

Dear Humans

I'm writing this for you. While many of my fellow bigfeet don't care for you, I find you interesting. Sure, you smell weird and are obsessed with covering your body in colorful clothes, but you also have some pretty great inventions. TV, computers, phones, milkshakes, holidays where you sit around all day and eat. Humans are awesome at finding ways to entertain and keep themselves comfortable.

But I'm not writing this to compliment you, I want to clear up a misunderstanding. While you humans have invented a lot, you didn't come up with kicking a ball into a net. In the second century, China created a game where you kicked a ball around, but it wasn't until the 1800s that England finally figured out how to make it the real sport of football.

I bet you think English people came up with all those rules themselves, eh? You're all probably so proud of that country for creating the most popular sport in the world. Newsflash, humans didn't invent football, bigfeet did.

Sure, it began with kicking a ball into a cave. And the ball was originally a rock. And fields were rare because first you needed to find two caves facing each other. And there weren't many rules at first besides no pulling hair.

Eventually, my ancestors came up with a ball, and a net, and all the rules *including* offside. The only thing we owe to humans is shin guards because when you live barefoot and naked in the woods, you don't often think about safety.

Most of you think bigfeet are just a myth. That's because we are very picky about who we choose to let see us. In the 1800s, some English bigfeet couldn't stand to watch humans running around in the grass kicking a ball willy nilly, so they made themselves known long enough to share our long kept secret of the beauty that is football.

We've enjoyed watching you grow and improve your skills, but the reason I'm writing this is to let you know that you have a long way to go. The fastest recorded human football kick was 131 miles, or 210 kilometers, per hour. The fastest bigfoot strike is more than twice that.

Kicking harder means we have to react faster, too. We have to run faster to catch the ball. We have to be tougher to survive getting pegged with a shot. We bigfeet are all of those things and that's why The Bigfoot Football League is the highest level of competition in the world. We're even better at football than dragons, but that's partially because they pop the ball about a hundred times per match.

I'm not writing this to brag. In fact, I thought it was about time you got a glimpse into our world as a way to show you what's still possible. My friends might hate that I say this, but I hope one day a human will be good enough to join our league. When that happens, I hope the human tradition of team scarves will catch on because that's the only piece of clothing I'm jealous of. It's a fashion statement, neck warmer, and fun flag to wave all in one!

Anyway, that's what this book is for. Motivation. I hope you're so motivated by reading this that you have to go out and kick a ball between every chapter. Why don't you start now? I'll meet you on the pitch!

Chapter One

It's a beautiful day here in Rumble Grove. The sun is shining, the birds are singing, and it's match day between the Pacific Northwest Sasquatches and the Nepal Yetis. Nestled in a valley deep in the Cascade Mountains of the American state you call Washington, Rumble Grove is a forested paradise.

Patterson-Gimlin Stadium, we call it PG, sits in the center of the city. While plenty of bigfeet work as farmers, builders, artists, and even businessfeet, the sport of football brings them together once a week. Our grass is the greenest and our nets are made from the finest willow bark to ensure they're strong enough to catch the ball.

I'd love for you to see Rumble Grove, but you won't find it on a map. You won't find it walking through Washington forests either, because we Bigfeet have just enough magic to avoid detection. Not even your fancy satellites in space can spot us. Your space people may be smart, but the Earth is far older than your technology and you haven't even begun to scratch the surface of what tricks this planet can play.

Wow, where are my manners? I've been talking to you this entire time without introducing myself.

My name is Moss, but most feet call me 2cent. That's because I am the 200th Moss in my family line. "200" became "2 Centuries" which became "2cent". It's not a perfect translation, but nicknames rarely are. Anyway my dad, Moss 199, played goalie for the Sasquatches and his dad was a striker. The Mosses have been midfielders, managers, fans, water boys, announcers, and Moss 42 was even a ref. I know, weird.

This long line of football talent might sound like I was born to be good. Genetics are a thing, sure, but I've worked hard to find my own path. And my path is defense.

Strikers get the goals, but defenders set the pace. I love reading the opponent's attack to find the exact moment when I can ruin their day with a perfect slide tackle. It's probably my enthusiasm for defense that made me team Captain. That, and my perfect football hairdo.

Enough talk, let's start this match.

I lead the team onto the field. Our strikers Stormtoe and Cavemouth go up front, with veteran midfielder Shatterpeak flanked by Moonwarden and Brother Birch. I play center defense, checking in with Slatefall, Deepriver, Winterleaf, and Grandvalley as they take their positions.

Our goalie is on loan from Scotland and we just call him Gray. While most feet around the world live in towns or cities, Gray is the only one of his kind. I don't know if it's his fog-colored fur, the fact that he's a head taller than the rest of us, or how he never talks, but dude kind of weirds me out.

"I'm gonna score!" Cavemouth shouts to no one.

"Not going to happen." A Yeti growls across the center line.

"Coming right at you, goalie!" Cavemouth hollers.

"Quiet, Slippers." Stormtoe warns.

"Just having fun." Cavemouth shrugs.

“Have fun with your mouth closed.” Stormtoe says.

This is much more polite than the normal for those two. Stormtoe has been our leading goal-scorer for the last three seasons, but now she has to deal with this big-mouthed rookie that can put some serious pace on the ball. We were all excited to have Cavemouth on the squad, until he started talking.

You’re joining us mid season as my squad battles our way to third in the rankings. Our opponents may not have as many wins, but you never count out a Yeti. Living in the frigid mountains of Nepal make them some of the toughest feet around. This fact is proven when the tiny gnome ref shuffles up, blows his whistle, and is immediately covered in a cloud of dirt as the Yetis barrel towards us. Game on!

Shatterpeak stops the charge, shifting the ball out to his right side and immediately passing it to Moonwarden. She gives it a single touch and sends it up to Stormtoe. Storm receives the ball off her thigh and drives it forward. She’s met by three Yeti defenders, two on the ball and one hanging back.

“I’m open, I’m open!” Cavemouth gives away his position, forcing Storm to pass it back to Brother Birch.

We push up as the midfield keeps the ball moving. Cave and Storm struggle to get open, I direct Winterleaf to help the midfield. Right when we’re about to create some space, a Yeti with a single braid wrapped in blue thread intercepts a pass and the momentum shifts.

I’m on my back foot and can’t change direction fast enough, but Deepriver is there. Deep is almost as quiet as Gray, but his focus on the field is unmatched. He picks the ball clean from the Yeti with the braid, chips it over the next opponent, and sends it flying with a near perfect pass to Stormtoe.

She flicks it off her big heel directly to Cavemouth, who got into the position without yelling this time. Cave plants his left foot and brings the right around like a Dwarven hammer to smash the ball in a mid-air volley. The Yeti Goalkeeper gets a finger on the ball, but it’s no use. Sasquatch goal! The crowd goes wild!

“Told you!” Cavemouth runs backward so he can brag at the Yetis.

“Cave!” I roar.

He stops and turns to me with a silly sneer. “You sound jealous.”

“Beautiful strike.” I say, putting a hand on his shoulder. “But please let your feet do the talking.”

“Yeah, Stormy said something about that, too.”

“Maybe listen, ay Slippers?” Shatterpeak gives him a playful shove.

“How long do I have to be called that?” Cavemouth whines.

“Until you grow up.” Shatterpeak grunts and Cavemouth sneers. “Slippers” is a name we sometimes use for little feet because your little ones wear slippers. Doesn’t sound clever when I explain it.

The team congratulates Cave and we take our positions for the reset. The crowd is still cheering and I take a moment to enjoy that. It never gets old to see how many feet come out to each match. Their support fuels our kicks in ways that vitamins and sugar never could.

The Yetis are mad! They explode from the kick off, moving the ball with heavy passes we can’t get in front of. The next few minutes are a blur of chasing down opposing

strikers and kicking the ball out when we can't get it back. No matter what we try, the Yetis keep pressing closer. Soon, the whole team is playing defense.

Grandvalley challenges the ball, but the Yeti nutmegs him. Slatefall moves in a moment too late as the ball is crossed to center. I spot two opponents coming and choose the one I think is going to take the shot.

At the last moment, she winks at me and stops. The ball zips in front of her feet to the other Yeti. He's wide open at the top of the box. Brother Birch stomps up to slide, but not in time. The Yeti's strike is a lighting bolt.

Time slows down as I watch the ball rise off the ground. It curves in the air, aiming for the top left pocket. Gray tracks the ball, leaping to the corner of the goal. At the very edge of the goal line, Gray's thick hands wrap around the ball. He smashes to the ground with the ball tight against his belly. The crowd cheers even louder than when we scored!

"Alright, Gray!" I cheer, too.

Gray rises slowly and gives me the smallest nod. I guess that means, "thank you". Gray takes three steps forward and punts.

I lose track of the ball for a moment because he kicked it so high, but my team doesn't. Moonwarden jumps to challenge, crashing with a Yeti. Moon heads it to Slatefall, who tries to pass to Storm.

The Yetis intercept again and the game heats up. We spend the next several minutes trading possession and a couple fouls. I warned my team that the Yetis were tough, but sometimes you have to get knocked through the air to learn that for real. Winterleaf takes a bump to the head and Slatefall gets clipped in the ankle.

With the first half winding down, we're holding our 1 - 0 lead, but the pressure is getting to us. The Yetis are used to marching through screaming wind and sheets of snow, which apparently means they never get tired. Even young Cavemouth is huffing and puffing as we counter another charge.

In the final moments of the half, our exhaustion gets the better of us. Moon and Birch lose a step on the ball, allowing a Yeti with red streaks in his fur to cut through the center.

I meet his charge, but he passes out to the side. His teammate receives the ball and sends it back to their midfield. Three more precise passes and the Yeti with the braid fakes out Deepriver to receive the ball. He's just inside the box on the left side when he winds up a huge kick. Gray is ready for the power, but that's not what happens.

The braided Yeti stops his kick and then toe-pokes it into the bottom corner. The Yetis even up the match with seconds to go. By the time we get things started again, the ref is blowing his whistle and waving his point hat at the center of the pitch to signal halftime.

Chapter Two

Cavemouth bursts through the door of the locker room, arms raised over his head.
“Did you see that goal? I crushed it!”

“Did you see the one that tied the game?” Coach is waiting for us.

“We got this, Coach.” Cave gives him a big grin that isn’t returned.

“Everyone have a seat.” Coach grumbles.

“Are we in trouble?” Cave asks.

“Cave, enough.” I warn him.

Cavemouth snarls at me and sits on a bench. When the rest of the team is settled, Coach walks into the center of the locker room. Most of his fur has turned as white as a Yeti, but Wild Thunder still looks ready to play. He was Captain and striker for the Squatches for 31 years before he finally hung up his shin guards. With his record 814 goals and four championships, becoming the Coach was a given. He’s been in charge ever since I joined up and I wouldn’t have it any other way. Just, don’t make him mad or you’ll get a taste of the thunder.

“Midfield was loose.” Coach looks at Shatterpeak.

“Ay, Coach.” Shatterpeak knocks his knuckles on his heel.

“Defense was slow on the challenge and strikers are too focused on scoring goals.”

“Isn’t that our job?” Cave asks.

“Your job.” Coach stomps over, cracking the tile. “Is to keep the ball on the OPPONENT’S SIDE!” The last two words shake the lockers. There’s the thunder I mentioned.

“Sorry, Coach.” Cave finally closes his mouth.

“More passing. Tighter control. No holes in the midfield. Got it?”

“Yes, Coach!” We all shout.

“Good. Nice shot, Cavemouth.”

Cave is too shocked to look proud. Coach runs a hand through the fur on his head and moves to sit down.

“Coach?” I ask.

“Yes, Moss?”

“Umm, is that it?”

“Oh, yes. Well, I have to keep things brief to introduce you to someone. Mr. Rom?”

“Thank you.” A weird voice, like a human computer having a fit, comes from behind me. I turn to see a big rectangle on two blocky feet wobble into the locker room. The guy is half our height with buttons and a joy stick on the front. A screen for a face shows light green circles and a line for eyes and a mouth. If I hadn’t been to the human world, I’d never know that this was an arcade game come to life.

“Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaat?” Cavemouth mumbles.

“Team, this is Mr. Rom. Our new sponsor.”

“What’s wrong with Big Timber’s Bark Bites?” Winterleaf asks. He’s the only one that can eat those things without wanting to barf. A thousand years ago, bigfeet probably enjoyed eating bark. But ever since we discovered real flavors like chocolate and pineapple, we aren’t reaching for a mouthful of wood when we want a snack. Maybe a change will be good for us.

“We at Rom Dot Com want to help your team move into the future.” Mr. Rom’s pixel face turns into a smile.

Deepriver raises his hand. Mr. Rom’s digital eyebrows raise in surprise and he says, “Umm yes?”

“You resemble technology from at least thirty years ago. How does that help us move into the future?”

“Sorry,” Coach stands up, “Deepriver can be blunt.”

“No problem.” Mr. Rom’s chuckle sounds like a car coughing. “It’s a good question. While you bigfeet have been keeping humans guessing for thousands of years, myself and a few other digital age monsters have only popped up in recent history.”

“Being new, Mr. Rom and his partners are catching up with our old world. They’re very excited about supporting us through the BA Cup in a few days.” Coach says this like he practiced it.

“That’s right!” Mr. Rom buzzes, “But, I also come to you with lots of tricks up my sleeves, so to speak, when it comes to new and exciting technology. Our tech can help you play better and win more! Doesn’t that sound great?”

We agree with various grunts and “Yeps”. Mr. Rom smacks his hands together and gives us one more big screeny smile. “Wonderful. We’ll talk more after the game. For now, I just want to say hi and good luck!”

“Thanks. Nice to meet you.” I stand to shake his hand.

He looks up at me with neon green eyes. “I’ve heard so much about you and your gifts. Quite the legacy. I look forward to working together.”

“Yeah, me too.”

We break the hand shake and I rejoin the team. A few minutes later, it’s time to return to the pitch. We file out, sharing some last moment strategies with each other. Right before we reach the grass, Deepriver pulls me back.

“Moss?”

“Yeah, Deep?”

“Watch out for Mr. Rom.”

“Why?”

“After you shook hands, he wiped his on a towel. It was like he was trying to get the bigfoot off of him.”

“Thanks, Deep.”

This gets my attention because Deepriver is very good at two things, noticing and understanding. On the pitch, he’ll notice a change in the opponent’s play the moment it happens and he’ll understand what they mean to do. If he understands Mr. Rom that way, I worry I’m actually going to miss the taste of those Bark Bites.

Chapter Three

The roar of the crowd tapers off as the gnome ref tottles to the center of the pitch. When he arrives at the ball, he looks up at Stormtoe and then the Yeti striker. Raising one tiny hand to point at Storm, he gives her a nod and blows his tiny whistle.

Tweeeeeeeet!

Stormtoe moves to kick the ball and then passes her foot over and uses her heel to pass back to Shatterpeak. The Yetis burst over the line in a white growling wave, but Shatter slides it to Moonwarden who immediately kicks it to Brother Birch. In less than three seconds, we've broken their counter attack and have the field wide open.

I urge Slate and Deep to press up, supporting our midfielders in case of a steal. It's not necessary as Birch scoots around an opponent and finds Cavemouth on the left side. Cave doesn't get fancy, probably still thinking about Coach yelling at him, and looks for the pass to Storm.

She's covered by two players, so Moonwarden cuts between them and receives a leading pass from Cave. With the ball pressuring their defense, the Yetis leave Stormtoe to regain control. Big mistake.

Moonwarden passes back to Shatterpeak, who cuts out right and passes back to Cavemouth. He receives the ball off his chest and delivers a pop fly over three Yetis directly to an open Storm standing at the peak of the penalty arc.

She controls the ball perfectly, making it almost float to the ground. The second it hits the pitch, the crowd starts stomping. Thousands of bigfeet stomping together sounds like the end of the world, or at least the end of the Yeti's hopes.

Stormtoe plants her left foot in the grass, toes digging holes in the earth. Her right arcs back until her heel is even with her shoulders. She tilts her shoulders forward and brings her left hand up as if to grab at the air.

There's a brief moment where she seems frozen in this position, Yetis closing in on all sides, then she fires. Stormtoe's left hand yanks back to twist her hips and bring her right foot forward. Her toes are pointed down to connect the ball with the top of her foot. The impact cracks through the chorus of stomps like a bolt of lightning.

"STORRRRRRRMM STRRIKKKE!" The crowd howls.

Stormtoe's signature move blasts the ball like it was shot out of a cannon. The Yeti's goalkeeper sets his stance and raises both hands to catch the ball. Unfortunately, he misjudged the amount of power behind Stormtoe's kick and winds up flat on his back as the ball is buried in the net.

We surround Storm to congratulate her with Cavemouth being the loudest, of course.

"Wow, that was incredible! I've seen the Storm Strike from the stands, but never on the field before. I felt the wind of your kick in my hair! Can you show me how to do that?"

"If she did, it wouldn't be the 'Storm Strike'." Slatefall nudges him.

"Yeah, we'd have to call it the 'Mouth Mash'." Stormtoe taps her toes on Cavemouth's in a classic sign of bigfoot respect. He returns the tap and we head back to our positions to restart.

As I walk, I notice the Yeti coach growling at his team and pointing at Stormtoe. Before I can worry, Deepriver is at my elbow. "He's telling them to cover her better."

"No plans to take her out?"

"They can't afford anymore red cards after they played The Mapis."

"Good."

The "Mapis" are Mapinguari from Brazil. Being the best team in the league makes them enough of a challenge, but word is that lately they've been playing rough. More on them later because the Yetis are bringing the ball back into play.

Their attack is immediate and strong. The strikers shove through Storm and Cave, moving the ball with ease out of the center circle and towards the right touch line. Winterleaf and Grandvalley move to counter, but Brother Birch is there first.

He picks the ball clean and sends it back to Grandvalley. Grand passes to Shatterpeak and then it's on to Moonwarden. Right when the Yetis adjust, Moon returns the pass and soon the ball is on Birch's side again.

The Yetis press, but can't intercept as our midfield keeps the ball in motion. A pull back from Moonwarden into a flick forces the Yetis to kick the ball out of play before Cavemouth can receive it.

"Now that's a tight midfield!" Coach thunders from the side. Shatterpeak gives him a nod.

Moonwarden's throw-in is knocked off course by a Yeti header. The braided Yeti that scored gathers the ball and looks for an opening. Shatterpeak moves to close it off. Braided Yeti reads this and passes back to his teammate. Stormtoe tries to steal but now it's their turn to play keep away.

Seeing my team struggle, I push up the defense. Winterleaf rushes to double the Yeti strikers with Birch. Grandvalley pressures the outside while Slatefall stomps toward the center.

I check with Gray in goal and then set my stance. The Yetis are still in possession but now our entire team is working to break their hold. Shatterpeak misses a tackle. Moon can't get into position fast enough. Even Deep misreads a play. Within a few seconds, I'm looking at a breakaway rush from the braided Yeti.

The look on his face is already celebrating another goal, but I'm still here. When he's a couple yards away, I move to intercept. He fakes to the right. I stay on my toes and don't take the bait. He touches the ball with the outside of his foot and moves hard left. I stay with him.

Growling, the braided Yeti stomps forward. I plant my left foot and lift my right so his shoulder check doesn't knock me off balance. Instead, I'm able to bring my right foot down on top of the ball. Light as a feather, I use my big toe to swivel the ball out of his possession.

"No!" Braided Yeti barks. He pushes me again. With the ball not entirely in my control, I lose both it and my balance. A second later, I'm eating dirt.

I push off the ground hard and break into a run before I'm vertical. Braided Yeti is at the penalty box and closing fast on Gray. Digging my feet into the earth, I hurl myself forward.

He reels back for the strike. I reach out to block. I don't see his kick but I certainly feel it. My wind is knocked out as a blistering shot on goal connects with my stomach.

"Alright then." Gray says the first words I remember hearing. I only know it's him because he's standing over me as I recover my breath. He reaches down to lift me up.

"What happened?" My voice is weak.

"Yer a brick wall, that's wot." Gray pats me lightly on the shoulder as I'm still hunched over. I look up to see my team driving the ball hard back into Yeti territory.

"I don't think brick walls hurt this much."