



The Penalty Area

Alain Gillot

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The Penalty Area is a heartwarming novel about overcoming adversity, making human connections, and playing the glorious game of soccer.

Vincent once had a shot at becoming a professional soccer player, but a career-ending injury put an end to his dreams. A tough kid from a poor family, he has become an emotionally cut-off man with frustrated hopes and limited options. He finds himself coaching an under-16 soccer club in an attempt to keep alive his only passion in life.

The team he coaches is little more than a roster of hotheaded boys, none of whom understands the on-field chemistry needed to win. Simply put, they aren't of a championship caliber. When his unemployed sister Madeleine, a single mother, dumps her thirteen-year-old son on him, Vincent panics. With no clue how to take care of a teenager, he brings his nephew to practice and eventually throws him into the scrimmage. It's then that Vincent notices there's something strange about Léonard. He has a preternatural ability for anticipating each striker's intentions, making him a remarkably talented goalkeeper, but he seems detached, absent, lost. It becomes clear that Léonard has undiagnosed Asperger's syndrome, and also that, with Léonard's abilities as a goalkeeper, Vincent's ragtag team has a chance to reach the finals. For that to happen, for the team to find a reason to rally behind this strange kid from Paris, Vincent will have to let down his guard and open his heart for the first time ever.

A warm and engaging read, *The Penalty Area* is about building a sense of family on your own terms.

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