

MC 052: Snap Decisions

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G.I. JOE #52

Snap Decisions

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Writer: Larry Hama

Penciler: Rod Whigham

Inker: Andy Mushynsky

Coloring: George Roussos

Lettering: Joe Rosen

Editor: Bob Harras

Editor-in-chief: Jim Shooter

Summary: In a scene set before the previous issue, the Cobra air armada approaches Cobra Island, carrying the evacuated citizens of Springfield. On the airfield, Cobra Commander is livid, angrily telling Tomax and Xamot he doesn't want Serpentor to land on the island. He means to usurp his power, as far as the Commander's concerned. "Cobra already has a perfect leader!" The Crimson Guard twins set up snipers all around the airfield to prepare for Serpentor's arrival. In one of the Cobra transport helicopters, Serpentor is happy to see Cobra Commander has lined up troops and vehicles to greet them. The Baroness and Destro warn him that he should be wary of a warm welcome from the Commander. Serpentor knows what to do. He orders the helicopter pilots to keep rolling right towards the podium the Commander is standing at once they land. They do so, and the 'copter screeches to a halt just inches away from hitting the Cobra leader. Serpentor then leaps from the cockpit towards the Commander. "Help! He's attacking me!" Cobra Commander shouts. "No! I'm embracing you!" Serpentor answers, throwing his arms around him. "I feel like I've found a long lost brother!" Serpentor's closeness to the Commander confounds the snipers who can't risk a shot. Soon, the evacuees from Springfield pour out onto the field and surround the podium. They cheer Serpentor, who cannot accept all the glory. He praises the Commander and the Cobra troops. The Baroness is obviously enamoured with Serpentor. "Isn't he magnificent Destro?" Tomax and Xamot call off the snipers: "If they shoot him down now, there'll be a riot!"

Serpentor begins a speech, praising all of Cobra and their brave pioneering spirit for coming to Cobra Island, he also says that he expected jealousy from Cobra Commander, but he now knows that their great leader "would never stoop so low as to assassinate a political rival!" The Commander isn't pleased with this display. "Take your arm off my shoulder or I'll have you shot," he whispers. The Baroness is impressed by Serpentor. "He's such a persuasive speaker. Even Cobra Commander is at a loss for words!" Destro isn't amused: "You'd be speechless too, if you were on the verge of losing your lunch." Tomax and Xamot see through Serpentor's charms, and know he's trying to wrest power from Cobra Commander by gaining the love of the troops and their families.

The next day (just after issue #51), a team of Joes led by Flint and Sgt Slaughter return from their failed attempt to stop the Dreadnoks from rescuing Zartan from Joe custody. The Sarge is upset that Zartan "played us for suckers!" Flint tries to calm him and takes him to the staging area where the Joes are working out, taking out "pent-up aggressions on special practice dummies" that are shaped like Cobras.

The various Joes test their fighting skills until Storm Shadow leaps down from the rafters: "Enough of this amateur violence! I must have words with my brother, Snake-Eyes!" Snake-Eyes and the other Joes are shocked. Didn't they watch the Baroness shoot Storm Shadow dead on Cobra Island? Scarlett guesses it's really Zartan, firing her crossbow at him. Storm Shadow proves her wrong by catching the arrow in mid-air. Stalker and Barbecue lunge at the ninja from different directions, but he leaps in the air, knocking them out with a kick from each leg. Quick-Kick steps up to fight Storm Shadow, and Scarlett sees it best to test the potential imposter against another martial artist. Quick-Kick puts up a good fight, but Storm Shadow beats him, explaining to Quick Kick, "You have speed, strength and skill but your weakness is the compassion at the core of your warrior's heart..." Now, only Scarlett stands between Storm Shadow and Snake-Eyes. Storm Shadow tells her it's not her concern, she explains she knows Snake-Eyes as well as anyone and that he would never harm Storm Shadow, no matter what he has done. She also recognizes that something has changed in Storm Shadow and he no longer has a killer's heart. Storm Shadow backs off, knowing she's right. "I meant no harm to any of you" he says. "I -- wanted to speak to Snake-Eyes... alone..." He allows Scarlett to stay since Snake-Eyes has no secrets from her.

Back on Cobra Island, Cobra Commander is still furious over Serpentor's arrival. He blames Dr. Mindbender, despite that fact that the Commander himself -- Mindbender argues -- authorized his creation. Outside, Serpentor has joined the troops in manual labor, which is subverting the Commander's leadership as far as he's concerned. Mindbender nervously assumes the Commander that he can find away to use Serpentor's ambition to their advantage. Destro doubts that. A Tele-Viper interrupts with a radio message from Zartan, on his way back to Cobra Island. The Commander decides that while he can't use the Joes to rid himself of Serpentor (as Destro wishes they could), "the next best thing is somebody who can make himself look exactly like a Joe!"

At the Pentagon, Hawk meets Wild Bill at his Dragonly helicopter. Wild Bill informs him of Zartan's escape. Hawk tells him it doesn't matter. He surprised at Hawk's response: "That committee of generals must've lit into you something fierce! What happened in there?" Hawk tells him to just get him back to the Pit. "You can hear the bad news along with the rest of the team."

In Zartan and the Dreadnoks' helicopter, flying out over the Gulf of Mexico, a call from Cobra Commander comes through. Zartan drags Buzzer in front of the viewscreen to tell Cobra Commander that he knew where the Pit was and kept it to himself. The Commander isn't interested. He tells Zartan he will allow them to land unnoticed on Cobra Island and Zartan is to report to him covertly. Zartan's surprised: "Something more important than discovering the location of the Pit? Hmmm..."

"I should have been dead," Storm Shadow says to Snake-Eyes back at the Pit. He saw the Baroness was about to fire on him, but he had no fear of death. He forced himself into the Sleeping Phoenix, a state of extremely low heartbeat and respiration. They could not detect he was still alive, so they decided to use his body in the creation of Serpentor. "The dead passed through me, or at least their thoughts did." The process healed his body, but his soul is still "scarred by revenge." He asks for Snake-Eyes' help: "Revenge is the dream of the weak. A soldier knows that no enemy is forever. Help me. Forgive me." Snake-Eyes hands him a key, and Storm Shadow knows it is the key to his cabin in the High Sierras where "the mountains gleamed in the sunset like molten gold." Snake-Eyes had told him about it when they were both in Vietnam. Storm Shadow thanks Snake-Eyes for allowing him to heal his soul in his home. He leaps up into the rafters he came from and disappears. The other Joes arrive and Barbecue makes an observation: "I guess we can forget about security...Not only has Zartan escaped, but Snake-Eyes lets a known Cobra agent walk out of here with the location of the Pit." His comment gets a punch in the mouth from Scarlett. "What was that for?"

On Cobra Island, Cobra Commander and the twins have sat down to dinner when Flint, Lady Jaye and Stalker crash through the window, but "Flint" is really Zartan in disguise, and his siblings and the Dreadnoks are disguised themselves. (The Dreadnoks aren't quiet as convincing as the others.) Zartan thought disguises were in order for secrecy's sake. The Commander notes the coincidence that they came dressed as Joes and they might as well make their move immediately. Later in Serpentor's quarters, the Baroness admires Serpentor's new suit of armor and air chariot, while Dr. Mindbender worries they'll only serve to anger Cobra Commander even more. Serpentor isn't concerned. He assumes the Commander is readying to assassinate him sometime soon, anyway. Suddenly, the "Joes" crash through Serpentor's window, guns firing. The Baroness won't allow Serpentor to be killed and she throws herself in front of them. Zarana's about to kill them both, but Zartan stops her because it would definitely anger Cobra Commander. "And it wouldn't exactly ingratiate you with me," Destro says as he and a group of Cobra troops barge in to stop the assassination.

A short time later, they all arrive in Cobra Commander's quarters and the Commander can't believe Serpentor's survived. He tells the Commander that Destro saved him, though he was probably there to save the Baroness. Serpentor says it's a stroke of genius to have it look like the Joes made an attempt on his life. It will be the perfect thing to get them excited over an invasion of the Pit. He reveals he intercepted his earlier transmission to Zartan's helicopter. The Commander is speechless. "We need each other, Cobra Commander," Serpentor says with a smile. "You wouldn't want your public to know that you set up such a popular fellow as me for a target? Isn't it better to be nice and cooperative and get things done efficiently? Isn't it?" The Commander doesn't seem very happy.

Back at the Pit, Hawk returns and tells the Joes in the motor pool to gather the Joes in the staging area in five minutes. As Hawk arrives in the staging area by elevator, and the Joes have already assembled. "This isn't easy for me to tell you, so I'll keep it short and simple... Pending a full investigation of the Springfield debacle, the G.I. Joe program is being suspended. As of right now, the Pit is closed and sealed. All Joe personnel will be quartered in standard barracks with the chaplains' assistants and everyone is confined to base!"

A week later, Storm Shadow arrives at Snake-Eyes' cabin in the High Sierras -- or more accurately, the rubble left over from when Cobra destroyed his cabin over a year ago. He finds the underground bunker that saved Snake-Eyes life, but gets worried when a wolf shows up. He discovers it's Snake-Eyes' wolf Timber when the wolf smells Snake-Eyes' scent on him. As he sits with Timber and watches the sunset over the mountains he says that Snake-Eyes was right, "they do gleam like molten gold!"

Review: "Snap Decisions" is a surprisingly good story, considering there's so little action. The maneuverings of Cobra Commander and Serpentor are the most interesting part of the issue, and as often is the case in any medium, the villains are more interesting than the heroes. Larry Hama continues to build on Serpentor's character as a shrewd, charismatic leader who quite easily manipulates things so that he gains power. Somehow, the fact that Serpentor is lying almost every time he speaks comes through in the comic, though his dialogue could be taken totally sincere. We know so much about Cobra Commander, we just know Serpentor has no love for him. Cobra Commander's reaction to Serpentor's speech is very funny, as he already hates this man who is trying to embrace him. It's also interesting to see how quickly the Cobras throw their support to Serpentor, with no disregard for the Commander. Only Destro seems to be concerned with loyalty to him, which is strange considering his dislike for Cobra Commander. He's most disgusted at the Baroness for her quick betrayal of the Commander, not to mention jealousy toward Serpentor. The Dreadnoks insert some humor in the story, when they try to assassinate Serpentor disguised as Joes:

Ripper: "Har! I betcha never would've known it was the Dreadnoks, eh, rag-face?"

CC: "Rag-face? That filthy Dreadnok just called me rag-face! Xamot, do something horrible to him!"

Tomax: "I'm Tomax, Xamot is the one with the scar--"

In the end, the Commander is forced to accept his rival's decisions thanks to his ability to gain the love of the troops.

Back at the Pit, Storm Shadow arrives and is trying to change himself and give up on the life of revenge that almost killed him. True, Storm Shadow's return to life is somewhat questionable, relying on ninja mysticism. Ninja trance or not, most people don't survive multiple gunshot wounds to the chest. Still, his attempt to figure out just who he is is portrayed well. He fights off the Joes, but really didn't want to do so. He easily dispatches the Joes who attack him. He fairly easily defeats Quick Kick, but it's nice to see his character wasn't totally short-changed. Storm Shadow explains that Quick Kick loses not for lack of skill, but because he is a soldier and not a killer. Though some might argue the point, there is a difference. It's kind of touching when Snake-Eyes forgives his friend and Storm Shadow arrives at his mountain retreat.

As for the rest of the Joes, they aren't doing so well. Hawk just got dumped on at the Pentagon for the debacle in Springfield. It's unexpected when he tells the Joes that the team is to be shut down temporarily. This will almost become a recurring theme for the series, as the committee of generals will become a thorn in Hawk's side for years to come.

There aren't many errors in the issue, but one scene is almost funny when knowing the stories to come in the series. One the first Joes to be defeated by Storm Shadow is Stalker. Seems kind of funny that the first thing Storm Shadow does when he sees his old army buddy, Stalker, is kick him in the face.

First Appearances:

- Cobra Vehicles: Serpenter's Air Chariot

Reprinted in:

- The Transformers (UK) #170-173 (June 18th - July 9th, 1988). A Marvel UK series that began reprinting Action Force stories after the end of that series. These issues reprint this story in four parts, alongside original stories. All references to "G.I. Joe" were changed to "Action Force".

- Classic G.I. JOE: Volume 6 (December 2009). A trade paperback collection from IDW Publishing. Includes issues #51-60.