

# I Am Panda, Hear Me ROWWWRRR!

Hello, my name is Bennie and I'm a Panda Cub. No, I'm not an actual specimen of the *Ailuropoda melanoleuca* species native to the bamboo forests of Central Western and South Western China. In the gay Bear community, I am considered a Panda—an Asian Bear.

For those of you not familiar with gay lingo, when I say Bears, I don't mean those hairy four-legged creatures that roam Yellowstone Park and hunt for salmon. When I say Bears, I'm referring to the subculture within the LG-BTQ community that is made up of bigger (mostly) and hairy (mostly) gay men. Oregon happens to be chock-full of Bears.

You're probably looking at my picture and wondering what the hell this smaller, smooth Asian gay guy is doing hanging out with all these big, hirsute and burly men. To be honest with you, by Asian standards, I'm considered quite rotund. But the simple truth is this—I've always been attracted to Bears and Cubs (think Bear but usually younger and not as big).

One of my earliest gay epiphanies was watching the TV show *Grizzly Adams* and finding myself getting titillated by Dan Haggerty, the quintessential example of a Bear if ever there was one. Though still in primary school, I already had a "thing" for Bears.

Ultimately I chose to associate with the local Bear community because they welcomed and accepted me with open arms (and sometimes



**PANDA  
SAY  
WHAT?!**

by Bennie Tan

You're probably looking at my picture and wondering what the hell this smaller, smooth Asian gay guy is doing hanging out with all these big, hirsute and burly men. To be honest ... by Asian standards, I'm considered quite rotund.

legs). Life for a gay Asian immigrant is rarely easy. It was hard growing up in an Asian country where being a homo can get you thrown in jail and caned. I can't even begin to describe the bullying I went through in school.

Things got somewhat easier when I moved to the United States, where being gay was better tolerated and did not automatically make one a pariah. However, after I came out of the closet, I found myself having a hard time fit-

ting in. Some Asians in the gay community did not accept me because I was too westernized and tend to be outspoken. And my predilection for white, hairy men was sometimes seen as a betrayal of sorts. Some of my Gay-sian friends wondered why I didn't just find a decent Asian man and settle down.

Like many young queers before me, I dabbled in several scenes. I was a twink until I realized I like to eat—Delta Burke has nothing on me when it comes to yo-yoing body weight. I tried to do the whole circuit queen thing until a fellow circuit queen and good friend pulled out three different types of drugs to ingest at the same time so they could work in tandem and give him the appropriate highs and lows. I'm not against recreational drug use but to consume that much in order to have one night of fun seemed silly to me. It was time for me to leave that world behind.

Then I found the Bear community. In years past, I would unwittingly wander into an Oregon Bears' event from time to time. However, in part due to shyness and in part because I didn't think I would fit in, I never got more involved with them. Then three years ago, when I started deliberately attending more events, I met former president of the Oregon Bears Frank Armstrong. We had a long chat during which he told me about the history of the Bear movement and encouraged me to get

involved with this furry band of merry men.

The Bears' acceptance of me is really not that unusual. After all, these are the guys who were ostracized for being different—for being too big and not manscaping. Bears are gay men who truly know what it feels like to be an outsider but have come to accept and love themselves for who and what they are. Finally, I found a place where I could be myself.

Yes, I drank the Kool Aid and I never looked back. It wasn't long before local Bear folk started calling me "Panda," and the nickname stuck. In the local Bear community, I'm known not only for being out there and friendly but also for speaking my mind. And at times I can be quite irreverent, bringing up issues that may make people uncomfortable but I think merit discussion. That's what I hope to bring to this column. Think of me as a male version of Margaret Cho. I consider her my power animal.

In coming weeks, I'll talk about some interesting topics, with a Panda Cub twist. My goal is always to make you think and maybe look at something from a different angle. Who knows, I just might make you go, "Panda say what?!"

BENNIE TAN can often be found foraging for bamboo at Oregon Bears' functions. Feel free to approach him; this Panda won't maul you—without you buying him a drink first. Electronically, reach him at [pdxpandacub@gmail.com](mailto:pdxpandacub@gmail.com).



The Imperial Sovereign Rose Court invites one and all to join us for our upcoming events:

Rose Court Community Art Exhibit  
January 11 - 30, 2011  
at the Q Center Gallery - 4115 N. Mississippi  
(opening reception Jan. 11th from 7-9pm)

The 2011 White Knight & Debutante Ball  
celebrating White Knight XV Kenty Valentine &  
Debutante XXXIX Onyx Lynn Valentine Duall  
Saturday, February 5, 2011  
at the Embers - 110 NW Broadway  
Doors open at 5pm / Ball at 6pm



"It Gets Better" - a benefit for The Trevor Project  
Sunday, January 23rd 2011 at the Embers  
Doors open at 5pm - Event starts at 6pm

visit us online at [RoseCourt.org](http://RoseCourt.org) for  
more information and more event listings



Proud Sponsor  
of the Q Center's  
Gala: "Vive la Q!"  
Jan. 29th 2011

The ISRC is a 501c3 non-profit

**Taboo**  
ADULT VIDEO [taboovideo.com](http://taboovideo.com)

PICK UP YOUR  
FAVORITE TOYS  
AND SUPPLIES  
THAT SANTA FORGOT

ALL \$9.95 DVDS ARE  
**\$7.95**

ALL LINGERIE IS  
**20% OFF**



magazines  
clothing • lingerie  
multichannel arcade  
huge selection  
gift cards available

[WWW.TABOOVIDEO.COM](http://WWW.TABOOVIDEO.COM)

VANCOUVER  
4811 NE 94th Ave.  
Vancouver WA  
(360) 254-1126

82ND AVE.  
2330 SE 82nd Ave.  
Portland OR  
(503) 777-6033

MLK BLVD.  
237 SE MLK Blvd.  
Portland OR  
(503) 239-1678

BROADWAY (PEARL)  
311 NW Broadway,  
Portland 97209  
(503) 227-3443

HUGE SELECTION OF DVDS • ADULT TOYS • LINGERIE • MAGAZINES  
ALL STORES OPEN 24 HOURS TO SERVE YOU! PRIVATE AND INTIMATE MULTICHANNEL ARCADE