may be sad and bitter advice, but Hephaestus is holding nothing back and teaching from his own experiences here. Dionysus offers a similarly honest, but more uplifting lesson at the end of this quest, telling Percy:

“Remember, boy, that a kind act can sometimes be as powerful as a sword. As a mortal, I was never a great fighter or athlete or poet. I only made wine. The people in my village laughed at me. They said I would never amount to anything. Look at me now. Sometimes small things can become very large indeed” (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 346).

Like the characters in any story, the gods' personalities vary, and so it makes sense that their teachings do too. But unlike most fictional characters, gods have ages of wisdom gathered. Often this comes out in the form of simple knowledge, offering a hero the next step on his quest or a solution to his problem. But here it informs a whole philosophy of life. The gods are sitting down with mortals and sharing their views, as mentors. This open and honest mentoring from a god to a mortal seems contradictory to many of the gods' harsher actions and reminds the reader that the gods are not only powerful rulers, but also parents. Hephaestus (through his machines) and Dionysus both harass Percy multiple times during this series, and here they are openly counseling him. The gods are not always consistent, making their characters wide-ranging and unpredictable.

Finally, the gods help mortals by offering them rewards for their great deeds. They pull heroes into their divine realm and expect them not only to function there, but to triumph. To this end, the gods afford mortals a certain amount of help, but even with that in mind, the heroes' feats are often extraordinary and worthy of acclaim and the gods rightly reward mortals for their heroic and herculean deeds.

However, these rewards must be exceptionally earned, as the gods do not reward mortals easily. Even after Percy fights monsters and gods alike to find and return Zeus' master bolt, the king of the gods hardly rewards him. He admits, "You have done me a service, boy. Few heroes could have accomplished as much... To show you my thanks, I shall spare your life" (*Lightning Thief* 343). Considering Zeus' first impulse was to kill Percy, perhaps this is fair compensation, however after everything the hero has been through for the gods, it seems he should leave with more than just his life. On his second quest, Percy struggles through the Sea of Monsters, retrieving the Golden Fleece and

thereby saving Camp Half-Blood, but he gets no reward for his efforts. All Percy gets upon his triumphant return is a letter from Poseidon with two words: “Brace Yourself” (*Sea of Monsters* 261), not a reward at all, but rather a cryptic and ominous warning. Gods are in the business of rewarding mortals, but so far Percy has not received a lot for his efforts. He desperately wants recognition, at least from Poseidon (*Lightning Thief* 192, *Sea of Monsters* 258), and perhaps this pushes him to greater achievements.

After Percy’s third quest, the gods finally reward him and his companions, though even that is up for debate as Ares, Athena, and others discuss destroying Percy and Thalia instead (*Titan’s Curse* 288-289). In the end, the heroes’ worthy deeds (and their parents’ interventions) once more outweigh any objections, and this time the gods go further than merely awarding the heroes their lives, as Zeus declares, “And so, since we will not be destroying these heroes...I imagine we should honor them. Let the triumph celebration begin!” (*Titan’s Curse* 294) The gods throw the heroes an Olympian scale party, during which all of the mortals receive congratulations from many of the gods. In addition, Artemis rewards Thalia by making her the new lieutenant of her Hunters (*Titan’s Curse* 291).

The end of the fourth book is a muted affair and the gods do not formally reward the heroes. Dionysus, however, says to Percy, “you and Annabeth saved this camp. I’m not sure I should thank you for that...Regardless, I suppose it was mildly competent, what you two did. I thought you should know—it wasn’t a total loss” (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 345-346). Coming from Dionysus, who always insults the campers no matter what the occasion, this is high praise indeed. Also, immediately after he commends Percy, Dionysus takes him to the amphitheater “and Dionysus pointed toward the

campfire...It was Chris Rodriguez, the half-blood who'd gone insane in the Labyrinth. I turned to Dionysus. 'You cured him?' 'Madness is my specialty. It was quite simple'" (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 346). Curing Chris may or may not be a reward for the heroes' accomplishments, but Dionysus' timing in first praising Percy and then showing him to cured half-blood points to a distinct connection.

There is no doubt, however, about the rewards the gods heap on the heroes after they defeat Kronos and save all of Olympus. The gods are excited, obliging, and generous. Normally dismissive of mortals, "Zeus didn't even blink an eye when [Percy] told him [his] strange request. He snapped his fingers and informed [Percy] that the top of the Empire State Building was now lit up blue" (*Last Olympian* 341). The heroes arrive amid cheers and congratulations as the gods praise their children profusely. Ares calls Clarisse the best warrior he's ever seen (*Last Olympian* 342), Hera (ungraciously) revokes Annabeth's punishment (*Last Olympian* 343), and Poseidon hugs Percy for the first time ever (*Last Olympian* 345). After Zeus thanks the gods, they reward all of the heroes: the fallen Hunters earn automatic entry into Elysium and Zeus promises Thalia help finding new mortals to fill their places (*Last Olympian* 347); Tyson becomes a "general in the armies of Olympus" and Zeus offers him a new weapon—"The best stick that may be found" (*Last Olympian* 348); Dionysus makes Grover a member of the Council of Cloven Elders (*Last Olympian* 348); Athena appoints Annabeth the "official architect of Olympus" (*Last Olympian* 350); and Zeus lets Percy choose his own reward, suggesting "The greatest gift of all" (*Last Olympian* 350)—immortality. He tells Percy, "if you wish it—you shall be made a god" (*Last Olympian* 350-351). For this entire series, Percy has been struggling in the realm of immortal gods, growing in his own

strength and reaching closer to their level of power. Yet by now, Percy also knows his own mortal strength. Becoming like a god himself is not his greatest prize; rather Percy wants to increase the power that all demigods have. He turns down Zeus' suggestion and instead binds the gods to "grant [any] *reasonable* request as long as it is within [their] power" (*Last Olympian* 352). With such an assurance in place, Percy asks the gods to claim all of their children and send them all to Camp Half-Blood to be trained, to give the minor gods and their children more power, to dissolve the pact between Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon to have no more children (and the resulting attacks on powerful half-bloods), and to welcome and treat every demigod with respect (*Last Olympian* 352-354). The gods are taken aback by Percy's extensive and imposing request. Zeus grumbles, "Humph...Being told what to do by a mere child" (*Last Olympian* 354). Just as in the final battle the heroes hold the power to save Olympus, leaving the gods helpless to save themselves (*Last Olympian* 268-269), here the gods have given Percy too much power, and now he can dictate to them. Athena ultimately speaks to the wisdom of Percy's request and the gods hold to their deal (*Last Olympian* 354).

### *Opponent*

The gods are inherently dangerous to mortals, even half-bloods. Percy recognizes this, saying, "I turned away as the god Ares revealed his true immortal form. I somehow knew that if I looked, I would disintegrate into ashes" (*Lightning Thief* 331). The power of the gods is too great for a mortal to witness and live. Though they can take on a human visage to safely interact with mortals, all they have to do to destroy one is to

reveal their true form. Whatever help the gods give mortals, it is important to realize that they are innately dangerous to them.

The gods have great powers in these stories, and they often use them to the detriment of mortals. Sometimes this opposition is light: Dionysus constrains Percy in grape vines that grow around his ankles (*Titan's Curse* 122), Aphrodite promises him anguish and indecision in his "tragic love story" (*Titan's Curse* 186), Janus paralyzes Annabeth with indecision (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 99-100), and Morpheus and Hecate help cut off any backup (both from inside and outside of Manhattan) that the heroes might be able to rally while defending Olympus (*Last Olympian* 163, 168).

The gods in these examples have different reasons for hindering the mortals in question: revenge, amusement, and desire to make themselves more important or garner more power. Yet all of these reasons are personal and self-interested. The mortals themselves did nothing much to earn this harmful attention, and it is carried out at the whim of selfish gods. This adds an element of unpredictability to the stories. Not only are the gods powerful beings that manipulate mortals' emotions and actions, but they are also capricious beings who might at any time frustrate a mortal for their own personal interests.

The gods use their powers for much more than frustration, however. In their role of opponent, the gods often use deadly force. When Hades fears that Zeus' daughter Thalia might be the child of the prophecy (and therefore have the power to destroy the gods), "Hades let the worst monsters out of Tartarus to torment [her]" (*Lightning Thief* 114). Zeus fears the same of Hades' two children and when Hades refuses to give them up, Zeus explodes the hotel that they, Hades, and their mother are in (*Last Olympian*

210). This kills Nico and Bianca's mother and would have destroyed them too except for Hades' intervention. As with the examples of minor hindrances, the mortals involved in these attacks have done nothing wrong. After hearing a prophecy, Hades and Zeus are afraid that one of these children might be the demigod that may choose to destroy them. Even with all of these uncertainties, the gods choose to use their powers to preemptively destroy all of the mortals in question. With such great powers, it seems that many of the gods never bothered to learn actual problem solving skills, but instead resolve any difficulties with destruction. This makes them all the more dangerous opponents.

So when Ares discovers that Percy survived the Underworld, and therefore may inform Olympus of his plans to start a war between the gods, his immediate response is, "I've got to kill you. Nothing personal" (*Lightning Thief* 324). Ares conjures a wild boar to attack Percy (*Lightning Thief* 324), but when Percy easily defeats the beast, Ares fights him personally (*Lightning Thief* 326-330). Similarly, when Percy flees from Hades in *The Lightning Thief*, Hades sends his skeleton guards after Percy to destroy him (*Lightning Thief* 318). The guards fail, however, and when Percy escapes from Hades' dungeon in *The Last Olympian*, the god of the Underworld wants to ensure victory, this time attacking along with his forces (*Last Olympian* 138). The gods do not usually fight mortals directly (as Ares puts it to Percy, "No direct involvement. Sorry, kid. You're not at my level" (*Lightning Thief* 324)). Ares and Hades are the only gods to fight a mortal directly, and they only do so because they are especially enraged, Ares under Percy's taunts (*Lightning Thief* 324-325), and Hades after he sees Percy escaping his grasp again (*Last Olympian* 137).

But when one does attack, a god is the most powerful opponent that a mortal can face. When Ares taunts Percy, asking, “I’ve been fighting for eternity, kid. My strength is unlimited and I cannot die. What have you got?” (*Lightning Thief* 326), it’s a valid question. In this battle, a young hero is going up against the ultimate authority figure. Percy *has* to rise to the occasion because otherwise he will be blown to smithereens in an instant. So ironically, if the opposition does not destroy the mortal involved, it often makes him stronger. Percy obviously does not kill Ares in this fight, but, stretching intelligence and ingenuity, he does manage to wound him (*Lightning Thief* 326, 329-33). Percy also gains the upper hand in his fight with Hades, pinning the god with his sword in Hades’ face (*Last Olympian* 138). These are both major achievements for Percy. The larger the opponent, the larger the danger and obstacle, but also the larger the triumph in the end. If Percy can stand his own with two of the greatest beings in the world, he can do anything. Indeed, after Percy gets the better of these gods he shows great presumption, both times making demands of the gods. After his fight with Ares, Percy sends the helm of darkness to Hades with the message, “Tell him to call off the war” (*Lightning Thief* 331). After he clashes with Hades, Percy’s message to him is, “Tell him he owes me for letting him go” (*Last Olympian* 139), and he instructs Nico to get information from Hades and convince him to help defend Olympus (*Last Olympian* 139).

Though the gods often hinder and attack heroes (as illustrated above), they most frequently oppose mortals through punishment (definitely a familiar concept in the original myths Riordan’s books draw upon). Sometimes these punishments are light, just to remind a mortal of the gods’ superiority and power. When Grover curses, “Oh, Styx!” (*Lightning Thief* 59), thunder booms, despite the clear sky. This cloudless thunder



sounds again when Percy uses several gods' names in passing (Dionysus later reprimands him for "throwing those names around" (*Lightning Thief* 67)). However, as the offence to the gods increases, so does the punishment to the mortal. Luke tells Percy that after he stole Zeus' master bolt, "I heard the storms rumbling, and I knew they'd discovered my theft" (*Lightning Thief* 367). This punishment continues, as New York experiences "massive snow storms, flooding, wildfires from lightning strikes" (*Lightning Thief* 8), tornadoes, squalls (*Lightning Thief* 17), and hurricanes (*Lightning Thief* 41-42). These storms disrupt the whole state, but several specifically focus on Percy (presumably because Zeus thinks he is the thief). Percy relates, "One night, a thunderstorm blew out the windows in my dorm room. A few days later, the biggest tornado ever spotted in the Hudson Valley touched down only fifty miles from [my school]" (*Lightning Thief* 17). The storms even follow Percy to Camp Half-Blood (*Lightning Thief* 138), though Grover says that "It never rains here [at the camp] unless we want it to" (*Lightning Thief* 131). Chiron tells Percy that if Poseidon and Zeus were to go to war over the stolen lightning bolt, chaos and destruction would erupt, "And you, Percy Jackson, would be the first to feel Zeus's wrath" (*Lightning Thief* 138). The gods do not care if their punishments overflow beyond the single wrongdoer (as they often do) however they want to make sure that the offender feels the brunt of the penalty.

When the Furies attack Percy, one declares, "Perseus Jackson... You have offended the gods. You shall die'" (*Lightning Thief* 165). When the gods feel that an offence is serious, they do not take half measures in punishment. But Hades' planned punishment goes beyond killing Percy. He tells the young hero, "I wanted you brought

before me alive so you might face every torture in the Fields of Punishment” (*Lightning Thief* 314). For theft from a god, not even death is enough of a punishment.

There are numerous examples of the gods punishing mortals, both half-blood and otherwise, throughout all five books. What constitutes offence depends on the god in question, but almost all of them take retribution for some affront during the series.

Artemis, valuing her privacy, transforms any humans who see her hunt, as well as most boys who see her Hunters, into animals (*Titan’s Curse* 27, 38). Zeus punishes those he does not want to have in his sky, throwing a lightning bolt at the last trainee Apollo had in the sun chariot (*Titan’s Curse* 52) and threatening Percy with the same (*Lightning Thief* 147, 341). Hephaestus makes mechanical devices to mete out his punishments.

When Bianca takes a statuette from Hephaestus’ junkyard, his giant automaton attacks, ultimately killing her (*Titan’s Curse* 193-198). Likewise, Hephaestus’ throne “[shoots] tendrils of electricity in all directions” (*Last Olympian* 326) after Percy jumps onto it.

When Annabeth insults Hera and refuses to give her a sacrifice (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 350), the goddess sends cows wherever Annabeth goes that leave her “little presents” (*Last Olympian* 146-147). In another instance, Percy sits on Poseidon’s throne and “A wave of gale-force anger slammed into [his] mind” (*Last Olympian* 309), nearly destroying it. Though Poseidon does stop this punishment once he realizes that it is his son he is harming, anyone else would have gotten the full blast, turning them into “a puddle of seawater” (*Last Olympian* 310).

As demonstrated here, although the gods will jump to punishments for most offences, some restrict penalties to their own children. Not all of the gods make this concession, however, as Ares threatens his daughter Clarisse with violence if she does

not complete her quest (*Sea of Monsters* 154-155). Nor is it true that prior service to a god will deter punishment from him. After Daedalus kills his nephew, not even his years of devotion to Athena can save him from her wrath because, as she tells Daedalus, “*the boy had my blessing as well. And you have killed him. For that, you must pay now and forever*” (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 174). Similarly, Zeus banishes the telekhines to Tartarus after they engage in dark magic (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 202-203), even “After [they] made so many of the gods’ finest weapons” (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 200). Such behavior shows the vengeance and unpredictability of the gods, traits that make them even more dangerous opponents.

In addition, all of these punishments show the gods’ seemingly absolute control over mortals. Anyone who survives such a punishment, or observes that of another, is likely to live in terror and awe of the gods in the future. As the dynamic changes between Percy and the gods, he loses some of this fear, but initially he learns to be afraid of the gods’ power. The first god Percy meets is Dionysus, and he soon gets a tiny dose of what his powers could do to him:

He looked at me straight on, and...I saw visions of grape vines choking unbelievers to death, drunken warriors insane with battle lust, sailors screaming as their hands turned to flippers, their faces elongating into dolphin snouts. I knew that if I pushed him, Mr. D would show me worse things (*Lightning Thief* 70-71).

Immediately Percy falls into submission (*Lightning Thief* 71). The gods’ punishments make mortals afraid of their deities, allowing the gods to maintain their authority and keep mortals in line with their wishes.

The gods most often use punishments to discipline those who offend them, but they occasionally also punish in their children’s names. When a rivalry erupts between two cabins at Camp Half-Blood, “the Ares campers called down a curse, and all the

Apollo kids' arrows turned to rubber" (*Last Olympian* 69). The Apollo cabin reciprocates in kind, and Annabeth bemoans the gods' involvement, saying, "Last time Apollo cursed a cabin, it took a week for the rhyming couplets to wear off" (*Last Olympian* 69). When their children ask, Ares and Apollo lend their greater powers to the fight. Polyphemus likewise asks his father, Poseidon, to "curse this thief!" (*Sea of Monsters* 226) when Percy steals his Golden Fleece. In this instance Poseidon does not intervene, as Percy is also his son, however Polyphemus' faith in his father's retribution shows that Poseidon might have under different circumstances. Although the gods combat or punish many mortals, ultimately they care about their children and often feel a loyalty to them and often want to help them, as they do here by punishing their enemies.

### *Manipulator*

Echoing the *OED*'s definition, Chiron describes the gods as "great beings that control the forces of nature and human endeavors" (*Lightning Thief* 67). As it is so central to their description, control obviously plays a major part in the gods' roles. Indeed, gods inherently affect humans. Their auras manipulate mortals' emotions, causing everyone around them to feel like fighting (*Lightning Thief* 225-227) or in love (*Titan's Curse* 183) or subservient (*Lightning Thief* 309), depending on the god in question. Percy says of his first encounter with Ares, "bad feelings started boiling in my stomach. Anger, resentment, bitterness. I wanted to hit a wall. I wanted to pick a fight with somebody" (*Lightning Thief* 225). Percy is able to control himself physically, yet Ares definitely riles up his emotions, "cranking up the passions so badly, they clouded [his] ability to think" (*Lightning Thief* 229). The mere presence of a god manipulates

mortals, making them feel emotions that are not truly theirs. The role of manipulator is part of the gods' very being.

So it is not surprising that the gods use their powers to manipulate and control mortals for their own purposes, often acting through them. When Poseidon claims Percy as his son, Chiron tells the young hero, "I'm saying it's no accident Poseidon has claimed you now. It's a very risky gamble, but he's in a desperate situation. He needs you" (*Lightning Thief* 145). As powerful as they are, the gods in this series live under certain restrictions. Divine law prohibits gods from directly stealing one another's symbols of power (*Lightning Thief* 136) or from entering another god's territory without his consent (*Lightning Thief* 145). Mortals, on the other hand, do not have these restrictions. Chiron asks, "No god can be held responsible for a hero's actions. Why do you think the gods always operate through humans?" (*Lightning Thief* 145). This setup provides heroes with a great deal of freedom; however, the gods also use it to their own advantage, forcing mortals to act where they themselves cannot. When Zeus' master bolt is stolen, he blames Percy, believing that the hero stole it for his father (*Lightning Thief* 135-136). This is not true; however, since Zeus believes it to be, he acts accordingly. Divine law prevents him from storming Poseidon's sea palace to retrieve his bolt, so Zeus manipulates Percy into doing it for him. The threat of global carnage, starting with his own destruction (*Lightning Thief* 138), plus the immediate show of Zeus' willingness to punish him (demonstrated by an unheard-of storm at Camp Half-Blood) pressures Percy into a quest to retrieve the weapon. He realizes, "I had brought this storm to Half-Blood Hill. Zeus was punishing the whole camp because of me. I was furious. 'So I have to find the stupid bolt,' I said. 'And bring it to Zeus'" (*Lightning Thief* 138). Percy has

barely begun his training as a hero and after a recent near-fatal brush with a hellhound (*Lightning Thief* 133), he is not looking for the danger of a quest. Without the pressure Zeus exerts over him, Percy certainly would not have agreed to leave camp. This manipulation, however, does not free Percy or the other heroes from responsibility for their actions. Hades' anger at Percy increases because the demigod brings Zeus' master bolt to the Underworld (*Lightning Thief* 314) despite the fact that Percy was unaware of its presence, and Ares tries to kill Percy merely because he survives Zeus' quest to retrieve the weapon (*Lightning Thief* 322). Percy may act because of the gods, but the blame for those actions falls squarely on his shoulders.

Just as Zeus manipulates Percy into action to recover his master bolt, Hades manipulates him into recovering his helm of darkness. When Percy finds out that his mother is not dead, but rather "being kept" (*Lightning Thief* 244), he asks Ares why this would be. Ares replies, "You need to study war, punk. Hostages. You take somebody to control somebody else" (*Lightning Thief* 244). This is exactly Hades' plan. He tells Percy, "I took [your mother]. I knew, Percy Jackson, that you would come to bargain with me eventually. Return my helm, and perhaps I will let her go. She is not dead, you know. Not yet. But if you displease me, that will change" (*Lightning Thief* 315). Here Hades is certainly acting in the role of opponent, perhaps even that of villain. With such great power at their fingertips, the gods are often willing to kill to solve their problems. Once Percy even questions their right to rule, remembering examples of their excess destruction (*Last Olympian* 228). Though the gods may help mortals, at times even genuinely, more often they are self-serving and willing to take whatever measures necessary to achieve their ends.

For whatever else Hades' threat does, it quite effectively maneuvers Percy into coming to the god's realm. The young hero admits that the real reason he takes the quest is not because of Zeus' pushing, or guilt from Poseidon (though those motives do play some part in Percy's acceptance of the quest (*Lightning Thief* 192)), but because he wants to save his mother from Hades (*Lightning Thief* 159). Once Percy arrives in the Underworld, Hades manipulates his actions by offering the hero his mother in exchange for his obedience. Though this does not work exactly as Hades plans (Percy cannot give Hades the helm because he does not have it), the principle of manipulation is sound. Though Percy flees from Hades, he promises, "I'll find your helm, Uncle...I'll return it" (*Lightning Thief* 317), and when Percy *does* locate the helm, he is willing to fight the god of war in single combat to win it (*Lightning Thief* 325).

Percy has been reaching out for family, seeking Poseidon's approval even before he will admit to himself that he wants it, but in Hades he finds an uncle who is playing with his mother's life. Family problems are certainly never easy, and Riordan spends a great deal of time on the abandonment Percy and other heroes feel for never knowing, or rarely seeing, their divine parent. Yet Hades takes these family troubles to a new level. In the end, it is the love of family that helps the heroes save Olympus (*Last Olympian* 334-335), but it is the family that several demigods made of each other, when the relations with their parents had not been enough. In Percy's final reward, he asks to strengthen the familial ties between gods and their children. In this, Percy finally creates a place for himself in his larger family, but his divine uncles and cousins, who at times seek to harm him or those he loves, makes this struggle for acceptance all the more difficult and confusing.

Ares, too, manipulates Percy, getting him to retrieve his shield from an amusement park. Ares first requests this as a favor, but when Percy refuses, he threatens, goads, expresses his superiority, bribes, raises the bribe, and finally threatens again in order to quell any lingering questions (*Lightning Thief* 227-229). Percy seems to have some control in this exchange, as Ares has to work for his acceptance of the deal, but Ares ultimately manipulates the situation, taking advantage of Percy's weak spot: his mother. Also, when Ares gives Percy supplies as payment for his help, he gives Percy the sheath for Zeus' master bolt, disguised as a backpack. In this, Ares maneuvers Percy into carrying the bolt to Hades. He explains to Percy:

“See, you've got to die in the Underworld. Then Old Seaweed will be mad at Hades for killing you. Corpse Breath will have Zeus' master bolt, so Zeus'll be mad at *him*. And Hades is still looking for this...’ From his pocket he took out...The helm of darkness...‘Hades will be mad at both Zeus and Poseidon, because he doesn't know who took this. Pretty soon, we got a nice little three-way slugfest going’” (*Lightning Thief* 322).

Ares, as the god of war, manipulates Percy in order to start a bloody conflict between the Olympians (*Lightning Thief* 322). While it is true that even as Ares manipulates Percy, he himself is being manipulated by Kronos (*Lightning Thief* 324), Ares “never realized the true master he was serving” (*Lightning Thief* 365). When Ares catches Luke with the stolen master bolt, Kronos (through Luke) feeds Ares the idea of a war between the gods (*Lightning Thief* 367). Ares takes the idea as his own and runs with it, denying Kronos' own manipulation of him (*Lightning Thief* 324). So though the Titan is ultimately pulling the puppet-strings, Ares is acting within his own character in the role of manipulator.

In *The Sea of Monsters*, when Tantalus grants the quest to retrieve the Golden Fleece to Clarisse and refuses to let anyone else leave the camp (*Sea of Monsters* 92, 95), Hermes manipulates Percy into also attempting the mission. Percy already wants to go,



but is not going to break the rules. So Hermes leads him to that decision, asking about Percy's plans with regards to the quest and egging him on. When Percy says that he does not have permission to leave camp, Hermes asks, "Will that stop you?" (*Sea of Monsters* 101) and tells a story about himself wherein he did not follow the rules and everything worked out fine in the end (*Sea of Monsters* 101-102). "'You're saying I should go anyway,' [Percy] said, 'even without permission.' Hermes's eyes twinkled" (*Sea of Monsters* 102). Hermes does not respond, but he then gives Percy magical gifts to help him on his journey. He also packs for the trip (*Sea of Monsters* 105), tricks two companions down to the beach (*Sea of Monsters* 107), and tells Percy how to get transport to the first stage of the journey (*Sea of Monsters* 105). To which Percy responds:

"Wait...I don't understand any of this. I haven't ever agreed to go!"  
 "I'd make up your mind in the next five minutes, if I were you," Hermes advised.  
 'That's when the harpies will come to eat you...Twenty paces away, [Hermes] shimmered and vanished, leaving [Percy] alone with a thermos, a bottle of chewable vitamins, and five minutes to make an impossible decision" (*Sea of Monsters* 105-106).

Hermes leads Percy to the decision he wants him to make, gives him all of the supplies to make such a choice possible and the advice to start the journey, and then leaves him in a situation where he either has to do as Hermes says or be torn apart by harpies. The gods manipulate heroes by taking away their choices, leaving them with only one realistic course of action. It is ultimately the hero's choice to act, but only after the gods have eliminated his other options.

In all of these examples, the gods' role of manipulator advances the action of the story. Percy would not have gone on any quest (or side-quest) if he were not maneuvered by five different gods. He would have stayed at camp and never had these adventures or

grown from their experiences. The gods' role of manipulator sets up the plots of these first two books and aids character development. Percy and the other heroes would not normally be matching wits with, fighting against, or working with gods, and this raises the heroes to a whole new level. They must use all of their abilities, both human and god-given, to have any hope of surviving these new experiences. Instead of practicing with other heroes at camp, Percy takes on powerful monsters (*Lightning Thief* 179-183, 207-210, *Sea of Monsters* 143-147, 158-162 216-220, 225-229) and even gods (*Lightning Thief* 318, 327-330). By acting through heroes, the gods are bringing those mortals into their realm, forcing them to become more godlike to be able to succeed on such a playing field. This technique of increasing character development through battle with excessively difficult adversaries is not unique to stories involving gods, but rather is used in many fantasy novels.

The role of manipulator also introduces an interesting dichotomy within the character of the gods. The Olympians have immense powers, in most respects more so than any other character in this series. They can control the laws of nature that mortals must live by, offer extraordinary gifts, and lightly throw around powerful threats and punishments. Percy thinks that Ares is trying to trick them when he convinces the heroes to retrieve his shield, but Annabeth tells him, "You don't ignore the gods unless you want serious bad fortune. [Ares] wasn't kidding about turning you into a rodent" (*Lightning Thief* 229). The gods can get heroes to do what they want because everyone fears them and knows that they will follow through with their threats. The gods are in control. Yet the most common reason that gods manipulate heroes in the first place is because they need them to perform a feat that they themselves cannot. Luke says of these feats: "All

the heroics—being pawns of the gods. They should’ve been overthrown thousands of years ago, but they’ve hung on, thanks to us half-bloods” (*Lightning Thief* 365). Chiron repeats this sentiment, telling Percy, “The gods use heroes as their tools...Destroy the tools, and the gods will be crippled” (*Titan’s Curse* 305). The gods may control mortals and their endeavors, but they also need them for their own survival. This makes the relationships between gods and mortals fluid and dynamic, allowing the gods to embrace roles as both manipulators and (as discussed later) beneficiaries, and the heroes to stand and fight alongside some of the greatest powers in the world.

Though it plays a part in all five books, the gods’ manipulation of heroes becomes less frequent as the gods acknowledge the heroes’ accomplishments. Over time and as the Titan threat grows larger, the gods begrudgingly admit their increased need of the heroes, and so work alongside them instead of merely manipulating their actions. Very strong in the first book and still the driving force for the main quest in the second, manipulation plays a lesser role in the final three books, especially with regards to Percy. In a minor example in *The Titan’s Curse*, when Ares wants to talk to Percy alone, he tells the other mortals go get some tacos. Grover responds that the taco stand is closed, and “Ares snapped his fingers again. The lights inside the taqueria suddenly blazed to life. The boards flew off the door and the CLOSED sign flipped to OPEN. ‘You were saying, goat boy?’” (*Titan’s Curse* 183). Here Ares manipulates not only the heroes, but also the scene around him, to get Grover and the others to do as he wants. The location does not hold what will help him, so he changes the terms of the situation.

Hades twice manipulates his son Nico in the final book. However this does not disprove my point about the gods’ admiration of heroes’ deeds decreasing their

manipulation of them, but rather shows that this is an individual process. While Percy has the first two books to prove himself, Nico's character only arrives in the third, and so Hades still thinks poorly of him until quite late into the fifth.

Hades uses Nico to get Percy before him (*Last Olympian* 122), hiding the real reason he wants Percy in the Underworld and promising information about Nico's mother if he cooperates (*Last Olympian* 123). It is interesting that Hades controls both Nico and Percy through their mothers. Because of the perceived abandonment by their divine parent, half-bloods often have family issues or resentments, which makes the parental connections they do have all the more important. Hades uses this information to his advantage, offering Nico information about his deceased mother, and Percy the continued survival of his own.

Also, though he technically meets the terms of their deal, Hades further manipulates the situation, giving Nico some, but not all of the information he wants (*Last Olympian* 123-125) and telling his son, "As for our agreement, I spoke with Jackson. I did not harm him. You got your information. If you had wanted a better deal, you should've made me swear on the Styx" (*Last Olympian* 125) as he places Percy in one of the Underworld's dungeons. At the end of this encounter, Hades has everything he wants and Nico has almost nothing.

Indeed, Hades blatantly manipulates his son for his own benefit. When Nico asks why Hades removed his sister and him from the Lotus Casino (where time stands still) Hades answers, because "This idiot son of Poseidon cannot be allowed to be the child of the prophecy" (*Last Olympian* 124). Hades puts Nico and Bianca back into the world, essentially bringing them back to life, because he wants them to raise him up to true

power. He explains, “Nico will turn sixteen, as the prophecy says, and then *he* will make the decision that will save the world. And I will be king of the gods” (*Last Olympian* 125). Hades’ children are merely game pieces that he puts in action to earn himself the power he desires.

### *Enabler*

The gods in this series enable mortals to achieve great things, empowering them and pushing them to succeed on their own. Percy’s final reward is a perfect example of the gods’ empowerment of mortals, giving him so much power, in fact, that he is able to command the gods themselves.

The gods literally empower their demigod children, imbuing them with supernatural powers from birth. All half-bloods are “hardwired for ancient Greek” (*Lightning Thief* 88), “impulsive [with] battlefield reflexes” (*Lightning Thief* 88) and have “senses [that] are better than a regular mortal’s” (*Lightning Thief* 88), fighting powers that kick in when they are in mortal danger (*Lightning Thief* 53), and the sensation that time slows down when they are fighting a deadly beast (*Lightning Thief* 54). In addition, every half-blood inherits powers from their divine parent. Poseidon gives Percy the ability to control water (*Lightning Thief* 91, *Last Olympian* 246-247), survive beneath it (*Lightning Thief* 212-213, 271), bring water to himself when there is none nearby (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 205-206), derive power and healing from water (*Lightning Thief* 121, 123), and understand equine animals (*Titan’s Curse* 109). Hades grants his children a connection with the dead and control over them (*Titan’s Curse* 307-308, *Battle of the Labyrinth* 86, *Last Olympian* 85), and the ability to move the earth and

rock (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 287, 305, *Last Olympian* 130-131). Zeus gives Thalia power over lightning (*Titan's Curse* 84, 88) and Demeter allows her children to grow plants quickly on any surface (*Last Olympian* 169). The gods physically empower their children, giving them not only magical tools to aid them in their quests and endeavors, but extraordinary powers that come from themselves. Though the gods instill these powers in demigods, the heroes themselves must learn to control them and cultivate them. Percy can shoot water out of a fountain before he even believes in such powers (*Lightning Thief* 9), but it takes him practice to be able to easily be able to control currents (*Titan's Curse* 111). Indeed, over time he discovers a number of new abilities. For example, Percy believes that he needs water nearby in order to control it until he calls the liquid, first from calcified seashells (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 153-154), and then from the far away sea (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 205-206).

The gods also enable and empower mortals by simply believing in them. Poseidon motivates Percy into action when the hero is demoralized and considering quitting by giving a Nereid a message for him: "*Percy, take the sword. Your father believes in you*" (*Lightning Thief* 214). Poseidon has faith in his son when Percy has lost it in himself. He thinks, "I felt like drowning myself. The only problem: I was immune to drowning. *Your father believes in you, she had said*" (*Lightning Thief* 215). Remembering these words jumpstarts Percy into action and grabs his sword, thanks Poseidon, and swims for the surface (*Lightning Thief* 215).

Poseidon also believes that his son can solve his own problems, and encourages him to do so. At the end of Percy's first quest, Poseidon tells his son, "When you return home, Percy, you must make an important choice. You will find a package waiting in

your room... You will understand when you see it. No one can choose your path, Percy. You must decide” (*Lightning Thief* 346). When Percy opens the package, it contains Medusa’s head (*Lightning Thief* 350), that Percy had mailed to Mount Olympus after he killed the gorgon (*Lightning Thief* 183). By returning the head to him, Poseidon gives Percy the power to personally get rid of his step-father, a rude, smelly man (*Lightning Thief* 30) who hits his mother (*Lightning Thief* 351). Percy asks his mother if she wants Gabe gone, and is ready to use Medusa’s head to turn him to stone. His mother stops Percy from doing this, not because she does not want it done, but because she does not want someone else to solve her problems for her (*Lightning Thief* 351). Percy wants to get rid of this horrible man from his mother’s life, but recognizes her feelings, so he in turn empowers his mother to solve her own problem and as he leaves, Percy sees his “mother staring at Gabe, as if she were contemplating how he would look as a garden statue” (*Lightning Thief* 353).

Just as Poseidon empowers Percy and (indirectly) his mother to solve their own problems, Pan calls upon all mortals to take up the problem of conservation. Pan is a dying god, losing power and fading in a modern world where man does not respect the wild expanses that make up his realm (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 314). He says to Grover, “tell the satyrs, and the dryads, and the other spirits of nature...they must stop waiting for me to save them. I cannot. The only salvation you must make yourself” (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 315). All of the satyrs have been waiting for Pan to return, condemning man for destroying his domain while he was away, but not doing anything to stop him. When Grover finally finds Pan, the god calls upon him and all of the mortals, saying, “You must carry on my spirit. It can no longer be carried by a god. It must be taken up by all

of you...Remake the wild, a little at a time, each in your own corner of the world. You cannot wait for anyone else, even a god, to do that for you” (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 315). Just because gods have great powers does not mean that mortals do not, or that demigods or humans or anyone should not exercise those powers. Pan passes on his own powers to the heroes, calling upon all mortals to take up the same spirit. He builds up and inspires Grover and his companions, but he also physically gives them part of himself. When Grover releases Pan, “the god dissolved. White mist divided into wisps of energy...It filled the room. A curl of smoke went straight into [Percy’s] mouth, and Grover’s and the others. But...a little more of it went into Grover” (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 316-317). Grover literally acquires some of Pan’s powers from this exchange, for when the Titans attack Camp Half-Blood, “Grover opened his mouth, and the most horrible sound...came out. It was like a brass trumpet magnified a thousand times—the sound of pure fear. As one, the forces of Kronos dropped their weapons and ran for their lives” (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 331). Chiron describes this sound as panic, Pan’s horrible cry and his greatest power (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 338). Within the smoke, part of Pan went into Grover, empowering the satyr to invoke fear itself and help win the day for Camp Half-Blood. This is not the only power Grover inherits. He tells Nico, “Since Pan’s death, I can feel when something is wrong in nature” (*Last Olympian* 113). However, the most important way that Pan empowers mortals is through his original statement that everyone must take up his spirit. Grover understands this, telling the other satyrs, “He let his spirit pass into all of us. We must act. Each of us must work to renew the wild, to protect what’s left of it. We must spread the word. Pan is dead. There is no one but us” (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 338-339). And so after his meeting with Pan, instead of just getting angry over



the way humans treat nature, Grover mobilizes forces to defend and improve the wild and green places (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 341).

Indeed, perhaps the most important way that gods enable mortals is simply by letting them know about the powers they already have. Dionysus tells Percy, “we actually *need* mortals to rescue Olympus. You see, we are manifestations of your culture. If you don’t care enough to save Olympus yourselves—... You must save, Olympus” (*Last Olympian* 268-269). While Percy prepares to fight for Olympus, he also tries to convince the gods to return and help the heroes do so (*Last Olympian* 268). He still feels that his own powers may not be enough and wants the gods around to help. But here Dionysus empowers Percy and the other half-bloods with the protection of their home. In most regards the gods have powers far greater than the heroes do. Yet they are helpless to save Olympus because it depends on the mortals’ continued belief and protection. The heroes must save it for them.

### *Beneficiary*

The gods’ final role is that of beneficiary. The gods help mortals a great deal in the beginning of this series, and less so as it progresses. The reverse is also true, as gods do not receive much help from mortals in the first few books, however by the final installment Dionysus is almost begging the heroes to save Olympus for them (*Last Olympian* 269).

In *The Lightning Thief* when Percy returns Zeus’ master bolt, he tells Zeus everything that happened on his quest (*Lightning Thief* 342). In doing so, Percy is not just telling his story, but rewriting the course of events for the god. Zeus is taken aback

by the information, saying, “I sense the boy tells the truth... But that Ares would do such a thing...it is most unlike him” (*Lightning Thief* 342). Percy provides the answer that Zeus and Poseidon cannot discover on his own, explaining that “Ares didn’t act alone. Someone else—something else—came up with the idea” (*Lightning Thief* 342) and describing the creature in the pit in Tartarus (*Lightning Thief* 342-343). Though Percy does not tell the gods who the creature is, based on his description, Zeus and Poseidon realize that it is Kronos (*Lightning Thief* 343). Percy tries to give them more information, telling Poseidon, “He’s healing...He’s coming back” (*Lightning Thief* 344). Yet the gods feel they know better and dismiss Percy’s correct assessment (*Lightning Thief* 344-345). When Percy further discovers the connection between Luke and Kronos, however, Chiron declares, “This must be reported to Olympus” (*Lightning Thief* 371) and takes it to the gods himself. Percy changes the gods’ intelligence on Kronos, alerting them to the fact that he might indeed be getting stronger. Without Percy’s information, the gods would ignorant of a grave danger.

Percy continues to keep the gods up to date with what he learns on his quests, showing Dionysus that Luke, not Chiron, poisoned the pine tree that protects the borders of Camp Half-Blood (*Sea of Monsters* 239-240) and giving Artemis all of his information on a manicomore he discovers (*Titan’s Curse* 38). After hearing Percy’s report, Artemis responds, “Soon we shall have the most important monster of all—the one that shall bring about the downfall of Olympus...I’ve been too slow to see the signs. I must hunt this monster” (*Titan’s Curse* 39). Percy does not fully understand the information that he offers Artemis, so the intelligence flows two ways. However Artemis admits that she

would not have known of the reemergence of this deadly monster without Percy's information.

As the danger from the Titan army grows larger and the gods are out in the field fighting, Percy is no longer the only source of information on the Titan threat. Yet Percy is often at the brunt of the action with Kronos, and Poseidon, at least, trusts his information more than others'. Percy returns home from Camp Half-Blood after the Titans' attack there, and Poseidon visits him, saying, "I heard stories...But I wanted to hear it directly from you. Tell me everything" (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 356). Only when Percy has finished his recitation does Poseidon admit, "So Kronos is indeed back" (*Battle of the Labyrinth* 356). The sea god has other sources, but he goes to Percy for the truth, and only then does he believe it.

When Artemis is captured during her hunt, the Oracle declares: "*Five shall go west to the goddess in chains... Campers and Hunters combined prevail*" (*Titan's Curse* 89). The prophecy states that mortals—half-bloods and Hunters—not gods, will succeed in rescuing Artemis. Several gods aid the mortal travelers on their quest; however, it is ultimately Percy and his companions who free Artemis from the Titans' trap. Poseidon later tells Percy, "The curse of the sky can only be forced upon a Titan... Anyone else must *choose* to take the burden of their own free will. Only a hero, someone with strength, a true heart, and great courage, would do such a thing" (*Titan's Curse* 297). Perhaps this is why mortals are needed to free Artemis. (Obviously Artemis herself accepts the burden, but she is manipulated into the position (*Titan's Curse* 107), and when Atlas taunts her about how easily he trapped her there, she answers, "You surprised me... It will not happen again" (*Titan's Curse* 107).) Annabeth and Percy both receive

the burden of the sky, and Poseidon's description of the person who would take the encumbrance does fit the heroes in this series much better than it does the gods. Indeed, even Apollo does not attempt the rescue (though he does lend the mortals extra help on this quest because it is his sister who is in danger (*Titan's Curse* 156)). So Artemis is trapped, holding up the sky, until Percy and the other mortals find her and set her free.

Hades, too, needs help from Percy, though in the form of mercy rather than rescuing. When the god of the Underworld attacks Percy, the hero fights his way through Hades' front lines, killing all of his forces and Percy realizes, "The next thing I knew, my knee was planted on Hades' chest. I was holding the collar of his royal robes in one fist, and the tip of my sword was pointed right at his face...Hades swallowed. 'Now, Jackson, listen here...'" (*Last Olympian* 138). Hades sounds scared, or at the very least worried. Percy cannot kill Hades, as the gods are immortal, however they can be wounded (*Lightning Thief* 330). Instead of taking that next step, however, Percy snarls, "Just because I'm a nice person...I'll let you go. But first, tell me about that trap!" (*Last Olympian* 139) and Hades disappears. "'Go to your father,' [Percy tells] Nico. 'Tell him he owes me for letting him go. Find out what's going to happen to Mount Olympus and convince him to help'" (*Last Olympian* 139). Hades has not been fighting Typhon with the other gods, content to wait in the Underworld, saving his forces for the most opportune time for himself, rather than for the gods as a whole (*Last Olympian* 124-125).

So not only does Percy show Hades mercy by not slashing his face when he has the chance, after his prodding Nico convinces Hades, Demeter, and Persephone to join in the fight with the other gods (*Last Olympian* 280-282). While Nico works on Hades, Poseidon does the same to Poseidon (who is similarly holed up in his undersea palace,

caring more about its survival than Olympus'), ultimately convincing him to add his forces to the fight with the Titan army as well (*Last Olympian* 310-311). Earlier in the series, Percy acted out the gods' plans, but here he is telling a god to act out *his* strategy. Percy tells Poseidon, "Kronos sent an army against you on purpose. He wants to divide you from the other gods because he knows you could tip the scales" (*Last Olympian* 310). It is a good thing that Percy not only realizes this, but also convinces Poseidon that Olympus is more important than his home beneath the sea, because even under constant attack by Zeus and all the gods that he could muster, Typhon arrives in Manhattan a bit worse for wear, but still rampaging (*Last Olympian* 330). It is only when Poseidon also joins the fight that the gods gather enough power to defeat him (*Last Olympian* 332). So not only do the gods receive help from the heroes in defeating Kronos and saving Olympus (as discussed earlier), but Percy also helps them with their own fight against Typhon. Hermes admits that the gods' forces are weaker because they do not have Hades or Poseidon fighting alongside them (*Last Olympian* 156), but instead of trying to change this, the gods merely decide to batter down and fight anyway. Percy, however, works to gather all of their forces together so that they have a real chance of beating the Titan, and it is this effort that leads to his defeat. Poseidon recognizes this and later thanks Percy for convincing him to enter the fight (*Last Olympian* 377).

Finally, after receiving so much advice from the gods over the course of the series, Percy reassures and counsels Hermes after Luke dies:

"A long time ago...you told me the hardest thing about being a god was not being able to help your children. You also told me that you couldn't give up on your family, no matter how tempting they made it."

"And now you know I'm a hypocrite?"

"No, you were right. Luke loved you. At the end, he realized his fate. I think he realized why you couldn't help him. He remembered what was important."

“Too late for him and me.”

“You have other children. Honor Luke by recognizing them. All the gods can do that” (*Last Olympian* 358).

The gods, especially at the beginning of this series, often see mortals as beneath them, and so do not treat them with the respect that Percy asks for in the end of the last book. Percy helps prove that the gods cannot simply ignore mortals (as Kronos’ rising is made possible by disgruntled demigods). Instead of the harsh threats or punishments that the gods instinctually use to solve their problems, Percy offers a more compassionate solution: to respect and care for mortals so that such disastrous situations do not arise in the future. Percy preaches compassion and Hermes, at least, is listening.

Percy learned from Hermes about the gods’ rules of non-interference, and from them came to better understand the relationship between his father and himself (*Sea of Monsters* 258-259). Now Percy takes on the role of teacher, offering that wisdom back to Hermes, adding hope, if not for the relationship between Hermes and Luke, than for that with Hermes’ other children. Hermes is focused, understandably, on the son he has lost, but shifts his focus to the children Hermes can still connect with, while at the same time offering a way to keep Luke’s memory. Percy’s continued optimism leads Hermes to ask hesitantly, “You think...Luke actually loved me? After all that happened?” (*Last Olympian* 359). When Percy honestly answers in the affirmative, Hermes finally switches over to thinking about his other children, asking for help getting them to the camp. “‘Percy Jackson,’ Hermes said, ‘you might just teach us a thing or two’” (*Last Olympian* 359). Percy not only lifts Hermes’ mood, but adjusts his mind-set and moves him to action. Percy has become a driving force and the gods greatly benefit from his help, receiving comfort, information, rescue, mercy, and ultimately salvation. In some of

their other roles the gods control and assault mortals, using their powers to keep a hierarchy in place with themselves at the top. In others they help and empower these mortals, but the gods are still in control, bestowing support and skills upon those beneath them. However in the role of beneficiary, the gods give mortal protagonists a strength that no other character could: control over, not only all of Western civilization but also, the greatest authorities known to man.

**Summary**

The gods play five main roles in Riordan's Percy Jackson and the Olympians series: helper, opponent, manipulator, enabler, and beneficiary. Initially the gods hold all of the control, helping or hindering heroes as they use these mortals to do their will. However, as the gods empower mortals, the heroes embrace and increase their own abilities, and ultimately the gods need help to save themselves. In their roles, the gods embody intangible fears or unknowns, raise the level of the action and increase the mortals' own powers, and ultimately prove the power and importance of humanity.



## Discussion

The gods in this series, like those in the original myths, help to explain the world. Commenting on his books, Riordan says, “mythology is a way of explaining something that can’t be explained, except by allegory, and my son’s struggle in school definitely applied. He completely bought in to the idea that ADHD/dyslexia, taken together, was an almost sure sign that you have Olympian blood” (*Myth and Mystery*). The idea that gods (through their bloodline) can help explain a problem that affects children today, and further make those children feel connected and special for it, is an amazing one. Children are searching for answers about their world, and if the gods in these stories can help provide them, then their revival is certainly a good thing. However, as Susan Cooper states, fantasy can also take over this function of “unriddling the world” (Cooper). So what do the gods in this series offer that other fantasy characters do not?

First of all, the gods are recognizable characters. Many schools teach mythology in middle school, so Riordan’s readers may be able to recognize “Mr. D” as Dionysus before Percy does (*Lightning Thief* 62-70) or identify Athena by her gray eyes (*Titan’s Curse* 211) before Percy names her (*Titan’s Curse* 218). Although Frey would call this “a parlor game for the well-read classicist” (9), it does create small puzzles within the story that readers may enjoy.

The gods also lend a level of fan fiction to these books, and through this, a sense of play. Riordan offers his readers new stories with characters they may already like and also entertains them with his changes to the gods. He states, “On one level, I mean I’m trying to have fun with the Classical models by modernizing them. The Underworld works very well under Los Angeles, and Ares is just at home in Washington D.C. as he

was in Sparta” (*Myth and Mystery*). It is fun, both as an author and a reader, to imagine well-known characters in new situations and surroundings. But through Riordan’s modernizations, the gods also make age-old lessons appear relevant to a contemporary American audience and at the same time allow the author to examine the interesting question of the progression of culture (*Myth and Mystery*). As Chiron describes to Percy, the gods and their homes are part of the “collective consciousness” of Western civilization, and so they move with the spirit of that culture as it shifts from Greece to Rome to Europe to America (*Lightning Thief* 72-73). Therefore Mount Olympus is in the Empire State Building (*Lightning Thief* 99), Poseidon wears Bermuda shorts and sits in a fisherman’s chair (*Lightning Thief* 340), and Ares threatens humans with a knife to get his way because, as he tells Percy, “I love this country. Best place since Sparta. Don’t you carry a weapon, punk?” (*Lightning Thief* 227). The gods retain their original natures, but have adapted to modern America.

However most of what the gods offer in this series comes, not from their name recognition or the resulting entertainment or exploration, but from the characters themselves. While any fantasy character can help readers examine and understand the unknowns in the world, the gods in this series take this a step further, physically embodying man’s concerns. In the first book when Percy believes his mother has died, he can actually go to the Underworld and face the force that took her away. His outward actions mirror man’s anger at death, creating a direct physical opponent to an emotional struggle and thereby making this struggle easier to see and understand. By making gods characters in the story, the protagonists can actually see, interact with, and overcome or embrace the powers and values that readers may deal with in their everyday life. The

gods allow Percy to physically engage intangible concepts, as he fights violence and death in the forms of Ares and Hades.

The gods in this story also represent not only authority over man (as other characters do also), but the ultimate authority. Gods control man's actions and indeed, at the beginning of the series, Percy is totally manipulated by the gods. They are seemingly omnipotent, and throughout the books the heroes remain aware of the gods' power to instantly destroy them. Gods create larger obstacles for their protagonists and raise the entire level of action, which pushes the young characters harder, until Percy is able to fight against these powerful beings with some amount of success, work with them in partnership, and in the end, emerge in control, saving not only all of Western civilization, but the gods themselves. Arguably, only divine characters could afford a protagonist this level of power. And ultimately, they show the infinite power and possibilities of man by allowing him to succeed where even the gods cannot. Through their deficiency, gods demonstrate the power of humanity.

However, the gods are not merely authority figures, but rather have several roles in this series. They act as manipulators, moving the plot of the story and drawing heroes into a higher level of action; opponents, personifying man's fears like death, war, and natural disaster while at the same time forcing the protagonists to increase their own power to survive; helpers, protecting mortals and allowing them to succeed at superhuman tasks; enablers, empowering those mortals until the gods themselves finally become beneficiaries, marking a shift in the balance of power and giving the protagonists amazing control. Though not performed in quite the same way, these roles are fairly common in fiction and indeed, other characters in this series perform all of them.

However the gods present an interesting dichotomy by embracing all five of these roles. While much of fantasy is black and white, good versus evil, the gods show both of these sides in the same character. They at once empower and dominate man. The gods may help explain unknowns in the universe, but they are themselves a contradiction.

Gods are one of man's earliest creations, and their characters still have value today. This study examined one exemplar series; however, in order to further understand the roles gods play in modern children's literature, further studies could take a broad approach to determine if these functions vary in other novels in this subgenre.

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