

The Suicide of a Factory Slave

By Cameron Tobin

It's a cold, autumn day in Alarahn. The ocean winds are strong and the factory plumes spread across the Shipping District. *A charcoal fog, one that you'd expect to house demons and devils, but instead keep the helpless hidden. Those Evils would rather lock themselves within solid gold canary cages in the fabled ivory towers of the Upper District than mingle with the likes of you.*

Obviously, you want nothing more than to not live in the factories' fog. What else can you do, though?

No! There has to be something else. A lifeline that will whisk you away from this hell—

"Come on Swiney," a bellowing voice beckons you. "Moping again? How many times have I told you to stop thinking about things?"

Your gaze meets the man. He's burly, the hard labor type – *big for moving shipping crates and maybe some blacksmithing? – though his head is... comically small for his otherwise brutish body. Yeah, a dockworker. That's who this man is.*

"Thinking helps you solve things, Barry. But I forget your head's too small for such mindfulness."

"Maybe you should think about that pig-face of yours then," he retorts.

That's right, your pudgy pigface. Bloated from all the dwarven ale and Ho'ask rum over the years. You should stop. It's not healthy.

You look south towards the sea, its winds keeping the black fog of Alarahn at bay. *It, much like you, hates this city. It too is poisoned by the Alarahni fog. Unlike you, however, it makes easy work of what you could only hope to one day defeat.*

But perhaps you can beat it? You can always quit and find something better than the textile factories and docks you've slaved away in for so many years. You've considered this option before.

"Barry, I've been thinking about quitting."

"Pfft, and do what?" He says this with a tone of sarcasm, but beneath it? Curiosity.

"I don't know. I haven't thought about that yet." *But you have thought about it, and you still don't know. All you've ever known was factory air and being one wrong step away from*

poverty and homelessness. After all, your purse is awfully light. Seven coppers, enough for this week's rent... maybe.

"Then maybe you should. There's nothing in Alarahn better than factory work." Barry says this matter-of-factly. But what's this? A hint of despair in his voice. He hates it too, the factory. But there isn't anything but hard labor here. He accepts this fact with a sour taste.

He's wrong, though. You can feel it. There is something else to this city. Something that would give you everything you desire. Power. No. Purpose. Factory work has nothing for you except a meager stipend.

What would you do without factory work? You'd be reduced to begging on the streets of the Lower District, where no passerby has coin, let alone any to spare. Those few copper pieces in their purses, their lifeline. Food. Rent. Ale. No worker can live without those constants. Not even you can support more than yourself.

"There's always the Union, right?" These words leave your mouth hesitantly. Mention of the Alarahni Union is often not well received.

"A.U.!? You mean those terrorists? I heard they were the ones behind the fire at Dock 4. We saw those flames, remember! Right as we were leaving our shift that evening. You can't possibly want to work with them."

You've heard those rumors too. The Union are arsonists. Killers. That they don't believe in the "worker's rights" they say they do. Anarchists lighting fire to the livelihoods of those they claim to defend. After the dock fire, you and Barry spent the next week looking for a new factory gig – the one you're working now.

Maybe they are right, though? Raze the problem to the ground. Salt the earth. Start anew and may the phoenix guide us to the new dawn. The scene of that noble's dock in flames, the burning sails falling into the ocean and all the expensive wine, silk clothes, and "fine art" used as kindling. It brings a warmth to your body that not even the strongest of liquors could match.

"I mean, hear me out Barry. If they did set fire to the Docks, maybe the Union is onto something? By Gond, Alarahn might be so broken that the only options we got is to burn it all down or suffer like we always have." *Oh? Are we defending anarchists now? Or is this just a primal urge to give fire to humanity?*

"Sure, Swiney, but I don't think arson's the right way."

"Then what is?"

He goes silent. *There is no “right way” in this city.*

“Pardon me, friends.” A new voice. An exotic voice. Foreign maybe? “I couldn’t help but overhear your plight and the slander against the Union.” You look to the man’s direction. He is well enough dressed for factory workers. A worn, yet fine collared shirt under a dark brown leather vest, the collar wide upon and low, revealing a bit of his chest. His shaggy black hair complements his red skin and –

Hold on! This man has a devil’s horns! Devils like fire. Could this be our arsonist?

Not every Tiefling is an arsonist, you racist! But what’s this about slandering the Union? Perhaps this man is one of them.

“My name is Raz. I take it you aren’t fans of this city. You don’t like being cogs in this machine called Alarahn?” *He’s definitely been listening in on your conversation since the start.*

No need to answer his question, he knows the answer. Everyone hates this city. “And what are you, Raz? Union?”

“I have friends there, sure. They are not the terrorists people make them out to be. You just want more to life here, right? So do I. So do them.” *You get a feeling he’s trying to sell you on them, like he wants you to join them. It won’t be a hard sell.*

You glance at Barry. There is a silent anger in him, but he is hesitant. *He’s never really spoken with someone from the Union, just the rumors.* To your surprise, he opens his mouth.

“Did your friends set fire to Dock 4?” *Straight to the point. As he always is.*

“My friends did nothing of the sort.” The devil said with an innocent smile.

Barry’s eyes narrowed. *He’s looking for a lie, but he knows he won’t find one. He isn’t as perceptive as you are.* “What do you think Swiney?”

You? What do you think? That innocent smile of Raz’s makes you think the Union did do it. He just wants you to join. That’s why he denies it.

But you are biased. You remember the way that fire felt. Its warmth greater than a thousand shots of whiskey with a dose of dream lily mixed in. You don’t really care if he’s lying, do you?

“I think he’s telling the truth, Barry.” Your deception rolls off the tongue effortlessly.

Barry trusts you. His shoulders lax and his anger retreats for another day.

“Look friends. The Union simply wants what is best for the workers of this city. We would never jeopardize the jobs of its people.”

Yes, never jeopardize the working class. But you'd stick it to the man, wouldn't you? Maybe leave a few first-degree burns to show them you aren't a force to be reckoned with? You see through this devil's silver tongue. But this isn't an act for you, it's all for Barry and you're the star actor.

You feel something inside you. Dread. It's the factory air getting to you again. It beckons you to work. But you don't want to go into the factory today. All you need is a reason, and this devil-man Raz has it for you.

"Does the Union give you purpose, Raz?" No, don't do it. Did you forget that he is part of a terrorist organization. He set fire to the docks.

"Always." He knows this is the answer you want to hear, but his response is genuine. He called the Union his friends after all.

He called you his friend too. It's just another tactic to get you to kill your fellow man. Barry is right, there is nothing better than factory work in Alarahn. You are not falling to a silvered tongue terrorist! Do you hear me!?

Hush. Stop thinking. Take Barry's advice for once and stop thinking. Just for a moment. Go with your gut. It knows what's best.

"Well, how do I join?" Hook. Line. Sinker. You fell for it. Time for terrorism!

No. Not terrorism.

This is purpose.