

Imaginary Peaks: The Riesenstein Hoax and Other Mountain Dreams

Katie Ives

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Spurred by the infamous Riesenstein Hoax, Katie Ives, editor of *Alpinist* magazine and a passionate climber, investigates cartographers' art through history, unveiling the mysterious imaginary peaks, blank spaces, and nonexistent land masses that have appeared on maps, luring explorers, seafarers, and climbers with promises of adventure and glory, and rewarding some with death for their efforts.

In June of 1962, *Summit* magazine published a story and photographs of a yet-unknown mountain range, thousands of feet high and with an unusual configuration of sheer rock cliffs, stacked spires, and ridges, its dark shadows and hanging glaciers hinting at the skyline of some cold, stormy extraterrestrial city. The story, with its challenge to climbers to be the first to ascend its peak, implied a location in British Columbia, and whetted the appetites of mountaineers to dominate this unknown gem. But those with an intimate familiarity with that landscape suspected something fishy.

In tracking the origin of the mysterious Riesenstein Hoax, Ives's book reveals many other anomalies, erasures, and apocryphal features that confounded and inspired explorers of land and sea throughout the ages. In the process, it provokes questions about the degree to which human imagination, imperialistic urges, hubris, and even the playful desire to pull one off on others have affected what is assumed to be an accurate portrayal of the world.

With its in-depth research, stories and legends, personal interviews, and Ives's own intimate knowledge of the psychology of climbers, *Imaginary Peaks* is an engaging look into what compels people to risk their lives to be the first to conquer a demanding ascent. And given humankind's insatiable drive to explore and challenge the species' perceived limitations, it's likely that the dreams, myths, and even hoaxes that inflame that desire will continue to be part of the adventure.

KRISTINE MORRIS (November / December 2021)

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