

# Mystery Of The New Atlantis

By BRUCE W. BALL\*

The door to the office opened softly, and a bearded, stockily built man of a little less than middle age and wearing dungarees and sneakers stood before us. His bright blue eyes scanned our faces.

"My name is Mott; I am a citizen of Atlantis," he said gravely.

My father smiled. "The Lost Atlantis, I presume."

The man retained his dignified gravity. "A principality which a group of scientists have founded on fourteen small, unclaimed and hitherto uninhabited islands in the Caribbean, near the site of what we believe to have been that of the Lost Atlantis." His English was perfect, with only a suggestion of accent.

At the time, in the summer of 1937, I was a teen-ager helping my father operate his stamp business in Miami, Florida. Although my duties in the office were minimal, I enjoyed the work (as I still do), and despite my youth, my father never neglected to introduce me to the various customers who came to visit us and look over our stock. Our customers then, as now, were drawn from many paths of life. One customer was a United States Senator; another, having equal interest in the hobby and making equally good purchases was a brick layer. Doctors, lawyers, truck drivers, clergymen, and business men made their way to our offices in search of elusive items, so it was with no great surprise that we looked back into the blue eyes of the roughly dressed stranger.

"And these islands are located . . ." my father began.

"Not too far from Nassau." I have a small chart, and we noted the following statement printed below it: "The 1000 year search for the sunken empire started by the Vikings about 930 A.D. and terminated 1933 in the establishment of the Principality of Atlantis with the then 79 year old descendant of Leif Eriksen (a Norse Jarl, leader of the first white expedition to the American continent) as Christian I, Prince Regent of Atlantis."

"What do you want of us?" my father asked.

"It is about our mail service that I am calling on you," said Mr. Mott.

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\*Mr. Ball is a philatelist with offices in Miami.

"Our mail is routed through Miami. Would you be interested in some letters carried on our first flight from Odin, Atlantis to Miami?"

"Your principality . . . has issued postage stamps?"

"Certainly." The man took from his wallet five stamps — blue, buff, yellow, red and purple, bearing the portrait of an old lady under which was the name "Marie." They were in 5, 10, 25, and 50 "skaloj" denominations. The purple stamp bore the same picture and was for 1 "dalo" (100 skaloj, or 32¢ U.S.). We ordered the covers, paying Mr. Mott a few cents for the postage to carry them, and he departed.

Was he a crackpot? Was this all some sort of joke? Surely we didn't expect to receive the mail, but in a few days the letters were delivered, bearing the postmark, "Odin, Atlantis," also the postmark, "Miami Fla." The letters were handled by U.S. mail and delivered by postman to our office in downtown Miami. On the face of one envelope was printed the following: "Atlantis . . . The World's Richest Country in History and submerged (salvageable) interests. Radium Baths Made by Nature. Truly a Garden of Eden, with the Fountain of Youth." Another bore this message: "ATLANTIS SPEAKS! The Sunken Empire is Rising! The New Atlantis Talking Exploring Camera Sees All, Hears All, Finds All, Tells All, With Precision. From Dizzy Heights in the Air to Unlimited Depths in the Sea, It Records All. Its Evidence is Absolute, and in Natural Colors!" We were amused by this extravagant advertising, but primarily we were astounded that the mail was actually delivered. We awaited with interest the next visit of our friend Mr. Mott.

He came in one day soon after, bringing with him a copy of the *CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR* for November 18, 1935. An article in it was headed, "Search for the Lost Atlantis Widens."

"I supplied the information for this," said Mr. Mott proudly.

The article began: "Group of Danish explorers and natural scientists at Miami hunting for the elusive continent of tradition centers work in Caribbean Sea, issues stamps and money, and designs flag for the Principality of Atlantis." The fact that Plato (who first wrote of the Lost Continent of Atlantis submerged by earthquake and flood) located the mythical continent near the Strait of Gibraltar, apparently bothered Mr. Mott not at all.

It was on this visit that he showed us what purported to be his Atlantis passport which had been visaed by several near-by governments as well as by the Immigration Inspector at Miami. Later he gave us a photograph of himself taken as he stood by his automobile in a New Bruns-

wick, New Jersey street. The car bears an Atlantis license plate! Mr. Mott assured us that with this plate he had no difficulty in travelling through the United States.

Mr. Mott's visits became more frequent, and we looked forward to talking with him, for though he always appeared at the office roughly dressed, (I've just come off my ship, he would say), he was a cultured and interesting gentleman. While at first it was difficult to listen to him with a straight face, as time went on the bizzare nature of his statements was overlooked because of his apparent sincerity.

In December of 1937 he came up to see us, bursting with enthusiasm.

"We have rented an office on N.E. Second Avenue (Miami) where we are booking passengers for tours to Atlantis on the cruiser ABEL. As you know, I am a Danish sea captain. Tourists will visit our Hot Springs, inspect the remains of an ancient civilization, and enjoy excellent fishing. Why don't you take this cruise? It will be most enjoyable." He handed us small circulars advertising the trip.

In looking back, I often wonder why we didn't take the cruise. What would we have found, if anything? What would have happened?

Some of our friends, having met Mr. Mott in our offices, became so curious about this gentleman, they decided to invite him to be their guest at a meeting of the Miami Stamp Club, a social organization (still in existence), where member-collectors gather to discuss their hobby and trade stamps. While the invitation was apparently sincere, we had the suspicion the club members anticipated an hilarious evening. Mr. Mott accepted the invitation with enthusiasm, appearing at the meeting in a tuxedo and groomed to the standards of a diplomat. All he lacked was a red ribbon across his chest.

We took our friend to the club with more or less trepidation, feeling we were leading a very nice and very vulnerable lamb to the slaughter, for we knew that he would be grilled about his "principality," especially by an old gentleman member who had the reputation for getting at the heart of a subject by the shortest and most ruthless route. We had no need to fear. Mr. Mott never lost control of the situation. He gave a short talk on Atlantis, and at its conclusion answered all questions politely and at length. No one could trip him up; he had a plausible answer to every query. After firing a barrage of questions at Mr. Mott, and apparently accepting his answers as satisfactory, the old gentleman mentioned finally sat down, mopping his brow. Mr. Mott told us that he had had a wonderful evening.

In April of 1938 we received a letter from our Atlantis friend telling us of the death of their "revered emperor," and saying that they were continuing with plans for a *world's fair* to be held in 1941. Other letters and notes followed from time to time, the last being from San Francisco shortly before the attack on Pearl Harbor. We never saw Mr. Mott again.

Who was Mr. Mott? An out-and-out fraud? But apparently he had nothing to gain from his hoax, if he were a fraud. He was selling nothing of value, asking no favors, seeking no loans. Was Atlantis the brainchild of one man who used it to intrigue and puzzle his friends? Or was it perhaps of a more serious significance? Recalling that Mr. Mott and his associates were working in the Caribbean area between 1934 and 1940, friends have suggested that this would have been excellent camouflage for agents of an unfriendly power interested in our Caribbean defenses. However, we prefer to remember Mr. Mott as an entertaining visitor even though his stories were so fantastic that sometimes I need the tangible evidence of letters, covers, stamps, maps, newspaper clippings, circulars and other mementos which I hold to assure myself that all this actually happened.