



Foul Play: The World Cup Mystery

A classroom read by Tom Palmer

Episode 2

(June 8th)

Danny relaxed once he and his dad were through passport control. He always felt weird at airports.

Men with machine guns. Massive scanner devices. The tension of queues and people with giant bags. None of it put him at ease.

But he was happy when he saw the TV screen in one of the airport lounges. They were at Manchester airport. Heading for Amsterdam, en route to South Africa.

‘How long to take off?’ he asked his dad.

‘Ages,’ his dad replied. ‘Two hours.’

‘Great. The England match is on a big screen over there. The Platinum Stars match.’

‘Can we get a coffee?’ Dad asked.

‘Yes, there are tables,’ Danny said. ‘It’s just over to the left.’

Danny watched his dad nod, sunglasses slipping to the end of his nose. Then he let his dad take his arm and Danny led him across to the TV screen. Dad lifted his stick under his arm and let his son lead him. They were both at ease with the fact that Danny’s dad was blind.

Once they were sat down, with drinks and cakes sorted, Dad carried on with the argument he’d started in the taxi from home.

‘Who’s Capello playing up front?’ Dad asked.

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‘Crouch and Defoe,’ Danny answered.

‘Crouch? Why’s he not playing Heskey?’

‘Because Crouch is better,’ Danny said, smiling.

Then he watched his dad shake his head. Dad always did this. He thought he knew best. He was about to start going on and on about how Heskey was the best player because he worked well with Rooney. Danny knew it.

‘He’s got to play Heskey,’ Dad said. ‘Rooney works better off Heskey.’

‘No way,’ Danny said, gritting his teeth.

Dad laughed. ‘Even your friend, Anton, thinks Heskey is the better choice.’

‘Well, he’s wrong,’ Danny said.

‘Anton is wrong? Anton, who is one of the country’s best football journalists? And you know more than *he* does?’

Danny decided to say nothing. They’d had this argument so many times before, it didn’t seem worth it. And he had argued about it with Anton Holt too.

Danny knew Holt because they had worked together on the football crimes Danny had been involved with solving. And it was true Anton was a famous journalist. But Danny still thought Crouch was better than Heskey.

‘Well, we’ll ask him when he gets here,’ Dad said, smiling. ‘He can put you right.’

Danny still had nothing to say. So he looked outside – at the rain sweeping down from the hills. A plane was just coming into land and it sent up an enormous spray as it hit the tarmac of the runway.

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Several thousand miles south another plane was coming into land. But this time it was not coming down on tarmac, but on hard earth. A landing strip next to a ranch and a small lake, in the shadow of a range of mountains.

Once the plane had taxied to the side of the ranch, parking under a tarpaulin like you would park a car in England, a man climbed out. He pulled his coat round himself, shivering. Although this was Africa it was cold. He grimaced. It was like being back home in England.

The man pushed open the door of the ranch and headed directly towards a room to the right. It looked like an office.

His phone rang immediately.

‘Yes?’ he said, snatching the phone off the table.

‘Mr Gaw?’

‘Yes?’

‘I have some information for you.’

‘Yes?’ Mr Gaw’s voice was becoming impatient. The man who was reporting to him was a senior policeman. Mr Gaw paid him good money for that information. So he wanted it quickly.

‘You asked me to alert you if a certain journalist came into the UK.’

Mr Gaw said nothing. He poured himself a glass of water from a jug.

The voice at the other end of the phone went on. ‘The journalist, Anton Holt, has left Amsterdam for Johannesburg.’

Mr Gaw nodded. ‘Good,’ he said. Then, after pausing, asked ‘Are there any other English people on board?’

‘Let me check,’ the policeman said.

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Mr Gaw glared out of the window. He was glad to hear that Holt was coming to South Africa. They had some unfinished business. Holt – with the help of a boy – had stopped him making a lot of money.

Twice.

It was time for revenge. And Mr Gaw was going to take it.

‘Mr Gaw. I have two more names.’

‘Yes?’

‘A Mr Harte. And his son, Daniel.’

‘Danny Harte?’ Mr Gaw shouted, dropping his glass on the floor.

‘Yes, Daniel Harte.’

‘And what time do they land?’

‘In twelve hours,’ the policeman said. ‘At Jo-burg airport.’

Mr Gaw nodded. ‘Meet me there in *eleven* hours,’ he said. ‘And come prepared.’

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Danny, his dad and Anton Holt walked onto the plane at Manchester airport. Holt had arrived just in time, checking in late.

Half the people on board were wearing football shirts. Holland shirts. England shirts. France shirts.

Danny smiled. He never imagined he’d be going to a World Cup.

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The next time he walked on the ground it would be in Africa. Danny smiled. He couldn't wait to get off the plane.

Episode 3 will be published at 8 a.m. on Wednesday 9th June at www.literacytrust.org.uk/worldcup. Thank you for reading.

If you are enjoying this story, you can read more about the adventures of Danny Harte in Tom's *Foul Play* series, published by Puffin. The three books to date are *Foul Play*, *Dead Ball* and *Off Side*. Tom also writes the *Football Academy* series for Puffin. You can find out more about Tom and his books – and contact him – at www.tompalmer.co.uk.

(This story is being written every evening and uploaded each morning. Please accept that although every effort has been made not to have grammatical or spelling errors we cannot guarantee that there will be none.)

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