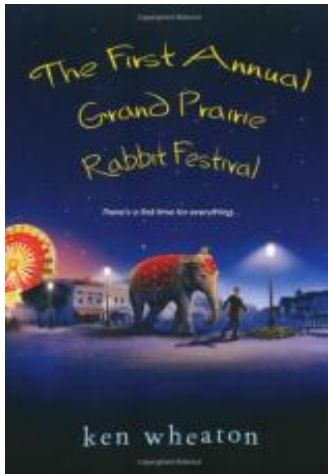


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# The First Annual Grand Prairie Rabbit Festival

by Ken Wheaton

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## About the Book

Ken Wheaton's **The First Annual Grand Prairie Rabbit Festival** is a debut novel with a fresh Southern edge.

Father Steve Sibille has come home to the bayou to take charge of St. Pete's church. Among his challenges are teenybopper altar girls, insomnia-curing confessions, and alarmingly alluring congregant Vicky Carrier. Then there's Miss Rita, an irrepressible centenarian with a taste for whiskey, cracklins, and sticking her nose in other people's business.

When an outsider threatens to poach Father Steve's flock, Miss Rita suggests he fight back by staging an event that will keep St. Pete's parishioners loyal forever. As *The First Annual Grand Prairie Rabbit Festival* draws near, help comes from the strangest places. And while the road to the festival may be paved with good intentions --- not to mention bake sales, an elephant, and the most bizarre cook-out ever --- where it will lead is anyone's guess.

## Discussion Guide

1. Did Father Steve ever stand a chance against Vicky? Discuss the struggle he had with his vows.
2. At one point, Father Steve refers to the "Americanization" of America. In other words, with the spread of chain stores and fast-food franchises, the country became more homogenous. Though some people bemoan the loss of American subcultures, many people in unique areas of the country want their Walmarts and Burger Kings. Indeed, Walmart is a gathering place for some of the folks in Grand Prairie. Has this homogenization robbed south Louisiana of its unique character, or, from what you gather from the book, has that character survived?
3. Do you think Father Steve has "church envy"? He may have issues with other religions, but does it seem that he wants a bit of that community and dynamism offered by less traditional religions? Was he jealous of B.P.'s church because it

was larger and had more parishioners? Discuss the size of a church as it relates to community.

4. At what point do you think Steve first sees Vicky as a woman rather than as a sidekick or an assistant?
5. Does Mark's story in the bar resonate regardless of sexual orientation? Does he seem less concerned with the Church's stance on homosexuality than with the fact that, gay or straight, living alone, detached from society, may not be emotionally healthy? Do you feel that such a lifestyle is antiquated, or does it have its merits in contemporary society?
6. Does Vicky make a good point? Has Father Steve, aside from detaching himself from society as a whole, become lazy and self-absorbed? What about him has changed since organizing the Rabbit Festival?
7. Father Steve and Miss Rita seem to have a pretty open relationship and could almost be seen as a hopeful sign in race relations, yet other than their interaction, their worlds appear to be fairly segregated. Do you see them as a sign of racial progress or as a holdover from a time when black and white were thrown together by unequal working relationships?
8. Did Father Steve join the priesthood for the right reasons --- i.e., as a refuge from his own inability to deal with regular relationships? Do you think this is a motivation behind some who seek a cloistered life, regardless of religion?
9. Is Blackfoot right when he says that denying the sexual urge is ultimately a futile gesture? Or are there arguments to be made for the focus and discipline necessary to maintain a celibate lifestyle?
10. How do you think the Church will respond to Father Steve's actions at the end of the book? What about Father Steve's congregation?

## Author Bio

Ken Wheaton is an editor and writer for *Advertising Age* magazine. His essay "Bombs! Anthrax! Gas! Ho, Hum," appeared in *The Subway Chronicles* anthology alongside the work of Calvin Trillin and Jonathan Lethem. His blog *The Nondating Life* (now defunct due to marriage) was named the best blog about not dating by the *Village Voice* in 2005 ("Best of New York 2005"). Wheaton lives in Brooklyn, but was born and raised in Opelousas, Louisiana, where he picked up all of the good things about Southern and Cajun culture --- and only a few of the bad.

## Critical Praise

Readers need to hold onto their hats because Wheaton's roller-coaster ride of a book has hilarious highs that plunge to soul-baring angst, then zoom back up to the top.

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# **The First Annual Grand Prairie Rabbit Festival**

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