

Xena: Warrior Princess - Subtext Virtual Season 10



Production #V1002 – Demons in the Dark

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

It is a carefully laid campsite, with a well tended, small fire blazing in the background. Close by the fire is a large bedroll, and in that bedroll is Xena. She is lying on her side, head propped up on one hand, staring at Gabrielle. Gabrielle is sitting on the very edge of the bedroll wrapped up in a fur, looking out on the dark woods with her shoulders slumped.

GABRIELLE

I can't believe this
just happened to me.

Xena reaches a hand up and gently lays it against Gabrielle's back.

XENA

Gabrielle, it's ok.



GABRIELLE

It is not okay, Xena. I can't believe
I can't... I couldn't.... GRAH!!

XENA

(offhandedly)

Relax, ok? It's not the end of the
world. It happens to everyone
at least once in their lives.

Very slowly, Gabrielle turns to pin Xena with her glare.

GABRIELLE

Has it ever happened
to you?

XENA

Well, no, but....

GABRIELLE

Then spare me the
platitudes, please.

Gabrielle grabs her head.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

I mean, I was there. Right there!
And then wham! Nothing.

Sitting up, Xena scoots over to sit next to Gabrielle.

XENA

I'm not patronizing you,
Gabrielle. Maybe I....

GABRIELLE

No. Don't start. You were perfect.
You gave me everything I needed.
It's just me. I....

XENA

Gabrielle, listen. You've been under a
lot of stress lately. And you know as well
as I do how stress effects something like
this. You just need to give it time, and relax.
You'll be back to yourself in no time.

GABRIELLE

You really think so?

XENA

I know so, my bard.

Smiling, she hugs Gabrielle to her.

XENA

(cont'd)

Now come back to bed and let's get some
sleep. If I'm remembering correctly, there's
a town pretty near here that's supposed to have
a very nice inn, good food, private hot-tubs...
perfect for what ails ya. We could be there
before sunset if we leave early tomorrow.

GABRIELLE

(smiling)

Hot-tubs, huh?



XENA

Oh yeah.

GABRIELLE

Hm.

XENA

We could pick up a fresh
set of massage oils.

She waggles her fingers.

GABRIELLE

Sounds like just what
the doctor ordered.

XENA

Good. Then it's a plan.
Now come on and come
back to bed with me.

Nodding, Gabrielle crawls back under the furs with Xena. They cuddle close to one another, and share a sweet good-night kiss.

GABRIELLE

Goodnight, Xena. I love you.

XENA

Right back atcha.

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. TOWN OUTSKIRTS - DAY

Xena and Gabrielle stand just off the main pathway that leads into the town of Janus Hepta.

GABRIELLE

(wryly)

I think you and I need to have
a talk about how you define
"pretty nice", Xena.

Xena looks at Gabrielle, then back at what she can see of the town, frowning. Though Janus Hepta could, once upon a time, quite conceivably have been pretty nice, it has obviously gone to seed. Dust and bits of rubbish blow listlessly in the wind that scours across the barren land. Buildings that might once have been grand in their day are now little more than ramshackle huts standing against the ever-present wind by inertia alone. The building that looks to be the inn sags appreciably to one side, and its sign "The Pig in a Barrel" swings sluggishly from its one remaining hinge.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Who told you about
this place, anyway?



XENA

(distractedly)

Autolycus, I think.

Gabrielle looks at Xena in surprise.

GABRIELLE

Autolycus?

She returns her gaze to the town.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd, softly)

Doesn't look like there's anything
here that a beggar would want,
let alone the King of Thieves.

As if on cue, the wind picks up and a small wooden shack standing next to the inn gives up and crumbles pathetically to the ground. The few people walking by, all dressed in little better than rags, don't even seem to notice.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

I guess something must
have happened between
then and now, huh?

Xena straightens and nods her head slightly.

XENA

Guess so. There's a clearing just
to the north of here. No hot-tubs,
or room service, but it's private....



Gabrielle thinks a moment.

GABRIELLE

You know? I think we should
give this place a try.

Xena looks at her as if her last toy has left the attic.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

I'm serious, Xena. If nothing else,
there might be a story in it.

She waves her hands grandly.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

"Riches to Rags:
Who Killed Janus Hepta?"

(beat)

Too flowery?

XENA

Too something. Are
you sure you want to....

GABRIELLE

Yes. I'm sure. Besides, what's the worst that could happen?

Xena eyes her.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Okay, okay, forget I said that. Look, we'll just go down there, see if the inn is open for business. Maybe we can get something to eat that you don't have to catch and I don't have to cook, and sleep with a roof over our heads for one night. You said it would be good for what ails me, right?

Xena sighs, hoisted by her own logic.

Gabrielle grins.

XENA

All right, but if the food's poisoned, or the bed breaks and you wind up with splinters in your....

GABRIELLE

I know. I know. Don't come crawling to you. Right?



XENA

Right.

GABRIELLE

Done. Now let's get going before the rest of the town blows over.

With that, Gabrielle happily starts down the small slope toward the dilapidated town, leaving Xena and Argo to stare bemusedly after her.

XENA

(sotto voce, to Argo)
Sometimes I wonder about
her, my friend. I really do.

Argo whinnies in agreement.

CUT TO:

INT. INN - DAY

The interior of the establishment is even worse than the exterior. Bits of broken tables and chairs are thrown in the corner of the dark, dank room. The floor is sticky with substances Gabrielle would really rather not identify, and the smells from the kitchen are causing her to seriously reconsider Xena's prior offer.

Still, she can help but notice that for all its meanness, the room at one time must have been quite a magnificent sight. The bar, though scratched, stained and pitted, is the work of a master craftsman, and the few remaining pieces of furniture are equally beautifully made. The huge fireplace that takes up the far wall bears the crumbling remains of what must, at one time, have been a truly spectacular mosaic done in colored tile.

The inn's few patrons look suspicious and frightened by the two new visitors, and especially by the weapons they wear so prominently. As the duo approaches the bar, the 'keep steps forward with a scowl on his face.

MALUM

If you're from the King, you can turn right
around and get outta here. We've got
nothin' to offer him. Same as always.

A bit taken aback by his hostility, Gabrielle nevertheless smiles at the man.

GABRIELLE

I'm Gabrielle. A bard. Looking for
a room. Do you have any for rent?

Malum continues to glare at her in suspicion, until he's met with another type of glare. This one is from the tall warrior standing behind Gabrielle, which causes him to pale and nod.



MALUM

T-two r-rooms, top of the
steps and t-to your l-left.

GABRIELLE

Thanks, but we'll only be
needing one. How much?

MALUM

Two dinars?

GABRIELLE

You're asking me?

MALUM

No. I'm asking her.

Gabrielle turns to look at Xena, whose expression has smoothly shifted into one of complete innocence... or as innocent as Xena can get, anyway. Gabrielle, of course, isn't buying the act for a minute. She turns back to the 'keep.

GABRIELLE

Two dinars it is. Can you
throw in some dinner?

MALUM

Yes?

Rolling her eyes, Gabrielle leans over the bar.

GABRIELLE

(whispering)

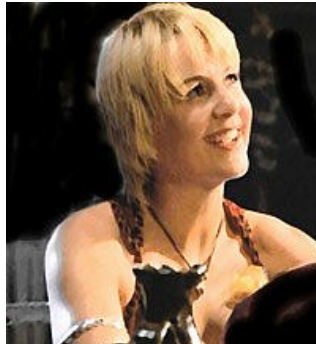
She's not going to hurt you.

He looks extremely doubtful.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Really. Okay?



After a moment, Malus sighs and nods.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Okay. Here's your two dinars.
If you could give me the room key,
we'll go freshen up a bit and
be back down for dinner.

He pushes the rusted skeleton key across the bar, only releasing his breath when Gabrielle gives him a final smile and turns to leave, followed by Xena.

As the pair makes their way up the rickety stairs, one of the inn's few customers approaches the bar.

MAN

You sure you're doin' the
right thing, Malum?
Could be lyin', ya know.

MALUM

You think that one would
bow down to any king?

The man follows Malum's gaze as Xena and Gabrielle disappear down the dark hallway at the top of the steps.

MAN

Guess not.

MALUM

We'll keep an eye on 'em,
though. Just in case.
(louder)
Sally, we got two
more for dinner!

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

The room is a pleasant surprise. Though small and a bit ragged, it is neat and clean. The bed, likewise, is small, but clean. A sooty marble fireplace dominates one wall, a window another. Between the bed and the fireplace is an old three-legged table with a cracked basin and a pitcher of water sitting atop it.

Gabrielle makes for the table, stopping when she sees something lying next to the basin. At first glance, it appears to be a piece of cloudy glass, vaguely pyramid shaped, and faceted like a prism. She lifts it and when the light strikes it, a thousand colors suddenly come to life.



GABRIELLE

(softly)

By the gods.... Xena, look at this.
Have you ever seen anything like it?

Xena glances at the object in Gabrielle's hand, her eyes drawn to the swirling colors that seem to come from deep within.

XENA

I've seen something like it once
or twice. Don't know what it's
called, though. Maybe some
kind of gemstone.

GABRIELLE

It's beautiful. Do you think
someone left it here by accident?
The last tenant, maybe?

XENA

I doubt it.



GABRIELLE

Well, if it belongs here, I can
see why Autolycus recommended
this place so highly.

Xena smiles briefly as she lays their packs down in the corner and returns to the table, lifting the pitcher and pouring some water into the basin to wash her hands.

XENA

Shall we brave dinner?

Gabrielle's stomach growls out its answer.

CUT TO:

INT. INN DINING ROOM - EVENING

Sitting at a corner table, Xena and Gabrielle dig into food that tastes surprisingly better than it looks or smells. Gabrielle has almost finished hers and is looking longingly at what Xena has left on her plate. Xena is looking around the room. A faint frown crosses her features.

GABRIELLE

What? What is it?

XENA

(softly)

Where are the men?

Her back to the room, Gabrielle looks over her shoulder. The room has filled appreciably since they sat down for dinner. At most of the tables are seated women and their children. Two very old men sit at the bar, talking between themselves. Aside from Malum, tending the bar, there are no other men to be seen.

GABRIELLE

Malum mentioned a king.
Maybe he conscripted
them into his army?

XENA

(doubtfully)

Maybe....



WOMAN'S VOICE

(off camera, from kitchen)

No! You won't go!
I forbid it!

The kitchen doors burst open and a teenaged boy strides through them. Dressed in rags, he carries a crude shovel and pick-axe in his hands. The boy's mother races out after him, grabbing one arm and pulling him to a stop.

WOMAN

Please, Vanus.
Please don't go.

VANUS

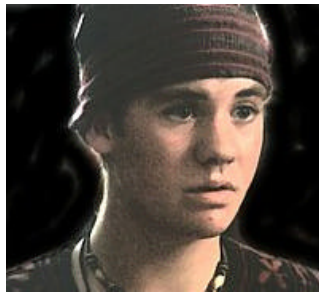
I have to, Mother.
I don't have any choice.

WOMAN

You do have a choice! You do!
You can stay here with me!
You'll be safe. I swear it!

VANUS

I can't, Mother.
Please, I have to go.



WOMAN

No, please! You'll just
die like all the rest!

VANUS

Then I'll die. I can't just sit here
and do nothing, Mother. I'm sorry.

Pulling away, he strides through the inn and out the door.

WOMAN

(sobbing)

VANUS!!!!

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. INN DINING ROOM - EVENING

WOMAN
VANUS!!!!

As the woman heads for the door, Malum darts around the bar and grabs her by one arm.

MALUM
No! Don't go out there!

The woman struggles against his grip.

WOMAN
Let me go! He'll die!!

MALUM
You don't know that, Sally.

SALLY
(outraged)
Don't know that?!? Of course I know
that! My husband! Your brothers!!
All the men in this town, dead!!
And now, my only son.... Vanus!!

One of the old men painfully rises from the stool and totters over to the struggling pair.

OLD MAN
Hold yer horses, Sal. Ain't none of us sure
what happened to them men. Ain't never
seen a body, and ain't none of 'em ever
come back sayin' somethin' was killin' em.
Me, I think it was Kregus. He's always been
jealous of our wealth. I think he kidnapped
'em so he could have it all for hisself.

SALLY
And that's supposed to
make me feel better?!?

The old man shrugs and looks away uncomfortably.

SALLY

(cont'd)

Kidnapped, dead, it's all the same,
isn't it? And in three days, it won't matter,
because the rest of us will be just like them!

MALUM

(hesitantly)

Then... maybe what Vanus
is doing is for the best?

Sally rounds on the man, her face a mask of rage.

SALLY

Best? Best for who, Malum? You??
You've never so much as dirtied your
hands in this town's business, and
now you're willing to sacrifice my
son to keep your precious Inn running?

MALUM

Now, Sally....

SALLY

It's true, Malum, and we all know it.
If you're half the man my son is,
you'll go out there and stop him.

OLD MAN

Or join him.

Malum stares at both of them, then drops his gaze to the floor, flushing slightly.

SALLY

Fine then. Stay a coward if it
pleases you, but don't barter
my son's life away for it.

She starts to move toward the door.

XENA

Wait.

Xena rises slowly from her seat, hand raised. Gabrielle doesn't look too surprised.

XENA

(cont'd)

I'll go after the boy.

She turns to Gabrielle.

XENA

(cont'd)

You stay here and figure
out what's going on.



With that, she exits, leaving the townspeople to stare after her open-mouthed.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN OUTSKIRTS - EVENING

Evening has drawn down over the desolate land, but Xena has no trouble following the dusty trail left by Vanus. Though obviously hurrying, Vanus does not make it much past the outskirts when Xena catches up to him, stepping just ahead and to the side of the young man. Terrified, he grunts and swings his pick-axe, only to have its handle caught in Xena's strong hand.

XENA

Watch it.

VANUS

(shakily)

You... you're the one from the
inn, aren't you? The warrior.

XENA

I am.

VANUS

The King didn't really
send you, did he?

In answer, Xena lifts an eyebrow, eyes glinting.

VANUS

(cont'd)

Didn't think so. You wouldn't
work for someone like Barakos.

XENA

Barakos? I thought
Kregus was your king.

VANUS

Kregus? Kregus is the Lord
of the flatlands to the east.
Barakos is our King.

When Xena releases the pick-axe, Vanus relaxes then gestures to a small rock outcropping just ahead.

VANUS

(cont'd)

Would... you like to sit down?
I could explain it to you.

He seems eager to delay his journey.

Xena nods.

CUT TO:

INT. INN - EVENING

The inn's dining room is a scene of chaos. All the adults, and most of the children as well, are busy trying to shout over one another to be heard. Unable to deal with the bedlam any longer, Gabrielle puts her fingers to her mouth and blows a piercing whistle that produces instant silence.

GABRIELLE

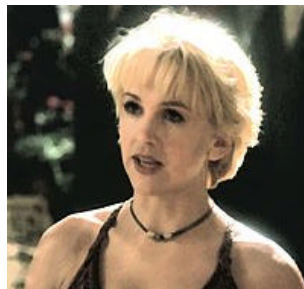
Thank you. Now, it sounds like you have a problem. Xena and I would like to help you, but we can't do that unless we know what's going on. So, this is what we're going to do. When I point to you, you speak. The rest of you, keep quiet. Understand?

She looks around the room. Several reluctant nods answer her question.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Good. Sally, why don't you start? Why is your son going... wherever it is that he's going, and why are you upset about it?



SALLY

Because he's going to die out there!!
Haven't you heard what I've been saying?

GABRIELLE

But....

MALUM

You don't know for sure....

Gabrielle cuts him off with a glare. He flushes, then studies his boots with fascination.

GABRIELLE

Sally, I understand that you think he's
going to die. What I don't understand
is why you think he's going to die.

She holds up a hand before the argument can start anew.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Remember, I'm a stranger passing
through here. I don't know your town,
or its history. Somebody needs to
start filling in some blanks for
me, or I can't help you.

She points to the old man.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

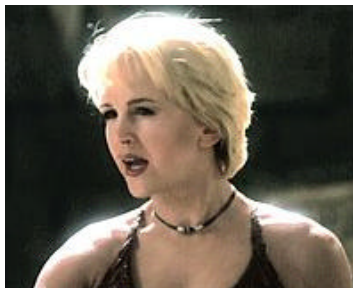
You.

OLD MAN

We're a minin' town, like you musta
guessed when ya saw Vanus leave
with that stuff in his hands.

GABRIELLE

And what do you mine?



Malum pulls something from his dirty pocket.

MALUM

This.

Gabrielle takes it, looking it over carefully.

GABRIELLE

I saw one of these upstairs in
my room. It's very beautiful.
Does it have a name?

OLD MAN

We call it Janusite. The most
precious gemstone in all the
lands, to hear our King tell it.

GABRIELLE

Kregus?

MALUM

No. Barakos.
Kregus is an idiot.

The other people in the room murmur in agreement.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROCK OUTCROPPING - NIGHT

Xena sits atop the outcropping, idly playing with a chunk of stone as Vanus looks on.

XENA

So, your miners started
disappearing, what...
a moon ago?

VANUS

A little more, but yes. Everything
had been fine up until then.

XENA

What happened?

VANUS

(slowly)

Well, when the sun rose, our four
best miners went down, just like
always. By sunset, they hadn't
come back. We thought, maybe
a cave in. It's happened before.

XENA

Did you send rescuers
after them?



VANUS

Yes. Five men,
all experienced.

XENA

And?

VANUS

They never came back either. We
wanted to send more out after them.
I even volunteered, but Torad, he was
the Headman, he said no. He said to
wait until the sun came up so we
could see what we were doing.

He looks down at his thin, dirty hands, twisting them in his lap. His face is a mask of anguish.

VANUS

(cont'd)

Two of my best friends snuck out
after everyone else was asleep.
They were goin' to try to help, you
know? They never came back.

Xena lays a hand on his shoulder, squeezing it briefly. Vanus scrubs at his eyes before turning to Xena.

VANUS

(cont'd)

I should have gone with them.
Maybe I could have done something.
Maybe I could have....

XENA

You might have died.



VANUS

(angrily)

It's better than living like this!! If Barakos hadn't pushed us so hard, maybe none of this would have happened at all! I've got no choice now, don't you see? Die in the mines, or die at that bastard's hands in three days! It's all the same!

CUT TO:

INT. INN - NIGHT

Gabrielle is now seated atop the table, feet planted comfortably on one of the chairs. The inn's patrons surround her, faces eager.

GABRIELLE

All right, let me see if I've got this now. Barakos is your King. And after he discovered what you were mining, he went a little crazy.

OLD MAN

Right off the deep end.

GABRIELLE

Right. So, he demanded that you step up your efforts and give most of what you mined to him as tribute.

SALLY

Plus the taxes he was already squeezin' outta us. Made it so we could hardly make a decent living anymore.

Gabrielle nods.

GABRIELLE

And then your men
started disappearing.

The people nod gravely. Many of the women have tears in their eyes.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

What did the King do then?

OLD MAN

Sent out his soldiers ta try and beat the
gems outta us, like we wuz hidin' 'em
from him or somethin'. We tried explaining
to them, but they wouldn't listen. They
demanded all the gems we owed, plus
extra for makin' the king angry. PLUS a
whole shipment more to make a wedding
cloak for his oldest daughter on account
of her marryin' Kregus' son.

GABRIELLE

Kregus. The one you think
kidnapped the miners.

OLD MAN

Well, o'course! It makes sense,
don't it? Kregus is dirt poor, even
if he is a king. He's always been
jealous of our wealth.

GABRIELLE

But why kidnap the miners when
he's going to get the gems
after the marriage anyway?



The old man looks away for a moment, not having a very easy answer to Gabrielle's logical question.

OLD MAN

(muttering)

Maybe he just don't
wanna share 'em.

GABRIELLE

You might be right, but he has
to know that once Barakos
finds out, it'll start a war.

OLD MAN

Wars've been fought fer a
whole lot less than this.

And that is logic that Gabrielle can't argue with.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROCK OUTCROPPING - NIGHT

XENA

So, you have three days to mine a wagon
in tribute, a wagon in interest, and a wagon
for a wedding cloak to be used as dowry.
And if you don't, the king will imprison
everyone and burn down the town.

Vanus nods.

VANUS

I know you don't think I can do it. But I
can't just let my mother and the rest of
those people be imprisoned, or killed,
while I sit back and do nothing. I have
to try, don't you see? I have to!

Taking in a deep breath and gathering his courage, Vanus stands and hefts his axe and
turns, facing Xena.

VANUS

(cont'd)

So... now you see why I have to do this.
I don't want to hurt you, the gods know
I don't, but I can't let you stop me, either.

Before he can even blink, he finds himself weaponless. He gulps in fear as blue eyes, now
silvered in the moonlight, glitter down at him.

VANUS

(cont'd)

D-don't....

XENA

Relax. I'm not gonna hurt you. But
I am taking you back to your mother.

VANUS

But....

XENA

I think we can figure out a solution to your problem. One that doesn't involve facing whatever's out there alone.

VANUS

But... why? Why would you help us? You don't even know us.

XENA

(very seriously)
It's what we do.



FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. INN - NIGHT

The mild commotion inside the inn quiets immediately as the door opens and Xena walks through, followed closely by Vanus.

SALLY
VANUS!!!

Breaking away from the small knot of humanity, Sally rushes to her son and engulfs him in a huge hug. She kisses his increasingly flushed cheeks as he tries ineffectually to wriggle away.

SALLY
(cont'd)
Oh, thank the gods! Thank the gods you're back. Don't ever do that again, do you hear me? Never!

VANUS
Aw, Mom!

Smirking, Xena makes her way over to Gabrielle's table, leaning casually against it as she folds her arms over her chest. Gabrielle smiles up at her.

GABRIELLE
That was quick.

Xena shrugs.

XENA
He didn't get very far.

GABRIELLE
Ah. Learn anything?



XENA
Yup. You?

GABRIELLE
Uh huh.

Their conversation is interrupted by Sally, who approaches with her completely embarrassed son in tow.

SALLY

The gods bless you for returning my son to me, warrior. I don't know what I would have done if....

XENA

Glad to help.

The woman appears ready to continue gushing and Gabrielle, sensing Xena's impending discomfort, rises from her place at the table. She stretches and gives a patently fake yawn.

GABRIELLE

Would you look how late it's getting? I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm beat. I think we'll all be able to get a better handle on this situation after a good night's rest, don't you?

The group looks at one another, then at Gabrielle, appearing about to protest. Xena narrows her eyes meaningfully. Jaws snap closed as they all nod quickly.



OLD MAN

Yup. Getting' real late, it is.
Gotta... um... gotta run.

MALUM

Past closing time for me,
that's for sure. Don't know
what I was thinking.

SALLY

Oh my, would you look at the time? My Vanus should have been in bed hours ago!

Quickly, the small crowd disperses until only Xena and Gabrielle are left standing in the middle of the room. Gabrielle grins up at Xena.

GABRIELLE

You're bad.

Xena leans down and steals a kiss.

XENA

Yeah, but you like
me that way.

GABRIELLE

Can't argue with that.
Night, Malum!

The 'keep peeks up over the bar, blushing as the two women make their way up the stairs and out of sight.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Having washed and changed into their night clothes, Xena and Gabrielle are curled up on the narrow bed. Xena's feet are hanging slightly off the end despite the fact that her legs are curled beneath Gabrielle's as they spoon together.

GABRIELLE

So, come to
any conclusions?

XENA

Not yet. You?

Gabrielle scratches under her chin, then clasps Xena's hand and raises it to her lips. She nuzzles it for a moment before pressing it against her upper chest and holding it there.

GABRIELLE

Not really. The old guy is sticking to the kidnapping story. Sally thinks the mines are haunted. Malum says that it's just loons mating or something, and the rest of them are scared spitless.

XENA

Mm.

GABRIELLE

Do you think Kregus
really kidnapped them?

XENA

Doubtful. From the little I've heard about him, he's an idiot, but he's also lazy. I don't think he'd go out of his way to set up such an elaborate operation, assuming he even had the brains to do it, when he's just gonna get the gems anyway by marrying off his son.

GABRIELLE

But you think we should check it out anyway? Just to be sure?

XENA

Couldn't hurt. It's only a quarter day's ride from here, so we could be there and back in enough time to check out the mines if Kregus isn't involved.

GABRIELLE

What about Barakos? That guy sounds like a real jerk.

XENA

Yeah, but since all his wealth comes from those mines, I don't think he's behind this.

GABRIELLE

You think it has something to do with the mines themselves?

XENA

Yeah. Cave-ins, most likely. Vanus said they'd pretty much mined out most of it and were having to dig further and further back to get to the gems. The shafts get unstable when that happens, and there's always a risk of poison.

GABRIELLE

Poison? In the rock?

XENA

No. In the air.... You can't see it, or smell it, but one breath of it, and....

GABRIELLE

Wow. That sounds
really dangerous.

XENA

It can be.

GABRIELLE

Why do people do it, then?

Xena shrugs.

XENA

Greed, maybe. For most
of them, though, it's the
only life they know.

GABRIELLE

Sobering thought.

XENA

Mm.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN - DAWN

Xena and Gabrielle are mounted on Argo. Malum, Sally and Vanus stand before them.

XENA

We'll be back
before midday.

She turns to look directly at Vanus.

XENA

(cont'd)

Don't go near those mines
until we get back, understand?

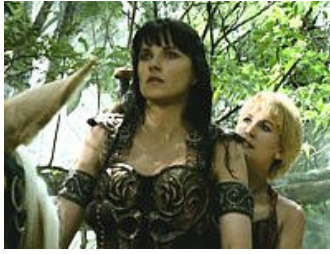
VANUS

Promise.

XENA

Good.

With a gentle nudge, Xena sets Argo off into a gallop, leaving the town and its people behind.



CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSKIRTS KREGUS' KINGDOM - DAY

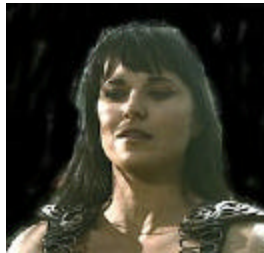
The castle grounds look much like the town of Janus Hepta; barren and windswept. The castle itself is in obvious disrepair with crumbling stonework scouring its edifice.

GABRIELLE

Wow. They weren't kidding
about him being dirt poor.

XENA

Doesn't look like it, no.



GABRIELLE

Why would Barakos want to marry
his daughter off to him? What could
he possibly gain from this?

XENA

Kregus has a standing army.
Rumor is they're not half bad.
Barakos could use that.

GABRIELLE

I suppose....

XENA

C'mon. Let's go see
what he's up to.

CUT TO:

INT. CASTLE - DAY

It is surprisingly easy for Xena and Gabrielle to enter the castle. Aside from a couple of suspicious looks, they slip right inside and come to stand in the middle of a crumbling, dirty rotunda.

No more than a moment passes when a tall, thin, pasty-faced man scurries over to them, hands fluttering. He's dressed in robes that might have been fashionable in their day, but now they hang on him like yellowed rags. The gaudy rings on his fingers are obvious fakes.

MAN

Oh, there you are! Repair to the
kitchens at once and see if you can
redeem the absolute mess that last
cook made of my dinner. Go! Now!

Xena and Gabrielle exchange glances, then return their attention to the man, who is obviously the king.

Kregus pales and steps back, hands still fluttering.

KREGUS

You... you're not the
cooks I ordered!

XENA

What tipped ya off,
Sophocles?

KREGUS

Guards! Guards!
Quickly!!

A young man, just as tall, thin, pasty-faced and badly dressed as his father, runs down the stairs, then stops abruptly as he sees the newcomers.

KREGUS' SON

Father what...? Oh, my.

KREGUS

Kregor, quickly, fetch the guards!
These women are trying to kill me!!

XENA

If that was our aim, you'd be dead
already, so relax... your Highness.
We just want you to answer a few
questions. Then we'll be on our way.

Kregus sticks his pointy nose in the air.

KREGUS

I do not answer questions
from commoners.

Xena slips her sword from its scabbard and lays it just under his chin.

XENA

There's one policy I
can see changing.

KREGUS

Guards! Guards!!!

KREGOR

Father, I....

KREGUS

Get them, you imbecile!

XENA

Stay right where you are,
son. This won't take long.

Xena looks at Kregus.

XENA

(cont'd)

I have just one question for ya, King.
Were you or any of your men down
by the mines in Janus Hepta recently?

The King's eyes widen and his mouth forms an O of disbelief.

KREGUS

The mines? Why would I go
to such a foul, stinking pit?

XENA

Gems. Lots of em.

Kregus laughs.

KREGUS

Why should I dirty my hands
when those gems will be mine
by right in three days?

Xena shoots a quick look to Gabrielle, who steps forward, smiling.

GABRIELLE

(conspiratorially)

Are you sure you didn't just take a quick look around down there? You know, to see how things were going?



Kregus laughs again.

KREGUS

I could care less how things are run, woman. As long as I get my jewels, I am perfectly content to let others dirty themselves for them. Besides, even if I had wanted to look, which I don't, that scamp Baragos keeps those mines guarded more tightly than his daughter's chastity belt.

Kregus shoots a look over his shoulder at his son, who flushes and stares down at his soft boots.

XENA

All right, then.

She sheaths her sword, taking him at his word.

GABRIELLE

Sorry to have bothered you, your Highness.

They turn to go.

KREGUS

Wait!

Xena stops, and turns back, eyebrow raised.

KREGUS

(cont'd)

Baragos sent you here, didn't he? That bastard is trying to come up with an excuse to cancel the wedding!!

At this, Gabrielle also turns, and gives him a comforting smile.

GABRIELLE

Believe me, your Highness, King Baragos is as excited about this wedding as you are. There has been no thought about calling it off, I can promise you.

Kregus looks at her, suspicion plain in his face.

XENA

(growling)

Gabrielle doesn't lie.



If possible, the king's face goes even whiter than it already is. He holds up his hands in a warding off gesture.

KREGUS

All right. All right.
I believe you.

XENA

Good. Now, if that's all,
we're outta here.

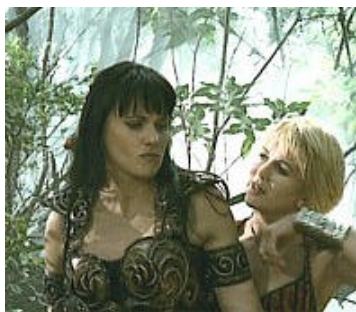
CUT TO:

EXT. KREGUS' KINGDOM - DAY

Xena and Gabrielle ride away from the kingdom, ignoring the suspicious looks thrown their way.

GABRIELLE

Well, that was a dead end.



XENA

Mm.

GABRIELLE

I guess it's just the
mines now, huh?

XENA

Yup. And the faster
we get there....

GABRIELLE

The faster we can
get gone, I know.

XENA

Yah!

CUT TO:

EXT. JANUS HEPTA - DAY

Opening her light carry sack, Xena stuffs several readied, unlit torches deep inside, then closes the buckles and straps. She hefts it over one shoulder as she straightens. She carries a shovel and pickaxe in one hand, and a small wicker cage housing a tiny songbird in the other.

Gabrielle looks curiously at this second item.

GABRIELLE

Music to mine by?

XENA

Animal to detect poison by. I'm
gonna set the cage down inside
the mines and then wait. If it's
still singing, we'll go in. If not....

GABRIELLE

Oh, the poor thing. Xena....

XENA

It's the only way to detect the
poison, Gabrielle. It's either this
bird or us, and I think you know
which choice I'm not willing to make.

After a moment, Gabrielle sighs grumpily.

GABRIELLE

All right, I understand,
but that....

XENA

... doesn't mean you have to like it.
I know. But like it or not, the only way
we're going down into those mines is
if our friend here says its safe.

Before Gabrielle can reply, the inn door bursts open and Vanus strides out, followed quickly by his wailing mother.

SALLY

Vanus!! Please!! You can't....

VANUS

I'm *going*, Mother, and
that's the end of it!

SALLY

But....

VANUS

No buts. You're my mother, and I
love you, but I have to do this.

(beat)

Look. These two women, strangers to us, are
willing to do what no one in this town has the
guts enough to do. Try to save our lives.
You might not understand, Mother, but they
deserve more than to just be handed off into
danger without so much as a thank you. I'm
going, and if you don't like it, well, I'm sorry,
but you won't stop me. Not this
time, Mother. Not this time.

GABRIELLE

You have a very brave son,
Ma'am. You should be proud.



For a moment, Sally looks as if she's going to say something particularly unpleasant. Instead, she stiffly turns on her heel and stalks away, back into the inn.

VANUS

Well, that went... pretty
well, don't you think?

Gabrielle chuckles as Xena rolls her eyes.

XENA

Daylight's wasting.
Let's get going.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. OUTSIDE OF MINES - DAY

Standing off to one side and holding the birdcage and his tools, Vanus watches with interest. Xena and Gabrielle examine the dirt-packed ground just outside the mines' entrance, looking for clues.

GABRIELLE

Find anything?

XENA

Not yet.

The dirt is tightly packed and hard to read. Looking very closely, Xena can just see scuff marks indicating human boot prints. All appear to be heading in the direction of the mine entrance. Despite meticulous examination, she can find none going the other way.

XENA

(cont'd, softly)

Not good.



GABRIELLE

What is it?

Xena gestures to the marks she's found and after a long moment, Gabrielle nods gravely.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

They went in, but nobody
came out, right?

XENA

Looks that way, yes.

Turning to Vanus, she takes the birdcage from his hand and walks toward the entrance.

GABRIELLE

Xena....

XENA

Relax. I'm not gonna go
that far. Be right back.

CUT TO:

INT. CAVE - DAY

Entering the cave with the cage and a torch in her hands, Xena notices first off a heavy, musky scent, indicating that an animal had used the mines for a den. She checks the ground for spoor, but can find none. What she does find are dozens of gems scattered all over the ground. Most are crushed or badly chipped. Seeing this, Xena frowns. Gems are, in her experience, a very hard mineral, not usually capable of being crushed by a careless step or drop. Squatting down, she picks up one of the more whole ones and examines it by the light of the flickering torch. A frown creases her brow. After a moment, she carefully replaces the stone, then rises.

Taking the bird cage, she walks several more long steps until the light of her torch is the only light seen, then sets it down in the middle of the path. The bird twitters up at her as it hops about on its perch.

XENA

(cont'd)

That's right. You keep singing, and
everything's gonna be just fine.



With a final look around, she turns and strides back to the entrance, welcoming the sun as it shines down upon her.

CUT TO:

EXT. MINES - DAY

Xena opens the door to the cage and the bird flies quickly away, chirping happily.

GABRIELLE

Guess we're set then, huh?

XENA

Yup.

Visibly gathering his nerve, Vanus hefts his tools and torch and takes a step forward.

VANUS

I'm ready.

XENA

It's better if you stay here....

VANUS

What? What do you mean stay here?! It was my idea to come here in the first place! I'm not going to....

GABRIELLE

(interrupting)

Vanus, listen. What Xena means is that we need someone standing guard at the entrance. We think that's why none of you know what happened to the miners, because there was no one on guard who could come back and tell the tale. It's a very important job.



VANUS

(huffily)

Very important. Hah!
My mother could do this
job standing on her head.

XENA

(silkenly)

Your mother isn't
here now, is she?

VANUS

But....

VOICE

(off camera)

Finally!

After much huffing and puffing the old man from the inn appears, red-faced from exertion.

OLD MAN

Figured ya'd need someone ta pull
guard duty out here. I ain't young
enough ta go gallavantin' in them
mines, but I reckon I can stand
out here in the sun easy enough.

Xena and Gabrielle cast the man equally dubious looks, then look at one another. After a moment, Xena shrugs, and the old man grins, toasting them with whatever he's got stashed in his waterskin.

OLD MAN

(cont'd)

Good luck to ya, then.... And don't
worry. If I hear a single peep outta
place, I'll be outta here so fast
you'd think my feet was on fire.

Xena stares at the now cackling codger, then eyes her two companions.

XENA

Let's go.

CUT TO:

INT. MINE - DAY

The mine shaft is long, narrow and very, very dark. The combined light of three torches casts only a feeble, flickering light that does little to dispel the gloominess within. As they walk deeper into the mine, the musky stench becomes almost overpowering. Vanus pulls up the neck of his shirt to cover his nose and mouth. Gabrielle waves a hand in front of her face, her eyes watering. Xena seems unaffected.

GABRIELLE

Xena?

XENA

Mm?

GABRIELLE

Are you sure that whatever's making
this smell isn't in here with us?

XENA

I didn't say that.



GABRIELLE

Oh.

They continue walking.

Suddenly, Vanus steps forward, holding his torch high so that it casts a wider circle of light. The floor seems to come alive with a sparkling myriad of pure color.

VANUS

(whispering)

By the gods.... There must
be thousands in here!
We've been saved!!

He begins to run, only to be held up by Xena's hand clamping down hard on his arm.

XENA

Don't touch them.

VANUS

(shocked)

Don't... what? Why not??
Don't you know what this means?

Gabrielle pats him fondly on the shoulder.

GABRIELLE

A little piece of advice, my friend.
When Xena says don't do
something.. don't do it.

VANUS

But....

GABRIELLE

Come on.
We've got work to do.

VANUS

But....

He finds himself yanked almost off his feet, and his words cut off, unuttered.

CUT TO:

INT. MINES - DAY

It is an hour later, and the party has stopped briefly to wrap and light new torches. Gems litter the floor in greater numbers than before. Vanus stands to one side, staring at them and sucking from a waterskin. Gabrielle stands near the opposite wall, staring closely at it.

GABRIELLE

Xena?



XENA

Yes?

GABRIELLE

Come here a second,
would you please?

A second later, Xena materializes over her shoulder.

XENA

Yeessss?

Gabrielle looks over her shoulder and grins. Then she turns back and cocks her head at what she's found on the wall.

GABRIELLE

What is this?

Xena looks on. There is a large brownish-black streak on the wall. It shines as if wet, but when she touches it, it is very smooth, and very dry. There are several more such marks further back, and on the opposite wall as well. Her eyebrow raises.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

You know something.

XENA

I might. These look
like scorch marks.



GABRIELLE

Scorch marks?
But they look wet!

XENA

Fire melted the rock
beneath. See?

GABRIELLE

Wow. That must have
been some hot fire.

XENA

Mm.

CUT TO:

INT. MINES - DAY

The trio continues their trek. It has steadily become hotter and danker as they have traveled, and all are liberally covered with sweat.

Gabrielle quickens her pace to come alongside Xena. Xena looks down at her.

GABRIELLE

(whispering)

Where are the bodies? I mean, if
those men were killed, wouldn't
we see evidence of it? Bodies?
A cave in? Something?

Xena lifts an eyebrow.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

You **do** know something.

XENA

I'm workin' on it. Vanus!

A few steps behind her, Vanus straightens guiltily.

XENA

(cont'd)

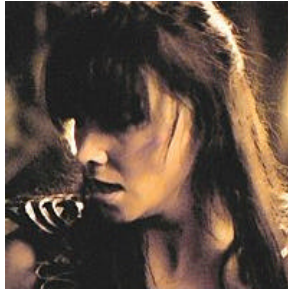
Put it back.

VANUS

I....

XENA

Now.



As Xena stalks ahead, Gabrielle drops back to make sure Vanus replaces the gem he's picked up.

VANUS

Does she have....

GABRIELLE

Yes.

VANUS

Oh.

GABRIELLE

Come on. I have a feeling,
whatever the answer to this
mystery is, it's close.

They both quickly catch up to Xena. Gabrielle is attracted by something near the far wall and surges ahead. At the same time, Vanus looks over at the opposite wall, and his jaw drops. Halfway buried in the rock is the biggest gemstone he's ever seen. Eyes dazzled, he crosses the shaft as if pulled and reaches for it.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Xena!

XENA

Vanus!! Don't!

She leaps toward him, but it's too late. Unhearing, Vanus tugs hard, and the gem slips into his hand.

There's a loud rumble, and the ground begins to shake.

XENA

Gabrielle!!!

GABRIELLE

Xena!!!

Before either can move, the rumble becomes a roar and a section of the mine caves in directly in front of Xena and Vanus. Vanus jumps back to avoid being crushed. Xena surges forward, beating the rocks back with the sword suddenly in her hand.

XENA

Gabrielle!!! GABRIELLE!!!

The last of the rocks falls, leaving a dusty silence behind.

XENA

(cont'd)

GABRIELLE!!!!



A beat of silence, then....

GABRIELLE

(very softly)

Xena?

XENA

Gabrielle! Thank the gods!
Are you all right? Can you
move? Are you hurt?

GABRIELLE

I'm okay, I think. I lost my torch
in the cave-in and I can't see
anything, but I'm all right.

XENA

Can you move?

Another long beat of silence.

GABRIELLE

My leg. It's stuck. I think
it's pinned between two
rocks or something.

XENA

Ok. It's ok. You're gonna be all right,
Gabrielle. Vanus and I will start
digging from this side. Just sit tight.
We'll have you outta there in no time.

Xena looks over at Vanus, who is standing there with the gem in hand, staring at her in shock.

XENA

(cont'd)

MOVE! NOW!!

Dropping the gem as if it's burning his fingers, Vanus grabs his pick-axe and moves toward the rock pile as Xena begins grabbing huge rocks and tossing them out of her way.

Suddenly, another rumble sounds. This time, however, the noise is a bit different. Xena's eyes narrow and a snarl curls her lips as the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end.

VANUS

Wh... what was that?

XENA

Keep digging.

GABRIELLE

(nervously)

Xena? Xena, I... I think there's
something in here with me.



XENA

Just hold tight, Gabrielle.
Do you hear me?
Just hold tight. I'm coming.

The rumbling becomes an unearthly roar, a sound that none of them has ever heard before. Vanus drops his axe, but can get no more than a step away before he's grabbed by Xena.

XENA

(cont'd)

Run, and you die here.

VANUS

B-b-but....

XENA

Keep digging. GABRIELLE!!

GABRIELLE

XENAAAAAAAAAAAAaaaaaa!

Her voice quickly fades away.

Like a woman possessed, Xena begins throwing rocks half her size and larger against the walls of the mine, shattering them. Vanus gulps, then wades in to help.

CUT TO:

INT. MINES - DAY

Xena has dug out a hole big enough for her to squirm through. Before she does so, she looks back at Vanus, dirt-covered and contrite.

VANUS

Xena, I--I'm sor....

XENA

Stay here. And don't touch
any of those stones. Not
even one. Understand?



VANUS

I swear it.

XENA

Good.

Turning, she tosses a lit torch through the hole, then squirms through to follow it. Coming to her feet, she looks at the ground near the caved in wall. She sees something wet and squats down. She runs her fingers against it and snarls.

XENA

(cont'd, quietly)

Blood....

I'm coming, Gabrielle.

Standing, she sets off down the shaft at a quick run.

She begins to notice that there is a faint, colorful light up ahead. The shaft continues to get brighter as she approaches, and she tosses down her torch, having no more need for it. The musky odor has become almost overpowering as well.

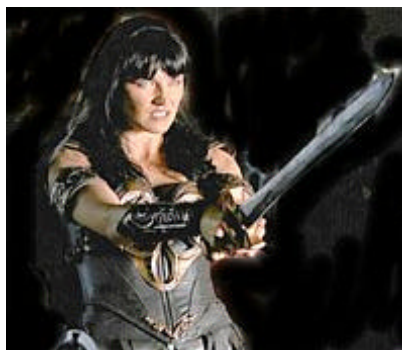
In the near distance, where the light is the brightest, the shaft appears to widen out, and she slows her steps, coming to a stop where the narrow walls end. Cautiously, she peers inside to see a gem-covered room, and in the middle is the largest creature she's ever seen. She remembers seeing representations of this creature many times in Chin, but never thought to see one in person, as it were.



Perched comfortably next to the creature is Gabrielle, whose face lights up when she sees Xena.

GABRIELLE
(happily)
Xena!

Xena draws her sword and steps forward.



CUT TO:

INT. CHAMBER - DAY

XENA

Gabrielle....

Xena jumps to the side, barely missing becoming a pile of soot by a streaming jet of fire directed at her.

GABRIELLE

Now, Penelope, that isn't nice. She's a friend.

XENA

Penelope?!?

GABRIELLE

It's better than Dagmar, isn't it?
Penelope, I'd like you to meet my friend, Xena. Xena, this is Penelope. She's a....

XENA

Dragon. Yes, I know.

GABRIELLE

(shocked)

You knew this whole time?



Xena shrugs.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

I suppose that doesn't matter right now. What does matter is that Penelope told me....

XENA

Wait a minute. You can talk... to a dragon?

Penelope rumbles. Smoke comes from her nostrils as she nuzzles against Gabrielle's side.

GABRIELLE

Well, not talk exactly. I mean, really,
Xena. She's a dragon, and I'm...
well... not. Anyway, it's more like...
we understand one another.

XENA

You... understand...
one another.

Gabrielle smirks.

GABRIELLE

Xena, Xena, Xena. It's not as if
I'm a novice at interpreting the
grunts of armor plated females
who breathe fire, now, is it?

Xena opens her mouth to say something, then closes it again, conceding the point.

Gabrielle's smirk broadens.

Xena sighs.

XENA

(grudgingly)

So, what do you understand
about this dragon?



GABRIELLE

Well, I understand that she's
probably the last adult of her kind.

She continues, spurred on by Xena's raised eyebrow.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Well, think about it, Xena! How many
other dragons have you seen in all
your travels? I mean, if anyone stood
the chance of running into a real live
dragon, it would be you, right?

XENA

Gabrielle....

GABRIELLE

Just go with it for
a minute, okay?

XENA

Fine.

GABRIELLE

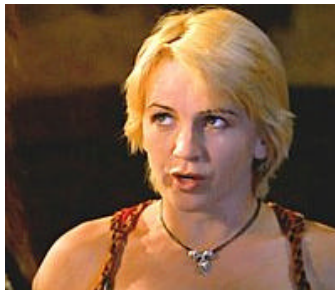
Right. And what I also understand,
mainly because I saw it happening
before my eyes, is that these
gems here are really....

XENA

Her eggs.

GABRIELLE

Yes and no. I think they belong to her
colony. And you stopped Vanus,
because you knew that if he touched
them, she'd be forced to protect her
family, like she did with the other
miners, and we'd all be in big trouble.



XENA

Somethin' like that, yeah.

GABRIELLE

Well, in this case, I happen
to agree with you.

Xena rolls her eyes.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Xena, she's not evil. I can feel the
goodness in her. She was only
trying to protect the last chance
for her colony to survive.

XENA

I understand that, Gabrielle, but when the townspeople find out that there's a dragon hiding in their mines, a dragon that just happened to fry half their men to a crisp....

GABRIELLE

Do they have to? Find out I mean? Couldn't we just tell them that the mines are haunted? Or that there was a cave in?

Xena narrows her eyes. Gabrielle widens hers, achieving true puppy dog status.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Xena, you know what'll happen if we tell them the truth. They'll send in an army to try to kill her, and she'll have no choice but to fight back. Is the truth worth their lives? Is it worth hers? Who knows how many of her kind they've already unknowingly killed?

Xena thinks for a moment as Gabrielle looks on hopefully.

XENA

You said you saw something happening before your eyes. Was it an egg hatching?



Gabrielle beams.

GABRIELLE

Oh, Xena, it was the most beautiful thing. There were so many of them, all hatching at once. They were so cute! Their little wings unfurled, and they stumbled around a little, and then they just... took off!

Gabrielle looks up, toward a slice of sky showing through a crevice in the top of the chamber very high above.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

But Xena, they need her... need her
to guide them to adulthood before
she really is the last dragon left. Who
knows better than her what it takes
for a baby dragon to become a
full-fledged adult dragon?

XENA

Hm.

Making eye contact with the dragon, Xena very carefully goes to her haunches, and slowly lifts an egg near her boot. The dragon rumbles and shifts a bit, but keeps her peace as Xena carefully examines the egg.

GABRIELLE

What is it?

XENA

These eggs are different than the ones
outside this chamber. More milky in the
center. I'm betting that the ones outside
of here are unfertilized. The dragon colony
must have laid thousands of eggs knowing
that only a few hundred would hatch
and fewer still survive to adulthood.

She looks up at the dragon and Gabrielle.

XENA

(cont'd)

If I'm right, and she allows us to harvest
them, that will get the King off the town's
back, with a little left over for them to make
a fresh start. We can use the cave-in
back there as an excuse to close off the
shaft entirely and make sure that no
one ever comes in here again.

Replacing the egg, she stands.

XENA

(cont'd)

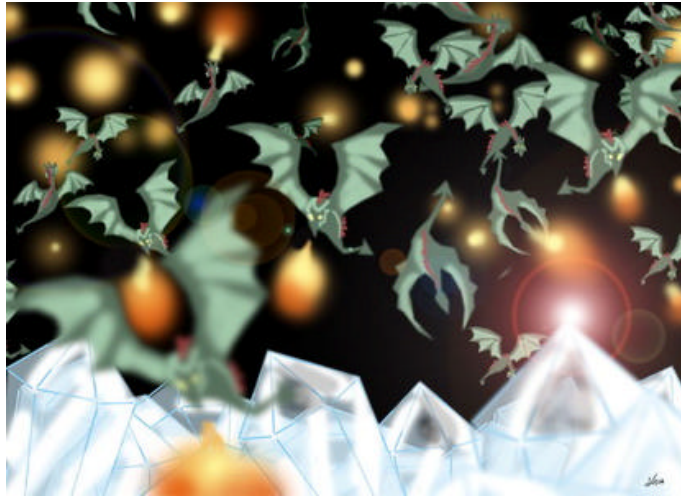
IF she lets us harvest them.

Xena and Gabrielle both look at the dragon, who honestly appears to be thinking the proposition over. After a moment, the creature gives an almost human sigh, and bends to nuzzle Gabrielle with its neck. Gabrielle grins.

GABRIELLE

I think that was a yes.

Just then, many more eggs hatch, and then the air is filled with tiny dragons racing toward the sky like fireflies sparkling in the night.



GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Isn't it beautiful?

Xena grunts.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Well, I guess we've still got a lot
of work to do. Goodbye, Penelope.

Good luck with the babies.

Rumbling, the dragon nuzzles Gabrielle once again. Gabrielle giggles, as Xena shakes her head.

XENA

(softly)

Another one's fallen for her.

GABRIELLE

What? I didn't hear you.

XENA

I said, let's get a move on.
We've got a town to save.



GABRIELLE

Yeah. That's what I
thought you said.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

TAG

FADE IN:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

A well-laid campfire is set in the middle of a small clearing. Nearby, dirty dishes sit outside the ring of stones. Xena sits on a log, sharpening a sword that hasn't been needed this week while Gabrielle paces before her, arms swinging wildly as she recites her tale.

GABRIELLE

... and so the King's daughter was married in a gown made of the finest gemstones ever seen. The townspeople were happy, for they were once again wealthy. And the dragon and her children lived happily ever after. The End.

As Gabrielle bows, Xena grins up at her.



XENA

See? Didn't I say you'd soon be back to your old self again?

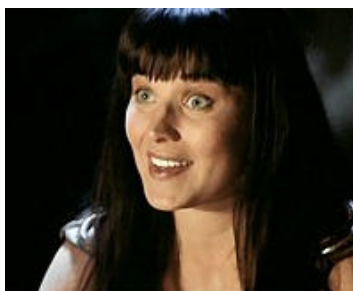
GABRIELLE

You promised me bath oils and massages, Warrior Princess, not cave-ins and dragons.

Xena shrugs.

XENA

Whatever works.



Gabrielle stares down at her, hands on hips.

GABRIELLE

Hmmmph.

Smirking, Xena snags their saddlebags, opens the flap and pulls out a long vial, twisting it temptingly in the light.

XENA

Although I do always
like to keep my promises.

GABRIELLE

(breathlessly)
You do, huh?

XENA

Oh yeah.

FADE OUT.

DISCLAIMER

No Hortas were harmed during
the making of this motion picture.