

## MC 059: Divergent Paths

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G.I. JOE #59

Divergent Paths

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Summary: In the secret laboratory in Fred VII's garage in Denver, Cobra Commander's son, Billy, marvels at his new prosthetic leg. He asks if he'll be able to run and more. His father assures him that Fred is a mechanical genius, and Billy's leg will be as good as the original -- even better than the Commander's high-powered suit of armor that Fred built. Billy tries to walk, but stumbles. But instead of falling, he stops himself by launching into a mid-air somersault. The Commander is amazed, noting Billy landed in a martial arts defensive stance. Fred recognizes that it was a very advanced move, and asks where the boy picked it up. "I don't know," Billy says. "I just did it..."

Somewhere in Central Utah, members of the Joe team are testing new equipment in the desert. While Grand Slam, Thunder and Steeler test out the new SLAM artillery vehicle, Crankcase and Dusty sneak up on them in the AWE Striker to test security. Crankcase scolds them for letting him get too close, until the new Joe, Tunnel Rat, reveals that he was hiding beneath the sand, covering the others. Crankcase then informs them that Hawk needs them to round up all the equipment into a convoy and prepare to head through the mountains to nearby Fort Carson.

Back in Denver, Fred's associate arrives. He introduces him to the Commander as Raptor, but asks Fred why he's dressed up like a bird. He's wearing a feathered cape with a cowl shaped like a falcon's head. "He's a nutcase, right?" Cobra Commander asks. "What's he doing running loose without a strait-jacket?" Fred explains that Raptor is a first-rate accountant and has done amazing work with birds of prey. Raptor enthusiastically explains that his genetically improved falcons will change the course of Cobra history. He rambles on excitedly until he's interrupted by the Commander: "This birdbrain is crazier than Dr. Mindbender! I'm sick and tired of wackos in funny suits! What do you do? Sleep in a nest?"

On the road through the Utah desert, heading towards the Rockies, the Joe convoy makes it way to Fort Carson with the AWE Striker in the lead, the HAVOC and the SLAM towed by the APC. In the back of the APC, Grand Slam complains that he hasn't had a chance to get paid while out in the sticks. Tunnel Rat offers to loan him some money and Grand Slam doesn't understand how Tunnel Rat got paid. He shows him the new Army "credit card" that replaces dog tags and lets him forward his pay anywhere. He had the bank in Jerkwater Flats forward his pay there, and electronically updated the Army records bank at Fort Leonard Wood.

In Denver, Raptor raves that he knows everyone thinks he's crazy, but he wears the bird suit to make his birds feel more comfortable around him. Then, to show them how sane he is, he shows the Commander that can locate the Joe team at any time and hacks into the U.S. Army records computer systems at Fort Leonard Wood...

Meanwhile, the Joe convoy is in the foothills of the Rockies. Hawk, atop the HAVOC, calls the vehicles to a halt. They're set to rendezvous with the new Joe survival specialist, Outback. He was dropped off 600 miles on the other side of the mountains with a ruck sack full of equipment for field testing. While scanning the mountains, a bright light shines into Hawk's binoculars. It's Outback, signalling with morse code that the Joes should stay put and not come up the mountain. Later, Outback arrives and explains that conditions are perfect for avalanches in the mountains, and one occurs in the distance as he speaks. Outback climbs up on the HAVOC and lays down using his pack as a pillow as the convoy turns around to find an alternate route. Hawk asks him about the equipment and foods he was supposed to test. "Sir, with all due respect, all of that crummy stuff fell apart after the first week and that freeze-dried stuff was just plain inedible...I've been living off the land, and living good!"

On the other side of the mountain, Fred and Cobra Commander (in civilian clothes) are driving in Fred's pickup truck, arguing about whether or not Raptor's hacking has found the Joes, while Raptor and his hawks follow in his car. Fred explains that according to Raptor's hacking, a soldier named Nicky Lee was assigned to the Chaplains Assistants Motor Pool at Fort Wadsworth, but was transferred about the time of the fall of the Pit. He had paycheck rerouted to Jerkwater Flats, Utah, where a gas station filed army vouchers for large amounts of diesel fuel. Fred says, "I think that odds are good that a G.I. Joe convoy is en route from Jerkwater Flats Utah to Fort Carson, don't you?"

Back in Denver, Billy leaves Fred's garage and starts exploring in the alley outside. He hears voices from the seemingly abandoned warehouse next door. He peers inside to see martial arts class being taught by a black instructor. Watching the students exercising begins to jog Billy's memory. "I remember... St- Sto- Stor- Storm-Shadow... I remember."

Back in the mountains, emergency vehicles are stopping traffic due to an avalanche up ahead. A police officer explains the situation to Fred and the Commander and tells them there are three alternate routes over the mountains. As they start to drive away, Raptor signals them that they should follow him. A short time later, they all meet atop a ridge overlooking the valley. The Commander puts on his battle armor while Raptor attaches a model of a Joe vehicle to a rope and swings it over his head to show his hawks what to hunt for. He then tags them different colors to show which route they'll fly over. While the hawks hunt for the Joes, Fred unloads his attack vehicle from the back of his truck -- the Cobra Pogo assault pod.

Back in Denver, the martial arts class lets out. Billy crouches over the open door and flips inside, climbing on the pipes that hang from the ceiling. He overhears two students speaking, one of whom mentions that their teacher, "Sensei Moore", is blind. As the students leave, Billy moves on to the next room where Sensei Moore sits meditating. Billy is surprised when the bland man says, "Enter, ninja... and be at peace."

In the Rockies, a small flock of hawks descend on the Joe convoy and tear the camouflage tarp off of the APC. As the birds fly off with scraps of the tarp, Outback tells Hawk that the birds not native to the area. The restraining ties on their legs indicate they're trained to hunt. Back on the ridge, the birds return to Raptor and bring the scraps of canvas. The Commander recognizes the Joes' camo pattern. Fred prepares the Pogo, but the Commander pushes him aside and climbs aboard. The Pogo takes off into the air and soon comes upon the convoy. The Joes don't know what to make of the vehicle, but Hawk does: "It's got Cobra sigils painted on it and it's shooting at us. I'm declaring open season on it!" The Joes open fire from their various vehicles, but the Pogo is too fast and maneuverable, flying and changing directions at high speeds. Outback leaps from the HAVOC to the APC, which is towing the SLAM. He makes his way to the vehicle and opens fire as the convoy heads inside a tunnel. Cobra Commander launches the Pogo over the mountain and lands on the other side of the tunnel and heads straight for the Joes. The SLAM can't get at him since it's now behind the APC. Clutch -- driving the APC -- tries to evade the Pogo's fire, but there's no room to maneuver in the tunnel. Finally, he speeds up enough to ride up the curve of the tunnel wall. The Pogo hits the APC and careens out of the tunnel and the Commander can't do anything about it thanks to the Pogo's thrusters failing.

In Denver, Billy meets the Blind Master. Though he claims he's not a "master". I am merely an adept... to meet a master, one must pass the test." A young Japanese woman appears and tells Billy that they've been waiting for him. She explains that they knew about Fred and who he made the battle armor for. They watched Fred "-- to find my father", Billy realizes. He asks what the test is and the woman shows him -- she swings her sword down, right towards Billy's head. He catches the blade between his hands. "I've had this test before," he says grabbing the woman's arm and pulling up her sleeve to reveal the tattoo of Storm Shadow and Snake-Eyes' ninja clan. "And the man who gave me the test had the same tattoo on his right arm!"

Cobra Commander lands the Pogo back on the ridge where Raptor and Fred are waiting. He tells them that the Pogo failed at a critical time, but that Raptor's method of finding the Joes is dependable. "Let's return to the garage. We have the future of Cobra to discuss."

Review: "Divergent Paths" is another story in which the Joes play supporting roles, while villains and recurring characters are the focus. The story also serves as an introduction to the next set of storylines for the series. Billy's discoveries will bring the ninjas back to the forefront and Cobra Commander's involvement with Fred will lead to big changes for the series. The test Billy undergoes was first seen when he trained with Storm Shadow, back in issue #42.

It's nice to see some old characters return, though very briefly. Grand Slam and Steeler show up, and it makes sense that the older Joes are testing out new equipment for the team. The battle scene here is short, but fast-paced and offers a quick burst of excitement in an issue that's mostly reserved for conversations and character scenes.

This is obviously one of those issues where Hasbro's requirements for toy introductions are met. Raptor, Outback, Tunnel Rat and Jinx (the Japanese woman) are introduced, along with the SLAM and the Cobra Pogo. When we first see Raptor, it's very funny to see the Commander's reaction to another "wacko" in a funny suit. It seems that making fun of silly new characters makes Larry Hama feel better when he has to introduce them. Even so, he seems to give a good reason for Raptor's suit, and the character does prove helpful. His method for finding the Joes, however, never really comes up again.

This issue will also mark the last time we see Cobra Commander in action for some time. The reason for that will become evident in issue #61...

First Appearances:

- G.I. Joe team: Outback, Tunnel Rat, Jinx (unnamed)

- Cobra: Raptor
- Recurring Characters: Blind Master
- G.I. Joe Vehicles: SLAM anti-aircraft artillery
- Cobra Vehicles: POGO assault pod

Reprinted in:

- The Transformers (UK) #220-224 (June 3rd - July 1st, 1989). A Marvel UK series that began reprinting Action Force stories after the end of that series. These issues reprint this story in five 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.