

# VOLUME ONE: THE PROPHECY.

1. The first page of *Prince Valiant* was the only one where Foster recounted Val's story in past tense, rather than present tense – and even then, either he or an editor converted the text to present tense, to match all the other pages. The original Fantagraphics Books reprint (published in 1987) used the “present tense” text, but the more recent (and more detailed) second Fantagraphics Books reprint (published in 2009) shows the “past tense” text.

We do not know why Foster began with past tense and switched to present tense after the first page. The adventure comic strip he drew before *Prince Valiant*, an adaptation of *Tarzan*, was also written in past tense.

Panel 1. The King of Thule, introduced in the very first panel of *Prince Valiant*, would not receive his name (Aguar) until #344 (see below). Foster did not reveal until #80 how Aguar came to lose his kingdom. (Indeed, Foster never provided the details of Sligon's overthrow of Aguar.)

The name of Thule first appears in the writings of the Greek explorer Pytheas of Massalia (now Marseilles) in the 4th century B.C., who described it as a land six days' journey north of Britain, beyond which lay a frozen sea. Scholars and historians disagree on whether the Thule of which Pytheas spoke was Norway or Iceland (Barry Cunliffe, in his *The Extraordinary Voyage of Pytheas the Greek*, has argued for Iceland); what is certain is that "Thule" since Pytheas's time has come to represent a distant, romance-tinged land at the edge of the world, generally associated with the far north. Most likely Foster chose that name for Val's homeland because of those poetic connotations, which matched the tone that he desired for *Prince Valiant*.

Foster eventually identified Thule as Norway. Its depiction in the early years of the strip did not always fit this location, though, as we shall see.

Panel 3. This is the first sign (see the annotation for #1, Panel 1 above) that Foster did not originally conceive of Thule as being Norway (or at least, he gave no thought to travel times while writing and drawing this page). Aguar, his family, and remaining followers have reached the English Channel by dawn after boarding a ship the previous night – and since they were still in flight from Sligon's men when they reached the ship, it must have sailed from Thule. A sailing ship could hardly have reached the Channel from the coast of Norway in a single night.

Panel 5. Foster's depiction of the Britons as “half-savage” and dressed in animal skins evokes the ancient Britons (at least, those of popular imagination and older history books) rather than the inhabitants of a conventional Arthurian Britain, set in a legendary Age of Chivalry. (Of course, they are living on the outskirts of Arthur's kingdom.)

Panel 6. Aguar, his family and followers, and their ship pass the river Thames. Since they had two panels earlier sailed past the famous white cliffs of Dover, and would evidently be wrecked in or near what is now East Anglia (since they travel northwards from their landing-place to the Fens), they must be journeying northwards along the southeastern coast of Britain.

2. Panel 7. The Fens are (or were) a marshy region in England, lying to the immediate southwest of the Wash, on the western border of East Anglia. During the Roman occupation of Britain, the Romans attempted to drain them, but after their departure, the Fens soon reverted to marshland. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a Dutch engineer named Cornelius Vermuyden led a fresh draining project, though he met such opposition from the people living in the Fens (who saw its marshy nature as both a source of food and a protection from would-be invaders) that he had to employ Dutch and Scottish prisoners of war to do the work. As a result, the Fens are now farmland rather than fen.

The most famous event in the history of the Fens took place during the reign of William the Conqueror (1066-1087), when a rebellious Saxon nobleman named Hereward the Wake used them as his home base during his brief struggle against the Normans (operating from the monastery of Ely, then an island in the middle of the Fens). Hereward's story soon became colored with the customary overlay of romance, turning him into a larger-than-life figure; he even became the hero of a historical novel by Charles Kingsley. It is tempting to speculate that Foster chose the Fens as the refuge for King Aguar and his family (including the young Prince Valiant) because of the story of Hereward (although they came to the Fens to escape Sligon's reach rather than to carry out a resistance movement against him – which would have been impossible across the sea from Thule, of course) – and from there, to also wonder if Horrit's presence in the Fens was inspired by one of the incidents in the Hereward legend (see the annotation for #6, Panel 9, below).

The case of Alfred the Great (871-899) is, in some ways, an even stronger parallel to Aguar's sojourn in the Fens (though this might be coincidence). In early 878 (shortly after Twelfth Night, i.e., January 5), the Danes made a surprise attack upon Alfred's kingdom of Wessex and overran most of it; King Alfred and a handful of followers fled into the marshes of Athelney in Somerset, where they managed to build up enough of a force to challenge the Danes to battle after Easter that same year and defeat them at Edington, followed by a truce in which the Danes agreed to withdraw from Wessex. (It was during this period, according to legend, that Alfred inadvertently burnt the cakes of a woman in whose home he had taken refuge.) Aguar's period of exile in the Fens lasted longer than Alfred's period of exile in Athelney, but other than that, the similarity between Aguar's story and Alfred's is even stronger than that between Aguar's story and Hereward's. In all fairness, though, we have no evidence that Foster was at all influenced by the reign of Alfred the Great when he told of Aguar and Val's time in the Fens; the likeness between the two may be accidental.

But the greatest inspiration for Val's boyhood adventures in the Fens most likely came from Foster's own life, for he was an eager outdoorsman. His biographer, Brian M. Kane, has suggested that a particular inspiration for the Fens was the bull marshes near the Red River, where Foster had undertaken a fowling expedition when he was eighteen (see the annotation for #182, Panel 4, below, for further information).

3. Panel 3. The "half-seen monster" is the first hint of the prehistoric beasts which Foster portrayed as inhabiting the Fens in the strip (see #4-5 and #8). Foster had originally imagined *Prince Valiant* as a fantasy strip (though as he himself admitted, as time went on Val and his family and friends became so realistically characterized that the fantasy elements no longer fitted

the story and he chose to remove or tone them down); his depiction of the Fens as a "lost world" clearly matches this approach.

Panel 9. Prince Valiant is first named within the actual strip (as opposed to the title). Foster was not initially fond of the name, which he considered an unsubtle character description masquerading as a name; his initial choices for Val's name were first "Derek, son of Thane", and then "Arn". Joseph V. Connolly, the president of King Features Syndicate, turned both down, proposing "Prince Valiant" instead. (Foster must have remained fond of the name "Arn", for he used it for two characters in the strip - Prince Arn of Ord and Val's oldest son - as well as for one of the two young leads of *Prince Valiant's* companion strip in the 1940's, *The Medieval Castle*.)

Panel 11. Our first glimpse of Horrit and Thorg. Years later, Foster reinterpreted this scene and portrayed the "strange couple" as the parents of the "half-savage native boy" introduced in the first panel of # 4 instead (see # 1346, Panel 3).

4. Panel 7. The dinosaur that pursues Val and his friend through the Fens is probably the worst anachronism in the entire strip. Dinosaurs became extinct at the end of the Cretaceous Period, 65 million years ago; none survived into human times, let alone recorded history.

5. Panel 12. Foster later reintroduced Val's tutor into the strip twice, first during King Valgrind's attempted coup (#346-8) and later during Aleta's first arrival in Thule (#512), and named him Erland (on this page, he is nameless, like Val's father).

6. Panel 9. Horrit the witch's presence in the Fens might have been inspired by the legend of Hereward the Wake (see the commentary on #2, Panel 7). According to the tale, at one point the Normans employed a local witch to aid them in their assault upon Hereward's base in the Fens, pushing her forward on a wooden tower as she uttered spells and curses against Hereward and his followers; Hereward's men merely set fire to the tower, burning her with it. We have no proof that Foster had this story in mind when he placed a witch in the Fens for the young Val to encounter, but since he frequently drew on medieval romance and historical novels for the strip, it is possible.

8. Panel 8. Again Hal Foster pits Val against a prehistoric monster (the giant turtle) belonging more to the Mesozoic Era than to the 5th century. (Indeed, Britain's damp and chilly climate makes it hardly an appropriate home for large cold-blooded reptiles.)

10. Panel 3. Here begins Horrit's prophecy. It fits the early tone of *Prince Valiant*, where magic could be depicted as real (see the note to #3, Panel 3 above) that all (or nearly all) of her words come true. Much of Horrit's foretelling might be seen as self-fulfilling (since her words inspire Val to leave the Fens, seek adventure beyond them, meet King Arthur and his knights, and travel the world), but we cannot so easily explain away her prediction of Val's mother's death. (Of course, Horrit merely tells Val that a terrible woe awaits him without being specific, leaving open the possibility that she was merely employing the traditional fortune-teller's trick of describing the future in such vague terms that almost any eventuality could appear to fulfill that prophecy; Horrit's words could appear to have come true just as well if it had been Aguar who had died instead, for example. Foster probably did not see it that way when he drew and wrote

this page, however, and it certainly would be an amazing coincidence for any grievous loss to befall Val so soon after Horrit uttered those words.)

Horrit's prophecy (repeated on many occasions throughout the strip) that Val would never know contentment would have been a safe prediction, since Foster would state many times (such as on #317, Panel 7) that contentment is impossible (or almost impossible) for humans to achieve.

Panel 6. King Arthur is mentioned and seen for the first time in *Prince Valiant* (other than in the strip's full title), as is Queen Guinevere.

Opinion is divided on whether there was a real King Arthur or not. Some historians believe that he was based on an actual figure in the 5th or 6th century A.D., a British leader who fought against the invading Saxons; others believe him to be entirely mythical. This controversy is irrelevant to *Prince Valiant*, however, for its King Arthur is clearly the Arthur of medieval romance (though linked to the real history of 5th century Britain in his clashes with the Saxons). Foster once explained, in discussing his depiction of Arthur and his court, "If I drew [King Arthur] as my research has shown, nobody'd believe it. I cannot draw King Arthur with a black beard, dressed in bearskins and a few odds and ends of armor that the Romans left when they went out of Britain, because that is not the image people have." (Kane, p. 76.) In an interview with Fred Schreiber in 1969, he similarly admitted, "The picture we have of the days of King Arthur is given by the Norman storytellers; it is they who fostered the legend. So you must dress the characters almost like Norman knights rather than Roman centurions.... I have to bring the costumes and the castles up by two or three centuries."

Arthur first appeared in the writings of Dark Age Wales as a shadowy figure, generally portrayed as a mighty warrior. The 9th century *Historia Brittonum* (*The History of the Britons*) - popularly ascribed to a monk named Nennius, although many historians now doubt this was the author's real name - described him as a leader of the Britons who defeated the invading Saxons in twelve great battles, culminating in a great encounter at Mount Badon (see the annotation for #1430, Panel 4, for more information on Badon). Other writings, though, portray Arthur in a mythical rather than historical or pseudo-historical setting. For example, the poem *Preiddeu Annwn* (*The Spoils of Annwn*), gives a fragmentary account of how Arthur voyaged to Annwn (a sort of Welsh fairyland), taking with him three shiploads of men; only seven of them returned with him. The prose tale of *Culhwch and Olwen* has Arthur ruling over a court composed not only of conventional heroic warriors, but also "tall-tale" figures who can drink up the sea, shoot a wren in Ireland from Cornwall, or flatten mountains by merely standing upon them; he and his followers come to the aid of the young Culhwch when he seeks to wed the beautiful Olwen, by fulfilling the tasks that Olwen's curmudgeonish father, the giant Ysbaddaden, sets him, which pit them against giants, witches, and the monstrous wild boar Twrch Trwyth.

In or around 1136, Arthur assumed a more familiar form when Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote *The History of the Kings of Britain*, which claimed to be a history of Britain from its first settlement by Brutus the Trojan, a great-grandson of Aeneas, to the death of King Cadwallader in 689, but which was mostly Geoffrey's own invention (though it often embroidered real history, or what Geoffrey and his contemporaries believed to be real history). Arthur formed the climax of Geoffrey's pseudo-history, as a mighty ruler of epic stature who presided over a court of

unparalleled splendor at the City of the Legion (now Caerleon), and who not only defeated the invading Saxons and Picts, but also conquered Ireland, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and Gaul; he was even on the verge of adding the Roman Empire to his domain when brought down by the treachery of his nephew Mordred. Geoffrey was the first person (so far as we know) to give Arthur a complete biography from birth to death, and his book solidified the legendary king in the imagination of western Europe, and maybe even beyond (only a few decades later, in the 1170's, an anonymous writer described Arthur's fame as having spread even as far as Egypt, Antioch, and Palestine among other places, though he might have been exaggerating). It also became the basis for almost all later versions of King Arthur's story.

Succeeding writers would add fresh elements to Geoffrey's account of Arthur, including the Sword in the Stone, the Round Table, Camelot, Lancelot and Guinevere's love affair, and the Quest for the Holy Grail (none of which appear in Geoffrey's work). This process culminated in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, written around 1470, which crystallized the legend into its current form. Interest in Arthur declined in the 17th century (partly thanks to the Stuarts embracing his legend for propaganda purposes, which made it unappealing to the Parliamentary forces that sought to challenge the notion of the divine right of kings – this might have been one reason why John Milton, who in his youth considered writing an epic poem about King Arthur, decided to write *Paradise Lost* instead), but was revived in Victorian times (thanks, in particular, to Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*), and remains popular today.

For the modern English-speaking world, King Arthur has become perhaps the most famous legendary hero of medieval Europe (his sole rival, if a strong challenger, is Robin Hood), and a symbol of the Age of Chivalry, not so much as it really was but as people like to imagine it to have been. Even with the present shift in Arthurian fiction towards "Arthur dux bellorum" (the hypothetical 5th or 6th century British military leader who may or may not have existed), pop culture treatments still focus on Arthur as a representative of the Middle Ages of the imagination. It is in that role that *Prince Valiant* depicts him (and the "search for the historical Arthur" was less prominent in fiction when Foster began the strip in 1937 than nowadays).

Guinevere appears to have been introduced into the Arthurian cycle early, as Arthur's queen and consort. (One of the Triads - a collection of figures or events in Welsh legend grouped in threes – even states that Arthur had three wives all named Guinevere!) Geoffrey of Monmouth included her in his *History of the Kings of Britain* as Arthur's wife and the most beautiful woman in all of Britain; while she occupied only a small role in his account of her husband's reign, later versions of the legend expanded upon it, focusing especially on her unfortunate love affair with Sir Lancelot (see the entry on #504, Panel 5).

Horrit's description of Guinevere as a "flighty wench" might be a reference to the notorious infidelity of Arthur's queen. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's work, she becomes Mordred's consort after his usurpation of the throne, and was apparently not reluctant to do so. (Though to be fair to her, during the civil war between Arthur and Mordred that follows, she flees to a nunnery at Caerleon, where she spends the rest of her days; Geoffrey leaves it uncertain, however, whether her motive was remorse or fear of her husband's vengeance.) Succeeding versions of the story also made use of this; Layamon's *Brut*, a late 12th century adaptation of Geoffrey's work in Anglo-Saxon verse (more precisely, an adaptation of Wace's *Roman de Brut*, a Norman-French

verse adaptation of Geoffrey), makes Guinevere an outright traitor alongside Mordred (and attributes her taking the veil to despair over Mordred's imminent defeat). The romances (in contrast to the pseudo-chronicles) rejected Guinevere's union with Mordred, replacing it with her amour with Sir Lancelot (which would twice appear in *Prince Valiant*, in #504-05 and in #1387-92); this tragic adultery had become one of the central elements of the Arthurian legend by Malory's time, and is still familiar today. (Until recently in Wales, a young woman with loose moral standards would be nicknamed a Guinevere.)

Panel 7. While Foster (as mentioned above) had evidently adopted an attitude of "magic is real" in *Prince Valiant*'s world during this stage, his depiction of the dragon and unicorn that Horrit speaks of as a crocodile and a rhinoceros (encountered in #17 and #262 respectively) shows that he had imposed limits on how much fantasy to incorporate into the strip. The griffon (presented here apparently as an eagle) never made an appearance, but the reader can make out, just behind the African tribesman, what is apparently the Irish elk that Val would see in #584. The African tribesman would himself appear during Val's trip to Africa in Boltar's company (#260-63), but Val never encountered the Chinese (as represented by the robed man to the right of the African and Horrit's mention of "yellow [men]") during Foster's run of the strip. Under Foster's successor, John Cullen Murphy, though, Val did indeed make a journey to China to establish trade relations between it and Britain (which ran in the strip from 1987 to 1989).

10. Panel 7. Foster's description of Britain as a "hostile north country" whose poor climate brought about the death of Val's mother is another hint (see the commentary on #1, Panel 1) that he did not initially envision Thule as being Norway (from whose perspective Britain certainly could not be described as "north").

Much later on in the strip (in #744, Panel 4), Foster revealed that Val's mother was of Roman descent, which would certainly match her being used to a warm, sunny climate. (Though she appears to have weathered life in Thule before Sligon's coup without any difficulty.) We never learn how a Roman noblewoman came to marry a king from far-off Thule, in the distant north of the known world.

12. Panel 12. The introduction of Sir Lancelot, first character from the Arthurian legend to actually cross paths with *Prince Valiant*.

Although Lancelot is one of the most famous characters in the Arthurian cycle, he appeared relatively late in its development. He is never mentioned in either the early Welsh legends about Arthur (unless he is to be identified with a certain Lleanlleawg the Gael, as a few Arthurian scholars such as Roger Sherman Loomis have suggested), nor in the pseudo-chronicles of Geoffrey of Monmouth and his successors. His first undisputed entrance in Arthurian literature was in the late 12th century, particularly in the French verse romances of Chretien de Troyes. In Chretien's works, Lancelot was portrayed as one of the leading knights of Arthur's court, though second to Gawain (whom the romancers then saw as the foremost knight of the Round Table). His most prominent role is in Chretien's *Lancelot, or the Knight of the Cart* where he comes to the rescue of Queen Guinevere after her kidnapping by the evil knight Sir Meleagant, and undergoes the humiliation of riding in a cart part of the way to Meleagant's homeland of Gorre.

The story established Lancelot and Guinevere as lovers, a concept that soon became one of the Matter of Britain's central threads.

In the early 13th century, the French *Prose Lancelot* gave Lancelot a formal biography. It made him the son of King Ban of Benoic (or Benwick), who, like Aguar, was driven from his kingdom into exile (by the invading King Claudas). Unlike Aguar, Ban died shortly after he lost his kingdom; the Lady of the Lake then took the infant Lancelot to her home, where she raised him. (Thus Lancelot's familiar title, "Lancelot du Lac" or "Lancelot of the Lake"; he even bears it in *Prince Valiant*, though the strip never alluded to this upbringing, and even depicted King Ban on several occasions as still alive.) She taught him the necessary skills of a knight, and when he was old enough, sent him to Arthur's kingdom to be knighted. There he performed many heroic deeds, such as capturing the haunted castle of Dolorous Garde (which he renamed Joyous Garde and made into his personal stronghold) and defeating the invading Duke Galehaut of the Long Isles (more through winning Galehaut's friendship than through force of arms). During this time, he and Guinevere also fell in love, with eventual disastrous consequences not only for the lovers, but also for Arthur and his kingdom. Lancelot's prowess of arms made him the greatest knight of the Round Table, surpassing even Gawain. But his adulterous love brought about his downfall. When Lancelot embarked upon the Quest for the Holy Grail, his sin with the Queen prevented him from achieving the Grail (ironically, the Grail was achieved by Lancelot's illegitimate son Galahad, who was begotten partly as a result of his father's love for Guinevere); he attempted to forswear his old desire for her afterwards, but soon backslid, and became so careless about his affair with her that Gawain's younger brother Agravain, who hated Lancelot out of envy, learned about it and exposed it. A civil war quickly followed between Arthur and Lancelot which led to the deaths of Arthur and most of his knights; smitten with remorse, Lancelot became a hermit for the rest of his days and died repentant, his sins at last forgiven by Heaven.

Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* made use of the *Prose Lancelot*'s story of Lancelot; Malory omitted the early stages of Lancelot's life (such as how the Lady of the Lake fostered him), but dealt in full with the latter portions, including how he was tricked into sleeping with Elaine of Carbonek and thereby begot Galahad upon her, how he failed to achieve the Holy Grail, how his love affair with Guinevere helped destroy the Round Table, and how, at the end, he repented and became a holy hermit at Glastonbury. Since Malory is the leading primary source for the Arthurian legend in the English-speaking world, Lancelot has become one of the most familiar figures in this cycle; indeed, he is probably the only knight of the Round Table whose name everyone has heard of – which makes it appropriate that he would be the first knight from Arthur's court whom Val meets.

14. Panel 9. Foster never fulfilled this prediction.

16. Panel 1. Sir Gawain, perhaps the most prominent Arthurian character in *Prince Valiant*, enters the strip.

Gawain was a relatively early addition to the Arthurian legend. In the story of *Culhwch and Olwen*, one of Arthur's leading warriors (alongside Cai and Bedwyr, who would become Kay and Bedivere in more familiar forms of the story) is a certain Gwalchmei son of Gwyar, described as being Arthur's sister-son; Arthurian scholars have generally agreed that this is a

Welsh version of Gawain. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, Gawain first appears under his familiar name, depicted as Arthur's nephew, the son of his sister Anna by King Lot of Lothian. At the age of twelve, he is sent to the household of Pope Sulpicius (an invention of Geoffrey's), who knights him. When Arthur goes to war with the Romans (see the annotation for #185, Panel 4), Gawain fights valiantly for him throughout. He is slain, though, in the first battle with Mordred, at Richborough in Kent.

Geoffrey's successors expanded on Gawain's character as the legend continued to develop. Wace's *Roman de Brut* depicts him as an elegant courtier rather than only another warrior (apparently his first such interpretation in Arthurian literature); when Duke Cadur of Cornwall urges Arthur to make war upon the Romans, Gawain counters with a speech in favor of peace, describing it as a time when young men have the leisure to engage themselves in courtly love and song. Chretien de Troyes followed this interpretation of Gawain, portraying him as not only the leading knight of the Round Table (surpassing even Lancelot), but also polished and cultured, as famed for his courtesy as his valor - and a definite ladies' man. On the surface, Chretien's Gawain seems an admirable figure; however, there are many hints that underneath his sophistication lies a hollowness that will keep him from rising to the heights that the title characters of Chretien's verse romances will attain.

Chretien's successors built upon these hints to diminish Gawain (especially as Lancelot took over his position as the chief knight of the Round Table). They expanded upon his philandering tendencies, depicting him as an inconstant seducer; his frivolity blinds him to spiritual matters, preventing him from achieving the Holy Grail in the *Prose Lancelot* (just as Lancelot's adultery barred him from the Grail). Furthermore, in the *Prose Lancelot's* final division, *Mort Artu (The Death of Arthur)*, Gawain develops a more serious flaw than superficiality and fickleness: vengefulness. When his younger brothers are accidentally slain by Lancelot while the latter is rescuing Queen Guinevere from being burnt at the stake, Gawain vows vengeance upon Lancelot. This vow keeps the civil war between Arthur and Lancelot going even after the quarrel over Guinevere is resolved through the Pope's intervention, thus ensuring the fall of Camelot. Later French prose romances added a feud between Gawain's family and that of King Pellinore; after Pellinore slew Gawain's father King Lot in battle, Gawain slew both Pellinore and his son Lamorak in revenge, even though they were his fellow knights of the Round Table.

Gawain's reputation in England fared better, and he was the hero of many Arthurian poems there, especially the 14th century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. However, Sir Thomas Malory, when he wrote *Le Morte d'Arthur*, adopted the unfavorable portrayal of Gawain in the French works as harsh and vindictive, presumably to make Lancelot seem more heroic by comparison. Alfred Lord Tennyson, in his *Idylls of the King*, also depicted Gawain in an unflattering light, though returning to Chretien's notion that his dominant failing was frivolity rather than violence. In "Lancelot and Elaine", for example, Gawain, assigned by Arthur the quest of tracking down Lancelot (who has won the prize at a tournament but left before he could claim it), goes reluctantly (because his errand will take him away from the festivities), attempts unsuccessfully to seduce Elaine of Astolat when he meets her, and when he learns of her connections to Lancelot, gives her the prize to present to him and returns to Arthur's court. When he explains that he delegated the mission to Elaine, Arthur rebukes him for his disobedience in not fulfilling it.

The Gawain of *Prince Valiant* clearly owes much to the Gawain of Tennyson (and possibly that of Chretien de Troyes, though we do not know whether Foster had ever read any of Chretien's works or even heard of them) in his characterization as a light-hearted, flirtatious man, who enjoys the company of ladies but is always careful to avoid commitment - and who, indeed, views matrimony as a fate worse than death. Foster makes him more sympathetic than his counterpart in Tennyson, while still showing his faults. (Gawain even deserts a quest - temporarily - in #292-297, just as he did in Tennyson's "Lancelot and Elaine".) Barely any hint of his tendencies to blood-feud enters the strip, however (except for two references to his quarrel with Lancelot, in #318, Panel 7, and #1024-29); the vendetta with Pellinore's family, in particular, never appears. (Presumably its presence would have clashed with Foster's depiction of Gawain's chief flaw as over-sophistication rather than vengeance.)

In this stage of the strip, Gawain displays only a few hints of the figure that he would eventually become. While he has a sense of humor from the start, he is a relatively serious, responsible knight during the time that Val serves as his squire, with no trace of the lady-killing or tendency to comical misfortunes that would be his leading character traits during the bulk of *Prince Valiant*. (Even Gawain's original costume varies from its familiar form; here he wears a simple white surcoat, rather than the fancy green surcoat with jagged edges that would later become his regular apparel.) Presumably Foster held these character traits back since they would have clashed with Gawain's then-function of mentor to the young Prince Valiant; once Val had graduated from squirehood to knighthood, Foster was free to turn Gawain into the "comic relief" foppish flirt that he is most familiar as to *Prince Valiant* fans.

17. Panel 5. The "great sea-crocodile" is clearly a rationalization of a dragon, though an unconvincing one. The wet and chilly British climate would hardly be conducive to its health; nor is there even any explanation as to how the crocodile had arrived in Britain. Presumably Foster was still thinking in terms of the "jungle/lost-world adventure" genre that he had worked on when drawing *Tarzan*.

19. Panel 1. The first appearance of Camelot, King Arthur's most famous residence, in *Prince Valiant*. While Arthur had several courts in legend, Camelot is the most familiar to a modern audience, so it is not surprising that Foster gives it such prominence.

Camelot first appeared in Arthurian literature in the late 12th century, in Chretien de Troyes' *Lancelot*. Originally, it was merely one of Arthur's castles, and his chief court was at Caerleon (which had been introduced in that role by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *The History of the Kings of Britain* - see the annotation for #86, Panel 9). But as time went on, Camelot grew more prominent in the romances, until it eclipsed all of Arthur's other strongholds (even Caerleon) in the popular imagination. It was here, according to Malory, that Arthur married Queen Guinevere and set up the knights of the Round Table, and from here that the knights of the Round Table embarked on the Quest of the Holy Grail. Tennyson aided the process, portraying Camelot as a magnificent city with an otherworldly atmosphere. The famous 1960 Lerner-Loewe musical, *Camelot*, cemented this reputation - particularly thanks to its title song's celebration of the perfect weather that blessed Arthur's kingdom.

Foster even ignores (except for the tournament at Caerleon in #87-89) King Arthur's other traditional homes, portraying the great king as dwelling almost exclusively at Camelot except while on campaign. This is contrary to medieval custom, where kings and powerful noblemen had several castles, spread out across their lands, and regularly traveled from one to another in a series of journeys known as a progress, both to better oversee the state of their realm and to avoid eating up all the food in one part of the kingdom. No trace of this activity appears in Foster's depiction of Arthur, however.

Foster did not immediately locate Camelot on the map, but would later, in #37, Panel 8, place it at Winchester, following Malory's identification. At that time, Winchester was the most popular place to identify as Camelot (if it had to be identified as a real place in Britain); even J. R. R. Tolkien referred to that school of thought in Appendix F of *The Lord of the Rings* where he compared calling Rivendell by its Elvish name of Imladris to calling Winchester "Camelot", "except that the identity was certain" (p. 1134) and that Elrond was far older than Arthur would be even if he was still alive in Britain in modern times. In the last few decades, however, South Cadbury, a hill-fort in Somerset dating back to the Iron Age, has challenged Winchester for the title – and has succeeded in many works of Arthurian fiction, such as John Steinbeck's *The Acts of King Arthur* and Mary Stewart's Merlin trilogy. The Tudor antiquarian John Leland mentioned that the locals believed it to be Camelot, and an archaeological dig conducted by Leslie Alcock in the late 1960's revealed that during the late 5th and early 6th centuries, the hill was occupied by a wealthy chieftain, raising speculations that this chieftain could have been a historical original for King Arthur. However, this excavation was still thirty years in the future when Foster first brought Val to Camelot in 1937, and thus South Cadbury had not yet become familiar to the general public. Foster might not even have heard of it at the time.

Panel 2. This is one of two times in *Prince Valiant* where Arthur's full name, "Arthur Pendragon", is given. (The other is in #1432, Panel 3.) Everywhere else in the strip, the name "Pendragon" is applied to Arthur's father Uther, first mentioned here.

Uther first appears in early medieval Welsh poetry, but only as a vague name, that tells us nothing about how the composers of those poems or their audiences saw him. The word *uthr* in Welsh means "terrible" (not in the sense of "monstrous" or "horrible", but in the sense of "inspiring awe or wonder"), and some Arthurian scholars have speculated that Uther was portrayed as Arthur's father in legend because somebody mistook a description of Arthur in Welsh as "Arthur the terrible" for "Arthur son of Uther".

Geoffrey of Monmouth provided a life-story for Uther in his *History of the Kings of Britain*, just as he did for Arthur. In his account, Uther was the youngest of the three sons of King Constantine, who became the ruler of Britain after the end of the Roman occupation; his two older brothers were Constans and Aurelius Ambrosius. After Vortigern usurped the British throne and murdered Constans (see the annotation for #1398 Panel 7 for further information), Ambrosius and Uther, then only boys, fled across the Channel to Brittany, where they found sanctuary with their kinsman, King Budic. When they grew to manhood, they returned to Britain and overthrew Vortigern; Ambrosius then became King of Britain while Uther became his leading general.

Not long afterwards, Ambrosius was poisoned by a Saxon in the employ of Pascent, Vortigern's only surviving son. Uther was leading the British army against Pascent's forces at the time, when he beheld a fiery star shaped like a dragon in the sky; astonished, he sent for Merlin, and asked him what this omen meant. Merlin explained that it was a sign of Ambrosius's murder and a foretoking of Uther's becoming king and the future deeds of his son Arthur, then as yet unborn. Uther was so impressed that he took on the title of "Pendragon", which, according to Geoffrey, meant "dragon's head" in ancient British. (It actually means "Chief Dragon" or "Dragon-King" in Welsh.) He also had two golden statues made of the dragon; he kept one with him and took it on his campaigns, and gave the other to the church at Winchester.

Needless to say, Uther became King of Britain after Ambrosius's death. Shortly afterwards, he fell in love with Igraine, the wife of Duke Gorlois of Cornwall, leading to a war with Gorlois over her; in the course of the war, Uther begot Arthur upon Igraine with Merlin's help. (See the annotation for #849, Panel 1, for the details.) During the latter part of his reign, Uther fell ill and the Saxons took advantage of his bedridden condition to renew their inroads into his kingdom. At last Uther decided to take the field in person, even though he could only command his troops from a horse-litter; he fought the Saxons at St. Albans and defeated them soundly. The vanquished Saxons still got their revenge by poisoning Uther's favorite spring of drinking water, thereby bringing about his death. He was buried at Stonehenge (where his older brother and predecessor, Aurelius Ambrosius, had already been laid to rest).

Later versions of the Arthurian legend held to Geoffrey's account, though with minor alterations and additions here and there. Most noteworthy of these was the verse romance *Merlin* by Robert de Boron, which renamed Ambrosius "Pendragon" and had Uther take on the name of "Pendragon" after his brother's death to honor his memory.

Foster in *Prince Valiant* regularly made the dragon of the Pendragons King Arthur's heraldic symbol. In the medieval pseudo-chronicles and romances (and in many of the textbooks on heraldry written during this period, which included the "attributed arms" of the knights of the Round Table, as well as of various biblical and classical worthies), however, Arthur's device was usually not a dragon. Geoffrey of Monmouth had him bear an image of the Virgin Mary upon his shield, while Arthur's "attributed arms" either followed Geoffrey here or gave him three or thirteen golden crowns upon a blue or red background or field (blue in French works, red in English works, most likely because the French kings' coat of arms had a blue field, and the English kings' coat of arms a red field). Nevertheless, Geoffrey allowed Arthur a certain amount of "dragon-heraldry"; in his account of Arthur's arming himself before facing the Saxons in battle at Bath (Geoffrey's adaptation of the Battle of Badon), he describes the king as donning a dragon-crested helm, and during the Roman war, Arthur has a standard depicting a golden dragon.

In the relatively recent Arthurian literature of the 19th and 20th centuries, the notion of Arthur's symbol being a dragon became more prominent. Alfred Lord Tennyson made a number of references to it in his *Idylls of the King*, such as these lines in "Lancelot and Elaine" where Arthur is presiding over a tournament:

.... to his crown the golden dragon clung,  
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,  
And from the carven-work behind him crept  
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make  
Arms for his chair.... (lines 432-36).

When King Arthur returns to Camelot after dealing with a nest of bandits in "The Holy Grail", Percivale (the narrator) says "up I glanced, and saw/ The golden dragon sparkling over all" (lines 262-63). Tristram describes Arthur to Isolt in "The Last Tournament" as having "his foot... on a stool/ Shaped as a dragon" (lines 666-67). When Guinevere recalls her journey to Arthur's court to be married to him in "Guinevere", she remembers seeing "The Dragon of the great Pendragonship,/ That crown'd the state pavilion of the King" (lines 395-96). Later in the same poem, as Guinevere watches her husband ride away from the nunnery at Almesbury, Tennyson says of the king's helmet "To which for crest the golden dragon clung" (line 590), and describes Guinevere seeing "the Dragon of the great Pendragonship/ Blaze" (lines 594-95).

Mark Twain also alluded to Arthur's dragon device in his *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* when he described the banners upon Camelot's walls as having "the rude figure of a dragon displayed upon them" (p. 21), while T. H. White in *The Once and Future King* made Arthur's coat of arms "*or, a dragon rampant gules*" (p. 330). Fiction writers delving into the search for the historical Arthur have done the same; the overall result has all but eclipsed the "official" blazon of Arthur's arms in medieval writings and art (though it still surfaces on occasion, such as in the fantasy role-playing game *King Arthur Pendragon*). Interest in the "historical Arthur" may have contributed to this trend; the traditional symbol of the Welsh is a red dragon (see the annotation for #1774, Panel 4 for further information), which would be appropriate for a man hailed by them as one of their greatest leaders.

Panel 6. Merlin, King Arthur's famous wizardly advisor, makes his entrance in *Prince Valiant*, seated on Arthur's right, though he takes no active role in this scene.

So strongly is Merlin associated with King Arthur and his court in the popular imagination that it comes as a shock to discover that his earliest manifestation in literature not only has no direct links to the Arthurian legend, but does not even make him a contemporary of the great king. Merlin first appeared, under the name of "Myrddin", in early Welsh poetry written during the Dark Ages. According to these poems, he was once the court bard to Gwenddolau, a king who supposedly ruled somewhere in the far north of Britain. After King Gwenddolau was slain at the Battle of Arderydd (from the evidence, an actual battle which took place around A.D. 573, approximately fifty years or so after Arthur's traditional time), Merlin went mad with grief over his death (and, according to some hints in the poems, apparently over guilt in helping to bring about the battle, though his part in causing it is not described). He fled into the Caledonian Forest (the woodlands of southern Scotland), where he spent the rest of his life uttering predictions of the future.

Myrddin soon became famous in Welsh legend for his prophetic visions, and many supposed predictions of events to come were ascribed to him. When Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote *The History of the Kings of Britain*, he incorporated Myrddin into his story, but renamed him

"Merlin" (most likely to keep his readers from linking the famous seer's name to the French word *merde*). Instead of portraying him as the madman of the Caledonian Forest, however, Geoffrey gave Merlin the role of a boy prophet from the *Historia Brittonum* named Ambrosius who confronted Vortigern at Dinas Emrys, even fusing the names together to name him "Merlin Ambrosius" (a name which Merlin bears in this very panel, and which would be mentioned in *Prince Valiant* several times thereafter).

According to Geoffrey, King Vortigern of Britain needed the blood of a boy without a father in order to build a castle, and discovered just such a boy, Merlin, in Carmarthen. (See the annotation on #1774, Panel 8, for the details.) Merlin, the son of an incubus by the daughter of the King of Demetia (southwestern Wales), calmly prevented Vortigern from killing him and proceeded to utter a series of prophecies covering first actual historical and legendary events in Britain between his time and Geoffrey's (the coming of Arthur, the final victory of the Saxons, the Norman Conquest, and even the drowning of Henry I's son Prince William in 1120), followed by a series of increasingly vague future events ("future" from Geoffrey's perspective as well as Merlin's) all the way down to an apocalyptic conclusion in which the heavens are thrown into confusion. After Vortigern's death, Merlin entered the service of his successors, Aurelius Ambrosius and his brother Uther. He advised Ambrosius to obtain the ring of stones known as the Giants' Dance from Mount Killaraus in Ireland, moving them to Britain when the Britons' efforts to budge the stones had failed and setting them up on Salisbury Plain as Stonehenge. (See the annotation for #1062, Panel 7, for more about this story.) When Ambrosius was poisoned, Merlin, beholding a fiery star shaped like a dragon in the sky, told Uther both of his brother's murder and of how the dragon-star foretold the greatness of both Uther and his son Arthur (see the annotation on Panel 2, above). It was also Merlin who helped Uther gain access to Igraine, the Duchess of Cornwall, upon whom he begot King Arthur (see the annotation for #849, Panel 1).

After assisting Uther in his pursuit of Igraine, Merlin vanished from Geoffrey's story, playing no further part in it and never interacting with Arthur at all. (Geoffrey did write a second book about Merlin, *Vita Merlini* or *The Life of Merlin*, but this was a retelling of Merlin's madness and flight to the Caledonian Forest, based on the Welsh fragments mentioned above - although it contains a scene where Merlin recalls helping to convey the fatally wounded King Arthur to Avalon for healing.) Later writers, however, apparently became fascinated enough with Merlin to expand his role further. The crucial step was taken by Robert de Boron around the year 1200, in his romance entitled *Merlin*; this adapted the story of Merlin's exploits as found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* but expanded upon them. After the conception of Arthur, Merlin has the future king secretly conveyed to a minor nobleman named Antor (the counterpart to Sir Ector in Malory) who raised him as his own son; he also helped set up the famous test of the Sword in the Stone which led to Arthur's becoming King. Other romancers continued Merlin's story beyond there to have him advise the young Arthur on many occasions, including helping him attain his sword Excalibur from the Lady of the Lake, until he was smitten by the charms of Nimue, which led to his undoing (see the commentaries on #871 and #1141). Sir Thomas Malory included most of these acts in the early portion of his *Le Morte d'Arthur*, thus making them canon to later generations.

Even after Malory, Merlin continued to appear in many literary works. Medieval and early modern writers were fond of applying various prophecies to him (such as having him predict the career of Joan of Arc in the early 15th century) or, as the Age of Reason drew on, attributing mock-prophecies to him in a satirical fashion. Merlin became all the more prominent in British and American literature after the Arthurian Revival of the Victorian Age, making major appearances in both Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King* and Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (in the latter, portrayed by Twain in an unfavorable light as a charlatan embodying the forces of superstition constantly at odds with the Yankee, always losing to him until the final chapter). T. H. White's *The Once and Future King* also gave a large role to Merlin (whose name White spelt "Merlyn"), and added two new elements to his legend that have become almost part of the "Arthurian canon" since: the notion that Merlin lived backwards (providing a novel explanation for his gift of prophecy), and his function as Arthur's boyhood tutor, preparing him for his future role as king. (Merlin does not play this part in the original medieval texts - he has no contact with Arthur between entrusting him to Sir Ector's care and supporting him after he becomes king - though this function is foreshadowed in Edmund Spenser's semi-Arthurian poem *The Faerie Queene*.) Since that time, Merlin has frequently featured in modern-day Arthurian fiction, particularly Mary Stewart's Merlin trilogy (see the annotation for #1776, Panel 6).

Foster follows the traditions of popular culture by describing Merlin as still at Arthur's court during its noontide glory; in Malory, Merlin departs the court forever soon after Arthur's wedding and the foundation of the Knights of the Round Table. The great wizard's ensnarement by Nimue would not take place for many years in *Prince Valiant*.

20. Panel 7. The first mention of the "invading Northmen". If these are meant to be Vikings rather than Saxons, this marks another anachronism in the strip (though not one as great as the inclusion of medieval castles and knights in 5th century Britain - a time-honored tradition of Arthurian romance, anyway). The Viking raids on Britain did not begin until near the end of the 8th century. The first recorded raid was in or about 789, when three Viking ships landed in the south of England. The Reeve of Dorchester, who was the nearest royal official, came out to meet them and attempted to conduct them to a nearby town, but they slew him and his attendants. (Magnus Magnusson in his book *The Vikings* speculates that these particular Vikings had actually come only to trade with the local Englishmen, and that they only got into a fight with the reeve and his men out of annoyance towards the meddling officials trying to hustle them off to town against their wishes.) Four years later, in 793, more Vikings raided the northern monastery of Lindisfarne and sacked it (according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, this event was foreshadowed by sightings of dragons in the heavens), ushering in a series of raids and invasions upon the British Isles, and mainland Europe as well, that lasted for over two hundred years. This was still three hundred years in the future at the time that *Prince Valiant* is set (the latter half of the 5th century A.D.).

Sir Negarth's pardon and reformation fit the conventions of Arthurian romance. While some robber-knights in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* were simply slain in battle, others were frequently spared on the condition that they go to King Arthur's court and yield themselves to him. For example, Sir Gareth, Gawain's younger brother, on his first quest, defeated Sir Ironside, the Red Knight of the Red Lands, and sent him to beg mercy to King Arthur; Arthur

pardoned him and made him a knight of the Round Table. Tennyson likewise made use of the motif in his *Idylls of the King*, where the villainous knight Sir Edyrn, after being overthrown by Sir Geraint, is sent to Arthur's court, where:

... being young, he changed and came to loathe  
His crime of traitor, slowly drew himself  
Bright from his old dark life, and fell at last  
In the great battle fighting for the King. (*The Marriage of Geraint*, lines 593-96).

Indeed, in #83, Panel 7, we learn that Negarth is eventually admitted to the Round Table, a true mark of his reformation.

22. Panel 1. Foster's description of the squires who taunted Val as "rough soldiers" suggests that they are not squires in the same sense as he (nobly-born youths training for knighthood), but "professional squires", either soldiers of non-aristocratic background or members of noble families not wealthy enough to become knights, who thus had to spend their entire lives as squires. (Beric, who served as Val's squire from #292 to #407, is another example of such a figure.)

23. Panel 1. The first time in *Prince Valiant* that Arthur's kingdom is called "England". This is yet another anachronism, for England was named after the Angles, one of the Germanic tribes collectively known as Saxons who settled in Britain during the 5th and 6th centuries A.D., and traditionally portrayed as Arthur's enemies, making it an extremely inappropriate name for Arthur's realm. (The name also ignores the fact that Arthur was, in legend, king over the entire island of Britain. England is only one part of the island; not only are Wales and Scotland also traditionally part of Arthur's domain, but he features more often in their local legends than those of lowland England.) To be fair to Foster, his depiction of Arthur's kingdom was based almost exclusively on its portrayal in medieval romance (as mentioned above, in the commentary on #10, Panel 6), rather than on the real Britain of the 5th and 6th centuries, and the application of the name "England" to it is no worse than the presence of knights, jousting, stone castles, and other trappings of the Middle Ages.

24. Panel 3. The Round Table first appears in *Prince Valiant*.

The earliest surviving mention of the Round Table in Arthurian literature is in Wace's *Roman de Brut*, although, since Wace describes the Table as "so reputed of the Britons" (*Wace and Layamon: Arthurian Chronicles*, p. 55), it may have appeared in previous works about Arthur and his knights, now lost. Wace explains that Arthur specifically had the Round Table made in that shape so as to make all the knights at it equal, and prevent discord among them over precedence. Layamon's *Brut* expanded upon this, by telling how at one of Arthur's feasts, his knights quarreled over who was to sit where; the quarrel degenerated into an actual battle. Arthur forced his followers to seat themselves and make peace, but to avoid a repeat of the incident, he obtained the services of a skilled craftsman from Cornwall who built the Round Table as a permanent solution to the problem.

As the Arthurian legend continued to evolve, the Round Table took on a deeper significance. In Robert de Boron's *Merlin*, the Round Table was now depicted as having been made by Merlin as a spiritual successor of both the table where Jesus Christ and his disciples ate the Last Supper, and the table at which Joseph of Arimathea and his companions were served by the Holy Grail. Instead of seating all of the knights at court, it was restricted to a select order. Merlin originally made the Table for Uther Pendragon, though later on Arthur would make use of it as well for his knights. In both the *Prose Lancelot* and Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, the Round Table passed into the possession of King Leodegrance of Camelard, Queen Guinevere's father, after Uther Pendragon's death; when Arthur married Guinevere, Leodegrance gave the Round Table to him as part of her dowry. The Knights of the Round Table met each Pentecost at Arthur's court, during which time they repeated their oaths: to never commit murder or treason, to grant mercy to all who asked for it, to always aid ladies and damsels in need of assistance, and to never fight in a wrongful quarrel for any reward. Malory described the Round Table as seating a hundred and fifty knights (in practice, only a hundred and forty-nine knights at most, thanks to the nature of the Siege Perilous - see the entry on Panel 4 below), but not all accounts agree with this (see the commentary for #1375, Panel 5).

The exact form of the Round Table varies throughout *Prince Valiant*, reflecting inconsistencies found in Arthurian art. In this scene, the Table is ring-shaped, in order to allow the servants to bring food to the feasting knights; this is the form that the Round Table takes in many medieval depictions. On the other hand, in #484, Panel 8, the Round Table is solid to the center (and used as a council table rather than a dinner table, unlike here). In #1065-66, the Round Table is also drawn as solid rather than ring-shaped; in #2229, Panel 3, there is a hole in the middle of it, but surrounded by wood on all sides, allowing no means of gaining access to the center.

A famous replica of the Round Table (also solid rather than ring-shaped, by the way) hangs in the Great Hall of Winchester Castle, dating to the late 13th century. It bears a portrait of Arthur (most likely painted during Tudor times, particularly since it strongly resembles Henry VIII, and also because the Tudor Rose appears in the middle of the Table), and the names of twenty-four of Arthur's knights written around the rim.

Panel 4. Note the Siege Perilous beside Gawain's chair, the first of its two mentions in *Prince Valiant* (for the other, see the entry for #1375, Panel 5). The Siege Perilous was the one chair at the Round Table which had to remain empty for almost the entirety of King Arthur's reign; any knight who seated himself in it (apart from the one for whom it was specifically made) would immediately be consumed in infernal fires. (In the French romances that came to comprise the Vulgate Cycle, such an event had happened twice. Once, shortly after the Round Table was set up in Uther Pendragon's reign, an arrogant knight dared to sit there, in defiance of Merlin's warnings, and immediately died. Later on Sir Brumart, a nephew of King Claudas - cf. the annotation for #2152, Panel 1 - while drunk, foolishly vowed to sit in the Siege Perilous; forced to abide by his words, he went to Arthur's court, seated himself in the forbidden chair, and met the inevitable fiery death, commenting in his final moments that he had justly earned such a fate through his folly.)

It eventually became clear that the Siege Perilous was reserved for Sir Galahad alone (although in the earliest versions, it was connected to Percival instead). In Malory, the morning of the day

on which Galahad came to court, the following inscription appeared upon the Siege: "Four Hundred Winters and Four and Fifty Accomplished After the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ Ought This Seat to be Fulfilled". Sir Lancelot, beholding this writing with the rest of the court, realized that it had indeed been four hundred and fifty-four years since the Passion (i.e., the Crucifixion), meaning that the Siege Perilous's destined occupant would soon arrive. And later that same day, Lancelot's own son Galahad came to Camelot and seated himself in the Siege Perilous without any harm to himself; the Siege itself now bore the inscription: "This is the Siege of Sir Galahad the Hawte [High] Prince". Galahad departed from Arthur's court the following day on the Quest of the Holy Grail, though, leaving the Siege Perilous forever empty afterwards.

The medieval texts provide differing accounts for why the Siege Perilous bore this property. The earlier versions, linking the Round Table to the table at which Jesus and his disciples partook of the Last Supper, portrayed the Siege Perilous as symbolic of the seat of Judas Iscariot, suggesting that its nature was a reflection of Judas's treachery. Later on, however (perhaps after the Siege became reserved for Galahad), the Siege Perilous was now viewed as equivalent to Jesus Christ's own chair, which could only be occupied with impunity by one who possessed at least some measure of Jesus's purity.

Incidentally, the presence of the Siege Perilous at the Round Table undermines the original point of the Table's being round (as found in Wace and Layamon), to keep the knights equal. One could argue that the Siege Perilous, as reserved for the noblest and holiest knight of all time, is the head of the table no matter what shape the Round Table is, and that those who sit next to it are especially favored. Indeed, in Malory, Merlin mentions to Arthur during the installation of the Round Table that even the seats next to the Siege Perilous are reserved only for those knights "that shall be most of worship" (apparently; the text of this passage is complicated), and gives King Pellinore either one of those seats or a seat adjacent to them as a mark of his worthiness, a move which angers the young Gawain (already hostile towards Pellinore for slaying his father); this suggests that the knights of the Round Table are not so equal in this setting as they are in Wace and Layamon's interpretation. For that matter, Malory makes no mention of the Round Table's shape being a means of equalizing the knights; instead, he states that "Merlin made the Round Table in tokening of [the] roundness of the world" (people in the Middle Ages knew that the world was round; the notion that they believed the world to be flat until Columbus's voyage in 1492 is a modern myth, invented by Washington Irving), a concept also used by the anonymous author of the Vulgate *Quest of the Holy Grail* who was his source. Could the medieval writers have understood that the Siege Perilous threatened the equality of the Round Table, leading them to provide a different rationale for the table's shape? (In *The Once and Future King*, T. H. White also challenged the notion that the Round Table served as the equalizer for its knights that Arthur had hoped to make it; they decide to rank the members of the Table by who has done the most heroic deeds and unhorsed the most knights – and since Lancelot excels at both, many of the other knights of Arthur's court, including Agravain, hate him for it.)

25. Panel 7. This is an early example of the style that Prince Valiant would adopt throughout the strip, setting him apart from the traditional knight of chivalric romance; he defeats his opponents more through cleverness and subtlety than through mere prowess of arms, becoming almost an Arthurian Odysseus.

26. Panel 2. This scene is true to the traditions of Arthurian romance (as found in Malory, at least), where defeated knights were customarily sent back to Arthur's court, to yield themselves up to him (or, on some occasions - such as in the case of those knights whom Lancelot overcame while out adventuring - to Queen Guinevere).

37. Panel 8. Foster for the first time explicitly places Camelot at Winchester.

38. Panel 1. The Tournament of the Queen's Diamonds is apparently an allusion to Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. In "Lancelot and Elaine", Tennyson tells how Arthur, while wandering Britain before he became King, came upon the skeletal remains of two brothers who had slain each other, one wearing a crown set with nine diamonds. He took away the crown and, after he assumed the throne, decreed a series of annual tournaments at each one of which his knights would compete for one of the diamonds. Sir Lancelot was victorious at all nine tournaments and thus won all the diamonds; it was during the last of these tournaments that he met Elaine of Astolat (see #99) and wore her sleeve during the melee. This so aroused Queen Guinevere's jealousy that when he presented her with the diamonds, she threw them all into the river nearby. They were thus "the Queen's Diamonds" only for a brief moment, and certainly not while the tournaments for them were taking place, making Foster's term inaccurate.

Panel 4. Foster borrowed Morgan Todd from the Welsh chivalric romance *Geraint and Enid*, found in the Mabinogion. Morgan Todd (or Morgan Tud) is there portrayed as Arthur's chief physician, who tends the wounded Edern son of Nudd after he is sent to Arthur's court by Geraint, and later on similarly treats the wounded Geraint following his many adventures in Enid's company. Some Arthurian scholars have speculated that Morgan Todd might have been derived from Morgan le Fay, who was noted for her healing magic; apparently the author of *Geraint and Enid* was confused about her gender.

Panel 5. Ilene, Val's first love, is introduced. It is a pity that we do not know whether Foster foresaw when he drew this page that her romance with Val would end in tragedy. (By the time that Foster killed her off, he had realized that she would have held Val back from continuing his adventures and so had to be removed for the good of the strip - cf. the note on #81, Panel 9 - but we do not know whether he understood this from the start.)

40. Panel 3. The villainous knight in red armor is a familiar "stock character" of Arthurian romance; with at least two outstanding examples. The first was the Red Knight of Quinqueroi Forest in *Perceval* by Chretien de Troyes, who rode into Arthur's court, sent the king a message of defiance, and carried off a cup from his table (spilling its contents over Queen Guinevere to add to the insult); the young Perceval promptly challenged him to battle and slew him with a javelin in the eye. The second was the Red Knight of the Red Lands (whose real name was Sir Ironside), in Sir Thomas Malory's tale of Sir Gareth in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, who besieged the castle of the Lady Liones and overcame and hung every knight who challenged him in an attempt to break the siege, until Gareth, on his first quest, defeated him and sent him to Arthur's court to yield himself. (There Ironside reformed and became a knight of the Round Table, like Sir Negarth - cf. #20, Panel 7.) And like the Red Knight of *Prince Valiant*, both of these Red Knights were overcome by young would-be knights on their first adventures. (Perceval's

unconventional method of slaying his Red Knight even parallels Val's own fondness for unorthodox methods of defeating his opponents.)

Another, much darker, Red Knight appears in "The Last Tournament" in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. Rumored to be a former knight of the Round Table who had left it because of disillusionment at the increasing corruption in Camelot (Tennyson himself identified him with Sir Pelleas, a young knight who was betrayed by Sir Gawain in a love affair), the Red Knight set up a rival court in the north of Britain and sent an insolent message to Arthur, defying him and announcing that while his own followers were brigands and murderers, at least they did not pretend to be anything other than that, in contrast to the hypocrisy of Arthur's knights. Arthur led an army to defeat him, but the actions of his men proved the Red Knight to be speaking the truth; against the king's orders, they slaughtered the Red Knight's household without mercy and burnt his castle to the ground.

43. Panel 2. The depiction of a "holy hermit" tending the wounds of a fallen knight is another familiar feature of Arthurian romance. Holy hermits often appear in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*; many were portrayed as retired knights who retreated into solitude at the end of their worldly careers. (Sir Lancelot himself became a hermit after the passing of Arthur, spending the last seven years of his life in this state, as did many of his kinsmen and adherents.)

Panel 7. Val bears Ilene's favor, again making use of the conventions of Arthurian and chivalric romance, where a knight taking part in quests or tournaments would carry with him a token representing his lady and bestowed upon him by her. The most famous example of this in the Arthurian cycle is Lancelot bearing the sleeve of Elaine of Astolat in a tournament (see #99), hoping to thereby disguise himself all the more effectively from the other participants. Nor was this convention confined to literature. In 1319, according to John Leland, a knight named William Marmion was given a splendid helmet by a lady at a feast in Lincolnshire, on the condition that "he should go into the daungerest place in England, and there to let the heaulme to be seene and knowen as famuse"; he wore it into battle against the Scots in the northern marches. Two hundred years later, King James IV of Scotland (1488-1513) bore a turquoise ring as a token from the Queen of France when he invaded England in 1513 (and was slain at the Battle of Flodden).

Panel 8. Foster faithfully follows Arthurian tradition yet again; villainous knights in chivalric romance were frequently portrayed as hanging their defeated adversaries from trees near their homes. Sir Ironside, the Red Knight of the Red Lands, was especially fond of this custom, much to the horror and revulsion of the young Sir Gareth. (Such a fate would have been all the more horrible from the point of view of a medieval knight, since hanging was an unaristocratic fate, reserved for commoners alone. Noblemen who were condemned to death under the law were customarily beheaded.)

46. Panel 3. Val's demon mask would have an impact lasting beyond his use of it against the ogre of Sinstar Wood and his followers. In 1972, the famous comic-book illustrator Jack Kirby began a comic book series for DC Comics entitled "The Demon", whose title character bore a striking resemblance to Prince Valiant's disguise; Kirby stated that the resemblance was

deliberate, intended as a tribute to Foster. The Demon himself was appropriately linked to Arthurian legend, being a former servant to Merlin.

## VOLUME TWO: THE SINGING SWORD.

50. Panels 7-8. The first version of this page had Val deliberately kill the bandit, complete with the mocking words "If you don't like my necklace, I'll gladly remove it". Presumably at the request of King Features Syndicate, Foster changed it to make the bandit's fatal fall appear an accident instead. The original text was revealed in the first volume of the revised Fantagraphics Books reprint in 2009.

53. Panel 5. The title of Ilene's father, Thane of Branwyn, is now revealed. The title of "thane" is most familiar to modern readers through William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, where all the Scottish nobles are thanes (until the end of the play, when Malcolm promotes them to earls), but it originated among the Anglo-Saxons rather than among the Scots. "Thane" is a variation of "thegn", an Old English term for a king's retainer or servant. Since kings' retainers were generally of high rank, it soon became a noble title, especially among the early Scots.

(Because of the word's roots, "thane" would be an inappropriate title for members of the pre-Saxon Arthurian nobility - but again, this fits the anachronistic nature of Arthurian romance.)

56. Panels 5-6. Morgan le Fay, one of King Arthur's best-known adversaries, makes her first appearance in *Prince Valiant*.

Although Morgan le Fay is most familiar as Arthur's enemy, she did not always have that role in the legend. Early mentions of her, such as in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, portray her as an ally, a beautiful fairy or enchantress who dwelt on the isle of Avalon, received Arthur when he was brought there after the Battle of Camlann, and willingly tended his wounds. But this interpretation gradually darkened. In the *Prose Lancelot*, Morgan was depicted as hostile towards Queen Guinevere (who had once broken up an affair that Morgan had conducted with Guinevere's cousin Guiomar), and made several attempts to expose the queen's own affair with Sir Lancelot or to make Lancelot her lover. A slightly later French romance, the *Suite de Merlin*, portrayed Morgan le Fay as hostile towards Arthur himself; Malory used this concept as well, ensuring that it would become a cornerstone of the modern world's interpretation of the legendary sorceress.

In Malory, Morgan was the (apparently youngest) daughter of Arthur's mother, Igraine, by her previous marriage to the Duke of Cornwall. After the Duke of Cornwall was slain fighting against Uther Pendragon, Uther married the widowed Igraine and had her older two daughters, Morgause and Elaine, married off to King Lot of Lothian and Orkney and King Nentres of Garlot; since Morgan was then too young to be wedded, she was put to school in a nunnery. When she grew up, she was married to King Uriens of Gore (see the annotation for #83, Panel 7), to whom she bore a son named Uwayne. While at the nunnery, Morgan somehow learned magic and later decided to use it to destroy Arthur so that she could seize his throne. She duped him into fighting a knight in her service named Sir Accolon of Gaul, arming Accolon with the

real Excalibur and Arthur with a worthless duplicate; fortunately, the enchantress Nimue intervened and saved Arthur's life. Arthur learned of Morgan's treachery from the dying Accolon, but she still managed to steal Excalibur's scabbard, which prevented its wearer from losing any blood, and threw it into a lake, escaping Arthur's pursuit by temporarily transforming herself and her attendants into stone. She made a second attempt to murder Arthur by sending him a magical cloak which would burn up whoever wore it (evocative of Euripides' *Medea*); Nimue again came to Arthur's rescue by advising him to have Morgan's messenger wear the mantle first, resulting in her (the messenger's) fiery death.

Afterwards, Morgan shifted her tactics to kidnapping or attempting to murder many of Arthur's knights, particularly Sir Lancelot. In "The Tale of Sir Lancelot du Lac", she and three fellow sorceress-queens, the Queens of North Galis (North Wales), Eastland, and the Outer Isles, came upon Lancelot asleep under an apple tree and bore him away to Morgan's castle, the Castle Chariot, as their prisoner. (This scene probably inspired Foster's account of how Morgan kidnapped Gawain.) They then asked him to choose one of them as his lover; Lancelot refused all of them in order to remain faithful to Guinevere, and was afterwards rescued by the daughter of King Bagdemagus on the condition that he assisted her father in a tournament against the King of North Galis (which he did). Morgan also made a few unsuccessful efforts at exposing Lancelot and Guinevere's love affair. After the final battle, however, she apparently repented of her evil deeds and was one of the women who took Arthur away to Avalon for healing (apparently the original interpretation of Morgan as an ally to Arthur resurfacing).

Panel 7. The name of Dolorous Garde is derived from Arthurian romance. The original Dolorous Garde indeed had a sinister reputation in the *Prose Lancelot*, where it first appeared, but it had no links to Morgan le Fay there. It was a haunted castle plagued with dark enchantments, until the young Sir Lancelot, on one of his first adventures, conquered it and freed it from its curse. He afterwards renamed it Joyous Garde (see the annotation for #116 for more information) and made it his home, until he was banished from Britain in the civil wars that ended Arthur's reign.

57. Panel 5. Presumably Foster had forgotten while writing this story that Morgan was the sister of Gawain's mother Morgause, meaning that Gawain would be Morgan's nephew and that her attraction to him would be incestuous; of course, Morgan might not have cared. (These family ties, however, would be mentioned later in *Prince Valiant*, in #763, Panel 6, and #1152, Panel 4.)

58. Panel 3. Gawain's comment on the fates of Morgan's past husbands is Foster's invention, yet echoes (perhaps unintentionally) a scene in Malory. Morgan le Fay, during her attempt to kill Arthur through Sir Accolon, plotted also to kill her husband King Uriens so that she could marry Accolon and they could rule Britain together. She attempted to slay him with his own sword as he slept, but their son Uwayne caught her in the act and stopped her. Morgan persuaded him to spare her by pretending that she had been temporarily possessed by the Devil; Uwayne gave her the benefit of the doubt, but removed every weapon from the bedroom to keep her from making a second effort at murdering his father.

Gawain's reason for rejecting Morgan's proposal, incidentally, has a time-honored heritage, going all the way back to the *Epic of Gilgamesh* from ancient Mesopotamia. In it, the hero

Gilgamesh turns down the offer of the goddess Ishtar to become her lover, because he is also aware that her past lovers had come to bad ends once she tired of them.

Panel 6. Apparently Foster still saw magic as real in the world of Prince Valiant (indeed, much of the content of the story of Val's encounter with Morgan le Fay only makes sense under this condition), but the visions can easily be explained as the products of a hallucinogenic drug in Val's wine. (Foster not only left the door open for that explanation here, but even rationalized it as such years later.)

60. Panel 7. Merlin's instructions to Val echo a traditional law of magic in legend and primitive belief, the Law of Contagion; in order to enchant a person, one must have an object in some way connected to that person (more often something like a strand of hair rather than a prized possession, however).

64. Panel 1. From this scene, Foster must have viewed Morgan's guards and servants as actual demons, again part of his early notion of magic being real in *Prince Valiant*. Decades later in the strip, when Val would cross paths with Morgan a second time (#1752-58), Foster would provide a more rational explanation for their uncanniness (though it does not explain their response to the cross).

66. Panel 8. The first mention of Vikings in *Prince Valiant* by that name. As mentioned above (in the commentary on #20, Panel 7), their raids on 5th century Britain are anachronistic.

A note on the word "Viking": "Vikings" referred only to the actual raiders from Norway, Sweden, and Denmark who attacked various portions of Europe in the 9th, 10th, and 11th centuries (it originated as an Old Norse verb, which meant "raiding"). It did not apply to those people in Scandinavia who stayed at home.

70. Panel 7. The Singing Sword is introduced into the strip, to become Prince Valiant's weapon henceforth. In medieval romance, knightly heroes often bore famous swords with an exalted lineage, such as Excalibur for King Arthur, Durendal for Roland, and Gram/Nothung for Sigurd/Siegfried. Naturally, Foster had to bestow one upon Val as well.

The name "singing sword" has become much used in Arthurian popular culture since then, although I do not know how much of this was thanks to *Prince Valiant*. (One of its best-known roles was its appearance in the Bugs Bunny cartoon *Knighty Knight Bugs* (1958), where the famous animated rabbit was assigned by King Arthur the task of recovering the Singing Sword from the Black Knight - played by Yosemite Sam - and his pet dragon; the sword was portrayed in the cartoon, of course, as literally singing.)

I have so far been able to locate only one use of the "singing sword" concept prior to *Prince Valiant*, in Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill* (a book which Foster may have read - see the commentary on #259, Panel 6 below). In the opening story, "Weland's Sword", the god Weland (Kipling's adaptation of Wayland Smith, the legendary master-smith of English folklore) comes to England to be worshipped; when his followers abandon him after their conversion to Christianity, Weland is reduced to shoeing horses, unable to return home to Asgard until

someone thanks him for his services - which none of his customers ever do. Puck (the same Puck featured in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) learns of Weland's plight and wishes to help him; after he sees Weland's most recent customer, a local farmer, refuse to give thanks for his horse being shod, he leads the ungrateful man's horse all about the countryside until morning, when a young nobleman named Hugh comes upon him. Hugh hears the farmer's story and rebukes him for refusing to give thanks. He leads the farmer back to Weland's forge and makes him show some gratitude (albeit of a begrudging kind). Hugh follows the farmer's words with some heartfelt thanks of his own, thus freeing Weland at last; in his joy, Weland decides to repay Hugh for his kindness and forges a splendid sword for him. In the following two stories, "Young Men at the Manor" and "The Knights of the Joyous Venture", Hugh's sword emits a strange groaning or singing sound on dramatic occasions, to the awe of Hugh and his friends. We do not know if this sword was the inspiration for the Singing Sword, but again, since Foster had probably read *Puck of Pook's Hill*, it is possible.

71. Panel 5. While Valhalla has become a term referring to the afterlife in general, it is especially appropriate here as the final destination of a Viking slain by Val in battle. In Norse mythology, Valhalla (Old Norse for "the Hall of the Slain"), was Odin's great feasting-hall in Asgard, the realm of the gods. It boasted more than six hundred and forty doors, each wide enough to allow nine hundred and sixty men to march through it. Any warrior slain in battle was brought here by the Valkyries, Odin's handmaidens, and became one of the *einherjar*, warriors sworn to serve Odin in the afterlife. Each day they fought each other in fierce battle, and were then magically restored to full health; at the end of the day, they feasted in the hall upon roast pork (provided by the boar Saehrimnir, who was always magically restored each night so that he could feed the *einherjar* again the following morning) and mead provided by a goat named Heidrun. The *einherjar* would fight for Odin at Ragnarok, the final battle of the gods against the frost giants and monsters, though there they would all be slain.

Panel 7. Brian M. Kane, in his biography of Hal Foster, stated that Val's stand against the Vikings on the bridge in Dundorn Glen was inspired by a scene in Howard Pyle's novel *Otto of the Silver Hand*. In Pyle's story, Baron Conrad of Drachenhausen, having just rescued his young son Otto from the dungeon of his enemy Baron Henry of Trutz-Drachen, holds a narrow bridge against the pursuing Henry and his knights while his own men take Otto to a friendly monastery where he will be safe. (Conrad was less fortunate than Val; he and Henry slew each other.)

72. Panel 7. The first hint in *Prince Valiant* that Thule is in Scandinavia.

74. Panel 11. Val's message to Arn, "Nor-east to Jutes Land", suggests that Foster may not have seen Thule as being in Norway at the time that he drew this page. The Jutes were one of the Germanic tribes collectively known as Saxons who were invading Britain during the 5th century, and came from northern Denmark (a portion of which is still known as Jutland to this day). If "Jutes Land" is taken literally here, Thule must be in Denmark rather than Norway. (Val's early travels in Thule would also support this location, as we shall see.) Both Denmark and Norway lie northeast of Britain, so the "Nor-East" part of Val's message fits both equally well.

77. Panel 3. The description of Thagnar's ships as made from "Danish cedar" offers further support for the thesis that, at this stage in *Prince Valiant*, Foster equated Thule with Denmark rather than with Norway.

81. Panel 4. Arn's mention of "that uneasy bauble that sets [sic] so heavily on [Sligon's] head" evokes the famous line in Shakespeare's *Henry IV Part Two*, "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown" (Act III, Scene i, line 31), though we do not know if Foster actually had that line in mind when he wrote this page. (The line in Shakespeare's play was also applied to an usurper: in this case, its speaker, Henry IV, who had gained the throne by deposing Richard II, just as Sligon had gained his throne by deposing Aguar.)

82. Panel 7. Despite both *Prince Valiant* and popular belief, Vikings never actually wore horned helmets in battle (which would, for obvious reasons, have been impractical in a fight). Such helmets did exist, but only for ceremonial occasions.

Panel 9. Foster explained once in an interview why he had to have Ilene die: "I had to kill her off. As I saw her, she would have made a good wife. She'd have [Val's] slippers waiting when he came home but she wouldn't like it if he went out slitting throats." (Kane, p. 119.) So, in the interests of Val being allowed to continue his adventures, Ilene had to be written out. Foster still received a torrent of mail from indignant readers protesting his decision.

83. Beginning on this page, Foster included collectible stamps depicting many legendary and historical figures and artifacts from the ancient and medieval worlds, or characters in *Prince Valiant*, at the top of each page (and from #99, at the bottom as well). This lasted until #168.

Panel 2. Val and Arn are able to make their journey from Thule towards western Europe without any mention of crossing the sea between Norway and Denmark; this could be yet another sign that Foster did not envision Thule as being in Norway at this point. Another such example of Val travelling dry-shod from Thule to mainland Europe appears in #119, Panel 2. (This parallels - though I do not know if Foster was aware of this - many of the Arthurian romances, where knights are portrayed as traveling from Britain to Brittany without any mention of crossing the Channel.)

Panel 7. With the exception of Negarth, the knights of the Round Table whom Val names here are all traditional figures from the Arthurian cycle. (Negarth's presence on the list suggests that his reformation had proceeded to such an extent that he had now been given a seat at the Table.)

Sir Kay first appears in the early Welsh legends concerning Arthur under the name of Cai, and was portrayed as one of his foremost warriors. In the poem *Pa Gur*, Arthur praises Kay's prowess, speaking in particular of his battle against Palug's Cat, a giant wildcat that had been ravaging the isle of Mona (now Anglesey). In *Culhwch and Olwen*, Kay is not only one of Arthur's leading champions, but provided with superhuman gifts; he can grow to the size of a tree at will, go without sleep or hold his breath under water for nine days, and exudes such warmth that he can remain dry even in a rainstorm. He successfully carries out many near-impossible tasks in this tale, such as slaying the giant Wrnach with his own sword or seizing the

beard of the robber Dillus; unfortunately, after Kay performs the latter feat, Arthur composes an irreverent little poem about it which so enrages Kay that he forswears Arthur's service forever.

Geoffrey of Monmouth ignored Kay's magical gifts, but kept the notion of his being one of Arthur's leading followers. In his *History of the Kings of Britain*, Kay is portrayed as Arthur's seneschal, a title that he would henceforth bear throughout the future development of the Arthurian legend, and also as Duke of Anjou (a role that would not last as long). He fights valiantly for Arthur in the Roman war that serves as the climax to the great king's reign, but is slain in the chief battle, fighting against the Medes.

Verse romances such as those of Chretien de Troyes proceeded to build further on Kay's role, fleshing out his characterization. He appears in them as a sharp-tongued man, who seldom has a polite word for anybody and whose abrasive manners generally result in his getting soundly thumped by the person whom he had just insulted. Often, Kay would serve as a foil to the more courteous Gawain; he would be set a task by Arthur, approach it in his usual blunt fashion, and meet with a humiliating defeat, after which Gawain would take a more diplomatic approach to the same problem and meet with success. (Could Kay's above-mentioned umbrage towards Arthur over the satirical verse on his victory over Dillus have been an embryonic version of his churlish nature in the literature of the High Middle Ages?) In spite of this almost comical role, Kay retained his high position at court and Arthur's favor throughout the tales (if at times in a manner that could lead the reader to question Arthur's judgment regarding Kay).

Robert de Boron's *Merlin* introduced the concept of Kay as Arthur's foster-brother (perhaps to explain why a man as rude as Kay had such an exalted position at court), telling how his father Antor (the Sir Ector of Malory) was entrusted by Merlin with the guardianship of the young Arthur. (Indeed, the medieval French accounts of this event went on to state that Kay's own mother was given the task of nursing Arthur in his infancy, and displaced Kay so hastily from her breast in order to begin suckling the future king that Kay spoke for the rest of his life with a stammer.) De Boron's poem also introduced the story (better known to us through Malory) of how Arthur served as Kay's squire at the time that he drew the Sword out of the Stone, and how Kay initially tried to take advantage of this event to pretend that he had been the one who had performed this great feat; after it became clear that the credit for that deed really belonged to Arthur, Sir Ector begged his foster-son as a boon to make Kay his seneschal, which Arthur granted.

In Malory, Kay appears as a valiant and courageous knight in his early appearances, fighting effectively in Arthur's battles. (His finest moment came during a war between Arthur and five invading kings, who surprised his camp by the Humber with a night attack. Arthur, Kay, Gawain, and Sir Griflet were trapped with Queen Guinevere by the bank of the Humber, when Kay noticed that the five kings had made the mistake of approaching Arthur on their own, without any followers; he suggested an immediate assault upon them. When Gawain argued that this attack would be foolhardy, "for we are but four and they be five", Kay replied that if Arthur, Gawain, and Griflet would each slay one of the kings, he would slay two - which he did. Both Arthur and Guinevere praised Kay afterwards for his valor and fulfillment of his vow.) Afterwards, however, he degenerated into the more curmudgeonish figure of the French romances. He bestowed rude nicknames upon Sir Gareth and Sir Brewnor le Noire when they

first came to court (the young Prince Valiant got off easy, taunted only by the other squires and not by Kay as well!), and displayed in general such a sour disposition that the other knights were only too eager to unhorse him in a joust whenever possible. (On one occasion, Lancelot took pity on Kay and exchanged armor with him when they crossed paths while out seeking adventure. The knights who came upon Kay in Lancelot's armor thereafter hurriedly shunned any confrontation with him, while those knights who encountered Lancelot in Kay's armor decided to challenge the insufferable seneschal to a passage of arms, only to find themselves hurled to the ground.)

Sir Percival was the original hero of the Grail cycle (before the invention of Galahad), first introduced in *Perceval* by Chretien de Troyes. His father and older brothers had all been slain in battles or tournaments, and Percival's mother, wishing to preserve him from harm, fled to the woods with him and brought him up to be ignorant of knights and warfare. But one day Percival saw a group of knights riding through the forest; believing them to be angels, he eagerly greeted them, and upon learning their true nature, immediately set off for Arthur's court to become a knight. Thanks to his ignorance of the outside world, he had several misadventures that came about through his misunderstanding of chivalric customs, but finally became one of Arthur's knights. In the early versions of his story, Percival was apparently intended to achieve the Holy Grail (Chretien's poem suggests this, but since it was never completed, we do not know for certain what his intent was); with the *Prose Lancelot*, however, that role was shifted to Lancelot's son Galahad, though Percival would also achieve the Grail on a smaller scale, alongside both Galahad himself and Bors. After Galahad's death and the Grail's ascension to Heaven, Percival became a hermit and died a little over a year later.

This panel is one of only three occasions when Percival is mentioned in *Prince Valiant*, the other two being #1860, Panel 2, and #2227, Panel 1. In all three cases, he was treated as just another name among the champions of King Arthur's court.

Sir Tristram was not originally part of the Arthurian cycle, but was gradually drawn into it. Tristram (or Tristan, as he was called in the early versions of his story) was the nephew of King Mark of Cornwall, whose sister married the King of Lyonesse (originally interpreted as either Lothian or Leonais in Brittany, but later, in early modern times, re-imagined as a once-mighty kingdom off the coast of Cornwall that was destroyed by a great flood, leaving behind only the Scilly Isles). As a youth, he came to his uncle's court just as King Mark was facing a challenge from a mighty Irish warrior known as the Morholt; Mark had refused to pay tribute to Ireland, and the Irish king had sent the Morholt to meet one of Mark's knights in single combat to decide the issue. The Morholt was so strong that none of Mark's men were willing to face him; Tristram volunteered to serve as his uncle's champion, and slew the Morholt in the ensuing fight. But the Morholt had wielded a poisoned spear in the battle and wounded Tristram with it; King Mark's physicians, examining the wound, told him that he could only find a cure for the poison in the Morholt's homeland of Ireland. Tristram went thither in disguise (under the singularly unimaginative alias of Tramtrist), where the Irish king's daughter Isolde (or Iseult), a skilled healer, tended him and nursed him back to health. They developed feelings for each other, but when the Irish king discovered that "Tramtrist" was really the man who had slain the Morholt, Tristram had to flee back to Cornwall.

After learning from his nephew about Isolde's beauty, Mark decided to take her to wife and sent Tristram back to Ireland to arrange the proceedings. Isolde's mother, aware that her daughter was not eager to marry Mark, gave her a love potion that she and Mark were to drink on their wedding night; however, Tristram and Isolde inadvertently discovered it on the sea voyage back to Cornwall, drank it, and fell hopelessly in love with each other. Thereafter, they kept up a constant secret affair at Mark's court; several times King Mark became suspicious, but the lovers always found a way of convincing him that there was nothing going on between them. At last, however, Mark found the proof that he needed, and banished Tristram from his court. (For the end of Tristram's story, see the annotation for #383, Panel 2.)

As mentioned above, originally the story of Tristram was independent from the Arthurian legend. But such was the popularity of the Matter of Britain that Tristram, Isolde, and Mark were eventually drawn into it (although they never became as firmly rooted in it as other additions to the cycle such as Merlin). In these later versions, Tristram comes to King Arthur's court after being exiled from Cornwall and becomes a knight of the Round Table, second only to Lancelot according to Malory. (While Tristram's inclusion in the Arthurian legend was mainly a product of the High Middle Ages, there is an earlier - if bizarre - tale connecting the two, a Welsh Triad which lists Tristram as one of the Three Great Swineherds of Britain. According to it, Tristram looked after King Mark's pigs while the swineherd who usually tended them delivered a message to Isolde for him, and protected them so well that when Arthur, Kay, and Bedivere tried to carry off the pigs, Tristram thwarted them at every turn.)

Malory's inclusion of Tristram in his *Le Morte d'Arthur* helped anchor him more firmly in the Arthurian cycle. Edmund Spenser gave him a brief appearance in Book Six of *The Faerie Queene*, and Tennyson focused one of his *Idylls of the King*, "The Last Tournament", around Tristram and Isolde, portraying them as foils to Lancelot and Guinevere (while Lancelot and Guinevere have a genuine tragic nobility amid their adultery which allows them to finally leave their sin for higher and holier things, Tristram and Isolde are shallow and scoff at Arthur's ideals). More recently, writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries rediscovered the original pre-Arthurian version of Tristram's tale and used these as the basis for their retellings, omitting or downplaying Arthur and his court; the most famous of these is Richard Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde*.

Tristram played a fairly prominent role in *Prince Valiant* (standing out among Arthur's knights almost as often as Lancelot and Gawain) thereafter, until Foster finally killed him off in #383.

Uriens was the King of Gore (whose location was not given in Malory or his predecessors – see below for a possible location, however) and Arthur's brother-in-law, who married his half-sister Morgan le Fay. Originally, Uriens was one of Arthur's enemies, part of the coalition of eleven kings who rebelled against him in the early years of his reign (another was King Lot of Lothian and Orkney, Gawain's father), but made his peace with him afterwards. Arthur even gave him a seat at the Round Table. He never participated in Morgan's schemings against Arthur, and indeed, was almost murdered by her once (see the annotation on #58, Panel 3, above).

Uriens is generally agreed to be based loosely on King Urien of Rheged, a powerful British chieftain in the late sixth century A.D. (This makes him too late to have been a contemporary of

Arthur's, according to traditional chronology, but the poets and romancers clearly overlooked that inconvenient detail.) Rheged corresponded more or less to present-day Cumbria (Carlisle was its chief court); if the King Uriens of medieval romance was indeed modeled on King Urien, this allows us to locate Gore on the map as Cumbria.

This is the only time Uriens is mentioned in *Prince Valiant* (assuming that the letter which begins his name in the text is an angular "u" rather than a "v").

84. Panel 5. There were two Sir Ectors in the Arthurian legend. The first was Sir Kay's father and Arthur's foster-father; Merlin gave Arthur into his keeping while the latter was still a baby, and Ector raised the future king as his own son until Arthur revealed his true heritage through his feat with the Sword in the Stone. The second (known as Sir Ector de Maris to differentiate him from the first Sir Ector) was the half-brother of Sir Lancelot. In Malory, after Lancelot died in retirement at Glastonbury, Sir Ector de Maris delivered a famous lament for him that is widely considered one of the finest pieces of prose in *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

Since the only other occasion on which Sir Ector is mentioned in *Prince Valiant* (#100, panel 3) clearly identifies him as the first Sir Ector, I assume that the "kindly Sir Ector" in this panel is Arthur's foster-father rather than Sir Ector de Maris.

This panel also contains the first mention of the invasion of Britain during Arthur's time by the Saxons and Angles, an actual ongoing event in the 5th and 6th centuries that would be a major problem for Arthur and his knights throughout much of *Prince Valiant*. Ector's description of the Angles being driven out of "England" is jarring, though, since England received its name from the Angles.

Panel 6. This is the first mention of Sir Lancelot's traditional French background. Foster equates his homeland with Brittany, the portion of France that looms most prominently in Arthurian legend (thanks not only to its proximity to Britain, but also to its settlement by Britons who emigrated there in the 5th and 6th centuries, hence its name). Malory, on the other hand, identified Lancelot's homeland (called Benwick in *Le Morte d'Arthur*) as either Bayonne or Beaune, both in southern France.

Panel 8. The description of King Bors as Sir Lancelot's father is a mistake of Foster's; King Bors was actually the brother of King Ban (Lancelot's father in Malory) and thus Lancelot's uncle. King Bors was also the father of Sir Lionel and Sir Bors de Ganis, both important knights among Lancelot's kinsmen; Bors de Ganis was even one of the three knights who achieved the Holy Grail (alongside Galahad and Percival). Sir Bors never appeared in *Prince Valiant*, although Sir Lionel received one brief mention near the end of Foster's time on the strip, in # 2227.

85. Panel 2. It would be wonderful to know if Foster, when he wrote this scene, had in mind Lancelot's own misfortune of being in love with the same woman as one of his closest friends - especially since that love would result in a tragedy just as terrible as the potential outcome he describes for the Val-Ilene-Arn triangle (or maybe worse, since Lancelot's tragedy destroyed an entire kingdom).

Panel 5. The Solent is the channel between the Isle of Wight and the British mainland, an appropriate place to sail through when going to Winchester (where Foster locates Camelot).

86. Panel 8. The custom of "an untried knight" bearing white arms with no design upon his shield is another traditional element in Arthurian romance. Malory even mentioned an order of young knights dedicated to Queen Guinevere, known as the Queen's Knights, who only bore white shields in battles and tournaments, rather than their own blazons.

Panel 9. Caerleon was one of Arthur's leading courts in medieval legend, originally far more prominent than Camelot. It first appears in an Arthurian context in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, where Arthur held a great court at the climax of his reign; Geoffrey enthusiastically describes the splendors of Caerleon, which he names the City of the Legion (a literal translation of "Caerleon", which had, in Roman times, been the headquarters of the Second Augustan Legion), in Book Nine, Chapters 12-14, which would become the basis for the depictions of Arthur's court in medieval literature afterwards. Even in Malory, Caerleon remains an important home for Arthur, appearing in *Le Morte d'Arthur* before the first mention of Camelot.

This is the only time that Arthur was shown holding court at Caerleon (or, indeed, anywhere other than Camelot in peacetime) in *Prince Valiant*, and on the occasion of Val's second visit there (#1138), Foster would describe Caerleon in far less glamorous terms.

87. Panel 8. This description of Tristram as "greatest of all warriors save only Launcelot" comes from Malory, who makes Tristram second only to Lancelot among the knights of the Round Table; the third was Sir Lamorak (who is never mentioned in *Prince Valiant*).

91. Panel 8. Val discovers the skeletal remains of the dinosaur that had attacked him in #4-5. Foster does not mention how it had died. Had it been unable to free itself from the trap that Val had set for it in their past encounter, and starved to death? Or did it meet its end some other way?

Years later, perhaps troubled by the anachronism of a dinosaur surviving into historical times, Foster engaged in a bit of retrocontinuity when Val was telling his son Arn about his youthful adventures in the Fens (#1346, Panel 4), and had him describe the dinosaur as having dwelt in the marsh "in olden times", presumably the Mesozoic Era.

92. Panel 7. Foster apparently drew the name "Flamberge" (though only Horrit ever calls the Singing Sword that) from the fantasy novelist James Branch Cabell (1879-1958), one of his favorite authors. In *Figures of Earth: a Comedy of Appearances*, the protagonist, a young swineherd named Manuel, is given the charmed sword Flamberge by a stranger who urges him to use it to rescue Gisele, the daughter of the Count of Arnay, who has been abducted by the wizard Miramon Lluagor. Manuel makes no use of Flamberge on his adventure, however, getting past the guardians of the wizard's castle through the cunning stratagems of his companion Niafer; when he enters Miramon's castle, he discovers that Miramon himself was the stranger who gave him Flamberge (Miramon had discovered after carrying her off what a shrew Gisele was, and wanted Manuel to "rescue" her in order to deliver him from her sharp tongue). Manuel abandons the quest, returns Flamberge to Miramon, and leaves him with Gisele. Eventually Miramon is

slain by this sword in the hands of his son Demetrios. (Miramon and Gisele may also have inspired the tale of Belsatan and Acidia, a few years later – see the commentary on #239, Panel 8, below.)

This is the first mention of Excalibur, King Arthur's sword. It (apparently) makes its entrance in Arthurian legend in *Culhwch and Olwen*, where Arthur, making a list of his prized possessions, includes in it his sword Caledfwlch. Geoffrey of Monmouth named it Caliburn, and included it among Arthur's gear during his description of Arthur arming himself for the Battle of Bath; he mentioned that it was forged on the isle of Avalon. The French romances would later on alter the sword's name to "Excalibur". (A few of them, including those of Chretien de Troyes, make Excalibur Gawain's sword rather than Arthur's; from this, some Arthurian scholars have argued that its connection to Arthur is an illusion. However, no trace of this link between Excalibur and Gawain appears in either Geoffrey of Monmouth or Malory, who serve as the primary sources of Arthurian legend for the modern-day English-speaking public; in their works, Excalibur is Arthur's sword throughout. Thus, even if Excalibur was Gawain's sword rather than Arthur's from the point of view of the average medieval romancer and his audience, the modern-day public has understandable reasons for associating it with the famous king.)

When the Sword in the Stone first entered the Arthurian legend (in Robert de Boron's verse romance *Merlin*), it was identified with Excalibur. However, later versions of the story made the two of them separate swords; in this account, used by Sir Thomas Malory (and thus made familiar to an English-speaking audience), Arthur broke his original sword fighting King Pellinore, and Merlin took him to see the Lady of the Lake. The Lady of the Lake gave him Excalibur, which rose up from the middle of her lake, held by an arm clad in a sleeve of white samite; Arthur rowed out to the arm and took the sword. With it came a scabbard which Merlin described as worth ten Excaliburs; whoever wore it would never bleed. (The scabbard was eventually stolen from Arthur by Morgan le Fay; she threw it into a lake, from which it was never recovered.)

Arthur bore Excalibur thereafter until after he was wounded by Mordred in his last battle (oddly, Arthur slew Mordred with a spear rather than with his famous sword). Dying, he told his last surviving knight, Sir Bedivere, to throw Excalibur into a nearby lake. Bedivere, alarmed at the prospect of losing the great sword forever, twice pretended to have cast it away, but when Arthur asked him what he had seen, Bedivere replied that he had seen only the waters rippling. Arthur thus knew that he was lying, and the third time, Bedivere at last did as Arthur had commanded him. The arm rose up from the lake, caught Excalibur, and sank below the surface of the water with it. Bedivere reported this to Arthur, who thus knew that Excalibur had been returned to the Lady of the Lake.

Panel 8. Foster's description of Horrit's predictions of Val's future as "what may not be told here" serves a double purpose; it makes the aforesaid future appear all the more ominous if it cannot be described, and it preserves suspense.

# VOLUME THREE: KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE.

95. Panel 4. Foster makes a slip in his mention of "we are but twenty"; in #92, he had described Aguar as having thirty followers in exile.

96. Panel 5. For the first time, Prince Valiant witnesses a Saxon invasion of Britain.

Foster differs from the traditional accounts of Arthur's Saxon wars by portraying the Saxons as raiders from overseas. In the pseudo-chronicles, such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, the Saxons were already established in the east of Britain, thanks to Vortigern, when Arthur became king. History is less certain about the details of the Saxon arrival in Britain, but historians generally agree that the Saxons had established permanent settlements and even kingdoms by the time that Arthur is usually held (if he was based on a real person) to have lived, the late 5th and early 6th centuries. Foster, on the other hand, implies that the Saxons are still overseas raiders who have yet to establish any lasting residence in Britain; throughout the early years of the strip, whenever they came to Britain, Arthur would always drive them back to the sea. Only in the later years of *Prince Valiant* would they be depicted as settlers.

99. The stamps on this page feature the Lady of the Lake and King Lot, both mentioned later in the text of *Prince Valiant* (see the entries on #870, Panel 7 and #763, Panel 4, respectively), and King Leodegrance and Elaine of Astolat, who were never mentioned in the text.

King Leodegrance of Cameliard was Guinevere's father; after Uther Pendragon's death, the knights of the Round Table entered his service, bringing the Table with them. In spite of this, Leodegrance was threatened by King Ryons of Ireland (see the annotation for #103) early in Arthur's reign, and would have been overthrown had Arthur not come to his aid. (It was on this occasion that Arthur first saw Guinevere and fell in love with her.) When Arthur afterwards requested Guinevere's hand in marriage, Leodegrance consented, and even gave the Round Table and its body of knights (then a hundred in all) for a dowry.

Elaine of Astolat was the daughter of Sir Bernard of Astolat (which Malory identified as Guildford) and sister to Sirs Tirre and Lavaine. Late in Arthur's reign, after the Quest of the Holy Grail, Lancelot came to Astolat incognito, intending to secretly take part in a tournament at Camelot. Elaine, smitten with love for Lancelot, begged him to carry her sleeve as a favor in the tournament; Lancelot accepted, thinking that it would make an excellent disguise (he had never borne a lady's favor before). He won the tournament, but was badly wounded and left the field, retreating to a nearby hermitage to seek healing. Arthur sent Gawain after the "mystery knight" to learn his identity, and whether he had recovered from his wounds; coming to Astolat, Gawain there discovered that the knight had been Lancelot, and shared his discovery with Elaine and her father. He returned to Arthur's court to share his tidings; needless to say, Guinevere seethed with jealousy at learning that Lancelot had carried Elaine's favor. Elaine, in the meantime, sought Lancelot out in the hermitage and helped nurse him back to health; when she professed her love for him, and asked to become his wife or mistress, Lancelot refused – though with

courtesy, even offering to bestow upon her and her heirs the annual income of a thousand pounds if she wed some other knight. Grief-stricken, Elaine pined away and died; on her deathbed, she asked her father to place her in a barge after her death and let it float down the Thames to Westminster (where Arthur was then holding court) with a letter in her hand that would tell the entire story. This he did, and thus Guinevere learned the truth and was reconciled with Lancelot (though telling him "Ye might have showed her... some bounty and gentleness that might have preserved her life"). Lancelot saw to it that she was given a splendid funeral.

The story of Elaine originated in the French *Mort Artu* and was adapted by Malory (whose account is the basis of the summary above). Tennyson adapted Malory's story in turn, in his poem "Lancelot and Elaine", as part of the *Idylls of the King*, thus helping to popularize it. (His early poem, "The Lady of Shalott", is a variant of this famous tale, which depicts the title character as trapped in a tower, able to see the world only through its reflection in a mirror; when she sees Lancelot's image in the mirror and turns to see him directly through the window in her chamber, her doom comes upon her.) Modern authors, such as T. H. White, have often fused her with Elaine of Carbonek, the mother of Sir Galahad, though there is no evidence of this in Malory.

100. Panel 5. Ulfius and Brastias (mentioned only here in the text of *Prince Valiant*, though they were also featured in the stamps on #92, #94, and #107) were two knights from Uther Pendragon's generation. Ulfius was a friend and confidant to Uther; when Uther made war upon Duke Gorlois of Cornwall because of his desire for Gorlois's wife Igraine, Ulfius served as Uther's advisor. In particular, it was he who suggested that Uther send for Merlin and obtain his help; when Merlin magically disguised Uther as Gorlois to allow him access to Igraine's chamber, Ulfius accompanied the king and the wizard, disguised as Jordan, one of Gorlois's knights. After Arthur became king, Ulfius loyally served him as he had done Uther, and was made his chamberlain.

Sir Brastias was originally one of Duke Gorlois's knights; Merlin impersonated him while accompanying the disguised Uther to Tintagel. Brastias survived Gorlois's death and, surprisingly, entered Uther's service afterwards. He also served the young Arthur after Uther's death. Arthur appointed Brastias Warden of the Northern Marches. Ulfius and Brastias fought valiantly for Arthur when he was faced with a rebellion from King Lot of Lothian and Orkney and his allies, and also went into Gaul on a diplomatic mission to obtain help from Kings Ban and Bors.

Sir Bedivere was, like Sir Kay, one of the first knights to enter the Arthurian cycle, appearing in the pre-Geoffrey of Monmouth Welsh legends under the name of Bedwyr. He played a leading role in the adventures of Arthur and his warriors in *Culhwch and Olwen*, where he was depicted as a close friend of Kay's and an expert spearman, although apparently (the text's wording is not too clear here) having only one hand. Geoffrey of Monmouth made him Arthur's cupbearer (a function which later romancers, such as Malory, transferred to Bedivere's brother Lucan) and the Duke of Normandy; he also had him slain in the same great battle with the Romans as Kay.

Bedivere's most famous feat in Arthurian legend (which Foster presumably alluded to when he described how Bedivere "served his king to the end") was the return of Excalibur to the lake after

Arthur's final battle (see the entry for #92, Panel 7 above). It should be noted, however, that Bedivere did not always have this role; in the earliest known version of the story, in the *Prose Lancelot*, the knight who performs this deed is Sir Girflet, who appears under the name of "Griflet" in Malory. Indeed, as long as Geoffrey of Monmouth's depiction of Bedivere as one of the casualties of Arthur's Roman war was considered canonical, the act could not be assigned to him. The identification of Bedivere with the knight who threw Excalibur into the water was first made - so far as we know - by the Stanzaic *Le Morte Arthure*, a medieval English poem in the late 14th century which was one of Malory's sources. Malory followed the Stanzaic *Le Morte Arthure* in ascribing this function to Bedivere, and Tennyson followed Malory when he wrote "The Passing of Arthur" in his *Idylls of the King*, thereby cementing it in the popular consciousness.

Modred or Mordred (Foster uses both spellings at different times) first appears in the *Annales Cambriae* (a Dark Age Welsh chronicle, meaning "The Annals of Wales" in English) under the name of Medraut; according to the *Annales*, both he and Arthur were slain at the Battle of Camlann. The text does not say whether they were enemies or allies, but the Welsh legends preceding Geoffrey of Monmouth generally portrayed them as adversaries; according to the Triads, two of the three greatest ravagings ever committed in Britain were Arthur and Medraut raiding each other's fortresses (suggesting that in this stage of the legend's development, Medraut was imagined as a rival of Arthur's rather than a traitor or rebel). It was Geoffrey of Monmouth who (presumably) produced the more familiar interpretation of Mordred, making him Arthur's nephew, the son of King Lot of Lothian by Arthur's sister Anna and brother to Gawain. In Geoffrey's work, Arthur left Mordred in charge of his kingdom while he went to Gaul to fight the Romans; Mordred rebelled, usurped the throne, and took Guinevere to wife. Arthur, learning of Mordred's treachery, returned to put down his rebellion, and they fought in the Battle of Camlann, where Mordred was slain and Arthur badly wounded.

Mordred's role was gradually fleshed out as the legend continued to develop. The *Prose Lancelot* introduced the notion of Mordred being actually Arthur's son, the result of an unwitting liaison between Arthur and his own sister, with his evil stemming from his incestuous conception. (Foster would subtly refer to this story a few times in *Prince Valiant*, most noticeably in #1546, Panel 3.) It also had Arthur and Mordred fight each other personally in the final battle, with Arthur slaying Mordred but being mortally wounded in the act; in Geoffrey's account, Mordred is slain in the early stages of the Battle of Camlann by an unknown hand and Arthur receives his mortal wound from Mordred's followers in their efforts to avenge their leader's death. Malory included both of the *Prose Lancelot*'s additions in his *Le Morte d'Arthur*, solidifying them into the familiar story.

Mordred's treasonous schemes resurfaced in *Prince Valiant* many times as the strip progressed, turning him into a recurring nemesis to Val and his family as well as to Arthur.

101. Panel 2. Horsa, the leader of the Saxons, was a traditional figure in the legends about the coming of the Saxons to Britain in the 5th century. According to the accounts given in the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, the *Historia Brittonum*, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and amplified in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, the first Saxons to arrive were led by two brothers named Hengist and Horsa. They

landed at Thanet in Kent (this event was traditionally dated to 449, but few historians take this date seriously now) and made a pact with the British king Vortigern; he agreed to give them land, if they in turn would help defend Britain from various invaders, especially the Picts. For a while, Hengist and Horsa lived up to their agreement; however, after a time, when more and more Saxons had emigrated to Britain under their leadership, they turned on Vortigern and his people and made war upon them. Horsa was slain early in the fighting, though the details of his death vary; the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* has him slain at Aylesford in Kent in 455, while Geoffrey of Monmouth (and the *Historia Brittonum*, his source material for the early Saxon wars) had Horsa slain at Epiford by Catigern, a son of Vortigern's (in fact, Horsa and Catigern slew each other). Hengist lived on, though, and fought for many more years. The early legends say nothing about his death other than that it took place; Geoffrey of Monmouth, however, had Hengist taken prisoner when he fought Aurelius Ambrosius at Conisburgh in Yorkshire and, at the urging of Bishop Eldad of Gloucester, executed as the early medieval equivalent of a war criminal.

Historians are still divided on whether Hengist and Horsa were real people or mythical. Since the two brothers first appear in written records a few centuries after they were supposed to have lived, long enough for the real events of the 5th century to have become embroidered by legend, and their names are both Old English words for "horse", many scholars have argued that Hengist and Horsa were really euhemerized gods, perhaps an Anglo-Saxon equivalent to the Dioscuri (Castor and Pollux) of classical mythology. Others, however, believe that Hengist and Horsa could have been real. The scarcity of contemporary sources for this period of history means that we will probably never know the truth.

Foster would regularly make Horsa the leader of the Saxons, having him face King Arthur and Prince Valiant in battle at least three more times. His choice of Horsa for this role is surprising, however, since all the stories about Hengist and Horsa portray Hengist (who would not even be mentioned in the text of *Prince Valiant* until #1394, Panel 6 – though he also appeared on one of the stamps on #96) as the more prominent of the two brothers. It was Hengist rather than Horsa whom the rulers of Kent claimed descent from (through his son Aesc), and it is Hengist rather than Horsa who handles the negotiations with Vortigern and the deployment of the Saxons in legend, Hengist whose daughter Vortigern marries, Hengist who outlives Horsa and even (in Geoffrey of Monmouth) has the far more detailed death. Why Foster should have made Horsa rather than Hengist Arthur's great opponent in the Saxon wars of *Prince Valiant* must remain forever a mystery.

(For that matter, Horsa's identity as Arthur's foe is another deviation from legend; in Geoffrey of Monmouth, he was slain before Arthur was even born. However, Foster places Arthur earlier on the timeline than tradition generally does.)

The dragon again serves as Arthur's emblem. Tennyson introduced the concept of lions as Lancelot's heraldic device in his *Idylls of the King*, speaking in "Lancelot and Elaine" of "Sir Lancelot's azure lions, crown'd with gold" (l. 659); Lancelot's attributed arms in medieval times were either one or three red bends (diagonal stripes) upon a white field. (T. H. White also ascribed Lancelot this blazon in *The Once and Future King*.) Tristram, on the other hand, was generally attributed a lion on his shield in medieval heraldry (perhaps as a play on the name of his homeland, Lyonesse).

Panel 3. Sir Dagonet is another canonical figure, as is his function as King Arthur's court jester. According to Malory, Dagonet was knighted by Arthur himself, and entertained him at tournaments. His knighthood was evidently purely honorary, for he was clearly no warrior (on the few occasions that he fought anyone in Malory, he lost every single time). His most noteworthy jest was disguising himself as Sir Lancelot in order to strike fear in the heart of the cowardly King Mark of Cornwall (a joke actually organized by Sir Dinadan); the joke went sour, however, when Sir Palomides the Saracen (after rebuking Mark for his ignominious flight) unhorsed Dagonet so soundly that his neck was almost broken.

Tennyson gave Dagonet a major role in "The Last Tournament" in *The Idylls of the King*, where he provides a mocking commentary on both Arthur's ideals and Tristram's adulterous affair with Isolde, until the end of the poem when, as the civil war that will destroy Camelot begins, the court jester sadly tells Arthur "I shall never make thee smile again" (line 756). William Shakespeare mentioned him briefly in *Henry IV Part Two*, where Falstaff's senile friend, Justice Shallow, recalls having played the part of Dagonet in "Arthur's show" in his youth (Act III, scene ii) - indicating just how much of a hopeless mediocrity Shallow must have been even then!

103. The stamps on this page depict Dagonet (see the annotation for #101, Panel 3, above) alongside "Tifkin the armorer", apparently Foster's invention, and "King Ryons of Ireland" and "Lile of Avelion", both minor figures from Malory who never appeared on-stage in *Prince Valiant*.

According to Malory, Ryons was the king of Ireland and North Wales in the early years of Arthur's reign, a man of great size, strength, and brutality. He made war upon King Leodegrance of Cameliard and almost overcame him, but Arthur came to Leodegrance's rescue and routed Ryons. Later on, Ryons declared war on Arthur himself, first demanding his beard as tribute (Ryons had defeated eleven other kings in battle, shaved off their beards, and placed them on his mantle to decorate it; he wanted Arthur's beard to complete the set). Arthur, after joking that he as yet had no beard and therefore could not oblige, refused outright to submit to Ryons, which led to war. Before Ryons could face Arthur in battle, however, he was captured by two of his knights, Sir Balin and Sir Balan, with Merlin's aid, while on his way to a rendezvous with a Lady de Vance (accompanied by a small escort of only forty knights), and brought alive to Arthur's palace as a prisoner. He disappears from Malory's account afterwards (though Malory tells how Arthur fought against, and defeated, the army of King Nero, Ryons' brother).

Ryons is derived from Ritho, a giant whom Arthur fought and overcame in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, and who, like Malory's Ryons, demanded Arthur's beard that he might adorn his mantle with it (Ritho respected Arthur enough to promise that he would give Arthur's beard pride of place on his mantle). Here, Arthur overthrew (and presumably slew) Ritho in single combat, afterwards accounting the giant one of his most formidable opponents. The only foe he faced in battle afterwards whom he considered a match for Ritho was the giant of Mont St. Michel, whom Arthur slew at the beginning of the Roman war with Emperor Lucius (see the entry for #185, Panel 4).

The Lady Lile is mentioned in Malory as a great lady on the isle of Avalon, but never appears on-stage. Her name probably originated from a mistranslation of the French "l'Île de Avalon"

(the isle of Avalon). Foster appropriately preserves her mystery by drawing her with her veil covering the lower part of her face.

Panel 5. Foster was perhaps overly generous in having Prince Valiant immediately admitted to the Round Table upon receiving knighthood. In the medieval romances, a seat at the Round Table was a rare and select honor that had to be earned by many deeds after becoming a knight; even Lancelot was not admitted to it when he won his spurs, but had to undertake several adventures first.

104. The stamps on this page feature not only Uther Pendragon (see #19, Panel 2), Morgan le Fay (see #56, Panels 5-6), and Mordred (see #100, Panel 5), all of whom had already been mentioned in *Prince Valiant*, but also Igraine, Arthur's mother, who was never mentioned in the strip.

Igraine was the wife of Duke Gorlois of Cornwall, and noted for her beauty. According to Geoffrey of Monmouth, when she and her husband attended Uther's court for Easter, Uther was overwhelmed with her beauty; Gorlois, noticing this, left the court for Cornwall in a rage. (Malory tells the story differently; Uther had been at war with Igraine's husband, called here only the Duke of Tintagel, until he learned of Igraine's beauty and summoned the Duke to him, demanding that he bring Igraine with him. He then tried to persuade Igraine to become his mistress, but in vain; she told her husband about the king's overtures and her fear that the truce was just a ploy by Uther to fulfill his lust for her, and suggested that they flee the court at once.)

Uther pursued Gorlois to Cornwall with an army, and made war on the duke, but with no headway. His unfulfilled desire for Igraine began to tax his health, until his friend Sir Ulfius (see #100, Panel 5) advised him to send for Merlin. Merlin's solution was to disguise Uther as Gorlois so that he could trick Igraine into admitting him to her bedchamber (see the entry for #849, Panel 1); thus Arthur was conceived. The same night, Gorlois was slain in a sortie, thereby making Igraine a widow. Uther quickly wedded her afterwards; astonishingly, Geoffrey describes their marriage as happy and says that they lived together as equals.

In Malory, Igraine, after learning of the death of her husband the Duke, realizes that it took place before the man whom she thought was the Duke visited her at Tintagel and is troubled over who the visitor really was; she keeps her fears to herself, however. After she marries Uther, when it becomes apparent that she is with child, Uther asks her if she knows who the father is. Igraine tells him of the mysterious visitor at Tintagel; Uther explains that he was the man disguised as the Duke, and thereby the father, to Igraine's relief.

Also in Malory, Igraine reappears during the early years of her son's reign. After his unwitting incest with Morgause in which Mordred was conceived, Arthur learned his true parentage from Merlin (while the wizard was rebuking him for his act), yet said that he could not believe that Uther and Igraine were his parents unless he heard it from Igraine herself. She was summoned to the court; there, Ulfius accused her of being partly responsible for the rebellions that had troubled Arthur's reign so far, by not announcing that Arthur was her son. Igraine protested that since her son by Uther had been taken from her at birth and she never heard what became of him, she did not know that he was the same as the young Arthur. Arthur finally became convinced

that she was his mother and held a feast to celebrate their reunion. Igraine plays no further role in Malory afterwards, and her fate is unrecorded. Chretien de Troyes, in his verse romance *Perceval*, portrayed Igraine as living in retirement in a remote castle with her daughter, Gawain's mother (the counterpart of Morgause), and her granddaughter, Gawain's sister Clarissant; Gawain discovers them in their retreat in the course of his adventures.

Geoffrey makes no mention of Igraine having children by Gorlois, but says that she and Uther were the parents of not only Arthur, but also a girl named Anna (who plays the role of Morgause in marrying King Lot and being the mother of Gawain and Mordred). Malory gives them three daughters, Morgause, Morgan le Fay, and Elaine; T. H. White called them "the Cornwall sisters", a title that Foster mentioned in #1152, Panel 4.

The Mordred stamp calls him "son of Le Fay", presumably a reference to the notion in many modern Arthurian retellings of Morgan le Fay, rather than Morgause, being Mordred's mother. Elsewhere, though, Foster makes Morgause Mordred's mother (when he speaks of Mordred's parentage at all).

105. The clothing and armor of the people of Thule on this page and the ones following, while having a northern flavor, are in the same medieval style as that of Arthur's court, with little of the Viking Age about them. Apparently Foster had originally intended Thule to be more courtly and less wild than he would later portray it.

106. Panel 6. Sligon's abdication might seem anticlimactic, but it makes good sense for the story. First, a major battle so soon after King Arthur's victory over Horsa in the Fens would have been repetitive. And Sligon had already been established in ##81 as wearying of his usurped throne and the trouble it cost him to keep it, making this resolution to the story appropriate.

108. Panel 9. Alfred de Gerin's name is another sign of how Thule at this stage was far more "chivalric" in style than it would later become; "de Gerin" is a Norman-French surname, not likely to have been found in Viking Age Norway. (Though "Alfred" is an Anglo-Saxon name in origin; its best-known bearer was Alfred the Great.)

109. The stamps on this page depict Lancelot, his parents King Ban and Queen Elaine, and their family's enemy King Claudas. Of the four, only Elaine was never mentioned in the text of *Prince Valiant*. For Ban, see the entry for #110, Panel 3; for Claudas, see the entry for #2152, Panel 1.

Elaine was the wife of King Ban and mother of Lancelot. In Malory, Merlin and Nimue visit her at Benwick, Ban's kingdom, during their travels, before Nimue imprisoned Merlin, and see the newly-born Lancelot. Elaine tells them of the harm that King Claudas has inflicted upon her husband and his kingdom, but Merlin assures her that when Lancelot grows up, he will defeat Claudas and deliver Benwick from him, as well as becoming one of the greatest knights in the world. Elaine asks if she shall live to see her son's deeds, and Merlin tells her that she will.

In the *Prose Lancelot*, after the death of her husband, the conquest of Benwick by King Claudas, and Lancelot's abduction by the Lady of the Lake, Elaine founded a convent at the place where

Ban died, and spent the rest of her days there – though, as Merlin had predicted, she lived long enough to see Lancelot become Arthur’s greatest knight.

110. Panel 3. King Ban was Sir Lancelot’s father in Malory. He was the King of Benwick (despite Foster, located not in Brittany but in southern France, at either Bayonne or Beaune); when King Arthur was having trouble with eleven rebellious kings early in his reign, he formed an alliance with King Ban and his brother, King Bors, who came to Britain with an army. Merlin concealed them in the forest of Bedegraine (now Sherwood Forest of Robin Hood fame) near the site of the battle between Arthur and the hostile kings; after Arthur and his enemies had fought each other vigorously for some time, Kings Ban and Bors burst out of the woods as reinforcements, taking the eleven kings by surprise and turning the tide against them.

According to the *Prose Lancelot*, King Ban died not long afterwards, when his old enemy King Claudas conquered his kingdom and sacked his last castle. Ban, fleeing the castle with his wife Elaine and their infant son Lancelot, looked back to see it in flames and died from grief (though the French *Quest of the Holy Grail* claims that Ban had been permitted by God, on account of his virtuous life, to choose the hour of his death). Malory makes no mention of this; neither does Foster, who, whenever he mentions King Ban, portrays him as still alive.

111. The stamps on this page depict four historical figures from the fifth century. Two, Genseric the Vandal and Emperor Valentinian III, would later enter the strip on-stage, and Clovis the Frank would be mentioned a couple of times. Only the fourth, Alaric the Goth, never appeared in the text.

Alaric was a Visigoth leader, who initially fought for the Roman Empire as a mercenary captain. When the Romans failed to pay him, though, he turned on Rome in anger, and eventually sacked it in 410. (He was a restrained conqueror, and spared all Church property. Still, the mere sack of the city was enough to shock the Romans; Rome had not known such humiliation since the Gauls captured it in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.) Alaric died shortly afterwards from illness. His followers diverted a nearby river and buried him beneath it, afterwards putting to death the workmen who had dug his grave to keep its location a secret.

112. Panel 1. The presence of a friar as the officiating churchman at Alfred and Claris’s wedding is another anachronism. Friars did not appear until the beginning of the 13th century, when St. Francis of Assisi founded the Franciscans in 1210 and St. Dominic founded the Dominicans six years later. (This means, incidentally, that the presence of Friar Tuck in those accounts of Robin Hood set during the reign of Richard the Lion-hearted - 1189-99 - is also anachronistic. Not that it makes any difference, since the notion of Robin Hood as a contemporary of Richard the Lion-hearted and John Lackland is a relatively late development in the legend, popularized – though not founded by Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*. The earliest Robin Hood tales placed him during the reign of one of the Edwards - either Edward I (1272-1307), Edward II (1307-27), or Edward III (1327-77). For that matter, Friar Tuck did not enter the tales of Robin Hood until the 15th century.)

Unlike monks (who lived in a monastery and stayed there), friars wandered about the countryside; they were founded in part as a protest against the wealth and luxury that were

increasingly filling the monasteries and an attempt to return to the more spiritual roots of Christianity (though, as works like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* make clear, friars soon developed a reputation for worldliness themselves). The Franciscans (or Grey Friars) preached open-air sermons, while the Dominicans (or Black Friars) fought heresy.

The presence of any Christian churchman, whether friar or not, contradicts the later depiction of Thule as still pagan, worshipping the Norse gods, and again suggests that Foster had not yet realized how "Viking Age" he would later on make Thule.

Panel 8. The tournament is yet another sign of how much Thule at this stage in *Prince Valiant* resembled a medieval kingdom like Arthur's, rather than a rough and wild Viking land. (Indeed, in #1529-30, Foster would portray Aguar's Viking subjects as not even comprehending tournaments; Val's attempt to introduce the concept to them results in a chaotic free-for-all battle that he has to stop before too many of them are slain.)

Foster's mention of "the survivors" echoes the dangerous nature of tournaments in the Middle Ages; many knights really were slain in these events. In 1186, Count Geoffrey of Brittany, one of the sons of Henry II of England, died from injuries he received from a horse stepping on him after he was dismounted; a similar accident cost Geoffrey de Mandeville, the Earl of Essex, his life in 1216. Two members of the Montagu family were killed in tournaments in the 14<sup>th</sup> century – William Montagu, Earl of Salisbury, in 1344, and his grandson, also named William Montagu, in 1383 (the latter William was mortally wounded by his own father). Even as late as 1559, King Henry II of France died from a jousting accident, when his opponent's lance pierced his visor. (Henry VIII of England, an enthusiastic jouster, barely escaped a similar fate in 1524, in a tilt with the Duke of Suffolk.) Nor did all fatalities stem from such wounds; at one tournament at Neuss in Germany in 1241, eighty knights reportedly suffocated to death in their armor.

The knights of Arthurian romance were more fortunate; few seem to have died in tournaments except in duels to the death (Sir Palomides – see the annotation for #1781, Panel 2 – engaged in three of these at a tournament held at Surluse in Malory, and slew all three of his opponents). Sir Lancelot was seriously wounded at the tournament he participated in while bearing Elaine of Astolat's sleeve (see the annotation for #99), though, and came close to death. Sir Walter Scott acknowledged the high casualty rate of tournaments in *Ivanhoe*, when at the end of his account of the tournament of Ashby de la Zouche, he stated that four knights were slain (including one who "was smothered by the heat of his armour", like the Neuss case above), over thirty seriously wounded, and others "disabled for life".

113. The upper right-hand stamp on this page describes Arthur's reign as lasting from 420 to 460, earlier than he is usually imagined living whenever he is placed on a timeline at all. The *Annales Cambriae* date his victory over the Saxons at Badon to 518 and his death at Camlann to 539; Geoffrey of Monmouth dates Arthur's passing to 542. Sir Thomas Malory dated Sir Galahad's sitting in the Siege Perilous, and the beginning of the Quest of the Holy Grail, to four hundred and fifty-four years after the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, placing it around the year 485, much earlier than the dates given in the *Annales Cambriae* and Geoffrey of Monmouth, but not as early as Foster's dating. A 13<sup>th</sup> century Cistercian monk named Alberic claimed that Arthur reigned from 459 to 475, even closer, though barely overlapping with Foster's dates. Historians

generally place Arthur in the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, or the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup>, if they support the notion of a historical original of Arthur at all. Why Foster placed Arthur earlier than that, we shall never know.

This stamp, incidentally, is the only allusion to the Sword in the Stone anywhere in *Prince Valiant*. (The sword in Foster's drawing is shown protruding from the less-familiar anvil mounted upon the stone, rather than the stone itself.) The story apparently originated with Robert de Boron, and was adopted by first the author of the *Prose Merlin*, then Malory. According to this tale, after Uther Pendragon's death, the nobles of Britain did not know who was supposed to succeed him to the throne. At Merlin's prompting, the Archbishop of Canterbury summoned them to London on Christmas day, to pray for a sign from God. While they were attending Mass at church in the morning, a sword appeared in the churchyard, fixed in a stone and anvil; on it was an inscription stating that whoever could draw out the sword was the rightful King of Britain. All the nobles and knights present tried to pull out the sword, but none could budge it. The Archbishop assured them that this only meant that the rightful king had not yet arrived; to ensure his coming, the lords proclaimed a great tournament to be held on New Year's Day, to which all the knights nearby were invited. Among those who came were Sir Ector, his newly-knighted son Sir Kay, and the young Arthur, serving as Kay's squire. On the morning of the tournament, Kay discovered that he had left his sword behind and sent Arthur back to fetch it. Arthur found the house in which they had lodged deserted and locked up; everyone had gone to see the tournament. Desperate to find a sword for his foster-brother, he went to the churchyard and pulled the sword out of the stone and anvil (apparently ignorant of its true nature – though how that could be when the tournament was a device to attract as many knights to London as possible to make the trial of the Sword in the Stone, neither de Boron nor Malory explains). When Arthur gave the sword to Kay, Kay recognized it and briefly claimed that he had pulled it out, but then admitted the truth to Ector. The nobles took longer to convince, and Arthur had to repeat his feat on Epiphany (January 6, also known as Twelfth Day), Candlemas, Easter, and Pentecost; when even then, the nobles tried delaying further, the townspeople protested on Arthur's behalf, and the lords yielded to them and accepted Arthur as their new king.

The Sword in the Stone is one of the best-known stories about Arthur, yet Foster alludes to it only on this stamp. He refers to Arthur's secret upbringing by Sir Ector a few times, though. (The Murphys omitted Arthur's fostering, depicting him as growing up in Uther's court with everyone presumably aware of his true identity.)

The upper-left hand stamp claims that the Romans left Britain in 412; see the entry on #294, Panel 5, for further information.

The bottom two stamps place Aguar's exile in the Fens, and Val's knighting, in 425 and 433 respectively. This contradicts the statement in #104, Panel 3, that Aguar and his men lived in the Fens for twelve years. (As we shall see, it also clashes with Val's adventures shortly after his return to Thule, which are set against the backdrop of actual historical events that took place in the early 450's, such as Attila the Hun's march on Rome and subsequent death, the assassinations of Aetius and Valentinian III, and the Vandal sack of Rome.)

115. Panel 7. Father Time includes "fortresses unconquerable" among his trophies; is this a foreshadowing of the siege and fall of Andelkrag (described in the text as a "fortress unconquerable"), only a few pages later in the strip?

116. The upper-left hand stamp depicts Joyous Garde, the castle of Sir Lancelot in Malory. This is the only time that Joyous Garde is mentioned in *Prince Valiant*.

Joyous Garde was originally known as Dolorous Garde, a haunted castle of terrible enchantments, until the young Sir Lancelot conquered it and cleansed it of evil magics (see the entry for #56, Panel 7). He then renamed it Joyous Garde, and it became his castle. (This story is only briefly mentioned in Malory, but covered by the *Prose Lancelot* in detail.) When Tristram and Iseult fled Cornwall, Lancelot gave them sanctuary at Joyous Garde, where they remained in happiness for a time. (Malory does not tell how this idyllic period ended, but according to the *Prose Tristan*, while most of the knights of the Round Table, including Tristram, were away on the Quest of the Holy Grail, King Mark took advantage of their absence to break into Joyous Garde and carry Iseult back to Cornwall. He also briefly laid siege to Camelot, but was driven off by a relief party led by Sir Galahad himself.)

When Lancelot rescued Guinevere from being burnt at the stake at the end of Arthur's reign, they also found refuge here. Arthur besieged Joyous Garde until the Pope intervened and persuaded both sides to a truce; Guinevere returned to Arthur, while Lancelot was banished from Britain, never to set foot again in Joyous Garde while he lived. After his death, however, his kinsmen brought him back to Joyous Garde to be buried.

Malory believed Joyous Garde to be either Alnwick or Bamburgh, both castles in northeastern England. Bamburgh was called "Din Guyardi" by the Britons during the Dark Ages, a name close enough to "Joyous Garde" to give its claim more weight than Alnwick's.

Panel 7. Note the apparent death from old age of Val's horse, now reduced to bones, as a side-effect of Val's own aging - evidently reversed when Val's own youth is restored to him.

117. Panel 3. Val's horrified cry that his adventure in the Cave of Time could not possibly have happened might be Foster's way of allowing room for a rationalist approach, suggesting that it was only a hallucination (maybe linked to the wine).

118. Panel 2. The traveler's report provides a definite chronological setting for Prince Valiant's adventures for the first time in the strip: Attila the Hun's invasion of northern Italy in 452 (though the traveler exaggerates in saying that Attila took Rome; he never made it that far).

Attila, one of the best-known figures in the history of 5th century Europe, was the nephew of the great Hunnish king Ruga. When Ruga died in 434, Attila's older brother Bleda succeeded him as ruler of the Huns, with Attila as his second-in-command. After Bleda's own death in 443 (there is some speculation that Attila might have helped bring it about, though no definite proof), Attila became the new king of the Huns, and began his career by threatening the Eastern Roman Empire and exacting tribute from it (he even marched on Constantinople at one point, but had to

retire when his troops were afflicted with illness), before turning his attention to the Western Roman Empire (see #119, Panel 7 for the details).

Panel 3. Foster's choice of the name "Andelkrag" for the magnificent castle of Prince Camoran, might have been influenced by "The Madness of Andelsprutz", one of the short stories of the noted Irish fantasy writer Edward Plunkett, Lord Dunsany (1878-1957). Dunsany's tale revolves around the mighty city of Andelsprutz, which comes to a tragic end after it falls into madness (not the inhabitants of the city, but the city itself); Andelkrag does not suffer a similar fate (unless one believes the almost-suicidal final actions of its defenders to be insanity), but the similarity of the two names, and the application of both to a once-mighty city or fortress which suffers a cataclysmic downfall, suggests such a connection. Foster was fond of Lord Dunsany's works, and many other passages in *Prince Valiant* also echo Dunsany's stories, suggesting that Foster was drawing on them for inspiration.

119. Panel 2. Note that Val rides from his father's kingdom into the lands surrounding Andelkrag with no mention of a sea-crossing between Norway and mainland Europe (where Andelkrag evidently is). This is yet another hint that Foster may not have initially envisioned Thule as being in Norway. (For earlier signs, see the note on #83, Panel 2.)

Panel 4. While Foster portrays the Hunnish hordes that Val battles as comprised entirely of Huns, in actual history, Attila's forces were swelled by Germanic tribesmen who were attracted into his service through the promise of booty. In fact, many historians believe that Attila's Germanic followers outnumbered his Hunnish followers during his invasion of western Europe (particularly since Attila had sent a large portion of the Huns to ally with the Armenians against the Persians at the time).

Panel 7. Emperor Valentinian is the historical Valentinian III, Western Roman Emperor from 423 to 455. He was the nephew of Honorius, the previous Western Roman Emperor (395-423), who reigned during Alaric the Goth's sack of Rome in 410; his mother, Galla Placidia, was Honorius's sister.

Foster's account of Valentinian's "shameful peace" with Attila is inaccurate, though based on real history in a confused way. Valentinian's sister, Honoria, had planned to depose her brother and replace him with her chamberlain and lover Eugenius; Valentinian had discovered her plans, however, executed Eugenius, and sent Honoria to Constantinople, where she was placed under the supervision of Pulcheria, the older sister of the Eastern Roman Emperor Theodosius II (408-450), a pious woman with a strong taste for prayer and fasting. Partly to escape Pulcheria's strict regimen and partly to further her own political power, she sent a messenger to Attila, bearing her ring and a proposal of marriage. Attila, liking the idea of marrying into the imperial family of Rome, accepted, requesting half the Western Roman Empire for a dowry; Theodosius, upon discovering Honoria's scheme, sent her back to her brother, who refused to agree to the marriage. Attila promptly invaded the Western Roman Empire. After sacking a few cities in Gaul, he was turned back temporarily at the Battle of Chalons in 451 (see the annotation for #187, Panel 5), but the following year, mounted an invasion of northern Italy. After taking a few cities, he was met at the river Mincio by Pope Leo the Great (440-461) and a couple of senators, who begged him to spare Rome. Attila agreed to their request and returned to Hungary. Various

explanations have been given for why he did so; according to legend, he was awestruck by the Pope (especially when St. Peter and St. Paul appeared to support his words and threaten him with divine punishment if he did not do as Leo bade him), but modern historians give the credit to plague and famine ravaging Italy, combined with a healthy bribe from the Romans. (It has also been suggested that at the time that the Pope's embassy arrived, Attila was about to head for home anyway, since summer was drawing to a close and he wished to return to Hungary before winter.)

Foster would later refer to Attila's meeting with Pope Leo in #468, Panel 8, and #469, Panel 2, during his account of the Vandal sack of Rome.

123. Panel 1. Hungary was indeed, as its name implies, the homeland of the Huns during this period of history, having been ceded to them by the Romans in 433, during the reign of Attila's uncle, Ruga.

Foster repeats his error from #119, Panel 7 of Attila having received a "Roman bride".

126. Iraine (who appears in Foster's pictures, but only receives his name on the bottom right-hand stamp on this page) was probably named after "young Iraine", one of the legendary heroes of the city of Merimna in Dunsany's short story "The Sword of Welleran". Sir Kerin (also only named on the stamp depicting him) was probably named after one of the knightly heroes in Count Manuel's service in Cabell's *The Silver Stallion*, a sequel to *Figures of Earth*.

127. Panel 2. Attila died in 453. He had married a young woman named Ildico and died during their wedding night, apparently from a burst artery. (It was later on claimed that Ildico murdered him in his sleep, though there is no evidence to support this. This rumor was later on merged with legends that had accumulated around a Hunnish victory over the Burgundians in 437 to develop into the tale found in the *Volsunga Saga* where Atli - the Norse version of Attila - is murdered by his wife Gudrun, to avenge the deaths of her brothers Gunnar and Hogni.)

As Foster states, the Huns declined in strength following Attila's death. Hungary was divided up among his sons, who began fighting each other for power. Only a couple of years after Attila's death, his successor, Ellak, was slain in battle against his father's former ally, King Ardaric of the Gepids, at the Nedao river, and the Huns were driven from Hungary, to eventually fade into obscurity.

128. Panel 8. Slith's name and role as a cunning and skillful thief appears to have been borrowed from "The Probable Adventure of the Three Literary Men" in *The Book of Wonder* by Lord Dunsany. Dunsany's Slith is a master-thief employed by a band of nomads to steal a golden box filled with beautiful songs and poetry from a mysterious house atop the far-off mountain of Mluna; he and his two fellow thieves obtain the box through Slith's wiles, and are almost out of the house when a strange light appears in an upper chamber. Slith, seeing the light and knowing both why it was lit and who lit it, jumps "over the edge of the World and is falling from us still through the unreverberate blackness of the abyss" (*Wonder Tales*, p. 15). Foster's Slith will enjoy a much happier fate than Dunsany's.

130. Panel 8. Could this be Foster's attempt to explain the "charm of the Singing Sword", suggesting that its magic is really just a case of Val being a well-trained and highly skilled swordsman? Val, though generally a rationalist, prefers to believe that the Singing Sword really is enchanted; Foster, by presenting both options here, allows his readers to decide for themselves.

131. Lady Linet, who appears on the stamp in the bottom right-hand corner, comes from the story of Sir Gareth; she was the sharp-tongued lady who accompanied him on his first quest, to rescue her sister Lady Lioness from Sir Ironside the Red Knight, and berated him all the way. (See the annotation on #760, Panel 4, for further information on her.)

133. Panel 9. Val's description of the Huns having raided Europe for "nearly six years" may be a veiled allusion to contemporary history, rather than a reflection of the actual deeds of the Huns in the 5th century. This strip was first printed in 1939, six years after Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. Did Foster intend the Huns in *Prince Valiant* to be a parallel to the Third Reich? (During the First World War, the Germans were nicknamed "Huns" by the Allies.)

138. Panel 3. The Huns were famous for their horsemanship, and it was even said that they held their councils on horseback. Count Zosimus, a contemporary historian, claimed (though he might have been exaggerating) that the Huns were also awkward on foot, a concept that Foster follows here.

## VOLUME FOUR: THE MENACE OF THE HUN.

139. Panel 1. Kalla Khan is Foster's invention, but his name is almost a backwards spelling of "Ellak" (Attila's eldest son and successor). This may be only a coincidence - but it's an intriguing one.

Panel 6. In the 5th century, the Visigoths (one of the leading Germanic tribes in western Europe) occupied southern Gaul or France. They would later on be pushed into Spain, however, after King Clovis of the Franks defeated their ruler, Alaric II, in 507 and conquered the Gaulish part of his kingdom.

In real history, the Visigoths played a noteworthy role in battling the Huns during Attila's invasion of western Europe. In 451, their king, Theodoric I, fought alongside Aetius at the Battle of Chalons; however, he was slain in the fighting, and his son Thorismund returned home to protect his new throne from potential rivals (such as his brother Theodoric II, who murdered him and seized the throne two years later). If it is still 453 in the strip at this point, then the king of the Visigoths could be either Thorismund or Theodoric II (although Foster probably had no specific figure in mind for his Visigothic king).

Panel 8. The first mention of Tristram's famous tragic love affair with Isolde in *Prince Valiant*. (See the commentary on #83, Panel 7.)

With Foster's mention of Gawain having to leave Britain on account of "King Arthur's displeasure at his mischief", he establishes the character as the merry, frivolous and over-sophisticated figure prone to comical mishaps that *Prince Valiant* would portray him as henceforth.

153. Panel 3. Foster's mention of the Huns having ravaged Europe for six years, appearing in a page most likely written and drawn in 1939 (though released on January 14, 1940), suggests again that he was paralleling the Huns with the Nazis (see the annotation to #133, Panel 9).

156. Panel 5. The Trojan Horse was the stratagem by which the Greeks finally won the Trojan War. They built a gigantic wooden horse and filled it with soldiers, then pretended to give up the siege of Troy and sail for home, claiming that they were leaving the horse behind them as an offering to Athena. The Trojans decided to bring the horse into the city in the hopes of transferring Athena's blessing to themselves; that night, the warriors inside the horse crept out and opened the gates to admit the rest of the Greek army into Troy. Since then, the Trojan Horse has become the most famous example of a victory won by duping the enemy into allowing one to enter his home.

158. Panel 6. At the Battle of Hastings in 1066, Duke William of Normandy was faced by a Saxon army under King Harold Godwinson of England that had taken up its position on high ground and formed a shield-wall; Harold's warriors grouped themselves and their shields so tightly together that William's mounted Norman knights could not break their ranks. At last, after making a few unsuccessful attacks, the Normans retreated in apparent disorder; the Saxons, convinced that they had routed them, broke up the shield-wall to pursue them, and in so doing, weakened their defenses to such an extent that the Normans were able to turn about and defeat them. By the end of the day, William was victorious and Harold dead. (Historians still argue over whether the Normans had engaged in a deliberate feint to tempt the Saxons into abandoning their position and thereby making themselves vulnerable, or if they actually were falling back.)

Foster's description of Val's tactics in his victory over the Huns being the same as those used by William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings is only partly accurate since the Huns whom Val fought were mounted, not foot-soldiers like the Saxons under Harold Godwinson. But the core principle was the same: using a feigned retreat to trick the enemy into breaking up his formation and thus opening himself to a counter-attack.

Despite Foster's description of how a strategy devised by one of King Arthur's knights could have brought about "the fall of Britain", William's victory in 1066 brought about the downfall, not of the Britons descended from Arthur's people, but of the Saxons descended from Arthur's enemies. Thus, the Normans' use of Val's techniques would be better described as the Round Table's posthumous revenge upon the heirs of its old foes.

160. The four stamps on this page represent major figures in the early history of Britain, both real and legendary.

Julius Caesar's stamp commemorates his invasion of Britain in 55 B.C., the first event in British recorded history. Caesar raided Britain partly because the Britons had aided the Gauls during his

conquest of Gaul, partly out of curiosity about the island (which lay at the edge of the known world in his time). Although the Britons opposed his landing, he finally defeated them, but had to return to the Continent after many of his ships were wrecked. He returned the following year with a larger army and this time, after many battles, defeated the Britons under their leader, Cassivellaunus, though he did no more than impose an annual tribute on them. (Later legend, alluded to in Shakespeare's plays, claims that Caesar stayed in Britain long enough to build the Tower of London – actually the work of William the Conqueror.)

Foster again places Arthur in the year 420 (see the annotation to #113), and makes Horsa, rather than Hengist, the representative of the Saxons who invaded Britain in the fifth century.

William the Conqueror, of course, took over England in 1066. The illegitimate son of Duke Robert of Normandy by a tanner's daughter (which inspired a far cruder nickname, "William the Bastard"), William succeeded his father to the ducal title at the age of seven; despite his youth and illegitimacy, he not only held onto his title into adulthood, but became one of the strongest noblemen in France.

William's great-grandfather, Duke Richard the Fearless, was also the father of Emma, who married Ethelred the Unready (979-1016), King of England, thus giving William a family link to the House of Wessex that ruled England. After the inept Ethelred was overthrown by Canute of Denmark (who ruled over England from 1016 to 1035), his son by Emma, Edward, sought refuge in Normandy (Emma stayed behind in England to wed Canute). Growing up there, he identified more with Normandy than with England, and when he returned to England in 1042 to become king at last as Edward the Confessor, brought many Norman nobles to court as his favorites, and even offered to make William his heir. When Edward's brother-in-law, Harold Godwinson, the most powerful nobleman in England, was shipwrecked in Normandy in 1064, William entertained him as his guest, but would not allow him to leave until Harold had sworn to support William's claim to the English throne. Despite this, when Edward died two years later, in January of 1066, Harold accepted the decision of the *witan* (the royal council that helped govern England) to become the new King.

William was outraged when he heard the news, and determined to invade England to seize the throne he considered rightfully his (he probably had no choice; to accept the loss of the English throne to Harold would have made him appear weak in the eyes of his fellow nobles). He gathered an army (including mercenaries from many parts of France) and even secured the Pope's blessing for the expedition. Unfavorable winds delayed William's departure for England until late September, however – fortunately for him, since when he finally landed, Harold had been called away to the north to defeat an invasion by Harald Hardrada, the King of Norway, and his own traitorous brother Tostig. Learning of William's unopposed landing, Harold hurried south to face the Norman duke at the Battle of Hastings, where he was slain and his forces defeated (see the annotation for #158, Panel 6, for details). William forced the now-leaderless English to accept him as king, and was crowned on Christmas Day at Westminster Abbey.

Though unpopular with his conquered English subjects, William was one of England's strongest rulers. Among other acts, he had the Tower of London built, had all the knights in England swear an oath of loyalty to him at Salisbury in 1086 (making rebellion against him more

difficult), and ordered the compilation of the Domesday Book, which listed all the towns, villages, and manors of England, describing who owned them and how much they were worth, in order to discover the wealth of his new kingdom. (Historians have been grateful to William for the Domesday Book, because of the information it supplies about late 11<sup>th</sup> century England.) He finally died in 1087, from injuries received when his horse threw him during a war with the King of France; he left the dukedom of Normandy to his eldest son, Robert Curthose, England to his middle son, William Rufus (see the annotation to #409, Panel 6, for more information about him), and a large sum of money to his youngest son Henry (who, after William Rufus' death in 1100, became King of England himself as Henry I). William was buried at Caen in Normandy; unfortunately, his tomb was ransacked during the French Revolution, and his remains lost.

164. On the four stamps in this page, Foster traces the early history of the spread of Islam, in the seventh and eighth centuries.

The first stamp shows Mohammed, and describes him as born in the year 569. Though the exact date of Mohammed's birth is unknown, historians generally place his birth around 570; Foster was unusually specific here. (Foster's depiction of Mohammed on the first stamp shows how different the climate of 1940 was from that of today. Would any contemporary cartoonist dare draw Mohammed in a Sunday strip, even one dedicated to medieval history?)

Mohammed began preaching the word of Allah around 610 in his home town of Mecca. The people of Mecca drove him and his followers out in 622; Mohammed took refuge in the nearby town of Medina. (This event, known as the Hegira, marks the beginning of the Muslim system of reckoning years.) There he built up enough of an army to return to Mecca in force eight years later and capture it; Mohammed made Mecca the holy city of Islam, to which all Muslims were supposed to make a pilgrimage or *hajj* at least once in their lives. He died in 632, leaving behind a devoted host to continue spreading Islam (frequently through the sword) after his passing.

The Muslim conquests in Asia, mentioned in the second stamp, were carried out by Mohammed's successors, first his father-in-law Abu Bakr (caliph – the title born by Mohammed's official successor - from 632 to 634), then Umar ibn Al-Khattab (caliph from 634 to 644). Not all of their conquests took place precisely in 637, but it was around this year that they conquered Jerusalem – an event which both Christians and Muslims saw as significant for different reasons.

The third stamp speaks of the Muslim conquest of Africa (North Africa, of course), dating it to 704. This event was under way even before 704 (the Muslims had sacked Carthage in 698, six years earlier).

The fourth stamp commemorates the Moorish conquest of Spain, which it misdates to 714; the Moors invaded Spain and seized it from the Visigoths in 711. (According to legend, the last king of the Visigoths, Roderick, raped the daughter of one of his nobles, Count Julian; Julian sought revenge by calling on the Moors – who probably needed no invitation in real life.) The leader of the Moorish invasion was a general called Tariq One-eye, after whom Gibraltar (Arabic for “the mountain of Tariq”) was named.

165. Foster continues to trace early Islamic history through the four stamps on this page, up to Charles Martel's victory over the Moors at the Battle of Tours.

The first stamp speaks again of the Moorish conquest of Spain, though misdating it to 709 rather than 711.

The third and fourth stamp deal with the Muslim foray into France in 732, defeated by Charles Martel (the grandfather of Charlemagne) at the Battle of Tours (or maybe Poitiers, depending on which history book you read). Historians debate how important Charles Martel's victory over the Moors were; while traditional accounts portray it as the only thing that stopped the Moors from conquering western Europe (Edward Gibbon conjured the image in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* of how, if the Moors had defeated Charles Martel, "the interpretation of the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford" – Gibbon, Volume Three, p. 223), many historians now believe that it was only a minor raid, not a full-blown attempt at conquest. (The Moors made a few more raids in the years following, which Charles Martel also repelled.) Charles Martel is anachronistically depicted in the armor of the High Middle Ages, rather than the likely gear of an 8<sup>th</sup> century Frankish warrior. The hammer emblazoned on his shield is probably a reference to his nickname "Martel", meaning "the Hammer".

166. Foster dedicates the four stamps on this page to the Crusades, specifically the First Crusade (which Peter the Hermit and Godfrey de Bouillon took part in) and the Third Crusade (which Frederick Barbarossa and Richard the Lionheart participated in).

For information on Peter the Hermit, see #457, Panel 3. Godfrey de Bouillon, the Duke of Lower Lorraine, was one of the leaders of the First Crusade. When the Crusaders took Jerusalem in 1099, Godfrey was one of the first knights to scale the walls and enter the city. Presumably because of this feat, the other Crusaders offered to make him King of Jerusalem afterwards. Godfrey refused the title of king, believing it presumptuous to wear a golden crown in the same city where Jesus had worn a crown of thorns. Instead, he settled for the title "Defender of the Holy Sepulchre", but died of illness a year later. Legend exaggerated his virtues, and he was even tallied among the Nine Worthies of the World (the other eight being Hector of Troy, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Joshua, King David, Judas Maccabeus, King Arthur, and Charlemagne); Dante included him among the great Christian warriors in the sphere of Mars in Canto XVIII of the *Paradiso* (alongside Joshua, Judas Maccabeus, Charlemagne, and Roland), and the 16<sup>th</sup> century poet Torquato Tasso made him one of the heroes of his epic poem *Jerusalem Liberated*.

Frederick Barbarossa (Latin for "Redbeard") was Holy Roman Emperor from 1152 to 1190, and one of the three kings from western Europe who embarked on the Third Crusade (the other two were Richard the Lionheart of England and Philip Augustus of France). Frederick had earlier taken part in the Second Crusade, when he had been Duke of Swabia. Unfortunately, he drowned while crossing the river Saleph in Asia Minor on June 10, 1190, before he could reach the Holy Land. (He is sometimes identified with one of the sleeping kings of legend, like King Arthur and Charlemagne; the evidence, though, suggests that the sleeping king Frederick was actually his namesake, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. So great was his reputation in

Germany, even by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that Hitler named his ill-fated invasion of Russia in 1941 “Operation Barbarossa”.)

Richard the Lionheart (“Coeur-de-Lion” in French, his native tongue) is the best-known of the Crusading leaders, at least to an English-speaking audience. King of England from 1189 to 1199, he spent only six months of his ten-year reign in England, more interested in wars abroad than in ruling his kingdom. England’s chief importance to him was as a source of revenue for his campaigns; after he became king, he raised money by selling lands and offices at high prices. (He is reported to have said once that he would have sold London if only he could find anyone wealthy enough to buy it.) Although he valiantly fought against the Saracens under their leader Saladin, the sultan of Egypt and Syria, Richard was unable to recapture Jerusalem from them; in the end, he had to settle for a truce and an agreement that Christians would be allowed to visit the holy shrines at Jerusalem. As he left the Holy Land, disconsolate, one of his knights told him that he could see Jerusalem from the vantage point of a nearby hill; Richard replied that since he had been unable to deliver Jerusalem from the Turks, he considered himself unworthy to look upon it.

Richard had quarreled with Duke Leopold of Austria, another of the leaders of the Third Crusade, and on his way home, was captured by the vengeful duke and turned over to the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI, who held the king for a ransom of 150, 000 marks of silver. (According to legend, Richard’s friend, the troubadour Blondel, discovered where he was imprisoned – see the annotation to #1142, Panel 4, for more information.) After Richard was freed in 1194, he made a brief visit to England before going to war with his rival Philip Augustus, over the control of Richard’s lands in France (thanks to many interweaving inheritances, Richard and his father, Henry II, controlled more of France than the French king himself, including Normandy, Brittany, Anjou, and Aquitaine). He was killed by a crossbow bolt while besieging the castle of Chalus in 1199.

167. The four stamps on this page trace the career of Charlemagne.

The upper left-hand stamp describes Charlemagne as crowned in 771. Presumably this alludes to the death of his co-ruler, his brother Carloman, that year, after which Charlemagne was the sole king of the Franks.

The upper right-hand stamp misdates Charlemagne’s reign; he ruled over the Franks from 768 to 814, rather than from 769 to 813. I have not been able to confirm whether he did fight fifty-three battles during his reign, but he did go to war many times, against the continental Saxons, the Lombards, and the Avars, among other opponents.

Charlemagne was crowned Emperor of the Romans by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day, 800, as the third stamp states.

The fourth stamp shows Charlemagne as imagined in the medieval romances about him and his paladins, complete with long white beard. He indeed died in 814.

168. The last page on which the collectible stamps appear. From #169, Foster adopted a new format for the top of the page: Val's portrait in the upper left-hand corner, King Arthur's in the upper right-hand, until #198, when Arthur's picture was replaced by a rotating series of other characters whom Val meets in his adventures.

177. Panel 2. Foster rationalizes the giant by making him a victim of gigantism rather than a giant in the mythological sense.

181. Panel 8. According to tradition, Venice was founded in 452 by refugees from the various towns in northern Italy that Attila had sacked on his campaign, such as Aquileia and Padua. (Their numbers were later on swelled by further refugees from the Lombard invasion of Italy in 568.) They were not the first people to settle there - the historical evidence indicates that there had been fishermen living on the islands that would become Venice for many centuries prior to Attila's invasion of Italy - but they were the first to actually turn the islands into one of Europe's most famous cities.

Foster alters the real history of Venice slightly by having it founded after Attila's death rather than during his Italian campaign, and portraying it as threatened during its birth by Hunnish raiders (who had ceased to be a threat to that part of Europe after Attila's death).

182. Panel 1. Padova is better known today as Padua, which would survive into the Italian Renaissance and beyond. It features a few times in William Shakespeare's comedies; *The Taming of the Shrew* was set there, and it was the home-town of both Portia's cousin Dr. Bellario in *The Merchant of Venice* and Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Panel 4. Foster engages in retro-continuity when he speaks of "the sport they [Val, Tristram, and Gawain] used to enjoy in the English Fens". In fact, only Val went hunting and fowling in the Fens; Gawain and Tristram had only visited those marshlands in the strip during the battle with Horsa and his Saxons, and there was no hint that they had done anything there other than take part in the fighting.

Nevertheless, such adventures were of great interest to Foster. At the age of 18, he eagerly went duck hunting in the marshes of the Red River, bringing back " 'enough ducks to put them in the freezer so that the folks could have duck dinners for a month.'" (Kane, p. 20). Unfortunately, at the time he was employed at a mercantile bank and was "playing hookey" from his duties during this expedition; upon his return, his boss told him disapprovingly, "You seem to think that duck hunting is more important than business". Foster answered "Yes", and was promptly sacked.

Panel 6. Ravenna emerged into prominence in the latter years of the Western Roman Empire, beginning when the Western Roman Emperor Honorius (395-423) chose it as a place of refuge when Alaric the Goth and his forces invaded Italy. It became the new imperial capital from then on, being far more defensible thanks to its location on the sea-coast and the marshes that surrounded it on land.

183. Panel 1. The "white-faced boy-emperor" is Romulus Augustulus, traditionally considered the last Western Roman Emperor. He was raised to that rank in 475 by his father Orestes (a

former secretary to Attila who had risen to prominence in the imperial administration), but the following year, was forced to abdicate by a Germanic mercenary named Odoacer or Odovacar (who would be mentioned in #1781, Panel 2). Odoacer then proclaimed himself merely "king of Italy" rather than emperor. Popularly, Romulus's abdication in 476 marks the end of the Western Roman Empire; in fact, he had never been officially recognized by the Eastern Roman Empire. The "Emperor of the West" from the Eastern Roman Empire's view was one Julius Nepos, who had the year before fled to Dalmatia and who survived for a few more years.

Foster never depicted Romulus Augustulus's involuntary abdication in his strip, although he did mention Odoacer, as an off-stage character, in #1781, Panel 2.

The description of Romulus Augustulus as a "white-faced boy-emperor" may have been inspired by the opening paragraph of Harold Lamb's *The Crusades*, which used the exact same phrase for the young emperor (p. 3, *The Crusades*, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1930). Lamb's book was published in 1930, ten years before this page appeared.

## VOLUME FIVE: THE SEA KING.

The cover picture was intended for #210; Foster was proud of it, describing it as "The best page I ever did". Unfortunately, Joseph V. Connolly rejected it, claiming that it lacked action. (Foster later learned from Bradley Kelly, an editor at King Features Syndicate, that Connolly's real reason for rejecting it was to "take [Foster] down a peg".) The original drawing was destroyed in a fire in 1967; fortunately, a black-and-white copy survived, to be colorized for the cover of "The Sea King".

185. Panel 4. Prince Valiant refers here to Julius Caesar's famous crossing of the Rubicon in 49 B.C. Traditionally, the Rubicon formed the boundary between Italy and Cisalpine Gaul; by Roman law, no general was permitted to bring his army across it when returning to Rome. In 49 B.C., Caesar, having recently conquered Gaul, was now at odds with the Senate, which feared that he had become too powerful and had ordered him back to Rome to face its judgment. Caesar chose to cross the Rubicon with his army instead, thus beginning a civil war that culminated in Caesar's victory over the Senate's forces (led by his former ally Pompey) and control over Rome as Dictator for Life (until his assassination on the Ides of March in 44 B.C.). Since then, "crossing the Rubicon" has become synonymous with making an irrevocable decision.

Rome's unsuccessful demand of tribute from King Arthur is an actual part of the Arthurian legend, if now little-known. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, after Arthur conquered Gaul, he returned to Britain and held a great feast at Caerleon. In the middle of the festivities, twelve ambassadors from Rome arrived, bearing a message for him from Lucius Hiberius, Procurator of the Republic; in it, Lucius angrily rebuked Arthur for withholding the tribute due to Rome and for seizing Gaul from the Roman Empire, and demanded that he come to Rome to be punished for these acts. Arthur not only refused to pay tribute or yield himself up, but also decided to declare war on Rome so that he might become Emperor (on the grounds that many past British kings - including Constantine the Great, whom Geoffrey treats in his work as a King of Britain - had also conquered Rome), and crossed over into Gaul with an army. There he

defeated and slew Lucius in battle, but before he could march on Rome itself, he was called back to Britain on account of Mordred's rebellion, leading to the fateful Battle of Camlann.

Later versions of the legend (primarily in the pseudo-chronicle tradition of Geoffrey) made use of this story, improving it along the way; Lucius, for example, rises in rank from Procurator to Emperor. Sir Thomas Malory, in *Le Morte d'Arthur*, included two versions of this scene. The first appears after the defeat of the newly-knighted Sir Griflet at King Pellinore's hands, when twelve ambassadors arrive from Rome to demand tribute; Arthur, already in a foul mood over Griflet's discomfiture, replies that the only tribute he will give the Emperor is a spear or sword. No immediate sequel to this event takes place, but later in Malory's work, a second embassy makes the same request of Arthur, who, as per Geoffrey, not only refuses to make the payment, but gathers his knights and goes to war with Lucius in Gaul, defeating him. Malory's account differs from Geoffrey's, however, in that there is no rebellion to call Arthur home, and he successfully enters Rome and is crowned Emperor after Lucius's death. Tennyson also made use of the scene at the end of "The Coming of Arthur" in his *Idylls of the King*.

Foster keeps the unsuccessful Roman embassy, but portrays it as sent by the historical Valentinian III rather than the mythical Lucius, and omits the "Roman war" sequel.

186. Panel 9. Foster here foreshadows Val's adventures with Angor Wrack.

187. Panel 2. Ariminum is now called Rimini, and is best known as the home-town of Francesca da Rimini from Canto Five of Dante's *Inferno*.

Panel 5. Flavius Aetius was the last great general of the Western Roman Empire. He was not only a skilled military commander, but also familiar with the barbarian peoples that Rome was having trouble with, thanks to having spent his youth as a hostage among both the Huns and the Visigoths (the latter under Alaric the Goth himself), familiarity that he could use to his advantage whether making war upon them or negotiating with them.

Aetius's most famous feat was his victory over Attila the Hun at the Battle of Chalons or the Catalaunian Fields in 451, in conjunction with King Theodoric I of the Visigoths (who was, however, slain in the battle). Despite Foster, the historical evidence indicates that Attila's "mad career" was not actually halted at Chalons, since he was able to invade Italy the following year.

According to Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae* or *On the Ruin of Britain* (a 6th century British work denouncing the morals of the Britons of his time, and the closest thing we have to an eyewitness account of 5th and 6th century British history), after the Britons became troubled with barbarian invasions in the aftermath of the Roman departure, they sent an embassy to Aetius (whose name Gildas mangles to "Agitius"), begging him to send help, with the plea "The barbarians drive us to the sea, and the sea drives us back to the barbarians!" In spite of this entreaty, however, Aetius (if he actually received this message and it is not merely legend) sent no aid, presumably too busy with matters on the Continent. Foster makes no mention of this event anywhere in the strip.

190. Panel 3. Foster's portrayal of Gawain as speaking English is another anachronism. The English language originated as the language of the Angles and Saxons, the traditional enemies of Arthur and his knights; while it is not impossible for some of the knights of the Round Table to have learned some of it on the basis of "know your enemy", it would certainly not be their native tongue. In actual history, a 5th century Briton would have spoken either a very early form of Welsh or (if he was well-educated enough) Latin.

191. Panel 4. Aetius's assassination by Valentinian III (in 454) took place under different circumstances in real history than it did in *Prince Valiant*. When Aetius visited the Emperor for a meeting, Valentinian drew his sword and slew him in a surprise attack. While Foster alters the details of the murder in order to involve Val and his companions, he accurately shows its significance; Valentinian, out of petty jealousy, killed his best general and thus left Rome vulnerable to its enemies.

192. Panel 1. In strict accuracy, the end of the Western Roman Empire (if one interprets "the end of the Western Roman Empire" as Romulus Augustulus's abdication) was twenty-two years after Aetius's death rather than twenty, but no one can blame Foster for rounding out the number.

193. Panel 4. Valentinian is referring to Arthur's refusal to pay tribute to Rome (see #185, Panel 4).

Panels 5-6. Foster deviates from history again in his account of Valentinian's death. In real life, he was killed by a couple of soldiers in the pay of the ambitious senator Petronius Maximus (who had earlier encouraged Valentinian to murder Aetius, whom he viewed as an obstacle to his goals); they ambushed him while he was on his way to the Campus Martius, where military exercises were held. (Petronius Maximus would later appear in *Prince Valiant* in #468-69, where his role in Valentinian's death would finally be revealed.)

Valentinian III was murdered in 455. Foster has thus made use of a succession of actual historical events from 452 to 455 in their proper chronological order, from Attila's invasion of northern Italy to Valentinian's assassination. (It clashes, however, with the dates on the stamps on #113, which date the Battle of the Fens and Val's knighting to 433; twenty years could hardly have passed by in the world of the comic strip since those events!)

196. Panel 4. This exploit of Tristram's is unknown to medieval legend. Most likely it was an invention of Foster's, probably inspired by a passage in Lord Dunsany's "The Sword of Welleran" where it is mentioned that Soorenard and Mommolek, two of the legendary heroes of Merimna, once performed a similar feat.

197. Panel 2. Ostia was the port serving Rome during the time of the Roman Empire.

198. Panel 6. Mt. Vesuvius is best-known today, of course, as the volcano whose eruption in A.D. 79 destroyed Pompeii and Herculaneum, probably the most famous natural disaster of ancient history.

201. Panel 1. The first two occasions in which Val used this strategy were in #29 (when he disguised himself as one of Baldon and Osmond's guards) and #132-33 (when he obtained a Hunnish officer's uniform). On the second occasion, however, Val obtained the Hun's uniform, not to disguise himself from pursuit, but to wear less conspicuous attire than his knightly armor from Thule while conducting his guerilla campaign against the Huns.

202. Panel 1. Foster's mention of Northmen settling in Sicily was probably inspired by the Norman conquest of Sicily in the late 11th century. The Normans were the descendants of Vikings who had settled in that part of northern France now known as Normandy in 911 and become gradually Frenchified (see the commentary on #707, Panel 7, for details). A group of landless young Norman nobles from the d'Hauteville family went south to Italy to seek their fortunes, and gradually conquered Sicily; the most prominent of these adventurers was Robert Guiscard (whose son, Bohemond, was one of the leaders of the First Crusade). Of course, this is another anachronism, since the Norman conquest of Sicily was not due for another six hundred years.

Panel 4. Scylla and Charybdis were two of the most infamous sea monsters of Greek mythology, who together guarded a narrow strait. Scylla was a monster with six heads who preyed upon passing ships (and helped herself to the local sea-life when no ships were available); Charybdis was a sort of living whirlpool which sucked down every ship that she encountered.

No record appears in Greek myth of Heracles (Hercules) meeting Scylla and Charybdis. However, Odysseus (Ulysses), the wily King of Ithaca and protagonist of Homer's *Odyssey*, did indeed face these two horrors on his way home from Troy. The demi-goddess Circe (see the annotation for #1707, Panel 7) warned him about them, and advised him to steer his ship closest to Scylla's side of the straits; he would lose six men this way (one taken by each of her heads), but it was better than losing all of his men to Charybdis. Odysseus did as she had counselled him. Since then, "between Scylla and Charybdis" has come to mean having to steer a narrow course between two equally undesirable possibilities (although Scylla was clearly, judging from Homer's description, the lesser of the two evils).

(Later accounts, such as the one found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, expanded on the story of Scylla, stating that she was once a beautiful sea-nymph, but transformed by a jealous Circe into a sea monster with a set of dogs' heads growing out from her body - presumably the six heads mentioned in *The Odyssey*.)

While Homer does not state where the strait that Scylla and Charybdis dwelt was (and probably did not care), his commentators from classical times onwards have often speculated on its geographical location (and those of the other strange lands that Odysseus visited on his voyages). One of the most popular candidates was the Straits of Messina between Italy and Sicily, where there is indeed a whirlpool that could be interpreted as the original of Charybdis. Foster follows this theory, although he has Val face only mundane sea-perils when daring the straits.

During their run on *Prince Valiant*, Gary Gianni and Mark Schultz referred to Scylla and Charybdis in #3588, when Val's son Nathan compares his father's account of the Kraken (see the entry on #339, Panel 6) and the Maelstrom (a legendary whirlpool) to Scylla and Charybdis in an

unimpressed manner. (Some scholars have suggested that Scylla was a mythified version of a giant octopus, which would make the comparison to the Kraken appropriate.)

Panel 5. In classical times, it was believed that Vulcan, the Roman god of fire and the forge (and equivalent to Hephaestus, the Greek smith-god), had his smithy within the depths of Mount Etna in Sicily. This became a mythological explanation for the mountain's volcanic activity. (Another was that Zeus had buried the monstrous giant Typhon here, who from time to time attempted to escape; according to this myth, these attempts produced the volcano's rumblings and eruptions.)

Mt. Etna also has a connection (though little-known, and probably not in Foster's thoughts when he drew this scene) to the Arthurian legends, incidentally. During the Middle Ages, Arthur was sometimes portrayed as dwelling in retirement at Mt. Etna, serving him as almost a Sicilian equivalent to Avalon. (Morgan le Fay was also associated with Sicily; mirages appearing in the Straits of Messina have become known as "Fata Morgana" - the Italian equivalent of her name - after her.)

205. Panel 2. The popular depiction of galleys and other ships of the classical world being rowed by slaves (made especially familiar to the modern world thanks to Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur* and its movie adaptation starring the late Charlton Heston) is another myth; oarsmen in ancient Greece and Rome were free men who were paid for their work. However, galley slaves did exist in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, so perhaps Foster, instead of following one of the most famous misconceptions about the historical past, was merely anachronistically transferring medieval customs to the 5th century again, as with his depiction of King Arthur's court.

208. Panels 7-8. Aleta makes her first appearance in *Prince Valiant*. Hal Foster modeled her appearance on his own wife Helen.

209. Panel 3. The first mention of the Misty Isles in the text of *Prince Valiant*, but not their first mention in the comic. On #92, the left-hand stamp depicts a "Queen of the Misty Isles"; the lady on the stamp, however, is dressed in the fashions of medieval Europe rather than classical Greece, and appears years before Foster introduced Aleta.

211. Panel 1. The Cyclades are a group of islands in the Aegean Sea, to the southeast of Athens.

212. Panel 1. Foster may have borrowed King Lamorack's name from the Arthurian legend, for it bears a striking resemblance to that of Sir Lamorak de Galis, the third-greatest knight of the Round Table in Malory (Lancelot and Tristram being the greatest and second-greatest, respectively). Lamorak was one of the sons of King Pellinore and a mighty champion, but he had the misfortune to fall in love with Queen Morgause of Lothian and Orkney, the widow of King Lot and the mother of Gawain and his brothers. This angered Gawain and his brothers for three reasons: first, that Lamorak, instead of marrying Morgause, was carrying on an affair outside of wedlock with her, thereby disgracing their family, second, that his father King Pellinore had slain King Lot in battle, and third, that Lamorak had overthrown them in jousts and tournaments several times. (On one occasion, King Arthur held a tournament where he requested Lancelot and Tristram not to participate so that Gawain could have an opportunity to win the prize. Unfortunately, Sir Lamorak arrived late in the tournament, apparently unaware of Arthur's

wishes, and proceeded to unhorse Gawain and his brothers, leading to his being declared the winner. King Arthur delightedly welcomed Lamorak, presumably forgetting how the latter's arrival had ruined his design; Gawain, all the more furious, called his brothers together to comment, "Fair brethren, here may ye see: whom that we hate King Arthur loveth, and whom that we love he hateth.") At last, Gawain and his brothers (except for Gareth, who refused to take part in the act and denounced it afterwards) hunted Lamorak down and slew him, all fighting him at once, an unchivalrous act which cost them much of their reputation in the eyes of their fellow knights. (Mordred stabbed Lamorak in the back, apparently the fatal blow.)

Foster used other names of minor Arthurian characters for his own cast (such as Sir Cador in the Illwynde adventure), so he might indeed have named King Lamorack after Sir Lamorak.

Panel 7. The portrayal of the Misty Isles here (and in #209, Panel 6) as a remote, half-mythical region clashes with their later depiction in the strip as a kingdom clearly on the map (though given only a vague placement in the Aegean) and carrying on trade relations with the rest of the eastern Mediterranean in a normal fashion; apparently Foster's conception of the Misty Isles changed in the course of the strip (just as his conception of Thule did).

Foster's depiction of both the Misty Isles and Tambelaine as independent kingdoms fits the world of medieval romance more than that of real history; in the fifth century A.D., the islands of the Aegean Sea would have been part of the Eastern Roman Empire. (During the Murphys' time on the strip, Emperor Justinian, the ruler of the Eastern Roman Empire from 527 to 565, made several attempts to annex the Misty Isles, all of which failed.)

213. Panel 3. Sombelene's name is probably another borrowing from Dunsany, this time from his "The Bride of the Man-Horse". Dunsany bestowed this name on a female superhuman being (a descendant of gods, centaurs, and sphinxes) of surpassing beauty whom his protagonist, the centaur Shepperalk, carries off.

215. Panel 1. Lamorack's invocation of Poseidon also fits the world of romance more than the world of history. The Roman Emperor Theodosius I (379-395) had abolished paganism throughout the Roman Empire (less than a hundred years before Val's adventures, according to the background historical events like Attila's career), even halting the Olympic Games until they were revived in 1896. The worship of the old gods probably continued in secret for a long time, but public invocations of them would have been unlikely in the Mediterranean during the real fifth century. (Of course, Foster was writing an adventure story drawing only loosely on history – and invocations to the gods of Greek mythology would seem more colorful and exotic than prayers to the Christian God. Also, Lamorack is apparently an independent king who owes no allegiance to the Eastern Roman Empire.)

223. Panel 2. Jaffa (or Joppa) was the port serving Jerusalem in ancient and medieval times. It was from here that Jonah set sail in a vain attempt to evade his divinely-commanded mission to Nineveh (Jonah 1:3), only to be swallowed by a giant fish at sea; Jaffa seems to have had a tendency to be linked with the greater denizens of the deep, for in Roman times the skeleton of a whale was exhibited there, believed to be the remains of the sea monster that Perseus had rescued Andromeda from in Greek mythology.

Panel 4. The Barbary Coast was the northern coast of Africa (though it was not known by that name in the 5th century). Its name originated from the practice of the ancient Greeks to call all peoples that did not speak Greek as "barbaroi"; because the Greeks and their heirs, the Romans, saw the Greek language as synonymous with civilization, "barbaroi" were viewed as uncouth and uncivilized people – hence our word “barbarians”. Since the native peoples of North Africa were not Greek-speakers, they were accounted "barbaroi", and thus their homeland was named "Barbary". (The inhabitants of northern Africa are still called "Berbers" as a variant of "barbaroi".)

The pirates of the Barbary Coast did not become prominent, however, until early modern times, during the 16th and 17th centuries. Their presence is anachronistic (although pirates were a general problem in the Mediterranean in ancient and medieval times as well).

224. Panel 5. The mention of "Moslems" is another anachronism in *Prince Valiant*, for Islam did not exist in the 5th century; indeed, Mohammed was not even born until around 570, over a hundred years after Val's first visit to Jerusalem. During the 5th century, Jerusalem and the Holy Land were still part of the Eastern Roman Empire. In 614, Jerusalem was temporarily taken by the Persians; the Eastern Roman Emperor Heraclius recovered it in 629, but lost it to the Muslims in 637, after which Jerusalem would be in Islamic hands for the next four and a half centuries. All of this was still in the future during the period in which *Prince Valiant* is set, however.

Val's later visits to Jerusalem and the Holy Land contain no explicit mention of Islam or Muslims, suggesting that Foster had recognized the anachronism; however, he continued to portray the local culture as evocative of medieval Islam. (Though this is no worse than giving 5th century Britain a culture evocative of England during the High Middle Ages.)

Panel 6. The Jaffa Gate is the most commonly-used entrance to Jerusalem.

Panel 7. The Via Dolorosa (or "Way of Sorrows") is the traditional name for the route that Jesus is believed to have taken on his way to Calvary to be crucified.

225. Panel 3. Constantine the Great (306-337) was the first Roman Emperor to convert to Christianity, legalizing the new religion in the Edict of Milan in 313. In 326, he came to Jerusalem and built the Church of the Holy Sepulchre over what he believed to be the tomb that Jesus was buried in after the Crucifixion. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre has been destroyed at least twice (once by the Persians in 614, once by the caliph al-Hakim in 1009) but was rebuilt both times, on the latter occasion by the Crusaders following their recovery of Jerusalem in 1099.

Panel 5. The Tower of David is an actual landmark in Jerusalem. Despite its name, it has no connection to King David. It was built by King Herod in 24 B.C. as part of his palace.

Panel 6. The Dome of the Rock was built atop the Temple Mount (the site of both King Solomon's temple and the later temple built after the Babylonian Exile) to mark both the traditional site of Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son (though the Muslims believe this son to

have been Ishmael, their traditional ancestor, rather than Isaac) and the rock from which Mohammed is said to have ridden up to Heaven upon the horse al-Borak (though there is no evidence that he ever visited Jerusalem). It was built in 691 by Caliph Abd al-Malik (thus making its presence in *Prince Valiant* anachronistic).

The Garden of Gethsemane was the site of Jesus's betrayal and arrest (Matthew 26: 36-56, Mark 14: 32-52; Luke and John do not mention it by name).

226. Panel 2. Jericho is best-known for its capture by the Israelites under Joshua after its walls were destroyed by a miracle (Joshua 6). Lying to the northeast of Jerusalem, it is a natural early stop on the way from Jerusalem to Damascus. (The traveller in Jesus's parable who was robbed by thieves and succoured by the Good Samaritan was journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho at the time - Luke 10: 30.)

Panel 9. The Druse are a Muslim sect, nowadays found mostly in Lebanon. Very little is known of the details of their religious beliefs, due to their secretive nature; however, it is known that their sect was founded by one Hamzah ibn Ali in Cairo in 1017, and named after a follower of his, Muhammad al-Darazi. (The date of their founding makes their presence in *Prince Valiant* even more anachronistic than that of Muslims.)

227. Panel 3. Damascus was celebrated for the high quality of its swords in medieval times.

Panel 5. The mention of Baghdad is yet another anachronism; it was not founded until 763.