

Magazine
David Keenan
 on the magic
 of Airdrie

+ Our Christmas gift guide
 + Food, arts, books and the week's TV



Sport
Hearts' Naismith
 on learning to
 live with pressure

+ Edinburgh 22 Benetton 24
 + Allan Massie:
 rugby's referees undermined



SCOTLAND'S
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER
WWW.SCOTSMAN.COM

Saturday 25 November 2023
£2.70
Subscription price £2.16



THE SCOTSMAN

◆ ON SATURDAY ◆

Salmond promises a 'day of reckoning'

◆ Yousaf says government will 'robustly' defend legal action

Conor Matchett and Dale Miller

Former first minister Alex Salmond has launched fresh legal action against the government he used to lead, alleging a complex conspiracy from within the civil service and the leadership of the SNP designed to damage and discredit him.

The leader of the breakaway nationalist Alba Party said it was time for the "evasion of responsibility" from senior Scottish Government officials to end as he declared the "day of reckoning" was coming. First Minister Humza Yousaf said the government would "robustly defend" the case. Former SNP leader Nicola

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Coming home

Families and friends of those held by Hamas in Gaza watch news broadcasts in Tel Aviv as hostages are released into Egypt before being brought back to Israel FULL STORY, PAGE 20



Brian Wilson
Grangemouth threat shows 'just transition' means little

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Stewart McDonald
Why we should not be getting close to China

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Make your own wreath, plus Allotment Tales

I WANT IT**A classy Christmas**

When it comes to your festive look how about going for a minimal approach? Here at Magazine Towers we are guilty of a more is more. Mariah Carey take on decorating but like Rudolf, we're going to rein it in. Designer Sam Greig says, "Think clean, not cluttered."

Get the look from the Christmas range at B&M Stores nationwide, www.bmstores.co.uk

The Scotsman Magazine

National World Scotsman Publications Limited, 80 George Street, Edinburgh, EH2 3BU
Issue: 424 **Cover photo:** John Devlin
Editorial: 0131-311 7500 E-mail: scotmag@scotsman.com Advertising: 07740 061423 or 07803 506291
Editor: Alison Gray, **Arts and Books Editor:** Roger Cox, **Lifestyle Editor:** Gaby Soutar
Pictures: Jane Cunningham Niven; **Production:** Will Slater

ARTS

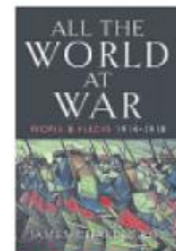
BOOKS

Painful lessons

This rich and thought-provoking history of the First World War illustrates how there were no winners by 1918

Allan Massie

@alainmas



All The World At War
by James Charles Roy
Pen & Sword, 724pp, £35

James Charles Roy is an American historian unattached to a university. He has lived in Ireland and written several books about Irish history, admired by Irish writers, among them Colm Tóibín. *All The World At War*, fruit of long reflection, research and much travelling, is an unusual history of the First World War. It is not a narrative account. There are innumerable such books. Its subtitle is "People and Places 1914-1918", but of course it goes back from the first date and beyond the second.

The First World War was a war of peoples, inasmuch as armies were of unprecedented size, but in the West – unlike the 1939-45 war – civilians

away from the battlefields were rarely in danger, rarely under attack, though they suffered economic hardship from, for instance, the Royal Navy's blockade of Germany.

Responsibility for the war has been long argued. The wretched truth is that Germany, France and Russia all had reasons for wanting war, as did Austria-Hungary, and once mobilisation was underway there was an unstoppable drift to war, even if AJP Taylor's claim that it was all due to the imperatives of railway timetables was an exaggeration. Roy saddles the Kaiser with responsibility, but despite his neurotic bombast, it was the General Staff, not the chatterbox Kaiser, that made the decision. Britain might have



British cavalry after the Second Battle of the Somme, 22 August 1918

remained neutral as in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 if the German war plan hadn't this time involved a sweep through neutral Belgium.

What horrifies us now in our knowledge of what was to come is the general enthusiasm for war, with cheering crowds in Paris and Berlin and the young poet Rupert Brooke thanking God for "matching us with this hour." There was no conception in Britain until 1918, but men and boys flocked to recruiting offices.

We are all still horrified by the slaughter on the Western Front and therefore mostly (perhaps) critical of the British and French strategy in a war in which advantage lay with defence. But Germany, occupying much of northern France and

both Russia and Central Europe. The punitive peace inflicted on Germany at Versailles, treated in detail by Roy, made Hitler and his foul regime possible. But the victorious Allies, France and Britain, were scarcely better off. The nature of their victory, and the peace that followed, prepared the way for defeat in 1940, neither being then in a position to fight a great land war.

This is a rich and thought-provoking book. It doesn't offer a straight narrative history of the war. Anyone ignorant of that might be better to read other works first, even AJP Taylor's short history. But there is a great sweep to Roy's book, and his character sketches are acute and often – to my mind – fair. As usual, few lessons were learned, and those

His character sketches are acute and often – to my mind – fair

that were learned were wrong. In 1914-18 advantage lay with defence, but the war of 1939-45 was a war of movement. Unusually for an American, Roy doesn't exaggerate the US's contribution to the Allied victory and understands why French and British leaders found President Wilson's hopeful idealism to be irritating.

At the time, the First World War was spoken of hopefully as a war to end war, but it led ineluctably to the equally terrible Hitler war 20 years later – a more modern war, one in which civilians suffered at least as terribly as the armies, navies and air forces. Bleakly, in his last sentence Roy says "It's the human condition." Looking at Israel, Hamas and Gaza today, who can deny this?

by other clubs' board members. John laughed, Taylor didn't.

Away from Watford, John was surrounded by yes-men and sycophants. But, while John was a football maven and a hands-on owner, he deferred to Taylor, a man with no interest in John's day job. "I always felt Graham loved me for who I was," says John, explaining the key to their partnership, which was strained only twice.

The first time involved John forging Vera Lynn's autograph and presenting it to Taylor – a childish prank. The second, when Taylor caught John having brandy for breakfast before a board meeting, was altogether more serious. Taylor's lengthy rant and acute sense of disappointment changed John forever. "He saved my life. I had to become the person that Graham thought I was capable of being."

These two men, so very different, delighted in each other's company.



Watford Forever
by John Preston
with Elton John
Viking, £22

John would pop round to the Taylors' suburban house where Rita would cook them shepherd's pie and rhubarb crumble. Rita unsuccessfully attempted to ban them from talking shop, but they shared a vision of football as a game to thrill and delight. They both revelled in their incognito scouting trips and they were both desperate to bond their football club with the community from which John came.

For all its merits, Preston's CV is light on football and his lack of football knowledge betrays him occasionally, but he's the ideal narrator: empathetic, witty and unsentimental.

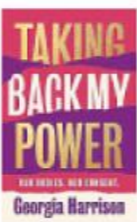
It ended without rancour. In 1987 Taylor moved to Aston Villa. Taylor died in 2017, but he lived to see one side of Watford's Vicarage Road stadium named The Graham Taylor Stand. It faces the Sir Elton John Stand. This lovely book is an equally fitting tribute.

IN BRIEF



Resurrection Walk
by Michael Connolly
Orion, £22
The Lincoln Lawyer and Harry Bosch have joined forces again to work on yet another seemingly non-winable case. This time, retired LAPD homicide detective Bosch is tasked with helping his half-brother Mickey Haller to secure the freedom of a young mother locked up for the fatal shooting of her husband, a sheriff's deputy. The case is fraught with danger and there is more than a whiff of corruption in the Californian air. As ever, with former newspaper reporter Connolly's long-running series, there is an uneasy feeling that life is constantly teetering on the edge of catastrophe – and no-one, not even Bosch, is safe. It may be slightly formulaic, but this is never less yet another slick blockbuster of a legal-detective thriller from a master of his craft.

Emily Pennick



Taking Back My Power
by Georgia Harrison
Renegade Books, £18.99
In her debut book, former Love Island and The Only Way Is Essex star Georgia Harrison speaks to the younger generation, inspiring hope for change and earnestly warning of the dangers of social media. The 28-year-old does not shy away from her struggles after reporting Stephen Bear for sharing intimate footage of her online, or the impact of navigating a legal system that currently requires a proof of intent to cause distress in revenge porn cases. Bear, a winner of Channel 5's Celebrity Big Brother, was jailed earlier this year and Harrison's journey does not end there. Her eloquence during the court case, which she details, propelled her into campaigning on sexual violence and work with MPs on the Online Safety Act. She also brought to the attention of an audience raised on reality TV the dangers of the current internet environment, where everything can be shared instantly.

Charlotte McLaughlin

POEM OF THE WEEK

Over the Edge of Blue

by Laura T Fyfe

This week's poem is by the Stirling Makar, Laura T Fyfe. The poem has alternative formats, one of which has the words forming a concrete poem in the shape of a blue and white Saltire. This knowledge, perhaps, adds to the words and sounds of the poem. Happy St Andrew's Day when it comes.

A girl sits in a sandy hollow.
Marram grass tickles her neck.
The shadows of dog walkers stretch
long into winter. The tide
calls. She thinks of those brought
by the promise of silver-tipped scales
into faithful embrace. The gasp
of souls lost in a breaking wave.
Pebbles roll with the old bones of a
man.

"Have you ever seen so much sky?"

Years ago, her mother peered
through the hole in the head of a key
in candlelight, the shimmer
of fountain mist to a reflection
of longing. She let her eyes
adjust to the future, the promise

of distant shores, footprints
filled with salt-water, widening
over millennia to swallow the risen
sea,
crumbling into the infinite,
full of the charge of ozone.

"Have you ever seen so much sky?"

Seagulls drift above the memory
of endless summer.
With the push-pull of wind and
cirrus,
blue waits, as it does, for the air
to clear, for rain to fall and whisper
welcome. She lifts her eyes to the
horizon.

"Have you ever seen so much sky?"

The Scottish Poetry Library at 5 Crichton's Close, Edinburgh, EH8 8DT is open from 10am to 3pm Mon-Thurs, 10-1pm on Fridays and 2-7 online at ScottishPoetryLibrary.org.uk. It also operates free postal borrowing. For poetry enquiries, e-mail reception@spl.org.uk

THE WRITE STUFF

A Game Called Malice

by Ian Rankin and Simon Reade

Welcome to our regular feature showcasing the talents of the nation's best writers.

HARRIET How is your casino doing, Jack? I've given up trying to get Paul to take me. JACK (to Paul) You need to stop hiding Harriet away, Paul. We've a nice restaurant you could treat her to, as you well know. Or isn't it refined enough for your good lady? New chef's bedded in, if that's what's worrying you. Food is back to where it was before Brendan slung his hook. (to Harriet) It's a classy place, Harriet, trust me, as befits an owner at the top of his game. Anyway, you'd be welcome any time. You might even change Paul's luck.

An awkward moment HARRIET (to Paul; a hint of steel) I thought you told me you tended to win?

JACK (too heartily, after an awkward pause) He does – that's what I mean! He'll break the house one of these days – I'll don't break his fingers first. (he laughs, Paul attempting to join in. Slight discomfort in the room at the mention of violence. Candida gives a look that says Paul's gambling prowess is far from the truth. Harriet seems to suspect this, too, now) PAUL (thinking he's off the hook) Lady Luck, Jack – always put your trust in her.

STEPHANIE The victim liked gambling, too. (she looks up, her dossier) After-hours card games at the pub, rolling home late. More like you all the time, Paul. PAUL (brushes this off with a fake laugh) Ready for a malt or maybe a brandy, Jack? How about everyone else? Time for a top-up? (he checks but the various bottles are mostly empty) Some host I make – back in two ticks. (he leaves by the door to the kitchen) REBUS So your casino is bucking the trend, Jack? JACK What trend?

REBUS I thought betting was all virtual these days. I sometimes wake up with the TV still on and every advert's for online gambling. JACK I make enough to get by. Besides, a physical casino is more of a lifestyle choice. REBUS That word again.

JACK You don't just go there to have a flutter. It's got a bit of razzamatazz, a bit of glamour. It's theatre and music and food and drink. REBUS Which is fine until the poor punter goes home and finds himself broke. JACK Come and see for yourself some night. Pile of chips on the house.

REBUS Brown sauce or vinegar? STEPHANIE How did you get into gambling, Jack? Casinos, I mean.

JACK I thought I told you? STEPHANIE (shifting slightly – he is referring to pillow talk, albeit from long back, but something she'd rather was kept hidden from the others) Maybe I've forgotten. JACK I started off with one bookmaker's, just one. Ended up making a name for myself, expanding. A casino seemed the logical next step. Axminster carpets, flock wallpaper, proper champagne. Pure class. REBUS I always reckon you can't buy class off-the-peg. JACK Which is why my suits are tailor-made. I can give you his name if you like?

About the authors

Sir Ian Rankin is the author of the bestselling Rebus novels, which have been adapted for both stage and screen. Simon Reade is a dramatist, director and producer. *A Game Called Malice* is published by Orion, price £18.99

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Back of the net

Entwining sport, music and social history, the absorbing *Watford Forever* is a saccharine-free, true-life fairy tale, writes John Aizlewood

They were an unlikely pair, Elton John, the flamboyant, gay, drug and drink addicted multi-millionaire. And Graham Taylor, the Vera Lynn fan whose idea of a good time was to take his wife Rita and their daughters on caravanning holidays.

They bonded over one thing: Watford FC. In 1977, Watford were marooned in the basement of English football when John, the childhood fan who had become chairman, enticed Taylor – whose undistinguished playing career was ended by injury,

before his remarkable work at Lincoln City transformed him into a coveted manager – to a crumbling club whose scouting department consisted of one 95-year-old man.

Entwining sport, music and social history, the absorbing *Watford Forever* is a saccharine-free, true-life fairy tale, which showcases another side of Elton John: tender, practical and as eager to please as he is willing to learn.

The book is written as "a collaboration with Elton John", so his children can "learn more about a comparatively little-known side of

Elton's life", according to author John Preston, writer of *A Very English Scandal* and the Robert Maxwell biography. Fall. With Preston's access to the star, *Watford Forever* could have been John-centric, but he and Taylor are accorded equal weight.

It details how, in just five giddy years, rocket man and football man guided Watford to the highest level, for the first time in the club's hitherto mundane history. But it's really about the relationship between the two men.

Taylor had never knowingly met a gay man before his chairman, but even back then, when homophobia was rampant, homosexuality was never an issue. "We never talked about it, not once," insists John.

For all his naivety, Taylor had instinctive sympathy for the underdog and couldn't grasp how anyone could be abused for their sexuality, as John was, openly by fans across the land and, more covertly,