



Aquaman #4
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Aquaman

Issue 4: "Shadows Over Atlantis, Part One"

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I remember the day I first met Arthur very clearly. It was time again in Atlantis for Neptune's Champion Games, a tradition whose origins were lost to the ages but one that every Atlantean looked forward to for celebration in good times and bad. First would be a week of shows and presentations of achievements in the sciences and the arts, followed by competitions and feats of skill, and ending in the Arena of Oceanus where individuals would battle until one was left to be recognized as the greatest warrior of Atlantis. It was the greatest honor that could be bestowed on an Atlantean and one that I was convinced that I needed to be accepted in the fabled city.

To say that I was an outsider in that time would have been an understatement. I was the forgotten son of the Idyllists, a group of intellectuals and peace-minded Atlanteans that would flee the city in times of war and conflict to continue their work in the sciences uninterrupted and free of the whims of warlords. They would take residence in the hidden city of Shayeris, a place carved in mountain stone before the sinking of the island continent and used as refuge by the Idyllists for millennia. My family led the secret society from the sunken city during the tumultuous times of King Trevis and the tyrants that followed, but even in peace, trouble pursued them and my father, Thar, was betrayed and murdered by the dark magicks of his brother Slizzath. Fearing for her unborn child, my mother, Berra, fled back to Poseidonis, but her vigil was brief as I was born with eyes of purple, the mark of sorcery. As advanced as the Atlanteans can be in some ways, they are still superstitious and backwards in others and have no shortage of curses and omens. For all the real threats the people were faced with in the Oceanics, demons that would slip through the doors between worlds to attack them, and would-be conquerors, ultimately the greatest enemy to Atlantis had always been itself. So long the people lived in a climate of fear that paranoia was ingrained in the consciousness of the culture.

So again my mother fled to the Idyllists who were plagued by Slizzath's dark ambitions. Thar had imprisoned his brother by turning his magick against him,

but the wizard was still able to manipulate forces against the Idyllists. And even among the intelligensia of Shayeris, the curse remained as they feared that, as the son of Thar, I would be used undo Slizzath's prison and release his wrath on them. As I grew, I watched my mother struggle for acceptance and resisted calls for my death. Eventually, during the dark hours, I went into a self-imposed exile and found my way alone. Had I not been born differently, stronger and more in tune with the ocean-life that surrounded me, I would not have survived. I lived this way for much of my young life, returning to visit my mother whenever possible, but eventually coming to enjoy my solitude. I befriended a strange amphibious humanoid named Tramm, a true friend for many years, but otherwise remained alone until I decided to pledge myself to the renewed Atlantis. I had heard of a brave and noble king that had brought a new age to the twin cities. A hero that had come to Atlantis from above.

And that is what he was when I first met him. There are few distinct times in life when you meet another that you know you understand immediately. A kindred spirit. That's what happened when I came face to face with Arthur. I knew right then that I had met someone who I respected and would always be my friend.

I had been in Poseidonis for only a short time. Even though I had seen it from afar many times, I remember the sense of awe I felt as I moved through the main gate and stared on the gleaming towers and grand fountains and huge statues of long-dead kings. Dry plazas and water gardens were populated by both the bipeds of Poseidonis and the merpeople of Tritonis, and the excitement and good will in the air was almost electric. It was the greatest day of my life and the beginning of the end for Atlantis.

"Well, if it isn't the lost boy of the sea?" the young man called smugly after the newcomer. "Come to make a name for yourself in the big city, eh?"

He was joined by a young woman with short, brunette hair. She leaned in on the other. "Yeah, I hope you don't think you're going to make it on good looks alone." Her eyes brightened a little at the last part.

"Ha. Right, good looks won't get... Hey!" He shrugged the girl off him.

"Some help you are, Tula."

"Oh come on, dear brother. He IS a looker."

Garth blushed at this last part and handed a bag to Tramm, readying his personal effects in a storage compartment as allotted to all the competitors in Neptune's Games.

"I guess we'll see if he's got what it takes soon enough." Javen looked him over narrowly. "I'll give him till the second round before he's out."

"Who are you kidding, Javen? You'll be out by the second round."

Tula's adopted brother only sneered at her in response.

The young man in red and blue turned to face his antagonists. "My name is Garth, lost son of the Idyllists. I hope to bring my people home to Atlantis and am here on a mission of good faith." He spoke calmly and stared at them self-assuredly through lavender eyes. "I am very pleased to meet you both." With the latter sentence he looked directly at Tula.

"Oh... your eyes..." Tula was taken off guard.

"Ahem." The noise came from the side of the group and they all turned to see their King standing along side the small area they occupied in the inner chambers of the Arena.

"Your highness..." Javen said as he and his sister bowed their heads in respect.

"That's not necessary," smiled Aquaman. "We are all friends here. Almost time for the big day, right? I'm sure you're all excited."

"T-there was word you wouldn't attend. That something might be wrong." Javen stumbled a bit on his words. He had only met the King once years before and was visibly nervous.

"Just delayed unexpectedly." A shadow passed over King Orin's face as he glanced down before he looked back at Garth. "I've heard about you. And I admire what you are doing here today." Aquaman extended his

hand to Garth. "Good luck."

The cautious young man took his hand and so began their friendship. "Thank you, sire. I will do my best."

He nodded as he regarded the three young people. "Now if you'll all excuse me. I had better not leave the Queen waiting any longer. I'll see you all later then." And with that the King moved off through the main room nodding to the others moving to and fro preparing for the festivities and ceremonies of the evening.

"Hey." Javen gave Garth a soft punch on the arm. "Come on. Why don't you hang out with us until the ceremonies?"

"Yeah, we can show you around the city." Tula smiled warmly as she took his other arm. And they walked along the room leaving Tramm behind tinkering with some equipment. The grayish-green, gilled companion looked after Garth as he left. "Skrundo?"

Mera gave a concerned smile as she moved around the throne room and its adjoining center chamber. The rooms were filled with Atlanteans in formal dress, clothing with ornate designs, and the women with glimmering adornments. Members of the High Council and their partners, representatives, and accomplished artisans, thinkers, and scientists of Atlantis were all present and perusing the various awarded artworks and sculptures from the week's celebration displayed around the rooms. And in the center of the main room was a large, deep tank of water that sank a few levels down lower in the tower, connecting to other cylindrical water chambers down throughout the structure. As was all of the city, the water passages and dry areas existed in unison, the life-giving ocean liquids surged into all parts of Poseidonis like the circulatory system of a living creature. Inside this large aquarium were citizens and leaders of Tritonis along several groups of dolphins.

The Queen had been making short conversations with the groupings but now found herself alone in the recessed throne room looking out across the room. A shorter, balding man with a pointed moustache and beard

slipped up next to her. "It is supposed to be a joyous occasion, my lady."

"Vulko, how can I not be worried? If he could be here he would already be." And on that note a figure appeared in the antechamber across the great hall. Mera took few steps forward. A second later King Orin stepped into the room. "Arthur," she whispered.

The room went quiet as Aquaman walked across the room, his eyes never leaving Mera until he stopped just in front of her. "I missed you."

Mera tears welled in her eyes and she grabbed her husband. The two hugged and the room's company began clapping. "I missed you too." With that they pulled close and kissed.

The Arena was filled to capacity and full of cheer. Almost every citizen of the twin cities of Atlantis were in attendance. Large water globes were populated by the mermen and mermaids of Tritonis and in the middle of the stadium rested a layered performance stage with complex crystalline arrangements. The orchestral sounds from the movements of the performers on the multi-tiered platforms drifted in tonal waves across the audience while holographic light shifted and swirled above in synchronization with the soft harmonic music.

The Queen and King watched alone from their box seats. Mera leaned in to her husband and reached to touch his shoulder. "I have something to tell you." But when her hand met his arm, Arthur made a slight flinch. She looked at him puzzled before raising the sleeve of his dress shirt.

"It's nothing." He tried to put her off looking at the scar.

"You were hurt. What exactly happened to you out there, Arthur?"

"A madman. Nothing we need to worry about for now. I will talk with... wait, where is our Chief of Guard anyway? I haven't seen him yet."

"He led a search party for you this morning. He should return any time now."

The King paused to look to the face of his lovely wife. "What did you have to tell me?"

"It can wait for now." She smiled warmly at him, barely able to contain herself from blurting out the news.

"You are a mysterious woman, Mera." The two exchanged knowing looks before they turned to enjoy the rest of the show.

Tula found Garth outside the Arena on the Great Bridge. He leaned on his folded arms, watching the artificial river below. His long black hair hung about his face.

"Not interested in the ceremonies I'm guessing. Its okay, you know. You can have a little fun."

"Today was fun." He looked at her. "But I've never really had much time for self-indulgence. I'm here to try to help."

"So serious." She leaned over next to him. "I like the new clothes. Blue looks good on you."

"It's the official uniform for the contesta.."

"I *know* what they are." She cut in. "I'm just saying. It looks nice on you."

He faced her and she looked into his deep purple eyes, trying to figure out what he was thinking. Even with partial telepathy she had trouble reading his emotions. "Garth... "

"What was that?!"

"What?"

"That group of men. Do you see them?"

Tula turned to see several men in black moving about the base of the Arena before disappearing inside. "Something's going on. Come on."

The pair rushed across to the entry and crept in behind where the men had disappeared. They moved in quietly before seeing one of the group had stayed behind. He moved back and forth around the corridor ahead, adjusting a setting on his weapon.

Garth and Tula watched carefully out of sight when two more shapes appeared behind them.

"There you are! Listen, I'm tired of playing babysitter to Lagoon Boy here. He doesn't even speak..." He noticed the two gesturing wildly at him. "What?"

A pulse laser struck the ceiling above him and sparks showered down. The two new arrivals ducked quickly into the side passage next to the others.

"Oh." Javen exclaimed. "What do we do now?"

Tula rolled her eyes at her brother.

The harmonic orchestra completed the show to a round of heavy applause. After a moment the roar died down and the King stood to address his people.

"People of Atlantis!" His voice rang out throughout the building. He stood looking over the assembled group and knew their hopes and fears. He felt very proud at having helped bring about this new age for the people under the sea. A huge smile grew on his face. "Let the games begin!!"

Less than a second later explosions ripped through the city and set off terror and chaos inside the arena. Suddenly, heavily armed men in black appeared at every entryway and even more on the center field below. One man in a large silver helmet and glowing red eyes came forward

and his amplified, metallic voice froze the crowd from their panic. "Return to your seats immediately! Now!!!"

A rumbling echoed in the city before fading off. Aquaman helped Mera to her feet as they both stood to face the unknown invaders.

"Your days of safety and security here at the bottom of the ocean are over! Look on me and know your new face of fear... . The Black Manta!!!"

To Be Continued!

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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 #3 (2006)

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

All the shocking secrets are revealed in the final chapter of this sensational opening storyline! Captain Krell makes a bold move against Aquaman with his daughter, Mariana, caught in between! Plus, a surprise guest-star!

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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