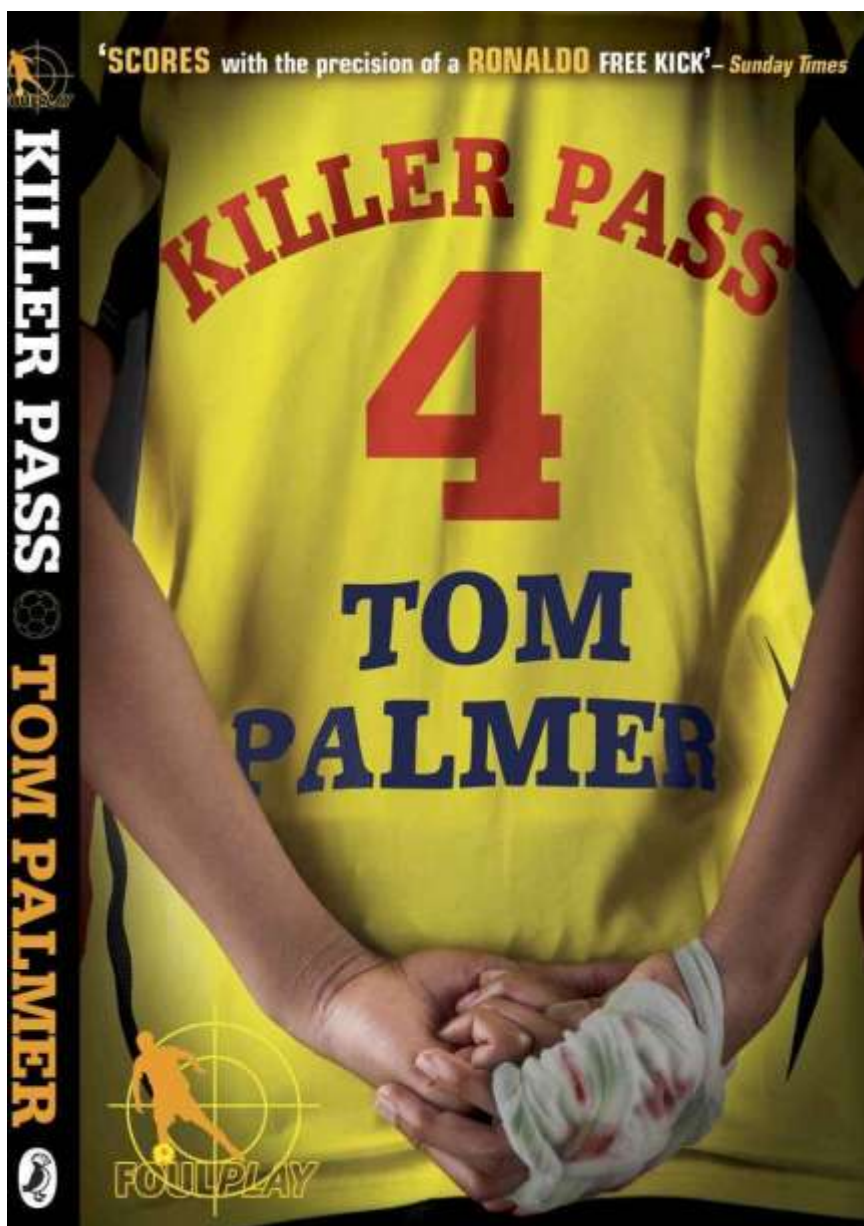


TOM PALMER

FOUL PLAY 4 : KILLER PASS



Danny Harte is obsessed with two things - watching football and tackling crime.



## Chapter 1

Danny Harte saw more than he had expected to over the fence. He was looking into a large garden and a *very* large house. The house backed onto a thick area of woodland, where Danny was carrying out a vital piece of surveillance.

There were five windows on the ground floor. All with lights on. Four of the windows had curtains or blinds drawn. But, through the fifth window, Danny could see a massive TV screen. So big it had to be a cinema screen, not a TV screen at all. He'd never seen one like that in the shops. It was amazing.

But he could see more than that.

A gold plated mirror on the wall next to the screen.

Several huge vases full of fancy flowers.

A giant model of a Ferrari 300 sat between two L-shaped sofas - that looked like it was being used as a coffee table.

But none of these things surprised Danny as much as the fence that stood between him and this millionaire house. For a start it was at least four metres high, with the top metre angling out towards the wood. It was tangled with razor wire. And, every few paces, displayed a sign showing a man being electrocuted. Black on yellow.

Danny wondered just how *he* would get over this fence. And into the house.

Feeling uncomfortable, he switched his crouching position from one leg to another. He could feel pins and needles coming on. And that was the last thing he needed. He was on private land. He may need to run away.

But that was not the only thing that was on his mind. What he was considering now was how to get into the house. He thought back to the book he'd been reading. A book about house breaking. Burglars explaining how to get

in and out without being caught. Danny was reading the book to help him with his latest investigation. An investigation of a crime that he wanted to solve more than any of the others he'd solved before. An investigation into a string of burglaries. Of City FC players' houses. And the latest had been on this street just days ago.

So, what would a burglar do now? He had to think the way they thought. That was how to solve a crime.

Was this the way he'd come in?

The only other option was the front of the house.

But that meant going through the main entrance to the street. And past two security guards, who were paid by its ten house owners, three of whom were footballers, one a pop star and another a supermodel.

That option also meant avoiding being seen by at least seven security cameras Danny had spotted up and down the street. It was a bad option. So how was it that a burglar had got into one of these houses?

Danny was baffled. It had to be impossible. And, even if it wasn't, it was going to be almost impossible to solve this crime.

But if he *was* going to solve it, it would be by thinking like a burglar. That was why he'd been reading how to burgle. That was why he was here watching footballers' houses from a wood.

Thinking all this through brought something else to Danny's mind. Something he couldn't believe he had forgotten.

City FC.

His team.

Playing a first leg away tie in the knock out stages of Champions' League. At Real Madrid.

Danny gave up his thoughts about burglary and giant TV screens for a moment, and switched on his mini radio, slipping in his earpiece.

At first he thought he had the wrong channel. All he could hear was noise. He went to retune, then heard the voice of the commentator trying to break through the chaos.

'... City FC drawing one-one here at the Bernabeu... but after a killer pass the length of the pitch from Real's midfield maestro... and that late tackle... penalty to Real... chance for the home team to take the lead...'

Danny's heart sank. He checked his watch. There were five minutes left. If Real scored now City would lose. Probably. And getting through to the semi finals would be a lot harder.

Danny waited for the noise to die down. Noise that was so clear Danny imagined he was there. And now he could hear the silence of the Real fans waiting for the penalty taker to step back and shoot. Then the noise of the City fans, trying to put the Real player off. The City fans would be in the top tier, miles away from the action. But you could still hear them. Danny felt proud. He tried to picture the game in his mind, his eyes closed.

'HEY YOU!'

Danny kept his eyes closed for a second, trying to work out who would be shouting that at the match. Then he realised that what he was hearing wasn't at the Bernabeu at all: it was in a wood overlooking a footballer's house. Right here. Right now. That was when he felt the hand on his shoulder.

**Read on ...**

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