

Tales of the Eternals chapter 5
A new Era

There was a long, horrified silence between them. Shern'aath was breathing fast, eyes darting from the ominous dark shape to Altallo, who looked sombre.

"H-how long do we have?" asks Shern'aath, his voice cracked.

"A day or maybe a few hours," says Altallo in a surprisingly neutral tone "Probably until nightfall."

"Well we can't just stand here!" Shern'aath shouts and then his face lifts "We can take my people in here! We can go to them and they can live in the ship! Its big enough after all."

"And how do you expect them to follow you blindly in here?" asks Altallo "What will they think when I see me?"

"Doesn't matter," Shern'aath mumbles. "Just get us there now!"

When Altallo doesn't reply, Shern'aath looked even more panicked and clicks his claws against the ship's floor, before screaming:

"This is my family Altallo! Don't you understand? My *family*! I guess you don't care though, being safe and sound in here!"

Altallo stares at the raptor who had thrown his spear to the floor and buried his face in his hands. He felt as though Shern'aath's outburst had pierced him through the middle, like a knife. After a pause he walks over to Shern'aath, with a glance to the meteor and awkwardly puts a hand on the raptor's head.

Shern'aath makes a gulping noise and looks up at Altallo with eyes shimmering.

"I'm sorry for being stupid Shern'aath," he says "Of course I'll help."

Smiling gently, he holds out a hand. Shern'aath wipes his eyes and then takes it and Altallo helps him up to his feet. They look at each other for a while and then Shern'aath suddenly grabs Altallo and pulls him into an embrace, pressing him against his scaly chest and wrapping his arms around Altallo's back.

Altallo looked startled and unsure.

"Shern'aath what are you doing?"

"Giving you a hug of course."

"What is a hug?" asks Altallo

"Its, um, well its something we do when we like each other and want to show it."

Altallo blinks and then rests his head on Shern'aath's shoulder. To Shern'aath, Altallo was rather comfy. His robes and hair were soft and he was warm.

"Erm, Shern'aath hadn't we better get going now?" Altallo asks

"Wha- oh! Right!" says Shern'aath, letting go and looking embarrassed. "Sorry."

Altallo gives him a pat on the arm and Shern'aath gives a weak smile. The Eternal begins to move around the basin, running his hands over the liquid within.

"We'll go see your father and then talk to the other raptors." he says briskly

"They all think he's mad though," says Shern'aath, "They won't listen to him."

"They will probably sooner listen to him than some strange thing like me," Altallo replies looking up again, "Not much time left."

The ship turns and flies away.

The Shaman was standing outside his home. The sun was beginning to set, casting huge shadows across the valley below. Shivering, he goes inside and starts poking the fire to get some warmth. He is just settling himself down when he hears a rumbling and the charms and ornaments hanging from the roof begin to shudder.

Leaping to his feet he grabs a spear rather like Shern'aath's and moves cautiously towards the door where the soft rumbling sound emits. He leaps out of the door and drops his spear in alarm. A huge yellow and blue object was floating just a few feet in front of him and through a hole stood Shern'aath and Altallo.

"Father," Shern'aath yells over the rumbling of the ship's engine "Come with us, the others are in danger."

"What?!" the Shaman shouts.

"THERE IS SOMETHING DANGEROUS COMMING!" Shern'aath bellows.

The Shaman was about to shout something back, but before he could both he and Shern'aath were being pushed towards the open ship. Once they were inside and the door slid shut, all noise of the engines was extinguished. Looking behind them, the two raptors saw Altallo pushing at their backs.

"I thought we could talk with less noise." he says, shrugging.

The Shaman stared, gob smacked, at ship.

"In all my journeys from the vast coasts to the highest mountain peaks, I have never seen anything like this." he says in hushed tones, running a claw across the rim of the basin.

"Look, father, there's something dangerous coming to us and-"

"What makes this thing fly?" the Shaman asks Altallo look excited.

"Shaman raptor, I-" Altallo begins, but the Shaman interrupts him again.

"Oh just call me Shern'ocsa."

"Shern'ocsa, there's something that is endangering your people. We need to get them in here so they can be sa-"

"WELL WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR!" Shern'ocsa barks "Come on! Get this thingaby over to the village! Now how do you work this thing..." he mumbles to himself looking at the turquoise liquid.

Altallo looks disparagingly at Shern'aath who merely shrugs. Sighing, Altallo rolls up his sleeves,

pushes Shern'ocsa aside and starts moving the ship.

It is dusk in the raptor settlement. The sun is low in the sky and the raptors are beginning to retire into their tents. A sound like rolling thunder rumbles across the landscape and the few raptors outside freeze and look worriedly around.

The big sandy coloured raptor who had taken the star chart from Shern'aath was sitting next to a fire, looking passive. At the sound of another distant rumble, he looks up and sees bright white shooting stars race across the sky. He scratches his chin thoughtfully. He hoped Shern'aath would come back soon, it wasn't like him to wander off like this. He hears another rumbling noise, this one coming closer. He snaps his head round as the rumble turns into a roar and snatches up his spear. He rushed to the settlement's entrance just as the heads of other raptors started popping out from their tents. A few other raptors follow him, some with spears, others with knives with youngsters and elders trailing behind looking apprehensive.

At the entrance they stop and stare at the huge shape descending in front of them. Smooth and blue and yellow in colour, it was eerie and mysterious to the crowd of raptors, who bunched together, as though scared it would snatch at anyone on their own. They all gasp as an archway of light opens and two familiar figures emerge.

"Shern'aath! Shaman!" cries one of the raptors.

"What were you doing inside that?" asks the sandy coloured raptor, looking uneasy.

"Well, we were just visiting a friend of ours," says the Shaman "This is his home by the way, wonderful thing," he adds, pointing to the huge shape.

"And who is this friend of yours?" asks one of the raptors

Shern'aath and Shern'ocsa move aside to reveal the strangest creature the raptors had ever seen. It was wearing blue and gold clothes like the thing it had emerged from, but its face was what surprised them, it had smooth pale skin covered in brown freckles, no snout, but a fleshy nose and an odd mouth. To the raptors it looked as though its face had been squashed and its tail had been chopped off. They backed away from it looking scared.

Altallo looks upset at this less than happy reception and looks sadly at Shern'aath.

Shern'aath clears his throat and addresses the raptors.

"This is Altallo," he says "He's an Eternal and he's here to help us."

He pushes Altallo towards the sandy coloured raptor, who looks down at the little creature and starts sniffing him. Altallo shudders at the sight of the raptor's large claws.

"And how is this particular friend of yours going to help us?"

"We've seen something that could be a danger to us and Altallo here has offered us a place in his home for us to stay until its safe again." says Shern'aath, patting Altallo on the shoulder.

"Oh has he indeed?" asks another of the raptors, a light blue one with similarly coloured feathers who was looking at Altallo with a mistrustful glare "And I also suppose he's going to kill us if you go into there, maybe eat us even!"

The raptors shuffled closer together again, eyes locked on Altallo.

Altallo looks thoughtful and then had an idea. He takes a step forward (the raptors backing away fearfully) and holds up a hand.

"I would never harm any of you because I cannot harm you" says Altallo.

"It can speak!" the blue raptor says in a carrying whisper

"Its kind of ugly looking" says a female with rust coloured scales raptor next to him

"I don't know," says another with pale yellow scales "It has some amazing looking colours."

Undaunted by these comments Altallo shows the crowd his hand.

"Look, I have no claws and my skin as you see is weak looking. I assure you if you were to slice through my skin with one of your claws or teeth, I'd bleed just like you. I am not here to harm you and even if I was trying to harm you I'd be outnumbered and weak."

There was a pause and then the yellow scaled raptor says "You know it does make sense Zhe-raac." to the blue raptor.

The blue raptor grimaced but doesn't reply. The big sandy raptor takes advantage of Zhe-raac's silence.

"So you think you saw something?"

"We didn't think that, we definitely saw it!" Shern'aath says interrupting, ignoring Shern'ocsa's groan and the sandy raptor's glare.

"Its true," says Altallo "Its a huge meteor."

"A what?" the sandy raptor says scratching his feathered crest.

"A meteor. Its a rock floating up there," Altallo waves a hand up to the sky. He notices the bright white flashes. "And that is one of the signs."

"What are those flashes?" asks the sandy raptor.

"Parts of the meteor." says Altallo "I suggest you and your people get to cover inside my ship."

"Why?" pipes up another raptor and both Altallo recognises Ta'arahis "This meteor can't really hurt is if its just floating in the sky."

There is a mummer of agreement. Shern'ocsa and Shern'aath give each other furtive looks, but Altallo doesn't look downhearted at all.

"It doesn't matter if its in the sky," says Altallo "What matters is when it lands."

"And what happens if it lands?" asks one of the raptors.

"It will hit the ground," Altallo says, putting a hand on the earth as though for effect "with huge shake and it will send sand and rocks flying and the world will be consumed in darkness. I have seen this before."

"Oh yes, and I suppose a great big rock will come flying and eat us up? Why are we listening to this

strange thing anyway?" the blue raptor Zhe-raac drawls in a mocking tone.

No sooner had the words left Zhe-raac's mouth than the ground started to shake. The wall surrounding the encampment collapses and so do some of the tents. Everyone is unbalanced, some falling over, others stumbling into each other. Shern'ocsa and Shern'aath stumble against the ship's hull, while Altallo trips over and lands flat on his back.

"Are you alright?" asks the sandy raptor, helping Altallo back on his feet.

"Yes. Thank you erm--"

"Ark'h'Tor. I think Zhe-raac now believes in your meteor," says the sandy raptor with a toothy grin at Zhe-raac who looks abashed. "What do you suggest my friend." he adds, to Altallo.

"I think we have a few hours, so you should get ready to leave." Altallo replies.

"We don't want to leave!" cries out a raptor who was holding an infant close to her "Its comfortable here."

Altallo rubbed his forehead, looking annoyed.

"If nothing happens, then you may leave my ship freely."

"You heard him," Ark'h'Tor calls out to the raptors "Gather what you need."

The raptors began scurrying around the encampment. There was little talking, most were hastily grabbing up small items. One raptor was wobbling with a whole stack of flint knives but kept dropping them and stopping to pick them up.

Shern'aath hurries to his tent with Altallo hot on his heels, and begins seizing pots and baskets. Altallo picks up a basket and starts putting flint knives and other little things into it before something catches his eye at the very back of the tent; a jumbled pile with a sheet draped over it. Pushing aside the sheet, he discovers some stones with bright coloured patterns painted on them. He scoops them up and adds them to his basket.

"Are you sure we'll have enough time to get everything together?" Shern'aath asks, making Altallo jump.

"Oh, erm....no we'll leave some things behind like the tents." Altallo replies look nervous and he bustles past Shern'aath.

The raptors gather around the ship as the last of the sunlight starts fading and slowly they enter it nervously and yet awed at the alien vessel.

"If you'll just step in here," Altallo says pointing to the plant chamber "You can rest in here."

The raptors file into the plant room look curious. Altallo walks to the entrance where Shern'aath is guiding an elderly raptor onto the ship.

"Any more coming?" Altallo asks him.

"Just one more." Shern'aath replies, nodding back to where the raptor with flint knives, still struggling and dropping them.

"Just leave those." says Altallo rushing up to him.

"But I like these knives, I've been making them for ages!" the raptor replies sounding defiant.

"You can make more later! Look just pick the best one." says Altallo

The raptor, with great difficulty extracts one of the knives and then drops the rest. Altallo frog-marches him to the ship.

"I only hope the sacrifice is worth it!" the raptor tells Altallo in sombre voice before entering the ship.

Altallo is about to follow him but a movement by nearby catches his attention. Dark shadowy figures were emerging from the trees. As they come closer, they become clearer. In front was a short, stocky grey scaled creature with a hard domed head, beaked mouth. The one next to him was taller and beautifully orange coloured, with a sweeping crest on her head. Behind them was a towering figure, a three horned face with dark green scales and a larger powerful body. He looked intimidating, though his face looks calm

Behind these three were a group of herbivores, clutching possessions and looking worriedly at the abandoned raptor camp.

The grey stocky creature sights Altallo and walks up to him smiling.

"Ah, greetings," he says in a kind and slightly wheezy voice "I'm Caza, this is Oji'ra," he points to the orange creature, who waves, "And this is Kero," he indicates the huge threehorn, who nods "And what may we call you?"

"Altallo." says the Eternal looking nervously up at the giant three horn who looks passively back. The crested person however looks very interested

"Why are you all here?" Altallo asks, peeking around to look at the crowd.

"We want to join you inside there." says Caza pointing to the ship.

"Of course you can," Altallo says smiling "There's plenty of room in there and-"

But he stops as Shern'aath pokes his head out of the ship. He looks at the herbivores looking horrified.

"What are these doing here?!" he asks

"They want to join the ship," says Altallo looking surprised at Shern'aath's reaction "Why?"

"You can't let them on! They're not like us." Shern'aath barks at Altallo.

The huge three horn looks annoyed at this comment, but Caza waves a hand at him and says: "No Kero."

Caza then turns to Shern'aath: "My young friend-"

"I'm not your friend." Shern'aath says tartly.

"-do we not have the same right to survive? Do we not breath the same air?"

"I...well, if you do go in there, you'll come face to face with the other raptors." says Shern'aath pointing to the ship.

"We'll deal with them in due course." replies Caza, leading the way into the ship.

The herbivores, like the raptors seemed amazed by the strange vessel.

"Why do you think they' shouldn't be allowed on the ship" Altallo asks Shern'aath in a whisper, indicating the crowd.

"They eat plants. They're beneath us and are stupid and weak-"

"Excuse me but we are not stupid," says Oji'ra crossing her arms and glaring at Shern'aath.
"Nor weak," says Kero the three horned in a deep voice, looking down at Shern'aath coldly.
Shern'aath quavered at Kero's gaze.

"Do you both know each other?" asks Altallo, standing between them.

"We were told as hatchlings that there were herbivore people," Shern'aath explains "But a lot of people didn't believe us. We eat herbivores and they can't talk."

"Well you raptors shouldn't talk then either," Oji'ra says hotly "You keep attacking us and we never got a proper conversation from any of those!"

"Stop arguing!" Caza hisses.

Oji'ra huffs loudly. Altallo pats her arm.
"I'm sorry he's been rude."

Oji'ra looks happier at Altallo.

"Its alright. I like these clothes you wear," she adds examining them, "All we have is brown, nothing pretty like this."

"Well, there's no point in standing round and waiting," Caza sighs "We have to face the raptors soon or later."

"You're not going to hurt them are you?" Shern'aath asks looking scared.

"Not if they hurt us." Kero grunts and Shern'aath gulps.

"Don't worry Shern'aath," says Altallo patting the raptor on the shoulder "I think I may have something that may help us persuade our friends."

Inside the plant room the raptors were relaxing. Some wandered around the room marvelling at the sculptured pillars and strange crystal statues. Arkh'tor, who was standing in the middle of the room looks round as Altallo and Shern'aath enters, followed by the herbivores. Other raptors begin to stare at these new arrivals.

"What are these things doing in here?" one of them asks loudly.

"They're here to shelter from the meteor," says Altallo sounding happy. He is holding a large red circular object with a rectangular opening. "I've let them in and they promise they mean no harm, as long as you don't attack them."

One raptor (Altallo recognises it to be Zhe-raac) scoffs loudly.

"And what are we going to eat? Might as well carve these things up, enough for all of us!" he shouts, pointing to the herbivores and starts to advance.

Kero steps in front of the group, head lowered, and snorts at Zhe-raac, who looks terrified at the giant and stumbles back.

"You won't need to eat them because of this!" Altallo says loudly and clearly, look downright angry at Zhe-raac and holding up the red circle. Shern'aath glanced at Altallo and felt slightly afraid. Altallo's eyes were blazing like a fire.

"And what exactly is that?" asks Zhe-raac, looking sceptical.

"It's a food machine," says Altallo, descending the stairs to the ground floor and placing the machine on a plinth "It makes food."

"Oh really?" says Zhe-raac rolling his eyes, but one of the raptors darts forward eagerly.

"Can I have some food?" he asks

"Of course you can," Altallo replies happily. He presses a button on the machine and it lights up

"What would you like?"

"Some three horn meat would be great." he says, but then looks back at Kero who was glowering at him and gulps.

"Three horn meat." Altallo says into the machine.

The machine starts humming and then a small dark coloured square pops out of the opening.

Altallo scoops it up and hands it to the raptor.

"You call that food?" Zhe-raac laughs "Oh yes, a great delicacy, a feast to end all feasts!"

"It's real!" the raptor cries out as he takes a bite out of the square "I can taste it! And I feel full already!"

Zhe-raac's mouth falls open, but the raptors and herbivores rush forward interested now.

"Does this thing make water too?" asks Caza. "I could do with some, my throat is rather dry."

"Water please." Altallo says to the machine and a cup carved of crystal emerges full of cool water, which Altallo hands to Caza.

Soon every dinosaur in the room has eaten and were now chatting awkwardly amongst each other. Oji'ra had taken Altallo's headdress and was trying to balance it on her crest. Altallo himself was sitting next to Kero, talking to the giant. Shern'aath sat next to Shern'ocsa and Caza who were deep in conversation.

The lazy atmosphere was suddenly punctuated by a loud rumble followed by the ship shaking.

Altallo rushed to the flight deck, the dinosaurs following. They all stop in their tracks when they enter. Outside the clear walls was utter chaos. Gravel and dust was swirling like water and trees had been torn apart, their trunks scraping along the ground. The soil looked as though it has been scorched.

The dinosaurs inside had grown solemn. The younger clung to their parents, looking terrified. An elderly raptor was crying and wiping her eyes.

"It's over." says Shern'ocsa.

"Not quite," replies Caza patting the raptor on his shoulder "We still live."

"He's right," says Altallo, "Outside may not be habitable for a long time or ever. But you're welcome to stay here. Let me show you."

The doorway to the cryogenic chamber opens and candelabra-like lights flash on to reveal the vast room. Altallo lead the way into it the chamber, the dinosaurs peering at the large blue bubbles.

"These are where you will be safe," Altallo says to them "These chambers will preserve you until we reach my homeworld."

"Why do you want us there?" asks Arkh'tor "And how long will it take?"

"It's probably the safest place you and your people will be," there was a murmur of agreement from the dinosaurs "It will take a very long time."

"What if we die though?" gasps Oji'ra.

"That's where these come in," says Altallo, patting one of the bubbles, "These will preserve you. Think of it like sleeping. And don't worry, it feels like no time has passed."

The dinosaurs moved over to the bubbles which open up with a hiss. Caza, Kero, Oji'ra, Ta'arahis, Arkh'tor, Shern'ocsa and Shern'aath stand to one side watching.

"Just lie down like you're sleeping." Altallo instructs.

Each dinosaur lays down in one of the bubbles; the mother dinosaurs helping their young.

When they are lying, Altallo presses a switch on the wall and the bubbles close. The dinosaurs inside close their eyes, their chests still rising and falling.

"Thank you for this," Arkh'tor says to Altallo "Are you sure we'll be safe from that meteor thing? Won't it destroy your home?"

"Don't worry about that, I take good care of my ship." Altallo replies patting the sandy raptor on the nose. Arkh'tor gives a silly grin and then ruffles Altallo's hair. He then climbs into a waiting cryogenic chamber. He waves as the chamber closes itself and then closes his eyes, a peaceful expression on his face.

"Altallo, do you mind before we go, telling us where you come from?" asks Shern'ocsa.

"Certainly," replies Altallo happily, "You see I come from a far away--"

All the other dinosaurs listen eagerly, all except Shern'aath and Ta'arahis.

"So you lied to me." Ta'arahis says to Shern'aath, arms crossed.

"What?" Shern'aath replies looking confused.

"You were hiding something from me." Ta'arahis says, nodding at Altallo.

"Oh right that...yes, I'm afraid I lied," says Shern'aath, lowering his head "I'm sorry."

Ta'arahis gives his arm a playful push and smiles.

"What are friends for? At first I thought you were hiding one of those painted rocks you used to hide. You know I like them." she says sticking out her tongue.

Shern'aath looks deeply embarrassed.

"Well, I want to say thank you also" says Caza to Altallo "You saved us and you also united us."

"Yes," adds Shern'ocsa "You did wonderfully. I never knew we could get along."

"It wasn't much really." Altallo replies "I'm just happy no one had to get hurt."

Shern'ocsa gave the Eternal a clap on the back.

"You're so modest! Ah well, time to try this thing out!" he says happily, hobbling over to a cryogenic bubble "This looks like fun! Oh and see you all soon!" he says as he lies down and the bubble closes itself.

"I hope we meet again," says Caza, shaking Altallo's hand and then climbing into his bubble. "I can't wait to see that land of crystal of yours."

"Goodbye Altallo. Oh and here, you might want this back." says Oji'ra handing Altallo his headdress and giving him a cuddle. She then gives Shern'aath an awkward handshake, before following Caza.

The giant Kero, sweeps Altallo into a hug and whispers "Thank you"

"You're welcome." replies Altallo, patting him on the back.
Kero puts him down and then lumbers to a bubble.

Ta'arahis gives Shern'aath another playful push before walking to her own bubble. Altallo helps her in.

"Thank you," she says smiling at him "And make sure Shern'aath behaves himself."
"I will," Altallo replies, grinning.

Shern'aath and Altallo looked at each other for a long time before they hugged again.

"I'll miss you." Shern'aath says thickly

Altallo pats him on the back.

"I have an idea. Why don't we both wake up to continue the survey?"

"You mean I can wake up when you do?" asks Shern'aath looking Altallo full in the face.

"Of course." says Altallo grinning.

"I can't though, I'll age won't I and grow old and die."

Altallo coughs at this.

"Did I mention these things extend your life?" he says quietly.

Shern'aath's alighten at this.

"I'll live longer?" he gasps "And they'll live longer?" he adds pointing to the chambers

Altallo nods smiling.

Shern'aath jumps into his bubble looking ecstatic.

"Don't you have one too?" he asks Altallo, looking around the room.

"I do, but I need to do a few things. I'll be back soon."

Shern'aath nods and lies down. It was warm in the chamber and calm. He started feeling drowsy and drifts off to sleep.

Seconds later, or so it seemed to Shern'aath, he felt cool air rush over him.

"Shern'aath, come quickly." came a familiar voice.

The raptor steps out from the bubble feeling groggy and holding a hand to his head. The room looked completely the same, but Altallo was standing in the doorway to the flight deck, beckoning him.

Shern'aath took a step, his legs feeling oddly stiff. He walked slowly to the flight deck, where Altallo was looking out of the clear walls. Outside the ground was grey and barren looking. Faint rays of sunlight were poking through the thick grey clouds, illuminating the once lush earth.

"How long has it been?" asks Shern'aath in a whisper.

"A few years," says Altallo "What do you think?"

Shern'aath shrugs, "Not much there. Do you think it will be alright? I mean the plants and animals."

"I don't know," replies Altallo "I hope they will be. The habitats on the ships are empty and ready. And if I have learnt anything its that life isn't fragile."

The two look at each other and then back at the fractured landscape. Tentatively, Shern'aath puts an arm around Altallo. Altallo leans his head on Shern'aath shoulder. Shern'aath pats Altallo on the arm and then suggests they could go back to the cryogenic chamber. Altallo agrees and both leave the flight deck in silence.

Far away from the ship beside some burnt tree trunks lay the skeleton of a once mighty knife-tooth that terrorised the great herds. From its eye socket a small brown furry creature pokes its head out and sniffs the air with its pointed nose. Beside the tree trunk fresh green stems had begun to grow. A lizard crawls out from beneath the trees roots where it hid.

A bird starts singing and the thick clouds begin to break up revealing the bright sun and a fresh blue sky.