

FREE COMIC BOOK DAY

Prince Valiant



IN THE DAYS OF KING ARTHUR

BY HAROLD R FOSTER



INTRODUCING: PRINCE VALIANT

In 1936, the Canadian-born cartoonist Harold Rudolf “Hal” Foster (1892–1982) had been working away on the newspaper-strip version of Edgar Rice Burroughs’s *Tarzan* for United Feature Syndicate for close to half a decade, in the process cementing his position as one of the greatest adventure cartoonists of all time.

But Foster had become tired of working on an adaptation, with its attendant limitations (both creative and financial); he decided to emancipate himself by responding to rival publisher William Randolph Hearst’s entreaties to come work for him, creating a brand new strip called *Prince Valiant in the Days of King Arthur*.

Valiant is a 5th-century Nordic prince from Thule whose friendship with the Arthurian knights Sir Gawain and Sir Tristram earns him entry into King Arthur’s inner circle, and membership as a Knight of the Round Table. From that point on, Valiant would roam the world, starting off from his adopted home of Camelot and his birthplace of Thule, visiting virtually all of Europe, some of Africa, the Mediterranean Islands (where

he would encounter his bride-to-be, Aleta), and even, a millennium before Christopher Columbus, the New World. He would have many exciting adventures and meet countless colorful friends and adversaries — and eventually, his children would begin going off on their own exploits, creating one of the great multi-generational sagas of adventure fiction, illustrated or not.

Foster would write and draw *Prince Valiant* every week for 34 years, until advancing arthritis forced him to pass the torch — at least the illustrative torch — to other hands. Beginning in 1971, John Cullen Murphy took over the drawing of the strip (based on Foster’s scripts, layouts, and pencils), gradually assuming a greater share of the art. In 1980, Foster retired from the strip entirely,

turning the writing over to Murphy’s son Cullen.

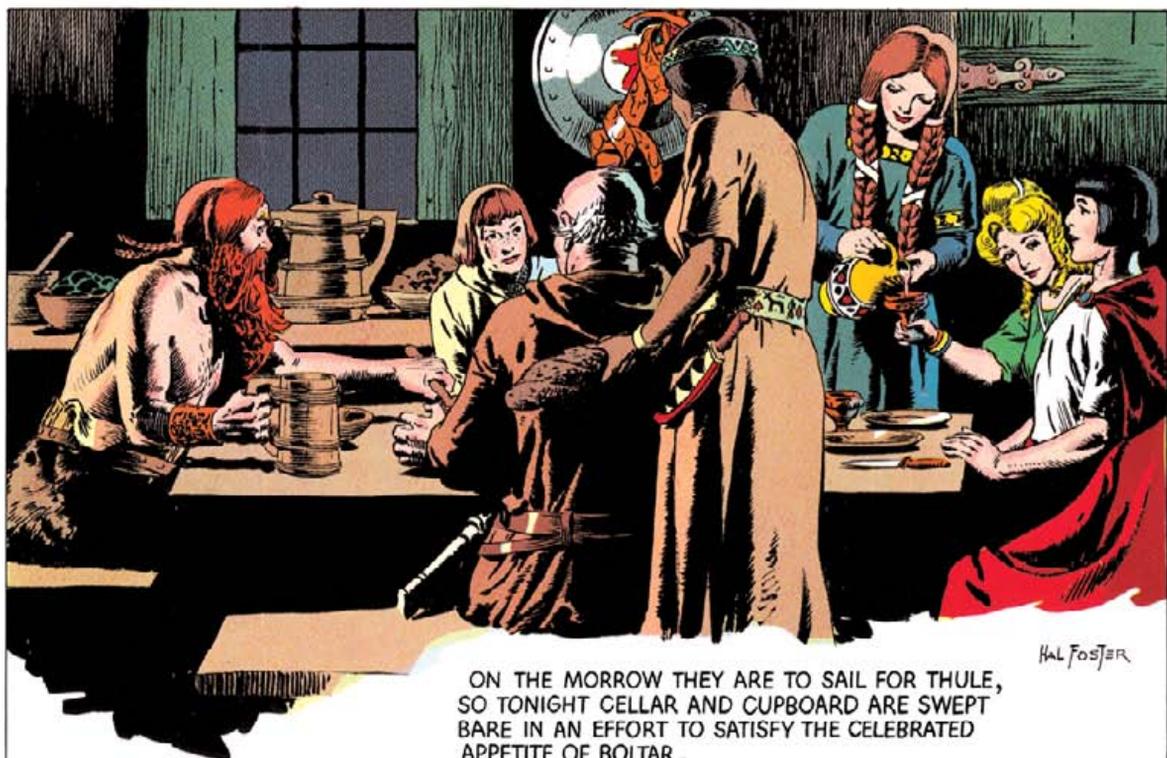
More than three decades later, new episodes of *Prince Valiant* continue to appear, now under the stewardship of Mark Schultz (writer) and Thomas Yeates (artist) — one of the few classic adventure strips that continues to thrill newspaper readers every week around the world.

Beginning in 2009, Fantagraphics Books launched the project of reprinting every single *Prince Valiant* strip written and drawn by Foster, scanned from the finest resources available (Foster’s own personal collection of “proof sheets”) and presented with state-of-the-art digital restoration. The sixth volume (covering 1947 and 1948) appeared earlier this year, and the seventh (which includes the two stories collected herein) will be published later this summer.

We hope new readers will be intrigued by their introduction to this great classic, and Valiant fans will enjoy this sneak peek at our upcoming volume.

—The Publishers

PRINCE VALIANT: FREE COMIC BOOK DAY SPECIAL EDITION contains two sequences from 1950: “The Homecoming” (January–March) and “The Challenge” (March–May). In order to fit within the reduced comic-book format and to eliminate certain narrative redundancies created by the original weekly serialization, certain panels have been modified, omitted, or moved around. The full, original versions will of course be appearing in the forthcoming *Prince Valiant Vol. 7: 1949–1950*. PRINCE VALIANT: FREE COMIC BOOK DAY SPECIAL EDITION is copyright © 2013 King Features Syndicate. All contents copyright © 2013 King Features Syndicate. All rights reserved. You must obtain the publisher’s permission to reproduce any portion of this publication. Fantagraphics Books, 7563 Lake City Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115. Publishers: Gary Groth and Kim Thompson. Associate Publisher: Eric Reynolds. Editor: Kim Thompson. Production: Paul Baresh. Special thanks to the Special Collections Research Center of the Syracuse University Library for providing the scans for the strips reprinted in this comic, reproduced from original syndicate proofs. First Printing: April 2013. Printed in Canada.

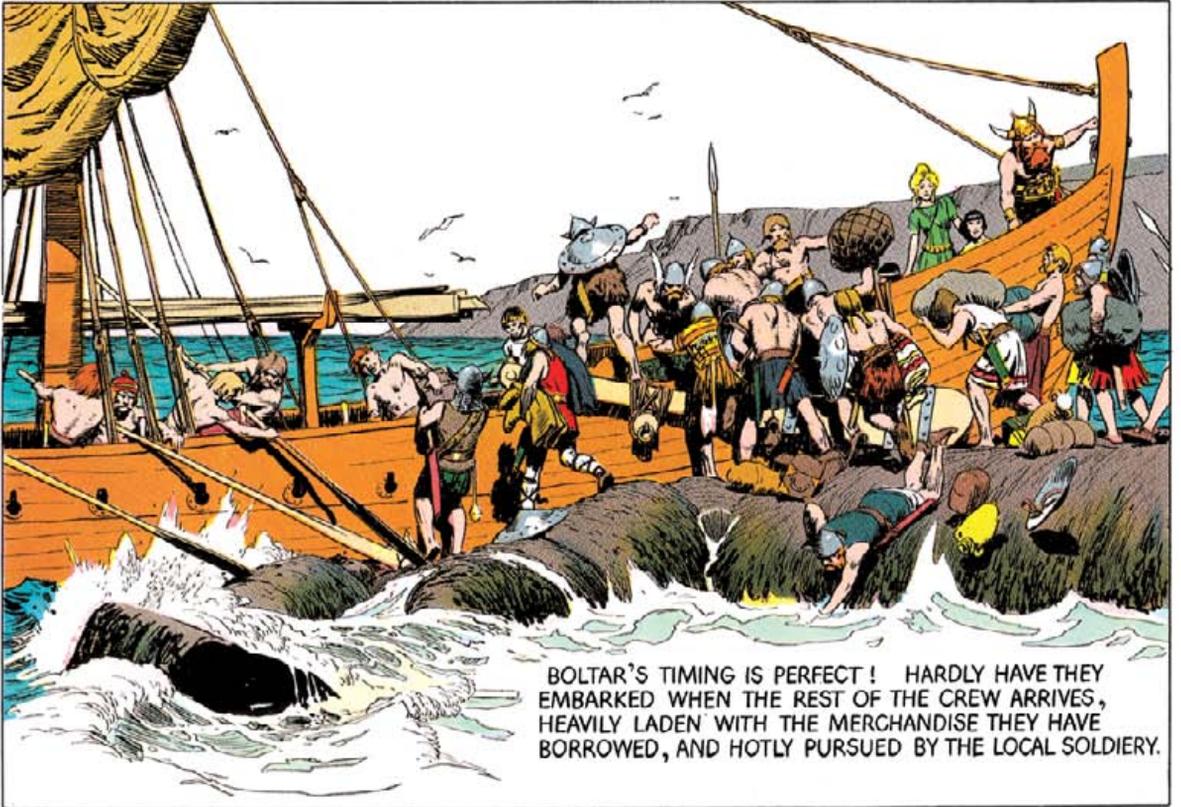


HAL FOSTER

ON THE MORROW THEY ARE TO SAIL FOR THULE, SO TONIGHT CELLAR AND CUPBOARD ARE SWEEPED BARE IN AN EFFORT TO SATISFY THE CELEBRATED APPETITE OF BOLTAR .



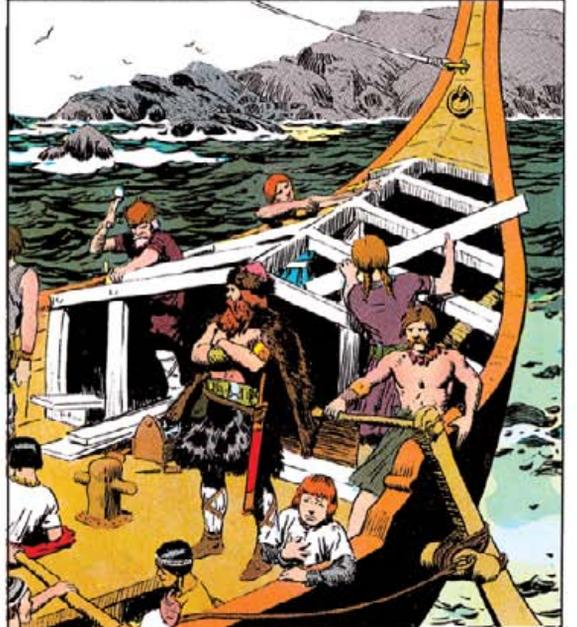
BOLTAR ARRIVES WITH HALF HIS CREW, AND VAL'S HOUSEHOLD IS MOVED ABOARD SHIP. THE NOISE THEY HEAR IS THE OTHER HALF OF THE CREW MAKING A MINOR RAID ON THE MERCHANTS OF NEWCASTLE, FOR, WHEN BOLTAR EMBARKS, HE HATES TO LEAVE BEHIND ANY UNFINISHED BUSINESS.



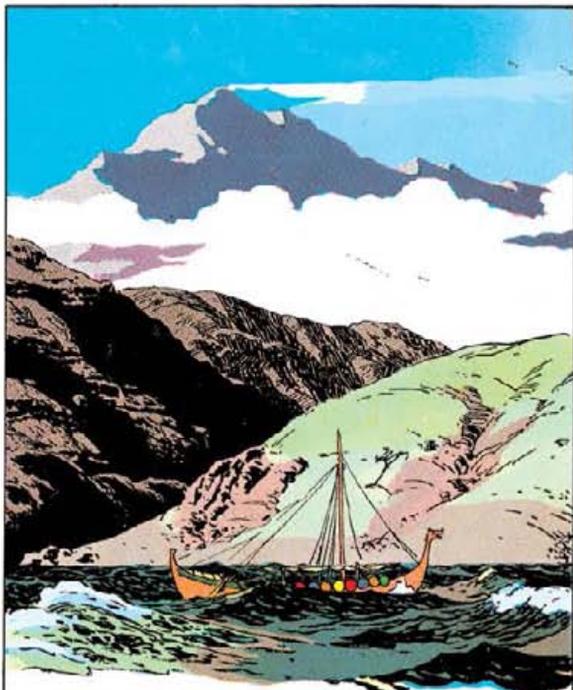
BOLTAR'S TIMING IS PERFECT! HARDLY HAVE THEY EMBARKED WHEN THE REST OF THE CREW ARRIVES, HEAVILY LADEN WITH THE MERCHANDISE THEY HAVE BORROWED, AND HOTLY PURSUED BY THE LOCAL SOLDIERY.



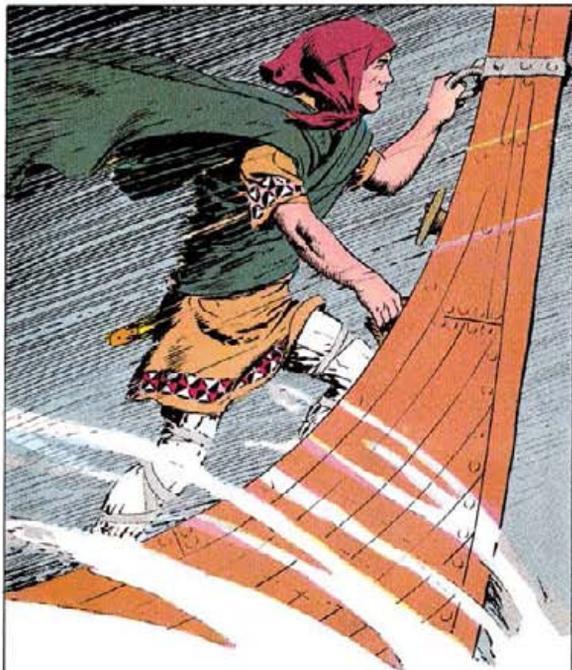
A FEW ARROWS COME ABOARD, BUT SOON THEY ARE FAR FROM SHORE AND THE VOYAGE TO THULE IS BEGUN.



BOLTAR SIGHS, FOR THE MERCHANTS OF ANY TOWN HE VISITS ALWAYS SEEM SO UNFRIENDLY WHEN HE LEAVES. THEN HE ORDERS A SHELTER CONSTRUCTED FOR HIS NOBLE PASSENGERS.



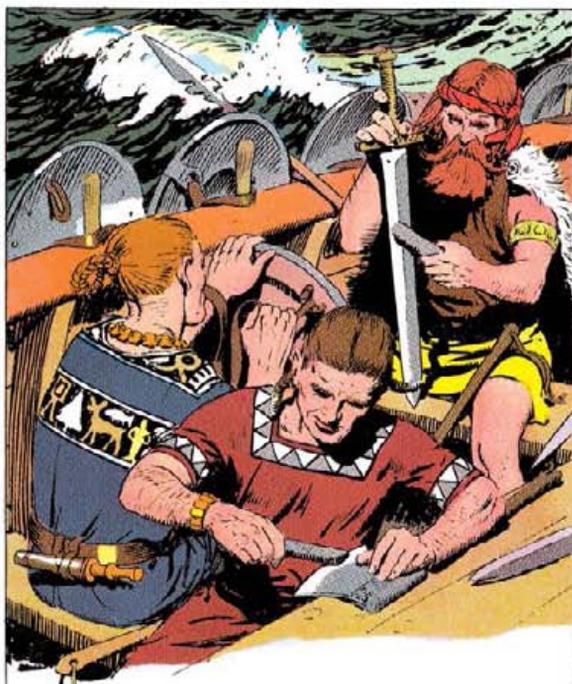
THEY TURN NORTHWARD UP THE ROCKY COAST OF CALEDONIA. THE GREAT SAIL IS FURLED AND OARSMEN BEND TO THE SWEEPS FOR THE WINDS ARE UNFAVORABLE.



DAYS PASS, STORMS BUFFET THEM, RAIN AND FOG OBSCURE THE LAND.



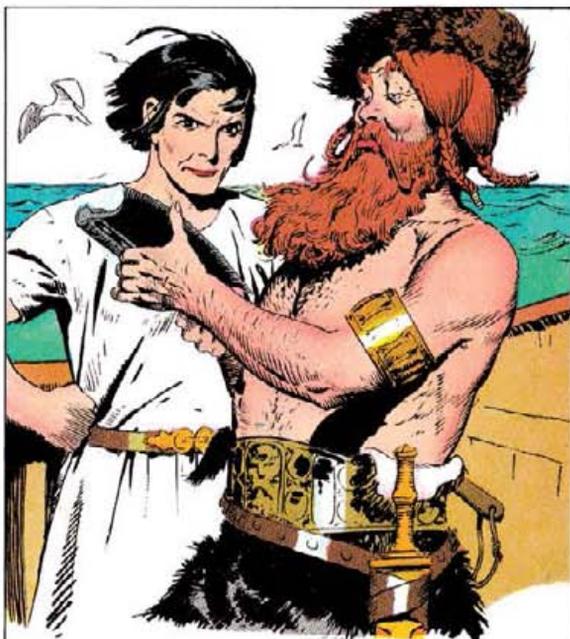
THERE ARE ALSO DAYS, SUNNY AND CRISP WITH THE APPROACH OF WINTER, THAT BRING BACK VAL'S STRENGTH AND HE CAN EXERCISE HIS STIFFENED MUSCLES.



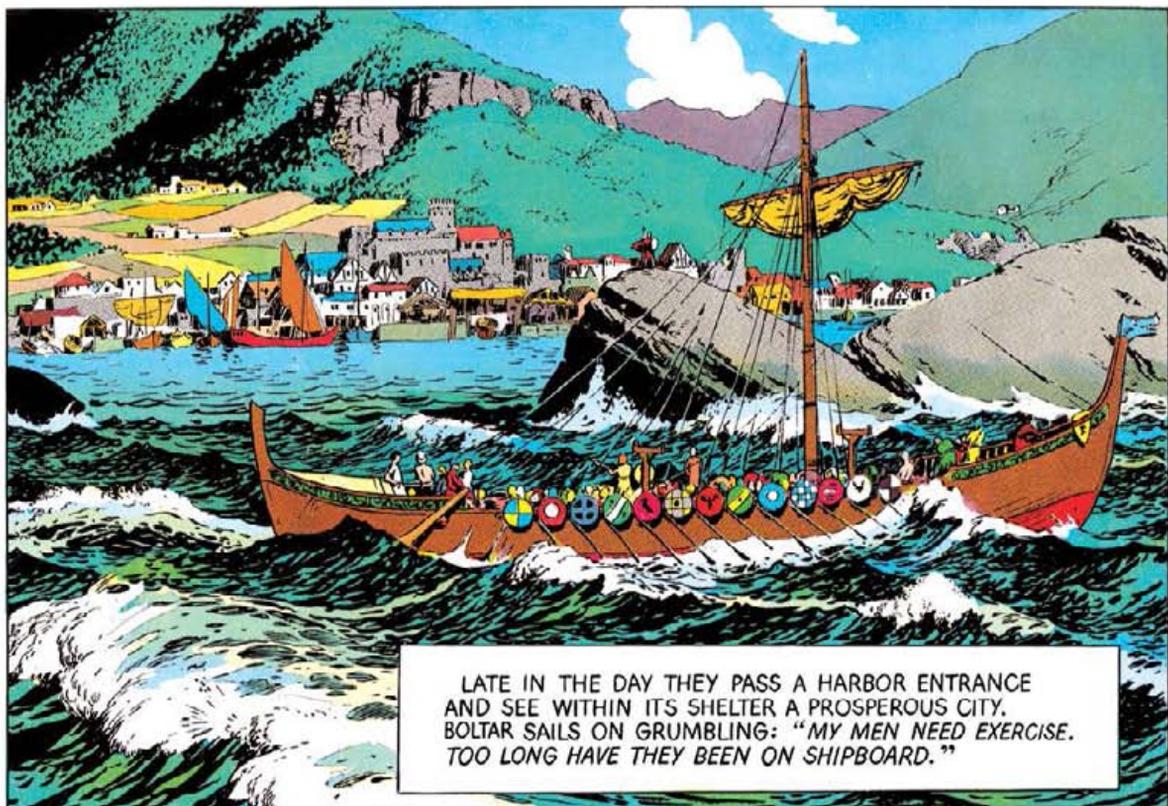
COMES A DAY WHEN WINDS ARE FAVORABLE. THE SAIL IS SET AND THE OARS RACKED. THEN THE MEN PUT THEIR GEAR IN ORDER AND CAREFULLY SHARPEN THEIR SWORDS.



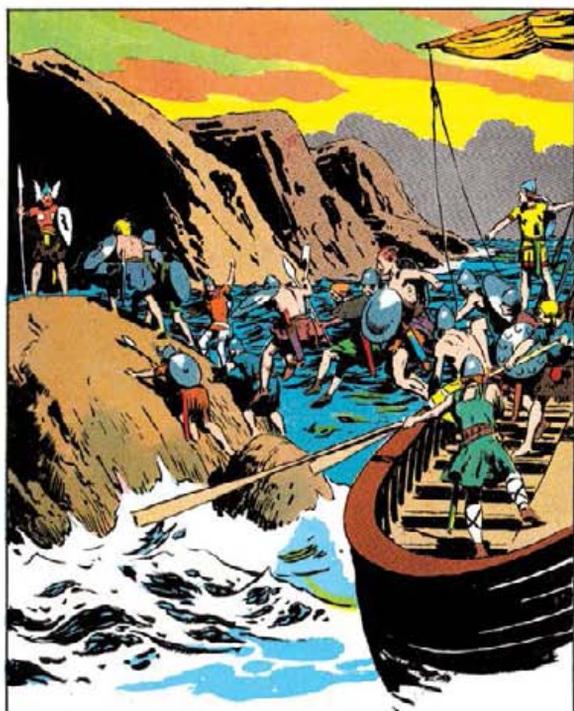
VAL IS SUSPICIOUS OF THIS ACTIVITY. "CAN IT BE THAT YOU PLAN TO RISK OUR NECKS ON SOME PLUNDERING RAID?" HE ASKS.



"YOU HAVE HURT ME DEEPLY, SIR VALIANT, BY HINTING THAT I AM ABOUT TO MAKE A THIEVING RAID!" SAYS THE SENSITIVE BOLTAR AS HE PUTS A NICE EDGE ON HIS AXE. "I MERELY PLAN A LITTLE BUSINESS TRANSACTION."



LATE IN THE DAY THEY PASS A HARBOR ENTRANCE AND SEE WITHIN ITS SHELTER A PROSPEROUS CITY. BOLTAR SAILS ON GRUMBLING: "MY MEN NEED EXERCISE. TOO LONG HAVE THEY BEEN ON SHIPBOARD."



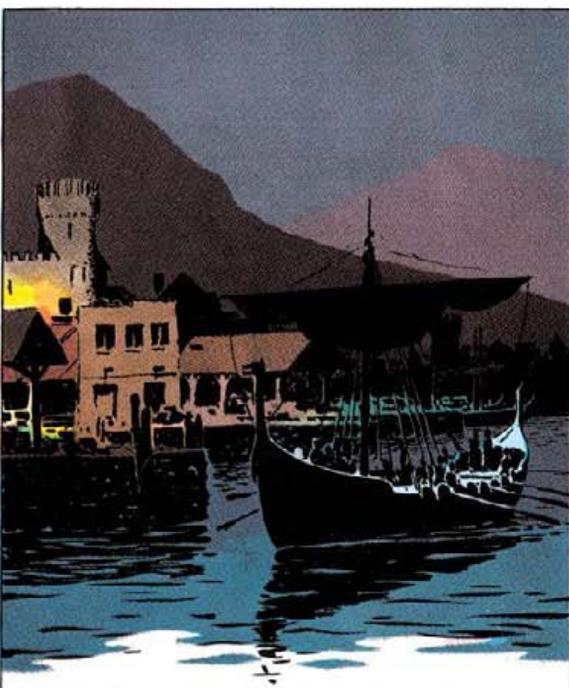
SO, A MILE BEYOND THE TOWN, HE SENDS ALL BUT A FEW ASHORE IN THE GATHERING DUSK.



AND THESE MEN OBEY THEIR CHIEFTAIN BY RUNNING. THEY RUN SWIFTLY NOR DO THEY STOP WHEN THEY REACH THE TOWN, BUT RUN RIGHT THROUGH UNTIL THEY COME TO THE QUARTER WHERE STAND THE WAREHOUSES OF THE MERCHANTS.



BOLTAR'S SHIP COMES SLOWLY INTO THE HARBOR, UNCHALLENGED. FOR SOMETHING SEEMS TO HAVE HAPPENED TO THE SENTRY IN THE DARKNESS.



AS THE SHIP GLIDES SILENTLY ALONGSIDE THE QUAY THERE IS A GROWING TUMULT WITHIN THE CITY. THE SOUND OF AXES ON STOUT DOORS CAN BE PLAINLY HEARD !



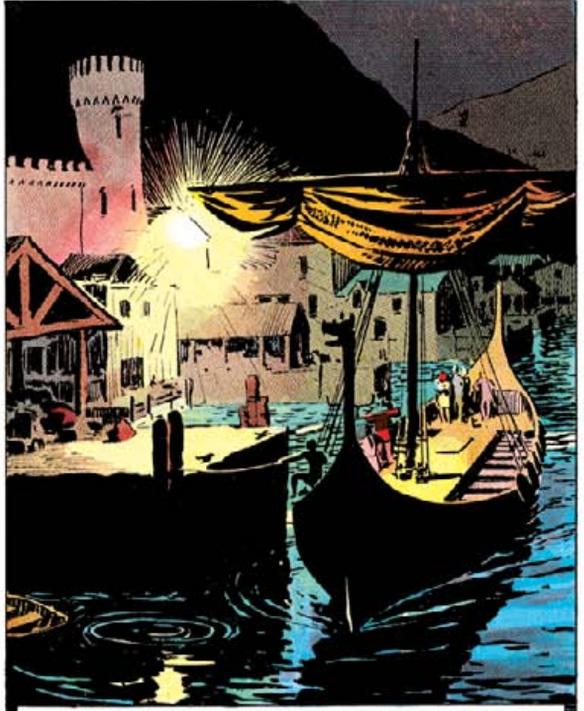
PRINCE VALIANT BIDS ALETA STAY WITHIN THE SHELTER OF THEIR CABIN AND STEPS ON DECK FULLY ARMED SAVE FOR HIS SHIELD, FOR HIS LEFT SIDE IS STILL WEAK FROM THE WOUND.



BOLTAR AND PRINCE VALIANT LISTEN TO THE GROWING TUMULT WITHIN THE CITY. "NOISY TOWN, ISN'T IT?" REMARKS BOLTAR VIRTUOUSLY. "ITS CITIZENS MUST BE ROISTERING IN THE TAVERNS!"



"I NEVER SHOULD HAVE ALLOWED MY POOR, INNOCENT BOYS TO GO INTO THAT NOISY TOWN!" MUTTERS THEIR CAPTAIN PIOUSLY. "ITS CITIZENS SEEM MOST UNFRIENDLY."



A LANTERN IS HOISTED TO THE YARD TO GUIDE THE SAILORS THOUGH THERE IS PLENTY OF LIGHT, FOR A WAREHOUSE SEEMS TO BE BURNING.