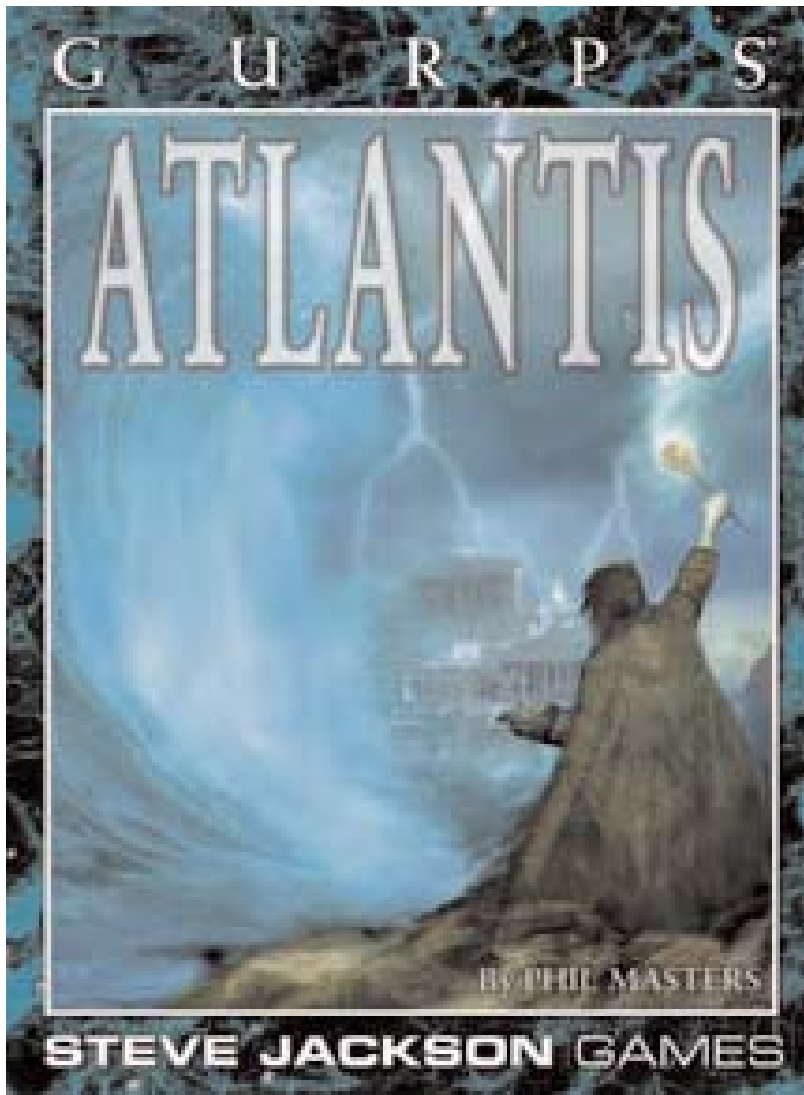


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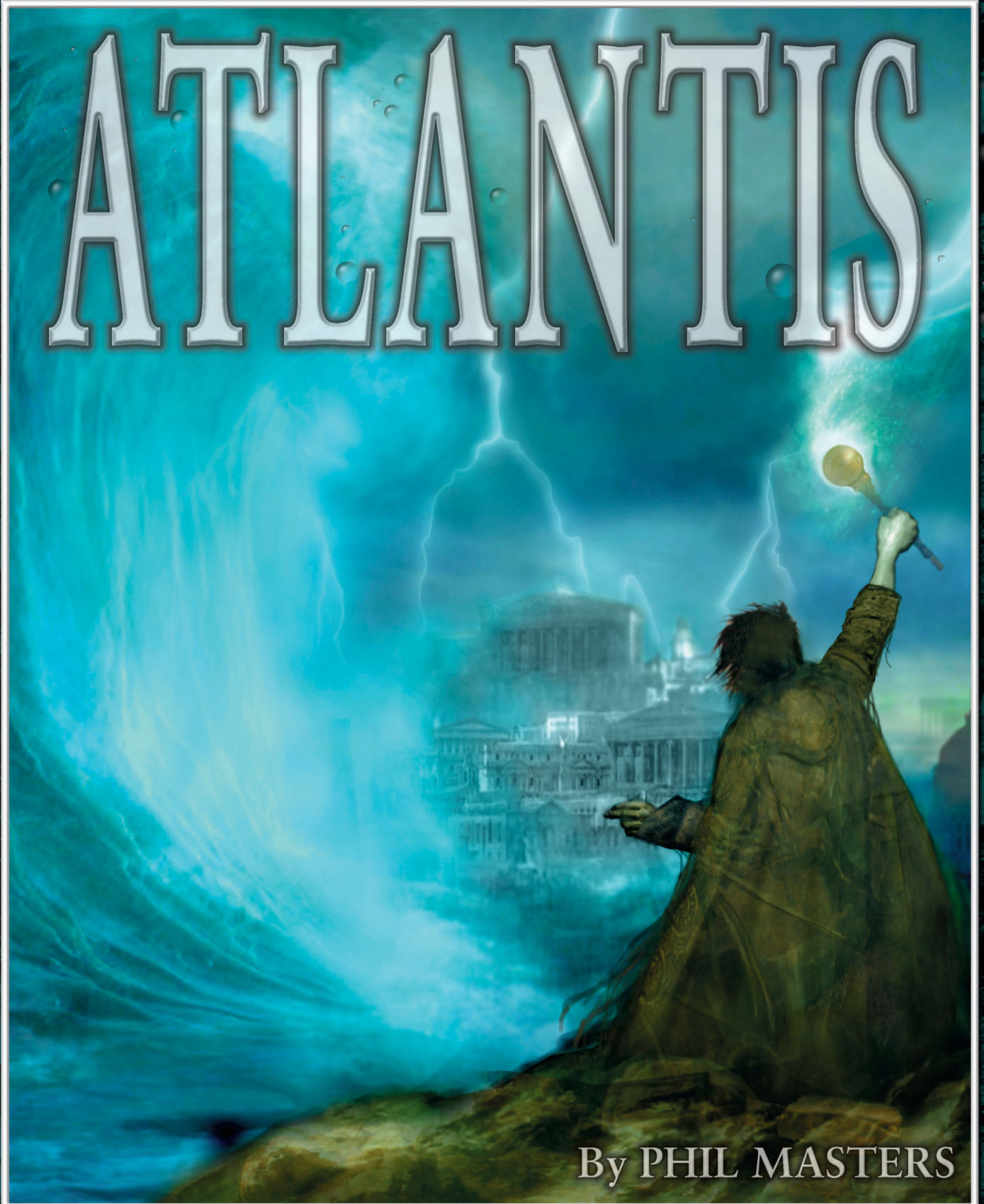
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# ATLANTIS



By PHIL MASTERS

**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

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The Lost Land; the Sunken City; the Ancient Birthplace of Secrets. It has haunted our dreams since the days of Ancient Greece. In some of those dreams, the Lost Land is still out there.

*GURPS Atlantis* is a gamer's guide to the story, the history, and the myth. From Greek philosophy to superhero comics, from fantasies of prehistory to the depths of the sea, it's all here.

This book includes details of legends of other sunken lands, rules for underwater operations, details of a wide range of submarines, and no less than three campaign backgrounds – one high fantasy, one conspiratorial, and one for steampunk or superhero games.

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*Written by* Phil Masters  
*Edited by* Andrew Hackard  
*Illustrated by* David Day,  
Zach Howard,  
and Ramón Pérez  
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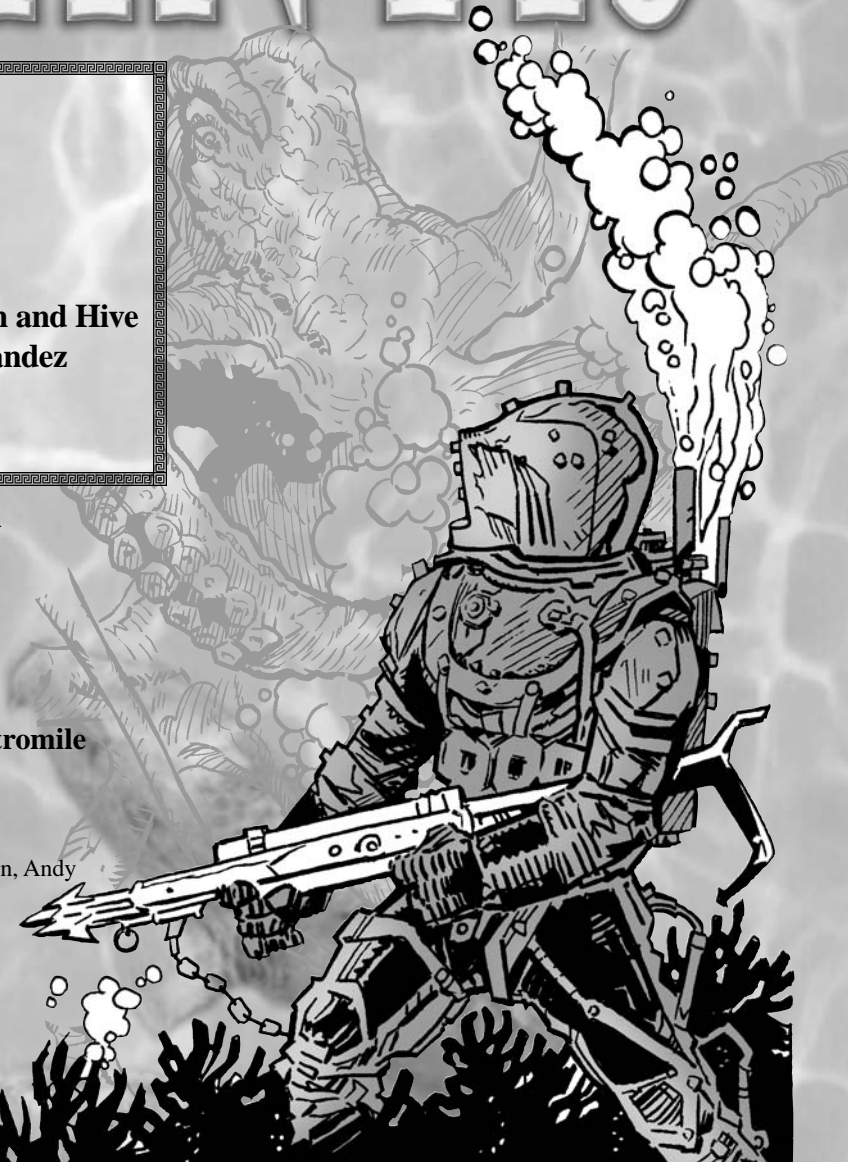
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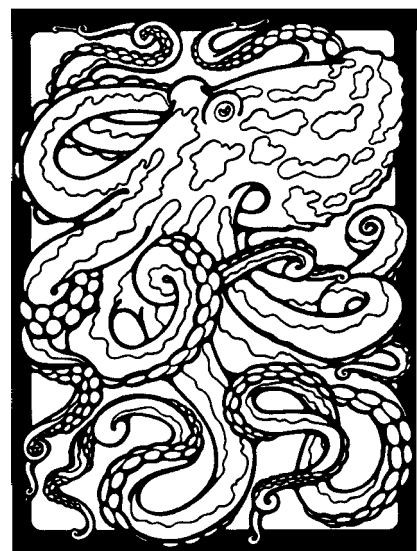
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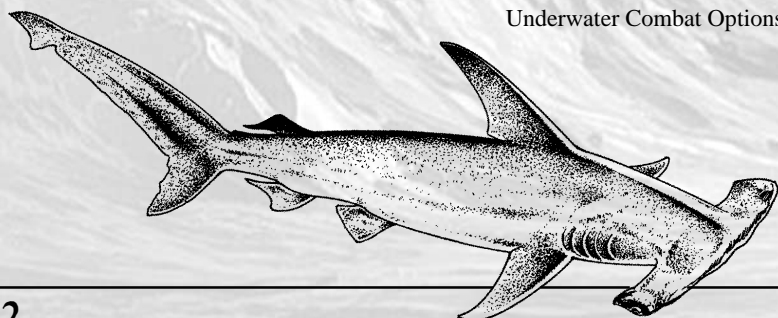
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# INTRODUCTION

## ABOUT GURPS

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of the *GURPS* system. Our address is SJ Games, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! Resources include:

*Pyramid* ([www.sjgames.com/pyramid/](http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/)). Our online magazine includes new *GURPS* rules and articles. It also covers *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Traveller*, *World of Darkness*, *Call of Cthulhu*, and many more top games – and other Steve Jackson Games releases like *In Nomine*, *INWO*, *Car Wars*, *Toon*, *Ogre Miniatures*, and more. *Pyramid* subscribers also have access to playtest files online!

*New supplements and adventures.* *GURPS* continues to grow, and we'll be happy to let you know what's new. A current catalog is available for an SASE. Or check out our Web site (below).

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*GURPSnet.* This e-mail list hosts much of the online discussion of *GURPS*. To join, e-mail [majordomo@io.com](mailto:majordomo@io.com) with “subscribe GURPSnet-L” in the body, or point your Web browser to [gurpsnet.sjgames.com/](http://gurpsnet.sjgames.com/).

The *GURPS Atlantis* Web page can be found at [www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/atlantis/](http://www.sjgames.com/gurps/books/atlantis/).

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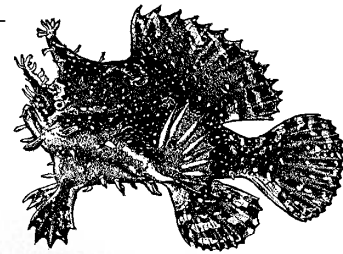
Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition*. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the *GURPS Basic Set* – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition Revised*. Page references that begin with CI indicate *GURPS Compendium I*. Other references are BE for *Bestiary*, CII for *Compendium II*, GR for *Greece*, HT for *High-Tech*, I for *Illuminati*, M for *Magic*, MA for *Martial Arts*, MAO for *Middle Ages I*, P for *Psionics*, STM for *Steampunk*, UT for *Ultra-Tech*, VE for *Vehicles*, and WWI for *Who's Who I*. For a full list of abbreviations, see p. CI181 or the updated Web list at [www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html](http://www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html).

There are few myths as versatile as Atlantis. It is the Ancient Enemy, the Birthplace of Secrets, and the Sunken City. It has served philosophers and cranks equally well for more than two millennia. It (probably) started as an embellishment on one of the foundation-stones of Western thought; today, it has become the home of a race of UFO pilots.

Naturally, this flexible myth has found uses in the world of roleplaying games, and many of these treatments have been just fine. However, each game has taken one specific approach to Atlantis. This book is an overview; it offers choices.

It starts with a review of the history of the story, from its (probable) origins in the works of Plato, through centuries of use and reuse, to its position in regard to modern archaeology, pseudoscience, and fantasy. The second chapter widens the view, looking at other variations on the theme of the Lost Land or the Sunken

City. Of course, the sinking of Atlantis takes us beneath the waves, and the third chapter looks at all that implies, and the ways that technology or magic can make life in the depths more feasible.



The remaining three chapters are examples of ways to use Atlantis in games (and other stories). Chapter 4 is Atlantis as the Ancient Enemy, or at least as a fantasy land, with fabulous wealth and strange powers. Chapter 5, by contrast, brings Atlantis up to date, combining mythic hints, conspiratorial thinking, and archaeology to present the heirs of Atlantis as a secret power. Last, Chapter 6 is Atlantis the Sunken City, which may even be a nice place to visit – though not without complications.

So here it is. Do what you want with it, but try not to lose it again.

### About the Author

Phil Masters was born and brought up on an island in the Atlantic, the capital of an old world-spanning empire, now largely vanished. Any ancient secrets which he learned were clearly of limited power, however, as he now spends his time creating material for roleplaying games.

Over the years since he first surfaced, in addition to writing, co-writing, or compiling a number of *GURPS* supplements, he has worked for Hero Games, White Wolf, and several other companies. He still resides on the island of his birth, worming his way through strange libraries in a quest for useful lore. He believes that his current home is safely well above any possible flood-level.

# PLATONIC SOLIDS

*Then listen, Socrates, to a tale which, though strange, is certainly true, having been attested by Solon, who was the wisest of the seven sages.*

*– Plato, **Timaeus***





# PLATO'S STORY



The story of Atlantis (and, perhaps, Atlantis itself) begins in the writings of the Greek philosopher Plato (about 428 B.C.-347 B.C.), one of the founding figures of Western thought. Plato mostly presents his ideas in the form of imaginary dialogues between the earlier philosopher Socrates and various other scholars and thinkers of the city of Athens. One of these, the *Republic*, discusses the ideal form of the state. Its sequel, the *Timaeus*, probably written around 355 B.C., sets out to (among other things) show something like this ideal state in action.

To achieve this, Plato presents a story, told to Socrates by one of his companions, Critias. Critias in turn declares that he received this story (indirectly) from one of his ancestors, the lawgiver Solon, who supposedly traveled to Egypt some time between 593 B.C. and 583 B.C., and visited a city called Sais, whose priests venerated a goddess whom the Greeks identified with their own Athene. These priests felt a kinship with the Athenians, and received Solon with honor, answering his questions freely when he became interested in their knowledge of history. (The following quotes are from Benjamin Jowett's 19th-century translations of Plato.)

*On one occasion, wishing to draw them on to speak of antiquity, he began to tell about the most ancient things in our part of the world . . . Thereupon one of the priests, who was of a very great age, said: "O Solon, Solon, you Hellenes are never anything but children, and there is not an old man among you." Solon in return asked him what he meant. "I mean to say," he replied, "that in mind you are all young; there is no old opinion handed down among you by ancient tradition, nor any science which is hoary with age. And I will tell you why. There have been, and will be again, many destructions of mankind arising out of many causes; the greatest have been brought about by the agencies of fire and water, and other lesser ones by innumerable other causes.*

*"In the first place you remember a single deluge only, but there were many previous ones; in the next place, you do not know that there formerly dwelt in your land the fairest and noblest race of men which ever lived, and that you and your whole city are descended from a small seed or remnant of them which survived . . . For there was a time, Solon, before the great deluge of all, when the city which now is Athens was first in war and in every way the best governed of all cities, is said to have performed the noblest deeds and to have had the fairest constitution of any . . ."*



## The Enemy!

In other words, Athens itself was once very close to Plato's ideal state (a claim which must have appealed to patriotic Athenians). The priest goes on to say that this ancient version of Athens lay 9,000 years in the past.

But a story needs conflict, and Plato set out to show his ideal state subjected to the greatest possible test: an all-out war. That meant that an enemy was needed, which the priest went on to describe:

*"For these histories tell of a mighty power which unprovoked made an expedition against the whole of Europe and Asia, and to which your city put an end. This power came forth out of the Atlantic Ocean, for in those days the Atlantic was navigable; and there was an island situated in front of the straits which are by you called the Pillars of Heracles; the island was larger than Libya and Asia put together, and was the way to other islands, and from these you might pass to the whole of the opposite continent which surrounded the true ocean; for this sea which is within the Straits of Heracles is only a harbor, having a narrow entrance, but that other is a real sea, and the surrounding land may be most truly called a boundless continent."*

(The "Pillars of Heracles" are what we call the Straits of Gibraltar, the "pillars" being the Rock of Gibraltar and Jebel Musa – Mount Ceuta. "Libya and Asia" mean part or all of modern North Africa and Asia Minor, making this a substantial island or a small continent.)

“Now in this island of Atlantis there was a great and wonderful empire which had rule over the whole island and several others, and over parts of the continent, and, furthermore, the men of Atlantis had subjected the parts of Libya within the columns of Heracles as far as Egypt, and of Europe as far as Tyrrhenia. This vast power, gathered into one, endeavored to subdue at a blow our country and yours and the whole of the region within the straits; and then, Solon, your country shone forth, in the excellence of her virtue and strength, among all mankind. She was pre-eminent in courage and military skill, and was the leader of the Hellenes. And when the rest fell off from her . . . she defeated and triumphed over the invaders, and preserved from slavery those who were not yet subjugated, and generously liberated all the rest of us who dwell within the pillars. But afterward there occurred violent earthquakes and floods; and in a single day and night of misfortune all your warlike men in a body sank into the earth, and the island of Atlantis in like manner disappeared in the depths of the sea. For which reason the sea in those parts is impassable and impenetrable, because there is a shoal of mud in the way; and this was caused by the subsidence of the island.”



### **The Critias**

This second volume, the *Critias*, takes up the story of Atlantis again. It appears that the island was granted to the sea-god Poseidon after the creation of the world:

*Poseidon, receiving for his lot the island of Atlantis, begat children by a mortal woman, and settled them in a part of the island, which I will describe. Looking toward the sea, but in the center of the whole island, there was a plain which is said to have been the fairest of all plains and very fertile. Near the plain again, and also in the center of the island at a distance of about fifty stadia, there was a mountain not very high on any side.*

(Tyrrhenia is part of modern Italy.) This last part is slightly curious, as there are no significant shoals in front of the Straits of Gibraltar, and sailors from the Mediterranean world were traveling the Atlantic fairly regularly in Plato’s time, as any intelligent Greek would have known.

In any case, the *Timaeus* diverges from this topic at this point, moving onto the history of Creation and the nature of man. It appears that Plato had decided to produce a trilogy, laying down grand philosophical principles in the first book, and describing more specific matters in the second.

## **PLATO’S IDEAL STATE**

*By Heracles, what a lot of lies this young man is telling about me!*

– *Comment ascribed to Socrates after hearing one of Plato’s dialogues read in public.*

Plato was not only the originator of the story of Atlantis (or at least, responsible for popularizing it); he was also one of the founders of Western thought, and the *Republic*, *Timaeus*, and *Critias* are significant works of political philosophy. That said, his ideas may seem unusual, to say the least, to modern readers.

The *Republic* especially propounds ideals that would have been hastily rejected by the most extreme 20th-century fascist dictator. It starts with an examination of the idea of justice, but places this in the context of a hypothetical just society. This, Plato says, must use a thorough educational system to select a class of philosopher-rulers, who must then be banned from owning private property or having families of their own, to ensure their impartiality. They would rule over two other sharply defined classes, the common people and a class of police/army enforcers. Plato thoroughly approved of the idea of artistic censorship, as art could all too easily be subversive; indeed, he concludes that the ideal society should ban poets altogether. However, he approves of the idea of the “pious lie,” which the philosopher-rulers could tell to lesser citizens for the sake of an efficient society.

It is unlikely that Plato imagined that his ideal state could be brought into existence in reality; indeed, the whole thing may be primarily a metaphor for his concept of human nature, divided into intellect, appetites, and active nature. (When Plato *did* try to intervene in real-world politics, attempting to turn the ruler of Syracuse, in Sicily, into a philosopher-prince, the project collapsed due to personal jealousies.) He certainly recognized the fact of entropy, admitting that even his Republic would eventually decline into corruption and decadence. One suggestion as to why the trilogy beginning with the *Timaeus* and *Critias* remained unfinished is that, having begun by depicting one state (prehistoric Athens) equivalent to his ideal, and another high-minded, pious, and impressive nation (Atlantis) that had fallen into decadence, he could find no way to actually show them in action with any plausibility. But it is worth bearing in mind that the original image of Atlantis comes from a distant age whose ideals were quite unlike our own.

(A stadium, or stade, is about 600' to 660', so that city seems to have been about 6 miles from the sea.)

*In this mountain there dwelt one of the earth-born primeval men of that country, whose name was Evenor, and he had a wife named Leucippe, and they had an only daughter who was called Cleito. The maiden had already reached womanhood, when her father and mother died; Poseidon fell in love with her and had intercourse with her, and breaking the ground, enclosed the hill in which she dwelt all round, making alternate zones of sea and land larger and smaller, encircling one another; there were two of land and three of water, which he turned as with a*

*lathe, each having its circumference equidistant every way from the center, so that no man could get to the island, for ships and voyages were not as yet. He himself, being a god, found no difficulty in making special arrangements for the center island, bringing up two springs of water from beneath the earth, one of warm water and the other of cold, and making every variety of food to spring up abundantly from the soil. He also begat and brought up five pairs of twin male children; and dividing the island of Atlantis into ten portions, he gave to the first-born of the eldest pair his mother's dwelling and the surrounding allotment, which was the largest and best, and made him king over the rest; the others he made princes, and gave them rule over many men, and a large territory.*

Thus, Atlantis was clearly a vast and impressive power, neatly divided into ten provinces. It was also rich:

*For because of the greatness of their empire many things were brought to them from foreign countries, and the island itself provided most of what was required by them for the uses of life. In the first place, they dug out of the earth whatever was to be found there, solid as well as able to be smelted, and that which is now only a name and was then something more than a name, orichalcum, was dug out of the earth in many parts of the island, being more precious in those days than anything except gold.*

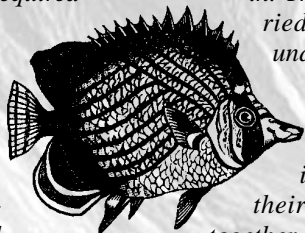
No one is quite sure what ancient writers meant by "orichalcum"; the word literally means something like "mountain copper." It may simply mean brass, or possibly some other copper-based alloy. After some more description of the island, Plato moves on to its capital city:

## THE PRINCES OF ATLANTIS

In the *Critias*, Plato actually specifies what their father, Poseidon, named the first Atlantean princes:

*The eldest, who was the first king, he named Atlas, and after him the whole island and the ocean were called Atlantic. To his twin brother, who was born after him, and obtained as his lot the extremity of the island toward the Pillars of Heracles, facing the country which is now called the region of Gades in that part of the world, he gave the name which in the Hellenic language is Eumelus, in the language of the country which is named after him, Gadeirus. Of the second pair of twins he called one Ampheres, and the other Evaemon. To the elder of the third pair of twins he gave the name Mneseus, and Autochthon to the one who followed him. Of the fourth pair of twins he called the elder Elasippus, and the younger Mestor. And of the fifth pair he gave to the elder the name of Azaes, and to the younger that of Diaprepes.*

*which became a harbor, and leaving an opening sufficient to enable the largest vessels to find ingress. Moreover, they divided at the bridges the zones of land which parted the zones of sea, leaving room for a single trireme to pass out of one zone into another, and they covered over the channels so as to leave a way underneath for the ships; for the banks were raised considerably above the water. Now the largest of the zones into which a passage was cut from the sea was three stadia [600+ yards] in breadth, and the zone of land which came next of equal breadth; but the next two zones, the one of water, the other of land, were two stadia [400+ yards], and the one which surrounded the central island was a stadium [200 yards] only in width. The island in which the palace was situated had a diameter of five stadia [1,000 yards]. All this including the zones and the bridge, which was the sixth part of a stadium [100'] in width, they surrounded by a stone wall on every side, placing towers and gates on the bridges where the sea passed in. The stone which was used in the work they quarried from underneath the center island, and from underneath the zones, on the outer as well as the inner side. One kind was white, another black, and a third red, and as they quarried, they at the same time hollowed out double docks, having roofs formed out of the native rock. Some of their buildings were simple, but in others they put together different stones, varying the color to please the eye, and to be a natural source of delight. The entire circuit of the wall, which went round the outermost zone, they covered with a coating of brass, and the circuit of the next wall they coated with tin, and the third, which encompassed the citadel, flashed with the red light of orichalcum.*



Whoever first told this tale, Plato or an Egyptian priest, clearly intended to impress by scale and opulence. The citadel and temples were vast and highly decorated: *Here was Poseidon's own temple which was a stadium [600'] in length, and half a stadium [300'] in width, and of a proportionate height, having a strange barbaric appearance. All the outside of the temple, with the exception of the pinnacles, they covered with silver, and the pinnacles with gold. In the interior of the temple the roof was of ivory, curiously wrought everywhere with gold and silver and orichalcum; and all the other parts, the walls and pillars and floor; they coated with orichalcum.* There were also public fountains, running with both hot and cold water; the springs created by Poseidon were sufficient to supply not only this, but also an aqueduct which led to the outer city.

Plato's account also emphasizes Atlantis's natural resources:

*There was an abundance of wood for carpenter's work, and sufficient maintenance for tame and wild animals. Moreover, there were a great number of elephants in the island; for as there was provision for all other sorts of animals, both for those which live in lakes and marshes and rivers, and also for those which live in mountains and on plains, so there was for the animal which is the largest and most voracious of all . . .*

The outer rings of the city had further wonders – temples, gardens, baths, a racecourse, and so on. There were more than adequate defenses, including a wall which began at the sea and went all round: *this was everywhere distant 50 stadia [6 miles] from the largest zone or harbor, and enclosed the whole, the ends meeting at the mouth of the channel which led to the sea.* This vast city was supported by a large agricultural region:

*The whole country was said by him to be very lofty and precipitous on the side of the sea, but the country immediately about and surrounding the city was a level plain, itself surrounded by mountains which descended toward the sea; it was smooth and even, and of an oblong shape, extending in one direction 3,000 stadia [350 miles], but across the center inland it was 2,000 stadia [200+ miles].*

This great plain, 200 or 300 miles in any dimension, was entirely surrounded by an irrigation ditch, 100' deep, 600' wide, and over 1,000 miles long in total, feeding further canals for irrigation and transport. (Plato's account admits that all this sounds too vast to believe, but the narrator says, "I must say what I was told.")

Needless to say, Atlantis could raise a vast army (citizen-soldiers on the Greek model); the capital city alone could provide 10,000 chariots, plus numerous supporting infantry, and 1,200 ships. Each of the 10 kings had absolute power in his own province, while their mutual relations were governed by rules laid down by Poseidon.

The *Critias* describes the process by which the island was ultimately governed in ceremonial, almost mystical terms. At the heart of everything were the laws laid down by Poseidon:

*These were inscribed by the first kings on a pillar of orichalcum, which was situated in the middle of the island, at the temple of Poseidon, whither the kings were gathered together every fifth and every sixth year alternately, thus giving equal honor to the odd and to the even number.*

(The sense that numbers were worthy of honor in themselves almost seems to suggest Pythagorean ideas – the numerological mysticism that was popular among Greek philosophers before Plato.)

*And when they were gathered together they consulted about their common interests, and enquired if any one had transgressed in anything and passed judgment and before they passed judgment they gave their pledges to one another on this wise:*

*There were bulls who had the range of the temple of Poseidon; and the 10 kings, being left alone in the temple, after they had offered prayers to the god that they might capture the victim which was acceptable to him, hunted the bulls, without weapons but with staves and nooses; and the bull which they caught they led up to the pillar and cut its throat over the top of it so that the blood fell upon the sacred inscription.*

Thus bound by sacred oaths and sacrifices, and perhaps by the mutual loyalty and trust that comes with shared danger, the 10 kings sat together overnight to agree their judgments, which they then wrote down on a golden tablet. The most important law govern-

ing them all was that they were not only not to take up arms against each other, but they were to defend each other in the event of rebellion.

This divinely ordained state survived for many generations, but eventually fell into decadence. This, it seems, was what led to their great war with Egypt and Greece, and eventually to their destruction by a natural catastrophe. *Zeus, the god of gods, who rules according to law, and is able to see into such things, perceiving that an honorable race was in a woeful plight, and wanting to inflict punishment on them, that they might be chastened and improve, collected all the gods into their most holy habitation, which, being placed in the center of the world, beholds all created things. And when he had called them together, he spoke as follows . . .*

But there, the *Critias* ends, an eternal cliffhanger. While it is possible that part has been lost, it appears fairly certain that Plato never did complete his story, or even start the third dialogue in the trilogy.



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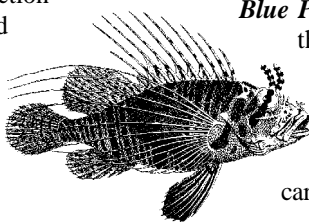
## RPGS AND SUPPLEMENTS

The following are suggested, in addition to the *GURPS* supplements mentioned throughout this book.

Allston, Aaron. *Mythic Greece: the Age of Heroes* (Iron Crown Enterprises, 1988). This treatment of heroic-era Greece for *Rolemaster* and *Fantasy Hero* incorporates a cinematic/mythic adaptation of Plato's Atlantis.

Bradley, Patrick E. *Atlantis* (Iron Crown Enterprises, 1995). A supplement for *Champions*, and a distinctly four-color game treatment of an underwater Atlantis, albeit following Plato's description fairly closely as a basis.

*Blue Planet* (Fantasy Flight Games, 2000). This is the second edition of the SF RPG originally released by Biohazard Games in 1997. The game's setting is a water world, and the planet, its ecology, and the science and technology involved are all depicted with care and in detail.



## FICTION

Merely listing all the novels and stories which have involved Atlantis, let alone those which mentioned Lyonesse, or Ys, or Lemuria, would take more space than this book has available; covering all those which explore themes such as lost lands or undersea life would require a book in itself. Specific instances are mentioned in the body of this book; many others can be found in any bookshop or library.

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