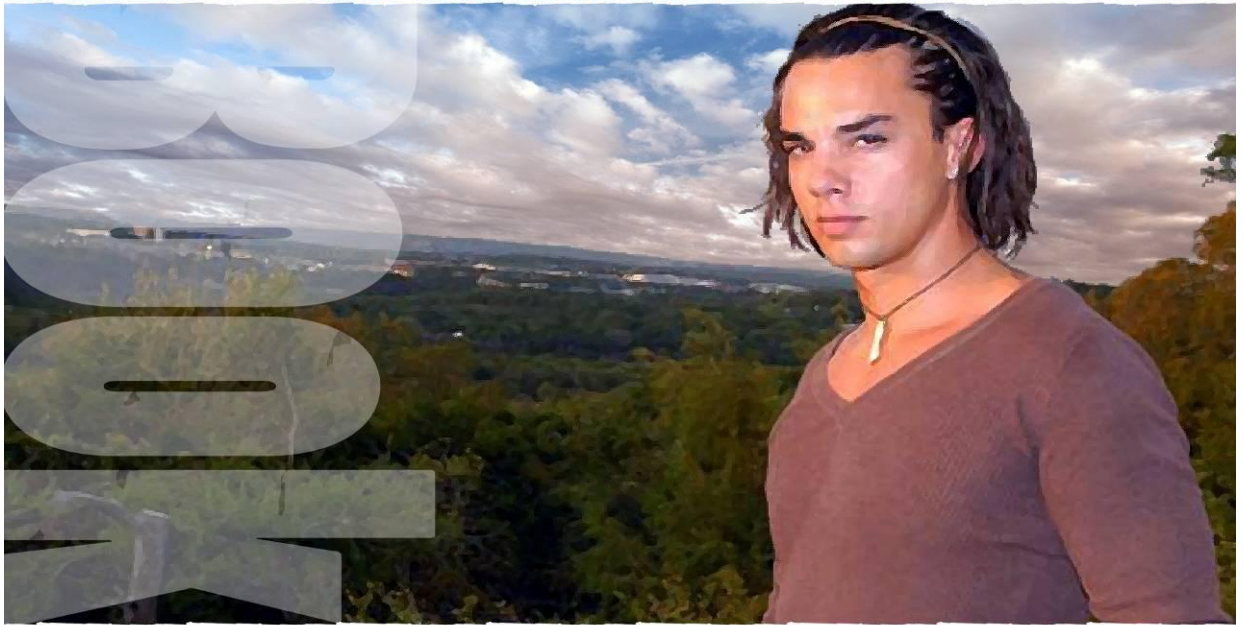


# AMERICAN SHAMAN



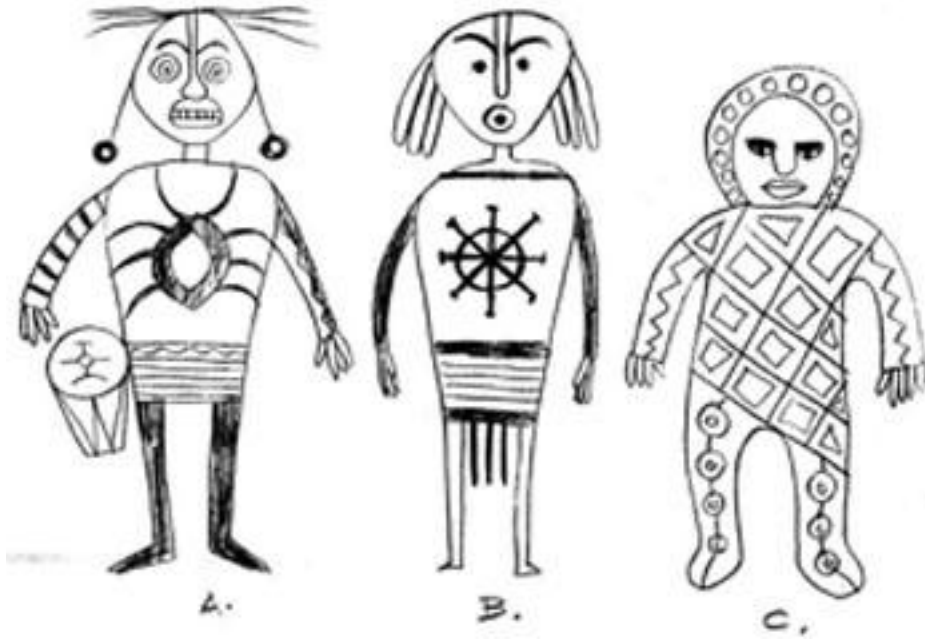
by **Brian Prioleau**

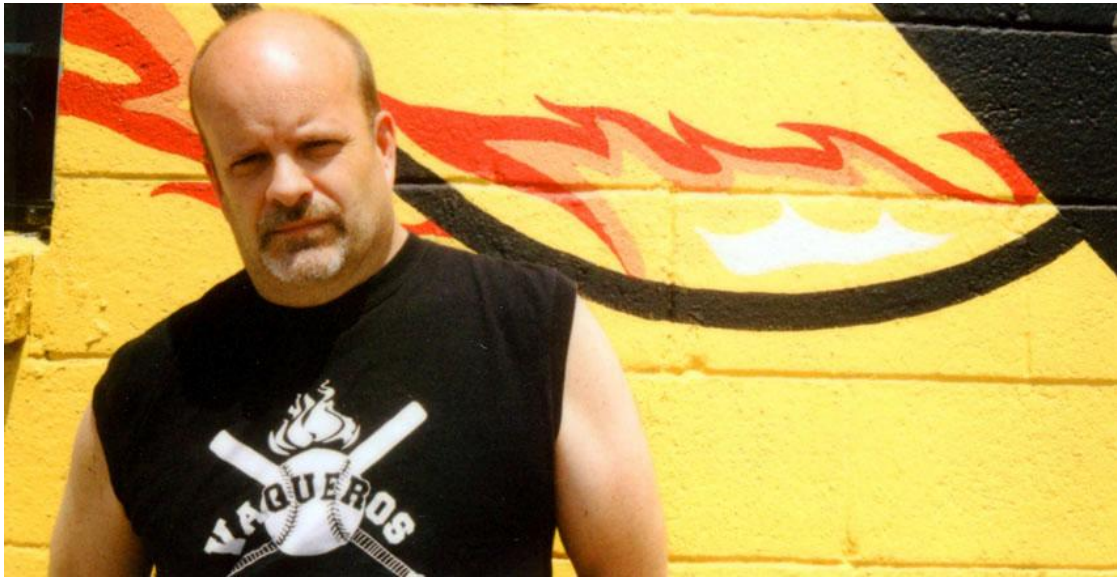
Illustrations by **Jim Siegey**



American Shaman, Book 1  
Brian Prioleau

Published by Brian Prioleau  
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### **About the author**

Brian Prioleau was raised in Fairfield, Connecticut and educated at Colgate University and Cornell University. He has made a living as a writer for decades, but this is his first foray into fiction. Brian is married to his beloved Gloria Adriana and lives in Austin, Texas



### **Forewarned**

American Shaman, Book One is the story of a young man from Siberia, Geser, who starts on the path to become a shaman and eventually finds himself in modern-day Texas, where he completes his training. (You may pronounce “Geser “as you see fit. It is a transliteration from another language that does not use our alphabet, and therefore spelled phonetically in English.) His initial selection and training, and his elaborate initiation at puberty, are taken from well-regarded sources in the anthropology of animism. The plot, concerning Geser’s third and final trial, is very much a contemporary invention intended to entertain.

I am not an animist or shamanist. I am a writer who loves a good “coming of age” story, and well-written entertainments that do not rely upon clichés. I wanted to write the story of how one young man, faced with a spiritual test that almost destroys him, comes to truly understand the myths and teachings he has known since childhood, and gains strength from that understanding.

In the very early days of the web (I mean, like, the Mosaic/Netscape days – early), I stumbled across an English translation of the Buryat shamanist mythology concerning the first shaman, Geser. I printed it out and shoved it a drawer. Several years later I came across it and decided to read it. It was boring – “Geser climbed this mountain and fought this monster, then he crossed this river to capture a demon, then he was exiled to this land,” etcetera, etcetera. It was simply a list of plot points. But then I realized why: what I was holding in my hand was merely an outline that would be fleshed out around the campfire, no doubt in reaction to, and elucidation of, recent events. It probably had been handed down for centuries orally, with the shaman memorizing what was needed to keep the tradition -- the stories that bound this nomadic culture -- alive.

That captured my imagination and was the seed for American Shaman, Book 1. The initial idea was to create a graphic novel, because it is a wonderful, evocative form that I thought would fit the sources. I wrote a treatment and approached a publisher friend. He wasn’t interested because he needed to see the artwork and not just the narrative. I tried to find somebody to collaborate with (I have no visual skills whatsoever) while I wrote it up as a novel. Though my intended audience is 16-to-26 year olds, I made no effort to “dumb it down” in any way, writing the best book I could given the resources I had. Eventually I found a terrific illustrator with a national reputation, Jim Siergey, who was willing to work with me. Jim supplied some storyboards, and eventually some four color illustrations, that were terrific, and a lot of fun. But I quickly realized it was not feasible to work with a guy this good on ‘spec’ (in other words, for no cash). But I absolutely wanted to use the drawings Jim had done because they were so good and they blended and contrasted with graphics from shaman drum paintings, some quite old, I also wanted to include. It was like there was this conversation between the modern drawings and

the ancient ones that was fascinating. So I decided to go with what I had: a fully realized novel with graphical elements to it, including illustrations that were either brand new or thousands of years old.

This is a hybrid, a chimera; one that may not be to your liking. It contains modern elements and ancient elements in both the narrative and the graphics. I feel no impulse to be 'consistent;' it just seems irrelevant at this moment. All content is digital and therefore all content is mashable. I feel strongly that the interactions between ancient and modern, graphics and story, are very much the point. You may not agree, but I hope you enjoy it.





### Prologue

*“Shaman” is a Siberian word meaning “excited man.” A shaman has the power to heal by journeying to the spirit world and interacting with the spirits that plague the ill and infirm. The journey is undertaken through the drum – the shaman is transported on the beat of a tambourine-like drum, drumming and dancing until he falls into a deep trance, then journeying to Spirit Ground and confronting the spirits.*

*A shaman must undergo three trials before becoming a fully empowered healer – a mental trial, a physical trial and a spiritual trial. An Icci or spirit guide, an animal spirit that may take human form, guides and instructs the shaman and can help in times of trouble. The shaman may heal before completing the three trials, but it is only upon completing all three that the shaman can attain full powers. The closer to death the shaman is brought during the three trials, the more powerful a shaman he or she will be.*

The earth is round, the earth spins. The spinning produces segmented time balanced between day and night. The earth takes care of itself -- human beings are not always so fortunate.

There is something in human nature that promotes imbalance. There is something in us that pushes us towards monomania, an excessive focus on a single activity or value, be it money or pleasure or beauty or power, and human culture historically rewards the most adept monomaniacs. Perhaps it is the pain of consciousness, the acute awareness of each moment in time and the finiteness of one’s own moments, the insistence there must be meaning in those moments. This insistence upon meaning is what drives human beings and what drives us insane. It drives us to build beautiful cities by warm rivers, and drives us to obliterate those cities in destructive wars. It drives us to have children, and then to ignore those children as we search fruitlessly for more meaning.

Arguably the need to restore balance is at the heart of every religion and every spiritual impulse. It certainly is at the core of the first religion, shamanism, as it developed in the vast, harsh world of Siberia a dozen millennia ago. The shaman’s purpose is to restore balance, or tegsh, to the imbalanced soul and the imbalanced community. The shaman is the outlier, the “excited man” who can go to places other humans cannot go, reconcile distortions and return. That is his role. That is his curse.



### **Chapter 1: Meet dead cute**

The spirits desire communion with us but evil prevents it. Evil is the web of distractions we believe keep us sane in an insane world – the various pornographies that emanate from the screens and loudspeakers with which we upholster our world, the amusements that reinforce our cheap and pervasive sense of irony. But these things are merely clever, and quite intentionally meaningless. Distracting. We think they keep us sane because we have a measure of control over them – we can change the channel, turn up the volume, increase the dosage – but this is a lie. We have no real control.

The spirits have only soft and subtle weapons with which to fight this evil: The music of silence. The open and accepting face of a child. The resolute hopefulness of the cycle of life: winter followed by spring, death by birth. The challenging depth and complexity of a truly beautiful thing. These things must be attended to; they must be cultivated and nourished. They are simple, but they are not easy.

And so it is not a fair contest.

In a subterranean parking garage in Invent City, Texas, a beautiful young woman lay upon the cold concrete slowly slipping away. It was the very early hours of the morning, before the sun rises, the still hours; she was pierced and tattooed and dressed in the studiously unselfconscious way of the contemporary hipster. The beautiful woman had one fashion accessory that drew the eye – a rig dangled out of her forearm, a syringe filled with her own blood and the last few drops of the brown heroin, or chiva, she had cooked up and coaxed into her veins. It was the good stuff, the stuff they call ‘glass’ – the concentrated residue left on the interior surface of the cooking drum, real strong, available only to those with the really good connections. If your dealer would sell it to you at all, he would be sure to let you know he was doing you a big fucking favor. The woman’s body convulsed but she was otherwise inert, her eyes slightly opened but unseeing, comatose, utterly alone in her narcotic reverie. A hand reached down and turned her head, reached into her mouth with two fingers to clear it of vomit. The hand and wrist were covered with impossibly white, shiny, inhuman looking skin, like the belly of a large fish, though the arm was otherwise normal-looking.

A young man stood over her and pulled several objects from a crude bag he had slung around his shoulder: a drum that looked like a oversized tambourine without bangles, with a supporting cross piece inside the drumhead that was carved into the shape of a child with outstretched arms and decorated with bits of colored ribbon, leather and feathers; a small, handmade rug; a bottle of brandy; a bit of cake; some tobacco. The young man sat upon the rug and arranged the objects around him. He was lithe, smallish but with a compact build and evident physical self confidence, with medium-long dark hair and intense eyes that consumed

everything in their gaze. The last thing the young man pulled from his bag was a red silk string. He looked around to orient himself to Spirit Ground and ran the string from that direction to the prone, lifeless body of the girl, making sure it touched her – this would be the conduit for the girl’s spirit to return to her body. He found a rhythm on the drum and played it insistently, obsessively, filling the parking garage with an instinctive and ancient beat, compressed the rhythm and made it louder until the parking garage receded away to become a vast plain; an immeasurable, ancient wilderness filled with sunlight and wind. And then there was no drum and no rhythm and there was no rig and no chiva. There was only the young man and, standing in the immediate distance, the lost, confused spirit of the girl, encircled by a pack of wild dogs that were hungry and angry at this intruder.

In a soft but confident voice, the young man called to the girl’s spirit. “You cannot linger here. Your mother, your father miss you. They sit sad in their home, awaiting your return. You must come with me...” The girl’s spirit looked down, ashamed, but did not move. About ten feet away from the spirit sat a pot and the young man walked over to it. It was filled with water, and the young man carefully put his hand into it – warm. He smiled. There was a chance he could bring her back. If the water had been hot there would be no chance.

“She is mine!” snarled the lead dog as he rose up on its hind legs. “You can’t have her back. She let us in and we are not going to let go.” Slowly and fairly subtly, like the pack hunters they are, the dogs shifted position from around the spirit of the girl to around the young man.

The young man smiled broadly and laughed, carefully shifting his weight until he was centered and ready. “We? There is no ‘we’...”

In a blur he spun to confront the second dog, for the second dog always charges from behind, and with a powerful, quick motion the young man decapitated it and drove its still-snapping jaws into the throat of the third dog as it lunged for his liver. Wisely, the fourth and fifth dogs turned tail and ran.

“...there is only you and me.”

“You can’t have her, she is mine,” said the lead dog as it backed off a few steps. “This is what she wants – she let us in!”

“She was with me first,” the young man replied. It was a lie, but it was okay to lie to a devil. This particular devil decided it was better to save this fight for another day and trotted off into the indeterminate distance.

The man took the hand of the girl’s spirit and gently told her to come with him, to focus on the rhythm. They walked together to the east using the red string as a guide. And the vast, ancient plain again became the subterranean parking garage in a dawning city in America and the young woman was at the young man’s feet again. He knelt down and took her head in his hands, gently removing the spike from her arm. She began to revive, her eyes losing their blindness and her heart pumping blood again into her ashen face. The beautiful woman moaned softly and was suddenly aware of the young man who held her in his arms.

“What happened? Where am I?”

“You are here outside the club. It is almost dawn. You tried to leave here forever.”

“What...what do you mean?”

The young man held up the syringe, still filled with her blood. “Is this what you want? You can have it, if that’s what you want. But I must warn you, your spirit, your soul as you in the West say, is an unstable thing. It yearns for the other side, to return to where it has lived for all eternity and where it will live after your body is gone. If you continue to separate your body and

your spirit, as you do every time you use this needle, you may find that one day your spirit does not return.”

She stumbled to her feet and turned away. “I don’t want it – I hate it! But once you’re in, there is no walking away from it. It owns you.”

The young man smiled kindly. “That’s not true. Just say you I don’t want it anymore, that you are done. Just say the words and it will be true.”

“It is never that simple,” said the young junkie with a resignation no human being should ever hear in their own voice.

“Just say the words and it will be that simple.”

“Okay, fine. I am done. I don’t want it anymore.”

The young man clapped his hands and leapt up, uncharacteristic delight plainly evident. Suddenly, the beautiful young woman fell to her knees and vomited a huge tide of black bile. It was as if the young woman’s entire history wanted to leap out of her body in an instant. Her jaw appeared to unhinge in a reptilian way and a spume of blackness exploded from her as her neck and back strained spasmodically. The dark, wriggling, putrid expungement filled the floor of the parking garage ankle deep; first a pool, then a stream, then a river, and it poured down the concrete stairwells as it became, finally, a deafening torrent, like a drainage culvert at the end of a hard Texas rainstorm – 12,357 gallons, all told. It was measured. When she was finished retching, the reeking black bile disappeared and she rose transformed – healthy, strong, completed.

“Jesus – who are you? What the hell is going on?”

The young man took her by the arm and walked towards the exit. “My name is Geser. And you are?”

“Alma Mergen.”

He stared at her for a long moment. “Wait – what did you say?”

“You asked my name and I told you it was Alma Mergen.”

“How did you know that? How did you know to call yourself Alma Mergen? Who told you? How did you KNOW THAT?”

She was more than a bit confused at the moment and this guy was starting to scare her. When Alma got scared she got hostile. She couldn’t look like she did, all pale and beautiful, and be a junkie walking through junkie streets in the raw, bleeding hours and ever show fear. She wouldn’t have made it to Wednesday.

“It’s my name you stupid fuck. It is what my parents called me, I didn’t have any fucking choice. Look...” She pulled her driver’s license out of her bag and showed it to him.

Geser stared at it for a long time. His shoulders began to shake and slowly a small laugh rose from his throat and grew larger and larger until it filled the street they were emerging onto as they walked away from the parking garage. Alma had no way of knowing it at that moment, but this would be the only time, through all their times together, through pain and death, through hopefulness and despair, through joy and loss, through piss and tears and black vomit and soaring and falling and all of it, this would be the only time she would ever see this man laugh. She did notice that his laugh was a bit ridiculous, as if he hadn’t had much practice.

“I don’t get it,” she said. “Why is my name such a big deal?”

“There are stories that we are told when we are children, stories of the ancients and of how the world was created and came to be as it is. Many of the stories are about a man named Geser – that is where my name comes from – who was sent to earth to help men defeat disease and evil spirits. One day he went hunting and just as he was about to shoot a deer with an arrow another

hunter came along and stole his prize. He followed the hunter, who turned out to be the daughter of the head of the water spirits, who was a good friend of his father's, another great spirit. The daughter's name was Alma Mergen. In fact, Alma Mergen had been promised as Geser's wife when they were children."

The odd story the young man had been telling was charming up to that point, Alma thought to herself. Then it became the weirdest pickup line she had ever heard, and she had heard a lot of pickup lines. She began to kind of move away from Geser, thinking this would be a good time to head out on her own.

"So he married Alma and they had two daughters together, Tumen and Urmai, and his heart was filled with such happiness that he would sit by the banks of a river at sundown with his children and wife and say, "Is the sun in the sky beautiful, or is Tumen beautiful? Is the sun in the heavens beautiful or is Urmai beautiful? Is the glorious gold sun beautiful or is Alma Mergen beautiful?"

Alma paused, felt her shoulders relax and walked back to Geser.

They walked through an industrial neighborhood in the accumulating dawn as Alma slowly regained her senses. Geser kept the conversation going. "I saw you in the club. You dance as if there is nothing in the world besides you and the music," said Geser.

Alma laughed. "That's true. I never thought of it that way but that is exactly how it feels. And the music felt particularly good tonight."

"Thank you," grinned Geser

"What, that was you – you were spinning the tunes? That must be a great job, making everybody dance like that."

"Well, it isn't really a job because they don't pay me. But you are right, it is wonderful to make people move to my rhythms. Rhythm is everything."

"Well, you certainly had me going," says Alma. "It's funny, I felt so wonderful in the club. But as soon as I got out here into the real world I needed to get high."

"The real world will do that."

"What is that strange accent you have?" Alma asked.

"I am what you would call Russian."

"Ah, one of those Euro-fag techno rave freaks. We have a small but annoying population of them here in Invent City. Oh well. You looked almost normal."

"I do not know what you mean by Euro-fag, but I am Siberian. It's a big country, where I am from," said Geser.

"Siberian – I don't even know what that means. You look like a Hollywood Indian, with those cheekbones and dark hair."

Geser looked at her quizzically.

"So, Siberian, if you don't D.J. for a living, what do you do? I mean to eat?"

"I guess you would call me an exporter," Geser said softly.

*Tenger, the creator-Father of all things, often marveled at his own creations. The way he had conceived them was often not the way they turned out and Tenger found the discrepancies fascinating; the soul of beauty, in his eyes. One day he saw a beautiful woman by a river and he caught her up and placed her in a bottle so that he could look upon her as much as he wanted. He placed his finger in the mouth of the bottle so that she could not escape.*

*The first shaman came upon Tenger as he was enjoying his bottled treasure. The woman was obviously terrified – this did not bother Tenger because he had no intention of harming her,*

*he just wanted to look at her – and the shaman decided he had to do something to set the woman free. He changed himself into a spider and he stealthily crawled up Tenger's arm to his shoulder, to the neck of his shirt, slowly up his neck to his face, careful not to be detected. The woman was frozen with fear but she did not cry out to Tenger to warn him. Then the shaman-spider stung Tenger, who dropped the bottle, allowing the beautiful woman to escape.*

*Tenger was furious at the shaman, both for the painful bite, which swelled Tenger's whole face and made him ugly for a month, but perhaps even more for the shaman's impertinence. So Tenger took all the shaman's powers away and told him he would have to spend the rest of his life on Human Ground struggling to survive as just another man.*



## *THE LAST BIT*



### **Epilogue**

About two months later, Geser and Alma returned to the industrial park where Raven and his crew had the chop shop. Everything was as it had been, a couple of cars half-stripped, parts with tags on them for immediate shipment, tools on the floor and in racks, a gross of condoms and two cases of cheap vodka locked up in storage. But there were no people.

When Raven didn't return from his confrontation with Geser on Spirit Ground, the crew was at a loss. They drew up plans to boost cars and tried to contact Raven's network, but no one spoke Spanish – or English, for that matter – well enough to make the deal. They drifted away, spirits lost in an unfamiliar land, with the wrong tongue, the wrong hands, the wrong instincts, and no way to get home. Several made their way north to Chicago, where they found a small Russian-speaking community engaged in dubious pursuits, and they felt right at home because there was thievery and winter. Some headed south to search for the rusting freighter Raven used to transport cars to the Motherland, a large roll of dollars in their hands, hopeful they could get it back home. They found the ship all right, about two weeks after the Mexican authorities had confiscated it for being abandoned in port – apparently it had slipped its mooring in a storm and was floating precariously around the harbor, unmanned and abandoned. Raven's men spent two days on the dock staring at it, quietly desperate, without ideas. Then they made for the border again, crossing the Rio Grande with a coyote, two of the four of them dying in the desert heat in New Mexico. Dimi and one other, who prided themselves on being able to realistically assess the situation, made their way to California to gaze across the ocean to what they remembered as home, powerless and alone. All of them were lost.

In the garage that had been home for the Siberians until just a few weeks before, Geser picked through the remains of his former life as Alma watched. His dominant sensation was one

of disbelief – he couldn't believe he had lived this way, that he had gone out three or four nights a week to take what wasn't his, and, most of all, that he had perceived this as normal. He also couldn't believe he had survived.

Alma kept telling herself this wasn't the right time. Geser was obviously going through something and this wasn't the time to get into heavy conversations. He wandered around the cavernous garage like a ghost, like the spirits Alma had only begun to detect in her education as a shaman. But she couldn't help herself.

"Geser, we need to talk," she blurted.

"...how did I ever do this," he mumbled to himself, exposing to the air the thoughts that had been silently knocking around his skull. "I could steal a car as easily as I could take a piss. From the time I saw it until I was behind the wheel a mile away, not more than five minutes. Didn't even think about it."

"We can talk later, I guess..." Alma said almost to herself.

"Did you say something?"

"Something came up, you know what I mean? I mean, it doesn't seem possible; it just never happens that way, just once and all that. I swear, it is like some kind of fucked-up act of God or something. I mean, I always knew the guy was some kind of fucked up comedian, but this is going too far. But it's true, I'm pretty sure anyway. I'm pretty sure it's true."

Geser could hear something in her voice that made him snap out of his reverie when Alma was about halfway through her speech, and he moved toward her.

"What's going on, Alma?"

"It doesn't ever happen this way, but it did. I mean, believe me, I know, it never happens this way, but it did."

"Just tell me, whatever it is. You are making me dizzy with your talking."

"I'm pregnant, and it's yours. You're the only one for almost a year, so it is yours."

Long silence. Long, long, long silence.

For some reason, Geser had never felt more an orphan than at that moment. Suddenly all he could think of was his mother, her warm smell, the way she held him and talked to him; his father and his silences and strong, square hands that seemed as if they could do anything. It had been so long since he had been home. He knew, finally, in that moment, that he would never again see his 'sleeping land.'

"Oh God, please say something. Please, Geser, I'm just hanging here."

The shaman looked into her beautiful, strong, intelligent eyes and said goodbye – to his mother, to his father, to the great expanses and harsh seasons of Siberia, to a world that no one here would ever understand, to a language he would never again hear anyone speak, to yearning, to memory, to the past. Geser took Alma in his arms.

"You are sure?" he asked her, not in a skeptical way, but to be reassured.

"Yeah, I'm pretty goddamn sure. I did the E.P.T thing in the privacy of my own home, like they say. Pee in the cup and all that, come back a few minutes later and there are those lines, clear as day. Clear as a dang bell. I confess that I did it a couple of times, just to be sure. Okay, okay, I did it so many times I lost count, like about eight or nine. It got so the damn lines would start showing up when I got the little tester within about six inches of the little plastic cup. I'm pretty damn sure, believe me."

Geser looked at her for a long moment and started to laugh. "You know, I never know what you are saying but I always know what you are talking about."

“I know, I know, I know. Believe it or not, I kind of feel the same way. What does that mean, anyway?”

“So what do you want to do?” Geser asked as he took a step away and adopted a problem-solving stance.

“I don’t know. I guess we’ve got to talk about it. You know, if this happened a year ago, there is no question what I would do – get rid of it, because that would have been in everybody’s best interest. But that is not what I want today. I mean, I’m 24 years old, and God knows I haven’t done much with my life. But I want this. Maybe it is the way it happened, maybe it’s because I’m clean now and my life seems to be moving in a meaningful direction. But it’s like it’s the way it has got to be. Like it is something I can’t ignore or run from. So anyway, I know what I’m going to do. I just want to know what you are going to do. Because you can do anything you want to do. I can take care of this on my own or you can be part of it. Either way, it is your choice. I know it is a lot to think about, so I understand if you want to take some time to think about it. I just really wanted to talk to you.”

“How do you feel?” asked Geser, slipping immediately into healer mode.

“You mean about this or healthwise?”

“Are you tired or sick at all? Sometimes that is the best way to tell if something is the right thing.”

“Well, the truth is I feel great, fantastic. I guess I will feel tired eventually, but I sure don’t now and really, I just feel good all the time. That’s one of the ways I know I am going to keep this baby.” Alma had a smile on her face like none Geser had ever seen before in his life, on anyone.

“It is easy to decide about the child. I feel as you do, that this is a good thing and a blessing for both of us, because all life decides for itself. It is harder to decide about you and me. I am a shaman, and someday you too will be a shaman. When that day comes, what I am about to tell you will make more sense. The shaman goes to Spirit Ground and returns to Human Ground. Only the shaman can do that, and only the shaman has seen all that there is. That fact alone makes us different from everybody else, including each other. Because we see those things, we are alone. We cannot share the most important part of our lives with other people because they have not seen the things we have seen. We cannot share our lives with other shaman because many of the spirits would object – that is too much power in the hands of too few. The shutger, the evil spirits, would find a way to stop that from happening. When you choose this life, and when this life chooses you, you are alone. There is a saying where I come from – there are five things in life that are yours and only yours: your birth, your pain, your decisions, the lessons you learn and your death. Everything else must be shared, especially your happiness. Unfortunately, for you and me, we share none of it.”

In the still of the industrial park garage, Alma silently considered Geser. Part of her would always want him, for he was beautiful, but she was acutely aware at that moment that she would never know him because he would never allow himself to be known. She shrugged her shoulders almost imperceptibly because in that moment she recognized another truth, another lesson she had learned that was hers and hers alone – that she would always have a part of Geser with her in her child.

“Hey Siberian, I got an idea. Let’s go dancing.”

*This is how the world began: There was nothing but the heavens and the oceans, no land, no sun, no moon, no stars. And even the heavens had no clouds. And even the oceans had no*

waves. Tenger, who had created all and could create even more, was disappointed in his creation and in himself. "What I have created is boring. I am boring," he said, to no one or nothing in particular.

So Tenger created a goldeneyed duck and sent it to the bottom of the ocean. The duck, which was an amusing creature as all ducks must be, was gone for a long time. Tenger waited for a ripple, a flash of color, a splash, but there was nothing. He began to wonder if he had any skills at all. But finally the duck reappeared and it had a bit of mud tucked in its bill. So Tenger created another amusing creature, a turtle, and placed the bit of mud on its back. The turtle's legs extended to the bottom of the ocean and the mud began to spread and become dry land. Tenger considered the broad, flat expanse of dry land that had been the turtle, and he wanted more. So he took both hands and created mountains, and he took his cupped hand and dug lakes, and he took his fingers and created rivers. It was all quite beautiful but nothing upon the landscape moved so Tenger was still a bit bored. So he created birds, fish and animals. And while these things were amusing, Tenger realized he had to create one more thing, something that would truly appreciate his creation, for all creators yearn to be appreciated. So Tenger created man. And to make it all even more beautiful, and man even more appreciative, Tenger created the sun, the moon and the stars. But he got it wrong at first, because he had the moon and the sun shining together in the daytime and man and the animals complained that it was too hot and bright. So Tenger made a new rule that Sun would shine in the daytime and Moon would shine at night, though the two could sometimes visit with each other in the early morning.

As the days went on and Tenger administered to his new, more intricate and more sophisticated creation, he began to realize something else -- he would need help. So he created sky spirits, the 44 tenger of the eastern direction and the 55 tenger of the western direction. They dwelt in the upper world and between them lay the land of the Blue Ice Tenger, or Sagaan Sebdeg. One day, the leader of the 55 tenger of the western direction, Han Hormasta, came upon the leader of the 44 tenger of the eastern direction, Atai Ulaan, on the border of the lands of Sagaan Sebdeg. They argued vociferously, until the argument became a fight. Han Hormasta won the fight and he tore Atai Ulaan's head off and shredded his body into tiny bits and threw them all in the air. When the pieces tumbled down to earth they touched Human Ground and instantly turned into the evil spirits and all the diseases of the world.

These diseases plagued man almost to the point of extinction. The sorceress serving the three brothers who ruled the earth decided to use her drum to relieve the suffering she saw every day. When her trance reached its most ecstatic point she hurled her drumstick in the air and it landed at the feet of Manzan Gurme Toodei, the mother of all the sky spirits. She looked down to where the drumstick had come from and saw that all upon Human Ground were suffering, indeed were in danger of disappearing. She drew together a few of the more generous and thoughtful sky spirits and they decided to send one of their own, Bukhe Beligte, the middle son of Han Hormasta, to rid the world of diseases and evil spirits. Bukhe was born onto the earth as a human child named Nurhata Nurgai, and he lived a human life for many years, alternately difficult and dull. But one day he climbed to the top of Mount Sumber and was transformed into his true appearance as Bukhe Beligte, a proud warrior with a broad chest, powerful hands, multicolored eyes and black hair a fathom long. When his father Han Hormasta saw his son on the mountain he sent to him a warrior's horse, with hooves that could not slip, legs that would never grow cold and a mane with a dozen armfuls of hair. When the warrior rode the horse, named Beligen, down from the mountain, its hooves created sparks that all of Human Ground could see as lightning. When the people of the seven lands saw the warrior ride through, astride

*the powerful bay horse, upon a saddle of silver and with red reins in his hands, they called him Hero; they called him Steadfast and Resilient; they called him Beautiful; they called him Geser.*

