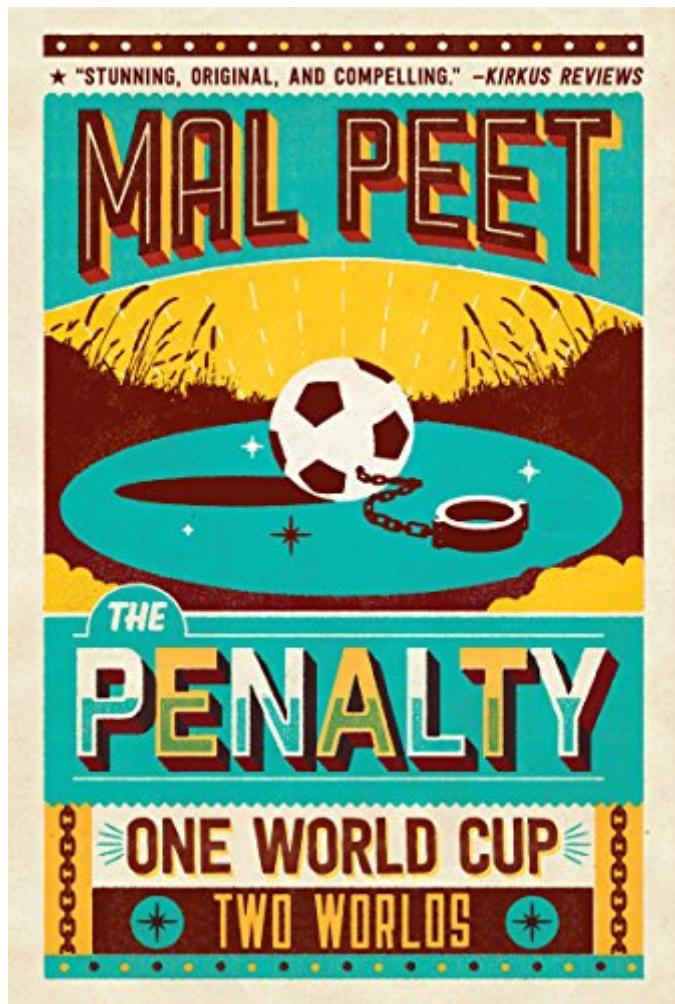


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The Penalty



Synopsis

From the award-winning author of TAMAR, a time-shifting thriller about a vanishing soccer star, occult secrets, and the dark history of slavery. As the city of San Juan pulses to summer's sluggish beat, its teenage soccer prodigy, El Brujito, the Little Magician, vanishes without a trace -- right after he misses a penalty kick and loses a big game for his team. Paul Faustino, South America's top sports reporter, is reluctantly drawn into the mystery of the athlete's disappearance. As a story of corruption and murder unfolds, Faustino is forced to confront the bitter history of slavery and the power of the occult. A deftly woven mystery flush with soccer and suspense, this gripping novel is a thrilling read not to be missed.

Book Information

File Size: 1495 KB

Print Length: 272 pages

Publisher: Candlewick Press (November 8, 2016)

Publication Date: November 8, 2016

Language: English

ASIN: B01MA5Z8MQ

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Not Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #566,653 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #31 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Sports > Soccer #341 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Teen & Young Adult > Literature & Fiction > Sports #408 in Books > Teens > Mysteries & Thrillers > Historical

Customer Reviews

ok

I thought this would be a lot like the book "Goal" (which was awesome). This book is just weird and hard to follow (I am an adult). Buy the first book instead.

Mal Peet garnered a number of awards in the field of Young Adult Fiction with *Keeper*, his debut novel. On the surface this would appear to be much the mixture as before—a key figure in the previous novel—South American sports journalist Paul Faustino—reappears; the book features a soccer player in a pivotal role and there is a dose of religion and mysticism thrown into the mix as well. All pretty similar to *Keeper* but this time out the role of soccer is relatively muted and soccer mad boys who relished the vivid evocation of matches in the earlier book will perhaps be disappointed by the absence of any such passages in this book. *The Penalty* is a darker, scarier book with more focus on religion and the troubled history of South America than on "the beautiful game." Faustino becomes involved in the disappearance of a soccer prodigy—the gifted teenageer El Brujito (the little magician) who simply disappears after being substituted in a big game. Faustino's search takes him upriver, to a remote and virtually inaccessible part of the jungle where he finds a world still largely in thrall to the Old Gods, those of Africa and with their roots in slavery. Much of the book takes place in flashback with the narrative being provided by a captive African slave and he tells of transportation to Latin America, the survival of the old ways and also features some quite violent scenes of murder and sexual violation. It is a book over which an air of violence and corruption, both moral and legal, hangs and I am unsure of its suitability for juvenile audiences on these grounds. It is strongly written and powerful but too dark and disturbing to be an automatic recommendation for soccer loving kids and adults who enjoyed the previous book. I would instead urge it upon those who like South American fiction as it gives an interesting British take on the themes common to Latin American novels.

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