

Transformations

Von chelle76

Kapitel 17: Scouting

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"I think we should all step back and look at what we have available to us." Saber says becoming a bit agitated. Everyone suddenly stops arguing amongst themselves and looks towards Saber, a bit shocked at the outburst. "I want this done just as much as any of you, but if we just pick an idea seemingly at random and charge in, we will most likely end up getting ourselves or someone else killed." Saber says as he looks around at the faces seated around the table, everyone is tired, but no one wants to stop and think. He sits back in his chair and sighs exasperated, closing his eyes before looking towards Athrun and Kira, "You both are military, you of all people should understand why we need to take the time to plan this. You are also familiar with the abilities of the vessels involved. We are all still learning, so any input you have is greatly appreciated."

Athrun nods, "You are right. I feel at this juncture we are sure that the base is between Orb and Sextilis, there are a couple of moons and satellites that could easily mask a base. That being said, I think that for the sake of keeping just how powerful we are a secret for as long as possible, we should perhaps take the Eternal and the GoLion crew to see about finding the base. We could easily store the lions inside the ship until they are needed. If it appears that all we are doing is returning to Orb, perhaps she won't bother with us. We could then deploy Kira and myself in our suits and see if that draws her out."

"If we can distract her, maybe then the GoLion team could then directly attack her base. By leaving you here, but ready to launch in the event that we are overwhelmed, or she splits her forces and attacks here again, you could help defend the base and/or us if need be." Kira adds.

Commander Eagle looks around the room, meeting the eyes of each person, finally resting his gaze on Saber before speaking, "You make good points, Captain Zala and Captain Yamato, and I think that is perhaps the best idea for the type of mission that needs to be carried out. Saber, what is your feeling on this plan? I know you are good at strategy, and you know the capabilities of the crew. I want you to speak openly here."

"As if he wouldn't anyways," Colt mutters under his breath, getting an elbow from April and a glare from Fireball.

"I think the plan is the most logical one that anyone of us has come up with thus far, Sir." Saber replies, pointedly ignoring Colt's comment. "We can come to their aid fairly quickly, even if we are here. So I don't see much about the plan to raise an argument against it. What about anyone else?" He asks to the room in general.

The room is silent for several minutes, no one daring to raise a question, everyone turning to read the reaction of someone else in the room.

"It's late afternoon by now, so why don't we all take a break and get something to eat. We can meet back at the hangar in an hour's time. By then the sun will be setting, so we can use that to our advantage. Also, maybe some food will do everyone some good," Commander Eagle says.

Several people get up and gradually file out of the room. No one says much, but a few murmurs are heard as people leave the room. Saber is the last person to get up and slowly files out behind the last of the others. He turns the opposite direction of the others, hoping to find solace for a while.

"Saber?" A female voice calls from behind him.

He hears the footsteps catching up to him and sighs before turning around, "Yes?" he replies a bit strained, as he meets the concerned gaze of April.

"Um, I came to see if you were all right. You seemed pretty upset back there," she says as she catches up to him.

"I'm fine, April," he replies a bit distantly. "I'm just tired. I let things get to me that I shouldn't have." He looks away and adds quietly, "I'm sorry."

"What you said was the truth, Saber. Why should you apologize for being a voice of reason? I know that we can be a bit...difficult sometimes, so you know that getting angry is sometimes the only way to get a point across. Especially when it involves Colt and Fireball," she adds trying to lighten the tension. "I think the plan that has been pitched is probably the best that we can do, at least without already knowing what we are in for, but that is part of the purpose of the mission, isn't it? To learn what artillery she has at her disposal?"

Saber nods slightly, "That is the primary focus of the mission." He looks back in the direction he was headed, then back to April, "I have something I'd like to do, why don't you go and check on Fireball and Colt. I'll come and apologize to them in a bit, after I clear my head. I'll get to the hangar in about forty-five minutes, we can talk more then if you'd like."

April nods, "All right. I suppose I'll see you then," she adds a bit hesitantly. He nods, and they turn and go their separate ways.

Saber walks quietly back to his quarters, opening the door, he steps inside and goes and sits quietly on the couch, allowing his body to relax for the first time in several hours. He closes his eyes for several minutes before slowly opening them and looking out the window to the fields outside. He remembers the school kids and teacher he met weeks before and how peaceful the area seemed. "We have to prevent them from being pulled into this. No one else should die needlessly," he mumbles to himself, barely audible. He sits quietly, unmoving for a while; he is jolted back to reality by a knock at his door. Sighing, he gets up and opens it, to find Fala and Keith on the other side. "Is it time already?" he asks. Keith nods.

"Are you all right?" Fala asks concerned.

"I'm fine, thank you," Saber replies. "I'm sorry for being so..."

"You had every right to be." Keith interrupts. "You made some valid points. It got others thinking and a plan was made, so you had the desired effect. I don't think

anyone can fault you for speaking your mind."

"If they do, then they are in the wrong," Fala adds.

Saber shakes his head and smiles weakly, "I hope the tension is significantly lower than before. I could have handled myself better than I did though."

"What's done is done. Let's just go in there as if nothing happened. If you have that attitude, you may be surprised to see that others will too," Fala says, placing a hand on Saber's shoulder momentarily.

He nods in thanks, "Let's go. I want this over with as soon as possible," he adds quietly. They all turn and heads towards the hangar, walking in silence.

Upon arriving, they notice that most of the others had already arrived and were sitting around talking. Several people look up when they enter. "Glad you made it Saber," April says lightly.

Saber smiles slightly, "Late again, eh?" he replies.

"Nah, you still beat Colt. I don't think that makes you late, does it?" Fireball quips.

Saber shakes his head and smiles, "I suppose I'm not late then." He looks around the room, noting that most people seemed relaxed, no hint of the earlier tension and he relaxes a bit. A firm hand is place on his shoulder and he turns to see Commander Eagle beside him. "Hello, Sir."

"Are you doing better? I noticed that you went your own way when we dismissed earlier," Commander Eagle says, looking him over carefully.

He nods in reply, "Yes, Sir. I am doing better. I just needed to sit in silence for a while and clear my head."

"I'm glad it helped. It seems that the break did everyone some good," the commander replies as he looks around the room. "Shall we begin?" He says loud enough for everyone to hear. Everyone gets up and heads closer to where they are standing. "Are we agreed that the GoLion team will board the Eternal and accompany them to scout out the base, then, upon finding it, make a decision on whether the Bismarck crew is needed right away or if we regroup to plan a more formal attack?" Everyone nods their agreement. "Good. I am glad that we are on the same page. Working together will be of the utmost importance from this point on. If any of you have any doubts, this would be the time to say so, otherwise, go with what those in charge of your group say."

"Yes, Sir!" several crew members say in unison.

The crew of the Eternal and the GoLion team members all board the ship, then after getting permission to take off they head towards space in the cover of near darkness.

"Where is Colt?" Fireball asks obviously agitated.

"I haven't seen him since we left the meeting earlier," April replies. "Maybe he called Robin or something. It has been a few months since he's seen or talked to her."

Just then, the door bursts open and Colt comes running in. "Sorry I'm late. Have I missed anything?"

"Just everyone rehashing the plan and the others leaving to look for the base," Fireballs says sarcastically.

"Is that all?" Colt retorts. "At least I made it."

"What did keep you, Colt?" April asks a bit concerned.

"I was trying to call Robin." He answers quietly. "I've tried several times and she's always unavailable to come to the phone. I'm afraid something is wrong."

Saber comes over and places a hand on his shoulder. "I'm sure it's nothing serious, Colt. If there was an issue, Thomas or Elaine would have contacted me. Perhaps she is

just actually getting some rest. She and Josh both seemed to enjoy exploring the grounds. Maybe you have just had bad timing." Saber says, trying to soothe him.

"I suppose you're right." Colt admits begrudgingly. "I'm sorry for earlier, Saber. I didn't mean what I said." Colt adds barely audible.

Saber chuckles lightly. "We've all been under a bit of stress, Colt. I wasn't exactly nice either. So let's just forget it and move on, all right?"

Colt nods. "Seems fair to me, I owe you anyways for allowing Josh and Robin sanctuary at your place."

Saber shakes his head, "You owe me nothing, Colt. I am doing what I would do for any friend." He walks over to the monitor that is following the progress of the Eternal. "It looks like everything is good so far. Let's hope their luck holds."

April comes over and presses an apple into Saber's hand. He looks up at her curiously. "It's an apple." She says matter-of-factly.

"Really?" he smirks. "I wasn't sure." He says, trying not to laugh.

April laughs and shakes her head. "I'm pretty sure you've not eaten, and I don't want you passing out on us if we have to go and fight, so eat the damned apple."

Saber laughs and takes a bite of the apple. "Thank you," he adds quietly.

She nods and smiles, "It's what friends do." They all sit quietly for a while, everyone lost in their own thoughts. "Why don't you run and get something, Saber?" April asks quietly.

"I don't want to be too far, in case something comes up." He replies.

"Just go and bring something back. We should be fine for five to ten minutes. The radar seems fine so far." She answers.

Saber thinks for a moment and nods, "All right. Does anyone else want something?"

"A stiff drink," quips Colt.

"Colt, you know alcohol is not allowed on base." Commander Eagle admonishes, trying to hide his smile.

Saber laughs, "I wish. I think all of us could use one about now. Sorry, but not happening." He heads out to get some food.

"I think I see something, Ms. Lacus." Mr. Waltfeld says as he puts an image on the screen. Everyone focuses on the screen.

"What exactly are we looking at, Mr. Waltfeld?" Lacus asks as she examines the screen. The images become clearer and several gasps are heard. "I believe we have found Merla's base, Ma'am." He replies. "It appears to be a well fortified castle and some rather worrisome looking buildings that I'm not sure I want to know what is in them."

"Do you think we can get closer?" Fala asks "Or would that be too risky?"

"I don't think we can get much closer without arousing suspicion." Mr. Waltfeld replies.

"Let's take the lions once we are a bit past here and loop back to see if we can get a closer look." Keith says as the ship continues slowly on its course.

Lacus nods, "Head for the ship bay, and prepare to launch. I'll send a signal when I feel it's safe to do so."

"Should we suit up too, Lacus?" Kira asks.

She shakes her head. "Let's wait and see what happens. We don't want to tip our hand too soon. If they believe we are just a supply or crew ship returning to Orb from Sextilis, they may not bother us."

"That's why you suggested the GoLion crew get below deck?" Athrun asks. Lacus nods.

"We have an incoming signal, Ms. Lacus. Should I open the connection?" Waltfeld says,

she nods. "This is the Eternal, go ahead."

Merla appears on the screen. "Hello, Eternal. I am Merla Queen of this realm. Why do you invade my air space?"

"I was unaware that space belonged to anyone, Madam." Lacus says. Merla sneers but regains her composure. "We are simply returning to Orb after working to help the victims of the colony of Sextilis." Lacus says, her gaze not venturing from Merla's.

"Well, this is my territory, and I will not be talked down to by some pretty little face. Surrender at once or I will attack you. Do not attempt to send a distress signal, I have jammed all of your other communications. I am aware that you are harboring two Mobile suits and their pilots, one wrong move, and I will destroy you. Your lives mean nothing to me."

"Then why haven't you already killed us?" Lacus asks.

"Simple, I want your technology. With what I already have, once I get my hands on your little units, I will be completely unstoppable. Now, land your ship and come out with your hands up. I will give you two minutes. If you have not landed by then, I will destroy you." Merla says harshly.

"We will do as you say." Lacus says without emotion. She turns to her pilot. "Land the ship. We go out as instructed."

"But Ma'am..." Waltfeld begins to argue.

Lacus holds up her hand to quiet him. "Just do as you're told." She says making eye contact.

He nods, understanding the unspoken request and begins hitting a series of buttons as they begin their descent. Kira and Athrun look to her with questions, but her face remains unreadable. They tense up, waiting to see what happens.

"Um, Chief it feels like we're going down." Lance asks a bit suspiciously.

Keith nods. "I noticed. Get into the lions and be ready to launch if that door opens."

"What do you think is going on?" Hothead asks.

"I'm not sure, but I don't like it. I think Ms. Lacus expected this, so she had us come down here to be ready. Perhaps it's not known that we are on board and she may ditch us, so we can look around." Keith replies. A minute later, the hangar door opens, allowing them to leave the ship. "I don't know what's going on, so go fast and head for the mountains there in the distance. We'll regroup there." They get into the lions and take off. Several minutes later, they land in a valley a ways from the castle, no evidence of anyone following them. They all come out and meet on the ground. "It appears that we weren't noticed." Keith says looking around to the group. The lions are well hidden here, so I think we need to try and do some recon and see if we can tell what weapons she has available.

Fala looks towards the castle and sees the Eternal landing. "They are landing now. I hope they will be all right." She says concerned.

"I'm sure they will be." Keith says. "We need to focus on our mission. I saw a few outer buildings that seem to be some sort of industrial buildings or possible hangars. If we can get to one or two of those, see what's in them and possibly destroy them, we can do some damage. At least long enough to allow us to come up with a better plan. There are four buildings; two are closer to us, so I vote that we try for them first. We should break into two groups, but we cannot use our com-links, as that would most likely give us away." They all nod. Lance, you, Hothead, and Shorty go and investigate the building to the left, Fala and I will go to the building a little further up. We meet back here in one hour to discuss what we've seen and decide what our next move is."

They all nod again. "If one team doesn't make it back within say...fifteen minutes past the time, leave and try to get either back to Calvary Command or to Orb and report whatever you have seen. Are we agreed?"

"Yes Sir!" They all reply in unison.

"Let's go." Keith says. He and Fala take off for their designated building with the other three heading in the opposite direction.

"What do you think we'll find, Keith?" Fala asks as they move towards the building, staying close to various rocks.

"I have no idea. I just have a feeling that we won't like it." He replies. She nods and they continue for several minutes, neither one saying another word. Occasionally, they duck for cover as a guard makes a round near the building, but so far, they seem to have avoided being detected.

As they approach the building, they begin seeing humans that are being used as laborers. Some are obviously very young. The people are entering an underground shaft of some sort, then go into the building hauling buckets, then returning down the shaft. They watch for several minutes, staying in the shadows. Keith leans close to Fala and whispers to her quietly. "I think they are mining something." She nods. "I wonder what it's used for." He whispers again to her, barely audible. "Let's try and see what's in the building. Follow me."

Several minutes pass before there is a brief halt in people coming and going, they take the chance to move closer to the building, heading for the far side, away from the shaft, hoping to remain undetected. They find a small window hidden by what appears to be a generator of some sort, so they duck behind it and peer into the window. Fala gasps as she looks in and sees a large cannon. Keith gives her a look, but then sees it too. "Not good." He mouths. She shakes her head and turns to watch the activity in the building.

Fala takes an item from her belt and holds it up. Keith looks at her quizzically. "Camera." She mouths. He nods, a small smile escaping his lips. She leans down and begins taking pictures for several minutes.

Keith looks to his watch and taps Fala on the shoulder. She looks up and he touches his watch, indicating they need to leave. She nods and as soon as they see a break, they make a loop back towards where they came from. After almost giving up their presence twice, they finally make it back to the clearing. Lance, Shorty, and Hothead are waiting, looking a bit nervous.

"Cutting that a bit close, aren't you?" Lance asks pointing to his watch.

"Sorry. We almost got caught." Keith replies. "Did you find anything useful?"

Lance turns to Shorty. "You explain it. You seemed to know what was going on."

Keith shakes his head. "Not here. We need to get out of here. It's too risky to stay here any longer. Should we head to Orb or Calvary Command?"

"Calvary Command." Fala says. "That way, if we get into trouble between here and there, they are closer to us, than if we head towards Orb."

"The Princess is right, Chief. We don't know if Orb would have anyone that could readily help us in the event of trouble. Especially since the Eternal is still being held by Merla. That other ship of theirs is probably still tied up on that colony." Lance adds.

Keith nods. "I think you're both right. It's almost dark here, so let's hide out for say about twenty more minutes, then take off and head towards Calvary Command, take care to stay low until we are behind the mountains, then we'll head up and go to Calvary Command."

They all nod in agreement. Once darkness begins to fall, they get into their lions and

take off.

Saber enters the hangar, carrying a drink. "Have I missed anything?" he asks, coming over and scanning the various screens.

"We think Merla has the Eternal." April says not looking away from the main screen.

"That's not good." Saber says quietly. "Has there been any word from anyone?"

Commander Eagle shakes his head, "Nothing as of yet."

"Is that GoLion?" Colt asks, pointing towards one of the screens.

April hits a few buttons, pulling up a visual of the five lions. "It is. Open the hangar doors, Fireball." He nods and quickly goes to open the doors.

A minute or two later, the lions land and the team comes out to meet them.

"I'm glad we made it back." Keith says, walking over to the Bismarck crew.

"We weren't sure what to expect when we saw the Eternal land on the base." April says as everyone returns to the control area of the hangar.

"Evidently, Ms. Lacus had a feeling it could happen. She sent us below deck and told us to launch when we got the signal. We felt the ship descending, and the doors opened, so we went. We were lucky not to be caught. We have some pictures that all of you should see." he nods to Fala, who nods back and goes into her lion and hits some keys. "Fala is sending you some pictures that she took of an outbuilding of the base. Merla has some kind of laser cannon, and she's mining something to either help run it or that is used to create the laser. Either way, it's not good."

A screen pops up indicating a file transfer, then images begin appearing as they are downloaded. Fala comes back to join the group, "I took these from the outside near a window. They aren't the best, but it's something to go from. I took a few pictures of the layout as we left, but it was too risky to try to take too many pictures."

Everyone is focused on the screen and the images before them. "If that cannon is as powerful as it looks, this really is not good news." Saber says following a long silence. "That cannon looks like it could easily wipe out the majority of this base from quite a distance."

"Yes, that was my thought too." Keith says quietly.

"We have a few pictures to share as well," Shorty says as he heads to his lion.

"We found a factory where she makes those annoying robots that she seems to have a limitless supply of." Lance says as more images appear on the screen.

Shorty comes back as the last of the images appear. "I thought about trying to get inside, but they told me it wasn't worth the risk."

"They were right." Saber says. "Well, now we need to firm up what we do from here. Have you already placed a few older model homing beacons on the desired targets?"

Keith nods. "They are all in place and set to go off in 15 minutes. That should allow us time to get back there and to distract Merla, while you go for the targets. Perhaps the crew of the Eternal can find a way to make a break for it. They are all battle trained, and I'm sure they can handle themselves. I don't see them giving up easily." Keith says.

"We could call for the Archangel to help with a distraction." April says. "They were heading back to Orb from that colony."

"They most likely would have civilians on that ship right now, unless they are already back at Orb. We don't want to risk more lives than necessary." Saber says.

Fala nods. "You're right, Saber. We will already be risking the lives of the humans we saw, but..."

"A risk we must take, Your Highness." Saber says grimly. "It's not a pleasant thought,

but we have to choose the lesser of two evils in this situation. If we try to warn them, we could alert the whole base. We just have to try and hit soon, you said it was nightfall there now, correct?" Keith nods. "Then let's hope they get a rest time and that it's far enough away from the targets that loss of life is minimal." Everyone nods. "I say we leave now. You would have maybe five minutes before you'd need to be there and ready to attack. We could be there, and begin our distraction in say, ten minutes." Keith says.

Saber nods. "That sounds like our best bet. Lacus and her crew are very resourceful, but if it looks like they are having trouble, I will try and see if I can help them, though I doubt it will come to that."

"Everything is ready to go, Chief." Shorty says.

"Good. Let's head out." Keith says.

"So, can we start shooting at things near her castle once it's in sight?" Hothead asks as he gets into his lion.

Keith nods. "Yes, you can start shooting once the castle is in sight, just try and draw the fire away from the Eternal." He adds. "Maybe we'll get lucky and they can break away in the chaos. Are we agreed on the plan?"

They all nod, and everyone takes off.

"Let's go." Saber says as they take off for the base. "We will have five minutes to destroy the targets. Until that's done, no more communications via com-link."

"Right." The others say simultaneously.

They arrive a short time later as the Bismarck robot. In the distance, they see evidence of GoLion's attack on the main base. They quickly fire the blaster easily destroying the targets, several internal explosions happen after the initial blasts. The scene below is one of chaos, but quickly, some of Merla's army begin to show up and they start firing at the Bismarck.

"Separate. Draw them apart. It's our best chance." Saber says as they disperse into four units and begin taking on the robots.

Colt begins firing the METEOR, hitting several robots simultaneously, "I love these new toys!" Colt says as he continues firing.

Fireball fires several shots in succession, hitting several targets while dodging attacks at the same time. "It seems like we have fewer than we did."

Saber uses his sword to destroy several robots, his suit deflecting a lot the shots being fired at him. "I think we are at least making some headway." he says as he continues fighting.

Several more robots are destroyed, and then suddenly even more seem to explode out of nowhere.

"What the Hell?" Fireball says looking at his screens.

"It's Kira and Athrun." Saber says. "The Eternal is heading for space."

"I see you did as we had discussed." Athrun says, appearing on Saber's screen.

Saber nods. "I knew that's what you wanted. Is everyone all right?"

"A few bruises, but nothing too bad. Merla is not happy though. We've laid waste to her base." Athrun replies.

Saber flips to another image and sees several places of the castle blowing up. "Ah, an 'inside' job. Good for you. This should keep her busy for a while. I think we've taken out her robot factory and a rather large cannon."

Kira comes onto the screen. "It looks like we've done what we needed to do. Let's get

out of here." he says as the last few robots are destroyed.
Keith comes on the com-link, "Kira's right. Let's regroup far away from here."
Everyone agrees and they head back to Calvary Command.

An hour or so later, everyone is sitting in the hangar, studying the screens of the base they just attacked. "It seems you were successful." Commander Eagle says. Several heads nod.

"I don't think Merla expected us to attack her directly." Keith says.

"We will have to keep an eye on her. We have a few ways to do that, since she was 'unloading' things off of our ship. We can track any of those items, and know where they are at least. I was surprised that she kept us so close to the ship. That was a good thing for us, but not her best move"

"Perhaps she didn't think you were capable enough to escape." Fala says.

"I know she didn't expect to be attacked. She had no clue that the lions were on our ship, so I'm glad you weren't on the bridge when she came on the com-link." Athrun says. "Otherwise, this might not have ended the way it did."

"We need to return to Orb." Lacus says suddenly. Everyone turns to look at her. "Our ship took a bit of damage, so we need to make repairs. We need the equipment available on Orb, so while Merla is otherwise occupied, we should head back and make the repairs, so we are ready in the event that she tries to attack us or one of you in the future in retaliation for today."

Commander Eagle nods. "When do you wish to leave?"

"As soon as possible, Commander. We can rest once we are on Orb." Lacus replies. She looks to her crew, who all get up. "Thank all of you for your help. We will be in touch. Do not hesitate to call if you require our assistance."

"Nor you hesitate to call if you need us." Saber replies.

Lacus nods and looks to Kira and Athrun, who start for the Eternal. "We'll see you soon, so we can figure out a way to end this for good."

Everyone nods and the crew boards their ship and it takes off for Orb.

A week goes by of constant practicing; no other attacks or distress signals are received. The group is all sitting in the common room talking when Commander Eagle enters, causing everyone to look up. "I have just talked with Ms. Lacus of the Eternal. The rebuilding effort is going well and thus far, they have had no sign of any enemy activity," he pauses, studying the tired faces in front of him. "I've been thinking, things seem to be relatively calm here at the moment, why don't all of you go back to Saber's Estate and get some rest. I know Colt would like to see Robin, as it's been almost four months since you left there. I'm sure a change in scenery will do all of you some good. Or, if you wish, your crew could return to Altea, I know it has been much longer since you have been home."

Everyone looks around to each other in a sort of stunned silence; finally Fala speaks up, "Would it be all right if we all went back to your place, Saber?"

Saber nods slowly, "I wouldn't mind going back for a bit. All of you are welcome to come," he looks towards Colt and smiles slightly, "I know you won't complain about going back." Colt blushes slightly, but says nothing, getting a laugh from most of the others in the room. "When would you want to leave?" Saber asks to the group in general.

"How soon could we leave, Sir?" Fireball asks Commander Eagle.

"Whenever you'd like," he replies.

"With the speed of the new units, we could make it there in a couple of hours, so we could leave this evening in the cover of darkness, and possibly avoid alerting anyone to our absence, or wait until early morning, if you prefer. Either way is fine by me," Saber says looking around to the group around him.

"I say we go now," Fireball says standing up.

"I agree," Keith says, getting up as well. "If we wait, we might tempt fate or something."

Saber stands up and nods, "Then let's go get packed and meet at the hanger in say, half an hour?"

Several heads nod and Commander Eagle nods in return. "Very well, I'll keep you apprised of the situation here and let you know if anything changes. Perhaps you can manage to stay for a couple of weeks; from there we can decide on how to handle this threat." Everyone leaves to pack and shortly thereafter, they leave for Saber's home.