



Changing life stories

# Defenders: Russia – chapter one

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 14 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. Email [admin@tompalmer.co.uk](mailto:admin@tompalmer.co.uk) to register for a reminder when the next chapter is live.

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](http://www.tompalmer.co.uk/defenders).

## ОДИН

It was Thursday 14 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.

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 St. Petersburg, 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.

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Suddenly, a loud knock at the door. Rosa was 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 4pm 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 Defenders: Russia will be published before 7am on Friday 15 June.**

World Cup word of the day

# Gesticulate

