

Crypt Zero

By Erik Radvon

Page One

Three panels.

Panel One

ART: Int. of an industrial space cargo ship. The ship's rear hatch is open, exposing a dark and dusty planet below. A ribbon of neon-blue atmosphere surrounds the maroon planet as it meets the black expanse of space.

COMMANDER DAL, our protagonist, wears a clunky spacesuit. His helmet is opaque; we don't see his face underneath. We look over his shoulder through the open hatch, bits of vertigo pulling at our perspective.

CAP: It's been a millennium since anyone's set foot on this planet.

CAP#2: Least that's what the **eggheads** tell me.

Panel Two

ART: Dal leaps out the back of the hatch, entering into freefall. Our P.O.V. is like this-



CAP: If I had a credit for every time an egghead was wrong...

CAP#2: I wouldn't still be working for them as a gofer for hire.

Panel Three

ART: Shift perspective to show Dal in freefall, small as an ant against a backdrop of the planet and space.

End Page One.

Page Two

Full Page Splash

ART:

Dal's made footfall on the planet. Feature Dal's shoulders and helmet in the foreground.

We're looking over his shoulder as a towering ancient structure dominates the page. It is old, dark, somehow menacing. The surface of the planet is dusty, red, and desolate.

At the top of the crypt are alien symbols and the numeral zero written in industrial neon tubing. Show the mechanical detail of the signage—glass tube, metal fixtures. The sign has been glowing for an eternity in the darkness. This place has not been touched in a very long time.

CAP:

Here it is. Waypoint reached.

CAP#2:

Nav charts call it **Crypt Zero**.

End Page Two.

Page Three

Six panels.

Panel One

ART: Side view of Dal bent down on one knee in front of the crypt, setting up a toaster-sized device with a small satellite dish coming out of it.

CAP: Eggheads require that I **check-in** upon arrival.

Panel Two

ART: Wide shot from behind Dal. We see the immensity of the crypt once more. Dal is small in front of it.

Draw little electric radio signals coming from the dish, up into the sky off panel right.

CAP: This far out, takes a couple minutes for the signal to relay.

Panel Three

ART: Close-up of the neon zero. It's glow and mechanicalness is an eerily reminder that this desolate place was built by something intelligent.

CAP: While I wait, the neon shines out from the darkness, the sole break in the planet's endless desert landscape. Who would build something like this way the hell out here?

Panel Four

ART: Back to Dal in front of the satellite dish receiver. Show the dish on the left of the panel and Dal's profile on the right.

BURST: **Commander Dal--**We trust you've made it to the surface. Have you located the site waypoint?

DAL: I'm here, Institute. Crypt Zero, exactly where the nav charts you provided said it would be.

BURST#2: Excellent. While you were en route, your ship's long range sensors picked up an **energy signature** emanating from a point approximately **three hundred meters** from your

current coordinates, nearly dead in the center of the site. We need you to **breach** the structure's exterior walls and identify the energy source.

Panel Five

ART: Medium shot of Dal and the satellite dish.

DAL: Institute, this structure hasn't had a building code inspection anytime in the last two thousand years. I breach an exterior wall and this thing very well might come down right on top of me. Can't you send in **drones** to take it from here? I'll install a few homing beacons and—

Panel Six

ART: Same.

BURST: Come, come, Commander--This sector is **far** too remote to mount expeditions to casually, even robotic ones. Sending you has already cost the Institute a **fortune**. We agreed to your rather generous fees precisely because drones don't meet the demands this project calls for. Only a human resource will do.

DAL(mutters): Well, at least I've got **that** going for me.

BURST#2: We need you to do what we pay you to do, **Commander Dal**. We need you to initiate a tag and locate on that energy source.

End Page Three.

Page Four

Five panels.

Panel One

ART: The conversation has ended and Dal is now up close to the crypt's exterior. There are no doors, but a seam runs up the main façade. This place was sealed and not meant for easy reentry.

Dal is digging through his suit's storage compartment (built-in backpack).

CAP: Damned **eggheads**. They're always **great** for changing terms on the fly.

Panel Two

ART: Close-up of Dal's hand, holding a gelatinous ball with a square inside. The square reads "STICKY BOOM 2000."

CAP: I could point out that my contract calls for exterior recon only, but I bite my tongue.

Panel Three

ART: Close again as Dal slaps the STICKY BOOM 2000 onto the crypt's wall.

SFX: **SLAP!**

CAP: Why? Why else-- **money**.

Panel Four

ART: Wide. Dal is sprinting away from the crypt.

CAP: Figured out a long time ago how to deal with these eggheads--

CAP#2: Bill the **hell** out of 'em on the back end.

Panel Five

ART: The STICKY BOOM 2000 explodes, hurling fire and chunks of the crypt wall in all directions.

CAP: Case in point-- they're now looking at demolition work and hazardous material handling surcharges. A couple **grand** in extra fees, at least.

CAP#2: For what it's worth, the Institute never bats an eye. I bill them up the nose and they deposit the credits that day. Wish all contracts went that smooth.

End Page Four.

Page Five

Six panels.

Panel One

ART: Dal has taken his first step into the crypt. The newly blown open hole is on the far left of the panel, letting in streams of faint light. Dal is shown stepping through the hole. The rest of the panel is dim and dark. We see hints of massive columns rising.

A path is visible leading from the hole off to the right of the panel.

CAP: Three hundred meters.

CAP#2: In and out.

CAP#3: Piece of cake.

Panel Two

ART: We're behind Dal now, looking as he makes his way into the crypt. A headlamp on his suit supplies light. We see hints of ancient looking hieroglyphics decorating the columns and grotesque statues filling the space of the crypt. Strangely iridescent mosaics are inlaid in the walls and the columns, sparkling in the darkness when Dal's light hits them. You have free reign here to start introducing whatever you wish, as long as it is crazy and creepy and catacomb-like it will work.

CAP: Whoever built this place had an **artistic** bent.

Panel Three

ART: Dal has made his way farther into the crypt and is now walking down a path, straight and neat like the center aisle of a church. On either side of the path are enormous columns, stretching far up out of our view. We can make out an altar in the distance ahead of Dal, with a large rectangular box held on it.

CAP: Ancients couldn't figure out how to wipe their own asses, yet had time for sculpture and fairy tales. Never understood that.

CAP#2: Guess I'm more of a **modernist**.

Panel Four

ART: Overhead shot of Dal, now nearly at the base of the altar.

CAP: Hold it. Suit's picking up some spikes.

CAP#2: Concentration of **dark energy** throwing up parameter fields all over this place. The eggheads say that's a probable sign of **extra-dimensional** activity. They don't know for sure, everything's a working theory with them.

CAP#3: All I know is the funky energy source I'm looking for is coming from this **altar**.

Panel Five

ART: Closer shot, side view of Dal ascending the few steps that lead to the top of the altar. We now see the box that rests on top of it. It is an ornate ark, with many witchy looking symbols carved into it.

CAP#2: Coming from this chest.

Panel Six

ART: Close-up. Dal's gloved finger reaching out to touch the ornate ark.

CAP: Coming from **inside** this chest.

End Page Five.

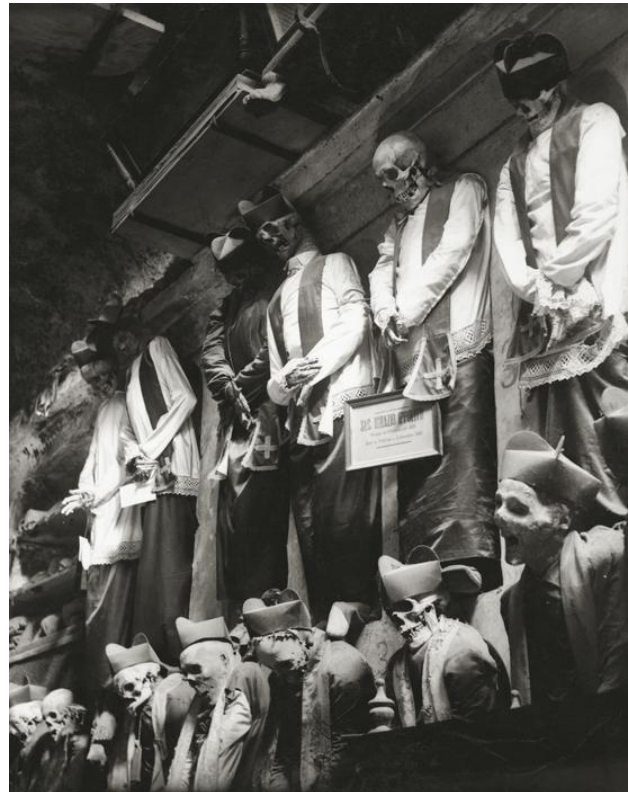
Page Six

Three panels. Panel One is a half-page.

Panel One

ART:

Our angle is down low, showing Dal and the chest/ark in the lower third of the panel. The camera is tilted up exposing a wall of skeletal remains that have suddenly dropped out from the darkness of the cathedral-like ceiling, like this:



The remains are those of other explorers and grave robbers who breached the crypt millennia ago. They are adorned in wildly varied warrior and explorer garb, and are mostly humanoid with a few odd skeletal structures in the mix. The skeletal remains cry out in a chorus:

REMAINS:

ANGRA MAINYU!

BURST:

TRANSLATION MODE ENABLED. BEGIN TRANSLATION:

BURST#2:

ANGRA MAINYU...EVIL SPIRIT.

(BURSTS FROM HERE ARE DAL'S SUIT. PLEASE USE COMPUTER STYLE FONT)

Panel Two

ART: Dal is only slightly taken aback by the appearance of the skeletons. He doesn't panic, it's all very matter of fact for him. He has one hand resting on the chest and is looking upwards at the skeleton remains.

CAP: **Always** talking dead things in places like this.

Panel Three

ART: Same, except Dal has turned his head down to examine the ark, ignoring the skeletons.

CAP: Or **supposed** dead things. **Theatrics**, if you ask me. Smoke and mirrors. Old school security systems to scare off plunderers and vandals.

CAP#2: Now, how to open this sucker? Top looks hefty, but if I blast it open I risk damaging whatever's inside. Manual labor time.

End Page Six.

Page Seven

Five panels.

Panel One

ART: Dal is putting his shoulder into the ark, seeing if the lid has any play and can be pushed off. Some bits of dust and sand begin to fall from the seam of the ark and its lid.

SFX: crrrrrr

CAP: The lid's got some play. Heavy as hell but I think I can push it off.

REMAINS: **NA ABRIE STO! ANGRA MAINYU A E'TRO!**

BURST: DO NOT OPEN THAT. EVIL SPIRIT INSIDE.

Panel Two

ART: Close up on the faces of the skeletal remains.

REMAINS: **ACHTRAT!** E'tro dispa **Zahhak!** Angra Mainyu eto gonolo Zahhak!

BURST: WARNING. INSIDE LIES ZAHHAK. ZAHHAK IS AN ENOURMOUS EVIL SPIRIT.

REMAINS#2: Zahhak sugga dien maddru foknuker!

BURST#2: ZAHHAK IS A VILE <EXPLETIVE DELETED> OF MOTHERS.

Panel Three

ART: Back to Dal, pushing hard to get the lid off. It's about halfway there.

SFX: CRRRRRRRR

CAP: Much as I'd like to banter, I can't afford to get distracted. Time is money, and the longer I linger the slimmer my profit margins get. No time for debates, with the living or otherwise.

CAP#2: Lid's nearly off. One more push!

Panel Four

Art: Close on the lid of the ark crashing to the floor.

SFX: **CRRRRASH!**

Panel Five

ART: Similar setup to panels 2 and 3 on Page 6. This time Dal stands with his hands on his knees, catching his breath after pushing the massive stone lid of the ark. His head is staring up at the skeletal remains, which are quickly retracting back into the ceiling from where they dropped on page 7. We see a portion of them in the panel as they are whipping away.

REMAINS: Pa, Nos fodon-- Ga poxt jex, aleng!

BURST: LO, WE ARE DOOMED-- YOU HAVE CURSED US ALL, STRANGER!

CAP: Fun times. I don't even bother putting this stuff in my reports anymore.

End Page Seven.

Page Eight

Four panels.

Panel One

ART: Bird's eye view of the opened ark. A mummified body lies inside, wearing ornate armor and decorations. The body's hands are shackled in massive handcuff restraints.

The body wears a large amulet around its neck. It's chunky, silver, and contains dark gemstones. This is the energy source Dal seeks.

CAP: An **amulet?** You've got to be kidding me. The market's flooded with these things.

CAP#2: Energy source or not, why the hell would the eggheads make me come all the way here for this junk?

Panel Two

ART: Over Dal's shoulder as he's reaching into the tomb to remove the amulet. We see the body inside, its bound hands featured prominently.

CAP: Shackles and chains. I'd wager this guy was a criminal in his day, but criminals don't usually receive decadent resting places like this. A **mad king** perhaps? Some kind of failed royal?

Panel Three

ART: Dal positions his one of his hands downwards, exposing his wrist. His suit fires a laser from the wrist and it burns through the mummified body's shackles.

CAP: Who knows, who cares. I'll just cut loose this energy-spouting necklace of his and be on my way.

CAP#2: Criminals or kings-- **lasers** cut through 'em all the same.

SFX: **ZZZZAPTTTTT!**

Panel Four

ART: Dal lifts the amulet, cut free by the laser, out of the tomb.

CAP: Got it.

CAP#2: There, that wasn't so hard—

End Page Eight.

Page Nine**Full page splash.**

ART:

We're looking at a wide shot of the cathedral-like crypt. Dal stands toward the center-left of the page on the raised altar, amulet in both his hands. Strange energy circles around the amulet, tying into a gigantic spectral head that emanates from the opened tomb!



HEAD:

**QUION REGGA NAUGKT DA GON
ZAHHAK!?!**

BURST:

WHO HAS FREED THE GREAT **ZAHHAK?**

CAP:

Damn it. **Again** with the talking dead things.

End Page Nine.

Page Ten

Five panels.

Panel One

ART: The floating head of Zahhak towers over Dal.

ZAHHAK: **CHUT KAPOO! TA LIBRIX JA MILANI'I DA CARCONDO. KEYPA TICHA WONDUNGO C'SIKT TOOKO?!**

BURST: GREETINGS, HOST! YOU HAVE LIBERATED ME FROM A MILLIENIA OF INCARCERATION. SHALL WE ENTER INTO COITUS TO CELEBRATE YOUR ARRIVAL?

CAP: Well, that's all I need to hear for **flight** to win out over fight.

Panel Two

ART: Dal is sprinting away from the altar as fast as he can, holding the amulet with both hands as the spectral head of Zahhak follows behind him. The crypt is shaking with the spirit's raw power. Spectral energy is flying around everywhere.

CAP: Three hundred meters to the exit point-- **MOVE!**

Panel Three

ART: We're looking from Zahhak's P.O.V., Dal scrambling through the cathedral hall toward the hole he entered through. The hole looks tiny in the distance.

ZAHHAK: **KUT ZG'NORO DA JAE LONTO GA! SLIPPA FUST CHA'A KUT!**

BURST: LONG HAVE I WAITED TO BOND WITH A MEAT-HOST AGAIN. ALLOW ME TO REWARD YOU WITH PENETRATION.

CAP: **GOGOGO!**

Panel Three

ART: A massive column has fallen into the main path out. Dal activates thrusters on his suit's boots to leap over it. The head of Zahhak nips at his heels.

CAP: Place is falling apart-- Gotta get up and over!

DAL: **Activate thrusters!**

Panel Four

ART: Dal leaps over the column, bursts of rocket power coming out of both his boots.

BURST: THRUSTERS ACTIVATED.

Panel Five

ZAHHAK: **NI SLORK AGA, JO DESIR PLAKTONO TOHAC KUT!**

BURST#2: DON'T RUN AWAY, ALLOW ME TO ROBUSTLY COPULATE WITH YOU!

SFX: **HA-HA-HA-HA-HA!**

BURST#3: LAUGHTER. LAUGHTER. LAUGHTER.

End Page Ten.

Page Eleven

Five panels.

Panel One

ART: Dal's P.O.V., looking through his helmet. We see elements of his suit's system displays overlaid. Dials and widgets are present, etc. (Think inside of Iron Man's helmet).

The hole is closer now. Dal can see the light.

CAP: Almost there. Don't look back.

Panel Two

ART: Same, but now spectral energy is creeping in to the corners of the panel, like an enveloping fog.

CAP: Gaining on me!

ZAHHAK: **KTHCO FLIP JA, DOONKA SMOLTA J'ON? PA JOK TRINZ DA YON PO KOL TA KAPOO NE.**

BURST: WERE YOU NOT TOLD THAT I WOULD BE SO FORWARD? I HAVE WAITED THOUSANDS OF YEARS TO BOND WITH A HOST AGAIN.

ZAHHAK#2: **PAJ KATOOK SA!**

BURST#2: I SHALL NOT BE DELAYED FURTHER!

Panel Three

ART: Wide shot, showing the spectral head-cloud coming over Dal, like a jellyfish imbibing a piece of plankton.

ZAHHAK: **G'NEEEEEEEEEEE~~***

BURST: YESSSSSSSSSS~~*

CAP: Run, damn it, **run!**

DAL: **BOOST!**

Panel Four

ART: Dal springs forward from the spectral head-cloud, shown in a blur ala the Flash. His suit's boost function kicks in and propels him forward. The temple continues to shake and crumble, columns and statues falling everywhere.

Panel Five

ART: Back to Dal's helmet P.O.V., the hole nearly there, speed lines showing that he is running in boost mode as fast as he can.

End Page Eleven.

Page Twelve

Six panels.

Panel One

ART: Static shot of the outside of the crypt. We see the neon tubing the “zero” sign glowing overhead. The planet surface is dim, red, and a small dust storm bellows on the distant horizon. We’re focused on the hole blown into the side of the crypt.

Panel Two

ART: Same. Dal leaps out of the hole, with a cloud of spectral energy gushing out behind him, like a flood of strange water.

Panel Three

ART: Close-in on Dal, still sprinting, as he shouts into his suit’s communication port on his right arm.

DAL: **STRATOSPHERE JUMP!**

BURST: STRATOSPHERE JUMP COMMENCING.

BURST#2: THREE.

Panel Four

ART: Dal scrambling, the massive Crypt Zero shaking to pieces behind him. Spectral energy continues to pour out of the hole and is coalescing into a rough orb.

BURST: TWO.

Panel Five

ART: The head of Zahhak is now partially formed again from the spectral mass, grotesquely deformed and gigantic, dominating the panel as Dal sprints toward to foreground, directly at us.

BURST: ONE.

ZAHHAK: **ZEKFIN ZAHHAK T’A LIBOR NE!**

BURST: AT LAST ZAHHAK IS FREE AGAIN!

SFX: HA-HA-HA-HA!

Panel Six

ART: Top-down view. Dal has launched from the surface of the planet, a spiraling swirl of smoke leading from the ground, like a rocket's trail. He clutches the golden amulet to his chest.

Crypt Zero is collapsing below in a cloud of fire and dust and debris. The faint outline of the spectral head of Zahhak is visible in the destruction.

BURST: LIFTOFF. LIFTOFF. LIFTOFF.

End Page Twelve.

Page Thirteen

Six panels.

Panel One

ART: Dal lands back into the open hatch of the industrial cargo ship from Page One.

CAP: Made it.

CAP#2: Just barely.

Panel Two

ART: Dal punches a button to close the hatch of the ship.

CAP: Exhausted.

CAP#2: Seen a lot of weird stuff on these field expeditions.

CAP#3: Think this one tops the list, though.

Panel Three

ART: Dal places the amulet in a safety deposit-box looking hold that slides out of the ship's wall.

CAP: Hope this thing was worth it.

CAP#2: Doubt it was. It'll probably end up in an Institute storage unit, collecting dust with all the other "unclassified" field findings.

Panel Four

ART: Dal's now at the ship's command center, plunking into a large seat.

DAL: Ship, get us back to the Institute.

DAL#2: And don't wake me 'til we're there.

Panel Five

ART: Same. Dal's now reclined in the seat.

CAP: Beat. Don't even have energy to get up and turn on the enviro controls. Can't keep my eyes open. I'll just sleep in the suit.

CAP#2: I feel the planet all over me still, like a cold ache under my muscles. Hope I didn't catch some ancient flu in that dump.

CAP#3: Definitely billing extra for this one. Then the casino...for a week...can't keep my eyes...

Panel Six

ART: All black.

End Page Thirteen.

Page Fourteen

Five panels.

Panel One

ART: **Ext. space.** Dal's ship is docked at a large space station. The station is the size of a city. This is the Institute.

CAP: Later. The Institute.

Panel Two

ART: **Int. cargo ship.** Teams of white-coated scientists are packing the amulet into a container and filling out digital clipboards of e-paperwork. The Chief Scientist talks with Dal.

CHIEF SCIENTIST: Excellent work as always, Commander Dal.

DAL: Yeah. Thanks.

Panel Three

ART: Silhouetted profile of the scientist and Dal talking.

CHIEF SCIENTIST: The item you've brought back is most perplexing. It appears to be made of some kind of unique alloy. The energy it's emitting is incredible.

CHIEF SCIENTIST: It will give our team plenty to study.

DAL: Three cheers for scientific progress.

Panel Four

ART: Scientists carry the boxed-up amulet out the ship's door and into the Institute's docking bay. Dal and the Chief Scientist stand by the door. The Chief Scientist types on an ethereal iPad-looking device, cutting Dal a virtual check.

CHIEF SCIENTIST: We've approved the surcharges for your demolition work and the other associated hazard pay. You should see the credits posted to your account by the close of markets today.

CHIEF SCIENTIST#2: You seem rather groggy, Commander. Run into any trouble out there?

DAL: Nothing I couldn't handle. Just a long flight is all.

Panel Five

ART: **Close-up** of the scientist handing Dal an ethereal virtual check.

CHIEF SCIENTIST: Well, enjoy your pay. Casino bound, I take it?

DAL: Hey, you know me--

End Page Fourteen.

Page Fifteen

Nine panel grid.

Panel One

CAP: "I'm a man of simple pleasures."

ART: Int. Casino Stripclub. The strip club is gaudy and rundown, like a Foxwoods in space. Dal is sitting at the base of a stage, where a buxom stripper dances. Her distractingly shapely form takes up the right of the panel.

Dal's face is gaunt, white, and drawn into a scowl. He has jet black hair and dark eyes. He's seemingly oblivious to the dancer in front of him.

Panel Two

ART: Closer-in on Dal. He nurses green ale of some kind and his face looks dour. Space is visible through a large porthole window beside his table.

CAP: The usual buffet of vices not doing the trick tonight.

CAP#2: This payday ought to keep me afloat for a couple more months. Guess I **should** be **happy** about that.

Panel Three

ART: Same, Dal's standing up now and flipping a few e-credit bills down around the stripper's feet.

CAP: I don't feel happy, though. I feel **tired**. I feel that desolate planet still on me. I feel the weird air of Crypt Zero **lingering** in my nostrils.

CAP#2: Calling it a night and heading back to ship's quarters before midnight. Not exactly the all-night bender I had planned.

Panel Four

ART: Dal is back inside his ship, which is docked at the casino. He stands inside an airlock placing his helmet on a rack.

CAP: Hate to admit it, but traveling to the edge of the galactic map and back took its toll on me. Hate even more that I can't shake off what I saw there. Head's **still** swimming with visions of that place.

Panel Five

ART: Flash of the Skeletal Remains we saw on Page Seven.

REMAINS: **ANGRA MAINYU!**

Panel Six

ART: Dal's gloves come off, and are hung in the storage area for his suit, hanging below his helmet.

CAP: Pain in the ass job.

CAP#2: Is there any other kind?

Panel Seven

ART: Dal in silhouette has he zips up into his standard crew jumpsuit. It's a pair of pants and shirt in one, like a Dickies work suit.

CAP: Nothing a few days docked at the casino won't fix. Imported **booze**, imported **women**, highly illegal **gaming**-- All my favorite brain cell killers lined up and ready for hedonistic consumption.

Panel Eight

ART: Dal moves from the airlock area into the ship's bathroom. It looks like any institutional bathroom- long row of sinks, a large mirror, some stalls for showers and toilets.

CAP: Just need to rest so I can fully enjoy it.

Panel Nine

ART: Close-up of a sink faucet on full blast, hot steam billowing around a thick steam of water.

CAP: Just need to wash it off and forget about it.

End Page Fifteen.

Page Sixteen

Five panels.

Panel One

ART: Behind Dal as he leans over into the sink and vigorously scrubs his face with the hot water. Steam fills the bathroom.

CAP: Talking dead things. Evil spirits.

CAP#2: Bunch of nonsense.

Panel Two

ART: Still behind Dal. He takes a towel off a pile and dries himself.

CAP: Crypt Zero was just another ancient hellhole outfitted with a twisted security system designed to spook raiders like me. And it worked. I got spooked. Happens to the best of us. That's **all** it is.

Panel Three

ART: We're looking head on at Dal, his gaunt face in the mirror.

CAP: And if that's **not** all it is, then I don't want to know.

CAP#2: Same goes for the Institute. The egghead's don't have any patience for superstition muddying up their pristine data sets.

Panel Four

ART: Close in on Dal's eyes. We see something round and odd in the center of his pupils.

CAP: They're not interested in tales of mad kings...

Panel Five

ART: Zoomed in further, Dal's eye taking up the whole panel. We see the head of Zahhak in the pupil.

CAP: ...or **ghosts**.

CAP#2: **AT LAST ZAHHAK IS FREE AGAIN!**

SFX: **HA-HA-HA-HA!**

END