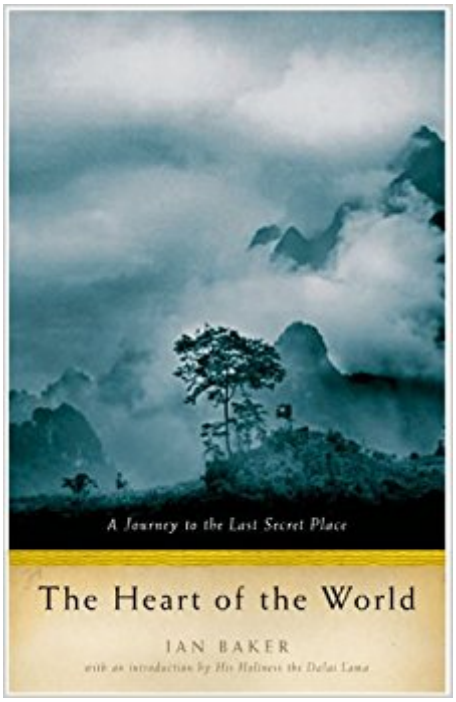
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The Heart Of The World: A Journey To The Last Secret Place



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Synopsis

The myth of Shangri-la originates in Tibetan Buddhist beliefs in beyul, or hidden lands, sacred sanctuaries that reveal themselves to devout pilgrims and in times of crisis. The more remote and inaccessible the beyul, the vaster its reputed qualities. Ancient Tibetan prophecies declare that the greatest of all hidden lands lies at the heart of the forbidding Tsangpo Gorge, deep in the Himalayas and veiled by a colossal waterfall. Nineteenth-century accounts of this fabled waterfall inspired a series of ill-fated European expeditions that ended prematurely in 1925 when the intrepid British plant collector Frank Kingdon-Ward penetrated all but a five-mile section of the Tsangpo's innermost gorge and declared that the falls were no more than a "religious myth" and a "romance of geography." The heart of the Tsangpo Gorge remained a blank spot on the map of world exploration until world-class climber and Buddhist scholar Ian Baker delved into the legends. Whatever cryptic Tibetan scrolls or past explorers had said about the Tsangpo's innermost gorge, Baker determined, could be verified only by exploring the uncharted five-mile gap. After several years of encountering sheer cliffs, maelstroms of impassable white water, and dense leech-infested jungles, on the last of a series of extraordinary expeditions, Baker and his National Geographic-sponsored team reached the depths of the Tsangpo Gorge. They made news worldwide by finding there a 108-foot-high waterfall, the legendary grail of Western explorers and Tibetan seekers alike. The Heart of the World is one of the most captivating stories of exploration and discovery in recent memory-an extraordinary journey to one of the wildest and most inaccessible places on earth and a pilgrimage to the heart of the Tibetan Buddhist faith.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

...more than just a gung-ho adventure tale...Baker went hunting the sacred, not the gaudy trappings of geological fame. -- Men’s Journal, November 2004

Ian Baker has lived in Kathmandu, Nepal, and been a student of Tibetan Buddhism for more than twenty years. He studied fine arts, literature, and comparative religion at Middlebury College, Oxford University, and Columbia University. He has written several books on Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism, including The Tibetan Art of Healing, Celestial Gallery, and The Dalai Lama’s Secret Temple: Tantric Wall Paintings from Tibet. He is also the coauthor of Tibet: Reflections from the Wheel of Life and has contributed articles to Explorers Journal and National Geographic magazine.

I simply can’t get enough of this book. I’ve read it twice and am about to start my third reading. Baker’s writing is magical as I would imagine from his YouTube posts, he is as well. I have embraced his outlook on my many travels to Asia to study martial arts. And, by maintaining a meditative, open mind, perspectives are revealed that, I am confident, wouldn’t otherwise to the uninitiated. I am about to complete my 5th book on taekwondo; this one on making our seventh martial pilgrimage to the Land of the Morning Calm...Korea. I have been inspired by this book to emulate a similar literary model where vista, both of substance and spiritual, abound. Read Heart of the World...you will see.

This is a great book! It goes very well with Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia by Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, although the latter does contain a few factual errors. If one has the stomach for it, I also recommend, in conjunction with Baker’s book, reading Elizabeth English’s Vajrayogini (but, warning: English’s book is dry and technical, although a real accomplishment in scholarship).

This is one of the best books I have read in a long time. It is a combination adventure story, philosophical treatise, personal search for meaning in life, and a wonderful book about indigenous Tibetans. I think this is one of the few books that I have read that I will read again, because I know there is more I will get out of it. Ian Baker’s many attempts to "discover" the hidden waterfalls on the Tsangpo river form the core of the book, but he is also searching for the truth behind many of the myths of local Tibetan Buddhist beliefs in the Tsangpo region. He leads expeditions with a colorful character list eccentric westerners, and has dealings with Buddhist lamas, local hunters, Chinese

bureaucrats, and more. A great read!

And you thought Shambala didn’t exist! This was a great, real-life, modern-day adventure story! The book is entertaining on several levels; Ian reveals much of the enigmatic history and culture of Tibetan Buddhism, gives a great overview of the late 19th century search for the fabled falls of the Tsangpo river, and his personal account of several expeditions to find those same falls in the late 20th century. He presents his quest in both physical and spiritual contexts with an entertaining and sincere style. It’s remarkable that there was still such a hard-to-reach, virtually untouched segment of the world left to be explored at the end of the 20th century! Excellent book!

This book is amazing. I am thankful for adventurous souls. This book is true adventure of discovery of hidden places and adventure for the soul. Let’s pray the Chinese respect the sacredness of Pemko.

A wonderful and exciting trip through uncharted territory. For those who are interested in reading about survival in hostile territory, this is a great true tale. Mixing history, spirituality and traversing tough terrain.

I struggled with the star rating for this book. As a student of Buddhism I was intrigued. Baker’s knowledge of scripture, Buddhist ritual and Western literature is amazing. His one pointed determination to reach the heart of the Tsangmo is to be admired. I raced through this book day after day to see what was going to happen next.. It was a very interesting read.I kept feeling as if there was something missing. It wasn’t his writing style, he is an accomplished wordsmith....then it suddenly occurred to me.... most of his characters had no depth. I want to know about more than the history of the quest and the geography and that he struggled through difficult terrain. I wanted to know about the numerous porters who went with him. Who were these people of the Tsangpo? I wanted to know about his companions. I wanted to know more about his and other’s feelings and thoughts, I wanted to feel his heart beating through the work. For instance in his first adventure there was a woman named Jill who suffered right along with him. We know nothing of her. In the second part all of a sudden they are without their glued on Chinese escort ...no explanation until they are into their 3rd or fourth adventure. Then it is mentioned in passing. He gets better in the second adventure, but in the third lapses back into his cerebral intellectual form.... In the second there is a great story taken from the diary of one of his companions about how a Lama who has

decided to go with them navigates a particularly difficult obstacle on the path. I would have liked to have had more of that.He speaks of love and compassion, but I don't see him ACTING with love and compassion. His poetic knowledge and depth of scholasticism is awe inspiring, but I would like to feel his heart. That is the purpose of exploring The Heart of the World. None the less I do recommend this as an interesting and compelling read.In terms of the bad review that someone wrote about the Nepali officials finding artifacts, I would take it as a piece of straw. Baker is a practicing Buddhist who has lived in Nepal for years. There are all sorts of ritual items Tibetan Buddhists use including various bones and paintings Baker has studied with many teachers and Tibetans who most probably gave him those items. Additionally, it is likely that Tibetans when he was in Tibet gave him items for safe keeping as the Chinese continue to destroy everything Tibetan. Baker without question is a Tibetan Buddhist scholar .Things are not so good in Nepal right now. The Maoists are gaining more and more control. It may be that Baker's assistant was being harassed by the Maoists, who are not keen on having Westerners in Nepal, so he was forced to "turn in Baker" as a thief to save his own skin. This is very, very unfortunate. We in the West ignore what is happening in this part of the world and it may well end up being to our own detriment. Baker stated he has pecchas (texts) that monks had smuggled out of Tibet. If the Maoists confiscate these scriptures it will be a very sad day for all of us.[...]

This was one of the best, if not the best, I've ever read.

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