

Seth is being haunted by a strange Russian boy via his television. And Nadiya thinks she knows who the boy is: Alexei Romanov, the former heir to the Russian throne, murdered with his family in 1918. The boy has threatened that England will lose to Tunisia unless Seth can discover where his precious ornamental egg is. Has Nadiya found out enough to satisfy the mysterious boy?

This chapter is dedicated to Harry Kane.

Четыре

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. It 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 I 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 goal 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 7am to 7pm 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 am 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

