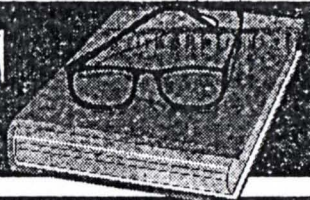


THE BOOK REPORT



Mythic proportions

Brian Jacques hits one over the Redwall with 'Legend of Luke'

By MICHAEL GILTZ

Long before the Harry Potter books became best-sellers, there was the immensely successful Redwall series.

Since 1986, burly Liverpool native Brian Jacques has been spinning his tales of Redwall, a medieval world where woodland creatures like mice and rabbits and moles live together, fight off attacks from evil foxes and rats, and use any excuse to break into a song and stage elaborate feasts.

His latest — "The Legend of Luke" — is a rip-roaring adventure of pirates and derring-do. And this 12th

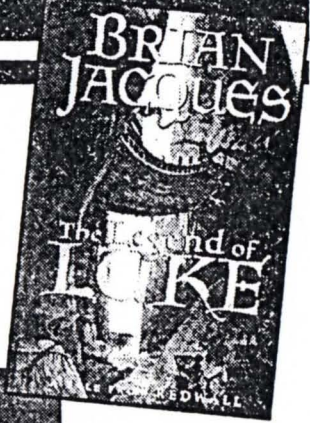
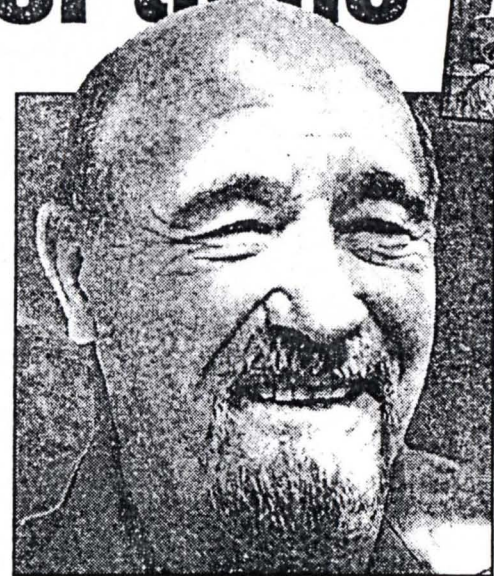
installment in the series is bound to add to Jacques' popularity. Already he hosts his own radio show; has a Web site, created by a young fan (www.redwall.org), that gets about 2 million hits a year, and counts Prime Minister Tony Blair and his family among his fans. There's even an animated "Redwall" TV show — a 13-part series that will probably be picked up by PBS — and a movie is in the works.

Published in 19 countries and in 16 languages, the "Redwall" books are an international phenomenon. Here, the last two entries

hit the best-seller lists.

Since Jacques turns out the books like clockwork, it's become an annual tradition for him to tour the States for about six weeks every winter. It's something the 60-year-old writer takes pleasure in.

This creator of a mythical world says it's the United States he finds most magical. "When I was a kid during the back end of the war — when everything was devastation and hunger and rationing in our country — the only magic place you could go to was the cinema," Jacques recently told The Post. "There you saw this



"Everything can't be singing teapots, can it?" jokes Brian Jacques of his sometimes violent children's books.

teacher once caned him in school for turning in a short story that was considered too good. The teacher was convinced the boy must have plagiarized it.

Jacques later dropped out of school at 15, joined the merchant marines, then headed back to land where he worked on the docks, drove a bus, sang in a folk group, did stand-up comedy, boxed, even read stories aloud to children at the Royal School for the Blind.

Unhappy with the books that were available then, Jacques penned his own. A

wonder of a place called America where everybody had big cars and iceboxes and swimming pools." In the hardscrabble time

of his youth, even imagination was rationed out. "I was never encouraged in anything," claims Jacques, who says a

friend took his first novel and — without Jacques' knowledge — showed it to a publisher. The Redwall series was off and running.

Though good always triumphs over evil in Redwall, the dangers are real and the violence that flares up has consequences. In "The Legend of Luke," for example, one major character's wife is killed, there's a slaughter of innocent people, and good creatures defend themselves by ambushing a group of pirates and killing the lot of them. "Everything can't be singing teapots, can it?" jokes Jacques.

Nor can everything be Redwall. "I love Redwall and the publishers and kids want more Redwall. So I said I'll write one Redwall a year, but I want to do other books, too." And the upcoming "Castaways of The Flying Dutchman!" will mark his first non-Redwall novel.

"I wrote it last year and I wrote it indoors, actually," says Jacques, who's famous for spending each summer in his backyard, working on the next Redwall book. "I'm very, very pleased with it."

Judging from the reception accorded his Redwall books, "Dutchman" may sail right to the top of the best-seller lists.