

Chris Columbus and Craig Titley in a free-wheeling interview discussing *Percy Jackson & The Olympians*

In which we discuss the legacy of 'Potter,' shooting FX, and selfish film criticism

By Drew McWeeny | Friday, Feb 12, 2010 6:30 AM

[<http://www.hitfix.com/blogs/motion-captured/posts/the-m-c-interview-chris-columbus-and-craig-titley-on-percy-jackson-the-olympians-the-lightning-thief>]

It amuses me greatly that the first formal interview I'm doing with Craig Titley is for a film that deals with Gods as the fathers of mortal children.

Why? Well, it could be because I'm aware that Titley has spent the last four years plus working towards a doctorate in mythology, making him pretty much the perfect guy to write a film about gods as fathers. And it could also probably have something to do with the fact that he's the actual godfather of Film Nerd 2.0 himself, my son Toshi.

Yes, that's right... Craig Titley is family. Figuratively speaking. I actually met Craig a decade ago at the premiere of "Detroit Rock City," when Kiss played the afterparty and the two of us ended up standing front row center and talking between songs. At the time, I knew him as a writer who had several scripts floating around that I'd read, including an early pass at the live-action "Scooby Doo" that was dead-on perfect, and a Bugs Bunny feature film that never got made. We bonded over mutual interests and both having last names that sound just plain dirty. We used to joke that we should open a law firm for porn stars with a producer friend called Suckle, Titley, and McWeeny. When I did the long-running "Jedi Council" articles at Ain't It Cool, Craig was one of the guys who attended almost every single one, and he hosted quite a few of them. He's been a good friend at some hard times over the years, and when Toshi was born, Craig stepped up to stand with us at his baptism, and since then, he's been an active godfather, having fun in the role. He's the one who has given Toshi the full line of books that we read at bedtime, each one about a different movie monster, and thanks to a birthday gift of a puppet theater and some animal hand puppets, his full name is, according to Tosh, "Craig Puppet Show." He's also part of "Bat Out Of Hell," the film Scott Swan and I wrote for Joe Dante to direct, a producer who was invaluable in helping us refine the screenplay. So consider that a whole fat lot of full disclosure, and read on fully aware of our ties.

When Craig started work on this, he went radio silent for a while. It was only in the last few weeks that we finally talked about the film, when he suggested that I should talk to him and to director Chris Columbus together. Craig started his career as an assistant to Joe Dante, who directed the first script Chris wrote, "Gremlins," and I know Craig has had a professional history with Chris as well. Craig's one of those writers like Laeta Kalogridis who has suffered through a lot of lame development quicksand, trying to get something made that they're genuinely proud of, and in the last two years, Craig has fulfilled twin ambitions: he's written episodes of "The Clone Wars," meaning he's actually written dialogue for Obi-Wan Kenobi and R2-D2, and he's also written a film for Chris Columbus, a movie that wears its influences on its sleeve.

And, no, I wouldn't say "Harry Potter" is the film's biggest influence. I haven't read the book by Rick Riordan, so I have no idea how "Potter" they are or aren't. I understand the characters as written were younger, more like the first Potter, and I have no doubt the books were published to capitalize on the Potter publishing craze. But the film looks like it draws on Columbus's own filmography from the start of his career as much as it draws on anything else for inspiration. Having recently rewatched both of the first two "Potter" films on BluRay, I was already interested in talking to Columbus, and this seemed like a good opportunity. However, press schedules being what they are, even with Craig playing middle-man, it was incredibly tricky to get everyone on the phone together. Last night, just as I was getting out of a screening, I got a call from Craig asking if I could hop on the phone at 10:00 with him and Chris. It was my last shot at getting them together, and so once I got home, I got out my tape recorder and, without having time to prep, hopped on with the two of them.

We cover a lot of ground here, including Columbus's work on the "Harry Potter" films, directing special effects, how Columbus taught Titley to write without ever realizing it, and much more. Surprisingly, there are very few spoilers for "Percy Jackson," so there's little need to worry about that. Dig in:

Drew: Hey, what's up, gents?

Craig Titley: Chris, you there?

Chris Columbus: Yes.

Craig: Drew?

Drew: I am. Thank you very much, Chris. I can't believe how last minute this is and I'm so sorry to do this late at night like this.

Chris: Oh, that's fine. I don't know if it's Athens or Rome or wherever we just were, but it was some sort of off-time that I'm still set to, so I'm up.

Drew: I just wanted to say, first of all, I really enjoyed it today.

Chris: Great.

Drew: I thought it was... I told Craig this earlier... it really was the Chris Columbus that I first enjoyed.

Chris: Oh, excellent.

Drew: It felt to me like if I had walked out of the theatre and I had looked at the poster and it had the Amblin' logo on the corner and it said copyright 1985, I would have gone, "Yup, sure."

Chris: Well, I definitely... there's no question we were going for that. There's absolutely no question.

Drew: It seems like that is an increasingly difficult thing for people to do, though. To make a film that is kind of unapologetically aimed at a certain audience and that treats them seriously but doesn't ask them to then also make the jump into borderline R-rated material...

Chris: Right.

Drew: ... and I think a lot of it is that we've bought into the thing where it has to be PG-13, almost R. It has to be "extreme," and it has to be for older teens to do anything at the box-office. But I remember the feeling when I was a kid and I'd see these movies, and it felt like movies were for me at that age. Like the early '80's, every movie that came out felt like, "Oh, okay, that was for me."

Chris: Right.

Drew: I love the empowerment of this one. Like I think the kids are just the right age to empower younger kids. When did you first find the book and then at what point did you bring Craig on and decide that this is something that you guys wanted to do together?

Chris: Well, you know, when I first read the book, my daughter was listening to the book... and I was aware of the book. I just wasn't that interested in reading it. But she said, "Dad, this is a story about a kid like me." Now, she has Dyslexia, so I don't want it to sound overly sort of sentimental, but that really was the original reason I got into the book. And then I saw that it had something much more than that, aside from the issues of empowerment, which are truly, you know, a great sort of base for doing a movie like this. The concept of dealing with the myths and the creatures and everything that we haven't really seen recently in terms of Greek mythology, combined with modern contemporary American society... I just thought, "Well, that's unique. I've never seen that before." So, for me, that was really the only reason to get into a film like this, because I thought, "If you're going to do a film that's going to take two years of your life and this amount of green-screen and intense action sequences"... all of those things when you're dealing with something like that... you really want the story to feel completely original. So, when I realized this is what I wanted to do next, it wasn't long. There was a script that existed at Fox for a while. I don't know if Craig read it, but I read it and it's so... as opposed to making kids feel like this is a movie for them, it really spoke down to kids. I think the protagonists were more the same age as the protagonists in the book. They were 11-year-olds, and it just felt like a Nickelodeon kind of adventure as opposed to what I really wanted to do with the movie. Then I talked to Craig about it, and this is my recollection... Craig had a lot of really terrific ideas for opening up the movie. And let me say that when I got into this, I didn't have the pressure that I felt on "Potter", which was really sort of a baptism by fire for me. When we did that first film, there was this sense of the eyes of the world looking at us.

Drew: And then some, yeah.

Chris: We had, "Who are you going to cast? Are you going to be extremely faithful to the book?" And a million more. So that was sort of a version of being in a directorial straightjacket. I really had no way I could direct except within a framework, within a box. As we got to the

second one and then the third one, we sort of earned some trust with the fans, so we had a certain amount of freedom. And obviously by the time they got to "Goblet of Fire" and the other pictures, you know, it felt like they were really thinking about the film first. When I got into this, I said to myself, "I'm really going to think about the movie first. I really want the movie to exist on its own terms." And the book is a great starting place, but I just wanted to make a movie that was so viscerally exciting and feels like... again, that feels like those movies that I was writing in the '80's, which I've just never had a chance to do. So I got in touch with Craig, and Craig had all these amazing ideas for the script. Plus his background in Greek mythology was sort of the real thing that convinced me that that, "Oh, this is the guy for the job."

Drew: That's one of the things... I know you and Craig have a history, but the idea that this is what Craig was doing anyway in Santa Barbara, that this is what he's been kind of consumed with for the last few years... it just seems like one of those perfect storms of, "Oh my God, this is the right piece of material and I've got to put it in front of him."

Chris: Right.

Drew: Craig, what was your response when you first were approached by Chris, and what it was that you responded to?

Craig: I had literally finished all my classroom work about three weeks prior, so to have this land on my desk, you know, right after being immersed in this study for three years? It was perfect timing. You know, Greek Gods, Medusa... sign me up. And then the chance to work with Chris... I think Chris had a vision for this thing from day one, which just made it that much more exciting. So yeah, it was the perfect storm.

Drew: I've got to say, I just recently revisited the first two "Potter" films on Blu-ray when they put out the big giant ultimate editions...

Chris: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Drew: And I'm going say this on the record, because I want to say it to you directly. I really feel like you should have been nominated for Best Director for the first film.

Chris: Oh, well... thank you. I appreciate that.

Drew: People confuse "Best Director" with "Director of the movie I liked most," and I think it's something different. I think it should be for people who do the impossible in some way. And the reason why I feel like that about the first "Potter" is when I look at what you did with the kids... like forget about all the decisions you had to make just to get the world up and running, and forget about the fact that you set a template that is still successfully being played off of all these films later... what you did with the kids in terms of finding the right young actors and then shaping those performances with them? I really don't think I understood how insane that process was until I looked at this new edition. And it seems unbelievable to me. Is there a sense of pride now as you look at them and the actors they've become?

Chris: Certainly from a technical standpoint as a director. You know, those first two films were really part filmmaking and part acting class, because these kids had no prior experience of being on a set... except Daniel Radcliffe had some small BBC thing, a supporting role where he played young David Copperfield. But I think that was about it. And you know, just to get the kids to actually speak one line without looking into the camera or looking up at the lights was really a bit of a challenge, I have to say. My role on that film was just basically guiding them through those performances, so by the time we got to the second film, they were able to get through... almost get through an entire scene. I can't really remember whether or not we were fortunate enough to ever do something in one shot, which would have been a dream come true for a director, you know? You don't have to cut. By the time we got to "Prisoner of Azkaban" and Alfonso was directing, then it was seamless. They really were primed as actors and they were really prepared for work each day. So I felt that I had turned over professional actors at that point after a total of 300 days of shooting. So I felt good about that. I felt great about that. I felt great about the fact that what the films have become was exactly what the four of us... the four of us meaning David Heyman and Jo Rowling and Steve Kloves and myself... would sit in a room for hours and hours and hours and really plan the next seven pictures. And at the time, there were only three books, and we got the galleys when we were almost a third of the way through shooting, we got the galleys for "Goblet of Fire", so we saw the direction. We really had a clear idea of the direction that the books were going, this darker direction. So the concept of the films was that the first film was going to be this beautiful, rich, very saturated storybook version of the first Potter book. And then by the time we got to the second film, it was a little darker, with a little less saturation in terms of color, and by the time we got to the third film, you know, most of the color is gone from the palette. Things are really getting a more intense. Some of the magic is starting to seep away and the pictures are getting, as I said, progressively darker. And that was just the goal throughout the seven pictures. Now, remember, when I initially started, when all those intense meetings were taking place, I was scheduled to do all seven films. At the time, I had no idea. I was just extremely naïve in terms of this concept of me just being able to do the films back to back to back to back and being able to do seven, which has now become eight. So by the time I finished the second film, I realized that I physically and mentally could not do a third right away. There was just no way I could direct. So I needed to recharge my batteries, and that's why we started to bring in... we brought in Alfonso. And then I just needed to get my family back to the States at that point. My kids wanted to get back to school in the States. I really, in answer to your question, when I go see these films now, it's sort of with a bittersweet quality because I do feel this enormous sense of pride. I think the kids have aged gracefully. They've become really, really fine actors. And I like the direction that the films have taken. I think they're visually rich and dense and beautifully crafted. And as a fan, I'm really looking forward to the seventh and eighth film. I think that the eighth film... particularly as a fan of films like this, I think the Battle for Hogwarts hopefully will take much of the eighth film, and I think it's going to be spectacular.

Drew: It seems like there were two really crazy gambles at the beginning of this decade: "Lord of the Rings" and "Harry Potter." And they were both totally different challenges. It's amazing to me that it looks like both are going to cross the finish line well. Not just, "Okay, we finished them," but "Wow, we really did what we set out to do," and I looking back, I got a whole different level of admiration for the accomplishment of the first film in particular. I can't imagine the effort.

Chris: Oh, well, thank you. I appreciate it. Thanks a lot.

Drew: On this film, it doesn't feel like you are necessarily as series oriented as it was single adventure oriented. I really like that about this movie. This quest feels like it was done. If there is something else, then great. But it didn't feel like there had to be. I like Logan in the film. I thought he was very strong and he has a lot of character. He's an unusual kid. Was it that same sort of process where you really had to go looking for a kid that you felt like, "Okay, he's got to be our surrogate in this, and he's got to be the person we go with, and I've got to find just the right one." How did you come to him?

Chris: Well, he was always in the back of my mind because I saw "3:10 to Yuma," and I thought, "Wow, that's a pretty strong performance for a teenager," you know? So I brought... and before we really... I think by the time Logan came into the office, we realized that Percy was going to be 17 years old. So Logan was really the first person I brought in, and I was really taken with him in the office. And then we did a screen test, and he blew everyone away, basically because of his emotional depth as an actor but also because of his instincts. He's got amazing technical abilities as an actor. Sort of far beyond his years. So I thought, "Well, this puts me in a really great position as a director. I can actually focus on... I can take a step back and actually direct an actor who is experienced." And at the same time, I felt he was really appropriate for the film because the film and the character of Percy do deal with some intense emotional things. You're dealing with a kid who's dealing with parental abandonment. He's also got dyslexia and ADHD, which we find out are actually empowering things for him, his ADHD being his battle skills and his dyslexia being his ability to translate ancient Greek into English. And also this concept of visualizing the battle sequences and thinking that the battle sequences themselves had to have a real urgency, intensity, and threat about them. These are life and death circumstances for these kids. These kids are learning to battle against the dark forces of the outside world. Imagining 11-year-olds doing that seemed a little scary, and I didn't know if we... remember, "Potter" was about wands and spells and it really was a much, much less dangerous undertaking for someone 11 years old. But two 11-year-olds learning how to fight with real swords, that's a whole other different ballgame, and I just felt that to adjust it for an 11-year-old's abilities would mean wooden swords and paper hats. And I was concerned that it would just feel too light on its feet. So that was really, in terms of casting Logan... he was the epicenter of this film. And I felt that he grounded it in a great way. And he grounds it in a way that makes it really accessible for kids who are 7 or 10 or 12 or 14, you know? They aspire to be him in this world of fantasy, you know?

Drew: My fear when I see a cast list with people like Sean Bean and Pierce Brosnan and Steve Coogan, all very, very strong actors, is they'll overpower the young cast. And I don't think that's the case at all in this movie. I think you used them very sparingly. I will say that Coogan's entrance is fantastic when he finally shows up in human form.

Chris: Thanks.

Drew: There's something great about it being Coogan of all people that plays Hades.

Chris: Right.

Drew: But you really keep the focus on the young cast and the chemistry between Logan and Alexandra and Brandon. Was there a lot of working with them together before you started shooting to create chemistry, or did you want it to grow as you were shooting?

Chris: No, we had a couple of weeks of rehearsals, pretty intense rehearsals, reading through the script, and then just the very nature of the training certainly brought Alexandra and Logan very close together, and also Jake Abel as well, who plays Luke. All of them were training daily for six to eight hours, so that coupled with the fact that we were doing an hour or two of readings per day really developed... they developed this real chemistry between themselves. And I encouraged them to hang out together, but you can encourage actors to hang out together, but if they don't like each other... these guys actually really liked each other, which was a huge plus. And they continue to this day to spend a lot of time together. So I think that it's really... it also helps that they were so enthusiastic about doing this movie, and I feed off that as a director, whether or not the cast is eleven or seventeen. It helps when you're working with younger people, because first of all, they're happy to have a job, but it's also just wonderful to see this enthusiasm and the energy every day that they bring to the set.

Drew: I like that you worked with Rosario again.

Chris: Yeah, it was great. I realized when we were doing "Rent" that she had a great sense of humor and she was one of the funnier people I've ever met. And we weren't really able to utilize that in "Rent." I never really was able to direct her in a dramatic or comedic scene in "Rent" because it was really all mostly about singing and dancing.

Drew: I think she's one of those assets that people really haven't figured out yet. I think when it happens, when there's the right role, it's just going to be unbelievable, and so right now it's just when you see her in something good and she's good in it, it's a pleasure.

Chris: Yeah, she's great.

Drew: Can I ask you about working with effects? Because I like the approach in this movie, in that they seem simply part of the fabric of the world and not like you stop the show for the effects. "Harry Potter" to me is far more, especially in the first one, about "We're going to introduce you to each element of Hogwarts," and I think it came from the expectation, like, "I want to see the moving staircases. I want to see Headless Nick. I want to see the Quidditch." So you kind of had to showcase those things.

Chris: Right.

Drew: Here it feels so much more organic. Were you more comfortable with it this time around?

Chris: Well, I certainly... you know, one of the regrets I have about the first "Potter" film particularly is the way we went about doing the effects. The studio backed us into a release date.

We weren't able to do the more complex visual effects sequences first. We didn't have time to build the sets, so things like Quidditch and certain other elements of that first picture suffered because of that. And I realized that when I got into this picture that we would do the most complex visual effects sequences immediately in terms of production, in terms of shooting. So the very first day of shooting was the Hydra sequence, because I realized that we were dealing not only with a Hydra. We were dealing with fire and water and interacting with these kids. Kevin Mack is the guy. Kevin Mack is our visual effects supervisor, and he won an Oscar for "What Dreams May Come," and he really is an amazingly brilliant guy. Our goal was to make the effects as seamless and real as possible so that they don't take the audience out of the movie. I didn't want these kids who see the movie to stop at any point and say, "Oh my God, that looks fake." Or, "That doesn't look real." I wanted them to feel as if, as you said, these effects were really organic. So it meant really, really working hard in terms of dealing with Steven Goldblatt, our cinematographer. Interactive lighting is key. Interactive lighting and actually having the actors have something tangible. I think for me, when it starts to get a little difficult is when it's an entirely green-screen stage. And I know for some directors that works brilliantly, but for younger actors they need something tangible. They need a real set because if you're dealing with... you know, they have to react to a monster that's not there anyway. We need to give them something that's real. So, you know, we built all of the sets. The Nashville Parthenon was a complete replica done on soundstage. A replica of a replica on a soundstage in Vancouver. And it really helped the actors. I think that helps when the performance of the actors are sort of guiding the CGI as well. That helps with the reality and the perception of a scene in terms of quality.

Drew: Kevin Mack... I've been a fan of his since "The Fifth Element" and "Fight Club," and I think his work on "Speed Racer" was groundbreaking. I really do.

Chris: Yeah, it was unbelievable. Underappreciated.

Drew: It's nice that it feels like there's a comfort level to your work with the effects that makes it feel very... I guess the way I would describe it is it's off-hand. It doesn't feel at any point in the movie like you're reaching for anything. In particular, the last fight between Luke and Percy and the flying stuff between them, because I know you talked about being dissatisfied with Quidditch, and you've said how if you were ever given the opportunity to go back and maybe rework the Quidditch a little bit or play with it, that it's something that has nagged at you, and that you would love to be able to do that...

Chris: Right.

Drew: ... well, this is really convincing. Is that something where you thought, "Okay, I know I'm going to be doing flight in this, and I know I'm going to be dealing with altitude and velocity, and I want to make sure I get it right this time."

Chris: Yeah and it comes down to moving the camera. It's a combination of camera movement and lighting. Lighting is crucial because... lighting particularly. If you go back to "Potter" and you look at that first flying lesson sequence when Malfoy and Potter are in the air, it just looks like not just CGI but it looks like blue-screen from the 70's. And the reason is because the visual

effects supervisor on that particular picture never really had... he was not giving enough information to our cinematographer, so when John Seale, who's brilliant, was not given enough information from our visual effects supervisor, he's lighting something in the dark basically. He has no concept of what the final sequence is going to look like. With Kevin Mack and Stephen Goldblatt, we made absolutely certain that every shot was planned out in terms of lighting and in terms of movement. For instance, you know at nighttime when you're up in the air like that over Manhattan, your face isn't... obviously your face is not going to be lit all the time. There has to be an intense variation of light on their faces and on their bodies, and all of that has to be in perfect conjunction with the way they're moving throughout the city. So, again it comes down to that very simple rule. and those three words that if any 10-year old utters, it just sends shivers up your spine: "It looks fake". So I just avoid... I kept that as my mantra as we went through these visual effects shots every day. Kevin and I, we'd go through each shot every day and say "No". We'd send them back to the vendor and some of the shots, you know, they have numbers on them for how many times we send them back, and we were on shot, like, 497, or shot 532. I mean, we sent them back and back and back and back until we got them where we wanted. We probably would still be doing that if we didn't have a release date.

Drew: Well, speaking of release dates, it's interesting because you guys are coming out the same weekend now as "Wolfman," and I certainly think that both films deal very directly with issues about parentage.

Chris: Really?

Drew: It's just kind of one of those weird coincidences that the movies would share a release date and have a theme that was similar. Obviously the other movie this year that's playing with Greek mythology is "Clash of the Titans," but from such a different sort of take and perspective, and obviously it's set in the period. When something like that is going on, how hard is it for you as a filmmaker to just kind of put that aside and focus on the film you're making? Does the studio put extra pressure on you?

Chris: Well, we can only think about the other one in terms of release date, in terms of "Clash of the Titans". You know, we knew we wanted the first Greek mythology movie released, not that that... who knows if that means anything, you know? At the time, it felt like the right thing to do. I see our film now and it certainly feels like a summer movie. It feels like it should have been released in the summertime. It feels like it's a hot day in July, and you want to go see a movie like this. I think of movies like "Gremlins," and certainly that's the feeling that I was trying to bring to this picture. We really were... I had to agree to a release date when I did this picture. So for me, that was up front, and then when I was shooting it, I couldn't think about that. I had to think about making the best possible movie for my 12-year old self, you know? I wanted this movie to feel like if you were 12 years old sitting in a theatre, whether it was 1985 or 2010, your head would explode with the excitement and the possibility of living in this world. And so I felt good about that, and I knew the other pictures weren't really trying to do that, you know? That's what I'm really trying to get back to. I think that critics and fans give a lot of cred to movies like... and I'm not going to name the movies, but movies that are supposedly made for children, but which are actually much more adult oriented. And pictures that, although they're beautiful films, they sort of leave kids in the dark, you know? Kids really can't relate to some of these

films, but critics can. And it's frustrating for me, because I really like to see these films through a 10 or a 12-year old's eyes. And that really helps me in terms of reaching out to these kids. So I know if those kids come this weekend, they'll love it, and they'll recommend it to their friends. We just have to get them into the theatre.

Drew: That's something I think the comic industry has run up against. There are a lot of comic fans who started reading them when they were young, and now they want comics to be for them as adults. But what they don't see is that when they were young, comics appealed to them, and that was when they got hooked. And it feels like they've almost selfishly taken that away from the next group of readers who are going to be growing up. Because I agree with you... I think that there is... look, I came out of the screening this morning, and I talked to Craig about this afterwards... there was a decidedly cynical air. And then I was talking about my response to it and how much I looked forward to showing it to my son and the way I felt like it really spoke to a younger age group. And somebody dismissed me and said, "Yeah, but what about me?" And I'm like, "Well, what about you? Your job isn't to be entertained by every single thing like it's targeted at you. It's to talk about whether it works for the audience that will go and that it's made for."

Chris: Right.

Drew: It's weird that criticism has become so selfish in a way.

Chris: Yeah. And it's frustrating because quite honestly, it is for the parent as well. It's not just, you know... it's a movie that you should be able to enjoy with your kid or your niece or your nephew or your godson or your goddaughter. It's not really about... I had no intention of isolating the parents. I think these pictures work best when they work on two levels, certainly. But at the same time, there's that sense of magic that you don't want to lose, and sometimes it's lost along the way. Those pictures seldom work in terms of... I don't want to say in terms of box office... but the pictures that seem to work the best and reach a lot of people are the pictures that really speak to children and adults on a kind of an equal level, you know?

Drew: Like I said, the "Chris Columbus" narrative for me began when I was reading about you as an NYU student writing "Gremlins," and then you get to work with Spielberg and, god, in the '80's, that was like winning the lottery. That was it. I think as a writer, the chance to work with him and that company at that time... Craig, when you sit now and you look at the finished version of "Percy Jackson" and you've had the experience with Chris, is there a feeling that you've now contributed to that sort of lineage of films, and are you satisfied with the final product of what you've done?

Craig: Yeah. I mean, when I watched the film, I was completely engulfed in it. Like I'd forgotten I'd been involved at all. I was at the edge of my seat and just totally along for the ride. What's funny... and I've mentioned this to a few people, but Chris, I don't know if I've even told you this... but it's funny how it's come full-circle. When I was Joe Dante's assistant way back in my first job, I hadn't read a lot of screenplays and I knew your name from "Gremlins", "Goonies", and "Young Sherlock Holmes," so I actually taught myself to write by reading your scripts.

Chris: Oh, that's cool. I never knew that.

Craig: Yeah, I read every draft of "Gremlins," and then they had a few drafts of "Young Sherlock Holmes" around, and you were the modern writer who I knew. I knew about Billy Wilder and Preston Sturges, but you were sort of the contemporary writer, and I just really studied your scripts, and I even notice now there are a few idiosyncratic things I took from you, like I think we both like to capitalize a lot of words in scene descriptions.

Chris: Right, exactly.

Craig: When we were doing our back and forth working on "Percy," I was like, "Oh, that's why I capitalize so many words. I took a little from Chris."

Chris: (laughs) I love that.

Craig: So it's kind of fun that I taught myself to write reading your scripts, and then it's come full-circle in a fun kind of way.

Chris: Yeah, I never realized that, and the interesting thing is I'm always beating myself up over it, and I can't stop myself. It's sort of, you know, I'd say to myself "Stop capitalizing all these words in these action sequences," but that's truly, you know, that's growing up on Marvel comics in the '60's. It's truly like everything had to be... it was the world of Stan Lee, and it just got into my head.

Craig: You like capitalizing the verbs and I do the nouns, I think. Between us, it's like everything is capitalized.

Chris: That's true. Exactly.

And with that, my phone died. Literally just gave out. It's a shame, too, because we were really starting to settle into the conversation. I enjoyed finally talking to Chris, and I'm amazed at how much vehemence is directed towards him when he's mentioned among fanboys. They treat some of his early work like holy writ, like "The Goonies," and my theory is that he moved on to make films that fanboys wanted no part of, and now no matter what he does, they hold that against him. In a world where guys like Adam Shankman and Shawn Levy are major A-list filmmakers, it blows my mind when people rail on Columbus.

I'll have a review up for this one a little later. Again, feel free to read the start of this piece, and if you think me incapable of laying out my feelings on it, I won't be offended, but I do have some thoughts, and I look forward to the conversation.