

Xena, When Fates Collide

So why can't every episode be like this?

May 14, 2001

You know, ethically, I probably shouldn't review this, having met the writer, Katherine Fugate, briefly when we both sat on the [Whoosh!](#) panel at the recent *Xena* convention in Pasadena. I found her to be intelligent and charming, and every bit as much of a fan as anyone else in the room. My opinion of her work could very well be a little suspect.

On the other hand, this was such an *amazing* episode, I can't keep my yap shut. So, take it for what you will.

Caesar, Julius Caesar, has escaped from Tartarus and imprisoned the **Fates**, re-weaving his own timeline so he joined up with Xena in "Destiny," instead of crucifying her. So now she rules Rome by his side as his empress and general (and total aside here, but why is it that whenever the **Fates** are on this show, that damn loom is completely different *every single time*?).

This means that, for one, Lucy Lawless has to come up with yet *another* interpretation of Xena, and it's a fine performance. This isn't the feral Xena from "The Debt" and others, because obviously that wouldn't make sense -- in this timeline, Caesar never betrayed her, and so she never became evil Xena. Nor is she simply the cocky pirate Xena from "Destiny," because many years have passed since then. Instead, this is pirate Xena all grown up: mature, confident, an excellent warrior, still quite ambitious, and, interestingly, more overtly feminine than the Xena we know.

In fact, the really cool thing here is that this is Xena as she always *wanted* to be: ruler of the world, an able and respected leader, with no dark past to haunt her. And yet, true happiness, true fulfillment eludes her -- there is, it would seem, no *love* in her life, her marriage to Caesar based on little more than shared ambition.

Fortunately, that doesn't last long. In this timeline, Gabrielle is a famous playwright -- and once again, this is the person *Gabrielle* always wanted to be, yet her life is just as empty. They meet at a performance of one of her plays (amusingly, it's a retelling of the episode "Fallen Angel"), and the two are attracted right away. There isn't a subtexty thing about it either, folks. It's all right-there-in-the-open maintext, and the rest of the episode is a dedicated celebration of a love so strong that nothing, not time, not fate, not any twisted destiny, will keep them apart.

Although Caesar and Alti sure try their darndest. He alone retains his memories of the original timeline, and using her powers, Alti is slowly

Series

Xena: Warrior Princess

Episode

When **Fates Collide**

Airing Date

Week of 2001-04-30

Sci-fi Bits

Warping into an alternate timeline.

Juicy Bits

The look on Xena's face when she spies Gabrielle on the opposite balcony -
- "Why must I be a teenager in love?"

Featuring

Lucy Lawless as Xena

Renee O'Connor as Gabrielle

able to see the real timeline as well. Recognizing the possible threat that Gabrielle represents to his nicely ordered little world, Caesar has her arrested, setting in motion a series of events that will, in the end, prove his own undoing. In much the same way, Alti's desire to cause pain in others eventually results in Xena and Gabrielle knowing just enough about their other selves to thwart her schemes. And actually, that's pretty cool too -- it's clear that no matter *what* timeline Caesar and Alti are in, his ego and her sadism will inevitably screw them both.

This episode is a serious emotional wringer from beginning to end. It quite deliberately echoes many of the more powerful moments from past episodes (and I don't mean the "flashbacks"), as if Xena and Gabrielle's lives form a pattern that can never be entirely broken, yet casts them in new contexts. It's a pretty delicate balancing act -- nearly repeating the crucifixion and dungeon scenes from "Ides of March," just to pick the obvious, could have simply trotted out the same sentiments without adding anything new, and turned out as little more than manipulative claptrap.

Yet it's all treated with a seriousness and a dignity that, combined with the excellent performances, keep you riveted and don't let go (heck, they're even nice to *Joxer*). On some level, it even shows Xena coming to terms with her evil self, saying, "I realize now, things happened precisely as they should."

And Gabrielle, as before, gets stronger every minute she's with Xena, growing from a soft-spoken playwright into a woman determined to challenge the **Fates** themselves, practically in front of your eyes. She's finally found the one thing that's given her empty life meaning, and she's *not* letting her go, destroying the loom while hissing, "Your loom destroyed what was *meant to be!*" It's a somewhat different note for Gabrielle to hit, and Renee O'Connor pulls it off magnificently.

In fact, if there's one quibble I have with this episode, it's the ending. At the very end of "Fallen Angel," after being brought back from the dead, Xena and Gabrielle were rather shaken and unsure, and it was a different and interesting way to handle it. Apparently, they took the positive feedback to heart and went even further here, with the two of them initially not even sure who they are. That's logical, but Xena, especially, seems so confused she's almost catatonic. Considering the "our love is stronger than anything" theme, a *little* stronger emotion would have perhaps been more appropriate.

That is, however, a rather small misstep compared to how smashingly *right* everything else is. "When **Fates Collide**" is one to watch and savor, over and over again.

--[Jeff Lundrigan](#) has seen his alternate timeline, and prefers it here too.

