

AI-Generated Graded Readers

Masaru Uchida, Gifu University

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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Anonymous, *The Song of Roland* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

[The original work is an epic poem, but this Simplified Edition tells the story in prose.]

Part 1

For seven long years the great king Charlemagne had fought in the land of Spain. His armies had crossed mountains and rivers. They had taken cities, broken castles, and conquered wide fields and valleys. One after another the strong places of the land had fallen before the power of the Franks.

Now almost the whole country lay under Charlemagne's rule. Only one great city still stood against him.

That city was Saragossa.

Saragossa stood high among the mountains. Strong walls protected it, and its towers rose proudly above the rocky ground. Inside the city ruled King Marsile, a Saracen king who feared neither Charlemagne nor the Christian God.

Yet Marsile was troubled.

One day he sat in a cool garden inside the city. The sun shone softly through the leaves of the trees. Around him stood many of his nobles—counts, dukes, and knights. Thousands of warriors waited in silence, watching their king.

Marsile sat upon a throne of bright stone. His face was dark with worry.

At last he spoke.

“My lords,” said Marsile, “listen carefully. Charlemagne, the great king of the Franks, has come into our land. He has destroyed our cities and defeated our armies. I do not have the strength to fight him in open battle.”

The nobles looked at one another but did not answer.

Marsile continued, his voice uneasy.

“If we fight him again, we may lose everything. Tell me what we must do. How can we escape this danger?”

For a moment no one spoke.

Then one man stepped forward.

His name was Blancandrin.

Blancandrin was known among the Saracens as a clever and thoughtful man. He was brave in battle, but he was also skilled in words and plans. Many times his advice had saved his king from danger.

Blancandrin bowed before Marsile.

“My lord,” he said calmly, “do not fear Charlemagne too greatly. There is a way to end this war without another battle.”

The king leaned forward.

“Speak,” Marsile said. “Tell us your plan.”

Blancandrin began to explain.

“Send messengers to Charlemagne,” he said. “Tell him that you wish for peace. Promise him great gifts—gold, silver, horses, camels, and many other treasures. Tell him you will become his friend and ally.”

The nobles listened closely.

Blancandrin continued, speaking slowly so that every word would be clear.

“Say that you will come to France and accept the Christian faith. Say that you will become Charlemagne’s man and obey him as your lord.”

Some of the nobles nodded as they listened.

“Send hostages,” Blancandrin added. “Send the sons of our great families, so Charlemagne will believe your promise.”

Marsile’s eyes narrowed.

“And then?” he asked.

Blancandrin smiled slightly.

“Charlemagne has fought in Spain for many years,” he said. “His soldiers are tired. If he believes your promise, he will return to France. His army will cross the mountains and leave our land.”

The nobles began to understand.

Blancandrin lowered his voice.

“When the Franks are far away,” he said, “we will break our promise. We will

keep Spain. Charlemagne will be gone, and the war will end.”

For a moment the garden was silent.

Then several nobles began to speak at once.

“Yes,” one said.

“It is a wise plan,” said another.

“Better this than another war.”

Marsile thought for a long time.

At last he nodded slowly.

“Very well,” he said. “We will try this plan.”

He called several of his greatest nobles to him. Ten men were chosen to carry the message to Charlemagne.

Each of them was proud and richly dressed. Their horses were strong and beautiful. In their hands they would carry branches of olive wood—the sign of peace.

Marsile spoke to them before they left.

“Go to Charlemagne,” he said. “Tell him that I wish to make peace with him. Tell him that I will accept the Christian faith and become his faithful ally.”

The messengers bowed.

“We will carry your words, my lord,” they said.

Soon they were ready to leave.

They mounted white mules given by the king. The animals were richly decorated with golden bridles and silver saddles. In their hands the messengers carried olive branches to show that they came in peace.

Then they rode out of Saragossa.

Across the valleys and hills they traveled until they reached the camp of Charlemagne.

The emperor of the Franks was resting outside the city of Cordres, which his army had recently captured. Its walls had been broken by his great war machines, and the city now belonged to him.

In the wide fields near the ruined city the Frankish army rested.

Many knights sat together on white carpets spread across the grass. Some

played games to pass the time. Others spoke quietly with friends.

Beneath a tall pine tree sat Charlemagne himself.

The emperor was an old man, but he still looked strong and noble. His long beard was white like snow. His crown shone in the sunlight. His eyes were calm but powerful.

Anyone who saw him knew at once that he was the ruler of the Franks.

Around him stood many of his greatest knights.

Roland, his brave nephew, was there.

Oliver, Roland's wise companion, stood nearby.

Also present were Duke Naimes, Archbishop Turpin, and many other noble warriors of France.

The Saracen messengers approached slowly.

When they reached the emperor's camp, they dismounted from their mules and walked forward respectfully.

Then Blancandrin stepped ahead of the others.

He bowed deeply before Charlemagne.

"May the great God protect you," Blancandrin said politely.

Charlemagne looked at the messenger but did not speak at once. He was known for thinking carefully before answering any question.

Blancandrin continued.

"My lord, King Marsile sends you greetings. He wishes to make peace with you. He offers you many gifts—gold, silver, animals, and treasure beyond counting."

The knights of France listened closely.

Blancandrin raised his voice so all could hear.

"Marsile says that you have fought long enough in Spain. Return now to your own land. Go back to your great palace in Aix."

The messenger paused.

"When you return to France," he continued, "Marsile himself will come there. He will accept the Christian faith and become your loyal vassal."

The Frankish knights murmured softly among themselves.

Charlemagne lowered his head and thought deeply.

The message sounded peaceful and generous. Yet Marsile had been his enemy for many years.

Could such a man truly be trusted?

The emperor remained silent for a long time.

At last he raised his head and spoke.

“Your words are fair,” Charlemagne said slowly. “But King Marsile has long been my enemy. How can I know that he speaks the truth?”

Blancandrin answered quickly.

“My lord, Marsile will send hostages to prove his promise. Many noble sons will come with us. They will remain with you until Marsile arrives in France.”

The emperor looked at the messenger carefully.

Then he said quietly, “If Marsile truly wishes to save his soul, perhaps peace is possible.”

Evening was coming.

The sun began to sink behind the hills, and the sky turned gold and red.

Charlemagne ordered that the messengers be given food and a place to rest for the night. A large tent was prepared for them in the orchard near the camp.

Servants brought them bread, meat, and wine.

Guards stood nearby to watch them.

When darkness fell, the camp of the Franks grew quiet.

But Charlemagne still had a great decision to make.

The next morning he would call his council.

Together with his barons he would decide whether to trust King Marsile—or continue the war in Spain.

Part 2

Morning came slowly over the Frankish camp. The sky grew pale above the mountains, and the cool air of dawn moved across the fields where Charlemagne’s army rested.

As was his custom, the emperor rose early.

First he attended matins and mass. Priests sang the holy prayers while the knights stood quietly nearby. After the service Charlemagne walked out into the orchard where the great pine tree stood.

Beneath that tree he sat upon his golden chair.

His beard shone white in the morning light. Though he was very old, his face still showed the strength of a great ruler. Around him gathered the barons of France.

Charlemagne had called a council.

Among those who came were Duke Naimés, wise and careful in judgment. Archbishop Turpin stood there also, both priest and warrior. Many other noble lords gathered around the emperor.

Roland came as well.

Tall, proud, and fearless, he stood near his uncle the king. At his side stood Oliver, his closest friend, whose wisdom often balanced Roland's courage.

Last among the nobles came Count Ganelon.

Ganelon was Roland's stepfather. Though he was a powerful lord, there had long been bitterness between the two men.

When all were seated, Charlemagne spoke.

"My lords," said the emperor, "King Marsile has sent messengers to us. They bring many promises and gifts. Marsile says he wishes for peace."

The knights listened carefully.

Charlemagne continued.

"He offers gold, silver, animals, and great treasure. He says he will follow us to France and accept the Christian faith. He promises to become my vassal."

The emperor paused.

"But Marsile has long been our enemy. I do not know if his words are true."

He looked around the circle of his barons.

"Tell me what we should do."

For a moment no one spoke.

Then Roland suddenly rose to his feet.

His voice was strong and clear.

“My lord,” Roland said, “do not trust Marsile.”

All eyes turned toward him.

Roland continued.

“Seven years ago, when we first came into Spain, Marsile sent you the same kind of message. He promised peace and friendship then as well.”

Roland’s voice grew harder.

“You trusted him and sent two noble counts to him—Basan and Basilie. Marsile betrayed them. He cut off their heads.”

A low murmur passed through the knights.

Roland looked directly at Charlemagne.

“Marsile is a traitor,” he said. “We should not listen to his lies again. We must continue the war.”

Many knights nodded in agreement.

Roland spoke with fierce energy.

“Let us march to Saragossa. Let us destroy the city and punish Marsile for his treachery. Even if we must remain here all our lives, we should not stop until the enemy is defeated.”

When Roland finished, he sat down again.

For a moment the council was silent.

Then another knight rose.

It was Count Ganelon.

Ganelon stepped forward proudly and spoke in a calm voice.

“My lord,” he said to Charlemagne, “do not listen only to the words of Roland.”

Some of the knights watched him carefully.

“Marsile now asks for mercy,” Ganelon continued. “He offers tribute and promises obedience. If he truly wishes to become a Christian and your vassal, why should we refuse peace?”

Ganelon turned slightly toward the other barons.

“We have fought in Spain for many years,” he said. “Our soldiers are tired. Our people at home long to see us return.”

He raised his hand.

“If Marsile sends hostages and swears loyalty, we should accept his offer. Let this war end.”

Several barons began to speak in agreement.

Duke Naimés then stood up.

Naimés was known as one of the wisest men in Charlemagne’s court.

“My lord,” he said respectfully, “Ganelon speaks with reason. Marsile has been defeated many times. His castles have fallen, and his armies have been broken.”

Naimés looked around the council.

“If he now asks for mercy, perhaps it is time to grant it. Let him send hostages. If he breaks his promise later, we can return and punish him then.”

Many of the barons nodded.

The emperor listened carefully to every word.

At last he spoke again.

“If we accept Marsile’s offer,” Charlemagne said, “we must send a messenger to him with our answer.”

He looked around the council.

“Which of you will go to Saragossa and carry my message?”

Duke Naimés immediately stepped forward.

“My lord,” he said, “I will go.”

But Charlemagne shook his head.

“No,” the emperor said. “You are too valuable to risk.”

Roland then spoke.

“I will go, my lord,” he said.

Oliver stood beside him.

“If Roland does not go,” Oliver said calmly, “I will go.”

But again the emperor refused.

“Neither of you shall go,” Charlemagne said firmly. “You are among my greatest knights.”

The council fell silent again.

Then Roland suddenly spoke once more.

His voice was clear and strong.

“If a messenger must go,” he said, “let Ganelon go.”

At those words every knight in the council turned toward Ganelon.

Some murmured quietly.

Ganelon’s face darkened with anger.

Slowly he rose to his feet.

“Roland,” he said coldly, “why do you choose me for this mission?”

Roland answered calmly.

“Because you are wise,” he said. “And because you are my stepfather. No one could represent the emperor better.”

But Ganelon understood the danger.

Many messengers sent to enemy kings never returned alive.

His anger grew.

“You have done this out of hatred,” Ganelon said. “You wish to send me to my death.”

Roland laughed lightly.

“If the king wishes, I will go instead,” he replied.

But Ganelon’s pride would not allow him to refuse.

He turned toward Charlemagne.

“My lord,” he said, “I will carry your message.”

Yet his eyes burned with anger as he looked at Roland.

“But if I return alive,” Ganelon said quietly, “Roland will pay for this insult.”

The emperor watched the two men carefully.

Then he spoke.

“Ganelon, you will go to King Marsile,” Charlemagne said. “Carry my answer to him.”

The emperor took a glove from his hand and held it out.

“Take this glove as the sign of your mission.”

Ganelon stepped forward to receive it.

But as he reached for the glove, it slipped from his hand and fell to the ground.

A murmur spread through the knights.

In those days such an accident was often seen as a bad sign.

Several barons looked at one another with troubled faces.

Ganelon quickly picked up the glove.

“You will hear news from me soon,” he said coldly.

Soon afterward he prepared for the journey.

Rich armor was brought for him. His horse was saddled, and his sword hung at his side.

Many knights came to say farewell.

Some spoke kindly to him.

“You have served the emperor well for many years,” they said. “Return safely to us.”

Ganelon answered politely.

But inside his heart another thought was growing.

His anger toward Roland had become deep and dangerous.

As he mounted his horse and rode away from the camp, Ganelon began to think of revenge.

And that revenge would soon bring terrible disaster upon the army of France.

Part 3

Count Ganelon rode away from the camp of Charlemagne with a dark heart. His horse moved slowly down the long road that led toward Saragossa. Behind him the banners of the Frankish army grew smaller and smaller.

Around him rode the Saracen messengers who had come from King Marsile.

Among them was Blancandrin, the clever noble who had first spoken before Charlemagne.

For a while the men rode in silence.

The road crossed wide valleys and rough hills. The air was warm, and the dust of the path rose beneath the horses' feet.

At last Blancandrin spoke.

“Count Ganelon,” he said politely, “Charlemagne is a powerful king.”

Ganelon glanced toward him but did not answer.

Blancandrin continued.

“He has conquered many lands. He has defeated many kings. Even now the whole country of Spain trembles before him.”

Ganelon nodded slightly.

“Yes,” he said. “Charlemagne is a great ruler.”

Blancandrin watched him carefully.

“Yet,” he added slowly, “even great kings may suffer trouble because of the pride of their followers.”

Ganelon turned his head.

“What do you mean?” he asked.

Blancandrin shrugged gently.

“Sometimes,” he said, “a powerful lord may have knights who push him into danger. They urge him to continue war when peace would be wiser.”

Ganelon understood the meaning of these words.

Blancandrin was testing him.

Ganelon looked ahead for a moment before answering.

Then he said quietly, “There is one knight in Charlemagne’s army whose pride is greater than that of any other.”

Blancandrin leaned closer.

“Who is that knight?” he asked.

Ganelon’s voice grew cold.

“Roland.”

Blancandrin listened carefully.

“Roland is brave,” Ganelon continued, “but he is proud and reckless. Because of him this war has continued for years.”

Blancandrin nodded slowly.

“Many men speak of Roland,” he said. “They say he is the strongest knight among the Franks.”

Ganelon’s eyes flashed.

“Yes,” he said. “The Franks love him. Charlemagne trusts him more than any

other man.”

Blancandrin spoke quietly.

“Such a man could cause great trouble.”

Ganelon looked at him sharply.

For a moment neither man spoke.

Then Ganelon said slowly, “If Roland were dead, the war would soon end.”

Blancandrin’s eyes brightened.

“You speak boldly,” he said.

Ganelon lowered his voice.

“Roland is my enemy,” he said. “He chose me to carry this dangerous message. He hoped that I would die in Saragossa.”

Blancandrin understood at once.

“You wish for revenge,” he said.

Ganelon did not deny it.

“Yes,” he answered.

The two men rode together beneath the shade of tall trees.

Blancandrin thought carefully.

At last he spoke again.

“If Roland were separated from the main army,” he said slowly, “it might be possible to destroy him.”

Ganelon looked at him.

“How?” he asked.

Blancandrin replied, “When Charlemagne returns to France, his army must cross the mountains through a narrow pass.”

Ganelon nodded.

“The rear of the army will be protected by a guard,” Blancandrin continued. “If Roland commands that guard, he will be far from the emperor and the main army.”

Ganelon understood the plan immediately.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “Roland would accept that position gladly.”

Blancandrin smiled.

“Then King Marsile could send a great army to attack the rear guard.”

Ganelon's face hardened.

"Roland would fight," he said.

"Yes," Blancandrin answered, "but he would be greatly outnumbered."

The two men looked at one another.

At that moment they both knew what they were planning.

"Roland would die," Ganelon said quietly.

Blancandrin nodded.

"And Charlemagne's army would be too far away to help him."

The plan of treachery had begun.

The two men rode on together across the plains and valleys until at last they reached the high cliffs near Saragossa.

The great city stood proudly among the mountains.

Inside the city King Marsile waited for news.

In the royal garden the king sat beneath a tall pine tree. Around him stood many Saracen nobles. Thousands of warriors filled the open space, waiting to hear what the messengers would report.

When Blancandrin and Ganelon arrived, they were led before the king.

Blancandrin spoke first.

"My lord," he said, bowing deeply, "we have returned from Charlemagne."

Marsile leaned forward.

"Speak," he said. "What answer does the emperor give?"

Blancandrin gestured toward Ganelon.

"This noble count brings the message."

All eyes turned toward the Frankish knight.

Ganelon stepped forward proudly.

"King Marsile," he said, "I bring the words of Charlemagne."

Marsile watched him closely.

Ganelon continued.

"Charlemagne commands that you accept the Christian faith and become his vassal. If you refuse, he will return with his army and destroy Saragossa."

The king's face darkened with anger.

He seized a spear from beside his throne and lifted it as if he might strike Ganelon.

Several nobles quickly stepped forward to stop him.

“My lord,” they said, “listen to the rest of the message first.”

Marsile slowly lowered the spear.

“Continue,” he said coldly.

Ganelon spoke calmly.

“If you agree to Charlemagne’s demands, he will return to France. You may keep part of Spain as his vassal.”

The Saracen nobles whispered among themselves.

Marsile looked carefully at Ganelon.

“And what do you advise?” the king asked.

Ganelon stepped closer and spoke quietly so that only Marsile and a few nobles could hear him.

“You should pretend to accept Charlemagne’s terms,” he said.

Marsile watched him with growing interest.

“Send him gifts,” Ganelon continued. “Send hostages as proof of your promise. When he believes you, he will leave Spain and begin the journey back to France.”

Marsile nodded slowly.

“And then?” he asked.

Ganelon’s voice became cold.

“Then attack his army as it crosses the mountains.”

The king leaned forward eagerly.

“Where should we strike?” he asked.

Ganelon answered at once.

“At the rear guard.”

Marsile’s eyes flashed.

“Who will command it?”

Ganelon smiled slightly.

“Roland.”

At that name several Saracen nobles laughed.

Roland was famous even among the enemies of the Franks.

Marsile spoke again.

“If Roland dies,” he said, “Charlemagne will lose his strongest knight.”

“Yes,” Ganelon replied. “And the pride of the Franks will be broken.”

The king rose from his throne.

He walked toward Ganelon and placed a hand on his shoulder.

“You are a wise man,” Marsile said.

The treachery was now complete.

Before the council ended, Marsile swore an oath to attack Roland in the mountain pass.

And Ganelon swore to help him.

That oath would soon lead to one of the greatest tragedies in the history of the Franks.

Part 4

When the secret council ended, King Marsile ordered rich gifts to be brought for Count Ganelon. Servants carried forward fine cloaks, shining helmets, gold coins, and beautiful jewels. Marsile wished to show his gratitude for the Frankish count’s help.

But Ganelon stood calmly and said, “My lord, I do not need these gifts now. What matters is that our plan succeeds.”

Marsile smiled.

“You shall have wealth enough later,” the king replied. “If Roland dies, Spain will be free from the power of Charlemagne.”

Then Marsile called his nobles together again.

“We must prepare carefully,” he said. “Charlemagne will soon begin his journey back to France. When his army enters the mountains, we must be ready to strike.”

Many Saracen lords stepped forward eagerly.

One of them was Marsile’s nephew, a proud young warrior named Aelroth.

“My lord,” said Aelroth, “give me the honor of striking the first blow. I will ride against Roland myself. With my lance I will kill him and bring glory to Spain.”

Other nobles also offered their service.

“Let me ride beside him,” said Falfarun, Marsile’s own brother.

“And I as well,” cried another lord. “Roland’s pride has long troubled the world.”

Soon many warriors had promised to fight in the coming battle.

Marsile listened to them all and nodded with satisfaction.

“Good,” he said. “Gather your armies. When the time comes, we will ride to the mountain pass called Roncevaux.”

The nobles bowed.

“Roland will not escape us,” they promised.

Meanwhile Ganelon prepared to leave Saragossa.

Marsile placed an arm around his shoulders.

“Remember,” the king said quietly, “you must persuade Charlemagne to place Roland in the rear guard.”

“Do not fear,” Ganelon answered. “I know Roland well. He is proud and brave. He will gladly accept that position.”

Marsile smiled again.

“Then our victory is certain.”

The king gave Ganelon a fine sword and many treasures for his wife and family. These gifts would show that the Saracens honored him as their friend.

At last the time came for Ganelon to depart.

He mounted his horse and rode away from Saragossa.

Behind him the Saracen city prepared quietly for war.

Thousands of soldiers sharpened their weapons. Armor was polished until it shone brightly in the sun. Horses were fed and made ready for battle.

All waited for the moment when Roland and his companions would enter the mountain pass.

Several days later Ganelon returned to Charlemagne’s camp.

The emperor and his knights were gathered in the open field.

Trumpets sounded when the count arrived, and the barons came forward to hear

his news.

Charlemagne himself sat beneath his great tent.

Roland, Oliver, Archbishop Turpin, and many other knights stood nearby.

Ganelon dismounted and bowed before the emperor.

“My lord,” he said, “I bring the keys of Saragossa and many gifts from King Marsile.”

Servants carried forward chests of treasure—gold, silver, and rich cloth.

Ganelon continued speaking.

“Marsile promises to follow you to France within a month. There he will accept the Christian faith and become your faithful vassal.”

The knights murmured with surprise and satisfaction.

Ganelon then added another message.

“Marsile’s uncle, the great admiral of the eastern lands, wished to oppose this peace. But as he marched toward the sea with his army, a terrible storm struck them. The ships were destroyed, and the admiral was drowned.”

Some knights crossed themselves when they heard this story.

“God has punished the enemies of France,” one said.

Charlemagne listened carefully.

At last he raised his hands toward heaven.

“May God be praised,” the emperor said.

He turned to his knights.

“If Marsile keeps his promise, this long war will finally end.”

Then he ordered the trumpets to sound across the camp.

The great army of the Franks began to prepare for the journey home.

Tents were taken down. Wagons were loaded with treasure and supplies. Horses were saddled, and banners were raised.

Soon the long line of soldiers and knights began moving northward toward France.

Roland rode proudly among them.

High above his head he carried the banner of the emperor, fastened to the tip of his spear.

As the army marched, the mountains of the Pyrenees rose before them.

Narrow roads wound through deep valleys and high rocky cliffs. These paths were the only way to reach the lands of France.

One evening, as the army prepared to enter the mountains, Charlemagne called his barons together once more.

“My lords,” the emperor said, “these mountain passes are dangerous. We must decide who will guard the rear of our army.”

The knights looked at one another.

The rear guard would be the last part of the army to leave Spain. If enemies attacked from behind, those men would face the greatest danger.

At that moment Ganelon spoke.

“My lord,” he said calmly, “no knight in your army is braver than Roland.”

Roland looked up in surprise.

Ganelon continued.

“He is strong, fearless, and proud. If anyone can protect the rear guard, it is he.”

Some of the barons nodded.

Roland himself smiled.

“My lord,” he said to Charlemagne, “I will gladly take this duty.”

The emperor looked at his nephew with troubled eyes.

Charlemagne loved Roland dearly.

Yet he also trusted the courage of the young knight.

At last the emperor spoke.

“Very well,” he said slowly. “Roland shall command the rear guard.”

Roland bowed.

“I will not fail you, my lord.”

Oliver stepped forward at once.

“Where Roland goes, I go,” he said.

Archbishop Turpin also came forward.

“And I with them,” the archbishop declared. “A priest should stand beside brave men in battle.”

Many other knights volunteered to remain with Roland.

In the end about twenty thousand warriors stayed with the rear guard.

The rest of Charlemagne's army continued its march through the mountains.

As the long line of soldiers disappeared into the valleys ahead, Roland and his companions remained behind.

High above them the rocky peaks of the Pyrenees stood silent.

Hidden beyond those mountains, the armies of King Marsile were already preparing to attack.

Part 5

The army of Charlemagne continued its long march through the mountains. Thousands of soldiers moved slowly along the narrow paths. Wagons carrying treasure and supplies creaked over the rough ground. The banners of France waved in the mountain wind.

At the very rear of the great army rode Roland and the knights who had chosen to remain with him.

Roland sat proudly upon his powerful horse, Veillantif. In his hand he carried his great spear, and at his side hung his famous sword, Durendal. The blade was bright and strong, and its golden hilt shone in the sunlight.

Near him rode Oliver, his loyal friend.

Oliver was as brave as Roland, but his mind was calmer and more careful. Many times his wisdom had balanced Roland's fierce courage.

Archbishop Turpin also rode with them.

Though he was a priest, Turpin was a strong warrior. His armor was bright, and he carried both sword and spear like any knight of France.

Around them rode many other noble warriors.

Gerin and Gerier were there, two brothers known for their bravery. Samson the duke rode beside them. Berenger, Otes, and Engelier also remained with the rear guard.

In all, nearly twenty thousand Franks stayed behind to protect the army.

As the day passed, the soldiers marched through steep valleys and rocky hills.

The mountains of Spain were high and wild. Dark forests covered the slopes, and narrow passes twisted between great walls of stone.

Many of the knights thought of home.

Soon they would cross the mountains and see the green fields of France again.

Some spoke quietly of their families.

“When we reach our lands,” said one knight, “I will ride straight to my castle. My wife has waited many years for my return.”

Another said, “My little children will not remember me. They were very small when I left.”

Roland heard these words and smiled.

“You will see them soon,” he said. “Our emperor has conquered Spain. The war is ending.”

Oliver rode beside him in silence.

Though he trusted Roland’s courage, a shadow of doubt had begun to grow in his heart.

Meanwhile far behind the Frankish army, the Saracen forces were gathering.

King Marsile had called warriors from every land of Spain.

They came riding across the plains and valleys in great numbers.

Their armor flashed in the sun. Their shields were painted in bright colors. Long spears and curved swords shone above their ranks.

Drums thundered across the fields of Saragossa. Horns sounded from the towers of the city.

The Saracen army grew larger and larger.

Soon hundreds of thousands of warriors were gathered.

Marsile himself rode among them, surrounded by his nobles.

“Today we will destroy Roland and his companions,” the king said proudly. “Without Roland, Charlemagne’s power will be broken.”

The warriors shouted with excitement.

“Death to the Franks!” they cried.

Soon the great army began to march.

They rode quickly through the valleys toward the mountain pass of Roncevaux.

Their plan was simple.

They would wait until Charlemagne's army had passed through the mountains.

Then they would fall upon Roland and the rear guard.

In the mountains, the Frankish knights knew nothing of the danger.

The afternoon sun was beginning to fall when Oliver rode up a steep hill to look across the valley.

From that high place he could see far across the land.

At first everything seemed quiet.

Then Oliver saw something that made his heart beat faster.

In the distance thousands of helmets were shining.

A vast army was moving across the valley.

Their banners waved in the wind. Their spears glittered like a field of silver.

Oliver stared in shock.

"So many soldiers..." he whispered.

Quickly he rode back down the hill to Roland.

"Roland!" he called. "Come and see what I have seen!"

Roland rode toward him.

Oliver pointed toward the distant valley.

"Look there," he said.

Roland turned and looked.

For a moment he said nothing.

The Saracen army filled the land like a dark storm moving across the earth.

Oliver spoke again.

"Ganelon has betrayed us," he said quietly. "These enemies have come to destroy us."

Roland's eyes burned with anger.

But his voice remained calm.

"If that is true," he said, "then today will be a great battle."

Oliver looked at him seriously.

"The enemy is very strong," he said. "We should sound your horn, the olifant. If Charlemagne hears it, he will return with the army."

Roland shook his head.

“No,” he said.

Oliver stared at him in surprise.

“Why not?” he asked.

Roland spoke firmly.

“If I sound the horn now, people will say that Roland called for help because he feared the enemy.”

Oliver frowned.

“Pride is dangerous in war,” he said. “If we do not call the emperor now, we may all die.”

Roland’s voice grew stronger.

“Better to die bravely than to bring shame upon France.”

Oliver looked toward the distant enemy again.

The Saracen army continued moving closer.

Their horns began to echo through the mountains.

Oliver turned back to Roland.

“My friend,” he said quietly, “this is not the time for pride.”

But Roland had already made his decision.

He lifted his spear and called to the Frankish knights.

“Barons of France!” he shouted. “The enemy comes to fight us. Today we must show the world the courage of our people!”

The knights raised their weapons and answered with a mighty cry.

“Monjoie!” they shouted, the battle cry of Charlemagne.

Archbishop Turpin then rode forward.

“My lords,” he said, “confess your sins and pray for God’s mercy. Those who die today fighting for the right will enter heaven as martyrs.”

The knights dismounted and knelt upon the ground.

Turpin gave them absolution.

“Fight bravely,” he said. “God is with you.”

The knights mounted their horses again.

Roland looked once more toward the approaching enemy.

The Saracen army now filled the valley below.
Thousands of warriors were preparing to attack.
Roland lifted his sword Durendal.
The blade flashed brightly in the sunlight.
“Franks!” he cried.
“Today we fight for our king, for our country, and for our honor!”
And with that the first great battle of Roncevaux was about to begin.

Part 6

The Saracen army advanced through the valley like a dark wave moving across the land. Their horses thundered over the rocky ground. Bright banners flew above their ranks, and their war horns echoed against the mountains.

The Franks stood ready.

Roland and his companions formed their lines across the narrow pass. Their armor shone brightly in the afternoon sun. Spears were held firmly. Shields were raised.

The air was filled with tension.

Oliver looked once more toward the distant enemy.

The Saracen army seemed endless.

“Roland,” he said quietly, “they are far more than we are.”

Roland smiled slightly.

“That only means greater glory,” he replied.

Oliver shook his head.

“It means greater danger,” he said.

But Roland’s courage was unshaken.

Archbishop Turpin rode forward among the knights.

“Remember your prayers,” he said. “God watches over those who fight for justice.”

The Franks raised their voices together.

“Monjoie!” they cried once more.

Then the battle began.

The first Saracen warrior rode forward from the enemy ranks.

It was Marsile's nephew, the proud knight Aelroth.

He rode quickly toward the Frankish line, shouting loudly.

"Men of France!" he cried. "You have been betrayed! Your king has abandoned you here to die!"

His voice rang across the valley.

Roland heard the insult.

His eyes flashed with anger.

"You lie," Roland shouted back. "Charlemagne is a wise king. He has placed us here because he trusts our courage."

Without another word Roland lowered his spear and spurred his horse forward.

The two knights rushed toward each other.

A moment later Roland's spear struck with terrible force.

It shattered Aelroth's shield and tore through his armor.

The Saracen knight was thrown backward from his horse and fell dead upon the ground.

Roland pulled his spear free and lifted it high.

"Franks!" he cried. "The first victory is ours!"

The Frankish knights cheered.

At once the armies rushed together.

The clash of steel filled the mountains.

Oliver rode forward beside Roland. His spear struck another Saracen knight and pierced his armor. The enemy fell heavily to the ground.

Archbishop Turpin followed close behind them.

Though he was a man of the church, he fought fiercely. His spear struck a Saracen king and drove through his shield and armor.

The enemy warrior fell lifeless beneath his horse.

Turpin raised his weapon and shouted, "Strike hard, brave Franks! God fights beside us!"

The Frankish knights pressed forward.

Gerin and Gerier fought side by side. Their swords flashed as they struck down enemy warriors.

Samson the duke rode into the thickest fighting. His spear broke through shield and armor alike.

Everywhere the Franks showed courage and strength.

Yet the Saracen army was enormous.

Wave after wave of enemy soldiers rushed toward the Frankish line.

The valley echoed with the sound of battle.

Horses screamed. Swords clashed. Shields shattered under powerful blows.

Oliver rode up beside Roland once more.

Blood covered both their armor.

“The battle grows worse,” Oliver said.

Roland nodded.

“Yes,” he answered.

Oliver looked again toward the mountains behind them.

“Roland,” he said, “sound your horn now. The emperor must hear us.”

Roland hesitated for a moment.

But his pride was still strong.

“No,” he said again. “I will not call for help while I still have strength to fight.”

Oliver sighed.

“You are brave,” he said quietly, “but sometimes bravery must listen to wisdom.”

Roland said nothing.

The battle raged around them.

Saracen warriors continued to attack in great numbers. The Franks fought fiercely, but many had already fallen.

Still Roland and his companions held their ground.

Their swords rose and fell again and again.

The mountain pass was filled with the noise of war.

Roland lifted Durendal and struck down another enemy knight.

“Franks!” he shouted. “Do not give way!”

The warriors of France answered with another cry of “Monjoie!”

But the Saracen army continued to grow.
Thousands more warriors were arriving from the valley below.
Oliver saw the danger clearly.
He rode beside Roland once more.
“My friend,” he said urgently, “the enemy is too many. If you sound the olifant now, Charlemagne may still reach us in time.”
Roland looked across the battlefield.
His knights were fighting bravely, but the enemy pressed closer every moment.
For the first time doubt touched his heart.
Yet he still refused.
“If I call for help now,” Roland said, “men will say that I feared the battle.”
Oliver’s voice grew sharper.
“Better to save our people than to protect your pride.”
Roland did not answer.
Instead he turned again toward the enemy and lifted his sword.
“Strike on!” he cried to the Franks. “The honor of France is in our hands!”
The knights obeyed.
Once again they rode forward to meet the attacking army.
But deep in Oliver’s heart a terrible thought had begun to grow.
If Roland did not sound the horn soon, none of them might survive the battle of Roncevaux.

Part 7

The battle in the mountain pass grew fiercer with every moment.
The narrow valley of Roncevaux was filled with noise and confusion. Steel struck against steel. Horses screamed. The cries of warriors echoed from the cliffs.
Roland and his companions fought like lions among the enemy.
Roland rode forward again, raising his sword Durendal high above his head. The bright blade flashed in the sunlight as it fell upon a Saracen knight. The enemy’s shield split apart, and his armor broke under the terrible blow.

The warrior fell from his horse and lay still upon the ground.

“Strike hard!” Roland shouted. “France must never be shamed!”

Oliver rode beside him, cutting down another enemy soldier with a powerful stroke.

“The enemy is endless,” Oliver said grimly.

Yet the Franks continued fighting bravely.

Archbishop Turpin rode among them like a warrior sent from heaven. Though he was wounded in several places, he refused to leave the battle.

“God is watching you!” the archbishop cried. “Fight for justice and faith!”

His words gave strength to the knights of France.

Gerin and Gerier fought side by side once more. Their swords rose and fell again and again. Samson the duke drove his spear through the shield of a Saracen lord.

All along the Frankish line the battle raged.

But still more enemies arrived.

The Saracen army seemed to fill the entire valley. Their banners moved like dark clouds across the hills.

Oliver rode up a rocky slope again to see the battlefield more clearly.

When he looked across the valley his heart sank.

Thousands more Saracen warriors were advancing.

Quickly he returned to Roland.

“Roland!” he called. “The enemy grows stronger every moment!”

Roland wiped blood from his face and listened.

“If we do not call Charlemagne now,” Oliver said urgently, “it will soon be too late.”

Roland looked toward the mountains behind them.

Far away beyond the pass the emperor and the rest of the army continued their march toward France.

The sound of battle could not reach them.

Roland’s hand touched the great horn hanging at his side.

The horn was called the olifant.

It was carved from the tusk of a mighty elephant and decorated with gold and jewels. Its sound could carry for many miles across the mountains.

Roland had the power to call the emperor back.

Yet he still hesitated.

“No,” he said slowly. “The Franks must not seem weak.”

Oliver’s voice grew sharp with frustration.

“Weak?” he said. “It is not weakness to save your people!”

Roland said nothing.

Around them the battle grew worse.

Many Frankish knights had already fallen.

One by one the heroes of France fought their final battles.

Gerin struck down a powerful Saracen warrior, but another enemy rider soon drove a spear through his armor. Gerin fell from his horse and died upon the rocky ground.

His brother Gerier cried out in grief and rushed forward to avenge him.

His sword cut down two Saracen soldiers before he himself was surrounded.

A moment later Gerier too lay dead among the fallen.

Oliver saw the brothers fall.

His face darkened with sorrow.

“Roland,” he said quietly, “our friends are dying.”

Roland’s heart grew heavy, but still he fought on.

Archbishop Turpin rode past them again, his armor covered in blood.

“Stand firm!” he shouted. “God will remember your courage!”

Yet even the archbishop had been wounded many times.

Blood flowed from his side, but he refused to leave the field.

The Saracen warriors continued to attack without rest.

Their numbers were too great.

At last Oliver turned to Roland again.

His voice was no longer angry. It was full of deep sadness.

“My friend,” he said softly, “you should have sounded the horn earlier.”

Roland looked around the battlefield.

The valley was covered with the bodies of fallen knights.
The once proud army of the Franks was growing smaller with every moment.
Roland's pride began to fade.
Slowly he took the olifant from his side.
Oliver watched him.
"At last," Oliver said.
Roland lifted the great horn to his lips.
Then he blew with all his strength.
The sound of the olifant burst across the mountains like thunder.
Its powerful voice echoed through the valleys and across the high peaks.
Roland blew again and again until the sound carried far into the distance.
The effort was so great that blood burst from his mouth.
Oliver looked at him with concern.
"You have blown too hard," he said.
But Roland continued.
The mighty cry of the horn rolled across the mountains toward the distant army of Charlemagne.
Far away in the valley ahead, the emperor suddenly lifted his head.
"Did you hear that?" he asked.
Duke Naimes listened carefully.
The faint sound of the horn echoed once more through the air.
"It is Roland's olifant," Naimes said.
Charlemagne's face grew pale.
"Then Roland is in danger," the emperor said.
He turned his horse at once.
"Sound the trumpets!" Charlemagne ordered.
"We must return!"
The army of France began turning back toward the mountains.
But the distance was great.
And the battle at Roncevaux was already reaching its terrible end.

Part 8

The sound of Roland's horn rolled again across the mountains.

Far away Charlemagne had heard it.

But in the narrow valley of Roncevaux the battle continued with terrible fury.

Roland lowered the olifant slowly. Blood had run down his face and stained his beard. The effort of blowing the great horn had wounded him deeply.

Oliver looked at him with sorrow.

"You have called the emperor," Oliver said. "But I fear he will not arrive in time."

Roland nodded.

He now understood the truth Oliver had spoken before.

The Saracen army still surrounded them.

Thousands of enemy warriors filled the valley.

Yet the Franks continued to fight with courage.

Roland lifted Durendal once more and rode forward.

"Franks!" he cried. "Stand firm! We will not fall without honor!"

The remaining knights answered with the cry of "Monjoie!"

Oliver rode beside Roland, though he too had been wounded many times.

His shield was broken. Blood covered his armor. Still he fought on.

The Saracen warriors attacked again and again.

A great Saracen knight rode forward toward Oliver.

His sword rose high.

Oliver struck first.

His blade shattered the enemy's shield and cut through his armor.

The warrior fell from his horse and lay dead upon the ground.

But Oliver's strength was fading.

A powerful blow from another enemy knight struck his helmet. The steel bent inward, and Oliver staggered in the saddle.

Blood filled his eyes.

For a moment he could no longer see clearly.

Still he tried to fight.
Roland rode toward him.
“Oliver!” he called.
But Oliver did not recognize his friend.
Blinded by blood and pain, Oliver thought Roland was another enemy.
With all his remaining strength he raised his sword and struck.
The blow fell upon Roland’s helmet.
Roland swayed but did not fall.
He realized at once what had happened.
“Oliver!” he said gently. “It is I—Roland.”
Oliver lowered his sword.
His vision slowly cleared.
When he recognized Roland, grief filled his heart.
“My friend,” he said weakly, “forgive me. I did not know you.”
Roland took his hand.
“There is nothing to forgive,” he said.
Oliver looked around the battlefield.
The valley was filled with the bodies of fallen Franks.
Very few of their companions still lived.
Oliver’s strength was leaving him.
“Roland,” he said quietly, “your courage is great... but your pride has cost us
dearly.”
Roland bowed his head.
“You spoke wisely,” he answered.
Oliver smiled faintly.
“We have fought well,” he said.
Then his strength failed completely.
Oliver slid slowly from his horse and fell to the ground.
Roland rushed to him.
But Oliver was already dead.
Roland knelt beside the body of his friend.

For a moment he could not speak.

Oliver had been his closest companion in many battles. They had shared danger and victory for many years.

Now Oliver lay silent upon the mountain ground.

Roland rose slowly.

His sorrow turned into fierce determination.

“Franks!” he shouted. “Fight on!”

Archbishop Turpin still lived, though he was terribly wounded.

The archbishop rode toward Roland.

“Many of our friends have fallen,” Turpin said. “But God sees their sacrifice.”

Roland nodded.

“We will fight until the end,” he replied.

Turpin dismounted and continued the battle on foot. His spear struck down several enemies before it finally broke.

Even then he took up a sword and continued fighting.

The Saracen warriors began to fear the courage of the remaining Franks.

One of their leaders cried out, “These men fight like demons! We must destroy them quickly!”

The Saracens attacked again in great numbers.

Roland struck down one warrior after another.

Durendal flashed like lightning.

Yet the enemy never stopped coming.

At last even the mighty Roland felt the weight of exhaustion.

His armor was broken in many places. Blood ran from several wounds.

Around him only a few Frankish knights still lived.

Archbishop Turpin staggered beside him, barely able to stand.

Roland looked across the valley.

The enemy army was finally beginning to withdraw.

The Saracens had suffered terrible losses.

Thousands of their warriors lay dead upon the field.

Yet the victory brought Roland no joy.

Almost every Frankish knight had fallen.

Roland turned toward Turpin.

“My lord archbishop,” he said quietly, “we are the last.”

Turpin nodded weakly.

“Yes,” he said. “But we have fought bravely.”

Roland looked toward the distant mountains where Charlemagne’s army was returning.

“The emperor will come soon,” Roland said.

Turpin smiled faintly.

“Perhaps,” he replied.

Then the archbishop sank slowly to the ground.

His wounds were too great.

Roland knelt beside him as the archbishop spoke his final prayer.

When the prayer ended, Turpin’s voice fell silent.

Roland was now alone among the fallen knights of France.

The field of Roncevaux lay quiet around him.

The final hour of the great hero Roland had begun.

Part 9

The valley of Roncevaux had grown strangely quiet.

The great battle was over. The Saracen army had withdrawn for the moment, leaving the narrow pass covered with the bodies of the fallen.

Broken shields lay scattered across the ground. Spears and swords were buried in the dust. Horses wandered among the rocks without riders.

Roland stood alone among the dead.

Around him lay the brave knights of France—Oliver, Archbishop Turpin, and many others who had fought beside him only hours before.

Roland’s armor was torn and stained with blood. Many wounds covered his body, but he still stood upright.

Slowly he walked across the battlefield.

At last he found the body of Archbishop Turpin lying among the fallen.

Roland knelt beside him.

“My lord archbishop,” he said softly, “you fought bravely for God and for France.”

Roland lifted the archbishop gently and placed him with the other Frankish knights.

Then he turned toward the mountains.

Far away beyond the peaks he knew Charlemagne and the army of France were returning.

Roland wished to greet his emperor one last time.

But he knew he would not live long enough.

His wounds were too deep. The blood that had burst from his mouth when he blew the olifant had weakened him greatly.

Still Roland had one final duty.

He looked down at his sword.

Durendal.

The blade had served him in many battles. It was the finest sword in the world.

The golden hilt held sacred relics: a tooth of Saint Peter, a drop of Saint Basil's blood, and hairs from Saint Denis.

Roland knew that such a sword must never fall into enemy hands.

If the Saracens found Durendal, they would claim it as a prize.

Roland could not allow that.

He climbed slowly up a rocky hill where a large stone stood.

With all the strength he had left, Roland raised Durendal high above his head.

Then he struck the blade against the rock.

The sound rang through the mountains.

Sparks flew as steel met stone.

But the rock cracked before the sword did.

Durendal remained whole and shining.

Roland struck again.

Once more the rock split, but the sword remained strong.

Roland tried again and again.

Each time the rock broke apart, but Durendal would not shatter.

At last Roland lowered the sword.

“Ah, Durendal,” he said quietly, “you are strong and noble.”

He remembered the many victories they had shared together.

“With you I conquered many lands,” Roland said. “Never will I allow you to belong to the enemies of France.”

Carefully he placed the sword beneath his body so that no enemy could take it easily.

Then Roland walked slowly toward a grassy hill overlooking the valley.

The wind moved gently across the mountain pass.

Roland sat down beneath a pine tree.

He looked once more toward the distant land of France.

His thoughts turned to his emperor.

“Charlemagne,” he whispered, “for you I fought with all my strength.”

He remembered Oliver, his brave friend.

He remembered the knights who had followed him without fear.

Tears filled his eyes.

Roland knew that death was near.

Slowly he removed one glove from his hand.

He raised it toward the sky.

“God,” he said softly, “I offer you this glove.”

Then Roland bowed his head and began to pray.

“Forgive my sins,” he whispered. “Receive my soul into heaven.”

The wind moved gently through the trees.

The mountains were silent.

Roland’s strength faded.

At last he leaned forward and lay down upon the grass.

His face was turned toward the land of Spain, the place where he had fought his final battle.

One hand rested upon Durendal.

The other still held the olifant.
The great hero of France closed his eyes.
Roland was dead.
High above the mountains angels descended quietly from heaven.
They carried the soul of Roland away to paradise.
Soon afterward Charlemagne's army reached the valley of Roncevaux.
When the emperor saw the field of the dead, a terrible cry rose from his lips.
He had come too late.
The greatest knight of France had fallen.

Part 10

When Charlemagne and the army of France entered the pass of Roncevaux, the evening light was fading across the mountains.

The emperor rode at the front of his returning army. His heart had been uneasy ever since he heard the distant sound of Roland's horn.

Now the truth lay before him.

The valley was silent.

Everywhere the ground was covered with fallen warriors.

Broken armor and shattered shields lay scattered among the rocks. Horses wandered slowly among the dead.

Charlemagne stopped his horse.

For a moment he could not speak.

Then he dismounted and walked forward across the battlefield.

The barons of France followed behind him.

Soon they began to recognize the fallen knights.

"Here lies Gerin," one knight said softly.

"And Gerier," said another.

"Samson... Berenger... Otes..."

Everywhere they looked, the heroes of France lay dead.

The soldiers of the emperor began to weep.

Charlemagne walked slowly among them.
At last he came to the place where Roland lay beneath the pine tree.
The emperor fell to his knees beside his nephew.
Roland still held his horn and sword.
Blood stained his face, but his expression was calm and noble.
Charlemagne placed his hands upon Roland's body.
"My brave nephew," he said in a broken voice.
Tears filled the emperor's eyes.
"Why did you not wait for me?"
Around him the knights of France began to mourn loudly.
One hundred thousand warriors wept for Roland.
Charlemagne's grief was deeper than all the rest.
He loved Roland as a son.
Duke Naimés stepped forward quietly.
"My lord," he said gently, "the enemy must not escape. They are fleeing across the mountains."
Charlemagne slowly rose.
His sorrow turned into fierce anger.
"Yes," he said. "They shall not escape."
The emperor looked toward the south where the Saracen army had retreated.
"Sound the trumpets!" he commanded.
The horns of France rang across the mountains.
The army mounted their horses once more.
"We ride!" Charlemagne cried.
The knights of France rode after the enemy.
The Saracen warriors were already fleeing toward Spain.
Many of them believed the battle was finished.
But suddenly the Frankish army appeared behind them like a storm.
Fear spread through the Saracen ranks.
"Charlemagne has returned!" they shouted.
Panic filled their army.

The Franks attacked without mercy.
Roland's death had filled them with fury.
Spears struck down fleeing enemies. Swords flashed across the battlefield.
Many Saracen warriors were killed as they tried to escape through the valleys.
King Marsile himself tried to gather his soldiers.
"Stand and fight!" he shouted.
But the Saracen army was already breaking apart.
Charlemagne rode straight toward Marsile.
His sword rose and fell with terrible force.
Marsile barely escaped with his life.
The king was badly wounded and fled toward Saragossa with the few warriors
who remained loyal to him.
Behind him the Frankish army continued the pursuit.
By nightfall thousands of Saracen soldiers lay dead across the fields and valleys.
At last Charlemagne ordered the army to stop.
The darkness had grown deep, and the soldiers were exhausted from the long
battle.
Fires were lit across the valley.
Yet the emperor could not rest.
His thoughts returned again and again to Roland and the fallen knights.
That night Charlemagne knelt alone in prayer.
"Lord God," he said, "help me bring justice for this terrible crime."
As he prayed, the moon rose above the mountains.
A strange miracle then occurred.
Charlemagne wished to continue chasing the enemy, but night had already
fallen.
Yet God heard the emperor's prayer.
The moon and the sun stood still in the sky.
The night did not grow darker.
The light remained as if day had not ended.
When Charlemagne saw this wonder, he knew that heaven supported his cause.

“Forward!” the emperor commanded.

The Frankish army mounted their horses once more.

Under the unmoving light of the sky they continued their pursuit of the fleeing Saracens.

Soon the emperor would bring terrible vengeance upon the enemies who had destroyed the heroes of France.

Part 11

The strange light still filled the sky as Charlemagne led his army forward.

The sun had not set. The moon had not moved. It was as if heaven itself wished the emperor to continue the pursuit.

The Frankish knights rode quickly across the valleys and plains.

Ahead of them the Saracen army fled in confusion.

Many of Marsile’s soldiers had thrown away their shields and weapons as they ran. Others tried to hide in the hills and forests.

But the Franks rode faster.

Charlemagne himself led the attack.

His great sword flashed again and again as he struck down the enemy.

“Roland!” the knights cried as they rode.

Their grief had turned into fierce anger.

The Saracen army broke apart completely.

Many warriors tried to cross a wide river that flowed through the valley. In their fear they rushed into the water without thinking.

But the river was deep and fast.

Horses slipped on the stones. Heavy armor pulled the soldiers beneath the water.

Thousands of Saracens drowned in the rushing current.

The river became filled with shields, helmets, and broken weapons.

When Charlemagne saw the destruction of the enemy army, he knew that the battle was won.

The Saracen force that had attacked Roland was destroyed.

Yet the emperor's heart was not at peace.

Roland and the brave knights of France were still dead.

Charlemagne finally ordered the army to stop the pursuit.

The soldiers were tired, and the night was finally beginning to return to the sky.

Slowly the light faded.

The miracle had ended.

Charlemagne turned his army back toward the pass of Roncevaux.

When they returned to the battlefield, the emperor ordered that the fallen knights be honored properly.

The bodies of Roland, Oliver, and Archbishop Turpin were carried gently from the field.

Charlemagne wept again when he saw them.

"These were the greatest knights in the world," he said.

Priests were called to bless the fallen warriors.

The bodies of the Franks were prepared with care and respect.

Roland, Oliver, and Turpin were placed together.

The emperor ordered that their hearts be carried back to France so that they might be buried with honor in the land they had served so faithfully.

Meanwhile the Saracen king Marsile had returned to Saragossa.

He was badly wounded from the battle.

When he entered the city, his face was pale and his armor broken.

The queen of Saragossa, Bramimond, hurried to meet him.

"My lord," she cried, "what has happened?"

Marsile struggled to stand.

"The army is destroyed," he said weakly. "Charlemagne has defeated us."

Soon after speaking these words, Marsile collapsed.

The wounds he had suffered in the battle were too great.

Before the night ended, King Marsile died.

In Saragossa the people were filled with fear.

Their army had been destroyed, and their king was dead.

But far away across the sea there lived another powerful ruler.

His name was Baligant.

Baligant was the emperor of many eastern lands. His power was vast, and his armies were enormous.

When news of Marsile's death reached him, Baligant was furious.

"Charlemagne will pay for this," he declared.

Baligant gathered a great army of warriors from many nations.

His ships crossed the sea and landed in Spain.

Soon the land was filled again with soldiers.

Their banners were strange and colorful. Their armor shone brightly in the sun.

Baligant himself rode at the front of the army.

He was an old man like Charlemagne, but still strong and proud.

"I will defeat the king of the Franks," he said.

Meanwhile Charlemagne had begun the siege of Saragossa.

The city's walls were strong, but the Saracens inside were frightened.

Queen Bramimond and the remaining nobles waited anxiously for help.

Then one morning they saw Baligant's great army approaching from the distance.

Their spirits rose again.

"Baligant has come!" the people cried.

When Charlemagne heard the news, he prepared for another great battle.

The war in Spain was not yet finished.

Soon the emperor of the Franks would face the mighty ruler of the eastern lands in a final and terrible fight.

Part 12

When the scouts of Charlemagne returned with their news, the emperor listened carefully.

"A great army approaches from the east," the scouts reported. "Their banners are strange, and their armor is not like that of the warriors of Spain."

Charlemagne understood at once.

“That must be Baligant,” he said.

The name was known even among the Franks. Baligant was a powerful ruler who commanded many lands and many armies.

The emperor of France looked across the plain toward the distant horizon.

“Then the war is not yet finished,” he said quietly.

The Frankish army prepared once more for battle.

Knights repaired their armor and sharpened their swords. Horses were fed and saddled again. The banners of France were raised high above the camp.

Yet many soldiers still mourned the loss of Roland and the other heroes who had died at Roncevaux.

Duke Naimes came to speak with the emperor.

“My lord,” he said, “Baligant’s army is said to be very large. But our men are brave, and God has already shown us favor.”

Charlemagne nodded.

“Yes,” he replied. “We will meet them with courage.”

Soon the Saracen army appeared across the wide plain.

It was larger than any army the Franks had yet seen.

Warriors from many distant lands rode beneath strange banners. Some carried long curved swords. Others bore great shields decorated with bright colors.

Their horns and drums filled the air with deep, powerful sounds.

At the center of the army rode Baligant himself.

He was an old man, but he still sat straight in the saddle. His beard was white, and his armor shone with gold and jewels.

Around him rode many powerful nobles.

Baligant looked across the plain toward the army of Charlemagne.

“So this is the king of the Franks,” he said.

His advisors gathered near him.

“My lord,” one of them said, “the Franks are strong warriors.”

Baligant smiled.

“Then the battle will bring great honor,” he replied.

Soon the two great armies stood facing each other across the field.

The Franks formed their lines carefully.

Duke Naimés commanded the left side of the army. Other barons took positions across the field.

Charlemagne himself stood at the center.

The emperor looked across the enemy ranks.

He thought of Roland and the knights who had died at Roncevaux.

“Today we fight for them,” he said.

The Frankish soldiers raised their voices.

“Monjoie!” they cried.

Across the field the Saracen army answered with their own fierce war cries.

The ground trembled as the armies began to move.

Knights spurred their horses forward.

Spears lowered.

The great battle began.

The first clash was terrible.

Horses collided. Spears shattered against shields. Warriors struck one another with swords and axes.

The noise of battle filled the air.

Duke Naimés fought bravely among his knights. His spear struck down several Saracen warriors.

Other Frankish nobles fought with equal courage.

But the Saracen army was powerful and well prepared.

Many fierce warriors attacked the Frankish lines.

Soon the field was filled with wounded men and fallen horses.

Baligant watched the battle carefully.

“The Franks fight well,” he said.

Then he raised his own spear.

“Now I will join the battle.”

With that the great Saracen emperor rode forward into the fight.

His warriors followed him with loud cries.

On the other side of the field Charlemagne also saw the enemy ruler advancing.

The old emperor lifted his sword.

“Forward!” he commanded.

The two great leaders rode toward one another across the battlefield.

Around them the armies of two worlds clashed in a battle that would decide the fate of Spain.

Soon Charlemagne and Baligant would meet face to face.

Part 13

The battle between the two great armies grew louder and more violent with every moment.

The plain outside Saragossa was filled with warriors. Spears struck shields with sharp cracks. Swords flashed in the sunlight. Horses rushed through the dust and confusion.

On one side stood the army of Charlemagne.

On the other stood the army of Baligant.

Both sides fought with great courage.

Duke Naimés rode bravely among the Frankish knights. His spear struck down one enemy after another. Around him the soldiers of France held their ground.

But the warriors of Baligant were strong and fearless. They had come from distant lands and were proud to fight under their emperor.

The battle raged across the entire field.

In the center of the fighting two great figures approached each other.

Charlemagne and Baligant.

Both were old kings.

Both had led many armies and conquered many lands.

Now they rode toward one another across the battlefield.

Baligant spoke first.

“Are you Charlemagne, king of the Franks?” he called across the field.

Charlemagne raised his sword.

“Yes,” he answered. “And you must be Baligant, ruler of the eastern lands.”

Baligant smiled.

“Your knights fought bravely at Roncevaux,” he said. “But today your army will fall.”

Charlemagne’s voice grew cold.

“You speak proudly,” he replied. “But God will decide the victory.”

With that the two rulers charged toward each other.

Their horses rushed forward.

Their spears struck with great force.

The first blow shattered both weapons.

The wooden shafts broke apart and fell to the ground.

At once the two kings drew their swords.

Baligant struck first.

His sword fell heavily against Charlemagne’s helmet. The blow rang loudly across the field.

But the emperor remained firm in the saddle.

Charlemagne answered with a powerful stroke.

His sword struck Baligant’s shield and split it in two.

The Saracen emperor staggered but did not fall.

Around them the battle paused as many warriors watched the struggle between the two rulers.

Baligant attacked again.

His sword cut through Charlemagne’s armor and wounded the emperor slightly.

Blood appeared on Charlemagne’s side.

But the old king did not weaken.

Instead he raised his sword high above his head.

“God help me now,” Charlemagne said.

Then he struck with all his strength.

The blade crashed down upon Baligant’s helmet.

The steel split apart.

Charlemagne’s sword continued through the armor and into the head of the Saracen emperor.

Baligant fell heavily from his horse.
The ruler of the eastern armies was dead.
For a moment the battlefield was silent.
Then the Frankish soldiers shouted with joy.
“Baligant is dead!” they cried.
When the Saracen army saw their emperor fall, fear spread through their ranks.
Many warriors began to flee.
The Frankish army pressed forward with renewed strength.
“Drive them away!” Charlemagne commanded.
The Franks attacked again.
The Saracen soldiers broke apart and ran toward Saragossa.
The battle was over.
Charlemagne had won the victory.
The army of Baligant was destroyed.
When the fighting ended, the emperor stood quietly upon the battlefield.
The victory brought him little joy.
His thoughts returned once more to Roland and the brave knights who had died
in the mountains.
Duke Naimés rode toward him.
“My lord,” he said, “the enemy is defeated.”
Charlemagne nodded slowly.
“Yes,” he said. “But our greatest heroes are gone.”
Soon the Frankish army marched toward the city of Saragossa.
Without their king and without their army, the Saracens inside the city could
not resist.
Queen Bramimond surrendered the city to Charlemagne.
The war in Spain had finally come to an end.
Yet one last matter remained.
The man whose treachery had caused the disaster at Roncevaux still lived.
His name was Ganelon.

Part 14

The city of Saragossa soon fell into the hands of Charlemagne.

Without their king and without their army, the Saracens inside the city could not defend it. The gates were opened, and the Frankish soldiers entered the city.

Queen Bramimond was brought before the emperor.

She stood proudly, though her people had been defeated.

Charlemagne looked at her calmly.

“Your king Marsile is dead,” he said. “Your army has been destroyed. The war is over.”

Bramimond lowered her head.

“Yes,” she answered.

The emperor continued.

“You will be taken to France. There you will learn the Christian faith. If you accept it, you will be treated with honor.”

Bramimond did not answer, but she offered no resistance.

Charlemagne then ordered that the city’s treasures be gathered and that the army prepare for the journey home.

The long war in Spain had ended at last.

Soon the army of France began its march back across the mountains.

The bodies of Roland, Oliver, and Archbishop Turpin were carried carefully with the army.

The emperor wished them to be buried with great honor in France.

The journey home was slow and quiet.

The soldiers still mourned their fallen companions.

When they reached the city of Blaye in France, Charlemagne ordered that Roland, Oliver, and Turpin be buried there in a great church.

Many knights gathered for the ceremony.

The priests prayed for the souls of the brave warriors.

Charlemagne stood silently beside the tombs.

At last he spoke.

“These men were the greatest knights in the world,” he said. “Their courage will never be forgotten.”

After the burial, the army continued its journey to the emperor’s palace at Aix. Yet one final matter still troubled Charlemagne’s heart.

The treachery that had caused the disaster at Roncevaux could not go unpunished.

Ganelon had returned safely to France with the army.

But now he was accused of betraying Roland and the Frankish knights.

When the emperor arrived at Aix, he ordered that Ganelon be brought before the court.

The great hall of the palace was filled with nobles and knights from across the land.

Ganelon stood before them proudly.

He did not appear afraid.

Charlemagne rose from his throne.

His voice was strong but filled with anger.

“Ganelon,” he said, “you betrayed Roland and the knights of France. Because of your treachery they died at Roncevaux.”

Murmurs spread through the hall.

Ganelon answered calmly.

“I did not betray the emperor,” he said.

The nobles listened carefully.

Ganelon continued.

“Roland was my enemy. I sought revenge against him, not against the emperor.”

His words shocked many of the barons.

“Roland insulted me,” Ganelon said. “He sent me on a dangerous mission so that I might die. I took revenge on him alone.”

Some knights were furious.

“You caused the death of thousands!” one shouted.

But others hesitated.

In those days the law of the Franks was complex.

Some nobles believed that Ganelon had acted only against Roland personally. Others believed his actions had betrayed the emperor and the whole army. Charlemagne turned to his barons.

“You must judge this matter,” he said.

The nobles began discussing the case.

Many were uncertain.

At last a powerful knight named Pinabel stood forward.

Pinabel was a close relative of Ganelon.

“My lords,” he said, “Ganelon did not betray the emperor. He took revenge on a man who had insulted him. That is not treason.”

Some of the barons nodded.

Charlemagne’s anger grew.

“Is there no one who will defend Roland’s honor?” he asked.

For a moment the hall was silent.

Then a young knight stepped forward.

His name was Thierry.

Though he was not large or powerful, he was known for his honesty and courage.

Thierry bowed before the emperor.

“My lord,” he said, “Ganelon is guilty of treason. His actions caused the death of Roland and the brave knights of France.”

He turned toward Pinabel.

“If you claim he is innocent,” Thierry said, “then we will let God judge between us.”

The nobles understood what he meant.

The judgment would be decided by trial in combat.

Pinabel smiled confidently.

He was a large and powerful warrior.

Thierry was smaller and less famous.

“Very well,” Pinabel said. “Let us fight.”

The fate of Ganelon would now be decided in battle.

Part 15

The great hall of Charlemagne's palace was filled with tension.

All the nobles of France had gathered to witness the judgment.

The fate of Ganelon would be decided by trial in combat.

In those days it was believed that God would give victory to the man who spoke the truth.

Pinabel stood tall and confident among the barons.

He was a powerful knight, strong in battle and famous for his skill with sword and spear.

Beside him stood Ganelon, his relative.

Ganelon remained calm. He believed that Pinabel would easily defeat the smaller knight who had accused him.

On the other side of the hall stood Thierry.

Thierry was not as large as Pinabel, but his face was serious and determined.

He believed that justice must be done for Roland and the knights who had died at Roncevaux.

Charlemagne rose from his throne.

"The judgment will be decided by combat," the emperor declared.

The barons nodded.

Soon the knights moved outside the palace to a large open field.

Soldiers formed a wide circle around the place where the battle would occur.

Thousands of people gathered to watch.

In the center of the field stood Thierry and Pinabel.

Both knights wore bright armor. Their swords and shields were ready.

A herald stepped forward and spoke loudly.

"Let the two knights fight in the name of justice," he announced. "God will give victory to the man who speaks the truth."

The signal was given.

The two knights mounted their horses.

They lowered their spears and charged toward each other.
Their horses ran quickly across the field.
The spears struck with a loud crash.
Both weapons shattered, and the knights nearly fell from their saddles.
At once they drew their swords.
The crowd watched in silence.
Pinabel attacked first.
His sword struck Thierry's shield with great force. The blow was so strong that
Thierry was pushed backward.
Many people believed the fight would end quickly.
Pinabel attacked again and again.
Thierry struggled to defend himself.
But the smaller knight fought with courage.
At last Thierry saw an opening.
He stepped forward suddenly and struck Pinabel with all his strength.
His sword cut through Pinabel's armor and wounded him deeply.
The large knight staggered.
Pinabel tried to raise his sword again.
But Thierry struck once more.
This time the blow was fatal.
Pinabel fell heavily to the ground.
The field was silent.
Then a great cry rose from the crowd.
Thierry had won.
The judgment of God was clear.
Ganelon was guilty.
Charlemagne stood and raised his hand.
"Justice has been decided," the emperor said.
Ganelon's face finally showed fear.
The emperor continued speaking.
"Because of your treachery Roland and many brave knights died. You will now

receive the punishment for your crime.”

The punishment was severe.

Ganelon was tied to four powerful horses.

When the horses were driven apart, his body was torn apart.

The traitor who had caused the disaster at Roncevaux was finally punished.

Peace returned to the court of Charlemagne.

Yet the emperor himself found little rest.

One night, long after the trial had ended, Charlemagne lay sleeping in his palace at Aix.

Suddenly an angel appeared to him in a dream.

The angel spoke clearly.

“Charlemagne,” the voice said, “you must rise again. A new war has begun in another land. The Christians there need your help.”

Charlemagne woke from his sleep.

He was old and tired from many years of war.

Yet he knew that he must obey the command.

Slowly the emperor rose from his bed.

Outside the palace the night was quiet.

Charlemagne looked up toward the sky.

“God,” he said softly, “my life has been full of battles.”

The old emperor sighed deeply.

Still, he began preparing once more to lead his army.

For the duty of Charlemagne had not yet come to an end.