

*Cillian McGonegal has spent his life solving ancient mysteries. Now, he and his friends are a part of those mysteries. He must restore an ancient artifact with all of its missing pieces to free his friends and avoid being trapped in the past.*

## **The Twelve Gates: The Road to Redemption**

By Terence A. McSweeney

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VOLUME 2  
THE MCGONEGAL CHRONICLES

# THE TWELVE GATES

THE ROAD TO REDEMPTION

TERENCE A. MCSWEENEY

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# Chapter 1

“Goodness is something chosen. When a man cannot choose, he ceases to be a man.”

- Anthony Burgess, A Clockwork Orange

Cillian never had much time for religion. This is not to say that he was not a moral man. In his studies he had experienced the different teachings of various religions from Christianity to Taoism and all the other isms. Each was compelling. Each was noble. Each was already a part of his sense of morality. The problem he had was with *deities*, those magical creatures immune to death and all powerful. Those he could not countenance. What part could these beings possibly play in the life of a person who believed in self-determination? What purpose do they serve if a person could decide his or her actions and choose the path he or she follows? Christianity was particularly vexing for Cillian because it was almost as if the Christian god wanted it both ways. You have free will, but you also have a god that can intervene through prayer. What madness thought Cillian. For him there was good and evil. Man chose which path. It was the concept of sin that kept him up at night.

In any light, Cillian knew evil and he was standing before it at this moment. The creature he knew as Thadnelius Gromfort oozed evil. He watched him snuff out the life of GE as one might swat a mosquito. There was no remorse or hesitation. When he first met Gromfort he seemed a small, creepy little man. Now he looked much larger and more malevolent. Yes, Cillian knew evil when he saw it and the creature standing above him was it!

“Where is my stone?” asked the creature.

Cillian needed time to think. He said, “Why are we here? Where is here?”

The creature smiled revealing rows of sharp teeth. After a moment he said, "Professor McGonegal I believe I explained all that. I am trapped here, and you and your friends are going to break me out." He extended his hand, and his friends began to choke. He could see Mary fall to her knees gasping for air. Patrick and Liam soon followed.

"Where is my stone Professor? Shall I continue? Your friends do not have long."

As if on cue, Mary went limp and crumbled flat on the floor. Patrick was hunched over panting, Liam in obvious distress. Cillian quickly reached into his pack and pulled out the stone. He screamed, "I have it here, take it!"

Gromfort snapped his fingers and all was as it was. Mary came to and Cillian ran to her, leaving the stone behind. Liam had steel in his eyes and if he could get to his tormentor it was clear that he would end this. Gromfort waved his arm and the stone flew from the floor into his hand. He said,

"So, Professor, why is it that you sons and daughters of apes always behave like children. It is so amusing. You jump up and down. You threaten and growl, but in the end, you are empty vessels. You are all bluster and no bang!" He chuckled and the sound of it put a chill in the air. After a moment, thankfully, he stopped. He placed the stone down and spoke again saying, "Now, to the matter at hand. We or should I say you have a great deal of work to do."

Cillian interrupted, "Why should we help you? Better yet, why don't you just help yourself? You have the stone in its complete form. You can just use it and I am sure that you can go wherever it is you want. Why do you need us *apes* as you say?"

Gromfort smiled and said, "The stone is only a part of a whole. It is like the stem without the flower and this flower has many petals. Once the stone is complete your task will be done, and you will be free."

Cillian after a moment said, “So, if you release us back into the world to find these other pieces, what is to prevent us from just refusing to go along with your request?”

Gromfort rose from his throne and immediately tripled in size. He was no longer Gromfort. He was something terrible to behold. Cillian and the others could not look directly at this creature. Every facet of their bodies seemed to shake as he spoke saying,

“Do not trifle with me! You are as insignificant as a grain of sand. Do not forget I have your two friends. Were they not your reason for using the stone? I can just wave my hand and they will cease to exist!”

This angered Cillian. His reply was cutting. “If we are insignificant as you say, then why are you so interested in our help. Surely a big guy like yourself could just wave your hand and be free. Unless...you don’t have that power. That’s it. You are trapped just like our friends. Which means that as powerful as you are, there is a power even more powerful and they want you here.”

Gromfort was caught off guard. Gone was that hideous smile. It was replaced with what Cillian detected as grievance and for the first time, fear. He returned to his throne and to his former size. He no longer was the all-powerful, vindictive puppeteer controlling their fates because their fates were tied to his fate. It was at that moment that Cillian understood the position they were in. He measured his next words saying,

“So, it appears that we need each other. We need our friends back and you need us to find other parts of the stone. It appears that there is a bargain to be made here.”

Gromfort looked at Cillian and said, “What do you propose Professor?”

Cillian answered, “I will need to speak with my companions.” Turning to Mary, Patrick and Liam he asked, “So what do you think? Should we help our dark friend?”

It was Patrick that spoke first. “I do not trust this one. He is stuck here for a reason and that reason must be an awfully good one. GE had dealings with him and look how he ended up. There must be another way to get back.”

Liam said, “I am with Paddy on this lad. That display we just witnessed does not give me the warm fuzzies. I say we take our chances and find a way.”

Mary made things clear. She walked over to Cillian and took his hand. Turning to Patrick and Liam she said, “There is no other way. We do not have the stone and even if we did, we don’t have all of it. To travel back we need both parts. I am afraid we must make a Faustian bargain. We must work, at least for the time being, with Gromfort.”

The creature Gromfort suddenly stood up and exclaimed, “Well it seems we have a covenant!” With that he presented the stone again to Cillian. “You will need this.”

Cillian answered, “Not so fast. We are agreeable, but we need assurances. First, what happens when we get the remaining elements of the stone? Second, will our friends be safe? Third, where exactly are they and finally, if we do this how will we know you will keep your word and set us all free?”

Gromfort smiled, a very discomfoting sight, and said, “When the elements are returned, the stone will be as it was, and I will be released of my burden. As a token to my fidelity for our compact, I will seal our bond.” With that, he rose up and extended his hand. This hand was different. It was scaled and taloned. Instantly Cillian was lifted and drawn to that hand. The creature then cut a small wound in his arm and one in Cillian’s. The pain while not excruciating for Cillian, was deeply unpleasant. While both Gromfort’s arm and Cillian’s bled, the creature placed his wound onto Cillian’s. Instantly, Cillian was taken to another world. Images flashed in his mind. He saw sand and felt the heat of the sun. He saw many men laboring over the hauling of stone. In another

instant he felt the depths of a mighty river as it flowed over him. Then, it was over. He was again standing in Gromfort's temple.

Gromfort said, "It is done. We are bound by our intents." He returned to his throne and after a moment began again saying, "Your friends are at the gates of the Twelve Halls. It is a place of testing. This is not a place for the living. I will send a guardian who will assist them, but hear me, their time is limited as is this guardian's time. You must work quickly on fulfilling our bargain for if they succumb to the perils of the Halls they cannot return to this world."

Cillian, now recovered, asked, "What is this place, The Twelve Halls?"

Gromfort looked Cillian straight in the eyes and replied, "It is the place of judgement. It has other names but to followers of the Hebrew it is called, Hell." With that Gromfort sent the stone back to Cillian and said, "You have much work to do. There are seven elements of the stone that need to be recovered. They are spread across the earth. Each element holds a clue to the whereabouts of the next element. Follow those clues and you will meet with success."

Cillian was still trying to wrap his mind around the fact that his two friends were in Hell. Finally, he asked, so how do we know where to go first?"

Gromfort replied, "I will send you using the stone. From there the clue will be in each element as I said and using the stone and the clue you will be transported to the next element. When you complete the recovery of all seven elements you will return here."

Cillian asked, "Where is here, exactly?"

Gromfort smiled and said, "Why you are in my temple, the temple of Atun?"

Cillian then turned to his friends who did not look too thrilled about what they were being asked to do.



Patrick asked, “Are you sure Cilly we can trust this thing?”

“Not at all,” replied his brother, “but it is all we have.”

He held up the stone and turned back to the creature Atun saying, “We are ready.”

Atun, formerly Gromfort began to chant:

***“yetem atlak sarahkam lalem al-mahba qud tecon sherifa ounajeha fe al-bahth”***

*“You are released to the world of the living; may you be honorable and successful in your search.”*

As before, a shimmering surface appeared before them. Cillian grasped Mary’s hand and as the two began to enter the shimmering doorway, Liam stepped in front of them protesting,

“This will take us back to the lab laddie. We will not have a grand reception if you catch my meaning.”

Cillian did grasp his meaning and turned to Atun who had also understood.

Atun said, “You will not return to your former entry point. The stone will know where to go. Trust it.”

With that Cillian and his party stepped through the shimmering doorway. Instantaneously they were transported to the place of their first search. Alarmed, Cillian said, “This can’t be right!” It was completely empty. No buildings, no ancient writing, just jungle. It was then that he saw it.

## Chapter 2

“Is it useful to feel fear, because it prepares you for nasty events, or is it useless, because nasty events will occur whether you are frightened or not?”

- Lemony Snicket

Susanne and Nathan had not traveled far when they came across two gates. There was no wall that the gates were attached to. They were just iron gates, very old looking and very high. The gates towered over them. They were attached to two stone carved figures, one on each side. *Attached*, was not quite what they saw. Each was being held by the massive stone arms of the figure. As for the figures, they were not precisely human looking although they had human faces and human upper torsos. The lower half was wrapped in bindings and there was no separation to reveal whether there were legs or some other appendage. This gave the figures an ominous feel. Also, adding to this feeling was their sheer size. Nathan estimated they were at least five stories with the hands that held the gates almost a story tall themselves. It was these hands that were the most frightening. Attached to the enormous fingers were massive claws. One would not want to be in their grasp. Definitely, this was not a place that was inviting, but there they stood.

Susanne at last said, “Now what do we do?” She looked back down the path that they had traveled. There was nothing. There only option was to travel forward, and that way was impeded. She tried to go around the gate but was instantly repelled as soon as she neared where there should be a wall. Startled but not surprised she said, “What do we do just sit down and hope someone will come along?”

Nathan said, “Perhaps the gates are unlocked and all we have to do is press on them.” He got up to do just that. As his hands touched the iron of one gate, the stone figure holding it came to life. The head of the gate

holder turned to look down at Nathan with the sound of grinding stone. The eyes, which were merely stone before, now had life in them, and they stared directly at the interloper who had the audacity to touch the gate. The gatekeeper spoke,

***“ma he rahlatke hill ant naqi al-qalbeh”***

Nathan looked over to Susanne and said, “What do I do now? What is he saying?”

Susanne said, “It sounds like a question, but if I am right it is in Arabic. I don’t know Arabic.”

The stone gatekeeper spoke again,

***“Είσαι αγνός της καρδιάς”***

Suzanne immediately spoke up, “I know that language. It is Greek. He is asking you if you are pure of heart.

Nathan then said, “That’s great, but I do not know any Greek.”

Susanne answered, “The Greek word for *yes* is *Ναι*.”

Nathan in a booming voice replied, *Nai*

There was a long moment that nothing happened. Then the gatekeeper spoke again:

***“ποια είναι η φύση της ζωής”***

Nathan turned to Susanne, and she said, “He asked what is the nature of life? We must be careful of our answer. Remember our last encounter with big scary things asking questions?”

Nathan did remember and he did not want to go through that again. He said, “So what is the answer?”

Susanne thought out loud, “Well, we know that this place is for the souls of the dead. The Egyptians believed that the souls had the be

tested. We also know that the ancients believed that the afterlife was easier. No sickness or ...that's it *suffering*. The answer is suffering.”

Nathan looked doubtful. “Are you sure lass. I don’t want to be wrong and old big arms squashes me like a bug. Have you seen the arms on this guy?”

Susanne nodded and said, “I think that is the answer. I’m sure of it.”

Nathan said, “Alright so how do I say that in Greek?”

Susanne said, “*υποφέρουν*. “

Nathan practiced saying the word to himself a few times and finally said, “Okay here goes nothing.” He turned to face the stone giant who was still staring intently at him and said,

**“*υποφέρουν*”**

Slowly, the stone guardian lowered his mighty arm that was closest to Nathan to the ground and opened its giant hand so that the palm of that hand lay on the ground saying,

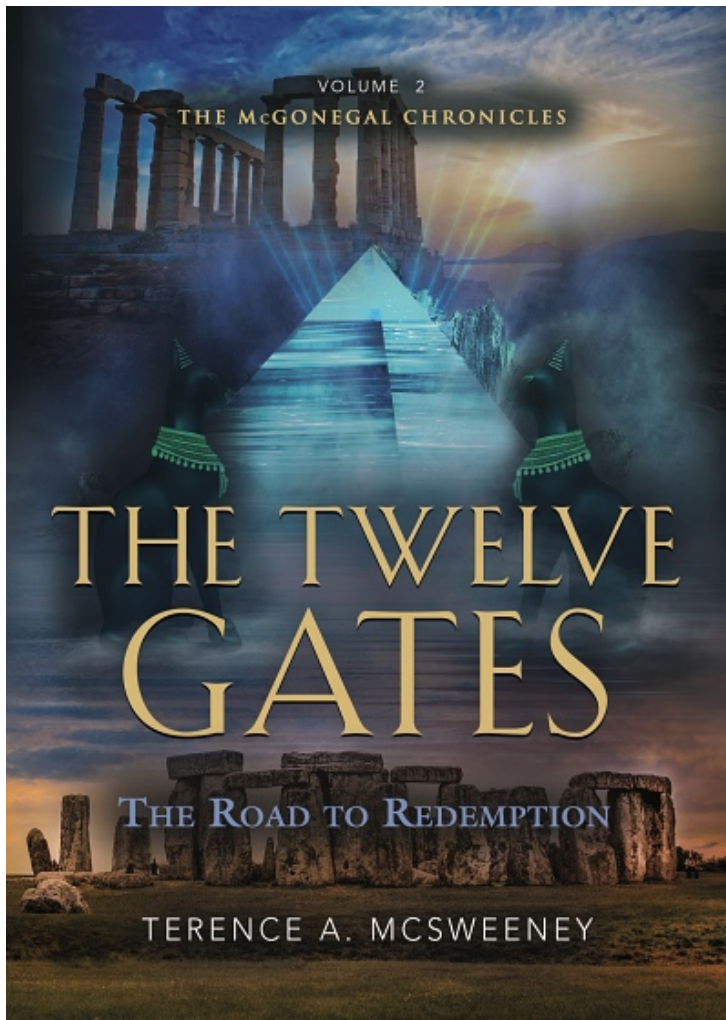
**Καλώς ήρθες**

*Welcome*

Nathan looked at Susanne and said, “I think our new friend wants us to go for a little ride. Shall we?”

Susanne nodded and they both stepped onto the giant stone palm. Slowly the stone guardian raised the hand with Susanne and Nathan safely standing on it and they were transported over the gate and set down on the other side. They stepped off and their new stone friend took his original position and posture. The eyes that moments ago had been piercing were now stone again.

Before them was a pathway that meandered off into the horizon. Susanne was reminded of Dorothy as she took her first step of her journey to find the Great Oz. Nathan's only thought was to get moving for the sooner they moved on, the sooner they would be done with the journey. He looked at his fellow traveler and said, "Well, one foot in front of the other, hey lass?" She smiled and arm in arm they began their odyssey.



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