



Euro 2020: A Ghost Story by Tom Palmer

Chapter Four

Rocky and Roy are heading to Baku with the help of the friendly football ghost, Toby Morton. The sister and brother duo are looking forward to the trip, but they will be on the lookout for Carlos Villar – the unfriendly football ghost – who says he plans to dump Wales out of the Euros. But what could he do? Really? And can the two Race children stop him before it's too late?

Rocky and Roy arrived at Mel Park early on Wednesday. They wanted to reach Baku in good time, so that they could check out what was happening in the area surrounding the stadium where the Wales-Turkey game would be played. To be ready for anything and everything that Carlos Villar might be planning.

As before, they walked up the steps in Mel Park stadium stands to find themselves surrounded by the now familiar smoke and crackling of wooden rattles. They knew now that these smells and sounds would transport them to the football stadium in Baku.

But this time they did not arrive in a stadium. Toby Morton delivered them to a long, paved promenade alongside a sparkling blue body of water. The Caspian Sea. It looked amazing.

‘Wow,’ Roy and Rocky said in tandem.

The siblings spent the day looking round Baku. Admiring buildings, old and new. Amazing sculptures. And people watching, too. Enjoying a foreign city as the sun beat down on them. Everywhere they went there were football fans in red. But the red of Turkey, not the red of Wales.

They found a postcard seller at the huge Baku Central Station, with a picture that would show Dad how lovely the old town was in Baku.



'I love it that Dad's enjoying these postcards,' Rocky said.

Roy nodded. 'We have to try to get him one from each of the EURO venues.'

'A hundred per cent,' Rocky said.

Hearing them in conversation, the lady in the shop was keen to speak English with them, but Roy was careful to say *Sa gol* when she handed him the postcard and stamp in a small decorated paper bag.

For lunch they sat in a café packed with tall plants that created shade between the tables. They were glad to be out of the midday heat. The temperature was over 30 degrees. Blistering.

Because of the foliage, neither of them noticed the figure sat in the shadows, on the other side of an open window just inside the bar. A man with dark hair. A moustache. A strange light in the air around him.

'So I had an idea,' Rocky said after their Qutabs were brought to the table. Qutabs are lovely pancakes stuffed with meat and vegetables, a speciality in Baku. Rocky went on after swallowing her first mouthful. 'What if we take Dad to the England-Scotland game? He's too ill to travel to a game, like by car or train. But with Toby Morton's help? Ghostpower...'

'Yes,' Roy said. 'Let's.'

As they tucked into their Qutabs, neither of them saw the moustachioed man in the café's face light up, nor his hands rubbing together enthusiastically. He

had heard their plan for Friday night. Never had a man looked more pleased at the results of his eavesdropping.

The Baku stadium was in full shadow by kick off, but it was still warm on the pitch. There was heat in the stands as well, with thousands of Turkish fans chanting and singing. They seemed certain their team would beat Wales. Rocky thought different. She predicted a 2-0 win to Wales. Roy said it would be a draw as he glanced at the Wales fans from the front of the main stand.

‘I can hear the Wales fans above the Turks. And there’s only 400 Welsh.’

When the Welsh national anthem was played Roy noticed the hairs on his arms were standing on end. ‘It’s a good song,’ he said, surprised a national anthem could make him react like that.

It was a good performance, too. A great one by Wales. They were all over Turkey, their key players – Bale and James and Ramsey – all on top form.

But Roy and Rocky had seen nothing suspicious that could attribute to the dastardly villain, Carlos Villar, like during Scotland vs the Czech Republic, when he changed the trajectory of the ball. Nothing on the pitch, or off it.

Roy had spotted strange shadows near the TV cameras on the pitch side. But he dismissed it as the heat of the day. Then, half way through the first half Roy received a text from Lofty back in Melchester.

‘The TV feed is all messed up,’ Lofty told them.

‘What?’ Roy replied.

‘Cameras going off and on. Strange disruption.’

Roy looked at Rocky.

‘Villar could be messing with the TV feed,’ Rocky said. ‘Maybe.’

They ran to the foot of the stand to see cables had been pulled out round the back of the camera women. ‘Your wires,’ Rocky shouted. ‘They’ve come loose.’

One camerawoman looked and put a thumb up, before plugging them back in.

‘Villar did that,’ Roy claimed. ‘I saw something. A swirl of something. You know... like the first time we saw him.’

Just as they were speaking there was a roar from the far end of the pitch. Aaron Ramsey was running from the goal, his arms in the air.

‘Yessss,’ Rocky said. ‘Wales have scored. 1-0.’

Roy beamed. ‘If all Villar can do to mess with Wales is unplug a few wires, I think we don’t have much to worry about.’

Rocky laughed. ‘We can relax now and enjoy the football.’

But just a few metres away Carlos Villar squatted, disguised as a steward. He had heard every word the two children had uttered.

‘That’s what I want you to think,’ he smirked. ‘You’ll be off guard on Friday at Wembley. And that means I get to meet your Daddy and take revenge for what Melchester Rovers fans did to me all those years ago.’

The game ended 2-0 to Wales.

‘As I predicted,’ Rocky told her brother.

They left Baku in the dark. But – when they got back home to Melchester – it was still light. Three hours behind Baku on the World Clock.

As they walked home through their second sunset of the day, Rocky turned to her brother. ‘I can’t wait to tell Dad about the match. Do you think he’ll come?’

‘If Mum lets us,’ Roy said. ‘So yeah. No problem. What a time we’re going to have on Friday. Just in time for Fathers’ Day. This will show him what he means to us.’

There was a strange echo on the wind. Both of them heard it, but neither remarked on it.

Show them... it went. I’ll show them...

Rocky and Roy have a false sense of safety now, believing that Carlos Villar cannot get to them. But they are wrong. Very wrong. They have no idea how much danger they are putting their dad in, having him anywhere near such a dangerous individual.

Thank you for reading. Chapter 5 will be published at 7.30 a.m. on Monday 21st June and will feature the Scotland vs England match.