

Avatar Press

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UP FRONT

Hi fellow readers!

Wow, where did the time go? I'm glad that Jeff Copeland sent out an e-mail about the deadline or I would have forgotten for sure. I've been rather busy enjoying life, among other things. I'm glad that I had May 28, 2001 off to work on my zine. Well I hope y'all had a great two months. I enjoyed them.

Gosh, it's very late and I've got a cold so I'll just hit the highlights (now that I've finished the mailing comments like a good boy and included some fiction by my friend, Leana Grice).

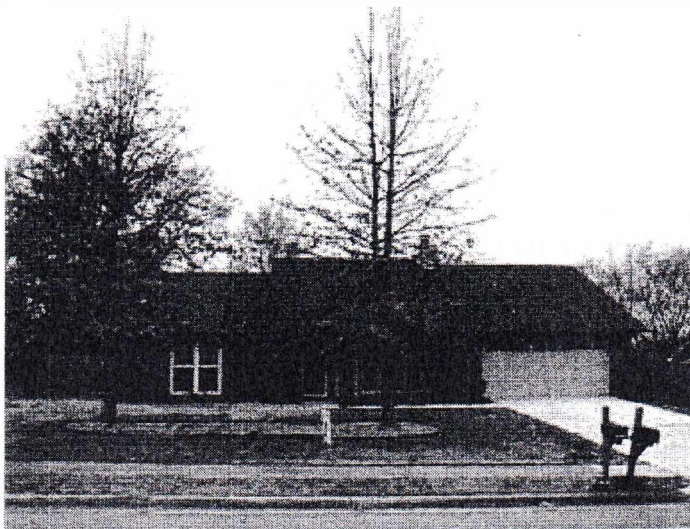
LESS OF A MAN

I won the weight lost contest among my friends (\$120 pot). I lost 26.6 pounds in three months. I lost 31.6 for the year. This month, I've gained about eight pounds though. Eek! The next three month contest starts June 1st. I intend to get really serious for that one.

HEART

I'm a little shy about sharing this. However, this year I was very surprised to have developed a little crush on someone. Surprised because I did not think I could feel attracted to anyone again (since it's been so long) and because they really are out of my league (as in AFL vs. NFL, not minor vs. major). Nothing will ever come of it but I really enjoyed the experience. Nice to know my heart has not turn totally to stone at the old age of 35. Very neat. :-)

HOME SWEET HOME?



Okay by the time you read this, I should be in my new home. I would have been in another home April 30th but that seller backed out (and owes me \$600 for my out of pocket expenses). My closing is Thursday, May 31st, 2001. Here's my new address and phone number (hopefully):

Randy B. Cleary
138 Bibb Drive
Madison, Alabama 35758
256-772-3826 (alms-pad-tao)

Details:

- 14 years old
- Rancher
- Full Brick (except for wood eaves, trim, and covered front porch)
- 1620 sq ft
- 440 sq ft two car attached front entry garage
- 3 bedrooms
- 2 baths
- Vaulted ceiling in living room
- Vaulted ceiling in formal dining room
- Breakfast nook
- Laundry room
- Pantry
- 90 x 120 ft lot
- Partial privacy fence
- Chain link fence
- Empty field behind backyard
- 1 street sub-division (curves around)
- playground (with old cemetery)
- good schools
- three miles to work (door to door)
- New paint inside and out
- New carpet and vinyl flooring
- 4 year old roof (20 year life)
- Electric

- Wood burning brick fireplace
- Landscaped (trees, flowers, etc.)
- Large double pane windows with storm windows.
- Wood cabinets
- Mini-blinds
- Swing on front porch
- \$103,000 and I pay Closing
- Owed \$750 for repair costs
- 30 Year Fixed Mortgage at %6.875
- 10% down and no PMI

Since I will have a new home, my Mother has decided to escape the hellish life she is living with my nephew by moving down here in June (while leaving him to either move back in with his Mom or with some friends). He is basically getting her thrown out of her apartment due to his antics. I hope it works out well for her and me. It's going to be a big adjustment after living on my own for so long. I will not have to buy any furniture like I thought I would in June. Wish us luck.

REVIEWS AND REPORTS

I've read several books, bought a few CDs, been to cons and took lots of trips but due to time constraints, those reviews and reports will have to wait until next time (if ever). Here's what you should look for next issue (plus hopefully more), plus a word or two of comment for now:

BOOKS

- A Canticle for Leibowitz, Walter M. Miller, Jr. (Good classic)
- A King of Infinite Space, Allen Steele (Good)
- Dilbert: Excuse Me While I Wag, Scott Adams (Good)
- March Upcountry, David Weber & John Ringo (Good but incomplete until sequel)
- Mother of Demons, Eric Flint (Good)

CDS

- Pet Shop Boys Discography (Great)
- The Least Worst of Type O Negative (Fair)

MOVIES

- Black Moria Film Festival (Good)
- Bridget Jones' Diary (Good)
- Shrek (Great)
- The Mummy Returns (Good)

CONS

- DeepSouthCon 39 (Good) / Tenacity (Fair)
- LibertyCon 25 (Good)

TRIPS

- Fencing in Kennesaw, Redbank, & Spring City (Fun)
- Birmingham City Stages (Fun)
- Sequoyah Caverns (Good)
- Six Flags (Fun)
- Stars Vs. Barons Baseball (Fun)

FICTION

It is with great pleasure that I include three short-fiction pieces done by my friend (and social activities coordinator), Leana Grice. I hope you enjoy them. She's my first official contributor. I hope to have more from her and others in the future.

AGI AND SLATEYE

"Name your price. Whatever the cost, I can pay. Get me across Slatti River." Agi, the fugitive, yanked his long red beard with one hand while he shook a heavy sack with his other. "A bonus if I'm in Von Reidaught Parish by moonrise."

He spun wildly, shaking the bag at any local who sidled past. The fishermen spat and continued walking from their stilt-legged shanties to the riverbank. The squalor made even Agi's red topknot ache. The dawn sky lightened as the fugitive waddled to the line of beached craft. His stack sandals sank into the corrupt sand. Children with huge double-lidded eyes hissed or flapped their neck gills if he approached a guarded sailing craft. The gray Slatti River oozed north to south, an oily boundary between Von Reidaught Parish and the Great Western Mountains. An insurmountable boundary for a corpulent nonswimmer.

"Twenty gold now," said a deep voice at the fugitive's right shoulder, "Twenty later. Twenty bonus."

A Slatti Riverman, his webbed hand extended, had approached without the fugitive's notice. Five foot, bright olive complexion, black eyes with a second filmy inner lid, a powerful square jaw and neck gills. He bore a decorative fish lure lip stud. Its yellow tassel flapped when he spoke. "Sixty gold."

Agi gasped and clutched his sack. "All I have?"

The local shrugged and followed the line of boats. Several had already launched into the Slatti, sails half-furled like bat ears. Inland a rooster crowed.

"Wait. Agreed agreed." Agi hurried after, choosing steps carefully around tangled nets. "What is--"

"Call me Slateye." The local stopped. Agi almost barreled over the little man. "That's what all land huggers call my kind. Follow." He crooked his finger, turned, and strode upriver.

They walked until the shanties were lost and white

dunes towered over Agi's head. Thighs, calves, even the fugitive's armpits ached and pulsed. His forehead burned. Only the lumps of a few pitiful debris islands broke the Slatti's monotony. At midmorning, Slateye veered right and marched straight into the river. Agi collapsed to his knees on the sand, exhausted. The local disappeared beneath the waters for several minutes. Agi scanned the riverbank, his eyes trained for bandits or ambush.

Slateye resurfaced and held a cord over his head. "This is my ferryman's rope." He walked backwards from the water. Leeward of one debris island, a flat wooden boat appeared. Mussels shone like button festoons along its length. "Here's Slatti's narrowest part for a hundred miles. How I am fastest slateye ferry-er."

Agi wiped his streaming forehead and grunted. Slateye worked hand over hand. "My beauty. She never touches shore." Only bare essentials: a tacklebox with a notched hatchet buried in the lid, gloves. Tree trunks lashed together, their hollows pitch patched, formed an eight foot square. A thin pole lashed to a metal hoop threaded by the ferry rope. If Agi squinted until his eyes wept, he could glimpse the far shore.

The ferryman stopped hauling once he stood in chest deep water. "Board." Slateye hopped from the water to the stern. He pulled the ferry rope taut.

"The Slatti stains fine cloth?" the fugitive asked his bare-chested guide. The local nodded once. Agi splashed and floundered to the craft. "Help me."

"I work. Help yourself."

"You motherless pygmy croppy-"

Agi swore himself red and breathless, but he could not climb onto the ferry. Slateye's strong movements carried them quickly down the rope, into the river center. The strong current passed beneath the ferry and tugged Agi's thighs. His sandals pulled him toward the muddy bottom.

"Help yourself."

"I can't."

"Lighten your load."

Agi rammed his fingers around the rope lashing the trunks and dug in his nails. "Carry on."

Slateye worked silently until mid-afternoon. He paused near a mudslide rapid. Geography lessons returned to Agi. Flash floods ripped topsoil into Slatti. Dirt mounded in shallow sections until the current eroded channels in the temporary dams.

Slateye corked the guide rope and hoop with his extra pole.

Agi snapped, "Now help me aboard." His entire left arm was numb, the fingers blue. The rapids stank of hot earth and old fish scales.

"I rest," Slateye said. He opened the tackle box and lifted a swollen leather flask. His clenched fist spurted water into his mouth and over his gills.

Agi licked his lips, then regretted his act as river water coated his tongue.

Slateye sat and braced his back against the rope hoop. His eyes reflected the rapid's white foam. "Lighten your load and drink your fill."

The fugitive's arm and side stung like hornets. Agi cursed, "You slateyed demon. Take it!" He tugged his coin purse from his soaked inner jacket pocket. He

slammed gold onto the deck. He released his death grip on the trunk and prepared to climb with his good right arm.

Slateye smiled and his lure twitched. "Now drink your fill." He reached above his head. His callused hand grabbed the pole and uncorked the ferry. The craft pitched and bucked, drawn by the current into the upper rapids. The guide rope flew, and Agi screamed amid foul Slatti waves. Though his right hand scrambled, he found no purchase. He slipped off the trunk. The Slatti sucked the red-haired fugitive into deep mud rapids.

Slateye's ferry jerked as the rope grew taut again. The ferryman pushed mud from the craft's mussel-trimmed edges. He laughed. "Won't eat me today, lonely Slatti." He strained and pulled for his home shore. "Let Bogggers find bodies and sell soiled clothes." He laid a foot on the sack and raked the gold within reach. Then he secured the bag to his belt. "I earn my living as a ferry-er."

"Fastest. Never ask why	ferry-o
Slatti's Hole drinks the world dry	ferry-er
I am the fastest roundtripper	ferry-o
Mud rapid encases	ferry-er
Dead water chases	ferry-o
Slatti's Hole will birth demons	ferry-er
Airless fishless black leavin's	ferry-o
Go due north against the flow	ferry-er
Slatti black death pool lurks below	ferry-o!"

GIBBLE GETS THE GIRL

Four of them peep over the serrated edge of the cardboard box. The box rests inside an olive-tiled shower stall. Four lovelies looking at Gible, on all fours himself for a better look at them. "Kitty kitty pretty puss," he croons. Eight eyelids blink, shading jade or howlite souls.

"Gible, I already told you, they already got homes." Darlene rattles the bathroom doorknob. "C'mon, now. I. Got. To. Pee."

"I'd love her very much."

"You're breaking my heart and my bladder."

"Her name is Arabella," Gible whispers the name, blows his warm air over the side of the box, ruffles delicate white hair on ear tips. He stands up four feet ten inches and stops. Another foot hangs over the corded belt of his pressed dockers. Now the legs bear dirt impressions of his knees. Darlene could see her reflection in his mottled bald spot if she'd only look. She doesn't, only pushes Gible outside and throws the deadbolt.

The deadbolt had been her gift to the narrow backroom of Gible's Vid-E-O-Emporium. A franchise of one.

Gible wanders to the faded vinyl couch and sits gingerly over its taped slashes. He drums his fingers against his kneecaps and scans movie posters pinned to the cork walls. Scream 2, Howling IV, Amityville 3, Blood & Donuts (his gift.)

Darlene flushes but stays inside the bathroom. Probably stroking her kittens, her-. Too easy.

Gible smiles. When he smiles, his round face

wears only shadows where eyes belong. He turns off a Snoopy and Linus ceramic lamp beside the couch. Indigo, Knoxville dusk charges out of the corners and from under the door. He drapes his navy trenchcoat over his trousers.

Darlene steps out and Gibble holds his breath. Bites his tongue for the salt.

"Gibble?"

Darlene's Avon perfume plucks at his nostrils. He stifles a sneeze.

Like a bad idea, Darlene tosses her hair and red shoulder-duster earrings out of her face. "You creepy little man." She snaps on the bare florescent overhead bulb.

"But I had you scared, right? For just a minute."

"Gib honey, I made 3 biker-slasher films last year. Heard my *dad* rented one. That's scary. You?" She rubs her palm over his head, bowing back her black fingernails. "You my buddhaman. Smiles and jelly rolls."

"Let me have a kitten." He does not touch her, lets her hand rest on his thinning hair.

Darlene's face is a jewel, oval and deep olive. Her moody Thursday eyes radiate hazel gamma rays. At twenty-five she was exquisite, twenty-nine a treasure. At thirty-three she lives in his backroom for free, a "looker" with her only prospect a slow slide down the alphabet. An artist would christen her portrait "Madonna who Never got the News."

"I never break a promise. You know that."

"You can choose one for me."

"I'm not giving you nothing. Those cats leave with their new, *promised* owners tonight." Darlene watches him with the corner of her eye as she adjusts her bra. Like a musical pause, her iris rests between bars of thick brown eyeliner. "Gave them to *good* homes."

Gibble wipes sweat from the front crease of his neck. "Who?"

An old steel safe serves as the lampstand, a heavy period to the couch's foamy disgorgements. Darlene kneels, spins the lock, grunts the door open. "I'm counting the till now. Got the inventory maintenance gate on?" Her thin voice rattles ironic reeds against Gibble's sensitive eardrum.

"Who did you give my Arabella?"

"I promised a kitten to Lee, Chad, Skippy," she drops a quarter for each name, "and Heather."

"Who-"

"I didn't check sexes. First come first pick. I already told you." She keeps her eyes on the ones passing between her thumbs.

Gibble stands and surveys her bent form curled over the black cash drawer. He takes, swirls in his mouth and releases a diaphragm-deep breath. "It was an accident."

Darlene lips move in silent multiples of five.

"How could I know that furball was your cat?"

"Wasn't. She was a stray. A wild thing." Darlene

snaps down the bill clamps one by one.

"You fed her."

"I threw scraps out the window cause I don't got a disposal."

"If you'd asked my permission to keep it-"

Darlene stands, breasts levered on top of the drawer. "She ate. She had kittens in my tupperware set box." Darlene swallows several times, shakes her earrings. "You sneak in, she claws your leg. And you break her spine against the wall. These things happen."

"I thought a rat maybe-"

"Thought crap. You had her by the hind legs. Like a batter. I saw..."

Gibble's eyes watch the muscle of Darlene's throat. Thin cords shorten, tighten, knot pain into silence, relax, sag from the strain. "Hey batta batta, *swing* batta."

"I'll buy her from Lee or one of the others. I'll buy her from you. Ten bucks."

"Can't buy my promises." She walks to the bedsheet draped in the door dividing the store and backroom. "Time to open." She pulls aside the dingy sheet printed with horseshoes, cactus and spurs.

"I need-"

"Who cares, buddhaman?" She steps through the door, releases the sheet. "Who really cares why or where or when or how much?" Her words are muffled, indistinct puffs, small folds and tucks in the fabric.

Gibble looks at the open safe, runs a finger along the edge. Fireproof, floodproof, soundproof. In the store Darlene rings open the till, slams it shut. Keys chime like broadswords striking display cases of Sega game cartridges. She unlocks the front door. Gibble doesn't like "no," ignores the guttural bark whenever non-fatal or uncollaborated. Certainly not from a busted apron-wearing salesclerk living three steps from Kingston Pike.

Soft scratching sounds echo from the john. He tiptoes to the door and squints in with one eye. In his periscopic sights, two calico scrappers balance on opposite edges of the tupperware box. The kitten closest to the door reaches down, tries to swat the olive tile. It hoists its tail and bares its tight red hole as it clings upside down to the box corner, bracing for free fall. Gibble holds his breath. His left hand holds the doorframe. One foot glides out, passes over the tiles like a serpent's head. He feels the floor through his sandals, accepts the weight and power of his muscles, his blood.

5/14/98

CLOUD & MOUNTAIN

Long ago, Earth wore only one long, warm, wet season. Cloud moved nimbly across the sky, shifted from one magnificent shape to another, adorned in sunset violets and lavenders, saw all parts of the world. Mountain landmarked the earth and wore a deep mantle of moss and trees. Strength and

generosity attracted Cloud, as did Mountain's vision and patience. Cloud decided to love Mountain.

Cloud settled over Mountain, who relished the sojourner's attention. Now no one saw Mountain's height. Cloud poured affection onto Mountain. Rain fell every minute. Soil eroded. Beautiful wildflowers and evergreens washed down into the surrounding valley. Mountain's generous nature changed.

Bounding brother and rolling sister clouds greeted their stationary cousin, yet they never slowed their waltz with chuckling Wind. Despite its dancer nature, Cloud remained Mountain's pale partner. Valley creatures watching the courtship began to wade, then swim. Mountain's entire base wore a scarf of water, then a dress, then a shroud. Many burrowers drowned before Bobcat, Squirrel, all valley creatures abandoned Mountain. No life remained, only the full force of Cloud's passion. Mountain couldn't see the devastation because mist obscured its vision. Its sides felt cold, wrong, because bare granite alone remained.

Brave Falcon flew into the mist and whispered truth to his old friend. Together they sang for Wind's stronger sister. Gale whisked away Cloud and tumbled the errant lover over four seas before disappearing in sighs.

Stronger flowers bloom, fleetier animals adorn Mountain's sides. Hardier trees root.

Cloud still wanders.

That is why some clouds wear mourning and weep, and why other shade-bringers reel past like white children's slippers.

written 3/11/99 revised 3/12/99
(for Ricky)

MAILING COMMENTS

Well, let's serve up some inane comments, shall we.

TYNDALLITE Volume 3, Number 94, February 2001

Hi Norm!

"Chuck pointed a pistol at Lew Martin." Gasp. Such behavior is inexcusable. It seems your definition of Science-Fiction tends to only include what some people refer to as "hard" science-fiction. That is, actual science and its logical extrapolation. Good pun on Roy Rogers guest starring on Wonder Woman as causing a response to be "triggered" in Tom Feller. Hey, I got two copies of your zine in my mailing! I better see if I did not get some one else's 'zine.

The New Port News 196, March 2001

Hi Ned!

It was nice meeting you at DeepSouthCon39. RAEBNC.

Challenger sub-micron

Hi Guy!

It was nice seeing you and Rose at DeepSouthCon39. Hope y'all had a good time. Good luck with the Hugo. Who did the mer-man artwork? Fultz?

Variations on a Theme #5

Hi Rich!

I enjoyed *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* also. Hope you had fun at Spring training.

As We May Think by Vannevar Bush

Interesting. The future is not what it used to be.

Spiritus Mundi 182, February-March 2001

Hi Guy!

Neat cover. Sorry about the lost wallet. The Endymion parade was great! I wish some of my photos of it had turned out. Thanks for the comments. My guess for "JWRFTM" is a variation of the classic tech support comment "RTFM" or "Jesus Would Read The F***ing Manual".

Offline Reader, Volume 1, Issue 21, February-March 2001

Hi Irv!

I hope Kay is feeling better. Good luck with Myriad. Thanks for the comments. The stock market has improved a little this year. My company, Intergraph, has really shot up to where I can sell it at a decent profit (if I chose so). Good luck with your stocks.

Frequent Flyer, March 11, 2001

Hi Tom!

Sorry about your grandmother. Thanks for the comments.

Revenant #5, March 2001

Hi Sheila!

Thanks for the comments. I had a great time at New Orleans for Mardi Gras weekend. I hope I can stay for the actual Fat Tuesday next time. Maybe you, Guy, and I could meet for lunch next time I'm in the Big Easy. I hope you had a good time at DSC 39.

Comments 10

Hi Steve!

It was nice seeing you and Suzanne at DSC 39. Thanks again for lunch. Cute robot illos in your zine. Thanks for the comments. I won the weight lose contest but have gained weight this month. The next contest starts June 1st and I hope to lose more weight and win again. Good luck with the move to Ellijay.

Twygdrasil And Treehouse Gazette #69, March 2001

Hi Richard!

Interesting cover. Good luck with your computer and teeth problems (bytes vs. bites). Thanks for the comments. I've lost some weight and hope to lose even more in the next contest. Krispy Kreme donuts are tastier (but I may be biased as I had those often long before I ever had a Duncan Donut).

Peter, Pan & Merry #36

Hi David!

"Ironed" pants! LOL!

Aristotle Meets Gernsback

Hi Jeff!

Sorry about Holly. Glad y'all survived the quake. Still keeping up with Boulder's wackiness, I see. In regards to your comment to Ned Brooks, did not that "Bach" group reform later as BTO?

Marching Through Oneshot

Hi Guys!

Nice color photos. What's next, putting your wrist camera on a rocket?

Dewachen and Planet of the APAs

Hi Trinlay!

I hope your knee and foot are healing well. Interesting zines!

Trivial Pursuits #94

Hi Janice!

Still traveling a lot, I see. "Join Fandom and See the World." I also was able to get a 30-year fixed rate of 6.875% for my house. Like you, I'm amazed at my co-worker friends who actually get near the company limit on stored up vacation (160 hours now, use to be 200). This year I get four weeks vacation and plan to use it all.

Snow and Shmoozing

Hi Janice!

Thanks for the trip reports. Sorry to hear of the travel troubles. "Getting there is half the fun." On the Wild Cards series, a DSC39 panel was about lame things in SF and that series was presented as pretty bad. Sounds like you had quite the adventures these trips.

Tennessee Trash #40

Hi Gary!

It was nice seeing you at DSC 39. Thanks for the "Water with Teeth" drink experience. Neat newspaper article. Too bad Pepsi was not an option at ConCave, because it is the superior cola. ;-) Glad the move to a new hotel worked out. I hope the Tennessee State Taekwondo Tournament went well for you.

Steve Vs. the Printer

Hi Steve!

Sorry for the printer problems. Thanks for the information. I'll keep those hints in mind when I get my next printer.

Guilty Pleasures 18

Hi Eve!

Congrats on your 25th wedding anniversary. Thanks for the comments. Good luck with the weight loss. I'll get back into gear on mine starting in June. The GA-Filk logo is modeled after the Darwin Fish and has a kazoo.

George Wells's Only an Idiot

Hi George!

Hefty issue! Interesting title. Did you see Buffy's season (series?) finale? Wow! Wonder what they will do when they move to UPN?

Avatar Press 2.14

Hi Randy!

Not bad. Hope you do an even better job next time. :-)

Home with the Armadillo #46

Hi Liz!

Cool quilt! Allie got a tattoo! Wow! Sorry about Holly.

Confessions of a Consistent Liar 73

Hi Arthur!

Thanks for the "A Boy Named Sue" information.

Passages #9

Hi Janet!

Thanks for the family photo. Glad you are starting to feel like you're coming up for air with the twins. Hope Indiana did okay with her baby.

Oblio No. 133, February-March 2001

Hi Gary!

Neat cover! Nice 'zine again. Sigh. I'm so envious. The new printer looks sharp. Glad the physical went well. I should probably get one sometime. Wow, appearing in a comic book! Cool! Playboy once ran a short-fiction piece with a character named "Randall Cleary" who was a software engineer (like me). I think it was pure chance, as I never heard of the author. That character was murdered in the story so I hope I don't know the author under his real name if he

was using a pen name. Wow on the weight loss! Again with the envy have I.

Everybody's Got Something to Hide

Hi Mike!

What's the deal with the monkey? RAEBNC.

The Sphere

Hi Don!

Good luck being a grandpa. Congrats on Toonopedia. Republicans are not for doing away with government. That's anarchists. Republicans believe government is a necessary evil while Democrats believe government is an indispensable good. ;-)

Yngvi is a Louse

Hi Toni!

Thanks for the books and Steven Hickman's cover art photo-print. I have my first contributor this issue. Taking a page from your book, so to speak. Great essay by Pat Gibbs. Thanks for the comments. I'm going to have to check out the soundtrack to *O Brother Where Art Thou?* I hope to do more art once I get settled into the new homestead. Krispy Kreme rules! Is not the Triangle in NC a great place?

GALLERY

The art drought continues, as my life has been far too hectic (and fun) this year. Here's the art that I did for the pre-con promotional T-shirt for DSC 40. They decided to print it white on dark colors. Had I known they were determined to do this, I would have designed it accordingly. Oh well. Some people are buying them so it must not be all bad. It's homage to the first issue of Godzilla put out by Marvel Comics and based on a suggestion by Naomi Fisher.

DEEPSOUTH CON 40



Huntsville, AL June 14-16, 2002