

Defenders: Russia – chapter 21

A live World Cup story by Tom Palmer

Nadiya and Seth are all set to tunnel into the Kremlin and kidnap a very powerful man's dogs. You might know who the powerful man in question is. And you might be right. But sometimes it is best not to name people. Just in case. The children hope that their dangerous mission will help to prevent the poisoning of the remaining stray dogs in Moscow before the World Cup final on Sunday. But – before all that – the children have a football match to watch. England v Croatia. The semi-final of the World Cup.

Двадцать один

Seth and Nadiya trudged away from the Luzhniki Stadium with Seth's mum.

The final score: Croatia 2 England 1. At Extra Time.

Heart breaking.

Seth watched England fans around him, heads down. The Croatia fans were jubilant.

It was tough to take. Seth wanted to cry, thinking of all the classrooms in England the next morning, all the school halls, full of children feeling a bit sad. But maybe proud, he thought. They'll feel proud of the England team too.

He looked at Nadiya to see that she also looked close to tears. Seth put his arm round her.

'You okay?' he asked.

Nadiya nodded. 'It's just... it's just...' she paused. 'I wanted football to come home.'

The morning after Seth and Nadiya went to the basement of their Moscow apartment, following the instructions of the animal rights activists, trying to forget the cloud of gloom that seemed to be hanging over them. At the back of a disused larder they found a doorway with a polished metal door. It was too small to walk through, so they had to squat down to enter the tunnel.

This was it.

Another dangerous mission.

The tunnel could not have been a greater contrast to the stadium they had been in the night before.

It was dark and silent.

The air was chilly.

They were alone.

Nadiya shuddered. It reminded her of the tomb she'd been trapped in earlier that month. She flicked on her torch quickly. Its beam illuminated the tunnel, bricks lining the way ahead 700 metres under Red Square.

'Is it safe?' Seth asked.

Nadiya shrugged. 'It might not be.'

'I keep thinking about those boys in Thailand who got trapped.'

Nadiya smiled. 'Don't worry,' she said. 'They're all safe now. Rescued! Isn't it wonderful?'

Seth nodded.

The two children made their way soundlessly through the tunnel without speaking. The beam picking out the 50 metres ahead of them, the stone floor and the bare brickwork arching over them.

There were three reasons for not speaking.

Firstly, that they did not want to give themselves away.

Secondly, that they wanted to listen. They knew this was a dangerous mission.

Breaking into the Kremlin to kidnap a powerful man's dogs? It was madness.

Deep down both children were having second thoughts. Was it right to kidnap dogs? Even if they belonged to a tyrant, the dogs might still be distressed.

That was the third reason they tacitly chose not to share their concerns. If one of them doubted their mission then the whole thing could go catastrophically wrong.

When the torchlight reflected back at Nadiya and Seth they knew they had reached the end.

Ahead was a polished metal door. Just like the one at the other end of the tunnel.

Nadiya put her ear to the door and listened. She heard a single sharp bark. Then silence.

‘I heard a dog,’ she said. ‘This is the place.’

‘Shall we go in?’

Nadiya frowned. She was frightened now. What were they doing? And why? To save hundreds of dogs from being killed, she told herself. Then she turned to Seth and said a firm ‘Yes.’

Seth pushed the door gently. The room they were entering was ill-lit. But it was light enough to see three pairs of eyes gazing up at them.

‘Hello doggies,’ Nadiya said in a soft voice.

One of the dogs’ tails thumped on the floor. A good sign.

Then, without a moment to prepare themselves, the three dogs were on top of them. Leaping from their blankets, mouths open, teeth bared. But only in playfulness. Seth and Nadiya joined the trio of dogs in their insane play fight. It was hard not to laugh. Seth counted three dogs, but sensed another dog was in the room too as they played. It was in the corner where it was too dark to see. Seth assumed that dog was old and didn’t like to play fight and he forgot about it. Or it was a ghost dog. He didn’t really have time to think about it.

During a break in the dog-wrestling, Seth looked at Nadiya, grinning and, to the sound of panting, said: ‘I can’t do this.’

‘Do what?’

‘Kidnap these dogs. It’s not right. They’ll be scared. They’re just dogs.’

Nadiya beamed. ‘I am so glad you said that. I was thinking it too. We can’t come and kidnap someone’s dogs.’

‘Kidnap?’ a voice said. With a strong Russian accent.

Seth’s heart stopped. He peered into the dark corner of the room. To where he had seen what he thought was a fourth dog.

But it was no dog.

It was a man.

And a very familiar face.

Nadiya and Seth had seen him on the television. Seth had seen him in person at the opening game of the World Cup finals all those weeks ago.

‘I asked you question,’ the man demanded, his voice heavy with menace. ‘You are planning to kidnap my dogs?’

Seth and Nadiya are trapped in a room with one of the most powerful men in the world. The disappointment at the defeat to Croatia is the least of their worries now. They are close to helpless. Or is there someone on hand to return a favour to our two heroes?

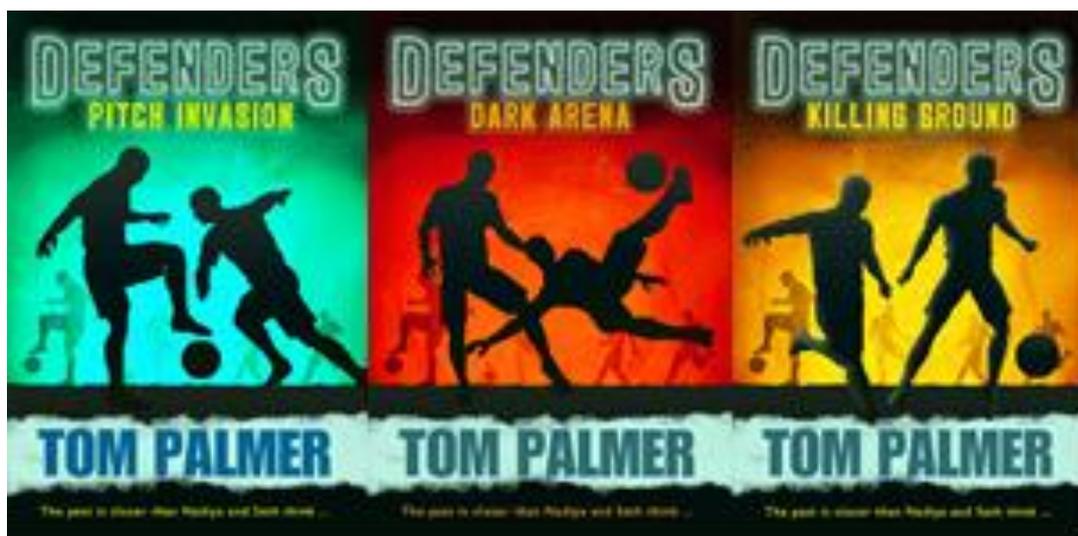
Chapter 22 of *Defenders: Russia* will be published at

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

before 7.30am on Friday 13 July.

It will be the final episode of Nadiya and Seth’s adventure.

Each of the *Defenders* books – below – features a quiz about the historical period that Seth and Nadiya have investigated. Quizzes cover the Iron Age, Saxon, Viking and Roman periods. As a big thank you for following *Defenders: Russia*, you can download all three quizzes for free at <http://tompalmer.co.uk/defenders/>. Please see the History Quizzes section half way down the page.



World Cup word of the day

Illuminated

