

First in the saga—the book that inspired the
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING SERIES!

20th
Anniversary
Edition

BRIAN JACQUES REDWALL



The legend begins!

CHAPTER

I



Matthias cut a comical little figure as he wobbled his way along the cloisters, with his large sandals flip-flopping and his tail peeping from beneath the baggy folds of an oversized novice's habit. He paused to gaze upwards at the cloudless blue sky and tripped over the enormous sandals. Hazelnuts scattered out upon the grass from the rush basket he was carrying. Unable to stop, he went tumbling cowl over tail.

Bump!

The young mouse squeaked in dismay. He rubbed tenderly at his damp snub nose while slowly taking stock of where he had landed: directly at the feet of Abbot Mortimer!

Immediately Matthias scrambled about on all fours, hastily trying to stuff nuts back into the basket as he muttered clumsy apologies, avoiding the stern gaze of his elder.

"Er, sorry, Father Abbot. I tripped, y'see. Trod on my Abbot, Father Habit. Oh dear, I mean. . . ."

The Father Abbot blinked solemnly over the top of his glasses. Matthias again. What a young buffoon of a mouse. Only the other day he had singed old Brother Methuselah's whiskers while lighting candles.

The elder's stern expression softened. He watched the little novice rolling about on the grass, grappling with large armfuls of the smooth hazelnuts which constantly seemed to escape his grasp. Shaking his old grey head, yet trying to hide a smile,

Abbot Mortimer bent and helped to gather up the fallen nuts.

"Oh Matthias, Matthias, my son," he said wearily. "When will you learn to take life a little slower, to walk with dignity and humility? How can you ever hope to be accepted as a mouse of Redwall, when you are always dashing about grinning from whisker to tail like a mad rabbit?"

Matthias tossed the last of the hazelnuts into the basket and stood awkwardly shuffling his large sandals in the grass. How could he say aloud what was in his heart?

The Abbot put his paw around the young mouse's shoulder, sensing his secret yearnings, for he had ruled Redwall wisely over a great number of years and gained much experience of mouselife. He smiled down at his young charge and spoke kindly to him. "Come with me, Matthias. It is time we talked together."

A curious thrush perching in a gnarled pear tree watched the two figures make their way at a sedate pace in the direction of Great Hall, one clad in the dark greeny-brown of the order, the other garbed in the lighter green of a novice. They conversed earnestly in low tones. Thinking what a clever bird he was, the thrush swooped down on the basket that had been left behind. Twisters! The basket contained only hard nuts, locked tight within their shells. Feigning lack of interest, lest any other birds had been witness to his silly mistake, he began whistling jauntily a few bars of his melodious summer song, strolling nonchalantly over to the cloister walls in search of snails.

It was cool inside Great Hall. Sunlight flooded down in slanting rainbow-hued shafts from the high, narrow stained-glass windows. A million colored dust-motes danced and swirled as the two mice trod the ancient stone floor. The Father Abbot halted in front of the wall on which hung a long tapestry. This was the pride and joy of Redwall. The oldest part had been woven by the Founders of the Abbey, but each successive generation had added to it; thus the tapestry was not only a priceless treasure, it was also a magnificent chronicle of early Redwall history.

The Abbot studied the wonderment in Matthias's eyes as he asked him a question, the answer to which the wise mouse already knew. "What are you looking at, my son?"

Matthias pointed to the figure woven into the tapestry. It was a heroic-looking mouse with a fearless smile on his handsome

face. Clad in armor, he leaned casually on an impressive sword, while behind him foxes, wildcats and vermin fled in terror. The young mouse gazed in admiration.

“Oh, Father Abbot,” he sighed. “If only I could be like Martin the Warrior. He was the bravest, most courageous mouse that ever lived!”

The Abbot sat down slowly on the cool stone floor, resting his back against the wall.

“Listen to what I say, Matthias. You have been like a son to me, ever since you first came to our gates as an orphaned woodland mouse, begging to be taken in. Come, sit by me and I will try to explain to you what our Order is all about.

“We are mice of peace. Oh, I know that Martin was a warrior mouse, but those were wild days when strength was needed. The strength of a champion such as Martin. He arrived here in the deep winter when the Founders were under attack from many foxes, vermin and a great wildcat. So fierce a fighter was Martin that he faced the enemy single-pawed, driving them mercilessly, far from Mossflower. During the rout Martin fought a great battle against overwhelming odds. He emerged victorious after slaying the wildcat with his ancient sword, which became famous throughout the land. But in the last bloody combat Martin was seriously wounded. He lay injured in the snow until the mice found him. They brought him back to the Abbey and cared for his hurts until he regained his strength.

“Then something seemed to come over him. He was transformed by what could only be called a mouse miracle. Martin forsook the way of the warrior and hung up his sword.

“That was when our Order found its true vocation. All the mice took a solemn vow never to harm another living creature, unless it was an enemy that sought to harm our Order by violence. They vowed to heal the sick, care for the injured, and give aid to the wretched and impoverished. So was it written, and so has it been through all the ages of mousekind since.

“Today, we are a deeply honored and highly respected Society. Anywhere we go, even far beyond Mossflower, we are treated with courtesy by all creatures. Even predators will not harm a mouse who wears the habit of our Order. They know he or she is one who will heal and give aid. It is an unwritten law that Redwall mice can go anywhere, through any territory,

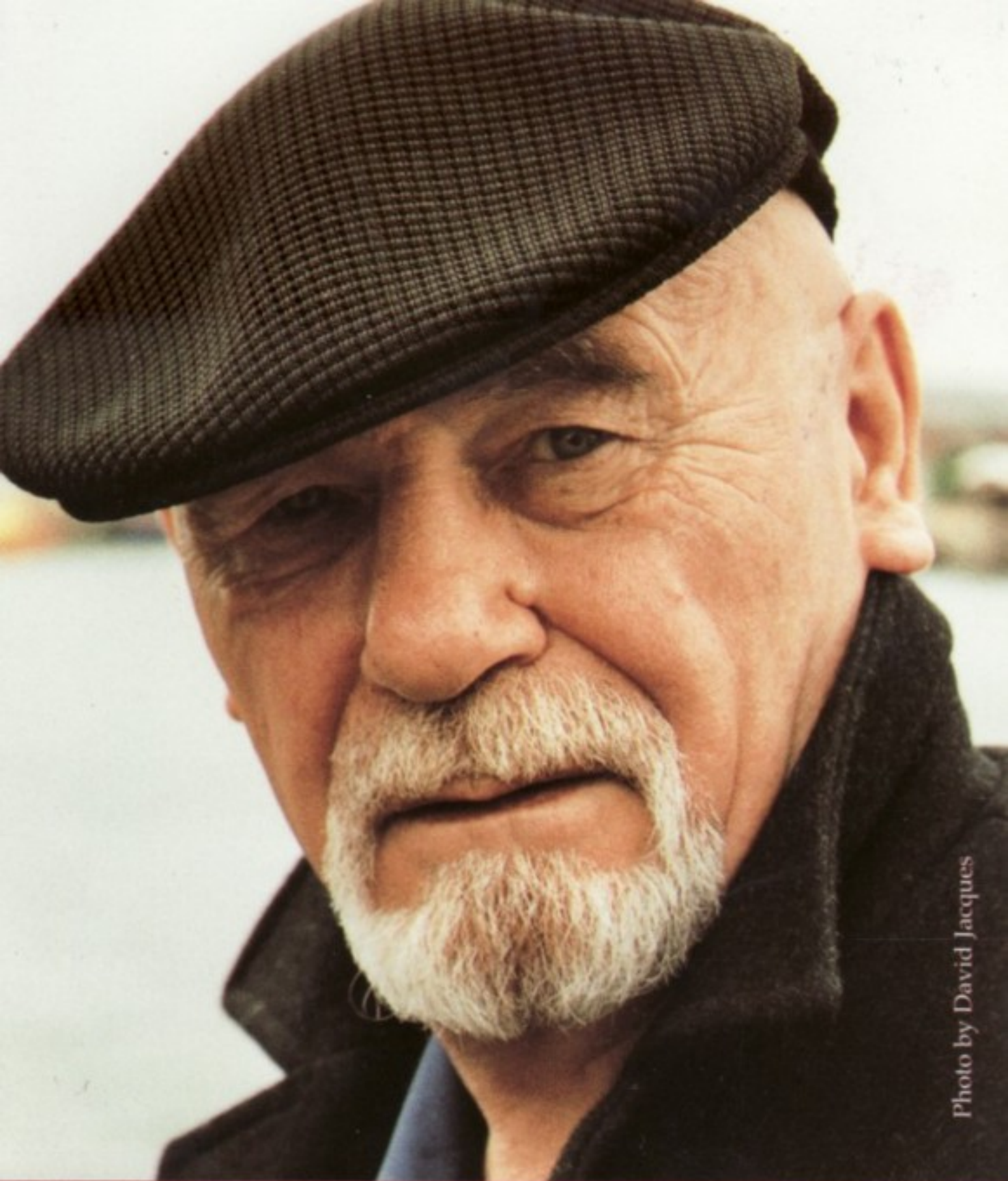


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