

MC 055: Unmaskings

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G.I. JOE #55

Unmaskings

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Summary: Deep under Fort Wadsworth, in the ruins of G.I. Joe headquarters, Destro and Cobra Commander -- still trapped in the Pit -- have found an escape tunnel. Unfortunately, it's blocked by tons of rubble. Cobra Commander, certain they'll die, starts to panic. "I had such magnificent plans! Everything was going so smoothly! All those years of sacrifice and denial! Arrrrrrgh!" Destro fails to calm the Commander and leaves him by himself. He searches for another means of escape and finds it: a huge drilling vehicle to create another tunnel.

Above ground, in Fort Wadsworth, Grunt is finishing off some of the last minute paperwork that will make him a civilian again. The file clerk is amazed that there's so much classified information in Grunt's personnel file, considering he worked in a motor pool for all these years. Hawk and Duke congratulate Grunt on his acceptance to Georgia Tech. "He's not Grunt any longer, Hawk," Duke says. "This is Robert W. Graves! And he's going to be an engineer to make us proud!" They wish him well and Grunt tells them it was an honor serving with them. Grunt finds Clutch waiting at the bus-stop to see him off. He thanks Clutch for stopping by. They decide they owe each other for some close shaves, and hope they'll keep in touch. Clutch watches Grunt's bus drive off and he salutes his old friend. "Have a good life...soldier!"

Meanwhile, in Sierra Gordo, deep inside the Terror-Drome, Dr. Mindbender and the Baroness are using the Brain-wave Scanner to interrogate the Joe who seems to be Flint. Mindbender is curious about why Flint is resisting the brain scan, while the Baroness suggests they go back to the old-fashioned kind of interrogation: "a few thumbscrews, hot irons and bamboo slivers could loosen his tongue up just as easily!" The leaders of Sierra Gordo's new government arrive, warning that the counter-revolutionaries are attacking the Terror-Drome. "They want to overthrow our benevolent dictatorship of the workers and replace it with another decadent democracy!" The Baroness sends Tomax and Xamot to handle the situation, while Mindbender notices that Flint's face is not showing the reaction that skin normally would when a subject is being scanned...

Back in the Pit, Destro and Cobra Commander climb aboard the earth-boring machine and figure out how to turn it on. The vehicle starts to dig into the walls of dirt surrounding the Pit, and then up. It hits the surface inside a closed shopping mall.

On Cobra Island, Serpentor continues to lead Cobra in the absence of Cobra Commander -- presumed dead when the Pit was destroyed. He explains to Zartan and the Dreadnoks that he plans on expanding Cobra's legitimate businesses and even unveils the new Cobra Consulate that's being built in New York City. They can essentially do whatever they want in the consulate, all under diplomatic immunity.

In the Staten Island mall, Destro and the Commander raid a clothing store to disguise themselves and find their way back to Springfield. They don sunglasses, false beards and "normal" suits, and in doing so, reveal their true faces to each other (but not to us, of course!).

In Sierra Gordo, Tomax and Xamot observe a battle between the counter-revolutionaries and the government backed by Cobra. The counter-revolutionaries are close to breaking through their defenses, but the twins can't understand how. Only a day before their fighting was pathetic. Then, Xamot's binoculars reveal the counter-revolutionaries' secret: they're being advised by members of the G.I. Joe team -- Stalker, Beach Head, Leatherneck and Low-Light. Inside the Terror-Drome, the truth is revealed about "Flint". Mindbender finally sees that his "skin" is really a mask. He pulls off the mask and is horrified, and the Baroness immediately knows who's underneath: "That ruin of a face! It's Snake-Eyes!" She realizes that their prisoner is even more valuable than they thought. A Tele-Viper reports that the Joes are helping the counter-revolutionaries, and they decide that it's time to see to the Terror-Drome's defense.

Somewhere, on a highway west of New York, Destro and the Commander -- still in disguise -- speed down the road in a yellow Corvette. With some hotwiring and typing up of temporary license plates, the Commander stole the car "legitimately" from a used car dealership. He reveals a fact about himself that we always suspected: he was once a used car salesman. Suddenly, a state trooper shows up and pulls them over. Destro is worried, but the Commander calms him. He has his actual driver's license with his real name on it!

Back in Sierra Gordo, Stalker's group watches the battle while the counter-revolutionaries get closer to the Terror-Drome. As the battle heats up, Low-Light uses hypodermic darts on a Cobra trooper when Stalker notices he's about the same size as Leatherneck. "Remember, I like my shirts roomy," the Marine reminds Stalker. They begin looking for a Cobra about the same size as Stalker...

On the highway west of New York, the state trooper who pulled over the yellow Corvette is about to let Cobra Commander and Destro go when he notices there's something familiar about the Commander's face and his "unusual last name." After thinking for a moment he remembers: "I've got it! Billy!" The Commander is stunned. The trooper tells him the story of a car wreck on a railroad track a little over a year earlier. No one survived except for a boy who barely crawled out. He lost a leg and an eye and has been in a coma ever since. His wallet said "Billy" on it, but there was no other ID inside except for a picture of the boy's father. The Commander grabs the photo from the trooper...

In Sierra Gordo, the Cobras are securing the Terror-Drome as their forces are being overrun by the counter-revolutionaries. The Baroness, Mindbender, Tomax and Xamot head for the helicopter, hoping to use it for a gunship, while the Joes -- now disguised in Cobra uniforms get inside the Terror-Drome and find Snake-Eyes. Beach Head is impressed that Stalker carried Snake-Eyes' mask and gear through the whole mission. Stalker explains that he takes the mission so personally because he nearly left Snake-Eyes behind once in Vietnam. Snake-Eyes never blamed him, but Stalker realized they couldn't afford to lose the brave men in the world and he owed Snake-Eyes. Outside, the Cobras are readying the helicopter when they spot the Joes escaping with Snake-Eyes. Tomax mans the 'copter's door gun, firing a burst across Stalker's chest. Leatherneck fires his grenade launcher, destroying the 'copter and sending the Cobras jumping for their lives. The Joes carry Stalker back into the jungle to tend to Stalker's injuries. Stalker asks how bad his wounds are and Leatherneck tells him he hasn't "seen much worse on people on people who're still walking around", but if they get him to an aid station, he'll probably have a chance. Stalker refuses. He says he'll only slow them down, and they should leave him. He owes Snake-Eyes and can't be responsible for anything else happening to him. As the Cobra reinforcements arrive and Mindbender sends the troops after the Joes, Snake-Eyes takes some of the other Joes weapons and orders the other to take Stalker on ahead. Stalker insists that he's the squad leader, but the others say he's been relieved by the next senior man -- Snake-Eyes. As they leave Snake-Eyes behind and carry Stalker away on a stretcher, Leatherneck reminds Stalker that the Cobras have to deal with a heavily armed ninja. "Does that sound fair to you?" Stalker, tears in his eyes, seems to agree, "No...it's not fair at all..."

Back at the treeline, Snake-Eyes stands his ground, two guns blazing, taking out several Cobras with the help of Leatherneck's M-16 / grenade launcher combination. But the Cobras launch grenades at the commando. A short distance away, the other Joes see the explosion and wonder what kind of ordinance it was. Beach Head says that if it was true grenades and not chemical explosives, that's the last they'll see of Snake-Eyes.

At a hospital back in the United States, Cobra Commander and Destro stand at Billy's bedside, while the doctor explains that Billy could eventually recover from his Cobra and that though he lost part of his leg, he can be fitted with a prosthetic. Cobra Commander asks Billy's forgiveness for all he's done. "I should have loved him better," he tells Destro. "How can he ever forgive me?" Destro leaves the Commander at his son's bedside and gives him some parting advice. "You can't change the past...let it go. Do something about the future."

Review: This issue serves mostly as a starting point for new storylines, and it's more of a character story than anything else. The most important development in the larger storyline is the discovery that Billy survived the accident seen over a year ago. Looking back at that issue, Billy's survival stretches reality, but in any comic book -- even G.I. Joe -- no major character stays dead forever. Though Cobra Commander's sorrow over his son makes for an interesting scene, it starts a chain of events that will lead to his absence from the series for years, which is difficult to deal with for some fans. It's interesting, though maybe disappointing, that the Commander's face is revealed, and though he's partially disguised it's obvious that he's just a regular guy and has nothing to hide beneath his mask. Still, it's better than him looking like some kind of snake-faced guy (please refer to G.I. Joe: The Movie if you like that idea better...).

We finally know for certain that "Flint" is really Snake-Eyes, and that he can still resist the Brain-wave Scanner like he did back in issue #10. Stalker's need to rescue Snake-Eyes was a nice nod to their friendship, and is the only thing that can cause Stalker to lose the business-like attitude he tends to show in the field. The biggest problem with the scene when Snake-Eyes orders the Joes to take Stalker to safety is that he insists on fighting off the Cobras alone. Granted, they probably needed two Joes to carry Stalker and one to defend them, but it's a bit of a stretch that the others are so willing to leave Snake-Eyes behind. And though we know Snake-Eyes probably wasn't killed by the explosion, the explanation for his survival is a little bit of a cop-out, but we'll leave that for next issue...

One of the most unexpected scenes is Grunt's leaving the team. We haven't seen much of Grunt recently, so it seems strange to have him leave like this, although it shows that not everyone stays in the Army all their lives. Clutch's farewell is a good scene, and lets us know that Larry Hama hasn't forgotten the original team of Joes. More will be seen of Grunt as a civilian, but the plotline will soon be dropped.

There are many funny moments during Destro and the Commander's escape from the Pit. Their clothing seems to

represent the worst fashions the '80s have to offer. Larry Hama seems to enjoy poking fun at the outrageous costumes the Cobra characters wear when the two make fun of each other: Destro: "I notice a lack of polyester suits in your size..." Cobra Commander: "Hrmph! Fashion snobbery from someone who still wears a gold chain with an open shirt!" And it's no surprise that the Commander was once a used car salesman.

Nothing is really resolved at the end of the issue, so: TO BE CONTINUED...

First Appearances:

- G.I. Joe Team: Low-Light
- Geography: A model of the new Cobra Consulate

Reprinted in:

- The Transformers (UK) #191-194 (November 12th - December 3rd, 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.