

# The Blotter

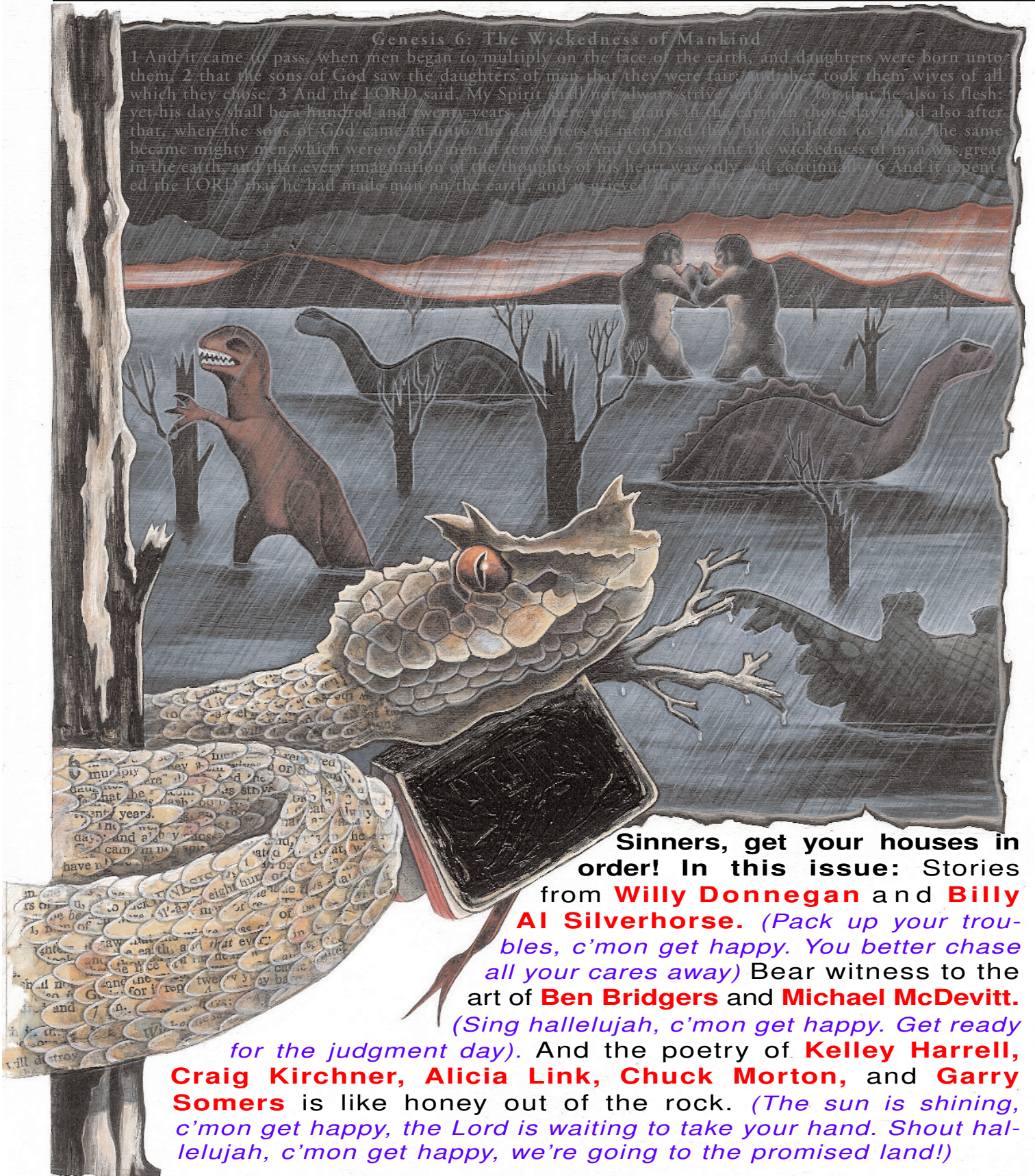
March 2004

Someday we'll find it, the rainbow connection

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## Genesis 6: The Wickedness of Mankind

1 And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, 2 that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair: and they took them wives of all which they chose: 3 And the LORD said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years. 4 There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown. 5 And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.



**Sinners, get your houses in order! In this issue:** Stories from **Willy Donnegan** and **Billy Al Silverhorse**. *(Pack up your troubles, c'mon get happy. You better chase all your cares away)* Bear witness to the art of **Ben Bridgers** and **Michael McDevitt**.

*(Sing hallelujah, c'mon get happy. Get ready for the judgment day).* And the poetry of **Kelley Harrell**, **Craig Kirchner**, **Alicia Link**, **Chuck Morton**, and **Garry Somers** is like honey out of the rock. *(The sun is shining, c'mon get happy, the Lord is waiting to take your hand. Shout hallelujah, c'mon get happy, we're going to the promised land!)*



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**Items Worth Mentioning  
from the desk of Johnny Pence****Before You Read Any Further:**

I just want to say right here that there is a picture of a **nude woman** as soon as you turn the page! However, of three criteria which must be met for a work to legally be considered "obscene," I think we can safely say "the work, taken as a whole, [does not lack] serious literary, *artistic*, political, or scientific value." (Miller v. California: Chief Justice Warren Burger *in your face!*) So you can't say it's obscene. I looked it up. Ha ha.

Lookit, I don't want to get in any trouble. And just so you know, there may or may not be **dirty words** in this issue. Or any issue. I really don't remember. I don't notice them while I'm working because I'm an editor, not a censor. But just let this serve as the **official parental advisory**. This magazine isn't really "adult" in the sense that word has come to carry, but it is for "grown-ups" and "smart teenagers" and probably not for "Jerry Falwell." So I don't want to lose any more distribution sites or advertisers over this trifling nonsense. Got it?

**And Another Thing:**

Don't organize some protest march over the cover, please. It's actually designed to be a little homage to the whole church experience, except nobody's telling you to sit still and pay attention, and as far as I'm concerned you're allowed to **drink coffee** while you look at it. I got the idea recently when I was reading about those antediluvian giants, the halfbreed offspring of the "sons of God" and mortal women, the "mighty men which were of old, men of renown." I just love that image, and they never talked about it in church when I was a kid, unless it was to say that those giants left their bones in the rocks—and not dinosaurs, because the earth is only a couple-thousand years old. That's good stuff. Let this month's cover serve as a sort of sermon on the matter. I asked Chris Dennis to do us up a painting for the cover. And he did a doozy, don't you think?

So I'm not saying that humanity is wicked or that one day a hard rain is going to wash all the scum off the street, and I'm not trying to be disrespectful, so there's no need to get upset. And all you Godless commie anarchist hippies can chill out too. We haven't gone all Bible-thumper on you. It's just art. Got it?

**After All That:**

If you've read this far, y'all can see how hard I'm working to obsequiously pander to every neurotic, superstitious, radical dysfunction. **So why aren't you advertising in this magazine?** People love it. We get a pickup rate close to 90 percent. And people read every word. And then write us to tell us they liked it. The economy is on the upswing. **You're nuts if you don't** join the ranks of our elite, wonderful, gorgeous advertisers. Give Marty a call. And as soon as we can afford a lawyer to help with the paperwork, we're going nonprofit. Then you can "donate" and "write it off on your taxes." Won't that be nice? (Hey lawyers, hint-hint.)

**The Power of the Press:**

Remember back in January when I said I wanted an old, ugly motorcycle that would otherwise just be collecting dust in a barn? I actually got a couple offers on some great *ugly* bikes, but none of them worked out. It was a very cool response, and thanks to those who wrote in. But I know somewhere out there is a horse who hates sharing her stall with a rusty Yamaha, or there's an old BMW out by the wood pile with honeysuckle growing in the spokes. Somewhere. Somewhere...

—ediot@blotterrag.com

# The New Boots

A Partially True Story  
by Billy Al Silverhorse

Once they wuz two fellers name of Oscar an' Dub an' they was a-workin' a huntin' camp up in the Cookson Hills, there in Eastern Oklahoma. Oscar wuz the camp cook an' Dub wuz the huntin' guide.

Well, one day Dub come in the cabin after a day of huntin' an' set hisself down at the dinner table an' said to Oscar, who wuz over at the sink a-washin' dishes, "Hey Oscar, how ya been?"

Oscar said, "It's been a passable day, an' how you been a-doin'?"

Dub said, "Fine. An' Ah hope ya had yourself a good day." Oscar figgered he oughtin' to say anythaing else, 'cause he seen what wuz a-comin' next.

Dub hiked up his britches an' put his feet up on the dinner table an' took out his makins' to roll hisself a cigarette.

Oscar said, "Dub, Ah'd 'preciate it iffen ya did'n put yer feet on the table, an' that there smoke'll git mah sinuses plugged up any secondt now."

Dub might've been a little crude an' rough aroun' the edges, but one thaing you could say for 'im, he wuz polite an' accommodatin'.

He said, "Why shore Oscar, Ah'd be glad to," an' he took his boots off'n the table an' snuffed out his cigarette.

He set for a spell a-hummin' "Home on the Range" an' all of a sudden he said, "Say Oscar, you ain't seen a sack of hard candy 'round abouts have ya? Ah brought some back on my trip to Fort Smith."

Oscar kept on a-washin' his dishes an' said, "Cain't say as Ah have." An' then, he made his major mistake an' he knew he'd made it as soon as he spoke.

He asked, "Whatcha been a-doin' over Fort Smith way?"

Dub scratched hisself an' cut a corner off'n his plug of Brown's Mule an' placed it gently in his jaw. "Well," he said after he got his chaw set, "Ah went

over to git me a new pair uv boots." He propped one uv the boots up on the table. "Boy Howdy," he said, "These are mighty fine boots. Ah really like 'em."

Oscar still had his back turned while he wuz still a-washin' dishes an' he heard the boot hit the tabletop. But he thought he'd wait an' give Dub a chance to take it off'n the table. "Zat so?" he said, "Git a good price on 'em?"

Dub said, "Oh, Ah got me a real good price on 'em. Shoesalesman feller even thew in a can of neatsfoot oil an' a pair of shoestrings."

*Shoestrings?* Oscar thought, but he knew better'n to ask Dub what he needed with shoestrings for his boots. Instead he said, "Well that neatsfoot oil'll do the trick a-keepin' 'em dry, that's for sure."

Oscar kep on a-washin' an' Dub said, "Yup, Ah really like these boots. They is top quality Tony Llama's, jist like that there pair of Justins Ah had a few years back.

"No doubt 'bout it, they is first class." He turned his head an' let fly with a stream of tabaccer juice out the winder which wuz 'bout five feet away. "Yup, he said, "Ah shore do like 'em, might be the best pair uv boots Ah ever had."

Oscar jist grunted an' did'n say nothin'.

Dub continued, "Yup, mighty fine boots. Ya know Oscar, one time mah Daddy said, 'Shoes is shoes, but boots is footwear.' Ah never forgot that. An' these boots is the best footwear a man could have."

Oscar put up some dishes an' started in on some roastin' pans. He said, "Dub, like Ah said, wouldja mind keepin' yer feet off'n the table?"

Dub said, "Why shore Oscar," an' he let fly with 'nother stream of tabaccer juice out the winder. He looked up at the ceilin' an' stroked his chin an'

## The Blotter Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

There is an honest and upright black man, a cop or deputy. While investigating a crime, he discovers evidence that implicates his boss, a corrupt fat white sheriff, who then imprisons him in a dungeon under a motel. A group of people band together to rescue him.

One of them is my former therapist, who drives a speedboat through a picture window into the middle of an S&M party being held at the motel, to cause a distraction while the others rescue the prisoner.

—T.R.L., Durham

My parents and I are visiting a tall, shapely, glass office building. Some aunts and uncles are meeting here because a prominent family member has died. He designed this building. A few years ago the doctors told him he needed to shape up, so he took up the architecture of food-industry buildings and became a leader in the field in just two years. My parents and I are remodeling the place now, while the aunts and uncles sit in a row of chairs with their backs to the wall. We install a pair of unpainted wooden columns, one on either side of the doorway between this meeting room and the rear loading dock area. I look through the deceased man's many large, leather-bound books that are on tables in a sunken area. I pick up Algebra for Sinners and open to a page in the middle and see a full page of intermingled algebraic formulas and biblical passages. I tell the eldest aunt that I would like to have this. She says it's worth between \$75,000 and a million dollars, smirking. I am disappointed that I can't have it.

—R.G., Raleigh

Please send excerpts from your dream journals to Ignatz at [ironbutterfly@throughthemoon.com](mailto:ironbutterfly@throughthemoon.com). If nothing else, we love to read them. We won't publish your whole name.



top row: transistor,  
frontier, misfit

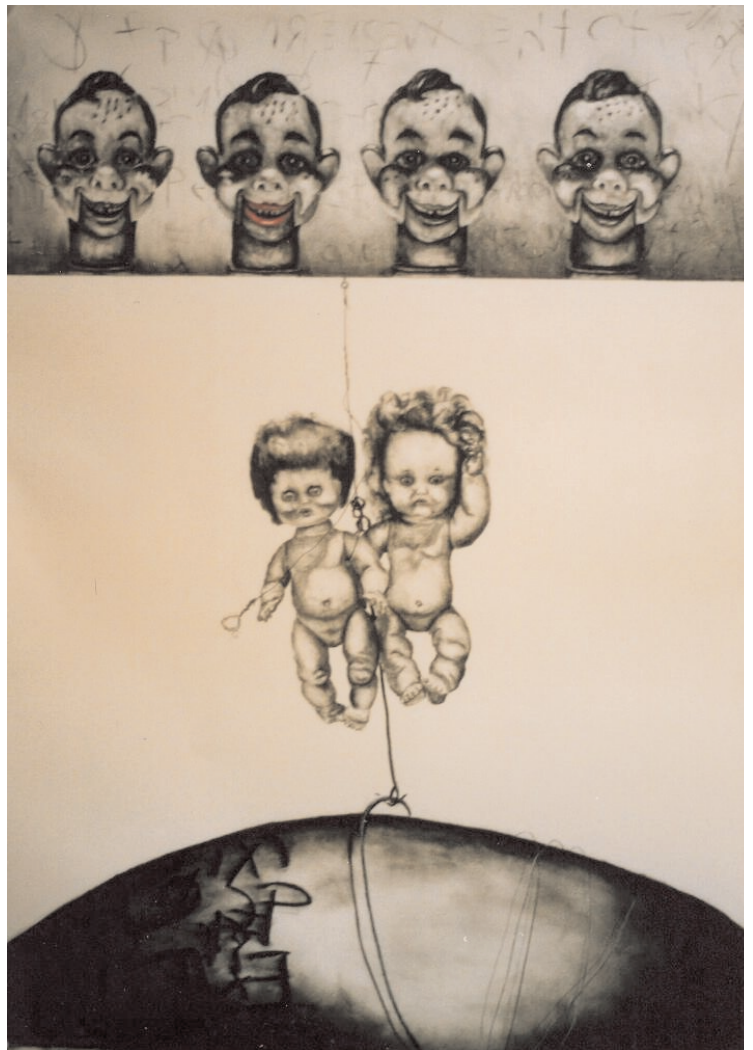
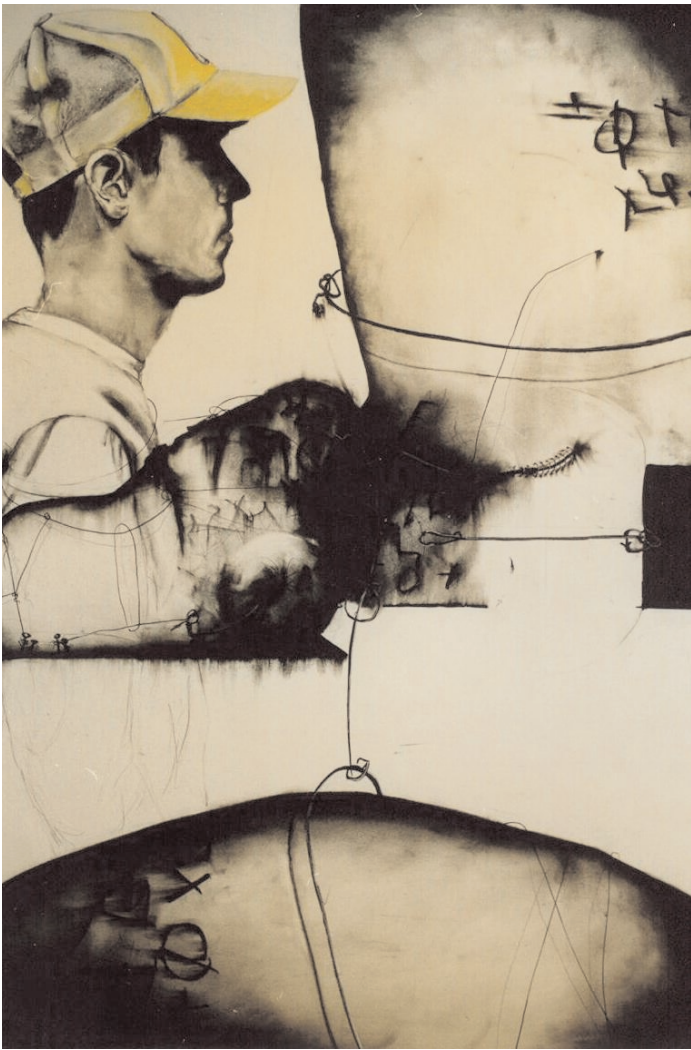
below: icon, wainwright  
bungalow



"The drawings, paintings, and objects I build are an attempt to gain an essence of personal fascination. Somehow I am trying to reconnect to an event, thought, or action. In the studio, where my head spins and my heart beats, I root around in memories, ideas, and images from my own experiences."

**ben  
bridgers**





said, "Ya know Oscar, Ah really cain't thaink uv 'nother pair uv boots that fit mah foot like these."

He kept on strokin' his chin an' tryin' to remember. After a spell, he quit tryin' an' looked back at his boot, now back on the table.

"Ya know what mah Daddy said onct? He said 'Shoes is shoes but—"

Oscar broke in, "But boots is foot-ware."

Dub grinned real big an' said, "Why that's right. Wuz you there?"

Oscar had a little bit uv a sharp bite to his voice now. He said, "'Course not. Ya jist told me that a minute ago—an' gitcher feet off'n' the table."

Dub looked at his boot on the table an' blinked, like he wuz suprizid to see it there.

"Why shore Oscar," he said, "Be glad to."

Then he stood up an' stretched an' walked over to the winder an' spit out it. He come back over an' set hisself down agin an' propped his boot up on the table.

"Yup," he said, "A man's really got to look out fer his feet. Ah'm shore glad Ah got these boots. Ah reckon they orta last me a few good years. They is mighty fine—"

Oscar said a cuss word an' threw a pan in the sink an' said, "Ah cain't take iny more uv this," an' he stood over the sink, his head a-hangin' down.

Dub wuz totally bumfuzzled. He said, "Cain't take iny more uv what Oscar, ya off yer feed er sumthin'?"

Oscar turned aroun' an' pointed his finger at Dub. "No! he yelled, "Ah ain't off mah feed. It's you, ya crazy honyak. You an' them there consarn boots. Yer a-gonna drive me crazyer'n a bedbug if ya keep goin' on 'bout 'em!"

Dub scratched his head an' said, "Well, Ah don't understand what yer a-hintin' at. Ah wuz jist tryin' to be sociable."

Oscar wuz a-yellin' at the top uv his lungs now. "Ah ain't a-hintin' 'bout nuthin' ya big dumox! Ah'm a-tellin' ya once an' fer all! Shut up 'bout them there dadblamed boots!"

He was yellin' so loud now that he'd scared Ol' Pug, the camp cat, outta his box in the corner. Ol' Pug wuz a-

creepin' slaunchways 'crost the kitchen an' a-lookin' sideways at Oscar outta his one good eye while he slithered out the door.

Dub spit out the winder agin an' rolled his chaw 'round in his mouth. He said, "Why shore Oscar. No more 'bout mah boots." He wuz quiet for a spell while he mouthed his chaw.

Then he leaned back in his chair an' threw his hat on the table an' said, "This shore has been a good hat."

Billy Al Silverhorse writes in the vernacular of Eastern Oklahoma where 78.9% of Bakersfield, California comes from ... or goes to. Your choice.



## Paper Cuts

### Books You Might Not Have Read

by Martin K. Smith

*The Compleat Angler*  
(Izaak Walton/David McKay & Co., 1931. First published in 1654 )

*The Compleat Angler* is said to be the third-most reprinted book in English, with over 400 editions in almost as many years. Any work of that age and pedigree is likely to intimidate people; as in "Oh God, is it another one of those Great Books?"

(A "Great Book," by my lazy definition, is one you're compelled to read in school or college, or that hectoring right-wing scolds are always saying you Should Read, in order to be Culturally Literate; whereas a classic is one that, even if you first meet it under duress, you like enough to read again; then

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start cruising the bookstores in search of your own copy to re-read still more as the years roll on. [Hectoring lefty scolds, like me, will more likely catechize you on Dylan and Lennon songs. If we do, just reply something like "Oh, isn't that the riff from the Hyundai commercial?" We'll probably implode.])

In *The Compleat Angler*, three representative characters—an angler ("Piscator"), a hunter ("Venator"), and a falconer ("Auceps")—meet one day while walking out of London, and exchange seventeenth-century courtesies:

PISCATOR: You are well overtaken, gentlemen; a good morning to you both; I have stretched my legs up Tottenham Hill to overtake you, hoping your business may occasion you towards Ware, whither I am going this fine, fresh May morning.

VENATOR: Sir, I for my part shall almost answer your hopes; for my purpose is to drink my morning's draught at the Thatched House in Hoddesden, where I have appointed a friend or two to meet me.

AUCEPS: Sir, I shall, by your favour, bear you company as far as Theobald's and there leave you; for then I turn up to a friend's house who mews a hawk for me, which I now long to see.

(Somehow under Walton's hand, the King-James-Bible language doesn't seem stilted and formal, but sounds like ordinary people just talking.)

Venator and Auceps have never met a Piscator before, and are curious. So all three describe what they enjoy

about their respective hobbies, and Venator is interested enough to ask for lessons on becoming "a brother of the Angle." The rest of the book is Piscator's instructing of his willing intern and "towardly student."

They spend a week in the country, fishing various ponds and streams. Piscator gives exhaustive—and exhausting—discourses on the diverse fishes of England and how best to pursue them:

Go to the same hole in which I caught my chub, where in most hot days you will find a dozen or twenty chevins floating near the top of the water; get two or three grasshoppers as you go over the meadow, and get secretly behind the tree, and stand as free from motion as is possible; then put a grasshopper on your hook, and let your hook hang a quarter of a yard short of the water, to which end you must rest your rod on some bough of the tree. But it is likely the chubs will sink down towards the bottom of the water at the first shadow of your rod (for a chub is the fearfulest of fishes), and will do so if a bird flies over him and makes the least shadow on the water; but they will presently rise up to the top again, and there lie soaring till some shadow affrights them again.

In case you catch anything, he gives recipes too:

First, scale him, and then wash him clean, and then take out his guts; and to that end make the hole as little and near to his gills as you may conveniently, and especially make clean his throat from the grass and weeds that are usually in it (for if that be not very clean, it will make him to taste very sour). Having so done, put some sweet herbs into his belly; and then tie him with two or three splinters to a spit, and roast him, basted often with vinegar, or rather verjuice and butter, with good store of salt mixed with it.

There are instructions on making line (in those days spun from hair), live bait, tying flies—everything you ever may have wanted to know about seventeenth-century fishing techniques; with at times a seventeenth-century, pre-

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**Michael McDevitt** is from Richmond, VA. I suspect he became acquainted with *The Blotter* because it is distributed in a few saloons and taverns in that fair city. While not representing a cross-section of the population, this work can serve as evidence that Richmond has its own fair share of seriously weird individuals—but weird in a very cool way.





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PETA casual attitude towards the pain of Lesser Species. On using a frog as bait:

Put your hook, I mean the arming-wire, through his mouth and out at his gills; and then with a fine needle and silk sew the upper part of his leg, with only one stitch, to the arming-wire of your hook; or tie the frog's leg, above the upper joint, to the arming-wire; and, in so doing, use him as though you loved him, that is, harm him as little as you may possibly, that he may live the longer."

At one point they join an otter hunt, catching and killing not only the adult otter but her litter as well. Piscator dislikes otters, as competitors for fish, and wishes their extinction with a cheerfulness that would leave modern-day environmentalists a bit green at the gills.

He also—and here is the oddity to modern readers—goes into all kinds of idiosyncratic digressions. He raises philosophical questions (is fishing contemplative, or active, or both) and natural-history theories (how certain bugs, frogs, and fish might reproduce), name-dropping authorities ancient and modern: "Gesner quotes venerable Bede; also by our learned Camden, and laborious Gerard ... Sir Francis Bacon ... Dr. Hakewill." He praises Nature, the countryside, "the simple life"; tells stories of gypsies and beggars, trades song-poems with Venator and passing characters—milkmaids and shepherds and such. (Walton, a cloth-draper by trade, was a poet by avocation.) He's also devoutly Christian, in a calm, comfortable, non-lecturing-scold way. "And it is observable that it was our Saviour's will that these our four fishermen should have a priority of nomination in the catalogue of his twelve apostles (Matt. 10); as namely, first St. Peter, St. Andrew, St. James and St. John, and then the rest in their order."

*Angler* wouldn't fit into any of our modern genre-categories: it's neither novel nor textbook nor essay, but sort of a chowder of all three. Your average Barnes & Noble computer, pressed to classify it, might well implode. I won-

der if writers could get away with such eclecticism then because books themselves were still fairly new, rare, and a luxury item. Printing technology was maybe a century old, hand-cranked presses slow and print runs small. The ability to own a book—and for that matter, to write or read one—were privileges of an educated minority. Genres were not yet invented; nor were there any English-Lit-trained critics enforcing genre constraints.

As for Great Book vs. Classic, I'd say it falls kind of midway between; though fishing-types may lean towards the latter. (I'm not a fishing-type: the few times I tried, the fish ate the bait from my hooks, and verily didst scorn me for a nerdling and a wuss.) I wouldn't re-read it, but would suggest it as an intriguing period-piece oddity.

Speaking of ancient-vs.-modern: When Walton published *Angler*, in 1654, England was still recovering from its own Civil War (1642–49, twice as long as ours). Charles I, who'd wanted an "off-with-his-head" absolute monarchy, had lost the war (and his own head) to the armies of Oliver Cromwell, who was in many ways a hectoring Puritan scold, but insisted on Parliamentary checks-&-balances to restrain the monarchy's power. However, having won, he ran England as pretty much a military dictatorship until his death in 1658. Walton, a royalist, was not happy with this arrangement. You'd never guess it from *Angler's* Arcadian calm: The book is as laid-back as a warm summer's day spent fishing. I suspect that that tranquillity, along with the quaint language and the air of modesty and courtesy, are reasons why it's still being republished and read after 350-odd years. I dare say that sometimes, whilst seated on a mossy bank awaiting the trout to rise, Walton contemplated on how Cromwell was a usurping fucked-up creep. (I've had the same thoughts about certain Presidents.) He says only "I envy not him that eats better meat than I do, nor him that is richer, or that wears better clothes than I do; I envy nobody but him, and him only, that catches more fish than I do."

Marty Smith is just about the only person I know who doesn't fish but would read a seventeenth-century fishing allegory for his own kicks, whether or not he wrote this column.

## Stumps

by Willy Donnegan

I never have understood why the TV statics up all the way in here when she's vacuuming clear across the house. There's got to be some scientific explanation about it. I don't think Abby would know. She's not too good about mechanical things and appliances, but her things are numbers and money and she knows I trust her with it. I always have. She's a bad vacuumer. I could hear the sucking and the little rifle shots each time she sucked up a coin that we'd need to dig out of the bag later.

I let the TV fuzz, and since I couldn't see anything of importance I figured it would be nice to straighten up the living room. The couch across from where I sit had junk all over it. Two years ago, my brother's eyes rolled back while we were talking, him and his wife and me and Abby. He had slumped over during drinks and curled up on Megan's shoulder. We thought he was passed out, so we stretched him across the couch and watched TV pictures of the war in the Gulf. It was two hours later when I had Abby call for an ambulance. Since then, I can't remember when we last used it. I moved the remotes to the armrest and moved a couple of magazines, but that was all. I sat back down in my chair and left it cluttered for Abby to get when she came through. Megan never came over any more to visit us. I don't blame her. She has a new husband, it would be weird. They live in Athens.

I live in Croy, with Abby. We live together and have for six years. She grew up somewhere near Savannah. I've lived in Croy all my life. When I was about five or six, I asked Dad why



the town was named Croy. He would always tell me he wasn't quite sure, and go back to watching Jackie Gleason repeats. He would sometimes watch Ed Sullivan or some of the music shows, but that was only when Jackie wasn't on. One day, he called me into his room before supper with a serious look, which was odd only because he hadn't touched any liquor. I expected to get his belt, but instead he sat beside me on the foot of the bed and told me Croy was named for the dying sound shot crows make. That's all he said until it was time for supper. I was going to ask who decided that and when and why and all types of questions, but he gave me the stone look that kept people away. He died a couple of years after, when I was ten and in the fourth grade. My mother said his eyes rolled back and he never woke up. He died like my brother, only I wasn't there when it happened. I was at Billy Greene's house, catching fireflies. We had a whole jarful that night, but they died quick and fell to the bottom like birds in the field behind Billy's house.

I missed the stack of bills Abby left for me to mail. The envelopes were right beside me on the end-table, held down by one of the heavy stone coasters Megan and my brother gave to us for our wedding present. They all have spiral rings where we set cans, but they're still pretty coasters.

I fished the keys out of my chair. They were really far in the cushion, and I scraped some knuckles on a steel spring when I pulled my hand out. I grabbed the envelopes with the unscraped hand, my right, and tucked them all in the back pocket of my jeans. I know Abby hates when I do that to the bills. She says it makes us look cheap to the collectors, but I think money is money whether it's folded or not. She wouldn't know anyway, she was still sucking all kinds of shit up when I left.

It's about three miles from our house to the post office and grocery store and everything of importance in Croy. Everybody knows everybody, or used to. I remember hearing it was a lot bigger before the war, but it lost a lot with the women running everything

while the men were fighting. I strapped on my seatbelt before I turned the truck on, another thing that Abby doesn't see any sense in. I laid into the gas pedal a couple of times while I turned the key to get her to turn over. She did. I hope there's a year or two left in the truck, since there's no credit to buy anything else. Half the town lost a job last year. I did too. I have one now, but stocking the beershelf at the Piggly isn't much. Abby wants me to go look for jobs in Athens, where Megan and her man are at. That won't work, and she knows it. She's worried about money; she always is. The back tires spun a little in the loose rocks of the driveway before I swung the truck around across the yellow lines. I turned to look over my shoulder for anyone coming after I already sat in the road. Abby says one day I'll get killed being reckless like she says I do. She doesn't drive, but she used to. I rolled the truck up the highway and tried not to strip gears.

The roadside stumps were once trees. The trees were only four months gone; a logging crew came through and hacked them down. It was a great job, very quick, except they got the wrong side. Now Croy has a two-mile stretch of stumps for scenery on the passenger's side going into town. When I ride Abby to the church for ladies' group, I watch the stretching stumps go into her mouth and out the back of her head. She's just the right height.

The stumps become little front-yard pear trees about a half mile into the city limits, where a half-dozen big antique houses rise out of their lawns to tell anyone who doesn't know where Croy's money's at. Each house is two stories, some with a huge attic to make two and a half. Mr. Morris has the biggest house. Three stories, with a wall of glass for a bay window and more kitchens than some people have rooms. He comes to mow every Sunday, religiously, and has a bunch of Mexicans do the rest of the yard work. Mr. Morris lives off in Athens, and has for maybe ten years. Nobody's lived in the house since he moved out, like it's a museum. Abby's related to him somehow. We both wish we could see some of that money, then we wouldn't have to ride

through town in the trembling Ford. The truck needed gas, but I figured it would last another day.

Abby needed Tylenol for her headaches. Not the regular Tylenol I could get at the gas station, but the prescription stuff from the pharmacy that costs too much. It used to cost \$40 for a hundred pills when I was unemployed and off insurance. Now it's \$10 on the Piggly's policy. Her pharmacy slip sat in the passenger's seat. The wind tossed it down on the seat, lifted it up, and whipped it down again. I'd cashed my check a couple of days before, so I had the money to pick it up. Abby needs the pills; without them she'll cry for a day straight. The tall houses govern both sides of the road as the mouth of the town opens and becomes a thin street with shops selling antiques on all sides, each wafting the smell of thick furniture polish to the road. Abby's headaches started a few months back, from what I think must have been money stress. Most of the stores were closed for the day, all at 4:30. Some were closed for good, with bright pasted signs hung up on the doors.

The pharmacy is attached to the Piggly, on the right a bit past the narrow, crowded street. There's modest little houses in between, with paint chipping or brickwork crumbling in spots, but all are more presentable than the houses of the stumps' side of town. I scraped the Ford's insides along the road (the muffler started dragging a week before) while children with loose clothes chased after a big lanky mutt in one of the yards that was mowed but not weed-eated. My mother's house was somewhere behind those. I hadn't seen her for a few weeks, since me and Abby went with her to the cemetery to take some flowers. I tugged on the shifter to slow the truck, making it spit out a couple of low grunts as I turned in to the Piggly's parking lot. There were some good spaces up front, or anywhere really, since there were only a dozen or so cars parked. I pulled Abby's slip from the passenger seat and got out near the Coors truck that broke down a week before and hadn't been towed. I'd

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called the trucking company, twice.

The Piggly is old enough to have graffiti from victorious soldiers come home from the war, DAN LOVES SUE was the biggest one you could see from the road, but the pharmacy is a new little thing with original paint still shining off it. The two buildings are connected, but it looks more like the Piggly with a fake right arm. Two rows of old shopping carts sat in between the two entrances and creaked like the thin steel radio towers that I always see on trips to Athens. I kicked one of the wheels on a rusty one to watch the spin and listen to the funny hum as it petered out.

The lady at the front register saw me through the window and beamed. She turned her white head slanted and waved with the most energy she had, though I could only see her top four fingers from over the counter. Her big smile was too perfect to be real teeth. She knew me from the church and the ladies' group, but I never learned her name. I smiled back, but didn't go over, and let a thin man with laundry detergent distract her with a purchase. She greeted him with the same excitement, like she had to or her blood would stop. The bells strung down behind clunked together a few times when I swung open the door. Abby always plays with those old tarnished bells, just flicks them between her fingers back and forth when I bring her. The register lady was still busy testifying to the detergent man.

I stepped around the green patio furniture growing old under a red and white \$39.97 sign. The only time me and Abby ever ate on patio furniture together was when we were invited by the preacher and his wife to eat barbecue chicken. Pastor Charles talked about us as young church members and our responsibilities so long that the flies got to it. We all ate broccoli casserole and had angel-food cake for dessert under the big umbrella jammed down through the table heart. I stretched myself between some metal cage bins filled with ladies' hose set out in the toy aisle and splashed through a black puddle of stuffed animals fallen from their spots. A set of feet hung off the highest

shelf, over the pile and slipping.

A retarded girl came behind me to straighten up, holding a broom and dustpan. Her nametag was crooked and one of her eyes wouldn't open. I nodded back to her, but she didn't see me. I picked up one of the stuffed animals I kicked and put it on a shelf with some coloring books about Noah and Jonah. A couple of little girls playing with the make-up samples were in the way, so I slid past. They were cute and smelled nice; too young for make-up though. Abby hasn't used make-up for a while. One of the girls smathered lipstick on her fat lips until she looked like a little hog used for lab testing. The other girls giggled. A lady shouted from the hosiery stands and the fat girl dropped her lipstick.

I could hear the Nigerian pharmacist ordering around some boy named Jim. Jim's shoes made snaps on the floor when he scurried back behind a big shelf of pills and papers in response. The Nigerian was towering over a lady, pointing at the tiny type she strained to see through his bulbous fingers. Jim tapped his way back towards his boss with a creased white bag and his red hair all across one side of his face. The Nigerian pointed at more labels on the bottle the hunched lady didn't understand and leaked some deep notes from his throat. Jim looked over towards a big black girl typing on the computer, then set the bag down beside the Nigerian's round fist.

In line, behind the lady, a boy with light-up shoes stood with a thin blonde girl reaching down to hold his hand. He reached up and clung to a belt loop with his caterpillar hand. Hold me Mommy. She looked down and pushed his little hand off her jeans shorts. No honey, you're too heavy. The ripples in the backs of her legs were full of the orange spray-tan that stained her rolled socks. There was an older guy her and the boy kept making eyes at, humming with the music from the speakers and reading the information on the back of me and Abby's old brand of condoms. They broke too much and felt like zip-lock bags.

The big black girl said something to Jim between keys. He got up from



the pill shelf and handed her a blue slip. She kept typing, holding it with her middle knuckles and working her teeth against the skin of her top lip while she thought. The Nigerian had moved on to the instructions for the old lady's next bottle. The big girl sighed and let her lip loose. I handed her my slip and a ten over the spinning rack of cheap paperbacks. She looked up one-eyed for a second and sized up my hand before she plucked everything out with her nails. I skimmed the back cover of the president's wife's book to keep from seeing the blonde girl and her little boys' look. Pastor Charles' wife had told Abby it was a very good story, but at the time I didn't see the need in spending twenty dollars on a book with a dog in it. Now they'd marked off a tag and dropped it to four. Jim came back up behind the big typing girl with a crisp white sack. I told him I didn't have any questions for the Nigerian and he stretched the pills over the head of the computer for me. The handle had little soaks of his sweat. I wedged the dog book back on the rack in front of a sex novel and moved away. The little boy cried some more about being picked up while the man and his blonde girl debated the benefits of the Duratex brand.

I went around the other side of the store, past the birthday cards and the candies, away from the little girls and toys. My birthday was soon, maybe two weeks. Abby always bakes a cake with candles that spell out the numbers when they get lit. The lady at the register waved as I got around the bin with \$2.99 videos. I smiled at her but kept a pyramid of Tide boxes between. A green plastic chair was pulled out too far from the patio table, so I nudged it back for the retarded girl. The bells glinted from their last bits of lacquer when I slid out the door into the blacktop.

I shooed some heavy black birds from the puddle of beer under the Coors truck. The bottles had busted in a week's worth of heat, and nobody needed drunk crows around. A sticky layer of beer peeled dirt off the parking lot between the dead truck and mine. I would have to take my boots off when

I got back to keep Abby's floor clean. Thin steam fingered out of a sunken grate and rolled in under my back tires, like the old Ford was flying on clouds.

At my dad's funeral, we planted a weak little willow tree in the grass behind his headstone. It was my mother's idea, but my grandpa had gotten the tree to her with his money. The tree wept to the ground like a vine before dad's hole could be covered all the way. In a few months, it was gone, survived by two inches of dry stalk in the shadow of the stone. My mother saw and didn't say anything. She wanted another one planted at my brother's funeral, but there wasn't enough room in the plot Megan bought.

I settled in the cab and tested the wheel with my palms. The hush of a radio man came through the speaker fallen behind the seat, something to do with the drought and brushfires. I swung back out of the spot and trembled up the blacktop delta where it emptied to the main street. The seats swayed when I crossed the thick cracks in the asphalt. Some rows of tiny pines were sprouted and rising in the wide spaces. Abby always says that she can smell the rain coming. Across the road, a family of pines stretched in a thin wind to keep their dry saps moving. I smelled rain, but the sky was one long blue. The trees were waiting and danced to pass time. Abby was fixing pork chops if she didn't have headaches. On the way to the post office, I wondered when the whole town would be stumps.



Willy Donnegan is a Pittsboro boy with a little bit of an accent that suits a Pittsboro boy just about perfectly.

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*have you lost weight?*

### Words by Alicia Link

Render me helpless  
I am left in love  
Wordless  
How I long  
To paint my mind  
In perfect pieces  
Madness  
I thrive upon this  
Fractured nonsense  
Feeling everything  
Only halfway  
Listless  
I might find solace  
In sleep  
Where everything is spoken  
In colors  
And half formed sentences  
Connect  
I can find the words  
When I wake  
Dreaming endless

### five by Kelley Harrell

my niece is a tough old broad.  
she's five, and she wears a bra,  
blue striped blue.  
the arm straps elude her.  
she wriggles, says "It feels funny, but I  
can live with it."  
and i think of how she can-  
she can withstand, how she knows  
things at her age  
i have at thirty-two finally remembered  
and i see that she  
will keep the bra  
only because it's pretty  
however to me it's clear:  
she will live with nothing

### Cocktails at the McCafferty's by Craig Kirchner

Polo and Marcy  
announce their engagement.  
Edwardo demonstrates his backhand.  
Bishop Sheen glares  
smilingly over his mint iced tea,  
and as the olive turns  
in my stomach  
I spill martini  
on my new flannel pants.  
Molly becomes concerned.

Closing her Chippendale eyes  
she wraps her Andalusian tongue  
around the stain  
and I remember why  
I had agreed to come.



## Wail by Garry Somers

Dark humped brethren feel the burn of midday sun  
 absorbed along their absurd length of skin  
 until only frigid seas can balance the heat of blood  
 pushed with hearts the size of boulders  
 stacked in bilges by New Bedford wrights.  
 Melanistic anomaly permits a mixed blessing  
 of visiting hurricane currents.  
 He sleeps in tingling Sargasso,  
 yawns his maw to common soups of strange herring  
 in waters warmed by dust blown on the sirocco,  
 for the bleach of his hide reflects tropic scorch.  
 He grows monstrous on  
 rich diets not intended for him.  
 Gorging on the mobile spawn  
 of some virulent nudabbranch  
 he digests a venom that spills into his brain,  
 making him as mad as he is giant.  
 The wet becomes an itch  
 to his mountain of fat and flesh,  
 something that clings to him and  
 which he cannot dive, cannot spout,  
 cannot breach away.  
 If his hunting skills would serve  
 he would chase and eat the world.  
 If he could scream he would.  
 And then he sees the prickly *Pequod*.

## Hallway Gossip by Chuck Morton

The tyrannosaurus moved into my building today,  
 The tenants' association is very upset.  
 Old Rex took the basement apartment  
 Behind the laundry room and the boiler.  
 Says it's warmer down there.  
 I have seen the beast feeding;  
 It is not a pretty sight.  
 In a corner booth at McDonald's  
 With an Egg McMuffin.  
 And back again for lunch—  
 Yes, it will have its quarter pound of flesh!  
 It glares at you with its cold lizard eyes  
 In a most impolite fashion.  
 Such a rude beast!  
 They say it's unpleasant to its Mother  
 But that's understandable.  
 I hear she just laid the egg  
 And left.

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 who would like to submit  
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## Excellent Career Choices:

**alicia link** is one of those clever young poets we like so much. last i knew she was still in high school and a hard-working barista.

**chuck morton** is one of those clever old hippies we like so much. he used to drive a cab and he's in a band called the Pole Barn Poets.

remember **garry somers** from january's issue? he's a stay-at-home daddy and a poet.

**kelley harrell** is a writer and shamanic practitioner. no, seriously. she has an intertribal shamanic practice, Soul Intent Arts, in cary and is a founder of the Saferoom Project, a non-profit peer support network for sexual assault survivors.

**craig kirschner** works as a sales rep on the east coast but considers himself a hobo of the universe.

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