

Knight Life at Camelot

PRINCE VALIANT

(20th Century-Fox)

IF you have read old Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, or Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, or even T. H. White's *Sword in the Stone*, you are likely to find the incredible adventures of Prince Valiant a somewhat numbing experience. But they were not meant for you, anyway. CinemaScope, which has been playing for the teen-age audience (and, as often as not, getting A certificates), has this time lowered its sights far enough to produce a film which appeals directly to the Lower Classes. Prince Valiant is definitely for primary school extroverts. Small boys such as the two I took along (you've got to do something with them in the holidays) will enjoy themselves thoroughly. Their elders will either be sent to sleep, or into paroxysms of helpless laughter.

Prince Valiant, as I was forewarned by my juvenile entourage (they always seem to know more than their elders about the irrelevant facts of current life) is based on a comic strip, and if I hadn't been armed with that vital information I'm sure I'd have plagued myself trying to recall where I had seen before so many characters looking like All-American halfbacks. Even the Knights of the Round Table appeared to be wearing shoulder-pads under their armour, and the dialogue had such a shattering simplicity ("Sit down; I want you to get acquainted with my knights"), that if it had issued in balloons from the lips of the *dramatis personae* I would scarcely have remarked the phenomenon.

For those of you (stuffed shirts, no doubt) who have not kept up with your pulp-reading, the story concerns a strippling prince, scion of a Scandinavian government-in-exile, who travels to Camelot to seek his fortune as a first step towards the liberation of his father's realm. After sundry adventures with a black knight and a blonde damsel, he reaches Arthur's court, where (with a self-confidence that would make Private Schine blush) he requests immediate admission to the Round Table. King Arthur, however, who is not merely commander-in-chief and Secretary of the Army, but chairman of the Commit-



ALAN LADD
All mixed up inside

BAROMETER

OVERCAST: "Prince Valiant."
OVERCAST: "The Red Beret."

tee of Investigation as well, is not impressed. "Another time, Valiant," he says, regally laconic, and drafts him for basic training as squire to Sir G'wain.

This section of the film is not at all bad—if you can shut your ears to the Basic English. It gives at least an approximate picture of the kind of military training young squires did get—elementary swordsmanship and tilting at the quintain—and there is one slap-up tournament before the Court that is full of colour and pageantry, and has also the added advantage of a running commentary. Television could do no better. Here, too, Prince Val runs into another spot of bother. Trying to prevent the blonde aforementioned—who is first prize in Open class at the tournament—falling into the hands of treacherous Sir Brac (James Mason, no less) he jousts with him in borrowed armour and is humiliatingly knocked for a row of ash-cans by the villain. It takes reliable Sir G'wain (in his second-best suit) to save the day and the girl. Much more follows, but of it all I have only the haziest recollection. I dozed fitfully, awakened from time to time by the bricks dropped by the script department. P.V. manages to recapture his Father's kingdom (populated by hairy vikings in horned helmets), and returns to Camelot, where he has a fight to the death with the wicked Sir Brac and, emerging victor, of course, fills the consequential vacancy at the Round Table. He wins the girl, too. Fortunately, the scriptwriters stopped there—there was a winner-take-all jackpot air about the climax that might have led them into even wilder flights of anachronism if they had carried on. But they proved something. The wide screen is just the thing for "comic" strips; so far it's just about as deep, too.

THE RED BERET

(Columbia-Warwick)

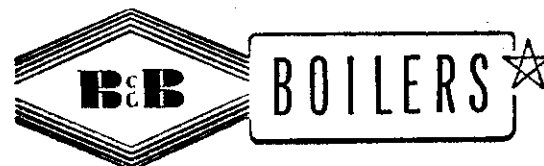
THE RED BERET claims to be based on the book by Hilary St. George Saunders, and sets out to tell the story of the Parachute Regiment, but that is a pure subterfuge. It is not much closer to its original than *Prince Valiant* is to *Morte d'Arthur*, being simply the story of Alan Ladd, an American masquerading as a Canadian, who joins the unit because he is All Mixed Up Inside. His method of reorientating himself is to pick fights with all and sundry, to refuse promotion, and in general behave in a manner which any reasonable C.O. would regard as Prejudicial to Good Order, etc. That, of course, is in training camp. In action he's a proper ball of fire. It's doubtful if the Bruneval raid would have come off without him (how sadly my mind went back to *School for Secrets!*) The corporal brought it there, but Ladd carried on; and the R.S.M. got his at Cape Bon, in the middle of a Nazi minefield. Even the C.O. was pinned down, but Ladd knew how to use a bazooka and blasted a path to safety. It's the Flynn technique, of course, and if it paid off in Burma there's no reason why it should be a dead loss in other theatres. But it's not chauvinistic, I'm sure, to get a little tired of it after all these years.



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