

# pooris, drones and withered dragons

FATIUL HUQ SUJOY

"How many?"

"Two. Aloo. I'm an aloo poori kind of a guy."

"Huh?" went the elderly poori wala, putting in the potato fillings.

"Nothing."

"Mana or might?"

"Mana."

The poori wala glanced up at Riyardh for the briefest moment before returning to his tablet. One of his arms was preparing the pooris, and the other one swooped in, picked them up and dropped them in the sizzling silvery mana oil. The gold oil in the cauldron beside it, Riyardh assumed, was might. In the cauldron behind the poori wala, the dark brown oil had the loudest crackle.

"What's that?" Riyardh pointed.

"Oil."

"Brilliant, but what kind?"

"The expired kind."

A drone buzzing around the poori wala started beeping.

"Agh, these annoying things," he groaned. His fourth hand picked up a few pooris from the expired oil and the fifth packed them in a newspaper bag. A sixth arm held the bag in front of the drone's lens. It scanned the code on the bag and flickered green while the poori wala checked the payment on his tablet and placed the bag inside the drone's compartment. The drone bolted into the drone streams heading to the upper district.

Riyardh was fascinated by the high demand of delicacies from this place, as evident by the number of drones hovering around. The shops, lined under the shelter of the massive Track that snaked through the city, formed the longest stretching market ecosystem of this era.

Beyond the single lamps, each shop was softly lit by the luminescent moss growing on the Track's towering pillars. The market resembled an old painting Riyardh had seen of a river at night, dotted with an array of fishing boats, faintly floating under the glow of a half moon.

"What a beautiful view," he sighed.

The poori wala scoffed, handing him the fried pooris. "I'm being serious."

"I can smell yer stinkin' jest from a mile away, uppy boy."

Riyardh had heard "uppy boy" before, but never confronted it. Then again, he'd never come down here before.

"What're ye doin' here? Did yer lordie dad kick ya out of yer tall tower?"

"First of all... my father... isn't... a lord," Riyardh replied in between bites. With each gulp, he felt the surge of mana pumping through his blood. "I'm my own man, an executive product manager, if you must."

"I mustn't."

"Secondly, I came to the Night Shift Market—"

"Ye mean the Leaky Market," the poori wala interjected. The Track, despite its width, could not shelter the market from the regular heavy rain, which leaked through the cracks of the structure. Hence, the name.

"Yes. I mean, no. That's not nice to say."

"Neither's whatever mighty shifty gibberish ye brought from yer fancy district. Call it what it actually is – Ton-drapoth Bazar."

Riyardh nodded. "Y-yes, sir."

The poori wala let out a measured laugh. "Sir? Such courtesy for an ol' Duskshade lowlander? Flatterin'."

With a hasted motion, Riyardh conjured a dark object, cylindrical and pointed, from under his sleeve. All of the poori wala's arms stopped as he glared at what was a folded umbrella. Riyardh breathed in and dropped it over his shoulder, "The rain's coming."

The poori wala sniffed. The air held the familiar scent of an approaching downpour.

"So," Riyardh continued calmly, as practiced from his lessons as a management trainee. "I want to propose a deal with the Bazar."

"A jokester, huh?" the poori wala started fuming.

"What d'ye mean a deal with the Bazar? I've met uppies like ye. All fancy, no heart. Intent as black as the tar ye shit outta yer towers."

"You have an asset that we can use. In exchange, we give you the ropes to climb up to the Cloudward district."

"Ropes? We don't need none of yer trickery."

"Oh, but you do, you've needed it for months, the missing piece to your great plan," Riyardh smiled. "And I need that secret weapon of yours."

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Panic, slowly forming inside Tohimur, now at the mention of the "secret weapon", burst into a flurry of cybernetic arms, aimed at the kid's throat.

Too late. The point of the kid's umbrella, still folded, touched the controller on Tohimur's chest. A silver-green thread of mana travelled from the kid's hand, through the umbrella, to the controller and puffed out. The arms that reached his throat lay around, unmoving.

"Limbtech. Discontinued, cheap and immensely useful. Susceptible to modern magic," the kid swallowed the last of his poori. Its tendrils of silver smoke blurred his face. He brought out his tablet.

"Ye a cop?"

He scoffed, "Did you not hear what I said? I'm not here to quash the Bazar's revolution. I'm here to help, for a price."

Tohimur heard commotion around him. The delivery drones were going haywire.

"Your brethren are too busy to hear your screams. Don't bother." The drones around Tohimur's shop assembled around the kid. "Where did you get it by the way? Did it fly up from the Burial district?"

"How do ye know about this, ye fiend?"

"As a product manager, I get access to products. Lucky for me, they have a penchant for collecting data."

Tohimur saw it now. The emblem on the kid's umbrella and his tablet. Defeated, motionless, Tohimur sighed quietly, "No."

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As the drones flew towards the dark underside of the Track, Riyardh shot embers at the two neighbouring pillars, burning down the luminescent moss. He then pointed his umbrella at the lights, discharging the tech. Darkness, and rain, fell on the Bazar.

Opening his umbrella, Riyardh squinted at the underside. A translucent webbing covered the surface. "Clever," he smirked and tapped his tablet. The drones shot rays of light at it.

"Wow," Riyardh gasped. A dragon lay there, stretched between two pillars. The massive beast, like all who resided in the Buried district, was devoid of any colour. Its opal eyes reflecting a dozen colours. Sickly, gigantic, and mesmerising. But what caught Riyardh off guard was stacked within the dragon's protective stance. Eggs. Six of them.

"Brilliant!" Riyardh exclaimed. "You outdid yourselves. In the disregarding shadow of the Track, you really pulled off a miracle."

"And now ye brought its bloody ruin."

Before Riyardh could respond, or connect with the eggs, the ground cracked. Riyardh was offered a moment to reach for the trickles of mana still within. Beneath him, as the concrete gave way to the Buried's darkness, wings unfurled, withered and colossal, led by fangs of revenge.

*Fatiul Huq Sujoy spends idle hours preparing for his urban surroundings to finally turn into a fantasy setting. Send him pictures of your rakkhosh-spotting at s.f.huq11@gmail.com*

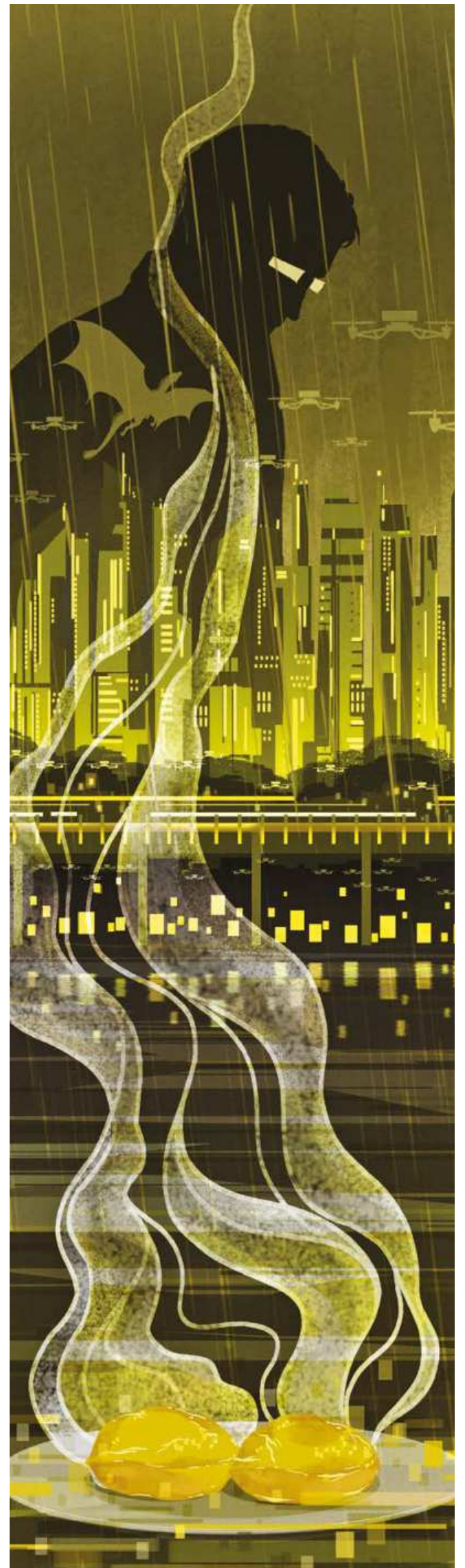


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