

When one arrives at the set after walking through a legion of Roman soldiers having lunch, it's more than a subtle clue that something big is going on.

Below: Gabrielle and Pompey lay bets on the arm wrestling championships.

except maybe for those modern-day dark glasses sheltering her from the sun.

Although the main section of the procession has already been filmed, the atmosphere on set is still one of epic proportions. One may begin to understand this when faced with some of the production figures involved in filming the parade: its full complement includes 20 Roman soldiers, 12 legion slaves, 10 elite guards and cavalry, several horse wranglers dressed as part of the army, a cartload of pilfered treasures and over 40 assorted Roman citizens (at one stage the procession was also going to include an 18-year-old elephant called Jumbo, but unfortunately his appearance had to be cancelled at the last minute).

There are a few more bodies in *Livia* than are usually needed for an episode of *Xena*, and additional extras always means additional members of the crew. The parade required over 20 dressers, make-up artists, horse wranglers and art department crew. "The more extras you have," explains an insider, "the more people you need to look after them."

The extras had to be ready for transport by 4:40am; they were then taken to the outdoor set by bus, in time for dressing and make-up at 5:15am. Although the extras initially arrived in two batches (5am and 5:40am respectively), the

catering crew had a multitude to feed for an early breakfast: 160 people at 6:30am. Guest actors Wilkinson and Moy arrived at 5:45am and 6:15am respectively.

For the main crew, "parade day" was a normal 12-hour shift – 7am to 7pm – and the unit crew (responsible for on-site facilities) had to be there before everyone; their day on the set began around 4:30am.

Back in the enclosed balcony, the literally heated confrontation between Xena and Augustus is still going on. "Cut," says the director again after a number of takes, and there is a few minutes' pause while the cameras and boom microphone are repositioned for another shot at the same scene, this time from a different angle.

Finally, at 3:15pm, come the much-awaited words, "We're moving on!" Exhausted cast and crew reappear from inside the enclosed space, thankful for a chance to get at air and the ice-filled water cooler at the end of the battlement walkway. It's suddenly a lot more crowded outside than in, with over 20 people vying for space to move themselves and their equipment down the three flights of wooden steps and around the corner to the next scene. Apparently, it's been like this for most of the day. "Every now and then," a crewmember quipped earlier, "people emerge from that sweatbox. The more courageous ones even go back in!"

For now, however, the "sweatbox" is momentarily forgotten as attention is turned to the courtyard for the re-run of Livia's victory parade. Some of the camera crew get to stay in the box, however, as part of the procession is being shot from above, and the balcony just happens to be the best spot for the cameras.

It's a pity about the elephant. But even without it, *Livia* is still one monumental episode. After all, when much of the space in the crew car park is taken up with carts, wagons and Roman chariots, it's a fair indication of something interesting in the near vicinity. When there are several racks of togas and leather armour hanging neatly behind the set, it's a good bet that there will be some fascinating sights to see. When one arrives at the set after walking through a legion of Roman soldiers having lunch, it's more than a subtle clue that something big is going on.

It may not be quite as big as *Ben Hur* (after all, *Xena* has already featured a chariot race in the first season), but *Livia* is certainly an epic episode. After all, this close to the dramatic end-of-season finale, it should be. ■●

