

## VOLUME SIX: JOURNEY TO AFRICA.

232. Panel 1. The Wheel of Fortune was a popular image in medieval times, originating in Roman mythology. The ancient Romans believed in a goddess named Fortuna or Fortune who represented the forces of luck or blind chance; she owned a great wheel which, when spun, would randomly send blessings or curses upon humans. During the Middle Ages, the image of Fortune's Wheel changed to almost a foreshadowing of the ferris-wheel; humans were seated in chairs upon it, and as the wheel turned, it first bore them to the summit, then dashed them to the ground, as an emblem of their rise to earthly power and riches and subsequent loss of these.

Both the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* had Arthur suffer nightmares about his own forthcoming end, linked to the Wheel of Fortune. The Alliterative *Morte Arthure* portrayed him as dreaming, on the eve of his receiving word of Mordred's treacherous revolt, that he was placed in a chair upon the Wheel of Fortune by the goddess Fortune, who treated him gently and lovingly, and then raised to the top; however, then Fortune turned upon him and sent the wheel spinning so that Arthur was crushed beneath it. In Malory, Arthur's dream about the Wheel of Fortune takes place the night before the final battle with Mordred; here the king finds himself seated in glory at the top of the wheel, and then hurled by its spinning into "an hideous deep black water" filled with monstrous creatures that eagerly seize upon him. In both instances, the dream presages Arthur's fall in the final battle with Mordred.

233. Panel 5. This is the first time that Foster gives Val's age. (See the commentary on #246, Panel 5, below.)

Foster's statement that Val had "sat at the Round Table" is inaccurate; Val had not actually taken his seat there at this point in the strip. He had left for Thule with his father immediately after he was knighted by King Arthur, and would not return to Camelot until #290.

238. Panel 5. Merlin's rationalist advice to Val would be crucial to the atmosphere of *Prince Valiant*, but the old wizard had not yet delivered it to the young prince on the occasion of his visit to Belsatan. Foster would not write that scene, indeed, until #628. (For that matter, in Val's only previous adventure involving Merlin, the rescue of Gawain from Morgan le Fay, both Merlin and Morgan le Fay's magic was portrayed as real rather than mere scientific trickery.)

Furthermore, Foster did not live up to the concept behind Merlin's remark here in telling the story of Belsatan, for the magic in it (Belsatan's undead servants, his ability to conjure up storms, and Acidia's instant transport back to his tower) is all left without rationalization (and indeed, there appears to be no way of explaining it other than as magic). Despite Merlin's words in this panel, Foster evidently still saw *Prince Valiant* as a fantasy strip.

Panel 6. Magi were originally the priests and learned men of ancient Persia (the most famous of whom were the "wise men from the east" who came to Bethlehem to present their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the infant Jesus in Matthew 2: 1-12). Because they were believed to have supernatural abilities, the word "magic" is derived from their name. The term "magus" or "magi" was thus also applied to wizards and sorcerers; Foster presumably uses it in this sense

when applying the word to Belsatan, rather than suggesting that he was a member of the order. (Foster errs, however, in calling him a "magi"; "magus" is the singular, "magi" the plural.)

Panel 8. Foster's "Next Week" caption repeats the error of using "magi" in the place of "magus" (see the commentary on Panel 6, above).

239. Panel 8. Belsatan's skill at dream-reading and his troubled marriage with Acidia may have been derived from the wizard Miramon Lluagor in Cabell's *Figures of Earth* (see the annotation for #92, Panel 7). Miramon Lluagor is also skilled at weaving dreams (indeed, he appears responsible for all the dreams in the world), and is also subjected to the nagging of the beautiful but shrewish Gisele, daughter of the Count of Arnaye, whom he had abducted. (The strong-willed Gisele, in particular, permitted him to send only the most pleasant and innocent of dreams into the world, banning nightmares and erotic dreams.) Desperate to be rid of her, Miramon tricked the young swineherd Manuel into "rescuing" Gisele from him, but at last decided to remain married to her instead.

240. Panel 7. Foster showed ingenuity in denying Val any dreams that night; as a result, Belsatan's claims to dream-weaving can be neither confirmed nor denied. (He did not apply this stratagem to the other fantastic elements in this story, though.)

242. Panel 4. A minor plothole: Belsatan is forced to fend for himself in Acidia's absence, with no mention made of his undead servants (who, indeed, disappear after #239, Panel 7). Why did they not attend to these tasks?

Panel 7. Behind the humor of Acidia's "best centuries of my life" is another sign that Foster, at the time he wrote the Belsatan story, saw the world of Prince Valiant as one where magic was real; if Acidia is telling the truth here, she has been gifted with both a very long life-span and an extended physical youth.

243. Panel 3. Foster's mention of Belsatan having to pay "a certain terrible price" is unfortunate; the nature of the price is obvious, and the prospect of eternal damnation for the old man clashes too much with the otherwise light-hearted look at the troubles and joys of married life.

244. Panel 4. Foster again presents the anachronism of Arthurian knights speaking English in the 5th century (see the commentary on #190, Panel 3).

Panel 5. Sir Astomore's name was most likely borrowed from Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, where a minor knight of the Round Table named Sir Astamore appears a few times. Malory's Astamore is little more than a name; his only important role in the book is the dubious distinction of being one of the twelve knights who helped Mordred and Agravain in their attempt to expose the love affair of Lancelot and Guinevere, resulting in his death at Lancelot's hands in the fight outside the Queen's chamber. (The two knights are probably not the same; Astomore's implied end as an aged pilgrim in Jerusalem is incompatible with Astamore's death as one of Mordred and Agravain's confederates. More likely Foster just liked the name and used it for one of his invented characters, as with King Lamorack – see the annotation for #212, Panel 1.)

Panel 6. Sir Astomore's decision to spend his final days going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem matches the strong piety of medieval knights, but also echoes the conclusion of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (though whether this was deliberate on Foster's part or not I will not even speculate). After Lancelot's death, four of the last surviving knights of the Round Table (Sir Bors, Sir Ector de Maris, Sir Blamor, and Sir Bleoberis) went to the Holy Land, where they died.

246. Panel 5. Foster's mention of Val's eighteenth birthday here allows us to draw up a timeline of our hero's early life. In #289, Panel 9, we learn that three years elapsed between Val's knighthood at the Battle of the Fens (and return to Thule immediately afterwards) and his return to Camelot. Thus, Val must have been knighted at the age of fifteen. Foster stated in #90, panel 9, that Val spent two years at Arthur's court as Gawain's squire, so that, in turn, would mean that he was thirteen when he first went there, and twelve when he encountered Thorg and Horrit in the Fens the previous year. This fits the way that Val is drawn in those scenes.

Foster also mentions in #104, Panel 6, that Aguar and his supporters spent twelve years in exile in the Fens, which means that Val would have been three years old when he came to Britain at the beginning of the strip (though #2000 would contradict this).

Panel 8. The captain's greedy interest in the Singing Sword is never followed up; the strip takes a different turn when, before he can act on this motive, he is murdered by his crew on the next page. Perhaps Foster had originally planned to have the captain attempt treachery against Val, but then remembered that he had already used a similar idea on #202. Or he might have simply meant to provide a sordidly realistic contrast to Val's idealism in the preceding panel.

248. Panel 3. This request makes Val's later belief that his crew were good-hearted and loyal men seem astonishingly naive. Perhaps he thought they were motivated by a desire for more adventure, rather than greed.

257. Panel 8. The Canary Islands were known to classical geographers, who named them the Fortunate Islands, thanks to their pleasant climate. According to Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History*, King Juba II of Mauretania sent an expedition to one of these islands, now Gran Canaria, around 40 B.C., which reported encountering great wild dogs while there; consequently, the island was named Canaria, derived from "canis", the Latin word for "dog". From there, the name came to be applied to the islands in general. (The familiar yellow birds were named after the islands, which they were native to, rather than the other way around.)

Foster makes no mention of the native inhabitants of the Canary Islands, the Guanches, a now-extinct tribe of Stone Age shepherds who seem to have had a striking similarity in physical appearance to the Cro-Magnon men of prehistoric Europe. (King Juba made no mention of them either in his account of the Canaries, which was obviously a major source of Foster's - and which might explain their absence from *Prince Valiant*.)

Foster originally included the decapitated head of one of the wild dogs in this picture, but it was blotted out as too violent. The more recent reprint of *Prince Valiant* by Fantagraphics Books reinstated it in Volume Three (published in early 2011).

259. Panel 6. Foster makes use of the traditional stereotype of gorillas as savage monsters; in real life, gorillas are shy, gentle, timid animals.

Val and Boltar's adventure in Africa bears a striking resemblance to the story "The Knights of the Joyous Venture" in Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*. In Kipling's story, Hugh the Saxon and his friend, a Norman knight named Sir Richard Dalyngridge, inadvertently stumble aboard a Viking ship bound for Africa to seek gold, and proceed to have a series of adventures strongly evocative of Val and Boltar's. Like Val and Boltar in *Prince Valiant*, they stop at what are (judging from Kipling's description) the Canary Islands - although here they are attacked by the local humans (obviously the Guanches) rather than by dogs - and when they reach Africa, battle gorillas (which they mistake for demons) and are richly rewarded by the grateful Africans; furthermore, Hugh, like Val, is armed with a "singing sword" (see the commentary on #70, Panel 7 above). Even many of the details of Kipling's story are echoed in Foster's strip, such as the trees whose roots appear to grow out of the water and the fever that overpowers many of the Vikings. These similarities are so strong as to make it almost certain that Kipling's story was the inspiration for Val and Boltar's journey to Africa.

Many years later, Gary Gianni and Mark Schultz, who succeeded the Murphys to the task of drawing and writing *Prince Valiant*, added a dark sequel to this adventure. In the summer of 2007, they showed Val returning to the African village to find it deserted; he discovers that a group of bat-winged monsters had descended upon the village and either slain or expelled its inhabitants. The gorillas had apparently kept the bat-winged creatures at bay, and by driving them off, Val and Boltar had unwittingly exposed the villagers to a greater danger. (These strips were reprinted in *Prince Valiant: Far From Camelot*, published in 2008.)

262. Panel 4. Horrit's prophecy in #10, Panel 7, that Val would encounter a unicorn on his travels, is fulfilled, in exactly the way that the art for that panel indicated. The rhinoceros is one of the leading inspirations for the unicorn of legend, thanks to its single horn (which is not a true horn but a growth of hair, incidentally). Another is the wild oryx, which has two horns, but appears to be one-horned when seen in profile. (The oryx is a more satisfactory original for the beautiful and majestic unicorn than the ugly and ungainly rhinoceros.)

265. Panel 8. Actually, Gawain only took part in one of the "two splendid fights", his battle, alongside Val and Tristram, with the imperial guard following Valentinian's assassination. The first fight, Val and Tristram's battle with the angry husband and his men, was one that Gawain was not even present at (though he was unwittingly responsible for it).

267. Panel 5. Carcasson (properly, Carcassonne) is a city in southern France noted for its well-preserved medieval fortifications, which have helped give it a reputation for romance and wonder.

Foster may have been particularly inspired to give Carcassonne the role of an exotic land thanks to two works. The first is a poem by Gustave Nadaud, "Carcassonne", which tells of an old French peasant who longs to behold this beautiful city and speaks to the narrator of its wonders, but dies on the journey there, without ever beholding it. Whether Foster had read this poem or not is unknown, but it is likely that he had read a story of that same title by Lord Dunsany, in

which Prince Camorak of Arn (the name of his domain is enough to draw the attention of any reader of *Prince Valiant*) and his knights set out in quest of this fabled city, but never find it.

275. Panel 5. Val had gone without his family badge since #131.

276. The comically inept battle between "Sir Avoirdupois" and "Sir Malnutrition" evokes the similar duel, equally farcical, between King Pellinore and Sir Grummore Grummorson in Chapter 7 of T.H.White's *The Sword in the Stone*, more in the general concept of two knights fighting a ridiculous battle that culminates in a draw through mutual exhaustion than in the precise details. (White's drawings of Pellinore and Grummore in the original editions of *The Sword in the Stone* and its sequel, *The Witch in the Wood* - later on rewritten for *The Once and Future King* as *The Queen of Air and Darkness* - even depict them with similar builds to Foster's bumbling champions, Pellinore tall and skinny like "Sir Malnutrition" and Grummore short and fat like "Sir Avoirdupois".)

We will probably never know whether Foster had been influenced here by White, but *The Sword in the Stone* was available to him at the time that he drew this page, since it was published in 1938. There are other signs, later in *Prince Valiant* (see the annotation for #763, Panel 6), that Foster had read White's Arthurian works and incorporated elements from them in his strip.

## **VOLUME SEVEN: THE ROMAN WALL.**

278. Panel 3. The title of "sheriff" originated in England in the 11th century, and is short for "shire reeve". The sheriff was a local royal official for the shire over which he presided, charged with such duties as collecting taxes for the king and looking after the king's lands in that particular shire. (The term is most familiar to the average modern reader, of course, through the Sheriff of Nottingham in the story of Robin Hood.) Of course, "sheriff" was a strictly English title and would not have been found in medieval France (or 5th century Gaul) in actual history; we can assume, though, that the word is being used as an equivalent to a real (but unfamiliar to English-speaking audiences) title in medieval France.

Panel 4. The presence of the noble title of "thane" is also improbable for a French lord, being English in origin (see the commentary on #53, Panel 5, for further information).

282. Panel 8. Technically, Gawain would not have actually thought of vampires, since these legendary undead beings originated in the folklore of eastern Europe rather than that of the British Isles (the word "vampire" did not even enter the English language until 1734). But the fear of the living dead is common to most superstitious cultures, so Gawain could be imagined as mistaking Dieman's daughter for the British equivalent of such a creature.

283. Panel 5. Val is again, as in #238, Panel 5, shown believing in Merlin's rationalistic teachings, before learning them. (Indeed, Val was not even portrayed during his original time at King Arthur's court - the only opportunity that he had had at this point in the strip to make contact with Merlin - as studying under the famous wizard, although Foster would include this "retrocon" several times thereafter.) For that matter, in light of Val's past encounters with Horrit,

Morgan le Fay, Merlin, Father Time, and Belsatan, he would certainly have good reason to believe the superstitions of the Middle Ages. (Val is correct to take the sceptic's approach here, though, for the "Curse of Blacktower" story, despite its eerie Gothic atmosphere, contains no genuine magical or supernatural elements.)

285. Panel 4. Might Foster have been influenced by Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* in his depiction of the death of Dieman's daughter? In Scott's historical novel, Ulrica, the last of the noble Saxon family of Wolfgang, bitterly seeks revenge upon the Norman family of Front-de-Boeuf that had slain her father and kin, reduced her to slavery, and usurped the rule of her family's castle of Torquilstone. After Sir Reginald Front-de-Boeuf is mortally wounded in battle against Robin Hood's men, Ulrica sets the castle on fire with him inside, and stands upon one of the towers amid the ensuing inferno, chanting a "barbarous hymn" in triumph until the tower collapses beneath her and she falls to her death.

Foster clearly made some alterations if Scott's Ulrica and her vengeance was indeed his inspiration for the "Curse of Blacktower" tale; Dieman's daughter is young (if she was a baby at the time of her father's death, she can be little more than twenty at the time of Val and Gawain's adventure), while Ulrica was old. And the characters' roles are reversed so that the Gaifortes are depicted as sympathetic and noble and the family of Blacktower as malevolent; furthermore, Dieman's daughter, unlike Ulrica, fails to achieve her revenge. But the central image is the same: a woman driven almost mad with hatred and vengefulness, seeking the destruction of her family's traditional enemy, standing in her final moments atop the tower of a burning castle. Under such circumstances, it would be very surprising if Foster had not had Scott's Ulrica in mind, even if only in his subconscious, when he wrote and drew this story.

288. Panel 3. Foster again erroneously makes Lancelot the son of King Bors instead of (correctly) the son of King Ban (for the first time that he did this, see #84, Panel 8). Fortunately, this was the last time he would make this mistake in *Prince Valiant*.

Panel 9. Boltar's indignant comment on the "positively unflattering" likeness of himself on Lancelot's wanted posters is most likely another piece of influence from Lord Dunsany. In Dunsany's "The Loot of Bombasharna", the pirate captain Shard is disgusted to learn that every major city has wanted posters of him, "*and all the pictures were unflattering*" (*Wonder Tales*, p. 20).

290. Panel 4. Disney comic book artist Don Rosa paid Hal Foster tribute by adapting this picture of the great hall of Camelot when he drew the great hall of the ruined Castle McDuck in the first chapter of *The Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck*.

291. Panel 2. King Arthur's report of an alliance between the Vikings and the Picts was almost certainly inspired by the semi-legendary accounts of the Saxon wars in 5th century Britain; as early as the 8th century (in the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*), it was said that the Angles entered into a league with the very Picts whom they had been employed by the Britons to fight against. Foster substitutes Vikings for Saxons, but Horsa's role as the Viking leader (a little further on in the adventure) suggests that he had merged these two peoples.

Panel 3. Arthur is, of course, talking about Hadrian's Wall, one of the most famous landmarks of Roman Britain. The wall was built at the command of the Roman Emperor Hadrian (117-138) when he visited Britain early in his reign, to mark the northern frontier of the province (contrary to both Foster and popular belief, the purpose of the Wall was not to hold back the Picts, but to serve as a base of operations for the Roman soldiers stationed at the border and to control peacetime traffic). The wall was built between 122 and 133, stretching 73 and a half miles from the Tyne to Solway Firth. (During the reign of Hadrian's successor, Antoninus Pius (138-161), the Romans briefly pushed the frontier north of Hadrian's Wall to build the Antonine Wall between the Firth of Forth and the Clyde, but soon abandoned it and returned to Hadrian's Wall as the border-marker.) While undergoing a few setbacks (including a major attack by the Picts and Scots in 367), the Wall lasted until the late 4th century, after which it appears to have been abandoned.

The timing of Val's adventure at Hadrian's Wall, not long after his journey to Africa with Boltar, raises another question. As mentioned above (see the annotation for #259, Panel 6), Val and Boltar's African adventure shows strong signs of having been influenced or inspired by "The Knights of the Joyous Venture" in Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*. Later in *Puck of Pook's Hill*, Kipling told the story of a Roman centurion named Parnesius, posted at Hadrian's Wall in the late 4th century A.D., and his struggles with the Picts, in three chapters, "A Centurion of the Thirtieth", "On the Great Wall", and "The Winged Hats". Could these chapters have given Foster the idea of sending Val to Hadrian's Wall upon his return to Britain?

292. Panel 1. Beric, who will serve as Val's faithful squire until his death in #407, makes his first definite appearance in the strip in this panel, though he will not receive his name until #301.

293. Panel 3. The "vallum" is a real feature to the south of Hadrian's Wall, apparently built at the same time as the Wall itself. It appears to have been made as a means of marking the southern boundary of the Wall's territory (a sort of "No Trespassing" sign for the benefit of the local Britons), rather than for a military purpose. Archaeological evidence indicates that it was abandoned around 140.

294. Panel 5. Julian's dating the Roman departure from Britain to 412 appears to be another slip of Foster's pen; the traditional date was 410. (Though this was not the first time he made this error; the upper left-hand stamp on #113 makes the same statement.) Historians are no longer so certain that the Romans did entirely leave Britain in this year, however; it is now believed that some garrisons remained in the island even after that.

For that matter, the use of Anno Domini dates by the characters in *Prince Valiant* is an anachronism; this system of reckoning years did not appear until the early 6th century when a monk named Dionysius Exiguus calculated Jesus's birth to 753 years after the traditional date of the founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus (now recognized as an inaccuracy, since Dionysius thereby had Jesus's birth taking place four years after the death of King Herod), and thereby introduced the western world's most familiar chronology. (In 1999, the Murphys had Val meet Dionysius Exiguus and learn about his new system of time-keeping.)

296. Panel 5. Horsa's portrayal here as the Viking leader is astonishing, since in his first appearance, at the Battle of the Fens, he had been identified as a Saxon chieftain (as was the original Horsa). In his later appearances in the strip, Horsa would revert to being a Saxon chieftain.

301. Panel 1. Beric is named for the first time, to become a major character until his death on #407.

302. Panel 3. Morgan Todd returns, giving Foster the opportunity to make an amusing satirical remark on the nature of medieval medicine.

303. Panel 2. Gil Hirvis's name may have been inspired by the names of many of the Irish rulers in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, such as Gilloman (the Irish king from whom Uther and Merlin seized the Giants' Dance - see the annotation to #1062, Panel 7), Gilmaurius (an Irish king whom King Arthur conquers), and Gillapatric, Gillasel, and Gillarvus (Irish leaders allied to Mordred who were slain at the Battle of Camlann). Foster does not say whether Gil Hirvis was a traitor in league with the Picts and Horsa, or just an opportunist attacking Arthur's supply lines in order to fill his own coffers (not that it matters to the story).

312. Panel 9. Val refers to Sligon's wife and Claris, whom Sligon had left behind in #107.

314. Val makes his final visit to Horrit on this page (although he would encounter Thorg one last time many years later, in #1549-50).

315. Panel 9. Val had encountered Merlin's door before in #62, Panel 2.

316. Panel 7. The effects of Merlin's cry of "Thunderations!" are another sign that Foster at this point in the strip still saw the famous wizard as having genuine magical abilities.

318. Panel 7. The "bitter quarrel between Gawain and Sir Lancelot" to which Foster alludes is evidently based on Malory's account of King Arthur's downfall, where strife between Gawain and Lancelot played a major role and indeed "wrecked the kingdom". While Lancelot was rescuing Queen Guinevere from being burnt at the stake, he inadvertently slew Gawain's younger brothers, Gaheris and Gareth. An angry Gawain vowed to avenge their deaths, and thereby kept the war between Arthur and Lancelot continuing long enough for Mordred to usurp the throne.

(Though Gawain and Lancelot's feud only began with the deaths of Gaheris and Gareth, there are hints in Malory that their families were at odds with each other even before the Battle at the Stake. Gaheris and Agravain once killed a knight for saying that Lancelot was a better knight than Gawain; Sir Tristram rebuked them for their deed, and spared them only because of their kinship to Gawain and King Arthur.)

Clearly the strife between Lancelot and Gawain that Foster presents here is not the one in Malory's account, especially since Gaheris and Gareth were portrayed as still alive on a few occasions in the strip thereafter; nor, indeed, do the events that Malory depicted as connected to

this war appear in *Prince Valiant*. For that matter, Camelot's fall does not soon come about from this quarrel (although the feud would resurface in #1024-29), and Gawain would be back to his old, light-hearted, flirtatious, merrily irresponsible self by the time that Val paid his next visit to Arthur's kingdom in #380, the shadows lifted from him without explanation. Obviously Foster did not want to be burdened with a guilt-wracked Gawain for the rest of the strip - or to have the Round Table destroyed at this stage in *Prince Valiant*.

319. Panel 1. The "unholy hermit" adventure may have been inspired by the scene in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* where King Richard the Lion-hearted (in disguise) spends the evening in the cell of Friar Tuck and partakes of his hospitality. (Sir Walter Scott, in turn, by his own admission, derived this incident from a late medieval ballad, *The Kyng and the Hermite*.) While the "unholy hermit" of *Prince Valiant* is far more villainous than the good Friar, actually plotting to murder and rob Val, there is the same concept of a "holy hermit" who, underneath his pious exterior, lives a far more worldly life than befits a man of his calling; both dine well on the king's deer and are on friendly terms with a band of outlaws (though the outlaws whom Val subsequently comes into contact with after disposing of the hermit are likewise far more sinister than Robin Hood and his merry men).

Panel 2. Poaching the king's deer (that is, deer living in royal forests – the medieval term for “game preserves” reserved for the king, not necessarily wooded) was a serious offence in medieval England, though more commonly associated with the tales of Robin Hood (fitting the tone of the "unholy hermit" as a darker version of Friar Tuck) than those of King Arthur and his knights.

## **VOLUME EIGHT: PRINCE OF THULE.**

325. Panel 5. Scandia, mentioned here for the first time, appears in the writings of Pliny the Elder as a land in the distant north (in the same passage where he speaks of Thule); the name is obviously linked to "Scandinavia". Foster, as the next panel shows, identifies it as Sweden.

Panel 6. Upsala (or Uppsala) was the capital of Sweden in Viking times, and famed as a center of learning. According to the 11th century historian Adam of Bremen, it was also the site of a great pagan temple, where stood images of Odin, Thor, and Frey; a great feast was held here every nine years, which all in Sweden were obliged to attend. Historians and scholars have questioned whether the temple actually existed (or was as grand as Adam of Bremen described it). Upsala has one genuine memento of its prominence during the Viking Age, though: the burial mounds of ancient Swedish kings close by.

This is the first time in *Prince Valiant* that Thule is placed in Norway.

329. Panel 2. Although Ahab of Tunis is never called a Jew in the text, there are many signs that Foster thought of him as one (why he never explicitly described Ahab as Jewish is unknown), and that the cruel treatment that both Wattle and the ship's crew inflict upon him stems from anti-Semitism. Ahab wears a yellow cap throughout, which Jews were required by medieval law to wear as an identifying mark; furthermore, Wattle's contemptuous label of "usurer" for Ahab

alludes to one of the reasons (or pretexts) for hostility towards Jews during the Middle Ages: they lent money at interest, which Christians were forbidden to do. (The Christians, in scorning the Jews for money-lending, conveniently overlooked the fact that the reason why so many Jews were money-lenders in the first place was because it was one of the few occupations the Christians had not legally barred them from.)

Panel 4. Although Val suffers from many faults that one would expect from a medieval knight (such as pride, a short temper, and recklessness), it is a delight to see that he does not also suffer from the anti-Semitism of his contemporaries.

Panel 6. The name Ahab comes from the Old Testament, another hint that its bearer in *Prince Valiant* is Jewish. However, it is unlikely that a real Jew would ever have borne that name. The original Ahab was a corrupt and idolatrous king of Israel, who became a byword for tyranny and apostasy. Encouraged by his wife Jezebel (who was even more wicked than he), he encouraged Baal-worship throughout his kingdom, which brought him into frequent clashes with the prophet Elijah. He also coveted the vineyard of one of his subjects, Naboth, and when Naboth refused to part with it, had him executed on trumped-up charges so that he could confiscate it; Elijah denounced him for this act of injustice, and foretold how the king would come to a bad end - a prophecy that was fulfilled not long afterwards when Ahab was slain in battle against the Syrians. (I Kings 16: 29-33; 17:1; 18; 21; 22: 1-40). A Jew named "Ahab" would be almost as improbable as a Christian named "Herod".

330. This is the last page to use the format at the top that began with #169, with a portrait of Val on the left-hand side of the title and a picture of a prominent character or (in this case) object that featured in that page's story.

331. Panel 2. The Goodwin sands are a sandbank approximately five miles off the coast of Kent, with a notorious reputation as a navigational hazard in the English Channel. (Shakespeare made use of this same reputation when he had one of Antonio's ships wrecked upon them in *The Merchant of Venice*.) Many legends formed around this sandbank, including the claim that the Goodwins are all that remain of a great city named Lomea, which was destroyed by flooding around the time of Edward the Confessor; Lomea, however, is probably mythical, one of the legendary "lost lands" of British folklore (such as Lyonesse or Lethowstow off the coast of Cornwall, or Cantref y Gwaelod in Cardigan Bay).

334. Panel 4. Wattle alludes to the biblical story of Jonah, an Old Testament prophet who was told by God to deliver a warning to the city of Nineveh (then the capital of the Assyrian Empire, the greatest enemy of the Israelites at that time). Rather than go there, Jonah took a ship for Tarshish (generally believed by biblical scholars to be Tartessos, on the coast of Spain, which would have seemed like the edge of the world to the Israelites at that time). The ship was caught in a terrible storm, though, and Jonah at last confessed to the sailors on board that the tempest was a punishment for his own disobedience, and would cease when he was thrown overboard. When the sailors did so, the storm ended, while Jonah was swallowed by a "great fish"; he admitted in contrition that he had done wrong, whereupon God had the fish return Jonah to dry ground so that he could go to Nineveh and complete his task. Since then, "jonah" has become a term for a passenger on board a ship who bears a taint that endangers the vessel and all on board.

337. Panel 5. Trondheim was a major town in Norway in Viking times, also known as Nidaross. According to legend, it was founded in 997 by King Olaf Tryggvason (if this is true, its presence in *Prince Valiant* is another anachronism); it was abandoned after his death, but reoccupied by St. Olaf, under whom it became almost the capital of Norway for the next two centuries. (Archaeologists believe, however, that Trondheim was a trading center even before Olaf Tryggvason's time, though as yet we lack any hard details.)

339. Panel 6. The Kraken was a legendary sea monster in Norwegian folklore, described by Olaus Magnus, who was Archbishop of Uppsala in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and Bishop Erik Pontoppidan of Bergen in his *Natural History of Norway*, published in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. They described it as a gigantic creature, capable of sinking ships. Pontoppidan reported that fishermen would sometimes, when measuring the distance to the sea bed, find it only twenty fathoms deep rather than the usual eighty or a hundred; they would then be able to catch great quantities of fish, but had to keep careful watch for signs of the Kraken rising to the surface. The Kraken was even mistaken for an island at times, with disastrous results when sailors set foot on it (a tale often told about other sea monsters, such as the great whale Jasconius in the story of St. Brendan the Navigator). Tennyson wrote a poem about the Kraken in his youth, describing it as sleeping at the bottom of the sea until the end of the world, when "once by men and angels to be seen,/ In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die".

Scientists now believe that the Kraken legend originated from sightings of giant squid; Hal Foster clearly followed this theory here.

During the Gianni-Schultz era of *Prince Valiant*, Val told his son Nathan about the Kraken on #3588; the art again identifies it as a giant squid.

340. Panel 1. Note that in the last panel of the previous page, Val is still stripped to the waist, but in this panel, apparently only a few seconds after the previous page's cliffhanger, he has donned his outer garments again!

342. The "logo" of *Prince Valiant*, a picture of Val on horseback in knightly armor, as if riding out to adventure, appears for the first time in the strip, though not in its final form (and would disappear for the next three pages). The picture on this page has Val wear a helmet; its final form depicts him as bare-headed.

Panel 6. Ahab's mention of "my race" is another hint that he is Jewish.

343. Panel 2. Foster presumably borrowed Valgrind's name from Norse mythology; it was the gate of either Asgard or Valhalla according to Verse 22 of the *Grimnismal*, a poem in the Elder Edda.

Panel 3. Troubadours originated in southern France during the High Middle Ages, as composers and singers of lyric poetry, particularly dwelling on romantic love. While some were professional minstrels, others were members of the nobility, such as Duke William IX of Aquitaine (1071-1127), the grandfather of the celebrated Eleanor of Aquitaine, or King Richard the Lion-hearted of England (Duke William's great-grandson). They would be anachronistic for

the 5th century, of course, but would be at home in the Arthurian Britain of medieval romance. However, a troubadour would certainly seem out of place in Thule as Foster was now portraying it, no longer an elegant medieval kingdom but a rough-and-tumble Viking land whose nobles would prefer straightforward tales about warrior-heroes and fierce battles over songs of love (as #348, Panel 4 makes clear).. Of course, Foster might have been using the word loosely, as a synonym for “minstrel”.

344. Panel 1. Val’s father is named "Aguar" for the first time in the strip. Foster presumably borrowed the name from a minor (and off-stage) character in Malory, from a sequence during the Quest of the Holy Grail. Sir Lancelot comes to a hermitage where he discovers the body of a dead holy man who had once lived there, and learns his life story from both the current resident hermit and a demon which the hermit conjures up. The holy man had once been a great warrior but had retired from the world to become a hermit; however, when his nephew, Sir Aguarus, was in great danger, the holy man left his hermitage long enough to assist him in battle. The similarity of "Aguarus" to "Aguar" makes it likely that this was the source of the name that Foster gave to the King of Thule.

Panel 4. Despite the earlier mentions of a tournament, Valgrind’s men dress like Vikings (or, more accurately, like the popular conception of Vikings) rather than like medieval knights. Foster has by this point evidently adopted the notion at last of Thule being Viking Age rather than medieval in its culture (contradicting the picture given in the immediate aftermath of Aguar recovering his throne from Sligon).

346. The “Prince Valiant” logo of Val on horseback (which first appeared on #342) reaches its final form, to become a permanent feature of the strip henceforth. Also from this page on, the “In the Days of King Arthur” part of the title is inscribed upon a scroll.

Panel 5. Val’s old tutor from his time in the Fens (#5, Panel 12) is re-introduced and now, like Aguar, receives a name.

Panel 6. "Western borders" must have been a slip of Foster’s; since Thule is in Norway and the Finnas are the Finns, a war with the Finnas would far more likely take place on Thule’s eastern borders.

358. Panel 4. The timing of this page makes Foster’s comment on Aguar’s hopes for a peaceful world all the more poignant: December 19, 1943, while World War II was still raging.

## **VOLUME NINE: JOURNEY TO THE MISTY ISLES**

376. Panel 7. Here begins *The Medieval Castle*, a companion comic strip to *Prince Valiant*. It originated as a result of paper shortages during World War II; if a newspaper plagued with this problem was unable to run all three tiers of *Prince Valiant*, it could drop *The Medieval Castle* without robbing *Prince Valiant* proper of its story.

Foster showed his fondness for the name "Arn" in using it for the older of his two young protagonists, alongside the two characters bearing that name in *Prince Valiant* itself (the Prince of Ord and Val's eldest son).

377. Page 6. Guy and Arn's parents are never named in *The Medieval Castle*. However, a novelization of the strip (published in 1957 by Hastings House, which also published adaptations of the early years of *Prince Valiant* in seven volumes) named them Lord and Lady Harwood. We do not know if these names were Foster's idea or not.

Panel 7. *The Medieval Castle* (see the commentary on #378, Panel 7, below) was set on the eve of the First Crusade (1096-99), and thus approximately thirty years after the Battle of Hastings in 1066 had brought England under Norman rule. Since almost all of the noble families in England by this point were Norman (with the Saxon noble families dispossessed, and in some cases, destroyed after their leaders were slain at Hastings or the resistance that followed), it is no surprise that the lord of the castle and his family are Norman as well.

378. Panel 7. The First Crusade took place between 1096 and 1099; since this event only begins at the very end of *The Medieval Castle*, this would place the events in the strip at approximately 1095.

381. Panel 3. Sir Blamor (assuming that Foster is not merely borrowing a name here, but using the actual knight from the medieval romances) was a kinsman of Sir Lancelot's in Malory. He joined Lancelot in his retirement at Glastonbury following the departure of Arthur. After Lancelot's death, he went to the Holy Land in the company of Sir Ector de Maris, Sir Bors de Ganis, and Sir Bleoberis; the four of them fought several battles against the Saracens there and eventually all died on Good Friday.

Val and Gawain's consulting Sir Blamor on Tristram's whereabouts is appropriate, for Blamor had a major encounter with Tristram in Malory. He and his brother Bleoberis believed that King Anguish of Ireland had murdered one of their kinsmen and accused him of the crime at Arthur's court. Sir Tristram, who had been commissioned by King Mark of Cornwall to persuade Anguish to give his daughter Isolde to Mark in marriage, offered to champion the Irish king against Sir Blamor (after Anguish had testified to Tristram that he was indeed innocent of the charge), defeated Blamor in single combat, and persuaded him to withdraw his accusation.

Tristram's affair with Isolde is again brought in, and Isolde's husband, King Mark of Cornwall, is introduced into the strip, for the first and only time (unless you count his appearing on a stamp on #88).. King Mark was part of the Tristram cycle, and entered the Arthurian legend at the same time that Tristram did. (He appears to have been loosely based on Cunomorus, a king of Cornwall in the late 6th century who was active in Brittany, and was even slain in battle there. This Cunomorus seems to have had a son named Drustanus, who may have been similarly a loose original for Tristram, though changed in the legends from son to nephew - most likely because the storytellers found the notion of Isolde thereby being Tristram's stepmother too uncomfortable.)

In the early versions of Tristram's story, King Mark is portrayed as a wise and noble king, who even comments after the deaths of the lovers, when he learns of the love potion that had been responsible for their becoming enamored of each other, that had he only known of this he would have renounced all claim to Isolde. However, after the Tristram legend merged with the Arthurian cycle, Mark degenerated into a villain - and a cowardly one at that, who dared not even face Tristram in fair fight but attempted to dispose of him through many underhanded schemes. This is how Malory, in particular, portrayed him, having Arthur's knights disdain him for his poltroonish and treacherous behavior; furthermore, Mark does not even confine his machinations to Tristram alone, but also murders his noble brother, Prince Boudwin, in an envious rage after Boudwin saved Cornwall from a Saracen invasion without Mark's help. One 13th century French prose romance even had Mark sack Camelot and burn the Round Table following the departure of Arthur and the death of Lancelot, though Malory did not make use of this concept. *Prince Valiant* followed the interpretation of Mark as a villain.

Panel 5. Tintagel, one of the most famous sites connected to King Arthur and the Arthurian cycle, first appears in *Prince Valiant*. It is best-known as the site of Arthur's conception (and, in Victorian and modern versions of the legend, his birth), though this is not alluded to here. Instead, Foster portrays it in this scene as the castle of King Mark of Cornwall, a role which Malory also bestowed upon it in his version of the Tristram story.

382. Panel 8. Since the seneschal is sent to Winchester, *The Medieval Castle* evidently takes place in southern England, either in or close to Hampshire (where Winchester is located).

383. Panel 2. Foster here follows the Malory version of Tristram's death, portraying him as slain by King Mark while singing to Isolde. In earlier versions of the Tristram story (before his tale became connected to Arthur's), Tristram met a different end. After he was banished from Cornwall, he went to Brittany, where he married a Breton princess also named Isolde (called Isolde of the White Hands to distinguish her from the Isolde who was Tristram's love). Tristram was seriously wounded in battle not long after, and sent a message to Cornwall, urging Isolde to come to heal him. It was agreed that if Isolde could come, the ship bringing her to Cornwall would bear white sails, but if she could not come, the returning ship would bear black sails.

Isolde set out for Brittany at once, but Tristram was too weak from his wounds to look out the window and see the ship for himself, and begged Isolde of the White Hands to do so for him and tell him what color the sails were. She saw the ship approach with white sails, but in a fit of jealousy, said that the sails were black. Tristram at once lost hope and died.

Panel 4. In Malory, Isolde died of grief immediately following Tristram's murder; Foster does not mention this. (She likewise died in the earlier, pre-Arthurian version of the story, upon arriving at Tristram's castle in Brittany and discovering that she had come too late.)

401. Panel 8. Foster's inclusion of a duke in England at the time of the First Crusade (1096-99) is anachronistic; this title was not introduced into England until the reign of Edward III (1327-77), who bestowed the title of Duke of Cornwall upon his oldest son, Edward "the Black Prince", in 1337.

403. Panel 5. Foster is engaging in retrocon here; on neither of Val's previous visits to the Misty Isles had any mention been made of a temple of Aphrodite.

404. Panels 2-4. Foster's account of Aleta's suitors may be influenced by the Dunsany tale "The Quest of the Queen's Tears". In it, the mysterious and beautiful Queen Sylvia is courted by many princes from far-off lands, some of whom, like many of Aleta's suitors, come in the guise of troubadours; Foster's very description of these latter "concealing noble names" may have been borrowed from Dunsany's description of Sylvia's wooers in minstrels' attire "concealing kingly names" (*Wonder Tales*, p. 27.) The description of the lands that Aleta's messengers go to including "some not even known to romance" may likewise be inspired by this passage in Dunsany's story: "be he only a petty duke of lands unknown to romance". Like Aleta, Sylvia will not accept any of her suitors; unlike Aleta, she does so, not because her heart is given to one not present, but because she is too cold to love anyone.

407. Panel 7. The description of the serfs as "sullen Saxons" again reminds us that *The Medieval Castle* is set only a generation after the Norman Conquest (see the commentary on #377, Panel 7 above), at a point when Norman and Saxon had not had time enough to blend into Englishmen. The sullenness of the Saxons would certainly not be surprising, with their defeat at Hastings still a relatively recent memory.

409. Panel 3. Foster's description of Val here may be more influence from "The Quest of the Queen's Tears" (see the annotation to #404, Panels 2-4 above). One of Queen Sylvia's suitors in that story, Ackronnion, is described as "clothed with rags, on which was the dust of roads, and underneath the rags was war-scarred armour whereon were the dint of blows" (*Wonder Tales*, p. 28). The similarity to Foster's words concerning Val, "On his ragged cloak is the dust of long, far roads, his armor is scarred with many battles", can scarcely be a coincidence.

Panel 6. Although Foster never names the King of England in *The Medieval Castle*, the strip's explicit setting on the eve of the First Crusade identifies him as William II (1087-1100), also known as William Rufus, the son and successor to William the Conqueror. William was a strong king, like his father, but also notoriously greedy and brutal, even for his time, and extremely unpopular. (Some historians, though, have argued that his bad reputation was exaggerated because of his quarrels with the Church, who wrote the chronicles at the time.) His reign finally came to as violent an end as his life, when he was slain by an arrow while hunting in the New Forest on August 2, 1100. To this day, nobody knows who slew him and whether it was deliberate or not; tradition has it, though, that the guilty party was one of his knights, Sir Walter Tirel, who shot him by mistake. (While Tirel's guilt has never been proven, he fled England immediately afterwards, making the theory that he was the bowman who killed the king plausible.)

414. Panel 8. The Yule log, though a well-known Christmas custom, is not recorded as having been observed in England until the 17th century, when Robert Herrick alluded to it (although it might have been in use even before his time). In fact, its earliest documented mention goes back only to 1184, about ninety years after the events in *The Medieval Castle*, and in Germany rather than England. This may make its mention here anachronistic, though it is impossible to be certain.

# VOLUME TEN: ALETA.

415. Panel 9. Arn and Guy's Christmas tree is, alas, a definite anachronism; Christmas trees do not appear to have entered England until the time of the Hanoverian or Georgian dynasty (1714-1837). They were a popular Yuletide custom in Germany (one tradition - unfortunately, most likely apocryphal - credits Martin Luther with their invention), and the Hanoverians, who were of German descent, brought them over to England. The English public's general dislike of the Georges, however, prevented it from adopting Christmas trees until Prince Albert popularized the custom after his marriage to Queen Victoria in 1840.

417. Panel 2. Val's visit to Tobruch might have been influenced by actual events in World War II that had taken place not long before Foster drew and wrote this page. In 1942, Tobruch (or Tobruk) was the site of a fierce battle between the British and the Germans during the Desert War. General Erwin Rommel captured Tobruk on June 20, 1942, after a month's fighting; the British recaptured it in November of that same year. Might Foster, in the course of giving Val a series of adventures in North Africa, have decided Tobruk as the site for one of them because it had recently been "in the news"?

418. Panel 3. In the 5th century A.D., Tobruch would not have had an autonomous sultan ruling over it; it and the rest of Libya would have still been part of the Eastern Roman Empire. (The title of "sultan", for that matter, evokes the Muslim world, making it anachronistic for the 5th century.) Foster is again providing *Prince Valiant* with a political geography based on the atmosphere of medieval romance, rather than real history.

419. Panel 7. Albert's title of friar is anachronistic; as mentioned in the commentary on #112, Panel 1, friars did not appear until the early 13th century, over a hundred years after the events in *The Medieval Castle*.

424. Panel 5. The Tuaregs are a Berber-speaking people native to north Africa. Timbuktu was a Tuareg town, but was founded around 1100, making its mention here another of Foster's anachronisms. (It would eventually become one of the principal cities of the Mali Empire, but then decline into a small and unimpressive town after the Mali Empire's fall.)

Cirene (or Cyrene) was one of the major cities of North Africa in classical times. It was originally (according to legend) founded by a certain Battus and his followers when they emigrated to Libya from Thera (an island in the Aegean Sea) around 630 B.C., and was later on absorbed into the Roman Empire. It disappeared from history after being taken by the Arabs in 642, almost two hundred years after Prince Valiant's adventures.

425. Panel 3. Aleta's dance for the Tuaregs may have been inspired by an extended simile in Lord Dunsany's "Idle Days on the Yann", which described how a swarm of butterflies danced "as some haughty queen of distant conquered lands might in her poverty and exile dance, in some encampment of the gipsies, for the mere bread to live by, but beyond that would never abate her pride to dance for a fragment more" (*A Dreamer's Tales*, p. 66).

430. Panel 3. Bengazi (or Benghazi) is the second largest city in Libya (called Berenice in classical times, after the wife of Ptolemy III). It also would not have been ruled by a sultan in the real 5th century, and there is no evidence for the Visigoths ever reaching northern Libya to threaten any of the towns there. Like Tobruch, Benghazi was the site of heavy fighting during the Desert War portion of World War II, changing hands no less than five times before the British finally took it in the November of 1942; this might have influenced Foster's decision to have Val and Aleta visit this town as well. (More recently, Benghazi was the rebel capital in the Libyan civil war of 2011.)

432. Panel 8. The war to which the lord of the manor and Sir Gregory are summoned is, of course, simply a plot device of Foster's to provide a reason for Arn and Guy to temporarily shoulder adult responsibilities, and we need not inquire too deeply whether it was based on any events in actual history. Nevertheless, according to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, in 1095 (around which year *The Medieval Castle* would be set), King William II of England summoned his levies for war not once, but twice. The first occasion was to put down a rebellion by the Earl of Northumberland; the second was an incursion into Wales in response to Welsh raids in the Marches (an unsuccessful one, since the Welsh hid in the mountains where the king's army could not easily reach them). It is tempting to see one of these expeditions (most likely the first one) as the war which the lord of the manor and Sir Gregory took part in - and it is certainly gratifying to note that, whether Foster had researched the matter or not, there actually was a "royal war" happening at just the right time for the story.

443. Panel 5. Despite Ramud's report of "three kingdoms" who have been forced to pay tribute to Donardo, only two (the realms of Alfgar and Hakim) appear in the strip, and the third is never even mentioned again. Presumably Foster changed his mind after writing this panel.

457. Panel 7. Peter the Hermit was one of the holy men whose words helped inspire the First Crusade. After Pope Urban II urged the rulers, nobles, and knights of western Europe to liberate Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Seljuk Turks, at the Council of Clermont in 1095, Peter began travelling about the countryside, preaching the need for a crusade everywhere as well. Such was his eloquence that thousands of peasants and villagers left their homes and set off for Jerusalem at once in the "People's Crusade", a preliminary to the First Crusade. (They were defeated and mostly slain by the Turks without even reaching Jerusalem.)