

Bright and early on a Friday morning, Hercules is sitting at a window booth at his favorite Los Angeles breakfast spot, Kate Mantilini. OK, OK, it's actually Kevin Sorbo—who's flown in for a rare respite from the rainforests of New Zealand, where Hercules: The Legendary Journeys films. But in his third season of playing a demigod, Sorbo, a 38-year-old Minnesota native, has become quite a hero in his own right: His show is battling Star Trek: Deep Space Nine to be the top-rated syndicated drama in the country, and there are Hercules action figures and fan conventions, as well as a successful spin-off (Xena: Warrior Princess). Guys love the show for its smart blend of mythology, action, and scantily clad damsels. Kids are spellbound by monsters like the Cyclops and sandworms. And women are charmed by the powerful but nonthreatening way Sorbo flexes his wit—and his muscles. With the California sun bouncing off his big, blue eyes, Sorbo talks about life Down Under, his future in country music, and Herc's impending nuptials.

TV GUIDE: You lived in L.A. for a long time before doing Hercules. How does it feel to be a visitor?

Kevin Sorbo: It's frustrating, because I've been out of town for three and a half years now. Life goes

Kevin Sorbo

The Man Behind the

Aside from superhuman powers, Herc's got nothing on the guy who plays him

BY STEPHANIE WILLIAMS

Myth

on, you know. Life goes on without you.

TVG: What do you miss about the U.S.?

KS: I miss watching football, going to hockey games, basketball. I miss the California weather. I miss Mexican food. And, of course, I miss my friends and family. I miss movies. It sounds bad, like I'm bashing New Zealand. It's a gorgeous country, but they're lucky if they get 50 days of sun in a year.

TVG: Do you get depressed?

KS: Yeah, you get depressed! It's cloudy all day long. And it never gets really warm.

TVG: If Renaissance Pictures, the company that makes *Hercules*, wanted to move the show tomorrow, would you go?

KS: Yeah. Please. Give me back the North American continent. There may be another spin-off—first we had *Xena*, and now we may have *Young Hercules*. They did a two-hour pilot, and I heard [producers] liked what they saw. There isn't room for three shows in New Zealand—it's a small country—so they'd have to move one of the shows to Vancouver. And I raised my hand first.

TVG: What's your life like down there? Do you get lonely?

KS: The hours are so busy that I look forward to being alone. I've got a beautiful house on a lake; it's quiet, it's nice. I [used to] get invited to things by the cast and crew all the time, but they sort of stopped because I never go. The Kiwis love to party. They drink and drink. It's like they're proud of it. I'm totally unimpressed by that. "Cool! Let's drink until we can't see anymore and we throw up all over each other!" How much fun can that be?

TVG: Have you seen the Sinbad, Tarzan, and Robin Hood shows?

KS: No. They're kind of rip-offs of rip-offs. To me, that's a form of flattery.

TVG: You could kick their butts, right?

KS: Sure. Hercules is the strongest man alive. I've had people ask me questions about who would win in a fight with Xena, and nothing against Xena, but she's a mortal. But I will say that Lucy [Lawless, who plays Xena] could probably beat me up pretty easily.

TVG: What's new for Herc this season?

KS: Steve Reeves, the original Hercules [from the movies], likes the show, and we are writing a script to get him on, which would be very cool.

TVG: Who would he play?

KS: A god. I think that's only fair.

TVG: I know you had some problems with the writing that resulted in some shake-ups on the staff. What was the specific problem?

Mighty Aphrodite

On a show that includes a pantheon of flashy gods, strapping heroes, and mythical beasts, it is the quirky goddess of love who has emerged as the standout guest character on *Hercules*. Alexandra Tydings, the 24-year old Ivy League graduate who plays Aphrodite, was initially unsure of whether she could measure up to such a heavenly role. "In my first episode there was a beauty contest between me and my two sisters, Athena

and Artemis," she says. "I got off this 13-hour flight from hell and I got into wardrobe and I saw these pictures of the girls who were playing my sisters, these models from New Zealand, and I was like, 'Oh, man, they totally mis-cast this thing!'" Helped along by Kevin Sorbo, who directed that first episode, she has since become comfortable with the role. "Aphrodite's full of spitfire, and I love that," says Tydings, a Washington, D.C., native who studied Irish

KS: I get crazy with the inconsistency in the way they write his strength. Why in one show do I have trouble fighting one guy who's a mortal, and in another show 20 guys come up to me and I flip them around like nothing? Why can Xena and Iolaus do as much, sometimes *more*, than I do, and they're mortals? Don't forget the fact that Hercules is half god. For somebody to come up behind me and hit me in the head with the butt end of a sword and I get knocked out—I'll argue that. I have *boulders* hit me in the head.

TVG: Do you think it bothers the fans?

KS: *Certainly* it does. The fans aren't stupid! Don't treat them that way. Sometimes we paint these pictures that are so connect-the-dots. I don't like that.

TVG: I hear Herc is marrying again this month. What's this about her being half woman, half deer?

KS: She's a golden hind. [Laughs] It's such a funny name for it. We've done

centaurs before, the half-horses, but this particular makeup and prosthetics job looks much more real than those. In mythology, the blood from a hind is the only thing that can kill a god, so gods fear them. And she's the last of her kind; Zeus has killed off all of them. The hind is able to transform herself into what appears to be a mortal. So I meet her as a mortal, then find out later that she's the hind. It's a three-part show, so we fall in love, get married, and...stuff happens.

TVG: All's not well.

KS: All's not going to be well. The gods say, number one, we're going to make her 100 percent mortal. And number two, you lose your powers.

TVG: And Herc loves her so much...

KS: He becomes a mere mortal. He doesn't have the strength of a thousand men anymore, just the strength of a guy who's 6'3", 215 pounds.

TVG: Who plays the hind?

KS: Sam Jenkins is the actress.

TVG: Ahhh. And this is your real-life girlfriend?

KS: [Coyly] Isn't that interesting? I met her on an earlier *Herc* episode, in which I get amnesia. She played a princess. We've been dating six or seven months now.

TVG: She's based in L.A. Is the distance a problem? I heard it broke up one of your previous relationships.

KS: Yeah, it did. It's always going to be a problem. Why am I doing it again? Well...we get along.

TVG: What are you like as a boyfriend?

KS: I'm not a big partyer. I would rather cuddle than go out to some club and get all smoky. I'm sure some people love that, but most people are



GEORGE H. SNOOK

folk dancing as a child and later entered the film program at Brown University. "I studied a lot of psychoanalytic feminist film theory and stuff that doesn't come in handy all that often in the real world," she says. "But it's how I got back into acting." Tydings

will appear in an upcoming episode of *Xena: Warrior Princess*, and though she's looking for a regular series job, for now she's happy with her goddess gig. "To play somebody who can literally turn a girl into a hag—that's pretty cool."

—Rich Sands

ing for the same thing we all
t: that one person who we can
on the couch with, watch a
vie, and share a pizza with
e champagne.

TVG: I've heard that you play
guitar.

KS: Actually, I've been invited
to play the Grand Ole Opry. I'll do
it but I'm scared to death.

TVG: What are the names of
some of the songs you've written?

KS: "A Sunday Apart," "She
Kissed Everything But the Blame"—

it's a country song about divorce.

TVG: But you've never been married.

KS: But I think of relationships I've had
like being married and divorced. You
know what? I don't put a lot of stock in the
institution of marriage. People are prob-
ably going to be upset with that. I think
the reality of that piece of paper doesn't
add up to what it's supposed to. But do I
want to get married someday? Certainly.

TVG: And have kids?

KS: Oh, yeah. Two or three. I came from
a big family of five, so I don't want to have
just one child. But when you see most of
my friends get married and divorced,
it's a kind of wonder what it's all about.

TVG: Any hidden talents? Do you like
to dance?

KS: Oh, I love to dance. But am I good
at it? No. I was actually approached by
a pippendale's when I was in college. I
and that flattering.

TVG: Tell me about an acting job that
didn't end up on your résumé.

KS: I did a *Divorce Court*. I played an
actor called the Tennessee Stud. An
adult-porno star. [Laughs]

TVG: You're kidding!

KS: The woman owned a company that
made edible underwear, and her husband
caught her sampling the underwear—
while I was wearing it. I put on this little
Tennessee accent that was *really* horri-
fic. I can't believe I'm telling you this.

TVG: You just finished shooting a film,
"Kull the Conqueror," which opens this



Sorbo's girlfriend, **Sam Jenkins**, plays the golden
hind, falling head over hooves for Hercules.

summer. Is he another hero?

KS: Kull is a lot darker than Herc. It's
obvious to make a comparison, to say,
Hey, another guy with long hair. But it's
from mythology to sword and sorcery.
The movie is going to be far more in-
tense. It's action, nonstop. People who
liked "Conan the Barbarian" with Arnold
[Schwarzenegger] will like it, because it's
the same people who did "Conan." I
think it's a better movie. I'm going to say
that right now and I'm sure Arnold will
come after me. [Laughs]

TVG: Would you like your career to
develop like his?

KS: Certainly. Who wouldn't want
that? I would like to have a career like
Harrison Ford or Robert Redford or Paul
Newman. Those are my heroes. I have
high hopes for myself.

TVG: Finish this sentence: People
would be surprised to find out that the
man who plays Hercules also...

KS: Writes poetry.

TVG: Do you let people read it?

KS: Very, very rarely. I've shown two
or three people. I think some of it's pretty
good. I think a lot of art comes from pain.
Most of the writing I did was when I was
in my 20s, and they were very confusing
years in terms of relationships I was in-
volved in, and in terms of finding my
place in life.

TVG: And what about now? Do you
still write poems?

KS: A lot less, these days. ■



He's stupendous!
He's spectacular!
And America's

Hot for Hercules!

He's a hero who's
half god, played
by an actor who's
all man. A mythic
interview with
Kevin Sorbo



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