



Surfing the Khumbu

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About Kadrey:

Richard Kadrey is a novelist, freelance writer, and photographer based in San Francisco. Kadrey's first novel, *Metrophage*, was published in hardcover in 1988 by Victor Gollancz Ltd., and went on to various other American and foreign printings in paperback. Mac Tonnies' *Cyberpunk/Postmodern Book Reviews* calls *Metrophage* "one of the quintessential 1980s cyberpunk novels," going on to describe "a gritty acid-trip through an ultraviolent L.A. where nothing is what it seems... . Alongside novels such as [William Gibson's] *Neuromancer* and Lewis Shiner's debut novel *Frontera*, *Metrophage* helped establish the cyberpunk aesthetic: relentless, paranoid and playfully cynical." Kadrey's second novel, *Kamikaze L'Amour*, is described by the same source as "mesmerizing... a surreal (and distinctly Ballardian) account of synesthesia and mutant desire set in the jungle-choked ruins of L.A." Kadrey's short story *Carbon Copy: Meet the First Human Clone* was filmed as *After Amy*. The publisher website, Amazon booksellers, and other sources list a July 15, 2007 publication date for Kadrey's next book, *Butcher Bird: A Novel Of The Dominion* (Night Shade Books). Other works include collaborative graphic novels and over 50 published short stories. His non-fiction books as a writer and/or editor include *The Catalog of Tomorrow* (Que/TechTV Publishing, 2002), *From Myst to Riven* (Hyperion, 1997), *The Covert Culture Sourcebook* and its sequel (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993 and 1994); Kadrey also hosted a live interview show on Hotwired in the 1990s called *Covert Culture*. He was an editor at print magazines *Shift* and *Future Sex*, and at online magazines *Signum* and *Stim*. He has published articles about art, culture and technology in publications including *Wired*, *Omni*, *Mondo 2000*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *SF Weekly*, *Ear*, *Artforum*, *ArtByte*, *Bookforum*, *World Art*, *Whole Earth Review*, *Reflex*, *Science Fiction Eye*, and *Interzone*. Source: Wikipedia

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Anna was covered in diamonds. That's how she felt as she trudged down the glacier. Ice had formed within seconds on her skin-tight environment suit, frosting Anna with jewels. As she moved, her skin and the suit began their chemical conversation, exchanging hormone, blood comp, skin integrity and body temperature data. A quick read off her wrist screen told her that, despite the rough landing, her body was stable. The frost slid off her in sheets as the suit injected time-release thyroid-stimulators through her skin to kick up her body temperature.

She was in the Himalayas, making her way down the western side of Everest, from Kala Pattar through the rocky cut carved out by the Khumbu Glacier. She stayed that night in the ice fall, setting up camp among the vertical flutes which rose like frigid, pale-blue stalagmites from the Khumbu. A few shots of expansion foam between the flutes made a cozy ice cave. And just in time. The wind was picking up. Between the ice and the blowing mist, she'd be invisible to any surveillance cams or spy sats overhead. Tucked warm into a sleeping bag of honeycombed Thermalon, Anna felt right at home.

She dreamed of flying, of coming down in a long, looping descent from the sky into a city. Random streets from different cities recombined into one uber-city. New York. Washington. Beijing. Sao Paulo. Tokyo. It was her recurring nightmare. Anna hated cities. Hated being locked up, cocooned in all that concrete and steel. She lived in Montana, on the edge of an old growth forest. Wolves came to her door and she fed them by hand. They knew she wasn't one of them, but she wasn't quite human, either. That didn't matter in the wilderness. In the city, it did.

Anna had dropped onto Everest in a drone after being ejected from a low-altitude stealth skimmer. The drone had no engine, but a single powerful propeller, powered by a spring-wound memory-metal mechanism, gave her a little more maneuverability than a chicken in a tornado. It was a rush all the way down. It took all of Anna's training and discipline not to whoop the whole way onto the ice. The drone was a graphite skeleton, more Archaeopteryx than Boeing. The body was wrapped in bullet-proof nylon so thin that when Anna pressed her face against it, she could see through. Extruded from the bio-hacked sacs of a thousand gold-orb spiders, the nylon was light as air and stronger than steel. It was sublime. As a kid, Anna had been a solo ice climber and a glider pilot, loving anything that took her up high or got her moving fast.

Anna's eyes snapped open. She looked at her wrist. She'd been asleep for a couple of hours. The wind had stopped outside. From her pack, she

pulled a handful of ant bots and tossed them out onto the ice. They swarmed away from her, in all directions. Anna closed her eyes and looked.

Her family and what few friends she made over the years always obsessed about the dangers of her desires. They never came close to understanding. There was no danger. There was just the next handhold. And where there was no danger, there was no fear. Just exhilaration. Her family and friends would just shake their heads, feet locked firmly and sensibly to the Earth.

Anna's skin-tight smart-fiber suit was electro-chemically "wired" into her central nervous system. Video signals from the ant bots— each an autonomous micro-cam on energetic little legs— gave her a good view of the surrounding landscape, from the visual range up through the infrared. It was the end of the storm season, and the valley was empty. Anna went outside to have a real look.

The Himalayan sky glimmered with a million stars, and the Milky Way smeared through the middle. Anna closed her eyes and swallowed her vision (that's how show it felt) into her body. In the right state, Anna could tap into the optical sensors in the fabric of her suit. It was like one big panoramic eye. It always took some getting used to, seeing three hundred and sixty degrees. The first time she'd tried to walk that way, she'd thrown up. But she got good at it quickly and the Langley spy boys loved her for it. That's why they sent her on assignments like this. Human back-up still beat the best AI. Anna was one of the few who could not only handle herself anywhere, but lived for it.

When she had a visual of the valley, Anna told the system to overlay the landscape with a contour grid, then code it with contrasting colors for elevation. She had a really good view, then. But that was just for a GPS reference. What Anna wanted was up, and when she panned her panoramic eye into the sky, she felt like she was falling into the stars.

Not yet, she thought. Not yet.

She bought out the microwave dish, a compact and powerful little device, about the size of a hubcap. There was more power and satellite data packed into that little concave slab of hardwired ceramic than in most countries. Anna pointed it at a designated point in the sky and clicked the dish on.

Heaven lit up like a Disneyland aurora. Technicolor lightning spread across the horizon as every object above her, natural and manmade, suddenly had a color-coded ID tag, and a line tracking its progress across the night sky. There was so much up there. And most of it was junk,

Anna thought. Parts from trashed space stations. Burned-out com-sats that didn't have the courtesy to fall quickly into a fatal orbit. The tons of wreckage from the pointless US-China kill-sat battles, a kind of glorified Robot Wars in geo-synch orbit.

All that garbage up there, and here I am. A few shitty meters up Everest. It looked to Anna as if she could head back up the main climbing route, grab onto one of those crossed grid points and start climbing. Maybe hitch a ride on the dead carcass of an old Russian spy sat, and never come back. Sky-surf into a black hole...

One of the specs in the sky winked at her. A red dot in a golden circle. Anna kicked into work mode. She double-checked the satellite's position and speed off the dish. It was her target, swinging by in orbit at exactly the designated time. Pulling two small brushed-aluminum cases from her pack, Anna ran her ring finger lightly down a seam in the front of her environment suit. The artificial skin peeled back from her chest, sealing itself, increasing her internal body temp to compensate for the exposed skin. Anna ran her middle finger down her sternum. A slit opened moistly in her chest. Anna tugged the slit open with her fingers, probing for the internal ports. When she found them, she pulled a line from the dish antenna and jacked in. Then she pulled a pre-loaded software stick from one of the aluminum cases and loaded the program into her system. When that was done, Anna took a software stick from the second case, her personal case, and loaded that, too. Then she waited.

When Anna was a girl, a few of the old-fashioned wooden rollercoasters were still working in dilapidated amusement parks around Texas and Oklahoma. She'd loved the click-click-click as the rollercoaster car rose for that first big drop. That's what this moment was always like for her. Going higher, waiting for the drop. It was all about the drop.

The dish and the satellite synched in and Anna was mentally blasted from the glacier up through a sea of orbital data. It took a minute for her senses to catch up with her. Locking in on the correct satellite, she noted that the coding looked Indian, but was overlaid with something else. Probably whatever program had hijacked the thing and was using it for... Anna didn't know what anyone would do with a shanghaied Indian spy sat. The boys in Langley never told her things like that. They just wanted her to make contact, download as much data as she could and bring the thing down, so no one else could use it or know that they'd been there.

The first part of the assignment was the usual dull wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am data extraction. It was the last part that Anna lived for. She

injected a worm into the satellite's navigation system, then gave the bird an order to change position. The confused satellite, its navigation system getting dumber by the second, didn't know how to respond. It began to drop from orbit. Fast.

Anna then injected her personal software into the system, waking the satellite up again, and hooking herself into the Langley boys' tracking system. She reached out her senses and wrapped herself in data. The satellite was picking up vibrations as it fell from orbit. When it touched the outer atmosphere, its skin began to heat up.

Click-click-click went the rollercoaster.

The satellite was tumbling, and Anna was tumbling along with it, her mouth agape, her rapid breath freezing in the air in front of her blind eyes. Her vision was overhead, looking both down at the earth and up at her satellite body falling through space.

She watched herself fall from a hundred tracking points simultaneously. The data from the tracking stations and other satellites was translated by her software into a 3D contour map in her head. It was like the best porn in the world. She was the satellite. She was surfing the sky, her skin on fire. She was flying.

Click-click-click, then the drop.

Her senses were overwhelmed by the heat, the vibrations, the alarms from sky traffic systems all over the world.

Click-click-click. Over the top, daddy.

Her satellite senses were off the chart. The satellite— her body— was shredding as she cut through the atmosphere, faster than a bullet, shaking, coming apart.

Anna screamed once and it echoed across the valley.

Later, gathering up her equipment, Anna changed into ordinary trekking gear. She'd sneak into one of the little towns at the base of the mountain and blend in with the other trekkers and climbers. She wondered how far her scream had been heard. She made a mental note to bring her kickboxing mouthpiece next time. With all Anna's training and discipline, her vices sometimes got the better of her. Not that it was her fault. It's the way the Langley boys wired her up. They knew she was a speed junkie. How was she not going to take advantage of the biggest adrenaline rush of all time? But the orgasms, those were a surprise. "Little deaths," someone called them, and they were right. How many times had she gone down in blazing satellites, crashing jets or burning spy drones? Every one another little death.

Anna wondered sometimes if she was the real experiment. Maybe all these spy missions and secret sabotage jobs were really just excuses to let her indulge her taste for sensations lived through machines. Maybe she was the first of a new kind of human, one who truly embraced the organic and the inorganic. A silicon Eve? More like the silicon Lilith, she thought.

Anna hoisted her pack onto her back and started down the mountain, toward a town her wrist map marked as Lukla. Behind her, the expansion foam cave was already beginning to flake apart. By nightfall, the wind would carry off the last scraps and leave no trace that she'd been there. As she walked, her suit checked her blood for signs of altitude sickness and lowered her thyroid activity so that she wouldn't overheat.

It was hard, Anna thought, living in machines and flesh at the same time. The only thing worse would be having to choose one or the other.

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