

XENA

WARRIOR PRINCESS

Death Mask

BY
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Episode #19

Prod. #76917

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

"Death Mask"

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Revised Pages: 39, 42-44

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SHOOTING DRAFT
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XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

"Death Mask"

CAST LIST

XENA
GABRIELLE

TORIS	(TOR-is)
CORTESE	(kor-TEEZ)
MALIK	(MA-lick)
AESCALUS	(a-SCALE-us)
SERA	(se-RAH)
VILLAGE ELDER	

Name Said in Dialog:

LYCEUS	(lie-SEE-us)
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SET LIST

INTERIORS:

CORTESE'S TENT
MALIK'S TENT
CASTLE - ANTE CHAMBER
 THRONE ROOM
 DUNGEON
 DOVE ROOM
 DINING HALL

EXTERIORS:

MOUNTAIN TRAIL
TRAIL
TRAIL ATOP HILL
TRAIL IN HILLS
HILLSIDE CLEARING
WOODED HILLSIDE #1
WOODED HILLSIDE #2
WOODS
WOODED AREA
DENSELY WOODED AREA
MALIK'S CAMPSITE IN WOODED HILLS
SMALL VILLAGE
FRONTING SERA'S DWELLING
FRONTING KING'S CASTLE

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XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

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CHRONOLOGY

DAY 1

SCENES #1 - 34

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

"Death Mask"

TEASER

FADE IN:

1 EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - DAY - START ON FIRST ASSASSIN

1

Hidden in the verdant foliage fairly close to the trail, the FIRST ASSASSIN waits. He wears a small shiny metal mask (not unlike The Lone Ranger's in design); an arrow is already notched into his still-slack bow. CAMERA FOLLOWS HIS GAZE, as he sees:

HIS POV - XENA & GABRIELLE

coming toward him along the trail. XENA riding Argo; GABRIELLE walking -- using a long, thick walking staff to aid her in these mountains. They are almost abreast of the hidden First Assassin.

CLOSER - XENA & GABRIELLE

moving relaxedly along.

GABRIELLE

But I've seen speeding arrows come right at you, and you just...

(demonstrates)

...catch them before they hit you. Nobody can do that. But even when you don't see them coming you do do it. I can't figure that out.

XENA

Stop trying to.

GABRIELLE

Don't you think it would come in handy if I knew how to do that?

XENA

Stop trying to "figure" it out. It's not something you think through. Your body has to "listen" for the arrow.

GABRIELLE

(lost)

What if my body doesn't hear them?

XENA

Then they got you.

CLOSE - XENA'S FACE

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED:

1

Suddenly, her eyes narrow; her manner stiffens. She senses that something in their surroundings isn't quite right. Long beat, then she hears the O.S. TWANG of an arrow leaving a bow. INSTANTLY, and as we PULL BACK and WIDEN SLIGHTLY, Xena wheels in her saddle, reaching for the arrow, but...

GABRIELLE

...has also wheeled, almost reflexively -- her staff raised. And...

E.C.U. - GABRIELLE'S STAFF HITTING SPEEDING ARROW
and knocking it to the ground.

XENA & GABRIELLE

Xena's hand grasps empty air. She gives a look to Gabrielle, then a quick smile.

GABRIELLE
(stupefied)
I did it!

XENA
Yes, you did. Now, get back.

XENA, GABRIELLE & FIRST ASSASSIN

The First Assassin in the foliage just stares in disbelief at what's happened to his arrow. Xena quickly turns Argo around, and -- drawing her sword as she goes -- starts to ride down the First Assassin (who'll drop his bow and draw his own sword).

E.C.U. - GABRIELLE'S FACE

GABRIELLE
(mutters confusedly)
How did I do it?

XENA & FIRST ASSASSIN

Almost upon him, Xena draws her sword. The Assassin holds his sword toward Argo's chest, but Argo stops suddenly, just shy of the point. Xena FLIPS OVER HIS HEAD and lands behind the First Assassin. He spins around as a foot hits his skull.

ON GABRIELLE

Suddenly, a rustling of foliage close by alerts her to a SECOND ASSASSIN charging at her from foliage on the other side of the trail.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: 2

1

He wears a shiny little metal mask identical to that of the First Assassin.

Suitably scared as hell, Gabrielle spins her staff down on the outstretched sword, knocking it down. Her backswing to his head misses as he ducks, but she continues the movement by dashing down the trail. The Second Assassin follows, his intentions deadly.

XENA & FIRST ASSASSIN

fighting. Ducking under a sweep of his sword, Xena comes up with a left hook which sinks into the very bottom of his stomach. As he doubles over, she brings the butt of her own sword up into his face and sends him -- airborne -- about five feet backward. During this:

GABRIELLE & SECOND ASSASSIN

As he's almost within sword-striking distance behind her, she suddenly kneels, planting one end of the staff into the ground, the other ending up in the stomach of her attacker. He sails up and over her and lands on his back. He immediately rights himself as Gabrielle prepares for his attack.

XENA & FIRST ASSASSIN

Xena leans down to lift away his metal mask. Strangely, it is the mask she studies, rather than the features of the Assassin.

CLOSE REACTION - XENA

as she studies the mask. Her face reflects a dark, almost horrified disbelief. BEAT. Then a MAN'S SCREAM is heard. Xena runs to:

GABRIELLE & SECOND ASSASSIN

The Second Assassin is already balanced on one leg, and is doubled over, holding his sword loosely in his grasp. WIDEN to INCLUDE the arriving XENA just as Gabrielle finally conks him hard on the top of his head. At last, the poor guy goes down for the count. Xena dismounts, with:

XENA

I guess you don't need my help.

GABRIELLE

(grinning)

Not this time, but... stay close.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: 3

1

Xena grabs the Second Assassin by his chestplate, and shakes him into consciousness with one hand -- ripping off his mask with the other.

XENA
(venomous)
Where did you get this mask? Who sent you?

He stares at her defiantly. Xena now applies her patented 'neck pinch' on the Second Assassin. Blood seeps from his nose. His eyes widen with fear.

XENA
That pinch to your neck cuts off the blood to the brain. If I don't relieve it, you've got thirty seconds to live. Now who gave you this mask?
(beat; grabbing his hair)
His name. Say it.

SECOND ASSASSIN
(finally)
Cortese.

GABRIELLE
Who's Cortese?

XENA
(pulls his hair)
Where is he? Where?

SECOND ASSASSIN
He's about to raid the village across that ridge.

Releasing her 'pinch', Xena puts his lights out again with a short side-fist to the jaw. Xena stands. Gabrielle notes the rigidity of Xena's body; the hate in her face, as:

XENA
(to herself)
Cortese.

GABRIELLE
Who is he?

XENA
(holds up mask)
The men who attacked and razed my village to the ground wore the mask of Cortese. This mask. I've never stopped looking for him.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: 4

1

GABRIELLE
(wide-eyed)
You mean he's the one who made you
so...
(searches for the words)
...y'know... aggressive?

XENA
Fighting him was what twisted me into
what I became. And now...

Xena's reflective... filled with narrow-eyed hatred.

XENA
I have him.

HOLD on HER FACE, until we:

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

2 EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - DAY - FULL SHOT

2

A Band of Raiders, WHOOPING and YELLING ferociously -- and all wearing the small shiny metal masks we've already seen -- is plundering it's way through this small, defenseless village.

ANGLE

One of the Raiders, wielding his sword above his head, rides heedlessly across a cooking fire, toppling the cooking pot and everything else in a shower of sparks. As he PASSES CAMERA, we hear the SCREAM of the O.S. Woman he's probably trampling as well.

LONG SHOT - XENA

From the woods near the perimeter of the village, her own sword flashing in the sunlight, comes Xena.

WITH XENA - STARTING AT VILLAGE PERIMETER

Riding hard toward, and into, the village, she emits her WAR CRY.

ON RAIDERS

turning toward the source of Xena's cry.

FOLLOWING XENA

as she charges, battling, into the thick of things.

ON GABRIELLE

Having run herself breathless, she reaches the edge of the village to worriedly observe the goings-on.

SERIES OF SHOTS

...as Xena sweeps a Raider away from the n/d Villager he's about to slay;

...as Xena punches another Raider right off his horse, then whirls in the saddle and uses her sword on still another attacking Raider;

...as Xena rides past one dwelling, not seeing the SMALL BOY who, just as Xena goes by, innocently wanders out of the dwelling door and into harm's way.

CLOSE REACTION - GABRIELLE

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED:

2

as she sees the O.S. Small Boy.

ON SMALL BOY

wandering ever closer to harm.

XENA - GABRIELLE - SMALL BOY (INTERCUT AS DESIRED)

Without hesitation, Gabrielle rushes forward. A passing Raider barely misses the Small Boy as he rides to meet Xena -- who blocks his sword with her own while, simultaneously, using the side of her hand to chop him from his horse.

Gabrielle snatches up the Small Boy -- carries him back toward the dwelling.

GABRIELLE AND SERA

The Small Boy's young, attractive mother, SERA, has come rushing, horrified, through the doorway after missing the child. As Gabrielle rushes to her holding the child safe, Sera's gratitude will be beyond description.

CLOSE - GABRIELLE, SERA & SMALL BOY (FAVORING SERA)

As Sera clutches her child to her:

SERA
(to Gabrielle)
Oh, thank you... thank you...

RESUME - SERIES OF SHOTS

...as Xena, holding onto her saddle the whole while, drops off Argo, lands on both feet -- uses both to cream a Raider -- then pulls herself back up onto Argo's back;

...as Xena rides down, and flattens, two more Raiders. And now, we HEAR:

MALIK'S VOICE (O.S.)
Retreat! Everybody out!

FULL SHOT

as the responding Raiders regroup and head out of town. The guy who yelled the orders is at their front (wearing a slightly larger, slightly more ornate mask), waving them out. His name will prove to be MALIK.

LONG SHOT

Riding out of the woods from the opposite direction from which Xena came, comes a company of uniformed Soldiers.

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: 2

2

They ride two abreast in perfect unison. Well-trained troops. Leading them is their commander, AESCALUS -- whose personality will reflect a no-nonsense, intelligent militarism, rather than any kind of savagery.

RESUME - FULL SHOT

MALIK

It's the King's Army!... Back to the woods!...

The Raiders ride off. Xena, in mid-village, watches them go.

ANGLE FAVORING XENA & AESCALUS

as the latter raises his hand to stop his Soldiers, then dismounts, as:

GABRIELLE

What're you stopping for! Go after them!

AESCALUS

I'd love to, believe me. But those woods mark the border I can't cross.

(disgusted)

Nor do I even have enough men to keep our boundaries secure.

(to Xena)

You fought well. I don't suppose you took any prisoners.

XENA

I left a man on the other side of those trees, but he's probably gone by now.

AT VILLAGE PERIMETER - ON TORIS

One Raider at the rear of the escaping band has stopped at the edge of the woods, and now lifts off his small mask as he looks back. He is a tall, handsome, well-built man. We'll learn he's slightly older than Xena, and that his name is TORIS.

E.C.U. - TORIS' FACE

His cold, narrowed eyes are riveted on:

XENA - TORIS' POV (ZOOM)

After a beat, CAMERA ZOOMS IN toward Xena, still talking to Aescalus. It's unmistakable that...

TORIS

(CONTINUED)

2 CONTINUED: 3

2

...cannot take his frigid gaze off...

TORIS
(a quiet hiss)
...Xena...

Only after a long beat, does he turn his horse and follow his compatriots back into the shelter of the woods.

3 EXT. WOODS - DAY

3

As leader Malik and his Raiders slow to a canter, Toris gallops through to their front, where Malik is just raising his own mask (which will rest atop his head). His face is that of a grizzled, but sharp-eyed, professional mercenary.

TORIS
Malik!

TORIS & MALIK

Malik raises his hand; the group behind him halts, as:

TORIS
I know that woman. Take me to Cortese.
I can tell him everything he needs to
know about her.

MALIK
You? Newcomers don't even meet Cortese
until you've earned the privilege. You
speak to me; I speak to Cortese.

A beat, then:

TORIS
Her name is Xena. She's a warrior from
Amhipolis.

MALIK
I'm sure Cortese will be grateful for
the information.

With that, he turns and spurs his horse onward.

4 INT. CORTESE'S TENT - DAY

4

As Malik enters, he immediately goes to one knee, with:

MALIK
My Lord Cortese...

INCLUDING CORTESE

(CONTINUED)

4 CONTINUED:

4

His appearance is as sophisticated as Malik's is grizzled. But he's nonetheless built like a warrior (we'll soon see that he's strong as an ox). His success at plundering is demonstrated by the gold and silver odds and ends (and bejeweled candleholders and even table service) which adorn the place. He's holding a heavy metal flagon of wine.

CORTESE

Malik, my friend, there's no need for my right arm to kneel before me.

MALIK

Yes there is, My Lord. We had no time to gather loot before the King's soldiers arrived.

CORTESE

Why not?

MALIK

(still on one knee)
A woman, Lord Cortese. I've never seen anyone like her. With the fighting skill and the strength of a...

CORTESE

(overrides)

Xena. The warrior princess, Xena. My two assassins must have failed.

Cortese drains the flagon.

MALIK

(awed)

You already know of her?

A long beat as Cortese examines the empty flagon. Then:

CORTESE

I created her.

Off this, we:

CUT TO:

5 EXT. TRAIL - DAY - XENA & GABRIELLE

5

Xena and Gabrielle walk along, Argo behind them. Gabrielle is fairly excited.

GABRIELLE

Whoosh! Zing! Thud! And I hit it!
Did you see that? Of course you did.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED:

5

GABRIELLE (cont'd)
Even while you were explaining it today, I didn't realize my whole body was already listening for that arrow. I can still feel that 'warrior fever' coursing through my blood.

XENA
Do you think you could do it again?

GABRIELLE
Yeah. I think so. Most of the time. I mean, if you shot ten arrows at me, how many do you think I would miss?

XENA
Only one.

GABRIELLE
I see the problem...

Suddenly sensing a presence, Xena instantly looks O.S. along the trail to see:

TORIS (AS MASKED RAIDER)

He steps out of the woods and plants himself in the middle of the trail, silhouetted against the sky at the crest of the trail about thirty yards away. His sword is out, but pointed down at his side. A BEAT as they stand there, facing each other.

GABRIELLE
What's he doing?

XENA
I don't know...

Toris remains annoyingly motionless. This is starting to concern Xena and worry Gabrielle. Play it, as:

GABRIELLE
I've got a really bad feeling about this.

XENA
It's one of Cortese's raiders.
(looks quickly left & right)
Alone. Still... I don't like it.
(gestures Gabrielle)
Keep back.

Gabrielle stays put as Xena moves cautiously closer to Toris. He still hasn't moved a muscle. When she's close enough:

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED: 2

5

XENA
(to Toris; ready and deadly)
All right, I'm close enough.

Xena's slowly raising her sword; might take the first shot here. But suddenly:

TORIS
Then stop.

as Xena's blade hesitates:

TORIS
Unless, of course...

CLOSE - TORIS

as he's pulling the mask up completely to reveal his face.

TORIS
...you want to kill your own brother.

CLOSE - XENA

This is one of the very few times we'll ever see Xena's face reflect wide-eyed, open-mouthed astonishment. HOLD on her reaction, until we:

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

6 EXT. TRAIL ATOP HILL - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

6

XENA & TORIS

Brother and sister, face to face for the first time in years, do NOT smile with any pleasurable surprise upon meeting.

INCLUDING GABRIELLE

GABRIELLE

(to Xena; hesitant)

You said your brother was killed by Cortese.

XENA

That was my younger brother. Gabrielle, this is my older brother, Toris.

GABRIELLE

(to Toris)

She's... full of surprises.

XENA

Toris has some surprises of his own. That's the mask of Cortese.

TORIS

That's right. It's the only way I can get close enough to Cortese... to kill him.

Off Xena's look.

CUT TO:

7 EXT. HILLSIDE CLEARING - DAY - START ON CAMPFIRE

7

It's a very small cooking fire, surrounded by rocks to minimize the possibility of detection. PULL BACK to INCLUDE Gabrielle, as she reaches in with a stick to turn over a couple of broiling foul wings, legs, a breast, while:

GABRIELLE

This is just about ready... Of course, it's missing my sister's seventeen secret herbs and spices.

During the following, PULL BACK and WIDEN to discover Xena is tending the fire, moving some of the charcoal around.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED:

7

Toris sits with his sword in his lap, polishing it and examining the edge. The Mask of Cortese is propped against a tree as a reminder of their enemy.

GABRIELLE

(trying)

My sister and I used to argue, too. Sometimes we'd go for hours without talking to each other.

(nothing)

Oh, come on! This is supposed to be touching! I mean, a sister and brother who haven't seen each other for years should have more to say to each other than --

XENA

(to Toris)

So, now you're an assassin?

GABRIELLE

(to herself)

Okay... it's a start.

TORIS

(intensely)

It's taken me years to find Cortese. Now that his raiders are starting to trust me, I'm almost close enough to kill him. Which is why I want you to stay out of this.

XENA

I can help you bring him to justice.

TORIS

He'll find justice on the end of my sword.

GABRIELLE

Wing, thigh, breast... Who wants what?

Gabrielle stabs a drumstick, and hands it toward Xena.

XENA

(offhanded aside to Gabrielle)

He likes drumsticks...

She gestures it toward Toris.

Toris will take the drumstick from Gabrielle. She starts to settle with her food when:

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: 2

7

XENA

Gabrielle, go see if Argo needs to be fed, will you?

GABRIELLE

Argo? Can't it wait until after I...
(off Xena's look; realizing)
Ah. Got it. Checking on Argo. Right.

Gabrielle rises and EXITS SCENE, leaving them together. Xena takes out her sword and examines the edge. Toris tosses her the sharpening stone. Almost without looking up, she catches it. During the following, we see them exchange the sharpening/polishing equipment as they talk:

XENA

I want Cortese as much as you do. But murder is not the way. I've learned the hard way about justice since I --

TORIS

(disdainful)
Learned the hard way? Are you bragging? What I saw of you when I left the village was not something to be proud of.

Xena is done grinding the edge of her sword. He tosses her the polishing rag. She catches it almost by rote and without acknowledgement.

XENA

And what did you see? Someone had to step forward. Cortese would have slaughtered everyone if we hadn't fought.

TORIS

If our people had followed me to the hills...

XENA

Cortese would have hunted us down like dogs! Someone had to make a stand. And I wasn't the only one who believed that.

TORIS

That's right. Our brother believed it. Lyceus stood by you to the end. And it was his end, remember?

Her eyes flash with pain and anger.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED: 3

7

XENA

(angry)

I said fight because it was our village. Lyceus believed that, too.

(beat; quietly)

And I'd say the same again.

A long beat, then the mood is broken by Gabrielle's return.

GABRIELLE

(a question)

Argo is... fed?

XENA

Gabrielle, that mother whose child you saved yesterday. Ask her to put you up for a day or two. You know... guard the villagers.

GABRIELLE

(feisty)

Oh, no, no, no. That's your way of saying, "It's too dangerous to be around me right now." Have you ever considered that there isn't a safe time to be around you? That family doesn't need my help, but you might. I'm going with you. Now... if that's all, I'll be practicing with my staff. End of discussion.

(to Toris)

I'm sorry you had witness that.

She turns and exits. Toris stares hard at her. Xena can't help but give her a smile of admiration. Then, back to Toris:

XENA

How close are you to Cortese?

TORIS

(beat; then)

I'm new. I have to earn their trust. My leader is his lieutenant... a butcher named Malik.

XENA

Then we start there. I need a look around Malik's campsite.

TORIS

No, too dangerous. You don't know what those monsters do to women.

XENA

Know it? I'm counting on it.

8 EXT. MALIK'S CAMPSITE IN WOODED HILLS - DAY

8

The main shelter here is Malik's tent, in front of which he's sharpening his sword. Several of his Raiders are sprinkled around the immediate area.

INCLUDING XENA & TORIS

Xena is almost hogtied, her hands behind her, as a victorious Toris hauls her into camp via a lead rope around her neck.

INCLUDING MALIK

Pleasantly surprised, he's moving to Xena and Toris with:

MALIK

(jovial)

Well!

Malik takes the lead rope from Toris' hand; holds it up.

MALIK

(to Raiders)

Look what I've captured, boys! Cortese will be very pleased to see my gift to him.

Malik visually appraises her with approval -- and she then allows him to jerk her along by the rope to the front of his tent. Toris shoots a worried look to Xena, then interrupts.

TORIS

This time you have to take me to Cortese. I've brought him the warrior. He'll want to see her immediately.

MALIK

Have to? I don't have to do anything except spare your life. And even then... don't push me. This prize is mine. And I will take the time that I need.

With that, he opens the tent flap and throws Xena into the room, where she lands on the bed. Toris looks distressed.

TORIS

I'm the one who has to take her to Cortese.

Malik pulls his sword and holds it under Toris' throat.

MALIK

There seems to be some confusion here about who I am, and who you aren't.

INTERCUT WITH:

9 INT. MALIK'S TENT - DAY - XENA

9

The tent flap closed, Xena looks around the room. She lowers her head and hunches her shoulders, working... then, finally, pulls the breast dagger from its hiding place with her teeth. A flip of her head tosses it into the air and she turns and catches it with her hands. She quickly cuts the rope as, outside, we hear Malik going on to Toris.

MALIK'S VOICE

There are only two types of men who question me. The dead and the dying. Which do you want to be, boy?

Xena looks around. There a rough work table with nothing on it, a few personal items, and -- surprisingly -- a bird cage containing a couple of (messenger) doves. She walks to them.

RESUME - TORIS & MALIK

A disgruntled-appearing Toris confronts Malik, with:

TORIS

I'm not questioning anything. I just think that Cortese would want to hear how I managed...

MALIK

And he will hear. He'll hear whatever I tell him.

RESUME - XENA

Xena is looking at the birds, examining the metal casings on the table and the bands on their legs. She smiles. Then, she hears:

MALIK'S VOICE

Now go away. The woman and I have to... "talk" before she meets our master.

RESUME - TORIS & MALIK

Toris appears visibly angry, but trying to keep control.

TORIS

Very well. You're in control. For now.

Finally, Toris turns... and walks away in grudging submission. As the Raiders all LAUGH:

(CONTINUED)

9 CONTINUED:

9

MALIK
(calling after Toris)
Keep walking, boy! If I see your face
again, I'll hang it over the cooking
fire!

LONG SHOT - TORIS

as he walks (feigning his submissive dejection) out of the
camp to disappear into the dense woods.

ON MALIK

feeling terrific now. He turns with anticipation toward his
tent.

10 INT. MALIK'S TENT - XENA & MALIK

10

She's lying at the rear of the tent -- hands apparently
still bound -- as he enters. He smiles.

MALIK
Now, my dear... let's not waste time
with senseless pleas of mercy or silly
games. Right to it, shall we?

XENA
(shrugs)
Have it your way.

And she slugs him. He drops.

XENA
Right to it. I admire that.

Xena takes out her breast dagger and slices open the rear of
the tent... through which she now disappears. HOLD for a
beat on the crumpled Malik. Then go to:

11 EXT. DENSELY WOODED AREA - DAY

11

Toris and Gabrielle are here. He looks nervous, pacing a
bit and looking off towards the camp. Gabrielle seems
unconcerned. She polishes her staff, every now and then
stopping, "sensing" her surroundings, then swinging around
as if blocking an arrow.

TORIS
It shouldn't be taking this long.
Where is she?

GABRIELLE
She'll be here.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED:

11

TORIS

This was a stupid idea. She's outnumbered and alone.

GABRIELLE

How many warriors in that camp?

TORIS

Fifteen. Maybe twenty.

GABRIELLE

(no problem)

She'll be here.

She takes another swing and pauses. She isn't satisfied with something and resumes polishing.

TORIS

(annoyed)

What are you doing?

GABRIELLE

I'm trying to "hear" with my body. Xena told me that you have to "hear" the attack before you see it. She's amazing. I've learned so much about things from watching her. When I first met her, I was just a little girl in Poteidaia...

TORIS

She's doing to you what she did to our village.

GABRIELLE

(stops)

Excuse me?

TORIS

She turned our simple village into warriors and got them killed. She's doing the same to you. She hasn't changed. I can't believe we share blood.

GABRIELLE

If you hated her so much, why are you worried about her now?

TORIS

What do you mean, worried?

He gives her a sharp look. She returns it with an even stare. The mood is broken by the arrival of Xena. Gabrielle rushes over to her.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED: 2

11

GABRIELLE

(overdone)

Xena! Are you okay? Did anything happen? You took so long!

Xena looks confused. Gabrielle looks to Toris.

GABRIELLE

That's worried.

(then; to Xena)

So...? How'd it go?

XENA

(a look to Gabrielle)

It went... fine.

TORIS

(still simmering)

By the luck of the gods. You could have destroyed everything I had been working for.

XENA

Maybe I still will.

(then)

Did you know Malik uses carrier doves?

TORIS

Sure. He uses them to communicate with the other raiding parties.

XENA

Then why do the doves carry the royal crest?

TORIS

(in surprise)

Of the King? Malik must have a spy inside the King's household.

XENA

And if he does, then he's reporting everything that goes on in there straight to Cortese.

GABRIELLE

No wonder the soldiers can't catch him. The King should be told.

TORIS

He doesn't just see anyone, and the castle is pretty well-guarded.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED: 3

11

XENA

I have ways of getting in.

She looks at Gabrielle. Gabrielle shrugs to the inevitable.

GABRIELLE

I know. It's easier to get two in than three. I guess I'll just go protect some villagers. Even if they're not in danger right now.

Xena gives her a smile. She reluctantly returns it. Toris watches this interchange with a stern look.

CUT TO:

12 EXT. FRONTING KING'S CASTLE - DAY

12

Establishing.

13 INT. ANTE CHAMBER - DAY

13

A sparsely furnished room, at the rear of which are the grand double doors which'll prove to lead to the Throne Room. Two Guards stand at the ready, their pikes aimed down at Xena and Toris, who stand before them. Nearby, a cleaning woman is on her knees, a tub of water next to her and soaked rags on the floor. She has interrupted cleaning the floor to watch the proceedings. A BEAT, then Aescalus enters the area.

AESCALUS

(to Guards)

What's the problem...

(sees Xena and Toris)

How did you get in here? What happened to my guards?

XENA

Oh, they're lying around... somewhere. I need to talk to the King and I don't like formalities.

AESCALUS

You were in that village yesterday.

(then)

Tell me what you have to say to the King, and I'll see what I can do.

XENA

No, we've just met. I'm not that trusting.

(CONTINUED)

13 CONTINUED:

13

AESCALUS

Neither am I.

TORIS

The bandit Cortese has a spy inside the castle.

Xena touches Toris on the arm, but too late. The cat is out of the bag. Aescalus' eyes go to slits. Xena calmly rests her hand on her chakram.

AESCALUS

Guards!

The Guards shift their weapons. Xena tenses... until the Guards step down and go into a standard guard mode on either side of the doors.

AESCALUS

Come.

Aescalus opens the doors. Xena and Toris follow into:

14 INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

14

A table and large throne sit at one end of the huge, opulent room. Behind the throne is an ornate etching of a fiery horse. NOTE: In the image are small holes. Aescalus closes the doors behind them.

AESCALUS

Your weapons.

They hand Aescalus their weapons, including sword and chakram. He looks at it with interest, then places them all on the table beside the throne.

AESCALUS

Wait here.

He exits through another door. Xena is scanning the room, her eyes searching every corner as she speaks. She scrutinizes the fiery horse, noting the small holes.

XENA

Speaking out like that was dangerous, Toris.

TORIS

It got us in here.

XENA

And what if Aescalus had been the spy?

(CONTINUED)

14 CONTINUED:

14

CORTESE'S VOICE

But Aescalus isn't the spy.

They turn to see the King... who is Cortese! Reactions.

CORTESE

The King is the spy. Recognize me,
Xena? It's been a while.

HOLD on Xena's face, until we:

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

15 INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

15

FULL SHOT

Xena and Toris are standing rock-still. Cortese, however, walks easily over to his throne and sits.

CORTESE

Oh, come now. You must have something to say. After all this time and effort just to see me.

TORIS

(smiling)

Yes, Cortese. You're dead.

Toris starts to charge Cortese as:

Cortese calmly pulls a lever on the arm of his chair.

Xena reacts and tackles Toris, dropping him to the ground as:

DARTS FLY OUT OF THE SMALL HOLES

and embed themselves into the wall behind them. Slowly, Xena and Toris stand.

CORTESE

(warning)

That's just one of the surprises in this room. Don't try it again.

(then; smiling)

So? What do you think of my little operation?

XENA

It's brilliant. You rule a Kingdom being threatened by raiders. The people tolerate huge taxes because they think it goes to the war effort.

CORTESE

And I become incredibly rich off the taxes and the spoils. Not to mention the pure fun of being able to put my mask on, go out and slaughter a few dissident farmers, then come back to a warm bath. I'm glad you like it.

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED:

15

XENA

I said it was brilliant. I didn't say I liked it.

TORIS

You murdering harpie.

CORTESE

Careful. You're talking to the legal regent of this land. Cortese... now, he's a murdering harpie.

XENA

So, what's your plan? You haven't killed us and you're not just talking to hear your own voice.

CORTESE

The people are getting tired of my Army losing. My Army is getting tired of losing.

XENA

Your Army doesn't know who you are.

CORTESE

They're loyal to the King. But, they need a victory. They can't have Cortese, of course, but I'm going to give them the next best thing. His second in command. The evil Warrior Princess Xena.

He pulls another lever on the arm of his chair and a TRAP DOOR opens up beneath Xena and Toris. Xena was ready for this, however. When she drops, she stretches out her body flat so that one hand is on one side of the gaping hole, her toes support her on the other, forming a bridge. Toris, however, drops straight down... until Xena grabs him by his leather vest.

XENA

Flip up!

Without a pause, Toris reaches up, grabs her arms, and flips himself up and out of the pit, landing near her hand.

CORTESE

Guards!

Toris turns around, sets himself...

TORIS

Go!

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED: 2

15

Xena (follow this carefully) punches her body up, tucks and flips over so that her feet are now pointing toward Toris. He grabs her ankles as she starts to fall. She then curls at the waist and flips herself up and over Toris to land on Cortese's table. Surprised, he goes to grab her sword as she kicks him in the face. He falls backwards against the wall. An angry beat from Cortese, and he pushes on the wall, spinning it open. He disappears behind it.

Toris has jumped to the door and holds it shut as we HEAR POUNDING from the Guards.

TORIS
I can't hold it!

XENA
Then let them in!

TORIS
What?

XENA
Open the door!

Toris swings the door open wide, staying behind it. The Guards rush in... and fall into the open trapdoor.

Xena tosses Toris his sword and they run out into:

16 INT. ANTE CHAMBER - DAY

16

Xena and Toris rush out to find a row of Guards barring their way. Swords drawn, they mean business. Toris appraises the situation. He starts to draw his sword.

TORIS
I think we can take them out...

XENA
No, we can't kill them. They're the good guys, remember?

They back up until they are standing next to the large water tub the woman left. Xena looks over to the window on the other side of the room.

XENA
That window.

TORIS
How do we get to it?

Xena reaches into the tub of water and pulls out two large rags.

(CONTINUED)

16 CONTINUED:

16

She spins them until she has two tightly wound rags, one in each hand. With a scream, she raises her hands overhead and starts SNAPPING THE WET RAGS at the Guards, one after the other, in quick succession.

The Guards are being hit all over; forehead, arms, stomach, groin, etc. And it HURTS (ask any ex-high school P.E. weakling what a towel snap feels like). The Guards drop their weapons as Xena continues her assault, still screaming her Xena yell. Toris looks at her and gives a little laugh as they both head for the window and DIVE THROUGH. The Guards stand and look at each other in embarrassment.

Cortese and Aescalus enter the room and look out the window.

CORTESE

I want them for execution by morning!

CUT TO:

17 EXT. MALIK'S CAMPSITE - DAY

17

Malik and his men stand outside his tent. Malik is reading a message while holding a mildly irritated pigeon in his hand.

MALIK

He wants them for execution by morning!
Avoid the soldiers; they'll be looking,
too. Move!

As everyone there is galvanized into action...

18 EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - DAY - FULL SHOT

18

Re-establishing.

19 EXT. FRONTING SERA'S DWELLING - DAY - GABRIELLE

19

Gabrielle is standing with her back to us, her staff at the ready. She seems to be "sensing" her surroundings.

POV - ON GABRIELLE

looking down the shaft of an arrow. Not any kind of arrow, but one that has a large glob of something on the tip. Still, it looks menacing. The arrow centers on Gabrielle and... it lets fly!

GABRIELLE

(CONTINUED)

19 CONTINUED:

19

spins at the last moment, slashing at the arrow. She misses and the arrow... sticks to her forehead. We now notice she has little glob marks all over her outfit and body. A BEAT, then:

WIDER

The assailant is the SMALL BOY we saw earlier. He giggles. Gabrielle pulls off the arrow, leaving yet another glob mark on her body.

GABRIELLE

Okay. One more time.

Xena and Toris arrive. Sera comes out from the house.

GABRIELLE

I'm so glad you're all right.

(aside)

You're always all right.

(introductions)

Sera, this is my friend Xena that I told you about, and her brother, Toris.

As Xena and Toris both nod their 'hello', we may notice that Toris seems for some reason far less cordial to Gabrielle than expected or warranted (we may be reminded that he eyed her similarly once before).

XENA

(to Sera)

Can you go get your Village Elder, and bring him back here? It's about your King; it's important.

SERA

I'll try.

She heads off. Gabrielle notices.

GABRIELLE

What is it?

XENA

The good King and Cortese are one and the same.

GABRIELLE

Not happy news. What are you going to do?

TORIS

We could have murdered him.

(glare to Xena)

But we didn't.

(CONTINUED)

19 CONTINUED: 2

19

GABRIELLE

Murder? You can't just "murder"
someone.

TORIS

(angry)

As if you knew the difference between
murder and justice.

Toris just turns and heads off into the woods. Gabrielle
gives Xena a look. She returns it and heads off after
Toris.

20 EXT. WOODED AREA - DAY

20

Toris stands alone, staring up into the sky. Xena
approaches him.

TORIS

How do you put up with that girl? She
bothers me.

XENA

Why? She knows a lot more about
justice and wisdom than you'll ever
know.

TORIS

At first, I thought she was just
blindly following your lead. And that
you were going to do to her what you
did to our village, use their fear to
manipulate them. But that's not it. *

Toris is upset and angry, but he's having a hard time
letting it out.

TORIS

She's brave because that's the way she
is! *

(then)

I was so sure I had you figured out
that I never bothered to figure myself
out. All these years I've been trying
to convince myself that what I wanted
back then was right. That it was the
best thing for our village.

(CONTINUED)

20 CONTINUED:

20

XENA

Toris... we made our choices based on what we thought was right. We did what we had to do because we cared about our friends.

*

TORIS

No, you don't get it. You stayed because you cared for us all. I left because... because I was...

*

*

He can't say it.

XENA

Because you were afraid.

TORIS

I was afraid I would die! That was all I could think of. I mean, I cared about you and Lyceus and Mother, but... That's what I've been carrying with me all this time. Xena... I was a coward!

*

*

*

*

Xena tries to move toward him, but he backs away.

XENA

Murdering Cortese is not going to cure that guilt.

*

TORIS

How do you know that? When I found out you and the others had turned him back... when I found out Lyceus had died... my life meant nothing anymore. There was only one thing left to do, and that was to take Cortese to the grave that I should have had. The grave that Lyceus has now.

*

*

(beat; then)

I have to find Malik and force him to take me to Cortese.

XENA

No. I lost one brother to that madman; I'm not going to lose you, too.

INCLUDING SERA

as she suddenly walks up, looking very concerned.

(CONTINUED)

20 CONTINUED: 2

20

SERA

(to Xena)

Xena? The Elders are gathered...
but... you'd better come quick.

Xena bolts off, leaving Toris and Sera.

21 EXT. FRONTING SERA'S DWELLING - DAY

21

Gabrielle's facing an uptight crowd of farm implement-armed Villagers. They're led by the VILLAGE ELDER.

GABRIELLE

(entreating Crowd)

Think for minute. When Cortese's
bandits were about to turn this village
into garbage... Who stopped them?

VILLAGE ELDER

The two of you did.

GABRIELLE

Two of us? Uh... yeah. Both of us.
Mostly Xena.

VILLAGE ELDER

And we are truly grateful. But
still... she may not stay here.

He points to Xena as she emerges from the brush.

XENA

(to Elder)

Your King and the raider Cortese are
the same person.

VILLAGE ELDER

The King is at war with Cortese. And,
now, we hear that the Army is searching
for you as well as the raiders. You'll
get this village destroyed.

GABRIELLE

But we'll stay and help you fight!
Whatever it takes, we're with you.

XENA

(almost softly)

No, Gabrielle. We only stand and fight
when we have to. This man is right.
Cortese will only come here if I'm
here.

*

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED:

21

VILLAGE ELDER
(very relieved)
And we appreciate it.

The Elder turns; gestures everyone to disperse. Sera comes out of the brush.

GABRIELLE
Where's Toris?

Xena turns to Sera.

SERA
He's gone. He said he had a debt to pay and that you'd understand.

HOLD on Xena's unhappy face for a long beat, before:

22 EXT. WOODED HILLS - DAY - FULL SHOT (STOCK)

22

Establishing.

23 EXT. WOODED HILLSIDE #1 - DAY - ON XENA

23

She rides slowly, cautiously, through the woods -- scanning the area around her as she goes.

24 EXT. WOODED HILLSIDE #2 - DAY - ON XENA

24

Still cautiously searching.

25 EXT. MALIK'S CAMPSITE - DAY

25

It appears deserted from our POV.

ON XENA (ZOOM)

Crawling now, she reaches the perimeter of the camp -- scans the place.

XENA'S POV - SLOWLY PANNING

The encampment looks deserted on the left, deserted ahead... then CAMERA HALTS on: Toris, strapped to a large pole. Around him, on the ground, are bales of hay and sticks. His head is down; he could be dead.

XENA (TRACKING)

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED:

25

START ON HER FACE, as she reacts to the sight of him. CAMERA will PULL BACK and ANGLE will WIDEN as she stands up; slowly draws her sword as she moves -- without hesitation, but most warily -- across the open length of the encampment toward her brother.

WITH XENA - ANOTHER ANGLE

Moving as if expecting to be set upon at any moment. But still not hesitating.

XENA - TORIS (INTERCUTS)

As she nears him, he apparently hears her, because he looks up. He is bloody, beaten and gagged, but starts shaking his head vigorously in the negative. She ignores his warning; continues to approach until she's right in front of him. She pauses, touches the bales of hay and sniffs her fingers. Then, she draws her knife and cuts the gag from his mouth. Instantly:

TORIS

It's a trap!

XENA

(calmly)

I know. The hay is soaked with oil.

FULL SHOT (PANNING)

From all around the perimeter of the encampment, Malik and his Raiders appear. Several of them have flaming arrows aimed at the bales of hay.

MALIK

(to Xena)

One arrow and your brother dies in a pall of smoke. Oh, yes, I know he's your brother. You'd be surprised what a man will say when he's being tortured.

Toris merely drops his head a bit and glares at Malik. Malik nods to the Bowmen, who draw their bows taut.

BEAT -- then Xena drops her sword and knife. Surrender.

Malik walks up to her and stares into her eyes.

MALIK

You're going to Cortese. But first...
I owe you something from my tent.

And he hits her a solid blow to the face. Her head recoils, but she doesn't go down.

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED: 2

25

She won't give him the satisfaction. He reacts, surprised. Then she HEADBUTTS him. He drops to one knee. The Bowmen tense, but she doesn't move.

MALIK

Wait! This is Cortese's pleasure.

(hissing; to Xena)

When he's done with you, I'll spit on your burning carcass.

Xena regards him with utter disdain. HOLD on her face, then:

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

26 EXT. FRONTING KING'S CASTLE - DAY 26
Re-establishing.

27 INT. DUNGEON - DAY - FULL SHOT - XENA & TORIS 27
Both held at the wrists by single binding ropes attached to the wall. They're about seven feet apart.

XENA
(wryly)
Well, we got ourselves back into his castle without much trouble.
(no answer)
It's going to be really hard to figure out our escape with you not talking to me.

TORIS
Why'd you have to follow me? This is my time, I told you that.

XENA
(with passion)
Your time? What is that supposed to mean?

TORIS
It means that you should have stayed out of this. Do you know how long I've planned the moment when Cortese and I faced off?

XENA
Plans don't always work out the way you want. Trust me on this one.

A BEAT. Then:

TORIS
What did it feel like? After you had beaten Cortese?

XENA
I didn't have time to feel. Maybe that was the problem. I knew that he'd come back, so I wanted to build an army for defense. Then, I figured, we should take the surrounding villages as buffers... Still for defense.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

27 CONTINUED:

27

XENA (cont'd)

Somewhere... I don't remember when...
it all changed and I became...

(beat)

I didn't have time to feel. And, I
promise you, Toris, if you murder
Cortese, you won't have time to feel
either. You'll become what I was.

TORIS

I've seen you kill, Xena. What's the
difference?

XENA

Maybe it's just a difference in my
mind, but the pure evil of murder is
that you plan it. It's not in the heat
of battle or in self-defense. And
you've been planning this for years.

(then)

We don't have time for this. When the
Guards come back, we have to move.

Xena examines her ropes. Another beat, then Toris lets out
a dry laugh.

XENA

Something's funny?

TORIS

When we were fighting our way out of
Cortese's throne room... you started
with that scream of yours. First time
I ever heard that, I had just thrown
that centaur doll of yours into the
river.

(then)

You beat the heck out of me.

(then)

I'm sorry I got you in this mess, Xena,
but I'm glad you're with me.

She smiles. Then, the door opens and Aescalus and a Guard
enter the room. Xena gives a look to Toris, then looks down
to his legs in a silent signal. He nods slightly.

AESCALUS

The King has ordered your burning
tomorrow. I don't believe in such
executions. But, if you'll tell me
where to find Cortese, I can try to
make your deaths quick and painless.

(CONTINUED)

27 CONTINUED: 2

27

XENA

Very well. Go to the throne room.
You'll find him seated on the big
chair. Your King is Cortese.

Aescalus pauses and is about to laugh when Toris' legs ENTER FRAME to entwine around Aescalus' neck. PULL BACK and WIDEN to discover that Toris, still hanging from his single binding rope, has hoisted his legs up to get a chokehold on Aescalus with his lower calves.

The Guard quickly moves to intervene, but Xena's legs wrap around his neck and she FLIPS HIM across the room. Meanwhile, Aescalus draws his sword. Xena kicks the sword.

It flies up and, just before it hits the ground, Xena catches it with her feet, while hanging from her bindings. In an amazing example of the perfect Abdominizer Commercial, she brings her legs up and CUTS HER ROPES with the sword (still holding it with her feet). She falls to a crouch, then stands quickly.

She grabs Aescalus by the neck and throws him to the ground. Putting her foot in his back, she quickly slices at Toris' bindings. He is free.

Aescalus is hauled to his feet by Xena -- who yanks the large ring of keys from his belt -- then wraps the severed end of the binding rope around his neck to control his movement. Toris grabs the Guard's sword.

AESCALUS

You'll never get out of the castle
alive.

XENA

We have no intention of leaving the
castle. First, I want you to show me
where the messenger doves are kept. *

Off Aescalus' confused look, we:

CUT TO:

28 EXT. FRONTING SERA'S DWELLING - DAY

28

Gabrielle is just coming out of the hut when Sera rushes up to her.

SERA

Gabrielle... your friends. The King
has them.

(CONTINUED)

28 CONTINUED:

28

Gabrielle grabs up her staff, and we:

CUT TO:

29 INT. DOVE ROOM - DAY

29

Cages with doves in them. One flies from the window where Xena is standing. Toris holds the rope around Aescalus' neck. His hands are bound.

TORIS

Why don't we just go find Cortese?

XENA

I just want to stir the pot a little.
Now...

She grabs Aescalus.

XENA

Where is your "King"?

AESCALUS

I'd rather die...

XENA

That's easy to arrange. Tell me.

AESCALUS

(beat)

The dining hall in the west wing. He has a meal at this time. But you'll never get there.

XENA

(to Toris)

For my plan to work, I have to get the Royal Guards into the courtyard. We'd better split up. Can you handle Cortese?

TORIS

(with a grin)

I'll take care of him.

He rushes out. A BEAT, then Xena turns to Aescalus.

XENA

(to Aescalus)

Now... we both know you're protecting your king. So... tell me where he really is.

*
*
*

(CONTINUED)

29 CONTINUED:

29

Off that, we:

CUT TO:

30 EXT. MALIK'S CAMPSITE - DAY

30

His Raiders are, as usual, lounging around a couple of large food fires. Malik, coming from the direction of the bird roost, again carries a small piece of message parchment to a spot midway between the fires.

MALIK

On your feet and ready to go.

(holds up message)

We're to attack the castle immediately
in full strength. Move!

The Raiders scurry to comply.

CUT TO:

31 OMITTED

31*

32 INT. DINING HALL - DAY

32

As non-descript as possible. We have a few chairs and tables. At one table sits a couple of Guards sharing a manly brew. Suddenly, the door bursts open and Toris enters, sword drawn. The two Guards stand, draw their swords, and attack.

TORIS

Cortese! Where are you?

He fends off the Guards. They try to surround him, but he manages to nail one in the head with the butt of his sword, while kicking the other to the face and down. (NOTE: He doesn't kill them.)

TORIS

Cortese!

He looks around, then it dawns on him...

TORIS

He lied...

(realizing)

The guard lied and Xena knew it!

He rushes out, as we:

*

CUT TO:

33 EXT. FRONTING KING'S CASTLE - DAY - FULL

33

With a ROAR, Cortese's masked Raiders, led by a masked Malik, charge through the outer entry wall. They begin to trash the place, kicking over carts, etc.

*

*

Suddenly, Toris comes flying out of the entrance and sees his former compatriots. More importantly, they see him.

*

*

MALIK

There's the traitor!

*

*

And they are upon Toris. He moves back and forth, fighting with an energy that reminds us of his sister. Still, he is outnumbered. Well, not quite.

*

*

*

GABRIELLE

*

makes her entrance into the city. Seeing Toris in the fray, she immediately joins in, trying to guard Toris' back.

*

*

GABRIELLE

Where's Xena?

*

*

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED:

33

TORIS

(anger)

Xena...

And that anger is focused on his current opponent, who goes flying. At that moment:

XENA

appears at the head of the steps. Beside her are Aescalus and Cortese, both bound. She takes in the battle, then turns to Aescalus and cuts his ropes.

XENA

Go! Get your soldiers.

Aescalus pauses.

XENA

Move!

He takes off. Xena turns to Cortese and, with a mighty effort, LIFTS HIM and hangs him on an available wall sconce. Turning, she FLIPS INTO THE AIR and lands next to:

TORIS

She blocks a sword blow as he gives her a look.

TORIS

You lied to me!

XENA

Talk later, fight now.

Now, we get to see the sister and brother team in action together. They coordinate their movements, grabbing each other to launch one or the other at the Raiders, at one point locking arms and swinging each other in sequence, kicking at the Raiders to knock them back.

Gabrielle is taking advantage of her height, staying low and using her staff to sweep men to the ground. Suddenly:

AESCALUS AND THE SOLDIERS APPEAR

and line up opposite the Raiders in formation, ready for the word. The Raiders stop fighting and back up, forming into an attack group.

Xena looks up to the hanging Cortese.

XENA

Cortese! Tell the Raiders to drop their weapons.

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED: 2

33

The Raiders and Soldiers look confused. Cortese doesn't answer her. *

CORTESE *

Someone kill her! *

Xena picks up two swords, flips them over her head, and lets them sail, end over end, until they STICK INTO THE CONCRETE on either side of Cortese's head. Xena pulls out the chakram and holds it up. *

XENA *

Take a good look at my chakram, Cortese. It's the last thing you'll see if you don't tell them now! *

A BEAT, then: *

CORTESE

Malik! Give your weapons to the soldiers! Surrender. I'm ordering you!

Stupefied and horrified at first, Malik lifts his mask.

The nonplussed Raiders begin to comply -- except for Malik. The most stunned of all is Aescalus. He stares up at Xena and his 'King,' Cortese.

XENA

(to Aescalus)

There's only one man with the power to make them do that.

Aescalus stares narrowly right through Cortese, with:

AESCALUS

(believing her now)

...Cortese...

FAVORING MALIK

Betrayed by his leader, he wrenches away from his captor Soldier, and dashes toward Cortese, with:

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED: 3

33

MALIK

No! You betrayed us!

But as Malik is almost upon Cortese, Aescalus cuts him down.

As Xena starts up the steps toward Cortese:

TORIS

(seething; to Xena)

You knew he was lying, didn't you? You wanted him to yourself!

Xena looks at Toris, then, almost angrily, she throws Cortese out into the middle of what is now a semicircle of Soldiers and their Raider prisoners.

Xena takes the sword from Aescalus. She hands it to Toris -- and gestures toward Cortese, with:

XENA

You're so hungry for that blood you'll never wash off? There he is. Everything I hated about me, you're determined to make of yourself. Go. Do it.

Somewhat surprised at having the sword in his hand and the chance to kill the man cringing within the semicircle, Toris moves toward Cortese -- confidently and determined at first.

XENA

And, when you're done... tell me if you "feel" anything.

Toris pauses. Fully expecting to die here and now, Cortese WHIMPERS. Toris raises the sword -- but, looking down at the pathetic Cortese, he finds himself losing the will that it takes to murder in cold blood. Toris regathers himself, but... he turns his back on Cortese and walks away. He hands the sword to Xena as he continues back into the castle. He stops and looks at her. She smiles.

XENA

Lyceus would be proud.

He nods and continues inside.

DISSOLVE TO:

34 EXT. FRONTING KING'S CASTLE - DAY

34

The courtyard is clear now. Xena is saddling up Argo as Gabrielle talks to her. Her staff leans against a wall.

GABRIELLE

I never did figure out the arrow thing.
It's very frustrating.

XENA

Like I said, Gabrielle... stop trying
to figure it out. You don't need to
conquer the world in one day.

GABRIELLE

I know...
(grin)
I'll need at least a week.

She walks over to pick up her staff. Just as she reaches it, Xena picks up a small stone and throws it at Gabrielle. Gabrielle spins and KNOCKS THE STONE DOWN. She looks amazed and thrilled.

XENA

It's a start.

Toris walks up with his horse behind him. A BEAT as they look at each other. Then, they embrace.

TORIS

I feel so free. After so long.
(beat)
In all the rush, I forgot to tell you
how much I missed you.

XENA

You had other things on your mind.

TORIS

The wrong things. Thanks for setting
me straight.

XENA

What now?

TORIS

Now? It's time I came full circle.
I'm going back home. To see Mother.

XENA

That will make her happy. Tell her I
said... well, tell her you saw me.

TORIS

Maybe you could come with me.

(CONTINUED)

34 CONTINUED:

34

XENA

No. Not yet. I just saw her a little while back and we're still sorting it out. Besides, Gabrielle and I are headed the other way.

TORIS

I understand. After all this time, I should bring Mother some kind of gift.

XENA

You are.

She smiles and mounts up. As she reins Argo away, we:

FREEZE FRAME

FADE OUT.

THE END