Joel Gordon, "Entry on: Young Hercules (Series) by Sam Raimi, Robert Tapert", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/356. Entry version as of September 14, 2026.

Sam Raimi , Robert Tapert

Young Hercules (Series)

United States / New Zealand (1998)

TAGS: Amazons Ares Centaur(s) Chiron / Cheiron Gods Heracles Hercules Iolaus Jason

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

General information	
Title of the work	Young Hercules (Series)
Studio/Production Company	MCA Television, Renaissance Pictures
Country of the First Edition	New Zealand, United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1998
First Edition Details	Episode 1. *The Treasure of Zeus* (part 1). Directed by Chris Graves; Written by Liz Friedman and Robert G. Tapert, screenplay by Mark Edens. USA, Fox Kids Network; September 12, 1998, 21 mins 20 secs. Episode 50. *Valley of the Shadow*. Directed by Simon Raby; Written by Mark Edens, screenplay byd Vanessa Place. USA, Fox Kids Network; 1999, 14 May. 21 mins, 28 secs.
Running time	approx. 22 min each (50 episodes)
Format	TV; also DVD (Shout! Factory) and digital streaming (Hulu, Lightbox)
Date of the First DVD or VHS	June 23, 2015 (The first release of the complete series on DVD (region 1) was by Shout! Factory).

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Awards	1999 – Daytime Emmy Award: Outstanding sound mixing, Nominated; Outstanding sound editing, Nominated. 2000 – Writers Guild of America Award: Outstanding children's script, Nominated.
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Alternative histories (Fiction), Mythological fiction, School story*, Television series
Target Audience	Crossover (Children and Yung adults)
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 Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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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

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Additional information

Casting

Hercules: Ryan Gosling,

Iolaus: Dean O'Gorman,

Jason:Chris Conrad,

Lilith: Jodie Rimmer,

Cheiron: Nathaniel Lees,

Ares: Kevin Smith,

Strife: Joel Tobeck.

Summary

The Young Hercules franchise (cf. the 1998 direct-to-video film of the same name, starring Ian Bohen) is intended as a spin-off/prequel to the *Hercules: the Legendary Journeys* franchise (henceforth, *HTLJ*) and its spin-off, *Xena: Warrior Princess* (*XWP*). *The Young Hercules* television serial follows on from the film's conclusion, exploring Hercules' adventures as a teenager during his time at the academy of the centaur Cheiron (a sort of training/finishing school for warriors and heroes). Hercules is accompanied on his adventures by his friends from the film – Iolaus (an ex-bandit who attends the academy as a form of penance) and Jason (the crown Prince – and later, King – of Corinth) – but this group is also expanded upon to include new students/friends such as Lilith (the academy's first female cadet and an ex-amazon).

Unfortunately, there are many issues with the chronology of the series as it was originally aired out of order. This was due to the production team's decision to avoid expensive shooting costs by producing episodes four at a time, grouping together those with similar settings/filming locations rather than following narrative arcs. The DVD release by Shout! Factory attempted to rectify this with a re-ordering of the episodes following their original production numbering (which is now generally accepted as the "correct" version); however, there are still minor inconsistencies present in this restructuring. For example, characters that are previously known to one another meet for the first time in later episodes, and Jason moves between being

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Prince and King of Corinth. For this reason, it is easier to discuss the series with regards to its thematic composition, rather than any sequential ordering of events.

As in the film, the series' primary antagonist is Ares, the god of war, who is greatly displeased with and jealous of the favour which Zeus shows his half-brother. The majority of the conflict within the narrative stems from Ares' machinations to harm the hero: since Zeus has placed a protection order on Hercules which prevents Ares from attacking him directly, he must do this via tricks and schemes. Ares' retinue, Strife (the nephew of Ares) and Discord (the mother of Strife), are often tasked with fulfilling Ares' schemes and, in order to do so, take on the appearance of mortals (e.g. Strife as Nysus in *Between Friends*). These plans include inciting the Amazons (*Amazon Grace*, *Battle Lines* (part 1 and 2), *Mila*, *Under Seige*), bandits (*Herc and Seek*), and other minor divinities including Orpheus, the god of dreams (*In Your Dreams*) and Lucius, an angry and resentful son of Zeus (see below), against Hercules. At various times, full-fledged Olympians also become offended with and attack the hero and his friends: for example, Hera (*The Treasure of Zeus*, *Herc's Nemesis*, *Valley of the Shadow*); Bacchus and the Bacchae – the god's vampiric cult-followers (*Lure of the Lyre*, *Fame*, *Lyre Liar*); Artemis (*Inn Trouble*, *Hind Sight*, *Iolaus Goes Stag*); and Apollo (*Apollo*).

Not all episodes address this theme, however, with a thematic counterpoint provided by exploring Hercules' relationship with his father Zeus, whom he has never met. Hercules is constantly attempting to prove himself to his father, under the impression that he might then win his father's acceptance and finally meet him. While on his adventures, Hercules encounters several other children of Zeus (both divinities such as Hephaestus and other demi-gods such as Castor and Pollux or Lucius) with whom he immediately tries to build a relationship with in order to fill the 'gap' left by his absent father. Some of these figures are good (or, having suffered similar abandonment, are misguided but ultimately have good intentions) and become good friends with Hercules after the resolution of some minor conflict, as with Castor and Pollux (*Winner take all*, *Dad always liked me best)*; however, others are evil and cannot be redeemed, such as Lucius who goes so far to kill Castor and frame Pollux for the murder and kidnap/kill Jason (*Dad always liked me best*; *Mommy dearest*). In the season finale (*Valley of the Shadow*), Hercules finally meets his father (although, in disguise as Aegeus) and Zeus expresses his approval at the man that Hercules is becoming.

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Finally, there are several stand-alone episodes which do not contribute to either theme; rather, these explore typical parts of a modern teenager's life. For example, Hercules must learn to cope with falling in love (*Hind Sight, Cyrano de Hercules*, *Girl Trouble*); Iolaus struggles to study for a test (*Cram-ped*); Hercules must deal with his mother's new relationship (*Home for the Holidays*); Iolaus, scared of a bad report, uses actors to impersonate his parents for parent-teacher interviews at the academy (*Parents Day*); and Iolaus has to juggle work and school commitments (*Teacher's Pests*).

Analysis

Young Hercules is, in many regards, a paradigmatic exemplar of depictions of Hercules on television produced during the mid-late 1990's. It was the last of several television productions which explored the life of Hercules and were produced during this period: i.e. the *HTLJ* and *XWP* franchises; the *Young Hercules* direct-to-television film (1998); and Disney's television serial spin-off *Hercules* (1998-1999; 2 seasons). As a result, it has been greatly influenced by its predecessors.

*Young Hercule*s has been directly influenced by *HTLJ* and *XWP* with many parallels between these franchises. For example, the goddess Hera is represented identically across all three serials (as peacock feathers and eyes superimposed upon the sky, accompanied by a screeching sound effect); numerous characters from *HTLJ* and *XWP* reprised their roles for *Young Hercules* – including, among others, Nathaniel Lees as Cheiron (*HTLJ*, *Young Hercules* [film]), Kevin Smith as Ares (*HTLJ*, *XWP*, *Young Hercules* [film]) and Joel Tobeck as Strife/Deimos (*HTLJ*, *XWP*); like *HTLJ*, *Young Hercules* was first released as a standalone direct-to-television film (see relevant entry) the popularity of which prompted the production of the series itself; and the majority of the filming (on location) was based in New Zealand. These similarities are not unexpected, however, since the same production team was responsible for all three franchises.

Since *HTLJ* preceded *Young Hercule*s and had already explored many of the well-known mythic narratives associated with the hero (such as his 12 labours), *Young Hercules* was forced to utilize other material as its source of narrative inspiration. As a consequence, while many of the series' characters originate from within wider Greek and Roman mythological/historical traditions (e.g. Jason, Theseus, Pythagoras Castor and Pollux), they are here transplanted into new/modern

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	contexts: for example, Orpheus appears as a gifted musician with whom Eurydice is in love until she dies a tragic death; however, Orpheus is a rock-star whose ability comes from a deal with Bacchus (to provide him with more victims) and it is Hercules, not Orpheus, who travels to the underworld to rescue Eurydice, not from death itself, but to ensure that she spends eternity in the Elysian fields – a realm barred to the Bacchae – rather than being tortured in Tartarus. This style of reception is indicative of the late '90's mode of production with a very similar treatment occurring in the Disney's *Hercules* serial (1998-1999) which similarly depicts a young Hercules in training to be a "real hero". In order to appeal to its target audience, *Young Hercules* is full of anachronisms which "update" the mythical narratives: for example, Hercules and his friends often play sports such as football and basketball (e.g. *A Serpent's Tooth*); the god Bacchus and his Bacchae are vampires (see above); the town of Corinth is plagued by a basilisk, a dinosaur-like beast which spits acid (*A serpent's tooth*, *The Mysteries of Life*); the Amazons attack Cheiron's academy with artillery and missiles – called boom-boom arrows – which were created by Hephaestus (*Under Seige*); and, in the episode *What a Crockery*, Strife refers to a girl as "phat" and then has to explain to Ares what this slang means. Again, this is indicative of the period of production with similar anachronisms in Disney's *Hercules*.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Amazons Ares Centaur(s) Chiron / Cheiron Gods Heracles Hercules Iolaus Jason
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Coming of age Friendship Gaining understanding Identity Self
Further Reading	Chiu, Angela, "Labors and Lesson Plans: Educating young Hercules in

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two 1990s children's programs". *Amphora* 11.1 (2014) 1 and 6–7.

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

Addenda

Ordering of episodes according to production numbering (following the DVD release), rather than the date of airing. (obtained from here, accessed: August 17, 2018):

1) The Treasure Of Zeus, Part 1

2) The Treasure Of Zeus, Part 2 – Between Friends

3) The Treasure Of Zeus, Part 3 – What A Crockery

4) Teacher's Pests

5) Girl Trouble

6) Amazon Grace

7) Battle Lines, Part 1

8) Battle Lines, Part 2

9) Hind Sight

10) Iolaus Goes Stag

11) Cold Feet

12) In Your Dreams

13) Down And Out In Academy Hills

14) Keeping Up With The Jasons

15) Cyrano de Hercules

16) Forgery

17) The Lure Of The Lyre

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18) Fame

19) Lyre, Liar

20) A Lady In Hades

21) Herc And Seek

22) Ares On Trial

23) No Way Out

24) Inn Trouble

25) A Serpent's Tooth

26) The Mysteries Of Life

27) The Head That Wears The Crown

28) Parents' Day

29) Winner Take All

30) Dad Always Liked Me Best

31) Mila

32) Mommy Dearests

33) Under Siege

34) Home For The Holidays

35) Con Ares

36) Herc's Nemesis

37) Get Jason

38) The Prize

39) My Fair Lilith

40) Me, Myself And Eye

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41) Golden Bow

42) Sisters

43) Cram-Ped

44) The Beasts Beneath

45) The Skeptic

46) Adventures In The Forbidden Zone

47) Life For A Life

48) Apollo

49) Ill Wind

50) Valley Of The Shadow

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