

MC 063: Going Under

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G.I. JOE #63

Going Under

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Summary: On a beach on "the now peaceful Caribbean Island of Grenada", Flint and Lady Jaye play in the surf, while Scarlett and Snake-Eyes sit under a beach umbrella. Snake-Eyes has a small portable television and is watching the latest news report on the Joes recently arrested in Borovia. "Let it rest, Snake-Eyes," Scarlett says. "We're supposed to be on leave." The TV reporter says that the State Department disputes the claim that the leader of the commandos in Borovia is actually Lonzo Wilkinson -- Stalker. Snake-Eyes continues to watch despite Scarlett's wishes. Flint and Lady Jaye approach and Flint tells Scarlett that she's "gotta get ol' 'Grumpy' to lighten up!" He says that they've been ordered to not attempt any rescue missions and that Stalker and the others are "big boys". They know what they were getting into when the mission began. Snake-Eyes isn't happy with Flint's comments, surprising Flint at how expressive Snake-Eyes' rubber mask can be. Scarlett asks the other couple to let Snake-Eyes sort things out on his own. "He and Stalker go back a long ways together..."

At Borovia's Gulag 23, the prisoners line up to be chosen for work details. Among them are Stalker, Snow Job and Quick Kick. Sergeant Mosiev and Corporal Olga size up the men and choose a logging crew that includes Stalker. As the loggers climb into a truck, the rest are assigned to the "cultural folk artifacts" detail -- sewing little "misha bears": stuffed bear toys that are bought by foreigners, believing them to be peasant crafts. After they're reminded that if anyone shirks his work, the whole group is beaten. The guards put Snow Job and Quick Kick at a table with Boris, a man known to inform on prisoners who had made plans to escape. In the mountains, Stalker and the logging crew are being worked like animals. Sgt. Mosiev calls Stalker "Wilkinson", explaining that he would welcome an escape attempt. He holds the national gold medal for long distance rifle, and promises that he'll give Stalker a sporting chance. "I would hold my fire until you had reached the 300 meter mark." Stalker is not amused, but says nothing.

At the Presidio Army base in San Francisco, Jinx brings Billy to the Defense Language Center, where service attend courses by the best linguists in the country. Billy doesn't know what this has to do with ninja training. She seats him at a cubicle in the language lab, explaining that ninjas must be fluent in many languages. Billy, annoyed, asks why he has yet to meet any Joes. "You ask a lot of questions, Billy," Jinx observes. "You don't give me a lot of answers, Jinx." On a hillside not far away, Raptor keeps close watch on the building. Inside, Billy repeats the foreign phrases coming from a tape recorder, obviously bored. Suddenly, the voice on the tape tells him to hold on to his seat. The desk and the entire cubicle lower beneath the floor like an elevator. At the bottom, he's met by three men and one dog. "Hello, Billy. I'm Hawk and this is Law and his dog Order. The fellow with the loud shirt is Chuckles. We've been waiting a long time to meet you... We want to talk about your future!"

A short time later in downtown San Francisco, Raptor tries to call Fred's garage in Denver on a pay phone. But Fred doesn't answer. He's just driving away in his pick-up truck, carrying something covered in a tarp. "Time to take the bull by the horns, Fred," he says aloud to himself. "Time to hammer out my own destiny! Time to cash in all the chips and go for broke!" Next to him is a map to Galveston, Texas, on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

Meanwhile, in the middle of the desert in Utah, at a small Army base made up of nothing more than three quonset huts, a large group of Joes bursts out of the middle hut, led by Roadblock. Holding a football, he tells the Joes that they've been cooped up underground for too long. "We're gonna choose up some sides and play some two-hand touch!" As they choose teams, they don't know that they're being photographed by Cobra's spy satellite. Dr. Mindbender later shows the photos to Serpentor on Cobra Island. He points out that more Joes came out of the hut than can be comfortably quartered there, and more came out than were seen to have entered it. An earlier batch of photos shows tracks from a huge vehicle, which seem to come to an empty spot in the desert and disappear. "I think the Joes in Utah are very busy at night when the satellite can't see them," Serpentor says. They are interrupted by a Techno-Viper with another batch of photos who explains that "There now appears to be a building in San Francisco's Presidio where visitors enter and don't come out!"

Back in Grenada, the Joe couples are walking down a dirt path past an airfield, on their way back to their hotel. They

encounter a black, blind man with an island accent. He asks if they can help him find his way to their airfield. Flint offers his arm, but he grabs Snake-Eyes' instead and suggests they cut across through a field of tall grass. Lady Jaye and Flint stay behind while Scarlett joins Snake-Eyes and the blind man. As they walk off, Flint says that there's something familiar about the view. Lady Jaye says that he probably remembers it from news reports when the Army airborne had a major operation at the airport. Flint remembers, then realizes what they were doing. He notices a sign has fallen over into the grass. He rushes to uncover the sign saying that they had been using special equipment like metal detectors. The sign reads: DANGER - MINES. Flint shouts, "Snake-Eyes! Scarlett!!! Stop!! That field is mined!!!" Then, there's a large explosion as Flint dives to the ground, taking Lady Jaye with him. They look out and only see a smoking crater. Lady Jaye is in disbelief and starts to run into the field before Flint nearly tackles her. "We don't know how many more are out there..."

In San Francisco, Billy finishes telling Hawk his story, but adds, "I won't tell you anything against my father. I owe him that much." Hawk says that he won't ask, but he wants Billy to tell some parts of his story again. He takes him in the other room, where Storm Shadow and Ripcord are waiting. Storm Shadow says he's sorry about Billy's eye and leg, but Billy shrugs it off. "I suppose I know what you both want to know about. What happened to the Soft Master and Candy, sometimes known as Bongo the Balloon Bear? They both died on the highway outside of Springfield..."

Back in Borovia, night has fallen and the logging detail gets back just in time for "evening slops". After Stalker gets his "dinner", he sits down with Snow Job and Quick Kick. Stalker starts to talk about how three men could get lost in the mountains where he was working. Before he goes on about a possible escape plan, Snow Job stops him, eyeing Boris the "stoolie" sitting at the end of their table. But it's too late. Boris shouts, "Gaurds! They are plotting in secret American slang! This one!" He points to Snow Job and the guards rush over and start to drag him away. Stalker starts to get up, but Snow Job tells him to stay calm. "I can take whatever they dish out." Sergeant Mosiev arrives and tells the half-standing Stalker, "You were not given permission to rise." Mosiev scolds him and Quick Kick calms Stalker. "If you move so much as an inch," a grinning Mosiev adds, "you friend will be shot instead of beaten!" The Sergeant then walks off, whistling. After they are alone again, Stalker sits and glares at Boris. "You can't blame me!" the sickly prisoner shouts. "We do what we must to survive! There is no escape. There is no hope. Accept that and make it easier on yourselves!"

That night, in Grenada, Flint and Lady Jaye (now in uniform) watch as ordnance teams search the field for mines. Flint is on the phone with Hawk, and says that they assure him that they already cleared the field and could never have missed a mine that big. He's also amazed that all three bodies disappeared; evaporated. The blast pattern was also inconsistent with any known explosives. Hawk stops and tells Storm Shadow, Ripcord and Billy the news from Flint. Storm Shadow asks to speak to Flint. "Somebody is mistaken. A ninja does not step on a landmine." He talks to Flint, who mentions the blind man. He seems to know who the man is, suggesting he was black and had a scar on his wrist. Flint is surprised, asking if Storm Shadow knew the man. "Yes. I thought he was dead all these years... But he was always good at that sort of thing. And I guess he still is!"

Meanwhile, Fred VII arrives in Galveston and heads to a marina. He parks his pickup truck and asks the first man he sees if he can rent his fishing boat. The Vietnamese man named Captain Minh agrees, as long as there's no drugs, no guns, no aliens. Fred smiles. "Nothing of the sort. I'm clean. Sort of..." He just needs a ride for himself and his cargo out into the middle of the Gulf. Minh suspiciously says, "Nothing out there. Just water...and Cobra Island." Fred smiles again. "Bingo."

To be continued...

Review: "Going Under" is a very full story, with all sorts of storylines happening at once as the plot thickens. As the issue before, there is little action here, with the most important story arcs get more complicated. Every thread is left unresolved, with a couple of mysteries unexplained.

A tropical beach is an unusual place to start an issue of G.I. Joe, but it starts here in Grenada, where a recent American operation there is fresh in people's minds. Here, we see the biggest acknowledgement of Flint and Lady Jaye's romantic relationship, with the couple joining the series other true "couple" Snakes-Eyes and Scarlett. They're even seen playing in the water. Flint is at his most insensitive when he calls Snake-Eyes "Grumpy" because he's upset over Stalker's arrest. He doesn't know their whole history, but he still acts rather stupid about it. The blind man is pretty obviously the Blind Master to anyone who's read the previous issues, though the fact that it's not mentioned adds to the mystery. The unexpected apparent deaths of Snake-Eyes and Scarlett seems shocking at first, but questions come up almost immediately. Even so, by the end of the issue, they haven't been seen, leaving a mystery until the next issue. In reality, it is learned that the Blind Master helped Snake-Eyes and Scarlett them fake their deaths so that they could conduct their own rescue in Borovia. The only questionable part of this plot is that in Scarlett's first conversation with Snake-Eyes, she speaks as if they don't have anything planned, though they must have. Grenada is the warm place with palm trees that Blind Master leaves for in issue #62.

The brutal life in the Gulag is focude on, and though we see no violence, the Sergeant is obviously sadistic and

unforgiving, welcoming Stalker's escape attempt simply so he can have the pleasure of shooting him. We never see any violence, but even the implication that Snow Job is dragged away and beaten is a dark concept for G.I. Joe. Snow Job and Quick Kick seem to be able to stay calm in their situation, but Stalker's pride almost makes it impossible for him to accept being treated so horribly. Looking at the series to date, Stalker reacts just as he should.

It's good to see that Larry Hama remembers that after Billy's accident, no one ever learned what happened to Candy or the Soft Master. Though Ripcord's brief appearance only reminds readers that his character was all but abandoned after being the focus of a handful of issues. Logically, though, when looking back at his accident in issue #42, Billy shouldn't have any idea what happened to the others. Even if he did, he certainly didn't have any knowledge of who Candy and the Soft Master were. In fact, the Joes had no way of knowing that Billy was present for their deaths.

Serpentor and Mindbender's discovery of what could be the new Joe headquarters is interesting, but unfortunately, it takes nine issues for this to be brought up again, though Serpentor will have his hands full with Fred after the next issue. The final mystery of the issue is simply, what's Fred up to? If you overlook the fact that Fred's prominence is because of the loss of Cobra Commander, Fred can be an interesting, fun, scheming character. After Fred essentially abandons Raptor, he is not seen for more than thirty issues! There's no explanation given for what happened to him or his surveillance of Jinx and Billy.

As the summary above makes obvious, this is a very rich story that leaves you wondering what will happen next and opens up a lot of new plotlines.

First Appearances:

- Cobra: Techno-Viper
- Recurring characters: Captain Minh

Reprinted in:

- The Transformers (UK) #258-261 (February 24th - March 17th, 1990). 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 7 (February 2010). A trade paperback collection from IDW Publishing. Includes issues #61-70.