



Xena. Again, the episode is packed with amazing moments: the smashing of Xena and Gabrielle's ice tombs; Xena renewing her acquaintance with Ares; her confrontation with Augustus; Eve and Xena's battle in the amphitheatre; Xena and Gabrielle's reunion with Joxer...

The episode again flows straight into the next, *Eve*, an emotionally fraught and powerful episode, which provides Ted Raimi with yet more opportunities to prove his mettle as a dramatic actor. There's a wonderful moment where he confesses to his son Virgil that he was never the great warrior he wanted to be, whilst his acting during Joxer's death scene is deeply moving. Equally impressive is the literally miraculous redemption of Livia/Eve. This is presented not as a quick fix solution, but as the beginning of a long and painful process. Eve is not simply forgiven. She sees her error thanks to divine intervention, but is haunted by guilt and tormented by what she's done, as the next episode goes on to prove.

*Motherhood* is as grandiose and extraordinary a piece of television as you're ever likely to see. The remaining Olympians rally for a final assault on Xena's family, desperate to preserve their place in the universe. Over Aphrodite's objections, Athena sets the Furies on Gabrielle, using images of both Joxer and Hope to torment her. Through Eve, the Archangel Michael (see the *Hercules* episode *Revelations*) gives Xena the power to kill Olympians. The stage is set for the final confrontation...

Olympus has been threatened many times

throughout both this series and its predecessor, but here it shakes and then falls. Xena's battle with the surviving gods in the burning remains of Joxer's barn is hugely impressive, but even that is topped by Xena and Athena's duel in the hall of Olympus itself. Aphrodite and Ares' actions are somehow both shocking and completely in character. The conclusion of the episode means that whatever follows it will have to be different from all that's gone before. The final scene as Eve, Gabrielle and Xena sit by the sea literally at the dawn of a new age is a very different season ending to any we've had before. Yet, like so much of the innovation this season, it works.

The fifth season of *Xena* has perhaps been stronger than any except its third – somehow both diverse and coherent, well conceived and stylishly executed. At the time of writing, *Xena's* sixth season is yet to air, and only the scantest details are known. By the time you read this, it will have begun in the US and be imminent in the UK, and we now know that this year will be the show's last.

What's next is, in a very real sense, the endgame. ■●

roman history, william shakespeare and the entire pantheon of the gods of olympus were harmed during the production of this article.



Above left: The end seems to be nigh for Xena and Gabrielle in *Looking Death in the Eye*.

Above: Gabby is torn between her Amazon heritage and her friendship with Joxer in *Kindred Spirits*.

Below: Xena and Gabby head off in search of Eve in *Motherhood*.

