

# THE SHIPPER SEASONS

## XENA WARRIOR PRINCESS VIRTUAL SEASON TEN



**Production #XWP207/SS73**  
**Episode #10.05**

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### **Logline**

When followers still loyal to Ares ask for his help in their war against a powerful warlord, Ares is offered the chance to reclaim some of the power he gave up with his godhood, and with it, he finds himself coming face to face with the realities of war and the consequences of the life he left behind. Meanwhile, Xena and Gabrielle are met with some shocking discoveries in a village unusually dedicated to a religious cult.

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## TEASER

### **FADE IN**

A dark night. Pan through a large, sleeping city as the sounds of battle resonate from somewhere in the distance. The camera pans up and over the far wall of the city to a valley full of soldiers locked in combat. The battle is fierce, the only light is what is cast by the moon and a raging bonfire in front of a large temple high up on a hill. A man stands in front of the fire, silhouetted against the bright backdrop.



Pan over the battlefield until we see a man wearing a dark cloak sitting on a horse at the edge of the valley. He watches as men die in front of him, cut down by swords and arrows. He tilts his head up and the moonlight shines on his face, his expression grim and uncertain. It's Actaeon.

### **CUT TO**

The sun rises. A cloaked young man on horseback rides at breakneck speed through a forest, the wind whipping around him. A satchel full of scrolls is secured to the back of the saddle.

### **CUT TO**

Two soldiers in silver and black armor stand in front of a stone temple. One of them, an older man in his early 40's with dark brown hair and a beard, has a hammer and is nailing the door to the temple shut. Both soldiers look rather sad.

**SOLDIER #1** (standing next to the soldier with the hammer):

We really have to do this?

**SOLDIER #2:**

What good is a temple to a god that no longer exists? We can't afford the upkeep ourselves now that even the priests have left. (he slaps a hand on the soldier's shoulder) We can still honor him without a place of worship. He'll never be forgotten--as long as there is war.

Another soldier runs up.

**SOLDIER #3:**

Sir!

The two soldiers turn. The third soldier stops and catches his breath before holding a rolled up scroll, tied with a gold ribbon, toward them.

**SOLDIER #3:**

A message...from Actaeon, King of Thebes.

Soldier #2 takes the scroll. He unties the ribbon and unrolls the scroll, beginning to read.

**SOLDIER #2** (his expression that of curiosity and then understanding):

He's asking for aid from all those still loyal to the God of War. (looks up) He says the cause is urgent.

**SOLDIER #1:**

Cause to do what?

**SOLDIER #2:**

To start a war.

**DISSOLVE TO**

Montage:

-- the boy with the bag of scrolls riding over the landscape.

-- soldiers from various temples getting these messages, reading them and nodding, grabbing their weapons and their horses and heading out.

-- the boy knocking on a simple villager's house, it opens to reveal an older, gray-haired man and three younger men. They read the scroll that is handed to them and then nod, understanding and eager.

-- a soldier standing out in front of a tent reading through the scroll. He looks at the messenger who'd given it to him and then shakes his head, handing it back. The soldier walks back into his tent and the messenger is left looking on.

-- several warrior women in leather training in a small courtyard of a large temple. They fight and dodge each other's blades with skill and agility. The messenger rides up, shows them the scroll and they read through it, looking intrigued.

-- soldiers, of all different ages and types (older men, young men and some women) riding in a large group over a valley toward a wooden building in the far distance. Ahead of them is soldier #2, looking proud and determined.

**DISSOLVE TO**

A quiet little village at dusk. Several dozen villagers are standing in a half circle surrounding a wooden platform. On the platform stands a man wearing a long robe and an Arabian-style turban: the magistrate. He faces Xena and Gabrielle who are standing in a picturesque view side by side on the platform, their hair blowing in the breeze. Behind them, four village guards are holding half a dozen dirty ruffians chained and gagged.

The magistrate holds out his arms in a warm gesture, a large smile on his chubby face.

**MAGISTRATE** (speaks in a very theatrical, overly emphatic way):

The village of Lamia thanks you...from the bottom of our hearts. If you two had not shown up when you did, these men (gestures to the ruffians who try to struggle against their bonds) would have destroyed our homes, taken our money and our children and ruined our lives. We are forever grateful that you got here when you did.

The crowd goes up in cheers and enthusiastic clapping.

Off to the side, Ares stands beside one of the buildings in a casual pose, his hand resting on the hilt of his sword. He watches as Xena and Gabrielle smile at the praise they receive and a young woman steps onto the platform, tears streaming down her face.

**YOUNG WOMAN** (emotional, shaking Gabrielle and Xena's hands with vigor):

Thank you, thank you, thank you. You saved my children from being taken as slaves. I owe you...everything.

They nod their heads in response and then look at each other, the joy of doing good clearly showing by the expressions on their faces.

**XENA** (to the townspeople):

Just doing our job. (pauses) For the Greater Good.

Pan back to show Ares watching silently, thoughtfully. The clapping and cheering begins to rise.

**DISSOLVE TO**

Xena, Gabrielle, and Ares ride over the landscape.

**CUT TO**

Close up of a strong hand as it lifts up a large rabbit by its back feet. Pull back to show that it's Ares holding the rabbit. He grins, looking it over approvingly.

**ARES:**

Not too shabby.

**CUT TO**

A clearing beside a lake. Ares sits on a log in front of a campfire with a boiling pot hanging over it, slowly stirring a stew. The steam rises from it and Ares inhales.

**ARES:**

Almost ready.

**MAN** (faintly, in the distance):

This way!

Ares looks up at the sound. The rattling of metal and the pounding of footsteps becomes louder. Suddenly, a teenage boy, about 16, in makeshift leather armor, runs into the campsite, stumbling a bit. The ground is soft and slightly muddy, splashing his pants with dirt at every step.

He doesn't notice Ares, and runs right through the campsite to the water's edge, ducking under the cover of some dense bushes. Ares looks back, watching him. A moment later, four thugs in dirty, tattered leather clothes and scruffy beards appear from the clearing. They stop, seeing Ares sitting by the fire.

**LEAD THUG** (threatening, points his sword at Ares):

You! Where is the boy?

**ARES:**

Boy? (looks around innocently, casually stirring the stew) I don't see any boy.

Pan around to show the boy peeking out through the branches of a bush.

**LEAD THUG** (draws his sword forcefully):

*Don't* play games with me. We saw him run into the clearing, there's nowhere else he could have gone.

**ARES** (slightly mocking):

In a forest full of trees and bushes? Didn't you ever play hide and seek when you were young?

The lead thug growls, agitated by Ares' casual attitude, and loses his temper.

He turns to the pot hanging over the fire and kicks the wooden supports holding it up, knocking them down. The pot tumbles into the fire, spilling over and causing a huge plume of steam to rise around them, the stew sizzling in the fire.

**ARES** (stands up):

Hey! (he grabs the handle of the pot and sets it upright before all of the stew can spill out) That does it. You just made an enemy.

**LEAD THUG** (sneers):

Oh, I'm scared. That boy has stolen something that belongs to us. (Ares is silent, the thug is losing patience again) And we'll get it back, with or without you.

Ares glances over at his sword that is lying upright against the trunk of a tree.



**ARES:**

Well... (he quickly steps sideways and grabs the handle of his sword, twirling it a couple times in front of the thugs) Guess it'll have to be without me.

The lead thug eyes Ares, then glances over to the lake where he sees the heel of a boot peeking out from the foliage.

**LEAD THUG** (grins, to Ares):

Fine by me. (nods toward the other thugs casually) Get him.

The three thugs draw their weapons and attack Ares. Ares is forced into a fight but he can easily hold his own against them. He gets in a few good swings, ducking under and over their blades. He seems to be enjoying the fight, a grin on his face.

While Ares is occupied with the fight with the other men, the lead thug makes his way around them towards the bush. The boy, realizing he's been found, jumps up and tries to bolt. The thug grabs his arm and stops him from running away. The force of the jerk knocks a scroll to the ground that had been tucked into his vest. It falls onto the bank of the lake. During this, the sound of clashing metal and grunting from Ares' fight behind them can still be heard.

The thug draws his sword and grabs the boy by the collar.

**LEAD THUG:**

You'll pay for stealing--boy.

**CUT TO**

A soldier--soldier #2 from earlier in the Teaser--riding on horseback through the forest.

**SOLDIER** (shouting):

Nicos!

**CUT TO**

The boy reaches for a dagger and tries to use it against the thug, jabbing it toward his right side but the thug knocks the dagger from his hand and laughs. He raises the sword and the boy struggles. The sound of clashing metal and

grunting behind them has now stopped. The thug pulls his hand back only to feel the tip of another sword touching the side of his neck. He pauses. Pull back to show Ares standing behind him holding his sword.

**ARES:**

I wouldn't move if I were you.



Ares continues to hold the sword to his neck as he moves around until he's facing the thug, stepping between the thug and the boy.

Behind them, soldier #2 rides into the clearing. Ares looks up at this and when he does, the thug snarls and attacks Ares while he's momentarily distracted. They cross blades a few times but Ares is clearly more powerful and more skilled than the thug. The boy runs over to the soldier who has ridden up. The soldier dismounts from his horse and embraces the boy in a hug in the background while Ares and the thug continue to fight.

Ares punches the thug a few times, and Ares is punched in the lip once causing it to bleed. He kicks back, knocking the thug to the ground, and his sword out of arms reach. The thug looks back to see the other three thugs lying on the ground, groaning--and further back to see the soldier standing next to the horse with the boy. He looks up at Ares.

**ARES:**

Unless you want to wake up to a nasty headache, I suggest you leave *quickly*.

The thug stares up at Ares then snarls, reaching for his sword. Before he has a chance to grab it and rise to his feet, we see through his eyes as Ares brings the hilt of his sword down toward the thug's forehead, knocking him out cold.

**ARES:**

And *that's* for the stew.

The soldier standing beside the boy watches Ares as Ares rubs his broken, bleeding lip.

**NICOS** (to the soldier):

He saved me, uncle.

**SOLDIER #2** (nods, looking at Ares):

I saw. (to Ares, sincere) Thank you.

Ares nods slowly. He sheathes his sword and this catches the soldier's attention, the red jewel on the hilt glinting in the sunlight. His eyes turn to recognition and admiration, then he bows. Ares is surprised by this, at first.



**SOLDIER #2:**

Lord Ares.

Nicos looks at Ares with realization, awestruck.

**ARES** (looks away, slightly deflated; to the soldier):

Not really anyone's lord anymore.

**SOLDIER #2** (rises to his feet):

The news of your mortality is well known. But there are those whose loyalty has not been shaken by it. (holds a hand to his heart) I am Pandion, a general who served you for many years...and still does.

**ARES** (nods):

Thanks.

He steps over the four unconscious bodies and walks up to the pot, the fire nearly out.

In the background, Nicos picks up the scroll lying on the bank of the lake, one end of it submerged in the water. Ares lifts the pot and finds a little stew left. He sighs.

**ARES** (to himself):

So much for lunch.

Pandion watches him.

**PANDION:**

We've heard you've been traveling with Xena. We've been searching for weeks.

**ARES:**

Why?

**PANDION:**

We need help to defeat a dangerous warlord.

**ARES** (sighs, slightly bitter and dejected):

And let me guess, you need Xena's help.

**PANDION** (shakes his head, straight-faced):

No. We need *yours*.

Ares looks back at him curiously, surprised and pleased.

Nicos walks up holding the scroll and hands it to Pandion. Pandion opens it and begins to read. He rolls up the scroll and looks at Ares.



**PANDION:**

Those men you fought are part of a much larger force led by a vicious warlord named Brygus who has been terrorizing the region of Attica for months, hurting anyone who gets in his way, disgracing your name...killing without question. Brygus has eluded everyone--no one knows where his fortress is, no one even knows what he looks like. (Pandion hands the scroll to Ares) Now we know *exactly* where he'll be. It's a message to some warlord he wants to join forces with. In a week's time, he'll be meeting this warlord in the town of Oenoe. Even if he doesn't make an appearance himself, it may give us a chance to take out some of his reinforcements. Better than we have done recently.

Ares looks over the scroll. Pandion kneels and pulls out his sword, placing it point down into the dirt.

**PANDION:**

This sword is always at your service, my lord. And there are still those loyal to you who would gladly follow you into battle, die in your name. You were the God of War; your presence will mean a great deal to those that still serve you if you come with me. (pause) Join us.

Slow zoom in on Ares' face as he ponders this, looking intrigued.



The whinny of a horse is heard off-camera. Ares and Pandion look over to see Xena riding into the clearing on Argo, a pack hanging from her shoulder. She slows Argo as she sees the unconscious men on the ground, the pot tilted over the dying fire, and Ares standing, with Pandion kneeling before him. Her expression is of surprised confusion as we:

**FADE OUT**

**ACT ONE**

**FADE IN**

Ares walks toward the pot of stew, Xena beside him.

**XENA:**

You're leaving?

**ARES** (looks over at her):

Just for a while. (looking into the pot) There's not much, but there should be enough stew for you, Gabrielle and Darion--I salvaged what I could.

Pandion walks up to Ares.

**PANDION:**

Lord Ares...we should be on our way if you're coming with us.

Behind them, the thugs have begun to stir.



Xena looks from Ares to Pandion and back looking uncertain.

**CUT TO**

Ares is standing next to Quirinus, his black stallion, who is already saddled and ready for travel. He puts a small loaf of bread in the saddlebag, then walks over to a rock and picks up his waterskin and hangs it over the saddlehorn.

On the edge of the campsite, Pandion and Nicos are waiting on horseback.

The thugs on the ground begin to stand. They see Ares and take off running. Pandion, Nicos, Ares and Xena see the men running off into the forest. The leader, who is the last to rise, points toward Ares, looking very menacing.

**LEAD THUG:**

This *isn't* over.

He snarls, then turns and follows the rest of the men out of the camp. Pan to Ares as he sighs, shaking his head, then turns back to his horse. Xena walks up to him.



**XENA** (slightly saddened, touching Quirinus' neck):

You don't want me to come with you? Together we could--

**ARES** (shakes his head, cutting her off softly):

No.

She's taken aback slightly. He puts his hand over hers.



**ARES:**

You need to stay and be there for Gabrielle. And Darion. Besides... Pandion is one of my followers. This is something I have to do on my own.

She nods slowly.

**XENA** (with a half-smile):  
Be safe.

She squeezes his fingers and then he raises her hand to his lips, kissing her knuckles.

**ARES** (a little emotional):  
You too.

Ares lets go of Xena's hand and steps back. He turns, mounting Quirinus. He grips the reigns and turns the horse around.

**XENA** (with a playful grin, trying to lighten the mood):  
Don't go starting any fights, now.

**ARES** (innocently):  
Who, me?

They chuckle, then grow serious.

**ARES:**  
I'll see you soon.

Xena nods, and Ares gallops off. Pandion and Nicos ride off with him. She watches until they've disappeared amongst the trees.



**XENA** (quietly):  
See you soon...

### ***DISSOLVE TO***

Ares and Pandion are riding through the forest, Nicos riding with Pandion.

The trees are dense. Up ahead the glimpse of stone becomes visible through the leaves. Ares and Pandion ride toward it and a stone temple slowly comes into view. Ares slows Quirinus' pace as he rides up to the temple. It looks old and dilapidated, covered in green vines that grow through cracks in the stones winding their way up to the roof of the building. Shrubbery nearly covers the entrance. It looks like it's been abandon for years.

The symbol of the God of War--a black dagger with two long prongs on a red background--is painted on the wooden doors. The paint is chipped and nearly worn off completely.

**PANDION:**

I guess when you leave a temple unattended for years it's not of much interest to Brygus.

**ARES:**

So he's been taking my temples for himself, huh.

**PANDION:**

Indeed. Destroying all of your possessions and replacing them with his own. In the last few months, he's taken six of your temples within seven leagues of here. No doubt he will take more before his reign is over.

**ARES:**

So he thinks he's a god?

**PANDION:**

I don't know--but he's a mortal with the *ego* of a god. Perhaps the most dangerous thing of all.

The sound of a vase breaking and men's laughter can be heard. Ares and Pandion turn toward the temple and see movement inside.

**ARES** (looks at Pandion):

What was that you were saying about Brygus having no interest?

Pandion shrugs.

Ares dismounts and walks up to the door.

**CUT TO**

Inside the temple, the place is covered in dust and cobwebs. Broken vases on the floor, the weapons that were once on the walls are gone, and even the symbols of war--skulls, bones--lie smashed amongst the rubble.

Half a dozen of Brygus' soldiers--much like the thugs from before but these men are better-armed--are standing around, laughing, as one of the men pulls a dusty banner down from the wall--red and with the same dagger symbol--throwing it on the ground and stomping on it.

**LEAD SOLDIER:**

To think the God of War used to call this place a sanctuary. Ha! Good riddance. As a god, he was a force to be reckoned with. As a mortal, he's nothing but a washed-up has-been.

**ARES** (off camera, faintly yet booming):

That's what *you* think.

The warriors look around, startled by the voice that seemed to come out of thin air. A few of them look nervous. Suddenly, the door of the temple bursts open, so hard that it falls creating a plumb of dust. Ares slowly walks into the temple as the dust settles, looking cocky and sure of himself--strutting very much like the God of War would. His sword is drawn, lying it across his shoulder casually, tapping the hilt with his thumb.

**ARES:**

That's *my* temple you're trespassing on.

The soldiers laugh.

**LEAD SOLDIER:**

*Your* temple? The *God of War* is no more. (looking Ares up and down, mockingly) Without your powers, you're not that impressive, you know that?



**ARES:**

We all change. (walks toward them, giving his sword a few good twirls) Sometimes for the better...

In a quick motion that only the God of War could be capable of, he swings and is able to simultaneously slice the lead soldier across the arm, leaving a large gash, and disarms him. The soldier's sword slides across the temple floor, stopping in a pile of rubble.

The soldier looks at the gash on his arm.

**ARES** (shrugs):

...sometimes for the worse.

Angering the lead soldier, he signals the attack. From the door, Pandion and Nicos can be seen walking up, looking in.

Ares counters the soldier's attack, dodging the blades and pushing them back. The debris under their feet makes it more difficult to fight on uneven ground, kicking up dust with each movement. Pandion and Nicos enter.

Ares knocks one of the warriors against the wall, and a metal shield still hanging from a hook teeters a bit but does not fall. Two other warriors attack Ares at once. He is able to disarm one of them quite easily while the other puts up more of a fight--ducking under Ares' blade and kicking Ares in the leg.

The lead soldier attacks Ares from behind, and Ares swings back, just as one of the other soldiers swings from the side. Ares dodges the blade and grabs the arm of the man at his side and twists his sword arm back nearly to the point of breaking it. At the same time, Ares uses his sword behind his back to deflect the blow from the leader.

Pandion attacks one of the soldiers and knocks him out, with Nicos' help who gives the soldier a swift kick to the head.

Ares twists the arm more until the man drops his sword and cries out in pain. Ares kicks him in the chest, then turns around toward the leader so that they are standing face to face. The leader swings and Ares deflects the blade. The leader charges forward and with a kick, pushes Ares back against the wall. The force causes the shield above him to fall. Ares leans to one side out of the way as it crashes to the ground.

Ares and the leader spar for a few more minutes. Ares' fighting skills are superior. He finally disarms the leader, knocking the sword out of reach and stepping on the blade.

**ARES** (moves in close to the leader's face, threatening):

You tell Brygus...that the *God of War* is still in business whether he's immortal or not.

He knocks the warrior out with a swift punch to the face. The rest of the warriors lie unconscious on the temple floor behind him.

Ares looks up at Pandion and Nicos.

The glint of metal at the base of the stone altar catches Ares' eye. He finds a small gold ornate dagger, the blade chipped and unpolished, the gold of the hilt tarnished and many of the jewels that had been embedded into the hilt have been removed leaving only empty holes behind.

He picks it up, staring at it reflectively and with a look of recognition but as if he doesn't know where he's seen it before. Then he looks around at the temple that was once magnificent but now is nothing more than a shadow of its former self

**ARES** (somewhat solemn, turning the dagger in his hand):  
How the mighty have fallen...

Pandion walks up.



**PANDION** (slapping a hand on Ares' shoulder in camaraderie):  
Not today.

Ares looks at him thoughtfully.

**CUT TO**

Dusk. Ares and Pandion (with Nicos) riding through a forest.

**PANDION:**  
We'll be at the camp before dark.

**ARES:**  
So this temple you're trying to reclaim, which one is it?

**PANDION:**  
Your greatest and oldest temple. (pause) The one that stands on the hill of the Areopagus.

Ares stares at him, surprised and Pandion nods slowly.

**PANDION:**  
It was Brygus' crowning achievement to take that hill. At night, he captured the temple and stripped it of its ancient, sacred artifacts, setting them ablaze in a bonfire so large that the glow from the flames could be seen from the neighboring city of Plataea, some say. King Actaeon sent his army to reclaim it but many lives were lost. Brygus' army was more powerful than they could imagine. Actaeon's devotion to you was strong but the safety of his people and his city was more important. So he sent word to followers of yours all over the southern part of Greece, hoping that those still devoted to you and the cause would be able to rise up and bring Brygus down.

After a moment of soaking this in, Ares nods slowly, chuckling a little.

**ARES:**

Looks like I may have more work cut out for me than I thought.

**PANDION** (nods slowly):

Brygus' main purpose has been to destroy the reputation of the God of War.

**[FLASHBACK]**

Montage of clips:

-- warriors running through a town, rounding up women, children and men, killing many people.

-- several warriors drag a bunch of villagers in front of a platform in a village and are forced to kneel.

**PANDION** (voice-over):

Putting fear and hatred into people, taking many of your temples as a shrine to himself, and killing whatever loyalty to you that they had.

-- A banner with the symbol of the God of War is set on fire in front of a temple. The priests and priestesses watch with sadness as Brygus' men stand laughing as the banner turns to ash in the flames.

**[END OF FLASHBACK]**

**PANDION:**

Our numbers are a lot less than what they used to be when you were still a god, and we've suffered a lot of defeats over the last few months. When Actaeon put me in charge of this army, I was prepared to do whatever it took to build up a force strong enough to get the Areopagus back, and ultimately to defeat Brygus. (smiles) With you here now, leading us, we will not fail.

**ARES** (slows his horse):

Leading?



**PANDION:**

Of course. I am giving you command. It's what the God of War is best at, right?

Ares stares at him then nods slowly.

**CUT TO**

A small, makeshift campsite set up at the edge of the forest. Ares and Pandion ride in. There are half a dozen men surrounding a campfire, preparing a meal. Beside one of the tents, there is a wagon with two large horses. The men look up to see Pandion, Ares and Nicos ride in. One of the men, an older, scruffy, blonde man, turns around when he sees them. This is Zarek.

Pandion stops the horse and Nicos dismounts, coming up to Zarek.

**ZAREK:**

Did you get it?

**NICOS** (nods, holding up the scroll):

I did.

**ZAREK** (smiles):

That's my boy.

Zarek pulls him into a brief hug which the boy seems to protest but goes along with it anyway.

**NICOS:**

It could have ended worse than it did. Ares saved my life, Dad.

Zarek looks curious.

**ZAREK:**

Ares. The...former God of War?



**ARES** (grins, walking up):

Is there any other?

**ZAREK** (genuine):

Thank you for saving my son. (pause) I--didn't expect to see you during this war.

**ARES:**

Neither did I.

**PANDION** (walking up):

He can be of great help to us.

**ZAREK** (nods slowly):

He can. More than half of this army are former worshipers of yours. Some top ranking generals, most simple foot soldiers, but all devoted to the cause. (slaps a hand on Pandion's shoulder) Pandion, here, was one of your most elite generals in this province.



**ARES:**

And what about you? Where do you sit among the ranks of my followers?

**ZAREK:**

I gave up worshipping the God of War long ago. I had seen too much of war. Nearly lost my life during a battle on the night my son was born. I realized that my family meant more to me than the life of a warrior. I haven't raised a sword in your name in...over 16 years. (pause) But this...is different.

Ares looks around at the camp.

**ARES (to Pandion):**

This can't be the entire army.

**PANDION (chuckles):**

Oh no. There are about seventy more where these came from. We're traveling to a nearby village of loyalists to retrieve a stash of weapons and armor we liberated from one of your temples two weeks ago, just before Brygus took control of it. We hid them for safe keeping until we could return.

Zarek looks at Pandion.

**ZAREK:**

While you were out, we've had news of the village of Arcan.

**PANDION (cautiously):**

And?

**ZAREK:**

It's been wiped out, just like the others.

**PANDION (troubled):**

The more villages that come under attack, the more soldiers we lose--either to fear, or to the need to protect their own families. (takes the scroll from Nicos) With this, we may be able to stop him before he can do any more damage. (looks at Ares) And with Ares leading us, we cannot fail.

Ares looks at them as they slowly begin to chant "Ares! Ares! Ares!" and pumping their fists in the air with vigor. He begins to smile, soaking it in.

**CUT TO**

Inside a tent. Ares stands next to Pandion with a goblet of wine in his hands, sipping it occasionally. There is a map lying on the table that has circles in some places on it, some with "X's" through them and others without. Ares, Pandion and Zarek are hovering over it.

**PANDION (pointing to the map):**

The Areopagus lies north of here. These are the villages that have been destroyed. (indicates the "X's") If there's a pattern to these attacks, we haven't found it yet.

**ZAREK:**

Even if there is, we have no way of knowing where he'll attack next.

**PANDION (shakes head):**

No.

**ARES:**

Maybe we don't have to. (Pandion and Zarek look at him) We go to these villages and prepare them--keep men stationed in each village to ward off attackers if and when it happens.

**PANDION** (shakes head):

You haven't seen what these attacks are like. They hit like some natural disaster, annihilating everything in its path.

Ares looks troubled.

**ZAREK:**

We figure Brygus has been the cause of these attacks as he's the only one around here powerful enough to do something like this, but we don't know what his purpose has been. Many of these villages had no affiliation with the God of War. It's all so random.

**ARES** (firmly):

Whatever the reason, we'll stop him.

**CUT TO**

Day. Ares, Pandion, Zarek and the rest of the men are riding through the forest. Nicos is driving the wagon.

Pandion looks over at Ares silently, clearly something is on his mind.

**ARES** (noticing Pandion's look out of the corner of his eye):

Yes?

**PANDION:**

Nothing, I was just wondering... Why didn't Xena come with you? I've...heard you two have been spending time together. I figured she'd--

**ARES:**

Xena has her own duties, just as I do. I told her I needed to do this on my own.

**PANDION:**

You mean, you needed war--and she couldn't be a part of that.

**ARES:**

What are you talking about? She's fought in plenty of wars--still does.

**PANDION** (quietly):

But you feel its pull...in a way she never will.

Ares is silent for a moment.

**ARES:**

Maybe...

They hear the sounds of fighting. Ares and Pandion ride on faster while the others follow. Nicos stays with the wagon.

**CUT TO**

In a clearing, five warriors in simple brown leather are fighting back against twelve soldiers in silver armor--Brygus' men. Two of the warriors are older men with graying hair and the other three are younger ranging from late 20's-early 40's. Ares and Pandion arrive in the clearing and attack Brygus' men, Ares' soldier's following.

Ares takes on two of Brygus' men while Pandion and the other men take on the rest. Ares dodges their blades and Pandion and his other soldiers can hold their own well. Ares parries a sword maneuver from one of the men and stabs another with his sword. As he pulls his blade out, he hears the shout of one of the younger men. He looks up and sees one of the older men fighting back against one of Brygus' soldiers. The older man is able to parry the sword thrusts but is clearly growing weaker. Ares knocks out the man he is fighting and charges forward but is stopped when an eager young soldier of Brygus jumps in his way, grinning and twirling his sword. Ares is forced into another fight.

Pandion and the other men are busy with their soldiers. The older man has his sword knocked from his hands and is pushed to the ground. The soldier of Brygus moves toward him and holds out his sword.

**YOUNGER WARRIOR** (seeing the old man on the ground):

No!

The younger man runs up and pushes himself in front of the older man. He looks up at the soldier.

**YOUNGER WARRIOR:**

Please. Don't hurt him. We'll leave, if that's what you want.

**BRYGUS' SOLDIER:**

Sorry. Not how it works.

The soldier grabs the young man by the collar and lifts him to his feet, tossing him aside like a used rag. He turns to the old man.

**OLDER MAN** (begs):

Please.

Ares breaks through the men he is fighting and rushes forward just as Brygus' soldier brings the sword down onto the man, stabbing him in the stomach. He screams in pain, and the young man screams as well, charging forward. Brygus' soldier turns and without a thought, slashes the young man across the chest. He falls down, landing on top of the older man, their wounds bleeding profusely. They both die.

Ares watches this, clearly shocked and disturbed. One of Brygus' soldiers charges Ares, taking advantage of his distraction, and slices him across the arm. Ares turns to face him--but just then, Pandion stabs the soldier and he dies.

In a quick, angry motion, Ares turns toward the soldier who had killed the two men. With one swipe of his sword, he slices it across the soldier's throat. The soldier brings his hands to his neck, blood seeping out through his fingers, and falls to the ground. Ares watches the soldier gasp and die and then looks once more at the two fallen men as we:

**FADE OUT**

## ACT TWO

**FADE IN**

A stream. Ares is crouched next to it, pulling a cloth through the water, dabbing it on the gash on his arm and then slowly wrapping it around the wound. He winces slightly at the sting. Pandion walks up from behind.

**PANDION:**

Need any help?

**ARES:**

I've got it.

He ties the cloth around his arm, his movements jerky.

**PANDION:**

Those men who were fighting Brygus' soldiers are followers of yours. They were coming to join us. The army has grown by three.

**ARES** (still not looking at Pandion):

Good.

**PANDION:**

The men are ready to move out whenever you are.

Ares nods, still not looking at Pandion.

**PANDION** (probing):

Are you all right?

**ARES** (turns to Pandion, his eyes cold):

I may be mortal but I don't do sensitive chats.

Ares stands up and walks away. Pandion looks after him.

**CUT TO**

Ares and his army ride into the village of loyalists. They enter the village and dismount. Pandion leads the way.

**CUT TO**

Inside a building. Pandion and Ares enter a room.

A man with black hair smiles as Pandion and Ares come in. Pandion smiles as well, embracing the man in a friendly hug.

**PANDION:**

Spiro, my friend. It's good to see you.

**SPIRO:**

I take it you've come for the weapons?

**PANDION** (nods):

So Brygus hasn't found out we have them then, I take it. (Spiro shakes his head) That's good news.

**SPIRO:**

They're in the cellar, locked away.

Spiro walks over to a drawer, opens it and pulls out a key that's hidden in the bottom under a board meant to hide it from view. He hands it to Pandion.

**SPIRO:**

May they help you in this war.

**PANDION:**

Oh, they will. (turns to Ares) Having the God of War on our side doesn't hurt, either.

Spiro looks at Ares surprised. Ares nods.

**SPIRO** (nods slightly):

Great Ares. It's an honor.

Ares acknowledges him, then follows Pandion to the back where there is a door. He puts the key in the lock and turns it. The door unlatches and he pulls it open with a creak. There are stairs leading down into a dark cellar. Pandion grabs a lit torch and heads down with Ares.

**CUT TO**

Inside the cellar. Pandion holds up the torch and enters a small room. Ares looks ahead of them, seeing a stash of very nice and polished weapons and a few breastplates and leather armor.

**ARES:**

Impressive. All this is from one temple?

**PANDION:**

The one on the coast. We heard Brygus was in the area. My men and I were able to get there and remove them before he took the temple. Our weapons and armor are old and outdated. With these we'll have a better chance.

Pandion walks up to a shiny bronze breastplate and brown leather armor with bronze accents sitting against the pile of swords. The breastplate has a swirl design on each side engraved into the metal. He holds up the breastplate, examining it, and then turns around.

**PANDION:**

This should be right for you--as a commander. (he holds it up toward Ares)



**ARES (smirks):**

Not really my style.

**PANDION:**

Not as a god--but as a mortal...better to come prepared, right?

Close up of Ares' face as he looks thoughtful.

**CUT TO**

Outside the village. There are men walking back and forth, carrying swords, shields and armor from the building and depositing them in the back of the wagon. Ares and Pandion walk out from another building off to the side, carrying a small bag of bread, fruit and a dead chicken.

A young boy stands next to Quirinus. Ares walks up and takes the reins. The boy looks back, wide-eyed.

**YOUNG BOY:**

I watered and fed him, sir.

**ARES (nods):**

Thanks, kid.

**YOUNG BOY (eager):**

Is there anything else I can do for you, Lord Ares?

**ARES (sighs):**

How about just "Ares"?

The young boy nods, staring at him open-mouthed. A man walks up and pulls the boy back from Ares.

**MAN** (grins):

Sorry about that. (ruffles the boy's hair) He gets a little excited around the great and famous. If there is anything you need, just let us know.

Ares nods and the man leads the boy away. Ares turns to Pandion.

**ARES:**

So, if I said "jump" they'd ask "how high."

**PANDION** (smiles):

Pretty much.

Ares glances over at a few village girls, in their teens and twenties, watching him from afar.

**ARES:**

Wonder if I could get used to this.

The girls notice his look and giggle, looking away.

**ARES** (continues):

At least until I got tired of all the fawning.

Pandion chuckles.

**PANDION:**

Still, must feel nice--a village full of people who still worship you.

**MALE VOICE** (off-camera, behind Ares):

That's right. People who would not turn their backs on you even in exchange for protection from the goddess.

Ares turns to see a middle-aged man standing behind him.

**ARES:**

Goddess?

**MAN:**

Yes, the goddess Artemis.

Ares stands shocked.

**ARES:**

Artemis...was here.

Behind Ares, Zarek comes walking up. He stops in his tracks.

**MAN** (shakes his head):

No, but her emissaries came by this morning. Offering a chance to worship her and be granted her protection in return.

**ARES:**

Protection from what?

**MAN:**

The thugs and bandits that have been raiding villages in these parts. (nods toward Pandion) You should know all about that. (Pandion nods)



**ZAREK** (from behind them, scoffs with a bit of anger in his voice):  
I wouldn't trust *anything* that lying witch says.

**MAN:**  
We don't. And besides (looks at Ares), Ares is the only one who has our respect. (nods slowly) *Even* as a mortal.

**ZAREK** (concerned):  
Have these emissaries visited other villages?

**MAN:**  
I don't know. But...there's a village not far from here that began worshipping her about a month back. That's all I know.

He holds up his folded hands to Ares as a gesture of respect, and walks off.

**ZAREK** (looks toward Ares):  
Any village devoted to Artemis deserves to be destroyed.

Ares turns sharply toward him.

**ARES:**  
And what good would that do?

**ZAREK:**  
If they're blind enough to think Artemis will *save* them, they're a danger.

**PANDION:**  
You can't go around killing innocent people, Zarek, no matter what their faith.

**ZAREK** (getting angry):  
No follower of Artemis deserves to be called innocent!

**ARES** (losing patience):  
We don't have time for this.

Ares turns away and starts to walk.

**ZAREK:**  
You really *have* gone soft, haven't you?

Ares turns, staring him down.

**ZAREK** (continues):  
The God of War would have agreed it's better for everyone. She *is* the reason you lost your godhood, isn't she?



Ares looks down, the memory striking a chord.

**ZAREK** (continues):

Doesn't that deserve payback?

Ares moves closer to him in a threatening manner.



**ARES:**

This is *my* army now, and I say we're not attacking villages. Is that clear?

Zarek eyes him, then turns and walks off.

**ARES** (looks at Pandion):

We've got everything we need. Let's go.

**DISSOLVE TO**

Ares riding out in front of the men, Nicos driving the wagon behind Ares. Pandion rides beside Ares and Zarek and a few other men are behind them. They ride out of the village.

**CUT TO**

A dark room with a few lit candles set into the stones. Weapons and shields hang on the walls.

Several of Brygus' men--the thugs that Ares had fought at the campsite and those he fought at his temple--are walking down the hall. Some look worse for wear--limping, cuts and bruises on their heads and their faces. The camera follows them as they come to a large wooden door. A big man stands in front of it. He crosses his arms.

**THUG:**

We have some information for Brygus.

**GUARD:**

You know the rules. No one gets in to see Brygus unless it's through me.

**SOLDIER #1** (sighs):

Then you tell him that Ares has returned.

**SOLDIER #2:**

The way he fought... if I didn't know better, I would have thought he was still a god.

The guard stares at them, looking intrigued.

**DISSOLVE TO**

A darker room, where a throne sits and a large map extends the length of the back wall.

The guard walks in.

**GUARD:**

Brygus.

Pan around to see a man standing near the throne, his back to the guard and his appearance shadowed by the dim light.

**BRYGUS** (deep and commanding voice):

Yes?

**GUARD:**

Some of your men have just reported seeing Ares in the area--apparently fighting with Actaeon's band of has-been worshipers.

**BRYGUS:**

Ares. (chuckles) I wondered when he would get mixed up in all of this. Took him longer than I thought--but it's about time.

**GUARD:**

He also knows about your plans to ally with the warlord Cletus in Oenoe.

**BRYGUS:**

They have the scroll?

**GUARD** (nervously):

I'm afraid they do, my lord.

Brygus is silent; pan to the guard, who gulps anxiously, and then back to Brygus.

**BRYGUS:**

Looks like a change of plans.

**GUARD:**

My lord?

**BRYGUS:**

I'll explain it all in time. (he pours himself a glass of wine) First, bring Aneus here. (his voice grows lower and more menacing) It's time we sent Ares a message.

**CUT TO**

A medium sized camp. Tents are gathered around an old abandon wooden fortress in an open field. Many of the men wear black, silver and red armor as Pandion does, but there are also several warrior women in the mix. Most of the men look to be in their early to mid-20's--young and rather inexperienced looking when it comes to war.

Pandion, Ares and the others and the wagon driver come riding into view, along the edge of the camp toward the wooden fortress. As they pass by, some of the men and women look up to see Ares on horseback riding side-by-side with Pandion. They give Ares curious looks, whispering to each other as Ares and Pandion make their way to the fortress entrance.

**CUT TO**

The other warriors have dispersed amongst the rest of the army. In the background, the wagon has stopped and several men are helping to unload the stash of weapons.

**CUT TO**

Ares and Pandion are walking through the inner courtyard of the wooden fortress. It looks more like the interior of a training camp.

A few men are training along one wall, with swords and staffs. Among the group is one woman, in dark brown leather and long brown hair pulled back into a ponytail. She stands out among the other soldiers. She swings and dodges as they spar with her. She's agile in her movements, ducking under the blades and jumping over them. She kicks out her feet and sends one of the men to the ground.

She sees Pandion and Ares walking past. Ares watches her intently. She jumps out of the circle of men and walks up to them, sheathing her sword.

**PANDION:**

Practicing, I see.

**WARRIOR WOMAN:**

Every day. Keeps the skills sharp. (she glances at Ares) And who is this?

**PANDION:**

He might just be the advantage that we've been looking for, Iona. Now, we have *Ares himself* on our side.

Iona looks at Ares.

**IONA:**

The former God of War. (looking him up and down, cheeky grin) Not bad.

Iona walks on and Ares watches her go.

**PANDION** (grins at Ares):

She's one of the best fighters we've got. Not that she'd measure up to Xena, but--

**ARES** (quietly, thoughtful):

No one would.

Pandion chuckles.

**CUT TO**

Evening. Ares and Pandion are walking side by side through the camp. Ares surveys the army. There are many men preparing meals around fires, some are getting in a light workout of swordplay before dinner. Ares notices that some, while they spar, aren't graceful in their movements. Some look very inexperienced.

**ARES** (glancing at two men who look in their early 20's):

These men haven't seen much war, have they?

**PANDION:**

Some of them haven't seen *any*. (Off Ares' surprised look) I told you before that we've had a lot of setbacks in our war against Brygus. The worst of these was that we lost many experienced fighters These men--they have plenty of zeal for the cause, but I'm not so sure they have the skill to fight for it.

**ARES** (with some bitterness):

What cause? Fighting for a god who's not a god anymore?



**PANDION** (stops walking, looking at Ares):

It's not immortality or fireballs that make people devoted. It's what you inspire in people, loyalty and devotion, courage and fire. The very essence of what you were will always be there. Maybe as a mortal you affect them more now than ever. You're not so unattainable and mysterious anymore. You've become one of us.

Pandion walks on, leaving Ares behind looking thoughtful and moved.

**DISSOLVE TO**

Inside the fortress, Ares is seated at a dining table with the other generals, eating and drinking and having a good time.

**DISSOLVE TO**

Iona walks down the hallway in the fortress with Ares at her side. She stops at a door.

**IONA:**

This is your room. If you need anything, don't hesitate to ask. (pause) It's good to have the God of War leading us in our fight.

Ares nods in response and Iona walks away. He opens the door and enters.

It's a small room but furnished nicely, with a sizable bed, a window and a table with a plate of fruit on it, and a mug of ale. Ares walks towards the table and takes a bite of an apple, then looks out the window, the camp below. It's dusk; soldiers are wandering around the camp, many of them gathering around large fires where they have their meals. The faint sounds of conversation can be heard.

Ares turns and looks toward the bed where the bronze armor lies. He walks over to it and picks up the breastplate.

**CUT TO**

Ares standing in front of a long tainted mirror wearing the suit of armor. He looks at himself approvingly then turns reflective.

**ARES:**

Xena...what would you say if you saw me now...

**CUT TO**

Close-up on Xena, her hair wet, water dripping down her face. The camera pulls back to show Gabrielle sitting next to Xena at the edge of a stream, her legs crossed and Samuel propped up against her. She cups her hand into the water and pours the water over Samuel, giving him a bath. Close-up on Samuel giggling as water trickles down his skin. He splashes his chubby little hands into the water and splashes Gabrielle. She smiles, then glances at Xena.

**GABRIELLE:**

Do you wonder where he is?

**XENA:**  
Who?



**GABRIELLE** (smiles):  
Who do you think? You said he's off helping his followers on some mission, huh? (Xena nods) Strange to think of people following him even now... (thinks) You know what's funny?

**XENA:**  
Hmm?

**GABRIELLE:**  
There used to be a time when I *really* wished he'd leave us alone. And now... now, when he's not around something doesn't feel right.

Xena looks thoughtful.

**DARION** (off-camera):  
I miss him, too.

Xena and Gabrielle turn to see Darion standing behind them, leaning on a large stick.

**XENA:**  
Darion. How's the scouting?

**DARION:**  
Good. Everything's clear. How was your swim?



**XENA** (smiles):  
Nice and relaxing.

Darion twirls the stick, with moves somewhat reminiscent of Gabrielle's moves with the staff.

**GABRIELLE:**

You're getting good at that. (Then, to Samuel, looking down at him) Okay. I think we're done.

She picks up Samuel and stands up, walking over to a log where her pack lies. She dries him off with a cloth, then rummages through her pack.

**XENA:**

Better get moving. We want to get to the village before nightfall if we're going to get supplies.

**DISSOLVE TO**

Xena and Gabrielle, with Darion riding Argo behind Xena and Samuel in the sling on Gabrielle's back, ride toward the village.

**DISSOLVE TO**

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion ride into the village. It looks deserted. Darion jumps down from the horse and Gabrielle follows him, carrying Samuel in the sling. Xena comes up behind them, looking cautious.

**DARION:**

Where is everyone?

The faint beat of drums is heard in the distance. Xena looks over and sees smoke rising from behind some buildings.

**XENA:**

Come on. (to Darion and Gabrielle) You two stay behind me. Could be trouble.

**CUT TO**

The village square. A large crowd is gathered in a circle around a firepit, billowing smoke rising from it. Several young girls, about sixteen years of age, are dancing around the fire wearing white dresses with green sashes. They dance with rhythm and purpose, throwing their heads back and forth, moving to the beat of the drum and a pan flute being played.

Xena and Gabrielle walk up to the back of the crowd. Darion sneaks his way through the mass of people toward the front, despite Gabrielle's attempt to stop him. He stands watching as the girls dance in front of the fire. Xena and Gabrielle watch from the back.

A woman in a long green robe with a white sash stands off to the side of the fire, holding a scroll.

**WOMAN** (commanding voice):

Today we celebrate these girls as they prepare to enter womanhood.

The girls stop dancing and walk toward the woman. The woman holds out a wreath of branches and puts one on each girl's head.

Pan back to show Xena and Gabrielle watching with curiosity.

**WOMAN** (commanding voice):

By the grace of the goddess we bestow upon them the duties, responsibilities, challenges and joys that will shape their lives in the years to come as they become wives and mothers themselves.

The people cheer and the music grows louder. Suddenly, a gust of wind whips through the square, and the dress on one of the girls catches fire. There are gasps of terror and the music stops. A middle-aged man and woman rush toward the girl. Terrified, the girl screams and runs, crashing into another girl--a child of about eight--whose clothes catch fire as well. The two girls are now running in opposite directions, screaming. Xena cartwheels after the first girl, grabs her and throws her into a trough full of water.

Pan to Darion, who jumps in the path of the eight-year-old girl, grabs her, throws her down and beats down the flames. A moment later her parents run up, muttering almost incoherent thanks.

**GIRL** (to Darion):  
Are you a hero?

Darion seems slightly at a loss for words, then nods.

**DARION:**  
I'd like to be. (looks back at Xena and Gabrielle, then at the girl) I travel with the best.

Pan to Xena and Gabrielle, who approach.

**GABRIELLE** (to Darion, with quiet pride):  
Good job.

**MAN** (the father of the girl Darion rescued):  
Thank you for your help. I'm Makis, the chief elder of this village. (points to the woman) My wife, Rena.

Xena and Gabrielle nod.

**RENA:**  
You helped our daughter Ilana, and this village. Our home is open if you'd like a place to stay, or if there's anything else you need... (noticing their tired appearance) some hot food, a bath?

**GABRIELLE** (nods):  
Thank you for your hospitality.

**XENA:**  
A home-cooked meal does sound nice.

The woman nods, smiling.

### ***DISSOLVE TO***

Night. Inside a small but cozy house. Xena, Gabrielle, and Darion are seated around a table (with Samuel in a basket next to Gabrielle), Makis and Ilana seated across from them. An older girl, about sixteen--she's one of the girls who participated in the ceremony from before--walks into the dining room, still wearing the wreath on her head. Makis smiles as she walks up and he gives her a kiss on the cheek.

**MAKIS:**  
So, Eleri--how does it feel to be a grown woman?

**ELERI:**  
Wonderful, Daddy.

**GABRIELLE:**  
So this was a coming of age ceremony?

**ELERI** (nods):  
It's a rite all girls must pass. It makes us prepared for our future and our place in this world. (curious) Didn't you ever have one?

**GABRIELLE:**  
No. (she glances at Xena who gives her a quizzical glance, then back at Eleri)

**ELERI:**  
Then how did you know when you were a grown-up?



**GABRIELLE** (slightly at a loss for words):

I--guess I'd rather become a grown-up when I know I'm ready than when someone else says I am.

Eleri nods uncertainly, a little confused by Gabrielle's answer. She sits down at the table across from Gabrielle.

Rena walks into the room carrying a plate with a roasted bird and vegetables and sets it on the table.

**MAKIS:**

That looks wonderful.

Rena smiles and sits down at the table.

Darion reaches out for a piece of meat but Makis and Rena look at him.

**RENA** (kind, but firm):

We say grace before we eat.

Darion pulls his hand back and looks at Xena and Gabrielle, puzzled. Rena looks over at Eleri.

**RENA:**

Eleri, will you?

**ELERI:**

Yes, mother.

Eleri folds her hands in front of her face and looks down in prayer, closing her eyes. Rena, Makis and Ilana do the same. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion watch silently.

**ELERI:**

We thank the goddess for this wonderful meal, and for the blessings she bestows on us. May we be reminded everyday of her gifts and treasure them. Praise Artemis.

Xena and Gabrielle glance at each other, shocked. Darion looks slightly nervous.

**RENA, MAKIS AND ILANA** (quietly, together):

Praise Artemis.

Eleri, Rena, Makis and Ilana open their eyes.

**RENA** (smiles):

Now, let's eat. (she sees the looks on Xena and Gabrielle's faces) Is something wrong?

**XENA** (unsure):

No.

Gabrielle looks above the table and sees a small statue of a woman archer, her hand pulled back on the bow, ready to release an arrow into the sky. There are two burning candles on either side of her. In the background, we see Rena slicing off pieces of meat and putting them on the plates.

**GABRIELLE:**

You worship Artemis?

**MAKIS** (matter-of-factly):

Yes. She protects us and guides us. Why?



**GABRIELLE:**

We-- (looks at Xena, then back at Rena) we just haven't met any worshipers of Artemis in...a long time. Are there others in this village who worship her, too?

The camera pulls in on Rena's face as she smiles a beatific smile.

**RENA:**

Oh yes. Everyone.

Close-up on Xena's shocked face as we:

**FADE OUT**

**ACT THREE**

**FADE IN**

A small bedroom. Gabrielle is lying in bed. Xena walks over to a bed across from her setting her armor and boots on the ground beside the bed. She sits down, sighing.

**XENA:**

Artemis...

**GABRIELLE** (turns on her side, leaning on her elbow):

Can't stop thinking about it, huh?



**XENA:**

I can't imagine... (trails off) She must be controlling them.

**GABRIELLE** (sits up in bed):

Xena...they're just people. We haven't heard from Artemis in months. Maybe...they're telling the truth. Maybe Artemis *has* done some good for them. For once.

Xena lies back in her bed, looking up at the ceiling.

**XENA:**

You really expect me to believe that?

Gabrielle lies back, too.

**GABRIELLE:**

We can't just condemn these people because of their faith.

Xena looks over at Gabrielle.

**XENA:**

We won't. (firm) We'll just keep an eye on them.

Pan back for a wide shot of the two of them lying in bed, then move out the window to see a view of the full moon.

**DISSOLVE TO**

Day. Xena is walking through the village. It's bustling with people going about their lives. A woman carrying a basket of fruit walks by. Xena passes by a shopkeeper who tries to sell her cooking knives.

At the edge of the village in a small sheltered courtyard. A wooden shrine stands surrounded by a garden of blue flowers. Xena walks up to the shrine and sees a small painted stone statue of Artemis at the back surrounded by incense candles. A silver basin stands at the entrance of the shrine with water in it. A rack of scrolls sits on the altar in front of the statue.

Xena walks up and looks at the statue.

**XENA** (muttering to the statue):

You've got this village wrapped around your little finger, haven't you?

She takes one of the scrolls and opens it up. The words have been written with silver ink, glittering in the light of the candles.

**XENA** (holding it up, reading):

By the grace of the goddess, protect us. Guide us. Though the road may look dark, you are our path to light. You are our hope, our savior. Without you, we are nothing--

Xena rolls her eyes.

**XENA** (drops the scroll onto the altar):

Wonderful.

**BOY** (off-camera):

Hey!

Xena turns back and sees a teenage boy behind her.

**BOY** (angrily):

Those are sacred scrolls--they must be handled with respect. (pause) Apologize.

**XENA** (sighs):

Sorry.

**BOY** (shakes his head):

Not to me. (nods toward the statue) To her.

Xena grits her teeth and turns toward the statue.

**XENA:**

Sorry, (forcing the words to come out) goddess.

Xena turns and leaves the shrine rolling her eyes as she goes. Behind her, the boy rolls the scroll up and places it back on the rack, giving Xena a long hostile look.

**CUT TO**

Rena is in her garden beside her house. Darion is sitting with Ilana in the grass, showing her something that he had carved. She looks intrigued and he smiles.

Gabrielle walks into the garden. She looks over at Darion and Ilana sitting and talking, then walks up to Rena.

**GABRIELLE:**

They're really getting along.

**RENA** (pulling a weed from the ground):

Ilana admires him because he was brave.

**GABRIELLE** (she sits down on a bench, across from Rena):

Can I ask you something?

**RENA:**

Sure.

**GABRIELLE:**

It's about Artemis. (Rena looks up at her) To tell you the truth...Xena and I *were* a little surprised last night when we heard you worshiped her. It's just...we happen to know a not-so-friendly side of her.

**RENA** (stands up and sits down next to Gabrielle):

What did she do?

**GABRIELLE** (looks down):

It's a long story.

**RENA:**

She must have had reasons.

**GABRIELLE** (looking off into the distance and nods):

She did...

**RENA:**

Gabrielle, Artemis has done a lot of good for this village, and many of the villages around here. She protects us.



**GABRIELLE:**

Protects you from what?

**RENA:**

This part of Greece has been plagued by raiders' vicious attacks on villages large and small alike. Not much is known about the attacks, only that those villages *never* survive. Everyone is killed and the village is burnt to the ground as if it had never existed. There was a sheep herder who, one evening while out in his field tending to his flock, saw a huge plume of smoke and fire where his village was. When he went back, he found the ground charred and everything turned to ash.

**GABRIELLE** (horrified):

But who...?

**RENA:**

No one knows who did it or why.

Pan to Gabrielle for a close-up; she looks bewildered and appalled.

**RENA** (continues):

Many of us spent many days in fear, wondering if our village would be the next. Then a messenger from Artemis came and told us that we would be protected from these raiders if we worshiped her.

**GABRIELLE:**

And you agreed.

**RENA:**

Not at once. Most of us didn't know much about Artemis, except that she was the goddess of the hunt and of the Amazons, a maiden who submitted to no male. Then she sent a sign..

**GABRIELLE** (intrigued):

What sign?

**RENA:**

The neighboring village, Andres, had just pledged their devotion to her. One night, two of our young men were out hunting by moonlight. They saw an army marching through the forest heading for the village. Out of fear, they hid and watched as the men arrived at the gates. When they were about to attack, a bright light engulfed the village. Artemis appeared before them and the light that shone from her form was so blinding that the two men had to shield their eyes. The warriors fled back into the forest. (pause) That's when we knew we could trust the Goddess to protect us from all harm.

Gabrielle gives her a thoughtful look.

**CUT TO**

Inside a room in Rena's house. Gabrielle is standing by the window; Xena is sitting on the bed, looking thoughtful.

**XENA:**

So this is how Artemis is gathering followers.

**GABRIELLE:**

You think she's got something to do with the attacks?

**XENA:**

Maybe. I'm going to go out to one of those destroyed villages and find out.

**GABRIELLE:**

We're going. Samuel's asleep; I'll ask Darion to check up on him.

**CUT TO**

Xena and Gabrielle riding through a forest.

**CUT TO**

A young woman and young man are dragged along a dirt path in the forest, each held by two men as they try to struggle. A person in a hooded black robe, visible only from the back, walks ahead of them. The young woman cries out, "No!" but the man dragging her clamps a hand over her mouth.

They are dragged out into a clearing where a long stone slab sits under a tree, and shoved to their knees near the slab. The person in the black robe stops, turns around, and pulls the hood down. It is a woman of about forty, with a clear air of authority about her. There is a band around her hair decorated with a silver half-moon, and a silver laurel branch is embroidered on the front of her robe. She pulls out a dagger.

**WOMAN IN BLACK** (shakes her head, disappointed):

Hilaera. (the young woman looks up, an expression of fear and desperation on her face) You have disgraced the name of the goddess, defiled the purity of her sanctuary, and broken your sacred duties as a priestess by indulging in your...*passion* for this man. (She spits out the word "passion" with obvious disgust; Hilaera hangs her head in shame) The goddess must be appeased...in blood.

She nods to the men, who grab Hilaera's arms, haul her to her feet and drag her, struggling, to the slab. They force her down on it and shackle her hands and feet. The woman in black approaches her, holding the dagger.

**YOUNG MAN:**

No!!! Please, spare her life. Kill me!

**WOMAN IN BLACK:**

Oh, we will. But first, you'll watch *her* die.

**HILAERA** (looking toward the young man, tears in her eyes):

Forgive me...

The woman in black raises the dagger over Hilaera's chest.

Close-up on Hilaera's face as she closes her eyes and grimaces, preparing for the blow.

Close-up of the dagger, swooping down.

There is a sudden swoosh and a sai appears across the screen, knocking the dagger out of the woman's hand as it is carried away by the prongs of the sai right into a tree behind them. The woman looks at it in shock and anger, then turns back to find Gabrielle standing face to face with him, Xena by her side.

**GABRIELLE:**

You really shouldn't play with sharp things. Someone could get hurt.

**WOMAN:**

Who are *you* to interfere? *This* is justice.

**XENA:**

Not where *we're* from.

Xena throws her chakram, which shatters Hilaera's shackles--first on the hands, then on the ankles--and comes back to Xena. Hilaera sits up with a gasp, rubbing her wrists. Meanwhile, Gabrielle charges the guards holding the young man and downs them with a couple of swift kicks, then helps the young man to his feet. Hilaera jumps down from the slab and runs toward the young man. They embrace.

**YOUNG MAN** (to the Hilaera):

Are you okay?

Hilaera nods and he holds her close. They look over at Xena and Gabrielle.

**HILAERA:**

Thank you.

The woman in the black robe steps up. She looks livid.

**WOMAN:**

Do you know what you've done? Do you know what they've done? (She points to Hilaera and the young man) They have disgraced the name of Artemis, defiled the purity of her temple...

**GABRIELLE:**

And that's a reason to kill them?

**WOMAN:**

The goddess must be appeased, or else we'll have to face her anger!



**XENA** (narrows her eyes at her):

Well. Right now, you're getting me pretty angry, and believe me, you don't want to face that. So I suggest you leave these people alone.

The woman snarls and retreats with the guards.

**GABRIELLE** (to Hilaera and the young man):

We should take you two home.

**HILAERA** (shakes her head):

You don't understand. We can't go home.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a look, then look at the two young people. Gabrielle nods, understanding.

**GABRIELLE:**

Your village worships Artemis.

**HILAERA** (sighs and nods):

It was my own mother who turned us over to be sacrificed.

Close-up on Xena's face, set in a hard stare.

**GABRIELLE:**

Do you have a place to go?

**YOUNG MAN:**

I have relatives in a village half a day's walk from here that is still free of these zealots. They'll shelter us for the night. Then we can escape to Athens.

**XENA:**

Good. Be careful.

**HILAERA** (nods, tearing up):

I can't believe I'll never see mother and father again.

**XENA:**

Maybe you will. (after a pause) Hilaera, what do you know about a village around here that was burned to the ground in an attack not too long ago?

**HILAERA** (shocked):

The unholy land?

**GABRIELLE** (puzzled):

Unholy land?

**HILAERA:**

Yes, that's what the head priestess calls it. We've been strictly forbidden to go there.

**XENA** (grimly):

Then that's exactly where we want to go.

**DISSOLVE TO**

The interior of the fortress, where a table is laid out with food. Ares is sitting beside Pandion; Iona and Zarek are at the table as well. They are eating and talking.

**CUT TO**

Outside, a warrior in black on a horse rides toward the fortress.

**CUT TO**

He rides up to the gates and two of the guards hold out their spears.

**WARRIOR:**

I wish to speak to Ares.

The guards look at each other.

**CUT TO**



The dining area. A soldier comes in and stops beside Ares. He turns to look at the soldier, holding a bird leg in his hand. The soldier salutes Ares.

**SOLDIER:**

Lord Ares.

Ares looks up at him expectantly.

**SOLDIER (continues):**

A messenger from Brygus.

Close up of Ares' face.

**CUT TO**

The warrior we saw earlier walking down a corridor, flanked by two soldiers.

**CUT TO**

The warrior enters the dining hall and stands before Ares.

**ARES:**

So what is this message that Brygus has for us? Keep it short--you're interrupting a good meal.

**WARRIOR:**

Oh, it's short enough. Brygus knows you're trying to defeat him. You will not succeed.

**ARES (chuckles):**

Would that be the great Brygus who keeps sending out his goons to do his bidding and isn't man enough to show himself? (sarcastic) Ooh, I'm so scared.

**WARRIOR:**

He'll show himself--when it's time.



**ARES:**

Time to kick his ass? I hope so. Nobody insults the God of War and gets away with it.

**WARRIOR (smirks):**

Brygus, insult the God of War? (laughs) Hardly.

**ARES (stung but nonchalant):**

Oh, I get it--because I'm no longer the God of War.

**MESSENGER:**

No, because *he* is.

Ares, Pandion and the others exchange shocked looks as we:

**FADE OUT**

**ACT FOUR**

**FADE IN**

Ares rises from the table and approaches the warrior.

**ARES:**

I've got a message for Brygus, too. One of these days, we'll have a chat--god to god. And he'll regret it. (to his soldiers) Show this man out.

The warrior bows mockingly and leaves, escorted by two soldiers. Ares looks uncertain.

**IONA:**

I can't believe it. How would Brygus become a god?

**ZAREK:**

Could he have gotten his hands on ambrosia?

**ARES:**

All the ambrosia on earth was destroyed years ago. And I doubt that Odin would share his golden apples. (thinks a moment) He's either crazy or trying to scare us. (looks at Pandion) You did say he has the ego of a god. That's probably all it is.

**PANDION:**

And if it's more than that?

Ares looks down, then back at them.

**ARES:**

Then we'll still defeat him, one way or another. And we will take the Areopagus back as promised. (determined) We head out in the morning.

**CUT TO**

Xena and Gabrielle are riding along a forest trail. Up ahead is a view of a valley. There is a blackened patch of land in the distance and Gabrielle frowns, the two of them riding toward it.

**CUT TO**

A large black patch of earth, the plants surrounding it are charred and dead, the remnants of what once was a village is now a flattened patch of dirt covered with ash. Only the remains of one building has been left standing--a few planks of cracked and burnt wood lean against one another in what looks to be a crude make-shift shelter. Gabrielle and Xena walk through the area, their horses in the background. They look on with shock and horror.



**GABRIELLE** (shakes her head):

It's just like Rena said. (looks down) I had halfway hoped she had been wrong.

The sound of rustling catches their attention. They turn toward the remains of the building. Slowly walking toward it, they peer underneath the haphazardly placed beams and find a young man in his early 20's, with ratty hair in very tattered clothes with holes and singed edges, is huddled in a corner of the shelter. He looks up toward them. His eyes are hollow, his face and arms emaciated. He's clearly suffering the effects of long-term starvation. He shivers when a breeze blows by.

**MAN** (cowering):

Please! Are you going to kill me? The way they killed my family?

He begins to cry and Xena and Gabrielle share a sympathetic glance. Gabrielle comes up and kneels down in front of him.

**GABRIELLE:**

It's okay. We're not whoever you think we are. We're here to help you. My name is Gabrielle, and this is Xena.

The man continues to whimper and Gabrielle rests a gentle hand on his shoulder. He looks toward her.

**MAN:**

They did this.

**GABRIELLE:**

Who?

The man shrinks back and stays quiet, turning away.

**XENA:**

You've been living here?

**MAN:**

My whole life.

**XENA:**

I mean since--

**MAN** (as if he didn't hear what she said):

This is my home. Always has been. Always will be.

The man begins to rock, murmuring "my home". Gabrielle watches, concerned, then stands, turning to Xena. The two of them step back to give him some room.

**GABRIELLE** (shakes her head, grim):

If this village was destroyed a month ago, do you think he's been living here since then?

**XENA:**

From the looks of it...

Gabrielle steps toward him again. He's no longer mumbling but is still huddled in the corner, now with his arms wrapped around his legs.

**GABRIELLE:**

Look--this isn't the best place to be living right now. Come with us. We can get you a nice meal and a warm bath. (she holds out her hand) It'll be all right.

**MAN** (shakes his head, mumbles, not looking at her):

Never all right. Never again.

Gabrielle watches him, concerned and looks up at Xena as she frowns.

**CUT TO**

Evening. Xena and Gabrielle ride into the village. The man is sitting behind Gabrielle on her horse, slouching over quite a bit, too weak to hold himself up properly.

**CUT TO**

Inside a house. The man is lying on a bed, dressed in clean clothes now. He's sleeping. An older woman is standing near the bedside taking away his dirty clothes. She exits the room, walking past Xena and Gabrielle who stand off to the side.

**XENA** (grim):

He's in bad shape. I've seen it before.

**GABRIELLE:**

What can we do for him?

**XENA** (shakes her head):

I don't know. The herbs will help him sleep for now--but it may be too late to save him. (squeezes Gabrielle's shoulder gently) We'll do our best.

**GABRIELLE** (nods, troubled):

I've never seen destruction like that before, Xena. I don't know how this man survived.

**XENA** (determined):

If he lives long enough to tell us what happened, maybe we can stop it from happening to anyone else.

**CUT TO**

Rena's house. Gabrielle picks up Samuel. Darion stands next to her.

**DARION:**

I was getting worried about you.

**GABRIELLE:**

I'm sorry we were gone so long. We got--caught up in some things.

Darion looks up at her.

**DARION:**

Was it Artemis?

**GABRIELLE:**

In a way. More zealots who worship her--and are willing to kill innocent people when they believe it's the will of the goddess.

**DARION:**

We have to tell Rena and Makis what Artemis is really like.

**GABRIELLE** (shakes her head):

Sometimes people can't see the truth until they find out for themselves.

Darion nods, clearly doubtful. Close-up on Gabrielle as she stares ahead thoughtfully, holding Samuel in her arms.

**DISSOLVE TO**

Sunrise.

**DISSOLVE TO**

Ares is in a chamber, putting on the leather armor. He places the metal breastplate over it and then straps the scabbard to his side and sheathes his sword. He turns to the mirror and looks at himself.

**DISSOLVE TO**

Ares mounts his black stallion, now wearing a face guard. He turns to Pandion, Iona and Zarek who ride up beside them, also wearing armor.

**ARES:**

Let's head out.

Ares rides forward and the rest of the army follows. Wide-shot of the army leaving the fortress, some people on horseback, others walking.

**CUT TO**



Ares is riding through a forest. Pandion, Iona and Zarek are behind him with the rest of the men marching behind.

Ares moves his arm and the wound on his upper arm stings. He looks at it. It's now dry and healing but the gash is still visible. Ahead is a crossroads. There are a few villagers walking along a road in front of them. An old man walks with a cane beside a younger man who helps him out when he needs it. The group of villagers pass by and Ares watches them silently, before heading forward, looking thoughtfully out into the distance.

**[FLASHBACK]**

The scene from Act One. The young and old man are killed by Brygus' soldier.

**[END OF FLASHBACK]**

***DISSOLVE TO***

Ares and his army are now in the middle of a field, the sun beating down. They ride in silence, the only sound is the hoofbeats and whinnies from the horses and the clattering of weapons and armor.

Ares stares forward, looking out onto the field.

**[FLASHBACK]**

A sky filled with smoke and ash. A field littered with dead bodies surrounding a large castle. The gate has been knocked down and destroyed, the walls surrounding the castle are in bad shape, crumpling and charred black--as if there had been an explosion.

Pan back to show Ares (with long hair like in season 2) standing on a hill overlooking the battlefield. He is smiling, looking very pleased with himself.

**[END OF FLASHBACK]**

***DISSOLVE TO***

Ares and his army are marching through a dense grove.

**[FLASHBACK]**

A man is killed in battle and Ares (in his season 3 look) watches from a distance, grinning.

**[END OF FLASHBACK]**

Ares shakes his head and his horse steps into a small hole, causing Ares to briefly lose his balance, shifting in the saddle a bit. Pandion grabs the reigns, steadying the horse. He looks at Ares as he shakes himself off, as if coming out of a daze.

**PANDION:**

Something wrong, my Lord?

**ARES:**

No. I'm fine.

***CUT TO***

Ares and his army arrive at the edge of the clearing, a valley before them. Ares looks up and in the distance sees the temple rising majestically from the hill of the Areopagus. Ares slows his horse down to a stop.

**PANDION:**

This is it.

Ares nods slowly.

***CUT TO***

The base of the Areopagus. Ares and his army ride toward it slowly, looking around cautious and alert. The place seems deserted.

**IONA:**

Wouldn't you think, if Brygus captures a temple, he'd be interested in keeping his property well guarded?

**ARES** (looking at the temple):

Who knows how he thinks. This isn't what I would have expected, that's for sure. Follow me, and stay alert.

The camera pulls back to show Ares riding up the hill, followed by his soldiers.

**CUT TO**

Ares and the others arrive at the top of the hill, the great temple doors towering in front of them. Ares dismounts, drawing his sword; Iona and Pandion do likewise.

Ares walks toward the doors. Suddenly there is a whizzing sound. We see an arrow headed straight for the camera.

**IONA** (shouts):

Lord Ares, look out!

Ares whips around and the arrow hits his armor, leaving him unhurt. A second arrow flies from behind a column. Some of Ares' soldiers rush in that direction. A female archer jumps out from behind the column. Throwing down her bow, she draws a sword and fights the soldiers. Several more female guards appear, ready to attack.

**FEMALE GUARD:**

You're trespassing.



**ARES** (scoffs):

On my own property?

The guards attack. Ares spars with two of them; he quickly disarms one and knocks the other one down with a kick. Iona spins and kicks another guard so hard that she falls, stumbling into the others; they lose their footing and roll down the side of the hill. Ares, Pandion and Iona look after them, shaking their heads. Close-up on Ares as he raises his eyebrows.

**ARES** (sarcastic):

It's all downhill from here.

**IONA:**

Brygus needs to hire better warriors.

**ARES** (puzzled):

These aren't Brygus' warriors. They're Artemis'.

Ares, Pandion and Iona exchange a concerned look. Then, Ares walks up to the doors and pushes them open with a loud creak. Ares, Pandion and Iona walk into the temple, several soldiers following behind. They all stop dead in their tracks.

Ares looks around.

Pan around the temple to show that it is pristine, lit with candles. There is gold on the walls, sparkling in the sunlight that shines through one of the large windows in the back. The place shines like the sun, completely re-decorated from what it was as a temple to the God of War. The room is completely empty except for a large gold statue at the back of the temple. It's of an archer, standing with his head held high and one foot planted firmly on the ground, his other foot raised, propped up by a golden surfboard. In front of the statue is a long table where a golden surfboard lies, and an ornate wooden plaque standing in front of it.

Ares walks toward the statue while Pandion, Iona and the rest stand back. He looks down at the plaque in front of the surfboard, the Greek writing engraved with gold leaf.

**ARES:**

It's a shrine to Apollo. (turns back to Pandion and Iona) A tomb.

**[FLASHBACK]**

From "Showdown":

Apollo, standing over the now-mortal Ares on the ground.

**APOLLO** (he lifts his hand, a fireball forming in it; to Ares):  
Say good-bye.

There is a swishing sound and then a thud. Pan to a close-up on Apollo as he makes a choked sound and his eyes widen with shock and pain.

The camera pulls back to show Apollo stagger back. The blade of a dagger is protruding from the left side of his chest. He gasps, his hands going toward the dagger.

Apollo falls.

**ARTEMIS** (screams in anguish and rage):  
Noooooooooooooooooooo!

***DISSOLVE TO***

Artemis kneels next to her brother, gathering him in her arms as blood spurts from his wound.

**ARTEMIS:**  
Brother--I'm so sorry--

With one last gasp, Apollo dies.

**[END OF FLASHBACK]**

Ares stares at the statue then turns.

**ARES** (walking briskly toward the door):  
Let's go.

Zarek grabs Ares' arm as he passes.



**ZAREK:**

Wait a minute! (Ares looks at him) We came all this way--for nothing? The temple is yours for the taking!

Ares hesitates.

**ARES:**

Artemis turned it into a shrine to her brother. I won't take that from her, or defile his memory.

**ZAREK:**

What does it matter? He was your enemy! He and Artemis conspired to bring you down--and they succeeded!

**PANDION:**

Zarek is right--we should take it back while we have the chance.

**ARES:**

Brygus clearly isn't using it for himself. Artemis can do what she will with it. (looks around the temple, softly) I don't have any use for it anymore, anyway.

He walks toward the door.

**PANDION** (off-camera):

What about your promise? To your followers, to Actaeon?

Ares stops and turns.

**ARES:**

I have to do what's right for *me*.

Zarek, boiling with anger, charges forward.

**ZAREK:**

No! Artemis will *not* get away with this! She uses Brygus to take it for herself, and then turns it into a shrine to her dead brother? And that is not an insult to the God of War? (he turns and grabs a torch from the wall) If you're not going to take it back for yourself, I'd rather see it in ashes than in *her* hands.

Zarek is about to put the torch to a curtain when a blue surge of energy shoots from off-camera, hitting Zarek in the side and propelling him across the room. He lands hard on the stone floor and is knocked out cold; the torch is flung against a stone wall, its flame smothered as it lands on the floor.

Ares, Pandion and Iona whip around in the direction it came from ("whoosh" sound effects).

A man with brown hair and rugged features steps forward, lowering his hand. He is dressed in black similar to Ares, and wearing Ares' gauntlets. Zoom in on Ares' surprised face.

**ARES** (slowly):

Brygus.



**BRYGUS** (grins):

You got it. (Brygus catches Ares looking at the gauntlets; he lifts his arms) Oh, these? Yeah, I bought them from a peddler a few months back. Said the man who gave them up was willing to pay a fortune to travel to some faraway city.

Brygus walks forward and Ares stands still. Pandion and Iona put their hands on their swords, prepared to attack.

**BRYGUS:**

It's fitting, don't you think? (Ares doesn't respond) I have your gauntlets, and I'm the new God of War. I guess it must be...destiny.

Close up of Ares' face.

**CUT TO**

Rena and Makis' house; the kitchen. Samuel, gurgling happily, is sitting in a sling suspended from a pole while Gabrielle is chopping some apples into tiny pieces and crushing them. Rena sits nearby, smiling.

**GABRIELLE** (coos):

You like applesauce, don't you? Yes, we're going to make you some applesauce...

The door opens and Xena comes in, looking concerned.

**GABRIELLE** (looks up):

What is it?

**XENA:**

The man is awake. Want to come talk to him?

Gabrielle looks hesitantly at Samuel.

**RENA** (smiles):

Don't worry, I'll feed him.

**GABRIELLE:**

Oh, thank you so much. (She comes up to Samuel, lifts him up in her arms and gives him a kiss) Be good.

Gabrielle and Xena head out.

**CUT TO**

The man is lying on a bed, his eyes fluttering open and closed, as if he's drifting in and out of consciousness.

Xena and Gabrielle walk in and come up to him. He slowly turns his head, seeing Xena.

**MAN** (weakly):

You brought me here... Thank you.

**GABRIELLE:**

How are you feeling?

He shakes his head wordlessly and closes his eyes.

**XENA:**

Yes. You're lucky to be alive.

**GABRIELLE:**

Can you tell us what happened?

The man hesitates for a long moment, staring off into the distance.

**GABRIELLE** (gentle):

I know--sometimes memories can hurt...but anything you can tell us can help us stop this from happening to others.

There is a long pause.

**MAN:**

Fire...



Xena and Gabrielle listen closely.

**MAN:**

Fire raining down--and everything, everyone... (he closes his eyes, his lip quivering at the memory)

**GABRIELLE** (touches his arm):

It's okay. Is there anything else you remember?

The man lies quiet for a long moment.

**GABRIELLE** (to Xena, quietly):

He's too weak. I don't think there's anything else--

**MAN** (faintly):

Brygus...

Xena and Gabrielle look at him, then move closer.

**GABRIELLE:**

Brygus?

The man nods, closing his eyes.

**CUT TO**

Ares, Pandion and Iona are standing before Brygus inside the temple. Zarek has begun to stir in the background.

**BRYGUS** (eyeing Ares):

So this is the Great Ares. We meet again.

Ares looks confused, not recognizing him.

**BRYGUS:**

You don't remember me. You *should*. I used to be a...fan.

**ARES:**

A fan who wants to kill me. Aren't I lucky. (chuckles) I thought this kind of thing only happened to Xena.

**BRYGUS:**

Kill you? Oh no. I don't want to kill you. *Yet*. I have much, *much* bigger plans for you.

**ARES:**

Can't wait to hear them. So (looks around the temple) you're doing Artemis' bidding now?

**BRYGUS:**

As a matter of fact--yes.

**CUT TO**

**GABRIELLE** (to Xena):

Who's Brygus?

**XENA:**

Never heard of him.

Xena and Gabrielle lean closer as the man opens his eyes.

**MAN:**

They said he would come if we did not do what they say. "Beware the wrath of Brygus". He...destroyed my village... (he drifts off)

**GABRIELLE** (tapping him lightly on the shoulder, trying to keep him awake):

Why?

**MAN:**

Artemis...

**GABRIELLE** (shocked):

Because you worshiped Artemis?

**MAN** (faint):

Because we wouldn't...

The man's eyes close. Xena and Gabrielle look up at each other, concerned.

**CUT TO**

Brygus standing before Ares and the others.

**ARES** (appalled):

So that's why you're destroying those villages? For Artemis?

**BRYGUS:**

Artemis needs worshipers--you know that better than anyone--this is her best chance of getting them. She offers them the chance to worship her and be protected from those that wish to destroy them.

**ARES:**

And that would be you.

**BRYGUS** (grins):

Good guess.

**ARES:**

And if they refuse--

**BRYGUS:**

I kill them all! (laughs) The more they fear, the more powerful Artemis becomes and the more people are willing to follow her...because they're afraid of a much nastier fate. If you haven't noticed, more and more villages around these parts are worshiping Artemis--some of them abandoning other gods in her favor. And it's all because they're afraid of what might happen if they don't. As long as I'm around, her power only continues to grow.



**ARES** (moves closer toward him):

Not for long.

Ares and Brygus stare at each other for a moment, then Ares draws his sword and swings it toward Brygus. At the same time, Brygus swings his sword as well and the two of them clash, sending bright sparks shooting around the blades.

**BRYGUS:**

Lets take this outside, shall we?

A bright blue light flares up around them and they disappear. The screen goes black as we:

**FADE OUT**

**TO BE CONTINUED...**

*[The temple of Ares underwent major renovations during the production of this motion picture.]*