

KREON

Loosely based on the play, *Antigone* by Sophocles

Adapted by Stephen Taft

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(In order of their appearance)

ELENA: female, a news correspondent

NIKOS: male, a reporter

SENATOR: male or female

GENERAL: male

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS: male or female

ATTORNEY: male or female

MINISTER: male or female

KREON: a King, male

ANTIGONE: female

ISMENE: female

KASSANDRA: Kreon's assistant, female

SOLDIER: male

TIRESIAS, an elderly blind prophet, male

MESSENGER, male or female

NOTE:

The Senator, General, Director of Public Affairs, Attorney and Minister serve as members of the King's Advisory Council. Essentially, they are representative of the traditional Greek Chorus.

Diversity in casting regarding ethnicity and gender is encouraged.

It is possible to double-cast the characters of Elena/Kassandra and Nikos/Soldier.

TIME

The not too distant future.

PLACE

A palace in a war-torn nation.

Kreon is intended to be presented without an intermission.

SAMPLE

SCENE 3

DAY 2. Mid-afternoon. The office of the KING. The ADVISORY COUNCIL enters. They are pleased the war is over.

SENATOR

It's a new day. Filled with peace.

ATTORNEY

We need to celebrate. A night on the town, drinking and dancing with our loved ones.

SENATOR

Yes, the war is finally over. It's time to rejoice.

DIRECTOR

Yet here we are.

MINISTER

To support our new King.

GENERAL

Far too long this nation has suffered over the stupidity of two brothers, each vying for the throne. The King blames Polynices, but it was Eteocles who was at fault. Once the sons of Oedipus reached the age of adulthood they were to alternate the power of the throne, but one had to be greedy and refused to relinquish his power.

MINISTER

It's not our place to say who was right or wrong. It was what it was and is what it is. The gods have not been kind to this family.

ATTORNEY

We thought we were getting a rational, thoughtful, kind leader, but are we?

MINISTER

Kreon has always been known as being fair in his decisions and generous in nature. Prior to the war he was a donor of many worthwhile causes.

DIRECTOR

Perhaps that is what he wanted people to think. Too many such benefactors have alternative reasons for their generosity. All too often it's a future vote.

ATTORNEY

Get serious. The election process has always been a show, certainly not legitimate.

SENATOR

It's all a matter of perspective. There are times our citizens do cast votes.

GENERAL

But not for a King. You're born to sit on the throne or not. And once you get a taste of power, well . . .

ATTORNEY

Kreon wasn't happy when the sons of Oedipus took over the throne. Word is he became bitter.

GENERAL

He has no reason to be bitter. My god, the spoiled brats paid him off by letting him use the royal vacation retreat up in the mountains whenever he wanted. It was a hell of a deal if you ask me.

ATTORNEY

But, bitter he may be and bitterness can fester deep inside a man and a monster can come roaring out.

SENATOR

Let's not overreact. Kreon must present an image of strength. An image of a true leader. We certainly need one. The people must know who is in charge as he attempts to unify this nation.

MINISTER

Do you really think such an order is going to unify the people? There was not just an army behind Polynices, but families as well. Mothers, wives, sons and daughters.

ATTORNEY

Maybe this is all a distraction . . . to give him time to organize his government. You never know what is going on behind the scenes.

GENERAL

WE should know. WE are behind the scenes. WE are his Advisory Council. I dislike being in the dark. We only know of his decree, like everyone else.

ATTORNEY

Yes, we know what he said. But perhaps it's just talk intended to ensure people listen.

MINISTER

He has my attention.

ATTORNEY

If someone opposes his decree through their actions, then we'll find out.

SENATOR

What do the people think? We need to keep our eyes and ears open and provide our King with insight regarding the will of the people. Reach out to our contacts in the city. Their thoughts will either support his decree or not. If he really cares about the people, he'll listen to them.

GENERAL

When does a King listen to the people? He needs to listen to us. WE represent the people. That's what we're here for. To counsel the King.

SENATOR

Let us pray to the gods for guidance and wisdom.

(Beat.)

MINISTER

God of all gods, listen to us now. We have suffered far too long. Our citizens deserve a compassionate leader. A leader who will rebuild our war-torn nation and return us to a life of prosperity. Help guide him to make wise decisions for the benefit of all.

(KASSANDRA enters. SHE is beautiful and serves as the new assistant to the KING. SHE announces Kreon as HE enters.)

KASSANDRA

Members of the Counsel . . . please welcome . . . your King.

(KREON enters. ALL applaud their new KING. KREON shakes hands with several members of the COUNCIL.)

KREON

Thank you. Thank you. I appreciate that warm reception. I'm sure you all enjoyed a peaceful evening of sleep. It's been a long time. *(Beat.)* Know that I value the counsel of everyone. You are here because you're intelligent, coherent, trust-worthy and above all, *loyal*. Am I correct in that perception?

ALL

Of course.

KREON

Of course, what?

ATTORNEY and MINISTER

Of course, . . . sir?

KREON

Try again.

ATTORNEY, MINISTER and SENATOR

Of course, . . . my King.

KREON

There you go! Typically, I'm not one for formality. However, in times like these it's important to know who whom is and where we stand. Am I right?

COUNCIL MEMBERS

(Random replies.)

Of course. I couldn't agree more. Yes sir. Exactly my King.

KREON

Let me introduce you to this intelligent and ravishing beauty. This delightful woman is my assistant, Cassandra. She'll be by my side at all times and handling much of the mundane details of the office and keeping me on track.

KASSANDRA

And on time.

KREON

Of course. And on time.

DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

But sir, traditionally that has been my job.

KREON

And look where traditions have led us. Today is a new day. And for now, you've been reassigned to my council. Cassandra will be my assistant. She cracks a mighty whip, so be careful.

(Beat. To the Council.)

Now, I want you to know I am depending on your insight, your advice and your wisdom. You're here because you are the bravest of the brave and the brightest of the bright. *(Crossing to each member as he speaks.)* A Senator to facilitate policy. A General to lead the bold and the valiant. An Attorney to assure that justice is swift and true. A Minister of Faith, to lead us in prayer and down a righteous path. And finally, a Director of Public Affairs to erase doubt from the minds of our citizens.

During these times when the ship has seemingly lost course, it's *we* that must right it! I know that you respect this office and wish to restore our nation to its former glory. Your loyalty has been demonstrated against the most agonizing of circumstances. And now, the throne is mine. And although this chair is just a symbol, I must say, "I like it." Why? Because whomever occupies it can make change and change we shall make! This is the highest office in the land and I will use its royal power to do what is right and just. I will make sure that our people are safe. I'll restore our wealth and our economy to the benefit of all. And we, as a nation, working together, will repair, renovate, and rebuild all that two warring brothers have destroyed. *(Beat.)* In

KREON continues

time, the people will discover who I am as a man. It's by my actions on the throne that I will be tested and ultimately judged by the people. Know that I am first and foremost here to serve the state! My friends will quickly discover my loyalty is here, as I'm sure is yours. It's my job to Captain this ship in order that we may stay on track to recovery. Now, it's time to set our course, to hoist the sails and to set forth on a journey filled with hope and most of all results. Let's get to work.

(The COUNCIL applauds KREON.)

SENATOR

Excellent words my King.

KREON

Thank Cassandra. She wrote them.

(KREON sits at his desk and KASSANDRA hands him documents to sign. The COUNCIL MEMBERS exit. Beat. Suddenly a SOLDIER comes up the steps towards the office. HE is stopped by the GENERAL and the SENATOR and is out of breath.)

GENERAL

Stop! You can't go in there!

SOLDIER

I have to see the King.

GENERAL

Why?

SOLDIER

Someone has buried the body of Polynices.

SENATOR

What?! When?

SOLDIER

We're not quite sure sir, but I can assure you, someone has disobeyed the orders of the King.

SENATOR

I can't believe it.

GENERAL

Someone's head is going to roll for this. Are you sure?

SOLDIER

The gods as my witness. We, my fellow soldiers and I, we couldn't believe it! We were guarding the body, just like we were told. It's like an invisible force . . . perhaps the gods, ignored the King and covered the body.

GENERAL

Oh, shut up.

SENATOR

Wait here.

(The SOLDIER waits with the GENERAL. The SENATOR enters the office and discovers KASSANDRA leaning over the KING and embracing HIM.)

SENATOR

Excuse me sir. Uh, oh . . . excuse ME.

(KASSANDRA immediately separates from the KING. The SENATOR turns his back to them.)

KREON

Just barge right in! *(Beat.)* What is it?

SENATOR

Sir, there's a soldier here to see you. It's quite important.

KREON

What does he want?

SENATOR

I'd rather he conveys his news to you personally . . . my King.

KREON

Well, let him in. Let him in. Just give me a moment.

(After a moment, the KING rises.)

Thank you, Kassandra for your . . . assistance. We'll continue our discussion later.

KASSANDRA

Yes, my King.

(KASSANDRA exits. The SENATOR smiles at her. At the entrance of the office.)

SENATOR
(To the SOLDIER).

Come in.

(KREON rises. The SENATOR leads the SOLDIER in to see KREON.)

KREON

Well, what is it?

SOLDIER

Excuse me sir, I'm sorry to bother you. I really don't wish to bring you such news. In fact, I've done all I can - not too. I ran, then stopped, and thought, "What am I doing? He'll never believe me. I'll be imprisoned or worse." I thought of running away, but I'm not a deserter. I know my responsibilities to my King. And so, I turned around and well, here I am, doing what is right.

KREON

Stop babbling! What news am I to hear? Spit it out!

SOLDIER

Well . . . a . . .

KREON

Out with it!

SOLDIER

Yes, sir. (Pause) The body . . . the body of Polynices has been . . . buried. Well, not buried, but covered . . . with dust, but enough for the body to be technically buried. But, we . . . my fellow guards and I have uncovered the body so the scorching sun, birds and ants can have their way with the corpse.

KREON

Are you saying that someone has defied my decree?

SOLDIER

Uh . . . yes sir . . . apparently. Last night.

KREON

How could this happen? You were to guard the body! What the hell were you doing? You'll pay for this!

SOLDIER

We did nothing sir. We . . . myself and my fellow soldiers were on guard.

KREON

Then HOW could someone bury the body if you were guarding it? Are you blind?!

SOLDIER

Well, sir we'd been out there all day standing in the sun. You know, no shade, hot, REALLY HOT, and all of us . . . there were four of us guarding the body, and you know how it is . . . well, maybe you don't. Anyway, we rotate duties. One man was guarding the road, another was catching a bit of shut-eye – having had little sleep, one was eating dinner and I . . . I was guarding the body but took a moment to do what all men must do.

KREON

(Doesn't say a word but expresses "What?" with his expression.)

SOLDIER

I . . . uh . . . I had to relieve myself sir. And I certainly didn't want to do that out in the open, so I found a spot, out of view . . . nearby. Shortly thereafter my men and I moved just paces away from the body, because it smells worse than you can imagine. It's disgusting. I was about to vomit. So, we decided to get up-wind of the body to avoid the smell. We were just going to play a game of cards. So, we did and checked on the body from time to time. *(Beat.)* At midnight all was fine. I checked personally. So, it happened sometime after that. Whoever it was is tricky sir. Quiet they were. Couldn't hear a thing. Cat-like. But, still he was able to wash the body first and then cover it.

KREON

He?! So, you saw the person?

SOLDIER

No sir. I just assume it is a . . . he. A woman wouldn't dare defy your orders. I don't think.

KREON

No one should defy my orders! Now, you said the body was washed?

SOLDIER

Yes sir, the body was washed and then covered. But, not just washed, but cleaned with ceremonial oils. We tried to uncover the body, but it just became a gooey mess with the blood, the water, oils, and dirt. And then shortly thereafter we all started blaming each other. "You did it." No, YOU did it! Why would I do it? You've always been religious. You know the decree is bull . . ." Anyway, we finally decided that none of us did do it. But we knew you had to be informed. Because we are loyal sir . . . to you. We heard you like loyalty and we are the most loyal of the loyal, I can assure you. So, we drew straws and I lost, and now I'm here. But I had nothing to do with it sir. Cross my heart and hope . . . not to die.

SENATOR

Sir, if I may. Perhaps this is a sign that the gods may not be pleased . . . or may believe there is a better way to deal with the matter of the demise of Polynices.

KREON

Shut up! You dare question my decree?

SENATOR

No, my King. No. It's just . . .

KREON

The gods have more important things to worry about than a rotting, stinking corpse. Particularly a man that was intent on burning down the temples that honor our gods, traditions, our way of life. (*Beat.*) He was always the rebel with a soft heart for those that want handouts. And deep down he was an obnoxious, coarse, bastard. And there are others like him . . . out there . . . wanting to take down those that have worked hard and may be better off than the average citizen. People who are friends of this office and friends of mine!

SENATOR

Sir, my colleagues and I have . . . acquaintances within the lower echelons of society. We have asked them to . . .

KREON

Spy?

SENATOR

No. No sir. Never. We've asked them to simply . . . listen . . . to keep their ears open . . . to gain insight into what the people on the streets are saying. To inform.

KREON

And are these "friends" being paid for their services?

SENATOR

Of course, my King. A secret fund.

KREON

Well, they damned well better be sure I hear what I should hear.

SENATOR

Of course. Message received my King.

KREON

I'm not oblivious to the subversive element, enemies of the people, those who oppose my leadership, although I'll never know why. I gave up a life of leisure to return this nation to what it once was. The people should be rejoicing. The war is ended. But, am *I* shown any appreciation for my return? For *my* loyalty to the state? Of course not. The people aren't pissed about my decree. They could care less about it. Because at the end of the day people only care about one thing. Money.

SENATOR

These days sir, for many people, the common citizen, it's about simply surviving, staying healthy, and having enough food to put on the table.

KREON

Because the land in which we live has been devastated by war. And now, we must rebuild this nation, this city, and the economy.

SENATOR

And confidence in the government.

KREON

Right. And how do we do that? By putting people back to work. (*Beat.*) There's a reason the world has had classes throughout history. We, the upper-class provide the vision for our world. The middle-class embraces that vision, while the lower-class makes that vision a reality. As we rebuild, tens of thousands of jobs will be created . . .

SENATOR

Tens of thousands? Is that true?

KREON

It's true if I say it.

SENATOR

Of course, sir . . . I mean, of course my King.

KREON

I'll be giving the people jobs but will the people respond with their loyalty and love for their King? At first perhaps, but over time gratitude is too expensive a commodity to share. Ultimately, I'll be stabbed in the back either figuratively or literally. All great leaders are. It won't be you, will it Senator that will stab me in the back?

SENATOR

Of course not, my King.

KREON

Do you pledge your loyalty to me?

SENATOR

My King, you know I am loyal to the State.

KREON

(*KREON crosses and puts both hands on the shoulder of the SENATOR.*)

But, do you pledge your loyalty to me? Here and now?

SENATOR

My King, I . . . I . . . of course, my King.

KREON

Good. Loyalty to the King is an admirable quality for all of my staff and our citizens to have.

SOLDIER

Excuse me, might I speak?

KREON

No! Your words and your news make me sick.

SOLDIER

I understand sir. My apologies.

(Pause.)

KREON

What? What is it?

SOLDIER

You're assuming the culprit is one of my people. I'm not sure that's the case.

KREON

You think someone from my world did this?

SOLDIER

Oh, I'm not saying that sir. But you're a wise, worldly man. You're an educated man. Why would someone from my world do it? We only want to make you happy. If you're happy, we're happy, everyone is happy and we all get along.

KREON

I'm so happy you're concerned about my happiness. *(Beat.)* Maybe someone from your world knows who did this but received some money to look the other way. You for instance?

SOLDIER

Me? No sir, certainly not. I'm poor, very poor. Look at my boots. Holes in the soles, shredded sleeves. I can't even afford a proper uniform. Plus, I have a wife, eight kids, too many mouths to feed. I will always be poor.

KREON

Because you have EIGHT kids!

SOLDIER

Every man needs a little affection sir. I'm sure you can understand.

KREON

Ever think of using a little protection?

SOLDIER

Can't afford it sir.

KREON

Now listen to me. You and your men had better find the man who dared to defy me. You have twenty-four hours. You hear me? I want the bastard that washed that pig Polynices and then spread the dust of our sacred city over him. If you don't find him, it will be your head on the chopping block and you won't have to worry about being poor anymore. Now get out of here and do your duty.

SOLDIER

Yes sir. Thank you, sir. You won't regret it sir. I'm off to do your bidding. We'll get . . .

KREON

Get out! (*The SOLDIER exits.*) My god, they're such suckers.

SENATOR

Excuse me?

KREON

Soldiers. They're suckers and losers. They work for little money, they get injured, disabled or die. And for what? I mean, what's in for them?

SENATOR

Sir, they fight for their country. They serve to defend us. My son died, serving this nation.

KREON

Well . . . whatever. I don't get it.

LIGHTS FADE / TRANSITION MUSIC

SCENE 4

DAY 2. Late Afternoon. The Council Chambers.

MINISTER

Well, what did the King say?

SENATOR

(The loyal confidant.)

He . . . he's quite adamant about finding and punishing the offender.

DIRECTOR

Did you see his new assistant? I bet the Queen will be furious when she sees her.

SENATOR

I don't think so. It's not like she's unaware of such liaisons.

GENERAL

She's probably thrilled there's someone else to share his bed.

DIRECTOR

I heard they sleep in separate bedrooms. I don't understand why she just doesn't leave him?

ATTORNEY

Perhaps she doesn't have a choice. It's important that the appearance of a strong marriage between the King and Queen be symbolic of the future of the state.

DIRECTOR

Do you think she has someone on the side, like the King?

GENERAL

It's most likely the days of needing someone to satisfy . . . a need, have passed her by.

SENATOR

All right, all right, enough gossip.

ATTORNEY

You're right. You're right as always. *(Beat.)* Why couldn't he have just buried the damn corpse?

DIRECTOR

Why did he have to announce such a decree publicly? It's not like enemies of the state haven't vanished before. The people know that.

GENERAL

This is what happens when someone with no military experience comes into power. We know how to take care of such problems delicately and quietly. We have our own laws when dealing with the enemy.

ATTORNEY

You know military law General, but not the laws of man.

DIRECTOR

(Still disheartened by his perceived demotion in duties.)

I know what information to release to the public and when. But, did he ask me? Of course not. He has a new assistant.

GENERAL

Get over it. I know the laws of man. But they have a tendency to get in the way. The only laws that count here are the King's laws. Period.

SENATOR

The General does have a point.

MINISTER

We will all pay for ignoring the gods.

GENERAL

The gods!?! I am so damned tired of hearing about the gods! Where are they? If they're upset, we haven't seen any evidence they are concerned. Certainly, we would see a sign if they were displeased. *(Looking up.)* Strike me down if I'm wrong! *(Pause. HE isn't struck down.)* It's all just bullshit. There are no gods. It's all just a sham. A way for someone to profit from those that need to believe in a higher power. "Buy a holy ornament, have it blessed, you'll feel better." "Purchase the good book, recite a verse and hold it close to your heart." "Donate and guarantee your salvation." Two things drive the economy when there's war. Ammunition plants and religion. Make one product to kill and sell another to pray you don't get killed.

MINISTER

General, where do you believe a soldier goes when they die on the battlefield?

GENERAL

They're buried six feet under if they're fortunate. Some are not.

MINISTER

You don't believe in an afterlife?

GENERAL

When you're dead you're dead. Period.

MINISTER

General, throughout history there certainly has been evidence of the unexplained, what one may call a miracle.

GENERAL

You may have a point, because it's a friggin' miracle this royal family is still in power! I mean what haven't they done? Let's see . . . we have murder, incest, suicide, greed, and inherited sovereignty whether one is qualified or not! (*Beat.*) If your god's sanction their behavior or their so-called rights, then yes, I have a problem. (*To the Council.*) Have I missed anything?

DIRECTOR

Infidelity.

GENERAL

There you go. And this is the family that we're supposed to be loyal too? (*To the MINISTER.*) But, keep praying my friend, because my soldiers, when they're ordered to charge, they charge. When they are outnumbered, they fight. There's no surrender in them. And if there are gods or "A" god, I do hope their prayers are answered because I am tired of gutless Kings who send such innocents to fight for their personal gain. Kings who send our men and women into battle only to come home limbless or paralyzed or suffering from wounds of war we can't see. I . . . I am personally tired of sleepless nights as I can't erase the voices of the wounded calling for their mothers before they die where they lay.

(Silence. And then . . .)

SENATOR

General, how about a drink . . . and a walk in the garden?

GENERAL

Senator, you are quite wise. Make mine a double.

LIGHTS FADE / TRANSITION MUSIC

(END OF SAMPLE)