Joel Gordon, "Entry on: Prisoner Zero (Series, Season 1, 26 Episodes) by Joshua Campbell, Jason Haigh-Elllery, Gary Russel", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/304. Entry version as of July 12, 2026.

Joshua Campbell , Jason Haigh-Elllery , Gary Russel

Prisoner Zero (Series, Season 1, 26 Episodes)

Australia (2016)

TAGS: Centurion Golden Touch Latin (Language) Legate Midas Oracles Praetor Tartarus

We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Prisoner Zero (Series, Season 1, 26 Episodes)
Studio/Production Company	Planet 55 Studios Pty. Ltd.; in association with The Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Screen New South Wales; Telegael; Bramall Productions (advised by Ingenious Investments). See the details in Addenda
Country of the First Edition	Australia
Country/countries of popularity	Australia
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2016
First Edition Details	Episode 1: “Rogue: Part 1” Directet by Sean Zwan; Written by Gary Russell. Australia, ABC 3; September 19, 2016.; Episode 26: “The Codec: Part 2”. Directed by Sean Zwan and Christian Barkel; Written by Gary Russell. Australia, ABC 3; October 14, 2016
Running time	approx 24 min each (Episode 1: 24:09 min; Episode 26: 23:54 min)
Format	TV (ABC 3); also DVD and Digital (Netflix; ABC iview)
Date of the First DVD or VHS	November 2, 2016 (The first DVD
Official Website	planet55studios.com (accessed: August 17, 2018). Official FB page run by Planet 55 Studios (accessed: August 17, 2018).

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Available Onllne	ABC ME Trailer (accessed: August 17, 2018). ABC ME Sneak Peak (accessed: August 17, 2018).
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Animated television programs, Dystopian fiction, Fantasy fiction, Science fiction, Space operas, Television series
Target Audience	Children (Specifically 8–12 years.)
Author of the Entry	Joel Gordon, University of Otag, 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

Joshua Campbell , b. 1991
(Director)

Joshua Campbell (1991) is a born and bred Australian television producer. Having graduated from Kotara High School (NWS), he began his career in television as an Assistant Producer for the Australian based branch of the studio Theta-Sigma. There he worked on episodes for the animated *Doctor Who* series. A year later, he joined the Australian branch of Planet 55 Studios (see above), continuing his work on animated *Doctor Who* episodes, the first of which was the 50th anniversary (animated) episode *Doctor Who: The Tenth Planet* (1966). He is now the studio's Producer (and Director of *Prisoner Zero*) and works closely with Gary Russel on various projects.

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

Jason Haigh-Elllery , b. 1968
(Producer)

Jason Haigh-Ellery (1968) is a British producer/director who is currently based out of London, Los Angeles, Ireland and Sydney. He has been involved with countless audio and radio plays (upwards of 650 in number), the most notable being the *Doctor Who: The New Audio Adventures* series. He has produced 12 West End productions (including *Footloose – The Musical*) and headed numerous touring theatrical productions. He is the founder of Big Finish Productions (1998-) and Planet 55 Studios, Australia (2011-). Both of these companies have worked alongside larger media corporations such as BBC, MGM and ABC to produce audio and television shows such as *Doctor Who*, *Torchwood*, *Stargate*, *Judge Dredd* as well as creating original series including *Graceless* and *The Confessions of Dorian Gray* (alongside 2016's *Prisoner Zero*). In 2013, Big Finish

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Productions won the "BBC Audio Drama Award" for "Best Drama" with their *Doctor Who* audio series, three episodes of which were adapted for the *Doctor Who* television series. In addition, Jason is also the CEO of 3Fold Media, the chairman of CFP Lotteries and Raffles Ltd. and a former B.J.B.F. British lightweight Judo champion. A more complete list of his various production activities can be found here (accessed: July 2, 2018).

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

Gary Russel , b. 1963
(Producer)

Gary Russel (1963) is a British writer and producer. His extensive experience within the television industry began in-front of the camera as a child actor, holding leading roles in several television productions including that of Dick in *The Famous Five* (1978) BBC television series. During this time he was also a member of the Prospect Theatre Company and the Royal National Theatre (London) for several seasons. He then began work as a freelance writer (with publications in periodicals such as *Radio Times*) while also serving as the Editor for Marvel UK and the *Doctor Who Magazine*. He was a founding member of Big Finish Productions (see above) beginning as a producer/script-writer/director for *Doctor Who: The New Audio Adventures* until 2006. He then worked for the BBC as a script editor on *Doctor Who*, *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, *Torchwood* and *Wizards vs Aliens*. During this time, he continued his work as a writer and published numerous books which explored further the universes of *Doctor Who* and *The Sarah Jane Adventures*, as well as producing and directing several *Doctor Who* animations. He recently relocated to New South Wales, Australia for a short period in order to take up the role of Executive Producer for *Prisoner Zero*, after which he returned to the UK in 2016.

Bio prepared by Joel Gordon, University of Otago,

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joel_gordon@hotmail.co.nz

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Additional information

Casting

Alexander Vlahos: Prisoner Zero,

Toby Longworth: General Vykar,

Sophie Wu: Gem Coll,

Danny Carmel: Tag Anaton,

John Schwab: Del Rev,

Gary Martin: The Librarian,

Katharine Mangold: Lady Kai,

Daniel Brocklebank: Barqel,

J. Michael Tatum: Bowi.

Summary

Prisoner Zero is an animated science-fiction series for children (target audience: 8–12 years). Its premise is that the titular Zero has been imprisoned and had his memories stolen by evil regime known as the Imperium in order to allow them to utilize the Bioweve to enslave the minds of its citizens. This said, it is not Zero who is the star of the show but rather the teenagers Tag and Gem who accompany Zero on his adventures. The story arc of the first season centres upon the pair's attempts to assist Zero in regaining his memory and shutting down the Bioweve (endeavours in which they are ultimately successful). While they do this, Tag and Gem bond over their orphan status (Tag's parents were imprisoned by the Imperium for insubordination; Gem's parents were killed by the Imperium for rebelling) and encounter various 'alien' peoples and planets. Chief amongst these are the mysterious ship named 'Rogue' (Zero's home-base) and the magical Librarian. These 'allies' help the group in their mission to oppose the Imperium's military commanders – General Vykar, Lady Kai and chief strategist Barqel – who seek to use the Bioweve for their own personal gains. The first season concludes with Zero recalling that he was the original scientist who had invented the Bioweve, a realization which empowers him to shut it down permanently – although not without a lengthy battle against Vykar.

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While it appears that the Imperium is now in tatters, a post-credit scene makes it clear that this is not the end of the adventures for our heroes.

Analysis

Prisoner Zero was intended to be a new children's sci-fiction animated television series which would replace *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* (2008-2014) after the latter finished its television run (see Johnson; Russo – accessed Nov. 10, 2017). Thus, there are many superficial similarities between the two 'universes' (such as the 'Rebels' and the evil 'Empire' battling for control of the universe). *Prisoner Zero*'s production team has been very vocal about which contemporary (children's) series have influenced the development of the show (see Johnson; themovieboards – accessed Nov. 10, 2017): with regards to narrative style, the "traditional western storytelling" found in shows such as *Avatar: The Last Airbender* and Doctor Who (the latter is not surprising given Planet 55's prior experience with *Doctor Who* – see above); and, with regards to visual elements, the "art style" of Japanese anime such as *Dragon Ball Z*. While there is a character in *Doctor Who* also named "Prisoner Zero" (see "The Eleventh Hour": episode 1, season 5, 3 April 2010), this figure has nothing in common with the titular 'Zero' of this series: the former is an alien shapeshifter hiding out on Earth whom the Doctor must defeat.

Despite the fact that the production team do not highlight Greek and Roman sources as influential, classical material appears throughout the series in all manner of ways as indicative of the show's thematic/narrative interest in the concepts of history, memory and the past. These themes are foundational to the larger structure of the narrative. First, Zero has no memory of his own past and is in a constant battle to remember his own identity (as too is the Librarian in episodes 10-11) and thus Zero is only able to finally defeat Vykar when he remembers who he is (i.e. that he was the creator of the Bioweve). Further, throughout the series, there is a constant threat that the present-time may return to a period identified only as "the Dark Times." It is hoped (by the Librarian in particular) that Zero will prevent this recurrence as the prophesied "Doomsmith" (the post-credit scene in the final episode suggests otherwise). This is because history repeats itself in cycles or, as the Librarian explains to Zero, "the same things happen time and time again" (episode 10). A prime example of this is that since *Prisoner Zero* is set far into the future,

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English has now become a dead language: only Zero is able to read the "ancient letters" (described explicitly as the "language of the ancients") which designate that the ship is called "Rogue" (episode 1, 2) – see below on the connection with ancient Greek language. Within this thematic framework, the series' continual engagement with antiquity, while being set far into the future, is itself indicative of this larger understanding of history as cyclical, of the necessity of remembering the past, and serves as a 'meta' justification for the inclusion of ancient material in a science-fiction setting.

There are several locations in the *Prisoner Zero* universe which share the same name as prominent places in the ancient Greek world; however, these are mostly superficial 'cosmetic borrowings' and have little in common with their ancient counterparts. These include the planet Arcadia (identified only as the 933rd planet of the Imperium); the planet Elysium (destroyed by the Imperium); and the Delphic Sphere (a prison-camp run by Dr. Mendez with no prophetic/oracular link, as one might well expect). This said, there is a small hint that Elysium (the home planet of Tag) was a sort of aristocratic utopia which may relate to the Elysian fields as an ancient paradise (e.g. Homer *Odyssey* 4.561-69).

There are two notable exceptions to this whereby named locations actively engage with traditional narratives/associations from antiquity: (1) the Phrygian System; (2) the planet Tartarus. The Phrygian system is where the golden ship and Alchemist's Pyramid originate (see further below), an association which finds its precedent in ancient testimonies describing Midas as a Phrygian king (e.g. Pausanias 1.4.5, Herodotus *Histories* 1.14.2). The tale of King Midas' golden touch is explored in the episode entitled "Alchemy" (episode 12; cf. Hyginus 191, Ovid *Metamorphoses* 11.85 ff.) with our heroes discovering that the Alchemist's Pyramid allows those who hold it to turn anything they touch into gold (including themselves). Just as in the myth, there is a moral caution to this episode: the desire for wealth is dangerous and can easily overtake its victims. Likewise, Tartarus, where Zero was imprisoned after having had his memory wiped, serves as the prison-planet for dangerous criminals who pose the greatest threat to the Imperium's rule. In this regard, it is similar to the Tartarus of Greek myth where the Titans are imprisoned by Zeus for threatening his rule (e.g. Homer *Iliad* 8, 14.200–210, 14.274, 14.279; Hesiod *Theogony* 712–811). In *Prisoner Zero*, Tartarus is depicted as a fiery lava-planet, a hellish location surely drawing upon predominant contemporary imagery of Hell and such confusion over the role of Tartarus in the

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Greek afterlife tradition.

The alphabet of the ancient Greeks appears throughout the series, although never as a functional language. The use of Greek language relates to the show's theme that to be ancient is to be innately magical; thus this 'oldest' of languages is the most powerful. While there are many minor references to individual letters throughout the series – e.g. the first episode has our heroes fighting over a holographic data cube upon which an Omega symbol is prominently displayed, while the different 'levels' of bioweve-downloads correlate to Greek letters (i.e. Beta, Gamma and Omega) – the most prominent use of Greek is in episode 11 with the spells of the Librarian. This 'magic' requires the repetition of various nonsensical combinations of Greek letters: for example, "tau, eta, epsilon, sigma, tau, omicron, rho, psi, iota, sigma, eta, nu, delta, iota, nu, gamma" – a spell which the Librarian repeats (no less than six times) in order to imprison the Ragnabook (see further, episode 11).

There are also various mythic tropes which *Prisoner Zero* draws upon for narrative inspiration. On the whole, these are well-known contemporary idioms which derive their meaning from antiquity. Several references are made to "Titans" as a point of comparison with the (now) supercharged Vykar who is above (lesser) mortals: for example, at the climax of the season finale, when Vykar and Zero and both empowered by the codec, Vykar exclaims "we are titans, not mere humans, anymore. We are almost gods!" (episode 26; cf. episode 5, 23). This is similar to the portrayal of the Titans within Greek myth since they fall somewhere between gods and mortals, having lost their divine authority to rule the cosmos yet still more immortal than humans (e.g. see above). Further, in reference to the Alchemist's Pyramid, the Librarian warns that one must resist its "siren song", alluding to the sea nymphs who lured sailors to their death (particularly prominent in the tales of Odysseus and Jason: e.g. Homer *Odyssey* 12; Apollodorus 1.135; Apollonius of Rhodes *Argonautica* 4.892 ff.). Thematically, the notion of oracular prophecy and its inevitability recurs throughout the series (a common motif within ancient literature): Zero is described as the "doomsmith" foretold about during the "dark times" (the period preceding the one in which *Prisoner Zero* is set; see, for example, episode 3). The doomsmith must fulfill his destiny, although what this destiny involves is never made clear during the first season (the final episodes' post-credit scene suggests that this will be addressed further in the second season). This prophecy is associated with Madam Oracle of the El

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Dorado Hives (episode 23) who serves as a sort of Sibyl-like figure.

In addition, there are several instances of Latin terminology and concepts being appropriated into this sci-fiction context. This is not surprising given that television and film has always preferred Rome over Greece and thus there is a precedent for presenting these concepts in contexts roughly equivalent to their historical usages. The primary villains of *Prisoner Zero* belong to the Imperium: an empire which seeks to enslave the whole galaxy with the Bioweve technology. This is clearly a reference to the Roman empire wherein *imperium* was the highest authority wielded by Consuls (during the Republic) and then by the Emperors. Further, when the Imperium controlled the Rogue, the ship was named Imperator. It is explained that this is because they intended it to be the power by which they controlled their empire (see episode 1), yet *Imperator* was also the title of the Roman commander who wielded the power of *imperium*. There are also several Imperium AI's (Artificial Intelligences) which are named after particular Roman offices: Praetor (the AI on the Rogue) was the office directly below the consul; and Centurion (the AI on the Imperium's flagship, the Spire) was a military commander who oversaw a unit of troops within a cohort (i.e. a century). Since the AI's are simply disembodied heads, their physical appearance is modelled on Roman military headdresses. There is also the AI named Primus who is described as "the pinnacle of artificial intelligence" (episode 21), appropriate since this Latin term contains the connotative sense of "most eminent". In a similar vein, General Vykar announces himself to be the "living Bioweve excelsior" – the comparative form of the latin root *excelsus*, "high, eminent" – once he utilizes the Bioweve to strengthen his own BAM powers beyond that of any other individual (episode 5).

Aside from Greek/Latin sources there are several other ancient cultures influencing the shaping of individual episodes, particularly in the second section of season 1 (see above): pseudo-Vikings (called the Vagabonds) in episodes 7 and 12; space-pirates (who prefer to be called corsairs) in episode 14; dragons in episodes 15 and 16; Samurai robot warriors and zenism in episode 18. Occurring throughout the series, is the Ragnabook: a fierce weapon of the Dark Times which seeks to re-write history (destroying all knowledge except the records of the 'victor'), and which Tag and Gem face off against in episodes 10–11. This is clearly an adaptation of the Norse event of Ragnarok: the destruction of the Norse pantheon and life on earth. These types of cultural mashups have been common since the early 2000's

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	although here, they also serve the larger thematic concern with history repeating itself.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Centurion Golden Touch Latin (Language) Legate Midas Oracles Praetor Tartarus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Coming of age Friendship Gaining understanding Self
Further Reading	Johnson, Travis, *Josh Campbell: Drawing the Universe in Prisoner Zero*, filmink.com.au, December 2, 2016 (accessed: August 17, 2018). Russo, Caroline, "Conversation with Josh Campbell Producer Director", *Hushhushiz: arts and entertainment news*, hushhushbiz.com, November 15, 2016 (accessed: August 17, 2017). Taylor, Matt, "After travelling back in time with *Doctor Who*, Planet 55 Studios' animator in a brave new world", *Daily Telegraph*, dailytelegraph.com.au, October 27, 2015 (accessed: August 17, 2018). Themovieboards, *Series Producer & Director of "Prisoner Zero" Josh Campbell Interview*, themovieboards.net, November 15, 2016 (accessed: August 17, 2018).
Addenda	**Production Team:** Jason Haigh-Elllery (Concept Co-creator); Austen Atkinson (Concept Co-creator); Gary Russel (Lead Writer; Executive Producer);

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Joshua Campbell (Series Director).

Principle production in New South Wales, Australia; financed in association with SCREEN NSW and its Regional Filming Fund; with support of investment incentives for the Irish Film Industry provided by the Government of Ireland; recorded by Toby Robinson at The Moat Studios, London. Distributed by ABC Commercial.

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