

XENA

"Destroyer of Nations"

Pilot Episode

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Based on *Xena: Warrior Princess*
Created by John Schulian and Robert Tapert

WRITER'S FINAL

TEASER

A TORCH BREAKS THE DARKNESS... THEN ANOTHER... AND ANOTHER...

As six SOLDIERS in black resolve through the inky gloom of:

EXT. THRACIAN COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

The soldiers STOP. Into torchlight STRIDES THEIR LEADER.

You know his name. Synonymous with strength and virility. His appearance - from the cunning, brutally handsome eyes to the muscular shoulders (armored with the indestructible pelt of the Nemean lion) and powerful hands grasping a knotted club only a demigod could wield - bears out the legend.

This is HERCULES. He looks past the trees to see...

EXT. CASTLE OF DIOMEDES - CONTINUOUS

Looming in darkness: a creepy and imposing tower and stables overgrown with ancient trees, guarded by ARMORED SENTRIES.

RESUME ON HERCULES

As his nephew, IOLAUS, scampers to him. He's a scamperer.

IOLAUS

Any sign of the giant?

HERCULES

Giant's asleep.

IOLAUS

They say he's trained his beasts to eat the flesh of men.

HERCULES

Calm down. They're just mares.

IOLAUS

If they're "just" that, why would the King send us... I mean, you, to steal them?

HERCULES

If this is how our liege wants to taunt his enemies, then we will be his hand.

(a smile)

Long as his gold lasts.

IOLAUS

These labors - they only get harder
and... this one's bad, uncle
Hercules. I can feel it. They say
the Giant can crush a man's skull
with his -

Hercules shoots him a silencing glare then motions a huddle:

HERCULES

Split into three teams, attack
simultaneously, take out the
sentries, then steal the mares.

IOLAUS

And if our strife awakens the giant
before we can get to the stables?

HERCULES

Then I crush the giant.

A commanding FEMALE VOICE sounds out from behind Iolaus:

FEMALE VOICE

Why not just sneak in and take the
horses?

HERCULES TURNS TO SEE XENA - ENTERING INTO TORCHLIGHT

EPIC in black armor. Face slashed with war paint. She's every
bit as imposing as the men, every bit as capable, and
significantly smarter and more ambitious.

HERCULES

Xena. This is not smash-and-grab.
The mares of Diomedes are feral -

IOLAUS

They eat the flesh of -

XENA

I've heard the myths. But
with your plan, if the guards
put up a fight, we'll awaken
the entire compound before
the prize is in our hands.

Hercules shoots Xena a shut-down glare. She understands, and
stops talking, backing away as Hercules waves in the huddle:

HERCULES

Iolaus, Pentacles, Cortus: lie in
wait. Signal when the guard
changes.

(MORE)

HERCULES (CONT'D)
Tassos, flank and Await the signal.
Xena, you and I - Xena... Xena?

SMASH CUT TO

XENA - RUNNING THROUGH THE WOODS TO THE CASTLE

A gazelle. Soundless. Lightning-quick.

INTERCUT WITH HERCULES AND HIS MEN, REACTING

As Xena takes uses her momentum to GRAB onto a low-hanging tree branch, losing no speed as she CLIMBS onto the canopy.

EXT. CASTLE OF DIOMEDES - PERIMETER - CONTINUOUS

A SENTRY does his rounds, clueless, until he looks up to see:

XENA - TUMBLING DOWN FROM A BRANCH

And LANDING to SNAP HIS NECK LIKE A TWIG! Xena turns to face:

EXT. THE STABLES OF DIOMEDES - CONTINUOUS

And spots a SENTRY at the gate. He sees her. Before he can -

XENA DRAWS HER CHAKRAM - WHOOSH! - IT SHUNKS INTO THE GUARD

Xena rushes by, TAKING IT BACK as she ENTERS the stable.

ANGLE ON HERCULES AND HIS MEN

IOLAUS
She's in, let's go.

HERCULES
Hold fast. Let her make her play.

A dread silence settles on these hard men... and sits...

IOLAUS
It's taking her too long.

ON THE STABLES

Silence... until the windows light up orange - a FIRE!

HERCULES
Zeus's balls!

THE GATES TO THE STABLE BURST OPEN

KICKED OUT by the front legs of a large and fearsome, SCREAMING war horse, covered in silver armor... and on top?

XENA, ETCHED IN SMOKE AND FIRE

GRASPING the reins in one hand while PULLING another three BELLOWING ARMORED BEASTS on a single line behind her - all the while emitting her signature XENA WAR CRY!

HERCULES AND HIS MEN STARE IN SHOCK AND AWE

HERCULES
Go! Now! Go!

RESUME ON XENA

Riding the mares across the compound as a half-dozen surprised GUARDS storm out of the castle.

JUST AS HERCULES AND HIS MEN BREACH THE PERIMETER

And the battle is joined. Swords SWING. Lances FLY. Blood SPATTTTERS: red mist in the billowing smoke from the stables.

With a SWING of his mighty club, Hercules sends a guard FLYING - clearing his path to lock eyes with:

XENA - WHO SHOOTS HIM A TRIUMPHANT LOOK

And tosses over the bundle of lines holding the SCREAMING war horses with all the attitude of a rapper's mic drop.

HERCULES
Iolaus! Take our prize! Go!

A CASTLE DOOR ERUPTS OPEN TO REVEAL DIOMEDES - THE GIANT

Seven feet tall - the missing half of his face replaced by a silver mask - wielding a BATTLE AXE!

DIOMEDES
HERCULES! FACE ME, THIEVING SCUM!

Hercules turns as his men continue the fight around him, and takes up the challenge - lifting his club -

AS XENA DISMOUNTS

And PUNCHES an enemy guard in the face, sending him DOWN.

HERCULES AND DIOMEDES TRADE BLOWS

Titans UNLEASHING HELL on one another as:

HERCULES' MEN FINISH OFF THE GUARDS

And take the mares, RUSHING OUT of the compound.

XENA HANDS HER MARE'S REINS TO IOLAUS

The mighty beast REARS with an awful ROAR that distracts -

HERCULES

Giving Diomedes just enough of an opening to PUMMEL HIM IN THE RIBS with his Axe handle, sending him down. As Diomedes lifts his axe for the kill...

XENA DRAWS HER CHAKRAM

And fires it like a guided missile -

BURYING IT RIGHT IN THE HEART OF THE GIANT!

Diomedes CRASHES DOWN, heaving a hellish DEATH THROE...

AS XENA'S HAND ENTERS TO HELP HERCULES TO HIS FEET

Hercules takes it and stands - grateful, disbelieving, and also looking around to make certain no one saw this.

HERCULES
Saved my life.

XENA
Yet again.

And off Xena's victorious, and knowing smile...

SMASH CUT TO MAIN TITLE

XENA

RESUME ON A FLAG WITH THE IMAGE OF HERCULES WRESTLING A LION

WAVING in the breeze as GLOWING ASHES waft from a bonfire at:

EXT. THRACIAN COUNTRYSIDE - HERCULES' CAMP - NIGHT

A boar ROASTS in the flames, devoured by Hercules' SOLDIERS (who number a dozen and change, with squires and slaves).

A small cluster of square campaign tents, torches, and a horse pen loom in the background.

Hercules stands before the men - the giant's head IMPALED on a pike - speechifying as a SLAVE pours wine into his goblet.

HERCULES

And so it was that I, Hercules,
with a single blow from my mighty
club, slew the giant, took the head
from his powerful shoulders, and
made off with his fabled mares.

(off the CHEERS)

And when we return to the city of
Argos, with the war horses of
Diomedes as our prize, the King,
Eurystheus will shower us with
wealth beyond dreams of avarice.

Another CHEER - Hercules basks in the adulation, letting it die down just long enough for Iolaus to chime in:

IOLAUS

We will suckle the breast of the
great whore 'til we can suckle no
more.

HERCULES

It won't be a breast you'll be
suckling.

Iolaus and the men BELLOW with LAUGHTER, then:

IOLAUS AND THE SOLDIERS

HER-CU-LES! HER-CU-LES! HER-CU-LES!

FOLLOW HERCULES' GAZE TO FIND XENA

Grimly washing her bloody hands in a basin as Hercules GLAD-HANDS his way through his men.

She looks up from the water as Hercules approaches... his expression darkening as he puts the men behind him.

HERCULES

You disobeyed me.

XENA

I got your king his war horses.

HERCULES

You made me look weak. I should
take your head right here and now.

XENA

When I'm worth so much more whole?

It's clear from Hercules' expression that he doesn't know whether to slap or kiss her. He splits the difference:

HERCULES

Your conceit insults me.

Xena dries her hands and turns to her commander, knowing now that she has to stroke his ego to insure peace between them:

XENA

Your men worship you. The King showers you with gold. The people think you're a hero.

HERCULES

"Think"?

(GRABBING her wrist)

If they ever find out what really happened in that battle -

XENA

They never do. Your legendary journeys are safe with me.

A long, tense, beat... and then he BREAKS INTO LAUGHTER.

HERCULES

I doubt anything's safe with you.

Xena laughs, loosens from his grip, and makes her way to a cluster of tents - lit by torches, battle flags waving.

HERCULES

After we've taken our prize to Argos, the King will task me with another labor.

XENA

And I will lend you my steel.

HERCULES

(a cynical chuckle)
As long as the King's gold lasts?

XENA

You sell yourself short. I would follow you to Hades and back.

(getting to the point)

We could return to Argos. Not to serve, but to rule.

HERCULES

What you say is treason.

Xena stops: is it a coincidence that she has chosen the moment of their arrival at HERCULES' TENT?

XENA

Valuing my strength is treason?
Wanting more for you is treason?

HERCULES

The King commands legions.

XENA

The treasures we steal would buy us
twice that many.

HERCULES

He is our lord and master.

XENA

You say you're the son of
god. But you serve a mere
man.

HERCULES

If the King could hear you now.

Eyes burning with scorn at her impertinence, Hercules shows her the back of his hand - indicating a slap.

Xena smiles and lifts a single finger to stroke his knuckle: her touch sends a shuddering wave through his body.

XENA

Can he?

The heat in his eyes turns to lust as Xena's gesture turns to a grip around his wrist... and as he draws her closer.

HERCULES

You would make me a destroyer of
nations.

XENA

I would make you so much more. Let
me build you an army. Let me
shoulder your labors. Let me write
your name across history in big,
bloody letters... and when enough
men have died, we will have a
kingdom of our own, with no god or
man to tell us what to do.

HERCULES

And you would be what? My queen?

XENA

Your equal. I would be to you as a ruler as I am in battle.

HERCULES

It's going to take more than that to make you my equal.

XENA

Try me.

And with that, he crushes the distance between them and PRESSES HIS LIPS TO HERS, roughly moving her hand behind her back to dominate her... and as she lets him:

INT. HERCULES' ARMY CAMP - HERCULES' TENT - NIGHT

A large tent with several chambers divided by thick curtains decorated with the Hercules/lion sigil.

Xena and Hercules TUMBLE IN, unable to keep their hands off one another - two beautiful warriors - their lust fueled by the rush of battle and the desire for mutual conquest.

Keeping her lips JAMMED into his, Xena grips Hercules' shoulders, TEARING AWAY his lion's pelt as he goes to work on her belt and TOSSES her sword to the floor...

Xena reaches below frame to pull out his ankle blade, THROWING it to the floor as his hands keep working on her...

Her Chakram falls... then his punch dagger... then her chest knife... his knuckle duster...

And so on, and so on, and so on. As the ground beneath their feet looks more like an armory than a scene of seduction:

PAN OVER TO FIND HERCULES AND XENA

GRAPPLING naked on his camp bed - chiseled bodies strategically covered by a sheepskin. And as she HOLDS HIM DOWN to straddle her legs over him...

TIME CUT TO

XENA'S CHAKRAM, ON THE FLOOR OF THE TENT

As Xena's hand REACHES INTO FRAME to pick up her weapon:

TILT UP TO REVEAL XENA - FULLY DRESSED

About to exit the tent when she hears a CRY...

SMASH CUT TO

A SHACKLE, AROUND THE FOOT OF A TWELVE YEAR OLD GIRL

The chain stretching to the shackles on two other YOUNG WOMEN and their MOTHER: all looking very bad for the wear.

PENTACLES, one of the soldiers from the teaser, drags the crying mother and children, CRACKING at them with a whip:

PENTACLES

Move it! Come on!

Xena walks to her tent, casting a sidelong glance at the enslaved mother and children as she passes by.

XENA

Who are these people?

PENTACLES

The giant's wife and children.

XENA

Giant had a wife?

PENTACLES

(a creepy smile)
Yes... and children.

XENA

And now they travel with us?

PENTACLES

After we have our fun, they join the King's Harem. We didn't just come for the horses, you know.

Xena looks at the YOUNGEST OF THE CHILDREN as the mother huddles up to protect her, and as they lock eyes.

PENTACLES

You have a problem with this?

CUT TO

Hercules' eyes, SNAPPING OPEN at:

INT. HERCULES' ARMY CAMP - HERCULES' TENT - NIGHT

As SCREAMS and a COMMOTION OF VOICES rouses him from sleep...

SOLDIER VOICE (O.S.)
Find the prisoners! Assemble
the men!

SOLDIER VOICE #2 (O.S.)
Alert Hercules!

Hercules SNAPS from his bed... and as he grasps his club...

EXT. HERCULES' ARMY CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

Hercules PUSHES through the scrum of his men to see:

PENTACLES - IN A POOL OF BLOOD

Next to the shattered chains of his prisoners.

HERCULES
Who did this?

IOLAUS
We were all by the fire, waiting
for him to bring us the prisoners,
all of us...

And that's when Iolaus's eyes turn to see...

XENA - ENTERING THROUGH THE CROWD

IOLAUS
All of us but her.

Xena's hand clenches around her Chakram - looking at the army
surrounding her - as Hercules steps toward her.

HERCULES
You have anything to do with this?

Xena lets her lips curl: she's about to make a Hail Mary
pass, but you'd never know it.

XENA
I was with you, Hercules.

Hercules looks at her - can he believe that? He just woke up
alone. Iolaus scampers up to his uncle:

IOLAUS
The perimeter's clean, Uncle, no
one entered the camp. I swear it.

Another Herculean soldier (CORTUS) enters the fray:

CORTUS
Should we assemble to retrieve the
prisoners?

XENA
(harsh and dismissive)
They're children, for Gaia's sake.

Hercules turns to Xena - moving Iolaus and Cortus behind him - her protestation peaking his suspicion.

HERCULES
You've killed children.

Xena looks at Hercules - it's clear she has said these words to him before:

XENA
Because it's a mercy compared to slavery. Let them go.

Hercules rears: she's giving him orders in front of his men?

HERCULES
They were mine to give to my men and take to my King as a trophy!

XENA
(trying to reason)
Pentacles has been murdered. We have bigger problems than a few escaped prisoners.

HERCULES
You're right. We do have bigger problems. I thought you knew this world... I thought you understood how men conquer kingdoms.

XENA
You're no man. You're the son of a god.

HERCULES
And I dispense with the lives of mortals however I see fit.

He's on to her. And he's not going to forgive her or let her walk away. She knows it now:

XENA
I thought you a hero.

HERCULES
And yet you draw steel on my men?
Question my orders?
(to the men, LOUDLY)
This woman is a traitor!
(MORE)

HERCULES (CONT'D)

She has defied my command and taken
from you the spoils of your labor!

THE MEN REACT

And as Hercules lowers his voice to speak to Xena, TASSOS -
from the teaser - APPROACHES from behind, drawing a sword.

XENA

Don't do this.

HERCULES

You did it to yourself.

XENA

I stood with you in battle.

HERCULES

But you think you're better than me
- and my men.

(SHOUTS to the men)

This woman stands accused of
treason. What do you have to say
for yourself, Xena?

ANSWERING, XENA SPINS

And in one fluid strike DRAWS HER SWORD AND CUTS TASSOS DOWN!

HERCULES REARS - LIFTING HIS CLUB

As Xena turns to him without even looking at the man that she
just made a corpse. She knows she can't take on all of
Hercules' men at once - but she can put a dent in their
resolve, so she RAISES HER VOICE for all to hear:

XENA

This is not about treason. It's
about his weakness. The giant had
him cornered and I saved his life.
I killed the giant! He will betray
anyone who discovers the truth. He
does not deserve your steel!

As she speaks, Hercules' rage and humiliation grows until he
can no longer contain it - as he BELLOWS an echoing WAR CRY:

IN SLO-MO

Hercules HEAVES HIS CLUB IN A VICIOUS ARC THAT ENDS AT XENA'S
TORSO - shaking her to her very core and sending her FLYING
back to the ground with an echoing KLUDD!

RESUME AT NORMAL SPEED

As Xena struggles to shake off the agonizing pain and get to her feet - only to find Hercules' boot on her chest.

He reaches down and RIPS the Chakram from her belt.

Now he has stolen a piece of her soul. Xena's expression resolves as he turns his back on her and walks.

XENA

No... NO!

Xena gets up onto her knees:

ONE OF HERCULES' MEN SMASHES HIS BOOT INTO HER BACK

She FALLS. Face first.

HERCULES KEEPS WALKING

She drags her face up to see:

THE MEN - STEPPING BETWEEN HER AND HERCULES

Xena STAGGERS to her feet. REACHES for her sword.

A LANCE SLASHES HER WRIST

Her hand OPENS. The sword FALLS. Xena will let no man walk away with her Chakram. She keeps going.

A WARHAMMER SLAMS INTO HER BACK WITH A SICKENING CRACK

She keeps going.

FISTS CRASH INTO HER

She keeps going. Clubs STRIKE her body. She keeps going. Knives SLASH the straps of her armor. She keeps going. Blades lacerate her skin.

SHE. KEEPS. GOING.

And so does the beating. In spite of her attempts to fight back, in spite of her strength and courage, her body BREAKS under the relentless onslaught of blows...

Until she completes her AGONIZING CRAWL past the men to see Hercules once more... turning around in shock and awe to see her still alive.

So he bends down to grab and lift her bludgeoned and swollen face to his as he raises his club overhead with the other.

Xena struggles to sputter the words through the blood streaming from her nose and mouth:

XENA

I... trusted... you... with...

Something plays across Hercules' face. Mercy? Weakness? Love? Or maybe just contempt. He lowers his club, turns to the men:

HERCULES

This whore is not worth a killing blow from any man's weapon.

EXT. HERCULES' CAMP - HORSE PEN - DAWN

The sun rises over Hercules as he drags DRAGS the barely struggling Xena into the pen and behind the closest of the horses as his men FOLLOW.

HERCULES

She lived like a beast and she will die like one - worthless and alone!
(letting Xena drop)
Iolaus - horse.

Iolaus scampers to one of the tied up horses and hands a line to Hercules, who ties it to Xena's foot.

The men cheer - "HER-CU-LES! - HER-CU-LES! - "HER-CU-LES!"

Hercules meets Xena's gaze- her eyes the only feature in her face not blackened with dried blood and bruises - then turns away and BACKHANDS the horse across its muscular hind.

THE HORSE REARS AND TAKES OFF AND OUT OF THE PEN

Taking Xena with it as the men's cheers RISE. And as the horse disappears into the treeline...

HERCULES TURNS TO HIS MEN

And cuts them off with a sullen wave of his hand.

HERCULES

Our King awaits his prize. Strike the camp. We ride at once.

SMASH CUT TO

XENA STRUGGLING TO ESCAPE HER BONDS

As the THUNDERING horse painfully drags her across:

EXT. THRACIAN COUNTRYSIDE - WOODS - DAY

IN A SERIES OF TIGHT, INTENSE CLOSE-UPS - the remains of Xena's armor slowly but inexorably DISINTEGRATE as she FIGHTS to keep her head off the ground.

It won't be long before this ordeal flays the skin from her bones. Xena knows it.

She won't survive long.

She painfully reaches into her tunic - drawing a small knife, then bends, painfully toward her leg to try to cut the line between her and horse...

SHE STRAINS... STRAINS... STRAINS... TO HER ANKLE

Life. Freedom. A knife's reach away. Until a ROCK kicks up from the trail and makes contact with Xena's hand with an excruciating SWAT!

The knife flies. It's over.

Xena's body unfolds. Her eyes close. And then...

A PEASANT'S HAND-DRAWN CART CAREENS ONTO THE HORSE'S PATH

Ramshackle and loaded with bags and supplies.

The horse SKIDS to avoid the cart - double-backing, confused - and in the moment it takes it to regain its bearings:

A YOUNG RED-HAIRED WOMAN SCRAMBLES ONTO THE PATH

Holding her own knife, which she uses to CUT THE LINE between Xena and the horse.

The horse quickly gets back on the path and VANISHES. The young redhead RUSHES OVER to her cart, where she exchanges the knife for a cloth roll of first-aid supplies.

With her alabaster skin and clear blue eyes, this young woman could pass for a wood nymph, but her bearing is rough-and-tumble, her movements are bustling with purpose, and her voice is one of intelligence and practicality.

This is:

GABRIELLE

You're lucky the land is flat and I
saw you coming down the path...

Gabrielle gets a really good look at Xena's macerated body:

GABRIELLE

Actually, you don't look so lucky... and these roads are full of slavers and marauders... but you're still breathing, and that means we can get you out of here before our luck runs out.

Gabrielle unfurls her kit, and works on Xena's injuries...

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. VARIOUS PLACES IN THE WILDS - DAY

As Gabrielle pulls her cart FURTHER AND FURTHER away from where she found Xena...

MORE DISSOLVES

Show the continuing journey as Xena lies unconscious in the cart... and Gabrielle keeps pulling... the woods get thicker... the paths gets rougher... the light gets darker...

END DISSOLVES ON

EXT. THICKLY WOODED PATH - DAY

As Gabrielle pulls and pulls and pulls, bowing her head and closing her eyes as she takes a deep breath for strength... and then opens her eyes to see...

TWO MEN STANDING ON THE ROAD BEFORE HER

Gabrielle stops. She looks back... stepping next to the cart... and notices a THIRD MAN, entering the road behind them - dragging a set of chains.

GABRIELLE

Slavers. Luck just ran out.

MAN #1

Throw down any weapons and get on the ground if you want to live!

Xena's hand REACHES UP to touch Gabrielle's wrist. Gabrielle looks down to see that Xena is holding the knife she used to cut the horse line.

GABRIELLE

Are you kidding? You can barely breathe. Just... be still...

(to the approaching men)

(MORE)

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)

Hey! Hello! Uh... you may not want to come too close to us...

MAN #2

We said throw yourself to the ground before we do it for you!

GABRIELLE

I would. I would but - wait. Don't move. I mean for your own safety - look at this, from where you are. Look at this woman - my sister - look at the lesions on her skin.

MAN #1

What's wrong with her?

GABRIELLE

Good question. My village healer said it was *lepra* -

Man #1 looks at Man #2 - they know what that word means.

MAN #1

Leprosy?

GABRIELLE

Very advanced stage -

MAN #2

I say she's lying.

Gabrielle steps over to Xena and removes one of her bandages, revealing the raw and bloody skin underneath:

GABRIELLE

I wish I were, look at it - her skin is sloughing off in pus-dripping sheets, and... since we shared a room together in our village, I began to have the symptoms myself - not in my face but, that's definitely coming -

The men take pause from Gabrielle's words... but aren't moving away, either. She has to bring it home and fast:

GABRIELLE

Did I mention we're on our way to a leper colony? That's right - our elders shunned us. Look, I don't judge how you make your living, you wanna chain us up, sell us to some brothel, that's - well - but I'm just saying, you may find your repeat business taking a hit.

(MORE)

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)

Apparently anyone who touches us in an intimate way is going to have bits of them falling in bloody, weeping chunks.

The slavers are starting to believe - and to BACK AWAY:

GABRIELLE

Why don't you come closer and have a look? I'll gladly take off the rest of her bandages if you - there's a really discolored and wet pustule right between her -

The slavers have heard enough - Man #1 simply gestures to the slaver behind Gabrielle and to his friend.

And within seconds, the slavers are GONE. Gabrielle sighs a deep breath as Xena looks up to - her words a raspy whisper.

XENA

You saved me. With nothing but words.

GABRIELLE

I'm good at telling stories. We should move before they change their mind.

XENA

Who are you?

GABRIELLE

Gabrielle.

Neither of them realize it yet - in which the greatest relationship of each of these women's lives was born...

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. GABRIELLE'S FAMILY HOMESTEAD - CONTINUOUS

A HOME TENT and open-air SMITHY near a SMALL VILLAGE. These dwellings have a nomadic, Eastern flavor.

MAN'S VOICE

Who is this woman?

The man's voice belongs to Gabrielle's father, HERODOTUS: a towering redhead with a blacksmith's thick arms and many tattoos on his pale skin.

He stands over the bandaged and bloodied Xena alongside Gabrielle's little sister LILA (14, also a ginger).

LILA

She's scary.

GABRIELLE

She's not scary. Someone beat her half to death and tied her to a horse to finish the job.

LILA

What if she deserved it?

GABRIELLE

Who deserves that?

LILA

Do you even know her name?

GABRIELLE

Shut up, Lila!

HERODOTUS

Your sister has a point. This woman was on her way to a bad end. We don't know who she is or what she -

GABRIELLE

So I should have left her to die? Mother taught us better.
(favoring her father)
To leave someone behind is a sin against Zeus himself.

LILA

Mother meant that about our people.

GABRIELLE

Mother meant that about everyone. She meant that about the greater good.

Herodotus holds up his hands - an impatient SHUSH of his squabbling daughters - then turns to Gabrielle:

HERODOTUS

Our fortunes are bad. This land is hard enough as it is. The gods -

GABRIELLE

Maybe the gods put her in front of us as a test. Like the parable of Baucis and Philemon. Maybe, if we help a stranger in need, we gain a friend and our fortunes will turn.

(MORE)

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)
(wearying of this)
Fine. You know what? I travelled
day and night. I need to rest.
Which one of you is going to drag
her back to the road to Thrace and
leave her to die?

Herodotus bows his head, a little ashamed, then:

HERODOTUS
Your mother taught you well.

LILA
Father!

A STERN LOOK from Herodotus shuts Lila down.

HERODOTUS
Tend to our guest, Gabrielle.

And off Herodotus furrowed with worry as his oldest daughter
does the right thing... and his youngest skulks away.

INT. HOMESTEAD - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Xena lies asleep in a bed... until she hears FOOT STEPS. Her
eyes SNAP OPEN. She produces Gabrielle's knife:

HERODOTUS
Stay your weapon, woman. I'm only
your host.

Xena puts the knife to the side and painfully drags herself
up to look at Herodotus.

XENA
I can tell from your face that you
are a decent man... who thinks he's
facing an indecent person.

HERODOTUS
Am I wrong?

XENA
No. You are kind. And you have
raised a kind young woman.

HERODOTUS
I worry it will be the end of her.

XENA
You're right to.

HERODOTUS

Who are you? What is your name?

XENA

You're better off not knowing.

Herodotus comes closer, his approach measured... and
REVEALING that he's carrying one of his blacksmith's hammers.

HERODOTUS

I'm not a child. I have the right
to know who's darkening my door.

Xena nods, knows her life might depend on what she says next:

XENA

It would appear truth is the only
payment I can offer you.
(sizing him up)
You're Scythians.

HERODOTUS

What gave it away? The ink beneath
my skin or the fire on my head?

XENA

I have faced your people in battle
and humiliated your King. If you
were to sell me out to his Royal
Guard, you would never have to
swing hammer against anvil again.

HERODOTUS

I like my work.

XENA

It's why I told you.

HERODOTUS

Do I have anything else to fear
other than my own King riding his
guard to my doorstep to kill you?

XENA

There's also the mercenary army
that beat me, tied me to a horse,
and left me to die.

HERODOTUS

Do you always make such friends
wherever you go?
(off her look)
It's bad augury to turn you away.
(MORE)

HERODOTUS (CONT'D)

I don't need more disfavor from the gods. So you will remain, my guest, and I will keep your secrets. But my daughter is to know none of this, and I expect you to go soon as you are well enough to travel. Do I have your promise?

XENA

Do you think you can trust my word?

Herodotus looks down at his hammer, then, as he turns to go:

HERODOTUS

Neither one of us has a choice.

XENA

I will protect your daughter. I promise.

Herodotus and Xena hold each other's gaze for a moment... then he EXITS. Xena clutches the blade...

Then, once she is certain he has gone, lets her hand fall... and as her eyes close:

SHOCK CUT TO

A SHACKLE... AROUND THE ANKLE OF NINE YEAR-OLD XENA!

Force-Marched - part of a chain gang of enslaved WOMEN AND CHILDREN - by SOLDIERS IN GOLD ARMOR across:

EXT. ARID LANDSCAPE - DAY (DREAM/FLASHBACK)

Nine Year-Old Xena, dressed in rags, covered in dust and blood, eyes red, lips dry and cracked, looks up to lock eyes with her MOTHER - also distraught and struggling.

Nine Year Old Xena STUMBLES: holding up the chain gang.

As a SOLDIER strides over and lifts his arm to WHIP her...

XENA'S MOTHER

Xena! No!

XENA'S MOTHER

THROWS herself at the Soldier. She's no match: the soldier SHOVS her down to the dusty earth.

The chain gang recoils from her as far as their bonds will allow.

The soldier draws his sword and lifts it overhead:

SLASH!

A STRIPE OF BLOOD slashes Nine Year Old Xena's face.

As the Soldier takes the sword from her mother's dead body...

SMASH CUT TO

A RED-HOT PLOUGH ENTERING A TUB OF WATER

Held by a pair of tongs... letting out a PUFF OF VAPOR,
through which enters Gabrielle:

GABRIELLE

It's Xena. Her name's Xena.

EXT. HOMESTEAD - SMITHY - CONTINUOUS

Herodotus removes the plough from the tub, and as he brings
it back to the anvil and finds his hammer:

HERODOTUS

Good to know. Finally. It's only
been two weeks.

GABRIELLE

She has been unconscious for a lot
of that.

HERODOTUS

So how did you find out?

GABRIELLE

She talks in her sleep.

Before Herodotus can reply, Lila enters the smithy:

LILA

Hey Gabby... your evil friend's
trying to run away.

GABRIELLE

Her name is Xena.

LILA

Well, Xena, just got out of bed,
and said she had to meet her
destiny, and not to follow her.

GABRIELLE

Again? Oh... gods!

EXT. HILLS NEAR THE HOMESTEAD - PATH - DAY

Bandaged, hobbling - and clearly still in agonizing pain - Xena uses a makeshift cane to propel herself.

GABRIELLE (O.S.)

Keep insisting on leaving before you heal and I may just let you.

Xena sees her coming but keeps moving, determined to go.

GABRIELLE

You won't last a day in the shape you're in.

XENA

I must meet my destiny.

GABRIELLE

So must everyone else. Ever think of that? Maybe I'm taking time off my busy schedule of meeting my destiny to try and help you. Maybe I want to leave the farm, go to Athens, enroll in the Lyceum, become a bard, and tell my stories to the world. And am I doing that? No. Why? Because I'm helping you.

XENA

If you knew anything about the world, you would have left me where you found me.

GABRIELLE

You are the worst person I've ever met. You know that? You're taciturn. Angry. No sense of gratitude. Helping you was supposed to bring me good fortune.

Xena shakes her head, then realizes something about Gabrielle: something she can use to her own advantage.

XENA

Have you been in a fight before? Wielded arms in battle?

GABRIELLE

Why would I "wield arms in battle?" I'm a blacksmith's daughter.

XENA

And you truly believe you could survive the road to Athens when you've never known the taste of blood?

GABRIELLE

Why would I need to know the taste of blood? Ew.

XENA

Spoken like a blacksmith's daughter.

GABRIELLE

Well, pardon me for not leading a dark and mysterious life of unremitting brutality, but I happen to believe that words change history. Not violence.

XENA

I may not know gratitude, but I know you need the same thing I do. Training.

GABRIELLE

Training?

XENA

Combat training.

GABRIELLE

I don't need to fight people, I need people to tell me their stories so I can be their chronicler. For example, you could tell me who you are, you know, beyond your name - and how you wound up beaten, tied to a horse, and - I could write your story.

(as Xena glares a dagger)

Or... not...

XENA

You're right about one thing.

GABRIELLE

One thing?

Xena TOSSES HER CANE to Gabrielle:

XENA

I won't recover completely without help. Someone to spar against. Take the cane. Hold it like a sword.

(MORE)

XENA (CONT'D)

Hand over hand, dominant arm below.
It powers your blows.

Gabrielle awkwardly grips the cane, follows Xena's motion to face the tree as if it were an adversary...

GABRIELLE

You want me to learn to fight?
(off Xena's nod)
All right. Who am I fighting?

XENA

You. Always you.

And as Xena trains Gabrielle...

THE FOLLOWING DISSOLVES SHOW THE PASSAGE OF TIME

Xena's wounds heal - her bandages get smaller and eventually go away entirely - lacerations scab, scar, and VANISH...

DISSOLVE TO

HERODOTUS'S ANVIL

The hammer BANGING out a sword.

DISSOLVE TO

Xena, hammering with her good arm (the other in a sling) as Herodotus holds the tongs for her. And off the sword... SLOWLY TAKING SHAPE...

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. HILLS NEAR THE VILLAGE - CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS

Gabrielle STRIKES the tree with the cane. Xena watches: the look on her face making it clear that Gabrielle is hopeless.

DISSOLVE TO

XENA'S SWORD - GOING INTO THE HOT WATER

As Xena - now able to handle the tongs - lifts it up to see:

DISSOLVE TO

THE SWORD - NOW IN GABRIELLE'S HAND

As she SHAKES HER HEAD and tries to return it to Xena, at:

EXT. HILLS NEAR THE VILLAGE - DAY

Xena refuses to take the sword back - and as Gabrielle clumsily WAVES it... and SHAKES HER HEAD...

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. HOMESTEAD - SMITHY/HOME TENT - DAY

Herodotus watches as Xena continues to coach Gabrielle, who swings the sword clumsily... so clumsily, in fact, that she KNOCKS XENA'S CANE OUT FROM UNDER HER.

Xena stumbles just enough to catch her balance - then walks over to the cane, shaking her head, and picks it up.

Gabrielle smiles. You can walk!

Xena regards the cane, then EXCHANGES IT for the sword.

Gabrielle shakes her head and tries to grip the cane like a sword - but Xena shows her how to hold it like a staff.

HERODOTUS EXCHANGES LOOKS WITH A DUBIOUS LILA

HIDING by the water barrel near the anvil, shaking her head.

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. HILLS NEAR THE VILLAGE - DAY

Xena creeps up the hill slowly, SEARCHING for something... until she finds it - a white flower, growing at the base of a tree... and as Xena PLUCKS the flower...

REVEAL LILA - HIDING behind bushes... watching from afar.

EXT. HILLS NEAR THE VILLAGE - DAY

Gabrielle now has a real staff. Xena - standing on her own - coaches her, using the sword for mock attacks.

As Xena recognizes that Gabrielle is, in fact, improving...

TILT UP TO THE BLUE SKY

Darkening as the camera reaches a starry apogee and then TILTS DOWN into the red, torch-lit roofs of...

EXT. CITY OF ARGOS - NIGHT

A sprawling hub of art and empire... and, of course, wherever there is art and empire, there's also...

INT. ARGOSIAN BROTHEL - NIGHT

MALE AND FEMALE SEX WORKERS in loincloths party with rough men from the military and cultured men from the city alike.

Eyes shut hard, Iolaus lies on a wooden table as two scantily-clad WHORES - one male, one female - pour wine into his open mouth, and several men from Hercules' army CHEER HIM ON.

The wine STOPS. The CHEERING stops. Iolaus keeps his mouth open and his eyes closed, expecting more, then:

IOLAUS

I paid good money for the wine and
the flesh! Where's the rest!?

Iolaus opens his eyes to see Hercules, standing over him.

HERCULES

Party's over.

Iolaus SCRAMBLES FROM THE TABLE to his feet as Hercules motions for Cortus and Pentacles to give them some space.

IOLAUS

Uncle - what - what are you -

HERCULES

Sit.

(as Iolaus obeys)

I've been to the King's court. He
has a mission for us.

IOLAUS

Another one of the King's labors?
What are we stealing? Slaying?

HERCULES

He's given us an army.

IOLAUS

We have an army.

HERCULES

Not like this. The King is giving
me an entire legion.

IOLAUS

Mother of Ares. What does he want us to do? Slay another Hydra?

Hercules reaches into his robe, UNFURLS a map...

HERCULES

We're marching back to Thrace... a group of nomadic tribes rode in from the east. They're living on the outskirts of the King's land.

IOLAUS

Nomads?

HERCULES

Scythians.

IOLAUS

Scythians? Those dirty, red-haired trolls with the - the tattoos?

HERCULES

We're going to march our army out there and burn down their villages, and the ones we don't exterminate, we drive back to whatever shit hole they rode out of. And when we return, the King will give us enough gold that we will never have to march again. I'm not talking a few months worth of wine and women. I'm talking for life.

IOLAUS

What do I have to do?

HERCULES

Accept the rank of Colonel and gather the men.

Iolaus stands and gives an EXAGGERATED MILITARY SALUTE:

IOLAUS

Men! This is your COLONEL speaking! Cease all fornication and inebriation! We march into battle!

HERCULES LOOKS DOWN AT THE MAP

And as he ZEROES IN on a green spot of land...

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. HOMESTEAD - SMITHY/HOME TENT - DAY

Gabrielle walks toward her father - who sees her coming, puts his tools down, and meets her, a troubled look on his face.

GABRIELLE

I know that look. What'd I do?

HERODOTUS

Your sister and I were in the village and... people are talking. About you and Xena. They see you training. They see how she handles weapons, what she's teaching you... and they don't like it.

GABRIELLE

Why does that matter?

HERODOTUS

Because I don't like it either. I am not raising you to wield weapons, and kill people. Our King has his Royal Guard to protect us. That's why we follow the Nomad City. We are a peaceful people.

GABRIELLE

So I don't have a right to learn how to defend myself?

HERODOTUS

(not buying it)

She made that sword for herself, not you.

(then)

Our neighbors speak of a warrior princess. An enemy of the people. Someone who once met our own in battle. A woman who led a legion of killers. They call her "Destroyer of Nations."

GABRIELLE

They think that's Xena?

HERODOTUS

Do you know any different?

GABRIELLE

Xena's a lot of things but - destroyer of nations? A murderer?

(off her father)

We helped her, treated her like a guest. Why would the gods send such bad fortune - it makes no sense!

HERODOTUS

The gods aren't always kind to the likes of us, child.

GABRIELLE

I can't believe that.

Gabrielle looks away - months of denial crumbling. Herodotus looks over to Lila: hiding and eavesdropping among the barrels and bales in the smithy.

HERODOTUS

Lila. Show her. What you showed me.

Lila emerges from hiding and takes a few tentative steps toward Gabrielle - opening one hand to show...

A WHITE FLOWER

And a second hand to show a small flask.

And off Gabrielle - knowing what this is and why it's bad...

EXT. HILLS NEAR THE VILLAGE - DAY

Xena - almost completely healed - STRIDES WITH PURPOSE around the trees... spotting another white flower... but as she squats to pluck it from the ground...

GABRIELLE'S VOICE

Xena! Destroyer of Nations!

Xena SPINS around to see:

GABRIELLE - WIELDING HER STAFF

And SWINGING it with purpose: going after her teacher. Xena DUCKS the blow with muscle memory alone.

XENA

This is cute.

GABRIELLE

Defend yourself!

Xena shakes her head, then grabs for her sword, pulling it from the scabbard with an ECHOING SWISH!

Xena motions to Gabrielle - EGGING HER ON TO ATTACK.

GABRIELLE PUSHES IN WITH FIERCE DETERMINATION

But Xena is a cat playing with a mouse. Every THRUST gets a PARRY. Every BLOW gets a BLOCK. Every SLASH gets a DUCK.

XENA

You have something to say, you best use your mouth and not your staff.

GABRIELLE

Fight me!

Xena gives an "OK, you asked for it" looksmile... then DROPS, grapples Gabrielle's legs with her own, and BRINGS HER DOWN.

Xena then POUNCES, gets on top of her prey, and brandishes her blade overhead to keep Gabrielle down.

Gabrielle looks up, and then, with a clever grimace:

SHE SCRATCHES XENA'S LEG WITH HER STAFF

XENA

One hit. That's good. Now. Speak.

Xena KICKS the staff out of Gabrielle's hands and away.

GABRIELLE

It was more than a hit.

Gabrielle lifts her hand to remove something from her belt... the white flower and vial that Lila showed her.

XENA LOOKS AT HER WITH MOUNTING CONCERN

XENA

Do you know what that is?

GABRIELLE

I told you my mother was a healer. It's hellebore. Most powerful poison in the world. I hear it could slay Atlas himself. Or poison an entire village. You are collecting it. Why?

XENA

That is my business alone.

GABRIELLE

Not really. I rubbed it on my staff.

Why? XENA GABRIELLE

I saved your life. I took you in. You can't even be honest about who you are.

XENA
So you've killed me?

GABRIELLE
I said my mother was a healer. I have an antidote.

XENA
Give it to me.

Xena rears up her sword: she is about to kill Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE
I die, you won't know where I put the antidote. So you tell me. Are you the Destroyer of Nations?

Xena tosses the sword so that it digs into the ground some feet away, then turns her back on Gabrielle, who stands.

XENA
I swear. I mean you no harm.

GABRIELLE
Who is this for, then?

Xena takes a deep breath, then speaks without turning to look at Gabrielle - confession is clearly not in her nature:

XENA
I trusted someone. A warrior.
(looking away)
He was more than a warrior. He was a god. I joined my army with his.

XENA
We were going to conquer the world, but he turned my men against me. They came after me. A hundred against one. Took everything I had.

GABRIELLE
Was this the person who tied you to that horse?

XENA
He must die.

GABRIELLE

Does this walking corpse have a name?

XENA

Give me the antidote. Now!

Gabrielle takes a moment, enjoying her victory, then smiles.

GABRIELLE

I was bluffing.

Xena realizes that this naive young thing has completely and utterly PUNKED her.

Xena YANKS the sword from the ground and STOMPS away.

EXT. PATH TO GABRIELLE'S VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Xena takes wide, angry strides down the path. Gabrielle enters from the treeline, rushing up to her.

GABRIELLE

Oh, come on, Xena... so I'm a little clever, is that so bad? Four months you've lived here and every time I ask the most innocuous of questions you turn away, and you brood, and you say things like "I'm a monster! I'm a villain! Avert your eyes from me!"

XENA

It was to protect you.

GABRIELLE

Oh please. All you wanted me for was to help you heal so you could go on your raging rampage of vengeance.

XENA

Leaving is the best thing I can do.

GABRIELLE

So you're gonna go kill a man. And then what? You know, after you find this man, run him through with a poison blade, he dies... painfully.

XENA
What do you mean?

GABRIELLE
I mean exactly what I said:
"Then. What?"

XENA
Well then - I... I mean...

GABRIELLE
You don't know, do you? You haven't thought of it. You are going to march out of here and kill a man and you don't care who you leave behind or what's in front of you.

XENA
All you want is to run away to join a bunch of dried up old men with their scrolls and their quills, and you question me?

GABRIELLE
You could come.

XENA
Do you have a head injury?

GABRIELLE
Do you know what Athens is? It's not just a city. It's the center of the world. It's a place where anyone can make of themselves whatever they desire. Even you.

XENA
What if what I desire is vengeance?

GABRIELLE
Was the life of violence really working out that well for you?
(as Xena lifts her hand)
Don't tell me to be quiet - we are having a moment of truth.

XENA
Listen -

GABRIELLE
No. You listen. You have a choice to make -

Xena shakes her head. Indicates her ears. A faint SOUND:

XENA
Listen. Horses. Hide.

SMASH CUT TO

EXT. THE SAME PATH - MOMENTS LATER

A half dozen horses, bearing yellow and purple flags THUNDER
DOWN THE PATH:

FIND XENA AND GABRIELLE - HIDING BEHIND TREES

GABRIELLE
That is the King's Guard. Those men
are his fiercest warriors.

XENA
I know their flags.

GABRIELLE
You do?

XENA
And they are heading for your
village. I'm sorry.

GABRIELLE
Why are you sorry?

XENA
Have you heard nothing I've told
you? I have met your people in
battle. I am an enemy of your King
and his armies. Those men are here
for me.

And off the exchange of looks... and Xena's dread that the
sins of her past have returned to haunt her...

EXT. HOMESTEAD - DAY

As the warriors on horseback close in. Herodotus makes his
way out of the smithy with Lila, cowering behind him... And
as they do...

PAN TO FIND XENA AND GABRIELLE

Hiding behind trees a good distance away - but still
whispering:

XENA
We don't have a lot of time. They
will search your home and torture
your family.

(MORE)

XENA (CONT'D)

You need to cause a diversion. I will flank the homestead. Sneak to the smithy and set the tarp on fire. It will frighten the horses. I will use the surprise to kill as many men as -

GABRIELLE
What are you talking about?

XENA
What I know how to do best.

GABRIELLE
Start a brawl with a platoon of soldiers?

XENA
You have spent months in the company of a pirate and a mercenary who has waged strife on your King. Why else would they be here?

GABRIELLE
Maybe we should ask before we start slaughtering them.

XENA
We aren't slaughtering anybody.

GABRIELLE
If I go talk to them -

XENA
We lose the element of surprise.

GABRIELLE
A fair trade for the life of my family, and if I'm wrong, you can "descend" on them while they interrogate my family and slaughter them any way your heart desires.
(before Xena can reply)
HAIL! KINGSMEN! HAIL!

And off Xena - annoyed and stymied as Gabrielle RUSHES OFF:

EXT. HOMESTEAD - MOMENTS LATER

Gabrielle BUSTLES down to her father and sister as the two lead soldiers - impressive men with massive arms covered with intricate tattoos - dismount and remove their headgear:

HEAD SOLDIER
You are Herodotus of Serica?

GABRIELLE
Hail Kingsmen!

HERODOTUS
(to Gabrielle)
Gabrielle - quiet!
(then to Head Soldier)
I am. This is my family.

HEAD SOLDIER
Bow your head and bend your knee -
for your home is now graced by the
presence of his Highness - King
Neyar of the Nomad City of Zarana!

The rider at the center removes his headgear to reveal KING NEYAR: a patrician man a great crest of flaming red hair, and tattoos reaching all the way past his shoulders to his neck.

HERODOTUS
My liege. We are your servants. We
follow your command as we follow
your nomad city with the seasons.

As Gabrielle's family KNEELS before their ruler:

ANGLE ON XENA

Watching... hand CLENCHED around the hilt of her sword...

INT. HOMESTEAD - HOME TENT - MOMENTS LATER

The King has the best chair in the house. Gabrielle and Herodotus sit on the floor before him. Star-struck, Lila serves him from a humble carafe.

NEYAR
What I am about to divulge is a
secret of state. I beg you, as your
King, and as a father, to take what
I say now to your grave.

HERODOTUS
You beg? I am a humble blacksmith.

The King silences him with a gentle pat of his hand on air:

NEYAR
An army has arisen. From the
Argolid Peninsula. They raze our
settlements, slaughter the men, and
abduct our women and children. They
seek to annihilate us.
(lets that sink in, then:)
(MORE)

NEYAR (CONT'D)

To protect you - my people - I
sought an alliance through marriage
with Raxos of Sauromatia.

GABRIELLE

Warlord of the Eastern Horse Clans?

NEYAR

He commands legions who would fight
for us. But my daughter, my
princess... my failure. She's run
away. My men have searched but...

HERODOTUS

You want our help in finding her?

NEYAR

That time is past. We seek a woman
who resembles my daughter's beauty.
Raxos only met her once, in
childhood. With the right girl
taking the role of the princess...
we will be defended. Our way of
life will be saved.

That's when Herodotus looks up and realizes that every person
in the room other than him and Lila are staring at Gabrielle!

And that's when Gabrielle makes the same realization:

GABRIELLE

Me?

NEYAR

Yes. You are her mirror image.

GABRIELLE

W - when?

NEYAR

The betrothal takes place in
days. And we must... prepare
you... I could demand this,
but, having lost my own
child, I know what I'm asking
you to sacrifice. I will give
you a few moments to
consider.

Neyar EXITS - Herodotus and Lila are left dumbstruck as
Gabrielle looks away. Herodotus finally breaks the silence:

HERODOTUS

Gabrielle...

GABRIELLE

You don't have to make me. I'll go.
(off his horrified look)
It's what mother would have done.

HERODOTUS

She would have wanted a life of
peace and happiness. Not... this.
This is wrong.

Gabrielle looks toward the tent's exit, appreciating her
father's concern, but knowing that it is misplaced.

GABRIELLE

It isn't, father. It's a sacrifice.
A necessary one, it seems.

HERODOTUS

Is this what you want? To be wife
to a battle lord?

GABRIELLE

I want a life of peace and
happiness for everyone. Mother
would agree.
(her mother's words)
It's a fair sacrifice for the
greater good.

EXT. HOMESTEAD AND SMITHY - MOMENTS LATER

Gabrielle packs things into a bag... Xena shakes her head,
clearly displeased... Lila chatters on:

LILA

Gabrielle is going to be a
princess, and I am going to be a
handmaiden. We are royalty now.
We're going to live in the Capital!

XENA

This is obscene.

GABRIELLE

An army is coming to kill us -
my marriage to Raxos will
save lives.

XENA

What about your life? Is this what
you want? To be traded off to some
barbarian? I've heard tell of Raxos
- he's as bad as whoever leads that
army that's coming to kill your -

GABRIELLE
(handing over a bag)
Lila, take this to the King's men.

Lila shoots Gabrielle a "but this is just getting good" look, which Gabrielle shoots down with a glare. Lila scampers.

XENA
I can get you out of this. They are just men. Your King is just a man.

GABRIELLE
Do you know any solution to a problem other than killing?
(off Xena's shrug)
All right go - commit regicide - then what?

XENA
You flee to Athens.

GABRIELLE
Athens is very far away.

XENA
Please. What about your dreams?

GABRIELLE
The ones you mock?

XENA
The ones you're giving up to be sold off like a brood mare.

GABRIELLE
A queen can be a bard.

XENA
Don't fool yourself. Raxos will make you give him heirs until he breaks your body and your mind.

GABRIELLE
Gods below! I'm scared enough as it is.

XENA
You should be. How much gold is your father taking to whore you out to his King?

GABRIELLE
He's taking nothing.
(off Xena's reaction)
(MORE)

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)
Please don't tell me you can't
understand what I am doing.

The two regard one another for a long moment, then...

XENA
I understand it... but it's
something I could never do.

A tear rolls down Gabrielle's cheek as she touches Xena's
shoulder - but Xena is too practiced in concealing her
feelings behind cold, dark eyes...

GABRIELLE
Please don't say that. Go to
Athens. Go for me. If I can't have
my future, then you have it for me.
You want to pay me back for saving
you life? Forego your vengeance.
Become everything I can't.

As Gabrielle goes, and Xena keeps her emotions in check...

EXT. PATH TO GABRIELLE'S VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Neyar and his royal guard RIDE DOWN THE PATH. As they come
closer, REVEAL Gabrielle and Lila, riding in tandem.

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. HOMESTEAD - SMITHY - DAY

Xena packs her meager belongings, strapping on the sword she
fashioned for Gabrielle - looking back to lock eyes with:

HERODOTUS - LEANING ON HIS ANVIL

Distraught by the sacrifice his daughters have made for the
Greater Good.

Disgusted - and more emotional than she would ever allow
herself to show - Xena WALKS AWAY...

DISSOLVE TO

GABRIELLE'S FACE

Filling with AWE as Neyar rides to her, and WAVES PROUDLY:

NEYAR

Princess... the Nomad City of
Zarana. Our capital. Your home.

WIDEN DRAMATICALLY TO REVEAL

EXT. CITY OF ZARANA - MAIN STREET - DAY

Imagine Paris, only fashioned entirely from massive tents!

This is a nomad empire's capital city: built not to only impress, but to also move with the seasons. Massive tent buildings stagger with their complexity. The yellow, grey and purple sigils of Neyar fly everywhere.

Gabrielle and Lila look at one another as their horses move down the bustling main street - CROWDED WITH MERCHANTS, CLIENTS, and SCYTHIAN GLITERATTI: all of them red-haired, light skinned, and heavily tattooed.

The expressions on Gabrielle and Lila make it clear that they have never seen the likes of this.

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. THRACIAN COUNTRYSIDE - DAY TO NIGHT

As Xena TRUDGES ACROSS THE LAND...

DISSOLVE TO

EXT. THRACIAN COUNTRYSIDE - NIGHT

Xena lies to sleep by a campfire... as she CLOSES HER EYES...

DISSOLVE TO

GABRIELLE'S EYES

As she walks down...

INT. NEYAR'S PALACE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

A hallway of billowing yellow and purple drapes, leading to:

INT. NEYAR'S PALACE TENT - BRANDING ROOM - NIGHT

Where HANDMAIDENS in yellow cloaks, now including Lila, lead Gabrielle - wearing a robe - into a top-lit area with a table, a rack of EXOTIC NEEDLES, and person-sized diagrams showing a female figure covered in INTRICATE DESIGNS.

Neyar stands before them:

NEYAR

Gabrielle. These are the heraldic markings borne by my daughter. They are the most secret of my family's possessions, and the sign of a true princess of the line of *Pansakor*. If you choose to take them, there will be no turning back. You will be my daughter and promised bride to Raxos of Sauromatia. Do you accept this burden?

GABRIELLE

For the sake of my people. I do.

Neyar nods. Several VERY HEAVY WOMEN in distinctive robes - the ROYAL TATTOOISTS - enter as Neyar EXITS.

As the maidens DISROBE Gabrielle and ease her on the table:

IN A SERIES OF DISSOLVES

The tattooists CLEAN NEEDLES and ARRANGE PIGMENTS.

The Handmaidens GENTLY HOLD GABRIELLE'S WRISTS to the table, their faces the model of compassion as...

The needles BURROW into Gabrielle's flesh and...

Lila AVERTS her eyes in fear as Gabrielle CRIES IN PAIN...

And as the marks spread painfully across her body, and the tears stream from her eyes...

DISSOLVE TO XENA'S EYES

As she looks back to her dying fire at...

EXT. THRACIAN COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

And then WALKS AWAY... until she reaches...

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Xena spots SOMETHING... she stops walking and focuses in...

AN ARMY - MARCHING ACROSS A PLAIN IN THE DISTANCE

Xena instinctively DROPS TO THE GROUND and looks up to see...

THE BRIGHT ORANGE BANNER AT THE ARMY'S FORE

Featuring an image of a SNARLING LION.

ANGLE ON XENA

Her face filling with rage and resolve...

CUT TO

THE LION SIGIL OF HERCULES - NOW ON A SHIELD

Carried by one of a pair of SCOUTS ON HORSES riding across:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The scouts stop their horses, Scout #2 DISMOUNTS.

SCOUT #1

Easy, Argo, easy. Don't dawdle. The
commander wants our report by
sundown.

SCOUT #2

(handing over his reins)
Don't soil your loincloth, even
demigods take a piss on occasion.

Scout #2 steps up to a clump of trees, and as he reaches
below frame to relieve himself.

WHO-WHO-WHO-WHO-WHOOSH! XENA'S SWORD CAREENS OVER HIS HEAD

And FINDS PURCHASE in Scout #1's ribcage. He doesn't even
know he's dead before he faceplants into dirt.

The horses SPOOK and REAR. As Scout #2 scrambles to tuck
himself in:

HE GETS A FACEFUL OF XENA!

EMERGING to bury her fist in his nose!

Scout #2 FALLS with a STUNNED MOAN... then looks up as Xena POUNCES - kicking away his weapons as his face fills with soul-shattering dread.

SCOUT #2
Xena... no...

XENA
You remember me. I'm touched.

SCOUT #2
(absolute disbelief)
This can't be. We killed you.

XENA
No... you failed to kill me... now
I'm going to teach your commander a
lesson.
(off his look)
Where is Hercules?

As Xena LIFTS Scout #2 by his armored breastplate and SHOVES him HARD against a tree:

SCOUT #2
You will never get to him.

Xena doesn't like hearing that. Not. One. Bit.

With expert speed and skill, Xena makes a PRECISION STRIKE AT THE TWO CAROTID BODIES OF HIS JUGULAR!

Scout #2 immediately turns crimson - STRUGGLING FOR BREATH.

XENA
Listen very carefully. What you're
feeling is your brain suffocating.
I don't remove the pressure, you
die in thirty seconds. Understand?
(off #2's pained GURGLE)
Good. Hercules. He sleep alone?
(#2 shakes his head)
Guards?
(#2 shakes his head)
Concubines?
(#2 nods)
What's the least guarded entry to
the officer's tents?
(off the silence)
Hercules will die by my hand. I
swear it. But you will die first if
you don't answer.

#2 now BLEEDS FROM HIS NOSE. He emits a STRAINED GASP.

Xena stands, casually YANKS the sword from #1's chest.

XENA

You don't have a lot of time. When will the army make camp again?

SCOUT #2

We won't make camp... we march into battle.

(off Xena)

You would have to... kill every soldier who marches ahead of Hercules to get to him now.

XENA

You're going into battle? Who against?

SCOUT #2

Zarana... Nomad capital... we're mere hours away...

That hits her hard.

XENA

What does Hercules want with the Scythians?

SCOUT #2

Exterminate... kill the king... enslave his heirs...

Xena looks away as blood TRICKLES from Scout #2's ear. Far as she knows, King Neyar only has one heir:

XENA

Gabrielle.

(turns back to #2)

Hercules is using my army to terrorize Scythian villages? Murder innocent people? Why?

SCOUT #2

He's being paid... by the King of Argos... you would have done the same.

(as her face darkens)

Please... stop... the pain...

Xena turns away.

Remember how - in the original series - Xena would always take the nerve pinch off after getting what she wants?

This ain't that.

Scout #2 dies.

Xena looks back, then to the horses - she can go and meet the army and take her revenge... or she can save Gabrielle.

IN QUICK CUTS

Xena SUITS UP in the Scout's armor. She STRAPS ON the gauntlets. SLAPS ON the greaves. BELTS ON both of the men's swords.

Xena MOUNTS SCOUT #1's HORSE... and then, under her breath, as her fists clench around the reins:

XENA

So. Your name is Argo? I hope
you're fast.

(off the horse's NEIGH)

I'm coming, Gabrielle.

And as Xena spurs the horse, heaves a commanding HYEEEAGH!
And tears ass to save Gabrielle...

CUT TO BLACK

FADE IN ON AN EXTREME CLOSE UP ON GABRIELLE'S SHOULDER

Now decorated with an ornate, intricate patterns of black, blue, and green swirls joined by webs of lines and curlicues.

PULL AWAY TO REVEAL GABRIELLE AT

INT. NEYAR'S PALACE - PRINCESS CHAMBERS - NIGHT

Where Gabrielle - finally alone - stares at herself, and her now-unfamiliar body, in a polished brass mirror while Lila sleeps innocently on a divan in the background.

And that's when a shadow appears behind Gabrielle, and a familiar voice, WHISPERING:

XENA

What have they done to you?

Gabrielle STARTS around to see Xena, wrapped in a handmaiden's cloak over her armor:

GABRIELLE

What are you doing here?

Xena comes closer, aflame with the intensity of someone who just finished a furious and desperate ride to her objective:

XENA

Wake your sister. We're going. Now.

Gabrielle rolls her eyes and covers herself back up:

GABRIELLE

Are you totally deranged? We had this conversation. I can't run away from this, my people -

XENA

Shut up about your people. Your people are as good as dead. An army is coming. I rode ahead of them. They're on a mission to kill the King and enslave his heirs.
(re: her tattoos)
That's you now, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE

How do you -

XENA

(mounting exasperation)
I saw them on the road. They march under the sigil of Hercules.

GABRIELLE

Hercules.
(off Xena's curt nod)
THE Hercules?
(off Xena's eye roll)
How can Hercules be coming to kill us? He's a hero of the people, his legendary journeys are the stuff of song and popular -

XENA

Hercules is a mercenary. He steals land, terrorizes the innocent, and kills people for money.
(bearing down)
Trust me, it takes one to know one.

The pieces CLICK together for Gabrielle:

GABRIELLE

By Hera. He's the man who hurt you? The one who stole your army, had you beaten, tied you to a horse -

XENA

(losing patience)
Yes, yes, I was there!

GABRIELLE

Hercules is the man you vowed to kill?

(MORE)

GABRIELLE (CONT'D)
(off Xena's nod)
You ran into him on the road?

XENA
Yes. He's on his way - with
an army!

GABRIELLE
And you came for me instead?

XENA
Isn't that obvious?

GABRIELLE
It's just. Seems like an
unusually selfless gesture
coming from you.

XENA
Don't make me change my mind.

Lila STIRS awake as Xena REACHES for the stunned Gabrielle,
taking hold of her robes:

LILA
Xena? What are you -

XENA
Long story, gather your things!
(pulling Gabrielle close)
I owe you my life. I'm not so hard
that I don't know that. I gave up
my revenge to do this. The King's
charade, your betrothal to Raxos -
none of it is going to happen.
Genocide is at the gates. We will
escape, we will fetch your father,
and I will personally see you to
Athens. Understood?

Gabrielle nods, beaming... because this is the moment when
Xena begins her path to redemption.

This is the moment this warrior - this mercenary, this thief -
put her life on the line for a better future.

Gabrielle nods. As Xena lets her go...

A TERRIBLE BOOM SHAKES THE AIR AROUND THEM

Lila cowers, Gabrielle and Xena exchange glances. Xena goes
to a window and draws the drapes to see:

EXT. ZARANA SKYLINE - CONTINUOUS

Beset by flaming arrows as massive FIRES erupt everywhere.

XENA
We have to move.

INT. NEYAR'S PALACE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Xena blasts out of Gabrielle's room, scouts the coast, then pulls Gabrielle and Lila out - but their progress STOPS as three members of the KING'S GUARD round a corner:

GABRIELLE
Do you bring news of the king?

SOLDIER #1
He has sent us for you -

GABRIELLE
I will make my own retreat.

SOLDIER #1
The King has ordered us to fall
back to his stronghold, you will be
safe there.

Xena REACHES for her weapon, but Gabrielle STAYS her hand.

GABRIELLE
All right, then... I... uh...
insist my handmaidens accompany me.

SOLDIER #1
As you wish, follow us.

The soldiers lead the way, Xena exchanges glances with Gabrielle - Handmaiden? Gabrielle shrugs - whatever.

But the journey is short-lived as the cloth walls on one side of the hallway ERUPT INTO FLAME.

XENA, GABRIELLE, AND LILA COWER TO AVOID INCOMING DEBRIS

And the wall COLLAPSES to reveal a GROUP OF HERCULEAN SOLDIERS, hacking their way through the cloth and canvas!

HERCULEAN SOLDIER #1
It's the princess! That's the one
we seek! Seize her!

THE HERCULEAN SOLDIERS ADVANCE

Leading the way, Neyar's Royal Guards ENGAGE the soldiers.

AS THE FIRE CONSUMES THE TENT AROUND THEM

Xena GRABS Gabrielle and Lila and leads them to safety as...

HERCULES' MEN MAKE SHORT WORK OF NEYAR'S SOLDIERS

Rapidly HACKING down Gabrielle's protectors without mercy.

XENA DRAWS THE TWO SWORDS SHE STOLE EARLIER

Pushing Gabrielle and Lila to keep running.

Hercules' men step over the corpses of the King's Guards - pushing relentlessly toward their prize...

Just as Xena double-backs and unleashes A STORM OF ULTRAVIOLENCE - CUTTING DOWN Hercules' soldiers like so many sides of beef.

No sooner has Xena sent this bunch of pursuers to Hades that:

THE REST OF THE OUTER HALLWAY WALL

COLLAPSES in flame to REVEAL:

EXT. CITY OF ZARANA - BOULEVARD TO CITY SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Chaos. Siege. Lit up by fire as the previously-seen Scythian merchants and Glitterati RUN FOR THEIR LIVES, carrying whatever their arms will bear.

Xena GRABS a handful of Gabrielle, who keeps her hand on Lila, RUSHING HER DOWN THE STREET...

As a pair of HERCULEAN SOLDIERS enter the boulevard, HACKING at fleeing citizens -

UNTIL XENA FLINGS HER SWORD AT ONE OF THEM - WHOOSH! SHUNK!

He's dead. Xena BARRELS OVER to retrieve her weapon and perform a DOUBLE-BLADED HEAD-ECTOMY on the second soldier.

Xena, Gabrielle and Lila then turn a corner and ENTER:

EXT. TENT CITY OF ZARANA - CITY SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Just as chaotic as the boulevard. The FLAMES OF THE BURNING CITY rise in the distance as the square fills with smoke.

Herculean soldiers herd large groups of captive citizens into lines and EXECUTE them.

Xena continues her flight with Lila and Gabrielle - the crowd CLEARS JUST ENOUGH for Xena to see some thirty feet away to the center of the square and spot...

HERCULES - WEARING THE NEMEAN LION HEAD FOR A HELMET

With Iolaus - surrounded by a cordon of their own soldiers - DRAGGING a bloodied and very badly beaten Neyar to the center of his own city to be executed.

GABRIELLE

They have the king.

And the one thing Xena cannot help but notice is that Hercules has her Chakram attached to his belt!

XENA

Hercules. You bastard.

HERCULES LIFTS HIS CLUB

Intending to crush the King's head as his men KNEEL the monarch before him...

HERCULES

Neyar of Scythia! Scion of the line
of *Pansakor*! In the name of
Eurystheus, King of Argos, I
execute you and cast your city to
the ashes!

Xena PULLS OUT a dagger, TOSSES IT in the air to catch it by the blade, and then, in a single and deadly arc -

HURLS IT ACROSS THE SQUARE

The dagger DIGS INTO HERCULES' SHOULDER! Hercules WINCES and falters briefly - he SPINS around:

TO LOCK EYES WITH XENA

IOLAUS

It's Xena! She's alive!

HERCULES

(red with bloodlust)
I see that.

IOLAUS SPOTS GABRIELLE - NEXT TO XENA

Her robe falling just enough in the crowd and chaos to EXPOSE her newly - and heavily tattooed body...

IOLAUS
And she has the Princess!

HERCULES
Get our prize - go!

Hercules KICKS Neyar aside, and as he falls, unconscious:

HE RAISES HIS CLUB AND RUSHES TO XENA

XENA LIFTS HER SWORD and the two mighty warriors CLASH!

XENA
I want my weapon back!

HERCULES
So get it!

Sword and club SWING, THRUST, and BLOW expertly - the air THROBS every time their weapons meet!

XENA
You will die screaming.

HERCULES
Not before you.

As they FIGHT:

IOLAUS GRABS GABRIELLE

And she FIGHTS BACK like Xena taught her... but then:

ANOTHER HERCULEAN SOLDIER GRABS LILA

And THROWS HER DOWN to the ground, then LIFTS HIS SWORD.

GABRIELLE SEES THIS

As Iolaus and his men OVERPOWER and CHAIN HER UP:

GABRIELLE
Xena! Please! Save Lila! They want
me alive! Save her! Please!

THE TWO LOCK EYES

This is the person to whom she owes a life debt, begging her to do the right thing...

XENA DRIVES A MIGHTY KICK INTO HERCULES' CHEST

Sending him REELING into the crowd as she RUSHES toward:

THE SOLDIER ABOUT TO KILL LILA

Xena TAKES HIM DOWN WITH ONE SLASH, then, as TWO MORE SOLDIERS mount a challenge to her...

IOLAUS DRAGS GABRIELLE TO HERCULES

She's now chained and gagged. Hercules gets to his feet:

IOLAUS

The flames are spreading, our
escape route's about to burn!

Hercules sees:

XENA - KILLING THE LATEST SOLDIER

And SLINGING Lila her over her shoulder before she:

URNS BACK TO GABRIELLE

To see her now clean across the square, as Iolaus and Hercules LOAD her onto a chariot!

HERCULES SEES XENA - AND WAVES AT HER WITH THE CHAKRAM!

A shit-eating grin of sheer son-of-a-bitchery on his face as Iolaus CRACKS the whip... And the chariot TEARS ASS OUT OF THE SQUARE!

XENA BREAKS INTO A RUN

But she is CARRYING LILA through a crush of soldiers and victims... and the distance is too far... and there is no way she can outrun a team of horses...

But she is not about to give up... running until her legs can carry her no further... and the last thing she sees...

IS GABRIELLE - IN THE CHARIOT - HANGING OVER IOLAUS

And as the chariot VANISHES into the smoke-filled distance...

XENA'S PACE SLOWS TO A HALT

And there she stands as Lila feet hit the ground... the city of Zarana BURNING around her, the person who saved her life a captive of the man who wronged her.

Xena exchanges glances with Lila, who breaks into tears and takes Xena's hand... and off the moment, a life saved - a small victory - but the greater battle still ahead...

CUT TO BLACK

FADE IN ON THE RISING SUN

Its rays FORMING BROAD SHAFTS OF LIGHT through the smoke still RISING over the smouldering ruins of...

EXT. TENT CITY OF ZARANA - CITY SQUARE - DAY

A group of SQUIRES bear the King's litter to the city center, where Neyar's surviving courtiers dab his forehead and clean the festering wounds dealt to him by Hercules.

As the squires help their wounded monarch to his throne, one of Neyar's GENERALS steps up to match his weakened gaze:

GENERAL

We have apprehended one of Hercules' soldiers. She was found trying to leave the city with one of the Princess's handmaidens.

Neyar strains to lift his head, to make eye contact with Xena, flanked by a phalanx of Scythian Soldiers.

NEYAR

You... you are Xena. I know you - you have met my people in battle. You are the Destroyer of Nations.

XENA

Highness.

NEYAR

Don't "Highness" me. You are a thief, and a mercenary, and now you march with that scum?

Xena takes a deep breath: confession is not in her blood.

XENA

I am all those things, but I did not come to attack you. I stole this armor from the scouts of Hercules. I came to warn your princess of the danger. Hercules is my enemy, just as he is yours. You have my word.

NEYAR

Your word is worth about as much as a pitcher of warm spit to me.

(to his men)

Take her head.

But before she can do anything... Lila steps up from between the gathered soldiers, and does something very courageous:

LILA

She's not our enemy, she has lived among us for months, she's a member of my family, and came here to save the princess. It is because of Xena that the princess lives!

Xena looks over at Lila, and nods - a warrior's acknowledgment of valor - but Neyar has his own perspective:

NEYAR

But does she live? The princess has been carried off by mercenaries -

XENA

Who will take her to Argos and present her as a prize to the King, who will make her a concubine in his Royal Harem. I know Hercules. I helped him abduct the Mares of Diomedes, and slay the Nemean Lion, and the Lernaean Hydra. I know his methods. I can get her back for you.

NEYAR

How?

XENA

I will sneak into the city of Argos. I will infiltrate the King's castle.

NEYAR

I could send my best men for that.

Xena looks at the soldiers around her, indicates their intricately tattooed bodies.

XENA

Meaning no disrespect, your best men are all a little bit... conspicuous. You know who I am, you've seen what I can do. Let me get your princess back for you.

NEYAR

This conversation is wasting time.
(casts a glare at his men)
(MORE)

NEYAR (CONT'D)

Generals, gather our remaining
soldiers. We will chase after
Hercules' army and get back our -

XENA

That is suicide.

NEYAR

It's a question of honor!

Xena smiles - she's found her in - she steps closer to Nayar,
her voice full of a warrior's stone cold persuasion:

XENA

Give your honor a chance in battle.
With your princess, you will count
the legions of Raxos as your allies
- and with their might, your honor
might be redeemed. Do this alone,
you - and your people - will die.

(off Nayar's expression)

If I fail, you still have time to
regroup and march to your deaths.

Nayar exchanges looks with his men, who offer him curt,
sullen NODS. He then turns to Xena:

NEYAR

What do you want from us?

XENA

(indicates Lila)

That you reunite this young woman
with her father... and I could use
a new suit of armor...

SMASH CUT TO

EXT. GABRIELLE'S HOME - SMITHY - DAY - MONTAGE

Herodotus BANGS OUT a new sword on his anvil.

XENA SLAMS THE SWORD INTO A SCABBARD

And straps it on.

HERODOTUS POLISHES A BREASTPLATE

Very closely resembling Xena's classic armor.

XENA FASTENS THE ARMOR TO HER LEATHER BREASTPLATE

Then the GAUNTLETS.

Then the GREAVES.

Then the knives HIDDEN IN THE FOLDS OF THE ARMOR - and the infamous "chest dagger".

XENA MOUNTS ARGO

Looking down to see Herodotus and Lila.

HERODOTUS

Go get our girl.

Lila REACHES OUT and touches Xena's outstretched hand.

XENA NODS

And then cries out a mighty HYEAGH!

AND AS SHE TAKES OFF ASTRIDE ARGO

An ARCHETYPAL HERO ON A LEGENDARY QUEST... to rescue the woman who will, in time, become her truest companion...

CUT TO BLACK

END OF PILOT