

**“You Created A Monster With Integrity...Scary, Isn’t It?”:**

**Xena and Buffy As Different Models of Female Military Leadership**

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[1] “I have many skills.” Indeed, this quote from Xena not only applies to herself, but to all of the women warriors of television: Sydney Bristow of *Alias* (2001-2006), Xena of *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995-2001), Buffy of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), and Nikita of *La Femme Nikita* (2010-2013) are just a few examples of women whose skills range from physical combat, to manipulation, disguise, emotional strength, and even embroidery. But arguably the two most iconic of these warriors, Xena and Buffy, display another skill that often leads people to wonder who would win in a fight: both are military leaders. Each has their own unique combat strategy, a different relationship with how love affects their leadership, have created their own monsters because of their strength, but are ultimately viewed the same by the worlds they inhabit: as something to be feared. Xena chooses to rule through absolute terror, exercising her authority by brutally murdering those who oppose her and crushing enemy villages with her army. Buffy instead follows the path of exercising her authority through trying to be the better woman. Despite the fact that vampires, demons, and humans are screaming for her blood, she continues to try her best to keep the world safe. But if terror is the end result of their leadership, no matter what path they choose, are they actually successful military leaders? Xena and Buffy are two incredibly different women, and both use

incredibly different tactics. But ultimately, both of them display powerful and effective methods of leadership.

[2] To truly begin looking at Xena and Buffy as warrior women and leaders, it must first be addressed how rare the story of female military leadership is. Frances Early and Kathleen Kennedy discuss this in their introduction to the book *Athena's Daughters*, noting that, "In Western Culture, the most powerful and influential story is arguably that of the male just warrior" (1). This term is described in *Athena's Daughters* as "the responsible citizen whose willingness to shed blood for the common good entitles him to mastery over self and others. His story is essential to masculine identity" (1). The "just warrior" is the representation of typically male-associated power, the one who bears arms and fights for those who cannot. This image permeates every facet of modern society: from film heroes such as Neo (*The Matrix*, 1999), Luke Skywalker (*Star Wars*, 1977-1983), and James Bond (beginning with *Dr. No* and today ending with *Skyfall*, 1962-2012), to television heroes like Sherlock Holmes (*Sherlock*, 2010-Present), the Doctor (*Doctor Who*, 1963-1989 and 2005-Present), and Arrow (*Arrow*, 2012-Present), and in to popular literature with characters such as Percy Jackson (*Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, 2005-2009) and Harry Potter (*Harry Potter* series, 1997-2007) The male hero dominates all popular media.

[3] So where are the women? More often than not, they are in the background: "From ancient times, Western society's just warrior narrative has been male privileged. The male "just warrior" fights and dies for the greater good, whereas the female "beautiful soul" epitomizes the maternal war-support figure in need of male protection." (Early and Kennedy, 1). Only recently have more female heroes stepped forward in

media, but because of this male narrative privilege, they encounter infinitely more resistance. The story of *The Hunger Games*, for instance, focuses on following a young female protagonist and her struggle to destroy the government that crushes her people. Rather than focusing on Katniss' story as a leader, however, popular media has responded with a focus on "Team Peeta" and "Team Gale," reducing a strong female character into an object to be fought over and claimed by men. That is why Xena and Buffy are important as military leaders: they are the exception, not the rule. They exist in opposition to the male privileged narratives, and are still incredibly powerful characters to this day. They have succeeded in their fight, both on and off screen, to become important and well-known names that garner respect.

[4] Several people have studied Xena and Buffy as warriors, leaders, and women on television. The book *Athena's Daughters*, edited by Frances Early and Kathleen Kennedy, studies both Xena and Buffy through the lenses of historic female leadership. Audience reception and production (specifically of fanfiction) also play a vital role in their analysis. Alison Futrell's chapter, "Xena as Ancient Hero" argues that Xena's military prowess emerges from her link to the classic mythological hero figure, as well as from how the series adapts history and myths to define Xena's journey. Frances Early's chapter "Female Just Warrior Reimagined" from the same book, looks at Buffy's leadership through how she represents the flipping of gender conventions. Both argue that Xena and Buffy are powerful military leaders because they subvert normal patriarchal expectations of Generals. This is the general conclusion of several other theorists, including Frances Tomaczyk, who points to the differences in these women's

leadership, rather than their similarities to typical male strategy, as their true points of strength.

[5] Not only do Xena and Buffy walk different paths in how they view themselves as leaders, but their leadership tactics vary as well. But how can one judge the effectiveness of these fictional female leaders? Popular military theory revolves around domination and superiority, an example of which can be seen from Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*:

If your enemy is secure at all points, be prepared for him. If he is in superior strength, evade him. If your opponent is of choleric temper, seek to irritate him. Pretend to be weak, that he may grow arrogant. If he is taking his ease, give him no rest. If his forces are united, separate them. Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected. (Tzu 21-24).

But in and of itself, military theory is also dominated by men, and therefore written from a male perspective, for men. This is what makes Xena and Buffy troubling as military leaders: general history classes do not teach Boudicca's strategies, but rather those of Napoleon or Genghis Khan. Female military leadership is not explored a fraction as much as male military leadership, because it is continually treated as a taboo, even in our media. Thus, looking at female military leadership requires one to compare and contrast with male military strategy as the "norm." In this effect, we must turn female warriors in to male warriors so that we can "judge" them properly. Their diversions from the male "norm" mark them as weak or inferior. Xena and Buffy walk on thin ice continually, where any mistake, fatal or not, causes them to be seen as "fake" or "imposters." Thus,

while Xena and Buffy do still follow several tropes of the male mythic hero, their deviances are what make them truly successful.

[6] From the pilot episode of *Xena: Warrior Princess* (shortened to *XWP* henceforth), Xena is constructed as a woman seeking redemption. But redemption from what? “Sins of the Past” (X1001) shows little more than a flash of her sitting upon a horse, village ablaze in the background, people chanting her name. It is not until Xena questions a little boy about his parents in the same episode that we are truly offered our first vision of Xena’s past: “They were killed by Xena, the Warrior Princess. She came down out of the sky in a chariot, throwing thunderbolts and breathing fire.” From this we gather that Xena was not just merely a force to be reckoned with: as *XWP* references and takes place alongside many classic Greek myths, the imagery linking her to a descending, wrathful Goddess is not out of place. What Xena must atone for are the crimes she committed in the past, more specifically those she committed as a warlord. It is heavily implied here that Xena’s rule as a female military leader was not only evil, but deserving of scorn. After Xena speaks with the boy, she attempts to bury her armor and weapons. Her own mother barely speaks to her, as it is revealed that Xena enlisted her own brother in her army, where he died. The people she encounters who recognize her fear her. Xena was the antagonist that heroes in Greek legends were supposed to triumph over, but did not. And it is only by her own conscience that she truly turns away from her previous path, seeking to change her name from one affiliated with evil, to one affiliated with good.

[7] Buffy, on the other hand, is only just beginning her ascent to power in the pilot episode of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* (shortened to *BtVS* henceforth). She is a girl who

has been destined to stand alone against the forces of evil, and not by her own choice: “[Prepare] me for what? For getting kicked out of school? For losing all of my friends? For having to spend all of my time fighting for my life and never getting to tell anyone because I might endanger them? Go ahead! Prepare me.” (“Welcome to the Hellmouth” B1001) But instead of facing the dangers of the demons alone, Buffy forms a group of friends that grows into a network, and evolves into a full-fledged army. For most of *BtVS*, Buffy is firmly planted on the side of “good.” But it is not until Buffy is heading a force of empowered women, still against the demons no less, that the term “Slayer” becomes feared and hated globally. As soon as Buffy takes control, the government pushes to take her down: “Worst of all, [the army of Slayers] got a leader. Charismatic, uncompromising, and completely destructive.” (Season 8 Vol. 1) Even slayers begin to reject the word “Slayer,” as it links them back to the source, Buffy. But Buffy does not seek redemption from her path – despite the fact that many have turned on her, the world has nearly ended, and her life will always be on the line, Buffy continues to stand out as the Slayer. “—You’re not Slayers, right. But I am. You getting this, breathless? I’m Buffy, the Vampire Slayer.” (Season 8 Vol. 4). She does not reject her title, but instead uses it to empower herself to continue to perpetuate her destiny, despite how alone she may be.

[8] While both Xena and Buffy see their powers differently, how they came about them is what truly separate the two characters. Whereas Buffy’s “birth” into leadership is never highlighted in a single moment, Xena’s rise sticks much closer to that of the male mythic hero, thus legitimizing her initially in her ascent. In the episode “Destiny” of *XWP*, we learn what drove Xena to becoming a warlord. At the head of a single ship and

a crew of pirates at that time, Xena captures Julius Caesar, to whom she reveals her purpose: “So all your raiding and looting is about protecting your homeland?” (“Destiny” X2012) he asks her. Xena’s goal is to see that her homeland Amphipolis, which was once raided by a warlord, is never harmed again. She is, however, not the Xena that the audience has come to know and love by this point in Season 2. While she does hold a good command over her band of men, her physics-defying fighting capabilities are not honed, and neither are her instincts. Xena blindly trusts Caesar, who betrays her, kills her crew, has her crucified and her legs broken as a symbol to others that he finds in the way of his rule. It is not until a stowaway slave, M’lila, who taught Xena her iconic “I’ve just cut off the flow of blood to your brain,” move, rescues Xena but dies at the hands of Caesar’s troops, that Xena vows revenge. Over a dying Roman soldier Xena vows: “You’ll be dead in thirty seconds. But know this: you won’t be the last. Tell Hades to prepare himself. A new Xena is born tonight, with a new purpose in life: death.” (“Destiny”) From that moment, Xena becomes a ruthless warlord, intent on seeing her enemies burn and extracting revenge on Caesar.

[9] Buffy’s mythic “birth” is not as delved into, because her power is different from Xena’s. While both experience leadership that ultimately results from men thrusting it upon them (The episode “Get It Done” in Season 7 of *Buffy* highlights this), Buffy’s power was not a choice. Where Xena could have rejected becoming a warrior, Buffy never had a chance. Arguably, Buffy’s “birth” as the mythic hero is actually spoken in the narration that precedes a number of the episodes: “In every generation there is a chosen one. She alone must stand against the vampires, the demons and the forces of darkness. She is the Slayer.” That is Buffy’s rise to leadership, something that is not

glorified nearly as much as Xena's, and thus the traditional male narrative expectation.

As an audience we never witness Buffy's birth, only follow her on her journey after she has been chosen.

[10] So while at this stage Buffy "fails" the traditional male narrative, and Xena "succeeds," both ultimately are successful in that they are both "born" into their power. They ascend and thrive, as any warrior or fictional character can. They are both mythic heroes, chosen ones, a pattern that does not have to be judged by male examples. But once they come in to their power, how they use it is what comes into question by the typical male "just warrior" model. Because now, though Xena follows the mythic birth and rise "perfectly," instead of becoming a just warrior motivated to undo the wrongs done to her, she finds pleasure in inflicting the wrong that has been done to her upon others.

[11] Xena's warlord leadership is best highlighted in the episodes "Adventures in the Sin Trade Part I & II." Having set off on the path of a military leader, Xena becomes crazed with her lust for power. She actively disobeys plans, endangers her troops, and is ultimately ruthless in her conquest. Though Borias, her warlord partner, orders her not to kill the Amazon Queen so that he can attempt negotiations, Xena eagerly attempts to do so anyway. Xena has shed all moral ties by this point: she has abandoned any hope for light in her life. When asked by Borias:

**Borias:** What would you do if I told you I am in love?

**Xena:** I'd cut out your sweetheart's throat. You think I wouldn't?

**Borias:** No, I mean I'm in love with you.

**Xena:** With me? Have you lost what's left of your mind? People like you and me



don't fall in love..." ("Adventures in the Sin Trade Part I" X4001)

Despite the fact that Borias is the father of her unborn child, Xena still believes that love is an impossible emotion.

[12] Though she followed a mythic birth traditional of a male "just warrior," Xena soon turns to acts that our media patterns and story constructions would deem as villainous (slaughtering of entire villages, rejection of love). Rather than focus her journey on defeating Cesar, as most "just warrior" stories would, Xena seeks to overthrow him by becoming exactly what he was, only better. She charts her path in "Adventures in the Sin Trade Part I & II" by slaughtering all of the Amazon leaders in a ruthless display of her skills, where she relies on trickery and traps to defeat the Amazons rather than taking them on in a fair fight. She displays no remorse for killing a young Amazon to lure the others, and is triumphant as she watches an evil shamaness gather blood from the corpses. This is the Xena that came down upon so many villages and people, the Xena that led an army and conquered nations. She rules through fear and lust – love is a weakness to this Xena, one that she cannot afford because it will lead to her downfall.

[13] Xena is in every way a general. Though there are not specific ranks in her army, just those that exist below her, and thus technically she does not have the title of general, it is her face and her name that carry her army. Every action that her men carry out is linked directly back to her. She is responsible for them, and all of them obey her. Any act they carry out is one she ordered. Xena reports to no one, and is the mortal end-all for her troops. Standard military theory designates a general as one who ranks above a colonel, yet Xena's subversion of titles in no way delegitimizes her role. She does not

need the title to earn respect, or to strike fear in her enemies: her name is enough.

Though she carries no official military title, no one questions her authority, or her power.

In fact, in her full title, “Warrior Princess,” she takes a rank that usually summons images of damsels or delicate females, and weaponizes it with the word “Warrior.” She openly declares with this title that she is a female, but that it does not in any way weaken her prowess. She embraces her femininity in the sense that she does not let standard male expectations determine what she can do because of her gender.

[14] Another way to look at Xena’s leadership method is to see how others employ her style of command. Xena’s time as a warlord drew her to the village of Cirra: It was just another village to conquer. Nothing out of the ordinary. A fire broke out and I don't know if it was my men or just an accident but there was a strong wind and those flames just swept through that town like a wave of death. And the people were huddled in their houses because they were afraid of my army. That was the one time that my army was responsible for the death of women and children. And there was just a handful of survivors. Obviously Callisto was one of them. (“Callisto” X1022)

Callisto is in every way Xena’s evil twin. She is what Xena would have been, had she not turned from her path as a warlord. Xena gave “birth” to Callisto, who grew up shaping herself in the image of Xena: she wears a similar costume, leads a similar army, and is capable of wielding Xena’s weapons. But what links her directly to Xena as a female leader of an army is in her mission. Callisto dedicated her entire life to revenge, just as warlord Xena did, and continues to let it rule every decision she makes.

The sight, just the *sight*, of Xena, Warrior Princess arguing on my behalf amuses me, so let me tell you. Let me answer your question about what I'd do if you let me go. You let me go, and I'll dedicate my life to killing everything you love. Your friends, your family, your reputation - even your horse. I'm being so honest with you, because the idea of your pity is worse than death for me. You see, you created a monster with integrity, Xena. Scary, is not it? ("Callisto")

What makes Callisto truly scary is that she can match Xena on almost every physical level, except she lacks Xena's newfound moral compass. Callisto is Xena's mirror to her past, and quite literally embodies it. As Frances Tomaczyk writes in relation to Callisto: "The disruption/intruder is always recognized as pathological (the "mad" and the "bad"), as abnormal (those with non-heterosexual sexualities), and as monstrous" (Tomaczyk). Indeed, Callisto is beyond obsessed with Xena. Extracting revenge upon the woman who 'made' her is Callisto's only true goal, the only driving force for her to form her identity. "Callisto's all-consuming obsession with Xena evokes absolute terror in men, as made evident in "Callisto" when male warriors who fail her commands to kill Gabrielle dare not return to face her" (Tomaczyk). Callisto's rule is absolute, echoing Xena's military style in every way. In order to combat Callisto, Xena must reach back to the evil side of herself and face her past demons: quite literally, in fact, in the episode "Intimate Strangers" where Xena and Callisto switch bodies. Forced to wear the face of her enemy, Xena re-experiences the pure hatred with which people once looked upon her.

[15] In this way, Callisto is the perfect "monster," as she forces Xena to realize that she can never truly escape what crimes she has committed, and must carry them throughout her life. But Callisto also reinforces the idea of a female military leader who

must be crazed by power and revenge in order to hold any ‘true command’ over an active army. A woman in power over men in the Xenaverse is thus something to be feared physically, emotionally, and mentally. Though the leaders of the different Amazon tribes are shown to be stable, and indeed women leading small bands of other women in the series are built as strongly-knitted groups founded on trust and family (like the group of surviving Amazons that Xena helps in “Adventures in the Sin Trade Part I & II”), when a woman leads an army of men, there must be something ‘wrong’ with her. Even Lucy Lawless’ portrayal of the “evil” Xena enforces this: In “Adventures in the Sin Trade Part I & II,” whenever we see Xena’s past self, Lawless plays her as practically crazed. Her eyes are always forced wide, and she wears a manic smile. Instead of the calm, quiet delivery of lines that we are used to, Lawless in these scenes rushes her lines, constantly twitches or shifts her body, and uses a forced, breathy accent that forces her to practically pant out her lines, as if she is hyperactive.

[16] This unfortunately puts Xena’s military leadership on the ‘negative’ side of portrayal. When compared with the Amazon Queen in the episodes “Adventures in the Sin Trade Part I & II,” Xena’s leadership is shown to be incredibly inferior. She’s a tool to be manipulated by material gain and whoever can get their hands on her next. And when she does finally begin to lead, it is out of spite and revenge for Julius Caesar. Alison Futrell writes in “Xena as Ancient Hero” that:

Rome holds a special position in Xena’s hero quest: Rome “caused” Xena. The actions of Xena’s Roman nemesis, Gaius Julius Caesar, were central in the creation of the “evil Xena,” the dark past for which she is driven to atone. Her years in darkness as the “Destroyer of Nations” represent an extreme version of

Roman imperialism, one that focuses on acquisition of territory and power at any cost; in those years, Xena was driven to become her nemesis (Futrell).

Xena is not shown to be particularly responsible in these episodes – rather than resisting power, it goes directly to her head. It is implied that she is impulsive, and that her warlord image was born from the hatred and actions of a single man.

[17] Xena herself even dubbed that time of her life as “evil” and “bad,” something deserving of scorn. We are not meant to look at Xena as a model of good female leadership: she is meant to be studied as a bad example. Futrell argues that “Evil Xena exhibited a warped (albeit apparently effective) leadership style, preferring the explicit use of terror while she scorned diplomacy and alliance. Indeed, terror defined her empire quite literally” (Futrell). The basis of Xena’s power lies in her side-by-side acceptance and rejection of the patriarchal constructions of war making. While she leads for ten years successfully, causing terror and striking down cities one by one, her methods are proven ‘weak’ when she is outcast by her own army for refusing to kill women and children. It was a deliberate tactic of war making in ancient Rome to kill innocents after a town had been conquered as a warning to others who might offer resistance, as cited in Polybius’ *Histories* in relation to the fall of Carthago Nova to Scipio in 209 BC:

When Scipio thought that a sufficient number of troops had entered he sent most of them, as is the Roman custom, against the inhabitants of the city with orders to kill all they encountered, sparing none, and not to start pillaging until the signal was given. They do this, I think, to inspire terror, so that when towns are taken by the Romans one may often see not only the corpses of human beings, but dogs

cut in half, and the dismembered limbs of other animals, and on this occasion such scenes were very many owing to the numbers of those in the place.

(Polybius 137-138)

We are thus forced to look at Xena at arguably her strongest, and most 'just' by today's standards of war, as a terrible criminal for her rejection of an aspect of ancient war-making tactics. She cannot commit to killing innocents, cannot commit to that level of terror, and thus rejects one of the patriarchal standards of war; and that is a sign of weakness to the men in her army, who assert their power and dominance in that fashion because it is an expected tactic for them. Female leadership over an army of men in *XWP* is shown to be poisonous, whereas if a woman is leading another group of women, it is acceptable and stable. Both Xena and Callisto crossed the line from female leadership to female military leadership over men, and both pay by becoming monsters, both by choice and not by choice. But what happens if your entire army is actually an army of women, like it is for Buffy?

[18] Just like Xena, Buffy's leadership strategies evolve over time. But where Xena was lost in her thirst for power, Buffy's approach differs. Buffy's initial 'military leadership' comes in the Season 3 finale of *Buffy*, with "Graduation Day Part I & II." As the mayor plans to ascend and feed on the graduating students at their ceremony, Buffy comes up with a plan to create a military force out of her fellow peers. Every student, asked by the Scoobies, arrives to graduation armed to the teeth at her command. Xander acts as her right hand, helping organize and command, but it is ultimately Buffy who plans, rallies, and lures the Big Bad. We gain an insight into what force drives her in her leadership: love. Unlike warlord Xena, who fears love and compassion because it will

weaken her, Buffy uses love to not only unite others and drive herself, but as a weapon. Buffy builds an army out of the students because she wants to protect those she loves – her mother, her friends, Angel, and her peers. Love motivates a lot of Buffy’s actions: she risks her life to save Angel, killing Faith and nearly killing herself just to save his life. And her love does not go unnoticed: in fact, it rallies people to her, and legitimizes her: in the Season 3 episode “The Prom,” Jonathan, speaking for the Prom Committee and Buffy’s peers, says that,

We're not good friends. Most of us never found the time to get to know you, but that does not mean we haven't noticed you. We don't talk about it much, but it is no secret that Sunnydale High is not really like other high schools. A lot of weird stuff happens here. But whenever there was a problem or something creepy happened, you seemed to show up and stop it. Most of the people here have been saved by you, or helped by you at one time or another. We're proud to say that the Class of '99 has the lowest mortality rate of any graduating class in Sunnydale history... And we know at least part of that is because of you. So the senior class offers its thanks, and gives you, uh, this. It is from all of us, and it has written here, "Buffy Summers, Class Protector." (“The Prom” B3020)

Traditional male heroes are not usually motivated by love, not in the sense that Buffy is. Where it is typically the male “just warrior” who fights, and the female “beautiful soul” who aids him, as described by Frances Early, Buffy embodies both roles. She uses love as a force to protect even those who may not know her, and thus Buffy creates an initial army of her own: one drawn to her compassion, not just her strength. With this speech, her peers reinforce their love and recognition of her. Buffy is legitimized as a leader in

their community not through the title of “Prom Queen,” but through her protection and caring. Her typically coded “maternal” power elevates her above her peers, not through domination, but through recognition.

[19] But love’s power can be used to harm as well, and Buffy uses it in “Graduation Day Part II” to finally kill the Mayor when she says: “Hey! [holds up Faith’s knife] You remember this? I took it from Faith. Stuck it in her gut. Just slid in her like she was butter. You wanna get it back from me, Dick?” (“Graduation Day Part II” B3022) Buffy turns the Mayor’s love for Faith into his own undoing, as he falls for her taunt and chases her into an explosive-ridden library where he finally meets his end. Buffy recognizes and allows love into her life, because it is what makes her strong: even more so, in later seasons.

[20] In the Season 7 finale “Chosen,” Buffy activates every Slayer in the world, and thus becomes a true military leader in the sense that Xena is, as she is the source of those Slayers’ powers. We finally see her lead a true army operation, as she takes a stand and commands her forces without hesitation. It is Buffy who organizes, deploys, and fronts the team to take on the vampires below Sunnydale High, but she is not asking people to follow her anymore, she demands they do so:

So I say we change the rule. I say my power... should be our power. Tomorrow, Willow will use the essence of the Scythe to change our destiny. From now on, every girl in the world who might be a Slayer, will be a Slayer. Every girl who could have the power, will have the power, can stand up, will stand up. Slayers. . . every one of us. Make your choice. Are you ready to be strong?

(“Chosen” B7022)



While the potential Slayers who follow Buffy agree to this (we assume), the rest of the potentials in the world, who do not know about the Slayers, do not have a choice. They are forcefully enlisted by Buffy, an action that comes back to bite her in Season 8.

[21] Now responsible for the entire synthesis and command of an army, Buffy becomes a general, though like Xena her title is not “legitimate.” Again, there are no true titled ranks within Buffy’s force. But this does not detract from her authority: whether or not she wants them to, people within her army turn to her for commands and strategies. This is despite the fact that the squads of Slayers can operate on their own and Buffy trusts them to do so, so that she does not have to be everywhere at once. Buffy has become the face and name of this force, though she is often disenchanted with the idea now that her role as the ‘source’ Slayer has truly pushed her from being leader of the Scoobies to leader of an army that she does not always want to command. Willow comments “She’s alone. She’s vulnerable. And she has the weight of the world on her slender shoulders...you need to remember...she’s not like us. She’s the general. We’re the army. And that’s never gonna change.” (Season 8 Vol. 2) Buffy was always their leader, the one coming up with plans and killing the monster of the week. But that was back in high school, a time that Buffy actively dreams about in Season 8 as one that she wants to return to: when she was with her friends, her family was alive, and there was just one enemy.

[22] That love that was once expressed by her classmates at Prom has disappeared. With the world turning on Slayers because of their romantic vision of vampires in Season 8, the people that Buffy protects or saves want nothing to do with her. Humans on top of the forces of evil want Slayers dead. Girls around the world die in

numbers because they are untrained, and hated. The world is a lot bigger than Sunnydale, and Buffy cannot always cope. She does not want to, initially feeling relief as her power is drained from her in Tibet:

**Buffy:** [to Faith] “Every life meant something to you. Every one.”

**Faith:** “They did to you, too.”

**Buffy:** “Did they? I don’t know. I guess that’s why I need this. I need to feel that connected. I don’t want to stand...to stand *over* people anymore.”

(Season 8 Vol. 3)

Buffy was always deemed as ‘special’ because of her power, and sharing it did not take away that association. In this sense, post-warlord Xena and Buffy share a similar desire: to shed the associations of their titles.

[23] Xena does not want to be **the** warrior princess, and Buffy does not want to be **the** Slayer: but that is something neither of them can have. Arwen Spicer writes: “While the metanarrative announces that it is deconstructing the discourse of hierarchical superiority via the sharing of power among multiple Slayers, the narrative brings about this announced deconstruction by erasing legitimate challenges to Buffy’s leadership” (Spicer). As much as Buffy wants to no longer stand alone as her destiny says she must, Buffy will always be the leader, the one that others turn to, because she is the source. Buffy stands her ground, and sticks with her designated role of military leadership. Rather than fearing it, she continues to lead, motivated by what she was always motivated by, love. Buffy’s “sisterhood” of Slayers needs a rock, and that is her:

“Buffy instinctively practices outward access. She moves among her followers almost constantly, both on the battlefield and off, even sharing her home with them through force of circumstance in Season Seven and by choice in Season 8”  
(Guffey).

Buffy does not see herself as above them, but rather one of them, and does what she can for her actual, old, and newfound, family alike.

[24] But love and sisterly bonds are not enough in an army of Slayers, and indeed even here Buffy is ‘punished’ by the monsters she has created. Quite literally, Buffy synthesized an entire army from her power: they were not exactly willing, though, rather dragged into the fight and causing the world to treat them as something to be cured – seen in Season 8 Vol. 1 with ads on TV that advertise (by a man no less) “support group[s]” for “girls who have this alarming...condition.” (Season 8 Vol. 1) – the threat of widespread, female physical strength, is what scares people the most. Buffy made Callistos of her own, notably Faith in Season 3 and Simone in Season 8. If Buffy is “good” female leadership (questionable, as many of the world’s new Slayers die under her inexperienced command, but she is still represented in the story as the “good” hero) then there must be “bad” female leadership. Though Faith does not lead her own group of Slayers, she is supposed to be *the* corrupt Slayer. She is Buffy’s opposite, fiercely independent, strong, capable, and thus her weakness:

...Faith, bad girl extraordinaire who becomes a rogue slayer and represents the fearful “disorderly woman” of history, myth, and popular culture, is introduced in Season Three to represent Buffy’s darker self. Buffy is drawn for a time to

Faith's self-destructive tendencies and her eroticized joy in violence (Early "Staking Her Claim").

Faith at many places is very much like Callisto: she feels like the world 'owes her' for her power. Faith saves the world, and believes that the world should respect her for her power by letting her do what she wants. And once Buffy is disenchanted by Faith's view, Faith seeks to destroy the traditional Slayer, almost driven by the same sense of enjoyment and revenge as Xena's enemy.

[25] In "Graduation Day Part I," Faith poisons Angel to get Buffy out of the way. She knows that Buffy is so heavily influenced by love, that she will even dismantle her own plans around saving those that matter to her. In fact, Buffy initially abandons all leadership responsibilities in taking down the Mayor to focus solely on curing Angel. Faith is Buffy's "intimate stranger" – in fact, it was not the Mayor's idea at all to take Buffy out of the picture for graduation day, rather a plan built entirely by Faith. But though she is strong in her beliefs of how she should operate, Faith is still lured to the side of "good" for Season 8, where she seeks to help other 'corrupt' Slayers such as herself learn to not use their powers for evil. Much like Callisto, who also "sees the light" of Xena in later seasons, she is finally controllable and conquerable.

[26] In this sense, Buffy's leadership draws from a maternal, protective instinct. Though she is still a threat because of the sheer number of forces and powers she has on her side, her military leadership is more "acceptable" because she does not seek to rule over the men who condemn her and the Slayers. Rather than Xena and Callisto, who want to see the world burn at their feet for the wrongs that have been done to them, Buffy seeks to protect and maintain the world she knows. Her power is drawn from the women

who surround her, a “traditional” view of female strength: how they come together and unite as a group. Frances Early writes:

Although Buffy is male-identified, she and her friends also partake of traditionally perceived female-gendered ways of thinking. Paradoxically, although Buffy and the Scooby gang, a mixed-gender group, “slay” monsters, they often resolve conflict non-violently, through rationality, tactfulness, compassion, and empathy (Early “Staking Her Claim”).

Buffy’s friends and family are what help support her as a leader, stopping her from becoming Faith. Where Xena and Callisto’s military leadership is a dictatorship, where they are the leaders and everyone else below them pawns, Buffy’s leadership idealizes the power of the group.

[27] Though Buffy is the leader, the people who surround her are not subordinates. Frequently the Slayers are referred to as Buffy’s new sisters, and Andrew becomes inducted into the “family.” Buffy’s leadership is not so much military-based as it is family-based with military roles. David Fritts writes in his article “Warrior Heroes”: “Each of Buffy’s victories requires the help of one or more of the Scooby Gang. They are her research team and her fellow warriors.” (Fritts). Though Willow tells Satsu that Buffy is “the General,” that is the only instance of Buffy being assigned a special military title. Otherwise, she is just one leader among many. Buffy is not the only one who fights – Xander, Willow, Faith, Giles, even other Slayers take command of operations and wield great power, acting akin to a core of “officers.” She is not singled out as General Buffy or Warlord Buffy, she is just Buffy. Or ‘Ma’am’, as the Slayers have taken to calling her: “Everybody calls me “Ma’am” these days.” (Season 8 Vol. 1) She is not

called ‘commander,’ rather a term used to simply designate a woman in charge: it is not linked directly to the military, or to any specific aspect of society. “Ma’am” exists as a title for a woman in charge in everyday society. What implications does this have for Buffy’s leadership? Frankly, it removes her command from just the sphere of military leadership, encouraging people to look at her not as a General, but rather as someone in charge. Her title does not tell people what she is in charge of, or how many follow her command. It is ambiguous, and makes Buffy both “safe” and dangerous for the patriarchy.

[28] Once Xena sheds her role as a warlord, she becomes motivated by love to right her wrongs. But that love does not simply come from within. Though Xena desires to fix what she has done in the past, she is unable to begin her redemption until she meets a true force of goodness in her life: Gabrielle. Though *XWP* never explicitly showed on-screen that Xena and Gabrielle were lovers (besides four kisses), Xena’s driving force for justice is born through her love for Gabrielle: “A long time ago you told me the cycle of hate has to end and the only way to end it is through love. It is a hard lesson to learn.” (“Intimate Strangers” X2007) In Gabrielle, Xena finds light and innocence, something she left behind long ago but finally has a chance of reaching. Xena’s love for Gabrielle causes her to go out of her way to help people and to atone. Though the warlord Xena cursed love as a weakness, she begins to find that it can help her in more ways than one, including empowering herself where she was once weak. In “Adventures in the Sin Trade Part II,” Xena must engage in a spirit battle with the evil shamaness Alti to find a new holy word to free the Amazons’ spirits. Alti gains the upper hand in the fight by showing Xena her future, taking her to the time of her death so that she’ll be killed in the

present. In that future (the episode “The Ides of March”), Xena is crucified alongside Gabrielle:

[The Future]

**Xena:** “Gabrielle – you’re the best thing in my life”

**Gabrielle:** “I love you Xena.”

[The Present]

**Alti:** “You’re little friend is dying with you, Xena. How does that make you feel?”

**Xena:** “Good.”

**Alti:** “Good?”

**Xena:** “Cause if she’s dying in my future – that means she’s alive!”

(“Adventures in the Sin Trade Part II”)

Xena, renewed in her vigor to fight because the light in her life is not truly dead, as she once thought, finds the will and power to kill Alti’s spirit, and thus her body. As Xena awakens from her spirit battle, she finds the new holy word, one stronger than courage: “The new holy word that the Shamaness must give the Amazon dead – it is ‘Love’.”

(“Adventures in the Sin Trade Part II”) This is the moment where Xena truly recognizes the strength and power of love: it is the foundation of not only her redemption, but her will to live.

[29] But what does this imply for Xena’s leadership? Unfortunately, though Gabrielle is a wonderful representation of love and a key figure in the show, it subverts warlord and thus military leader Xena to the trope of the hard, cold, crazy woman who underneath it all just wants to be *loved*. It shows that had she been loved as a woman is

“supposed to” by the patriarchy, she would never have become the threat that she was. It is even directly stated by Xena that “She knew that the light from a child’s face would turn me away from her darkness.” (“Adventures in the Sin Trade Part II”) Implying that had Xena just been given the chance to be a mother, her womanly, maternal instinct would have turned her away from the dark path of military leadership. Outwardly recognized by Xena who “later confesses that even her brief experience of motherhood planted a seed of change, a conviction that potential goodness lurked even within her embittered soul” (Futrell), this is a pretty big weakness for Xena as a feminist icon. Where male ‘big bads’ can be triumphed over in physical combat, this reinforces that female ‘big bads’ can be dismantled by returning to their “purpose” as women as designed by the patriarchy. Though a woman can become a female leader, and though Xena weaponized her femininity, this implies that deep down gender will always be a weakness, and will never be as “pure” or “superior” as male leadership.

[30] In the case of Buffy, love is a little more complicated. While the emotion, when used in concerns for family and friends, lets Buffy carry on, love is often shown to be elusive, if not downright dangerous for her. Unlike Xena, whose love stayed with her on her entire journey and helped her complete her mission, Buffy’s love is often portrayed as weakening her and holding her back. This is in some way going against the classic Western idea of military service, where the idea of love of country and fighting to protect those you love can be the driving motivator for success. Though Buffy does fight for those she loves most, she is also hindered by her love. In particular, in Season 8, Buffy kindles a brief relationship with the Slayer Satsu. While Satsu’s love does give Buffy power: namely, the power to be woken out of a trance that can only be broken by



“true loves kiss,” their relationship grinds to a halt almost as soon as it has begun. It reduces their love (however one-sided or experimental) to the classic trope of the action hero “getting the girl.” It is just like James Bond in every movie: he sleeps with a woman, but does not really love her. He is using her, just as Buffy is using Satsu as an experiment. “We’ll leave it at ‘*We had a wonderful night.*’” (Season 8 Vol. 2) And indeed, Buffy does cast aside Satsu after two nights of sleeping with her. Romantic love is thus left to something Buffy desires, but cannot truly have. Because she is a leader with responsibilities, stopping to have romantic love like classic male heroes do leads to rather dire consequences, again punishing her as a female leader. Where a male in authority is practically expected to have a love interest that he can have on the side, every romantic love Buffy has as a military leader is either refused (Xander), a fun one-night experiment (Satsu, despite wielding true love’s kiss), or something that ends up punishing her and her friends (Angel and Buffy reaching Twilight, abandoning it, and thus creating hell on Earth).

[31] One of the most important aspects of viewing Xena and Buffy as models of female military leadership lies in looking at how those around them act, obey, disobey, and respect their commands when they are alive. It is already very clear how the world viewed Warlord Xena: bad, evil, corrupt, something to be feared and taken down. And those who did not fear her, like the God of War Ares, sought to use her in their armies. Xena as a military leader was seen by the world and even the Gods as an upset to the patriarchal order. In “Dreamworker,” Xena faces “Evil Xena,” who forces her to see her past self through the eyes of her victims:

**Evil Xena:** You can't go through life trying to deny that I'm the real you. We were so happy all those years, don't you remember? Putting fear into all, pushing aside those who stood in our way, taking whatever we wanted. Ah, those were the days...Ever wonder how the rest of the world sees you? Curious? Watch as if you had the eyes of your victims! ("Dreamworker X1003)

Visually, we do not see what Xena is forced to see by her evil doppelganger, but referring to her "victims" ties Xena with being a murderer. Evil Xena is empowered by the vision, whatever it may be, and begins to attack Xena with even more strength. Frances Tomaczyk analyzes this scene in her article "Lunatics with Lethal Combat Skills," saying:

Xena's horrific vision of herself through the eyes of patriarchal society reflects Cranny-Francis's concept of the "re-visioning" effect of displacement. The incongruity between the terrifying, monstrous view of Xena, and Xena's (and viewers') own knowledge and experience of her exposes the contradictions behind the gender ideologies which "operate to construct 'reality' for the individual" (Tomaczyk).

Xena cannot escape Evil Xena: the only way out of the nightmare is to accept the nightmare as a truth. The people will always view Xena as a threat, but that does not disempower her. Xena must recognize that her evil half is a source of power, and not just a source of shame as society tells her it is. By acknowledging the past, she can continue to exert her influence and strength for good.

[32] Unfortunately, the world within the fictional Buffyverse does not view Buffy's military leadership as any better. The American military refers to her squads of

Slayers, saying: “Terrorists call them “cells.”” (Season 8 Vol. 1) To them, Buffy is a terrorist. And as mentioned previously in this essay, the rest of the world sees Buffy and the Slayers as public enemy number one. This stems from her “failure in the use of sanction,” as stated by Ensley Guffey in his essay “Buffy as General”:

The conclusion that must be inevitably drawn by outside observers is that Buffy cannot or will not control her troops, and her failure to impose sanctions on Simone and the Rogue Slayers is one of the primary factors in the shift in public and political opinion that results in the perception of the Slayer Army as a dangerous international terrorist organization (Guffey).

Buffy makes some big mistakes in Season 8 as a military leader in terms of typical patriarchal standards. In order to fund her operations, she robs banks, thus performing a typically villainous act in order to keep herself in power. Just like Xena, the people view Buffy as a threat. But where Xena ruled through terror and fear, Buffy chooses to lead through group power. She takes the “traditional” female powers of love and compassion, and weaponizes them, which makes her so terrifying to the male powered military.

Frances Early writes in “Female Just Warrior Reimagined” that:

“An interrogation of patriarchal arrangements of powers in society, including military institutions, has been a persistent preoccupation in the *Buffy* series since its inception...Adam’s murder of his mother-creator [in season four of *BtVS*] in his first moments of life underlines two of the show’s key themes in season four: the destructive potential of military war machines and the gender-blind corrupting power of non-legitimized military authority” (Early “From Boudicca to Buffy”).

Perhaps then that is the true strength of Buffy as a military leader. Buffy does not seek true military authority, because her claim would be illegitimate: Buffy is not a General. She is a warrior, yes, but she has never fought in a war. This is her first time leading a true army, not just a group of friends whose bonds run deeper than authority.

[33] Finally, another vital part in studying both Xena and Buffy's leadership is to look at what happens once they die. David Fritts writes in his article "Warrior Heroes: Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Beowulf" that the death of the classic hero ultimately reflects "their respective importance to their community" and that "the evidence of their greatness comes in how they are remembered" (Fritts 8). Upon Buffy's death, she is buried with a gravestone that simply reads: "Buffy Anne Summers, 1981-2001. Beloved Sister. Devoted Friend. She Saved the World. A Lot." ("The Gift" B5022). Buffy is remembered first through her familial ties, not through her physical deeds. As her true strength came from love, she is honored first through her emotional connection to the people she touched in her life. This highlights Buffy's maternal strength as more influential than her brute force: unlike a military leader, Buffy is not purely valued by her conquests. At least, initially she is not. Once Buffy is gone, "Sunnydale descends into chaos" (Fritts 8). The place that Buffy has fought so hard to protect begins to crumble without her direct influence. Thus, we can gather that Buffy was not just another girl in Sunnydale: she was incredibly important not just to the people who knew her, but to the people who did not as well. Though we as the audience know that Buffy is important, the realized necessity of her by the people who surrounded her reinforces that she was truly a hero, even by classic male narrative standards.

[34] And what of Xena? Though the series ends with her ultimate death, she is remembered much in the same way as Buffy: through her emotional connections first. In “A Friend in Need Part II” (X6022), Gabrielle begs Xena to let her breathe life back into her, but Xena’s spirit argues that she cannot, that she must stay and free thousands of souls. Xena wants to be remembered through her final good deed, but Gabrielle wants her to remember her emotional influence as well: “Xena, that is not right. I don't care. You're all that matters to me.” Though Xena does finally fade away, we do not see her lead the souls to freedom: instead, she lives on through Gabrielle’s memory, not through her selfless act. It is hard to say what happens to the world once Xena dies, as the series ends there. But it can be speculated that nothing collapsed once she was gone, despite the fact that she was incredibly important to so many: because Gabrielle became the new Xena. All throughout the series, Gabrielle has grown as a warrior, and in this final episode for the first time she successfully wields Xena’s most prized weapon, the chakram. This completes Gabrielle’s ascent into a warrior, and lets her become the new Xena that the world needs. “I hear they need a girl with a chakram,” Gabrielle says as she sails off into the distance towards a new land, holding the ashes of Xena. And this too, is an acceptable end in terms of the traditional hero: the world will always need a Xena, and now they have a new one – though she carries a different name, she also carries the very spirit of Xena: it is almost like an early Slayer prototype.

[35] So are Xena and Buffy’s leadership styles truly “good” or “bad?” If analyzed through traditional patriarchal standards, both of them “fail” as leaders. Xena ruled through terror, with a lust for power. She was a Destroyer of Nations, often existing in contrast to the Xena the audience has come to know: where the atoning Xena

is quick of wit, dangerous in her knowledge of human anatomy, not bound by physics in her fighting, and strong of will, the past Xena is crazed, terrifying, runs a dictatorship, and lacking most of her moral compass. Love is an emotion that weakens her, and leads to her downfall: her femininity, specifically her emotions, ensures that she will fail in a man's world. Buffy similarly "fails," although in a different way. While still the same humorous, dedicated, and capable Slayer, when put at the front of a force Buffy relies on her friends to help her. Where traditional male power comes in the form of the lone hero, Buffy finds her true strength in building a gigantic family; a deadly family, for sure, but one where responsibilities are split. Buffy does not or will not watch over and command every Slayer she activated: rather, she gives them a choice. Buffy's leadership is not absolute, and prioritizes empathy and compassion rather than blind, brute force.

[36] But are these two iconic women really "failures" as military leaders? No. Instead, they accentuate their own strengths through a feminine style of military leadership: specifically one that takes the supposed weaknesses of their gender, and proves that they are beyond capable of what the male "just warrior" can do. In fact, the true power of their leadership comes from how they ignore the traditional masculine military standards. Xena learns her killer moves from a female slave she protects that her male crew was intent on harming – where a male warrior always stands out and above people in being gifted with their power, Xena successfully earns her powers instead, proving her lethality in her ability to learn and adapt. In the same way, Buffy takes the "traditionally accepted" aspects of female rule in a patriarchal society, and turns them on their heads. Firstly, she empowers women globally with the strength and knowledge to lead, as well as a choice for them to join her. Buffy does not need to conquer the globe

by forcing people to follow her. Secondly, she takes “traditional” female powers (as determined by male-dominant society), such as emotion, love, compassion, and empathy, and shows that they in no way inhibit military leadership: in fact, they aid Buffy greatly. They keep her army together, and even earn the trust and respect of her enemies, something that cannot be earned from brute force alone. And ultimately, love does not truly “end” Xena’s leadership. Just like Buffy, once Xena finds love in her life, she becomes an even greater warrior.

[37] Xena and Buffy are successful models of female military leadership. They are cold, they are caring, they are ruthless, and they are considerate. But most importantly, they are strong. As the famous quote goes: “a woman can preach, a woman can work, a woman can fight, a woman can build, can rule, can conquer, can destroy just as much as a man can” (Saldana).

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