

XENA

WARRIOR PRINCESS

(SIXTH SEASON)

Xena's adventures came to an end last June as the sixth season closed. The series had a great run, beginning as a spin-off of *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* and eventually pulling in higher ratings than Hercules himself. While many fans clamored for a seventh season, the production company probably did the right thing in letting the series die while it still had some energy. What's sadder than seeing a show die? Seeing it remain on the air long past its prime.

Ratings were down (although it still ranked high among syndicated action/adventure shows), but more than that, the sixth season lacked a direction that made the third through fifth years so strong. Of course, in the fifth season finale, Xena managed to kill almost all of the Olympian gods. Where does one go from *there*? While the sixth season had some fine moments, there were episodes in which the show seemed to be marking time, waiting for a big finale (which it got in the two-part season-ender) so that it could pass gracefully into the land of perpetual reruns.

Many of the familiar supporting characters who had made the series such a success were brought back once more (and often several times)—three notable, and unfortunate, obvious omissions were Bruce Campbell (Autolykus), Robert Trebor (Salmoneus), and Hudson Leick (Callisto). Campbell was probably too busy working on his own series, *Jack of All Trades*, to spare any time. We don't know what happened with Trebor and Leick.

Nevertheless, the sixth season saw the return of Joxer, Ares, Aphrodite, Alti,

Caesar, Borias, Ephiny, Brutus, Eve, Cyrene, Lila, and even the present-day incarnations of Xena, Gabrielle, and Joxer in Annie Day, Mattie, and Harry O'Casey. While Hercules did not appear (Kevin Sorbo was starring an *Andromeda*, currently the top-rated syndicated adventure series), nor his friend Iolaus, Michael Hurst (who played Iolaus) appeared as a sleazy tabloid TV journalist in one episode ("You Are There") and directed two others ("Who's Gurkhan?" and "To Helicon and Back").

Surprisingly, in light of this steady stream of familiar guest appearances, the sixth season still managed to introduce some new major characters to the mythos—the Norse pantheon Odin and the Valkyries; Beowulf and Grendel (here called "Grindl"); the Roman emperor Caligula (who, in a wonderful twist, didn't just believe himself to be a god; he really *was* a god!); the Amazon queen-in-the-making Varia; Borias's son Belach; and a group of Japanese friends and foes in the finale. All in all, the sixth year featured an impressive assembly.

How Did We Get Here?

When introduced on *Hercules*, Xena was a raider who had assembled an army and terrorized villages. Soon, Hercules—along with a mutinous army—pushed her to see the error of her ways, and she decided she needed to make amends for her past misdeeds. The foundation of the character was hence established, though in going back and re-watching that three-episode introduction on *Hercules*, it's surprising how underdeveloped Xena was.

She was simply the bad-guy-of-the-week for Hercules to battle. She was nasty because, well, because she was. She wanted to kill Hercules because, umm, because she was the bad guy. It didn't go much deeper than that.

Nevertheless, there was something about the character, and the way Lucy Lawless played her, that made her interesting. Her fighting style in the second episode was a little off-beat, and there is an early version of her yi-yi-yi battle cry. She also had the cool Frisbee-like weapon. If the plot had some gaps—why exactly did her army turn from her so quickly? Why did she suddenly become uneasy over the killing and terror she induced—these things could be developed once the character got her own show.

Her association with Ares was established, even back in the *Hercules* episodes, and that was expanded upon greatly in Xena's own series. In light of later episodes, her fighting in *Hercules* seems rather primitive; clearly if such an episode were filmed now, her style of battle would be much different—more advanced, and more exciting to watch. Hercules, even though half god, would not defeat her so easily. (He probably would win eventually, but it would be a much more intense struggle.) But these things are forgivable, because every long-running television series creates an evolution for a character.

When *Xena: Warrior Princess* premiered in September 1995, Xena's struggle to atone for her evil past became a major theme. In the first episode, she picked up a perky young girl, Gabrielle, and soon the