

MC 078: Payback!

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G.I. JOE #78

Payback!

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Summary: At Dulles airport in Washington, DC, Storm Shadow, Jinx and Billy step off a plane from San Francisco and are quickly surrounded by federal agents from the Domestic Operations Agency. Storm Shadow recognizes them because they have the lowest clothing allowance and they also "stooge for" General Malthus. The ninjas can't risk a firefight in a crowded airport and surrender. The agents can't believe the ninjas' arrogance in thinking they could come to Washington and rescue their "traitor boss", Hawk. As the handcuffed prisoners are lead outside, a bright yellow car with flames painted on it pulls up, driven by Rock & Roll. Storm Shadow and the others quickly take out the DOA agents even while handcuffed and get in the car. The agents put a call out for the conspicuously painted car and chase after them. Rock & Roll swerves into a nearby car wash where the car's water-based paint washes away. When the car comes out the other side, it looks like a military police car. The Joes make their escape.

At a hospital somewhere in Virginia, General Malthus yells at a DOA agent through a telephone, angrily telling him to get the Joes. Senator Hegel tells Malthus that it's going to be very hard for them to shift the blame for "the Cobra Island fiasco" onto Hawk and General Hollingsworth if half the G.I. Joe team is running around loose. Malthus disagrees, and thinks that they will just enhance their traitor scenario. He adds that he contracted the operation's weapons and supplies outside ordinary channels. In a nearby room, Hawk and Hollingsworth sit handcuffed to hospital beds.

The Joes' MP cruiser arrives at Dr. Burkhart's house in Georgetown. A number of Joes led by Roadblock are already there, including the former Joe, Grunt and his girlfriend Lola.

Somewhere in the Atlantic, Destro's personal helicopter lifts off from his cruise ship. As the Baroness takes the controls, she asks why Destro wants to get involved with the Joes' problems. He puts on a TV news broadcast of Malthus blaming Hawk and Hollingsworth. Destro's disgusted by Malthus and Hegel's cover-up, but explains his real motivation for getting involved is Hawk. "Sometimes, the soldiers you respect the most are on the wrong side!"

Back at Dr. Burkhart's, the Roadblock explains how he tried to contact any Joe who hadn't been arrested after the Cobra Island civil war. Jinx reports that she accessed a government central payroll computer and found a number of DOA paychecks being transferred to St. Lo's Infirmary in Virginia. The Joes assume that's where the Generals are being held and prepare to rescue them. Roadblock explains that they intend to enter the hospital, not attack it, and carry their weapons only as a show of force. He hopes they won't have to fire a shot. Outside, a telephone truck full of Joes and being driven by Dusty and Cover Girl is waiting to leave.

At St. Lo's, Hegel offers Hawk and Hollingsworth the chance to make a false confession "for the good of the country", exonerating Malthus and the Senator. He even offers to give them an off-the-books "pension" if they do so. The Generals refuse and Malthus is content to let them rot in prison. Just then, a bus arrives carrying armed DOA agents disguised as hospital personnel. Hegel also invited a news crew, wanting documentation portraying the Joes renegade commandos staging an attack on a hospital. Meanwhile, the Joes, along with Burkhart, head for the hospital. At St. Lo's, Hawk and Hollingsworth realize the hospital is now staffed with DOA agents. Hawk now knows that they're being used as bait to lure the Joes into a trap. Outside the hospital, the Joes arrive. They, too, are dressed as hospital staff, but their special sunglasses can pick up an invisible dye on each other's clothing, clearly showing who the Joes are. Storm Shadow and the ninjas scale the outside wall of the hospital to attack the DOA communications center on the top floor, sending Malthus and Hegel running.

In the main lobby, TV reporters recognize "human rights advocate, Dr. Adele Burkhart" arriving with an armed escort. Malthus hadn't expected Burkhart's involvement complicating matters. Burkhart argues with one of the "doctors" and demands to see Hawk and Hollingsworth to make certain they're in good health and are being treated fairly. As the argument continues in front of live TV cameras, the disguised Joes begin to quietly force DOA agents to drop their weapons. One of the agents starts getting worried that the Joes will rescue the Generals without firing a shot, and gets the shooting started. Two Joes are wounded and the others return fire. An outraged Burkhart stands amidst the firefight,

demanding that they stop shooting. "I am a non-combatant!" As Roadblock gets her under cover, Hawk and Hollingsworth surprise their distracted guards by knocking them out with some well-placed kicks, even while handcuffed. They eventually get loose as Malthus and his agents arrive. They open fire, while Hawk and Hollingsworth take cover and return fire. Soon, the other Joes arrive along with the camera crew. Malthus tosses a grenade inside, leaving a smoking hole where the room's window used to be. Everyone rushes inside to see that the Generals took cover under two hospital beds and survived. Just then, Destro's chopper shows up outside the window. Destro climbs inside, asking for Malthus, and on live television, he gives the General his receipt for the purchase of weapons and supplies for the Cobra Island operation. "Strange purchase order. The order was paid through a special services fund. Supposedly for basketballs. It couldn't be that you didn't want the order to show up in the official records, could it? Hmmm?"

THE END

Review: The Joes' unexpected fight against corrupt officials continues. While Cobra has nothing to do with the story, it remains interesting, especially since it's such a change of pace for the series. It continues the theme of honorable soldiers dealing with dishonorable politicians. It's also just fun to see the Joes go rogue, all knowing that Hawk would never take on an authorized invasion. Many of the Joes involved in the mission either haven't seen much action in the series lately, or were simply not included in the Cobra civil war story. It's nice to see Grunt return to help the Joes even though he's no longer in the Army. This will be his last appearance for several years. Roadblock is definitely in command here, whether or not he outranks the others or holds any commanding position on the team. But, he's probably in charge because he's a favorite character of Larry Hama and the fans.

Hama's use of Burkhart seems smarter than before, and she appears much more likeable here. In the past she was more of a short-sighted, stubborn activist. Here, she seems very willing to welcome the Joes into her house no matter the consequences. She's brave enough to be involved in the rescue, aware of her public image. She's a funnier character here, too, like when we learn that she drives a motorcycle. Another bit of humor comes from her being so outraged that she's being shot at that she demands the shooting stops, not believing the agents would dare shoot her.

The story shows us the connection between the media and politics, something not really used in the series before. Malthus and Hegel try to manipulate the media to their advantage, even welcoming the Joes' rescue so that they can paint them as rogue commandos. Burkhart turns it around, knowing that her fame as a peace activist will call Malthus' integrity into question. The presence of a television camera also insures Malthus' downfall when Destro reveals his guilt to an audience. This scene is the last of the issue, and is one of the best. The reader is given enough credit to just assume Malthus is ruined without having it spelled out. Many issues later, we'll learn that Malthus was sent to prison, while Senator Hegel was cleared of any wrongdoing. Hegel is a strange character, because we never really learn how he's connected to Malthus or the Cobra Island operation. A little more background on him could have improved the story.

"Payback!" turns out to be a fun, smart story that works well despite the lack of the Joes' usual enemy. The usual villains will return in the next issue.

First Appearances:

- Recurring characters: Senator Hegel

Reprinted in:

- G.I. JOE: Best Worst of Destro (June 2009). Part of a series of reprints from IDW. Also includes issues #11, 14, 33, 57 and 87.

- Classic G.I. JOE: Volume 8 (May 2010). A trade paperback collection from IDW Publishing. Includes issues #71-80.