

MC 076: All's Fair

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G.I. JOE #76

All's Fair

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Script: Larry Hama
Pencils: Ron Wagner
Inks: Fred Fredericks
Colors: Bob Sharen
Lettering: Rick Parker

Editor: Bobbie Chase
Editor-in-chief: Tom DeFalco

Summary: In the rain, outside of the flight control tower on Cobra Island, Destro receives a report from his Iron Grenadier Sergeant Major. Serpenter and the Joes are retreating to the Northeast, while Cobra Commander (Fred VII) heads Northwest. Both are likely heading for their own headquarters. Below the drainage grate Destro stands on, Falcon is listening to the conversation. Below, his team and Captain Minh are looking for a way out of the flooding drainage system. Captain Minh suggest the sluice tunnel, which is a tight squeeze. Tunnel Rat heads in first, with his flashlight in his teeth. He's not happy. "I hate thith!" They close the grate behind them just before Destro's men pass by, ignoring the sluice tunnel.

Cobra Commander -- Fred -- and his troops arrive at his Citadel headquarters as Zartan argues with him about what to do next. Zartan wants to attack Serpenter and the Joes before they can reach Serpenter's HQ and resupply. Fred mentions they should attack Serpenter to rescue the Baroness. He values her advice "-- among other things." Zarana can't believe the Commander is worrying about "that four-eyed bimbo" in the midst of the civil war. Fred remembers he had a video camera installed in one of Serpenter's BATs to spy on him.

Meanwhile, Serpenter and his forces march through the rain, with the Baroness still tied to the front of Serpenter's HISS tank. Dr. Mindbender notes a modified BAT with a video camera, now exposed due to much of its head being blown off. He didn't know Serpenter had installed cameras in any BATs. Serpenter says he didn't and destroys the camera with his pistol. At the rear of Serpenter's column -- where the G.I. Joe forces are marching -- Hawk radios the U.S.S. Flagg and calls for reinforcements, though the airfield is now in unfriendly hands. Keel-Haul decides to send reinforcements by sea, since the weather is too bad for air insertion, anyway. They send the old LCT (Landing Craft Tank), carrying several Joes and armored vehicles. They also send in the Stealth Fighter -- flown by a pilot whose name no one can ever remember -- to knock out Cobra's radar.

Back in the sluice tunnels, Tunnel Rat is complaining as the water gets higher. Falcon tells him to stop being a pessimist, and that it can't get much worse. Of course, it does when a "tidal wave" of rats comes down the tunnel and right at them. Dial-Tone comments that now it can't get any worse. At the drainage grate above, the Iron Grenadier's cook dumps a barrel-full of leftover slops down the drain...

Out in the Gulf, Torpedo steers the LCT through the terrible weather while Psyche-Out and Recondo plan to land and come through the marshlands to hit Cobra Commander's troops, leaving them no place to go but directly into Destro's forces. Back on the island, Hawk informs Serpenter of the reinforcements. Serpenter asks how they'll get past coastal radar. Clutch speaks up, "Don't sweat the small stuff!"

At Cobra Commander's HQ, Fred finds the BAT spy camera no longer transmitting. Zartan suggests Fred needs to beef up their defenses, reminding him that their warning systems aren't foolproof and they weren't designed to track armies moving right on the island. Out in the Gulf, the Stealth pilot easily takes out the "tracked submarines" (Cobra BUGGs) guarding the coastline, then sneaks in under the radar to destroy the early warning systems Fred and Zartan were arguing about. Just then, Serpenter's forces start to attack the Citadel. Fred orders troops to be pulled from their west defenses, but Zartan disagrees. When Fred says that no one would attack through the marshes, Zartan runs off, frustrated. "I think you had better rescue the Baroness. At least you listen to her advice!"

The LCT arrives on the western shore and the group of armored vehicles head through the marshes, made easier by a trail Croc Master blazed for them. Psyche-Out radios Hawk, who tells him that he couldn't hold Serpenter back from attack without waiting for the reinforcements. At the head of the attack, atop their HISS tank, Mindbender tells Serpenter that he's exposing himself needlessly on the front line, but the Cobra emperor says the troops won't respect him if he doesn't share their danger. Psyche-Out's team of reinforcements speed on to the battle.

Meanwhile, Falcon's team has reached the end of the sluice tunnels, just under a manhole leading to the airfield. When

they climb out, they find Destro's forces have abandoned the airfield and headed North, where the battle is raging.

At Cobra Commander's western defenses, the Joe reinforcements easily defeat the remaining defenders, including the Dreadnoks. They take them all prisoner and press on, while Ripper notices that Zarana's disappeared. The Joes spot Destro's forces spreading out to prepare to attack. Zarana arrives at the Citadel with news of the Joes breaking through. Fred is panicked, not knowing what to do, and is even more worried when he hears Destro is coming. Zartan asks, "Do I have to do everything around here?" He hops on top of an overturned tank, pulls out his bow and fires an arrow into the air. As Serpentor leads the assault, he's reminded of the Battle of Hastings, when the king of the Saxons was killed by an arrow. At that moment, Zartan's arrow hits its mark -- Serpentor's head! The Cobra emperor slumps over in his turret, dead. Mindbender immediately jumps from the tank and runs towards Fred and Zartan, shouting about making a deal, bringing a stop to the shooting. Hawk can't believe it. "Did this guy crawl out from under a wet rock or what?" Mindbender offers to join forces with "the Commander" to push Destro off the island. As the two men shake hands, Hawk and Zartan look on, disgusted. Destro arrives and says he's had enough fighting. He offers to leave if they give him the Baroness. "No problem!" Fred agrees. "Is that all?" As Mindbender cuts the Baroness down from Serpentor's HISS tank, he tells Hawk that he and the Joes can get off the island now, since their deal was with the late Serpentor.

Off to the South, Falcon's team is walking towards the battlefield when Destro's column rolls by. They get out of sight, but Destro calls to them, "You can pack up and go home! It's over!" The Sergeant Major tells Destro, "That was some campaign! We hardly fired a shot, and we got what we started out to get!" Destro, holding the unconscious Baroness, smiles. "That's the right way to do it!"

TO BE CONTINUED

Review: "All's Fair" is an exciting end to the Cobra Island war storyline. It's wrapped up fairly quickly, and surprisingly. The issue continues the military feel of the entire story, with battles that make some tactical sense. The Joes slogging through the mud and rain seems like something out of an old World War II epic. It's also a fast-paced story, with little or no time happening between scenes. This helps show how quickly things go badly for Fred's forces. It also shows that Fred's ability to lead has its limits.

The biggest shock is the sudden death of Serpentor. There is very little actual killing in the series, and almost never is a major character killed. For many fans, Serpentor is a hated character, though Larry Hama wrote him into an interesting character even if he disappeared from the series for long stretches. His death is partly due to his willingness to be in the thick of the battle, leading his troops. This was something seen in his first appearances. Larry Hama was not very fond of the Serpentor character, and he goes back to some of his favorite story elements to kill him. Zartan's an obvious favorite of Hama's and his method of killing goes back to the death of the Hard Master and Zartan's skill with a bow. Serpentor's return will be hinted at once or twice in the series, but for the most part it's the last we hear about him.

We learn that Destro's supposed reason behind his invasion is to retrieve the Baroness. That may seem like Destro's gone overboard to get her back, but in the next issue, he'll admit that it was also an opportunity to test out his new Iron Grenadier army.

The story also brings us back to the old theme of the fighting soldier against the deal-makers of the world. The battle is quickly forgotten when the people in charge make a quick deal. And once again, the Joes find themselves both winning and losing a major battle. In fact, nearly every major Joe battle story seems to only be half a victory. But this is still part of Larry Hama's attitude that no one really wins in war. The biggest story of the Joes versus their own leaders starts in the next issue, when the aftermath of the war focuses on a group that plagues the Joes all the way into their new series from Devil's Due.

First Appearances:

- G.I. Joe team: Stealth Pilot (Ghost-Rider)
- Cobra: Secto-Viper (BUGG Driver)
- G.I. Joe vehicles: Bridgelayer, Phantom X-19 Stealth fighter, Rolling Thunder, Slugger
- Cobra vehicles: BUGG submarine

Reprinted in:

- A version of the issue was released by Hasbro in 2005, packaged with action figures of Flint, Hawk, and Tunnel Rat, as seen in this issue. All references to Marvel Comics were removed.
- Classic G.I. JOE: Volume 8 (May 2010). A trade paperback collection from IDW Publishing. Includes issues #71-80.