As soon as Torak set foot on the trail, the cold grew intense. The breath crackled in his nostrils. The ice crumbled, and he nearly went over.

About forty paces ahead, the trail widened slightly beneath a rocky overhang. It was too shallow to make a cave: merely a hollow where the black basalt of the ravine’s side showed through. At the sight of it, Torak’s spirits lifted. He’d been hoping for some kind of shelter. He would need it if his plan -

Beside him, Wolf tensed.

He was looking down into the ravine, his ears forwards, every hair on his back standing up.

Shading his eyes, Torak peered over the edge. Nothing. Black tree-trunks. Snow-covered boulders. Puzzled, he turned to go – and the bear appeared suddenly, as bears do. First a movement at the bottom of the ravine – then there it was.

Even from this distance – fifty, sixty paces below him – it was enormous. As Torak stood rooted to the spot, it swayed from side to side, casting for a scent.

It didn’t find one. Torak was too high up. The bear didn’t know he was here. He watched it turn and move off down the ravine, towards the Forest.

Now he had to do the unthinkable. He had to lure it back.

There was only one sure way of doing that. He slipped off his mittens and blew on his fingers to warm them; then he unfastened the ravenskin pouch from his belt. Untying the hair cord that bound it, he opened the rowan-bark box, and the Nanuak stared up at him. The river
eyes, the stone tooth, the lamp.

Wolf gave a low grunt-whine.

Torak licked his cold-cracked lips. From his medicine pouch, he took Renn’s little birch-bast bundle. He stuffed the purifying herbs and birch-bast wrapping into the neck of his parka, and looked down at what Renn had made for him in the night. A small pouch of knotted wovengrass: the mesh so fine that it would hold even the river eyes, but let the light of the Nuanak shine out; the light that Torak couldn’t see, but the bear could.

Taking care not to touch the Nuanak with his bare hands, he tipped the lamp, the stone tooth and the river eyes into the wovengrass pouch. Then he drew it shut, and looped its long drawstring over his head. He was wearing the

Nuanak unmasked on his chest.

Wolf’s eyes threw back a faint, shimmering gold light: the light of the Nuanak. If Wolf could see it, so could the demon. Torak was counting on it.

He turned to face the bear. It was some distance down the ravine, moving effortlessly through the snow.

‘Here it is,’ said Torak, keeping his voice low so as not to anger the World Spirit. ‘This is what you’re after: the brightest of those bright souls that you hate so much – that you long to snuff out for ever. Come for it now.’

The bear halted. A ripple ran through its massive shoulder-hump. The great head swung round. The bear turned and began moving back towards Torak.

A fierce exultation surged through him. This monster had killed Fa. Ever since then, he’d been on the run. Now he wasn’t running any more. He was fighting back.

It was faster than Torak expected; soon it was beneath him. Man-fashion, it rose on its hind legs. Although Torak stood fifty paces above, he saw it as clearly as if he could reach out and touch it.

It raised its head and met his eyes – and he forgot about the Spirit, he forgot about his oath to Fa. He was not standing on an icy mountain trail, he was back in the Forest. From the ruined shelter came Fa’s wild cry. *Torak! Run!*

He couldn’t move. He wanted to run – to race up the trail to the overhang, as he knew he must – but he could not. The demon was draining his will – pulling him down, down . . .

Wolf snarled.

Torak tore himself free and staggered up the trail. Staring into those eyes had been like staring at the sun: their green-edged image stayed stamped on his mind.

He heard the cracking of ice as the bear began to claw its way up the side of the ravine. He pictured it climbing with lethal ease. He had to reach the overhang, or he wouldn’t stand a chance.

Wolf loped up the trail. Torak slipped and went down on one knee. Struggled to his feet. Glanced over the edge. The bear had climbed a third of the way.

He ran on. He reached the overhang and threw himself into the rocky hollow, bent
double, fighting for breath. Now for the rest of his plan: now to call on the Spirit for help.

Forcing himself upright, he filled his chest with air, put back his head and *howled*.

Wolf took up the howl, and their piercing cries buffeted the ravine — back and forth, back and forth through the Mountains. *World Spirit*, howled Torak, *I bring you the Nanuak! Hear me! Send your power to crush the demon from the Forest!*

Below him, he heard the bear getting closer... ice clattering into the ravine.

On and on he howled until his ribs ached. *World Spirit, hear my plea...*

Nothing happened.

Torak stopped howling. Horror washed over him. The World Spirit had not answered his plea. The bear was coming for him...

Suddenly he realised that Wolf, too, had stopped howling.

Look behind you, Torak.

He turned to see Hord’s axe swinging towards him.