

# DEFENDERS

## PITCH INVASION



# TOM PALMER

The past is closer than Seth and Nadiya think ...







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**TOM PALMER**

With illustrations by  
**David Shephard**



First published in 2017 in Great Britain by  
Barrington Stoke Ltd  
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP

[www.barringtonstoke.co.uk](http://www.barringtonstoke.co.uk)

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library upon request

ISBN: 978-1-78112-731-5

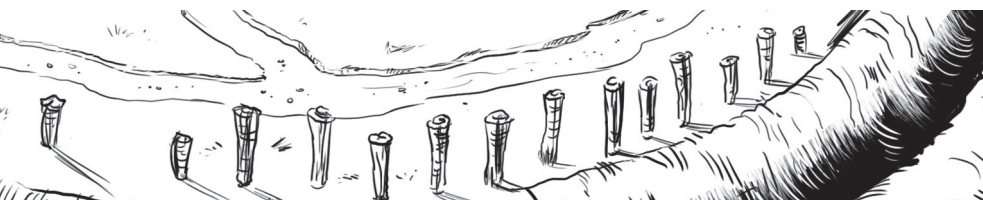
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY



*This book is dedicated to the memory of  
Rose and Steve Wing.*



**Seth stared in horror at what he saw on the spikes above the gate. Five human heads. Five heads dripping with bloody, severed flesh. Five faces with no eyes, only blank eye sockets where a crow pecked aggressively. It was a gruesome sight. And it stank.**





# 1

Seth's phone buzzed as he was walking out of Maths. He knew it would be a text about one of three things.

- (i) An alert from FC Halifax Town.
- (ii) A message from his best friend, Nadiya.
- or
- (iii) A message from his mum.

The messages from his mum were the ones Seth had to focus on. She'd been ill and was now



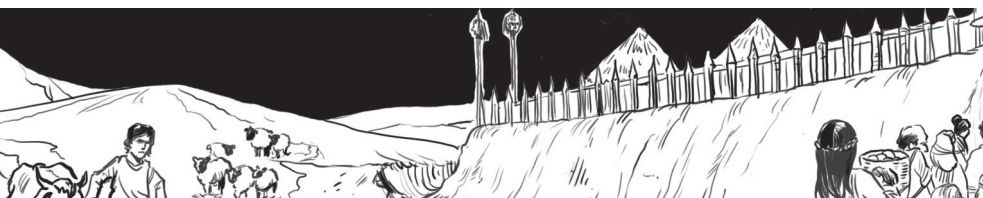
at home recovering. Today was an important milestone – Seth’s mum was waiting to receive her test results, to hear she was well again.

Seth found a quiet place at the foot of the school’s main staircase to concentrate on what the message might say. He took a deep breath and checked his screen.

### CLUB NEWS

**Deadline Day. Halifax-born striker – Ian Oldfield, 20 – has left the Shay Stadium and signed for Liverpool for an undisclosed fee. The Egyptian forward, Yehir Jawaz, 32, will take Oldfield’s place in the team. More info at [fchalifaxtown.com](http://fchalifaxtown.com).**

Seth flung his phone into his bag and sprinted



up the staircase. All of a sudden, he was aware of the footsteps of two hundred Year 7s thundering towards him.

He was fuming.

He was livid.

He wanted to sprint the half-mile down the hill to the Shay Stadium and kick down the boardroom door. Selling Oldfield to Liverpool! What were they thinking of?

“Seth?”

Why would they sell him? Oldfield was their best player. He’d scored nine goals in six games this season. Halifax were top of the league.

“Seth? Wait.”

Seth stormed on, picking up pace all the time.

“SETH!!!”

Seth stopped and turned round. Nadiya was there, breathless.



“Why didn’t you stop?” she said, angry.

“They’ve sold Oldfield,” Seth fumed. “That’s why.”

“Who?”

“Ian Oldfield. Our leading scorer.”

Nadiya laughed. “So?”

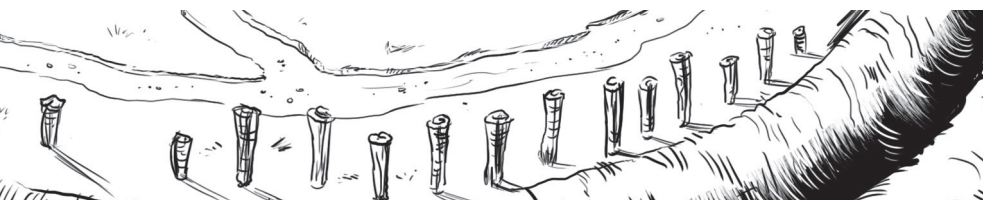
Seth felt like his head was going to explode.

Nadiya had no idea how important this was. He had to explain. He had to make her see why this was the worst thing that could possibly happen.

Still shaking with rage, Seth said, “So now Halifax have got no one to score goals for us ... except for some stupid Egyptian, or whatever he is, that we’ve signed from the middle east of nowhere and ...”

There was no laughter in Nadiya’s eyes now.

“He might be good,” she said coolly. “He might score more goals than Ian Oldfield ever did.”





“No way.” Seth shook his head. “Oldfield is a footballing genius. This Jawaz is just some bloke at the end of his career. Here for easy money. He’ll be rubbish.”

Seth’s head had cleared a little. He’d blown off some of that white-hot anger.

But Nadiya looked less than impressed. She was scowling at him.

“What?” Seth asked, flinching.

“What you’ve just said is racist,” Nadiya said.

Then she turned and walked off down the corridor, disappearing among the hordes of Year 7s.

