

# Sapphic Scientist

*Finding Bigfoot's* Ranae Holland searches for the truth. **By Rachel Shatto**



Ranae Holland and the *Finding Bigfoot* cast

Do you believe in Bigfoot? Well if someday, definitive proof comes to light it may very well be an LGBT-identified woman who makes the discovery. Who is this scientific sleuth, combing the wilds of North America in search of Sasquatch? Ranae Holland, research biologist, Bigfoot skeptic and co-star of *Finding Bigfoot*. The Animal Planet series, which is now in its second season, follows the exploits of Holland and three Sasquatch true believers as they hunt for proof of one of nature's most enduring cryptids.

Raised in South Dakota, an alleged hotbed for Bigfoot activity, Holland grew up with the tale of a mysterious creature at large. While she has always been fascinated with the stories, being science minded she has never believed in their existence. However, her life-long interest in the phenomena, her training as a research biologist—she received a Bachelor of Science from the School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences—and her time spent in the field in the Northwest (another popular Bigfoot sighting region) make her uniquely qualified for the search. And really,

I'll keep doing this as long as those kids show up with their dads to the town halls or the queer youth come, all day long. I'll keep doing it for them. No question.

can you blame us for hoping when and if the big Sasquatch discovery comes, that it's made by a sista?

**How did you get involved with the series *Finding Bigfoot*?**

My special time with my dad growing up was when we'd watch Bigfoot movies and all things paranormal that you would find on *In Search Of...* everything from that 1970s craze. I grew up, moved out to Seattle and I became a Research Fisheries Biologist. I'd been out there for a few years and my father

passed away. While going through some of his personal belongings I ran across some Bigfoot paraphernalia and I had wonderful flashbacks of being a little girl with my dad. So I found myself out in the thick woods where all of the Bigfoot stories from my childhood were. I hadn't even thought of it. So, I jumped on the Internet and... found BFRO [Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization], which is [co-star] Matt Moneymaker's group. And we developed a relationship where I don't believe in Bigfoot, but I love Bigfoot stories and Matt can contact me and ask anything that he would want to ask a research biologist.

**Can you describe your role on the team?**

I am essentially called the skeptic scientist. I love Bigfoot stories. It's this phenomenon that persists for hundreds of years if you think of the Eurocentric aspect, but from oral traditions of Native Americans and the tribes across North America, for thousands of years. I don't believe Bigfoot's real. I can't wrap my head around it. I've never seen one. I've never seen proof that for me

definitely says: yes. So how does this mythos persist? It's fascinating to me.

#### Does the rest of the crew ever get on your case for being a non-believer?

Definitely. They're like brothers now. And we come from different opinions. I mean those guys will even argue within themselves, let alone I'm the one that doesn't believe. And it really comes down to ultimately tolerance and being respectful of each other. All four of us bring unique specialized skill sets to the team. And we're a team for a reason because one is no better, stronger than the other.

#### What will happen if you actually find a Bigfoot?

Well, interestingly, in season one, we had a nice little exchange, in our North Carolina episode. We all had this agreement...that if we see some heat signature [on the] thermal imaging camera, that we'd radio each other and then we'd try to corner it and move in closer. And Matt went rogue—Matt just went running after it. So now we basically have our agreement that we at least try to communicate before we move in. But I'm just telling you if I'm sitting there and I see something in the line of sight. I'm going after it. [Laughs]

#### As a specialist in this area, which cryptid is most likely to be real?

I would say something aquatic. It would have a higher percentage than anything terrestrial. And if it is terrestrial it better be something small—but I don't believe in the chupacabra.

#### Do you find it challenging to be so publicly out as LGBT-identified?

It's so interesting to really wrap my head around the idea that, first of all, I'm a research biologist and fascinated by Bigfoot. I never meant to be on TV and here I'm on TV to the point where I'm publicly discussing my sexuality, which is so foreign to me. And at one point, it saddens me that it's even a pertinent question, but at the same time I respect that for gay youth, it's very important.

#### So what is it that keeps hope alive? How do you stay motivated?

This job takes us around the country to rural America...and it's a lot of hard work, it's outdoors and a lot of time in the dark in rough conditions. I'm feeling spent, and I feel like: What am I doing? I'm looking for a unicorn? What are you doing, Ranae? And I stop, and here comes this little 8-year-old with his dad, and I'm taken back 30 years and I'm that little 8-year-

old with my dad, at a car show and some Bigfoot person is there. And I'm like, OK, it's all right. And then even more so, I go to some town hall meeting, and an LGBT youth comes up to me and wants a picture with me and just wants to give me a hug. I'll keep doing this as long as those kids show up with their dads to the town halls or the queer youth come, all day long. I'll keep doing it for them. No question. ([animalplanet.com](http://animalplanet.com)) ■

### DVD Picks By Rachel Shatto



#### Mangus! (Wolfe Video)

All Mangus wants is to follow in the footsteps of his father (who is deployed in Iraq) and play the part of Jesus in his high school's production of "Jesus Christ Spectacular." But when tragedy strikes and Mangus is left paralyzed from the waist down, his musical debut is put in jeopardy. Making matters worse, his selfish stepmother ships him off to live with his mother and closeted sister in the trailer park. This dark comedy co-starring out lesbian Heather Matarazzo also marks the indie darling's producing debut. Politically incorrect humor and subversive themes abound in this quirky indie musical in the vein of *Saved!*—plus it features a wickedly ironic cameo from John Waters that no iconoclast should miss.



#### Trigger (Wolfe Video)

Molly Parker and Tracy Wright (in her final role) star in this beautifully acted drama about the passion and chaos of a dysfunctional friendship. The film opens during a performance of the duo's band, Trigger, that ends with Vic (Wright) storming off stage, and picks up several years later when the two are reunited for the first time. They begin the evening still caught up in the toxicity of their past but over the course of the night they remember what they love about each other—reconnecting over music and their childhood friendship—as they deal with the realities of aging and loss of identity. It's also a welcome reminder of the riot grrrrl scene and boasts a rocking soundtrack that will have you dusting off your Bikini Kill records.



#### Portlandia: Season 1 (Video Serv)

Starring *SNL* vet Fred Armisen and bisexual Sleater-Kinney alum Carrie Brownstein, this wonderfully bizarre and deeply queer sketch comedy series turns its incisive eye to the principles' hometown of Portland, Ore. The show features a variety of characters including a duo of women's only bookstore owners, a militant bike rider and a variety of liberal yuppie characters. *Portlandia* lovingly skewers everything that is wonderful and silly about that Northwestern city's culture and fortunately you don't have to be fluent in the ways of Portlandians to be in on the joke. A bevy of familiar faces including Selma Blair, Heather Graham, Aimee Mann and Kyle MacLachlan make guest appearances and help make this an easily accessible if narrowly focused premise.



#### Our Idiot Brother (The Weinstein Company)

When word broke that über cuties Zooey Deschanel and Rashida Jones would be playing gay in *Our Idiot Brother*, needless to say it caught our attention. While sadly the film is not a lezzie rom-com à la *Imagine Me & You*, it's a charming film about an idealistic man and his sisters (of which Deschanel is one). When Ned (Paul Rudd) is released from jail he returns home to discover his girlfriend has a new man and she kicks him off his biodynamic farm. He moves back home where he immediately complicates his sisters' lives, ultimately uncovering unwanted truths. While it may not have been the queer film of our dreams, it is a heartfelt, funny and lesbian-inclusive comedy sure to put a smile on your face.