

Defenders: Russia Chapter 1

A live World Cup story by Tom Palmer

Seth and Nadiya are *The Defenders*. They solve problems. Ghostly problems. With Seth's ability to see people from the past and Nadiya's passion for history, they are the perfect team to take on anything. And that *anything* is about to kick off in Russia at the World Cup finals.

This is chapter one of Seth and Nadiya's World Cup adventure. It is intended for reading to children on the morning of Thursday 14th June, the day the World Cup begins. The remaining 23 chapters will be published on weekday mornings during the World Cup. The storyline – written the night before publication – will be influenced heavily by the events of the World Cup on and off the pitch, as well as by a weekly vote where children can choose what happens next.

You can find out more about Seth and Nadiya's previous adventures with Vikings, Anglo Saxons, Roman Britons and Iron Age Celts in the Defenders series, published by Barrington Stoke. Visit www.tompalmer.co.uk/defenders.

The details of the URL where the remaining chapters will be posted are just being finalised: please email admin@tompalmer.co.uk to register for a reminder, if have not already done so.

ОДИН

It was Thursday 14th June 2018: a day Seth White had been waiting a long time for.

The World Cup.

Was starting.

Today.

Seth sat down in front of the TV to eat his breakfast. Rosa, his dog – black, with a rough wiry coat – had followed him in from the kitchen and now observed him closely as he ate.

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Seth flicked the TV on and began searching for the latest World Cup news. It didn't take him long. The BBC were showing a feed from England's training base. Live from Volgograd, Russia. Men in white tops and blue shorts passing and running in blazing sunshine.

A small crowd was watching the England training session. It looked to Seth like they were local school children, all in red t-shirts, sporting suntans, except for one pale boy who was wearing a heavy brown coat and staring hard into the camera.

Seth heard something: a distant whispery voice, but not in a language he recognised. He looked again at the boy and realised that his mouth was moving, Suddenly, a loud knock at the door. Rosa immediately on her feet, barking, as the front door opened and a voice called out.

'Get a move on!'

It was Nadiya. Seth's best friend. Time for school.

Seth began to eat faster, shovelling Shreddies into his mouth. He glanced at the clock on TV, wondering about the voice he'd heard, the boy in the brown coat.

Nadiya came into the front room. 'Football?' she sighed.

Seth nodded, his mouth still stuffed with cereal.

Nadiya slumped onto the sofa, Rosa dropping her chin onto Seth's friend's knee.

'Look. It's nice,' Seth said. 'The England team have invited local school children to watch them training. It's good for UK-Russian relations.'

Nadiya grimaced.

'And... er... can you see that boy with the pale complexion?' Seth went on, once he'd swallowed the last of his cereal. He pointed at the TV. Behind the England squad, Gareth Southgate gesticulating, you could still see the children watching the training session.

Nadiya looked up at the screen. 'I can see lots of boys. *And* girls.'

Seth shook his head. 'Not them in the shorts and t-shirts. The one in the coat. He must be boiling.'

Nadiya leaned forward and squinted. 'No,' she said. 'No boy in a coat.'

Now Seth was on his feet. He moved towards the TV. Rosa went with him. She could sense he was anxious.

Seth put his finger on the screen. 'Him,' he said.

‘Still nothing,’ Nadiya replied, putting her head on one side, looking at Seth.

The two friends said nothing.

Rosa slumped down, her tail thumping the floorboards the only sound.

Eventually Nadiya coughed. ‘Is...’ she hesitated. ‘Is that thing happening again?’

You need to know a bit of history here.

Seth and Nadiya’s history.

Seth and Nadiya are close. Not girlfriend-boyfriend close, but close all the same. And for a good reason. A few months earlier Seth had started having visions. Of people that no-one else could see. People who were supposed to be dead.

For instance, on the fields outside his and Nadiya’s school, Seth had seen wooden buildings with thatched roofs, fenced off animal pens, a blacksmith hammering at his forge. And people. Dozens of them. Wearing rough clothes. Old fashioned leather shoes, if they had shoes. And their hair was unkempt, longer. Not like people have their hair today. Seth had had no idea what he was seeing then. But it didn’t take him long to understand that he was the only one seeing it.

‘It sounds like an Anglo Saxon village,’ Nadiya said when Seth had chosen to confide in her. ‘It sounds like you’re seeing what happened here in our town nearly a thousand years ago.’

And when – one night, walking Rosa – Seth smelled blood and heard the cries of the villagers as he saw them being chased by men with wild beards and long swords, Nadiya helped him understand that he was seeing a Viking attack.

Seth could see the dead.

Nadiya could tell him who they were.

Together they could do something about it. They could stop the hauntings.

The duo had dealt with Vikings in Yorkshire, Romans in London and Iron Age people in Cornwall.

Was it all about to happen again? In Russia?

‘Seth?’ Nadiya was still sitting next to her friend on the sofa in his front room. ‘I asked if it was happening again.’

Seth shrugged. ‘We’d better get off to school,’ he said.

Seven hours later, Seth ran home from school, determined not to miss the 4 p.m. kick off in the opening game of the World Cup finals.

Russia versus Saudi Arabia.

As he settled down, feet up on the table in front of the TV, Seth waited for kick off. The screen showed thousands of Russian fans waving red flags and scarves. They looked happy. And Seth was too.

This was it. The World Cup. One month of football on the TV 24/7.

Then he saw a figure among the smiling flag-waving Russians.

A figure in a brown coat.

Not smiling.

Not waving a flag.

Staring straight back into Seth's front room as the temperature dropped from warm to freezing cold and just as Rosa whined and pushed her way out of the door.

Now Seth knew that there was something very wrong.

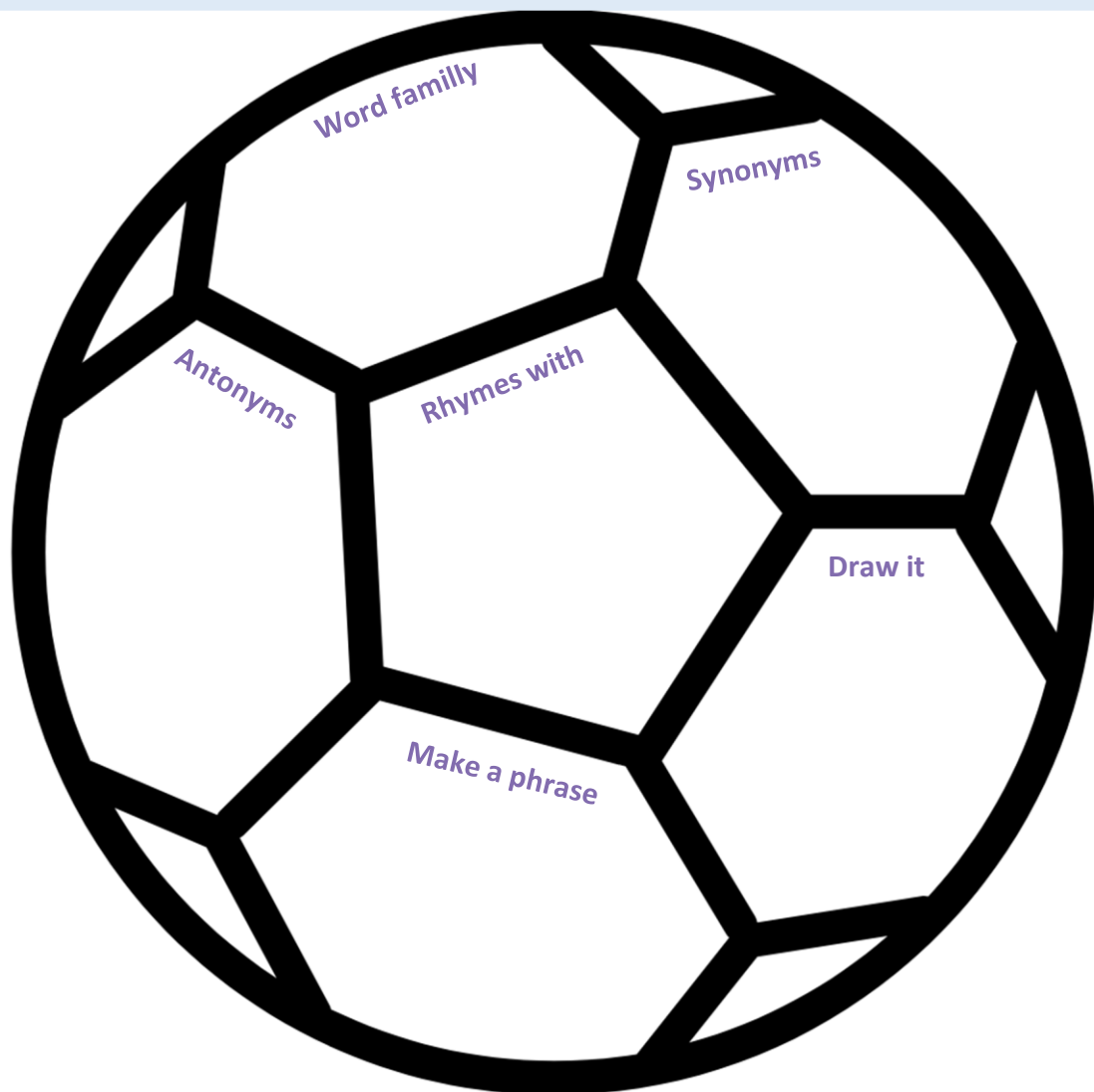
This boy. Who was he? And what did he want?

Chapter two of *The Russian World Cup Mystery* will be published before 7 a.m. on Friday 15th June.

The details of the URL where the remaining chapters will be posted are just being finalised: please email admin@tompalmer.co.uk to register for a reminder, if have not already done so.

World Cup word of the day

gesticulate



Defenders: Russia Chapter 2

A *live* World Cup story by Tom Palmer

Seth White used to see people from the past, people who were supposed to be dead. He thought all that was behind him, but – as he settled down on the sofa yesterday to watch Russia hammer Saudi Arabia 5-0 in the opening game of the World Cup – he saw something... saw someone... that made him fear it could all happen again. What Seth didn't know is that – this time – he and England's World Cup campaign were under threat.

ДВА

Seth sat right in front of the TV, scanning the Luzhniki Stadium crowd. Thousands of fans cheering and dancing behind Robbie Williams and Aida Garifullina, the Russian opera singer, as they performed *Let Me Entertain You*.

Seth was searching for the boy. The boy in the brown coat who seemed, before, to be staring right at him. Had he just imagined him?

Seth saw fireworks. Dancers. Aida's white dress and Robbie's red suit. But he had no sight of the boy. He'd seen him so briefly before, amid a sea of red, white and blue striped flags, that he was now starting to doubt he had even seen him at all.

Seth's phone pinged, making him jump. A text coming in. He glanced to see that it was from Nadiya.

U ok? U didn't wait for me.

Seth felt guilty that he hadn't stayed on for Nadiya after school. He would apologise to her later. For now, he needed to keep scanning the crowd.

After a few minutes, Seth had still seen nothing. He began to feel relief. Maybe he wasn't at the start of a new haunting. Maybe everything was going to be okay.

After Robbie and Aida left the centre circle stage, a balding man in a blue suit and red tie gave a speech. Seth knew who he was. Vladimir Putin. The leader of Russia.

The camera was fixed on Putin for what seemed like ages. Five minutes of blah-blah-blah at least. Seth felt bored after two.

‘Come on,’ he shouted at the TV. ‘I want to watch the football. Not this.’

His dog, Rosa, had come back into the room and sat down by the door looking at Seth, her tail thumping slowly and uneasily on the floor.

After the speeches, Seth began to relax. He even smiled. Yes, he clearly had been imagining things. He settled back on the sofa. The national anthems made it feel more like a World Cup match and Seth put his feet up on the coffee table and breathed out.

Saudi Arabia’s anthem first. Seth studied the row of child mascots standing in front of the players, each wearing a yellow top and red shorts, all smiling as the cameras panned the Saudi players.

Next the Russian anthem started up.

Seth watched as the first Russian player and his mascot came on the screen.

He cried out: ‘No!’

It was him. The boy.

Rosa was on her feet, barking.

Seth gawped in horror as the boy stared back at him. Hard eyes. Cold eyes. Hypnotic eyes. And now Seth felt like he was falling or spinning or fainting, he didn’t have time to think which. It just happened. He felt sick, his sense overloaded.

He heard new noises around him. And the air moving, like he was outside, not in his front room at all.

He opened his eyes. He was in a row of children. A camera woman was staring at him down a lens. Behind her, thousands of people were waving flags. Blue and red and white flags.

Seth understood immediately where he was. He was in Russia. In the Luzhniki stadium. At the World Cup.

Next he felt a hand on his shoulder and looked to his right to see that it belonged to the boy from the screen. The boy was next to him, wearing a yellow top and red shorts, his face so pale it was almost translucent.

The Russian national anthem played in the background.

What *was* this?

Seth had to know. 'Who are you?' Seth turned and asked the boy.

The pale hand was still on his shoulder. It hurt Seth. He couldn't move, like the iron grip was paralysing him.

'I am a king, a saint,' the boy said in a dry whispery voice. He spoke in Russian, but Seth could somehow understand every word.

A king?

A saint?

What was the boy talking about?

This was mad.

The boy handed Seth a piece of folded paper. Seth stared down, unfolded it, to see a faded photograph of the boy holding something up to the camera.

'You are the only one who can help me,' the boy said.

'How? I don't understand.'

'This is mine,' he said pointedly. 'I need it back. You must discover where it has gone.'

'But why me? How do I find that? What even is it?'

'An egg,' the boy said. 'I will come for you when England play. Know by then.'

'Why?'

'Stop asking questions. If you won't help me, if you fail me, I will see to it that England lose to Tunisia. Do you understand?'

Something clicked then in Seth's head. It was the way the boy was talking to him. He was sick of feeling scared. Because now he was angry. England, lose? No way!

Seth pulled away from the boy's grip. If this boy was going to make England lose, then this serious. Because, if England lost to Tunisia, then they had no real chance of qualifying for the next stage of the competition.

'No,' Seth said as his head began to spin again.

His eyes closed.

Darkness.

Then he was back home on his sofa. On the TV screen the boy's pale face disappeared as the camera moved on to the other mascot children.

The Russian national anthem ended to huge cheers from the home crowd at the Luzhniki stadium.

When Nadiya arrived at Seth's she saw her friend was staring solemnly at the TV. He didn't say hello. Rosa did. After greeting the dog, Nadiya turned to Seth.

'Seth?'

No reply.

'Seth?' she tried again.

Nothing.

'Football's boring,' she shouted. 'Football's rubbish. I'm going to turn the TV off.'

Surely that would provoke him?

Silence still.

Nadiya looked at the screen to Russian forwards attacking the Saudi Arabia goal.

She noticed the clock in the top corner: 11 minutes, 40 seconds.

Then chaos in the Saudi Arabia goalmouth. A Russian header. And a goal, Russian players streaming to the corner of the pitch to celebrate. Nadiya watched the replay, then turned to Seth. He'd not moved. His face and body hadn't changed since she had arrived.

Now she *was* worried.

'SETH?'

Still no reaction.

Nadiya realised she had to be careful. She noticed a piece of paper in Seth's hand. She prized it gently from his fingers. It was a crumpled photograph. An old one. A boy holding something.

Nadiya studied it closely for a while, turning it over, trying to make sense of it.

Then she heard Seth's voice. 'He said it was an egg.'

'What?' Nadiya squinted at the photograph.

'An egg.'

The object the boy was holding in the photograph was egg-shaped, but it was more like an ornament, a large blue and gold bejewelled egg, a fraction smaller than the boy's

head. And something flickered in Nadiya's memory. She enjoyed reading history books and watched loads of history programmes on the TV. She had an idea about what this might be.

Maybe.

'He said... he said, if I don't find out where it is, then he'll make sure England lose their opening game to Tunisia on Monday.'

Nadiya laughed.

'It's not funny,' Seth said.

'It is,' Nadiya said. 'No one can do that.'

Seth shook his head. 'Nadiya. This feels like last time. But worse. It's stronger. That boy – whoever he is – is strong. Powerful. I really think he will do what he threatened. Unless we help him.'

As Seth watched Russia destroy the Saudi defence four more times, Nadiya picked up her phone and began to search online. She needed answers if she was going to help her friend. And – if Seth was right – to help her country.

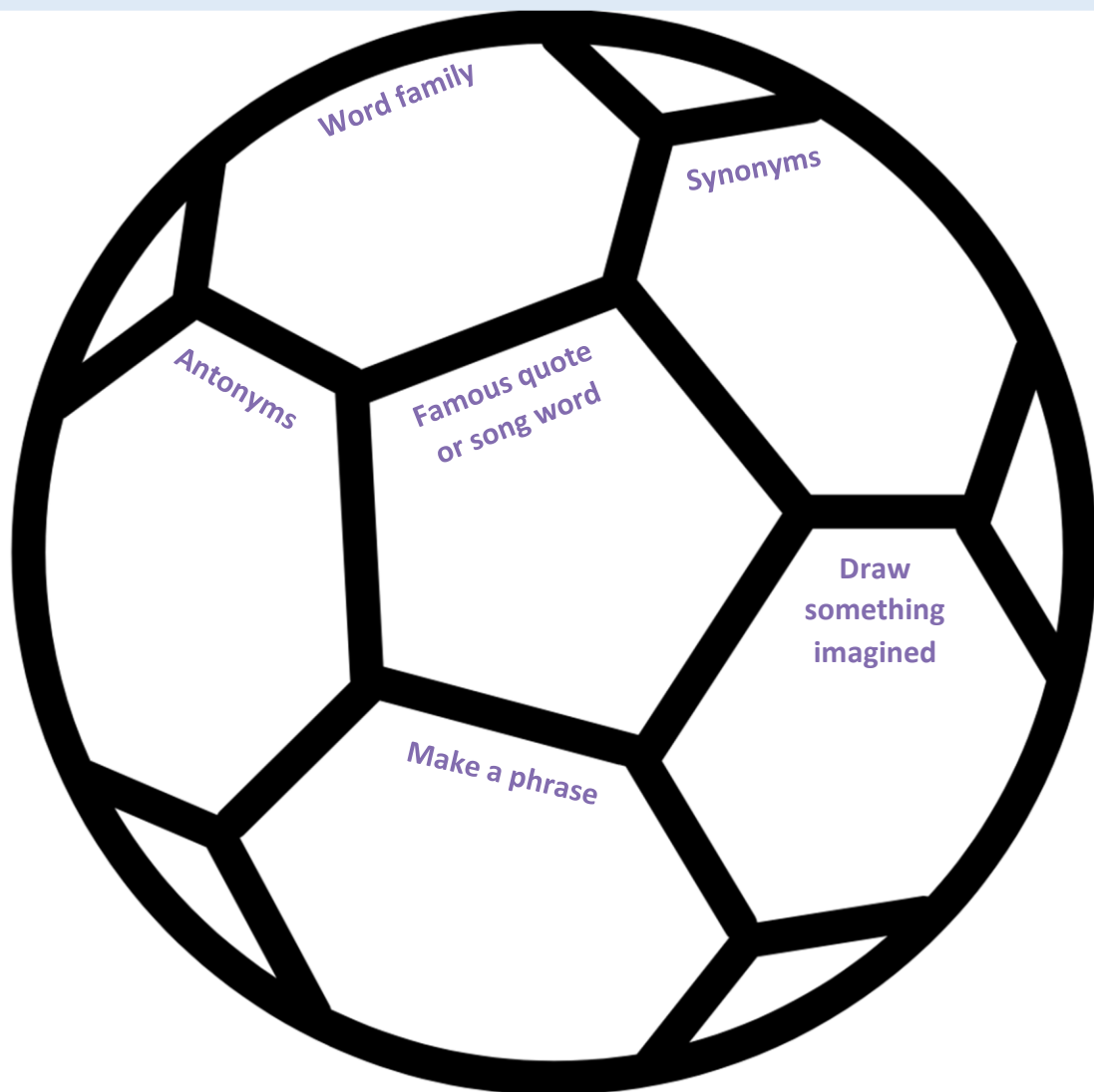
The challenge is set. Can Seth and Nadiya work out what the boy in the Luzhniki Stadium was talking about? Can they give him the information he wants? And would he – really – be able to make England lose if the two children fail in their quest.

Chapter 3 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published before 7.30 a.m. on Monday 18th June. Some time next week you will have the chance to vote on what you would like to happen next from two or three options. More about that soon. Thank you for reading and have a wonderful World Cup weekend! Thanks to West Thornton Primary School for the great idea of Seth visiting Russia via his TV and for helping me workshop lots of other ideas.

Tom visited Russia in 2009 to research his book, *Dead Ball*. You can find out more about his trip and his tour of the Luzhniki Stadium here: <http://tompalmer.co.uk/foul-play/dead-ball/>

World Cup word of the day

imagined



Defenders: Russia Chapter 3

A *live* World Cup story by Tom Palmer

Seth and Nadiya face a challenge. A strange Russian boy is haunting Seth through his TV and has made a threat that, if Seth doesn't help him, he will cause England to lose their opening World Cup group game against Tunisia tonight. All the duo have to go on is a photograph of the boy holding a large ornamental egg. Will our two heroes be able to discover what the boy needs to know? And, if they don't, will England lose in Volgograd tonight and be on the edge of elimination from the tournament?

Три

Nadiya was worried about Seth. She had been involved the last time he was troubled by shadows of the past.

'I'll help you,' she said. 'On one condition.'

'What's that?' Seth asked.

'That you leave it to me. I'll do all the research online. But you have to avoid screens *all* weekend. Or you might see the boy again. Okay?'

'But Brazil?' Seth complained. 'And Germany on Sunday? And there's Messi and Ronaldo on Saturday, working out who's the best player. The Goat. What if one of them scores a hatrick? Or misses a penalty? I need to see it.'

'Goat?' Nadiya asked. 'What are you on about?'

'Greatest of all time,' Seth told her. 'G.O.A.T. It's an acronym.'

Nadiya shook her head. 'No screens. Not even your phone. No goats: or no deal.'

Nadiya worked all Saturday and Sunday on her laptop, deep sea trawling the internet. She had the World Cup on in the background. It was just after Ronaldo scored his first goal and stood facing his teammates, stroking his chin, that she saw an image that horrified her.

Staring out of her computer screen was a boy wearing a military uniform. There was a medal on his chest. His pale face and unflinching gaze were unmistakable.

The boy from the photograph.

Nadiya had never doubted that Seth was seeing something real to him. Now she knew how real – and how dangerous – the situation might be. Because now she knew exactly *who* the boy was.

They met on the edge of the Moor, the expanse of grass and trees that separated their school from where both Nadiya and Seth's houses were. It was after nine p.m. Daylight fading.

Seth had been listening to the Germany and Brazil games on the radio all afternoon. He was intensely frustrated. He'd missed enjoying Germany losing and Brazil drawing. Huge games. After Brazil's match ended he took Rosa out for a walk. She was running free, playing with a young Cocker Spaniel.

That was when Nadiya had called him.

Nadiya could see her friend looked tired and anxious for news of her research. She hoped what she had to tell him would help. But, really, she knew she needed more time. Much more time.

'I know who he is,' she announced.

'Who?'

'His name was Alexei Romanov. He was the heir to the Russian throne in 1918. His mum was our Queen Victoria's granddaughter. But they were killed.'

'Killed?'

'Murdered alongside his mum and dad and siblings. He was the youngest. Just fourteen, like us.'

Seth felt a shudder go through him.

'So that's why he said he was a king?'

‘Yes,’ Nadiya went on. ‘And he was a saint too. The Russian church canonised him.’

‘Well... thank you... that’s brilliant...’ Seth said. ‘And what about the egg?’

‘I don’t know’ Nadiya admitted. ‘Not exactly.’

Seth said nothing. He was waiting, because he knew Nadiya had more to tell him.

‘Eggs like that were called Faberge eggs,’ his friend explained. They were made by a man called Gustav Faberge from precious jewels and gold and – now – they’re worth millions. Seriously. Some go for *twenty* million.’

‘But why would he want it if he’s dead?’ Seth muttered to himself.

The light was fading to the west now. No glorious sunset. Just a pale pre-darkness. A cold wind now blowing across the moor. Seth checked where Rosa was and waited for Nadiya to speak.

‘But I’ve not found out which egg Alexei Romanov is holding in your picture. Not yet.’

Seth coughed to hide his disappointment. ‘You’ve done well,’ he said, trying to sound positive. His legs felt weak.

‘But I will,’ Nadiya added.

Seth looked at the church clock. ‘It’s night time now,’ he said. ‘And school tomorrow. Then there are only three hours before England and Tunisia kick off. We’re running out of time. Let me help too. Let me...’

‘No,’ Nadiya stopped him. ‘No screens. It’s not safe for you. I’ll do what I can tonight. We’ll talk in the morning at school. It might not be too late.’

It was dark as Seth made his way down the hill, Rosa tugging as eagerly as she always did when they were on their way home.

Monday morning. Seth walked his normal route to school. Past the old hospital, now converted into fancy flats. He counted four cars with England flags flapping and two women jogging past him, both wearing England football tops. There was something in the air today. That buzz in the country when England are playing in the World Cup and nothing has gone wrong, yet.

Seth also saw a horse pulling a large wooden caravan with AMBULANCE written on the side. And a pair of nurses standing at the door to the old hospital. Figures from the past. He was seeing shadows again. Seth shuddered.

He called at Nadiya's house. No reply. He hung around for her until the last minute, when he had to run to school. Where was she? Why wasn't she answering? Had she gone to school already?

But Nadiya was not in registration.

Nor was she in Maths later.

Seth didn't have his phone with him, so he had no way of texting her.

At morning break he sat outside staring through the trees and across the moor. He watched, as three boys in suits and ties walked by, pushing each other. They were wearing the school's uniform. From 1927. More shadows. More omens that Seth was heading into a troubled time.

Seth realised he was scared now, that he needed Nadiya. He didn't think he could face this without her. The visions from the past: they were overwhelming him again.

Then a sudden heavy hand on his shoulder. He jumped, looked round, expecting the worst.

'It's me,' Nadiya said.

She looked tired. Her eyes were dark underneath and puffy.

'Where've you been?'

'The library in town. I've been marked as late. The first time. Ever. Can you believe it?'

Seth winced. 'I'm sorry,' he said.

'Don't be,' Nadiya grinned. 'I think I've worked out where the egg is. I found an old travel book in the library. Written in 1920 by a man who knew what happened to the Romanov family. They were all murdered in a place called Yekaterinburg.'

'Yekaterinburg? That's where some of the games are. France play there on Thursday.'

'It's there,' Nadiya said. 'I'm pretty sure the missing egg is there.'

After school. 6.15 p.m. Seth and Nadiya decided to watch the BBC coverage as soon as it started. Nadiya's mum and dad were in the front garden with Seth's mum and Rosa, drinking tea.

The BBC TV World Cup intro began.

The boy on the train with the book of stickers.

The girl with football balloon.

The Russian dolls with pictures of players on them.

And then Gary Lineker's smiling face filled the screen.

It was time.

A strange time for Seth. He'd not looked at a screen for three days. Not a TV, not a computer, not a smart phone. The light and colour made him feel dizzy. He looked away from the screen to see Nadiya studying him.

'Are you ready?' she asked.

Seth nodded.

Nadiya glanced at the screen to see footage of the England team climbing off their bus and entering the stadium.

'Are you sure you want to do this?' she asked.

Seth nodded again. 'It's not just about me,' he said. 'This is about England. We need to beat Tunisia, so I need to do this.'

Has Nadiya correctly identified the strange Russian boy? Is he really the ghost of the heir to the throne of Russia and can he do what he threatened and stop England winning their opening World Cup game? Have the children done enough to satisfy him by finding out where the missing egg might be? And how will Seth meet him and tell him?

Find out in the next chapter of *Defenders: Russia*. Chapter 4 will be published at

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/defenders-russia-world-cup-2018-football-story/>

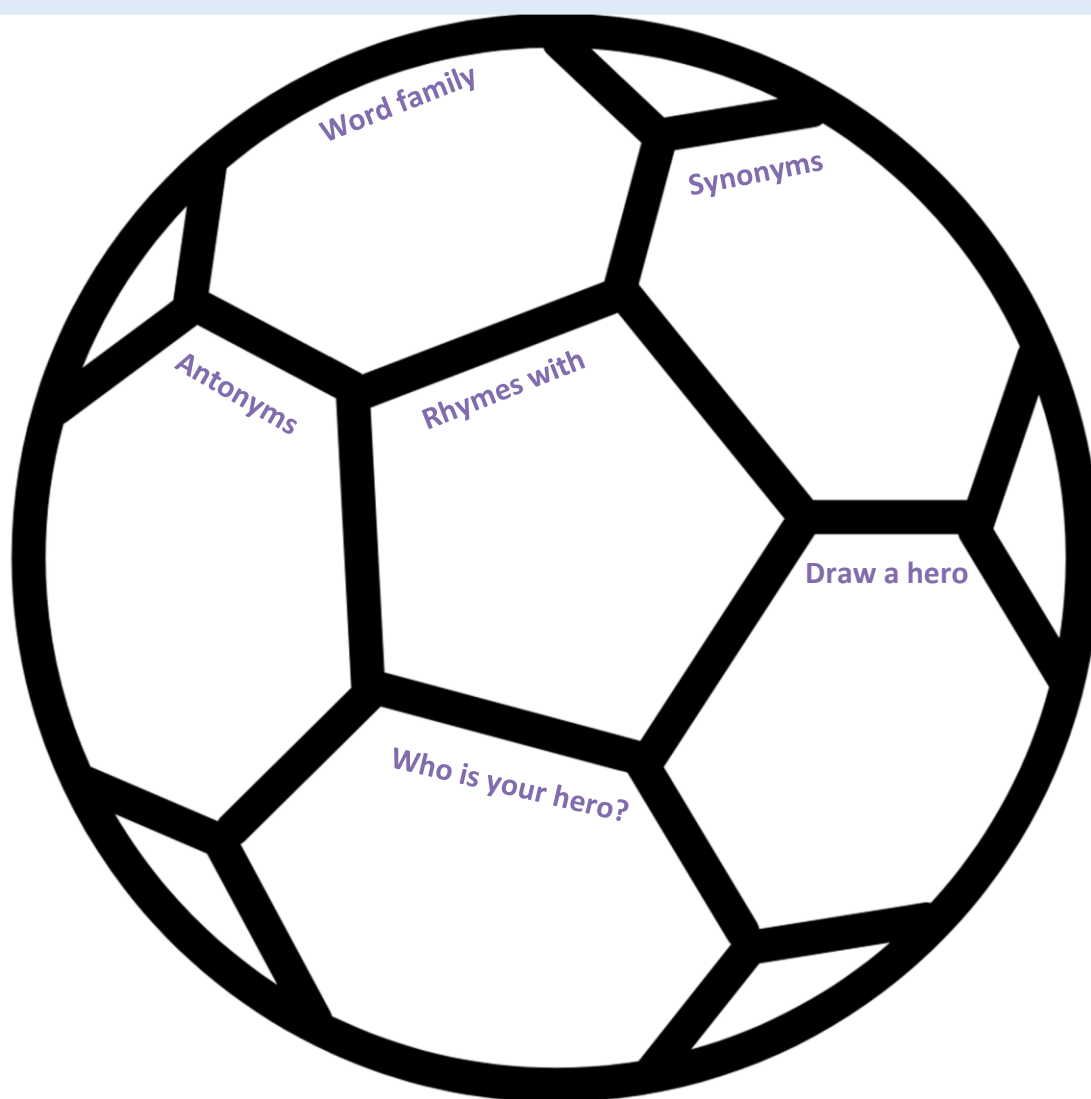
before 7.30 a.m. on Tuesday 19th June.

If you would like to know more about the adventures of Nadiya and Seth and find videos and resources about how Tom wrote his history ghost series, *Defenders*, then please visit:

<http://tompalmer.co.uk/defenders/>.

World Cup word of the day

heroes



Defenders: Russia Chapter 4

A live World Cup story by Tom Palmer

Пять

Monday night. Nadiya and Seth sat nervously on the sofa, Rosa on the far side of the room, snoring. They could barely hear Gary Lineker and his expert panel as they previewed the Tunisia-England game.

The footballers – England in red, Tunisia in white – were shown gathering in the tunnel, coming out onto the pitch and then lining up for the national anthems. Two rows of mascot children lined up in front of them.

‘This could be it,’ Seth said and he began to feel light-headed as the anthems started. ‘It was when I saw the mascots that it happened last...’

Nadiya put her hand on Seth’s hand to comfort him. Then felt her arm drop heavily to the sofa.

She stood up and gasped.

Seth had gone.

Seth came out of a trance to find himself was on the pitch in Volgograd. There were thousands of football fans ahead of him. The famous England players behind him.

He felt overwhelmed by the circle of lights around the top of the stadium and the waves of noise coming from the crowd. But Seth knew he had to concentrate: he had a job to do.

He swallowed, forgot his fear and looked to his left.

The Russian boy was there, his face even paler than it had been the last time, his expression anxious. Seth noticed hundreds of flies flitting around his face.

‘I know where it is,’ Seth said to placate him, just as *God save the Queen* came to a triumphant end.

The boy's face lit up. 'You do?'

'I do.' Seth couldn't help but join in and grin: at last the boy looked happy.

As the players of both teams shook hands, Seth ran off the pitch, following the boy.

'Where is it, then?' the boy gasped as they found two empty seats at the front of the main stand. 'My treasure?'

'Yekaterinburg,' Seth said.

The boy stepped backwards. 'It's *there*. That's where...' he stopped, overcome with emotion.

Seth knew what had happened to the boy in Yekaterinburg. I was where he and the entire Russian royal family had been brutally murdered. He didn't want him to have to relive something so painful.

'Look,' Seth admitted. 'I know who you are. I know you are Alexei Romanov.'

The Russian boy nodded gravely.

'It is true,' he said. 'My father, the Tsar Nicholas II, gave me the Fabergé egg that asked you to locate. It was his last gift to me before...

'So...' Seth filled the silence. 'Are you happy? Have I done what you asked?'

Alexei Romanov looked into Seth's eyes and smiled.

'Yes. And I thank you. Please, will you be my guest and watch the game with me?'

Nadiya was glued to the screen watching the match. She felt increasingly tense as the game progressed, terrified for her friend. It was one-all. And that was not enough for England. They had to win this one to be sure of qualifying for the last 16.

Half an hour left.

Twenty minutes.

Ten.

Four minutes injury time. She wondered what had happened to Seth. Was he safe? Where had he disappeared to? How had the Russian boy reacted to what she had found out about him?

'We need to score, Rosa,' Nadiya told the dog.

Rosa's tail thumped on the carpet.

Seth leapt out of his seat when Harry Kane headed his second of the game in the dying seconds. He punched the air and shouted out loud, then noticed Alexei Romanov studying him, head on his side.

'I am happy you are happy,' Alexei declared.

'Well... thank you,' Seth replied, feeling jubilant.

'Time for you to depart?' Alexei suggested.

'Yes. Please. I need to go home. There are people at home who will worry about me.'

'Who is that?' Alexei asked.

'My friend, Nadiya. My dog, Rosa. And...' Seth stopped talking. He heard a distant alarm bell. Should he be telling Alexei about people he cared about? Maybe not.

'There's one more thing,' Alexei said cautiously. 'Before you leave.'

'What's that?' Seth grinned, still excited about the victory against Tunisia.

'I need you to do something more for me.'

Seth stepped back, his happiness draining away. 'No,' he said. 'We had a deal.'

Alexei smiled. 'Now we will have a new deal.'

'What deal?'

Alexei breathed out deeply, then began to explain.

Seth shook his head as he heard what the Russian boy wanted of him. Then, utterly exhausted, he found himself next to Nadiya on his sofa, Rosa leaning heavily against his leg.

He looked at his friend closely.

'He wants us to do something else,' Seth told Nadiya. 'And you won't believe it when I tell you.'

On Wednesday 20th June – in Chapter 5 of Defenders: Russia – I will offer children three clear options for what happens next. You will be able to cast your vote by using the contact form here <http://tompalmer.co.uk/world-cup-2018-literacy-resources/> or by

emailing vote@tompalmer.co.uk with your preferred option in the subject line. Voting will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. British Summer Time on Wednesday 20th June. Any votes submitted before or after the voting is open will not be counted.

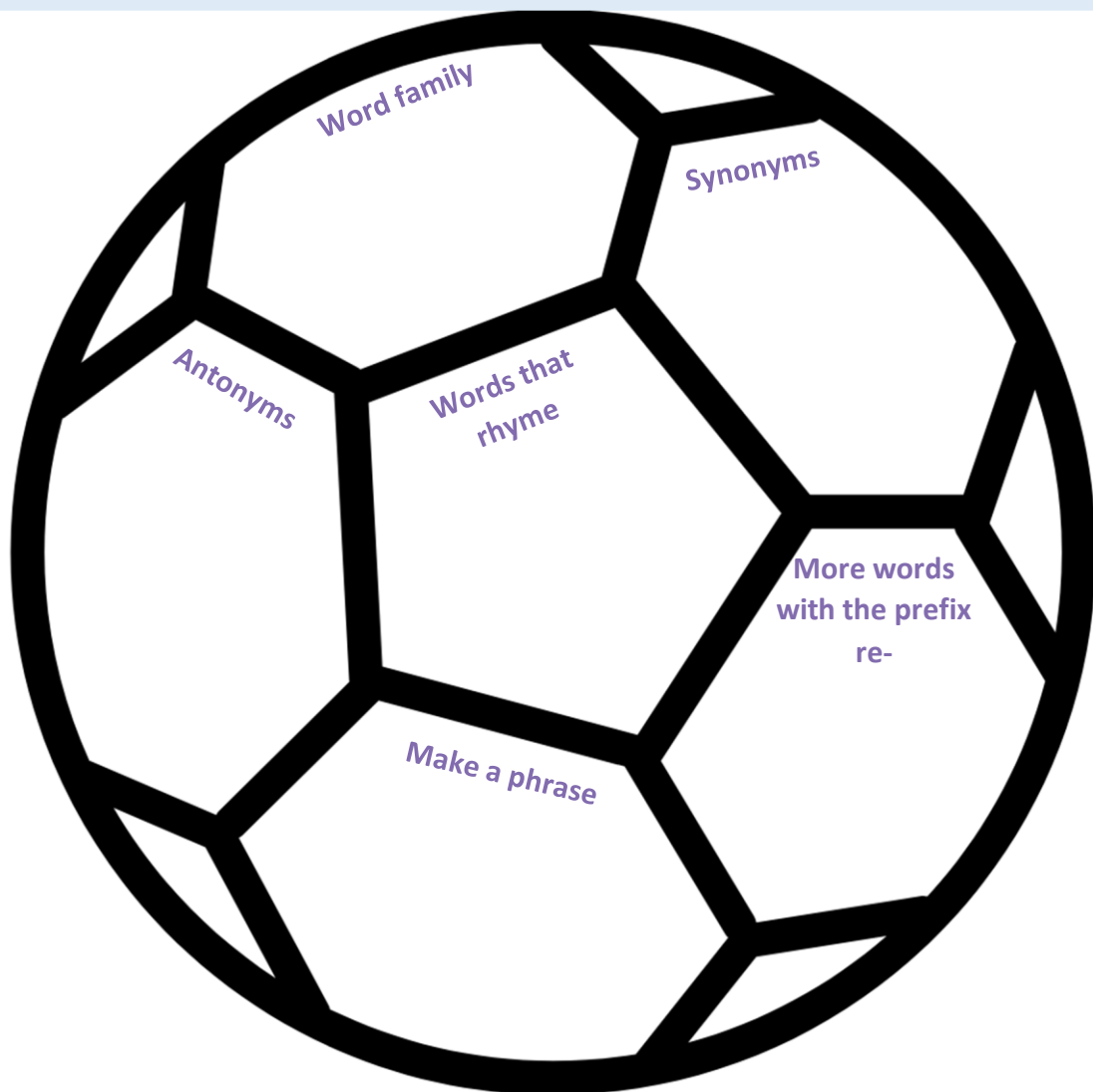
Any additional email addresses submitted for voting purposes will not be used for future marketing purposes or shared with any third party, without consent. (With new GDPR rules coming in, we ask you to check our privacy policy <http://tompalmer.co.uk/privacy-policy/> and terms and conditions <http://tompalmer.co.uk/terms-and-conditions/>.)

Chapter 5 will be published at <https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/defenders-russia-world-cup-2018-football-story/> before 7.30 a.m. on Wednesday 20th June.

What is Alexei going to ask Seth and Nadiya to do now? You decide.

World Cup word of the day

Relive



Make a phrase

Alexei Romanov is thrilled that Seth has located the Fabergé egg that his father had given to him. But when Seth returns to Nadiya in England, he has to tell his friend that the Russian boy has insisted he do him another favour. But what is it?

Now it's time for you to discuss and decide together what happens next.

Пять

Option One

Alexei takes Seth back to the time of the Russian Revolution, almost 100 years ago, to witness his death and follow his murderers so that Seth can discover where the Fabergé Egg was taken to after his death. If Seth doesn't agree to it, Alexei swears that he will keep him in 1918 Russia forever, never allowing him home.

Option Two

Alexei has been watching Seth and Nadiya through their TVs. He knows all about their lives and that Nadiya has become a keen history detective. He demands is that Nadiya comes to Russia to help him find his Faberge Egg. If she doesn't he threatens to remove her ability to remember history, the things she loves most and to threaten England's progress in the World Cup. This option would mean that Nadiya becomes the main character in *Defenders: Russia*.

Option Three

Alexei tells Seth that he needs him to return to present-day Russia to search for the Fabergé Egg. Seth has to hunt for it in both the Kremlin Museum and a secret military camp in Yekaterinburg, two of the most dangerous places to be in the world today. Seth refuses... until Alexei kidnaps Rosa and says she will be returned only when he has fulfilled his mission.

Now it is up to you. If you have time, talk about what you would like to happen next in the classroom or at home. Have a debate and then vote as a class or group how you would like to cast your vote. Whichever storyline is chosen will begin on Thursday 21st June. And don't forget, there is no right or wrong. Tom is happy – and excited – to write any of these three scenarios.

Please cast your vote by using the contact form here <http://tompalmer.co.uk/world-cup-2018-literacy-resources/> or by emailing vote@tompalmer.co.uk with your preferred option in the subject line.

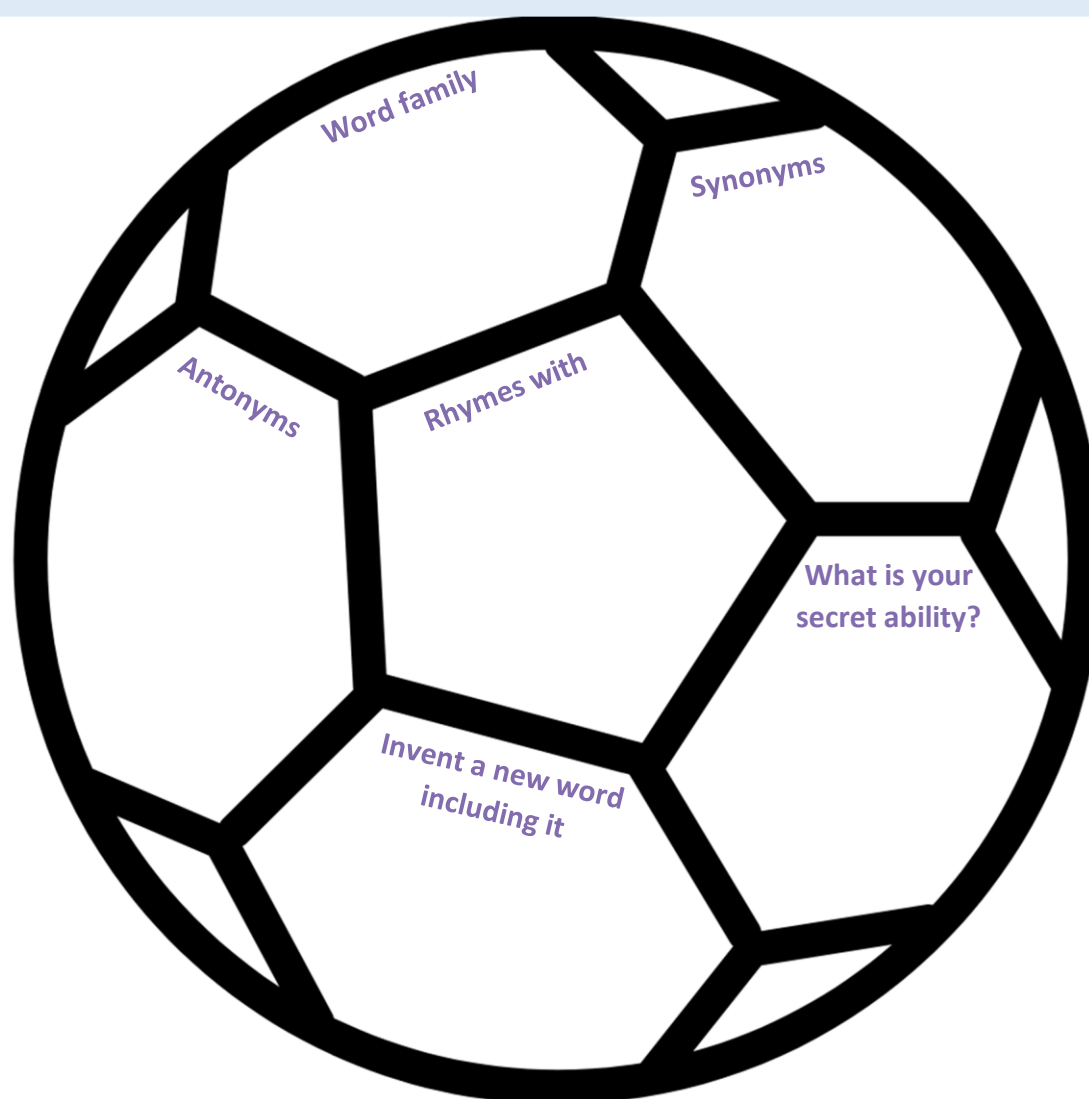
Voting is open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. British Summer Time, today, Wednesday 20th June. Any votes submitted before or after the voting is open will not be counted.

Any additional email addresses submitted for voting purposes will not be used for future marketing purposes or shared with any third party, without consent. (With new GDPR rules coming in, we ask you to check our privacy policy <http://tompalmer.co.uk/privacy-policy/> and terms and conditions <http://tompalmer.co.uk/terms-and-conditions/>.)

Chapter 6 – where you will find out what children across the world have voted for – will be published at <https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/defenders-russia-world-cup-2018-football-story/> before 7.30 a.m. on Thursday 21st June.

World Cup word of the day

ability



Alexei Romanov has demanded another favour of Seth. A favour that is not going to be easy to fulfil.

We had more than 2000 votes from schools and families to decide what happens next in *Defenders: Russia*. Thanks to everyone for thinking about it, talking about it and voting.

Now, on with the story...

ШЕСТЬ

‘So what is it?’ Nadiya asked. ‘What does Alexei want you to do?’

To Nadiya, Seth looked anxious, his hands shaking visibly. Suddenly, and without a word, he left the room. Nadiya heard him running round the house, calling out in a loud voice.

For Rosa.

For his dog.

That’s weird, Nadiya thought to herself. *Rosa was just here. Now she’s vanished.*

When Seth came back into the front room, his face was ashen.

‘What is it?’ Nadiya pressed. She had an inkling, a terrible inkling of what had made Seth so distraught.

‘Alexei insists I follow him and his family to see their...’ Seth stopped.

‘Their what?’ Nadiya asked, confused. ‘Their palace? Their gardens? Their Faberge eggs?’

Seth shook his head. ‘Their deaths,’ he croaked.

Nadiya gasped, putting her hands to her mouth. ‘No,’ she said. ‘No, you can’t. You mustn’t.’

‘I don’t have any choice,’ Seth said calmly.

‘You do. Just don’t watch the TV. Don’t look at screens. You managed a whole weekend before.’

Nadiya flicked the remote to turn the TV off.

‘You don’t understand,’ Seth said, pausing. ‘Alexei has Rosa.’

Nadiya’s heart stopped. Just for a moment. Her gut feeling had been right. She couldn’t breathe. Not Rosa! Not Seth’s lovely dog! As she took it all in, she felt her bottom lip trembling. She had no words.

Seth filled the silence.

‘He wants me to witness their execution. In Yekaterinburg, where it happened. Then – when it’s over – he wants me to find his Faberge egg that his father gave him. When they were taken that night, his family took their most-valued possessions with them. They’d been told they were going to be taken to an underground room for their safety from marauding enemy soldiers. But it was a lie. They were put in a basement room and shot by the Bolshevik troops, who wanted to finish off the royal family and let the people rule themselves. Sort of. Most of their possessions were stolen, but...’

Nadiya groaned. ‘I know...’

‘What?’ Seth asked.

‘I know what you’re going to say. In that book I read at the library in town, the writer said the soldiers who killed the Romanovs later admitted seeing a strange boy and... a dog. That they appeared out of nowhere. Like ghosts, they said. And that he stole the Faberge egg.’

Seth nodded. ‘Alexei says I’m that boy,’ he said gravely. ‘And Rosa’s the dog. That’s why Alexei took her. He needs a boy *and* a dog.’

The two children sat in silence again.

‘He wants me to take the egg and bury it so that I can go back for it in 2018... well, I mean... this year.’

Nadiya breathed out. ‘When? I mean... when do you have to go?’

‘On Thursday,’ Seth replied. ‘Thank goodness my mum is away until Sunday. France are playing a World Cup match in Yekaterinburg on Thursday. If I watch that match on TV, then he’ll reunited me with Rosa. He says, if I agree to it, he’ll promise to return us safely home before England play Panama.’

Thursday after school. Seth and Nadiya sat on the sofa. Seth felt nauseous. Nadiya deeply troubled. The TV was showing the build-up to the latest World Cup match, France versus Peru.

‘Are you nervous?’ Nadiya asked.

Seth nodded. ‘But determined too,’ he said. ‘I need to be with Rosa. I’m frightened for her.’

On the screen the TV was showing images of a full stadium in Yekaterinburg. Flags waving. Light shining. Fans singing. Seth wondered if any of them knew what had happened in the city where they were enjoying the football.

‘Look,’ Nadiya said. ‘You know what happened in that basement. To the Russian royal family?’

‘I know they were murdered,’ Seth said.

‘Do you know,’ Nadiya hesitated, ‘the details...’

Seth shook his head. He didn’t want to know. Not really.

‘I think I should tell you,’ Nadiya said. ‘Just so you’re prepared.’

Seth didn’t reply. Nadiya took his silence as consent. She spoke slowly and clearly. She tried to be matter-of-fact about it, but she could see her description was troubling Seth. And why wouldn’t it? It was a horrible story.

After she had finished, Seth looked at the clock above the fireplace. Nearly 5 p.m. Time for France and Peru to kick off.

The pair looked at the screen. Behind the large word Yekaterinburg pitch side, Seth saw Alexei. The Russian boy was holding a rope. And there was Rosa on the end of it. Seth felt overjoyed seeing his dog.

‘It’s time,’ he said to Nadiya, feeling faint again, his words echoing around him.

Seth found himself outside a grand two-storey house on a wooded hill, looking down over a small old town. There was woodsmoke in the air. The sound of birds singing, but also boots marching. The house had lovely gardens, but the gardens were circled by a tall forbidding wooden fence that he could not see through. And Seth knew this was the house in Yekaterinburg. He knew it was 1918 too, not 2018.

Then, suddenly, Rosa came bounding across the lawn towards him. Seth grabbed her and hugged her as she mouthed his hair and his ears. She was whimpering. But Seth felt better. They were together. She was safe, for now.

Then Seth felt Rosa stiffen: she had spotted something behind him. Seth turned and had his first glimpse of the Romanovs through the large open front door. The Russian royal family being ushered down a grand staircase. And there was Alexei being carried stiffly by a man aged about fifty wearing a suit, with no sense of what a terrible gruesome end they were about to come to.

Seth knew the was Alexei's father, Tsar Nicholas II. And he knew exactly where they were being taken.

This was it.

Seth is about to go follow Alexei and the Russian royal family to their executions. His bleak challenge is to watch and let it happen, then to play the role of the ghostly figure who takes Alexei's egg. But will he hold his nerve while witnessing such terrible events? Will he be able to get his hands on the Faberge Egg? And who will be in the room intent on stopping him?

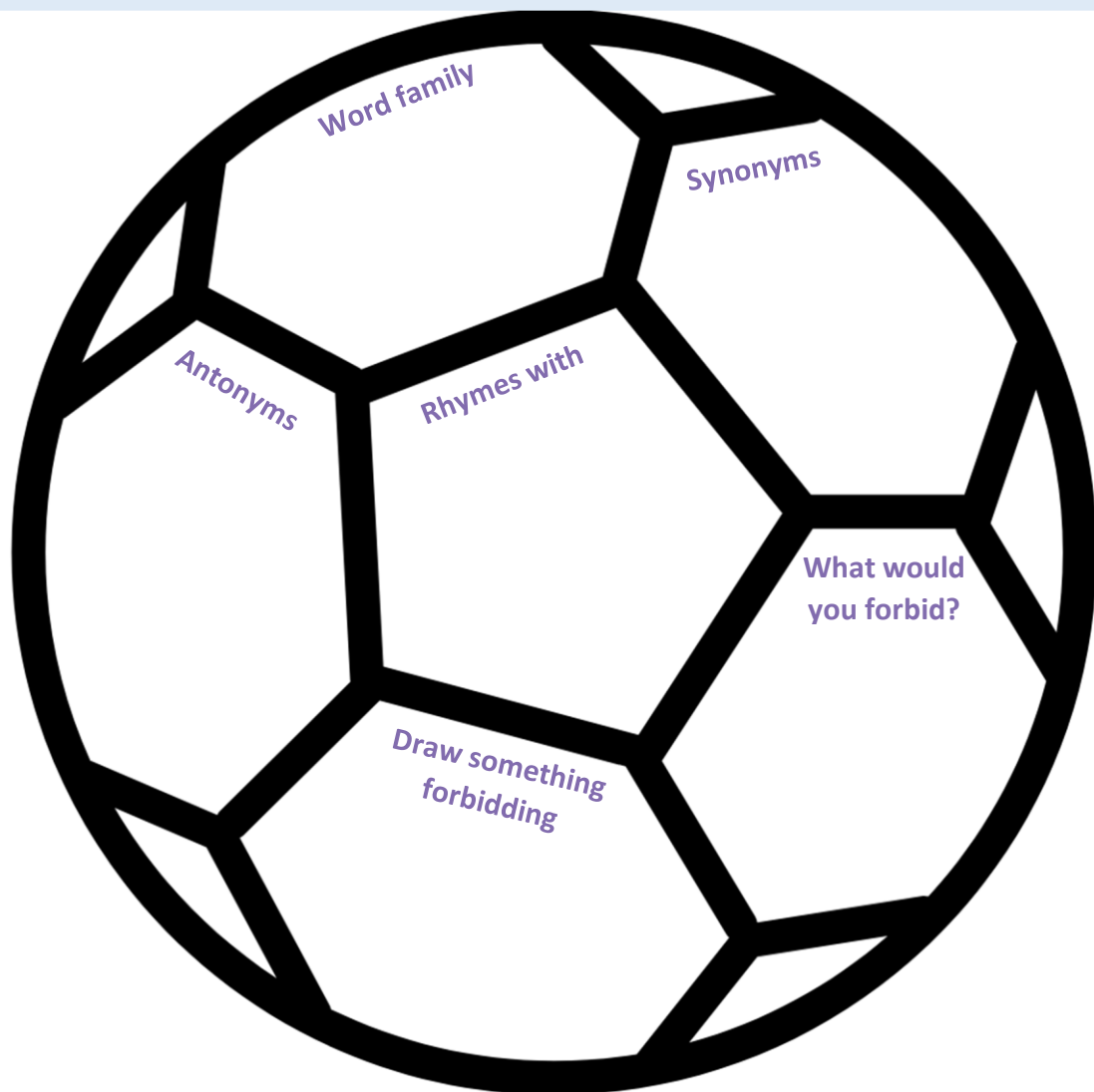
Thank you to everyone for their votes, ideas and comments yesterday. There were some fantastic ideas and I will certainly use some of them.

The final results were Option one 64%; Option two 7%; and, Option three 29%. Although there was a clear favourite, there was a great demand for Rosa to be increasingly involved, so I've added more Rosa!

Chapter 7 will be published at <https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/defenders-russia-world-cup-2018-football-story/> before 7.30 a.m. on Friday 22nd June.

World Cup word of the day

forbidding



Defenders: Russia Chapter 7

A live World Cup story by Tom Palmer

Seth is about to witness the demise of the Russian royal family in a Yekaterinburg cellar. Alexei Romanov has asked him to wait until after the murders, then to recover his precious Faberge Egg, so that Seth can hide it in 1918 to recover it in 2018. Seth is terrified, but, also, determined to help Alexei, because, doing what is asked of him, is the only way he can be sure his dog, Rosa, will be safe.

This part of the story is based very accurately on the accounts of some of the people who were in the Romanov house that night. Because this story is aimed at Y4 upwards, I have drawn back on being too explicit about what happened that night in Yekaterinburg, even though some schools are asking for more gruesomeness. However, I would recommend teachers read it through first to be sure it is right for everyone in their class.

After this chapter – voted for by readers – the narrative will return to a more predictable cliff hanging action type of story. With more football.

Семь

Standing outside the smart house in Yekaterinburg, Seth couldn't believe he was in 1918 Russia, watching the last Tsar of Russia and his family walking to their execution.

But here he was.

Before Seth had left Alexei, the Russian boy told him that once he had recovered Rosa and the Faberge Egg, he could escape home by tugging firmly once on Rosa's collar. Alexei also told Seth strictly not to take the egg back to the UK with him. He didn't say why.

‘This way.’ A smart-uniformed man with dark hair and a short beard addressed the Tsar in a clear voice. ‘The enemy are approaching. We have automobiles coming to take you to safety. You must wait in the basement.’

Seth knew this was a lie.

He listened as the Tsar encouraged his family to do as they were told.

Seth knew the name of the bearded man. Yurovsky, chief executioner of the Romanovs.

The Tsar was wearing a military coat and worn-out boots. His son, Alexei, was still in his nightshirt, a white blanket around him. Alexei’s arms were wrapped tightly around his father’s neck.

Ahead of them, Alexei’s mother walked, guided by her daughters, all older siblings of Alexei. All of the girls and women wore dresses that moved strangely as if they were weighed down by something. Seth knew that to be true: each dress had millions of roubles worth of jewellery sewn into it for safe-keeping.

Seth waited until the soldiers escorting the Romanovs had passed through the front of the house before he followed. He kept Rosa on a tight lead.

Seth thought about what Nadiya had told him about the executions. That the revolutionaries had taken the royal family as prisoners, now that the people called the Bolsheviks were in control of Russia. They were no longer considered royalty, no longer rulers of their people.

Seth didn’t really know if the Russian royal family was good or not, but he *did* know he felt sorry for this family – this mum, dad and their children – who were being treated so badly.

He followed in the background as the Romanovs were led into a cellar smaller than a school classroom, with only one window that was barred by a heavy iron grille. There was no way out of the room other than through the door. But the door was guarded by a dozen soldiers. Seth watched the soldiers. He could see – in the corner – a table with a pile of revolvers on it. Two young women in black stood by the revolvers.

The sound of soldiers singing songs outside increased the tension in the room.

‘Please may I have chairs for my wife and daughters while we wait?’ the Tsar asked Yurovsky.

Three chairs were shoved into the room, clattering on the stone floor. Two of Alexei’s sisters recovered one and gave it to their mother who appeared to collapse into it.

The Romanov’s were left alone for a moment, gathered together in a corner of the small room. They reminded Seth of animals he’d seen, flocking together for safety, anxious about what would happen next.

‘The automobiles will be here for us soon,’ the Tsar said in an assuring voice, as the sound of men singing outside stopped suddenly.

Silence. A long silence.

Then the door opened. Yurovsky was there. Behind him, the dozen soldiers stood with pistols at their side.

‘Your relations have tried to save you,’ Yurovsky announced in a deep voice. ‘They have failed and we must now shoot you.’

The Tsar rose to his feet and Seth heard him say ‘What...’

It was his last word.

Yurovsky shot the Tsar dead as twelve men entered the room, each holding a revolver. To Seth’s horror, the soldiers then turned their guns on the Romanov family.

The rest of this story is history.

Seth watched what happened over the shoulders of the soldiers.

When the first shot was fired he had shouted out ‘No’ and Rosa had barked as if to echo him. None of the soldiers had heard him, but Seth did notice the two women in black glance around towards him. He assumed it was a coincidence.

What Seth could see happening to the Russian royal family was brutal and bloody. He looked at the floor, it was too much. Rosa recoiled and hid behind him.

There was a strong smell of gunpowder. And of blood.

And then on the floor Seth saw it. The Faberge Egg. Gold and blue. It had fallen to the side, away from where everyone in the room was looking. Seth couldn’t save Alexei, but he could retrieve his egg.

He moved cautiously towards the egg and picked it up.

Immediately he heard Rosa growl. Low and quiet, the growl was a warning to Seth. Seth scanned the room and noticed two women in black moving towards him.

Could they see him?

Surely not.

Seth thought he was invisible to everyone, like a ghost from the future.

But the two women continued to approach, bitter looks on their faces.

Seth stood up, called Rosa to his side. The women were too close now. Seth and Rosa began to run.

Out of the door.

Past the executioners on the stairs.

Through the front door.

Onto the lawn and the cool of the night.

Those women, Seth thought. *Had they really seen him?* He thought Alexei was the only one who could see him.

And so Seth panicked. He had no time to bury the Faberge Egg, as Alexei had asked him to: he had to get home. To safety. Without thinking it through, he put his hand into Rosa's collar and tugged.

And it worked. He was home. Safe. On his bed.

Rosa on his left.

And on Seth's right, something he did not want to see there. The Faberge Egg.

Seth has fulfilled the second quest set for him by Alexei. The events on his latest trip to Russia have troubled him greatly. But that is not his main worry. His main worry is that he has inadvertently brought the Faberge Egg back to the UK in 2018 with him. And unfortunately for Seth that is not the only thing from Russia that will find its way to his door. Outside, searching the streets of his home town, are two women dressed in black.

Chapter 8 will be published at <https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/defenders-russia-world-cup-2018-football-story/> before 7.30 a.m. on Monday 25th June. Thank you for reading. Have a nice weekend.

World Cup word of the day

automobiles



Defenders: Russia Chapter 8

A live World Cup story by Tom Palmer

Seth finds himself back in the UK, having returned from 1918 Russia, where he witnessed the murder of the Romanov family. While there, he did what he was instructed to do by Alexei Romanov and retrieved the Faberge Egg. Unfortunately, Seth also did something he was told not to do: he brought the egg back to 2018 England. Now the two women in black, who also witnessed Alexei's family execution, have followed Seth home. He has no idea how much danger he could be in.

БОЕМЬ

Sunday afternoon.

Seth and his mum were sat in his front room, after they'd made an early lunch together, enjoying it in the garden. Seth had eaten his too quickly: it was hot outside and he wanted to get in to see the build up to the match.

England v Panama. Game two.

The national anthems. The banners on the pitch. The close ups of players and fans. And no Alexei, Seth was relieved to see. Maybe he could even to enjoy this game.

The referee's whistle blew.

Seth sat on edge of the sofa, leaning right forward, as he usually did when England played. Rosa was next to him, her weight against his leg. But very quickly Seth was slumping down, staring at the screen, not really taking what was going on. He felt so exhausted, unable to take anything in.

He heard his mum shout when Stones headed the first goal in.

Then again when Kane got his first penalty. Two-nil.

But Seth was deep down inside himself, trying to make sense of what he had witnessed in Russia. A dozen people shot to death. That was what he'd seen. But it just

didn't make any sense to him at all. His mind was going over and over little details, like the Tsar shouting 'What...' and the first crack of a bullet.

When the third goal went in his mum paused the game, eyeing Seth.

'What?' Seth said. 'What are you doing?'

'You're not watching it. You don't care. What on earth is wrong with you, Seth?'

Seth shrugged.

After a long loaded silence, Mum moved closer to Seth on the sofa.

'It's happening again,' she murmured. 'Isn't it?'

'What?' Seth parried, sitting up. 'England winning?'

Mum shook her head. 'No, not England,' she said. 'The thing. With ghosts. With you seeing things.' **

Seth admitted it all to his mum.

About Alexei. His threat that England would lose to Tunisia. Kidnapping Rosa. Going to Russia and seeing the executions. And the egg. That he had hidden it under his bed in a shoebox.

Mum stood with her back to the closed front room door as Seth spoke, her hands folded, as if she was barring his way.

'Why do you do what he says?' she asked.

Seth pulled a face. 'Didn't you hear what I told you? About Rosa. About England.'

'And have you refused? Have you said no?'

'No,' Seth answered in a quiet voice.

Mum paced across the room, Rosa shifting herself round to watch.

'He's a bully,' Mum declared. 'He might be the son of a Tsar who seems to be able to make you travel through time and space like some junior Dr Who, but he is still a bully.'

Seth thought about what his mum had said.

'I know there is not a lot I can do to help you with these things. But I can give you my advice, as a mother. And my advice is that you have stand up to this bully, whoever he is.'

Seth walked up the hill to the moor, Rosa alongside him, glancing behind her every few steps.

Seth felt sad and happy at the same time. Happy because England won 6-1 and had qualified for the groups stages in style. Sad because of what had happened to him in Russia – and to Alexei. It was 100 years ago: but, for Seth, it had been only a couple of days.

Seth had no idea someone were there, a hundred meters behind him, hidden in the shadows, concealed by the trees that lined the road.

But Rosa knew.

They walked past the church and over the road to the moor. Several steps onto the grass – a huge field ahead of them – Seth released the clip on Rosa's lead. He had seen her best friend – a Cocker Spaniel called Finn – and knew Rosa would want to race off and play with him.

But Rosa turned and faced the way they had come.

'Come up,' Seth said, walking on, waving to Finn's owner, a man with dark hair and black tee-shirt.

But Rosa stayed put. She let out a single bark. Loud. Seth knew the bark well. It was a warning bark, so he turned and looked in the direction his dog was staring.

He felt like he had been punched in the chest.

He saw the two figures moving towards him, watching from the other side of the road, dressed in black jeans and black tee-shirts. With black hair.

'The egg,' Seth said to Rosa. 'They want the egg. They were looking for it in Yekaterinburg at the execution and they're looking for it now. I bet that's what it is.'

Then the two women in black began to cross the road.

Seth squatted and linked Rosa's lead to her collar. Then they were running. Across the moor. Down the far side of the park. They ran without looking back for over half a mile, Rosa ahead, pulling Seth so he was running faster than he felt he ever had. Until they were close to home and Seth stopped to look up and down the street. No sign of the two women.

Opening his gate, up the garden path, through the door, slamming it behind him. Now he breathed deeply, as Rosa observed him.

'We'll be safe at home,' Seth said.

Late that night, Seth watched the Poland v Colombia match. As the final whistle blew, he felt disappointed for his two Polish friends at school. Sadly, they had been outclassed by Colombia.

Seth's motivation to watch the match was to see if Alexei was there. He needed to speak to the Russian boy, it was Seth's turn to ask for help.

But Alexei did not appear. And Seth felt panic rising through his body. He had no idea what to do about the women in black, about Alexei, about anything.

But he knew he would have to do something. And soon.

The two women in black are following Seth, possibly waiting for a chance to get at him and Alexei's Faberge Egg. Seth needs to talk to Alexei, but the Russian boy has not made contact since Seth witnessed his execution. Seth has no idea what to do next. How bad a mistake was it for Seth to bring the egg back to 2018? And will he ever see Alexei Romanov again?

Chapter 9 will be published at <https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/defenders-russia-world-cup-2018-football-story/> before 7.30 a.m. on Tuesday 26th June.

The next vote will take place on Wednesday 27th June. It will be a straightforward Yes/No.

**** Seth's mum knows about the visions he has had in the past. Normally a parent would do everything they could to protect their child from this sort of danger. How she tolerates it is explained in the three *Defenders* books. I decided not to go into detail about this as it would affect the momentum of the story. If you'd like to know more about Seth and his mum (as well as Rosa and Nadiya) you can find out more in the *Defenders* trilogy here: <http://tompalmer.co.uk/defenders/> where Seth and Nadiya take on Viking, Saxon, Roman and Iron Age hauntings.**

World Cup word of the day

concentrate



Defenders: Russia Chapter 9

A live World Cup story by Tom Palmer

Seth is still recovering from the shock of witnessing the execution of the Romanov family. He is also very worried. He brought a Faberge Egg home with him from Yekaterinburg, against Alexei's instructions, meaning two strange women all in black appear to be watching his every move. But they have yet to act. Seth would like Alexei's help, for a change, but Alexei hasn't appeared to him since that brutal day last week.

ДЕВЯТЬ

Monday morning.

Seth spent all break and lunch time with Nadiya. He told her everything he had seen in Russia and said his head was hurting, that he couldn't sleep and he knew it was because of what he had witnessed.

'You're traumatised,' she told him.

'I know,' Seth smiled weakly.

'Do you think you'll see him today?' Nadiya asked gently. 'On the TV?'

Seth nodded. 'It's Russia's last game. He'll show. And if he doesn't I'll simply go out and hand over his Egg to those two women.'

Nadiya looked at Seth closely. Too closely.

'What?' Seth recoiled.

'You,' his friend said. 'You seem weird. Angry. Not like you at all.'

Seth shrugged. He didn't know what to say to that.

'So, you'll try to talk to him tonight?' Nadiya urged.

'This afternoon. Russia-Uruguay kicks off at 3 p.m. He'll be there. School finishes at two-fifty today. I can be home for three if I sprint.'

'What will you say?'

‘I’m not sure,’ Seth said, thinking about his mum and what she had said about bullies. ‘That he needs to make it stop. That I am sick of this.’

‘Do you think he will?’ Nadiya asked. ‘I mean he’s been telling you what to do, not the other way round.’

‘It ends now,’ Seth said firmly.

‘And if...’ Nadiya faltered.

‘What?’

‘Well... if he doesn’t do what you want and you need to make a big decision?’

‘Yeah?’

‘Well, if I can help. Please, will you talk to me first. I’m worried about you, Seth.’

Seth smiled.

‘I will,’ he said. ‘I promise.’

Seth was sweating profusely by the time he got home. 3 p.m. Time for Russia v Uruguay.

As he burst through the front door, Rosa raced into the garden and stood barking loudly, as if she was worried he had been chased home. But he hadn’t.

Seth had seen them loitering near the library, but just raced past them. All they had done was turn and watch him go past. He’d wondered if they really were a threat to him.

Two matches were on when he put the TV on. Saudi Arabia versus Egypt. Russia against Uruguay. Seth flicked from one channel to the other as the national anthems were played. He studied every mascot. No sign of Alexei.

Seth decided to watch the Russia game. Surely if Alexei was going to haunt another game it’d be one involving his home nation. Wouldn’t it?

He watched Uruguay destroy the host nation. Two goals after 25 minutes. Then a Russian sending off. The match was over as a contest. It was only then that Seth saw him. Alexei Romanov, sitting among hundreds of flag-waving Russians in the crowd who were cheering and chanting even though they were 2-0 down.

Seth closed his eyes. This was it. The dizziness came. The feeling sick. The noise of the Russian fans was louder now Seth understood he was sat amongst them. He looked out

across the pitch. A rectangle of beautiful green grass. Luis Suarez running just fifty metres in front of him.

On the seat next to Seth, Alexei Romanov looked diminished. But he ignored that. He wanted to talk to Alexei immediately.

‘I don’t have long,’ Alexei said. ‘I...

‘Neither do I,’ Seth interrupted. ‘I am sorry you died like that. I watched and it was horrible. I will never be able to forget it. But that’s history. You’re... you’re dead. And I don’t want to do this anymore.’

Seth watched Alexei shudder and fall back into his seat. Around them was chanting and Russian flags waving, but it was quiet between the two boys.

‘There’s no point in me saving the egg for you. You’re dead. You... you don’t have power over me. I don’t have to do what you ask.’ Seth knew he sounded heartless, but he had to be honest, face the truth.

Alexei nodded. ‘All that is true. Except...’

‘Except what?’ Seth narrowed his eyes.

‘Except that if you don’t take my Faberge Egg to my family’s crypt in St Petersburg before the centenary of our deaths in three weeks, then I can never be with my father and mother again. I will be a lost soul.’

‘But I don’t have to,’ Seth snapped back.

‘No, you do not have to. I have less power now. You can see I am getting weaker.’

Seth gave Rosa a long walk after the Group A games. They walked out of town and up onto the moor. It was wild up there, the sun searing down on him, but he liked being high up and able to see so much sky and hills in the distance.

The two women followed him at a distance. As soon as Rosa noticed them she barked vociferously and they would back off. Seth was disappointed they had not just gone to his house and taken the Faberge Egg. That would solve everything, he thought. His mum was out. No-one would be harmed. Then this would all be over.

Seth yearned for that. To be a normal boy walking his dog, thinking about England’s game against Belgium in two days, not Russian royals. Not strangers tracking him.

After his conversation with Alexei, Seth now realised he had the power to take control. Give the women in black the egg.

Could he do that?

The only downside was that it might have consequences for Alexei, but hadn't Seth done enough for him already? He wanted his own life back.

'Should I do that?' he said out loud. And realised that he had a choice to make. He was determined to make it before the England game on Thursday, so that finally he could enjoy the football.

Seth is coming to the realisation that he can get himself out of this situation, that he can make the women in black go away. He has talked to his mum and to Nadiya about it. But now it is down to him. He has given himself until Thursday to make a decision about what to do next. Tomorrow, you can help him decide.

Chapter 10 will be published at <https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/defenders-russia-world-cup-2018-football-story/> before 7.30 a.m. on Wednesday 27th June.

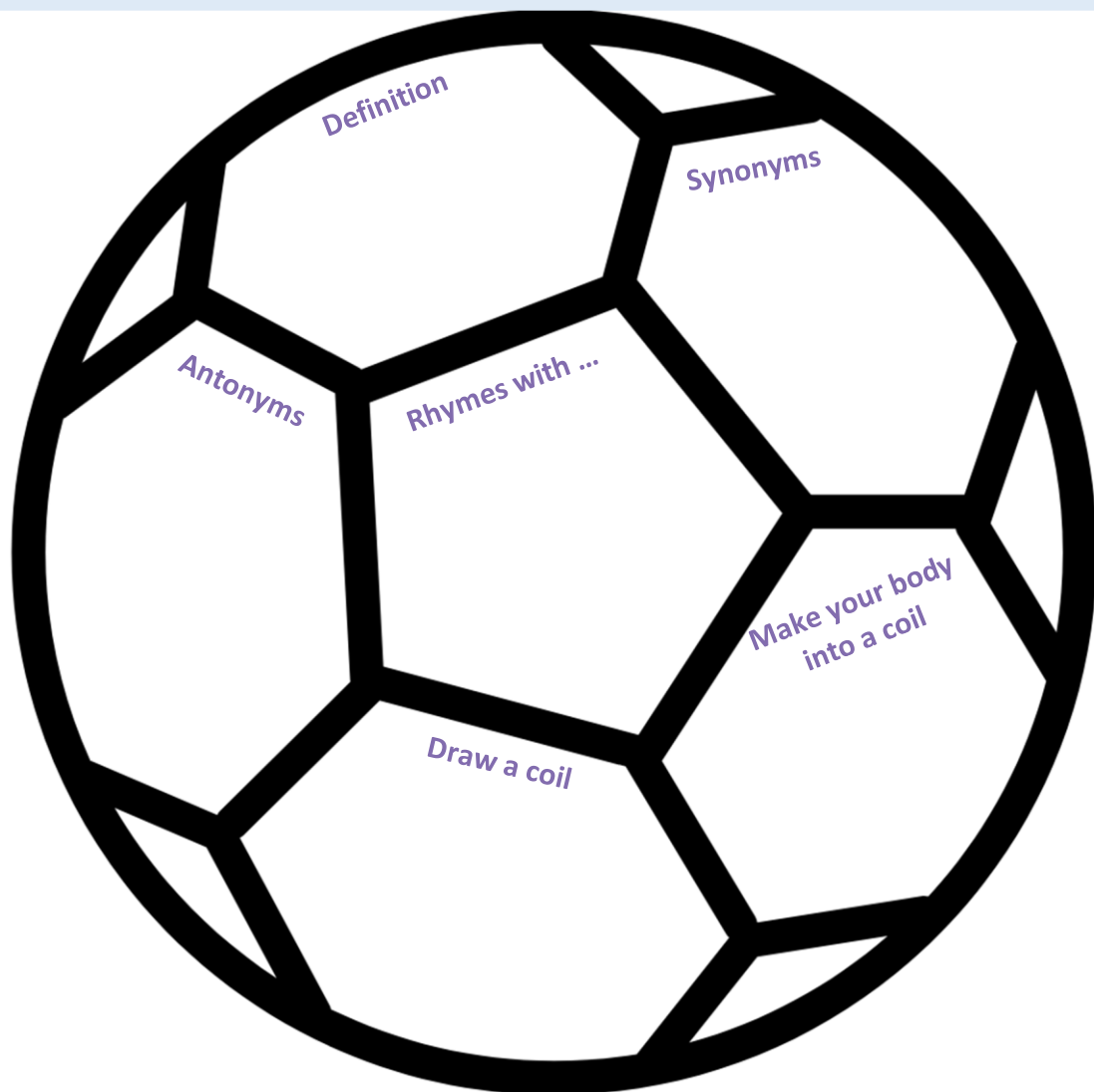
Note to teachers and parents

On Wednesday 27th June – in Chapter 10 of *Defenders: Russia* – I will offer children two clear options for what happens next. You will be able to cast your vote by using the contact form here <http://tompalmer.co.uk/world-cup-2018-literacy-resources/> or by emailing vote@tompalmer.co.uk with your preferred option in the subject line. Voting will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. British Summer Time on Wednesday 27th June only. Any votes submitted before or after the voting is open will not be counted.

Any additional email addresses submitted for voting purposes will not be used for future marketing purposes or shared with any third party, without consent. (With new GDPR rules coming in, we ask you to check our privacy policy <http://tompalmer.co.uk/privacy-policy/> and terms and conditions <http://tompalmer.co.uk/terms-and-conditions/>.)

World Cup word of the day

recoiled



Seth has realised that he might have found a way to take charge of his relationship with Alexei, to make the women in black go away, and to start, at last, to enjoy the World Cup. He has talked to his mum and to Nadiya about what he should do. And now the day has come for him to decide, or for you to decide what happens next...

Десять

Seth had been confused all day. There were so many thoughts, ideas, memories and feelings in his head that he had no idea which direction to go in to confront the grave situation he found himself in. All day at school he'd been trying to make sense of everything, not focusing on his lessons at all. He even forgot to have lunch he was so distracted.

When he got home he was sweltering and hungry. The weather had been so hot and he was desperately thirsty, as well as hungry. Once he had given Rosa a quick walk, he went to the kitchen to find food and drink. As he opened the fridge he noticed the World Cup wall chart that he had stuck to the fridge with magnets.

It was blank. He had not filled in one result.

Nearly two weeks into the tournament and nothing. Seth felt angry. He had so much going on in his head that he was neglecting the things that should matter to someone his age, like filling in a World Cup wallchart.

Without scores on it his wallchart was useless!

Seth tore the wallchart off his fridge. He slammed it onto the kitchen table.

Time to sort himself out. Time to find a use for his wallchart. Time to empty his head. Onto the back of his World Cup wallchart.

As he ate a sandwich and drank some water, Seth heard a knock at the door. Rosa barked. Then Seth heard Nadiya's voice.

'Where are you?'

‘Kitchen,’ Seth replied, his mouth stuffed with food. ‘Sandwich?’

‘No thanks,’ Nadiya grimaced.

Seth sat down and pushed the wallchart towards his friend. ‘You can help me. Can we talk about what I need to do? And will you write down the things we decide? Please.’

Nadiya grinned now. She loved making lists.

She started by drawing a line to divide the blank side of the posters into two columns. Seth asked her to write his **Reasons to stop helping Alexei** at the top of one, then his **Reasons to continue to help Alexei** at the top of the other.

This would help them decide whether he should return to Russia with the Faberge Egg to hide it into the Romanov crypt, or whether he should just take the egg and hand it over to the two women in black, who had been harrying him for days now.

Then they began, as the Argentina v Nigeria match began on the TV, the sound off.

Reasons to stop helping Alexei

ONE. I think I am in shock after seeing the execution of the Romanov family. I don’t feel well. What if I carried on helping Alexei and something else happened like that? Would it be too much for me?

TWO. I want to be normal boy who can sit down and enjoy the World Cup without worrying about being transported to Russia through my TV. England play Belgium tomorrow. That’s what I should be thinking about: not women in black, ghosts of Russian royalty and eggs worth tens of millions of pounds.

THREE. My mum said Alexei is a bully and you should stand up to bullies, whoever they are.

FOUR. I don’t need to help Alexei. He is weaker now. He admitted it himself. I don’t think he has the strength to cause England to lose or kidnap Rosa again.

Reasons to continue to help Alexei

ONE. Alexei says that if I do not take the Faberge Egg to his parents' crypt in St Petersburg, then he will remain a lost soul for ever and never join his parents. It would be kind to help him – if I thought it was not too dangerous.

TWO. Now that I am no longer afraid of him, I sort of feel sorry for Alexei after seeing how he and his family were killed. If I could help him find peace, that would be a nice thing to do.

THREE. It doesn't feel right just handing the Faberge Egg to the women in black. They've been following me and – in a way – bullying me too. That makes me angry.

FOUR. It might be fun to carry on visiting Russia and taking on these challenges. It was actually quite thrilling being chased by zombies from a Roman amphitheatre and some of my other adventures. I do sometimes like my life as child Ghostbuster.

Seth leaned back and stared at the muted TV in front of him. The last few minutes of the Argentina v Nigeria match. It was 1-1. Nigeria were going through if it stayed like this, meaning one of the best teams in the world were going home. And one of the best players.

Nadiya and Seth watched as play moved from end to end. Either team could score. And then – from nowhere – Marcus Rojo was on the end of a cross. He buried it.

2-1 to the South Americans.

Seth smiled as he watched Messi jump on Rojo's back, then the tow of them being mobbed by the Argentina subs. It was mayhem as thousands of blue and white flag waving fans celebrated in the stands.

But not so good for Nigeria: Seth felt very sorry for them.

'That was awesome,' Nadiya said.

Seth nodded and laughed. He had enjoyed the game. And it occurred to him that it was the first match of the World Cup he had really been excited by. He knew exactly why.

He'd made his decision about Alexei.

He felt like he was back in control of his life.

'I've decided what to do,' Seth told his friend, looking at the list they had made. And, after he told her what he was going to do, he turned the wall chart back to its right side and together they filled in the scores he'd not had a chance to fill in.

Now it's time for you to vote. You have two choices for where the story will go next. Talk about what you think Seth should do next. Think about the reasons Seth and Nadiya came up with for and against helping Alexei. What would you do if you were Seth?

Option A

Seth stops helping Alexei and goes to hand the Faberge egg over to the women in black. He has had enough and wants to enjoy the football.

Option B

Seth continues to help Alexei, so to try to fulfil Alexei's last wish to be with his parents' spirits. But Seth will do it only on his terms, with no more bullying.

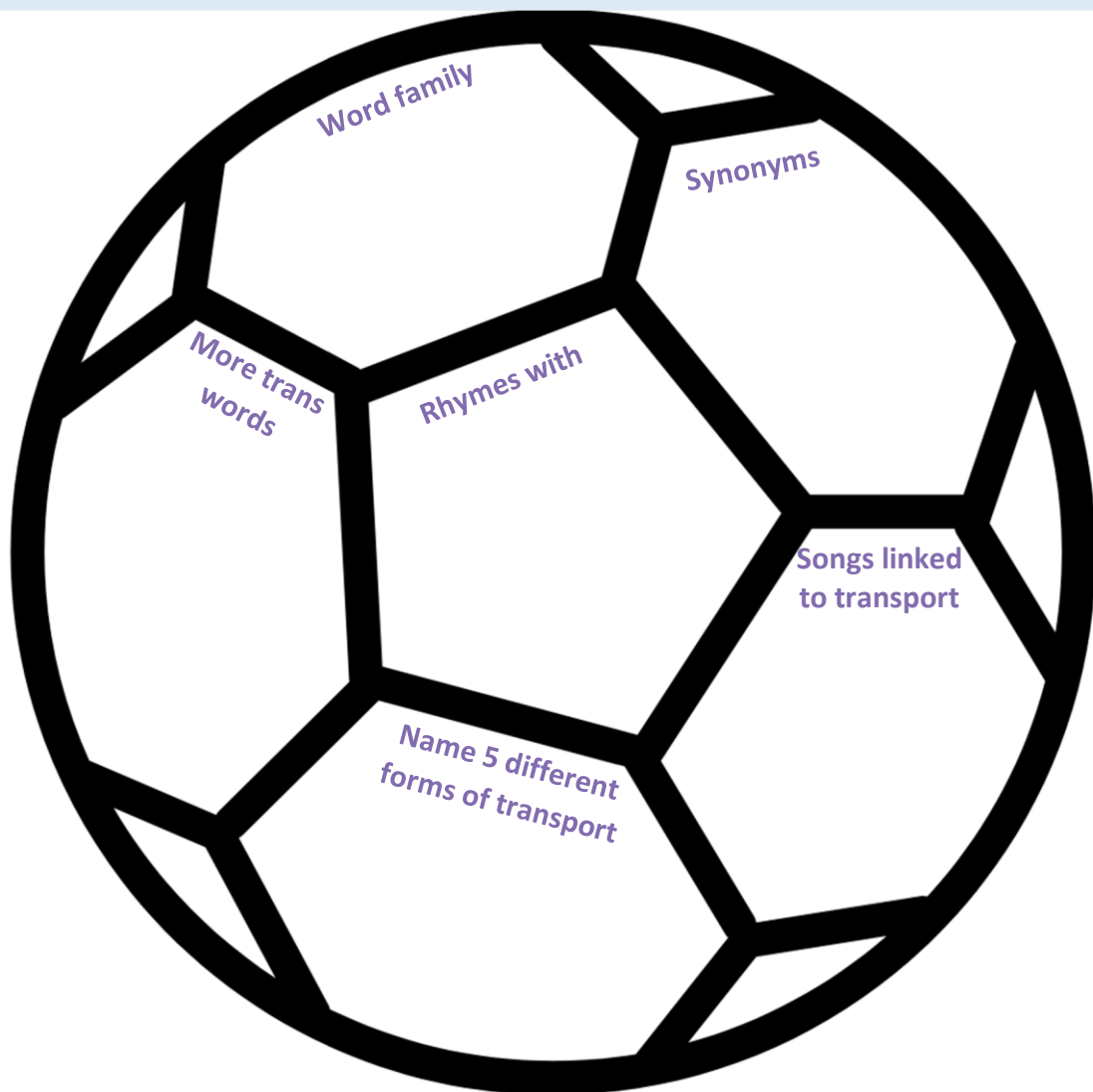
Please cast your vote by using the contact form here <http://tompalmer.co.uk/world-cup-2018-literacy-resources/> or by emailing vote@tompalmer.co.uk with your preferred option in the subject line. Voting will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. British Summer Time on Wednesday 27th June only. Any votes submitted before or after the voting is open will not be counted.

Any additional email addresses submitted for voting purposes will not be used for future marketing purposes or shared with any third party, without consent. (With new GDPR rules coming in, we ask you to check our privacy policy <http://tompalmer.co.uk/privacy-policy/> and terms and conditions <http://tompalmer.co.uk/terms-and-conditions/>.)

Chapter 11 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published before 7.30 a.m. on Thursday 28th June at <https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/defenders-russia-world-cup-2018-football-story/>. The results of your vote will determine what happens next!

World Cup word of the day

transported



Defenders: Russia Chapter 11

A live World Cup story by Tom Palmer

Seth has had a big decision to make.

Should he help Alexei Romanov or not?

Over 1000 schools have voted.

This is the storyline that more than 75% of you voted for.

Одиннадцать

Wednesday afternoon and Mr Schadenfreude, Seth and Nadiya's German teacher was offering his German GCSE class the chance to stay on for an extra lesson after school. To watch Germany versus South Korea in the World Cup.

With a German commentary.

'It will be educational,' Mr Schadenfreude told them. 'It'll sharpen up your German.'

Seth and Nadiya sat in the German classroom, blinds down to keep the raging sun out, both of them trying to work out what the commentator was saying.

Seth was feeling good. He had made his mind up what to do about Alexei Romanov. He knew it was only a matter of time before Alexei appeared to him and then he could tell him about his decision. And – to make matters better – he had not seen the Women in Black – for over 24 hours. Maybe they had gone away for good. Maybe life was about to get better.

Mr Schadenfreude had suggested that the pupils work in pairs and listen out for key words in German. He had make them bingo cards with nine words they had to identify in the German commentary.

As half time approached, Seth and Nadiya had eight of the nine words they needed. One more and they would win a £10 book voucher prize each.

Seth stood up once the half time whistle had gone.

‘I want to win the book tokens,’ Nadiya said, looking up at him.

‘Me too,’ Seth replied.

‘So make sure you get back from wherever you’re going. And fast. Don’t be going off to Russia or something. Okay?’

Seth rushed out of the classroom.

Toilet break.

After he’d washed his hands, he checked his phone to see if his mum had texted him. Turning his phone on he didn’t see his usual home screen, a picture of Rosa on the top of the moors, wild and wolf-like.

He saw Alexei Romanov, looking very pale and very tense.

‘So?’ the Russian boy asked. ‘What have you decided?’

Seth coughed. He had something very serious to tell Alexei. He wanted to make a joke about them Facetiming, but he resisted.

‘Well?’ Alexei pressed.

‘I’ve decided to help you, Alexei,’ Seth said calmly.

He watched as the boy’s face began to crumple. Tears ran down his cheeks. Alexei was trying to smile, but he seemed so emotional it was hard to tell what his expression was.

‘Thank you,’ Alexei said at last. ‘You will go to St Petersburg for me next week? With my egg?’

‘I will.’

Alexei was laughing now. He was less pale. Seth had never seen him smile. He looked like he was a nice person now, not a bully. Seth felt a strange warmth towards him. Something like friendship.

‘Now...’ Alexei gushed, ‘please... tell me... what can I do for you? I will do anything I can.’

Seth grinned. ‘How about finding a way of me and Nadiya going to watch England play Belgium tomorrow?’

‘Granted,’ Alexei said.

‘Cool,’ Seth said. ‘And – er – how about helping South Korea beat Germany?’ Seth asked, but his screen had gone blank. He wasn’t sure if Alexei had heard that.

Back in the German room, Seth sat next to Nadiya. He told her about seeing Alexei, about what the Russian boy had promised.

‘Great,’ Nadia said. ‘I can’t wait. Well... actually... I can. I am more interested in winning this bingo game.’

‘What’s our last word again?’ Seth asked.

‘Katastrophe,’ Nadiya said.

When Mats Hummels headed over the crossbar, unmarked, with Germany’s 28th goal attempt of the game, Seth wondered if a katastrophe was about to happen. A German katastophe.

What if Germany only drew with Korea?

They’d be out of the World Cup!

Soon the ninety minutes were up. And injury time began. Would it happen? Or would it be like the Germany-Sweden game? A last minute winner for Germany?

No.

Because then it happened. The unthinkable.

South Korea scored.

The room went crazy. The German commentators’ voices sounded like cries of pain. It was mayhem. But, still, the commentator had not said the word Nadiya wanted.

Everyone was on the edge of their seat as Germany pushed for a goal.

Manuel Neuer came out of his goal and moved up field.

Then, over-reaching himself, he lost the ball.

That was when the commentator said it. Three times.

‘Katastrophe! Katastrophe! Katastrophe!’

Nadiya was on her feet.

‘BINGO!’ she shouted.

And Seth saw – in the corner of the screen – underneath where it had just changed to South Korea 2 Germany 0 – a small image of Alexei, smiling again.

And Seth had to wonder.

Had Alexei really made Germany lose? Just for Seth?

Seth walked home in the heat. He took his blazer off and loosened his tie. He felt good. He was going to help Alexei, but on his own terms, without any threat hanging over him. And Alexei was going to reward him by getting Seth and Nadiya with pitch side seats at the England v Belgium match tomorrow.

Next week Seth would go to St Petersburg and find a way of putting the egg in the crypt of the Russian royal family. Not an easy task, but that was something to worry about next week. Not now.

Because Seth was thinking about tomorrow.

Tomorrow was going to be a good day.

Or was it?

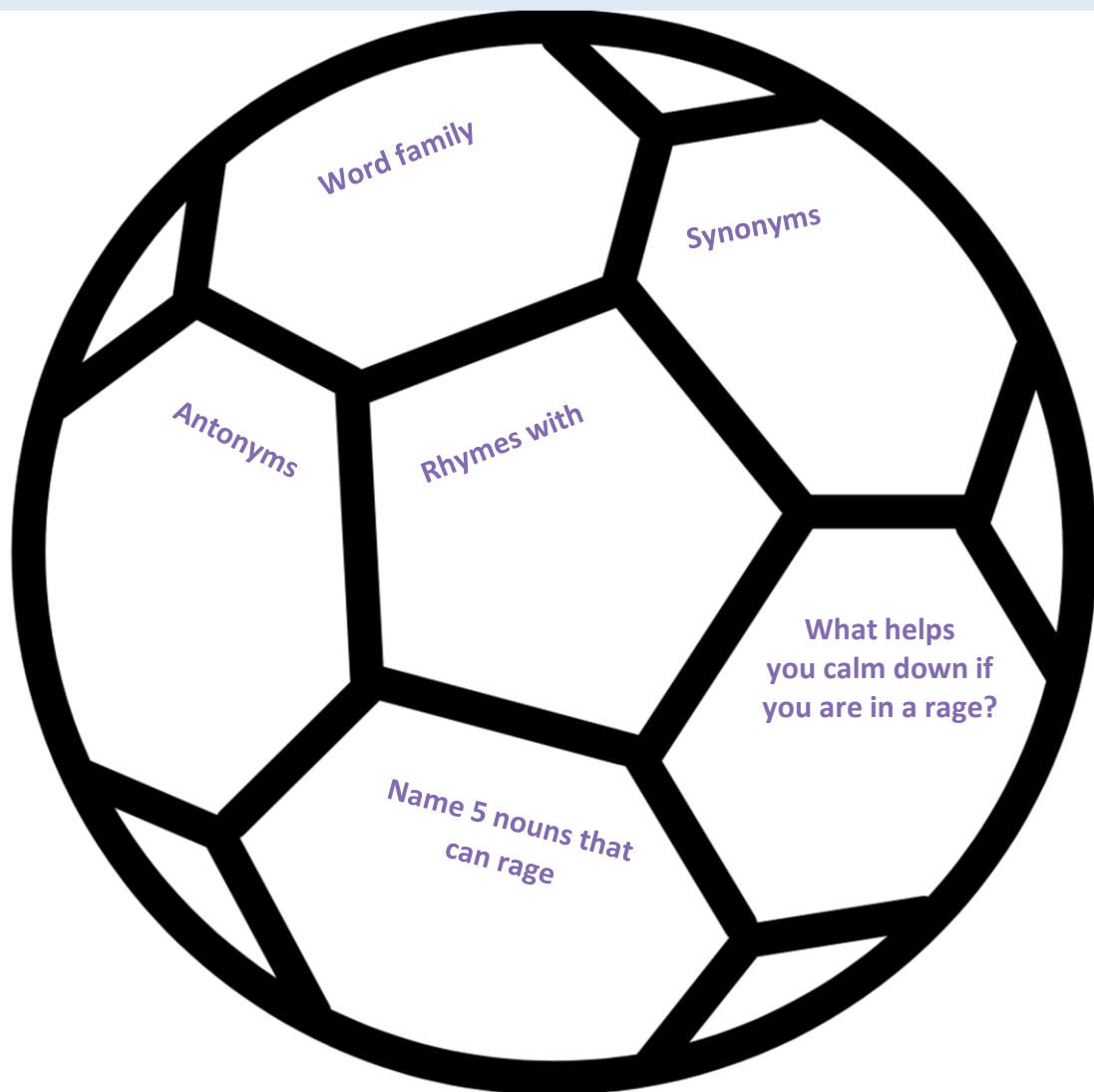
Seth has a mission. He is determined. He is relaxed. He is doing what he thinks is the right thing. But is Seth right to feel relaxed? Is it really good that the Women in Black are no longer hanging around his house and school? If they're not in England, where are they? And how easy is it going to be for him to enter a national Russian monument and hide a valuable Faberge Egg. Is it a good idea for Seth – and Nadiya – to go to Russia tomorrow. Or could it be a catastrophe?

Chapter 12 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published before 7.30 a.m. on Friday 2nd June.

Thank you to everyone for thinking about Seth's choice and voting. Thanks especially to teachers and others who helped make it happen.

World Cup word of the day

raging



Seth has agreed to take Alexei's Faberge Egg to St Petersburg next week, so that he can place it in the Romanov crypt and Alexei can rejoin his mum and dad. As a thank you, Alexei promised to send Seth and Nadiya to the England v Belgium match last night, where the two children were planning to have a fantastic evening at the World Cup. But plans don't always play out the way you intended...

Двенадцать

'Aren't you disappointed it's the second team playing?' Nadiya asked Seth. 'No Kane. No Trippier. No Lingard.'

They were sitting pitch side in the Kaliningrad Stadium. The national anthems had just finished. Southgate and Martinez standing just in front of them.

'A bit,' Seth said. 'Are you?'

Nadiya shook her head. 'No. I think the players who haven't had a game yet need game time. And,' she paused, 'if the first team don't play tonight, then Southgate can prepare them to train for either Japan or Colombia tomorrow.'

'True,' Seth agreed.

The first half was calm, apart from Belgium nearly forcing the ball over the line, after Pickford had it kicked out of his hands. Seth was loving the sound of the England band and England fans singing. Loving the flags and banner. Loving the floodlights' glare as the sky turned from blue to black.

When the half time whistle blew, Seth turned to Nadiya again.

This is amazing,' he said. 'Did you ever imagine we'd do something like this?'

'Watch England in the World Cup finals?' Nadiya asked. 'Er... no.'

Seth grinned. He felt great.

'But we need to talk about the crypt,' Nadiya counselled.

Seth shuddered involuntarily. The crypt. That word. It sounded dangerous.

‘We do,’ he admitted.

‘So, I’ve done some research on it,’ Nadiya told him.

‘Go on.’

‘It’s in a beautiful church in St Petersburg,’ Nadiya explained. ‘There’s a chapel attached to it. That’s where Alexei’s parents’ remains are. People still go there and put flowers on the tombstone. All of Alexei’s family are there – apart from him.’

‘So, it’s like a normal church?’ Seth said, feeling that sympathy for Alexei that had made him decide to help the Russian. ‘Maybe it’ll be easy to get into. Do what I need to do.’

Seth saw that Nadiya was shaking her head.

‘What?’ he asked.

‘The remains of most of the Tsars of Russia are in there, Seth. It’ll be guarded like the crown jewels are in England, but times one hundred. We’ll have to come up with an amazing plan, like something out of a James Bond movie.’

‘But that no-one would expect children to do,’ Seth nodded, standing up. ‘Once this match is over we’ll give it everything we’ve got. But, before that, we need snacks.’

Nadiya stood too. ‘I’ll go. I need to go to find the ladies.’

‘Okay,’ Seth said, sitting down again.

Seth gazed around the Kaliningrad Stadium and took in the colour and light and sound of ten thousand conversations discussing whether either manager would bring on a substitute for second half.

Then, just for a second, he thought he recognised a face in the crowd.

A woman.

Maybe it was just someone he’d seen earlier in the crowd. It was hard to be sure, because the woman turned and walked away with another person, both of them wearing white England vests.

Then a sudden noise. So loud it shocked Seth. Cheering.

The players were coming back on the pitch. Seth watched the England team to check there had been no substitutions. He saw a 6 on the back of an England shirt.

‘Maguire,’ he said to himself. ‘For Stones.’

England had made one change at half time.

‘Come on Nadiya,’ Seth said, checking his watch. ‘Where are you?’

He scanned the crowd and the entrance she had disappeared down when he’d seen her go.

Then a sudden chill came over him, like someone had poured icy water down his back. Where was Nadiya? Something was wrong? She wouldn’t have been gone all this time.

He stood up.

He looked around the stand.

When he had finished, he saw one of the World Cup stewards was right in front of him, holding a piece of folded paper.

Seth took it.

‘What’s this?’ he asked.

‘From woman. Two woman,’ the steward told him in faltering English.

‘Thank you,’ Seth said, as he began to unfold the note.

What was this?

It was to do with Nadiya.

He knew it would be bad.

If he had put his friend in danger, he would never forgive himself.

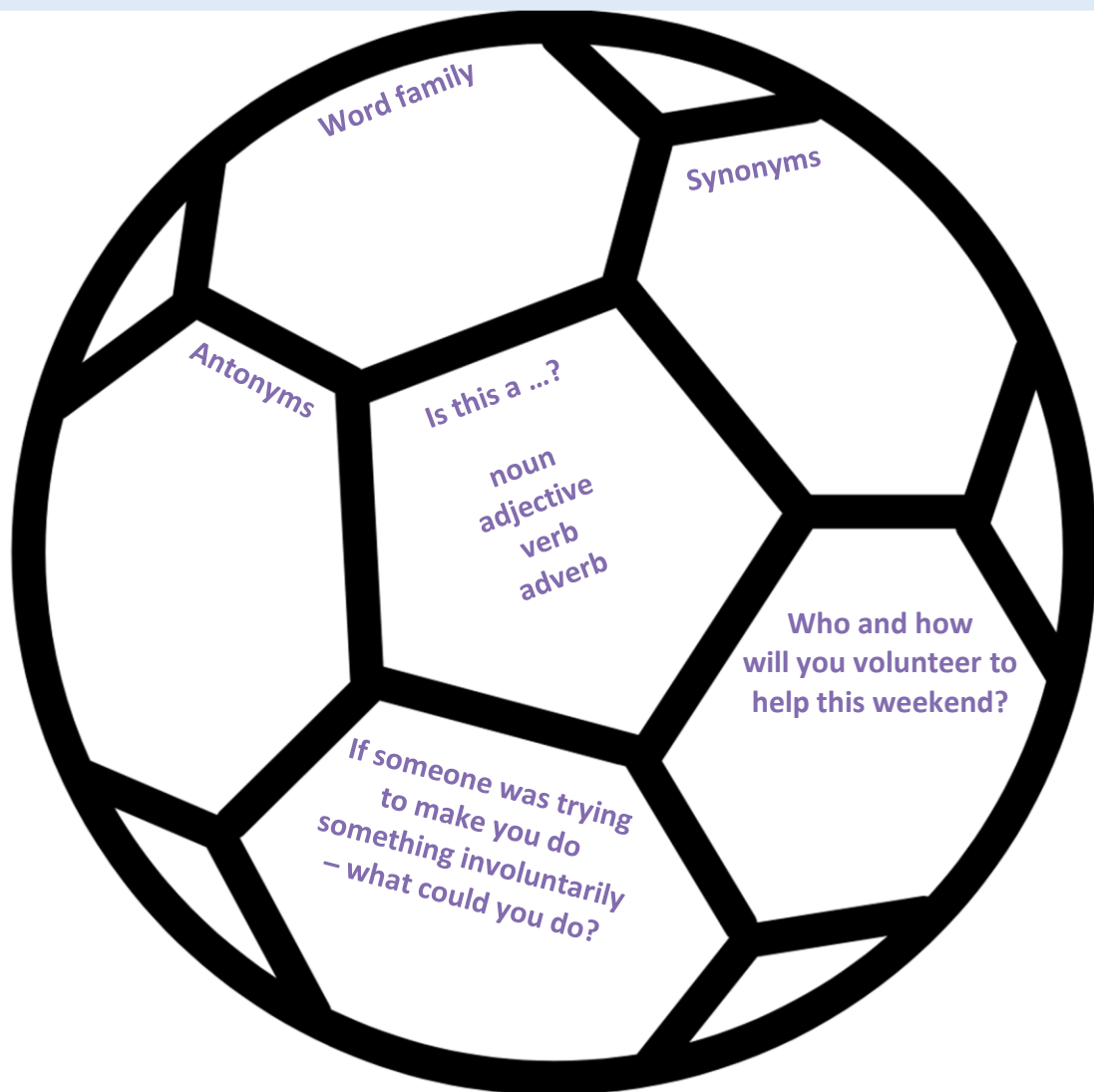
Nadiya has been gone too long and Seth instinctively knows that she is in danger. The note he has just been handed must be related to Nadiya’s disappearance. But what does the note say? Is this going to affect his and Alexei’s plans for next week? And – most important of all – where is Nadiya?

Chapter 13 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published before 7.30 a.m. on Monday 2nd July.

Thank you to the schools in New Zealand and Australia for following the story. We know you break up today. Your pupils are welcome to follow the story from home, by registering. Also, don’t forget a full printed version – with some dyslexia-friendly features – and certificates will be available later in July.

World Cup word of the day

involuntarily



Тринадцать

Seth realised that Nadiya was in danger when she didn't return during the Belgium-England game. His fears were confirmed when he was handed a folded note. He dreaded opening it, but knew he had to.

To Mr Seth White of England

*We have taken your girlfriend. We know you have the Romanov Egg.
It is worth £20 million US dollars to us and we will do whatever it takes to get it. If you do not bring it to the Peter & Paul cathedral in St Petersburg during the Russia v Spain game on Sunday, your friend will be left where she is to die.
Which is worth more to you? Your girlfriend? Or £20 million dollars?
Yours very sincerely – Marfa and Petrovna Svidrigailova*

When she woke Nadiya's first sensation was coldness. She touched the floor and felt stone. Cold hard stone.

She opened her eyes to see darkness, apart from a thin line of light above her.

As she shifted to become more comfortable, Nadiya heard something rustle. She searched the area with her hand and found a plastic bag.

She examined the contents in the dark. Three warm plastic bottles. Three dry and crusty objects. The unusual smell of Russian rye bread.

Sunday morning. Seth sat in a café and looked across the Neva River at the Peter & Paul Cathedral. Since Nadiya had been taken, Seth had been home to retrieve the Faberge Egg.

He had wondered if, with Alexei being weaker, he would be able to move from Russia to England. But he found he was able to by looking at any screen, where he would see a ghostly vision of Alexei and then be transported.

He had feared the two women in black would take the egg from him given any chance: but would they keep their promise to release Nadiya? Seth had hidden the Faberge egg in a locker at the railway station in St Petersburg before coming across the city to the cathedral where he knew the Romanov's remains had been buried.

The egg was his bargaining power and was safer hidden out of the way.

This was it. Seth strode across the bridge from the Kronverkskiy Park to the island, leaving a tense café of people watching Spain beating Russia 1-0 as half time approached.

The city of St Petersburg was beautiful, but the streets were quiet. Seth knew most Russian families would be cheering their team on against Spain.

He made no attempt to hide in the shadows cast by the trees and buildings as he approached the Cathedral across a wide square. Nor did he try to conceal the package he was carrying under his arm, something that looked the same size as a Faberge Egg, something to confuse the two women in black.

The cathedral was spectacular, a tall honey-coloured stone tower with a sharp spire that resembled a needle, sharp and shining against the radiant blue summer sky.

Seth walked through the main cathedral door – paying his 20 roubles at a small booth – into what felt like a forest of white marble and gold. The inside of the cathedral appeared to radiate its own light. Seth would have taken the time to enjoy its beauty if he had not known that he was being followed.

But he was. And he did. He was glad of it.

Inside the cathedral, Seth took corners quickly, doubling back on himself to check if his tail was there. There they were. Two figures. The women in black. Not wearing white England tops now.

Time to outthink them. Beat them. Save Nadiya.

Seth did nothing to suggest he knew he was being followed, skirting round the tombs of the Romanovs, carved stone plinths on walls, large tombs like giant raised graves, flowers scattered on the top. There was a strange smell in the cathedral, like his mum's incense sticks in the bathroom.

Seth turned sharply and walked through the exit door. Out into the sun. Hiding round the corner of the church, peering back to see if the two women were coming.

One was. Heading straight towards him. But only one of them. Why? Where was the second woman in black? Seth heard a click behind him and turned. Now he knew why the first woman in black was alone. The second woman was right there, aiming a gun at Seth. Then a sudden and loud noise. Deafening.

Nadiya sat up and felt another layer of stone just above her head. She could hear no sound to help her identify her location. But she *could* smell something. A smoky flowery smell.

Nadiya identified it immediately. Incense.

Incense was used in the Russian Orthodox churches during services. She must be in the cathedral where the Romanovs were buried. She knew it. If only she had her phone with her she could just text Seth and tell him to come and get her.

But she did not have her phone. She had nothing. And what she had least of was hope. A loud noise interrupted her thoughts. The first sound to permeate the stone box she was entombed in. Then quiet again. And Nadiya felt very alone.

The loud noise Seth had heard was a tremendous cheer. It was followed by shouting, as doors opened and hundreds of people filled the streets, waving Russian flags.

He heard one woman crying out in English. 'We win! We win on penalties!'

Somehow Seth was swept among them and away from the women in black. Into the crowd, down an alleyway and safety. No longer petrified, crouching in an alleyway, Seth watched the two women in black argue, then appear to give up searching for him. And perhaps go home.

Now Seth could follow them. Now he could find out who they were and where they lived and where they had put Nadiya.

Seth followed, leaving the cathedral behind.

The two women walked quickly along the banks of the Neva until they reached an old wooden house. They seemed nervous every time they met another group of celebrating Russian fans, rushing, not noticing they were being followed. By Seth.

It was large, with a wooden-plank façade and a red roof overhanging. The house was surrounded by trees. It looked to Seth as if it had not been decorated for 100 years.

Now Seth knew where they lived. He was sure that was where they would be keeping Nadiya. His plan was to wait until they left their house, hopefully tonight or tomorrow. Then he would go in.

As he waited in the dark – the rustling, snuffling, squeaking of creatures around him – Seth shook his head in disbelief. This crazy life he was living. So crazy he had not given a thought to Colombia v England.

If only he could find Nadiya tomorrow in this creepy house, then take her to the game in Moscow on Tuesday night, get back that feeling he had had when watching England before. But it would not work out quite like that for Seth. Let alone for Nadiya.

Nadiya could tell that night had fallen. The line of light above her had gone. She checked the contents of the plastic bag again.

Two bottles of water left. Two small loaves of bread. She wondered how long she could survive on that and yearned for the line of light.

Seth is convinced that Nadiya is being kept in the women in black's house. But is he right about where his friend is? And when will he look for her? After dark, when everyone is asleep or tomorrow when, he hopes, the pair will go out.

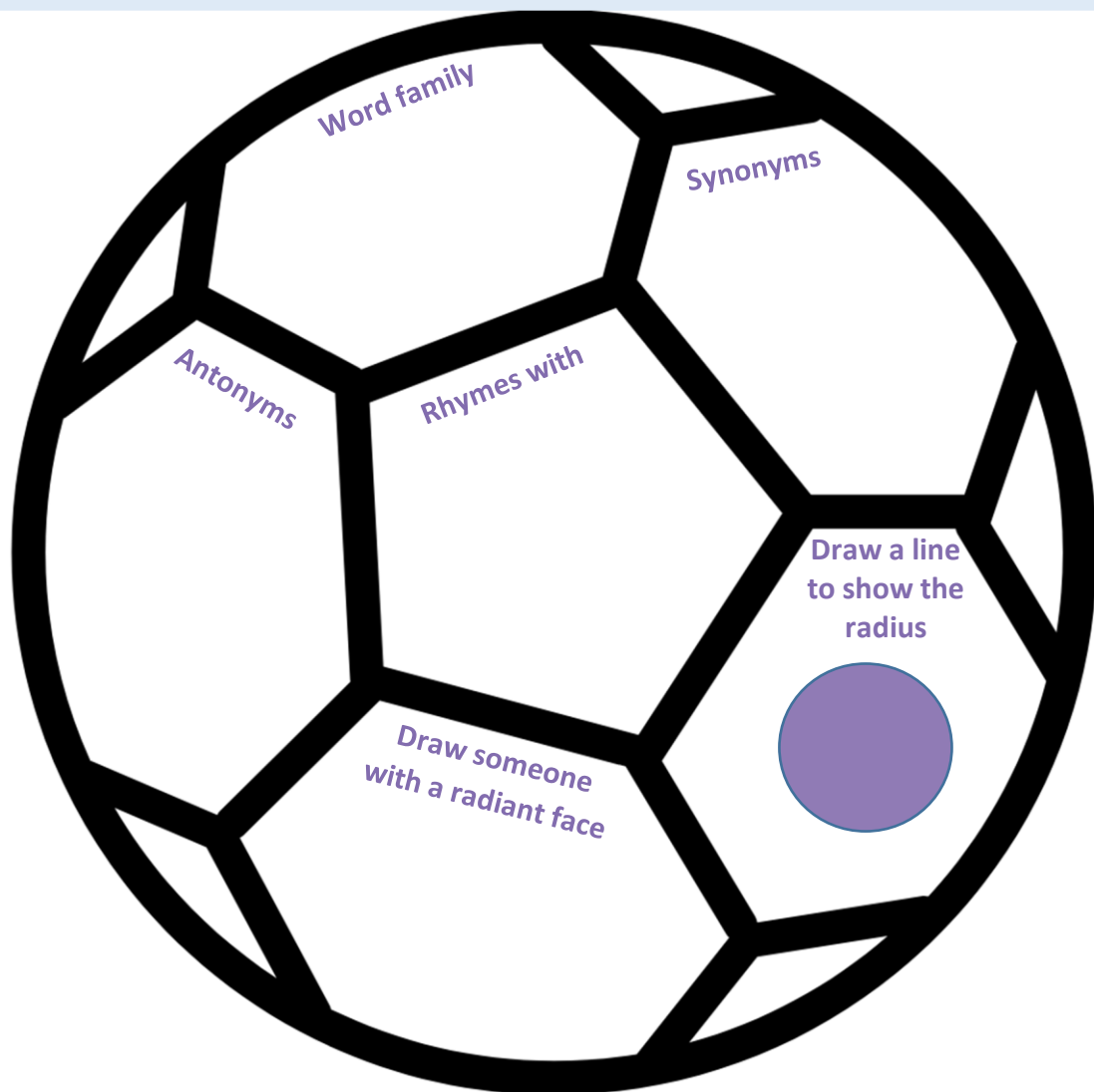
Chapter 14 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published before 7.30 a.m. on Tuesday 3rd July. Chapters will go back to being shorter than this one. Apologies for it being longer today.

Watch the video trailer for the first book in Tom's *Defenders* series here:

<https://youtu.be/yjzqIJZNbEQ>.

World Cup word of the day

radiant



Seth is hiding outside the women in black's house, hoping that, when they next leave the property, he will be able to break in and rescue his friend. What Seth *doesn't* know is that Nadiya is not even in the house: she is back at the St Peter & Paul Cathedral, trapped in a stone tomb with no chance of rescue unless Seth hands the Faberge Egg over to the women in black.

Четырнадцать

It was mid-morning before the front door to the women in black's house opened. Seth had been watching it since waking at dawn, waiting for this moment. He leaned forward to peer through the trees and bushes that obscured the building, his whole body aching from lack of sleep.

With the door open, Seth saw inside. There were no lights on in the house, even though all the curtains were drawn and only one window, above the porch, was open.

It was the strangest looking house Seth had ever seen. Pieces of the wooden cladding on the outside were hanging loose: it appeared as if vines or branches were growing inside the brickwork.

Once they had passed his hiding place, Seth followed the women in black for a mile along the banks of the Neva River. Then he quickly turned back.

This was it: he was going in.

Nadiya woke to find herself still in darkness. She took a sip of water. It tasted as stale as the air in the tomb. She closed her eyes and concentrated on trying not to panic.

Back at their house, the women in black long gone, Seth jogged into the garden, concealed by overgrown bushes. He climbed up the tree nearest the house, then lifted himself onto the top of the porch and through the open window.

Seth found himself in a darkened corridor, the smell of dust so overpowering that he sneezed, then listened out in case other people were in the house.

Nothing. No one. He was convinced he was alone.

Seth didn't waste time, taking his search from room to creepy room. How long did he have before someone returned? All the furniture was ancient. Wooden mostly. Some was so old it had collapsed and yet it still lay there, as if nobody had been in the house for a century. A dressing table without a leg, the contents spilled out over the floor. A wooden chest, its front collapsed inwards. Both covered in a thick layer of dust.

Huge cobwebs hanging down, catching Seth's hands, hair, sometimes his mouth. He felt sick, like the cobwebs were fingers trying to cling to him. And the smell. Musty. Like the air had died decades ago.

In the fourth room he entered, Seth found a set of six framed photographs on the wall, each taken in different times in the garden of the house he was in. He recognised their different eras from the vehicles on the road behind them – from horse-drawn carriages to glossy modern black limousines.

Each image showed a pair of women staring at the camera. Their faces looked similar. And Seth understood. The women: they were all related. The two women from today were granddaughters, maybe even great-granddaughters of the pair he had seen at the Romanov execution.

Then Seth looked at last frame on the wall. It was a photograph. Of him.

Nadiya closed her eyes again. She was waiting until she heard someone before crying out. There was no point in wasting energy. She would conserve it. She knew that, as long as she was trapped down here, she had only a finite amount of energy. And time.

Seth searched the whole house. Every room, every cupboard, every corner.

No Nadiya.

As he moved around he noticed strange shapes in mirrors or glass-fronted cabinets. He knew he was seeing someone dead. The blurry shape looked like a face. Seth had no desire to know who it was. He could not be distracted.

In the last room Seth discovered the strangest thing of all. A World Cup wallchart. A large one – in Russian. A mirror at the centre. In front of the mirror and wallchart were candles. A burner with incense too. Dried leaves. A dead mouse, stretched out next to the wings of a small bird. A saucer of red liquid scabbing over.

Seth felt something catch in the back of his throat. An acidic sting, but he forced himself to study the wallchart. Each of the round of 16 games had something stuck into the flag of one of the teams. Seth took a closer look to see needles with feathers that had been dipped in something red.

‘Blood,’ Seth said involuntarily.

He checked the pierced teams. Argentina. Portugal. Spain. Denmark. Mexico. Japan. Sweden. England. What was this? Some sort of curse? And why those teams?

Seth hesitated, remembering that he would normally have been excited about England’s game against Colombia, making it to the last 16 of the World Cup. It would have consumed his every waking minute.

But that was before all this.

His mind went back to the wallchart? What did it mean?

The needles? The feathers? The blood?

Then it came to him.

The first four teams with a needle in them had all lost. It was Monday today. Did that mean Mexico and Japan would lose tonight? And what about tomorrow? Did it really mean England would lose to Colombia?

As Seth stared at the shrine – or whatever it was – he looked again at the mirror there and could, at last, make out the blurry face he had been seeing.

It was Alexei. And he was shouting, gesticulating. Seth read his lips.

‘You’re too late. They’re here!’

Seth turned, looked behind him as the door to the room opened and froze as he saw the two women in black, one lifting a pistol to direct it at him.

Seth bolted. Hard up the stairs, legs exploding with pain as he took three steps a time, gasping in air to fuel his lungs, along the corridor with the crumpled furniture, table legs scattering across the wooden floorboards, past the photos of the women, and of him, onto the next staircase, the first step collapsing, his leg snared, pulling it free, running on to the top of the house, the attic, scrambling round invading branches and splintered roof beams as footsteps hammered hard behind him.

Seth heard another gun shot. The window next to him exploded. They were shooting at him. He was at the top of the house now. A skylight. Nadiya was not in this house. He had wasted a whole day and night looking for her here.

Seth lunged towards the skylight, his only way out now, to find his exit was blocked.

The women in black were already there.

How had they done that? He felt his leg muscles crumple, his lungs gasping for air, his heart hammering a hundred hits a minute.

They had him.

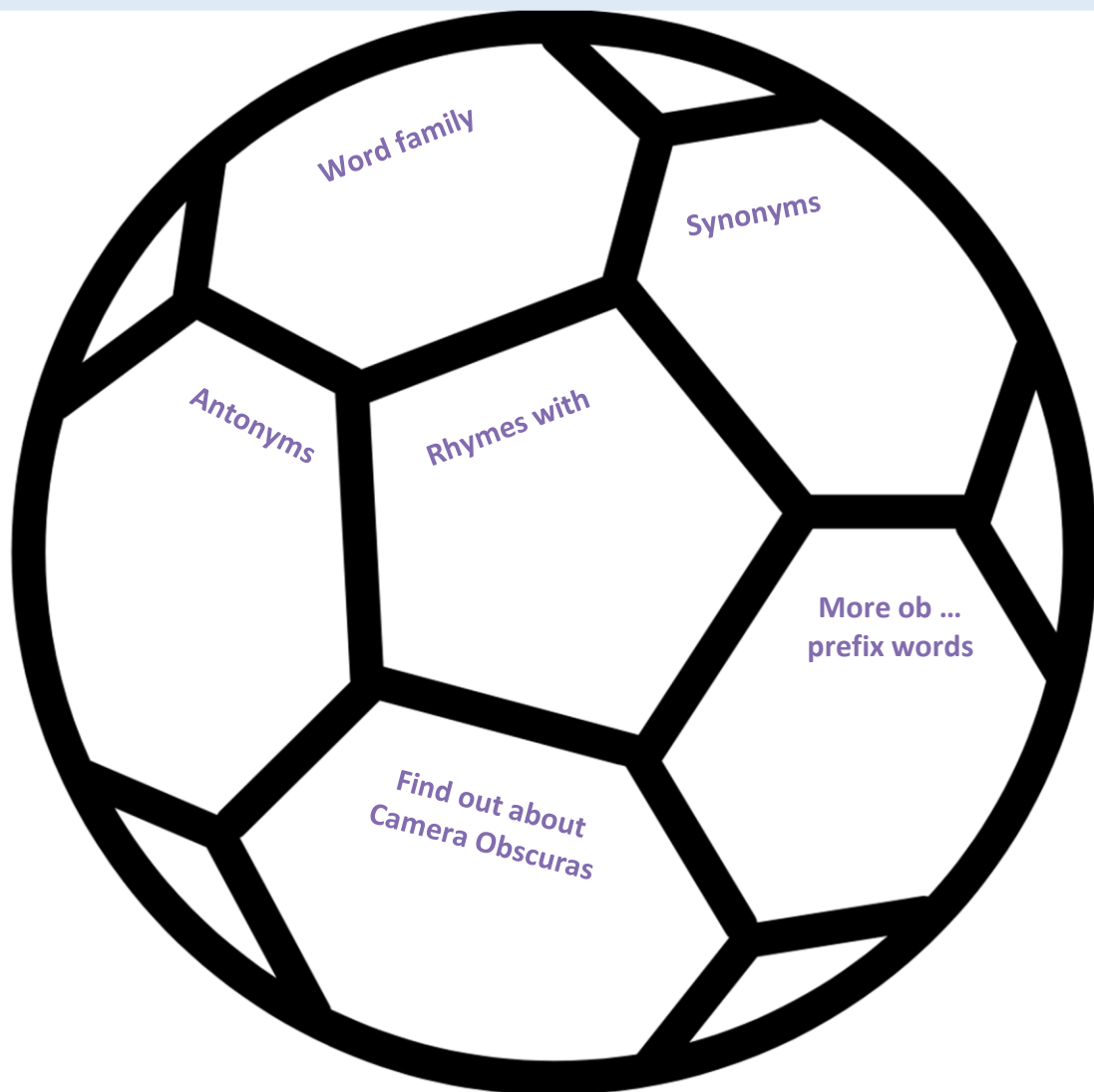
It was over.

Can Nadiya find a way to escape before she runs out of stale bread and warm water? Will Seth get out of the crazy house alive? Will he work out that Nadiya is being held captive in a tomb in the St Peter & Paul Cathedral? And what was that shrine about with the needle going through the England flag? Are England going out of the World Cup tonight? Find out in tomorrow's episode.

Chapter 15 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published before 7.30 a.m. on Wednesday 4th July.

World Cup word of the day

obscured



Seth is being held at gunpoint in an attic after breaking into the women in black's house in St Petersburg. Nadiya is entombed in the St Peter & Paul Cathedral with no hope of escape. Alexei is fading fast, his spirit energy almost gone. And thanks, in part, to Seth, as you will soon see, England are through to the quarter finals of the World Cup. But beyond that, has Seth's quest to save his two friends failed?

Пятнадцать

Seth swallowed. Was this it? The end?

One of the two women in black was glaring down the barrel of the pistol she had trained on him. Angry now, Seth returned the gunwoman's glare and raised his eyebrows, daring her to shoot.

'You have one last chance,' she said. 'Deliver the Faberge Egg to the St Peter & Paul Cathedral by 10 p.m. tonight. Or your girlfriend will die before midnight.'

Seth wanted to say: 'She's not my girlfriend.' But something stopped him.

Seth didn't want to anger them.

The other woman in black moved out of the doorway and allowed him to pass. Seth remembered that they would not kill him until they had the egg: they had too much to lose.

Seth walked down the dilapidated staircase and – before leaving the house – revisited the room where bizarre World Cup wallchart had been. He plucked the needle out of the England flag and stuck it into the Colombia flag. The game wouldn't kick off for a few hours. Maybe, just maybe, he could influence the result. Then he smiled and did the same with the penultimate game, moving it from the Sweden flag to the Swiss flag.

Then Seth White, a slight smile on his face, was on his way: he had something to do and he couldn't mess it up this time.

Nadiya was sleeping. Without light or sound or anything else for her senses to feed on, she dozed for longer and longer, her breathing shallower and shallower.

Later that afternoon, Seth left St Petersburg station with the Faberge Egg in a small rucksack. He was astonished by the railway station: its grand entrance and cavernous interior, stonework painted gold, stained glass windows, all seemed more like another cathedral than a transport hub.

Once or twice, when Seth caught sight of a blurry face in a mirror or a reflective window in the station, he would stop and look, only to see the face fade quickly. He knew this was Alexei Romanov trying to communicate with him. But he knew, too, that the Russian prince was powerless to help him now.

Outside the station was a sea of yellow, blue and red. Huge numbers of women, men and children flooding towards Seth over the bridge from the island. Football fans returning from the Sweden v Switzerland knockout game.

Seth held his rucksack in front of him, anxious not to lose the Faberge Egg, his last chance of saving Nadiya's life.

There was chanting and laughing and on the faces of those wearing blue and yellow, huge grins.

Now Seth knew that, if England beat Colombia tonight, they would be playing Sweden for a place in the semi-final of the World Cup.

Seth could barely take any of that in. His mind was sharp and focused on one end: to hand over the Faberge Egg to the women in black and save Nadiya, while at the same time condemning Alexei's spirit never to join that of his parents. Seth had no real choice: Nadiya had to come first. But he felt terrible about what he was doing.

Seth checked the time on the big screen in the fanzone in the large public square. It was 8.55 p.m. Time for kick off. When he heard the British national anthem he felt hairs go up on his arms. Not because of the football. But because he was doing what he was doing

for his friend. If it inspired the players to hear their national anthem before they took part in a big game like this, then it could help him now.

Because Seth's game was a matter of life or death.

By the time Seth reached the St Peter & Paul Cathedral it was 1-1, the game in extra time. Passing a bar he glanced inside to see images of Colombian players surrounding the referee and pushing him.

Unbelievable, Seth thought to himself.

Then the screen changed. Now all Seth could see was Alexei Romanov's face. The Russian boy spoke weakly, but clearly enough for Seth to hear him.

'Save her,' the boy said. 'Not me.'

Then the screen was showing football again. Penalties. It was penalties. Seth felt a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. That penalty feeling. But enough of that. Seth had to forget the World Cup. For now. He walked across the square to the cathedral, the weather dry and hot and he felt a bead of sweat trickle down his back like an insect.

Seth exhaled long and hard.

The time had come.

Hearing female voices, Nadiya stirred and lifted her head. Nothing. She opened her eyes and took a sip of water, finishing the bottle. Now she stared at the darkness above her. She had just drunk the last of her supplies.

Walking into the St Peter & Paul Cathedral, Seth shivered. The huge metal doors looked forbidding, but he was able to ease in through a small entrance.

Inside it was dark and quiet and cool. It felt to Seth like his senses had been muted.

As his eyes adjusted Seth saw them: two women in long black coats or capes, standing at the far side of the Romanov tombs, a line of stone boxes on the floor, surrounded by an iron fence.

There were flowers strewn on the tombs. More than before. Seth knew why: in two weeks it would be the centenary of the Romanov's executions.

Seth walked towards the women. He wasn't going to try anything. He knew the best way to save Nadiya was to give them what they wanted as soon as possible. He noticed that one of them had a walking stick and wondered if she had hurt her leg on her splintering staircase. But that was just a stupid half-thought and he dismissed it.

'Forgive me, Alexei,' he said under his breath as he listened to his own footsteps' echo, the only sound in the church.

Up close, Seth looked into the women's sullen faces and handed the Faberge Egg over. Now he saw their eyes light up as they caressed it, as if it were a long lost favourite pet animal.

'Our family has waited 100 years for this day,' one of the women whispered. 'It is our history.'

Seth demanded. 'Where is my friend?'

He watched as the two women smiled at each other, then he shivered again. But not from the cold.

Then – before he could react – the stick one of the women was holding whistled through the air. He heard a crack echo back off the cathedral walls. And he was down on the cold marble floor. Dazed. Trying to get up onto his hands and knees.

He'd been struck. Hard. And could only watch as the two women walked away.

'My friend?' he shouted after them.

'Will die,' one of the women finished his sentence.

Seth had been tricked. They had never intended to tell him where Nadiya was.

He tried to get up, but still couldn't make his legs and arms work. He felt weak, so weak.

Then two things happened. Together.

Colours and light flickered around Seth, reflecting off the walls. And his phone. A message alert coming in. Still concussed, Seth found it hard to make sense of it all. He wondered deep down if he was losing consciousness. Or worse.

He looked at his phone and read *England win on Penalties!*

And, as he did, he heard a noise, rattling or banging. He looked up to see the women in black at the door to the cathedral. They couldn't open it and now they were gazing at something beyond Seth.

And the look on their faces betrayed their utter terror.

Terror of something they had seen above the Romanov tombs.

England have won and are through the play Sweden in the World Cup quarter final. But it means next to nothing to Seth. It is what is happening in the cathedral that matters for the moment. The lights. The sounds. The look of terror on the women in black's faces. What now? For Seth? For Nadiya? For the women in black? For the Romanov spirits?

Chapter 16 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published before 7.30 a.m. on Thursday 5th July.

Chapter 17 of Friday 6th July will end with a vote

Another note to teachers...

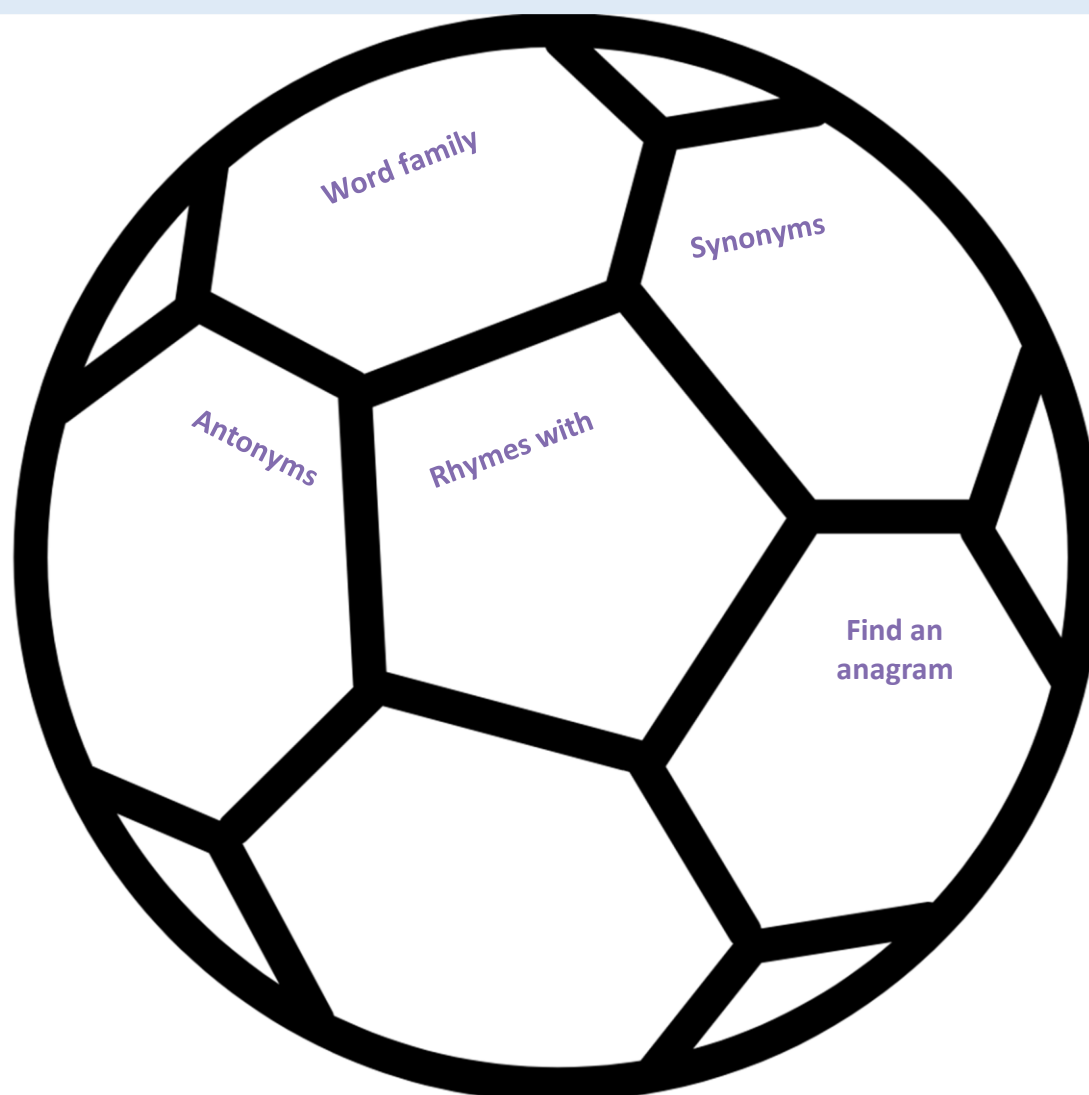
Thank you for the very kind enquiries about if *Defenders: Russia* will be published! Sadly it won't because it is not really good enough for that format and was never intended for publication because it is being written day by day, to be read aloud. So you may have noticed, I have broken a few grammatical rules and used different sentence formats to make it easier for all the teachers across the country to "perform" it. I also hope it helps to make the story more "real", confirming that it is really happening now and making it easier for you to quickly identify with the main child characters Seth and Nadiya.

To understand a bit more about how books like those in your school library were published, we've put together *Tom Palmer's Guide To How Books Are Made* (a 1 page worksheet with answers) downloadable from <http://tompalmer.co.uk/world-cup-2018-literacy-resources/>

Thanks to La Mare school in Guernsey for the spectacular idea about Seth moving the needles.

World Cup word of the day

trickle



Seth is trapped in St Petersburg's Cathedral. What he doesn't know is that Nadiya is there too, encased in a stone tomb with time running out. The women in black have possession of Alexei's Faberge Egg, but now something unfathomable has started happening in the cathedral, meaning they, too, are trapped, petrified by what is happening before their eyes.

Шестнадцать

Seth managed to lift himself off the cold marble floor of the cathedral to turn around and see why the women in black looked so frightened.

At the other end of the cathedral, the stone tombs of the Romanov family appeared to be cracking open, as if they were being splintered by giant chisels. Brilliant coloured shards of light were diffusing from the cracks up and around the crypt, onto the walls and pillars of the cathedral, reflecting off gold and glass and marble.

And, amid all that, strange figures loomed in the spaces between shadow and light. Figures dressed in suits, fine gowns and dripping in jewellery, like kings and queens. A bleak sound of howling, chanting, screaming and wailing forced Seth to cover his ears.

'Con- concussed,' he muttered to himself, remembering how he had been struck by one of the women in black. He heard his words slur and felt like he might pass out again.

Seth knew what he was witnessing. That it wasn't just the results of his concussion. He was seeing the Romanov family rise a century after their execution. The Tsar. The Tsarina. Alexei's mum and dad. His sisters, Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia. He also noticed two dogs. Seth knew them by name: Jimmy and Joy.

And then, he saw the main tomb was shuddering, a quaking movement along the floor of the cathedral. A large torch that had been sitting on a table beside him fell to the floor, switching on, adding to the lightshow.

Seth studied the humanlike figures who were appearing in the lights. Among them: a boy. The boy was wearing a military uniform.

Alexei Romanov.

The Russian prince looked taller than usual, stronger.

‘Alexei?’ Seth called out.

The boy looked gravely at Seth, then saluted him.

Seth watched what happened next in total awe. Alexei and four young women from the group of spectres approached the larger tomb and lifted the great stone lid off it without the slightest effort.

No light shone from *this* tomb. Seth assumed it was empty and wondered if it was for Alexei.

Then he saw her. Climbing out of the tomb. Nadiya.

Still unsteady on his feet, Seth ran to his friend and they threw their arms round each other.

‘I thought you were...’ Seth felt his voice choke and falter.

‘Dead?’ Nadiya asked, then she looked at the tomb she’d been trapped in, puzzled. ‘How did you get lift the lid off? Are Superman now as well?’

Seth smiled. ‘Alexei did it,’ he explained. ‘And his sisters.’

Nadiya looked around the cold dark empty cathedral. She saw nothing out of the ordinary. No Romanov children.

‘I don’t understand,’ she said.

But Seth’s attention had gone, now he watched as the Romanov family stood together in one group, observing Alexei walking away from them, staggering, fading as the supernatural lightshow faded itself. The Tsarina put her hand to her mouth displaying her grief: she was losing her only son again. His sisters called out for him to stay. But Seth knew Alexei could not stay. The women in black had the Faberge Egg: Alexei’s spirit could not remain with his family’s. It would be lost and alone forever.

‘Alexei,’ Seth said. ‘He’s going.’

Seth looked at Nadiya in disbelief.

‘What?’

‘He’s going. He’s lost. Forever.’

Then a sudden noise. Rapid footsteps. Louder. As the two women in black ran at Seth and Nadiya, released from their fear, the walking stick coming at Seth for a second time, hitting him on the head again.

‘Owwwww!’ Seth shouted. Then he watched through blurry-eyed double-vision as the women in black headed towards a spiral stone staircase at the far end of the cathedral.

‘Alexei’s egg!’ Nadiya said.

‘It’s gone. They’ve gone. Forget it. Alexei is lost.’ Seth could hardly speak. He felt so faint. And so sad for the Russian boy.

‘But Alexei,’ Nadiya said. ‘You told me that he saved me.’

Seth nodded. ‘He did.’

‘And we need to egg to save *him*?’ Nadiya shouted.

Seth nodded again.

Nadiya stood up and grabbed the torch from beside Seth. ‘Then we need the egg,’ she said. ‘We need to return it to his family crypt. Wait here. I am going to try and get it back, even if it is the last thing I ever do.’

‘Nooo,’ Seth’s voice echoed around the cathedral.

He watched his friend sprint off towards the foot of the spiral stone staircase, carrying the still-lit torch that had fallen near him, as the spectres of the Romanovs and the lights and noises of their coming faded back to a silence that was broken only by the hammering of footsteps.

What happened next happened quickly.

At the top of the spiral staircase there was door out onto the roof of the cathedral, where there was a huge stained-glass window. Seth watched helplessly as the two women in black escape through the door and go outside. Now he could see their silhouettes through the window as they stood on the roof, no doubt looking down to the square below, plotting their escape.

Seth wished he could do something to stop them. But every time he moved his head he felt like the world was slipping to one side. Only Nadiya could do rescue the situation now.

And there she was. She had made it to the top of the stairway. Seth saw her lunge towards the outside door. He was tempted to cry out to warn her, but was worried that all he would achieve was warning the two women in black she was coming. So he stayed silent.

Now – behind the stained glass window – he could see three figures. He was inside. They were outside. The light of the big screen showing England v Sweden meant that the three shadows were clearly visible. Seth had no idea who was who. But he could see the light of the torch Nadiya had taken as the three shapes intermingled roughly.

Were they fighting?

Just talking?

It was impossible to tell.

Then... suddenly... horribly... one of the silhouettes fell. The torch in that person's hand fell too, spinning its light before it smashed on the floor.

Seth heard another thud. And a scream. And it before he knew he was doing it, he was shouting at the top of his voice.

'Naaaaadiyyyaaaaaa!!!!!!'

In response he heard only silence.

Seth has seen someone fall to their death from the roof of the St Peter & Paul Cathedral in St Petersburg. Was it Nadiya? Her final words were that she was going to help Alexei even if it was the last thing she ever did. Seth is convinced his friend has made that terrible sacrifice. Find out what happened to Nadiya in tomorrow's episode. Then vote to decide what happens next in the story.

Chapter 17 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published before 7.30 a.m. on Friday 6th July and will give children the chance to vote on where the story goes in its final week. Details about how to vote will be published in tomorrow's chapter.

If you are breaking up this week, please tell the children they can follow the story from home with their families, if they would like to. And thank you for reading the story with them.

World Cup word of the day

possession



Has Seth just witnessed his best friend, Nadiya, fall to her death whilst attempting to recover Alexei Romanov's Faberge Egg from the women in black? Has Alexei missed his last chance to be reunited with the spirits of his parents? What next for Seth if he has lost his best friend? Find out now in chapter seventeen of *Defenders: Russia*.

Семнадцать

Seth watched carefully as a silhouette moved across the other side of the stained glass window high in the St Peter & Paul Cathedral. He could not make out if the silhouette was one person or two: but he *could* be sure that the torch had fallen from the top of the cathedral. And that it was Nadiya who had been carrying the torch.

Next, he heard a door open and close, its creak and bang echoing around the tops of the pillars holding up the cathedral.

Now footsteps.

Rapid footsteps.

So rapid that, again, it was impossible to tell how many people were coming down. But they *were* coming. Seth was about to face the women in black and know his best friend was dead. Or face his friend and know the women in black were dead. His mind could not cope. He wished he could make the world stop turning.

And, indeed, time slowed for Seth as the footsteps became louder.

He swallowed. And – being as he was in a cathedral – he screwed his eyes shut and prayed.

As he reached the end of his prayer, he realised that the footsteps stopped.

Someone was standing there.

Watching.

Waiting.

This was it. Nadiya was dead. Or Nadiya was alive.

Seth opened his eyes.

And saw her standing there, breathing heavily.

'They fell,' Nadiya told him. Her voice was quaking.

'Are you okay?' Seth tried to stand, leaning against a table.

'I am. But they fell,' she said again.

Seth nodded and watched as his friend came towards him. He had been so pleased to see her that he had only looked at her eyes. But now he could see what was in her hands.

The Faberge Egg.

'It's going to be okay,' Seth said. 'It wasn't anyone's fault. They did it to themselves.'

'Where do I put it?' Nadiya asked, ignoring Seth's reasoning.

'On the tomb?' Seth told her.

Nadiya placed the Faberge Egg on the top of the tomb she had been trapped inside. She shuddered at the memory. Her head was pounding with dull dark pain.

And now, inside the cathedral, the glowing returned. More subtle this time, as the entire Romanov family appeared. Then a thin golden thread emanated from them, spinning towards the door where Alexei had exited.

Nadiya held her breath.

Seth observed her quizzically.

And then Alexei came. Walking gingerly, as if he might collapse at any moment, prompting his father to run to him and scoop him up in his arms, like he carried him on the night of their executions. But now Tsar Nicholas II was carrying his boy to a better place.

That was what Nadiya thought as she watched them.

'You can see them, can't you?' Seth gasped.

'I can.'

'That's good. That you get to see Alexei. Just once.'

Nadiya felt a burst of heat behind her eyes. She smiled at Seth, then put her arm around him to make sure he didn't stumble. She could tell he was still concussed.

The duo watched as the Romanov family came together to embrace their youngest member, Alexei, who turned and saluted to Seth and Nadiya for a final time. As the former

Russian royal family faded, Alexei's Faberge Egg faded away too. Then it was gone. And the Romanov's were gone. And Seth knew.

'That's it,' he said.

'It's over?' Nadiya wanted to know for sure.

'Over,' Seth confirmed.

The two friends walked to the cathedral exit and pushed the door open. It was a cool St Petersburg night outside. The sky was dark. The streets quiet after the chaos of Sweden and England victories.

'So, what now?' Nadiya asked Seth.

'Well, England v Sweden is what I'm thinking,' Seth smiled.

Nadiya nodded. 'I can't believe that, if we win on Saturday, we're in a World Cup semi-final.'

But what about after the England v Sweden game? Now it is time for you to decide. You have two options for where the story will go next.

Option I

The story ends on Monday. Seth and Nadiya are alive and return home. Alexei's spirit is restored to his family. The women in black are gone forever. Everything is good. Everything is calm. Life goes back to normal, for now, for our intrepid heroes.

Option II

Seth and Nadiya stay on at the World Cup, in an unlikely quest to get tickets to watch England in the final. Meanwhile, Seth is experiencing a new haunting: by a stray dog from the streets of Moscow called Laika?

Option I or II.

It's up to you.

Please cast your vote by using the contact form here <http://tompalmer.co.uk/world-cup-2018-literacy-resources/> or by emailing vote@tompalmer.co.uk with your preferred

option in the subject line. Please choose Option I or Option II. Voting will be open from 07:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. British Summer Time on Friday 6th July only. Any votes submitted before or after the voting is open will not be counted.

Any additional email addresses submitted for voting purposes will not be used for future marketing purposes or shared with any third party, without consent. (With new GDPR rules coming in, we ask you to check our privacy policy <http://tompalmer.co.uk/privacy-policy/> and terms and conditions <http://tompalmer.co.uk/terms-and-conditions/>.)

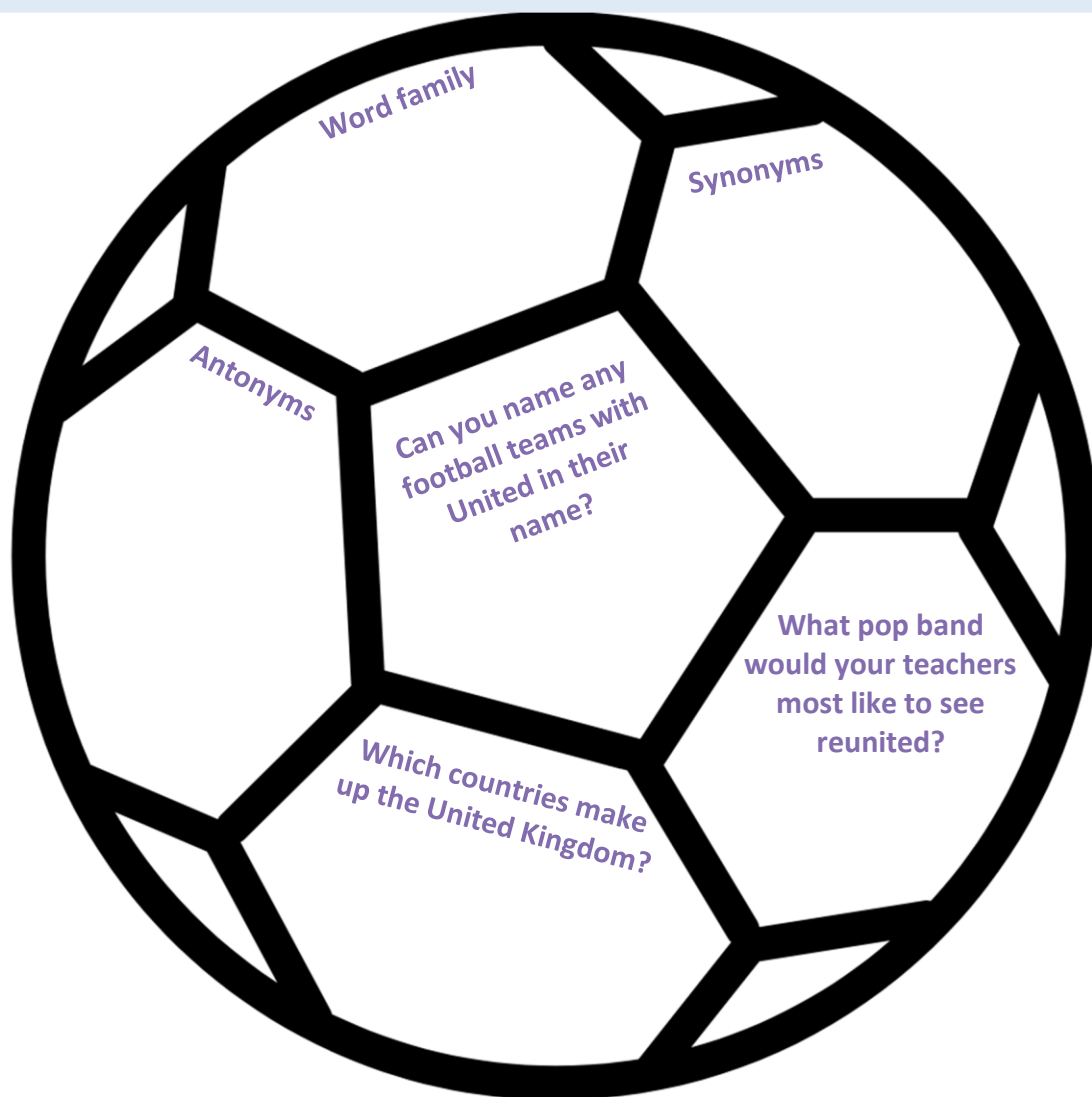
Chapter 18 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published before 7.30 a.m. on Monday 9th July. What happens next depends on your vote.

If the majority of you vote for the story to end now there will be a final episode on Monday, as well as an opportunity to order signed certificates for anyone who has read or listened to the whole story. In addition, Tom will include a link to a short video to say thank you and tell you a few more details about Seth and Nadiya.

Thank you and have a great weekend.

World Cup word of the day

reunited



Seth and Nadiya emerge from the St Peter & Paul cathedral in St Petersburg, having helped reunite Alexei Romanov's spirit with his family. The threat from the women in black is gone. But who is inside the sleek silver limo that is approaching them? And what does it mean for Seth and Nadiya in the last week of the World Cup finals?

Восемнадцать

Nadiya and Seth walked out of the Cathedral into beautiful Russian night. Stars glittering in the black chasm of sky above them. Soft piano music coming from an open window. And the Neva River running silent and strong below the bridge the pair were crossing.

As they walked Nadiya pointed out a small pack of dogs.

'Strays,' she said.

Seth stopped watched them. One of the dogs, with a black and white face and pricked-up bent-over ears was looking directly at him. Seth squinted to look more closely. The dog had something about it. An aura? A presence? It was hard to explain, except that it was a little like one of the echoes from the past Seth would sometimes see. But different.

Seth normally saw ghosts of Vikings and Romans and Iron Age people: not spectres of *animals*.

Suddenly a slick silver car drew up to drive slowly alongside them, obscuring Seth's view of the dogs.

Seth and Nadiya began to walk faster. An instinctive reaction.

To danger.

What now? Hadn't there been enough?

Then the window rolled down and a familiar face peered out that them.

Seth glanced out of the corner of his eye. He could not believe who it was.

'Mum?'

Mum explained everything in the car. She had been approached by the British embassy in Moscow. They said a mystery benefactor had offered to pay for her to fly in a private jet to Russia, then put her and the two children up in a spectacular apartment in central Moscow. For a whole week. As well as that they would have all the food they needed, a swanky limo to take them where they wanted to go, a helicopter for longer journeys and tickets to all England's remaining games.

Seth and Nadiya were so astonished by the idea of seeing England's last matches, that neither of them saw the white- and black-faced dog chasing after their car as it sped out of St Petersburg.

The flat was posh. Seriously posh. The taps in the three bathrooms were made of gold. The wallpaper was crushed velvet, which looked luxurious in the light of every room's chandelier. There were four staff to welcome them. One on the door, one in the kitchen and two serving and cleaning. Every curtain, TV screen and other device was voice-operated.

The apartment had a bird's eye view of Red Square and over some high walls into the heart of Russian power.

The Kremlin.

Seth and Nadiya had no idea that, in three nights' time, they would be breaking into the building on their most dangerous ghostbusting mission of the World Cup.

Game day. Saturday. Samara, Russia.

When Dele Alli headed in the second goal, Seth and Nadiya leapt out of their front row seat.

2-0.

England were going to the World Cup semi-finals. It was really happening.

After the crescendo of noise from the England fans, Nadiya turned to Seth.

'We're actually here,' she exclaimed.

'Are you sure?' Seth asked.

Now Nadiya was laughing. 'No.'

Seth's mum chose that moment to take a photograph of the pair.

‘Just so you believe it when we get home,’ she said.

Events after the game was amazing. The England players came running over to the fans and right up to Seth and Nadiya. Harry Kane was first, throwing his captain’s armband into the fans. Nadiya caught it, but saw a small girl beside her looking crestfallen that *she’d* not caught it, so Nadiya handed it to her.

Later, Mum took photos of Nadiya and Seth singing the national anthem with thousands of others, Gareth Southgate photo-bombing in the background conducting the singing.

‘Have we really got tickets for the semi?’ Seth asked his mum.

‘Back in our apartment safe in Moscow,’ she said. ‘I’ll show you after the chopper ride home.’

‘This is about as fab as it gets,’ Seth turned to Nadiya. ‘I mean, after all that crazy stuff the last few weeks, we’re living the dream. Match tickets. Limos. Helicopters.’

Nadiya laughed. ‘Don’t say that. You never know what’s round the next corner.’

Nadiya’s words would prove to be prophetic.

Just hours later after they had travelled back to Moscow, landing on the helicopter pad just next to St Basil’s Cathedral, Nadiya, Seth and his mum walked across Red Square towards their apartment, seeing Gary Lineker and Alan Shearer come the other way.

But Seth had no time for Lineker and Shearer: he’d seen the St Petersburg dog again. Hundreds of miles away in Moscow.

It was sitting by the eternal flame, a monument that burns forever on the edge of Red Square – to remember all the Russian soldiers who have died in battle.

‘What’s up?’ Nadiya asked, noticing his hesitation.

‘That dog,’ Seth pointed. ‘Can you see it?’

Nadiya shook her head. ‘Just leave it, Seth,’ she said. ‘Come on. Please.’

‘Give me a minute,’ Seth replied, leaving his mum and Nadiya as he walked towards the dog. ‘It’s a dog. I miss Rosa. And, if you can’t see it...’

Seth walked slowly and smiled at the dog, sitting calmly watching him approach.

‘Hey boy,’ Seth said gently.

The dog stood up, stretched and eyed him. And then it spoke. 'I'm not called Boy: I'm called Laika.'

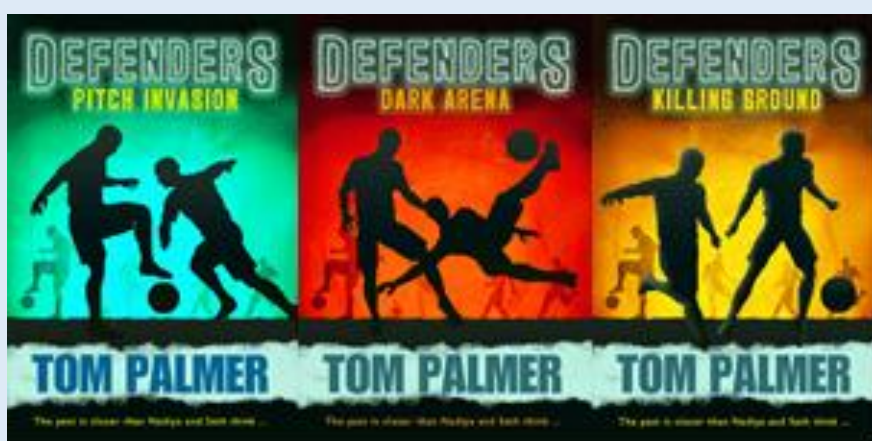
Who is Laika? What does she want from Seth and Nadiya that she would follow them across a continent? Is she alive – or a ghost? And... did she just speak? Find out more in Chapter 19.

Chapter 19 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published before 7.30 a.m. on Tuesday 10th July. There will be 22 or 23 episodes with the last one being on Friday 13th July or Monday 16th July.

The final result on Friday night was more than 99% in favour of option II, carrying on with *Defenders: Russia*. Thanks to all the children for voting to keep the story going. And to teachers, librarians and parents for helping make that happen.

Several schools have been asking about whether there are any other books featuring Nadiya and Seth. There are three. More information about them here:

<http://tompalmer.co.uk/defenders/>



World Cup word of the day

prophetic



Just like the England football team, Seth and Nadiya are enjoying an unexpected extra week in Russia. They're staying in a fancy apartment as guests of a mystery benefactor. And why has a dog called Laika followed Seth all the way from St Petersburg to talk to him?

Восемнадцать

A cold wind was blowing across Red Square, Moscow.

Trying to comprehend that he was talking to a ghost dog, Seth looked around the square. The high walls of the Kremlin. The other magnificent buildings, most notably the spectacular spiral towers of St Basil's Cathedral.

In the shadows between the buildings Seth saw more dogs. Just small groups of four or five, standing or sitting, lying down, but all of them wary and watching. He also saw a pair of soldiers standing about fifty metres away from him. Machine guns slung casually from their shoulders. One soldier flashed Seth a warning glare as he stood by the eternal flame, but now the pair were deep in conversation again.

Seth looked back at Laika, the talking dog.

'Russia has many dogs,' Laika told him in broken English. 'Many live with humans. Like you, with your dog, Rosa. And many live wild in the city streets. Here in Moscow there used to be thousands of the wild city dogs. Now, only hundreds.'

Seth frowned, checking over his shoulder to confirm that his mum and Nadiya were waiting at a distance, looking out for him, but not interfering. When Seth looked back into Laika's deep brown eyes he remembered how his dog, Rosa, would look at him like that, almost as if she was trying to hypnotise him. It seemed the same was happening now.

‘Why are there few dogs now?’ Seth asked. ‘Why hundreds, not thousands?’

‘Before every football game, the people from inside here,’ Laika glanced at the forbidding walls of the Kremlin. ‘They come and they finish them.’

‘Finish?’ Seth gasped. ‘You mean kill them?’

‘Yes,’ Laika said. ‘With poison. Terrible poisons. They do not want foreign football fans to see wild city dogs.’

‘But why?’ Seth asked.

‘I don’t know,’ Laika said. ‘How could anyone poison dogs? How could anyone poison people? It’s a question for today.’

Seth heard a cough from Nadiya. He looked around him and noticed the pair of soldiers were watching him more closely now.

‘Please,’ Laika said ‘Please help them. You can save them. Like you have saved others. There are people who can help us. Let me tell you how you can help.’

Back at their lavish Moscow apartment, after mum had gone to bed, Seth and Nadiya stayed up to work. Nadiya fired up her laptop and together they began.

‘So,’ Nadiya said, trying to conceal her incredulity. ‘This invisible talking dog? Exactly what did it say to you again?’

Seth narrowed his eyes. ‘You don’t believe me?’

Nadiya tried to look serious. ‘Sadly, I do. You don’t have to persuade me of anything after the last two weeks.’

‘Good,’ Seth said. ‘Laika said some people were trying to kill stray dogs. And that other people were trying to save them. Organisations who help animals. We need to find out more before we decide what to do.’

Seth and Nadiya spent half the night online. Researching. Reading. Finding out the things they needed to know, the things that would help them decide what they should do.

They found out about three things that they thought would be helpful.

One. That stray dogs in Russian World Cup host cities were being killed by the government to make the host cities look nicer to visitors. The culls happened the nights before each game.

Two. There were groups of Russian underground animal rights activists who were trying to save the dogs, by making films of what was happening to the dogs and showing them on social media.

Three. Information about Laika.

‘Seth?’

‘What?’ Seth said returning from the apartment kitchen with two glasses of freshly squeezed orange juice.

‘I’ve found out something about your dog.’

‘Go on.’

Nadiya turned her laptop round to show Seth a photo of a medium sized dog that looked to him like it had a bit of husky in it.

‘That’s her,’ Seth gasped.

‘She’s called Laika,’ Nadiya told him. ‘She was a space dog?’

‘A what?’

Nadiya explained that Laika had lived in the 1950s and had been the first living creature sent into space. The first living animal sent into space. There was even a statue to honour her. Not that she had much choice in the matter.

‘And she’s haunting me?’ Seth mused.

The last thing they did before going to their bedrooms last night was send an email offering to help the animal rights organisation called *For Laika* who were trying to stop the poisoning of the dogs.

Breakfast was served in the apartment dining room at nine.

Seth, his mum and Nadiya were attended to by the waiting staff. They had sliced melon, chocolate filled breads and Seth’s mum tried caviar on small pancakes called blini.

‘How is it?’ Nadiya asked.

‘Mmmm,’ Seth’s mum replied.

Nadiya’s phone pinged as she and Seth were finishing their rich hot chocolates at the end of the meal. Seth’s mum had gone for a walk into Moscow.

Nadiya checked her phone, frowned, then put her cup down.

‘Is it them?’ Seth asked.

‘Yeah. The animal rights people.’

‘What did they say?’

Nadiya breathed out heavily. ‘They want to meet us,’ she said. ‘They say that we’re the perfect people to help them save the dogs.’

‘When?’

‘Tomorrow.’

‘But it’s England v Croatia tomorrow.’

‘Tomorrow morning. Before the match. There’s a sculpture park on the other side of the river. They say to meet them there. They say they have something we can use.’

‘What does that mean?’

Nadiya shrugged.

Seth closed his eyes. A part of him wanted to say no to all this, to just go to the semi-final and enjoy the game. No Moscow more madness. But another part of him remembered the eyes of Laika and how she had looked into him just like Rosa would. And he knew they had no choice but to do what the ghost dog of Red Square asked.

Tomorrow they would meet these animal rights people.

Tomorrow they would try to help the dogs.

Then they would go to watch England play Croatia for a place in the World Cup final.

What is it that the animal rights people want Seth and Nadiya to do? Are our two heroes right to want to help? What could possibly go wrong?

Chapter 20 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published at

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/defenders-russia-world-cup-2018-football-story/>

before 7.30 a.m. on Wednesday 11th July.

You can access free posters, videos and other literacy resources about Tom's *Defenders* series at <http://tompalmer.co.uk/defenders-resources/>. Linking to the KS2 history topics of the Iron Age, Roman Britain, the Anglo Saxons and the Vikings.

HAUNTED BY THE PAST!

By Tom Palmer

My new book – *Defenders: Killing Ground* – is set on the street where I now live. It's about a fictional boy and a girl who live on that street and how – one day – they see ghosts of people who used to live there a long time before: Anglo Saxons being attacked by Viking invaders! The children realise that echoes of the Viking attack are resonating and causing problems in their town today, so they set out to try to understand the past to help them solve the hauntings of the present.

Would you like to write a history ghost story set on your street? Read on, and follow my ten point plan on how to write one.

- 1 Find out about a real historical event that happened near where you live. Perhaps something from a period of history you have studied in school. For instance, a battle – like in World War 2 – or famous or gruesome event. You can investigate by looking in a local museum or library, asking an adult, or searching on the internet.
- 2 Can't find anything exciting? Then exaggerate a real event to make it even more dramatic if you need to!
- 3 Think of new children to be your main characters – one could even be you. Add a family pet for a bit of fun!
- 4 Find a way to make your real historic event echo today. For example, if there was a fire or plague in the past, perhaps fire or a plague could be starting in your area now? Or a haunting, by visitors at the fire or plague, or from a murder or an accident.
- 5 Have the children try to find out why the haunting event is happening in their town. But... make them fail the first time, because they don't understand the link between the past and today.
- 6 Make your characters feel dejected, puzzled. But then they realise the happenings are to do with the town's history – and that they must understand that just to solve the haunting of the present!
- 7 The hauntings in their town begin – and the children now are haunted by a link between the past and present of their town.
- 8 How do they deal with the problem? Have them think of a solution which they carry out – but then it doesn't go completely to plan.
- 9 Finally, go back over your story and add descriptions of places or things that people who live in your street or town will recognise, such as landmarks, shops, schools.

Of course, you don't have to stick to this plan – because the chances are you'll have better ideas once you get going!

ECHOES OF AN ANCIENT VIKING ATTACK ARE CAUSING PROBLEMS IN THEIR TOWN TODAY

About the Author
Tom Palmer will be running events in Telford on June 20th and Peterborough on June 27th with his books *Over the Line* (Barrington Stoke, £6.99) and *Wings: Flyboy* (Barrington Stoke, £5.99). His new book, *Defenders: Killing Ground* (Barrington Stoke, £6.99) is out in June.

World Cup word of the day

benefactor



Nadiya and Seth have been summoned to a public park in Moscow to meet a group of animal rights activists. The activists have asked for help to stop the killing of stray dogs ahead of the World Cup final on Sunday. Will our heroes help the activists before heading off to watch England play Croatia at the Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow tonight? Can the dogs even be saved? And what will happen on the pitch? Is the England World Cup dream about to come to an end? Or is football coming home?

It's coming... football's coming home...

Двадцать

Nadiya turned the World Cup semi-final tickets over in her hands as she sat at breakfast with Seth and his mum. She couldn't believe she was actually going to watch the game in person. Tonight. She felt her heart begin to beat faster just at the thought of it.

'Big day,' Seth's mum said, watching her.

Nadiya nodded.

'And France in the final,' Mum went on.

'If...' Seth interrupted their conversation.

'If what?' Mum asked.

'If we win tonight.'

Nadiya glanced across the table to see that Seth also appeared to be nervous. He held her stare and she could tell that he was thinking about their meeting with the animal rights activists just as much as about England playing Croatia.

What a day they had ahead!

Nadiya had no idea how any of it was going to play out.

Sometime late, Nadiya and Seth walked across Red Square, passing a building called Lenin's mausoleum. Nadiya told Seth that this was where Muscovites kept the preserved body of Vladimir Lenin, the leader of Russian revolution a century ago.

Seth was shocked. He didn't know much about the Russian revolution, but he couldn't help but feel angry about Lenin having his own mausoleum, seeing as he was one of the people responsible for the murder of Alexei and the rest of the Romanovs. He knew that some people thought the Romanovs had been bad leaders themselves, but, for Seth, that was no excuse for murdering a fourteen year old boy.

The two friends crossed the River Moskva as it ran fast and deep. Then down some steps to the Bolotnaya Park, which was small and rectangular with sculptures and stunted bushes on raised beds.

Nadiya pointed out a pack of dogs hiding among some of the bushes.

'Do you think they know they're being hunted?' she asked Seth.

'It looks like they do to me,' Seth grumbled.

There were several other people in the park. The two children walked to its centre, as instructed. And then – as if from nowhere – two young women appeared from amongst the dog walkers and football fans idling the day away before the match. Seth and Nadiya felt safe because there were so many other people about. They had agreed beforehand not to go anywhere alone with the activists.

The two young Russian women spoke good English. Both were tall, wearing jeans and leather jackets. One was carrying a green rucksack.

'Password?' one of them said.

Nadiya and Seth looked puzzled.

'Who told you about us?'

'Laika,' Seth replied.

‘Good. That is password. Thank you for meeting us. We are animal rights activists,’ they told Seth and Nadiya. ‘Let us show you quickly what problem is. Walk to edge of park. Look across water to the opposite bank. At edge there is a green van. Look closely.’

Nadiya led Seth to the edge of the park to look out over the Moskva. What they saw horrified them. By the green van, four people in overalls were beneath the bridge the children had just walked over. There were at least a dozen dogs. The four people were throwing food to them, which the dogs pounced on. Then they ate. Voraciously.

But, within minutes, it was clear the dogs were not well. They began staggering and vomiting, dropping to the floor soon after.

‘Poison,’ one of the activists explained. ‘It is slow. But painful. And you can see the how the animals are suffering?’

Nadiya frowned. She could see that clearly. She looked into Seth’s eyes. Seth nodded. They had both seen quite enough.

‘How can we help?’ Nadiya asked.

‘There is only one man in Russia who can stop this,’ the activist with the blue rucksack explained. ‘He works in there.’ She pointed to the high walls of the Kremlin. ‘We have way that you can enter the Kremlin. A secret passage. Under river here.’

‘Why us?’

‘Because this man’s dogs know our scent – and they like children. They are famous for it.

‘But what would we do?’ Seth asked. ‘When we got inside?’

‘There are three rare pedigree dogs that kept at night locked in a room at the end of the tunnel. They are left alone all night. It would be easy to take them.’

‘Take them?’ Nadiya gasped.

‘Yes. Take them. Kidnap them. Using tunnel. They are treasured by the very important man. If you take them, bring them back to this side of the river, he has power to stop the killing of the mongrel dogs before cup final on Sunday to be sure we do not harm his pets. And once final on Sunday has passed he will have no need to harm the stray dogs. They will be saved.’

‘Who is the important man?’ Nadiya asked.

The activists told Nadiya exactly who he was. She and Seth shuddered. They knew who he was and knew, too, that he was a dangerous man.

It was challenging for Nadiya and Seth to put everything to do with Laika, the stray dogs and the activists out of their minds as they walked around the bend in the river towards the towering Luzhniki Stadium. But, once they had passed their tickets under an electronic reader to access the stadium, then climbed up the concrete staircase to be met by a wall of loud music and gigantic flags of Croatia and England laid out flat on the vast green illuminated pitch, they were in the zone. The England-versus-Croatia-World-Cup-semi-final zone.

The two children took their seats three rows behind the England bench just as the players came out of the tunnel. As Nadiya watched the England players belting out the national anthem, she felt a shiver running up her spine. She had never really thought about *God Save the Queen* before.

But now?

Now it was the best song in the world to her, as she bellowed it out with thousands of other England fans. Nadiya decided that for ninety minutes, or so, she was going to think about nothing but the football. Then she and Seth would be able to give their full attention and energy to helping save the stray dogs from tomorrow.

But now: football.

It was time.

Time to see if football was coming home...

Nadiya and Seth are tense twice over. England's World Cup semi-final against Croatia is about to kick off. If England win, the two children will have tickets to the final on Sunday. But they have something else on their minds, too: because, whatever happens on the pitch tonight, tomorrow they must tunnel into one of the most secretive buildings in the world to help save the lives of dozens of innocent dogs.

Thanks for reading. Enjoy the game tonight.

Chapter 21 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published at

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/defenders-russia-world-cup-2018-football-story/>

before 7.30 a.m. on Thursday 12th July, by which time we will know if England are in the World Cup Final – or not!!!

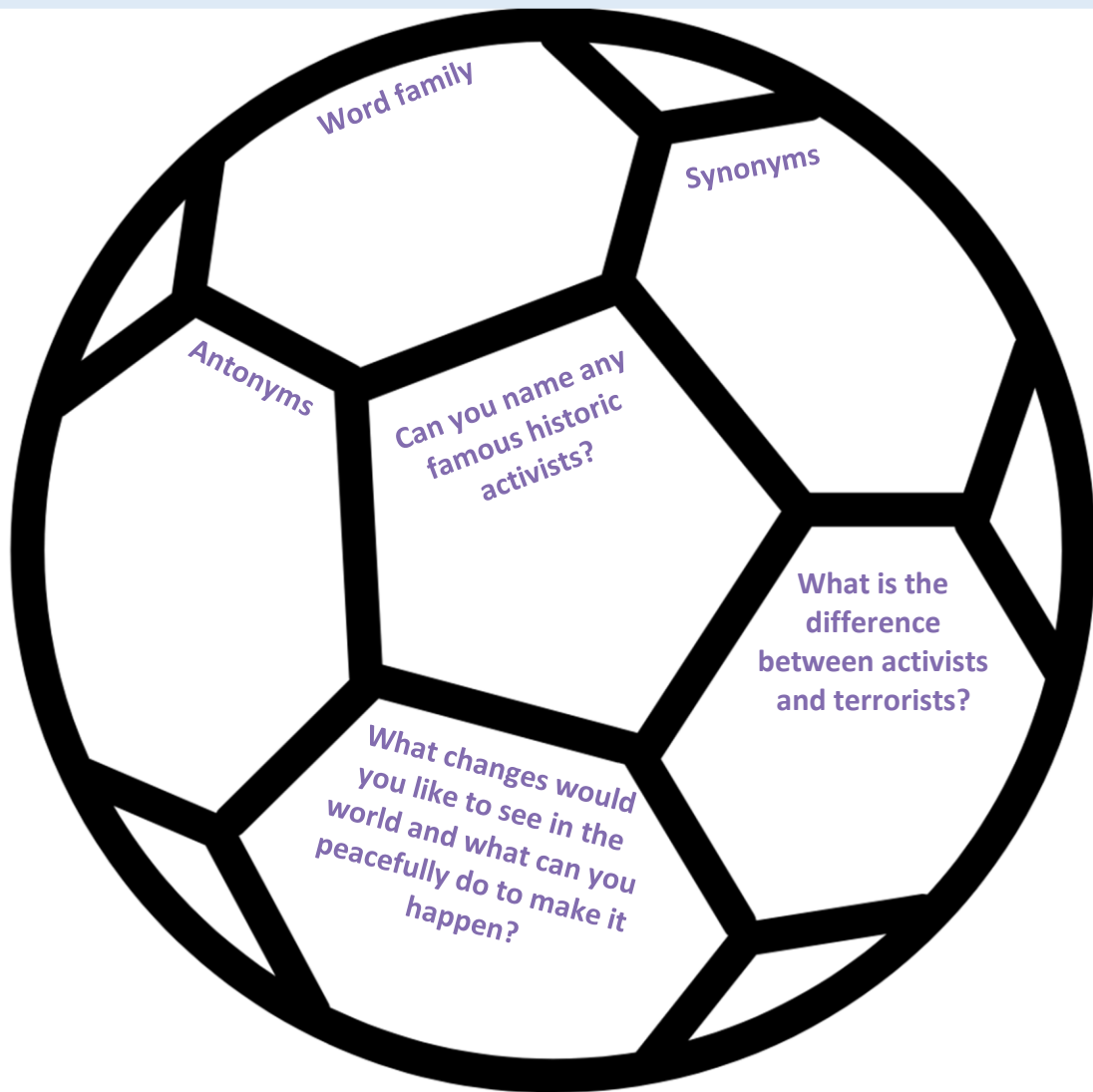
Watch a video of Tom when he visited the park and Red Square in Moscow that he describes in this story: <http://tompalmer.co.uk/foul-play/dead-ball/>

Note for teachers to pass on to the children

In this story Seth and Nadiya are not at school, though it is still term time. They have also gone off and faced dangerous situations without a trustworthy adult. And, in this episode, they are about to meet two strangers in a park. Obviously none of these actions are good or safe for children and Tom would like to stress, on behalf of the National Literacy Trust, that this is a story. Children should always ask for help from a trustworthy adult rather than face these situations and should not do the things Seth and Nadiya are doing because this is fiction. In the same way they would not do what Harry Potter does in some of J K Rowling's books. (Tom knows that children knows this, but he still has to say it, just in case.) One of the problems of writing adventure stories for children is getting rid of adults and putting children in adventurous situations where grown-ups aren't checking up on them to keep them safe. The National Literacy Trust has asked Tom to clarify this. Please can you pass it on to the children? Thank you.

World Cup word of the day

activist



Nadiya and Seth are all set to tunnel into the Kremlin and kidnap a very powerful man's dogs. You might know who the powerful man in question is. And you might be right. But sometimes it is best not to name people. Just in case. The children hope that their dangerous mission will help to prevent the poisoning of the remaining stray dogs in Moscow before the World Cup final on Sunday. But – before all that – the children have a football match to watch. England v Croatia. The semi-final of the World Cup.

Двадцать один

Seth and Nadiya trudged away from the Luzhniki Stadium with Seth's mum.

The final score: Croatia 2 England 1. AET.

Heart breaking.

Seth watched England fans around him, heads down. The Croatia fans were jubilant.

It was tough to take. Seth wanted to cry, thinking of all the classrooms in England the next morning, all the school halls, full of children feeling a bit sad. But maybe proud, he thought. They'll feel proud of the England team too.

He looked at Nadiya to see that she also looked close to tears. Seth put his arm round her.

'You okay?' he asked.

Nadiya nodded. 'It's just... it's just...' she paused. 'I wanted football to come home.'

The morning after Seth and Nadiya went to the basement of their Moscow apartment, following the instructions of the animal rights activists, trying to forget the cloud of gloom that seemed to be hanging over them. At the back of a disused larder they found a doorway

with a polished metal door. It was too small to walk through, so they had to squat down to enter the tunnel.

This was it.

Another dangerous mission.

The tunnel could not have been a greater contrast to the stadium they had been in the night before.

It was dark and silent.

The air was chilly.

They were alone.

Nadiya shuddered. It reminded her of the tomb she'd been trapped in earlier that month. She flicked on her torch quickly. Its beam illuminated the tunnel, bricks lining the way ahead 700 metres under Red Square.

'Is it safe?' Seth asked.

Nadiya shrugged. 'It might not be.'

'I keep thinking about those boys in Thailand who got trapped.'

Nadiya smiled. 'Don't worry,' she said. 'They're all safe now. Rescued! Isn't it wonderful? And, anyway, don't forget that we're just characters in a story. Tom Palmer won't let us come to any harm'

Seth nodded.

The two children made their way soundlessly through the tunnel without speaking. The beam picking out the fifty metres ahead of them, the stone floor and the bare brickwork arching over them.

There were three reasons for not speaking.

Firstly, that they did not give themselves away.

Secondly, that they wanted to listen. They knew this was a dangerous mission. Breaking into the Kremlin to kidnap a powerful man's dogs? It was madness.

Deep down both children were having second thoughts. Was it right to kidnap dogs? Even if they belonged to a tyrant, the dogs might still be distressed.

That was the third reason they tacitly chose not to share their concerns. If one of them doubted their mission then the whole thing could go catastrophically wrong.

When the torch light reflected back at Nadiya and Seth they knew they had reached the end.

Ahead was a polished metal door. Just like the one at the other end of the tunnel.

Nadiya put her ear to the door and listened. She heard a single sharp bark. The silence.

‘I heard a dog,’ she said. ‘This is the place.’

‘Shall we go in?’

Nadiya frowned. She was frightened now. What were they doing? And why? To save hundreds of dogs from being killed, she told herself. Then she turned to Seth and said a firm ‘Yes.’

Seth pushed the door gently. The room they were entering was ill-lit. But it was light enough to see three pairs of eyes gazing up at them.

‘Hello doggies,’ Nadiya said in a soft voice.

One of the dogs’ tail thumped on the floor. A good sign.

Then, without a moment to prepare themselves, the three dogs were on top of them. Leaping from their blankets, mouths open, teeth bared. But only in playfulness. Seth and Nadiya joined the trio of dogs in their insane play fight. It was hard not to laugh. Seth counted three dogs, but sensed another dog was in the room too as they fought. It was in the corner where it was too dark to see. Seth assumed that dog was old and didn’t like to play fight and he forgot about it. Or was a ghost dog. He didn’t really have time to think about it.

During a break in the dog-wrestling, Seth looked at Nadiya, grinning and, to the sound of panting, said: ‘I can’t do this.’

‘Do what?’

‘Kidnap these dogs. It’s not right. They’ll be scared. They’re just dogs.’

Nadiya beamed. ‘I am so glad you said that. I was thinking it too. We can’t come and kidnap someone’s dogs.’

‘Kidnap?’ a voice said. With a strong Russian accent.

Seth’s heart stopped. He peered into the dark corner of the room. To where he had seen what he thought was a fourth dog.

But it was no dog.

'It was a man.

And a very familiar face.

Nadiya and Seth had seen him on the television. Seth had seen him in person at the opening game of the World Cup finals all those weeks ago.

'I asked you question,' the man demanded, his voice heavy with menace. 'You are planning to kidnap my dogs?'

Seth and Nadiya are trapped in a room with one of the most powerful men in the world. The disappointment at the defeat to Croatia is the last of their worries now. They are close to helpless. Or is there someone on hand to return a favour to our two heroes?

Chapter 22 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published at

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/defenders-russia-world-cup-2018-football-story/>

before 7.30 a.m. tomorrow, on Friday 13th July.

It will be the final episode of Nadiya and Seth's adventure.

Each of the Defenders books – below – features a quiz about the historical period that Seth and Nadiya have investigated. Quizzes cover the Iron Age, Saxon, Viking and Roman periods. As a big thank you for following Defenders: Russia, you can download all three quizzes for free at <http://tompalmer.co.uk/defenders/>. Please see the History Quizzes section half way down the page.

World Cup word of the day

illuminated



Seth and Nadiya are trapped in a room with one of the most notorious and powerful men on the planet. The man has overheard them saying that they are going to kidnap his beloved dogs and now he has Nadiya and Seth at his mercy. Can our heroes escape this most dangerous of situations in the very last chapter of *Defenders: Russia*?

Лидс Юнайтед

‘I shall ask you question again,’ the Russian man barked. ‘You are planning to kidnap my dogs?’

He was standing now. Looming over them, his fists clenched. And, although he was neither a tall man or a large man, he looked strong, his arms like thick pieces of taut rope.

‘We weren’t going to go through with it,’ Seth said, his voice coming out embarrassingly high-pitched. ‘We changed our minds.’

‘No,’ the man raged. ‘You are here. Breaking into Kremlin. You have come through Romanov Tunnel. This is illegal in Russia. You have broken law.’

‘That what?’ Nadiya said. ‘What’s the tunnel called?’

The man looked at Nadiya for a moment as if she was mad asking him about the tunnel. Then he smiled.

‘The Romanov Tunnel. It is how the illustrious Romanov family moved secretly in and out of Moscow. How did you find tunnel? Tell me.’

‘Alexei Romanov showed it to us,’ Seth lied.

The man stared at Seth, uncomprehending. He opened his mouth to speak, but then his face began to change as he stared over the children’s heads.

At the same time, Seth noticed the shadow being cast ahead of him: his own shape. As if the light was moving in this underground room. He already had an inkling what was happening. It emboldened him.

‘Alexei Romanov,’ he said, louder, as the light behind him became brighter. ‘He is our guardian angel.’

Suddenly the man covered his eyes and fell to his knees. His dogs scrambled to cower behind him.

Then Seth turned round to see what he knew was there.

A bright light. And at the centre two figures.

One, he expected. Alexei Romanov.

The other, he did not. It was Laika, the space dog. His two Russian spectres.

‘Kneel, peasant!’ Alexei Romanov said.

The man kneeled without hesitating.

Then the ghost of Alexei Romanov spoke. ‘This coming Monday it will be 100 years since, I, Alexei Romanov and my family were murdered. I wish you to release these children in memory of the Romanov family. And Laika, here, wishes you to stop the slaughter of the city’s stray dogs.’

The man nodded vigorously just as his dogs came to lean in at his side. He no longer looked strong. He looked afraid, trembling.

‘Your excellence,’ he said. ‘I am honoured...’

‘Show that honour and grant me two favours,’ Alexei said.

‘Anything. Name it. I am your servant.’

Nadiya watched the scene with incredulity. She never imagined she would see this powerful man being *put in* his place.

‘I will let them go,’ the man gibbered. ‘I will stop the crews killing the dogs.’

Nadiya decided it was time to go. She had noticed that Alexei’s ghost was fading.. Who knew what that meant? She grabbed Seth and pulled him towards the door.

‘Come on,’ she insisted. ‘We’re going.’

Seth followed and looked back to see Alexei and Laika, their glow certainly fading now. The man kneeling before them, his eyes screwed tightly shut.

Then they headed to the tunnel.

As they left both of them made eye contact with Alexei and Laika. A warmth passed between them. An understanding. Seth put his hand out to Alexei and felt a ripple of electricity run through him

Then Nadiya shut the metallic door behind them and they walked back to their apartment by torch light.

‘I’m sorry,’ Seth said as they walked.

‘Sorry about what?’

‘Sorry for dragging you into these dangerous ghost history situations.’

‘Sorry? You shouldn’t be sorry. I want you to promise me something, actually.’

‘What?’

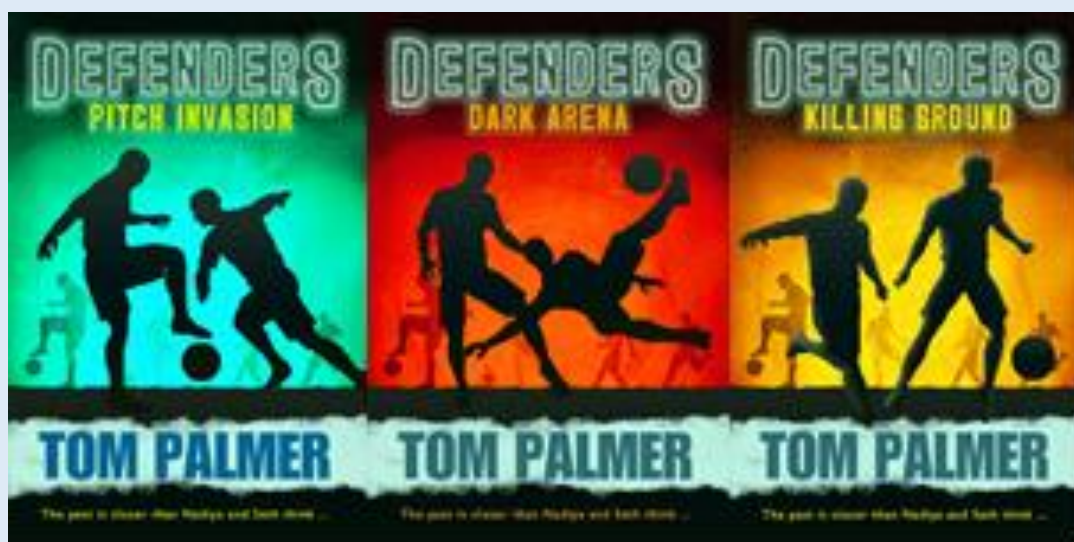
‘Next time you’ll take me with you.’

‘Really?’

‘Really.’

Seth smiled. ‘Okay,’ he said.

Nadiya and Seth will travel home to England, after watching the 3rd place play-off game, England against Belgium, on Saturday. Back to their last week of term at school, then the summer holidays. If you want to go on holiday with Seth and Nadiya this summer you can travel to Cornwall with them by reading *Defenders: Pitch Invasion*, or London, by reading *Defenders: Dark Arena*. And, if you’re staying at home, try *Defenders: Killing Ground*.



If you'd like a certificate for children who have read *Defenders: Russia*, please find one o
download at <http://tompalmer.co.uk/defenders>. A full version of *Defenders: Russia* will
be available very soon at <http://tompalmer.co.uk/free-reads>.

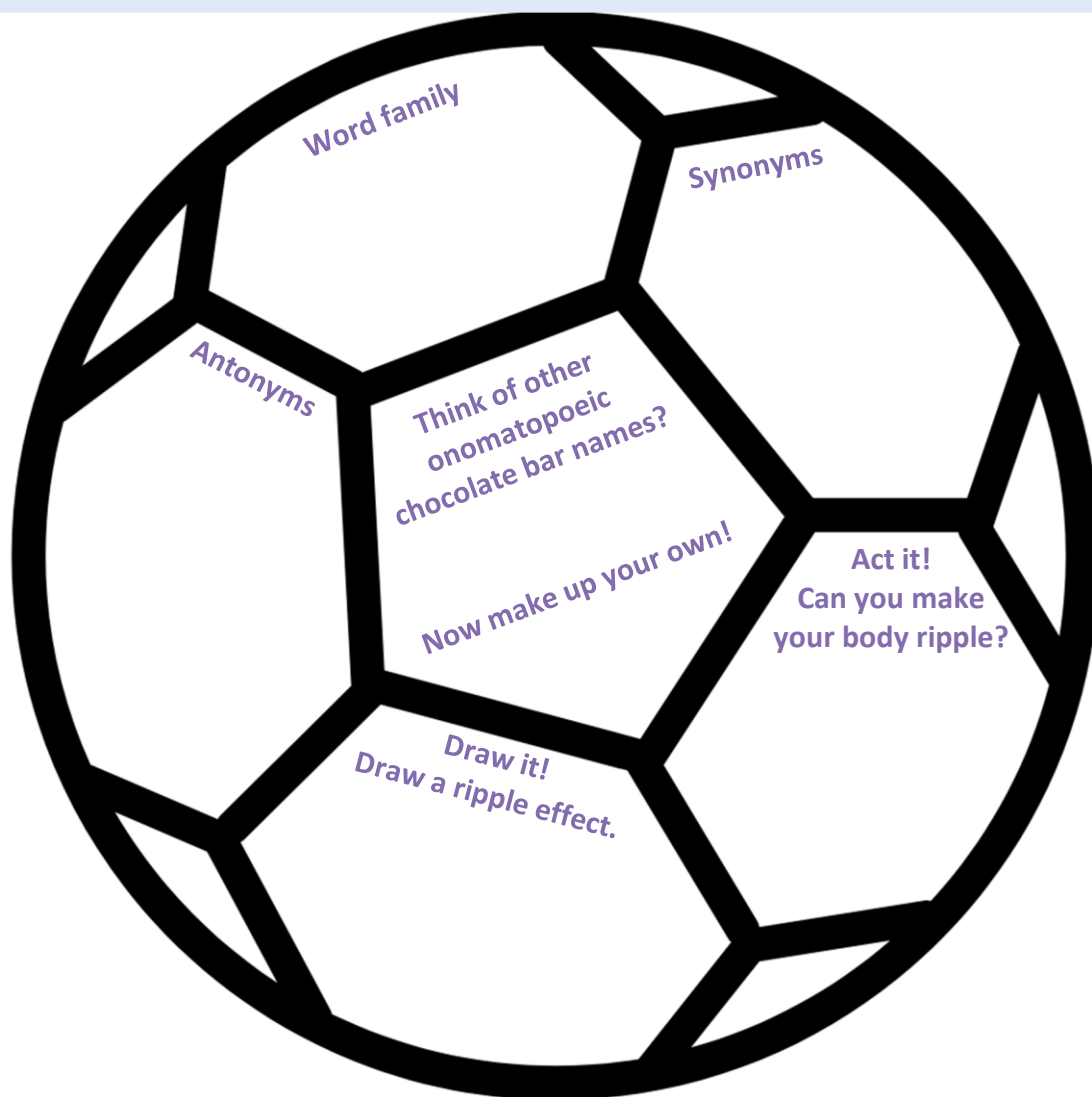
Thank you very much for following the *Defenders: Russia*. If you've had a teacher or
someone else reading it to you, please give them a round of applause now.

Finally, have a happy summer and thanks for reading *Defenders: Russia*. I hope you've
enjoyed it.

Tom

World Cup word of the day

ripple



Remember, even if you can't see the ripples, your actions have consequences.
Always be kind!