

KAÍVEN | Chapter One

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PAGE 1 - THE MOUTH OF NIGHT

PANEL 1 (WIDE / EXTERIOR)

Wrecked ship against a gargantuan black hole. Accretion disk like a burning crown. Light warps.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): We have run so long that even the stars feel tired of watching us.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): The ship is ruined, its bones cracked, its skin torn, and there is no kindly harbor in the void.

PANEL 2 (INTERIOR / BRIDGE WIDE)

Crew slumped. Consoles flicker. ZÁALI stands, rigid, hands braced as if holding reality steady.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): They trusted me. That is the sharpest thing in the room.

PANEL 3 (DETAILS / SYSTEM READOUT)

Cracked screen: HULL 12%. Failing seals.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): How many times can a man make the same choice and still call it bravery?

*CAPTION (ZÁALI): How many times can he lead others into fire and name it **the only way**?*

PANEL 4 (CLOSE-UP / CREW FACES)

Silent tears. Tremors. Someone's hand hovering near an eject lever.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): I wanted a simpler life once.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): A house. A door that locks. Mornings that mean bread and not battle.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): But I stepped onto this road, again, and again, and each time I told myself it was the last.

PANEL 5 (LOW ANGLE / ZÁALI + WINDOW)

Black hole swollen larger.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): Why do I keep doing this?

CAPTION (ZÁALI): Why does it feel... like repeating?

PANEL 6 (FULL-BLEED / EXTERIOR)

Ship tiny, being drawn in. Stars smear.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): As if some unseen hand has set the pieces upon the board before I ever touch them.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): As if the world has grooves worn into it, and my feet find them no

matter how I fight.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): If this ends the way it always ends... then what, in the name of all the lights that ever were, was I meant to learn?

PAGE 2 - A SMALL GRAVE

PANEL 1 (WIDE / PARK)

A modest park. Trees. A bench. Summer light. At the edge, a patch of dirt turned over.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): Pain is not a stranger. It is the oldest crewman aboard every ship I have ever flown.

PANEL 2 (MEDIUM / YOUNG ZÁALI)

ZÁALI, 6 years old, kneeling with a small shovel. Dirt on his hands, cheeks wet. Beside him: a small bundle wrapped in cloth, his dog.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): It sits quietly in the corner while we laugh, and it does not laugh with us.

PANEL 3 (DETAIL)

His tiny fingers press earth down gently, like tucking someone in.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): It watches us eat, and sleep, and make promises we do not understand the cost of.

PANEL 4 (MEDIUM / THE OLD MAN ENTERS)

A mysterious old man stands a few steps away, simple clothes, unassuming, but somehow too still for the world. No sinister vibe. Just weight.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): Then, when the alarms begin, it rises as if it has been waiting for its proper work.

PANEL 5 (TWO-SHOT / OLD MAN + CHILD)

The old man crouches to ZÁALI's level. Gentle distance.

OLD MAN

What was his name?

PANEL 6 (CLOSE-UP / YOUNG ZÁALI)

ZÁALI looks up, watery eyes, throat tight, can't answer. His mouth opens but no sound comes.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): They tell you existence is a gift.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): If so, it is a gift wrapped in thorns, and the blood on the ribbon is

usually yours.

PANEL 7 (MEDIUM / OLD MAN, SOFT)

The old man's expression is calm, tender, certain in a way that's almost frightening because it's kind.

OLD MAN

I understand your pain.
You will see them again... your dogs.
Just not in the way you probably expect.
You are too young to understand... but time will
show you.

PAGE 3 - BACK TO THE SHIP

PANEL 1 (INTERIOR / BRIDGE)

A jolt. Sparks. Crew brace.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): I have crossed a hundred skies. I have tasted a hundred triumphs.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): None of them were clean.

PANEL 2 (EXTERIOR / SHIP)

Ship tumbling slightly as gravity pulls.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): Victory is only a word we use when grief has not yet caught up.

PANEL 3 (MONTAGE)

Overlay images like memory shards: a helmet spinning in space, a hand slipping away, a body wrapped and sent outward.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): I remember faces the way sailors remember storms.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): A smile that went out.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): A hand reaching for mine... only emptiness.

PANEL 4 (CLOSE-UP / ZÁALI'S HANDS)

His hands tremble, then steady.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): I have buried companions in places that do not allow graves.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): I have left them drifting where no planet will ever claim them.

PANEL 5 (CLOSE-UP / CREW MEMBER)

A crew member, awake now, staring at ZÁALI as if asking without words: why again?

*CAPTION (ZÁALI): It is a strange thing, to be called **leader**, when all your path is marked by those who followed you and did not return.*

PANEL 6 (WINDOW / BLACK HOLE)

The black hole now dominates.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): Some nights I wonder if I am a collector of endings.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): And the worst of it is not that I lost them.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): The worst of it is that I can still feel them... aching where they used to be.

PAGE 4 - THE OLD MAN LEAVES

PANEL 1 (MEDIUM / OLD MAN STANDS)

The old man rises with effort that looks performed like he's pretending to be old.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): There are losses you can accept: the swift, clean kind, where the universe is merely cruel.

PANEL 2 (DETAIL / YOUNG ZÁALI'S FACE)

Z'AALI's grief shifts into confusion, hope intruding like an unfamiliar guest.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): And then there are the other losses... the ones that return.

PANEL 3 (WIDE / THE PARK PATH)

The old man begins walking away along the path. Sunlight behind him.

YOUNG ZÁALI

...I'll see him again?

PANEL 4 (OVER-SHOULDER / OLD MAN, NOT TURNING AROUND)

The old man does not look back... like looking back would break a rule.

OLD MAN

Yes

PANEL 5 (SURREAL HINT / CHILD POV)

For a moment, the world feels subtly wrong: a bird freezes for a fraction, leaves hang too still, the old man's outline **double-exposes** as if time stuttered.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): They do not return as they were.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): A familiar laugh in a stranger's mouth.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): A gaze that once knew you, now sliding past as if you are smoke.

PANEL 6 (MEDIUM / YOUNG ZÁALI ALONE)

ZÁALI kneels by the small grave, staring after the old man. The park feels larger now, as if it contains an infinite distance.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): I remember too much.

PAGE 5 - THE SEARCH BEGINS

PANEL 1 (MONTAGE / SPACEPORT CROWD)

Adult ZÁALI in a crowd on a distant world. He spots someone with a familiar posture.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): I have found them again. Sometimes years later. Sometimes worlds away.

PANEL 2 (MONTAGE / NEAR-MISS DOOR)

A door closes. ZÁALI arrives late.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): ...and I have missed them by a single choice, a single hour, a single wrong door.

PANEL 3 (MONTAGE / DIFFERENT LIFE)

A person laughs, same laugh as someone we saw die earlier, but in a different face.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): Do you know what it is to search for a person across the breadth of the cosmos, armed only with grief and intuition?

PANEL 4 (MONTAGE / SILHOUETTE)

A silhouette in rain and neon. ZÁALI's heart in his throat. It's not them.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): To see a silhouette in a crowd and feel your heart lunge like a dog straining at the leash only to be disappointed, again.

PANEL 5 (MONTAGE / THE NAME FALLS)

ZÁALI speaks a name (balloon cropped). The stranger smiles politely. No recognition.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): To speak a name you are not sure you are allowed to speak, and watch it fall to the floor between you like a dead thing.

PANEL 6 (BACK TO PRESENT / BRIDGE)

Adult ZÁALI on the bridge again, eyes hollowed by years.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): They do not remember dying for me.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): And I... I remember too much.

PAGE 6 - THE ARCHITECT

PANEL 1 (SHIP SHUDDERS)

Reality leans.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): What breaks him is the pattern.

PANEL 2 (VISUAL PATTERN MONTAGE)

Repeated imagery across time: the same reaching hand, the same farewell, the same red warning light, like the cosmos has a template.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): The sense that suffering is not an accident, but a design.

PANEL 3 (BLACK HOLE AS EYE)

Frame the hole like an eye. Let the lensing look like a face for a heartbeat.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): I have stared into the dark long enough to suspect it stares back.

PANEL 4 (THE “SEAM”)

A nav-map glitches into impossible geometry. A faint grid behind the stars only for a moment.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): There are days I feel the seams of the world beneath my fingertips.

PANEL 5 (ZÁALI’S DECISION)

He stands straighter. Crew sense it.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): And I know... that there will be another battle after this one.

PANEL 6 (HINT OF A GREATER WAR)

A symbolic panel: nine distant points of light arranged not like stars but like chosen placement. Or nine “shadows” implied in the lensing.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): against the hands that set the rules of the game and call it existence.

PAGE 7 - THE VOW

PANEL 1 (CREW QUIET)

A hand on a shoulder. Exhaustion as intimacy.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): If I were wise, I would let the dark take us gently.

PANEL 2 (TEMPTATION OF REST)

Peaceful composition poisoned by the black hole’s edge.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): But I cannot.

PANEL 3 (FLASHBACK MICRO-BEAT)

Tiny insert panel: young ZÁALI's wet eyes. The old man's voice echoes.

OLD MAN

You will see them again...

PANEL 4 (ZÁALI RISES)

He becomes something sharper.

CAPTION (ZÁALI): And if suffering is the law, then I will become its heresy.

PANEL 5 (FULL-BLEED / DOOR IN THE DARK)

In the blackness: a hairline seam, like a doorframe made of nothing.

Lo var delna.

Let the dark come close.

Lo var na kaelle nor.

Let it show me the edge of the world.

Eth etheth silna varën, na eth kuul.

If there is a door hidden in the mouth of night, I will find it.

Ja na tal kaelna...

And I will knock...