



Aquaman #23
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Aquaman

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"All hail King Orm! All hail King Orm!"

The echoes of the Oceanics outside of the palace rang throughout the domes of Poseidonis. It had been only minutes since Ocean Master had declared himself the new king and already the seas surrounding the once grand and advanced city seemed to darken.

Orm Marius, once a proud warrior and brother to the former king, sat on his throne, his eyes gently closed while he took in the smoothness of the seat. The mask of the challenger, a mask he had worn as a symbol of his determination to take what rightfully belonged to him, was held in his right hand, dangling carelessly.

He had no need for it anymore.

The challenger had challenged and a king had fallen.

He had won.

This was his kingdom now.

"What do we do, Vulko?"

Tula and her brother Javen stood amid the mob of Atlanteans standing outside of their homes while lines of Oceanics filed into the domes of the

city. The elderly royal aide, Vulko, stood shoulder to shoulder with the siblings and their mute friend, Tramm.

"I'm afraid to say the only thing we can do...is nothing. Our soldiers have been beaten and we are at Orm's mercy," Vulko said sadly, the wrinkles on his face seeming more visible than ever.

"So we don't do anything!? At all?" the young Javen questioned.

"It's not about what we want to do, my boy. It's about asking yourself what could we do."

Javen's vision dropped to his feet, a feeling of uselessness sweeping over him. Vulko put a kind hand on the boy's shoulder and managed a small smile.

"We will be fine, lad. We will."

"What about, Garth?" Tula asked, her arms folded against her body in worry.

"Tula, I-I don't know how t--"

"I have a right to know, Vulko," Tula argued. "Please."

Vulko froze, giving a deep sigh.

"I'm sorry, Tula...but I have not seen Garth or King Orin return."

"And you are absolutely sure Orin is dead?"

Black Manta stood tall, clad in his high-tech diving gear, in front of the throne where Orm sat, his actual visage revealed to Manta for the first time. Lord Ladon, his pale face staring hard at Manta's mask for a response, waited beside Orm.

"Absolutely," Black Manta said, his voice deep and cold thanks to his helmet. "Take a look."

Manta turned, taking a long object from the two Oceanics who had walked in with him. He swung back around to face Orm and held out the shining object in front of him for the new king to examine.

The Trident of Neptune.

“Arthur was using this when he went belly up,” Manta said while Orm wrapped his fingers around the trident’s handle. “I was a bit disappointed that he didn’t put up that great of a fight but hey, we can’t always get what we want.”

Orm ignored Manta, continuing to examine his late brother’s weapon.

“So I’ve been wondering, oh righteous one,” Black Manta’s synthesized voice said, Orm glancing up at him. “When do I get my pay?”

Ocean Master rolled his eyes, annoyed by the interruption. He stared hard into Black Manta’s bug-like eyelids.

“Orm!”

Mera, queen of Poseidonis, opened the throne room doors, storming in without missing a step. Orm rose, setting the trident against his seat, and then holding out his arms in welcome.

“Ah, Mera. So nice to see you!”

“How could you do this? How could you-“

“I am only doing what someone should have done long ago. Your husband made some decisions that could have marked the end of our great civilization; decisions that damaged our kingdom,” Orm explained calmly, every expression now visible. “I’m merely fixing what was broken.”

Mera peered down at the object leaning against the throne and her eyes grew large.

“That’s...Orin’s.”

Orm followed her gaze to the trident and grasped it tightly in his hand, lifting it up, and then tilting it back and forth in front of his face.

“Yes, Mera. Indeed it is.”

“Why do you have it!?” Mera questioned, her face tightening. “Where is my husband?”

Orm said nothing and Mera’s face boiled with anger. She threw herself forward, both of her hands grabbing onto the trident, attempting to pry it away from Ocean Master. Ladon made a move but Orm shook his head, pulling the trident toward himself and Mera along with it. He brought Mera close to him as she still tried to tug the trident away.

“He was your brother, Orm! Your brother! How could you do this to him, to all of us!?”

“I told you, Mera, it’s for the best, and unlike Orin, I put my kingdom before my family.”

“This isn’t for the kingdom, this is all for yourself!”

“Mera, Mera. Calm yourself. Poseidonis may have a new king but it still needs a queen, a familiar face to make this transition easier,” Orm said, his face so near to hers that his warm breath brushed against her cheeks. “So you can either do the right thing and give these people just a flicker of hope by becoming my queen or...” the man’s lips curled with satisfaction, “or you can remain loyal to a corpse.”

Mera’s face grew white and a frown formed on her lips. She turned away from Orm for a moment before looking back, tears forming in her eyes. Orm placed his hand gently against her chin, raising her head a little.

“She’s beautiful, isn’t she?” Orm said, smiling wickedly.

“Indeed,” Ladon replied, brushing back his slick, black hair.

Mera stepped away from Orm, on the verge of crying but she remained strong. Without another word, she turned away from the villains,

walking toward the exit.

“Times have changed, Mera,” Orm called from the throne. “It’s best you accept that.”

The large doors slammed shut behind the queen.

Orm blankly stared at the door before his eyes flickered back to Black Manta who stood with his arms folded, his breaths gently echoing through his helmet.

“Ah, yes, your reward.”

Ocean Master climbed back to his feet, his cape flowing majestically behind him. He put an arm on Manta’s shoulder and began to stroll across the throne room.

“You’ve been a strong ally, Manta. You retrieved the Mask of the Challenger for me all that time ago and since then you’ve proven to be very capable with any task I recruited you for.” They came to a stop inches from the doorway, the two Oceanics Manta had come with at their heels.

“Well that’s flattering and all, Marius, but all I can say about you is that you pay well,” Manta said.

“Ha. Then I’m sorry I’m going to have to ruin even that compliment.”

Manta’s masked head craned a bit while Orm just grinned. Before Black Manta could react, the two Oceanics bound both of his arms behind him in restraint.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing!?” Manta’s deep synthesized voice roared.

“As king, I intend to avoid all of the mistakes my brother made. One of which was his dealings with the surface dwellers which is a bit unfortunate for you, Manta.” Orm looked to the two scaly figures. “Get rid of this surface slime. We don’t need him tainting these waters.”

The fist of one of the Oceanics cracked against Manta’s ribs and the other

began to walk toward the door with Manta still in tow, his feet dragging on the floor.

“You can’t do this to me, Marius! No one rips me off, nobody! Especially not a mermaid like you! You hear me!? Do you hea-“

The doors slammed shut once again.

“It is time to sever that ludicrous bond my brother made, to be what we have always truly been deep down...enemies.”

Orm Marius gave a final nod before the communication ended and the group of men sitting around the table staring at the monitor all looked around at each other in silence.

“We received that message only minutes ago.”

Admiral Wertheimer of the US Navy stood up, waiting for a reaction from the surrounding officers, who all seemed to be in differing stages of uneasiness.

“What does this mean, exactly?” one asked.

All eyes on the room fell upon Wertheimer, who wiped some sweat off of his brow and then took a deep breath.

“It means that we could potentially be at war.”

“War!? How soon!?”

“Impossible to tell right now, but any day, I’m guessing.” All of the men in the room, men who had been serving the Navy for years, all spoke to each other in soft whispers. “This man who we just watched, this Ocean Master, does not seem too concerned with getting into an all-out brawl with our troops.”

“Then he’s a fool. No one can even try to contend with our military!” another man shouted boldly.

“You forget that Poseidonis’s technology far surpasses our own. If we were to fight them, there is no doubt in my mind that we wouldn’t stand a chance. Like shooting tanks with squirt guns,” Wertheimer said gravely.

“Then what the hell are we supposed to do, Admiral?”

“I...I’m not all that sure, to be honest. It seems like it will be a losing battle no matter how we fight it.”

“Not necessarily,” the youngest man in the room, Captain Trainor spoke up. Throughout his military career, Robert Trainor had impressed his superiors with his ingenuity and creativity when it came to strategizing, a gift that had been a major aid in getting him to this point while only being in his early thirties.

“Go on, Captain,” Wertheimer said, suddenly intrigued.

“Well, there’s Project Scavenger.”

“Ha! Those advanced deep-sea diving suits? Those things are supposed to help us defend ourselves?” Admiral Crychek snorted.

Trainor just glanced over at Crychek and smirked.

“They’re not supposed to, Admiral. They will.”

Her heart was hollow.

Mera walked through the palace, her skin pale and her head hot. Her long red hair flowed behind her with each step, her eyes red from tears she had been hiding well. She walked down the hall, toward the one place where she felt most safe.

The balcony of the palace.

The door creaked when Mera opened it and where she expected to find

her usual place of peace and solitude that overlooked the city, she found something else entirely.

The backside of a blond man, clad in an orange shirt and emerald pants. Mera's face contorted with overwhelming surprise. She ran to her true love, to his unmistakable golden hair, to his comforting arms, and to his beautiful blue eyes.

Mera was only steps away from the man that made her most happy.

"Orin!"

Mera grabbed onto her love's shoulder and turned him around, only to find herself not staring at the indigo eyes she was expecting, but at emotionless, soulless black eyes. And, where there should have been a beard and a strong jaw, there was a clean cut face - a younger, more lean one.

Mera almost fell over at the sight of the man but, surprisingly, the young man held her steady before she could fall.

"I didn't mean to alarm you," the man said.

"You're that swordsman who tried to kill my husband a few weeks ago," Mera said, still catching her breath. "What are you doing out here?"

The man turned a bit, leaning against the rails of the balcony and watching the crowded city below.

"Just thinking."

Mera pushed some stray red hair out of her eyes before moving next to him.

"Who are you exactly?"

"Thanatos," he said plainly.

There was an eerie silence between the two of them but Mera remained interested.

"You look so much like him...like how he used to," Mera said, leaning slightly to get a better look at Thanatos's face. "How?"

"I was made from dark magics to be a possible replacement for your husband. Someone to make the transition of this new government easier for these Atlanteans." Thanatos could hear the roars of the Oceanics cackling below. "Clearly though, my presence hasn't eased anyone's aggression."

"Funny...Orm wants me to help the change along too," Mera said, hoping to get a reaction out of her company, but he disappointed her with none. "This war will not be an easy thing to transition from. I'm honestly not sure I'll be able to...not without-"

Mera froze in the middle of her sentence, refusing to shed a tear. Thanatos moved a bit closer to her, his dark gaze peering into her very soul. Mera bowed her head, hoping to hide her sadness from this stranger. Thanatos leaned against the rail awkwardly, unsure of how to react.

"Why do you weep?" Thanatos asked curiously.

Mera slowly looked back up at the young man, her eyes narrowed.

"Why do I weep?" Mera's already red eyes flared up and she glared hard at Thanatos who took a step back in confusion, unsure of the reason for her reaction. "I weep because of what the world has come to, where good men can be killed over one person's jealousy!"

Mera turned her back on Thanatos, catching her breath, her arms folded and comforting her tense body. Thanatos blankly stared at the woman's back, an uneasy frown on his face.

"Why are you even here?" Mera said, wiping her face.

"Here?"

"Fighting in this war...why are you with Orm? We never did anything to you." Mera spoke softly.

Thanatos's mouth lay agape for a brief moment, one hand resting on the hilt of his sheathed sword. Mera patiently waited for a reply and Thanatos seemed to be struggling to give one. Finally, his black gaze fell back onto Mera and he straightened his posture, looking strong and confident.

"It's what I was created for."

"Created for!? That's your reason?" Mera said irritably.

Thanatos stayed silent, refusing to look the queen in the face. Mera got even closer in proximity to him, determined to press him for an actual answer.

"As far as I'm concerned, the moment you were created, you became your own individual. You weren't created *for* anything."

Thanatos's expression became one of annoyance, shaking his head.

"That's where you're wrong. I was created for this purpose. I would not have even been made if it wasn't for your husband's mistakes on the thro--"

The palm of Mera's hand struck Thanatos's cheek and he stumbled backwards, taken aback by the sudden attack.

"Don't you dare talk about my husband."

Mera walked a few steps toward the exit, leaving Thanatos speechless.

"What would you have me do?" Thanatos asked, his hand gripping his cutlass's handle a bit tighter.

Mera stopped in her stroll, inching her shoulder around, not fully turned. She stared Thanatos down with a chilling gaze.

"You're your own man, no matter what people tell you. So you can do what you want or you can just keep doing what you were *created* for."

"Atlantis a threat? You don't say." Peter Mortimer, clad in his usual white lab jacket, was smoking a cigarette while scratching his balding head. Captain Trainor, his back straight and his head held high, stood in front of him. "I've been telling your pals at the Pentagon that for quite some time, and now, when all hell breaks loose, they do something about it." Mortimer breathed out some smoke that floated into the air before turning back to Trainor. "Typical."

"How many Scavenger suits do you have ready?" Trainor asked, ignoring Peter's rant.

"Thirteen are prepped and ready for action."

Trainor looked over the wet suits laid out on the table in front of him, the helmets to the suits resting beside them.

"And they'll make the wearer as strong and fast in the water as Aquaman, right?"

A smug grin crossed Peter Mortimer's lips, the embers on the cigarette butt lighting up.

"Stronger and faster."

"Good. That's what we've been paying you for," Trainor said. He brushed the tips of his fingers against the strange fabric of the suits. "Have you ever worn one?"

"Of course. I prefer to be hands on with my projects. Not a believer in lab rats."

"Dangerous belief."

"But a successful one. I know these suits better than I know my own family," Mortimer said, stepping on his cigarette butt.

Captain Trainor forced a thin smile, looking from the suits to Mortimer.

"Well then, suit up," Trainor said to Mortimer's utter surprise.

“Excuse me?”

“You’re the one with the most experience with the suits. That type of knowledge is vital in a mission where our soldiers are using tech completely new to them. We need you leading the charge.”

“Me?” Mortimer barked. “I’m no soldier.”

“Well you are now. We’ll be assigning twelve of our top SEALs to this mission. You’ll be taken under in a sub captained by Cornelius Krell.”

“Krell?”

“You’ve heard of him?” Trainor asked to which he received a simple nod in response. “He recently made dealings with Aquaman but I’m guessing those plans have fallen through due to this new management. Still though, he knows much about Poseidonis and that could prove to be key in the liberation of its people.”

“This is a liberation?”

“What the hell did you think it was, Peter?” Trainor asked.

“Those people down there in the water...they’re a threat, Captain.”

“My next door neighbor is a threat. The cashier at register seven at Stop & Shop is a threat. There are potential dangers everywhere. Don’t let prejudice for a different group of people get in the way of-“

“This isn’t prejudice, Captain. The Atlanteans have the means to wipe out a continent.”

“I’m aware, but we are not murderers. There will be no genocide here today, are we clear?”

Peter Mortimer looked down at his feet, sweat rolling down his balding head.

“Yes. We’re clear.”

“Orm, my son.”

A beautiful woman, long white hair draping her face, entered the throne room. She appeared to be a very young, fair lady, but in fact, she was far older than she appeared.

Merganys. Woman. Mother. Witch.

“Hello, Mother. Come to congratulate me on my victory?” Orm snickered from where he rested on the throne.

“You did well. You struck without remorse, hesitance, or mercy as I asked you to.” Merganys paused. “I am proud of you, my son.”

Orm revealed a thin smile.

“I appreciate the sentiments, mother, but don’t think I don’t know why you’re really here. You’re here to make sure I still remember your, excuse me, our goals.” Orm rose from his throne, grasping his trident firmly. “Recognize this?”

“The Trident of Neptune,” Merganys gasped, her eyes fixed upon the object. “The weapon of the enemy, the weapon used to defeat our Dark God, Xthulu, long ago.”

“The very same.”

Orm admired the trident while Merganys tiptoed closer, also eyeing the weapon with great interest.

“We need to be rid of that trident,” Merganys hissed. “It is the only thing that can harm Xthulu and now that you have taken the throne, we can prepare for his arrival.”

A bitter, tasteless laugh sounded and Orm shook his head with a smile.

“You think that’s what all of this was about? You think that’s why I

organized this coup, why I took the throne? Honestly, mother, I thought you were a bit wiser than that. This has nothing to do with your preparations."

Merganys's expression darkened.

"You dare disobey me?"

"It seems to have escaped your notice that I am the one in charge now. I don't obey anyone. They obey me. And I'm not doing this for you or for that monster you worship. I'm doing this for the betterment of our kingdom...not for anything else," Orm said.

"You defy the woman who brought you into this world, child?" Merganys hissed. "The woman who made this all possible!?"

"I made this possible, Mother! I stormed the domes of Poseidonis! I climbed the steps to my throne! I killed the man who called me brother! You did nothing!"

Orm's cheeks were red with anger and he pressed his face up against hers, his tight grip on the trident making his knuckles white.

"Now if you don't find your place and fast...you'll be buried up to your neck in chains just like that foolish boy."

Merganys raised her hand threateningly a bright light appearing at her fingertips and Orm just raised his trident.

"Sire!"

Ocean Master and his mother shifted their attention to the source of the voice. General Gorgon, leader of the Oceanics, stood in the doorway of the room.

"The security systems of this city have picked up something! There's some sort of vessel only a few miles away and closing in!"

Orm's eyes flicked to his mother for a second before he stormed away from her, walking to Gorgon.

“We have a squad of my men on their way to intercept.”

“These suits will provide you all with the strength, stamina, and agility you will need to move through the waters as you’ve seen Aquaman do. They can withstand the pressure of even the bottom of the ocean so try not to worry about that.”

A dozen Navy Seals, some of the world’s best, sat on either side of the cramped submarine’s interior. They were dressed in their Scavenger suits, the black wet suits clinging tightly against their bodies. Their helmets were resting in their laps while Peter Mortimer, also wearing one of the suits he created, explained the functions of their apparel.

“Here, on the wrist gauntlets, are impact sound cannons. They will emit a burst of pure sound waves, slamming against your enemies. Be careful though, they can be a bit unpredictable and you wouldn’t want to hit one of your allies.”

“Thank you for the sound instruction, Professor Mortimer.”

Captain Cornelius Krell patted Mortimer on the shoulder, then, examining the faces of the soldiers who all sat, waiting anxiously.

“Our objective, gentlemen, is to free the innocents of Poseidonis from the newly-established government led by Orm Marius, alias Ocean Master, former head guard of the city. He no doubt has studied Poseidonis’s defenses for years and we would usually be at a disadvantage in the water but now, with these Scavenger suits, that disadvantage is gone. Still, we are outnumbered so a stealthy attack is advised. A direct confrontation would no doubt end in defeat.”

The Navy Seals and Peter Mortimer all listened closely to Krell’s instructions.

“The plan is to sneak into the city and find Ocean Master.” Krell held up a screenshot of Orm’s message, showing Ocean Master’s face to the dozen soldiers. “Poseidonis’s domes are made of an unidentifiable

substance that is transparent and neither completely solid nor entirely liquid, allowing you to pass freely in and out of the dome walls. So as you see, it will be easy to get inside if we are careful, but it is unknown how difficult the mission will be once we enter the city."

The Navy Seals all looked at each other as a ringing noise sounded through the submarine. Krell acknowledged the sound, nodding his head calmly.

"It's time, gentlemen."

Mortimer looked uneasily at the helmet in his hand. He knew it couldn't be doubt in his technology...he had created it, after all. No, it was doubt in himself. He was a scientist, not a warrior like the men he'd be fighting alongside.

"You alright, man?"

Peter turned his head to see one of the soldiers, marked as Scavenger Two leaning over to him.

"Y-yes. I'm fine," Peter said, ignoring his shaking hands.

"Good. Looks like it's showtime." Scavenger Two grinned, putting the helmet over his head and hooking it onto his collar piece, securing it.

Peter Mortimer reluctantly did the same when Krell spoke up again.

"Good luck, gentlemen."

A large crowd had formed on the outskirts of the city, behind the dome walls. About twenty Oceanics had left the dome, swimming away from Poseidonis and people were beginning to wonder why.

"What's going on, Vulko?" Tula asked from amongst the mob of people and Oceanics.

"There are whispers that there is a vessel from the surface on its way."

“A surface world vessel? Coming here?” Tula repeated in hopeful surprise.

“Maybe they’ll kick Orm onto his backstabbing ass,” her brother, Javen, snickered.

“Javen!” Tula glared.

“Sorry...his backstabbing backside.”

“Make way! Make way!”

General Gorgon shoved through the crowd with Orm tailing closely behind him. They forced themselves to the front of the crowd where they were met by Lord Ladon and The Shark. The Oceanic forces pushed the mob of Atlanteans back a bit, making plenty of room for their leaders. Lord Ladon looked to General Gorgon.

“I don’t see the cause for concern, General,” Orm said. “This will merely be another one of the surface’s pitiful strikes which will amount to nothing.”

“But, my lord-“

“If you really believe they are even a minimal threat, General, then deal with them. Someone of my stature, however, should not be wasting his time on things like this. Get rid of them and report to me when you are finished. I’ve been meaning to speak to a rebellious young sorcerer all day.”

“Yes, my lord,” Gorgon said.

Ocean Master vanished from the crowd and Tula flashed a thoughtful glance at Vulko and Javen.

“Did you hear that? Orm’s going to go visit a young sorcerer. Do you think he means...Garth?” Tula’s eyes were filled with hope but Vulko just sighed.

"I'm sorry to say but there's no way of knowing that for sure, my dear."

"But what if it is!? He might need our help."

"Tula, please! We are in no position for thoughts like that right now!"

"My sister's right, Vulko." Javen stepped forward a bit, patting Tula's back and looking threateningly at the Oceanics who continued to hold back the crowd of Atlanteans. "If Garth's alive then maybe King Orin is too."

"I hope you're right, Javen," the soothing voice of Mera said as she moved up next to the group of them. "I haven't given up on my husband and I hope you all haven't either."

Vulko stared at Queen Mera with the utmost surprise. She was different somehow...the loss of Orin had done something to her. She seemed strong, as if an unknown fire had been lit inside of her - a fire, he assumed from her determined face, she would use.

"Look!"

Cries shouted through the crowd as a group of shapes appeared in the distance.

"Scavenger Five, watch your left."

Peter Mortimer darted through the murky depths of the ocean, feeling more confident than he had in his entire life. The moment he had submerged, an unexplainable feeling of absolute power overtook his body, as if he was just sitting in the passenger seat while someone else was in control of his movements.

An Oceanic lunged at him but he clenched his fist tight and aimed his knuckles at the creature. In seconds, a shockwave of sound shot from his gauntlet in a pressurized ball that smashed against the Oceanic, its bones cracking on impact.

A proud smile formed across Mortimer's face.

His invention was a success.

The other soldiers were pummeling the scaly creatures into submission with little effort, swimming with great haste in the direction of the magnificent domes only a short distance away.

"Shall I dispatch more of my men...or perhaps those Devil Ray submarines that surface dweller gave us?"

Gorgon waited for a response from Lord Ladon but the pale man just stared out at the trespassers, his slit-like eyes glistening with anticipation as he fiddled with the rings on his fingers.

"There will be no need for such measures. We don't need to waste any more of your 'men'. I will handle this," Ladon said smugly.

"You? And how exactly do you plan on doing that? You didn't even participate in our invasion."

"I didn't participate because I didn't feel compelled to. I didn't wish to waste my precious time."

"So why participate now if it's such a waste of time?" Gorgon growled.

"I'm quite bored with this whole game and I need to have some sort of entertainment...after all, there's a reason Ocean Master saw it best to get someone like me onto his side."

"And that reason is?"

"Better watch closely."

With that, Ladon leapt through the transparent dome wall and into the chilling depths of the ocean to confront the oncoming surface soldiers.

A once-great warrior of Poseidonis blankly stared at the black walls that surrounded him. He was on his feet, albeit weak, while his wrists were attached to the chains that clung to the walls, leaving his arms stretched apart. He blinked, trying to adjust to the darkness but it remained just as dark as it had been since he had first awoken.

There was a thumping sound resonating through the metal walls of the small room and a beam of light fell upon his back. He had been locked up, turned away from the entrance to the room, but he immediately knew that someone was standing in the doorway, watching him.

“Hello, Garth.”

“Hey, what’s that?” Scavenger Seven stuttered.

Peter Mortimer looked up ahead to Poseidonis where a single shape floated outside of its walls. Red robes drifting up and down in the gentle currents, Lord Ladon waited.

“Whoever that is, he’s in our way!”

Scavenger Nine, a particularly well-built man who had quite the attitude to match his pronounced body, launched through the ocean, shooting past the schools of fish that were fleeing the scene in terror.

“Wait, Scavenger Nine! I said wait!”

“You may have never been in a battle before, Professor, but I have, and I’m going to get rid of the opposition like any soldier would!”

Ladon remained still, his body swaying slightly in the water while the soldier continued to approach at great velocity, a knife slicing through the salty waters. Lord Ladon closed his eyes and bowed his head, ignoring his enemy entirely.

The roar of Scavenger Nine could be heard as he came down upon Ladon. The water seemed to freeze and Peter Mortimer gazed in

horrified dismay as Ladon's eyes popped open and he let out a monstrous scream. The water around him exploded in a ring of thousands of bubbles that threw Scavenger Nine backwards, smashing him like a ragdoll into the coral reefs below.

Light built around Lord Ladon's body and he looked up to the heavens, his mouth open wide and suddenly...the Scavengers' victory seemed further away than ever.

Orm entered the cramped metallic cell, leaving the door open so some light managed to brighten the room. Orm walked around the young man until he stood inches away from Garth's face. Garth squinted, the new-found lighting hard to adjust to at first but he could make out the confident smile that shaped Orm's features.

"I don't talk to traitors," Garth said.

"Oh please, Garth, enough with your pointless acts of 'loyalty'. There's no need for any of that anymore."

Garth's jaw tightened and he snapped forward in aggression but the bindings of the chains on his wrists were far too strong to break out of.

"Not very friendly today, are we, you Idyllist trash."

"Give me one good reason that I should be even a little friendly to you, traitor."

"You throw around that word so lightly, boy. You forget that it is you who are the real traitor, Garth. Idyllists were exiled from this kingdom because of their witchcraft but you showed up and were welcomed by my brother with open arms."

Garth stared at his feet, not wishing to look Orm in the face.

"Fact is, you wound up here because it's where you belong. You broke the rules of our kingdom just by crossing our borders all that time ago."

Outside, in front of the domes of the city, Lord Ladon's entire body was tingling, his cold snake-like pupils shrinking, and he seemed to be unleashing a scream that chilled Mortimer to the bone. The light that had been gathering around him shone brighter than before.

"Take this bastard out!" Scavenger Three hollered, aiming the sound cannons on his wrists.

Some of the other soldiers followed his lead, unleashing a barrage of attacks on Ladon but they all proved to be ineffective. The other Scavengers, such as Mortimer, were mesmerized with what they were witnessing.

Ladon's eyes grew red and his teeth were sharpening, growing. His skin grew whiter and veins began to appear across his body. He was panting rapidly while his nails grew sharp and his fingers warped into a talon-like shape.

Ladon's head shot back down and he stared at his enemies with a expression of rabid excitement. He smiled at them wickedly, revealing his newly-formed set of fangs. The light that stretched around him engulfed his entire body in its magnificent flare.

"Why did you even come here?" Garth asked.

"To deliver a message. This is a new kingdom now, Garth, so some new ground rules need to be set, and one of those isn't so new. Idyllists like you are not to set foot in these lands...but unfortunately, Garth, you already did...so there's only one solution."

Ladon's shrieks turned into a howling roar that shook the entire ocean.

"What the hell is happening?" Scavenger Two asked Peter Mortimer.

The light that hid Ladon from view continued to blind the surface dwellers when, suddenly, an enormous shape emerged from within. The shape shot outward, and Scavenger Ten didn't even have a chance to scream, vanishing from the face of the Earth. The gigantic silhouette slithered around them at incredible speeds, grouping the Scavengers together.

Once they were encircled, the great creature's crimson eyes looked them over. The creature was completely black, with long strands of hair flowing off of its head. Its slimy body was at least thirty feet long, slithering through the currents. It opened its jaw, revealing its long green tongue that was surrounded by razor-sharp teeth.

Lord Ladon, a sea serpent of legend, had found his prey.

"Yeah and what's the solution you're babbling on about?"

Orm paced in front of his prisoner with a smug demeanor.

"Congratulations, Garth. You will take part in the first execution of this new age. You should feel honored."

"You think killing me is going to solve anything? Is it going to make you feel stronger, more powerful. Is it actually going to make you feel like you deserve to carry that trident you're flaunting around?"

Orm Marius froze, his arrogant expression now shaken. Aqualad leaned up as much as he could in the shackles, his face sticking out to meet Orm's.

"What's the matter, 'your highness'? Struck a nerve?"

Orm's eyes darted back up, a scarlet flare of anger within them. His knuckles bashed against Garth's gut and he then coiled his fingers around the young man's throat.

"You don't know anything about me. You can keep putting on that bravery all you want, Garth. The end will be the same either way." Orm

stepped back from his chained prisoner, moving around him towards the door.

Garth's head hung low, the predicament he was in beginning to sink in. He heard the metal door to the cell creak open again but before it closed, Orm's voice spoke from behind him.

"Enjoy the short time you have left because this time there won't be an Aquaman to save you."

Darkness.

His feeling suddenly returned to him, surging through his entire body as if a light switch had gone off in his mind. The tips of his fingers pressed against a smooth surface but he couldn't tell what it was with his eyes still tightly closed. He could feel the water currents lightly brushing against his body which raised his hopes a little.

The comfort of water was unmatched.

He could hear voices; muffled, but perhaps that was only due to the fact that he was unable to hear much of anything, not even his own heart-beat.

Perhaps he was dead.

Perhaps...

"It's time to awaken, Atlantean."

Perhaps not.

"Your kingdom needs you."

To Be Continued!

If you enjoyed this story, you can find more tales of your favorite DC heroes at DC2 Universe.

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From the same author on Feedbooks

Ultimate Green Arrow #1 (2008)

Ultimate Green Arrow: The Archer, Part 1 (of 2).

A modern reinvention of the Emerald Archer as young playboy Oliver Queen is caught in the middle of a conspiracy against his father's company, the results of which may cause great change in the youthful man's lifestyle. It's GA as you've never seen him before!

Ultimate Green Arrow #2 (2008)

Ultimate Green Arrow: The Archer, Part 2 (of 2).

Oliver and Roy must contend with nature. Trapped on a deserted island with no way out and, for all they know, thousands of miles from human life, the pair of friends must learn the skills they'll need to survive. Meanwhile, Arthur King begins to spread his power throughout Star City and has a surprise meeting with a certain bald billionaire...

Rogues Gallery #12 (2008)

Rogues Gallery: Bizarro, Part 3 (of 3).

Rogues Gallery #11 (2008)

Rogues Gallery: Bizarro, Part 2 (of 3).

Aquaman #15 (2009)

Aquaman: A Promise Kept.

It's a romantic and relaxing day for the happy couple of Aquaman and Mera when the king shows his wife the home he grew up in. However evil lurks in the shadows from both the ocean and the surface. Meanwhile, Aqualad has some startling mood swings.

Aquaman #16 (2009)

Aquaman: Crimson Tides, Part 1.

A series of bloody attacks by a new threat calling himself The Shark worries the people of Poseidonis and their king. Fearing the worst, Aquaman and his brother Orm must venture on a journey to a place no Atlantean would dream of going. They better hurry as The Shark's next murder is nearing!

Aquaman #17 (2009)

Aquaman: Crimson Tides, Part 2

Aquaman and Orm journey towards the domain of King Shark, in search of answers to the recent murders. Little do they know that the real threat still waits at Poseidonis, ready to spill more blood.

Plus: Garth reveals his secret!

Aquaman #18 (2009)

Aquaman: Revelations, Part One.

An old enemy returns as a new one emerges! A mysterious swordsman arrives and his first target: Aquaman. Also: the secret of the Ocean Master's identity REVEALED! Don't miss the beginnings of the countdown to KING'S REIGN, the undersea epic coming this summer!

Aquaman #19 (2009)

Aquaman: Revelations, Part 2

The Ocean Master's identity now revealed and the deadly swordsman Thanatos at his side, Aquaman must make one of the toughest decisions of his life. Tension ramps up as the can't miss event, KING'S REIGN, is on the horizon!

Aquaman #20 (2009)

Aquaman: Wealth and Value.

He has had a long troubled history with creatures of the deep. He has known and hated Aquaman for years. He is the only man from either the seas or the surface to ever successfully raid Poseidonis.

He is Black Manta.

And he has found his next target...

Don't miss the final step before this summer's epic undersea event KING'S REIGN!

Aquaman #21 (2009)

Aquaman: King's Reign, Chapter 1: The Uprising.

Twenty issues of undersea action and adventure have all been leading to this boiling point. An epic event that will shake the world's oceans forever! Jam packed with just about every hero and villain the seas have to offer!

Who will reign?

Aquaman #22 (2009)

Aquaman: King's Reign, Chapter Two: The Siege.

This is it! War has arrived on Aquaman's doorstep and it's up to him and Aqualad to defend Poseidonis from Ocean Master's forces. This is when you know what really hits the fan, ladies and gentlemen, and the oceans will never be the same again!

Action Comics #41 (2009)

Action Comics: Times Are Changing

With the arrival of Superboy, Superman's had his hands full. But things become even more complicated when a new reporter shows up at the Daily Planet, Lex continues one of his old plans, and did we mention Parasite attacks?

A new era for both the Man and the Teen of Steel begins!

Action Comics #43 (2009)

Action Comics: Ring of Fire, Part 2 (of 4)

Superman and Det. Maggie Sawyer try to track down Pete Ross but the situation has become even worse now that Pete's wife and Clark's childhood love, Lana Lang, has also been kidnapped! Meanwhile, Lex Luthor confronts Morgan Edge who has quite a startling secret!

Action Comics #42 (2009)

Action Comics: Ring of Fire, Part 1 (of 3).

It's training day as Superman tries to show Conner the ropes and how to use his powers. Meanwhile, trouble is brewing in Metropolis that involves The Man of Steel's old friend Pete Ross. And if that isn't all, Lois finally gets her chance to interview the man who should be dead...Morgan Edge!

Action Comics #46 (2009)

Action Comics: Toy Soldiers, Part 2.

Action Comics #44 (2009)

Action Comics: Ring of Fire, Part 3.

Tyler McKnight has struck a chord in the Man of Steel, possibly gravely injuring Maggie Sawyer. He must be stopped before his

vendetta is complete. But it may take the help of the young Super-boy to stop him!

Aquaman #24 (2009)

Aquaman: King's Reign, Chapter 4: The Ashes.

With Aquaman gone and Ocean Master holding Poseidonis in an iron grip, all hopes seems lost. But deep within the home of an old enemy, a small shred of hope emerges from the depths of the ocean....

Action Comics #45 (2009)

Action Comics: Toy Soldiers, Part One.

Winslow Schott is dead, killed by one of his own creations who has taken the Toyman name. But this new menace isn't the only one in Metropolis with an arsenal of dastardly toys. Another has also taken up the identity of Toyman and he will soon realize...there isn't room in the city for two of them!

Rogues Gallery #18 (2009)

Rogues Gallery: King Shark.

Travel into the mind of King Shark, ruler of a tribe of shark-men located in the depths of the oceans. Witness his first ever encounter with a much younger, less experienced Aquaman. Also guest starring The Shark!

Aquaman #25 (2010)

Aquaman: King's Reign, Conclusion: The Monarch.

The time has come for the epic conclusion of "King's Reign", the Aquaman event that has shaken all seven seas to the core! This is the big one, folks! Aquaman finally confronts Ocean Master to decide who is truly fit to sit on the throne. Plus, Aqualad finally unleashes his magic when he must contend with the witch Mer-ganys! King vs. Usurper! Sorcerer vs. Witch! Atlanteans vs. Oceanics, and much much more! You can't miss this jaw-dropping ending where 3/4 of the world will never be the same again!

Aquaman #26 (2010)

Aquaman: Adrift, Part 1.

Aquaman #27 (2010)

Aquaman: Adrift, Part 2.

The Flash #37 (2010)

The Flash: Game Plan.

Saying that times have been rough lately is an understatement. Recently, I've been put to the test on both my skills as a protector of the world along with my strength as a human being. I've been being stretched like a rubber band at the breaking point and it doesn't seem like it's going to loosen anytime soon.

My name is Barry Allen. Though just about everyone on the planet knows me by my other name now-- The Flash, the Fastest Man Alive.

And today-- the rubber band snaps.

The Flash #39 (2010)

The Flash: No Rest for the Kind.

It seems like a beautifully peaceful day for Barry Allen, now known to the entire world as The Flash. Though when you're the Fastest Man Alive, a regular day of shopping with the wife could turn into a violent struggle for your life when Doctor Alchemy shows up out of nowhere! Plus, the ghost of the Pied Piper?

The Flash #38 (2010)

The Flash: Trick of the Lens

He ruined Barry Allen's life. He outed The Flash's secret identity during one of the most horrifying events in recent history for the Scarlet Speedster, and now - he wants ol' Flasher's help? The Trickster really must be insane if he thinks it's going to go down without a hitch!

The Flash #40 (2011)

The Flash: When Hell Freezes Over.

In this double-sized issue of the Flash...wait...the Flash isn't in this issue? In this return to the series, the Rogues are visited by an old friend, an act that launches them into a hopeless mission to rescue their comrade, the Trickster, from Iron Heights. To do this, they'll have to break into a place they've had loads of experience breaking out of...Iron Heights. When things begin to take an unexpected turn, though, the Rogues may not get out of the prison in one piece!



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