

Cassandra:
A Steampunk Romance

A full-length play

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ACT I

SCENE 1

The main drawing room of a Victorian mansion. Lavishly decorated with the finest furniture and art. Drinks are served via an automated steam powered butler of sorts, a large wheeled can with tubes and pipes rolling about and tooting.

The conversation is lively and causes a steady drumming in the ear. To casually look over the crowd you would think it was the mid to late 1800s - and you would be right. But this is not the 1880's of our history, no, this is an 1800's mixed with advanced technology and ancient magic. It is parallel to our own time line. And as the story begins, we are in the ballroom of a mansion belonging to one Sebastian Mead, wealthy entrepreneur and inventor. The party is of his own design to reveal his latest invention.

ARTHUR

Sebastian, good fellow, come now! What is all this about?

SEBASTIAN

My dear Arthur, I have never known you to complain when free alcohol was provided!

ARTHUR

Not a complaint, merely a show of anticipatory excitement! I am simply overwhelmed with curiosity!

SEBASTIAN

Ah, there's a saying about curiosity and a cat, isn't there? Oh yes, curiosity made the cat fabulously wealthy and happy beyond all compare.

*A general huzzah from
the gallery.*

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

My dear friends, it has been an incomprehensibly good year for my business ventures. I have sold nearly 100,000 units of gear butlers.

*Steam shoots out the top
of one of the strange
butler machines.*

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

Nearly the entire world has taken to the wonders of my science! We have here General Stanley, recently fitted with a steam powered arm! How is it treating you sir?

STANLEY

Bully, Mr. Mead! It's ten times the strength of my other arm! I'm thinking of lopping off the slacker and getting an improved limb!

A cascade of laughter.

SEBASTIAN

Everything I have done, I have done for the betterment of mankind.

ARTHUR

Hear, hear!

*A volley of toasts and
acknowledgements.*

SEBASTIAN

But I believe I have outdone myself this time.

ARTHUR

Do tell!

SEBASTIAN

We are the most powerful nation on the face of the earth. We have threats of war at every border, on every continent. And there is one terrible and inescapable truth about war: Death.

*The crowd is silent with
awe.*

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

I believe that I have found an answer to that problem.

Murmurs of disbelief.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

I give you my latest invention, I call it the Lazarus engine.

*Steam powered cyborg
servants wheel out a
large draped
contraption. Sebastian
crosses to General
Stanley.*

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

My dear General Stanley, would you kindly share with us the unfortunate story of Corporal Kelly?

STANLEY

Kelly? What? Oh, dear... terrible business in the Congo.

Kelly was one of my best men, attached to my own personal detail. He found himself separated from the unit and on his own. He bravely fought a score of savages before falling beneath the spear. We found him a day later, spear still thrust through him, he had managed to crawl some two miles of jungle before expiring.

SEBASTIAN

A terrible loss.

STANLEY

A damn shame!

SEBASTIAN

Well, General... gentlemen, allow me to introduce you to... Corporal Kelly.

The drape is removed and something akin to a suit of armor slowly stands and commands the attention of the room.

STANLEY

What? What's this?

The machine fumbles about. It holds it's arms out to the fright of the guests.

KELLY (V.O.)

Hello? Can anybody hear me?

STANLEY

That's... that's Kelly's voice.

The suit of armor reels toward Stanley.

KELLY (V.O.)

General? Sir? Is that you? I can't see.

STANLEY

Good god man! What have you done?

SEBASTIAN

One moment! Please, everyone, a moment.

*Sebastian adjusts a few
knobs and twists a few
dials.*

KELLY (V.O.)

Oh, there... yes... now I can see quite well. Ah!
General There you are! Good to see you sir! I
thought for sure I was done for in the Congo!

STANLEY

Yes, well, so did I! What is going on here,
Sebastian!

SEBASTIAN

Corporal Kelly has been brought back from the
dead.

Gasps from the room.

KELLY (V.O.)

I'm sorry, what?

STANLEY

This is crossing the line, sir!

KELLY (V.O.)

Did he say I was dead?

STANLEY

You were dead, son, I'm terribly sorry you had to
find out like this.

KELLY (V.O.)

I suppose it's better than not knowing at all, sir.

STANLEY

This is outrageous, Mead!

SEBASTIAN

General, gentlemen, I assure you that I have toiled to bring about an end to death.

Murmurs of disbelief.

STANLEY

Impossible.

SEBASTIAN

Corporal Kelly?

KELLY (V.O.)

Yes sir?

SEBASTIAN

Are you in any pain?

KELLY (V.O.)

No sir. No pain. I am a little confused. I can't really...

SEBASTIAN

See there? No pain! Brought back from oblivion! And I hold the secret! Think of all the soldiers who never came home! Think of all the wars waged and lives lost! I have found a way around our mortality.

KELLY (V.O.)

But sir...

SEBASTIAN

No need to thank me, Kelly.

KELLY (V.O.)

But...

SEBASTIAN

Run along now, back to the lab. Jackson?

*Jackson, a sinister
Cyborg butler steps
forward.*

JACKSON

Yessir.

SEBASTIAN

Would you escort Kelly here back to the lab.

*Jackson walks the
mechanical man back
through the parlor, much
to the scrutiny of the
crowd.*

ARTHUR

(Aghast.)

My dear Sebastian, whatever could have possessed you?

SEBASTIAN

Not you too, Arthur.

ARTHUR

Is this about Eliza? I understand you miss her, man... but you cannot bring her back.

SEBASTIAN

You have no idea what I can and cannot do, Arthur.

ARTHUR

It is unnatural! Unthinkable! It is... blasphemy, that's what it is, blasphemy!

SEBASTIAN

I was so hoping that you, of all people, could see this as the miracle it is.

ARTHUR

Only God can perform miracles.

SEBASTIAN

And how do you know that he is not performing them through me? Think of what this means. Think of never having to let go of your loved ones, never having to say good bye ever again.

ARTHUR

Part of being human is accepting death, Sebastian. You must accept it. She is gone. It is the merciless truth that you cannot escape.

*The crowd stares in
silence.*

SEBASTIAN

Gentlemen, I pray you leave us for a moment, my partner and I have some matters to discuss.

*The crowd thins out
until only Arthur and
Sebastian are on stage.*

ARTHUR

What on earth were you thinking? I have half a mind to pull my investments.

SEBASTIAN

Your investments have paid you back a thousand fold. And this new direction will mean millions upon millions more.

ARTHUR

Have you no scruples, man? I knew that Eliza's death had you distracted, but by God, man! How would she react to this unnatural obsession? What would Eliza think about this?

SEBASTIAN

Why don't you ask her yourself?

ARTHUR

What? You can't mean?

SEBASTIAN

She's here, in this room.

Arthur looks around. He sees the gear butler and approaches it with horror.

ARTHUR

Eliza?

SEBASTIAN

Don't be daft man, over here.

Sebastian leads Arthur to a large, ornate mirror.

ARTHUR

The mirror?

SEBASTIAN

It's a vessel of my own design. I can keep her consciousness within the frame. I am waiting until I can build a more... refined body for her.

ARTHUR

More refined?

SEBASTIAN

There are certain unfavorable attributes to the Lazarus Engine. I fear there is no sense of touch, or any sensory perception, outside of vision and hearing, and of course those are terribly limited.

ARTHUR

And you say Eliza is in here?

Arthur looks at the mirror. Eliza appears in the frame.

ELIZA

Hello Arthur, so good to see you again.

Arthur lets out a yelp.

ARTHUR

She's a specter! A ghost!

SEBASTIAN

Honestly, Arthur. In a time of such scientific leaps and bounds you're relying on antiquated superstition?

ARTHUR

Eliza, is that really you.

ELIZA

In the flesh... well, not exactly.

ARTHUR

How? How is this possible?

SEBASTIAN

It's not merely possible, Arthur, it is essential.

ARTHUR

Whatever do you mean?

SEBASTIAN

We need to talk about the future, Arthur. Our future.

ARTHUR

Why does that sound so ominous?

SEBASTIAN

The future is an intimidating subject, to be sure. That is why we must prepare ourselves.

ARTHUR

How is it that you have Eliza in this mirror? Or that Kelly fellow in that suit of armor? What's going on here?

SEBASTIAN

Do you recall the source of my research?

ARTHUR

Da Vinci... Leonardo Da Vinci. You found a collection of his works.

SEBASTIAN

(Spiteful)

Leonardo Da Vinci... He was a bastard born into peasantry three hundred years ago... and with every advance I make I am but a child at his workbench. There are things in his work that defy everything I understand as science.

ARTHUR

What then? Witchcraft? Sorcery?

SEBASTIAN

Again with the superstitions. Da Vinci simply understood nature better than we can... or will.

ARTHUR

I don't understand... what are you trying to tell me, man?

SEBASTIAN

I hunted down every piece of Da Vinci's work...

ARTHUR

Paintings?

SEBASTIAN

His real work! His technological feats! A ship that runs underwater, a collection of flying machines, a cannon on a cart of armor... All these things were genius, but they were nothing compared to the lion...

ARTHUR

The lion?

SEBASTIAN

In 1515, Da Vinci was commissioned to create a mechanical lion that would walk up to King Francis I and present him with lilies.

ARTHUR

A clockwork piece?

SEBASTIAN

A work of art that puts the Mona Lisa to shame.

ARTHUR

I am confused.

SEBASTIAN

The lion was a greater achievement than all that I have created, perhaps greater than anything I could ever hope to create.

ARTHUR

How can you say that?

SEBASTIAN

Because I owe... we owe everything to Da Vinci's Lion.

ARTHUR

What?

SEBASTIAN

Centuries ago my family had been charged with the keeping of a secret.

ARTHUR

What secret?

SEBASTIAN

The secret of Da Vinci's true genius.

ARTHUR

I don't think I can endure this jest any longer.

SEBASTIAN

You will endure it! Furthermore, you will embrace it!

ARTHUR

See here!

ELIZA

Sit down, Arthur! You can be very tiresome at times. Allow me to illuminate the situation.

*The Mirror now becomes a
shadow puppet stage.
Showing the history of
Sebastian's legacy.
First we see the lion in
silhouette.*

ELIZA (CONT'D)

First came the lion. The greatest mechanical creation ever devised by man. The lion was all but alive!

SEBASTIAN

Leonardo Da Vinci loved his creation as God supposedly loves us. He knew what mankind would do with a creature like the lion. And fearing the worst Da Vinci turned to his trusted assistant, Bernardo di Simone. "Hide the lion." Da Vinci ordered. "Let no one know of its existence."

ELIZA

But Leonardo had no way of knowing that his creation would last forever. Surely he thought that the lion would fall apart in time.

ARTHUR

So, where did this Simone hide the lion?

SEBASTIAN

Where else? Africa.

ARTHUR

Oh come now...

SEBASTIAN

It was the perfect place. The mechanical gears were covered with a fine coat of fur.

ARTHUR

Fur couldn't last very long under those conditions.

ELIZA

Quite right, Arthur. It was left to Simone's family to meet with the mechanical lion once a generation for new skin. Each generation for hundreds of years fulfilled its obligation.

SEBASTIAN

Of course, they didn't understand the significance of the lion. They couldn't grasp its place in human history.

ARTHUR

I'm not sure I follow you.

SEBASTIAN

The lion was the greatest achievement of the greatest mind of all time. Inside those gears and wires and cables were the answers to all of man's ills.

ARTHUR

So... your inventions?

SEBASTIAN

The product of close examination of Leonardo's lion.

*The shadow show ends.
Eliza returns to the
mirror.*

ELIZA

The lion holds the answer to immortality.

ARTHUR

And you believe this?

ELIZA

I am here, am I not? Beyond the grave. Beyond the veil of this life.

ARTHUR

It's blasphemy!

SEBASTIAN

It's science!

ELIZA

It is the future, Arthur. And you have invested in it. And now, you may collect on your investment.

ARTHUR

What?

SEBASTIAN

I am in need of new subjects to test upon. It is tedious work to find fresh corpses. You see, by time a body has been lying around for even a few hours, there are problems.

ARTHUR

What are you going on about?

ELIZA

Don't worry Arthur. It doesn't hurt. Well, it doesn't hurt for long.

SEBASTIAN

You are a full partner in this, and so, you get a full share.

Sebastian pulls out a souped up revolver and shoots Arthur dead.

ELIZA

That was a chore. Are you sure you want to bring him back?

SEBASTIAN

My dear, if only you weren't trapped in there!

Sebastian kisses the mirror and then turns and drags Arthur off. He stops at the edge of the stage.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

I will unlock the secrets of touch and restore you to full senses.

ELIZA

And I will reward you with a body that never tires and never stops wanting you.

SCENE II

A grand office.

Sebastian is sitting at
his desk and a very
distressed
Mrs. Gwendelynn
Kentworthy is sitting
opposite him.

GWEN

I just do not understand it, Sebastian. It's not
like Arthur to go away on business like this,
without warning of any kind.

*A small cylinder shakes
on the desk. Sebastian
quickly smacks it and it
stops.*

SEBASTIAN

I am sure Arthur is about his business, all of
his bills are being paid are they not?

GWEN

Yes, but, I haven't heard a word from him in
weeks.

SEBASTIAN

I am certain he was just excited by some new
prospect. We are on the verge of a major
breakthrough.

GWEN

Oh?

SEBASTIAN

Yes. And if it comes together you will never have
to say good bye to Arthur ever again.

GWEN

That would be lovely.

SEBASTIAN

Would it not?

GWEN

Thank you Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN

Come by at any time.

He escorts her to the door.

GWEN

Good day.

SEBASTIAN

And to you.

*Once Gwen is gone, Eliza
appears in the mirror.*

ELIZA

What a bore.

SEBASTIAN

Show some compassion she just lost her husband.

ELIZA

Nonsense. He's right there.

*Sebastian goes to the
canister on his desk. He
presses a button and a
head springs out. A
mechanical head. It is
moving its mouth.*

SEBASTIAN

Hold on, man.

*A few adjustments and
the head speaks.*

ARTHUR

Why do you delight in torturing me?

SEBASTIAN

It is merely in my nature.

ARTHUR

You are a monster.

SEBASTIAN

I disagree. If anyone would be looked upon with horror in this room, I think it would be the talking head in a box.

ARTHUR

Please, Sebastian... release me.

SEBASTIAN

I am going to make you the most powerful human on the planet, Arthur. Well, until I revive Eliza, of course.

ARTHUR

I cannot bear this, I'll go mad. Mad I say.

SEBASTIAN

By all means, go mad. It will undoubtedly help.

The doorbell chimes.

SEBASTIAN (CONT'D)

She's here!

ELIZA

She's here!

ARTHUR

Who?

SEBASTIAN

I'm afraid I'll have to shut you down for a few hours, Arthur.

Arthur protests but he is relegated to the cylinder before he can object fully.

ELIZA

I cannot wait to meet her!

SEBASTIAN

You may have to, darling. I am afraid she will not be ready to encounter a woman in a mirror on her first day of work.

ELIZA

She can do this, Sebastian, I know she can.

SEBASTIAN

Of course she can.

ELIZA

I'll be watching.

The door opens as Eliza disappears into the mirror. A young woman, CASSANDRA COOK, is escorted onto the stage. She is amazed at the decadence of the room. The butler nods to Sebastian and steps back through the door.

SEBASTIAN

Miss Cook?

CASSANDRA

Yes?

SEBASTIAN

I'm Sebastian Mead.