

**GRIDE**

**RESOLUTE**

**Revenge**

**By Eduardo Freyre**



# **G.I. Joe: Revenge**

**By Eduardo Freyre**

From the files of Sgt. Conrad "Duke" Hauser.

*It's been over a year since Cobra Commander tried to hold the world hostage with HAARP. Cobra has been quiet since then. We've taken down a few cells but it feels like there's more out there. All our outposts are keeping their eyes open. No one has seen Cobra Commander since Springfield. He should be dead. But there's no body. He just disappeared. This tells me he'll be back. Hopefully we'll be ready.*

## **CHAPTER ONE: First Strikes**

Location: Joe base 5: Codename- Oasis

The sun beat down on the desert floor. The day was without a cloud.

Wild Bill sat inside the Eagle Hawk, trying to keep the shadows over him. The heat though, was still there. Taking his hat off and wiping his forehead, Will Bill got up on his feet and crossed the desert floor towards the main building.

Oasis was not what the name implies. Rather than palm trees and a refreshing body of water, Oasis was a building that looked like a bigger version of an old German bunker. Outside at that moment was a row of vehicles; Awe-Strikers, Vamps, a Humvee, and a brace of motorcycles.

Dusty stood by as greenshirts worked on maintenance on a Vamp. Wild Bill walked up to the Joes' desert expert. Without looking away from what the greenshirts were doing, Dusty took his water jug and passed it to Wild Bill. The grateful cowboy accepted the offer and proceeded to take a big gulp.

"Thank you kindly Dusty," said Wild Bill as he handed back the canteen. "How the heck do you stand this? I feel like something my uncle would've roasted on the smoker."

"It's not as bad you think. You just have to not move as much and keep in the shade," responded Dusty.

"I've been doing both since we were stationed here and I'm still melting," threw back Wild Bill.

"Dusty's leaving out the part where he's half lizard," came a voice. Wild Bill and Dusty turn and saw Sandstorm has joined them.

Dusty laughed his comment off. "I don't know about the lizard part but I've definitely got some desert lover in my blood."

Dusty turned back to Wild Bill. "What say we get some wind our faces. You and I are hopping in the Eagle Hawk and going on patrol."

With a tip of the hat and a Yee-Ha, Wild Bill ran for the Eagle Hawk's cockpit Dusty smiled and turned to Sandstorm.

"While we're gone I'm gonna trust you to look after the kids," he ordered.  
"You can count on me "Dad""", responded Sandstorm. He saluted Dusty as the former went and joined Wild Bill as the Eagle Hawk took off into the skies.

Sandstorm took up Dusty's position watching the maintenance on the vehicles. Not even 5 minutes had gone by when a tech named Viney emerged from the inside of the base and ran up to him.

"Have you seen Dusty sir?" she asked. "I have something he should see"

"Dusty's on patrol but you can show it to me," said Sandstorm.

"Well sir. We've been getting strange readings on radar. It's like we're getting lifesigns but then they disappear before we can verify." The tech handed Sandstorm a small tablet. The Joe looked over the readings with a frown.

*Fffwwwweeeeeeeeeee.....*

One of the greenshirts working on the vehicles stopped what he was doing. "Hey! Does anyone else hear that?"

*Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee.....*

Sandstorm and others lifted their heads. Straining their ears. There was something. It was getting closer.

*EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE.....*  
.....

**KABOOM!!!!**

The vehicles all went up in balls of fire. Greenshirts were consumed in the flames. Parts went flying. Sandstorm and the tech went flying from the force of the blast. The two hit the ground hard. The pad Sandstorm had been holding had its screen shattered.

Sandstorm dragged himself off the ground. His gaze went straight to where the vehicles once stood. The heat of the flames joined the desert heat to create a vision of Hell. The tech also rose from the ground and immediately vomited at the sight.

Bullets hit the ground nearby. Sandstorm jumped back. "We gotta get inside and arm up," he ordered. The tech ran for the entrance following Sandstorm. The two put all their strength into their legs as they ran.

Inches from the entrance, the ground came to life. Vipers almost the color of the desert floor rose from the ground like armed zombies. Sandstorm stopped in his tracks and grabbed his sidearm. The Vipers responded by lifting their machine guns. Bullets flew. Shots hit their mark.

And more red mixed into the desert floor.

Miles away the Eagle Hawk moved over the landscape. Inside Dusty looked over the ground. His eyes caught a glimpse of the horizon. Black smoke rose.

"BILL!" he yelled. That looks like it's coming from Oasis."

Wild Bill saw what Dusty saw and went for the radio.

"This is Freebird1 to Oasis. Freebird1 to Oasis!! Please respond. Sandstorm, are you receiving? Myler, Matthews, Barenas, Blanchard, is anyone receiving??!! No answer pardner."

No words needed to be said. The two Joes gripped the controls tight and turned the Eagle Hawk in the direction of the smoke.

Soon they reached the base. The flames of the destroyed vehicles had started to die down. But that did nothing to make the carnage any less gruesome.

Dusty jumped out of the Eagle Hawk before it had fully landed. He reached where Sandstorm and the tech lay.

"We got ambushed. How the Hell did we get ambushed??!!"

Wild Bill had finished landing the Eagle Hawk and made his way over to Dusty.

"This looks bad. We should call this in to the Pit." Wild Bill made his way to the entrance. Dusty started to follow Bill but something stopped him. Instead he grabbed Bill and leaped back.

A small explosion and a giant column of flame roared out of the entrance. Dusty and Wild Bill sat up on the desert floor and stared.

"Well shoot," exclaimed Wild Bill. "Scratch calling from Oasis. What do we do now?"

"Let's get back into the Eagle Hawk and call this in," responded Dusty. "Let's see how far the nearest army base is. We'll hold there till Duke and the others give the all clear. If this is an attack by the snakes we don't want to leave the front door open."

"How'd you know about the booby trap at the front door?" asked Wild Bill.

"Instinct. The way Sandstorm and Viney fell says that whoever took them out blocked them from getting inside," said Dusty. "I figured they may have booby-trapped the entrance. That and I thought I heard a faint click, like something activating."

"Well thanks for the save," said Will Bill.

As the two Joes headed back to the helicopter, a scope observed them. On the other side of the scope and the rifle it was attached to, Blackout stared. His trigger finger twitched.

"I have those two Joes in my sights," he growled. "I can do headshots or hit the gas tank, your choice."

Tombstone stood next to Blackout and saw how his bloodlust was high. "Neither," he responded. "The Commander ordered we make sure there were living witnesses."

Blackout out his rifle away. "What a waste," he muttered. "I didn't take any lives this trip."

"The Commander's game isn't over. You will have plenty of chances to take plenty of lives. Now let's pull back and enjoy a mission accomplished."

Location: Joe Base 9 (auxiliary DC office): Codename-KingBeard

A Jeep pulled up to a non-descript 6-story office building located on the outskirts of Washington DC. Two gentlemen in army uniforms stepped out. One had blonde hair and wore sunglasses and a stern look on his face. The other had strawberry blonde hair and a much lighter step as he moved.

The two moved into the building and made their way to the top floor. The more relaxed soldier started whistling a tune. His no nonsense partner turned and glared at him.

"Sorry", he responded. The whistling stopped and the two continued down the hall till they reached a set of double doors. A mousy looking female soldier in glasses tried to block their path.

"Excuse me," she said. "You're not allowed in there without an appointment."

The second soldier looked at her and smiled. "It's no problem," he responded. "The General is expecting us". At that, he and his silent partner opened the door and walked right in. The female soldier was right behind them, stuttering madly over their brazenness.

Inside the office was an unoccupied desk with a computer. The three soldiers stared ahead of themselves in wonder over the room's lack of occupant.

"Did we miss him?" wondered the second soldier.

"That's not possible," responded the female soldier. "There's no other way in or out of this office. The General's been in here all day."

'Relax Ms. Westover," came a voice from behind them.

The trio of soldiers turned. One of the double doors swung back, revealing Hawk standing against the wall, pistol in hand.

"I know you two said you had some urgent news but you still should've let Lexi here announce you."

The two visiting soldiers snapped to attention and saluted.

"Sorry Hawk," responded the second soldier. "We didn't want to wait too long on the intel."

Hawk holstered his pistol and made his way back to the desk. "You're here now. Take a seat and tell me what you got. You can even change out of those outfits and into your Joe gear."

With that, the second soldier took off his shirt, revealing a ninja gi underneath. The first soldier took off his shades and laid them on a side table. Next to them, he laid down the latex mask he

had been wearing. Ms. Westover took one look at his face and gasped. She covered her mouth to prevent herself from getting sick. Fortunately for her, Snake-Eyes immediately produced his regular mask and put it on before shedding the rest of his army uniform to reveal his usual ninja commando look.

Hawk sat back in his chair, fingers pressed together. "I sent you two to Asia to get some intel. What did you bring back?"

Kamakura and Snake-Eyes stood in front of Hawk's desk. Since Snake-Eyes couldn't speak, Kamakura did the talking.

"We snooped around. We found a few contacts who knew of the Arashikage and were willing to give us some info or help track some down. Cobra activity has been pretty much non-existent since the HAARP incident. But two weeks ago, a rumor started running through all the mercenary channels. Someone was looking for anyone willing to join in on attacking any US intelligence or Special Forces assets and bases they could find. We dug further and found out whoever put word out was looking for Joe bases in particular. But the real kicker was the name being used in all these messages. Naja Hanna."

"That means King Cobra," said Hawk. "So Cobra is prepping a strike against us."

"Sure looks that way," responded Kamakura.

Suddenly Snake-Eyes reached over and grabbed Hawk, yanking him away from his desk chair. The Joe ninja also swept his leg sending Kamakura crashing to the floor. Seconds later a missile came crashing through the window. It continued on, smashing the double doors leading to Hawk's office until it came to rest in the wall.

Kamakura and Snake-Eyes got up off the floor. Snake-Eyes ran to check on the missile. Kamakura picked Hawk up off the ground.

Snake-Eyes reached the missile. Mrs. Westover was already staring at it. "I'm calling security," she yelled as she ran down the hall. Snake-Eyes made no movement in her direction. He stared at the missile.

Then he heard it. A tiny beeping noise. Each beep getting closer and closer.

Snake-Eyes took off like a shot back towards Hawk's office. The beeps were one on top of the other. He passed by Westover and motioned for her to follow him. The secretary stared dumbfounded.

At that moment was just one long beep followed by the missile erupting into a massive explosion. The fireball traveled down the hall. Mrs. Westover didn't have time to put the phone down and follow Snake-Eyes.

In the office Snake-Eyes grabbed Hawk. Kamakura quickly followed. The trio flew out the window. The ball of fire came soon after. As the Joes fell, Snake-Eyes pulled out a grappling hook and threw it at a ledge on the next floor. He and Kamakura swung the rope till they were able to leap onto the ground. All three hit the ground roughly but were otherwise ok.

A pair of security guards ran up to Hawk as he slowly stood up. "Sir, are you ok?" said one.

Hawk ignored them and stared at the obliterated floor that once contained his office. Snake-Eyes and Kamakura were already up

"I'd say we have our proof about what Cobra's planning." Sad Hawk. He turned to the two Joe ninjas.

"Kamaura, stay here and coordinate with security and emergency services. Snake-Eyes and I are heading to the Pit."

Hawk and Snake-Eyes jumped into the Jeep and sped off, leaving Kamakura to start talking to the security guards as the sound of sirens grew closer.

A distance away, Firefly stood by his missile launcher. He stared at the flames rising from the building. Without looking down he dialed a number on his cell phone then brought the phone to his ear.

:"Mission accomplished. I delivered the present to the Big Bird. His feathers are ruffled but otherwise uncooked. You want me to finish the job? No? Alrighty then. Fortunately, I'm having a blast. In fact, I'm having so fun I can stick around if you want. Free of charge."

The call ended and Firefly put away his phone. He then stood and watched the fire some more. "Boom," he whispered.

#### Location: Joe Base 6: Codename- Swamp Ape

The "Swamp Ape" rested at the mouth of a big river in a jungle in a classified location. The layout of the base was based on the design of an old portable battle station the Joes used years ago. This base though, was much larger, resembling a small oil rig. At the rear center was a helipad large enough to fit an Eagle Hawk. Flanking it were a command hut to the right and another hut with living quarters to the left. The front of the base included a row of machine gun nests. Parked next to the base was a patrol boat.

In the command hut, the base's commander, Torpedo, stood over Dial-Tone, the base's tech geek and her greenshirt aide, a woman named Diaz.

"Anything onscreen today?" he asked.

"No sir," responded Dial-Tone. "All quiet in the jungle."

"Just the way I like it," said Torpedo as he turned and headed out of the hut.

On deck, Gung-Ho and Recondo chatted by the helipad while Wet Down stationed himself on one of the machine gun nests and looked at a greenshirt that was fishing off the side of the deck.

Torpedo made his way over the helipad. "What's Archey up to?" he asked Gung-Ho and Recondo.

The Cajun Joe shrugged. "I don't know. Recondo and I just saw him come out of the barracks with a pole in his hand and a look in his eye."

At that, Torpedo made his way to the greenshirt. "What are you doing Archey?"

The greenshirt turned his head and saluted Torpedo. "Just trying to catch some fish."

"You know we do have food stores here on the base. And Gung-Ho and I do cook regularly for you all."

"With all due respect chief, not all of us can stand his Cajun cooking and not all of us are vegetarian."

"Fine Archey. But you're cooking what you catch. And if it isn't up to snuff, I'm giving GH permission to raze you about it even after both of you rotate out of this post."

Torpedo walked over to Wet Down. "I'm surprised you didn't join him kid."

"Fishing's too boring," responded Wet Down. "But I wouldn't mind jumping on the patrol boat and going for a cruise downriver. That's much more my speed."

Torpedo thought for a moment. "Not a bad idea. I'll get Gung-Ho to go with you."

He started to head back in the direction of the helipad when a ghastly scream pierced the air.

All eyes outside turned to see Archey the greenshirt. He had a spear sticking right through his chest. He then doubled over and his body splashed into the water.

The water nearby came to life as Cobra Eels emerged from the wetness. With a loud of the "Cobra!!" battlecry, they swarmed over the patrol boat. Wet Down turned his machine gun in the direction of the boat and its invaders. He squeezed the trigger and let the bullets fly. A couple of Eels went down hard and a few more returned fire.

As Wet Down started the retaliation, Gung-Ho ran into the barracks and grabbed some firepower. He threw a rifle at Recondo. The two added their guns to the mix, forcing the Eels to deal with returning fire from two directions. Torpedo grabbed his side arm and added its voice to the noise.

The three Joes found their counterattack answered as shots rang to their right. The Joes turned to see more Eels climbing up the side and hugging the outer wall of the command hut. Torpedo turned his attention to the new attackers and fired. One went down while the others continued firing. Suddenly, shots took another Eel on his left side. Bullets flew from inside the command hut.

Inside the hut, Dial-Tone and Diaz had shot through the window separating them from the outside. The Joe computer expert and her aide fired sporactically, trying to either deal with the Eels or keep their heads down.

"Get ready to move," Dial-Tone told Diaz. "After this next burst we break for the outside and hook up with Torpedo and the others."

"Yes ma'am!" barked Diaz in reply.



Outside the hut, an Eel crouched close to the blow out window. He unclipped a grenade and hurled it through the window. Torpedo tried to shoot the Eel before he could complete his throw, but was too late. All he succeeded in doing was clipping the Eel on the shoulder.

"Dial-Tone!" Torpedo yelled.

Inside the hut, Dial-Tone spotted the grenade flying through the window.

"MOVE!" she yelled at Diaz. She then swiveled and shot out the another window. She ran for the newly created opening and jumped out. Diaz was fast behind her.

The explosion obliterated the hut. Diaz was caught in the blast and killed instantly. Torpedo, Gung-Ho, and Recondo were throw back the force of the blast. Wet Down had his attention drawn by the explosion. The moment's distraction was enough for shots to reach him. He went down like a rag doll.

As for Dial-Tone, she hit the water hard. Her vision a mix of blue and yellows. Then it went black.

Torpedo and his remaining teammates rose up off the floor. The Eels by the patrol boat charged. Gung-Ho picked up his rifle and fired. He took two more down.

"Dis place is no longer Joe friendly," said Gung-Ho. "We should get the heck out. N'estce Pas?"

Torpedo nodded. "Run for the water and swim to shore."

The three Joes made a break for it and ran across the deck. They passed by what remained of the command hut and dove off the edge. In the water, the three put all their strength into heading for the shore. Torpedo felt a tug at his leg. An Eel had grabbed it and was trying to pull him down. The Joe responded by kicking his opponent in the head with his free leg. The Eel flinched then went for his knife. Torpedo grappled with his opponent. The struggle started dragging on and Torpedo knew he couldn't keep it going forever. He tighten his grip on the Eel's knife wielding hand and brought the blade up the Eel's mask. In one swift motion he cut the breathing tube from the Eel's mask. As the Eel began to struggle to fix the deadly damage, Torpedo grabbed his knife and stabbed him in the stomach. He then gave the Eel one more kick to send him to the bottom of the river.

Torpedo made it to shore. Gung-Ho and Recondo were already there trying to catch their breath. Torpedo motioned for them to head for the tree line. Once there, the trio looked at each other and tried to take stock.

"We need to call this in" said Torpedo. "But the radio probably bought it when Dial-Tone and Diaz did."

"There's a Tucaro village about half a mile from here." Said Recondo. "They know me and consider me a brother of the jungle. I had them stash a radio for me awhile back in case of emergency."

Gung-Ho chuckled and patted Recondo on the shoulder. "Mon ami! Your whole Phantom routine can come in handy. Let's go talk to your native buddies and call home. We need us some beauchop backup down here.'

"Agree," threw in Torpedo. "Let's move out."

The trio melted into the jungle.

On the river a short distance away from the wreck of Swamp Ape base, a Cobra boat stood in the water. Copperhead sat at the controls while Shadow Tracker and Skull Buster sat on deck.

Copperhead laughed. "Anyone else loving this job?" he asked his fellow Cobras. "Wrecking a Joe base and killed a few Joes while we're at it."

Shadow Tracker got up and headed towards the edge of the boat. "Something's fouling up the waters." He plunged his arm into the water.

Skull Buster joined Shadow Tracker on the edge. "What did you find?" he asked.

Shadow Tracker withdrew his arm from the water, bringing up with it the wet form of the Joe known as Dial-Tone.

"Is she dead?" asked Skull Buster.

"She's alive," responded Shadow Tracker. He produced a knife and brought it close to her throat. "But I will now fix that."

"Wait!" ordered Copperhead. "Let's leave her alive and give her to the Commander as a present."

Skull Buster let out a low chuckle. "What Shadow Tracker would do to her is a mercy compared to what Cobra Commander would do to her."

Shadow Tracker put his knife away. He leaned in closer to Dial-Tone. "You will wish I had killed you. Oh yes, you will."

If Dial-Tone had heard anything, she gave no sign.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Vendetta**

### **G. I. Joe Main Base: The Pitt. Location: CLASSIFIED**

Duke stood calm in the midst of a storm. Computer screens were alive as floods of data danced across their screens. Flint and Lady Jaye stood over Mainframe and Jack "Dial-Tone" Morelli (brother of Jill aka the female Dial-Tone) as they worked. Spirit stood by Duke, standing like a stone monument.

Dusty and Torpedo's faces were on split screen style on the main viewscreen. Dusty had managed to find a way to call in via video but Torpedo could only provide audio so a standard file image of him was being used.

"Talk to me gentlemen." Said Duke. "I want as much detail as you can give me."

"I'd love to give you a whole book of it but I can't," said Dusty. "If the snakes hit us they didn't leave any calling cards."

Torpedo's audio came in scratchy but audible. "It was definitely snakes for us," he said.

"Did you see where they went after taking down Swamp Ape?" asked Duke.

"Negatory," responded Torpedo. "Our priority was getting to safety."

Jack Morelli interrupted. "So you guys have no clue what happened to my sister?" he said angrily.

"Recondo's out with some of his Tucaro buddies right now scouting out the edge of the river. They'll find your sister one way or the other."

"Back to the bigger matter at hand," interjected Duke. "Torpedo, I want you and Gung-Ho to stay in the village. I'll be flying out there soon. We're going back to Swamp Ape and search that place to find anything we can use to track down the snakes. We'll also see about bringing our fellow soldiers home to rest."

The Joes in the room bowed their heads for a moment. However soon everyone got back to work.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Dusty.

"You stay put at your location as well," said Duke.

"You want me to take a team to join him and Wild Bill in searching through Oasis?" asked Flint.

Duke turned his head towards Flint and Lady Jaye to respond when Dusty and Torpedo's faces disappeared from the screen. Everyone in the room stopped what they were doing to stare at the static. They suddenly it disappeared. No more static. Just a face.

Duke stared in disbelief. "You," he said. "Somehow I knew you survived Springfield."

If Cobra Commander's metal mask could make expressions, it would be smiling.

"Greetings Duke," said Cobra Commander. "How nice to see you again."

"What do you want?" Duke said.

Cobra Commander let out a chuckle.

"Do you remember what I told you the last time we saw each other? I told you that you should've let me win. I had the keys to the world in the palm of my hand. All you had to do was surrender. Do nothing. But no. You had to be the "hero". You had to fight the "good" fight.

"Now it is time to teach you a lesson. To show you what happens to "heroes". They lose everything. And that is what I will do to you. Your friends and loved ones will die. Your precious team and everything that belongs to it will burn. I will break you. Mentally. Physically. And

Spiritually. And the last thing you will see is your heart in my hands as I crush it. Surrounded by everything you love in flames.

"Everything that happens from now on is your fault.

"And all because you wouldn't let me win."

The static returned. Then it disappeared to be replaced by a blank screen. The Joes stood in shock. Except for Duke. He stood and stared at the now blank screen. If he could shoot lasers out of his eyes, he would've burned a hole in the screen.

"What did we just walk into?" came a voice.

The Joes turned and saluted. Hawk and Snake-Eyes walked into the room.

Duke lowered his arm and addressed the general. "Looks like Cobra Commander is back with a vengeance."

"I'll say," included Flint. "He's got a major mad-on for Duke and is taking it out on the rest of us."

"I know about that part," said Hawk. "My office was hit by a rocket attack."

"I was just about to mobilize the team," said Duke. "We've got KIAs at Swamp Ape and Oasis. Dial-Tone is also missing."

"Deploy what and who you need," said Hawk. "Stay airborne. We may need to check on the other bases as well. Especially the Coffin."

Duke motioned to Spirit to follow him. Jack Morelli rose from his seat and called out before Duke could leave the room.

"I want in on the mission to Swamp Ape," he said.

"Out of the question," responded Duke. "How do we know you can stay objective?"

"I can stay on task," answered Dial-Tone. "Just help me find my sister."

Duke gave Jack a cold stare. "Don't make me regret it."

Cobra Base. Location Unknown.

Jill "Dial-Tone" Morelli opened her eyes.

The room was dark except for the glow of computer screens and buttons.

She tried to sit up but couldn't. She was strapped down to a metal chair. Her arms and legs pinned down by large metal cuffs.

Cobra Commander emerged from the shadows. He stared down at Dial-Tone.

"I see you're awake," he hissed in a menacing monotone.

Dial-Tone tried to hide her frightened awe. "Cobra Commander," she gasped.

"You know my name, but I do not know yours," he responded. "Let's see if we can change that."

"You plan on torturing me?" Dial-tone bit back.

"Nothing so crude and vulgar." The Commander motioned with his hand. Dr. Mindbender stepped out of the shadows and approached where Dial-Tone was sitting.

The Doctor's voice took on a clinical air. "We will be conducting a brainscan of your memories."

The Doctor reached over and attached a pair of electrodes to Dial-Tone's chest. She glared at him as he did his work.

The Doctor continued his cold professional monologue. "Before we start, I need you to answer a few questions. Do you suffer from any of the following maladies: Insomnia, Migraines, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Anxiety, Depression."

"Go to Hell," she snapped.

Mindbender showed no reaction to her retort. He lowered a helmet on to her head and checked the wires connecting it as he continued speaking. "Patient refuses to answer inquiries. This will make it difficult when recording this session for future study."

Mindbender walked away from the chair and over to a computer console. He readied his hands at the controls as Cobra Commander made his way out of the room. He turned to Mindbender.

"Find out everything she knows," he ordered.

"I will present you with a detailed analysis of all my findings when the session is complete," responded Mindbender. As the Commander exited the room, Mindbender turned his attention to Dial-Tone one last time.

"There will be some discomfort when the Brainwave Scanner first begins its scan. I recommend you do not resist and simply let the Scanner do its work. This will make the procedure go much faster and much less painless."

Dial-Tone gave Mindbender one more hard stare. The Doctor looked at her for a moment then looked back down at his console. He pressed a button.

The helmet sprang to life and Dial-Tone stiffened as a jolt slammed into her head. She closed her eyes and tensed up, ready to resist. Soon, however, she found herself lost in the pain. Then everything went dark.

Location: remains of Joe Base "Swamp Ape"

The smoke from the battle was gone now. But the aftereffects were plainly visible.

Two rafts quietly approached the ruins. As they touched the sides of Swamp Ape, their occupants disembarked and stealthfully made their way on deck.

Torpedo and Spirit took point, crouching low and scanning the area with their rifles drawn and pointed in front of them. Duke and Gung-Ho came in behind with Jack "Dial-Tone" Morelli taking up the rear. After several moments of silent sweeping and scanning, Torpedo raised his arm to signal an all clear.

"Place is empty," he said. "Looks like Cobra cleared out and left us to clean up."

"Search the base from top to bottom," ordered Duke. "Let's see if the snakes got careless and left us something to work with."

"I'll go check what's left of the command hut," responded Dial-Tone.

As Jack made his way to the remains of the command hut, Gung-Ho made his way up to Duke.

"I'd feel a lot better if we had Recondo and his native buddies here," he said to Duke.

"I'm happier keeping them a safe distance," responded Duke. "I don't know if Cobra knows about them. With the way Cobra Commander is acting, I'd rather not give him an excuse to wipe out an entire village of innocent people."

"You not letting that snake get to you, are you?"

Duke stared at Gung-Ho. His face seemed to indicate he was angered the Cajun Joe would even ask the question. If he was going to say anything, he never got the chance because a call from the ruins of the command hut diverted the attention away.

Duke, Gung-Ho, and Torpedo converged on the command hut. Dial-Tone and Spirit came out carrying a large metal case. The two Joes carried the case over to the center of the base and put it down on the floor. As they backed away, the other three Joes circled the case, keeping a safe distance with their guns drawn.

"Is it a bomb?" asked Gung-Ho.

"It's not ticking," responded Dial-Tone.

"That doesn't mean a thing," bit back Duke.

"I see a button on the side," said Dial-Tone. He slowly approached the case.

"Jack, don't be stupid!" yelled Torpedo.

Dial-Tone pressed the button and backed away.

The case beeped then sprang to life. Legs sprouted from the bottom, lifting the case a foot or two. The case then split open, revealing a flat screen. The Joes kept their guns trained. The screen remained blank for several seconds.

Suddenly the screen lit up and Cobra Commander's face appeared.

"Why am I not surprised?" the Commander intoned. "Inspecting my handiwork, Duke?"

The Joe leader said nothing. But Dial-Tone rushed up to the screen.

"Where's my sister, scumbag?!" he yelled.

Cobra Commander betrayed no signs of reaction to Dial-Tone's outburst. "Ah, you must be Jack. Your sister has been my guest. There is so much I wanted to know about G.I. Joe operations and she has been extremely kind enough to share a few choice tidbits."

The picture on screen changed to Jill Morelli. She was still strapped into the brainwave scanner. Her head lay low.

Jack pointed his gun at the screen. "Let her go you bastard!"

The picture changed back to Cobra Commander. "No. There is still much I can learn from her. Besides, I told Duke everyone around him would suffer. And why should I go back on my word?"

Dial-Tone screamed in rage. He squeezed the trigger on his rifle. Bullets tore through the screen, obliterating it. Dial-Tone kept shooting until his gun was empty.

Gung-Ho and Spirit moved to flank Dial-tone. Gung-Ho gently made him lower his gun while Spirit patted him on the shoulder. Duke then approached and stared at Dial-Tone right in the eyes.

"I told you not to make me regret bringing you," he furiously said to Jack. "What the hell was that? There could've been a bomb in there."

"But there wasn't," snapped back Dial-Tone. "And at least we know my sister is alive. And we can get her back."

"We can't if we don't have leads," Duke yelled back.

Gung-Ho stepped in between the two Joes. "Hey, let's everyone calm down now. We need to find a way to get some intel and right quick. Jack, you think you can work some magic with what we got left of that nasty laptop?"

Dial-Tone calmed down. "Yeah maybe."

Duke also took a breath. "First thing's first. I need you to come with me to check out Base Nightwatch. Gung-Ho, I want you and the other Joes to head back to the Pitt. Take that thing with you and make sure it's in a secure location."

The Joes saluted and got to work. Duke couldn't help but notice Jack Morelli still looked mad.

Location: Joe Base 4; Codename: IceBox

An Eagle Hawk flew several miles towards the Joes' Artic base. In the cockpit, Flint leaned in between Lift-Ticket and Ripcord, looking out at the white expanse.

"I volunteer for a desert mission and Duke sends me into the snow," he said.

Flint turned his head and looked at Lady Jaye. The two smiled at each other.

"Makes me think we should've retired when we got married," Flint told Jaye.

"Who are you kidding?" she laughed back. "You'd get bored of civilian life in under one minute then run off to reenlist."

Beach-Head sat nearby and chuckled. "She's got you there Flint."

Flint laughed and turned back towards the cockpit. "What's our ETA?" he asked.

"Should be there pretty soon," said Ripcord.

Flint settled back into his viewing of the landscape. The whiteness spread out in all directions.

His revelry was broken by a series of explosions close on the horizons. As the pilots gasped, Flint reached for a headset mike.

"Flint calling IceBox! Flint calling Icebox! Come in!" he barked.

Snow-Job's voice came in through a huge cloud of static. "This is IceBox. We're getting shelled over here. We've lost Trooper Depolo and Trooper Adler. Our Snowcat got nailed. Frostbite and I are pinned down. We need reinforcements!"

"We're inbound, try and hold out!" Flint called back. He turned his attention to Ripcord and Lift-Ticket. "Can you guys get some more speed out of this bird?"

"Put your seats and tray tables upright and hang on!" responded Ripcord.

The Eagle Hawk roared as it sped up. Flint bounced around the cabin and he went back to his seat. Lady Jaye and Beach-Head braced themselves. Soon the helicopter reached the burning chaos that had once been IceBox Base. Three out of Four Huts were on fire. A Snowcat burned to slag, two bodies lay near it.

A sound came from a nearby hill, a rocket belched from it, arcing into the air before coming down on a patch of ground in IceBox. Two more rockets followed and hit one of the already burning huts, adding more flames to the fire.

Snow-Job and Frostbite crouched low in a trench. Frostbite looked up and saw the Eagle Hawk. He tapped Snow-Job on the shoulder and pointed the helicopter out. The two Joes waved and let out cheers as the Eagle Hawk swooped overhead.

Whatever Cobra force was on the hill didn't appreciate the Eagle Hawk's presence. Two rockets streaked towards the helicopter. Ripcord squeezed the trigger and took one rocket out with the Eagle Hawk's chin gun then banked hard left to avoid the second one.

"What's going on up there?" yelled Flint from his seat.

"Cobra doesn't like us coming to the barbeque," responded Ripcord. "The good news is I can zero in on where the rockets are coming from."

"Sounds like there's bad news," said Flint.



"The bad news is we have to get shot at for this to work," said Ripcord.

"Well try not to get us blown up," called Lady Jaye.

"Not on my to-do list," yelled Ripcord.

The Eagle Hawk banked hard right avoiding another rocket. Two of the helicopter's own missiles let fly, intercepting a rocket and slamming the hillside.

The Eagle Hawk finally drew close enough to the hillside to identify the trouble. On a ridge was Cobra's artillery expert Scrap-Iron. He and a quintet of Snow Serpents manned a trio of rocket launchers. Two of the Snow Serpents grabbed their rifle and started shooting at the Eagle Hawk. The Joe helicopter banked away from the shots.

Ripcord called back to his passengers "Spotted the snakes. You guys want some payback now's the time."

"Alright," responded Flint. He and the other two Joes grabbed their rifles and headed towards one of the open areas on the helicopter. The Eagle Hawk came in low and fast. Its chin guns roared as bullets tore up the three rocket launchers. Two of the Snow Serpents went down as they got caught in the bullets and explosions. Scrap-Iron and the other three started running for cover. The open side of the Eagle Hawk passed by and Flint's trio opened fire. The remaining Snow Serpents were taken down as Scrap-Iron raised his rifle to fire back.

He didn't get the chance as Flint leaped out of the helicopter. He slammed into the Scrap-Iron, sending them tumbling into the snow. Scrap-Iron tried to push Flint off. Flint responded with a punch to the face that shattered Scrap-Iron's goggles. He then punched him again, knocking him out. Flint then rose and pointed his gun at the unconscious Cobra. By this time the Eagle Hawk had landed and Lady Jaye and Beach-Head ran over to Flint, rifles drawn.

"He in any condition to talk?" asked Lady Jaye as she looked at Scrap-Iron.

"I think I left him enough teeth to be able to speak clearly," responded Flint. "Now let's tie him up and get him back to IceBox. Maybe we'll catch a break and get some answers."

Message to Joe Base: Night Watch

To: Chuckles

From: Duke

RE: Change of orders

*Chuckles, I know you've been monitoring a Dreadnok enclave for the past few months. I am changing your orders. The non-engagement rule has been lifted. Dial-Tone and I are on the way now to rendezvous with your squad. We're kicking the door down. Prep your group and be ready by the time we get there. Duke out.*

The street looked deserted. The area looked like the kind of place one would not want to walk around in regardless of whether it was daylight or not. But the time of day meant nothing to Duke. He and Dial-Tone sat in an alleyway across from a bar. Music came from the slightly ajar door. They were open for business.

As the two Joes stared at the bar, a faint whistle came from further down the alleyway. Duke turned away from the bar for a moment and stared at the darkness. He motioned to Dial-Tone and pointed out the direction of the noise. Jack Morelli put his lips together and whistled a similar tune. After a few seconds, a whistle of "Shave and a Haircut" came from the darkness.

Duke and Dial-Tone relaxed as two Joes emerged from the darkness. Mayday smiled as she approached, a female greenshirt following close behind. "Welcome to the neighborhood," said Mayday.

"Thanks," responded Duke. "Where are Chuckles and Law & Order?"

Mayday walked past Duke and stared at another alleyway that ran alongside the left side of the bar. She pulled out a pocket flashlight and clicked it on and off towards the alleyway. A series of flashlight clicks came from the alleyway in response.

"They're in position," Mayday told Duke. "They'll see about coming in a back entrance while we take the front."

"Sounds like a plan," said Duke. "Let's kick the door down."

"Ladies first," responded Mayday. She signaled her greenshirt partner to follow her. The two sprinted across the street till they came to stop in front of the door. Duke and Dial-Tone followed close behind then took flanking positions by the door. Duke nodded and Mayday responded by kicking the door at the entrance to the bar down with a swift kick of her leg.

Mayday and the greenshirt jumped in weapons drawn. The place was empty. There were only three living things to be seen. First were two bartenders behind the bar, one short and bald, the other tall with long hair and beard. Also, a woman in a red dress sat at a bar stool.

"What are you two fine looking ladies doing here?" asked the bald bartender.

Mayday signaled the greenshirt to watch the rest of the room as she approached the bar. "Hands above your head!" she ordered.

"I don't know if I want to do something when someone isn't polite enough to say please," responded the bartender.

The other bartender chuckled. "That's telling Marcel" he laughed.

"Hands above your head now or I will shoot!" demanded Mayday.

"You have the guts Joe," responded the long haired bartender.

Mayday trained her rifle right at the bartender. "What did you just say?"

"I said you don't have the guts," responded the bartender.

Then in one instant, the situation changed. The long haired bartender's hands moved at high speed. With one hand, he removed his wig and false beard, revealing the evil grinning visage of Zandar.

With his other hand, he reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a small knife. Without missing a beat, he threw his knife. It hit the greenshirt right in the neck. The greenshirt went down. From the floorboards sprang Zarana and the Dreadnoks Buzzer, Ripper, and Torch. They drew guns and aimed at Mayday. The Joe tried to process everything that was going on. Before she could pick a target, the woman in the red dress jumped her. Mayday flipped her off her back just as the Dreadnoks opened fire. The woman in the dress took the hits then fell to the floor like a rag doll.

Mayday meanwhile crouched low on the ground and made her way back to the outside. Marcel the bartender produced a shotgun from underneath him and opened fire on her. The shots just missed as Mayday reached the outside. As she did, Duke and Dial-Tone fired back.

Mayday took position by Duke. She produced a grenade and pulled the pin. Counting to three she threw the grenade into the bar. The Joes moved away from the open door as the grenade exploded. The three Joes waited as the smoke cleared. Duke signaled to his teammates then moved in.

The explosion wrecked the inside. Tables were overturned. Glass bottles behind the bar were shattered. Marcel the bartender got up from the floor. His face bloodied. Dial-Tone drew his rifle on him and moved in on him.

"Don't move scumbag!" he yelled. The Joe then shoved his rifle in the bartender.

Duke grabbed Dial-Tone's rifle and pulled it away from the bartender. "Dial it back now!" he ordered.

"Give me a break Duke," responded Dial-Tone. "I'm not in the mood to play nice with these guys."

"I don't care if you're in the mood," said Duke. "I'm ordering you."

The faces of the two Joes were inches away from each other. Neither one looked like they were going to back.

Their face off was broken by noise from the back of the room. A door burst open and Chuckles and Law & Order came running through, retreating from heavy fire. As they reached Duke's squad, their pursuers emerged. The Dreadnoks Road Pig, Storm Rider, Thrasher, and Burn-Out came running in, guns blazing. The Joes stood their ground and fired back. Marcel the bartender took advantage of the situation and retrieved his shotgun. He aimed at the Joes. Before he could squeeze the trigger, Mayday drew her pistol and took him out with a shot to the head. The fire from the other Joes started pushing the Dreadnoks to behind an upended table. A shot from Duke clipped Storm Rider in the shoulder. The Dreadnok grabbed his wounded area and dove behind the makeshift cover.

Without warning some debris by the Dreadnoks' cover exploded into the air. The trapdoor Zarana and her trio emerged and began firing back.

"Go for cover behind the bar!" shouted Chuckles. The Joes ran over to the bar and jumped behind it. Soon the five of them took turns emerging from cover briefly to fire back.

Zarana made her way to where the other Dreadnoks were under cover. "We could do this all day but I'd rather hightail it out of here."

Ripper looked surprised. "You don't want to finish these guys off?" he asked.

"Don't you see how the Joes are acting?" she responded. "They look out for blood. Whatever heat the Commander brought down on them has them all stirred up. I don't think we're earning enough bank for this. I say we beat it and hide out until everything dies down."

"I like the sound of that," said Ripper.

"Everybody run for the door, we're outta here!" Zarana yelled. The Dreadnoks that were behind cover broke out and ran. The others followed suit. Only Storm Rider lagged behind. He clutched his shoulder then collapsed on the floor. Chuckles and Mayday immediately jumped from cover and drew their guns on him. Duke and Law ran to the door and fired into the night streets. Their shots hit the ground and nothing else. The Dreadnoks had melted into the night. The sound of their hoots and hollers echoed off the walls.

As Dial-Tone rose from cover he heard a groan. He turned his head and saw Zandar on the floor. The Dreadnok had been wounded in the grenade explosion. He had laid unnoticed while the firefight raged. But now his moans of pain could be heard.

Dial-Tone crawled over to Zandar and grabbed him by the collar. "Well look at you," he growled. "Mister Big Bad Dreadnok got himself all messed up. I'm going to make it worse if you don't start talking."

Zandar laughed weakly. "Yeah, right. What're going to do, talk me to death?"

Dial-Tone hoisted Zandar up and threw him over the bar. The wounded Dreadnok landed with loud crash on the floor. Dial-Tone then followed up by jumping over the bar and landing right on top of Zandar. Then he begin hitting him in the face and chest. Zandar cried out in pain. Dial-Tone showed no signs of stopping even as Duke yelled at the top of his lungs, ordering the Joe to stop. Eventually Law grabbed Dial-Tone and hauled him off.

Duke was once again in Dial-Tone's face. "I am done with your attitude," he yelled. "I know your sister is being held captive. That does not excuse this behavior. We're not here to torture people. Now get it together."

Dial-Tone looked like he was about respond violently but a low chuckle interrupted the standoff. All eyes turned to Storm Rider. The Dreadnok lay on the floor, clutching his wound. Mayday stood nearby, pointing her gun at him.

"Wow," said Storm Rider. "Cobra Commander really got to you people didn't he?"

Duke walked over and faced Storm Rider up close. "He got our attention," he responded. "now we're looking to find him so we can properly repay him. Feel like cluing us in? There's a nice cozy hospital bed in it for you."

Storm Rider moved his head in Dial-Tone's direction. "You keep that mad dog away from me and maybe."

Dial-Tone tried to rip himself from Law's grasp. Chuckles patted Dial-Tone on the shoulder and motioned for him to calm down. He then walked over to Duke and Storm Rider.

"Depending on what you tell us, we'll at least make sure you two aren't in the same vehicle as we haul you away," he said.

"You guys suck at bargains," answered Storm Rider. "But since my shoulder hurts like hell, I'll give you a tasty bit of info. Zarana was talking with the Commander just before you guys came barging in. He wanted us to help some guys hide out after they got what he called 'early parole.'"

"What the heck is that supposed to mean?" asked Mayday.

Duke got to his feet. "I think I know exactly what he means," he said. "We've got to move now. Let's get these guys some medical attention and heavy guard. And we gotta contact Blackwater Prison ASAP."

"What's going on?" asked Chuckles.

"I'm guessing Cobra Commander found out the location of Blackwater Prison and is going to arrange a jail break. We need tell the Joes over there to go on high alert immediately."

### **CHAPTER THREE: Counterstrike**

#### **Blackwater Prison: Location: CLASSIFIED**

Somewhere in the southeastern portion of the United States is Blackwater Prison. Since its creation, the prison has served as a place to hold the most dangerous enemies of the US. In the past few years, G.I.Joe has used the prison to hold any and all Cobra operatives they capture. Since the HAARP Incident, the prison has been the home of Destro and the Baroness, two of Cobra's top most operatives behind the Commander himself.

While the prison is one of the harshest on the planet, the Joes aren't cruel. In a room somewhere inside is a fully functional medical facility. In addition to the medical officer Lifeline, there's also the Joes' own resident shrink Psyche-Out, on hand in case any one of the prison's current mandatory residents is having second thoughts about their choice to follow Cobra.

At the moment, the two Joes were just sitting in the empty infirmary, trying to pass the time on a slow day.

"I appreciate the value of the work being done here, but I have this need to leave," said Psyche-Out.

"Don't tell me this place is getting to you," responded Lifeline.

"That's not it," said Psyche-Out. "Judging by what I've been hearing, it sounds like Cobra Commander is trying to hurt us, and Duke in particular in the worst way. I worry about nerves snapping."

You think Duke won't handle the pressure?" asked Lifeline astonished.

"Everyone has their limits, even our esteemed field leader. But I'm not just worried about Duke. I'm also concerned about our fellow Joes. I would be surprised if Cobra Commander wants all the violence to get to us. It would suit his plans if one or more of us are unable to fulfill our duties because we're flak happy."

"So what's your plan?"

"Not much I can do here. I did however, arrange for something to help Duke. Hopefully it will reach him."

"Care to clue me in?"

Psyche-Out smiled. "I want to see if it helps first."

A rumble and a flicker of lights snapped the two Joes out of their relaxed state. The viewscreen on Lifeline's desk sprang to life. Shockwave's face filled the screen.

"Lifeline, come in," he shouted. "Security has been breached. We're being invaded. Lock down the infirmary and do not let anyone in without proper authorization." The screen then went to static.

Psyche-Out calmly pulled out a pistol and armed it. Lifeline stared at him then did the same.

In a corridor Shockwave and Bullhorn set up a barricade using a table. The two Joes drew their rifles and pointed straight ahead.

"What makes you think trouble will come through here?" Shockwave asked Bullhorn.

"A hunch," responded Bullhorn. "This is the way to the maximum security section where Destro and the Baroness are being held."

As if in agreement to Bullhorn's assessment, two men in prisoner uniforms appeared down the hallway. They guns and began firing. The Joes responded in kind, taking down one of the ex-prisoners.

More ex-prisoners joined the shootout. Accompanying them were a group of Iron Grenadiers, members of Destro's personal army. One of them walked up to one of the ex-prisoners. "What is taking so long?" he asked with a thick Scottish accent.

"A couple of the pigs have blocked off the area and are shooting back," came the response.

"Oh is that the only problem? We've got a nice solution here." The Iron Grenadier turned his head and whistled. "Oh Bryan, come here and clear a path for us, willya?"

A large Iron Grenadier brandishing a larger chain fed machine gun strode forth. Shockwave and Bullhorn saw him approach and ducked out of the way. The machine gunner then squeezed the trigger and his gun roared. The table barricade was torn to shreds as was much of the surrounding wall. The Iron Grenadier gunner then lifted his gun and stepped back. "All clear" he intoned.

The motley assemblage of ex-prisoners and Iron Grenadiers marched forward. Suddenly a grenade flew into the middle of the group, exploding and taking out a large percentage of the group. Bullhorn and Shockwave then broke cover and fired, driving the rest back.

"I don't know about you but I can't keep this up," said Bullhorn. "I'm about to run dry."

From behind came a noise. Shockwave turned to see a ceiling panel drop. As he pointed his gun in that direction, Tunnel Rat came hurdling down. Roadblock came down seconds later, his large frame slamming into the ground.

"Sorry we're late," responded Tunnel Rat.

"Did my ears deceive me or did I hear a big bad machine gun giving you boys a hard time?" asked Roadblock.

"You heard right," said Bullhorn.

Roadblock strode forward with his M-60. "Time to even the odds," he quipped. He faced the corridor and opened fire. The roar brought forth the Iron Grenadiers' machine gunner. The two dueled back and forth as their fellow soldiers ducked for cover. Finally, Roadblock got a shot in. The IG machine gunner yelled in pain then dropped to the ground. Roadblock continued to fire until the other machine gun was in pieces.

"Maybe we can actually win this," said Bullhorn.

The Joes took up positions looking out into the corridor. Everything was silent. The shadows of their opponents could be seen peeking from around the corner. But other than that, no sound or movement.

"Could they be getting ready to give up?" wondered Tunnel Rat.

Shockwave's communicator went off. "Attention G.I.Jerks," came a voice. "You're going to want to surrender."

"Why should we do that?" responded Shockwave.

In the infirmary Metal-Head of the Iron Grenadiers laughed as he spoke into the desk intercom. He stared at Lifeline and Psyche-Out as they lay on the floor. The two Joes were flanked by a pair of Iron Grenadiers who were training their guns on them. "That's easy," he said. "Cause if you don't, I have your doc and your shrink here shot in the head."

"You wouldn't dare"" growled Shockwave.

"Try me," snapped back Metal-Head.

Bullhorn grabbed Shockwave's communicator. "You do know it is considered against the rules of war to fatally harm medics right?"

"Give me a break," said Metal-Head. "I don't play those games. Besides, they had guns on them. They're not just medics, they're Joes. Now I'm giving you five seconds to surrender or they die."

The Joes stared at each other. In the corridor, some of the Iron Grenadiers started taking peeks around the corner. Tunnel Rat kept his rifle trained on them.

"Time's wasting," chimed Metal-Head.

"We're the only thing between Destro and freedom," said Shockwave. "We surrender and that metal-masked freak is loose on the world."

"But are he and the Baroness really worth Lifeline and Psyche-Out?" asked Roadblock.

"Answer now!" ordered Metal-Head. The sound of guns cocking could be heard over the communicator.

"Dammit," growled Shockwave.

An Iron Grenadier machine gunner lifted his gun. Pressing the trigger, he let the bullets fly. The shots tear through the cell door's lock. As the machine gun ran out of bullets, the door slowly swung open. Destro walked out, radiating strength even in prison scrubs.

The Iron Grenadier trooper stood straight and saluted. Metal-Head saluted and smirked as the Joes were on their knees next to him. The Baroness strode up to Destro, wrapping her arms around him and kissing him. Destro did not kiss back. His face didn't move. After a minute he slowly pushed Baroness away. He then strode over to Metal-Head and the Joes.

"Welcome to freedom sir," said Metal-Head. He nodded towards the Joes. "What should we do with these losers?"

The Joes all raised their heads and glared at Destro. The two sides stared at each other in silence for more than a minute. Neither side flinched. Neither side blinked.

Finally, Destro turned back to Metal-Head and broke the silence. "What would you like to do?" he asked Metal-Head.

"Cobra Commander is having all his operatives killed as many Joes as they can find," Metal-Head responded. "I see no reason not to follow orders."

Bullhorn chuckled. One of the Iron Grenadiers moved to strike him. Destro raised his hand to stop his soldier. He then leaned over Bullhorn and locked eyes with him.

"And pray tell, what is so amusing?" Destro asked.

"Oh nothing," said Bullhorn. "I just never thought you were another dog Cobra Commander had on a leash."

"Bullhorn's got a point," added Psyche-Out. "Based off my research, you don't seem like someone who takes orders, you give them. Makes me wonder why you and Baroness took part in taking over HAARP."

Metal-Head growled and pulled out a gun. He started pointing at the Joes but Destro yanked the gun from his grasp. Destro then pointed the gun at the Joes himself. He then moved the gun from Bullhorn to Psyche-Out then back again. The two Joes gritted their teeth and continued to



try and stare down Destro. The other Joes watched the proceedings and wondered what was going on.

Once again, Destro broke the silence. "I took part in Cobra Commander's mad scheme in order to gain information on how HAARP worked in order to develop similar technology. I am no one's dog."

He then threw Metal-Head's gun back to him. "I also do not engage in senseless slaughter. We are leaving"

Metal-Head and Baroness stared as Destro walked away. Both of them and the Iron Grenadier troopers present followed him out. Metal-Head quickened his pace to catch up to his leader.

"Why are we leaving?" he asked. "We're just going to let those Joes live? We're just going to leave this place still standing?"

"Yes," responded Destro. "My main interest at this moment is returning to home to Castle Destro and checking on the status of endeavors since my incarceration. This place has already been compromised by your assault. There is no need to engage in mindless destruction. The Joes are tied up. We can be long gone before they can be ready to pursue."

"What about the Cobra troops we busted out?" asked Metal-Head. "There are still more in cells."

"We are not a prison escape service for captured Cobra personnel," said Destro. "Those that were already freed can come with us. They will be given two options; One, they can defect to the Iron Grenadiers. Two, they can be dropped close to the nearest Cobra safehouse." He then turned his head and stared at Metal-Head. "Go back and make sure my orders are followed to the letter. And be sure to let everyone failure to follow these orders will result in severe punishment.'

Metal-Head saluted and began to turn around before Destro grabbed his arm and stared him down.

"That punishment goes for you as well. I appreciate the rescue but I do not appreciate the length of time I was imprisoned. Nor do I appreciate the fact you let Cobra Commander think MY army is subject to HIS whims."

Metal-Head gulped and saluted again.

### Cobra Base. Location Unknown

Jill Morelli stirred.

Her eyes opened slowly. The room was in haze at first. Then the image cleared. It was still the same room. Her arms and legs were still clamped onto the chair. The helmet and electrodes were still in place.

And Doctor Mindbender was still there. Behind his console. The Cobra scientist was jotting notes down when he noticed his "guest" was awake.

"I see you are awake," he intoned. "You have been a very interesting subject. Stronger than I would have guessed. The Commander did want as much information from you that the scanner could find. We did find a few things but not as much as I'm sure the Commander would have wanted. The Scanner did reveal to us your name. I am torn. Should I call you Jill or Dial-Tone?"

Jill glared at him. "Go to Hell," she softly growled. She would have spit at him but her throat was too dry.

Mindbender continued his monologue. "In any event, we know your name. We know you have a brother. We did see the destruction of the aircraft carrier USS Flagg from your perspective. And we did find out the location of your secret prison."

Jill's eyes widen when she heard the last thing Mindbender said. She tried to wiggle her arms and legs. Unfortunately, her strength was sapped by her time in the Brainwave Scanner. If she could have broken out, that time was gone.

Mindbender noticed her struggles. He pressed a button on his console. The helmet came to life. The pulsing waved over Jill's head. She felt the remaining reserves of strength drain from her body. Her head dropped forward. She tried to lift it but it stayed down.

"Interesting," noted Mindbender. "Still some resistance but the Scanner has adapted. Perhaps with this session we can discover some more interesting information about G.I. Joe."

Jill murmured in a low voice. So low whatever she said in response was lost.

#### G. I. Joe Main Base: The Pitt

Duke and Dial-Tone stepped off the Eagle Hawk as it came to rest in the dark underground hanger. Dial-Tone began to almost walk/run but didn't get very far before Duke caught up to him. The Joe first sergeant grabbed Dial-Tone and turned him around so they could be face to face. Dial-Tone's face was a mask of anger and rage.

"We're not done talking," said Duke.

"With all due respect, Sir," responded Dial-Tone. "We've got data to analyze which means I don't have time to talk."

"Well you're talking right now. And the sounds coming out of your mouth are sounding a lot like disrespect to a superior."

"A superior that hasn't done much to find a missing soldier."

Duke was ready to explode. It took everything not to unleash a torrent of rage and emotion in Dial-Tone's face. "I am getting really tired of having to explain myself to you. I can't magically conjure up Jill's location. And I've got other troops in danger I have to take care of. I haven't forgotten her and we WILL find her. But you have to cut me some slack and do your job."

The two stared at each other, fists shaking. Their eyes not leaving one another. Each one seeing what the other would do next.

How much time passed is uncertain, but the staredown was broken by a voice coming from the other side of the room.

"What's going on here?" demanded Scarlett as she approached the two Joes.

Dial-Tone was the first to receive her attention.

"Dial-Tone, Jack. Get back to the ready room immediately. Flint should be calling in any minute with updates on any info he's gleaned from Scrap-Iron. But first, you're going to salute both of us."

Dial-Tone saluted and walked away. Scarlett then turned to Duke. She grabbed and pulled him into an empty corner of the room. She stared at him as he wouldn't look eyes with her. She gently but firmly placed her hand on his cheek and made him look in the face.

"Hey," she said. "Talk to me. No ranks. No one here. Drop the hardcase field leader for a second and talk to me."

"There's nothing to say," he responded. His voice was low. It sounded tired.

"Duke, please let it go," Scarlett told him. "No one is asking you to perform miracles."

"Dial-Tone is."

"Well he's letting his emotions get the best of him. You can't let that affect you."

Scarlett moved to embrace Duke. He tried resisting. He turned his eyes away again. Scarlett persisted. She could see the hurt, anger, and exhaustion in his face and in his stance. She could see he didn't want to look at her and show the weakness he was feeling.

Finally Scarlett's efforts to break through paid off. Duke collapsed his head on her shoulder. He wrapped his arms around her. She caressed the back of his head. He did not say a word but she knew he'd cry if he could only let himself.

"You don't have to do this alone," she told him. "Dial-Tone may be mad because of his sister but others are behind you. I'm behind you."

Duke raised his head and stared at Scarlett. She stared back at him. Her eyes warm. Her expression one that said "Let me in." His mouth was open but no words were coming out. Scarlett put her hand on his cheek again and gave him an "its ok, I know" look. The two were close to each other. And getting closer.

A voice came out of the air and broke the mood. Scarlett and Duke separated just as Hawk came around a corner.

Duke. Scarlett. Is everything all right?" he asked.

Duke saluted. "Everything's fine sir."

"Need you right now," said Hawk. "Flint just called in. He got some information out of our prisoner."

Hawk waked off and the other two Joes followed him. Duke turned back to look at Scarlett. She flashed him a warm smile. He flashed one back at her.

The command center was buzzing. Flint's face filled the screen. Several Joes stood by as Duke, Hawk, and Scarlett walked in.

"What do you have for us?" Hawk asked Flint.

"Scarp-Iron talked," responded Flint. "Cobra is basing itself out of some place called Temple Alpha."

"I thought that was Springfield," said Wild-Bill.

"Apparently it's a new place," said Flint. "But wait till you hear the crazy part. We're going to have no trouble getting there."

"What do you mean?" asked Scarlett.

"It's actually located a few clicks from Swamp Ape," responded Flint.

Duke, Hawk, and Kamakura stared in disbelief. Mainframe and Dial-Tone looked at each with a "Can you believe it?" look on their faces.

"Was that on purpose?" asked Scarlett.

Flint shrugged. "He didn't say. He did say though that Cobra Commander wasn't coordinating from there. He said the Commander would be overseeing things from what he called "The Alpha of this whole conflict." Whatever the heck that means."

"I know exactly what that means," responded Duke. "I'm heading there now to finish this."

"Not alone you're not," interjected Scarlett. "Psyche-Out told me you needed help and I'm giving it to you whether you want it or not."

"Duke stared at her then motioned her to follow him. Dusty, Wild-Bill, and Snake-Eyes followed.

"Begging the top shirt's pardon but you're going to need a pilot," said Wild-Bill.

"And you need some fire support, said Dusty. Snake-Eyes gave a thumbs up in agreement.

Duke tried very hard not to break into a smile. Inside he felt relief and gratitude at the sight of his team rising to support. Outside he kept his cool.

"We haven't much time," he responded. "Grab your gear and have a copter ready in five minutes."

Hawk watched the group go before turning his attention to the remaining Joes.

"Correct me if I'm wrong but there are two locations we need to scout out," he told the Joes. "Flint, I take it you're on your way back here."

"Yes sir," Flint answered.

"No you're not," responded Hawk. "Rendezvous with the Joes near Swamp Ape. I'm sending a team to back you up. Find Temple Alpha and take it down."

"Yes sir!" responded Flint. The screen then went blank.

Hawk barked orders. "Spirit, Kamakura, head down there. Dial-Tone go with them."

"What am I supposed to do?" asked Dial-Tone.

"Your sister is probably at one of the two locations," responded Hawk. "Either Duke rescues her or you do. Either way, she comes home."

Dial-Tone saluted and joined the other two Joes as they ran out the door.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR: Reckoning**

##### **Location: ruins of Springfield**

The Eagle Hawk touched hovered over the ground as Duke and the rest of the team jumped down.

"You sure you don't need me to stick around?" came Wild-Bill's voice from Duke's headset.

"Negative," responded Duke. "Park yourself nearby and await orders. You're too big a target to just be idling around."

With that the Eagle Hawk turned and flew off, leaving Duke and his team in the ruins.

For over a year the town formerly known as Springfield lay in ruins. Every building reduced to rubble. No signs of life. It resembled more a World War 2 village that had been bombed repeatedly than a seemingly innocent small town in Middle America.

Dusty looked in awe at the damage. "I can't believe it's still like this," he said.

"I know the US military cordoned off the entire town," answered Scarlett. "The Pentagon and the CIA wanted every square inch of this place searched for anything Cobra related."

"I don't see anybody here," responded Dusty. "No army guys. No spooks, nothing. Is everyone on a break?"

Snake-Eyes stiffened. His head started darting around, searching for something. He turned his head to the side and stared. The rest of the Joes stared at him. Duke got ready to ask him what was going on when the Joe ninja commando motioned for everyone to move quickly.

Seconds later a missile roared passed the group and crashed into a nearby destroyed building. The resulting fireball all but finished off anything left standing. The Joes took refuge behind a scrapped HISS tank.

Duke peeked out from behind to investigate. "I can't see where that came from." Snake-Eyes crouched then ran into the open. He unsheathed his sword and ran for a mountain of debris. He jumped his way up the large pile then made his way over the top to the other side. Soon the sounds of gunfire and screams pierced the air.

The other Joes broke cover and ran to join Snake-Eyes. Not as nimble as he was, the Joes took the long way around. As they turned the corner of the debris pile they were met by another missile. Duke and the others hit the dirt as the missile hit a nearby pile of debris. The force of the explosion rained junk on top of the Joes, almost pinning them to the floor. The Joes crawled their way forward then rose to their feet to keep charging.

Several feet away, Snake-Eyes was cutting his way through a group of Cobra troopers. Nearby, Firefly stood by a missile launcher. The barrel of the launcher still smoked from having just launched its load.

Firefly noticed the other Joes. "Well well," he said, "Looks like the ninja didn't come alone. And here I thought the Commander was paying me to be bored sitting around here. Looks like I'll end up having more fun here than when I took care of that Brit TV guy Gary Russell."

Duke reached Firefly first and lunged at him. Firefly moved out of the way and Duke collided with the launcher. "Where is he?!" Duke barked at Firefly.

Firefly took out his pistol and fired at Duke. The Joe leader rolled out of the way. "I can't tell you that," Firefly responded. "Client confidentiality is important."

More troopers appeared and began firing on the various points where the Joes were standing. Snake-Eyes cut down the last of the first set of troopers and ran to meet up with Scarlett and Dusty who were taking cover behind what was left of a building wall. Duke tried to head for the wall but Firefly kicked him in the back. Duke hit the floor. The Cobra saboteur pulled out a knife and tried to go for Duke's back. Shots from the Joe position scared him off. Duke then got up off the ground and ran for his teammates.

He reached them in time to see Scarlett and Snake-Eyes pulling out handfuls of grenades. "We're giving you some cover," she told Duke. "Go find Cobra Commander. We'll keep these guys busy."

Duke looked Scarlett. "Be careful," he told her.

Scarlett stared back and nodded. She then signaled Snake-Eyes. The two Joes got up and threw three grenades each. The explosives rolled close to Cobra's position and went off. The blast took some troopers and drove the rest back.

"GO!" Scarlett yelled at Duke. He broke cover and ran up a side street. He ran for a handful of blocks before stopping. His ears could hear gunfire being exchanged. He stared in the direction of the battle for a moment and directed a silent prayer for his friends. He then moved on.

#### Location: remains of Joe Base "Swamp Ape"

Flint and his team scanned the surrounding area. The jungle made no sounds except the odd bird call. Spirit stood like a stone sentry at the edge of the base, staring out into the river. A

casual observer would have to look close at his eyes to tell he was human and not a very lifelike statue.

Kamakura took up a higher position next to the Eagle Hawk the team used to transport themselves. He softly whistled to himself music from the Disney movies Tarzan. Jack Morelli was inside the Eagle Hawk playing with the radar. He switched back and forth from scanning the area nearby to scanning a much wider area. He grumbled in frustration.

Kamakura turned his head towards the helicopter. "Problem?" he asked Dial-Tone.

"Yep," answered Morelli. "We were told Temple Alpha is around here but scanners show nothing. It's like trying to find a phantom castle."

"Figures the snakes wouldn't just be nice enough to lay out a welcome mat." Said Kamakura. "But don't sweat it. As soon Torpedo and the others get here, we'll track this place down."

"I just hope my sister's still alive when we do," responded Dial-Tone.

If Flint heard the exchange he didn't give a sign. But his thoughts had similar echoes to Dial-Tone. Lady Jaye walked up to him and put her hand on his shoulder. Flint turned in her direction and gave a smile.

"You look like someone who hates waiting," she said to him.

"That's a rodge," Flint responded. "I'm hoping this long wait isn't a sign Torpedo and the others got ambushed."

"I'm sure switching from cold air to jungle heat doesn't help either," chimed in Lady Jaye.

"No it doesn't," said Flint.

Spirit's stance finally changed as he raised his arm and pointed at the jungle's edge. Flint ran up to him and followed his arm. His eyes caught a series of light flashes coming from the trees.

"Message from our friends," said Spirit. "They want us to meet them there."

"Then let's go find a boat around here and get to shore," replied Flint.

"Not necessary," came a voice. The Joes on the base looked out and saw Recondo and Torpedo approaching on a native row boat.

"Where'd you get that?" asked Lady Jaye.

"From my jungle family," answered Recondo. "I've got a group of them at the jungle's edge covering us. It was one of them who signaled you."

"I was hoping you'd bring a missile boat but this'll do nicely," said Flint.

"Get aboard," said Torpedo. "The sooner we get ashore, the sooner we can get to Temple Alpha".

Outside Temple Alpha, Shadow Tracker stood staring out at the jungle. His muscles tensed up. His grip tighten around a wooden spear to the point the Jungle-Vipers nearby could hear the wood begin to crack. One of the Vipers decided to be brave enough to approach him. "Sir, is everything alright?"

Shadow Tracker growled and looked in the Viper's direction. The Jungle Viper almost wet himself in fear.

"There are intruders in the jungle." Said Shadow Tracker. "They march here with impunity. I want to strip the skin from their bones."

The other Jungle-Vipers joined their comrade in feeling fear.

Skull Buster stood nearby and chuckled. "Are you going to do something about it or just growl?" he asked Shadow Tracker.

Shadow Tracker turned in Skull Buster's direction and emitted a low growl. If his eyes could be seen beneath his mask, they would be staring right at Skull Buster's face, like a predator zeroing in on a target.

"I am going into the jungle to punish these interlopers," he responded. "Are you coming as well?"

Skull Buster motioned for a brace of Range-Vipers to join him. "The Temple should not be left unguarded."

Shadow Tracker started silently then turned in the direction of the jungle and walked off. The Jungle-Vipers gave each other looks then followed him.

#### Location: ruins of Springfield

The firefight still raged on. The Joe force stayed behind cover, occasionally popping up to throw shots back at Firefly and his Vipers.

"I don't know about anyone else but I'm almost empty," said Dusty as he felt around for an ammo clip.

Snake-Eyes made a hand motion indicating a similar dilemma. Scarlett raised herself and squeezed off a quick shot before ducking under cover.

A shot nearly missed her. Snake-Eyes lifted himself to take a look then quickly ducked as another shot impacted nearby. He looked at Scarlett and both could tell this came from a different weapon than what was being used against them before.

Dusty peeked and took a look over at Cobra's position. Blackout had joined Firefly and was busy talking to him. "Someone new joined the party," Dusty told the others.

"Terrific", responded Scarlett.



Over on the Cobra lines, Firefly reloaded as Blackout fired a couple of more shots from his sniper rifle. "You here for any particular reason or are you just stopping by to chat?" Firefly asked Blackout.

"I saw Joes showed up", responded Blackout. "I've been itching to get some Joe blood on my hands."

"Well la-de-da. You and everyone else with a snake printed on their undies", retorted Firefly. "Make yourself useful. One of the Joes made a break for it. He's probably looking for the Commander. Go find that Joe first and dirt nap him."

Blackout took one last look at the Joes and ran off.

Snake-Eyes peeked over at the Cobra side of things and noticed Blackout leave. He motioned this info to his teammates. Dusty took a look to confirm.

"The new arrival left," Dusty said. "That just leaves the same snakes we've dealing with."

"I've got a nasty feeling he went after Duke," said Scarlett. "I'm going after him. Cover me."

Dusty and Snake-Eyes rose and fired on Firefly's side. Scarlett broke cover and ran.

In another part of the ruined town, Duke approached the crater that used to house Cobra Commander's command bunker. Climbing down the crater. Duke's memories of the last time he was there flooded his mind as he scanned for clues.

"Welcome Duke," came a voice.

Duke drew his rifle towards the sound. From the shadows came Cobra Commander himself. The Commander stood staring at Duke, one hand on his sword. He chuckled.

"This is amusing. What are you trying to do? Still be "the Hero"? Are you trying to sacrifice yourself to save your friends? Do you seriously think this will stop me from torturing your team to death?"

"You don't know me too well," responded Duke. "All I'm concerned with is taking you down. No escape this time."

Cobra Commander drew his sword and pointed it at Duke. "Come," he directed at Duke.

Location: Outside Temple Alpha.

Recondo and Spirit took point, their eyes scanning every inch of jungle. The rest of the Joes fell in behind. Everyone stayed silent.

Soon the jungle began to recede, revealing the giant shape of Cobra's Temple Alpha. However, Recondo stopped short. He bent down and motioned for everyone else to do the same. Spirit came up next to him and drew his knife. The Joe tracker closed in on the tripwire on the jungle floor. As the knife sniped the tripwire, setting off the trap as a tiger trap swung down and impaled itself on a tree. The rest of the Joes stared back and forth between Recondo and Spirit and the triggered tiger trap.

Flint arose and started to say something but Spirit raised his hand to silence him and get him to get back down. Spirit then adjusted the knife in his hand and threw it. The knife struck something in the bushes with a scream piercing the jungle. A Jungle-Viper came into view as he fell dead. Targeting lasers shot out from the nearby jungle darkness, followed by gun fire. Recondo and Spirit drew their rifles and fired in several directions. Flint signaled the others to fire in the same directions as well.

A few shots hit their marks, sending more dead Jungle-Vipers into the Joes' view. Recondo paused to reload. Suddenly, a massive shape emerged from the darkness and tackled him onto the ground. Spirit turned to see Shadow Tracker trying to pin Recondo to the ground and stab him with a massive dagger. He ran and jumped on top of the Cobra jungle warrior. Torpedo soon joined in. Recondo managed to break free and soon all three Joes were trying to restrain Shadow Tracker.

"Fools!" said Shadow Tracker. "My Vipers will soon overwhelm you worse than how you're trying to overwhelm me."

"I don't think so," responded Recondo. Between grunts he whistled loudly into the jungle.

Soon, the shooting stopped and the last of the Jungle-Vipers dropped dead into view. Shadow Tracker saw this and roared. "How?!" he yelled.

"My Tucaro brothers have been following us," responded Recondo. "This is their jungle and they don't like you snakes infesting it."

Shadow Tracker roared louder. "I am the embodiment of jungle rage," he bellowed. "How dare they disrespect my power."

Flint and the other Joes made their way to where Shadow Tracker was being subdued. He was soon on the floor being tied up. Some of the group then headed towards the clearing so the journey to Temple Alpha could continue.

Yells and shots stopped their progress once again. On a ledge of the temple overlooking the jungle, Skull Buster and his Range-Vipers rained fire down on the Joes. Flint's group took cover behind the trees as best they could.

"Cobra doesn't seem to want visitors," said Flint.

"Too bad," responded Dial-Tone. "I gotta know if my sister is in there."

"I'm thinking some of us stay here and distract these Range-Vipers while the others make a run for the temple," Lady Jaye chipped in.

"Sounds like a plan," responded Flint. "Dial-Tone is with me, so is Kamakura. Everyone else keep the Vipers' heads down and work on staying alive."

"Roger that," said Lady Jaye. She and Torpedo returned fire on Skull-Buster's position. One Range-Viper went down while Skull Buster and the others ducked down.

"Go!" yelled Lady Jaye.

Flint, Dial-Tone, and Kamakura ran towards the temple, dodging fire till they got close enough to the temple wall.

“Alright we’re in business,” said Flint. “Hug the wall and look for a way in.”

The other Joes nodded.

#### Location: ruins of Springfield

Cobra Commander lunged. His sword just missing Duke’s right shoulder. The Joe responded with a kick to the Commander’s stomach. His leg found its mark. The Commander groaned and doubled over. Duke leaned over to press the advantage but the Commander hit Duke’s knee with his sword hilt. Duke growled and grabbed his knee. The Commander rose and connected with an uppercut. Duke hit the floor.

Cobra Commander stood over Duke. His sword pressed against Duke’s chest.

“Do you know I know where to stab someone without killing them?” the Commander told Duke. “If I hit the right spot, your spine will be severed. But you’ll be alive. You will totally immobile. A living statue almost. Perhaps I’ll pin you to the wall, like a trophy.”

“Or maybe you talk too much,” said Duke. He kicked up his foot, striking the sword and sending it hurling away from the Commander. He then sprung up and started punching the Commander in the face. His fists repeatedly hitting the Commander until his face mask began to crack.

The Commander slumped against a wall. His breathing was heavy. Duke paused his assault and stared the Commander down. Was it over? Was the Commander finished?

He didn’t have time to figure it out. Cobra Commander reached into a hidden pocket and pulled out a small taser. He lunged at Duke and jammed the taser into his stomach. Duke screamed and fell to the ground.

The Joe sergeant groaned and tried to get up. Cobra Commander walked calmly over to where his sword fell and picked it up. He went back to where Duke lay and once again pointed his sword.

“Hmm, maybe I shouldn’t sever your spine. Maybe I should just remove your hands and feet. Or maybe do it all. So many choices. So many ways to make you suffer.

It’s over Duke.”

#### Location: Inside Temple Alpha

The inside of the docking bay was quiet. Flint took point as the Joes made their way inside. Dial-Tone spotted a computer terminal and headed towards it.

A voice cried out “Halt!”

A group mixed up of Range and Jungle Vipers had come into the room. They opened fire on Dial-Tone who began running back to his fellow Joes. Flint and Kamakura began returning fire.

"These guys really don't like getting visitors," said Kamakura. "They are hellbent on stopping us here."

"I need to get to that computer terminal," said Dial-Tone. "The only way we're going to know our way around and maybe find my sister is with that."

Flint lobbed a grenade. The blast took down a Jungle-Viper and a pair of Range-Vipers but that still left 2 of the former and 3 of the latter standing and continuing the fight.

"Alright, I'm done with this," said Kamakura. He drew his sword and charged forward. Flint and Dial-Tone provided cover fire as Kamakura charged the Cobra position. As a shot took down a Range-Viper, Kamakura swung his sword and cut down a Range-Viper and Jungle-Viper. He then aimed his Uzi with his free hand and shot a Jungle-Viper at point blank range. Finally he swung his sword again and cut the last remaining Range-Viper across the chest.

Flint and Dial-Tone moved forward. Dial-Tone went back to the terminal while Flint joined Kamakura.

"Nice moves," Flint said as he patted Kamakura on the shoulder. "I keep forgetting you have some ninja talent."

"That's cause ninjas don't advertise," responded Kamakura with a chuckle.

Dial-Tone motioned them over. "Couldn't find any information on my sister," he said. "But I did find out Doctor Mindbender has a lab two levels above us. Worth taking a look."

"Agreed. Let's move out," responded Flint.

Dr. Mindbender looked at Jill Morelli as she sat still strapped into the Brainwave Scanner. She was slumped down in the chair, her head leaning to the side. Quiet murmurs came from her mouth. The Doctor turned and looked at the screens. Many of the same scenes played over again while some scenes were a mess of static.

"Hmm..."he said out loud to himself. "I may have made a miscalculation. It appears my subject has been burned out. I have not been able to procure any more vital information from her. Perhaps I may have to unhook her from the machine and place her stasis until her mind has recovered enough to undergo another procedure."

A gun pressed hard against the back of Mindbender's head. "Change of plans scumbag," said Jack Morelli. "You're going to find religion and pray that my sister is ok. Otherwise your grey matter is going all over these screens."

Flint put his hand gently on Jack's arm to lower the gun. "Go to your sister DT, we'll keep this creep covered," he told Jack.

Dial-Tone went over to his sister. With great care he unhooked her from the Brainwave Scanner and held her head up. "Jill? Jill. Can you hear me?" he pleaded with her.

Her eyes flickered. Slowly they opened and she stared ahead. Her voice came out in hoarse whisper. "Jack....? Is that you?" she asked.

Dial-Tone smiled. "It's me sis," he responded warmly.

Brother lifted sister up onto her feet. The two joined their fellow Joes as they held Dr. Mindbender at gunpoint.

"How's our girl doing?" asked Flint.

"Shaking like a leaf. We need to get out of here," responded Dial-Tone.

Jill stared at Mindbender. The Doctor stared back at her. Neither speaking. Finally Mindbender spoke.

"Remarkable. I would have thought you'd be unable to stand. Yet here we are. Completely remarkable what simply unhooking a subject from the Brainwave Scanner does for recovery."

Jill broke free from her brother's grasp and grabbed a nearby data pad. She summoned the strength to smash it into Mindbender's face, breaking his glasses. The Doctor slumped against the screens, blood running across his face.

"Shut up. Shut up. SHUT UP!" she screamed. She continued to hit him again and again with the pad. Pieces of it flew. Mindbender spit out teeth. Finally, Mindbender slumped onto the ground unconscious. His face was bleeding and covered in bruises. Jill fell to her knees. The pad fell to the ground. She shook violently. Noises came from her. She was trying to suppress the urge to cry.

Dial-Tone and Kamakura went over to her and helped her back on her feet. She sank to her brother's arms. "That's enough," Kamakura said quietly.

"Let's move out," said Flint.

Dial-Tone looked at Mindbender on the floor. "What about him?"

"I'd love to drag this scumbag in," responded Flint. "But we don't have the manpower to take both Jill and him. Let's get her out of here and to safety. We'll come back with a larger force and shut this place down."

#### Location: ruins of Springfield

Blackout made his way through the rubble and ruin. His eyes searched the area, looking for any sign of Duke. His hand gripped tightly on his rifle, ready to fire the second he spotted his prey.

His meditation was broken by a voice crying out from under cover. He raised his rifle and hunted down the source. He soon found himself face to face with Tombstone who was in the middle of seeing if a Stinger jeep was working.

"What are you doing?" Blackout asked.

"Getting the heck outta here," responded Tombstone. "If you had brains you would too."

"No way," said Blackout. "The Joe leader is here and I intend to put a bullet in his head."

"Shut up," barked Tombstone. "I know I said you'd get a shot at taking some more lives but that was before the Commander screwed up and brought the Joes back to our doorstep. How long till more Joes show up? You might get one or two but then you're headed for a bodybag."

"So what do you think we should do?" asked Blackout.

"Get in this thing and get the hell outta here. We'll regroup with another unit and see about laying low," responded Tombstone.

Blackout thought for a moment as Tombstone finished his work on the Stinger and slid into the front seat. The jeep started up and Tombstone stared at Blackout as he backed the jeep up. Blackout took one last look around and got into the passenger seat.

The Stinger drove off, heading for the nearest way out of town.

Wild Bill flew over them as he scanned the city. He thought for a second about taking a shot at the Cobra jeep he saw drive away but continued on. His Eagle Hawk flew towards the last remaining shots of the battle that occupied his fellow Joes.

On the ground Dusty and Snake-Eyes dropped their rifles. Dusty took a peek over the edge of their cover and saw Firefly and the last few Vipers getting ready to charge. He ducked back down and looked at Snake-Eyes. The Joe ninja pulled out his sword.

"You got anything I can use," asked Dusty. In response Snake-Eyes pulled out a spike-knuckled combat knife and handed it to Dusty. The two crouched down and faced in the direction of their enemies.

"Ready?" Dusty asked Snake-Eyes. The ninja nodded.

The Eagle Hawk burst into the scene. Shots were fired, bringing down all but one of the remaining Vipers and Firefly. Dusty and Snake-Eyes came out of hiding and charged. Dusty used his knife to stab the Viper in the shoulder while Snake-Eyes hit Firefly in the face with a flying kick. The Cobra Saboteur hit the ground hard. Snake-Eyes stood over Firefly and pointed his sword at Firefly's neck.

Wild Bill landed his copter and called out to his teammates. "Hope you all don't mind if I broke protocol and came to look and see how you're doing."

Snake-Eyes gave a thumbs up and Dusty laughed. "Heck no Bill," responded Dusty.

Location: outside Temple Alpha

Torpedo and Lade Jaye crouched behind cover as shots rained down. Recondo and Spirit kept a close eye on Shadow Tracker as he still lay tied up on the jungle floor. All the Joes kept a nervous eye on Temple Alpha, looking for any sign of Flint's group.

"How much longer do we wait?" asked Torpedo.

"For as long as possible," responded Lady Jaye. "Until we know for sure that Flint and the others succeeded in finding our fellow Joe."

From their perch on Temple Alpha, Skull Buster and his Range-Vipers continued to fire on the Joes. As they paused to reload, they failed to notice they were no longer alone.

Kamakura dashed forward in a quick and quiet burst. His sword cut down a Range-Viper as he kicked another in the stomach. He whirled around and cut down a second and third Range-Viper. Two more Range-Vipers were shot down by the Joes below due to their attention being diverted.

Skull Buster lunged at Kamakura. The ninja sidestepped and karate chopped the back of Skull Buster's neck. Skull Buster yelled in pain but quickly turned around and lunged again. Kamakura jumped and kicked the Cobra in the face. Pieces of Skull Buster's mask came flying off as the kick connected. Skull Buster hit the ground and did not move any further.

Kamakura peered over the edge and into the jungle. He waved in the direction of the other Joes.

"Looks like all clear," said Torpedo.

"Then let's go," responded Lady Jaye. As the Joes moved out, Recondo let out a whistle. The jungle brush moved as whistles responded back.

"My brothers will take care of our prisoner," Recondo told his teammates.

Lady Jaye's group broke cover and approached the temple. Kamakura was repelling down the side as Flint and the others arrived. Jill was still leaning on Dial-Tone.

"Is everyone alright?" asked Lady Jaye.

"I'm fine," answered Jill. "I'm just sick and tired of the jungle. Can we go now?"

"Sounds like a good idea", responded Flint. "Let's get back to Swamp Ape and call for someone to come clean out this mess. Hopefully the guys we left unconscious in there won't wake up and pull a disappearing act."

"Maybe Recondo's jungle brothers can help," chimed in Spirit.

"I can see what I can do," answered Recondo.

#### Location: ruins of Springfield

Cobra Commander poked Duke with his sword as the Joe leader struggled to get up. He chuckled as he played with Duke. Duke's face betrayed frustration over Cobra Commander toying with him.

"What's the matter Duke?" Cobra Commander said sarcastically. "Is this torture getting to you? Do you want it to end?"

Duke grunted and whipped his arm out, grabbing the sword. Blood trickled from his hand as he struggled to move the sword. He started to rise from the ground, pushing back as the Commander bared down on him.

"Do you ever get tired of hearing yourself talk?" responded Duke. He finally got on his feet. One last grunt and push and the Commander was pushed back. Duke raised his fists, ready to restart the fight.

"Freeze Commander!" came a yell. The two combatants turned to see Scarlett closing in, her rifle pointed in Cobra Commander's direction.

"How touching. The mother lion has come to defend her mate," growled Cobra Commander. "Maybe I should kill you before I defeat him. Then I can drink in his pain as he sees your lifeless corpse."

Duke took advantage of the Commander's distraction to tackle him. The two fell on the floor, Duke on top. "Stand down Scarlett," yelled Duke as he punched the Commander repeatedly. He grabbed the Commander by the head and slammed down on the floor. The Commander barely moved. He tilted his head slightly in Duke's direction and did a soft shallow chuckle.

"Is this how you achieve victory? By having one of your soldiers come in for a rescue? Does the leader not know how to reach his goals without exploiting those under him? What does that say about you?"

Duke arose and looked down at the Commander as Scarlett joined him. Both pointed their weapons at him.

"You've got it all wrong," responded Duke. "I had ordered all my troops to stay back while I hunted you down. The only reason she's here is because she disobeyed my orders. Ordinarily I'd get mad except she proved the biggest difference between you and me. The reason why your plan was never going to succeed. You can hit us as many times as you want, as vicious as you want, you'll never break us. You'll never destroy us. We'll always come together and take you down."

### G.I.Joe Main Base: The Pitt

Hawk stood in the hanger as the group of Joes came out of the Eagle Hawk. Jill walked on her own. She still bore the scars of her captivity, but seemed to be recovering. Jill and her brother stood before Hawk and saluted.

"At ease," said Hawk. He turned to Jill. "How are you holding up?"

Jill made a slight smile. "Psyche-Out said he'd make room in his schedule for me if I wanted to talk. I'm more interested in getting back to work."

The trio's discussion was interrupted by Duke and Scarlett joining them. Jill turned to Duke and saluted.

"Thank you sir," she said to him. "Thank you for all you did to find me. And for taking out that chrome plated psycho."

Jack Morelli stared at Duke then saluted. "I want to apologize. I'm sorry for my attitude. I had no right to act like I did. I'll take whatever reprimand you have in mind."



Duke stared back then smiled. "No apology necessary," he answered back. "Even the most seasoned soldier has their breaking point. But we got your sister back and we caught the Commander. Mission accomplished. That's what matters in the end."

The group moved to head into the base but Scarlett grabbed Duke's arm and stopped him. He turned and looked at her with a quizzical expression.

"Hey, how are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm alright. Better, now that we stopped Cobra Commander." He responded. He looked into her eyes and smiled. "And I should thank you for coming to find me. You were a great help."

Scarlett chuckled. "Oh yeah, great help for someone who just stood there."

"There is something to be said about moral support," Duke chuckled back.

The two laughed and stared at each other. Duke held her by the shoulders. Scarlett placed her hand on his cheek. The staring continued for a minute that felt like forever. The two pressed their foreheads together. Then came the kiss. A short one at first followed by a longer one.

From a corner Hawk and Flint watched the two as they held each other and kissed.

"Should we say something?" Flint asked.

"No. Let them have this moment," responded Hawk.

#### Location: unknown

Cobra Commander still had his face plate on. The helmet was missing but the faceplate remained. He sat in the chair, his form wrapped in a strait jacket. He stared at his visitor as the latter sat in a chair staring at him. The Commander chuckled.

"Come to gloat? Come to relish in my imprisonment? You know this will not stay like this for long. Our battle will never be truly finished."

Duke laughed hard and stared the Commander down. "Well get ready for a long hiatus," he answered. "Do you even know where you are?"

"Bottom of the ocean. Deep underground. Outer space. It doesn't matter," responded the Commander.

"Oh it does," answered Duke. "You're someplace really secure. All the other Cobras we captured aren't even here with you. They're someplace else. You're here all alone. And you're going to stay here. No escape and disappearance this time."

The Commander let out a low growl.

"We shall see, Duke. We shall see."

#### **The End. For Now.**

## **Epilogue**

Major Bludd's eyes stung as he opened them. He gingerly stepped out of the pod and tried looking around. His vision settled and he stared at the two men looking at him. The man in the lab coat approached him and draped a robe over him.

"Welcome back to the land of the living Major Bludd," he said. "My name is Doctor Venom. I am sure you recognize my friend here." Venom gestured to the man who had watching him revive Major Bludd.

"Zartan," whispered Major Bludd.

The assassin smiled. "Good morning Major. Looks like the doctor has another success story under his belt."

"What's that supposed to mean?" asked Major Bludd.

"I used my scientific genius to bring both of you back from the dead," responded Venom. "they said I couldn't do it but here we are. And this proves I can succeed with the next step in my master plan."

"And what's that?" asked Zartan.

Venom motioned for the two to follow him into another part of the lab. The room was sealed off with a heavy door. Venom walked over to a keypad on the wall and typed in a series of numbers. The door opened and bathed the trio in a greenish glow. Zartan and Major Bludd stared in awe at what stood in the center of the room.

"Cobra Commander has all but ruined Cobra thanks to his egomania," chimed Venom. As the other two kept staring he waked into the room.

"If Cobra is to truly reach great heights, then it's time for a change in leadership. Its time to not have a Commander, but a something greater. A god."

He stood in the center of the room next to the object that dominated everything, especially the attentions of Zartan and Major Bludd.

It was a tube much like the one Major Bludd just emerged from. And a man floated inside.

Venom smiled. "Not just a god. A god-Emperor."

The top of the tube displayed the name of its occupant. A name neither Zartan nor Major Bludd ever thought they'd see or hear again.

Serpentor.