

DESTINY

As the fate of Xena and Gabrielle hangs in the balance, **JIM SMITH** brings us an in-depth review of the sixth and final year of *Xena: Warrior Princess*, leading up to the show's climactic final adventure...

"This isn't just a rescue mission... This is about revenge."
gabrielle,
who's gurkhan?

Like most seasons before it, *Xena's* sixth year kicks off with a particularly dramatic episode, fan fiction writer Melissa Good's debut *Coming Home*. Surprisingly, however, *Coming Home* was not originally intended as *Xena's* season six premiere. The ghostly *The Haunting of Amphipolis* was originally planned as the opener, but the writers felt the dramatic *Coming Home* would get the series' final season off to a stronger start.

Good's script carefully picks up the pieces of shrapnel left over from the format-destroying explosion that was *Motherhood*, and works them together into a really satisfying hour of television. A skillful mix of action, comedy and real drama, her love for the series and its characters is visible in every frame.

Ares' plan to steal the Ambrosia kept by the Amazons, and to use it to restore his Godhood is perfectly sensible given his condition. It also makes unobtrusive use of the series' own continuity. The characterisation of the now ex-God of War is multifaceted, and makes great demands on actor Kevin Smith. Whether Ares is visibly mourning his Godhood, trying to inspire his army, or shaking under the weight of his Furies-inspired hallucinations, Smith pitches his performance exactly right. Who else could be so funny, so evil, so hateful and yet so sympathetic, all in the same scene?

Also hugely impressive (as she will be in all her subsequent episodes) is Adrienne Wilkinson as

Xena's daughter Eve. Somehow managing to be both fragile and resolute, rock-hard and desperately vulnerable, Wilkinson's performance successfully conveys someone trying to come to terms with their past whilst not really knowing who she is. It's not an easy task, and the actress rises to it skilfully.

In the season's second episode, *The Haunting of Amphipolis*, Xena returns to her home town for a long overdue reunion with her mother. However, it's a reunion that both Xena and the audience are denied, as we discover that Cyrene is dead – burnt at the stake as a witch.

An atmospheric and disturbing little horror story with more than a passing resemblance to both *The House on Haunted Hill* and *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *The Haunting of Amphipolis* seems, in both style and content, very unlike any episode of *Xena* that has gone before it.

In keeping with the fifth season's jettisoning of the trappings of Greek Mythology, concepts more in



Left: Xena fought the good fight right up to the end of the show's sixth season...

Right: The Valkyrie Xena takes flight in the Ring trilogy.