

DEEPSOUTHCON: How It Began

by Larry J. Montgomery

Welcome all to the 25th anniversary of my inability to go to Hulan's house for a weekend of fannish conviviality. Sociologists write that the older we get, the faster time 'seems' to pass. That's very true in my case. The past quarter of a century seems to have zipped by all too quickly!

The words DEEPSOUTH CON have a special meaning for me and a lot of other southern fans. Organized Southern Fandom as we know it begins with the formation of the Southern Fandom Group in 1960, a N3F clone which lasted only a couple of years. Before it gave up the ghost, it spawned the premier Southern APA: The

Southern Fandom Press Alliance (SFPA), now well into its 26th year. It was the rallying point for the emerging Southern Fan; SFPA members visited each other frequently. And it was in SFPA's first year that charter member Dave Hulan urged the formation of an annual Southern Science Fiction convention.

It seems like only yesterday Dick Ambrose sat down beside me in our high school and asked if I was going to be able to make Dave Hulan's fan gathering in Huntsville that weekend. I wanted to say YES! But my reply was an unfortunate no. My 1951 Chevy was nonfunctional just then, as usual, and

my father refused to lend his automobile for "such a silly trip." Bus fare to the Huntsville gathering was unavailable that spring of my senior year at Anniston High School. So I missed the first of what we call Deep South Cons.

Dave Hulan could shed more light on that weekend, but since I've been asked to reminisce about the early Deep South Cons, I DO recall what a fine and gracious man he was. He and then-wife Katya made Bill Plott, Rick Norwood, William Gibson (yes, the pro), and Dick Ambrose feel at home with style that weekend. Lots of fannish talk ensued. SFPA was discussed and Dave's UNKNOWN collection

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was appreciated in its garage storage place. The attendees crashed on the sofa and, from what I could tell, a fine time was had by all. If I had been able to make that small gathering, we might be attending "Mid" South Con 25.

Let's flash to the summer of 1964. Dave Hulan had moved to California. I was between my freshman and sophomore years at Jacksonville State University. I was as active as one could be for a fan of that time and place. I was corresponding with 30 or so fans from all across the U.S. I was in three apas. I was visiting everyone I knew who lived close by. But I had never been to a science fiction convention and wanted to attend one in the worst way! Working my way through college precluded the financial means to travel to regional cons outside the South. That summer I hit on the idea of bringing the con to me. I would host my OWN convention--a Southern fan convention. As SFPA was my main fannish focus, I invited them. I checked with the late Janie Lamb in Tennessee to invite the N3F membership and sent out invites to as many Southern fans as I was aware. I pondered a name for my con: AlaCon? DixieCon? But certainly NOT Mid-SouthCon. Dave Hulan

might have considered Huntsville as "midsouth" the spring before, but I didn't. Alabama, the Heart of Dixie, was nothing if not DEEP South! Deep South Con it would be.

The South needed an annual fan gathering. I figured anyone who showed up would make it a fun weekend and that I could keep such an annual gathering going for the foreseeable future. I thought back and unofficially made Dave's fan gathering the "First," and MY DSC was numbered "Two."

In spite of my feeble efforts at organization, 10 fans from 5 states enjoyed the hospitality of 2 rooms of the Vann Thomas Motel (still in business too) in Anniston in August of 1964.

It would be unfair to compare the DSCs of the 70's and 80's with those first few DSCs. It would be like comparing apples and potato chips. The attendees were few in number but the enjoyment factor was high!

But I digress. There was no beer because Calhoun County was "dry" at that time...we drank Cokes. I delighted in my first "con," urging the creation of a one-shot called CONGLOMERATION which ran in the September SFPA mailing, snapping a few photos, rapping comics with Rick Norwood, trading a

scarce hardbound LORD OF THE RINGS volume for a silver dagger with the brilliant teenager from Virginia, William (we called him Bill) Gibson, and barely realizing just how special was the warmth of wit of the late Lee Jacobs.

Lee J. was a West Coast BNF and never let on that "real" cons had beer instead of Cokes. Dick Ambrose and high school friends Terri Ange and John Hall were in and out. But most of all, the con was special because of Al Andrews.

My DSC 2 began with driving to Birmingham and transporting Al to Anniston. Lee J. should have blamed Al for the Cokes. Cramped in the front seat of my black VW Bug, he never uttered a word of discomfort, but I knew he was in constant pain.

That weekend, so long ago and just yesterday, is a blur of taking turns at my typer, working on an atrocious round-robin fan fic. Strangely, William Gibson didn't help with the writing, but did contribute hilarious cartoons to illustrate it!

The weekend was over all too quickly. On the way back to Birmingham as I drove him home, Al smiled that wonderful smile of his and joked that he could die happy now...he had finally been to a science fiction convention. As we drove,

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I told Al that with better planning and a year to work on it, Anniston could have a bigger and better DSC the next summer. While I was planning DSC 3, aloud, Al convinced me that Birmingham and a real hotel, like the Downtowner, would attract more attention and attendance. While we had had a good time, national fandom, he felt, would laugh at 10 or so fans gathering in one place for a weekend and calling itself a convention. The South deserved better for an annual event.

Nearly a year later, several weeks before the first DSC which would REALLY classify as a convention as we now know them, I thought about my good friend Al Andrews, a friend who was wasting away from muscular dystrophy, slowly but surely dying. Al was very ill in the months preceding the third DSC, held in Birmingham. With that in mind, I made a few phone calls, wrote a few letters and received nothing but positive feedback for an annual Southern Fan Award with Al as its first recipient. His peer group agreed that Alfred McCoy Andrews was a truly special man and had done as much as anyone in binding together the few and scattered Southern fans. Thus the Rebel

Award was born.

In spite of a year's planning, my scheme for having SF movies to show fell through. The first night of DSC 3 was a bit disorganized. Twenty or so fans showed up that weekend. We had a panel or two Saturday night, highlighted by the presentation of Al's Rebel. Lots of fannish goodwill was shared and the seeds which would result in DSC lasting 25 years were sown.

Lon Atkins' group from Chapel Hill North Carolina won the vote to hold the next DSC. He would move to Huntsville soon after and DSC 4 passed into his capable hands, returning the con to the Rocket City once again. Lon put on an even more organized and better attended con. Hearts were played for the first time--tradition in the making--and Dave Hulan received the well-deserved 2nd presentation of the Rebel.

The winds of change which blew like a tornado through the decade of the 60's carried me away to a draft-motivated enlistment with the U.S. Air Force in 1967. I maintained my membership in SFPA up until 1970, but I slowly lost contact with Southern fandom and then GAFIated.

Fans who had attended those first four DSCs carried on the tradition. The convention moved from city to city around

the South binding Southern fandom together, at least on an annual basis. The Phoenix Award for professional achievement joined the Rebel and Meade Frierson III founded the Southern Fandom Confederation as the decade of the 70's dawned. MYRIAD was created by Stven Carlberg as a 2nd successful Southern apa. Fan clubs sprang up in major cities. Southern fandom was alive and well and thriving in early 1981.

1981...the 100th mailing of the Southern Fandom Press Alliance was approaching. (Then) Editor, Guy H. Lillain III was attempting to contact some of the early members of that apa for the event. He phoned me one Sunday afternoon in Colorado Springs while I was at my radio job. Eleven years had elapsed. SFPA still lived! Deep South Cons were still being held and Southern fandom was alive and remembered its past. I was delighted and made plans for a vacation the summer of 1981 to attend DSC 19 in Birmingham. I checked into the DSC hotel late Thursday night. Next morning, I checked at the front desk: oldtime friend Lon Atkins was indeed registered. I called his room and we agreed to meet in the lobby. We hugged each other after all the years,

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and then he introduced me to the lovely redhaired lady beside him. Her name was P.L. Caruthers. The three of us adjourned to the bar for a drink and for Lon and I to get reacquainted. Four months later, P.L. became my wife.

P.L. and I flew back from Colorado Springs for the next several DSCs and then moved back to Alabama six months before DSC 23. It was with much pride that I accepted a Rebel here in Huntsville at DSC two years ago. P.L. also received a Rebel for her own separate and distinct contributions to Southern Fandom. As you can see, DeepSouthCon is VERY special to me for very many reasons.

I expect to be nodding off in the consuite when I reach the ripe old age of 90, regaling neos with the tale of the first Hank Reinhardt Awakening Ceremony and the story of how Jerry Page picked up the reins after Lon and I moved away and held DSC 5 in Atlanta.

And so it goes. tradition. That's what DSCs are all about, handing down the history, beliefs, legends and customs from generation to generation of fans through word-of-mouth and practice so long as fandom shall continue in the South. Deep South Con--long may it reign!

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