



Aquaman #13
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Aquaman#13: "The Return", Part 4: Inside the Ark
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"That damn thing is too damn strong!" Jim shouted. Inside, the ship was cramp and compact, loaded with memorabilia and trophies. Pictures were put onto the wall of a young Jim in different situations: meeting celebrities, receiving medals, news clippings and fixing his ship. With Jim strapped into the pilot's seat, Orin stood closely behind grasping onto the walls.

The ship rocked as a missile hit its sides. "Comfortable back there?" Jim said chuckling. "I'll have to apologize for the cramped quarters."

"It's okay. And call me Orin."

"Right, Orin it is," Jim said. He grunted as the ship took a steep dive. Orin fell forward a step and then quickly righted himself. Jim brought the ship back up, going into an upward spiral, and then strafing hard to the left to dodge another barrage of incoming missiles. "I have to apologize for not having a second seat. I've always considered myself a one-man crew."

Orin grunted. "I just want you to know that if I die, my wife will kill you."

Jim smiled. "I won't have to worry about that. If this sucker goes down, I'll be right with you at the pearly gates."

"What can we do?" Orin asked.

Jim shrugged just as the ship was rocked again. He put a hand to his neck and said "We can make sure we live." The ship barrel-rolled in place, and then sped up around some heat-seeking missiles. "Besides that, I don't know what to tell you. That ship...it may be centuries old, but it is more powerful than this fifty year old bird. It's weaponry doesn't look like ours, but it acts similar, if not better. The only thing keeping us on God's green Earth, or above it really, is this ship's

mobility. If we were any slower or any closer to that ship, you'd be salt-fish and I'd be bacon."

"How do you know so much about that ship? How did you find me on that cliff?" Orin asked.

"Business first, my friend. I'll tell you soon."

"Hmmm. Well I think I know what we have to do."

"What's that?" Jim asked.

Orin leaned in, making sure Jim could look him in the eyes. "We need to get as close to that ship as possible."

"To do what?"

"To let me get on top of it."

Jim stared at Orin blankly, then stared out the screen before him. "I know you're young and fearless, but I probably have a few years left to live and I wanted to go to that resort in the Bahamas—"

"Jim."

Jim nodded and smiled. "If I knew you were this crazy, I'd've left you on that cliff."

Orin smiled. "Too late to turn back."

Jim stared down the Ark with a strong resolve. "Damn right."

The Red Torpedo strafed right and then plunged into a downward spiral. Three coral-covered rockets shot past the space where the Red Torpedo had just left. The Red Torpedo came out of its spiral, straightening, and then burst with speed to sail by another trio of rockets. The afterburner trailed out behind the Red Torpedo as the ship lurched forward and made a 90° turn. Another burst of afterburner sent the ship

upwards and away, taking one missile into its rear but avoiding four others. The ship zigzagged until Jim regained control and shot forward.

They were much closer now. Orin was by the hatch already, keeping himself steady. He was still a bit hurt from the battle with Noah and Black Manta: but he was already regaining his strength during the entirety of the chase. "Jim!" Orin said, speaking into the intercom by the hatch.

"Yeah?" Jim replied.

"How did you find me? Just happened by and said 'Look, there's a superhero in need of a team-up'?"

"Not quite. The 'other side' has an inside man who has kept in contact with me. I can't give any more information, just to help him keep his cover, but you'll know who he is when you meet him."

Orin smiled. "Good to be one step ahead of the enemy. You wouldn't imagine the luck I have."

"Don't worry. I don't know about your past battles, but this one is full proof."

As the Red Torpedo continued to dodge the barrage of missiles and rockets that came from the Ark, Orin waited for the right moment. The moment where either he would overcome his greatest risk or die a very foolish death.

Finally the ship used all of its afterburner to make a long arc around the Ark, zooming over the larger ship. Orin took a breath, looked down at his large target, and leapt off. Like a human torpedo he fell toward the Ark, his body straight and strong. A missile came toward Orin's space in the sky: the Red Torpedo destroyed it with an anti-missile. An explosion sent a shockwave out, smoke rushing around and pushing Orin up into the air. His body twisted in the air: he quickly righted himself and continued to plummet.

80 feet.
50 feet.
30 feet.
20 feet.
15 feet.

Another explosion rocked nearby, the smoke knocking Orin aside into a spiral as he braced himself and came upon the Ark with such speed. Upon impact, he struck the ship hard and bounced off of the hull. The wind was knocked out of him as his vision blurred momentarily. He was banging up his body too much lately: he had to take care of himself better in the future, he knew. He grabbed out blindly and held on tightly to something that felt like an edge: in a few moments he opened his eyes to find himself hanging off of the side of the ship.

"Damn!"

He pulled himself up, his back aching, throwing himself over the ledge. He took a few breaths, looking up at the sky and focusing his thoughts. He picked himself up, flexed his muscles, and thought about his purpose. He knew he had to go on with his mission. *I need to stop Manta*, he thought.

He stood up, looking around. The deck of the ship was large: it was easily the size of a football field. He was along one end of the ship; but his goal, a pair of twenty foot doors, was on the other side. He began to run full speed, clearing yard after yard in seconds. As he reached the center though, smoke began to shoot from the floor.

Suddenly, holes began to open up all over the deck as people in black suits and helmets came from beneath. One after another, large forms began to stand, hunched over due to their bulk, and walked over step by menacing step toward Orin.

He shook his head. "This is just a bad day."

Far below, the battle of the Ark and the Red Torpedo echoed into the ocean depths. A man swam up to the surface, breathing in fresh air and

staring at the ships above. Missile, rockets and lasers clashed, explosions sending shockwaves and raining ash and debris into the sun.

"Nemo?" he whispered. He grimaced and decided to dive immediately. If Nemo was around after all this time, things were going to get worse. He had to help anyway he could.

A cold, wet fist punched into Orin's jaw as he tried to parry a flurry of blows. He fell to the ground more surprised than hurt. He spun his body into a stand, sweeping the legs of his nearby enemies.

He had been fighting for a few minutes now, against these men who appeared to be Oceanics, but Orin could tell that they weren't. Their suits had name tags and symbols of rank, showing that they had been soldiers at one time, but now they were nothing more than mindless monsters. They were also overwhelming: each of their hits was almost as strong as his own. One-on-one he could take one on easily, but surrounded by dozens of them was too much to bear, especially that he was already hurt.

Orin leapt up onto the shoulders of one of the men, and as he came down he pressed with all of his might. The man fell hard, and Orin sprang into the air, turning mid-flight and hitting the deck in a roll. He hopped, but stayed close to the ground, mixing acrobatics with the movements of a frog, until he dodged the men enough to make it to one of the covered holes that they had come out of. He made a strong blow into the platform that had brought the men up, revealing a tunnel that went into the ship. With one look behind him at the behemoths racing towards him, he dived into the hole.

Orin pushed his arms and legs out as he slid down the tube, slowing his descent so that by the time he reached the bottom he was slowing inching down. He came down into a large chamber that was about the same size as the deck above. He kicked outwards, breaking out of the tube and setting foot on the floor of a room. He looked around: the room was dark, but his eyes had already adjusted to let in more light. Where to

now?

A sound. Orin spun as he heard a footfall with his sensitive ears, though he was too late to react. The room lit up as an optic blast hit into him, sending him backwards across the room. He slammed into a wall, knocking the wind out of him. Black Manta limped over towards Orin. The room lit up again as Black Manta's optic blast hit into Orin again, square in his chest.

Orin coughed up blood. He fell to his knees, breathing hard. He'd been hurt too much... his fighting spirit hadn't gone but he felt his flesh too weak to rise up. The lights came on, immediately blinding him for a moment, and then his eyes adjusted quickly. Soldiers flooded in behind Black Manta: they were dressed all in black. The majority of them wore matching uniforms with the exception of several men who had a specific insignia on their chest.

Black Manta waved his arm and all of the men came upon Orin in a wave. He was surrounded by all sides: his back was to the wall he had been slammed against and the men had formed a semi-circle. Black Manta had begun to limp around the semi-circle while speaking. "Once again, twice in one day, I've had the Ocean King at my mercy. The planets must be aligned!" He continued walking, step by step, coming to an end, and then he made an about face and retraced his steps. "So... what made you think you could break into this ship and take us on? What made you think you could take on my monstrous lieutenants or my ballistics troops? Thought you had a leg up? A handicap against me? An insider's information?"

Orin almost betrayed his thoughts, but kept his mouth tight. Black Manta limped behind his men, his armored boots making a "clang" against the floor. "I'm sorry you're disappointed Aquaman... but I have no betrayers on my team... " he said as he continued to walk. "None... " he stopped. "Except one."

All of a sudden a man began to turn, but he was too late. Black Manta had pulled out his gun and shot a man in his back. The man dropped to the floor, holding his stomach, as blood came from his wound. He fell on his stomach and stopped moving. All of the human soldiers took a breath in, tightening their lips. Black Manta stepped over that man's

body and limped toward Aquaman.

"That was Alexander Plain," Black Manta said, staring down at the blonde hair soldier. "He wasn't our traitor. I just didn't like him. Our real traitor knows exactly who he is. And he knows the penalty. Everyone converge on ex-lieutenant Cal Durham!"

All of the sudden a man with chocolate skin began to move. Orin hadn't seen anyone move like that besides... well besides himself. The man in black dodged his peers, avoiding their fists as they surrounded him, and leaping high above them towards Black Manta.

Black Manta fired a shot from his pistol, but Durham had landed and sidestepped. He dashed toward Black Manta, randomly strafing left to right to avoid Manta's shots. Accidentally, Black Manta hit some of the soldiers behind Durham, which seemed to Orin to be Durham's strategy. As Durham came close, he took one last dive towards Black Manta.

Black Manta unleashed a ferocious optic blast which hit Durham square in the chest. It pushed him up into the air until he had left the stream of the blast, dropping to the floor from two dozen feet up. The other soldiers, human and mutated, jumped on him and began to pound on him. After a moment, Black Manta's voice swept through the room. "Enough. Bring him forward."

The soldiers brought Durham's limp body forward, dropping him beside Orin. Black Manta limped forward until he was before the two men. "Bet you didn't expect that did you, Durham?"

Durham remained dazed and unspeaking. Orin looked up at Black Manta. "Damn you Manta! You've been playing him all along!"

Black Manta laughed. "That's what it seems, doesn't it? But it's not what happened. They had played me for a long time apparently... he and that old fossil... I thought forcing Durham into my ... 'treatment' would have been his end to independent thought, but apparently he was too pure to be overtaken by the effects of mutagen. He is almost like you now, in more than one way. If he had more time to live, his final changes would take affect in just a little time. But now you're both going to die."

The villain turned, walking towards his troops, and then turning back towards the sea king. "I've been playing you all this last time. My organization has been working against you in so many ways. We fooled you once... that was shameful of us. But to fool you again and again... that's just shameful on your part." He paced around the two in a wide arc. "I sent the message to Lockhart. Durham had no idea what was going on. I lured you both here and here is where you'll die, together with your soulmate."

Orin grimaced. "So what are you planning? What 'end-of-the-world scheme' do you have going now?"

Black Manta laughed. "This time there is no 'ending-the-world' or 'taking-over-Atlantis' or 'stealing-from-the-rich-to-give-to-myself' schemes. This time we're working larger. We have a purpose."

"Is this organization related to the word 'Ogre'?" Orin asked.

Black Manta chuckled. "We are working to resurrect the past, King. A past that will change the future. If we have to cause a little destruction here and there, so be it. But we will win. Your heritage will be the key to our survival."

Black Manta stopped. "We are entering Procedure Omega. We have three awful weapons that will be fired from our largest leviathan... the *Colossus*. A war island that is the most devastating weapon ever to be built on this planet. We have an old war sage... name of Nemo... He has used his endless resources and considerable amount of time to make a ship equal to the first two of your leviathans... he's named it the *Nautilus*. From there he will use your stolen technology to activate the war island... I think he'll be starting soon. You'll have a lot of company when you reach the gates of hell, sea king."

"Why? Why resurrect such harmful tools? What is with all of the useless deaths? You aren't targeting the government or military bases or anything of the sort... it's all at the innocent... all of the civilian population. Why? What's the point if you're not out to cause useless destruction?"

"It's all leading up to a big moment. Everything we do, every death we cause, every moment of pain we bring will lead us to our goal. If you

had more time, I'd tell you brush up on the dark past of your culture. But too bad for you... "

He raised his arm. "We're leaving! This ship is about to fall to the sea. We're leaving these two to die. Prepare our ship to depart!" He turned back to Orin and Durham. "Farewell, heroes."

One of the mutated soldiers punched the two, knocking them down. Black Manta then led all of his men out of the exits as the Sea King lost consciousness.

The ship was shuddering. Everything trembled around them as Orin woke up. Besides his fallen comrade they were the only ones in the room. He picked up his new ally, placing Durham's arm around his shoulder and making his way to one of the tubes that led to the surface.

In moments he was reaching the top, dragging Durham with him to the edge of the ship. The sky was dark but for the slivers of moonlight that fell on the ship. The ship plummeted towards the sea: any minute now they'd crash.

All of a sudden Durham began to shake. Orin let go of him as he fell to the floor and he began to convulse. "Must be going through his final changes," Orin whispered. He tried to help, but he didn't know where to start. The ship fell fast, and then within moments, hit the water hard.

The impact sent Orin and Durham up into the air crashing against the siding. They went underwater, spinning due to the currents and conflicting pressures. Everything was chaotic: it was hard to see and in seconds he lost his comrade. He struggled to right himself and get a view on his surroundings.

He moved away from the ship, diving deeper into the sea. He circled around the plummeting ship as he dived, trying to find any trace of Durham. Soon he saw: Durham was caught along the side of the ship which was dragging him further and further down into a valley full of rough and jagged corals. Orin wasn't sure whether Durham's mutation was great enough to afford him the adaptations and strengths of

atlanteans needed to survive so low in the ocean: like being able to withstand high pressure and whether his body had truly changed enough to process air and water. But one thing was for certain: if his body didn't fail him, the corals would surely tear him apart.

He put all his might into diving as deep as possible, but his body was hurt and even his seemingly endless endurance was beginning to fail. He was gaining; gaining strong. But the ship was moving too fast. He wouldn't make it.

The next few moments went too fast for Orin to understand. One moment he was diving; the next, he was beginning to inexplicably be pulled up towards the surface. The water around him was moving upwards, the waves alive and possessed. For a split-second he thought that perhaps his wife was nearby: but when she used her abilities, the waters usually were formed into a construct of some kind. No, this felt like some other force. But unfortunately, he didn't want to be saved this time.

Then in the rush of things, he thought he saw a blur below him: like something speeding down. But he had no time to see when he was being snatched up against his will.

To his surprise a large serpent entered the sea. This was a real leviathan: it was at least a hundred feet long and thirty feet wide, spiraling into the sea with the force of a missile. Yet he couldn't make contact with it: it was as if something was blocking him. It began to coil around the falling leviathan, though it was long enough to get it all. It seemed to expand and lengthen, but Orin couldn't tell. In moments, he was above the surface and moving toward land.

The waves took him to a beach. He hadn't thought to look to the stars and figure out where he was: he was much more interested in what was going on. He braced for any inevitability when he was caught by a sight rising out of the sea.

A man walked out with Durham in his arms: he was slightly tanned, with long, parted shoulder length black hair. He wore a sleeveless top, form fitting shorts, and gloves and boots that all matched a crimson,

ruby and gold color scheme. On his chest was a black trident symbol surrounded by a gold circle. He was lean and strong and his eyes were fierce.

Behind another came from the waves: this was a Japanese woman with long black hair falling to her lower back. She wore blue thigh high leggings and matching bracelets. She wore a revealing two-piece: her top was green with blue and white linings and her bottom was blue. She wore a light blue-green visor that slightly hid her eyes.

Suddenly the sea serpent erupted from the sea: following after it was The Ark. It dived under the water again and used its tail to push the leviathan towards the beach. With the help of the lively sea the gigantic ship landed just a few dozen feet behind the heroes. Orin expected the serpent to come out again but all that came out was a young woman. Her skin was the color of a soft baby blue; her hair was a mix of cyan and cerulean shades. She wore a body suit that matched her hair and had some kind of ocean flora on her chest. In her hands, cradled like a baby, was a miniature version of the serpent Orin had seen moments ago.

An explosion sounded off in the distance: they all looked up and found the sky full of fireworks. Different colors exploded and mixed before fading away. Then a large rumbling caught their ears before the very ground they stood on began to tremble. *Was that the war island? Was the Colossus on its way?*

It had been a long stressful day: Orin was quite tired and he didn't know what to think anymore. He had been saved, but he had learned that there were more than enough liars out there. He looked at them suspiciously. "Who are all of you?"

The man in the front holding Durham spoke. "We're allies. We're here to help."

"How do I know I can trust you?" Orin asked.

"Besides saving your life and the life of your friend here?" The man replied. "Right now we don't have time to put our selves through a trust test. All you need to know is that if you don't accept our help, the whole east coast, hell the whole Atlantic area, may be destroyed by tonight!"

To Be Continued!

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Though he's evaded the spotlight for sometime, Aquaman makes a return, battling an enraged King Shark on the shores of Florida! But while our hero is busy, what forces, new and old, are plotting the downfall of Atlantis's only savior?

Aquaman #12 (2008)

Aquaman: The Return, Part 3 (of 5): Taking on a Flood of Wickedness.

As Orin tries to understand the mystery of the Leviathans, he finds another obstacle in his path in the form of a man called Noah: a man with strange abilities who claims that a second flood, like the Great Flood of the Bible, is coming to destroy humanity for its wickedness. How can Orin tackle a cult and this new foe while trying to finish his mission?

Aquaman #14 (2008)

Aquaman: The Return, Part 5 (of 5).

With the arrival of the war-island, the Colossus, can Orin and his new allies stop the inevitable doom that is approaching the East Coast? And what is the larger plan that Black Manta and his allies have been preparing for that involves the dark past of Atlantis? What is OGRE and what is their purpose? What are Lex Luthor and Cornelius Krell's roles in this organization? What are the roles of the Atlantean mages Merganys the Sea Witch and Hagen the Mystic, Orin's loyal counsel? Where is the Dweller-in-the-Depths and what are the Black Days of the Obsidian Age that is to return to Atlantis? And who is the Black King of Prophecy who will help return it?



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