

Xena's electrifying fifth season finale, *Motherhood*, pits the warrior princess against the ancient gods in a final battle for survival. **KATE BARKER** visits the hallowed *Xena* sets during the final days of season five's production, and discovers the joys of *Motherhood*...

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It is often said that any creature in the wild is always more ferocious when cornered and attacked, and this is doubly true when that creature is a mother protecting her young. Of course, when that mother is also Xena, ferocity doesn't even begin to describe the power behind the action that ensues.

Motherhood, the fifth season finale of *Xena: Warrior Princess*, could be described as a "family" episode. Xena has been reunited with her daughter Eve (Adrienne Wilkinson). Then, all hell – or rather, Mount Olympus – breaks loose around them...

In *Motherhood*, Xena, Eve and Gabrielle

must contend with Artemis, Ares, Athena, Aphrodite, Demios, Discord, Hades, Hephaestus and Poseidon, not to mention the Furies and their own dark demons as well. And if the prophecy of the Twilight of the Gods is to reach fruition, sacrifices must be made – on both sides of immortality.

Coming out of a showdown like this unscathed isn't going to be easy, especially if the action in one of *Xena's* darkened interior sets is anything to go by. This particular studio has been transformed into a dimly-lit back room; the back room, in fact, of the elderly Joxer's Tavern, itself a museum dedicated to all things *Xena*. Remember, in just a few episodes, 25 years have passed.

In a corner of the set, Wilkinson and Lucy Lawless (*Xena*) are blocking out the moves of the current shot. It is mid-battle; Eve is bruised and bleeding, and Xena is throwing all she has – conveniently nearby spears and other weapons included – at the unseen gods who want her destroyed. For the first couple of rehearsals, Lawless blocks out her moves in slow motion, then at half speed, simulating the noises of explosions to check her reaction times for the upcoming effects.

"They're doing a 'Xena fights the gods' scene," warns a crewmember, "so there are

going to be a lot of loud noises soon."

Loud noises aren't all. Unlike the other room of the tavern – located in another studio some five minutes' drive away – the back room has been specifically designed for the effects about to be filmed. As the crew starts shooting, flame bars and control switches are activated, and several parts of the wooden set look as if they are bursting into flame. Lawless and Wilkinson are right in the thick of it, perfectly safe as actors but in big trouble as Xena and Eve.

The fires are all carefully controlled under the supervision of special effects man Ken Durey, and can be switched off as easily as they spring up. Director Rick Jacobson yells, "Cut!" and the crew steps in to reset the scene. "Let's go again on that," calls Jacobson, "but let's push Lucy's mark up a bit." Lawless gets a little watered down too; Xena's just rushed in from a raging storm. A few months ago she was outrunning a gigantic fireball in *Amphipolis Under Siege* and now she is back in the heat of things, waiting for special effects to send another volley her way.

As if the fire isn't enough, a few explosions need to be added too. After all, there are eight angry gods out there who want Eve and Xena to be so much mortal dust. While the crew is at work, Safety Officer Sally Forde starts handing



MOTHERHOOD