



DAN FREEDMAN

JAMIE
JOHNSON



WORLD CLASS

 SCHOLASTIC





PROLOGUE

“We have a saying in football: form is temporary and class is permanent. But world class – genuine world class – well, that’s for ever. Are *you* world class? We’re about to find out...”

Sir Brian Robertson – Football Manager





1

REVENGE

THE MIDDLE OF THE WORLD CUP

Jamie instantly killed the pace on the ball, deftly cushioning it on his thigh. As it dropped to the ground, he flicked it forwards and sprinted after it in one easy, fluid movement.

Using his perfect close control, he passed the ball from foot to foot, nimbly evading the tackles like a speeding slalom skier racing down a mountain.

With his arms pumping and his legs racing, he galloped down the line. Once he hit turbo speed, Jamie was simply uncatchable.

He was a superhuman playing against mortals. His skills came from another world.

A huge grin was plastered across his face as he teased and destroyed the defenders with his speed and





poise. He could beat anyone today and he knew it.

But just at that moment, with Jamie right at the top of his game, displaying the full array of his majestic talent to the watching world, the cruel finger of fate was pointing directly at him.

Disaster was about to call and yet, with his eyes still firmly fixed on the ball, Jamie had no idea at all...

Jamie almost couldn't see through the pain. The torture tore through him like a furious forest fire. Bertorelli had known exactly what he was doing. In an evil scissors motion, he'd wrapped himself around Jamie's knee, crushing it and twisting it, almost until it broke.

Now, as Jamie was lifted on to a stretcher and given oxygen to breathe in, the pain in his brain was almost too much to bear.

All that training ... all that practice ... all those hours fighting his way back from the last injury. It had all been about this: reaching the World Cup and showing the entire world his skill.

But now Bertorelli had killed those dreams. He'd slashed them apart in cruel, cold-blooded revenge.

Jamie covered his eyes as he was carried away from the pitch into the darkness of the tunnel. He couldn't believe that this was it. That it was all over. It seemed only minutes ago that his World Cup journey had





started with those special letters that came to the house.

Both of them.







REWIND —

**TWO AND A HALF WEEKS BEFORE THE
START OF THE WORLD CUP**







2

JAMIE'S CHOICE

FRIDAY 25 MAY

Jamie picked up the letter and read it again. For the fourth time. No matter how many times he read the words, only two stood out – like flashing lights:

WORLD CUP





24 May

Dear Jamie Johnson,

It is with great pleasure that I inform you that you have been selected to join Scotland's Provisional World Cup squad. The tournament is being held in England from 11 June – 11 July. Please report, with your passport, to the Scotland Team base: The Riverside Hotel, Buckinghamshire, on 29 May.

Congratulations and good luck.

Sheila Clarke
Team Administrator

Schedule:

- 29 May – Squad meets
- 31 May – Warm Up International v Ghana
- 1 June – Final World Cup Squad Announcement
- 13 June – First Group D Match v Nigeria
- 18 June – Second Group D Match v France
- 23 June – Final Group D Match v Argentina

Dates of further matches will depend on Group Results.





Jamie shook his head and carefully placed the letter on his bed. Then he picked up almost the exact same letter from the England squad.





3

THE RING

Spinning around in circles on the kitchen table, Jamie's ring reflected his mind. Turning this way and that, going around and around but moving nowhere.

Jamie squeezed his head. He felt as if the answer was close to him. Within touching distance. And yet somehow he couldn't reach it.

"I don't see how there's any choice to make," said Jeremy, Jamie's stepdad, barely looking up from his newspaper. "Play for England. They're the hosts, they've actually got a chance of winning the tournament and you'll make more money. Simple. And stop spinning that thing, will you! I'm trying to do the crossword."

"Well, it's not simple to me," said Jamie, purposely ignoring Jeremy and continuing to spin his ring in





circles on the kitchen table. Jamie loved that ring. It had been his granddad Mike's and, before that, it had belonged to Mike's dad. It had been passed down from generation to generation and, as Mike had not had a son, he'd left it to Jamie in his will. It was the most precious item Jamie owned.

"What do you reckon Mike would say?" Jamie asked his mum, who was contentedly cradling her cup of tea. "He'd just want me to play for Scotland, wouldn't he?"

Jamie's mum smiled as she sipped her warm cuppa. "Just to see you playing at the World Cup would make Dad the happiest man in the world," she said reassuringly. "He wouldn't care who it was for."

"But what about that?" Jamie said, pointing to the framed photo on the ledge by the kitchen table. It was his mum's favourite: a picture of Jamie as a three-year-old, when his hair was still a bright strawberry-blond colour. He was smiling and, though he was barely able to run, he was kicking a little football, being proudly supported by his granddad Mike, who was standing just behind him, holding him up.

Jamie liked the photo. He realized that Mike must have been supporting him almost from the day he was born.

"What about it?" asked his mum, turning to look at the photo. "He always said you'd play at a World Cup,





you know. I can't believe it's actually coming true!"

"Yeah," said Jamie. "And look at what I'm wearing in the photo."

It was a Scotland shirt.

