

EVEREST RISING

“*Everest Rising* is a tour-de-force—dazzling, thought-provoking, and packed with a kaleidoscope of brilliant images. Matt Kambic has produced a modern classic, certain to keep readers on the edge of their seats. His dramatic writing and keen story-telling skills are as potent as the secrets that burst forth from the book’s pages.”

Ken Gormley

New York Times bestselling author and educator

“I admire the devotion to all things environmental and the clear messages put forth. The characters are well-developed as are the overlapping complexities about our challenges regarding technology, profit and human ambitions. *Everest Rising* features a concept that is unique.

I truly enjoyed it.”

Randy Gaul

Co-Creator, Production Designer

Zeke the Odd, the Next Great Maker movie

“The plot led me on at a fast pace—a great thriller. The mix of science and philosophy worked. It also evoked memories of the Khumbu region, where I have traveled myself and seen the wonders of Everest. The author did a good job of revealing the character of the Nepalese in the story.

I recommend this book.”

Liz Wedderburn PhD

Glasgow University, Faculty of Science

“*Everest Rising* is a compelling read from the very first page. The concept for the novel is brilliant. The book is more than just a sci-fi thriller; it explores our relationships to others and to the earth itself.”

Pete Niederberger

International Civil Engineer, Author

In My Fathers Steps

“Give me good speculative fiction, like Harlan Ellison or *The Twilight Zone*, any day. I would say *Everest Rising* falls into this category. Kambic is a damned good writer and has obviously done his homework. In short, I liked it a lot.”

John Harper, PhD

Pennsylvania Geological Survey, Retired

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Everest Rising

M.D.Kambic



SCIENCE THRILLERS MEDIA

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*For Louetta Jo Anastasia
and Alison Barbara*

Chapter One

Nepal

Mount Everest brooded.

At the summit, tattered flags held on in the tearing wind. A few tokens stood fast: a discarded oxygen tank; a scarf trapped under rock; a broken camera frozen in the ice.

Chomolungma, the goddess mother of the universe, preferred to be alone. The humans who had left these markers—so many of them traipsing to this pinnacle as a trophy for the ego—didn't please her.

The mountaintop stirred, the earth convulsed. A low rumble rose, drowning the rip of fluttering nylon. The oxygen tank rolled, disappearing over the edge. The summit flags bowed on their poles, tilting, their anchoring pins loosed. With a sullen crack, the rock opened. The flags fell inward, swallowed.

* * *

John Bateman led four pack-laden men off the slopes. The team had landed early that morning, clambered off the plane, shouldered their gear, and headed north. Climbed just high enough to scout some prospects for their surveying camps. Not a

grueling day, but sufficient. Decent enough for a start, Bateman thought. No point beating up everyone's legs. They'd be needing them.

He glanced behind at his New Zealand mates. Edwards still had a kick in his step. Muldoon was flagging. Dawa, their Sherpa guide, brought up the rear. His forehead, strapped to the load on his back, gleamed brown above his bright grin. He looked like he could go all day. Bateman wondered if the Sherpa ever frowned.

Dawa stopped, cupping a hand to his ear. "John-ji, did you hear?"

Bateman stopped. "What?"

"Up there, top of mountain." Dawa pointed.

"What?"

"Did you feel? A shake?"

The hikers halted.

"I didn't feel anything," said Bateman. "It's cold, Dawa. Let's keep it moving. A hot shower beckons."

"Bugger the shower. I want beer and a bed," said Muldoon, hands on hips.

"May be avalanche," said Dawa, shrugging, as they continued down the trail. "You say cold. Not cold, anyway!"

Bateman led them over a ledge, following the track across a field of broken rock. Dawa was right; the snow was soft, Bateman's steps mushy. It was not as cold as predicted, when the mission was blueprinted many months ago.

Edwards caught up to Bateman. "Should be there in less than an hour," he said.

"Did I tell you about the lodge, Eddie? New owners poshed it up," said Bateman.

"I should hope so. No denying we're upscale, right?" said Edwards.

"Original owners cut down trees, screwed up wells, didn't give a fig if anybody griped. Treated the locals like chattel, from what I heard."

“That’s stupid,” said Edwards.

“Guests woke up choking. Choppered in from Kathmandu without acclimatizing, right? Someone almost died.”

“*That’s a tough sell.*”

“Then the earthquake. Owners gave up. Japanese, I think. They sold it.”

“Now posh-i-fied,” said Edwards, passing him on the trail.

“Some high rollers bought it. Hired New York architects. Cupertino engineers. Pressurized it. Oxygen masks if you want them, for a good night’s sleep, can you believe it?”

“Guests can’t pay the tab if they’re dead,” said Edwards.

“I’m not that fussy. If the shower is hot, I’ll pay the tab,” said Bateman.

“For me, a cold stout.” Edwards looked back, grinning. “Might order one for you— if you’re buyin’.”

Bateman’s laughter carried up the mountain. He smiled, relishing the thought of being dry, clean, and sated with hot soup and a mug of mead. He liked his team— mostly. Muldoon was a part-time grump, but he had a knack for managing field gear, from nailing down the quirkiest aspects of high-altitude radio to keeping gas stoves alight. Edwards was a savvy surveyor and long-time associate. Dawa was Sherpa: an uncomplaining stalwart. He carried heavy things, made tea at dawn, and knew the mountains like the back of his gnarled hands.

The team descended, snow giving way to muddied earth and a well-tramped path. Before long, Bateman looked up to notice bright banners fluttering on silver poles. They walked over a rise and saw their destination: the Everest Vista Lodge. Bateman was grateful the expedition’s bean-counters had been coerced to include a stay at this distinctively situated luxury hotel. They made their way under an elaborately carved arbor and entered the complex, navigating past gardens and ponds. It was not spring, but he could picture bright blossoms and flowing water in the well-manicured plots.

“Check it out, Johnny,” said Edwards. He gestured at the indoor pool, glistening aqua, though no one seemed to be using it. Glass doors led to an outdoor deck where bar stools, folded sunshades, and silver tables glinted in the sun.

“Spiffy,” said Bateman. “Never thought of packing togs.” They reached the front doors, tall glass panels hung from rock pylons. Above, great eaves framed the word *Swagatum* chiseled in stone over the entryway. *Welcome* in Nepalese. Bateman hailed his crew. “Don’t forget to wipe your feet.”

The doors slid open—*whoossh*—venting pressurized air. A Nepalese from the lodge staff greeted them as the men shook the snow and mud from their boots. The staffer circled around behind to urge them inside. The pressurization depended on a closed system. Expensive, Bateman thought. Money was flowing out. The doors shut. *Whoossh*.

“Namaskar, sirs,” greeted a bowing concierge. The low chatter of guests filled the lobby, which was replete with hanging ferns, plush couches against floor-to-ceiling windows, a huge fish tank, and a striking wood-hewn doorway to the dining area. Staffers tidied the floor the surveyors had muddied. Bateman walked to the check-in desk.

The Nepalese clerk bounced to attention. “Namaste, sir. Welcome to the Everest Vista Lodge.” He bowed.

Bateman bowed in return; he thought the custom lovely. “Namaste. Reservations for four. John Bateman. Joint Nepalese-New Zealand Everest Surveying Commission.”

“I have it, sir, thank you. Two nights, two rooms, party of four. Additional nights dependent on your fieldwork.” The clerk programmed the electronic key cards, slid each card into a small envelope, and set them on the counter. “Rooms 27 and 28. Second floor. Anyone wish a mask for oxygen?”

“Yes, me,” said Muldoon.

“Muldoon. You’re kidding me,” said Bateman. “Dawa, if he snores, shut off his air.”

The clerk reached under the counter and brought out one of the masks. Juggling it awkwardly, he promptly lost his grip. The mask fell, hitting the floor with a clatter. “*Ke garne*,” said the clerk, palms spread. He picked up the mask, did a quick glance left and right, and handed it to Muldoon. Must have a fussy boss, thought Bateman.

“He dropped it. Great,” said Muldoon. He gave the mask a shake.

“Muldoon, show some courtesy,” said Edwards. “It’s hardly broken.”

“You feel that?” asked Dawa.

Bateman looked at him. He had yet to notice any kind of shudder. “Dawa. Again? That tea you drink all day must be spiked with caffeine. You need to cut back.”

“Attach the mask to the air flow valve next to your bed,” the clerk said. “Please be considerate and make certain the air flow is turned off when you don’t require it.”

“Let’s shower,” said Bateman. “So we can mingle with the aristocracy.” He started towards the steps, with a last look at the fastidious-looking crowd in the lobby. At a lounge table, a middle-aged woman sat reading the *London Times*. She reached for the cup resting on the table and tipped it, spilling her tea.

“Goodness.”

Bateman saw the front desk clerk reach under the counter, probably using a discreet button to hail staff to the lobby. Two showed, almost immediately.

“We will bring more tea. Stay and relax,” said one, bowing towards the woman. She nodded back.

Bateman glanced at the fish tank, where exotic species drifted in the hyper-blue water, playing lazy hide and seek behind a plastic mountain and sunken pirate ship. A Statue of Liberty sat on its base with a tiny plastic figure of Charlton Heston. The water stirred. As Bateman watched, the Statue of Liberty tumbled, falling gently on its face.

Eugene, Oregon | United States

James Von Kamburg expected what was coming. That didn't make it easier. He heard his wife call to him. He heard the bathroom door close. A half minute later she walked into the room.

Maggie had auburn hair, dark jade eyes and a physique—James thought in more peaceable moments—that made him wish he could paint, with an undraped Maggie posing under pale light. But she was the artist. He was the geologist. And Chair, Department of Geophysics and Earth Sciences, the University of Oregon.

Painter and scientist shared the space. An easel with unpainted canvas was propped near a north-facing window. Maggie's taboret held a smattering of brushes, tubes, a jar of thinner, and gessoed panels. James sat before a large computer display at an oversized oak desk. Hidden under stacked exams, the wood surface was barely visible. In one corner, a ceramic sculpture of Mount St. Helens rose above the sea of paper.

James looked at the screen, but couldn't focus. He glanced at his wife, who stared at the floor, sliding her foot over the hardwood, heel to toe. The pregnancy test indicator hung from her fingers.

"It's negative," she stated.

James leaned across his desk, re-organizing the piles of student exams.

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes, I heard," he said.

"So...?"

"So." James turned. "All that hard work and you're still not pregnant."

Maggie pitched the indicator into the trash. "Thanks for understanding."

"Maggie."

“You can’t take one afternoon to see a doctor.”

James took off his glasses. “Nature will do its job, if we let it.”

She picked up a small brush, dipped it into red paint, and jabbed at her canvas. “Nature’s doing a job. On my biological clock. A year we’ve been at this– if you call this trying.”

“Okay. I’ll chuck everything and run out to see the fertility doctor. Dedicate my life to the study of making babies.” James swiveled back and shoved at the exams.

Maggie walked over, brandishing the paint. “That was uncalled for. You haven’t spent two hours finding out if you’re fertile. See if this is all a waste of time.”

James held back. They were escalating again. He took a breath. “Not to be technical, but didn’t we try last night, right on schedule?”

“This isn’t about a schedule.” She dropped the brush into thinner. “Stop making it worse.”

“Look. You keep conjuring up this rosy picture of bouncing babies while I’m watching fluorocarbons chew up the ozone layer. Just for starters. You want our children to grow up in this nightmare?”

She glared at him. “It’s the apocalypse. The world’s ending. Why bother.” Her hands went to her neck, pushing at the roots of her hair. “The world doesn’t roll over and play dead just because things aren’t perfect. It’s ridiculous.”

Same discussion, different week. He couldn’t find anything else to say.

“Breathable air and drinkable water– ridiculous? You think the future’s shiny and bright.” James reached across his desk and slid the monitor towards him. “The Earth’s got its own ticking clock.”

Maggie exhaled and walked to the window. A light rain drizzled grey down the glass.

Bzzzz.

Someone at the door. James walked over and placed a hand on Maggie's shoulder. "Bringing kids into this mess is not smart. It might actually be irresponsible. You don't want to see that. But it's true."

Bzzzz.

"And we don't dislike each other as much as this feels like," he said.

Bzzzz.

The slight, half-second smile Maggie managed made him feel better. Neither knew this odd territory, being so far apart on such an important issue. Maggie retreated to a small coffee table and picked up a magazine. She dropped cross-legged onto the rug. James opened the door to see a UPS delivery driver.

"Yes?"

"Priority lettergram for Dr. James Von Kamburg."

"That's me."

"Sign here."

James signed, closed the door, tore open the lettergram, and picked up his glasses. "It's from Jared Griffon."

Maggie set the magazine on her lap and looked up at him, her eyes suddenly warming.

"What...?" asked James. Mentioning an old flame's name was not supposed to enable a surge of *happy*.

"Just weird. Had a dream Jared was in. A few nights ago."

"You're kidding," he said. "No you're not." He read out the letter. "*Dear Dr. Von Kamburg: Your research into the frontiers of geology and earth science is internationally renowned. We would be honored if you could join us at a media event, to take place at the corporate headquarters of Earthyield Incorporated, Vancouver, BC, where we will announce and elucidate a significant breakthrough in mineral resource synthesis. Et cetera, sincerely, Jared F. Griffon, C-E-O.*"

"CEO. Rich, and about to be famous," Maggie said.

"*Elucidate*. That's Griffon. Preening." James leaned back in

his chair. “Civil of him to invite me. I’m sure he hasn’t forgotten I wasn’t that fond of him.” He looked over at his wife. “You were,” he said.

“I gave him up for somebody else.”

James nodded. “You did.” He picked up the lettergram, scratching at the return address. “I saved you from a horrible fate. You could have ended up in wet, cold, Canada.”

Bourn Institute of Seismic Research | Geneva, Switzerland

It was after midnight. Xavier Frauz, robed in a smoking jacket, warm socks and slippers, stepped softly down the spiral stairwell that connected his upstairs apartment with the research facility below. The director of the Bourn Institute flipped a switch. The newly installed LEDs faded on overhead. A cold, pale light illuminated the spacious lab area.

“Loathsome.”

He switched the LEDs off, navigated to his desk by the dim glow of the security lights, and turned on a small lamp. The warm incandescent threw shadows across the wide room.

“Melodious.”

Seismic sensors located around the world fed data to the Bourn Institute. An alert light had flashed on in his apartment, indicating that *significant data* were incoming. The night crew would normally get this, but he’d given everyone an extra few days off after the new year. He knew there were other organizations that would get the feed. The world’s alert system was nothing if not watchful. He was checking from curiosity as much as responsibility.

Like the brass alarm clock he wound punctiliously every night, Frauz had shepherded much of his original research equipment into the modern world. He vowed to continue using it as long as it didn’t “muck things up.” He had connected

the server-based telemetry to a paper printer, and as long as the ink held, he'd be able to see the data without powering on an electronic display. He smiled at the *tick, tock, tack* of the old-school machine. *Music, that*. Though it might need a smidge of oil.

Frauz shuffled over to a worktable, gently slid a few beakers out of the way, and felt around the top of a glass-paneled cabinet. "Drat." He moved to another table and groped behind a stack of reference manuals, and found what he was looking for. He tossed the tobacco pipe lightly in the air, clutched it as it fell, then gave it an affectionate shake. "That's better."

He struck a match and lit the pipe, the amber glow reflecting off his face. He was in his early fifties, with silver-black hair and a goatee. His nose was sharp, his eyes creased under their lids, his beard a tidy triangle of razored hairs.

His cheeks expanded as he savored the Red Burley blend, crowned with a deliberated exhale. He studied the feed, then tore off the paper. He grasped a lever and gently slid it to *Stop*. With a soft clatter the telemetry pattered, then ceased. He patted the machine, took a moment to burnish the metal with his sleeve, then sat and peered at the paper. Smoke from his pipe wandered into the hazy dimness.

"A disturbance in the Mohorovicic Discontinuity."

He leaned back and sent out a few distended smoke rings, holding the telemetry close. The Mohorovicic Discontinuity was the theoretical transition area between the Earth's crust and its mantle. It was a long way down and only barely discernible to measuring technologies. He rose and walked to a large freestanding relief globe of the Earth. He set his hand on the round surface and gave it a spin, abruptly stopping it at Asia. He ran his finger over the continent, alternately reviewing the paper and studying the globe.

"Somewhere under China, maybe, sixty to seventy kilometers." He looked at the paper again. "752 degrees

centigrade. Has to be igneous, but should be hotter. No record of anything equivalent, that I recall.”

On the globe, his fingers traced greater Asia, with Nepal in the center. The Himalayan terrain stood out in shadowy relief. A smoke ring from his pipe floated in, impacting and dispersing on Mt. Everest.

“Hmm. Might need another wad of Red.”