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# LETTERS TO AN ALIEN

by

ROBERT CAISLEY



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(LETTERS TO AN ALIEN)

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**For Sher**

*LETTERS TO AN ALIEN* was written on commission from the Idaho Theatre for Youth, Boise, Idaho for their 1994-95 touring season. It was subsequently produced by Mad Horse Theatre Company, Portland, Maine.

Idaho Theatre Production

HANNAH .....*Anna Lisa Maldonado*  
POPS .....*Dan Peterson*  
KAYAK .....*Rusty Greene*  
KROEVNIK .....*Pat Sibley*

Directed by  
Scenery & Costume Design  
ITY Artistic Director

*Micheal Baltzell*  
*Michelle Ney*  
*David Lee-Painter*

# LETTERS TO AN ALIEN

A One Act Play  
For 2 Men and 2 Women  
(can be expanded to 6 men and 2 women)

## CHARACTERS

HANNAH ..... a young Jewish girl

POPS .....her grandfather

KAYAK ..... a Philostian

KROEVNIK ..... a Philostian

and...

NAZI GUARDS (played by KAYAK and KROEVNIK)

ELI (played by POPS)

BOY (played by KROEVNIK)

## SETTING:

The action of the play moves between Pops' painting studio in 1994 and Poland in 1943. The set should be simple, allowing for seamless transition between the scenes.

Scene One: Painting Hannah

Scene Two: Painting Aliens

Scene Three: Painting History

Scene Four: Painting The Future



## LETTERS TO AN ALIEN

*(Before the play begins, as the audience is being seated, we hear POPS quietly singing the Kaddish.)*

### SCENE ONE: Painting Hannah

*(POPS is painting HANNAH. She is playing a GameBoy, practically jumping off her stool. She is imitating the laser blasts and explosions as she destroys Alien invaders.)*

POPS. I give up. How d'you suppose I should paint your portrait with you dancing about like a fool, ha?

HANNAH. I don't even wanna be here, Pops.

POPS. You think I like this any more than you? Having you here? Disturbing my peace?

HANNAH. Disturbing your peace? I'm not the one going around the house singing those stupid songs.

POPS. Those stupid songs have a special meaning. You wouldn't understand. If your parents had taken the time to teach you, but no, no...they had to send you to me! I'm supposed to tell you something wise, something earth shattering, something...I don't know what I'm supposed to teach you.

HANNAH. Don't go out of your way for me. They had to practically bribe me to come.

POPS. Well, I'd hate to think you'd been sentenced to the horrors of visiting your grandfather without you get something good out of the deal.

HANNAH. I got this GameBoy.

POPS. Ha, a stupid video game? You kids today, all you do is watch TV, play those electronic games, little blue men running 'round inside your heads, Ninja Turtles karate chopping each other. What d'you know about anything?

HANNAH. You don't understand. You're old.

POPS. Y'know, you've really turned into a little monster since last time I saw you. What is that, growing up, are you? Keep still, you want to look cross-eyed?

HANNAH. Well, how long is this going to take?

POPS. And how'm I going to get your mouth right when you keep flapping it about talking? Ha?

HANNAH. Pops, I'm getting old just sitting here.

POPS. You can't rush a painting!

HANNAH. Well, can't you just sketch it in pencil or something and finish it later?

POPS. No.

HANNAH. Why not?

POPS. That's not the way art is created.

HANNAH. Well, I don't wanna be art, I wanna be a teenager.

POPS. What's happened...you used to enjoy this.

HANNAH. You've got me confused with somebody else. (*Speaking into the GameBoy.*) Somebody help me! My grandfather is killing me with boredom!

POPS. What are you doing?

HANNAH. Maybe someone will hear my cries! Help! Those little blue men inside my head, right? From outer space. Maybe they'd understand me.

POPS. Keep still, I'm losing my light.

HANNAH. Pops, pleaseeeeee!

POPS. Whaaaaaaaat?

HANNAH. I'm bored out of my skull.

POPS. What, life should be so thrilling every second of every day? Just be happy you're alive. You've got your health, food on the table, what worries does a girl your age...

HANNAH. Just forget it!

POPS. When I was your age...

HANNAH. What? When you were my age, what? Go on, I'm supposed to be learning something so valuable from you, go ahead, tell me something. See, you won't talk.

POPS. And you won't listen. Chin, chin! (*HANNAH sighs. After a beat.*) I can't work like this. All I want is a little peace and quiet so I can paint. I love to paint, I need to paint, but you could care less...you'd rather be playing that game, burning up your brain cells.

HANNAH. I'm a guest in your house, you could try to be nice.

POPS. You're no guest, you're an intruder, an invader. Ha! An Alien Invader!

HANNAH. Well, don't worry, I'm not staying for long.

POPS. Good.

HANNAH. I'm just visiting...

POPS. I hate visitors...

HANNAH. ...against my will.

POPS. ...they create chaos. I've worked very hard to find some peace in my life and now your parents throw everything into turmoil. Did I mention I hate turmoil? I hate cooking for other people. I hate having to talk when I don't want to talk. I hate noise. And I hate painting people who can't keep still. We have nothing in common. Nothing! (*They look at each other, a moment of silence.*) I'm going to clean my brushes. (*POPS leaves.*)

HANNAH. I hate it here. I hate my parents for making me come. And I hate my grandfather for being so strange. I don't understand him, he's so different. He's the kind of

Jew everyone makes fun of. He doesn't...blend in. I don't want to be like him. I don't want to be part of his world. (*Looking up.*) I'll escape. Up there. The Milky Way. Little people with blue skin. No school. No stupid friends. Up there, everyone's different, and nobody bothers you. (*She speaks into the GameBoy.*) Can anyone hear?

(*HANNAH begins to play the GameBoy, she remains seated on the stool. The ALIENS enter and immediately begin milling about the audience, greeting their fellow Philostians with the traditional greeting, "Zaloom," and perhaps a slight incline of the head, clicking together of heels, etc.*)

**BOTH ALIENS.** Zaloom! Zaloom! (*KAYAK and KROEVNIK move to C, straightening their uniforms. Very formal, very regimental.*)

**KAYAK.** Zaloom! Greetings, fellow Philostians. The Bureau of Information welcomes you. Zaloom!

**KROEVNIK.** Private First Class Kroevnik Molly, reporting for duty, sir!

**KAYAK.** Commander Kayak Alix, Third Division, Philostian Exploratory Unit. Attention! (*They click their heels together and pull out kazoos from inside breast pockets; they play a short-lived but rousing rendition of the surprisingly patriotic National Philostian Anthem. It warms their hearts. KROEVNIK sheds a sentimental tear. KAYAK nudges her.*) Our mission?

**KROEVNIK.** "To go beyond the boundaries of our world."

**KAYAK.** "To search, peruse and ponder, examine and explore."

**KROEVNIK.** —"new life forms, new intelligence, new civilizations"—

KAYAK “To...learn their ways...” (*Continued—simultaneously.*)

KROEVNIK. —“Learn their ways, study their customs, and appreciate them as a people,” blah, blah, blah.

KAYAK. “And to boldly go—”

KROEVNIK. “Where no one else would want to!” (*Big kazoo finish.*)

KAYAK. Current assignment: Earth.

KROEVNIK. The year: Nineteen hundred and ninety-four. (*A short kazoo blast followed by a moment of reverent silence.*) Cor, I love my job.

KAYAK. And your job loves you.

KROEVNIK. Zaloom!

KAYAK. Activate scan mode. (*They plug in their BrainBoys.*)

KROEVNIK. All systems on-line.

KAYAK. Accessing. (*KROEVNIK adjusts her BrainBoy by smacking it again and again. KAYAK looks frowningly upon her. He unplugs the BrainBoy from KROEVNIK's cranial port; an electronic pop is heard.*)

KROEVNIK. Owwww!

KAYAK. This is not a toy. This is a highly complex device.

Fellow Philostians, note the latest in information retrieval systems: the Comprehendo BrainBoy...

KROEVNIK. Ooooo! (*Displaying it with pride.*)

KAYAK. ...capable of accessing virtually any data on any subject. (*Back to KROEVNIK.*) Not a toy! (*The BrainBoy beeps.*) Look lively, there's work to be done. Responsibilities, deadlines.

KROEVNIK (*clicks her heels*). Yessir! I am looking *trés* lively, sir! (*She adjusts her BrainBoy; it issues forth a series of short whistles and beeps.*)

KAYAK. Fellow Philostians, take note. Our subject... (*KROEVNIK moves U to where HANNAH is still playing*)

*the video game. She wheels HANNAH D on the stool; HANNAH does not notice.)*

KROEVNIK. Inter-space transmission received.

KAYAK. Open channel.

KROEVNIK (*adjusts her BrainBoy*). Check.

HANNAH. \*Dear Alien: My name is Hannah Stern, and I'm miserable. My parents have banished me to my grandfather, Pops. What torture.

KROEVNIK (*quietly*). *Goysh Zervat: Keteem vay Hannah Stern... kin vay distra voo... di uneet ish kadsvolup... wing-wing sahvat dee Pops. Kool misk-vütt.*

KAYAK. Begin translation mode. (*The BrainBoy beeps.*)

HANNAH. I hate sitting still while he paints me. I hate his funny accent. I hate his crummy cooking. I hate his stupid songs, moaning about the house that way. Please come and rescue me before I turn into...I just hate being a Jew.

KAYAK. Life form: Human!

KROEVNIK. Check the BrainBoy.

KAYAK (*plugs in his BrainBoy; a popping and cracking noise. He adjusts the buttons*). File!

KROEVNIK. "Complete Guide To Other-Worldly Life Forms."

KAYAK. Access Code!

KROEVNIK. R2-D2-C3PO-WD-40.

KAYAK. Got it. Hit me. (*KROEVNIK does. KAYAK reels.*)  
The letter, Martian!

KROEVNIK. Don't get nasty!

KAYAK. Don't get smart! (*Pointing.*) The letter...what's the letter...?

KROEVNIK. Humans. H.

KAYAK. H. (*The BrainBoy beeps.*) A, B, C, D, E, F, G, zero in on...H!

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\* Simultaneously with KROEVNIK's Philostian translation.

KROEVNIK. Also known as Homo Sapiens.

KAYAK. Hadacians. Haji-fillipi. Hippopotami.

KROEVNIK. Getting warmer.

KAYAK. Hittiyugs. Hockey Night In Canada. Hokey-Pokey.  
Homo Sapiens. Got it.

KROEVNIK. Bingo.

KAYAK. Homo Sapien: The wise human. Habitat: Earth.  
Came into existence 200,000 years ago, but evidence suggests ancestral presence four to eight million years ago.  
(*Slight pause.*)

BOTH ALIENS. Kids! (*The ALIENS begin to laugh. A moment.*)

HANNAH. Is anybody listening?

BOTH ALIENS. Yes.

POPS (*off*). **Hannah!**

BOTH ALIENS (*simultaneously*). **Hannah!**

POPS (*off*). There's brushes to clean! Come help me! (*HANNAH draws a slight breath, looks at the sky, a moment passes. She exits.*)

KAYAK. We don't know how it happened.

KROEVNIK. A strange and unusual thing.

KAYAK. She knows of our existence.

KROEVNIK. Humans call it...imagination.

KAYAK. We have become part of her imagination.

KROEVNIK. Theory A: Hannah. H-A-N-N-A-H. The same if you spell it or say it or read it backwards. Kayak. K-A-Y-A-K.

KAYAK. I was the one who received the transmission.

KROEVNIK. Theory B: Hannah possesses an electronic device.

KAYAK. She calls it a GameBoy. Initial tests conclude it is for entertainment, escape. But somehow we're able to intercept her thoughts.

KROEVNIK. Theory C:...

KAYAK. We're still working on that one.

KROEVNIK. More information as it becomes available.  
*(They play a riff of their anthem on the kazoos and they are off. POPS' voice begins to meld with the sound of their anthem, taking us into the next scene.)*

### SCENE TWO: Painting Aliens

*(POPS enters alone, wearing a prayer shawl and a yarmulke. He has a cardboard tube in his hand. He crosses to C, kneels, opens the tube and pulls out several paintings. He unrolls them and lays them in front of him. He is chanting the Kaddish. After a moment, HANNAH enters. She is playing her video game. At first she hangs back and watches, then she enters scene, making no attempt to be quiet.)*

POPS. Yit-ga-dal ve-yit-ka-dash she-mei ra-ba be-al-ma di-ve-ra chi-re-u-tei, ve-yam-lich mal-chu-tei be-cha-yei-chon u-ve-yo-mei-chon u-ve-cha-yei de-chol beit Yis-ra-eil, ba-a-ga-la u-vi-ze-man ka-riv, ve-i-me-ru: a-mein.

HANNAH. Singing those stupid songs again, huh? Y'know, I could understand if they had a catchy tune, but they're so depressing. And you certainly can't dance to them.

POPS *(angry)*. Have a little respect, Hannah, for things you don't understand!

HANNAH. Jeez, I'm sorry. Don't get so angry.

POPS. Yes. Yes, I'm angry.

HANNAH *(suddenly notices that he's been crying, goes to him)*. Poppa, what's wrong?

POPS. Nothing. I'm fine.

HANNAH. You've been crying.

POPS. Ha, an old man cries and you think it's the end of the world?

HANNAH. I'm sorry, I didn't...

POPS (*sharp*). Come on, I said I was all right! What are you looking at?

HANNAH. Those paintings.

POPS. No, not for you to see. (*POPS quickly places them back in the cardboard tube.*)

HANNAH. What are they? Who painted them? They look so old, look how brown the edges are...

POPS. They are none of your business, do you understand?

HANNAH. What, are they that bad you don't want me to see them?

POPS. They belong to me. They're all I have...

HANNAH. What...?

POPS. Don't. (*HANNAH looks at him; he sighs. POPS sets the cardboard tube down somewhere U. HANNAH keeps looking at it. POPS goes back to his easel. He begins to mix some paint on the palette. A long silence; no one knows what to say.*) Please. Sit. (*HANNAH is still looking at POPS; she has not moved.*) I want to finish what I start, don't I? (*She takes her place on the stool.*)

HANNAH (*after a beat*). Pops, you really gotta learn to chill out.

POPS. No, no, I get pneumonia, that's it for me.

HANNAH. It's just a saying, Pops. Chill out. Cool it. Take it easy, dude.

POPS. Yeah, well, here's a little saying for you, dude: Sit, and don't spin. How'm I supposed to capture your beauty, Hannah, if you keep squirming about?

HANNAH. Beauty, that's a laugh. No one at school thinks I'm beautiful.

POPS. Trust me, you are a beautiful girl, you look just like my sister. You have her hair, same eyes. I don't know why I'm telling you this, it'll just go straight to your head.

HANNAH. Maybe if I believed it.

POPS. Believe it, she looked just like you. You were named after her. Hannah. Oh, she could get the attention of the boys, she...

HANNAH. Yeah, well not me. They hate me. They look at me and right *through* me at Elizabeth Johnson. She's got this long blonde hair and she swishes it, SWISH, all day. I hate the way I look. I hate my hair. I hate my eyes. I hate my whole face. And I really hate Elizabeth Johnson and her stupid, stupid...

POPS (*sharply*). Hey, I don't want to hear that, understand? I don't ever want to hear you say "hate." Please, Hannah. (*Pause.*)

HANNAH. I don't know why you wanna paint me. What are you gonna call it, "Feeding Time at the Zoo"?

POPS. Everybody's unhappy about the way they look. You grow out of it. It's your age.

HANNAH. No, it's my face.

POPS. Come on, Hannah. (*Beat.*)

HANNAH. This stool is too hard.

POPS. Don't move, you'll get a crooked nose.

HANNAH. It'd be an improvement.

POPS. You have to concentrate. Like in school. You'll never learn if you can't sit still and concentrate.

HANNAH. I don't care. I hate school. I hate my teachers, I hate everything about it.

POPS. Hannah, I told you. That word "hate," you don't understand how dangerous it is.

HANNAH. Well, I have to do this stupid assignment.

POPS. Oh, they're giving stupid assignments these days? Education isn't what it used to be.

HANNAH. I have to give a presentation.

POPS. About what?

HANNAH. That's what's so stupid. All they said was, "Discuss something that's important to you."

POPS. Well, that should be easy for you. Just show them your video game!

HANNAH. Very funny.

POPS. That's all you seem to care about.

HANNAH. It is not.

POPS. Then what? Ha?

HANNAH. Yeah, well, maybe I'll just talk about what a boring person you are.

POPS. Hey, that's a terrific idea. I could come down and speak to your class. Ya? Talk to them about art?

HANNAH (*almost too quickly*). No. No.

POPS. What's the matter?

HANNAH. Nothing...I...you don't have to do that. I'll think of something. (*Beat.*)

POPS. Tell me what you did today in school, ha?

HANNAH (*after a moment*). I learned my name is a palindrome.

POPS. A what? What are you telling me?

HANNAH. A palindrome. My name is a palindrome. It's exactly the same forward or backwards. H-A-N-N-A-H, H-A-N-N-A-H.

POPS. Ya, so's mine. Pops!

HANNAH. No, it isn't.

POPS. Ya, P-O-P-

HANNAH. "S." You're forgetting the "S." P-O-P-S. That's "Spop" backwards. It's not a palindrome.