

SHIPPER SEASON EIGHT



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Episode #8.20

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Logline

When Xena and Gabrielle meet a man who has been persecuting worshippers of the Olympian gods, they find out that he is no ordinary man and while trying to stop him, they learn about his past.

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TEASER

FADE IN

The camera slowly zooms in on a beautiful classical Greek temple. Intricately designed pillars hold up the entryway. The pathway toward the temple is lined with rose bushes and marble statues. As the camera moves in closer, we hear the sounds of chaos inside--voices shouting, things being smashed.

CUT TO

Inside the temple. There is a mob of people--men and women in simple clothes--trashing the place. They are breaking vases, tipping over statues, and tearing down the curtains.

The camera pulls around to show an exquisitely crafted statue of Aphrodite, zooming in on its face. Then we see a hammer smash into it, breaking off the nose. The camera pulls back to show a tall, burly red-headed man swinging the hammer and hitting the statue again, then knocking it to the ground. The man turns around--he is very ugly, with crooked front teeth, a huge nose and warts on one cheek--raises the hammer in the air with a yell of triumph.

RED-HEADED MAN (yelling):

That'll show those gods! Down with the Olympians!

The other vandals erupt in cheers.

FEMALE VOICE (off-camera):

Please stop this!

The camera pulls back to show two young, pink-clad priestesses of Aphrodite trying to stop the mob.

PRIESTESS #1:

Stop! You'll destroy everything!

A stocky, rough-looking middle-aged woman grabs the priestess by the hair.

WOMAN:

That's the point!

She throws the priestess to the floor. The rest of the mob laughs.

PRIESTESS #2:

Please! What has the Goddess of Love ever done to you?

RED-HEADED MAN (scoffs):

Done *to* me? What has she ever done *for* me, huh? (turns and kicks the fallen statue)

Priestess #1 tries to get up but the woman pushes her down again. Priestess #2 rushes to her aid but two other women block her way and start pushing her.

PRIESTESS #2 (frightened):

Aphrodite, help me!

MAN (off-screen):

The gods will not interfere here.

The camera pans around to show a man in his mid-30s, in an elegant red silk robe with a golden sash belt, slouching casually against the wall. He is quite handsome, with dark brown hair, a chiseled face, and a dark curly beard. He surveys the destruction around him and a smile comes to his face. He looks at the people and the frightened priestesses. Then he stares intently at the statue of Aphrodite that has been knocked to the ground. After a few moments the statue begins to shake, then rises off the floor and levitates as the people gasp. With a loud crack, the statue shatters to pieces. There are more gasps and cries of amazement.

MAN IN RED ROBE:

Do you see? I, a mere mortal, have been granted the power to end Olympian rule. Humankind has no more use for the gods!

PEOPLE (cheering):

Down with the gods!

MAN IN RED ROBE (raises his hand):

This was the last of the Olympians' temples in Pelius. I now declare this city-- (he pauses dramatically as the camera pans over the faces of the mob and the two terrified priestesses) --a god-free zone.

More cheers go up from the mob.

RED-HEADED MAN:

Hail, Paeonis, the liberator!

The people cheer again; cries of "Hail, Paeonis!" are heard.

PAEONIS (glares harshly at the priestesses):

I didn't hear *you*.

Close-up on the priestesses, who remain silent, their lips trembling. Then pan back to Paeonis, who smiles cruelly.

PAEONIS:

Take them away--we'll deal with them later.

As the crying women are hustled away, Paeonis makes a sweeping gesture pointing to the riches of the temple--gold, fruit, jewelry.

PAEONIS:

And take this away, too.

Some of the people start loading the treasures in wheelbarrows as Paeonis looks on, obviously pleased.

PAEONIS (smiling, quietly to himself):

For you, father.

His smile suddenly fades to a frown and he turns toward the doorway. A woman who seems to be in her sixties, slender and of medium height, is coming toward him. Her hair is gray and pulled back in a tight bun, and she is dressed in an austere dark blue dress. She looks around at the looters, a sad and stern look on her still-beautiful face.

OLD WOMAN:

What are you doing?

PAEONIS (looking away):

Mother...I am doing what I was always meant to do. Don't try to stop me. (He turns toward her. A close-up on his face, cold and hard) You're the one who taught me to hate the tyranny of the gods.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle are riding along a road through a hilly area. Daytime. A city is visible in the distance.

XENA:

So Darion can stay with the Amazons for now.

GABRIELLE (chuckles):

Eve can be very persuasive.

XENA (pensively):

She's come a long way... (glances uneasily at Gabrielle) How's Lykia?

GABRIELLE (a little uncomfortably):

Uh...all right. She--doesn't tell me much. She's so determined to become a full-fledged Amazon--she's already practicing with the staff... (Off Xena's thoughtful look) Xena--is there something you know about Lykia that you haven't told me?

XENA (abruptly):

Like what?

GABRIELLE (slightly exasperated):

Well--if I knew, I wouldn't have to ask you, would I?

XENA (sighs):

Gabrielle...Lykia was a slave for nearly a year. Nero's slave. Who knows what she's been through... There may be things she wouldn't want anyone to know.

As she speaks, Gabrielle stares at something ahead of them. Xena follows her gaze. We see a group of about twenty people coming toward them. A single horse is pulling a cart laden with a chaotic pile of various possessions--clothes, household utensils, etc. Some of the people are carrying bundles. Most of them are men of varying ages, clad in leather; some are accompanied by women and children. As the camera pans over them we see that many of these people look battered and bruised. The apparent leader of the group, a stately man in his fifties in a black robe embroidered with silver, with graying dark hair, has bruises on his face and a bandaged arm. As they approach, Xena and Gabrielle stop and look at them with a mix of curiosity, sympathy and concern.

XENA:

What's going on here?

The man in black looks up at her.

MAN IN BLACK (bitterly):

What does it look like? We're leaving town.

GABRIELLE:

Why? Was it attacked by an army, or--

MAN IN BLACK (vehemently):

An army! That man--our ruler--is worse than six enemy armies. Who wants to live in a city where you're liable to get your throat slit for worshipping your god?

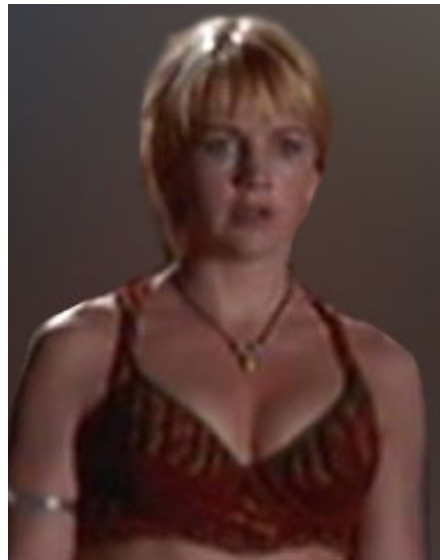
GABRIELLE (taken aback):

Your god? (looks over them, hesitantly) Are you--followers of Eli?

MAN IN BLACK (even more vehemently):

Eli? I *curse* the followers of Eli! Damned rabble-rousers--

As Xena and Gabrielle looks at him curiously, the camera zooms in on the pendant on his chest. It's shaped like the rune pendant Ares wore in Season 1 and 2.



GABRIELLE (shocked, to Xena):

They're worshippers of--

XENA (nods, quietly):

Ares.

Bewildered, they stare at the group of refugees as we:

FADE OUT

ACT ONE

FADE IN

The same scene as before.

MAN IN BLACK (proudly):

That's right. I am Korax--the priest of Ares in Pelius.

XENA:

So who's this ruler of yours, and what's his beef with Ares?

KORAX (spits out the name as if it were an insult):

Paeonis--he became our king last year.

GABRIELLE (concerned):

How?

The tall middle-aged woman next to Korax, probably his wife, speaks up.

WOMAN:

He saved the city. You see, two years ago there was a terrible fire that swept through Pelius, much too fast to be put out by ordinary means. It would have destroyed everything--our homes, our possessions--it would have killed hundreds. And then this man, Paeonis--he used his powers to stop it.

XENA (frowns):

Powers?

WOMAN:

Yes, he has special powers. (awed) He held out his hands (she stretches out her arms to illustrate his action) and commanded the fire to stop--and suddenly, the flames began to die down. Everyone hailed him as the savior of the city. Our king at the time, King Therapon, didn't have any heirs--

XENA:

And what better solution than to give the job to the most popular man in town.

KORAX (contemptuously):

The most power-hungry man in town! When King Therapon died--that's when this Paeonis showed his true colors. That's when we learned that he hates the Olympian gods--all of them, but especially Ares.

XENA:

What did the people think about this?

WOMAN:

Oh, he has a lot of them wrapped around his little finger. They figure they don't need any Olympians when they have their god-like mortal king to worship. Others were scared of him. But a lot of us remained loyal to our gods, no matter how much we were mocked by the king's followers. When

the king saw that persuasion didn't work, that people still went to the temples of the Olympian gods and made offerings--that's when... (she trails off, too overcome to speak)

KORAX:

That's when he decided to use violence. Paeonis sent his thugs to destroy our temples, to burn our homes... Finally, (he lowers his head in shame) we had to leave.

GABRIELLE (shakes her head in disgust):

Has anyone tried to oppose him?

KORAX:

Some of the old king's counselors tried. (bitter and sarcastic) They're holding their meetings in the dungeon now.

XENA:

Sounds like a job for us, Gabrielle. I take it this is the road to Pelius?

KORAX (nods toward the city in the distance):

Keep going this way and you'll be there in about an hour. Though I don't think you're going to have much luck.

GABRIELLE (smiling):

Who needs luck when you've got Xena?

KORAX (scowls at Xena):

Xena--you're Xena? I've heard of you--you're a defender of those Eli people!

XENA:

I'll defend anyone who gets chased out of town for worshipping their god.

KORAX (softens a little):

Well, then...if it's true what I've heard--then if anyone can defeat this infidel, you can. (Quick pan to Xena, who looks pleased in spite of herself; then back to Korax, who turns to his followers) All right--let's move on. (he hesitates and turns to Xena and Gabrielle, speaking softly) The gods be with you.

Xena nods thoughtfully. She and Gabrielle look on as the refugees continue on their way.

GABRIELLE:

I don't get it. Ares' worshippers are getting pushed around like this and he doesn't do anything about it?

XENA:

You're right. He's started wars over less.

GABRIELLE:

Maybe you should talk to him.

Xena gives her a pensive look, then turns Argo off the road with Gabrielle following her, and stops under the trees.

XENA:

Ares! I need to talk to you!

With a flash of blue light the God of War appears.

ARES (trying to act casual):

Uh...Xena. You called?

Xena and Gabrielle both stare at him for a second.

XENA:

What do you know about Pelius?

ARES:

Well, good morning to you, too.

XENA (tersely):

Good morning; what do you know about Pelius?

ARES (sighs):

Pelius is a medium-sized city in Greece on the Aegean coast, population thirty thousand, main industries include--

Xena gives him the look.

ARES:

Sorry.

GABRIELLE:

They destroyed your temple and threw your worshippers out of the city.

Ares turns to Gabrielle.

ARES (shrugs):

Eh... I never liked that temple much anyway. Between us--it was a bit of an eyesore.

GABRIELLE:

You have opinions about architecture?

ARES:

What can I say. I guess this king of theirs doesn't like me. (gives Gabrielle a sarcastic look) I'm sure you can think of a few reasons why.

XENA (raising an eyebrow):

Let me get this straight: your followers are being treated like scum, your temple is trashed, the king has a problem with you...not to mention some sort of special powers--and it doesn't bother you?



ARES:

Standing by your man? I'm touched. (off Xena's glare) Look, Xena--isn't this how you wanted it? I don't really care anymore. Worshippers come and go.

XENA:

Well, looks to me like the ones in this town are going. For good. (her eyes narrow) Maybe this doesn't bother you--but there are people getting hurt and I'm not going to leave this alone.

ARES (sighs):

So you're going to Pelius. (with obviously faked indifference) Don't you have any bigger fish to fry?

XENA:

Oh, I think this fish is pretty big.

ARES:

Suit yourself. I'm due back on Olympus, anyway--Discord and Artemis are battling it out. Gotta love those family gatherings... Catch you later.

He disappears. Gabrielle gives Xena a puzzled look.

GABRIELLE:

He's not telling us something.



XENA (puzzled):
He's not telling us *anything*.

CUT TO

Xena and Gabrielle are walking through the streets in Pelius; it's late afternoon. The city looks prosperous, with well-tended gardens in front of stone houses. The smaller wooden houses look neat and well-tended.

Sounds of a scuffle--blows, grunts, shouts--are heard off-camera.

FEMALE VOICE (off-camera):
Stop it!

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a quick look and race around the corner where the noise is coming from. They see a man, who seems to be in his forties, being beaten by five other men outside a modest wooden house. His face is already bruised and bloodied. A woman tries to stop the attackers; one of them shoves her away and she falls to the ground.

Xena heads toward them, Gabrielle following close behind. One of the thugs punches the man in the stomach; the man cries out.

THUG #1 (laughing):
Where's your god now, huh?

XENA (off-camera):
He's taking a break. (The camera pulls around to show Xena drawing her sword.) But I'm here.

GABRIELLE (twirling her sais):
Let's even the odds.

The thugs let go of the man and turn toward Xena and Gabrielle, drawing clubs.

XENA (yells):
Chee-YA!

She launches herself forward, legs forward, and kicks the two thugs in front of her to the ground. She lands directly on top of them, one under each foot, as they groan.

The camera pulls back as Gabrielle twirls her sais to deflect the club wielded by one of the thugs as he throws himself forward. Giving him a swift knee to the gut, she throws him aside. Another thug swings his club at her and she swiftly ducks and then spins her foot around to trip him.

The camera pulls in as he starts to rise and Gabrielle raises one of her sais.

GABRIELLE (angrily):
Lights out.

Gabrielle releases her arm knocking him out with the butt of the sai.

The camera pans back to Xena as she advances on the one thug still standing.

XENA:
Your turn.

He raises his club, then looks hesitantly at his comrades--one unconscious, three rising to their feet groaning--and lowers it again.

XENA (grins):
What's the matter, not having fun anymore?

The man turns and runs; the other three who are conscious scramble away as well.

Xena walks over to the man and woman who were being attacked.

WOMAN:
Thank you.

XENA:
Who were they?

MAN:
The king's thugs.

CUT TO

Inside the modestly decorated house. The man, Straton, sits at the table; his wife, Melaina, is tending to his cuts. Xena and Gabrielle are sitting at the table as well, goblets in front of them; a boy about ten brings up a basin of water while a girl of about seven looks on.

XENA:
So you're a soldier?

MELAINA (cleaning a cut on Straton's face):
Former soldier.

STRATON (winces):

And would be still, if it weren't for this blasted leg! I took an arrow in it years ago; since then... (points sadly to his leg) No more battles for me.

Melaina starts to wrap a bandage around his arm.

XENA:

And you're a worshipper of Ares.

BOY (excitedly):

Ares saved Dad's life once--tell 'em, Dad!

Straton hesitates.

GABRIELLE:

Please. We'd like to hear about it.

STRATON (winces a little as Melaina bandages his arm):

Well...I was in a battle a few years ago, and a handful of us--my friends and I--were trapped by the enemy. It seemed like we didn't have a chance to make it out alive. (as he speaks, his features become animated) Then, I prayed to Ares to give me strength--and a miracle happened. Suddenly, I felt no fear and no pain--it was as if something greater than myself drove me into battle and gave me the strength of six men. I broke through the encirclement, and my friends and I were saved. It was Ares who did it.

Xena shakes her head.

XENA:

Straton, Ares doesn't care about any of his followers. He--

Gabrielle elbows Xena; Xena turns, giving her a "what was that for?" look. Melaina finishes bandaging Straton's arm and turns to Xena and Gabrielle.

MELAINA:

A lot of worshippers of Ares--and the other gods--have left Pelius.

GABRIELLE:

Yes, we met some of them on our way here. Do you plan to--

MELAINA (interrupts):

Why should we? This is our home. We were both raised here--our families have lived here from the day it was built. (sadly) But now...it looks like we have no choice. Look what happened today! But the worst of it is that it's happening to the children, too. They've been called names, taunted about their parents...the other day Likos even came home from school with a black eye! (fighting back tears) He was beaten by kids twice his size while the teacher did nothing. Now that--that just isn't right! Children should not have to suffer for the choices their parents make!

Xena turns to the two children, who are upset but trying to look brave.

XENA (reassuring):

Don't worry--everything will be all right.

GIRL (defiantly):

I live here. I won't go away!

GABRIELLE:

With a bit of luck, you won't have to. (Off Xena's wry look; defensively) What? It sounds better than 'a bit of Xena'.

XENA:

Point taken.

CUT TO

Aphrodite's temple. It is now empty and stripped of all its riches; there is only debris left. The double doors are wide open, one door hanging off a hinge.

Xena and Gabrielle come in and stop, looking around them in horror and disgust.

GABRIELLE (picks up pieces of a broken vase):

This is awful. (looks around) I can't believe Aphrodite didn't do anything to stop them. I mean-- she's pretty possessive about her temples.

XENA:

Maybe she was afraid.

GABRIELLE:

Of what--of mortals?

XENA:

Well--apparently, this king has some sort of powers, remember?

GABRIELLE (dropping the jar pieces):

So what do we do?

XENA:

We pay him a visit and find out what's really going on.

CUT TO

The city square. A crowd is gathered in front of a platform guarded by soldiers, on which Paeonis sits on a throne. On the same platform are statues of gods: Zeus, Ares, Hera, and Aphrodite. The royal palace is behind the platform.

A middle-aged man who looks like a former soldier is led up on the platform by soldiers and prodded toward the statue of Ares. He looks like he doesn't want to be up there. As the man stands still, shuffling his feet, Paeonis frowns impatiently.

PAEONIS:

Well?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN (not too convincingly):

Curse the gods!

PAEONIS:

How about--with a little more feeling?

MIDDLE-AGED MAN (putting on an act):

Curse the gods! They have done nothing for us. Hail our king Paeonis!

He hesitates, takes a deep breath, and finally spits on the statue of Ares, then glances fearfully at Paeonis. Paeonis gives a slight wave of the hand, his expression saying "that'll do."

The man comes down from the platform; a woman in her thirties comes up the steps.

WOMAN (yells at the statues):

Damn the gods! Damn them all!

Some of the people in the crowd cheer. The woman reaches into her pocket, pulls out an egg and throws it at the statue of Hera, hitting it in the face. There is scattered laughter in the crowd as the woman looks ingratiatingly at Paeonis.

PAEONIS (nods his head in approval):

Good, good. The egg was--creative.

As the woman steps down, one of the priestesses of Aphrodite whom we saw in the teaser, a beautiful blonde haired woman in a pink gown, is led up the podium by two soldiers. They push her toward the statue of Aphrodite. Her eyes are filled with tears.

SOLDIER #1:

Spit on it.

PRIESTESS (sobbing):

I can't! I can't betray my goddess!

The guard shoves her and she falls to the ground. Paeonis gets up from his throne, walks up to her and squats down next to her.

PAEONIS (in a gentle, almost comforting tone):

Of course you can.

The young woman looks up at him through tears, her blonde hair hanging down.

PRIESTESS (tearfully):

No, no--

PAEONIS (thinks a moment):

Very well. Then get up and kiss her hand.

The young woman gives him an uncomprehending look.

PAEONIS (smiles contemptuously):

You heard me.

He gets up, pulling the priestess to her feet. She gingerly approaches the statue of Aphrodite while Paeonis stares intensely at the statue. As the priestess bends down toward the statue's hand, the hand suddenly moves. There are gasps in the crowd as the statue grabs the priestess by the throat. A close-up on the priestess's terrified face as she struggles for breath, trying in vain to loosen the marble hand's grip on her throat.

PAEONIS (smiles cruelly):

This is what you get from your goddess.

The young woman struggles for breath. Paeonis continues to stare at the statue and its grip on the priestess's throat unclenches, letting the woman fall to the floor. She coughs, clutching at her throat. Paeonis squats at her side again and strokes her hair almost seductively.

PAEONIS (smiles):

Think you can say it now? Unless, of course, you haven't had enough yet.

PRIESTESS (mutters through tears):

Curse Aphrodite!

PAEONIS (shakes his head as his fingers in her hair tighten):

Louder. Like you really mean it.

The priestess cries harder, then looks up at the statue.

PRIESTESS (crying):

Damn Aphrodite! Damn all the gods!

PAEONIS (harshly):

That's good. But you can do better.

PRIESTESS (screams):

Damn the gods!

Paeonis smiles approvingly and gets up, letting go of her hair as she sobs.

OLD MAN (off-camera):

You ought to be ashamed, you--bully!

There are gasps in the crowd. The camera pans to a man in his sixties who looks nervous and angry at the same time.

PAEONIS (eyes him scornfully):

Do you want to challenge me, old man? Then why don't you step up and do something about it.

The man looks at him, shaking in terror.

PAEONIS (chuckles):

I didn't think so. (to guards) Take him to the prison.

The man is dragged away and the priestess of Aphrodite, still sobbing, stumbles off the platform. Paeonis looks at the crowd, obviously satisfied.



PAEONIS (smiles):
Any other challengers?

XENA (off-screen):
Yeah--me.

The camera pans around to show an angry Warrior Princess approaching the platform, looking up at Paeonis as we:

FADE OUT

ACT TWO

FADE IN

The city square. Xena looks fierce, like a wild animal ready to pounce on her prey.

Paeonis smiles.

PAEONIS (hissing):
Give me your best shot.

The camera pulls around to show that Gabrielle is in the crowd closely behind Xena, ready to jump in if necessary.

XENA:
A-la-la-la-la--shee-ya!

Xena runs toward the platform, launches herself into a flip and lands in front of Paeonis, drawing her sword. Paeonis extends his hand and Xena suddenly seems to run up against an invisible wall. Her own sword starts to turn toward her. Xena struggles as its sharp end is pointed at her shoulder. Paeonis smiles; he doesn't even seem to be breaking a sweat.



The tip of the sword moves closer to Xena's shoulder. With all her strength, she tries to push it back but it scrapes her shoulder, drawing blood.

Pan to Gabrielle, who seems ready to surge forward; then back to Xena, who finally manages to wrench the sword away from herself but drops it as she does so.

With a flick of his wrist, Paeonis sends Xena flying through the air and landing hard on the boards of the platform. She scrambles to her feet, breathing heavily, blood dripping from her shoulder. Her sword is lifted off the ground and flies toward Paeonis, who catches it and grins.

PAEONIS:

I think you've more than met your match.

He twirls the sword in his hand. With a furious yell, Xena takes her chakram off her side and throws it at Paeonis. It flies through the air, then stops right in front of his face.

A quick pan over the crowd as the people gape, open-mouthed. Gabrielle looks alarmed. The chakram remains suspended in the air in front of Paeonis.

PAEONIS:

You can have it back.

Then the chakram hurtles back towards Xena at super speed as Xena's eyes widen. She manages to catch the chakram.

PAEONIS (laughs):

Not bad. (shakes his head as Xena advances toward him) You're a glutton for punishment, aren't you?

He and Xena slowly circle each other; then, while Xena's back is to the palace gate behind the platform, Paeonis shoots out his hand again; the wave of energy sends Xena flying back. She slams into the palace gates and falls. She's out cold.

GABRIELLE:

Xena!

She rushes up the platform steps and to Xena's side. Paeonis watches in amusement.

PAEONIS (to the guards):

Put her in chains!

The guards nod and head towards the unconscious Xena. Gabrielle turns around and twirls her sais, prepared to fend them off.

PAEONIS (shakes his head):

I see that you still haven't got the point.

The sais fly out of Gabrielle's hands and then turn around so that they point directly at her.

PAEONIS:

I wouldn't move if I were you.

The guards pick up the still-unconscious Xena and chain her hands; two others grab Gabrielle and chain her up as well. The sais fall helplessly to the ground.

PAEONIS (to the guards):

Put them in the dungeon.

The camera zooms in on Gabrielle as the guards hustle her away.

CUT TO

A cell in the dungeon. It is half-dark, only a little daylight coming in through the barred window; the camera pans over the grimy, damp stone walls. Xena and Gabrielle are both shackled to the wall by their arms. Gabrielle is sitting up while Xena is slumped, still unconscious.

Medium close-up on Xena as she opens her eyes and stirs. Gabrielle turns towards her.

GABRIELLE (softly):

Hey.

Xena looks up at her, smiling feebly, then looks around.

XENA:

Well, that didn't work out exactly as I planned.

GABRIELLE (shaking her head):

We had no way of knowing he was so powerful.



XENA (nods, looking a little bewildered and defeated):

No...

GABRIELLE:

Xena--back when you were fighting him in the city square--

XENA (bitterly):

You mean, when I was getting my butt whipped.

GABRIELLE:

Come on, Xena--don't blame yourself for this. When you were trying to fight him--did it--

She falls silent as the door opens with a screech.

Paeonis enters the jail cell; he is holding Xena's chakram and her sword as well as Gabrielle's sais. He directs his gaze at an unlit torch mounted into the wall, and it suddenly flares up, lighting up the cell.

Xena scowls at him. Paeonis smiles as he spins around Xena's chakram, throws it up in the air and catches it.

PAEONIS (looks at them):

Well. If it isn't the Warrior Princess and the Battling Bard.

Xena and Gabrielle don't seem too thrilled to be recognized.

PAEONIS:

I've heard many stories about you two. It's often hard to tell what is truth and what is legend--but you are certainly no fans of the gods and their cruelty. (He comes closer to them, letting the sword, the chakram and the sais clatter down to the floor, and folds his arms on his chest) You've often battled against the gods in the past--especially Ares, God of War. Isn't that true? (Xena glares at him silently.) You were also good friends with Eli. I've always been a great admirer of his. Humanity doesn't need the gods--isn't that what Eli taught?



GABRIELLE (bitter):

Eli taught that we must fight their enemies with love--not with violence. His message was one of peace.

PAEONIS (chuckles, looking at Gabrielle):

And look what happened to him. (pan to Gabrielle, who purses her lips angrily.) Come, Gabrielle--where's the sense in repeating Eli's mistakes? I know I was given these powers for a special purpose--to free mankind from the shackles of the gods.

XENA (glances at her chained hands):

No pun intended, I'm sure. (Quick pan to Paeonis, who manages a wry smile.) You know, Paeonis, if you really wanted to free the people, you would show them that they can manage their lives without the gods. You'll be no better than the gods if you rule these people in fear. (Hesitates for moment) Maybe worse.

Paeonis walks towards Xena, staring directly at her.

PAEONIS (lowers his voice to a near-whisper):

Ah, but fear has its uses.

A chain attached to the wall, its other end lying on the floor, suddenly starts to move. Then it flies up and wraps around Xena's neck, choking her. Xena struggles to bring her hands to her neck as she gasps for air.

Gabrielle cries out in horror.

GABRIELLE (screaming):

Stop it. *Stop* it!

Gabrielle struggles with her chains.

PAEONIS (laughing, looking at Gabrielle):

Your friend needs to be taught a lesson.

Despite her hands being chained to the wall, Xena manages to grab the chain that is choking her. She struggles as she tries to pull it back, making a little progress. Slowly but surely she manages to get it further away from her neck. Paeonis exhales, obviously letting up the pressure, and the chain falls limp. Xena looks relieved as she gasps for breath.

PAEONIS (raising an eyebrow):
I'm impressed.

He walks away from them and towards the door. Then he stops and turns, staring intently at Xena and Gabrielle. Their chains fall off. Stunned, they stare at Paeonis, rubbing their wrists.

PAEONIS:

No matter what you may think, Xena, I'm no tyrant. I have no need to keep you here. (He looks on as the two women get up gingerly.) I've ordered the guards to let you leave the prison--I'm even giving you your weapons back.

He stands back while Xena picks up the sword and slides it into the scabbard, then picks up the chakram and hangs it at her belt.

PAEONIS:

I suggest an alliance. You have fought the gods before, I am fighting them now. Together, we could win. (Offhand) Of course, I will win anyway. But it will be a lot easier for all involved if we cooperate--don't you think?

XENA:

No, I don't.

PAEONIS (softly):

It's the best offer you're going to have, Xena. (with subtle menace) Join me--or stay out of my way.

CUT TO

The corridor of the prison. Xena and Gabrielle walk out of their cell, Xena rubbing her neck. Gabrielle touches her shoulder.

GABRIELLE (softly):

You okay?

XENA:

This is only the beginning.

Hearing a noise, she looks up. Two guards are dragging a prisoner down the corridor toward them.

GUARD #1 (nods toward the door of the cell Xena and Gabrielle just came out of):

Put him in there.

The man looks up; it's Straton.

GABRIELLE (gasps):

Straton! (to the guards) What did this man do?

GUARD #2:

He wouldn't renounce his gods.

STRATON (desperately):

Please, Xena--help my wife! Help my children!

Xena reaches for her sword but Gabrielle puts her hand on Xena's arm.

GABRIELLE (whispering):

No. Xena, we can't afford to get arrested again.

Xena stands still, her hand still on the hilt of her sword, her jaw clenched; it is obvious that she hates feeling so helpless.

GABRIELLE (softly):

Xena... (She points down the corridor. We see Paeonis standing at some distance, staring at them, his arms folded on his chest.)

XENA (lowers her hand, grimly):

Come on--lets get out of here.

CUT TO

A street in the city. It is dusk and there are few people around. Xena and Gabrielle walk along the street, Xena staring pensively ahead of her.

GABRIELLE:

Xena, back at the city square, when Paeonis was using his powers against you...did it remind you of-- (trails off)

XENA (staring straight ahead of her, speaks very quietly):

Hope? (off Gabrielle's gasp) That's what you meant, isn't it?

She stops and turns to look at Gabrielle, who stops as well and nods.

GABRIELLE:

Hope had the same abilities--the same powers... (she tosses her head as if trying to shake off the memories)



XENA:

And Paeonis is waging war on the Olympian gods.

GABRIELLE (aghast):

You mean--he might be--? (shakes her head) It can't be happening again...if he is Dahak's child, why would he admire Eli?

XENA (shrugs):

It could be just a ploy to win us over. (thoughtfully) But--somehow, I don't think he is. (after a brief pause) I just wish we knew how Paeonis got his powers. (she rubs her neck instinctively) There is something we're not seeing here--some missing piece of the puzzle.

FEMALE VOICE (off-camera):

I can tell you what it is.

Xena and Gabrielle stop and turn around, startled. Facing them is old woman we saw in the teaser--Paeonis' mother.

XENA (looks at her warily):

What can you tell us?

OLD WOMAN:

Paeonis' secret. You see, I'm his mother. Around here they call me Budeya.

XENA (still mistrustful):

So what's his secret?

BUDEYA (matter-of-fact):

Paeonis *is* the son of a god. (after a pause) One of the Olympians.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a shocked look.

XENA:

Which one?

The camera zooms in on the old woman.



BUDEYA (sternly):

Ares, God of War.

Close-up of Xena's face, staring at Budeya in shock as we:

FADE OUT

ACT THREE

FADE IN

Wide shot of Xena, Gabrielle, and Budeya crossing the now-deserted square on their way to the palace.

BUDEYA:

This way. I'll take you to my quarters--there's a private entrance.

Xena gives Budeya a speculative look, frowning a little.

CUT TO

Inside Budeya's quarters. Budeya opens the door and silently motions for Xena and Gabrielle to come in. Her room is beautifully decorated, with purple drapes hanging from the windows and bedposts, an ornate fireplace in a corner, and exquisitely crafted wooden furniture. A vase with fruit stands on a table.

BUDEYA (motioning towards the table):

Sit down.

Xena and Gabrielle exchange a quick glance, then sit down on the two chairs in front of the table. Budeya sits down on a couch across from them.

BUDEYA (sighs):

I don't know where to begin.

XENA:

How about from the start. Who are you? And what's your connection with Ares?

BUDEYA (taking a deep breath):

Not that you could tell now...but I was once a goddess myself. My real name is--

XENA (her eyes narrow):

Nemesis. Goddess of revenge--*former* goddess.

Gabrielle glances at Xena, surprised.

NEMESIS:

How did you know that?

XENA:

Lucky guess. Hercules told me, years ago, that Hera took away your godhood because you wouldn't kill him.

NEMESIS:

Well, then... Did Hercules also tell you that I had a child with Ares?

XENA (shakes her head slowly):

No.

[FLASHBACK]

From the *Hercules: the Legendary Journeys* episode "Two Men and a Baby":

Nemesis (Budeya), now very young and beautiful, stands facing Hercules.

HERCULES:

Why would you get involved with Ares?



NEMESIS:

Ares came to me. He promised I could be a god again if I gave him a son. I was afraid of being mortal--not knowing what to expect. I was weak--and foolish. I believed him.

HERCULES:

Ares never kept a promise in his never-ending life.

CUT TO

Later, Nemesis and Hercules are still talking.

HERCULES:

But, why would Ares be after Evander? He cares nothing for any of his children.

NEMESIS:

Evander--inherited some--qualities from his father.

Evander lets out a loud burp and out of his mouth comes a fireball that bounces off the ground, shoots past Hercules and rockets into the night sky. Hercules looks startled.

CUT TO



Hercules is standing on a cliff in the moonlight holding Evander. He is facing Ares.

HERCULES:

I won't let you take away his chance to be a good man.

ARES:

Good--what good is a good man? (he stretches his arms out from his body and looks up into the sky) He has a shot at greatness! (his voice resonates through the canyon five times before fading)

HERCULES:

You don't care about your son.



ARES:

Oh, I care--in my own way. You see, Evander, grown, will become your worst nightmare--yours and all those good men you care so much about.

CUT TO

A fight scene. Hercules is in front of Ares, in a fighting stance. Ares is holding Evander in his arms.

HERCULES:

Evander. (Evander squeals and looks at Hercules) Go to Mommy. Come on. Go to Mommy.

Hercules and Ares watch as Evander slowly rises from Ares' arms, floats through the air and up to the top of the wall where Nemesis is standing. Evander lands gently in Nemesis' outstretched arms and hugs him tightly.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

Nemesis (Budeya) pauses.

XENA (angrily):

Makes sense. Evander had a power Ares wanted to control.

NEMESIS:

Yes. But as Evander got older, he only became more powerful. I never told him who his father was, but when Zeus started wanting to spend time with his grandson, I told him that Zeus was my father.

[FLASHBACK]

From the *Hercules: the Legendary Journeys* episode "Full Circle":

Hercules and Iolaus at Nemesis' house.

NEMESIS:

I thought I could teach him to control the power he inherited from Ares. But the older he gets, the more it seems to slip away from him. ... What Evander imagines, he can make real. He's even more powerful than his father.

CUT TO

Hercules stands before his father Zeus, King of the Gods.

ZEUS:

He'll kill Nemesis, you know. That's why I took him--to protect her. Didn't she tell you about his powers?

CUT TO

Montage of Clips:



- Four-year-old Evander uses his powers to free Hera from the Abyss of Tartarus
- The Titans escape
- Hercules and Iolaus battle the Titans
- Zeus and Hera get back together
- Hercules and Nemesis smiling with Evander by their side

[END OF FLASHBACK]

NEMESIS:

But it was nowhere near a happy ending. Zeus and Hera showed up a few weeks later...

[FLASHBACK]

Outside Nemesis' home. Evander is outside playing catch with himself. He throws the ball and then has it come right back to him.

Zeus and Hera materialize in the yard.

YOUNG EVANDER (excited):
Grandpa! Grandma!

Evander drops the ball and runs over to them, Zeus and Hera are smiling as they kneel down and give him a big hug.

The camera pans around as Nemesis opens the door. She looks to see Evander with Zeus and Hera.

She walks up to them, trying to avoid looking at Hera.

NEMESIS (smiling at Zeus):
Zeus. What brings you here?

Zeus smiles and pats Evander's head.

ZEUS:

I was wondering if tomorrow, Hera and I could take my favorite grandson for a ride in Apollo's chariot.

YOUNG EVANDER (thrilled):

Really? The flying chariot?! (turning to Nemesis) Can I, Mom?

NEMESIS (glancing at Hera for a moment):

I--uh...I'm not sure it's--safe.

YOUNG EVANDER (disappointed):

Oh, Mom--*please!*

HERA (understandingly):

I--understand your concerns. But there's nothing to worry about. (quietly to Nemesis) I don't really have to come along.

NEMESIS (shaking her head, speaks quietly):

No...it's all right. Hercules told me everything that happened. You helped save his life. Besides, what's past is past. (turning to her son) And Evander would love to go.

YOUNG EVANDER (jumping up and down):

Yippee! Are we ready to go now?

Zeus and Hera laugh.

ZEUS:

We are going to wait until tomorrow. (off Evander's disappointed look) You see, Evander, Apollo's using the chariot right now. Besides, I have to pay a visit to the Fates first.

NEMESIS (worried):

The Fates? What for?

ZEUS (serious):

My dreams--they have been dark of late. I think something--strange is about to happen.

NEMESIS (worried):

I hope nothing's wrong.

ZEUS (shrugging):

Nothing the King of the Gods can't fix. (looks at Evander) Be ready tomorrow at sunrise, young man. We'll be here.

YOUNG EVANDER (grins):

You promise?

ZEUS (smiling):

Nothing in the world could keep me away.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

NEMESIS (sadly):

The next day they never showed up. Evander sat at the window all day, waiting--that day and the next day, and the day after that. And still Zeus never came. I called for him but he never showed. (looking at Xena) I didn't know it, but Zeus was already dead. (Xena looks away guiltily as Nemesis sighs) Finally I managed to talk to Athena...

[FLASHBACK]

Nemesis stands in a temple to Zeus.

NEMESIS (yells):

Zeus! Show yourself! (Nothing happens.) *Zeus!* What kind of king of gods doesn't keep a promise to a child?

There is a bright flash of golden light in front of her. Athena, Goddess of Wisdom, appears.

NEMESIS (confused):

Athena. What's going on? Did Zeus send you?

Athena is silent for a moment; she looks sad.

ATHENA (softly):

Zeus is dead, Nemesis.

NEMESIS (shocked):

What? Who... How...?

ATHENA:

The Fates, they prophesied it. It's the Twilight of the Gods. It was said that Xena's child would be the death of the Greek gods. It all happened so quickly. Hera's gone, no one knows what happened to her. And--in an effort to protect Xena and her child--Hercules killed Zeus.

Nemesis looks stunned as she tries to take it all in.

NEMESIS:

And Xena's child...

ATHENA:

Still lives.

Nemesis looks worried as she ponders something.

NEMESIS:

Athena--I need you to do something for me.

ATHENA:

What?

NEMESIS:

Take away Evander's powers.



ATHENA (shakes her head):

Nemesis...

NEMESIS:

You're next in line after Zeus and Hera--you have the power to do it. Anything could happen... He could die because he has the blood of a god. Or else Ares could try to use him again, because of the powers he has. I am not going to put my son's life in danger--not again.

ATHENA (looks at her intently, then sighs):

Fine. I'll do it.

CUT TO

Evander's room. It's night and he is asleep in his bed. Nemesis stands next to Athena as the goddess raises up her hands. A blue glow starts to emanate from Evander's body, flowing into her hands.

CUT TO

Next morning. Evander sits on the porch staring at the sunrise. Behind him, the door is half-open. Nemesis comes out on the porch.

YOUNG EVANDER (looks up at her sadly):

They're not coming, are they?

NEMESIS (gently):

No, Evander. They're not.

YOUNG EVANDER (starts to cry):

But grandpa *promised!*

Nemesis sits down next to him and strokes his hair; she starts tearing up.

NEMESIS:

You can't trust gods, Evander. They don't...they don't have feelings like you and I do. But I will always be there for you, do you understand?

Evander hugs her tightly as he cries.

NEMESIS (crying):

I promise.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

A small tear rolls down Nemesis' cheek.

GABRIELLE:

But why did you lie to him?

NEMESIS (her eyes sparkle angrily):

Well--what was I suppose to tell him? That Grandma disappeared, and Uncle Hercules killed Grandpa? And if he asked why, I'd have to tell him that it was to stop Grandpa from killing an innocent baby?

Xena looks away uncomfortably; Gabrielle is speechless.

NEMESIS:

That day, Evander noticed that his powers were gone--he couldn't make things come to him the way he always had. I told him the gods took his powers away... I just didn't tell him that it was I who asked Athena to do that. (she sighs) Looking back--I would have done it differently...but I was just so angry. Then, we never talked about it again for years--until one day...

[FLASHBACK]

The front yard of Nemesis' house. A somewhat older-looking Nemesis is tending to some plants; a teenage Evander, about fourteen, comes up to her with a bucket of water.

TEENAGE EVANDER (puts down the bucket):

Here you are.

NEMESIS:

Thanks, Evander.

TEENAGE EVANDER (hesitates):

Mom...I wanted to talk to you about something.

NEMESIS (stands up straight and looks at him warily):

What is it?

TEENAGE EVANDER (uncomfortably):

We never talk about my grandparents... How come you're the daughter of two gods and yet you're a mortal? And how come you've never told me anything about my father? Is he dead?

NEMESIS (sighs):

Well...I used to be a goddess, Evander. Then one day, some of the other gods... They ordered me to kill a man, but I couldn't do it. So they punished me and turned me mortal.

Evander looks shocked.

TEENAGE EVANDER:

Why did they want you to kill him?

NEMESIS (sighs):

He--he had done something to make them angry. But he was a good man. And I couldn't kill him because...because I fell in love with him.

TEENAGE EVANDER (understanding dawns on his face):

Was he--my father?

Nemesis slowly nods.

TEENAGE EVANDER (distressed):

What happened to him? (off her silence) Did the gods kill him?

Nemesis nods, a tear rolling down her cheek.

NEMESIS:

Yes. He was killed by Ares, God of War.

Evander clenches his fists, his face distorted with rage and pain.

TEENAGE EVANDER (furiously):

So that's why they took my powers! So I couldn't avenge my father! (looks at Nemesis) Isn't that true? (he shakes his fists with an angry cry) I *hate* all the gods!

Nemesis stares at him silently.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

NEMESIS (sadly):

I shouldn't have lied to him--but I was so angry with Ares for what he had done.

XENA (impassively):

I understand.

NEMESIS:

And then we just went on and didn't talk about it again. Then, some three years ago, Evander started getting some of his powers back.

GABRIELLE:

Three years ago... (to Xena) That would have been after you killed Athena.

Xena nods uncomfortably.

NEMESIS:

We heard rumors about the Twilight...but we didn't know what to believe. Then, one day, we were going through the woods on our way to the market...

[FLASHBACK]

Nemesis (now much older) and Evander (who is in his thirties) are walking along a forest path. Suddenly, five bandits emerge from the trees. They are armed with knives and clubs.

BANDIT #1:

You know the drill. Give us all your money, and no one gets hurt.

Evander steps in front of his mother.

NEMESIS (worried):

Evander, don't.

The bandits laugh.

BANDIT #2:

You're gonna take us on, kid? Five on one? I don't think your mommy is going to be a lot of help.

One of the bandits starts approaching Evander, meaningfully tapping his hand with the club he carries. Evander punches him out and he falls back; Evander hears Nemesis cry out behind him and turns around to see one of the bandits grab her hair and push her to the ground.

EVANDER (yells):

Leave her alone!

The bandit laughs--but his laugh changes to a scream when an invisible force lifts him off the ground, making him fly through the air and slam into a tree. The other bandits look confused and angry. One of them charges Evander; he holds out his

hand, staring intently at the man, and the bandit's own club suddenly jerks in his hand, hitting him in the face. Evander looks at his hands; a close-up of his face, flashing a triumphant smile.

We see a quick montage of shots:

- * Evander sending two bandits flying into each other
- * One bandit being dropped on his head upside down
- * Another bandit flying into a tree
- * The bandits running away

Nemesis looks at Evander in shock. Evander seems almost as stunned as she is. He comes up to her, smiling incredulously.

EVANDER:

My powers are back. (excited) It makes sense. Mom--we've heard all these stories about the Twilight of the Gods....

NEMESIS:

What does the Twilight of the Gods have to do with--

EVANDER:

Don't you see? I was given these powers for a reason! To end Olympian rule once and for all. The Twilight. (looks at his hands, smiling triumphantly) This is it.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

NEMESIS:

Then we came here, to Pelius. He used his powers to save the city from a fire--

GABRIELLE:

We've heard about that.

NEMESIS:

At first, he thought that under his leadership everyone would turn away from the gods. When that didn't happen...he decided to force them to his way of seeing things, by whatever means necessary. I want to stop him, Xena--I can't stand by and watch him do this to people. I feel like it's my fault...I am the one who raised him to hate the gods, and now he is taking his hatred out on their followers. His powers are growing--soon he may become stronger than the gods themselves, and then who knows what he will do.

There is a knock on the door. Nemesis, Xena and Gabrielle turn warily toward the door.

NEMESIS:

Who's there?

The door opens and a young woman, obviously a servant, comes in. She is in tears.

NEMESIS:

Medora--what's wrong?

MEDORA (sobbing):

My sister Arikia...she's been thrown in the dungeon!

NEMESIS:

Why?

MEDORA:

She and some other people...they held secret worship services for the Olympian gods. Now they're going to be punished as traitors.

NEMESIS (deeply distressed):

Oh, Medora...

MEDORA:

Can you do anything?

NEMESIS (shakes her head slowly, then points to Xena):

I don't think so. But maybe she can.

MEDORA (looks at Xena, wiping tears from her face):

Can you?

XENA (tries to be reassuring but it's clear that she isn't entirely confident):

I'll do my best to help your sister.

MEDORA:

Thank you!

NEMESIS:

I'm sorry, Medora. (sigh) I hope everything turns out all right.

Medora leaves, closing the door behind her. Xena turns to Nemesis.

XENA:

Something needs to be done to stop Evander--but I'm not strong enough to stop him. (grimly) I'll have to talk to--Ares. (off Nemesis' shocked and upset expression) Look--Ares isn't the person he was when you knew him. I know you find it hard to believe that he could change--

NEMESIS (bitterly):

And you find it easy?

XENA:

No. But Nemesis...on Mount Olympus, when I was fighting Athena, Ares gave up his godhood to save me--and to heal my daughter and my friend...

NEMESIS (disbelievingly):

Why? (off Xena's uncomfortable silence) It was probably just part of some plan...

GABRIELLE:

Nemesis--he loves her.

NEMESIS (repeats slowly):

He--*loves* her. Are we talking about the same Ares? The God of War? The one who used me to bear him a child (quick pan to Xena, who winces slightly) and then tried to use that child for his own purposes? (There is an uncomfortable silence; then, Nemesis shrugs) Xena, if you think getting Ares involved is your only choice, then go ahead.

Xena stands up and looks ahead of her.

XENA:

Ares!

There is a moment of tense waiting. Then there is a flair of blue light and Ares appears. He looks from Xena to Nemesis, to Gabrielle, and then back to Xena.



ARES (sighs):

So, now you know.

He stares at her grimly as we:

FADE OUT

ACT FOUR

FADE IN

On the same scene as before. Ares stands in front of Xena, Gabrielle and Nemesis (who looks nervous and angry).



XENA (through clenched teeth):

That's right, now I know. Somehow you forgot to mention that you had a son.

ARES (sighs):

Xena, I had given up on Evander a long time ago. Until recently, I didn't even know he was still alive.

NEMESIS (angrily):

Of course you'd given up on him. All you wanted was to use Evander as a weapon! Once that didn't work out, that was it--you never actually cared about him. You never cared about anybody!

Ares bites his lip uncomfortably; he glances over at Xena, who looks troubled.

ARES (defensively):

Maybe even if you weren't so busy getting him to fawn over Hercules--

NEMESIS :

Hercules loved him and treated him like a son!



ARES (yelling):

You also didn't have a problem with him hanging around Zeus, did you? Not to mention Hera--the one who made you mortal because you wouldn't kill your precious Hercules for her!

NEMESIS (yells back):

At least Hera didn't try to use him in some twisted power game!

Gabrielle glances at Xena, who is clearly anguished by this exchange, and then walks toward Ares and Nemesis.

GABRIELLE (clears her throat):

Listen, all this arguing isn't going to get us anywhere. We need to put the past behind us and focus on what to do now.

XENA (nods):

She's right. We need to figure out a way to stop him.

While she speaks, the camera pulls back to show Evander (Paeonis) opening the door. He surveys the scene, his expression angry and sarcastic but masking hurt.

EVANDER:

I assume the "him" would be me. (he shakes his head in disbelief) My own mother plotting against me.

NEMESIS:

Evander...I love you. But what you're doing is wrong.

EVANDER (turns to Ares):

And who's this?

Ares looks from him to Xena to Nemesis, not knowing what to say.

NEMESIS (stumbling a bit):

Evander...it's about time I told you the truth. This is your father.

EVANDER:

My father? You told me my father was dead!

NEMESIS (sighs):

I lied to you. This is your father--Ares, God of War.

Close-up on Evander's stunned face, his lips trembling slightly; then on Ares as he nods slowly.

ARES:

It's true.

Evander gradually recovers from shock and forces his expression to a sarcastic smile.

EVANDER:

So my father never died--he abandoned me. He was nothing but a selfish, heartless bastard--just like all the gods!

Ares remains silent, his expression grim. Evander stares at him, obviously struggling with conflicting emotions.

EVANDER (to Nemesis):

Don't think this changes anything. I'll put an end to the worship of the gods--not just in Pelius, but in the rest of Greece as well!

Evander storms out of the room.

ARES:

That didn't go too well.

NEMESIS (softly):

This has to stop.

XENA:

Athena took away his powers before. What about--

ARES (shakes his head, still looking away):

Evander was a child before. If one of the gods tried to do it now and he resisted, it could kill him.

Xena slowly turns to Ares.



XENA:

Then we'll have to fight him together. Can you fight Evander?



ARES (still looking away):

I can fight him. I'm just not sure who's going to win.

With that, Ares vanishes. Nemesis sighs, looking at the spot where he was. Then she looks up at Xena.

NEMESIS:

You actually trust him.

XENA (her face hard):

Yes, I do.

NEMESIS:

Why? Because he sacrificed his godhood for you? He probably knew all along that you'd get it back for him. He's the God of War, Xena--he always has a trick up his sleeve. He probably thought you'd survive anyway--and if he helped you, you'd have a reason to spare his life. Or else he thought that if Athena killed you, she'd turn her wrath against him next. Ares only cares about himself, and that isn't going to change.

XENA (softly but firmly):

I was there, Nemesis. I know what happened.

NEMESIS:

And since then--Ares has never given you a reason to mistrust him?

Gabrielle turns her attention towards Xena, who thinks for a moment, her face unreadable.

XENA (shakes her head):

I don't have time for this, Nemesis. I've got a job to do. And right now, the only way I can do it is with Ares' help.

Xena walks off, Gabrielle staying for a beat and then following. Nemesis watches as they exit the room.

CUT TO

Noon. The city square. Once again, a large crowd is gathered in front of the platform where Evander sits on his throne. A dozen men and women, their hands tied behind their backs, are led toward the platform by soldiers and dragged up the steps. Straton is among them. Evander rises from his throne and walks toward the edge of the platform.

EVANDER:

Citizens of Pelius! These people have broken the law prohibiting the worship of the gods in our city. They would keep us under the Olympian yoke forever. (pauses for emphasis) What shall we do with them?

VOICES IN THE CROWD:

- Kill them!
- Hang the scum!
- Hail Paeonis!
- Down with Olympus!

A few rotten fruit and cabbage leaves are thrown from the crowd, hitting some of the prisoners. Evander smiles, obviously pleased. Then he holds up his hand.

EVANDER:

I appreciate your zeal. But (looks heavenward) unlike the gods, I wish to be merciful. I will allow them to leave this city--with the clothes on their backs.

XENA (off-camera, her voice dripping with sarcasm):

How nice of you.

The camera pulls around to show Xena, her face hard and sarcastic, walking slowly toward the platform.

Evander starts laughing, but his laughter has an angry edge.

EVANDER:

You are starting to get on my nerves, Warrior Princess!

Xena continues to walk slowly toward the platform. Then, with a cry of "*Chee-ya!*", she flips forward onto the platform, kicks out her legs and slams her boots into Evander's chest. Taken by surprise, he is knocked off his feet and flies back with a frustrated grunt, landing on his back. There are audible gasps in the crowd.

Xena launches herself toward him but he fixes her with an intense stare and she staggers back, as if pushed by something. With a satisfied smile, Evander gets up.

EVANDER:

Very good! The element of surprise. (smirks) Unfortunately, it's only going to work once.

He extends his hand and Xena is slammed down hard on the boards of the platform. At the same time, Evander extends his right hand, making a guard's sword fly towards him, he catches it and twirls it in his hand as he walks toward Xena. She raises her head feebly but then drops it again.

Pan to Gabrielle who rushes toward the platform.

GABRIELLE:

Xena!

Evander turns toward her, fixes her with a glare and flicks a wrist at her, sending Gabrielle flying back. Then he comes closer to Xena and raises his sword.

EVANDER:

Too bad it had to come to this.

In a flare of blue light, Ares materializes in his path. There are more gasps and exclamations from the crowd.

ARES (blocking Evander's sword):

Yeah, too bad.

EVANDER:

Well, look who's here. Daddy wants to fight.

Evander charges forward and his sword clashes with Ares'. For a few moments they fight like two common mortals, blocking and parrying each other's thrusts, dodging sword blows and kicks. Evander clearly has difficulty parrying Ares' moves. Piqued, he steps back and holds out his hand, using his powers to block Ares' sword; Ares' sword is almost wrenched out of his hand but he manages to regain control of it. Evander laughs as the War God struggles.



Stepping back, Ares flips the sword into his left hand and then raises his right hand and launches a fireball. The crowd gasps in horror.

His hand shooting out, Evander deflects the fireball back at Ares. Ares deflects it so that it slams into the platform at Evander's feet, instantly igniting the wooden boards. In a moment Evander is encircled in a ring of fire; clearly troubled, he stares intensely at the fire and makes a circular motion with his hand. The fire dies down. Ares advances on Evander, his sword ready. Slightly shaken, Evander blocks him again; Ares hits him with a surge of energy that makes Evander stagger. Recovering from the shock, Evander extends a hand and launches a bolt of power at Ares, who is nearly knocked off his feet. With a snarl, Ares launches another fireball; Evander stares at it intently and the fireball dissolves. Ares already has another fireball in his palm, bouncing it from one hand to the other; Evander waits tensely. With a snarl, Ares throws the fireball and Evander, obviously rattled, deflects it so that it flies into the palace wall, leaving an ugly black gash.

While Ares and Evander fight, the camera pans to Xena, who sits up, watching them. With a supreme effort, Evander shoots out his hand and throws Ares back; he flies through the air with a yell (reminiscent of his fight with Athena in "Amphipolis Under Siege") and slams into the wall of the palace, where the fireball had hit before. Ares rises to his feet, breathing hard, and advances toward Evander. Evander stares at him intently and raises his hand; Ares stops, stares at Evander for a moment and then vanishes.

Almost in disbelief, Evander stares at the spot where Ares just stood. A look of incredulous joy flashes in his face. Then he turns to the crowd.

EVANDER:

I have defeated the God of War!

Behind him, Xena rises to her feet.

XENA:

Now you just have me to deal with.



With a piercing, ululating battle cry, Xena leaps up and flips in the air; she lands and charges Evander. He tries to use his powers to stop her; she is momentarily slowed down but then quickly regains control and comes at him with her sword. They spar briefly, with Xena easily parrying Evander's attacks. Evander grows more and more frustrated, and soon he is almost blindly swinging his sword, grunting and snarling furiously.

Finally, Xena kicks his sword out of his hand and it lands on the platform with a clatter. Evander looks stunned and dismayed; before he can recover from his shock, Xena lands a powerful punch to his face that knocks him out cold.

The crowd erupts in cheers.

Gabrielle runs up the platform; she and Xena quickly cut the ropes binding the prisoners' hands.

FEMALE PRISONER #1:

Thank you!

STRATON:

Xena--did you see that? (beams) My lord Ares--I prayed to him--I knew he would help me!

Xena shakes her head and says nothing. A noise from the crowd suddenly draws her attention and she turns abruptly.

A group of people, some armed with swords and others with sticks, is charging up the platform.

MAN #1 (armed with a sword):

It's payback time!

WOMAN #1 (swinging a stick):

Kill the bastard!

In the general murmur from the crowd, shouts are heard:

-- Kill him!

-- Die, you infidel!

Before Xena can react, there is a flare of blue light; Ares appears, standing in front of the still-unconscious Evander, a stern expression on his face.

ARES:

Enough of this.

Terrified, Evander's would-be attackers fall back and scramble down from the platform, a couple of them scrambling and falling down the steps. Xena gives Ares a tense smile; Ares nods slightly and then looks regretfully at the unconscious Evander (with an expression somewhat similar to the way he looked at the dead Athena in "Motherhood").



CUT TO

A richly decorated bedchamber. Evander, still unconscious, is lying in a large bed. Nemesis is sitting by his bedside. Gabrielle is seated on a small couch nearby while Xena is pacing the room. Ares, looking very uncomfortable, slouches by the wall.

NEMESIS (looks up at Xena):

So that was your plan. Ares would drain him and then you'd fight him before he regained his powers.

XENA (stops and turns to her):

It was the only way. The people of Pelius had to see that a mortal could defeat him.

Evander stirs and opens his eyes. He looks around, confused.

NEMESIS (reaches out and puts a hand on Evander's arm):

Evander...I'm sorry. I know you think I betrayed you. But I couldn't let you go on doing this.

EVANDER (sits up):

Don't you get it? All I wanted was for people to be free from the gods' tyranny.

GABRIELLE:

And you were going to force them to be free? (shakes her head) Evander, when Eli's followers were persecuted for their beliefs, Xena and I defended them. But these people have just as much of a right to worship their gods.

NEMESIS (softly):

I know I set you against the gods. But the gods aren't evil--they never were. They're just very, very powerful--and sometimes...a lot of the time...it's made them arrogant and cruel. (she pauses, tearing up) And that's what you became, too.

XENA:

You see, Evander, when you have a lot of power, it's easy to misuse--whether you're a god... (she pauses for a moment, her face clouding over) ...or a mortal.

NEMESIS:

Can you understand how it made me feel? When everything I hated most about the gods, I could see in my own son.

A tear rolls down her cheek as she touches his face.

EVANDER (shakes his head):

Mom...I never meant to hurt you of all people. I'm sorry.

Nemesis manages a smile and hugs Evander, both of them in tears now.

NEMESIS (whispers):

I'm sorry too. We were both wrong. I lied to you about...a lot of things.

They pull apart. Evander turns to Ares, who looks intensely uncomfortable. Evander gets up, the look on his face changing to a scowl.

EVANDER:

Get out of here, *dad*. (his voice dripping with sarcasm) If those fools want to worship you, let them. But don't expect any tender father-son reunions. Whatever you did to her (nods toward Nemesis), it must have been bad enough for her to tell me that my father was dead and that you killed him.

Ares straightens up, his arms folded on his chest, his expression grim. He's obviously about to disappear.

GABRIELLE (to Ares):

Wait! (turns to Evander) Back in the square--Ares saved your life. (Off his disbelieving look.) That's right--some of the people in that crowd would have killed you. He stopped them.

EVANDER (sneers):

Are you going to tell me that he cares about me all of a sudden?

ARES (wryly):

Maybe I just thought we'd make a good team. Just imagine what he could do at the head of an army... (off Xena's, Gabrielle's, and Nemesis' very un-amused glares, he raises his hands defensively) Just kidding. I probably *should* get going.

XENA:

I'll talk to you later.

ARES (semi-facetiously):

I was afraid of that.

He vanishes. Xena lowers her head for a moment, a thoughtful look on her face. Then she turns to Evander.

XENA:

You could do a lot of good with those powers, Evander--if you use them to help people. Like I said before...you want to free people from the gods, show them they can fend for themselves without the gods' help.

EVANDER:

Maybe you're right. (shakes his head, still bewildered) Look, this has been...a lot for me to digest in one day.

GABRIELLE (smiles):

I'm sure your mother will help you with that.

Evander and Nemesis exchange an affectionate look.

CUT TO

Xena, Gabrielle and Nemesis walk down a corridor in the palace.

NEMESIS (reluctantly):

Maybe you were right, Xena. I never thought I'd say this, but maybe Ares really has changed.

Xena stops and looks at her, obviously struggling with something.

XENA (hesitantly):

Nemesis...if Evander and Ares ever get close... Well--just make sure you watch them carefully.

Gabrielle shoots her an alarmed look, while Nemesis nods with a sad, understanding expression.

CUT TO

Lakeside. Night. Xena is alone as the moon reflects down on the beautiful lake. She skips a stone across the water.

The camera pans to show the ripple the rock caused in the water. The camera zooms in.

[FLASHBACK]

Scene from "Dreamworker."

Xena is talking to Gabrielle, in her Season 1 blue dress.

XENA:

See how calm the surface of the water is? That was me once. And then--the water ripples and churns; that's what I become.



GABRIELLE:

But if we sit here long enough it will go back to being still again. It will go back to being calm.

XENA:

But the stone's still under there. It's now part of the lake. It might look as it did before, but it's forever changed.

[END OF FLASHBACK]

The camera zooms in on Xena as she reflects. Her face is illuminated by a flash of blue. She turns to see Ares standing next to her. He sits down.

ARES (softly):

Hey.

XENA:

Hey.

There is a pause between them.

ARES (looks at her intently):

You still don't trust me around Evander, do you...

XENA (with a bitter chuckle):

You heard what I said to Nemesis, huh?

ARES (shaking his head):

No. I just kinda figured it out.

Xena looks at him, then raises an eyebrow slightly and shrugs. There is a tense silence between them.



XENA (shakes her head):
Why didn't you tell me, Ares?

ARES (brusquely):
Tell you what? That I wanted Nemesis to have my child so I could use him as a tool? That once that didn't work out, I didn't care about him anymore?

XENA (her face hard):
Is that why you didn't want me going up against him? So I wouldn't find out?

ARES:
So I'm a bastard. Go ahead, say it.

XENA (her face softening a little):
Or maybe that wasn't the only reason...

She puts her hand over Ares'. He lowers his eyes, then looks up at her again.

ARES (his expression softer now):
For years, I didn't even know Evander was alive or dead. I won't lie to you--I didn't give it much thought. But when I found out he was alive--look, I'm not running for Father of the Year, but--I wanted him to stay that way.

XENA (lowers her eyes, her voice dropping to a near-whisper):
You wanted a child from me once...like you did from Nemesis.

ARES:
No, Xena--not like that. You know that's not what it was about--what I wanted... (trails off)

After a moment Xena wordlessly squeezes his hand.

XENA:
Nemesis was wrong about one thing... She said gods couldn't love.

Ares manages a slight smile and gently wraps his arm around her shoulder. Xena leans against him as they stare out into the lake.

The camera holds for a beat and then pans around towards the spot where Xena threw the rock. The ripples are gone.

FADE OUT

THE END

[Yet another dysfunctional parent-child relationship was introduced during the production of this motion picture.]