

the commentator as they do about the text.

The best scene in *Send in the Clones* is the one in which Xena, Gabrielle and the fans sit round eating a Chinese Takeaway and commenting on the television series that has been made about their lives...

When *Fates Collide* is a mind-bogglingly complex parallel universe, alternative reality epic, which allows us a glimpse of a completely different *Xenaverse*. A world where Gabrielle is an assassin and Xena is an ally of Julius Caesar, the late Roman dictator returned to life in a world made anew through an alliance with the Fates.

When *Fates Collide* is very clever, hugely dramatic and often grisly viewing, but none of that is important. What's important here is how these alternative versions of the characters we know so well remain the same people regardless of the world in which they live. Xena's connection with Gabrielle transcends everything, even reality itself.

Gabrielle's destruction of the Loom of the Fates, restoring our reality, the one that was "meant to be", is an amazing moment, while the final scene with Xena and Gabrielle on the beach is one of the season's most quietly satisfying codas. "You gave us the world back," says Xena, "No," Gabrielle replies. "We both did."

The Last of the Centaurs is a love story with a ghost story twist. The tale re-introduces the deceased Amazon Ephiny (Danielle Cormack) and Xena's former lover Borias (Marton Csokas), as well as Borias' son, Lord Belach (also played by Csokas).

Belach is distraught over the disappearance of his daughter, Nicha, who he believes has been kidnapped by Centaurs. But unbeknownst to him, Nicha is carrying the child of Xenan, Centaur son of Ephiny. With the help of Ephiny's spirit, Xena and Gabrielle step in to take charge of the situation, and are able to help the two lovers find peace away from society's prejudice.

The episode contains elements of season one's *Hooves & Harlots*, and fills in gaps in Xena's past with great skill, specifically in her relationship with the warlord Borias.

Lots of silly practical jokes are played and Aphrodite gets to perform a magic show in *Many Happy Returns*. The show centres, not surprisingly, on Gabrielle's birthday, and is a frivolous piece of nonsense without a slither of a plot, rendered instead as a series of comedy set pieces.

Comedy has always been an integral part of the show's appeal, and *Many Happy Returns* is one of the series' best. It's also nice that, even at this stage, the series is confident enough to give a quietly grinning nod to Xena and Gabrielle's mutual love of the poet Sappho.

Soul Possession, the series' last ever clip show and the final stand-alone episode, returns again to present-day Los Angeles, and acts as a direct sequel to *Déjà Vu All Over Again*. The episode features Annie, Harry and Mattie, present-day reincarnations of Joxer, Xena and Gabrielle, respectively, in a tale



Above: Back in the present-day in the clip show *Send in the Clones*.

Below: Alti returns in the show's sixth season.

which takes a swipe at the excesses of fandom.

Sadly, the show represents the final leg in Ares' story arc, but fans of the *God of War* will no doubt take pleasure in this latest (and last) over the top appearance from Kevin Smith. Throw in a few in-jokes about the series' subtext and a cracking final scene, and you have one excellent episode.

Soul Possession brings us right up to date. As you read this, the final instalment of the series' two-parter, *A Friend in Need*, will quite literally just have been broadcast in the US, and at the time of writing, the producers of *Xena* were keeping the content of the climactic finale under their hats.

While there's not much more we can say about this episode, there's no doubt *A Friend in Need* will be a thrilling, emotional rollercoaster of an episode, befitting the conclusion of a brilliant television series and the end of what's been a dramatic, fun-packed final season.

We hope you enjoy it. ■●



"Nothing could stop me... No force on this earth could have kept me from returning to where I belong... by your side."
xena to
gabrielle,
Return of the valkyrie