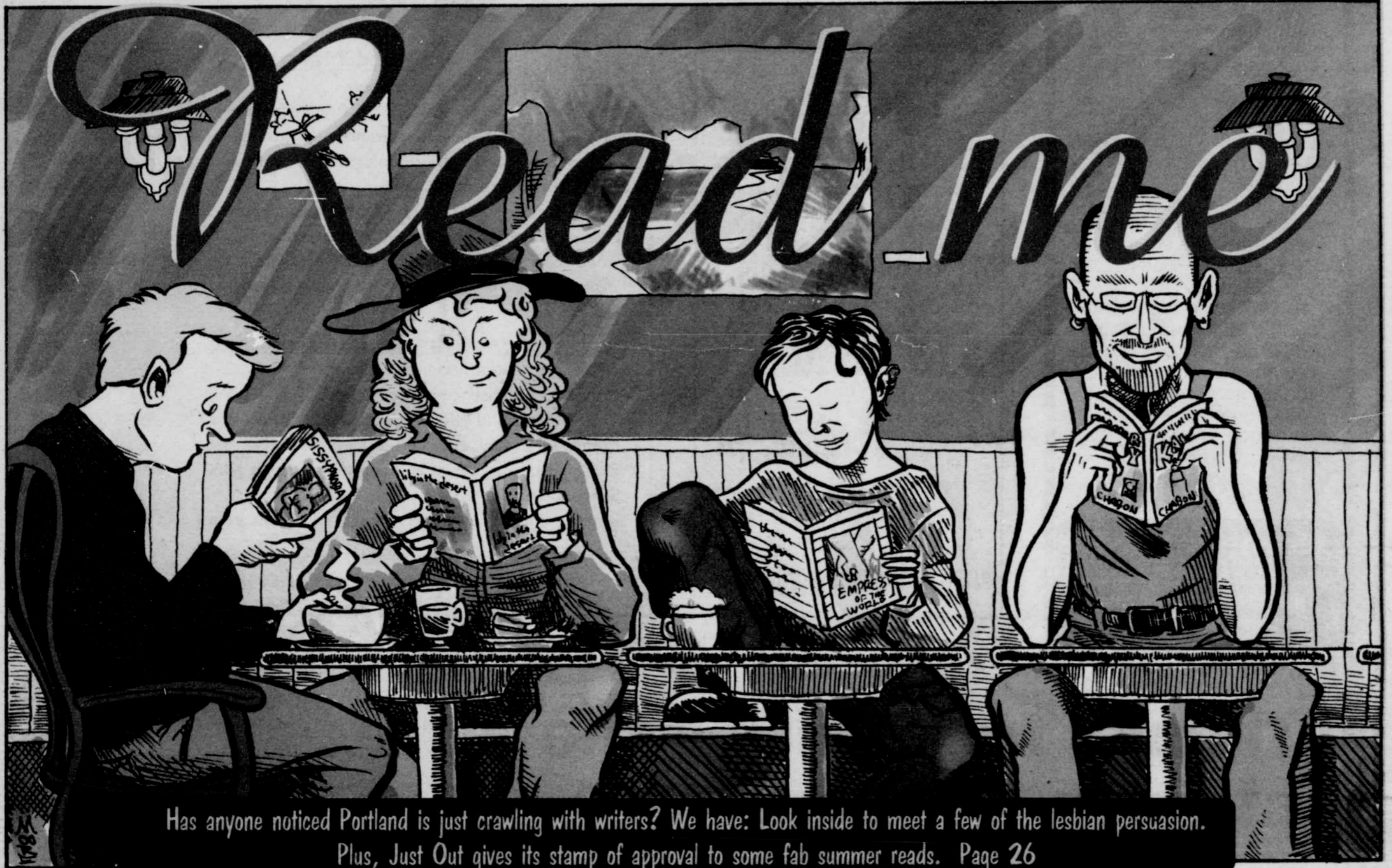




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Has anyone noticed Portland is just crawling with writers? We have: Look inside to meet a few of the lesbian persuasion. Plus, Just Out gives its stamp of approval to some fab summer reads. Page 26



Benjamin Pring

PHOTO BY MARTY DAVIS

Playing with Fire Benjamin Pring bluffs his way into Cirque du Soleil and falls in love with a clown BY LISA BRADSHAW

Benjamin Pring never meant to be a performer. The 27-year-old was studying business at New York University and taking dance classes just for fun. After a student performance, someone told him he should go to the upcoming auditions for the Doug Elkins Dance Company, which specializes in a combination of hip hop, ballet and capoeira, a Brazilian form of martial arts. Pring, whose family moved from the Philippines to Massachusetts when he was a kid, went on a whim, "not expecting anything," he says, "but they took me." He smiles as he admits, "I really fooled everybody and just mimicked whatever I saw." Pring came from a swimming and diving background and is naturally "very flexible," he says, which helped him out considerably. In any case, he knew a good thing when he saw it and stayed with the company for three years while finishing his business degree. After that he decided to audition for Pilobolus Dance Theatre, one of the most creative troupes in modern dance with a major international influence. The company performs all over the world, and its pieces are regularly commissioned by other groups. "People who see Pilobolus never forget it," Pring states. Pilobolus only employs a handful of dancers, and for three years Pring

was one of them. "It didn't require any dance skills," he says, trying to explain how he again held his own in a competitive audition. "Just a good imaginative mind and good improvisational skills, which is really my forte." Eventually, one of the dancers from Pilobolus suggested he audition with her for Cirque du Soleil. "Why not? I sent in my videotape, and Cirque du Soleil said, 'You're the one we want.' So here I am." The business major is still kind of amazed at his good fortune. "I haven't been to many auditions at all, and I don't even have a head shot or a formal résumé. I really just, like, got by," he laughs, "like the jack of all trades." **A**ctually, the jack of all trades is exactly what Pring is in Cirque du Soleil's *Dralion*. Playing the element of Fire, it's his job to entertain the audience during transitions on stage. When it's time to set up the trapeze, for instance, out comes Pring in one of the most memorable of the company's costumes and makeup jobs with a flag, a spear or in a big metal wheel he rolls around in—"the gerbil wheel"—to distract you from stage manipulations. "Don't look at the setup, look at the big wheeeel," he laughs.

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Project provides support, safety and fun for queer youth Page 17

Word up: Slam champ Alix Olson returns to Oregon Page 41