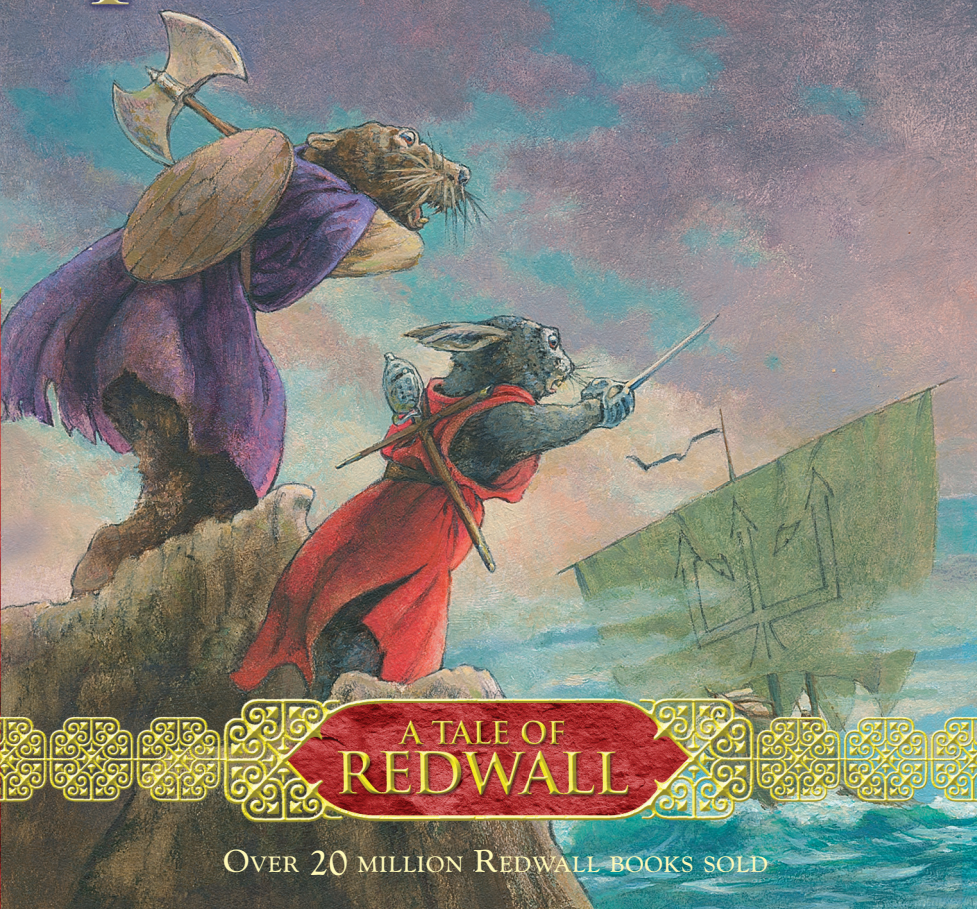




BRIAN JACQUES

THE ROGUE CREW



A TALE OF
REDWALL

OVER 20 MILLION REDWALL BOOKS SOLD

THE ROGUE CREW

A TALE OF REDWALL

Books by Brian Jacques

REDWALL

MOSSFLOWER

MATTIMEO

MARIEL OF REDWALL

SALAMANDASTRON

MARTIN THE WARRIOR

THE BELLMAKER

OUTCAST OF REDWALL

THE PEARLS OF LUTRA

THE LONG PATROL

MARLFOX

THE LEGEND OF LUKE

LORD BROCKTREE

THE TAGGERUNG

TRISS

LOAMHEDGE

RAKKETY TAM

HIGH RHULAIN

EULALIA!

DOOMWYTE

THE SABLE QUEAN

THE ROGUE CREW

BRIAN
JACQUES

THE ROGUE CREW
A TALE OF REDWALL

ILLUSTRATED BY SEAN RUBIN



PUFFIN

PUFFIN BOOKS

UK|USA|Canada|Ireland|Australia
India|New Zealand|South Africa

Puffin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com.

www.penguin.co.uk
www.puffin.co.uk
www.ladybird.co.uk



Penguin
Random House
UK

First published in the USA by Philomel Books,
a division of Penguin Young Readers Group, 2011
Published in Great Britain by Puffin Books 2021

001

Text copyright © The Redwall Abbey Company Ltd, 2011
Illustrations copyright © Sean Rubin, 2011

The moral right of the author and illustrator has been asserted

Designed by Semadar Megged
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

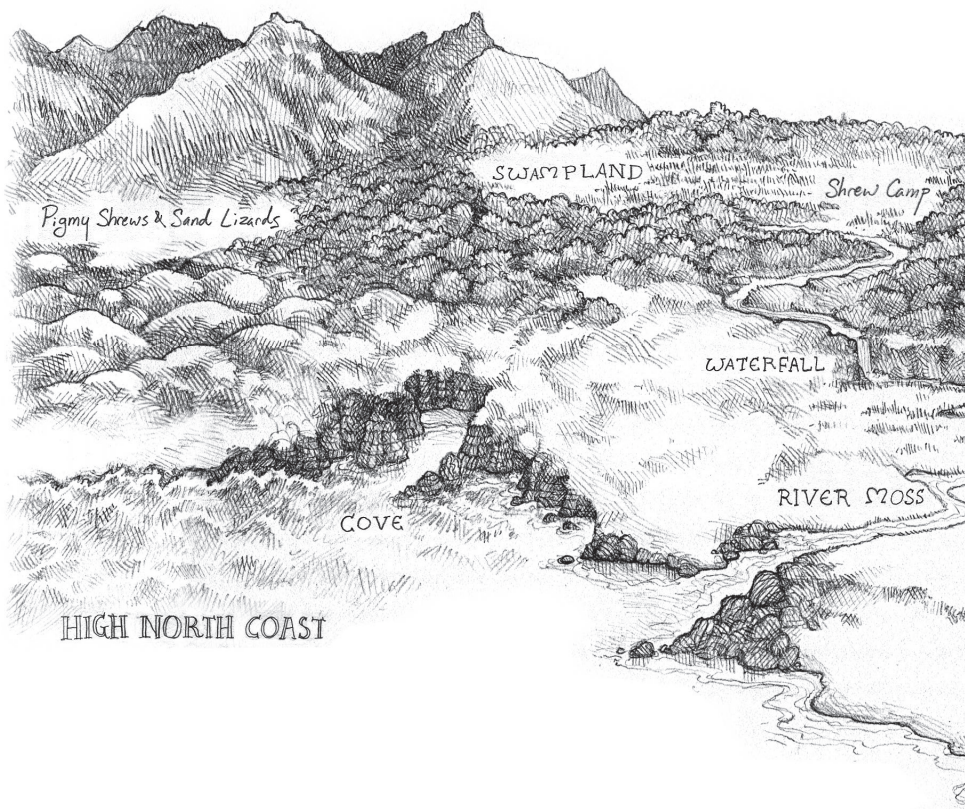
ISBN: 978-0-241-52558-6

All correspondence to:
Puffin Books
Penguin Random House Children's
One Embassy Gardens, 8 Viaduct Gardens, London SW11 7BW



Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

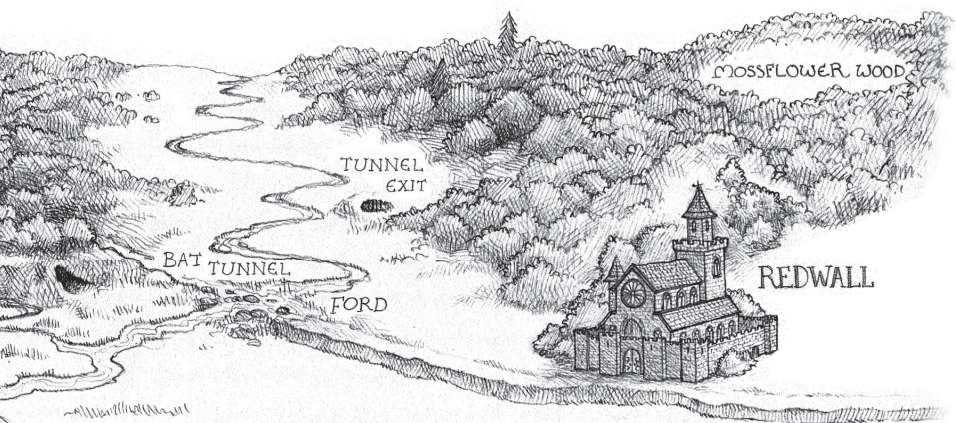
*For Jimmy Jacques,
a great pal who is also
an outstanding brother.*



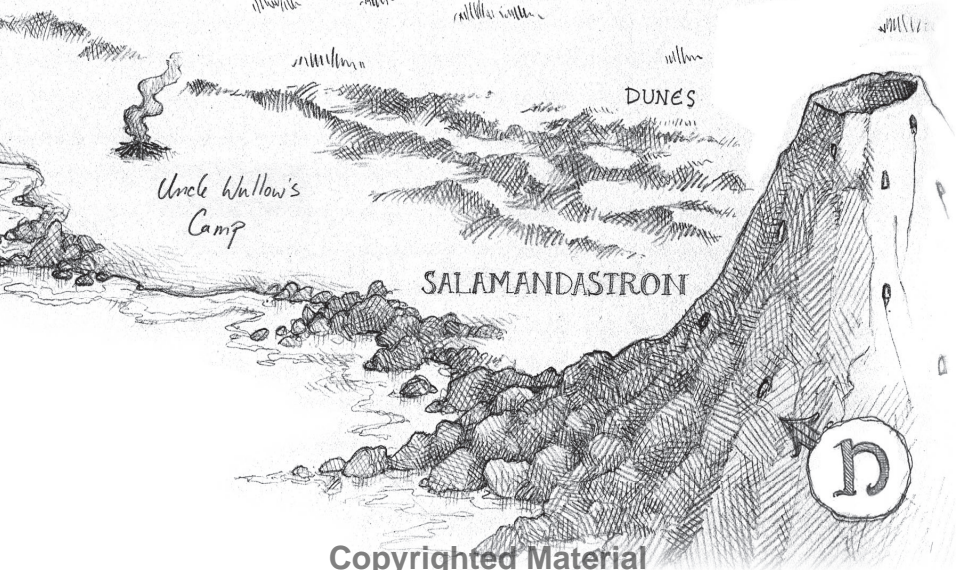
MOSSFLOWER COUNTRY

AND THE
HIGH·NORTH·COAST

DURING THE EVENTS OF THE ROGUE CREW



THE WESTERN PLAINS

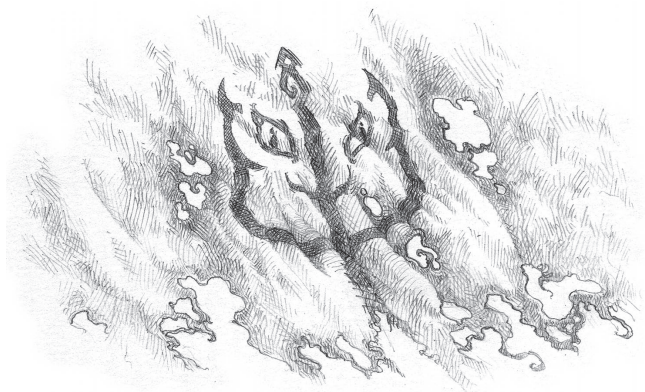


The Land of Dreams, that mystical realm,
where the oddest of visions appear,
come wander through scenes of joyful peace,
or stampede through nightmares of fear.
Dare we open those secret doors,
down dusty paths of mind,
in long-forgotten corners,
what memories we'll find.
Who rules o'er the Kingdom of Night,
where all is not what it seems?
'Tis I, the Weaver of Tales,
for I am the Dreamer of Dreams!

BOOK ONE

A Small Glutton's Dream





1

The face of a Wearat is a sight to instill fear and loathing in any creature. Two narrow eyes, crimson, with small green pupils, a huge, squat head sparsely coated with hair, save for the stiff mane at the back. A short, broad muzzle, with a sheen like polished leather, beneath which yellowed fangs jut in all directions. Truly a beast that should never have been born, an obscure hybrid that cannot be categorised with anybeast.

Some were of the opinion a Wearat was part weasel, part water rat. Nobeast knew. One thing was beyond doubt, however. A Wearat was the embodiment of nightmare, with a vicious nature that knew no bounds. It revelled in blood and death.

One such rare savage was Razzid Wearat, the most barbarous of all seagoing vermin. From his fortress on the Isle of Irgash in the warm southern seas, he emerged like a hurricane of destruction. His ship was the *Greenshroud*, a long, swift galley. From sailtops to hull, the entire vessel was green. It carried a single bank of oars, twoscore port and starboard. Aft of its square-sailed mainmast were

two lateen sails, tall billowing triangles. The mainsail bore the Mark of the Wearat, a trident head, with two evil eyes between the forked prongs. *Greenshroud* was crewed by vermin corsairs spurred on by the promise of plunder.

The season that Razzid struck coasts and settlements both sides of Mossflower Country became known as the Winter of Slaughter. The speed with which Razzid raided helpless creatures was swift and ruthless. He left in his wake the flames of desolation and death, smouldering ruins which made his name a byword for terror.

Razzid's Seer and Soothsayer, the vixen Shekra, cast her shells, bones, feathers and stones, advising him on all his wicked enterprises. It was, therefore, his own fault when he ignored her warning to steer clear of the High North Coast. Defenceless creatures, and easy victories, made the Wearat overconfident—he laughed scornfully.

"The only trouble I have is tryin' to get somebeast that'll stand an' fight me. All I ever see is timid creatures turnin' tail an' runnin' away. Right, Mowlag?"

Greenshroud's first mate, the searat Mowlag, agreed promptly. "Ain't never seen a beast with the guts to stan' an' face ye, Razzid. Yore the terror o' land and sea, sure enough!"

Razzid kicked Shekra's collection of omen givers scornfully. "Hah—mumbo jumbo, shells'n'feathers! Set a course for the High North Coast, Mowlag!"

The decision was Razzid Wearat's greatest mistake, for he met Skor Axehound and his sea otter warriors. Expecting nobeast to stand in his way, Razzid pressed on. Reaching the High North Coast, he made a swift foray inshore, speeded by a blustering, snowy gale at his stern. The corsair crew daubed their faces with war paint, following their captain. Razzid leapt overboard into the rough grey waters, brandishing his trident, with the crew all around him roaring, "A Wearat! A Wearat! Death's on the wiiiiind!"

Sea otters were fighters and not fools. The lookouts of

Skor Axehound had sighted *Greenshroud* as she hove into land. They were waiting in force for him. Carrying thick birchbark shields, armed from tooth to rudder with axes, spears, swords, clubs, slings and bows, they ambushed the would-be raiders. Razzid and his crew were caught waist deep in the sea, facing battle-eager beasts, the Warchief Skor and his Rogue Crew. That day the snow-flecked water of the Northern Sea was dyed crimson with vermin blood. The fury of Skor's otters was so great that the Wearat, and the remnants of his defeated crew, were forced to beat a blundering retreat. Clambering aboard *Greenshroud*, they tried to get underway. But the slingstones, spears and fire arrows of sea otters hammered their vessel.

Greenshroud finally managed to struggle off, with sails and stern gallery ablaze, lines and rigging popping as the fire took hold, and the added handicap of a damaged tiller. Skor and his warriors stood in the shallows, banging weapons on their shields, challenging the invaders to come back and fight, roaring out their victory song.

"Hoolawhey! Hoolawhey!
Hurry to the slaughter.
Hiyaree! Hiyaree!
Meet us in the water.
Come back here, do not fear,
come and grant our wishes.
Join your friends in this sea,
come and feed the fishes.
Hoolawhey! Hoolawhey!
We will meet another day.
Hiyaree! Hiyaree!
Flee, cowards, flee!"

The invitation was all in vain. *Greenshroud* headed off southwest, its vermin corsairs cursing the mothers of all sea otters for bearing such fearsome sons and daughters.

In his frantic efforts to extinguish the blaze which threatened to engulf *Greenshroud*, Razzid Wearat was badly burnt. Shekra had him wrapped in wet canvas; he was carried off screeching with pain and anger. The vixen stayed at his side, having a knowledge of healing. She stopped in the charred cabin to tend his wounds. Rain and snow helped to douse the flames. After a few running repairs, Mowlag took command, steering the vessel southwest, back to more temperate climes. Realising it was a case of stay afloat or sink, the searat mate drove the decimated crew hard, cursing, flogging, and threatening the wretched corsairs. Through endless days and wearisome nights, the damaged craft limped slowly into the far southern seas.

It took a full season until *Greenshroud* came at last to anchor in the bay at Irgash Isle. Vermin waited on the shore to greet their leader—for was not the fearsome Wearat always returning in triumph? However, this time it was different. *Greenshroud*, charred, battered and half crewed, was a chastening sight. The searats and vermin corsairs watched in silence as a party bearing a canvas-covered stretcher waded ashore through the sun-warmed shallows. Shekra had the litter well guarded by a score of heavily armed crewbeasts. There was little need for guessing. Everybeast knew who the hidden figure was by the lethal trident which had been placed on the stretcher. It was their chief, Razzid Wearat. The vixen hastened the group over the sand into the timber stockade, slamming and locking the gates as the onlookers surged forward.

There was plenty to speculate about, but everybeast held their silence. Razzid had his spies—there was always the fear of reprisal for loose talk. However, there had long been a contender for the captainship of *Greenshroud*, Braggio Ironhook. He was a big, brutal ferret, renowned as a killer, with a curved iron hook replacing his left forepaw. Braggio turned to view the damaged ship in the bay, then spoke, his voice loud and bold.

“Well, break out the grog, mates, we got us a broken craft an’ a dead cap’n if’n I’m to believe me eyes, eh!”

An old searat shrugged. “Mebbe Razzid ain’t dead. I saw the canvas move a bit. Wearats don’t die so easy.”

Braggio tripped the speaker as he turned to walk away. “Wot would yew know, ye can’t even stand up proper. I say Razzid’s dead—or leastways, if’n ‘e ain’t, well, ‘e soon will be. Am I right, Crumdun?”

The small, fat stoat who was his constant shadow chuckled. “Yore right there, Bragg. Y’ain’t afeared o’ nobeast!”

The big ferret swaggered amongst the other corsair vermin, letting them see his lethal iron hook. “Youse ‘eard Crumdun. I ain’t afeared o’ nobeast! Of course, if’n there’s anybeast who ain’t afeared o’ me, all ‘e has to do is challenge me by speakin’ up!”

Braggio Ironhook had an enviable reputation as a fierce fighter. The corsairs looked at the ground. There was not one who fancied his chance against the ferret.

Braggio spat scornfully on the sand, watching the crew and some slaves hauling the emaciated *Greenshroud* above the tideline. “Ahoy, Crumdun, let’s go an’ cast an eye over that wreck.”

Inside the stockade, Razzid lay in his private chamber, with Shekra attending him. The vixen had lit a fire in the centre of the floor. She tended the Wearat diligently, smoothing unguents and soothing ointments on his burns. Mowlag stood watching her in the dim light as she poured medicine into Razzid’s unresponsive mouth. It spilled out. The searat mate shook his head. Perhaps his guess had been right—maybe the Wearat didn’t have long to go. He looked very still. Shekra sprinkled powder upon the fire. It began giving off heavy green and yellow smoke. Now she emptied out her pouch onto the floor close to Razzid. Selecting some items from the contents—shells, stones, feathers and bones—she went into a high, croaking dirge.

Mowlag covered his mouth and nostrils, to save having

to breathe the cloying fumes of the smoke. "Well, fox, wot's the strength o' things? Is Razzid gonna live?"

The Seer cast her materials at the Wearat's footpaws, then hurried to and fro. She set the chamber door ajar, then opened a window shutter. In a short time, the chamber was completely clear of the greeny yellow smoke and fumes. Mowlag was not impressed. He repeated the question irately.

"Stow the mumbo jumbo, fox. Just tell me, will 'e live?"

Shekra studied how the omens had fallen. "Oh, yes, Razzid Wearat will live. The omens never lie. See this long shell? That is the *Greenshroud*. Three green feathers landed in it—they are the sails." She picked out a stone from the shell, explaining. "This pebble, it represents him. See how it is pitted and marked, no longer perfect—damaged but still aboard the ship? Nothing is more certain, my friend. Razzid will survive to sail his vessel again!"

Mowlag silenced her with a wave of his paw. "His lips just moved. Does he want water?"

They both leaned close to the bandaged figure as Shekra soaked some moss in water. She held it close to his mouth. He did not drink but spoke quite clearly in a low snarl. "I . . . will . . . live!"

Braggio Ironhook strolled around the beached hulk of *Greenshroud*, assessing it closely. There was a creak from the high stern deck, then the rudder moved fractionally. Braggio called out, "Wot are ye playin' at up there, picklebrain?" Owing to the number of times he had sustained head injuries whilst leading the corsair life, Crumdun was not the brightest of vermin. Popping his head between the after rails, he announced his discovery.

"She's gonna need a new tiller, Braggio!"

Braggio feigned surprise. "Well, now, who'd have thought that?"

The fat stoat seemed pleased with himself as he continued. "On me oath, she is. An' foremast, an' new sails, an' about fifteen oars, an' a whole set o' riggin'. There ain't a

strand o' rope wot didn't get burnt. Good job ye brought me wid ye, eh, Bragg?"

Braggio gestured with his hook.

"Ahoy, pudden'ead, shut yore fat gob an' git down 'ere. I've got a job for ye."

Crumdun wheezed his way down the charred hull. Brushing damp black ash from his greasy vest, he grinned crookedly. "Wot job's dat, mate?"

Braggio leaned close, keeping his voice low. "Go an' round up some slaves for me, but do it nice'n'quiet. Fetch those three ole shrew wives, the ones who are good at fixin' up sailcloth. Aye, an' them vole brothers that builds carts an' such like. . . ."

Crumdun saluted and trundled off, but Braggio yanked him back by the tail. "Don't go roamin' off, mudface. I ain't finished yet. Now, lissen. Y'know those 'ogslaves Razzid uses for ship repairin'?"

The fat stoat nodded eagerly. "That'll be ole Kalstig an' 'is kinbeasts. Shall I fetch them, too?"

Braggio nodded. "Aye, bring 'em all an' make sure they've got their tools with 'em."

Crumdun wrinkled his snout in a secretive smile. "Are ye figgerin' on makin' the ole *Greenshroud* shipshape agin? Are ye, Bragg?"

The hulking ferret touched the tip of his hook to the end of Crumdun's nose, snarling savagely. "Just one word o' this to anybeast on Irgash Isle, ye middenbrained lard bucket, an' ye know wot I'll do to ye?"

"Aye, ye'll stick yore 'ook so far up me nose that it'll come outta me left ear." Crumdun grinned cheerily. Braggio released him.

"Right. Now, get goin', addlebrain!"

Braggio Ironhook had always wanted a ship of his own. The idea of being a sea captain appealed immensely to him. Razzid Wearat would soon be making the voyage to Hell-gates—he wouldn't be needing this charred wreck, so why waste it if it could be made seaworthy again? Sitting down

on the shore, Braggio began marking out in the sand a blueprint. This was the plan for a vessel he had long dreamed of. Many seasons of cunning and ingenuity had gone into the idea. Braggio knew it would work.

The ship was to be named *Ironhook*. It would be invincible, fast and powerful, feared both on deep sea and dry land. He pictured it sailing out of Irgash harbour, with him pacing the foredeck, a master of vermin corsairs, Braggio Ironhook. This island would become his—the day would come when Razzid Wearat would be nought but a dim memory.

Contrary to Braggio's prediction, Razzid Wearat was not dying. It took almost half a season of constant attention from the vixen Shekra before his condition began to improve. Then one morning he called Mowlag to his side. The searat mate knew his master was recovering when Razzid's claws dug sharply into his shoulder. The Wearat hauled himself almost into a sitting position.

"Did ye think I was goin' to Hellgates, Mowlag?"

The mate winced as the claws tightened their grip. "Not me, Cap'n. I knew ye'd live. I'm 'ere t'serve ye—just give the word an' I'll do as ye say!"

Razzid released Mowlag and lay back. "I know you were here night an' day, my friend, but now I want ye to go out an' be seen round the island agin. Put the word about that I'm slowly sinkin' an' won't last out the season. Then report back here t'me every evenin'."

Mowlag nodded. He could see Razzid's right eye peering from a gap in the bandaged face. "Aye, Cap'n. Anythin' special ye wants me t'look for?"

Razzid beckoned to Shekra, who helped him to sip some water. Licking blistered lips, he closed his eyes. "Tell me how that fool Ironhook is progressing with his work on my ship. Make him think you are on his side."

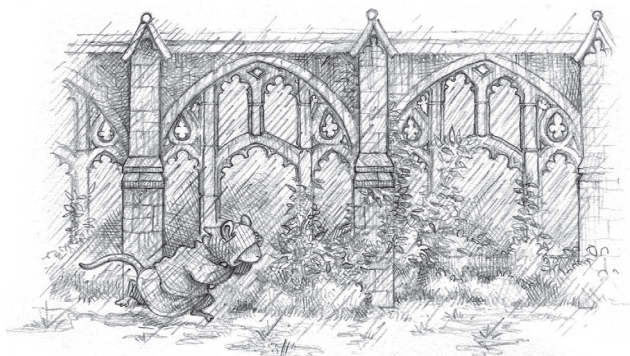
Mowlag rose. "I'll act as if'n Braggio was me own brother."

When Mowlag had gone, Razzid whispered to Shekra, "When will I be fit enough to move about again?"

The vixen bowed respectfully. "Why ask me when you already know, Lord?"

A faint chuckle rose from the bandaged figure.

"I would have slain you for answering falsely."



2

Brisk breezes caused the window shutters to rattle and clatter round old Redwall Abbey. It was a boisterous late spring. With no prior warning, the rain arrived. Workers left their outdoor chores, hurrying to seek warmth and comfort inside the ancient building. Leaning on the sill of his study window, Abbot Thibb watched Sister Fisk hurrying over the rainswept lawns toward the gatehouse. Fisk was the Infirmary Sister, a youngish mouse the same age as Thibb. Her habit flopped wetly about her as she held on to the hood with one paw whilst clutching her satchel in the other. Thibb was popular with the Redwallers, though some thought that the squirrel's lack of seasons was not quite appropriate in an Abbot. This did not bother him. He was normally cheerful and fair in his dealings with everybeast. However, Abbot Thibb was not a squirrel to gladly suffer fools and wrongdoers. He saw Sister Fisk stumble and fall ungracefully.

Thibb struck the sill with a clenched paw, muttering angrily, "Right, Uggo Wiltud. Let's find out what you've got to say for yourself, shall we?"

He ran from the chamber, slamming the door behind him. Taking the stairs two at a time, he descended rapidly

to Great Hall, still muttering under his breath. "A full-sized hefty fruitcake, with marchpane topping as thick as an otter's rudder, and the greedy hog ate all of it!"

A burly otter stepped aside as Thibb hurried by. "Ar-ternoon, Father Abbot, where be ye off to in such 'aste?"

Thibb nodded to old Jum Gurdy, Redwall's Cellardog. "Oh, hello, Jum. Thought I'd take a look in at the gatehouse."

A Dibbun volemaid (Dibbun is the affectionate name for all Abbeybabes) tugged at Thibb's cloak. Little Brinky chuckled with unconcealed glee at the thought of what the Abbot was about. "You goin' ta tell Uggo off? Can I come wiv ya, Farver?"

He patted the Dibbun's head. "No, no. Stop here, Brinky."

The volemaid asked that question which all little ones ask. "Why?"

Thibb's eyes twinkled momentarily, but he kept his voice stern.

"I don't think some of the things I have to say to Master Wiltud would be fitting for a little maid's ears!"

Thibb had to push hard on the door to open it against the blustering wind. The big oaken door closed with a boom which echoed round the vaulted hall.

Wide-eyed, Brinky turned to a molebabe called Murty. "Ho, my jingles, I wouldn't like t'be Uggo when Farver T'ibb has a word wiv him!"

Murty shook his small velvety head, replying in the quaint mole accent. "Boo urr, nor wudd oi, Brinky. They'm sayen Uggo stoled a gurt fruitycake, burr aye, an' 'ee etted it all boi 'isself. 'Ee never give'd uz none, so 'ee'm dissurves a gudd tellen off, so 'ee doo!" At the main gates of Redwall's high outer walls, Thibb wiped rainwater from his eyes, gave a brief knock on the small gatehouse door and entered. Sweeping off his wet cloak, he allowed Dorka Gurdy, the Cellardog's sister, to hang it on a peg.

"Well, how is the young glutton, Dorka?"

The female otter Gatekeeper nodded at the large, overstuffed bed, which occupied almost a third of the little room.

"Ye'd best ask Fisk that, Father Abbot."

Sister Fisk was sitting by the bed, her head enveloped in a towel, scrubbing herself dry. She peeked from beneath its folds. "Oh, 'tis you, Father. Young Wiltud's still sleeping. I thought it best not to wake him just yet." Thibb looked over to the figure. Uggo Wiltud was huddled in the shadows at the far side of the bed.

"I don't know why you're mollycoddling him, Sister. He's brought all of this on his own head, the rascal!"

Dorka Gurdy explained. "Young Uggo's in some kind o' funny dream, Father. Wrigglin' an' jabberin' away, like as if he's afeared of summat. See, there he goes agin."

The young hedgehog began throwing up his paws to protect his face or to blot out some fearsome sight. He started to wail aloud, pleading shrilly, "Oooowwww! No, no, go 'way! Don't take me, please. Yaaaaah!" Uggo pulled the pillows over his face, holding them tight.

Sister Fisk tut-tutted. "Young fool, he'll smother himself."

Reaching over, she snatched the pillows from her patient. Uggo Wiltud sat up with a jerk, his eyes popping open. He was trembling all over, staring straight ahead. Abbot Thibb's stern tone caught his attention.

"So, Master Wiltud, what was all that caterwauling about, eh? Were you being chased by a monster hefty fruitcake?"

Uggo stared at Thibb, as if seeing him for the first time. "It was the ship, a big one, with a green sail!"

Dorka chuckled. "Yore stomach must still be queasy after all that cake you scoffed. Dreamin' ye were at sea, I s'pose."

Uggo's voice trembled as he fought back tears. "I wasn't at sea, marm. I were stannin' on the path outside the Abbey. . . ."

There was a touch of irony in Sister Fisk's tone. "And you saw a ship, a real sailing ship. Coming over the west flatlands, was it?"

The young hog shook his head. "No, Sister. 'Twas comin' along the path, straight at me!"

Abbot Thibb sat down on the edge of the bed. "Was it a real sailing ship chasing you? What did you do?"

Uggo waved his paws in anguish. "I ran, Father, ran for me life, but the ship came after me. I looked back an' I saw the 'orrible beastie leanin' over the side o' the ship, gnashin' 'is teeth at me." Uggo yanked the bedsheet up over his face, howling. "Owwwowowww! It was dreadful, I was so scared, I was—"

The Abbot interrupted him sternly. "You were having a nightmare after gorging on enough hefty fruitcake to feed ten creatures, and this was your reward for the deed, you stupid young rip!"

Uggo took to snuffling and weeping piteously. "Waaahaaah! I'm sorry, Father Abbot, I'll never do it agin, I promise ye, never agin, waaahaaahaaaah!"

Sister Fisk took over then. "Stop this silly blubbering right away, d'you hear me? Now, drink this!"

She held Uggo's snout, forcing him to open his mouth whilst she poured medicine from a beaker into him. "Come on, now, drink it all down. 'Twill ease any tummy aching and help you to get some rest!"

The Abbot took a thick old blanket from the chest at the bottom of the bed. He passed one end to the Infirmary Keeper. "Come on, Sister. I'm sure Dorka can look after him now. I'll have a proper talk with Uggo when he's recovered. Let's go to lunch. We can use this blanket as shelter—sounds like 'tis still raining out there."

After the pair had departed, Dorka sat by the bed watching Uggo. His eyelids were starting to droop as the Sister's potion took effect. The big old otter Gatekeeper spoke softly to him.

"There now, young un. I 'opes ye keep that promise ye made to Father Abbot. You go asleep now like a good lid-dle 'og an' don't dream about monsters an' ships no more. Hush now an' sleep."

It was warm and snug in the little gatehouse. Glowing embers from the log fire in the grate cast gentle rays of red light into the shadows. Dorka sat back in the old armchair, listening to the rain pattering on the window and Uggo's drowsy mutterings as he dropped into a slumber.

"Ship . . . big ship . . . green one . . . green sail, too. . . Aye, green sail, wid a black fork top, an' two eyes marked on it. Won't rob no more cakes. Be a good 'og now. . ."

Dorka Gurdy stood up, alarm bells going off in her head at the symbol Uggo had described on that green sail. A black fork head with two eyes.

A moment later she dashed out into the rain, running for the Abbey building. Her brother Jum Gurdy, the Cellardog, knew what the sign meant. She fervently hoped it was not what she thought.

Razzid Wearat had endured the pain of his injuries, hidden away in his fortress; he suffered for several seasons. The burns to his body would have killed a lesser creature, but not a Wearat. Eventually he regained his old strength and vigour, convalescing whilst he laid cunning plans. Now up and about, he went to an upper loft in his stronghold. Through a hole in the timbered wall, he viewed the refurbishment of his ship. Initially he had looked upon the scheme with scorn, but as time went by, Razzid's opinion changed radically. He came to realise that Braggio Ironhook was not just a loudmouthed bully. The big ferret was a clever and resourceful beast, highly inventive when it came to shipwork. Braggio had nearly all the corsairs behind him. Everybeast believed that the Wearat had died of his injuries some seasons back. That was the way Razzid wanted things—he had his spies to keep him informed.

The Wearat observed with growing wonder as Braggio supervised his slave labourers. Things he had never imagined were happening to his once-battered vessel. This irked Razzid. He began questioning himself. Why hadn't

he thought of that? Why had he never envisaged a ship armed in such manner? How had Braggio thought up all these great modifications?

Razzid knew the answer. Because Braggio was more intelligent than he! The Wearat could not tolerate such a notion, yet he knew it to be true. However, Razzid also knew that the most dangerous creature was a brainy one, a thinker, and one whom others would follow. Hence, the simplest way he could rid himself of the danger was to kill Braggio.

But not right away. When *Greenshroud* was fixed up and seaworthy, that would be the time he would make his move. Meanwhile, it suited his purpose that all the vermin of Irgash Isle believed their Wearat ruler was dead. So Razzid continued to watch and wait and let his spies report back to him.

It was toward the end of winter when the vessel was shipshape and ready for sea. Braggio had selected his crew, promising everybeast a share in the plunder and loot they would be bringing back. Down on the shore that night, festivities were in full swing. Bonfires blazed on the beach, coloured lanterns had been strung amidst the ship's rigging, and there was a general air of celebration about. Slaves rolled casks of grog bearing names which denoted their ferocity. Shark's Tooth, Scorpion Sting and Old Turtlebeak were but a few of the potent brews. Laid out upon the flat rocks was a spread to delight any corsair's heart: lobster, crab, mussels, cockles, clams and a wide variety of fish which inhabited the warm southern seas. Searats and other corsair vermin reeled about in drunken hobjigs to the accompaniment of flutes, drums, fiddles and accordions played by a band of slaves, whom they had "volunteered" for the job.

Braggio Ironhook sat on the long, flat prow, beaming with pleasure as he raised his tankard and bel-lowed, "Drink 'earty, buckoes! Hahaarr, 'ere's to the good ship *Ironhook*! Aye, an' all 'er crew o' rakin's an' scrapin's o'

land an' water. Hahaharr! Beasts after me own 'eart, killers all!"

Crumdun dipped a large clamshell into a cask of Shark's Tooth, his speech slurred with grog. "An' I'll shecond tha', Catping. 'Appy shailin' to ye!"

Drunken vermin raised their drinking vessels, roaring, "Iron'ook! Iron'ook! Waves o' blood an' plenny o' plunder!"

It happened without warning. A heaving line with a sling rigged at its end swished down from the top of the foremast. The figure sitting in the sling swung out with a broad ship's carpenter's hatchet as it sped by, and Braggio Ironhook lost his head. It splashed down into an open grog cask on the shore. The slayer waited as the heaving line swung back, then neatly stepped onto the prow end, kicking the headless ferret aside. Musicians ground to a halt; the drunken revellers froze, still holding up their drinks. Suddenly all that could be heard was the waves washing the sand and the fires crackling.

Mowlag's command cut the silence. "I give ye a toast. To the mighty Razzid Wearat an' his ship *Greenshroud!*"

Vermin corsairs gaped in disbelief. It was Razzid, and he was alive. He had lost both ears, and his head was a mass of shining scar tissue, minus its fur. One of his eyes was slitted, half shut and leaking. But there was no mistaking the brutal face and the barbarous stance. It really was Razzid Wearat. Shekra attended him, passing her master a tankard of grog and his trident. He raised the tankard, his voice hoarse and rasping from a scarred throat. "Well, cullies, aren't ye goin' to take a drink with yore ole cap'n?"

Mowlag and his comrade, a weasel named Jiboree, who was one of Razzid's secret spies, shouted lustily, "Three cheers fer Razzid Wearat, the cap'n wot can't die!"

There was a moment's pause, then the cheering and shouting broke out. More so when Razzid bellowed, "*Greenshroud* sails with the mornin' tide. Who's with me?"

As dawn broke over the southern wavecrests, *Green-shroud* took the breeze, sailing out in fine style with a new crew, a Wearat as captain and the head of Braggio Ironhook impaled on the foremast top. Razzid Wearat was well and truly back in command.



3

It was cold and windy on the shores of the great western sea, near the mighty mountain fortress of Salamandastron. Scudding clouds raced across a full moon, scattering silver light patterns over the vast, heaving waters. A swelling spring tide boomed and hissed, sending foam-crested rollers at the coast. Huge waves were flung forward, dashing and breaking on the tideline. Salamandastron towered over all, a long-extinct volcano, now the rocky stronghold of Badger Lords and Warrior hares of the Long Patrol.

Colour Sergeant Nubbs Miggory leaned on the rough-hewn sill of a high window in the fortress. The old hare wiped moisture from his eyes, seared by the buffeting wind. From his lofty viewpoint, the sergeant commanded a fair view of the night panorama. Long seasons as garrison instructor in unarmed combat had sharpened Nubbs's senses. Catching the slightest of sounds behind him, he identified the approaching creature and spoke quietly.

"That ole wind's a touch nippy t'night, marm. Do I smell mulled nettle ale with a touch o' spice 'ereabouts?"

His visitor, a strikingly regal-looking young badgermaid, placed the steaming tankard close to the sergeant's paw. "My father used to say there was nought like mulled nettle

ale to warm a beast on bleak nights. When I was young, I often stole a sip when he wasn't looking."

The sergeant's craggy features softened. "I recalls h'it well, Milady. But yore pa knew you was suppin' his h'ale, so 'e looked t'other way an' let ye. Steal his h'ale. Hah, you was a real liddle scamp back then, but look at ye now. Lady Violet Wildstripe, ruler o' Salamandastron an' commander of all the Western Shores!"

With her jagged cream muzzlestripe and clouded violet eyes, she looked every inch the noble Badger Lady. Violet smiled. "Happy times, those young seasons. But what of the present, Sergeant—anything to report?"

The tough old veteran paused, as if loath to speak. Then he pointed down to a patch of fireglow on the south shore. "Er . . . beggin' y'pardon, marm, but those four young uns on Seawatch—they should be carryin' out their duties from h'up 'ere, h'inside the fortress, h'instead o' sittin' round a fire down there, toastin' chestnuts h'an singin'. Who gave 'em permission t'do that, I asks meself?"

A note of concern crept into Violet's voice. "It was me, Sergeant. Forgive me—did I do something wrong?"

The colour sergeant took a sip of his mulled ale. "Well, now, h'if 'twas yore order, Milady, then that's that. Beggin' yore pardon, there h'ain't n'more t'be said."

Violet had always held Miggory in the highest regard. Disconcerted, she placed a paw on his shoulder. "My thanks to you for pointing out my error, friend. There are so many rules and traditions for me to learn."

The kindly sergeant patted the paw on his shoulder. "Ho, t'aint nothin', really, Milady. You'll soon learn. Them four rascals sittin' down there took advantage of ye. They're only second-season cadets. Salamandastron standin' h'orders states they've got t'serve four seasons afore they're qualified for nighttime Seawatch h'outdoors."

Violet nodded. "Thank you, Sergeant. Rest assured I'll consult you on all such matters in future."

The old hare shrugged. "No 'arm done, marm. Mebbe 'twill teach those young buckoes h'a lesson. Mark my words, by the time their relief watch arrives at dawn light, those cadets will be sittin' round h'a pile of ashes, chilled t'the scuts an' snifflin' away t'beat the band. That'll teach 'em not to trick ye h'into lettin' 'em disobey h'orders!"

Lady Violet chuckled. "Right you are, Sergeant. Well, I'm off to my nice, warm bed in the forge chamber. What about you?"

Miggory swilled down the last of his mulled nettle ale. "Barrack room dorm for me, marm. Long Patrol snores don't bother me on cold nights like these. Thankee for the ale, an' good night to ye, Milady."

Down on the shores, the four cadets—two bucks and two maids—drew closer to the fire. Trying to ignore the keen, cold breeze on their backs, they put a bold face on things by singing raucously.

"With the stars for me roof an' the shore for me floor,
good chums an' a roarin' hot fire,
down by the seacoast, fine ole chestnuts we'll roast,
ah, what more could us warriors desire!
With no bossy sergeant to come marchin' by,
a-bellowin' orders galore,
whilst keepin' close watch with his cold, beady eye—
Attention, left right, two three four!
We'll sleep all the day whilst the chaps drill away.
Aye, we'll snore just like hogs down a hole,
firm comrades let's stay until our dyin' day,
in the ranks of the great Long Patrol!"

Contending with the boom and hiss of breaking waves, the four young hares sang out lustily, full of the joys of life as only young ones can be. Unaware that they were being watched by evil murderous eyes.

*

Most creatures agree that whenever it is a cold, rainswept day, the best place to be is indoors. One of the Redwallers' favourite retreats is the Abbey cellars, where Jum Gurdy is Head Cellardog. The big, jovial otter never fails to make everybeast welcome. His forge constantly glows, radiating warmth from a fire of old barrel staves and charcoal lumps. Jum's two companions, Roogo Foremole and the Redwall Bellmaster, a squirrel known as Ding Toller, usually preside over the food and fun for all. An old iron battle shield is placed on the fire whilst chestnuts are piled on it to roast. Young and old are given sharpened sticks to retrieve the nuts when they are ready. Once peeled, they are dipped in a basin of cornflower honey. Jum has a fine collection of large clamshells, sent to him by his sea otter cousins. He sits by a barrel of Baggaloob, dispensing shells brimming with the delicious brew (made from a recipe known only to Jum himself).

Many a pleasant day is passed in Jum Gurdy's cellars by the Abbey community playing instruments, singing songs, solving riddles and listening to poems and stories whilst feasting on delicacies and drinking the good Baggaloob. The Foremole plays his melodeon whilst Ding Toller sings out his challenge, to begin the proceedings, thus . . .

“’Tis cold an’ wet outdoors this day,
but we be snug an’ dry.
So now I’ll name a name to ye,
of some goodbeast who’ll try,
to entertain us with a song,
a joke, a poem or dance.
Now, pay attention, one an’ all,
an’ give our friend a chance. . . .”

There was a hushed silence (apart from a few giggles) as Ding's paw circled the audience, suddenly stopping to point at his choice as he called out the name.

“Friar Wopple!”

The furry watervole, who was Redwall's Chief Cook, stood up amidst resounding applause, shuffling her foot-paws shyly. "Dearie me, I ain't much of a singer at all, friends."

Everybeast knew Wopple was a fine singer, who always had to be coaxed. The Dibbuns were the most vocal in their pleas. "Ho goo on, Friar marm, sing us da one 'bout Dibbun Pie!"

Wopple smiled furtively whilst fidgeting with her apron tassels. Then she nodded at Foremole, who played the opening bars as she started singing.

"If any babe won't go to bed,
an' will not take a bath,
an' talks back to his elders,
Oh, that fills me with wrath.
Come right along with me, I say,
don't try to run or fly,
don't pull or tug, you'll soon be snug,
inside a Dibbun Pie!
Dibbun Pie, my oh my,
I won't tell you a lie.
If you ain't good, you surely should
end up as Dibbun Pie!
I covers him with honey 'cos
some Dibbuns do taste sour,
I stuffs a chestnut in his mouth,
then rolls him round in flour,
I shoves him in the oven,
an' sez yore time is nigh,
for with a piecrust o'er yore head,
you'll soon be Dibbun Pie!
Dibbun Pie, my oh my,
no use to weep or cry.
If you ain't good, you surely should
end up as Dibbun Pie!"

The Dibbuns sang the chorus lustily and cheered the Friar loudly, giggling and chortling at the idea of a Dibbun Pie.

Foremole Roogo shook his head with mock severity. "Burr, you'm likkle villyuns, Oi wuddent larf so loud if'n Oi wurr ee, or Froir Wopple'll make ee into pies!"

Brinky the vole Dibbun scoffed at the idea. "Hah! No likkle Dibbuns never got maked into pie!"

Old Fottlink, the ancient mouse who was Recorder to Redwall, interrupted. "That's all you know, young Brinky. I knew a very cheeky Dibbun who was once baked into a Dibbun Pie, so there!"

The little volemaid stared wide-eyed at Fottlink. "Who was it? Was 'e very naughty?"

The Recorder nodded. "Very, very naughty—it was me!"

Brinky mulled over this revelation for a moment, then said, "But if you got eated for bein' naughty, why are you still 'ere?"

Fottlink whispered knowingly, "Because I was very young."

Brinky went into some more deep thought before speaking. "Very, very young an' only a tiny likkle beast?"

The Recorder nodded solemnly. "That's right!"

Murty the molebabe enquired hopefully, "But you'm wasn't naughty again, was you'm, zurr?"

Jum Gurdy chuckled. "Oh, no. Ole Fottlink was a good-beast from that day on. I know, 'cos 'tis true!"

The two Dibbuns stared open-mouthed at the big otter. If Jum said it was true, then it had to be so.

Dorka Gurdy, Jum's sister, entered the cellars. She looked cold and distracted.

"Jum, I've got to talk with ye!"

Jum rose, waving his sister, whom he was tremendously fond of, over to the forge fire. "Dorka, me ole tatercake, come an' sit 'ere. Ding, fetch 'er some 'ot chestnuts an' a drink o' Baggaloob." Taking off his sister's wet cloak, Jum

placed a warm blanket around her shoulders. "Now, wot is it, me ole heart, is ought troublin' ye?"

Dorka leaned close, dropping her voice. "I don't wants t'say it aloud. 'Twould upset these good creatures. Could I speak with ye in private, Jum?"

The big otter gestured to a stack of empty barrels. "Right ye are, sister dear. Come over 'ere."

Once seated behind the barrels, Dorka clasped her brother's huge paw. "D'ye recall young Uggo Wiltud? Stole a hefty fruitcake an' ate the whole thing by hisself?"

Jum managed to hide a smile. "Aye, I think that ole cake must've been nearly as big as liddle Uggo. I know he's a scamp, but I can't 'elp likin' 'is boldness."

Dorka shook her head. "Well, he's sufferin' for it now, but that's not wot I wanted t'talk to ye about. It was Uggo's dream. He told Abbot Thibb that he saw a ship comin' to attack Redwall, a big green craft. Later I 'eard 'im say some-thin' about a design on the ship's sail."

Jum chuckled. "A ship attackin' our Abbey? I think it was really a big cake attackin' Uggo. But why all the fuss, me ole darlin'? 'Twas only a greedy liddle 'og's dream."

Dorka gripped her brother's paw tighter. "Well may ye say, Jum Gurdy, but let me tell ye the design Uggo saw on the ship's sail. 'Twas the prongs of a trident with a pair of evil eyes starin' from the spaces atwixt 'em. You know wot that means. 'Tis the sign o' the Wearat!"

Without either of them knowing, little Brinky had been eavesdropping on the conversation. She skipped to the forge, calling out in a singsong baby chant, "A Wearat, a Wearat, Uggo see'd a Wearat!"

Every Redwaller knew what a Wearat was, though none had ever seen one. *Wearat* was a forbidden word in the Abbey. It was an unmentionable horror, a thing of nightmare. There was a moment's silence, then frightened shouts rang out from everybeast.

"A Wearat? Uggo Wiltud saw a Wearat?"

"Where did he see it—is it in our Abbey?"

“Oh, no, we’ll all be murdered in our beds!”

“Lock the gates, bar the doors, it’s a Wearat!”

Abbot Thibb came hurrying in to see what the alarm was about. “What Wearat? Where?”

Little Brinky was sobbing with fright. Jum came from behind the barrels and swept her up in his paws. “There now, liddle un. There’s nought to fret about.” Raising his voice, he silenced the panicked cries. “Calm ye down now, good-beasts. There ain’t no Wearat at all, so stop all this noise or ye’ll disturb my barrels of October Ale. Nothin’ worse than unseemly shoutin’ for October Ale!”

Abbot Thibb confronted the Cellardog. “Then perhaps you’d best keep your voice down, sir. Mayhaps you might explain this upset to me.”

Dorka curtsied respectfully to Thibb. “’Twas my fault, Father Abbot, but I didn’t know the Dibbun maid was lissenin’. I was tellin’ Jum that after you left my gate’ouse, Uggo was talkin’ in his sleep again, describin’ the marks on the sail of the green ship ‘e saw in ‘is dreams. ‘Twas the sign o’ the Wearat, weren’t it, Jum?”

The big Cellardog caught the warning look in Thibb’s eye, so he chose his words carefully.

“Well, that’s wot Uggo said it was, but who can tell wot an overstuffed liddle ‘og sees in a bad dream, eh?”

Dorka’s observation slipped out before she could think. “But ‘e did describe the sign right, I’m sure of it!”

Jum saw the look of dismay on his sister’s face. Making light of the situation, he smiled, patting her back. “Now you lissen t’me, ole gel—an’ you Redwallers, too. There ain’t no Wearat within twenny sea leagues of ‘ere, nor is there likely t’be. There was only one such beast I ever ‘eard of. Razzid Wearat, the corsair cap’n. I know wot ‘appened to that un, ‘cos when I went t’the coast I saw my ole uncle Wulrow, the sea otter. ‘Twas Wulrow that gave me a gift o’ those fine clamshells wot yore usin’ t’drink from. Any’ow, some seasons ago, Wulrow got news from ‘is kinbeast, Skor Axehound, chieftain o’ the High North Coast. It seems that

Razzid Wearat an' 'is corsair crew came a-raidin'." Jum paused to give a wry chuckle.

"Sorriest day o' that Wearat's life, 'twas. Skor an' them wild sea otters loves battle more'n Uggo loves stolen cakes. They gave those vermin a mighty whackin'. Aye, slew most o' the corsairs an' set their cap'n back out t'sea, with decks awash in gore an' the ship in tatters an' flames. So ye can take my ole uncle Wulow's word, as give to 'im by the Axe-hound hissself. If there ever was a Wearat, well, 'e's lyin' on the seabed now, burnt to a soggy crisp!"

An audible sigh of relief rang through the cellars. Abbot Thibb stowed both paws in his wide sleeves, acknowledging Jum with a slight bow.

"Thank you, Mister Gurdy. Now, who was next to sing us a song—a good jolly one I think, eh?"

Foremole tootled a lively ripple on his melodeon, nodding to a pair of little moles, who immediately began singing and dancing.

"Ho round an' round an' round ee floor,
shutten ee window, close ee door,
moi likkle beauty take ee charnce,
join Oi en ee molebabe darnce!

"Clappen ee paws a-wun, two, three,
twiggle ee tail roight murrily,
moi ole granma carn't do thiz,
a-'cos she'm got ee roomatiz!

"Jump ee h'up naow gurtly 'igh,
watch thy 'ead, doan't bump ee sky,
jumpen 'igher than ee trees,
hurr, wot 'arpy child's uz bee's!

"Jumpen 'igh as trees you'm arsk,
Ho, by urr, a drefful tarsk,

you'm a h'orful silly lump,
doan't you'm know ee trees carn't jump!"

They sang it again and again. Dibbuns joined in the dance, showing off much tail wagging and jumping. Amidst the merriment, mention of Wearats was soon forgotten.

Jum Gurdy edged close to the Abbot, murmuring a message. "Father, can ye tell Foremole Roogo t'keep an eye on my cellars for a few days? I'm off t'the seacoast. That ole uncle Wullow o' mine, he's a rare ole tale teller. I think he makes a lot of 'is stories up, so I'm just goin' t'see if'n wot 'e said about that Wearat was for true."



4

Dawn had scarcely shown its pale light over the western coast when pandemonium broke loose at Salamandastron. A bugle blasting out its brassy alarm set every hare on the mountain dashing to the call. Lady Violet Wildstripe hurried from her forge chamber, joining Colour Sergeant Miggory and Lieutenant Scutram as they rushed downstairs. From dormitory, mess hall, kitchens and barrack room, Long Patrol members charged to the main gate. They parted to make way for the Badger Lady and her officers.

A bewhiskered and monocled Major Felton Fforbes was waving his swagger stick, rapping out orders. "All ranks back off now, quick as y'like, wot! Come on, chaps, give 'em room t'jolly well breathe, if y'please!"

Two young hare cadets, Lancejack Sage and Trug Bawdsley, who formed half of the Seawatch dawn relief, were sitting slumped against a gatepost. Both were obviously in shock, shivering and moaning incoherently.

The colour sergeant twitched his ears enquiringly. "Nah, then, wot's goin' h'on 'ere, buckoes?"

Lady Violet came forward, sweeping off her warm cloak. She draped it about both the hares. Then, crouching down in front of them, she enquired in a calm low voice, "One

thing at a time, young uns—easy does it now, take your time, try to speak slowly and clearly. Sage, make your report. What’s upset you so?”

Lancejack Sage, normally an ebullient haremaid, stared blankly into space. She spoke in a flat, halting, monotone. “We went straight out t’the south beach, to relieve the night Seawatch. I came back straight away with Trug. We left Ferrul an’ Wilbee with ’em. Not proper form, y’see, marm, leavin’ ’em alone like that. . . .”

Violet took the haremaid’s face in both paws, staring into her dazed eyes. “Left Ferrul and Wilbee with whom? Tell me.”

Sage’s companion, Trug Bawdsley, a hefty young buck, could no longer restrain himself. He shouted aloud, “Saw them in the mess yesterday, had tea with ’em. Now all four o’ the poorbeasts are dead! Gilbee, Dobbs, Dunwiddy an’ my sister Trey. They’re dead, I tell ye!” Here the sturdy fellow broke down, sobbing uncontrollably.

Nobeast was swifter than the Badger Lady. Seizing a lance from a wall rack, she swung into action. “Sergeant Miggory, Lieutenant Scutram, bring a score of armed warriors and follow me! Major Felton, see these two are cared for. Fortify the gate and shutter all windows!”

It was a sad and shocking scene on the sands of the south shore. Four young hare cadets, the night Seawatch, lying mangled and pierced by arrows amidst the cold ashes of their fire. Ferrul and Wilbee, whom the lancejack had ordered to stay, were staring hypnotised at the ghastly tableau. Running in Lady Violet’s wake, Scutram and Miggory halted the rest at the badger’s command.

“Hold fast there until I can see what went on. Do you have a tracker with you, Sergeant?”

Miggory waved his paw at a lean haremaid. “Buff, go with ’er Ladyship, see wot ye can find.”

Buff Redspore wore the tan-hued tunic of an expert scout and tracker. She walked with Violet to where the four slain