



Radek Malý • Adam Wolf

An ATLAS of Incredible ISLANDS



Written by Radek Malý • Illustrated by Adam Wolf

An ATLAS of Incredible ISLANDS

*Real stories
of unreal lands.*

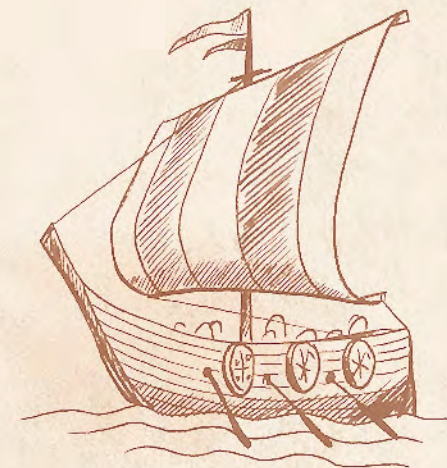
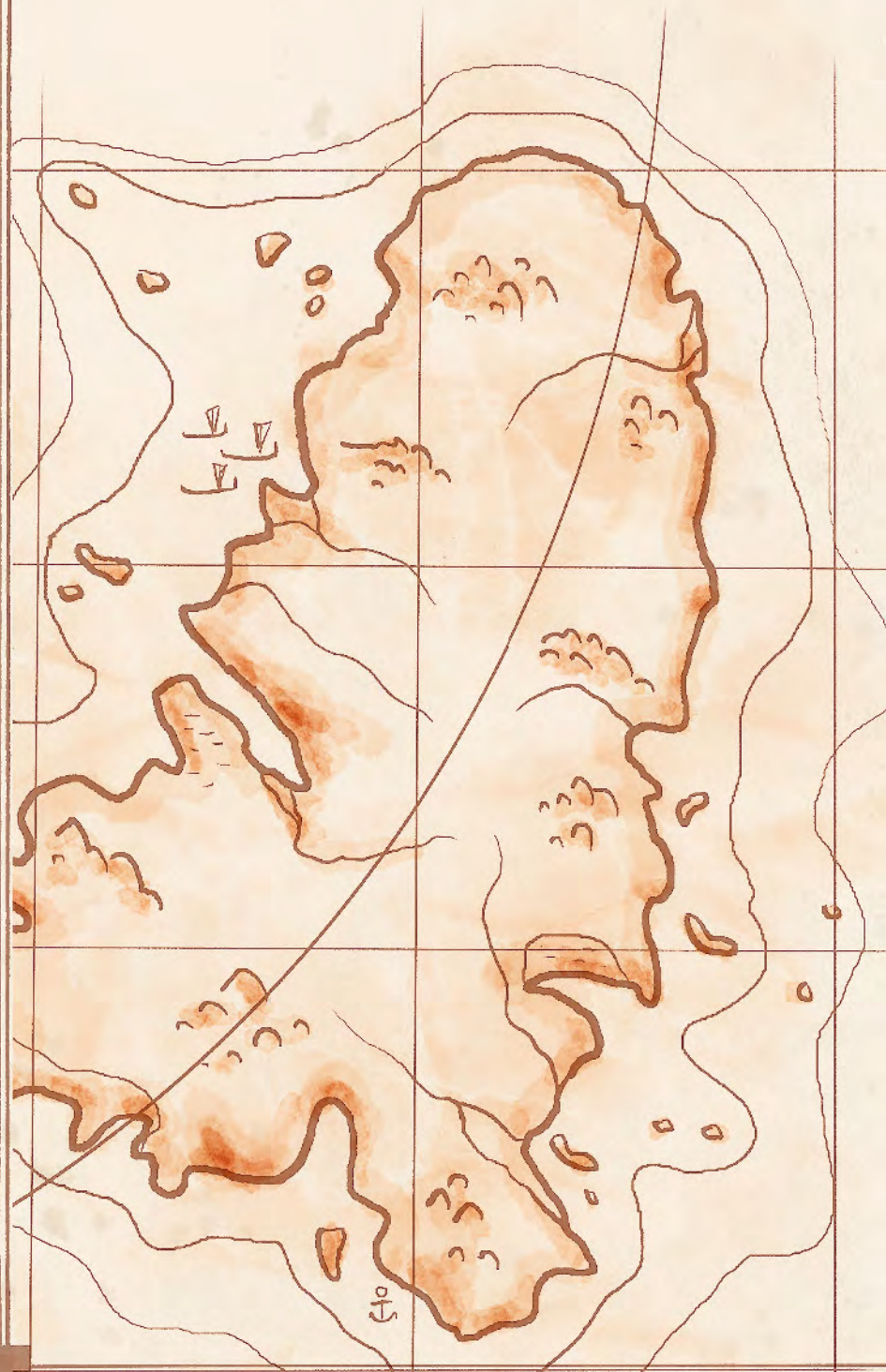


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Dear readers and imaginative lovers of old maps and great distances, the atlas you have just opened fills a gap in our knowledge of the world. Its subject is islands about which legends are told, some of which will surely be new to you. Many have featured on maps, encouraging hordes of adventurers to seek them out. Some are as big as continents. Some comprise little more than a rock or a sandy beach. Some have had whole books written about them, and some actually came into being on the page. This book is divided into three basic sections: mythical and mythological islands, literary islands (i.e. islands in books), phantom islands. All these islands have one thing in common: they exist in the imagination only. We wish you a pleasant voyage!



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The islands in this atlas cannot be found on any of today's official maps of the world. Even so, we have very specific ideas about what they are like, where they are, and who lives on them. These storied places show us that the only true barrier to knowledge of the world resides in the imagination.

ATLANTIS

Atlantis is a mythical continent said to have been home to a highly developed civilization. This was lost as a result of a huge natural disaster sent by the gods, along with the island itself. Although what we know about Atlantis comes from a single source — too little to confirm its existence — there are believers in and seekers of this lost continent to this day.

What we know from Plato

The only source of information on Atlantis is Greek scholar and philosopher Plato. In the works *Timaeus* and *Critias*, Plato mediates the narrative of an Athenian statesman called Solon, who learned about the lost continent on a trip to Egypt, where priests told him of a 9,000-year-old heroic struggle between the Athenians and a civilization that once commanded most of the Mediterranean region.

Temple of Poseidon

At the very centre of the island stood a monumental temple covered with gold, silver and ivory. It was presided over by an enormous statue of the god Poseidon standing in a chariot pulled by six winged horses. Bulls were kept in the temple; ordinary mortals had no access. Local rulers sacrificed the bulls to the gods at the temple's altar.

Divine origin of the Atlanteans

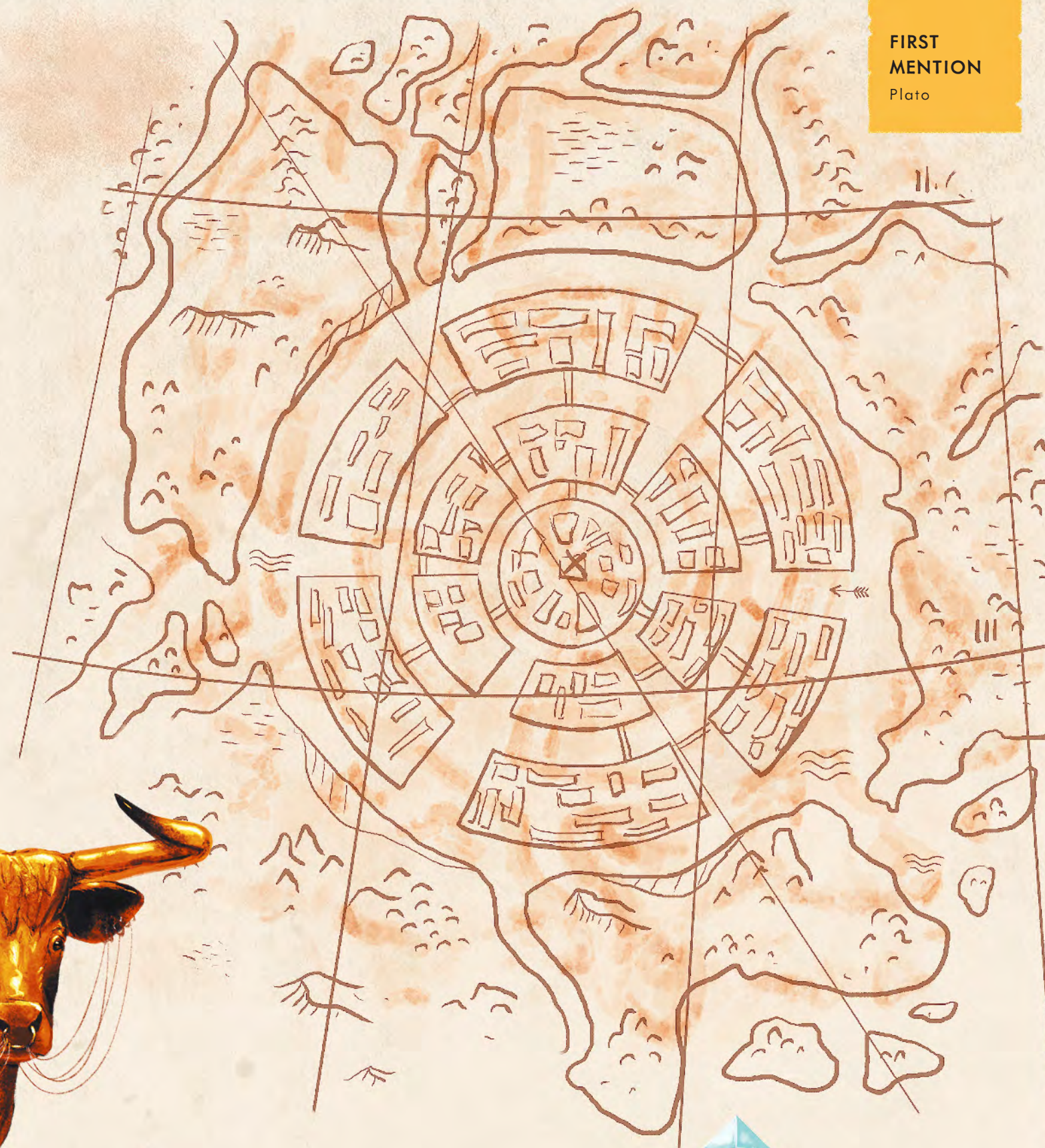
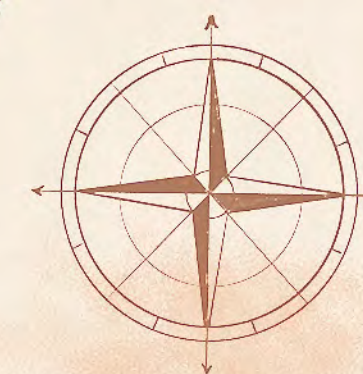
Poseidon, god of the sea, is said to have loved Atlantis so well that he populated it with his children. The island's name is derived from that of Poseidon's eldest son, Atlas. The sea god fathered a total of ten sons on Atlantis, which explains why it was divided into ten provinces. Atlantis was a fertile, densely populated land with a well-developed economy. It had two springs, one with hot, the other with cold water — thanks to which numerous baths were established for use by the whole population.



1. Crete
2. Thera and Santorini
3. Azorean islands

Capital city

Atlantis was said to be beyond the Pillars of Hercules. As Gibraltar was once referred to by this name, we assume that the great island was somewhere in the Atlantic. It is said to have been oblong in shape and about the size of Asia Minor and North Africa combined. At its centre was a mountain around which Poseidon raised three strips of land, flooding the valley between them with sea. On this territory, people built a walled city with arched bridges and many broad waterways.



FIRST MENTION
Plato



THULE

The island of Thule was first described by Greek explorer Pytheas. He locates it in the far north and explains that its people make a drink of bread and honey. For winter, when the sun barely appears, they store grain in holes in the ground because of the frosts. No one has ever been sure of the location of the place of Pytheas's description.

FIRST MENTION

Pytheas of Massilia:
ta peri tou Okeanou
(“things about the ocean”)



Who discovered Thule?

Pytheas of Massilia (today's Marseille) was a Greek adventurer and navigator. His great voyage was prompted by traders' interest in a newly discovered deposit of tin and amber. Around 325 BCE, he set out on a single-masted ship called Artemis, along with fifty oarsmen and twenty sailors. For Pytheas, trade was a pretext allowing him to satisfy his urge to discover new places and expand what was known about the ancient world.



1. Greenland
2. Iceland
3. Faroe Islands
4. Ireland
5. Saaremaa

Voyage

Pytheas's voyage took him around the coast of Brittany to the British Isles, site of tin mines, where as far as we know he became the first Greek to observe and describe the tides of the sea. Pytheas learned about Thule, a northern island said to be bigger than all Britain, from people of Scotland. His expedition reached the island after a journey of six days, after which it travelled still further north. Only on encountering a region of impenetrable ice did Pytheas decide to return home.

Ultima Thule

As “Ultima Thule”, Thule became synonymous with any remote part of the world beyond the realm of common knowledge and understanding. Its actual geographic position wasn't so important: no one could be sure how far Pytheas had travelled. Today's maps show us two places called Thule. One is in the South Sandwich Islands in the Southern Ocean. The other is a US air base in northern Greenland.

Where Thule might be

The report of discoveries made on Pytheas's voyage was destroyed in a fire at the Great Library of Alexandria. We know of it today only through remarks by scholars who considered it fictitious. Many experts agree that Pytheas reached Iceland, in those days uninhabited. Others, however, believe Pytheas's “Thule” to have been Ireland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, or the island of Saaremaa in the Baltic Sea. The most recent theory, from 2010, makes a case for the Norwegian island of Smøla.



AVALON

Avalon is a mythical island from the Arthurian legend. It was first mentioned around 1136 by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his pseudo-historical HISTORY OF THE KINGS OF BRITAIN, as the magical island where King Arthur's sword Excalibur was forged. It is to Avalon that the mortally wounded Arthur is brought after the Battle of Camlann. Avalon has become as much a symbol of Arthurian mythology as the Camelot palace and court.

Island — apple

“Avalon” translates as “apple island”. According to Geoffrey’s and some other tellings of the Arthurian legend, the island’s ruler is Arthur’s sister Morgan, a powerful enchantress. It is she who cares for Arthur and waits for the time when he is able to return to the world. In all accounts, Avalon is a sacred place where Celtic spirituality mingles with Christian faith. The apple is the spiritual symbol of the island.

Arthur and Merlin

Later, in 1278, the remains were re-buried in a solemn ceremony attended by King Edward I. Some claim that they can be found today in front of the main altar of Glastonbury Abbey, although contemporary historians dispute the authenticity of these remains, claiming they were forged to draw attention to the abbey’s economic decline. Another candidate for the site of Avalon is the island of Ynys Enlli in north Wales, the legendary resting place of Merlin the magician.



FIRST
MENTION
Geoffrey
of Monmouth



WHEN
12th century



Discovery in Glastonbury

In 1190, monks at the ancient abbey in Glastonbury claimed to have found the remains of King Arthur and his queen Guinevere. Could this place be Avalon? Glastonbury is indeed on an island, among marshes. What is more, its Old Welsh name is Ynys Afallach, meaning “island of apples”. It is said that in this place was discovered, at a depth of five metres, a great coffin bearing a leaden cross with the inscription in Latin: *Here lies entombed the renowned King Arthur in the island of Avalon.*

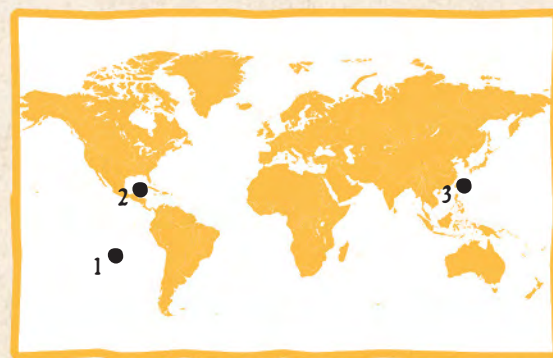


MU

The legend of Mu grew out of research by American antiquarian and amateur archaeologist Augustus Le Plongeon, who studied remains of the Maya civilization on the Yucatán peninsula and claimed to have deciphered Maya script. He read about a lost continent at the bottom of the Pacific, whose highly developed civilization gave rise to the Maya and the ancient Egyptians. As evidence of the connection between these two civilizations, he gave the fact that both built pyramids.

James Churchward, adventurer

The lost continent of Mu was popularized in a book series by British amateur archaeologist and inventor James Churchward (1852–1936). Churchward describes Mu as a vast continent in the Pacific with a highly developed civilization, manifestations of which are found all over the world in the form of unexplained prehistoric monuments. Such monuments include the huge statues on Easter Island (Rapa Nui). The story goes that Mu was destroyed by a terrible disaster 12,000 years ago, leaving nothing but islands scattered about the Pacific.



1. Rapa Nui
2. Yucatán Peninsula
3. Yonaguni



Yonaguni

In the late 1980s, in the sea off the westernmost coast of the Japanese island of Yonaguni, a strange discovery was made: a large formation reminiscent of the remains of a vast building. If this were indeed a building, it would have originated before people were thought to have possessed the technology to make such a thing. Some researchers believe it to be a natural geological formation; others persist in searching it for signs of the lost continent of Mu.

Turkey and Mu

Research into Mu and other lost civilizations was actively promoted by Turkish statesmen Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the 1930s. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, he decided to build a modern Turkish state. His reading of Churchward's books led him to believe that the Uyghur Turks created a highly developed empire that dominated the world 50,000 years ago. He hoped for the discovery of a connection between Turkish civilization and other ancient cultures.

FIRST MENTION
Augustus le Plongeon



Movement of continental plates

We believe today that Earth's continents were created by the break-up of the supercontinent Pangea and the movement of continental plates, creating continental drift. This would explain the kinship of species occurring in different parts of the world. Even so, we have no solid evidence that any of the world's oceans contains the remains of a lost continent.

LAPUTA

The island of Laputa appears in the prose work widely known as GULLIVER'S TRAVELS, a famous fantastical traveller's tale by Anglo-Irish writer Jonathan Swift. It was first published in 1726, under the complicated title TRAVELS INTO SEVERAL REMOTE NATIONS OF THE WORLD. IN FOUR PARTS. BY LEMUEL GULLIVER, FIRST A SURGEON, AND THEN A CAPTAIN OF SEVERAL SHIPS. As Laputa floats in the clouds, determination of its location is impossible.

Lilliput and Blefuscu

In the book, ship's surgeon Lemuel Gulliver tells of incredible adventures he had on his travels. Remarkable islands abound. First, he is shipwrecked on the island of Lilliput, whose tiny inhabitants he helps win a war against the neighbouring island of Blefuscu. The conflict has been provoked by disagreement on the proper way to peel a boiled egg.

Laputa and Balnibardi

On his next expedition, Gulliver reaches the flying island of Laputa. About seven kilometres in diameter, this island has a bottom made of diamonds. It is kept airborne by a giant magnet. For technical reasons, its movements are limited to the space above the islet of Balnibardi, which it overshadows and with which it threatens to collide. This can be read as an allegory for the relationship of dominant England with subjugated Ireland.

Island of scholars

Laputa is a place of crackpot aristocratic scholars who hold the head on one side, are devoted to music and sciences, and are scornful of fools. They are so absorbed in their thoughts that they have servants called flappers, who flap when the master should speak. From Laputa, Gulliver travels to Balnibardi, which is in economic and cultural decline and also has no shortage of mad scholars; at the local academy, researchers are working at extracting sunlight from cucumbers.

AUTHOR
Jonathan Swift
(1667–1745)

Brobdingnag, island of giants

On the second expedition, a storm drives Gulliver and his ship to Brobdingnag, an island inhabited by 18-metre-tall giants, where he ends up spending three years. He is exhibited at market for money and becomes a toy of the queen. After surviving many dangers, notably from giant wasps, rats and a gardener's dog, he escapes from the island in a wooden crate with the help of a giant eagle.



WHERE
In the clouds

Other Gulliver's travels

Gulliver goes on to visit Glubbudbrib, island of magicians, where he encounters the ghosts of historical figures. On the island of Luggnagg, he encounters the immortal struldbrugs. Finally, Gulliver travels to the land of the Houyhnhnms, intelligent horses with the power of speech, where falsehood and other human vices do not exist. It is from here, in 1715, that he returns to his family for good.

TREASURE ISLAND

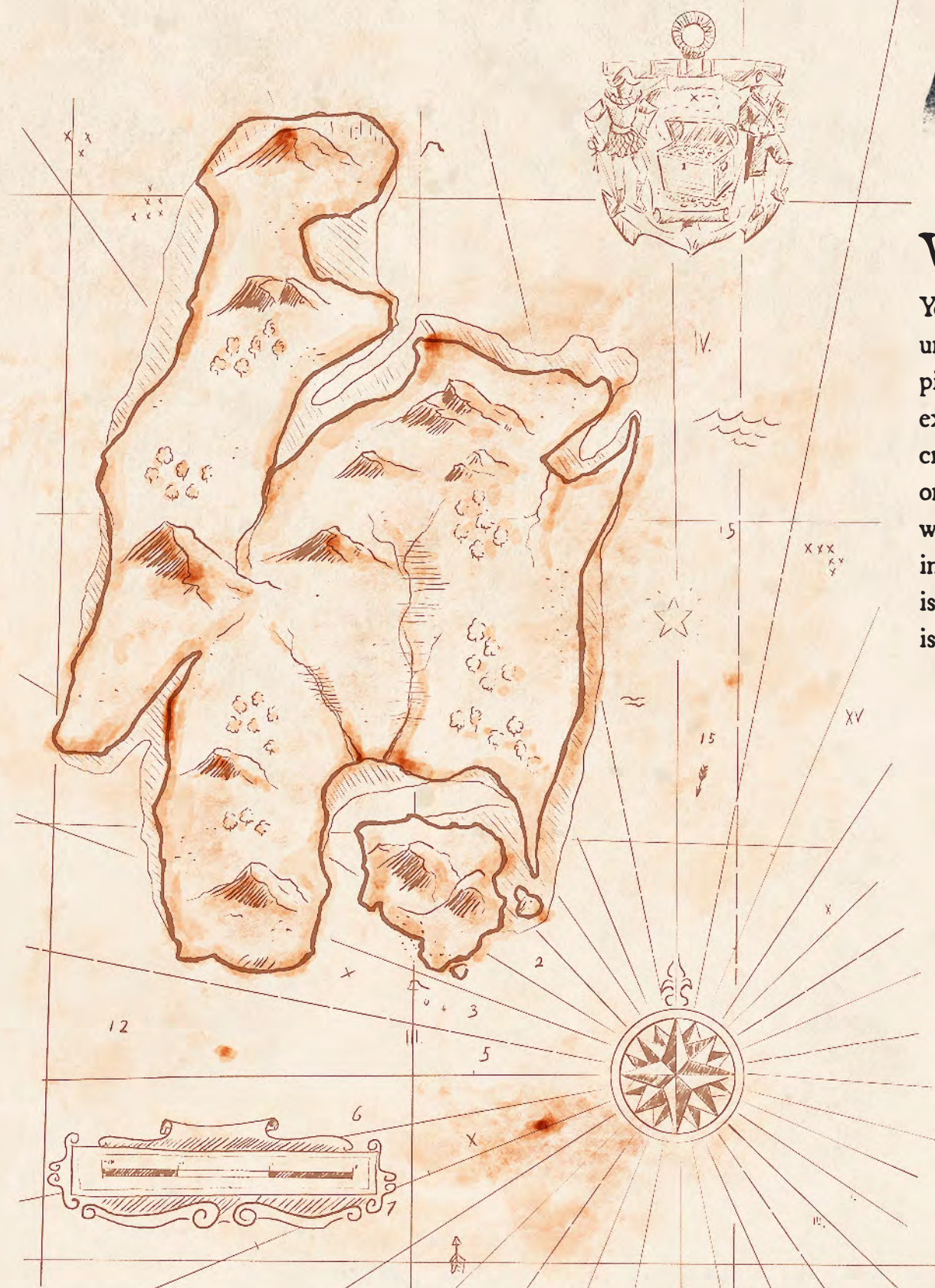
TREASURE ISLAND is an adventure novel by Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote it for his twelve-year-old son Lloyd on a rain-spoiled holiday in 1881. The book opens with a map of an imaginary island the two of them drew together. This thrilling tale of pirates became hugely famous and has had many imitators.

Inspiration

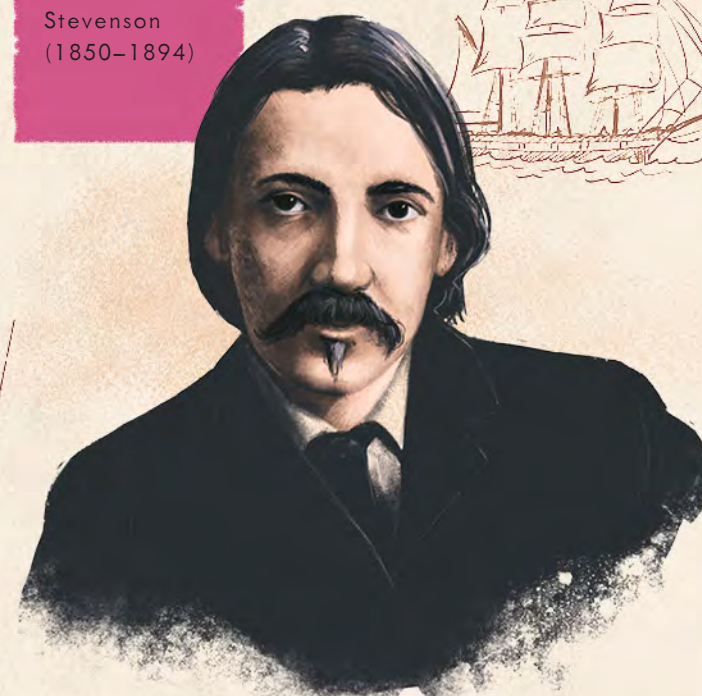
Several islands pride themselves on being the inspiration behind Stevenson's Treasure Island. One is Isla de la Juventud (Isle of Youth) near Cuba, which has a piratical past. Stevenson may have been inspired by stories told by a sailor uncle, who travelled to Norman Island in the south of the British Virgin Islands. But maybe Treasure Island was inspired by the Cocos Island off Costa Rica, or — in appearance at least — by the Shetland Islands in northern Scotland, which Stevenson knew well.



1. Isla de la Juventud
2. Norman Island
3. Cocos Island
4. Shetland Islands



AUTHOR
Robert Louis
Stevenson
(1850–1894)



Dragon-shaped island

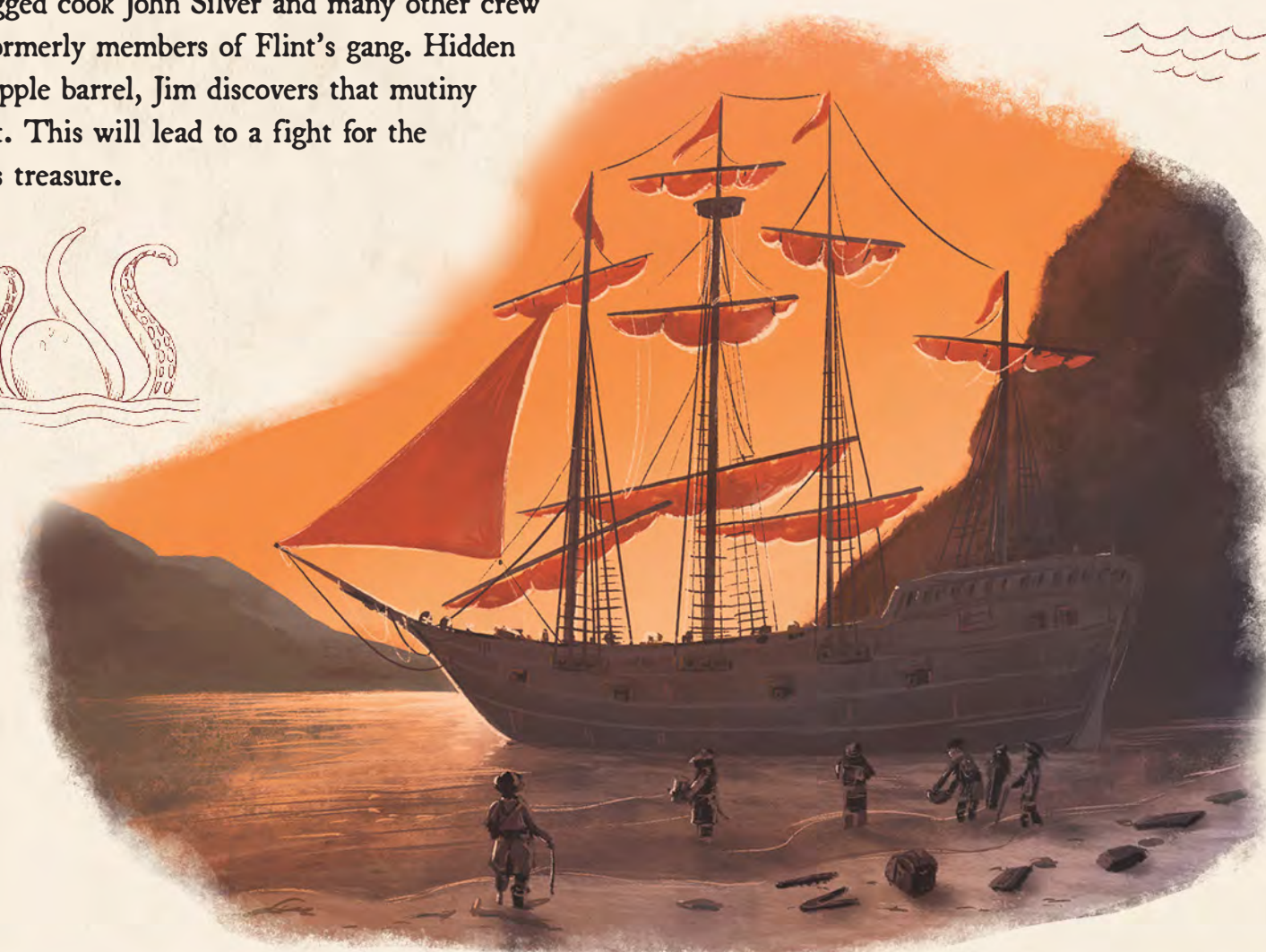
Treasure Island is in the Caribbean Sea, where many pirates were based. Its jagged shape is reminiscent of an upright dragon. In the south, where the mooring bay is, it is very close to Skeleton Island. The island is about 15 km long and 10 km wide. Near its middle is an important landmark, known, and marked on the map, as Spyglass Hill.

Where is the treasure?

The greedy pirates eventually start fighting among themselves. As he roams the island, Jim meets Ben Gunn, a sailor set down there three years ago as a punishment. He manages to free the ship before being captured by the pirates and witnessing their search for treasure. But when they get to the place marked on the map, instead of finding treasure, they get an unpleasant surprise. The *Hispaniola* eventually sails away, leaving most of the pirates to their fates on the island.

Voyage on the HISPANIOLA

Young Jim Hawkins comes across a map of an unknown island, on which is marked the buried pirates' treasure of Captain Flint. He joins an expedition on a ship called the Hispaniola, whose crew intend to collect the treasure. It turns out that one-legged cook John Silver and many other crew were formerly members of Flint's gang. Hidden in an apple barrel, Jim discovers that mutiny is afoot. This will lead to a fight for the island's treasure.



RUPES NIGRA

Rupes Nigra, also known as Magnetic Mountain, is a phantom island placed by Early Modern cartographers in the Arctic Ocean. Although the compass was already in use, the principle of magnetism was as yet unknown. Some believed that Earth's magnetic field was produced by a vast magnetite island at the North Pole. Ships avoided the north in the belief that Rupes Nigra would pull out their metal parts, so causing their disintegration.



Nicholas of Lynn



North Pole



Black rock

The island comprises a huge shiny black rock with jagged cliffs. It is 52 kilometres wide. In the Amber Sea, it is surrounded on all sides by four vast islands, two of which are inhabited. Ocean “rivers” flow in straits between the islands. We come across Magnetic Mountain in various forms in folk tales, as well as in different parts of the world in the adventures of Sinbad the sailor.

Finding its way to the map

Rupes Nigra was first mentioned in *Inventio Fortunata*, a fictional travelogue written in 1360 by Nicholas of Lynn, a Franciscan friar from Oxford. But it wasn't until the late 16th century that cartographers took the idea of Magnetic Mountain seriously – i.e. one hundred years after Europeans discovered America. Celebrated Flemish cartographer Gerardus Mercator was convinced of its existence; he describes it in a letter from 1577 to the famous scholar John Dee.

WHEN
1360



FIRST MENTION
Nicholas of Lynn –
Inventio Fortunata

Magnetic Island

We find a “Magnetic Mountain” in Russia's Urals: the town of Magnitogorsk. There is even an actual Magnetic Island. Located off Western Australia, it was given its name in 1770 by the great explorer James Cook, who believed that his compass needle recorded a magnetic pull there. By its indigenous people, this island is called Yunbenun.



FRISLAND

We find an island called Frisland on an old map of the north of the Atlantic Ocean. The island's story resembles the plot of a detective novel. What inspired cartographers to include it on maps until the 17th century? And how did its "discoverers" succeed in convincing the Pope of its existence?



Historical injustice?

The Kingdom of Spain dominated Europe in terms of overseas discoveries. But because an Italian discovered America on Spain's behalf, some Italians had a sense of historical injustice. In an attempt to right this, Nicolo Zen, a highly respected Venetian, opted for deception. In 1558, he presented Pope Paul IV with an old map he claimed to have found among other documents in the attic of his family home.

Iceland's mysterious twin

Zen claimed that two of his ancestors had discovered the American continent at the end of the 14th century, while mapping islands in the North Atlantic. Zen's map shows the most remarkable of these, Frisland, lying to the south of Iceland and having roughly the same area. Zen was unable to prove the veracity of the map with the original documents, claiming that he had destroyed these as a child.



WHEN
1558

FIRST
MENTION
Nicolo Zen



Frisland on contemporary maps

Trusting in Zen's story, the Pope declared all old maps to be wrong. Influential geographers and cartographers of the time added Frisland to their maps. Expeditions set out from all over Europe, their intention to discover and colonize the mysterious island, where they would make full use of its rich mineral resources (notably gold and silver). Needless to say, none of the expeditions succeeded.



Cosmography

In 1659, English historian and theologian Peter Heylyn published the scholarly work *Cosmographie*, which includes a detailed account of life on Frisland. Shortly thereafter, in 1660, a shocking revelation was made: Zen's grandson admitted that his ancestor had invented the whole story out of hatred for the Spanish. When years later the younger Zen was murdered, Heylyn was suspected of perpetrating an act of revenge for damage done to his career.



HAWAIKI

In 1769, when British naval captain and explorer James Cook mounted his first Pacific expedition and visited New Zealand, he was accompanied by Polynesian navigator Tupaia, with whose help the expedition learned from local priests that the indigenous Māori population had not lived there long. Their ancestors had arrived in forty waka canoes just a few centuries earlier. The place they had left was called Hawaiki.

Original homeland or underworld?

We find the same or a similar name in many Polynesian cultures. It refers not only to the place from which ancestors set out on a long journey, but it is also an analogue of an underworld to which the souls of the dead depart. Many layers of legend and history make it hard to know where to look for Hawaiki today. Even so, recent findings suggest the original homeland of Polynesians to be the island of Taiwan, three millennia ago.



Polynesian colonization

Under pressure from the invaders, the Polynesians gradually retreated from the mainland to the ocean and so discovered the immeasurable territories of the Pacific. Using their knowledge of the stars and sea currents, they sent out scouts before settling on new islands, some as far west as the coast of South America. They brought cultivated plants for crops and Polynesian rats, the latter as stowaways. Around 1280, they found a new home, which they called Aotearoa (“land of the long white cloud”) – today’s New Zealand.

FIRST MENTION
Polynesian legends



WHEN
11th century

Fight for living space

Explorers at sea suddenly became conquerors of a vast territory with many unique animal species, including a giant wingless bird called the moa. This was such a ready source of food that the conquerors slowly exterminated the species. The fate of the moa was almost shared by the Māori, whose tribal wars were supported by European colonizers, who supplied them with firearms.

Where is Hawaiki?

Fortunately, the Māori culture was preserved. Even today, Māori honour their waka – one of forty canoes in which their ancestors sailed out from mythical Hawaiki. This place may be Hawaii, or it may be Tahiti; it may even be the island of Raiatea, the most important religious centre in eastern Polynesia, to which Polynesians would regularly travel great distances.







If you were thinking of looking up in an atlas any of the 29 islands featured in this book, think again! None of them exist – not officially, at least. Yet they have been written and talked about through the ages, and they pique our interest and spark our imaginations still. They are the stuff of myth, legend, fairy tale and literature. Even so, some have relatively precise descriptions. Where do the details come from? What gave rise to ideas of human societies on unvisited pieces of land in the middle of an ocean? Might there be some truth in stories of their existence after all? Or do we know of them only through the great power of the human imagination? And what is it about Atlantis, Buyan, Frisland and the rest that inspires us to keep looking for them? Embark on a great adventure by following the true stories of the unreal islands in this book.



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