Joel Gordon, "Entry on: Hercules: The Legendary Journeys (Series, S01E01–13) by Sam Raimi, Robert Tapert, Christian Williams ", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/888. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Sam Raimi , Robert Tapert , Christian Williams

Hercules: The Legendary Journeys (Series, S01E01–13)

United States, New Zealand (1995)

TAGS: Ancient Slavery Ares Centaur(s) Cyclops / Cyclopes Dionysus / Dionysos Gladiator Games Gods Hera Heracles Hero(es) Iolaus Tiresias





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General information	
Title of the work	Hercules: The Legendary Journeys (Series, S01E01–13)
Studio/Production Company	MCA Television, Renaissance Pictures
Country of the First Edition	New Zealand, United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America, New Zealand, Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1995
First Edition Details	S01E01. *The Wrong Path*. Directed by Doug Lefler; Written by John Schulian. USA, Syndicated (MCA); January 16, 1995. 44 min. – S01E13. *Unchained Heart*. Directed by Bruce Seth Green; Written by John Schulian. USA, Syndicated (MCA); May 8, 1995. 44 min.
Running time	44 min each episode
Format	TV; subsequently VHS, DVD and digital streaming.
Date of the First DVD or VHS	VHS June 17, 1997; DVD June 24, 2003
Official Website	mca.com/tv/Hercules (accessed: October 8, 2019).
Awards	2004 – *Hercules: The Legendary Adventures* seasons 1 & 2, nominated for "Saturn Award: Best DVD Television Release" for Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, USA.

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Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Mythological fiction, Television series
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Joel Gordon, University of Otago, joel_gordon@hotmail.co.nz
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il

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Creators



Sam Raimi by Gage Skidmore. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons, licensed under CCBY-SA 2.0 (accessed: December 30, 2021).

Sam Raimi , b. 1959
(Producer)

Sam Raimi is an American filmmaker, actor and producer. He was born in Michigan (USA), to a conservative Jewish family, and attended Michigan State University. His career has been closely linked with that of Robert Tapert. Although Raimi intended to major in English, he chose to put his studies on hold in order to work on the feature film *The Evil Dead* (1981), after the success of his first co-operative production with Robert Tapert, *The Happy Valley Kid* (1977). Raimi is a co-founder of both Renaissance Pictures and Ghost House Pictures (see above). His solo-directorial work (distinct from productions with Tapert) include the original *Spider-man* trilogy (2002–2007) starring Tobey Macquire, and, most recently, *Oz the Great and Powerful* (2013). His most recent solo-producer role was for the crime-thriller, *Don't Breathe* (2016). As an actor, Raimi has appeared in many of his own films as minor characters – such as his cameo appearances in *The Evil Dead* and its sequels. Raimi turned to television during the 1990's, working together with Tapert as a producer for the franchises *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Young Hercules* and *Spartacus.*

Bio prepared by Joel Gordon, University of Otago, joel_gordon@hotmail.co.nz



Robert Tapert by Cooltv. Retrieved from Wikipedia, licensed

Robert Tapert , b. 1955
(Author, Producer)

Robert Tapert is an American actor, producer and writer. Born in Royal Oak, Michigan (USA), he attended Michigan State University where he first began experimenting with filmmaking under the influence of Sam Raimi. During this time, they both worked on the film *The Happy Valley Kid* (1977) in which Tapert also starred in the

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leading role. Following the success of this venture, the pair began work on their first feature film, *The Evil Dead* (1981) – directed by Sam Raimi and starring Bruce Campbell – and, in order to assist with its production, Tapert, Raimi and Campbell (along with Irvin Shapiro) co-founded Renaissance Pictures in 1979. This trio have since worked together on numerous successful films – particularly in the horror genre – including: *Crimewave* (1985), *Easy Wheels* (1989), *Darkman* (1990), *Lunatics: A Love Story* (1991), *Timecop (*1994), *30 Days of Night* (2007) and *The Gift* (2015). In 2002 Tapert and Raimi co-founded Ghost House Pictures known for, among others, the film franchises *The Grudge* (2004, 2006, 2009) and *Bogeyman* (2005, 2007, 2008). Tapert's involvement in television began during the 1990's with his most notable productions being the franchises of *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (1995-1999), *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001) and *Young Hercules* (1998–1999) – all of which included both direct-to-television movies and television serials spanning several seasons. It was during this period – in 1998 – that Tapert married New Zealand actress Lucy Lawless (the star of *Xena*), with whom he has since had two children. More recently, his interest in antiquity and television has returned with the serials *Spartacus: Blood and Sand* (2010), *Spartacus: Gods of the Arena* (2011), *Spartacus: Vengeance* (2012) and *Spartacus: War of the Damned* (2013) and plans for a Xena reboot for NBC. (see further, his official website, accessed: August 16, 2019).

Bio prepared by Joel Gordon, University of Otago, joel_gordon@hotmail.co.nz



Christian Williams by Pacunagonz. Retrieved

Christian Williams , b. 1943
(Author, Producer)

Christian Williams is an American journalist and television writer from Brooklyn, New York. His career in the news industry began in 1972 as an assistant editor (Style Section) for *The Washington Post.* It was during his early years at the *Post* that Williams was given a unique insight into the film/television industry, serving as the editor on a behind-the-scenes exclusive when Robert Redford used the *Post*'s

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newsroom to research his film *All the President's Men* (1976). In 1984 Williams became a reporter in Bob Woodward's investigative team which led to his second interaction with the film/television industry: in 1986 Woodward's team (Woodward, Williams and co-journalist Richard Harwood) wrote and featured in an ABC movie, *Under Siege*, which was based upon the group's reporting on domestic terrorism. Williams then continued to dabble in the television industry, co-writing (alongside Woodward) an episode of the television drama series *Hill Street Blues* (1981–1987), before formally leaving journalism for a career as a television writer – specializing in one-hour drama television shows. He went on to co-create (alongside David Milch) the drama *Capital News* (1990) before assisting in the creation of *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* franchise (which began with the five direct-to-television films). Unlike Tapert and Raimi, however, Williams was not directly involved in the production of the *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* serial beyond the pilot films. Williams went on to continue writing for television, for example as the co-executive producer of the drama *Six Feet Under* (2001–2005), until he retired in 2010. He has since turned his interests to authoring books and sailing.

Bio prepared by Joel Gordon, University of Otago, joel_gordon@hotmail.co.nz

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Additional information

Casting

Main Cast:

Hercules: Kevin Sorbo,

Iolaus: Michael Hurst.

Supporting Cast:

Alcmene: Elizabeth Hawthorne,

Ares: Kevin Smith,

Atalanta: Corinna Everson,

Deianeira: Tawny Kitaen,

Deric: Peter Muller,

Hera: voice only,

Nemesis: Karen Witter,

Salmoneus: Robert Trebor,

Xena: Lucy Lawless.

Adaptations

Video game:

Hercules: The Legendary Journeys for Nintendo 64 and Game Boy Colour (developer: Player 1; publisher: Titus Interactive; producer: Sam Raimi), released October 13 2000 (single player, action adventure).

Board Game

Hercules: The Legendary Journeys (1998), 2–4 Players, 180 min play time. Ages 8+. Published by Component Game Systems, Fanpro.

Novel series:

John Whitman (1998) *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*. San

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Francisco: CA: Chronicle Books. (see entry)

[*Hercules and the Amazon Women*; *Hercules and the Circle of Fire*; and "The Wrong Path" – S1E1]

Timothy Boggs, *By the Sword* (1996); Timothy Boggs, *Serpent's Shadow* (1996); Timothy Boggs, *The Eye of the Ram* (1997); David Sediman, *The First Casualty* (1997); Hunter Kennedy, *Hercules and the Geek of Greece* (1999). Berkley Pub Group, New Jersey, U.S.A. (now available in e-book format, published 2015 by HarperCollins).

Rik Hoskin, *Storming Paradise* (in four parts) e-book, published 2015 by HarperCollins.

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

Prequel: *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* five television movies (1994).

Spin-off: *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001).

Spin-off/Prequel: *Young Hercules* (film: 1998; serial: 1998-1999).

Animated spin-off/Cross-over film (with *Xena: Warrior Princess*): *Hercules and Xena – the Animated Movie: The Battle for Mount Olympus* (1998) dir. Lynne Naylor.

Summary

The *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* franchise, starring Kevin Sorbo in the titular role, began in 1994 with a collection of five feature-length, television-movie, pilot-episodes, the popularity of which then ensured the franchises' continuation via an established television series. The series ran for a total six seasons (1995-1999) and picked up the narrative from the where the films had concluded. The series became even more popular than the films and several spin-offs ensued, including *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001) and *Young Hercules* (1998: series and film) (see relevant entries).

Each episode in the television serial is self-contained and follows a standardized format: Hercules engages on a quest which centres upon him defeating "monsters" (not always by violence) and/or resolving "curses" that plague various villages. Season 1 includes quests which

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feature the following "threats": (ep. 1) a demon that turns its victims to stone; (ep. 2) an angry Cyclops; (ep. 3) a cursed cup stolen from Hera; (ep. 4) the threat of regicide; (ep. 5) Ares' attempt to destroy the world; (ep. 6) a centaur sent to kill Hercules; (ep. 7) Nemesis sent to kill Iolaus; (ep. 8 and 10) the institutions of slavery and gladiatorial games; (ep. 9 and 12) Xena, the Warrior Princess, sent to kill Hercules; (ep. 11) restless ghosts and Ares' attack-dog; (ep. 13) attacks from Darphus (Xena's mercenary captain) and Graegus (a monster of Ares). Underlying these individual narratives is a continuous subplot regarding Hera's antagonism against Hercules, for she is often the instigating cause behind the threat to humanity or to Hercules directly.

Analysis

Season one begins by establishing continuity between the *Hercules: the Legendary Journeys* television series and the preceding 'pilot' films, while also presenting the serial as somewhat different in tone. Episode 1 opens in a similar manner to many of the prequel films, beginning with Hercules completing his usual heroic duty of saving villagers; however, here, upon his return home, Hercules finds his wife and children have been killed by Hera. A heartbroken Hercules vows to take revenge upon the goddess and to destroy all of her temples, establishing the animosity between the pair which runs throughout the season (and subsequent seasons as well). But, with his family no longer in the picture, Hercules is able now to devote himself to being a full-time hero and finds new meaning to his life in helping others. The death of Hercules' family is a necessity required by the film-serial's continuity since the films had firmly established Hercules' as a loving, family-man and had emphasized the tension this created with his identity as a hero (see relevant entry). Thus, the serial not only addresses but also resolves this tension by removing the obstacle of Hercules' devotion to his family, which would have prevented him from fully embracing his heroic identity or would have required his caring nature to be undermined. Continuity between the serial and films is also established by the retention of the narrative voice-over within the title sequence. Further, this re-emphasizes Hercules' continued characterisation as the champion of mankind and as a modern, emotionally intelligent hero – themes which mark this Hercules as different to his ancient counterpart (On these themes and Hercules' characterisation see further the analysis in *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys (Series, S00 - Season Zero).*

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Since this is first season of the serial, the thirteen episodes are relatively conservative in their adaptation of mythological material. The distinct narratives of each episode are largely novel, to be sure, but there is a clear emphasis upon utilizing well-known gods, places, characters and themes from wider Greco-Roman mythology: including, for example, cyclopes and centaurs (ep.s 2, 6); the seer Teiresias (ep. 4); veterans of the Trojan war (ep. 5); the theme of fratricide and senseless war, clearly derived from "The Seven Against Thebes" (ep. 11); and institutions such as slavery, mercenary warfare, and gladiatorial combat which fit within the ancient setting (ep.s 8, 9, 10, 12). This is in contrast to later seasons which draw upon a variety of different mythological or fantastical traditions for narrative inspiration: for example, season 5 has Hercules travel outside of Greece to places such as Sumeria, Norseland and Éire and introduces the god Dahak ("the one evil god") as the primary villain (see relevant entry) – narrative elements which find no direct precedent within Hercules' ancient mythological tradition. This said, season 1's heavier reliance upon 'traditional' material should not be taken as an indication that these narratives are not also influenced by anachronistic elements with many fantastical and modern tropes evident: for example, more than once, Hercules encounters "ghosts" who are depicted in a manner customary of the fantasy genre rather than ancient perceptions on the dead (ep.s 11, 13); and, his challenges to the institution of slavery (ep.s 8, 10), while reflecting his particular characterisation within the franchise as the champion of the downtrodden, is entirely unknown within an ancient context.

It should also be noted that one of the more famous figures of the HTLJ franchise, Xena, the Warrior Princess, is first introduced in season one of the television serial. Xena then became the main character in her own spin-off serial, the popularity of which surpassed that of Hercules. On this character and the serial, see further the relevant entries.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Ancient Slavery Ares Centaur(s) Cyclops / Cyclopes Dionysus / Dionysos Gladiator Games Gods Hera Heracles Hero(es) Iolaus Tiresias

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Good vs evil Revenge Violence

Further Reading

Drushel, B., “Pandora's box in cyberspace: The online alternative fan sites of Hercules: The Legendary Journeys”, *Femspec* 7.2 (2006): 7–28.

Maurice, L., *Screening Divinity*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019.

Solomon, J., “The Convergence of Family Values, Computer-Generated Monsters, and Cleavage in *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*”, in A. Blanshard, E. Stafford, eds., *The Modern Hercules* vol. 2, forthcoming.

Weisbrot, R., *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys – an insider’s guide*, Taylor Trade Publications, 2004.

Wright, A., "Classical myths and legendary journeys: Hercules, landscape, identity and New Zealand", *Australasian Journal of Popular Culture* 2.3 (2013): 351–362.

Addenda

Directors: Doug Lefler, John T. Kretchmer, Peter Ellis, Harley Cokeliss, George Mendeluk, Bruce Seth Green, Garth Maxwell, Bruce Campbell, Jack Perez.

Writers: John Schulian, Andrew Dettmann, Daniel Truly, Steve Roberts, Robert Bielak, Adam Armus, Kay Foster.

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