

Interviews with Refugees and Migrants



Interview#: 1

Name: Shukrullah

Age: 37

Country of origin: Afghanistan

Current location: Tehran, Iran

Names and identified characteristics are changed, but the story is real.
The interview was conducted in 2020.

Hello, I am working with the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC). This interview is to find out about the experiences of Afghan refugees and migrants in Tehran. If you are from Afghan community residing in Tehran, aged 18 or over, and have arrived in Iran for less than 2 years, we would like to invite you to participate! If you agree to participate, we will ask questions about your migration journey, working and living condition, security concerns and plans, among other topics. We will use the information collected to report to NGOs and other actors, so that they can develop interventions adapted to the real needs of Afghan communities in Iran.



Participation in this project is entirely voluntary and does not provide access to assistance programs or any form of compensation. Our interview will be strictly confidential and anonymous: we will not ask you for personal data during the call.

Many thanks!

How long have you been a refugee/migrant in this city, when did you arrive and where did you come from?



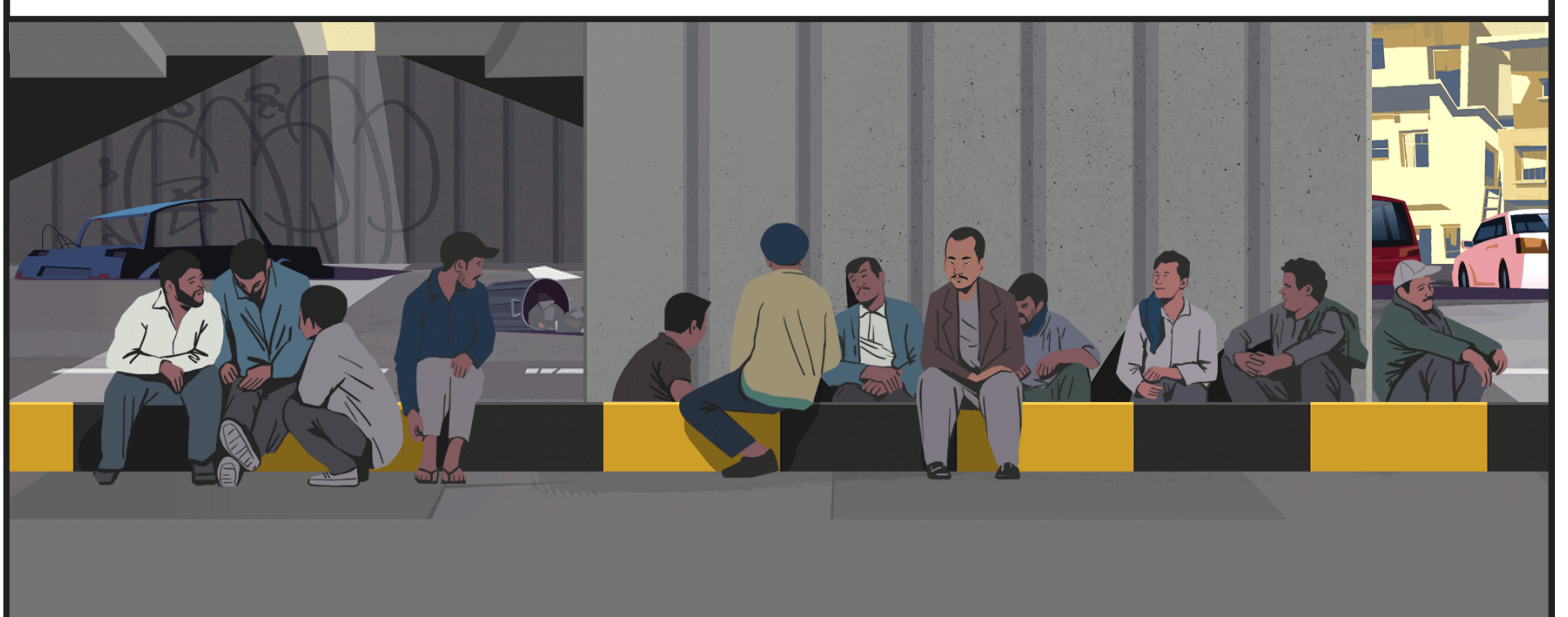
It is about one year that I am a migrant in Iran. I came here for work. It was around the beginning of last summer when I started my journey from Daikundi and reached Iran.



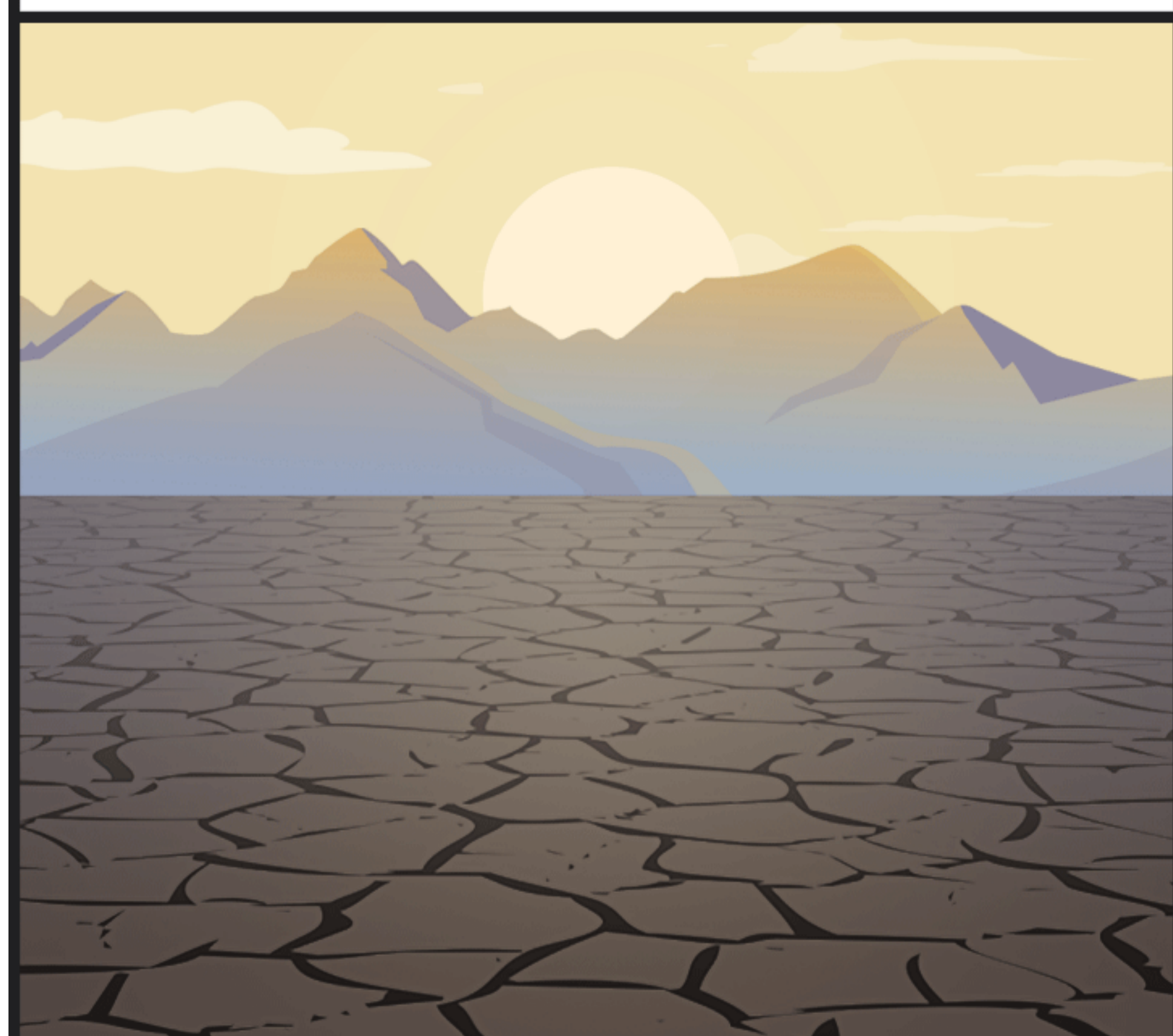
Why did you leave your home country?



There was no work in my hometown. Employment opportunities are good for those who have networks in the government sector, but for people like me, I cannot even find physical work or manual labour jobs.



Once I went to Kabul, there were only a few jobs, with low payment.



Life expenses such as rent and food are high in Kabul, so I was not able to make a life there. On advice from friends and family, I decided to come to Iran for work.



Did you come alone or with others?



When you came did you come with a smuggler or did a smuggler organise your travel from your home country, or did you do it alone or another way?

I came alone and left my family back in Daykundi. It would cost me very much to bring my family with me. Also, it could be very dangerous for them.



I came with some young men from my village. We all went to Zaranj, and there we found a smuggler who was introduced to us in Kabul; with him, we came to Iran. When we reached Zaranj, we called the smuggler and made an appointment in a hotel. After that, the smuggler waited with us in Zaranj for two days and then took us, together with a group of 30 people, to Pakistan and then Iran.

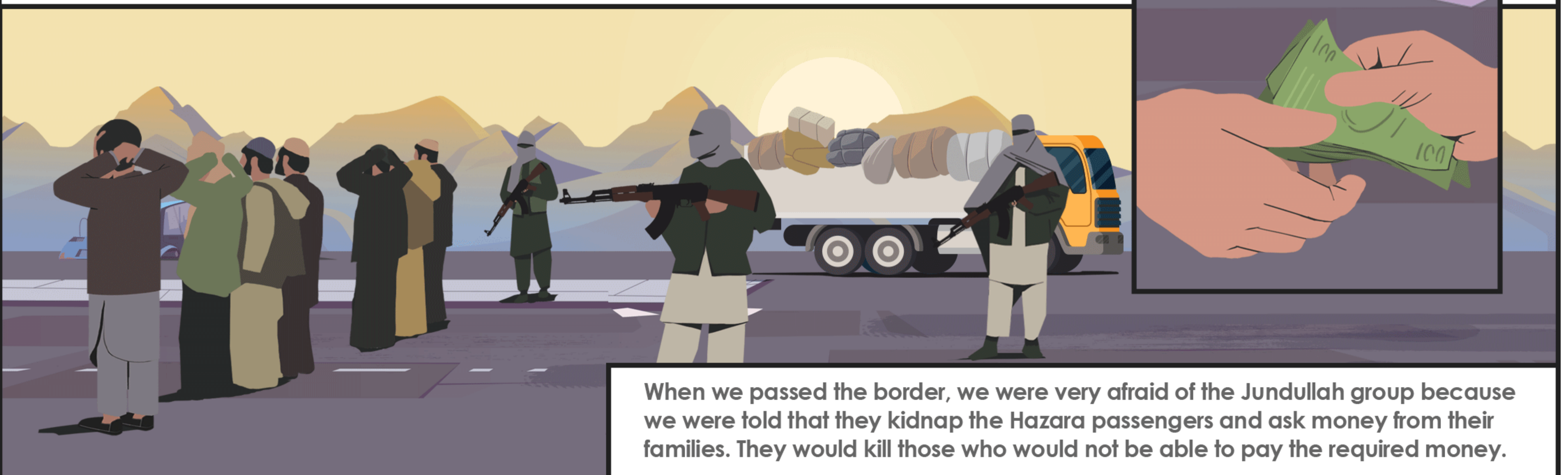
Tell us a bit how you got here... by foot, truck, bus, boat, plane... or a combination?



It is an illegal journey, not a vacation! We had tough times.



Two hours from the start of the journey we reached a Taliban military station. They took us out of the car and separated us, the Hazaras, and threatened to kill us. Finally, the smuggler took some money from us and gave it to the Taliban commander, then they allowed us to pass. But they beat two of our young co-travellers very badly.



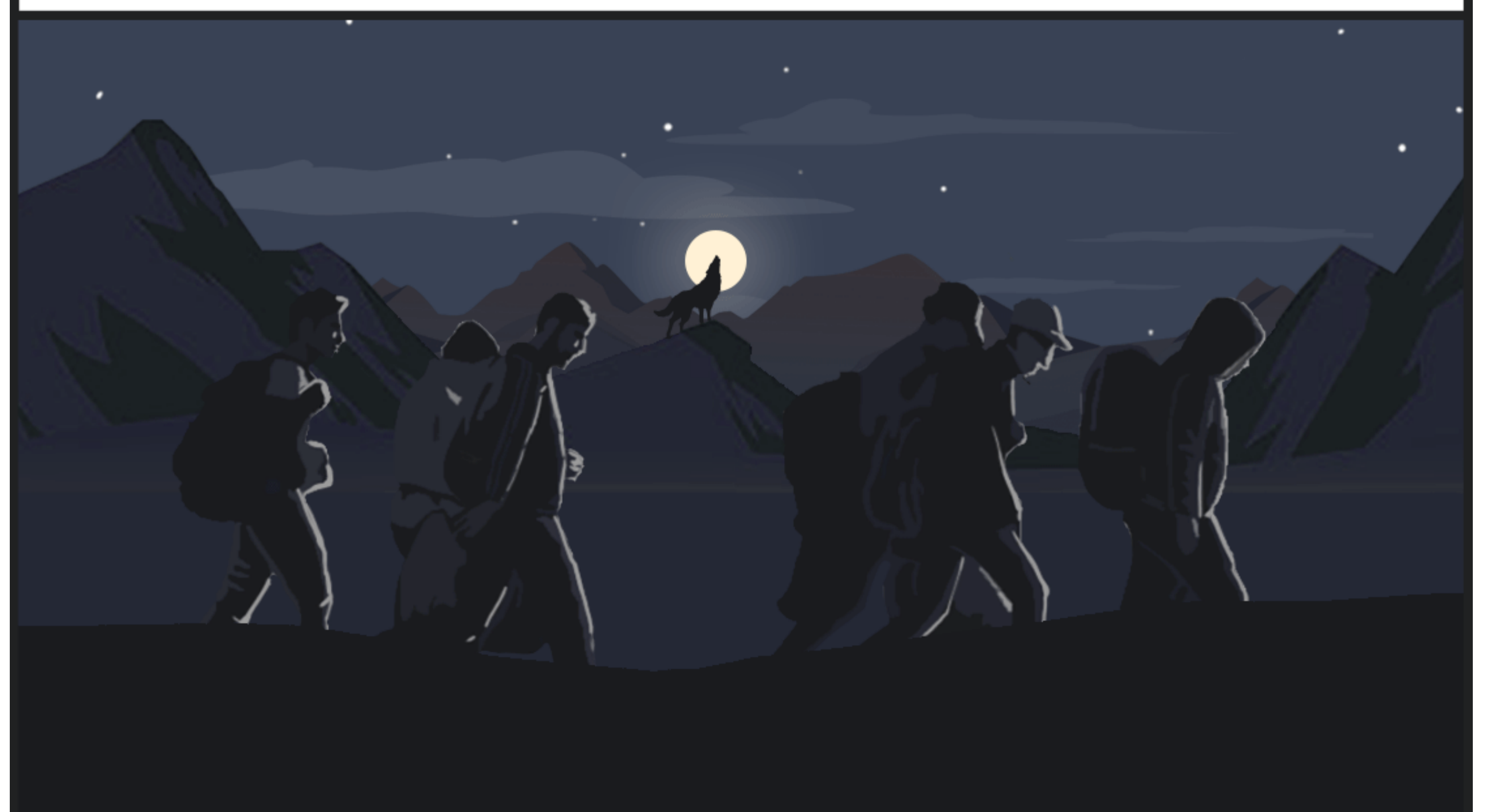
When we passed the border, we were very afraid of the Jundullah group because we were told that they kidnap the Hazara passengers and ask money from their families. They would kill those who would not be able to pay the required money.

With difficulty, we passed these routes. When we arrived in a village, I do not know its name, the local people provided the smuggler a room for us to stay. We passed the night there.



The next day we took a tough path towards the Iran-Pakistan border.

We were on the route for almost two days, going on foot through a mountainous landscape. We were about to die in hunger, thirst and the fear of Jundullah and wolves. It was a very dangerous and scary route.



As we reached the Iran border, they took us towards Sarawan. We got into some pick-ups and went to the local leaders' house. Fortunately, we were not caught by the Iranian forces at the border. We reached Sarawan, almost without any troubles.

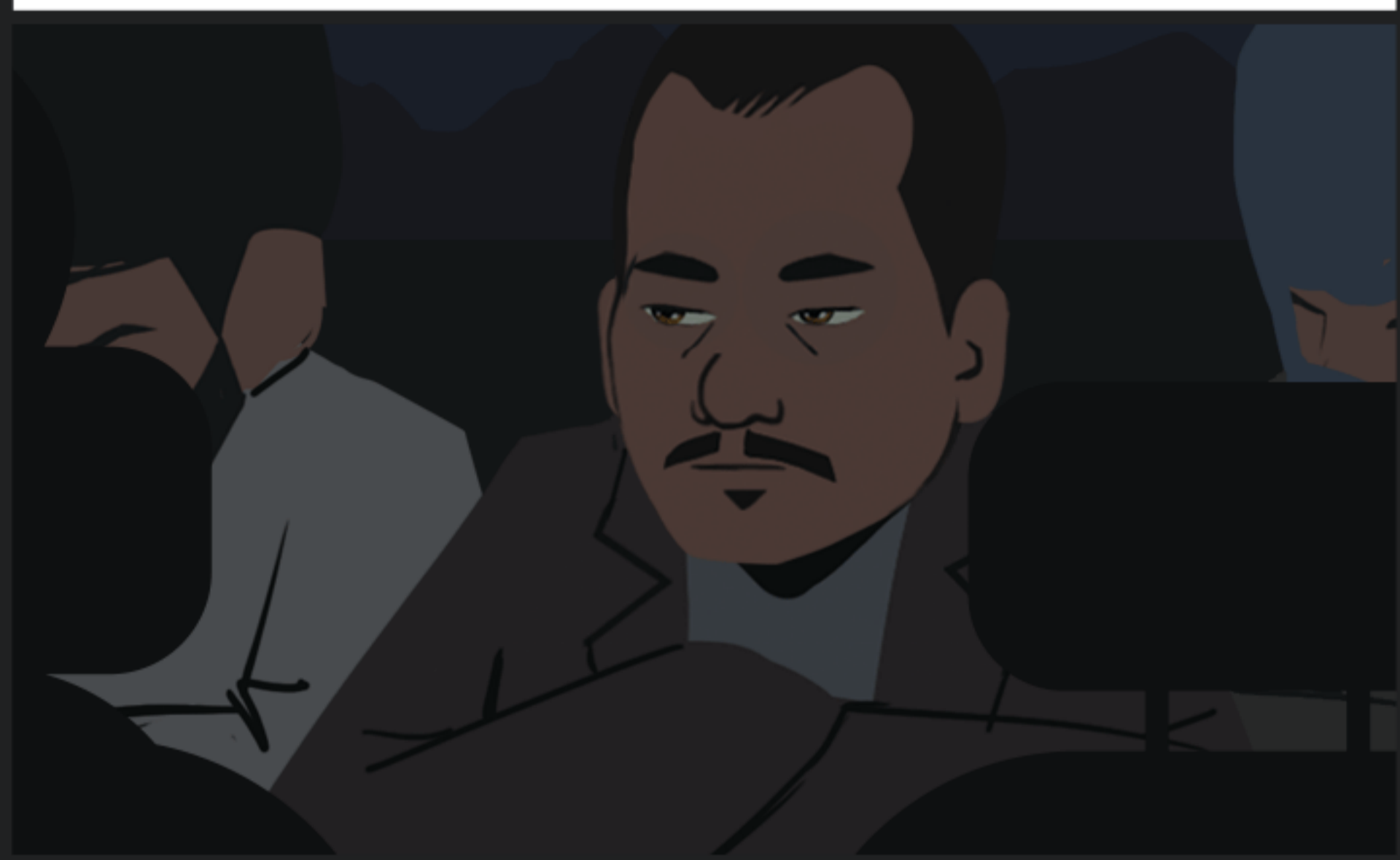


After passing the night there, they made us get into the cars and headed towards Yazd. I do not know where we were, but not Yazd, they changed the car and we arrived in a Pizhu.



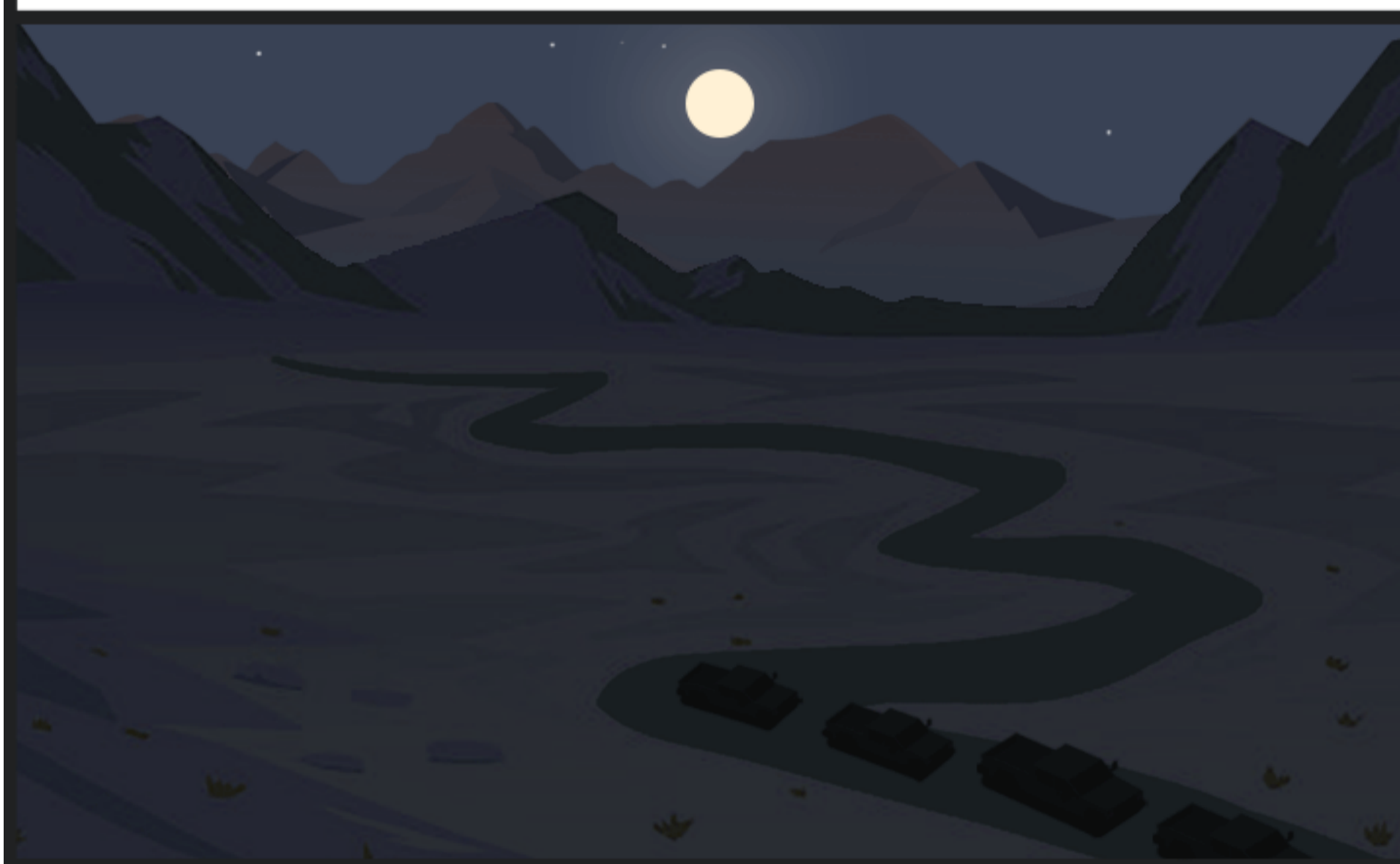
You know that the standard number of passengers for this type car is normally four people, but we were 16 people inside. Two in the front seat. Eight in the back seats, three of which slept on and under the feet of other passengers.

The six others were in the toolbox. We were inside the car in that situation for several hours stationed and then started moving at night.



These cars do not drive during the day because they would soon be caught by the police, therefore they move only at night time.

They moved, lights switched off, at a 160 km speed. 15 to 20 cars moved one after the other at a very high speed



On this route, a lot of our people died in car accidents. In-car accidents or, if the police fire, then death is unavoidable.

When they got us to a village in Shahr e Rey of Tehran, we got out in a garden. When we got out, we all lay down on the ground.



We could not feel our feet for ten minutes. We were not even able to move that time.

What about the costs of journey? Was it expensive and how did you pay it?

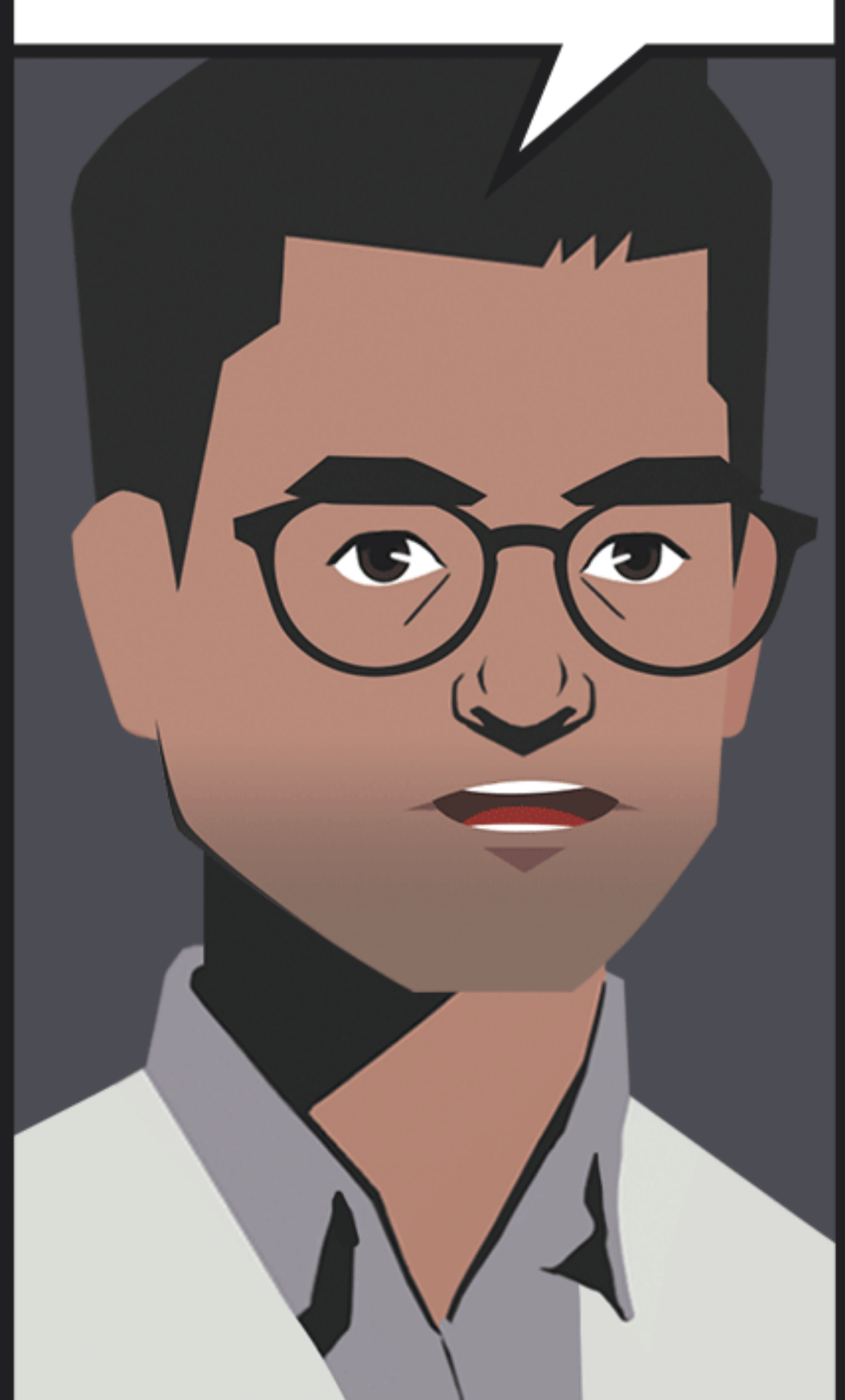


We paid 4 million Toman each, equivalent to USD 320 for the journey. Of course, it was expensive for us. I did not have all the money.



When I reached Tehran, I called my cousin. I told him to pay the smuggler's fee through ATM card transfer. He did the same and then we were free. But those who had not finalised their payments were still there. I do not know what happened to them.

Do you work in this city?



Yes, I currently work on a dairy farm. It has a positive point that it is located outside the city so there is no danger of getting caught by the police. I do not have a written contract, but an oral agreement. I work every day without any holidays. I have to clean the stable, feed the cows, and many more daily tasks. I receive my salary monthly in Iranian currency, as in the agreement.



Last year it was around 200 USD, but since the Iranian currency's value decreased, I received less.

Tell us a bit about any change in your work since the Covid19- outbreak? Have you experienced loss of job due to the outbreak?



No, I have not lost my job. Most of the construction, and generally the jobs inside the town, stopped.



Almost all those who came with me have now returned back to Afghanistan. But my work is distant from the town.

And I am not in touch with anyone. No one comes here. Neither the people nor the police nor the other officials. Only my employer comes every morning, and gets me some food, and brings some fodder for the cows. He then takes the milk to his car in afternoons.



It is now almost six months passed since I went to visit my family friends in the town. Generally, I can come to the town 3-2 times a year but not more frequently because if I get caught, I will directly be sent to the camp and then to Afghanistan.

Where do you stay and is that a part of the city where other migrants and/or refugees stay?



I work on a dairy farm. I have a room here and always live in this place. I am alone in this place with no other workers. In nearby dairy farms, there are other Afghans, but they also do not move outside because they do not have legal documents, like me.



Is the place you stay OK or does it have problems?

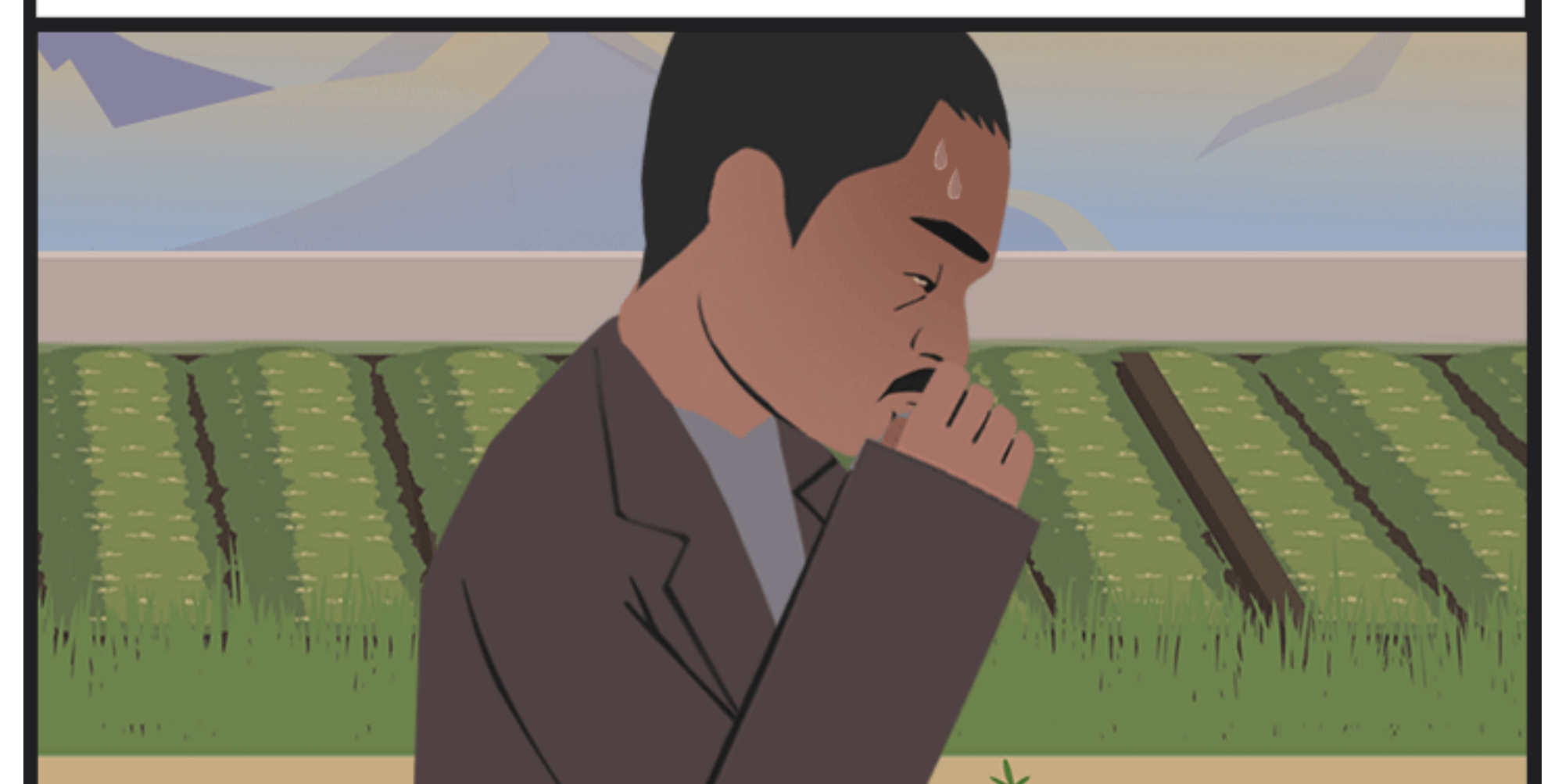


Thank god, it is good. I am satisfied. It is not clean because of cows' dirt. But it is a stable job. Also, there is no danger of deportation. This is enough for me.



I do not have the kind of services Iranian and legal Afghan migrants have. Undocumented migrants like me only have water and a telephone, but we do not have a clean living place, often we get sick.

Still, we do not visit doctors in fear of police. We cannot go to hospitals because it requires documents for the reception. We do not have any cooler in this hot weather, no heater in the winter.



I am not with my family here, but some Afghans live with their families on the dairy farm. I know that their children cannot go to school because schools are far away.

Do you have documents that allow you to stay in this city?



No, I do not have documents. If the police catch me, they will definitely deport me.



Are you living a bit under the radar and a bit insecure that you might be caught and given trouble?

If you have that feeling how much does it dominate your daily life?



As long as I am living inside the dairy farm, I will not have any problem of this kind because no one comes here.



The municipality officials and the health office officials visit the dairy farm sometimes.



But my employer is a friend with them and pays them some money.



So they ignore it.

Whenever I want to visit my family, friends and relatives, I have to get out of the farm and go to the town. I feel afraid of the police every time, I have to look around on every street and road to see if they are not around. For this reason, I got out of the farm no more than three times per year, only for the funeral ceremonies of relatives.



I have that bad feeling. If I get caught, not only myself, but also my family back home will suffer hunger. They expect remittance for their daily expenses. If I don't send this little money every three months, they will be starving.

Do you know any member of your community that was arrested, detained or deported? What is their current situation?



Yes, I heard the news of the deportation of some people I know every month. It is clear that their situation is not good.



The police would send them to the Safid Sang or Sia Chashma camp and then deport them. They would suffer physical violence and humiliation on the route and inside the camp. A relative of mine was tortured in Safid Sang and his arm was broken in two places. He even did not make it to see a doctor in Iran, so when he returned to Herat then he saw a doctor.



Under what circumstances were they arrested? What are the offences they are charged with?



They usually get caught on the streets when they commute between their workplace and their room.



For this reason I say that going out is dangerous for the illegal migrants.

Sometimes, the police raid on the Afghan migrants' rooms or the construction sites and arrest the illegal migrants.



How do people in your community keep each other safe?



It depends. Those in the town go to work in the daytime. Whenever they see police somewhere, they call their friends not to pass from that place. Those working on the construction sites would flee or hide inside the barrel or in the scaffoldings if they see the police.



Recently the Afghan youth have created a Facebook page called 'Afghani Begir' [Afghan Arresting]. When they see somewhere police arresting the Afghans, they post the news on the Facebook page to notify others. Because I do not use the page, so I have not seen it.

Have you benefitted from assistance to survive in this city or do you survive without help or assistance?



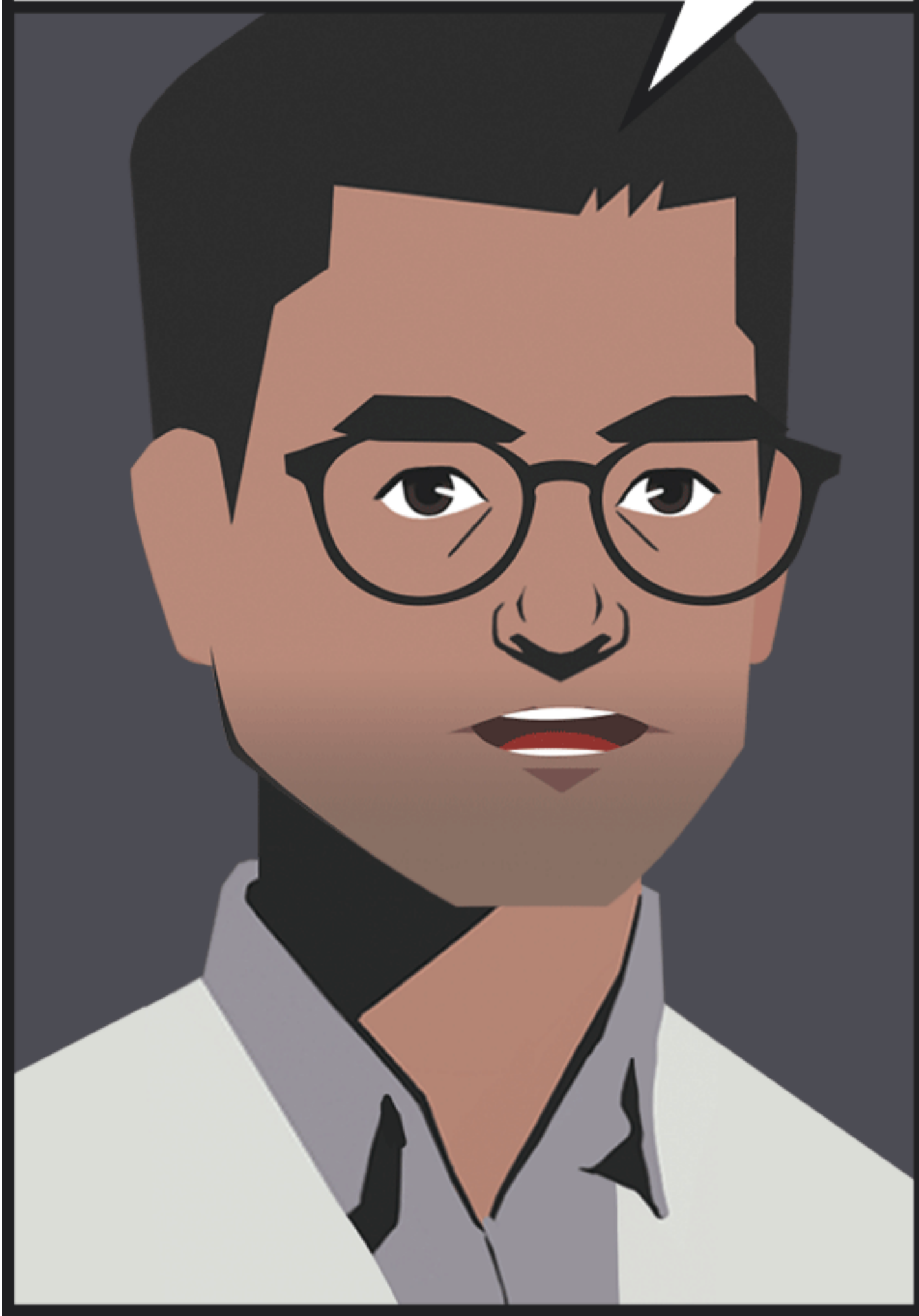
I was supported by my relatives. When I reached here, they paid the smuggler's fee then took me to their house and found a job for me. I would not be able to do these works or continue living in Iran without their support.



In return, I also try to be helpful to them, for instance, in funeral ceremonies and wedding parties.

I do not have money as of now, but in the future, when I get rich I will definitely lend money to those in need. I also help those who recently come from Afghanistan. For instance, when a worker leaves the farm and they need a worker, I will inform the relatives to introduce a worker.

How does the community support people who have newly arrived in the city?



Mostly by getting them a job and financial support. Of course, other communities also do the same, especially in family matters.



For instance, if someone dies in Afghanistan, the community members and relatives come and inform his/her next of kin, give condolence, and do the religious and cultural ceremonies.

What about assistances from local authorities, INGOs or NGOs or any kind of civil or religious associations?



No, not at all. We do not expect assistance from them. Because if they get to know that we are here, police will also realize it.



In addition, no one cares about us here. Iranians do not care about us, both religious and irreligious groups. Some people from my community were arrested in the religious shrines.

Any new needs you or other Afghans near you since the COVID-19 crisis and police raids?



There has not been any police raid around me. Fortunately, the employers in this area have good relations with the police. They bribe the police officers, then as if no illegal migrants had not been here at all.



Most of the raids happen on the buildings under construction where workers gather. I do not know much about the pre-covid situation and how it might have changed during the pandemic.

Do you think all foreigners have a similar experience of the city or are some less included than others, or less accepted than others?



If you mean the difference between Afghans and other foreigners, I would say there is a big difference.



For example, Iraqis are in much better condition. Although they are all refugees, they are engaged in business and have shops. They own the gold selling market. But we, the Afghans, have nothing in our hand.

I mean we do not have the right to have these things. We cannot buy a car or a house. Even if we want to buy a motorcycle, we need to buy it in an Iranian's name. We cannot make the document by our own name. The discrimination against Afghans is very severe in Iran.

I am an illegal migrant and not expecting any facilities. But those legal Afghans migrants or refugees living here are not in better condition.



They are harassed on the street and sometimes face physical violence. Their bank account gets closed after some months. They cannot buy any assets in their own names. In one word, Afghans are the most miserable people in Iran. Other groups are in a better situation.

Do you feel the city makes it easy for you to be 'part of the city' or do you feel a bit on the outside of the city's life?



I have always been in this city only. It is not my homeland, not my home to feel myself as belong to it. People of Tehran do not want me here. The only person want me here is my employer. As I step out of this dairy farm, they all want to get me out of their country.



Do you feel the city authorities and services have made any efforts or offered facilities to make migrants feel part of the whole city or do you feel excluded?



I am sure that all Afghans have the same feeling as I have. Going to school and hospital is possible only for those who have documents. Those without documents have to either visit unprofessional doctors or suffer their pain. Recently the reception for undocumented Afghan children is open but it is very irregular and indiscipline. It depends on the decision of the school, whether they like to allow the undocumented Afghan children or not. Some schools ask for extra fees.



Parks are not legally banned for Afghans, but we face humiliations and discriminations there, that is why I am not interested to go to parks. Once, I went to a park, I felt that I was not welcomed there. People were staring at me as if I had occupied their home. For this reason, I soon left the park and have never returned there. Before, it happened that the entrance of Afghans was banned in some parks, restaurants and pools. For instance, the poster was put on the entrance door which mentioned 'the Afghans entrance is banned here'.

Do you observe any change in the attitude of local people here towards migrants since the COVID-19 crisis began? How was it like before?



I do not know. I have not any interactions with Iranians after the covid-19 outbreak. So I do not know if it has changed or not.



What are the good things about this city that make you want to stay? Especially when you compare it with your home country and/or other cities you may have passed through in transit in your migration.



First, its security. At least, I am not worried about the dangers of explosion and suicide attacks. Second, the employment rate is high. Although the salary rate is low, but we can provide the basic necessities of our family.



Only this. Nothing else to be interested in. if there was security and work in Afghanistan, I would never be here at all.

How have you contributed to the city?



They work with low salaries and they do not expect anything. Neither do they want assurance nor any other services. The only thing we expect is to be allowed to work here.



If Afghans had not come to Iran, the fruit bazar, dairy farms, buildings and metros wouldn't be constructed, even in the next 20 years.

Do you have any friends/ family members from your home country that are planning to come to Tehran? Why do they make that decision?



Yes, my relatives/ community members always come here for work. Now that covid-19 has spread in all over Afghanistan and the construction works resumed in Iran, some youths of my community have come in Iran, others also plan to come.



They do not need any special reason. They come for work, just like I did. They want to work here to send remittances back home to save their families from hunger.

Can you tell us of any event(s) that occurred during your time in this city that were positive and impressed you, and also any that were negative?

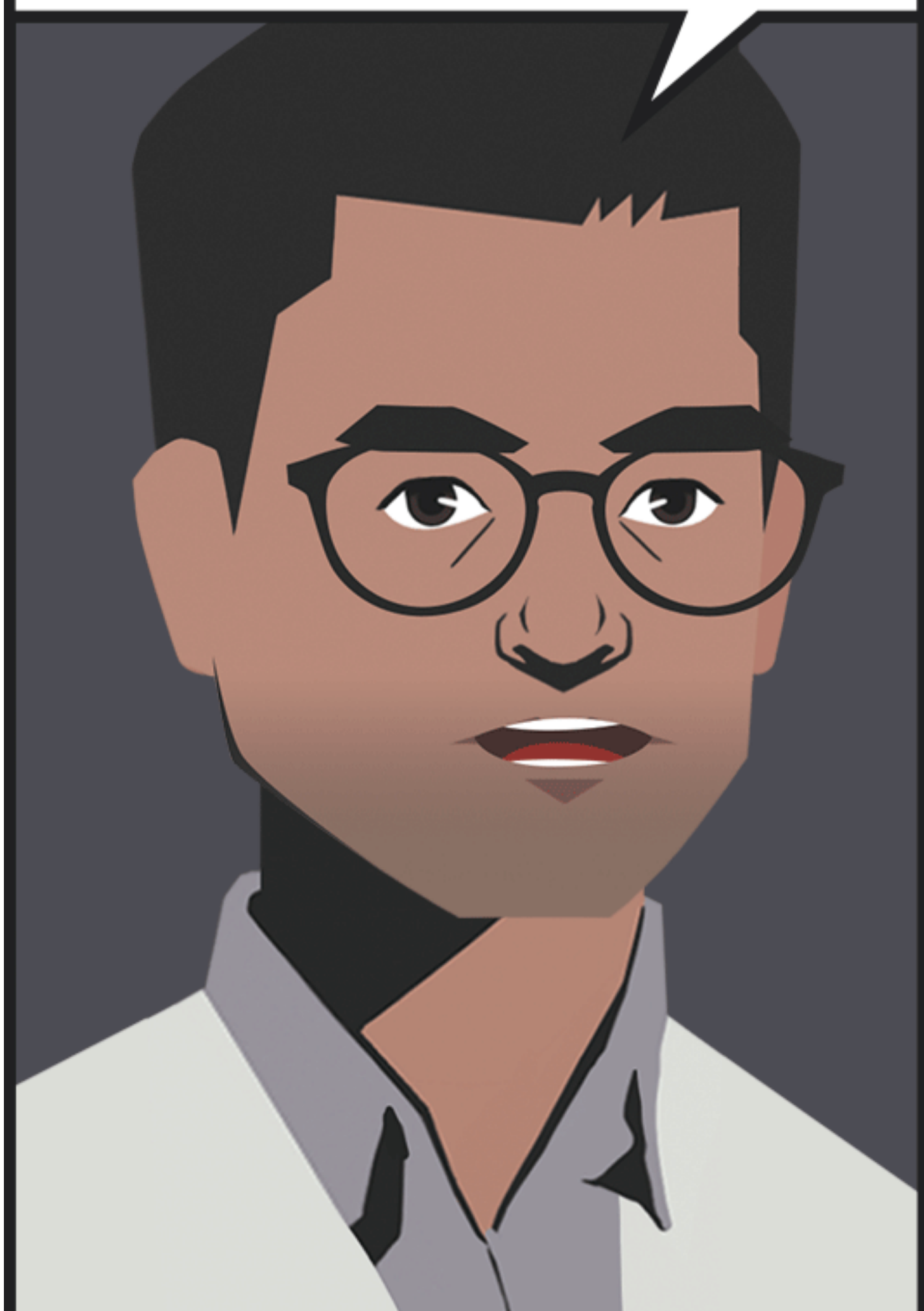


Honestly speaking, I had only one good memory of living here. Once I attended a wedding party before the COVID-19 outbreak. I saw some of my community members and relatives and we had a nice time. Other than that, I do not have any other good memories.

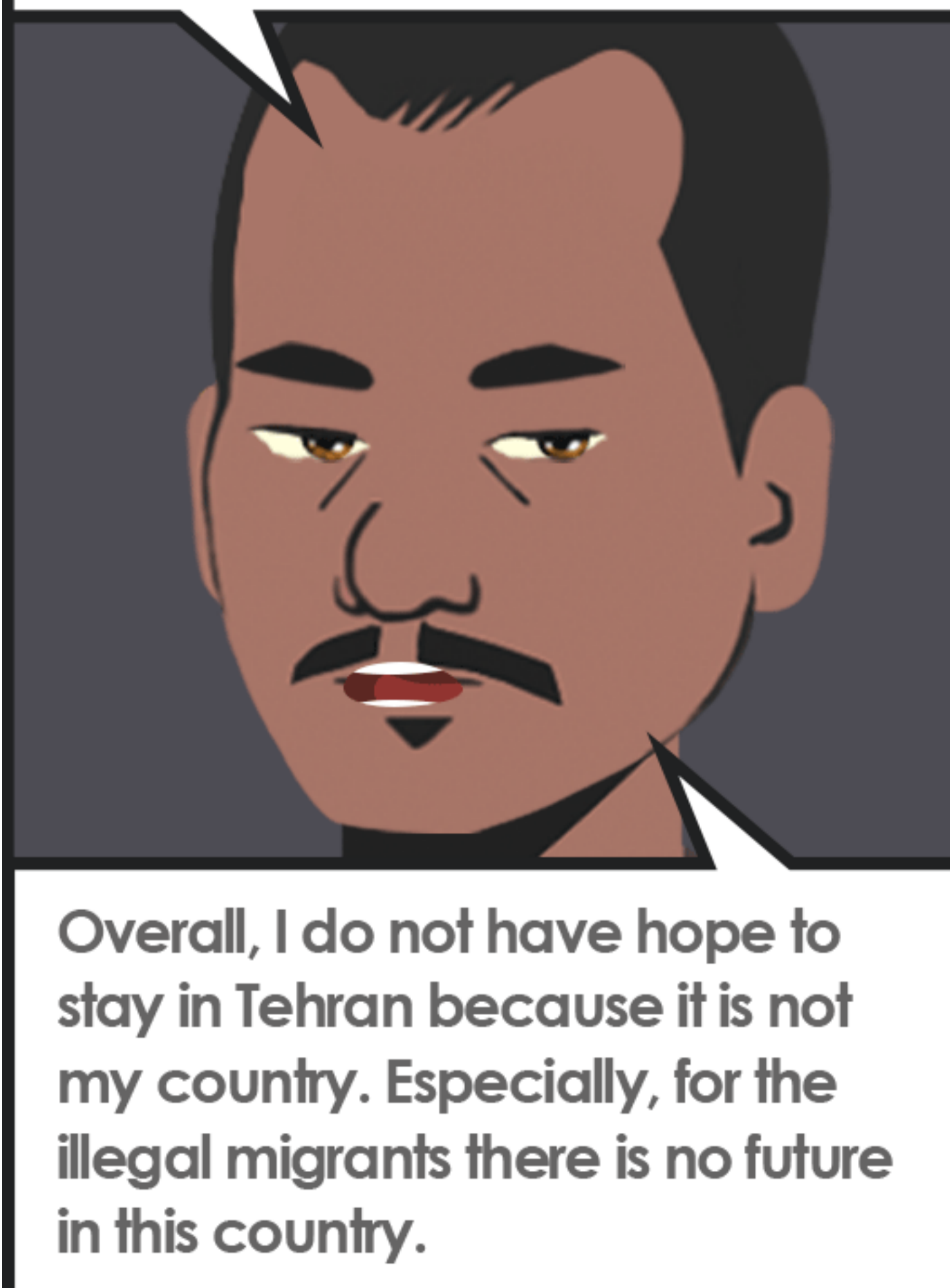


The bad memory is that any time I get out of the dairy farm I fear getting caught by the police.

Do you have some dreams of what you would like to do in this city that you can share?



All I want in this city is to let me work in order to save some money to send to Afghanistan and to make a simple work for myself there.



Overall, I do not have hope to stay in Tehran because it is not my country. Especially, for the illegal migrants there is no future in this country.

What were the reasons you remained in this city? How long do you plan to stay?



For now I am here until I get caught and deported. If no problems come, I will stay here for two more years.



Would you like the reader of your story to know anything extra or special about your life in this city, something we haven't mentioned?



No, I do not a special comment. The destiny of Afghans is only misery and poverty. The best thing is getting an education. If I had the chance to get an education in Afghanistan, I would not be in this situation now. I would be able to get a proper job there, other than physical works. Even if I could not get a job, I would pursue my education in other countries and would not be humiliated every day.



End of the interview

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