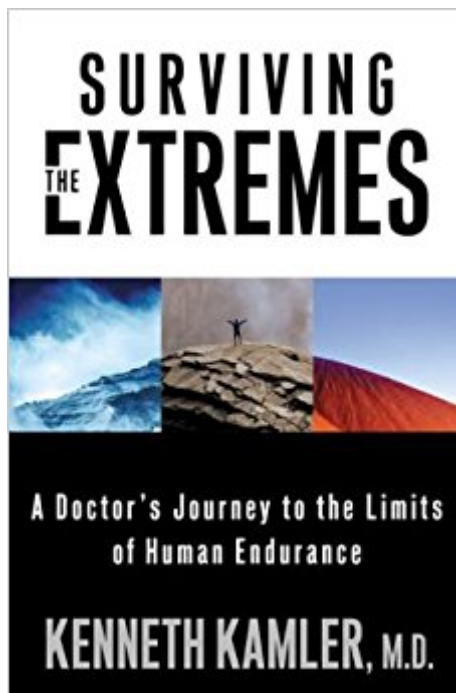




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# Surviving The Extremes: A Doctor's Journey To The Limits Of Human Endurance



## Synopsis

Physiological constraints confine our bodies to less than one-fifth of the earth's surface. Beyond that fraction lie the extremes. What happens when we go to them? Dr. Kenneth Kamler has spent years observing exactly what happens. A vice president of the legendary Explorers Club, he has climbed, dived, sledded, floated, and trekked through some of the most treacherous and remote regions in the world. A consultant for NASA, Yale University, and the National Geographic Society, he has explored undersea caves, crossed the frozen Antarctic wastelands, and stitched a boy's hand back together while kneeling in knee-deep mud. He was the only doctor on Everest during the tragic expedition documented in Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air* and helped treat its survivors. Kamler has devoted his life to investigating how our bodies respond to "environmental insults"-a nice way of saying the things that can kill us-and watched while some succumbed to them and others, sometimes miraculously, overcome them. Words like "extreme" and "survival" have lost some of their value from overuse and media hype. By showing us what happens when life itself is at stake, and the body's capacities put to their greatest test, this book reminds us what they truly mean. Divided into six sections-jungle, open sea, desert, underwater, high altitude, and outer space-*Surviving the Extremes* uses first-hand testimony and documented accounts to illustrate what happens in environments where our instinctive survival strategies must become fully engaged. These stories reveal how infinitely complex are the workings of the human body-and also how heartbreakingly fragile. At the heart of this book is a quest for the source of our will to survive and the haunting question of why some can, and others cannot, summon its awesome and nearly mystical power at their moment of greatest need. Surgeon, explorer, and masterful storyteller, Kamler takes us to the farthest reaches of the earth as well as into the uncharted territory within the human brain. *Surviving the Extremes* is a scientific nail-biter no reader will forget.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Medical case studies can be fascinating to read, full of drama, heroism, and sometimes tragedy. Most doctors' tales take place in clinics or hospitals, but those pedestrian settings are not for Kenneth Kamler, who practices medicine outside, patching people up with surprising success under harrowing conditions. *Surviving the Extremes* starts with open-air surgery in the steamy jungles of the River, moves to disturbingly detailed descriptions of the many ways humans can die at sea, and from there takes white-knuckled readers through the rest of Earth's extreme environments. Krakauer fans will gasp at the book's best chapter, covering the high-altitude medical feats Kamler has performed on Mt. Everest and other peaks. "No course in medical school taught me the proper mixture of oxygen, IV fluids, and Tibetan chants to treat a subdural hematoma in below-zero temperatures on a 3-mile-high glacier," Kamler writes. Instead, he has learned the fine art of adventure doctoring by doing it, and in the process, he's won fans among the world's most prominent risk-takers. Through it all, Kamler remains fascinated by the human body's ability to heal under horrifically dangerous conditions. His medical adventures are inspiring and thrilling, as well as occasionally bloody and disgusting. In short, perfect stories of human survival. --Therese Littleton

Ever since Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, books about human survival have captured readers' imagination. Add this book to the list. Kamler is no office-room doctor, preferring to use his skills on survival missions. As he puts it in his prologue, "I practice medicine where I don't belong." He takes the reader along on his explorations-be they on the or on Mt. Everest. While on the former, he used his medical techniques to save locals; on the latter, he saved climbers, including some of those threatened during the ill-fated 1996 climb chronicled by Krakauer. But Kamler's book is far more than just a story of his own explorations. He uses his journey as a launching point for investigating the nature of survival. In a style reminiscent of Oliver Sacks, he details remarkable stories of human endurance in adverse conditions-adrift at sea in a raft, lost in an unknown desert-while simultaneously educating the reader in the science of survival. For Kamler, the secret lies in the brain, which provides the key to survival: "If the will is there, the brain initiates actions that are appropriate responses to the environmental stress." Even readers who aren't survivalists

themselves will find their brains stimulated by Kamlers fluid writing and lively stories. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Good read,

This book is so fascinating I was in awe. It is written so well and took me places I will never go and never want to go. So little we know about our bodies, the planet, the struggles extremists endure and how tough, yet fragile we are.

Really enjoyed this book. Found all the aspects of his journeys intriguing and enjoyable. The book is teaching me things I never knew. I like his first hand accounting of his extraordinary travels!

A scientific thriller and adventure book in one! My wife bought me this book in 2008 so I am only 1 year late in writing a review (actually opinion). I reread it last month so the details are still fresh. First off, the writing is superior in style and content. In fact, some of the lines in the book feel as if they were composed more for a classic piece of literature than a book on survival. Next, the credentials of Dr. Kenneth Kamler - surgeon and explorer - are beyond dispute, therefore what he writes, I truly believe. His education and experience provides him with a unique voice in this genre. I really appreciated his behind the curtain look at different indigenous cultures. This greatly added to the book. The book is divided into six sections: 1. Jungle 2. High seas 3. Desert 4. Underwater 5. High Altitude 6. Outer Space Using firsthand, documented accounts, these tales show us how complex and sadly fragile the human body actually is. At its essence, this book gives us a broad stroke view of the source of the will to survive. It opens the door for us to peer into and question why some survive and others perish far too soon. Tapping into this knowledge and becoming aware of the fine line between success and failure should benefit everyone. Indeed, the lessons in this book can be used in other areas of our lives. I would like to also recommend *The Survivors Club: The Secrets and Science that Could Save Your Life* and *Extreme Encounters: How It Feels to Be Drowned in Quicksand, Shredded by Piranhas, Swept Up in a Tornado, and Dozens of Other Unpleasant Experiences*--I hope you find this review helpful. Michael L. Gooch

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