

SHIPPER SEASON EIGHT

“The Beast Within”

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Logline

When Xena and Gabrielle return to an island they once helped free from a monster, they find that its old problems have not gone away—they have only taken on a new form.

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TEASER

FADE IN

On a bustling port. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion are walking through a crowd.

GABRIELLE (to Darion):

So, it sounds like you had a pretty good time in Potidaea.

DARION (indifferently):

It was okay. But I really missed you. (with emotion in his voice) I wasn't sure if you were going to come back or not.

GABRIELLE (obviously concerned but trying to sound cheerful):

Darion--*of course* I was going to come back!

DARION (his mood shifts quickly to excitement):

It's so great that we're traveling again! I loved it the last time we were on a ship! Where are we going again?

XENA:

A place called Britannia. (her face darkens) Just want to check out some rumors that the Romans may be up to something over there.

DARION:

Romans... (wistfully) It's too bad you went to Rome without me. I really liked it over there.

GABRIELLE (quickly):

I don't think you would have liked it much this time around. (changes the subject) But before we get to Britannia, we have a stop on the way, on an island called Elis.

DARION:

What's in Elis?

XENA (with a pleased smile):

Some people who should be pretty happy to see us.

DARION:

People are pretty happy to see you everywhere, aren't they?

GABRIELLE:

Especially the people in Elis. Two summers ago, Xena freed them from a terrible monster.

XENA:

We freed them from a terrible monster.

GABRIELLE (smiles self-deprecatingly):

Yeah, you did the fighting and I gave some rousing speeches about freedom.

[FLASHBACK]

A dragon, with a lizard-like head, two bleeding stumps on both sides where two more heads clearly used to be, and huge webbed wings, emits a furious roar and flaps its wings as blood gushes from its neck.

The camera pans quickly down to a city square where a crowd has gathered. Two dead dragon heads are lying on the ground, with some curious people milling about them. Some people are looking up, others only sneaking occasional peeks. The camera zooms in on Gabrielle, who looks up.

GABRIELLE:

Look! It's falling!

MAN #1:

But they told us it's dangerous to look up!

GABRIELLE:

You don't have to listen to them anymore! The dragon is dead! You're free!

People start to look up and gasp.

GABRIELLE:

Get out of the way!

There are screams as people run to get out of the way of the falling monster. With an enormous thud, the dragon lands on the ground. A cloud of dust goes up, and then starts to settle as the noise of the fall slowly vibrates down to silence. People come closer again, staring at the fallen dragon. The camera zooms in on Gabrielle again.

GABRIELLE (worriedly):

Xena?

The camera pans over to show Xena stepping from behind one of the dragon's wings, shaking herself off. Pan back to Gabrielle, who smiles in relief. A loud chorus of cheers goes up. There is a chant of "Xena! Xena! Xena!"

GABRIELLE (raises her fist):

Freedom!

The chant turns to "Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!"

[END OF FLASHBACK]

DARION (excited):

A monster? I want to hear this story!

GABRIELLE:

Come on--I'll tell you later. Hurry up or we'll miss the ship!

DARION:

So when do we get to Elis?

Their voices start to fade as they walk off into the distance.

GABRIELLE:

In five days. And we stay there for two days, just like we did the first time on our way to the Norse Lands...

CUT TO

A montage:

- * a ship traveling across the seas;
- * Xena standing by the railing, looking out at the sea;
- * Xena and Darion racing around the deck, with her playfully chasing him;
- * a somewhat greenish-looking Gabrielle lying on her bunk in a cabin;
- * Xena and Darion standing up on the deck, Xena pointing something out in the sky to Darion;
- * Darion bringing a cup of water to Gabrielle;

* Xena standing on the deck and looking at an island visible in the distance;
* the ship pulling into the harbor.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion walk down the street of a city. Everything has a gloomy look of poverty and fear. Guards in dark green leather armor are patrolling the streets, hands on clubs hanging at their belts, looking around at shabbily dressed men and women who cower in fear as they pass.

DARION (puzzled):

This doesn't look like a very happy place...

GABRIELLE:

Actually, this is pretty much how it looked last time...

DARION (to Xena):

But you killed the monster!

XENA (thoughtfully):

Maybe there's something else going on.

A commotion is heard around the corner--the sound of blows, the shouts of two male voices and the screams of a couple of higher-pitched voices.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange worried looks.

CUT TO

Around the corner, in an empty side street, two guards in dark green leather are pummeling a boy and a girl who look about fourteen. A marble column with a bust on it is visible in the background.

Pan to Xena, who peers around the corner, then charges forward silently, grabs the guards by the scruff of their necks and slams their heads against each other, knocking them out. They collapse.

Gabrielle and Darion come around the corner.

DARION (seeing the guards lying on the ground, looks disappointed):

Wow--I missed everything... (to Gabrielle) She works too fast.

GABRIELLE (amused):

She does sometimes.

XENA (to the boy and girl, who are trying to regain their bearings):

I don't care what you kids did, they had no business doing that. (pauses) So, what *did* you do?

The boy and the girl stare at her in awe and whisper to each other. The girl points at the chakram on Xena's hip.

BOY:

You...you're the Dragon-slayer.

XENA:

Well, the last guy I knew who went by that title was a weirdo with an eyepatch who lived in a house covered with scales. But I guess I'll take it as a compliment.

GIRL:

This is the crime we committed. (she turns and points to the column) Trying to tell the truth about you.

The camera zooms in on the column and on a charcoal drawing on the marble. It's a crude drawing of Xena's chakram.

XENA (shocked):

What?

The camera pulls up higher to show an inscription on the column.

GABRIELLE (reads):

Hail, King Orantes, Dragon-slayer...

XENA (repeats in disbelief):

King Orantes, Dragon-Slayer?

Xena and Gabrielle exchange shocked looks as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

On the same street. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion are walking, with the boy and the girl in tow.

XENA:

This one really takes the cake. King Orantes! (snorts contemptuously) He did everything he could to stop me from killing the dragon.

GABRIELLE:

And now he's obviously taking the credit for it.

BOY:

Now that you're back, you're going to take care of him, aren't you?

XENA (not too sure):

We'll see about that. Listen, you two had better run along. And don't tell anyone you've seen me.

GIRL:

Thank you, Xena!

The boy and the girl scamper off.

GABRIELLE:

I think the first thing we should do is go see Alida and her father.

DARION:

Who?

XENA:

They're the first people we met in Elis.

[FLASHBACK]

Xena and Gabrielle--Gabrielle in her Season 6 outfit--walk down a quiet street with a lot of lush greenery.

XENA:

I don't know what we're going to do on this island for two days. It looks like the most boring place in the world.

GABRIELLE (teasingly):

You mean, it's very peaceful and quiet?

XENA:

Something like that.

GABRIELLE:

I think we could use some rest--considering that we may have to take on Odin to get the golden apples. (off Xena's strange look) On the other hand, we could still run into some adventure here.

CHILD'S VOICE (off-camera):

Excuse me!

Xena and Gabrielle stop and look. The camera pans to a red-haired girl of about ten, in a blue dress, sitting on the porch of a modest but cozy-looking house and staring at the two women.

GABRIELLE:

What is it?

The girl gets up and sprints toward them.

GIRL:

You don't look like anyone I've seen around here before... (lowers her voice to a whisper) Are you Amazons?

GABRIELLE (smiles):

I am.

GIRL (obviously excited and fearful at the same time):

Really? Listen...I don't know if you can help us or not. But unless somebody does something, my sister Alida is going to die in two days.

XENA:

What's wrong?

A stout middle-aged man walks down the street toward them and gives them a suspicious look.

GIRL:

Listen, come inside... I'll tell you everything.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a doubtful look, then follow the girl inside the house.

CUT TO

Inside the house; the interior is just as modest and cozy as the outside, with a fire burning in the fireplace. The girl stands by the window points to a couple of chairs.

XENA:

We're not here on a social visit. What's your name? And what's wrong with your sister?

GIRL:

I'm Teria. Listen--how long have you been on this island?

GABRIELLE:

We only got here this morning. We're on our way somewhere else--our ship is here for two days while the merchants traveling with us do some trading.

TERIA:

So you don't really know anything about Elis.

GABRIELLE:

Why don't you tell us?

TERIA:

We have a dragon.

XENA (raises an eyebrow):

A dragon?

TERIA:

That's right. A big, ugly, slimy green dragon. He's made a bargain with the people of this island. They feed him and he lets them live. Except, once a year, they give him a girl.

GABRIELLE (appalled):

A girl? You mean, he kills them?

TERIA (sarcastic):

No, he marries them. What do you think? Actually, nobody knows what happens to these girls. Mr. Slimy just takes them away to his cave and nobody ever sees them again.

XENA:

And this time, he's picked your sister.

TERIA:

That's right. (hopefully) Do you think you can help her?

XENA:

Maybe. (thoughtfully) What's this dragon like?

TERIA:

I *told* you. Big, ugly, slimy--

XENA:

How big?

TERIA (scrunches up her face):

About the size of that big oak tree out there. (points at the window) Huge claws, huge teeth. Oh, and he's got three heads. Each one of them breathing fire.

XENA:

Great.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, that sounds pretty serious. (to Teria) Has anyone tried to kill him before?

TERIA (matter-of-factly):

Sure, lots of people. He killed them all. (off Xena's grim look) But that was a long time ago. I heard about it from Dad. In the past couple of hundred years, no one's even tried.

XENA:

How long--

TERIA (interrupts, looking out the window):

Shh! Alida and Dad are coming back from their walk!

Xena and Gabrielle walk toward the window and look outside. A young woman of about twenty, who looks somewhat like Teria but has a softer, less angular face and lighter hair, is coming down the street. She is wearing a light brown dress with a green belt. A middle-aged, gentle-looking bearded man in dark clothes is holding her arm. They are talking and smiling cheerfully at each other.

XENA (turns to Teria and glares at her):

Wait a minute. You just made this whole thing up, didn't you?

TERIA (intimidated but indignant):

Me? I never make things up!

XENA:

That girl isn't about to be sacrificed to any dragon. She's smiling. So's her father.

TERIA (desperate):

You just don't get it. That's the worst part of it. They're smiling.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange puzzled looks as the door is pushed open, and the young woman and the middle-aged man come in. They stop as they see Xena and Gabrielle.

ALIDA:

Teria, we have visitors?

TERIA:

Yeah, they're travelers. I invited them in.

XENA:

I'm Xena. This is my friend Gabrielle.

ALIDA (smiles pleasantly):

I'm Alida. This is my father, Victor--and you've already met Teria. We're always happy to welcome travelers to our house.

VICTOR:

Would you like some wine? Cheese? Fruit?

GABRIELLE (looks uncertainly at Xena):

Sure.

CUT TO

A little later, in the same room. Xena, Gabrielle, Alida and Victor are sitting around a table, eating fruit and cheese and drinking wine. Teria sits on the floor, staring glumly into the fireplace.

ALIDA:

Let me guess. You two have traveled a lot and had a lot of adventures, haven't you?

GABRIELLE:

You can say that again.

ALIDA (pensively):

I envy you... I've never left this island. And this is such a quiet place. Nothing ever happens here.

XENA:

Nothing?

ALIDA (thinks):

Well, we had a measles epidemic last year. But that's not such a big deal.

GABRIELLE (a little timidly):

But...what about the dragon?

VICTOR:

Oh, the dragon! We're so used to him--he's been around for five hundred years. (picks up a jug) More wine? (pours some wine into Xena's goblet)

GABRIELLE (even more hesitant):

But--but we've heard that Alida--

ALIDA (interrupts, looking sternly at Teria):

Teria. Have you been bothering our guests with your stories? (she shakes her head, then turns to Gabrielle) Gabrielle, I'm very sorry--but could we please not talk about this?

XENA:

Why not?

ALIDA:

Because no one can do anything about it.

XENA:

Sure they could. Kill the dragon.

VICTOR (shakes his head):

People have tried. Though not for the past two hundred years. I know all about it--you see, I am the official historian of this island.

GABRIELLE:

What if the whole island got together and challenged him?

VICTOR:

They tried once. He killed two hundred people in one day, then breathed fire and burned two villages just outside the city to a crisp. (reverently) He's a great warrior.

Xena gives him a startled look.

ALIDA:

Try the grapes, please. They're delicious.

XENA (absently pops a grape in her mouth):

So now, everyone just puts up with this.

VICTOR:

He's really not so bad, our dragon. You know, for one thing, as long as we've got him, no other dragon is going to attack us.

XENA (wryly):

I can see the logic in that.

VICTOR:

Besides, he's done some very good things for us.

Pan to Teria, who snorts contemptuously.

GABRIELLE:

Good things? Like what?

VICTOR:

Well, just over a hundred years ago the lake where we get most of our drinking water became infected. The doctors asked the dragon to breathe fire on it and boil the water, and it became clean again.

XENA:

How incredibly generous.

VICTOR (missing the sarcasm):

Wasn't it? And he did some other good things too--rid us of Amazons, for instance.

GABRIELLE (flinches):

What?

VICTOR:

We used to have an Amazon tribe living on this island. He killed them off.

XENA (bitterly):

Probably knew they'd be too much to handle.

GABRIELLE:

What's wrong with Amazons?

VICTOR (horrified):

Are you joking? Let me tell you something--I've never seen an Amazon in my life, but everyone knows they're the most horrible women. We're taught all about them in school. They don't recognize authority. They don't believe in marriage. (lowers his voice) A lot of them don't even like men.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange exasperated looks.

XENA (gets up):

All right, let me tell *you* something. After two hundred years, it's about time somebody challenged your dragon. Like me.

Teria looks up, a flash of joy in her eyes.

ALIDA (pleading):

No--please don't! He's going to kill you and it's only going to make things worse! I'll have to die knowing that someone else died in vain trying to save me.

XENA:

No. I'm going to kill *him*.

She is about to continue when a roaring noise is heard outside--the flapping of giant wings and the sound of something huge hurtling through the air.

TERIA (sourly):

Speak of the devil.

Xena draws her sword and rushes to the window; Gabrielle follows. They look outside to see the green three-headed beast hovering in the air over the street and then beginning a descent.

XENA (whips around):

He's coming here?

VICTOR (placidly):

Don't worry. You see, the dragon has lived among us for so long that sometimes he drops by for a visit. We're all used to it.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange puzzled looks and step away from the window. There is a loud knock on the door.

VICTOR:

Come in, come in!

The door opens. Xena and Gabrielle stare tensely at the door. A rather ordinary-looking brown-haired man with a mustache, in dark green leather armor, comes in.

MAN (smiling broadly):

Hello, everyone! (to Victor and Alida, who start to rise) No, no--don't stand up. We're all friends here. (to Teria) Hey, kiddo.

Teria scowls, silently picks up a ball and goes outside.

MAN:

Not very sociable, is she? Hey...I see you have guests. Who are the ladies?

ALIDA:

They're travelers, sir.

MAN (frowning):

They're not Amazons, are they?

VICTOR (hastily):

No, no--of course not!

MAN:

Well, that's good. (to Xena and Gabrielle, who are still staring at the door) What are you two staring at?

GABRIELLE:

We're waiting for the dragon.

MAN (laughs heartily):

I *am* the dragon.

Xena and Gabrielle look bewildered.

VICTOR:

You see, my friends, the dragon has lived among us for so long that sometimes he takes on a human shape. Just so we could all feel more comfortable around each other.

XENA (wryly):

Right.

DRAGON (laughs and slaps Victor on the shoulder):

Isn't that right! You could say I'm an old friend of the family. *Really* old. As in, I remember your great-great-grandma when she was this big. (holds out his palm, indicating the stature of a child, then glances at Xena and Gabrielle) Didn't expect me to get all sentimental, did you?

GABRIELLE:

Er...no.

DRAGON:

Alida! Come here, darling. (Alida comes up to him) Give me your hand. (Alida does as told) Such a sweet girl. (chucks her under the chin) Keep your chin up. Give me a nice smile. That's good. (he turns to Xena and Gabrielle as Alida goes back to her seat) So, what brings you two to Elis? Are you just passing through or do you have some business here?

XENA:

Well, we *were* passing through. But now, I think we actually have some business here.

DRAGON:

What kind of business?

XENA (icily, with her trademark steely glare):

Killing a dragon.

DRAGON (turns crimson):

What did you say?

XENA:

I'm challenging you to a fight. Is that clear enough for you?

ALIDA:

Xena, don't!

The dragon clenches his fists, throws his head back and lets out a huge, completely inhuman roar that makes the house shake. A vase with flowers falls off a shelf and shatters.

A puff of smoke erupts, and the dragon's human head changes to a lizard-like dragon head, about half the size of his body, with flames shooting from its mouth. Xena grabs her chakram, ready to strike. There is another puff of smoke, and the dragon's head changes to a human head again, only this time it's that of a gaunt-faced pallid redhead. The man looks taller.

ALIDA:

It's one of his other heads.

DRAGON (dryly):

You're Xena, Warrior Princess?

XENA:

That's right.

DRAGON:

I've heard of you. You're just as bad as any Amazon. I accept your challenge. You have to be destroyed.

XENA:

That's easier said than done.

DRAGON:

You're a worthy opponent. But I have killed one hundred and eighty-five warriors in single combat. And that's not counting a whole village of Amazons, one rebel mob, and one crazy fourteen-year-old boy who didn't like it when I picked his sister as my-- prize. (he walks over to the table, pours himself some wine and gulps it down)

XENA (darkly):

Trust me, you don't want to start comparing body counts.

DRAGON:

Mine is about to go up by one. (glances at Gabrielle) Or should I say, two. (puts down the goblet) Care to step outside?

XENA:

Right now?

DRAGON:

Of course. I said you were a worthy opponent--did you think I was going to give you time to prepare?

XENA (her sword at his throat):

Then what's to stop me from killing you right now?

DRAGON (folds his arms on his chest and sighs):

At best, you'd only get one of my three heads. Besides, if I were to return to my true form right here... (looks around) ...it would not be good news for our hosts. And you wouldn't want that, would you?

XENA (lowers her sword):

All right.

DRAGON:

If there's anything I despise, it's do-gooders. (heads for the door) Come on out. Trust me, it'll be quick.

VICTOR (rises from his seat, sweating, obviously nervous):

Sir? I'm sorry, but...you can't do this.

DRAGON (turns around indignantly):

What did you say?

VICTOR:

You see...please don't question my devotion to you, sir...but I *am* the official historian of Elis...

DRAGON:

What on earth does your job have to do with this?

VICTOR:

There's a scroll in the archives--an agreement that you yourself signed with a claw print, sir. (off the dragon's glare) Sir...really, she *is* my daughter, you know...there's nothing wrong with my wanting her to stay alive a little longer, is there?

DRAGON:

Keep it short. What are you trying to say?

VICTOR:

It's an agreement...if someone challenges you to combat, the challenger has the right to pick the day and time of the battle. (the dragon glares at him) Not only that,

but the people of Elis must supply the challenger with any weapons he or she wants, and no one will be punished for it.

DRAGON (strokes his chin):

When did I sign this so-called agreement?

VICTOR:

Four hundred and forty-five years ago, sir.

DRAGON:

So I was sixty-five years old at the time. I was just a naïve, idealistic kid.

VICTOR:

But sir--

GABRIELLE:

If you kill us now, the entire island will think you're a liar and a coward.

DRAGON:

The entire island will never know a thing. These two (motions toward Victor and Alida) will keep their mouths shut.

VICTOR (his hands are shaking; he is obviously making a major effort to overcome his fear):

I protest!

ALIDA:

Daddy!

DRAGON:

All right, then. I guess I'll just have to exterminate you all.

The door swings open and Teria bursts in.

TERIA:

And they'll still know you're a coward! I've already told half the neighborhood that Xena is here to fight you!

The dragon clenches his fists and lets out another roar, even louder than the last time, making the fire flicker in the fireplace. Once again, a puff of smoke erupts around his neck and his head turns to a huge fire-breathing dragon's head; when the smoke clears again, the man who stands in front of Xena and the others is a broad-shouldered stocky barbarian with long hair and a shaggy beard.

DRAGON (barks):

All right! When do you want to fight?

XENA:

How about tomorrow at noon.

DRAGON:

Fine. Tomorrow it is.

He storms out. The sound of flapping wings is heard outside once again as the dragon flies off with a roaring storm-like noise that makes the house shake.

VICTOR:

He's gone... (rubs his forehead) That was terribly selfish of me, wasn't it?

ALIDA (sadly):

No, daddy, it was all right.

VICTOR (gulps down some wine, his hand shaking):

I think I'll go to my room and lie down.

ALIDA (helps him up):

I'll help you.

VICTOR:

No, no--you stay and entertain our guests.

TERIA (comes up to her father, suddenly almost affectionate):

I'll go with you, daddy.

Victor and Teria go out through a side door.

ALIDA (turns to Xena and Gabrielle):

You shouldn't have done this.

GABRIELLE:

Alida, aren't you afraid to die?

ALIDA (shrugs):

It's really not that bad to die young. At least I'll never grow old.

XENA:

What about your father and your sister?

ALIDA:

They'll still have each other.

GABRIELLE:

Don't you have a boyfriend, or a fiancé? (Alida nods) Aren't you sorry to part with him?

ALIDA:

It all worked out for the best. You see, as a reward, the dragon made Gregor his personal attendant.

XENA (wryly):

You're right, you probably shouldn't be too sorry to leave him behind.

ALIDA:

Really, it's not so bad. Warriors sacrifice their lives for something they believe in, don't they? (Xena nods pensively) Well, I'm sacrificing my life for my people. And they'll remember my sacrifice. For three days after I'm... (her voice falters a little) ...gone, everyone on the island will wear black and skip dessert after each meal.

XENA:

That's quite a sacrifice. (she comes up to Alida and takes her hands) Listen to me, Alida. The dragon has crippled your soul and poisoned your mind. But everything is going to change once I've killed him.

ALIDA (gives her a long, thoughtful look):

If what you just said about me is true, then it's better for me to die.

Close-up on Xena's troubled face.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion are walking down the same street. Xena and Gabrielle are wearing dark hooded capes over their armor.

XENA (critically looks herself over):

I don't think these are such a good idea.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, considering what we've heard, I think it's best to stay undercover for a while.

XENA (lifts up the heavy cloak):

Maybe not quite so literally. Besides, these aren't exactly inconspicuous, don't you think?

DARION:

I think they're really cool! Can I have one too?

XENA (glances impatiently at Gabrielle):

I rest my case.

They approach Victor's and Alida's house.

GABRIELLE:

Well, there it is.

She goes up on the porch and knocks. There is no reply. Xena comes up to the front door as well.

XENA (knocks loudly):

Victor? Alida? Are you there?

Silence.

GABRIELLE:

Maybe they're out for a walk.

They walk back to the street. A woman comes out of the house next door.

WOMAN (looks at them warily):

Are you looking for Victor and his daughters?

XENA:

Yes, we're old friends.

WOMAN (comes closer to them and speaks in a conspiratorial half-whisper):

They took them away just this morning.

GABRIELLE (shocked):

To prison?

WOMAN (equally shocked):

No, the gods be with you! To the royal palace. Orders of King Orantes himself. He's had it proclaimed all over the city.

XENA:

Had *what* proclaimed?

WOMAN:

He's taking Alida for his bride.

Xena and Gabrielle stare at her, stunned, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

Gabrielle, Xena and Darion are walking away from the house.

DARION:

So this King Orantes--he's a bad guy?

XENA:

Let's just say we didn't get off to a very good start.

[FLASHBACK]

Inside Victor and Alida's house. Xena and Gabrielle are alone in the main room.

XENA:

There's got to be a way to beat that thing. There's always a way.

Teria comes out.

TERIA:

So you're going to fight him, huh?

XENA:

Yeah.

TERIA:

Good. (she picks up an apple from the tray of fruit and bites into it) 'Course, it's not like you're gonna win or anything. But hey--at least for a day, it'll be kind of nice to go on thinking that you might.

XENA:

Thanks for the vote of confidence.

TERIA (shrugs):

I tell it like it is. (takes another bite of the apple) That's probably why I don't have a lot of friends.

GABRIELLE:

We can be your friends.

There is a loud knock on the door. Xena and Gabrielle turn their heads. Teria goes toward the door.

TERIA (tensely):

Who's there?

VOICE (off-camera, muffled):

His majesty King Orantes is here to see you!

GABRIELLE (glances at Xena):

The king!

TERIA (surly):

Come on in.

The door is pushed open by an attendant in a dark blue tunic and pants, embroidered with gold. After a moment he is followed by a small, plump middle-aged man in purple robes, with a crown on his balding head.

KING ORANTES (to the attendant):

Wait outside. (to Teria) Leave us alone, child.

Teria goes into a back room.

XENA:

So you're the king of this island. (she gets up)

KING ORANTES:

Please! No abrupt gestures. And keep your voice down.

XENA (puzzled):

Why?

KING ORANTES:

Because I'm very, very, *very* high-strung. Some people even call me "the mad king." (suddenly, he starts laughing hysterically, a high-pitched hyena-like laugh. Xena and Gabrielle look at each and shrug. Then Xena goes over to the table, pours some water into a goblet and offers it to Orantes; he takes a few sips and calms down) You think it's easy to be the king of an island ruled by a dragon?

XENA:

Well, I'll kill the dragon and things are going to get a lot easier.

KING ORANTES:

Easier? Hah! (he has another fit of hysterical laughter, then drinks some more water and quiets down) You don't know what you've done with that challenge of yours! My sister's been plotting to take over the throne and the dragon's been keeping her on a pretty tight leash. Now he's going to be busy getting ready for the fight and Sis is going to get completely out of hand.

XENA:

Listen, *your majesty*. (with heavy sarcasm) I don't know if you're crazy or stupid, but don't you realize that I'm going to save this island?

KING ORANTES:

Save the island? Hahahahaha! (drinks some more water) Believe me, my sister is worse than five dragons. Who asked you to fight the dragon, anyway?

XENA:

Everyone who's afraid to ask.

KING ORANTES (petulantly):

Listen, I'm the king. I'm telling you to drop it!

GABRIELLE:

Actually, your majesty, according to Victor, there's an agreement which says that if someone challenges the dragon to a fight, the people of Elis have to help the challenger.

KING ORANTES:

Help? What am I, crazy? I mean--I'm not *that* crazy.

XENA (scornfully):
I don't need anything.

GABRIELLE:
How about a shield? Or a helmet? You don't even have a horse!

KING ORANTES:
How about if I just offer you five hundred dinars from our treasury to go away and leave us alone?

XENA:
That's not going to work.

KING ORANTES (hopefully):
Six hundred?

Xena glares at him.

There is a knock on the door. King Orantes shudders theatrically and then presses his hand to his heart, panting.

KING ORANTES:
No one spares my poor nerves.

The door is pushed open. A blond-haired, blue-eyed handsome young man in dark green clothing comes in. A medallion around his neck has an image of three dragon heads.

YOUNG MAN (bows slightly):
King Orantes.

KING ORANTES:
Oh yes--Gregor. Here to meet our so-called liberator? (he gives another mad laugh, but this time a mercifully short one) Xena, Warrior Princess--Gregor, personal attendant to my lord Dragon.

XENA:
Gregor. You were Alida's fiancé, weren't you?

GREGOR (haughtily):
I'm not here to discuss my private affairs. I have orders from the dragon. Actually, I was looking for you, your majesty.

KING ORANTES (eagerly):
Orders? Do tell. (rubs his hands) Are we going to throw these two in a dungeon?

GREGOR (coldly):
No, you're going to supply Xena with anything she requests.

KING ORANTES:

Help! I think I'm hallucinating! Did you just say that I have to supply Xena with anything she requests?

GREGOR:

That's right.

KING ORANTES (crestfallen, looks at Xena):

What did you say you needed? A shield, a helmet and a horse?

Xena shrugs.

GABRIELLE:

That would be good.

GREGOR (to Xena):

My lord Dragon also wants you to know that he will meet you on the main city square at noon tomorrow. And now, if you'll excuse me, I need to talk to Alida privately.

He moves on to knock on the door leading to the inner part of the house. The door opens. Xena gives him a thoughtful look.

KING ORANTES (sighs):

All right, all right...come to the palace before noon and you'll get your weapons.

He turns and walks out.

XENA (stares after him thoughtfully):

Come along, Gabrielle. Let's go check out that city square and see if I get any ideas.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion walk along a city street. The noise of a still-distant crowd is heard.

XENA:

Well, there it is--the city square.

The noise is getting closer. Music, drumming and singing can be heard, as well as celebratory shouts.

DARION:

Sounds like a big party.

As they come out into the square, we see a wide shot of the square filled with jubilant men and women. The square is dominated by a tall, imposing castle of gray stone, with a large balcony in front. On the sides of the steps leading up to the castle are two large identical stone sculptures of the dragon, two of its heads cut off and lying on the pedestal, with the figure of a sword-wielding King Orantes standing on its back.

Cheers go up as a richly clad man comes out on the balcony. The camera zooms in on him. It's Gregor.

GREGOR:

People of Elis! We celebrate the second anniversary of our liberation from the tyranny of the cruel, greedy, inhumane and utterly disgusting dragon who used to lord it over us! (cheers) Two years ago, a feckless warrior wannabe challenged the dragon to a fight.

Pan back to Xena, who looks at Gabrielle in open-mouthed shock.

XENA:

I'm starting to understand how Joxer felt...

Pan back to Gregor.

GREGOR:

A special royal investigative commission has determined that this so-called hero gave the dragon a couple of light wounds and then fled, leaving behind an enraged and dangerous beast. (Xena rolls her eyes in disgust) It was then that our brave King Orantes charged into battle, attacked the monster and finished it off in a glorious heroic feat.

The square erupts in loud cheers.

GREGOR (starts to speak again as the cheers begin to die down):

On that day, the curse of slavery was forever eradicated from our soil! Long live the free people of Elis!

The cheers rise again.

GREGOR:

And now, the dragon-slayer himself, King Orantes!

The cheers in the square become deafening. A close-up of a man applauding, tears streaming down his face.

MAN:

Hail, King Orantes, Dragon-slayer!

KING ORANTES (raises his arms and waves to the crowd):

Thank you, thank you, my good people!

Cheers of "Hail, dragon-slayer!" go up from the crowd.

KING ORANTES:

Our long nightmare is over, and happy days are here! You all remember what a nervous wreck I used to be under that damned dragon! And look at me now--I'm the picture of health! And I know you're all happy as larks! (cheers go up again) And now, the best news of all, which you may have heard already...today, I am going to marry Alida, the beautiful maiden who was doomed to die in the lair of the beast!

The cheers erupt again.

XENA (grimly):

Let's get out of here.

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion start making their way out of the crowd and away from the square as the sounds of Orantes' voice and the noise of the crowd begin to fade.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, we have to help Alida. She would have never agreed to this of her own free will.

XENA:

Of course not. Alida's a very brave girl.

DARION:

I thought Alida didn't want you to fight the dragon.

GABRIELLE:

She didn't, at first.

DARION:

So what happened later?

[FLASHBACK]

Night. A guest room in Victor's and Alida's house, moonlight streaming in through the window. Xena and Gabrielle are asleep. A female figure in a long gown walks stealthily into the room and tiptoes toward Xena's bed. A metallic object in the woman's hand gleams in the moonlight as Xena breathes evenly. After standing over Xena for a few moments, the figure puts the object--a dagger--down on the small bedside table, then reaches over and shakes Xena's shoulder.

WOMAN (whispers):

Xena, wake up!

XENA (opens her eyes):

I woke up when you opened the door. (sits up) Just wanted to see what you were going to do.

The camera pans to show Alida's moonlit face. She sighs and sits down on the bed next to Xena, who sits up.

ALIDA:

I wanted to talk to you.

XENA:

Did Gregor want you to kill me?

ALIDA (nods):

He did. On the dragon's orders. He said that if I killed you, the dragon would let

me live and we could still be married. (smiles in disbelief) Xena, the Dragon is scared of you.

XENA (thoughtfully):
I guess so.

Gabrielle stirs and sits up, awakened by their voices.

GABRIELLE (sleepily):
What's going on?

XENA:
It's all right. It's Alida.

ALIDA:
You know, I realized something tonight. I've always been an obedient little girl. Well, not anymore. When I saw you and Gabrielle, and the way you stood up to the dragon, I realized that there's a different way to live. You made me want to respect myself. And you know what? Even if I die the day after tomorrow--at least I'll respect myself for those last two days of my life.

XENA (hugs her):
Listen to me, Alida. You're not going to die. You're going to live and be free.

ALIDA:
Thank you, Xena. (turns to Gabrielle) Thank you, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE (smiles):
Thank *you*, Alida. It's not easy to find your courage when you've lived in fear your whole life.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion walking down a city street.

DARION:
So what did King Orantes do? Did he ever give you those weapons?

Xena smiles bitterly.

[FLASHBACK]

Day. The city square. It looks much as it does in the present, only the two stone sculptures on the sides of the palace steps are intact statues of the three-headed dragon (and no figure of King Orantes). Xena and Gabrielle are approaching the palace.

GABRIELLE:
Do you think they'll really give you weapons?

XENA:

Doesn't matter. My plan doesn't really depend on having a helmet or a shield. And I definitely don't need a horse. But it would do them some good if they did.

GABRIELLE (worriedly):

Are you sure there's nothing I can do to help?

XENA (shakes her head):

Not this time.

They come up the palace steps and approach the two guards at the front door.

GUARD #1:

Are you Xena?

XENA:

I am.

GUARD #1:

This way. (points to a corridor) King Orantes and his councilors will meet you in the inner courtyard.

Xena and Gabrielle enter the palace.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle come out into the large inner courtyard of the palace, edged with green shrubbery and some sparse flowers. In the center of the courtyard, a large, richly decorated throne stands on a dais. On the lower level of the dais stands a much smaller and more modest throne, with chairs lined up on both sides of it. Xena and Gabrielle stop and look around.

Voices are heard, and King Orantes comes out from under an arch on the other side of the courtyard, followed by a group of somber-looking, middle-aged and old men and women.

KING ORANTES (ecstatically):

Hail, hail, O great and mighty Warrior Princess! (in a normal voice) Sorry, nerves. (coughs) Our meeting is now open.

He goes up to the lower dais and sits down on the small throne. The councilors take the other seats. Two attendants stand at the foot of the dais.

KING ORANTES:

So, here's our agenda for today. Xena, Warrior Princess, has challenged our Lord Dragon to a fight. In accordance with an agreement most magnanimously signed (his voice breaks up a little as if he's about to laugh) by our magnificent Lord Dragon, we are supposed to provide the challenger with (he seems to stifle another laugh) any weapons she requests. (This time he bursts into paroxysms of quiet laughter, almost choking; finally he motions to an attendant who brings him some water. He takes a few sips and calms down, then raises his voice a little) Bring the weapons, please!

The attendants walk off into the arcade on the side of the courtyard and return, one carrying a helmet, the other a shield. Xena takes the shield and looks it over suspiciously, then takes a swing and punches it hard--punching a hole in it.

XENA (looks up and glares at King Orantes):

This is wood.

KING ORANTES:

You don't say. It's what they use on stage in the best theater on Elis. (peevishly) You should be a little more careful, you know--damaging public property like that.

XENA:

I take it the helmet is from the theater too?

KING ORANTES:

Of course. We only use the best.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, after this, I'm not sure you want to see the horse.

Before anyone can continue, a deafening noise is heard overhead--the flapping of giant wings and the sound of something huge hurtling through the air. A large shadow falls over the courtyard. King Orantes and the councilors look up.

KING ORANTES:

My Lord Dragon! He's coming here!

The king and the councilors jump to their feet, run off the dais and line up, standing at attention. Xena draws her sword.

The dragon hurtles down in a cloud of smoke in which his paws with huge claws, his webbed wings and his three heads are visible. When the smoke clears, he is in human form--that of the gaunt, pallid-faced redhead--seated in the ornate throne on the upper dais.

DRAGON (snaps):

Everyone out. Except these two. (indicating Xena and Gabrielle)

KING ORANTES:

Sir, yes, sir!

King Orantes and the councilors file out quickly.

DRAGON (to Xena):

So. They came through with the weapons?

Xena throws down the shield and the helmet. The helmet cracks as it falls on the stone floor of the courtyard.

XENA:

Theater props.

DRAGON (shakes his head):
Ouch. That must've hurt.

XENA (coldly):
It's all right.

DRAGON:
Let me tell you, it would have hurt *my* feelings--and I'm a cold-blooded creature. (rubs his hands together) Literally. Aren't you scared?

XENA (lifts an eyebrow):
Of you?

DRAGON:
Not of me. Of my people. They're pretty scary, you know. I made them that way.

GABRIELLE (defensively):
They're still human.

DRAGON:
They look human on the outside. (leans forward, his eyes glittering) If you could see their souls...you'd be scared to death.

XENA:
Not me.

DRAGON:
I guarantee you, you'd get out of here instead of dying for these freaks. (leans back in his throne and sounds almost philosophical) It's a funny thing, you know--the human soul. You cut a man's body in half and he'll croak. You rip his soul to pieces, and he'll be fine--just...easier to handle. You should see some of the souls on this island. Crippled souls, poisoned souls, blind souls, deaf souls--dead souls. You know why King Orantes pretends to be crazy? He doesn't want anyone to know that he hasn't got a soul anymore.

GABRIELLE:
Bodies can be healed. Souls can, too.

DRAGON (to Xena):
Quite the optimist, isn't she? (rises from the throne) Well, now. That's enough chit-chat. Shall we get started?

XENA:
I'm ready.

DRAGON:
Get out on the square and wait. You'll know when it starts.

He walks away briskly, disappearing into the arcade as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Resume:

[FLASHBACK]

The city square. People are starting to gather on the edges of the square, looking around timidly.

CUT TO

The courtyard, where Xena and Gabrielle are now left alone.

XENA:

All right, Gabrielle. You make sure to keep them distracted. I have to get up to the top of the battlements.

She heads for the arcade. A dark-haired, bearded palace guard, about 30 years old, emerges from behind a column and approaches Xena, looking around cautiously.

GUARD:

Xena?

XENA (suspiciously):

What do you want?

GUARD (in a low voice):

To see if I could help you in any way. There are those of us who've been waiting our whole lives for someone with the courage to challenge the beast.

Xena sizes him up warily, obviously trying to decide if this is a trick.

GUARD (eagerly):

Trust me. You won't regret it.

XENA (sighs):

Maybe I will--but I'm in too much of a rush not to trust you. You know the quickest way to get up to the battlements at the top of the castle?

GUARD:

Sure, I'll take you there. Anything else you need?

XENA (gives him a thoughtful look):

Got a good crossbow?

GUARD:

Sure. Follow me. (his voice fades as they walk off, Gabrielle looking after them)
My name's Leonid.

CUT TO

Gabrielle comes out of the palace into the square and goes over to the edge of the square where she stands with the rest of the crowd. People are speaking in hushed voices.

WOMAN #1 (a well-dressed woman in her forties):

So where's this Xena?

MAN #1 (elderly and gray-bearded):

She must have chickened out at the last minute!

WOMAN #2 (young, pretty and snappily dressed):

I hope she has! Why did she get this whole thing started anyway?

GABRIELLE (gives her an exasperated look):

Aren't you the least bit happy that maybe Alida's life will be saved?

WOMAN #2 (purses her lips, looking over Gabrielle's clothes with obvious disapproval):

Listen, Alida is a friend of mine. I care about her a lot. But you know what? If it hadn't been for Xena, my friends and I would be getting ready for poor Alida's farewell party right now. Now Alida's under lock and key in her house and everything's gone haywire. (she sniffles)

MAN #2 (middle-aged and dignified):

That's right, everything's gone haywire. Even the prices on bread and fish at the market have gone up.

WOMAN #1:

Terribly sensitive people, these market vendors.

MAN #3 (in his twenties, slightly unkempt):

You know, I'm an artist. I just finished a very creative art project--a portrait of the dragon made entirely out of dried green vegetables. The dragon was going to come by and look at it this afternoon. (sighs) I was hoping he'd tell the king to give me money for future projects... Now he's going to be busy fighting.

CUT TO

The roof of the royal castle. Xena races out of a stairwell, now armed with a crossbow as well as her sword and chakram. She stops, catching her breath, and looks back.

XENA:

Thank you, Leonid!

The camera pans to Leonid, who stands in the stairwell.

LEONID:

Good luck!

Xena comes out on the roof and crouches behind the battlements.

CUT TO

The crowd on the edges on the square.

MAN #4:

I hope it's over quickly.

Somebody tugs at Gabrielle's elbow; she turns and sees Teria.

GABRIELLE:

Teria! What are you doing here?

TERIA (grins proudly):

They've posted guards at every door and window of our house, but they forgot the kitchen window. I'm small enough to get out.

GABRIELLE:

Shouldn't you be with your father and your sister?

TERIA:

Nah. I want to see that big lizard get his butt kicked.

MAN #1 (gives her a horrified look):

Somebody shut that child up!

Suddenly, a deafening roar is heard overhead and everyone looks up. The dragon, in his natural form, swoops down toward the square, roaring and breathing fire.

DRAGON:

Xeeeeenaaaaaa!!!!

He circles the square a couple of times and then soars in the air, his three heads turning this way and that as he looks for Xena.

Over his roar and the flapping of his wings, the sound of the chakram whizzing through the air is heard. The chakram slices at one of his necks and leaves a huge bleeding gash in it. The dragon lets out a roar; its wounded neck droops and he seems to lose balance, flapping its wings desperately and clawing at the air. Quick pan to Xena as she catches the bloodied chakram, then down to the crowd as people

cry out in shock and point toward the wounded dragon and toward Xena on the palace roof.

TERIA (pumps her fist):
Yeah!

Several people shush at her.

WOMAN #1:
Why, the poor dragon! He's hurt! This is awful!

Pan to King Orantes and Gregor who are standing on the palace balcony.

KING ORANTES (in consternation):
How did she get up there?

Pan up to the dragon as he roars again and breathes a stream of fire at Xena. Xena dives behind the battlements, rolling on the surface of the roof.

The dragon flies toward the roof. Xena readies her crossbow; a long piece of thin but sturdy rope is tied to the arrow. She shoots the arrow, embedding it deeply in the dragon's still-intact middle neck. The dragon roars in pain. Before it can regain its bearings, Xena grabs the rope; letting out her battle cry, "A-yi-yi-yi-yi-yi!", she leaps high, flipping in the air, and uses the rope to pull herself up and straddle the dragon's middle neck. The dragon roars.

Pan to the crowd, which has drifted toward the middle of the square. Cries of horror go up as some people cover their mouths in dismay.

Gregor rushes to the edge of the balcony.

GREGOR (shouts over the noise of the battle):
Good men and women of Elis! Please, listen to a very important news update. My lord Dragon has just performed a very clever maneuver and managed to capture the enemy. His victory is now assured.

The camera zooms in on the crowd.

MAN #2:
Well, *that* explains it.

WOMAN #1:
Of course.

Pan up to Xena on the dragon's middle neck, sword in hand. The dragon turns his only intact head toward her and opens his mouth, a flame hovering in it, but then blinks in confusion as he looks at his middle head, obviously realizing that he cannot breathe fire on her without burning his own head as well.

XENA (sneers):

I guess bad breath is a lot more offensive when it's up close and personal.

The dragon roars furiously.

Pan down to the crowd.

WOMAN #2 (pouts):

Oh, that Xena. Why won't she just give up? She *knows* you can't beat the dragon. She's just being stubborn.

MAN #2 (shakes his head):

This war has been dragging on for nearly ten minutes and it *still* isn't over.

WOMAN #1:

I can't believe it's taking so long.

Pan up to the dragon, who roars again and lifts up its wounded neck. Xena hacks at it with the sword; with the third blow, the head is severed completely and tumbles down.

Pan down to the crowd.

TERIA:

Hur--

Before she can finish the "hurray," Man #2 grabs her and clamps his hand over her mouth.

There are cries of "I can't believe it!" -- "It's falling!" -- "Somebody get me an eye doctor!" -- "Run!"

The head falls with a resounding thud, setting off a chorus of screams.

Pan up to the balcony.

KING ORANTES (erupts in hysterical laughter, then calms down abruptly and turns to Gregor):

Well? Say something!

GREGOR (rushes to the edge of the balcony again):

Good people! Please listen to another news update! For purely strategic reasons, our lord Dragon has temporarily suspended the use of one of his heads. Everything is going according to plan. The only reason our lord Dragon has not yet slain his opponent is that, as a true warrior, he wants to draw out this battle for as long as possible.

Pan down to the crowd.

MAN #2 (a little dubiously):

Now *that* makes a lot of sense.

WOMAN #1 (nods importantly):

Absolutely.

GABRIELLE:

Makes *sense*? Are you mad?

GREGOR (off-camera):

Also, you are asked to refrain from looking at the sky--only in order to avoid damage to your eyesight. We will continue, of course, to give you regular news updates on the course of the battle.

WOMAN #3 (elderly):

Good idea.

Many people look down. A few continue to look up; some others sneak occasional peeks at the sky and whisper to each other.

Pan up to Xena and the dragon battling. The dragon manages to swipe at Xena with one of his paws, slashing at her upper arm, which starts to bleed. Her hair is slightly singed by fire and blood is trickling from the corner of her mouth. Xena throws her chakram, which flies past the dragon's still-intact third neck. The dragon's two heads cackle loudly and start snapping at Xena while she beats them back with her sword. Then, the chakram whizzes back; with her sword moves, Xena pushes the dragon's right-side neck in its way, so that the chakram severs the neck almost completely. The dragon's furious, desperate roar shakes the palace and the square.

Pan down to the square, where a few people look up. Teria is staring brazenly at the sky.

TERIA:

He's getting his butt kicked!

MAN #4:

It's just strategy, little girl.

TERIA (snorts):

Strategy? Listen, mister, I've been in lots of fights. I know a butt-kicking when I see one.

WOMAN #1 (hisses at Gabrielle):

Get this child out of here!

TERIA:

Look! Look!

She points upward. There are gasps and screams as the dragon's second head lands on the ground.

WOMAN #2:

I think I've lost two-thirds of my respect for the dragon.

Pan up to the balcony.

GREGOR:

Good people of Elis...

VOICE IN THE CROWD:

Oh, shut up!

GREGOR:

Listen to a very important news update. The dragon has decided that having one head is the best policy because (there are scattered boos in the crowd) first of all, it's very, very human...

Pan up to the dragon, who is flailing helplessly and letting out hoarse roars. Xena drives her sword through his middle neck. His wings still flapping, he starts to fall.

Pan down to the square.

GABRIELLE:

Look! It's falling!

MAN #1:

But they told us it's dangerous to look up!

GABRIELLE:

You don't have to listen to them anymore! The dragon is dead! You're free!

People start to look up and gasp.

GABRIELLE:

Get out of the way!

There are screams as people run to get out of the way of the falling monster. With an enormous thud, the dragon lands on the ground. A cloud of dust goes up, and then starts to settle as the noise of the fall slowly vibrates down to silence. People come closer again, staring at the fallen dragon. The camera zooms in on Gabrielle again.

GABRIELLE (worriedly):

Xena?

The camera pans over to show Xena stepping from behind one of the dragon's wings, shaking herself off. Pan back to Gabrielle, who smiles in relief. A loud chorus of cheers goes up. There is a chant of "Xena! Xena! Xena!"

GABRIELLE (raises her fist):
Freedom!

The chant turns to "Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!"

Zoom in on Teria's face, full of almost incredulous joy. Gabrielle and Teria hug.

Pan up to the balcony.

GREGOR:
Good peop--

A piece of rotten fruit hits him in the face.

Pan down to the crowd. People are laughing, shouting, hugging.

WOMAN #2:
We're free! We're free!

MAN #3:
I can't believe I wasted so much time on making a portrait of that disgusting lizard!
(shakes his head) Such a waste of vegetables, too.

Pan up to the balcony where King Orantes and Gregor beat a hasty retreat inside the castle.

Pan down to the square. A smiling Xena approaches Gabrielle and Teria. Xena and Gabrielle hug. Then Xena looks affectionately at Teria.

TERIA (grins):
I knew you'd come through for us!

XENA (teasingly):
Did you, now?

TERIA (makes a face):
Weeeelll...I thought you might.

XENA (laughs and gives her a joking slap on the shoulder):
Good girl.

TERIA (her face lights up):
Hey--you think school will be out for a few days?

[END OF FLASHBACK]

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Darion in a small, nearly empty square, looking at a brass statue of King Orantes with a sword in his hand, his foot trampling a severed dragon head. Xena shakes her head in disgust.

GABRIELLE (dismayed):
What happened here?

XENA (somberly):

Maybe it's what the dragon said to us before I killed him, Gabrielle. He maimed and poisoned these people's souls. The dragon's dead--but there are a lot of people on this island who are dead inside. The way he made them, it was just a matter of who was going to pick up the reins once he was gone.

Darion walks around the statue, looking it up and down. His eyes widen suddenly in excitement.

DARION:

Hey, look! (points to the pedestal)

Xena and Gabrielle come up to him and look. The camera zooms in on the image of a chakram scratched into the black stone pedestal and an inscription next to it. A title appears on the screen, translating the inscription:

HAIL XENA, THE DRAGON-SLAYER!

GABRIELLE (looks up at Xena):

Some of their souls are all right.

XENA (smiles):

Come on, Gabrielle--Darion. We've got a wedding to crash tonight.

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

A luxuriously decorated room in the palace. King Orantes sits on the throne that was once occupied by the dragon. The chief of the guard, a burly man in green leather armor and a helmet stands before him.

KING ORANTES:

So. How are things in town?

CHIEF:

Everything's pretty quiet, your majesty. Except some troublemakers keep drawing that round thing everywhere. You know, the weapon that Xena woman used to carry.

KING ORANTES:

Nonsense. That's not a weapon, it's an O. Stands for "Orantes."

CHIEF (puzzled):

You mean, if we catch someone drawing one of those we shouldn't jail them?

KING ORANTES:

I didn't say *that*. Better safe than sorry. (pauses warily) Do they write anything?

CHIEF:

"Xena the Dragon-slayer," sometimes.

KING ORANTES (shakes his head):

What is it with this Xena obsession? Anyway, go on. Just make sure all's quiet tonight for the royal wedding.

The chief bows and walks toward the door. Just then, the door opens and a servant walks in.

SERVANT:

Your majesty! Your chief counselor Gregor is here to see you, along with Victor, the father of the happy bride.

KING ORANTES:

Oh yes, very good, very good. Bring them in.

As the chief of the guard leaves, the servant ushers in Victor, followed by Gregor.

KING ORANTES:

Ah, Mr. Historian. And Gregor. Come in, come in. (Victor approaches the throne and bows stiffly) You know, of course, why you have been brought to the palace. Tonight is your daughter's wedding. Of course, I haven't actually proposed or anything, but we men of state have no time for frivolities like courtship. Still, a king *should* respect certain traditional formalities. So. You agree, of course, to give me your daughter's hand in marriage?

VICTOR (stammering a little):

To be quite honest with you, your majesty, I--I don't think I do.

KING ORANTES (barks):

What? I can't believe this ingratitude. I killed the dragon--

VICTOR:

I am very sorry, your majesty, but I simply can't believe that.

KING ORANTES:

What nonsense! Didn't you read the report of the special commission? If I can believe it, then you certainly can.

GREGOR:

He just doesn't want to. The man is obviously bargaining.

KING ORANTES:

Well, I can respect that. All right then, you can have a position on the royal council with an annual salary of five hundred dinars. That's on top of your salary as official historian.

VICTOR:

I'd--I'd rather not take it.

KING ORANTES:

Six hundred?

VICTOR (shakes his head):

No, your majesty.

KING ORANTES:

Then what do you want?

VICTOR:

Just to be left alone.

KING ORANTES:

Left alone? Are you joking? What's wrong with the Dragon-slayer marrying the maiden he rescued?

VICTOR:

Your majesty...this is very difficult. In these past couple of years, I've learned to think for myself. That's not an easy thing at my age. Meanwhile, most of our people are just as quiet and obedient as they were before, and that's very, very sad. (sighs) And now, this wedding...

KING ORANTES:

Very sad? What are you talking about? (squints suspiciously) Are you planning to foment rebellion or something?

VICTOR:

No, your majesty...

KING ORANTES:

Good. Then I assume that you and your daughters are going to look cheerful and happy at the wedding and no one's going to make any trouble. Otherwise--well, you know, we've got a dungeon right here at the palace. (waves his hand) Go on and help Alida get ready for the ceremony.

Victor bows and leaves, looking dejected.

KING ORANTES:

That went well. (rubs his hands) It's good to be the king. (to Gregor) You know, there's just one thing that worries me...that Xena woman isn't going to come back, is she?

GREGOR:

Of course not, your majesty. I told you, I have it on very good authority that she was killed more than a year ago on an island in the East.

KING ORANTES (rubs his hands and chuckles):

Good, good.

CUT TO

The square. Xena and Gabrielle (still in their capes) and Darion are approaching the royal palace. Well-dressed men and women, with pieces of parchment in their hands, are filing into the palace

through the massive wide-open doors. Xena, Gabrielle and Darion hang back, waiting for the last of the guests to go in.

GABRIELLE (quietly to Darion):

All right, you wait here. (points to one of the two dragon sculptures by the steps, the one on the right)

DARION (makes a face):

All right. I'm sure it's all going to be over in a minute anyway.

He hides behind the statue, peeking out cautiously from behind the pedestal as Xena and Gabrielle approach the front doors where six guards are stationed.

GUARD #1:

Your invitations?

XENA:

Here's mine.

She throws off her cape and whips out her chakram, holding it up. The guards gasp audibly.

GUARD #2:

It's Xena!

The guards freeze in consternation. The chief guard comes down the hallway.

CHIEF GUARD:

What's going on?

GUARD #1:

It's...it's *her!* (points to the chakram in Xena's hand)

CHIEF GUARD (hesitates for a moment):

Seize them!

The guards step rather hesitantly toward Xena and Gabrielle.

CHIEF GUARD:

Cowards!

He draws his sword and charges at Xena. Quickly drawing her sword, she parries his blows.

In the meantime, two of the other guards rush at Gabrielle. She uses her sais to deflect their blows and battles them with kicks, quickly knocking down one of them.

Pan back to Xena, who continues to battle the chief guard. Another guard, looking rather indecisive, comes to his aid. Xena spins and knocks him out with a powerful backward punch even as she kicks the sword out of the chief guard's hand. She then leaps, flipping in the air, and kicks the chief guard in the face. He flies backward and lands on the floor by the wall, unconscious. The camera pulls back for a wide shot, to show Gabrielle punching out her second opponent and knocking him down.

XENA (assuming a battle stance):

Next?

The three remaining guards meekly sheath their swords.

The camera pans to Darion, who peeks out from behind the pedestal of the dragon statue. He runs out, races up the steps and joins Xena and Gabrielle.

DARION:

Are we going to crash the wedding now?

XENA:

In a minute. (to the guards) Two years ago, there was a palace guard here named Leonid. Where is he?

GUARD #2 (stammers):

He's...he's in the dungeon.

XENA (her face darkens):

The dungeon? We're going to get him out. Who's got the keys?

Guard #2 motions toward the still-unconscious head of the guard. Gabrielle goes over and takes a bunch of keys off his belt.

GABRIELLE:

I'll get him.

She goes off with Guard #2.

DARION (looks after them):

You think Teria will be at this wedding? I'd like to meet her. She sounds cool.

XENA (looks at him, amused):

She is.

CUT TO

The same palace hall as before, now crowded with guests. King Orantes sits on the throne, Gregor stands on the steps of the throne. A priestess in white robes embroidered with gold is standing at the foot of the throne. On the other side of the throne is a scribe holding a huge scroll and a quill.

Two attendants throw the doors open. A group of musicians with lyres and flutes start to play the wedding march.

CUT TO

The dungeon. Gabrielle is fighting two guards, displaying an impressive array of kicks, punches and spin moves. Leonid, looking gaunt and worn-out, wearing shabby gray prison clothes, is clutching the bars of a cell.

CUT TO

The throne room. A somber-looking Victor and Alida (wearing a white bridal gown) enter arm in arm and walk toward the throne along a dark red carpet rolled out on the floor.

CUT TO

Gabrielle unlocks the door of the cell.

LEONID (comes out of the cell):

Gabrielle! I thought you'd never come. (hesitantly) Is Xena--

GABRIELLE (smiles):

She's alive--she's here.

CUT TO

The throne room. Victor and Alida stop in front of the throne.

KING ORANTES:

Ah. My lovely bride. Welcome, welcome, my dear. (walks down the throne steps, approaches Alida and takes her arm; to Victor) Dismissed.

Victor gives Alida an apologetic look and retreats to stand in the front row of the audience.

GREGOR:

Dear guests! As you all know, two years ago, King Orantes freed us from the cruel tyranny of the dragon. (applause) For five hundred years, we gave our best maidens to the barbarous beast. Surely, we are not going to refuse the same to our beloved liberator! (applause) This scroll (points to the scroll the scribe is holding) bears the names of five hundred unfortunate girls who died in the beast's lair. It is only fitting that the lucky girl who was rescued from its clutches, and is about to marry her brave savior, should be number five hundred and one. (applause) And so, as a symbol of our King's greatness and our island's devotion, the high priestess of Elis will now perform the wedding ceremony.

PRIESTESS:

Do you, Orantes, King of Elis, take this woman for your lawful wedded wife?

KING ORANTES:

Out of love for my people, I do. (applause)

GREGOR (to the scribe):

Write it down!

PRIESTESS:

Do you, Alida, take Orantes, King of Elis, to be your lawful wedded husband?

A long, tense pause.

ALIDA:

No.

Another tense pause.

GREGOR:

Go ahead, scribe--write it down. The bride says "I do."

ALIDA:

Don't you dare!

The scribe pauses, confused.

KING ORANTES (quietly to Alida):

You wouldn't want anything bad to happen to your little sister, would you?

ALIDA (wrenches her arm free and turns to the guests):

Please let me speak! Just a few words!

GREGOR:

Alida!

KING ORANTES:

No, no--that's all right. Don't shout. This is a wedding, the bride wants to make a speech; that's fine. Go ahead, my dear.

ALIDA:

My friends--my friends--think about what you're doing! Two years ago, the dragon was going to kill me. Now the dragon is dead and nothing has changed. We had a chance to be free and what have we done with it? If Xena and Gabrielle could see us today, they'd be ashamed. It's as if the dragon never died at all--he just took on a human shape, the way he used to. Only now, he's not one man, he's a lot of people and they're all killing me. Don't you understand?

The guests listen in stony silence.

KING ORANTES (clears his throat):

Well, now. The bride has made her speech. Let's go ahead and conclude the ceremony.

PRIESTESS:

I now pronounce you husband and wife.

Gregor signals to the guests.

GUESTS (in a chorus):

Hail, King Orantes! Hail, Queen Alida!

PRIESTESS:

Your majesty may kiss the bride.

Tittering, King Orantes raises himself up on tiptoes to reach Alida.

The doors swing open. Xena, Gabrielle and Leonid (in the middle, now dressed in a palace guard's leather armor again) stand in the doorway. Everyone turns around there are scattered gasps and whispers, "Xena, Xena!"

King Orantes, who was just puckering up his lips to kiss Alida, turns in shock.

ALIDA (close-up on her face, filled with incredulous joy):
Xena! Gabrielle! You're alive--you're back!

XENA (smirks):
Rumors of my death are usually exaggerated.

The camera zooms in Victor as he breathes a huge sigh of relief, then pans to the stunned, terrified faces of King Orantes and Gregor.

KING ORANTES (manages to get a grip on himself):
Uhh...Xena. What a pleasant surprise.

XENA:
I bet. (eyes him scornfully) King Orantes, Dragon-slayer, huh?

KING ORANTES (stammers):
Well, it was just...just...a bit of poetic license, if you will.

XENA:
Then I hope you won't mind some poetic justice.

She comes up to him and yanks the crown off his head. The spectators gasp.

KING ORANTES:
D-d-d-do you...want me to resign?

XENA:
You're not getting off that easy. (she turns toward a group of guards who now stand in the doorway and points to King Orantes and Gregor) Take them both to the dungeon.

GREGOR (indignantly):
Me? What did I do?

XENA:
If I started telling you, I'd miss my boat tomorrow.

GREGOR:
Excuse me, but if you think about it, it wasn't really my fault. It's the way I was taught.

XENA (grabs him by the collar):
Well, you didn't have to be such a good student, you bastard. (to the guards) Take them!

King Orantes and Gregor are led away. The guests burst into applause.

XENA (to the guests):
Hold the applause. (to one of the men) You! I saw you on the square today, yelling "Hail, King Orantes, Dragon-slayer" --with tears streaming down your face!

MAN (embarrassed):
That's...that's true. But I swear, I wasn't faking it.

GABRIELLE:

But you knew it was Xena who killed the dragon!

MAN:

Well...I did at home...but out on the square... (he shrugs helplessly)

XENA (shakes her head):

What am I going to do with you?

Darion and Teria, wearing a frilly pink dress but unceremoniously holding up its hem, burst in through the open doors.

TERIA:

Sis! (runs over to hug Alida)

As she breaks the embrace, Xena comes up to her and ruffles her hair.

XENA:

Hey, kid. Good to see you.

TERIA:

Thanks, Xena! (grins brazenly) Took you long enough. I had to let them dress me up for the wedding. (points to the frilly pink dress in disgust)

DARION (to Gabrielle):

She *is* cool.

ALIDA:

Are you two here for long?

XENA (shakes her head):

Just until tomorrow. Like last time.

VICTOR (comes up):

Xena...how can I thank you?

XENA:

I'll tell you how. Don't make such a mess of things next time.

VICTOR (bewildered):

But what's going to happen to the island now that we've got no king?

GABRIELLE:

You have a queen. (points to Alida)

ALIDA (gasps):

You expect me to stay married to that--that--

GABRIELLE:

Of course not. You can have the marriage annulled and stay on as the queen... (looks at Victor)
Can't she?

GUESTS (burst into applause):

Hail, Queen Alida!

Alida hesitates.

GABRIELLE:

Alida, you have a chance to do something important for your island. But it's your choice.

XENA:

It's going to be hard work. You'll have to kill lots of little dragons.

ALIDA (bewildered):

What little dragons?

GABRIELLE:

The ones inside people's hearts.

ALIDA (hesitates, then sighs):

I'm not going to pretend I'm not scared. But I'll do it--to honor what you two have done for us.

XENA (to the priestess):

I think you should do the honors.

The priestess, still looking stunned, takes the crown from Xena's hands and places it on Alida's head. The guests burst into applause.

XENA:

I can suggest a good new chief of the royal guard. (points to Leonid) He helped me when I fought the dragon, and got thrown in the dungeon for his trouble.

LEONID (approaches and bows his head):

Queen Alida--if you place your trust in me, I swear I won't let you down.

ALIDA (smiles):

Orantes threw you in a dungeon and Xena trusts you. That's good enough for me. (to the guests) Please welcome Leonid, the chief of the royal guard. And my father Victor, who will serve as my counselor.

The guests burst into applause. Xena and Gabrielle exchange proud smiles.

GABRIELLE:

Shall we go out on the balcony and announce the news to the crowd outside?

ALIDA (smiles a little tensely):

Sure.

Alida, Leonid and Victor head toward the doors, followed by Darion and Teria and then by Xena and Gabrielle.

DARION (to Teria):

Hey, your sister's a queen now. Does that mean you're a princess?

TERIA (struck by the idea):

Yeah...I guess it does! Maybe that means I don't have to go to school anymore!

ALIDA (without turning):

Don't even think about it.

GABRIELLE:

Xena. Do you ever wonder if we're doing the right thing, playing with people's lives like this? Like the lives of all the people on this island?

XENA (shrugs):

You mean, we should have let Orantes go on playing with their lives? Or the dragon? (their voices start to fade as they walk away)

GABRIELLE:

I know Alida's a good person. You think she'll be a good queen?

XENA:

Sometimes, you have to take a chance and do something. Because doing nothing would be even worse.

FADE OUT

THE END

[No deliberate references to current events were made during the production of this motion picture.]