

out history who should be centuries apart, and there's no explanation taken place in northern Norse lands, far removed from where most of the adventures in the series take place, so (applying Xenia logic here) perhaps this kind of thing has been going on for a long time there.

"You Are There" is structured like a clip show, but it isn't one. While a few clips from previous episodes are used, they don't comprise the bulk of the time. Instead, Nigel simply goes to various people and interviews them about Xenia. It's a clever way to give Lawless and O'Connor a bit of a week off, and Michael Hurst is more than capable of carrying the load. Not only did he play the sidekick Iolias for years on *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, but he's made appearances on *Xenia* as both an actor and a director (this season, he directed "Who's Gurkhan?"). For "You Are There," he's fun to watch as a Jerry Springer-type talk show host who seeks to show Xenia and her friends in the worst possible light in order to garner high ratings. There's a nice in-joke by having Nigel interview Charon, a character Hurst himself played on *Hercules*. Though here it's credited to Peter Rowley (though in the heavy make-up, it's difficult to tell *who* is playing the part).

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of this "gimmick" episode is that it plays an important part in the *Xenia* continuity, restoring Ares and Aphrodite's godhood. The past two episodes, then, do a great deal to returning the show to its natural order, with the Olympian gods back home, and Xenia no longer able to kill gods. Of course, most of the Olympians have been wiped out (by Xenia), but, as noted before, that corresponds to the real history of how the adherents to those gods declined as Christianity took a foothold in Europe.

The end-credits disclaimer: "The concept of linear time was severely harmed during the making of this motion picture."

RATING: ***

14. PATH OF VENGEANCE

First televised February 2001

(Ares); Written by Joel Metzger; Directed by Chris Martin-Jones; Edited by Tim Guest starring Adrienne Wilkinson (Eve), Tsianina Joelson (Varia), and Kevin Smith

The Amazons have united against the Romans. Eve is in the forest seeking to bring the message of the peace of Eli to the Amazons when Roman soldiers appear to be her guard. She balks. Amazons attack. The queen (Varia) recognizes Eve (Livia) and takes her prisoner; she must pay for Livia's crimes against the Amazons. One soldier leaves to notify command as to what's happening. Xenia and Gabrielle notice that the Romans have pulled back their troops ever since Eve turned the emperor toward peace. The Roman soldier tells Xenia that Eve has been captured by the Amazons.

Varia wants the surrendered soldiers killed, but one of the tribal queens (Cyane) complains. Eve says she was on a mission of peace. Varia says Livia raided Amazon lands for slaves; Margia sentenced her to death if she ever returned. Xenia and Gabrielle find the slaughtered soldiers. Some have been executed. The new Cyane (name and rank inherited from the previous one) reluctantly lets Xenia and Gabrielle accompany her to the tribe council meeting. Varia explains that, six years ago, the tribes were strong. Livia came with Roman soldiers, killed many Amazons, and enslaved the rest. Varia had the chance to kill Livia but hesitated. Varia's sister came to her defense but was killed in front of her by Livia. Now, Varia wants justice. Xenia is speechless. Eve says that Varia is telling the truth. Amazon law is clear: death or banishment. But since she returned, the Amazons vote unanimously for death. Xenia insists on presenting a defense. Varia gives her one hour.

Xenia recognizes Varia's sword—it came from Eve but was originally from Ares. Xenia confronts Varia about her alliance with Ares, who's helping her to build an Amazon nation. Xenia questions Eve and insists she tell the whole truth, including her alliance with Ares. She was fighting two northern campaigns, taking provinces for Rome. Ares suggested she take on the Amazons, just for kicks and glory. He knew Gurkhan, a Persian warrior, who would buy Amazon slaves. Varia says she'll find out the truth from Ares himself. Xenia suggests the Amazons consider Eve's verdict carefully. Gabrielle will join the council in the deliberations. Xenia says if Gabrielle can't convince them, she'll get Eve out "the old fashioned way."

Ares admits that he was behind Livia's Amazon raid, but as a way to unite the tribes. He knew Gurkhan wouldn't really buy the slaves. When Livia

couldn't sell them on the open market, she tossed them overboard. Varia should now lead the Amazons against the Romans. Gabrielle can't change the minds of the council. It must speak unanimously. Gabrielle votes that Eve is guilty. Xenia is angry. Gabrielle argues it's the only way she will have a voice during sentencing. Xenia leaves the camp and calls for Ares. Ares tells her the story of the scorpion and the swan. Ares needs new worshippers; he'll get that with the largest battle in history, with both sides praying to him for victory. Eve wasn't part of his plan; she got involved on her own.

Varia is about to pronounce the sentence when Gabrielle challenges her. Gabrielle prepares to fight. Xenia wants to fight in her place, but that is not allowed. Xenia promises not to interfere. Gabrielle fights Varia, who wins fairly easily. Xenia calls on Ares, who says he would like to see Xenia take on some Amazons while saving Eve. Xenia reminds Ares that in the parable, the scorpion drowned. Xenia stops Varia on the way to the execution and says Varia is doing this out of her guilt, her inability to kill Livia when she had the chance. Xenia and Varia fight. Xenia warns Varia that if she follows Ares, she'll end up worse than Livia. If she wants vengeance, she should start with her. Varia can't bring herself to kill Xenia. Ares congratulates Xenia on being "so good." Xenia: "It's what I do." At a council meeting, Varia sentences Livia to death so that Eve may live. She is free to go. Eve will go East, to Chin.

HISTORICAL NOTE: Though this episode does not name the emperor to whom Eve converts to the peace of Eli's ways, in history Nero succeeded Caligula, and Nero was a virulent anti-Christian. The first (ostensibly) Christian emperor would not come until 306 with Constantine.

COMMENTS: Episodes featuring the Amazons generally make for solid stories, and this is one of the best—a wild action/adventure episode from beginning to end. There are three extended battle sequences, and all are fabulous: the Amazons' brutal attack on the Roman soldiers; Varia's vicious fight against Gabrielle after being challenged; and the climactic confrontation between Xenia and Varia, each one has its own distinctive elements and shows why *Xenia* does this kind of thing better than just about any other television show in history. The attention to background details, camera movement, and innovative fighting styles make these a joy to watch. And it doesn't hurt that the actors excel in these scenes, especially Lawless. Of course, she's been doing these long enough that she can probably do them in her sleep, yet on screen, she maintains Xenia's air of intensity and amusing confidence that make these fights convincing.

One of the things that has always set *Xenia* apart from other television heroes is her dark past. In this episode, the parallels between her story and Eve's are emphasized, giving the story a thematic weight it would not otherwise have. Xenia appears horrified at the details of Livia's attack on the Amazons and cannot trivialize them or excuse them with sentimental, motherly love because she is still dealing with redeeming her own past. It's a question posed on this series (much like the Buffy and Angel sagas, in which Angel seeks redemption for his past) without much resolution. How does one atone for past misdeeds? Is it ever completely possible? This problem is at the heart of many religions, and the solutions fall roughly into two camps (ignoring, for the moment, the philosophies that explain away the ideas of evil/sin to begin with). Most religions propose a redemption through good works—that is, one atones for past misdeeds with present good works in the hopes that, before death, the good will outweigh the bad. One can never be sure how the scales are balanced, but the person hopes they turn out favorably. This is Xenia's philosophy. Set against that is Christianity, roughly represented (in a much simplified fashion) by Eve's adherence to the teachings of Eli. Christianity acknowledges the inability of men to be perfectly righteous on their own, making salvation by works impossible. Redemption comes as a gift from God to the believer. Good works follow as a result of the righteousness, not as a way to obtain purity. It's a subtle difference, but important. Though both Eve and Xenia have turned from evil, Xenia is still trying to "earn" redemption, and one gets the sense that she still questions whether she has fully paid for her previous atrocities. Eve appears to be working differently—she acknowledges her past misdeeds and is ready to accept judgment. Though never stated directly, the implication—represented by her name change—is

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