

FOOTBALL

Simon was on fire. He'd played for the school football team once before when Ronny hadn't been able to because he had to go for tea at his granny's, but this time was different. They'd only been playing for fifteen minutes, and they were already two-nil up. What was even better was the fact that Simon had scored both of the goals.

He glanced across at the flank to see his best friend, Beth, bombing down the wing. He stared as she knocked it through the defender's legs, and he felt his legs start sprinting on their own. When Beth turned and whipped in a cross, he was already rising to meet the ball. Just as his head was about to make a connection and complete his hat-trick, the goalkeeper blundered out, and Simon felt the air leave his lungs. Everything was dark underneath the goalkeeper, but Simon pushed and shoved until he could see daylight again.

Somewhere in the crowd, a fan roared something unintelligible, and the opposition took up the cry. It sounded strange, and Simon realised why. He wasn't on the school pitch anymore; the canteen wasn't rotting away on the sidelines, and the hapless defenders of St. Josephine's Primary weren't trying to tackle him. Instead, the defenders were goblins—small, green and wiry and with mouths filled with sharp teeth. The whole team were goblins! Even his own team were goblins, and none of them looked like Beth. Instead of a brand new ball, just like the one they released for the World Cup, they were kicking around a wooden sphere. It looked heavy.

"Where am I?" Simon said to nobody in particular.

"When the goalkeeper landed on you, you popped through to another dimension," somebody said behind him. Simon spun round to look into the face of an old man, dressed head to toe in a brown leather coat. He had a head of shocking white hair that stood out as though he had been electrocuted. "It happened to me many years ago. You can get home, though. Just don't do what I did."

"What do I need to do?" Simon asked. On the pitch, some of the goblins had started fighting with



each other. It sounded aggressive.

“Win the game and go home.” It sounded simple enough until the old man continued, “But, you must not score. If you score a goal, you will be stuck here forever. That’s what happened to me.”

Simon stood up and looked at the players brawling on the pitch. Most of them seemed more interested in biting and clawing each other than kicking the ball. He ran out into the centre circle and started to dribble towards the far goal. Some of the goblins must have noticed what he was doing because they soon started scrambling towards him. The goalkeeper was hanging around picking his nose and looked startled when he glanced up to see a human and a handful of goblins bearing down on him. He came running off his line, but Simon chipped it over him with ease. His heart lifted as he watched the ball roll towards the goal line; however, he realised what was about to happen and he felt the pang of fear.

With his heart beating in his chest, Simon sprinted towards the ball and slid across the rough turf, desperate to kick it clear before it crossed the line.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Find and copy a metaphor in the first paragraph that means Simon was playing well.
2. What impression do you get about the goalkeeper from the word “blundered”?
3. Which word in the text has a meaning close to “do something really quickly”?
4. Which word in the text tells the reader that the St. Josephine defenders weren’t very good?
5. Find a synonym for “ball” in the text.

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

How had Simon got his first chance to play for the team?

R

What was the score?

I

Why was Simon panicking at the end?

R

What type of creature was Simon playing against in the end?

E

Explain how Simon’s emotions changed over the story.