



## Playing in the Dark

*Avery Cockburn*

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## **Playing in the Dark** Avery Cockburn

The popular Scottish gay romance series takes a thrilling turn, as a spy falls for a wedding planner who can't keep a secret to save his life—literally.

Evan Hollister needs to feel real. He's pledged his life to protecting the innocent, but heroism carries a heavy price. After his job forced him to abandon his last boyfriend, Evan vowed never to love—and hurt—another man. Now, a wedding planner with a kind heart and a goofy grin is taking a blowtorch to Evan's wall of ice.

Ben Reid needs to feel safe. Burned by secrets in the past, he thinks knowing everything about everyone is the best way to keep people happy—to keep them, full stop. But after falling for a god-on-earth-gorgeous footballer spy, Ben learns that some secrets can never see the light.

When Ben's same-sex weddings become a terrorist target, Evan must once again choose between the man he loves and the country he swore to defend. And Ben must find the courage to fight for what he needs—no matter the cost.

## **Playing in the Dark Details**

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# From Reader Review Playing in the Dark for online ebook

**R \* A Reader Obsessed \* says**

## 4.5 Still Impressive Stars!

I know I sound like a broken record when it comes to this Glaswegian series, but don't be fooled that this is some easy going sports themed romance. It consistently brings the emotions, the gritty angst, and the oh-so-relevant issues that face our young MC's. Though these Scottish guys take their football seriously, they are faced with much more dire things than finding a job and graduating school. In past books, we've witnessed their country's warring political climate which included social differences, marriage equality and acceptance, independence and nationalism, and this time around, the little known but very real threat of terrorism that pretty much everyone around the world can potentially face these days.

Here, we finally get to Evan's story. He's an understandably much disparaged character, but Evan has more layers than an onion, and though on the surface he might be that cocksure guy who cheated on poor Fergus in *Playing for Keeps*, in reality, there's many a personal and extenuating circumstance surrounding that tumultuous time. Evan has quite the burden to carry, and how he handles it with grace and bravery is strongly affecting.

It's also not surprising that Evan's basically an outcast amongst his fellow teammates, and he's alone and lonely. When he connects with Ben, there's a glimmer of hope that maybe, just maybe, love might be a possibility for him again. For me, this latest installment was a bit more weighty - there's real fears, there's real stakes at play as lives possibly hang in the balance. So, not only is this a thoughtful touching romance, mix it with complex local and international political issues with also an insightful and frustrating look at religion as well. There are no easy answers for Ben and Evan, and they definitely struggle with the difficult dilemma of choosing between faith and love and love and duty.

Cockburn obviously does not fail us here. She keeps this consistently engaging, sexy and sensual, with heartache and hope and redemption with possibly some forgiveness. This no doubt was a long story, but I never once felt impatient or bored which is an amazing feat for my feeble brain. I urge all to invest the time and start with *Play On* and immerse yourself in these men and their struggles. It's been a well worth it and rewarding journey, and I absolutely look forward to more!

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**Ariana says**

\*3,75\*

I enjoyed this, but I didn't love it as much as I hoped I would.

**All the +++++++:**

.) One of the Glasgow lads actually being a \*cough\* spy was a huge surprise and a very interesting move.

.) The author did a good job highlighting the complexities of living with a person working in the secret service. Having to sign a non disclosure document before you can even date ... darn. I wouldn't want to be in

that situation. And that is only the beginning.

.) The MCs:

**Evan**, who we grew to hate as Fergus's ex is actually an amazing guy who does whatever it takes to do his 'duty'. But his job is having a severe effect on him. Not only does he deem himself unlovable, but he is seriously effected by events of a previous operation.

The wounds left by his rough, work-related break up with Fergus are closed here in a very honest way. I loved that he and Fergus talked it out eventually.

**Ben** we met as the wedding co-ordinator who helped out with Fergus and John's wedding. He is just a 'wee cutie' with a very kind heart and a genuinely nice guy. But it did irk me that he 'couldn't keep a secret'.

**Why was I not over the moon with this one?**

Bascially I think there was too much going on everywhere.

With Evan: I think that all his worries and psychological issues would have been enough. But then we get the whole backstory of his family and his parents' marital problems on top of it. The events at his sister's wedding felt half baked and irrelevant.

With Ben: First there is Evan and all the problems that come with him being who he is, then we get a lot of info about the weddings he's organizing and his mother who is half approving, half disapproving of him being gay (her attitude really confused me) and mostly the struggle with his faith which does not allow OPEN gay relationships. I think this issue alone could have been the centre of a book.

The terrorist investigation ... I admit I found it a bit long winded and did switch off sometimes when too many acronyms hit the page. It seemed somehow not quite to fit in with the rest of the book.

To me it felt the book is going into too many directions. Adding in all of Evan's family, Evan's work colleagues and the whole footballing community at the Warriors it is also bustling with a huge amount of people.

Saying that, I did have a good time. I loved this series, but this was not my favourite.

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## **Kaje Harper says**

In this book, we get to see what happened back at the beginning, when Evan Hollister cruelly dumped Fergus right before that semi-final game-- both the pain of it, and the fact that Evan made his choice for valid reasons, but... despite everything, he could have chosen Fergus if Fergus had truly been the center of Evan's universe. He wasn't, quite - not enough to balance other really vital priorities. This reveal both solidifies the relationship of Fergus and John with no regrets, and gives room for Evan to move forward as a sympathetic character, the spy who was forbidden to tell the truth.

He met Ben at Fergus's wedding, and there was a real spark of attraction, but Evan isn't looking for a relationship to complicate his life. When the next terrorist threat appears to be against gay weddings, though, Evan's work and personal life are about to collide again.

Ben is doing gay wedding planning, but he's conflicted about it. He's sweet, open, a bit naive despite all the pick-up sex he's indulged in. He's torn between a faith he and particularly his mother still believe in, and his sexuality and his right to be who he is. "Love the sinner, hate the sin of gay relationships" is hideously unfair, no matter what religion it's coming from. You can't love only a part of who someone is, but Ben's mother is trying to walk that path. So far, Ben has coped by keeping the gay sex hidden away from his life, and his heart. But Evan is different, and he's going to make Ben face all the various parts of himself he's been trying desperately to compartmentalize.

Evan deeply believes in the work he has been doing as an intelligence agent, infiltrating organizations that may be planning terrorist attacks. He hasn't let his personal life ever come ahead of saving innocent lives. He let the job take Fergus from him, for the greater good.

But as Ben works his way deeper into Evan's heart, Evan's ability and willingness to go on keeping secrets and following orders will be threatened. Last time, Evan chose to hurt the man he loved to protect strangers, but this time the situation is messier, and Ben is directly at risk. And this time, Evan is an older, battered and traumatized man, psychologically scarred by how things played out last time. Lives were saved, but also lost, and it wasn't clean and it wasn't always heroic, and now Ben isn't someone who'll fit comfortably or silently into those grey areas.

I really enjoy this series, both the characters and relationships, and the social context. We see the fracture lines between belief and power in society, the agencies that are both protection and oppression, the hidden hands in the background of our social media and beliefs. There are no easy answers to the problems these characters face, and that makes their stories all the more compelling.

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## **Meags says**

### **5 Stars**

#### **Spoilers ahead if you haven't read the rest of the series!**

I remember having a conversation about this series, roughly a year ago, during which me and my friend were all like, "could you imagine if Evan turned out to be a spy!?!". We were joking at the time, literally laughing the idea off. We figured such a twist would never happen in this already well-established series about football (soccer) and romance. But as it turns out, guys, EVAN'S A FREAKIN' SPY!!!!... And I couldn't be happier with this turn of events!

Like many a long-time reader of this series, I was on the "we hate Evan, the bastard cheater" bandwagon for a good long while. Up until late in *Play Dead* (book #3.5), I could not fathom ever rooting for this guy, let alone wanting to read his story. But looks can be deceiving and information can be misleading, and, thankfully, everything I thought I knew and understood about Evan was completely wrong – so wrong, in fact, that by the time I knew this book was in the works, I was eagerly counting down the months until its release as one of my highest reading priorities.

Turns out that what we (and the other characters in the series) thought we knew about Evan was completely false. Everything he is perceived as doing in the past is a lie, of sorts, led to cover up a much bigger, more dangerous truth regarding his secret job working in anti-terrorism for a government agency.

In *Playing in the Dark* we finally get to know the real Evan – a man who battles with personal demons from his past, unable to tell anyone what he really does or who he really is. I felt for him immediately upon finally getting his POV, and before long I was head over heels for the man within that Evan keeps hidden from the rest of his world.

When Evan (re)meets Ben, a young, mixed-race gay man, who specialises in LGBT wedding planning in Glasgow, Evan finally considers what it would be like to truly let someone into his world for the first time in his adult life. The risks are high and the keeping of the classified secrets remains an issue, but in Ben Evan finds his perfect partner in all things, and the fight to make a real and honest relationship work with Ben becomes paramount to Evan's health and happiness.

I loved Evan and Ben together. I've spent several years holding Lord Andrew and Colin (from book #2) up on a pedestal as my preferred *Glasgow Lads* pairing, but I daresay that Evan and Ben have just taken top spot as my ultimate favourites. I loved every single interaction these two shared. Their chemistry was through the roof, in *and* out of bed, and although the sexy-times were of the highest quality in terms of intimacy, steam and tenderness, I adored their simple interactions and in-depth conversations about life, politics, and religion just as much.

From the outside, it's possible to assume this series is yet another simple and fluffy sports romance romp, but the *Glasgow Lads* and their stories are SO MUCH MORE than that. The themes alone are thoughtful and impressively weaved into the stories, featuring a deeper look at everything from the threat of terrorism we all now face in the free world, to gay rights and marriage equality, to religion, and the vast scape of the political and social climates across Scotland. Most of these themes are not ones I'd usually seek out – in fact, I'd be more likely to avoid stories with such themes in my regular reading – but the way Cockburn delivers her narratives, intelligently and comprehensively, I find myself completely enthralled and fascinated by all the themes touched upon within. I honestly come away from these stories feeling like I've learned something of value, which I can't say often.

Although a long read, clocking in at almost 500 pages, I was never once bored or impatient. The story was paced to perfection, and even though it was long, I finished with a feeling that I could have easily just kept reading about these guys and their complex and delicious romance.

Needless to say, I highly recommend this series to anyone who wants a brilliantly written, deeply thoughtful and intelligent read, featuring some of the hottest and most swoon-worthy book couples in the M/M genre.

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## Hollis says

I have been waiting for Evan to get his story (and his redemption!) for aaaages. And it was well worth the wait. I so loved discovering more of this character, his secrets, his past, his struggles, and I felt for him so much. What **didn't** work for me, however, was the romance.

I mostly liked Ben, I loved the diversity and dialogue surrounding his faith, but I never felt the connection between these two. Not once. Somehow they just didn't click for me. I don't know if I could've loved Ben had he been in a different story, with a different guy, but I like to think so. I just couldn't root for these two as a couple.

As for the plot, it was very well researched and very in-depth, all these political and terrorist elements, and I

mostly enjoyed that, too. It did get a little heavy on the details at times and I felt some of that slowed down my reading, so, overall this is not my favourite of the *Glasgow Lads* series but I loved the closure it offered to an event that stretches back to book one and that Evan did get his HEA.

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### Bev says

Wow!! The Glasgow Lads grow up and come of age in this adult-themed, right wing extremism story from Avery...and I warn you now, there is hardly any football in this read. ????? 4.5 stars rounded up from me.

Evan...well, even \*I\* had a go at him in book 1 *Playing for Keeps* **but** smoke and mirrors people, smoke and mirrors. To keep his friends safe and his profession under wraps [Evan has more layers than the proverbial onion], he takes all the flak for dumping Fergus, losing his friends and legging it to Belgium with a 'new lover' when the actual reality was something much more scary indeed...he was on an undercover op in Belfast [I've mentioned in previous reviews for this series that to this day some parts of Glasgow remain divided by religious differences as they have close ties to Belfast]. I'm not going into any more detail about what happens but suffice it to say that things did not go as planned for either Evan or his employers MI5.

Due to his Persian and Scottish ancestry, Ben really struggles to reconcile his faith with the fact that he is a young, out and proud gay man with needs. His 'job' as a wedding planner means that he knows several of the Warriors players, and when he and Evan connect at Robert and Liam's wedding [*Playing with Fire*], we could only hope that things would work out for the two of them. I had big issues with Liam in this story I have to admit but he redeems himself towards the end. Evan finally gives Ben the vaguest details about his job [to keep him safe] but Ben unfortunately is unable to keep quiet when things get rough, and trouble follows ?. He also has problems with his own perception of Evan, and doesn't know whether the man he is in love with is the 'real' Evan ?. I'll leave this one here...

(view spoiler)

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### Elena says

These days I feel like I should just hire a ghostwriter to write my reviews, I have a thousand thoughts in my head about the books I read but I just can't seem to put them into words.

Thankfully, for this book I don't need to, since Linda already did such a great job here, right down to me not remembering Ben (at all!) and needing to reread this series sooner or later because I completely drew a blank on some characters when they were mentioned.

I'll add that I couldn't believe it when (view spoiler)

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### ~nikki the recovering book addict says

#### 5 brilliant stars!

This was definitely worth the wait. I don't know how many months but it was many, many months!

I have so much respect for Avery Cockburn (although I know that's not her real name) that not only is she

able to craft such a beautiful and believable romance with all the sweetness and angst that truly makes a romance. But also for making the plot lines work especially with real world events in the timeline she has chosen. That's possibly one of the hardest things to do, to string all that together. So massive, massive respect for Ms Cockburn. ???

For this instalment, I love Ben! He's such a happy character and definitely one that makes up for Evan's maudlin nature. I didn't know where this story would take me so it was truly lovely to be immersed in a story that isn't predictable.

I laughed and cried and hurt and had adrenaline coursing through my veins in this brilliant story. And swooned. Definitely swooned with Ben as he fell in love with Evan and vice versa.

I have to point out that I love a despairing Evan as he fed and looked after new-born lambs. So adorable! ? the entire scene just tickled me for some reason ?

In closing, I just want to say, Thank you, Ms Cockburn. Now when's the next one coming?? ?

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## **Natalie says**

### **Fascinating take on spying**

It's so cool to get this explanation for Evan's behavior towards Fergus and find out he's not a cheating son-of-a-B. What did happen was far more than I could have imagined. I kind of wish I'd gone back and reread everything but I was too anxious to read this. Ben is kind of adorkable but I confess, I didn't entirely believe his and Evan's connection fit. I never got that extra zing of having my emotions become invested in them. I also feel like adding in the crisis of Ben's religion was a bit much on top of the many contretemps over Evan's job and details in Evan's family that didn't really have a point. It was still pulled off quite well through Avery Cockburn's skills and the added interest she builds using political subjects to stimulate a readers intellect along with the romantic and erotic content. She balances it well, never making it overly political but entirely intriguing.

The entire Warriors team is present for various scenes of course, so updates for previous couples were nice to see. I did like Ben and Evan's characters, helped by the alternating viewpoints. It was a rather lengthy story, complex but not complicated. Info about Evan's father and extended family with his mother and stepfather added quite a bit of support to the choices Evan had been making in his life. I did really enjoy the overall story and hope there will be another book centered around the team members.

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## **Elsa Bravante says**

Avery Cockburn es una autora que a temporadas es muy activa en Twitter, fundamentalmente en lo relativo a política. En muchas ocasiones estoy de acuerdo con ella, en otras no tanto (lógicamente puesto que somos dos personas distintas) y soy muy consciente de que diferimos en algunas ideas sobre las que trata este libro y fundamentalmente sobre el trabajo de Evan, probablemente estas diferencias estén muy influenciadas por el hecho de que ella es de USA y yo europea (española). Teniendo en cuenta esto encaraba la lectura con mucha ilusión, porque adoro la serie y a la autora, pero también con muchas dudas.



Afortunadamente, no tenía por qué haber tenido esas dudas, la experiencia, como siempre en el caso de los lads, ha sido muy positiva. Evan y Ben son polos opuestos, uno extremadamente reservado y el otro extrovertido, con backgrounds culturales y religiosos diferentes, uno deportista y otro organizador de bodas. Pero, todas esas diferencias al final se complementan y nace una historia de amor llena de sensibilidad y con unas escenas de sexo que tienen siempre una razón de ser, como es habitual con Avery, muy eróticas, pero también llenas de sentimientos. Al mismo tiempo que se desarrolla la relación entre los protagonistas hay una subtrama relacionada con el trabajo de Evan, se entrelaza muy bien con la historia de amor, es interesante y nunca llega a ser aburrida o con una carga pesada de información. Además de todo esto, puedo decir que he aprendido muchísimo, fundamentalmente sobre la Fe de Ben. Los personajes están muy bien dibujados, puedes compartir o no cómo actúan o cómo piensan, pero los entiendes siempre y sabes de dónde vienen esas actitudes y pensamientos y tras tantos libros es francamente bonito ver cómo Evan encuentra el amor que merece. Punto muy muy positivo adicional es la aparición de Colin, Lord Andrew, Fergus, John (que es un santo), Duncan y Brodie, ¡los amo a todos!

Le pongo 4.5 estrellas, no llega a las 5 porque en la última parte la trama relacionada con el trabajo de Evan me costó algo creérmela y porque la relación entre los dos, aunque el amor se palpa, en alguna ocasión me ha parecido algo precipitada.

Es un libro largo para lo que estamos acostumbrados en el MM, pero en ningún momento se hace tedioso, además de una bonita e intensa historia de amor es un libro muy entretenido, se me ha pasado en un suspiro. Una vez más, y ya son un número considerable de libros y novellas, los lads no me decepcionan, una de mis series favoritas, y sin duda una de las más completas, la autora siempre consigue un equilibrio entre amor, sexo y cuestiones sociales/políticas.

Muy muy recomendable.

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## Ami says

### 4.25 stars

Who knew that a romance that involves spies become my favorite book of this series so far! I mean, I'm really not a fan of spy-romance, I neither like nor care about their job description (even if they're hero to the country they represent). Having said that, Evan as a character intrigued me -- he comes at first as the *villain* who breaks Fergus' heart -- but then we find out that he's a spy! And well, I want to read his redemption romance, so to speak.

And BOY, I **LOVE** this book!!

I loved both Evan and Ben as characters. I loved their struggles -- Evan with his secrets, his job, and his desire to keep Ben close and safe, then Ben with his Bahá'í Faith, his relationship with his mother, and his protective stance towards Evan. IT'S A VERY COMPELLING READ, people!! I mean, it's the longest book in this series to date, and I almost usually avoid romance with more than 400 pages these days, but this one kept me focused.

I felt that Evan and Ben were really good for each other. I'm sorry for Fergus, and I can understand his hurt. But hey, he's with John now, and John is good for him. Evan and Ben are solid together, and I'm happy that they can live happily ever after too.

I still didn't care about the spy job though -- and every time Evan talked about his worked, my eyes kinda got blurry, and I sort of skimmed the words. Maybe it's the state of the world, with Russia, ISIS, immigrants, etc.

But at the same time, my country has its own problem, so yeah, I don't really pay attention to all of these. Sorry.

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### **Achim says**

I usually do reviews mainly to remind myself how I felt or what I liked/disliked if I ever feel like reading a book again or the book comes up again somehow and I need to remember. Glasgow Lads are one of my favorite series, one where I know the next book is not just the same same as the one before and it's one of the rare real contemporary historical books - so I will feel the need to reread it sometime but instead of writing my own thoughts about it I can completely refer to the review of R\* A Reader Obsessed \* and can only support her to urge all to invest the time and start with Play On

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### **Linda ~ chock full of hoot, just a little bit of nanny ~ says**

When this series started, I hated Evan with a passion for hurting Fergus the way he did, skipping off to Belgium to be with some other lover. Only in Play Dead, we learned that things were not as they seemed, and I got instantly way more interested in learning more about him. And about Ben too, I guess. \*whispers\* I actually forgot who Ben was! shhh!

Evan's trying to get his life back together after a horrifying ordeal and when he met Ben in Playing With Fire, he was pretty much resigned to living a lonely life as the bad guy on the team. But he and Ben connected instantly apparently, and they pick up on that attraction here and move incredibly quickly considering the sort of life Evan lives and the secrets he needs to keep and lies he needs to make. (I should do a reread one of these days because I was having trouble keeping a lot of these couples straight ... but not straight-straight. You know what I mean.)

I admit, I started getting a little worried by the halfway point about where this story might go. I don't know why, since Ms. Cockburn has always avoiding cliché pitfalls before, but there's always a first time right? Not here, I'm glad to say. This story was more about two characters learning how to be more fully themselves and realizing that in order to do that they actually had to let go of some of their previous preconceptions of who they were. That didn't stop me wanting to smack them more than a few times when they were making stupid mistakes, and there were a few chapters with a few too many sex scenes too close together at the beginning, but that evened out and we really got to see how they work as a couple and not just in the sack.

I did like learning about Ben's Bahá'í faith, which I never knew about before. It did feel a tad on the preachy side a couple of times though. I really would've liked to see some more of Ben's mom and Evan's family. Evan's job with MI-5 was also interesting and well-paced, with a layered quasi-mystery to drive the plot. Evan was a little reckless at times, and this teetered just over the line into unprofessional professional a couple of times, but I could understand why Evan made the decisions he made.(view spoiler)

I was happy where this book left them though and they're both clearly where they need and want to be by the end of it. I hope we get more of them in later books and novellas.

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## **Cadiva says**

### **Brilliantly detailed spy adventure still keeps the romance alive**

This review is spoilery but the short story Avery just released let the cat out of the bag already so.

Wow, just wow. I've been waiting for Evan's story ever since he sent the Captain's armband and a note saying he was running off to Belgium with his lover and broke Fergus' heart.

I knew there had to be more to it, running off to Belgium just sounded like it had to be an excuse, not that there's anything wrong with Belgium, but it's not the first place you think of when it comes to illicit affairs.

Avery dropped other hints here and there throughout the series that there was more to Evan than him being a callous heartbreaker and I remember mentioning somewhere that I bet he was in MI5.

Now I was joking really when I said it, I honestly was expecting some kind of twist, undercover police or special forces perhaps, rather than the UK secret service.

But with this wonderful narrative, it makes perfect sense and my heart broke for Evan so many times. This is a love story, it is a romance, but it's like all of the Glasgow Lads series - it's laced through with so much more.

Set back in 2015 there's a whole host of things going on here in the UK which are reflected in this book and Evan's dedication to his country is given the weight it deserves.

I loved Ben, I was fascinated by the background Avery gave him and the insights into a faith I'd only heard about in passing. I loved his passion, his innate sense of justice, his quirks and his growing confidence in himself and his relationship with Evan.

All of this book made me happy, but the scenes in Orkney were among my favourites, where Evan could let go and be the Evan he might have been in a different lifetime.

A triumphant closure, if it is the last of the Lads I think they've gone out on a positive note.

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## **Michael Jensen says**

Avery Cockburn's Glasgow Lads series has been one of my favorite ongoing M/M series for quite a few years now. But I have to confess that I was a teensy bit less excited to read the latest, *Playing in the Dark*, the fourth full novel in the series. Not because I'd been disappointed in any of the others (or her spin-off series about curling. Yes, curling!), but because I wondered how much more drama there was to be rung out of the world of Glaswegian soccer.

I needn't have wondered. Because Cockburn has pulled a fast one on us readers. Or to use a much more appropriate sports metaphor, *Playing in the Dark* is a change-up.

Yes, it's still set (mostly) in Glasgow, and, yes, it still involves soccer and the gay soccer team, the Warriors.

But this time, playing soccer and the fate of the Warriors aren't central to the tale. Instead, our story this time focuses on Behnam Reid and Evan Hollister. Fans of the series might remember Evan was the villain who broke Fergus' heart in a previous book.

But it turns out Evan isn't the villain readers believed. In fact, he's a good guy. A really good guy. Explaining how would spoil the fun for many readers, but let's just say Cockburn convincingly uses the world of the UK's MI5 to take her series in an entirely new direction that I loved once I got past my initial skepticism. (Let's just say the words "spy," "Glasgow," and "terrorism" don't usually go hand in hand.

Cockburn also adds a great element of diversity with Behnam, known to his friends as Ben. I'd never read a character who was also a practicing Baha'i, a mostly progressive and tolerant religion, except when it comes to same-sex relationships. Ben has to struggle with his own beliefs, as well as those of his mother's. Given that they both work as wedding planners—and that Scotland had just legalized same-sex marriages—life gets pretty complicated for Ben when he falls for Evan.

But that's the least of the complications these two gay men have to navigate.

Playing in the Dark is filled with Cockburn's usual attention to Scottish detail—the dialect, slang, and setting truly make the book sparkle—as well as her hot sex, deft weaving in of current political events, and most importantly for me, characters you truly care for and want to see end up happy.

While Playing in the Dark isn't too much of a soccer book, it will definitely leave you cheering at the end. You might even yell "GOOOOAAAAALLLLLL!"

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