**SCIENCE FICTION BLAST-OFF THEATER**

"Puppets  by Richard Nathan

Before the lights come up, a voice announces the title of the story:

                                                            VOICE  
                                    "The Puppets"

There is a boulder downstage right.  We are on an alien planet.  Enter visitors from Earth:  CAPTAIN JACOBS and LIEUTENANT MASTERSON, carrying scientific equipment.  They look around.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    Nothing!  You'd think after all these years   
                                    of searching, we'd have found some sign   
                                    of intelligent life.

                                                            MASTERSON  
                                    We've found abundant planet life throughout   
                                    the universe.  All kinds of plant life, insects....

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    But no intelligent life!  Doesn't that seem odd   
                                    to you?

                                                            MASTERSON  
                                    I guess that's just the way it is.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    There are unlimited worlds.  That means   
                                    unlimited possibilities.

                                                            MASTERSON  
                                    Maybe all the possibilities went wrong.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    Take this planet.  It seems a perfect candidate.    
                                    The atmosphere, gravitation, chemical composition,   
                                    all nearly identical to Earth!

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Lights

Sound

Rigging

Notes:

Flys SR

Floob

Kronkle

Hand

Boulder

Backdrop

Unnoticed by the Earth people, two hand puppets enter from behind the boulder.  The hand puppets are aliens named KRONKLE and FLOOB.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    Where is the awareness?  Where is the ability   
                                    to perceive and process information?  Is it too   
                                    much to ask why there is no intelligence?

                                                            KRONKLE  
                                    Maybe someone dropped you on your head as   
                                    a baby?

                                                            FLOOB  
                                    Yeah!   And that would explain the nose.

Jacobs and Masterson stare at the puppets.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    Who are you?

                                                            KRONKLE  
                                    I'm Kronkle.

                                                            FLOOB  
                                    I'm Floob.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    You look like hand puppets.

                                                            FLOOB  
                                    You say that like it's a bad thing!

                                                            KRONKLE  
                                    Praised be the Hand.

                                                            MASTERSON  
                                    They speak English!

                                                            KRONKLE  
                                    We don't speak.

                                                            FLOOB  
                                    You may have noticed our lips don't move.

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                                KRONKLE  
                                    You are hearing telepathy.  How did you think   
                                    I was speaking when my lips don't move?

                                                            FLOOB  
                                    Maybe he thinks you're a ventriloquist.

                                                            KRONKLE  
                                    And maybe he thinks you're the dummy.

Floob attacks Kronkle.  They fight.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    Who is operating you?

Floob and Kronkle cease fighting.

                                                            KRONKLE  
                                    The Hand of course.

                                                            FLOOB  
                                    Praised be the Hand.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    Show yourself.  Show yourself!!

Kronkle and Floob look at each other, then they look at Jacobs.  Then they hold out their little puppet arms and exclaim:

                                                            KRONKLE &  
                                                                    FLOOB  
                                    Ta-daaa!

Jacobs strides over to Kronkle.  He struggles with the hand puppet, pulls off the puppet, and reveals the hand underneath.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    Who are you?

He grips the hand and pulls on it.  At this point, unseen by the audience, the performer operating the puppets substitutes an artificial hand for the real hand that was operating Kronkle.  Jacobs pulls up the artificial hand and stares at it in amazement.  Floob looks away from the hand.

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FLOOB

The Hand will not communicate directly with lesser beings.  The Hand will only   
                                    communicate through us.  Praised be the   
                                    Hand.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    I don't understand.

                                                            FLOOB  
                                    Please put  Kronkle back together.    
                                    We consider it obscene to reveal the   
                                    Hand.

Jacobs puts the artificial hand back at the top of the rock and puts Kronkle back on it.  While he is doing this, the performer behind the rock substitutes his real hand for the artificial hand.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    Has this atmosphere been tested for   
                                    hallucinogens?

                                                            MASTERSON  
                                    Yes sir.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    This can't be real.

                                                            KRONKLE  
                                    Reality is what we perceive it to be.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    But the hand...  it's not possible!

                                                            FLOOB  
                                    Are you some kind of atheist?

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    How could life evolve like this?

                                                            FLOOB      
                                    We used to be like you, with legs, and nasty    
                                    parts below the waist

                                                            KRONKLE  
                                    But we noticed no matter what we did, it   
                                    never turned out exactly as we planned.

                                                       FLOOB  
                                    We could never achieved everything we set out   
                                    to achieve.

                                                            KRONKLE  
                                    It was as though some outside force was   
                                    controlling us.  As if some unseen hand   
                                    was guiding us.  We decided we might as   
                                    well submit to our fate...

                                                            FLOOB  
                                    And then when we looked down...  
                                    No more legs and nasty parts!

                                                            KRONKLE  
                                    We were hand puppets!

                                                            FLOOB  
                                    It explained everything!  And the truth   
                                    set us free!

                                                            KRONKLE  
                                    No it didn't.  The truth made us hand   
                                    puppets.

                                                            FLOOB  
                                    Well, that's a sort of freedom.

                                                            KRONKLE  
                                    No it isn't.  We're hand puppets!  We're   
                                    only free to do what the Hand lets us do.

                                                            FLOOB  
                                    The truth set us free to do whatever the Hand   
                                    lets us do.

                                                            KRONKLE  
                                    It lets you be an idiot.

Kronkle and Floob starting fighting.  Kronkle chases Floob off stage.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    This is insane.

MASTERSON  
                                   And yet, it makes a strange sort of sense.

   Haven't you always felt as though there   
                                    was something else controlling your destiny?

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    No.

                                                            MASTERSON  
                                    I have.  I've always felt that way.  All my   
                                    life.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    Go bring them back.  We need to scan them,   
                                    get some bio-readings.

                                                            MASTERSON  
                                    Yes, captain.

Masterson exits.   Jacobs prepares the equipment to take readings.  He waits a moment, then calls out impatiently:

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    Masterson!  What's taking you so long!

A HAND PUPPET MASTERSON comes up from behind the rock.

                                                            MASTERSON  
                                    Sorry, captain.  I looked everywhere.  I   
                                    couldn't find them.

                                                            JACOBS  
                                    Good Lord!

                                                            MASTERSON  
                                    It's as though something wouldn't let me find   
                                    them.  I'll keep trying, captain, but I can't   
                                    promise anything.  You win a few, you lose a   
                                    few.  It may be out of my hands..

The Masterson puppet exits.    Jacobs makes a choking sound of disbelief.

BLACKOUT!

THE END