

SHIPPER SEASON NINE

“Looking Forward”

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Logline

In a distant future, Xena, a former space pirate-turned-officer of justice, teams up with an attorney named Gabrielle to stop a pirate raid on a transport caravan. But the success of their mission requires that Xena join forces with Ares, a former ally who is now an adversary.

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TEASER

FADE IN

On a fight aboard a spaceship. A group of men and women in navy blue uniforms with silver insignia are trying to fend off a ferocious assault by people in a motley assortment of flight suits. Most of the fighting is hand-to-hand combat with martial arts moves. We see one of the attackers shoot a man in a blue uniform; with a short cry, the man falls to the floor.

The camera pans to a tall black-haired woman in a black and bronze flight suit battling several of the ship's defenders. As the camera zooms closer, we see that it's Xena.

XENA (shouts to some of the others):
Control room's that way!

She leaps high and kicks two of the ship's defenders in the chest, knocking them down. Of all the people who were fighting her, just one woman is now left standing.

A sliding door opens and a strongly built man with more ornate silver insignia than the rest comes charging toward Xena. He aims his pulser at her. Xena whips around and kicks the woman in the navy blue uniform, pushing her in the way of the pulser ray. The woman's scream is cut short as she falls. Before the captain can recover, Xena shoots the pulser out of hand. He stares at her in shock and anger.

More people in navy blue uniforms come running down the corridor to the scene of the battle and engage the attackers.

XENA (smirking):

Well, captain. Just in time to give your last order. "Surrender ship."

CAPTAIN:

And leave my crew to you? Never!

With a bored look, Xena shoots him. He crumples to the floor. There are gasps among the ship's defenders.

XENA:

I see I have your attention. Now. (Cocks her head) You *do* have a choice...

She pauses. After a moment's hesitation, one of the crew members throws down his pulser. Several others follow suit.

XENA (with a feral grin):

I see that I don't need to explain what the choice is. I'm glad we understand each other. (to her warriors) Take their weapons and shackle them.

Xena's warriors begin to disarm the ship's defenders. The image freezes suddenly on one of the attackers: a squat, blonde woman wearing a dented half-helm and dark green armor suit.

XENA'S VOICE (off-camera):

That's her.

The camera pulls back to reveal the small computer monitor on which the preceding scene had unfolded, then further back to show two people in front of a desk, looking at the screen, which is still in freeze-frame. It's Xena and Hercules, both wearing the light-colored skinsuits that mark them as officers of Justice Station. They are in a sparsely furnished office with chrome walls and dark blue carpeting. This is Xena's office.

HERCULES:

That's Zeb?

XENA:

Right. (pause) Too bad we won't be going after her together.

HERCULES:

Oh, you don't need me there, I bet you'll have her locked up and tied down before I have time to take my judge's pledge.

XENA:

Who said anything about need? (warmly) I did like having you around.

HERCULES:

We did make a good team, didn't we? (they exchange a smile) But hey, I'm sure you and, uh ... (stumbles trying to remember the name) Georgette--Gertrude ...

GABRIELLE'S VOICE (behind them):

Gabrielle.

HERCULES:

--Gabrielle, are going to get along just fine.

Xena and Hercules turn around to look at Gabrielle, who is standing behind them. She is similarly dressed, with short hair. Visible on the backs of her hands are tattoos similar to the mendhi designs that Gabrielle had in late Season 4.

Gabrielle gives the video screen a final disapproving look. Xena picks up a short, ornate silver dagger from the desk and twirls it in her hands, looking away.

GABRIELLE:

So--this is glory days, huh?

XENA (coolly):

Not exactly.

GABRIELLE:

Your army came and sacked that ship, right? Zeb was one of your own?

XENA (even colder):

Very perceptive.

GABRIELLE:

So what happened to all these people, Officer? Sold them to the Andromeda mines, did you?

HERCULES (looking between them nervously):

You know what? I just remembered--uh, look, I'll just leave you two alone to get acquainted, okay? (To Xena) They tell me the kid's a good lawyer. Just give her a chance.

Xena and Gabrielle ignore Hercules as he leaves the office. Xena twirls the silver dagger in her hands.

XENA (making an effort):

All right. If we're going to work together, we're going to have to get along. You can start by calling me Xena.

GABRIELLE (likewise trying to be conciliatory):

Look--Xena--I knew when I got this assignment that you used to be a-- (pauses, searching for a word)

XENA (drops the dagger on the desk and whips around to face Gabrielle):
Pirate? Murderer?

GABRIELLE (winces slightly):
Let's stick with "pirate".

XENA:
Let's.

GABRIELLE:
What I'm trying to say is--I knew that you had this--past. But it's one thing to know it and another to actually watch--*that*.

XENA:
I know. I see *that* every night. But--Gabrielle--it exists. If it's not me, it's someone else, Zeb, whoever. That's why we're here.

GABRIELLE:
That's why I'm here. But you? They did tell me you changed sides a couple of years back...they just never said why.

XENA (picks up the dagger and slowly traces its edge with a finger, looking down):
If you don't understand it... For your sake, I hope you never do.

Gabrielle takes a breath for an indignant response, then seems at a loss for words. Changing the subject, she points to the dagger:

GABRIELLE:
What's that?

XENA (reluctantly):
A good-luck charm. I haven't parted with it since I was sixteen.

GABRIELLE (even more taken aback):
It looks--sharp.

XENA:
Everyone needs an edge. And a story. (nods at the tattoos on Gabrielle's hands) I see you have yours.

Gabrielle tugs her sleeves down with some embarrassment, but is saved from explanations by a loud "beep." An "Incoming message" signal flashes on the computer monitor. Xena hits a button.

The camera zooms in to show the message:

Hostile activity detected in vicinity of midrange transport vehicle Endeavor, coordinates E34:56T. Vehicle carrying cargo of silver, 340 tons, shielded. 40 crew. Comlink interrupted. Further updates upon availability.

XENA (gets up abruptly):
Let's go.

GABRIELLE:

What, out there?! Fieldwork. They said we'd start on the papers.

XENA:

You can stay here. Do the filing. (she nods at a precariously balanced tower of papers and disks near the desk).

GABRIELLE (brightly):

Fieldwork it is!

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle in the space station's hangar, getting into a small two-seater vehicle ("roach"). The letters on the side of roach spell "ARGO".

GABRIELLE:

How do you even know it's Zeb's people?

XENA:

I don't.

She forcefully flips a switch, causing the door of "Argo" to close, and then hits some keys at the control and flips a row of switches.

METALLIC VOICE IN SHIP:

All clear. Prepare for liftoff!

The camera pulls back to show "Argo" take off vertically and gather speed as the ceiling panels slide open to let it through.

CUT TO

Exterior shot of a space station, with the logo "JUSTICE STATION" visible on one of the panels. We see the "roach" flying off into space.

CUT TO

The deck of a raided ship. The camera pans over dead bodies on the floor. Several rescue crew medics in white suits and oxygen masks are treating the wounded.

Pan to Xena and Gabrielle, striding briskly onto the flight deck, Gabrielle visibly making an effort to keep up with Xena's pace. Xena stops next to a medic tending to a wounded man. Her face is closed and grim.

WOUNDED MAN (looks up at Xena):

You're too late... (groans) Always too late.

Before Xena can answer, she's approached by an armed member of the rescue crew.

RESCUE CREW MEMBER:

Officer. Wish I had good news for you.

XENA:

Nothing usable from the surveillance cameras?

RESCUE CREW MEMBER (shakes his head):

The chip's been taken.

XENA:

No doubt. (under her breath) I taught them well.

Gabrielle gives her a sharp look. Xena squats down next to the wounded man.

XENA (gently):

What's your name?

WOUNDED MAN:

Lieutenant Elos, Ma'am.

XENA:

Can you tell me anything about them? Their leader?

LT. ELOS:

A woman--not as tall as you, Ma'am--a blonde--

Xena takes a small handheld computer notebook off her belt and turns it on, showing the screen to Lt. Elos.

XENA:

Is that her?

LT. ELOS (winces as the medic gives him a shot in the shoulder):

Yes.

Xena stands up, her face unreadable. Gabrielle glances at her, then squats down next to Lt. Elos and reaches out to touch his hand.

GABRIELLE (softly):

Thank you. We'll get them, I promise. (with a strained smile that's meant to be reassuring) You'll be all right.

XENA:

Come on, Gabrielle. (Under her breath as they walk away) Be careful what you promise these people. After what they've been through, the last thing they need is empty words.

GABRIELLE:

But we *are* going to get them. There'll be an arrest order issued the moment we confirm Zeb's ID.

XENA:

You really do trust the system. That's very touching, but good luck finding Zeb by the time that order is stamped and verified.

As they talk, they are now walking down a corridor. Medics occasionally walk past them carrying some of the wounded on stretchers.

GABRIELLE:

They're going to sell that silver, right? We can track that.

XENA:

Definitely, Miss Lawyer. Just look under "Zeb's Discount Plunder" on the commodities exchange.

GABRIELLE:

Ha ha. I *am* a lawyer, Xena. I know all about dirty deals. (Off Xena's look) Not from experience!

XENA (grins):

I didn't say it.

GABRIELLE (grumbles):

You thought it. I'm sure *you* have enough experience with the black market in silver to know what Zeb is going to do next.

XENA:

Yes, I do.

She speeds up, leaving Gabrielle behind for a moment.

GABRIELLE (speeds up, desperately trying to keep up with Xena):

Wait! What's she--what are you going to do? What are we going to do?

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

Xena and Gabrielle in "Argo," Xena's "roach" vehicle.

GABRIELLE:

So you think Zeb and her thugs will be hiding out on this abandoned exploration base?

XENA(businesslike as she flips the switches on the control panel):

Yep.

In the rear-view portal, the raided ship is growing smaller.

GABRIELLE:

Well, why this one and not some other hiding place?

XENA:

Because no one else knows about it.

GABRIELLE:

So how come you do?

XENA (grins):

I'm special.

GABRIELLE:

Aha. And psychic, too?

XENA:

Only when it comes to my army.

GABRIELLE (slowly):

Your army...

XENA:

They may be scum, Gabrielle, but they used to be *my* scum. I picked them. I know how they think, every one of them.

GABRIELLE (catching on):

Including Zeb?

XENA:

Of course. There was a time when she would have told me anything, if it meant rising through the ranks.

GABRIELLE (thinks a moment):

Xena, we have a problem.

XENA:

Only one?

GABRIELLE:

There's no way Justice Station is going to dispatch a squadron to some old exploration base because you have a hunch that Zeb and her gang are there with the stolen silver.

XENA:

I know.

GABRIELLE:

So--what do you propose?

XENA:

A raid of our own.

GABRIELLE (freaking out):

What? The two of us against two dozen bandits armed to the teeth? You can't be serious!

XENA:

Why not? A dozen for you, a dozen for me. We'll split them even.

GABRIELLE:

Works for me. Then we take the silver and run.

XENA:

Don't forget the slaves.

GABRIELLE:

We marry the slaves, take the silver and run?

XENA (grins):

There's hope for you yet.

GABRIELLE:

So, really. What's your plan?

XENA (after a pause):

Ever heard of Ares?

GABRIELLE (shocked):

Ares? The God of War?

XENA (shrugs):

If you believe his publicity.

GABRIELLE:

Ares, the pirate king? Ares, who sold heaven knows how many people into slavery, who brought about the Great Silver Recession? The same Ares who has topped the most wanted list for a decade, who raided station after station...

XENA (dryly):

He'd be so flattered. Do you want his autograph?

GABRIELLE:

Sure, on an arrest warrant.

Xena stares at her silently, with sudden intensity.

GABRIELLE ("oh, now I get it"):

You think he was behind this raid? You think this Zeb person is working for him? I know she was one of your people--

XENA:

She was one of *our* people.

DISSOLVE TO

[FLASHBACK]

We go back to the fight we saw in the teaser. With a feral grin, Xena stares at the ship's defenders in navy blue uniforms as some of them dejectedly throw down their weapons.

XENA:

I see that I don't need to explain what the choice is. I'm glad we understand each other. (to her warriors) Take their weapons and shackle them.

Xena's warriors begin to disarm the ship's defenders. Xena watches them with a pleased smile as she clips her pulser to her belt. She takes the silver dagger we saw in the teaser off her belt and taps her palm with it.

ARES' VOICE (behind her):

All done?

Xena turns around. Ares is coming toward her, grinning rakishly. He is wearing a suit of black and silver armor.

XENA (uses the dagger to indicate the captives with a sweeping motion):

As you see.

ARES (nods over his shoulder):

Zeb. Take them down below.

Zeb motions for two other warriors to help her lead away the chained and struggling prisoners.

ZEB (in the distance):

Move on!

The area clears; Xena and Ares remain. Ares walks around behind Xena and begins to rub her shoulders. Xena smiles a little and half-closes her eyes. She slips the silver dagger back into her belt.

ARES:

Hey, good news. Velasca's babes are on the warpath again.

XENA:

That's *news*?

ARES:

Call it information. Point is, they've been looking around to buy some silver, under the radar, of course. We're talking some five thousand skinsuits--fully armored--plus whatever we can sell off to the other side, once we find out who the other side is. We sell this lot to them, and we can live like kings on PleasureInc. for at least a month. Whatever we make off the slaves will just be the cherry on top.

XENA (opens her eyes):

Not right now.

ARES:

Not right now? Tell me you're kidding. This is a limited-time offer, you know--it won't be hard for Velasca to find another seller.

XENA (turns around to face him; sarcastically):

I've got news for you, *God of War*. You think you're the only one who's got an eye on Velasca? Justice Station has had her in their sights since the last skirmish. Not to mention that if they don't already know about the raid on this ship, they'll know by the end of the day. Trying to sell off this cargo now is a really good way to get JS after us.

ARES (smoothly):

Good. Then we take them on and really make ourselves famous.

XENA:

And dead. No thanks.

She turns and starts walking down the corridor. Ares shakes his head in exasperation, then walks after her.

ARES (teasing):

Since when are *you* so practical?

XENA (coolly):

Since when do *you* want to risk your neck for no good reason?

ARES (a little sheepishly):

All right, you've got a point. So what do you suggest? We take this wreck to one of our usual hideouts and wait it out?

Before Xena can answer, sounds of screams and crude laughter are heard from down the corridor. Xena speeds up. In a moment, she and Ares reach a semicircular hall on the side of the corridor. There, two members of the ship's crew, with their hands shackled, are hopping to avoid being hit as two of Xena and Ares' warriors shoot pulsers at their feet. Several other warriors, including Zeb, stand around laughing raucously. In their merriment, they don't see Xena and Ares approaching.

WARRIOR #1:

Hey, nice dance moves!

The charge from his pulser hits one of the crewmen in the ankle and he yelps in pain.

Xena comes up behind the warriors with the pulsers and grabs their wrists, yanking their arms up with a swift motion that makes them yell in shock.

XENA (snarls):

What do you think you're doing?

WARRIOR #1:

Uhh--just havin' some fun, commander.

WARRIOR #2:

Teaching these two a little lesson. This one (nods toward one of the men) spat in my face when I was putting the shackles on him. The other one kicked--

XENA (gives their wrists a hard squeeze, making them yelp and drop the pulser):

I don't care what they did. (She pauses briefly, looking at the two captive men who are breathing hard, staring at her defiantly) You're not supposed to damage the goods.

WARRIOR #1:

Nah, can't do any real damage at this setting--it'll just sting like hell. (sneers) They better get used to this now that they're headed to the Andromeda mines. The overseers--

XENA (interrupts as she lets go of the two warriors):

Take them down below with the others. And no more *fun* unless it's on my orders (nods toward Ares) or his. (to the other warriors) Don't you have anything else to do?

The warriors disperse. The shackled men are led away in the direction Xena and Ares just came from. Xena and Ares stand still for a moment, looking after them.

ARES:

Funny thing, life. One minute you're an officer on a silver transport vessel--the next you're a slave in a chain gang on Andromeda getting zapped if you slow down.

XENA (gives him a sharp look):

What's *that* supposed to mean?

ARES:

Just that whichever way the wheel turns, you gotta make sure you always come out on top.

Xena starts walking again, with Ares at her side.

XENA (reflectively):

But it's not really life, is it. It's us.

ARES (shrugs):

So? Life isn't fair. Who says we should be? Come on, let's go check out the captain's quarters and drink to a job well done.

Xena and Ares walk away down the corridor. Over the sound of their fading conversation, we hear Gabrielle's voice.

GABRIELLE'S VOICE:

Are you trying to tell me you wanted to save those people?

[END OF FLASHBACK]

We're back with Xena and Gabrielle flying in "Argo."

XENA:

They were no use to us dead.

GABRIELLE (looks probingly at Xena):

But that wasn't the only reason, was it?

XENA (looks back at her sharply):

Don't make me out to be some kind of hero here, Gabrielle. If you're looking for the good guys in this story--they're about to be sold into slavery.

Gabrielle nods slowly, then glances at Xena.

GABRIELLE:

So--I take it you and Ares were--pretty close.

[FLASHBACK]

Xena and Ares in a cabin. A sliding door closes behind them. They stare at each other for a moment, then embrace and kiss passionately.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

XENA:

You could say that.

GABRIELLE:

He must really hate you for switching sides.

Xena looks away, her face inscrutable.

[FLASHBACK]

Xena and Ares are sitting facing each other, Ares in his black and silver flight suit and armor, Xena in a gray silk pantsuit. Ares looks bewildered at something Xena just said.

ARES:

Justice Station. (Breaking into a grin) Very funny.

Xena shakes her head and Ares' grin fades slowly.

ARES (raises his eyebrows):

Well, I know it can't be the exciting salary offer.

The camera pulls back to show them sitting at a table in a garishly decorated bar/casino filled with neon lights.

XENA:

If you don't get it, there's nothing I can say to explain.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

XENA:

It's a long story.

GABRIELLE (with an exaggeratedly bright smile):

I'm sure you can't wait to tell me all about it. (pause) So. Where are we going now?

XENA (evenly):

To Corinth0581.

Gabrielle gives her a curious look.

GABRIELLE:

Why?

XENA:

Just taking a little detour.

GABRIELLE:

Whatever it is you're up to, Xena--we're recording this for Justice Station.

XENA:

Sure. (thinks a moment) Why don't you record it? That way, I can save my chip for the rest of the file on Zeb.

GABRIELLE:

Fine. I'll use mine for the--detour.

She takes a tiny recording device off her belt and pushes a button. A dot-like blue light goes on. Gabrielle clips the device back to her belt, with the light turned inside, so that the recording device looks like just one of the buckles on her belt.

CUT TO

Exterior of their ship as it speeds out of view.

CUT TO

Heavy steel airlock doors sliding open. Xena and Gabrielle step through them, facing the camera, and walk into a brightly lit area that looks like the inside of a space station. They are wearing short black mantles that cover up their Justice Station insignia.

GABRIELLE:

You still haven't told me what--

MALE VOICE (off-camera):

Hold it right there!

The camera pans back to show two guards in skinsuits and armor, holding their pulsers at the ready.

GUARD #1:

Who are *you*?

XENA:

Ah. You must be new.

As the guards move to attack her, Xena grins and spins around, punching one man in the face and kicking the other in the stomach. The men stagger back as they fire, the pulser rays harmlessly hitting the steel walls. Quick pan to Gabrielle as she watches the fight, nervously but with obvious admiration. One of the guards charges toward her but Xena brings him down with a swift kick, at the same time that she grabs the other guard, twists his arm, making him drop his weapon, and throws him down on the floor. The two guards try to get up but Xena jabs her fingers in their necks, causing them to start gasping desperately for air.

GUARD #2 (coughing):

What do you think you're doing?

XENA (with a wicked grin):

Just sending a little message to your boss.

Behind the guards, a panel in the wall slides open and out steps Ares.

Quick pan to Gabrielle as her eyes widen and she gasps a little.

GABRIELLE:

Is that--

XENA:

Yes, it is.

ARES:

All right, I got the message, *officer*. Go easy on my guards, would you? You know what it costs to train them.

XENA:

Looks like you're not getting your money's worth--they didn't put up much of a fight.

She jabs her fingers into the men's throats, taking the pinch off them. They clutch at their necks, greedily breathing in gulps of air.

Ares shakes his head, looking at her with an admiring smile.

ARES:

So, what brings you here? Business or pleasure?

XENA:

A little bit of both. (Grins) Once you've heard my offer, you won't need to skimp on training for your personal guard.

GABRIELLE (shocked):

Xena?

Completely ignoring Gabrielle, Ares comes closer to Xena and puts his hands on her shoulders.

ARES:

Welcome home.

The camera pans over Xena and Ares grinning at each other and Gabrielle staring at them in horror as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

On the same scene as before. Gabrielle looks in horror from Xena to Ares.

Ares steps back and pushes some buttons on a device on his belt. The wall panel slides open again. Ares steps through, with a mock-gallant gesture inviting Xena to follow him. She steps through the opening. Gabrielle remains frozen on the spot; Xena turns, grabs her arm and pulls her through the opening. The camera follows them into another, similar room. The panel slides shut behind them.

ARES (steps back, then turns to look at Gabrielle):

Who's your friend?

XENA:

A lawyer from Justice Station. Name's Gabrielle.

ARES:

Really. A new recruit for us? A homecoming trophy?

Gabrielle opens her mouth indignantly.

ARES (continues, grinning):

Really, you shouldn't have.

XENA:

I didn't. (very serious) Ares, I'm not coming back.

Gabrielle visibly breathes a sigh of relief. Ares gives Xena a curious look.

ARES:

This had better be good.

XENA (leans back against the wall):

Oh, it is. It's about the missing silver shipment from *The Endeavor*.

ARES (perks up):

Missing? Is it "missing" already, or do I...make it that way?

XENA:

The Endeavor's just been raided by Zeb and her little gang.

ARES:

Zeb? Oh please.

XENA:

What would you say if I told you I know where you can find them and the loot?

ARES (pauses to reflect for a moment):

I would say--what's in it for Justice Station?

XENA:

A chance to bring in Zeb. We nail her, I take her in--you and the boys will have all the silver you can carry off.

GABRIELLE (indignantly):

So this is why we're here? To get backup from Ares? And in exchange for a stolen silver shipment? Xena, this is so totally...illegal!--

ARES (glances wryly at Xena):

How do you put up with her?

GABRIELLE (not hearing him):

--and this is my first day on this job--

ARES:

Ah. That explains it.

XENA (to Gabrielle, through clenched teeth):

Trust me on this one, okay?

Ares looks at Gabrielle and then, still mistrustfully, at Xena.

ARES (slowly):

Why don't we go some place more private and discuss this over a drink

CUT TO

Ares' private quarters. Xena and Gabrielle are seated at a round table at the center of the large room. Various maps and charts are scattered over the polished tabletop. The walls are lined with screens;

most are dead, a couple are showing corridors inside the station with Ares' warriors walking around. Ares walks up to Xena and hands her a beer. She flips off the cap with a familiar movement.

ARES (to Gabrielle):

What can I get *you*? Lemonade? Milk? Herbal tea?

GABRIELLE (with some annoyance):

Beer is fine.

With an exaggerated gracious smile, Ares hands her a beer from a wall cabinet, takes one for himself and sits down at the other side of the table.

ARES (to Xena):

So. (takes a sip of beer) You need a little help from the God of War.

GABRIELLE (mutters to herself):

I can't believe he actually calls himself that.

XENA (unflappable):

Looks like the God of War needs mine--if he's letting a wannabe like Zeb cut in on his turf.

ARES:

You want me to believe that you're willing to lend a hand? (sarcastic) I'm sure Justice Station would just love that.

XENA:

What they don't know won't hurt them.

ARES:

What makes you think *she* (nods at Gabrielle) won't tell?

Xena reaches over toward Gabrielle and unclips the recorder from her belt. Close-up on the recording device in Xena's hand, its blue light blinking faintly. The camera pulls back to show all three people at the table. Gabrielle is too shocked to protest as Xena opens the tiny device, removes the chip, and looks at Ares.

XENA:

It wouldn't matter. Without this--

She crunches the chip in her fist, then opens her hand and lets the pieces fall to the table. Gabrielle gasps.

XENA (grins):

...they have no proof.

GABRIELLE (finally regaining the gift of speech):

You--Xena! That was *evidence*. You know there's no way to get another one until...

Xena gives Ares a mock-innocent smile.

XENA:

Oops.

ARES (warily, checking):

Off the record.

XENA:

Off the record.

GABRIELLE (moans):

My first day...

ARES:

So let me get this straight. You don't just want my help--you want *my army* to help you do your job.

XENA:

You heard my offer.

ARES:

Of course, the guys aren't nearly as fond of you as I am. (off Xena's thin smile) They'll think you've got a lot of nerve showing your face around here after what happened.

Xena stares back at him as we:

DISSOLVE TO

[FLASHBACK]

A spaceship's door slides up. Xena (in her pirate outfit) and Ares walk out side by side and come down the steps. As they walk across an airfield, a sudden explosion shatters the ground a few feet from them. Xena and Ares look up, alarmed.

WARRIORS' VOICES (off-camera):

--An attack!

-- it's Justice Station!

--Take cover!

There's another explosion. Then, with a deafening roar and in a burst of smoke and fire, a spaceship lands on the other side of the airfield.

ARES:

Dammit--they tailed us here!

A squadron of Justice Station soldiers streams out of the spaceship on the airfield and charges toward them. More of Xena and Ares' warriors run out onto the airfield. Some pulser fire is exchanged and we see a few people on both sides fall dead or wounded. The Justice Station soldiers and Xena and Ares' warriors clash in hand-to-hand combat. Xena and Ares shout out orders that are drowned out in the general din of the fight. On the other side, we see a tall man in a silver suit and helmet shouting

commands to the Justice Station soldiers. The camera zooms in on him and we see that it's Hercules.

CUT TO

Ares and Xena fighting back to back. They're keeping most of their attackers at bay by firing shots from their pulsers, but several Justice Station soldiers manage to get close to them between shots only to be repelled by kicks and punches. Pan back to Hercules.

HERCULES (yells to the Justice Station soldiers, pointing toward Xena and Ares):
Make sure those two aren't hurt!

Pan back to Xena and Ares still fighting. The camera pulls back to show that they've been cut off from their army, which is now in disarray and offering only haphazard resistance.

ARES (spots Hercules; to Xena):
Well, if it isn't my bastard half-brother.

XENA:
I hate family reunions.

She aims her pulser at Hercules and fires but he fires back, deflecting her shot with his own. Xena snarls in frustration. They trade several more shots, the camera panning rapidly back and forth between them. Pan to a Justice Station soldier aiming a pulser at Xena.

ARES (off-camera):
Watch out!

Close-up on Xena as she convulses and falls unconscious. Quick pan to the soldier who hit her; he stares, almost in disbelief that he brought down big game like Xena.

ARES:
Xena!

He turns to Xena only to be stunned by another pulser ray.

ARES:
Damn you--

He falls at Xena's side as the screen momentarily fades to black.

CUT TO

An extreme close-up of Xena as she slowly opens her eyes and looks around. She is in a small dimly lit cabin with a bunk bed, a table and a stool, and a surveillance monitor mounted into the wall. Xena sits up, rubbing her temples. She looks at her

wrists to see plastic bracelets on them, sparkling slightly with electricity. There are similar devices on her ankles.

The door slides open and Hercules comes in. He's carrying what looks like a leather folder under his arm. Xena turns away with a scowl.

HERCULES:

Hello, Xena. (He sits down and looks at her a little awkwardly) How are you feeling?

XENA (derisively):

Never better.

HERCULES:

Uh--I should probably introduce myself. My name is Herc--

XENA (interrupts):

Hercules. I know who you are. Ares' brother, the Justice Station bloodhound.

HERCULES (emphatically):

Half-brother.

There is a brief uncomfortable silence.

XENA:

What's this supposed to be? An interrogation? Need more evidence to put us away?

HERCULES:

Actually, we don't. You and--your friend have eluded justice for a long time and you've been very good at it. This time, though, we've caught you red-handed.

XENA (sneers):

So I'm headed for the Andromeda mines. Fine. It's no different than what I've done to others.

HERCULES (calmly):

It *is* different. You deserve it. (off Xena's look) It's only the truth.

XENA:

You think that badge gives you the right to judge me?

HERCULES:

No. My job is to bring you in.

XENA:

Oh, I see. You leave the judging to others?

HERCULES:

The court will sentence you, but the only one who can judge you is you.

XENA:

How profound. (pauses) So if you've got all the information you need to pack me off to the chain gangs, why don't you just leave me alone?

HERCULES:

I spoke to the rescued crew members from *The Amazon Pride*. They told me you stopped your thugs from torturing two of the ship's officers.

XENA (shrugs):

They were damaging the merchandise.

HERCULES (looks at her astutely):

But that wasn't the only reason, was it?

XENA (looks away sullenly):

What do *you* care?

HERCULES:

I'm here to make you an offer.

XENA (contemptuously):

Let me guess. To be a snitch for Justice Station, is that it?

HERCULES:

No. A Justice Station officer, like me.

XENA:

Right. A snitch like you.

HERCULES:

I mean it, Xena. Complete amnesty, we drop all the charges.

XENA:

Yeah, right. What's this really about? You need a spy? (sneers) Or just hoping to piss off your brother?

HERCULES:

I mean it, Xena. I have authorization from the bigwigs at JS. We know enough about you to know that you could be a great asset to us. You're smart, you're a great fighter--

XENA:

And I have inside knowledge of the enemy, is that it?

HERCULES:

That too. But that's not the most important part. It takes brains and skill to do this job--

XENA:

The kind of brains you have, I see.

HERCULES (refusing to be baited):

You've got the skills. If you put your mind to it, you could be very, very good at it.

XENA:

And if I don't?

HERCULES:

It's the chain gangs. (neutrally) I don't make these decisions, Xena. But I am giving you this choice.

XENA (after a brief silence):

What makes you think I'm interested?

HERCULES:

Call it a hunch. (He puts the folder down on the table) You may want to take a look at this.

XENA:

What is it?

HERCULES:

It's your file.

He opens the folder and we see that it's a flat portable computer. Hercules pushes a button and the screen lights up. He punches a series of keys and a video clip starts to play on the computer. It's Xena fighting.

XENA:

You think there's something in here that I haven't seen?

HERCULES:

Yes, there is. What you leave behind.

We see a raided space station. There is a charred jagged hole in a wall from an explosion. From a distance, we see a badly burned man being pulled out of the wreckage. He screams.

XENA:

Mind games?

HERCULES:

This is no game. (nods at the vid of the burned man) Not to him.

XENA:

Are you trying the same tricks with your brother?

HERCULES:

My *half*-brother? Hardly. (shakes his head) That would be a waste of time. He's had every chance and he's made his choices. You're more--

XENA (derisively):

Gullible?

HERCULES:

Reasonable.

XENA:

Ha. And this is how well you know me?

HERCULES:

We *did* shackle you.

XENA (almost grins despite herself):

Very clever of you.

HERCULES (modestly):

We try.

XENA (looking back to the computer):

And you really think that if I watch this (gestures dismissively toward the paused image), it's suddenly going to give me a conscience.

HERCULES:

No one can give you something you don't have. (gets up) We'll be at Justice Station tomorrow. See you there.

Hercules puts his palm to the sensor near the door. There is a chime, the door slides open and he walks out.

With an irritated snarl, Xena slams the computer shut and flops down on the bunk bed. After a few moments she leaps to her feet, grabs the computer from the table and makes as if to hurl it down on the floor and smash it, looking defiantly at the wall monitor. Then she pauses, sits down, puts the computer down on the table and opens it. She reaches toward the button, then pulls her hand back. Finally, with a brusque gesture, she turns the computer on. The video clip starts playing on the scene of the raided station that we saw before.

Suddenly there is a piercing beep over the video soundtrack. The video freezes abruptly and we dissolve to:

[END OF FLASHBACK]

The beep turns into a high-pitched rendition of the Xena: Warrior Princess theme music. A close-up of a device resembling a mobile phone, flashing in time with the sound. Quick zoom-out to show that Gabrielle is holding the device in her hand. Zoom out on Gabrielle, Xena and Ares, all looking at the ringing phone.

ARES:

Parents checking up on you?

XENA (warily):

Close enough. It's Justice Station.

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

On the ringing phone.

XENA:

It's Justice Station. They want to know where we are.

GABRIELLE (takes a deep breath; loudly):

Acknowledge.

Xena and Ares exchange a tense look.

The ringing stops.

METALLIC VOICE ON THE PHONE:

Security call for team 10S, Xe-na and Gab-ri-elle. Justice Station cares about your safety and wellbeing. State your location, please.

Gabrielle gives Xena and Ares a panicky look. Ares crosses his arms; Xena looks grim.

PHONE:

Team 10S, your status is currently unknown. State your location, please.

GABRIELLE:

Umm...um-um-um!.. (gestures desperately at Xena)

PHONE:

One moment please. We're sorry, we are unable to confirm location M:MMM. Justice Station cares about your safety and wellbeing. State your location, please.

GABRIELLE (frantically):

Classified! I mean-- (clears throat) this is Team 10S, reporting. Location temporarily confidential, pending completion of assignment.

PHONE:

One moment please. Acknowledged. Status update?

GABRIELLE (on a roll):

This is Team 10S, engaged in a--a reconnaissance mission! Request signal silence until further notice.

PHONE:

Status acknowledged. Request acknowledged. One moment please.

There is a brief pause. In the background, Xena gives her a thumbs up, then glares at Ares, who is clearly trying not to laugh.

PHONE:

Signal silence approved. Proceed with reconnaissance mission. Signal silence will be terminated in 3 days; Justice Station cares about your safety and wellbeing.

The phone goes suddenly and completely dead.

XENA:

That was some quick thinking.

GABRIELLE (breathing out slowly):

Thanks for all your--help.

Ares silently passes her another beer. Gabrielle takes a swig.

GABRIELLE:

Right. You were saying--something about your army? (turns to Xena) They must have quite a grudge against you now that you've switched sides.

XENA (with a crooked grin):

I'm sure they do.

GABRIELLE:

Aren't you going to tell me?

XENA and ARES (at the same time):

No.

Xena and Ares exchange a long look; close up on Xena as we dissolve into:

[FLASHBACK]

On Xena watching the vid on the computer. A montage of images dissolving into each other: Xena pacing around the cell; Xena watching the file; Xena lying on the bunk bed staring into the ceiling.

DISSOLVE TO

Ares, without his armor, being hustled into a similar cell by two guards. Like Xena, he is wearing electrified shackles.

GUARD #1:

Your new quarters, *your majesty*.

GUARD #2:

Just a nice place to cool off until we get to Justice Station.

ARES:

You think my army is going to let this happen?

GUARD #2:

You talking about your collection of thugs? Funny how they always go back under whatever rock they crawled out from once we've caught the big fish. And this time, we have both of you.

ARES:

Where's Xena? What have you done with her?

GUARD #1:

Don't you worry about her, pal. You got your own problems.

CUT TO

Xena stretched out on the bunk, staring at the ceiling.

DISSOLVE TO

Hercules is waiting in a small room. The door slides open and two guards appear with Xena between them. She is no longer shackled.

HERCULES (to the guards):

That will be all.

The guards leave. Behind them, the door slides shut.

XENA (rubs her wrists as she looks at Hercules):

No shackles? I thought you knew me well enough.

HERCULES (looks at her probingly):

Maybe I do. Please, take a seat.

Xena comes up to him but remains standing. She crosses her arms.

XENA (brusquely):

You know what's going to happen if I take you up on your offer. Everyone is going to think I'm a turncoat who got scared of being shipped off to Andromeda.

HERCULES:

Probably.

XENA:

And that I ratted out my men.

HERCULES:

That too.

XENA (uncrosses her arms with a crooked, unhappy grin):

Lucky for you, I never cared much what everyone thinks.

They stare at each other silently until Hercules finally speaks.

HERCULES:

So--you'll do it?

XENA:

Yes.

HERCULES:

Why?

XENA (dryly):

Don't expect me to give any speeches about self-discovery. I've got my reasons--let's leave it at that.

HERCULES (rises and stands to face her):

Welcome to the team, Xena.

He extends his hand. Xena pauses for a moment, as if not quite sure what to do; then she takes his hand and shakes it rather stiffly

XENA (wryly):

Do I get a welcoming present?

HERCULES:

Our trust?

XENA (after a brief pause):

You know--Hercules--you could be making a big mistake. (almost catlike) Handing me the keys to Justice Station like this, hmm... Didn't your mother ever tell you not to play with fire? What makes you think I won't turn spy for my friends--or simply take off into the night?

HERCULES (calmly):

I'll take that chance.

XENA:

And risk your job, your friends? (lowers her voice) Your life?

HERCULES:

I trust you.

XENA:

Famous last words.

HERCULES (smiles):

Perhaps. But I have a good feeling about this.

XENA:

And you're willing to stake your reputation on a *feeling*?

HERCULES:

Oh, it's more than a feeling.

XENA (surprised):

Yeah?

HERCULES:

Call it a hunch.

Xena gives him a long stare, then turns on her heel and walks out. Hercules watches her go.

CUT TO

A cell door sliding open. Ares, no longer shackled, stops pacing and turns around to see Xena standing in the doorway. He looks almost emotional, but only for a moment.

ARES (lightly):

I've been expecting you.

XENA:

Mm, really? (She moves to kiss him) Is that why I had to bust three locks and a code to get in here?

ARES (responding to her kiss):

You always did love a challenge.

XENA:

Oh, I still do. (breaks away) That's why you're getting out of here.

Ares opens his mouth to speak, Xena presses a finger to her lips.

XENA:

Quiet. Come quick--we don't have much time.

ARES (leans forward to kiss her again; with bravado):
What's the rush?

XENA:
Stop it. (looks around) No one's watching the monitors right now--

ARES:
Privacy. Good.

XENA (ignoring him):
--but in case they decide to check-- (thinks a moment) Take off your cloak.

ARES:
Now you're talking.

XENA (exasperated):
Ares!

She rips off his cloak and bundles it up with the blanket and the pillow on the bunk, so that it might look like a person lying there.

XENA:
Come on.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares running along an empty corridor.

ARES:
Once we're clear, I'll get Strife's unit to come around the back with the second-wave pulsers and--

XENA:
Shut up and run, Ares.

CUT TO

The hangar on the spaceship, with several small exploration vehicles lined up. Close-up of Ares getting into one.

ARES:
I've got the airlock codes. Coming?

XENA (shakes her head):
Not right now--there's something I've got to take care of first.

ARES (bewildered):
Are you out of your mind?

XENA:

No, I'm thinking very clearly. Go, quickly--before someone shows up--

ARES:

Xena--

XENA:

Trust me.

She steps up, leans into the roach and passionately kisses Ares, then breaks away. There is a flash of regret in her eyes as she looks at him. She steps down.

XENA:

Go on. I'll follow you.

ARES:

I appreciate you like to do things your own way, but these codes are only valid for the next hour--

XENA:

If I'm not back at the base by tomorrow, meet me in ten days--Caesar's Grand Casino on Vesta. (with a forced grin) Don't worry about me--I'll be all right.

Before Ares can say anything, she turns around and runs toward the back of the hangar. The doors slide open to let her out. Ares shakes his head with visible exasperation, then disappears inside the cabin. There is a chime and the door slams shut.

Exterior view of the spaceship as the tiny vehicle flies out. There is a brief flash of reflected light off its hull, then it disappears among the stars.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Close up on Xena and Ares.

GABRIELLE:

Are we going to do something productive or are you two just going to stare at each other meaningfully all day?

XENA (snaps out of it):

Do something productive. (She reaches for one of the maps on the table and points to a spot) Zeb should be--right here.

ARES:

How do you know?

XENA:

A hideout she once told me about. An abandoned base on Artemis-7.

ARES (looks at her curiously):

If you're so sure she's there, why wouldn't you just get your precious Justice Station to send a squadron after her? (grins rakishly) Unless, of course, working with me is more fun.

XENA:

Because I don't have any information. Just--a hunch. Justice Station won't green-light a raid on a hunch, not without a confirmed location. (smiles) But you will. So, Ares--I've laid all my cards on the table. What'll it be?

ARES (after a moment's pause):

As far as my army is concerned--you were never here. (after a brief pause, grins cockily) Unless, of course, you do decide to stay.

XENA (ignoring his last comment):

What about your bodyguards?

ARES:

Don't worry, I'll work it out. No one else needs to know. (he looks meaningfully at Xena)

XENA (slowly):

Including Justice Station.

Ares and Xena look at each other for a moment; then Xena looks at Gabrielle, who spreads her hands in a helpless "what can I do" gesture.

Ares studies the spot on the map for a few moments, then looks up at Xena.

ARES:

I'll do your little job for you. On one condition.

XENA (warily):

What?

Gabrielle looks nervously from her to Ares. Ares gets up, opens another wall panel, takes out a helmet and tosses it to Xena.

ARES:

It'll be great fighting at your side again.

XENA (grins):

I thought you'd never ask. (more serious) Except that, of course, you don't want the boys to know I'm here.

ARES:

They won't.

Xena thoughtfully takes the helmet, puts it on, and pushes a button on the side of the helmet, lowering a shield that conceals her face.

XENA:

I'll do it.

Gabrielle stares at her and then at Ares; she seems to be in shock.

ARES (reaches toward a button on the desk):

I'll tell Strife to ready the ship. (He glances at one of the blank screens, then at Xena and Gabrielle, who are sitting across from it.) Move out of sight, you two.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, you know I can't go along on this--raid.

ARES:

Not on your first day on the job.

GABRIELLE (annoyed):

What I *meant* was, we need a warrant on Zeb.

XENA (to Ares):

Without it, there's no way to bring her in. (to Gabrielle) All the evidence is here.

She takes the recorder off her belt and tosses the chip to Gabrielle, who catches it.

GABRIELLE:

I'll be back. Don't do anything stupid.

ARES (to the computer on the desk):

Open videolink, contact name: Strife.

GABRIELLE (continues with a sigh):

Who am I kidding.

COMPUTER VOICE:

Connection requested. Please wait.

Gabrielle heads for the door; instead, a different door opens beside it.

ARES:

I suggest you take the exit without the guards. (glances at a screen on the wall showing an empty corridor) Straight ahead and to the right; your ship is near the airlock.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head):

They really don't pay me enough.

XENA (takes off her helmet; to Gabrielle):

Good luck.

GABRIELLE:

Thanks.

She heads out into the tunnel.

Strife's image appears on the screen, in half-profile. He is eating popcorn from a bag. He turns to the screen, looking slightly annoyed.

STRIFE (chewing):

Hey--this *is* my day off, you know. What's up?

Xena, who is sitting out of Strife's line of sight, gives Ares an amused look. Ares rolls his eyes.

ARES:

We're off on a little fishing expedition to Artemis-7. Catching up with your old flame Zeb.

Strife drops the popcorn in shock.

CUT TO

Gabrielle climbs into "Argo" and closes the door. She takes a deep breath and closes her eyes for a moment.

GABRIELLE (opens her eyes, mutters to herself):

Here we go.

She flips the controls. The roach takes off rapidly (we see it from inside, the image of the star-studded blackness of space in the front-view window suddenly in motion).

CUT TO

Ares' warriors emerging from an underground tunnel and boarding a spaceship. We see the letters on the spaceship's side: GOD OF WAR.

CUT TO

Ares and Xena in the cabin where we saw them before.

ARES:

How does it feel to be back here?

XENA:

Ares--this is business.

ARES:

And let me guess--Justice Station doesn't approve of mixing business with pleasure?

XENA (softly):

This isn't about Justice Station, Ares. It never was.

Close-up of Xena and Ares as they look at each other.

DISSOLVE TO

The ship roaring away into space

DISSOLVE TO

A big metallic hulk of an abandoned exploration base, in distant view, sitting in the middle of a desolate desert landscape, with several large rocks nearby.

The camera pulls back to show Ares and Xena watching the base on a screen in Ares' cabin on the ship. Another screen next to it is blank.

XENA:

Let's get a good scan of the whole place.

Zoom in on the screen as we see the station from above, then back on Xena and Ares.

ARES (sarcastically):

Tell me why someone would stick a military base in a desert?

XENA (shrugs):

The whole planet's a desert. This was an exploration base--built when they were looking into settling the place. Who cares?

ARES (points to the screen):

Their ship's gotta be in one of those hangars. I say we give 'em a couple of good blasts, take out the ship and take the gang while they're still trying to figure out what hit them.

XENA (shakes her head):

No. Zeb could be on that ship. I need her alive. (looks significantly at Ares) The silver could be on that ship, too.

ARES:

Good point.

XENA (looks thoughtfully at the screen):

There--those rocks. (turns to Ares) We blast at them--blow them to bits--whip up a big sandstorm--use it as a distraction, land and go in. (mimicking him, with a grin) While they're still trying to figure out what hit them, of course.

ARES (grins back at her):

I love it when you talk business.

Xena gives him a mischievous little smile. Then it fades quickly from her face and she looks away.

ARES (wary):

Wait a minute. We land--in a sandstorm? How do you think the pilot's going to see the airfield?

XENA:

Who needs an airfield? We land in the sand. Just make sure it's on the other side of those rocks. (gives Ares an amused look) I could do it.

ARES:

Right. (raises his voice) Activate screen two. (The screen lights up as Ares continues) Full video link to control room.

CUT TO

Inside the station. A large room that looks like a warehouse or hangar, with stairs leading to a second level that has a grid metal floor. The place is lit by a couple of weak portable lamps and some light coming in from a window covered with a transparent plastic pane. Everything looks grimy, neglected. Three pirates, two men and one woman, are sitting on boxes and playing dice on another box.

PIRATE #1 (the woman):

I'm telling you, this is the kind of stuff they used to play before they had computer games.

PIRATE #2:

You know, there's a reason computers got invented. This is supposed to be *fun*?

PIRATE #1:

It's supposed to kill time.

PIRATE #2:

Unless time kills us first. (throws down the dice hard) Or boredom.

PIRATE #3 (looks at the dice):

Eight. Pony up.

Pirate #2 hands him some copper-like chips.

PIRATE #3 (pockets the chips):

Who knows how much longer we'll be cooped up here. I'm already starting to wish something would happen.

There's a deafening explosion outside. The pirates leap to their feet, knocking over the box with the dice.

PIRATE #1:

What in the hell--

A chunk of rock hits the window and bounces off it. The pirates rush toward the window, where nothing is visible except a cloud of swirling sand. Another piece of rock hits the window and sounds are heard of pieces of rock hitting the wall.

PIRATE #3 (yells over the noise):

What's going on? A storm?

PIRATE #2:

No way I'm going out there!

Footsteps are heard. Zeb and several more pirates rush down the stairs.

ZEB (yells):

Stay put!

CUT TO

Exterior view. The base is barely visible through the swirling sand. A blast from above raises more clouds of sand. Through their veil, we see the ship descending diagonally. It is almost touching the sand.

CUT TO

Inside the ship's control room. The ship is shaking and lurching violently; the lights dim for a moment. The pilot at the controls is furiously tapping at computer keys and flipping switches trying to steady the ship. Finally he grabs a manual steer in a desperate attempt to manage the landing.

CUT TO

A corridor in the ship; two of Ares' warriors are knocked off their feet and slide on the floor, muttering curses, as the ship lurches.

CUT TO

Inside Ares' cabin. As the ship lurches, Ares is slammed into a wall while Xena holds on tight to the back of a chair.

ARES:

Got any more bright ideas?

XENA (gritting her teeth):

I told you I could have managed a better landing--

As the ship lurches again, she loses her hold on the back of the chair and is thrown across the room into Ares' arms just as the ship comes to a standstill.

ARES (grins at her):

Or maybe not.

XENA (extricates herself from his arms):

All right. We're on.

She puts on the helmet, carefully tucking away her hair under it, and flips down the visor as we :

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Ares stands by the side of the ship in the subsiding sandstorm as his warriors, most of them wearing helmets, run out of the ship.

ARES (shouts):

Go, go, go, go--

A quick montage:

- * Ares' warriors are running toward the base
- * Grenades blast at the walls of the base
- * Panic inside the base as Zeb tries to rally her troops.

ZEB:

Come on--get the pulsers!

PIRATE #2:

Is that Justice Station?

- * Exterior view of Ares' warrior starting to storm the base
- * Inside the base, a young shaggy-looking female pirate (Pirate #4) comes running toward Zeb.

PIRATE #4 (out of breath):

It's Ares!

- * Exterior view as Ares aims a pulser at a heavy steel door and blasts a hole in it.
- * Inside the base, the pirates react to Pirate #4's announcement, gasping and muttering curses.
- * Ares' warriors stream through the doors.
- * Interior of the base:

PIRATE #3 (to Zeb):

We could still make it to the ship--

- * Ares' warriors stream through the doors.
- * Inside the base, blasts are heard.

ZEB (yells):

Not anymore!

- * Ares' warriors and Zeb's pirates exchange pulser shots
- * One of Ares' warriors cries out in pain as he is hit
- * One of Zeb's men falls dead
- * Ares' warriors and Zeb's pirates clash in hand-to-hand combat

Several pirates, with pulsers held at the ready, emerge from a side door and move cautiously toward Ares' men from the rear, planning to take them by surprise. Pan to Xena as she turns quickly, obviously noticing them.

Pan back to the pirates as one of them aims a pulser; then back to Xena as she shoots, lining up the pulser ray so that it hits the pulsers of all but one of the attackers, causing the weapons to drop to the floor. The one attacker who is still armed lowers his arm, as if about to drop his weapon, then raises it suddenly. Quick pan to Ares firing, and then to the pirate as he crumples on the floor, dead.

Xena and Ares look at each other, though her expression is invisible behind the visor. He is clearly enjoying their sense of comradeship.

STRIFE (to Ares, elbowing him):
Hey--your new chick's pretty good!

Ares glares at him.

The pirates who are still standing throw down their pulsers, surrendering.

Pan to Zeb sneaking away into a side corridor; Xena sees this and rushes after her. Ares looks after Xena, then turns to face Zeb's now-disarmed pirates, surrounded by his warriors.

ARES (to several pirates who cower as they look at him):
So. Thought you could do better on your own, did you? What did Zeb do, promise you a bigger cut?

The pirates look down dejectedly.

CUT TO

Xena racing down a dark corridor after Zeb.

CUT TO

Ares addressing the captured pirates.

ARES (continues):
Well, what do you know--it's your lucky day. I'm in a good mood. That means I'm willing to take you back. (Sighs dramatically) I'm not sure why--you're a bunch of pretty sorry excuses for warriors. (looks around) Those of you who've never served under me are welcome to join up and find out how a *real* army is run.

CUT TO

Xena catching up with Zeb in the base's enormous hangar. Zeb's ship is visible in the background.

XENA (grabs Zeb's shoulder):
Oh no you don't.

ZEB (turns around, gaping):
Xena?

XENA:
Hello, Zeb.

Zeb kicks out at her leg, causing Xena to lose her balance momentarily, and then punches her in the chest. Xena staggers back for a moment, then spins and delivers a powerful kick that knocks Zeb down. Zeb jumps to her feet and tries to kick Xena again but Xena blocks her kick. Zeb jumps back and they start to slowly circle each other.

CUT TO

Ares addressing the pirates.

ARES:

Agreed? Good. Now, you're going to show Strife here (he motions toward Strife, who preens a little) where the silver is--and in the meantime-- (he looks toward the corridor where Xena went) I've got some scores to settle with your ex-boss.

He walks off toward the side door.

CUT TO

Xena and Zeb facing off against each other.

ZEB (sneers):

I should have known you'd be back with him. So much for Xena, fighter for justice.

XENA:

I should have known you'd never amount to anything more than a pathetic thug.

She throws a punch but Zeb ducks and goes for the pulser at her belt. Xena knocks it out of her hand with a strong kick and it falls. With a frustrated grunt, Zeb dives after it and slides along the floor. Xena leaps over her, flipping in the air, and lands between her and the pulser, grinning gleefully.

XENA (steps back and steps on the pulser):

Time to stop playing with dangerous toys.

Zeb looks up at her, obviously trying to decide what to do. Then she jumps up and, with a yell of rage, charges Xena again. Xena kicks away the pulser and the two women exchange some kicks and punches. Zeb is clearly no match for Xena, and after a few moments Xena knocks her down with a powerful punch, then kneels quickly and rips off Zeb's belt.

Quick pan to a close-up of a gauntleted hand picking up Zeb's pulser, then back to Xena as she binds Zeb's hands with the belt, holding Zeb down as she struggles.

Clapping is heard behind her. Close-up on Xena as she whirls around and sees Ares applauding her. Zeb's pulser is in his hand.

ARES:

All done?

XENA (gets up, hauling a sullen-looking Zeb to her feet):

As you see.

ARES (comes closer):

Zeb, Zeb, Zeb. I bet you thought I'd never come after you. (grins) You can't just stand up Strife on a date and sneak off like that.

ZEB (glares at him with the defiance of someone with nothing to lose):

Go on--kill me and get it over with. Or do you want to do it in front of all the men?

XENA (smirks):

Oh no, nothing so dramatic.

ZEB (glances at her, then turns to Ares):

So you just took her back, after everything she did to us? After she made a fool of you in front of the whole army? (shakes her head) If I'd ever doubted I was right to split off from you--

As she speaks, Xena looks around, then pushes Zeb toward a door with a worn-out sign saying "Supplies."

XENA:

You'll just have to wait here until transportation arrives.

ZEB (bewildered):

What? (then, defiant again) Get your hands off me, you turncoat--

Xena kicks the supply room door open.

ZEB:

At least I never sold out my troops to be a good little doggie for Justice Station--

Xena shoves Zeb inside and slams the door shut. Zeb's indistinct shouting can be heard from inside the supply room.

XENA (turns to Ares, dusting off her hands):

Well, that was that.

ARES (looks at her appreciatively):

That was that. Almost like old times, huh?

XENA (quietly):

Almost.

ARES (suavely):

You know--there's still time.

XENA:

For what?

The momentary silence is interrupted by a loud beeping noise. Ares looks down at the phone clipped to his belt.

ARES:

It's from the ship. (grabs the phone) *Acknowledge.*

Quick pan to Xena, who looks impassive.

A man's agitated face appears in the phone's small video screen.

MAN:

Boss--we got trouble!

ARES (frowns):

What kind of trouble?

MAN:

Justice Station warship headed this way, Sir--currently at S43:22C...

Ares looks shocked, then glances at Xena; the expression on his face changes as understanding dawns.

MAN:

Should be landing in about 15 minutes.

Ares thinks a moment, looking heavily at Xena. She remains impassive.

ARES (to the phone):

All right. Signal Strife. Tell him to get everyone back on the ship. We're taking off. I'll be there right away. *Over and out.*

The phone goes off. Ares turns to Xena and looks at her. The look on his face is one of anger and hurt.

ARES:

You set this up.

XENA (emphatic):

It wasn't a trap for you. (He looks at her doubtfully) Ares. Don't you think I knew the ship's monitors would spot the JS squadron?

ARES (bewildered):

Then what the hell--

His phone beeps again and he grabs it furiously.

ARES (yells):

Acknowledge! (A distressed-looking Strife appears in the video window and Ares snaps) What?

STRIFE:

Boss--did you give orders--

ARES:

Yes, I did. Now get everyone back on that ship--*now!*

STRIFE:

But we haven't got the silver!

ARES:

Forget about the silver. We're not going to sit here and wait for Justice Station.

STRIFE:

Hey--what about Zeb?

ARES (furious):

Don't you worry about your sweetheart--that's taken care of. *Over and out!*

The phone blinks off. Ares turns and looks at Xena, pondering something.

ARES:

So *that* was your plan. You use me to get Zeb and I get (sarcastic) *all the silver we can carry off.*

XENA:

I'm an officer for Justice Station, Ares. That silver doesn't belong to you. Did you think I was going to let you get away with the loot if I could help it?

ARES (glowering):

You said they'd never authorize a raid unless they had Zeb's location confirmed.

XENA (quietly):

It was.

Her eyes go down to the phone at her belt. Ares stares at her, then breaks into a somewhat forced smile and applauds.

ARES:

Well, that was a pretty clever trick. I guess you deserve to keep Zeb. Good-bye, Xena. See you around.

He turns and starts to walk away. There is a "whoosh" off-camera and a blur of silver. Ares' hand shoots out instinctively and catches something. It's Xena's silver dagger. He turns, staring at her in shock.

XENA:

I did promise you silver.

Ares looks from her to the dagger.

ARES:

I thought it was your good luck charm.

XENA (comes closer to him, grinning a little):

With me on the other side, you'll need all the luck you can get.

ARES (quietly):

I can't take this.

XENA (after a brief pause):

You can.

She leans over and kisses him hard on the mouth; Ares responds hungrily and for a few moments the kiss continues. When Xena pulls back, Ares looks at her, a twinkle in his eye. Then he flips the dagger casually, clips it to his belt and turns to enter the corridor--only to stop and turn again.

ARES:

Coming?

Xena shakes her head and smiles a little.

ARES (smirks):

It was worth a shot.

He turns around to walk away.

XENA (lightly but with suppressed emotion):

Of course, you *could* come with me.

Ares whips around, staring at her incredulously.

ARES:

You've got to be kidding.

XENA (impassive):

You're right. I was.

Ares shakes his head, then walks away briskly into the corridor.

Close-up on Xena standing still, looking after him. There is a small wistful smile on her face.

The image of Ares' ship taking off is superimposed on that of Xena's face.

DISSOLVE TO

A montage of images:

* The Justice Station warship landing

* Xena meeting the other officers

* Zeb being hustled away, looking daggers at Xena

* "Argo" landing on the base's airfield, Gabrielle scrambling out of it and running to meet Xena.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle in "Argo", Xena at the controls. The desert landscape and the base are visible in the roach's rearview portal.

XENA (breaking the silence):

Not bad for your first day on the job.

GABRIELLE (laughs a little):

Well...it wasn't boring.

XENA (after a moment, looks at her with a warm smile):

Sorry if I gave you a hard time.

GABRIELLE (smiles back):

I was going to say the same thing. (a little awkwardly) Xena--sorry if I came across like I was judging you for your past--

XENA:

That's all right. Why shouldn't you?

GABRIELLE (after a brief silence):

Is that the first time you've seen him since you--

She trails off. Xena glances at her hesitantly and finally speaks.

XENA:

No.

GABRIELLE (quietly):

Want to tell me?

Xena looks at her as we:

DISSOLVE TO

[FLASHBACK]

A garish neon-lit casino (the one we saw in the earlier flashbacks), filled with statues, fountains, and other decorations. Cocktail waiters and waitresses in skimpy clothes are carrying drinks around.

Xena, in a gray silk pantsuit, is walking through the crowd, her face stern.

ARES' VOICE:

Xena!

The camera shows Ares, in full armor, walking toward Xena. They stop facing each other and stare silently for a moment, then kiss passionately.

ARES (pulls back and smirks, trying to sound casual):

What took you so long?

XENA (likewise adopting a casual air):

Heavy traffic.

Ares laughs, then puts an arm around her shoulder.

ARES:

You know, now that we're here, I'm thinking we should hang around for a few days. Get a room, order some drinks...

XENA (shakes her head slightly):

I could use a drink right now.

They start walking toward a table.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares facing each other at the table, drinks in front of them.

ARES (catching Xena's odd look):

What?

XENA (brusquely):

I'm not coming back.

Ares stares at her in shock, then finally speaks.

ARES:

What in the name of...

XENA (interrupts):

Ares--haven't you ever wanted anything--different?

ARES (gives her a puzzled, then incredulous look):

Don't tell me you want to retire.

XENA:

No. I've taken a new job. (off his questioning look) As an officer for Justice Station.

For a few moments Ares stares at her in silent shock.

ARES:

Justice Station. (Breaking into a grin) Very funny.

Xena shakes her head and Ares' grin fades slowly.

ARES (raises his eyebrows):

Well, I know it can't be the exciting salary offer.

XENA:

If you don't get it, there's nothing I can say to explain.

ARES (with a sudden burst of anger):

Are you out of your mind? Turning on all your friends--

XENA (bitterly):

Friends? In *our* line of work?

ARES (not listening):

Everyone is going to think you're a traitor--

XENA (quietly but firmly):

Ares, my own mother thought I was a murderer and a thug. That didn't stop me. Do you think *this* will?

Speechless for a moment, Ares gulps down his drink. Xena picks up hers and slowly drinks it.

ARES (after a pause, in a suddenly amicable, almost patronizing tone):

Well--I think I know what's going on.

XENA (looks at him sharply):

You do?

ARES:

You need a break.

XENA (evenly):

Is *that* what you think.

ARES:

I know you too well, Xena. (Xena shoots him a guilty, slightly alarmed look, as if recognizing the truth of what he said) You can't change who you are. Playing by the rules, being a cog in the wheels of Justice Station...it's not you. It won't be long before you start to miss what you had.

XENA (quietly):

I know.

ARES (cockily):

And then you'll be back. In the meantime--I'll miss you, of course. But on the bright side--I'll have an inside contact at Justice Station.

Xena looks at him silently, her face hard. Ares raises his half-empty glass to her, with gallantry and a bit of mockery.

ARES:

To your new life, Xena. Short as it may be. (raises his glass higher) To fun--past and future.

He drains his glass. After a momentary hesitation Xena finishes her drink as well. They both rise.

XENA:

Good-bye, Ares.

They look at each other, as if about to kiss but unsure about it. Finally Ares takes her hand and kisses it. Xena squeezes his hand lightly, half-closing her eyes for a moment.

ARES:

See you around.

He turns and walks away.

XENA (whispers to herself):

I'll miss what we had.

Close-up on Xena, a small, wistful smile on her face. Then her look turns hard and determined.

GABRIELLE'S VOICE (cutting into the flashback):

Hey!

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Xena, who had obviously been lost in thought, gives Gabrielle a startled look.

GABRIELLE:

We almost hit that!

Pan to a piece of space debris floating by the window.

XENA (grins at Gabrielle):

Come on, that wasn't even close.

GABRIELLE:

You like to live dangerously, don't you.

Xena's look turns serious for a moment as she ponders Gabrielle's words. Then she gives Gabrielle a mischievous look.

XENA:

Well, enough about me. It's about time you spilled some of *your* little secrets. (nods at Gabrielle's hands with the tattoos) What's the story with those?

GABRIELLE (laughs, obviously flustered):

Oh, just something from my wild youth...well, not as wild as yours... (she laughs again, obviously flustered; the camera starts to pull back and her voice begins to fade) I went through this phase where I was on a kind of spiritual quest--

XENA (in a tone of good-natured teasing):

Spiritual quest?

Zoom out on "Argo" as the small ship flies off into space, veers dangerously close to an asteroid, then straightens its course and flies further away, becoming a mere dot as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

[No good turn went unpunished during the production of this motion picture.]