ForeWord Reviews

COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS

Prince Valiant: Vol. 1, 1937-1938
Harold Foster
Fantagraphics Books
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Widely acknowledged as the greatest adventure strip ever created, Prince Valiant is also arguably the best comic strip in that medium's history. However, reprint collections have failed to truly capture the beauty and consummate artistry of Hal Foster's creationÂ…until now, that is.

For the first time, a reprint series is being scanned directly from copies of the color engraver's proof sheets. As a result, this new Fantagraphics edition goes beyond simply correcting the shortcomings of past reprints-in truth, it is more of a revelation than a mere restoration.

Now modern readers can fully appreciate Foster's keen understanding of color's power, and how he used it to breathe life into his work while simultaneously employing it to heighten and underscore the emotional twists of his hero's journey.

From the opening page, where Val's father, the deposed King of Thule, is discovered fleeing with his wife, his heir, and a handful of loyal retainers from those usurpers who would rob him of both his throne and life, to the final scene depicting Val's dramatic entrance on horseback into King Arthur's court just ahead of an invading hoard, it's obvious that Foster was master of his tools and chosen medium. Between those moments we are immersed in the Pauper Prince's world and introduced to all of the series' essential elements-the settings and characters, including Merlin, Morgan Le Fey and Camelot's other denizens, which continue to provide story fodder for the strip to this day.

But Foster's true genius is best found in his greatest creation: Prince Valiant himself.

Eminently likable and appealing, he also possesses serious faults which hamper his success. Thus, readers are drawn in by Val's battles against forces within and without as he carves a place for himself in his world, all the while learning that to be a worthy ruler of men, one must first become a man of real worth.

Ultimately, Prince Valiant is much more than a series of fantastic adventures in some legendary era; rather, it is a depiction of the making of a fully rounded and realized human being. That this astounding literary feat is accomplished without resorting to sentimentality or

preaching, and without appreciable loss of momentum, sets this strip apart from all othersÂ…and marks it as worthy of attention by all but the youngest of readers.

Hal Foster’s Prince Valiant is a story to be read and cherished-today, tomorrow, always.