

SHIPPER SEASON NINE

“Showdown”

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Logline

Xena and Gabrielle return to Thebes to visit Antigone but when they find out about an impending war and that two angry gods, desperate to preserve themselves, are behind the troubles the city may face, Xena and Gabrielle get involved to stop them. Meanwhile, Ares is faced with his own choices that eventually lead him to a decision that will change his life.

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TEASER

FADE IN

Temple of the Fates.

A dreary looking place comes to view. The wind can be heard howling outside, as the bare trees clatter against the stone walls. The camera pans to the Loom in the center of the temple. It looks to be unraveling itself, as some threads start to dissolve into thin air. The three Fates are weaving away at what is left of the Loom.

Suddenly there is a flash of blue light and Ares appears in front of the loom. He looks confused, as he notices the condition the Loom is in.

ARES:

What is going on?

CLOTHO:

The Twilight --

LACHESIS:

--is affecting--

ATROPOS:

--all of us.

Atropos, the crone, begins to cough loudly.

ARES (uncertain):

Is there a way to stop it?

Clotho, the child, looks up at him sympathetically.

CLOTHO:

Foolish god. You can't stop death.

The Fates get back to work.

ARES:

Eve told me about the choice we had--mortality, or eternity as a ghost. (He sighs) I want to know how much time we have left.

LACHESIS:

The prophecy--

ATROPOS:

--will come to pass--

CLOTHO:

--after god turns on god--

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

LACHESIS:

--and one god's powers--

ATROPOS:

--increase another's.

ARES (shakes his head, almost shouting):

Just tell me how much time!

CLOTHO:

You--God of War--

LACHESIS:

--will be--

ATROPOS:

--the next to fall.

Fear begins to fill Ares' face. He is speechless. The Fates don't seem to be too concerned. He turns back to walk away.

CLOTHO:

Wait.

Ares stops and turns around. Clotho, the child, is rummaging through the vanishing Loom. Finally, she pulls out a small thread. It only about three inches in length, and the edges are frayed.

CLOTHO (holding it out to Ares):

This is for you.

Ares reaches out and touches the end of the thread. A bright flash of light fills the screen, as Ares trails his finger across the thread and experiences a vision much like he did in "This is Your Life Pt. 1 and 2."

He takes the thread from Clotho, and puts it tightly in his fist.

ARES (stumbling for words):

I don't--

CLOTHO:

The threads of our past--

LACHESIS:

--will bind together--

ATROPOS:

--our future.

CUT TO

Mount Olympus. The gods are standing in a semi-circle in front of the thrones where Zeus, Hera and Athena are seated. The gods seem to be in the middle of an argument, Artemis, Apollo, and Hephaestus are going back and fourth about something. They are all talking at the same time; all the words come out as jumbled sounds. Ares is standing off to the side with Aphrodite nearby, watching them silently. She is wearing blue, instead of her usual pink.

Finally, Zeus stands up from his throne and raises his hand.

ZEUS (voice booming):

Enough!

The hall momentarily shakes from the power that he commands and the gods immediately quiet down.

ZEUS:

That's better. Now (looks at them) I know we all have doubts about the news Ares has brought us from Eve--

He glances at Ares, then back at the other gods.

APOLLO:

Yeah, how do we *really* know Eve's telling the truth? For all we know, she just wants us to give up our powers willingly and become (spits out the word angrily) *mortals!*

ARTEMIS:

You can't trust her. She was born for a single purpose...to *destroy* us. (glances at the rest of the gods) You all know what the prophecy said long ago. Nothing has changed. Except now, she really *does* have the power to get rid of us, once and for all. (pan to Ares in the corner who looks down)

ATHENA (stands up, addressing the entire room):

Why would she lie to us? (looks at Ares) Why would she lie to him? Xena once had the power to kill us all-- (looks down) --and many of us suffered at her hand. (looks at the gods) But Eve helped bring us back from the dead. Why would she want to destroy us...*again?*

ARTEMIS (sarcastic):

You know, Athena is right. We might as well just give up. Let Eve and Eli and that God of his take everything.

The room falls silent for a moment. Athena glares at Artemis.

ZEUS:

Until we know more, the safest course of action is the one we have been pursuing up to now. Doing what we can to ensure that our worship is strong.

HERA:

Husband--are you sure this is truly best? (Zeus continues to look ahead) Maybe Eve--

ZEUS (looks directly at her):

We are still gods. We should be the masters of fate, not its slaves.

HERA:

But the Twilight--

ZEUS:

Can we trust someone who was put on this earth to bring about our demise? The least we can do is make sure her message is not a trap. (looks out at all the gods) There will be no change in our plans.

Hera looks uncertainly at him. With a sigh, she gets up; she and Zeus walk down from their thrones and walk away hand in hand, vanishing in mid-stride. Athena vanishes next, followed by Artemis and Apollo and then the other gods. Ares begins to walk down the hall; Aphrodite follows him and taps his shoulder.

APHRODITE:

You've been awfully quiet.

Ares does not respond; Aphrodite grabs him by the shoulders and spins him around to face her.

APHRODITE (softly):
What is it, bro?

ARES:
I went to see the Fates. They talked about god turning on god--

APHRODITE (interrupts, exasperated):
Come on, Ar--don't you know better than to believe their cryptic mumbo-jumbo? They told me I would be going through a major change pretty soon, so just to spite them, (points to her dress) I went and changed into this.

ARES (serious):
You know what else they said? That I'd be the next to fall.

Aphrodite's expression soon turns serious. Suddenly, with all her might, she lunges at him and pushes him to the ground. The bulky God of War hits the floor, knocking down a vase behind him.

ARES (angry):
What in Tartarus--?

APHRODITE (dusting her hands off):
All right, you've *fallen*. Now how about you start acting like the God of War and drop this whole God of Paranoia thing.

Ares scrambles to his feet and stares at Aphrodite, who is looking completely serious with her arms folded across her chest. He manages a grin. Aphrodite smiles back.

ARES:
Who knew you of all people would knock some sense into me.

APHRODITE (giggling):
Literally. Bro, I'm full of surprises. (looks at him probingly) Soooo...anything else you want to talk to me about? You know--the Goddess of *Love*?

Ares gives her a guarded look and Aphrodite shrugs.

APHRODITE:
Okay, whatever. Just trying to help. I better get going.

Aphrodite vanishes in a flash of light. The camera focuses in on Ares' hand as he runs his finger across the thread the Fates gave him.

ARES (softly):
Me too.

DISSOLVE TO

Early morning. Xena and Gabrielle are riding toward a large city in the distance, Darion riding with Xena.

GABRIELLE:

It's hard to believe Antigone is now a mother. (chuckles) It isn't long since she was only a child herself...and she was so angry at the world.

XENA:

She's had to grow up fast.

Close-up on Darion's thoughtful face; then pan to Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

It's been just over a year since we were here last. So much has changed--for everyone...

XENA (nods slowly, still thinking):

Yes, it has.

DISSOLVE TO

The dining hall of the large palace in Thebes. A long table is spread out with all kinds of breakfast foods, from fruit and cheese to bread and eggs.

Pan to Xena and Darion, who sit at the table eating.

Gabrielle walks in, looking a bit queasy. Xena glances up at her as she walks up to the table.

XENA:

Hey. Feeling better?

GABRIELLE:

It comes and goes. (takes a seat next to Xena) Was it this bad for you?

XENA (smiles):

With Eve, I had morning sickness almost every day for the first few weeks. With Solan... (looks away, suddenly somber) I barely even knew I was pregnant until the last month or so. It's different every time.

GABRIELLE (rubs her head):

Well, right now, I feel like--I don't even want to get out of bed in the morning sometimes. (looks at the food on the table) Or eat anything--even though it looks delicious.

XENA:

Been there. It'll pass.

GABRIELLE:

I'll have to start shopping for a new outfit.

Xena smiles and puts an arm around Gabrielle's shoulder.

Antigone walks into the dining hall.

ANTIGONE:

Xena, Gabrielle! It's so great to see you.

XENA:

Antigone.

Xena and Gabrielle rise and Antigone hugs them both in turn.

GABRIELLE:

Hello, Antigone.

ANTIGONE (looks at Darion):

And this must be Darion. (puts a hand on his shoulder) Hi.

DARION:

Hello... (thinks about etiquette for a moment) Queen Antigone.

ANTIGONE:

Just Antigone. (she sits down) You must be famished from your journey. Please--help yourselves. I'm so glad you could come for the celebration.

GABRIELLE:

The baby is doing well?

ANTIGONE (smiles):

Yes, he's beautiful.

XENA:

The news was quite a surprise.

ANTIGONE:

To me as well. (hesitant) Actaeon and I weren't planning to start a family yet. When the healer told me I was with child...I wasn't sure whether to welcome the news or not. You know things (looks away) hadn't been easy between us.

Pan to Gabrielle, who inclines her head in acknowledgment.

ANTIGONE (continues):

But now...I wouldn't trade this for the world.

GABRIELLE (smiles and pats her hand reassuringly):

I know you'll make a wonderful mother.

ANTIGONE:

I hope so. (after a brief pause) By the way, a good friend of yours is coming too.

Xena and Gabrielle look at her questioningly. Before Antigone can continue, there is a knock on the door. A guard enters.

GUARD:

Your majesty, Hercules is here.

XENA (pleased):

Hercules!

ANTIGONE (to the guard):

Well, show him in!

The guard bows and exits.

ANTIGONE (to Xena):

I was just about to tell you--

Hercules walks in. Antigone rises and walks toward him.

HERCULES:

Antigone! It's great to see you. Congratulations!

They hug; then, Hercules looks at Xena and Gabrielle, surprised and pleased.

HERCULES:

Well, look who's here.

Xena rises. They clasp arms in a traditional greeting. Gabrielle walks up to Hercules, smiling.

GABRIELLE:

Hello, Hercules.

HERCULES (steps back and looks at her, slightly surprised):

Wait a minute, have you gained weight or are you--?

Gabrielle nods and smiles a little, patting her stomach which is bulging out slightly.

GABRIELLE:

I am.

HERCULES (warmly):

Congratulations. (looks from her to Xena) We always seem to meet at--interesting times.

GABRIELLE:

Thanks. (changing the subject) But this is Antigone's special day.

HERCULES:

You're right, of course.

His smile suddenly fades as he turns to Antigone.

HERCULES:

Not to spoil the happy occasion, but I have some troubling news. (zoom in on his face) On my way here, I saw a large army headed straight for Thebes. From the looks of it--it wasn't friendly.

There is a brief silence.

XENA (caustic):

Don't we always pick the best time to visit.

Pan over Xena, Gabrielle, Antigone, and Hercules' troubled faces as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

On the same scene: Hercules, Xena, Gabrielle, and Antigone. In the background, Darion has stopped eating.

ANTIGONE:

Which direction were they coming from?

HERCULES:

From the south--from Delium.

ANTIGONE (puzzled):

But that makes no sense! Thebes has never had any hostilities with Delium. We've always had a good relationship, traded with each other--

XENA:

Maybe we can go out to them and find out what they want.

The door is flung open and Actaeon comes in. He looks troubled.

ACTAEON (briskly):

Xena, Gabrielle--Hercules. I'm delighted to greet you all as guests, but I'm afraid I've just been informed of some bad news.

ANTIGONE:

We already know. (off his surprised look) Hercules told us. There's an army headed this way from Delium--apparently with hostile intent.

ACTAEON (taken aback):

Delium? You mean, Leuctra.

Pan to Hercules, who looks surprised.

HERCULES:

I saw an army coming here from Delium--from the south.

ACTAEON (puzzled):

I just got a report from our scouts that there's an army headed this way from Leuctra, from the north.

ANTIGONE:

Are you sure?

ACTAEON:

That's what they said. (He walks over to the table, pours himself some wine from a jug and drinks it, then looks at the others, bewildered) Don't tell me there are *two* armies coming toward us from different sides?

ANTIGONE:

What if they're not coming here to fight *us*? (off his questioning look) They could be after each other, couldn't they?

ACTAEON (thinks a moment):

Even if that's true, we'd be trapped between two warring armies. That would be very bad news for us.

Xena walks up to the open window and looks out. The Areopagus and the temple of Ares looms in the distance. Obviously getting an idea, Xena turns around.

XENA:

Actaeon--your father--

Quick pan to Actaeon, who presses his lips tightly together and looks away. Antigone puts a hand on his arm, comforting him.

XENA (continues):

--went to war because he wanted to take the Areopagus and the sacred medallion of Ares. The one that was reputed to bestow almost godlike powers on whoever possessed it. (Quick pan to Hercules, who looks curiously at her) What if that's what these armies want, too?

HERCULES (skeptical):

Godlike powers.

GABRIELLE:

The medallion has no actual powers. It's a myth. But it wouldn't be the first time people have fought a war over a myth.

ACTAEON (shakes his head):

I don't think that's it. As far as I know, no one else has heard of this medallion.

XENA:

Rumors spread easily.

HERCULES:

Wait. You said, the sacred medallion of Ares. What if Ares put them up to it? Two armies making war over his sacred medallion...

Pan to Xena, who looks grim and almost heartsick.

HERCULES (continues):

...what better way to shore up his fan base? (off Xena's stricken look) Look, I know you and Ares are--friendly these days. I don't try to understand it because--well, I'm sure you have your reasons. But that doesn't change what he is.

XENA (quietly):
It's possible.

ACTAEON:
Whatever or whoever's behind it, we need to be ready.

ANTIGONE:
We have to call a meeting of our commanders.

XENA:
Before you do anything, we should try and find out what these armies are after.

ANTIGONE:
We'll send messengers.

GABRIELLE:
How about if we (indicates Hercules, who is standing next to her, and Xena, who is still by the window) go out and try to talk to them? It might work better than a formal embassy from Thebes.

Actaeon and Antigone exchange a look, then turn toward Gabrielle and Hercules.

ACTAEON:
We'd be very grateful.

GABRIELLE:
Then that settles it. (To Hercules) You can head south--Xena and I will go north and see if we can talk to the leaders of that other army.

Xena comes over toward Gabrielle and puts a protective hand on her shoulder.

XENA (quietly):
Shouldn't you stay here and get some rest?

GABRIELLE (laughs lightly):
Xena, I'm not an invalid. I'll go with you.

She goes over to Darion and is seen talking to him in the background.

ANTIGONE (to Xena and Hercules):
Thank you again. If there's anyone we'd want on our side at a time like this, it's you.

XENA:
I'm glad we could be here. With luck, we'll be able to get this settled peacefully.

ACTAEON (puts a hand on Antigone's shoulder):
Come on, Antigone--let's go talk to the council. (to Xena and Hercules) We'll see you later.

ANTIGONE (to Xena and Hercules):
Good luck to you both.

Antigone and Actaeon leave.

HERCULES:

I'll be on my way toward Delium, then.

XENA (concerned):

Be careful. You don't know what they could be up to.

HERCULES (smiles):

You took the words right out of my mouth.

Hercules walks out. Gabrielle comes up to Xena, glancing uneasily after Hercules.

GABRIELLE (in a low voice):

Do you really think that Ares--

XENA (with quiet anguish):

Gabrielle, it's the Twilight. Having worshipers is not just about ego anymore. It's--

GABRIELLE (nods):

--a matter of life and death. So, if Ares thinks that if he can get people to fight over this medallion in the hope of gaining great powers... (she trails off, shaking her head)

XENA (her face hard):

Then we'll just have to stop him.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle riding out of the gates of Thebes.

CUT TO

An overhead shot of an army camp. The sun is setting.

Quick pan to inside the camp, with the soldiers walking around and a few men sitting around a fire. The camera moves in on a large, richly decorated tent.

CUT TO

Inside the tent, lit by candles and oil lamps. A woman with short, curly brown hair, wearing silver armor, is sitting in a chair, sipping wine. Two officers, a man and a woman, stand in front of her.

MALE OFFICER:

If we leave at dawn, we'll be there tomorrow before noon.

LEADER (curtly):

Good.

FEMALE OFFICER:

Our scouts saw no sign of troops around the hill.

LEADER (puts aside the empty goblet on a small tripod table near her chair):

Even better. Then we set out at first light. You're both dismissed.

The officers linger, exchanging an uncertain look.

LEADER (impatient):
Any questions?

FEMALE OFFICER:

Queen Althea... You know we are devoted to you as much as we were to your late mother and father, may the gods rest their souls. But--

ALTHEA (nails her with a stern gaze):
Are you questioning my decision, Zoe?

The officers are silent for a moment.

MALE OFFICER (sighs):
No, my queen. But some of the men--

ALTHEA (haughtily):
The men will do as they're told. (firmly) Dismissed.

The two officers bow and turn around to leave.

CUT TO

Outside the tent. The two officers are walking away.

ZOE:
I'm telling you, Callios, no good can come of it.

CALLIOS:
I know, but--

They both stop short. Quick pan to Xena and Gabrielle, who are standing in front of them.

ZOE (after a moment's silence):
Who are you?

XENA (businesslike):
Xena. (off Callios and Zoe's awed look) Yes, Xena, the Warrior Princess. This is Gabrielle. We need to talk to whoever's in charge.

CALLIOS (bitterly):
Queen Althea? You think you can change her mind? Good luck with that.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a quick, curious look.

CUT TO

Inside the tent. A guard stands in front of Althea.

GUARD:

Xena, Warrior Princess, and Gabrielle are here to see you, my queen.

Althea purses her lips in displeasure.

ALTHEA (more to herself than to the guard):

I didn't expect to go up against *them*. (to the guard) Show them in.

The guard goes outside; a moment later, Xena and Gabrielle walk in.

XENA:

Queen Al--

ALTHEA (interrupts brusquely):

Let's skip the introductions. I know who you are. I also know you have a bad habit of meddling in other people's plans.

XENA (firmly):

If those plans include attacking Thebes, then we'll have no choice but to meddle. (Off Althea's silence) What is your quarrel with Thebes?

ALTHEA:

It's not my quarrel, Xena. I'm fighting for a cause--far greater than my own.

GABRIELLE:

Look, if you're after the sacred medallion of Ares --

Althea reacts visibly to the mention of Ares, then shakes her head.

ALTHEA:

I don't know of any medallion.

Xena stares at her intently, lowering her gaze from Althea's face to her armor. Zoom in on Althea's breastplate, which bears a golden design depicting two crossed arrows, a half-moon, and a laurel branch.

Pan back to Xena, who narrows her eyes at Althea.

XENA:

The symbol of Artemis. Are you acting on her orders?

ALTHEA:

I don't owe you any answers, Xena.

XENA:

I'll take that as a yes. (after a moment's pause) Let me guess. Thebes has the greatest temple of Ares in all of Greece--and his oldest temple on the sacred hill is just outside the city walls. You want to conquer them in the name of Artemis. Is that right? (Off Althea's silence) Why do you want to do the bidding of some power-hungry goddess? Artemis cares nothing for the well-being of your people. She--

ALTHEA (interrupts):

Be quiet!

She rises from her seat, furious, and strides up to Xena and Gabrielle. She's a fairly short woman, about Gabrielle's height.

ALTHEA (almost hissing):

When I was twelve years old, I was badly injured in a hunting accident. I was dying. My parents prayed to Artemis, and the goddess healed me. I vowed then that I would dedicate my life to my goddess. (Her voice fills with hate) I know you killed her once, Xena. But now--she's back and nothing will stop me from serving her. Not even you. (She raises her voice) Guards!

The flaps of the tent open and two guards rush in.

ALTHEA (pointing to Xena and Gabrielle):

Take them!

XENA (shakes her head):

Big mistake. Cheeh-yah!

She kicks one of the guards so hard the he flies backwards, slamming into two other guards who are just rushing in.

XENA (continues, to Althea):

Of course, you're not the first to make it.

She grabs another guard by the wrists, flips him over her head and throws him toward the back wall of the tent, where he knocks over a bowl of fruit as he lands. Meanwhile, Gabrielle yanks out one of the poles of the tent and swings it like a staff, knocking out two more guards.

ALTHEA (clenches her fists in fury):

Fools!

CUT TO

Outside the tent. Dusk is falling; the camp is now lit with bonfires and torches. Xena and Gabrielle fight their way out, Gabrielle using her makeshift staff, Xena using her sword to parry the blows of her attackers. With her "A-yi-yi-yi-yi!" battle cry, Xena leaps in the air, knocking out two soldiers with a split kick as she lands, then kicking down a third and slamming him into two more soldiers behind her. Xena whistles and Argo comes galloping toward her, followed by Klio.

XENA:

Come on, Gabrielle!

Gabrielle knocks down two more soldiers and mounts Klio, tossing the pole at the soldiers and knocking down a few more of them. Xena delivers a spin-kick that knocks the sword from an attacker's hand, then downs him with a punch and jumps in the saddle.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle riding toward Thebes.

GABRIELLE (glances cautiously at Xena):

At least now we know Ares has nothing to do with this.

Xena flinches slightly, then looks at Gabrielle, her face unreadable.

XENA:

Yes, now we know.

CUT TO

A close-up on Hercules' face. He looks wary and puzzled.

HERCULES:

With all due respect, King Otus--this is madness. Why would you want to do this in the name of Apollo?

The camera pulls back to show a man with short blonde hair, wearing gold and silver armor and leather, sitting in a chair facing Hercules. There is a frightening intensity in his eyes.

KING OTUS:

Why do you care, Hercules? I've heard a great deal about you--

HERCULES:

Then I'm sure you've heard that I make it my business to care.

KING OTUS:

I also know there is no love lost between you and your half-brother Ares. Why would you want to protect his temples?

HERCULES (sarcastic):

How about--to stop innocent people from dying in a senseless war? Besides, if there's one god I like even less than Ares, it's Apollo. Has he ever done anything for you?

KING OTUS (stares intensely at Hercules):

It's funny you should ask. (off Hercules' questioning look) Let's just say he has and leave it at that.

DISSOLVE TO

A marble tomb in a forest clearing, bathed in moonlight and covered with flowers. A small stone statue of a male warrior stands atop the tomb. The camera lingers over the inscription on the tomb, as subtitles appear to translate it:

BELLEROPHON

The camera pulls around to show Artemis standing in front of the tomb, looking somber. Apollo stands at her side.

ARTEMIS (whispering):

She killed him. My only son. (sighs) I wasn't even there to protect him. The son I had to make sure my legacy lived on.

APOLLO (snorts):

So much for the virgin goddess thing.

Artemis glares at Apollo.

ARTEMIS:

You are so pathetic, bro. Don't you get it? (pointing at Bellerophon's grave) This is what awaits us! We become mortal--then someday, we die. We remain gods and lose worshippers--we die anyway.

APOLLO (irritated):

I get it, Artemis. Hey, I'm on *your* side, remember?

Artemis shakes her head, staring at the tomb.

ARTEMIS:

I remember that you chickened out the first time. (glances wryly at Apollo) You just had to take a long vacation in--what was it, Egypt? (mocking) A much nicer climate than Hell. (The mocking smile fades from her face as she grows serious) You've never even felt real pain. You've never felt your own blood in your fingertips, knowing that you only have seconds left to live, and that each breath you take could be your last.

APOLLO (scared and angry):

You don't have to rub it in. We all know this is serious business. Zeus--

ARTEMIS (snaps):

Zeus knows nothing! His wait-and-see approach isn't going to help anyone. Well, if our father wants to be a goody-two-shoes like Hercules--let him. At this point, it's every god for himself. (meaningfully) And if we can increase our power at another god's expense...

APOLLO:

You can count on me, sis.

ARTEMIS:

Can we count on your man in Delium?

APOLLO (smirks):

Oh, yeah. Otus owes me big time. He once sent his own half-brother into a death trap on the battlefield because he had a thing for his sister-in-law.

ARTEMIS (snorts):

Men.

APOLLO:

Well, guess who granted him a cleansing and got the Furies off his back. (chuckles) The crazy fool will fight for me to the death.

ARTEMIS (grins):

Good.

APOLLO:

Of course, you realize what this means. Sooner or later, we'll have to face off against Ares.

ARTEMIS:

That was bound to happen anyway. Ares has already sold out the Olympian order twice--first for Dahak, then again for (sarcastically) his beloved Xena.

APOLLO (nods):

We can't trust him.

ARTEMIS:

We can't trust anyone--except each other.

Apollo stares at her for a moment.

APOLLO (nodding):

I'm with ya 'til the end.

They clasp hands as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

Dawn rises over the Areopagus.

DISSOLVE TO

Inside the majestic but ancient temple. Ares is standing at the altar, looking at a large plate with offerings. Something catches his eye. He picks up an object and looks at it, curiously and somewhat nervously. The camera zooms in on the object and we see that it is the pendant Ares gave Xena in the dream in "What Dreams May Come" (Season 7) --Ares' rune symbol circled by Xena's chakram.

XENA (off camera):

I thought that would get your attention.

Ares turns his head to see Xena standing in the doorway of the temple. He looks at the medallion. Xena walks slowly toward him.

ARES:

You're returning this?

Xena comes up to him and stops.

XENA (shakes her head):

No.

ARES (bewildered):

Then what--

XENA (cuts him off):

You called it a token of love when you gave it to me. This is my way of saying...I want us to go back to that.

ARES:

To the way things were?

XENA (quietly):

Is that possible?

In response, Ares takes the pendant and fastens it around Xena's neck. She shivers at his touch, closing her eyes for a moment. He leans in and gives her a short, gentle kiss, then pulls back.

ARES (looks at Xena with a grin):

There, now everything is back where it belongs.

Xena looks at him, smiling, then leans in and kisses him back.

XENA (in a low voice):

It was also my way of saying...I'm sorry.

ARES (surprised):

For what?

XENA (grins):

Being too hard on you sometimes.

ARES (with pretend nonchalance):

Before you go all soft on me, there's something I need to tell you. (serious) It has to do with the Twilight.

XENA:

So you already know.

ARES:

Eve told me. (uncomfortably) I--take it she told you, too.

XENA (bewildered):

Eve? What does Eve have to do with this?

ARES (puzzled):

Are we talking about the same thing? Eve told me that (uneasily) Eli came to her in a dream. He told her that the gods have a choice. To fade away and turn to ghosts...or give up our godhood and live out the rest of our lives as mortals.

XENA (stares ahead pensively):

Mortals... (looks at Ares) Have you told the other gods?

ARES:

I have--and not even half of them believe it. They're afraid that Eve could be trying to trick them

into giving up their powers. They still think they can hold on to their godhood if they can just keep their worshipers.

XENA (looks at him probingly):
What about you?

Ares pauses a moment, then shrugs.

ARES:
I don't think she has any reason to lie.

XENA (gestures toward the altar):
You still have plenty of worshipers.

ARES (quietly):
The truth is... (he looks away) I don't care about them so much anymore. (Off Xena's surprised look) Being the God of War--isn't what it used to be.

XENA:
Just recently, you seemed pretty anxious to hold on to it.

ARES:
I know. (pauses) I was afraid of what the future would bring. But let's face it, there's no going back to the past. I've known that ever since you gave me that apple.

XENA (puts her hand on his arm):
You were mortal, Ares--and it's changed you.

ARES:
Sometimes, when I look at slain soldiers in the battlefield, I think that I could have been in their place. (Off Xena's sympathetic look) Oh, don't get me wrong, I've still enjoyed my job. But it's only a job. Before, it used to be--more of a *lifestyle*. And now that it's come between us... (he shakes his head and trails off)

They stare silently at each other. Then, Ares holds up his hand, showing Xena a piece of thread.

XENA (puzzled):
What's that?

ARES:
The Fates' Loom is vanishing. They gave this to me. (softly) They said that the threads from the past will bind with the future.

Xena reaches out and touches it; a flash of light fills the screen.

DISSOLVE TO

The Temple of the Fates.

The Fates continue to tend to the crumbling loom, which is in far worse shape than before. A flash of green light illuminates their faces as Artemis appears before them.

ARTEMIS:

Hello, ladies.

The Fates don't look up at her and continue to weave. Atropos quickly cuts a thread.

ARTEMIS (irritated):

I came here for answers. I'm not about to spend eternity a ghost and I'm sure as *hell* not going to turn mortal just to eke out a few more numbered days. So I'll put this simply--how can I live forever?

CLOTHO:

The more we tell you--

LACHESIS:

--the faster the Twilight--

ATROPOS:

--will happen.

CLOTHO:

The Slayer--

LACHESIS:

--of Gods--

ATROPOS:

--will strike again--

CLOTHO:

--and shed--

LACHESIS:

--new--

ATROPOS:

--Olympian blood.

Atropos cuts another thread.

Close-up on Artemis' face. She looks terrified.

CUT TO

Xena and Ares in the temple. Xena takes Ares' hand, weaving her fingers through his.

XENA (tenderly):

Ares--I trust you to make the right decision.

ARES (chuckles bitterly):

Never thought I'd hear you say that.

XENA (pensive):

So...most of the other gods haven't received Eve's message very well.

ARES:

Didn't think they would. They'll still fight to keep as many worshipers as they can.

XENA:

Yeah. Even if it means stealing them from you.

ARES (surprised):

What are you talking about?

XENA:

Two armies moving on Thebes--from Delium and from Leuctra. (Off Ares' expectant look) It's Artemis and Apollo's work. They're after your temples.

ARES (clenches his fists and scowls):

So they want to play hardball. Fine. I'll show them how that game is played.

XENA (guarded):

I thought you didn't care about worshipers or temples anymore.

ARES (sarcastic):

Yeah, well--that doesn't mean I'm going to let those two spoiled brats take away my toys, does it? (very serious) Xena, if I decide to give it all up, it's going to be *my* choice--on *my* terms. (harshly) I deserve no less.

XENA (nods slowly):

I understand. (after a brief pause) If the attack can't be stopped, Gabrielle and I are going to help Antigone and Actaeon defend Thebes.

ARES:

Be careful. If this is Apollo and Artemis you're playing against--

XENA:

It wouldn't be like them to get involved directly. That's why they've had their followers raise those armies.

ARES:

The rules are different now that they're in fear of their lives. I think it's time for me to have a chat with my dear brother and sister and slap a little sense into them.

XENA (worried):

Be careful. You said it yourself--they're desperate.

ARES (scoffs):

Oh, please. What do I have to worry about? Apollo will beat me to death with a musical instrument?

Xena laughs and Ares joins in her laughter; then, the laughter fades to smiles as they look at each other.

ARES (quietly):

It's good to hear you laugh again.

XENA (teasingly):

Especially at your jokes.

They kiss.

DISSOLVE TO

A temple to Zeus on a hilltop, the same one we saw in "God Fearing Child".

CUT TO

Hercules stands in the quiet temple, looking slightly apprehensive.

HERCULES:

Zeus. (no answer) Zeus!

There is a whooshing sound and in a swirl of lightning and thunder, Zeus appears, standing in front of Hercules. They look at each other for a moment, both of them slightly uncomfortable.

ZEUS (moving closer to Hercules):

My son. I was wondering when we'd see each other again.

Hercules looks at Zeus, then looks down, obviously struggling with something.

HERCULES (quietly):

I'm sorry. I should have come to see you sooner after you--returned.

ZEUS:

Hercules...

HERCULES:

It's not easy to face your father when, the last time we met... (trails off)

Zeus approaches and puts a hand on his shoulder.

ZEUS:

The last time we met, you did what you had to. I understand that.

HERCULES:

It wasn't until after you were gone that I realized how much you mean to me... (looks up at Zeus) Father.

ZEUS (smiles):

I seem to recall that you vowed never to call me 'Father' anymore.

HERCULES (guilty):

Father--I--

ZEUS:

Wait, let me finish. I told you that you had never disappointed me--and I meant it. It wasn't your fault that things happened the way that they did. I was afraid of losing everything and I acted rashly and--stupidly.

They embrace. After they pull apart, Zeus looks probingly at Hercules.

ZEUS:

Now, why do I have a feeling that your visit today has something to do with the Twilight happening again?

HERCULES (nods):

Xena told me about it.

ZEUS:

Has she. (He steps away and looks out the window) I'm not sure what's worse: to live out a mortal lifespan and then face whatever the afterlife holds...or fade and wander the earth as a ghost for all eternity--to look on as we are forgotten, and as new generations are born that don't even believe we ever existed. (He turns toward Hercules again) You know, I'm determined to find a better way to deal with it this time. (smiles faintly) I just wish I knew such a way.

HERCULES (bitterly):

Well, I can tell you how Artemis and Apollo are planning to deal with it. They've raised armies to go up against Thebes to take over Ares' temples.

ZEUS (shakes his head):

I knew they were up to something. Those fools. Fighting amongst ourselves will only ensure our destruction.

HERCULES:

Not to mention the destruction of a few thousand mortals who get caught in the crossfire.

There is a long pause, Zeus obviously struggling with a decision.

ZEUS:

Hercules...I don't know how much longer I have, or which among the Olympian gods will outlast the others. There's something that I think you should know.

Hercules looks at him expectantly.

CUT TO

Artemis' quarters on Olympus, richly decorated with hunting weapons, deers' antlers, animal skins and other hunting trophies. Ares appears and lobs a fireball at a pair of antlers on a wall, causing them to crash; then, looking around, he fireballs a tapestry depicting a hunt, leaving a burnt hole in its middle.

Artemis materializes in a flash of green light.

ARTEMIS (yells):

Hey! What do you think you're doing?

ARES (glares):

I could ask you the same thing.

Apollo materializes next to Artemis.

APOLLO (nonchalant):

Problem, sis?

ARES:

Yeah, and it's your problem too, (sarcastically) *bro*. (points a hand with outstretched fingers at them both, with blue bolts of energy crackling between his fingers) Stay away from Thebes. Stay away from my temples and my followers. Is that simple enough for you?

APOLLO (laughs):

Oh, Ares. You take everything so seriously.

ARTEMIS:

Don't worry. We'll pull back the armies. Actually, we've just found out something that solves our problem with no need for new temples and no need to get mortals involved in any wars.

ARES (lowers his hand and narrows his eyes at them):

What are you talking about?

APOLLO (mysteriously):

The tablets of the Fates.

ARES:

What?

Artemis approaches him and stares at him intently. She reaches out and puts a hand on his arm. He looks down on her hand, as if irritated at the touch of a foreign object.

ARTEMIS:

They're supposed to reverse the effects of the Twilight. Come and we'll show you.

ARES (steps back):

Oh, I get it. You're playing some kind of game to stall for time. Forget it. I'm not going anywhere.

ARTEMIS (glances wryly at Apollo):

I think he's scared.

APOLLO:

He thinks it's a trap. (to Ares, mockingly) Hey, why don't you bring your darling Xena along to protect you.

ARES (stung):

I don't have to take that from you. All right, I'll play your little game.

CUT TO

Inside a dark cave studded with stalactites. There are three flashes of light--blue, green and gold--and Ares, Apollo and Artemis materialize. Ares looks around and, with a sweep of the hand, causes torches to appear, lighting the cave.

ARES:

All right, so where are those tablets of yours?

ARTEMIS:

They're supposed to be embedded into one of the walls.

Skeptical but curious, Ares walks along the wall, looking at the rock. Something alerts his senses, causing him to tense and then whip around--just in time to see Apollo and Artemis send two fireballs toward him. Ares extends his hands, repelling the fireballs, so that Apollo and Artemis are barely able to dodge them.

ARES (contemptuously):

I knew it. (draws his sword) Well, I'm always up for a good workout.

Even as he charges Apollo and Artemis, they hold up their hands and swords appear in them. They spar. Ares spins around and delivers a kick to Artemis' midriff that sends her flying back and slamming into a wall with a shout of rage. Meanwhile, he spars with Apollo, knocks the sword from his hand and elbows him in the stomach and then in the face. Apollo falls down, groaning. Ares shakes his head.

ARES:

Stick to playing the lyre, bro. You were never any good with a sword.

APOLLO (grits his teeth):

Yeah? Well, maybe I've improved.

He leaps to his feet and makes his sword fly upwards from the floor of the cave and into his hand. Artemis joins him and they spar again. As Ares simultaneously parries blows from both of them, Apollo and Artemis manage to kick the sword out of his hand, then deliver a couple of kicks to his chest and stomach, accompanied by lightning bolts. As Ares staggers back, they fly forward and slam into him, pushing him back and into what looks like an open sarcophagus at the base of the wall.

ARTEMIS:

Now!

She and Apollo lift their hands, directing streams of light at something on the wall, just above the camera's range. After a moment they lower their hands.

Ares tries to get up but realizes that he can't move, as if held in place by an invisible energy field. He tries to dematerialize but the blue light flares up around him and quickly fades.

ARTEMIS:

Ah-ah-ah. You're not going anywhere.

ARES (frightened but trying not to show it):

What are you talking about?

APOLLO (clicks his tongue):

Tsk-tsk. I'm afraid you've fallen into one of Haephestus' little traps.

ARES:

Are you insane? What are you planning to do, keep me trapped here forever?

ARTEMIS (gleefully):

Oh no. Not forever. I'm sure the Twilight will eventually catch up with you and you'll just-- (with mock regret) fade away. Then I guess you'll find out whether or not this tomb will hold a ghost, as well as a god.

ARES:

And you think you can get away with this?

APOLLO:

You've been too much of a liability to the family, Ares. You think they'll get you out of this mess just so you can betray them again? (snickers) In the meantime, we'll have your temples *and* your worshippers.

With a desperate effort, Ares tries to free himself again but sinks to the bottom of the coffin with a groan.

APOLLO and ARTEMIS (in unison):

Sweet dreams.

They extend their hands, using their powers to lift a lid from the ground and deposit it on top of the sarcophagus. The camera moves in on the sarcophagus; the lid has the image of a person carved into it. Then, the camera pulls away to show the Eye of Hephaestus pulsing with a red glow above the sarcophagus. Apollo and Artemis direct another beam of energy at the Eye and its glow dies down. Apollo and Artemis disappear and the camera lingers for a moment on the empty cave as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

A chamber in the palace in Thebes. Antigone is sitting on the edge of a bed with silk sheets. In front of her is a cradle where her baby is lying. She is rocking the cradle slowly, humming a lullaby. Actaeon, Xena, Gabrielle, and Darion are standing around her.

GABRIELLE (looks at the baby, smiling):

He looks so peaceful.

ANTIGONE (chuckles):

After keeping me awake most of the night. (Her expression grows serious and she sighs) The one thing I want most for him is to have a life of peace.

ACTAEON (firmly):

And he's going to have one.

CUT TO

The two armies are marching toward Thebes. We cross-fade from one army to the other, each headed by its leader on horseback. Both Otus and Thea look determined.

DISSOLVE TO

Antigone's chamber.

ANTIGONE (to Xena):

We haven't had any success in negotiating with Althea and Otus.

XENA (sighs):

I didn't think you would.

ACTAEON:

They're determined to take not only the Areopagus but the city itself. We have no choice but to fight. (To Antigone, gently) I have to get ready and lead the men out into the field.

Antigone rises and comes up to him. She looks worried.

ANTIGONE:

You'll lead them yourself?

ACTAEON (takes her hands):

You know it's the right thing to do. The men need me out there.

ANTIGONE:

I just...don't want our child to grow up fatherless.

Quick pan to Gabrielle, who lowers her head, looking somewhat pained.

Pan back to Antigone and Actaeon.

ACTAEON:

And I will do everything in my power to keep that from happening.

He kisses Antigone.

DARION:

Don't worry--Xena and Gabrielle will look out for him.

Everyone laughs.

ACTAEON (ruffles Darion's hair):

Don't forget Hercules--it doesn't hurt to have the world's strongest man on our side.

ANTIGONE:

I wish I could go out there with you... Be careful.

XENA (to Gabrielle):

Wait a minute--you're not going into battle, are you? (off Gabrielle's uncertain look) Gabrielle, stay behind. You know you need to take care of yourself.

GABRIELLE (wavering):

Are you sure?

XENA:

I don't want you out there. (gently) Gabrielle--I know it's your decision to make, but I would feel a lot better knowing you're safe back here.

Darion comes up to Gabrielle and looks up at her, concerned.

DARION:

Please stay here, Gabrielle. (quietly) I'm scared.

Gabrielle looks at him, then at Xena. She sighs and puts her hands on Darion's shoulders.

GABRIELLE:

All right.

Xena breathes a visible sign of relief.

CUT TO

A courtyard. Theban soldiers are arming themselves, strapping on armor, picking up swords, spears and shields.

CUT TO

An overhead view of a square in Thebes with warriors lining up. Actaeon, on horseback, rides up to them, dressed in his battle armor. Xena rides up on Argo as well. Hercules, on foot, joins the troops. The soldiers cheer as they salute Actaeon.

The camera pulls back to the palace behind the square, and up to a window. Gabrielle, Antigone and Darion are standing at the window looking down. Antigone looks worried. Gabrielle puts a reassuring hand on her shoulder. Darion wordlessly squeezes Gabrielle's other hand.

DISSOLVE TO

A wide shot of the Theban army leaving the city gates. Actaeon riding his horse in front of his troops; Xena rides a few paces behind him.

DISSOLVE TO

A wide shot of the Areopagus and the field in front of the hill.

CROSS-FADE TO

Althea's and Otus' armies on the move.

DISSOLVE TO

Actaeon's army moving out into the field in front of the Areopagus.

DISSOLVE TO

Medium close-up on a group of Theban soldiers lined up in front of the Areopagus hill, staring intently ahead of them.

DISSOLVE TO

Otus leading his army into the field. He raises his sword.

CROSS-FADE TO

Althea, at the head of her army, raises her sword.

ALTHEA (shouts):

For you, great goddess!

SMASH CUT TO

The Thebans charging forward to meet the enemy, shouting as they charge.

CUT TO

Xena, now on foot, charges forward. She lets out her ululating battle cry--"A-yi-yi-yi-yi"--as she leaps up and flips, downing two of Otus's soldiers on landing, then knocking out a third with an elbow to the face. Two sword-wielding soldiers charge her and she parries their blows, then knocks down of them with a kick to the midriff and spars with the other. The soldier she has just knocked down jumps up and moves to attack her from behind; she spins around and delivers a powerful kick that leaves him unconscious on the ground.

CUT TO

Hercules is on the other side of the battlefield, fighting against an equal number of Otus' and Thea's men. He uses his strength to lift some of them off the ground, spin them around and throw them at the others.

CUT TO

A montage of scenes of fighting:

* a Theban soldier falls, struck down by one of Althea's men

* two Theban soldiers fight five of Otus' men; one of Otus' men falls, run through with a sword, then another one of Otus' men swings his sword with a shout, killing one of the Thebans

* a wounded Theban lies on the ground next to one of Althea's men, who is either dead or wounded

- * a soldier from Otus' army fights with two swords, beating off the attackers
- * five female archers from Althea's army, wearing silver armor, shoot arrows toward the Thebans
- * the arrows whiz through the air
- * five Thebans fall, groaning and clutching at their chests
- * Actaeon gallops through the battlefield, swinging his sword and shouting something.
- * Hercules punches out two men from Otus' army at once, making them stagger into two men behind them.
- * Xena flips a fallen soldier's sword from the ground into her left hand and twirls two swords with a fierce cry, then uses them to spar with two warriors from Althea's army.
- * A group of Otus' men charge forward, spears at the ready
- * In a mirror shot, a group of Thebans charge forward, spears at the ready.
- * Xena continues to spar with the two warriors, then knocks the swords from their hands. Even as they move back, two other warriors charge her from behind. She runs them through with a back-thrust of the two swords at once.
- * A rather gruesome general melee of Thebans, Otus' men, and Althea's men, soldiers on all sides hacking at each other with their swords and men falling wounded or dead.
- * A female archer from Althea's army is struck by a spear and falls to the ground.
- * Several men from Otus' army aim their javelins and prepare to launch them when Xena's chakram whizzes through the air, slicing off the tops of their javelins. They whip around in shock as Xena catches the chakram and grins at them from a distance.

DISSOLVE TO

A wide shot of the battlefield, with the battle raging.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena finds herself facing Zoe, Althea's reluctant lieutenant. They face each other, sword in hand. Xena looks grim.

XENA:

We don't have to do this. I know this war means nothing to you.

ZOE (regretful):

I have to do as my queen commands.

Xena and Zoe start to spar.

CUT TO

Althea, with a female archer at her side. The archer draws her bow, then looks at Althea and shakes her head slightly.

ARCHER:

It's too far, my queen.

ALTHEA (impatiently):

Not for you! You're the best--almost as good as if you'd been trained by Artemis herself. You can do it!

The archer releases an arrow.

A shot of the arrow flying toward the camera.

CUT TO

Actaeon clutches at his side and gasps. He's been hit by the arrow just underneath his armor. He sways and almost falls off his horse but one of his lieutenants, looking alarmed, holds him up.

CUT TO

Xena is still sparring with Zoe. She suddenly stops, her attention distracted by shouts off-camera that rise above the din of the battle. She looks around, then turns and races in the direction of the shouts. Zoe looks after her.

CUT TO

Xena is racing across the battlefield. A Theban officer runs up to her.

THEBAN OFFICER (out of breath):

The king...King Actaeon is wounded!

XENA (shouts over the noise around them):

How badly is he hurt?

THEBAN OFFICER (shouts):

It doesn't seem to be too bad--he'll recover soon--but right now we have to get him off the field!

Xena looks around as the camera sweeps across the battlefield; everywhere, Theban warriors are being pressed hard by the forces of Althea and Otus.

Zoom in on Xena, struggling with a decision.

XENA:

We have to tell the men to retreat.

THEBAN OFFICER (shocked):

What?

XENA:

You heard me. Pull back inside the city gates.

THEBAN OFFICER:

But--but they'll take the hill! (he gestures toward the hill and the temple)

XENA (shakes her head impatiently):

You're losing too many men. And with Actaeon wounded, you can't keep fighting. You need to save your strength for defending the city--that's where they'll attack next. (She grabs his shoulders for emphasis) Give the order to retreat--now!

The officer stares at her, uncertain.

CUT TO

Another Theban officer raises his sword. The camera pulls back to show him on horseback.

THEBAN OFFICER #2 (shouts):

Retreat!

CUT TO

A long shot of the battlefield and the hill. The Theban army is pulling back.

CUT TO

Althea on her horse, with her female archers and a group of soldiers behind her. Althea raises her sword.

ALTHEA (shouts):

Victory for the goddess Artemis!

Pan to Otus, who rides up to her and raises his sword in salute.

OTUS (shouts):

Take the hill!

The troops cheer.

The camera pulls back to see the soldiers climbing up the hill toward the temple.

CUT TO

A bedchamber in the royal palace. Actaeon, looking rather pale, is lying on the bed. A healer, an elderly man, is about to finish bandaging his wound. He winces with pain.

The camera pulls back to show Antigone standing by the bed, and then to show Xena, Gabrielle and Hercules standing further back. Antigone looks stricken.

ANTIGONE:

I had such a bad feeling about this...

The healer finishes putting on the bandage and steps back.

HEALER:

There you are, Sire. You should be back on your feet in a week or so.

ACTAEON:

A week? That's not good enough! We have to go back into battle. (to Antigone) I'm so sorry we couldn't hold them off. I know how much this hill and this temple means to Thebes--and to you...

ANTIGONE (tenderly):

Your life means more.

XENA:

Actaeon, it wasn't your fault. You were facing the combined strength of two armies. They struck with no warning; Thebes didn't have the time to get ready for war.

HERCULES (shakes head):

So once again, people are stuck in the middle of a war between petty and selfish gods... I thought those days were long over.

ACTAEON:

I never thought Ares would allow this to happen... (miserably) I failed him, too.

Xena gives him a sharp look; Hercules rolls his eyes.

HERCULES:

You know, there *is* something I don't get. Artemis and Apollo have their followers take Ares' oldest temple, and he doesn't lift a finger to stop them?

GABRIELLE (with a meaningful glance at Xena):

Maybe he doesn't care as much anymore.

Xena shakes her head slowly and gives Hercules a thoughtful look.

XENA:

He wasn't happy when I told him what Apollo and Artemis were up to. (after a brief pause) I should talk to Ares.

HERCULES (wryly):

Well, I hope you don't mind if I skip this little get-together.

He heads for the door.

XENA (raises her voice):

Ares! I need to speak to you.

In spite of himself, Hercules stops in the doorway without turning back.

XENA (impatiently):

Ares!

As nothing happens, Hercules turns around. Xena looks worried.

GABRIELLE:

Maybe he just doesn't want to show himself in front of... (glances at Hercules) all these people.

XENA:

No, I would have felt his presence. (She shakes her head) I don't like this.

ACTAEON:

What do you mean?

XENA:

Last time I saw him, he told me he was going to have a chat with Artemis and Apollo.

GABRIELLE:

You think they've--

XENA (interrupts):

Something's wrong.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange worried looks. Hercules shakes his head slightly, with an "I'll never be able to understand this" expression.

CUT TO

Exterior view of the Areopagus. Late afternoon.

DISSOLVE TO

A long shot of the temple's interior. The sound of chanting fills the air. There are many candles and lamps, and a large fire burning in front of the altar. The camera zooms in to show a statue of Ares on the floor, broken into pieces; then lingers over two large shields hung over the altar. One is silver, depicting a bow and arrow, a moon, and a laurel; the other gold, depicting two crossed arrows, a sun disk, and a lyre. These are symbols of Apollo and Artemis.

The offerings on the altar include a dead doe and a large plate of fruit.

The camera pulls back to show Althea and Otus standing before the altar steps. They bow down.

ALTHEA:

Great goddess Artemis!

OTUS:

Apollo, most gracious of gods!

ALTHEA:

We now dedicate this temple in your name.

There are two flashes of light, one green, one golden. Artemis and Apollo appear, standing in front of the altar on top of its steps, facing their worshipers. There are gasps in the temple. Close-up on the faces of Althea and Otus, their expressions adoring and worshipful; Otus' expression is particularly intense. The camera pulls back to show them kneeling.

ARTEMIS:

You have done well. We're very pleased with you.

Althea and Otus bow their heads.

CUT TO

Xena riding up the slope of the Areopagus.

CUT TO

Xena dismounts in front of the temple. Two guards bar her way.

GUARD # 1:

You can't go in there--it's a--

XENA (interrupts):

Listen, buddy. I'm Xena, Warrior Princess. Do you want to do this the easy way or the hard way?

The guard looks at her and gulps nervously.

CUT TO

Inside the temple.

APOLLO:

Your work is not yet done.

ARTEMIS:

The army of Thebes has been weakened in the battle. Their king is wounded. Tomorrow is the time to finish the job.

As she speaks, the camera zooms in on her and Apollo. Suddenly, Apollo notices something and points rather nervously toward the temple doors.

APOLLO (in a low voice):

Look!

Pan to Xena, coming in through the doors.

XENA (raising her voice):

Just the two I wanted to see.

Otus and Althea whip around, shocked and furious.

XENA (to Otus and Althea):

And no, I didn't mean you two. (She stares at Apollo and Artemis)

Pan to Apollo and Artemis.

APOLLO (quietly to Artemis, somewhat nervous):
You don't really think she can kill gods again, do you?

ARTEMIS (quietly):
I know what the Fates told me. Be careful and stay out of her way.

Xena strolls up to the altar.

APOLLO (sarcastic):
I can't imagine what you'd want to talk to us about.

XENA:
How about--Ares.

ARTEMIS (innocently):
What about him?

XENA:
I thought maybe you'd tell me where he is.

APOLLO (snorts):
I'd have thought that would be more up *your* alley.

XENA (ignores the jibe):
Well, I called him and he wouldn't show.

ARTEMIS:
Maybe he finally wised up and found a new girlfriend.

XENA (with a crooked grin):
Very funny. Listen, Artemis, I am not in the mood for your banter. Last time I saw Ares, he told me he was going to have a chat with you two. Now, are you going to tell me where he is?

APOLLO:
Look, we had a chat. That doesn't mean we've been babysitting him ever since.

XENA (narrows her eyes):
Why don't I believe you?

ARTEMIS (shrugs):
I don't know--maybe because paranoia is your normal state of mind? I assure you, Xena, we don't know where your boyfriend is. He's probably just busy. He's fine.

With a frustrated grunt, Xena turns away and is about to walk toward the door.

APOLLO:
Hephaestus is keeping an eye on him.

Xena whips around and stares at Apollo, trying to figure something out.

Pan to Artemis, who purses her lips, displeased.

Pan back to Xena. She narrows her eyes.

XENA:

I'm going to find out exactly what happened. And when I do, there'll be *hell* to pay. (to Artemis)
You should know what that means.

Xena gives Artemis and Apollo one last glare, then turns around and walks out of the temple. Otus and Althea stare after her, stunned by her disrespectful attitude.

Pan to Apollo and Artemis.

ARTEMIS (quietly but angrily):

You fool! You gave her a clue.

APOLLO:

Come on, Sis, she'll never figure it out. And if she goes after Hephaestus... (smirks) well, that gets her off our backs, doesn't it?

ARTEMIS:

Don't underestimate Xena. Right now, everything is going well. Even my powers have increased again. Do *not* screw this up!

CUT TO

Xena is pacing around a room in the palace in Thebes. Gabrielle, seated on a chair, looks at her with alarm. Hercules is standing by the wall, his arms folded on his chest.

XENA:

I know something isn't right. I could feel it, the way they were acting. And that thing Apollo said, about Hephaestus keeping an eye on him... (shakes her head) it was almost like he was taunting me with some sort of inside joke. And then Artemis looked at him like--like he'd given something away.

GABRIELLE:

Well, why not ask Hephaestus himself, or Athena, or--

XENA:

I don't know who on Olympus I can trust right now.

Hercules looks at her suddenly, a look of realization in his face.

HERCULES:

Wait--did you say, Hephaestus is keeping an eye on him?

XENA:

Yeah, that's what Apollo said.

HERCULES:

I wonder if he could be talking about the Eye of Hephaestus.

XENA:

The what?

HERCULES:

Zeus told me about it today. He thought I might need to know about it if these wars between the gods get out of hand.

XENA:

Well, what is it?

HERCULES:

Something Hephaestus created--a ruby eye that can imprison a god in a tomb.

Xena's eyes widen.

XENA:

Did he tell you where it is?

HERCULES (thoughtfully):

You think Apollo and Artemis used it to trap Ares.

XENA:

I'm willing to bet on it.

HERCULES:

And this is important to us because--

XENA (brusquely):

Because it's important to *me*. (off his disapproving look) Hercules, just tell me where it is.

They stare intently at each other for a few moments. Then, Hercules sighs.

HERCULES:

The Petralona caves.

XENA (quietly and with feeling):

Thank you.

She turns around and walks out briskly.

HERCULES (stares after her, then looks at Gabrielle):

Are you really okay with this...thing between Xena and Ares?

Gabrielle looks away thoughtfully, then looks up at Hercules.

GABRIELLE:

I know he cares about her. (after a brief pause) I know I can trust her to do the right thing.

Hercules shrugs.

HERCULES:

I hope you're right.

CUT TO

A montage of images:

- * Xena mounts Argo in a courtyard
- * Xena rides out of the gates of Thebes
- * Xena rides over a hill, through a forest, across a river
- * The sun starts to set as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

Morning. A wide shot of Xena on horseback racing over a plain.

DISSOLVE TO

A mountain road. A caravan of merchants is moving slowly. Pan to Xena, who rides up behind the caravan. It is blocking her way.

XENA (gritting her teeth):
Oh, come *on!*

Finally, she yanks Argo's reins and directs her up the rocky slope of the mountain.

XENA:
Yah! Yah!

She gallops away along a narrow path. The camera pans over the faces of the merchants as they follow her with curious stares, then pulls away for a long shot of Xena riding away.

CUT TO

An exterior shot of the Theban royal palace. It is high noon.

CUT TO

A soldier is running through a palace hallway.

CUT TO

The soldier bursts into a room in the palace. The camera pulls back to show Actaeon sitting up in bed. Antigone, sitting on a stool by his bedside, rises and turns, alarmed.

SOLDIER (out of breath):

Sire--they're on the move again!

CUT TO

Antigone, Gabrielle and Hercules are standing in another room in the palace.

ANTIGONE:

We need to push them back now, before they start attacking the city. (resolutely) I have to lead the troops out into the field.

HERCULES (dubious):

Are you sure that's such a good idea?

GABRIELLE:

Don't even think about it. I'll do it.

HERCULES:

But wait a minute--

ANTIGONE (speaking at the same time as Hercules):

Gabrielle--

GABRIELLE (determined):

I can do it. I've fought with the Thebans before. They know me-- (to Antigone) they know I have your trust.

ANTIGONE:

It's not a question of trust. You need to take care of yourself.

GABRIELLE:

I will. (curtly) Let's go. I'll need a helmet and a sword.

Gabrielle walks briskly toward the doorway, then turns to Antigone, her expression softening.

GABRIELLE:

Take good care of Darion... (sighs) I'll go talk to him.

She leaves. Hercules looks at Antigone and shrugs, as if to say, "What can I do."

DISSOLVE TO

A long shot of the city walls and the fields in front of the city. The sky is overcast and it's starting to drizzle. The camera pans around to show the Areopagus looming over the field, and the armies of Althea and Otus on the move.

CUT TO

Xena rides up to the entrance of a cave, dismounts.

XENA (whispers):
Hold on... I'm coming.

CUT TO

Holding a torch, Xena makes her way through the cave.

CUT TO

The large cavern with the sarcophagus and the Eye of Haephestus, emitting a faint, barely visible glow.

XENA (off-camera, her voice echoing faintly):
Ares!

CUT TO

Xena walking through the cave.

CUT TO

Xena walks into the cavern with the tomb, looks around and runs up to the sarcophagus. She looks up at the Eye of Hephaestus and stands still for a long moment; thinking, then takes the chakram off her belt and holds it up.

XENA:
Can't hurt to try.

She hurls the chakram toward the Eye of Hephaestus. It strikes the eye and flies back; Xena catches it and places it on her belt. An orange light shoots out from the center of the eye and strikes the sarcophagus. It glows bright as the coffin starts to shake, and its lid moves a little. The light fades. Xena rushes toward the sarcophagus but before she can reach it, Ares pushes off the lid and sits up. He looks somewhat dazed as he gasps for breath.

ARES (whispers):
Xena--

XENA:
It's all right--I'm here.

She helps Ares out of the coffin. He draws her into his arms with an almost convulsive movement and they are locked in a long, passionate kiss. Then, Ares pulls back and grins at her.

ARES:
What took you so long?

XENA (grins back):
Traffic was a bitch. (after a brief pause) Come on, we've got to get back to Thebes.

Ares stands still, looking at her thoughtfully.

CUT TO

The battle raging in the field. It's raining. The camera zooms in on Gabrielle, wearing a helmet, fighting opponents with a sword. Hercules is also fighting nearby, using his strength to repel and knock out the attackers.

Pan to Althea in another part of the field. She is on horseback next to her lieutenant Callios.

ALTHEA:

Bring in the reserve troops! If we make one final push, we'll be close enough to the walls of Thebes to use our catapults and breach their defenses.

CALLIOS:

But my queen--we've already lost far too many men--

ALTHEA (snaps):

I want the city in our hands by nightfall!

Pan to the top of the Areopagus. There are two flashes of light, green and gold. Artemis and Apollo appear. They look at each other and smile gleefully.

Pan to the battlefield where Gabrielle is fighting. She is sparring with two men at once; as one of them staggers back, she spin-kicks him and knocks him down.

XENA (off-camera):

A-la-la-la-la-la-la--SHEE-ya!

Gabrielle whips around. Xena flips over the heads of several soldiers from Otus and Althea's armies and lands next to Gabrielle. She swings and punches out two warriors, then kicks down two more.

GABRIELLE:

Xena!

XENA (shakes her head):

Gabrielle...

GABRIELLE:

I know. I know you asked me to stay in the palace. I just couldn't sit back and rest while you were away and Actaeon was wounded. Xena, would you stop worrying about me?

She spins around to block a soldier's sword thrust and spars with him. Xena draws her sword and she and Gabrielle fight back to back.

GABRIELLE (yells as she spars with enemy warriors):

So, did you get Ares out?

XENA (likewise):

Yeah, he's fine. (after a brief pause) How are we doing?

GABRIELLE:

We're holding our own--but I'm not sure how much longer we can keep this up. They just keep coming.

There is a momentary break in the fighting and Gabrielle turns toward Xena, lowering her sword.

GABRIELLE (continues):

It's like--they're determined to take the city, no matter the cost.

Xena gives her a thoughtful look, then sweeps off her rain-soaked hair.

CUT TO

Apollo and Artemis on the hilltop, still looking on. There is a flash of blue light and Ares appears standing between them, looking rather grim. Apollo and Artemis glance at him, shocked.

APOLLO (unpleasantly surprised):

Ares.

ARES:

No getting rid of me, is there?

ARTEMIS (regaining her composure):

Oh please. We knew you'd get out--we just wanted to slow you down a bit.

APOLLO:

It doesn't matter now. By nightfall, the city will be ours.

The three gods stand side by side, remaining completely dry in spite of the rain.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle in the field.

XENA:

These men don't really want to fight here--at least most of them don't, not for the gods. If we can take out Althea and Otus, this whole thing would stop.

GABRIELLE (nods thoughtfully):

I don't think there's any other choice. (after a brief pause) Can you?

The camera pulls around to show Althea and Otus on horseback, facing each other and talking. To the left of them is a giant catapult. They are surrounded by their troops. The visibility is dimmed by the thin drizzle that is still falling.

XENA:

I'll give it a shot.

She takes the chakram off her belt and throws it.

A shot of the chakram flying toward the camera.

The chakram hits the catapult, bounces off it, and flies toward Althea and Otus. They turn their heads at the sound. Their eyes widen.

The camera pulls back to show Otus swaying and falling off his horse; Althea falls a moment later, her body landing on top of his.

Pan to Xena catching the chakram, grinning.

Pan to another part of the battlefield where Otus and Althea's men are clearly in disarray.

Pan to the three gods on the hilltop. Apollo and Artemis look furious.

ARES (sarcastic):

Oops.

An overhead shot of the field. The tide of the battle has clearly changed and Otus' and Althea's men are now fleeing.

ARES (to Apollo and Artemis):

Had enough?

ARTEMIS:

As a matter of fact--I have.

She disappears. Ares looks after her, puzzled.

CUT TO

The battlefield. Gabrielle takes off her helmet and throws her head back, catching some rainwater on her tongue.

XENA (concerned):

You okay?

GABRIELLE (turns toward her with a smile):

Yeah.

CUT TO

On the hilltop. Artemis reappears in a flash of green light. She's holding a struggling, terrified Antigone with the right hand, a squirming Darion with the left. Ares gapes at her, bewildered.

ARTEMIS:

I'll make it simple, Ares. There's another way we can increase our powers at your expense--without taking your worshippers or your temples. Give up your godhood to us--or these two die.

ARES (his face hard):

What makes you think I care?

With a snarl, Artemis grabs Darion by the throat and lifts him up so that he starts to choke, wheezing as he tries to call for help.

ARES (flinches):
Stop!

Artemis puts Darion down, grabbing him by the collar, and sneers at Ares. Darion coughs, rubbing his throat.

ARTEMIS (contemptuously):

I rest my case. You've gone soft. After all the time you spent hanging around with those mortals, living as one of them--you think their little lives actually *mean* something.

APOLLO:

And besides, your *girlfriend* might get upset with you if you let them die.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle, and Hercules out in the field.

XENA:

It's over.

Hercules' eyes are riveted to the gods on the hilltop.

HERCULES:

Something's going on there...look! (he points ahead)

Pan to Gabrielle as her eyes widen with horror.

GABRIELLE:

She's got Darion!

She runs toward the hill, across the battlefield littered with dead and wounded. Xena and Hercules take off running as well.

CUT TO

The hilltop.

ANTIGONE (trying bravely to hold back tears):

Please don't let her kill me.

ARTEMIS:

Give it up, Ares. Let's face it, you don't have what it takes to be a god anymore.

Ares lowers his head for a moment. The camera pans down to zoom in on his hand. He is holding the piece of thread the Fates gave him. He runs his thumb along the thread. A flash of light fills the screen.

DISSOLVE TO

[FLASHBACK]

From *Motherhood*:

Ares gets up, throwing off the chains of Hephaestus. Gabrielle and Eve sit up.

Athena is clutching at her wound, gaping at Ares.

ATHENA:

You healed them without my blessing? That's impossible!

ARES:

I gave up my immortality to save them.

ATHENA:

Why?

ARES:

I'm sorry--but I've got a thing for her.

Athena falls and dies. Xena rushes toward Gabrielle and Eve, hugging them and crying. Ares looks on.

Xena gets up and whips around, facing Ares with a look of shock, anguish, and tenderness on her face. Ares looks at her nervously and expectantly.

XENA:

Thank you.

Ares nods, his face lighting up with quiet joy.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Ares stares at Apollo and Artemis; his gaze glides over Darion and Antigone.

[FLASHBACK]

From Act Two.

Xena and Ares are in the temple.

XENA (puts her hand on Ares' arm):

You were mortal, Ares--and it's changed you.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Ares looks at Artemis, struggling with himself.

[FLASHBACK]

From Act Two.

ARES:

Xena, if I decide to give it all up, it's going to be *my* choice--on *my* terms.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Ares stares at Artemis.

[FLASHBACK]

From *Of Love and War Part I*

Xena (in her leather tunic) and Ares are standing by the window of a small cabin. Rain is pouring outside; it's dark and the cabin is illuminated only by flashes of lightning.

XENA:

You *have* changed.

ARES (speaks solemnly and almost sadly):

I'm still the God of War.

XENA:

That's what you do...but maybe it's not what you are. (off his puzzled look) At least, that's not all you are. (she pauses slightly) You have been human, Ares. I think that human part of you is still inside you.

Ares leans in toward her. Their lips meet in a tender kiss; then, they deepen it. Xena puts her arms around his neck, and almost simultaneously Ares puts his arms around her waist, drawing her closer.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Ares takes a deep breath, then nods.

ARES:

All right.

Apollo and Artemis exchange a gleeful look.

ARTEMIS:

Excellent.

Standing on different sides of Ares, Apollo and Artemis each raise a hand; Artemis lets go of Antigone but continues to hold on to Darion.

Ares holds up both hands with the palms outwards. A blue glow begins to radiate from his hands. Artemis' outstretched hand begins to glow a bright green, while Apollo's hand glows gold. Their eyes also begin to glow, his gold, hers green. Beams of blue light radiate from Ares' hands and connect to theirs.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Hercules racing up the hillside.

GABRIELLE (shouts):
Darion!

CUT TO

The hilltop.

The glow from Ares' palms fades. Drained completely, he staggers and drops to his knees.

Artemis and Apollo laugh triumphantly; the glow in their eyes and around their hands fades. With a casual gesture, Artemis throws Darion aside.

ARTEMIS:
We've won.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Hercules are running up the hillside.

CUT TO

The hilltop.

Ares rises to his feet.

ARES (to Apollo and Artemis):
Enjoy your reign while it lasts. It won't be long.

APOLLO:
Longer than you'll enjoy life as a mortal.

He lifts his hand, a fireball forming in it.

DARION:
No!

He tries to run toward Ares but Antigone restrains him.

APOLLO (snickers):
Look at that--the kid wants to help. (He lifts his hand, a fireball forming in it; to Ares) Say good-bye.

Close-up on Ares' face. His hair is now wet from the rain. He tenses, closing his eyes as he awaits the final blow.

There is a swishing sound and then a thud. Pan to a close-up on Apollo as he makes a choked sound and his eyes widen with shock and pain.

The camera pulls back to show Apollo stagger back. The blade of a dagger is protruding from the left side of his chest. He gasps, his hands going toward the dagger.

Pan to Xena, who stands facing him, her face grim. Gabrielle and Hercules are behind her.

Apollo falls.

ARTEMIS (screams in anguish and rage):

Nooooooooooooooooooooo!

Xena leaps forward, flipping over her head, and lands next to Apollo. With a quick move, she yanks the dagger from his chest. It's the Dagger of Helios.

In the background, we see Gabrielle rush toward Darion. She kneels next to him and hugs him tightly; it looks like she's asking him and Antigone if they are okay. Antigone gets up.

With a cry of rage, Artemis takes a step toward her but Xena holds out the dagger, holding her at bay. Xena backs away slowly to stand next to Ares. Artemis kneels next to her brother, gathering him in her arms as blood spurts from his wound.

ARTEMIS:

Brother--I'm so sorry--

Xena looks on, her expression softening to an anguished look. Ares looks away grimly. Xena squeezes his hand, still holding the dagger in her other hand.

With one last gasp, Apollo dies. Artemis rises to her feet and faces Ares and Xena, her fists clenched.

ARTEMIS:

You're going to pay for this!

There is a flash of golden light and Athena materializes between her and Xena and Ares.

ATHENA (calmly):

You are not going to harm them, Artemis.

ARTEMIS:

Who asked you to get involved?

ATHENA:

I'm here because what you're doing isn't right.

ARTEMIS:

If the rest of you acted like gods, none of this would have happened!

ATHENA:

Have you learned *nothing* from the last time, except hate and selfishness? (forcefully) Leave them alone, Artemis; you've done enough.

Artemis kneels next to Apollo's body and puts her arms around him, much like Athena cradled Ilainus' body in *Amphipolis Under Siege*. She vanishes with his body in a flash of golden light.

ATHENA (to Xena):

The Dagger of Helios. Where did you get it?

ARES:

It isn't her fault, Sis. I gave it to her. (off Athena's probing look) Look, I was hoping I wouldn't have to. But after that stunt Apollo and Artemis pulled with the Eye of Hephaestus, I knew they'd stop at nothing. I just wanted her to be able to defend herself if it came to that.

Xena gives Ares a quick, tender look. In the background, Hercules looks stunned. Gabrielle and Darion are looking on as well.

XENA (hands Athena the dagger; anguished):

Take it. (glances at Ares) No more Xena, Slayer of Gods. (to Athena) I know it will be in safe hands with you.

ATHENA:

Thank you, Xena. (She takes the dagger and puts it in her belt) I'm glad I didn't have to ask you for it. I promise you--as long as I'm around... (she pauses and looks away) she will not harm you in any way. (to Ares, with a small but warm smile) Brother...take care of yourself.

She vanishes in a burst of golden sparks.

Everyone stands silently, digesting what has just happened. The rain has tapered off. Finally, Darion speaks.

DARION (to Ares):

So when are you going to get your powers back?

ARES (after a moment's silence):

I--think I'm done with the god thing for good. (After another brief pause, he grins) Sorry, kid--no more tricks.

Darion looks disappointed.

ANTIGONE (to Ares):

I...I don't know how to thank you...

Ares nods, embarrassed.

HERCULES (to Ares, reluctantly):

That was...a good thing you did.

Ares turns to look at him.

ARES:

You know, I *really* don't have to take that from *you*.

Xena chuckles and gives Ares a somewhat exasperated, but affectionate look.

HERCULES:

Right.

DARION:

Hey, look--the sun's out!

Pan to show the clouds parting. The hilltop is flooded with sunlight.

GABRIELLE:

Great. Come on, let's get back to the palace.

Gabrielle, Darion, Antigone and Hercules start to walk down the hill. They are followed by Xena and Ares.

ARES (his voice fading as he and Xena start walking down the hillside):

I almost forgot the best part. The walking.

DISSOLVE TO

Evening. A small room in the palace. Ares is sitting in front of the fireplace staring pensively into the fire. Xena comes in.

XENA:

There you are. Dinner's about to start. Are you coming?

ARES (distracted):

Sure.

Xena takes another chair and moves it, then sits down next to Ares.

XENA (quietly):

Are you okay?

ARES:

Yeah, I guess, considering... (trails off)

XENA (gently):

Are you sorry?

ARES (looks up at her):

You know, back when you were wounded in Moesia, you told me that this mortal/immortal thing was always going to come between us. Well...not anymore.

Xena smiles, almost tearing up, and kisses him tenderly. She puts her hands on his face as their kiss deepens. When Xena pulls back from Ares, she takes his hands and holds them tenderly.

XENA (whispers):

I love you.

She kisses the tips of his fingers. He reaches up to rub her cheek and she puts her hand over his.

DISSOLVE TO

Noon. A long shot of Xena, Gabrielle, Darion, Ares and Hercules leaving the gates of Thebes. Xena and Gabrielle are leading their horses.

CUT TO

The group walks down a country road. The Areopagus is visible in the distance. Ares turns to look at it.

GABRIELLE:

I guess it ended up being a double celebration. For Antigone's and Actaeon's baby, and for Thebes' victory.

XENA:

I'm glad we could be there.

DARION (to Hercules):

So, are you gonna travel with us for a while?

ARES:

Don't give him any ideas.

Xena punches him playfully in the shoulder; he punches her back.

HERCULES:

Well, I'm supposed to be heading to Thessally to meet Iolaus...

ARES:

Guess what. I'm pretty sure we're going in the opposite direction.

HERCULES (wryly):

Really. (to Xena) How do you put up with him?

ARES (insinuating):

Oh, she puts up with me *fine*.

DARION:

Hey! Stop fighting! I'll race you both to that tree. (points to a tree in the distance) Come on!

Ares is about to say something when there is a flash of green light in front of them. Artemis materializes and stands glaring at Xena, Ares, and the others. Darion clings to Gabrielle, frightened; she puts a protective arm around him.

XENA:

What do you want?

ARTEMIS:

You killed my brother, Xena. And before that, you killed my only son. You're going to pay. (to Ares)
And so will you--traitor.

Xena and Ares stare at her, shocked. Artemis extends her hands and launches a surge of green lightning. Xena dives away from the bolt, pulling Ares with her. The bolt hits a tree behind them, setting it on fire.

Artemis raises her hands again, taking aim, and releases another bolt of lightning; but another, golden firebolt explodes from behind Xena and Ares, intercepting Artemis' bolt. The two bolts clash in a huge explosion; after a moment the light and smoke dissipates. Artemis looks furious. Xena and Ares scramble to their feet and turn to see Athena.

ARTEMIS (yells):

Athena, get out of my way!

ATHENA:

No. I told you--you aren't going to harm them.

ARTEMIS:

I won't be satisfied until they're dead.

ATHENA:

Then you won't be satisfied--as long as I'm here.

Artemis screams and sends a fireball flying toward Athena. Athena shoots a fireball back at Artemis and they start throwing lightning bolts and fireballs at each other. Argo and Klio whinny in fright.

Gabrielle pulls Darion back. Hercules takes a few steps back as well. Xena and Ares remain closest to the fight.

GABRIELLE:

Xena! Move back!

Artemis sends another surge of lightning toward Athena; once again, the lightning bolts of the two goddesses collide. The huge explosion creates a great ball of energy with a blue swirling vortex at the center. The ball explodes and then dissipates, creating waves of energy that ripple through the air. Close-ups of Gabrielle, Darion and Hercules shielding their eyes from the blinding light.

The light finally fades. Artemis disappears in a flash of green light.

GABRIELLE (to Darion):

Are you okay?

DARION (nods):

Yeah, I'm fine. (He looks around and his eyes widen) Hey, where's Ares?

Gabrielle looks around. The camera pans around. There is no one there except for Hercules, Darion, and Athena, as well as the two horses.

GABRIELLE:

Where's Xena?

There's a brief silence as everyone looks around. Athena shakes her head, mystified.

The camera pulls away for a long shot of the small group on the road.

GABRIELLE (shouts):

Xena? Ares?

HERCULES (shouts):

Xena? Ares?

There is only silence.

GABRIELLE:

What happened to them?

FADE OUT

THE END

[The future changed during the production of this motion picture.]