

## "Path Of Vengeance" (written by Joel Metzger)

**SD:** You were brought on as a staff writer for *Xena* during the sixth season?

**Joel:** Yes, the beginning of the sixth season.

**SD:** Had you seen the show before you were hired?

**Joel (chuckling):** I hadn't seen a single episode.

**SD:** How did you come to write for the show? And how did they prepare you to write for a show that has been on for five years?

**Joel:** I knew one of the writers on *Cleopatra 2525*. I pitched successfully for that show and then wrote an episode. Because that was a new show, there wasn't much preparation needed. They didn't have a history I needed to learn. That went well and I was asked to rewrite "The Haunting Of Amphipolis." They gave me a ton of tapes and scripts and I watched hours and hours as quickly as I could to get a handle on it. They liked the work I did on that script and offered to bring me on staff. There was a lot to absorb.

**SD:** What story did they want to tell with this episode? What elements were you given to work with?

**Joel:** They knew they wanted to do an episode about the trial of Eve in this last season. She had this checkered past they felt needed to be explored. At first they thought it might take place in the Roman Senate or somewhere else in Rome. It ended up being an Amazon story because she was responsible for inflicting so much damage to them. So they wanted to put her on trial. That's the driver of the story even though there's a lot of other intrigue going on.

**SD:** It's interesting that you mention they were considering either using Rome or the Amazons as a background. Those are two of the most popular elements for many viewers of the show — Amazons and Roman politics.

**Joel:** Yeah.

**SD:** Was the episode ever titled "The Trial Of Eve"?

**Joel:** No, that was just a sentence that was tossed around during story meetings. They change titles a lot up until the last minute. Sometimes the story changes so much the working title doesn't make sense so they have to come up with a new one. The season opener, "Coming Home," it was a completely different story. Later, they realized the title referred to the original idea.

**SD:** Speaking of "Coming Home," was anything in "Path Of Vengeance" left over from that earlier episode? There was a reference to the Amazon Queen Marga's banishment of Eve in "Path" that we never heard of before.

**Joel:** A lot of things used in "Path" were

set up in "Coming Home" — Marga's banishment. Eve knowing if she returned to Amazon lands they would put her to death. Those points didn't make the final cut of "Coming Home."

Also, in "Coming Home," Varia recognizes Eve because of a certain fighting move Eve executes. That pays off in "Path." We see Livia do it in the flashback sequence when she attacks the Amazons and then Varia does it to Xena. That was all Rob's idea.

**SD:** Long-time viewers noticed that move.



**Joel:** Really! Well, it was a through line that Rob wanted to do.

**SD:** Can you tell me anything about the birth of Varia as a character? Since "Coming Home," she has appeared in quite a few episodes.

**Joel:** In "Coming Home," we knew we wanted a hotheaded Amazon, a real aggressive go-getter. That's what she came out of. They didn't give her a whole lot to do in that first episode, just established that she was an angry chick. (laughs) I wrote the second episode she appeared in, "Dangerous Prey," and I went round and round figuring out how to develop her more. I played her, in that episode, as really hotheaded and Xena tries to get her to control herself. The girl is so bent on vengeance she doesn't realize the

large part she would play in the future of her tribe if she would just stop acting like a kid.

**SD:** There's an ironic difficulty in a fictional character. One tends to wonder what Marga saw in Varia to make her think she would make a good leader for the Amazons, but as neither person is real, we'll never know.

**Joel (laughs):** Right.

**SD:** So, as the writer, you had to find some way to convince the audience this character was worth Xena's attention.

**Joel:** Yeah. The thing about Varia is that, although she's often wrong and hotheaded, she really believes in what she's doing, she's brave as hell and she would just lay it on the line. And, at the end of the day, Marga knew the Amazons needed a queen who would never give up.

**SD:** That's something the Amazons are known for — their determination and steadfastness.

**Joel:** Right. She was the Amazon's Amazon in that regard.

**SD:** We hear about actors who develop a back story for their characters that isn't shown on screen, but gives them more to work with when they play the character. Do you, as a writer, do anything like that?

**Joel:** Yeah, sometimes you don't have time to do a lot of that, but if you have the time to really develop your character, then if someone asks you where they went to high school, what their childhood was like and what kind of ice cream is their favorite, you can probably come up with an answer because they exist more fully in your imagination. But, in the world of TV, you're moving so fast sometimes it's just, "She's really pro-Amazon and angry." That's all you have time for.

In "Path," we had the flashback where we learned two things -- she always wanted to be a warrior and she failed her tribe. That was my main point. I wanted to show the reason she's such a hothead and so angry is that she's been carrying around her whole life the fact

that she feels she let her tribe down. She had a chance to kill Livia/Eve and didn't. She was just a young girl and had never been in battle before and she choked. So she's been beating herself up this whole time.

**SD:** Varia was invented for "Coming Home." Tsianina Joelson was hired to play her and turned out to be terrific. So good, in fact, they brought the character back for three more episodes. How does a character go from a one-shot to a recurring role?

**Joel:** Yeah, they really used her a lot. Originally, we were casting for the Norse trilogy ("The Rheingold," "The Ring," and "Return Of The Valkyrie") and she came in to read for a Valkyrie part. We were going for a more Germanic blonde look.