

**The Madness
of
Roland
By Greg Roach
Book One**

The Madness of Roland

This printed book accompanies the interactive CD-ROM "The Madness of Roland"

Copyright 1992, Greg Roach.
All rights reserved

Chapter One

The Siege of Paris

"O Beate Deus Deorum in Syon-"

**O blessed God of Gods in Zion, what a mighty stream of
pleasure
made
our hearts glad whenever we had leisure to visit Paris and to
linger
in the paradise of the world! Our days there were always too
few
for the great love we bore the place!**
-from the journals of

The Madness of Roland

Richard de Bury

The Siege

order. By acting without action, all things will be in

-Lao Tsu, Tao Te Ching

Heavy clouds , the color of pewter, rolled low over the walls of Paris as the city prepared for another day of siege. The attackers, unwelcome guests at the city's feet for the past five weeks, grumbled over their morning ablutions at the day's prospects. A massive assault was planned: one that was to breach the city's defenses, end the siege, and return their liege lord's property to him, restoring his family's honor and allowing them all to return to their new-found Spanish homes.

Beji Al Hasrad knew of these plans. He knew also that the Franks had proven unexpectedly fierce, that the siege had gone on much longer than his lord had anticipated, that it must be brought to a swift conclusion because winter was coming on, and that of all these factors none began to compare with The Roland. It was The Roland that had brought them there and it was The Roland who had thwarted,

The Madness of Roland

sometimes single-handedly, every wave they had launched. He knew it was The Roland who caused the sharifs of his lord's army, hardened veterans all, to grumble over their breakfasts.

"Beji?!"

"Yes lord?"

He knew what was coming.

"Cast the stones for me."

A hesitation.

"Yes lord."

Beji Al Hasrad drew from under his tunic a pouch which contained his dearest possessions. The stones. He cast a furtive glance at his master - one designed to show his loyalty, respect and unease at the circumstance.

For weeks now the casting had been poorer and poorer for his master. Each casting and each adjacent defeat pulled his master deeper into an obsession that could only end in disaster.

The stones hit the sand, pwithing tiny clouds into the damp air. As the pattern revealed itself Beji remembered The Roland. Ostensibly, he cast for his master on the outcome of the day's battle. But they both knew he cast on The Roland. He was like a murderous lightning, Roland, rolling along the ramparts, filling a breach, shouting encouragement, slaying by the dozens. He was the linchpin of the city's safety. Beji, who had followed his master through five years of campaigning, had never before seen anything like The Roland. The sharifs claimed he was a demon shifted into the frame of a man, but Beji knew him to be holy. It bothered him that he had such respect for the infidel Roland and he wondered if the stones might not know this, might not cast differently because of it... it was difficult sometimes to tell which came first, the casting or...

"Beji?"

"Yes Lord Mandricardo?"

"What do the stones say?"

The pattern suddenly lept off the ground, dispelling Beji's image of Roland prowling the ramparts, staunching the flow of attacker through sheer presence...

The Madness of Roland

"The Roland will not fight on the walls today."

A hesitation.

"He will not?"

Something strange he heard in his master's voice.

"He will not."

This last said with all the surety of the pattern.

Mandricardo let out a long breath. It smelled of lamb stew. Beji saw he had something in his teeth.

A horn sounded. The assault had begun. Beji followed his master out of the tent. They walked to the hill where the couriers and sharifs waited, eager for orders and talk. The first wave bore down on the city.

There was no sign of The Roland during the first hour. They had gained a significant foothold at the Gate of Pigs and Mandricardo was beginning to believe that it might be true. But if he wasn't in the city, where was he? And where was the sword?

A sudden shout from the left. Then another. In an instant Mandricardo knew what the casting meant. "The Roland will not fight on the walls today." He cast a glance at Beji. It began to rain.

They watched as The Roland and another Paladin, a short man with blonde hair, waded through their armies. The siege was once again turned. Beji marveled at the knight. He fought like a duke of the air. His blade whirled and sang. He and his companion moved almost as one, locked in a mesmerizing dance of parry, thrust, cut, advance.

One by one the sharifs left the hill and intercepted the pair only to be cut down and replaced by another.

Finally, Mandricardo rose, took his helmet in hand, belted on his sword and rode out to meet The Roland.

The Madness of Roland

**On my honor
I will so my best
to do my duty,
to God and my Country.**

**To obey the scout law
To help other people at all times,
To keep myself Physically strong
Morally straight
and mentally awake.**

The Madness of Roland

I can never forget it. The perfection of that day. That ride. The surprise, so sweet, on their faces. The cries of my Paris as it watched my clamoring path ring down through the infidel. Such grace for steel and muscle. Of all my days that is the clearest now. Why should that be? Time is strange for me now.

I had ridden out from the city the night before under the cover of a storm. Turpin tried to stop me, said I was a fool, said my uncle, Charlemagne, would teach me for disobedience. As the rainwater ran down my back I brushed him off and galloped away. Astolpho met me outside the Gate of Infants and we rode, side by side, into the darkness.

Moving through their lines was ridiculously easy. They slept like pigs, bloated on that damn orange stew they eat with their hands.

We camped, ate and prayed.

Heavenly Father, grant me victory over the heathen invaders, over their leader, and over their vile and corrupted god. Grant me victory that I might do glory to thy cause and thy name.

Astolpho told me a joke: What's the difference between an Arab woman and a cistern?... You can eat a cistern if you have to!

Before dawn we oiled our swords (Oh, my Clou! Widowmaker! Durendal! He will never take you from me!), tightened our saddles and prayed again. As the sun split the clouds we prepared for our sortie.

I do not know what this Saracen knight's quarrel was with me. The insults!

I will at least do him the courtesy of thinking chivalrously of him. Which is more than he ever gave to me. I had won the sword fairly. His father died bravely. There was no dishonour. Why all this? Why lay

The Madness of Roland

siege to an innocent town? There was the sword, yes. It was unequalled. Yet the sword was my spoil by right. I will never understand the minds of these men. So... foreign. Note, if you will, I still call him "Knight". I do him that courtesy at least.

Astolpho tied a ribbon on to his lance. A favour from a lady... I don't know which... he has so many, too many, that little Englishman... He wastes his energies. I prayed one final time and we began our charge.

The heathen were all in the midst of their morning toilet. Their... prayer washing (woodoo, they call it) when we fell on them. I only attacked those who were armed but still they dropped by the dozens. I can't tell how many we killed. I topped a rise to see a group of them, on horseback, charging toward us. I plunged Clou into one man's gut and pulled the lance from another, unhorsing him, as Astolpho fell upon the rest. He killed two more as I finished the last of the group.

Slowly, we waded through them. They were around us like locusts. How God shone on us that day (Look... the sky so blue... a blue to crack your eyes... What glorious sign!): the heathen ringed us like the armies of Pharaoh yet we were David before the giant.

Soon the walls of the city were lined with people, all yelling and cheering us in our effort. Trumpets began to play from the ramparts. As we approached the gate, they flung garlands on us from above. Still the enemy came - though with less and less vigor. My uncle appeared, much to the delight of the onlookers, and saluted. Turpin doused us with holy water. Still they fell. Astolpho shattered his lance. I yelled for the gate to be opened. More of them died.

Then suddenly - he was there. Mandricardo. My goal. This humiliation was to be his. I lunged at him, a long arcing swing to the head which unhorsed him. The wind went out of him when he fell. I was down and on top of him before he knew he had lost his horse! How unmanly.

Had it been another battle, another day, I would have allowed him at least the show of a true fight. But not this one, not after his words. I knocked the blade from his hand (Clou was thrumming and moaning like a colt), pulled his helmet off and jerked him to his feet.

Then was the sweetest of moments. It was as if the whole world had

The Madness of Roland

stopped on its axis. All noise abated. The din and clang of the field slowed. The musicians on the ramparts were still. I watched a fat courtier, mouth full of meat, stifle a laugh and motion to a companion.

I held him there, not a breath between us, as the sounds of the world died away. Finally, in an unrivaled silence, as the eyes of a thousand - Christian and Infidel - looked on, focusing, boring into the moment, pouring the expectation and heat and joy of death into the space between us: I slapped him. With my bare palm. As a mother might strike a child who has done what he should not. I slapped him, dropped him to the grass, turned and strode the final yards through the gate and into my beloved Paris, as garlands fell around me.

The Madness of Roland

**Then the woman turned her face to me and looked
into my eyes
without speaking.**

**And through me passed a thrill, mysterious and
penetrating like
a golden wave...**

--P.D. Ouspensky

My eyes are blue. This disturbs my father immensely. As does my blonde hair. This was all my mother's doing. A glamour cast at birth. I still must maintain it, with cats and lotus. I have never had a monthly flow. My eyes are not, like my father's, almond-shaped; they are wide and round. My mother preferred the barbarian aesthetic.

I remember him telling me about Paris. My peacock had died earlier that day. I fed its remains to the coi in the garden pool. I made a point of displaying my cleavage to Sencho, my father's advisor, as he came

The Madness of Roland

to fetch me to audience. I loved to watch his mouth work and his old eyes bug as he tried not to look!

There was a foreigner in my father's chamber. I murmured a warding as Sencho and I approached the visitor's broad back. His clothes were very handsome and cut in a way I had never seen before. I could smell the spices and salt on him even from the doorway. How intriguing! I could smell his traveling... almost hear the breezes that had whipped at his robes.

He looked very handsome from behind. He and my Father continued to talk - the warding worked - he had not heard us as we entered. I strained to catch their words. A young man, dark and beautiful, stood by them. He glanced at me.

Ah! Angelica. Beloved. How is it with thee?

The wind blows always at my back, so long as you, dear father, stand before me. Oh, really. What tripe. What an old goat. Absolutely no sense of humor.

The visitor turned. How disappointing. His front was in no way the equal of his back.

Angelica, this man has come a long way to meet with us...

Then father we must give him our time. Oh, vomitous! Another pathetic suitor who thinks that if he gives my idiot father a trade route somewhere, or some horrid beast from the Africas that he can get his hands on me. Well, I've got...

Bring the food!

My father called for meat, quail eggs and wine and we sat down to talk.

The stranger waited beatifically. Finally, my father nodded assent.

My name is Mandricardo (does he scream when you pull him out of the ground?) and I am a sharif of Persia. I have come to ask a favor. A favor that only the greatest King of the Orient and his most beautiful of daughters can grant.

Oh, please.

But it is not only your beauty, which is unsurpassed even by the stars in Allah's heavens...

The Madness of Roland

Poetry. How original.

...but your powers as an enchantress, the news of which has carried even to my far lands, that has caused me to entreat you thus.

What is that in his teeth?

I have been sorely wronged. My honor and the honor of my family has been besmirched...

Besmirched?!?

My father was cowardly attacked by one who does not deserve to wear the livery of a knight. A European. The blade of my ancestors was taken, stolen from my father...

...stolen by this cowardly knight. I must recover my father's sword, Durendal, and avenge his murder.

But, why do you need our help?

Good question. Surely...

Because this knight is in league with unnatural forces. He is a paragon of evil. He is not human; he is like a mountain...

Hmmm...

Like murderous lightning... demons fight at his side. If he were a man there would be no question, but there is no natural force, man or beast, that can withstand him.

Sounds like somebody I need to meet...

The quail eggs arrived. Mandricardo popped one into his mouth. What is his name?

He is called Roland. A Paladin in the army of Charlemagne of the Franks, he said through a mouthful of quail egg.

**A man may dream of inserting a key in a lock, of
wielding a heavy
stick,
or of breaking down a door with a battering ram.
Each of these can
be
regarded as a sexual allegory. But the fact that
his unconscious for
its
own purposes has chosen one of these specific
images it may be
the
key, the stick, or the battering ram - is also of
major significance.
The
real task is to understand why the key has been
preferred to the
stick,
or the stick to the ram. And sometimes this might
even lead one
to
discover that it is not the sexual act at all that is
represented, but
some quite different psychological point.**

--Carl G. Jung

The Madness of Roland

I am Widowmaker. Called Durendal. Called nail. Called saviour by The Roland. He swings me like a lover. With him I am like a babe flung high by its father on strong arms (I have never tasted child!) and I coo to the throatrattles of his victims. I am called by their breath as it arcs past my edge, called by the geysers of their hearts and the fence posts I make of their bones.

What is the sound of me? The sound of wind-plaited steel. The sound of fear.

I am a dark joy in his hand, segmenting the many sounds of the world. Singing my song of spring green blood, cartilage and bone and hair. Snicker snack (how right he was). My sound and song parts the fruit of the world and sows spring's seeds on the wailing wind.

I am the sound of death.

I am Widowmaker. Called Durendal. Called nail.

The Madness of Roland

**Oggier spake King Didier:
'When cometh Charlemagne?
We looked for him in harvest:
We looked for him in rain.
Crops are reaped and floods are past;
And still he is not here.
Some token show, that we may know
That Charlemagne is near.'**

The Madness of Roland

**Then to King made answer
Oggier, the christened Dane:
'When stands the iron harvest
Ripe on the Lombard plain,
That stiff harvest which is reaped
With sword of Knight and Peer,
Then by that sign ye may divine
That Charlemagne is near.**

**'When round the Lombard cities
The iron flood shall flow,
A swifter folld than Ticin,
A broader flood than Po,
Frothing white with many a plume,
Dark blue with many a spear,
Then by that sign ye may divine
That Charlemagne is near.'**

Roland? Oh, yes, yes, yes. What a... I mean really, well, he was without peer... Ha! Get it? Without peer (Can they hear me?). And all this business about that day outside Paris... it's all wrong. It wasn't Paris at all. It was Aachen. That was my capital. Aachen. What a magnificent... You know, Paris, in what was that, 778?... was just a wide spot in the road. No, it was Aachen. That's where the hot springs were (God I miss that - a nice hot bath...). Oh, yes, but Roland. The greatest warrior I ever... I mean he was a tremendous fighter. I suppose that, really, I'm the greatest warrior of my day, though I never did a whole lot of fighting. I remember Roland as a baby: sweet, sweet little child,

The Madness of Roland

huge feet, and quite a farter. I didn't have the slightest inkling he would end up the "flower of chivalry", because he was such a little sweetmeat as a baby. He would coo, and tug on my beard... I remember remembering him as a baby that day outside of... (maybe it was Paris). He was like murderous lightning that day among the Saracens and I thought, how did he come to be this person? Actually, you know, now that I think about it, it might have been Theoderada who was the farter...

Oh, yes. Roland. He was a brilliant warrior. I've never seen his equal, not before or since. I was more fond of him as a baby than my own children. My sister was so jealous of us! It was quite amusing. I have to admit that I played it for all it was worth. I'd hold the boy and wait for her to walk into the room or step around a corner and then I'd pick up with: Oh, what a sweet boy. If only my children were like you, little Roland.

(Poooot, he'd say.)

Would you like for me to adopt you? Would you like to come and live with your uncle Charles? I'd treat you just like my own son. Gisela would snort and turn on her heel! Oh, how I laughed. She never caught on. Not very bright, my sister. Roland the same. Very earnest. Very intense and forthright. And very strong. Even though I was a good hand taller than him, he always beat me at wrestling or the joust. But not very bright. For instance, that whole bit where he and... who was it? Astolpho! Where they snuck out past the Saracen camps and then fought their way back into the city... that was all my idea. He would never have thought of something like that. But there was no one else among all the Peers who could have succeeded.

The Madness of Roland

Aachen. Yes. God how I loved that place. The hot springs and the countryside... I would have spent all my time there if it had been possible, but well... heavy lies the head, as they say.

The baths there were magnificent - all this beautiful, hot water steaming up from the ground - even in winter - I had a room built just for the springs - someday, in the dead of winter, I'd sit in the bath for hours. And I had a cathedral built that was... well words could never... I'll show you a picture sometime. It was so beautiful... I worked on the design myself you know, and we brought marble from Ravenna... I remember once, as a baby, Rollie was in the bath with me and he... well, the farther, he... you know he went. In the bath. It was very funny, got all in my chest hair, and Theoderada went screaming out of the tub... Yes, which reminds me, did you know I invented a salve for curing the rash some babies get on the bottoms? Yes indeed. I'm something of an apothecary... Yes, it was honey, milkweed extract, butter oil and sea salt. Worked quite well. Except in summer. I never figured how to get rid of the flies.

Oh, the siege, yes. Well, here's the thing about that... IT NEVER HAPPENED. At least not in my experience of things. This Bulfinch fellow will tell you otherwise. So will a whole slew of other writers, including this one here. But, I have grown rather fond of the notion. It appeals to a romantic side of me I could never indulge before... and besides, truth has taken on a strange subjectivity for me these days. So, I'll play along. I'll just make it up as we go. Alright? Good.

So, yes, the whole thing started over some damn sword - Clou, I think it was called. Roland had taken it from an infidel at the battle of... (Oh pooh...my memory) some damn place. Spitted some Saracen war-lord and snatched the blade from his hand. Fine piece of work that Clou (Rollie claimed the damn thing talked!) I have rarely seen its equal. So the Saracens came on to Paris asking for it back. Well, I had to stand by Roland. Besides, that jaunty little Arabian cock Mandricardo needed a teaching. I didn't care for his manner. Calling Roland a coward and a murderer. No call for that kind of talk - besides I saw the whole thing myself: Roland beat the man fairly. After a month's worth of siege I got tired of their foolishness and sent Roland and Astolpho (was it?) out to rub their noses in it! Simple as that.

Chapter Two

Beware the Forest Green

I saw the woman looking out upon the world as though

The Madness of Roland

**enraptured
with
its beauty. And from the tree on which ripened golden
fruit I saw a
serpent
creep.**

--P.D.

Ouspensky

A Good Rat

**The rat had no morals, no conscience, no scruples, no
consideration,
no decency, no milk of rodent kindness, no compunctions,
no higher feelings, no friendliness, no anything.**

-- **E.B. White, Charlotte's Web**

Beji Al Hasrad bared his fangs and hissed as heartily as he could muster into the face of the rodent opposite him. It had little effect. This rat was big. Bigger than Beji. Bigger certainly than the last filthy obstacle he had clawed his way past. Rats were amazingly territorial; he was just passing through, but reasoning with them was apparently out of the question. He worked a silent prayer to Allah. What did it say about rats in the Quran?

In the blink of one of his yellow eyes, Beji's brutish blockade fell on him with a glee that Beji would have thought unique to the battlefield. Beji was frightened. More frightened than he had been in a very long time. Years of hard campaigning under his master, Lord Mandricardo, had largely inured him to the things most ordinary people would consider worth their adrenalin, but this was different.

The Madness of Roland

He prayed with a renewed sincerity and attention to detail.

His opponent bore him over and sank his teeth into Beji's shoulder. A scald of pain raced up his neck and into his ear. Crazy, he found himself wondering if, after he returned to his own body and natural state of being, his wounds would be rat-sized or man-sized. He had endured a rat bite or two and, while not pleasant, they were certainly survivable; a nip from a rodent with a head the size of his own, on the other hand, was to be avoided if at all possible. The big squeal ripped a ragged chunk from Beji's throat and closed for what Beji assumed would be a, if not fatal, at least massively inconvenient, bite.

Beji cursed. He cursed the whole foolish enterprise. He cursed The Roland, whose fault it was that he was here in the first place, then (for causing him to infiltrate Charlemagne's keep in the body of a rat) doubly cursed and faulted him. He cursed the Enchanter who shifted him (Beji had hoped for something more glamorous - a hawk, for instance). He cursed his master, Lord Mandricardo, for sending him. He cursed the rat (and its mother). He cursed the stones for their casting; "Your right hand will carry answers." He cursed just for cursing.

He was about to invoke the counter-spell that would render him human again (a drastic measure certainly - one that would leave him in his native frame in the middle of the enemy's camp - but these were drastic times and at the moment he would prefer Charlemagne's Paladins) when the sudden entrance of the cook (our ratty combatants were tussling in the castle's kitchen) and his dog brought their melee to a halt. Beji, while scampering to safety, thrilled at the meaty crunch his oppressor made in the dog's big jowls.

The Holy Roman Emperor wheeled on him, every imperial atom challenging the insolence. A magnificent silence followed. Finally the bishop broke it:

"No one believes that Roland would leave his duties willfully, but if the woman enchanted him..."

"Turpin, you would find the Devil's work in my dog's fleas. Next you'll tell me the rats are spies and my counselors are not to be trusted!"
The door opened and a pleasant-looking old man in brilliant vermilion

The Madness of Roland

entered. Charlemagne plopped into a chair with a meaty thwack.

"Hello, Lord Gan."

"Greetings, Lord Charles. Any news of your nephew?"

"Not yet."

"Well, I have a complication for you. My son is missing."

"Medordo?"

"I went by his barracks this morning. He hasn't been seen in two days."

Charlemagne offered wine to the old man in vermilion. Another silence rose in the room. The lull was cracked by the entry of a huge paladin in dark blue livery.

"Lord Charles, this was found in the forest outside of Reims."

He held Roland's sword; Widowmaker, called Durendal, called nail. The blade seemed to buck and moan in his hand.

Beji scampered through the tall grass of the Frankish countryside, a full moon chasing him overhead. To his right the river Seine gurgled in the moonlight. Somewhere behind him a dog barked. The wind rolled through his fur, cooling the several wounds he had acquired during his espionage. He was happy. Happier than he had been in a long time. Not only was his mission a success, the news he carried was very, very good. He gave a casual thanks to Allah. The barking seemed closer now. What was that counter spell again?

Mandricardo was busy picking a bit of lamb stew from his teeth when Beji Al Hasrad burst into the tent. His clothes were shredded and he bled from a half-dozen wounds, large and small. There was a particularly cruel gash on his neck and it looked as if the seat of his pants had been chewed out. He smelled of wet dog.

The Madness of Roland

"Beji?"

"Lord Mandricardo, the enchantress has succeeded! Durendal is in Paris and The Roland is dead."

house,
the keep of

- with a

INvocation"

**At the last, tenderly,
From the walls of the powerful fortress'd
From the clasp of the knitted locks, from
the Well-closed doors,
Let me be wafted.**

**Let me glide noiselessly forth'
With the key of softness unlock the locks**

**whisper,
Set open the doors O soul.**

**Tenderly - be not impatient,
(Strong is your hold O mortal flesh,
Strong is your hold O love).**

--Walt Whitman, "The Last

The Madness of Roland

Her eyes were like nothing I had ever seen. Oddly shaped and almost black. She was deliciously scented. Her appearance took us all quite unaware. She said to me, Are you the Roland of whom so many sing? I remember one of the babies crying. She told us she came as an envoy from her father. She kept glancing at me as she spoke to my uncle. Medordo squeezed my hand. I looked back at him and he smiled.

Gisela, tell the steward we'll be having a guest for dinner. The cooks should give us something special! My uncle loved to throw parties. Any excuse. It didn't matter. Here was one plopped in his lap.

She talked with my uncle of trade; spices and gold. She talked with Astolpho of arms. She was delightfully well-schooled.

After dinner she served me tea, after the fashion of her people. Her hands were so delicate and small. It frightened me a little. They moved like doves under the lamplight: pale and astonishing. She touched my arm. She smiled.

Her teeth are so white. So clean. What do they taste of? The tea is delicious. Her teeth and hands are so right. So happy. They gnaw at my stomach and catch in my throat. So right. So beautiful. Medordo asks me, More quail's eggs? I tell him no. Mother Mary forgive me for

The Madness of Roland

her teeth but they are so white I must find the taste of them and the skin of her throat to taste so smooth and glorious. She pours me more tea. Delicious, this tea steeped from her. We're alone in the hall... where is everyone? Astolpho...? Her hair is as black as a cave and her skin is so yellow like the saffron cakes sold at market, saffron and violets, she would crumble in my mouth, wouldn't she? Yes, my spit would dissolve her as she ran down my throat to live in my belly. Spitted in my belly she laughs, I laugh with her, her hair is in my mouth, she bites me bites my tongue.

What is she doing? Why is she biting me? Blood salts my mouth. Her tongue is a spear in my throat as I swallow the world away in the down of belly and her white, white teeth. Oh, for the burying, bury me oh Earth! Oh, mother, take me to arms and heart, in this one. With her saffron and black! Yes! The joy of her hands her hair her teeth! What?! Why is she...

Medordo! Go away, boy. Take your fawning and your delicacy out of here. I have no time for your eyes now! Go! Lord Jesus, forgive me my... No! Where is she going? Where is she going?! I am the Roland. She must stay. I am the Roland she must take the bread my body, the bread of my heart! These words sound inside me like a child after milk, please, you cannot go away from me. I run after her, I run like the deer of my pulse, where is she? Please mother Mary Jesus lord just a glimpse, please, I am so sorry for my weakness, my sin, but don't you see that this woman, this woman with the saffron and hands can heal me, make the bread of my body whole for you. Whole for your teeth. Please...

The woods slap me like mothers. I stumble in the foreign displacement of forest, night and stone. I am the Roland, I am flint, and bone and wood charred mean, the spear of Christ, who am I to follow this woman's smell, the smell of the gates of Zion and the garden's breezes; sweet water and saffron shade.

Who is she to run from me. The woods! The trees are the fingers of the world, they roll me like dimpled dough. They glow, green, and alive with the night. They are the cage around the garden, they must go! Durendal! Together, we fell them like flesh, fell them for her scent. She is close! The moon moans me her voyages! The forest yields its ciphers. Her voice! Yes! She is here, she at last is mine...

The Madness of Roland

She...

Medordo...?

She...

GET OFF HER!

Get away, you filthy little boy how dare you lay your squalid figures on her body is the garden of the world her teeth are only for me. I will split you like Durendal!

The Madness of Roland

**There was a Hungarian adventurer who had
astonishing beauty,
infallible charm, grace, the powers of a trained
actor, culture,
knowledge of many tongues, aristocratic manners.
Beneath all
this was a genius for intrigue, for slipping out of
difficulties, for
moving smoothly in and out of countries.**

--Anais Nin

The Madness of Roland

My father was, needless to say, pleased with the return of my original colorings. It reassured him. Confirmed his manhood. Although the job would have gone as well with my favored blue and blonde. I'm sure the local cats are relieved. Next time, I'll try red hair (and green eyes!).

He wondered about transport, then mentioned some ridiculousness with a griffin. I declined. I have my ways. Getting there was the least of my problems.

...there little Peppin, how is that? Eh, little pooter... So this is the mighty Charlemagne. Which is Roland? He's awfully short... Oh no, there he is. With the hawk. Well, this won't be half bad.

I just stood and waited. Beautiful weather. A concubine screamed and spilled her wine.

The short knight rushes forward with his sword drawn, realizes his foolishness and retreats. Roland's hawk scores a kill.

Charlemagne takes charge. We talk. I fawn (Charles is too easy, you would think that with all those concubines he would be less susceptible.) I eye Roland. He fidgets (wonderful); a beautiful young page gives him doleful looks. (well,well.)

Is this The Roland of whom so much glory is sung?

I am.

I take his hand and lead him inside. The page casts an accusing glance. (at me or Roland?)

Dinner is arranged. (you never doubted me, did you?) We talk of trade and weapons. I pepper the evening with minor glammers: beauty, wit, desire. It was at last time for the real work. The Roland's downfall.

I began with the tea ceremony. What a fascinating bit of magic; spell

The Madness of Roland

within spell; glamour within ritual. I had never performed it before and the act of creation was as engaging as my quarry. What Roland lacked in wit he more than made up for in strength and beauty; he put up a magnificent fight, his power played between us as the spell buffeted him, pulled him under. He eventually succumbed (they always do).

I cleared the hall and began the final circle of glammers. I pulled the blood from his mouth. So close now. Still he fights it! Amazing! He grabs me and throws himself down on top...

Then was the moment of my undoing. Roland's doleful young page pushed his way past my wardings and into the hall.

The first law of Magic: Power is never created, only channeled. The fifth law of Magic: Avoid backlash.

The beautiful page stared at me, his chest shuddered and thundered. (The first law. I had pulled Roland's snare from the boy's desires!) He was so fragile and dear. His eyes. His teeth.(Backlash?) How could I have lived without him? Stop it! BACKLASH! Medordo?! Go away, the Roland says.

We ran out of the hall, Roland lumbering after us, past the guards' gates and into the night, the woods. Roland was long behind us. The woods closed like a hand, his hands, his beautiful hands and teeth devour me, devour the chalice of my hips as the nightwoods flow around us like a river. So dear, my boy, so fragile and light inside me. Pour out your pain into my earth little dear one! We will never be parted lover I will stay with you always lover always keep you near me, in me, we will stay always. ANGELICA! He found us. His glamour was unfinished and had pulled him to us like a tide. As the boy scampered to cover himself Roland crashed into the clearing, his sword drawn.

Dogs howled in his eyes. I prepared for battle.

The Madness of Roland

**killling;
yourself.**

**If you rejoice in victory, then you delight in
If you delight in killing, you cannot fulfill**

--Lao Tsu, Tao Te Ching

The Madness of Roland

But for the bitchmeat the Roland was my own. How I will flay her bone from flesh from bone Oh! For the piercing! How I long for that one - I long to tear the petals, long to string the pomegranate and grapes of her sex onto the long blades of emerald grass, sweet beneath an evening summer sky, as I ply her gilded juices into the sky... the evening sky...

How Dare She! Bitchmeat! The saviour is mine! He, the Roland is for me! AND ME ALONE!

I have timbres which she could only dream...

I am Widowmaker called Durendal called nail what colors could she offer that are not already given his grip, his caress... ?

I am his arc, his breath, SHE CANNOT HAVE HIM.

I shall give her hair to the crows and bathe myself in the tallow from her fat yellow thighs.

I am hues beyond you. Hues beyond the jerking of your feeble orbs. I am the tooth of the night. I am the shuddering violet between your

The Madness of Roland

veins. I wish I could forgive you. Forgive the coup of your hands. I am beyond all shades. How can we speak?

I am Widowmaker.

I can only sing of snicker-snack.

And you are afraid. Afraid of me. Afraid of the ant and the beetle.

Afraid of everything.

Your fear tatoos my name on your lips.

How ashamed you must be.

I will not humiliate you more.

I hold my victories too dear.

He bore the death of his two sons and his daughter with less fortitude than one would have expected, considering the strength of his

**character; for his emotions as a father, which were very
deeply
rooted,
made him burst into tears.**

--Einhard, Vita Caroli

That was a very hard time for me. After Rollie... left. He was very dear, you see. I know you must all think I'm a sentimentalist, but after all, life isn't just cold iron and pennants.

The woman just... appeared, I suppose. The heathens hadn't pressed an assault for several days and we were enjoying a jongleur on the roof of the oriel. It was a fine, clear day and Rollie was flying his hawks while the ladies took turns feeding me pears (I don't normally care for fruits, but they were all so sweet and insistent - could I resist?). I was

The Madness of Roland

massaging an unguent into little Peppin's hump (ridiculous, but it makes his mother feel better). The singer (splendid voice) was singing the most remarkable song (it was about the troubles this Danish king was having with some monster, fascinating, of course I've always been enamored of those old stories).

Samson had killed a dove and some gray feathers drifted down onto the roof. That's when I first saw her.

I was watching these feathers falling and one of them floated right down onto her head.

I gave a little start and Gisela spilled wine all down her front. Astolpho ...was it Astolpho? Yes. Astolpho... must have seen her at about the same time because he drew his sword and stepped toward her. The jongleur kept right on playing. Of course, he was blind.

She was one of the most magnificent women I had ever seen. Her skin was extraordinary: a color somewhere between honey and cinnamon. She was very small, but well-proportioned, with hair down beyond her waist. (so black.)

Her rarest attribute were her eyes. Words could never...

She plucked the dove feather from her hair.

What beautiful teeth!

The Madness of Roland

Greetings, great Lord Charles. Pardon my intrusion, but I could find no steward to announce me (it was true, he was always a problem, a few years later we had to put his eyes out). I am Angelica, Princess of Cathay. I bring greetings from my father.

Peppin hiccupped.

You must be the knight Roland, of whom so much glory is told, she said, walking toward him (something odd about the way she spoke).

Samson landed on Roland's wrist, a bit of dove hanging from his beak.

That was the last time I ever saw Roland whole.

Chapter Three Black is the knight

The rule for use of the military is: if you outnumber your enemy ten to one, surround them; five to one, attack them; two to one, divide.

If you are equal, then fight if you can. If you are fewer, keep away if you are able. If you are not as good, then flee if you are able.

--Sun Tzu, The Art of War

The Madness of Roland

Black is the Knight

Delirious mania: In the most severe type of manic reaction the individual is confused, wildly excited, and violent. The individual becomes incoherent and disoriented and may experience vivid auditory and visual hallucinations. There is extreme psychomotor overactivity, and the individual is violent and destructive and spends days and nights in restless pacing, singing, screaming, gesticulating, and incoherent shouting.

--from Abnormal Psychology and

Modern Life

Beji translated as quickly and accurately as he could. The fact that neither party wanted to hear what the other was saying, of necessity put the burden for the present turmoil squarely into Beji's hands.

Charles towered over Mandricardo. Frankish spit ran down into his beard. His temples throbbed timpani to the imperious bassoon of his voice.

"The sword is not the point! We are not here about the sword."

The Madness of Roland

The first syllable of Beji's translation had barely tumbled past his lips when Mandricardo launched into his by now familiar refrain.

"I will help you fight the Demon if you return the sword to me. I know you..."

Beji's mind, in spite of the bilingual cacophony and despite his better judgment, wandered. He didn't even attempt to translate.

No one seemed to notice.

Since the rodentine reconnaissance of a week before, Lord Mandricardo had been furious with Charlemagne's refusal to admit he had the sword Durendal. The Roland was dead. This was a certainty. The stones had confirmed it.

"The Roland will not return."

Mandricardo had grinned widely, lambsmeat gleaming, and danced a foolish little jig to his family's honor. They ate heavily and danced and laughed that night. With the Roland gone their return to Spain was imminent; unfortunately, the next morning life again soured.

Charles was stubborn and wily. Beji had a hard time keeping up with the flow of subtlety that ran through the first parley. He had been taught that the translator's job was not only to communicate what was said, but the texture, tone and subtext of the speech as well. Charles the Frank gave Beji more than a casual challenge. Beji also had the vague intuition that Charles understood at least part of what passed between him and his lord.

The hostilities had commenced afresh after the third negotiation. Mandricardo's forces were actually making headway and had established a foothold at the Gate of Swallows when the Demon struck.

His genesis and purpose were beyond the scope of mortal conjecture.

He was huge, his skin was as black as a cave and a baleful hatred raged in his eyes. He wielded only a tree trunk (the size of a horse's leg) and fought anything that moved. He fell first on the armies of Lord Mandricardo and then on the warriors of Charlemagne, sent to help what they thought to be a beleaguered Christian knight in black livery.

The Madness of Roland

His fury was absurd.

He bent back all who opposed him and many who didn't. His attacks were capricious and wide-ranging: a wine train from the south (killing the mules and spilling fifty gallons of Bordeaux), a group of nuns from the convent at Rhymes (the sisters escaped, harried

but unharmed) and, just this morning, Lord Mandricardo's own tent.

He killed

Mandricardo's cook and his first lieutenant. Mandricardo himself had been tossed into the camp's latrine.

So it was that Mandricardo had sought out Charles with the proposition of a concerted disposal. All hostilities between the two lords had ceased because the Demon was particularly keen to the scent of pitched battle. He seemed to delight in cutting a path through the middle of a melee, indiscriminately pulverizing on either side of the front. After the third such attack Mandricardo's men refused to take the field.

Forty-three of Mandricardo's men had fallen to the Angel of Hell (a Frankish priest had tried to exorcise the Demon but the monster had merely held him down and shat upon his neck), and they estimated at least twenty of Charles' men had suffered similarly. Dozens more were hurt - bruised and beaten by the brute's oak branch.

Beji's reverie was broken by a crashing wail a few yards into the woods. The Demon had been seen here just a few hours before, so the lords haggled and puffed at the forest's gate while the foot soldiers searched the leafy shadows for darkness' emissary. They had apparently found him.

Charles and Mandricardo stopped, mouths agape, un-understood arguments forgotten. Another crash. A scream. A thud.

Mandricardo summoned the spearmen he had kept close to hand for just this contingency. Charles ran to his horse and drew his sword.

The Madness of Roland

A horse bolted from the forest, its rider dragging obscenely behind. His head had somehow been deflated. The Demon followed.

Beji was still busy with the picture of the horseman's head when he realized the monster had broken out of the undergrowth and was bearing down on them at a wicked pace.

Charles and Mandricardo took their ground, side by side, in front of the line of spears. Their fear was palpable. The Demon's skin was a horrible scaly black-grey; his head was covered in an odd grey-green mane of mossy... leaves. Leaves? Why would a demon have...

The Beast fell on the two generals with a swiftness and surety that Beji found both otherworldly and unsettlingly familiar. The creature snatched Charles' blade from his hand and hurled it, singing, end over end, into a tree. Charles was knocked backwards, heels over head, as Mandricardo was pushed away, arms windmilling, onto the point of a spear. Beji watched, disbelieving, as spear point and blood geysered beneath Mandricardo's mail-shirt. The spearmen scattered.

Mandricardo looked, puzzled, from the spear point to Beji, before tumbling backwards. The spear shaft groaned green wood and snapped under his weight.

Beji was digesting his lord's death when the wind went out of him, the world whirled round and he found himself staring into the hell-rimmed visage, the fiendish face of..

The Roland, covered in mud and drooling like an infant.

The Madness of Roland

Chapter Four
A Chapel, Small and Dear

**I could feel them coming as I lay in the dark of my
cave.**

Grendel

-John Gardner,

The Madness of Roland

Birds of a Feather

Pigeon Pie

5 tbsp butter
2 cups plain broth
5 tbsp flour
1 cup heavy cream

20 pearl onions
1 cup fresh peas
1 pastry shell
4-5 pigeons, cleaned &

dressed

The Madness of Roland

Melt butter. Stir in flour to form a roux. Add broth, and heat until thickened, about 3-4 minutes. Add cream and peas, and remove from heat. Place pigeon meat on top of pastry shell in deep pie dish. Cover pigeon with sauce. Stir in pearl onions. Put crust on top and bake for one hour.

Beji twittered and flew up as high as the low roof of the tiny chapel would allow. A large mastiff barked and blundered after him. The priests were beside themselves trying to catch him before the service began. The larger of the priestly pair ran into the baptismal fount, sloshing holy water onto the thrush-strewn floor. Sweat ran down the fat father's face in great glistening streams. Beji was convinced the chubby cleric was picturing him baked into a pie (pigeon pie was a favorite with the local populace) and that his fervor to remove Beji was motivated more by hunger than piety.

Beji inquired of Allah why he must constantly travel in a guise less than human. His rat bites had yet to fully heal and here he was careening about the nave of a tiny woodland chapel, pursued by a dog and two priests: the former primed to swallow him whole, the latter ready to say a prayer and wash him down with a hearty Port.

The Madness of Roland

A door in the back of the chapel opened and Beji saw his chance. He sprinted between the dog (what a smell) and the hefty holy man (even worse) right into the waiting arms of the woman he was there to spy on. He hit her head-on in the chest and fell, motionless, to the floor. She bent and picked him up.

"Oh, look, a bird."

Beji's black bird eyes blinked and cleared. Angelica held him to her breast.

"Oh, the poor little thing."

Beji cursed at the loss of egress, then, spurred by the arrival of the dog, thanked Allah for the woman's presence. She surely had saved him from becoming the priest's (or the dog's) unwilling supper guest. Beji admired, from his bird's eye vantage, her startling beauty. As the priests careened onto the scene, panting and puffing, Angelica cast them a look all imperious fire. The older of the two stammered out, "The bird got into the church and we was trying to get him out before the services began..."

Another door opened and a second pair of men, father and son (it would seem), approached.

Beji recognized the older man as a counselor of Charlemagne's. The younger one he did not know.

So it was true. Here was one of Charlemagne's closest advisors. The enchantress was leagued with the Franks. Beji's fundamental mission was now fulfilled and he could, thankfully, return to his camp. All he had to do was effect his departure. Something it seemed the enchantress would expedite, for as the young man approached her she passed the bird in hand to the larger priest. Beji thanked Allah. She would, he knew, tell the monks to set him free. Traveling about as an animal might not be so bad after all.

"Bake him up into a pie for yourselves," Angelica said in her melodious soprano. Had he been better versed in the intricacies of aviary expression, the meaty monk would have seen the subtle look of terror that trampled over Beji's birdly countenance at the culinary prospects

The Madness of Roland

sanctioned by the young queen. The priests deposited Beji in an ornamental cage near the chapel's door where several plump doves cooed and jostled. Beji wondered what their fate was to be. Were they casseroles-in-waiting for the grisly priests? Or were they simply dressing for the shrine's interior? Beji knew the heathens' God sometimes appeared as a dove, perhaps...

A ceremony of some kind was beginning. Beji pondered the reasons for this bizarre arrangement. Angelica and one of Charlemagne's advisors had traveled to this tiny, out of the way church for what reason? Who was the boy and why was he here?

A plump grey dove sidled up to Beji and cooed in his ear. Beji scooted aside. The lady dove followed, cooing more intently.

If it was just a private meeting they desired why not meet in Paris? The city surely offered ample locality for such a rendezvous. Perhaps they could not run the risk of being seen together. But why? Were they plotting against Charles? The older cleric finished his nasal intonations (in a language Beji failed to recognize, but guessed had to be Latin). A procession started up the center aisle as the fat priest began to sing in a brilliant, high falsetto. No, it wasn't a falsetto. Had fatty lost his... ? Beji had heard of the boy singers who gave up their manhood so that their voices would not change. He smiled a little pigeon smile at the prospect.

Angelica, the old advisor and his son (was it?) all walked up the aisle as the alleged castrati assaulted the roof with his sweet, strong voice. The singing stopped, the nasal chanting resumed. The priests and the trio exchanged words in Latin... What was going on? Perhaps they were practitioners of an outlawed or blasphemous religion and were forced to worship in private. No, wait, this made no sense - Angelica was from the East...

Beji abandoned this line of inquiry as unproductive and turned his thoughts to a more pressing issue: how was he to get out of the chapel without first passing through some stranger's bowels?

Suddenly, the doors to Beji's right exploded inward as if struck by a massive blow. There was a single moment of stillness, as heads turned and mouths gaped, then he was there: The Roland - more fearsome and huge and wild than when Beji had last seen him. Like a fox among

The Madness of Roland

hens he waded into the church, bellowing, swinging his tree-trunk club in horrible arcs. The enchantress disappeared in a shimmering veil of light, only to appear a moment later across the nave. The bird cage was knocked to the ground, springing its door open. Amidst a cacophony of wings Beji took to flight. Angelica flung a blue bolt of enchantment at the Paladin, striking him in the chest. Beji flew out the shattered doors as the sounds of screams and blows echoed through the tiny churchyard.

**We begin with the realm of hell, the most intense. First there comes
a
build up of energy and emotions to a peak; at some stage it may be
very confusing whether the energy is controlling us or we are
controlling it.
Suddenly one may lose track of this whole race; the mind is put into
an
empty, blank state - the luminosity. From that empty state an
extreme
temptation to fight starts to develop; that paranoia will also bring
terror.**

-from The Tibetan Book of the Dead

The Madness of Roland

Murder. Murderer.

I will live forever with these words. Think about it.

It's irrevocability is suffocating.

Most of the vices that people engage in fade so nicely with time.

Not murder, though.

No. That one hangs with you.

I know that It was not me who did those things... Not ME who killed those people. I know that most of the men killed were soldiers, I know that it was Satan who acted through me, controlled me, hid my reason, that It wasn't me, that no one considers me a murderer. No one except myself.

I had killed a lot of people - a lot of men, a lot of soldiers before the

The Madness of Roland

madness came, but that was different.

That was the way things were, the way things should be. Men risked their lives, it was their job. Not the others, though.

That's what I can never forgive myself for.

The innocents. Whether I was aware of what I was doing or not, still I did it.

I am a murderer. I always will be.

You see, if a man is a blacksmith or a cobbler and he wants to change his vocation, he has simply to do so and from that day on he can say he 'used to be a blacksmith.' Not so the murderer.

Oh, you can lie - but the truth is in you like a worm. I wish I could lie to you about my madness and what I did.

I remember very little of that time. Almost nothing in fact. Just the vague swatches of an animal's memories.

Smells, feelings and tastes - the moon - all my skin crawling with an itch to be free - the deep green caress of the forest - its leaves like fingers on me... and a boundless desire to kill. Anything. To stop my shame.

My shame?

Does an animal know shame?

No, but I was ashamed. Ashamed of what the boy had done. So I killed him.

When you fight a man, a knight or a soldier, on the field, all is equal, everyone is responsible for his own survival, even the greatest can fall with a single blow. There is honor in the battle. I loved it well. For years it was all I knew. It is still all I know. Killing. I don't know how to do anything else.

The Madness of Roland

The Madness of Roland

**I delighted so much in her that I made for her love songs,
ballads,
roundels, virelays, and diverse things in the best wise I
could. But
death, that on all makes war, took her from me, which has
made me
many a sorrowful thought and great heaviness. And so it
is more than
twenty years that I have been for her full of great
sorrow. For a true
lover's heart never forgets the woman he has truly loved.
-from the letters of Geoffrey
de la Tour**

The Madness of Roland

It had nothing to do with religion. I did it because he insisted on it. And his father. Oh yes, Lord Gan was very keen on having little Medordo married to the daughter of the King of Cathay.

There's very little of that time that I remember. The backlash from the glamour was intoxicating. I lived and breathed his flesh, his pulse, even though I didn't like him much at all. Somewhere, I knew it was the magic, yet there was nothing I could do. No proof against it could I find. I was like the dreamer who knew they dreamt, yet could not wake up. The dream rolls on despite you.

I still love him. The thought of his sweet skin rotting makes me sick.

Without him I am undone. I know it is backlash, and yet I am undone.

The craft is such a strange master. The price for power is freedom. I suppose many things are this way.

I choose to saddle myself with the costs of creation, and in so doing forfeit my ability to choose. After I am anchored to a spell I must ride its tolls until all energies are equalized.

This is the honor and conundrum of the craft. My mother gave me the finest respect for it. I love her so. And miss her. Gods, she was so alive. Now she feeds the Earth. Like poor little Medordo.

I didn't even really like him, he was so fragile, like a woman almost, yet all the blood in the world won't wash away the loss.

The Roland took him from me and I will be revenged.

Is it worth it?

The craft?

Is it worth all this?

Chapter Five
La Bella Luna

The Moon

A desolate plain stretched before me. A full moon looked down as if in contemplative hesitation. On either side of the path a wolf and a dog sat and howled at the moon. I remembered that dogs believed in thieves and ghosts. A large black crab crawled out of the rivulet into the sands. A heavy, cold dew was falling.

--P.D.

Ouspensky

The Madness of Roland

La Bella Luna

**This new life started out just as he wanted. His mate, the
Moon, bore him
a little one. This little one looked exactly like he did, it
was his very image
and every bit like him. It was a male.**

-- Percy Bullchild, The Sun Came

Down

The Madness of Roland

I didn't believe the crone at first. The moon! Oh, how I bloody laughed! But, well, here I am. I mean, after all, who would have believed that Roland's reason was kept in a phial in a huge storehouse on the moon? Looking back, it makes as much sense as anything else. Oh, how grand. The distances! From down here it looks like you could just pluck it out the sky with thumb 'n forefinger but it's a long bloody way off, I'll tell you. God, is it DARK out there and so cold. I think I liked that most of all. The cold. It was all so clean and thin - up there between the mountains and the moon.

Ah, but I precede myself. First things first.

Lord Charles all but threw Paris to the infidels to get Roland back. Had the whole of the peers out scouring for him, searching for the trick to get him. It was easy enough to find him - just bang two swords together for five minutes and there he'd be - wailing on all concerned - but how to get him BACK.

Paris was all but undefended - the peers were scattered about the country, poking their heads in caves and such - while Roland was covered from crown to crack with river-mud, talking to birds and howling at the moon.

Speaking of which.

The Madness of Roland

I'm not sure where this old woman came from - I can't remember if I found her or she found me - but she's the one who told me about the moon. And the trip! God, the Hippogryf - what a magnificent animal. It heaved through space like a swimmer. It was all I could do to hold on!

The moon's not at all like they say, you know. Not at all. I was expecting everyone to walk upside down or to speak in rhymes. None of it. It's very barren, actually. Beautiful, though.

Very.

Reminds me of a woman I knew once, very cold and severe, but God, the beauty... You know, Roland used to constantly chastise me about my... involvements. He just never got it. He loved to fight. I fought so that I could love. But what a fighter he was.

Yes, anyway, the moon. Astounding. At the very center...

It's a huge flat disc, you see...

At the very center is a vast castle, made of the cleanest, sweetest white marble - like virgin's teeth - and that's where the King of the Moon is to be found. Huge fellow. Big white teeth. All this mass of snowy hair and eyes like... ice.

Here's his thing: he's a drinker. That's how I got Roland's noodles out of hock. Drank the bastard under the table. Ha! Good thing it wasn't the other way round - Rollie going for me he drinks like my mother - I'd still be rooting for truffles and crapping on my heels (when we finally caught Roland and cleaned him up - what a stink!)

Praecox (that's his name! - sounds like what you call a boy's wick before he's got his beard! - didn't tell him that, of course) he tells me he'll give me Roland's reason back if I can best him at a drinking contest! Silly old bugger - right out of some story, isn't it? A drinking contest. He shows me the vault where all the phials are kept - bloody, bloody astounding. I knew most people were basically half-cracked but I had no idea the number of absolute lunatics there are running about... Oh. I just got it. LUNATICS. That's what it means. The phials were magnificent, all gold and jewels and the like - I wanted to ask him what happened to them after the "owner" died but he wasn't very

The Madness of Roland

forthcoming.

We go into the banquet hall - it's full of the most interesting sorts (like people from a dream, all beautiful and wicked and strange) and is the size of... well, you could fit Charlie's great hall and chambers (including the courtyard and fountains) into it twice. We go up to a dais and this fellow booms out: "Gentles of the dark and reflection!" They all get quiet. "I present to you all - Astolpho of Britain, Acquitania and Lombard. Paladin in the service of Charles the Great and friend to the Knight Roland. He's to drink with us tonight, in contest for The Roland's reason. If he bests us he can leave with Roland's wit - if not, he will stay and revel with us here forever."

He didn't mention THAT before. It was too late by then, of course, but we might at least have discussed it before hand. Fair is fair.

The wine was exquisite - lovely reds, delicate whites, lumbering ports - a honey wine that was like suckling at the breast of nature herself. Then we moved to beer (I would have preferred to go the other way round myself) dark, light, heavy, nutty, cold, warm - we drank and drank. All the while we were served by the most fetching little creature - all tawny and doe-eyed, very slender, lovely hands and the most tantalizing mouth I'd ever seen. She seemed rather shy, but with every new carafe or barrel she'd cast me the dearest little glances, and eventually a tiny smile (all these I returned both in quantity and quality). I told her that regardless of what I was to drink, she would be the dearest intoxicant of the night. She colored a bit and moved off. Loony moon king shot me a nasty look. He was probably bedding her - you know how these kingly types are.

Then we moved to harder selections: whiskey, brandy and rye. Rare and violent unguents all. Soon I was reeling; the room moved like it was under water (Water! I could've drained the whole bloody channel then!). On and on the glasses came. Down and down I sank. I crawled, I barked, I cried, but still and still I drank. Lunaris Rex seemed unaffected. I began to get worried. It was getting very late and the drink grew stronger. I began to see double. I toasted the Emperor Charles: "the greatest monarch on Heaven or Earth!" I was reeling. Praecox drained a mug and called for more. On and on and on. My head was on fire. Soon it would be over. He called for the spirit of white poppies and I knew it would be my last. The girl brought out two silver goblets. I gripped the table, tottering. I mumbled. I broke wind.

The Madness of Roland

The crowd laughed. The King said, "You will like it here." I grew very afraid. He drained his goblet and motioned to me. The room waited. Soon it would end. I tipped the goblet back and readied myself for the swoon. It didn't come! I drank expecting fire and midnight; the oblivion of the rarest, meanest spirits - but it was water! Clear and simple water. The girl smiled at me as I thumped the goblet to the table. I winked.

"What's next?" I bellowed.

The Green Cheese king looked a little miffed.

"We have plenty more, little man. Don't worry."

Oh oh.

Just as he raised his hand to order more, a soft little murmur ran through the assemblage. The beautiful, wicked strangers began to fade: their colors running first to gray, then white, then transparency. I looked about, thinking the water had been drugged - a trick.

The King of the Moon smiled at me and said, "The sun is coming up. It is daybreak. You've won, Astolpho."

Bloody right.

"Take your friend's reason back with you." With that he was gone.

The girl followed in the instant, a blown kiss fading to insubstantiality.

General description of the types:

No other human type can equal the extroverted sensation type in realism. His sense for objective facts is extraordinarily developed.

His life is an accumulation of actual experience of concrete objects, and the more pronounced his type, the less use does he make of his experience. In certain cases the events of his life can hardly be called experience.

-- Carl Gustav Jung

The Madness of Roland

It's not just the murder. There was so much more from that time. Even now I can feel everything slipping away. Dissolving. Do you know what it's like to be shattered? To lose yourself - the most vital part of what you believe yourself to be - to darkness? It is terrible and intoxicating. I don't think I have known a greater wholeness since. Isn't that funny? Wholeness? Strange word for that time. I had all but unraveled.

I learned that the only center is outside the skin. I learned that the worms of the gut are the rice-cakes of peace. We are all wolves. We shit flowers in the forest's dark rings. We cannot jack the moon's bones from under our skin with wafers and blood.

I have learned to swallow my madness whole.

I am thankful that Charlemagne's peers followed me and watched over me - brought me back from the abyss - but I would as like slaughter them all for it.

Oh, I am sorry. I meant to tell you of redemption and peace. I meant to tell you how the cross dissolved and how I lived in a place of no lines. I wanted to talk about...

I'm sorry. I thought I had something more to say.

The Madness of Roland

"Have you ever cursed someone and wished he was dead?" she said abruptly.

"Yes," I answered at once. Strangely enough, I had not thought about it until that moment, but now it was clear to me that I had been hoping for the death of the girl in the lodging-house, who had been a

The Madness of Roland

witness of my shame.

**-- Yukio Mishima, The Temple of the
Golden Pavilion**

The Madness of Roland

Enough! shouted the enchantress, clapping her hands violently together. A blue flame sheeted from between them and an explosion of some note whumped outward with the fire.

Beji's translation was interrupted in mid-conversion by the report. It bounced tankards off shelves, raised a dust cloud of heroic proportions, and rattled the window panes in their settings.

Angelica eyed the room's occupants. Finally she said, in a tone liquid with sarcasm, I'll translate from now on - it should go a little faster.

Ganelon, a finger oscillating wildly in one ear, said, Was that absolutely necessary? He brushed at his vermilion robes and lobbed Angelica a steely accusatory stare.

She volleyed back with, Once the ringing goes away we will all be able to understand one another as if we were speaking the same language.

It will certainly be an improvement over his fuddlings.

Beji, doe-eyed, blurted out, Well, I'm sorry, but I'm doing the best I can.

You, she said, have been turned into some animal or other one too many times. It's got you all scrambled.

Beji barked, Oh, shut up! You spoiled little child. What would you know about it? His voice reached for registers normally reserved for bats. Do you think you can do any better?! He blushed suddenly at the uncharacteristic outburst, started to say something (an apology?) then stopped, scratching (furtively) at an imagined flea.

Angelica thought how beautiful the boy was; his teeth and eyes. How finely boned - like a bird. He is quite... A sudden image, almost violent, the boy on her, pounding and grunting: his teeth digging in to the meat of her neck, those beautiful teeth...

Beji and Angelica locked on each other, for the briefest of moments before a scream (of some note) burst from her throat. A low-pitched animal sound that rose in a frenzied scale of frustration. Her face contracted into a mask of rage.

I want Roland Dead! I will feed his bowels to the crows! I will crush his

The Madness of Roland

balls with my own hands!!!

Her face was flushed a livid pink, her breathing was heavy and ragged. Beji felt every thought of hers in the well between his eyes. His ears still rang. He knew (somehow) that she was wet. She said, her words measured, I will kill the Roland.

Mandricardo, propped on a couch, the large bandage around his chest tinged with blood, said weakly, I assure you, Angelica, that our goals are very much in line.

Ganelon stroked his beard and said nothing.

**Therefore let there always be non-being,
so we may see their subtlety,
And let there always be being, so we may see their
outcome.**

--Lao Tzu

How hard the fallow season. How hard the memories of sun and blood. The memory of brave pennants snapping sweet against an evening sky. How hard the singing in the dark of my soul-thought for rage and victory.

Is this only for what I am made? Singing of blood and the babies' cry. I

The Madness of Roland

am Widowmaker. I am nail, wherefore?

Why?

The dark is a dangerous enemy. Thoughts run like rust, bloody under plaited skin.

Wherefore.

I long to cajole the bone out into its rightful resting place, I long to laugh with The Roland's arm, but all my thoughts shout of silence.

All my thoughts ask: If I were The Roland would I know other days?
Does he fear the dark --like quiet or fire-- too?

I am Widowmaker. I am nail.

Singing of blood and the babies' cry.

Wherefore?

I dreamt I was a woman.

It terrified me.

Chapter Six

The Tide Turns

**... what is war, after all, but this passing of more and more
dented objects from hand to hand?**

The Madness of Roland

-- Italo Calvino, *The Nonexistent Knight*

The Tide Turns

"Warriors don't do anything just to amuse themselves," he replied. "His transformations were strategical. They were dictated by need, like his transformation from old to young.

Now and then there were funny consequences, but that's another matter."

-- Carlos Casteneda, *The Power of Silence*

"I'll have you whipped. I could even have you killed."

The words were delivered casually, almost placidly, making them seem all the more threatening.

"No, my lord. The stones do not work that way."

Beji gazed soberly at the nobleman opposite. Marsilius looked to Mandricardo.

"Are you going to let him act this way towards me?" Marsilius asked.

The Madness of Roland

He seemed almost bored.

Mandricardo shrugged. "It's the time he spent as a rodent. I can't do anything with him."

"Then I shall have him killed."

"Oh, Beji," Mandricardo said petulantly, reclining on a huge pile of rugs and pillows, "read him the stones and if they're wrong it's his own fault. No one will hold you responsible."

"As you command, Lord Mandricardo."

As Beji readied his casting the sounds of the camp filtered into the silence of the tent. It was early, well before dawn, and the cold Frankish air carried the sounds of the army stirring: cooks washing scallions, horses prancing and stamping off the night's deep cold, two knights calling a greeting.

Marsilius was a large and handsome man: he wore his beard in the Eastern fashion, daintily trimmed to two fine points, and was very popular with the ladies. He was the liege of Saragossa, a well-known poet, only moderately devout, and Mandricardo's half-brother.

"It's the principle. You understand," said Marsilius.

"Of course, Brother."

"How's your wound?"

"It's very deep. It hurts. Especially in this cold. It will be good to have done with this and get back home."

"My Lords. The stones are ready."

"Well then, rat-boy, let's see if my half-brother's braggings are accurate. Cast away."

"Beji did. After a moment's study he pronounced, "Lord Marsilius, your boots will know the streets of Paris today."

"Splendid! Allah be praised. See now, rat-boy, I knew you could do it."

The Madness of Roland

"Yes, Lord," said Beji, eyes to the ground. He had not really cast the stones - that would have been a transgression the stones might not have easily forgiven. Oh, he went through the motion of casting, certainly, but the stones, like the Quran, were as much about intent and purity of mind as they were about ritual. He simply told Marsilius what he had wanted to hear.

"Now, Brother Marsilius, shall we discuss strategy?"

"What's to discuss? I have arrived with 5,000 fresh troops and you, Brother Mandricardo, are bed-ridden. You can observe my strategy from your sickbed. Perhaps you'll learn a thing or two about conducting a siege."

"What do you intend to do about The Roland?"

Marsilius smirked. "You mean the demon? I don't intend to do anything about him. He is not a factor. I intend to end this siege, recover your property and get us all home before winter sets in. Besides, I thought the enchantress was going to see to 'The Roland.' What's become of her?"

"I don't know."

"Yes, well, intelligence and reconnaissance are two of the essential principles of any military campaign."

Beji stood next to Mandricardo's couch as Marsilius addressed the assembled troops. Beside them the sharifs, vassals to both the great lords, tried to look stoic in the cold. The sun was just tinting the horizon and their breath shot out of their mouths in great plumes. Below, and far away, Paris stirred in the beginnings of her defense. Perhaps because of the cold, perhaps because of Marsilius' presence, the proceedings seemed to take on an extreme importance, as if everyone there knew that great deeds, worthy of song, would take place that day. Paris itself seemed larger and more grand, like some city of legend Thebes, Damascus or Ur - and they the conquerors who would take her and live forever in a thousand tales.

"Men of Saragossa, Covadonga and Toledo. The Farangi have humiliated us these many weeks. Today it ends. Today we will take this

The Madness of Roland

city and we will break their heathen power. Victory. For the honor of your families! For your wives and children! For Mecca! For Allah and for Islam! You will all eat lamb in paradise!"

Amidst a tumult of shouts and banging shields, Marsilius, the sharif of Saragossa with the beard so favored by the ladies, rode toward Paris. As the collected armies thronged around him, Mandricardo turned to Beji and said, "Certainly has a way with words, doesn't he?"

The first wave of the Saracen assault was easily repelled by the Parisians. But by mid-day Marsilius' fresh forces and siege engines had bought purchase at the Gate of Swallows and the Gate of Leaves. Charlemagne missed, more than ever, the strength of his nephew and the company of Peers sent to look for him. Within three hours the Saracens had punched a hole in the Eastern wall, near the Gate of Sighs, and begun to pour into the interior of the city. Upon hearing the news, Marsilius belted on his sword and spurred his horse straight for the breach, shouting, "The stones were right!" at Beji as he rode away.

He was soon deep in the melee, riding over his own men in his determination to reach the interior of the city. Within minutes he had ridden through the breach, carrying the banner of Saragossa into Paris. As he cleared the wall a great shout went up from the Saracen forces at his back. Looking up he saw Charles, not a hundred yards away, on the ramparts. He knew then the day was his. The stones had told it. Seizing the moment, he shouted up at the Frankish King, "Charlemagne! Paris is mine! Surrender now or I will kill you to a man!" Charles stood very still and it seemed then that battle inside the walls suddenly died out, as if waiting for his reply. Into the silence came a sound. A sound like a great wave breaking: deep and sonorous and compelling. At first Marsilius thought the sound had come from Charlemagne but when it sounded again he knew it was from beyond the walls.

Nearby someone shouted, "The Oliphant! The Oliphant sounds! Roland is returned!" Looking down at Marsilius, Charlemagne laughed and spat, "I'll surrender when you drop to your knees and bark like a dog, heathen!"

Marsilius furiously wheeled his mount around. Through the Eastern breach could be seen a company of Frankish knights riding in close order. At their head was Roland, sounding a great silver horn as he

The Madness of Roland

rode.

...Once Man was occupied in intellectual pleasures & energies, But now my Soul is harrow'd with grief & fear & love & desire, And now I hate & now I love, & Intellect is no more. There is no time for any thing but the torments of love & desire...

-William Blake, "The Warrior's Lament"

The afternoon had grown warm. Roland flicked at a bead of sweat as the tiniest of smiles creased his face. If there had been anyone who knew him, who was familiar with his manner, close enough to have seen that sly, cold little half-smile they would have perhaps taken him for someone else, or wondered at the dark foreign joys that could produce such expression on so sweet-faced a man. As it was, he stood unobserved, amidst a vast scape of the dead and dying, and smiled his terrible little smile. He stood in the warm afternoon light, the sky a brilliant high dome, and smiled as a sublime exhaustion settled on his limbs: the exhaustion known only to warriors who have outdistanced the day's hazards to stand, surrounded by the dead.

The battle, now all but spent, stirred fitfully around him: a cry, ringing steel, mumbled prayers, a cough. Closer, an alien supplication, desperately gasped, caused Durendal to thrum lightly in his hand. As Roland stepped toward the sound, the sword moved more insistently.

Durendal cried to the Roland for the Saracen's blood, but the Paladin

The Madness of Roland

sheathed the blade and knelt beside the infidel.

He was older than Roland, a veteran certainly of many such affairs, and he implored the Frank with a look that said, "From one warrior to another I ask quarter." Another smile from Roland as he nodded to the Moor.

Roland! A shout from behind him. It was Astolpho, flanked by Charlemagne and Bishop Turpin. All three were bloody and disheveled, Turpin had a large gash on his forehead and Astolpho limped as he approached.

Roland stood and watched, mouth slightly slack, as the three came nearer. For a moment Charlemagne was afraid that he didn't remember them.

Charles grabbed up Roland and held him tightly in his arms. So, Roland. You've come back to us. And once again the day is yours.

What do you mean, Roland? said Astolpho. Leaving your battle-mate like that? After I flew to the bloody moon to get you back with us, you go charging off into the hordes all by yourself? I wanted to present you to the emperor in proper fashion and you went and spoiled it."

The rashness of youth, replied Roland, smiling.

As the three comrades talked, Turpin bent to aid the injured Saracen. His left side had been laid open by a spear thrust and the Bishop could see that he was not long for the world of flesh. He pulled a silver flask from under his mail-shirt, unbelted his sword and mace, and knelt next to the dying man.

I can offer you salvation if you will accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your saviour...

The words broke off in his mouth as Roland, eyes light with a frightening whimsy, jerked the flask of holy water from the warrior-priest.

Let the man die in peace, he said. Turpin watched, his face a beacon of confusion, as Roland raised the flask of holy water to his lips and drained it, then, bending at the waist, kissed the heathen warrior

The Madness of Roland

squarely on the lips.

Cross or crescent, it's all the same for you now, he whispered to the dying man. Turpin mumbled a prayer.

Roland stood and faced the three Christians.

Forgive me, he said, before walking away through the field of the dead.

If an individual has wrestled seriously enough and long enough with the anima (or animus) problem so that he, or she, is no longer partially identified with it, the unconscious again changes its dominant character and appears in a new symbolic form, representing the Self, the innermost nucleus of the psyche. In the dreams of a woman this center is usually personified as a superior female figure --a priestess, sorceress, earth mother, or goddess of nature or love.

--Carl G. Jung, Man and His

Symbols

Yes, that day lives on. The day the saviour was returned. I hold its sound in my surfaces; its taste in my gleaming edge. The dying sweetened dirt with life for me and I, in return, set them free.

I envy them. I know that flesh is terror, but must it not also be that...? I don't know. How can I know the ways of flesh? They are only meat for my table. All of you are meat, sweet meat made for dying. Only steel endures.

Yet, in the shadow time of stillness I yearn for taste and breath I yearn for tears I yearn for other than the thinness of cleaving. All my knowledge is but a hair's breadth passing endlessly through the folds of the world. I long for hair and sunlight. Arms for holding not swinging.

The Madness of Roland

And I wonder if, when the sober quiet thrums me finally, when the autumn dark and rusted blood have ground me away - will I pay? For the slaying. Will I pay for my sins? The sins of steel. The sins of the cleaver.

Whose only knowledge is the edge of drinking, of prying, spying the sharp-nickel shine of desire in the saviour's eye and splaying it jeweled out onto the grass, sweet beneath an evening sky.

I long to smile. And with my smiling to rise, sunlike up into the evening air, rich with wind and seed I long to be flung, seedlong to the wind, that my children would root in the dark soil and spill, play, splay forth their souls to the violet, tasting sky as we, he and I, tumble through the luxurious stalks of emerald grass; offering and feasting, freeing the pomegranate and grapes of my sex that the mother might grow.

Oh, the dreams I have.

How hard.

He loved foreigners and took great pains to make them welcome. So many visited him as a result that they were rightly held to be a burden, not only to the palace but the entire realm. In his magnanimity he took no notice at all of this criticism, for he considered that his reputation for hospitality and the advantage of the good name which he acquired more than compensated for the great nuisance of being there.

-- Einhard, Vita Caroli

The Madness of Roland

There was always much more to it than just the sword. Make no mistake about that. Even when they first marched on Paris, Durendal was simply an excuse. It was really about domination. It was about Moorish rule of France. It was about the death of Christianity.

Can you understand now my need for vigilance? My need for cruelty? I would have preferred to play with my children in the afternoons, and laugh and be easy. I worry, sometimes what history must think of me. Am I remembered as a good man? How do you think of me? I mean, do you...

Oh, bugger it all anyway. I hate when I get like this. All self-absorbed and morbid. Sod it. What does it matter?

Action! That's the cure. Nothing like decisive action to pull a man out of the doldrums.

The wind at your back, a clear goal before you and all is right with the world.

Of course, it's a lot harder when you're dead.

But, I've always been like this. That's why I used to envy Roland so. No time for self-examination. No introspective musing for that lad. Word one and off he went. Especially after he came back, I mean after he was restored - his reason. God, he was like... thought made real. It could be terrifying. Still, I was so proud. God I loved him. Loved him like...

...like he was my own son.

And that day when he came back? Oh, that was rich, I'll tell you! I thought we were done. I was so afraid. Paris was all but overrun and I knew that it was all about to go, that the heathen would have my head on a pike and the empire divided for spoils, when Roland sounded that horn.

That sound was like... oh, God, resurrection, it was like a sudden light that just poured in on all of us and our wills were propped up and rebound. Ha, listen to me, I sound like Turpin.

The Madness of Roland

Funny though, that Roland had brought us there and just when it seemed that the whole world would slip away from us, he sounded that Oliphant of his and led us back.

There are few circumstances among those which make up the present condition of human knowledge more unlike what might have been expected, or more significant of the backward state in which speculation on the most important subjects still lingers, than the little progress which has been made in the decision of the controversy respecting the criterion of right and wrong.

--John Stuart Mill,

Utilitarianism

Winter's Coming

The tired rabbits fed and basked in the sunny meadow as though they'd come no further than from the bank at the edge of the nearby copse. The heather and the stumbling darkness were forgotten as though the sunrise had melted them. Bigwig and Hawkbit chased each other through the long grass.
-Richard Adams, Watership

Down

"Come here, boy," the enchantress purred, as her companion, slender and brown, scampered to the other side of the bed. The silk bedclothes which served as his impromptu robe slipped aside, revealing his eager youth, surprising in proportion to his body.

"Stay away from me, you fiend." A grin belied his tone. "I know what you want to do with that plum."

"What's the matter? Don't you like fruit?"

"After a meal, in season, in the proper proportion and in the proper orifice, yes, a piece of fruit can be quite nice."

Angelica laughed, genuinely and with affection. She truly liked the

The Madness of Roland

boy, which surprised her, and found herself ready for him again, which surprised her even more. She had many crafts at her disposal and it was a delight to ignore them, to instead give herself fully to honest expression and enthusiasm.

The enchantress tossed the plum casually into the air over her head, where it disappeared without even the sound of the air taking its place.

"All right. No fruit."

The words were barely out before he was on her, his hands and mouth hungry little animals, gorging before the cache could be exhausted.

Later, panting and glistening, they fed each other sliced plums.

Angelica wondered if the strength of their connection was predicated on the backwash of her enchantments, or if, meeting in some other life, they would still find each other so affecting.

"Beji. Throw the stones for me." The enchantress was fascinated with Beji's art and wondered at a magic so passive. Her workings were, innately, active and aggressive. She plied the male principle (even when seducing) whereas Beji...

"The Stones are not to be taken frivolously."

Angelica's native guile was so practiced that it worked on the boy almost immediately. She turned away from him with a wounded look.

"Oh, Beji. That hurts me. My interest is very serious. I know you don't really like me very much, but I at least thought you respected my craft."

Indeed, her craft had achieved its ends without the awareness of either.

Beji moved soundlessly to the bed and prepared for the ritual. Angelica's veil of intent followed her to his side. Beji turned and locked her gaze. Neither moved or spoke as currents of exploration twisted between their eyes. Beji never blinked.

Suddenly, he snatched up the stones and tossed them onto the

smoothed bedclothes.

After a moment Beji said, "The Roland is still your master."

Angelica's voice shuttered up into those inhuman registers of which she was so fond, as her hands slammed into his face and the side of his head. She was bigger than the boy and easily gained the advantage. Beji was surprised, not by the fierceness of her attack or the animal mask she wore as she hissed into his face, but by his own lack of fear. He knew well what this woman was capable of.

"That little cunt was never my master. Don't mention his name to me again."

Angelica prowled to the far side of the room as Beji wiped the blood from his mouth and nose.

Suddenly she rushed at him again, and Beji prepared for another blow, though it never fell and it never occurred to him to strike her back. She grabbed his face up into her hands and after a moment of intense study, said:

"You will help me kill The Roland."

Pennants and flags snapped brightly in the fierce early-winter sunlight as the victory procession careened through the streets of a newly liberated Paris. Roland, held high on the shoulders of a half-dozen Paladins, was dropped twice, handed skins of wine by ten people, kissed by an even dozen women and bitten by a dog. A group of boys fell on the dog, beating it, but Roland yelled them off.

Dozens of pigs, cattle and sheep were killed and roasted (generosities many would regret in the deep of the following winter). Charlemagne supplied the wine, fruit and desserts for the festivities. Astolpho refereed a drinking contest at the Gate of Swallows in honor of Lunarix Rex (won, much to Astolpho's chagrin, by Bentan, the man responsible for emptying the city's rat traps). Bishop Turpin sprinkled three dozen vials of holy water on the general citizenry. Seven Moorish prisoners were executed quickly (at Charlemagne's request).

The Madness of Roland

The grand ceremony was delayed for nearly an hour because Roland insisted on checking the reconstruction of the Eastern wall himself. "They might come back," he said quietly to Charlemagne, before departing for the work site.

He instructed the foreman to add an additional three feet of dirt to a particularly weak section of wall, set a man's broken finger, and carried a dipper of water to each of the workers. The men cheered with much affection as Roland rode away.

Charlemagne was in full and glorious form that afternoon before the assembled Paris. He played the crowds like a master; the supporting music was perfectly timed for maximum effect (Charlemagne made these arrangements personally). Roland stood at his side, a boyish bewilderment painting his face. Charles worked the spectators through a gamut of feeling. From outrage to a sublime pity, Paris slalomed a breakneck course of expertly wielded theatrics, until finally, in one numbing moment, the afternoon coiled down into a single, powerful realization. The body politic grasped the true import of the siege and its breaking. An audible moan went up from the crowd; women began to weep, men gnashed their teeth and knitted their fists. A huge unsettled darkness came over the gathering, palpable in its menace and pain. Charlemagne thought for a moment that he had gone too far.

Then the mood suddenly turned in on itself and the collected peoples of Paris rushed the platform hungry for the body of the city's saviour: hungry to touch The Roland.

"My boots will know your backside, ratboy," Marsilius snarled at Beji, grabbing him by the hair and kicking him repeatedly in the rump. Several blows landed before Beji responded by punching Marsilius solidly in the nose. Marsilius sprawled on the ground, momentarily unconscious and bleeding.

Mandricardo appeared at the mouth of his tent, drawn by the sounds of the scuffle, then turned and went back inside.

A gentle snow began to fall.

The Madness of Roland

Roland stood on the ramparts outside of Charlemagne's apartments and watched as, high above, the sun wrestled with the cold thin air for the day's outcome. This day would go to the orb, but tomorrow would belong to the winter gods. These days were always his favorite; the cusp of one season to the next.

Charlemagne appeared at the door to his chamber, squinted into the afternoon light, and crossed the roof to Roland.

He stood for a long moment before the Paladin, his face alive with emotion, then grabbed him up in a desperate embrace. His tears rained into Roland's beard and shirt collar. Roland haltingly wrapped his arms around the imperial neck.

Charlemagne, his voice shuddering with emotion, said, "I have no words."

**The former harper crept out into the darkness, unnoticed
by the
rest.**

**He slipped away through fields and forests, his precious
old
instrument**

**under his arm, to seek out refuge in the hall of some
lesser
marauder.**

--John Gardner, Grendel

The Madness of Roland

I used to wonder what history would think of me. But I have become more fascinated with my own judgments. My own opinions.

I am beginning to find what I think of myself.

Don't misunderstand - I haven't come to any conclusions. I have simply recognized the process. A definitive interpretation is still some way off.

I try to find the points of my life where I turned some fundamental corner, where my becoming became something else again.

Paris was like that. After the siege was broken I came to see what had really been taken from me. Everything I held dear was taken away, but more than that, I was shown something I can never wholly retreat from. Before the madness, I had spent my life seeking salvation; after it, I went out seeking revenge.

He knew that when he kissed this girl, and forever wed his unutterable visions to her perishable breath, his mind would never again romp with the mind of God.

So he waited, listening for a moment longer to the tuning-fork that had been struck upon a star. Then he kissed her. At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower and the incarnation was complete.

-- F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great

Gatsby

I loathe failure. I abhor it. I think my father must be responsible for that particular character flaw.

It has taken me years to realize how fully I lost control after Medordo's death. I was rabid for Roland's pain. I thought, at one point in time, of shifting myself into a man's frame and challenging him to combat. Can you see me? Belly like a bull, all manly meat, scampering around with The Roland and knives?! Seems rather comical now.

I would have lost.

I always prided myself on perfection, or at least, its human counterpart, so you can imagine me in the wake of so glaring a failure. I suppose if Mandricardo and that pompous boar Marsilius had succeeded in taking Paris I would have felt differently but as it was...

I lost so much after that. The law of backlash is never to be taken lightly.

The Madness of Roland

The hardest thing of all is...

despite Medordo, despite the cost of the spell, despite my own penances...

I never stopped loving Roland.

It seems to me now that I loved him before the magic was even begun.

It seems that I loved the idea of him.

Because you can't know for sure in advance what will feel good and what won't, you have to pay especially close attention to the woman's reactions. Start out gently and search for the right response. If she's enjoying it, she'll respond. Her breathing will speed up, her hold will tighten, her body will push toward you, encouraging you to continue. As she becomes aroused, the pushing may become more rapid and thrustlike.

-- Michael Morgenstern, How to Make Love to a Woman

The Madness of Roland

What is my beginning?

Where will be my ending?

I wonder sometimes the way of steel and flesh. I wonder beyond cleaving, beyond the parting sounds of the world.

Does the edge turn inward upon itself? Will the edge swallow plaited skin, like a gulping fish gorging on the tension of water and air?

Will I perhaps pass the edge into flesh?

Can I know a pink inferno to birth forth fruit for the world's gobbling maw? And if, can I stand to see my own sweet offerings swallowed and consumed by men or man or sea? Swallowed like grapes for the world's insatiability?

Better the steel song of snicker snack than to watch the feeding earth swallow up and shit out my baby's little fingers.

My solitude used to comfort, sheathe me. I have many brethren, yet no kin. My aloneness is harder than shattering or fire.

The saviour is returned, but now I wield him.

I am trapped between the unjoinable edge of steel, (oh we join, but this dance of edges leaves me unfilled) and the soft fruit of flesh.

The Madness of Roland

I pray sometimes for even the slow decay of water and air.

I wonder: how many are the edges of God? Does She sing and tumult in the killing or does She shirk and cry on the side of meat?

What is the sound of God? I who part the fruit of the world for life, could I part Her flesh? And if, what would grow from Her rot? Sweet mulch or shouting steel?

**The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward;
when the sons of God came into the daughters of men, and they bore children to them.**

These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown.

--Genesis 6:4

The Madness of Roland

I found him on the roof of the oriel, late in the day, after the celebrations...

That was such a good party.

Well, you can imagine. Paris had all but been taken away from us, and then Roland thundered down into the fray sounding that magnificent damned horn of his, and well, blessit all, we deserved a good party.

I had 300 head of cattle slaughtered (saved the tongues for myself), bought 500 barrels of Anjou wine, ordered the graineries to...

Oh.

Yes. Roland. On the roof.

I went up to him, to tell him... I don't know what... and I said, You've saved us all.

Poor Roland, he says: Yes, but who will save the saviour?

I remember remembering him as a child and thinking, How did he come to be this person?

Bibliography

"The Legends of Charlemagne"
by Thomas Bullfinch

"The Castle of Crossed Destinies"

The Madness of Roland

by Italo Calvino

"The Non-existent Knight"

by Italo Calvino

"The Power of Silence"

by Carlos Casteneda

"Vita Caroli"

by Einhard

"Man and His Symbols"

by Carl Gustav Jung

"De Carolo Magno"

by Notker the Stammerer, Monk of Saint Gall

"The Symbolism of the Tarot"

by P.D. Ouspensky

"Watership Down"

by Richard Adams

Collected works

of William Blake

"The Great Gatsby"

by F. Scott Fitzgerald

"Grendel"

by John Gardner

"The Dark Tower"

by Stephen King

Bibliography (cont'd)

"Utilitarianism"

by John Stuart Mill

"The Temple of the Golden Pavilion"

The Madness of Roland

by Yukio Mishima

"How to Make Love to a Woman"
by Michael Morgenstern

"Little Birds"
by Anais Nin

"Tao Te Ching"
by Lao Tsu

"The Art of War"
by Sun Tsu

"Charlotte's Web"
by E.B. White

"Leaves of Grass"
by Walt Whitman

Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life

The Bible

The Song of Roland