

Spectrum 24 for the details.) In the Bible, only two angels are named, Michael and Gabriel. Rev. 12:7 suggests that the angels are led by Michael.

Virgil, introduced in the fifth-season episode "Livia," is the son of Joxer and Meg. The actual Virgil was, of course, a famous Roman poet who lived from 70-19 B.C. and wrote the epic poem *Aeneid*.

The end-credits disclaimer: "All Hell broke loose during the filming of this motion picture."

RATING: ★★★

4. WHO'S GURKHAN?

First televised October 2000

Guest starring Adrienne Wilkinson (*Eve*), William Gregory Lee (*Virgil*), Willa O'Neill (*Lila*), Calvin Tuteao (*Gurkhan*), and Tandi Wright (*Sonata*); **Teleplay by R.J. Stewart; Story by Rob Tapert; Directed by Michael Hurst; Edited by Robert Field**

Xena, Gabrielle, Eve, and Virgil return to Gabrielle's home. It's run-down, but Lila is inside and greets them. Lila's daughter Sarah was captured eight years ago by the raider Gurkhan and taken to north Africa. Lila's mother, father, and husband went to try to buy Sarah back from Gurkhan's harem, but all three were beheaded. Gabrielle wants vengeance.

Soon, Gabrielle and the others are on a ship sailing to Africa. Lila tells Gabrielle that Gurkhan keeps his identity a secret. Eve was in the walled city (Mogador) once selling slave girls. Xena thinks Gabrielle's on a suicide mission. Gabrielle gets seasick; Xena gives her something that knocks her out. Meanwhile, Xena and Virgil will try to find Gurkhan. They enter Mogador, where Virgil "sells" Xena as a slave. The slave trader auctions Xena. Virgil is



Xena and Lucifer in "Heart of Darkness"

supposed to identify Gurkhan, but he has multiple people bidding in his name. He wins Xena for two hundred twenty gold ducats.

Gabrielle wakes up and learns what Xena and Virgil have done. In Gurkhan's harem, Xena takes a bath and meets Yo from Japan. Xena says her name is Sophia. Xena meets the "number one wife." Virgil brings in another "slave," an untamed Amazon queen (Gabrielle), whom he will offer as a gift to Gurkhan. Gabrielle dances for Gurkhan. Xena notices that Gabrielle has a hidden knife; she tackles Gabrielle and stops the dance, then knocks her unconscious. Guards knock Xena unconscious.

Virgil slips away. Xena is taken to the dungeon and beaten. Gurkhan interrogates Xena (she says she wants to be his number one wife) and renames her Fatima. Xena recuperates. She tells Gabrielle that Gabrielle can kill Gurkhan. That night, Fatima (Xena) is chosen to dance for Gurkhan. After

the dance, Xena asks Gurkhan for Sarah's head on a plate. The number one wife is upset. Gabrielle is in disbelief.

Xena seduces Gurkhan and proposes that Gabrielle join them. He likes it. Gabrielle enters; Xena puts the touch on him and hands her a knife. She refuses to kill him, saying that if she does, he wins because she'll become like her. She beats him instead. Gabrielle and Xena find Sarah in the dungeon—she's the number one wife. Sarah thought the only way to survive all these years was to be more vicious than her competition. Xena frees the harem girls. Guards behead Sarah—not realizing until it's too late that it was really Gurkhan in her place. Sarah doesn't think Lila will ever be able to forgive her.

COMMENTS: Despite the poor title (it sounds like it should be for a humor episode), "Who's Gurkhan?" is one of the grimmest *Xenas* ever. The teaser sets the foundation: Gabrielle's parents have been beheaded by the raider Gurkhan, and an outraged Gabrielle is out for blood. But it doesn't stop there. Inside Mogador, Xena is tossed in a dungeon and beaten repeatedly in one of the most harrowing sequences since the character's second appearance in "The Gauntlet" (in the *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* show). Xena is bloodied, bruised, hung upside down, and covered only by scraps of cloth; it's uncomfortable viewing but, ironically, not completely atypical of a Rob Tapert episode (who also co-wrote the grim series finale). The fact that he's Lucy Lawless's husband might provide fodder for a wild psychology essay, though you won't find it here, as we try to avoid committing psychology in public.

The episode was directed by Michael Hurst—who, of course, played Iolaus in the aforementioned *Hercules* series. His direction here is solid except for some unfortunate lapses in judgment. The most obvious is in the teaser. Gabrielle stands outside her house,

having just heard the horrible news from her sister, and screams out for revenge. At that moment, thunder booms, and a storm appears. Gabrielle and Xena are standing in a downpour, getting drenched. It's supposed to add dramatic impact, and maybe it would have done so fifty or a hundred years ago, but it's such a cliché by now (like the thunderstorm during the haunted house episode) that the scene is merely funny. The episode is also marred by interminably long dances by Xena and Gabrielle as they perform before Gurkhan. The one by Gabrielle is especially dull, with little hint of the eroticism she's supposed to use to entice Gurkhan. It's not that we believe Renee O'Connor is incapable of it, just that it doesn't come across here.

A more serious problem with Gabrielle in this episode isn't the fault of Hurst, or even O'Connor, but the writers. When Gabrielle is finally able to kill Gurkhan, she doesn't, saying that if she does, he will win, because she will become just like him. This is simply dumb. For years Gurkhan has been terrorizing innocent women and holding them hostage, killing anyone who would stand in his way. Gabrielle is about to enact justice on a guilty man. How can she possibly think that killing him would make her as evil as he is? (It's not as though she hasn't killed before.) Gabrielle isn't exactly a genius, but her thinking here is weird. If she would have suggested that Gurkhan needs to be turned over to the local authorities (whoever that would be) to face punishment, that would be one thing, but now Gurkhan's death is left to an implausible plan by Xena in which his guards do the killing.

And about that plan—Xena takes a huge risk in asking