

EXT. SMALL TEXAS TOWN NEAR THE BORDER OF MEXICO - DAY

It's the late 1970s. The colors are as saturated and yellowed as an old Polaroid. Hot summer winds blow dust around the bare ankles of KIDS IN JEAN SHORTS. They eagerly take bags of popcorn from a VENDOR near a small circus tent.

From inside this tent spill circus brass band notes and snare drum hits, as a yet unseen audience "oos" and "ahs."

Buttery popcorn in hand, these eager kids run into the tent displaying the banner "THE INTERSTELLAR CIRCUS." Outside are posters of the acts: "Ivan the Cat Master," "Toots Tiny & Fanni the Bearded Woman," "The Flying Cranes," "Cannonball Carlos," "Hernando 'El Cuchillo'," settling on "Giganto Steelballz vs. Slippery the Clown and BuBu the Cosmonaut Monkey."

Families pile into the tent, kids with sticky snow cones, and we follow them in.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - DAY

A knife lands squarely on the pink petals of a rose as they are gripped in the mouth of ESTRELLA, 42, a flamboyant target woman tied to a rotating wood platform painted like the moon.

The audience claps as she smiles, winking at the thrower of the knife, HECTOR MONTOYA, 43, (stagename HERNANDO "EL CUCHILLO") who bows to the full audience in this small tent. Hector is tall and proud, dressed like a Conquistador.

With much drama, Hector sets fire to the handle of one of his knives as the small circus band adds to the tension.

INT. "BACK STAGE" AREA OF CIRCUS TENT - DAY

As the sounds of the band continue, strongman GRIZO MONTOYA, 23 (stagename "GIGANTO STEELBALLZ") is getting oiled up by SIMON VADELTREE, 23, (stagename "SLIPPERY THE CLOWN"). Grizo wears a tiny silver bikini barely covering his strong body. Simon towers over 6 feet, dressed in a silver clown suit with a space theme. A small organ is strapped to his back.

On Simon's shoulder is BuBu, an organ-grinder's monkey, also dressed in a space-themed suit. He is just adorable.

BuBu passes Simon the body oil, and Simon lovingly spreads it on Grizo's biceps.

SIMON
I'm going to try something
different tonight.

Grizo gives him a worried look.

GRIZO
(in Mexican-Spanish
accent)
Keep it the same, sweetheart.

SIMON
It's the same every night. We're
artists. We have to push things,
surprise people, or we're dead.

Grizo still seems worried.

SIMON (CONT'D)
It'll be fine. Just follow my lead.

Applause sounds from offscreen.

RINGMASTER (O.S.)
Don't try that at home, kids. Our
next act will please your pickles.

Simon slips Grizo a sweet kiss on the cheek, and pats his
strong buttocks. Grizo "high-fives" BuBu as he heads to the
ring. Simon smiles. It's clear they both love this monkey.

Hector and Estrella appear from the ring. A COSTUMER attends
Estrella as Hector passes Grizo.

HECTOR
(in Spanish-subtitled)
Knock 'em dead, son.

Grizo nods in nervous excitement and leaves for the ring.

Hector grins, gives BuBu a treat from his pocket, but
otherwise ignores Simon.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - DAY

The RINGMASTER, 30s, of South Asian descent, clutches a
microphone under a spotlight.

RINGMASTER
(in Bengali accent)
And now, the amazing Giganto
Steelballz from Planet Amazon!

The lights open up as the audience applauds. Grizo emerges in character as an angry strongman and goes about bending metal bars and roaring.

GRIZO
 (as Giganto Steelballz)
 Which earthling dares challenge me,
 the great Giganto, to a dual of
 strength?

The circus band adds proper music to the spectacle. Kids in the audience gasp, their eyes opening as wide as daisies.

INT. "BACK STAGE" AREA OF CIRCUS TENT - DAY

Simon leans over to release BuBu to the ground near the ring.

SIMON
 Go get him, fella.

He whistles once and BuBu runs towards the ring. CARNIES and performers like CANON BALL CARLOS and TOOTS TINY linger in the back ground to watch with smiles.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - DAY

BuBu appears, much to the delight of the audience.

Grizo is in the middle of lifting heavy steel barrels over his head when he notices BuBu. As this is part of his act, he roars at the monkey, and starts to chase him off.

In the audience, the kids and their parents laugh to see this big strong man chasing a tiny monkey in a space suit around the ring, over the stack of barrels, the metal bars and dumbbells, until...

Simon appears as Slippery the organ-grinding clown, lugging his organ.

SIMON
 (as Slippery the Clown)
 Excuse me, sir, have you seen a
 little...

BuBu dashes from under the stack of barrels and Simon chases him around.

SIMON (CONT'D)
 Space monkey! Back to the ship!

Grizo tries to continue his act, lifting a dumbbell, but BuBu zips by, followed by Simon, nearly knocking Grizo over.

Flustered, Grizo begins to chase both Simon and BuBu around the ring.

SIMON (CONT'D)
 Sorry, so sorry, sir. You'll have
 to pardon the monkey.

Grizo roars as Simon and BuBu hide under a car. Grizo lifts the fender to reach for them. They duck away and Grizo chases them, Simon tripping over the dumbbells in his huge clown shoes.

The audience cannot get enough and the tent is full of the laughter of the young and old alike.

Finally, Grizo catches Simon and hoists him over his head. The audience gasps at this feat of strength. Simon beckons to BuBu who climbs up Grizo to rest on Simon's shoulder. The audience applauds.

Simon looks down to Grizo who glances up at him. Simon winks, whispers:

SIMON (CONT'D)
 Follow my lead.

GRIZO
 Simon, no.

Simon begins to carefully stand in Grizo's hands. Grizo struggles to balance, his face breaking out in sweat.

Simon is now standing in Grizo's hands and the audience applauds again. Simon whistles at BuBu who now climbs up Simon's extended arm to sit as the cherry on the top.

Simon grins but it's not enough. He now starts to lift one leg to do a crappy arabesque. Grizo's face is bright red, damp with oily sweat.

GRIZO (CONT'D)
 Simon!

Simon pays him no mind, and Grizo finally can hold it no longer. He moves as if dropping a dead weight, sending Simon and BuBu into the stack of steel barrels used as props.

As Simon hits them, the barrels fall over, rolling towards Grizo and knocking him flat on his back. He cries out in pain as he falls, a barrel running him over.

Audience members gasp, cover their mouths in shock, their eyes almost popping from their heads.

INT. "BACK STAGE" AREA OF CIRCUS TENT - DAY

Hector's face tightens in horror to the sound of crashing. The other performers and Estrella quickly come to his side to watch in shock.

INT. CIRCUS TENT - DAY

Dead silence as the last of the barrels stops moving, tapping like an eight ball against the side of the ring reading "The Interstellar Circus."

A TUBA PLAYER of the circus band stares in shock from the sidelines, his lips shining with spit.

In the audience, an OLD WOMAN blinks once, her brows knitted together like a tight rope.

A FATHER hides his YOUNG SON's face against his chest.

A LITTLE GIRL stares ahead, her hands clutching a cherry snowcone that drips red over her shiny black Sunday shoes.

In the spotlight, Simon stands like a spectre in the middle of the ring, crying. His big wet tears gather over the dark greasepaint of his fake clown tears.

Hector, the Ringmaster, Estrella, and the other performers rush to the tragedy in the ring.

Grizo lies pinned under a barrel which IVAN THE CAT TAMER and a member of the FLYING CRANES trapeze act remove with some effort. Grizo cries out in pain and Estrella rushes to him.

FANNI THE BEARDED WOMAN screams and points at something in the wreck of the barrels.

FANNI

BuBu!!

She hides her face against the Ringmaster who comforts her crying, a look of pain crossing over his own face.

Grizo looks up at Simon and they hold each other's stare. Somehow, they both know this is the last of their days in their beloved circus.