

ATLANTIS

THE LEGEND OF A LOST CITY

adapted and retold by Christina Ballit

A **legend** is a traditional story about a people or land. The story may be based on truth but is mostly fiction. Read to find out why the author calls this story a legend.

Centre

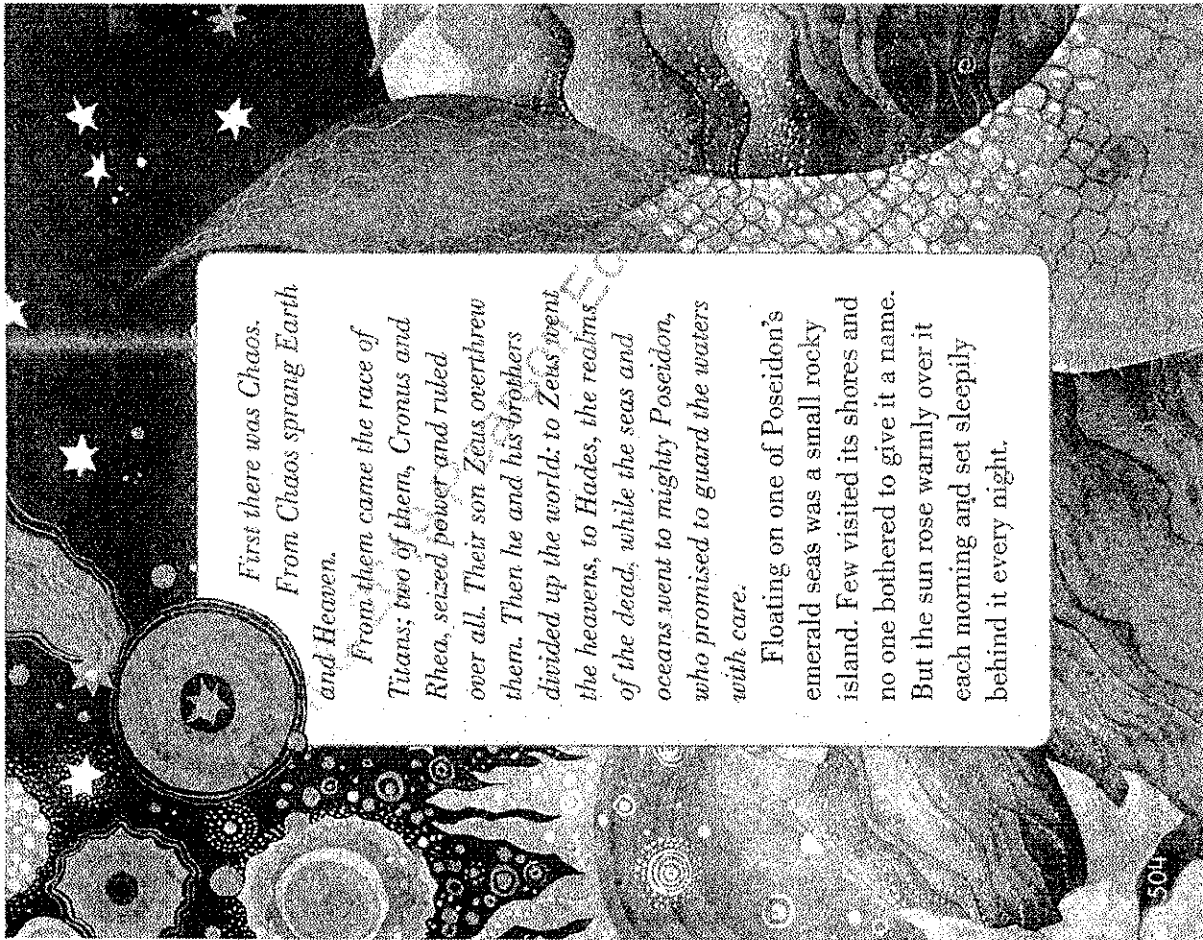
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Question of the Week

What is the best way to keep your freedom?



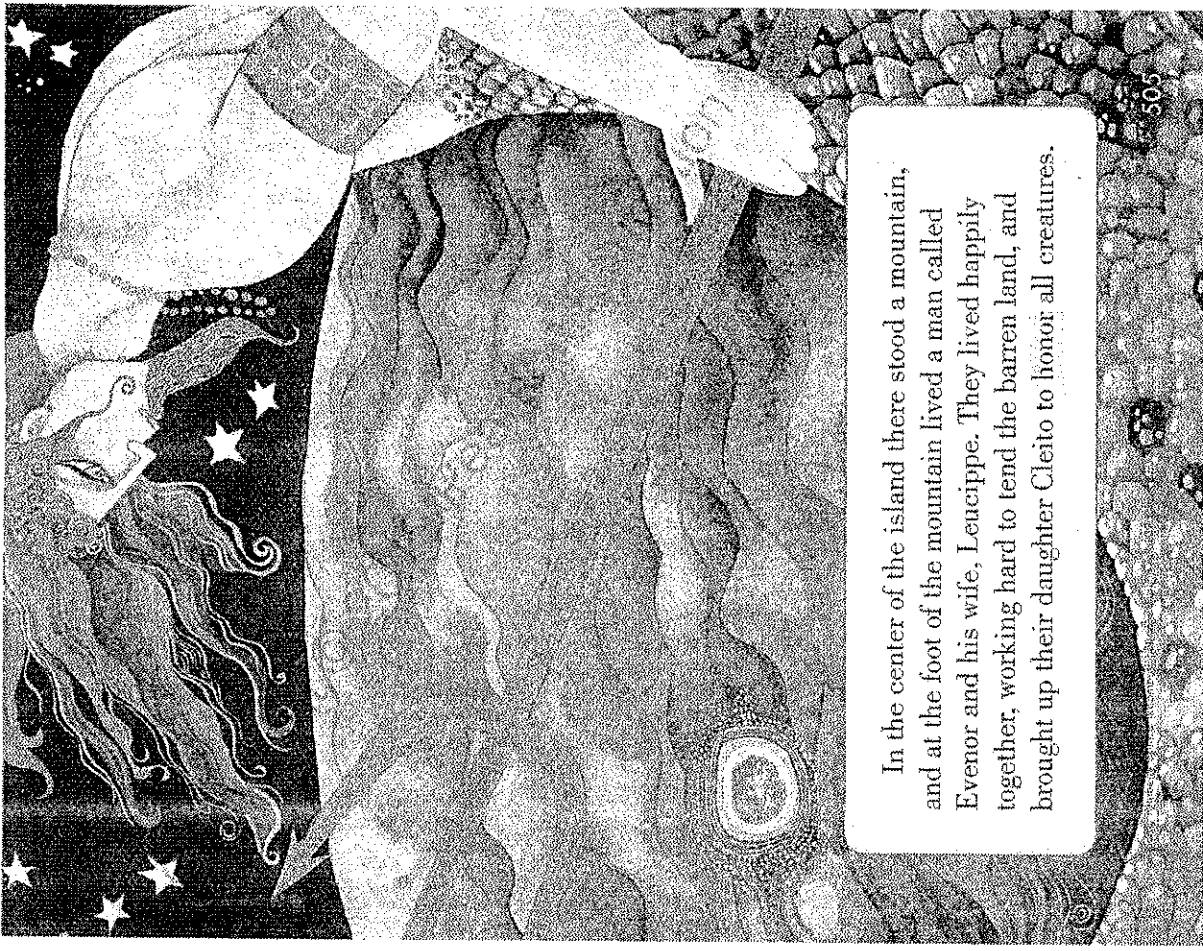
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*First there was Chaos.
From Chaos sprang Earth
and Heaven.*

*From them came the race of
Titans; two of them, Cronus and
Rhea, seized power and ruled
over all. Their son Zeus overthrew
them. Then he and his brothers
divided up the world: to Zeus went
the heavens, to Hades, the realms
of the dead, while the seas and
oceans went to mighty Poseidon,
who promised to guard the waters
with care.*

Floating on one of Poseidon's
emerald seas was a small rocky
island. Few visited its shores and
no one bothered to give it a name.
But the sun rose warmly over it
each morning and set sleepily
behind it every night.

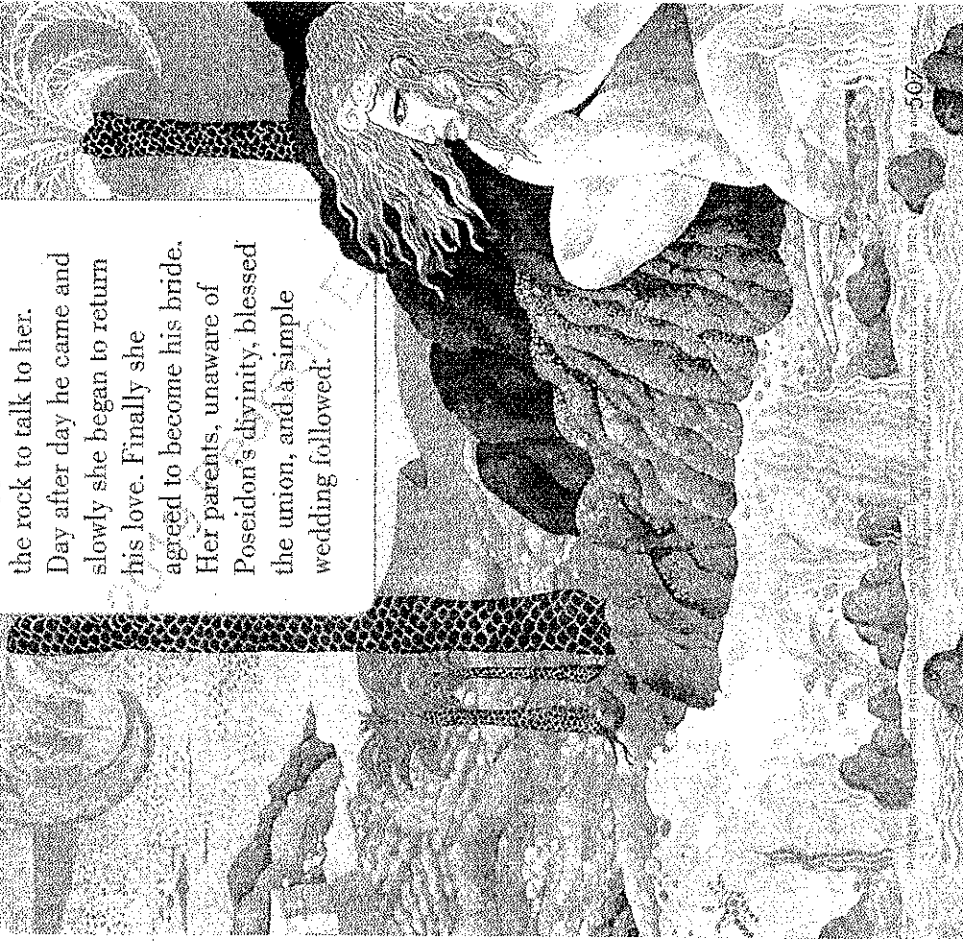


In the center of the island there stood a mountain,
and at the foot of the mountain lived a man called
Evenor and his wife, Leucippe. They lived happily
together, working hard to tend the barren land, and
brought up their daughter Cleito to honor all creatures.

Poseidon grew curious. How could they be content with so little? He took on human form and crouched unseen behind a rock to find out. Each morning at daybreak, he watched Cleito walk over the pebbled ground, barefoot and smiling, to fill her water pot at the stream.



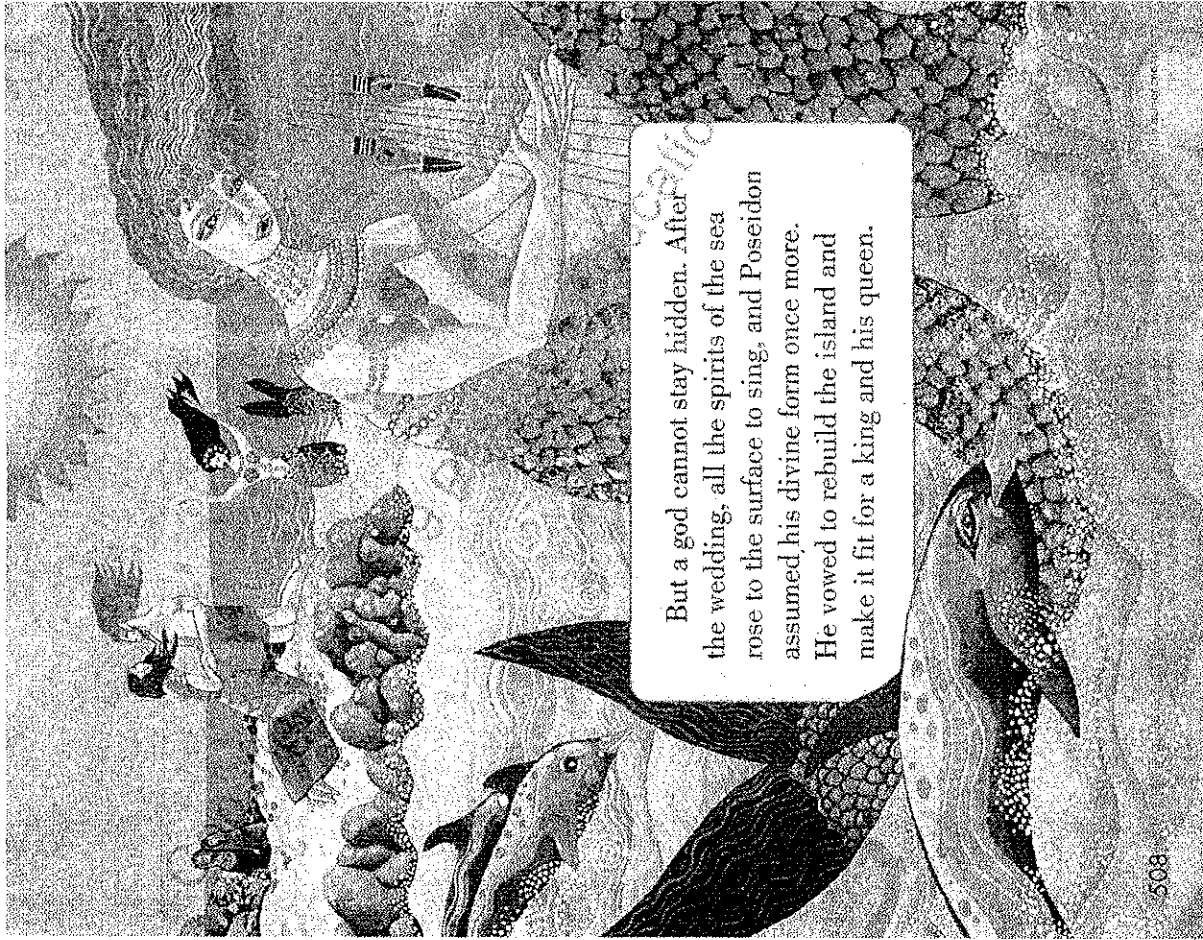
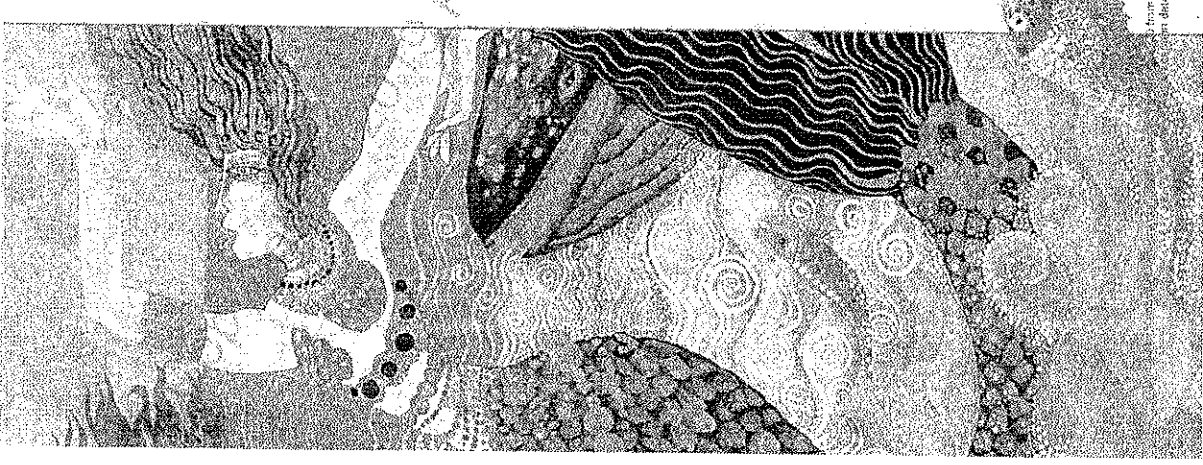
Seeing Cleito in all her beauty, Poseidon's heart grew tender, and one day he stepped out from behind the rock to talk to her. Day after day he came and slowly she began to return his love. Finally she agreed to become his bride. Her parents, unaware of Poseidon's divinity, blessed the union, and a simple wedding followed.



Poseidon used powers beyond human imagining to transform the isle into a paradise.

First, he arranged alternate circles of land and sea—three of land and three of water—to enclose the mountain. Within each circle of land a forest sprang up. Trees bloomed and grew heavy with fruits, and creatures multiplied.

Next, he made a network of canals, fed by waterfalls. Soon the island was yielding two crops each year—one watered by winter rains, the other irrigated by Poseidon's canals. The rich earth was carpeted with herbs and vegetables, and thick with healing roots; from its depths men dug out priceless yellow mountain copper. All things flourished on the sacred island.



But a god cannot stay hidden. After the wedding, all the spirits of the sea rose to the surface to sing, and Poseidon assumed his divine form once more. He vowed to rebuild the island and make it fit for a king and his queen.

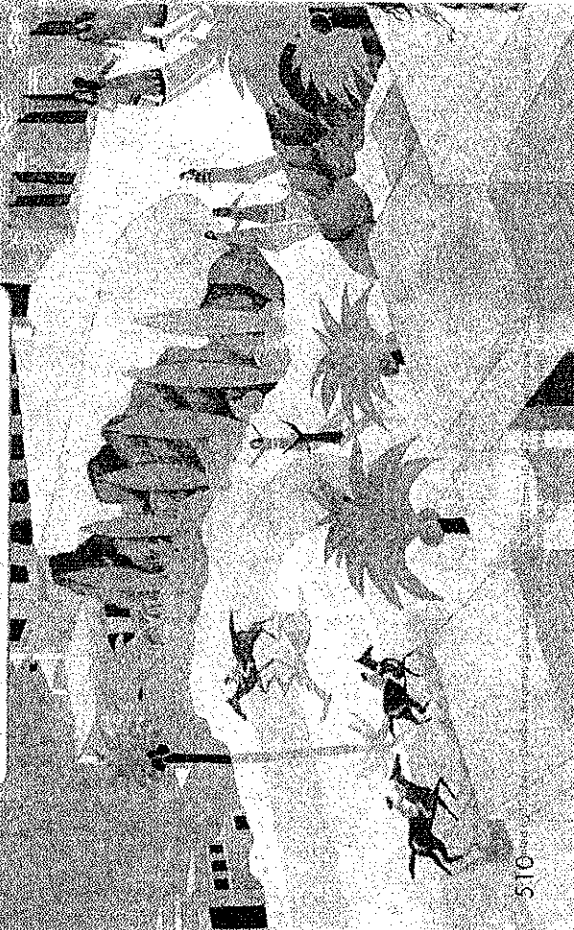
Then, under Poseidon's guidance, the inhabitants built a palace fit for a god, with towers, gates, and parapets trimmed with gleaming brass and tin. In the center they set up a holy temple dedicated to Poseidon and Cleito, with pinnacles of silver surrounded by a wall of gold.

They built thermal baths and aqueducts, fountains and gardens, and even a huge racecourse.

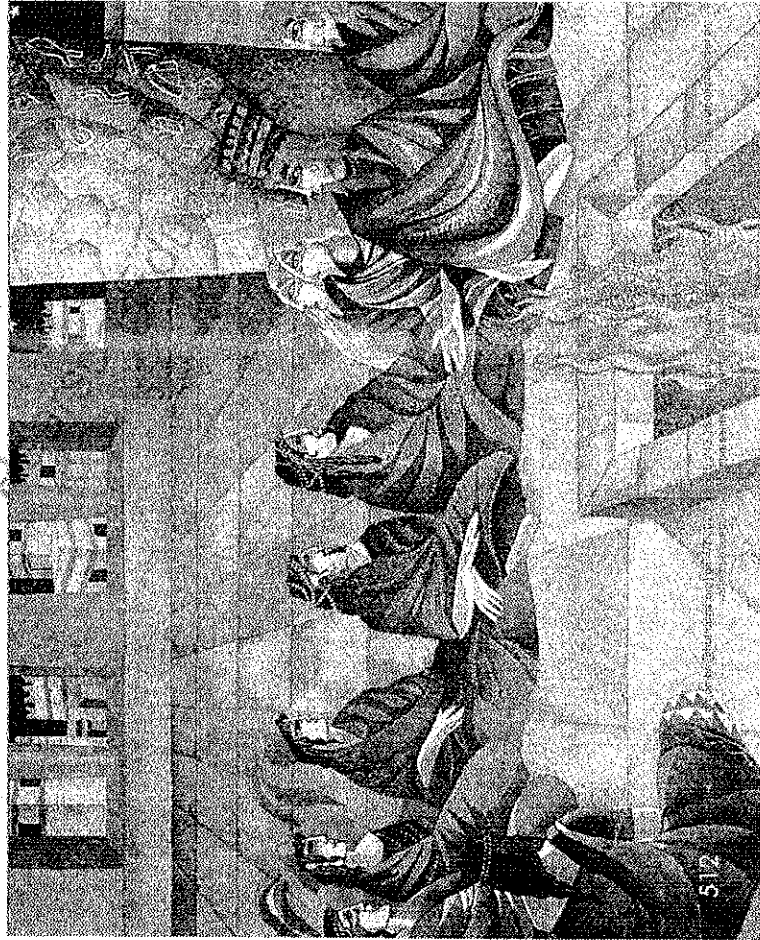


It was a happy time for Poseidon and Cleito, and over the years Cleito gave birth to five pairs of twin sons. Their firstborn son they named Atlas. In the summer of his twentieth year he was crowned high king, and they named the island Atlantis in his honor.

Then Poseidon divided the island into ten parts, and gave his sons one-tenth each.

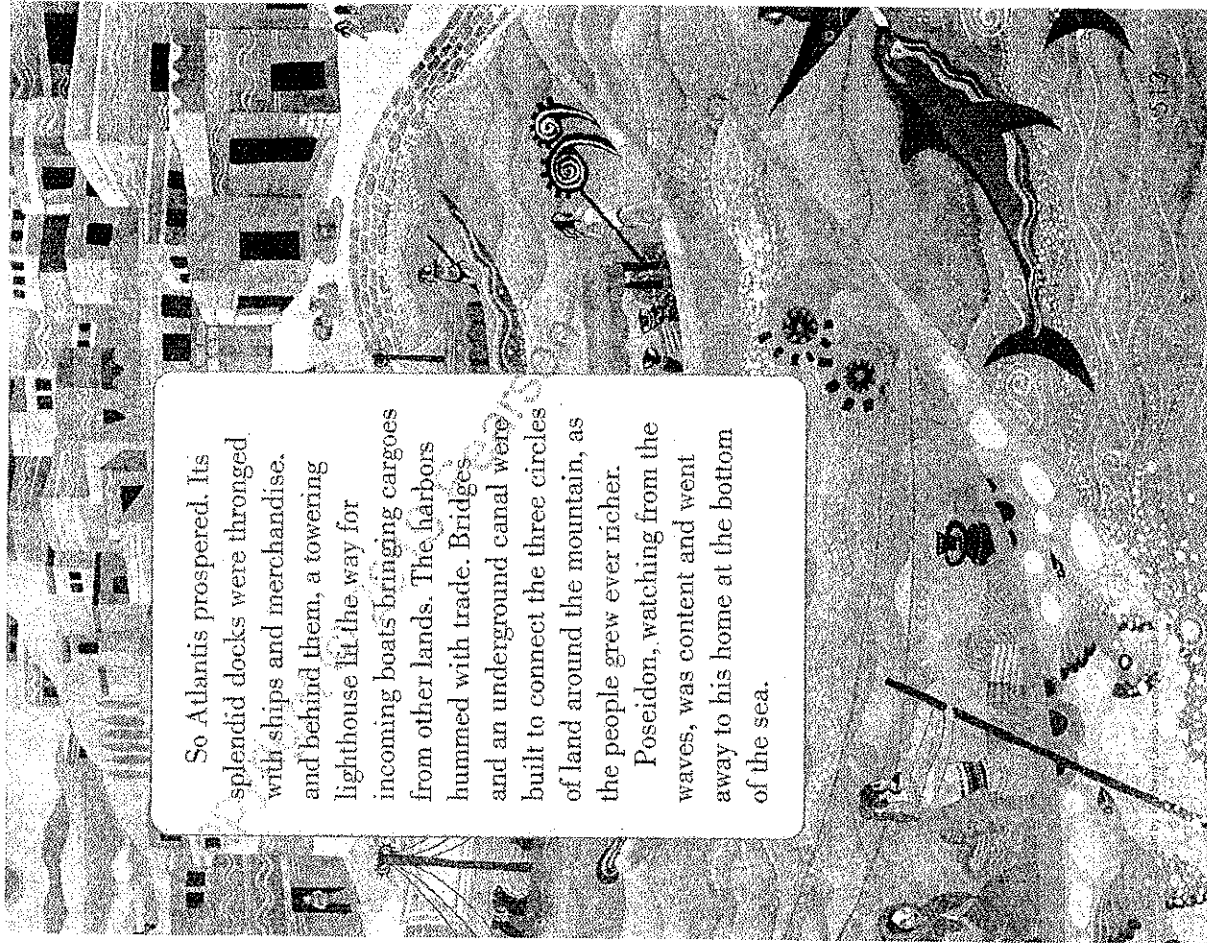


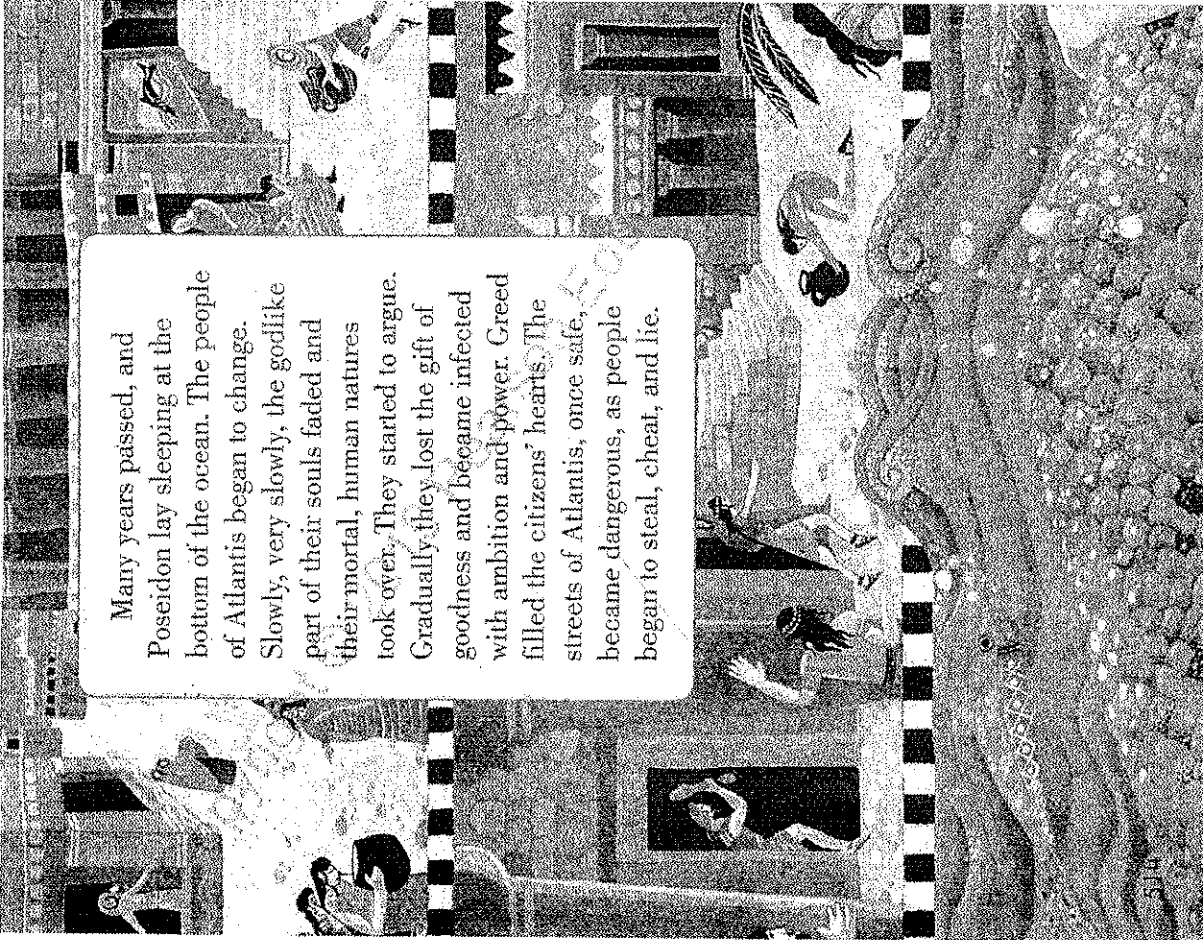
To ensure peace in his new island city, Poseidon set down laws in stone on a pillar of the temple. Chief among them was the commandment that no person should take up arms against another—with a terrible curse on anyone who disobeyed. Every five years, Atlas and the nine princes gathered by night beside the pillar to judge their people according to Poseidon's laws. The people of Atlantis became wise, gentle, and great-spirited. They were sober and kind, as the Creator had always wanted them to be. Above all, they lived in peace.



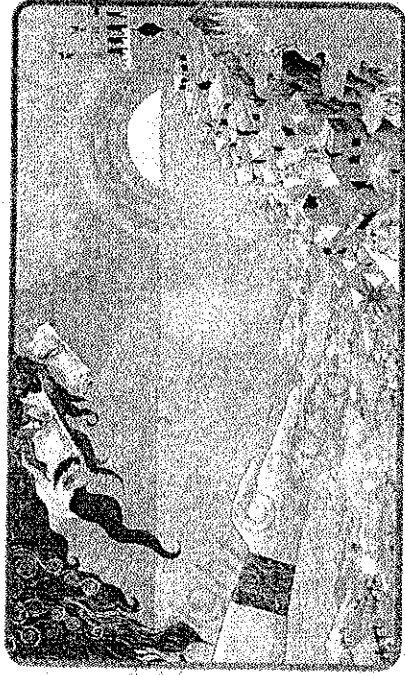
So Atlantis prospered. Its splendid docks were thronged with ships and merchandise, and behind them, a towering lighthouse lit the way for incoming boats bringing cargoes from other lands. The harbors hummed with trade. Bridges and an underground canal were built to connect the three circles of land around the mountain, as the people grew ever richer.

Poseidon, watching from the waves, was content and went away to his home at the bottom of the sea.



A black and white illustration of a city street. In the foreground, a horse is being led by a person. In the background, there are buildings with windows and other figures. The scene is set in a city, likely Atlantis.

Many years passed, and Poseidon lay sleeping at the bottom of the ocean. The people of Atlantis began to change. Slowly, very slowly, the godlike part of their souls faded and their mortal, human natures took over. They started to argue. Gradually they lost the gift of goodness and became infected with ambition and power. Greed filled the citizens' hearts. The streets of Atlantis, once safe, became dangerous, as people began to steal, cheat, and lie.



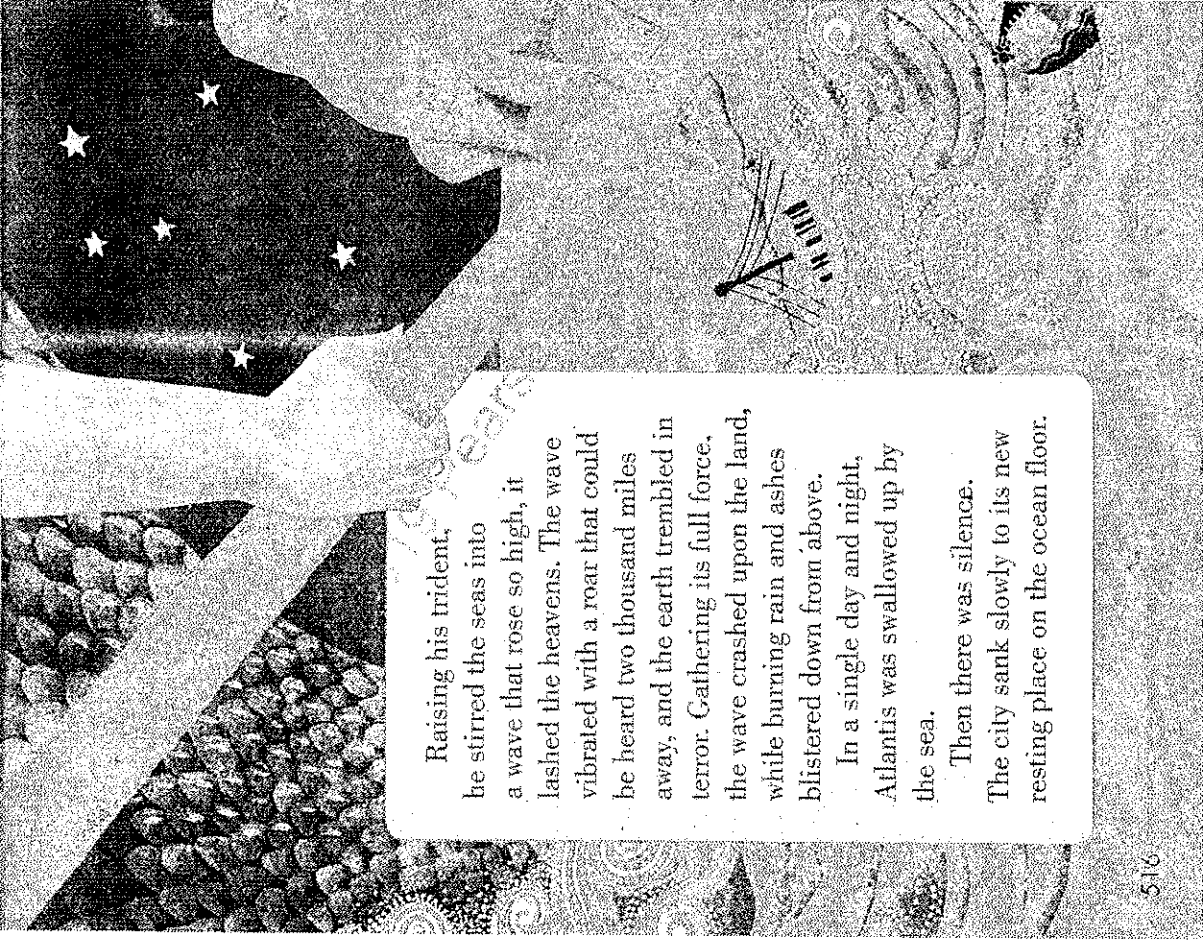
One day Zeus, god of gods, who ruled according to the law of the Creator, looked down from the heavens above. He saw the city walls crumbling with neglect, the empty temple, and, worst of all, people fighting one another. He roared out his anger.

The sound of his fury woke Poseidon. Rising to the surface of the waves, the sea-god looked out over his once-perfect kingdom—and wept.

Now he had no choice: he must carry out his terrible curse.

Illustrated by [unreadable]

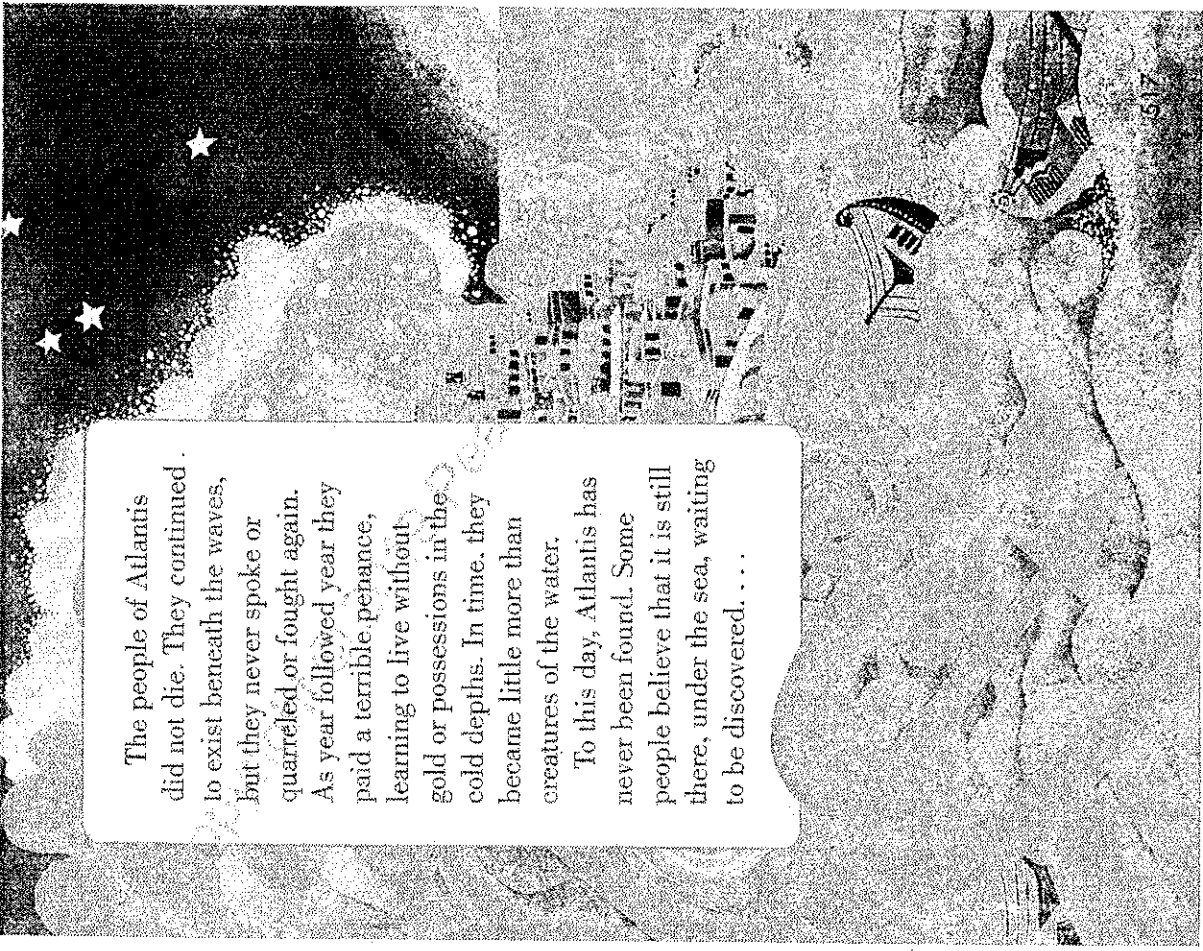
Page 513

A black and white illustration of a stormy sea at night. The sky is dark with several white stars. In the foreground, a large, turbulent wave is crashing. In the background, a city is sinking into the water, with buildings and structures partially submerged. The overall scene is dramatic and somber.

Raising his trident, he stirred the seas into a wave that rose so high, it lashed the heavens. The wave vibrated with a roar that could be heard two thousand miles away, and the earth trembled in terror. Gathering its full force, the wave crashed upon the land, while burning rain and ashes blistered down from above.

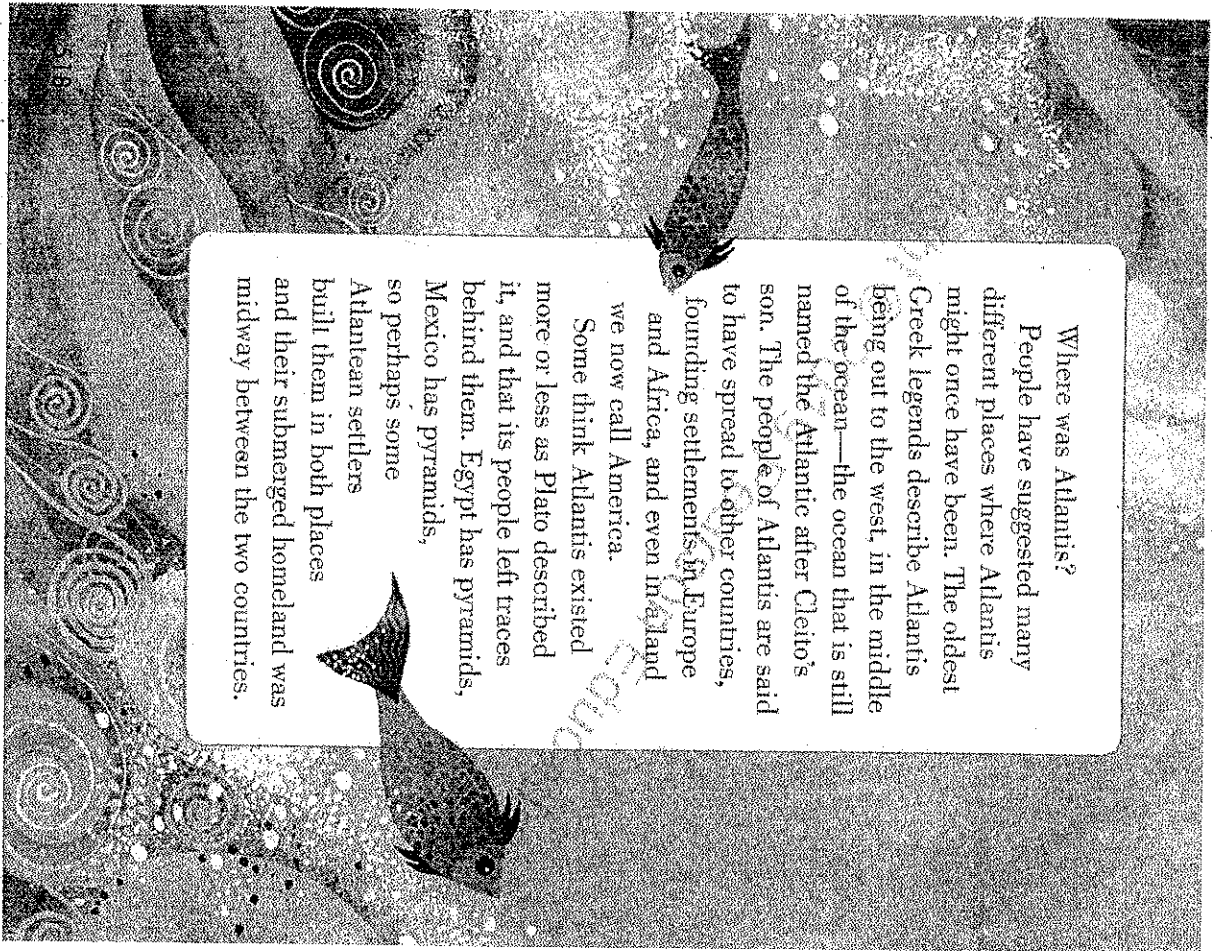
In a single day and night, Atlantis was swallowed up by the sea.

Then there was silence. The city sank slowly to its new resting place on the ocean floor.

A black and white illustration of a city built on a cliffside. The city features various buildings, including a prominent tower with a spiral design. The city is set against a dark background with several white stars, suggesting a night scene. The overall style is reminiscent of ancient Greek or Roman art.

The people of Atlantis did not die. They continued to exist beneath the waves, but they never spoke or quarreled or fought again. As year followed year they paid a terrible penance, learning to live without gold or possessions in the cold depths. In time, they became little more than creatures of the water.

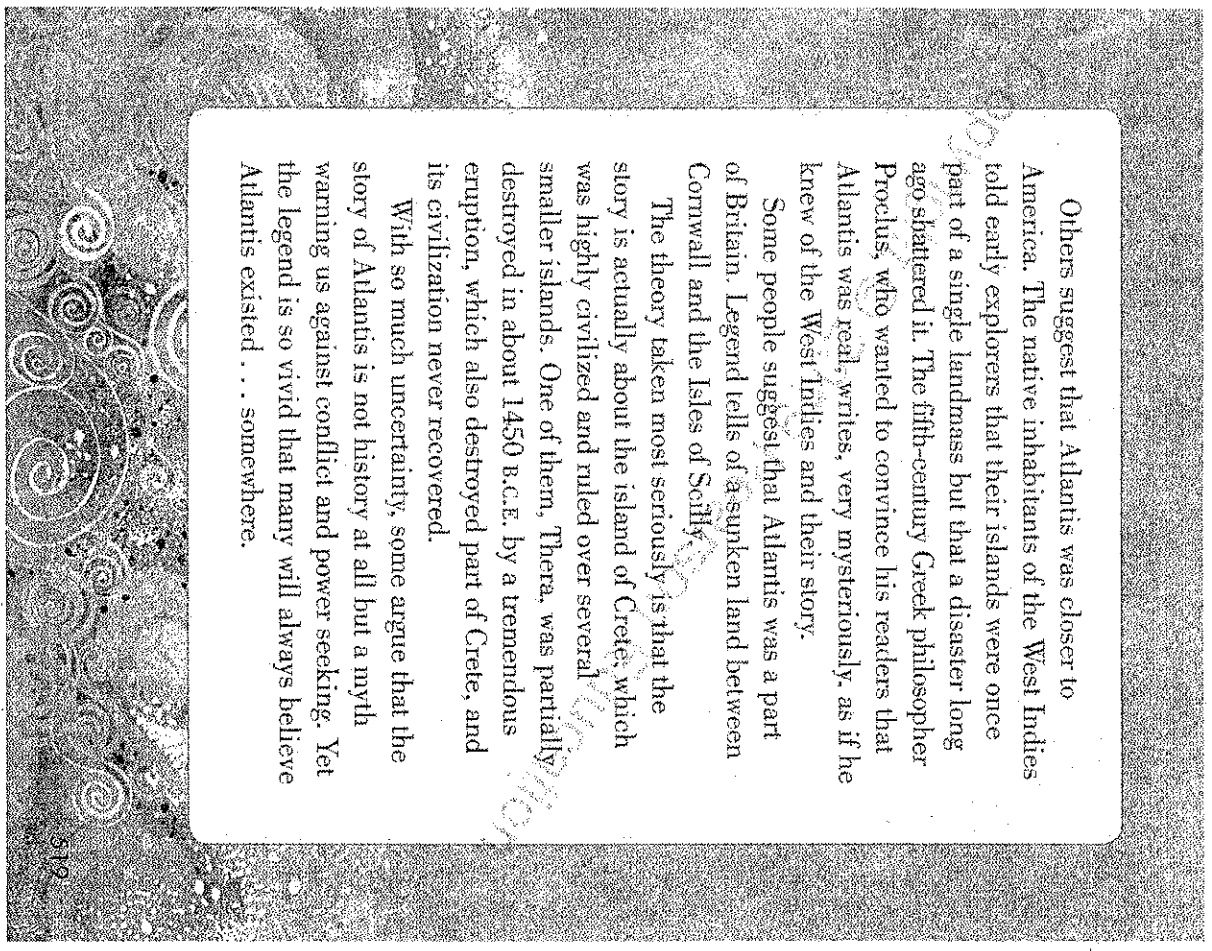
To this day, Atlantis has never been found. Some people believe that it is still there, under the sea, waiting to be discovered. . . .



Where was Atlantis?

People have suggested many different places where Atlantis might once have been. The oldest Greek legends describe Atlantis being out to the west, in the middle of the ocean—the ocean that is still named the Atlantic after Cleito's son. The people of Atlantis are said to have spread to other countries, founding settlements in Europe and Africa, and even in a land we now call America.

Some think Atlantis existed more or less as Plato described it, and that its people left traces behind them. Egypt has pyramids, Mexico has pyramids, so perhaps some Atlantean settlers built them in both places and their submerged homeland was midway between the two countries.



Others suggest that Atlantis was closer to America. The native inhabitants of the West Indies told early explorers that their islands were once part of a single landmass but that a disaster long ago shattered it. The fifth-century Greek philosopher Proclus, who wanted to convince his readers that Atlantis was real, writes, very mysteriously, as if he knew of the West Indies and their story.

Some people suggest that Atlantis was a part of Britain. Legend tells of a sunken land between Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

The theory taken most seriously is that the story is actually about the island of Crete, which was highly civilized and ruled over several smaller islands. One of them, Thera, was partially destroyed in about 1450 B.C.E. by a tremendous eruption, which also destroyed part of Crete, and its civilization never recovered.

With so much uncertainty, some argue that the story of Atlantis is not history at all but a myth warning us against conflict and power seeking. Yet the legend is so vivid that many will always believe Atlantis existed . . . somewhere.

Envision It!

Retell

Think Critically

1. In the story, the author writes about the mythical lost city of Atlantis. Think about other myths you know, such as "Catch It and Run." How are the myths alike and different? Be sure to compare the settings; paraphrase the themes and supporting details; and describe the characters, their relationships, and the changes they undergo. *Text to Text*

2. The subtitle of this selection is *The Legend of a Lost City*. Why do you think the author used this subtitle? Why did the author use the word *legend* instead of *myth*?
Think Like an Author

3. What generalization can you make about the gods in this story? What generalization can you make about people in this story?
Generalize

4. Read page 514. What inference can you make about ambition and power? Explain your answer using evidence from the story.
Inferring

5. **Look Back and Write** Look back at pages 518–519. Think about the reasons why the story was created. What does the story try to explain about the world? Provide evidence to support your answer.
Key Ideas and Details • Text Evidence