

PRINCE VALIANT ANNOTATIONS

By Todd Jensen

VOLUME ONE: THE PROPHECY.

1. 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). It would not be revealed until #80 how he came to lose his kingdom. (Indeed, Foster never provided the details anywhere in the strip as to exactly how Sligon deposed Aguar and seized his throne.)

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 are divided as to 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. Foster most likely chose that name for Val's homeland precisely because of those poetic connotations, so appropriate for the tone that he desired for *Prince Valiant*.

Foster would eventually identify Thule as Norway. However, as we shall see, its depiction in the early days of the strip does not fit this location.

Panel 3. The fact that Aguar, his family, and his remaining followers should have reached the English Channel by dawn after boarding a ship the previous night - and boarding it while still in flight from the pursuing followers of Sligon - is the first sign (see the annotation for #1, Panel 1 above) that Foster had not specifically imagined Thule as being Norway at this stage of *Prince Valiant*. Assuming that they had set sail from Thule itself (as the context suggests), it is unlikely that they could have reached the Channel in a single night, if Thule was indeed Norway. (Of course, Foster might simply have not given any thought to travel times when he was writing this scene.)

Panel 5. Foster here depicts the Britons as "half-savage" and dressed in animal skins; they could easily be the sort of ancient Britons that one would find in the illustrations of an old-fashioned history book, making ready to repel a landing by Julius Caesar and his legions. Certainly they resemble them more than they do the inhabitants of a conventional Arthurian Britain in a legendary Age of Chivalry. (Of course, they are living on the outskirts of Arthur's kingdom, rather than at Camelot itself.)

Panel 6. Aguar and his 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 what is now East Anglia (since they travel northwards from their landing-place to the Fens), they are clearly journeying northwards up 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 made an attempt at draining them, but after their departure, the Fens soon reverted to marshland. More recently, beginning in the 17th and 18th centuries, they have been drained again, and converted into farmland.

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 wonder if Foster may have chosen the Fens as the place of 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 fight against him). From there, it is also tempting to wonder if Horrit's presence in the Fens just might have been inspired by a particular incident in the Hereward legend (see the annotation for #6, Panel 9, below).

An even stronger parallel to Aguar's time in the Fens (though one that may be coincidence) is the case of Alfred the Great (871-899). 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. (This was the period when, according to legend, 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, so the likeness between the two may be accidental.

But perhaps the strongest source material for Val's boyhood adventures in the Fens 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 in well and he chose to remove them), and his depiction of the Fens as a "lost world" is clearly part of that.

Panel 9. Prince Valiant is first named within the actual strip. Foster was not initially fond of the name, which he considered to be an unsubtle character description masquerading as a name; indeed, his initial choices for Val's name were first "Derek, son of Thane", and then "Arn". Both of these Joseph V. Connolly, the president of King Features Syndicate, turned down, proposing "Prince Valiant" instead. (Foster must have retained a fondness for the name "Arn", however, 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 protagonists 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 would reinterpret this scene and portray the "strange couple" as being 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, of course, perhaps the worst anachronism in the entire strip. Dinosaurs became extinct at the end of the Cretaceous Period, 65 million years ago; none of them survived into human times, let alone recorded history. A dinosaur in 5th century Britain, therefore, is clearly impossible.

5. Panel 12. Foster would later on reintroduce Val's tutor into the strip twice, once during King Valgrind's attempted coup (#346-8) and once on the occasion of Aleta's first arrival in Thule (#512). He also gave him the name Erland on both of those occasions (on this page, he is nameless).

6. Panel 9. It is tempting to wonder whether Horrit the witch's presence in the Fens might have been influenced by the legend of Hereward the Wake (see the commentary on #2, Panel 7). It is said that, 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 directed 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 decided to place a witch in the Fens for the young Val to encounter (the only similarity between Horrit and the witch in the Hereward legend is their home), but in light of his tendency to get ideas for his strip from medieval romance and historical novels, it is possible.

8. Panel 8. Again Hal Foster pits Val against a prehistoric monster (the giant turtle) more likely to have been found in the Mesozoic Era than in the 5th century. (Indeed, the damp and chilly climate of Britain is hardly appropriate for large cold-blooded reptiles to live in.)

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 see so much of the world), but it is much more difficult to explain away her prediction of Val's mother's death. (Although, Horrit merely tells Val that a terrible woe awaits him without being specific as to what that woe is, leaving open the possibility that she was merely making use of 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.)

Of course, Horrit's prophecy (repeated on many occasions throughout the strip) that Val would never know contentment would have been a safe enough prediction, since Foster would periodically state throughout *Prince Valiant* that it is all but impossible for humans to know contentment.

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.

It is still uncertain as to 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 ultimately unimportant as far as *Prince Valiant* is concerned, 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 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.)

Arthur first appeared in the writings of Dark Age Wales as a shadowy figure, generally portrayed as a mighty warrior. The 9th century *Historia Britonum* (*The History of the Britons*) - popularly ascribed to a monk named Nennius, although many historians now doubt that he actually wrote it - described him as the leader of the Britons in their struggle with the Saxons, who defeated the Saxons in twelve great battles, culminating in a climactic encounter at Mount Badon. Other writings, however, 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 while standing in 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 curmudgeonly father, the giant Ysbaddaden, sets him, tasks that bring them into conflict with giants, witches, and the monstrous wild boar Twrch Trwyth.

In or around 1136, Arthur assumed a more familiar form when Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote a book entitled *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 often embroidering 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, and 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 may have been exaggerating). It also became the basis for almost all later versions of King Arthur's story.

Succeeding writers would embroider Geoffrey's account of Arthur, adding fresh elements to it. Among these were 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 crystalized the legend into its current form. Interest in Arthur declined in the 17th century (partly due to the Stuarts embracing his legend for propaganda purposes, making it unappealing to the Parliamentary forces seeking to challenge the notion of the divine right of kings), but was revived in Victorian times (thanks, in particular, to Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*), and still holds strong today.

For the modern English-speaking world, King Arthur has become perhaps the most famous legendary hero of medieval Europe (only Robin Hood could seriously compete with him for that title), 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 "the search for the historical Arthur", that is, 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 figure 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 it is today).

Guinevere appears to have been introduced into the Arthurian cycle early, as Arthur's queen and consort. (In one of the Triads - a collection of figures or events in Welsh legend grouped in threes - it is even stated 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 in particular on her unfortunate love affair with Sir Lancelot.

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, in fairness 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; it is uncertain, however, whether her motivation is remorse or merely fear of her husband's anger.) 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. 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 at this point, 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 limits on the amount of fantasy to incorporate into the strip. The griffon (presented here apparently as an eagle) never made an appearance, but one 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. During the Murphys' time on *Prince Valiant*, however, Val did indeed make a journey to China to establish trade relations between it and Britain.

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 fit with her being used to a warm, sunny climate. (Though she appears to have weathered life in Thule, before Sligon's coup, well enough.) We never learn, however, how a Roman noblewoman came to marry a king from far-off Thule, in the distant north of the known world.

12. Panel 12. This marks the first entrance of Sir Lancelot, the 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. So far as can be told, there is no mention of him 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. He first recognizably appears in Arthurian literature 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 (who was then seen by the romancers as the leading 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, undergoing 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, however, Ban died shortly after he lost his kingdom; the Lady of the Lake then raised the infant Lancelot. (Lancelot gained his traditional title, "Lancelot du Lac" or "Lancelot of the Lake", because she fostered him; he bears that title 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 then, 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 (not so much through force of arms as through winning Galehaut's friendship). 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 great prowess of arms made him the foremost 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 made an effort 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, but dealt in full with the latter portions, including how he was tricked into sleeping with Elaine of Corbin and thereby begetting Galahad upon her, his failure to achieve the Holy Grail, and how his love affair with Guinevere helped destroy the Round Table, concluding with an account of Lancelot's repentance and becoming a holy hermit at Glastonbury. Since Malory is the leading primary source for the Arthurian legend in the English-speaking world, Lancelot has since come to be 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. It is thus entirely appropriate that he would be the first knight from Arthur's court whom Val should meet.

14. Panel 9. Foster never fulfilled this prediction.

16. Panel 1. Sir Gawain, perhaps the most prominent Arthurian character in *Prince Valiant*, now 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 rather than a real historical figure), 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, however, in the first battle with Mordred, at Richborough in Kent.

Geoffrey's successors began fleshing out Gawain's character further as the legend continued to develop. In Wace's *Roman de Brut*, Gawain appears for the first time in Arthurian literature (so far as we know) as an elegant courtier rather than merely another warrior; when Duke Cadur of Cornwall urges Arthur to make war upon the Romans, Gawain counters his words 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, depicting him as not only the leading knight of the Round Table (surpassing even Lancelot), but as 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 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 an even more serious flaw than superficiality and fickleness: vengeance. When his younger brothers are accidentally slain by Lancelot while the latter is rescuing Queen Guinevere from being burnt at the stake, Gawain immediately 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 responded by slaying both Pellinore and his son Lamorak, 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 vengeful, presumably in order 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; there Arthur rebukes him for his disobedience in not carrying his mission through to the end.

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 figure, 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. 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 never appears in *Prince Valiant*. (Presumably its presence would have clashed with Foster's depiction of Gawain's chief flaw being 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 portrayed during the period that Val serves as his squire as a relatively serious, responsible figure, 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 on 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 and vitality; nor is there any explanation as to how the crocodile had arrived in Britain to begin with. 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. This is the first appearance of Camelot, King Arthur's most famous residence, in *Prince Valiant*. While Arthur had several courts in legend (including Caerleon and Carlisle), Camelot is the most immediately familiar of them all to a modern audience, and 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 portrayed as merely one of several castles of Arthur, with his predominant court being 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). However, as time went on, Camelot grew more prominent in the romances, until it would eclipse all of Arthur's strongholds 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 a campaign. This is contrary to medieval custom, where kings and powerful noblemen had several castles, spread out all over their lands, and would regularly travel 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 does not immediately locate Camelot on the map, but would later, in #37, Panel 8, place it at Winchester, following Malory's identification. (Nowadays, the most popular location for Camelot in Arthurian fiction is South Cadbury in Somerset, a hill-fort dating back to the Iron Age. 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 made itself familiar to the general public. Foster might not even have heard of it at the time that he was beginning *Prince Valiant*.)

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 fleshed out Uther in his *History of the Kings of Britain*, giving him a life-story just as he did for his son Arthur. In Geoffrey's story, 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, 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 between himself and 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 himself, 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, however, 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, as a way of honoring his memory.

Foster in *Prince Valiant* regularly made the Pendragons' dragon 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 "ascribed 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 "ascribed arms" either followed Geoffrey in this regard 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 field of the French kings' coat of arms was blue, and the English kings' red). 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 portrays the king 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 all the more prominent. Alfred Lord Tennyson made a number of references to it in his *Idylls of the King*; for example, 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 from 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. It is likely that the interest in the "historical Arthur", in the context of the wars between the Britons and the Saxons in the 5th and 6th centuries, 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 plays no active role in this scene.

Merlin is so strongly associated with King Arthur and his court in the popular imagination that it must come as a surprise to discover that his earliest manifestation in literature not only has no direct links to the Arthurian legend, but that he was not even a contemporary of the great king. Merlin first appeared, under the name of "Myrddin", in early Welsh poetry written during the Dark Ages. He was said to have been 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 Ardeydd (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 perhaps, according to hints in the poems, out of guilt at having somehow caused the battle, though it is not recorded as to exactly how he helped bring it about). He fled into the Caledonian Forest (the woodlands of southern Scotland), where he spent the rest of his life uttering prophecies of things to come.

Myrddin soon became famous in Welsh legend for his prophetic visions, and predictions of the future came to be 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 Britonnum* 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 the White Ship 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, personally 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 on #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 (called 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 prominent 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 a less-than-sympathetic light as a charlatan embodying the forces of superstition who was 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" by now: 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 there are foreshadowings of this role in Edmund Spenser's semi-Arthurian poem *The Faerie Queene*.) Since that time, Merlin has played a major role 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 in having Merlin still at Arthur's court during its noontide glory; in Malory, Merlin departs the court permanently almost immediately 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* - but it would come about in the end, all the same.

20. Panel 7. This is the first mention in *Prince Valiant* of the "invading Northmen". If these are meant to be Vikings (as is most likely the case) rather than Saxons, then this forms another anachronism in the strip (though not one as great as the inclusion of medieval castles and knights in 5th century Britain - which is 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 their fight with the reeve and his men was motivated by their annoyance towards the meddling officials that were trying to hustle them off to town when all that the Vikings wanted to do was to sell their goods and have a few drinks.) 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 would last 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 in well with 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 is likewise, after his defeat, sent off 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 will 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 (youths of noble birth training for knighthood), but "professional squires", either soldiers of non-aristocratic background or members of noble families not wealthy enough to become knights and had to spend their entire lives as squires. (Beric, who would serve as Val's squire from #292 to #407, is another example of such a figure.)

23. Panel 1. This is the first time in *Prince Valiant* that Arthur's kingdom is called "England". This is 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 who were traditionally portrayed as Arthur's enemies; this makes it extremely inappropriate to give the name "England" to Arthur's realm. (The name also ignores the fact that Arthur was, traditionally, king over the entire island of Britain; England is not synonymous with Britain, but represents only part of the island. Wales and Scotland - both of which were traditionally part of Arthur's kingdom, and where, indeed, local legends about Arthur and his associates are far more numerous than in lowland England - are part of Britain but not part of England.) To be fair to Foster, however, his depiction of Arthur's kingdom was based almost exclusively on its portrayal in medieval romance, rather than 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, and stone castles, none of which existed in Britain during that same period of history.

24. Panel 3. The Round Table now 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 already appeared in previous works about Arthur and his knights that have been 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, a quarrel that 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 for him 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 Cameliant, 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 up to a hundred and forty-nine knights, thanks to the nature of the Siege Perilous - see the entry on Panel 4 below), but this number varies from one medieval account to another (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 portrayed as not solid to the center, but 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 of it. On the other hand, in #484, Panel 8, the Round Table is shown as being 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 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 the names of twenty-four of Arthur's knights written around the rim. (This version, by the way, is also solid all the way through, rather than ring-shaped.)

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, a particularly arrogant knight dared to sit there, in defiance of Merlin's warnings, and immediately died. Later on, a nephew of King Claudas - cf. the annotation for #2152, Panel 1 - named Sir Brumart, 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 it, and met the inevitable fiery death, commenting aloud in his final moments that it was the fate that he had justly earned through his folly.)

It eventually became clear that the Siege Perilous was specifically 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 forever from Arthur's court the following day on the Quest of the Holy Grail, however, leaving the Siege Perilous to remain forever empty afterwards.

The exact reason for this trait of the Siege Perilous remains uncertain in the medieval texts; 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 threatens the original point of the Table's being round (as found in Wace and Layamon), as a means of keeping the knights equal. One could easily 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 is not too clear on this point), 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. One is tempted to wonder whether the medieval writers understood that the Siege Perilous threatened the equality of the Round Table and therefore decided upon a different rationale for the table's shape.

25. Panel 7. This is an early instance of the style that Prince Valiant would adopt throughout the strip, and which sets 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 - 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 evidently an allusion to Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. In "Lancelot and Elaine", Tennyson tells of how Arthur, while he wandered 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 of these tournaments, and won all of the diamonds; it was during the last of these tournaments that he met Elaine of Astolat 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 - but nevertheless, Foster was most likely referring to the event in "Lancelot and Elaine" when he wrote and drew this scene.

Obviously, the tournament that Val and Gawain interrupt is not the climactic tournament that Elaine of Astolat was involved in, but could very well be intended as being one of the earlier tournaments in that series.

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. Arthurian scholars have speculated that Morgan Todd might have been derived from Morgan le Fay, who was noted for her healing magic, thanks to the author of *Geraint and Enid* becoming confused about her gender.

Panel 5. Ilene, Val's first love, is introduced. It is a pity that we do not know whether Foster had foreseen from the start, when he first 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 Quineroi 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.) 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 all of 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 that Foster uses here. These appear often in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, many of them 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, 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 (only to be slain at the Battle of Flodden).

Panel 8. Foster faithfully follows Arthurian tradition 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, displayed this custom in particular, much to the horror and revulsion of the young Sir Gareth. (This 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; it would be an utter disgrace for a knight, a man of noble birth, to undergo such a death. 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 on his part, as a tribute to Foster. Appropriately enough, the Demon had roots to the Arthurian legend himself, being a former servant to Merlin.