



## Keeper by Mal Peet

**Subjects:** Soccer; Interpersonal relations; Coming of age

**Award:** Best Books for Young Adults

**Book List:** Latin America

**Props:** Cassette, tape recorder

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The reporter slid a cassette into the compact tape recorder and pushed the record buttons. (*Slide a cassette into a tape recorder and press play*) He spoke into the machine, (*Clear throat*) “Testing. Date: August second. Tape one. Interview: Paul Faustino, (*Point to yourself*) of *La Nacion* newspaper talks to the greatest goalkeeper in the history of the world, El Gato (the Cat). The man who two days ago held in his hands the World Cup in front of eighty thousand fans and two hundred and twenty million TV viewers. The reporter put the tape recorder down and asked Gato to begin. (*Set running machine down on the table*) He asked him to start with his background, to begin with where he grew up in the South American rain forest.

(*Use Spanish accent as Gato*) “Soccer began for me when I was a teenager and I left the plaza soccer games and entered the forest. I felt trapped in my small town and wanted a way out. My grandmother filled my head with horror stories of the jungle, but I still went. Despite everything, I went into the forest again and again. And I saw wonderful things: shimmering green hummingbirds smaller than butterflies, moths with wings as clear as colored glass, beetles that looked like flowers and flowers that looked like beetles.”

El Gato stopped, looked at the reporter and said, “Listen, when you write this up, you’ve got to somehow get across to the readers the magic of the forest. It’s important, really important.” Paul Faustino agreed to do his best. El Gato continued, “But looking back, I have realized that I didn’t go into the forest looking for a way out but rather I was looking for something in the forest.”

The reporter asked if El Gato had found it, the thing he was looking for in the forest. Gato replied, “No, but it found me. It just happened one day. I broke away from the path, something I never did. But I think I saw a big patch of sunlight and my curiosity was stronger than my common sense. Anyway, I pushed aside a curtain of thick, fleshy leaves and found myself in an open space. An open space in the jungle is not possible. In the jungle, if there is space and light, something will grow. There is no open space. Yet here was this clearing, and it was covered in grass. Turf. Even more impossible. Then I looked to my left and saw a goal, a soccer goal. Again, impossible. I walked into the clearing towards the goal. I stopped, my fingers began to tremble, then my legs, I was suddenly certain that I was not alone. I turned and saw him. A goalkeeper. I could say that he stepped out of the trees, but that is not right. He did not seem to be solid until he stopped moving. It was a bit like when you get bad TV reception, and there is a kind of shadow that follows the picture, so that things seem to happen twice. I watched him move and saw him standing still at the same time. He was the Keeper. I didn’t know it at the time, but he was there to teach me.”

What follows is an enthralling blend of magic, realism, and exhilarating soccer action woven into the story of a poor and gawky kid who mysteriously became the world’s greatest goalkeeper. (*Hold up book*) *Keeper* by Mal Peet.