

XENA: WARRIOR PRINCESS

Event Series Pitch

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WE ONLY GET ONE SHOT AT THIS

Xena: Warrior Princess occupies a unique spot in pop culture.

It is a beloved, yet dormant franchise.

Xena's fans form a loyal, and still very demographically-desirable cult audience - and the name recognition is massive.

As the industry has now learned from properties that have been rebooted and re-rebooted to fair-to-middling results:

You only get one chance to come back a beloved title with both the glow of nostalgia and the shock of the new on your side.

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It has to be special.

It has to be different enough make its own mark.

It has to be similar enough to appeal to the original fanbase.

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This is a chance to make *Xena* into a cultural event by delivering not just the fun and action and adventure, but also a restatement of the original's most daring virtues, in a grander, more epic package.

And, of course, at the end of this limited series, the field will be left wide open for many, many more adventures...

So that every year, NBC can bring back a beloved property the way the BBC makes an event of bringing back *Doctor Who*, and Masterpiece with *Downton*, and as Fox is doing with *The X-Files*.

A NEW APPROACH TO XENA

The original Xena was magical, anarchical and anachronistic.

It told the story of a woman with a very dark past finding redemption in a lawless land accompanied only with her best friend, Gabrielle...

Who provided a voice of goodness and morality while realizing her own arc from naive girl to fully realized, empowered woman.

It told case-of-the-week stories with strong moral lessons, occasionally hilarious comedic interludes, and a recurring cast of gods, monsters, and wizards taken from an international catalog of myths. And it was beautiful.

Xena: Warrior Princess does not need to be remade in its old image because what it did, it already did to perfection.

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The purpose of this reboot is to take those archetypal characters and their classic arcs - redemption and empowerment - and put them in a world closer to that of *Game of Thrones*, *Rome*, *Gladiator*, and - most recently - *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

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Why? Because Warner Bros. isn't putting Charlize Theron in the *Mad Max* sequels. Because Disney can't make a *Black Widow* movie even though she's a lead in the *Avengers* movies, *Captain America*, and *Iron Man*.

The world of action and honor forged in battle, and victories that change the course of human history, keeps working under the perception that a male lead is the only marketable option.

We are sending Xena to take it back.

She is a **wide-appeal character** that's already loved by an audience that craves action and adventure. She's a truly universal hero whose arc is all about the heart... and she was a pioneer as a complicated, multi-dimensional series leads.

It will be epic, full of power, passion, danger and courage - and it will also be deeply romantic.

THE SUBTEXT CAN NOW BE THE TEXT

It has been almost twenty years since Xena first came to TV.

In the time since, the depiction of LGBT relationships in television has come a huge way...

That's thanks one of the many legacies of this show: "the subtext."

"The subtext" was the perception, never confirmed but... always implied... that Xena and Gabrielle were more than just friends and companions.

Why? Because their relationship is one of the greats - it had opposites attracting, banter, mutual respect, they did what all great couples do, friend or lover: they took care of each other and moved mountains to protect their companion.

The purpose of this reboot is to honor "the subtext" and all it accomplished by telling the story of that romance as the true dramatic arc of Xena and Gabrielle.

So we're not just doing **an epic adventure full of kickass battles** - we are also telling a love story that just happens to be between two women, against the backdrop of a huge and fascinating, yet very accessible ancient world.

THE WORLD - BEHIND THE MYTH

Imagine, then, that the original Xena is the legend - full of Gods and demigods, and monsters and magic.

The reboot will be the "real" story.

In our Xena, the gods and demigods are people - by and large, very dangerous people who stand in the way of peace, and the "magic" is the medicine and technology of antiquity with just a dash of the unknown.

In this reboot, the monsters roam the human soul rather than the countryside.

For example, we've all heard of Hercules. We all know Hercules as the son of Zeus, whose Twelve Labors included slaying a Hydra, changing the course of a mighty river, and slaying a boar the size of a Volkswagen.

Our Hercules is a ruthless military general whose legend is a carefully crafted public relations story designed to make him more fearsome.

Our uber-villain is the guy who sent Hercules on his legendary journeys - the now-mythical King Eurystheus (we'll call him "Uris"). He's warmongering demagogue who rules over a Bronze-age Greece much different from the birthplace of democracy.

Our Athens is a male-dominated boomtown where women have no role other than wife, slave, or whore: it's warlike, atavistic, and very dangerous.

Our reinvented Xena doesn't face giants and use magic - she is a warrior who grew up with clashing city states and rampant slavery, where kill-or-be-killed was the everyday reality for most people, where life was - as Thomas Hobbes summed it up - "nasty, brutish, and short," and where the gods and magic of myth exist only as fictions designed to inspire fear...

And also, sometimes, hope.

In short, the task of this Xena is to place our hero in a period which - if not entirely historically accurate - is historically plausible, serious in tone, and grounded in the known history and possible events of the time.

Now, here are a few words you haven't and won't hear in the next fifteen minutes...

Gritty

Grim

Brooding

Dire

Depressing

But here's a word you will hear - a word that encompasses why we want to reboot Xena:

Audacity

Mad Max - Fury Road may have been set in a post apocalyptic wasteland devoid of natural resources, but they still had a guy in a red leotard on top of a truck loaded with amps playing a fire-spewing electric guitar.

That kind of rafters-swinging **audacity** is part of the fun and the spirit of the original Xena - especially as expressed in kick ass fights that left the audience cheering - and that's what we want to keep: the head-butting, high-jumping, pole-twirling, arrow-from-mid-air-snatching, sword juggling awesomeness...

Tied to a more believable universe.

A SAGA OF LOVE AND REDEMPTION TOLD IN THREE ACTS

Pilot Episode - Overture

Establish a long term story - set Xena's arc of redemption and Gabrielle's arc of empowerment

Meet our two lead characters (the rest will be recurring which will make casting bigger names doable)

The pilot story of the new *Xena: Warrior princess* begins somewhere in the countryside along the southern shores of the Black Sea...

And we meet Xena the same way you might meet Clint Eastwood's Man With No Name, or Shane - or Gregory Peck in *The Gunfighter* - or Mad Max...

A lone... swordslinger... wandering the countryside: and you love her because she's a badass.

As our pilot begins, we see her enter an inn, and a few bad dudes - professional thieves - give her shit for being a woman traveling alone in ancient Greece... it escalates into a fight, and she kicks the shit out of them...

Which leads to them making her a job offer - they are about to raid a trade route and need muscle. She agrees... only to learn during the job that she is being set up for a bounty.

Why? Because Xena is well known - and she's an outlaw - wanted wherever she goes, with huge rewards on her head, why?

We'll get to that in a moment...

Cornered, Xena fights mightily and slaughters every one of the thieves, but finds herself surrounded by mounted WARRIORS and held at spear point.

These are the Scythians.

The Scythians in our Bronze-Age are fearsome horse clans, distinctive for their blazing red hair, fair skin and grey eyes.

These Scythians were the first people in the area to master mounted warfare - and are also distinctive for their heavily branded, tattooed, and scarified bodies. These warriors carry their personal and collective history on their skin!

Xena knows the Scythians well - having faced, and bested them, them when she was a warlord, when she had her own army and was on the way to rule a great deal of the ancient world...

Xena is force-marched to the city of Zarana: nomadic capital of this Scythian tribe. Zarana is a massive, magnificent tent city that moves at the King's pleasure, never becoming a fixed point and a military target.

Xena has a bitter reunion with NEYAR - the king of the Scythian nation, whose ass she once kicked in the field of battle - and demands a trial by combat against the best warrior in Zarana.

Xena is imprisoned pending her trial... and in jail, receives a very strange visitor: Neyar's daughter, the Scythian princess.

The Princess comes to Xena's jail cell - that's when we start hearing some of Xena's backstory, because the Princess knows it all... Xena's terrible past as a warrior, all the horrible things she did, how she almost ruled the world until she was betrayed by a man - Hercules - who turned her own army against her and became Athens' greatest general.

And that's when the princess reveals why she came, she knows Xena is the biggest badass alive... she knows Xena will win the trial by combat... and she wants Xena to kidnap her when she wins... why?

Because Gabrielle is not really the princess... she's her double and food taster!

The princess has been missing for months, escaped when she was promised to an asshole prince from a nearby horse clan in a political alliance. Gabrielle has been forced to keep the secret on pain of death.

All Gabrielle really wanted in life was to become a writer and a poet - already hard enough for a woman in this time - but now she has to marry an asshole prince from a nearby country, and in the place of her old boss no less... unless Xena can save her.

And during the time these two women spend talking before Xena is to fight the greatest warrior in Zarana, Xena realizes that she can save Gabrielle from becoming what she is: a woman who was given no choice.

In the course of the series, this will be what drives these women together and provides the emotional foundation of their relationship.

Xena has always been driven by forces outside of her - by wars and revenge: her childhood was taken from her by a war, and she became a warrior to avenge herself - she never truly charted a destiny beyond the desire to punish those who wronged her.

Our Gabrielle is - like the original - wide-eyed, naive, and more than a little bit dorky, trapped in a situation she has no agency to escape, needing to go on a great journey to find herself and her own ability to chart her destiny.

Xena's trial by combat finally arrives, but it never takes place, because just before it can take place, the city's war horns blare: they are under attack.

In an epic action sequence that serves as the centerpiece of the pilot, a small army led by Hercules and flying the Athenian flag sacks the city of Zarana, and kills Scythians in the thousands.

The raid's target is Neyar, whom Uris has come to see as a dangerous potential rival.

This is the BIGGER - overarching story - that Uris is a despot and has been waging surprise attacks on his rivals, hoping to take out anyone who will challenge him.

Realizing that her hated nemesis is here - Xena fights all the way to the Neyar's compound, just in time to see his defeat by Hercules and the kidnapping of Gabrielle!

Uris not only sent Hercules to humiliate Neyar - but also to abduct the princess and take her back to Athens as a wife, thus giving him reign over the Scythians!

And - of course, seeing Hercules again galvanizes Xena: the man who betrayed her taking away the woman she sees as her hope for redemption. **She now has a quest - to save Gabrielle - and a motivation - to get revenge on Hercules.**

As the pilot ends, Xena confronts the wounded Neyar in the smoking ruins of his capital. Neyar plans on rounding up his armies and marching on Athens to retrieve his daughter and lost honor.

Xena smirks - what Neyar proposes is suicide: he doesn't have the forces to defeat Uris and Hercules in Athens. This campaign will be the end of the Neyar's people. Neyar, however, feels he has no choice: honor must be redeemed in the field of war.

Xena makes a counter proposal... she will go to Athens, infiltrate the court of Uris, and rescue Gabrielle in exchange for her freedom, and the protection the Scythian tribes - essentially lifting her fugitive status.

Now it's Neyar's turn to call Xena suicidal: she is a wanted criminal. Maybe, Xena replies, but at least she is not covered in tattoos, branding and scarifications and easily recognizable as a Scythian agent.

Neyar agrees to send Xena on the mission - with one condition: she only has as long as it takes for Neyar to gather reinforcements - and heal from his wounds - to retrieve Gabrielle.

If Xena is not back by then, the Scythians will march on Athens, and if that means the destruction of Neyar's people, at least honor will be satisfied.

The pilot episode ends as Xena - still a ruthless fighter, still a mercenary, but her heart a little bit softer from her knowledge of Gabrielle - gathers her armor and weapons, her sword and Chakram, and rides off to rescue Gabrielle and, in doing so, avenge herself on Uris and Hercules...

Act One - Escape From Athens

In the first act of the series after the pilot episode, Xena makes her way to Athens - making contact with members of the army she lost to Hercules, many of whom are starting to see that they backed the wrong horse - and forcing them to atone for their betrayal by helping her to enter the city and infiltrate the palace of Uris.

SOME OF THEM ARE THINKING OF DEFECTING TO ARES.

Xena makes contact with Gabrielle, who is being groomed to marry Uris - and drugged into a suggestible state in which she may even come to believe that she loves the city's evil monarch.

Xena and Gabrielle's bond is still there, but Gabrielle will eventually become completely, physically and psychologically dependent on Uris - the clock is ticking.

Unable to simply rescue Gabrielle and spirit her out of the royal palace, Xena instead engineers a massive revolt from within Uris's harem, which she uses as cover to kidnap Gabrielle.

In the final episode of the first act, Xena escapes from Uris's palace with Gabrielle - and has a major Boss Battle with her former lover, Hercules, whom she cannot kill, but ultimately maims horribly (most likely dismembering him) and renders unable to ever fight again.

Act Two - The Road to Zarana and Revenge of Callisto

In the second section of the story, Xena races back across the Aegean sea and the Anatolian peninsula to return Gabrielle to Neyar - but the journey is fraught as Gabrielle struggles to recover from the psychological wounds of her captivity...

And as Uris finds a new soldier to take on the duty of hunting down Xena... CALLISTO.

Callisto is a sociopathic warlord who styled herself on Xena after Xena - during her pirate/warrior phase - destroyed her village and murdered her family.

Callisto is the epitome of a split image, and in some ways is Xena's dark daughter: equal parts fan and arch-enemy.

In the closest thing to magic we will see during the season, Xena must take the increasingly volatile Gabrielle to a Phrygian mountaintop monastery to undergo a form of treatment (not unlike Ibogaine dosing for heroin addicts) for her drug-induced bondage to Uris.

Taking the potion, Gabrielle hallucinates horribly and tries to murder Xena - and ultimately emerges not only as herself, but

stronger - an abuse survivor now more hell-bent on being a force for good in the world.

In the aftermath of this - and in one of the emotional climaxes of the series - Xena and Gabrielle consummate their love for one another, and realize that their shared struggles have bonded them together.

But no sooner have Xena and Gabrielle emerged from this ordeal that Callisto catches up with them, and in their ensuing conflict, realizes that if Xena and Gabrielle do not return to Zarana, the entire Scythian kingdom will be left open to invasion as Neyar takes every able-bodied warrior on his mission to Athens.

Callisto soon realizes that if she kills Xena and Gabrielle, she can not only get her revenge: she could also potentially set herself up as a new queen of Scythia while Uris destroys Neyar and his armies!

As the second act draws to a close, Xena and Gabrielle bravely escape from Callisto, but fail to return to Zarana in time.

Neyar's armies march on Athens. Uris's forces meet them and destroy them summarily. Callisto is now poised to take Zarana and become the new Scythian queen... and only Xena and Gabrielle know her plans!

Act Three - The Warrior Queen

Reaching Zarana before Callisto - and bringing the news of her impending invasion - Xena and Gabrielle face a new problem: the warriors left behind by Neyar refuse to accept Gabrielle's legitimacy.

The Scythians will not only not follow her orders, many believe this entire mess to be her fault. Facing a fractious population that can't come together to defend their lands, Gabrielle must face the General left behind by her father in combat and prove herself a warrior.

But even after Gabrielle unites her people, the sad truth is that the force left behind is no match for Callisto's army. Xena only knows one way to save Gabrielle's land and people - she must return to a former lover of hers - the warlord Ares.

In mythology, Ares is the Greek God of War. In our reinterpretation, Ares is a powerful military leader who has encamped an army in what is now modern-day Istanbul... but Ares's allegiance draws a steep price...

In exchange for sending his armies to Zarana, Ares demands that Xena betroth herself to him.

In a tough and bitter decision, Xena decides that it is better to save Gabrielle's people than to have the woman she loves.

Gabrielle implores Xena - wanting to escape instead - but Xena tells her that it is her duty, having destroyed so many lives, to give up her own to save many.

Similarly, Gabrielle ultimately realizes that her own desire to forge her own destiny has to co-exist with her own responsibility to the safety of her people.

Gabrielle agrees to give Xena up... and in the final battle, Xena leads Ares's armies against Callisto and wins the day as Neyar returns from his own failed campaign to witness Gabrielle's apotheosis as a warrior queen.

Of course, there is one twist left... Xena fakes her own death in the battle and offers Gabrielle the chance to go with her... it will be a hard life, as a wandering bard and warrior, and woe unto them if Ares or Neyar were ever to find out that they escaped...

But maybe they have done enough for their people: and maybe even a tainted soul such as Xena's deserves the happiness of true love.

In a final emotional moment, the two women mount up and ride off into the sunset - leaving the war behind for a life of adventure.

THE VISUALS

The look of the classic *Xena: Warrior Princess* was lush and verdant - reflecting New Zealand filming locations and a lightness of tone - full of production design culling elements from different time periods to create a unified myth: a sense that all periods and legends could coexist in one world.

Where the original presented a world of greens, blues, and browns - a world bursting with natural life, the color palette of this Xena will favor reds, oranges, and golds. Our new look will indicate bronze era of endless conflict: an unsafe world where - in spite of the rise of civilization - wealth and power are the province of a privileged few, and the rest must fight for their ongoing freedom...

The visuals of the retelling of Xena seek to evoke a sense that to be a woman, much less a woman warrior, in the world of Archaic-era Greece was a solitary and hard life and in which powerful men held sway and only the very driven would survive.

Like the classic Xena, we seek to make the point that the redemptive power of love and friendship transcends brute force and war.