

James Aranas has been named Archivist after the former Archivist's death. As he takes on his new duties, he is immediately confronted with a threat that jeopardizes all mankind. He turns to old friends, the McGonegals, for help.

Between the Folds - The Agency: The Aranas Years

By Terence A. McSweeney

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The cover art depicts a man with a backpack standing in a dark, cavernous space, looking into a tunnel of concentric clock faces. The clock faces are golden and feature Roman numerals, receding into a bright light at the end of the tunnel. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and sci-fi.

THE MCGONEGAL CHRONICLES

BETWEEN THE FOLDS

THE AGENCY: THE ARANAS YEARS

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1

It was fitting that this day of all days was cold and damp with a penetrating chill that could only be experienced in the British Isles in November. The stage was set to mark a death. The actors alive and dead were in their places. The heaviness of loss was ever present. There was a silence in tribute to the deceased. The ceremony began. He never contemplated his own death as he watched the pall bearers carry the casket to the final resting place of his mentor. The Archivist managed to get eight months after his retirement before the Reaper's knock. James had a number of opportunities to consult with him and he found his old boss to be at peace with it all, but now that the finality of it seeped in, James began to understand the void that was left. There were only a few mourners at the gravesite and other agents that were saying goodbye to a comrade. The ceremony was short as the Archivist was not a religious man and would have it no other way. There were a few words about being in a better place and a life of service, a service that few would ever know about. Adriana stood by his side and although stoic still betrayed her feelings with misty eyes.

“Ashes to Ashes, dust to dust.”

The coffin was lowered into the ground after the mourners each placed a rose on the casket. A legend was laid to rest. The mourners made for their vehicles to meet up at the pub. Agent Franklin came up to James and placed his large hand on his shoulder. There were no words spoken, none needed for he knew that “Eyes” always had his back. Adriana uncharacteristically gave her partner, now boss, a hug, and said, “I’ll wait for you by the car.” He nodded and she left. He now stood alone or thought he did for a voice from behind asked,

“Agent Aranas, can we speak?”

James turned and before him stood Thomas McGonegal. He went up to him and shook his hand saying, “Mr. McGonegal, thank you for coming.”

“He was my good friend and a good man. I’ll miss him.” James nodded.

“There is another matter I need to discuss with you. Can you come by the house tomorrow?”

James answered, “Certainly.”

“Is two convenient?”

“I’ll be there,” replied James. Thomas nodded, patted the new Archivist’s shoulder, and said, “Two it is.” He walked away.

James turned back to the hole that his boss, mentor and recently, friend now occupied.

“Better place. I will miss you and I hope to be at least half the man you were.”

He dropped the flower that he had forgotten was in his hand into the hole, nodded and said, “Until we meet again.” He turned around and went to his car asking, “Addy, are you up for a casual drive?”

“You know it,” was the reply. As the wing doors of the Lamborghini Diablo rose, she jumped in and closed her door. James got in the other side, closed his and pushed the ignition. Instantly, the V12 engine screamed to life, cycled down, and purred in anticipation of the journey. He revved that engine once, put her in gear and eased out of the cemetery to the street.

The Lamborghini Diablo was first built in 1990. The car was produced for eleven years and in that time, it got faster and faster. Her 485 horsepower engine straight off the line could reach a speed of over 200 miles per hour, but James had made some modifications and his car, Sophia, named after Sophia Loren, could do 225 miles per hour.

Today, James was going to do his damndest to reach that mark. Once on the road, he pushed her, and she accelerated with ease making that sound that only a Lambo could make. The more gas he gave her, the more resolved she was to go faster. James began to feel his mind open up and contentment soon rushed in. It was the greatest stress reliever for him. They screamed on down the road.

Finally, he pulled over at the top of a ridge that overlooked the channel. The fog was clearing and as impossible as it seemed to be earlier, the sun was beginning to make an appearance. He exited as did Adriana and looked out over the sea. Adriana moved by his side and as was her habit, a few steps back. He didn't speak for a moment, nor did his number two. They just took it all in. Finally, after a bit James said,

"We'll get back to the office tomorrow night. I have a meeting with Thomas McGonegal in the middle of the afternoon first."

"Do you need me to come along?" asked Adriana.

"Not necessary. Make the arrangements for the jump and I will meet you at the station."

"Can I ask what the meeting is about?"

James answered, "I'm not sure. He came up to me at the gravesite and said he needed to speak with me about a matter of importance."

She nodded and they got back into the car. They traveled on to the town and James threw the keys to her saying,

"You ladies play nice. Leave her outside the station. I've made arrangements for her pickup after we leave."

"Aren't you afraid someone will steal her?"

"No. Sophia bites, so don't lose the keys." He got out and smiled. Adriana got his meaning. She hopped into the driver's seat and said, "Don't worry, Sophia and I are going to be best friends." She revved the

engine and peeled off. James smiled and said, "That's what I worry about."

2

James found Thomas in his office with the aid of William, the McGonegal's butler. The room did not have the size and trappings of the library where he first met the patriarch of the family, but it certainly had the gravitas. It was dominated by a large Louis XIV desk. Thomas McGonagle was busy working at that desk when James entered the room. He stood up to greet him saying,

"Punctual as always, Agent Aranas, please have a seat." He pointed at two large leather wing chairs that were positioned in front of the desk.

"Please call me James, Mr. McGonegal," he answered as he made his way to the chairs.

"Only, if you will call me Thomas."

"Agreed. Now what was it you wanted to discuss?" asked James.

Thomas again sat down and reached into the bottom drawer of the desk and retrieved a tablet. He placed it and an envelope on the desk in front of James. He said,

"The Archivist left these in my care for you to open upon his death. I have to tell you something now that will come as a shock. James, the Archivist's name was Ennis..." he paused then finished, "Ennis Aranas."

At first James just sat there, then it came to him. "The Archivist had my...last name?"

Thomas answered, "Well, actually, you have his last name. Ennis Aranas is your father."

"My father? But how....can that be?"

Thomas opened the tablet and hit a few keys saying, "I think it best if he was to tell you himself." He handed the tablet to James and on the screen was the face of the Archivist. James took the tablet, his hand tentative, and pressed the play command. Immediately he heard his mentor's voice.

"James, if you are viewing this I am no longer with the living. So dramatic. I am dead. I have asked Thomas to provide you with this video and package. James, I am your father. Now, I know that this will be a shock. It was a shock to me when I found out a few months before you became an agent. I chose not to tell you because frankly I was afraid you would think I had abandoned you and your mother all those years. The truth is I didn't know I was your father or that I was a father at all. When your mother passed away, I received a letter telling me that I had a son, you. Your mother wrote that letter which I saved and is in the envelope. All those years she never contacted me, but she changed her name to Aranas prior to giving birth to you and gave that name to you. When I found out I made inquiries into your whereabouts, and you were still in the states on bereavement leave. I requested that you be transferred to our service along with Mr. Franklin. James, we all have regrets in life. I regret that you are hearing this after my death. I have enjoyed your company. I hope someday you will be able to forgive me. You are the Archivist now and there is a matter that is rapidly growing critical. In the envelope besides the letter from your mother is a key and coordinates. You must travel using those coordinates and upon your arrival employ that key to a vault. What you find in that vault will guide you in your actions. It is imperative that you open the vault and retrieve the materials. There is a cancer growing within time itself and what we have relied on in the past will not be available to us in the future if we do not cut this malignancy out. Please, put your feelings aside for being given a lousy hand in regard to me. You are the Archivist,

and you must succeed. I love you son. Despite my actions, I was thinking of your welfare."

The screen went dark, and James just stared at it.

"Lad, I know this is a great deal to take in," said Thomas. "I can only say that your father, Ennis was a good man. He had his quirks, but he never wavered in two areas, duty, and you."

"Did you know?" whispered James as he attempted to reconcile his emotions.

"Yes. After he found out, he came to me and asked for my assistance in finding you."

James put down the tablet and picked up the envelope. He emptied the contents onto the desk. There was a key, a slip of paper and a letter. He picked up the letter first and immediately recognized the writing as his mother's. He silently read it. There was a knock on the door and a servant brought in two glasses of brandy. Placing them on the desk, Thomas picked up one and handed it to James saying,

"You look like you could use one of these."

James took the drink, downed it, and placed it back on the table. He finished reading the letter and just said, "Huh." Thomas sipped his brandy and waited for James. Finally, the new Archivist looked up and said,

"My father was a good man. I am honored to have his name. It's just a bit weird that all this time we had the relationship of a boss and employee and now...well now I see him differently. It's a lot to get used to."

James picked up the key and slip of paper saying, "One mystery solved and another to consider."

"What are those?" asked Thomas.

“I haven’t the foggiest. This key is to be used in a vault that is located at the coordinates and time stamp written on this slip of paper.”

“May I see that?” asked Thomas.

“I don’t see why not.” James handed the paper to Thomas. The older man stared at the numbers and said, “This is very strange. The time stamp is at the very edge of our ability to travel. How did your father manage this? There are too many digits.”

“I know.”

“What are you thinking?” asked Thomas. “There are limits to time travel. I doubt that we have perfected the machines to go beyond those limits.”

James asked if he could have another brandy and then said, “It looks like we are going to find out.”

Thomas rang up the servant and said, “Two Irish in tumblers, neat.” He looked back at James and said, “I know just the right station and the man to coordinate it. When do you want to leave?”

James answered, “Tonight.”

3

The building was completed on May 26, 1977. There was no ribbon cutting by dignitaries nor a mention in the local newspaper about the company that it was built for. A sign with four letters was placed on the front, STTI Manufacturing. It was a tool and die manufacturing factory like so many other factories in Great Britain. It was a standard brick and mortar structure with a one level layout employing seventy-five machinists. Its ordinariness was its suit of armor. All day from early morning until the four o'clock whistle men and a few women would toil within its walls making metal parts for a variety of machines. At the end of the day, they would punch out, march back to their homes, eat their dinners, watch their tele, go to bed and start it all over the next day. It was a non-descript, unimposing and easily forgotten building amongst others who were equally unimposing and easily forgotten in the waning days of the industrial age. But, under that skin of the regular, this structure held a secret. Deep below the manufacturing floor was a different world. Initially, this secretive realm was accessed by a long forgotten tunnel dug during the last world war. As those men and women clocked in above, many more entered below, out of sight to ply their skills at a different task.

In the eighties, STTI made its last widget, die and machine part and closed, a victim to the modern age of technology, but the underground workers were just getting started. As the building upstairs was abandoned and boarded up, the underground workforce completed building the first teleportation gateway. Computers were soon added, calculations were made, tests were done, and the age of time travel was born. It was born without ribbons being cut or a newspaper article being written. In the nineties an elevator was erected up to the abandoned factory floor. It was made to look old, and no one questioned why a single story edifice would actually need an elevator as frankly no one cared about an old derelict building. There was no one to even ask the

question because the overgrown landscape had covered the building and the few surviving employees had also forgotten the place where dies and widgets were made. Even the sign as final testament had let go of its job as it hung by the last rusty screw. The transformation was complete. Station Centurion was born.

Thomas McGonegal was never late for an appointment. He always arrived early as his mother had impressed upon him as a young child was an essential habit. She would often say, “*Now Thomas, being punctual is a quality of professionalism, but being early shows dedication. Be early.*” He was always early. It allowed him to set his purpose, evaluate his task and calm his mind. Apparently, James’s mother taught him the same thing for as Thomas pulled into the lot in front of the abandoned factory, he saw the new Archivist waiting. He gave his driver the time that he was to be picked up, got out of the car, and walked over to his fellow traveler. He extended his arm and said,

“Shall we?”

James nodded and said, “After you.”

They walked around to the back of the building, and Thomas pushed on the cornerstone of the factory wall. It moved in ever so slightly and there was a distinctive click. Instantly, a narrow section of the wall also moved back and into the interior. Thomas pushed on the wall door, and it swung to one side. They entered and he positioned the wall back into its original place. Outside it appeared again as it was. Thomas walked over to the elevator with James following. He pressed the only button and the door slid back. They entered and Thomas pushed the button that closed the door. There were a number of buttons inside the elevator with floor designations for floors that did not exist. He found a button labeled **B** and pulled out a key. He placed the key into a lock that was over to the side of the buttons and made three different twists forward and back. The **B** button changed to **B2** and flashed. He hit that button and the elevator moved down a few levels until it stopped and opened up above a cavernous room. It must have been excavated from

below as where they stood was at least thirty feet above that room and the noise coming from the place assaulted them as the door opened with the force of a city's worth of humanity all busy about different tasks. There were computers lined up in rows with individuals behind screens, headsets on, tapping at keyboards and speaking. In the middle of this organized chaos was an enormous gate. James had never seen one so large. Thomas saw the younger man was staring at the structure and said, "We call her Bertha. She is a WX Terrestrial Imager. Very powerful and accurate to the microsecond, but we won't be using her."

"Really? Why not?"

Thomas smiled and said, "Because, she cannot get us to where we are going. She cannot get you where you need to go. We need her sister."

"Sister?"

Thomas only said, "You'll see," and then he led him down a flight of steep stairs and over to an office on the other side of the vast hall.

The room was not what James expected. It was sparse. It was nondescript. There was nothing on the walls. There were two chairs and a large desk, all white. Behind that desk was an elderly man seated. His hair was long and almost a blue gray. He wore very large glasses with thick lenses that made his eyes look fishlike. The man, upon seeing the two, stood up and bowed saying,

"Welcome Archivist. Congratulations on your new appointment."

Thomas said, "How come you don't bow to me Moriarty?"

The older man answered, "You get a bow when you are in the job Thomas. Now quit dawdling. I expect that the new Archivist is here to see the vault."

"Precisely," answered Thomas.

“Please follow me, Archivist,” said Moriarty. Thomas signaled James to follow saying,

“I cannot go with you. Only the Archivist may enter the vault. There are protocols.”

James nodded and followed the old man with the big glasses as he pushed a button on his desk and a section of the floor opened revealing a staircase that led down into the bowels of the building. They walked down for what seemed quite a distance and when they reached flat ground Moriarty waved his hand and panel after panel of lights began switching on. The room was as vast as the one he had just come from, but it was empty except for a very large gate that was exactly in the center of the open space. They walked over to that gate and James noticed there was no terminal. Also, this gate was larger than the one upstairs. It was at least two or three truck widths. James turned to the older man and asked,

“Where’s the terminal to enter the coordinates?”

“Archivist, there is no terminal because this gate is only used to go to one location, the vault.”

“Well, how does it work?”

“As soon as you enter, it recognizes you as the Archivist and it transports you to your destination.”

James thought about that for a moment then frowned and asked, “But how does it know me?”

Moriarty answered, “It knows your DNA.”

James considered this and finally asked, “Does it work both ways like that?”

“Correct, sir.”

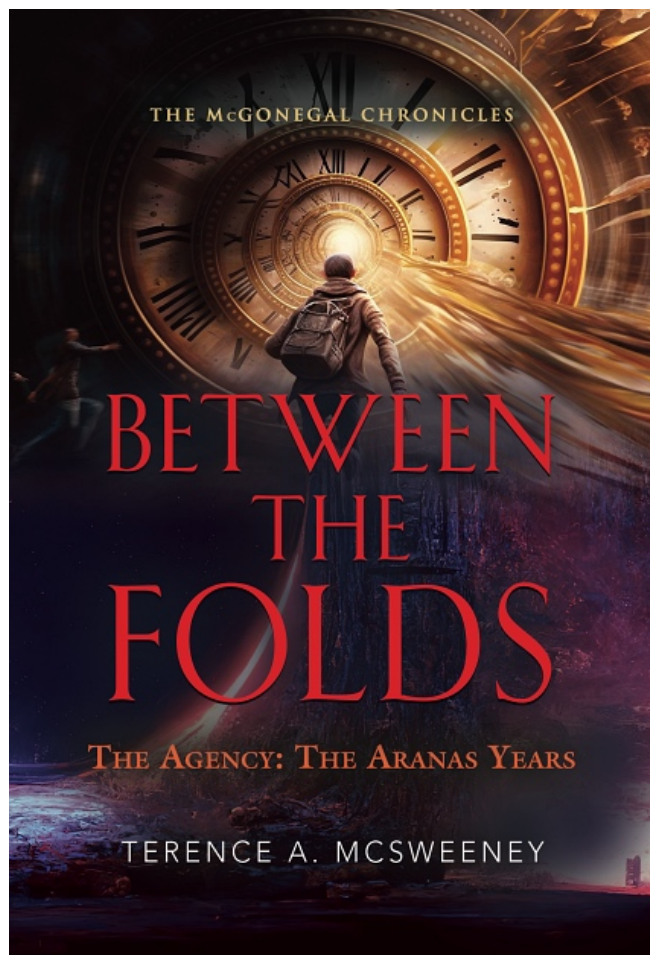
“Okay, let’s do this.” James stepped up to the massive gate and entered. He immediately vanished. For him it was like walking into another room. The first thing he noticed was the stone. It was all around him except for the direction he was facing. There, was a massive circular door with a circular handle much like a bank vault. He started off in that direction. Instantly, a large metal creature appeared in his path. It was enormous with a multitude of legs and two metal claws clicking. It was a thing of nightmares.

“STATE YOUR INTENTIONS. IDENTIFY.” many voices said in unison.

James considered backing away from the monster, but he thought that would seem a hostile act and if it was interpreted as that the consequences would certainly be a painful death. Instead, he said as he reached into his pocket and pulled out the key that was given to him by the former Archivist,

“I am the Archivist and I wish to enter the vault.” He placed the key in both hands palms up and presented it to the metal guard. The creature scanned James’s hands and immediately curled its legs in and retracted its arms saying,

“WELCOME ARCHIVIST. YOU MAY ENTER.” The beast then moved to one side much like a crab would walk and was absorbed by the wall. James walked up to the vault and inserted the key. He turned it to the right and spun the handles. There was a thud and the vault door pushed back and opened inward. He took a step and immediately there was a figure that blocked his way. It was then that the door closed, sealing him inside.



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