



**Aquaman #7**  
Brandon Herren

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Issue 7: "Sea Change Pt. 1: Castles Made of Sand"

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"Is Aquaman friend or foe? And what type of threat does Atlantis pose being so close to the border of the United States? We'll discuss these topics and more on tomorrow's *America Today*."

Click.

Lisa Morel switched the radio off next to her and raised her sunglasses. She squinted as she scanned the beach in both directions. There were dozens of other sunbathers, people swimming back and forth in the water and even children building a sand castle not far away, but there was no sign of her friend. She reached around to her bag and shuffled through the chaos inside for her cellphone, her skin feeling tight as she moved. Time to get back to the house she thought to herself. She didn't need to overcook. Her phone chimed as she flipped it open and she read her new messages.

"LIS, SRY CAN'T MAKE IT. TTYL, SELENA."

Lisa let out a long sigh. Stood up again. She loved Selena but sometimes she wasn't sure if it was worth the trouble. She laughed at the last part. Like she knew many people here in Florida.

She looked out at the surfers and wondered if any would make good boyfriend material. She practically lived on the beach so it would make for an easy relationship. It had to be better than her current one. Wait. What the... ? She narrowed her eyes even more at something further out on the water. There was something... moving through the water... right toward the beach and way too fast! She bolted up to her feet and stared for another brief second to be sure. The water bulged up in a straight line as the mysterious object cut along the surface of the ocean. She felt a panic in her stomach and called out around her.

"Everyone!" She yelled more loudly the second time. "Everyone! Look

out!" She pointed out at the water but mostly got confused looks in return. She glanced back in frustration and then grabbed her radio, purse, and blanket before taking off down the beach. "Run!"

By this time there was an audible rumbling in the water and the crowd started into a panic. Screams and confusion broke out just before the water erupted and two figures propelled over the sand. A large, green-scaled creature rolled and landed on his feet first, glancing around before lunging over to a long, golden trident lying on the beach in front of him. At the same time, Aquaman launched forward into the large, intimidating amphibian, knocking him back away from the weapon. The creature jumped back in a split second and landed his large, webbed and clawed hands on Neptune's Trident at the same moment as the Sea King. The two pulled the staff up between them and locked their stances in a physical stand-off.

"This is not yours! Stand down, Trident, before I show you exactly why I am the King of the Oceans."

"Overbearing flesh-bag! I will have it and neither you nor your pathetic Atlanteans will stand in my way!!"

Where the scene on the beach had been serene and relaxed just moments before it was now a battlefield! People scattered in every direction away from the combatants, some stopping to watch once they were at a safe distance. As she ran, Lisa noticed a small boy lost and crying in the fleeing throng and reached out to scoop him up. Once at the perimeter of the beach near the parked cars she looked around and spotted the mother scanning the crowd frantically. "Over here!" She called out.

The mother hurried over and pulled her son in close to a kiss of relief. "Thank you so much." Tears were in her eyes.

"It's okay." Lisa said to the boy and then smiled at the mother before turning back to the battle not far away.

Trident thrust his rough knee into Aquaman gut and yanked him over to one side. The sun glistened off of his scaly skin as he put his taloned foot onto Aquaman's throat and chin, grinding it down into the sand. He propped his weight forward on the trident, his newly acquired prize.

"It is mine! It is my birthright!" He pointed to a large marking on his skin covering the middle of his torso. "I was born with the mark of the trident and I will have it!"

Aquaman struggled to get a handhold on the monster's claw. "You... Oceanics... are all the... same. More muscle... than brains... and always feeling sorry for yourselves!" He caught the creature's leg just below a large fin and pushed it back with all his strength, sending the large humanoid stumbling backward. Aquaman threw his legs up and over his head, rolling back and jumping to his feet. "It takes a stronger will than yours to handle the power of the trident. It will consume you!"

"Do you take me for a fool?! Don't you know I can see the fear in your eyes? You will watch Atlantis crumble under my heel and you will be powerless to stop it!!"

Aquaman hurled himself into the creature, launching them both forward a half dozen feet. He pummeled Trident under fists with several strong blows before the Oceanic ripped his claws across his chest, gashing easily through the King's scale-mail and tearing into his flesh. Aquaman uttered a low grunt and scrambled back. He raised to his feet but swayed as if his strength was already failing.

"Poison." Trident stated as he fixed his position upright and retrieved the gilded trident. "Powerful enough to kill a small whale. I'm sure it will give even you more than a little trouble." He planted his treasure firmly in the beach in front of him. "Time to consider your options, King of Atlantis." He spit out the last part in defiance of his opponent. "You can run for your city now but I don't think you'll make it. Or you can stay here and die quickly by my hand."

"Never!" Aquaman stumbled as he ran forward and the creature easily repelled his attack, swatting him backward.

“Pathetic. You and your ridiculous city. So full of yourselves for so long. You can’t even see the danger right in front of you. Things are different now. The Oceanics will rise against your aging Atlantis and it will be destroyed!”

“The Oceanics... couldn’t organize... a strike like that... no leadership.” Sweat was broken out on Aquaman’s face and he leaned forward. “Not even you...”

“Maybe not, but I’ve got my own plans.” Trident shifted the weapon and the sun glinted off of it, momentarily blinding the struggling Sea King. “But they don’t need me, the Ocean Master is leading them now.”

“The Ocean... Master?”

“You really don’t remember do you? Any of you. Right under your noses and you can’t even see it. The Sea Witch did her work well.”

“What... ?” Aquaman started to lose focus on his antagonist and he his head began to swim.

“Don’t even bother, fool. You’ll just forget it again anyway. Your doom is hovering over you like a cloud and you are completely blind. Not that it matters now anyway, I think I can easily expedite the death of your beloved kingdom with this!” The creature turned the trident up and aimed it at the failing hero before him. The weapon glowed with power and energy began to crackle around it at a feverish pitch. “Farewell, King of Atlantis.”

A powerful blast struck from the Trident of Neptune and sent Aquaman flying backward dozens of feet where he disappeared along a jetty of rocks.

Lisa ran along the large stones looking for some sign of the life from the beaten Aquaman. She stopped and looked around in a panic. Sounds of sirens were audible in the distance. The monster had dived back into the

sea after the battle but she could still see confusion on the beach from where she stood. She began to search down the undeveloped coastline running the other side of the rocky breakline and saw something in an indentation where the grass wore down to the beach. She ran over to find the hero lying unconscious, his face and arms bruised and his shirt soaked with blood.

"Oh no", she gasped. Lisa ran to fall next to him. She couldn't help but wince while looking at his injury. "Aquaman?" There was no reply from the King, now unconscious and an ashen pallor. She looked up frantically to see where she might be able to go for help.

"Help!" She screamed, hoping desperately that someone might hear her plea. But all she heard in return was the sound of the ocean behind her and she closed her eyes, trying to decide what to do.

"They can't help him now."

Lisa snapped her head around in surprise to see a slim figure silhouetted against the bright sky, emerging from the water. "Who...?"

"My name is Garth and I'm a friend. But if we are to save the King we have to get him to a safe place as soon as possible." The young man dressed in blue approached the fallen hero. "Do you know of a place?"

"I-I live nearby. Over at the lighthouse there. Out on Atlas Point."

Lightning flashed and a low rumble echoed outside. Arthur sat up in bed and looked around the dark room. "Dad?"

He squinted, catching glimpses of the room as it flickered with the light of the storm outside. He was in his room, but it was wrong. He felt a sharp pain in his chest and reached up to feel a heavy bandage. His head began to swim and he flopped back against the pillow, but felt like he continued to fall. Lost and floating in a void.

A school of fish brushed against Arthur's leg as he swam. He moved swiftly along the sand as it shimmered with the sunlight cutting through the surface of the water above. He skimmed the sea flora as he drifted along for long moments with his eyes closed, enjoying the feeling of freedom he could only feel here in the sea. And in his solitude gliding through the warmed waters he thought he could he whispers. Tiny, almost imperceptible voices all around him. Then one grew louder than the rest and he recognized it.

*Arthur!*

He snapped to attention and swerved in the water in a direct line for the nearby shore. When he arrived and emerged from the water his father was waiting for him.

"You were beginning to wander a bit far don't you think, son?"

"Yeah, I know. Don't go too far. Don't stay gone too long. Don't have any fun at all."

"Now that's exaggerating a bit don't you think?" The tall, gray-haired and bearded man handed the thin, young Arthur a towel and they began to walk up the grade toward the lighthouse looming overhead. "If I were really that strict I wouldn't tell you about the bonfire that your friend Melanie has invited you to this evening down the beach."

"What? Really?! I mean, okay, right. That's sounds good."

Tom Curry laughed. "It's fine to be excited. I know you don't really get to much spend much time with other children your age. Not with being home-schooled here for so many years."

"I'm not a child anymore." Arthur grumbled, mildly annoyed while he scrubbed his hair quickly with the towel. "I'm a teenager now, you know."

The two stopped outside the structure and sat down to rest on a bench. The man looked off over the stretch of shoreline to his left, thinking of

another person and another time. "Your mother would be proud of the young man you are becoming." He allowed only a second to dwell on that thought and then quickly changed the subject. "And speaking of schoolwork. You'll need to finish your essay on Herman Melville before you can go to this, *shindig*, with your friends. So you'd better get inside and get started."

Arthur laughed at his adopted father now. "Sure thing, Pops." He grinned widely at him, the only father he had ever known. "But then I get to do a report on Captain Curry, right? Hey, did you ever find out if you were related to him or not? That would be so cool!" The boy enthusiastically waved his hand in the air and lunged forward in a mock sword-fight.

"No. He was one of the more mysterious of the old sea captains and there's not much to go on. Just his legacy remains."

"The guys who founded that charity or whatever, right?"

"I think you are stalling, young man. Now get inside and get to work. We can talk about this later." The father watched his son walk inside. She would have been very proud indeed.

The young man walked up on the bonfire and spotted a half dozen other kids his age sitting around.

"Artie!"

He grinned shyly as gave a small wave to the group.

One dark-haired boy walked up and put his arm behind him to usher him in closer to the gathering. "Good to see you could pull yourself away from your swimming long enough to grace us with your presence, Aqua Boy."

Another boy sitting near two young girls on a log jumped in. "Yeah, what are you doing out there all the time anyway, Art? Trying to set a

world record for holding your breath?"

"Well, actually... " He started but then sighted a young lady with short auburn hair to his right.

"Hey, Artie." Her face lit up. "Glad you could come." She bit on her lip a bit and invited him to sit down.

The group enjoyed cooked hot dogs and shared more than a few rounds of laughs as the cool evening air blew in around them from the ocean. But that is not all that would come from the ocean that night as a dark shape crept slowly out of the water down the beach and just out of view from the firelight.

"So why don't you come to school, Artie?" She looked at his face as he stared into the smoldering blaze. "You'd have so much more fun than being stuck in that old lighthouse all the time out."

"I know. But my Dad needs me. Since my Mom died he's really... "

"He's overprotective."

He chuckled at that. "Well, yeah." He glanced up at her and his eyes grew wide.

"Get down!" He pulled her down to the sand and jumped over her into the menacing shape beyond.

The other girls screeched out and scrambled as the boys tried to lead them up the beach toward the house nearby. Melanie hurried back on the beach but stopped to watch the event unfold. One boy stopped to go back for her.

"Melanie! Come on!"

She stood as if not having heard the warning. "No. I have to make sure Artie's okay."

Arthur grappled with the scaled beast that was only a little larger than himself. Its hide was coarse and unlike anything he had ever felt.

"Hawwwwwrrrrrrrrssssssss!" The inhuman sound sent a shiver through him as the beast hissed. Arthur winced as its claws dug into his hands. He threw his weight down and back and flung the attacker across the sand. He followed with a charge and was startled when the mysterious thing stood before him in the light of the bonfire. It was a kind of fish-man, like some type of creature from the late movies his dad would let me stay up to watch sometimes. It continued to gargle and growl at him but as it went on he discovered he could understand what it was saying.

"Priiiince of Atlantiss." It sneered out. "You will die at my hands!"

"Who... what ARE you?" The boy walked in cautiously. "Why did you attack me?"

"Because of the curse, boy. Every creature beneath the waves will suffer if you are allowed to take the throne. And I will be a hero when I return your head to my brothers!" As the creature uttered the last part he lurched forward, but the boy was ready and caught his arm, wheeling him over into the burning wood of the fire.

"Eeeeeiiiiieeee!!!" The creature let out a shrill wail and fumbled widely over into the sand and then limped quickly back out into the waves to disappear.

The ocean breeze blew the boy's messed blond hair as he stood catching his breath. He turned to find the girl staring at him with a look of horror and confusion.

"Melanie... " He stopped, not knowing what to say.

"That... thing... it was after you. What is going on, Arthur? What... ?" She couldn't find the words either. There was a moment of silence as they exchanged uncomfortable looks. "I think you should go home, Arthur."

The young hero shook his head slightly and turned to walk down the beach alone.

Aquaman jerked awake, bolting upright in the bed. He blinked for a few moments trying to focus properly.

Nearby a radio played quietly, "... Lexcorp has made a statement today that they now believe the tanker that exploded in the Atlantic weeks ago was attacked by the recently revealed city of Atlantis. No evidence has been offered at this time but Lexcorp has another scheduled press conference for the end of next week. The non-profit organization Brotherhood of Neptune has pledged to arrange legal representation for the controversial new city-state. In other news, unusual weather patterns continue to plague the Atlantic today. Weather experts continue to watch..." Aquaman reached over and clicked it off.

He looked down over his chest to see the thick bandages, and then ran his hand over his eyes face to better wake up, finding stubble now growing there. He looked around the room and recognized it. He threw off the bed cover and swiveled his legs off the bed, but when he attempted to stand he staggered at first. He remembered his fight with Trident on the beach, and then the dream. "It was him." He said aloud as the realization dawned on him. "He was the first to attack me that night on the beach." He listened closely for a second and could hear a girl's voice somewhere nearby inside the lighthouse. He made another attempt at standing and found his strength to be returning quickly. The displaced Sea King opened the door slowly to the central room and saw a girl sitting on a couch toward a large opposite-facing window and talking on a cellphone.

"I don't care, Selena. I'm tired of the excuses, okay? I've got other stuff going on here and I just can't keep track of all your craziness anymore... .. No... . No, I'm sure. Listen, just give me a few days, but I don't think it's working out... You don't have to..."

She clicked her phone shut and threw her hands up. "Dammit!" Then she turned and jumped at seeing the large man now standing in the room.

"Oh, ha, you surprised me. Sorry about that. I think I picked a bad day to break up with my girlfriend. Are you okay?"

The Sea King looked around the living space. It was completely different but still very familiar. "Yes, thank you. Thank you for helping me."

"Well, I didn't really do much besides lend you a bed. Your, uh, Aqualad? He brought you here and made some type of medicinal paste to put on that wound. Not the best smelling stuff but it did the trick. He said something about the poison being magically created? And that's why it hit you so hard? I don't know, it all sounds crazy to me, but then again, the world we live in these days is pretty crazy. Underwater cities, flying people, Amazons... . Anyway, your friend said he wanted to go out looking for that creep from the beach and that he'll be back later." She opened the refrigerator and took out a soda can. "Want something to drink?"

He looked at her a little baffled. "No, thanks. I'm Aquaman, by the way."

She laughed and walked over to him. "Oh, yeah. Yeah, I know. I've seen you on TV. Pretty nice punch on Superman there."

He looked a little embarrassed at that and began to put the bandages off his torso. "Yeah, not my best day."

"He can be a little smug. Probably asked for it. My name's Lisa. I'm studying marine biology at the university." She stuck out her hand and they made a quick shake.

Aquaman grinned and then tilted his head as his brain caught up with the conversation. "Girlfriend?"

"Yep." She helped him with the last of the wrapping. "Don't you have that sort of thing in Atlantis?"

"Well yeah. I just... you remind me of someone. I don't know. Maybe it's the lighthouse. I used to live here."

"Here?!"

"Yes."

"Right here? The King of Atlantis grew up right here?"

Aquaman laughed and shook his head. "Right here."

"Duuude. That is so cool. I could probably give tours or something! It would totally pay for my student loan."

"Right." He looked at her closely. She did remind him of someone but he couldn't put his finger on it. "I appreciate what you've done for me. But, I need to find the creature from the beach. He stole a very powerful weapon from me. He's very dangerous."

"Okay, okay. Hey, do you need me to drive you somewhere?"

"No, I have someplace nearby. An old hangout."

Lisa grabbed her coat. "Alright! Let's go!"

"Be careful." He helped her across the wet rocks at the entrance of the seaside cave, her other hand holding an electric lantern. They moved in from the light rain that fell outside.

"So what is this place, uh, Aquaman?"

"You can call me Arthur. This is a cave I used to come to when I was younger. And then later when I was on my own for awhile. It's a special place to me."

Then walked along the edge of a wall with water on their other side. They came to a branch in the cave and had to squeeze past a large rock to get through. Soon it opened into a larger chamber with a pool of water on one side. There were a number of items spread around: chairs, books, a makeshift bed, and some other artifacts looking to have been recovered from the sea floor.

"Nice! The Aquacave!"

"Yeah. I've spent many hours down here." He walked over to a large

covered object and pulled the cloth away to reveal a strange looking device. "This is Atlantean technology. I brought it here after becoming king. Sort of a back-up."

"Woow." Lisa looked it over. "This is so sick."

"Sick?"

"Nevermind. What does it do?"

"It's a monitoring device. A kind of computer. Here... " He pressed his hand to a panel and a holographic swirl of color shimmered on in its center. "Search. Energy source. Trident of Neptune." The color shifted and now looked like a three-dimensional satellite image. Aquaman looked over at his new friend who now stood speechless. "Your mouth is open a little."

"Oh, sorry. This is amazing stuff, A-man."

He chuckled at her. "Here. This dot. That's him. At the edge of the Bermuda Triangle." He pointed his finger into the image and it zoomed in. "It looks like we've found the source of the mysterious storms. He's up to something big already. I need to go." The image faded and the device once again went dark.

"Okay. I can make it back." She looked around again. "Wait, what's that over there?" She pointed to a recessed area on the far side of the room.

"Those are markers. My father buried my mother down here, to keep any curious people from discovering she wasn't human. That's why I started coming down here to begin with. So I could talk to her."

"Oh, I'm so sorry." She touched his arm. "But there are two of them. Who's the other one for? What does it say... Mariana, something?"

"A friend. She died helping me so I made a place to remember her." His tone became somber as he recalled the event. "I had a run-in with her father, this crazed sea entrepreneur named Cornelius Krell... "

"Krell? You mean *Mariana Krell*?"

"Yes, did you know her?"

"Of course, she was a legend in marine biology. But she died so young."

"Right, I knew she was... "

"No, you don't understand. That was twenty years ago."

Aquaman's face instantly turned to a look of disbelief and confusion.

"What?!"

At that moment, Aqualad entered the cave behind them.

"Aquaman, I've found Trident and I know what he's up to. We have to go right now!"

The hero exchanged a brief look with the girl and then hurried out of the cave toward the danger that lay ahead.

## **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 #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 #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  
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