



Aquaman #3
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Aquaman

Issue 3: "The Deep: Unfathomable, Finale"

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She drifts through the passageway, her iridescent gown shimmering and flowing behind her in the windless air. Her feet glide softly across the floor as if not really touching it as she moves through the barren ship. Tiny phantom noises echo through the space, but the woman doesn't seem to notice. Her blank, pale face moves back and forth as she passes each corridor, until she freezes and turns to face the long, narrow path in front of her. At the end of the corridor is a heavy door with word "restricted" imprinted on it, flashing red with each turn of the warning light fastened into the wall next to it. The ghostly woman pauses before starting into the hallway. The shadowy noises begin to thump louder and small screeches can be heard somewhere inside the walls. She moves as if compelled but with every passing inch a feeling of dread grows within her. The door creaks out a long groan and seems to bulge slightly. Her expression shifts from cold ambiguity to a pained anxiety to finally one of abject terror. She can not stop her slow, inevitable progress to the door as its bolts pop from the plates holding the structure in place. She claws out at the walls to no avail. Suddenly the door crumples and explodes backward and horrible, gnarled tentacles shoot into the corridor, filling it with cold, slimy appendages dotted with suckers. The arms wrap the woman and squeeze her tiny frame. She tries to cry out but there is no sound. And in her final doom she is all alone.

Mariana jerked awake. She had fallen asleep in her lab station, studying the results from tests on her new samples. She removed her reading glasses and rubbed her eyes, trying to shake off the disturbing dream from which she had lurched. The doctor gathered her papers and moved lazily across the room, straightening up her unfinished work. She had been tired since being onboard her father's submarine. The endless dark

of the water rarely broken by light seemed like an unending night. She longed for the week to come when she would return to the surface.

She began to leave for her quarters, but found herself instead at the lab's computer terminal. A few quick key strokes and she was reviewing a layout of the lower levels of the ship. She stared at the blanked out portion in the high security section of research labs, then moved her eyes over the rest of the level looking for patterns in the design. Moments later she was on a lift headed toward her destination.

Mariana walked slowly, looking down the corridor as a twinge of fear ran through her. Just a dream, she told herself.

She moved down the passageway to another door. She used her clearance badge to access the small room full of various supplies. She searched the surface of the wall before pulling a tool from her pocket and prying open a panel. She stepped into darkness, lighted panels here and there gave her little help as she moved past pipes and wiring. She found a small grate on her left and removed her tool again. A short time later she was through the air duct and climbing out into the back of a large, darkened room. She crept forward, trying to stay behind the large machines and objects that filled the space. Further down she could hear voices coming from a lighted space. Tubes ran up and down and several arcs in the structure made it difficult to see clearly. She slid behind a large tank of some sort and made her way down the long wall to try to get a better view, carefully stepping over the large cables on the floor. As she came closer she could see several men on an elevated platform in the middle of the main chamber. One of which was her father...

Darkness.

Then a distant hum.

Slowly Aquaman opened his eyes, but it seemed like a struggle to do only that. Heat flashed on his retinas and he closed them shut. The only image he glimpsed was deep red all around. He realized the searing heat

was all around him, drying him, weakening him. He hung loosely from his arms, restrained securely above his head. He made a move to stand but discovered his feet were also bound.

It's okay. I'm here. I will try to help you.

Aquaman was surprised by the voice in his head. *Who are you? Are you the one that called out to me before?*

Yes. We haven't much time. They are watching us. He means to harm you to get what he wants. The voice continued. It was a female and the sound of it was melodic in Aquaman's mind.

Why? Who is doing this?

The large man in black.

Krell.

Yes. There was a brief pause before she continued. He is completely blind in his ambition, sire. And I am very fearful for what things he is capable.

Mariana strained to peek around the corner as best she could without being noticed. There were a few men in goggles walking about and she could see her father and a strange man in a white jumpsuit standing over large table, lit from underneath, and the Trident of Aquaman lying on top.

"What are the results, Dr. Benway? What are we looking at here?" Krell's deep voice filled the chamber and the long room connected to it.

"It's very old. And is giving us some very *interesting* readings." Benway was a thin, older man. His countenance was sullen and set by deep lines, and his voice creaked through his nose as he spoke. Just looking at him made Mariana uneasy.

"It is a beautiful object." Krell circled around, staring at it greedily from a new angle. "How does it glow like that?" He pondered aloud and then

looked at the doctor. "Is it magic?"

"At first I thought it might be. I couldn't quite grasp what I was looking at. But then I realized it was a device. With very tiny little components. Almost seamless. But a device nonetheless."

"A technology?"

"Yes." His sibilance drawing out the word for a long second. "Very old. Very *advanced*. And I can barely make heads or tails of it. It's an alloy unlike any I've ever seen. The laser doesn't even scratch it. It almost might as well be magic." He flicked his fingers and sneered as if to dismiss the mysterious weapon.

The Captain shook his head, lost in thought. "Excellent." He said it to himself more than the others.

"Sir!" One of the goggled lad attendants called to his Captain. "There is brain activity in the subject."

"At last!" Krell bellowed. "Open the shield."

The air shimmered in waves of heat as the front of a small, round containment room moved away. The interior glowed red and a singular, indignant figure was inside.

"Aquaman." Krell positioned himself in front of the weakened hero. "Welcome back." His words stabbed as disingenuous. He regards the mechanism. "You are to be commended, good Doctor. Your trap seems to have done its job nicely." Dr. Benway crept in behind him watching Aquaman carefully, not entirely convinced.

Aquaman was able to open his eyes now and straighten himself somewhat in his restraints. "What... . are you doing... . why?"

"First things first. I told you when we last parted that we could benefit from each other's cooperation. But if you are unwilling to offer it freely, then I am forced to take a more *direct* approach... . Mr. Curry."

"What? How did you... "

"Not hard to deduce with the right resources really. A lighthouse keeper you said? Judging from your dialect I guessed you from Florida. A search of records of those in operation, say 20 or so years ago, revealed only one that was surrounded by conspicuous circumstances." Benway had handed the Captain a document, and he read through the pages as he continued. "One Thomas Arthur Curry of Atlas Point I do believe. A quick wedding at sea to a woman with no apparent past, or so one could say from the lack of any previous record of her existence. And after her mysterious death, this man raised their child, but there seems to have been a rather sharp increase in unusual occurrences and police reports from that point on. And, finally, the boy carries on after the father's death to attend a university briefly, before incurring a police record for eco-terrorism it's seems. Releasing dolphins from tanks was it? Destroying research labs? And then he disappears completely." He looks up. "Any of this rings a bell?"

Aquaman stares at him flatly.

"Right. Let's get down to business." He hands the papers back to the Doctor, who shuffles back to observe the bio monitors hooked to Aquaman. "Now, Mr. Curry. I'm going to ask you again. Are there others like you?"

"Why are you doing this?" Aquaman reached inside for unused strength as he twisted his arm slowly, testing the cylinder-like shackles holding him in place.

"Of course, I didn't expect this to be easy, Mr. Curry." He moved a switch nearby. "Only through understanding will we find a common ground. So to be fair, let me show you something I think you'll find interesting." The entire back wall to the main chamber opened up as shuttered panels moved away, revealing a view of the ocean outside. Just outside on the abyssal plain of the ocean floor, sprawled a large structure. Several large domes, dotted and glowing with lights, were connected by tubes and support pillars. Several small submersibles buzzed around it, and other parts were in the construction process. It was a small city at the bottom of the sea.

"This." Captain Krell strolled over to the large window with his hands clasped behind him. "Is Aquatica One." He turned to Aquaman. "This is the future!"

Mariana was taken aback. How could she not have known about this? He father had always been secretive about his work, but this was something else entirely. Her mind reeled at the revelations. Suddenly something beside her moved. She pushed back a few inches to look up and realized she was standing next to a huge tank, and it was holding something very large. She hesitated before leaning back in to listen.

"The future of humankind, Mr. Curry." The Captain reasserted. "The human race is growing at an exponential rate. The world's population has doubled from three to six billion in the last fifty years. And in another fifty it will have grown to almost ten billion. All of those people, and no where to go. One could argue for space colonies, but let's be honest. It is the stuff of science fiction for now. Generating artificial atmospheres and gravity and the enormous costs? No. I look to the other great, unexplored frontier." He waves his hand down to the scene outside the ship.

"So you're going to build cities underwater? What does that have to do with me?"

"It's not going to be an easy task, Mr. Curry. As I have said, people are unsure, afraid of the ocean. It is perceived as a curious, strange, and dangerous place. It is up to me to show them this brave, new world. To build the cities they will live in."

"And that you will rule." Aquaman snapped.

"That is one viewpoint. I see it as a necessity, one that I alone am capable of and willing to do." Krell's voice grew grave as he continued. "But to do so I have to tame the domain. Become its master. Conquer it, if you will, in all its forms." He stepped back to activate another switch. The lights inside the tanks in the long room flickered to life, revealing a bizarre menagerie.

Mariana gasped and fell backward, still out of view from the rest of the

room's occupants. She pushed herself further backward on the floor along the wall. She looked around to see a variety of unnatural creatures. A large eel and seahorse, prehistoric in appearance, an oddly-colored dolphin with surgical scars around its head, a tank full of small octopi, something resembling a crab with a heavy spiky shell, a few tanks she can't quite see, and ... a mermaid!?

"Our Doctor has been a busy man. We've already learned and unlocked some useful genetic information from our found subjects, and as you can see the Doctor has made a few creations of his own. I wonder what we'll discover when we study your DNA."

Aquaman held back his rage. He couldn't stand to see his marine animals treated in this way. And the mermaid! Krell had far overstepped his boundaries. "You're sick."

"For the greater good, Mr. Curry. There are so many resources that will be needed for life under the sea: food sources, beasts of burden, and if need be, foot soldiers... But you might know something about that I'm guessing."

He walked the floor in front of his prisoner. "I've been watching you for awhile, 'Aquaman'. Your exploits and adventures while helping ships, boats, and their seafarers have been widely reported. Many articles have been written over the last few years of the 'Man from Atlantis', or so the press started referring to you after an off-comment you made to a sailor. Taken as a joke by the media, but I think there's something to it." Krell stopped between Aquaman and the tank containing the mermaid. Worry was on her face from seeing her king in such a state. Her long brown hair shimmered and waved about her. Her long tail glimmered in the interior light.

"Now. One last time. *Are there others?* And I'll have you know before you answer that nothing displeases me more than being lied to!" Krell's own anger had begun to bubble to the surface.

"Then stop asking the wrong questions." Aquaman stated as a challenge.

"Wrong!!" Krell barked and then made a motion to Benway, standing at the ready. Benway grinned a long, dark smile and pushed a button. Suddenly, a massive volts of electricity surged through Aquaman's bonds and his body arched forward. He closed his eyes tight and grimaced, trying not to cry out. It stopped as suddenly as it began and the Sea King slumped down.

"The mermaid is a beautiful creature isn't she?" Krell turned his attention on a dime, after regaining his composure. "Wonderful and impossible, but there she is. And it does beg the question, where did she come from?"

Aquaman was breathing heavily, dehydrated and powerless. "I... just thought... of something..." He fought to pull himself up. "You... planned this. All of it. This device. Taking the trident. The attack by the cave." Another thought passed. "The octopus. *You* took her eggs. That's why she attacked Mariana's pod. You put your own daughter in harm's way to capture me!"

Mariana listened, a dread feeling growing in her stomach and tears forming in her eyes.

"Practically a coincidence, really. It was an opportunity for her to continue her work." The Captain's voice lowered, betraying his own conscience. "And we had tracked you in the vicinity. She was never truly in danger. We had pods close by, watching the event as it unfolded. I do what I have to do, Mr. Curry. As I said, chances must be taken to achieve any worthwhile goal."

"You're obsessed!" Aquaman flexed his muscles inward, straining with every remaining ounce of strength he had left, until another surge of electricity shot through him.

Mariana scrambled along the floor toward the back of the room, crying silently. She climbed back through the hole in the wall to the interior passage, lit with power boxes and wires. She searched them frantically looking for a way to cut the power to the dread contraption holding Aquaman.

"No!!" The mermaid's voice rang out from the speaker on her tank. "Stop hurting him! He can't tell you anything, we took an oath!"

Captain Krell smiled. "Now it talks. Tell me more, creature, or I'll kill him."

"... no... " Aquaman gasped.

"He is Orin, King of Atlantis. And when they learn of what you have done here, the fury of the fabled cities will be upon you!" The mermaid pleaded.

"Atlantis!" Krell's eyes gleamed. "Tell me more! What is its origin?"

She hesitated, but knew better than to test him. "It's ancient. More advanced than any city on the surface."

"Yes! Now tell me, where is it located?!"

"NO!" The power to the torture machine blinked out and Aquaman ripped through his restraints!

Krell stood wide-eyed before walking quickly up toward the entrance. "Guards!" The door hissed open and three men in black and padding spilled into the room. Benway was nowhere to be seen.

But Aquaman fell to the floor, exhausted. He felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up to see a distraught Mariana. One last time he summoned strength he did not have to stand to his feet.

"Mariana. I... "

"Don't." She cut her father short. "Don't say a word to me."

"You don't understand. You weren't... "

"DO NOT!"

Her scream cut through Krell like a knife. He turned on Aquaman

instead. "I know your secrets, Curry. And I will not let you stand in my way. You and your monsters are relics! Leftovers from another time, rotting at the bottom of the sea!! I don't know what curse you have upon you but you're time has long since passed. A new world is coming and you will be wiped from the face of the earth!!!" He had become unhinged, his face ripe with anger!

"I won't let you. You are the one who doesn't belong! This is MY kingdom!"

"Oh really?! And how do you think the governments of the world will react to your secret city?? How will they feel about an entire army in possession of advanced weapons lying in wait beneath them? It would take so little to bring your 'kingdom' crumbling down. And I see no reason not to do it!"

"What gives you the right?!"

"NO! What gives YOU the right?!?!"

"Stop it!!!" Mariana screamed again. Her face wet with tears. "This is crazy! Stop it!"

"This is your last chance, Curry! Surrender to me or everything you know will be destroyed!"

Aquaman did his best to posture himself against Krell's demands. "Go to hell."

The Captain pointed to the guard on his left. "Kill the mermaid." And the sound of a high-powered gunshot ricocheted inside the chamber.

"No!" Mariana threw herself sideways at her father's order and the bullet ripped through her chest and cracked the tank behind her, just missing the mermaid.

Aquaman knelt on the floor, holding Mariana in his arms. Watered spilled from the hole in the tank behind him flooding the floor. Krell

walked to her slowly, a look of terrible dread on his face as he fell to his knees in front of the pair. He took his daughter into his arms with a crushing sorrow. "I'm so sorry." The words escaped quickly from his lips. "Mariana... I... "

She looked at him, her face growing ghastly pale. "Dad... ."

"What, dearest? What?"

"It... it's your fault. Mother was right... you are a... terrible man... " She fought for each word. The front of her gray uniform was soaked with blood now and mixing into the water on the floor.

"No... " Krell was aghast.

She turned meekly to Aquaman. "Thank you... . for being... . my... hero... " And her eyes closed forever.

Krell raised, his daughter's body in his arms and walked back to the entrance. "You will pay." He said, facing Aquaman again. "You will pay with everything I can take from you, Aquaman!" His expression then turned to one of pure vengeance. "To the last, I grapple with thee; *From Hell's heart, I stab at thee!*"

Aquaman felt the water renew him as he stood tall to face the men. The sound of the tank glass splintering behind him. "Get out. Tell your men to evacuate the ship." He outstretched his hand and the Trident rose from the table, glowing with power. He grabbed the long staff as it floated to him and raised it above his shoulder. "Now!!"

Krell retreated with his guards and door slammed behind them. Aquaman wheeled with his Trident and speared it through the outer window, and the room exploded with ocean water. The change of pressure shattered the tanks and the strange creatures fled the vessel with their king. Once clear Aquaman swerved the trident about and unleashed its crackling power on the Leviathan's propeller screws. He sent another quick blast across the bottom of the giant submarine piercing it enough to cause it to take on water.

He watched grimly as the vessel began its descent to the ocean floor.

The mermaid approached Aquaman as he sat silently; looking to make sure the ship's evacuation was successful. Small transport pods moved back and forth from the ship to Aquatica One.

She looked on his face from the side, searching for some emotion.

"What is your name, Tritonian?" His words half-spoken and half-communicated through thought.

"Lorelei Lemaris. My friend's call me Lori."

"You are... interested in the surface dwellers?"

"Yes." She admitted. "I have met a few. I guess my curiosity almost got the better of me this time."

"You should use caution, Lori. Some humans can be very dangerous."

"And so can some Atlanteans." She retorted. "Do you think he will follow through on his threat? Do you think he'll try to expose Atlantis?"

"I'm not sure. But it is something I think we will all have to consider in the near future. In a way Krell was right. We cannot stay hidden down here forever. I do think he will come for me though. He blames me for Mariana's death."

"What about you? You don't feel responsible for her do you?"

Aquaman didn't answer. Satisfied with the safety of Krell's crew, he moved from his perch, carrying a small container. "Can you help me do something?"

Lori smiled. "Yes."

When Aquaman released the small octopi, they swam to encircle their

mother. The large octopus was overcome with a sensation of joy. Aquaman closed his eyes for a moment and then spoke aloud to her.

"You're welcome, Topo." He turned to Lori.

"Let's go home."

Epilogue.

Captain Krell watched monitor over the man's shoulder. "Show it to me again."

The video restarted. It replayed the events of the previous day in slow motion. The footage showed Aquaman attacking the The Leviathan.

"Perfect." He watched the screen attentively and sneered. "This is exactly what I need."

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Aquaman #0 (2005)

Aquaman: Kings of Atlantis

A city of legend... of marvels beyond imagination, trapped in an eternal struggle! Learn the secrets of the lost city of Atlantis and its history of triumph, turmoil and disaster. Plus, rediscover the city's greatest king: Aquaman! Will he become Atlantis' last great hope or bring its final destruction?

Aquaman #1 (2005)

Aquaman: The Deep, Part 1 (of 3): Unfathomable.

What is the secret origin of Aquaman? Can the King of the Seven Seas survive a deadly encounter with one of the ocean creatures he's sworn to protect? And who is Captain Krell and what dark secrets lay hidden aboard his ship, The Leviathan? Find out the shocking answers to these questions and much more in Aquaman #1!

Aquaman #2 (2005)

Aquaman: The Deep, Part 2 (of 3): Unfathomable.

Meet the newest player in Aquaman's undersea world, Captain Krell, a man determined to discover and conquer all the mysteries of the deep. But what will happen when he sets his sights on the King of Atlantis himself? Plus, a special guest star!

Aquaman #4 (2006)

Aquaman: Shadows Over Atlantis, Part 1 (of 2).

It's time once again for Neptune's Champion Games and Atlantis is full of cheer! But what evil menace threatens to ruin the fabled city's greatest day, and what dark omens will forever change the lives of every Atlantean?

Aquaman #5 (2006)

Aquaman: Shadows Over Atlantis, Part 2 (of 2).

Black Manta and his raiders have launched a deadly strike on Atlantis! Can Aquaman and Aqualad discover their true objective in time? What unlikely hero will save the day and what Atlantean will pay the ultimate price? Find out as surprises abound in this month's Aquaman!

Aquaman #7 (2006)

Aquaman: Sea Change, Part 1 (of 2): Castles Made of Sand.

Aquaman finds his stolen Trident of Neptune and more than he bargains for! THRILL, to a deadly fist fight between Aquaman and a new enemy! SEE, Aquaman's adventure as a teenager! EXPERIENCE, the first thrilling appearance of the Aquacave! All this and more in this month's Aquaman!

Aquaman #9 (2006)

Aquaman: Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea.

Editor's Note: There was no Aquaman #8. It was simply titled "The Lost Adventure" and is ... well... lost until the time that Mr. Herren chooses to revisit the events in the "Sea Change" plotline.

Crisis: The Apokolips Imperative, Part 11!

The war continues under the waves! As parademons assault the undersea kingdom of Atlantis, the New Gods' secret project stands revealed at last! But when the amphibious assassins of Apokolips, the Deep Six, strike, all that stands between them and Darkseid's assured victory is Aquaman!

Batman #6 (2006)

Batman: Identity Theft.

There is an intruder in the Dark Knight's base of operations and he has seized control of his computer network. Now, Batman must find a way to survive his own deadly security defenses and break into the Batcave! But what will he find inside once he's confronted the strange and mysterious trespasser?

The Flash #4 (2006)

The Flash: ... As Fast As You Can...

Dr. Spectro unleashes a device that is stealing all the color from Blue Valley! The Flash soon discovers the threat is far more dire than it appears, but is helpless to stop it thanks to Spectro's inescapable Speed Trap! It's the end of the world in this month's Flash so don't miss it!

The Flash #5 (2006)

The Flash: ... As Fast As You Can, Part 2.

Dr. Spectro holds all the cards as he makes his bid for ultimate power! Can Flash free himself from the inescapable Speed Trap? Join us for high excitement and super science thrills as our hero faces his Last Day on Earth!



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