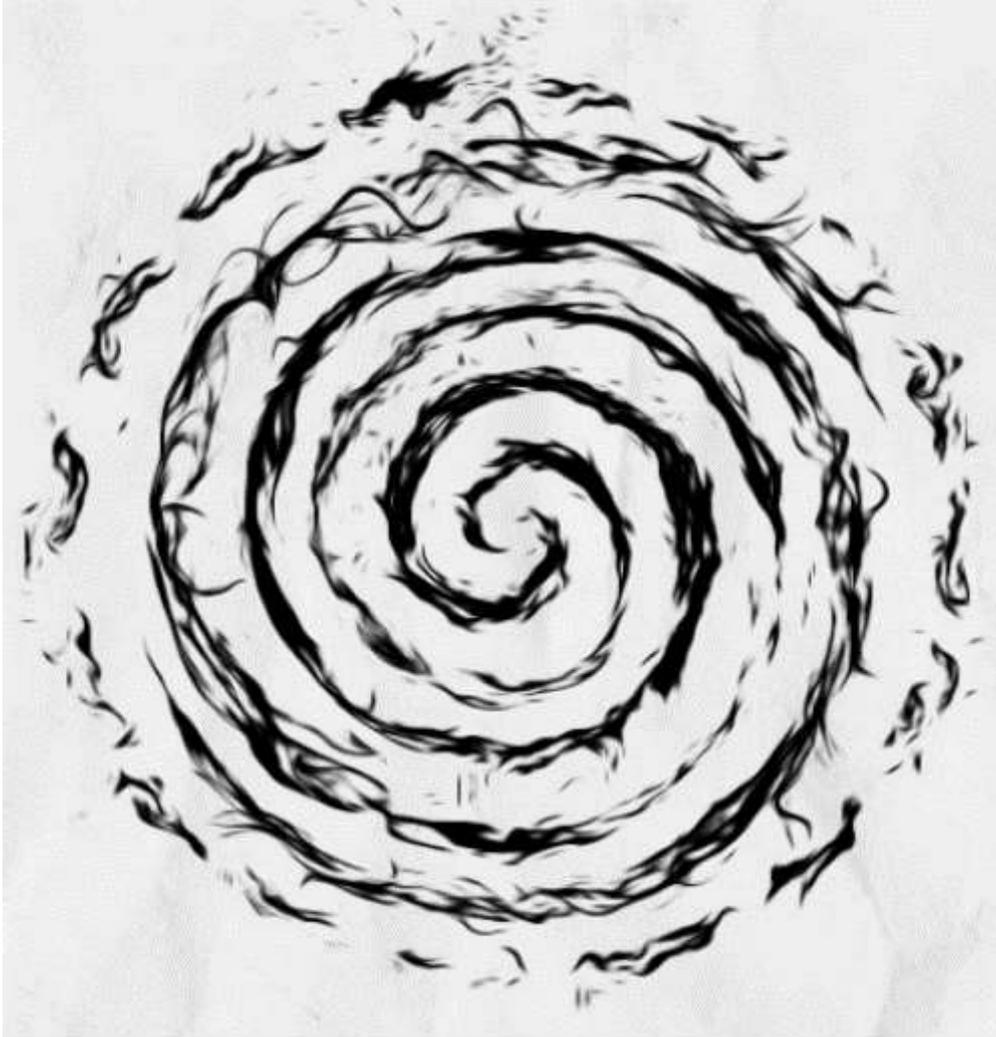


# The Eternal Night

*Ni'vim POV*



**T**hey call it *the eternal reflection*.  
Everything in the cosmos reflects the glint  
of its glory or malice to itself.

Even the cosmic creator, Os'los, trembles at the mere call of eternity.

Mortals quake before death above all else. They have found many means to weave songs of delight and meaning before the dreadful end dims any sliver of hope, beauty, truth, and purpose. However, immortals face a far more evil concern. It is an eternal cosmos where the throes of nihilism would smother their radiance.

Os'los knew he could neither be cleansed nor destroyed. Therefore, he sparked the sacred symbol, which revolves forever with spirals of fiery gold, and sings the melody of pure silence. It exists only to soothe the infinite darkness and echoes of eternity.

Many have aspired to unravel the flaming symbol's secrets.

None have succeeded.

However, within it lies a light that might dispel the eternal night of meaninglessness.

The ancients knew the above truth. Unfortunately, most people in this world have forgotten it.

Truth is like a veld looming before us. The plains may shimmer with hues of green; however, the world's limits are the limits of my language and concepts. Gaze at the world through glasses of gray, and a sprawl of barren gray would preside over you. However, it is a misfortune that most people gaze at the world through shades of mere black and white.

It is this fundamental illusion that births all wars and conflicts. If all we see is the fury of hatred or meaninglessness, we would never grace our foes with mercy or compassion.

I was once like this – the limits of my world were the shades I wore. But one can only stay in one's comfort zones for so long.

I am no exception.

Now, the burden of deciphering the symbol for the *eternal reflection* rests upon me.

Rivulets of gold swirled before me. As they spun, trails of yellow gleamed and turned into the arms of a cyclone. Glistening silver and jets of rainbow merged with the vortex.

I gazed into the symbol, which looked like the iris of some god glaring into me. Around the whirlpool was a ring of disconnected flames. At its core was a void of emptiness that sent quivers into my limbs.

My elders have always told me of the importance of this symbol. However, in times of peace, most people remain like mere sheep without concerns about death and mortality.

Golden flames streaked through the air. All around me, hundreds of meteors tore through the surroundings. They clashed atop the shields and barricades of my allies.

The fortress thundered with the clangs of swords clashing upon shields and spears thrust into plated armors. A cloak of

dismal blue had cloaked the crust, and blood gushed like fountains upon the soils. Dozens lay prone on the ground, with the flame of life extinguished within them.

Time froze, and the arrows, spears, and projectiles pierced the air with every vignette so vivid that I could count their numbers. I floated upon a cushion of air, staring down at a person who was as frail as a puppet. Her arms swirled with a choreography that wove jets of sinister black into the air, coalescing into that dreaded language.

*She was no other.*

A darkness revolved around and dragged me through the air. The swish of torn clothing echoed as I flew through a tunnel of pure emptiness. Beyond it, I beheld a veil of heinous shadows gushing all around. A sphere, darker than the blackest night, loomed ahead.

Streams of atrocious black flowed out of the sphere like the rivers of a delta. It glowed. Soon, within it was a maelstrom of scarlet glowing with the radiance of the twin suns.

I squinted my eyes, covering them, as the vile creature's radiance pierced the surroundings. The air thundered with the clashing of bone and metal against glass, with one crack after another.

With every pounding on its cage, crushed matter flaked off the creature's prison. It continued until its visage pierced the cage's outer layers, unveiling a mist of black with juts as sharp as icicles.

A pair of malefic eyes, blistering with crimson smog, gazed into me. Its stare was so malignant that my body quaked, and sweat dripped down my limbs and soiled my clothes.

"Curse this prison!" bellowed the beast in Sha'vilo, the language of my people. "No matter, Ni'vim ... these chains cannot imprison me forever!"

As the being spoke, ripples exuded from it, like the crests and troughs of the ocean. The waves pulsed outward, and the ambient air burned with each throb. Hundreds of filaments poured out of the shadowy black and fused into helices.

Merging like the threads of an embroidery, the heinous elements turned into a vile monstrosity. It assumed the form of a slug, with black froth rising from its body. The creature had no limbs - instead of a face, a visage formed of a thousand gawking eyes crowned its head. As it gazed into me, its eyes detached from its body. They jolted through the air, creating a haze made of hundreds of scarlet eyes.

A storm of eyes swirled around me, and an icy wind gushed over my shoulders. My azure cloak dangled beneath me and swished over a current of warm air. My arms formed a gesture, and a verse flowed out of my mouth:

*Qui Ino'tosh Kor Freya*



The air rang with a crescendo so loud that my eardrums shuddered with pain. A force burst forth from my hands, shaking the surroundings until it gushed like a cascade towards my foes. The sprawling vortex of eyes swirled around the attack as it shot toward them.

*A miss, but no matter.*

Another ripple of death burst forth from my palms and headed towards the infernal being. Holes punctured the beast, and a gurgle of fluids poured outward. Without delay, the creature's eyes and sinews regrew and turned into the pink of mended flesh. Acids gushed to the ground and sizzled, forming a white mist.

Sparing no time, I uttered:

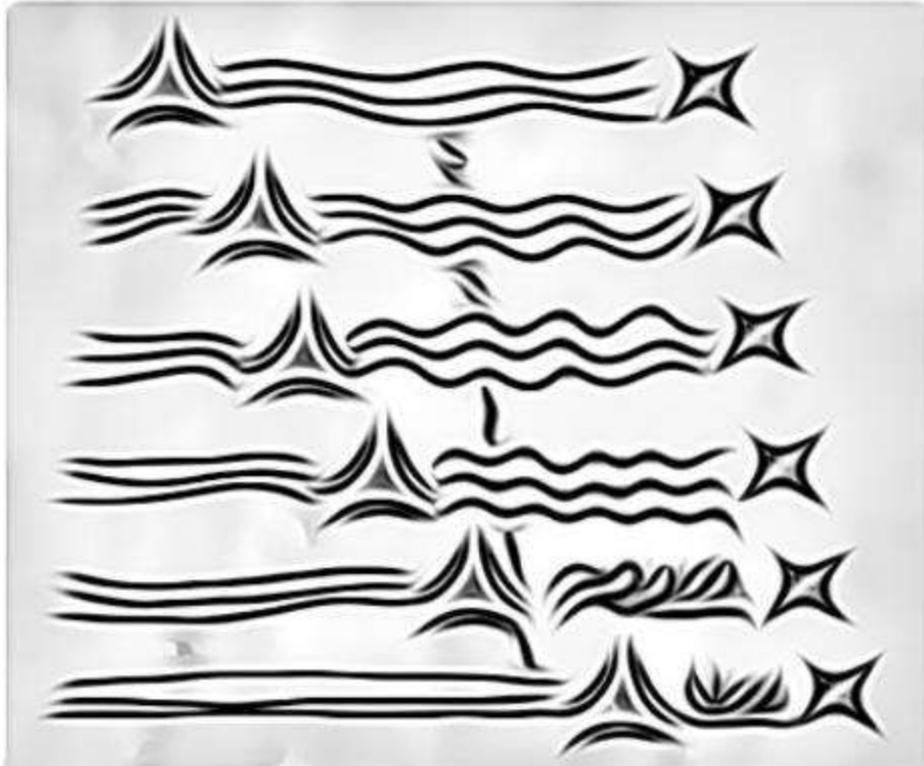
*Qui Ga'sh Mo'tosh*



A cushion of air shouldered my legs, and I rode atop a white mist that left trails of silver as I headed towards my foes. Torrid air gushed over my body. All around, hundreds of eyeballs whizzed and swirled into a cyclone.

With another invocation, I cast the following *Kar*:

*Sa'sh Ga'sh*

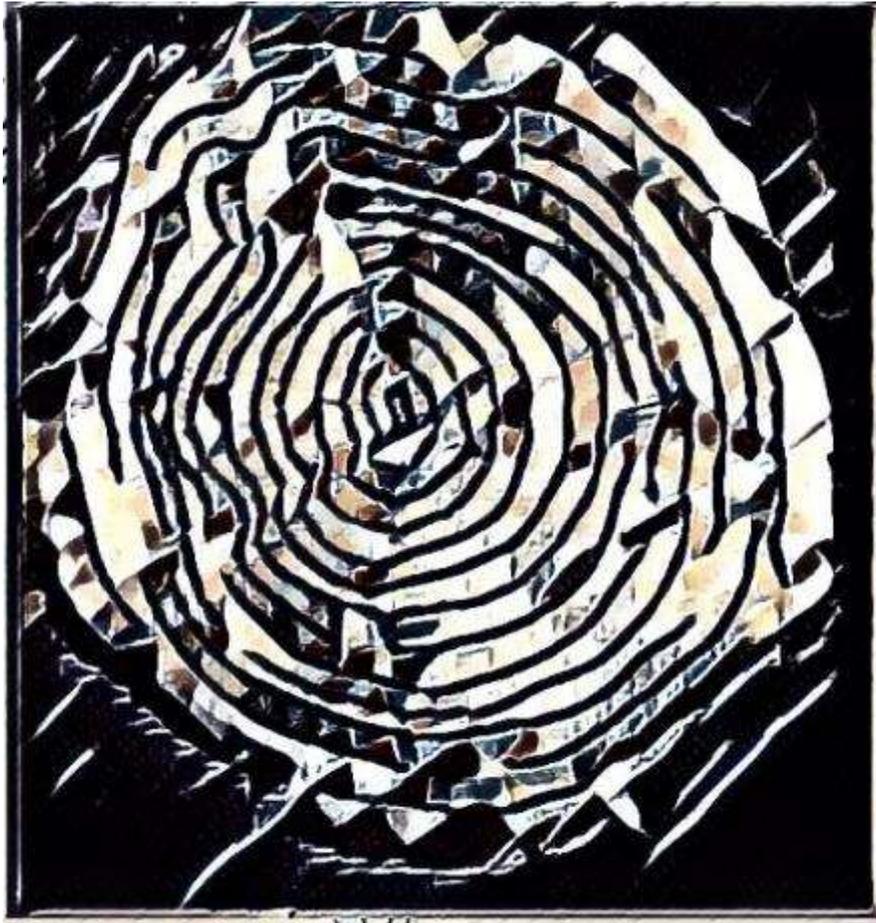


Another force propelled me through the air. I flew past the mottled flesh and eyes into a heart of darkness that I knew too well would usher the eventual demise of the world.

"Ni'vim!" thundered the being. "You do not remember what I've shown you, is it not?"

As I approached the creature, threads of barren black once more spilled forth from the entity. They merged into a symbol that presided before me. Filaments of bloody red melded to form a sign with the semblance of a whirlpool. However, it was not *the eternal reflection*. Instead, it was:

*Ini'quia*



My arms and legs flailed with every approach towards the being until a freezing gale gushed over me. Frills of soot and smog permeated the room, causing me to choke and cough. Thousands of shadowy threads besieged me like the tendrils of an oceanic beast. They twisted and meandered until their sharp edges tore through the fog.

Once jab after another thrust into my cloak and skin. Pain engulfed my body and sent convulsions into every limb, finger, and toe. Tears and saliva streamed like a brook down my chin.

"You're still weak, Ni'vim," said the being.

"No. I'm no longer the person you once knew," I said.

"You failed to protect those around you. *You let them die.* You torched the skin and faces of many. And you know all too well that the cosmos is without purpose and meaning."

The surrounding air blistered with an unholy fusion of sheer nihilism and darkness with every word. The vision continued to hold me spellbound, like a nightmare.

The surroundings morphed into a vortex that spun beneath, and a force dragged me downwards.

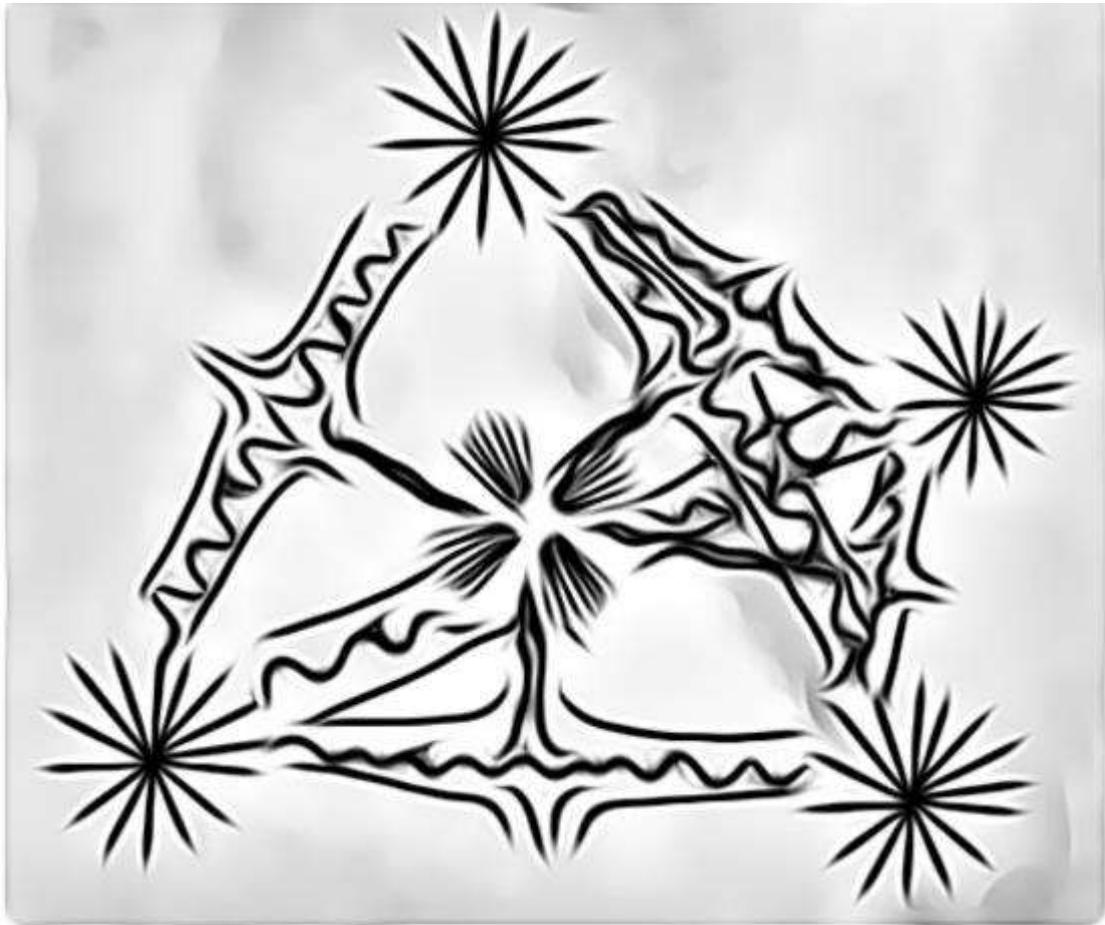
*I fell.*

I sank ever deeper into the chasm of pure nothingness. Only a faint light glimmered high above as my body sped up to an abyss with no bottom. The words of my father roared within me:

"Remember, *Thus Spake Oneness* is the key to the salvation of this world. However, it is only as useful and real as the one who embodies its truth and not merely preaches it. *Ei'lara* is a living flame, and a philosophy is only as valid as a person who lives it."

My hands formed a mudra, with my index finger and thumb touching one another. The floral *Akortosha* on my body glowered with a glint of lustrous gold until a single ray of light illumined the everlasting night.

With one scream, I invoked the following spell:



A burst of light surged forth from my body and turned into crescents of milky white, like the smiles of the twin moons. They cascaded, forming a lukewarm radiance that coated me. With every spin, the sacred symbols of *Ei'lara* wrapped around my body, twisting into the whorl of a tornado. A force brewed within me, and I rose atop a mist of shining gold, away from the bottomless chasm.

"You are wrong," I said. "As long as the glint of *the sacred flame* exists, the nights will never be dimmed of the slightest glow of hope."

"Time, space, matter, and consciousness," said the shadowy avatar. "They are only as real as in the beholder's mind. Everything which exists is nothing more than a mirage. This grand illusion has existed since the beginning of all things. And with it, every theory and concept. They are the prisons we adorn, but they are what *they* shall one day transcend beyond. When *they* arrive, the sweet requiem of *Kol'lara* shall fill every crevasse in the universe."

It is a madness that I could not conceive in the slightest. *That person* taught me that the cosmos needed some order for any meaning to be derived. He had, however, crossed all moral frontiers with his catechisms. Embarking on a crusade, all he beheld were the fires of bigotry smearing his lens. This man told me that, with no coherent order, it would plunge the universe into a nightmare where no comparison is possible. It would be a lawless cosmos where every man would live in his moral bubble and be empty with the throes of egoism.

However, in the vile being of darkness before me, I realized that some have taken its reverse too seriously. Man desires only the prospect of eternal growth, leading to divinity. However, when one's penchant for such transcends any order or logic, the end is one of pure nihilism.

*A flame cannot exist without a candle.*

It is a universal law that I have learned.

Winds howled and coursed around me, turning into an umbra darker than any abyss. Like battering rams, they jolted toward the light barrier formed by that ancient tongue.

With each hammering, the air roared with dins and cracks. My heart beat with heavy throbs as my surrounding radiance clashed against the infernal darkness. The symphony of light and darkness continued for many dreary seconds until, at last, my aegis creaked and shattered. Shards of light burst outward, and, once more, a pair of scarlet eyes stared into me.

Time froze again, and visions of an apocalyptic world loomed before me. The shadowy visage's form drilled into *that thing* beneath the earth. Rivers of meteoric flames had set ablaze the skies. Arcs of lightning sprawled across ominous black clouds. The heavens crackled with thunder, and trails of fiery orange landed upon the crust. The ground sizzled as magma spilled forth from the earth and clad the world in a cloak of sultry gold.

*The black flame!* – it had already glazed the world with its malefic influence. All around me was the continuous sprawl of an eternal black – a deluge of no reversal – gushing against the bedrock and cliffs of the world.

The eternal night had arrived.

*Kol'lara* has been spoken.

The dreadful song has been sung, and all that I beheld was an undying night robbed of the slightest glint of light.

*No. It must not occur.*

I know not of the vile being's intention, but I have a promise to keep to my father and my village.

An eternal night loomed ahead of me, and I perceived only its vague silhouettes. However, the radiance of a single flame is most valuable only when besieged by a swathe of infinite darkness.