

# Defenders: Russia – chapter 17

A live World Cup story by Tom Palmer

**Has Seth just witnessed his best friend, Nadiya, fall to her death whilst attempting to recover Alexei Romanov’s Fabergé 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 17 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.

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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 Fabergé 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 suggested.

Nadiya placed the Fabergé egg on the top of the tomb that 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 had 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 Fabergé egg faded away too. Then it was gone. And the Romanovs 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](mailto:vote@tompalmer.co.uk) with your preferred option in the subject line. Please choose Option I or Option II. Voting will be open from 7am to 11.59pm British Summer Time on Friday 6 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 7.30am on Monday 9 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. Good luck to England on Saturday!

World Cup word of the day

# reunited

