

## MC 072: Stiletto

Sunday, 23 November 2008

G.I. JOE #72

Stiletto

Cover Date: June, 1988

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Summary: In Dr. Mindbender's laboratory on Cobra Island, the doctor is showing Serpentor his advanced Strato-Viper known as the Star-Viper. Serpentor has yet to be impressed and complains about the flies in the lab. The Star-Viper has a electromagnetic shunt to the right side of the brain which "can be used to heighten reflexes and direct-feed data." He is able to pilot the new Stiletto rocket-plane through G-stresses that would kill a normal pilot. Serpentor complains again, until Star-Viper snatches each fly out of the air in seconds. Mindbender then suggests using the Star-Viper to infiltrate the base in Utah suspected to be a G.I. Joe launch site. As Serpentor ponders using this to gain an advantage over Cobra Commander (Fred VII) and the Baroness, his two rivals are watching the entire meeting through a video camera in a BAT modified by Fred. The Baroness is worried about Serpentor finally making his move and revealing Fred's identity. Fred tells her not to worry and calm down. He takes off the Baroness' glasses and kisses her. The next day along the highway in Utah, the Star-Viper gets out of a tractor-trailer driven by a disguised BAT. He tells the android to drive up and down the road and reach the same spot at noon and midnight. The Star-Viper just stands and waits at a service station.

On Cobra Island, Croc Master and his crocodiles come upon a campfire out in the swamps. He remarks how clever the stranger must be, but it doesn't bother him if the stranger keeps to himself and feeds off little animals. As Croc Master leaves, a "trap door" beneath the fire lifts up to reveal Captain Minh, the man who was seemingly killed when Fred arrived on the island and destroyed his fishing vessel.

Back in Utah, two new Joe vehicles approach the service station where Star-Viper is hitch-hiking. The lead vehicle is the Mean Dog tank driven by Wild Card. In the next vehicle - the Desert Fox - Skidmark, the driver complains to his passenger, Windmill, that Wild Card is driving to fast. Windmill mentions that they'll be late arriving at their new station. As Skidmark annoys him with a safety lecture, Windmill turns back and notices that the hitch-hiker "just went and disappeared". The new Joes arrive at the gate of the Pit, guarded by Dusty and Gung-Ho. Skidmark annoys Gung-Ho by questioning the number of copies of his orders he needs to get past security, and asks him not to crease the pages, then Wild Card accidentally breaks Gung-Ho's pen while signing the log sheet. Gung-Ho yells at them all to get inside and "out of my sight!" Dusty comments that it'll be neat to see the new vehicles in action. Gung-Ho's still upset. "Dusty, anybody ever tell you you're too cheerful for your own good?" At the main building, Spirit leads the new Joes into the stairs beneath the trap door he's sitting on.

As the new Joes get a tour of Pit III from Iceberg, above ground the Star-Viper drops to the ground from underneath the Desert Fox. He quickly sneaks inside the main building. Back underground, the new Joes meet Mainframe who's installing top secret electronic "black boxes" onto the shuttle Defiant. It's a highly-advanced receiver/decoder/data-link that can read every signal from the military's spy satellites. Up in the rafters of the Pit, the Star-Viper listens, hidden in the shadows. Iceberg shows the new Joes to huge blast doors that lower the desert floor down to allow vehicles access above ground.

Night falls and the Star-Viper steals the black box from inside the shuttle and sets explosive charges on the blast doors. He heads upstairs and is surprised when he interrupts Flint and Lady Jaye kissing in the main building above. Flint and Lady Jaye move to stop the intruder, but his enhanced speed and reflexes are too much for them. He tosses them aside and smashes through a nearby window. He hops into the AWE Striker outside as Flint sounds the alarm. The Joes are woken up by the sound and rush to their stations. The black boxes are discovered missing and Joes man their vehicles. When the blast doors are opened, the charges go off, making them impossible to open. The new vehicles are still above ground and the new Joes rush upstairs with Tunnel Rat. Flint and Lady Jaye join them in the Mean Dog and both new vehicles chase after the Star-Viper. In the AWE Striker, he attaches a small device to the shunt in his forehead and starts easily dodging everything the Joes fire at him. He finds the BAT still driving along the road, and pulls up alongside the truck. Wedging something in the AWE Striker's gas pedal, he leaps onto the truck and climbs inside the trailer. Wild Card prepares to fire his rockets at the truck as the trailer opens up to reveal the Stiletto rocket plane. The truck is destroyed, but the Star-Viper escapes in the plane. All that remains is the truck's wreckage and the Star-Viper's AC/DC t-shirt. "He also left us a load of problems," Flint says. "Even if that anti-tamper device works, the honchos at the Pentagon are not

going to be happy about their secret, expensive toy going missing!"

TO BE CONTINUED

Review: Though it's not obvious without reading later issues, "Stiletto" is actually the beginning of the Cobra civil war storyline that will last for six more issues. The Star-Viper's theft indirectly leads to the war, and the black box he stole is what gets the Joes involved. The issue gives us a closer look at the Pit III and also serves as one of the comic's "new characters and vehicles" issues. Of the three new Joes, only Wild Card is featured in later stories, mostly as comic relief. Unfortunately, Windmill and Skidmark look like they could be fun characters, despite some pretty bad code names. The colorist even tones down their mostly-flourescent action figure colors. Skidmark appears once or twice more, while Windmill -- whose vehicle isn't seen 'til much later -- only makes one more brief appearance. Star-Viper appears as an individual character as opposed to being one of many generic soldiers as the "Viper" suggests. His enhanced abilities intended for high-altitude flying are used well on the ground. Still, its hard to believe he could've climbed up underneath the Desert Fox while it was still moving. His infiltration afterward seems too easy as well. I would think any Army base would have more security then guards at the main gate.

Star-Viper's escape ends up being a funny scene when he stumbles upon Flint and Lady Jaye kissing. It seems a little immature for them to be sneaking off at night like that, but Flint seems sufficiently embarrassed, not explaining the scene to the other Joes, only saying they both "want a piece of" the Star-Viper. The final chase scene is exciting enough and Flint's ominous words build up suspense to see what happens next issue. That issue picks up the morning after "Stiletto".

The issue gives the first good look at the Pit III, and it makes a reader wonder why Marvel never published any floor plans of the headquarters like they did for Pit I and II. The new "earth ramp" for bringing vehicles above ground is a clever addition and better explains how the shuttle complex and other vehicles travel above and below ground.

First Appearances:

- G.I. Joe team: Skidmark, Wild Card, Windmill
- Cobra: Star-Viper
- G.I. Joe vehicles: Mean Dog attack vehicle, Desert Fox jeep
- Cobra vehicles: Stellar Stiletto rocket fighter

Reprinted in:

- The Transformers (UK) #294-297 (November 3rd - 24th, 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 8 (May 2010). A trade paperback collection from IDW Publishing. Includes issues #71-80.