



But she was so beautiful and obviously athletic and perfect for *Xena* that when we were talking about having a hot-headed character, we thought of her. Watching her work in the dailies for "Coming Home," they saw how fit she was, her skill at martial arts and how good she was in the fight sequences, we wanted to use her again. They like to use what works. I don't think anyone sat down at the beginning of the season and said, "Let's have a character that shows up four times this year."

SD: As I said, Amazons are very popular among *Xena* fans and they found a good one. It made sense to use her again. Were you there during Tsianina's audition?

Joel: Yeah, I was. She read some of my dialogue from "The Ring," when she was auditioning for a Valkyrie. We saw about 20 girls that day. Some were better actors, some looked the part, some were more Germanic, some were beautiful, but just too skinny to be warriors. I gotta tell you, she really lit up the room! She's so beautiful in person, she stole everyone's breath away. Film doesn't do her justice. We really wanted to use her because we knew she would just leap off the screen and she does, I think.

SD: Is Varia an Amazon Queen?

Joel: Yes. The original story for "Dangerous Prey" was Marga is killed and Xena and Varia are going to rescue a young girl who Varia thinks is going to become the new queen. We had Varia

go through all these trials and tribulations and she doesn't realize that every step along the way, Xena is training her to become queen. At the end, when the girl is rescued, Varia finds out that she is actually going to get the crown herself. The story wound up going in a different direction entirely. We played a bit of that with Xena trying to teach Varia some lessons, but I think that part of the story became more of a background to the action and Xena's battle with Morloch. But our "B" story was that Varia grows up and takes command of her tribe. Then, in "Path Of Vengeance," she becomes Queen of all the tribes.

SD: We saw, I think, almost all the Amazon tribes that had ever been shown on *Xena*.

Joel: Siberian tribes, African, Asian, Irish (laughs).

SD (laughs): The "red-headed" tribe.

Joel: Yeah. It was meant to be similar to the Native Americans

banding together to form one giant nation.

SD: Varia hooked up with Ares. How did Ares become part of the story?

Joel: If Kevin is available, if we haven't used him in a while and Ares can fit into the story, Rob loves to add him in. He's like a chef sometimes, adding different ingredients to the stories. I thought if

Ares had just gotten his immortality back, he would have been out of circulation so long that no one was worshipping him as they should. So Ares would think if he created this huge war between the Amazons and Romans, then both sides would be open to coming to him for success in battle. It was a great way for him to get back into the god business. And Rob really wanted to make a point of Ares becoming a shit again. (laughs) After spending the fifth season making him mortal and crazy, Rob told me to make Ares like he used to be — manipulative, cunning.

SD (laughs): Ares was quite different in this episode than he was in "Old Ares Had A Farm."

Joel (laughs): Right. But I think as much as we wanted to make Ares a bad guy again, we didn't want to go too far. So RJ (Stewart) tweaked the Ares stuff after I turned the script in. That resulted in the Scorpion and the Swan story about how it's in Ares' nature to do what he does.

SD: As bad as Ares has been in this show, I've always felt a touch of Cary Grant about him — devious but charming. I think that's one of the things that makes him so appealing, at least for me.

Joel: Right.

SD: That was an interesting glow Ares caused in Xena when he came up behind her in the field and put his arms around her.

Joel (laughs): Yeah! That's not something I did. That was part of the tweaking. It showed he had his powers back and his tricks.

SD: That pose the two of them were in harkened back to "The Reckoning," the first episode in which Kevin Smith played Ares. Lucy plays that so well — she falls under his spell and then reminds herself, "No, I'm not that kind of girl anymore." I feel a touch of regret though. As if Xena wishes she could have her Ares and still be a good girl.

Joel: I think I saw that show. I remember that.



ARES: 'THE SCORPION NEEDS TO GET ACROSS THE RIVER AND HE ASKS THE SWAN FOR A RIDE. THE SWAN FIGURES IT'S NOT MUCH OF A RISK. THE SCORPION WOULDN'T STING THE CREATURE WHO'S CARRYING HIM OVER THE RAGING RIVER. ABOUT HALFWAY ACROSS, THE SCORPION STINGS THE SWAN. AS THEY'RE BOTH BEING SWEEPED TO THEIR DEATH, THE SWAN ASKS THE SCORPION, 'I WAS HELPING YOU, WHY DID YOU STING ME?' AND THE SCORPION ANSWERS...'

XENA: 'IT'S WHAT I DO.' ('PATH OF VENGEANCE')