

G.I. Joe Yearbook 4

Sunday, 23 November 2008

G.I. JOE Yearbook #4

Cover Date: February, 1988

Trade-Offs

Writer: Larry Hama

Artist: Herb Trimpe
Summary: Six miles off the coast of Cobra Island in the Gulf of Mexico, a Russian submarine is offloading a raft with October Guard members Schrage and Stormavik on board when they spot the G.I. Joe WHALE hovercraft approaching. On the hovercraft Shipwreck reports the Russian sub and Cutter orders a couple of salvos fired across its bow and stern. The Russian sub dives beneath the surface, leaving the two October Guardsmen on their own. The motor on their raft suddenly dies and Stormavik guesses it a piece of seaweed. The Joe SEALs Wet Suit and Torpedo pop up from underwater and prove it wasn't seaweed.

Just off the coast of Cobra Island, another raft carrying Colonel Brekhov, Daina and Horrorshow approach the beach as the Colonel sees his other team members captured by the Joes. Daina complains that she can't do her share of paddling because Horrorshow is weighing down his side of the boat. Brekhov scolds her for going against party doctrine and lets her bury the raft while Brekhov and Horrorshow "stand security watch". Diana points out that their security watch seems to consist of eating and smoking, then notices another raft that was buried years ago, proving others think the beach is a good place to land a covert mission. Horrorshow thinks that's a good reason to quickly move inland.

The WHALE now heads towards the island as Cutter radios Hawk with a status report. He reports that Stormavik and Schrage were carrying mountaineering equipment sans rope. He guesses where the men with the ropes might be and spots Brekhov's team heading inland through his binoculars.

In the swamps of Cobra Island, Croc Master is floating in the water and notices that someone is disturbing the swamps and rounds up his pet alligators, heading off to find the intruders. Nearby, the October Guardsmen notice the sound of kettle drums in the distance. The source is Cobra's amphitheater at the other end of the swamp. A Cobra rally is being held, with all the "citizens" of the island in attendance. Cobra's high command is introduced and "Cobra Commander" (still Fred VII in disguise) begins to speak. His speech is very short, prompting the Baroness to ask to speak to Fred in private.

Back in the swamp, the October Guard continues toward the amphitheater. Suddenly, an alligator rises out of the water and attacks Horrorshow. Daina sees that they're everywhere, but Brekhov stops her from shooting because the noise will announce their presence. "Rifle butts and bayonets, only!" Hidden in the tall grass, Croc Master mutters, "This shouldn't take too long".

On the balcony at the rear of the amphitheater, the Baroness tells Fred that she didn't help him pose as Cobra Commander "just to pass the time." She wants a return on her investment. She asked what happened to speech she wrote for Fred. "That speech was a snoozer," he says as he removes his helmet. Instead of memorizing it, he built a spare suit of body armor. He explains that the troops don't want a long-winded speech, especially after the major setback in Frusenland (issue #68). "Save the speeches for a victory." The Baroness asks what she's going to do with him. Fred answers, "How's this for starters?" and kisses her.

As Cobra's fireworks display begins, Brekhov orders his team to start shooting the alligators now that the sound of their guns will be masked by the fireworks. The numerous 'gators continue to overrun the Soviets until Horrorshow tosses his bag full of cooked chicken at the animals. He starts to run, but can't explain why. Brekhov and Daina follow wondering why Horrorshow won't speak. The big Russian then spits out a mouthful of grenade pins. Behind them in the distance, alligators start exploding. Croc Master watches angrily. "Ohhhh, they shouldn't have done that!"

Just off the coast of the island, Deep Six's SHARC submarine surfaces with Torpedo and Wet Suit in tow. The Joes change into their camouflage gear and head off toward the fireworks in the distance.

Back at the amphitheater, the Baroness interrupts she and Fred's kissing when she notices a flash of light in the swamp. Fred tells her Croc Master and his carnivorous alligators will take care of it. The Baroness heads off to check it out anyway. In the bushes just below the balcony, Serpentor, Dr. Mindbender and a Battle Android Trooper are spying on Fred and now know he's an imposter and the Baroness is in on it. Serpentor decides to wait and "see how we can turn this to our advantage."

Meanwhile, the October Guard are just approaching the amphitheater when the Baroness atop a HISS tank leads an armor column out into the swamp. The Russians take cover in the grass while Croc Master approaches them from behind. At the same time, Torpedo and Wet Suit are right behind Croc Master. The Cobra -- smelling the Joes camo paint -- sends back one of his gators after them. Torpedo catches a glimpse of "a guy in a green camo suit...crawling back towards us on all fours."

Back on the balcony, Fred is musing that kissing the Baroness was like kissing "a dead mackerel", but quiets down when the BAT sneaks up behind him and knocks him out. Serpentor and Mindbender then remove Fred's armor and puts it on the BAT.

When Torpedo heads off to take out "the guy", he's surprised to find a gator. After a short struggle, Torpedo tosses a thermite grenade into the gator's mouth and blows it up.

On the balcony, Mindbender puts the BAT on "standby mode" and is about to rig up a voice synthesizer when the October Guard climb onto the balcony and knocks everyone out. Wet Suit watches through binoculars and realizes that the Russians are trying to kidnap Cobra Commander. The Croc Master nearly gets the drop on him, but Torpedo arrives and knocks him out with the butt of his rifle. The Joes then decide that they'll let the October Guard perform the difficult task of getting away with the Commander and then snatch him for themselves.

Back on the balcony, Brekhov believes the BAT on standby mode is an unconscious Cobra Commander. Horrorshow lifts "the Commander" on his back and follows the others down from the balcony. He jumps instead of using a rope and lands right on top of an alligator. The animal bites the Russian's back pack off and Horrorshow tries to get it back. When he pulls it free, he shouts, "The detonator pin came loose!" He picks up the Cobra Commander BAT and runs right past the two Joe SEALs who fortunately recognize the Russian word for "detonator pin" and run, too. The Joes and the Guardsmen run back towards the swamp and run right into the Baroness' HISS tanks. While, she orders them all to surrender, Brekhov recognizes the two Joes and they quickly make a temporary truce and start firing on the HISS drivers. The Baroness orders her men to hold their fire when she sees "Cobra Commander". The temporary allies rush to the waterfront where the Russians steal a Mamba helicopter and the two Joes take to sea in a small attack boat. A Cobra hydrofoil chases after the Mamba, and the chase is noticed by Serpentor and Mindbender, just regaining consciousness. Serpentor remotely reactivates the BAT in "berserker mode". The BAT awakens and, to the surprise of the October Guard, starts tearing apart the cockpit. After shattering the canopy, the BAT stands up and gets cut to pieces by the spinning rotors. As the Mamba goes down, the Baroness, aboard the hydrofoil catches up the Joes and Russians, but discovers the WHALE and the Soviet sub and the Cobras all retreat.

Minutes later, after the two rival teams pick up their men, the WHALE comes up alongside the Russian sub which has the Mamba lifted up by a crane. Cutter suggests they make a trade: the Russians give up the 'copter and the Joes give back Schrage and Stormavik. Brekhov drops the Mamba and Cutter kicks Stormavik and Schrage overboard. "Looks like everyone came out even on this one!"

The Baroness arrives at the amphitheater to inform Serpentor that Cobra Commander is dead. Before Serpentor can finish his half-hearted attempt to sound upset, Fred appears, now wearing his spare set of armor. Serpentor says he's glad to see the Commander survived. Fred thanks him. "Your little ruse of substituting a BAT for the real Cobra Commander has saved the day! I'm sure the troops will be touched by your loyalty!" The Baroness can't keep from smiling. "I'm sure they will!"

Review: "Trade-Offs" is often a fun story, with not much of a plot. The most significant thing in the story is that Serpentor and Dr. Mindbender are now certain that Cobra Commander is only an imposter. Oddly, this fact is never revealed to anyone, and it's never explained why as the series continues. It's possible Serpentor is worried how Cobra's rank and file would react to the loss of their leader. The least logical part of the story is the fact that Fred mentions nothing about his identity being revealed, though he awoke without his suit of armor on, so he must have known someone saw his face, though he couldn't be sure who. For the next several issues, it appears that the Baroness and Fred have a sort of romantic relationship, but it's spelled out here that Fred doesn't exactly enjoy kissing the Baroness. The Baroness is using Fred to gain power, but Fred pretends there's more to it, maybe attempting to strengthen his own position. These elements of the story at times fall flat and make the Cobras seem childish.

It's always nice to see a story focus on the October Guard. Here, we see a very funny relationship among the Guard. Daina feels she does all the work, while Brekhov and Horrorshow don't pull their own weight. Horrorshow's size is made fun of by having him carry whole cooked chickens with him on a mission. Exploding chickens blowing up alligators from the inside is not a common event, and would probably be much messier than shown here. Wet-Suit and Torpedo make a rare showing here, and are actually seen operating on the ground. G.I. Joe fans commonly think of both Joes as divers, but they are designated Navy SEALs, who very often operate as ground forces. Other than the humor in the scenes including the Joes and October Guard, both groups spend most of the story bumbling around in the dark, dodging alligators and Croc Master. "Hush Job" is a fun and fast-paced story and is entertaining if the thin plot is overlooked and accepted as a "get the bad guy" story.

And the Adventure Continues:

This segment is designed to help readers catch up to the storyline by seeing what important events they've missed. The feature is "narrated" and reprints important scenes from the series from the Joes' assisting Destro in Scotland up to the defeat of Cobra in Frusenland. This section is actually a nice way to give new readers access to the comic book. Scenes are shown from issues #57 to 68.

Cover Gallery:

This section displays small pictures of the covers of issues #57 to 68.

Bystander

Writer: Larry Hama

Artist: Tony Salmons

Summary: Scarlett and Snake-Eyes in their civilian clothes, driving a convertible, pull up to an "8-12" convenience store on a desert road. Snake-Eyes' rubber mask is chafing his neck, so they head inside to get some powder. The woman behind the counter tells Scarlett to try the drug store further down the road. Scarlett heads off to get it, and lets Snake-Eyes stay behind and browse through the magazines. Three men head inside after Scarlett leaves. As Snake-Eyes looks on, they pull out guns and proceed to rob the store. The woman's husband reaches for the silent alarm under the counter, but one robber notices him and shoots the man with his shotgun. His wife begins screaming, distracting the other men. Snake-Eyes flings a six-pack of cans at one of them and quickly disappears behind the shelves as the man blows away the cans. One of the men tells the one with the shotgun to shoot the woman, too. He's about to when a hidden Snake-Eyes leaps over the shelves and lands on the man, jamming his magazine in his mouth. Another robber runs at Snake-Eyes, but the commando dodges his gunfire and smashes the man in the head with a bottle. The third man comes down the aisle after Snake-Eyes, but only finds his unconscious accomplice. Snake-Eyes sneaks behind the man with a can of lighter fluid and dumps some on the man's jacket, then hides again, leaving a trail of the liquid behind him. He ignites it with a cigarette lighter, then grabs the woman and runs outside, away from the burning store and screaming robber. Just then, Scarlett pulls up. "I'm not even going to ask! Get in the car," she says angrily. "Can't I take you anywhere?" She fixes his mask, gives him his powder and the drive off down the road.

Review: Bystander is a short seven pages, and is a different than most Joe stories. Some might complain that this story just makes Snake-Eyes again look like a superhero, but I tend to think that any highly-decorated, martial arts-trained commando would be more than a match for a couple of convenience store robbers, even if he was unarmed. For such a short story, it has a fair amount of violence. One man is killed with a shotgun and Snake-Eyes smashes one gunman in the face with a bottle, then lights another on fire. Although, none of it is very graphic, and we never see the results of the fire.

Here, the relationship between Scarlett and Snake-Eyes is played for laughs. Instead of praising him for being heroic, she scolds him for getting into trouble and treats him like a misbehaving little kid. It also hints at Scarlett's wish to spend some time as a normal couple, a theme occasionally brought up in the series.

One funny little detail is that Snake-Eyes is reading "The 'Nam", Marvel's Vietnam War comic from the 1980s. Bystander is a brief, entertaining story for Snake-Eyes fans, even though it's more like a Chuck Norris or Steven Seagal movie than a G.I. Joe comic book.

Memo from Hawk:

The inside back cover features a "memo" from Hawk, briefly talking about the past year. There's really nothing significant there.