

Gary Trousdale , Kirk Wise

## Atlantis: The Lost Empire

United States (2001)

TAGS: [Atlantis Plato](#)



We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
<i>Title of the work</i>	Atlantis: The Lost Empire
<i>Studio/Production Company</i>	Walt Disney Pictures, Walt Disney Feature Animation
<i>Country of the First Edition</i>	United States of America
<i>Country/countries of popularity</i>	Worldwide
<i>Original Language</i>	English
<i>First Edition Date</i>	2001
<i>First Edition Details</i>	<i>Atlantis: The Lost Empire</i> . Directed by Gary Trousdale, distributor: Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, June 3, 2001.
<i>Running time</i>	95 minutes
<i>Format</i>	VHS, DVD
<i>Date of the First DVD or VHS</i>	VHS and DVD - released at the same time, January 29, 2002.
<i>Awards</i>	2002 - Golden Reel Awards for Best Sound Editing - Animated Feature Film.
<i>Genre</i>	Action and adventure fiction, Science fiction
<i>Target Audience</i>	Crossover
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## Creators



[Gary Trousdale](#), Under the Wikimedia Common Rights, Date: 11 June, 2014, Source: Own work, Author: Boungawa (accessed October 3, 2018).

### **Gary Trousdale , b. 1960 (Director)**

Gary Trousdale is an American animation director. Animation has fascinated him since he was a child, and after deciding not to be an architect, he joined California Institute of the Arts, where he studied animation for three years. At the beginning of his career he drew storyboards, artistic menus for restaurants and designs for t-shirt prints. Finally, in 1985 Trousdale was hired by 'Disney' to work on *The Black Cauldron*. Later on, he worked on directing, above all, *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, classic Disney movies. After working with Kirk Wise on *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* he moved to Dreamworks (where he directed inter alia *Shrek the Halls*)

Bio prepared by Anna Mik, University of Warsaw,  
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### **Kirk Wise , b. 1963 (Animator, Director, Screenwriter)**

Kirk Wise is an American director, screenwriter and animator. As a child, he won the Junior Art Champion contest, as his talent blossomed when he was very young. Like Gary Trousdale, he graduated from California Institute of the Arts During his studies, he made money drawing caricatures at Universal Studios. After that he was hired by 'Disney' and worked on several productions, inter alia: *Sport Goofy in Soccermania*, *The Great Mouse Detective*, *The Brave Little Toaster*. Along with Trousdale, he directed *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Atlantis...* Even though he has worked mostly for Walt Disney Company, he also directed the English version of Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*.

Bio prepared by Anna Mik, University of Warsaw,  
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## Additional information

### Summary

*Atlantis: The Lost Empire* is a story about a young linguist Milo, who wants to fulfill his grandfather's dream and find the legendary land of Atlantis. In Milo's opinion Atlantis is now located near Iceland - and there is where he wants to start his research.

The animation opens with a quotation from Plato:

“[...] in a single day and night of misfortune,  
the island of Atlantis disappeared  
into the depths of the sea.”

The first scene presents a lecture that Milo practices in front of the potential audience. As young researcher recalls the myth told by Plato, we may notice a bust of the philosopher on his desk. Even though Milo clearly admires the ancient myth, he is also skeptical, he does not believe in the old stories that he perceives as fairy tales. What he does believe in are the ancient languages, to be specific - the language used in a medieval guide book to Atlantis. Milo presents his project to the scientific board. Despite his evident passion and knowledge, the authorities do not give him the fund he applied for - what is more, rectors and deans avoid him, do not believe in his research and at the end of the day, in order to keep his job, Milo is assigned to supervise the boiler placed in the basement. But in the moment of great humiliation, the hero meets a mysterious and eccentric rich man - an old friend of his grandfather - who launches his dream journey.

After overcoming several obstacles and losing part of the crew, the expedition ends with success: the lost empire is found. There Milo and his friends meet the unusual inhabitants of the island. They live in harmony with nature, cooperate with each other, sustain peace - everything out of reach of the imperial and capitalistic influences. One of the many treats of living on the island is immortality - that lately started to fail Atlanteans. The reason for this is given in the story told by the princess of Atlantis, Kida:

“It is said that the gods became jealous of Atlantis. They sent a great cataclysm and banished us here. All I can remember is the sky going dark and people shouting and running. Then, a bright light, like a star



floating above the city. My father said it called my mother to it.”

The story of the mysterious source of power completes the dying king, Kida’s father:

“The crystal thrives on the collective emotions of all who came before us. In return, it provides power, longevity, protection. As it grew, it developed a consciousness of its own.”

Atlantis functions according to its own laws and does not belong to the so called civilized world. So does Milo. After defeating the main antagonist, Rourke, who wanted to exploit the rich land and kill its inhabitants, the young man stays with princess Kida and lives in the mythical land outside the *profanum* sphere of humans.

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## Analysis

This is the first film made by Disney combing two genres: new adventure and science-fiction. The connection of those two genres appears to be even stronger when we stress that the main character was voiced by Michael J. Fox, the star of *Back to the Future*. Not only is the style of the animation based on the comic book creator’s Mike Mignola, but the whole story is loosely based on Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* - and this combination expresses the great creative mixture behind the project. The richness of material and research done by the creators of *Atlantis...* show how well developed the production was and how much thought was put into the telling of the mythical story. The animation was not the biggest of Disney’s successes (the movie is not a musical nor fairy tale, which appear to be the most successful combination) but its many layers still give multiple opportunities for interpretation.

Atlantis is presented as a marvelous land, and people inhabiting it might be perceived as living in an ideal, utopian society. And even though we will not find a Poseidon temple there or war shafts created by the god, its atmosphere and mythological core might be related to the story told by Plato. The project of this ancient philosopher was without a doubt an inspiration for the creators of the film. The differences with what we know of the myth of Atlantis told in antiquity and the Disney version of the Atlanteans and their realm demonstrate the constant vitality of the myth and its potential to adjust to current times, views, esthetics, etc.



*Atlantis...* is another example by Walt Disney Production of adapting a well-known story into a new myth, maybe more relatable, compatible with other influential works (like *The Journey to the Centre of the Earth*), as well as with other myths - the creators combined Greek tradition with the ones from South America. They also applied a new language, developed for the purpose of the movie and adjusted the comic book esthetics to the CGI technology. The combination of styles and inspirations reflects the current state of postmodern culture which might easily provoke researchers to do further analysis - as happened in the case of Milo.

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Classical, Mythological,  
Traditional Motifs,  
Characters, and  
Concepts

[Atlantis Plato](#)

Other Motifs, Figures,  
and Concepts Relevant  
for Children and Youth  
Culture

[Desires Knowledge Nature Storytelling Tale vs reality](#)

Further Reading

Cavalier, Stephen, *The World History of Animation*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2011.

Kjos, Berit, [Atlantis Rises Again. New Age Spirituality for New Millennium Children](#) (accessed: October 15, 2018).

Smith, Dave, ed., "Atlantis: the Lost Empire" (entry); in *Disney A to Z: The Official Encyclopedia*, 4th ed., Glendale: Disney Books, 2015.

Tasker, Yvonne, *The Hollywood Action and Adventure Film*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015.

Addenda

[Interview](#) with the creators.

Anna Mik, "Entry on: Atlantis: The Lost Empire by Gary Trousdale, Kirk Wise ", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Susan Deacy. *Our Mythical Childhood Survey* (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/512>. Entry version as of July 09, 2026.

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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016-2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.