

WHEN FATES COLLIDE

KRICKEL:

^[36] Who initially approached whom about your writing an episode?

FUGATE:^[37] I had my managers, AMG, call Renaissance and introduce them to my work. Then I met with Patrick Moran, then the President of Production. Patrick and I hit it off immediately, and he is now one of my closest friends. I do believe I jumped up on the couch at one point and said, "I have to write for *Xena*!" Poor Patrick had to either hire me or call security. I'm glad he chose the former.

KRICKEL:^[38] Did you have a specific story in mind, or were you presented with a basic plotline, and you essentially fleshed it out into a script?

FUGATE:^[39] When I came in to meet with RJ Stewart and Rob Tapert [both executive producers of *Xena*], I did have themes I wanted to explore. I have always liked the idea that every choice we make in this lifetime is the right one because it gets us to the next step in our life or to the next life itself. If we continually judge every "mistake" we think we've made, we don't see the path and how that choice brought us to the place we are now. It's all about mistakes and lessons in life. And it's the judgment of them that gets in our way. I wanted to explore that with an alternate reality and with Xena's own struggle with her choices in life. Her dip into her dark side and how that still haunts her soul. I wanted her to finally understand the beauty that path took her to and thus, the necessity of it. And that's where we started.

KRICKEL:^[40] That "choices" theme—were you at all influenced by either of the films *Sliding Doors* or *Run Lola Run*? Or Bach's book *One*, for that matter?

FUGATE:^[41] I have only seen *Sliding Doors*—not *Run Lola Run* or read *One*. I personally have always been attracted to this theme. I've had many early deaths in my family and tragedies requiring me to realize how transient life is, so I see the choices we make as rather profound. And it has intrigued me that Xena had never really addressed her own choices as integral to her being and instead judges them as "bad."

KRICKEL:^[42] What about two previous episodes that vaguely explored this theme—**REMEMBER NOTHING** (26/202), in which Xena saw where she would be if she had chosen not to defend her village, and **ARMAGEDDON NOW** (H72-73/413-414), in which we saw how she'd be empress of the known world, had Hercules never been born. (Actually, that was a Hercules episode, so perhaps you've not seen that one at all!)

FUGATE:^[43] Haven't seen that Hercules episode. Rob did mention **REMEMBER NOTHING** (26/202) as a concern, but we realized the take wasn't at all the same, so we felt confident it would feel like a fresh exploration. I think *Sliding Doors* is a good comparison, actually, more so than **REMEMBER NOTHING**.

KRICKEL:^[44] I'm sure everyone is fascinated with what the writing process is like. Who did you work with, and how closely?

FUGATE:^[45] I worked closely with RJ [Stewart], Rob [Tapert], and Michael McDonald. Everyone is very positive and upbeat and there's a genuine love for the show and for the people writing on it that made me feel at home. And, since I could quote other episodes, I think that made me a valuable commodity to them. They didn't have to bring me up to speed, introduce characters to me, awash me with tapes and past episodes, etc. I was with them all the way. The rewrite process was a thrill as each person brings his own brand of magic. RJ is very plot and story driven, understanding character arc and writer-speak. Rob is very protective of Xena and her journey, and he's very visually minded, letting you know when a scene might get too intellectual or talky, forgoing its roots. Rob also writes very entertaining emails and I found they brightened my day. There are specific stages the script goes through from beat sheet to script to rewrites to shooting drafts.

Other Experiences

KRICKEL:^[46] How did this compare with other writing experiences you've had?

FUGATE:^[47] Each process has been different. The negative processes usually deal with producers just telling you what to do and not listening to your point of view or your (passionate) arguments about why a choice is important or valid. They look at you as a typist and tell you to type what they say. Those meetings can be demoralizing and tend to harm creativity. At RenPics, everyone there comes at you from a place of love first. They love Xena, they love that you love Xena. Thus, all the conversations come from how to make your Xena even better. I don't remember one time thinking, "I can't do this." I was always sparked.

The Process

KRICKEL:^[48] So take us through the process, from start to finish. Was there a lot of collaboration?

FUGATE:^[49] Okay. I walk into the room with themes I want to explore. Then we all chat and they send me away. I write a two page beat sheet, very briefly outlining the big picture. That gets signed off on, then I go to outline, which is more involved and write out all the scenes without dialogue. That gets discussed and altered accordingly. Then on to script, etc. Then I wrote three drafts of that. As far as the collaboration, I am far more a character-driven writer than an action writer, so I relied on Rob to insert a fight scene, which he did in the teaser and to stay true to the genre he and RJ have created. RJ is very good at character work, too, noting where a scene could be extended, when I was going for short and sweet, thinking of time.

^[50] Both Rob and RJ work very well together and have complimentary strengths, which make the show well-rounded. There was one moment when I said, "So basically more fighting, more dancing, more bathing and could I make it funnier?" which caused Rob to twinkle. That joke comes from a basic note studios give writers, which makes writers batty (battier). But actually, my Xena is a straight drama, so don't get your hopes up for funny. But basically, producers want a feeling they miss and it's the writer's job to create that for them, not necessary rewrite a specific line. It's not that detailed.

Michael McDonald

KRICKEL:^[51] You mentioned Michael McDonald—this is the first year he's been a full producer, I think? Could you tell us a little about him?

FUGATE:^[52] Michael is a great dresser and very handsome. That was my first impression of him. He could be an actor. In the meetings, Michael knows everything about every episode coming up and in the past. I had a line about "fate" and "free will" in the script which Michael knew was too similar to a line in YOU ARE THERE (125/613), which was only then being shot. He's got that kind of Who Wants To Be A Millionaire? memory. I think he will go far in whatever he wants to do. He has that energy.

Joxer

KRICKEL:^[53] Tell us the bit with adding Joxer's character. Was this difficult?

FUGATE:^[54] Joxer was not in my episode when it was conceived or written by me. I believe Ted Raimi was not available as a character/actor choice from the beginning. I didn't discover he was in the episode until I arrived in New Zealand and saw the new script with the Joxer changes. RJ handled that insertion by tweaking the dialogue of an existing character to fit the voice of Joxer, whom he knows so well.

Filming the Episode

KRICKEL:^[55] So then - you actually went down to New Zealand for the filming of your episode? Is this customary for episode writers?

FUGATE:^[56] I understand most of the writers don't visit the set due to the distance problem. Most of us are LA based. I wanted to go to NZ because I was flattered by Rob's invitation, I love the show and there's nothing like seeing your work materialized in scene shops, costume departments, etc. I also had selfish reasons. I have been on many sets before, but I haven't actually studied each person's job. There's a push lately for the writer-director tag, so I wanted to watch the director more and decide if that's an avenue I wanted to explore. John Fawcett was incredible. He never tired of answering questions and he's truly remarkable to watch work. But after watching him work, I realized directing isn't for me. The director is a completely different beast. I'm a writer. So, I think I'll concentrate on that.

Culture Shock

KRICKEL:^[57] So there you were - an American girl in New Zealand for the first time. Any culture shock?

FUGATE:^[58] The first thing I balked at was all the driving on the wrong side of the road business. Truly, it feels like a Disneyland ride with all these cars coming at you. Then I drove Claire Stansfield around and we shut off the radio, didn't chat, and just drove. Claire would yell,

"Wide right - Short left - too close! I'm sitting over here!" that sort of thing. A latte is a "flat white." I'm a vegetarian - not many of us there. Then the money. I kept mine. The money is so pretty. I love money from other countries. Overall, though, I returned sad. I wish I could say I fell in love with NZ, but I can't. I didn't leave Auckland and I spent all day on the set. So, I'm going back to leave the city and see some of the beautiful country so I can return in love.

^[59] But there was one great, magical moment. I had just landed, completely out of mind from a crying baby next to me on the flight, and I was wearing my pajamas and zombie-like, walked up to Claire Stansfield and handed her a note with my room number for dinner later. I turned to go back to bed, when Claire grabbed me and said, "You're going to the beach!" and forced me into a car with director John Fawcett's wife, Laura. They took me to Kare Kare, where *The Piano* was filmed. It was so beautiful, shells on the beach, high mountain cliffs, crashing waves. I think it's where Xena stands on the rock and faces Poseidon. It was the only time I left Auckland and it became the most wonderful memory of New Zealand.

Robert Tapert

KRICKEL:^[60] So how much of a presence did Rob Tapert have on the set during filming? Or did he pretty much leave everything up to the director?

FUGATE:^[61] I only saw Rob at lunch. He wasn't on set as much because he and RJ were working on the finale. But the thing about Rob is he's instantly likeable. He has a warm smile for everyone and this deep booming voice that sails up higher and higher as he greets you. It's hard to emulate - but it's unforgettable. He could call me when I'm 80 and I'd still know it was him.

John Fawcett

KRICKEL:

^[62] Tell us about John Fawcett. He seems to have directed many of the more apocalyptic episodes — **FALLEN ANGEL** (91/501), **THE WAY** (84/416), **THEM BONES THEM BONES** (95/505), **THE RHEINGOLD** (119/607), and **RETURN OF THE VALKYRIE** (121/609).

FUGATE:^[63] I loved **FALLEN ANGEL** (91/501) and was really overjoyed that John directed **WHEN FATES COLLIDE** (130/618). John's very quiet and confident and secure in what he wants and how he directs. It adds a measure of calm to the set that makes the day even more enjoyable. You can almost hear him think, he thinks so loud. He is Canadian. He loves Diet Coke.

Behind the Scenes People

KRICKEL:^[64] Did you get a chance to interact with some of the other behind-the-scenes people?

FUGATE:^[65] I did interact with the crew quite a bit. Rachel Munro, the script continuity gal, who looks like Tea Leoni, first comes to mind. She taught me quite a lot and was very gracious about me hovering over her when she appeared to be the busiest person on the set. She's also whip-smart and knew the script as well as I did, completely understanding the journey and pointing out links to other days already shot. Rachel does everything. She's the class president, really. She oversees and keeps track of everything done on paper. Each scene shot, the sound tapes, the

camera rolls, the dialogue changes, the entire script, where scenes began and ended, the editing choices. It's not "continuity" in the simplest definition, but the hardest. It's a job that requires a lot of stamina, knowledge and basic control skills. The director's right hand. Rachel really is Wonder Woman.

^[66] I also was quite fond of the sound fellow, whom I can picture clearly in my mind but can't remember his name. He showed me how he deletes wind during outside shots, tries to combat a lot of looping by futzing with his instruments, that sort of thing. And he says "sound speed" very well.

KRICKEL:^[67] You mentioned continuity on the set. Is there anyone who tries to maintain continuity from episode to episode? Is that essentially an RJ Stewart sort of thing?

FUGATE:^[68] You mean story continuity? I think so. Rob and RJ love this show like it was a child. It is their creation. As RJ says, the writer knows his episode better than anyone else. So, as head writer, RJ does understand every episode or knows what needs more explanation. He's the calm sort. Rob is the genius personality - an insane genius, but a genius nonetheless.

Karl Urban

KRICKEL:^[69] So in this episode I gather we get to see the return of two audience favorites, Karl Urban and Claire Stansfield. Tell us a little about them, on and off set.

FUGATE:^[70] I worked very closely with Karl and Claire on several scenes and at one point we were hovering over pen and paper whilst sitting on a grassy knoll, all to make a scene really soar. Karl is a very studious actor and has actually read quite a bit about Caesar, so we added actual lines Caesar said into the script.

KRICKEL:^[71] So the actors do get some input into the dialogue, then, if they are familiar with the character?

FUGATE:^[72] I think all actors make the script their own to some degree—that's part of their process.

Claire Stansfield

KRICKEL:^[73] And Claire?

FUGATE:^[74] Claire and I became personal friends off-set and spent a lot of time exploring Auckland together. She introduced me to the hot local spots, the shopping and all the fun. My trip wouldn't have been the same without her. But on the set, she scares me. She loves that she scares me because that means she is doing her job, doing Alti, very well. But she would do an Alti thing and I'd frown, then say, "friend," just to remind myself she wasn't going to hurt me.

KRICKEL:^[75] You two went on a helicopter ride?

FUGATE:^[76] Claire and I wanted to see some volcanoes. I wanted to see something other than the car that picked me up and took me to the set, so we hired a helicopter for a 20 minute trip over the islands. It was fantastic! I think Claire had a hard time deciding what she enjoyed most. The actual trip or the look on my face. I'd never been in a helicopter before, and you are jerked and swung back and forth by some sort of heavenly puppeteer but you have faith and enjoy the ride.

Lucy Lawless

KRICKEL:^[77] What about Lucy Lawless? What were your impressions of her?

FUGATE:^[78] The first thing you notice about Lucy is how stunningly beautiful she is. She makes us mortal girls feel slightly uncomfortable, and I imagine that must wear on her a bit. But then Lucy breaches her outer beauty by treating everyone equally and with no airs, and you realize it hasn't gone to her head. She has a groundedness despite her beauty, if that makes sense, which is no easy feat and says a lot about her own personal journey. And then there's that accent. When she would speak, I'd stare. Three sentences went by as I translated. Then dead air, then I'd reply. It took several days for me to get into the rhythm of the accent, then we were fine. Lucy has her son with her quite a bit and she's a doting mother, full of kookiness. On the set, Lucy knows exactly who Xena is and pulls a Houdini act on you when the cameras roll. She's laughing one minute, then jumps into Xena's skin so quickly, you blink. And she can make you cry with a look. Lucy has actually met Barbara (Eden) so we had that in common to talk about as well.

KRICKEL:^[79] There's been much debate on exactly how much input/influence Lucy has on actual shooting, dialogue, etc. Comments?

FUGATE:^[80] Lucy would ask me if a cut was necessary here or there and certainly was on top of things, but as for input/influence, I couldn't answer that. She is very articulate and vocal, though, so I am sure she is respected.

Renee O'Connor

KRICKEL:^[81] How about Renee O'Connor?

FUGATE:^[82] Renee really struck me, perhaps because I had no preconceived notions of her and didn't really know what to expect from her. The first day, she walked all the way over to me to introduce herself, without waiting for an introduction. I was impressed with that - truly not actorly at all. Then she discussed the script and its themes with me and any writer will tell you, it doesn't get any better than that, hearing someone get your themes. Usually, writers get comments on theme and invention from other writers, the directors, but not the actors. So when Renee let me know she had read every one of my drafts and discussed what the story meant to her, I was obviously doing cartwheels.

^[83] The best way to describe Renee is this: You know, how when you walk into a party and you see a bunch of strangers, but then one person catches your eye and smiles and you think, I'd like to meet that person. That's a good person. Someone who gets it. Someone you can trust, that sort of thing. Renee has that quality about her. You instantly recognize her as a good evolved soul.

And someone sincere in all she does. There's a lot of artifice in Hollywood, mainly because people befriend you out of need - what can you do for them. So when someone befriends you out of genuineness, it stands out. Plus, Renee's on set behavior couldn't be more professional and structured and crafted. I'd fight to hire her in anything I'm involved with.

Ted Raimi

KRICKEL:^[84] Like with Karl Urban and Claire Stansfield, I've read that Ted Raimi is famous for ad-libbing, just as Renee is known for offering insight on how she sees her character. Did you see a good bit of that from them as well?

FUGATE:^[85] I didn't see any of Ted's work, so I can't answer about him. Renee is very involved with Gabrielle in all aspects. She is not an actor who phones it in. She does know what's going on with Gabrielle at every instant. Lucy adlibbed a wonderful line in When Fates Collide that was hilarious.

Filming

KRICKEL:^[86] When did it film, exactly? Early February? And what was the mood on set, as far as the end of the series?

FUGATE:^[87] Shooting was the end of January into February. The mood on the set wasn't much about the end yet. I did ask a few folks about what they planned to do when it all ends, and there was some sadness. I know John Fawcett and I did. I was rather melancholy - this is my one and only XENA. I wish I'd pushed a year earlier.