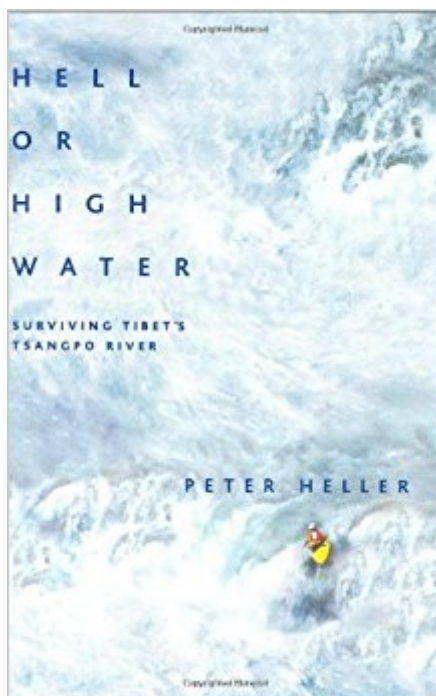


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# Hell Or High Water: Surviving Tibet's Tsangpo River



## Synopsis

A grand adventure—an elite kayaking team’s heroic conquest of the world’s last great adventure prize: Tibet’s Tsangpo River. The Tsangpo Gorge in southeastern Tibet has lured explorers and adventurers since its discovery. Sacred to the Buddhists, the inspiration for Shangri La, the Gorge is as steeped in legend and mystery as any spot on earth. As a river-running challenge, the remote Tsangpo is relentlessly unforgiving, more difficult than any stretch of river ever attempted. Its mysteries have withstood a century’s worth of determined efforts to explore its length. The finest expedition paddlers on earth have tried. Several have died. All have failed. Until now. In January 2002, in the heart of the Himalayan winter, a team of seven kayakers launched a meticulously planned assault of the Gorge. The paddlers were river cowboys, superstars in the universe of extreme kayaking who hop from continent to continent ready for the next death-defying pursuit. Accompanying them was author Peter Heller. A world-class kayaker in his own right, Heller has logged countless river miles and several major first descents. He joined the Tsangpo Expedition as a member of the ground support team and official expedition journalist, and was also granted the exclusive opportunity to write the book about the descent. *Hell or High Water* is that book—greatly expanded from his coverage for *Outside* magazine. Filled with history, white-knuckle drama, and mutiny in one of the world’s most storied—and remote—locations, *Hell or High Water* is as riveting as any of the great epic adventures throughout history. Publication coincides with the release of a documentary about the expedition by National Geographic.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Dedicated kayakers have long had their hearts set on the Tsangpo River, which cuts a gorge through Tibet many times deeper and steeper than the Grand Canyon; successfully navigating it is akin to snowboarding down Everest. The last major expedition of the 1990s ended when one of the kayakers drowned in the raging currents, but in 2002 a group led by adventure filmmaker Scott Lindgren, one of the extreme sport's most prominent heroes, gave it another shot. Heller was assigned to cover the expedition for *Outside* and, despite having completely worn out the cartilage in one hip, he decided to go for it. The story takes him to one of the most beautiful spots on the planet, still almost entirely untouched, but also subjects him to the ugliest aspects of human nature. Heller is unflinchingly honest about the hostility he faced from Lindgren and his companions, who openly attack the journalist for "getting rich" from their story, as well as the resentment that begins to well inside him at their condescension. Meanwhile, the locals hired to carry the equipment realize they have the upper hand and start extorting more money for their services. The drama on shore, however, is easily matched—sometimes surpassed—by the action on the river, which includes a few chilling brushes with death. Heller nimbly blends the history of the region into his gripping modern trek, as the crew lives up to the legacy of the great explorers before them. An offhand remark made to the paddlers early in the journey—that their story could be the kayaking equivalent of *Into Thin Air*—has come true in the best possible way. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

A river in Tibet called the Yarlung Tsangpo has been the stage for recent works about extreme kayaking, such as *The Last River: The Tragic Race for Shangri-la* by Todd Balf (2001). Heller knew Doug Gordon, the kayaker whose 1998 death was central to that book. Amid this narrative of a 2002 expedition, Heller reaches for explanations for why kayakers risk their lives on phenomenally dangerous rivers. Bragging rights to a first descent are one reason he offers, and the ineffable euphoria of intense experience is another. Whatever the temptations of radical rafting, Heller's tale—while reporting the white-water expertise of expedition members—focuses more on the group's logistics; on its recurrent haggling with porters; and, as a subplot, on the animosity directed toward the author by the team leader, Scott Lindgren. (They argued about Heller's book contract.) The author will occasionally grind a gear in his transitions between cultural passages, immediate events, and poetical evocations of river-gorge vistas, but he also stokes plenty of the action that propels thrill-seeking readers. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

This kayak expedition follows the trail of famed plant explorer Frank Kingdon Ward. I read all of

Ward's books and now I am wrapping up all of Heller's. Heller is readable and engaging regardless of topic. He understands our thoughts and contradictions, noble and otherwise. He tells a great story. The Painter is my favorite Heller work if you want to sample the first time. However, if kayaking or Himalayan trekking is just your fare you will find this most satisfying. As with all his works Heller gets the reader immersed, this time literally in the icy, thundering river of the Himalayas. I tend to read every work when I discover an author of this talent. I read all of Kingdon Ward's books nearly 20 years ago, and now Heller has brought me back to the Himalayas the only way I ever want to travel that treacherous terrain -- by reading. I got to know the intricacies of the expedition and its porters and the human side of inhumanly skilled kayakers who make the story notable. So grab your paddle and read this one or your brush and read The Painter a five star novel. Or visit the surf or simply go apocalyptic. Heller offers it all in his library.

I'm a whitewater kayaker so I may have more interest in this story than people who don't kayak. Though I don't know the men who were on the expedition I do know of many of them and have read of them and/or seen them in kayaking videos. That being said, If you enjoy adventure you might enjoy this book even if you aren't a kayaker. There is a lot of real life drama and adventure both on and off the water. Hell or High Water may be the most engaging non-fiction book that I've ever read.

Thrilling whitewater story and beautiful description of the landscape of the Tibetan plateau.

In 2002, a group of world class kayakers went into the deepest gorge on earth, the Tsangpo gorge, in Tibet. They successfully kayaked virgin waters of epic power in some of the most awe inspiring landscape in the world, traveling on foot with the aid of porters and guides. The story is told by a kayaker who accompanied the trip but did not kayak it, making it a series of snapshots. His writing style sometimes detracts from the flow of the simple facts. Amazing story.

For a NON white water person the book describes the adrenaline addiction, self challenges, skills necessary to tackle the Tsangpo River, probably the most dangerous and inaccessible river in the world. It describes the physical challenges, political and cultural differences of sherpas and carriers. It describes the kayakers intrusion into sacred territory and the needless aggression of China over Tibet's indigenous people. Insight into high-achievers, and an unseen part of the world.

An exciting adventure story describing some harrowing kayaking feats on an awesome river in Tibet. It was often difficult to understand his descriptions of these feats though. A large map would have been useful and it may help to be an expert kayaker.

This is an adventure book, and Peter Heller tells his story so directly that I felt like I had joined the party. It's a really fascinating, heart-racing story that reminds us that we can take on incredible challenges, face the hurdles, and achieve our goals. It's really wonderful.

I love Heller's books but I found this early effort way too filled with jargon and unnecessary detail. I eagerly anticipated an engrossing story about running those untamed rapids but felt the book wandered -- especially parts about the conflict between the author and some of the group leaders.

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