

THE SHIPPER SEASONS

XENA WARRIOR PRINCESS VIRTUAL SEASON TEN



Production #XWP208/SS74
Episode #10.06

Story By: Aurora
Written By: Aurora
Edited By: LadyKate
Collage By: Aurora
Images Gathered By: Aurora

Logline

Ares learns some shocking secrets about the new God of War, while Xena and Gabrielle seek to expose Artemis' plot to the villagers.

Airdate

March 30, 2010

TEASER

The village. Xena and Gabrielle stand over the dead man. Gabrielle sighs, pulling the blanket over top of him, then walks over to the window of the room.

GABRIELLE (turns around):

It's been Artemis all along. (pause) These people must be told.



XENA:

Oh, they will be.

Xena walks out. Gabrielle turns to watch her leave.

DISSOLVE TO

A small, crowded building. Xena and Gabrielle are standing in front of a group of villagers. Xena and Makis are standing with them glancing uncertainly from Xena and Gabrielle to the restless villagers.

VILLAGE MAN (scoffs):

Nonsense!

GABRIELLE (sympathetically):

I'm sorry. (determined) But you've all been deceived.

VILLAGE WOMAN:

Artemis protects us!

XENA:

Yes--from her own minions whom she sends to destroy villages that will not worship her!

This is greeted with a loud murmur from the villagers.

XENA:

The man we brought back into the village, the one who died--

VILLAGE MAN #1 (shouts out, interrupting):

The one who stayed in his village for a month after it was destroyed, slowly starving to death? (he chuckles) Sounds like a crazy man. And we're supposed to take his word for it?

The villagers are murmuring amongst themselves, nods of agreement and quiet exclamations of "Yes" and "He's right" are heard from a few. Gabrielle gives Xena a silent glance.

VILLAGE WOMAN #2 (stares hard at Xena):

My son says he caught you desecrating Artemis' shrine a few days ago, before any of this happened. (Xena opens her mouth to speak but the woman cuts her off) So why should we believe *you*?

The villagers begin to murmur louder, some nodding in agreement, some pointing fingers at Xena and Gabrielle.

Makis steps forward, holding out his hands to calm the crowd. The people begin to quiet down. Makis turns to Xena.

MAKIS:

Panthus is right. That man, may he rest in peace, may have been mistaken. We can't know for sure. (kindly but with authority) Unless you can provide proof... I think you're better off leaving here before there's any trouble.

Xena sighs and turns, walking off. Gabrielle gives her a sympathetic look and then follows. The villagers continue to murmur in the background.

CUT TO

Outside the building, Xena walks down the street. Gabrielle catches up to her.

GABRIELLE (frustrated):

That went well.



XENA:

If it's proof they want, it's proof they'll get.

Gabrielle looks at her curiously, following.

CUT TO

The Areopagus. The sound of clanging metal is heard.

Pan around the exterior of the temple to the field below where Actaeon's army had fought Brygus before. Now, the army of Ares is locked in combat with Brygus' men. In the center of men stands Brygus and Ares themselves, fighting each other.

Brygus isn't using his powers but is fighting as a mortal would. He and Ares are evenly matched--perhaps too evenly; some of Brygus' moves seem to mimic Ares' swings, dodges and kicks.

Ares' inexperienced men don't fare as well on the battlefield against Brygus' soldiers. Pandion fights back well, and so do Iona and Zarek but too many of the others are beaten by Brygus' men. One man is attacked by a group of Brygus' men. His screams are heard as they close in around him, stabbing him from all directions and then they leave, moving on to their next victim.

BRYGUS (glances around):

Your men are losing, Ares.

Ares is silent as he delivers another blow toward Brygus. Brygus jumps over the blade and kicks Ares back, he stumbles just a bit, clearly tiring from the fight.

BRYGUS (walking up to Ares who is bent over slightly, breathing heavy with sweat on his forehead):
You seem to forget that you can't fight forever without getting fatigued. Part of the price of mortality.



ARES (slowly steadies his breathing):
Spare me the lecture on mortality, Brygus.

BRYGUS (mocking):
Of course you don't need a lecture--you've got the first-hand experience. (he swings and Ares dodges the blade)
Your godhood is behind you--just like mortality is behind *me*.

ARES:
How did you find the secret to immortality, anyway?

BRYGUS:
It's all a matter of--who you know.

This causes Ares to pause for a moment, whereby Brygus lands a punch right to his face. The force of it is much harder than any mortal could create. Ares goes down. Across from him, several of the younger soldiers see Ares land on the ground. They charge forward. Brygus looks up at them and shakes his head.

BRYGUS:
Well, it's been fun but now it's time for what I *really* came for...

He waves his hand and the soldiers are pushed back by an invisible force, sending them into a couple of other soldiers and knocking them all down into one large heap. Brygus turns to Ares who is getting to his feet.

He grabs Ares forcefully by the arm.

BRYGUS (snarls):
Payback for destroying my life.

Brygus takes his sword, slamming the hilt of it into Ares' head and he collapses. The two of them disappear from the battlefield in a flash of blue light.

Pandion sees them disappear, uncertainty on his face. Brygus' men push Ares' army back. Pandion looks around and then raises his arm in retreat.

PANDION:
Pull back! Pull back!

The army begins to retreat, back away from the valley and into the forest beyond. Those who had horses mount and ride off. Pandion, Iona and Zarek do this. Zarek lingers a bit, staring up at the temple on the hill with frustrated anger

and then finally turns his horse and rides off, following Pandion and the others out of the field. Brygus' men watch them go, raise their swords and cheer, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

A handsome young man, only about 20, with fire in his eyes in leather armor swings his sword at a burly warrior in front of him. He's standing on the edge of a forest clearing, the backdrop of several tents in the distance behind him. Warriors can be seen moving amongst them.

ON-SCREEN TITLE: 32 Years Ago

The burly man attacks and the young man ducks under the blade with agility, swiftly moving from one side of the man to the other and turning to kick him in the back. The burly man snarls and lunges forward. Pushing all his weight behind his blade, the young man springs forward, their blades clashing in a dizzying array of sparks. He swings left and right, countering his opponent's attacks swiftly and with ease until he pushes the man down. The young man grins, satisfied with himself and presses the tip of the sword to the man's throat.

MAN (off-camera):
Well done, Brygus.

Brygus turns, finding an older man with a beard watching him.

OLDER MAN:
One day, you'll make Ares proud, my son.

BRYGUS (nods, then turns back to the man on the ground):
He's already proud.

He brings the sword down, piercing the man's chest.

Pan around to show the older man watching him, then further back to show Ares lurking in the distance, his arms crossed, invisible to everyone. He has a small grin on his face.

DISSOLVE TO

Outside a large stone building.

ON-SCREEN TITLE: Months Later

Swords clash. Brygus grins as he pulls back his sword and steps back from the man in black standing in front of him. Pan around to show that it's Ares.

ARES:
You're a natural.

BRYGUS:
As good as Xena?



ARES (grins):

Don't get ahead of yourself. No one's as good as Xena--at least, not yet. Maybe never. (chuckles at Brygus' annoyed look) Ooh, that one stung your pride, didn't it. Good. I can see you've got fire in the belly.

Ares walks around Brygus.

ARES:

You want to honor your late father by joining me.

BRYGUS:

The legacy must live on. (proud) Serving the God of War is in my blood.

ARES (smiles, mutters to himself):

Well, you're sure no Agathon.

CUT TO

Inside a dark temple with skulls and weapons on the walls.

ON-SCREEN TITLE: 2 Years Later

A slightly older Brygus, with longer hair and the start of a beard growing on his face, walks in toward the altar where a statue of Ares stands. He draws his sword and places it point down into the stone floor, kneeling.

BRYGUS:

Lord Ares, grant me and my men your favor in the upcoming battle. The warlord Neos is ruthless, many say. With you on our side, however, we will be *more* ruthless and will destroy the camp of his thieving, cutthroat warriors. In a world ruled by your might there is no place for bloodshed without purpose.

Brygus stands and reaches down into his boot, pulling out a dagger. The hilt is gold with a few red jewels on it, the brilliance of the dagger shines in the dim light of the temple. He sets the dagger down on the altar.

BRYGUS:

To show my devotion, I offer this--the most valuable thing I own. It was my father's, and his father's before him. It has been in my family for almost five generations.

Brygus steps back and waits silently. A bright flash of blue light appears in front of him and Ares stands beside the altar, lifting up the dagger and examining it. Brygus watches slowly as Ares runs his finger along the blade and then looks over at Brygus.

ARES (nods slowly):

You have my favor.

Brygus bows and Ares acknowledges him with a nod before disappearing out of sight, leaving the dagger on the altar. Close up of the dagger.

DISSOLVE TO

Brygus' army is fighting Neos' men in a large valley. Behind them is Neos' camp, many tents and a larger army of warriors.

The battle is fierce, and Brygus' army is vastly outnumbered. Brygus is amongst the rest of his warriors, fighting, blood on his leathers and his arms. He kills two men with a single swing of his sword. He stops for a moment, watching his men as they are cut down around him, their screams echoing through the valley. Brygus looks toward the hill--there is no sign of reinforcement from Ares.

BRYGUS (yells):

Ares! Why have you abandoned me?

There is no response. He charges forward into the fray, screaming with fury and determination once more.

DISSOLVE TO

A dark stone room.

ON-SCREEN TITLE: Present

Close-up on Ares' face. His eyes are closed; then he blinks and opens his eyes, looking slightly dazed as he regains consciousness. There is a small gash with dried blood and a bruise on his forehead from where the hilt of Brygus' sword had hit him.

The camera pulls back to show that he has been stripped to the waist and is tied to a wooden chair, facing the back of the chair. His eyes begin to focus as he looks around the room. Everything is dark but he can make out a few weapons on the far wall.

BRYGUS (off-camera):

You have any idea why you're here, *former* God of War?

Brygus walks out of the shadows. Ares looks up at him but says nothing.

BRYGUS:

To pay for what you did to me thirty years ago.

Brygus circles Ares and Ares watches him.

BRYGUS:

You told me I was one of your best warriors--you promised me I'd have your favor--and then you left my army to be slaughtered. (he comes closer to Ares and stares him right in the eye) You lied to me!

CUT TO

[FLASHBACK]

From *Looking Death In the Eye*:

Inside the ice cave, Ares leans over Xena's dead body and kisses her lips. He straightens up and looks down sadly into the coffin and Xena's almost peaceful expression.



ARES:

I love you, Xena.

DISSOLVE TO

Outside the cave, he uses his powers to seal the cave and then disappears in a flash of blue.

DISSOLVE TO

Pan over a large, vast city. The Coliseum can be seen in the distance.

Ares stands on a high hill overlooking the city. His arms are crossed.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Ares looks at Brygus who is still staring down at him.

ARES (quietly):

I didn't lie.

BRYGUS (sarcastic):

Then what? Were you busy?

[FLASHBACK]

Close up of Ares sitting on a throne in a dark room, staring at a portal before him. The light from the portal flickering across his face. His expression is solemn and blank. The image of soldiers fighting and killing each other shows in the portal. Half the soldiers are Roman. Ares watches it with little interest but continues to stare. A man guts another man and Ares doesn't react, one way or another. He glances up slightly at the wall across from him--there is the faint image of a chakram carved into the stone. He flinches slightly at the sight of it, then turns back to the portal where another man is stabbed and thrown aside.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Ares looks thoughtful; then, turning to Brygus, his face turns hardened and defiant.

ARES:

You expect me to keep every promise to every king and warlord who ever asked for my help?

BRYGUS (enraged):
Because of you, I lost *everything*!

[FLASHBACK]

The battlefield is littered with dead bodies. Brygus stands amongst the destruction, blood on his face and his armor and his sword. His look is filled with despair and anger as he sees all of his men lying dead.

A man on horseback rides toward Brygus and stops in front of him. He's a seasoned warrior, with rich armor--clearly having been living off the wealth of others--and a neatly trimmed beard. It's Neos. He looks down at Brygus with a mocking glance.

DISSOLVE TO

Inside a large tent, Brygus is tied up, standing in front of Neos.

Two warriors drag a struggling woman into the room, her clothing torn.

WOMAN (shouts desperately):
Brygus!

Brygus turns and sees her; he looks horrified. The woman is dragged toward Neos, who leers at her and runs his hand over her face.

NEOS:
Very nice.

BRYGUS:
No!

Neos pulls back and looks at Brygus.

NEOS:
I don't think you're in any position to protest. You attack me, you pay the price. (Points to the now-sobbing woman.) Your pretty wife is *mine*. As for you... (waves to the guards) Give him a good whipping, then put him with the others headed for the slave market.

The guards grab Brygus' arms and haul him out of the room.

BRYGUS:
No!!!

[END OF FLASHBACK]

BRYGUS (walking around Ares):
If it hadn't been for you, my wife wouldn't have been defiled by that monster and I wouldn't have spent thirteen years of my life as a slave.

ARES (scoffs):
You know, maybe you would have lost with or without me. Maybe you just weren't that good.



BRYGUS:

No. I lost because you abandoned your followers. After I escaped, I went to one of your temples seeking revenge. The priests told me that no one had seen you in Greece in more than ten years. You never answered prayers, never accepted offerings. They said you had abandoned us all. (Ares looks away) And they were right.

Brygus steps back. A long black bullwhip materializes in his hand. He grips the handle and lets the whip uncoil to the floor.

BRYGUS:

Now, where were we? (shakes the bullwhip lightly) Oh yes. Payback.

Close up of Ares' nervous expression. Brygus moves around him and raises the bullwhip, his fingers clenching around the handle. The screen blurs as we hear the crack of the whip and Ares' scream.

CUT TO

The fortress. Inside a small building a make-shift hospital has been set up. The wounded men are lying on cots and on the ground while several other soldiers pass by with buckets of water and clean and dirty bandages, tending to their wounds. Some men are only mildly injured, with bandages on their heads and their arms, while others are moaning and groaning from severe gashes in their sides, legs and arms. Pandion sits a distance away from the rest of the injured men tending to a cut on his left forearm. He dabs it with water as Iona walks over, sitting down next to him. There is a bandage on her head but other than that, she looks fine.

IONA:

We've lost a lot.

PANDION (nods, slowly):

I know.

He wraps a bandage around the cut on his arm.

IONA (quietly, and with feeling):

What are we going to do?

Pandion is silent for a long moment.

PANDION (looks at her with determination):

We'll get him back.

IONA:

We can't fight a *god*. These men (gestures around the room) need rest. They're not strong enough to fight Brygus' army, you've seen that. How are we supposed to get Ares back if we can't even defeat that army? (looking off into the distance) He might not even be alive.

PANDION (forcefully):

He's alive. He won't go out easily *even* as a mortal.

Pandion stands and walks around her toward one of the soldiers. He hears commotion in the distance, people talking faintly. He turns his head to look and walks toward the noise.

CUT TO

Outside the room in the courtyard. Several of the soldiers are standing around Zarek, looking eager and excited. Pandion walks out.

PANDION:

Zarek. What is going on?

Zarek turns toward Pandion.

ZAREK:

The men and I have decided--we're going to get back at Artemis.

PANDION (slowly):

Get...back at her.

ZAREK:

She took Ares' temple...we'll take her followers. Eye for an eye.

He holds out a map and points his finger to one of the villages on the map.

ZAREK:

Tyrone says that this village has come under Artemis' protection. We'll destroy it, and show her we mean business.

PANDION (steps up to him):

You can't do that.

ZAREK:

Ares isn't here to tell us otherwise.



PANDION:

No, but *I* am. This was *my* army before he came along, and it'll be my army until he comes back. So you'll do as *I* say. (eyes Zarek) We need to save up our strength and prepare for Ares' rescue.

ZAREK (scoffs):

You're crazy if you think you'll have any luck fighting against a *god*.

PANDION (standing his ground, moving closer to Zarek):

We're not harming innocent people. That's final.

ZAREK (forcefully):

There's nothing *innocent* about worshipers of Artemis.

PANDION:

It's not our place to judge their innocence. (he goes to put a hand on Zarek's shoulder, trying to reason with him)
You're my brother. We should be working together.

Zarek looks at Pandion's hand on his shoulder, then turns and backs up.

ZAREK:

No. Artemis must pay for what she's done.

PANDION:

Done to the people...or to you?

This hits a cord with Zarek and he stares at Pandion, his face hard and thoughtful.

ZAREK:

Stand down, brother. Ares isn't here to tell me what to do--and you can't stop me.

PANDION:

I can.

Pandion lands a punch to Zarek's face and he staggers back, surprised by the blow. Zarek swings once and punches Pandion in return. They get into a fistfight, both of them fighting well but Zarek's anger propelling him to fight harder than Pandion. The other soldiers watch as he pushes Pandion back, hitting him several times in the face.

CUT TO

Inside the hospital, Nicos runs up to Iona. He looks uncertain. She takes the hint and stands, following him outside.

CUT TO

Iona walks up and sees the crowd of people gathered in a circle. She charges forward and pushes her way through. In the center of the circle, she finds Pandion on the ground, his lip bloody from being punched. Zarek stands above him, also bloody.

IONA:

You did this?

Zarek steps back.

ZAREK (to the men who he had been talking to before):

Let's go.

He turns and walks away, the other men following. The crowd disperses. Iona lifts Pandion's head up and he looks at her. The map lies on the ground next to her. Close up of the map and the village that Zarek had pointed to.

DISSOLVE TO

A village.

People scatter in fear as a dozen warriors, led by Zarek, ride through the streets. Zarek and a few of the other warriors have torches in their hands, grinning and holding them out as the people flee. Zarek laughs.

The buzz of Xena's chakram is heard. It appears in the village, split into two, half of it whizzing in one direction and the other half going in another direction. One half ricochets off of a building and slices one of the warrior's swords in two. He looks at the broken blade, stunned.

XENA (off-camera):

Aiyiyiyiyi!!

The other half of the chakram bounces off a tree, then a rooftop, then connects with the first half, bounces off the metal helmet of a soldier and flies back toward Xena as she flips and lands in the center of the village, her outstretched hand catching the chakram.

Gabrielle runs in behind her, and Darion is seen standing in the background beside Rena and Makis.

Xena holds out her sword and Zarek rides out in front of the rest of his men, stopping the attack momentarily.

ZAREK:

Stand aside.



XENA (points her sword at him; beside her, Gabrielle draws her sais):
Not a chance.

ZAREK:

Then you can die with the rest of them.

XENA (grins):

You don't know who you're talking to, do you?

Zarek ignores her and signals to a few of the other warriors and they dismount, advancing on Xena and Gabrielle. Xena and Gabrielle fight the warriors while the villagers run and hide.

Several villagers hold their hands out in prayer, looking up at the sky.

VILLAGERS:

Artemis, protect us.

Gabrielle takes on a group of two warriors beside a building, using her sais to deflect the swords and kicking and spinning her body to deflect their attack.

Xena kills the warriors she is fighting with. She throws her chakram and it lodges in one of the warriors as she flips over another one, knocking him down.

Zarek and his warriors begin to throw their torches toward two of the buildings, catching them on fire. The people scream.

Zarek watches as Xena and Gabrielle defeat the warriors. Xena advances toward him. In the background, several buildings are in flames (some people racing around in a panic with water buckets to stop the spread of the fire). Xena charges forward, letting out her battle cry but in an instant, Zarek turns around and rides out of the village, the rest of the men (the few that are still alive) following him.

Xena turns to Gabrielle.

XENA:

Stay here.

Xena races toward Argo standing beside a post nearby, jumps onto her back and rides quickly out of the village while Gabrielle stands back, watching for a moment, then turns to the other villagers to help them put out the fire.

DISSOLVE TO

Zarek and his men are riding fast through the forest. Xena is close behind them, riding through a row of trees.

CUT TO

The fortress. Zarek and the others ride into the fortress. Zarek dismounts and turns to one of the guards at the gate.

ZAREK:

Close the gate. Don't let *anyone* in.

GUARD:

But--

ZAREK (grabs the guard by the collar and pulls him close, threatening):

Do it!

The guard shrinks back in fear and nods. He rushes to the doors with the other guards and they close the heavy wooden doors, latching it with a large beam.

CUT TO

Xena rides toward the fortress, seeing, from a distance, that the gates are shut. As she rides, she sees the red banners flying from inside of the fortress and she begins to slow down, finally stopping just short of the gates. She stares at one of the banners with curiosity, noticing the black twisted dagger design on it.

[FLASHBACK]

From *Coming Home*:

Ares marching with his army toward the Amazon village. Red banners with a black dagger are carried by some of the soldiers.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

DISSOLVE TO

Close up of Xena's face as she looks at the fortress, her eyes reflecting shock and hurt.



XENA (disbelief):
Ares?

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

Xena sitting on Argo in front of the gates. She dismounts and walks up. The guards see her and extend their weapons.

GUARD #1:
No one passes--

XENA:
I have business inside.

She walks forward.

GUARD #1:
Stop her.

The other guards corner her. She grabs them and knocks their helmets together, knocking them out cold. She then turns to the third guard and grabs him, taking his weapon and throwing him aside. She steps back and jumps, propelling herself up onto the wall above them. The remaining guard watches her in awe as she lands on the fortress wall and disappears behind it.

CUT TO

Inside the fortress. Xena is walking briskly along the base of the wall. She sees Zarek standing a distance away. He turns as she approaches. Zarek barely has time to react with surprise before she lands a hard punch to his face and he goes down. She stands over him as he gathers to his feet, his lip bleeding.

ZAREK:
How did you--

XENA:
I *told* you that you didn't know who you were messing with...

Xena draws her sword and Zarek does the same.

XENA:
Why were you attacking that village?

ZAREK (swings at her):
I have my reasons.

Xena dodges his blade and pushes him back, knocking him to the ground with one swift kick and pinning him to the ground by planting a firm foot on his chest. She bends over, pressing harder, making him yelp in pain.

XENA:
I'll not ask you again...

MAN (off camera):
Xena.

Xena looks up to see Pandion walking toward them. His face is bruised, his lip is broken, and he looks worse for wear but he seems okay. Recognizing him as the man that she'd seen with Ares at the campsite when he left, she steps back. She grabs Zarek by the collar and pulls him to his feet, holding him by the neck firmly as Pandion walks up.

PANDION:
Let him go.

Xena looks from Pandion to Zarek and finally gives him a casual "okay" look, grinning a little as she pushes Zarek back so hard that he stumbles and falls again. Pandion looks at two soldiers standing nearby and nods toward them. They nod back and when Zarek stands, they grab his arms preventing him from leaving.

XENA (looking from Pandion to Zarek and back):
I take it he wasn't following orders?

PANDION:
No.

The soldiers take Zarek away as he struggles against them. Xena turns to Pandion.

XENA (looks around):
So this is what Ares has been up to. Building an army, destroying villages...

PANDION:
What Zarek did was *not* part of the plan. He's let his hatred of Artemis control him.

XENA:
Then I suggest you keep him on a tight leash.

Pandion nods.

XENA:
Where is Ares? I want to talk to him.

Pandion looks down, Xena's expression reflects concern.

PANDION:
Ares isn't here. (he looks up) Brygus took him.

XENA (determined):
Then we'll get him back.

PANDION:
Easier said than done. (pause) Are you prepared to go up against a god?

XENA (shocked):
Brygus is a god?

Pandion nods slowly while Xena takes in this information.

XENA:

I've dealt with gods before. You might say it's my specialty. Find out where he is.

Pandion looks at Xena, unsure.

CUT TO

Inside the dark room where Brygus has Ares captured. Pan around to show Ares slumped in the chair, his back covered in lash marks from the whip. He's drifting in and out of consciousness.

DISSOLVE TO

[FLASHBACK]

The gates of the city that had been captured, shown in a previous flashback from Part I. Ares (in his season 2 look) stands on the hill overlooking the city with the smashed gate as his men flood into the city. People screaming can be heard in the distance.

Some people are dragged from the city and out into the open where men with long whips begin whipping them viciously. Their torturous screams and cries for mercy echo.

ARES:

That'll teach the people of Asponica not to cross the God of War. Ever. Again.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Ares turns his head, his eyes still closed.

DISSOLVE TO

Inside Ares' dream.

Ares stands watching from the hill.

He feels a presence behind him and he turns around to find Xena standing there.

ARES (bewildered):

You weren't there when I took Asponica.

XENA:

No. But you were. (she walks around him) It affects you, doesn't it? (looking out onto the battlefield where the whipped people now lie dead outside of the city walls) The blood. The death. (she turns back to him) It feeds you, the God of War inside you. Except...

Pan around to show that Ares now stands in front of her looking like mortal Ares, with short hair, his shirt off, showing the whip marks he's received from Brygus' beating.



XENA:

...now you feel their pain. Now...you're one of them. And you question yourself, what you were, what you are...
(Ares looks down) You never thought it'd come to this, did you?

ARES:

No.

XENA:

You have regrets, don't you?

She waves her hand and he looks down at his hand, a cut appearing on his palm and a small trickle of blood streaming out of it.

After a long moment, Ares looks up, clenching his fist.

ARES:

No.

XENA (mocking):

No?

ARES:

I don't regret.

Xena grins and morphs into an identical look-a-like to Ares, except with a much darker stare and colder eyes, and in full leather.

GOD OF WAR (voice deep):

You will.

All goes black.

FLASH TO

Ares opens his eyes with a start and looks around. Brygus is standing in front of him.

BRYGUS:

Good. (grins) You're awake.

CUT TO

The fortress. Xena is standing in the war room, now with Pandion and Iona.

XENA:

And you have no idea where he might be.

PANDION:

He's a god. He could be *anywhere*.

XENA:

But his army couldn't. (Pandion looks at her) They'd need a place to stay. (she looks at the map lying on the table in front of them, scanning it until she finally points to an area along a cliff on the coast) There. I bet he's there.

PANDION (examines where she points):

The...Halls of War.

XENA (nods):

Exactly. You say he's been taking Ares' temples for himself. As temples go, that one's pretty important.

Pandion nods and smiles.

PANDION (admiring her):

Ares sure knows how to pick 'em. (Xena looks away slightly; Pandion changes the subject) We'll gather the men and head out.

XENA:

I'll go, but I don't need an army.

CUT TO

Outside the fortress, Xena is riding Argo, Pandion and Iona ride up. She looks back.

XENA:

I can do this on my own--you don't need to come.

PANDION:

Face a god on your own. Are you crazy?

XENA (grim chuckle):

I've been called worse than that.

Pandion smiles.

IONA:

We're coming with you.

XENA:

Then we'll get him back together.

She rides off, Pandion and Iona following pursuit.

CUT TO

The village. Steam from the fires that have been put out rises from some of the buildings in the village as several villagers work around the buildings to pick up any charred debris left by the fire. Rena and Makis stand looking at one of the burnt buildings as the roof crumples to the ground and a couple stands near it, sobbing at the loss of their home. Rena and Makis exchange a sad look and then walk on.

CUT TO

The shrine to Artemis. Part of it has been damaged by the flames that swept through the town. Rena and Makis walk in and stop, looking at the statue.

RENA (hurt):

This village has been attacked, and she was not here to protect us like she promised. (pause) What Xena said... (sighs) I just don't know who to believe anymore. (Makis puts a comforting hand on her shoulder)

Gabrielle appears behind them.



GABRIELLE (calm):

What Xena said is true.

The two of them turn around to see Gabrielle standing there, holding Samuel in her arms. She walks over to the altar and picks up some scrolls that have been touched by the flames--partly burnt and crumbling.

GABRIELLE (to Rena):

You asked me before what she did to Xena and me in the past. I didn't want to explain because I wanted to respect your faith. (she looks at the partly crumpled scroll and opens it, reading) "Guide us to our destinies, great goddess. Show us the way and we will follow." (she closes the scroll and looks at Rena and Makis) You don't need Artemis to guide you to your destinies. (pause) Artemis is dying--like all the gods.

RENA (shocked):

What?

GABRIELLE:

It's the Twilight. The only way she can survive is by acquiring more worshipers. And she's willing to do anything to gain them. She tries to destroy the Amazons. She started a war. She took Ares' powers. And now she's destroying villages that refuse to follow her, and forcing people to worship her out of fear. Is that really the kind of god you want guiding you?

Gabrielle sets the scroll back down on the altar, turns around and walks out. Rena and Makis look after her, then at each other.

CUT TO

Inside the dark room. Brygus is staring at Ares.

BRYGUS (sneers):

You're a stronger man than I expected, Ares. I thought you'd be nothing without your powers.

ARES (wincing from the pain but still cocky and sarcastic):

So, speaking of powers--how *did* you become a god? Must be a thrilling story.

BRYGUS:

Indeed. (he turns around) Lets just say, Artemis can be...very generous.

ARES:

Artemis... (realization dawning) The powers she took from me...

BRYGUS (nods):

What better way to use them than to give them to her most loyal servant? (pause) Artemis is...busy elsewhere right now. She needs me to govern over Greece while she's away.

Ares looks at him curiously.

ARES:

And she sent you after me, is that it?

BRYGUS (looks down at Ares):

She wants you to pay for what you did to her brother.

ARES:

I didn't kill Apollo.

BRYGUS:

Technically, no. That doesn't make you any less of a traitor to the gods.

Ares stares at him for a long moment.

GUARD (off-camera):

Sir.

Brygus turns around to see the large guard standing in the doorway.

BRYGUS:

What is it? I'm busy.

GUARD:

Several riders have been seen traveling along the road in this direction. The Warrior Princess is leading them. (quick pan to Ares, a flash of hope across his face)

BRYGUS:

The Warrior Princess. (grins, turning around, looking down at Ares a bit mockingly) Here to save her boyfriend. (leans toward Ares) Well, then... I'll give her what she wants.

Ares stares at him, puzzled. Brygus punches Ares in the face, knocking him out cold. He slumps over in the chair.

BRYGUS (nods toward the guard, casually):

Drop him off in the forest--where she'll find him.

The guard nods and walks up to Ares beginning to unlock the chains holding him to the chair.

DISSOLVE TO

A rider on horseback rides fast through the forest with Ares lying across the back of the horse, still unconscious and now in full armor again. The horse stops near a dirt path. The rider pushes Ares off the back of the horse. He falls and rolls on the ground. He lies unconscious next to the road as the rider gallops off.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena, Pandion and Iona ride down along the road. Xena looks toward the side of the road and sees the shape of a body lying beside it. Zoom in on Ares' face which is facing in her direction. Her eyes widen.

XENA:
Ares...

She quickly pulls Argo to a halt and jumps off the horse, rushing to his side.

XENA:
Ares.

She kneels down and touches his face. He's still out cold. She frowns with concern.

XENA (gently shaking him):
Ares. (he doesn't respond) Come on...

She pats his cheek, noticing his breathing and he moans slightly but does not wake. Leaning forward she gives him a deep kiss. He responds to her kiss and she cradles his head in her hands as she pulls back and he opens his eyes.

ARES (smiles, relieved):
Xena...

Xena smiles back at him. She touches his face, seeing the cut on his head from the hilt of Brygus' sword. She notices another few bruises and cuts, too. She frowns.

XENA:
Brygus did this to you.

ARES:
That's not all he did. (he touches her hand and squeezes it reassuringly) I'll be fine.

Xena smiles back at him slightly, then helps him to his feet. He's slow to rise and he leans against her shoulder.

XENA:
We'd better get you back and fix you up.

CUT TO

Xena (with Ares behind her), Pandion and Iona ride through the gates and into the fortress.

CUT TO

Ares is seated on his bed, his armor off. Xena is sitting behind him, gently cleaning the whip marks on his back as he winces.



ARES:

Yep. Mortality hurts. And sometimes, it *really* hurts.

She reaches her hand around, touching his shoulder.

XENA (reassuring):

We'll get you fixed up and you'll be better in no time.

Ares looks off into the distance.

XENA (still cleaning the wounds on his back):

Something on your mind?

ARES:

Everything's on my mind. (pause) He just let me go. (Xena turns to him curiously) He said it was good that you were coming for me, and he let me go. (rubs his head) Could have done without the wallop to the head, though.

XENA:

So he captured you, beat you, then let you go. (nods understanding) He's up to something.

Ares nods.

ARES:

There's something you have to know. Brygus is--

XENA (finishes for him):

--a god. I know. Pandion told me.

ARES:

You don't know. He's not just *a* god, he's the God of War. And I mean *literally*. The powers that Artemis took from me--she's given them to Brygus.

Xena takes this information in, pondering it.

ARES:

That isn't all. My temple on the Areopagus... Brygus took it for Artemis and she turned it into a shrine to Apollo. (Off Xena's startled look). My men and I went to take it back... (shakes head) I couldn't do it. He was still my brother, even if we were enemies.

XENA:

Brygus has also been destroying those villages because they won't follow Artemis.

ARES (shrugs):

She's desperate to preserve herself. And she's planning something. Artemis put Brygus in control of Greece while she's away. (Xena listens intently, thinking about this) I don't like the sound of that. (he shakes his head, frustrated) This isn't how it's supposed to be! (he stands up, then winces at the pain and sits back down) She's given the powers of the God of War to a warlord, one who doesn't understand or respect that power. (looks at Xena) I told you once before, the Godhood of War is a sacred trust. It's not to be used in the service of some other god's petty greed to annihilate people who don't follow her way.

Xena gets off the bed and moves around, standing in front of him.

She puts her hand on Ares' shoulder and squeezes it. He looks up at her.

XENA (gently):

We'll find a way to stop him.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares are walking along the wall of the fortress, Ares in his leathers again. They see Zarek walking toward them, looking unhappy. Xena stops walking.

ZAREK (coming up):

So you've come from that Artemis-loving village. (pause) And I hear that you aren't one of them.

XENA (defensive):

Your point?

ZAREK:

If you don't believe in what they believe in, why do you stand up for them?

XENA:

I help anyone who needs it.

ZAREK:

Then you are a fool. Anyone who sides with them *is* one of them. And we must destroy Artemis' worshipers before she becomes more powerful.

Ares steps forward.

ARES:

We went over this before, Zarek. As long as I'm around leading this army, we're not doing to Artemis what she has done to others.

Ares walks past him.

ZAREK (from behind):

Then I challenge you! That will decide who should lead this army.

Xena looks from Ares to Zarek and back. Ares moves closer to him.

ARES:

I accept.

Xena gives him a concerned look and pulls him to the side, away from the others.

XENA (speaks softly):

What are you doing?

ARES:

He has to know his place if he's going to be in *my* army.

XENA:

You've just been beaten by Brygus. You can't take Zarek on.

Ares takes her hands and kisses her lightly.

ARES:

I have to--now or never.

Close-up on Xena's face as she looks at Ares, her expression a mix of anxiety and respect, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

The courtyard in the fortress. A platform has been set up. Soldiers are gathered around it. Xena is standing beside Pandion off to the side. Ares stands on one side of the platform, Zarek on the other. They are posed in a boxing stance.

Zarek advances on Ares and swings his right fist toward Ares' face. Ares ducks under the punch and swings at Zarek, missing his face and hitting him in the shoulder. Zarek staggers back. They circle each other for a moment, then Zarek attacks again. Ares catches his fist and pushes him back but Zarek lands a punch with his other fist right into Ares' face. Ares pulls back, his lip broken and bleeding. He turns to stare at Zarek.

ARES (grins):

So you *can* bite.

Ares swings left and right, Zarek dodges the blows and spins around to kick Ares in the back. Ares notices his intent and turns around. When Zarek goes to kick him, Ares grabs his foot and pushes him back so he falls to the platform with a thud. Ares stands above him, grinning again. Zarek looks angry. Ares grabs him by the shoulders and pulls him to his feet, then punches him quickly on one side of the face and then the other. Zarek staggers and Ares knocks him down with a punch to the chest.

Ares walks up to Zarek who isn't trying to get up, his face bleeding.

ARES:

I guess we're done here.

Ares steps over him and turns to the crowd. Some of the soldiers begin to cheer.

ZAREK (spits out some blood):

Not yet.

Zarek stands as Ares turns. Before Ares has time to react, Zarek punches one of the soldiers nearby, and takes the sword from his hand as he falls, knocked out cold. Zarek turns and swings toward Ares. Ares ducks out of the way of the blade as it passes just over his head.

CUT TO

From the crowd, Xena watches cautiously as Zarek swings with fury toward Ares again and Ares dodges out of the way. She turns, looking around, then her eyes lock on something and she moves through the crowd.

CUT TO

Zarek swings and Ares grabs his arm, pushing him back, the edge of the sword nicking Ares on the forearm.

ZAREK (steps back):

You're not *fit* to lead these men. You've become soft.

ARES (mocks the insult):

Soft. I'll show you soft.



Ares spins around and kicks him in the chest, knocking him back, then backhands him across the face.

XENA:

Ares!

Ares looks up. Xena is standing beside the platform holding his sword. She tosses the sword to him and he catches it. He looks at Zarek, holding the sword out.

Then their swords clash.

ZAREK (locking blades with Ares and holding there for a moment):

Artemis *has* to be stopped--her cult, destroyed! You know that better than anyone. (he pushes back, the blades slide across each other) But you've grown weak . (Zarek swings again and Ares moves out of the way) You have...principles. (glances at Xena in the crowd, scoffs, then turns back to Ares) *Her* principles. You used to be a god; now, you're not even your own man.

Zarek tries to kick Ares in the side but Ares narrowly moves out of the way.

ZAREK (stopping the fight momentarily, he points the sword at Ares' throat):

Face it, without your godhood, you're *nothing*.

We finally see Ares' reactions to all of this. He looks up, staring Zarek straight in the eye. His eyes are dark and angry, displaying a fire we've not seen from him since he was a god.

Zarek swings again. Ares pushes him back with a powerful force. It knocks Zarek off the platform and onto the ground. The soldiers move out of the way, giving them room. His eyes dark, Ares jumps off the platform, staring down at Zarek as he gets to his feet and attacks again. The two of them get in a few good swings but Ares seems more determined than before. He smacks Zarek across the face, grabbing his shoulder and head-butting him hard. Zarek teeters a bit. Ares slices Zarek's arm with the edge of his sword as Zarek falls back.

From the sidelines, Xena watches with concern and distress. Some of the soldiers are cheering him on but many are too stunned by Ares' sudden change in attitude to do anything but watch in silence.

Now that Zarek is on the ground, Ares kicks him a few times in the gut. Zarek grabs a handful of dirt and throws it toward Ares' face. Ares closes his eyes but it doesn't distract him enough. Zarek doesn't have time to rise before Ares steps on his sword hand, pressing down hard until he releases his grip on the handle.



ARES (looking down at Zarek, darkly):

No one mocks the God of War and gets away with it.

In a swift motion, Ares thrusts his sword down into Zarek's chest. Blood trickles from the wound and Zarek gasps. The crowd of soldiers around them falls to an eerie silence. Ares grasps the handle of the sword, pulling it out of his chest and Zarek cries out.

Ares stares down at him and his anger almost immediately gives way to regret. Zarek gasps and sputters for air in a few short breaths before finally falling limp.

Pandion rushes toward him, kneeling down.

Blood drips from his sword. Ares looks up and sees Xena watching him from a distance. Their eyes lock.

DISSOLVE TO

Ares is in his room standing in front of a water bowl. He runs a cloth along the blade of his sword, washing the blood away. The blade becomes polished and he holds it up, looking into it.

The sound of the thrust of Ares' sword into Zarek's chest and the sounds of his cries echo in Ares' mind.

Ares stares into the blade, conflicted. He turns it slightly and the fuzzy reflection of Xena appears in it. Ares turns back to see Xena standing beside the doorway. She looks in his direction but doesn't make a move toward him.

Ares sighs and lowers his sword, laying it across the tabletop.



XENA (steps up, quietly):

Did he really have to die?

ARES (trying to conceal his discomfort):
He got what he deserved.

XENA (not buying it):
Really.



ARES (snaps):
He defied me. No one defies--



XENA (interrupts):
--the God of War?

Ares looks away, clearly troubled--the emotions affecting him more than he wants to let on. Xena is about to touch Ares' arm with a sympathetic gesture when suddenly, a guard rushes into the room, out of breath.

GUARD:
You must come quick.

Ares and Xena share a glance, then follow the guard out of the room.

CUT TO

Outside the fortress. Several soldiers are gathered in a circle around something in front of them. Ares pushes his way through the crowd, with Xena not far behind, and finds a wounded man lying on the ground. He's holding a scroll, covered in his own blood. Ares kneels down.

ARES:
What happened?

MAN (breaths):
An attack...on Oenoe. (Ares gives him an understanding and concerned look) Brygus...

The man gasps and dies. Ares looks up and then stands. Ares looks over to see Pandion standing nearby, some men gathering Zarek into a wagon behind him. Pandion stands silent for a long moment.

ARES (to the men around him):
He's meeting up with an ally. We head out now.

Xena watches him silently and Ares turns from her, heading back toward his room. Xena follows him. They pass Pandion who is still standing silent. Ares slows and stops in front of him.

PANDION:
Go. Stop Brygus. I have to stay here.

He looks sadly across from him. Beside a building, Nicos is sitting on the ground, looking off into the distance, his face wet from tears.



PANDION (sadly):
For Nicos' sake.

Ares offers a nod and walks on.

CUT TO

Ares, in armor once more, rides out of the fortress with Xena, Iona and a few other soldiers.

CUT TO

Oenoe. People are huddled in a corner in fear. Brygus, with many soldiers around him, are standing in front of the frightened villagers. Brygus walks back and fourth, tauntingly. Some of Brygus' soldiers are holding some of the villagers hostage, with knives at their throats.

The sound of hoofbeats are heard. Brygus turns around to find Ares, Xena, Iona and a few other men riding into the village. Brygus grins.

BRYGUS (shouts):
You're just in time!

Ares stops his horse and jumps off. Xena follows, both of them drawing their weapons and walking toward Brygus and his men.

BRYGUS:
I was expecting you.

ARES:
So where's your warlord friend?

BRYGUS (shrugs):
Plans have changed.

ARES:
Really. Why? So you can finish where you left off? Because I seem to remember--though with the bruise you gave me (rubs his forehead) things have been a little fuzzy--you let me go. On purpose.

BRYGUS:
You needed softening up before the big finish.

XENA (steps forward, snarls):
Just get to the point.

BRYGUS:
Ooooh. She's feisty. (winks at Ares) I like that. (turns around) The only way I can truly be respected as *a god* (there are a few gasps that come from the villagers) is if I prove to the masses that I *am* one. *The* one. (turns back around to Ares, grinning even more) What better way than fighting--and defeating--the former God of War himself? (cocky) The final step in passing the mantle of the Godhood of War from you...to me.

ARES (angry):
You have no respect for that power.

BRYGUS:
I have plenty of respect. Do you?

This catches Ares slightly off guard and one of Brygus' soldiers attacks him. Xena turns to Brygus, drawing her sword and advancing on him.

BRYGUS:
Have you forgotten? Your days as Slayer of Gods are long over, Xena.

XENA (through gritted teeth):
Don't be so sure.

A fight breaks out. Brygus uses his powers this time, Xena and Ares, Iona and the few soldiers fight well, having to dodge fireballs and lightning bolts. Brygus' fireballs strike some of the buildings, setting them ablaze. Xena and Ares fight against the backdrop of the fire.

Xena flips and lands behind Brygus. He spins around, and lets loose a fireball that misses her.

XENA:
You need to practice your aim!

She runs and jumps over him again, landing beside Ares once more.

Though Brygus is a god, Ares holds his own well, dodging fireballs when needed but fighting in hand to hand combat at other times. Brygus corners Ares, knocking him down with a kick, while Xena is busy fighting four of Brygus' soldiers. Brygus whirls around to face Ares, smirking. Then he sends a lightning bolt toward Ares and Ares ducks out of the way as it catches another building behind them on fire.

Xena has now come up behind Brygus and kicks him hard (while he is distracted by looking at Ares). The force brings Brygus forward, stumbling. Xena pushes him hard again and he falls momentarily against a building, a black stone ring with a smooth blue stone inlaid into the band at the top, falls off his finger and slides across the dirt.



He turns back to Xena, snarling. He holds out his hand to send a fireball her way but nothing happens. He looks back in bewilderment at his hand, as do Xena and Ares, and tries again but nothing.

Glancing sideways, he sees the ring lying in the dirt.

XENA (realizing, seeing the look on his face as he stares at the ring):
So *that's* the source of your godhood!

She glances at Ares and the two of them go into action. They charge forward, Ares dives into the sand just as Brygus has put his hand over the ring. Ares grabs his wrist but Brygus wiggles away. In a split second he puts the ring on his finger and disappears in a flash of blue, Ares and Xena tumbling down together. The moment their leader is gone, Brygus' men retreat, running out of the village.

Ares and Xena stand up.

ARES (business-like, to Iona and the others):
Our work here is done.

Ares walks over to his horse, mounts and rides off. Xena watches him leave, showing concern.

DISSOLVE TO

Outside the fortress, under a tree. There is a mound of dirt and Nicos stands above it, looking down at it. His eyes are sad and still tearful. Pull back to show the scene from Ares' room in the fortress where Ares sits beside the window on the bed, looking out at Nicos from a distance.

Xena walks in. She stops, looking at him for a moment. When he doesn't react to her presence, she comes forward slowly.

XENA (trying to break the silence):
Now we know Brygus' secret. I told Pandion. He said now we have a real shot at defeating him. He's right. (smiles, trying to lighten the mood a little) Now it's only a matter of time before we win. (still getting no reaction from Ares, she sits down next to him, looking out the window at the boy and the grave) You--did what needed to be done.

ARES (not looking at her):
That never made you feel better, did it?

He looks up at her and she gives him a thoughtful, grim look, the pain evident in his eyes. He turns, glancing out the window again.



ARES:

Mortality really does suck.

Xena touches his hand.

XENA (breaking the uncomfortable silence):

So what now?

ARES (determined):

I'll stop Brygus. Somehow.

XENA:

And then what? (off Ares' probing look, Xena sighs) How long do you think you'll be leading this army?

Ares is thoughtful.

XENA (softly):

This is something you need, isn't it.

She looks down. Ares touches her hand that is resting in her lap.

ARES (softly):

Maybe you're right.

Xena looks up, giving him a startled look.

ARES:

I may be mortal, Xena--but I'm not...

He pauses as Xena watches him expectantly.

XENA:

What?

ARES:

I'm not your sidekick.



XENA (shocked):

Sidekick! We have a life together. (pause) If this is about what Zarek said--

ARES:

It's not about that. (after a pause) It's not really *my* life, is it. It's your and Gabrielle's life, and I've had to fit into it. (sighs) When I gave up my godhood--*again*--I knew what to expect, and it's worth it. But mortal or not, Xena, I am not you. The Greater Good is not my calling.

XENA (stands up):

So you're saying you'd rather lead an army than fight by my side.

ARES:

No. (he stands) I'm saying that sometimes...I need something for myself. Right now, this is it.

Xena nods.

XENA (briskly):

I should be going.

She turns to leave and Ares grabs her arm quickly.

ARES:

Xena.

She stops and turns back. He holds her stare for a moment, her gaze softening.

XENA:

I understand. (changing the subject) I've got to get back to the village, try to find a way to make the people see what Brygus and Artemis are up to. And now that we know he's not a full god, we have an advantage. We just have to make them believe it.

ARES (touches her hand again):

Good luck.

CUT TO

Ares is standing along the wall of the fortress watching as Xena rides away on Argo. Without noticing, Pandion walks up behind him. Ares turns around and they share a tense look before Pandion finally sighs.

PANDION (looking out toward Zarek's grave):

You did what you had to do. (softly) I know--

ARES (shakes head, not looking at Pandion):

No, I could have done it differently.

There is a long pause.

ARES (quietly):

He was a friend of yours, huh.

PANDION:

He was my brother. (Off Ares' shocked look) *Half*-brother. We were never very close; he was taken from our mother to live with his father when we were very young. I rarely saw him growing up.

Ares nods.

PANDION (continues):

Zarek was always angry. He didn't always show it but it was there.

ARES (nods, understanding):

Angry at Artemis. I get that. She's been a problem for us all.

PANDION:

Not in the same way. Zarek used to be one of her commanders.

ARES (shocked):

What?

PANDION:

The only *man* ever to command one of her temple armies. She promised him power, glory, wealth... And then, there was--an indiscretion with one of her virgin priestesses. (Pan to Ares, who nods knowingly) She spared his life--but took away everything else. His anger at Artemis made him turn to you, and he became one of your most devoted followers. (Pandion shakes his head) But he let that anger cloud his mind. And now, his boy is suffering because of his rashness.

ARES (sighs and shakes his head):

I wish--

PANDION (interrupts):

What's done is done. I just hope Nicos is strong enough to deal with it.

They share a quiet look.

CUT TO

The village. Xena rides in and dismounts near a building, hearing the sounds of voices shouting in the distance.

CUT TO

A raucous of villagers in the center of the village. They are divided, Gabrielle is doing her best to calm the crowd as are Makis and Rena.

VILLAGER #1 (shouting across at another villager):

If Artemis protects us, why would she let this village burn?! (points toward Gabrielle) They were right--we've been deceived.

VILLAGER #2 (angry):

Artemis has many followers; she can't be there for every single one.

VILLAGER #3:

Then what good is her protection?



GABRIELLE (holds out her hands):
Fighting amongst ourselves is not going to do anyone any good!

XENA (off-camera):
She's right.

The villagers turn to see Xena walking up. Gabrielle turns, giving her a slightly relieved smile.

XENA (taking charge):
Go back to your homes. Fix the damage that has been done rather than fighting over who is to blame.

Xena glances across at Makis and Rena. They nod, then turn to the crowd.

MAKIS (to the people):
Please. Do as she says.

The people begin to disperse, some of them grumbling under their breath, some giving Gabrielle and Xena, but mostly Xena, dirty looks. Gabrielle walks up to her.

GABRIELLE:
Thanks. (Xena nods) So what happened? You've been gone longer than I thought you would be. I was getting worried.

XENA:
I stopped them. They won't be coming back to cause trouble anymore.

GABRIELLE:
Who were they?

XENA:
Ares' men.

Gabrielle looks at her in shock; Xena responds with a grim stare.

XENA:
Long story.

GABRIELLE (still shocked):
Ares!

XENA:
He's leading them against Brygus.

GABRIELLE (taking in this information):
Ares at the head of an army...

XENA (nods):
For now.

GABRIELLE:
Do you know how long it will last?

Xena shakes her head.

DISSOLVE TO

A room in the house. Gabrielle is changing Samuel while Xena looks on.

GABRIELLE:
So what is Ares planning to do now that he knows Brygus isn't a god?

XENA:
Stop him.

GABRIELLE:
How?

XENA:
The usual way.

She gives Gabrielle a long look, then turns away, lost in thought.

GABRIELLE (glances at Xena):
Anything you want to talk about?

Xena hesitates for a long moment.

XENA:
I can't make him into something he's not.

GABRIELLE:
Who, Ares?

A long silence.



GABRIELLE:

He'll make the right choice in the end.

XENA (repeating Gabrielle's words):

The right choice... (pause) For him or for me?

She and Gabrielle share a long silence as Gabrielle puts a comforting arm around Xena's shoulder as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

The fortress. Men and women are gathering in the center of the fortress. Ares walks up onto the platform, wearing his usual vest and stops, looking out at them. Pandion is off to the side. Through the entire scene as he speaks, the camera slowly pans around him for a view of Ares on the platform and further around until his back is to the camera and the soldier's faces are seen. Inspirational battle-music plays quietly.

ARES:

Brygus is *not* a god. He's a mere mortal disguising himself as one with a ring given to him by Artemis.

CUT TO

The village. Xena is standing on a platform next to Gabrielle addressing a crowd of villagers, in much the same way that Ares is standing in front of his men. The camera pans around during this scene in the same way it does in Ares' scene.



XENA:

And he *can* be defeated. He can be killed, if we can only separate him from that ring

CUT TO

The fortress.



ARES:

While Brygus hides in the Halls of War, we'll be preparing for an attack. Tomorrow, I will train each and every one of you the way I trained my best warriors as the God of War.

CUT TO

The village. The villagers listen to Xena; they look uncertain.

XENA:

We can prove that Brygus, under Artemis' orders, is the cause of all this.

CUT TO

The fortress. The soldiers listen eagerly to Ares.

ARES:

Once you're ready, we will attack the Halls of War. Brygus will never know what hit him.

CUT TO

The village.

XENA:

And we will bring him back here and he'll tell the truth. Then maybe you'll believe Artemis isn't all she says she is.

VILLAGER:

And if he doesn't?

Close up on Xena's face with a nasty grin.

XENA:

He will.

DISSOLVE TO

The setting sun; then the rising sun.

DISSOLVE TO

Montage:

-- The fortress. Men and women are standing outside the fortress walls, swords in their hands fighting in pairs. Ares walks around all of them, studying them.

-- Ares stops one of the younger soldiers from swinging against his partner and takes the soldier's hand, showing him how to properly swing at the opponent. He demonstrates, then lets the boy do it himself. He swings and is able to aim toward his opponents side. They stop fighting and the boy grins. Ares grins, too.

-- Ares is swinging around his sword in a few fancy moves, twirling and lunging and thrusting at the air. Several warriors stand watching him in awe as he fights with such agility and skill. Then Ares stops and turns to the men. He nods and the men start to fight each other, practicing the swings and thrusts of the sword that almost mimic Ares'. He smiles in satisfaction.



-- Ares is fighting with one of the female warriors as Iona watches beside them. Ares enjoys sparring with her as she jumps and holds her own against him very well. He's able to knock the sword out of her hand and he gives her a grin and she returns the look with a challenging grin of her own as she picks up her sword and nods with a "shall we go again?" look on her face.

DISSOLVE TO

The sun sets.

DISSOLVE TO

The courtyard of the fortress. Ares is standing in front of a bench with a bowl of water sitting on it. He dips his hands in and splashes his face with water, then sits down on the bench. Pandion comes out of a doorway from another part of the fortress.

PANDION:

So? What's the verdict?

ARES (rubbing his face with a towel):

They're all fast learners. They'll do well.

PANDION:

Are they ready?

ARES:

We'll soon find out.

He leans against the wall and closes his eyes.

PANDION:

You look tired. (pauses) It's tough being mortal, isn't it.

Ares opens his eyes and looks at him.

ARES (flexes his fingers):

Sometimes. I'm getting used to it. (pauses) Hands-on training is really not my thing.

PANDION (smiles):

You're good at it. (joking) If you ever need a job, you should keep that in mind.

Ares gives him a curious look.

CUT TO

The sun rises.

CUT TO

Ares is on his horse outside the fortress. He has men in front of him in full armor, on horses and on foot.

ARES:

It's time. This time tomorrow, Brygus the *God of War* (sarcastically) will be no more.

Ares turns his horse and heads off, the army following him.

CUT TO

Outside the village, Ares' army rides up in the distance and stops. Ares looks down toward the village.

CUT TO

Gabrielle and Darion are walking through the marketplace with Xena looking at the fruit on the stalls. A murmur attracts Xena's attention. She turns to see Ares riding up, with Pandion and Iona behind him. The sun glints off of the bronze metal of his breastplate as he slows his horse, Quirinus, to a stop. Xena looks at him. She is clearly troubled but also impressed in spite of herself. Seeing her expression, Gabrielle smirks a little and nudges Xena with her arm.

GABRIELLE:

Your knight in shining armor.

Xena chuckles, her gaze sliding from Ares to Pandion and Iona behind him--and then further back, to the hill outside the village, where the army with Ares' red banners can be seen standing. Her face hardens, unreadable.

XENA:

I take it this isn't a social call.

ARES (serious):

We're going after Brygus. (pauses, grinning slightly) I figured you wouldn't want to sit this one out.

XENA:

No. (to Gabrielle) I've got to go.

GABRIELLE (nods, understanding):

Be careful.

CUT TO



Ares, Xena and the army ride through a forest.

DISSOLVE TO

The entrance to the Halls of War in the side of a tall cliff. Xena, Ares and the rest of the army ride toward it and stop.

XENA (softly, seriously):
You ready for this?

ARES (grins):
I didn't get dressed up for nothing, did I?

Xena gives him a small, tense smile.

Ares dismounts from his horse, followed by Pandion, Xena and Iona. Ares walks toward the entrance to the cave and looks into the dark beyond, then finally enters, slipping into the darkness. Xena follows, drawing her sword, and Pandion and Iona do the same, the rest of the army slowing following as well.

DISSOLVE TO



Inside a dark building with weapons hanging on the walls of a long, dark hallway. Xena comes in cautiously, Ares at her side, and they look around. In the dim light they can see that there are many hallways leading in different directions.

ARES:
If he's anywhere, he'll be in the main chamber. (points down one of the hallways) That way.

Ares walks forward. Just as he does, the entire interior lights up with a row of fire along the the walls in a stone ledge. The fire races along the walls and down all the hallways until everything is lit up as clear as day. Ares and the others stand back in the center of the room, the army still coming inside. There is a flash of blue light as Brygus appears in front of them all. He grins when he sees Ares.

BRYGUS:

Welcome. (grins) And good-bye.

Brygus disappears. Xena, Ares and the others look around cautiously and curiously. Then from all of the hallways, soldiers of Brygus begin to appear as if from nowhere, well armed and well protected by armor and helmets. Brygus' soldiers begin to spill into the room and surround Xena, Ares, Pandion, Iona and the other soldiers who have already entered, Brygus' soldiers circling them with swords drawn.

After a moment of no activity as Xena and the others watch in silence, one of Brygus' soldiers charge toward them and the fight begins.

Ares' soldiers fight well, noticeably better than their previous fight with Brygus' men. They are able to hold their own, swinging and kicking and spinning under and over the blades, shifting from side to side as each sword thrust jabs toward them, intending to kill.

Xena and Ares, and Pandion and Iona fight back to back. Their movements are swift, cutting down every one of Brygus' warriors that come near them. Xena and Ares are clearly the far superior fighters--but even Ares, as he fights against one of the men, slips up momentarily and Xena intercepts the blade that was headed straight for Ares' side. She plunges her sword into the soldier's side and looks at Ares as she pulls it out, the soldier falling down dead. Ares nods his thanks and she nods right back, then turns and the two of them take on another opponent.

As they fight Brygus' men and defeat them one by one, more men continue to come rushing forward from somewhere inside. Pandion looks up as he cuts down one of the soldiers, then glances over at Ares who is dispatching a man.

PANDION (shouts):

They keep coming!

Ares looks over at him and then glances at Xena. She sees the look in his eyes and shakes her head.

ARES:

I'm going in.

Ares charges forward, jumping over several fallen soldiers before Xena has a chance to stop him. He attacks a few of Brygus' soldiers, knocking them out or killing them, before he races down one of the halls and out of sight. Xena runs forward to follow him but is intercepted by several soldiers and forced into a fight.

CUT TO

The hallway. Ares runs down the hallway, now devoid of soldiers.

CUT TO

The main chamber. It's empty but lit as brightly as the rest of the temple. Ares runs in and stops, looking around, seeing the map on the wall, the throne high up in the back of the room and the chair where Brygus had him tied to before.

BRYGUS (off-camera):

I knew you'd get past them. (Ares turns to see Brygus now standing on the throne) You prepared to duke it out with a god? (eyes him) In your condition? You remember what happened last time...

Ares walks forward casually, holding his sword.



ARES:

The question is, are *you* ready.

Brygus jumps down from the throne. At the same time, he sends a lightning bolt toward Ares. Ares jumps out of the way, landing on the ground as the bolt flies past him and strikes the wall in the back, creating a hole in the wall and setting the map ablaze. Ares looks back at the burning map and Brygus looks down at him with a sideways grin.

BRYGUS:

I think my question is more important.

Ares gets to his feet and swings toward Brygus. Brygus ducks out of the way.

BRYGUS:

That has no effect on me, remember.

ARES:

Not right now, it doesn't. (he swings again and Brygus ducks again) But you're not invincible.

Ares attacks, pushing Brygus back. Brygus draws his sword and swings to counter the blow from Ares' sword. As he does, sparks fly from the blades. They begin sparring, flashes of light around them as they do.



CUT TO

Xena kills three more of Brygus' soldiers. She jumps over and kicks one to the ground who was about to kill one of Ares' men. She slaps her foot into Brygus' soldier and sends him sliding across the floor, hitting the wall on the other side. Turning, her hair flowing behind her, she looks at Pandion and Iona who seem to be doing well with their opponents, then at the rest of Ares' soldiers--some whom are dead and lying on the ground--and then rushes into the

back of the room, following the path Ares had taken. Pandion sees her leave out of the corner of his eye, then swings to meet another sword, breathing hard.

CUT TO



Ares and Brygus fight. Brygus throws a fireball at him which he narrowly dodges out of the way of, and it explodes on the side of the wall sending rocks crumbling to the ground.

CUT TO

Xena running down the hallway. She sees flashes of light in front of her.

CUT TO

Ares is thrown against the wall by the force of Brygus' kick. He lands next to the throne.



Xena comes running in, seeing Ares down and Brygus standing above him. She takes her chakram from her belt and aims it toward them, throwing it. It splits into two and ricochets off the walls, back and fourth.

XENA:

Brygus!

Brygus turns around to see Xena standing there as one of the chakram halves fly toward him, lodging in Brygus' side.

Pandion appears from behind them, looking tired but determined.

Brygus stares at her and then grins, pulling the chakram out and dropping it to the floor.

BRYGUS:

You'll regret that.

He sends several fireballs toward her that she has to dodge one after the other as she runs along the wall, missing each one by a hair. She flips and spins in the air as he sends a final fireball toward her. The flames graze her leg as she comes down, and she grits her teeth from the burn.

Ares watches from behind, seeing Brygus' hand at his side and the light shining off of the ring on his finger.

Xena catches one half of her chakram, giving Brygus a mocking look.



XENA (sneers):

What a waste of firepower. Typical god.

Meanwhile, Ares starts to move in on Brygus from behind.

BRYGUS:

You're starting to annoy me, Warrior Princess!

He raises both hands and launches two fireballs at the same time. Xena flips, lands on her back and at the same time deflects the fireballs with the sword and half of the chakram.

Brygus raises his hands again. Ares lunges quickly and grabs his left hand. Brygus snarls and yanks his hand away. He pushes Ares back so forcefully that Ares' head hits the side of the throne behind him and he falls, face down. Brygus sneers and walks over to stand over Ares.

BRYGUS (mocking):

And that's the end of Ares, God of War.

Brygus raises his hands toward Ares who is unmoving on the floor and Xena charges forward. In slow motion, Xena runs and Brygus stops short and looks at his hand. The ring is gone. Surprised, he glances down at Ares who has turned over, blood from a cut on his forehead dripping down the side of his cheek. Ares stands. The ring is in his hand.



ARES:

More like a new beginning.

Ares slides the ring onto his finger past the knuckle and in an instant, he's engulfed in a blue light, his head thrown back as the power overcomes him and awakens something primal he hasn't felt in months. Xena watches with apprehension and a slight feel of ecstasy as she seems to feel the power he does, radiating off him. The wound on his forehead and the ones on the rest of his body disappear as if they were never there. He opens his eyes. He flexes his muscles, rolls his shoulders and neck as he feels the strength coursing beneath his skin. Then he locks his eyes on Brygus, much more menacing than before.

ARES:

How does it feel to stare into the face of your destruction?

Before Brygus has a chance to say anything, Ares raises his hand and sends a clear bolt of energy toward Brygus, picking him up off the ground and hurling him toward the back of the temple. He collides with the wall and slides down.



As Brygus quickly struggles to stand, Ares disappears and reappears in front of him. Sword in hand and he attacks and Brygus is forced to defend himself. They get in a few skilled swings, Ares fighting like a mortal still even as a god--but with much more raw power behind every forceful blow. Ares pushes him back toward the other wall, past Xena and Pandion as they watch Ares fight with a fierceness he hadn't displayed previously. Brygus is pushed against the wall. He tries to kick Ares but Ares merely knocks his leg away and punches him hard in the stomach. Brygus doubles over. Ares stares back at him, then kicks him sideways, knocking him to the floor. Brygus falls into the corner beneath the nearly burnt map still hanging on the wall. Ares raises his sword.

Xena comes up behind him, grabbing Ares' sword arm.

XENA:

Don't. We need him.

Ares hesitates for a moment, then lowers his arm, looking back at her.

CUT TO

The village. Gabrielle is talking to Darion on the porch, kneeling down in front of him. There is a flash of blue light and she turns to see Ares appearing with Xena by his side and Brygus on the ground in front of him, his hands held behind his back. Gabrielle stares in shock.



GABRIELLE:

You're a god.

Ares gives her a brief, thoughtful look before taking Brygus' hands and hauling him to his feet. He and Xena walk toward a building, Gabrielle and Darion following.

CUT TO

Inside a building. Ares, Xena and Gabrielle are standing in front of the villagers, Brygus kneeling at their feet.

XENA:

Tell them what you've been doing.

Brygus is silent. Ares takes out the dagger from his boot that he'd taken from the temple and puts it to Brygus' throat.

ARES (snarls):

Tell them.

The dagger to his throat doesn't sway him. Xena bends down and puts the pinch on him.

XENA:

You've got 30 seconds before you suffer a slow and painful death.

He gasps, blood dripping from his nose.

BRYGUS:

All right. (coughs) All right.

Xena takes the pinch off and he catches his breath.

BRYGUS (looking at the villagers):

Every village between here and the Aegean Sea that's been destroyed--that was my work.

There are gasps and murmurs in the crowd.

XENA:

Tell them why!

BRYGUS:

It was for Artemis. To make the villages seek her protection.

One of the villagers charges forward, swinging his fist in anger.

VILLAGER:

I had friends in one of those villages. You killed them all!

BRYGUS:

They wouldn't submit to Artemis. It served them right.

The crowd gets angrier and begins to close in. Xena nods toward Ares and Ares picks up Brygus by the shoulder, hauling him to his feet.

Brygus snarls and struggles, breaking free of Ares' grasp. Some of the villagers gasp, stepping back as Brygus prepares to lunge at Ares.

BRYGUS:

You will pay for everything, Ares! *Everything!*

Brygus charges forward. Just then, Ares pulls out the gold dagger, the blade of it shining in the light, and stabs him as Brygus charges to attack. Brygus' eyes go wide and he looks down at the dagger in his stomach, blood around the wound. His eyes go back and he falls. Ares holds the dagger up, covered in blood, then looks down at Brygus lying on the floor of the building, gasping for breath.

Close-up on Ares' face. He looks grim.

BRYGUS:

Killing me does not stop...Artemis. Her reign will only continue to grow. (coughs) It's already begun...in Ephesus... You cannot stop...

Brygus coughs, coughing up blood. Ares kneels down, as do Xena and Gabrielle around him.

BRYGUS (looking up at the ceiling):

Praise Artemis, the one...and only.

He lets out his final breath and goes limp. Ares, looking remorseful, stares at him and then at the dagger in his hand. He drops the dagger and it clatters to the ground, then glances back at Xena and Gabrielle. Xena squeezes his shoulder. Pull back for a view of him standing with Xena and the crowd of villagers, with Gabrielle and Darion, around the fallen Brygus.

DISSOLVE TO

A mound of dirt, with rocks piled on top of it in a shady grove outside of the village beside a small stream. Ares stands, placing the final rock onto the pile. Pull back to show him standing silently looking at it as Xena stands beside him.

ARES:

I made him, you know. Just like you've made others.

He holds out the dagger that Brygus had given him years ago, and that he had used to kill Brygus with. The blade is now clean and polished. He lies the dagger across the pile of rocks and steps back.

Then he looks down at his hands, seeing the ring still on his finger. Xena follows his look.



XENA:

I'll understand if you want to keep it. (she looks him in the eyes and continues softly) It might not make you immortal--but it would keep you safe, and give you back the power that is your birthright. It belongs to you.

Ares is silent, looking at her. Then he walks past her to a patch of dirt between some trees. He holds out his hand and sends a flame toward the ground, setting it ablaze. It burns hot and white. He looks down at his hand and touches the stone ring, then slowly slides it off his finger. Xena watches him intently as he holds it up as if contemplating it. Without another thought, he tosses the ring into the fire and it sends sparks shooting in all directions. A faint bluish tint, the remains of his powers, begins to rise from the flames and dissipates into the air around them.



XENA (looking at him, moved):
You gave it up.

ARES (turns to her):

I let Artemis take my powers before. (firm) I'm not going to give her the chance to do it again. It's better this way. (pause) Besides... (with a small, reflective smile) the god thing? (shrugs) Been there, done that.

Ares steps closer to her.

Pan down to show the fire beginning to die down.

ARES (voice-over):

The God of War is my past.

The last of the bluish haze rises from the fire.

CUT TO

Ares standing close to Xena.



ARES (looking into Xena's eyes):
My future is with *you*.

Ares raises his hand, cupping her cheek in his palm and leans forward, bringing their lips together in a tender kiss.

As they begin to kiss slowly and sensually, Xena raising her hand behind his head, the camera pans down to where the fire had been. There's a small, dark stone in the dirt, smoke rising around it.

CUT TO

The village. In a building, Ares is sitting on the edge of a bed, looking down at the floor. He's wearing his leathers again.

[FLASHBACK]

His anger taking him over, Ares stabs Zarek in the chest.

CUT TO

Ares watching as that young and old warrior die at the hands of Brygus' warriors on the roadside from part I.

CUT TO

Ares stabs Brygus with the dagger.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Ares looks at his hands.

[FLASHBACK]

Ares, as a god with long hair, walking amongst a battlefield as men die around him. He is invisible to them as people walk right through him. He sees a man gut another man and grins with glee as the man falls, then walks past another man who has his throat slit and pushed to the ground where he slowly bleeds to death. Ares grins.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

DREAM-ARES (echoing off-camera, in Ares' mind):
You'll regret it all.

The creaky door opens across from him and Xena walks in, holding a small brown sack. He glances up at her and she gives him a small smile.

XENA:
You ready to head out?

ARES:
Yeah. (pauses) Just thinking... Being at the head of an army was fun, but it's not all it's cracked up to be.

XENA (teasing):
So, I told you not to get into any fights and you went ahead and did it anyway. Don't you ever listen to me?

ARES:
Sometimes. (He looks thoughtful for a moment and chuckles)

XENA:
What?



ARES:
You know, I went off on this mission because I wanted to do something on my own, and we still ended up working together. (chuckles again) For the Greater Good...I guess?

XENA (smiles, moving closer to him):
Mm. That must be annoying.

ARES (stands up, smiling back):
I can deal with it.

XENA:
Don't forget these.

She opens the bag and pulls out his gauntlets. He smiles and she takes one of his hands, slipping the one gauntlet over his hand and fastening the straps. She does the same to his other wrist and when she's done, he flexes his arms.

ARES (grins):
It's good to have them back.



XENA (huskily):

It's good to have *you* back.

She leans forward and kisses him. He wraps his arms around her, his hands on the small of her back, pulling her closer as they deepen the kiss.

After a few moments of kissing, Ares slowly pulls back and Xena looks at him.

ARES:

I have something for you, too.

Xena watches him curiously as Ares steps back, pulling something out of his vest. It's a small, brown pouch. He holds it out to her and she takes it. She opens it, pulling out a small, gray, unpolished stone.



She holds it up.

ARES:

I found this in the fire. (she lets the stone lie in her palm as she looks at it) What's left of my godhood. (he puts his hand over her hand that is holding the stone, then looks into her eyes) I don't think it could be in better hands.

Ares moves his hand away and she glances at the stone once more before closing her fingers around it. When she looks up at Ares, she is misty-eyed, deeply touched by his gesture. She leans forward and kisses him, wrapping her arms around his neck.

DISSOLVE TO

Outside in the village. The horses are standing nearby, Gabrielle is standing in front of Makis and Rena, smiling.

GABRIELLE:

Thank you for everything.

MAKIS:

No. Thank *you*. (glances over at Xena who's standing beside Ares in front of Iona and Pandion, and then back at Gabrielle) If it weren't for you two, we'd still believe Artemis' lies.

GABRIELLE:

No lie can last forever. Just listen to your own conscience; it'll help you out more often than you think.

She and Rena hug.

Pan around to show Ares standing beside Xena, looking at Iona and Pandion.

ARES:

Now that Brygus is defeated, there's no reason to keep the army together.

IONA:

There is a reason. We'll always honor you no matter what.

PANDION:

We'll fight for you whether you're with us or not. (pause) Nicos will be okay.

ARES (to Xena, somewhat facetiously but with a serious undertone):

So I guess it's back to being your sidekick.

Xena grabs the reins and then stops, looking at him with a small smile but also a hint of seriousness. She takes his hand and laces their fingers together.

XENA:

Partner.

She squeezes his fingers and he smiles back, grinning more now.

ARES:

I can live with that.

Xena smiles, mounting. Ares follows, and Gabrielle does as well, pulling Darion in the saddle behind her. They turn their horses around and ride out of the village.

DISSOLVE TO

Night. The stars shine bright. Xena, Ares, Gabrielle, Darion and Samuel are sleeping in a clearing in the forest beside a campfire. Ares is sleeping beside Xena, both of them covered by their fur blankets. Close in on Ares' face as he sleeps.

DISSOLVE TO

Inside Ares' dream.

Montage:

-- Ares blasts a mountain side with his fireballs, glee in his eyes.

-- Ares disappears and reappears in a flash in a forest.

-- Ares walks through a wall of fire.

-- Xena, on her back, with Ares on top of her placing his hands on her bare stomach and causing it to glow red hot. She throws her head back and gasps at the pleasure he's creating.

DISSOLVE TO

At the campsite, Ares opens his eyes. He looks up at the stars and then turns on his side to look at Xena sleeping beside him. He reaches out and brushes the hair away from her eyes, then touches her hand. On her finger is a ring with a tarnished bronze band and the gray stone securely fastened to its center.

ARES (whispers, his look content):
No regrets.



Ares rests his head, closing his eyes once more. Close in on Xena's peaceful look as she sleeps, then close in on their hands as her fingers slowly close around his as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[Ares resolved his midlife crisis during the production of this motion picture.]