



There was a  
 ne when  
 could  
 ever have  
 imagined this.  
 ou washing  
 ood off my  
 ands.”  
 abrielle to  
 ena, *Legacy*

**Above:** The relationship between Xena and Ares has come full circle.

**Below:** Lucifer proves almost a match for Xena in *Heart of Darkness*.

**Bottom:** Gabby fights cannibals in *The Abyss*.



line with Christian thinking about. We see the wounds Xena and Gabrielle sustained on the cross bleed spontaneously, while the idea of a deceased person going to hell because they died unabsolved of their life's sins is a very Catholic way of regarding the afterlife.

The villain Mephistopheles takes his name from a traditional term for the Devil, one these days largely connected with Elizabethan dramatist Christopher Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus*. Here, Mephistopheles is not the Devil himself, but some sort of demon (and one of the series' best-ever monster designs) who has taken control of hell since the downfall of the Olympian Gods.

Although seeming largely self-contained, *The Haunting of Amphipolis* actually leaves many plot threads dangling, waiting for other episodes to tie them up in due course. Oh, and the killer chandeliers are very, very cool.

*Heart of Darkness* is a direct sequel to *The Haunting of Amphipolis*, and deals with the ramifications of Xena's murder of Mephistopheles. It also features a renegade angel named Lucifer. Well, if you're going to have a villain, you may as well make it the big one...

*Heart of Darkness* is an effective, sexy little shocker of an episode. The cut-away effects shots to Xena's heart turning black are disturbingly effective, and coupled with Lucy Lawless' terrific 'dark Xena' performance, they allow us to see her character becoming more and more corrupted as the episode progresses, giving us a horribly plausible vision of our heroine going bad.

There are a number of great lines in this episode, too. "We actually have a lot in common, you and I," Xena tells Lucifer. "Of course we do," he replies. "You're a mortal female with a lying tongue, savage tendencies and a blonde girlfriend. I'm a celibate winged-warrior that dwells with the Divine."

What's also interesting in this episode is how the motives of the 'One God', unassailable in *Hercules* episodes such as *Revelations*, or even earlier *Xena* instalments like *Seeds of Faith*, become more and more questionable. This is an idea that will be returned to later in the season.

In the next instalment, *Who's Gurkhan?*, Xena, Eve, Virgil and Gabrielle then return to Gabby's home village of Poteidaia and, as with Xena's return to Amphipolis two episodes earlier, our heroes aren't welcomed by the happy reunion they were expecting. Instead, they are once more faced with personal tragedy and an unpleasant task to complete: the rescue of Gabrielle's niece, Sarah, from the episode's eponymous villain, a slave trader who has already murdered her entire family, including her mother, Gabrielle's sister Lila.

*Who's Gurkhan?* is a bit of a showpiece episode, written by the show's executive producer R. J. Stewart from a plot by head honcho Rob Tapert, and shot under the assured direction of Micheal 'Iolous' Hurst.

Much of the 'Xena-in-harem' scenes are reminiscent of the traditional 'POW camp movie', although some of the action contained therein sometimes feels like a deliberate parody of the worst excesses of fan fiction. Nevertheless, the script contains a number of fun twists, and, as is often the case with Stewart's work, we're led to feel sympathy for a character who's initially presented to us as a bad guy (or girl). Despite Sonata/Sarah's undeniable unpleasantness, it's impossible *not* to feel sorry for her when she reveals that "Life just seemed so brutal I thought the only way to survive was to be more vicious than the competition."

The following episode, *Legacy*, is, as the title implies, about Xena and Gabrielle realising they've become legends in the two and a half decades they've been away. Gabrielle's '*Xena Scrolls*' have spread further than even she anticipated, telling of the exploits of 'the legendary Warrior Princess' and 'the battling bard of Poteidaia'.

Xena and Gabby's reactions to their fame are initially presented quite comically, with Xena having trouble convincing a group of doubting nomads that they are actually who they say they are. The manner in which the tribesmen worship the two women eventually changes tone, however, from quite amusing to downright disturbing, and Xena soon finds herself leading a coalition of tribes against her old enemies, the Romans.

Gabrielle's shocking accidental killing of Korah, and the moral quandary which ensues, is reminiscent of the types of scenarios the show presented in its earliest instalments. This is clearly