

The poster features a large, golden, mechanical dragon-like creature with a red eye and sharp teeth, flying over a city at sunset. A young man is shown falling or flying through the air in the foreground. The background is a cityscape with lights reflecting on the water.

RETURN TO PERCY JACKSON'S WORLD

HEROES OF
OLYMPUS
THE LOST HERO

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CHAPTER 2

JASON

THE STORM CHURNED INTO A MINIATURE HURRICANE. Funnel clouds snaked toward the skywalk like the tendrils of a monster jellyfish. Kids screamed and ran for the building. The wind snatched away their notebooks, jackets, hats, and backpacks. Jason skidded across the slick floor. Leo lost his balance and almost toppled over the railing, but Jason grabbed his jacket and pulled him back. “Thanks, man!” Leo yelled. “Go, go, go!” said Coach Hedge. Piper and Dylan were holding the doors open, herding the other kids inside. Piper’s snowboarding jacket was flapping wildly, her dark hair all in her face. Jason thought she must’ve been freezing, but she looked calm and confident—telling the others it would be okay, encouraging them to keep moving. Jason, Leo, and Coach Hedge ran toward them, but it was like running through quicksand. The wind seemed to fight them, pushing them back. Dylan and Piper pushed one more kid inside, then lost their grip on the doors. They slammed shut, closing off the skywalk. Piper tugged at the handles. Inside, the kids pounded on the glass, but the doors seemed to be stuck. “Dylan, help!” Piper shouted. Dylan just stood there with an idiotic grin, his Cowboys jersey rippling in the wind, like he was suddenly enjoying the storm. “Sorry, Piper,” he said. “I’m done helping.” He flicked his wrist, and Piper flew backward, slamming into the doors and sliding to the skywalk deck. “Piper!” Jason tried to charge forward, but the wind was against him, and Coach Hedge pushed him back. “Coach,” Jason said, “let me go!” “Jason, Leo, stay behind me,” the coach ordered. “This is my fight. I should’ve known that was our monster.” “What?” Leo demanded. A rogue worksheet slapped him in

the face, but he swatted it away. “What monster?” The coach’s cap blew off, and sticking up above his curly hair were two bumps—like the knots cartoon characters get when they’re bonked on the head. Coach Hedge lifted his baseball bat—but it wasn’t a regular bat anymore. Somehow it had changed into a crudely shaped tree-branch club, with twigs and leaves still attached. Dylan gave him that psycho happy smile. “Oh, come on, Coach. Let the boy attack me! After all, you’re getting too old for this. Isn’t that why they retired you to this stupid school? I’ve been on your team the entire season, and you didn’t even know. You’re losing your nose, grandpa.” The coach made an angry sound like an animal bleating. “That’s it, cupcake. You’re going down.” “You think you can protect three half-bloods at once, old man?” Dylan laughed. “Good luck.” Dylan pointed at Leo, and a funnel cloud materialized around him. Leo flew off the skywalk like he’d been tossed. Somehow he managed to twist in midair, and slammed sideways into the canyon wall. He skidded, clawing furiously for any handhold. Finally he grabbed a thin ledge about fifty feet below the skywalk and hung there by his fingertips. “Help!” he yelled up at them. “Rope, please? Bungee cord? Something?” Coach Hedge cursed and tossed Jason his club. “I don’t know who you are, kid, but I hope you’re good. Keep that thing busy”—he stabbed a thumb at Dylan—“while I get Leo.” “Get him how?” Jason demanded. “You going to fly?” “Not fly. Climb.” Hedge kicked off his shoes, and Jason almost had a coronary. The coach didn’t have any feet. He had hooves—goat’s hooves. Which meant those things on his head, Jason realized, weren’t bumps. They were horns. “You’re a faun,” Jason said. “Satyr!” Hedge snapped. “Fauns are Roman. But we’ll talk about that later.” Hedge leaped over the railing. He sailed toward the canyon wall and hit hooves first. He bounded down the cliff with impossible agility, finding footholds no bigger than postage stamps, dodging whirlwinds that tried to attack him as he picked his way toward

Leo. "Isn't that cute!" Dylan turned toward Jason. "Now it's your turn, boy." Jason threw the club. It seemed useless with the winds so strong, but the club flew right at Dylan, even curving when he tried to dodge, and smacked him on the head so hard he fell to his knees. Piper wasn't as dazed as she appeared. Her fingers closed around the club when it rolled next to her, but before she could use it, Dylan rose. Blood—golden blood—trickled from his forehead. "Nice try, boy." He glared at Jason. "But you'll have to do better." The skywalk shuddered. Hairline fractures appeared in the glass. Inside the museum, kids stopped banging on the doors. They backed away, watching in terror. Dylan's body dissolved into smoke, as if his molecules were coming unglued. He had the same face, the same brilliant white smile, but his whole form was suddenly composed of swirling black vapor, his eyes like electrical sparks in a living storm cloud. He sprouted black smoky wings and rose above the skywalk. If angels could be evil, Jason decided, they would look exactly like this. "You're a ventus," Jason said, though he had no idea how he knew that word. "A storm spirit." Dylan's laugh sounded like a tornado tearing off a roof. "I'm glad I waited, demigod. Leo and Piper I've known about for weeks. Could've killed them at any time. But my mistress said a third was coming—someone special. She'll reward me greatly for your death!" Two more funnel clouds touched down on either side of Dylan and turned into venti—ghostly young men with smoky wings and eyes that flickered with lightning. Piper stayed down, pretending to be dazed, her hand still gripping the club. Her face was pale, but she gave Jason a determined look, and he understood the message: Keep their attention. I'll brain them from behind. Cute, smart, and violent. Jason wished he remembered having her as a girlfriend. He clenched his fists and got ready to charge, but he never got a chance. Dylan raised his hand, arcs of electricity running between his fingers, and blasted Jason in the chest. Bang! Jason found himself flat on his

back. His mouth tasted like burning aluminum foil. He lifted his head and saw that his clothes were smoking. The lightning bolt had gone straight through his body and blasted off his left shoe. His toes were black with soot. The storm spirits were laughing. The winds raged. Piper was screaming defiantly, but it all sounded tinny and far away. Out of the corner of his eye, Jason saw Coach Hedge climbing the cliff with Leo on his back. Piper was on her feet, desperately swinging the club to fend off the two extra stormspirits, but they were just toying with her. The club went right through their bodies like they weren't there. And Dylan, a dark and winged tornado with eyes, loomed over Jason.

"Stop," Jason croaked. He rose unsteadily to his feet, and he wasn't sure who was more surprised: him, or the stormspirits. "How are you alive?" Dylan's form flickered. "That was enough lightning to kill twenty men!" "My turn," Jason said. He reached in his pocket and pulled out the gold coin. He let his instincts take over, flipping the coin in the air like he'd done it a thousand times. He caught it in his palm, and suddenly he was holding a sword—a wickedly sharp doubleedged weapon. The ridged grip fit his fingers perfectly, and the whole thing was gold—hilt, handle, and blade. Dylan snarled and backed up. He looked at his two comrades and yelled, "Well? Kill him!" The other storm spirits didn't look happy with that order, but they flew at Jason, their fingers crackling with electricity. Jason swung at the first spirit. His blade passed through it, and the creature's smoky form disintegrated.

The second spirit let loose a bolt of lightning, but Jason's blade absorbed the charge. Jason stepped in—one quick thrust, and the second storm spirit dissolved into gold powder. Dylan wailed in outrage. He looked down as if expecting his comrades to re-form, but their gold dust remains dispersed in the wind. "Impossible! Who are you, half-blood?" Piper was so stunned she dropped her club. "Jason, how...?" Then Coach Hedge leaped back onto the skywalk and dumped

Leo like a sack of flour. "Spirits, fear me!" Hedge bellowed, flexing his short arms. Then he looked around and realized there was only Dylan. "Curse it, boy!" he snapped at Jason. "Didn't you leave some for me? I

like a challenge!" Leo got to his feet, breathing hard. He looked completely humiliated, his hands bleeding from clawing at the rocks. "Yo, Coach Supergoat, whatever you are—I just fell down the freaking Grand Canyon! Stop asking for challenges!" Dylan hissed at them, but Jason could see fear in his eyes. "You have no idea how many enemies you've awakened, half-bloods. My mistress will destroy all demigods.

This war you cannot win." Above them, the storm exploded into a full-force gale. Cracks expanded in the skywalk. Sheets of rain poured down, and Jason had to crouch to keep his balance. A hole opened in the clouds—a swirling vortex of black and silver. "The mistress calls me back!" Dylan shouted with glee. "And you, demigod, will come with me!" He lunged at Jason, but Piper tackled the monster from behind.

Even though he was made of smoke, Piper somehow managed to connect. Both of them went sprawling. Leo, Jason, and the coach surged forward to help, but the spirit screamed with rage. He let loose a torrent that knocked them all backward. Jason and Coach Hedge landed on their butts. Jason's sword skidded across the glass. Leo hit the back of his head and curled on his side, dazed and groaning. Piper got the worst of it. She was thrown off Dylan's back and hit the railing, tumbling over the side until she was hanging by one hand over the abyss. Jason started toward her, but Dylan screamed, "I'll settle for this one!" He grabbed Leo's arm and began to rise, towing a halfconscious

Leo below him. The storm spun faster, pulling them upward like a vacuum cleaner. "Help!" Piper yelled. "Somebody!" Then she slipped, screaming as she fell. "Jason, go!" Hedge yelled. "Save her!" The coach launched himself at the spirit with some serious goat fu—lashing out with his hooves, knocking Leo free from the spirit's grasp. Leo dropped

safely to the floor, but Dylan grappled the coach's arms instead. Hedge tried to head-butt him, then kicked him and called him a cupcake. They rose into the air, gaining speed. Coach Hedge shouted down once more, "Save her! I got this!" Then the satyr and the storm spirit spiraled into the clouds and disappeared. Save her? Jason thought. She's gone! But again his instincts won. He ran to the railing, thinking, I'm a lunatic, and jumped over the side. Jason wasn't scared of heights. He was scared of being smashed against the canyon floor five hundred feet below. He figured he hadn't accomplished anything except for dying along with Piper, but he tucked in his arms and plummeted headfirst. The sides of the canyon raced past like a film on fast-forward. His face felt like it was peeling off. In a heartbeat, he caught up with Piper, who was flailing wildly. He tackled her waist and closed his eyes, waiting for death. Piper screamed. The wind whistled in Jason's ears. He wondered what dying would feel like. He was thinking, probably not so good. He wished somehow they could never hit bottom. Suddenly the wind died. Piper's scream turned into a strangled gasp. Jason thought they must be dead, but he hadn't felt any impact. "J-J-Jason," Piper managed. He opened his eyes. They weren't falling. They were floating in midair, a hundred feet above the river. He hugged Piper tight, and she repositioned herself so she was hugging him too. They were nose to nose. Her heart beat so hard, Jason could feel it through her clothes. Her breath smelled like cinnamon. She said, "How did you—" "I didn't," he said. "I think I would know if I could fly..." But then he thought: I don't even know who I am. He imagined going up. Piper yelped as they shot a few feet higher. They weren't exactly floating, Jason decided. He could feel pressure under his feet like they were balancing at the top of a geyser. "The air is supporting us," he said. "Well, tell it to support us more! Get us out of here!" Jason looked down. The easiest thing would be to sink gently to the canyon floor. Then he looked up. The rain had

stopped. The storm clouds didn't seem as bad, but they were still rumbling and flashing. There was no guarantee the spirits were gone for good. He had no idea what had happened to Coach Hedge. And he'd left Leo up there, barely conscious. "We have to help them," Piper said, as if reading his thoughts. "Can you—" "Let's see." Jason thought Up, and instantly they shot skyward. The fact he was riding the winds might've been cool under different circumstances, but he was too much in shock. As soon as they landed on the skywalk, they ran to Leo. Piper turned Leo over, and he groaned. His army coat was soaked from the rain. His curly hair glittered gold from rolling around in monster dust. But at least he wasn't dead. "Stupid ... ugly ... goat," he muttered. "Where did he go?" Piper asked. Leo pointed straight up. "Never came down. Please tell me he didn't actually save my life." "Twice," Jason said. Leo groaned even louder. "What happened? The tornado guy, the gold sword ... I hit my head. That's it, right? I'm hallucinating?" Jason had forgotten about the sword. He walked over to where it was lying and picked it up. The blade was well balanced. On a hunch he flipped it. Midspin, the sword shrank back into a coin and landed in his palm.

"Yep," Leo said. "Definitely hallucinating." Piper shivered in her rain-soaked clothes. "Jason, those things—" "Venti," he said. "Storm spirits." "Okay. You acted like ... like you'd seen them before. Who are you?" He shook his head. "That's what I've been trying to tell you. I don't know." The storm dissipated. The other kids from the Wilderness School were staring out the glass doors in horror. Security guards were working on the locks now, but they didn't seem to be having any luck. "Coach Hedge said he had to protect three people," Jason remembered. "I think he meant us." "And that thing Dylan turned into ..." Piper shuddered. "God, I can't believe it was hitting on me. He called us... what, demigods?" Leo lay on his back, staring at the sky. He didn't seem anxious to get up. "Don't know what demi means," he said. "But

I'm not feeling too godly. You guys feeling godly?" There was a brittle sound like dry twigs snapping, and the cracks in the skywalk began to widen. "We need to get off this thing," Jason said. "Maybe if we—" "Ohhh-kay," Leo interrupted. "Look up there and tell me if those are flying horses." At first Jason thought Leo had hit his head too hard.

Then he saw a dark shape descending from the east—too slow for a plane, too large for a bird. As it got closer he could see a pair of winged animals—gray, four-legged, exactly like horses —except each one had a twenty-foot wingspan. And they were pulling a brightly painted box with two wheels: a chariot. "Reinforcements," he said. "Hedge told me an extraction squad was coming for us." "Extraction squad?" Leo struggled to his feet. "That sounds painful." "And where are they extracting us to?" Piper asked. Jason watched as the chariot landed on the far end of the skywalk. The flying horses tucked in their wings and cantered nervously across the glass, as if they sensed it was near breaking. Two teenagers stood in the chariot—a tall blond girl maybe a little older than Jason, and a bulky dude with a shaved head and a face like a pile of bricks. They both wore jeans and orange T-shirts, with shields tossed over their backs. The girl leaped off before the chariot had even finished moving. She pulled a knife and ran toward Jason's group while the bulky dude was reining in the horses. "Where is he?" the girl demanded. Her gray eyes were fierce and a little startling.

"Where's who?" Jason asked. She frowned like his answer was unacceptable. Then she turned to Leo and Piper. "What about Gleeson? Where is your protector, Gleeson Hedge?" The coach's first name was Gleeson? Jason might've laughed if the morning hadn't been quite so weird and scary. Gleeson Hedge: football coach, goat man, protector of demigods. Sure. Why not? Leo cleared his throat. "He got taken by some ... tornado things." "Venti," Jason said. "Storm spirits." The blond girl arched an eyebrow. "You mean anemoi thuellai? That's the Greek

term. Who are you, and what happened?" Jason did his best to explain, though it was hard to meet those intense gray eyes. About halfway through the story, the other guy from the chariot came over. He stood there glaring at them, his arms crossed. He had a tattoo of a rainbow on his biceps, which seemed a little unusual. When Jason had finished his story, the blond girl didn't look satisfied. "No, no, no! She told me he would be here. She told me if I came here, I'd find the answer."

"Annabeth," the bald guy grunted. "Check it out." He pointed at Jason's feet. Jason hadn't thought much about it, but he was still missing his left shoe, which had been blown off by the lightning. His bare foot felt okay, but it looked like a lump of charcoal. "The guy with one shoe," said the bald dude. "He's the answer." "No, Butch," the girl insisted. "He can't be. I was tricked." She glared at the sky as though it had done something wrong. "What do you want from me?" she screamed. "What have you done with him?" The skywalk shuddered, and the horses whinnied urgently. "Annabeth," said the bald dude, Butch, "we gotta leave. Let's get these three to camp and figure it out there. Those storm spirits might come back." She fumed for a moment. "Fine." She fixed Jason with a resentful look. "We'll settle this later." She turned on her heel and marched toward the chariot. Piper shook her head. "What's her problem? What's going on?" "Seriously," Leo agreed. "We have to get you out of here," Butch said. "I'll explain on the way." "I'm not going anywhere with her." Jason gestured toward the blonde. "She looks like she wants to kill me." Butch hesitated. "Annabeth's okay. You gotta cut her some slack. She had a vision telling her to come here, to find a guy with one shoe. That was supposed to be the answer to her problem." "What problem?" Piper asked. "She's been looking for one of our campers, who's been missing three days," Butch said. "She's going out of her mind with worry. She hoped he'd be here." "Who?" Jason asked. "Her boyfriend," Butch said. "A guy named Percy Jackson.