

SUDDEN DEATH

A **ROY** OF THE **ROVERS** NOVEL!

TOM
PALMER

Illustrated by
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ROY REALISED THAT something unusual was going on even before he and Lofty had made it through the sliding doors of the Tayir Stadium's main entrance. There was a terrible racket coming from within the stadium.

But what was it?

As they walked into the lavish reception area of the Tayir, with its huge murals, glistening trophy cabinet and the smell of freshly ground coffee, it sounded like a bus load of football fans was somewhere inside the stadium corridors – where fans never

went and were never supposed to go – and that they were chanting.

‘What’s going on?’ Lofty asked, glancing at Roy.

The pair were close. They’d been friends since childhood and were now key players for the English Championship football outfit, Melchester Rovers. Living their childhood dream of playing football for the team they loved.

Roy shrugged, making out he wasn’t bothered what the noise was. But he was bothered. Very bothered.

Because Roy Race liked things to be normal before a football match. He liked them to be the same, predictable, nothing off key. If anything *was* off key, he would begin to sense a creeping anxiety. The kind of anxiety that made it hard to concentrate on what you had to do.

Football.

Roy hated playing at Melchester Rovers' arch-rival's ground at the best of times. But here they were, at the Tayir Stadium, guests of Tynecaster United, while their own stadium – Mel Park – was being rebuilt after a fire.

And, what made it even worse, they had to be grateful for the honour of playing at the Tayir: Tynecaster United had offered them use of the stadium for free. It was a kind gesture that required the Melchester Rovers players to show respect and gratitude every time they set foot in there. Their enemies had been friends to them. How did you deal with that?

‘Hi, Jatinder. Hi, Rebecca.’

Roy greeted the two staff on reception. That was how you dealt with it, he thought. Be friendly back. Be kind back. Make the world a nicer place.

Both receptionists waved at Roy, and made gestures that were difficult to interpret. Just then Roy noticed an extra security presence inside the stadium halls and corridors. Stewards everywhere. And still the roar of fans chanting.

Something was definitely up.



Roy and Lofty walked across the foyer of the reception area to the players' zone. Lofty opened the door so that he and Roy could access the changing rooms.

Now the noise hit them hard.

Chanting football fans. And inside. Definitely inside. Very close, too.

What was going on? Roy felt his unease growing. Things were not supposed to be like this.

Outside, moments before, Roy and Lofty had been enjoying a Tuesday evening in August. Warm air. Bright skies. Birds tweeting. Great preparation for the first cup tie of the season. Melchester Rovers had a home draw in the first round of the League Cup, the knockout competition open to teams in the Premier League, Championship, and Leagues One and Two.

The draw was good news for them. They

didn't have to go on a long bus journey or stay in a hotel, away from the familiarity of their own beds. And – in theory – they had the home advantage.

Except it wasn't really a home game because it wasn't at Mel Park.

But, even so, it shouldn't matter what stadium they were playing the game in. Melchester could not have had an easier draw. Crowley Harriers were just up from the Conference – after fifty years of non-league football – and in Division Two for the first time in their history. They were still semi-professional, with most of their players having other jobs. One was a postman. Another was an accountant. One was even a head teacher.

Rovers should win this one easily. Roy Race knew it and had known it all day. But all of the confidence Roy had been feeling was bleeding away now. The chaos. The mayhem.

Something was not right.

Lofty swore as the noise – and smell – of fifty or more football fans came wafting down the corridor. Loud and raucous. It reminded Roy of that gust of stale air that hits you when you're in the London Underground on a hot summer's day and a train rushes through the station. Sweaty and human.

He frowned. Roy needed routine. Not this. He needed to arrive at the stadium early. To sit in the changing rooms and listen to some music. To chat and smile with his teammates. To warm up in front of the gathering fans. Then a team talk from the Melchester Rovers boss, Kevin 'Mighty' Mouse.

Roy had enough on his plate with how things were at home. He didn't need other things to unsettle him.

Home. Home was hard. And it had been for three years.

Roy's dad was ill. He had a brain tumour. He could hardly speak anymore and was partially paralysed, along with other complications that meant Roy needed to be a carer for his dad, as well as a son. But Roy was happy with that. He could handle it. And he had been handling it for three years. It was just that things seemed to be getting worse recently.

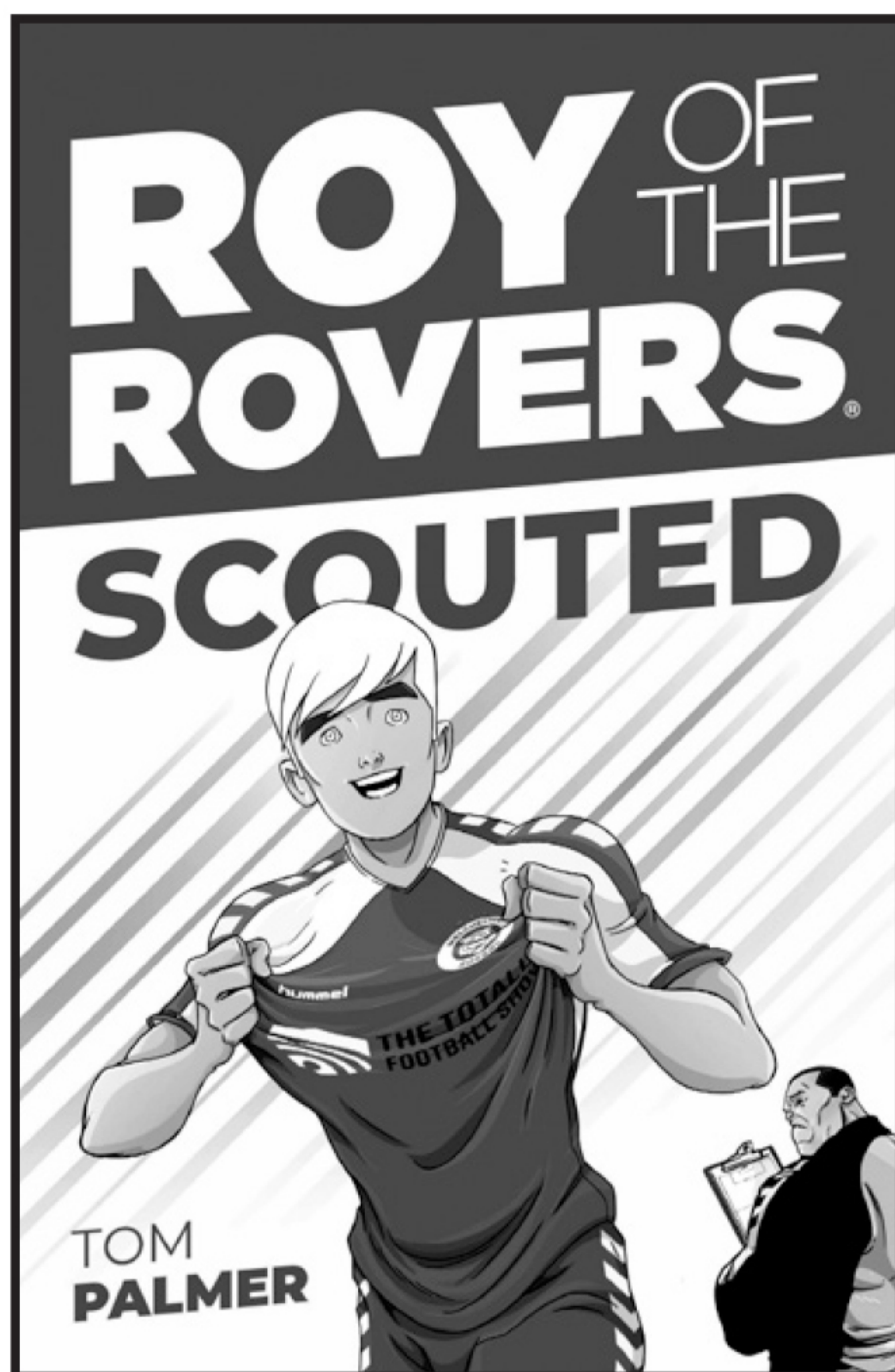
Dad was becoming more confused. He wasn't able to move his body like he used to. He would stare into space. It was kind of like – sometimes – he wasn't there.

That was why Roy kept work and family separate. As long as things were steady at the club Roy could keep his tensions about his dad buried. It was like his job as a footballer was a bubble. Safe and airtight from the rest of his life.

Now that bubble was about to burst. Unless Roy worked out what was going on.

ILLUSTRATED FICTION

SEASON 1



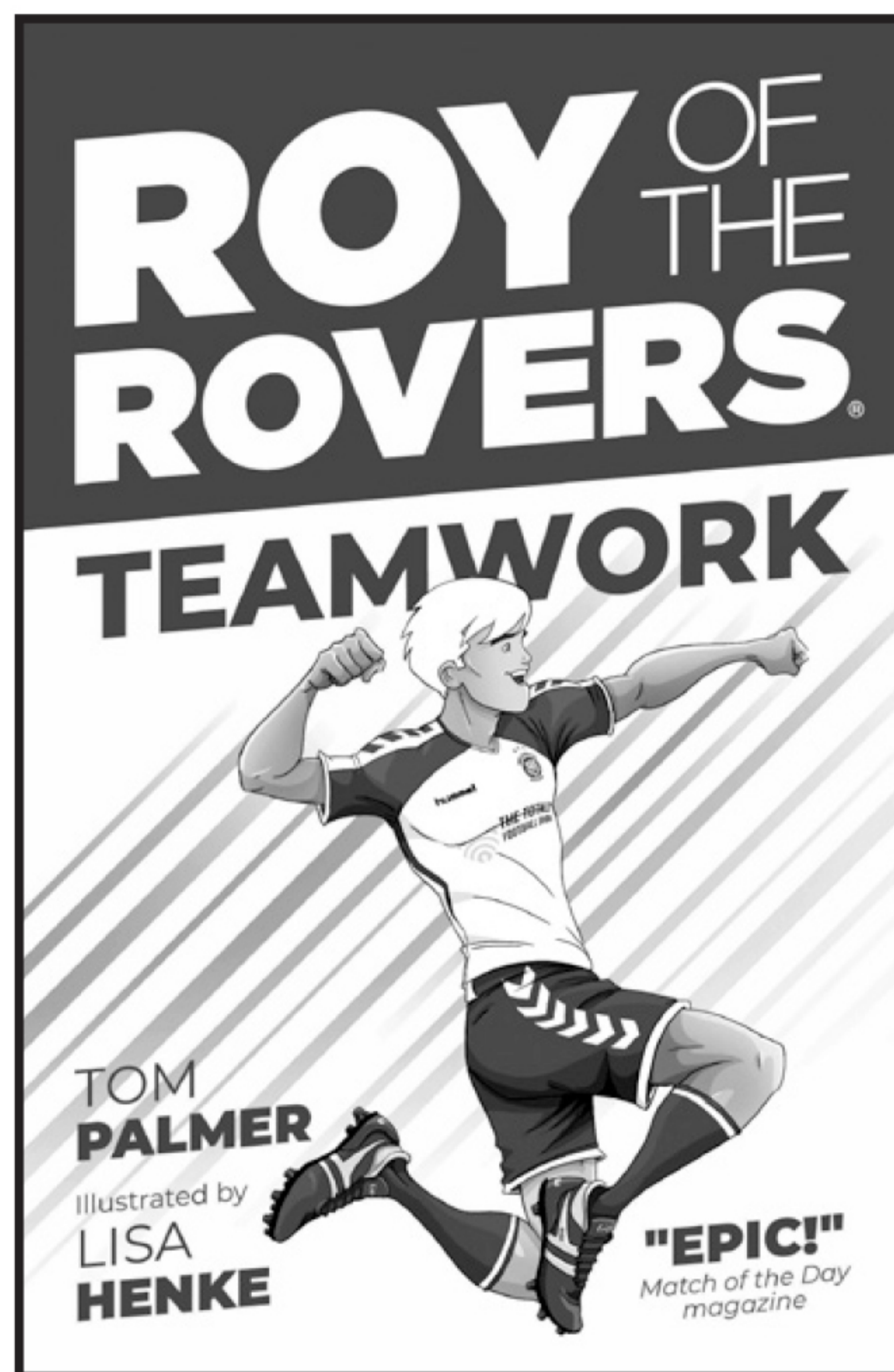
SCOUTED

Author: Tom Palmer
Illustrator: Lisa Henke

ISBN: 978-1-78108-698-8

Roy Race is the most talented striker in Melchester – but is he good enough to catch the eye of the Melchester Rovers scouts?

READ? ☐



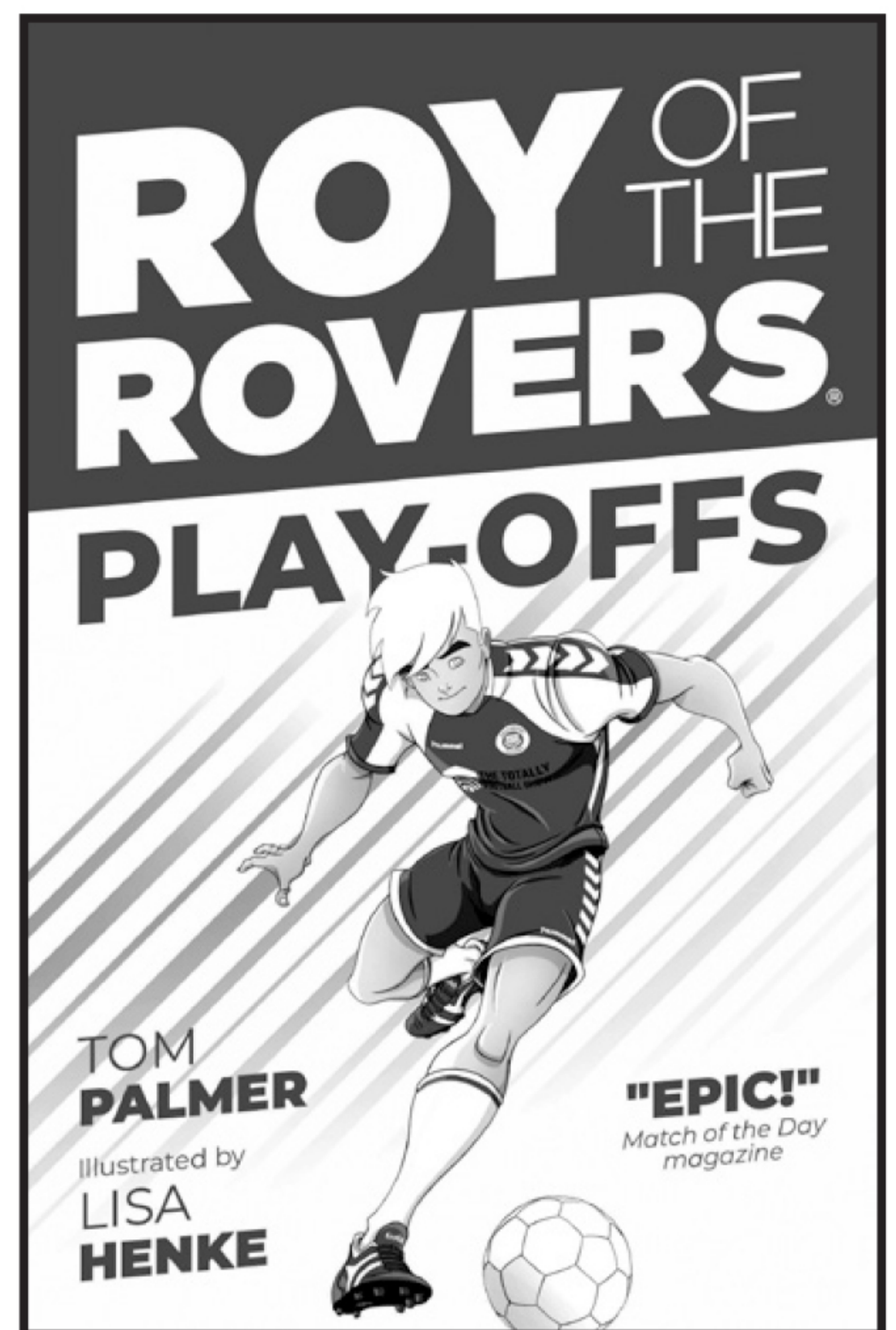
TEAMWORK

Author: Tom Palmer
Illustrator: Lisa Henke

ISBN: 978-1-78108-707-7

Life gets tricky for Roy as he adjusts to life in the spotlight. Fortune and glory await, but can Roy juggle football, fame and family?

READ? ☐



PLAY-OFFS

Author: Tom Palmer
Illustrator: Lisa Henke

ISBN: 978-1-78108-722-0

Crunch time for Rovers: the end of the season is here, the club is in deep trouble, and it's down to Roy to bring a bit of hope back to the Melchester faithful.

READ? ☐

ILLUSTRATED FICTION

SEASON 2



ON TOUR

Author: Tom Palmer
Illustrator: Dan Cornwell

ISBN: 978-1-78108-685-8

Roy Race is living the dream. But something strange is afoot, and as Rovers head off on a preseason tour, Roy is treated differently, and kept apart from the team. What's going on?

READ? ☐



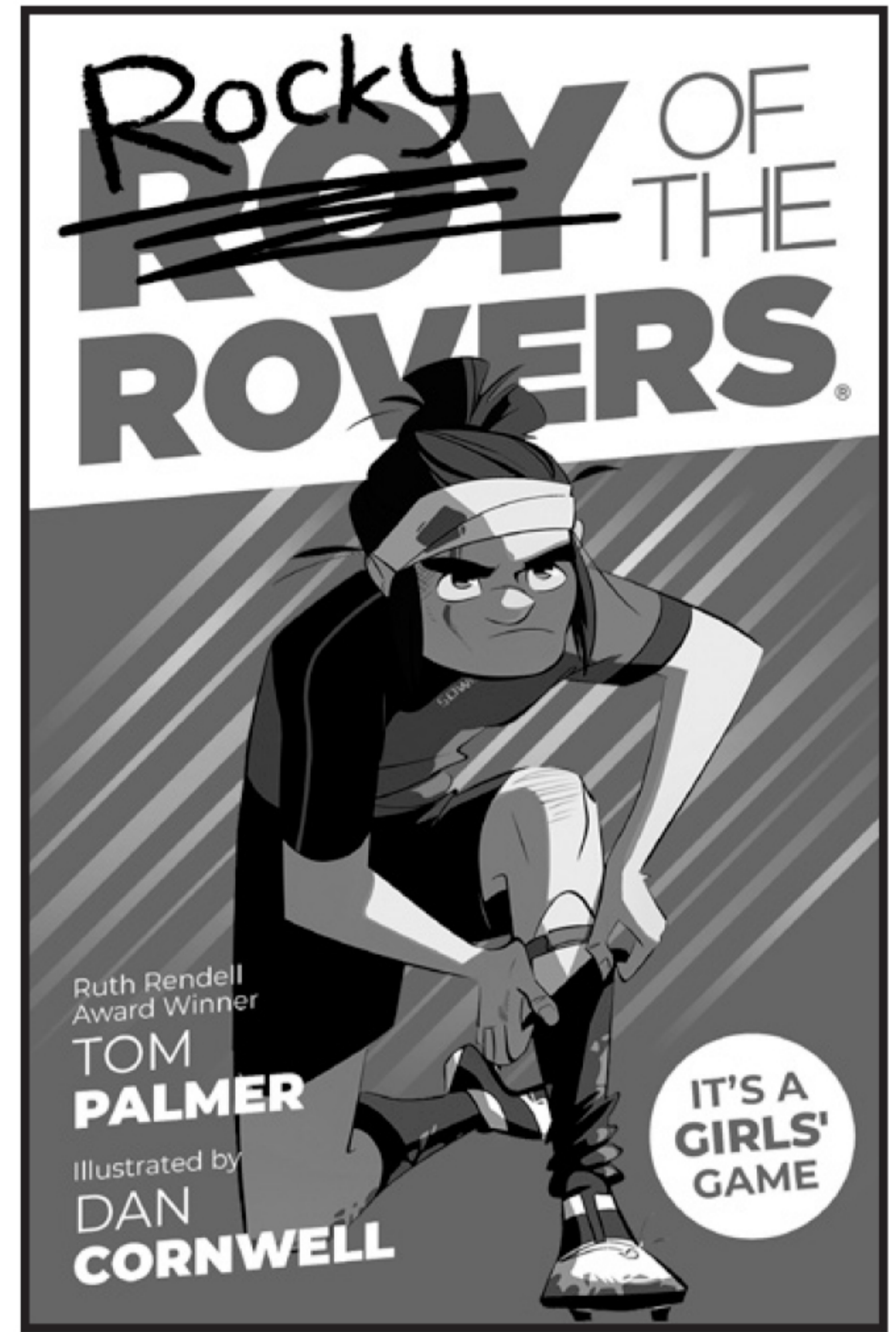
FROM THE ASHES

Author: Tom Palmer
Illustrator: Dan Cornwell

ISBN: 978-1-78108-783-1

Mel Park lies in ruins. Dodgy backroom deals brought Rovers low, and now Roy is determined to lift it out of the mess it's in. But he might have to break a few rules to do it...

READ? ☐



ROCKY

Author: Tom Palmer
Illustrator: Dan Cornwell

ISBN: 978-1-78108-826-5

Rocky's sick of everyone knowing her through Roy. It's time to find her own way as a person and a player and she's going to need all her grit and determination to do it...

READ? ☐