

Mera: Tidebreaker**Danielle Paige****Stephen Byrne, Illustrator**

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After the big-budget *Aquaman* movie release in 2018, Danielle Paige and Stephen Byrne continue the momentum in 2019 with a story focusing on another character from the Aquaman universe: Mera. Published under the DC Ink label for young adult readers, *Mera: Tidebreaker* focuses on the teenage Xebel princess as she seeks to free her people from their Atlantean overlords by killing the crown prince of Atlantis. That prince, of course, is the young Arthur Curry—the man who will be Aquaman—who has no idea he's anything but human and lives with his lighthouse keeper father on land.

Mera's mission gets sidetracked as she gets to know Arthur and repeatedly witnesses his kindness first-hand. She grapples with what she perceives as her duty to her people versus the morality of killing an innocent person; her budding romantic feelings for Arthur also complicate the issue. The book's resolution makes for a satisfying prequel to the Aquaman legend, but more importantly it establishes Mera as a complex, captivating character in her own right.

Byrne's art features clean lines and a limited color palette that consistently emphasizes Mera's distinctive red hair; meanwhile, Paige's writing effectively wrings every drop of emotional angst from her main character's moral dilemma.

Along with some typical fish-out-of-water humor as Mera explores the world outside her ocean, there's an amusing visual gag as Mera browses clothing in a beachside boutique and picks up a Little Mermaid-style bikini top. The salesperson tells her, "Put that down. It's all wrong for you." Indeed, *Mera: Tidebreaker* goes beyond Disney princess territory, depicting a future queen of Atlantis who's a fascinating and sympathetic role model for teens.

PETER DABBENE (May/June 2019)

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