

The last time Aquaman had a celebrity team-up,* Parker didn't take full advantage of the narrative possibilities, instead delivering a mindless monster mash that went nowhere. With the memory of that disappointment still smarting, you're not terribly enthused to see Martian Manhunter making a guest appearance this issue. The fact that the cover features the typical set-up of hero versus hero should already tell you not to expect any profound role for the alien hero. The best Parker can do is have J'onn idly ponder how his life on Earth would have turned out had he ended up in Atlantis instead of the surface. At no point does he or Arthur commiserate on being outsiders in their respective societies or odd ducks within their respective teams, both of which were the foundation for their friendship in earlier incarnations. Maybe Parker feels that's someone else's job to develop; he only needs J'onn to keep his current arc moving forward. In that regard, J'onn makes things too easy for Arthur. After telepathically confirming Vulko's belief that Atlanna died in a freak accident, J'onn proceeds to use his psychic mojo to lay bare the rest of the mystery: her foreknowledge of the theater explosion, her secret plan to use it to fake her death, her assistance from an individual with purple eyes (signifying a connection to Garth) who thanks her for protecting "my kind through your entire reign[.]" Lord knows how Arthur would have uncovered all these details by conventional means, and how long it might have taken, but a shortcut's a shortcut. Fortunately, there are still questions to be answered, mainly what was Atlanna running from and where did she run to? The former would have a simple explanation had Atlanna really intended to leave with Orm as she had planned with Vulko: the absence of both royals would leave the throne free for Arthur to fill. Under that assumption, Vulko's distrust of Orm and obsession with making Arthur king is more easily understood. But thanks to J'onn, we know Atlanna left Orm behind on purpose, making her true plans for Atlantis' royal future more uncertain. As to where she ended up going, J'onn projects a vision of a portal, of the same style and construction as the one used to send away the Giant Born ages earlier. With any luck this portal didn't send Atlanna to the same place they ended up; we wouldn't want another mad Hercules fiasco on our hands. That's all well and good for the issues coming forward, but for what we have on our hands, it's all kind of bland. To spare us from an entire issue of exposition, Parker unleashes J'onn on our heroes in a psychic rampage that once again confirms that the collective consciousness of Atlantis hates Arthur's guts. Although he's not totally out of J'onn's class the way he was with Swamp Thing, Arthur really doesn't stand a chance against the Martian, not even with Mera and Tula as backup. That leaves him with only one viable option: get some fire into the picture, anyway it can be done. I know some people are tired of my monthly knocking of Pelletier's artistic efforts, but really, my only criticism is that it's good, but not great. His old-school approach to the action looks rather staged and not terribly exciting, and his minimum of detail prevents the visuals from popping as much as they should. The concept of Atlantis' psychic forces manifesting as tortured faces all over his body is good, but it looks kind of cheap and clunky as executed. As a definite plus, lovely architectural details abound as Arthur and his companions swim through Atlantis, and there's always the nice touch of random sea life swimming about. Some Musings:* I'm talking about Wonder Woman. Arthur didn't team up with Swamp Thing so much as get in his way while he was trying to solve an actual crisis.- Which is the superior fictional undersea theater: the Nautila Theater or the one Ariel's sisters performed on in *The Little Mermaid*? The post Aquaman #36 appeared first on Weekly Comic Book Review.

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