

Illuminations on the Eight: A Dreamer's Journey

By
Melarius

Translated by Jarathrum, Grand Octane of Boreal and Third of the Council of Thunder

Translator's Introduction

Melarius, our most holy father, who kindled our minds against ignorance, was not always a pious man. In his early years he ignored the Gods, and it was only at the insistence of his greatest friend, Halvarg Eourlanson, that he recognized them. Halvarg's conquest of the known world is well known today, but it was Melarius who lead his armies at the onset.

Following his defeat at the battle of Kelldin's Fall, Melarius was taken prisoner by Rufarius Aileus, Right-Wing of the Windblown. He was taken into the north arm of the Mountains of Mior, and thrown deep within a dungeon that was built there. When he emerged sixteen days later he was a changed man. By this translation I hope to stay true to his sacred words, but also to illuminate the uninitiated. Praise be to Melarius, and praise be to the Gods.

- Jarathrum, Grand Octane of Boreal
Third of the Council of Thunder

A Beginning

How I came to reside in these darkened halls I do not know. Before I awoke all I remember was fire. The Dragons broke us against the mountains. Damn them...damn them all.

I cannot say where I am. These walls are black stone, and everywhere I look all I see is more. I have wandered for hours now, and every room looks the same. A wispy light clings to every stone, enough to write by, but nothing more. I must conserve my energy. The bastards left me with a sack of bread and three skins of water, but that will not last. I have found a small pile of straw, and shall use it as my bed tonight. I must remember who I am, and the world I will see again.

- Melarius

Day Two: A White Sail against the Wind

I write this as I wake. I had a most unsettling dream last night. I stood at the prow of a great black ship, cutting through black water against a black sky. No wind blew across the world, yet the ship moved, and knowing this did not trouble me. I was alone as far as I could tell, and the creak of the deck as I wandered split the silence more than it had any right to.

The ship pushed on for what seemed like days; the sky never changing, the wind never picking up. Then I saw a light against the water. It was small at first, and would not have been visible if there had been moonlight. It drew nearer, and as it did it grew, until I beheld its form. A narrow ship with ends turned up and a single sail, not unlike our warships, but small, with only one passenger. He was of portly stature, and his beard hung down past his knees. To my eyes he was a jovial man, and yet I was frightened.

He called to me, and told me to let him up. Against the black world he shown like a torch, yet when I beheld him he appeared no different from any other man. He asked me where I was going, and I told him I did not know; that I had been travelling for days and had gone nowhere.

He asked about my crew, and I told him I had none. Then he beckoned for me to follow him below deck. I write with all sincerity that before he arrived the ship had been empty, yet now it was filled. Not men, but pale apparitions, not unlike a spirit or ghost. And I knew them. They had fought with me, and as I passed by them realized that all had died for me. As I stood staring, the man passed by me and placed a hand on the arm of Valden Hrothir, who I saw take an axe to the chest. He grew brighter until he looked as well as I did. And then I understood something, but I awoke as I discovered it, and cannot remember what it was.

I awoke, and a torch was lit on the opposite wall, a torch that had not been there before.

- Melarius

Day Five: The Market Song of Alairian

I dreamt again last night. I stood in a market unlike any I had seen before. Buildings of dark wood and stone rose around me, and above all a fortress. It gleamed like crystal, and seemed to change color whenever I moved. The top of its great towers were lost in cloud, but they seemed to dwarf even the mountains around the city.

The market square was filled, and I struggled to make my way out of it. As I reached the edge I glimpsed a man standing apart from the rest. His eyes drew me closer, for I had never seen someone with gold eyes before. He sat atop a crate, and in his hands he held a lute. And his music was beautiful. I cannot describe what came over me when I heard it, but I would give anything to feel it again.

When he finished I applauded enthusiastically, and expected others to do as well, but no one else seemed to be paying any attention. He did not look startled.

“Why do they not applaud?” He smiled back at me.

“They have no time for music, nor any will to discover its beauty. They are just here to make money.” For an instant his eyes gleamed. “And what of you? Warriors do not often enjoy my melodies.” I cannot say if my sword had been at my side all this time or if he willed it there.

“I thought I had no mind for music, but I found beauty in your playing.” In that moment something willed me to unstrap my sword and hand it to him. “Take it,” I said, “I no longer have need of it.”

“I am a man of trade; something must be given in return.”

I awoke, and dined on the finest meat I had ever tasted.

- Melarius

Day Seven: The Trial

I had never seen a room quite like it. It was circle, or as near to one as I could tell. Long windows reached from the black floor until they reached the white ceiling far above. And outside snowcapped peaks were like blades of grass following a frost.

Eight figures sat atop marble pillars at the far side of the room, one higher than the others. The woman above the rest was not beautiful, but she was captivating, and I could not take my eyes off of her. Her stern face and pale robes seemed to radiate light. She held a small wooden hammer in her hand and at her side was a winged spear that appeared to be made of silver.

At the center of the room knelt a man. Ragged were his clothes and unkempt was his hair. I knew him for a prisoner before I saw his hands chained behind his back.

“Darkness is within you. What you have done is a terrible crime.” The woman’s voice carried authority and power; I knew that from the start. Just that was enough to bring the man to tears.

“War is war,” he managed to say after he recovered. “I was only following orders.”

“And did those orders involve the murder of innocents?” The man broke again, and his sobs resonated through the hall. Those who sat the pillars looked around the room, several times passing over me without pause. Only the woman seemed to know I was there

“I was only following orders,” he insisted. “We were told the civilians had abandoned the city and that only the garrison remained.”

“When you discovered otherwise, why did you deem it necessary to hang children from the walls?” Something tugged at the back of my mind, pulling me away from the trial. The man was weeping again, and this time it did not appear that he was going to stop. The woman gestured towards two guards who had just entered, both in gleaming silver armor. They grabbed the man by the shoulders and dragged him from the room, crying and screaming for forgiveness.

I awoke, and could still hear his screams.

- Melarius

Day Ten: The War Camp of the Thunderclap

I have organized many military campaigns in my life, and this camp could have been any that I had made. Rows of tents lined the hillside, banners of all colors streaming in the breeze. Soldiers walked through the tents and all seemed to be headed towards the outskirts of the camp. I followed, and as I did began to hear a noise: shouting, and the sound of fighting. I pushed my way through a crowd of soldiers who did not seem to know I was there until I found the source of the sound.

Two men stood at the center of a circle of sand. One wore full plate armor, not unlike those my soldiers wore, and carried a long steel spear. The other wore only a shirt of red chainmail and leather pants. In his hand he carried a battle-axe larger than any I had seen, and it crackled with lightning as he swung it.

They circled around each other, the man with the spear staying well out of range of the battle-axe. He jabbed quickly and darted to the side, and every time the other man countered the spear with his axe. The crowd grew louder and louder whenever the weapons connected, and I could almost feel the energy of the soldiers coursing through me.

“What do you think of my husband’s fighting?” I turned, startled, and found a woman standing next to me. She was far shorter than I, and wore a belt lined with bottles and flasks carrying liquids of every color imaginable. Next to her was a man, though he looked to have just reached manhood. His eyes looked like fire, and the hammer at his side and the bulk of his shoulders named him a blacksmith.

“Which is your husband?” I asked, looking back at the two men. The woman chuckled.

“A general must know all of his men if he wishes to retain their loyalty.” The man with the spear lunged forward, spear gliding through the air like the wind. When he landed he slipped in the sand, and the battle-axe was at his neck in an instant. A clap of thunder accompanied the roar of the soldiers as the man in red helped his opponent to his feet.

“Why do they always challenge father? He’s never lost a fight.” The blacksmith looked to the woman, who I now knew to be his mother.

“A leader cannot gain the respect of their people if they are not one of them, but show them weakness and they might start to doubt you.” The man in red said as he approached. He towered

over me now that I stood next to him. “A leader, no matter who follows them, must know their people.”

I awoke, and remembered the faces and names of all the men and women I had ever known, and also those that I had killed.

- Melarius

Day Twelve: The Midday Execution of Junel

I am having trouble finding the right words for this, for last night disturbed me like no other. I stood on a balcony looking out over a city. I did not know this city, but I knew it was home. White buildings extended out as far as I could see, and the colored tiles of the roofs caught the rising sun. If this truly was a city of men, then it was certainly the fairest city ever built.

At my side was my wife, and yet I knew that it was not. Everything about her was right, but it was too perfect. And my wife is dead. But this was a dream, so why couldn't it be her? It was a dream wasn't it? I dearly hope so, because what followed was too terrible to live through.

She told me we were going out, and I followed. We walked for what seemed like hours through the city streets, which despite all their beauty were empty. The streets were wide and paved, but only our footsteps echoed throughout them. It was as if the city had been abandoned in an instant.

We walked in silence until we reached the outer gate. She took my hand and smiled. “All is as it must be,” she said to me, and I did not know. I couldn't have known what to expect. But it did not shock me. We exited the gate into a dirt road lined on both sides by gallows, and

from the nooses hung the people of the city. Men, women, children, young, and old, all hung silently. And I knew that I had done this. I had done it before. I could not count the times I had ordered my men to exterminate a city, it was too numerous.

There was one rope that had not been occupied. And I thought I knew what to do. I stepped toward it, but she held me back. She simply shook her head and gave me a kiss. Then she left, and as she walked towards the gallows I swear she transformed, and whoever she became seemed to gleam in the midday sun.

I awoke, and cried.

- Melarius

Day Sixteen: The Void

At first I did not think it was a dream. I was in the chamber I had fallen asleep in. Black stone all around, four paths leading out into rooms exactly alike and every one filled with the bones of men who had died there. I rubbed my eyes and looked around, which is when I saw it. It wasn't a man, nor was it a woman, but it looked human. It seemed to billow out of the shadows itself, yet it spilled pale moonlight on the ground wherever it stepped. A black hand pointed in a direction, and I went.

It walked beside me as I journeyed through the dark, never once making a sound. And at every intersection it would point, and I would go. We passed through the room from the first night, and the torch that I had taken from the wall was there again, and still burning. I went to grab it, but as I approached it went out. Turning I saw it standing in the center of the room, pointing back the way we entered. And I went.

I followed for what seemed like an eternity until it stopped. We were in a room with no other exits save the one we entered through. It stopped, and raised a hand towards me. I backed away, but it was as if the darkness itself engulfed me. And then I saw: cities rising and falling, seasons passing, death, and life; the kindling of the stars and the ending of the world. And I heard. I heard the sounds of war, of men dying and of children being born into a world full of hate. I heard wind against the sails of life and mountains collapsing into a sea of death. And I heard the glorious song of the heavens. Then all was silent. My guide was gone, and the darkness had returned. But I knew what I had to do. And I drifted...

I awoke, and there was light.

- Melarius

An Ending

The room I had left the night before was much the same as when I slept. But now, where only a path leading to darkness had been I saw the outside world. And I tried to run, but was too weak. So I crawled, the light blinding my eyes. The world looked brighter and more beautiful than it ever had before. In the valley below I saw a camp. And above the camp I saw the golden banner of Halvarg. My torment was over.

I am not sure I will ever see the world as I once did, but I have no desire to. As I write this I am home again. A new age has dawned, and I have found peace in it. I cannot forget what I did before I was enlightened, but I must move forward. The world has changed, and I will be the one to lead it into the light.

- Melarius, Prophet of the Eight

