

Xena: Warrior Princess - Subtext Virtual Season 9



Production #V911 – Pompeii – Part 2

Virtual Airdate – February 25, 2004

WRITTEN BY
Susanne Beck

PRODUCED BY
Carol Stephens

DIRECTED BY
Denise Byrd

SCREENGRABS
Judi Mair

ARTWORK
Lucia

TITLE GRAPHIC
MaryD

TEASER

FADE IN:

Scenes from last week's episode....

EXT. TOWN - NIGHT

Xena and Gabrielle, drawn on by the smoke and screams, have pitched in to help. Xena stands with a stable hand helping to get the panicked horses from their burning quarters, while across town, Gabrielle stands atop the roof of the village inn, wetting it down to prevent the fire's spread.

From her position on the roof, Gabrielle can see a young woman running back and forth, pulling at her hair and screaming. She can't make out the words, but she knows the woman is in trouble.

GABRIELLE

Hold this!

Handing off her water pail to a middle aged man, she makes for the ladder and quickly slides down. Running to the woman, Gabrielle gently grabs her elbow and spins her to face her.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

What is it? What's wrong?



WOMAN

My baby! Oh, please...
my baby!!

CUT TO:

INT. BURNING HOUSE - NIGHT

The fire is still blazing all around them despite the great amounts of water being thrown at it.

GABRIELLE

What now?

Xena looks up at where the roof had been just moments before. She gifts Gabrielle with a wicked grin.

XENA
Ready?



GABRIELLE
Somehow, I just knew that
was going to be your choice.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

GABRIELLE
Are you thinking
what I'm thinking?



XENA
Vacation?

GABRIELLE
Oh, yeah.

CUT TO:

INT. FALAFEL'S SHOP - DAY

FALAFEL
(cont'd, dramatically)
Oh, fair Pompeii, the land of
beauty and legend, an artist's
paradise! Rolling green hills,
the beautiful Mount Vesuvius....

GABRIELLE

Excuse me. Did you
say artist's paradise?

FALAFEL

Indeed I did, dear woman.

GABRIELLE

Sold!

CUT TO:

EXT. POMPEII - DAY

GABRIELLE

By the gods, Xena, did you
ever see anything so beautiful?

CUT TO:

EXT. POMPEII MAIN SQUARE - DAY

ORATOR

I tell you, my brothers and sisters,
the time for my God's wrath is
at hand! But you can save
yourselves! Repent your sinful
ways! Repent your wickedness!
Repent and you will be saved!

XENA

(whispering)

Loos.

CUT TO:

EXT. POMPEII - MORNING

LOOS

You thought I was crazy! Well
you were wrong! Come see!
Come see the wrath of the
God of Eli against this
unholy city! Come see!!

GABRIELLE

(nervously)

Xena? What is it?

XENA
(softly)
Son of a bacchae....



FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. POMPEII - DAY

Gabrielle follows the direction of Xena's penetrating gaze, and sees Vesuvius in all its majestic glory. Above its crown, a plume of white hangs glittering in the slowly rising sun.

GABRIELLE

That's just mist, right?



She looks at Xena, whose expression is unchanged. High in the sky, a large flock of birds suddenly wheels away from Vesuvius like a fast moving cloud and flies very quickly in the opposite direction, crying out their fright.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

It's not mist. Xena,
please, what's going on?

Loos halts his insane capering and comes to stand next to her.

LOOS

Xena knows, Gabrielle. She
knows. Even the birds of the
air know. God's judgment
is coming, and quickly, too.

(beat, louder)

Did you hear that, Pompeii?!
Be prepared to meet your doom!

GABRIELLE

Xena....

Xena finally blinks, and turns.

XENA

Grab him. I'll get our gear.
We need to go. Now.

GABRIELLE

But....

She finds herself talking to air.

Frustrated beyond belief, Gabrielle clenches her fists and raises her face to the sky.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd, yelling)

What in Tartarus is
going on here?!?!?



A moment later, Xena ducks back out of the house with their meager belongings in hand. She looks to Gabrielle, then to the still insanely cackling Loos, then back to her partner. Her eyebrow arches.

Gabrielle crosses her arms and taps her foot.

XENA

Gabrielle, we **need** to go.

GABRIELLE

And I need answers. Please.
What's happening here?

Letting go a soft sigh, Xena crosses the distance between them and, setting gentle hands on Gabrielle's shoulders, once again turns her toward Vesuvius.

XENA

Vesuvius isn't a mountain.



Gabrielle flicks her gaze over her shoulder, her expression one of patent disbelief.

GABRIELLE

(drawing)

Okay...so, what is it if
it's not a mountain?

XENA

It's a volcano.

GABRIELLE

A volcano.... Oh, I get it.
Vulcan, volcano, very good.

XENA

This isn't a joke, Gabrielle.
I saw something very much
like this during my time in Chin.

GABRIELLE

What happened?

XENA

The top of the volcano blew off in a
massive explosion. It was like nothing
I'd ever seen before. The ground
trembled beneath our feet from the
force of it. Liquid fire flew into the
sky higher than Mount Olympus, then
rolled down the sides of the volcano
like a burning river, killing everything
it touched. Choking black ash fell like
a blizzard, turning day into the blackest
night. Thousands died as I watched,
consumed in a flood of fire and ash.

GABRIELLE

(whispering)

By the gods....

XENA

That's why we must leave now. Our
only hope of outrunning it is to get
to the harbor and flee by boat. We'll
take as many people along as we
can, but we need to hurry.

LOOS

Don't bother with the evil inhabitants
of this unholy city, Xena. They're
doomed. They chose to seal their
ears against my message and....

XENA

And I'm gonna choose to seal
your lips if you don't shut up
and come with us. Now.

A hard yank to his toga, and Loos does just that.

CUT TO:

EXT. VIA DEL'ABBONDONZA - DAY

Yet again, Pompeii's main thoroughfare is a scene of utter chaos. This time, however, it is the city's animals that are causing all the carnage. Sensing the oncoming danger, horses, donkeys, goats, pigs, and a host of other creatures make a desperate bid for freedom. They overturn carts, trample produce, people, and even each other in their terror to get away.

Half dressed, disheveled men, most hung-over from the festivities the night before, stand around in dazed confusion as the animals continue to run riot.

One of the men, Africanus, stares dumbly at a broken rope that had once tethered his prized goat.

Shoving Loos into Gabrielle's arms, Xena grabs Africanus by the toga and shakes him roughly.

He looks up at her, dazed.

AFRICANUS

She was my best goat.

XENA

Never mind the goat. You need to
gather your family and make for
the harbor, as fast as you can.



AFRICANUS

(confusedly)

What does the harbor have
to do with my goat?

XENA

Your goat ran away because
it knows something that
you apparently don't.

AFRICANUS

And what might that
be, pray tell?

XENA

Vesuvius is gonna blow sky
high and anyone left in this city
is gonna be nothing but ash.

He looks at her for a moment. Then a chuckle sounds deep within his chest, followed by several more, until he is doubled over laughing.

AFRICANUS

Vesuvius... blowing sky high.
Oh, Xena... I'm sorry but...
you're mad.

LOOS

She tells nothing but the truth,
you minion of Satan! The God
of Love's judgment is soon
to fall upon your head!

Africanus' laughter only gets louder.

XENA

(grimly)

C'mon, Gabrielle. We don't
have time for this.

GABRIELLE

Africanus, please. Xena is
telling you the truth!

Africanus straightens, wiping the tears from his eyes.

AFRICANUS

I'm sorry, Gabrielle. I like you,
I really do. Take care of the
Warrior Princess, yes? It's
obvious she's succumbed
to her friend's insanity.

Before she can say more, Africanus turns away and picks his way through the debris,
searching for his goat.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARD ROCK CAFÉ - DAY

XENA

I'll go back and get our things.
See if you can talk Marcellas
Flavias into coming with us.



GABRIELLE

I'll try.

CUT TO:

INT. BARD ROCK CAFÉ - DAY

Oblivious to the chaos just outside, Marcellas Flavias prepares the café for a new day.
She turns, smiling as Gabrielle enters.

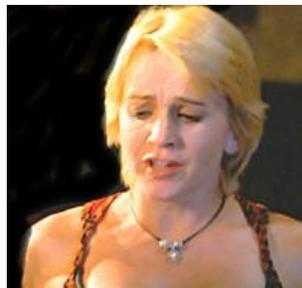
MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

Gabrielle! Welcome!
You were missed at the
festival last night.

GABRIELLE

(hurriedly)

Marcellas Flavias, I need for
you to come with me. Now.



MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

What? Where?

GABRIELLE

Please. Just come with me.
I don't have time....

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

The café's just about to open, Gabrielle. I can't go anywhere right now. I'm sor....

GABRIELLE

Mount Vesuvius is about to erupt. If you stay here, you'll be killed.

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

Mount Vesu....

She smiles.

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

It was a mistake for you to spend the night in Loos' company, I think. Gabrielle, the priests have assured us that Vulcan was pleased with our sacrifice. Have no fear. Pompeii is quite safe.

Desperately, Gabrielle grabs Marcellas Flavius by the arm and pulls her outside. The older woman frowns as she sees the chaos in the street.

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

(cont'd)

What's happening here?
Loos again?

GABRIELLE

The animals. They know danger's coming, Marcellas Flavius. They know it, and so does Xena. Please, we need to get to the harbor. It's our only chance.

The woman pulls gently away and looks sadly at Gabrielle

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

I'm sorry, Gabrielle.
I can't leave. My café....

GABRIELLE

There won't **be** any café.
Don't you understand?
This city is doomed!

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

But....

GABRIELLE

Look up at the top of Vesuvius.
What do you see?

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

A bit of mist. A small cloud.
This kind of thing....

GABRIELLE

A cloud? Do you see any
other clouds around?

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

No, but....

GABRIELLE

It's not a cloud. It's not mist.
That mountain is getting ready
to erupt. Xena is never wrong
about this kind of thing. Never.

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

I'm sorry....



GABRIELLE

Look. If we're wrong, what have
you lost? A couple of hours?
I'm sure your patrons will forgive
you. But if we're right.... Please.

After a long moment, Marcellas Flavius finally nods.

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

Fine. I'll agree to your request,
but you must help me take
down these scrolls. I won't
leave without them.

GABRIELLE

We don't have time!

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS
I won't leave without them!

Gabrielle sighs.

GABRIELLE
Fine. Just hurry. Please.

Laden with their baggage, Xena steps into the café, frowning as she watches Marcellas Flavius and Gabrielle hurriedly pluck scrolls from the walls and stuff them into large sacks.

XENA
What's going on?

GABRIELLE
She won't leave without them.

Xena takes two strides forward before her motion is halted by an ominous rumbling. Suddenly, the ground bucks beneath their feet, throwing Marcellas Flavius and Gabrielle hard to the ground. Barely keeping her own balance, Xena walks forward tentatively.

The shaking stops, then a second, much stronger, tremor shakes the building and, with an ominous crack, part of the ceiling comes down, directly on top of the two fallen women.

XENA
GABRIELLE!! GABRIELLE!!!



FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

INT. BARD ROCK CAFÉ - NOON

Gabrielle is already rising as Xena arrives, and together they pull Marcellas Flavias to her feet. The older woman is dusty, but appears basically uninjured except for a small knot on her forehead where it collided with the ground.

XENA

(to Gabrielle)

Are you all right?

GABRIELLE

Yeah, but this roof falling on us thing has got to stop soon.
It's becoming a hab....

Her voice trails off as she turns to face the café's entrance. Her eyes widen.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

What the...? It can't be. Snow?
In the middle of summer?

XENA

Not snow....



Turning, she retraces her steps to the door with Gabrielle close at her heels. Both look out toward Vesuvius.

GABRIELLE

(profoundly)

By the gods....

A massive column of white smoke rises thousands of feet into the air, blocking the sun and sky before them. As they watch, the column darkens to grey and jagged forks of lightning illuminate it from within.

All around them, small pellets of rock fall, sounding like hailstones as they quickly coat everything in the city in a thick fall of grey. As they watch, the fall deepens until it is at ankle level.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Xena? How do we
get out of this?

Xena turns to Marcellas Flavias.

XENA

You've got pillows
around here, right?

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

P-pillows? Well, yes, but....

XENA

Get them. One for each of
us and one for Loos. Go.

A question in her eyes, Marcellas Flavias rushes off to do Xena's bidding and quickly returns with four plump pillows.

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

Will these do?

XENA

Yeah. Thanks.

Grabbing two pillows, she hands one to Gabrielle, who gives her a questioning look. Xena holds her pillow over her head in demonstration. Gabrielle smiles.

GABRIELLE

Protection from the
falling stones, right?



XENA

Right. Let's go.

CUT TO:

EXT. POMPEII - JUST AFTER NOON

The scene outside of the café is chaos. Men, women and children run pell-mell through the streets, terrified. Still others pour out from the myriad of buildings lining the street, dragging huge sacks of precious possessions behind them.

In the center of it all, and seemingly untouched by the tumult around him, stands Loos, laughing. The falling stones seem to have less effect than raindrops on his fanatic joy.

LOOS

Who is the madman now, Pompeii?
I warned you!! I warned you!!
You wouldn't listen, and now
you're paying the price in blood
and tears!! I warned... oof!

He finds himself looking up at the ash-filled sky, knocked off his feet finally by the onrushing crowd. A hand enters his field of vision, and he finds himself yanked up by the front of his toga. A pillow is shoved hard against his narrow chest.

XENA

Put this over your head
before I use it on your
mouth. Now move!

The small group falls in with the stream of Pompeians running for the harbor. Daylight quickly gives way to dusk as the ash spewing from the volcano paints the sky a thick, angry grey.

Up ahead of them, a young girl is turned this way and that, constantly buffeted by the onrushing crowd. Her dark eyes are tear-filled and huge as she obviously searches for someone she knows.

Before Xena reaches her, a young woman appears out of the crowd and snatches the child up, holding her close to her breast.

Nearby, a man trips and falls to his knees, then is squashed flat as another man runs right over him, unseeing. Reaching down, Xena yanks him to his feet without breaking stride.

Suddenly, the ground trembles violently again, throwing men and women hard to the ground. With a booming roar, fresh lava and ash shoot out of Vesuvius, towering into the sky. Hot ash and pumice rain down on them in a blizzard, obscuring everything in sight.

An older woman hits the ground and screams in agony, her leg obviously broken and pinned beneath her.

Seeing this, Gabrielle grabs Xena's arm and tugs.

GABRIELLE

Xena, we have to help her.

XENA

Keep moving!

GABRIELLE

Xena! She's in pain!
She needs help!

XENA

Keep moving!
We don't have time!

Taking a quick glance over her shoulder, Xena's eyes narrow as through the swirling ash, she can see the smoke and flames that signal the burning of the homesteads closest to Vesuvius.

GABRIELLE

We'll make time! We can't
just leave her here!

XENA

Fine.



Reaching out, she grabs two running men, dragging them to a rather abrupt stop.

XENA

(cont'd)

You two. Pick her up and
carry her to the harbor.

MAN #1

Are you crazy?!?

XENA

Yep. And if you don't wanna
see just how crazy, you'll
do as I say. Now!



Something in her eyes tells them that listening would be their safest course of action. Lifting the woman rather roughly between them, they resume their flight to hoped for safety.

Xena and her small group are about to resume their run when yet another older woman comes out from the archway of a fine house lining the road.

WOMAN

Please, you must help me.
My husband, he's bedridden,
and I'm not strong enough to
move him. I have no other family.
I... please. Please, help me.

Suppressing a sigh, Xena nods.

XENA

Gabrielle, you take her and
Marcellas Flavias and keep
heading for the harbor. I'll
meet up with you in a minute.
Loos, you're coming with me.

LOOS

Me?! Why...?

GABRIELLE

(simultaneously)

Xena....

XENA

(to woman)

Here, take this and put it over
your head to protect you
from the falling stones.

Handing over her pillow, Xena gives Gabrielle a pleading look. Gabrielle bites her lower lip, then nods. Xena smiles in thanks, and grabs Loos by his toga, yanking him into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. VILLA - AFTERNOON

A frail, elderly man lies in a canopied bed. His legs are withered, his skin sallow, his breathing raspy in his narrow chest. Regardless, his toga is bright white and clean, and he's been freshly shaven. It is obvious he is well cared for and well loved.

MAN

Who... who are you?
What are you doing here?

XENA

We've come to help.

MAN

My... my wife...?

XENA

... is safe. She's headed for the beach. You'll be together again shortly.

MAN

Thank you. Oh, thank you.

XENA

(to Loos)

Help me lift him,
and be gentle.

Loos stares at her, lip curled in derision.

LOOS

Why? He has already been judged and found wanting, Xena. Leave him here to die in his own filth.

Straightening slowly, Xena pins Loos with her iciest of glares. He pales, but holds his ground.

XENA

Is this what Eve taught you about the Way of Love?

LOOS

I am acting as my God commands me.

Xena sneers.

XENA

Can't answer the question, can you?



Bending, she lifts the old man into her arms as gently as she can. Through his pain, he smiles at her in thanks.

XENA
(to Loos)
Get outta my way.

CUT TO:

EXT. POMPEII - AFTER NOON

Xena quickly catches up with Gabrielle and the others. The man's wife, also infirm, has been having difficulty walking over the loose, constantly shifting mass of volcanic rock being hurled down at them from above.

Gabrielle smiles in relief as Xena comes into her sights, and quickly hands over her head-cover to protect the frail man lying in her partner's strong arms.

MAN
Thank you, kind woman.

GABRIELLE
You're very welcome.
(beat, to Xena)
We can't go very fast.

XENA
I know. Let's just make
it as quick as we can.



With that, they start off, moving once again to the beach and safety.

CUT TO:

EXT. POMPEII - AFTERNOON

The group is just about to move past the last row of shops and homes when Xena feels the hairs on the back of her neck stand straight up. With an icy sense of dread, she looks over her shoulder in time to see one of her worst fears confirmed.

The cone of the volcano has collapsed and as she watches, a huge surge of ash is forced down to the ground and out, heading directly toward them at an incredible speed.

Looking quickly to her left, she spies an archway heralding a deep alley and she heads in that direction at a run.

XENA
(shouting)
Everyone! Follow me!
Hurry!!!

Without thought, Gabrielle lifts the frail old woman into her arms and bolts after Xena, knowing by the tone of Xena's voice, something horrible is about to happen.

LOOS
No! I won't!

He begins to turn.

XENA
Loos! Hurry! Don't
look back! Hurry!!

CUT TO:

INT. ALLEYWAY - AFTERNOON

Stepping aside, Xena nudges Marcellas Flavius through first, and herds her to the very back of the alley, against the stone wall that marks its end. She quickly, though as gently as she can, dumps the old man in her lap.

XENA
Hold him!

Turning back, she pelts down the alley, pulls the old woman from Gabrielle's arms and pushes her back toward Marcellas Flavius.

Turning back again, she grabs Gabrielle's arm, yanks her inside the alley, holding to her arm tightly.

Gabrielle struggles in Xena's grip.

GABRIELLE
Xena! We have to get Loos!
We can't just leave him!



XENA

There's no time!!

Gabrielle almost succeeds in pulling away. Xena grabs onto her with both arms and goes to her knees, embracing Gabrielle tightly against her body, protecting her as well as she can.

Gabrielle's voice is muffled against Xena's chest.

GABRIELLE

LOOS!!

CUT TO:

EXT. POMPEII - AFTERNOON

Loos stands looking at the onrushing cataclysm, face painted in rapture.

LOOS

The Hand of God!

It's beautif....

CUT TO:

INT. ALLEYWAY - AFTERNOON

Loos voice is abruptly cut off as a toxic wind, faster and stronger than the strongest hurricane and hot enough to boil water, jets across the city, flattening much of it in its wake.

The group in the alley huddle together, awaiting their fate.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. ALLEYWAY - AFTERNOON

Almost as quickly as it begins, the surge passes, leaving those in the alley choking on the toxic gases that managed to penetrate into the deep, narrow crevasse. The elderly man, in particular, is having a hard time of it. His face is almost plum as he chokes and gasps for breath.

Hearing this, Gabrielle pulls away from Xena, concentrating on getting her breathing under control.

GABRIELLE

I'm... all right...
Help...him...

Her own breaths raspy, Xena looks over Gabrielle carefully, before finally nodding and rising to her feet. She crosses the alley in quick strides, then lowers herself to her haunches, gently lifting the man by his heaving shoulders until he is in a sitting position.

XENA

(softly)
Easy, easy.
Long, slow breaths.



MAN

Can't... can't... breathe!

Xena supports him, easing him forward until he is sitting in a leaning over position.

XENA

Now listen to me. I want you to purse your lips like you're trying to whistle and breathe out. Try it. It will help.

Struggling, the man tries his best, and to his great relief, his breathing suddenly becomes much easier.

MAN

Thank... you....

Xena smiles and squeezes his frail shoulder lightly.

XENA

Glad to help.

Xena looks at the others.

XENA

(cont'd)

How are you two doing?

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

B... better.

The elderly man's wife simply nods.

With a quick smile, Xena raises to her full height and turns, making her way back to Gabrielle. She is also standing and breathing freely. Xena squeezes Gabrielle's hand in passing, then stops just at the entrance to the alley.

GABRIELLE

(concerned)

What are you doing?

XENA

I'm just gonna check if it's okay to go back out there yet.

GABRIELLE

But....

Xena turns to her.

XENA

Gabrielle, we can't stay in here forever. We've got to be clear of the harbor before the next surge hits, or....

GABRIELLE

I understand. Just...
Be careful?

Xena's smile is sweet, her eyes very tender.

XENA
(softly)
Always.



Stopping just before the portal, she looks outside. The air is heavy with ash, but an offshore breeze cleanses it as she watches. She trails sensitive fingertips over the hot brick just to the inside of the archway, feeling as it slowly cools. Several moments later, she takes in a breath of cooling air and steps outside.

CUT TO:

EXT. POMPEII - LATE AFTERNOON

The scene is one of utter carnage. Dozens of men, women, children, and even animals have become mummies of hardened ash, caught in the hot, toxic wind without hope of escape. They lay where they have fallen, bodies perfectly preserved in their molten sarcophagi.

She walks over to one of the bodies and lays a hand on it. The fused ash is still quite hot to the touch and she quickly lifts her hand away. The body is of a young child, lying on his side, arm curled under his head as if he is sleeping peacefully. She looks at him for a long moment, then rises slowly to her feet.

XENA
(whispering)
I'm sorry.

She turns, and looks to her left, toward the still spewing volcano, and stills. Pumice stones fall around her in a raging torrent, but she doesn't notice.

Gabrielle steps out to join her and also stills.

GABRIELLE
(sorrowfully)
Oh, Loos....

Like a pillar, Loos' ash entombed body stands facing the instrument of his death, his hands raised and clasped in a gesture of eternal piety.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Why?



XENA

Arrogance. Conceit.
Self-righteousness.

Gabrielle looks at her for a long moment. Part of her is angered, but a larger part knows Xena's telling the truth. She lets go a soft sigh.

GABRIELLE

I think I'm more comfortable believing that the pressure of his quest drove him over the edge.

XENA

That might have been part of it.

GABRIELLE

Good. Then that's how I'm going to remember it. Better that than....

Nodding, Xena takes Gabrielle's hand, and together they say a silent goodbye to Loos.

Then....

XENA

Let's go. We need to move quickly.

CUT TO:

EXT. POMPEIAN SHORE - EVENING

Along the sands of the shore are several bodies, but surprisingly, several dozen more are still very much alive and huddled together like frightened children. A huge ship is moored in the nearly empty harbor, and as Xena watches, a handsome middle-aged man steps down from the plank, attended by several younger men dressed in the regalia of the Roman Navy.

Smiling slightly, Xena lays the old man on the ash-covered stand, steps away from the group. Gabrielle is at her side, and they approach the man and his retinue.

XENA

Pliny.

Pliny looks up at the voice, and returns her smile, his own broad and warm.

PLINY THE ELDER

Xena! How wonderful to see you again! I didn't know you were in Pompeii!

XENA

Spur of the moment decision.

PLINY THE ELDER

Well, it's a lovely city, just lovely. I'm sure you're enjoying your time here.

Gabrielle looks at the man slightly askance, wondering if he somehow doesn't see the huge lava and smoke spewing monstrosity standing directly in front of him.

XENA

Commander, we need your help.

The older man waves a hand.

PLINY THE ELDER

Yes, yes, I know. My nephew caught the first glimpse and I headed off to rescue the survivors post haste.

XENA

Good. Then I'll....

PLINY THE ELDER

We'll carry out the mission in the morning.

Xena and Gabrielle both stare at him, eyes wide.



XENA

We don't have that much time! Surely you know....

PLINY THE ELDER

(offhandedly)

Relax, Xena. We have plenty of time. I've seen things like this before, you know.

XENA

(forcefully)

So have I. And I know we need to leave. Now.

PLINY THE ELDER

Can't be done, I'm afraid. The winds are playing havoc with the water. A crossing is unsafe at this time. Why, I barely made it here in one piece. No, tomorrow will be just fine.

XENA

Commander, the winds aren't what's playing havoc with the water. What you felt was a surge. Look at the top of the volcano. It's much shorter than it was before. The cone collapsed on itself, sending the hot ash flying into the city. Hundreds are dead. I've seen them, covered with ash and dead where they lay.

(beat, very intensely)

Pliny, it will happen again.

PLINY THE ELDER

Nonsense. Everyone knows that once the top collapses, the danger is as good as over. This... falling rock will cause a few bruises, yes, but the people will be safe until tomorrow.

He smiles at her.

PLINY THE ELDER

I'm spending the night with some friends of mine. I'm sure you and your party would be welcomed. We'll head out for Mycineum by the light of a new day.

GABRIELLE

Sir, you don't understand....



PLINY THE ELDER

Oh, I understand perfectly, my dear.
(to Xena)
Coming?

The corner of Xena's mouth curls in derision.

XENA

No. You go on. I'll take my chances with the sea.

PLINY THE ELDER

As you wish.

With an imperious wave of his hand, he collects the rest of his followers and heads directly into the city. Soon, they are lost to sight, blanketed in the darkness of ash and the unnatural evening.

Gabrielle stares after him.

GABRIELLE

He's crazy! He's going
to die, isn't he?

XENA

Count on it. C'mon. Let's
find something seaworthy
and get the hell outta here.



FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. POMPEIAN HARBOR - NIGHT

Xena scans the harbor, scowling. Few boats remain at the docks, and most of those are either capsized or useless wrecks. Grabbing a torch from one of the huddled men, she walks the dock, peering down into the dark, churning water below.

Finally, she spots a longboat, half buried in pumice. Its mainmast is splintered, its sails nothing more than torn, fluttering rags. Its paint is chipped and peeling away. But it still floats atop the water soundly and its oars, five to a side, are straight and whole.

With a grim smile, she nods and turns back to the shore. As she steps off the dock's wooden planking, the earth trembles again, almost throwing her to her knees. The torch gutters, but remains blazing as she quickly turns toward Vesuvius.

Thankfully, the flattened cone appears to be intact. For now.

The sound of running feet alerts her to Gabrielle's presence, and she smiles as Gabrielle comes into the torchlight and embraces her.

GABRIELLE

I saw you nearly fall.
Are you all right?



XENA

I'm fine. Is everyone else...?

GABRIELLE

We're all okay.

She turns concerned eyes in the direction of the volcano.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Is it going to happen again?

XENA

Yeah... but not yet.
We've still got time.

GABRIELLE

Any luck?

XENA

I found a boat. A small one.
It should hold a couple
dozen, maybe a few more.



GABRIELLE

Oh, thank the gods.

Her expression turns pensive.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Xena, I counted at least fifty
people on the beach. What....

XENA

We'll do what we can.
C'mon.

CUT TO:

EXT. POMPEIAN BEACH - NIGHT

Xena maneuvers easily through the small crowd. She stops before the huddled forms of Marcellas Flavias and the elderly couple.

XENA

You al right?

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

We're fine. Was your
search successful?

Nodding, Xena turns to face the crowd.

XENA

(voice slightly raised)

I've found a boat. I want the women
and children to head for the docks.
Whatever room is left, you can
draw lots among yourselves.

A large man jumps to his feet.

MAN

Forget it! Survival of the fittest!
C'mon, lads! To the boat!

The hiss of steel is loud as Xena withdraws her sword, planting herself firmly in the path of the oncoming men.

XENA

Stay where you are or I'll
gut you where you stand.
Gabrielle! Escort the women
and children to the boat.

Resheathing her sais, Gabrielle begins to do as Xena asks, talking softly to the women as they pass on their way toward the docks.

MAN

It's thirty of us against
one of her! Let's go!

The men rush Xena. At the last second, she reverses her grip on her sword and starts beating them away with the pommel, adding a few kicks and punches for good measure.

After the first several men go down, the others lose their starch and come to a stop, breathing hard.

XENA

I would suggest that the rest of
you decide among yourselves
who will come and who will stay.



Sheathing her sword, she steps forward and easily hefts the elderly man and, turning, makes her way to the docks.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOCKS - NIGHT

Gabrielle has made quick work of helping the women and children aboard the rickety craft. Twelve women with children on their laps sit along the outer wall, looking up at Gabrielle expectantly.

Hearing a soft sound behind her, Gabrielle turns and smiles as she watches Xena approach, the old man resting comfortably in her strong arms. She holds the boat steady as Xena boards and carries the man to the rear, where she rests him gently on the ground next to his wife.

GABRIELLE

(softly)

We've got room for
about ten more.



XENA

And here they come now.

Fourteen men arrive on the dock, all looking rather diffident. The youngest, Gaius by name, steps forward with a small stone in his hand.

GAIUS

We... took your suggestion,
Warrior Princess, and drew
lots. Is there still room?

XENA

We can take ten of you.

Nodding, Gaius begins the short procession onto the boat.

XENA

(cont'd)

You eight, man the oars. Leave
room for Gabrielle and myself.

When all are finally settled, Xena looks back to the men still on the docks.

XENA

(cont'd)

Keep looking further down. There
might be a small boat or two
that were overlooked in the panic.

The men nod and begin to disperse.

XENA
(*cont'd*)
Good luck.

A moment later, Xena and Gabrielle are at their positions, each manning an oar.

XENA
(*cont'd*)
All right. Let's get
the hell outta here.

CUT TO:

EXT. SEA - NIGHT

It has taken awhile, but finally the rowers have managed to find a rhythm and the boat moves quickly across the dark water as the rowers strain against the wind at their backs.

GAIUS
Where are we going?

XENA
Mycenium.

MALE ROWER
That's too far away! I say
we head for Herculaneum!
I have family there!

XENA
No! The wind is moving in
that direction. Herculaneum
is no better than Pompeii!

MALE ROWER #2
Neapolis, then!
Or Stabiae!

XENA
(*growling*)
We're heading for
Mycenium. Keep rowing!



CUT TO:

EXT. SEA - NIGHT

The rowers are covered with sweat and panting hard as they work their way across the churning sea. Suddenly, a huge explosion sounds, and Xena looks up, eyes wide. As if in slow motion, the widened cone of the volcano falls in upon itself in a huge upwelling of ash, smoke, and fire. Like a runaway chariot, the hot ash and gases are pushed down to the ground and begin to flow outward with a speed and a force greater than anything she's ever seen.

GABRIELLE
XENA!!!



XENA
I see it! ROW!!
ROW!! ROW!!!

The boat moves sluggishly at first, then gains speed as the wide-eyed rowers strain against the oars with panic-driven strength as the noxious cloud hurtles toward them.

After several moments, Xena notices with some relief that the cloud of hot ash appears to be losing speed as it approaches. Then her heart pounds hard and fast in her chest as she sees something tall and black and glistening above the slowly dissipating cloud.

XENA
(cont'd)
Son of a bacchae!

GAIUS
WAVE!! BIG WAVE!!!

XENA
(shouting)
YOU GUYS... OARS, UP!!
Everybody, HANG ON!!!



GABRIELLE

Xena, what are we doing?!?

XENA

We can't hit it this way!
We'll be crushed! PORT
SIDE OARS, DIG IN!!

Xena comes to her feet, muscles straining against the pressure of water on her oar. The thick wood vibrates painfully in her hands, creaking and threatening to snap.

XENA

(cont'd)

HANG ON!!

The small boat hits the huge wave at a slight, oblique angle, climbing halfway up the glistening face before turning and hurtling back down, picking up tremendous speed as it rides the energy of the roiling water behind it. Xena's oar snaps in half and she is thrown forward by the force of it, cracking her head hard against the lip of the boat and nearly flying free.

GABRIELLE

XENA!!!!

A bit unsteadily, Xena drags herself back to her feet, holding tightly to the lip of the boat with one hand while wiping the blood streaming into her eyes with the other.

XENA

I'm all right. I just....

GAIUS

SHHHHHIIIIIIIPPPP!!!

Gabrielle looks up in time to see a large ship coming out of the darkness, looming like a giant directly ahead. They race toward it, completely out of control.

She feels herself pushed aside as Xena grabs the oar from her hands. With all of her considerable strength, Xena digs it into the water, desperately trying to steer the out-of-control craft away from its inevitable destiny.

XENA

HANG ON!!!

Suddenly there is a sickening crunch of wood on wood. Gabrielle feels herself catapulted into the air, the breath driven from her lungs. Gravity pulls her in and she drops like a stone, only to find herself grabbed and cradled against a strong body she knows as well as her own.

GABRIELLE

(breathlessly)

Xena....

Then all goes black.

CUT TO:

EXT. MYCENIUM SHORE - DAY

The sun peers weakly through the still thick clouds of ash and smoke that float over the sea to Mycenium. Gulls circle and screech overhead and the water laps gently over the sand.

Gabrielle, lying face down, opens one eye, then blinks the sand from her lashes. The pain hits her like a cresting wave and with a groan, she turns over onto her back, squinting at the filtered sun.

Memories flow into her with sudden force, and with a gasp, she sits up, trapping an arm tight against her bruised and hurting abdomen.

GABRIELLE

Xena!

Blinking rapidly, Gabrielle looks up and down a beach littered with bodies.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Xena!!

Jumping to her feet, and stumbling just a little on trembling legs, she begins walking, then running, down the stretch of sand. Seeing a shock of dark, unbound hair, she stops and comes to her knees.

Marcellas Flavias blinks and turns, looking up into Gabrielle's concerned eyes.

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

Am... am I dead?

GABRIELLE

No. You're fine.

Have you seen Xena?

I can't find her.

The older woman's eyebrow knits.

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

Not since... I remember hitting the water. It didn't hurt, but I also can't swim. I felt myself going under, and then... and then... someone pulled me up by my hair... It was Xena! She dragged me to shore and then went back out.

She looks up at the sky and frowns.

MARCELLAS FLAVIAS

(cont'd)

Surely she can't still be looking
for survivors, can she?

GABRIELLE

I don't know. I have to
find her. I have to....

Just then, a wave rolls in and breaks on the beach. Behind it, Gabrielle can see Xena, half staggering under the heavy weight of a body in her arms. She is pale and soaked and bleeding from a dozen slashes to her skin.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

XENA!!



Jumping to her feet, she splashes out into the surf.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Xena, I....

Xena passes her by without speaking and lays the body gently upon the shore. It is the elderly invalid, and it is obvious that he is dead.

Without pausing, Xena strides back into the surf, once again passing Gabrielle by without speaking. She bends over, straightens, and turns, bearing another lifeless body in her arms. Gabrielle sees that it's the old man's wife.

Like a puppet whose strings have finally been cut, Xena collapses to her knees and lays the body of the old woman next to that of her husband. Gabrielle approaches from behind and also kneels, laying a hand of support on Xena's shoulder.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

Xena?

XENA

(hoarsely)

I couldn't save them. I.... He couldn't swim, and she... she wouldn't leave him. I tried to pull her away, tried to get to him, but.... There was a young child and when I... when I looked back, she was gone.

Reaching up, Gabrielle tenderly strokes the sodden hair from Xena's face, and rests her chin on Xena's shoulder.

GABRIELLE

(softly)

You did everything you could.
No one could have done more.

XENA

I could have. I could have
tried harder. I....



GABRIELLE

No. No, you listen to me. I know what you did. So does Marcellas Flavias. So do all the rest of these people.

She waves a hand to encompass the men, women and children slowly coming to consciousness around them.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

You saved them, Xena. You saved me. We would have died without you. You know that.

XENA

I don't. I....

Gabrielle looks down at the old couple. Their expressions, in death, are peaceful.

GABRIELLE

Look at them. They died, yes.
But they died **together**. It's what
they wanted. It's what **I** want.

Sliding her hand over, she turns Xena's face toward her, and smiles.

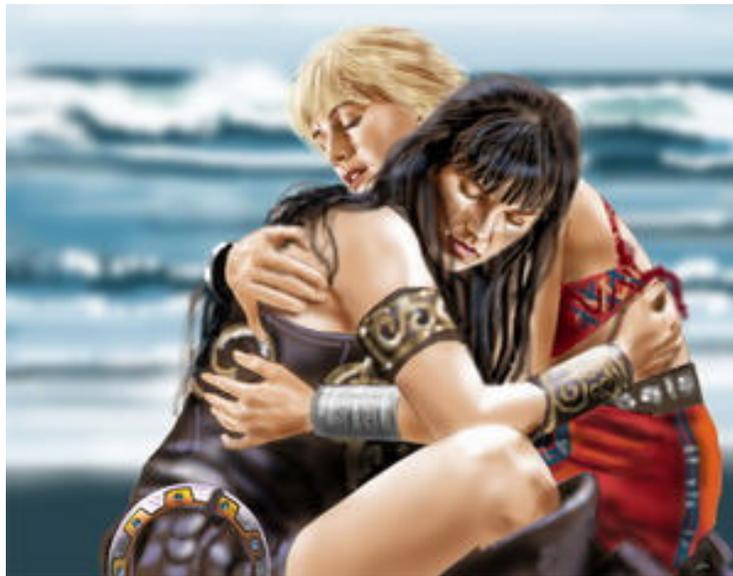
GABRIELLE

(cont'd)

You did more than anyone
could ever have hoped
for, and I love you.



Opening her arms, she takes Xena into them, guiding the proud head to her shoulder and holding on tight.



GABRIELLE

(cont'd, whispering)

I love you.

Behind them, the waves roll in as the smoke and ash continues to spew from Vesuvius.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

TAG

FADE IN:

EXT. MYCENIUM - SUNSET

The ash from Vesuvius stains the sky, causing the setting sun to throw off a riot of extraordinarily beautiful color. It seems a fitting legacy for the city and people of Pompeii. The volcano itself is finally silent, once again the placid mountain that everyone loved and none had feared.

Xena and Gabrielle sit atop a cliff that faces the sea and Pompeii. The town is empty of life; a tomb for the dead who litter her streets and houses, covered in ash and eternally silent.

Also on the cliff, but some distance away, Pliny's nephew, Pliny the Younger, looks over the scene, his quill never still as he pens an epitaph for his uncle.

GABRIELLE

Do you think anyone will ever come back to Pompeii?

XENA

I doubt it. They say the city's cursed, and with a monster like that looming over it, I don't blame them.

GABRIELLE

Maybe.



A comfortable silence falls between them.

GABRIELLE

(cont'd)
Xena?

XENA

Mm?

GABRIELLE

Do you think that maybe one day, a long time from now, someone might come back and wonder what happened?

Xena thinks about it for a moment.

XENA

Maybe. But if they do come back, I don't think they'll have to wonder.



GABRIELLE

Why do you say that?

Xena shrugs.

XENA

Because with bards like you, and like Pliny over there, who put history into words, I think they'll already know what happened to Pompeii and her people.

Smiling, Gabrielle gives Xena a side-armed hug, then settles back to watch the sun set over Pompeii.

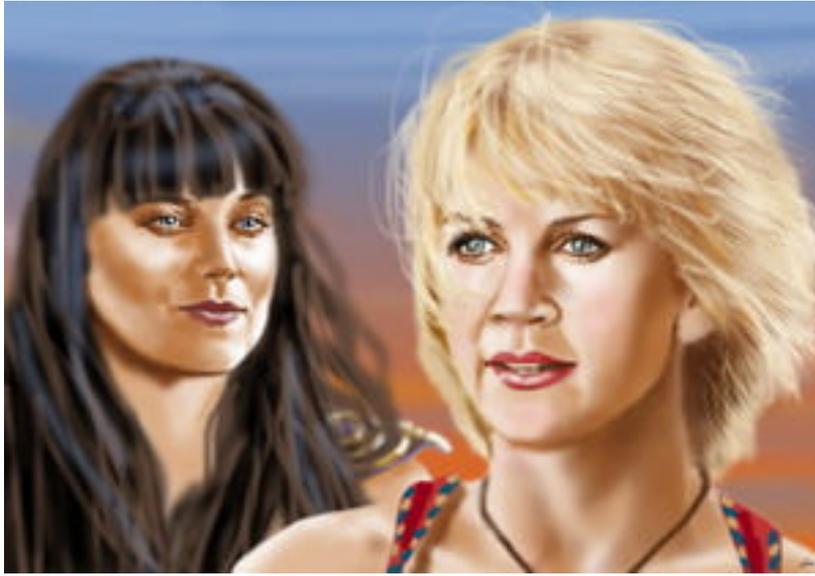
GABRIELLE

(softly)

It sure is beautiful.

But Xena has eyes not for the city, or the sky, but only for the windblown profile of Gabrielle.

XENA
Very beautiful.



FADE TO BLACK.

DISCLAIMER

Neither Lot, nor any biblical references were harmed during the making of this motion picture. No, really, they weren't. Pompeii and Sodom and Gomorrah were already pretty badly harmed before we got to them.

The writer would like to thank the wonderful DJWP for her brilliant story, Seven Days in Pompeii, which was the inspiration for this work.