

Tales of the Eternals Chapter 4
The Journey Begins

"So there are fathers and mothers?" asks Altallo.

"That's right," says Shern'aath "I'm still surprised you don't know anything about a family Altallo."

The two had made their way down the cliff and were now walking back to the forest along the other side of the river, keeping out of sight of the raptor settlement. Altallo carries the vase of models.

"I never had a family to be honest," says Altallo "Or at least I don't remember having one and—hold on!" he says suddenly.

He thrusts the vase into the arms of an unsuspecting Shern'aath, who struggles to steady the heavy vase. The raptor wobbles over to a tree and rests the vase against its trunk. He looks up in time to see a blue clad leg and foot disappear into a thick tangle of undergrowth. Shern'aath rolls his eyes and sits down, back against the tree, watching a small birds fly around the tree tops. He soon hears crunching of branches and rustle of leaves and Altallo emerges from the undergrowth, carrying a small lizard with colourful scales.

"Look what I found Shern'aath!" says Altallo, holding up the lizard.

Shern'aath scrutinises the lizard, which seems rather relaxed in Altallo's hands.

"I think these things are poisonous," the raptor says "We never pay attention to them much."

"I'll take him to the ship." Altallo says, putting the lizard on his headdress and picking up the vase with ease.

Soon they reach the rock outcrop and pterosaur nests. All seems quiet with the pterosaurs drifting lazily above and Altallo's boulder stood unchanged and inconspicuous. As they climb up the slope towards the boulder, they hear an echoing roar.

"Don't worry its far away." says Shern'aath wearily.

"Are you feeling all right?" asks Altallo, noticing Shern'aath. The raptor's eyes were drooping and he shuffles over the rough terrain.

"Mmm? Oh just feel tired." he mumbles. In truth he felt utterly drained from the early walking; his feet ached and his legs felt like they were going to melt away.

To his surprise, Altallo takes hold of one of the raptor's arms and helps him up the slope, whilst holding the vase under one of his arms. The raptor mumbles something about not needing help, but Altallo ignores him. Reaching the boulder, Altallo once again presses his hand against its surface and with a flash of bright turquoise light, the ship opens. The two shamble inside, the raptor mumbling a thanks.

"You sure you'll be all right?" asks Altallo.

Shern'aath nods slowly.

"You can have a rest while I just take care of these models and the lizard," Altallo says kindly, helping Shern'aath to the plant room "Just over here," he adds, pointing to a dais at the centre of the room. Shern'aath sits heavily on the dais and lets out a sigh of relief.

"I'll be back soon." Altallo says, putting down the vase next to a wall and walking off through a doorway into the animal chambers.

Shern'aath lies back on the dais. Eventually he closed his eyes and falls asleep again.

In the green stone chamber, Altallo takes the lizard to an exhibit with a small tree, a cave and a stone basin full of water. He starts tugging at a small indentation on the wall's surface, his feet slipping on the smooth floor. The whole wall suddenly slides forward, causing Altallo to trip and fall onto the floor! The lizard slides out of Altallo's head and looks rather shocked.

Picking himself off the floor, Altallo scoops up the lizard and inspects its legs, checking for injuries. Satisfied, he takes the lizard over to the exhibit. Behind the open wall now is a small cubical, giving him access to the exhibit. He squeezes into the cubical and places the lizard into the exhibit. The lizard flicks its tongue, looking around its new home. It crawls over to the basin and started drinking the water.

Satisfied, Altallo makes his way back to the plant chamber. Reaching the chamber, he finds Shern'aath still asleep on the dais, mouth lolling open. Altallo approaches him looking unsure and gives the raptor's nose a gentle poke. Shern'aath grunts and mumbles. Altallo then takes hold of Shern'aath's tail and lets it slide out of his hand, Shern'aath shuffling slightly in response.

Leaving the raptor, Altallo picks up the vase walks off to the small hidden doorway to the artefact room.

Shern'aath awakes to the sound of clattering and banging. Getting to his feet he rubs his eyes and shakes his head to clear away the drowsiness. He follows the sounds to the artefact room and sees Altallo at the far end of the room, placing some models into a long clear display cabinet with most of the models already in them. Altallo glances up at the raptor, continuing to store the models.

"Hello Shern'aath, sleep well?"

"Yes, need any help?" asks Shern'aath in a mumbling voice.

"That's ok, I'm almost finished." Altallo replies, ducking into the vase and pulling out two more models. With all the models in the case, Altallo lifts the vase and wobbles over to another smaller case and gently places the vase onto the cushion inside.

"Right now that is sorted out, I think we'd better plan our next trip in the flight deck," says the Eternal in a matter of fact voice, making his way back to the first room Shern'aath following close behind, "I've been in this area for a season now and have recorded just about everything there is here, so its time to move the ship."

"Move it? How are we going to move all this?" asks Shern'aath, pointing around the plant chamber.

"Flying of course!" replies Altallo waving his hand in the air for effect.

"Flying?! You can't fly this! Its too heavy!"

"Never say never," Altallo says to Shern'aath as they enter the flight deck, "You'll see for yourself."

Altallo approaches the basin full of the strange turquoise liquid, swirling and shimmering like water in a lake. Altallo rolls up his sleeves, flexing his fingers and sticking out his tongue to one side of his mouth. He starts running his fingers over the liquid and it begins to ripple and flow. The whole chamber seemed to become lighter. Shern'aath gasps as the walls of the room disappear, revealing the rocky hills and forest outside. He approaches the place where the wall had been, but he walks into something solid.

"The wall is still there," says Altallo without looking up from the basin, "This take off may be a shock for you, so you might want to hold onto something."

Shern'aath gulps and hurriedly grabs the side of the basin, looking worried.

Outside the ship, not too far away, the dome-headed creature that had watched them earlier is making his way out of the forest. His body is stocky with grey coloured scaly skin and a long tail similar to Shern'aath's. He carries a staff from which beads, feathers and threads are attached to its top. He rests the staff on the ground and sits against a tree. He looks tired and wipes his brow with a stubby clawed hand.

He is startled by a loud noise close by; a huge roar that did not sound like any animal he knew. Snatching up his staff again, he rushes off in the direction of the noise. Pushing past some ferns, he is just in time to see a sight that causes his beaked mouth to fall open. A huge blue and yellow object which looked like a crescent moon was rising up into the sky, spooking pterosaurs nearby. It floats higher and higher before turning and flying northwards; growing smaller and smaller until it disappears into the sky.

The dome-headed creature blinks in surprise and then hobbles off in the direction of the object.

Inside the ship, Shern'aath was not enjoying himself. He clung to the rim of the basin as the craft shakes and shudders. Through the clear wall he could see trees and hills rushing past in a phantasmagoria of colour.

"When will it stop?" he mumbles looking ill.

"When we're high enough," replies Altallo, noticing the raptor's discomfort, "I'm sorry about that, take off's are usually rather smooth but this one needed some quick acceleration to get us away from those cliffs."

The raptor only picked up a couple of words that Altallo had said and just shut his eyes.

After what seemed like an age for Shern'aath, he felt the ship stop shaking and opened his eyes. Outside he could see a blue sky and wispy clouds. Walking up to the window, he presses his snout against its surface and looks out. The ship was gliding across a huge flat plain with a wide river twisting and winding like a snake, with trees and thick vegetation growing close by.

They flew lower and lower towards an area away from the river, close to a clump of trees. The ship begins to slow and float gently down until with a soft "thud" it lays to rest on the ground.

Inside the ship shook a little on landing. It felt like landing after a jump to Shern'aath. Altallo leaves the basin and opened the doors, stepping outside and looking around, Shern'aath following.

Outside, the air was warm but smelled moist and fresh with a fine dewy mist hanging in the morning air, with only a slight breeze. The sounds of huge creatures calling to each other can be

heard in the distance, while nearby the two can hear insects chirrup and birds singing.

Altallo looks interested and wanders off into the trees. Shern'aath meanwhile spies a moss covered hill nearby and starts climbing it. At the top he is afforded a spectacular view of the flood plain below; a huge open space with ferns, horsetails and scattered trees. What caught Shern'aath's eye though was the animals. From the foot of the hill to the river bank where hundreds of animals of all shapes and sizes. A few were gathered around large mound nests and in the closest Shern'aath sees small round eggs inside the nests or young creatures crawling around.

Shern'aath wondered if he should look closer at the nests, but he spots a huge three horn-face close by her young and decided it was not worth the risk. He reluctantly walked back to where the ship had landed.

His eyes rest on the ship and he stopped, only now noticing it. The undisguised blue and yellow shape amazed the raptor, who walks up to it and feels its smooth surface. He presses his ear against the hull and hears a faint hum. A branch snapping alerts him to Altallo returning from the trees, holding several seeds in his hand and with a huge yellow seed under his arm.

"Something the matter?" asks Altallo.

"No, just seen a lot of animals over there." says Shern'aath pointing back to the hill.

"Really?!" says Altallo, excitedly, "Let me just put these in the ship-"

He opens the ship and puts down the huge yellow seed on the floor, tipping the other seeds into his robes.

Shern'aath leads Altallo to the hill. Altallo looked out across the flood plain with interest.

"I wonder why all these plant eaters are here." he thinks to himself, before descending the hill towards the nests.

"Hey! Be careful!" Shern'aath cries out, hurrying after the Eternal. "Those animals are dangerous!"

At his shout, the horn-face that had been attending her young looks up and begins pawing the ground at the sight of Shern'aath, who backs away slowly until he bumps into Altallo, who was looking at a small two legged and two armed creature with a flattened head and a beak, eating a fern leaf nearby.

"Just keep quiet," Altallo whispers to the raptor, noticing his predicament, "They won't notice if you're quiet and move slowly."

"I don't think that will work." the raptor thinks to himself.

To his surprise the horn-face turns away from them and returns to her nest. He is even more surprised when Altallo appears by his side holding the creature, which looked oddly calm in his arms. Its scales were a light green and its eyes were black.

"Shern'aath do you know what this is?" Altallo asks, nodding to the plains.

"Its where the herds gather to nest their young. The elders often told me when I was younger never to go here because its dangerous." says Shern'aath.

"When I take this little fellow back to the ship, I'd like to look closer, won't you?" Altallo asks, walking back to the ship with the little animal resting its head on his shoulder.

"As longs as its safe." Shern'aath mumbles to himself.

Inside the animal room, it was just as noisy as outside. The door to the room opens and Altallo and Shern'aath descend the stone ramp to the ground floor. Altallo sets the flat-head animal on the floor and he and Shern'aath step back and watch it. The little creature sniffs the air of its new surroundings before scampering off into a thicket of ferns, where they hear it munching and chirruping.

Outside they make they're way past the first few nests, the horn-head not paying them much attention, and its not long till they encounter even more nesting animals. There were other horn-heads; some with huge crests sweeping back across their necks and three horns, others had shorter crests; some with spikes on their crests, some without but they all have only one horn on their snout. Some were building new nests, scraping up earth with their snouts and using their legs to shape it. Shern'aath was surprised to see this behaviour from animals that he and his tribe always considered dangerous and short tempered.

Nearby some more trees they spotted groups of small two legged creatures. Some were the flat headed types like the one they had seen earlier. Others were taller and more slim and built for speed rather than skulking in foliage. Closer to the river they see the flat toothed and beaked animals, some with featureless heads, others with ornate crests. Some were scooping up water plants from the river, while other stood on their back legs to reach the leaves of trees. On the river birds and small pterosaurs dart across the water, scooping up water and small fish in their mouths, whilst avoiding crocodiles floating lazily at the surface. Shern'aath jumps onto a nearby fallen tree and peers around, whilst Altallo searches through some reeds, picking up a frog along the way.

Something catches Shern'aath's attention nearby. A huge creature was making its way to the river. It had four sturdy legs with blunt claws at the end of its circular feet, a long whiplash tail and a long sweeping neck, at the end of which is a small boxy head with two nostrils on its forehead. It bent its neck down to the water's surface almost effortlessly and starts drinking, Shern'aath noticing its strange peg like teeth. Two more join it at the river, one around the same size as the first, the third was smaller. Altallo soon joins Shern'aath at the fallen tree, looking amazed at the three creatures.

"What are they?" he whispers to Shern'aath.

"Giants," comes the reply "I've heard of them but never thought I'd see them. They're impossible to hunt."

"Let's take a closer look." Altallo says, slipping off the fallen tree and walking up to the giants.

Shern'aath dashes after him hissing under his breath

"Look, I know I've already said this before but you have to be careful! Those things could crush you or swipe you away with its tail!"

"Trust me, I know what I am doing. Oh and hold this" Altallo says simply, tapping Shern'aath's nose, much to the raptor's annoyance, and thrusting the frog into Shern'aath's hands.

Apparently throwing caution to the wind, Altallo steps up to the smallest of the giants, ignoring Shern'aath's worried chirrups.

The giant notices Altallo and lowers its head and sniffs Altallo; its huge breaths causing Altallo's robes to billow. Altallo laughs and strokes the giant's snout. The other giants notice Altallo and also start sniffing him curiously. Shern'aath watches intrigued. There was no fear in any of the creatures, it seemed unnatural to the raptor.

Altallo had begun wandering back to the ship, with the three giants following him quietly and docile. Shern'aath keeps by the fallen tree, watching the giants leave, their whiplash tails swishing gracefully. He listens to their pounding footsteps fading into the distance before strolling away from the fallen tree.

He doesn't walk far before he happens upon another nest. This one had broken eggshells and tracks on and around its base. Dropping the frog, Shern'aath starts sniffing the pieces of egg and at the tracks. The footprints had four round toes and Shern'aath smelled a dusty scent. He follows the trail towards, what he thinks is a large grey mound. As he moves closer, pushing aside some wispy stemmed flowering plants, he realises that the grey mound turned out to have four sturdy legs. Shern'aath's eyes widen with surprise and he looks upwards.

The owner of the huge body had a head similar to that of the three horned faces he had seen before, this one had a smaller body but was still bigger than Shern'aath. Its head shield was narrower than the three horned and it had a large single horn on its snout. It was chewing on some plants, but then stops and starts sniffing. It starts pawing at the ground, sending dust into the air. From behind it Shern'aath could see more single-horns emerging from tangled ferns, including tiny young ones with no horns, walking urgently to the one closest to Shern'aath, which the raptor assumed must be the leader. The single-horns were forming a circle, with the youngest in the centre, creating a wall of horns.

Shern'aath wondered why they were acting like this and at first thought that he had caused the herd to panic, but then saw the real reason. Circling the herd was a large two legged knife-tooth, slightly smaller than the one that had chased him and Altallo earlier. It had a short strong looking head on a powerful neck. It snapped occasionally at the herd trying to scare one of them into the open, but the herd stays firmly in place, stabbing out with their horns.

Not wanting to get caught up in the action, Shern'aath turns and runs as quietly as he could, the sounds of the herd and the knife-tooth ringing in his head. He didn't stop running until he was clear of the tangled plants. He bent double and breathing rapidly.

Close to, Altallo appears looking happy, until he sees Shern'aath and this his face falls.

"What's wrong Shern'aath?" he asks dashing up to the raptor and looking at his face.

"Back there, horn-faces and a knife-tooth fighting." Shern'aath sputtlers, as soon as his breathing becomes steady

"Really?" says Altallo looking behind Shern'aath, "I hope those horn-faces will be alright. Oh by the way do you still have that frog I found?"

Shern'aath's eyes widen.

"The frog!" he says sounding irate "I just saw creatures fighting each other and all you can care about is that frog?!"

"Well just asking." Altallo says taken aback.

Shern'aath crosses his arms and looks grumpy. His grumpy expression fades as when looks more closely at Altallo.

"Your clothes are filthy!" he says, noticing earth covering Altallo's back.

"A bit doesn't hurt anyone" Altallo replies and as though in demonstration, he scoops up some dust and throws it over himself. "See? No harm done!"
And with that he starts drifting off in a random direction.

Shern'aath stares at Altallo, but then shakes his head.

"Suit yourself." he grunts before following the Eternal.

They trek through another thick growth bushes, scaring away birds and insects. Altallo accidentally ran into a spider's web and tried swiping it off, spluttering and coughing out web and trapped flies. Shern'aath resisted laughing, and instead helped Altallo pull it off. They eventually find themselves at the edge of a lake. The water here flowed slowly, almost lazily and was slightly green in colour. On the far side of the lake they could see some beaked herbivores with round crests on their heads drinking or bathing in the waters. Nearby was yet another horn-face, even smaller than both the three-horns and the single-horns, about as tall as Shern'aath. It too had just one horn on its snout but had a crown of spikes on its crest. It looked up at them, nervously scraping the ground with its foot.

"Look at that Shern'aath!" Altallo says pointing to the creature.

"It doesn't look very friendly," says Shern'aath, grimacing at the thought of being charged by the creature. "Just be careful around it." He says turning to Altallo, but soon realises Altallo had approached the creature and was already stroking its nose. The horn-face looked relaxed and was rubbing its head against Altallo's arm, looking quite docile.

Shern'aath moves steadily forward looking uncertainly at the creature.

"Its quite safe," says Altallo happily to the raptor "Just think of her as a like meeting another raptor."

Shern'aath glanced at Altallo and the gulps and shuffles to the horn-face, Altallo keeping a grip on the creature's back. Holding out a shaking hand he touches the horn-face's nose. The horn-face sniffs the raptor's hand and then opens her beaked mouth and licks his palm. Shern'aath utters an involuntary giggle and then starts patting the creature on the head, feeling strangely calm. Altallo had begun wandering away from the horn-face and Shern'aath, who quickly became worried.

"Where are you going?" he asked sounding desperate.

"Just keep calm!" Altallo calls back, waving his hands "You can keep her company and look around for some other creatures." he adds pointing to the horn-face now sniffing Shern'aath's tail, which the raptor twitches.

Shern'aath decides to search nearby. Pushing aside a large bush, he gives a yelp of pain and retracts his hand, finding a nasty looking wound on his palm.

Amongst the bush's branches he spotted the culprit, a tiny bird with a sharp beak and blue feathers was glaring up at him with beady black eyes. Shern'aath glowers back then turns away to find Altallo, gritting his teeth as his wound throbs. The horn-face follows him.

He finds Altallo nearby with the small herd of beaked plant eaters, birds and small fur covered animals nestled in his headdress and a cluster of more flat-headed creatures at his feet. He looks around spotting Shern'aath.

"Something wrong?" he asks

Shern'aath shows Altallo his injured hand for answer. Altallo takes his hand and studies it.

"That looks sore!"

"You don't say." Shern'aath mumbles.

"Don't worry I have something that will help on the ship," Altallo replies brightly "We'll head back there now. I think we've gathered enough specimens here to bolster the ship's population and, oh look at those little birds!" he adds, pointing to the bush where Shern'aath was bitten. Amongst its branches was a nest with several young birds inside. Already they had grown the blue plumage of its mother, who was eyeing Shern'aath up.

"You haven't met their mother yet," mutters Shern'aath, staring daggers at the bird. "She's the one who did this to me!"

"She thought you were attacking her young." Altallo says distractedly, staring at the bird's colourful feathers. The family of birds ruffle their wings and then take flight, the mother swooping gracefully to nestle with some other birds on Altallo's headdress, the younger birds following with some difficulty.

The horn-head leads the odd procession back to the ship, ploughing through undergrowth, with Shern'aath following, Altallo and his animals behind them. The odd procession however is unaware they're being watched. From a distance away the dome-headed creature watches them, accompanied by a companion; a tall slim figure with a beaked mouth, a bony crest sweeping back her head and burnt orange coloured scales.

"Is that them?" she asks in a nasally, warble-like voice.

"Yes, Oji'ira" replies the much shorter dome-head, his voice gravelly and rough. "Call the rest of the tribe, tell them to bring what provisions they need."

Oji'ira nods and rushes away through the trees, whilst the dome-head remains where he is, a calculating look on his face.

In the clearing where they had landed, the ship was shrouded by dewy mist as Altallo, Shern'aath and the animals they had collected approach it. Altallo opens the ship and enters along with the animals. Shern'aath makes to follow, but stops and looks back for a moment; smelling the moist air and listening before slowly entering the ship.

Inside, he finds Altallo in the animal chamber; the horn-face, the beaked plant eaters and the flat-heads running off to the lakes or else browsing in the thick growth. He then takes the birds and small mammals to a ring of large trees and bushes. In the centre of this ring was a set of small objects of carved crystal. There were stands for the birds to perch on, flat surfaces covered in seeds and an oval basin full of water. There were already birds there feeding on seeds. The birds on top of Altallo's head flew down and started pecking at the seeds, whilst the furry creatures clamber up the trees.

Altallo made his way back to the flight deck, where he found Shern'aath examining his hand.

"Is it still sore?" Altallo asks.

"A little, it keeps stinging-ah!"

Shern'aath shudders as he presses the cut on his hand and hisses through his teeth.

Altallo puts a hand on Shern'aath arm and leads him to a part of the flight deck's wall and runs his finger across it. The wall slides away and a dark glowing light envelops them.

Inside the room is huge and dark blue in colour, with the walls and floor glowing and fading slowly, like a heart beating or lungs breathing. Shern'aath shivers; the room was cold and felt unnaturally clean. All along the room were rows of raised rectangular platforms with clear bubble shaped glass tanks covering them. On the nearest wall were some shelves holding little containers.

"What are those?" he asks to Altallo who was rummaging amongst the shelves.

"Cryogenic chambers," Altallo replies. "Its for preserving people for voyages. I have one myself. They hold the person, extending their life and keeping them healthy."

Shern'aath gives them a wary look and shudders.

"Here," says Altallo, extracting a container of clean water and rolls of yellow cloth. He takes Shern'aath's hand and washes it with the water and then binds the wound with some of the yellow cloth.

"How does that feel?"

Shern'aath flexes his hand.

"Much better. Thank you," he says, giving Altallo a toothy grin.

Altallo smiles back and pats Shern'aath on the shoulder. Shern'aath takes a glance at the cryogenic chambers slightly nervous.

"Don't worry about them, they're not scary," says Altallo "Just think of it as like sleeping after a long day."

Shern'aath looks a little happier, but then shivers again in the cold. When Altallo suggests they should go back to the flight deck, Shern'aath doesn't hesitate and nearly bowls Altallo out of the way as he dashed to the warmth.

Altallo glides up to the turquoise basin and glances at Shern'aath.

"Now then, where do you want go next?" he asks.

"Well I always wanted to see what lurks under the huge seas," says Shern'aath "We don't usually go there."

"Alright then, to the depths of the sea it is then!" says Altallo happily, swiping the turquoise liquid, tongue sticking out once again to one side of his mouth.

"Is there any reason why you stick your tongue out?" Shern'aath asks conversationally as the ship begins to hum.

"It helps me concentrate, why does it bother you?"

Shern'aath shrugs.

"Not really."

The ship started to rise from the ground. Shern'aath, ready this time, clung on to the basin. But the take off was very smooth, barely even a shudder or a shake.

They soared across the river valley and over some nearby mountains; beyond which lay a vast track of dark plain dotted with sturdy trees and ferns. A high mountain was in the centre of this plain, billowing grey and black smoke from its snowy peak. Shern'aath started at the mountain entranced. As they flew over the smoke he could see flashes of fiery red beneath the smoke. They fly past the mountain and reach a narrow strip of green, beyond which lies a rocky shore and the vast blue expanse of the sea.

The ship swoops low over the waters and then plunges into it. Shern'aath grabs the rim of the basin as the ship shook on impact and bubbles race past the windows. Shern'aath stares out at the sunlit waters beyond. Schools of large fish swam around the ship. The floor and ceiling of the ship had turned translucent. Beneath them was a huge reef full of colourful corals like strange stone flowers and turrets. Bright fish darted around the coral branches. Shern'aath tapped Altallo on the shoulder and points at the ceiling. Above them were strange shelled creatures floating lazily, a pair of large long necked sea creatures with four flippers glided around them snapping up silver fish and a big ray was gliding slowly close to the ship, creating a huge shadow in the flight deck.

Altallo presses a part of the turquoise liquid and with a soft sliding sound a part of the floor rises up to form a wide column full of water that reached Shern'aath's and Altallo's waist.

"What is that?" Shern'aath asks pointing to it.

"I use it to collect animals from the sea. All we need now are containers." Altallo says going over to the plant chamber.

Shern'aath stays behind, looking at the water filled cylinder. He jumps as a small bright orange

fish pops into it and swims around calmly.

Altallo returns with a jumble of clear containers of varying sizes; the largest so big that he has to push it.

"Ah! We have a visitor." he says excitedly, picking a small container and rushing over to the column. He fills the container with water and then scoops up the little fish. He lifts the container and peers inside. "Wait a minute." he says, tone suddenly serious.

He takes a pair of forceps from his robes and pulls something off the fish; a tiny brown thing.

"What is that?" Shern'aath asks.

"Some sort of parasite," says Altallo "I'll just store this away."

He enters the cryogenic room again, this time making for a clear fronted depression in the wall full of identical glass jars with lids. Taking one, he puts the parasite into it and seals the jar.

"You collect those too?" asks Shern'aath from the doorway

"We have to take note of any diseases and parasites. Every creature and plant needs to be healthy for the journey," Altallo says, walking back to the water column where some more fish had floated into along with a few shelled creatures. Shern'aath was starting to enjoy himself as they caught the animals into the tanks, whilst Altallo took the full ones to the aquatic chamber.

They moved the ship slowly over the coral reef, gathering not only fish but crabs, pieces of coral, sponges and other invertebrates.

"Oh look at this one Shern'aath!" Altallo says, holding up a container with an oval shaped fish with wavy blue lines over its yellow body.

Shern'aath did not answer. He was staring out of the window at a huge grey shape rising emerging from the dark blue. As it comes nearer and nearer, he sees it has four huge flippers and long jaws full of sharp teeth like knives.

"Uh, Altallo?" he says his voice quivering.

"I've never seen a little fellow who had this sort of colouration before." says Altallo still looking at the fish.

"Altallo..."

"That is some very interesting tail patterning too."

"Altallo!"

"Must be a generalised feeder too with that mouth."

"ALTALLO!" Shern'aath bellows.

"What?" asks Altallo sounding indignant.

Shern'aath just points out of the window. The creature was now circling them and suddenly, as Altallo looks up, it strikes at the ship from the front. The force of its bite nearly knocked Altallo and Shern'aath over. The creature was now trying to chew the ship.

"Get us out, GET US OUT!" Shern'aath screamed

Altallo dashes to the basin and frantically swipes at it.

The ship backs away, dragging the creature with it, they could see each of its teeth. On the surface, both ship and creature burst from the ocean. The creature is momentarily surprised and its jaws slacken. It falls back with a tremendous splash back to its watery home, whilst the ship flies higher and higher into the sky.

Altallo and Shern'aath let out sighs of relief and then Shern'aath begins to laugh, it was short bark like laugh.

"That was...pretty fun!" he said "Did you see when that thing fell? Hah! We beat him! Travelling with you is probably going to be really fun! Altallo? What's the matter?"

Altallo was staring at the sky. Shern'aath looks up and sees a gigantic shape looming in the sky. It looked like some sort of monstrous island.

"What is it?" Shern'aath breathes.

"The meteor." says Altallo, voice no longer bright and happy. To Shern'aath he looked and sounded older now.

"What's going to happen?" asks Shern'aath.

"I'm afraid it could be the end." Altallo replies