SPECIAL AQUAMAN ISSUE

BACK ISSUE!
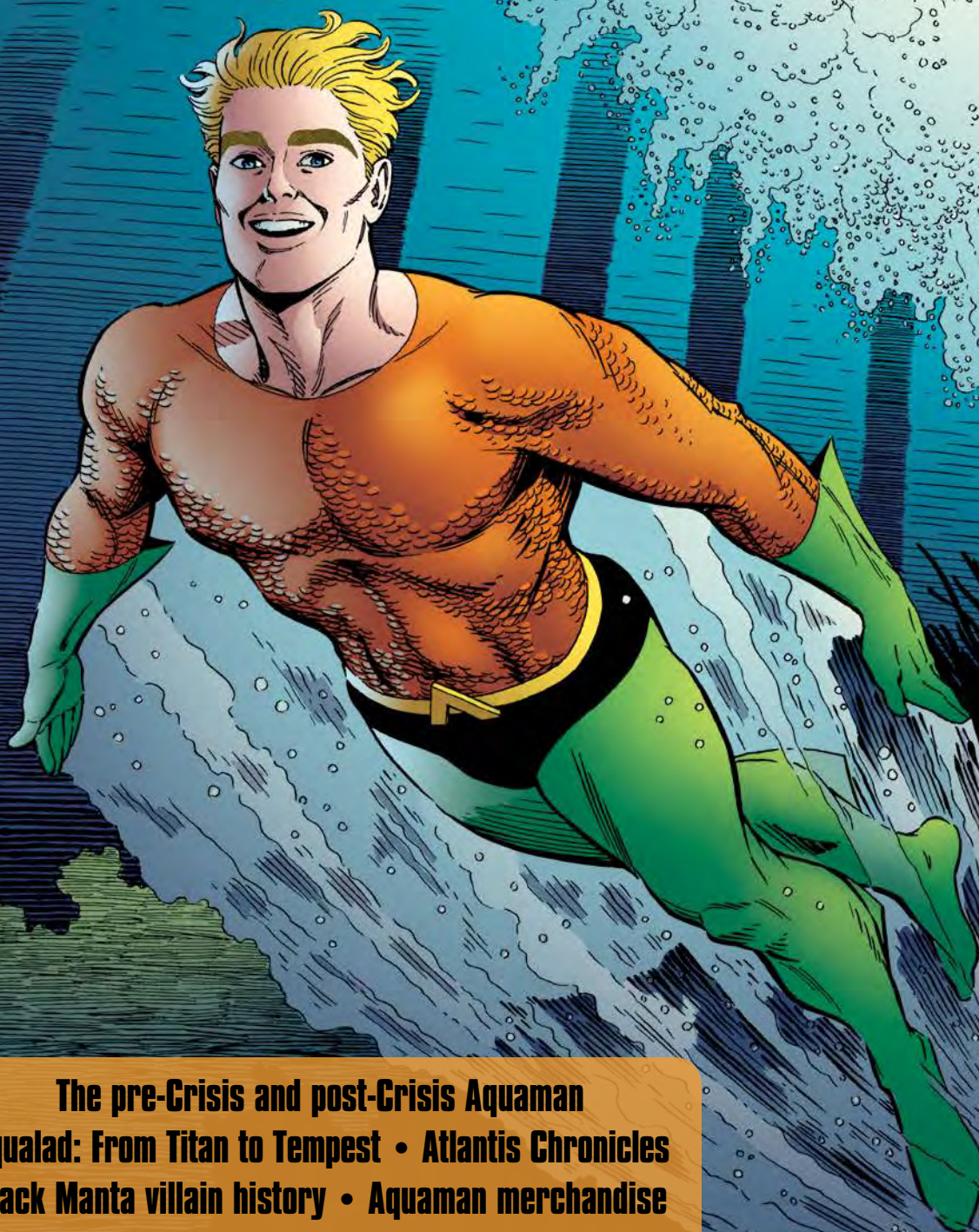
The pre-Crisis and post-Crisis Aquaman
Aqualad: From Titan to Tempest • Atlantis Chronicles
Black Manta villain history • Aquaman merchandise
with Aparo, Calafiore, David, Egeland, Giffen,
Hamilton, Hooper, Jurgens, Maroto, Swan, and more!

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GW '17

AQUAMAN ISSUE

Aquaman created by Paul Norris.

Aquaman commission by Neal Adams, courtesy of John Schwirian. Aquaman TM & © DC Comics.

BRONZE AGE
AQUAMAN
TEAM-UPS™

Super Friend or Frenemy? Aquaman may have gotten along swimmingly with his fellow Super Friends on Saturday morning television, but in the comics, he wasn't always the most congenial partner. *Super Friends* bumper cel art by Alex Toth; courtesy of Heritage Comics Auctions (*www.ha.com*).

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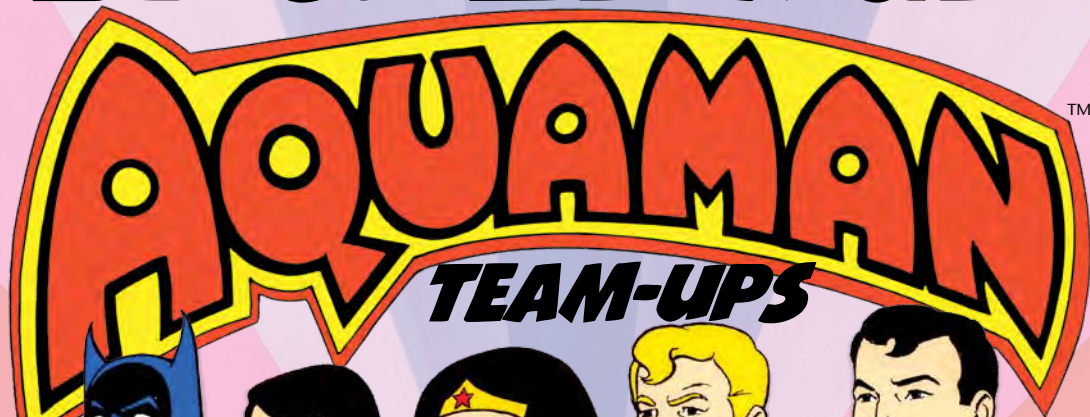
by Michael Eury

Aquaman team-ups often pose problems for writers. Most superheroes don't adapt to his waterworld (and look ridiculous when they try, with their scuba masks or fishbowl headgear), and when the Sea King ventures onto land he's limited to 60 minutes of action before requiring a dip. Also, the personality for Aquaman that surfaced in the Bronze Age—that of a hard-edged, vengeful monarch—didn't earn him the DC Comics "Plays Well with Others" Award (outside of his appearances in the kid-friendly *Super Friends* Saturday morning cartoons and spin-off DC comic).

Still, during our halcyon years of Bronze Age fandom, the '70s and early '80s, the Marine Marvel managed to cross paths with several members of the DC Universe. Which team-ups made a splash, and which sank? Let's find out…

AQUAMAN AND DEADMAN
This one's a bit of a cheat as a "team-up," because the King of the Seven Seas and the Hater of the Hook don't really join forces. The oddball Aquaman/Deadman crossover of 1970 might better be called a patchwork that morphed into a round robin.

It began with Dick Giordano, the editor (and artist) who jumped from Charlton Comics to DC in the late '60s, bringing with him Charlton writer Steve Skeates and artist Jim Aparo. Giordano wanted to shake up *Aquaman*'s book, which had gotten a bit stale despite its beautiful Nick Cardy artwork. So Skeates and Aparo, beginning with 1968's issue #40, sent the suffering Sea King on a multi-chaptered, sci-fi "Search for Mera" to find his missing wife.

But a year and a half later, the burden of a long-running saga in *Aquaman* was taking its toll on the creative team (and on some readers unaccustomed to such protracted storytelling) and shorter stories were in order, as the Skeates/Aparo/Giordano (SAG) team agreed during an impromptu 1969 coffee klatch in the offices of National Periodical Publications (that's DC Comics to you and me). This matter was forced by Aparo's slow recovery from an illness, which was adversely affecting his output. "We finally decided to toss Aquaman into another dimension, giving Jim a chance to draw

all sorts of new, wild, and psychedelic settings and cities," Skeates wrote in a text piece in *Aquaman* #52. It was agreed that this would take place in three 16-page chapters to run in *Aquaman* issues #50 (Mar.–Apr. 1970) through 52 (July–Aug. 1970).

To round out the book, a temporary backup feature was envisioned. Giordano turned to his pal Neal Adams, the two having worked together when Dick took over as editor of Neal's Deadman feature (which had recently been cancelled) in *Strange Adventures*, and asked him to produce some Deadman backups for *Aquaman*. "I didn't think a backup was a good idea for Deadman," Adams told John Schwirian in John's in-depth article on the Aquaman/Deadman team-up in *BACK ISSUE* #45. "He's a lead feature type character, not a backup."

Adams eventually agreed to produce a Deadman mini-feature for *Aquaman* that was more than a mere self-contained backup. What evolved was a parallel storyline that both Steve Skeates and Neal Adams would tell in their respective stories. Skeates wrote his Aquaman stories first, introducing extraterrestrial aggressors that transport the Sea King into a weird world. Adams' motivation for his contributions, as he revealed in *BI* #45, was to tell an interwoven ghost story, and the writer/artist riffed off what Skeates had scripted. As the analogous tales progress, Deadman, unknown to Aquaman, thwarts an alien invasion, while the two stories dovetail, reuniting the dimension-hopping Aquaman with his wife, Mera.

AQUABOY AND SUPERBOY
Remember the *Aquaboy* series from the Silver Age, "The Adventures of Aquaman When He Was a Boy"? Of *course* you don't—there was no such thing.

Well, except for that one time…

In late 1970, DC introduced Aquaboy—a teenage Aquaman—in the pages of *Superboy* #171 (cover-dated Jan. 1971). In "Dark Strangler of the Seas," the patrolling Superboy—the *real* Superboy to us *BACK ISSUE* types, the one who was Superman as a kid—assists a fisherman who's struggling to reel in an errant catch: a crude oil-saturated human who's choking to death! Rushing the slippery victim to a nearby detergent

plant, Superboy and factory workers race to scrub the oil off the gasping figure, soon discovering the form of the amazing Aquaboy, the "half-fish, half-boy" who can talk underwater!

Sounds like the kind of outrageous shocker that Bob Haney, the cavalier storymeister notorious for his continuity blindness, might concoct, doesn't it? Nope, not this time. Bob had nothing to do with this one, although his *Brave and the Bold* editor and the tacit enabler of that old Haney zaniness, Murray Boltinoff, edited this *Superboy* tale.

Scribe Frank Robbins was responsible for the Aquaboy story, a continuation of a Silver Age trope of Superboy's youthful encounters with characters he'd know later in life as Superman. Aquaman's Silver Age origin had been revealed some ten years earlier in *Showcase* #30 (and reprinted in *Super DC Giant* #S-26, which hit the stands several months after the Aquaboy story)— and even earlier than that in 1959's *Adventure Comics* #260 (where his real name of Arthur Curry first appeared)—and it included a flashback to young Arthur learning to telepathically command sea life. But Aquaman's career as a superhero began as an adult.

Once you get past the head-scratching concept of a previously unrevealed Aqua*boy*, Robbins' story is a great deal of fun. Aquaboy's oleaginous predicament is the result of his running afoul of the corrupt commanders and crew of a Trans-East Oil Company tanker whose toxic spills are endangering marine life. Luckily for the Boy of the Sea, the Boy of Steel proves an ally in Aquaboy's environmental mission, and saves his bacon a second time after Aquaboy is lured into an explosive trap by a decoy for the Sea Lad's girlfriend, Marita (a ringer for a young Mera), another previously unrevealed character. The teen titans put the oily oilers behind bars, and Superboy remarks of Aquaboy's war against water pollution, "This is one battle too big even for us—we're going to need all the help we can get!" The story's closing caption contends, "The war against pollution just started in the early days of *Superboy*'s and *Aquaboy*'s youth."

Robbins' "Dark Strangler of the Seas" is an obvious example of the "relevance" movement of socially conscious stories sweeping DC in the late '60s and early '70s. Around the same time this issue was published, other DC superhero books were tackling such torn-from-today's-headlines subject matter as racism (*Lois Lane* #106), the population explosion (*Green Lantern/Green Arrow* #81), world hunger (*Justice League of America* #86), and campus protests (*Teen Titans* #31).

Yet when considering *Superboy* #171's story setting—the 1950s (approximately 1955, as Superboy stories of this era generally predated the contemporary Superman tales by 15 years)—this attempt at relevance seems shoehorned into modern history. American oil spills certainly occurred before the '50s (in 1929, a nine-mile spill choked nine miles of ocean near Ventura County Beach, California, and around 1889, a steamer named *The Albatross* spotted a slick of unknown origin that stretched from south Los Angeles to northern San Diego County, among others), but it wasn't until the era in which this tale was penned that they became more commonplace… and more reported, thanks to the prolific emergence of television news throughout the '60s. When penning this tale Robbins perhaps had in mind the then-recent spill of March 1967, off the coast of Cornwall, England, where nearly 120,000 tons of oil contaminated the sea. "Dark Strangler of the Seas" is such an engaging story, however, beautifully delineated by the penciler Bob Brown/inker Murphy Anderson combo, that it's easy to ignore its incongruences (as well as its Arab stereotypes) and enjoy the adventure for the lark that it is. (If you don't want to scour the back-issue bins you can find it reprinted in the 2010 TPB *Superboy: The Greatest Team-Up Stories Ever Told*.)

AQUAMAN AND THE CRUSADER

If you're going to do an eco-friendly Aquaman story, you should set it in contemporary times… and that's exactly what Aqua-scribe Steve Skeates did with "The Creature That Devoured Detroit!," his Jim Aparo-illustrated tale that appeared in what turned out to be the final issue (at least for a while) of the *Aquaman* series, #56 (Mar.–Apr. 1971).
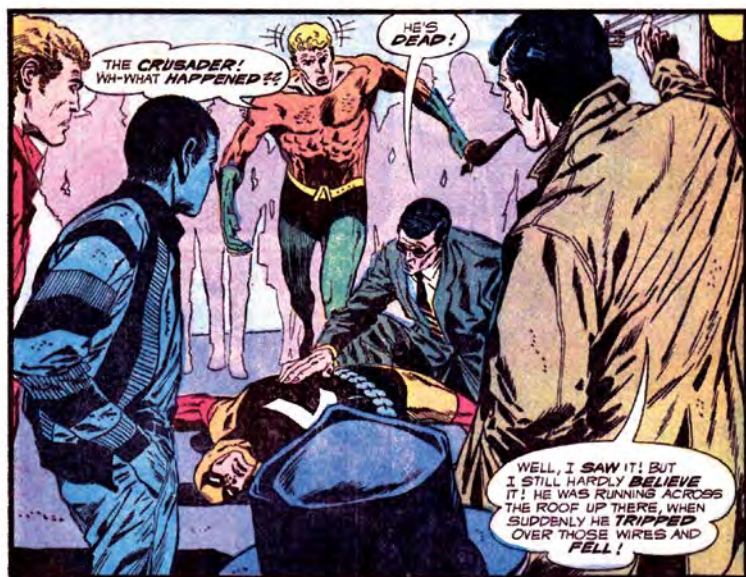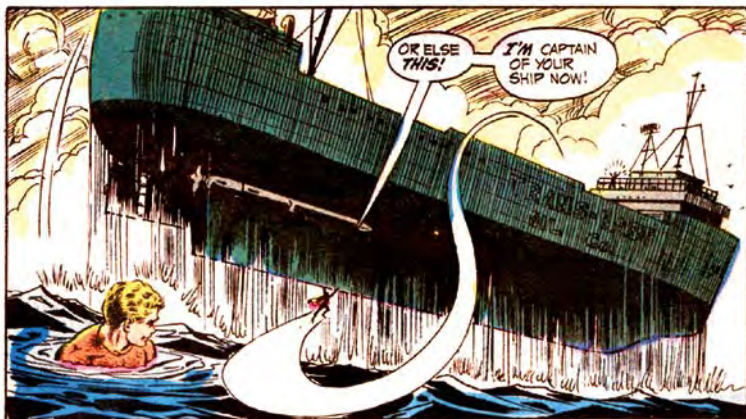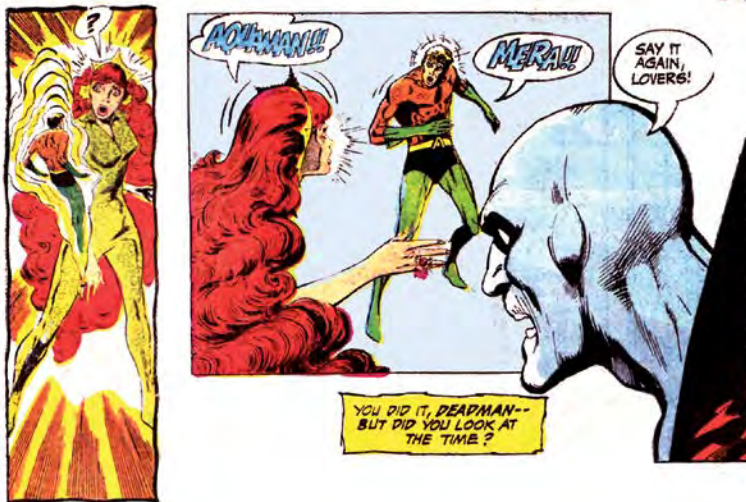
Odd Couplings

(top) Panels from the offbeat Aquaman/Deadman crossover. From *Aquaman* #52. (center) Aquaboy and Superboy tackle water pollution. From *Superboy* #171. (bottom) The ill-fated "meeting" of the Sea King and one-hit wonder the Crusader. From *Aquaman* #50.

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of Conway's criminal-crammed *Secret Society of Super-Villains* (*SSOSV*) title, enters the stage when he rushes Kid Flash—currently guest-starring in *SSOSV*—to the Justice League satellite for medical attention. There, Captain Comet crosses paths with the Atom, who's frantic over Jean's plight. JLAer Aquaman becomes involved with the saga as he valiantly spares New York Harbor from a tidal wave by telepathically commanding whales and octopi to fashion a giant dam out of debris (this is a dynamite showcase for the Sea King, illustrated with gusto by Arvell Jones and Romeo Tanghal).

From there, the three headliners battle parallel crises involving the machinations of a cataclysmic villain named Wind Pirate (not exactly one of DC's A-list baddies—or C-list, for that matter) and their connections to Jean's abnormal mental state. Aquaman, Atom, and Captain Comet cross paths and link telepathically as they scurry to save the both Jean Loring and the world, but being part of a larger ongoing storyline, *Super-Team* Family #13 feels less like a team-up and more like a crossover event.
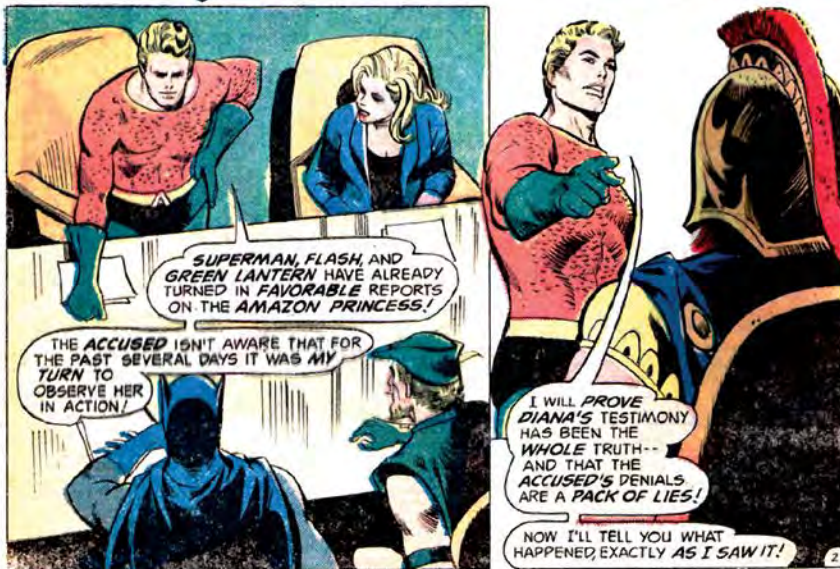
AQUAMAN AND SUPERMAN

After longtime Superman editor Mort Weisinger retired in 1970, the first thing Julius Schwartz did when he took over *World's Finest Comics* was to demote Batman to occasional co-star status and essentially transform the title into Superman's version of *The Brave and the Bold*. After team-ups with the Flash, Robin, Green Lantern, and a returning Batman, it was Aquaman's turn to pair off with Superman, the result being *World's Finest* #203 (June 1971) and its story, "Who's Minding the Earth?"

Schwartz tapped *Aquaman* scribe Steve Skeates to pen the tale, which saw print a mere three months after *Aquaman* #56, the aforementioned last issue of the series, an appreciated gesture for the Sea King's fans still aching from the sting of cancellation. Skeates ably follows the "How to Write a Successful Team-Up" playbook by crafting a tale that gives equal weight to both co-stars, drawn here by *World's Finest*'s regular art team of Dick Dillin and Joe Giella.

It begins with Aquaman's discovery of the ruins of an abandoned oceanography lab on an island, where he stumbles across a group of bizarre dolphin-men. The Marine Marvel makes the mistake of chuckling at

With Friends Like These…

(left) Aquaman stands up for Diana *Wonder Woman* #215. A Bates/Rosenberger/Colletta collaboration. (right) Aquaman was among the many superheroes appearing in Gerry Conway's *Super-Team Family* #13. Cover by Al Milgrom and Jack Abel.

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Ripples in the Water

The Intended Tale for AQUAMAN #57™ and Its Three Reincarnations

by John Schwirian

Sadly, the celebrated Skeates/Aparo/Giordano (SAG) run on **Aquaman** *came to an end after 17 issues with #56 (Mar.–Apr. 1971).* DC Comics publisher Carmine Infantino decided to pull the plug on the book after editor Dick Giordano resigned to go into business with Neal Adams [at Continuity Studios—*ed.*]. Giordano proposed continuing *Aquaman* as a freelance editor, but Infantino felt business would get too complicated and opted to cancel the fan-favorite instead. Thus, the decade-old series ended on a cliffhanger, with our hero trapped in a room with armed guards preparing to open fire as they break down the door.

Flash back to the year 2000, when I noticed a text box at the end of the letters column in 1970's *Aquaman* #55: "Next issue, Aquaman battles 'The Creature That Devoured Detroit'… and the following issue, as Aquaman is headed towards New York… he meets and teams up with (Are you ready?) Green Arrow."

Fortunately, *Aquaman* writer Steve Skeates had joined our Internet Aquaman fan chat-line, so I asked him about the unfulfilled tease.

"Yep," Skeates replied, "a team-up with Green Arrow was definitely in the works for *Aquaman* #57 of that particular run—in fact, it was gonna be a three- or four-issue deal! Jim [Aparo] had even sneakily given readers a hint of what was to come—check out the fourth panel on page 4 of 'The Computer Trap' in issue #55! I had written the first issue of that arc, which began with Aquaman, severely wounded, stumbling out of the Powers Lab, trying to make it back to the sea, but passing out before he could get very far. Jim was in the midst of drawing that ish when word came down that the book had been cancelled."

Later that same year, Skeates published a more detailed explanation in *Comic Book Marketplace* #83 (Nov. 2000). The article, titled "Aquaman & Green Arrow – The Lost Episode," explained how Aquaman dramatically emerged from the Powers Lab building (leaving the details of his battle up to the readers' imaginations), only to stagger down the street, bleeding from multiple gunshot wounds. As the Sea King attempts to reach a waterway, his injuries continue to drain his strength. "Marvel no longer, then," Skeates explained, "over this hero's fortitude, for, as he wobbles around a corner, into an alleyway, all that has occurred to him this day at last takes its toll and he tumbles, prone, into heavy-breathing unconsciousness. Yet, how long will it last, this breathing? Can this be the end of Arthur Curry? At least he still breathes even as a shadow falls over him—the shadow of someone supremely pleased to have happened upon a superhero, the shadow of someone who now gives forth with a hearty 'heh-heh-heh!' "

In time, Aquaman awakens in the alley and finds his wounds miraculously healed. Confused, he races

Marine Marvel and Emerald Archer
From the collection of John Schwirian, Dick Giordano's fantasy cover for *Aquaman* #57, teaming the Sea King and Green Arrow.

Characters TM & © DC Comics.

I CAN'T **STAND** THIS PLACE ANYMORE!

THE ATMOSPHERE IS SO **DEAD**... SO **STERILE**!

WE CAN **LEAVE!** THAT'S WHAT WE CAN DO!

WE CAN GO TO **ANOTHER** COLONY-- ONE WHERE ART AND BEAUTY **ARE** APPRECIATED!

And so, the young people left...

BUT, WHAT CAN WE **DO?** WE **CAN'T** CHANGE THINGS! THERE'S ONLY A **HANDFUL** OF US!

Of course, you continued to control their parents...

But they grew old...many died...soon there were only a few old men...

And then there was no one.

But even then you were not idle... you worked on yourself... you improved your own circuits.

KLIK WHIRRR WHIRRR KLIK KLIK

Thank you for your time.

George Kessler, Jr., Meadowbrook, Pa.

Thank you for your kind words, George. As for your suggestions:

1) I enthusiastically agree that continued stories add to our ability to improve both plot and character development. I would like nothing better than to devote 2 or 3 issues, at the least, to most stories. However, I have a feeling that many of our readers might object to waiting that long for a story's conclusion.

What do you say, readers? More continued stories? Or less?

2) Okay. AQUAMAN "is like a fish out of water" on dry land. Right on! But man in space is exciting because it's man out of his element, so AQUAMAN out of his element, water, could be exciting!

Anyway, we're gonna try. Next issue, AQUAMAN battles "The Creature That Devoured Detroit" (Detroit is generally considered to be on the surface of the earth), and the following issue, as AQUAMAN is heading towards New York (Also, generally considered . . . etc.) when he meets and teams up with (Are you ready?) Green Arrow. Well, we think it'll be kinda exciting . . .

3) As stated above, we're locked in to doing full-length stories for the next two issues. After that, if we can iron out some king-sized problems, we're gonna have one whale of a new back-up feature for AQUAMAN! Look for it.

to a nearby lake where he, according to Skeates, "relatively overjoyed, feeling that his ordeal is nearing its end, rushes toward it, dives in, breathes deep, and nearly drowns. He breaks to the surface, choking, coughing his guts out. Somehow he can no longer breathe water. He thinks about that, taking an inventory of his inner-workings, and realizes that his telepathic powers are missing as well. What's happened to him? And, where should he now turn? What to do? What to do?

"His only answer is to get on home! To be with his people, to see Mera, to talk to Dr. Vulko (a man he trusts implicitly), and with the good doctor's help, hopefully learn what has happened to him. His means of getting back entail first of all getting to the coast, to New York City, and his chosen method for doing that is the popular-back-then practice of hitch-hiking. As luck would have it, it is through just that activity that he meets up with Green Arrow, who is piloting a van (one that looks rather like a hippie bus) returning from some sort of adventure of his own."

Here ends the script for #57. As for the remaining three issues, Skeates laments, "The rest of the story I have no actual memory of, except, of course, that the whole thing is based rather loosely upon Stan Lee's

STEVE SKEATES

Comic Vine.

Fantastic Four adventure entitled 'This Man, This Monster'— that previously mentioned shadowy figure having somehow (through, no doubt, the use of some big, bulky, Kirbyesque piece of sci-fi equipment) stolen Aquaman's powers. How does Green Arrow help Aquaman regain those powers? To tell you the truth, I haven't the slightest idea; that particular piece of the puzzle is lost to me memory-wise."

While we will never know where this story might have gone, Skeates adapted the plot three times for stories that appeared in Warren's *Eerie* #40 (June 1972), Marvel's *Sub-Mariner* #72 (Sept. 1974), and DC's *Adventure Comics* #449 (Jan.–Feb. 1977). Surprisingly, the first reworking of the plot was instigated by Roy Thomas for an issue of *Sub-Mariner*. Note that, while most comic companies required a full script provided to the artist, the Marvel method was to send a plot outline, and then dialogue the pages after they were drawn. This difference in production resulted in yet another twist in what should be a simple story. "Yet another splashdown," Skeates elaborates, "yet another plunge, once more into the depths of oceanic reality, and, what with yours truly being most particularly lauded for my work on *Aquaman*, now given a chance to write but one story (a fill-in issue) for the Sea King's one-time crosstown rival, Marvel's *Sub-Mariner*, could it possibly come as a surprise to

Trumpeting a Team-Up

(left) Note the Bearded Bowman lurking in the background of panel four on this page from *Aquaman* #55. (right) From that issue's letters column, note, in column two, the announcement of the upcoming GA team-up (that never happened).

TM & © DC Comics.

THE TOY BOX

Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman didn't have to wait very long after their comic-book debuts before appearing on licensed merchandise. While crude to our modern eyes, these initial offerings showed that these characters were so massively popular that they could not be contained in the pages of a four-color comic book.

Their future Super Friend, Aquaman, was not so lucky. Relegated to the back pages of *More Fun Comics* and (later) *Adventure Comics* throughout the 1940s and '50s, there was a drought (I apologize in advance for all the water puns) of Sea King merchandise that lasted all the way until 1966, a full quarter-century after his debut in 1941. Along with Superman and Batman, Aquaman was part of Ideal Toys' Captain Action line, where kids could dress up the good Captain as Aquaman and have adventures alongside his sidekick Action Boy (who came along in 1967), who you could dress up as Aqualad. Both sets came up with multiple accessories (a trident, a knife, flippers, etc.), most of which most kids probably lost 15 minutes after opening the box.

The floodgates (see?) really opened in 1967, after the debut of Filmation's *The Superman/Aquaman Hour of Adventure* animated cartoon. Ideal released several Justice League-related toys and playsets, and Aquaman was frequently included. He even got his own "Aqua-Family" set of figures from manufacturer Multiple Toymakers, which came with a nifty Aqua-Sub, which now commands thousands of dollars from collectors. You could also find Aquaman on a board game, Big Little Book, jigsaw puzzle, and Halloween costume, among other items. Mera got in on the action, too, as part of Ideal's "Super Queens" line of dolls, another item that will cost you more than a car nowadays.

Once *The Batman/Superman Hour* replaced *Superman/Aquaman* on Saturday mornings in 1968, however, the Sea King's appearance on store shelves similarly dried up (again, sorry). But luckily for Aquaman fans, this period didn't last long, because Hanna-Barbera's *Super Friends* debuted on September 8, 1973, and with that show came a merchandising juggernaut, encompassing numerous products, and Aquaman was along for the ride. And while we don't have the space here to catalog them all (if that is even possible), we will highlight some of the more memorable, popular, and just plain weird among them.

Any article on Aquaman toys of this period has to start with Mego. The Sea King was one of the first four "action figures" (don't worry boys, they're *not* dolls!) in Mego's World's Greatest Super-Heroes (WGSH) line, alongside Superman, Batman, and Robin. Initially released in "solid front" boxes (meaning you couldn't see the figure inside before buying), Mego's Aquaman is a pretty good reproduction of the comic-book version. The one odd detail Mego felt to add was… pointed ears! Maybe the doll's designer thought this guy was Sub-Mariner, perhaps? All in all, not a big deal—

Mego Mania

The King of the Seven Seas was one of the first Mego action figures. From a 1973 Mego product catalog.

Aquaman, Superman, Batman, Robin TM & © DC Comics.
Captain America © Marvel. Tarzan © ERB, Inc.

AQUAMAN™
MERCHANDISE
OF THE
BRONZE AGE

by Rob Kelly

AQUAMAN VILLAIN

BLACK Manta

by Bryan D. Stroud

Black Manta first bedeviled Aquaman in the hero's self-titled book, issue #35 (Sept.–Oct. 1967), but his debut was not all that auspicious. It nearly seemed an after-thought as the Sea King spends much of his energies in that tale battling the Ocean Master.

This new villain was the co-creation of writer Bob Haney and artist Nick Cardy, and this first appearance included a curious bit of dialogue uttered by Aquaman on the third page, when he states, "This vehicle is a lure of my old enemy… Black Manta!" How he got to be an "old enemy" so quickly is anyone's guess, but it wouldn't take long for him to make his mark in the murky depths.

HE'S GOT THE LOOK
Manta's design is a simple, yet striking visual, described aptly by Jim Lee in *DC Comics Super-Villains* (2014): "That helmet, and that silhouette, is what really defines the character. Why that shape? It can be hard to explain at times. Things that might look silly from the '50s or '60s can work if you refine them in a visually striking way. Look at car design. Cars that have been around for 50 years, like the Porsche 911, have certain elements that you just have to have. But they're able to refine the edges to make it look modern. And at the same time, retro."

That diving helmet, essentially an over-sized scuba re-breather, grants Black Manta an unforgettable profile and aside from concealing his features, also serves as a weapon, but that would come later. In the debut tale he is seen using other means of assault, to include his combination underwater headquarters/submarine, the atomic-powered Manta Ship, which resembles its namesake with its energy blasts, along with the mutant Manta-Men that he controls in his nefarious bidding. The new villain describes his mission thusly: "That is why Black Manta was born to conquer… to gain the ultimate power!"

Before the story closes, Black Manta has kidnapped Arthur Curry, Jr., known colloquially as Aquababy, but Mera's only child is returned unharmed in a hostage exchange with Aquaman. This scenario is perhaps some unintended foreshadowing of things to come. The capsule containing the tot begins to double back to Black Manta's sub, but then the Ocean Master intervenes, intercepting the youngster. Later, Ocean Master battles the Black Manta hand-to-hand until they're caught in a current and carried away.

Black Manta was soon back in *Aquaman* #42 (Nov.–Dec. 1968), where he is featured on a Nick Cardy-rendered cover with some imaginative use of the Aquaman logo. We begin to see some of Black Manta's motivation in this Steve Skeates-scripted story as he has set himself up as the ruler of a primitive underwater people called the Marzons. Manta has a lust for power and will do anything within his abilities to gain it, preferably with Atlantis itself as the brass ring. One notable development in this

Undersea Enmity
Black Manta, slayer of Aquababy, traps the late child's grieving father on the Jim Aparo-drawn cover to the Sea King's comeback issue, *Aquaman* #57 (Aug.–Sept. 1977).

TM & © DC Comics.

story was the first use of that unique helmet as a weapon, with blinding and disorienting beams being shot from the eyes to try to negate Aquaman in battle.

Furthermore, Black Manta is under suspicion by the Sea King of having been the perpetrator of the disappearance of his beloved family back in issue #40. This subplot brings to light a subtle but significant fact about Aquaman. While Hawkman, and later the Elongated Man, fellow members of the Justice League of America, are also husbands, only Aquaman, in addition to the tremendous responsibility of ruling the seas—which comprise 71% of the surface of the Earth—is also a father.

A couple more appearances by Black Manta in Aquaman's book occurred as the Bronze Age was dawning, but they were relatively minor, and unfortunately this was also the time for the series' curtain call with issue #56 (Mar.–Apr. 1971). Never fear, however, as both Black Manta and the Aquaman title would return.

BRONZE AGE BADNESS

The storyline serial that would forever define Black Manta's infamy began in the pages of the venerable *Adventure Comics*, starting with issue #435 (Sept.–Oct. 1974), where the Sea King began as a backup feature for a trio of issues— and, of course, Black Manta came right along with him. By the time issue #441 hit the newsstands in 1975, the Spectre had been replaced by Aquaman on both the cover and as the lead feature, and soon Aquaman's life and career were going to get very complicated.

The pressures of being both an active member of the Justice League of America and the King of Atlantis were beginning to take their toll. The people of Atlantis went so far as to dethrone Aquaman and install a new king named Karshon. Having been effectively exiled, the family relocates to an undersea cave to try to start life anew, but Aquaman's enemies are never far away. In *Adventure Comics* #446 (July–Aug. 1976), Black Manta is back, this time involving himself in a smuggling operation that seems to be some gun-running. Somehow, he is fully aware of the dethroning of Aquaman and is determined to make things as miserable as possible for his foe. As part of this latest effort,

PAUL LEVITZ

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Wikimedia Commons.

Black Manta goes so far as to capture Aqualad in a tank with Manta Rays and Electric Rays, both of the "Order Batoidei," to threaten the ally of Aquaman.

As the series was continuing to unfold, there was a rotating cast of creative talent contributing to the stories, though the art tasks were consistently and expertly accomplished by the late, great Jim Aparo. Another constant member of the creative team, whether plotting, scripting, or editing, was Paul Levitz. While his memories are a little vague on the Aquaman run, he does share a few anecdotes about his multi-tasked assignment for *BACK ISSUE*, beginning with how he managed to get involved initially. "The Aquaman series was supposed to be written by me, but when Carmine [Infantino] read (or skimmed) issue #441, he felt I wasn't ready, so for several issues thereafter, other writers either dialogued over my finished work or wrote the scripts based on my plots. When Carmine was no longer in charge, a few months later, I was able to resume work on it and other scripting assignments."

Joe Orlando was credited as editor, but according to Paul, his efforts were somewhat limited: "Joe certainly had plot discussions, and edited the scripts. It wasn't a series he was particularly fascinated by, so it wasn't deep involvement."

One of the writers who provided key input during the series was David Michelinie, who recalls joining the team as follows: "I'd been working mostly for Joe Orlando and Paul Levitz since I started writing for DC Comics in the early 1970s, so I was part of their stable and when the series writing chores came open, and they offered the gig to me. I was delighted, since it was my first change to write a superhero series after several years of war, supernatural, and mystery stories, but it turned out not to be quite the experience I thought it would be.

"At the time, Aquaman was pretty much confined to the ocean," Michelinie continues. "He couldn't easily interact with the 'normal' world, do the human things that Marvel had pioneered like hang out with friends at the local coffee shop, catch the latest blockbuster at the downtown multiplex, have relationships with un-super folks— things that readers could relate to. It was actually more like writing a character on another planet, with its own environment, culture, and political statements, rather than writing, say, Spider-Man or Captain America in New York City. I was grateful to have the opportunity, but it wasn't exactly what I was expecting."

Michelinie shares how he and Paul Levitz interfaced: "As I recall, Paul had been writing *Aquaman* before I took over and continued to plot the character for my first couple of stories. I think I just wrote the scripts from his plots on those issues. So, we really didn't collaborate much in the give-and-take sense. I wrote stories from his plots, then wrote my own stories and plots when I took over the series solo. I'm sure I discussed plotlines with Joe [Orlando], but I don't remember any specifics."

Martin Pasko was given writing detail for two issues during this run in *Adventure Comics* #446 (July–Aug. 1976) and 447 (Sept. 1976) and has a few recollections to share. "I came in on *Aquaman* because Paul Levitz, in his staff capacity at DC, got tied up with a big

Sinister in the Silver Age

(inset) Nick Cardy cover to *Aquaman* #35 (Sept.–Oct. 1967), Black Manta's first appearance. Inside, the villain terrorizes the depths with (center) his Manta-Men and his awesome sub and ominous appearance. (bottom) Another stunning Cardy classic cover, for *Aquaman* #42 (Nov.–Dec. 1968).

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Changing Tides: The Post-Crisis AQUAMAN™

by *John Trumbull*

INTO THE ABYSS

1st ISSUE OF AN ALL-NEW MONTHLY SERIES!

Forget Rodney Dangerfield. Aquaman's the real one who gets no respect.

A DC mainstay ever since his debut in 1941's *More Fun Comics* #73, Aquaman survived into the Silver and Bronze Age by virtue of being underestimated. A consistent back-up feature, he received a solo series in 1962, his popularity waxing and waning like the tides. Through cancellations, relaunches, and revamps, he's been a Justice Leaguer, a Super Friend, a husband and a father, king of an under-water nation, and ruler of three-fourths of the planet.

But to most of the general public, he's still just that guy who talks to fish.

From 1986 to 2001, a number of talented creators worked on the Sea King, each trying new things to fight this popular misconception. The result was 15 years that brought more changes to the character than the previous 45 years put together.

POZNER TAKES THE PLUNGE

Aquaman's first post-Crisis treatment was in a four-issue miniseries by writer Neal Pozner, penciler Craig Hamilton, and inker Steve Montano. In *Aquaman* #2's text piece, *On Learning to Breathe Underwater*, Pozner shared the genesis of the project: Impressed with an analysis of Wonder Woman that DC design director Pozner wrote, executive editor Dick Giordano invited him to pitch for an available character in the DC Universe. Considering his options, Aquaman caught Pozner's eye.

In Pozner's view, Aquaman was "potentially a very neat character. This guy had a rich history and heritage in the DC Universe, and no one had done anything revolutionary with him in the last [15] years. Well, could I bring him a new approach?"

A few days later, Pozner brought his analysis of Aquaman to Giordano:

"1. The character looked as exciting as a Waring blender. His costume hadn't changed in over [40] years, and unlike Superman's uniform, it hadn't stood the test of time well.

"2. Having him in above-land adventures made him quite literally a fish out of water. In fact, he had never worked well relating to surface-dwellers.

"3. Atlantis was a vague concept which had never been explored in depth. Or perhaps I should say, several vague concepts within the framework of the DC Universe which had never been related.

"4. Aquaman has consistently been portrayed as a hothead, a totally dislikeable, unsympathetic protagonist, unable to support a book on his own.

"I proposed several things: Integrating several different [versions of] Atlantis from DC's cosmology

The Acumen of Aquaman

Gallopin' guppies! From maligned monarch to hook-wielding warrior to undersea King Arthur, Aquaman has perhaps been DC's most frequently changing superhero since 1985's *Crisis on Infinite Earths*. Shown here is the Martin Egeland/Brad Vancata cover to 1994's *Aquaman* #1, with some other Aqua-issues explored in this article.
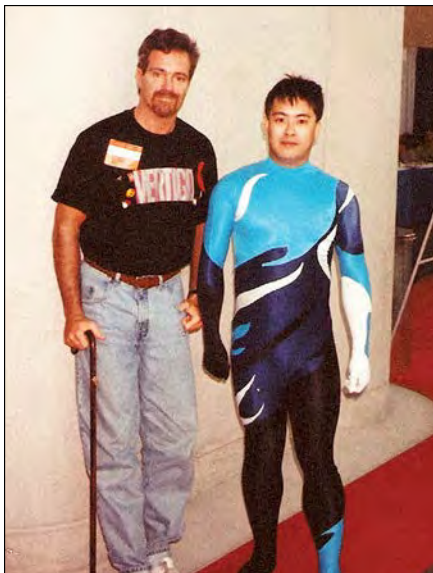
(Aquaman's, Arion's, Warlord's, and so forth) with contemporary theories of what Atlantis might have been in our real world (assuming it ever existed), and figuring out a history of the continent based on mythology and pseudo-archaeology done on the fabled lost continent; a new costume that would be more contemporary and somehow show what Aquaman was all about; a situation which would examine Arthur Curry's personality as it had been established and force a change to it which would make him a hero people could care about."

Giordano liked Pozner's ideas, and had him start work on a story proposal and a new costume design. Pozner dove into his research, reading every Aquaman appearance dating back to the Golden Age, the complete runs of *Justice League of America* and *Arion, Lord of Atlantis*, as well as several books on oceanography and the mythology of Atlantis.

Pozner continued, "I remembered a costume designed by the art nouveau artist Léon Bakst for Nijinsky and the Ballets Russes which would be the inspiration for the new Aquaman uniform. And I assembled a package that had a detailed character analysis, history of Atlantis, costume design, and plot synopsis."

Breaking from the past, Pozner decided to have the miniseries take place largely underwater, and choose a mystical emphasis rather than the science fiction of most Aquaman stories. In issue #3's letters column, Pozner explained, "No matter how you look at it, historically and cross-culturally, water is linked to mysticism. Add this to the mythic roots of the Atlantean legend and a mystical/mythological approach seemed the most logical to me."

Although he found writing a laborious process, Pozner kept at it, ultimately turning in his final script for the miniseries in July 1984, over a year and a half from his initial proposal.

ATLANTEAN ARTISTS

With the miniseries written, the search began for a penciler, with an emphasis on artists outside of DC's regular talent pool. As Neal Pozner wrote in *Aquaman* #2, "I especially wanted an artist who could draw moody, romantic, art-nouveau-inspired fantasy. There was also a sensuality underneath the story that I felt was very important to convey. And yet, there was a great deal of emotionalism and violence."

British artist Alan Davis was the initial choice, but after completing breakdowns on the first issue, Davis was persuaded to take on *Batman and the Outsiders* as the better career move. Davis intended to return to *Aquaman* after completing his year on *BATO*, but within six weeks, the book was reassigned. [*Author's note:* For a more detailed account of Davis' involvement with *Aquaman*, please see TwoMorrows' *Modern Masters* vol. 1: *Alan Davis*.]

Finally, after close to a year of searching, Pozner met Atlanta College of Art alum Craig Hamilton through mutual friend Klaus Janson, resulting in Hamilton scoring the assignment. Hamilton was thrilled to have his first job in comics working on a favorite character. "Aquaman had always been my favorite Justice League member and when I saw the costume that Neal had designed, I fell instantly in love with it and understood how it worked so spectacularly with anatomy, one of my strong points. I recognized the Léon Bakst influence of the design and I think that impressed Neal," Hamilton tells *BACK ISSUE*. "He set up a meeting with Dick Giordano at the DC offices, which is probably the most exciting thing that could happen for a 19-year-old artist who had been not just dreaming, but aiming for a career in comics.

CRAIG HAMILTON

Aquaman '86

(top) Aquaman writer Neal Pozner (1955–1994), and an unidentified Aqua-fan. Circa 1993. (center) Courtesy of John Trumbull, a Russian ballet program and photo revealing the possible inspiration for Aquaman's "camouflage" costume. (bottom) Artist Craig Hamilton (right) and his Atlanta College of Art instructor, Houser Smith, circa 1990, in a photo by Tiffany Brown. Says Craig of his teacher, "Houser Smith was a brilliant portraitist and learning from him made me look at faces and hands as unique structures and utterly essential in visual storytelling." (inset) Hamilton today.

"It was an exciting day when Neal told me that we had a meeting with Dick to discuss my samples. They were being gracious but rather coy and before they could tell me, Joe Orlando popped into the meeting to tell me how excited he was to color my work! I was a bit confused as Joe looked at Dick and said, 'Oh, you haven't told him yet?' Mr. Giordano grinned broadly and said, 'You got it, kid.' This is still to this day one of my most joyful memories."

Hamilton poured himself into *Aquaman*, taking nine months to draw the four issues. As he wrote in the second issue, "A lot of comics characters can only be distinguished by their costumes. To change that, I based all of my people on friends or celebrities. Aquaman is a cross between Buster Crabbe and *GQ* model Jeff Aquilon. Nuada is modeled after Glenn Close, and Brea is based on Grace Jones. The various Atlantean council members are all roommates and neighbors. Mera is Lucille Ball in her starlet days."

Explaining this practice, Hamilton says today, "I simply like to have a clear picture in my head of what a character's face looks like, so some 'casting' helps me do that. I am drawn to unique faces, so I guess my casting reflects that. Strong, unique faces have features that are more effectively stylized as well. Actors make great models because I can study their expressions through their films."

When it came to designing underwater worlds for his cast to explore, Hamilton says, "it was mostly tremendous fun! My love of history, oceanography,

astrology, magic, and mythology all came into play. But we all know I have a tendency to go overboard with the details, and that can lead to unacceptable degrees of overthinking. I tend to think big, want to do too much, and pay attention to every detail. I am a perfectionist. It is both a strength and a weakness and something I will always have to be mindful of."

When the first issue of the miniseries finally went on sale in November 1985, it had been nearly three years since Pozner's initial proposal. Would the fans respond? Would it be worth the wait?

AQUAMAN VOL. 2:
THE DEPTHS OF ATLANTIS (1986)
As the miniseries opens, Aquaman and his wife Mera find their home of New Venice ravaged by the Ocean Master, Arthur's evil half-brother. As an enraged Aquaman attacks his brother, the Sea King is mystified by Orm's increased power and sudden disappearance. Summoned back to Atlantis, Aquaman learns that the Royal Seal of Poseidonis has been stolen, the loss of which has the Atlantean people on verge of riots. Going undercover with a new blue camouflage costume, Aquaman journeys to Thierna Na Oge, a recently rediscovered Atlantean city (loosely based on the Celtic legend of Tír na nÓg) that King Vulko suspects has mystically spirited away the seal.

In Thierna Na Oge, Aquaman finds himself caught in the royal power struggle between sorceress Nuada Silverhand and her evil sister Bres. Learning that Thierna

Aquaman Blue
(left) Craig Hamilton's stunning cover to *Aquaman* #1 (Feb. 1986), which launched the four-issue miniseries, certainly signaled to longtime readers that things were changing for the Sea King. (right) Courtesy of Craig, a scan of a 1986 illo he believes he produced for a convention. (inset) The artist based Aquaman's appearance on the chiseled features of male model Jeff Aquilon, here clipped from a *GQ* cover, as well as Hollywood Flash Gordon Buster Crabbe.

AQUALAD™
FROM TITAN TO
TEMPEST™

by *Marc Buxton*

Open the ancient scrolls of Atlantis with me, dear historians, and read of a time long ago. A time beneath the waves of history where a sidekick, superhero, Teen Titan, and underwater champion known as Aqualad was a pretty darn big deal amongst the pantheon of DC superheroes.

During the ancient period of the surface world's history known as the Silver Age, Aqualad was regularly appearing with Aquaman in the pages of Sea King's comic series and the myriad backups that Aquaman frequented. The soggy sidekick was a founding member of the Teen Titans and regularly appeared in the pages of that groovy series. In addition, Aqualad appeared on Saturday mornings in the popular Filmation animated series *The Superman/Aquaman Hour of Adventure* (1967), both in the *Aquaman* feature and in the *Teen Titans* segment. Finally, Aqualad had his own costume set as part of the *Captain Action* line of dress-up toys and his own Mego figure (inset) as part of a *Teen Titans* set.

Moving forward in history, our waterlogged tomes tell us that to claim that Aqualad, real name Garth, stayed a big deal in the hearts and minds of DC fans and creators would be an exaggerated fish story. It seems that during the post-Silver Age era of Aqualad, it became clear that in a new sophisticated wave of comics, Aqualad would have a hard time finding traction with a new breed of fan because of the derivative nature of the character.

Aqualad may have been redundant, but the once popular young hero just would not allow the currents of ennui to pull him under the waves. In the 1990s, Aqualad would transform from a typical kid sidekick into a powerful and unique hero—the mighty Tempest. But even before Tempest arrived, there are a few hidden Aqualad treasures floating beneath the waves of the Bronze Age, stories that are often overlooked by deep divers into comic-book history. So join us and journey back to a time where Aqualad only surfaced sporadically in the pages of DC Comics and help us chart a course into a new era where DC transformed the former kid sidekick into the powerful Tempest.

THE BRONZE AGE ADVENTURES BEGIN

It is always difficult to find a line of delineation between the Silver and Bronze Ages, but for Aqualad, the cover blurb of *Adventure Comics* #446 (July–Aug. 1976) reads, "Featuring: The Return of Aqualad," so let us begin our undersea exploration there.

Adventure Comics #446, written Paul Levitz and Martin Pasko and drawn by Jim Aparo, features Garth in a very different role. Aqualad, along with Aquagirl, was on the
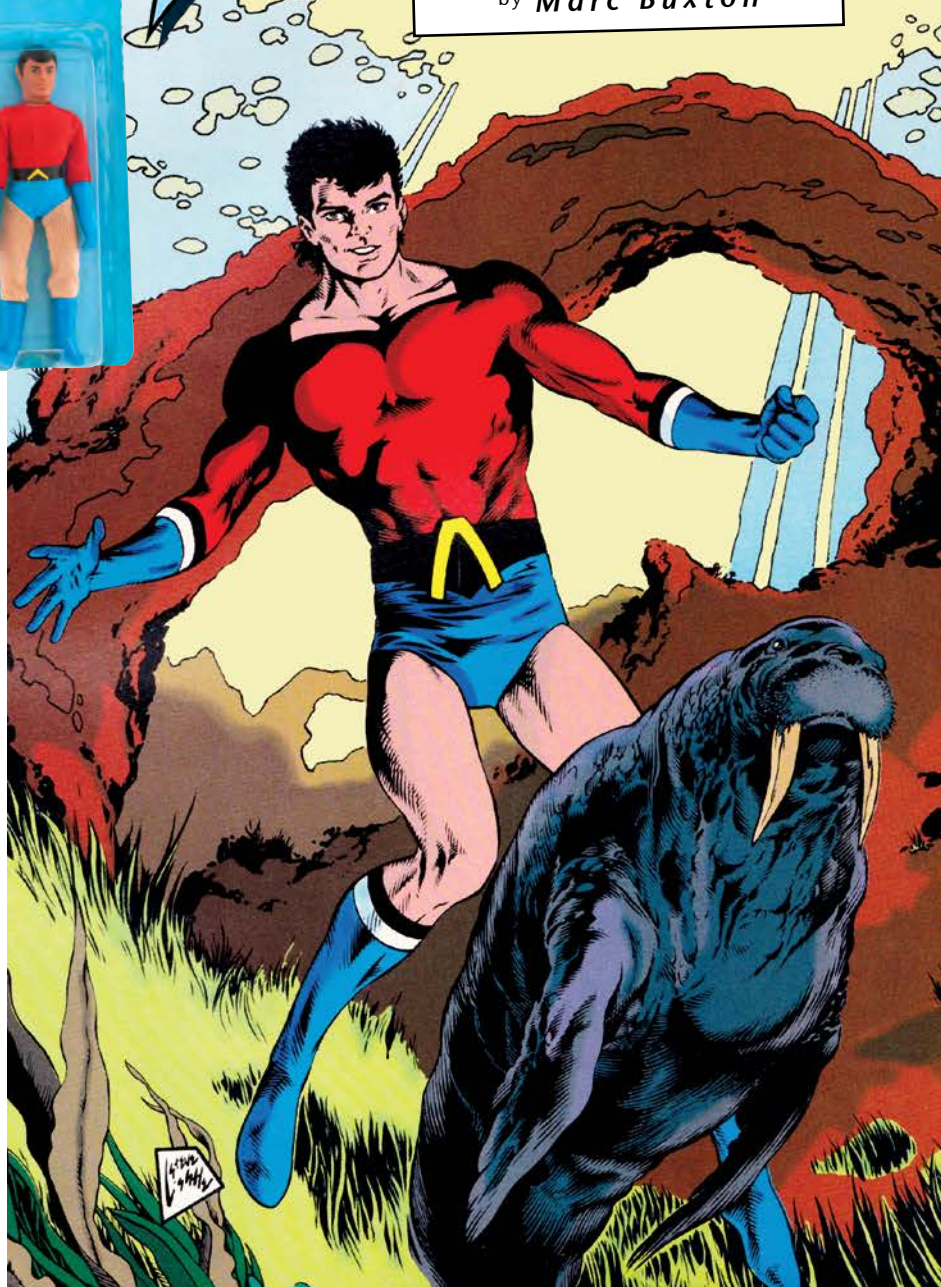
Tadpole and Tusky

Ye ed's all-time favorite (maybe yours, too) Aqualad illo, by Stupendous Steve Lightle, from *Who's Who in the DC Universe* #7 (Feb. 1991).

TM & © DC Comics.

backstory and a sense of mission, something that he was fighting for that distinguished him from Aquaman and all the other heroes."

In Mishkin and Cohn's issue of *Spotlight*, Aqualad was fighting for his powers. Aqualad's powers may have made him sometimes redundant, but they also defined him. In this *Millennium* crossover, Aqualad was fighting for his place in the DC Universe, because without his powers, what was he? By the end of Mishkin, Cohn, and Thibert's issue, Aqualad's powers subtly transform. During his battle with the Manhunters, Garth found that he could no longer command fish to do his bidding—he had to ask for their help. This set Garth's ability apart from his mentor's, but the distinction was thin at best. As to why this minor power change took place, Mishkin says, "It's been such a long time that I can only guess about what our goals were. Obviously, there's an effort to

make his powers somewhat different from Aquaman's, but I can't tell you the history of that decision. Did it come from Gary and me? I can see some thematic resonance with our other work in the way the story implicitly challenges the assumption that the power to command confers a right to command, but that's hardly definitive. It may well have been the outcome we were instructed to reach. The fact that the change in Aqualad's powers now seems pretty minor (they're still way too close to Aquaman's, in my opinion) makes me hope that this is what we were told to do, rather than being a sign of our limited imaginations."

Whatever the case, with the subtle changes to his abilities, Aqualad was no longer an exact replica of his partner. The issue also has the distinction of being one of the first times Aquaman and Aqualad worked together without bitterness after the death of Tula. In the two Aqualad issues of *Teen Titans Spotlight*, Aqualad continued his growth as a hero and as a person, something, according to Mishkin, the character needed. "I think it goes back to that issue of his having been created as a pretty cookie-cutter version of the kid sidekick: same powers as his mentor, and learning how to use them in a mature and responsible way in the context of a substitute parent-child relationship. That worked just fine in 1960, but in the 1970s and beyond, a fairly substantial rethink or retcon would have been needed for him to have a reason to show up anywhere but in *Titans* stories."

GARY COHN

DAN MISHKIN

TANKS FOR THE MEMORIES: THE ROAD TO TEMPEST BEGINS

And that rethink was coming in a big way. Aqualad's transformation into independence, adulthood, and his own distinct identity began by his almost dying. In *New Titans* #72 (Jan. 1991) by Wolfman and Tom Grummett, Aqualad and Golden Eagle were attacked by a member of the villainous Wildebeests. Aqualad was tossed off a cliff and by issue's end, he was found not breathing. Thus began the "Titans Hunt" storyline by Wolfman, which promised to change or remove many existing Titans from this mortal coil.

It was back to the recovery tank in *The New Titans* #73 (Feb. 1991) as Deathstroke saves Aqualad from certain death. Yeah, Aqualad was pushed to the med bay once again in the pages of a *Titans* book, but at least a major storyline like "The Titans Hunt" used Aqualad as the inciting incident that kicked off the epic tale. In *The New Titans* #85 (Apr. 1992), Aqualad is still recovering as Wolfman reaches back to the Kupperberg days for the Idylists. As a last desperate hope, Aquaman and the Titans decide to find the Idylists to help Aqualad recover.

Thanks to the medical aid of the Idylists, Aqualad makes a full recovery and saves the day in *The New Titans* #92 (Nov. 1992) as the young seagoing Titan returns in a Tom Grummett-designed new costume. Grummett's costume used the same color scheme as Aqualad's classic costume, but it was sleeveless and sleek. The new look really accented Aqualad's swimmer's physique and finally set his look apart from Aquaman's. Grummett would play with his Aqualad design throughout his *Titans* run, adding long sleeves (and eventually, a leather jacket—it *was* the '90s, after all) to the new look. This was the first costume change for Aqualad in his, at that point, over-30-year history, but another new look, and a new name, was right around the corner.
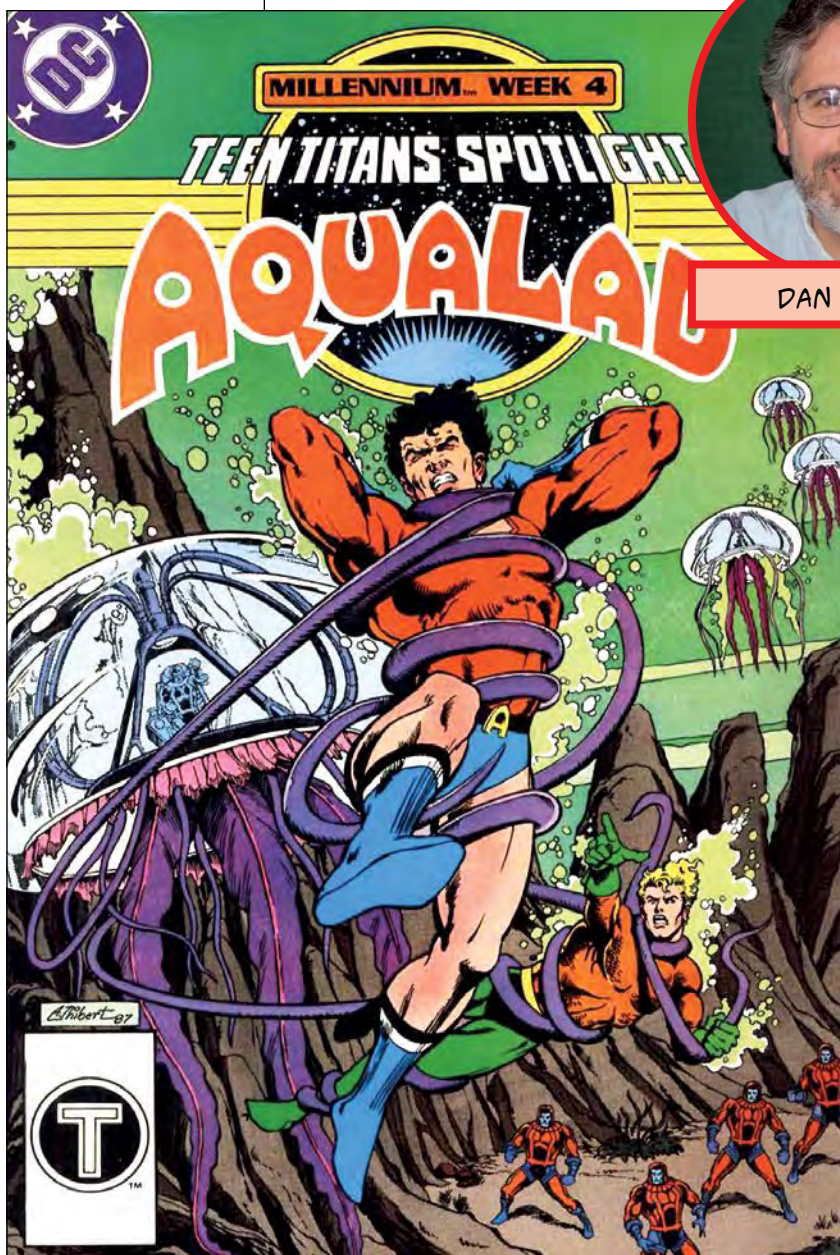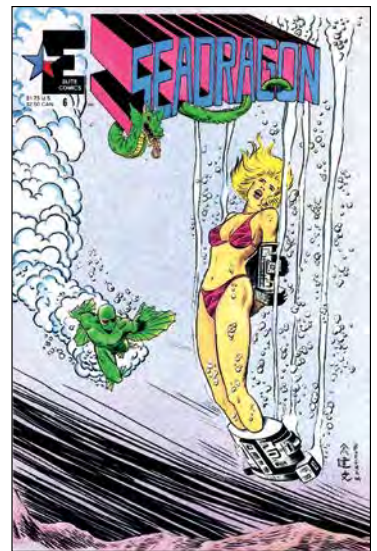
What the--?!

SEADRAGON

MORE FUN THAN A BARREL FULL OF SEA-MONKEYS®

by John Schwirian

The Saga of Seadragon Covers to Elite Comics' *Seadragon* #1 (May 1986)–6 (Jan. 1987). Cover art by Tom Floyd (issues #1–3), Dennis Yee (#4), and Yee (pencils) and Floyd (inks) (#5–6). (opposite page, top left) Floyd's back cover art to issue #2.

© Carl Knappe and Tom Floyd.

Back in 1984, the comic-book market was evolving. Long-established publishers like Gold Key, Harvey, and Charlton had either quit the business or were soon to do so, and spinner racks were dominated by Marvel and DC. Meanwhile, the direct market was gaining ground, with new independent publishers skipping the traditional distribution system and shipping directly to comic-book stores. This allowed for many new and different series to edge their way onto the scene—series like *Cerebus*, *Elfquest*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, and, of course, *Seadragon*.

What? You say you don't remember Seadragon? Well, then, allow me to refresh your memory.

TOM FLOYD

ERBzine.com.

DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS

It all began in Texas with Tom Floyd and Carl Knappe, two Vietnam vets looking for a change of pace. Knappe and Floyd had been friends for a while, and Knappe, who worked as a surveyor for the city of Midland, Texas, wanted to go into business for himself. "Carl and I were both inspired by the fact that we didn't like our jobs at the time," writer/illustrator Tom Floyd explains. "My oil field job was starting to wear me down. I was an engine mechanic working for a Caterpillar Tractor dealership, but mostly I was recovering from a bad case of pneumonia and had light duty jobs and hated it. I liked being an engine mechanic, but had a hard time getting back up the ladder of jobs at work.

BEYOND Capes!

The first half of the 1980s saw things creatively percolating in the DC Comics offices with expectations running high after the success of projects like *Camelot 3000* and *Ronin*. Everyone knew *Crisis on Infinite Earths* was going to be unique, but as that 12-issue maxiseries was being produced, Frank Miller was already deep into *Batman: The Dark Knight* and Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons were talking to Dick Giordano about a maxiseries involving the Charlton heroes, a project that would become *Watchmen*.

In the wake of *Crisis*, 1986 was explosive for DC. *Dark Knight*, *Watchmen*, Howard Chaykin's *The Shadow*, and John Byrne's *Man of Steel* were a crescendo—all mammoth sales successes. As the year ended, DC was reprinting these books and starting the bookstore graphic novel category, something still being enjoyed today.

It was a heady time in the DC offices, and its editorial department was being encouraged to find creators they wanted to work with and bring their passions to reality. Publisher Jenette Kahn was open to almost anything editors or creators were fervent about. Everyone wanted to get in on the fun, and I, as a DC editor, was no exception.

Once the *Crisis* dust settled, I was tasked with tidying up things in and around the new DC Universe, which gave me plenty of time to ponder what might make for a good story. Flipping through *Who's Who* now and then for inspiration, I hit upon the notion of something sweeping in scope focused on Atlantis.

THE SEARCH FOR ATLANTIS

One common element in all of DC's versions of Earth that have existed within the multiverses has been the sunken continent of Atlantis. In all instances, Atlantis began as a legendary civilization lost to surface world history, having sunk into the Atlantic Ocean around 9,600 B.C. In each case, its existence only became common knowledge thanks to the appearance in the 20th Century of such citizens as Aquaman and the beautiful mermaid Lori Lemaris, Superman's friend.

Readers may have asked editors George Kashdan and Mort Weisinger why their versions of Atlantis were different if Superman and Aquaman were Justice League members, but the explanation for the conflicting versions of Atlantis—that they were separate cities named Poseidonis and Tritonis that evolved independent of one another—was expressed in *Action Comics* #475 (Sept. 1977), *DC Special Series* #5 (a.k.a. *Superman Spectacular*, Nov. 1977), and, in greatest detail thanks to E. Nelson Bridwell, in *Super Friends* #9 (Dec. 1977). Len Wein and Marv Wolfman added a bit more to the lore in the Atlantis *Who's Who* entry in issue #1 (Mar. 1985), weaving in that the city-state dated back 45,000 years ago, as depicted in Paul Kupperberg and Jan Duursema's *Arion, Lord of Atlantis* series. The Marshall Rogers art for the Atlantis *Who's Who* entry was particularly inspiring. But *how* did that all happen, and when?
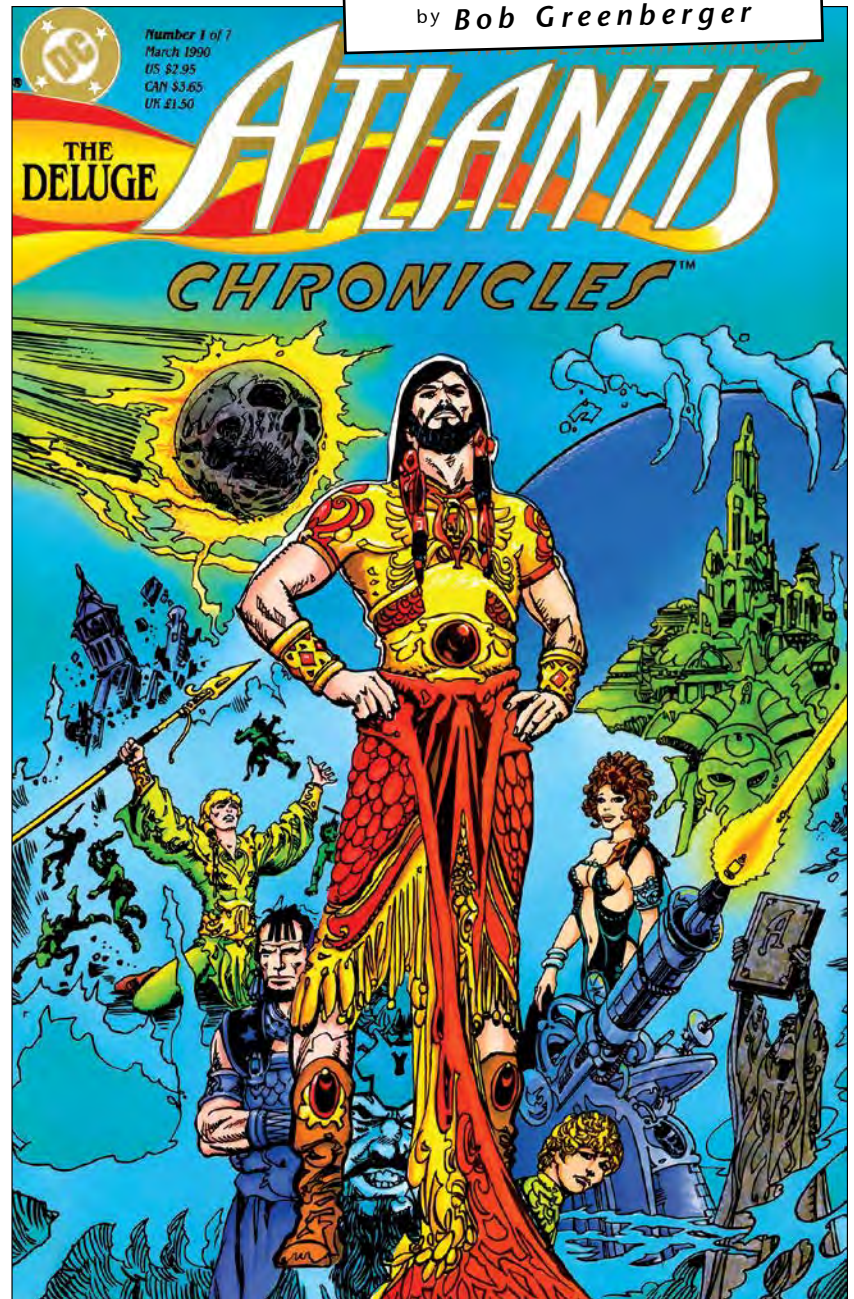
The Saga Begins

First issue cover to scribe Peter David and artist Esteban Maroto's epic *Atlantis Chronicles*, which ran seven issues cover-dated from March to September 1990.

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UNSEALING THE ATLANTIS CHRONICLES
A LOOK BACK AT THE MAKING OF THE UNDERAPPRECIATED MINISERIES

by Bob Greenberger

There was a story buried in the depths, and I decided to find it. Not long before, there was a series of bestsellers by John Jakes, a sprawling generational saga called *The Kent Family Chronicles*. (During this period Jakes partnered with artist Gil Kane to co-author the novel *Excalibur!* in 1980.) As a result, I began thinking of the project as *Atlantis!*

To me, this had the same scope—a generational saga from Arion to Aquaman, and how the cities evolved differently, and when did they unite? During this period, writers Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway had formed a partnership and were pitching themselves as Hollywood screenwriters. They had a few successes, so I thought they might be able to share my visions. I approached them with all the enthusiasm I could muster.

As they say in Tinseltown, they gave it a pass.

Undaunted, I thought of who else might be able to bring fresh eyes to the story, someone who would respect but not be slavishly tied to the continuity and could make the characters feel fresh. At the time, I had been working with Peter David on DC's *Star Trek*, and he had additionally been writing novels. So I rang him up and discussed the notion.

"Well, it sounded really fascinating to me that what you proposed was doing this massive history of Atlantis, which to the best of my knowledge no one had ever written a comic book quite like that," David recalls to *BACK ISSUE*.

"Right at the time I was very enamored of a TV series called *I, Claudius*, based on books by Robert Graves that told the story of Tiberius Claudius, the stuttering, limping emperor of Rome. I was fascinated by that tale in terms of how it covered so many years and focused on individuals. That, in my mind, was the best way to tell a story that was supposed to be history. In addition, I decided to tell about specific characters in Atlantis' history, none of whom we ever heard of before, but would give us the entire progression of Atlantis."

Regarding the snippets of Atlantean history already established in DC lore, David says, "I don't recall requiring a lot of research into the Lori Lemaris Atlantis or the Arthur Curry Atlantis. There was a lot of blank slate involved. I did have a couple of things that needed to be touched on, such as Arion. There was also the whole thing about purple eyes as a problem, blond hair, and the whole thing about just *how* did they survive under the domes that separate them?"

SEEING PURPLE

The purple-eyes taboo stemmed back to the introduction of Aqualad, the last of the teen sidekicks, introduced in a 1960 issue of *Adventure Comics*. For reasons left unexplained until the 1970s, purple eyes were seen as a bad omen, much as it was decided by plotter Keith Giffen that Aquaman was abandoned by his mother for being born with blond hair in a story that finally saw print in the *Legend of Aquaman Special* in 1989.

Arion, Lord of Atlantis, introduced in the back of *Warlord* before gaining its own ongoing series in 1981, presented different complications because it was set further back in time and talked of the waning days of magic and told of Atlantis' sinking… something to do with aliens. *Arion* felt too far back to do the new story right. Peter David knew he needed to sink the continent on his own.

"I felt that showing the sinking of Atlantis was a very important thing," David reveals. "I didn't want to just simply repeat what had been done in the *Arion* comic books. I wanted to do my own take on it. So I came up with the concept that part of Atlantis had sunk but that a city that was further inland had managed to survive. That seemed to me to make sense. I mean, if Manhattan sank, Queens, Brooklyn, Staten Island, and Long Island would be fine. So, no, that was the angle that I took. I had a gold statue of Arion that was in the middle of the square, which we showed in the first issue. I don't recall we ever showed it again."

With that out of the way, David readily signed on to pitch the series and develop the concepts. This meant doing research above and beyond the DC library. "Most of my research into Atlantis had almost nothing to do with DC history aside from

Atlantean Lore
(top) Atlantis' twin cities were mentioned in this Lori Lemaris backup in *Action* #475 (Sept. 1977) by Elizabeth M. Smith, Win Mortimer, and Frank Chiaramonte. (bottom) Paul Kupperberg and Jan Duursema's *Arion, Lord of Atlantis* also laid some groundwork for the legendary locale.

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AQUAMAN™

THE DEEP-SIXED ANIMATED MOVIE

by Michael Eury

...s ago, in **BACK ISSUE** *#104, I shared* ...*tory of an animated* **New Gods** *movie* ...*appened.* It was in development by ...ctures' Feature Animation, a division of ...ent giant separate from the Television ...up and started in 1994, in response ...ce success of Disney's *The Lion King.* ...*Pictures'* Feature Animation remained ...ntil the mid-2000s, producing films ...*e Jam, Quest for Camelot, The Iron Giant,* ...*ones.*

...roducer, writer, and author **Tim Hauser** ...e, an in-house Producer in Development ...e of the DC Comics library of stories and ...e related in *BI #104, The New Gods* was ...properties under development for an ...on picture, the other being the star of ...*BACK ISSUE, Aquaman.*

...iously dusts off his memories and dons ...for a return to Atlantis for *BI's* curious ...ed=... in this special Q&A edition of "The Greatest Stories Never Told."

MICHAEL EURY: *With you being a longtime DC Comics reader, what's your favorite era of Aquaman comics, and why?*

TIM HAUSER: I always loved the character from childhood forward. The Filmation animated series of the late '60s was a favorite and my introduction to the character. I liked the undersea-fantasy aspects of the concept as much as the superheroics. To me, there was nothing odd, corny, or silly about Aquaman and Aqualad riding giant seahorses and leading armies of fish—that was awesome!

The mid-'70s Paul Levitz/Jim Aparo comics in *Adventure* and *Aquaman* really captured that fun feel yet added thrills, excitement, heroic drama, and engrossing tragedy to the mix. And the imaginative, visual storytelling splendor of Aparo's art reached off the page. That's the classic Aquaman run in my heart and mind.

EURY: *What qualities of the Aquaman mythos made the property attractive to Warner Bros. Feature Animation?*
HAUSER: Well, it was simply one of the titles available to us that no one had plans for at the time (mid-1990s). And it was on my own short list. This was before the WB considered a live-action series and the character appeared in *Smallville,* and before the jokey *Entourage* references—though I think Cartoon Network may have already begun their satirical bumpers. To be honest, even the top executives of the studio at the time felt "Aquaman is the joke member of the *Super Friends.*" But the character had a solid Cartoon Q rating—the general public knew who he was and didn't dislike him. He was a valuable unused asset to DC/WB, so worthy of consideration.