

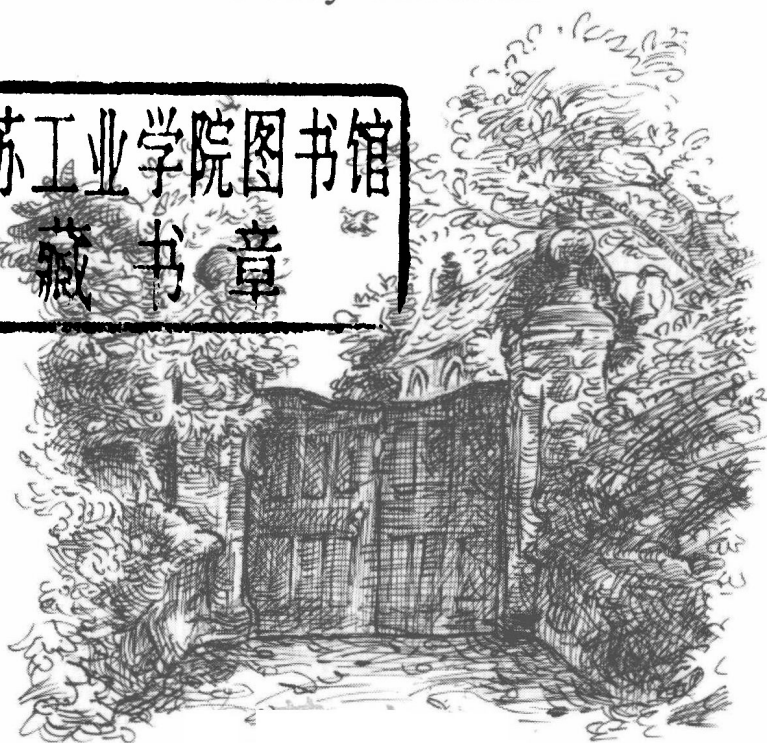
# THE LOST PEOPLE OF MALPLAQUET

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illustrated by  
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藏书章



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# For Lilliputians everywhere

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The Malplaquet Trilogy takes much of its initial inspiration  
from *Mistress Masham's Repose*, one of the less known work  
of the great English writer, T.H. White

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# Contents

1. First Moves	5
2. New Tasks	15
3. Ties of Friendship	25
4. Origins and Beginnings	35
5. Gaining the Capital	45
6. New Faces	55
7. Uncovering The Past	66
8. Looking for an Answer	77
9. Families, Posts, and Statues	88
10. Lift-Off	99
11. The Decoy	111
12. Goodwill to all Men	121
13. The Art of Survival	131
14. Visions of the Past and Future	141
15. Hawkwell Field	152
16. Hopes and Fears	166

## The Prophecy

A Child no more, the Man appears,  
He comes of Age, the Hope of Years.  
Our Fount of Wisdom, whose Way is Delight,  
True Source of all Pure Knowledge and Insight,  
Our Guide, for whom the Bells do Ring,  
Thy Presence much Warmth in Friendship Bring.  
Thou makest the Sea-people great Appear,  
This Blessed Island shalt have no Fear.  
In every Quarter defend our Shores,  
Unite our People, grow strong in Wars.  
The Capital gained, our Frontiers Sealed,  
Temples Restored, the Nation Healed.  
Through thee the Great Empire newly Starts,  
The Garden Kingdom, true Home of our Hearts.

after Alexander Pope





## Chapter 1: First Moves

Hurrying head-down through ‘China and Glassware’ in the smartest Department store in Oxford, Julius Newbold felt confused, lonely and nervous.

He felt confused because two weeks ago, whilst happily boating on the lake at Malplaquet, he had been attacked by a group of tiny humans only six inches high, savaged by an extremely vicious local fish (a dreaded Vazedir), chained to one of the old garden buildings, and ridiculed by the visitors as a half-crazed hermit who’d been hired to entertain them. Finally, he had been roughly ejected from the gardens by an irritating little man with a little badge.

And before all these humiliations, he’d been hiding for months in a smelly and leaky tent in Malplaquet’s miserable woods, and the smell still wouldn’t go away.

And that of course explained why he was lonely. Everywhere he went, people backed off when they realised the source of the awful stench.

He quickly glanced around the store; it was happening yet again. Shoppers were casually walking towards him, then suddenly halting a few yards away, screwing their noses up and diving down the nearest side-aisle. He spotted an anxious assistant on the phone looking in his direction and obviously warning other departments of his movements. He knew that his smell *was* absolutely foul; a rancid and pungent mixture of rotting vegetation, animal droppings,

dank clothes and mould. He had tried everything to rid himself of the odour; showering every day (twice), scraping himself with a scary implement from the Far East that removed two layers of skin (one dead and one live), even driving through his local Car Wash with all the windows down.

Nothing had worked. He now had the up-escalator all to himself, and people were bounding down the adjacent one. Reaching the top and stepping off, he pulled out of his pocket the bright yellow piece of paper, read the words (again), looked at his watch (again) – 10.55 – and made his way towards the café.

That piece of paper was precisely why he was nervous.

When he'd seen the colour of the note dropping through his letter-box yesterday morning, he had involuntarily flinched. It hadn't needed a signature; the colour was sufficient. The terseness of the message was also familiar: *Shoppers' Rest. 11 am. Tomorrow.*

For the hundredth time since that final series of incidents at Malplaquet, he turned over in his mind that fateful moment when, chained up and furiously angry and frustrated, he had so stupidly (and so loudly) shouted out that one word. That name.

Biddle.

There were bound to be extremely serious repercussions.

In the café, preoccupied by his anxious thoughts, he wandered along past the food counter, absent-mindedly placing the occasional item on his tray. At the pay-desk, the young girl looked quizzically at his unusual collection; an empty cup, two serviettes, a bottle of water, a plastic fork, a sachet of tomato sauce, and two small blocks of butter. Raising her hand over her nose and mouth, she said a muffled, '90p.' Julius dropped a one-pound coin on the desk and hurried off to a corner-seat.

At the very same moment as he sat down, three large men in dark suits approached the manager, who was standing by the café entrance. One spoke with him. Nodding in acknowledgement, he immediately clipped a rope across the passage-way and briskly gestured to his staff. Those behind the counters simply left through a side door, whilst two others quickly and quietly approached all the customers. A few words were said to each, vouchers were handed over, and within a minute of his arrival Julius had the café all to himself. Apart from the three other men.

His nervousness increased ten-fold.

The largest of the trio, with a small black listening-device curved round one ear, strode over to Julius' table and squeezed his frame into the seat opposite. Hands clenched together on the table in a wad of thick fingers, he looked straight at Julius, who was unable to return the stare. Nothing was said. Julius could feel himself beginning to sweat.

The silent tension was suddenly interrupted by the sound of the lift doors opening around the corner. The big man stiffened, and a phone rang inside his jacket. The guard reached inside, took the call and handed the phone to Julius, indicating that he should lift it to his ear.

The voice was unmistakable, cold and characteristically blunt.

'Do *not* turn round, and do *not* attempt to speak. Just enjoy your little snack, although your choices surprise me. You seem distracted.' In the slight pause, Julius was aware of a small bead of perspiration running down his neck. The calm and measured tone continued. 'A most unfortunate end to the first plan. *Most* unfortunate. But perhaps not – how shall I put it? – *unexpected*, given your past record. We must not forget, however, that you still have your sight, and therefore your uses – and you still have your debts.' Julius shifted position awkwardly. 'You will remain in service at Malplaquet, and you will receive further instructions. In the meantime, take very good care of those eyes, but I don't wish to see that face of yours ever again. That is your next task.'

The phone went dead. Julius, anxious and bewildered, slowly handed it back. He was given in return a small business card. At the top it stated, '*Altered Images Inc.*' and underneath, '*Specialists in corrective and cosmetic surgery, physical restructuring and facial reconstruction.*' Below that was an address and Freephone number. Julius shuddered.

The dark-suited gorilla leaned over. 'Word of advice, mate.' He paused and grimaced. 'Do us all a favour. Have a bath when you get home.'

Jamie Thompson was wandering through the gardens surrounding Malplaquet School (which he'd soon be joining), to visit an old family friend, whom they called 'Granny.' This summer she had



introduced him to the Lilliputians living in the garden's 'temples', and had also explained that he was the long-awaited leader (the 'Guide'), who could unite their four provinces and bring about the new Empire. Jamie was holding up to his ear a mobile phone that had stopped working months ago.

'Any idea why she wants this meeting, Nigriff?'

'None at all, young master,' came the reply from inside Jamie's right sleeve. 'But I believe that the great General Thorclan will also be present.'

'That's very generous of you, Nigriff,' said Jamie. 'You wouldn't have called him 'great' a few weeks ago.'

'Not correct, sir. I've always had the most enormous respect for the General and his fine troops in the Grecian province.'

'Right,' replied Jamie. 'Which is why you once called them "savages and barbarians," I suppose?'

'If I *did* use those specific words – and I'm not convinced that is the case – you must have misunderstood the context, Master Jamie. I would have been describing their *opponents*' opinion of their awesome fighting qualities.'

Not for the first time, Jamie realised there was no point in trying to out-argue Nigriff, who always had the last word. The 'Permanent Grand Archivist' lived in the province of Elysium, which meant he was naturally clever and articulate. (The other provinces also had particular types of people; the people in Palladia were very practical, the Cascadians sporting, and the Grecians – like Thorclan – were the soldiers).

Jamie was pleased that the Lilliputians were now (at last) speaking *warmly* about other provincials – and actually visiting each other, which they hadn't done for years. And when they did, some temples were mysteriously affecting the visitors; Thorclan had said something very clever inside an Elysian one, and Nigriff had begun rowing like an expert oarsman near a lakeside temple in Cascadia.

It was all extremely odd.

Jamie and Nigriff walked through the Bell Gate on Malplaquet's perimeter and approached Granny's cottage, built onto the back of a classical pavilion by the Octagon Lake. The old lady herself was in her front yard with their teenage friend, Vicky, poking around amongst the collection of tubs and stone ornaments.

Vicky had lifted to one side the figure of a toga-clad woman carrying a water jar, and was now picking up a small statue of a seated lion. 'I can't hear anything, I'm afraid,' she said. 'You said it was a sort of humming?'

'Or perhaps a soft buzz,' replied Granny. 'As if a bee was stuck somewhere. Oh, hello, Jamie, I didn't see you.' She stood up straight, pressing her aching back and giving him a friendly scowl. 'I don't know, young people nowadays, can't go anywhere without their mobiles.'

'It's not what you think, Granny,' said Jamie, still holding his arm up to his ear. 'This one doesn't work.'

'That makes it even worse,' replied Granny. 'You could have an obsessive ailment in your arm. It might need treatment.'

'It's not been called an obsessive ailment before,' said Jamie, smirking, 'but you might be right about treatment.'

Nigriff's head poked out. 'I do apologise, did I miss something?'

Vicky grinned at him. 'I think Granny said you're an observant sailman and she wants to treat you . . .'

'Most kind, Madam. However, despite my recent rowing exploits on the water, I am still primarily an Archivist. But I *do* like the sound of a treat.'

'Let's go in then,' smiled Granny. 'Thorclan's been here a while. I've been trying to explain a few things to him, but I'm not sure he understands yet.'

Facing away from them, the General was standing on the polished table, feet apart and his hands clasped behind him.

'At ease, General,' announced Jamie.

'Thank you, sir,' replied the old soldier, turning round, 'but I already was.' He clicked his heels smartly on the smooth surface and saluted. Granny winced at her best table being stamped on. Jamie held out his index finger, which Thorclan grasped and shook warmly.

'Let's make a start,' said Granny. 'I did ask Yenech to come, but now he's been granted the Freedom of Malplaquet, he could be anywhere.' The others smiled, remembering Yenech being decorated at the recent Provincial Assembly, in honour of his bravery in the battle with Old Smelly on the lakes. It was a most suitable award; he was well-known for wandering (by mistake) all over the gardens.

The adults each adjusted their chairs, and the two Lilliputians made themselves comfortable on squashy pincushions (minus the pins) deliberately left for them on the table.

‘Vicky, can you take the Minutes?’ asked Granny, pushing across a pad of paper and a pen. ‘It’s about time we did these things properly.’

‘Okay,’ agreed Vicky. ‘Those present?’

‘Nigriff, previously Chief Historian (2<sup>nd</sup> Papyrus Division), Most Notable Librarian (First Editions), Senior Imperial Archivist, and most recently appointed as Permanent Grand Archivist.’

‘Thorclan, General,’ added a second. ‘Leader of the Grecian Army, previously honoured as Great Lord Of Battles, and recently appointed as Supreme Commander At Battles.’ He winked at Vicky. ‘Just write “General Thorclan, GLOB, SCAB,” if you prefer, my dear.’

‘Jamie,’ came a proud third voice. ‘Surname Thompson, known as the Guide, and also (in no particular order) the Hope of Years, Fount of Wisdom, True Source of all Pure Knowledge and...’

‘...and that’s enough,’ interjected Granny, glaring at the three men, who looked suitably apologetic. ‘Just put our first names, Vicky, we’ve some serious business to sort out. Agenda Item 1,’ she continued. ‘Biddle. What do we know about him at the moment?’

‘Same name as the eighteenth century sea-captain who rescued Gulliver and then returned to kidnap some Lilliputians,’ offered Vicky. ‘This one’s probably a descendant. He’s just tried, using Old Smelly, to capture two, one of each sex. Probably to breed them.’

‘His son is starting at the school with me,’ added Jamie. ‘Oh yes, nearly forgot, Biddle told them he’s relocating his business here.’

‘Hmm,’ murmured Granny, ‘just what I was afraid of. He knows he can’t trust any more incompetents, and he’s going to do more himself. We’ll have to keep our eyes and ears open.’

‘And our brains,’ said Thorclan, who after his a flash of inspiration in the Elysian temple, had sent some special troops to benefit from training-exercises there. On return, these soldiers had formed an Intelligence section in the Grecian Army. It hadn’t had any Intelligence before.

‘Absolutely,’ agreed Granny, ‘which brings us neatly to Agenda Item 2: The Lilliputians becoming visible, *and* changing. Who wants to lead on this one?’

‘I will,’ said Jamie, taking a deep breath. ‘Okay, basic facts. They’ve been virtually invisible here for centuries, partly because they were hiding on an island, but also because Malplaquet was in such a bad state that most humans didn’t sense what the place was really about. But the National Trust is now *restoring* the temples, and so the visitors are starting to feel and see things – like the craftsmanship, the atmosphere . . .’

‘And tiny humans,’ added Thorclan. ‘Brilliant. Makes complete sense.’

‘No, it doesn’t,’ said Jamie. ‘I’ve got a couple of questions.’

‘Exactly!’ agreed Thorclan breezily. ‘Not *totally* complete sense, just *almost* complete sense.’

‘Question one,’ continued Jamie. ‘*Why* did the Lilliputians become invisible? When Biddle kidnapped them nearly three hundred years ago, everybody could see them. And then it’s like they faded away. Why?’

‘Why indeed?’ repeated Thorclan, looking round at the assembled faces, which all remained unalterably blank.

‘First question – unanswered,’ said Jamie. ‘Try the second. Restoring the temples makes the Lilliputians visible, and also changes their character – like Thorclan becoming brainy . . . sorry, *more* brainy, in the Temple of Ancient Virtue. But the *whole garden* is being restored. So, why are the *temples* so important?’

The other faces turned towards Thorclan, who shrugged his shoulders.

‘Because they’re in Pope’s prophecy?’ suggested Vicky hopefully. (This was an old poem by the eighteenth-century writer Alexander Pope, discovered in the archives by Nigriff, which indicated that Jamie was the Guide who would bring about a mighty Empire. ‘Temples restored’ was a phrase in it.)

‘Probably,’ said Granny. ‘And talking of the prophecy, there’s that bit in it about ‘capital gained’. We don’t *really* know what that means yet.’

‘Well, it means I’m starting school here,’ said Jamie. ‘The ‘capital’ *has* to be the school mansion, as it’s the biggest building. There’s also my idea of Malplaquet and Lilliput being similar shapes; the mansion is right where Lilliput’s capital, Mildendo, was.’

As before, the others seemed unconvinced by Jamie’s idea;

only Nigriff looked thoughtful. 'Your theory *does* warrant further investigation,' he said. 'If you would do me the honour, young sir, I will acquaint you with the untold riches of the Imperial Archives. They contain an ancient map of Lilliput that may be of considerable help to us.'

'Which is a good place to call this meeting to a close,' said Granny. 'Points made, questions raised, and plans laid. Any other business?'

'I do have two matters,' said Nigriff. 'The first concerns the Pebble Alcove, which, as we all know, has on occasion portrayed mysterious images of the Gulliver story. In accordance with the request of the Listener, I intend to fully investigate that building.' His words were met with nods of approval. 'The second concerns the enlightenment of my countrymen, who remain sadly unaware of their true history and heritage. As we have previously agreed, it is our privilege and responsibility to reveal that they are noble Lilliputians, people of dignity; not just tiny creatures who, by some cruel trick of nature exist in a hostile world of over-mighty giants.'

Thorclan clapped, and shouted, 'Hear, hear!'

'Which is why,' continued Nigriff, 'I will be making two presentations. Firstly, I have been given an opportunity to address the renowned Academic Board, the guardians of our intellectual life.' (Murmurs of approval.) 'Secondly, I can formally announce that my application to the Listener for a Full Speech Licence at the next Assembly has been granted. Your support at that gathering would be greatly appreciated, though it may not be straightforward.'

'Presumably you're not going to read out Pope's poetry again?' inquired Jamie, remembering how Nigriff tried to win over an unsympathetic audience by publicly declaiming the poem . . .

'Sir, as it happens, I was considering – bearing in mind that some of his allusions are rather obscure and technical . . . ' He stopped, as he noticed four heads shaking. Thorclan took him by the arm and spoke to him gently. 'Take it from me, old chap,' he said, 'it wouldn't be very intelligent. I've done a few night-exercises in Elysium recently. I know about these things.'

Mrs Thompson, quite out of breath, came rushing in through the back door of their house, dumped her two bags of shopping and dashed

into the sitting-room, startling her husband who was stretched out half-dozing on the sofa.

‘You’ll never guess what’s happening!’ she blurted out.

‘In that case you’d better tell me,’ answered Mr Thompson wearily, slowly sitting up and rubbing his eyes. Relaxing was such hard work sometimes.

‘It’s the Manor! The Harrison-Smythe’s. They’re moving – leaving!’

Mr Thompson took a deep breath and looked sympathetically at her. Obviously she had got the wrong end of the stick; there was no way that the Harrison-Smythes would be leaving Chackmore Manor. It would be easier to imagine the house pulling away from its own foundations and walking down the High Street. He would calm his wife down and find out what was really happening.

‘Cup of tea?’

‘Look, listen to me,’ responded his wife. ‘I know exactly what you’re thinking, and no, I’ve *not* got it wrong. It’s true – they actually *are* leaving!’

Mr Thompson realised that he was going to have to take this more seriously. ‘And the evidence is?’

‘I bumped into Lady Harrison-Smythe in the Post Office, and she told me . . . came straight out with it, absolutely streaming with tears.’

This did sound like good evidence. ‘But they can’t. It’s not possible.’

‘I know that,’ said his wife impatiently, ‘but they are – *today* – at this very moment!’

Mr Thompson at last heaved himself off the sofa and swung into action. ‘Charlie!’ he shouted upstairs. ‘Come on, we’re going for a walk!’

*En route*, he explained to his younger son trotting beside him, just why it was so inconceivable that the H-S’s should be leaving Chackmore Manor. ‘They’ve been there for generations, since before the Conquest. They can trace their family tree and possession of the Manor right back to Wellbred the Proud of Mercia – and there are possible links with the legendary Nevahaere the Absent of Wessex, and even Unraede the Illiterate.’ Charlie was concentrating hard and trying to find this fascinating. ‘And the church in the grounds



– stuffed full of their family’s monuments! The finest alabaster tombs in the county. They *can’t* leave – Lord H-S once told me the only way he was leaving the Manor was to be carried out in a box.’

They rounded the final corner and came within sight of the wrought-iron entrance gates. The road in front was virtually blocked by a long line of removal lorries, most of them in the final stages of the job, with men slamming the large doors at the side and rear of the vehicles. Beyond the final lorry stood Lord and Lady Harrison-Smythe, she with her head on his shoulders, he holding her close to comfort her, both looking shell-shocked. Mr Thompson didn’t feel it was right to intrude. He turned slowly around and the two began to wander sadly back to their house.

Down a side lane, Charlie spotted a large black car parked below an overhanging tree, its engine calmly ticking over, as if waiting to move. It was the smartest car he’d seen in the village for a long time, a brand-new Bentley no less, and he was dead impressed by the smart uniformed chauffeur behind the wheel. Charlie would have been equally impressed if he’d seen the dominating and powerful figure sat in the rear, but not if he’d heard his quiet words.

‘They’ve all got their guilty secrets,’ the passenger was muttering to himself. ‘Especially our dear respected landed gentry. Works every time. Just a little anonymous card – *flee at once, all is discovered*. Pathetically easy.’ He leaned forward, slid open the small glass partition, and gave the clipped instructions. ‘Past the Manor – *very* slowly.’ The car began to ease down the lane. ‘This,’ whispered the passenger, ‘is a moment to treasure.’

Jedekiah Biddle, the new Lord of the Manor of Chackmore, was pleased with himself. The new plan was coming together nicely, very nicely indeed.





## 2 : New Tasks

‘It’s a real honour to be given a tour of the archives, especially by the Permanent Grand Archivist.’ Jamie was talking into his sleeve again as they approached the old porch doors of the parish church at Malplaquet.

‘Indeed it is, sir, but your size does prevent a full tour of the facilities. Nevertheless, you will be able to peer into the main entrance, and then allow your imagination to wander around the innermost recesses. Do close these church doors as well – they warn us of approaching humans.’

Jamie closed them behind him and gently stepped into the cool interior, its ancient walls painted a crisp sky-blue. He knew the building from the occasional Carol Service and a couple of Christenings. ‘I never realised there was a collection of old documents here,’ he whispered to Nigriff, setting him down on the stone floor under the rear organ gallery. ‘Isn’t it a bit odd, using a church?’

‘Master Jamie,’ replied Nigriff, with an air of surprise, ‘it is the *logical* setting for items of such value. This is the only building guaranteed to remain untouched by the passing whims of architects, heritage advisers, and garden designers. When the surrounding village was swept away by the first dukes, it stood as an unmoveable and timeless rock, and it will continue to do so.’

Fair enough, thought Jamie.

‘Furthermore,’ continued Nigriff, ‘it is one of the few outlying

buildings that has its own heating system, an incomparable and essential benefit to the preservation of our papers. And where else would one keep one's most holy objects?'

'Okay, I get the point,' agreed Jamie. 'So exactly where in here are the archives?'

'If you would position yourself on the floor by that heating vent, I will be with you in a moment.' With that, Nigriff strode briskly off past a pew.

Jamie knelt down by the wall and peered through the patterned metal grille into what seemed to be a completely dark void. An instant later the space was flooded with light, and Jamie saw Nigriff striding towards a small desk about twenty centimetres away. Behind it lay a central walkway, with rows of shelving, drawers and racks extending on either side. Tiny rolls were protruding from some open compartments. At the far end of the main aisle were two tables with minuscule books and sheets of paper spread across them. It was all very neat and purposeful.

Nigriff firmly tapped a domed brass bell on the desk and wandered back to the grille to speak to Jamie.

'The timing of your visit is *perfect*, young sir, as by a happy coincidence today sees the trial of a new system. Normally, I would walk in and collect the relevant document, but the Directors are implementing a procedure that is very common – and therefore presumably *much* admired – in your world. Apparently it increases efficiency, and the transmission of information. The operator will appear soon.'

'Sounds good, Nigriff. I'll just lie here and watch.'

Nigriff walked back, and pressed the bell again. Thirkatew, a young female Lilliputian, appeared from one side. She stopped at the other side of the desk, stared him straight in the face, and spoke in a cheery and bubbly voice.

'Thank you for calling at the Archives. You are advised that your call may be monitored for training purposes. Please choose one of the following options. Press once for archives, twice for ancient documents, three times for old writings, or four to speak to the Operator.'

Nigriff turned to look happily at Jamie, winked as if to say, 'Good, isn't it?' and pushed the bell deliberately four times.

The young girl remained impassive, staring directly ahead and