



NIERGEL
CHRONICLES

Book Two

Quest

D. I. HENNESSEY

NIERGEL CHRONICLES ~ QUEST

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BOOK TWO

D. I. HENNESSEY



DEDICATION

To the invaluable friends who have helped me in my search for truth.

'You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.'

Jeremiah 29:13.

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NIERGEL

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(Welsh: 'Nirgel,' pr. Near--ġ-el – Mysterious Secret)

“FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU — THE LORD DECLARES...”

~ Jeremiah 29:11

CATHEDRAL

“IT’S TIME...THE TIME HAS COME FOR A NEW KING.”

Jeff feels his heart jump to his throat as Earnest Billingsly recounts his uncle Barrymore’s last words. The words pour over Jeff, bringing a staggering weight of responsibility — it feels like an avalanche. The degree of faith that his uncle placed in him seems inconceivable.

The self-doubts that flood Jeff’s thoughts swirl like a powerful churning tide — what if he isn’t able to complete his secret challenge? Everything his uncle worked for... and died for... will be lost. Everything the Niergel have fought for ...for thousands of years... will be lost! He finds himself bending forward with his head against his folded hands, suddenly wishing he knew how to pray the way his friends E.B. and the kindly missionary Christos did. It is clear to him that his uncle’s shoes are enormously large shoes to fill... he can’t help admitting that he needs the help of a higher power!

At the cathedral’s dais, EB pauses momentarily and brushes away a tear from his eye. The large audience is utterly silent except for the

sound of mourners sniffing into tissues. His account of Barry's words hangs in the air poignantly in the silence before EB continues.

"...It was clear t' me that Barry felt far more sorrow over the thought of departin' from his friends than he did for his own life. There was a tear in Barry's eye as he wished me godspeed and sent me off. I'll confess that there was a true mist in mine as well."

EB bows his head for a moment as his voice becomes strained. "... Bein' entrusted with that night's mission was my life's greatest honor. But sayin' goodbye to Barry at that moment was, just the same, the most difficult act of my life."

The distinguished old man's voice cracks as he unapologetically removes his glasses to wipe his tear-filled eyes with a handkerchief. Sniffing can be heard throughout the broad audience as his emotional account strikes home. Jeff feels his own eyes fill with tears as well. Even though he never met his uncle Barrymore, it seems like he knew him... he feels a remarkable kindred spirit with the amazing man.

"I would be deeply remiss," EB finally continues, "if I failed to mention Barry's great and profound faith. He often said that his relationship with Christ sustained him, and those who knew him will agree that he lived his faith in every part of his life... We know he is rejoicin' today in the company of dear friends and angels... and most surely in the embrace of his Savior."

EB casts his eyes upward, "...fare-thee-well dear friend... steady on, until we meet again."

The congregation — more than a thousand strong — stands to their feet, erupting in thunderous applause as EB quietly makes his way back to his seat. Jeff stands, offering EB his hand; both men's eyes are wet with tears as they embrace.

WHEN EVERYONE SITS DOWN, Jeff remains standing — he looks to the pulpit and catches Christos' eye: "May I?" Jeff asks. Christos nods graciously and invites him to come.

The vast crowd's utter silence reveals their rapt attention as he

climbs to the dais. Christos gives Jeff an encouraging smile and steps aside, inviting him to step to the pulpit.

Standing there alone, Jeff looks out over the audience, noticing how full the huge cathedral is... the pews and balconies are filled with people, with many standing in the back and along the sides. He sees his kind-hearted housekeeper, Isabel standing beside the door in the back; she is drying flowing tears with her handkerchief. Then his eye catches Angus' widow, Mrs. Baird, and she gives him a kind smile and a slight nod of encouragement. He looks back at EB with the old man's amazing account still reverberating in his mind. EB gives him a kind nod and sits attentively. The vast cathedral is so quiet that the sound of a single pin dropping could be clearly heard.

"Six days..." Jeff says quietly as the amplified sound of his voice echoes in the large auditorium, "...who would have thought that so much could change in such a span of time?" Just as he says this, he happens to look over at one of the enormous stained glass windows that depicts Michelangelo's Creation scene; "...except God, of course," he adds with his arm stretched toward it. A smattering of polite laughter is heard from around the auditorium.

Jeff looks down, collecting his thoughts quietly. "I have to say that the events and revelations of the past week have been more than a little overwhelming... but none of them more so than what I've learned of my uncle Barrymore himself. A wave of emotion wells up inside him, forcing him to stop as he chokes back unexpected tears.

I must confess that a week ago, my life was adrift. Although I was fortunate to be finding success in my work, I was still grappling with the old traumas of being orphaned as a young child with no family of my own. My adoptive parents were taken in an automobile accident several years ago." The surge of emotions that these memories elicit stops him once again. This time he is unable to stifle the tears that unexpectedly escape and run down his face, causing him to step back from the dais for a moment. Christos offers him a clean handkerchief, which Jeff accepts gratefully, wiping his eyes. When he has collected himself, he steps forward again, clearing his throat and swallowing carefully as he continues.

“On the night that EB...Mr. Billingsly... arrived to rescue me... for which I will be eternally grateful...” Jeff gently clears his throat as that night’s events add to the emotional swell within him. The powerful account of it that EB has just shared echoes in his thoughts. He pauses to sure up his composure before continuing.

“...On that night, my entire world changed. I learned that I *did* have a family, only to discover that I had once again lost that newfound family in the same brief moment.”

“Since then, I have learned more of that remarkable story... of uncle Barrymore’s selfless act of love — for me, someone he’d never met; and of the humbling degree of trust he placed in me.

“EB’s rescue that night was nothing short of heroic; it has quickly become clear that my uncle’s greatest gift to me, by far, has been the friendship of the finest friend I’ve ever known.” He holds his hand toward EB, who bows his head humbly.

“All of you have made it clear that I have many friends here. I feel as though I now suddenly have a very large family... more than I could ever have dreamed of!” He unconsciously holds his arms out as if trying to embrace the entire audience, and the cathedral quickly fills with a wave of clapping that sounds like a refreshing rain shower as it washes over him. A single tear runs down Jeff’s cheek.

He looks down at the two wreaths in front of him, and his expression grows somber. “I never had the chance to know either of these great men personally,” he looks out at the audience and continues, “... but I *do* know them — I have seen them clearly in so many of you.” Jeff straightens as he is filled with the thought.

“Many men leave a legacy. A few are great conquerors or kings, some leave behind monuments of buildings, companies, or fortunes, and most leave families and friends who remember them for a time. But it is a rare few whose lives make such a lasting impression on the world that they inspire the highest honor — that honor that makes others want to emulate them ...to become like them. It’s clear that Angus and my uncle Barry were men of that kind.

“The manner in which their sacrifices were made reminds us of the great struggle in which we’re engaged. The past week’s lessons

have opened my eyes to that struggle for the first time. But I pledge my life from this moment onward to ensure their sacrifices will not have been in vain. We honor their memory by being tireless champions of that struggle... all of us... together.”

A great rumble of “Aye’s,” “Yea’s,” and “Amens” sweeps through the audience. Borgia’s emissary, Blandus Alfos, shifts uncomfortably in his seat, suddenly feeling a degree of unity and resolve among the large audience that he has never sensed before.

Jeff straightens and looks again at the wreaths; “I still remember my grandmother’s words at my parents’ funeral:

“Huq p'unchaykama...,”

“...which means in Quechua: ‘Until another day.’” Jeff quietly clears his throat to ease the tightness as he remembers that memorial service. He catches a glimpse of Hun Hunahpu wiping his eyes at the mention of his daughter’s words.

“The man who took me in that day and adopted me as his son was a dear friend of my father. I’ve never forgotten the blessing he spoke at their graveside; it’s been a constant comfort to me. It was an old Gaelic blessing...” Jeff closes his eyes with a bow of his head as he repeats it touchingly...,

“... Ar dheas Dé go raibh a anam¹..., ‘May thy soul be on
God’s right hand.’”

AFTER A MOMENT OF POIGNANT SILENCE, Jeff slowly lifts his gaze and nods to Christos politely. The choir’s powerful harmonies begin to fill the cathedral as Jeff makes his way down from the platform. EB stands to meet him with a second emotional embrace, revealing their deepening friendship. Anyone could see that this was the embrace of more than friends... it was more the way a man might embrace his father or a father his grown son.

Jeff looks over at Angus Baird's widow and makes his way to her, bowing his head in heartfelt sympathy as he offers her his hand. She stands and hugs him as well, "Thank you for those beautiful words; your uncle would be very proud." He nods to her gratefully as she sits and then offers his hand to her daughter Bridget, who shakes it shyly and wipes her tears.

As he returns to his seat, Jeff catches Eugenia's gaze where she is sitting beside her grandfather. He can see that her eyes are wet with emotion before she draws her glance down to focus on her folded hands. A moment later, she has raised the shield of her steely countenance again, reflecting the strength of a well-trained soldier within her.

When the choir has finished, Christos gives a closing homily and then takes a seat as the Chapel's Pastor, Diarmuid Abbott, rises to dismiss the service with a benediction. The choir sings their final hymn while Christos and Dr. Abbott make their way up the aisle to take their place at the door.

EB LEANS OVER and speaks close to Jeff's ear: "th' Board is meetin' immediately after the service. We can head there together."

An usher taps Jeff on the shoulder, inviting him to make his way up the aisle as the rest of his row files out behind him. As he is walking, Jeff's mind is filled with conflicted thoughts. He has never given much thought to God but can't help wrestling with a question that is suddenly confronting him. The sense of God that he feels here is indescribably loving. How could a God so loving allow such tragedy? The thought of Barrymore's and Angus' deaths mixes with memories of the others that have rocked his life — all of his family. It's unconscionable that a loving God would really allow such a thing.

Still, the wrestling continues — the sense he feels of God's love is unavoidable — it is undeniable and relentless.

MEETING OF THE BOARD

Jeff and EB remain longer than planned at the Chapel, as practically everyone stops to welcome him and share their condolences. They finally reach the Board Meeting more than an hour late.

Christos is with them as they arrive at the office suite, noticing Blandus' bodyguards standing outside the door — still following Barrymore's rule prohibiting the Borgia guards from entering the suite.

AS THEY ENTER the office lobby, Jeff can hear the sound of arguing coming from the Board Room; he recognizes the voices of Blandus and General Zobrist.

"...Of course, we must! I propose we confirm him now — there is no reason to wait!" Zo argues passionately.

"Am I now the sole defender of these arcane bylaws? Where is there not irony in that?" Blandus retorts.

"I'm afraid that Blandus is right," EB agrees as he enters the room.

“Well! There’s a turn!” Blandus exclaims in exasperation.

All of them look over at Jeff standing in the doorway, suddenly feeling uncomfortable about the topic of their conversation. EB makes his way to his place at the large oval table, behind a nameplate that reads “Company Secretary.” After typing on his keyboard, all their flat panel screens display an image of the bylaws, with key passages highlighted.

“I took the liberty of familiarizin’ myself with the pertinent articles,” EB explains, “I dare say that none of us have been through a change of the Chairmanship before.

“The long and short of it is that a prescribed sequence must be followed. First, nominations are made for the vacant member seat, and then a vote is called. The elected individual will serve as an interim member for the trial period of 90 days, following which they must be confirmed for full membership by a simple majority vote. Durin’ this period, they will have all the rights and prerogatives of full members, with one exception — they cannot vote for the Chairmanship before their confirmation.

“As you can see in the clause that is now highlighted on your screens, the selection of a new Chairman must be made by a vote of no fewer than ten full members, representing at least eighty percent of the company’s shares. The nominee whose votes constitute at least two-thirds of the company’s shares is deemed the winner.”

All of the Board’s members understand that this means the Chairman cannot be selected without the vote of the majority shareholder, and since the Hastleworth family still owns and controls seventy percent of the company’s shares... Jeff is that shareholder.

“In essence, therefore, the vote for Chairman must be postponed until the company’s majority shareholder has taken a seat on the Board and completed his 90-day confirmation period,” EB explains.

“Well then, it seems straightforward enough,” Zo interjects, “let’s be on with it!”

“There is one other matter, I’m afraid,” EB notes. “The vacant seat is for an Executive Director. Therefore it must be filled by an active member of the executive leadership.”

Adalwin holds his nameplate in the air: “I move to nominate Jeffrey Sutherland Hastleworth for the CEO position,” he declares.

“Is there a second?” EB requests.

“*I/I second/second the/the nomination/nomination!*” Cynefrid and Berengar both answer in near unison.

“Very well,” EB acknowledges. He looks at Jeff, “will you accept the nomination, Mr. Sutherland?”

“What? ...well ...y-yes,” Jeff answers, caught a bit off guard.

“Would you be so kind as to wait in your office while the vote is taken?” EB asks him with a friendly nod.

“Y-yes, certainly,” Jeff answers self-consciously. He scans the room, registering a compliment of friendly smiles with a few exceptions — Blandus is scowling in frustration, and Eugenia is characteristically stoic, revealing no opinion at all. Zo stands and meets him in the doorway, shaking his hand with a broad smile and a wink of his eye as he motions for Jeff to please step outside and closes the door behind him.

JEFF WALKS AWKWARDLY to his office a few steps away and enters, leaving it open a crack as he sits behind the desk and spins his chair around to stare out the room’s expansive windows, releasing a deep breath.

It is a beautiful day outside. The sun is sparkling off the ocean whitecaps, and the sky looks deep blue, without a cloud in sight. Jeff rises from his seat and walks to the window, looking out over the castle grounds with their manicured lawns and beds of vibrant flowers. The sight still looks surreal to him. His mind, however, is miles away, thinking about the discussion he had with Hunahpu at breakfast.

Hunahpu’s revelation that he is the father of Jeff’s grandmother — his great-grandfather, only adds to the astonishing mystery of this place. Hunahpu’s words from breakfast seem to hang in the air as Jeff considers them:

. . .

"THERE ARE NO OTHERS... only you and I... and I am very old."

HE PULLS his O-P from his pocket — the remarkable mobile device that hosts his uncle's fantastic avatar. "...CHET, how old is Hun Hunahpu?"

"Comparisons are difficult between the European and ancient Incan calendars," CHET notes, "but it is assumed that he was born somewhere around 1300 AD." CHET's answer doesn't surprise Jeff, but he is taken aback nonetheless.

"WERE the Incas descendants of Arubija then?" he asks.

"The original Incan people were not. Arubija's descendants were avid explorers. They ventured from here before the first century, at first encountering the Mayan civilization."

"WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM ...their descendants, I mean?" Jeff asks with trepidation.

A VOICE from the doorway beats CHET to the answer.

"Most of us were wiped out by those who came after."

JEFF TURNS in surprise to see Hunahpu standing at the door.

"That is a very long story," Hunahpu adds sadly, "...very long indeed. I would be happy to spend as much time as you'd like discussing it.

"Now, however, I've come to let you know that the Board has

completed their voting. It's my great pleasure to inform you that they have approved your nomination as CEO and a board member." He walks to where Jeff is standing and shakes his hand. "Let me be the first to offer my heartfelt congratulations. Godspeed, my son; I pray your tenure may be long and prosperous."

"Thank you," Jeff replies gratefully, "but if I don't succeed in completing the Challenge, then it'll be a short tenure for sure."

"Ah yes, that," Hunahpu acknowledges, "I cannot help you with that, I'm afraid. But I have the utmost confidence that you will complete it easily."

Jeff thinks of the words in his uncle's letter: *...it will be the most arduous and soul searching test you have ever endured...*

"I have a feeling that completing it easily is pretty unlikely," he confesses. "I don't suppose you've completed one, have you?" he asks hopefully.

"Not of the kind you suggest," Hunahpu admits. "That is an honor reserved for only a Hastleworth..."

"...and only a Hastleworth can complete it," Jeff says, interrupting him to finish the sentence. "...Yeah, so I've heard."

"Yes, well then..." Hunahpu says as he returns to his reason for coming to get Jeff, "...I am supposed to retrieve you for the Board's meeting... shall we join them?" He places one hand on Jeff's shoulder and stretches his other arm toward the door in an invitation to return to the boardroom.

"...MR. Alfos! I must remind you that the Board is in session, and you are subject to parliamentary procedures..." they hear EB ruling as they enter the room. He strikes his gavel repeatedly: "You may seek t'be recognized if you wish t'have the floor!"

"For what purpose?" Blandus answers sarcastically, "...nothing I say is recognized among this group of closed-minded automatons!" He looks at Jeff as he and Hunahpu enter; "Perhaps the *anointed heir* will be more open-minded... although I sincerely doubt it," he

complains. He waves his hand in the air and nods his head mockingly as he pretends to pay homage to Jeff.

General Zobrist snorts in outrage, his face turning deep red, but he manages to hold his tongue.

EB ignores Blandus' outburst and turns his attention to Jeff with a smile. "I trust that Hunahpu has informed you of the news regarding your appointments; the heartiest congratulations on behalf of the entire Board!"

Blandus grunts indignantly at EB's remark; his had obviously been a dissenting vote.

"Thank you... thank you all," Jeff says as he looks over the faces around the table. Aside from Blandus, all of them are smiling back, including Eugenia. "...I'm humbled by your confidence," he adds sincerely.

"Yes, as well you should be," Blandus says with disdain. "Can we please get on with more important matters?" he asks EB impatiently. Jeff smiles at him with an acquiescent nod, seeming unfazed.

"Mr. Sutherland, if you please," EB says, still smiling as he offers Jeff the vacant seat that had been his uncle Barrymore's. It is at the head of the large oval table, giving him a clear view of everyone's face. EB is seated directly to the chair's right, and Hunahpu's seat is beside it to his left. At the far end of the table, directly opposite his place, is Blandus. Jeff feels an overwhelming sense of legacy as he sits down, holding the chair's leather armrests and noting the years of wear they reveal from his uncle's use. A momentary silence comes over the room as everyone acknowledges the poignancy of the moment.

EB CLEARS HIS THROAT... "Right then... seein' as this is an emergency meetin', there are no reports to be heard from the division operations; the last matter of business is an authorization of spending for repairs to the castle and grounds followin' this week's ...incident."

Their screens flash as the cost estimates and funding requests are displayed. Each of them spends a moment studying the proposal.

"This is only for property damages," Jeff says as he quickly scans

the screen. “Has there been any remuneration to the families who were injured?”

“We have made certain that all have received full pay throughout the week while attending to their personal needs,” Adalwin explains sincerely. Of course, all medical costs have been assumed — as well as the property repairs noted here, many of which are repairs to private residences.”

“Is that all?” Jeff questions, “just repairs, lost pay, and medical costs?” The room is silent. “W-well, what about their personal suffering...” Jeff continues, “...what will become of Mrs. Baird and her daughter with no means of income? I looked into the eyes of Alpin Bannock... we both did,” he adds, looking at EB, “and saw the pain of his injuries and the fear that still gripped his thoughts.”

“Mr. Sutherland is right, of course,” Christos agrees. “Those men went far beyond the call of duty. We must ensure that their families are cared for.”

“And a monetary award is more than justified,” Adalwin adds.

A vote is quickly called, and the proposal passes with eleven in favor and one against.

“Seriously?” Jeff asks as he sees Blandus’ Nay vote.

“My shareholders do not mix business with sentiment,” Blandus answers coldly. “It is not a suitable use of their assets to be frivolously wasting them on sentimental gestures that do nothing for the good of the company.”

“Speaking of which,” he continues, “what will be done with this ridiculous Niergel business now that Barrymore is gone? I propose that it be immediately defunded and disbanded!” He stares at Jeff as if coaxing him to second his motion. The room falls silent as several board members look at one another with impatient glances. General Zobrist grunts with a “Hrumph!”

“Is there a second to the proposal by Mr. Alphos?” EB asks after a short pause.

“Certainly not!” Zo says indignantly.

“Outrageous!” Christos bursts out.

Everyone else remains silent, avoiding eye contact with Blandus.

“The motion has not been seconded,” EB announces after a moment of waiting, striking his gavel.

“He makes that motion at every meeting,” Hunahpu whispers, leaning closer to Jeff as EB calls the session to a close.

JEFF STANDS at the door and thanks each of the Board members gratefully as they make their way out. Blandus is the first to leave; he offers Jeff a limp hand as he speaks to him with disgust in his voice.

“I must admit, you had me feeling hopeful for a moment this morning, but I see that the old man has gotten to you...” he nods behind him toward EB. Then he leans closer to Jeff and says in a low voice: “If you ever want to continue our conversation, you know where to reach me.”

Jeff nods politely. “It has certainly been good putting people’s faces with their names,” he answers evasively, as he wishes him safe travels. He notices Zo winking at him with a smile, recognizing the double entendre in his reply.

The rest of the members file past, offering Jeff congratulations and promising their support. All of them mention Barrymore in voices mixed with sorrow and admiration; several tell Jeff that his uncle would be very proud of him for the way he had handled himself today.

EB and Eugenia are nearly the last to leave the boardroom; “would you like t’join us for dinner?” EB invites, hopefully. The word “us” resonates in Jeff’s ears, and he smiles as he looks back and forth between the two of them, but then his eye catches sight of Hunahpu standing behind them....

“I’m sorry, I already have plans,” he says as he nods in the direction of his great grandfather with a smile and then looks back at both of them.

EB smiles back with a comprehending look. “We shall make it a rain check then,” he says in a friendly voice.

“It was very nice meetin’ y’ today...” Eugenia says with the broadest smile he has seen from her yet.

“Ms. Escutia... Eugenia...” Jeff replies, stumbling with her name... “The pleasure has been mine,” he says honestly as he shakes her hand. “Goodbye for now,” he adds, “I look forward to our next meeting... soon.”

“Please call me Genie,” she answers with a smile. “Bye for now.” She nods goodbye as she takes her grandfather by the arm.

EB looks at Jeff, beaming with pride as he escorts his granddaughter off.

ONLY HUNAHPU REMAINS as the two of them are left alone in the large room; he grabs Jeff’s hand with a firm handshake using both hands. “I recall the day your uncle was appointed,” he says with a warm smile, “he would be very pleased.”

“I’m sure he would have hoped for different circumstances,” Jeff notes sadly.

“On the contrary,” Hunahpu insists, “it is exactly as he would have hoped.” He places his hand on Jeff’s shoulder and motions toward the door; while they walk, he continues to explain. “If the Lord wills, you may one day understand this yourself. A long life can become burdensome; there comes a day when the desire for a meaningful death overtakes even the wish for a meaningful life.” He stops walking momentarily and looks at Jeff... “Barry’s accomplishment in death could hardly have been greater; I dare say that you may well be his life’s greatest achievement — he certainly believed that was so.”

Jeff swallows and waits for the tension in his throat to clear so he can speak, “...But he barely knew me — how could he have been sure that... that his sacrifice would be worth it?”

“You are a Hastleworth... that is enough,” Hunahpu answers in a kind voice. “Come,” he says as he motions for Jeff to walk with him.

Niergel Chronicles

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Quest

Niergel Chronicles Book 2

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