

Let the Games Begin – Day 3

With that Mr Andrews handed Freddy a luminous yellow football and a carrot.

At four o'clock on the Friday they gathered at Freddy and Wil's house, waiting for Mr Andrews to arrive. Jaz was studying the ball intently, a large book open at the word 'luminous' at his side.

'Hold it under the light, then turn the light off. What's supposed to happen is that the ball is phosphorescent'.

'HANG ON!', said Hardy predictably, *'foss for ressent? What does that mean?'*. Jaz read on for a few seconds.

'It means that the ball is painted in some special stuff that takes in light and then emits it again when it is dark. Absolutely fascinating.' He adjusted his glasses further down his nose so that he could focus better on what he was reading.

'So you're saying that when we turn the light off, the ball's going to glow in the dark. NO WAY!' said Clara in disbelief.

'Give it a few more minutes, you'll see. What else did he give you?'

Freddy handed Jaz the carrot. Even Jaz looked a bit quizzical as he turned the pages of his encyclopaedia to the section beginning with 'C'. He fingered the pages urgently as he searched for clues to the significance of the carrot.

'Aha, here it is!', and he read out,

'...During the second world war, various tricks were played on the enemy to cover up the fact that Britain had developed a system for seeing enemy planes in the dark – called radar. The Royal Air Force did not want the enemy to know this, so they invented stories, including one which said that pilots had been given cats' eyes so that they could see better in the dark, and another which said that pilots were being fed large quantities of carrots so that they could better see the enemy aircraft on dark nights...'

'So, he wants us to see better in the dark?', said Wil, *'why would we want to do that?'*

'Well, look outside, it is almost dark, and we are just going off training', Jaz replied.

'Hang on, though, read on...' said Freddy. Jaz read a bit further,

'...Both of these tricks were entirely untrue, although carrots do contain Vitamin A which is important in vision and bone growth...'

'I know a great trick, turn the lights off...quick!' said Hardy, just as JoJo was coming back from the kitchen. Hardy crept under the table with the ball, which, sure enough, was now emitting a ghostly green glow.

'Whoo..ooo...' went Hardy from under the table. The others covered their mouths to try to keep from

laughing.

'Oooh...oooh!' went JoJo, stepping back in fright.

'WHOO...OOO...OOO!' went Hardy, louder this time, slowly lifting the glowing ball out from behind the table, so that it looked like a ghostly sunrise set against the rest of the dark room.

'Ooo la la! Mama Mia! 'Elp me, 'elp me!' screamed JoJo, her hands pressed hard against her eyes, her little feet tottering up and down in alarm at the sight. With the others falling about laughing, Hardy lobbed the ball at her and she departed screaming (and cursing – in French) to answer the door to Mr Andrews.

They all trudged up the road to the park, each carrying at least one bag of the hundreds of carrots that Mr Andrews had brought with him. The sun had gone down an hour before, and night was falling.

At the ground, Mr Andrews gathered them around him, and started opening one of the bags.

'Now listen to me. Difficult game this weekend. Girls' team...' There was a whispered exclamation of *'Yessss!'* from the boys present.

Mr Andrews continued, *'when I was a lad, I would look up into the skies, and see the planes overhead...'*

'Mr Andrews, carrots don't really help you see in the dark,' interrupted Jaz, *'but they are very good for you anyway'.*

'Absolutely right, lad, just what I was going to say,' lied Mr Andrews, munching on a carrot, *'OK, let's get started'.*

The training session went surprisingly well considering they were unable to see the goals, the sidelines, or each other. Clara, Jaz, Freddy and Wil were on one side, dressed in bright orange bibs, with Michael, Alex, JoJo and Hardy, who all happened to be in dark blue tops, forming the other team. They were a strange sight to anyone passing by.

But after some minutes, their eyes got used to the light and they started to play some football.

After half an hour or so, most of the light had drained from the ball, and the game ended when Hardy fired a shot from halfway which nobody saw at all, even though it just trickled into Clara's goal. She kicked it away in disgust and Mr Andrews drew them together once more.

'So, my friends, any questions?'

Michael spoke, quietly,

'Mr Andrews, why are we out in the pitch dark, playing football with a luminous ball?'

'Ah, I'm glad you asked me that question Michael. You see, tomorrow, you're playing another difficult

team. I don't know much about them, but they're all girls, and I'm not at all sure about their manager. Lives down the road here at number 23. Now I've met some funny ladies in my time (especially old Rita, back in '53 I think it was), but this one actually frightens me a bit. Oh... and the name of their team... very odd.'

He scratched his head. He juggled a football nervously in his hands.

'Yes, take care tomorrow, you're playing against the mysterious... Hags United!'