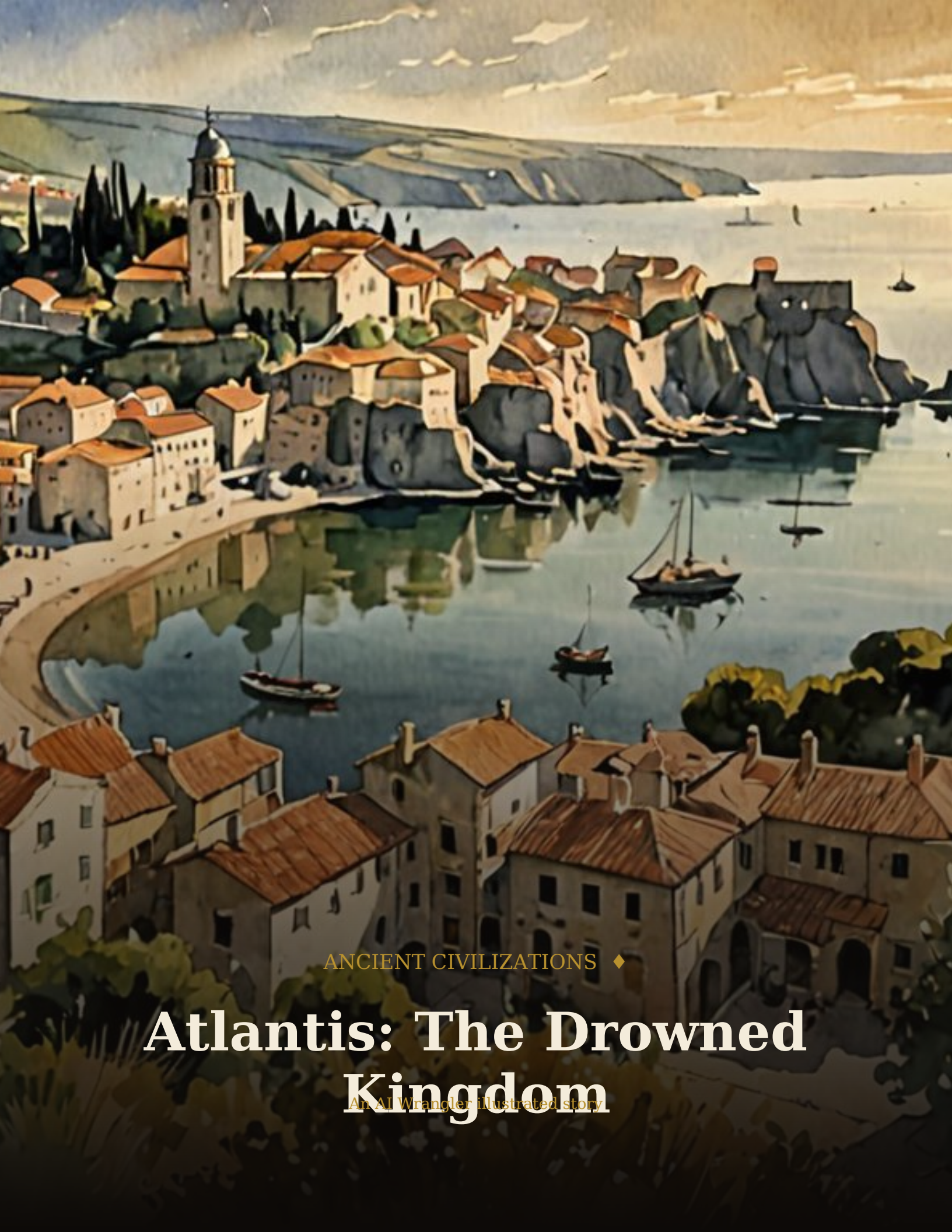




ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS ♦

Atlantis: The Drowned Kingdom

An AI Wrangler illustrated story



From the film

MARTY

Come in close to the fire, friends, for tonight we begin a journey into the deep past, to the great civilizations of the ancient world, their glory and their mystery and their falls. And we begin with the most famous lost civilization of them all, one that may never have existed at all, and yet has haunted the human imagination for more than two thousand years. Tonight, Carol, the drowned kingdom of Atlantis.



CAROL

Atlantis. Oh, Marty, the name alone sends a shiver through me, a whole shining world beneath the waves. But you say it may never have existed. Where does the story even come from?



MARTY

From one man, Carol, and this surprises most people. There is no ancient tribe of Atlantis-tellers, no chorus of old sources. The entire legend springs from a single writer, the Greek philosopher Plato, who set it down in two of his dialogues around two thousand four hundred years ago. He tells of a mighty island empire that lay beyond the Pillars of Hercules, out in the great ocean, larger and grander than the known world, rich beyond measure, with golden temples and rings of land and water and a powerful navy. And it was, in his telling, a noble and virtuous society, at first.



CAROL

At first. Marty, there is always an at first, isn't there. So what happened to this noble golden empire?



MARTY

It grew corrupt, Carol, and that is the whole point of Plato's tale. The Atlanteans, once wise and good, became greedy and arrogant and drunk on their own power, and set out to conquer the world by force. And the gods, seeing this corruption, grew angry. And in a single terrible day and night, Plato writes, there came violent earthquakes and floods, and the whole great island of Atlantis was swallowed by the sea and vanished beneath the waves, gone forever. A civilization at the height of its pride, erased in a night.



CAROL

In a single day and night, the whole world gone under. Marty, that is a magnificent and a terrifying image. But if Plato was a philosopher, not a historian, was he telling a true story or a made-up one?



MARTY

Almost certainly a made-up one, Carol, and here is the key that most treasure hunters throw away. Plato was a teacher of ideas, and he loved to tell an invented story to illustrate a lesson, what we would call a parable. And the lesson of Atlantis is written plainly across it. It is a warning about pride, about how even the most advanced and blessed civilization will destroy itself if it grows arrogant and grasping. The scholars who know Plato best have long believed Atlantis was never meant as real geography at all, but as a moral fable, a mirror held up to his own proud city of Athens. He made up a perfect empire precisely so he could sink it.



CAROL

So he built the most glorious civilization imaginable for the sole purpose of drowning it, to teach a lesson. Marty, that is rather brilliant, and a little sad, that we have spent two thousand years hunting for a place he invented to make a point. But has no one ever found a shred of anything real behind it?



MARTY

Here is where it gets wonderful, Carol, because even a fable is often woven from threads of truth, and there is one real catastrophe that may have colored Plato's imagination. Long before his time, perhaps a thousand years before, there flourished in the Greek islands a brilliant, sophisticated civilization we call the Minoans, centered on the island of Crete, with fine palaces and art and a great seafaring trade, one of the glories of the early world. And on a nearby island, the one we now call Santorini, there stood a Minoan town beside a volcano.



CAROL

A brilliant island civilization beside a volcano. Oh, Marty, I can feel where this is going, and I do not like it.

MARTY

Then you have the right instinct, Carol. That volcano erupted, around thirty-six hundred years ago, in one of the most colossal explosions in all of human history. It blew the very heart out of the island, collapsing it into the sea, and it hurled up such a cloud and drove out such waves, great tsunamis, that it devastated the coasts of the Minoan world and helped send that whole shining civilization into decline. An advanced island culture, struck down by earthquake and flood and the swallowing sea. It is not hard to imagine, Carol, how the echo of such a real disaster, passed down for centuries in story, might have lent its power to Plato's invented tale of a drowned kingdom.

CAROL

So there may be a real drowned world underneath the fable after all, just not the one everyone goes looking for. Marty, that is somehow more satisfying than any treasure map. But people never stop searching, do they?

MARTY

They never stop, Carol, and that is the strangest legacy of all. For two and a half thousand years, people have placed Atlantis everywhere on earth, in the ocean, in the Mediterranean, off the coast of Spain, in the Caribbean, even at the bottom of the world under the ice, each one certain they alone have cracked it. Whole libraries have been written, expeditions launched, fortunes spent, all chasing an island a philosopher dreamed up to scold his neighbors. Atlantis has never been found, Carol, for the simplest of reasons. There is nothing to find. And yet the searching never ends.

CAROL

The searching never ends, for a place that was never there. Marty, what does it say about us, that we cannot let it go?

MARTY

That is the real mystery of Atlantis, Carol, and the meaning I take from it. We keep hunting for it not because the evidence calls us, but because the story answers something deep in us. We want to believe there was once a civilization greater than ours, wiser and more wonderful, and we half want to believe it was destroyed, because there is a strange comfort in the idea that greatness can be lost and mourned. Plato gave us a perfect kingdom and drowned it to warn us of our pride, and we took his warning and turned it into a treasure hunt, which may be the most human thing we have ever done. The kingdom under the waves, Carol, is really the kingdom inside us, the one we are always sure we have lost. I'm Marty Shepard.

CAROL

And I'm Carol, and tonight I am thinking of a philosopher's invented island, still glittering at the bottom of the human imagination after twenty-four centuries, and the real one that a volcano truly took. Beware your pride, friends, the way Plato meant you to, and come back to the fire.