

DDP 01: Reinstated!

Thursday, 27 May 2010

G.I. JOE v2 #1

Reinstated!

Cover Date: September, 2001

Writer: Josh Blaylock

Pencils: Steven Kurth

Inks: John Larter

Colors: Hi-Fi Colour Designs

Editor: Scott Wherle

Summary: Southern Florida: The Everglades. Center of operations for the Dreadnok syndicate." Standing outside a large compound, two Dreadnoks discuss the arrival of the "Snakes" and "blue suits". They wonder why Zartan allowed them here and think that they did all right for nearly ten years and don't need them. A ninja with a familiar red tattoo on his arm watches the Dreadnoks silently from the swamp through image intensifiers. The Dreadnoks continue to talk about Zartan and why he passed leadership on to his teenage daughter Zanya, instead of Zarana. They also mention Zartan's "skin condition". The ninja leaps off into the trees.

Thousands of miles away, the ninja arrives at a cabin in the High Sierras. Inside, he greets the Silent Master, who sits cross-legged amidst burning candles, his face covered in shadows. The young ninja explains that he has finished the complete surveillance of the Dreadnok Everglade chapter and hands a disk to the Silent Master. The ninja master rises, then descends through a trap door in the cabin's floor. He stops at a large computer console, types a few keys and the image of "Agent Hauser" -- Duke -- appears on screen. As the data disk is uploaded to Duke he thanks the Silent Master for getting the information for he and the General and says that some of the top brass doubted him. "But I always knew my old buddy Snake-Eyes would pull through." He then completes the message by telling Snake-Eyes that "homecoming is in two days".

Somewhere, nine levels below the surface of Washington D.C., Duke -- dressed in a black, non-military suit -- addresses a small group, showing them satellite images of Cobra agents and Cobra Commander himself here in the United States. The images confirm suspicions of activity in the Middle East and Cuba. He says that the government has decided to bring back the G.I. Joe team. He asks the five former Joes sitting there -- Flint, Scarlett, Roadblock, Shipwreck and Snake-Eyes -- if they are willing to return as part of the reinstated G.I. Joe team as "seasoned team of commanders...in the field." They all, of course, agree. "Let's reacquaint ourselves with some old friends," he says as the screen behind him is filled with images of the former agents of Cobra.

After the briefing, Duke tells the Joes to be ready for duty on Monday. "Hopefully, you old-timers can pass the physical." The Joes leave the conference room and Shipwreck says that "it weirds me out. Duke disappears off the map for near ten years, and now he shows up lookin' like a CIA spook? Somethin's different about him now." Roadblock isn't interested in discussing it, and asks the others if they want to go out for drinks. Flint goes with them, but they leave Snake-Eyes and Scarlett behind. Scarlett stands silently for a few moments, just staring at Snake-Eyes. She finally slaps him across the face and walks away.

Two days later, at the Dreadnok compound, Cobra Commander welcomes his guests: Zartan, the Baroness, Dr. Mindbender, Tomax, Xamot and Major Bludd. He is pleased to announce "the triumphant return of Cobra Commander!" Zartan isn't impressed, and though he allowed the meeting to take place in his territory, he hopes the Commander makes the meeting worth their while. "You didn't exactly leave us all on good terms." The others agree. Tomax and Xamot are busy with their corporation, Extensive Enterprises and the Baroness and Destro are running Destro's weapons manufacturing business. The Baroness wonders where he's getting his troops, since most were arrested once Cobra sympathizers were run out of Congress and the United Nations annexed Cobra Island. He explains that he found supporters in Cuba and the Middle East: refugees turned away from America, Mid-East youths who blame their poverty on U.S. sanctions, and even jaded U.S. troops. He built his new army just as he built his first. The Commander then reveals a large scale replica of a nano-machine, capable of entering computer systems and bloodstreams. He has them planted throughout the United States, ready to have them multiply and "infect" a person or computer network. A Cobra Officer opens the door for another guest and is promptly knocked unconscious with the butt of a rifle being held by an Iron Grenadier. Destro has arrived. He apologizes for his troops' anxiousness in the midst of so many armed Dreadnoks, then compliments Zartan on his accomplishments. He sits at the table to hear the Commander's proposal.

Meanwhile, many former members of the Joe team get phone calls and learn that the team is back: Stalker, Gung-Ho, Wild Bill, Lady Jaye, Dusty, Mainframe, Rock & Roll, Jinx, Spirit and a balding, overweight security guard named Bazooka. At Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, General Hawk and Duke welcome a large group of soldiers and sailors into the Joe team. As Duke speaks, Hawk interrupts, unhappy to see Snake-Eyes' ninja student with the others. "I thought I made it clear that I won't repeat the 'Ninja Force' recruitments that the upper brass passed in the

90's." Duke introduces the ninja as Kamakura, a formal pupil of Snake-Eyes and an agent of Duke "current department". Hawk is willing to accept the one exception: "If you're good enough for Snake, you're good enough for me." Hawk wishes the troops good luck, then he and Duke discuss "The Jugglers", the formerly corrupt committee of generals overseeing the Joe team. Hawk has joined their ranks in order to keep them in check, and has tried to keep them in the dark about a lot of things.

Back in the Everglades, Destro and Cobra Commander are continuing an argument that began almost twenty years ago. Despite Destro's misgivings that the Commander's plan is foolish (and a whispered comment about running Cobra himself), he is convinced to sit back down at the table and listen.

At a small restaurant in Washington, Flint, Shipwreck and Roadblock are catching up on the last seven years. Flint explains that Scarlett and Snake-Eyes were due to be married three years after the team shut down, but Snake-Eyes returned to his cabin just three weeks before the wedding. "I guess ol' Snake-Eyes spent so many years all messed up, he can't go back," Roadblock observes. "Almost like he can't handle the good times." They continue their conversation while Snake-Eyes, back at the base, sits alone looking at a old photo of him and Scarlett.

In Cobra Commander's quarters in the Everglades, he mentions his plans to the two women there. One snuggles up to the Commander, then suddenly kicks him a couple of times. As the Commander rises unsteadily to his feet, Destro comes inside, complimenting the women's work. The Commander shouts for the guards and several Crimson Guardsmen burst into the room. But they don't respond to the Commander's order to seize Destro. But, when Destro snaps his fingers and order them to "seize him", they surround their leader and hold him at bayonet point, leaving the shocked Commander to wonder, "What is the meaning of this?!!" TO BE CONTINUED

Review: After seven years and one failed attempt to revive the series, G.I. Joe is back. The first issue is an interesting but sometimes flawed start. Writer Josh Blaylock has tried to make a sequel to the original Marvel series that is not a direct continuation of it. Some aspects of the series seem a bit strange, but much of that could be simply due to the fact that the original series was written by one man, and few differing takes on the Joes even exist. There is definitely enough here for fan of the Larry Hama series will recognize and some that even the cartoon fans will notice.

While some readers will not like the changes, Blaylock is at least being bold enough to shake things up. Some of the differences may be because of the two differing eras that they are published in, and some are due to time passing since the first series ended. It's obvious that this is not a recreation of 1985. The Joes have aged and their places in the Joe story have changed, as well. I'd say this is a better way of doing things rather than just emulating Hama's style. This is not the first series, and there's no reason it should be. A complete recreation would be a waste of time. Even in the original run, many things changed and characters were quite different in 1994 than they had been in 1982. In this series, it's obvious time has passed. Some may argue that in comic books, people don't age and time has little meaning. But G.I. Joe was always different than Superman or Spiderman. Dated events played a role in the past, most notably the Vietnam War. The war was often an important part of the story. And making Snake-Eyes a Gulf War veteran instead of a Vietnam veteran just wouldn't fit, considering the extreme differences between the two conflicts.

The changes that took place are hard to analyze after one issue. Duke is part of some secretive government agency, and though Shipwreck says Duke's changed, we don't really explore what has changed. Hawk is playing the role of General more than he ever did, and is apparently not to be fighting with the Joes, now in command from afar like General Flagg had been in the past. He is now a part of the Jugglers, the group of powerful Generals whose ambition and corruption plagued the Joes in the past. It seems that he has not become like them, and is striving to keep them in check. His character and goal fits the original series' Hawk perfectly. Scarlett seems quieter and more sullen this time around, but that change is understandable. She was left behind by Snake-Eyes years before and is obviously bitter about it. Snake-Eyes seems to be the same here, and his inability to marry Scarlett does make and Roadblock's explanation makes sense. The other Joes really aren't explored, though Shipwreck's appearance here is Blaylock's nod to the Sunbow cartoon series. Shipwreck appeared very rarely in the comics and wasn't explored much. His character here is patterned after the cartoon, where he was one of the show's stars. Flint and Roadblock aren't focused on much, though Roadblock's first sentence is a rhyming one -- a tip of the hat to his cartoon self. This only happens once, though, and is probably only there for the sake of cartoon fans. One criticism I have is with Duke using the Joes' real first names when asking them to join the team. This just feels wrong, since in both cartoon and comic, Joes never called themselves by their real names. And after 19 years of calling them by their code names, there's no reason why Duke would call them anything different. It's more like name-dropping for the sake of showing us that Blaylock read the characters' filecards. One of the more "embarrassing" moments of the issue is Bazooka's appearance as a balding, overweight security guard. Bazooka was barely seen in the comic, but in the cartoon he was probably the dumbest person on the team, and using him as comic relief here would be unwelcome.

The bad guys don't seem to have changed much, though Zartan has turned the Dreadnoks into a national organization. He impresses even Destro, and it's hinted that he's got a small army of Dreadnoks, not to mention a daughter named Zanya who is to be taking command, though we don't meet her yet. As usual, Destro and Cobra Commander are the main villains and are at odds with each other from the beginning. The character of Blaylock's Destro does not bear much of resemblance to Larry Hama's Destro. Hama made him a fairly subtle and very intelligent character. This Destro is far

more sadistic and is played a bit over the top. He does seem more like the cartoon version. Some might not mind that, but I think it undermines one of Hama's best written characters. But, you could argue that the differences in Destro's personality are after-effects of his brainwashing at the hand of the Commander in the final issues of the Marvel series. The mind control storyline was not mentioned here, though it's possible the series will address it later. Cobra Commander is not much different from either the comic or the cartoon versions. In fact, those two versions were very similar, though the cartoon Commander was more of a foolish character than his meaner comic version. Even so, it's not easy to analyze him until after seeing how he handles Destro's treachery in the next issue.

As for the storyline itself, the Commander's use of nano technology somewhat out of place. Maybe even more "science-fiction" than Serpentor, since nanotechnology often used in Star Trek. Still, the paranoia wave producing Terror-Dromes set a precedent for high-tech weapons in the first series. We don't really get many specifics of the Commander's plan. The Joes know even less, so the next issue will likely flesh things out. The real story is Destro's apparent and sudden takeover of Cobra. I hope it isn't as easy as it seems to be here, once we see everyone else's reaction. Hopefully, the series will not treat the Commander as a weak, ineffective leader and make Destro the star of the show. Hopefully, the Commander will get his revenge and not lose his organization to Destro so easily.

The new artwork by Steven Kurth is fairly good, but a little uneven. The characters spend much too much time scowling and everyone looks to be clenching every muscle in their bodies. The effort to make the characters look older is often overdone with too many lines, wrinkles and sunken cheeks. So, it's difficult to judge this new series after one issue, but the series has the potential to be a good one. Unfortunately it also has the potential to be a failure. Either way, it's difficult to be too cynical when G.I. Joe has made its long-awaited return to comics. Why don't we hang on for a few issues and see what we get?

First appearances:

- G.I. Joe team: Kamakura
- Dreadnoks: [Zanya mentioned only]
- Geography: Dreadnok Everglades headquarters

Reprinted in:

- G.I. Joe: M.I.A.: Issue 1-2 (February 2002). This single volume reprints issues #1 and 2 for readers who missed them the first time.

- G.I. JOE: Reinstated! (July 2002). A trade paperback collecting issues #1-4.

- G.I. JOE: Disavowed, Volume 1 (June 2010). A trade paperback from IDW Publishing collecting issues #1-4. The title "Disavowed" refers to the fact that IDW has started a series that follows Marvel's G.I. Joe #155, and ignores the Devil's Due continuity.