

# Defenders: Russia – chapter 7

A live World Cup story by Tom Palmer

## Note to teachers

This chapter is based on accurate accounts of some of the people who testified later to being in the Romanov house that night. That includes some of the dialogue.

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 check it is right for everyone.

Thanks for reading this with the children. And for your kind emails and tweets.

**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 Fabergé egg, so that Seth can hide it in 1918 to recover it in 2018. Seth is terrified but, also determined to help Alexei, because that is the only way to ensure the safety of his dog, Rosa.**

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## Семь

Standing outside the smartly decorated house in Yekaterinburg, Seth couldn't believe he was back in 1918 Russia, watching the last Tsar of Russia and his family walking to their execution. But here he was. Within a mile of where, in 2018, one of the World Cup stadiums was hosting matches.

Before Seth had left Alexei, the Russian boy told him that once he had recovered Rosa and the hidden Fabergé Egg, he could return home by tugging firmly once on Rosa's collar. Alexei also insisted that Seth promise he would not to take the egg back to the UK with him.

He didn't say why.

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‘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 ushered his family to do as they were told.

Seth remembered the name of the bearded man. Yurovsky. And he knew that Yurovsky was to be the chief executioner of the Romanovs.

The Tsar was now 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 as he carried him.

Ahead of them, Alexei’s mother, Alexandra, walked shakily. She was guided by her daughters, including Anastasia. All of the females’ dresses 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. Nadiya had told him that too.

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

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

Seth didn’t really know if the Russian royal family had been kind rulers or not, but he *did* know that, right now, he felt sorry for them – a mum, dad and their children – who were being treated so badly.

He followed down the stairs as the Romanovs were led into a cellar smaller than your school classroom, with only one window, 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 dressed in black stood by the guns.

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

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

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 Romanovs 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 12 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 peeped in horror 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 them, but Seth noticed the two women in black dresses glance around in his direction. Was that just a coincidence? Or not?

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 Fabergé egg. Gold and blue. It had rolled to the side, away from where everyone in the room was looking. Seth couldn’t save Alexei, but he could retrieve his egg for him. He moved covertly 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 Fabergé 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 Fabergé 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 Fabergé 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 am on Monday 25 June. The storyline will reconnect with the World Cup a little more from now on. Thank you for reading. Have a nice weekend.**

World Cup word of the day

# Automobiles

