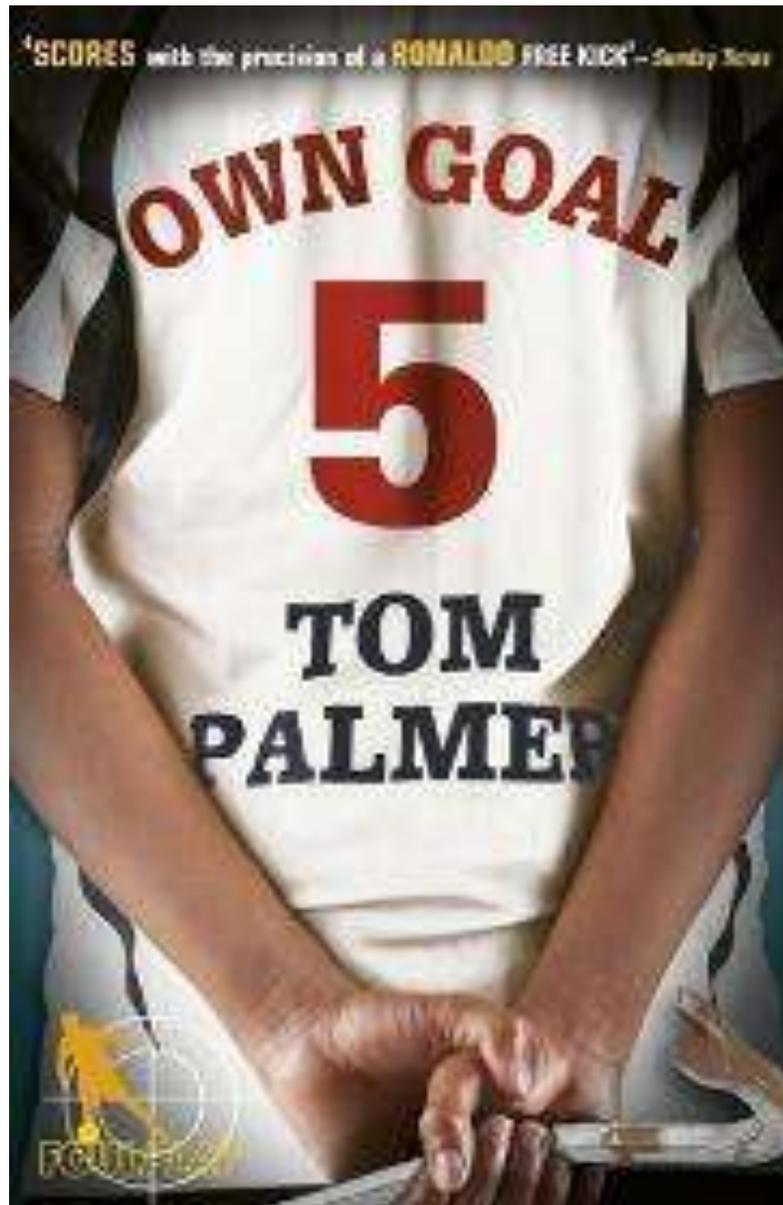


TOM PALMER

FOUL PLAY 5 : Own Goal



Danny Harte is obsessed with two things - watching football and tackling crime.

Watch the trailer

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJmgBfbdwly>.



'Who *are* you? Who *are* you?'

Danny was walking down the long corridor than ran the length of the main building at school when he heard it. Someone chanting a football song. One he knew well.

But he carried on walking. Although he was the only one in the corridor that morning, there was no reason to think it was being aimed at him.

'WHO ARE YOU? WHO ARE YOU?' It came louder now.

Danny looked round this time to see three figures at the far end of the corridor. He knew who they were immediately. Theo Gibbs, from the sixth form. And his two mates, Andy and Ryan.

Now what? Ignore them? Shout something back? Just stand there, like he was now? They wanted to get a reaction out of him: he knew that much.

A second chorus started up.

LET'S ALL LAUGH AT CITY. LET'S ALL LAUGH AT CITY.

NA NA NA-NA. HA! NA NA NA-NA. HA!

Danny wasn't surprised. He had been expecting this kind of thing to happen sooner. Everyone at school knew he was a big City FC fan. He'd been a season ticket holder long before City had become one of the best teams in Europe. And anyone who was a City fan was going to get stick this week.

When things like this happened you just had to walk away. That's what Dad would say. So Danny started to walk.

But not *away* from Theo and his cronies. *Towards* them. And he knew exactly what he was going to say. That was because he knew exactly what *they* were going to say, even before they said it.

He stopped when he was a metre away from them.

'Alright City fan?' Theo said. He was medium height, thin, with black hair.

Danny smiled a tight-lipped smile, but kept quiet. Situations like this were weird for Danny. Normally he would avoid arguments. At home. And here at school. He liked a quiet life and he was generally a very calm person, barely ever in trouble.

But when it came to City FC it was different. When it came to City FC it felt like it wasn't *him* who was being insulted. It was his football club and its thousands of supporters. That was why he was ready to stand his ground. That was what made it different.

Especially when it came to Theo Gibbs. Because Theo Gibbs supported the team Danny hated more than any other.

'Looking forward to a beating on Wednesday?' Theo asked.

This was it. The reference to next week's match that he had been waiting for.

'Not a beating...,' Danny said, calmly.

'What? You think City can beat the best team in the world?' Theo sneered.

'I do,' Danny replied, glaring at the sixth former.

Theo exploded with laughter.

But Danny still said nothing. He had done what he had wanted to do. Faced down Theo Gibbs. Kept calm. Done his duty to City. He turned and started to walk away. Even though he knew there was more to come.

'We are *so* going to take you apart,' Theo started again. 'Four or five nil. We are better in every department. Our keeper. Our defenders. Our...'

As Theo went on, Danny reflected on the game next week.

City FC versus Forza FC in the Champions League quarter final. An English team versus an Italian team.

So why was it, then, that so many people supported Forza FC in this school? It was crazy. It did Danny's head in. But there was no escaping it. People were obsessed with Forza. Even Emily, Danny's sister liked them. And she *hated* football. It was crazy enough that people here preferred to support the big English teams, seeing as they had such a good team in their city.

But to support a foreign team? It didn't make sense.

'... and you know who is going to score the goals?' The sixth-former left his question hanging in the air, knowing it would vex Danny.

'You do know, don't you?' he went on.

Danny stood with his back to Theo. Now he *was* angry.

'Roberts. Your ex-player, Sam Roberts.' Danny could hear the smile in Theo's voice. 'Roberts knew which was the *best* team. And that's why he left City for Forza. Do you miss him?'

Read on... *Foul Play 5 : Own Goal* by Tom Palmer available now in libraries and all good bookshops ISBN 978-0141331195

www.tompalmer.co.uk

