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# Golden Buddha

## Clive Cussler

Chapter one

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The flowers surrounding the summer palace of Norbulingka were closed but ready to bloom. The parklike setting of the complex was beautiful. High stone walls surrounded it, within the walls were trees and lush gardens, and in the center was a smaller yellow wall, through which only the Dalai Lama, his advisors and a few select monks passed. Here were tranquil pools, the home of the Dalai Lama and a temple for prayer.

It was a sea of order and substance centered in a country in chaos.

Not far away, perched on the side of a hill, was the imposing winter palace of Potala. The massive structure seemed to step down the hillside. Potala contained over one thousand rooms, was populated by hundreds of monks and dated from centuries before. There was an imposing orderliness to the building. Stone steps led from the mid levels of the seven-story palace in an orderly zigzag downward and then stopped at a gigantic block stone wall that formed the base of the behemoth. The precisely laid stones rose nearly eighty feet into the air.

At the base was a flat stretch of land where tens of thousands of Tibetans were assembled. The people, as well as another large group at Norbulingka, had come to protect their spiritual leader. Unlike the hated Chinese who occupied their country, the peasants carried not rifles but knives and bows. Instead of artillery, they had only flesh, bone and spirit. They were outgunned, but to protect their leader they would have gladly laid down their lives.

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Their sacrifice would require but one word from the Dalai Lama.

Inside the yellow wall, the Dalai Lama was praying at the shrine to Mahakala, his personal protector. The Chinese had offered to take him to their headquarters for his protection, but he knew that was not their true motive. It was the Chinese from whom he needed protection, and the letter the Dalai Lama had just received from Ngabo Nga-wang Jigme, the governor of Chamdo, held a truer picture. After a discussion with General Tan, the Chinese military officer in command of the region, Jigme was certain the Chinese were planning to begin shelling the crowds to disperse them.

Once that happened, the loss of life would be horrific.

Raising from his knees, the Dalai Lama walked over to a table and rang a bell. Almost instantly the door opened and the head of the Kusun Depon, the Dalai Lama's personal bodyguards, appeared. Through the open door he could see several Sing Gha warriors. The monastic policemen lent a terrifying presence. Each was over six feet tall, wore a fearsome mustache, and was dressed in a black padded suit that made them appear even larger and more invincible.

Several Dogkhyi, the fierce Tibetan mastiff guard dogs, stood on their haunches at attention.

'Please summon the oracle, the Dalai Lama said quietly.

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From his house in Lhasa, Langston Overholt III was monitoring the deteriorating conditions. He stood alongside the radio operator as the man adjusted the dial.

'Situation critical, over.'

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The radio operator turned the dial to reduce the static.

'Believe red rooster will enter the henhouse, over.'

The operator watched the gauges carefully.

'Need immediate positive support, over.'

Again a lag as the operator adjusted the dial.

'I recommend eagles and camels, over.'

The man stood mute as the radio warbled and the green gauges returned to a series of wavelike motions. The words were out in the ether now; the rest was out of their control. Overholt wanted airplanes-and he wanted them now.

The oracle, Dorje Drakden, was deep in a trance. The setting sun came through the small window high on the wall of the temple and cast a path of light that ended at an incense holder. The wisps of smoke danced on the beam of light and a strange, almost cinnamon smell filled the air. The Dalai Lama sat cross-legged on a pillow against a wall a few feet from Drakden, who was hunched over, knees down, with his forehead on the wood floor. Suddenly, in a deep voice, the oracle spoke.

'Leave tonight! Go.'

Then, still with his eyes closed, still in a trance, he rose, walked over to a table and stopped exactly one foot away. Then he reached down, picked up a quill pen, dipped it in ink and drew a detailed map on a sheet of paper before collapsing to the ground.

The Dalai Lama rushed to the oracle's side, lifted his head and patted his cheek. Slowly, the man began to awaken. After sliding a pillow under his head, the Dalai Lama rose and poured a cup of water from an earthenware pitcher. Carrying the cup back to the oracle, he placed it under his lips.

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'Sip, Dorje,' he said quietly.

Slowly, the older man recovered and pulled himself to a seated position. As soon as the Dalai Lama was sure the oracle was on the mend, he walked over to the table and stared at the ink drawing.

It was a detailed map showing his escape route from Lhasa to the Indian border.

Overholt had been born into his career. At least one Overholt had served in every war the United States had fought since the Revolutionary War. His grandfather had been a spy in the Civil War, his father during World War I, and Langston the third had served in the OSS in World War II before switching to the CIA when it'd been formed in 1947. Overholt was now thirty-three, with a fifteen-year history of espionage.

In all that time, Overholt had never seen a situation quite this ominous.kground.