

recovered from the ground. Xena, Gabrielle and Joxer appear and launch straight into a rendition of Edwin Starr's seminal 'War'. The real highlight of the instalment is Ted Raimi's performance of the Latino standard 'Dancing in the Moonlight', sung in character as Joxer's brother Jace. *Lyre, Lyre* is a great episode. The songs (all cover versions) are well chosen, and the performances are pitched at exactly the right level.

Following *Lyre, Lyre*, we get another lighter episode, this year's clip show, *Punchlines*, which has not one but two framing sequences. In the first, Gabrielle is trying to return to her writing but finds she can no longer express herself through her scrolls. Aphrodite pops in for a chat, and Gabrielle relates the events of her day to the Goddess of Love – including an encounter with Lachrymose, the God of Despair. It is Gabrielle's conversation with Lachrymose that provides the framing sequence within the framing sequence, as she attempts to make the god laugh. Like most *Xena* clip shows, this is a laugh a minute. It even has a custard pie fight. The episode gains extra marks for a wealth of nice details, such as Gabrielle's pyjamas, the bamboo trolleys in the supermarket scene, and Aphrodite's little spectacles.

The second of the season's three pivotal instalments, Alex Kurtzmann and Roberto Orci's *God Fearing Child*, is next. With one eye on the future and another on the past, it allows another, final adventure with Hercules, and features the death of Zeus, King of the Olympian Gods, an occurrence which sets into motion a series of events that will come to dominate the series. Apocalyptic prediction and hopeful optimism clash perfectly – Xena's daughter is born as Hercules murders his own father for her sake. Birth and death converge and suddenly the audience knows, or should know, that nothing can ever be the same again.

Hardcore *Xena* fans may not have fully appreciated what this episode meant to those who have been following Renaissance's productions since the



Left: Gabby should have chosen a less conspicuous item for her first attempt at shoplifting.

Below: Xena stops passers by in the hope of finding a doctor in *God Fearing Child*.

Bottom right: Back to her normal shape, Xena wastes

time in picking a fight with the gods.

Bottom left: Ares is in Xena's bad books after killing Eli in *Seeds of Fate*.

earliest days of *Hercules*, but the presence of Herc at this juncture in the series' shared history is absolutely perfect. Xena is, was and always shall be inextricably linked with its parent show. Here's appearance is in line with this season's returns for Eli, Alt and Amarice.

The following episode, *Eternal Bonds*, begins with Xena, Gabrielle and Eve being chased by a tornado, and then proceeds to move up a gear. This is an impressive episode, with everything an audience could want. As Xena points out, following the death of Zeus, the Gods are throwing everything they've got at the happy trio. Artemis, Apollo and Poseidon send first assassins and then armies after them.

In conjunction with the following episode, the equally dramatic *Amphipolis Under Siege*, *Eternal Bonds* conveys very well the desperate situation in which Xena and Gabrielle find themselves. How do you fight immortal, omnipotent gods? And who will join with you if you try? Joxer appears to help, and gets poisoned during a fight with a priest of Apollo. His slow deterioration into delirium gives Ted Rami far more dramatic material than normal, and he rises to the challenge skilfully.

*Amphipolis Under Siege* contains many great moments, including Xena's apparent willingness to give herself to Ares for Eve's sake. The episode's real highlight, however, is the revelation that it is Ares, of all people, who is the voice of sanity amongst the gods. The God of War believes that the prophecy of Eve's power to destroy the gods may be self-fulfilling, and that by attempting to stop it from occurring they may all be hastening their own demise. He also proves pragmatic

