



## **The Enigma Event**

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**Published:** 2002

**Categorie(s):** Fiction, Short Stories

**Source:** <http://www.infinitematrix.net/stories/shortshorts/kadrey24.html>

### **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 Tonnie's *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

### **Also available on Feedbooks for Kadrey:**

- *Butcher Bird* (2005)
- *Metrophage* (1988)
- *Zombie* (2002)
- *A Cautionary Tale* (2002)
- *SETI* (2002)
- *Mudrosti* (2002)
- *Second-Floor Girls* (2002)
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- *Chronalgia* (2002)

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"Mikhail Vasilovich Boltrushko, the young master, had been smuggled to Canada before the Great Patriotic War," old Anna began. "After the German surrender in 1945, he returned to the family's home here in Irkutsk."

Tony Lansen looked at the old, weathered woman. He still wasn't sure how she'd found him, at his hotel. He hardly ever came into Irkutsk, preferring the clean air of the Siberian taiga. But the old woman had insisted on speaking to him, because he alone, an American scholar, might understand.

"I had been the head servant," she continued, "and the young master, he was kind enough to keep me on, though I was old, even then. I'd come east with the family when we left lovely Kiev for harsh Siberia. When he returned, the young master had little interest in the family shipping and export business. I mostly left him alone to his studies. He had arrived from Canada with crates of books and boxes of special inks, papers, and odd instruments I had never seen before. I was just happy to have someone to take care of again.

"Mikhail Vasilovich disappeared into his father's old study for weeks at a time. When I brought him his dinner — he soon stopped eating anything but a single evening meal — I found the floor littered with reams of parchment, papyrus and rice paper covered in colored gibberish. What I saw disturbed me. Many of the letters looked like the writing on the old synagogue in Kiev, the one that was burned. The master would never let me clean the room or remove any of the papers, but he would occasionally permit me to gather them from the floor and stack them on his father's desk. One night, I boldly asked the young master what the papers were for. Was he writing a book in a foreign tongue? Had he been consorting with Jews in Canada? He must keep his associations with them a secret, I told him. I was talking above my station, but I was afraid, and it all spilled out.

"Mikhail Vasilovich laughed and drew a clean sheet of paper from a stack on the sidetable where he worked. He took a fresh pen, dipped it into ink, then wrote some of the strange letters. All at once, a tiny flame appeared above the desk. I remember I screamed at the sight, but he showed me that it was safe. He controlled the flame he had conjured. He licked his thumb and smudged one of the letters from the word he had written, and the flame flickered and disappeared. He said that he'd learned the True Name of fire and was trying to learn the names of many other things. Yes, some of the words he had been writing were Hebrew, but others were Tibetan. Still others were Mayan, a people of the

southern Americas. I'd never heard of any of these languages, but when he assured me that he himself had not converted to Judaism, I felt better. The young master, always a prankster as a boy, even offered to show me that he wasn't circumcised. That made us both laugh and I went to bed happy.

"That night, I dreamed of the whole sky on fire, and of angels.

"After the German came, nothing was the same. I hated him on sight, with his greasy hair and long, filthy nails. He left the same day he arrived, but the young master became more elusive than ever. He even stopped eating his single daily meal and would only munch a piece of toast every two or three days. It was too much. I wouldn't have the head of the family starving himself while I was running the household. After finding another cold, uneaten dinner outside the study, I opened the door to demand an explanation.

"Above the sidetable, the moon slowly circled.

"I learned to write its name,' he explained.

"There was a machine on the table. He brought me over to see the thing. It was like the typing machines I'd seen Party clerks and secretaries using in government offices. But this machine had dials and wheels and little lights that shone when you touched a letter.

"It's called an Enigma Machine,' he said. The German had brought it. One of the few that hadn't been captured by the Allies after the war, he said. It had cost the young master a small fortune.

"The Nazis were madmen and despots,' he said to me, 'but they were also powerful occultists.' The Enigma had written unbreakable codes for the Germans during the war. 'What are codes,' he asked me, 'but a kind of secret language which reveals mysteries to those with eyes to see?' He had conjured the moon by writing thousands of variations of its name on the machine. There was much more work to do, he said. More names to learn. After promising to eat more, he shooed me from the room.

"I was concerned for the young master, but I didn't enter the study after seeing the moon. I know I should have been more courageous, for his sake. Sometimes I peeked at him through the keyhole. Soon a star hovered near the ceiling, and the moon circled it. Then there were planets. Light poured from the keyhole night and day. Then it was gone. I stooped and peered into the room. It was empty. No floors, no walls, no ceiling. The young master still sat the sidetable, typing, as a galaxy spun slowly over his head. That night, the good people of Irkutsk saw strange things in the sky. Swarms of fireflies filled the streets. Ball lightning

spooked cattle. The stained glass window in the old church collapsed on itself.

"Perhaps a week later, imps invaded the house. I heard them at night, tittering as they crept passed my bedroom door. In the morning, my kitchen would be a mess. All the sugar and lard would be eaten, often along with the crockery in which they had been stored. This was too much. I marched to the study. When I opened the door and saw the burning sulfur lakes of Hell, I wasn't surprised. I stood my ground, and explained that I simply couldn't run a proper household with beasts roaming the halls all night. Instead of being angry with me, Mikhail Vasilovich — he was such a kind boy — came and embraced me. He agreed with me, and, over my protests, left for the country the next day. He took only his typing machine, the family Victrola on which he ceaselessly played American jazz, and some of his books. As much as I hated to see the young master go, I was relieved that, the very night he left, the study reverted to its former appearance, and there were no more demons in the kitchen.

"But things weren't right. My dreams kept me awake at night. I got down on my knees and prayed for peace, but it didn't help. When I read my bible for comfort, I finally understood the fear that haunted me. If the young master had gone so far as to conjure up the stars and then Hell, the only thing left for him to manifest was heaven itself. This was inconceivable. The monstrous blasphemy of it. There would be no forgiveness for such bloated pride. In the middle of the night, I dressed and went to the train station to catch the early morning coach to Tayshet. Using the remaining household money, I hired a boat to take me to the Angara and thence to Keshma. It took another three days overland to reach Vanavara, a stinking trading town, full of Cossacks and of nomads smelling of sweat and the seal fat they gobbled to keep warm. The boatman would go no further into the wild country where the young master had his izba — a hut, really — and I had to hire a horse-drawn wagon with the last few rubles I dug from my pockets.

"Later, I dearly wished that I hadn't found the money and had simply returned to Irkutsk.

"Mikhail Vasilovich's hut was a distance from the village. When the wagon made it through the woods and into open land, I could see the hut on a rise above us. It was glowing with the pure white light of stars and angels. When we reached the bottom of the final hill, the driver stopped, refusing to get any closer. Celestial voices drifted down to us. Stars spilled from the rooftop, sailed into the sky, and fell back to earth

with the light snow that was starting. Meteors streaked across the heavens. More and more, until they were a storm. Overhead, a star glowed, brighter than all the others combined. The star seemed to hover over the hut. I thought of the star of Bethlehem and wondered if the young master had conjured it so that he could proclaim himself some mad, new messiah. I didn't understand what was happening, until the driver pulled me back to his wagon. The star wasn't hovering. It wasn't a star, at all. It was something bright and enormous, falling straight at us.

"The star, the size of a mountain, seemed to fall forever. I prayed as the wagon driver cursed his horse to go faster. When the star hit the young master's hut, I closed my eyes and waited to die.

"The wagon trundled on.

"I looked back at the mountain. The light was gone and so was gone the hut. A few last stars shot across the night sky. Snow fell and thunder echoed from far away across the taiga.

"Farther than that, even," Anna said, leaning across the table and taking Tony's Lansen's hand. "Thunder from forty years in the past.

"During one of his infrequent meals, the young master had told me that time and space were the same thing, that one could affect and pervert the other. When God reached down to slap from existence Mikhail Vasilovich Boltrushko — for that could only have been God's hand in the sky — the weight of the creator's wrath had warped time and space. The man God obliterated with a falling star in 1946 had been blown through time to be felt in 1908, near the Little Tunguska River. I remember hearing about the event as a girl. Whole forests had been laid low. Lakes had been burned dry in a split second by the blast of the falling star."

The old woman finished her story and looked at Tony, as if expecting an answer of some sort. The American didn't say a word, but got up from the table and went to one of crates stacked in the little hotel room. He pushed aside his field notes and collections of local plants, until he found what he was looking for. He fumbled in the dark, putting things together. Then he came back to the table and sat with Anna. A tinny music filled the room. From the crate, Benny Goodman and his band jumped through a rendition of "It's Only a Paper Moon." Anna moved one of her wrinkled hands to her mouth, and began to weep quietly.

Tony knew how to fudge data in his geology reports to keep the grant money flowing in, but until that night, he had no idea what to say about the stack of Benny Goodman 78s and the scorched Victrola he'd dug up in the same layer of geological strata as the Tunguska explosion. He still had no idea what he was going to say when he got back to the

university. Pouring Anna and himself shots of good Finnish vodka, Tony silently toasted Boltrushko. Then he took Anna's hand, and in the little room, they began to dance.

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