



Bigfoot

by Zeke Jarvis

[Home](#)

[Spring-Summer 2013](#)

[Winter-Spring 2013](#)

[Fall-Winter 2012-2013](#)

[Summer-Fall 2012](#)

[Spring-Summer 2012](#)

[Winter-Spring 2012](#)

[Autumn/Winter 2011-12](#)

[Summer 2011](#)

[Winter/Spring 2011](#)

[Autumn/Winter 2011](#)

[Summer 2010](#)

[Spring 2010](#)

[Winter 2010](#)

[Autumn 2009](#)

[Summer 2009](#)

[Spring 2009](#)

[Autumn 2008](#)

[Summer 2008](#)

[Spring/Summer 2008](#)

[Winter/Spring 2008](#)

[Editor's Note](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[Contact](#)

Alex was sitting in a folding chair and whistling, which was always murder on Drew's headaches. Whistling was better than listening to him talk about the need for a vegetarian UFC champ, but not that much. Even worse, he was doing some kind of remix of an old-school punk song. Drew couldn't tell what song or group it was, but he did know that meant Alex would probably be fucking with him all day. At least Alex was stuffed up enough today to need a pause now and then. Still, it was looking like a long day; there were still a big chunk of petition sheets to get on the clipboards for the demonstration. That was because they'd knocked off early last night to go catch a show. Some local band Emily had heard of. Drew couldn't remember who exactly, but it was one of those bands with a swear word in their name, and the swear word was a gerund. Emily loved those kinds of bands.

Drew had wanted to go out and do something about the Bigfoot situation, but Emily said they couldn't really do anything that night anyway, and she wasn't going to stick around getting bogus information from the mainstream media all night. She was right. Even the blogs were all over the place with weird information and claims. There were dozens of reports that Bigfoot was dead, over ten that Bigfoot was an alien, and even a few weirder ones, like that someone was making an anti-cancer drug from Bigfoot's droppings or that he would only eat live chickens. Still, the whole night, all Drew could think about was that sad look from Bigfoot. It was the only footage that'd been released to the public, and it was everywhere. Lady Gaga had already announced that she'd be working it into her next video.

Drew would've already been done with the pre-rally chores if he weren't so depressed from the footage and hungover from the previous night. Emily didn't seem hungover at all. "I think," said Drew, "that we should just ask for immediate release. If he's kept in captivity, then just like any other animal, any other being —"

"Drew," said Emily, crossing her legs, "did you hear for sure what the gender of the Bigfoot is yet?" Emily was working on the signs while Alex was basically just sitting at the card table by the window. Emily's art was getting better all the time.

Drew's mouth twitched. He looked down at the petition sheets. "Sorry. I meant 'he or she.'"

Alex leaned back on the feet of his chair. "Immediate release, huh?" Maybe he'd been thinking about the layout for tomorrow's demonstration or about animal release in general, but Drew doubted it.

"Well, it's just that if we're already against zoos. Where they have him has to be way worse than a zoo. Maybe worse than a cosmetics-testing lab. Right?" Drew knuckled his temple. "Probably worse, I bet."

Emily drew a few squiggles in the air. She'd been trying to incorporate more primitive art into her protests lately. Drew couldn't remember if she'd said that was trying to be more in tune with the planet or if she was gunning for an NEA grant. Maybe both. "Yeah. But if we focus on springing just Bigfoot rather than

zoo animals in general, then people will say that we're anthropocentric, that we're focusing our efforts on the most human animal we can find, because, deep down, we think humans are the highest form of animal just like most people do."

Alex let his front legs drop onto the floor. He did this Charlie Chaplin thing where he pretended to look as surprised as anyone. Or maybe it was a Buster Keaton thing. Drew really didn't know many silent actors. Alex seemed to know them, though Drew thought he knew them just enough to appear cool. Emily shrugged at Drew and giggled, then went back to drawing on her posters. Drew wished he'd smoked pot last night instead of drinking, but Bigfoot's eyes had just been a drunk kind of a sad.

"Maybe," Drew said, "but we could pull people in with Bigfoot who might not support other animal causes. Besides, a lot of us helped out on the Mumia campaign, and that didn't compromise our animal-rights principles."

"Yeah, and Bigfoot didn't even murder anybody," said Alex.

Emily's giggles turned to a frown. "Mumia didn't kill anyone, except maybe in self-defense. And, Drew, the point isn't whether or not our principles are compromised. We have to be mindful of our public image. How our actions make people think of our activism *and* our cause." Emily was wearing a shirt that she'd scratched a little and reworked to say Fugazi, but Drew couldn't tell what it had originally said.

Alex stood up and pulled out a handkerchief. It was one of those blue, mass-produced hankies that made Drew think of redneck factory workers. "You know," Alex said. "Even if they *do* release Bigfoot, Bigfoot'll never actually be free." Alex laughed and shook his head. "There'll be 24-hour-a-day coverage for as long as someone can get ratings or some kind of merchandising income."

"And there could be poachers," said Emily.

"Poachers?" Alex blew his nose while he went to the window. "Bigfoot will be monitored way too closely to get knocked off by some nutjob looking to get on the cover of *Guns & Ammo*."

Emily took the cap off a new marker. They'd tried to buy some eco-friendly art supplies, but the posters would smear on the way to the rallies, so they'd gone back to the mass produced stuff, even though they all felt like jerks buying it. "Alive or dead, someone would probably say it'd make great television."

Drew let the hinge on the clipboard snap shut. He thought of that sad Bigfoot on TV and imagined him or her crying as he or she bled to death. Then he tried to remember how *Harry and the Hendersons* had ended. It made him wonder why John Lithgow had done that movie. He'd been so good in *The Emerald Jungle*. "The FOX Network would air a special," he said.

That got a little chuckle from all three. "Nike would sponsor it," said Emily. She drew a swoosh in the air. "Big shoes for big feet."

Alex unfolded his hankie, looked at it, and walked back to the table. "Well, if they give Bigfoot a show and the ratings fell, then maybe they *would* let the Nuge have a crack at him."

As they finished laughing, Drew started loading clipboards into the box to bring

to the protest. “Really, though. Bigfoot. Isn’t it crazy?”

“I thought it was a hoax,” said Emily.

Alex sat down and wiped his upper lip. He didn’t put the hankie back in his pocket. “I thought I’d tuned in to an *Onion* radio broadcast at first. No shit. I almost pissed my pants when I figured out it was true.” He just laid the hankie on his leg. Hankies were a little more environmentally friendly than tissues, but Drew still thought they were gross. The planet was the most important thing, but it seemed to him that there should’ve been some happy medium between eco-friendliness and taking care of Alex’s seasonal allergies.

Drew said, “I heard this group in the Midwest is trying to appropriate ‘beast’ like the gay people did for ‘queer’. They’re trying to make porn based on rutting movements.”

“Porn is bad, period,” said Emily. “And beasts bite your head off for no good reason.”

Alex snorted. “So do liberal chicks if you don’t listen to their poetry.”

Emily slid the marker in her hand so that she was holding it like a knife. “Fuck you; I may be an artist, but I *don’t* write poetry. And ‘beast’ creates a certain idea in people’s minds that animals, especially neglected animals, don’t need.”

Drew wiped his forehead with his wrist; every time he got hungover, he would sweat like only a human could. “Do you want some of that wine we picked up during the alpaca protest?”

This led them to both look over at Alex. He held up his hands and shrugged. “I told you guys before, you don’t have to check with me every time. Just chill out and I’ll be fine.”

“We know,” said Emily. “We just want to be sensitive.”

“You rub my face in it a lot more by asking me than if you’d just get plowed like you’re supposed to.” After a few seconds of quiet, Alex finished, “Hey, we’re supposed to be *advocating* rights, not suppressing them, right?” He grinned.

Emily got up from the table. “I’ll go get us some wine. Alex, want coffee?”

He looked toward the window in the front of the headquarters. Drew waited for him to pitch some new sign for their headquarters, something involving violence, lesbians or both. “Sure,” was all that he said.

As Emily went into the back room for coffee and wine, Drew went over to the supply cupboard and grabbed three mugs. One of them had a dead bug in it. Drew frowned and blew the little body out of it. It knocked against the side of the cup and flew out onto the floor. He wiped the inside of the cup with his finger. When he turned back, Alex was looking at him. Drew smiled and gave him a mug that hadn’t had anything in it. “You know,” said Alex, “Emily isn’t as interested in me as you think she is.”

Drew took his and Emily’s mug back to the table where she’d been working. He kept the bug mug for himself. “Oh.”

“Just thought you might want to know that.”

Drew put a large rubber band around several of the full clipboards, making sure that each clipboard alternated back and forth to conserve space. Alex leaned back in his chair again, but this time he let it down slowly. Drew could feel his face getting hot. Sweat was starting to drip. “You really think that you and Em hooking up is going to make a difference in the cause as a whole?”

Drew let the end of his clipboard clank down on the table. His head was throbbing. “Alex,” he said. “The fact that we act is predicated on the idea that each individual *can* make a difference to the whole. It might be a small difference, but it matters, and if things didn’t work out, then it’s entirely possible that we might not be able to work together. What if the cause loses a great artist like her?”

Alex shook his head. “Sometimes you think too much, man. A little fucking might renew enthusiasm for the cause.”

Drew dropped the clipboard. Before he could do anything other than pick it up, Emily walked back in with an open bottle of wine. “Coffee’ll be up in a minute, Alex.”

“No hurry,” said Alex. He looked back towards the window. Drew held up his mug for Emily to pour in the wine. He waited for the mug to get more than half full before saying “when.” As Emily picked up her mug and went back to her posters, Drew held the mug up to his nose. The wine smelled tart. He looked at the mug. It had a picture of Mickey Mouse on it, and Drew wondered where they’d gotten it from. “It’s good,” he said, before trying any of the wine. When he did take a sip, that little hair of the dog made him feel pleasantly warm instead of just hot. He wondered if Bigfoot ingested any kind of intoxicant. It wasn’t a purely human practice.

Emily took a sip of her wine. “It’s all right.” She held her mug in the air, away from her, as she kept doodling on the poster. She tilted her head. Her neck looked long and elegant. Like something that you’d touch lightly to feel it without leaving a mark. “Maybe,” said Drew, “we should focus on getting them to feed Bigfoot a vegetarian diet. I mean, if Bigfoot’s system can handle it, and if Bigfoot’s close to human in biology than it should be okay, and when the being flourishes with a vegetarian diet it could be big.”

“I’m telling you,” said Alex, “You get one UFC fighter to be veg while holding a belt, and every fratboy in America will leave meat behind.”

“Yeah,” said Emily, “that’s our demographic.”

Alex started to rotate his hips. “Don’t you want to save some animals?”

Emily looked up from her sign. “Maybe Bigfoot already is an herbivore. It’s not so uncommon for primates. Have either of you heard any announcements about dietary findings?”

Drew frowned. He wondered if Emily and Alex had ever fucked. Alex said, “You’d sure think somebody would be on that. They have to be monitoring what the big thing’s eating fairly carefully. Can you imagine the explosion that would happen if they captured Bigfoot and ended up killing the poor fucker?”

Drew shook his head. It chilled him to even think of that as possible. Emily set

her mug down quickly and a bit loudly. Drew worried that she'd stain her poster. "Although, think of how much it would strengthen our argument against zoos and captivity in general if Bigfoot *did* die in captivity."

"You want Bigfoot to die?" asked Alex. "You really think there's something good about a living creature dying?"

Emily looked down at her poster. "Of course not. I wish every living being well. But, maybe if Bigfoot just got sick or something. Then when they released Bigfoot back into the wild..."

After a brief silence, Alex stood up. "I'll go check the coffee."

After he left, Emily looked over to Drew. "You understand what I'm saying, don't you?"

"Just a second," Drew said. He was counting his stack of petitions for the third time. He thought about that sad face Bigfoot had made, and he hoped that Bigfoot didn't die. It would be a tragedy if a great creature died only to end up as backdrop to Lady Gaga for a national tour. Drew had always imagined Bigfoot as being big and majestic, but this thing had been bent, and its fur had shit in it. "Umm..." he said, still staring at the stack.

"I'm not saying I want him dead," said Emily. "Or her." She ran a hand through her hair, getting a touch of marker on her cheek. "I'm not going to try to assassinate Bigfoot or something. That would just make me a hunter."

Drew looked from the stack over to her. "Emily, I know you'd never kill Bigfoot."

"Hunh," said Emily. She went back to her poster and Alex came in with his coffee and with a cigarette between his lips. He blew on his coffee and swirled his mug very slowly. "I bet people start looking twice as hard for the Loch Ness Monster because of the Bigfoot capture. Has anyone heard any announcements about that?"

Emily shook her head. "I bet you're right. People just can't leave the animals alone. But 'monster'? Let's watch our word choice." She held up the poster she'd been working on. The sign read: "Meat is murder / Zoos are torture", and it had a picture of a teddy bear crying behind bars. All the letters were empty frames of red with dotted insides. The tag board started to fold over a little as Emily held it up. "Ach," she said, and she set down her wine. "When someone's holding it two handed at the protest it'll stay up. You know the ban on posts to keep signs up has totally fucked with, like, half of our designs?"

Drew nodded. "Looks good to me, Em. Have you thought about just leaving the little letters spotted? Gives a nice texture to it."

Alex snickered. Drew looked at him. "What?"

"Yeah," said Emily. "It's not that bad." She tossed a marker at Alex, and the tag board sagged again. The marker bounced off his chest and landed in his coffee. Emily stomped her feet and cheered.

"Shit," Alex said. Drew snickered. "Fucker," Alex said. After getting another stack of clipboards banded and in the box, Drew said, "I like the sign."

“Thank you, Drew,” said Emily. She let the poster drift down to the table again. It made him think of a commercial, something for soap or an expensive pair of designer jeans. “It might be a little too cutesy, but I think people are getting tired of the really graphic posters. I don’t want to get compared to those pro-lifers.”

“Fuckers,” said Alex. He fished the marker out of his coffee, sniffed the contents of his mug, and took a sip.

Drew shook his hands out, trying to loosen them up after all the stacking and counting. “It might pay to be mindful of that stuff. We don’t want to undercut everything we do with some bad associations. Or even just making the same mistakes that other activists might make.”

Alex sighed. “We define ourselves with each action and activism. Because of my AA shit, I can define myself each moment.” He took a drag off his cigarette. “I’m an alcoholic, but each day my actions prove me to be sober.”

Drew bent some of his fingers back a little, just to stretch. Alex went on, “I live life new day-to-day instead of being defined by what’s come before.”

Going back to the clipboards, Drew asked “Is your sponsor an activist, Alex?”

Alex smiled and narrowed his eyes. “Are you fucking with me?”

There was a knock on the door. The three of them looked at each other and then Alex stood up. “Don’t worry, I’m sure it’s not the Feds.”

Emily said, “Maybe it’s your sponsor, coming to join up and fight the good fight with us.”

Alex nodded. “Or maybe it’s your parents coming to see what all the money they put into art school has done.”

Drew shook his head and his hands, giving a little grunt of disapproval. They all glared at each other, and then the knock came again. “I’m coming,” yelled Alex as he went to the door.

Before the door was even fully open, Grenadine came bursting in. Her legs got bound up in the skirt she wore over her jeans, and she stumbled a little. As she righted herself, she yelled, “Bigfoot’s pregnant!”

Drew tried to think about his breathing. The appropriate response to this was important, and he felt a bit hungover to know if he should yell or nod solemnly. Either seemed reasonable. This put a whole new level of concern for the care Bigfoot (now obviously a she, though he wouldn’t tell Emily that he was right) received while in captivity. Drew looked up to see Emily and Grenadine jumping up and down.

Alex shook his head and laughed. “Somebody get to work on knitting some bigass booties.”

“I can’t believe there’s gonna be more Bigfoots,” said Emily. She hugged Grenadine. “Let’s have some wine to celebrate.”

Drew scooted his chair back. “There’ll only be more if the babies are carried to term. Babies, hell, does anyone even know how many children a Bigfoot mother

has? Or the gestation period?" Drew put a hand over his eyes. He felt hot, and his head hurt.

Emily quit jumping and started laughing. "Jesus, Drew, you can't even be happy about more Bigfoots?" She did a twirl. "You should quit worrying about some of that shit and clap and laugh and drink or smoke up more."

"I'm drinking," said Drew. "Sorry," he said to Alex.

"I think she's right," Alex said. "You haven't even tried 'shrooms before."

Grenadine grabbed the bottle of wine. "Yeah, be happy, Drew. A preggers Bigfoot. Who would've thought we'd live to see that?"

"Yeah," said Drew. All he could think of was a whole other generation of Bigfoots to look sad for the camera. How long would it be before they made a string of awful movies about it and forced the Bigfoot family to go on the Today Show to promote them? "I guess. It's just, there are just so many new questions and worries, I guess."

"Yeah," said Alex, "like what if Bigfoot wants an abortion?" They all looked at Alex. "What if Bigfoot's a lesbian, was raped by some other Bigfoot, and doesn't want to carry it to term?" He smirked as the rest of them stared. "Just joking." After a pause and some drinking from the others, Alex said, "Hey, I got a real question for you, Drew: suppose a hunter came along, ready to murder Bigfoot. Murder a pregnant Bigfoot. Do you think you could take the hunter out to save the Bigfoot?"

"Oh Christ," said Grenadine. She walked over to Alex and grabbed his cigarette. "All your jokes and hypotheticals. Who cares? Bigfoot's pregnant. And that means there's a male Bigfoot. A probable male Bigfoot and a definite pregnant fucking female." She smoked the cigarette down to a stub.

Alex shook his head and puffed out his lip. "No, no. Bigfoot was fucking. *Now* she's pregnant."

Emily flipped him off. Alex shrugged and pulled out another cigarette. "Whatever. Just asking about the hunters."

Drew nodded. "Yeah, it's a good question. That and whether or not they'll go after that male Bigfoot."

Alex shrugged. "If they don't, then it's the breakdown of the Bigfoot family unit."

"Knock it off. And it's not a good question." Emily went back to her posters. "Drew, why would you be the one person between Bigfoot and a hunter? And why would you have a gun?"

"But it doesn't matter," he put his clipboard and sheets down to finish his wine. "The point of the question isn't to get the answer; it's to force me to consider where I fit into the movement. Plus, you never know. I'm sure none of us ever thought there'd be a Bigfoot capture and confinement, but here we are."

Grenadine laughed. "Yeah, Em. What if Bigfoot got cancer, and they gave her chemo and radiation? Would you share some pot with her to help her get her

appetite back?”

Emily tightened her face. “Only *after* she gave birth.”

Alex laughed. After a little silence, Drew asked, “Really, guys, what do you think we should do?”

“Do?” asked Alex. “We really can’t *do* anything right now. Busting her out is impossible, and wouldn’t actually do anything anyway. Are we going to demand she be released so that she can get captured again? Or dogged by scientists and documentarians?”

Emily kicked at the floor. “Bullshit. *We are* doing something.” She held up her poster. “I’m doing something, and Drew is doing something. What are you doing, Alex?”

Alex looked out the window. “Nothing. I’m doing nothing. Just another member of the animal kingdom living in captivity.”

Drew shivered. He thought of Bigfoot having to nurse in front of all those scientists. “All Bigfoot’s kids are going to be born into captivity. Every last one of them.”

Grenadine drank straight from the bottle of wine. “We should check the website and our e-mail. See what PETA’s official stance is. Figure out if we can tie that in to tomorrow’s demonstration somehow.”

“Sure,” said Drew. “Who would our PETA contact be?”

They all looked around. There was an awkward silence as they all realized that they had no access to PETA’s inside information. Emily was the first to give up, filling in her letters, then Grenadine tested out the bullhorns, singing old protest songs and finally Drew went back to his clipboards. He tried to think of something to whistle, but he kept coming up with old TV show themes, and that didn’t seem appropriate.

As the rest of them went about their work, Alex smoked his cigarette. “We ought to start a garden to work in. Bring some life into this place, you know?”

“That sounds fine,” said Emily. “We could always use the extra life.”

Nobody else responded. Alex turned the radio to a folk-hip-hop fusion song. Nobody acknowledged his choice.

Zeke Jarvis is an associate professor at Eureka College and a Faculty member at University of Phoenix. His work has appeared in *Bitter Oleander*, *2 Bridges* and *KNOCK*, among other places.

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