

stuck and is recited in some churches to this day.

Unfortunately, Ares' struggle between his human and divine sides was mostly reduced to comedy—he has to *walk* from place to place instead of teleport. As comedy, it worked because Kevin Smith is a good actor, but we wish the writers would have taken the opportunity presented to them to explore the theme in more depth.

### Ending in Death

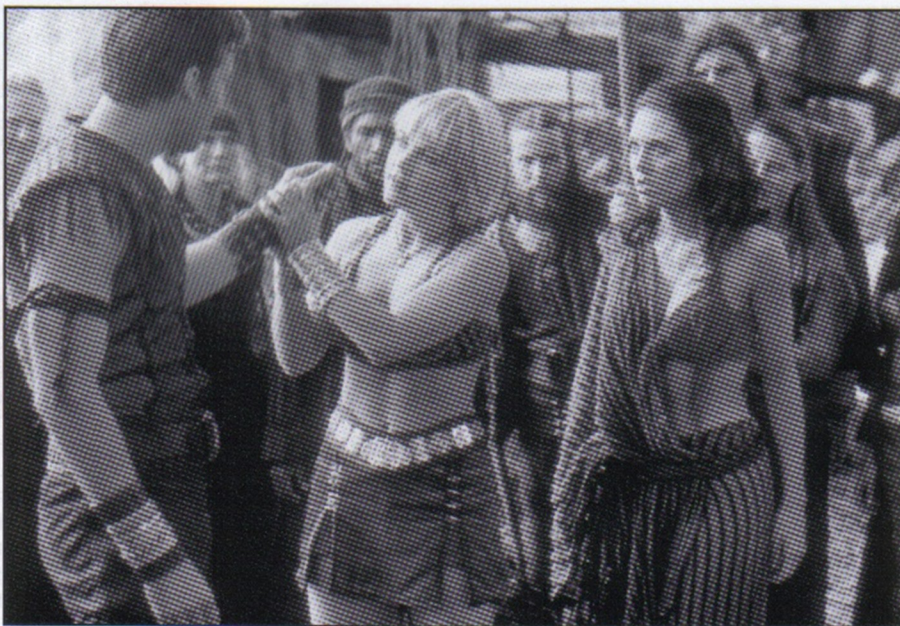
In the series finale, Xena finally met her end at the hands of a Japanese samurai. The death was essentially planned by Xena—she needed to become a spirit in order to battle a demon, Yodoshi, and free forty thousand souls he had imprisoned. Though we're not sure the setting provided the strongest impact—why far-off Japan instead of Greece?—Xena's death gave the series a closure it would not have had if Xena and Gabrielle had walked off into the sunset together. Many fans wanted an ending that would match what happened on *Hercules*, with the hero and sidekick heading off to whatever their next adventure might be. But that kind of thing worked for Hercules, who did not have the baggage of an evil past that Xena had. We discuss the season

finale in more detail in the episode guide, but we'll say here that we consider it the strongest episode of the sixth season. Though not perfect, it showed that executive producer Robert Tapert was more concerned with being true to the story he thought needed to be told than bowing to fan pressure. (Rumors had been circulating for months that Xena would die in the final episode.)

In considering the death of Xena in the final episode, one should not ignore the idea that Lawless herself probably preferred such a story to end the series. We have not heard any statements from her directly, but consider two circumstantial arguments: (1) Tapert is her husband, and it's doubtful he would have killed Xena if she had strenuously protested (even if they weren't married, the input of the show's star would carry considerable weight); and (2) when Lawless appeared on *The Late Late Show with Craig Kilborn* on November 15, he asked her if she missed Xena, and she said that she didn't. It sounded like she wanted to move on and not be trapped

in the warrior princess identity forever. What better way than to have the character demonstrably killed—shot with arrows, beheaded, and cremated—in the final episode?

Though there were stretches over the years when our interest in the series waned—and let's face it, not every episode was a masterpiece, even a masterpiece of heroic fantasy—we were somewhat surprised to find ourselves missing the show when fall 2001 rolled around. Six seasons is, of course, a good run, and there are plenty of episodes to re-watch. We'll look forward to their eventual release on DVD (we don't know of any definite plans, but we'd be surprised if they didn't end up coming out within the next few years). There was simply something cool about



Gabrielle and Eve

the series, whether it was the action, the above-average performances, the hilarious guest appearances (especially by Ted Raimi and Bruce Campbell), and just the basic weirdness of it all. No series could combine comedy and drama as well as Xena. And though the series was essentially episodic, it had enough of a memory to weave in some serial plot threads.

There are lots of great moments to remember, but when we think of Xena, first and foremost we think of Lawless's great portrayals of Xena in battle, sword and chakram in hand, an intense gaze in her eyes, always ready to fight to the end. The series could easily have deteriorated into absurd camp (okay, it probably did here and there), but Lawless's ability to bring some dignity to such a role is a credit to her abilities as an actress. She should have a long and successful career as an actress if that's what she chooses to do.

Forget the Xena conventions with girls dressed up as warrior princesses; forget the anachronisms; forget the way the writers toyed with the audience about the

relationship of Xena and Gabrielle. Remember Lawless—as the evil Xena with Borias and Lao Ma in Chin; as the good Xena traveling with Gabrielle and Joxer and sparring with Ares; and as the warrior Xena battling overwhelming odds—and in the long run, Xena holds up just fine and should enjoy a long life in syndication and on disc.

### The Episode Guide

We have followed the format used in our previous two guides—commentaries follow a plot synopsis; brief historical and mythological notes appear where applicable; and most end credits are omitted, since they appeared in microscopic type. We've tried our best to confirm spellings, though with Xena, this is always somewhat of an ordeal.

Our commentaries differ slightly from past guides in that, because this is the final season of the show, in many cases we have included mini-histories of the characters as they appeared during the year. We didn't want to get buried in such material—readers can find most of our previous guides still in print—but capsule histories seemed appropriate in establishing just where the character had been and how he or she ended up.

Readers wanting detailed reviews can find our coverage of the first two seasons in *Spectrum Special Edition 2*. Season three appears in *Spectrum 14* and 15,

though only the latter is still in print (and just barely, at that, as with *Special Edition 2*). Season four appears in *Spectrum 20* (also in short supply), and season five is split over issues 24 and 25. See page 40 for ordering information.

We won't be back next year for another Xena guide, but we actually do have two or three Xena articles in mind and are eager to get to them. So the character won't disappear completely from these pages.

**Bibliography:** *Encyclopaedia Britannica CD 98*; *Mythology* by Edith Hamilton (Mentor, 1942); *Encyclopedia of Things That Never Were* by Michael Page and Robert Ingpen; *Gods, Heroes and Men of Ancient Greece* by W.H.D. Rouse (Signet Key, 1957); *Dictionary of Classical Mythology* by Z.E. Zimmerman (Bantam, 1964); and even a Xena-related Web site or three, notably [www.ukxenate.fsnet.co.uk/index.htm](http://www.ukxenate.fsnet.co.uk/index.htm) and [www.whoosh.org](http://www.whoosh.org).