

DON'T FEED THE ANIMALS

A Play In Two Acts
Written by Jon Christie

18354 Collins St. #F
Tarzana, CA 91356

972-415-7274
jonmichael613@gmail.com

GRIZZ - 60s-70s. Caucasian Male. Grumpy, sickly old grizzly bear. His ticking clock fuels his "no shits given" demeanor. Patriarch of the zoo.

CHIP - 20s-30s. Caucasian Male. Paranoid, aggressive chimp. Embodies the phrase "chip on your shoulder." Has a soft spot for his sister Z but is poorly capable of showing it.

GIB - 30s. Male. Open Ethnicity. A carefree gibbon who can turn anything into a (really bad) joke. Serves as a confidante and mediator amongst his monkey roommates, though he is no exception to hidden secrets.

RAPH - 30s. Male. Open ethnicity. A depressed and suicidal giraffe. An artist and intellectual with zero social skills. Must be at least 6'3 in height.

ZENYA - 30s. African-American Female. Zebra whose blend of logic and sass leaves her without equal. Struggling to navigate new life without a herd. An eternal optimist.

SPIDER - 20s. Ethnically Ambiguous Male. Clever, mysterious South American primate. His quiet bravado supersedes his small stature. New mammal on the block. Bilingual skills a must.

Z - 20s. Caucasian Female. A picture of the All-American chimp. Loving and loyal, yet the male dominant zoo life has given her rough edges. Relishes time for self reflection.

SPIKE - 20s-30s. Hispanic Female. Pink-haired, punk rock horned lizard covered in piercings. Constantly living in survival mode. Slow to trust, but capable of lowering her spiky shield. Bilingual skills a must.

IGGY - 20s-30s. Hispanic Male or Female. Street smart iguana on the run after a human encounter cost him a limb. Aggressive to all who threaten the safety of his/her companion. A true provider. Spanish speakers only.

*Don't Feed The Animals is a bilingual play in English and Spanish. Words shown in *italics* will be performed in Spanish. *

ACT I

SCENE 1

The action takes place in a rundown zoo. Four cages are visible - the first cage, stage right, contains a tire swing and a couple sitting perches. In the cage next to it sits an easel upstage and a large mound in the middle. The next cage in line contains a large boulder which has a groove in the middle suitable for sitting. The final cage on the stage left side is completely barren. Bars separate the cages from one another. Towards the back of each cage is a round opening, presumably the means of delivering food to the animals, however the opening is gated shut.

Lights are low as an announcement comes on through the speakers. But due to the state of the zoo, static periodically interrupts the announcement.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

Welcome to...zoo...visit our kiosk at...to pick up your...so you can visit one of our many...exhibits. Remember these are wild...please be respectful of...

During the announcement, the zoo animals enter their respective cages. Only animal sounds are heard from the cages. But slowly, over time, the animal sounds fade out and are replaced with people talking. Simultaneously the human announcer's voice becomes unrecognizable, ALIEN. Finally the announcement ends. Lights rise on our animals. In the monkey cage (stage right), Gib sits in the middle of the floor with playing cards, Spider stands in a corner, Z argues with Chip as he paces in front of the food gate.

One cage over, Zenya waits next to her tube. Raph stands in front of his easel. Grizz sits in his "chair." The animals all shout over one another.

CHIP

(To the sky; simultaneous)

You think I don't know what you're doin'? You think I've got shit for brains? Well I'm smarter than I look assholes! I know how this shit works! Now give us our food! We're starvin' here!

Z

(To Chip; simultaneous)

They're not gonna feed us if you piss them off Chip. You're so annoying! Idiot they can't understand you. Would you just shut up please? I'm telling you they'll feed us.

ZENYA

(To Raph; simultaneous)

Could you take a second to not stare off into that whiteboard? We have a bit of a situation here. Okay I'm gonna need you to care a little bit more about the fact that we might not get any food today.

RAPH

(To Zenya; simultaneous)

No I am creating. It is not a whiteboard, it is a canvas. There is no point in becoming perturbed with the current state of affairs, and I for one have no interest in joining this hysteria.

GIB

Hey hey hey!

Gib whistles. The animals quiet down.

GIB

Zoo family. Inhale. Exhale. Channel your inner penguin and chill.

Grizz coughs.

CHIP

(To the sky.)

I can tell time fuckheads! Sun's next to the noise box! When the sun's next to the noise box, we eat! That's the deal!

Z

The Keeper knows where the sun is. You're not helping-

CHIP

(To the sky.)

But hey, if your goal is to starve us to death, why wait! Come out here and shoot us and get it over with!

RAPH

Now I second that notion. T'would put us all out of our misery.

ZENYA

(To Chip.)

Could you not feed his imagination? I have to live with him.

RAPH

Not my decision, I assure you.

CHIP

(To the sky.)

Come on ya cockroaches! Mammal up and show your ugly faces! I'll take you all on!

Z

Why does every day have to be a battlefield with you Chip? They'll feed us. They always do.

CHIP

So what, just cause they got a decent track record we can go on cruise control the rest of our lives? Maybe you all forgot how this shit works. We're here for them. We live for their amusement, full bellies or not. Maybe they're bored and wanna find a new way to make us squirm. Maybe they're gonna skip a couple days, couple weeks even, to see if one of us cracks. Maybe we'll eat other.

ZENYA

Oh for heaven's sake.

GIB

Come on Chip...

CHIP

(To the sky.)

Is that it? Are we not entertaining enough for you? You want us to sing for our supper? Well how do you like this tune? Up yours dickmunchers!

GRIZZ

You know all your screamin' is startin' to piss me off.

CHIP

Mind your own business old timer!

GRIZZ

You're an entitled piece of shit with opposable thumbs. The Keeper isn't the only one who wants to watch you suffer. I hope they don't feed us.

CHIP

Why you fat, crotch-lickin' teddy fucker! If I could slip through these bars I'd-

GRIZZ

You'd what? Kill me?

Grizz laughs hard which causes him to cough. Chip fumes but says nothing. He grapples aggressively with the bars before continuing to pace.

RAPH

Grizz, you should drink some water.

GRIZZ

I don't need to do shit.

SPIDER

(Looking out at the audience.)
They're just...staring at us.

GIB

Yep. That's what humans do. They're master starers.

ZENYA

They stare every day. And smile. And point.

SPIDER

That young has been staring at me a long time. It's weirding me out.

ZENYA

And their light screens... They keep flashing their light screens at us. Why do they do that?

RAPH

You'll grow accustomed. They are nothing more than faint, angular blurs to me now.

SPIDER

He's still staring at me. Stop it! Stop staring at me! Don't you have anything better to do?

CHIP

Hey shut up!

GIB

Chip cut him some slack. He's new.

CHIP

No fuck that first day jitters crap. You better get it together Spunky before I give The Keeper the show he's after and eat your sorry ass.

Z

The Keeper will feed us.

SPIDER

(To Chip.)

What, you're the only one allowed to have a freak out around here?

CHIP

You bet your fuckin' prehensile tail I am.

Z

That's enough Chip.

SPIDER

I'm not afraid of you.

CHIP

Worst mistake of your life.

SPIDER

Not even close.

A loud buzzer goes off.
The metal gates open and
food slides into the cages.
The metal gates close
behind.

ZENYA

Oh thank goodness!

Zenya reaches in and pulls
out vegetables. The monkeys
reach in pulling out
bananas. Chip and Spider
rise up fighting over a
banana.

CHIP

You really have a fuckin' death wish don't ya?

SPIDER

Hey! I'm just trying to eat.

CHIP

One thing you're gonna learn in here is first don't matter. Size matters!

Chip throws Spider across
the cage. Chip moves to a
corner and digs into his
meal.

Spider is slow to get up.
Gib hops over and hands
Spider his banana.

GIB

Here ya go. I'm sure I've got some berries stashed away somewhere.

SPIDER

Thanks...

GIB

First flight's always the roughest. I remember the first time
Chip tossed me across the cage. Felt like a baby robin falling
out of its nest...then splatting on the ground breaking all its
ribs.

Gib smiles at the memory
and leaves Spider, who is
now completely unnerved.

Zenya sits on the mound
eating lettuce and carrots.

ZENYA

You need to eat something Raph.

RAPH

Unless that lettuce is laced with arsenic I am not hungry at this
time.

ZENYA

Can we please have one day where you don't go suicidal on me?

RAPH

That would require me to experience a sense of hope I have never
known. So I wouldn't hold your breath.

(Beat.)

Holding your breath. Now there's a thought.

Zenya crosses to Raph.

ZENYA

Look, this is the only food we're getting and you haven't so much
as licked a crumb in three days. You may have already started
digging your grave but we zebras need a herd and right now you're
the only herd I have! So eat damn it!

Zenya holds out some
vegetables in front of
Raph.

RAPH

A herd requires a large number of the same animal species. We
are not a large number, nor are we the same species; therefore
your argument holds no weight on whether I eat or not.

Zenya angrily throws the
vegetables at Raph.

ZENYA

Fine! Go ahead and starve.

She crosses back to the
mound.

RAPH

That was already my current course of action.

GRIZZ

Raph, eat your supper.

RAPH

Grizz I am not hungry. I will not eat-

Grizz stands. Raph cowers.

GRIZZ

I said eat your supper.

Raph picks the vegetables
up off the ground.

RAPH

Alright. Perhaps I'll get lucky and choke on a broccoli stem.

ZENYA

(To Grizz.)

Thank you.

GRIZZ

Raph's always been a picky eater. You just gotta learn how to
talk to him.

Grizz coughs lightly and
sits back in his chair.

ZENYA

Aren't you going to eat your dinner?

GRIZZ

I'll eat it when I eat it. I'm not in any hurry for more fruit and berry shit.

Zenya spies Grizz's food.

ZENYA

Looks like you got salmon today. You like salmon right?

GRIZZ

Salmon... Yeah... Yeah I'll get to it.

Zenya resumes eating her meal. The monkeys are now sitting down in the center of their cage playing cards. Chip, Z, Gib, and Spider sit from left to right. They pass around a bowl of nuts as they play.

SPIDER

So this is it? We just sit here and play cards?

GIB

No. We also eat nuts.

SPIDER

I just figured we would have to, I don't know, put on a show or something.

CHIP

There's no song and dances Spunky. It's us here, and them there. That's it.

SPIDER

My name is Spider.

CHIP

Like I give a shit. For fuck's sake Z, do something!

Z

I'm thinking!

CHIP

You think too much! Just play!

Z

Fine!

Z throws two cards in the center. Gib deals her two fresh ones.

GIB
You know, I've been working on some new material-

CHIP
No. Z
No.

GIB
(Laughs.)
You guys are a hoot. Much like the owl in my joke.

Chip and Z groan.

GIB
Okay here goes. What is an owl's favorite joke?

Chip and Z don't respond.

SPIDER
What?

GIB
A knock knock joke!

Long beat.

Z
Don't say-

SPIDER
I don't get it.

Chip and Z groan.

GIB
Ah, my new cage companion. I was hoping you'd say that. Allow me to explain. Knock knock.

SPIDER
Who's there?

GIB
Hoo.

SPIDER
Hoo who?

Gib starts laughing uncontrollably.

CHIP
(To Spider.)
You really are a schmuck, you know that?

Z

It's not funny Gib.

GIB

Then why am I laughing so hard?

Z

That's animally insensitive. Owls don't say "hoo."

GIB

How would you know? Do you speak bird?

CHIP

You know just when I think your jokes couldn't get any more dumbo-

GIB

Oh now look who's being animally insensitive.

SPIDER

So where's everyone else?

The group gets silent.

CHIP

You're lookin' at 'em.

SPIDER

Really? The size of this cage, the size of that tree, our giant watering hole, you're tellin' me there's no one-

CHIP

Hey! Gib found himself here as a solo act. Then me and Z made it a trio. There was no one here before, and there's been no one here since. Until you.

SPIDER

Guess that makes us a quartet then, huh?

CHIP

Wrong. It makes you expendable.

SPIDER

Hey I don't want me in here either. I'm more than happy to switch rooms.

(Gestures to the empty cage.)

Looks like no one's taking up that one. I'll put in a transfer request to this Keeper guy.

The monkeys grow silent
again. Grizz's ears perk
up.

Z

That cage wasn't always empty.

CHIP

Z, don't.

Z

What? We're just never gonna talk about him again? Blake was a huge part of our lives. We can't just act like-

Grizz abruptly stands from his chair and crosses to exit. On his way out, he reaches into his opening, grabs the salmon and chucks it at the wall. It splats and falls to the ground. Silence.

GIB

A toucan, a parrot and a flamingo fly into a bar-

Chip smacks Gib behind the head.

CHIP

Enough with the birds Gib. Bet's yours Z. Try not to take forever this time.

The monkeys try to resume their game.

ZENYA

I never got to meet Blake...

RAPH

Regretful... He and Grizz were very close, cage bars notwithstanding.

ZENYA

That's awful... There's gotta be something we can do.

RAPH

There is nothing to be done for Grizz other than allow him privacy. There is however something you can do for me.

Raph crosses to the mound and places a rock next to Zenya.

ZENYA

You have got to be kidding me. No!

RAPH

You were all too eager to provide assistance with Grizz's afflictions. Why do you withhold assistance with mine?

ZENYA

Because all this will do is give you a bump on the head and a migraine.

RAPH

Untrue. If you wield it with enough force it will-

ZENYA

Forget it! I'm not going to help kill you!

RAPH

That is a tad dramatic. Killing me would only be a possible side effect. Albeit a welcomed one. No, I need you to help me meet my subconscious.

ZENYA

Your subconscious?

RAPH

Precisely. Artistic inspiration lies inside one's subconscious. A manufactured near death experience is the only way for me to learn what I should be creating.

Raph crosses back to his
easel. Zenya follows.

RAPH

I paint religiously every day, in my mind's eye. But none of my conscious ideas are worth relaying to the canvas. I must go deeper.

ZENYA

Sounds like procrastination to me. Why don't you just start painting and see what happens?

RAPH

See what happens... If you inspect our surroundings you will notice that we do not have an abundance of resources at our disposal. This canvas is the only one I will ever have in my possession and I will not squander its solitary use to "see what happens."

ZENYA

Well in the two months I've been here I haven't seen you so much as pick up a brush. I bet you don't even know how to paint.

RAPH

Instead of questioning my artistic abilities, I would urge you to be more productive with your time. However since you already refused my granite suggestion, I'll empower you to astonish me with a task of your choosing.

ZENYA

Well if you inspect your surroundings you'll notice that I'm not your personal servant. And if I was going to surprise you with anything, it would be taking your "granite suggestion" and shoving it up your subconscious. Have fun mind painting.

Zenya exits.

RAPH

What a crude idea. At least my violence is tasteful.

Raph resumes staring at the canvas. Back in the monkey cage, Chip spots something out in the audience. He suddenly ducks as if something was thrown at him. He rises, poised to attack.

CHIP

Hey! Hey I saw that! I know it was you, you little shit! Come in here and we'll see how tough you really are!

Gib crosses to Chip.

GIB

Relax big guy. Let it go.

CHIP

Why should I let it go? I'm not the one playin' dodgeball with rocks!

GIB

He's just a young. He doesn't know any better.

CHIP

Well he should! You all should! Wake up! We're not just stupid monkeys in here!

GIB

Come back to the game Chip. Come on.

CHIP

Bunch'a blind jizzdicks!

Gib and Chip sit back down.

GIB

Digging deep into the curse library I see.

SPIDER

Does this happen a lot?

Z

Sure. Young around here keep you on your toes.

GIB

Eh it's not so bad. It's a good workout for the reflexes.

CHIP

No don't do that. Don't downplay. Don't joke around. This is terrible. Everything about this fucking hellhole is terrible.

Z

Chip can we not-

CHIP

No, Gib I don't understand how you can be so carefree about our situation. We sleep in a dying tree with two fuckin' branches. The place smells like a wildebeest's asshole-

SPIDER

These nuts taste like tree bark.

GIB

You know some consider bark to be a delicacy.

CHIP

This is a place where the sun don't shine Gib. So what is it? Where's that ray of sunshine you're graspin' onto?

GIB

Chip you see these bars as a prison. I see a home where I don't have to worry about a metal monster smushing me like a cockroach.

Z

Life should be about more than just surviving. I'll take the metal monsters.

GIB

I don't think you're giving surviving enough credit. Life is hard out there for everyone, including humans. It doesn't matter where we land on the evolutionary chain.

Chip stands.

CHIP

It matters Gib! It fuckin' matters! Look at us! This is what second place looks like! We're trophies! Just another doll on the shelf for the humans to show off to their stupid friends. And you know that's the part that really pisses me off.

(Faces the audience.)

These humans are so fuckin' stupid! They're helpless without their little lightscreens tellin' 'em what to do. You think you're so smart with your fancy screens and shooters, well you're not! Any moron can do what you do, pound some buttons, blow stuff up.

(MORE)

CHIP (CONT'D)

So who died and made you top shelf huh? What makes you better than us?!

GIB

Their screens and shooters do.

(Gib deals out the cards.)

There's no sense obsessing about it Chip. All we can do is play the hand we're dealt and make the best of it.

CHIP

Well I'd rather flip the table than play a rigged game.

Chip exits in a huff.

Beat. Z stands and exits.

Spider glances at his cards.

SPIDER

I had a good hand too.

Gib starts collecting the cards. Grizz reenters, still seething.

SPIDER

Grizz, right? Look I'm sorry about the whole cage thing. I didn't know-

GRIZZ

You think you're safe from me in there? Do you? I may be a walking fossil but maybe my breakout's just been lacking the right motivation. So keep talking monkey. Motivate me.

Spider slowly rises before bolting for the exit.

GIB

You crack me up. You can barely get off that rock in your condition.

GRIZZ

Fuck off. He doesn't need to know that.

Gib chuckles. He finishes gathering the cards and exits. Grizz coughs heavily and sits in his chair.

RAPH

I've noticed your cough is more persistent today.

GRIZZ

That's typically how these things go.

RAPH

How I envy you Grizz. To finally escape this darkness.

GRIZZ

I wouldn't call death an escape. More like a change of address.

RAPH

Oh no, you're mistaken. Death is the ultimate escape. Outside the zoo we would still face limitations from humans and their metal, not to mention an ever-eroding Mother Earth. But death... Death dodges the sharpest of teeth, protects from the harshest of suns. Death is freedom. Freedom from life. Freedom from pain...

GRIZZ

Oh shut up. I don't need you makin' death out to be some fuckin' reward. Dying sucks. And you would know if you had the balls to walk the talk and off yourself.

RAPH

There is a certain honor in a natural death such as yours. Manufactured death is barbaric unless it can be done artfully, with purpose. I'm still discovering how best to satisfy that condition.

GRIZZ

Bullshit. You just don't have the guts.

Raph does not reply.

GRIZZ

All this talk of meaningless life, artful death. It's ignorant. Childish! Your mother wouldn't have tolerated it.

RAPH

...is that so? Well. I'm sorry to disappoint the both of you. But at least we can take comfort in knowing mother wasn't here to bear witness to my shortcomings.

Beat. Grizz stands.

GRIZZ

You ungrateful little shit. That beautiful giraffe gave up everything so that you could have this life!

RAPH

Well I didn't ask for this life! I didn't ask to be born into a lifetime of bondage, to go day after day stomping on my footprints and eating human leftovers! All these years living the same day, enduring the same turmoil-

GRIZZ

Remember who you're talking to Raph!

Beat.

RAPH

It's just hard Grizz. It's hard...

GRIZZ

I know it is. It's not easy living here alone. But last I checked, you weren't alone anymore.

RAPH

(Laughs.)

Your condition must be making you delusional. Zenya is insufferable. She's stubborn, antagonistic-

GRIZZ

Well then I guess that makes the two of you a perfect match.

RAPH

Touche I suppose. But your notion has one primary flaw. Zenya wants nothing to do with me. She is trapped with me.

GRIZZ

Doesn't have to be that way if you'd lay off the death topic. Try talking to her like a well-adjusted mammal. Maybe she'll find something she likes underneath all that cynical bullshit.

Zenya runs onstage, now
wearing workout clothes.
She makes a lap around the
cage. Raph watches her.
Zenya exits. Grizz gestures
for Raph to "go on."

RAPH

You wish for me to engage now?

GRIZZ

(Sighs.)

Yes. Engage now.

RAPH

She was moving at quite a rapid pace.

GRIZZ

Then give her a reason to stop.

Zenya reenters and makes
another lap of the cage.
Raph steps in front of
her. She stops. Silence.

ZENYA

What are you doing?

RAPH

I don't know.

ZENYA

Can you "I don't know" somewhere else?

Zenya gestures for Raph to
move aside. He obliges.
Zenya runs offstage. Grizz
face palms.

RAPH

Your instructions are inadequate. I require further assistance.

GRIZZ

Use your words! Damn it, you got a billion of 'em in that head
of yours. Pick one!

RAPH

One billion is quite an exaggeration. However your point has
been made. I will try again.

Once again Zenya enters
and laps the cage, and
once again Raph blocks her
path.

ZENYA

Raph, I'm about to just run you over. What do you want now?

RAPH

Zenya. Hello.

ZENYA

...hello.

RAPH

What is up?

ZENYA

Excuse me?

RAPH

What is up? What is new? What is the word?

ZENYA

Yeah... Okay. Well the sky is up. This conversation is new.
And the word is uncomfortable.

RAPH

Why do you insist on being so obtuse?

ZENYA

Because I don't know what's going on right now!

RAPH

It seems perfectly apparent that I am beginning a verbal social interaction.

ZENYA

Not as apparent as you think. Raph have you ever started a casual discussion with another creature before?

Raph starts to speak, but then stops himself. Zenya shakes her head.

ZENYA

I can't believe I have to hold your hoof through a conversation. One usually has a reason to start a dialogue, a topic or a question.

RAPH

Ah yes, specificity. Well within my capability. Allow me to try again.

(Clears throat.)

Say Zenya, how do you fantasize meeting your ultimate demise?

Grizz smacks his forehead.

ZENYA

Are you kidding me?

RAPH

What? I am doing precisely as you proposed.

ZENYA

You're supposed to ask things like my favorite color, not ask me how I want to die!

RAPH

It seemed a natural place to start. Besides, I wouldn't think to ask what your favorite color is as it appears fairly obvious.

Beat.

ZENYA

And how, praytell, is it obvious?

RAPH

I mean...it's... It's self-explanatory.

ZENYA

Explain it to me.

Beat.

RAPH

I'd rather not.