

SHIPPER SEASON SEVEN

“Dark Reign”

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Logline

Xena and Gabrielle encounter a young woman who is being hunted by a group of mysterious warriors-who may be either an innocent victim or an evil witch.

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TEASER

FADE IN

Daylight. Xena and Gabrielle are riding through the woods.

GABRIELLE (brightly):

Hey, you want to go to the market when we get to Prytus?

XENA (glumly):

Oh yeah...that sounds like a lot of fun.

GABRIELLE:

Xena--can't you just relax a little once in a while? For once, there's no one after us, no bad guys to knock out...why are you so grumpy?

XENA:

No one after us, no bad guys to knock out...

GABRIELLE (grins):

Xena...you have such a way to accentuate the negative.

XENA:

So I've been told.

Suddenly, a piercing scream is heard from behind some trees.

WOMAN'S VOICE:

Help! Somebody help me!

MALE AND FEMALE VOICES:

Get her! Get her!

Xena and Gabrielle exchange quick looks and speed up their horses. They reach the edge of a clearing and see a rather disheveled blonde young woman running and stumbling, being pursued by three men and two women on horseback, armed with swords--Egyptians, by their clothes and their looks.

EGYPTIAN WOMAN #1 (tall and beautiful, with many piercings on her face and a tattoo on her right cheek--a pair of curved horns with a circle between them):

Kill the abomination!

EGYPTIAN MAN #1:

Kill the sorceress!

Screaming, the young woman stumbles and falls. The tall woman dismounts and stands over her, sword in hand.

EGYPTIAN WOMAN #1:

My goddess Isis! Your will be done!

She raises her sword. Xena's battle cry echoes through the woods as she throws her chakram and knocks the sword out of the woman's hand. The woman looks up in shock. The young woman is still crouching helplessly on the ground. One of the men raises a spear, prepared to run her through, but Gabrielle throws a dagger, killing him. Xena and Gabrielle fight the other warriors and kill three of them--everyone except the tall, tattooed woman, who has managed to get back in the saddle.

EGYPTIAN WOMAN (desperately):

You don't know what you're doing!

XENA (battles her):

Oh yeah? Well, I know what you're doing--trying to kill a helpless unarmed girl. You're a pretty sorry excuse for a warrior.

She prepares to deliver a killing blow but the Egyptian woman deftly blocks it. She stares Xena straight in the eye.

EGYPTIAN WOMAN:

We will meet again. You may yet be thankful that you didn't kill me.

She turns around and gallops away.

XENA (catches her breath, sheaths her sword and then turns to Gabrielle, chuckling):
So, what was it you were saying about relaxing, Gabrielle? I'm afraid I missed that.

GABRIELLE:

You know what is more annoying than a grumpy Warrior Princess?

Xena dismounts Argo and walks toward the girl, who sits up, whimpering.

XENA:

What?

GABRIELLE:

A Warrior Princess trying to be a wiseass.

XENA (extends a hand to the girl and helps her up):

Are you all right?

GIRL:

Yes, I think so...

XENA:

Who are you? And if you don't mind my asking, why were those people so pissed off at you?

GIRL:

My name is Cassiopeia. I'm from the village of Mela, about a day's walk from here. I was on my way to the town of Pryrus to look for a job, and then all of a sudden they attacked me... I've never seen them before in my life!

GABRIELLE:

Pryrus? That's where we're going! You can come along with us--we'll make sure you don't get hurt. By the way, I'm Gabrielle and this (turns and points to Xena) is Xena.

CASSIOPEIA (looks awestruck):

Xena? The Warrior Princess? And Gabrielle, Bard of Potidaea? I can't believe it! I've heard so much about you! I've always admired you so much! Xena, you are the most amazing woman I've ever heard of--and to think that you've actually saved my life...

XENA:

I know, I know--me hero, you damsel in distress. (smiles at the young woman) Come on, Cass. Let's get going.

CASSIOPEIA (puts her hands up, folded in a prayer-like gesture):

Thank you so much! You have no idea how much this means to me!

XENA:

I think I have a fair idea.

Xena nods. She gets back in the saddle and extends a hand to Cassiopeia, who takes it gratefully and gets up on the horse. Together, they ride away.

At some distance, behind the trees, the Egyptian woman stares in the direction where they went, an intense look on her face, her hand on the hilt of her sword as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

A campsite at night. Xena, Gabrielle and Cassiopeia are eating.

CASSIOPEIA:

Wow, Gabrielle, that was an amazing story! Amazons... Centaurs... is there anything you guys haven't seen? Tell me, Xena; is it true that you two slept in an ice cave for twenty-five years?

XENA (slightly tense, her face darkening):

Yes.

CASSIOPEIA:

Is it true that you once had the power to kill gods?

XENA (mutters through clenched teeth, looking away):

It's true.

CASSIOPEIA:

And is it--

All of a sudden, Xena bolts upright. Cassiopeia and Gabrielle look at her, surprised.

XENA (gets up):

Stay here. I need to go and--check on something.

She walks away.

CASSIOPEIA (puzzled):

Was it something I said?

GABRIELLE (gently puts a hand on her arm):

Cassiopeia...there are things about the past that Xena doesn't especially like revisiting. (looks in the direction where Xena went, thoughtfully) Still, I wonder why she went off like that...

CUT TO

In a small grove, Xena stops and looks around in the moonlight.

XENA:

You've been watching me all day. What do you want?

Ares materializes in front of the Warrior Princess in a blue flash of sparks and moves toward her slowly. He lifts her hand to his lips and gently kisses it.

ARES:

Nothing really. I just wanted to see how my favorite warrior was holding up...considering that you picked up such an interesting companion today.

XENA (frowns):

Who, Cassiopeia? Why would you be interested in some peasant girl?

ARES:

She's not just a peasant girl, Xena. You've got a crazy sorceress on your hands.

XENA (incredulously):

You're the crazy one if you think I'm going to believe a story like that. (gives him a distrustful look, narrowing her eyes) Wait a minute...those warriors who were trying to kill her, were they yours?

ARES:

No. But they had the right idea.

XENA:

This is some game you're playing for your own reasons, Ares, and I'm not going to play along. I can always tell when you're up to no good.

ARES:

You know *damn* well that I would never do anything to hurt you.

He draws an arm around her waist, pulling her closer to him. Xena looks uncertain.

ARES:

So, do tell, why all the hostility? I thought we were getting past that. What happened, did you get up on the wrong side of the bedroll?

XENA:

Nothing. (disengages herself) I'm telling you, Ares, whatever game you're playing, leave me out of it.

ARES:

And I'm telling you that if you help Cassiopeia, you are going to be in more danger than you could ever imagine.

XENA:

And why, pray, is that?

Ares leans close to her so that their lips are only millimeters apart.

ARES:

Because Cassiopeia is no ordinary sorceress, she is the most powerful witch to ever walk the earth, and the most evil.

XENA:

You're lying.

ARES:

I've told you before, Xena, a god need never lie. (lowers his voice) Especially not to the woman he loves.

XENA:

Prove it.

Leaning even closer, Ares kisses her on the lips. Xena closes her eyes momentarily and responds to his passionate kiss, then comes to her senses and pushes him away.

XENA:

What are you doing?

ARES (with a cocky grin):

Proving that I love you, just like you asked. I think you just proved something too...you want me.

XENA (angrily):

No, I don't. Anyway, don't try to get me sidetracked. Can you prove any of this stuff about Cassiopeia being a witch?

ARES (impatiently):

Not if you don't believe a word I say. You know, Xena, I'd think that after everything we've been through, you'd be able to trust me a little more. I gave up my immortality to save you and your annoying daughter and your little sidekick. I brought you back from the dead after that silly stunt you pulled in Jappa...

XENA (softens a little):

Ares...I know you wouldn't do anything to hurt me. But to sacrifice an innocent girl if it furthers some scheme of yours--I hate to say this, Ares, but I wouldn't put it past you to do that. (Ares scowls) Before I believe that insane story of yours, I need to see some evidence.

ARES:

Fine, Xena. Don't believe me. Just remember, I did warn you. (the blue light starts to flare up around him, then fades. Ares clicks his fingers as if he just remembered something.) Oh. I almost forgot. That other new friend you made today, the Egyptian? The one with a pincushion for a face? (makes a gesture to indicate facial piercings) She's on your trail.

He's gone in a flash of light. Xena stands looking at the spot where he vanished, lost in thought, and then starts walking back toward the campsite.

CUT TO

The campfire, Gabrielle and Cassiopeia look up expectantly at Xena.

GABRIELLE:

What's going on, Xena?

XENA (sarcastically):

Oh, just had a visit from an old friend.

GABRIELLE (gasps):

Ares?

Xena nods.

CASSIOPEIA (awed):

Ares, the God of War?

XENA:

Cassiopeia, do you know anything about Ares?

CASSIOPEIA (gives her a puzzled look):

Just that he's the God of War... What would a village girl like me know about Ares?

XENA:

Tell me one more thing, Cassiopeia. Have you ever practiced sorcery?

Gabrielle gives her a bewildered look.

CASSIOPEIA:

Uh...I don't think so.

XENA:

What do you mean you don't think so? It's not the kind of thing you just forget.

CASSIOPEIA (looks down):

There are a few years of my life that I don't remember too well, Xena. When I was twelve years old, a warlord and his army raided our village and my parents and my sister were killed... (Xena flinches slightly and averts her eyes; Cassiopeia's words have obviously brought back her own painful memories of the loss of her brother.) After that, I wandered around the countryside...I think I traveled to some distant places...but I just don't remember much about it. Then I came back to Mela six years ago, when I was twenty. That's all I know. (she wipes away tears)

XENA (approaches Cassiopeia and puts a hand on her shoulder, sighs):

It's all right, Cass. Let's turn in.

CUT TO

The next day. Xena, Gabrielle and Cassiopeia (now in the saddle behind Gabrielle) are riding along a road. Suddenly, Xena perks up, hearing a sound. An arrow is flying straight at Cassiopeia, who shrieks. Xena catches the arrow when it's just an inch away from the young woman.

XENA:

They're persistent, whoever they are.

CASSIOPEIA (starts to sob):

Why would anyone want to kill me? I've never hurt anyone in my life!

XENA:

Wait here.

She takes off at a gallop in the direction the arrow came from. There is a rustle of leaves as the assailant flees. It's the Egyptian woman. Xena pursues her through the woods. Just as it seems that the woman is about to get away, Xena throws the chakram so that it slices a branch off a tree and the branch falls right in the path of the Egyptian's horse. The frightened horse rears up and throws the woman to the ground. Xena catches the chakram, then leaps off Argo with a battle cry and lands on top of the Egyptian before she can get up, pinning her down and holding the chakram to her throat.

XENA:

Who in Tartarus are you?

EGYPTIAN WOMAN (stares at her bitterly and defiantly):

You don't know what you're doing! That woman you're protecting is the Harbinger of the Apocalyptic Battles!

XENA (sneers):

Whoa, that's quite a mouthful. Why don't you tell me your name?

EGYPTIAN WOMAN:

I am Ancktari. And I know who you are--Xena, the Warrior Princess.

XENA:

That's right. So, mind telling me why you are here--and why you want to kill Cassiopeia?

ANCKTARI:

Is that the name the vessel is using now?

XENA:

Answer the question or I'll carve you a hole in the head. (glances at all the piercings on Ancktari) Although in your case, it might not make much of a difference.

ANCKTARI:

Do you know the danger that this creature holds for the world?

XENA:

You know, you're the second person now to tell me that Cassiopeia is evil and dangerous. How about something a little more specific?

ANCKTARI:

Xena, she is not only evil...she is one of the most powerful forces in the world, more powerful than some of the gods!

XENA:

I wouldn't call that very specific.

ANCKTARI:

I have a story to tell you, Xena. I'm just not very good at storytelling when I'm being pinned to the ground with a sharp blade pressed against my throat.

XENA:

All right, I'll let you up, if you promise to behave.

ANCKTARI (scornfully):

I'll behave, Xena. Trust me, I'm not the one you need to worry about.

Xena rises and so does Ancktari. Xena continues to look at her warily, chakram in hand.

XENA:

Make it snappy. My friends will be wondering where I am.

ANCKTARI:

Very well.

[FLASHBACK]

It's night. A temple of Egyptian design. Two priestesses--one of them is Ancktari, looking younger and without the facial piercing--are performing a ritual in front of the altar. They chant and lower sticks of incense into a bowl filled with candles. Smoke wisps around their heads, and then dissipates.

ANCKTARI (voice over):

My story begins about six years ago, when I was a priestess at the temple of Isis in the great city of Alexandria. One night, my friend Hymnia and I had just finished performing the nightly rites. We were just starting to put away the sacred objects when we heard a knock on the temple doors. And at the temple, we always allowed anyone in for the night if they needed shelter.

Hymnia goes to the solid gold doors of the temple and hauls them open. A woman is standing there. It is Cassiopeia, wearing a dark robe.

ANCKTARI (voice over):

It was the sorceress Cassiopeia, the girl you saved yesterday.

HYMNIA (in the flashback):

Do you need help?

CASSIOPEIA (with a nasty smile):

No, but you do.

She pulls out a dagger, grabs Hymnia's hair, yanks her head back and cuts her throat. Ancktari screams in horror. Hymnia falls to the floor, a pool of blood spreading around her. Cassiopeia runs a finger along the blade of the dagger and tastes the blood. With a yell full of pain and rage, Ancktari rushes at her.

ANCKTARI (voice over):

I fought her, and our skills were evenly matched--I was Isis' best temple warrior, and I still am. Then the witch said a spell and held up her hands, and a jolt of blue light shot out of them. I was alive, but I lay on the floor unable to move a finger. The other priestesses and the maidservants at the temple came running to see what was

happening. With her powers and with her dagger, she slaughtered them all. And then she turned to me.

As Ancktari tells the story, we see the events she describes unfolding in the flashback.

CASSIOPEIA (in the flashback):

So you thought you could fight me? How very presumptuous. I think that deserves a special payback.

Cassiopeia drags Ancktari over to the flames that now rage all around the altar of Isis and throws her into the flames, laughing as Ancktari shrieks in agony.

ANCKTARI (voice over):

Enya, the eldest and wisest of our priestesses, was mortally wounded but still alive. In her last moments, she managed to perform a rite to destroy the evil in Cassiopeia. But Enya was dying, and so she didn't complete the rite. (in the flashback, a middle-aged priestess intones a spell, and then dies.) And so now, Cassiopeia's evil side is not gone, it is merely dormant. If she ever takes a human life again, the spell will be undone.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

XENA (who has been listening to Ancktari intently):

You look pretty good for someone who was barbecued six years ago. (then she starts, remembering what Cassiopeia said) Six years...

ANCKTARI:

The goddess Isis restored me to life, Xena--to live until the day that Cassiopeia is destroyed. It is my mission to destroy her before she can kill again. If she does, she will lose all resemblance to the sweet young woman you and your friend have taken under your wing.

CUT TO

Gabrielle and Cassiopeia, who are still waiting on the road. Suddenly, there is movement in the trees, and four thuggish-looking men on horseback emerge. They eye the two attractive women with obviously bad intentions.

THUG:

Well, well, well. Look at the nice catch.

They attack. Gabrielle and Cassiopeia are thrown from their horse. Cassiopeia cowers on the ground while Gabrielle starts to fight.

CUT TO

Xena and Ancktari still talking.

ANCKTARI:

There is something else you must know. The evil Cassiopeia was the favorite mortal of the god Set.

XENA:

Set? Don't think I've ever heard of him.

ANCKTARI:

Set is an evil god who murdered his brother Osiris. After that, he was banished from the mortal realm, and his worship was forbidden. But this girl you call Cassiopeia was able to summon him. Should she ever regain her evil side, she will become his vessel. Then, evils await the world such as you cannot begin to imagine.

XENA (mistrustfully):

It's one hell of a story. But even if it's true, Cassiopeia is not evil right now. You can't kill her for something that she may do in the future, if she becomes evil again.

ANCKTARI:

It's not enough for you that she slaughtered the priestesses of Isis, and only the gods know how many others?

XENA:

But she's not the same person now. She has no memory of her evil deeds. Right now, Cassiopeia is innocent. I can't allow you to kill her.

ANCKTARI:

Just remember, Xena, she is only innocent until she kills again.

CUT TO

Three of the thugs are lying on the ground and Gabrielle is fighting the fourth. She doesn't hear one of the fallen men get up behind her. Just as she stabs the man she is fighting, the man who has gotten up trips her and she falls.

CASSIOPEIA:

Gabrielle!

She picks up a dagger that lies next to one of the dead thugs. The man raises his sword over Gabrielle. Just then, Cassiopeia rushes toward him in desperation and plunges the dagger into his left side. The man's eyes bulge and he begins to gasp. His sword falls to the ground. He clutches at his chest, falls down and dies.

GABRIELLE (gets up):

Cassiopeia...thank you! Are you all right?

CASSIOPEIA (drops the dagger, looking very pale, and whispers):

I killed someone...

CUT TO

ANCKTARI:

Once she has killed, then, before the next time the sun rises, she will revert to her evil self and regain her powers. And then, she won't be easy to destroy.

XENA:

Look, Ancktari. I'm not about to destroy an innocent girl just because I heard an interesting story from someone... (she pauses and smiles, obviously thinking back to what Ares said) ...with a pincushion for a face. That's final. So do me a favor and stop following us, or I'll throw my chakram first and ask questions later.

ANCKTARI:

You're making a mistake.

XENA:

Then I'll have to live with it.

ANCKTARI:

No, you'll have to die with it. (she gets back on her horse as Xena ponders her words) I'll see you again, Xena. (rides away)

Xena starts riding back toward the road. Rejoining Gabrielle and Cassiopeia, she sees the dead bodies and stops in her tracks.

XENA:

What happened?

GABRIELLE:

We were attacked while you were gone. Don't worry; we took care of them.

XENA (lifts an eyebrow):

"We?"

Then she notices the blood on Cassiopeia's hands, and there is shock on her face.

GABRIELLE:

Would you believe it, I think Cassiopeia saved my life? I was down and one of these thugs might have killed me if she hadn't grabbed a dagger and stabbed him first! (she goes over to the still-distraught Cassiopeia and embraces her) Cassiopeia...I know what a terrible thing it is to lose your blood innocence. (strokes her hair) I know how you feel. But you had no other choice.

XENA (softly, as if speaking to herself):

She killed him...

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

Night. A campsite illuminated by the bright moonlight. The fire has almost gone out. Gabrielle and Cassiopeia are sound asleep. Xena is sitting nearby, gazing pensively at her sword, and then at the sleeping Cassiopeia. Then, she walks over to Gabrielle and shakes her by the shoulder.

GABRIELLE (sleepily):

What? Xena--

XENA (presses a finger to her lips):

Shhhh. We need to talk. I think we may have a problem on our hands.

CUT TO

Ancktari. Lurking in the shrubbery by the campsite watching Xena and Gabrielle and trying to listen to their conversation.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle, who speak in a half-whisper.

GABRIELLE (looks shocked):

And you believe this?

XENA:

I don't know what to believe, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

You're not going to kill Cassiopeia, are you? Just because Ares and some Egyptian with tattoos and nose rings told you she's evil?

XENA (raising her voice slightly):

If Ancktari was right, we only have until sunrise.

In a leap, Ancktari is at their side.

ANCKTARI (hisses):

So it has happened! The vessel has killed!

XENA (rolls her eyes and sighs):

Why am I not surprised that you're still here? Gabrielle, meet Ancktari, warrior of Isis. Ancktari-- Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE (in an angry whisper):

She killed a thug who was about to kill me! If she hadn't, I might have been dead now!

ANCKTARI:

This is no time to be sentimental.

GABRIELLE (shocked):

Sentimental! I wouldn't say that having doubts about murdering an innocent girl is sentimental.

Cassiopeia awakes and sits up.

CASSIOPEIA:

Is everything all right? (she sees Ancktari and leaps to her feet screaming) Xena! Help me! Please don't let her kill me! (Xena slowly begins to back off) Xena? What's going on? Please tell me... Xena!

GABRIELE:

Xena, you're not going to let this happen!

Ancktari bares her sword and starts walking toward Cassiopeia, but Gabrielle tackles her and, taking her by surprise, throws her down. Cassiopeia crouches on the ground, hiding her face. Suddenly, she shudders, and for a moment her body is enveloped in a strange, faint glow. Xena flinches and her hand goes toward her chakram. Cassiopeia slowly gets up. There is something subtly different about her face.

Ancktari manages to throw off Gabrielle and gets to her feet. Cassiopeia's eyes narrow.

CASSIOPEIA:

Ancktari. Long time no see.

ANCKTARI:

Can't say I've missed you much.

CASSIOPEIA:

Come now, that is a bit harsh. Just because I dumped you into the fire last time we crossed paths doesn't mean we can't greet each other like friends!

GABRIELLE:

What! Cassiopeia! You did no such thing!

Cassiopeia laughs and shoots a bolt of energy at Gabrielle; Xena's chakram intercepts it before it hits her. Gabrielle is still thrown back by the force and lands on the ground unconscious.

CASSIOPEIA:

Now, Ancktari...do you have any idea how much I have looked forward to killing you all over again?

ANCKTARI:

I can imagine.

CASSIOPEIA (grins):

Oh that's right, you wanna kill me too, don't ya? Wow, I feel special. What about you, Xena? Are you gonna grab a number and join the line?

XENA:

No. I'll just kill you.

Xena and Ancktari charge at Cassiopeia, who takes them on, using fighting moves as well as occasional bolts of energy. Soon, Ancktari is knocked out and Xena is losing badly. Finally, Cassiopeia gets in a good blow in that knocks Xena to the ground. She picks up Ancktari's sword and prepares to stab Xena with it. A bolt of blue fire hits Cassiopeia in the back, and she screams, arching her body. Ares stands behind her. Cassiopeia mutters a quick spell and vanishes. Ares kneels down beside Xena.

ARES:

Are you okay?

XENA:

Yeah. I've been better though. (she gets up with his assistance, and shakes herself off) You were right. Cassiopeia is evil, and very powerful. How did you know about her?

ARES (slightly embarrassed):

She was someone I tried to recruit as a warrior...back when I thought you were dead. But then I found out she was beholden to the Egyptian god Set, so I figured it was best not to mess with her. Set is one nasty customer. I still kept an eye on her, though.

XENA:

Nice.

ARES:

Hey, it could have been worse. I could have actually *recruited* the crazy bitch.

XENA:

Yeah, maybe you two deserve each other.

Ares smirks and looks at Ancktari.

ARES:

That's one hell of a fighter. What's her name?

XENA:

Ancktari, and she is going to be dead the moment she kills Cassiopeia. She is already on her second lifetime. Six years ago, Cassiopeia burned her alive.

ARES:

Ouch. I guess she's one angry woman.

XENA:

I wouldn't call her angry. She wants revenge.

ARES (looks at Xena, smirks):

Don't we all?

XENA:

Her only mission in life is to destroy Cassiopeia.

ARES:

Talk about having a one-track mind.

Gabrielle gets up and looks around. She sees Ancktari unconscious on the ground and Xena talking to Ares. She is confused.

GABRIELLE:

What happened? Where is Cassiopeia?

Xena and Ares turn to Gabrielle.

XENA:

Ares and Ancktari were right, Gabrielle. Cassiopeia is evil, and now she has her powers back.

ANCKTARI (recovers consciousness and sits up, a ferocious look on her face):

Where is the vessel?

ARES:

Just like I said, a one-track mind.

XENA:

Look, all I know is that we have an insane sorceress running around somewhere, and she's not happy with us at the moment.

ARES:

So why don't you go after her?

XENA:

Where would we look?

ANCKTARI:

Egypt. She will go back to Egypt to join Set. You must come with me.

GABRIELLE:

You want us to go all the way to Egypt so you can pursue your vendetta? I don't think so.

Ancktari rushes her with a furious growl and Xena can barely restrain her.

ARES:

Well, we know she's devoted to her cause.

XENA:

Gabrielle, there is more involved here than just a vendetta. If Ancktari is telling the truth, and I believe her now, Cassiopeia could destroy the world as we know it. And we helped release this evil into the world. We must go after her.

Gabrielle turns to look at Ares.

GABRIELLE:

He's not coming with us, is he?

Xena looks at Ares, obviously thinking of something.

XENA:

He can do more if he comes with us. Ares, you could take us over to Egypt and save us all a lot of time.

ARES:

Sounds like a lot of fun, Xena, but I'm not sure that's a good idea. If Set is working with Cass, he'll be able to detect our arrival. Gods can sense movement through the ether. If you want to surprise them, it would be better to choose some less dramatic means of transportation. Boat, for instance.

XENA:

Well, then I suppose we can do just fine without you, Ares.

ARES:

Come on, Xena, you know you can use my help. You've already seen that Cass is no ordinary sorceress.

ANCKTARI:

The people of my land do not hold the Olympians in very high regard...

ARES (with a look of mock hurt on his face):

You cut me to the quick!

ANCKTARI (ignoring him):

...but it couldn't hurt to have a god on our side.

ARES (grins):

You hear that, Xena? Besides, I *can* get us as far as the docks.

XENA (businesslike):

Let's go.

CUT TO

The docks. Xena, Gabrielle, Ares and Ancktari are approaching an Egyptian ship. Ancktari approaches the men standing near the ramp.

ANCKTARI (in a commanding tone):

When does your ship sail?

SAILOR:

In three hours.

ANCKTARI:

We must leave on this boat. I am Ancktari, warrior of Isis, and this is a matter of life and death.

The captain steps forward.

CAPTAIN:

For the four of you, that will be four hundred dinars.

ANCKTARI:

Fool! The fate of the universe hangs in the balance, and all he can think about is money.

ARES:

I don't think you're making much of an impression, sweetheart. (while Ancktari glowers, he takes out a pouch and hands it over to the captain)

CAPTAIN (looks inside the pouch and beams):

Very well. But we only have two cabins left, so you'll have to pair up.

Gabrielle and Ancktari look shocked.

ARES (grins):

Looks like this trip is going to be even more fun than I thought. Come on, Xena, you know there's no way I'm going to bunk next to either of these two. Your little sidekick can't keep her hands to herself, and Pinface here is definitely not the first thing I want to see when I wake up.

ANCKTARI:

You shut your mouth, you pathetic excuse for a god.

ARES:

That hurt.

XENA:

All right, shut up. Gabrielle, you bunk with Ancktari, you two obviously don't want to be anywhere near Ares.

GABRIELLE (shocked):

Xena! Are you sure...

XENA:

Can we just stop bickering and get on the boat?

CUT TO

Ares and Xena entering their cabin. Ares looks slightly disappointed when he sees that there are two bunks, one above the other, but in the next moment he flashes a devilish smile at Xena.

ARES:

So, who gets to be on top?

XENA (smirks):

I bet you're disappointed that there isn't a single bed. Do gods need to sleep anyway?

ARES:

Not much, but sometimes we want to...in the right kind of environment.

XENA (gives him a mischievous look):

I guess you're out of luck, then.

CUT TO

The next morning. Ares is tossing and turning on the upper bunk while Xena is sound asleep below. There is a knock on the door. Xena stirs.

XENA (in a sleepy voice):
Who is it?

ANCKTARI (behind the door):

It's me. Come up on the deck, Xena, and bring your Olympian friend with you. I think you need to see what's going on.

ARES:

Why do I have a feeling this is bad news?

XENA:

Coming.

She jumps out of bed wearing her leather tunic, quickly gets into the rest of her outfit and goes out. Ares follows. Xena leaves.

CUT TO

The ship's deck, where the sailors and passengers are running around and shouting in a panic. A giant tornado is coming fast toward the ship--a column of swirling, foaming water that looks like it could sweep everything in its way. Xena's eyes widen.

ANCKTARI (shouts over the roar of the sea):

This is no ordinary tornado, Xena. When the captain ordered the helmsman to steer the ship out of its way, the tornado changed course.

XENA:

You think this is Cassiopeia's doing?

ANCKTARI:

I'd be willing to bet on it.

Gabrielle runs up to them.

GABRIELLE:

What's the matter? (she sees the tornado and gasps)

XENA:

Cassiopeia is trying to stop us from getting to Egypt.

ARES:

I don't think so. Cassiopeia's powerful, but I don't think she's that powerful. That must be my old pal Set.

ANCKTARI:

So Set and the vessel have joined forces.

ARES:

Yeah, and they're obviously on to us.

XENA:

So much for taking them by surprise. Ares, I think this would be a good time for you to use your powers and take us over to Alexandria.

ARES:

Any particular place?

ANCKTARI:

The old temple of Isis. The one where the vessel murdered my friends and me. Take us there.

ARES:

All right. Hold on.

He puts his right arm around Xena's shoulder while Gabrielle and Ancktari (who looks visibly disgusted) grab his left. They disappear in a flare of blue light. A moment later, the tornado suddenly disintegrates. The sailors stop and gape in amazement at the suddenly calm sea.

CUT TO

A now-abandoned temple of Isis. Everything looks deserted, with cobwebs, broken statues, smashed vases, and torn and faded draperies. Xena, Gabrielle and Ancktari materialize. Ares is nowhere to be seen.

ANCKTARI:

Where is the god?

XENA (yells):

Ares! (silence) I don't know.

GABRIELLE:

Is he all right?

XENA (her eyes narrow):

He must be up to something.

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

The throne room in a temple. On the steps on the throne, Cassiopeia is in the arms of the god Set. He is tall, dark-haired and beardless, wearing a dark blue tunic with rich decorations of gold and precious stones, and gold bracelets on his wrists and upper arms. He is passionately kissing her.

Blue light flares up and Ares materializes in the middle of the temple. He looks around, somewhat bewildered, and then sees Set and Cassiopeia. He looks angry and troubled.

SET (sneering):

Ares. How nice to see you.

ARES:

Wish I could say the same to you.

CASSIOPEIA:

So tell me, Ares. How does it feel to know that you're facing a power far greater than yours?

ARES:

Well, look at you. Didn't take you long to go all feisty again.

CASSIOPEIA:

I bet you're wondering why your little trip from ship to shore ended up going a little off-course, aren't you, Ares? Now that my Lord Set and I have combined our powers, it was a cinch. We wanted you here, and here you are. Impressed?

SET:

Believe it or not, Ares, this is a friendly warning. I have no quarrel with the pitiful remnants of the Olympian pantheon. (Ares, his pride injured, bites his lip) And that means you. You'll be fine as long as you stay away from me and my Chosen. But if you and those mortals who arrived with you go up against us, you'll be destroyed. You can't win.

ARES:

I wouldn't be so sure about that.

He launches a fireball at Cassiopeia. Cassiopeia and Set join hands and send out a bolt of energy that deflects the fireball and knocks Ares flat on his back. Cassiopeia laughs gleefully.

SET (puts his arms around Cassiopeia, kissing her hair):

Oh, my Chosen One...it is so wonderful to have you at my side again...how I've missed you!

CASSIOPEIA (laughs):

Now, now, Set...do control yourself a little while longer while we have company...

SET:

How can I? You are so lovely, like a perfect flower... (kisses her passionately)

ARES (gets up and shakes himself off):

Oh, Set, Set. You'll never make it as a poet.

SET (sarcastically):

Ares, I hope you were convinced by this little demonstration. I hate to put it in so vulgar a fashion, but--don't mess with us.

Ares stands silently, obviously thinking of something. Then, he approaches the throne.

ARES:

Look, Set. You two may have a good thing going but let me tell you something--that Ancktari woman, she really has her mind set on taking out your girlfriend.

CASSIOPEIA (laughing):

Oh, and that's supposed to scare me?

ARES:

Who knows what powers she may have gotten from Isis when she was brought back to life. If I were you, I wouldn't get very comfortable while she's around.

SET (intrigued):

What exactly are you saying?

ARES:

Here's the deal. You leave Xena and Gabrielle out of this...

SET:

So it is true. Ares, the mighty God of War, has a soft spot for the Warrior Princess.

ARES:

Sure, and you have a soft spot for your little sorceress. Now, you leave Xena and Gabrielle out of this and I will give you the assassin, Ancktari.

CUT TO

The temple of Isis. Gabrielle is sitting on the floor looking at some scrolls; most of them tattered and charred around the edges, while Xena and Ancktari are talking.

ANCKTARI:

I have heard a great deal about your life, Xena--about who you were. In some ways, you and the vessel have much in common.

XENA (shocked):

How so?

ANCKTARI:

You lost a brother in a warlord's raid; she lost her sister and her entire family when she was just twelve summers old. Left all alone, she had to fend for herself, and necessity forged her into a warrior.

[FLASHBACK]

A young Cassiopeia, about fifteen years old, is walking through a forest, a short sword strapped to her back.

ANCKTARI (voice over):

Like you, she was seduced by power. Only in her case, it was the power of magic, which she accidentally discovered she had.

In the forest, Cassiopeia is being attacked by a group of bandits. She is fighting them but her situation looks hopeless. The sword is knocked out of her hand. Screaming, she holds out her hands to defend herself. Suddenly, a bolt of energy shoots out of her hand and strikes one of her attackers dead. The others stop in their tracks, exchange frightened looks, and run.

ANCKTARI (voice over):

Then, she began to study magic to develop her potential... (in a dark room, surrounded by candles, Cassiopeia is looking at some parchments and muttering spells) And when she found out that her power had almost no limits, she became obsessed with it. Soon, she began to kill for the sheer pleasure of it.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

XENA (pensively):

And like me, she was given a second chance. Only she lost it again, through no fault of her own.

ANCKTARI:

Xena, you have fought to earn your redemption. The vessel did not. Her evil side was temporarily put to sleep by an act of magic, but she never strove for good. (Xena nods but she still looks somewhat troubled) Xena, for us to fulfill our mission, you cannot have any sympathy or pity for the vessel.

XENA:

What can we do to stop her?

ANCKTARI:

I pray that we are not too late as it is. After being dormant for six years, the vessel's powers are stronger than ever. And once she is joined to the God of Evil, it may be that nothing can stop them.

XENA:

A little pessimistic, aren't you?

ANCKTARI:

Do not forget, Xena, no matter what happens, I die at the end of this mission. If we win and kill the vessel, I die with her. If we lose, we all die. I am not for this world and I know it. I am ready for death; I hope you are too.

GABRIELLE (lifts her head):

Ancktari, I bet you always spread cheer wherever you go.

ANCKTARI:

I think it is best to think that we are going to die. That way, when we live, we are pleasantly surprised.

XENA (brusquely):

Enough with this talk of dying. Every evil force can be stopped, Ancktari.

ANCKTARI:

The prophecy that predicted the coming of the vessel said that she and her god can only be

matched by one force. If that force fails, the world will be consumed by a dark reign, the reign of the vessel and her god... But most of our priestesses believe that such a force does not even exist.

XENA:

Well, what kind of a force is it?

ANCKTARI:

A god and a mortal whose souls are joined in a deep bond--not as a master and his favorite but as equals.

GABRIELLE (gasps):

Xena, it's about you!

XENA:

What are you talking about?

GABRIELLE:

Don't you get it? You and Ares!

XENA (looks flustered):

Gabrielle...either you've been eating henbane, or you're still a little dizzy from our trip through the ether.

GABRIELLE (stares at the floor):

Look, Xena, I may not like this thing between you and Ares, but don't tell me that there isn't a deep bond between you.

XENA (irritably):

Meaning that I can never shake him out of my hair?

GABRIELLE:

Come on, Xena, this isn't the time to play games. You know what I'm talking about. Have you ever stopped to think that you've both had plenty of chances to kill each other? And plenty of reasons, too? And yet you're both still around.

XENA (snorts):

Talk about an original way of expressing affection. (then, her face goes serious) Still, if you're right, that may be our only chance. (looks at Ancktari) Why is it no one can ever come up with a prophecy that's easy to figure out? You know, something like "If Xena and Ares fight Set and Cassiopeia together, then peace and contentment will reign for the next thousand years and happy rabbits will hop around Alexandria's main square."

Ancktari glares at her.

GABRIELLE:

I don't think she has much of a sense of humor.

ANCKTARI (curtly):

Enough foolishness. Now we have to find the Olympian and tell him about the prophecy.

XENA (sarcastic):

Where do you suggest we start looking?

ANCKTARI (rises):

I have no time to waste, Warrior Princess. Whether or not you and this god of yours are the key to defeating the vessel and her god, I must make my own plans to fulfill my mission. (heads for the door)

XENA:

Where are you going?

ANCKTARI:

To round up some of the best temple warriors to assist me and to find out where the vessel and her god are now.

She leaves.

XENA (shakes her head):

So now I have to tell Ares that according to some prophecy, he and I have a special bond. (rolls her eyes) I'll never hear the end of this.

With a flash of blue light, Ares materializes in the middle of the temple.

GABRIELLE:

Speak of the devil.

XENA:

Where were you?

ARES:

Oh, busy being zapped over to a temple of Osiris where Set and your little friend are holed up right now. (drops the flippant act and becomes very serious) Xena, you have no idea what power these two have when they're joined together.

XENA:

So what do you propose to do?

ARES:

Look, Xena, I won't beat around the bush. I cut a deal.

XENA (scornfully, with a look of bitter disappointment):

A deal? Let me guess. If he spares you, you'll let us all die.

ARES (approaches her and stares deeply into her eyes):

No, Xena. If they leave you and Gabrielle out of it, I'll give them Ancktari.

XENA (after a long pause during which her face reflects a struggle of conflicting emotions--anger at Ares' willingness to betray Ancktari, and acknowledgment of how much he cares about her):

I think I have a better plan.

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Sunrise. Outside the old temple of Isis, which looks slightly dilapidated inside just as it does on the outside. Xena and Ares are sitting on the steps of the temple.

ARES:

Xena, I've been thinking...

XENA:

That could get to be a nasty habit.

ARES:

You know, even if this prophecy is true, we might not come out of this alive.

XENA:

I know, Ares. Mortal warriors deal with that every time they go into battle.

ARES:

Well, I can't say that's very much of a consolation. (he takes her hand) Xena...since this may be the end of the world as we know it, how about a proper goodbye?

XENA (eyes him warily):

What do you mean?

ARES (smiles slightly):

A kiss, Xena. What did you think I meant? (Xena looks hesitant) Besides, it's a good way to find out if we really do share a special bond.

XENA (looks uncertain for a moment):

All right...

She takes Ares' face in her hands and kisses him lightly at first, but before she knows it they are melting into each other in a passionate kiss. Gabrielle comes out of the temple and looks away, embarrassed. They finally break the kiss.

ARES (grins):

I think we do.

XENA (a little flustered):

You think we do what?

ARES:

Have a special bond, of course.

ANCKTARI (off-screen):

I certainly hope so, for the sake of the universe.

Pan over to Ancktari and six warriors with tattoos like hers, two men and four women, standing at the steps of the temple.

ANCKTARI (sternly):

So the Olympian is back. Are you ready to take on the vessel and her god?

XENA:

We are. I have a plan, Ancktari. But it will put your life and your warriors' lives in danger.

ANCKTARI (scornfully):

You forget that my life is already forfeit, Warrior Princess. When the vessel dies, my allotted term in this world runs out. As for my warriors, there is not one of them who would not gladly die to stop the vessel.

CUT TO

The temple of Osiris, which now looks empty. Ares materializes in the temple, holding a bound Ancktari.

ARES (raises his voice):

Hey, Cass! Are you here? I've got something for you.

In a slow, sensuously swaying walk, Cassiopeia comes out from behind a giant statue.

CASSIOPEIA:

Ah...Ancktari. Just who I've been waiting to see. (she tilts her head, pressing a finger to the side of her chin in a quizzical gesture) Now, let's see...what do you think I should do with you? Should I just let history repeat itself? (she turns around and waves her hand, and the flame that burns before the altar flares up) Or maybe come up with something more creative...

ARES:

Hold it, girlie. I'd love to listen to your twisted little fantasies but before we conclude this transaction, I need some assurance that you'll hold up your end of the deal. No harm comes to Xena or Gabrielle.

CASSIOPEIA (laughs):

You already have my master's promise. Is the word of a god not enough for you?

ARES:

Oh please. I know how *that* game is played.

CASSIOPEIA:

So, do you want it in writing or what?

ARES:

Not a bad idea.

Cassiopeia bursts into peals of laughter. Just then, with a loud bang, the temple doors swing open and the six warriors of Isis burst in, armed with swords and spears.

WOMAN WARRIOR #1:

Hold on, Ancktari! We are here to fight the witch!

CASSIOPEIA (laughs):

Ooooh, reinforcements. How exciting.

She shoots a bolt of energy at the woman but she manages to avoid it by leaping high into the air. She lands right next to Ancktari, grabs her from Ares' hands and, with a quick motion, cuts her bonds with a dagger. Ares vanishes.

ANCKTARI (taking the sword the woman warrior hands her):

So, vessel. Now you have to face me in a real fight, instead of slaughtering me when I am bound. Disappointed?

CASSIOPEIA:

You think you can fight me? How amusing. Of course, I could summon my lord Set and he'd turn you all to dust in the blink of an eye, but this is going to be so much fun!

The warriors circle her, and then the fight begins. Cassiopeia uses her warrior skills to disarm two of the warriors with powerful kicks and then kills them with her sword. Then, she knocks out two more with a bolt of energy that leaves them alive but immobilized. Laughing gleefully, she starts to fight Ancktari and the remaining woman warrior.

Ares, Xena and Gabrielle materialize in the middle of the temple.

CASSIOPEIA (turns):

Oh...what a touching reunion. I think the whole gang is here now. Ares, I see you're being your usual double-crossing self. (she fends off a blow from Ancktari and delivers a kick that sends her opponent flying across the hall and landing in a heap at the foot of a column, then stuns the other warrior with an energy bolt.) What a surprise. Oh--Xena, Gabrielle, I don't think you've had the pleasure of meeting my master yet. (she raises her voice) My lord Set!

There is a flare of dark blue and golden lights, and Set materializes next to her.

CASSIOPEIA:

And now that we've completed the introductions...let's get this show on the road!

Cassiopeia and Set clasp hands and direct a stream of blinding light at Ares, Xena and Gabrielle. Ares and Xena join hands and deflect the energy bolt back at Set and Cassiopeia, making them sway a little.

CASSIOPEIA (jeering):

Well! I love a challenge.

XENA:

Nice to see that you think so highly of us, Cassiopeia.

CASSIOPEIA:

Come on, give us your best shot!

Joining hands, Ares and Xena shoot a fireball at Set and Cassiopeia, who manage to block it. Set suddenly transforms into a monster with the snarling head of a grey dog.

XENA:

Uh, Cass...I think your boyfriend is a little challenged in the looks department.

CASSIOPEIA:

Oh, Xena, you're so shallow. It's not the looks that count.

There begins a ferocious battle of the two gods and their chosen mortals. Fireballs and energy bolts fly wildly. The temple begins to tremble, with some statues, pedestals, vases and sacred objects crumbling to pieces and others being shattered by firebolts. Gabrielle is nearly hit by some falling pieces of stone. A column falls, sending up a huge cloud of dust that envelops everything. Only lights are seen coursing through the dust, indicating that the battle is still raging on. When the dust clears, Set is sprawled on the steps of the throne, knocked out, while Xena and Ares are aiming at Cassiopeia.

CASSIOPEIA (puts up her hands, with a suddenly plaintive look on her face):

No, wait! Please! Xena, what gives you the right to kill me?

XENA:

What gives me the right? How about the fact that you've spent the past few days trying to kill me and my friends?

CASSIOPEIA:

I wasn't born bad, Xena. I am who I am because my family was destroyed by a warlord--just like the one you used to be. (Xena looks troubled) I was seduced by power and I became a killer just like you did, Xena.

ARES (glances over at Xena):

Um, Xena--can we skip the chitchat and finish the job?

CASSIOPEIA:

And then I got another chance, a chance to live my life as a good and innocent woman, and I lost it because of you, Xena!

XENA (looks shocked and lets go of Ares' hand):

What?

CASSIOPEIA:

You let the assassin live, Xena! You saw Ancktari try to kill an innocent defenseless girl and you let her go! If she hadn't followed us the next day, you wouldn't have run off in pursuit of her and left Gabrielle and me alone to face the bandits on that road! And I wouldn't have taken a life! I'd still be that innocent girl I was when we first met!

Xena is visibly torn.

ARES (grabs Xena by the shoulders):

Xena, come on! This is a *really* bad time for one of your guilt trips!

There is a flash of light, and Set is standing at Cassiopeia's side again. They clasp hands and burst into a gleeful laugh. Suddenly, Cassiopeia's laugh turns into a shriek of pain and rage. The tip of a blade, glistening with blood, comes out of her chest. She lets go of Set's hand as her hands go toward the wound.

SET (howls):

Nooooooooooooooooo!

He changes back into human form and catches Cassiopeia as she sags forward. Standing behind her is Ancktari. She yanks her sword out of Cassiopeia's back, and Cassiopeia collapses into Set's arms.

CASSIOPEIA (shock on her face):

You killed me...Ancktari.

ANCKTARI:

Guess who gets the last laugh.

Blood bubbles up on Cassiopeia's lips, and she dies. Set throws his head back and screams. The temple shakes, and there is a blinding flash of dark blue and golden light. When the shaking stops and the light fades, both Set and Cassiopeia are gone.

ANCKTARI:

It is done. The vessel is dead, and the evil god is again banished from the mortal realm.

She suddenly sways and falls. Xena rushes to her side.

XENA:

Ancktari...is there anything I can do to help you?

ANCKTARI:

No, Xena. I have told you, my life ends with that of the vessel. You and the Olympian have done more than I could have ever asked. Thank you for everything.

XENA (holds her up):

No. Thank you, Ancktari. You reminded me once again that nothing in this world is safe if people like us aren't willing to die to protect it.

Ancktari smiles and reaches up to touch her face. Then, she dies and her body crumbles to dust.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle, and Ares coming down the steps of the temple of Osiris, facing the setting sun.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, are you all right?

XENA (looks a little distracted):

Yeah...I keep thinking about what Cassiopeia said. Maybe it is my fault that she killed again.

ARES:

Xena, you never cease to amaze me. Don't you see that the witch was just messing with your mind?

XENA:

Doesn't mean she didn't have a point.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

Xena, it's not like we could have spent our lives babysitting Cassiopeia. Who knows what else might have happened to her sooner or later? It's like Ancktari said...Cassiopeia never really did anything to redeem herself. She lost her evil side through a magical rite. And the rite didn't work completely because Cassiopeia had mortally wounded the priestess who performed it. (she puts her hand on Xena's arm in a comforting gesture) Look at it this way, Xena. At least, thanks to you, Ancktari was able to fulfill her mission.

XENA:

And to die doing it.

GABRIELLE:

But she died as a warrior, not as a victim.

ARES:

So...back to Greece?

XENA:

Back to Greece. You know, Gabrielle, I guess there are advantages to having a god on your side... (smiles affectionately) ...even when it's a conniving bastard like him.

ARES:

And there are advantages to having a mortal on your side, even if it's a stubborn hellcat like you. Come on.

He puts his arms around the women's shoulders and they all disappear in a flash of light.

CUT TO

A field in Greece. Ares materializes in a shower of sparks with Xena and Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE (brightly):

Home, sweet home... By the way, where are we?

ARES:

About a half-mile from where you left your horses stabled. (to Xena) Say, it took the threat of the end of the world for you to admit that we have a special bond.

XENA:

Yeah, and I'm sure it will take the end of world for you to shut up about it. (growing serious, she squeezes his hand) Ares...thanks for your help.

ARES:

You know something else, Xena?

XENA (warily):
What?

ARES:

When I told you about Cassiopeia, you said you could always tell when I was up to no good. I guess you shouldn't always be so sure of yourself.

His comment leaves Xena momentarily at a loss for words. Ares smiles slyly and gives her a kiss on the cheek before vanishing in a flare of light. Xena remains glued to the spot, in a slight daze.

GABRIELLE:

Xena? (waves a hand in front of Xena's face)

XENA (flinches, snapping out of it):
Yeah?

GABRIELLE:

I was thinking--now we can finally continue that trip to Prytus and go shopping.

XENA (smiles):

Yeah...maybe relaxing a little isn't such a bad idea after all.

FADE OUT

THE END

[No actual priestesses of Isis were actually harmed during the production of this motion picture. The temple of Osiris, however, was left badly in need of repairs.]