

Xena: Warrior Princess - Subtext Virtual Season 7



Production #V703 - Choices

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TEASER

FADE IN.

EXT. A CAMPSITE - NIGHT

It is dark and the sky is cloudy. Small stripes of moonlight lay across two sleeping figures under a large set of furs. Nearby, a fire burns low. The figure closest to the fire begins to move, twitching and murmuring.

GABRIELLE

N... no....

Xena wakes up and peers at her, very concerned. Gabrielle does not wake. Instead, she becomes more agitated.



GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Oh... no... Please... no... no, not....

XENA

Gabrielle.

Xena shakes Gabrielle gently. Gabrielle's eyelids twitch, but remain closed, and suddenly we can see her dreams.

INTERCUT TO:

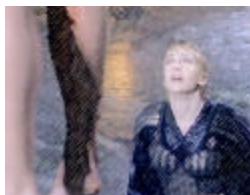
EXT. JAPA - VILLAGE - NIGHT

Gabrielle runs through the night, searching.

INTERCUT TO:

EXT. BATTLEGROUND - NIGHT

A stark, horrific view of Xena's dead, mutilated body hanging, seen from Gabrielle's perspective, fading as first tears, and then blood obscure Gabrielle's vision.



GABRIELLE

Nooooooooooooo!!!!!!!

INTERCUT TO:

EXT. A CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Gabrielle sits bolt upright, horrified.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

NO! NO!!!! DAMN YOU!!!!



Xena grabs Gabrielle and turns her around, shaking her a little.

XENA

Gabrielle! It's okay.

Gabrielle stares at Xena, but she does not relax, and her expression remains both anguished and fearful. Xena reaches behind her and picks up a cup. Gabrielle's eyes fasten on Xena's hand, and remain fixed there as Xena brings the cup to her lips.



XENA

(cont'd)

Here, take a drink.

Gabrielle takes the cup, but she folds her hands around Xena's hand and closes her eyes, her body at last relaxing in relief.

GABRIELLE

Sorry. I wasn't sure if you were really....

Xena looks very concerned.

XENA

I know.

GABRIELLE

Here.

(beat)

Damn.



Gabrielle wipes the hair out of her eyes. Her hand is shaking. Xena takes her hand and clasps it.

XENA

I can give you something so you can sleep.
You've been up for days, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

I know.

XENA

Then let me....

Gabrielle squeezes Xena's hand.

GABRIELLE

Xena... It's just going to take time
for me to get your murdered,
headless body out of my dreams.
(beat)
I'll be all right.

Gabrielle gets up and sits by the fire. Xena watches her, then gets up to sit next to her. Gabrielle stares into the flames, but reaches out to take Xena's hand and holds it between both of her own.

FADE OUT.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Xena and Gabrielle walk along the road. Argo walks along behind them. The road is well constructed and maintained. Gabrielle appears tired, and Xena keeps an eye on her as they travel.

GABRIELLE

I thought after you came back it would get
easier. I don't know what it is. I just
can't seem to shake what happened.

XENA

I know it's tough.
(hesitantly)
But we'll find a way to put it behind us.

GABRIELLE

(softly)
Will we?

Xena reaches over and rubs Gabrielle's back.

XENA

Just give it some time.

GABRIELLE

Easy for you to say.
(smiling)
I'll just keep trying, I guess.

There is a loud rumble coming towards them. Xena and Gabrielle look up to see a fully loaded wagon rolling at them at full speed. Four horses pull the wagon, and it takes up the entire road.



XENA

Hey!

Xena waves her arms, attempting to attract the driver's attention. The wagon does not slow down.

GABRIELLE

Xena, those horses are not going to pass through you. We need to move.

XENA

Take Argo. Move over there.

Xena keeps trying to stop the wagon. The driver obstinately ignores her and keeps his head down, yelling at the horses and striking them with a short whip.

XENA

(cont'd)

Slow down! You! Hey buddy!

Gabrielle leads Argo off the road, and turns, her face tense with fear as she watches Xena.

GABRIELLE

Xena, get out of there!

At the very last moment, Xena leaps out of the way. The wagon almost brushes her as it rushes past, the horses sweating and snorting as they run at full speed. Xena and Gabrielle watch it disappear around the bend.

XENA

Friendly travelers.

GABRIELLE

(grimly)

Maybe he was late for a funeral.

Xena and Gabrielle continue on their way.

CUT TO:

EXT. CROSSROADS - A SHORT TIME LATER

A large crossroad with a great deal of traffic passing. Wagons rolling, men and women on horseback, mule back, even cow back all traveling in one direction. Xena and Gabrielle are going in the opposite direction. A man slows down as his cart draws even with them.

MAN

Hey! You're headed the wrong way!



XENA

(pointing behind her)
Been there already.

MAN

You don't want to go that direction, lady.
There's trouble that way, big trouble!

GABRIELLE

(under her breath)
Bigger trouble than us? I think not.

XENA

We'll take our chances, thanks.

MAN

Don't say I didn't warn ya!

Xena and Gabrielle continue to make headway against the crowd. Xena tries to stop a few passersby to ask them questions, but they ignore her and rush past. A woman stops, however.

WOMAN

Don't go that way.

GABRIELLE

Why not? What's wrong?
What's that way?

WOMAN

Milltos is that way.

XENA

Who's Milltos?

WOMAN

Not who, what. A village at the end of the
road! Hah! End of the road! Isn't that
the truth! It's ruin, I tell you, RUIN!

The woman pushes on. Xena and Gabrielle finally make it past the big rush of people.

GABRIELLE

We could listen to her, and
turn around or keep going and
find out why they're all running.

XENA

I never was much for lemmings.

Xena looks at Gabrielle with some concern.

XENA

(cont'd)

But we can go the other way if you want.

Gabrielle thinks, as they walk. After a few steps, she shrugs and smiles.

GABRIELLE

Maybe dealing with someone else's problem
is just the right thing for us right now.

XENA

Yeah.

(beat)

Besides, how much trouble could one
little village be, anyway, right?

GABRIELLE

Right. Let's go.

Xena and Gabrielle march off towards Milltos, as the crowd raises a cloud of dust going in the other direction.



FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. MILLTOS VILLAGE - AFTERNOON

Xena and Gabrielle ride up together on Argo to the gates of a small, rather shabby village. The gates are tied together sticks, and on either side of them are grubby little farms, with yards full of scraggly chickens and goats. The atmosphere is run down, but well ordered. There are no human beings in sight.

Xena and Gabrielle pause at the gates and look around.

GABRIELLE

This place looks harmless enough.

Xena looks over her shoulder at Gabrielle, and smiles warmly at her.

XENA

Ya never know. I thought Potedeia was harmless, and look what I found there.

Gabrielle does not react for a moment, then she leans against Xena and hugs her. Xena is a little confused at this reaction.

XENA

(cont'd)

Sorry. The jokes are a little rusty.

GABRIELLE

That's one of the things I missed most.

XENA

(puzzled)

My bad jokes?

GABRIELLE

Your sense of humor.
You didn't have it as a ghost.

XENA

No, I guess I didn't.
Wasn't much to laugh about.

Xena looks off into the distance, then guides Argo to the gates and unlatches them. Argo backs up and they pull the gates open and proceed inside.



FADE TO:

EXT. MILLTOS INN - AFTERNOON

Xena and Gabrielle ride through the village and up to the inn. The Milltos Inn is a single story structure. Its sign is broken, hanging down from one catch and creaking in the breeze. The exterior is patched and shabby.

As Argo reaches the Inn, the inhabitants of the village slowly appear, coming out of houses and from around corners to look at them. The villagers are dressed more or less alike, all with homespun aprons tied over their work clothes with a jagged, knife like symbol sewn on them.

XENA

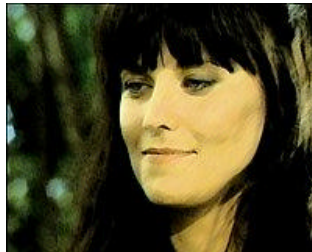
(low, to Gabrielle)
See that symbol?

GABRIELLE

Yeah. What is it?

XENA

Damned if I know, but I bet we find out.



Gabrielle gives Xena a look.

GABRIELLE

Remind me to think again
about that sense of humor.

Xena smiles.

The crowd surrounds Xena and Gabrielle and look curiously at them, pointing and whispering. Xena and Gabrielle look at each other, then dismount from Argo's back. The Innkeeper comes out to meet them. She is a hatchet-faced woman who has seen better days, with a tight, pinched face and a gaunt frame.

INNKEEPER

What's your pleasure, travelers?

XENA

(under her breath)
Wouldn't you like to know?

Gabrielle has her mouth open to speak, but she pauses on hearing the bawdy comment and reaches over to give Xena a pinch. Xena smirks.

GABRIELLE

(clearing throat)
We'd like a room. Do you have any?

The Innkeeper laughs unpleasantly.



INNKEEPER

Have any? Oh yes, we've got plenty of them. Come with me, strangers. We'll fix you right up!

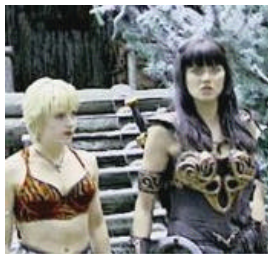
Xena doesn't much like the sound of this, but she can't find any immediate threat. She starts to follow the innkeeper inside when the sound of people fighting comes from the road.

GABRIELLE

What's that?

INNKEEPER

Quickly, quickly, inside if you please!



The innkeeper tries to hurry them inside. Xena and Gabrielle ignore her, grab their weapons, and head for the sound of trouble.

CUT TO:

EXT. MILLTOS VILLAGE ROAD - AFTERNOON

A crowd of men dressed in the strange aprons, but with hoods over their heads surround a bound captive. The captive is wrapped in strips of cloth from head to foot, on which are painted various symbols. The captive is plainly terrified. His eyes are coming almost out of his head, but his mouth is bound and he cannot speak.

The hooded men drag the captive down the street. The captive struggles - he is a very powerful man and he knocks several of them off their feet despite how he is bound.

The captive falls, and the men drag him forward, then pull him back onto his feet. The men start to chant very loudly.

MEN

Toola! Toola! Toola!

Xena and Gabrielle run towards the men.



GABRIELLE
Stop! Let him go!

HOODED MAN
Get them!

The hooded men leap forward and attack Xena and Gabrielle with sticks and poles, beating at them viciously.

XENA
You really don't wanna do that!

Xena takes the pole from one man's hands and breaks it, then she kicks him in the chest and flips him backwards several times. At the same time, Gabrielle takes out one of the hooded men with a roundhouse kick, then uses her sais to punch out two others, knocking them unconscious.

GABRIELLE
She's right. Why don't
we stop now, before....

A man leaps at Gabrielle and tackles her, taking her to the ground. They wrestle, as Xena turns and sees them. Xena leaps over two men who are trying to grab her and kicks back in mid air, kicking them into a horse trough nearby. Gabrielle is struggling with her opponent. The man is far larger than she is.



XENA
Gabrielle!

Gabrielle rolls out from under her attacker and pulls back a fist, then slugs him hard in the jaw. The man's head rocks back and he drops flat to the ground. Gabrielle gets up and looks around. Xena picks up one of the last of the attackers and spins around with him, knocking out two others. She lets him go, and he flies across the road, landing in a manure pile outside the barn.



GABRIELLE

Bull's-eye.

XENA

No. Bullshit.

(beat, pointing at captive)

Cut him loose.

Gabrielle has already gone to the side of the captive. She draws her dagger and slices through the linen wrapping, freeing the man.

GABRIELLE

Easy... it's okay.

The captive frantically wrenches his limbs free, and as soon as he can get loose, he turns and bolts for the gates, running as fast as he can.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

(yelling)

You're welcome!

Xena walks over to Gabrielle and puts a hand on her shoulder.



XENA

You okay? I thought that
guy had you there.

Gabrielle wipes her brow and puts her dagger away. She is a little shaken, the days without sleep have taken their toll and she knows it.

GABRIELLE

Yeah, I'm fine. Let's go turn
these creeps in, Xena, and
find out what's going on.

Xena looks concerned, but she just claps Gabrielle on the back and they start back towards the inn.

CUT TO:

EXT. MILLTOS INN - MOMENTS LATER

A crowd is gathering. They move around Xena and Gabrielle as they approach. Xena addresses the innkeeper.

XENA

Who's the law here?

INNKEEPER

You might well ask!

The crowd starts to mutter angrily. A man rushes in.

MAN

He's gone! We'll never catch him!
He got across the river!

Xena and Gabrielle exchange looks.

GABRIELLE

Are you looking for one of the attackers?
Most of them are by the road.

INNKEEPER

(pointing at Xena and Gabrielle)
It was them! The strangers! They attacked
the holy ones, and let him go!

GABRIELLE

(under her breath)
Holy ones?

XENA

I've got a bad feeling about this.

The crowd starts to riot. Rocks and sticks start to fly. Xena and Gabrielle immediately draw their weapons and go back-to-back, ready to defend themselves. Xena knocks sticks out of the air with her sword.

INNKEEPER

They attacked! I saw them!

GABRIELLE

Wait! You've got this all wrong!

A tall, stern, bearded man suddenly steps into the center of the crowd, and holds his hands up. Following him is a large group of the aproned and hooded men, now obviously in authority.

MAN

Silence!

The crowd stops dead, and you would hear a pin drop if they were not on a dirt road.

MAN

(cont'd)

They will be judged
according to our custom.

Xena has had about enough.

XENA

Judged for what? We saved
that poor guy's life!

MAN

For breaking our laws, and putting
us all in great danger. Bring them
to the council chambers!

The hooded guard surround Xena and Gabrielle, pointing lethal looking spears and crossbows at them.



FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. VILLAGE COUNCIL CHAMBER - EVENING

The villagers assemble in what is obviously the largest hut in the village. There are handmade tables and chairs. The hut is used for meetings, and for other large group gatherings. At the front, there is what appears to be an altar of some kind, made of very heavy, naturally carved wood. The villagers mill around, very upset.

Around the walls of the chamber, woven mats have been hung which are painted with the jagged symbol the villagers all wear. The VILLAGE LEADER enters and goes to the altar.

LEADER

My friends, my friends... please.
We have a lot to talk about.

The villagers take a seat.

LEADER

(cont'd)
Bring in the prisoners.

Xena and Gabrielle are led inside. Guards surround them.

GABRIELLE

(low, to Xena)
I'm sure this is just a misunderstanding.

Xena looks at the altar, which is stained with a dark substance.

XENA

Uh huh.



LEADER

The laws of our village have been
broken. The culprits are here.

The leader points at Xena and Gabrielle.

XENA

Watch where you're
pointing that, buddy.
(beat)
What rule did we break?

LEADER

You prevented us from giving our tribute to the great Toola. Now he will take revenge on us, unless we find a way to appease him.

GABRIELLE

Toola? What's that?



The villagers react in shock.

MAN

Blasphemer! Stone her!

The crowd yells agreement.

LEADER

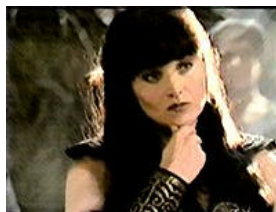
Toola is our god. Our great god.
Bringer of the rains, father of
the sun, provider of all that is good,
propagator of the Universe...



XENA

(interrupting)

We get the idea. So where does the not yet dead mummy come in?



The leader looks puzzled. The crowd murmurs to each other, confused.

GABRIELLE

(under her breath)

I don't think they know what
a mummy is, Xena.

XENA

The guy wrapped in sheets.

LEADER

Ah. The bringer of the tribute.
It's a great honor.

XENA

Uh huh...so... he chose to do that?

LEADER

Not... exactly.

FADE TO:

EXT. VILLAGE STREET - EVENING

Several small children play with a goat in a nearby pen. As they run and laugh, a low sound is heard. The children do not hear it at first. The sound gets louder. The children stop laughing and look around fearfully.

The sound gets louder, making water in the horse trough vibrate.

The children scream in terror. Animals start to race around in fear.

The sound comes again, this time with a definite vibration that shakes the ground.

FADE TO:

INT. VILLAGE COUNCIL CHAMBER - EVENING

The crowd is chattering, the leader shakes his head, and shrugs. Gabrielle decides to take charge.

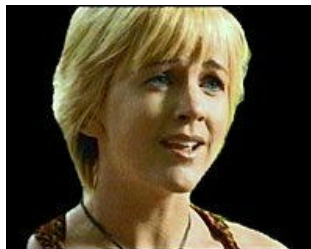
GABRIELLE

(to Xena)

Let me try.

(to Leader)

What was the tribute? Were you
going to kill that man we let go?



The leader reacts in horror.

LEADER

Kill him! What do you take
us for?? Of course not!

Xena pokes Gabrielle in the ribs, amused.

XENA
(softly)
Atta girl.



The crowd starts yelling in anger, shaking their fists at Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE
(clearing throat)
Sorry.

LEADER
He was to be given the tribute
for this moon, and gently placed
in Toola's hands, as he manifests
himself to us in the form of the
Great Waterfall of Life.

The leader places his hands together, and bows his head. The crowd imitates him.

XENA
I get it. You don't kill them,
the god does. Nice.

LEADER
We must meditate, and ask
Toola what we should do. Take
them to the holding place.

XENA
Wait a minute....

LEADER
Ooommm....

XENA
Hey!

The crowd starts to chant, drowning Xena out. The guards surround Xena and Gabrielle and march them outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE OUTSIDE MILLTOS - EVENING

From an opening in the mountainside outside the village, smoke begins to drift. An eerie light is seen within. The low rumble sounds, and small rocks trickle out of the opening, to bounce down the mountainside and roll onto the main road of the village.



CUT TO:

INT. VILLAGE JAIL - EVENING

The jail is a dark, dingy, dismal, yet very well constructed pit, obviously intended not to allow it's occupants to escape. Xena and Gabrielle are thrown inside, and the hatch slammed behind them, something heavy being dropped on top of it to keep them in.

A shower of debris cascades down and covers them. Xena brushes herself off disgustedly. Gabrielle examines the pit. There is a tiny window near the top of the wall that lets in light.

XENA

Great. Just great.

Gabrielle finds a boot, it's laces tied, and it's sock still in place. She studies it with a perplexed expression.

XENA

(cont'd)

Ya think just once we could go into a town and kick a few butts, and not get involved in a sacrificial god cult.

Gabrielle looks at Xena, and smiles.

GABRIELLE

Feels like old times, doesn't it?

A low vibration shakes the room, showering Xena with sticks, bits of dirt, and debris. Gabrielle laughs and walks over to brush Xena off. She continues to chuckle.

XENA

Yeah, it does.

(beat)

What's so funny?

Xena plucks a twig from under her armor.

GABRIELLE

I can't believe after all we've been through,
here we are in a dirty pit, in trouble for
doing a good deed. It's so....



Another low vibration shakes the pit. This time, both Xena and Gabrielle pay attention to it.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

What is that?

Xena cocks her head and listens. The noise rumbles again.



XENA

Too regular for an earthquake.

(beat)

Almost sounds like a giant's around.

Xena suddenly smiles as she remembers something and her expression softens.

XENA

(cont'd)

Remember Goliath?

Gabrielle leans against Xena.

GABRIELLE

Sure I do.

Gabrielle seems suddenly pensive.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Back in the days when dealing with giants
was the worst of our problems.

The ground shudders again. Xena puts her arms around Gabrielle. As they listen, they can hear cries of terror outside.

XENA

Sounds like this Toola meaner than I thought. We'd better humor them until we find out what the real story is.

There is a sound of footsteps heading their way, and voices calling out.

GABRIELLE

I have a feeling we won't have long to wait for that.

CUT TO:

EXT. MILLTOS VILLAGE ROAD - NIGHT

The opening in the mountain is now glowing. The light pulses as though the mountain itself has a heartbeat. Rocks tumble out and down the road almost continually. The villagers run in fear back and forth, avoiding touching the rocks.

CUT TO:

INT. VILLAGE COUNCIL CHAMBER - NIGHT

The chamber is now lit with torches. The front of the chamber is filled with the hooded guards. The leader enters, dressed in the same manner. He stops as the ground shakes, then with a determined look, he goes to the altar and stands behind it. The entire atmosphere of the village has changed, from irritation to fear bordering on panic.



LEADER

Bring them.

Xena and Gabrielle are brought inside. They are surrounded by guards, who are heavily weaponed. The men are nervous. Most of them flinch when the rumble sounds. The noise comes more often, every minute or so.

XENA

All right. Let's talk.

LEADER

The time for talking is over. The time for action is at hand.

XENA

Catchy, but I think you'd better tell us what's going on.

A low roar interrupts them. The sound of debris clattering outside is clearly heard. Several villagers cry out at the noise.



GABRIELLE

Listen to her. We can help you.

LEADER

Yes, you will help us.

The leader produces a large, ornamental staff from under his apron and lays it on the altar.

LEADER

(cont'd)

Our tribute is gone.
You must take its place.

XENA

Hold it right there.

LEADER

Don't be afraid. Toola will
be gentle with you.

GABRIELLE

You can't do this.



LEADER

Guards! Take them and prepare them!
Quickly, before the waters rise!

The guards rush Xena and Gabrielle, yelling at the top of their lungs.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. VILLAGE COUNCIL CHAMBER - NIGHT (RESUME)

Xena and Gabrielle draw their weapon as a loud roll of sound is heard outside. The villagers are beginning to panic and the guards have a desperate look in their eyes as they close in on their two prisoners.



GABRIELLE

We still humoring them?

XENA

No. My sense of humor just gave up the ghost again.

(louder)

Hold it right there!

GABRIELLE

Wait a minute. We're not going to just stand by and let you kill us.

The men pause and listen.

XENA

She's right. Somebody's gonna get hurt, and it's not going to be us, if you catch my drift.

For a moment, the sight of their bright weapons and determined faces make the men hesitate. Then a low, booming roar sounds outside, and they surge forward, frantically attacking Xena and Gabrielle, letting out screams again.



LEADER

Get them! Quickly!

Xena cuts the heads off the spears of three of the men coming after her. They look at their stubs, then start striking Xena with them.

XENA
Slow learners.

Xena whirls her sword in a figure eight, slicing down the spears a foot at a time. Bits of wood go flying everywhere.

XENA
(cont'd)
(to Gabrielle)
We need a distraction!

Gabrielle catches two of the guard's weapons in her sais. She twists her wrists expertly, and the guard's spears get yanked out of their hands. One spear almost hits the leader. The other bounces off the ground then hits a torch. The torch falls over and sets the wall thatch on fire. The fire spreads rapidly across the wall and up into the roof.

GABRIELLE
How's that??

Xena ducks as a flaming piece of wood almost falls on her.

XENA
Not what I had in mind,
but I'll work with it.



LEADER
Run! We'll all be killed!

There is pandemonium in the hall. Everyone runs for the door, pushing and shoving to get out. The fire now consumes the entire roof, putting a layer of flame over their heads and dropping burning thatch all over them.

Xena and Gabrielle watch the crowd jam the door. Xena turns and plunges her sword into the wall, cutting a hole big enough to walk through. Xena jumps through the hole. Gabrielle follows her, but turns at the last moment to see the Leader buried by a falling piece of roof.

GABRIELLE
Xena!

Gabrielle re-enters the room and grabs the Leader's arm, pulling him out from under the burning wood. The roof is now collapsing all around her, and she covers her face with her arm as she struggles towards the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE COUNCIL CHAMBER - NIGHT

The sounds from the mountain are now continuous. The villagers run from the council chamber, coughing and choking, only to be faced with the ground vibrating under their feet.

Xena turns and finds that Gabrielle has not followed her. She jumps to the opening in the wall, and plunges back inside the fire.

CUT TO:

INT. VILLAGE COUNCIL CHAMBER - NIGHT

Gabrielle can barely see in front of her. She feels her way towards the opening in the wall, and her hand suddenly meets something that does not feel like wood or thatch. She clamps down on it.

XENA

Ow!

Gabrielle has grabbed Xena's nose.

GABRIELLE

Thought that felt like you.

Xena grabs Gabrielle and pulls her out the hole in the wall.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE COUNCIL CHAMBER - NIGHT

The villagers are weeping. Xena and Gabrielle drag the leader over to the horse trough and sit him down on it. Rocks tumble down the street from the opening in the mountain. A woman simply stands and shrieks nearby. Xena shakes her.

XENA

Hey!

The woman continues to scream. Gabrielle goes to her and grabs her by the shoulders.

GABRIELLE

Why are you screaming?

You got out! Look!

The woman stops.

WOMAN

Out of the fire, into worse! Toola will kill us!
He will burn the crops, drown the village...
send the mountain down upon us!

GABRIELLE

Is that what he's done before?

LEADER

Yes. He is a demanding god. We
must do something, quickly.

The Leader stands.

LEADER
(cont'd)
Guard!

Xena draws her sword.

XENA
You're not gonna try that again, are you?



The guard stumbles over. The rest of the villagers cluster anxiously around, plainly terrified.

GABRIELLE
Listen, we can find a way to stop this.

LEADER
Yes. I know of a way.

The Leader lifts his hands.

LEADER
(cont'd)
My friends, our god is angry.

The ground vibrates.

LEADER
(cont'd)
We have not given him what
he demands. We cannot
defeat these strangers.

A low keening sound rises, covering the leader's voice. It sounds like very large fingernails on an even larger piece of slate. Everyone covers their ears, especially Xena, who feels actual pain from the noise.

XENA
Augh!

LEADER
(yelling)
Only one thing will appease him!
We must offer him our tribute.

WOMAN
But we have no one to send!

The sound decreases into a moan. Everyone uncovers their ears.

XENA

(grimacing)

Any more of that, and your
god'll get more than a tribute.

LEADER

I will go. I will take the tribute,
and give myself to the waters.
Quickly, take me!



The crowd cries out in relief. They surround the Leader and cheer him, patting him on the back and thanking him. The guards surround the Leader, pick him up onto their shoulders and carry him off. The villagers follow, chanting, very happy and relieved. Xena and Gabrielle are left behind, completely forgotten. They look at each other, stunned.

GABRIELLE

Xena, this is insane. What kind of
god makes its followers mindlessly
sacrifice strangers to it?

XENA

(grimly)

I don't know. Let's see
if we can find out.

Xena and Gabrielle follow the crowd.

FADE TO:

INT. LEADER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The Leader stands in the center of the room. The other villagers pack the small room, surrounding the guards. The guards are wrapping the Leader in strips of linen. Nearby, the chest the prisoner had been carrying earlier in the day is being polished by one of the villagers. Everyone is happy and excited, with the exception of a small, dark haired woman, the LEADER'S WIFE.

WIFE

Don't do this! Please!



LEADER

(gently)

I must. The safety of all
of us depends on me.

Xena and Gabrielle enter, and watch quietly.

WIFE

What about us? Doesn't
your family matter?

The villagers pull the woman away, and push her towards the rear of the room.

MAN

Get out of the way. We have
to hurry, before Toola sends
the waters on us. Come on!

The guards surround the leader, and one of them places the chest in his hands. Another one is hurriedly painting the symbols of the god on the strips of linen. They start to hustle the Leader out the door.

WIFE

Wait! Brandon!

The Leader looks back and their eyes meet.

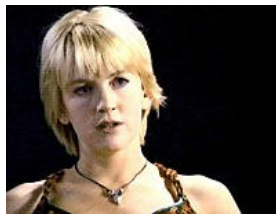
LEADER

When they are older, tell the children.

The villagers push past the Wife, and file out the door, following the guard. They are relieved, and also a little embarrassed at the Wife's evident distress.

GABRIELLE

Xena, we have to stop this.



XENA

And take on the entire village?
Then what? You saw what was
going on outside, Gabrielle.
That damn god means business.



GABRIELLE

So, we just let him die?

XENA

His god, his choice.

Gabrielle gives Xena a shocked, then somber look.

The Wife notices them. She becomes angry, and grabs a broom, brandishing it at them.

WIFE

You! It's all your fault! Why did you have to interfere?

GABRIELLE

We saw someone being attacked.
We thought we were helping.

WIFE

Helping? Now my fool husband is rushing to his death for it. Thanks a lot!

Gabrielle looks at the woman, understanding her anger better than the woman knows. Xena walks over to her, ignoring the threat of the broom.

XENA

Your husband is doing what he thinks is right. If this god is as dangerous as you all claim....



WIFE

(subdued)

Toola is a terrible god.

XENA

Then your husband is a hero to the rest of them, isn't he?

WIFE

Hero?

(laughing bitterly)

If he were a hero he'd care about his family. Only fools are so eager to die. Dying is easy. It's left to the living to suffer the hardships of it.

The Wife throws her broom into the corner and storms through an inner door to a second room. She slams the wooden thatch door behind her, causing bits of it to drift to the ground.

Xena shakes her head and walks back over to where Gabrielle is standing. Gabrielle doesn't react. Her face is set and very still.

XENA

If their god is so dangerous, you'd think she'd appreciate the choice he made to save all of them.



Gabrielle looks very hard at Xena.

GABRIELLE

Yeah. Well, you know something? The losing side of that choice is a real nasty place to be.



Gabrielle turns and walks to the inner door, opening it and going through, without giving Xena a backwards look.

XENA

Gab....
(beat)
Damn.

Xena is left alone in the room. Gabrielle's anger surprised her, and she remains still, thinking hard about what Gabrielle said and why she might have said it.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE STREET - NIGHT

The villagers surround the guard, who surrounds the Leader. They march up towards the mountain. As they get closer, the sounds, and the stones slowly reduce. The villagers begin chanting in relief and joy.

CUT TO:

INT. LEADER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The Leader's Wife stands at the window, watching the torches recede towards the mountain. Beside her are two children, a boy and girl. The children hang on to their mother, obviously scared and very confused.

Xena enters, and looks around for Gabrielle, then stops when she spots the family at the window.

BOY

Mama, where's daddy?

WIFE

(in tears)

He's going to talk to Toola, sweetheart.

GIRL

Why? Does Toola want to tell
him something? Will he tell
us when he gets back?

Xena watches and listens from the shadows. She closes her eyes as she sees bits of her own memories - of the suffering she felt after Gabrielle fell into the lava pit with Hope.

WIFE

He... won't be back for a long time.
But maybe he will tell us what
Toola said, when we see him again.

BOY

Daddy's not coming home tonight?
Can I sleep in his bed?

The Wife can barely keep her composure. She puts the two children in the large bed and pulls the covers up.

WIFE

That's it. You go to sleep, and
dream good dreams.

The Wife turns, and sees Xena standing there. They both listen as the loud noises and vibrations die down, and then cease.

WIFE

(cont'd)

You must think I'm selfish, don't you?

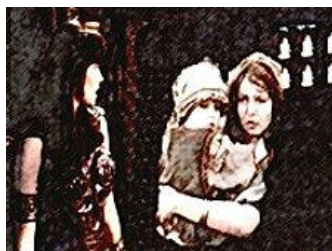
Xena is shaken.

XENA

No.

(beat)

Just someone who loves.



The Wife looks puzzled.

XENA

(cont'd)

My friend, where did she go?

WIFE

She said she was going for
a long walk, to think.

The sounds outside have stopped. Now only cheers can be heard of the happy villagers. The sounds get closer and closer. Then the door bursts open, and men and women pour in, relieved and happy that the threat is over.

The men part, and suddenly the Leader emerges. He is covered in tatters of linen, and the chest is gone. He spots Xena.

WIFE

(cont'd)

(very surprised)

Brandon!

Xena's face shows she realizes what is coming next. She is already in motion when the Leader speaks.



LEADER

We were at the mountain,
then your friend insisted on taking
my place! How wonderful! How brave!
She wanted so much to meet Toola!

Xena shoves through the crowd and bolts out the door, scattering people everywhere without a backwards look.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

INT. TOOLA'S CAVE - NIGHT

Gabrielle stands inside a cavern. There are torches stuck into clefts in the wall that provide light, but the overwhelming sound inside is one of water. In the back of the cavern a huge waterfall emerges from the rocks and drops down into a dark, seemingly bottomless pit.

Next to the waterfall is a wooden platform, obviously built for ceremonial purposes. It is covered with the jagged god symbol, and parts of it bear scratch and claw marks.

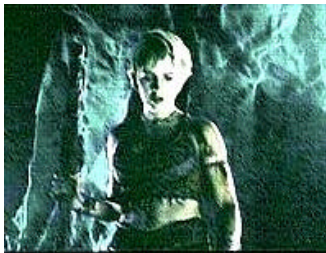
Gabrielle has the chest in her hands. She looks around the cavern for several moments. The falling water produces a steady wind that blows into her face and a spray that quickly dampens her.

GABRIELLE

I know this isn't fair, Xena.

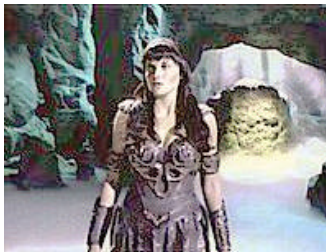
(beat)

But you taught me life is
like that sometimes.



Straightening her shoulders, Gabrielle steps confidently forward, climbing up onto the platform and walking towards the edge. She is one step from going over when she is roughly tackled from behind and pulled off to one side of the platform, falling to the ground with her attacker on top of her.

Gabrielle rolls free and scrambles to her feet, facing Xena, who blocks her path towards the waterfall. They stare at each other for several moments. The sound of the water almost overwhelms any attempt at speech.



XENA

(yelling)

Gabrielle!

GABRIELLE

(yelling)

Xena, get out of my way.

XENA
(yelling)
Listen to me!

Gabrielle starts past Xena, but Xena grabs her and holds her, bringing them close together.

GABRIELLE
I'm not going to let that man
die, Xena. Not for something
we did, right or wrong.

XENA
Well, I'm not letting you walk off
that platform so you better
rethink what you're doing.

GABRIELLE
(angrily)
Xena, I have a right to choose my
own destiny. Just like you did.

XENA
This is not the same thing!

GABRIELLE
(furiously)
Isn't it? Or is it just that it's you
that gets left behind this time?

Xena looks at Gabrielle, plainly hurt, and a little shocked.

XENA
(quietly)
I guess I deserve that, don't I?



Gabrielle stops struggling when she hears this. She stands inside the circle of Xena's arms and looks up at her, all of her anger dissipated by the sadness, and weary anguish she sees in Xena's face.

GABRIELLE
Neither of us deserves this.

Xena touches Gabrielle's cheek.

XENA
No.

GABRIELLE

But this was my choice, Xena.

Xena shakes her head.

XENA

It can't be your choice... or my choice... anymore, Gabrielle.

(beat)

If we want this to work, it has to be our choice from now on. Together.



Gabrielle looks off into the waterfall, deep in thought.

GABRIELLE

(whispering)

Together.

XENA

I should have leveled with you in Japa. I should have made you part of my decision, but I didn't.

Gabrielle looks at Xena. They are both now drenched from the cold spray.

GABRIELLE

That hurt.

XENA

(softly)

I know.

(beat)

I'm sorry. But don't make the same mistake here because you're angry at me.

GABRIELLE

Angry at you? Maybe I'm angry at myself for not following my heart and just dumping that urn into the water.

Xena hugs Gabrielle closer.

XENA

(whispering)

Gabrielle, Gabrielle, I'm so sorry.

Gabrielle returns the hug, surrendering up the rest of her anger.



GABRIELLE

You're right. We have to be
responsible to each other.
For each other, from now on.

Xena looks very relieved. She kisses the top of Gabrielle's head, then as Gabrielle looks up, kisses her on the lips. Gabrielle responds, then they part and look at each other.

XENA

From now on. I promise.

GABRIELLE

Me too.
(beat)
Now, what are *we* going
to do to fix this mess?

Xena smiles and looks over at the waterfall.

XENA

Nasty. What'd you have in mind?

GABRIELLE

We don't know how far it goes.
I figured I'd ride it down and
see if that got me to this Toola.

XENA

(frowning)
Then what?

Gabrielle walks to the edge and looks down.

GABRIELLE

If I made it, then I'd find him
and get him to stop asking
these people for sacrifices.
(beat)
He's just a god, Xena.
We both know that doesn't
mean he's invincible.

Xena nods thoughtfully.

XENA
Good plan.



Gabrielle looks at Xena, and then she smiles.

GABRIELLE
I had a good teacher.

She holds out hand.

GABRIELLE
(*cont'd*)
Come on.

Xena takes Gabrielle's hand, but points with the other one towards a dark cleft in the rocks, under the edge of the waterfall.

XENA
Cut your teacher a little slack.
I think I found a better way across.
We may not know how long a
drop it is, but I'm not in the
mood to take the chance.

Gabrielle nods in agreement, and they walk to the edge of the falls, disappearing together under the onrushing water.

FADE TO:

INT. WATERFALL REVERSE - NIGHT

Xena and Gabrielle are plastered against the rocks, holding on for dear life. The water rushes by them, its force nearly knocking them off the tiny ledge they are standing on.

Xena balances precariously as she inches along. She comes to a rock that juts out, and realizes they must go around it to continue.

XENA
(*yelling*)
I don't know if I can get around this!



Gabrielle looks past her, barely able to see through the water and darkness. She lets go of the rock with one hand and takes hold of Xena's leathers.

GABRIELLE

(yelling)

Give it your best shot.

Xena looks at Gabrielle's hand.

XENA

If I fall, you're not gonna
be able to hold me.

GABRIELLE

No, but we'll both end up in
the same place. Go on!

Xena grins on hearing this. She spots a handhold on the other side of the rock and jumps for it, pulling Gabrielle along with her. They teeter on the edge of disaster for an endless moment, then Gabrielle gets her footing and they are safe. Now, however, an entire section of the ledge is missing.

Xena and Gabrielle look at each other in consternation.

CUT TO:

INT. CAVE - OTHER SIDE OF THE WATERFALL - NIGHT

The waterfall crashes down, throwing spray into a small piece of rocky ground. On the other side of this, the cavern walls rise up, with a large crack in one that appears to have been used as a passageway. A torch flutters in an iron holder wedged into the rock.

For a very long moment, all is still, except for the rushing water.

Then the water parts and Xena and Gabrielle leap through, both of them tumbling in mid air and landing at the same time. Xena shakes herself vigorously, sending droplets everywhere. Gabrielle does the same, then walks gingerly in boots that emit a squishing sound. Xena examines the torch.

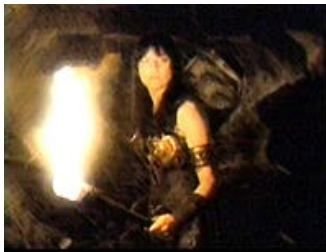
GABRIELLE

Toola must have worshippers on this side.

XENA

Looks like it. C'mon.

Xena takes the torch, and leads the way into the narrow crack in the rock.



CUT TO:

EXT. CAVERN LEDGE - NIGHT

Xena and Gabrielle emerge onto a ledge on the outside of the mountain. Overhead, stars twinkle. In front of them is a rock wall. Xena sniffs the air.

GABRIELLE

What is that?

XENA

Burning flesh.

They exchange grim looks. Xena puts the torch down and unsheathes her sword. They can see an eerie light on the other side of the wall. It increases, and decreases erratically. Gabrielle draws her sais.

GABRIELLE

I'd better go first.

Xena's eyebrows go up.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

(grinning)

If he starts throwing fireballs, I'll turn my back and jump into your arms.

XENA

(smiling)

Sounds like a plan.

Xena and Gabrielle creep slowly over to the wall and pause, now hearing a low rumble through the rocks. They gather their courage and stand up, raising their heads over the wall for their first sight of the mighty Toola.



CUT TO:

EXT. TOOLA'S CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Below the ledge is a large, rambling camp full of people. There are men in armor, half clad women, half clad men, and women in armor. Tents are scattered everywhere, with various bits of personal belongings hanging off them.

The entire atmosphere is raunchy and freewheeling. Kegs of ale are strewn about, and crates of supplies are tumbled, half emptied.

On one side of the camp a huge, round piece of metal is strung up, with a log poised in front of it for striking. Nearby, a large lever made of wood and iron cradles a huge boulder, balancing it so that it can be tipped over to block the waterfall.

Near mountain wall, a huge rock is suspended by many ropes, tied to a frame. Two men, laughing, walk over to it and pull on a large, timber handle. The frame flexes, and the huge rock slams against the side of the mountain, making the entire area vibrate.

Far below, the base of the waterfall can be seen, with debris strewn about it. It is obvious the people in the camp have been living high off the tributes from Milltos.

A man stumbles up to the central fire, holding the chest that had been in Gabrielle's hands. He opens it and shakes the coins out, strewing them everywhere. Several women grab a few and toss them up, then tuck them into their bodices.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAVERN LEDGE - NIGHT

Xena and Gabrielle stare at the scene, then slowly turn and stare at each other.

XENA

Son of a Bacchae.

GABRIELLE

Xena?

XENA

Yeah?

GABRIELLE

Remember that joint decision
thing we talked about?

XENA

Yeah?

GABRIELLE

Do we have a consensus that
there are some butts down there
in serious need of kicking?

XENA

Oh, yeah. Let's go.

Xena and Gabrielle leap over the wall, and head for the camp.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOOLA'S CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Xena and Gabrielle tear into the camp. Xena leaps over discarded crates of Milltos' property and cuts the ropes holding up the tents, collapsing them on top of their occupants.

Gabrielle spins and kicks two men charging at her, then turns and sinks her sai into another man rushing her from behind, sword poised to strike. She pulls the sai out and glances at it, then ducks two other rogues coming at her with a net.



The half clad women and men run screaming in panic, colliding with startled rogues scrambling for their weapons.

ROGUE IN CHARGE

Hey! Hey! Who are you!

XENA

Trouble.

Xena slugs the Rogue in Charge in the face.

XENA

(cont'd)

Any other questions?

The rogue slowly keels over, hitting the ground with a thud. Xena grins, then turns and runs up a ramp into a nearby wagon and launches herself off it, throwing her arms wide and colliding with a bunch of rogues heading for Gabrielle. The men all go to the ground, and Xena uses well placed kicks and vicious elbows to make sure they stay there.



Gabrielle engages a huge brute, intent on clobbering her with a spiked club. She fights literal circles around him, ducking under his blows and stabbing him in the butt with her sai. He whirls around, but she is already gone, somersaulting over his leg and landing on her hands, then kicking backwards to slam him right in the gut. He goes flying into a nearby refuse pit, sending bones and bits of garbage everywhere.

ROGUE #2

They're demons! Run for it!!!

Xena grabs Rogue 2 by the scruff of the neck as he runs past, and swings him around to slam him face first into the wagon she recently jumped off of, the sound of his nose breaking scaring the horse into bolting and dragging the wagon after him.

ROGUE #3

Look out! Ahhhh!!!!

The wagon rolls over Rogue 3.

Xena tosses Rogue 2 into the wagon as it thunders past, careening wildly and scattering people before it.

XENA

Heeyahh! Keep running, boy!



Gabrielle grabs a piece of wood and whacks at the rogues running past. She is enraged, and releases her anger on the men as they try to escape her.



GABRIELLE

Go on! Get out of here you bastards!
Cowards! ANIMALS!!!!

Gabrielle catches a man as he runs by and grabs him by the collar, throwing him against a stack of boxes. She cocks her fist and hits him as hard as she can. The man's head snaps back and he slumps to the floor. Breathing hard, Gabrielle glares at him, then, reacts and looks at her own hand, shaking it .

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Ow. Son of a....

A retreating rogue picks up a crossbow and aims it at Gabrielle, releasing the trigger and sending the bolt towards her.

XENA

Gabrielle!

Xena jumps to the top of a box and leaps forward, crashing into Gabrielle and taking her to the ground out of harm's way.

The sounds of running feet and screaming men slowly subside as the rogues all beat a hasty retreat, running as fast as they can from their now wrecked campsite.

Gabrielle finds herself trapped under Xena, who shows no signs of moving.

GABRIELLE

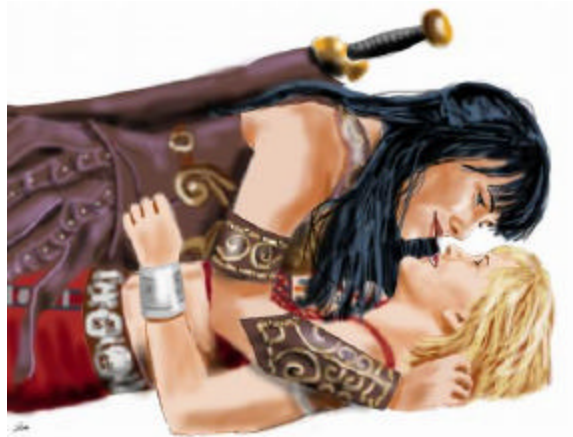
Xena?

XENA
Yeeesss?

GABRIELLE
Did you forget how to catch
arrows or something?

XENA
What? Oh. No, just wanted
to make sure, that's all.

Gabrielle notices Xena is still making sure she's safe, to the point where she can't move an inch.



GABRIELLE
Why am I suspecting an
ulterior motive here?

Xena grins, and lets her up. They survey the camp. They are alone, surrounded by the debris of years of the rogues sponging off Milltos. There are boxes of supplies, chests of coins, food, and ale. Everything given by the town thinking they were honoring a god and protecting themselves.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange hand slaps.

GABRIELLE
(cont'd)
That was a great joint decision.

XENA
First one of many. C'mon,
let's go. We've got a lot to tell
those people back there.

GABRIELLE
And a lot of things to bring
back where they belong.

Xena and Gabrielle start to pick through the supplies.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

TAG

FADE TO:

EXT. MILLTOS VILLAGE - LATER THAT NIGHT

The villagers gather around the huge wagon of supplies Xena and Gabrielle have brought back from around the side of the mountain. To one side, the Leader and his Wife stand with Xena and Gabrielle. The Leader seems crestfallen and embarrassed.

LEADER

I... I can't believe we were taken
in for so long. I feel so foolish.

XENA

They had a good scam going. Noisemakers, a
way to flood the place. Fooled us... for a while.

LEADER

Still.
(sighing)
It'll be strange not having Toola to guide us.

GABRIELLE

Having someone, or something else make your
choices for you gives you a kind of security.
(beat)
But it's the choices you make
on your own that really count.

WIFE

Gabrielle, thank you.
(hesitantly)
Thank you both.

A village man runs over with a keg.

MAN

Brandon, look. From your stock this
year! We sent the last of it!

LEADER

Then we must celebrate. Please, join with us, Xena,
Gabrielle - it's the least we can do to thank you.



The villagers close around them, and Xena and Gabrielle are drawn into a happy, dancing crowd.

FADE TO:

EXT. MILLTOS VILLAGE - VERY LATE NIGHT

The party is ending. Villagers are staggering off, or staying where they cheerfully collapsed. Xena and Gabrielle walk towards the Inn. Xena puts an arm around Gabrielle's shoulders; Gabrielle puts her arm around Xena's waist, and yawns.

XENA

Tired?

GABRIELLE

Yeah, I am.

(beat)

Maybe even too tired to dream.

Gabrielle leans her head against Xena's shoulder, much more at ease now.

XENA

Maybe I can do something
about those dreams.

Gabrielle smiles, as they enter the inn together.

FADE TO:

INT. MILLTOS INN - MORNING

It is late morning. Sun is pouring in the window, covering the bed against the wall. Xena and Gabrielle lie in bed. Gabrielle is sound asleep, her body draped over Xena's.

The sun falls on Gabrielle's back, highlighting the dragon tattoo except where Xena's arm covers it. Xena is awake. She looks down at Gabrielle and smiles. A rooster flies up and lands on the windowsill, fluffing its feathers as it settles down. It cleans its beak on the wood, then preens, ready to crow.

With a swift motion, Xena whips her leg out and boots the rooster out through the window.



A feather drifts slowly down on to the bed's covers. Xena grins, and closes her eyes.



FADE OUT.

DISCLAIMER

No mysteriously omnipotent gods were harmed in the making of this motion picture, but the rooster didn't get off so lucky.