LLAMAS GO LARGE

Also by Scott Allen

Llama United

MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS



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First published 2018 by Macmillan Children's Books
an imprint of Pan Macmillan
20 New Wharf Road, London N1 9RR
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-1-5098-4092-2

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1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

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To Spike and Zach –
I knew you when you were babies!

1
THE RETURN





Ah, it's you. You came back. I've just been reading some of the fantastic headlines for Llama United's cup run last season. Glory days.

What do you mean, you can't remember who I am?

It's me, Arthur Muckluck, the greatest footballer in the world ever! Last year, eleven llamas



unknowingly ate my ashes and became brilliant at football. They then went on an amazing cup run, beating all the best human teams around, until they were unfortunately pipped to the post in the final.

You must remember that, now? OK, what about Tim Gravy and Cairo Anderson? Two best friends who managed Llama United all the way to the Cup final. Tim even scored the winning goal in the semi-final, while playing in goal! You really don't remember? It was all over the papers . . .

Well, never mind. I've pretty much told you the story of Llama United now, so you should be up to speed.

Tim, Cairo and the llamas have been really busy since then.

After the Cup final, Llama United started to get requests for friendlies and exhibition matches from some of the biggest teams in the world. They were in so much demand, they didn't have to start playing in a league. In the summer holidays, they travelled to Brazil, the spiritual home of football, and played on the famous Copacabana beach. They arranged a huge match against a team of over one hundred local

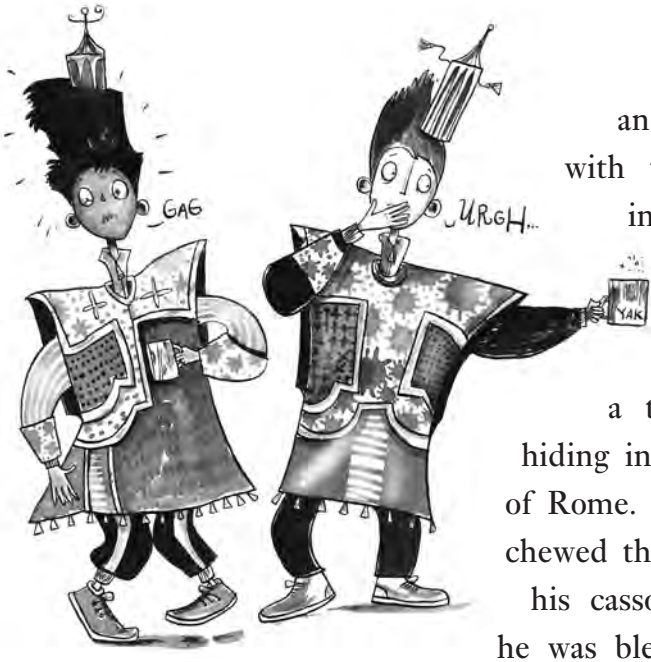
people and still won 92 – 7. Goal Machine, Llama United's star striker, scored about fifty goals. The game went on for what felt like a whole day, and nobody knew who the referee was. Tim and Cairo had at least ten ice creams each, and felt a bit sick, and McCloud, their grumpy Scottish coach, didn't take his cap or tracksuit off at all, even though it was boiling hot.

Fitting things around school was difficult, but Tim and Cairo trained the llamas every evening and weekend, and in the half-term holidays they all went to Spain to play the giants of Borcaloona and Royal Modrid. Llama United defender Bill did do a poo in one of the star player's boots, but he didn't notice until he got home that night. He needs to buy a new carpet now.

At Christmas the whole team were invited to play in China. The Duke, Goal Machine and Smasher did headers and volleys over the Great Wall of China. Some schoolchildren tried to teach Cruncher how to play ping-pong, but he was only interested in eating the net. Tim and Cairo drank some yak's milk. Let's just say they won't be putting it on their cereal in the morning.

And in the Easter holidays, the llamas were granted





an audience with the Pope in his home in the Vatican City, a tiny state hiding in a corner of Rome. Cruncher chewed the edge of his cassock when he was blessing the llamas' noses. Thankfully, the Pope laughed and let him chew on his *zucchetto*, which is that small white hat he sometimes wears when he is doing all that waving at people. Like Popes tend to do. After all the waving, Tim and Cairo ate a lot of the best pizza they had ever tasted, and not one slice had any pineapple on it. Because we all know that's wrong, don't we?

Tim, Cairo and their grumpy Scottish coach, McCloud, had followed the llamas around the world, and though they had enjoyed every minute, it was incredibly exhausting. Tim's dad, Frank, also came on all the trips, because McCloud is as good at looking after two children and eleven llamas as I am

at French. *Benjure, monsewer, je apple Arthur, silver plate.*

One day, on the way back from a short weekend trip to Germany, where Goal Machine had smashed five past the German champions Booyern Moonich, Cairo noticed that Tim looked a bit fed up. He'd hardly touched his 'delicious' airline meal of a brown meat-paste sandwich, a tiny orange juice and a dry brownie, and was staring blankly out of the window. He certainly wasn't thinking about what type of meat was in the brown paste. Shrew, perhaps?

'You OK, gaffer?' asked Cairo. 'You seem a bit down. Is everything all right?'

Tim let out a deep sigh. Clearly, everything wasn't OK. However, because he's a boy, and twelve, he said: 'Yep, everything is great. All good.'

Then he went back to staring out the window again.

Cairo, because he is also a boy, and twelve, shrugged and didn't press his friend any more. He picked up a magazine from the back of the chair in front of him and began reading about a cheese-flavoured chocolate bar that was being made in South Africa. Yuck! Within minutes he was fast asleep.



2
LUDO THE AGONY AUNT



That evening, after dinner at the farm where Tim lived with his mum, dad and two sisters, Tim went out to the new state-of-the-art training ground, built with all the money they had made from being famous.

The llamas were all tucked up in their shed, having a sleep after their travels. He began dribbling a ball up and down the pitch, weaving in and out of a handful of cones that had been left out. For a goalkeeper, he had pretty good control.

Tim wasn't really sure why he felt so low, but something was knocking away, deep in the pit of his stomach. He couldn't talk to his parents, sisters, McCloud or Cairo. They would just think he was being selfish. He had everything he could ever want, so what was wrong with him?

As the sun was substituted for the moon, Tim could just make out a tall, dark figure striding

purposefully out of the early evening gloom. Tim smiled as it got closer. It was Ludo, Llama United's brilliant goalkeeper, and if I'm honest, my favourite player – well, one of my favourite players. I'm also quite keen on Goal Machine . . . oh, and Smasher, and maybe Barcelona. Actually, I like them all, really.

Ludo looked majestic as ever, nothing ever phased him. He was what every manager in the world wants from a keeper, unflappable, strong and focused. Ludo wasn't interested in many things, apart from grass, football and protecting Llama United's goalmouth sheep, Motorway, who thought she was a princess.

Tim reached up and stroked Ludo under the chin. It was his favourite place to be stroked. He then let out a deep, mournful sigh. Tim, not Ludo. Ludo never sighed. Although he sometimes liked to hum.

'Oh, Ludo,' said Tim. 'What's wrong with me? I have no idea why I feel so unhappy. I just do, and I shouldn't. I've got everything I could ever want.'

Ludo stared deep into Tim's eyes. Neither of them blinked for what seemed like an age. Actually it was eleven seconds, but it always feels longer, doesn't it?

Tim blinked first. Ludo lowered his head and took a huge bite out of the lush green turf beneath their feet and began casually chewing on it. Of all the llamas in



the team, he had the best manners. Bob ate with his mouth wide open so you could see exactly what he was mushing around his mouth. It wasn't very pleasant.

'The world tour was fantastic, wasn't it?'

Ludo carried on chewing and didn't reply.

'It was really, really good. But it was missing something. We met celebrities and world-class footballers, but it just wasn't the Cup, was it?'

Ludo carried on chewing and still didn't reply.

'The Cup had a sort of magic to it. Something we didn't have during the tour.'

Ludo looked at Tim, and then swallowed his mouthful. His neck swung low to the ground and he took another bite out of the turf. If you think Ludo is going to start talking, then I'm afraid you've got another think coming. He's a llama, after all. Tim watched Ludo's jaw go round and round and round as he munched on the grass. It was almost hypnotic. Then something in his brain flashed.

'Of course, that's it!' he said, slapping his forehead. 'There's no competition.'

Ludo carried on chewing.

'There's no pressure on us; we don't have anything to aim for. Nobody cares if we win, draw or lose all these friendly matches; they just help the clubs we

play to make more money because we're famous. None of it really matters. We have all this training stuff and no real plan about what we're doing next, and nobody gets to see your true talent when you're not under pressure in a proper match.'

Ludo paused . . . and snorted.

'We need to play in some important matches again, Ludo. We need to win a massive, big, shiny, silver trophy. You'd like that, wouldn't you?'

Ludo sniffed and swallowed his latest mouthful. He wasn't one for dramatic reactions.

'Oh, thanks, Ludo, you've totally helped me figure this out,' said Tim, as a broad grin spread across his face. 'I couldn't have done it without you.'

He gave Ludo a big hug round the neck.

Ludo gazed off into the distance, and began sucking at his teeth to try and remove all the grass that was caught between them. Tim tickled him under the chin one more time, turned on his heel and marched across to the little caravan that was parked behind the training pitch. A surge of energy pulsed through Tim's body. He felt alive again.

He was going to see McCloud.

Which sounds more impressive than it actually is. He only lives on the other side of the training ground.

