

out little packets of green foam cones, attached to each other in pairs by pieces of string. "There will be a bomb in this take," she explains, "so don't get a fright. Earplugs, anyone?"

Even with the earplugs in, it's not a quiet scene. The lights – including a strobe – flash menacingly as Lawless throws out various weapons and deflects unseen lightning bolts with her chakram.

Seconds later, we have the big bang.

It's an almighty noise, cueing the flames elsewhere on the set and throwing up a huge cloud of smoke. It clears away in seconds as though it had never been there; Jacobson calls cut again, and Lawless and the others crowd around the camera monitors to watch the shot played back.

The actors go back to their starting marks again and try the scene with slightly different moves as Jacobson suggests to the special effects crew that the fire and brimstone should come in a little earlier. Another warning from Forde ("Explosions in this one, guys!") and they film the shot again.

Once more the set needs to be redressed and some of the bigger props – including a weapons rack that resembles a stylised umbrella stand! – are shifted off the set to make way for repositioned lighting and sound equipment. The crew have just worked a six-day week and they'll be working on this episode for another four days.

The crew's current location is a very good-looking set, from the lit candles on a nearby table to the window shutters through which simulated sunlight is pouring. Looking at those slatted shutters, it would be very easy to believe that the shafts of light streaming in are not electrically generated but the real sunlight of the bright cloudless day outside.

Each angle of this explosive shot requires a great deal of preparation and everything must be repositioned perfectly for every take.

"Let's go again," calls Jacobson, "from Lucy picking up the dagger..."

Despite the fact that her character is in very bad shape, Adrienne Wilkinson is enjoying her role as Eve. "I feel like I'm in the middle of *Fire in the Hole*," she says.

"What's *Fire in the Hole*?" I ask.

"It's a roller-coaster," she beams.

It's certainly a roller-coaster for the characters involved – and for some of them, it's a ride that marks the end of the line. Many of the minor gods seem to have simply vanished out of fear for their Olympian lives, but the remains of the pantheon are certainly formidable to face.

Motherhood is a wonderfully dramatic way to end the fifth series, and being on the sidelines of its creation is certainly a "full-on *Xena* experience." There are even souvenirs: everybody gets to keep their earplugs. ■●

"It's certainly a roller-coaster for the characters involved – and for some of them, it's a ride that marks the end of the line."

Below: Athena returns to Xenaverse in *Motherhood*

