

# Defenders: Russia – chapter 19

A live World Cup story by Tom Palmer

**Just like the England football team, Seth and Nadiya are enjoying an unexpected extra week in Russia. They're staying in a fancy apartment as guests of a mystery benefactor. But why has a dog called Laika followed Seth all the way from St Petersburg to talk to him?**

## Восемнадцать

A cold wind was blowing across Red Square, Moscow.

Trying to comprehend that he was talking to a ghost dog, Seth looked around the square. The high walls of the Kremlin. The other magnificent buildings, most notably the spectacular spiral towers of St Basil's Cathedral.

In the shadows between the buildings Seth saw more dogs. Just small groups of four or five, standing or sitting, lying down, but all of them wary and watching. He also saw a pair of soldiers standing about 50 metres away from him. Machine guns slung casually from their shoulders. One soldier flashed Seth a warning glare as he stood by the eternal flame, but now the pair were deep in conversation again.

Seth looked back at Laika, the talking dog.

'Russia has many dogs,' Laika told him in broken English. 'Many live with humans. Like you, with your dog, Rosa. And many live wild in the city streets. Here in Moscow there used to be thousands of the wild city dogs. Now, only hundreds.'

Seth frowned, checking over his shoulder to confirm that his mum and Nadiya were waiting at a distance, looking out for him, but not interfering. When Seth looked back into Laika's deep brown eyes he remembered how his dog, Rosa, would look at him like that, almost as if she was trying to hypnotise him. It seemed the same was happening now.

'Why are there so few dogs now?' Seth asked. 'Why hundreds, not thousands?'

'Before every football game, the people from inside here,' Laika glanced at the forbidding walls of the Kremlin. 'They come and they finish them.'

'Finish?' Seth gasped. 'You mean kill them?'

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‘Yes,’ Laika said. ‘With poison. Terrible poisons. They do not want foreign football fans to see wild city dogs.’

‘But why?’ Seth asked.

‘I don’t know,’ Laika said. ‘How could anyone poison dogs? How could anyone poison people? It’s a question for today.’

Seth heard a cough from Nadiya. He looked around him and noticed the pair of soldiers were watching him more closely now.

‘Please,’ Laika said ‘Please help them. You can save them. Like you have saved others. There are people who can help us. Let me tell you how you can help.’

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Back at their lavish Moscow apartment, after mum had gone to bed, Seth and Nadiya stayed up to work. Nadiya fired up her laptop and together they began.

‘So,’ Nadiya said, trying to conceal her incredulity. ‘This invisible talking dog? Exactly what did it say to you again?’

Seth narrowed his eyes. ‘You don’t believe me?’

Nadiya tried to look serious. ‘Sadly, I do. You don’t have to persuade me of anything after the last two weeks.’

‘Good,’ Seth said. ‘Laika said some people were trying to kill stray dogs. And that other people were trying to save them. Organisations who help animals. We need to find out more before we decide what to do.’

Seth and Nadiya spent half the night online. Researching. Reading. Finding out the things they needed to know, the things that would help them decide what they should do.

They found out about three things that they thought would be helpful.

One. That stray dogs in Russian World Cup host cities were being killed by the government to make the host cities look nicer to visitors. The culls happened the nights before each game.

Two. There were groups of Russian underground animal rights activists who were trying to save the dogs, by making films of what was happening to the dogs and showing them on social media.

Three. Information about Laika.

'Seth?'

'What?' Seth said returning from the apartment kitchen with two glasses of freshly squeezed orange juice.

'I've found out something about your dog.'

'Go on.'

Nadiya turned her laptop round to show Seth a photo of a medium sized dog that looked to him like it had a bit of husky in it.

'That's her,' Seth gasped.

'She's called Laika,' Nadiya told him. 'She was a space dog?'

'A what?'

Nadiya explained that Laika had lived in the 1950s and had been the first living creature sent into space. There was even a statue to honour her. Not that she had much choice in the matter.

'And she's haunting me?' Seth mused.

The last thing they did before going to their bedrooms last night was send an email offering to help the animal rights organisation called *For Laika* who were trying to stop the poisoning of the dogs.

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Breakfast was served in the apartment dining room at nine.

Seth, his mum and Nadiya were attended to by the waiting staff. They had sliced melon, chocolate filled breads and Seth's mum tried caviar on small pancakes called blini.

'How is it?' Nadiya asked.

'Mmmm,' Seth's mum replied.

Nadiya's phone pinged as she and Seth were finishing their rich hot chocolates at the end of the meal. Seth's mum had gone for a walk into Moscow.

Nadiya checked her phone, frowned, and then put her cup down.

'Is it them?' Seth asked.

'Yeah. The animal rights people.'

'What did they say?'

Nadiya breathed out heavily. 'They want to meet us,' she said. 'They say that we're the perfect people to help them save the dogs.'

'When?'

'Tomorrow.'

'But it's England v Croatia tomorrow.'

'Tomorrow morning. Before the match. There's a sculpture park on the other side of the river. They say to meet them there. They say they have something we can use.'

'What does that mean?'

Nadiya shrugged.

Seth closed his eyes. A part of him wanted to say no to all this, to just go to the semi-final and enjoy the game. No more Moscow madness. But another part of him remembered the eyes of Laika and how she had looked into him just like Rosa would. And he knew they had no choice but to do what the ghost dog of Red Square asked.

Tomorrow they would meet these animal rights people.

Tomorrow they would try to help the dogs.

Then they would go to watch England play Croatia for a place in the World Cup final.

**What is it that the animal rights people want Seth and Nadiya to do? Are our two heroes right to want to help? What could possibly go wrong?**

**Chapter 20 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published at**

**<https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/defenders-russia-world-cup-2018-football-story/>**

**before 7.30am on Wednesday 11 July.**

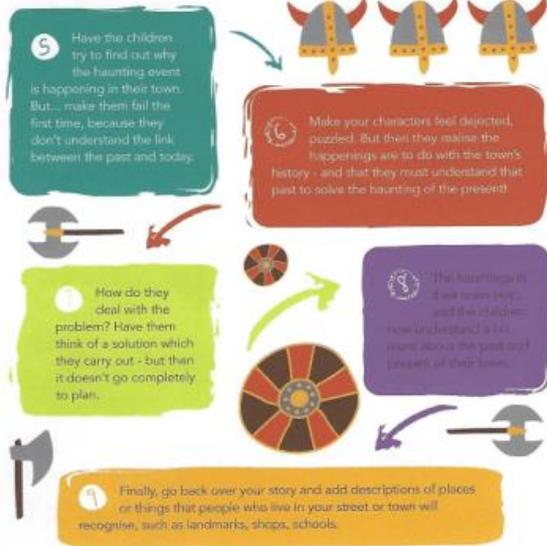
**You can access free posters, videos and other literacy resources about Tom's *Defenders* series at <http://tompalmer.co.uk/defenders-resources/>. Linking to the KS2 history topics of the Iron Age, Roman Britain, the Anglo Saxons and the Vikings.**

## HAUNTED BY THE PAST!

By Tom Palmer

My new book – *Defenders: Killing Ground* – is set on the street where I now live. It's about a fictional boy and a girl who live on that street and how – one day – they see ghosts of people who used to live there a long time before: Anglo Saxons being attacked by Viking invaders! The children realise that echoes of the Viking attack are resonating and causing problems in their town today, so they set out to try to understand the past to help them solve the hauntings of the present.

Would you like to write a history ghost story set on your street? Read on, and follow my ten point plan on how to write one.



Of course, you don't have to stick to this plan - because the chances are you'll have better ideas once you get going!



### About the Author

Tom Palmer will be running events in Telford on June 20th and Peterborough on June 27th with his books *Over the Line* (Barrington Stoke, £6.99) and *Wings: Flyboy* (Barrington Stoke, £5.99). His new book, *Defenders: Killing Ground* (Barrington Stoke, £6.99) is out in June.