



A GALLERY OF PRINCE VALIANT DIORAMAS BY FIGURE GOBLIN ROLAND SCHAFFRIN

Michael Dean

Sometimes it seems as though the world of Prince Valiant, as conjured by Hal Foster out of Arthurian legends, is so real that you could reach out and touch it. In Germany, the two-dimensional world of the strip made such an impact on the traditional crafts of figure making and dioramas that it created a parallel world, one you actually can touch. The figures and scenes on these pages are the work of Roland Schaffrin's Figurenkobold studio. Figurenkobold translates as Figure Goblin or Figure Leprechaun, as Herr Schaffrin is known among collectors. He kindly shared these images of his carefully crafted figures and dioramas depicting characters and stories from the *Prince Valiant* strip.

The general public may be only vaguely aware of this craft/hobby, but figure collectors all over the world and especially in Europe flock to regularly scheduled (at least in non-pandemic years) fairs, conventions and exhibitions focusing on toy soldiers, figures and miniatures. Schaffrin's work is much sought after among the auctions and exchange markets of Nauheim, Friedberg, Vienna and Neustadt b. Coburg.

It's a tradition that can be traced to a 1912 German factory run by Otto and Max Hausser who created figures made from sawdust, glue and clay sculpted around a wire armature and hand-painted. Toys made according to that early Hausser method are known as Elastolin figures. Early figures included World War I officers such as Kaiser Wilhelm II. The company's rapid growth in the 1930s, along with a new factory in Neustadt b. Coburg, coincided with the rise of the Third Reich, and among its line of figures were several Nazi leaders and soldiers. Such emblems of its dark past have long been banished in Germany, but the figures were popular at the time and remain popular collectibles today, coveted by some as rare examples of the figure-making craft and by some as a source of fascist nostalgia.

Though he learned the skill thanks to the generosity of Hausser craftsman Erich

Leistner, whom he met in the 1990s, Schaffrin, like other postwar figure makers has steered clear of Germany's 20th-century military history, concentrating on characters and scenes from earlier historical periods, legends, and popular culture such as Hal Foster's

Prince Valiant strip, which was very popular in Germany. In Schaffrin's opinion, "Toy and 'soldier' are two words that do not go together." Other postwar figures in the Elastolin tradition include Old Shatterhand and Winnetou from Germany's 1960s boom in cowboy movies based on Karl May's turn-of-the century Western novels.

Schaffrin began creating his dioramas for his own amusement, sometimes sculpting his own figures, sometimes combining parts from classic Elastolin figures and scenes and elements from old Aurora model kits. Figurenkobold is still a one-man workshop, existing first of all as an outlet for Schaffrin's creative impulses, but also producing dioramas commissioned by collectors. As can be seen on these pages, *Prince Valiant* has been a particular inspiration.

A catalog/gallery of Schaffrin's works can be found online at figurenkobold.de.



LEFT: The Goblin himself, Roland Schaffrin, among his creations.

RIGHT: An original Schaffrin diorama for a Norman fortress designed to fit 7 cm figures.



ABOVE: Val visits his forge. (7 cm.) RIGHT: Val and the Celtic cross.



TOP AND BOTTOM LEFT: At the court of the Dragon Queen. One of Schaffrin's older pieces. BOTTOM RIGHT: *Am, aut alitatur mostio occumen duciatium fugiatiumqui quae verem vacerum*

TOP: *Am, aut alitatur mostio occumen duciatium fugiatiumqui quae verem vacerum*. BOTTOM: *Am, aut alitatur mostio occumen duciatium fugiatiumqui quae verem vacerum*



OPPOSITE AND RIGHT: It took Schaffrin two months to create this tower before peopling it with Elastolin figures.

BELOW: Created about 10 years ago, this is one of Schaffrin's favorites.

BOTTOM: This tournament scene is composed of rare, old Elastolin figures. These are differently painted and modeled than later figures modeled by Schaffrin. Collectors call them "longnecks." The faces have fewer details than later figures. Because of their rarity, the figures in this scene sell for \$175 to \$350 apiece.





TOP AND LEFT: Val at a dragon hunt.

ABOVE CENTER: *Fugiatiumqui quae verem vacerum.*

ABOVE: Aurora meets Elastolin. This King Kong-inspired diorama was created by Schaffrin utilizing Aurora model parts and Elastolin figures.



TOP LEFT: Val riding a sea stallion. TOP RIGHT: Val in Africa. BOTTOM: Val at the ruins of an old Celtic temple, recreating a scene from Foster's strip pages 1140 and 1141 published in 1958. (Size 7 cm. or roughly 2.76 inches. 1/4 ratio to life-size.)



LEFT: Val amid Celtic ruins.

BELOW: *Fugiatiumqui quae verem vacerum.*

BOTTOM: Val at the ruins of an old Celtic temple, recreating a scene from Foster's strip pages 1140 and 1141 published in 1958. (Size 7 cm. or roughly 2.76 inches. 1/24 ratio to life-size.)

OPPOSITE: Val's war wagon, another scene featuring Elastolin figures, against a backdrop of a German Prince Valiant comic (Prinz Eisenherz) from the early 1960s.

