

SHIPPER SEASON NINE

“The Monarch”

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Logline

Xena, still trapped in a parallel universe and accompanied by the other world's Gabrielle, joins the rebels to fight the Monarch and runs into some familiar faces. As the rebellion gathers force, events escalate toward a confrontation between Xena and the Monarch, while the other world's God of War seeks to manipulate their deadly game--and the now-mortal Ares and rebel Gabrielle find themselves in the midst of it.

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TEASER

FADE IN

Previously on Xena:

[MONTAGE]

* Ares faces a soldier.

SOLDIER:

You don't serve in the Monarch's army, do you?

* Xena faces some villagers on a road.

XENA:

The Monarch? What monarch?

AN OLD WOMAN:

The one that rules everything!

* Medium close-up of Xena as the Monarch, in red dress and tiara.

GABRIELLE (voice-over, her voice filled with hatred and disgust):

Xena of Amphipolis.

* The Monarch (Conqueror Xena) is facing Ares, in an Egyptian-style room.

ARES:

It's funny--you're everything I wanted her to be... (trails off)

* The Conqueror stands over Ares.

CONQUEROR XENA (softly):

I'm the only Xena you're ever likely to see from now on.

She leans down and kisses him on the lips.

* Ares and Conqueror Xena are in bed, her head resting on his shoulder, his hand in her hair. He is drifting off to sleep.

ARES (mutters drowsily):

I love you, Xena...

Close-up on the Conqueror's face. There is a strange, startled look in her eyes.

* Conqueror Xena and Ares in the Egyptian-style room.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Tell me about her.

ARES:

Who?

CONQUEROR XENA:

The other Xena. The one in your world.

* Xena faces several of the Monarch's soldiers on a road, with crosses in the background. Four soldiers advance on her. Xena backs away, holding them at bay; then, gaining enough distance to charge, she sprints forward and leaps, somersaulting over the soldiers' heads. On landing, she slams her boots into two of the soldiers just as they start to turn around, and knocks down all four. As the first of them tries to rise, she points a sword at his neck.

XENA (dangerously suave):

You better get out of here before I start to play rough.

* Conqueror Xena, on her throne, faces an officer.

CONQUEROR XENA (off-camera):

This woman. What did she look like?

OFFICER:

You know who she is?

CONQUEROR XENA:

I have a pretty good idea.

* Xena faces villager Gabrielle outside the farmhouse in Potadeia.

XENA:

I'm from some kind of...other world.

Gabrielle stares at her in shock.

XENA:

I ended up here because a battle between two gods opened up a window between worlds--and now I have no idea how to get back.

* A village being raided by the Conqueror's troops. Houses are burning, armed men are galloping through the village, the villagers are running around in a panic. A little boy runs through the burning village.

* Xena and Gabrielle in the farm yard.

XENA:

She's my responsibility, Gabrielle. I have to stop her--maybe I'm the only one who can. I am her.

GABRIELLE:

You are nothing like her.

XENA:

Gabrielle, I was on that path once. I could have been the Monarch. Even now--there's still a piece of me that's her...and that's what's going to help me defeat her.

GABRIELLE:

If you're going--I'm not letting you leave me here. You've got to take me with you.

* In a forest, Xena is putting on her armor while Gabrielle watches admiringly.

* Xena and Gabrielle in the farm yard.

XENA:

Do you have any idea how dangerous this is?

GABRIELLE:

That's what friends do, Xena. They stand by each other when there's trouble.

Xena thinks a moment, moved; she smiles and squeezes Gabrielle's hand back.

XENA:

All right, friend.

* Xena and Gabrielle ride away through the forest on a horse, Gabrielle riding behind Xena.

[END OF MONTAGE]

Xena and Gabrielle make their way through a forest. Xena is leading her horse behind her.

GABRIELLE:

I wish I could have told Mother and Lila where I was headed.

XENA:

Gabrielle, you're joining the rebellion against...the Monarch. It's safer for both your mother and Lila--as well as us--if they don't know where you're headed.

GABRIELLE (sighs):

I know you're right. It's just that if anything were to happen to them...

Xena stops and turns to Gabrielle, placing her hands on the girl's shoulders.

XENA:

Gabrielle, are you having second thoughts? If you want to turn back, now is the time to do it. (gently) I wouldn't blame you one bit.

Gabrielle thinks a moment, then shakes her head.

GABRIELLE:

No. Something is telling me this is where I belong.

XENA:

If that's how you feel, then I'm not going to stop you. But you have to remember one thing. You can't tell *anyone* your real name or where you're from. You've got to protect your family--and yourself.

GABRIELLE:

What about you? You don't think the rebels would find it a little strange if you came in and introduced yourself as Xena of Amphipolis?

XENA (sighs):

I suppose you're right. Okay, from here on out we're Varinia and Charis from Thebes and Sparta.

GABRIELLE:

Can I be from Athens? I've always wanted to live in Athens.

XENA (chuckles):

All right. Athens it is.

GABRIELLE (sighs dreamily):

Charis of Athens.

XENA:

Now wait a minute. I was going to be Charis.

Gabrielle studies Xena a moment.

GABRIELLE:

You don't look like a Charis to me. You definitely look much more like a Varinia.

Xena scowls at her.

GABRIELLE:

I'll play you Rock, Parchment, Dagger for it.

Xena gazes thoughtfully at Gabrielle a moment, then laughs in spite of herself.

XENA:

You win.

GABRIELLE:

Just like that?

XENA:

Just like that.

GABRIELLE:

I never though you'd be so...easy, Xena.

XENA:

It's Varinia from now on. And let's just say you remind me of someone.

Gabrielle (quietly):

You mean your Gabrielle?

Xena's head suddenly snaps around. She has heard something.

XENA:

Gabrielle...

GABRIELLE:

It's Charis, remember?

XENA:

Whatever your name is, follow my lead.

Xena clasps her hands above her head in the Amazon symbol for peace and Gabrielle imitates her.

Six rebels emerge from the underbrush. They are obviously not Amazons. They eye Xena and Gabrielle warily. A large, muscular man in his thirties approaches slowly, his sword trained on Xena.

XENA:

Just take it easy. We're friends.

CRISPIN:

You'll forgive me if I don't take your word for it.

Xena glares at him.

XENA:

You could move that sword yourself...

CRISPIN (laughs):

Or?

XENA:

Or I could move it for you. But then you wouldn't have any fingers left.

CRISPIN:

Big talk for someone that entered our lands with some kid.

Velasca emerges from the bushes, a cool, smug smile on her face.

VELASCA:

First of all, Crispin, it's not *your* land--it's Amazon land. Secondly, they obviously know the Amazon symbol for peace, which is more than I can say for you. Put down your sword.

Crispin reluctantly does. Velasca looks over Xena and Gabrielle.

VELASCA:

You have business on these lands?

XENA:

We do. I'm Varinia and this is my friend Charis. We've come to fight the Monarch.

Velasca looks them up and down appraisingly.

VELASCA:

Varinia, huh? Where are you from?

XENA:

Varinia of Thebes.

VELASCA:

I've never heard of you. You'd think a warrior as formidable as you seem to be would have quite a reputation.

XENA:

I've spent many years in Gaul and Britannia. I came back to defeat the Monarch.

Velasca thinks a moment, debating whether or not to take them in.

VELASCA:

Ephiny.

An Amazon steps forward, lifting her mask. Her look and tone are respectful though cool towards Velasca.

EPHINY:

Yes, my Queen?

VELASCA:

Find them a hut. (to Xena and Gabrielle.) Nothing fancy, just a bedroll and a fire pit. You'll have to collect your own wood.

XENA:

Sounds fine.

Ephiny gestures with her hand to lead them off toward their hut when Velasca grabs Ephiny by the arm and pulls her back to hiss in her ear.

VELASCA:

And make sure you watch them.

CUT TO

It is twilight; Xena is busy setting up her hut. Velasca enters and Xena turns around at her footsteps.

VELASCA:

I trust your quarters are adequate?

XENA:

All the comforts of home.

VELASCA:

Where's your friend?

XENA:

Gab- (catches herself) Charis is out collecting firewood.

VELASCA:

Some of us are wondering what that girl is doing here. She doesn't seem to have anything to offer.

XENA:

Don't sell her short. Charis will surprise you. Besides, there's more than one way to win a war.

VELASCA:

True. We've had to develop some rather unconventional tactics ourselves.

XENA:

You mean these hit-and-run suicide raids? (Xena frowns.) They're getting you nowhere and you're getting a lot of people killed.

VOICE (off-camera):

My thoughts exactly.

Xena and Velasca turn to see Callisto standing in the doorway, clad in warrior gear. She has a scar on her face. Xena looks at her in shock as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

On the previous scene. Xena stands silently, looking at Callisto in shock.

CALLISTO:

So good to hear someone around here talk sense for a change.

Velasca and Callisto exchange an unfriendly look.

VELASCA (coldly):

Callisto, if you don't approve of the way I do things, feel free to leave and start your own army. Until then, remember that I'm in command and we do things *my* way.

Callisto purses her lips and smiles mockingly.

CALLISTO:

And how much longer will you have anyone to command if you continue to insist on sending your people out on these suicide runs?

During this exchange, Xena is able to regain her composure and mask her shock. She clears her throat.

XENA:

She's right. At this rate, you'll run out of troops long before the Monarch does. You need to hit her big and hard. We need to take and hold a city. That way, we can ensure our supply lines when we make a move on Corinth.

VELASCA (coldly):

And which city do you plan on taking?

Xena unrolls a map on the table and points.

XENA:

There. We take Klios. We seize their arsenal, their food supplies and we'll probably be able to recruit some of the liberated people to fight with us.

Callisto nods in agreement.

CALLISTO:

Not to mention secure a line of retreat if we move on Corinth.

VELASCA:

Amazons don't retreat!

XENA:

A good commander is prepared for anything.

VELASCA (bristles at this):

Regardless, this is insane! There's at least a regiment stationed at Klios. How are we supposed to defeat a force that size?

XENA:

I've thought of that too. (she indicates the map) This village, about 10 leagues west of Klios-- Laotia. We make a feint for it--fool the Monarch's troops into thinking that's our target. They'll move on Laotia. We get the villagers out--they shouldn't be too hard to convince, Laotia was where the Monarch had one of her trademark mass executions a couple of years back. We lay a firetrap for the Monarch's soldiers there. And then we hit in Klios.

CALLISTO (riveted):

We'll destroy them.

XENA (frowns):

Pretty much, yeah.

CALLISTO:

It's a brilliant plan. (She glances at Velasca in mock innocence.) And one that I'm sure you would have eventually come up with on your own, Velasca.

Velasca is clearly furious but trying to contain her anger.

VELASCA:

I'll propose this to my advisors and see what they have to say!

She turns and marches out.

CALLISTO (with mock sympathy):

It's lonely at the top.

CUT TO

A skeleton hanging from a cross, against a bright blue sky, the bones gleaming in the sun.

ARES (off-camera):

Friend of yours?

CONQUEROR XENA (off-camera):

Take a guess.

The camera pulls back to show the Conqueror and Ares on horseback side by side, at the foot of the cross. Ares is wearing a brown leather vest and pants.

ARES (looking up at the cross):

All by himself on the tallest hill in Rome. Must've been someone really special. (after a moment's pause) Caesar?

CONQUEROR XENA (a hard edge in her voice):

Got it in one.

ARES (stares at the skeleton, then shifts his gaze to the Conqueror):

It's lonely at the top, huh.

The Conqueror chuckles bitterly, then looks away. The camera pulls back to show that they are on a hill, with a panorama of Rome in front of them. Even from a distance, we can see that some of the buildings lie in ruins.

CONQUEROR XENA (bitterly):

After all those years--the bastard escaped my vengeance.

She turns to Ares, who gives her a silent "You've got to be kidding" look.

CONQUEROR XENA (continues, venomously):

All the satisfaction I got was seeing his carcass hauled up on the cross.

A close-up on her face, hard and filled with simmering rage.

[FLASHBACK]

The Conqueror, in Warlord Xena-style battle gear, is battling some Roman soldiers in the hallway of a palace, her own warriors behind her. She kills the Roman behind her with a backward thrust of her sword while simultaneously kicking the sword out of a centurion's hand. She kicks up his sword, catches it and then stabs him with the two swords.

CONQUEROR XENA (yells):

Break down the doors!

CUT TO

Close-up on a battering ram slamming into a heavy double door. Another slam, and the doors groan and begin to give way.

CUT TO

Inside the room. Caesar and Brutus stand side by side, waiting grimly. Caesar is dressed in the blue gold-rimmed toga he wore in "When in Rome..." and is wearing the golden wreath.

The doors break down and fall. Conqueror Xena, sword in hand, stands in the doorway, a fierce and gleeful grin on her face.

CAESAR (quietly, to Brutus):

Do it.

BRUTUS:

Good-bye, my friend.

He embraces Caesar and, in a quick motion, stabs him with a dagger. Close-up on Caesar's face, his mouth open in a grimace of pain; then pan to Conqueror Xena as her expression changes from glee to rage and disbelief.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Nooooooooo!

She springs forward like a wild animal, almost instantly reaching Caesar--only to see him fall dead at her feet.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

ARES (somewhat taken aback):

Brutus.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Yeah. (Her emotions now under control, she manages to sound almost casual as she motions toward another hill with a row of crosses on its top) He's over there with Pompey and--others. (looks probingly at Ares) Why?

ARES:

Funny thing, fate. In--my world, Caesar died at Brutus' hand. Except it wasn't exactly a favor.

The Conqueror looks at him curiously; then, a small, vicious smile appears on her face.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Do tell.

ARES:

Stabbed to death in the Senate--just as he was about to proclaim himself Emperor. I think Xena had something to do with setting it up. (He looks away and adds somberly, almost as if to himself) It was the same day he crucified her.

He looks like he immediately regrets what he said.

CONQUEROR XENA:

The same day he did *what?* (Off his silence) Oh, come on. This one I want to hear. He crucified her *again?* And--she survived?

ARES (reluctantly):

Not exactly.

The Conqueror frowns at him, puzzled.

ARES:

She was brought back to life--she and Gabrielle both. Look, it's a long story and storytelling isn't really my thing, so-- (with a slight sarcastic edge) you'll have to excuse me.

CONQUEROR XENA (curious):

So he crucified them together. (She looks at him probingly) You know, I'll bet anything that Caesar used her little friend as bait and your *Xena* walked right into his trap. I'm right, aren't I? (Off his grim look) Yes, of course I am. That's what friends do... (pauses) they get you killed.

She pauses briefly, staring away. There is a wistful look on her face before her expression hardens again. She turns to Ares, a nasty gleam in her eye.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Like they say. Crucify me once, shame on you. Crucify me twice... *Well*. Tell me, is she really such a fool? Or does she, perhaps--enjoy it?

Ares scowls at her; then, he shapes his features into a wry smile.

ARES:

Tell me... (he takes the Conqueror's hand and kisses it in a suave gesture) ...does the wit come naturally, or did *your* Ares teach you that?

The Conqueror's smile fades; for a moment she looks hurt, then sarcastic.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Sounds like your *Xena* taught you a thing or two--like being a sap.

They fall into a tense, resentful silence, staring at the panorama of Rome at their feet. Finally, the Conqueror speaks.

CONQUEROR XENA (glances at Ares):

Well? What do you think?

ARES (shrugs):

So you conquered Rome. I knew that.

CONQUEROR XENA (pensively):

Five years ago. (chuckles) Not that I expect you to be impressed by next week's celebrations.

ARES (wryly):

Well, I'm sure your God of War will be suitably impressed. (Pauses) Anyway, thanks for the tour.

CONQUEROR XENA:

It's a change of scenery from Corinth.

ARES:

Oh yeah. (He glances in the direction of the hill where the other crosses stand) Landscape with crucifixions.

The Conqueror stares at him thoughtfully, then nudges her horse with her heels and starts to ride downward. Ares sighs and glances up at Caesar's cross, then follows her.

DISSOLVE TO

Night. A bedroom lit only by the moon with additional faint light emanating from an off-screen lamp. Ares and the Conqueror are next to each other, half-reclining on pillows. His arms are folded on his chest and he looks rather uneasy. The Conqueror stares ahead, looking disappointed and angry.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Do I sicken you that much?

Ares glances at her silently and says nothing.

CONQUEROR XENA (sharply):

Just try and pretend you're with your love. Lucky for you--you won't even have to close your eyes.

ARES (sighs):

Stop it. (after a pause) I'm just-- (trails off)

CONQUEROR XENA (mockingly):

--not in the mood?

The Conqueror sits up, hugging her knees under the blanket, her profile sharp in the moonlight.

CONQUEROR XENA:

I'm everything you ever wanted her to be, isn't that what you said?

Ares stares at her silently.

CONQUEROR XENA:

But you still like your *good* Xena more? (after a brief pause) Why? Because she was the one woman who said no to you? Get 'em hooked by playing hard to get--oldest trick in the book.

Ares looks at her silently, obviously struck by her words.

CONQUEROR XENA (continues):

Or--maybe because she spends her life running away from herself? Pretending to be somebody else?

ARES:

And you're not.

CONQUEROR XENA (snaps):

What are you talking about?

Ares sits up next to her and touches her face.

ARES (quietly):

You're so scared of being soft--

For a moment the Conqueror's look is wide-eyed, tender and scared. Then, her face hardens suddenly, as if a door has slammed shut.

CONQUEROR XENA (venomously):

Soft? You should talk.

Ares lowers his hand, scowling at her silently.

CONQUEROR XENA:

There's got to be a spare bedroom somewhere in this palace. Find it.

Ares gives her a look of disappointment and unease, then purses his lips and changes his expression to a defiant half-grin.

ARES:

Thought you'd never ask.

He starts to get up. Close-up on his face with his back to the Conqueror; his expression is now wary and somewhat nervous.

CONQUEROR XENA (off-camera, behind his back; her voice soft and vulnerable):

No--stay.

Ares' expression changes; he is clearly affected by her soft tone. He turns around to see a hurt, tender look on the Conqueror's face. Then, she turns away.

Ares sighs and sits down on the bed next to her.

CONQUEROR XENA:

I just wish--

She trails off, staring ahead. Then, she leans against Ares' shoulder. After a moment's hesitation Ares sighs and puts his arm around her.

DISSOLVE TO

Some time later. Close-up on the Conqueror's face. She is asleep, her look peaceful. The camera pulls back to show Ares in bed next to her, propped up on his elbow. He looks at her face, then gently brushes away a strand of hair.

[FLASHBACK]

From "Showdown":

Xena and Ares in the temple. Ares is holding the medallion from "What Dreams May Come."

XENA:

You called it a token of love when you gave it to me. I want us to go back to that.

CUT TO

The now-mortal Ares and Xena sitting by the fireplace in the palace. They kiss.

XENA:

I love you.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Ares lies back on the pillow, staring somberly ahead.

CUT TO

Gabrielle draws water from the communal well. She lifts the bucket with a groan and starts back to her hut, her gait slow and awkward from the weight of the bucket. Velasca storms out of the Amazon Council hut, followed by Ephiny. She runs into Gabrielle and the girl stumbles, the contents of the bucket spilling out onto Velasca.

VELASCA:

Watch where you're going!

She storms off and Ephiny comes over the Gabrielle, taking the now empty bucket from her.

EPHINY:

Are you all right?

GABRIELLE (frowns):

Fine. (indicating Velasca) Not exactly known for her people skills, is she?

Ephiny frowns and moves over to the well, drawing more water.

EPHINY:

The council just voted against her in support of your friend's plan.

GABRIELLE:

Oh yeah--the Klios plan...Varinia explained it to me. Most of it didn't make sense but she's trying to teach me strategy. (she smiles proudly) She's amazing, isn't she? If I could be even half as good as her... (she notes Ephiny's pensive look.) You don't like her much, do you? Velasca?

EPHINY:

What are you talking about? She's the Queen.

GABRIELLE:

And the Monarch is the ruler of the known world. It doesn't mean you have to like it. Is she a good leader?

EPHINY (shrugs):

She's--rash. Velasca lets her emotions rule her. If it were up to her, we'd be at war with the Centaurs now.

GABRIELLE:

The centaurs? You're enemies?

EPHINY (nods):

Originally, our dispute was over hunting lands. Once the Monarch came to power, she gave those

lands to them. The Centaur nation falls under her protection and yet they're exempt from taxation *and* conscription into her army. They're able to live their lives in peace.

GABRIELLE:

Why would the Monarch do that?

EPHINY:

No one knows. There have been rumors that their leader Kaleipus did her some kindness in exchange for a pact. (she frowns.) Any friend of the Monarch's is no friend of mine--especially the Centaurs. Most Amazons feel the same way--but we also know that to go to war with them would be suicide. We'd be fighting a two-front war against the Monarch *and* the Centaurs. Luckily the council sided with me.

GABRIELLE:

So Velasca resents that?

EPHINY (nods):

And today just added insult to injury.

Gabrielle frowns and shakes her head.

GABRIELLE:

How does someone like that become Queen?

EPHINY:

We were ruled by Melosa. As a member of the royal line it was within Velasca's rights to challenge her for the throne. (she raises her hand tiredly.) Melosa was defeated and Velasca became our Queen. And I've always believed... (she shakes her head.) Never mind.

VELASCA:

Ephiny!

Ephiny and Gabrielle look up. Velasca stands at the far side of the well, glaring at them.

VELASCA:

Since you have so much time to stand around gossiping then perhaps you should take the patrol tonight. (She indicates Gabrielle disdainfully) And bring your friend. If nothing else, she'll be useful for body warmth in the forest at night.

EPHINY:

You leave her out of this. It's me you have a problem with.

VELASCA:

You *and* her meddling friend. You're all the same in my eyes. (menacingly) So either you and she take the watch or I'll have you thrown into prison for insubordination. Or worse.

EPHINY:

Careful who you threaten, Velasca. I'll be tougher to beat than Melosa. I know you don't fight fair.

Velasca draws her sword from the sheath at her back with a snarl.

VELASCA:

You'd better be ready to back that up with a sword, Ephiny!

Velasca swings at Ephiny, who draws her sword as well. The blades meet. Gabrielle steps back, frightened.

Velasca and Ephiny parry each other's blows for a few moments, evenly matched. Then Velasca screams and delivers a spinning kick to Ephiny's midsection. Ephiny staggers back but regains her footing just as Velasca attempts to stab her in the side. Ephiny flips backwards, out of the way of the blade, and lands next to a line of trees along the edge of the camp.

Velasca charges her and Ephiny dodges a few of Velasca's swings, ducking under and around the blade. She delivers a kick to Velasca's side. She is fazed long enough for Ephiny to slice her sword across Velasca's thigh. Velasca looks down at the bleeding cut and glances up at Ephiny.

VELASCA:

I always thought you were useless as a warrior. Maybe I was wrong.

She seems to sink down; then, she grabs a handful of dirt and throws it in Ephiny's face. Taking advantage of Ephiny's momentary confusion and dimmed eyesight, she kicks Ephiny in the shins, spins around and knocks the sword out of her hand. Ephiny punches Velasca in the face but when she tries to punch her again, Velasca catches her hand and pushes her back. As Ephiny tries to reclaim her sword, Velasca delivers a ferocious kick to her chest, punches her in the stomach and face a few times, and then kicks her again, knocking her down.

Ephiny coughs, out of breath; then looks up, pride and determination mixed with fear showing in her eyes. Velasca comes up to her and plants a foot on her midriff, pinning her to the ground.

VELASCA (with a gleeful laugh):

Or maybe I was right.

Grinning, she twirls her sword and raises it above her head--but before she can deliver the final blow, Gabrielle throws herself over Ephiny.

GABRIELLE (looks up at Velasca):

You'll have to kill us both.

VELASCA (viciously):

Gladly.

She starts to bring down her sword.

A distant whizzing sound is heard, growing louder until Xena's chakram comes into view, headed straight for Velasca's sword. It hits the sword and slices off the tip, and ricochets off a couple of trees before heading back--straight toward Xena who stands behind Velasca with an outstretched arm. She catches the chakram with a swift motion, hooks it to her side and draws her sword.

Velasca turns around to see Xena and glares at her. Behind her, Gabrielle and Ephiny scramble to their feet and move back. Gabrielle can be seen asking Ephiny something, obviously checking if she's all right.

VELASCA:

You don't belong here, *Varinia*.

XENA (coldly):

Let's settle this. Now.

VELASCA (snarls):

Well, since you asked so nicely...

Velasca turns around and picks up Ephiny's sword. Xena charges forward; their blades clash. They spar briefly before Xena kicks Velasca in the face, then in her leg. Velasca staggers back momentarily but quickly recovers. Xena spins around and swings her sword toward Velasca, but she moves out of the way so that the blade glides over her head. She swings at Xena, who ducks the blade and blocks it with her own. They hold their pose for a moment, swords locked, both snarling, before Xena slides her sword across Velasca's, spins around and pushes Velasca back with a hard kick to the stomach.

XENA:

A-la-la-la-la--CHEE-ya!

She does a backward flip over Velasca and lands on a wooden platform about twelve feet off the ground. The boards momentarily give under her weight and she steadies herself, glaring down at Velasca. Ephiny and Gabrielle look on.

Velasca snarls and jumps up, then leaps onto the platform to face Xena.

VELASCA:

Taking the fight to new heights, *Varinia*?

She screeches and swings toward Xena, who jumps over the blade and gives Velasca a kick that sends her toward the other end of the platform where she lands flat on her back. Xena whirls around as Velasca regains her footing and charges again. Their blades clash a few times; then Xena manages to kick at Velasca's leg, knocking her down. This time Velasca rolls off the platform and lands on the ground with a thud, causing dirt to fly. Xena flips off of the platform and lands in front of Velasca. Velasca scrambles to her feet, her lip bleeding, blood running down her face from a cut on her forehead.

VELASCA:

Don't think that can stop me!

She charges at Xena again but now her movements are much less coordinated--she is clearly beginning to tire and lose focus in her rage. When she charges forward, sword pointed directly at Xena, Xena swings her sword once more, side-swiping Velasca's sword, and runs her sword through her.

Velasca stops in shock as Xena yanks the sword out. She staggers back, her hands trying to stem the flow of blood from her chest, and looks up, blood running from her lip. She tries to speak but crumples to the ground, dead. Xena stares down at her, breathing hard.

Gabrielle and Ephiny walk up to her.

XENA (ruefully):

I'm sorry. She left me no choice.

EPHINY:

Don't be. That's one queen the Amazon Nation isn't going to miss.

Xena looks at her.

GABRIELLE (breathlessly):

That was...that...Xe--Varinia, you saved our lives!

EPHINY (to Gabrielle):

And you risked yours for mine. I won't forget that.

XENA:

This makes you the new queen, Ephiny.

EPHINY (nods grimly):

Come on, we've got an attack to plan.

CUT TO

Xena, Callisto, and a group of Amazons and rebels ride out of the camp and onto a hilly landscape beyond.

CUT TO

A long shot of Xena, Callisto, and the rebels and Amazons riding toward a small village in a valley beside a large hill.

CUT TO

A soldier in the Monarch's army rushes into a small hut where two other soldiers are playing dice. The other soldiers look up.

SOLDIER #1 (panting):

We got trouble. At least forty rebels coming this way.

SOLDIER #2 (jumps to his feet):

We'd better get out of here!

CUT TO

Three of the Monarch's soldiers ride away from the village.

CROSS-FADE TO

Xena and the rebels enter the village as the rebels gather around them.

CUT TO

An exterior view of a fortress-like building in a large town.

CUT TO

One of the Monarch's soldiers stands before a military commander in a feathered helmet.

SOLDIER:

Sir--the rebels have taken Laotia!

COMMANDER (rises to his feet, furious):

Then we move on them and crush them.

CUT TO

A regiment of the Monarch's army rides out of the town gates.

CROSS-FADE TO

A long shot of Laotia. The peasants are streaming out of the village, carrying their possessions with them.

CROSS-FADE TO

Xena and Callisto stand at the edge of the village, looking out as the Monarch's regiment approaches. Xena and Callisto exchange a knowing look.

CROSS-FADE TO

The Monarch's regiment rides into the small village, which seems deserted. The camera pans over the faces of the soldiers as they look around, bewildered.

A soldier falls suddenly, struck down by an arrow. Other arrows fly from behind some of the buildings.

OFFICER (raises his sword):

Attack!

As the soldiers charge, the rebels (on horseback) emerge from behind buildings and gallop toward the end of the village. The soldiers give chase.

CUT TO

Callisto walks through another part of the village with a lit torch in hand and a gleeful grin on her face. Pan down to show that the ground is soaked in oil.

CUT TO

The rebels ride out of the village.

CUT TO

Callisto throws down the torch. Flames rise from the ground, engulfing a building.

A quick montage of five other rebels throwing torches on the ground or into buildings.

The camera pulls back to show the village engulfed in flames. The screams of the Monarch's men can be heard.

CROSS-FADE TO

Xena, Callisto, the rebels, and the Amazons ride away from the village.

CROSS-FADE TO

Xena and the others ride through the gates of Klios.

CROSS-FADE TO

A company of the Monarch's soldiers, led by the commander who was seen in the earlier scene, are in the square in front of the fortress. The rebels attack.

A quick montage:

- * Several soldiers aim spears at the rebels
- * Xena's chakram flies through the air, shattering the spears
- * With a fierce yell, Xena fights several soldiers, swinging her sword and delivering ferocious kicks
- * A young Amazon fights the Monarch's soldiers using a staff
- * Callisto fights the Monarch's soldiers; she flips in the air and knocks down two men as she lands, then stabs a soldier behind her with a backward thrust
- * A wide shot of the square with the rebels and Amazons fighting the Monarch's men
- * Xena, a fierce look on her face, slices a soldier's throat with her chakram
- * Callisto screams ferociously as she spars with a soldier
- * Xena is attacked by several soldiers. She leaps up and does a split kick, knocking out two soldiers and slamming them into the others. As they try to regroup, she lands powerful kicks that knock down two more men, and uses her sword to block three swords at once
- * several of the Monarch's soldiers flee on horseback

CUT TO

A wide shot of the square. Many of the Monarch's soldiers lie dead; some, who have surrendered, are herded back into the garrison building. The rebels stand in the square.

Xena lifts her sword and lets out a victory cry. She is joined by Callisto, the Amazons, and the rebels, who lift their swords, spears, and staffs in the air and cheers as we:

ACT TWO

FADE IN

The rebel camp. Xena is sitting on a tree stump cleaning her sword.

Callisto approaches. Xena looks up.

CALLISTO:

That was--brilliant.

XENA (curtly):

Thanks. You did your part well.

CALLISTO:

You were the brain, Varinia. I have some ideas of my own, though.

Xena stops cleaning her sword, gives Callisto a wary look and gets up.

XENA:

Go on.

CALLISTO (mocking):

You want me to spill the beans just like that?

XENA (impatiently):

Callisto, I'm not in the mood for games.

CALLISTO (pouts):

Spoilsport. All right, then. (she lowers her voice conspiratorially) Imagine if we had a valuable hostage.

XENA (her face hard):

What are you talking about?

Callisto grins playfully and beckons to Xena with her finger, inviting her to lean closer.

XENA:

Come on--spit it out.

CALLISTO (sighs):

Okay, okay. (mysteriously) Rumor has it, the Monarch's got a kid stashed away somewhere. If we-

XENA (brusquely, her face impassive):

Forget it. We're not using anyone's child as a weapon.

CALLISTO (offended):

Well, that's very high-minded of you, Varinia. You think *she* would have such scruples?

XENA:

Exactly. If we're no different from her, then what are we fighting for?

CALLISTO:

But --

XENA:

I said, forget it. We're not stooping to that. And besides-- (zoom in for a close-up on Xena) we're not wasting time on a wild goose chase looking for some child who may not even exist.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena in medium close-up, staring ahead at something as she stands in the woods.

Pan to the scene Xena is watching. A large meadow on the edge of a village. Some children, Centaur and human, are playing together, laughing and kicking around a ball.

Pan back to Xena, watching them. The look on her face is impassive, clearly concealing deep emotion.

Suddenly, she becomes alert, hearing something behind her. She whips around to see a boy of about 15 who has just jumped down from a tree. Close-up on the boy; then on Xena. There is a look of recognition, tenderness, and anguish in her face.

XENA (whispers almost inaudibly):

Solan...

SOLAN:

Who are *you*? (looks her over warily) You don't look like an Amazon.

Close-up on Xena. Her face reflects a struggle. Finally, she speaks.

XENA:

I'm not.

SOLAN (warily, resting his hand on the hilt of the sword on his side):

What are you doing here?

XENA:

Just passing by. I didn't mean any harm. (nods toward the sword) Aren't you a little young to be carrying that?

SOLAN (indignant):

I'm almost sixteen! (off her skeptical look) All right, fifteen. I'm not a real warrior yet, but I can use it if I have to. (He grips the hilt of the sword) This was my father's.

Xena nods, holding back tears.

XENA:

I'm sorry. I'll be leaving now.

She walks past Solan and heads into the woods.

SOLAN (off-camera, behind her):

Wait! I know who you are!

Xena stops abruptly and turns.

SOLAN (comes up to her, looking excited):

You're that rebel, aren't you? Varinia? (with awe) People say you can leap ten feet into the air. And that your weapon (he gestures toward the chakram on her belt) can cut through the strongest armor and shatter swords--

XENA (with a wan smile):

Don't believe everything you hear.

SOLAN (with resolve):

Take me with you. *Please!*

XENA (shocked):

What?

SOLAN (passionately):

I want to join the rebels. My uncle won't let me--he thinks I'm still a kid. But I'm not! I'm a real good hunter--I killed a *huge* bear last month. And --

XENA (interrupts):

Fighting in a war isn't like killing a bear, Solan. (sighs) You have no idea --

SOLAN (interrupts):

I want to fight the Monarch. (angrily) My father Borias tried to stop her, years ago--and she killed him.

Pan to Xena, who seems about to say something, then remains silent.

SOLAN (continues):

I want to carry on his legacy.

XENA:

And get yourself killed, too? (she puts her hand on his shoulder) Your uncle is right to protect you. Go back to him. (after a brief pause) I promise I'll--avenge your father.

Solan looks disappointed for a moment. Then, he nods and smiles at Xena.

SOLAN:

Good luck.

Xena nods back, squeezing his shoulder. After a moment she turns and begins to walk away. Now that Solan cannot see her, her face crumbles and tears well in her eyes.

The camera pulls back to show Solan standing behind her, watching her walk away. Zoom in on Solan. Something is obviously bothering him.

SOLAN:

Varinia--hold on!

Quick pan to Xena, in medium close-up, as she stops in her tracks and tries to regain control. She does not turn around.

XENA (in a level voice):

What is it?

SOLAN:

How did you know my name's Solan?

For a moment Xena looks anguished and helpless. Her lips quiver.

A slow-motion shot of Xena turning around.

Facing Solan, Xena now looks composed again.

XENA (manages to sound casual):

You told me yourself, just before.

SOLAN (skeptical):

I did?

XENA:

Sure you did. How else would I know?

SOLAN (nods, unsure):

I guess... Bye, Varinia.

XENA (quietly):

Good-bye, Solan.

CUT TO

Xena is walking through the woods alone, her expression grim. Suddenly she stops in her tracks. She has a strange look on her face, as if sensing a presence. She looks around.

There is a flash of blue. Ares, God of War, materializes standing by a tree, leaning casually on its trunk.

For a moment they stare silently at each other.

XENA (coldly):

You.

The God of War comes closer to her and stops, eyeing her with obvious curiosity.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

You know who I am.

XENA (snorts):

Ares, God of War. You don't exactly keep a low profile.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

Then you're one-up on me. I have no idea who *you* are--except that you look and fight like--Xena. (admiringly) That was quite a stunt you pulled at Klisos.

XENA:

Thanks.

She starts walking again, only to find Ares standing in her path.

XENA:

What do you want?

ARES GOD OF WAR:

You still haven't told me who you are.

XENA (chuckles):

Her evil twin.

Ares, God of War bursts into a hearty laugh.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

I think I'm going to like you.

XENA:

Yeah? Well, I don't plan to reciprocate.

She turns and starts to walk away again.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

You haven't even heard my offer yet.

Xena stops, her back to the camera. Quick pan to show her face in medium close-up. She looks wary.

XENA (her eyes narrowing):

What offer?

ARES GOD OF WAR:

You've done a pretty good job turning that ragtag bunch of Amazons and peasants into an army. Imagine--

He is suddenly right behind her, his arms around her waist, his mouth at her ear.

ARES GOD OF WAR (continues):

--how much better you could do with my help.

Xena shivers and closes her eyes, leaning back against him a little; then, she opens her eyes and shakes herself slightly to snap out of it.

XENA (brusquely):

Why would you want to help me? You're *her* patron god.

In an instant Ares is in front of her again, his eyes locked on hers.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

She has ruled much of the known world for five years. Oh, she's great, but she's gotten a little--lazy. She doesn't have that--fire in her eyes anymore. (gazes into Xena's eyes intensely) You do.

Xena is clearly affected by his proximity but is trying not to show it.

XENA:

So that's your game. You want to pit the two of us against each other and watch the action. Well, forget it--I'm not playing.

She walks away with a resolute stride.

Ares, God of War watches her and shakes his head, laughing indulgently.

ARES GOD OF WAR (shouts after her, still chuckling):

Call me when you change your mind!

He vanishes in a burst of blue light. Xena slows down and glances back, looking thoughtful; then turns and walks on.

CUT TO

Night. The rebel camp. Gabrielle stands in front of campfire, a crowd of people sitting on the other side of the fire. The audience erupts in enthusiastic applause and calls of encouragement--it is obvious that she has just finished a story.

VOICES IN THE CROWD:

Another, Charis! Another!

Gabrielle blushes and smiles.

WOMAN IN THE CROWD:

Oh, come on! Just one more!

Gabrielle looks to the back of the crowd, catching Xena's eye.

GABRIELLE:

Thanks, but I don't think I could tell one more story tonight. I need some sleep. (the crowd groans in disappointment and she holds up her hands.) Hey! Tomorrow is another night!

The people begin to rise and disperses until it's just her and Xena left. Xena approaches , carrying a mug of ale.

XENA:

You look like you could use this.

GABRIELLE:

Thanks! (exhaling loudly, she drops onto the log before the fire.) I haven't done that in ages!

XENA:

How did it feel?

Gabrielle thinks a moment, as if assessing herself, she smiles and nods.

GABRIELLE:

It felt good. (she looks up at Xena and grasps her hand.) Sit with me awhile.

Xena does and Gabrielle inches closer to her with a soft laugh.

GABRIELLE:

It's cold tonight!

Xena nods and holds her hands out towards the fire.

XENA:

The fire feels good.

Both women stare silently into the fire for a long moment.

XENA:

I was so proud of you tonight, Gabrielle. You have such an amazing gift. The stories are like a piece of your soul that you share with the audience.

GABRIELLE (gasps):

How could you know that that's *exactly* how it feels to me?

XENA (in a hushed tone):

I know everything about you.

Gabrielle looks at Xena a moment then clears her throat and looks away.

GABRIELLE:

It's thanks to you, you know. After Joxer, and then Perdicus and my father ... I thought the stories were dead inside me. But then I met you and I feel...

Xena smiles lovingly and brushes the hair from Gabrielle's eyes.

GABRIELLE:

I wish I could just... (Xena watches her, waiting patiently for her to complete her thought. Finally, Gabrielle takes a sip of ale and sighs.) Thank you, Xena. For everything.

Xena smiles and lets out a small laugh.

XENA:

Right back at you.

Gabrielle squeezes Xena's hand companionably.

GABRIELLE:

I'm tired. I think I'm going to turn in.

XENA:

I'll be right behind you.

Gabrielle turns toward the hut. Xena watches her a moment, then:

XENA:

Gabrielle?

Gabrielle stops and turns back.

GABRIELLE:

Yes?

XENA:

Gabrielle, I want you to know that I... (Xena frowns as if in thought and Gabrielle watches her expectantly. Xena smiles softly.) I'm glad you're here with me.

GABRIELLE (smiles):

I'm glad you found me. Good night, Xena.

XENA:

Good night.

Gabrielle enters the hut and Xena hunches closer to the fire, blowing into her hands.

CUT TO

Conqueror Xena and Ares sit at a table laden with dishes and drinks. Two servants, one male and one female, stand silently in the background.

CONQUEROR XENA:

You can't sit with me at the games tomorrow--I'll be up in the imperial box... (she pauses for a moment, as if searching for words)

ARES (glances at her wryly, sipping his wine):

With *your* Ares?

CONQUEROR XENA (calmly):

Probably. The games will be a sacrifice in his honor. Don't worry, you'll get a good seat.

ARES:

Oh, I'm not--

He's interrupted as the doors of the dining room fly open and a guard comes in, looking perturbed.

GUARD:

Conqueror--a man with an urgent message!

A man in an officer's leathers staggers past him into the room and almost falls. He looks dirty and bedraggled; there are blood-stained bandages around his head and his arm.

OFFICER (panting):

Conqueror--

He nearly collapses and the guard has to hold him up.

The Conqueror rises swiftly to her feet.

CONQUEROR XENA (brusquely):

Give this man some wine!

One of the servants takes a goblet of wine to the officer, who drinks avidly.

OFFICER (still panting):

I've ridden for days...

CONQUEROR XENA (impatiently):

What news?

OFFICER:

The rebellion...they've--they've destroyed our regiment--and taken Klios!

CONQUEROR XENA (shocked and furious):

What!

OFFICER:

There was this--warrior--an amazing woman, in black leather--

Pan to Ares, a quick flash of recognition and hope in his face; then to the Conqueror, whose face shows a flash of fury and fear.

OFFICER (continues, off-camera):

--by the head of Ares--she couldn't have looked more like you if you had been twin sisters! She fought with the strength of a dozen men--and--

Pan to Ares, as the hopeful look in his face becomes one of incredulous joy.

CONQUEROR XENA (coldly):

Leave us. (to the guard) Make sure this man gets food and fresh bandages--and some rest. (to the officer) You'll give me a full report later.

The man nods and salutes her feebly, then leaves, leaning on the guard.

CONQUEROR XENA (to the two servants):

Wait outside.

The servants bow and leave wordlessly. The Conqueror turns to face Ares. He stands up.

ARES:

She's here. (off the Conqueror's silence) You've known for a while, haven't you?

CONQUEROR XENA (contemptuously):

Since the morning after you spent your first night in *my* bed.

Ares purses his lips, staring at her, then nods silently.

CONQUEROR XENA (sarcastic):

Do I sense your devotion--flagging?

Ares stares at her thoughtfully, then finally speaks.

ARES:

Just out of curiosity--if I did decide to look her up... (wryly) you know, just for old times' sake?

CONQUEROR XENA:

Well. (She raises a hand and strokes his face) Far be it from me to stand in the way of true love. However, if a close confidant of mine were to go off to join the rebellion...well, I couldn't very well allow *that* to happen, could I? (off his grim look) Nothing personal.

Ares stares at her intently.

CROSS-FADE TO

The sound of clashing swords and cheering crowds gradually fades in as we see a Roman amphitheater. Two gladiators are fighting. The camera pans up to the imperial box where the Monarch sits in red dress and Tiara. Ares, God of War stands behind her, a hand on her shoulder.

Pan down to the arena, where one of the gladiators runs the other through, then roughly yanks out his sword. The defeated gladiator sinks to his knees, then falls dead. The audience erupts in a mix of cheers and cries of disappointment.

Pan up to the imperial box for a medium close-up of the Conqueror, who is applauding. She glances up at the God of War.

CONQUEROR XENA:

A fitting sacrifice, my lord.

ARES GOD OF WAR (shrugs with a condescending smile):

Not bad, my dear. But hardly a replacement for--a *real* battle.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Oh, I'll show you something *real*.

She rises and raises her arms, commanding silence from the crowd. As the noise of the arena dies down, the camera pulls back for a wide shot of the arena. We see the dead body being removed. The gladiator who won the match remains standing, leaning on his sword.

Quick pan to a medium close-up of Ares sitting in the audience, wearing the same brown leathers he did in the scene at the cross. He is leaning back, thoughtfully watching the Conqueror and the God of War.

Zoom in on the imperial box. The arena is now quiet.

CONQUEROR XENA:

People of Rome! For today's final event--a special challenge. Behold--Arnskell, a ferocious barbarian from the North!

She points to the gladiator in the arena. The camera zooms in on him. He is a tall, blond, bearded, fierce-looking man.

CONQUEROR XENA:

This man has never had a bad day in the arena--though he considers it a bad day if he doesn't get to kill his opponent. (She looks around the amphitheater.) Is anyone here brave enough to challenge him? If you fight him, and win--I will grant any request you make. (She smiles coldly) Well--within reason. The best horse from the palace stables. Wealth from the treasury of Rome. Mercy for a condemned criminal. If you're a slave--freedom.

Close-up on Ares, who stares at the Conqueror intently. The camera pulls back for a wide shot of the arena and the imperial box, from Ares' point of view.

CONQUEROR XENA:

But remember--a fight with Arnskell will probably to be a fight to the death!

Zoom in on the Conqueror and Ares, God of War, standing next to her.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Now--will anyone step up?

Pan to Ares as he stands up.

ARES:

I will.

Pan to the Conqueror for a close-up as she stares at him, her expression a mix of shock, anger and anxiety.

There are murmurs in the spectator rows as he walks down into the arena.

Down in the arena, Ares stops and looks up at the Conqueror.

ARES:

I'll fight.

CONQUEROR XENA (after a brief pause):

You're prepared to fight to the death. *Your* death.

ARES:

Come now, Conqueror. Have a little faith.

The murmurs in the audience grow louder, with people exchanging puzzled looks.

Ares, God of War glances curiously at the Conqueror.

ARES GOD OF WAR (wryly):

You're--concerned for this man's well-being? (after a pause) I take it he's a--friend of yours?

CONQUEROR XENA (reluctantly):

Yes, it's--Aristos of Miletos. He--he used to serve in my army. He's at my court in Corinth now.

ARES GOD OF WAR (curious):

Really. (he gives her a sarcastic and somewhat suspicious glance) I wonder in what position. (He pauses, looking down at Ares.) I'm sure you've noticed a--resemblance?

The Conqueror turns and smiles at the God of War, having regained self-possession.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Yes--quite remarkable, isn't it? I *have* wondered if you were--related.

ARES GOD OF WAR (dryly):

Hmm. Fascinating. Well, then--give the man a sword and let's see what he's made of!

The Conqueror gestures to one of the attendants behind her and sits down, her face a mask of composure.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Very well, then. Good luck.

An attendant comes out into the arena and hands Ares a sword. He swings it a few times, then steps up and raises the sword.

ARES (raises his voice, a touch of sarcasm in his tone):

To the glory of the Conqueror--and the God of War!

ARNSKELL (raises his bloodied sword):

All hail!

The Conqueror looks expectantly around the arena. After a moment's silence, the audience erupts in a chorus of "All hail!"

After the cries die down, the Conqueror glances at Ares, God of War.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Will you--do the honors, my lord?

ARES GOD OF WAR (waves his hand lazily):

Proceed.

Ares and Arnskell both turn around simultaneously, their swords clashing hard.

They get in a few good moves: Arnskell swings above Ares' head and Ares meets his sword; he swings lower and to the side and Ares meets his sword, again. Arnskell swings toward the right and Ares dodges out of the way, meeting Arnskell's sword with an underhand motion. Arnskell snarls and charges with powerful force, slamming into Ares, pushing him back. Ares shakes himself off, regaining balance.

Arnskell attacks again. Ares narrowly escapes the blade as he jumps out of the way. During a moment's pause, he looks at his left shoulder and realizes the blade had nicked his skin and there is blood running down his arm. He attempts to counterattack Arnskell's next blow but when their swords meet, the strength behind the impact nearly knocks Ares off his feet. Arnskell punches him in the face and he staggers back.

The Conqueror tenses up, clutching the armrests of her seat as she leans forward slightly. Ares, God of War eyes her with curiosity and suspicion.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

Looks like the suspense is killing you.

CONQUEROR XENA (with a somewhat forced laugh):

Well--you have to admit it's an exciting fight.

With a bloody nose, Ares shakes himself off, ready to attack again. He twirls his sword with bravado and grins. He meets his opponent's sword and kicks him, once in the side, once in the left leg. This time it's Arnskell who staggers back. Ares charges forward, swinging toward Arnskell, hitting his sword so hard that it throws Arnskell off-balance.

ARES GOD OF WAR (glances curiously at the Conqueror):

He's quite a fighter, your Aristos. Did you--teach him some of the moves you learned from me?

CONQUEROR XENA:

Yes, I did. He's a natural learner.

ARES GOD OF WAR (folds his arms on his chest as he watches):

Ah. Well, that explains it.

Regaining the advantage again, Arnskell kicks the sword from Ares' hand and kicks him in the midsection, sending him sprawling on his back. There are gasps in the audience.

Pan to the Conqueror, who struggles to remain impassive. Ares, God of War looks on curiously.

Arnskell stands over Ares, his feet planted wide on both sides of Ares' torso, and raises his sword, preparing to run him through.

Pan up to the Conqueror, whose face flinches slightly. The audience falls silent.

Pan back to the arena. With a quick move, Ares manages to slide between his opponent's legs. Then, he flips over and slams his boots into Arnskell's back, knocking him down. The crowd erupts in cheers as Ares jumps to his feet.

Pan to the Conqueror, who exhales slightly.

Ares dives to grab his sword. Then, just as Arnskell gets to his feet and charges at him, he thrusts his sword forward. Close-up on Arnskell's face in a grimace of shock and pain. Blood bubbles at his lips.

Pull back to see Ares yank his sword out of the man's gut. Medium close-up on Ares. His face is harsh and determined.

Ares steps back as Arnskell falls dead. After a moment the crowd erupts in cheers.

Ares stands still for a moment, panting. Then he walks over to the end of the arena where the imperial box is, and raises his sword in a salute.

ARES:

Conqueror and Monarch of the Empire--great God of War--I dedicate this victory to you!

After a moment of silence, Ares, God of War claps his hand slowly.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

Well fought. Step up and claim your reward.

The camera pulls back to show Ares walking up the aisle in the spectator rows. He stops a few rows below the imperial box, facing the Conqueror and the God of War.

ARES GOD OF WAR (contemplates him curiously, stroking his beard):

Remarkable. (To the Conqueror) Why do I have a feeling that there is something you're not telling me about this man?

CONQUEROR XENA (laughs casually):

There's nothing to tell.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

A fighter like that should be one of your generals.

CONQUEROR XENA:

I don't think he's got the right--attitude. (raises her voice) All right, then.

She pauses, staring at Ares, then finally speaks again.

CONQUEROR XENA:

What do you want?

ARES:

A good horse--and permission to travel back to Greece--immediately.

The Conqueror stares at him heavily.

ARES:

Your pledge, Conqueror. And a parchment with your seal--safe passage to travel in the empire with no trouble from your soldiers--and to carry a sword. (He motions with the sword) I'll just keep this one, if you don't mind.

A brief pause. Ares, God of War, glances expectantly at the Conqueror.

CONQUEROR XENA:

With Ares, God of War as my witness...

She pauses and glances up at Ares, God of War; then, back at mortal Ares.

CONQUEROR XENA (continues):

...I grant your request, and pledge that you shall have safe passage back to Greece.

She motions to a guard behind her, who approaches.

CONQUEROR XENA:

A parchment and a quill. (motions toward Ares, brusquely) And get him a horse.

Ares gives her a look of barely concealed triumph. Then, as he shifts his gaze, his eyes meet those of the God of War, and he fidgets slightly.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

Leaving so soon?

ARES (coldly, concealing his nervousness):

I'm in a hurry.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

Too bad. Well, I'm sure I'll have another chance to get to know you. (looks him over) Are you sure we're not family?

ARES (jovially):

Not unless dear old Mom was more adventurous than I ever knew.

Ares, God of War bursts out laughing.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

Family or not--I like your style.

Ares bows his head slightly in acknowledgment.

DISSOLVE TO

Ares is riding down a road, the hills and buildings of Rome behind him, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

A village square. A large group of people are gathered in a circle. Gabrielle is standing on a makeshift platform, looking out over the crowd, in the middle of an impassioned speech.

GABRIELLE:

How much longer are we going to let this go on? How many more innocents will be slaughtered by the Monarch's soldiers? How many will be forced into her army? How many parents will have to watch their children die and how many children will grow up without parents?

The people begin to talk among themselves, many nodding in obvious agreement. Xena stands, among the villagers, wearing a blue dress and a wrap, watching Gabrielle with a small but proud smile.

GABRIELLE:

I say, we rise up and stop her once and for all. We don't deserve to be treated this way. Together, we can build a new world in which we are the masters of our lives, not her!

The crowd erupts in applause. Gabrielle smiles, pleased with herself. She glances down at Xena and they share a smile.

Callisto, also in simple peasant dress, rushes up behind Xena.

CALLISTO:

Varinia! (Xena turns around) Trouble. There's a patrol of the Monarch's soldiers headed this way.

Xena looks concerned; Callisto glances up at Gabrielle, who is basking in the villagers' applause.

CALLISTO:

I knew it was a bad idea for her to go around making flowery speeches to the peasants. (shakes head) We need action, not words.

XENA:

What good is action if the people don't have any hope? (nods toward Gabrielle who is smiling at the villagers) *She* gives them hope.

Xena beckons to Gabrielle, who comes down from the platform, makes her way through the crowd and walks up to Xena.

GABRIELLE:

Something wrong?

XENA:

We've got to go.

Xena turns to the people.

XENA:

Everyone! The Monarch's soldiers are on their way.

The villagers exchange frightened looks.

XENA:

I want you all to get out of here. Now.

Just as the villagers start drifting away, a dozen soldiers ride into the square. They are led by a captain, a big man with a feathered helmet.

CAPTAIN (sarcastic):

Hope we're not interrupting anything important. (pause) What's going on?

Gabrielle steps forward boldly. Xena looks concerned but doesn't have a chance to hold her back.

GABRIELLE (smiles brightly):

Excuse me, sir. I'm a traveling bard and I was just here entertaining the people with some stories, that's all. No harm done.

CAPTAIN:

A traveling bard, huh? We've been hearing stories of some girl bard going around the countryside inciting people against the Monarch. That wouldn't be you, would it?

GABRIELLE (laughs):

Really, sir. Do I look like a rebel?

CAPTAIN:

Well, if you're not a rebel--then you have nothing to fear if we bring you in for questioning. (Gestures toward her, to the other soldiers) Take her.

Two soldiers dismount and walk toward Gabrielle. Zoom on Xena, who starts to reach under her wrap. Callisto puts a hand on her arm, restraining her.

GABRIELLE (backs away, holding up her hands):

Look--this is a mistake...

CAPTAIN (addresses the villagers):

Now--if we find out you pathetic yokels have been harboring a rebel here--you know what's going to happen. So if she was inciting rebellion--you better come clean *right now*.

Pan to the crowd. The villagers exchange nervous looks. Finally, an old man speaks up.

OLD MAN:

She was inciting rebellion! (points to Xena and Callisto) And those two are in cahoots with her.

CAPTAIN:

Get them!

Most of the soldiers dismount--except for two in the very back--and advance, drawing their swords. The villagers back away, Gabrielle with them, while Xena and Callisto stand in front, readying

themselves for the fight. Callisto reaches down and grabs two daggers out of her boots while Xena throws off her wrap to reveal the chakram hanging at her hip. She grabs it and tosses it toward the men. It splits in two, each half whizzing in a different direction. The men see the flying object coming toward their heads and duck out of the way as the chakram half whizzes over them.

One soldier is not quick enough; the blade slices across his side and he falls down, dead. Another soldier jumps out of the way as the blade slices across his arm, cutting a deep gash. He falls to the ground in pain.

Callisto grins and attacks the soldiers with her daggers, using them to repel their swords (like "our world" Gabrielle with her sais). She manages to disarm one of the soldiers, then drives the dagger into his chest. He clutches the wound as he dies.

The whizzing chakram halves continues to make their rounds. The captain eyes the two blades in awe, following them until both halves join in mid-air and fly back toward Xena. She catches the chakram, placing it back at her side. The captain shakes his head, impressed in spite of himself.

The fight continues as Xena and Callisto repel the soldiers, their dresses now ripped and tattered. Xena divides the chakram into halves and uses them in hand-to-hand combat. Xena flips over a soldier and kicks him in the back, knocking him to the ground while Callisto spins and kicks another man in the side, knocking him over.

Xena uses half of the chakram to repel the swing of the sword from one of the soldiers that attacks her. She pushes him back and snarls.

Off-screen, Gabrielle's scream is heard. Xena whips around.

Pan to show two of the soldiers with their hands on Gabrielle, dragging her away as she struggles. Xena's eyes widen in fear. The momentary pause is all one of the soldiers needs as he charges up behind Xena and swings his sword. She senses someone behind her and looks back, but it is too late--his sword slices across the front side of her leg, leaving a large, bleeding gash.

In pain, Xena stumbles and sinks on one knee. The soldier attempts another deadly blow but Xena is ready for him this time. Holding the chakram blade, she turns toward him and rams it straight into his chest. He gasps and falls dead.

Xena looks toward Gabrielle, who is still struggling. Gritting her teeth, she stands and charges forward, attacking the soldiers who are hauling Gabrielle away. She is weakened by her wound, though, and the soldiers are able to land a few kicks and punches before one of them hits her in the head with a club. She is knocked to the ground, unconscious. Gabrielle screams.

Pan to Callisto, just as she kills the last of the soldiers she was fighting. She looks around to see Xena lying on the ground, one of the soldiers about to pick her up. With a fierce cry, she rushes to Xena's side and kicks the soldier in the head, knocking him down. The other soldiers step back. Callisto grabs Xena and throws her across the back of a brown horse standing by the side of a house. She mounts the horse in a jump and rides off.

CAPTAIN:

After her!

Two soldiers take off after Callisto. They are gaining on her when she turns and throws two daggers with a fierce cry.

Zoom on the daggers flying through the air, toward the camera.

Both of the soldiers fall dead as Callisto gallops away.

Pan back to the captain who punches his knee in frustration. He looks around to see only four soldiers left standing. Two of them are holding a struggling Gabrielle. They haul her toward the captain's horse and throw her down.

CAPTAIN:

Well, it's not a total loss. (grins) We got us a bard.

Gabrielle looks up at him, fear and hatred in her eyes.

CUT TO

A close-up on Xena's face. She is unconscious, her face bashed up and streaked with blood.

Some water is splashed in her face and a hand lightly slaps her cheek. She stirs and takes a deep breath. A flask of water is brought to her mouth. She swallows some, then coughs and splutters. She opens her eyes and raises herself up on her elbow.

The camera pulls back to show Callisto squatting down next to her. They are in a small clearing by a brook, surrounded by forest.

Xena brings a hand to her head and rubs the side of her head, wincing. She looks up and her eyes widen in shock for a moment as she sees Callisto; that changes to a look of recognition as she remembers where she is.

XENA:

Where's Gab- (quickly catches herself) Where's Charis?

Callisto gives her a curious look, then speaks after a moment's pause.

CALLISTO:

Bad news, I'm afraid. The soldiers got her.

Xena sits up abruptly.

XENA:

What? (she grabs Callisto's shoulder) And you let them?

CALLISTO (insulted):

Hey! For your information, I saved your *life* back there.

XENA (with disgust):

By sacrificing Charis.

CALLISTO (passionately):

You're a great warrior! With you, we can win this. We can beat that monster--win our freedom back--avenge the lives she's destroyed. That little girl means *nothing!*

With sudden force, Xena grabs her by the throat.

CALLISTO (gasping and wheezing):
What--? Are you mad?

XENA (through clenched teeth):
That *little girl* is my friend, Callisto. You don't get that, do you?

She lets go of Callisto and rises to her feet, still a little wobbly.

XENA:
We're going back to that village and we're going to find out what happened to her.

CALLISTO:
But--

XENA (fixes her with a glare):
I'm going. With or without you.

Callisto raises to her feet, rubbing her neck, and gives Xena an unfriendly stare.

DISSOLVE TO

The soldiers riding. One of them has Gabrielle in the saddle in front of him, hands tied behind her back.

CROSS-FADE TO

Ares riding fast along a road.

CROSS-FADE TO

A group of peasants in the village square, looking fearful.

MIDDLE-AGED VILLAGE WOMAN (in a near-whisper):
They said they were taking her to Corinth!

Pan to Xena, standing next to Callisto in front of the villagers.

XENA:
Then that's where I'm going.

CALLISTO (exasperated):
It's useless! You can't do anything for her! You'll only get yourself killed!

XENA (gives her a grim stare):
Well, that's *my* business, isn't it.

As she speaks, an image of her galloping fast along a road fades in over the close-up of her face.

CROSS-FADE TO

Gabrielle is riding on a horse in front of a soldier, surrounded by other soldiers.

CROSS-FADE TO

Ares is riding fast along a road.

CUT TO

A medium close-up of Ares on horseback, standing still.

EPHINY (off-camera):
She's not here.

Pan to Ephiny, who stands facing Ares.

EPHINY (continues):
She went to Corinth after her friend, Charis.

ARES (taken aback):
Charis?

FEMALE VOICE (off-camera, sarcastically):
Yeah, her little *bard* friend.

Startled by the familiar voice, Ares turns and sees Callisto who has just come up. He does a double take.

CALLISTO:

A little girl dumb enough to get herself captured by the Monarch's soldiers. (Sighs) Too bad-- Varinia was a great fighter to have on our side. (Off Ares' stare, smiles coldly) What's the matter? Never seen a girl with a scar before?

ARES (shakes his head):
No, you just--looked familiar. (after a brief pause) Thanks.

He turns his horse around and rides off. Ephiny and Callisto stand watching him ride away, then exchange a puzzled glance and a shrug.

DISSOLVE TO

Ares gallops fast along the road.

DISSOLVE TO

Day. Xena is riding through a forest. She is visibly weak, swaying a little in the saddle.

There is a loud noise in the trees as some animal runs by. Startled, Xena's horse rears up and she is thrown off.

DISSOLVE TO

A short time later. Xena sits up with a groan. She notices that the bandage on her leg is soaked in fresh blood. Wincing, she removes the bandage.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena is stitching up the gash in her leg.

DISSOLVE TO

The Monarch's soldiers riding with Gabrielle.

CUT TO

An exterior view of the Monarch's palace in Corinth.

CUT TO

The Conqueror is seated on her throne, in the same throne room we saw before. The captain who captured Gabrielle stands in front of her.

CONQUEROR XENA (pensively):

So the girl is a bard. And one of the other two was a woman who looks like me and has a metal disc for a weapon. (businesslike) She was hurt?

CAPTAIN:

Wounded and knocked unconscious, Conqueror. I wouldn't be surprised if she was dead by now.

CONQUEROR XENA:

I would. (pauses) Where is the girl now?

CUT TO

Gabrielle lies unconscious on a narrow pallet in a dank cell. It is dimly illuminated by one flickering candle. Slowly she rouses and a voice comes out of the darkness.

VOICE:

Gabrielle?

Gabrielle picks her head up groggily, squinting around the cell.

VOICE:

Good, you're not dead. I had wondered.

GABRIELLE:

Xena?

Conqueror Xena lifts the candle close to her face. For a moment joy flickers in Gabrielle's face--only to give way to a look of recognition and horror.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Boo.

Gabrielle scrambles to sit up.

CONQUEROR XENA:

You know, I've executed people for addressing me in so casual a manner. (she looks Gabrielle up and down.) But in your case I'll make an exception.

GABRIELLE:

What do you want with me?

CONQUEROR XENA (chuckles):

Want? Maybe I need a new pet now that my old one has gone off on a moonlight flit.

Gabrielle looks away and brings her knees up to her chest, hugging them.

CONQUEROR XENA:

But enough time for that later. Right now we've got business to attend to.

GABRIELLE:

You might as well kill me. I'm not telling you anything.

CONQUEROR XENA (sneering):

Of course not. You would never betray your precious Xena, would you?

Gabrielle glares sullenly and Conqueror Xena leans closer.

CONQUEROR XENA:

The trouble is, she's not *your* Xena. She doesn't belong in this world.

GABRIELLE (shocked):

How do you know--?

CONQUEROR XENA:

I have my sources. (pauses) I know all about her. How she used to be like me in her world and then turned around and became a do-gooder. How, in *that world*, you're her best friend. (pauses) Well, not *you*--her own Gabrielle. You're nothing but a cheap understudy to her.

GABRIELLE:

That's not true!

CONQUEROR XENA:

Face it, Gabrielle. In this world, *I* am your Xena. (Conqueror Xena smirks and leans even closer.) Scary, huh?

GABRIELLE:

You're not Xena! You're nothing like her. Xena is good and gentle and kind--

CONQUEROR XENA:

We're the same, Gabrielle. She has the same darkness inside her. She's just better at hiding it.

GABRIELLE:

Then maybe you're not so bad at hiding things yourself. If you and Xena have the same darkness,

then maybe you have the same goodness too. Maybe you can find that somewhere inside you. Maybe then you could have the same kind of love and devotion Xena has.

Conqueror Xena is moved by Gabrielle's words despite herself. Her lip quivers once, barely noticeable.

CONQUEROR XENA:

You believe that?

Gabrielle sighs heavily.

GABRIELLE:

I look at you and there's so much sadness and misery. You've conquered the world--and the only way you know to hold onto it is by ruthlessness. You've paid the price for that with your soul. You killed my father, you killed my betrothed. You killed--a dear friend of mine. And only the gods know how many other orphans and widows you've made. And now you're asking if there's any redemption for you? You think *I* could give you that? (she thinks a moment.) I'm sorry, my forgiveness just doesn't extend that far.

Conqueror Xena's teeth flash white as she snarls, almost animal-like.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Good. At least I won't have any pangs of conscience when I put you on the cross tomorrow. Good-bye, Gabrielle.

Conqueror Xena rises swiftly and marches out of the cell.

CUT TO

The palace square. The Conqueror is sitting on a richly decorated seat on a platform in the center of the square. The people are assembled around. There is a cross resting on wooden supports.

Gabrielle is dragged out by guards, amidst murmurs from the crowd.

The Conqueror rises and raises a hand, waiting for the murmurs to die down.

CONQUEROR XENA:

People of Corinth! Under my rule, you have enjoyed five years of peace and order. Now, that order is threatened by a rebellion that seduces people with talk of *freedom* (she spits out the word) but will only bring you chaos and ruin. One of these rebels is now before you.

As she speaks, the camera pans away from her and into the crowd, moving over the grim and fearful faces of the people. Then it moves further back into the crowd--and focuses on Ares, making his way through to the front as he looks around cautiously. Meanwhile, Conqueror Xena continues to speak.

CONQUEROR XENA (off-camera):

She's been offered a chance to change her ways and be a loyal subject. But she would rather die. Now, she is about to get her wish.

Pan back to the Conqueror, who motions to the guards.

The guards drag Gabrielle toward the cross as Gabrielle struggles.

GABRIELLE (shouts to the crowd):

All I did was raise my voice to speak for you! How many of you have loved ones who are dead--or rotting in a dungeon--because of *her*? Have you no dignity--no rights? Have you forgotten that you're people, not animals to be led to the slaughter?

Pan to Ares in the crowd as he rolls his eyes. The crowd listens in fearful silence.

CONQUEROR XENA (mockingly):

I guess they don't hear your voice. (to the guards) Put her on the cross.

The guards start tying Gabrielle to the cross as she continues to struggle.

ARES (off-camera):

Wait.

A murmur rolls over the crowd. The guards pause, stunned. Gabrielle lifts her head, gasping, not sure what's going on. Pan to the Conqueror, who looks shocked, then furious.

Pan to Ares at the front of the crowd. He steps forward and walks up to the platform as the Conqueror gapes at him. Recovering somewhat from the shock, she turns to the guards who stand by the platform and is about to motion to them; then, she obviously reconsiders and stares at him expectantly.

ARES (stops in front of the platform):

Conqueror--a word.

CONQUEROR XENA (coldly):

Step up.

Ares climbs up on the platform and approaches her as the camera moves in on them.

CONQUEROR XENA (in a near-hiss):

You. What do you think you're--

ARES (in a low but emphatic voice):

Don't do this.

CONQUEROR XENA:

What are you talking about?

ARES:

The girl. You (at a loss for words) --you can't do this.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Watch me.

ARES:

Look--you don't get it. She's--

CONQUEROR XENA (mockingly):

She's what? She's my little soulmate in another world? That bard you were telling me about? I know. (harshly) Well, this is *my* world--and in it, she's my enemy. So keep out of this.

ARES:

She's just a kid. You really think she'll be a threat to you if you let her live?

CONQUEROR XENA:

Yes, I do. Those pretty speeches of hers are more dangerous than *ten* armies.

ARES:

Listen to me. If you kill her--

CONQUEROR XENA:

--I'll lose my soul? It's a little too late for me to worry about that.

She turns to the guards and raises her voice.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Proceed with the execution!

Pan to Gabrielle as she soldiers finish tying her to the cross. Her face is filled with terror but she struggles not to cry.

The cross is hoisted up, with Gabrielle facing the platform.

GABRIELLE (shouts to the Conqueror):

You can kill me now--but your time is running out!

The Conqueror looks at her almost regretfully, then shrugs and turns to the guards.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Break her legs.

She turns to Ares and raises a hand to caress his face.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Oh, and--welcome home, my sweet.

Gabrielle's piercing scream is heard off-camera.

SMASH CUT TO

Night. Medium close-up of Gabrielle hanging from the cross. She is unconscious. The camera pulls back to show three sentinels under her cross, playing dice. The area is lit by two torches on poles.

DISSOLVE TO

A street in Corinth. A tall shadow falls on a wall.

DISSOLVE TO

The Conqueror's bedroom. The Conqueror is her bed asleep, wearing a red kimono. She tosses and stirs, her sleep obviously troubled.

Pan to Ares, who is sitting in a chair by her bedside. He is still in his brown leathers. He looks at the sleeping Conqueror and sighs deeply, then rises very cautiously and moves soundlessly toward the door.

CUT TO

The place square. The sentinels are still playing dice. A noise draws their attention; they look up and then rise to their feet.

SENTINEL #1:

Who goes there?

Ares comes into the light. He is carrying a jug of wine.

SENTINEL #2 (chuckles):

Hey, I know *you*! The Monarch's boy-toy. They were sayin' you ran off.

ARES (nonchalantly):

Do I look crazy? (He holds out the wine jug.) Here--compliments of the Conqueror.

SENTINEL #3:

Now you're talkin'!

He takes the jug and drinks from it, then passes it on to Sentinel #2. Taking advantage of their distraction, Ares grabs Sentinel #1 and #3 by the collars and slams their heads into each other, knocking them out, then grabs the jug from Sentinel #2 before he can recover from the surprise and smashes it over his head. Sentinel #2 collapses in a heap.

ARES (to the fallen sentinel, dusting off his hands):

Don't *ever* call me a boy-toy.

He walks over to the cross and looks up at Gabrielle.

ARES (winces):

Don't know if there's much I can do for *you*...

He pokes cautiously at her leg. Gabrielle stirs and moans.

ARES:

Well, at least you're alive...

He goes over and takes the sword off one of the sentinels. Going back to the cross, he cuts the rope around Gabrielle's ankles and then the ones on her wrists. She collapses into his arms.

ARES:

Easy...

He looks at her face in the torchlight. She looks very pale, her face swollen; there is blood on her lips and her breath is coming out in short shallow spurts. Ares shakes his head.

ARES (mutters):

All right--let's get you out of here...

He starts walking when a steely female voice behind him stops him in his tracks.

VOICE:

Hold it right there.

Ares tenses and whips around--

only to find himself facing Xena. She is wearing a gray cloak, the hood around her shoulders. She is holding the chakram.

Close-up on Ares as he stares at her in shock; then, pan to Xena, who looks incredulously from Ares to the unconscious Gabrielle in his arms, as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

A repeat of the conclusion of the last act. Ares whips around with the unconscious Gabrielle in his arms and finds himself facing Xena. They stand staring at each other in shock. Ares is the first to break the silence.

ARES:

Xena. You're here.

Xena stares uncomprehendingly.

ARES:

Xena, it's me. That--portal Artemis and Athena created with their firebolts--it brought me here, too. I didn't know you were here. When I--

XENA (shakes her head, still in shock):

You're here. You--

She trails off and then, as if snapping out of her trance, dashes toward Ares.

XENA:

Gabrielle!

She takes Gabrielle from his arms.

ARES:

Careful--her legs--

With a short sob, Xena lays Gabrielle down on the ground and kneels over her.

XENA:

Gabrielle. Gabrielle--

Ares stands over her, looking down at her in helpless anguish.

Xena takes out a flask from under her cloak and sprinkles some water on Gabrielle's face. Gabrielle stirs and moans a little. With difficulty, she lifts her swollen eyelids.

GABRIELLE (in a hoarse, broken whisper):

Xena...you're--you're the real--Xena--aren't y... (the word ends in a gasp and she trails off)

XENA (tries to smile through tears):

Yes, it's me. Don't talk. We'll get you out of here.

GABRIELLE (makes a great effort to speak):

Xena...no...I know I haven't got (gasps for breath) much time--

XENA (shakes her head):

No.

GABRIELLE (whispers):

I just wanted to say--that I love--

XENA (cradling Gabrielle in her arms):

I love you too--shh--

GABRIELLE:

I know I'm not *your* Gabrielle--but--

Xena strokes Gabrielle's hair and kisses her forehead, choking with tears.

XENA:

No, Gabrielle, don't--

GABRIELLE:

--these weeks that I've known you-- (she breaks into a hacking cough but manages to speak again) have--

As Xena kneels over Gabrielle, weeping, one of the sentinels sits up in the background, then starts to rise to his feet. Ares turns and knocks him out again with a punch, and he falls on top of his two still-unconscious comrades.

GABRIELLE (her voice fading):

--and I want to--thank you--

Her voice breaks off. She gasps for air, her gasps turning to a rattling sound as she convulses in Xena's arms, and then after a moment lies completely still.

XENA:

Gabrielle. (She pats Gabrielle's cheek.) Gabrielle.

ARES:

She's dead.

XENA:

No. *No!*

Reminiscent of "Is There a Doctor in the House," she starts to pound on Gabrielle's chest, then bends down trying to blow air into her mouth.

XENA:

Come on, Gabrielle, wake up. Come on--

Ares kneels down next to her and gently puts his hands on her arms.

ARES:

Xena. Come on, we have to get out of here. If you want to take her body--

XENA (savagely):

No! (She turns around to face Ares) She's not dead! (she breaks into sobs) You let them kill her! Why didn't you do something--why didn't you--you--

ARES (gently but with urgency):

Xena, I did all I could. I--

Not listening, Xena turns to Gabrielle again and starts to shake her.

XENA (hysterical):

She's not dead! She's not dead! She's--

Ares puts his hand over Xena's mouth.

ARES:

Shh--you'll bring the whole palace guard down here! (humoring her) All right. All right. She's not dead. We're going to get her out of here and then we'll--get her patched up. Just come with me, okay?

He tries to help Xena to her feet but she pulls away from him and continues sobbing over Gabrielle's body.

ARES (urgently):

Xena--*please!*

FEMALE VOICE (off-camera):

Touching!

Ares whips around, the sentinel's sword in his hand. The camera pulls back to show the Conqueror standing in front of him. She is wearing her red dress but without tiara or veil, and carrying a sword.

CONQUEROR XENA (to Ares):

So *this* is your true love. (mockingly) Who doesn't even notice you exist.

ARES (raises his sword, his face hard):

Shut up.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Oh, please. (nods toward his sword) Do you really think you stand a chance against *me*?

As she speaks, the camera turns toward Xena. She is no longer crying. The look of grief on her face changes to one of intense revulsion and hatred.

CONQUEROR XENA (continues, off-camera):

A has-been war god? Don't make me laugh.

Xena stands up and turns to face the Conqueror.

CONQUEROR XENA:

The *good Xena*, I presume.

XENA (savagely):

You killed Gabrielle.

CONQUEROR XENA (her face hardening):

There's no place for her in this world, *Xena*. In *my* world. Just like there's no place in it for you. (She sighs) Strange, meeting you like this. I'm what you were meant to be, you know. Or maybe you're what I was meant to be, or-- (shrugs) who can sort these things out?

Xena throws off her cloak--she is still wearing the now-tattered blue dress--and draws the sword at her side.

XENA (spits out):

I'm not in the mood to talk philosophy.

CONQUEROR XENA (laughs harshly):

No, you're in the mood to kill me. The question is, *can* you?

XENA:

Try me.

CONQUEROR XENA:

My captain said you were wounded. I imagine you heal quickly. (chuckles) But even so...you'd be fighting *me*.

ARES:

You'll have to go through me first.

CONQUEROR XENA (her voice softening):

Ares. I'm giving you another chance.

ARES:

What?

CONQUEROR XENA:

Come back to me.

Xena shoots Ares a sharp look.

The Conqueror continues, a sudden passionate, almost pleading note in her voice.

CONQUEROR XENA:

She doesn't care about you, don't you see? Think about everything I'm offering. My love--my empire--

ARES:

You're crazy.

CONQUEROR XENA:

You lost your godhood because of her--did she take your manhood too?

XENA:

Stand back, Ares. This is between her and me.

She and the Conqueror approach each other slowly, swords raised in a combat stance.

There is a "whoosh" and a flare of blue light. Ares, God of War, materializes slouching against the foot of the cross. Xena, Ares, and Conqueror Xena stare at him, startled.

ARES GOD OF WAR (dryly):

Enter the God of War.

He looks from Xena to the Conqueror to Ares, and back.

ARES GOD OF WAR (continues):

Oh--don't interrupt the program on my account. It was just getting interesting.

He walks slowly toward the group.

ARES GOD OF WAR (continues, eying the two women):

So--the rebel who looks and fights like Xena--*is* Xena from another world. And this-- (he nods toward Ares) is...*me!* (bursts out laughing) Well, I thought it was time for me to pop in and complete the quartet.

He approaches the Conqueror, who remains stone-faced, and stares directly at her.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

You know--I have never begrudged you your little flings. But--

CONQUEROR XENA (contemptuously):

Playing the jealous husband? The role doesn't suit you.

ARES GOD OF WAR (presses a finger to her lips in a "be quiet" gesture):

But--when you take up with--*my* counterpart from some other world--and start offering him your love *and* your empire...well. Can't blame me for taking that just a tad personally, can you?

He touches her face in a seemingly affectionate gesture, then pulls his hand away and steps back abruptly.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

You're on your own.

He raises his hands and clicks his fingers. There is a big flare of blue light and sparks; when it clears, Xena, mortal Ares, and Gabrielle's body are gone as well as Ares God of War, and only the sentinels are sitting up groggily.

With a grimace of anger and pain and a short cry of rage, the Conqueror slams her fist into the palm of her hand.

CUT TO

A temple of Ares, looking like the one in *Sacrifice*--a large hall with weapons on the walls and statues of Ares, with murky light from candles and torches.

There is a flash of blue light and Ares, God of War, materializes, slouching casually in his throne (in a pose reminiscent of the end of *The Furies*).

In another flash of light, a somewhat disoriented-looking Xena and mortal Ares, holding on to each other, materialize before Ares' throne. Gabrielle's body also materializes on the floor.

XENA (looks around):

What--?

ARES GOD OF WAR:

One of my temples. Nice place to chat, with--a little privacy.

XENA:

What do you want from us?

ARES GOD OF WAR:

Why don't we start with a full briefing on why you're here and why (gestures toward Ares) he's mortal.

XENA:

First things first. (She points to Gabrielle's lifeless body) My friend--can you bring her back?

ARES GOD OF WAR (laughs):

Can I? I'm a god. And I don't know about *your* world, but here, I'm *top* god. So I can do pretty much whatever I want. (glances at Gabrielle's body) This one has barely made it to Hades' waiting room, so--

XENA (interrupts):

Then bring her back.

Ares, God of War chuckles as he rises from the throne. He saunters over to Xena and strokes her shoulder while the mortal Ares glowers at him.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

I don't sell my favors that cheaply. If you want your friend back, you have to give me something more than a few stories. Right now, for instance-- (he plays with a strand of her hair while Xena shoots him a disgusted look) I'm in the market for a new Warrior Queen.

ARES:

Hey, wait a minute--

ARES GOD OF WAR (points a finger at him):

You. Shut up and be glad I haven't turned you into a rat. Yet.

Xena steps between them and looks intently at Ares, God of War.

XENA:

All right--Ares. I'll play your little game. But here's what I want. You bring my friend back--*now*. And you give me your word that no harm from you or your minions will ever come to her--or him (nods toward Ares) --or my Amazon friends.

ARES GOD OF WAR (slightly sarcastic):

Loyalty. An admirable quality, really. Anything else on your wish list?

XENA (viciously):

Only to defeat the Monarch--and have my revenge. (Close-up on her face) You give me what I asked for, God of War--and I swear that once she dies by my hand--I'm your Warrior Queen.

Pan from Ares, who looks shocked and anxious, to Ares, God of War, who looks at Xena with a smug grin.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

Deal. (He pauses) No harm from me will come to your friends--you have my word. What else? (clicks his fingers as if remembering) Oh yeah--the girl.

He extends a hand, his palm flat and turned downwards, over Gabrielle's body. A blue glow begins to radiate from his hands, encasing the body. Pan to Xena, who watches with bated breath.

Zoom in on Gabrielle's face, bathed in blue glow. Her eyelids quiver; then, she takes a deep breath, her mouth opening as she gasps for air, and her eyes fly open. The camera pulls back as she sits up with a gasp, looking around in shock. The blue glow fades as she pats herself down, realizing she's alive and unhurt.

Close-up on Xena, who breathes a deep sigh of relief, smiling tenderly and tearing up a little. The camera pulls back as she rushes toward Gabrielle and helps her to her feet.

XENA:

Are you okay?

GABRIELLE (still in shock):

Umm...I think so. (starting to come out of her daze) Uh--for someone who was just crucified--I'm great. (bewildered) How--?

ARES GOD OF WAR (to Xena):

There you go--good as new. As for killing the Monarch--that's up to you, of course. May the best Xena win.

XENA:

Don't worry, I will. Just take us to the rebel camp.

ARES GOD OF WAR (wryly):

At your service.

CUT TO

A wide shot of the rebel camp at sunrise.

CUT TO

Inside a hut, Gabrielle is asleep on a pallet.

CUT TO

Xena, in her leather tunic with no armor, sits on a bench outside the hut, sharpening her sword. The look on her face is unreadable.

Ares comes up to her (in his brown leather pants, with no shirt) and sits down next to her. He gives her a rather sheepish look.

XENA (in a neutral tone):

'Morning.

ARES:

Hey.

There is a brief, tense silence.

XENA:

Thank you for trying to help Gabrielle. I know you were risking your life out there. (A brief pause) So you ended up--in Corinth.

ARES:

Xena, as soon I realized you were here, I went to look for you. They told me Gabrielle had been captured and you'd gone after her to Corinth. So I went back. I thought I'd find you there.

XENA (resentfully):

Yeah, this wound slowed me down. I should have been there-- (trails off)

Ares puts his hand on her arm a little hesitantly.

ARES:

Let it go.

A brief silence. Xena stares straight ahead as she continues to sharpen her sword.

XENA:

So. You finally found your Warrior Queen.

Ares looks down, his mouth tightening. Then he raises his head.

ARES:

Xena... You know no one else is like you for me--

XENA (interrupts, bitterly):

Except--the *other* me?

ARES:

She's not you.

XENA (continues to clean her sword with brusque gestures):

Which didn't keep you out of her bed.

ARES:

Look, Xena, I-- (he trails off, then sighs deeply and shifts on the bench) I'm--I-- (he takes a deep breath, not sure what else to say) You think I wanted to be--her boy toy?

Xena lowers her sword and turns to him.

XENA (wryly but not without sympathy):

No, I'm sure you resisted her tooth and nail. (She lifts the sword, contemplates it and runs a finger along the edge of the blade.) Anyway. We've got work to do.

Ares clears his throat and nods, looking away guiltily.

Xena stares ahead. Her look is grim with a touch of sadness.

Ares turns to Xena, struck by a new thought.

ARES:

Say--back there in the temple...did I miss something, or did you promise yourself to, um--?

Xena rises abruptly and turns, facing Ares.

XENA:

Like I said. We've got work to do.

CUT TO

A montage of scenes, cross-fading into each other:

* The rebels clash with the Conqueror's troops; the camera briefly lingers on Xena, Ephiny, Callisto and Ares fighting;

* Gabrielle, with some other rebels, tends to the wounded;

* The rebels surge through the streets of a town, its inhabitants greeting them with jubilation;

* Xena and Ares fight back to back on a battlefield;

* The rebels push back the Conqueror's troops;

* The Conqueror's soldiers throw down their weapons.

DISSOLVE TO

An exterior view of the walls of Corinth. The rebel army is camped out in the field, some distance from the walls.

CUT TO

Xena, Ares, Ephiny, Callisto, and Gabrielle are standing in a field, looking at the walls of Corinth.

EPHINY:

So, what now? (glances at Xena) Varinia, we've done better than any of us could have imagined--but I don't think we have the strength to sustain a prolonged siege.

XENA:

We won't need to. I'm sending a messenger to the Monarch.

CALLISTO (shoots her a sharp look, sarcastically):

For what? To call a truce?

XENA:

To resolve this one on one--with no further bloodshed.

She and Ares exchange a meaningful look.

GABRIELLE (worried):

Are you sure that's the best way?

XENA (somberly):

It's the only way.

CUT TO

Close-up on Xena.

Close-up on the Conqueror, in her Roman leathers.

The camera pulls back to show the palace square. Xena and the Conqueror are standing face to face. The square is filled with a large crowd, with a chain of the Conqueror's guards standing in the front row.

Ares, God of War stands slouching against a pillar, his arms folded across his chest, watching. The camera pans over the faces of Gabrielle and Ares near the front of the crowd. As the Conqueror spots them, there is a small, bitter smile on her lips. Then she turns back to Xena and nods.

Xena and the Conqueror begin to circle one another. Xena's sword is drawn, as is the Conqueror's. Their eyes are locked on each other, ready to anticipate any move. With a lightning-fast motion, the Conqueror swings her sword forward--and in a motion just as fast, Xena counters the move. Each clash of their swords erupts in sparks.

The Conqueror swings around to attack Xena from behind. Xena moves out of the way and blocks the Conqueror's sword with her own. She jumps up and pushes the Conqueror back, then lets out her ululation and flips over the Conqueror's head. The Conqueror spins around, facing Xena again. She grins and then lets out her own battle cry and flips over Xena's head, landing directly behind her. Xena turns around to face the Conqueror.

The Conqueror twirls her sword and charges forward. Xena ducks under the blade and raises her own sword to meet the Conqueror's from below. She pushes upward, pushing the Conqueror's sword away and back flips out of the Conqueror's reach as she swings again.

Xena whips around, a gleeful grin on her face. The Conqueror stares at her for a moment before attacking again. Their swords meet once more. They fight like mirror images of each other, every swing, kick, punch, sword thrust, or flip done by one woman almost exactly replicated by the other.

The Conqueror kicks Xena in the leg. Xena backs away but returns with an equally fierce punch to the Conqueror's face. The Conqueror steps back, her nose bloodied, and snarls a little. She charges toward Xena and then flips over her, grabbing her shoulders so that she manages to flip Xena over as well. As Xena is swung through the air, the chakram comes loose from the hook on her hip and falls to the ground. Xena lands on the other side of the Conqueror and steps back. Their eyes meet, both of them breathing hard.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Not easy fighting yourself, is it? Same moves, same tricks...no way to get the advantage.

She glances down as the chakram rolls toward her feet and stops. She picks it up. Xena watches cautiously.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Different from mine but...not bad. (she examines it, then looks up at Xena, grinning) 'Course, I haven't used mine in a while. You think I still got it?

She grins and hurls the chakram at Xena; with no hope of catching it at this close range, Xena manages to duck out of its way. It whooshes over the crowd, hits the wall, making sparks fly, and flies back toward Xena, splitting in two. Xena catches one blade while the other flies back toward the Conqueror, who catches it.

CONQUEROR XENA (grinning):

Oh, yeah. Nifty!

She charges forward, making to stab Xena with the chakram blade. Xena blocks her with her own chakram half and they struggle, the two sharp piece of metal grating against each other. Finally, they drops the chakram halves and their swords clash again. They get in a couple good swings but are so evenly matched that it's difficult to tell who is winning.

Pan around to show Ares, God of War, watching them.

Suddenly, the advantage seems to shift to the Conqueror. She kicks Xena in the side, making her stagger back, then kicks the sword from her hand and yanks at Xena's arm, throwing her hard to the ground. Xena begins to get to her feet but the Conqueror walks up to her, looking down.

Pan to Ares, God of War, who watches them intently; then to a horrified-looking Gabrielle.

A sympathetic look comes over Xena's face as the Conqueror raises her sword.

XENA:

You don't have to do this. I changed; you can too.

The Conqueror looks at her for a moment, almost pondering these words. Then, her face hardens.

CONQUEROR XENA:

It's too late.

The Conqueror begins the motion to swing down but her body suddenly jolts and she stops, her eyes widening. Pull back to reveal an arrow protruding from her chest. The Conqueror gasps and staggers, dropping her sword, then sinks to her knees, raising her hands to her chest. Blood trickles from the wound and down her leathers, and wells up on her lip.

The crowd erupts in shocked gasps and murmurs. Pan to Ares, God of War, who seems taken aback.

Xena watches the Conqueror for a moment before turning her head to look toward the crowd.

Pan to Ares, who stands in front of the crowd, a crossbow in his hand. His eyes meet Xena's; his expression is filled with pained regret.

Pan to the Conqueror as she sees Ares and realizes what has happened. There is a flash of rage in her face, but then it gives way to an odd look of almost-understanding.

Ares walks slowly toward the Conqueror. Gabrielle stays where she is, clearly torn between satisfaction and pity.

CONQUEROR XENA (hoarsely):

Xena--

XENA:

Yes?

CONQUEROR XENA (nods toward Gabrielle):

I'm glad--she's alive.

Xena nods, a flicker of warmth and sympathy in her eyes.

XENA:

I know she'll forgive you.

The Conqueror tries to laugh and breaks into a cough, blood bubbling on her lips.

CONQUEROR XENA:

Well--that makes everything all right, doesn't it?

Ares comes up and squats down next to her, putting the crossbow down, as Xena steps back.

In the background, we see Gabrielle running up to Xena, obviously asking if she's okay. They hug. Gabrielle looks at the Conqueror, clearly conflicted.

ARES (gently):

I had no choice.

CONQUEROR XENA (nods and speaks with difficulty, her voice fading):

Neither did I.

She lifts a hand and touches his face, leaving a streak of blood on it.

CONQUEROR XENA:

You know--when I made you that offer... (she coughs again) I meant it.

She leans forward and brushes her bloodied lips against his, then slumps against him. After a moment's hesitation Ares strokes her hair.

ARES (whispers):

Good-bye.

The Conqueror moans, then stills. Ares lowers her to the ground and turns her on her back. Close-up on her face, her eyes closed, her expression strangely peaceful.

Xena lays her hand on Ares' shoulder. He looks up at her with anguish, tears in his eyes.

XENA (gently):

You okay?

She helps Ares to his feet as he struggles to get a grip on himself.

ARES:

I... (he swallows hard, wiping the blood from his face) Yeah.

She puts a comforting hand on his back.

ARES GOD OF WAR (off-camera):

I gotta say...

Pan to Ares, God of War, approaching as Xena turns toward him.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

...it's pretty scary to think that I could *ever* turn into *that*. (points at mortal Ares with a theatrical shudder) Brr!

Xena looks at him for a moment, her face hard with anger and disgust. Then she draws her fist back and punches him in the face.

In the background, Gabrielle gasps and raises her hands to her mouth.

Ares looks at Xena, smiling a little; Xena turns and gives his shoulder a gentle squeeze.

Pan to Ares, God of War, who rubs his face and looks at Xena, uncertain whether to be angry or amused. Finally, he breaks into a grin.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

You know, I appreciate irreverence--but you may be pushing it a bit. (He pauses, looking her over) Oh well--I'm gonna let this one go. I believe we have a deal. (He glances at the crossbow on the floor and at the Conqueror's body) Of course, technically, you cheated--

Pan to Xena, who flinches slightly.

ARES GOD OF WAR (continues):

--since you didn't actually best her in single combat--but hey, a good leader knows when to delegate. (He presses his hand over his heart in a slightly ironic gallant bow) Welcome, *Varinia*--Warrior Queen.

Xena looks at him, the expression on her face turning sarcastic.

XENA (suavely):

I don't think so.

ARES GOD OF WAR (stares uncomprehendingly):

What?

XENA:

Well, *Ares*--the agreement was, the Conqueror dies by my hand and I become your new Warrior Queen. That's not what happened, is it?

Ares, God of War stares at her, the realization that he's been played slowly coming over his face.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

You planned this, didn't you? You let her beat you on purpose so she wouldn't die by your hand.

XENA:

Does it matter? (smirks) Deal's off.

The God of War looks from the Conqueror's body to mortal Ares, who glances at him with a somewhat bitter half-grin, and then to a very smug-looking Xena. He is visibly torn between frustration and admiration. Finally, he repeats his mock-gallant bow, takes Xena's hand and kisses it, in a gesture reminiscent of Ares in *The Reckoning*.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

Marvelously played, my dear.

As he speaks, the camera pulls back to show mortal Ares mouthing the words along with Ares, God of War. Xena and mortal Ares exchange an amused, knowing look.

ARES GOD OF WAR (continues):

Of course, it would have been *much* smarter to take the job.

XENA (smiles a little):

I made the right choice--for me.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

I'm sure you'll see it my way eventually. (he blows her a kiss) Until next time.

He vanishes in a burst of light.

Xena stands thoughtfully, looking at the spot where he vanished. There are gasps and murmurs around the square; then, slowly, the crowd erupts in cheers. Gabrielle runs up to hug Xena.

GABRIELLE (excited):

We did it!

Pan to Ares, who shakes his head.

ARES (rolls his eyes and mutters):

We.

Pan to Xena as she kisses Gabrielle on the forehead, then pulls back and glances at the Conqueror's body.

XENA (somberly):

Come on. We should build her a funeral pyre.

CUT TO

Evening. A torch-lit hall in the palace in Corinth. A banquet is in full progress as the rebels celebrate their victory.

Medium close-up on Xena and Ares standing by a column, sipping wine from goblets. Ares is in his old leathers again.

ARES:

Tell me--

Xena turns to him.

ARES:

Was I ever as bad as that?

XENA (chuckles):

Worse.

ARES (gasps in mock indignation):

Aw--*that* was low.

Xena chuckles and they stand in silence for a moment. Then, Ares' look turns serious.

ARES:

Xena...about--*her*--

Xena gives him an uncomfortable look. They are interrupted by Callisto, who comes up to them, eating an apple and holding a goblet.

CALLISTO:

Mind if I cut in?

Xena nods, looking somewhat relieved. Ares looks both relieved and frustrated.

ARES:

I, um-- (gestures with his goblet) I'm going for a refill.

As he walks off, Callisto looks after him, puzzled.

CALLISTO:

Your boyfriend doesn't like me. (shrugs, then turns to Xena) I've got a bone to pick with you, *dear*. You didn't tell me about that wonderful little plan of yours. I heard all about it from our young bard, who's been telling everyone how Varinia outsmarted the God of War. (chuckles and takes a bite of the apple) I would have volunteered to do the honors.

XENA (looks at her warily):

You would have enjoyed it too much.

CALLISTO:

What are you talking about?

XENA (gently but firmly):

Callisto...trust me--revenge is not good for the soul.

CALLISTO (laughs):

Well, it's been very good for mine. (lifts her goblet in a mock salute) Cheers!

She turns and starts to walk away. Xena stares after her for a moment, then sees something out of the corner of her eye and turns. Gabrielle is coming toward her, dressed in the Amazon princess outfit similar to the one in *The Quest*.

XENA (surprised):

What's this?

GABRIELLE (smiles excitedly and a little shyly):

Would you believe I'm an Amazon Princess?

XENA (smiles warmly and proudly):
Absolutely.

GABRIELLE:

Ephiny gave me her rite of caste. She said I showed the true Amazon spirit when I risked my life to shield her from Velasca.

XENA:

You did.

GABRIELLE:

Oh, and I started my scroll--

The camera moves away from them as their conversation fades into the general din of the party, and pans over to Ares. He stands by a column at some distance, sipping wine from a goblet as he watches Xena and Gabrielle talking and smiling at each other.

VOICE (off-camera, behind him):

She's something, isn't she.

Ares turns around with a start to find himself face to face with Ares, God of War. The God of War eyes him with some distaste.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

Do you *have* to dress like that?

ARES (annoyed):

Hey--these are *my* clothes. (shifts his eyes to Xena) And yeah. She's really something. (pauses) You know, that's how it begins.

ARES GOD OF WAR:

How what begins?

ARES:

She pulls a stunt like this and you just can't help thinking--damn, she's good. Then you try another time, and another--and just when you think you've got her--she turns the tables on you *again*. One thing leads to the next, and before you know it--

ARES GOD OF WAR:

--you're totally whipped?

ARES (slightly affronted):

Not *quite* the word I was looking for.

ARES GOD OF WAR (chuckles):

The truth hurts. (He strokes his chin, contemplating Xena.) Yes, I can see how she could become an obsession. A dangerous girl to have around. Well... (pauses) I could kill her. (Off Ares' alarmed look) That vow she tricked me into was to do no harm to you or the girl. Not that I get what she sees in either one of you, but...I am a god of my word. However--I never promised not to kill *her*. Problem is...

ARES (understanding):
...you can't do it. (chuckles)

ARES GOD OF WAR (stung):
Oh, I can. I just--don't want to.

Ares looks at him for a moment, obviously struck by an idea.

ARES:
Of course, you *could* just send her and me back to our own world. (pauses) Unless, of course, that's beyond your powers...

Ares, God of War glares at him, then suddenly bursts out laughing.

ARES GOD OF WAR:
Clever! Beyond my powers, huh? (still laughing) Did you really think I wouldn't see through *that* little trick? Come on, give me some credit. I know how you think.

ARES:
I'm counting on it.

ARES GOD OF WAR:
I know you are.

ARES:
I know you know.

ARES GOD OF WAR:
This could be a long day. (brief pause) So. You know the spot where that portal of yours opened up?

ARES:
Bored already?

ARES GOD OF WAR:
Well, unlike you *mortals*, I've got things to do. Places to be--

ARES (chimes in):
--people to kill--

Ares, God of War gives him an amused and slightly exasperated stare.

ARES GOD OF WAR:
Oh, yeah. You're going back.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle, talking.

GABRIELLE:
Tomorrow, I'm going to send a message to Mother and Lila. They must be worried sick.

Xena is about to say something when she sees Ares coming up. From his expression, she realizes something important is going on.

ARES:

We're going home.

Pan to Xena, who looks happy and stunned, and then to Gabrielle, who looks at Xena in shock and with a little sadness.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle are walking down a palace hallway. Ares can be seen in the background walking behind them.

GABRIELLE:

The legendary Varinia, disappearing without a trace. There'll be some explaining to do.

XENA (smiles):

I'm sure you'll come up with a good story.

GABRIELLE:

I knew you'd find your way back someday. (sighs) I'm happy for you.

XENA (squeezes her shoulder):

Gabrielle...I will never forget you.

GABRIELLE (half-teasing but with a touch of sadness):

Even though you have your own Gabrielle?

XENA:

You're not just a copy of her. You've lived your own life--made your own choices. I know you have great things ahead of you. And I'm *proud* to have been your friend.

Gabrielle smiles wistfully.

GABRIELLE:

I just wish I'd had a chance to really thank you--

XENA:

You've thanked me enough.

GABRIELLE:

And I wish I'd learned more about your Gabrielle. (gives Xena a mischievous look) I bet *your* Gabrielle isn't an Amazon princess.

Xena ponders this for a moment, then opts for the truth.

XENA:

Um, actually--she is.

GABRIELLE (slightly deflated):

Oh. (then, with excitement) Then I guess it was really meant to be, huh?

XENA (sighs):

Gabrielle...who knows what was meant to be and what we create ourselves, and what--just happens. (stares ahead pensively) You just do the best you can and hope things will work out.

GABRIELLE (nods):

Right. I should put that in my scrolls. (pauses) Tell her she's very lucky.

XENA (glances at her thoughtfully):

Life hasn't always been easy for her either, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE:

She's lucky to have *you*.

Xena stops and turns to face Gabrielle, who stops as well.

XENA:

No, I'm the lucky one.

They look tenderly at each other and hug.

CUT TO

The empty yard where Ares landed in "Worlds Apart." A wide shot of the yard. Ares, God of War stands at one end, Aphrodite (dressed in a glittery black outfit) at another. Xena and Ares stand in the center of the yard, holding hands.

Ares, God of War, and Aphrodite raise their hands simultaneously, each sending forth a blue stream of energy. The two streams meet and forms a fireball which grows larger and brighter until it explodes in a brilliant burst of power, sending waves all through the yard.

When the light clears, Xena and Ares are gone. Close-up on Ares, God of War, who looks somewhat regretful. He shrugs as if to say, "what can you do."

CUT TO

A peddler with a donkey-drawn cart is walking along a road, humming a tune. He stops suddenly and gasps, gaping at something ahead of him, his eyes nearly popping out of his head.

The camera pulls back to show the field near Thebes, the same one seen at the end of "Showdown." A vortex of blue light opens up.

Close-up on the vortex as Xena and Ares tumble out of it, holding on to each other. They're thrown to the ground, landing next to each other, Ares on his back, Xena face down.

The camera pulls back to show the vortex fading.

Medium close-up on the peddler as he shakes his head and looks toward Xena and Ares, obviously tempted to check out the scene. Then he shakes his head and walks on.

CUT TO

Ares stirs and lifts his head. He looks around groggily, then sits up and lightly shakes Xena's shoulder.

ARES:

Hey. I think we made it.

Xena opens her eyes and takes a deep breath, then pulls herself up.

XENA (lightly but with an undertone of real worry):

I hope this is the right world.

She sits up. Their eyes meet and they stare at each other. Then, Ares leans in and kisses Xena tenderly. After a moment she pulls away and rises, then holds out a hand to Ares.

XENA (with a small smile):

Come on.

She pulls him to his feet.

CROSS-FADE TO

A long shot of the farmhouse in Potidaea.

Zoom in on the yard as Xena and Ares walk up to the house.

Zoom on the front door as Xena's hand knocks on it.

The door opens and we see Gabrielle standing on the threshold. She is visibly pregnant and wearing a dark blue dress. For a moment she looks incredulous. Then, her face lights up with joy. Pan to Xena, who smiles at her, tearing up. Ares is standing behind Xena.

The two women hug warmly, their faces filled with emotion. Ares looks away, a little embarrassed by this display.

XENA:

Gabrielle--

GABRIELLE:

Welcome home.

She smiles tenderly at Xena as we:

FADE OUT

THE END

*[Gabrielle's crucifixion count reached the point of overkill during the production of this motion picture.
Poor Gabby.]*