COMICS NEWS

Tripwire's 101 Greatest Comic Artists Of All Time: No.33: Hal Foster

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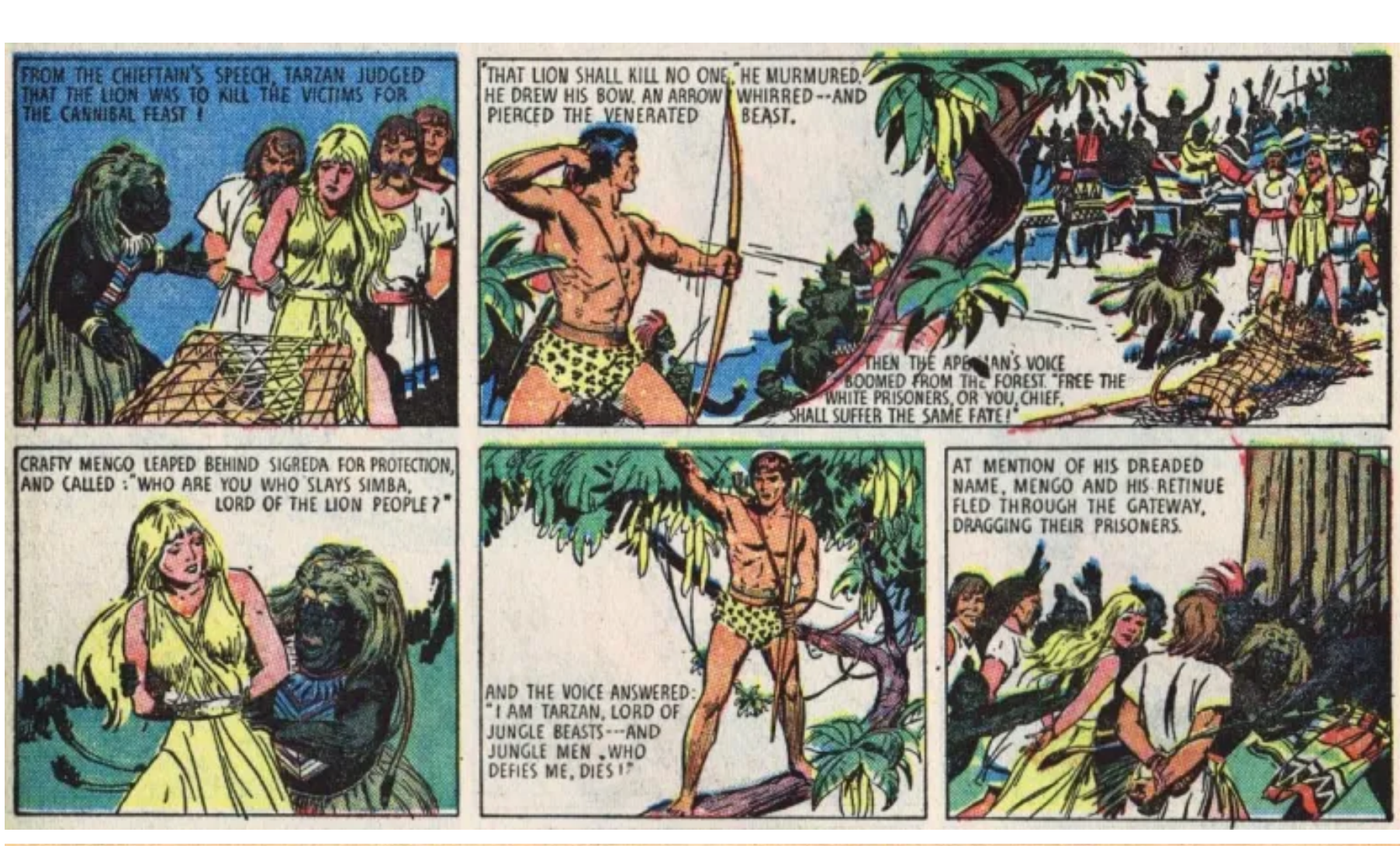
By admin

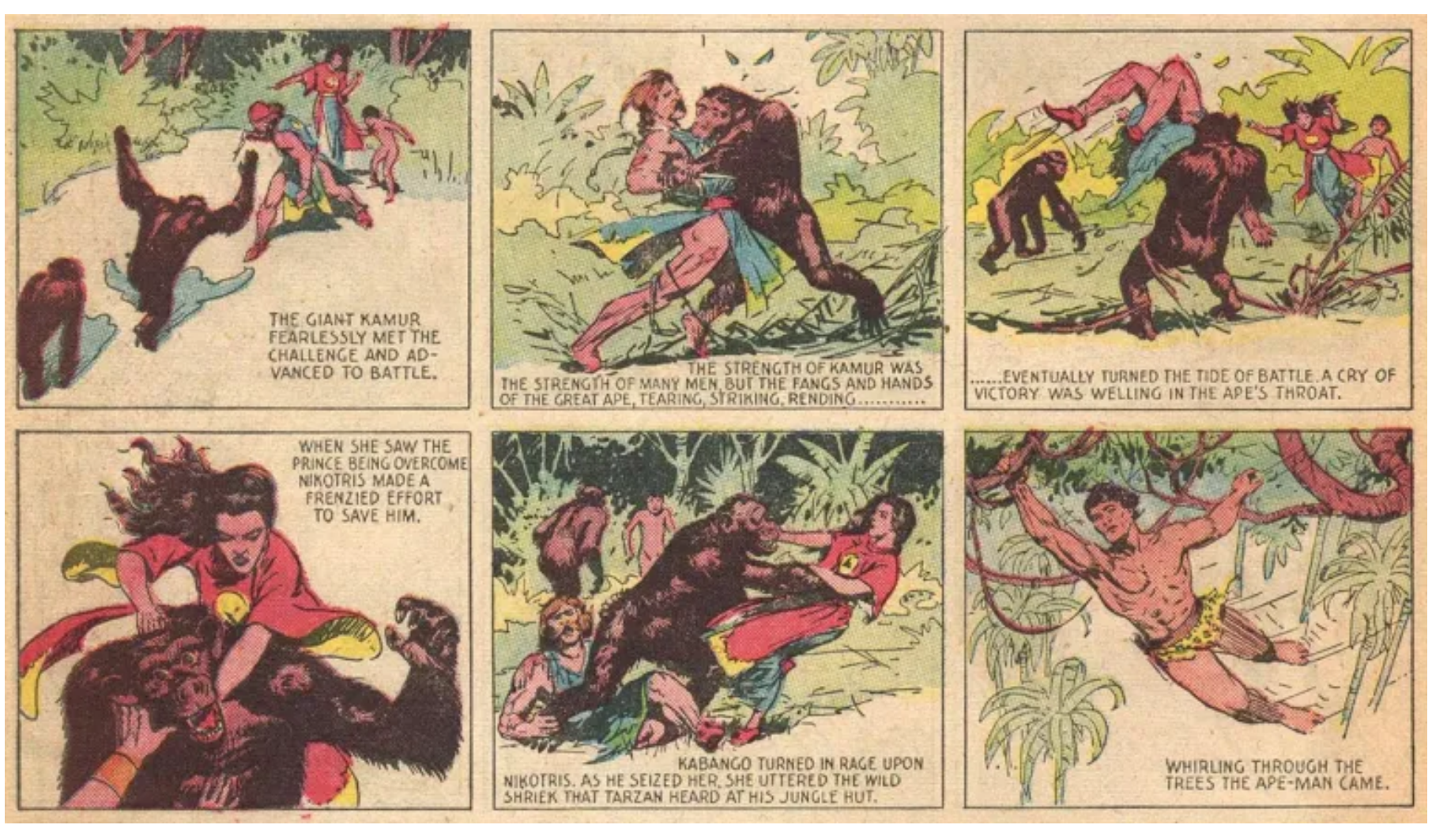
THE 101 GREATEST
COMIC ARTISTS
OF ALL TIME

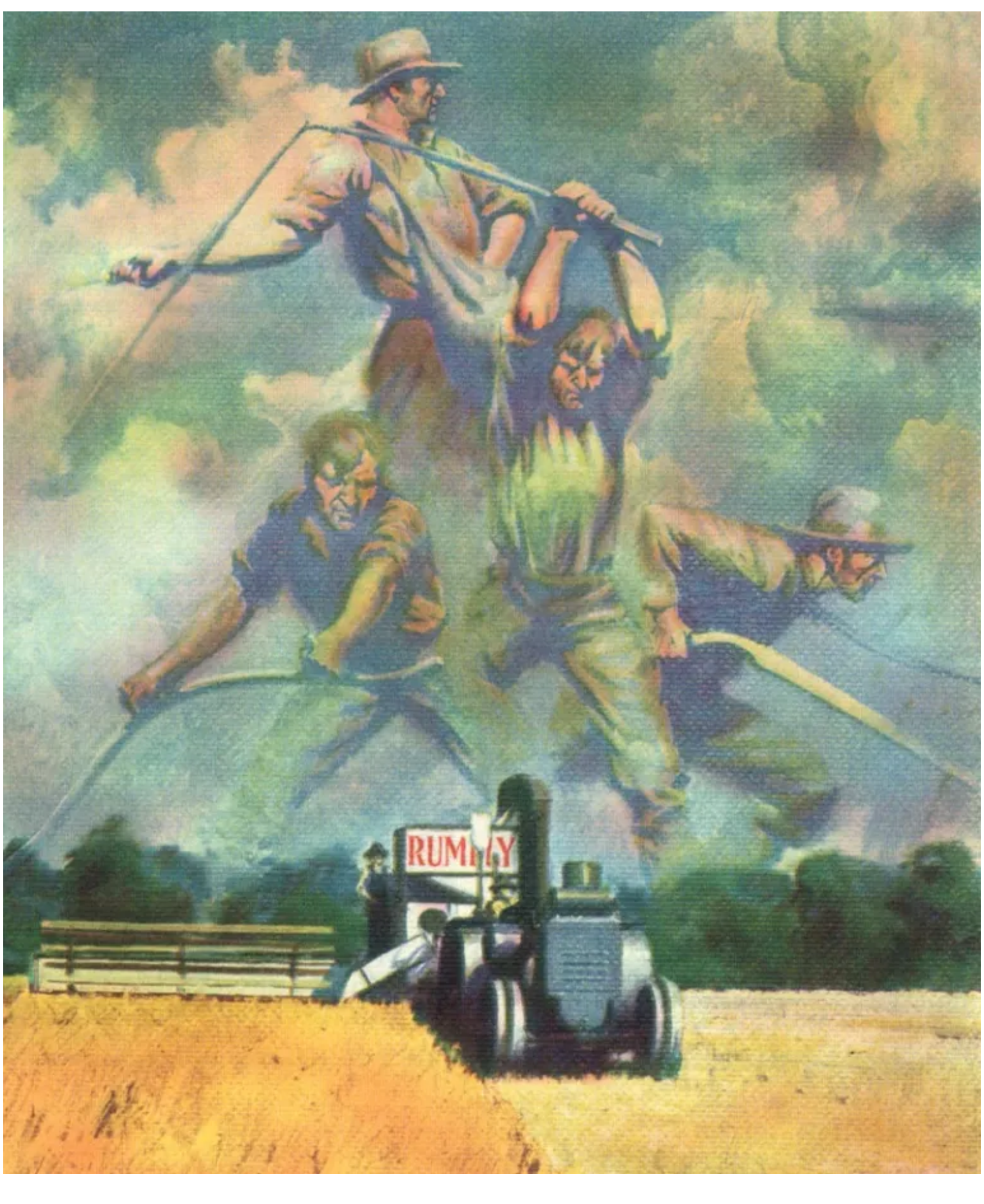
No.33: Hal Foster

Hal Foster was another cornerstone of the comic medium, developing the form with his accent on draughtsmanship, attention to detail and experimentation with chiaroscuro, naturalism and cinematic action. Along with contemporaries Milton Canniff, Burne Hogarth and Alex Raymond, he was the progenitor of the adventure comic strip. His key series, *Prince Valiant*, was a stately Arthurian work that was painstakingly illustrated and coloured, setting the standard for newspaper strips, with Foster preferring to use captions rather than speech bubbles, which lent it a literary, fine art feel. In many respects his sense of perspective, anatomy, rendering of texture and instinctive subtlety has been the template and main influence for countless artists that came after him, from Frazetta to Kirby to Kubert amongst many. **Words: Andrew Colman...**

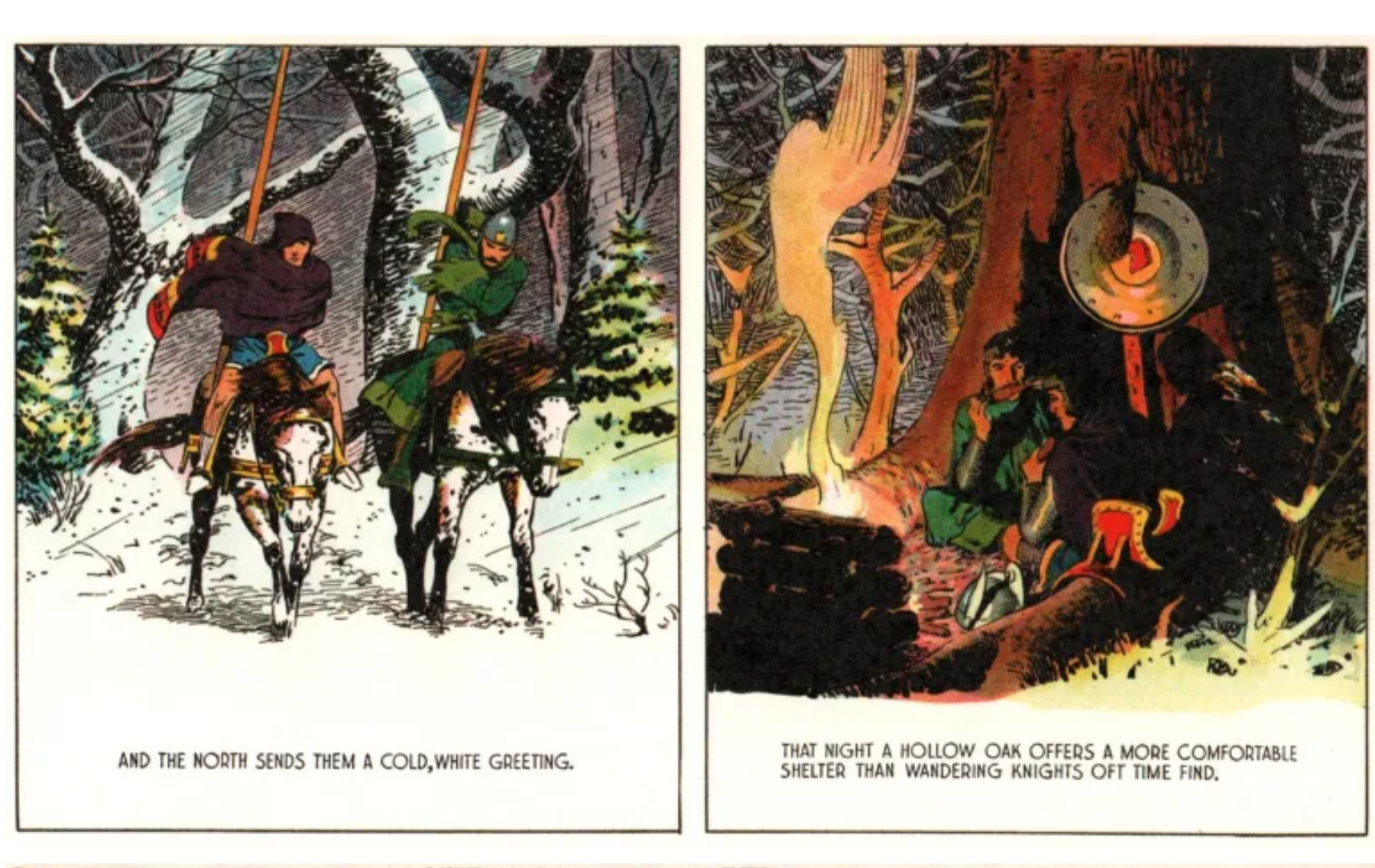
Growing up in Canada, Foster was largely self-taught as an artist, obsessing over his craft from an early age while studying classic illustrators such as Wyeth and Rackham. In 1921, after trying his hand at freelancing, Foster made his way to the Chicago Art Institute as well as other academies to refine his skills. After settling in the U.S., Foster got work drawing magazine covers before being taken on by United Features in 1927 to turn Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan* into a serialised newspaper strip. From 1931, after two years drawing the dailies, Foster focused exclusively on the Sunday episodes, and within two years began to develop the strip due to fan interest and also to sustain interest, as he didn't write the stories. By the mid-1930s, despite his reaching new heights as an artist on *Tarzan*, Foster began to lose interest in the character and came up with his own property with which he would have full creative control - *Prince Valiant*.

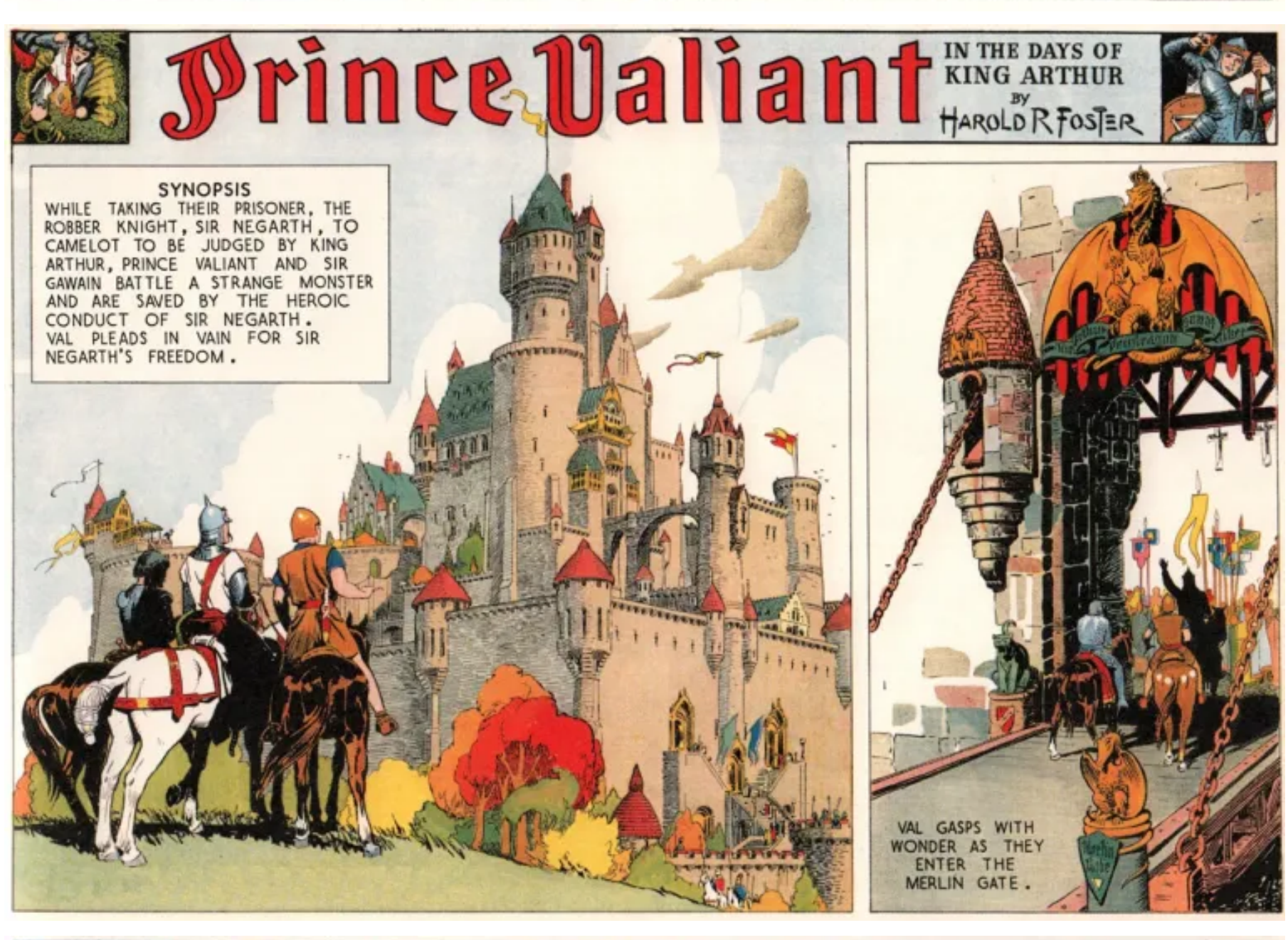

FROM THE CHIEFTAIN'S SPEECH, TARZAN JUDGED THAT THE LION WAS TO KILL THE VICTIMS FOR THE CANNIBAL FEAST !
"THAT LION SHALL KILL NO ONE," HE MURMURED. HE DREW HIS BOW. AN ARROW WHIRRED--AND PIERCED THE VENERATED BEAST.
THEN THE APE-MAN'S VOICE BOOMED FROM THE FOREST "FREE THE WHITE PRISONERS, OR YOU, CHIEF, SHALL SUFFER THE SAME FATE!"
CRAFTY MENGO LEAPED BEHIND SIGREDA FOR PROTECTION, AND CALLED : "WHO ARE YOU WHO SLAYS SIMBA, LORD OF THE LION PEOPLE ?"
AND THE VOICE ANSWERED: "I AM TARZAN, LORD OF JUNGLE BEASTS---AND JUNGLE MEN, WHO DEFIES ME, DIES !"
AT MENTION OF HIS DREADED NAME, MENGO AND HIS RETINUE FLED THROUGH THE GATEWAY, DRAGGING THEIR PRISONERS.

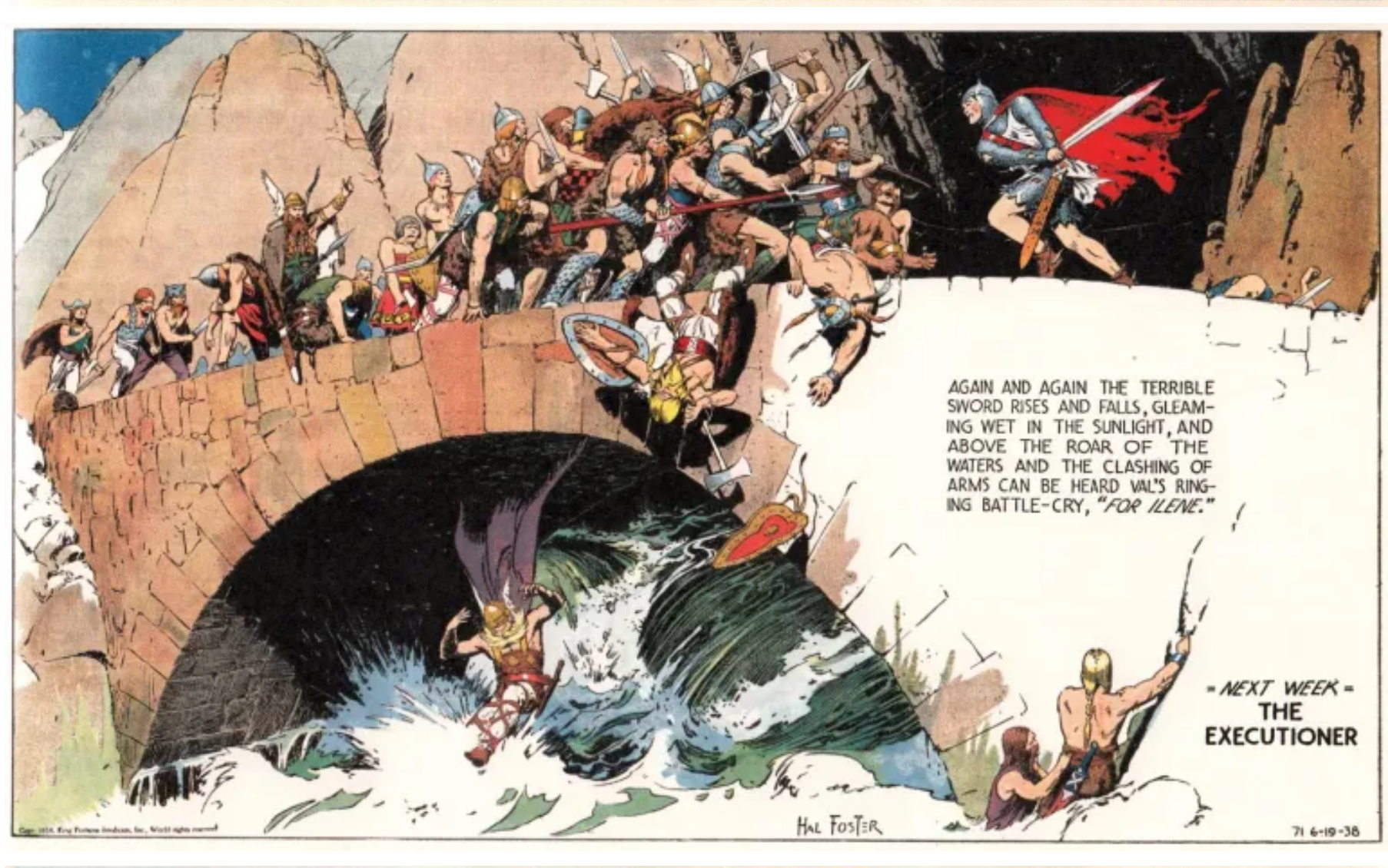

THE GIANT KAMUR FEARLESSLY MET THE CHALLENGE AND ADVANCED TO BATTLE.
THE STRENGTH OF KAMUR WAS THE STRENGTH OF MANY MEN BUT THE FANGS AND HANDS OF THE GREAT APE, TEARING, STRIKING, RENDING..........
.......EVENTUALLY TURNED THE TIDE OF BATTLE. A CRY OF VICTORY WAS WELLING IN THE APE'S THROAT.
WHEN SHE SAW THE PRINCE BEING OVERCOME NIKOTRIS MADE A FRENZIED EFFORT TO SAVE HIM.
KABANGO TURNED IN RAGE UPON NIKOTRIS. AS HE SEIZED HER, SHE UTTERED THE WILD SHRIEK THAT TARZAN HEARD AT HIS JUNGLE HUT.
WHIRLING THROUGH THE TREES THE APE-MAN CAME.

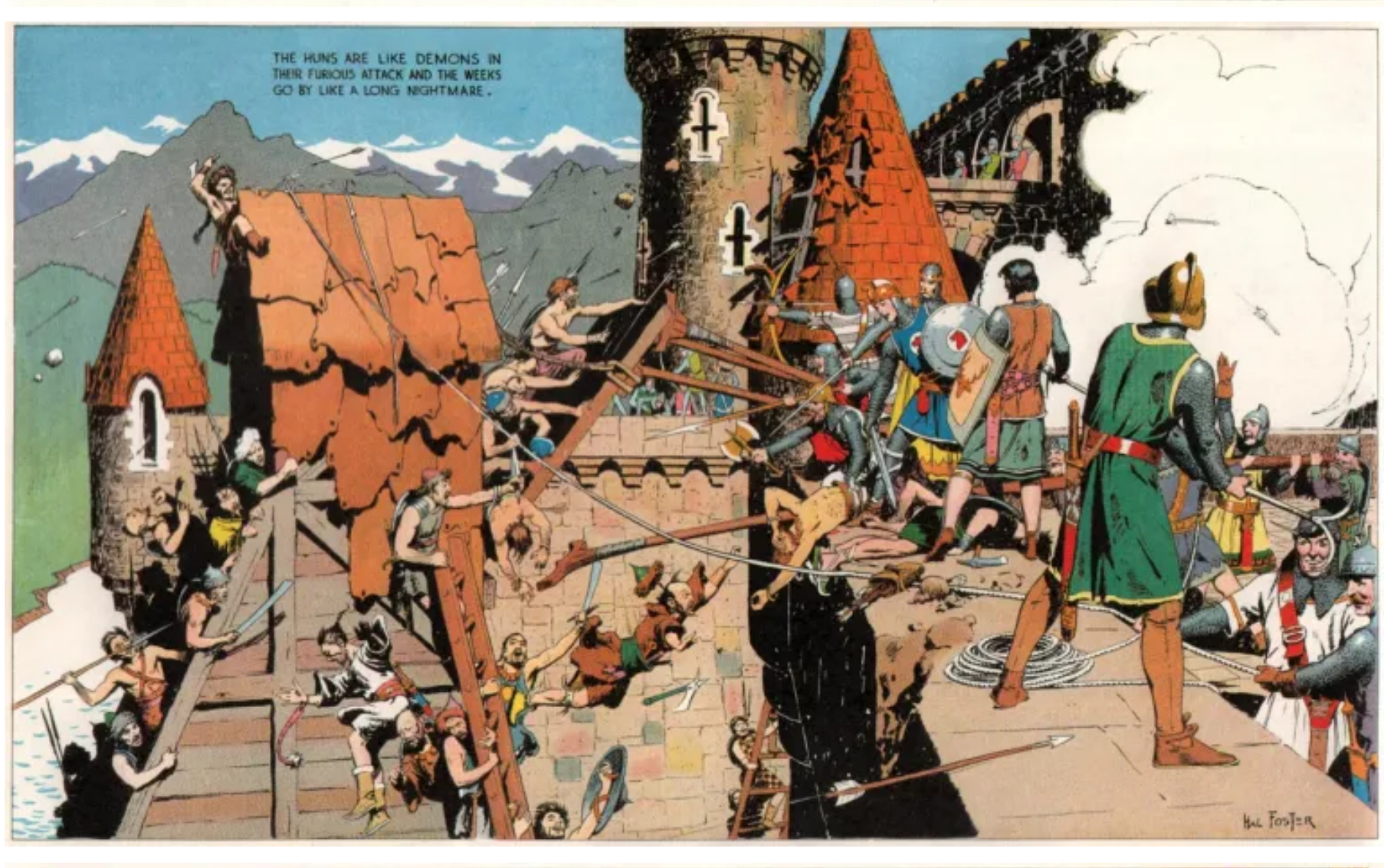


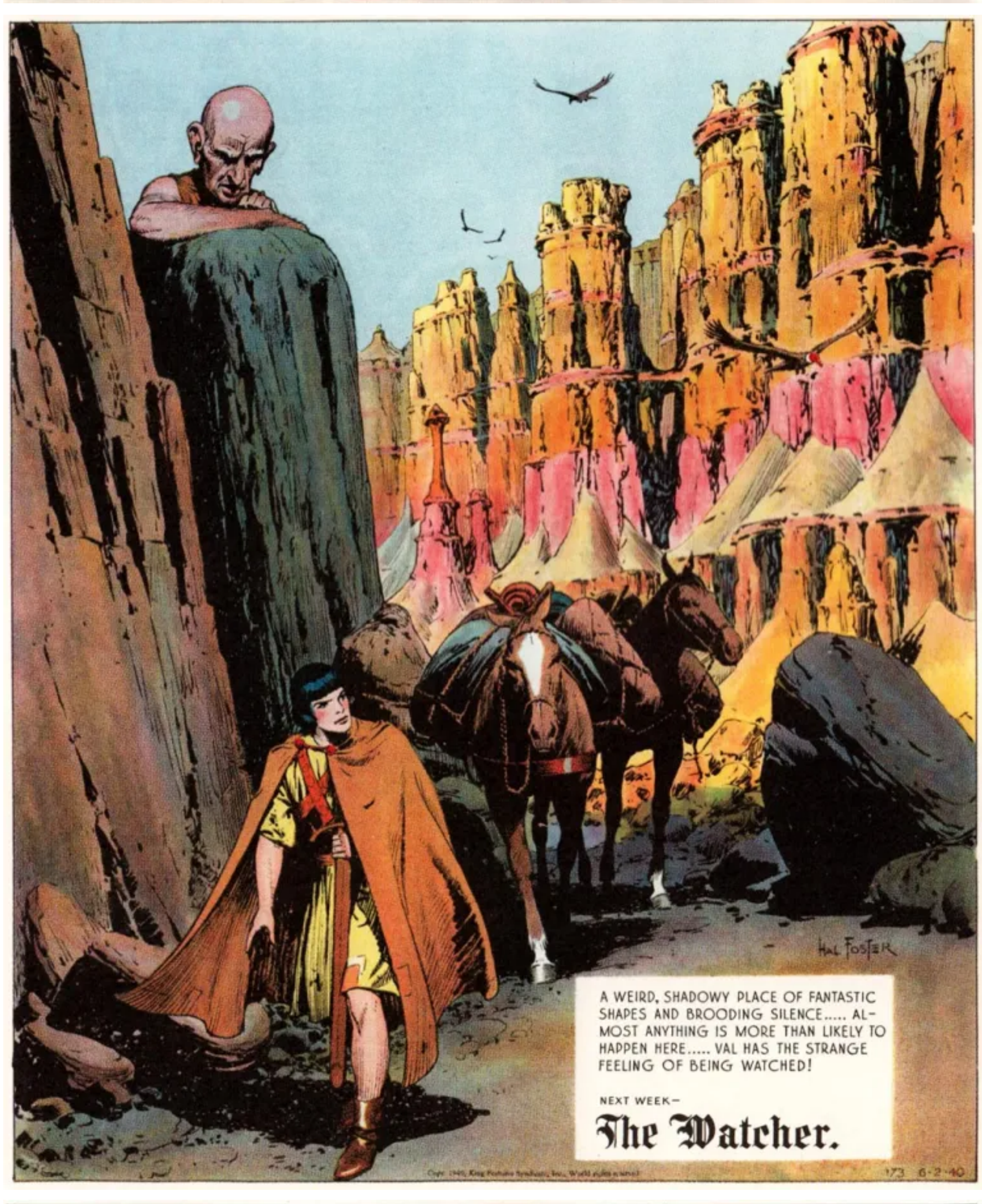
Despite the phenomenal success of *Tarzan*, both as a strip and within pop culture in general, Foster moved on in 1937, taking his new strip *Prince Valiant* to rival King Features, owned by William Randolph Hearst. Hearst offered Foster not just complete artistic control (one assumes Will Eisner was taking notes) but also 50% of the gross for the strip, which was an unsurpassed deal at the time. Within a few months *Prince Valiant* was given a full page by Hearst, allowing Foster the space to develop not just his artistry but the parameters of the medium. *Prince Valiant* was a feast for the eyes and senses, with Foster providing an epic, layered and long-running medieval saga that combined fantasy with realism, humanizing his characters while carefully delineating plots that took in a considerable ensemble who were allowed to age. His painterly, elegant, if not fastidious style and broad colour palette meant that *Prince Valiant* was practically unrivalled in terms of its visual presentation. His storytelling and world building also set the standard - one can look at a Prince Valiant page, not read a single word and know exactly what the story is, what the characters are thinking, and what their emotions are, while his mythical world seems palpably real, with backstory, humour and depth.

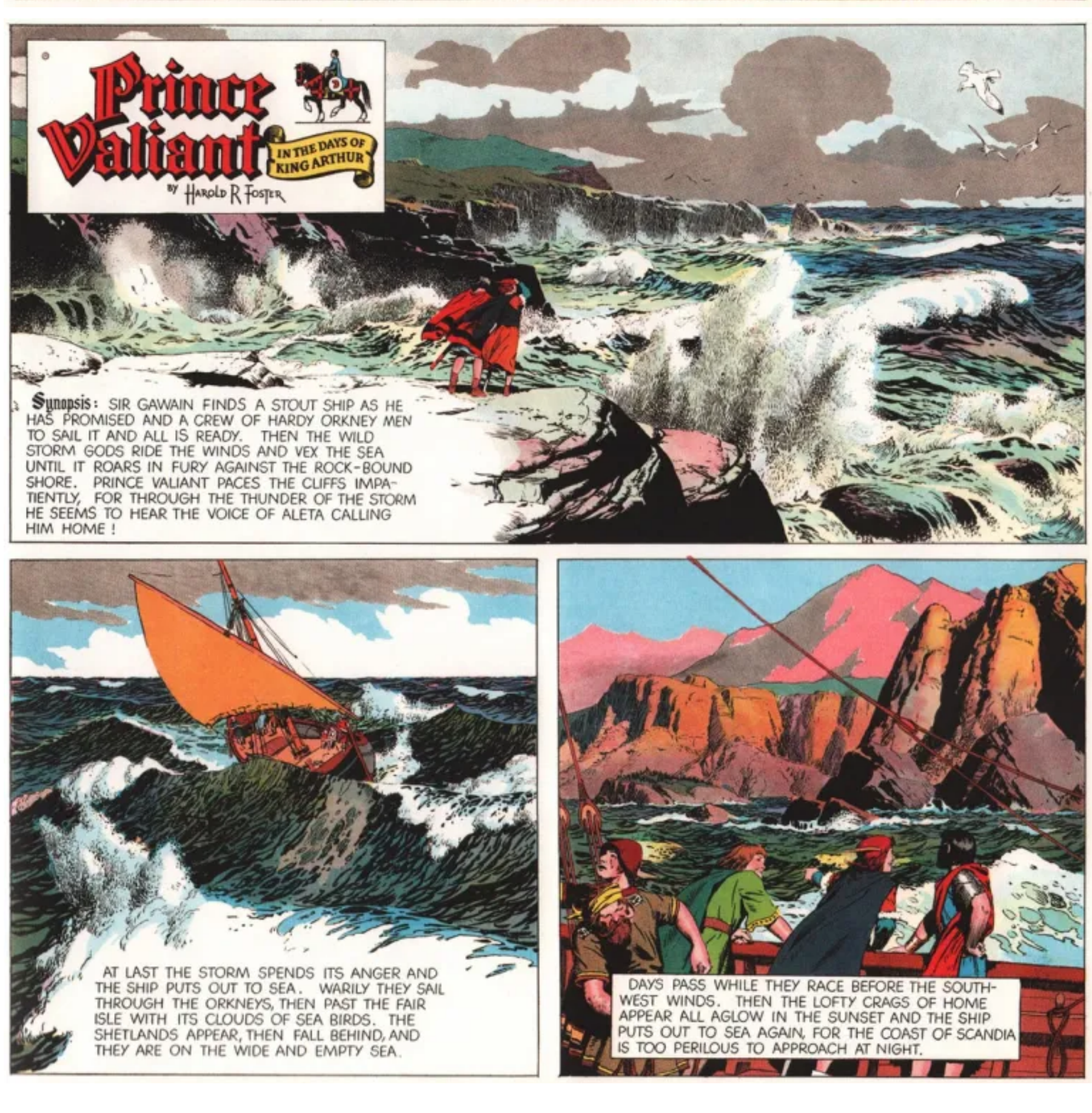

AND THE NORTH SENDS THEM A COLD, WHITE GREETING.
THAT NIGHT A HOLLOW OAK OFFERS A MORE COMFORTABLE SHELTER THAN WANDERING KNIGHTS OFT TIME FIND.


Prince Valiant
IN THE DAYS OF KING ARTHUR BY HAROLD R FOSTER
SYNOPSIS
WHILE TAKING THEIR PRISONER, THE ROBBER KNIGHT, SIR NEGARTH, TO CAMELOT TO BE JUDGED BY KING ARTHUR, PRINCE VALIANT AND SIR GAWAIN BATTLE A STRANGE MONSTER AND ARE SAVED BY THE HEROIC CONDUCT OF SIR NEGARTH. VAL PLEADS IN VAIN FOR SIR NEGARTH'S FREEDOM.
VAL GASPS WITH WONDER AS THEY ENTER THE MERLIN GATE.

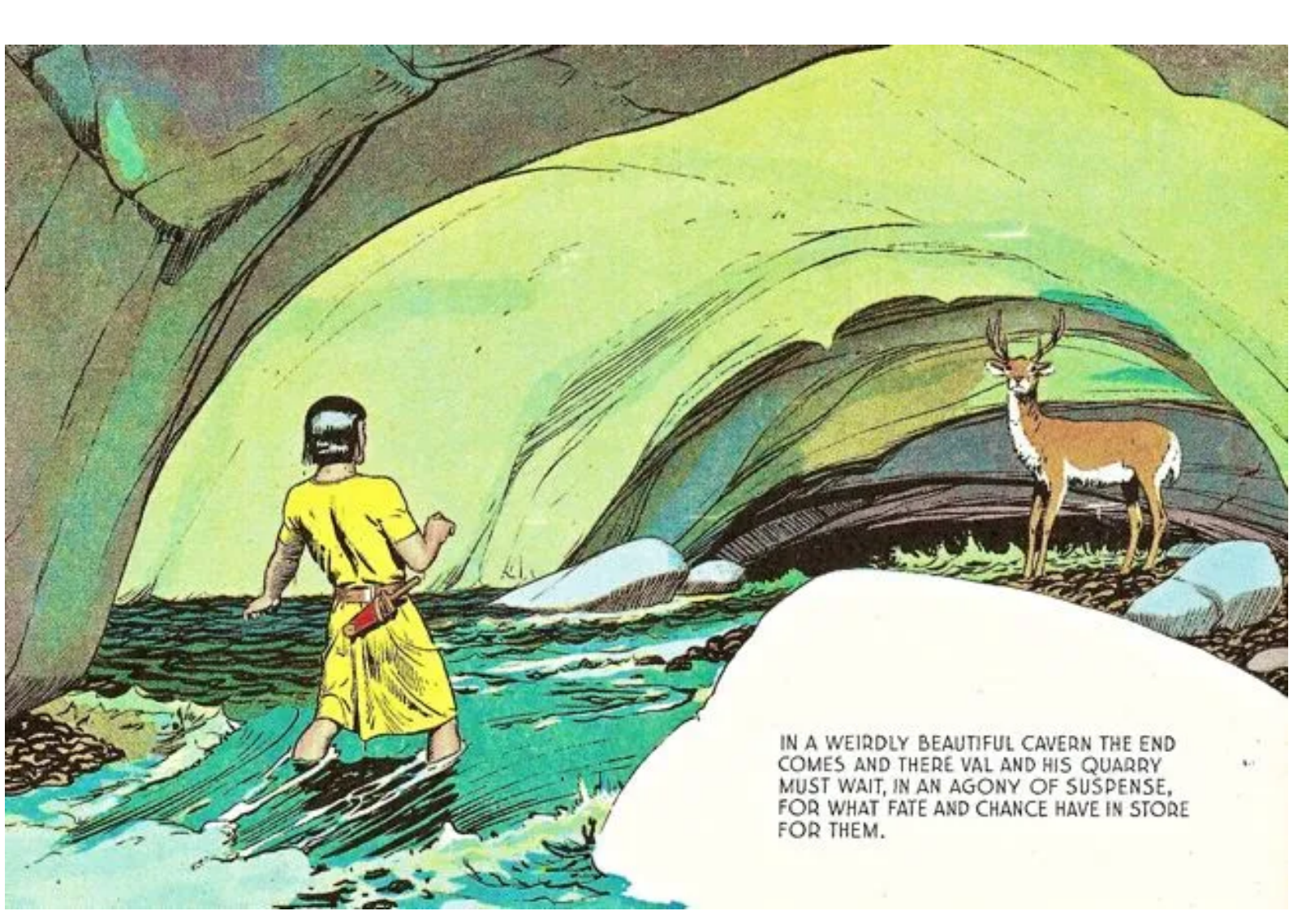

AGAIN AND AGAIN THE TERRIBLE SWORD RISES AND FALLS, GLEAMING WET IN THE SUNLIGHT, AND ABOVE THE ROAR OF THE WATERS AND THE CLASHING OF ARMS CAN BE HEARD VAL'S RINGING BATTLE-CRY, "FOR ILENE."
- NEXT WEEK - THE EXECUTIONER
HAL FOSTER
71 6-19-38

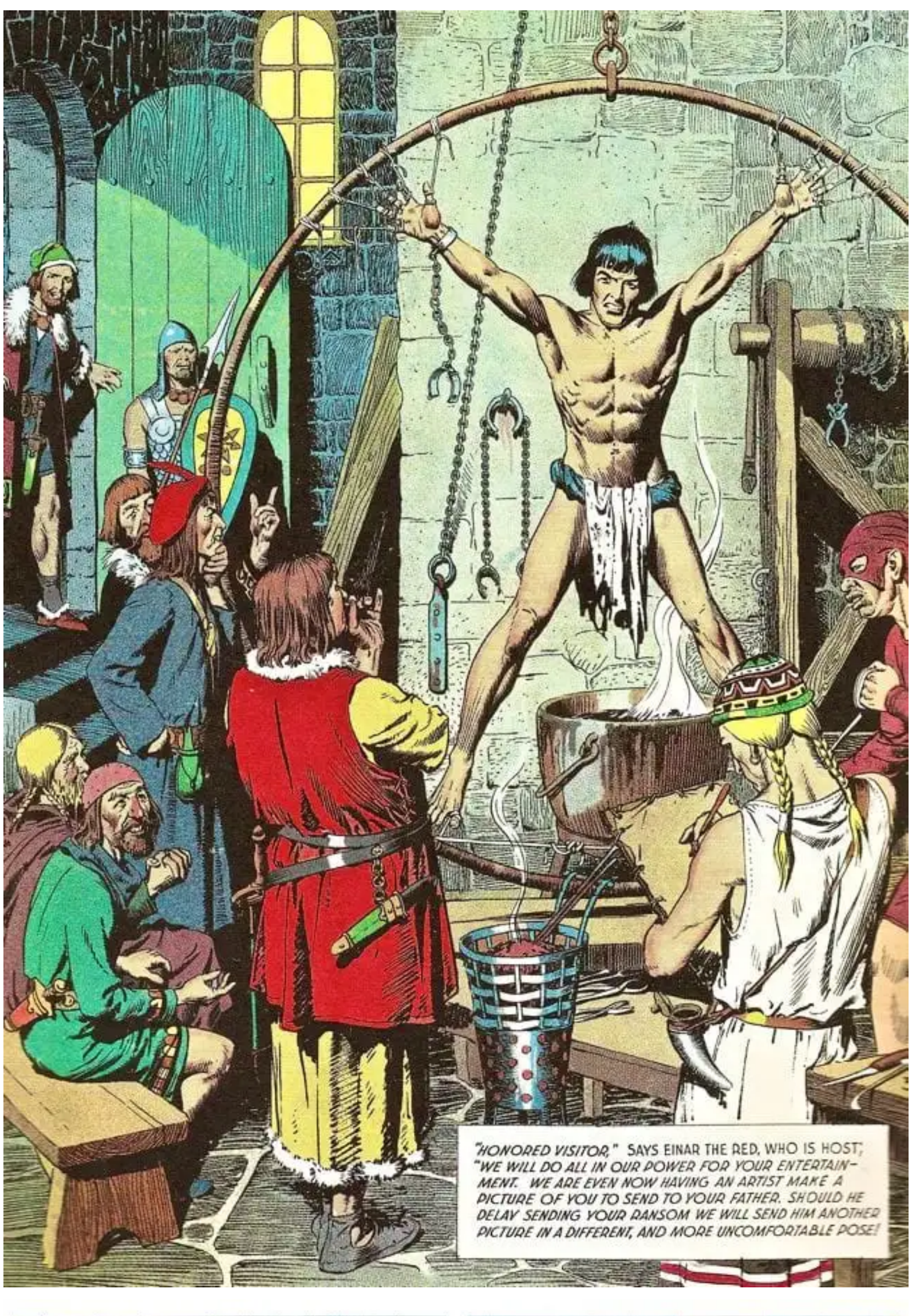

THE HUNS ARE LIKE DEMONS IN THEIR FURIOUS ATTACK AND THE WEEKS GO BY LIKE A LONG NIGHTMARE.
HAL FOSTER

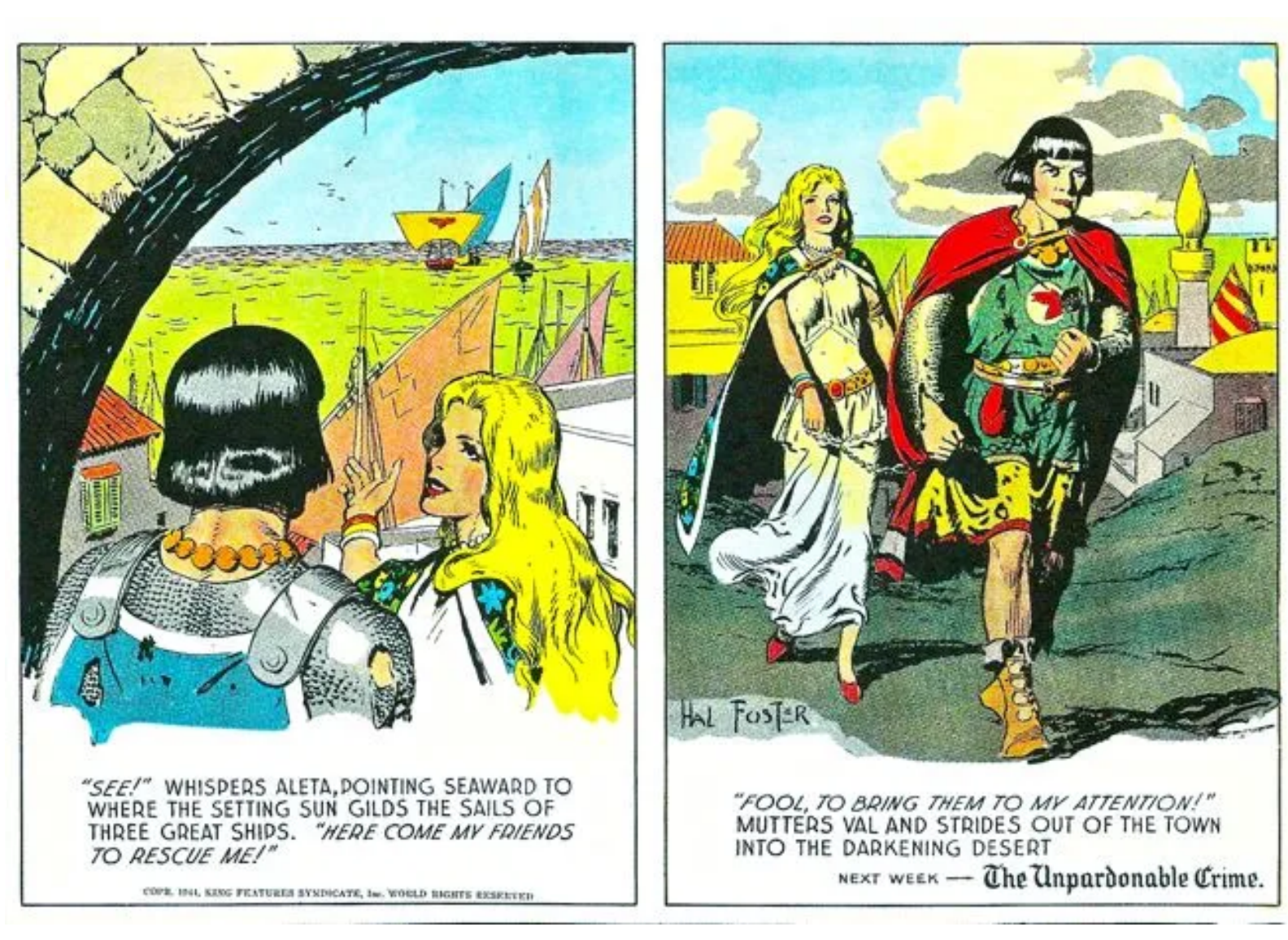

HAL FOSTER
A WEIRD, SHADOWY PLACE OF FANTASTIC SHAPES AND BROODING SILENCE..... ALMOST ANYTHING IS MORE THAN LIKELY TO HAPPEN HERE..... VAL HAS THE STRANGE FEELING OF BEING WATCHED!
NEXT WEEK—
The Watcher.
173 6-2-40

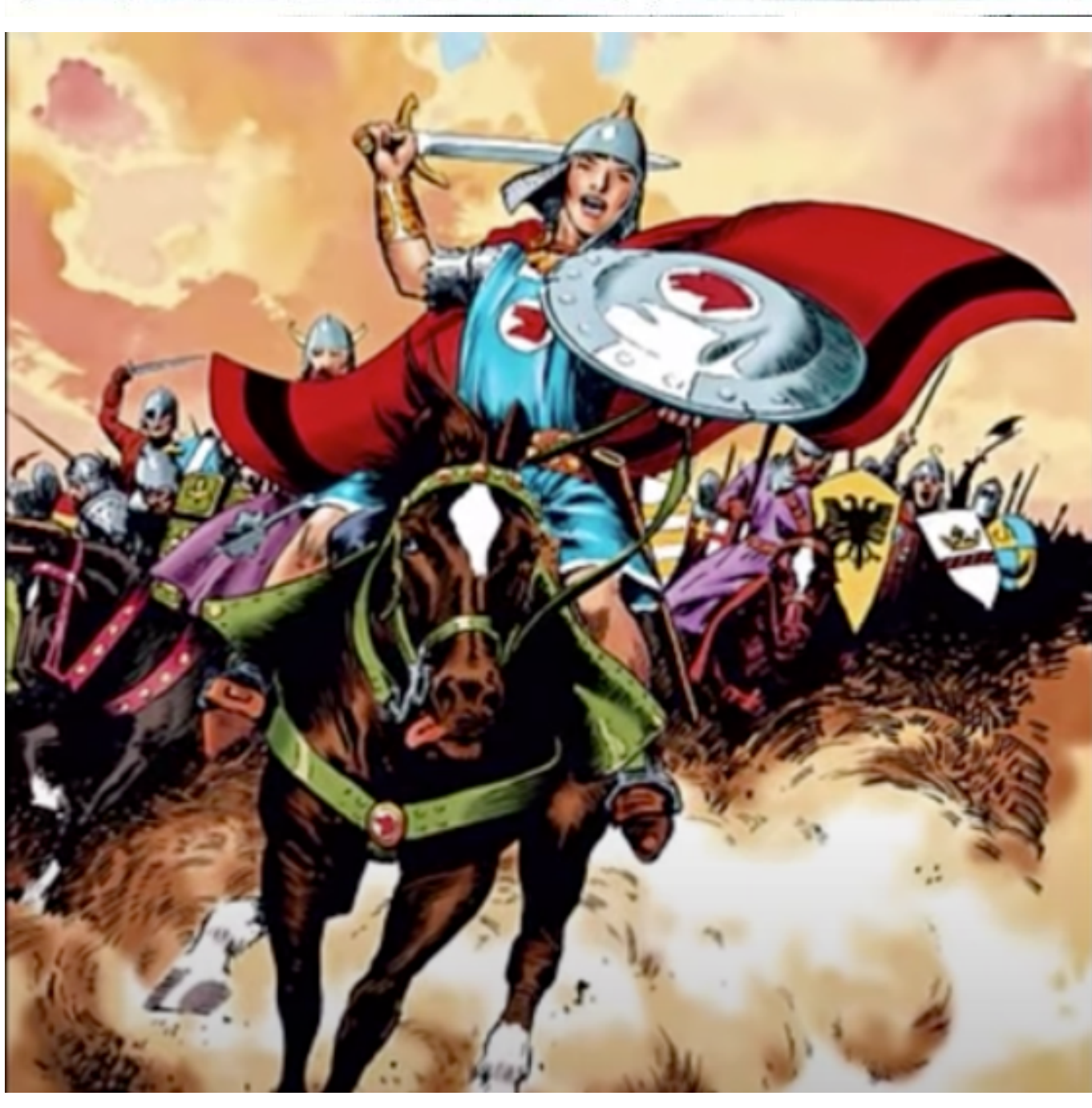

Prince Valiant
IN THE DAYS OF KING ARTHUR
BY HAROLD R FOSTER
Synopsis: SIR GAWAIN FINDS A STOUT SHIP AS HE HAS PROMISED AND A CREW OF HARDY ORKNEY MEN TO SAIL IT AND ALL IS READY. THEN THE WILD STORM GODS RIDE THE WINDS AND VEX THE SEA UNTIL IT ROARS IN FURY AGAINST THE ROCK-BOUND SHORE. PRINCE VALIANT PACES THE CLIFFS IMPATIENTLY, FOR THROUGH THE THUNDER OF THE STORM HE SEEMS TO HEAR THE VOICE OF ALETA CALLING HIM HOME !
AT LAST THE STORM SPENDS ITS ANGER AND THE SHIP PUTS OUT TO SEA. WARILY THEY SAIL THROUGH THE ORKNEYS, THEN PAST THE FAIR ISLE WITH ITS CLOUDS OF SEA BIRDS. THE SHETLANDS APPEAR, THEN FALL BEHIND, AND THEY ARE ON THE WIDE AND EMPTY SEA.
DAYS PASS WHILE THEY RACE BEFORE THE SOUTHWEST WINDS. THEN THE LOFTY CRAGS OF HOME APPEAR ALL AGLOW IN THE SUNSET AND THE SHIP PUTS OUT TO SEA AGAIN, FOR THE COAST OF SCANDIA IS TOO PERILOUS TO APPROACH AT NIGHT.

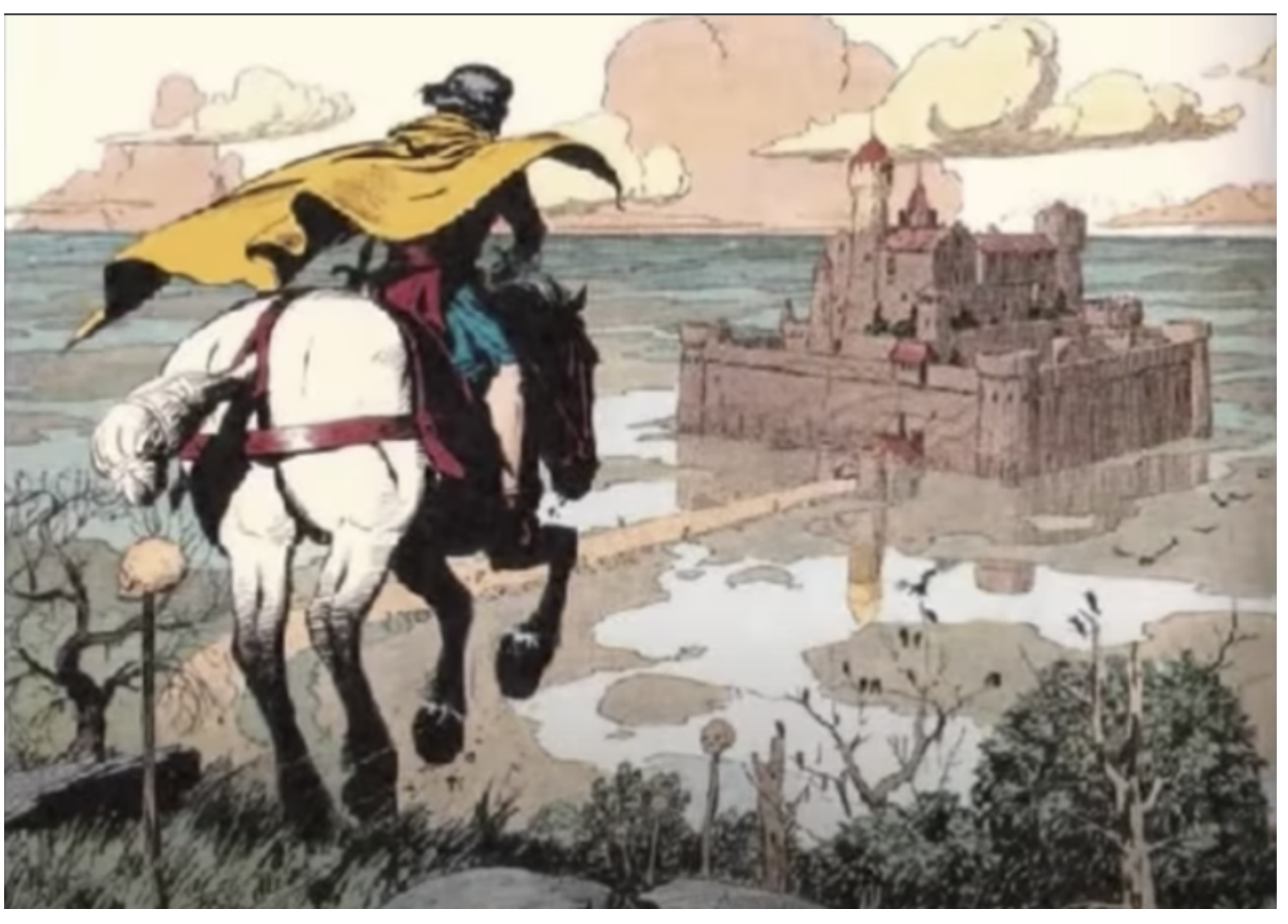
One of the true legends of the newspaper strip art that would have such an impact on the comic medium, Foster's art has remained required reading for most professionals in the industry and is a byword for the hard work and commitment involved in producing such masterworks.

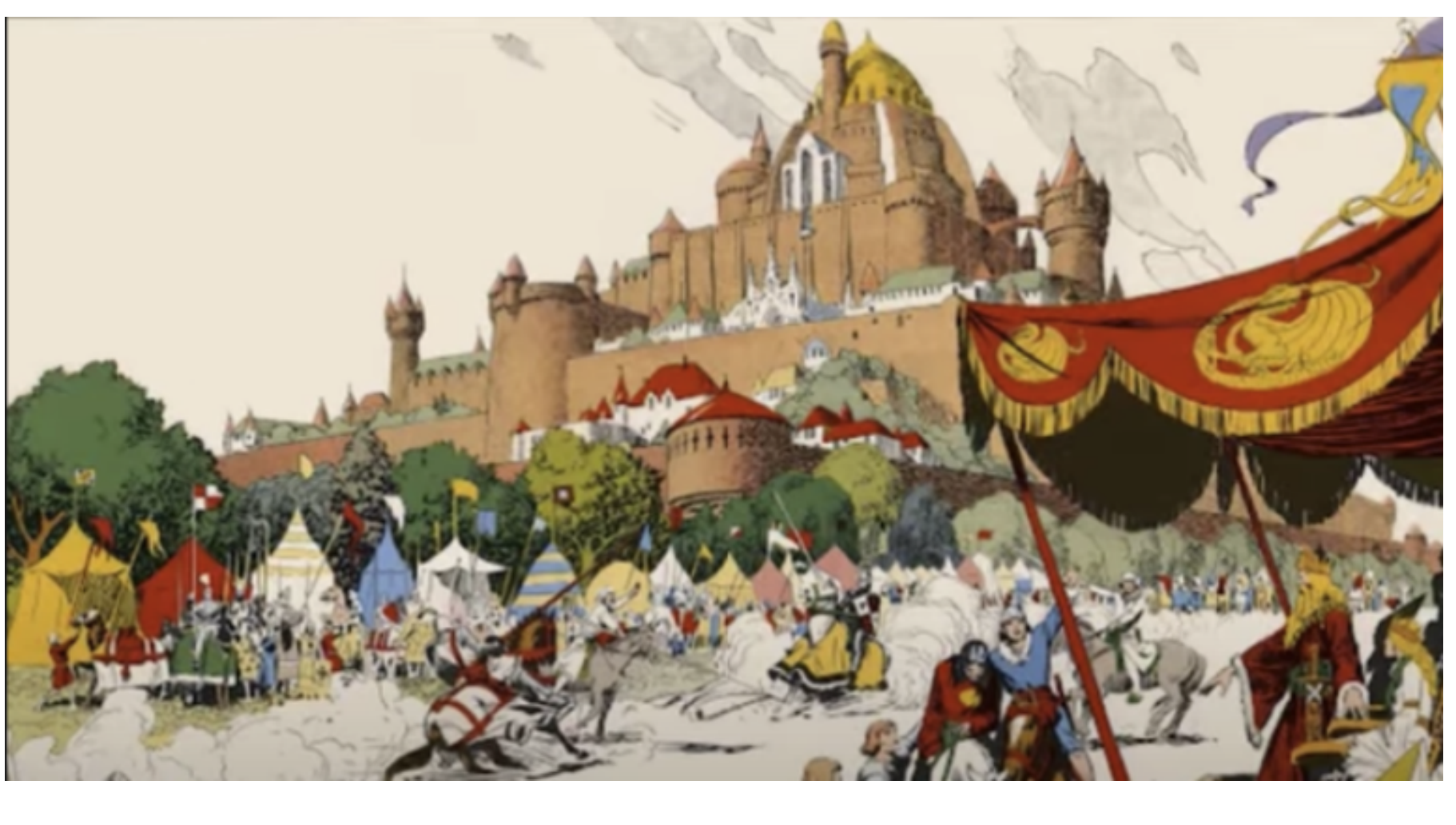

IN A WEIRDLY BEAUTIFUL CAVERN THE END COMES AND THERE VAL AND HIS QUARRY MUST WAIT, IN AN AGONY OF SUSPENSE, FOR WHAT FATE AND CHANCE HAVE IN STORE FOR THEM.


"HONORED VISITOR," SAYS EINAR THE RED, WHO IS HOST; "WE WILL DO ALL IN OUR POWER FOR YOUR ENTERTAINMENT. WE ARE EVEN NOW HAVING AN ARTIST MAKE A PICTURE OF YOU TO SEND TO YOUR FATHER. SHOULD HE DELAY SENDING YOUR RANSOM WE WILL SEND HIM ANOTHER PICTURE IN A DIFFERENT, AND MORE UNCOMFORTABLE POSE!


"SEE!" WHISPERS ALETA, POINTING SEAWARD TO WHERE THE SETTING SUN GILDS THE SAILS OF THREE GREAT SHIPS. "HERE COME MY FRIENDS TO RESCUE ME!"
HAL FOSTER
"FOOL, TO BRING THEM TO MY ATTENTION!" MUTTERS VAL AND STRIDES OUT OF THE TOWN INTO THE DARKENING DESERT
NEXT WEEK — The Unpardonable Crime.







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