

Atlantis

By Aaron Weissman

Carly. Psst! Hey! It's your favorite secret host here, from your favorite hopefully-still-secret podcast. Today was a wild adventure with some very unexpected turns. Let's just say that our search for one of the most famous lost cities of all time took us to someplace amazing. Yes. Minneapolis! Stick around to hear more. I'm Carly Q, and this is Who When Wow, Mystery Edition.

(THEME SONG)

Carly. As soon as I got to the office I was desperate to find Lewis ASAP. You might recall that we've been struggling to find the person who wrote us a letter saying they know we've been sneaking back in time.

Carol. Morning Carly!

Carly. (shouting) Hi Carol! Sorry, I'm just a little pumped up today.

Carol. No apologies, love the enthusiasm!

Carly. Then, Odie suggested we dig deeper into our evidence so I looked over everything we've learned, thought about it really hard and had an amazing new idea. Here's what I realized, the letter isn't actually handwritten, it's just in a special computer font, you know, typed words that look like handwriting. But that font is just not something people use very often. Maybe, if we could check to see who's been using it, it would narrow down our search?

(Soundbite of basement door closing.)

Carly. And thankfully, Lewis is on the Committee-Making Committee, so he can get access to the all computer programs used at BUTTHED. And first thing this morning I found him waiting for me at my desk.

Lewis. It's about time Carly Q.

Carly. Hi Lewis. What's the update? Oh, and hello to you too Nibbles!

(Soundbite of rat squeaking.)

Lewis. I did it. I looked through the database to see who's got that special handwriting font downloaded to their computers and it turned up fifty four people! I was thinking it was gonna be like, two!

Carly. Well, it does narrow it down from the entire workforce at BUTTHED, but

yeah, that's still a lot of suspects!

(Soundbite of rat squeaking.)

Carly. Not quite, Nibs!

Lewis. What's she saying?

Carly. She's worried we're gonna have to go through each of those fifty four suspects individually. But I actually thought this might happen, so last night I came up with a plan, we set a trap!

Lewis. A trap?!

(Soundbite of rat squeaking.)

Carly. No No, Not a mouse trap Nibs. I would never. A people trap. What if we email everyone on the list with a fake security message, something like, (deep voice) "Please be aware, BUTTHED security will soon be conducting a routine search of all company computers for any forbidden content."

Lewis. Carly, a type font that looks like handwriting isn't "forbidden content", it's totally allowed!

Carly. That is the beauty of the trap! If the letter writer thinks security is coming to look at their devices, maybe they'll get scared and delete the font from their computer. You know, erase the evidence! And since the font IS in fact allowed, no one is gonna think to delete it UNLESS they have something to hide.

Lewis. Omg, that's BRILLIANT! So all we need to do is send out this message and then check later to see if any of the fifty four suspects on the list delete the font.

Carly. Exactly! We high-fived or, we tried to. We missed a few times. We didn't quite get there but just then.

(Soundbite of a thumb drive drops down the vacuum tube.)

Carly and Lewis. A new time-sealed file!

Audio File. Event: In 1882, (Bleep) Minnesota (Bleep) The Antediluvian World (Bleep).

Carly. The Ante-de-who-dian What now?

Lewis. H-dad, help us out!

H-dad. H-dad's back powered by the power of love!

Carly. I plugged in the clues from the file. 1882, Minnesota, The Antediluvian World.

(Soundbite of beep)

Lewis. He's getting faster.

H-dad. This file most likely refers to a famous book about the lost city of Atlantis, written by a former U.S. Congressman from Minnesota Ignatius Donnelly.

Lewis. Ooo Atlantis.

H-dad. While the original legend of Atlantis dates back to the Greek philosopher Plato in 360 BCE, Donnelly's book from the 1880s is the basis for much of the myth as we know it today. Waves emoji. Water emoji.

Carly. Atlantis, yeah! I've definitely heard of that before. But what exactly is the legend?

H-dad. According to Plato, Atlantis was a powerful island empire that the ancient Greek gods sunk into the sea.

Carly. That doesn't sound good!

H-dad. Congressman Donnelly greatly expanded on these claims. He argued that the great flood from the Bible, famously told in the story of Noah's Ark, was the very same disaster that sunk Atlantis underwater.

Lewis. Oh, I get it. "The Antediluvian World." "Ante-" means before, and "diluvian" means flood. So his book title means, "the world before the flood."

Carly. Uh, someone's been working on their vocabulary lessons!

Lewis. Indubitably! H-dad, where actually is this mythical city of Atlantis?

H-dad. The location of Atlantis is the core of its mystery. Many have searched for it, but no concrete evidence of its existence has ever been found.

Carly. Well, that sounds like a challenge, if I ever heard one! Umm, maybe Atlantis was like an old-timey water park with a lazy river and big slides? Ooh, or maybe it's not so much a place as much as a state of mind? OR maybe it's near Atlanta, Georgia?

Lewis. Yeah, not sure any of those are right but I can't wait to explore! Listen, I'm gonna head back to my desk to send out our "security notice." Hopefully, we'll have our suspect by the end of the day.

Carly. Lewis went back upstairs, I got some work done myself, and in what seemed like the blink of an eye-

P.A Voice. Attention, Butthead employees. it's Mixto Mezze Mediterranean Mondays! That's right, the baba ghanoush is loose! .

(Soundbite of footsteps coming down the steps)

Carly. Nice.

Lewis. Lunch tiiiiime! Let's go find Atlantis! You think we'll see Aquaman?

Carly. I grabbed Nibbles and H-dad, and we took off for the elevator.

Carly and Lewis. Odie!

Odie. Hello and hello. How are we today?

Carly. So good! I filled Odie in on the little trap we set, and how excited we were to maybe finally be closing in on our letter writer.

Odie. Very exciting indeed.

Lewis. And we ALSO have an exciting new mystery. The lost city of Atlantis! And some guy from Minnesota who wrote about it, Ignatius Donnelly?

Odie. Ah yes, I'm familiar. He wrote quite the book about the "lost city." I suspect the period of when he was writing the book will be under the time seal, but you could go speak with him after it was published to ask about his claims.

Lewis. Great plan! Carly, tell her the rules so we can get out of here.

Carly. Oo okay! Be back by the end of lunchtime, and no changing the past.

Odie. Well said! Based on talking with Donnelly, you may want to jump back in time to check out potential Atlantis locations yourselves. Remember the time cloak function, which will make your clothes more appropriate for the time, and the translation function if you run into any foreign languages.

Carly. Oo love it. Let's get outta here!

Odie. Then just remember one last thing, the truth is out there.

(Soundbite of wind chimes.)

Carly. Wait. Like the X-Files?

Lewis. That old TV show from the 1990s?

Carly. Yeah! Or maybe an episode of Sesame Street? Cause the actual truth is I love both of those shooooooooows!

(Soundbite of elevator travel noises then thud.)

Carly. we made it! We're right outside a big old house in what I can only assume is Minnesota.

Nibbles. (sniffs) Lake water? Hockey pucks? Casseroles and extremely nice people? Smells like Minnesota to me!

Carly. The house had a nice big porch out front, and we could see a man sitting there reading a newspaper.

Lewis. Maybe that's Donnelly?

Carly. Yeah, let's go talk to him. Nibbles hid in my pack as we walked over, and sure enough. Hello there!

Donnelly. Hello, hello, you must be some local students coming to ask about my new book about Atlantis, no?

Carly. Uh, yes, we are students. We love to learn. Assuming you're Ignatius Donnelly?

Donnelly. Indeed I am. And there's nothing I love more than sharing what I've learned about Atlantis. Many people took Plato's writings about it to be a fable, but they are WRONG. It was real!

Carly and Lewis. Really?

Donnelly. Really! A really real island in the really real Atlantic Ocean. Many of the world's great religions reference a place just like it- the Garden of Eden, the Elysian Fields, Olympus, Asgard.

Lewis. Hey, I've heard of some of those!

Donnelly. Many cultures have similar versions of a perfect place where people lived in peace and happiness. Atlantis was the real place that inspired those tales.

Carly. And why has it never been found?

Donnelly. How could it? Do you have some special technology I'm not aware of for searching or scanning the ocean floor?

Lewis. Weeeeeeeell.

Donnelly. No, you will simply have to take my word for it. Atlantis sunk into the sea, and those who survived spread out to start ancient civilizations like the Greeks and the Mayans.

Carly. Right, right, right, but could you maybe be more specific about where, exactly, in the Atlantic Ocean the island would have been?

Lewis. Yeah, maybe like, longitude and latitude?

Donnelly. Oh, I see what this is. You're with those naysayers pointing to Thera and all that. Enough! I will not be bullied by these needling questions about "exactly where" and "longitude and latitude." Be gone!

(Soundbite of Carly and Lewis walking away.)

Lewis. Defensive much?

Carly. What was that he said at the end there? "Thera"? What's that?

Nibbles. Maybe we should ask H-dad?

Carly. We fired him up, and low and behold.

H-dad. Thera is an island in the Aegean Sea, near Greece, known today as Santorini. This island also appears on the Atlantis file, with a special note marked around the year 1600 BCE.

Lewis. 1600 BCE!? That's over three thousand years ago!

Nibbles. Then let's take the elevator back in time and go check it out!

Carly. We raced back to the elevator, punched in the coordinates, and - Thera here we goooo.

(Soundbite of elevator travel noises then thud.)

Carly and Lewis. Ooooh Thera.

Carly. We stepped out onto a beautiful island. We were on a paved road, and there was some kind of city off in the distance. The water all around us, and the clear blue sky overhead were gorgeous. Seagull!

Lewis. Look at our clothes! Old-timey tunics!

Carly. Well, we are in the land of the ancient Greeks. Tunic-mania!

Nibbles. Enough tunic talk! Let's go figure out what this place has to do with Atlantis!

Lewis. Sounds like someone's a little jealous she didn't get a tunic.

Nibbles. Am not! And it's actually called a "chiton"!

Carly. We started off towards the town.

Lewis. H-dad said this island, Thera, is in the Aegean Sea. That's part of the Mediterranean Sea which is NOT in the Atlantic Ocean.

Carly. But Donnelly said his naysayers "point to this island." Maybe there's an argument that Atlantis was actually here instead, and Donnelly doesn't like it cause it contradicts his theories?

Nibbles. Sounds plausible to me!

Carly. Just then we came across a man traveling along the road. He was carrying nets and poles, so I figured he was a fisherman.

Carly. Hi there, this might sound a little odd but any chance you know of a place called Atlantis?

Fisherman. "Atlantis?" Never heard of it.

Carly. Uh you're sure? Not even by another name?

Fisherman. How would I know that something I've never heard of goes by another name?

Carly. These ancient Greeks and their tricky philosophizing.

Lewis. Okay look, forget the name. We're looking for a big giant city. It would be world renowned.

Fisherman. (laughing) Well the only city around here is Akrotori just down the road. We've got paved streets and sewers sure. But world-renowed?

Carly. Okay, forget the city. What about a powerful empire that's maybe on the outs with the Gods? Like, maybe it's in danger of, say, sinking into the sea.

Fisherman: Isn't anything on the sea in danger of sinking into it?

Carly. Again with the philosophizing.

Fisherman. We're lucky. Our island here is right along the best sailing routes between Cyprus and Crete, so we have lots of trade. But that's far cry from powerful empire.

Lewis. Ok but.

Fisherman. I'm sorry, we have to be getting back to our fishing nets. Good luck finding your "Atlantis."

(Soundbite of fisherman laugh and walk off.)

Lewis. Okay, NOT helpful.

Carly. We decided to go check out the city ourselves. In a few minutes, we were there, and it was actually pretty impressive, compared to whatever I guess I would have expected an ancient Greek city to look like. Uh this is a real city considering we're three thousand years in the past.

Lewis. Beautiful.

Nibbles. Wow look at those murals! I think they're called Frescos!

Carly. Nibbles was right, many of the walls were covered in beautiful, elaborate paintings depicting life here by the seaside. And the fisherman was right about all the nice paved roads.

Lewis. Well, it's definitely a bustling little city. But it doesn't exactly seem like the epic metropolis Donnelly or Plato talked about.

Carly. Agreed. And this can't be the only city in Greece with roads and wall murals.

(Soundbite of H-dad beeps.)

H-dad. H-dad's back with some new info! Hashtag 411!

Carly. Yes! H-dad, what you got? Did this place somehow become Atlantis?!

H-dad. Extremely unlikely! Most modern scholars believe the entire Atlantis myth is based on a misunderstanding. Plato simply invented it in order to make a point about governance. The fictional Atlantis was just an example for Plato to illustrate bad ways that rulers govern cities.

Carly. Wait, it's all a myth about government?

H-dad. Affirmative! The modern-day belief that Atlantis might have been real is largely because of Donnelly's book, which scholars now regard as completely unfounded pseudoscience.

Lewis. AKA fake news?! Well, at least we had good instincts about that!

Carly. But what about this place, the island of Thera? Why was Donnelly so dismissive of it, what's the connection?

H-dad. Around the year 1600 BCE, the eruption of a giant underwater volcano destroyed massive parts of Thera island and decimated the community of Akrotiri.

Lewis. Oo a volcano.

H-dad. It's possible that, when Plato was writing 1300 years later, this historical event is what inspired the fictitious Atlantis and its "sinking into the sea."

Carly. Oh I track that. That makes sense.

Lewis. So Plato may have taken the actual history of a destroyed city and turned it into a fictional myth, all in order to make his point about bad governance?

Carly. Sounds like it!

Nibbles. Not that I'm not thrilled we figured this all out but I think we're all missing something here.

Carly and Lewis. What?!?

Nibbles. H-dad just said that a massive eruption destroyed this island. And that could happen anytime.

(Soundbite of rumbling.)

Carly and Lewis. Uh-oh.

Nibbles. Or, right now even. Run!

Carly. We started racing back for the elevator.

(Soundbite of rumbling and eruption.)

Carly. In the distance behind us, we could see huge explosions of lava suddenly shooting up out of the water. That volcano H-dad told us about appeared to be erupting at that very moment!

Everyone. AHHH!

Carly. We ran and ran and ran and ran. Have you ever tried to outrun a volcano eruption? Not easy. Get in, let's go!

Lewis. I'm not built for this much cardiooo.

(Soundbite of elevator travel noises then thud.)

Odie. Welcome back. Goodness, are you okay?

Carly. (out of breath) Fine! We are, fine.

Lewis. Close call with a bit of an underwater volcano eruption. You know, the usual.

Odie. And was that, Atlantis?

Carly. No, it was Akrotiri. It sounds like Atlantis was just a myth, if possibly inspired by real-life natural disasters like that volcano we just escaped.

Lewis. When Plato first wrote about it, he was just trying to make a point about what happens to badly governed cities. Like, for instance, that they get destroyed by sinking into the sea.

Odie. I see. And Donnelly?

Carly. Yeah, he made a whole bunch of sensationalized claims in his book about Atlantis, but he didn't really have anything to back it up. Nevertheless, we do have him to thank for turning an obscure bit of Plato's writing into a commonly known myth today.

Odie. Excellent work, you two. It seems it's just like I told you (Soundbite of wind chimes.) The truth is out there.

Lewis. Right! You meant that with enough hard work and critical thinking, it really is possible to get to the bottom of things.

Carly. Yes, definitely but I think it might have another meaning too. It's kind of a pun, because it could also mean the truth is "out there." You know, "wild or wacky or something you'd never believe in?"

Lewis. Wait, so the truth is "out there"?

Carly. Yeah, Yeah! The whole idea that most of what we "know" about Atlantis actually just comes from an 1880's Minnesota congressman who made it all up? That's pretty "out there." It's the last thing I would have expected!

Lewis. Honestly, same. Good call, Odie! And speaking of getting to the truth of things.

Carly. (gasp) The trap! Lewis raced upstairs to check his computer, and a few minutes later came racing back down.

(Soundbite of footsteps coming down the stairs.)

Lewis. Okay. This is gonna sound wild, but it worked! The trap worked!

Odie and Carly. No way! Really?!

Lewis. Yes! Out of all the fifty four people on our list, only one of them deleted the handwriting font. I think we finally found our suspect, right here working alongside us at BUTTHED!

Carly. None of my coworkers have been on my suspect list in months. I checked banking information, cell phone records, pie preferences. They were all clean! But somehow, one of them managed to sneak through. Because if we're right about this, then the person who wrote us that letter? The person who's been onto us this whole time? The person who started here as my work neighbor, right next to me in the basement? That's right the letter writer is none other than.

Lewis. AMBER from HR!

Odie. Really?

Carly. What?! Amber?! Really!? She's always been so nice to me. But I guess you never know?

Lewis. The truth is "out there," right?

Odie. I wonder what her game plan is. What is she after? Why would she send you that letter and then just not do anything for months?

Carly. I don't know, but by the toe of Agent Mudler, we are going to find out! We were all a little unnerved, but we agreed there was only one logical next step, We've gotta go confront her!

Lewis and Odie. Yeah! Let's get her!

Carly. Uh yeah, yes. We gotta think of a speech Lewis. A speech. We talked out a plan, and decided it'd be best to wait until tomorrow to bring it up. Which means that for me, it's gonna be one more day before we finally have this thing solved. But even still, WOW how cool to have actually finally landed on a suspect! Not to mention go searching for Atlantis and almost get blown to bits in a volcano eruption. Anyway, I can't wait to have our little letter mystery finally solved once and for all. We are so close! Until then, this is Carly Q, signing off. And remember, you never heard this!