

## PROLOGUE

**G**liding silently through the night, the huntress skimmed the lake's moon-silvered waters, her own reflection moon-like. Lured by the light, a trout swam to the surface, where the she-beast scooped it up and devoured it whole. Her offspring joined in the frenzied fish-fest. Voracious predators, taloned yet toothless, nameless yet having many names, they ruled the lake.

The natives who arrived later knew the beasts as the *Skookum-kallakala*. No one—especially children—ventured out at night when the *Skookum-kallakala* were hunting. Fish were not all they ate.

Out of the east the creatures had come. Winging upon the prevailing winds, they skirted the jagged young mountains and reeking volcanoes thrown up during the Great Flood. Harsh winters drove them across uncharted oceans and seas. In their quest for warmth, shelter and prey, they traversed wastelands of freshly laid stone where others of their kind lay entombed in their final agonies.

At length, the *Skookum-kallakala* reached the coast of a vast continent teeming with wildlife. Enjoying the land's abundant food and mild climate, the newcomers lacked only

a suitable place to breed.

Above an inland lake valley, alternating flows of basaltic magma and an iron-rich slurry had invaded a mountain of flood-borne sediment, forming thick beds of a heavy brown ore. Much of the molten basalt spewed out of the mountain, leaving behind lava tubes and caverns—a perfect refuge from ice and snow, fire and flood.

The Skookum-kallakala had found their ideal home.