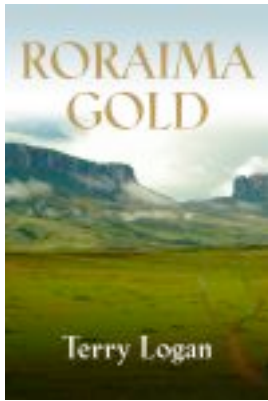




# RORAIMA GOLD

Terry Logan



*Science mystery in a gold mine on the Brazil/Guyana border.*

# Roraima Gold

by Terry J. Logan

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First Edition

*Roraima Gold*

*This book is dedicated to all my wonderful children and  
grandchildren*

## Chapter 1

It was a late summer morning in Golden, Colorado and Luke Simmons was headed back to his home in the university district after an eight-mile run in the South Table Mountain Park. The temperature was still pleasant, high sixties, but would rise into the low nineties by early afternoon. The sky was clear and a deep blue and the only clouds in sight were hovering over the peaks of the Front Range to the west. At forty-five, Luke had been running forty to sixty miles a week since his late twenties in graduate school. He had been a mediocre athlete in grade and high schools in Honolulu, but enjoyed the challenge of cross-country running. Later, after enlisting in the Navy out of high school, basic training had produced a lean and fit young man. As a Navy corpsman in the first Gulf war, he was assigned to the First Marine Division. In the first day's push into Kuwait through the Iraqi minefields, Luke was hit by an antipersonnel mine as he crawled to assist a Marine who had also been hit by shrapnel. Most of his right hand and arm were shattered and would later be amputated at a base hospital in Saudi Arabia. Evacuated to Walter Reed, he spent two months in rehab and was fitted with a prosthetic arm. He decided he would stick to running, as other pursuits seemed to be out of the question.

Luke appeared young for his age and his looks were striking. Slender, at six foot two, he had dark skin and black hair he inherited from his Japanese-American mother, and pale green eyes he got from his father's Scots blood. He wore his hair long in rebellion to the squared away appearance required in the military. He was born in Honolulu a year after his Marine father had

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completed his second tour in Vietnam. His mother was a nurse in the naval hospital where his father was treated for gunshot wounds.

Luke used his morning runs to puzzle over problems that arose in his work, and today was no exception. He held the Arthur Weisell Chair in Mining Engineering at the Colorado School of Mines in Golden and was internationally renowned for his research on environmentally sound mining practices. He became a sought-after consultant on mining operations worldwide, at the request of private companies, foreign governments and the U.S. State Department. He had earned an undergraduate degree in geology from the University of Hawaii and masters and doctorate degrees in mineralogy and mining from the University of Sao Paulo. He had chosen Brazil for graduate work to get away from the isolation of island life in Hawaii and from pictures of thong bikini-clad girls on Rio's beaches. He had then spent two years at the University of New South Wales in Australia working with one of the preeminent scholars in hard rock mining in the world. That had led to his present position where he had moved quickly up the ranks to the Distinguished Chair position he now held.

He was mulling over his current assignment as he peeled off his running clothes and headed for the shower. The State Department had requested that he investigate suspicious mining practices at a small gold mine on the border of Brazil and the small nation of Guyana. He was now in the process of figuring out where the damn place was and how to get there.

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## **Chapter 2**

Luke's office in the Mining Engineering building was large compared to those of other faculty, as befitted someone holding a Chair position. A large window behind his desk gave a spectacular view of the Front Range with its snow-capped peaks. The office walls were lined floor to ceiling with bookshelves crowded with texts and journals. His massive mahogany desk, by contrast, was uncluttered, and was taken up by his large-screen computer. Like many in the technical world, Luke had moved rapidly into the electronic age where paper documents were a reminder of a not so distant past. The books on the shelves were more for appearance than anything else.

Luke liked absolute privacy when he worked and kept his door closed. Now, his concentration was about to be broken by a rap on the door.

Damn, he thought. It's impossible to get anything done around here. I might as well work at home.

"Come in, and this better be important," he answered, testily.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Professor Simmons, but I've completed the research you assigned me the other day and I wanted to show you what I found."

The speaker was a petite Asian woman, his current postdoc from the Taiwan National University. Lin Yuan had been with Luke for a year and was working on nickel mining techniques for non-



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sulfidic ores. He had asked her to look into gold mining methods in Brazil and Guyana.

Luke could sense that she was uncomfortable with his demeanor and a little apprehensive in his presence.

At a very early age, he had become aware that he was not like other children. Besides having a photographic memory that greatly aided his scientific career, Luke had an uncanny sense of what people were thinking – he could literally see inside them and invoke a vision of what they were like. He described it to a school psychologist when he was ten as being able to see a vision beside, in front, or sometimes behind the person. The vision revealed the mood of the individual – fear, anger, happiness, lust – and the true nature of the person. As he grew older he kept this ability to himself so as not to be branded a freak.

When he was seventeen, he was called to his high school principal's office. He could sense immediately shock and pity in the man even before the principal asked him to sit down. His father, who was being treated for what would, in later years, be diagnosed as post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, had shot his mother, his twenty-year old sister and himself in their home. For years, Luke had sensed the fear, anger and helplessness in his father but could not communicate it to his mother and sister. He knew to stay away when his father's vision, his aura, was particularly bad, and he tried to warn the women but they always chided him for overreacting. For the rest of his life, Luke would blame himself for not protecting his family and he vowed to use his special skill to protect others.

“Chill out, Lin; I'm not going to bite. Sit down and tell me what you've got.”

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The young woman took the chair across from Luke's desk and spread out a sheaf of paper printouts from a number of web pages.

“Well Dr. Simmons, what's available is a mixed bag, as they say,” she said, consulting her notes and laboring with her heavy Chinese accent. “Gold mining is big in Brazil and is well documented. It is mostly placer mining and on a fairly large scale. Most of it is in the State of Minas Gerais and along the Guyanese and Venezuelan borders, the area known as the Guyana Shield. The Shield area is one of the richest in the world for mineral deposits. The mafic rocks are approximately two billion years old and deposits of gold, diamonds, chromium, and other important minerals are scattered throughout the area. These deposits have not been extensively exploited to date because of the extreme remoteness of the area. The region is mostly rain forest – what they call triple canopy jungle – with trees approaching three hundred feet in height. Transportation is primarily by river – and there are many of them – and the population is sparse – mostly Amerindian tribes. The situation in neighboring Guyana is even more severe, and there is less information. All the mines there are small, and all are placer operations. Mining is primarily run by small groups of former slaves, black men who roam the interior of the country working smallholdings for gold and diamonds. These people are called porknockers and theirs is a subsistence life – as soon as they put together a small cache of diamonds or gold they head for Georgetown, the capital city on the Atlantic coast, and sell their take for booze, women and supplies for their next trip back. There have been a few commercial operations but all have failed – often having to do with a lack of labor.”

“And why is that?” Luke asked, impressed with the detail she had uncovered.

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“Primarily because the interior of Guyana is sparsely populated. According to government statistics, the total population of the country is around seven hundred thousand and two-thirds live within thirty miles of the coast. And, of those who do live in the interior, the tribes are adverse to that type of work and the porknockers are independent.”

“What about labor from Brazil? Isn’t that side more populated?”

“Yes. Guyanese and Brazilians cross the border at will and the few commercial Guyanese mines have tried to use Brazilians but there is the language problem and the Brazilians can make more money on their own side.”

“Thanks, Lin. That was good work. I may need you to expand on this before I leave.”

The girl smiled and he could tell she was pleased and relieved. So, you don’t think I’m such an ogre after all, he thought. He knew what people said about him behind his back but he could care less.

Luke left his office at six, a little earlier than his normal schedule that gave him an hour or two of free time after hours without interferences from his students and postdocs. Tonight he was having dinner with a colleague and former lover, a woman knowledgeable in the sociology of primitive societies. He wanted to pick her brain about the people who lived on the Guyana/Brazil border – he would be meeting them soon enough.

His date, Kathryn Sibelius, was a noted specialist in the social structure of primitive societies on the verge of advancing modernity. Her work had taken her to Indonesia, the Philippines,

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and to Papua, New Guinea. She focused on how modern societies corrupted and eventually overwhelmed native customs and beliefs. He was interested in any insight she could provide about circumstances on the Guyana/Brazil border. Plus, he hadn't seen her in a month; they had left on good terms and he was looking forward to seeing her again.

Luke picked her up at her condo in the university area at seven. She was fifty – a good fifty, he told himself – and had never married – one of those science widows. She kept herself in shape by swimming every day and by good Scandinavian genes. She was flirty, but, at her core, she was a scientist absorbed with the arcane details of her chosen area of research.

“Hey, Kathryn,” he said when she answered the door. She was stunning, in a simple yellow dress, expensive gold jewelry and a dazzling smile. Her aura was projected behind her, a combination of happiness to see him and curiosity about why he had invited her to dine at Golden's finest restaurant. They had normally eaten at a campus pizzeria.

“Hi, Luke. I was honored when you found time to ask me out,” she said, somewhat sarcastically. She took his hand and drew him in. “Whatever the reason, I'm glad you're here.”

“Well, I hadn't seen you in a while and I wondered how you were. Plus, I need to pick your brain on a project I'm working on.”

“We didn't have to go out for that. We could have eaten here.”

“You deserve better than that, Kathryn, and my intentions aren't all professional.”

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“Hmm,” she said, “that’s more like what I wanted to hear.”

The Briarwood Inn was one of the city’s finest restaurants and Luke chose it for its outdoor seating – perfect for a late summer evening. They were shown to a table with a wonderful view of the Front Range that residents never tired of admiring. They ordered drinks – bourbon on the rocks for him, chardonnay for her. They made small talk – mostly university gossip – and she probed him about his current romantic interests. In fact, he hadn’t been seeing anyone recently. They ordered dinner and a bottle of pinot noir.

“OK, Luke, what do you need from me? We’re not exactly in the same professional area.”

Luke detailed what he knew about the Guyana/Brazil region and the mining operation the State Department had asked him to investigate.

“What I really need to understand, Kathryn, is the relationships between the Amerindian tribes, these subsistence black miners, and the Brazilians across the border. And how they function as laborers in the gold mining operation.”

“Wow, Luke, you’ve picked an interesting one. The area you’re talking about, on the Guyana side, is one of the most primitive and wild areas in the world. After Guyana gained independence from Britain, in nineteen sixty-six, I think, the country underwent decades of political turmoil and a succession of Marxist governments. The educated classes, mostly white, fled and took their wealth and knowledge with them. As a result, the country has remained undeveloped since. In fact, today, Guyana is one of the most unspoiled areas in the world with incredible natural resources, and there is a small niche market for ecotourism.”

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“But, I read that Brazil had just completed a highway bridge across the river that separates the two countries with the idea of building a highway to the capital on the coast. Something about opening markets to the Caribbean.”

Kathryn sipped her wine and paused as the waiter removed their salad plates.

“You’re right. I read the same thing. The bridge crosses the river at the town of Lethem on the Guyana side. The sister city in Brazil is Bonfim. I know this because one of my colleagues recently attracted a postdoc from Brazil and he was talking about the highway project and what it means for both economies and the local tribes.”

Luke poured himself another glass of wine. He would have preferred to stick with bourbon but it hardly went with the roasted quail they had ordered.

“So back to the residents of that area. What can you tell me about the tribes?”

Kathryn nodded. “I’ve studied them somewhat but not to the extent I have those in other countries. The two main tribes are the Wapishana and the Wai-Wai. They’re quite similar and, in recent years, there has been intermarriage. They’re both part of the greater Arawak nation that extends from Venezuela into the Guyanas and Brazil.”

“Have they interbred with the blacks and the Brazilians?”

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“Yes. That has been ongoing for years. Pure tribal blood is fast disappearing, as are their languages. It’s too bad, but inevitable when modern societies intrude.”

Luke poked at his food and watched with admiration his slim date chow down like a Marine. Must be the swimming, he thought. I run and still have trouble keeping the weight off.

“And what about these black miners, the so-called porknockers? They seem to be a unique group.”

Kathryn reluctantly put down her fork. “I’ve read a few things, but little is known about them. That may be because their numbers are small and they’re scattered throughout the interior. From what I’ve picked up, they’re descendants of former slaves who left the sugar plantations along the coast of Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana and developed a subsistence living working smallholdings for gold and diamonds in the interior. They speak the languages of their countries, but also use a polyglot speech called Taki-Taki, with one of the smallest vocabularies in the world, a few hundred words.”

“My own research,” Luke added, “indicates they live a nomadic life, moving from their mine holdings to Georgetown to sell their gold and diamonds. But only men are mentioned. Where do the women come from?”

“From what I understand,” Kathryn said, eyeing Luke’s uneaten quail, “they have non-marital relationships with black women in Georgetown and more permanent arrangements with women in the tribes. A few marry Brazilian women and move back and forth across the border.”

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Luke pushed back his chair and got the waiter to take away his plate and get him another bourbon. Kathryn continued to nurse her wine and asked for the dessert menu.

“That brings me to my main question, Kathryn. How would you expect these three groups to perform as laborers in the gold mine?”

She shook her head. “In the case of the Amerindians and the porknockers, not well. The tribes have maintained a subsistence living from the forest, and work for them is hunting, fishing and tending small plots. They have no need for money and, therefore, no need for outside work. As for the porknockers, from what I can tell, they would resist being laborers. Former slaves have a strong resistance to working for others. They prefer to eke out a simple living as free men.”

“And what about the Brazilians?”

He waited as she ordered the Crème Brule.

“That’s where they would get most of their workers. Brazil has become a crowded place and work is scarce. Unlike the other groups, the Brazilians have a cash economy and mine work would be no harder than some of the other available jobs.”

The two faculty members finished their scholarly banter as they finished their meal. Kathryn nursed her espresso and Luke a snifter of Spanish brandy. He could sense that she was composed and aroused at the same time. Damn, he thought, having ESP has its advantages.

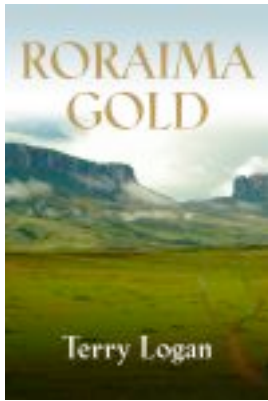
“Kathryn, thanks for the feedback; it’s just what I needed. I hate going unprepared to a strange place, especially somewhere as



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exotic as the Guyana bush. How can I thank you besides the great dinner we had?"

"You know how you can thank me, Luke. Now let's get out of here and no more office talk."



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