

*UTGARD 22 is produced by Dave Hulan, PO Box 1403, Costa Mesa, CA92626, for the 74th Mailing of the Southern Fandom Press Alliance, and is Jotun Publication 427.*

My apologies for the lack, again, of mailing comments this time around. This time, though, the apologies are unaccompanied by a promise to do better next time; I don't intend to do MCs for the next couple of mailings, probably. I don't rule out the possibility, either; a mailing with a lot of food for comment that I don't think will upset anyone may bring me back to the practice, but for the present I plan to stick to doing THAL as my regular SFFPA entry, intending to include a number of short articles inspired by things people said in the mailing, but no MCs as such. I'll also probably do an UTGARD with brief MCs answering specific questions directed toward me, so there won't be a lapse of communication from my side (it was lack of time and not inclination that prevented that this mailing). But the days of the long rambling Hulan MCs are at least temporarily at an end.

The main reason is that the reading of some members' zines with an eye to MCs just puts me in too bad a mood to be comfortable, especially when there's really nothing at stake. This may come as a surprise to some people, but I don't really enjoy feeling irritated at people and irritating back. On the other hand, when I get irritated, I find it hard to resist returning it with interest, and the easiest way is just to cut out commenting. I can shrug off the things that bother me much more easily if I don't have the problem of figuring out how to answer them. And since I have no bones to pick with the OE these days, I feel no obligation to answer anything either.

I fully realize that in eschewing MCs I'm going against a dictum of my own of a year or so back. Anyone who wishes to criticize me for this, feel free. I agree entirely that I'm being inconsistent, and don't ask anyone to apply any different standards to me than you would to anyone else. I hope that THAL will be an adequate, if different, contribution to the health of the mailings (it may be argued that somebody has to produce something besides MCs eventually to provide new topics), and it's certainly true that I don't have time any more to do both MCs and THAL on any regular basis, but if anyone feels that MCs would be a better use of my time criticism of me is certainly warranted. (On the other hand, it isn't likely to do anything toward making me change my mind...)

Elsewhere in the mailing you'll find SOUTH COAST'S A WILD COAST #1, the opening blast in a DSC bid from Lon and me. I commend it to your consideration. Two experienced DSC chairmen working together, close proximity to the ensuing Worldcon, and a great area to spend your vacation - what more could you ask? (All right, you could ask that it be located in the Deep South. That would be nice, but it's impractical - and nowhere in the Deep South is this close to Worldcon in Phoenix.)

I'm waiting with some anxiety to see how SFFPA reacts to LOKI 13. So far the response from the rest of the mailing list has not been what one would call encouraging. I sent out an immediate mailing, the day after the SFFPA deadline, to 31 people, and since then have sent out half a dozen more; the response to date is a net of three letters of comment and two brief acknowledgements, not counting people I've seen in person who've acknowledged. Haven't even gotten any trades yet, though I suppose there'll be a few of those trickling in eventually. I'm going to mail out about ten or a dozen more in the next week or so and see what happens then. The genzine may be doing well these days - a lot of people say so - but LOKI doesn't seem to be one of them. (Possibly the fact that I acknowledged that it was a one-shot as a genzine may have affected response, but I hated to lie when I knew it

would be.)

What with the exigencies of time getting LOKI ready, I never did get around to making Fearless Predictions of the NFL race this year before things got so well defined that there's not that much doubt in most of the divisions. But Ken Budka and Gary Brown did last mailing, and so I think I'll make some comments on the situation, especially with respect to the Rams, which are My Team and which I believe both Ken and Gary picked to take all the marbles this time round. They still could, but at the moment it looks unlikely - although by beating the '49ers today (a game I just finished watching before I started this) they ~~xxx~~ have probably gotten into the playoffs for the fourth straight year under Knox.

Looking at the rest of the league first, though - in the AFC all the interest is in the Central Division, and whether Pittsburgh, which has been playing the best football in the league the past six weeks or so, can overcome their early-season slump and make the playoffs. If they can, they'll probably repeat as champs, but the odds aren't that good that they will. Right now Cincinnati has a two-game lead for the division championship, and will be favored in two of their remaining three games. If they win those as expected, they'll be division champs even if the Steelers beat them in their one remaining head-to-head confrontation. The other key in the AFC is New England - they have an 8-3 record at the moment, with three relatively weak teams to go; this gives them the inside track for the wild card slot in the AFC, since they'll have a better record than Pittsburgh if they win all of them and the Steelers win all of theirs. Furthermore, unless my memory fails, one of the Steeler losses was to New England, so that even if the two finish with identical records the Patriots would be the wild-card team. Except...the Broncos and the Browns are both also 7-4, and if one of them wins its remaining games, the Steelers win all of theirs, and the Patriots lose one, a different tie-breaking procedure will come into play (and I'm not even sure what it is), and the Steelers might still end up as the wild card team. Oakland has already clinched the Western Division (confirming what everyone thought from the beginning), and Baltimore seems highly probable in the East. My guess at this point: Oakland vs. New England and Cincinnati vs. Baltimore, with Oakland and Baltimore in the finals and Baltimore going to the Super Bowl.

In the NFC the Vikings are as usual winning the Central Division going away; the Bears and Lions are both much stronger this year than formerly, and I expect there to be some real competition in the division next year (even Green Bay is improved), but the Vikings have been outstandingly lucky in winning close games this year (exceeded only by the Cardinals, if them), and will probably host the wild-card team in the opening round. In the East, it's still a race among Dallas, St. Louis, and Washington (unless St. Louis pulled out another last-minute win; the last I heard Washington was leading 16-10 and had the ball with the 2-minute warning just given), but the Cowboys are probably going to win it; they have a one-game edge and it would be a surprise if anyone caught them. St. Louis is probably going to beat out Washington for the wild card spot, though if there's a tie between the two Washington has won both games between them and would go. I predict the Cards to play the Vikings in the first round.

Then there's the Rams. They're probably going to win their division again, because the 49ers have collapsed after a brilliant 6-1 start (especially since Cedric Hardman broke his ankle in this game), but they haven't done it with much style, losing to San Francisco, Cincinnati, and St. Louis and tying Minnesota. The St. Louis loss was due to Hart having an incredible second half passing, but the other two were just bad play. Three different starting QBs have been a problem, but... So I predict St. Louis over Minnesota, Dallas over LA, and St. Louis over Dallas, with Baltimore over St. Louis in the ~~pkayaffax~~ Super Bowl. And we wait & see.