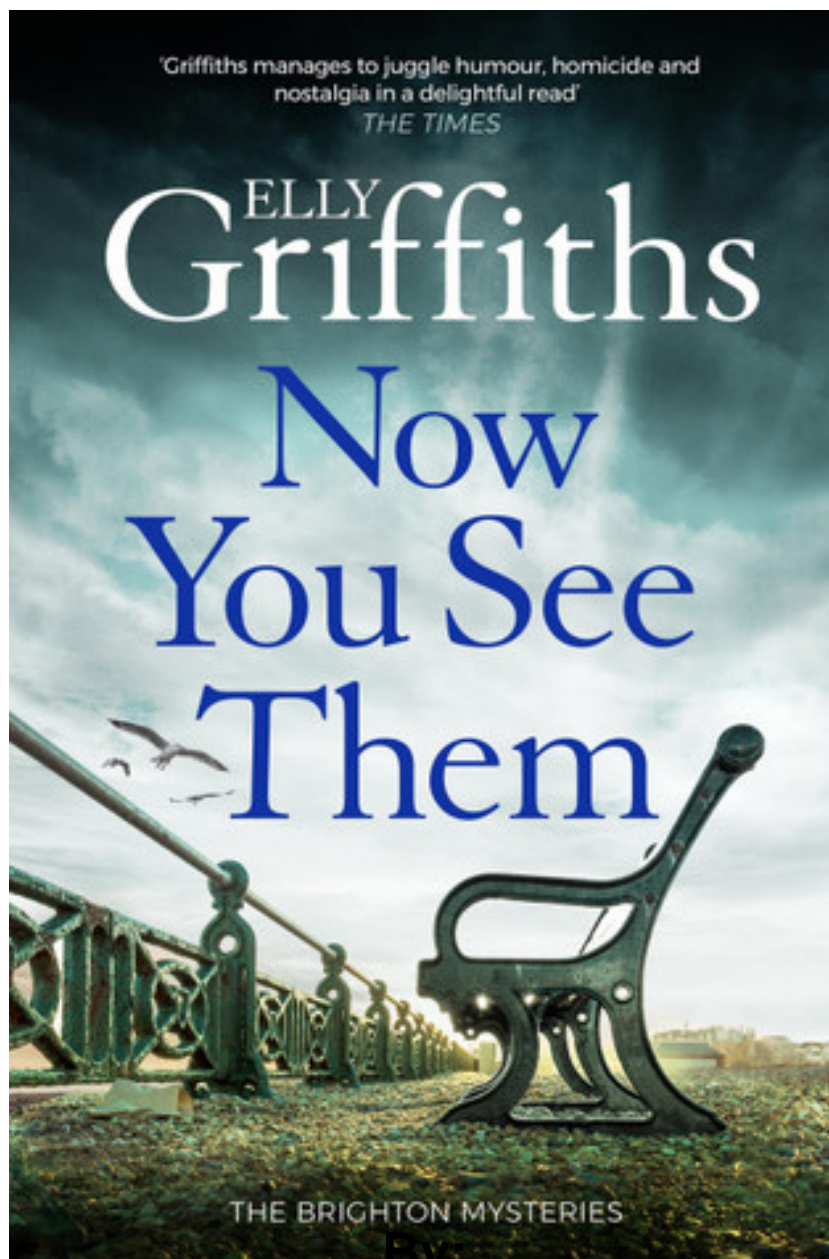


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By
Elly Griffiths

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What people Say:

Paromjit

It has taken this latest addition to Elly Griffiths's historical Stephens and Mephisto series set in Brighton for me to become aware of just how much I love this series. It picks up more than a decade later from events in *The Vanishing Box*, in the interim fundamental shifts have taken place in the lives of the major characters. It is 1964, Max is now a bona fide movie star living in LA, married to the famous actress, Lydia Lamont, and has two young children, Rocco and Elena. He is now Lord Massi

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The paths of this close knit group connect once again at the funeral of Stan Parks, *The Great Diablo*, along with Max and Edgar, was part of *The Magic Men*, wartime comrades running vital missions in WW2. Being a housewife and mother is not enough for Emma, she sorely misses her previous life as a DS, her dissatisfaction is something Edgar is aware of, correctly intuiting she hankers a return to her previous role in the police, which is just not a realistic possibility. Max too is feeling his own strain of unhappiness, he hankers for his old variety music hall shows, the itinerant lifestyle as a magician, but that has all but disappeared from British cultural life. Now it all about pop stars, like *The Beatles*, and film stars, attracting huge young crowds of screaming fans. There are violent running battles on the Brighton seafront between the Mods and the Rockers, with the police caught in the middle. Max is ruminating over the loss of the murdered Florence, who he believes he loved, and wondering about the nature of his marriage to Lydia, but his children keep him tethered to his current life. A 16 year old Rhonda Miles, a Roedean school girl, has gone missing, a fanatical follower of the American film star, Bobby Hambro. 2 other women have previously gone missing, with matters coming to a head when the dead body of a woman is discovered on the beach.

Danger comes much too close to Max, as Ruby disappears and Emma just cannot stop herself getting involved, resentful, aware that she is much the better detective than both Edgar and Bob. She is joined by her only friends, Sam Collins, local reporter and medium, Astarte Zabini. It is the women, along with WPC Meg, that make the key breaks on the case. The sixties is an era where

rampant sexism, racism and anti-gay sentiment make life considerably more challenging. Emma has to forge a path in another direction with a police force unwilling to accommodate married women. Griffiths has a real gift in creating complex characters that you cannot help but care about, getting caught up in their lives and relationships, which hold centre stage as much as the core murder mystery in the novels. A brilliant historical series, capturing the class distinctions and spirit of Britain and Brighton in the 1960s in this addition, dripping with the social and cultural norms and attitudes of the time, amidst a background of the popular culture. Looking forward with great anticipation to the next in the series. Many thanks to Quercus for an ARC.

Carolyn

Where the first four books in this series were set in 1950s Brighton, this fifth episode has leapt ahead 10 years to the 1960s. Mini skirt wearing teenage girls are swooning over the Beatles and Mods and Rockers are ganging up on each other. The Magic Men who were part of a special squad in WWII have all gone their separate ways. Max Mephisto is no longer a variety show magician but a movie star, married to a Hollywood actress in LA and father of two young children and Edgar Stephens is now a po

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This is a case of missing girls, initially three girls from different walks of life who are first thought to have run away. It's more of a cosy mystery than a thriller, despite the involvement of the Brighton police with Max, Emma and a journalist all involved in looking for the girls. The plot is somewhat slow to develop with the police making little headway until a sudden breakthrough at the end.

The 1960s setting of this novel in the popular seaside town of Brighton is very atmospheric, particularly with regard to the social and cultural changes underway, such as the rise of pop stars and movie stars, the changing fashions worn by the Mods and the Rockers and more generally adopted by teenagers. The changing role of women is also highlighted with ex DS Emma Holmes unfulfilled as a full-time wife and mother and yearning for the excitement of her old life. This series will appeal to those who enjoy a murder mystery with an authentic historical setting.

Richard

It is always an event when a new Elly Griffiths book is due out. The chance to receive an advanced reader's copy (ARC) should not be passed up.

This is now the 5th in this series that began with her main characters caught up in making a go of things after World War II. Life in Post War England was a struggle and the charm of these books were the end of the pier shows, variety and where magicians were often topping the bill in theatres. Two wartime colleagues were reunited in what became ini

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Mephisto mysteries centred on Brighton, where Edgar Stephens became a detective inspector and Max Mephisto star and travelling magician assisted, whenever he was in town in solving the crimes presented.

They have now been rebranded the Brighton Mysteries but Max remains a central character and Edgar, now Superintendent makes this still really a police procedural (but with a magic twist).

This compelling addition to this engaging series is set some 11 years after the last one. Consequently, much has changed in the intervening years for these characters. The author manages this with the expertise of the successful novelist she is and integrates the backstory without deviation, hesitation or reputation.

It can be read as a stand-alone and would be a get in to anyone new to the series or Ely's diverse work.

Perhaps more challenging to the author was the jump into the 60's and presenting details some of her readers may have memories of and could have lived through themselves. Here Brighton comes into its own. While not like a Graham Greene novel but real and black. This series has always had an edgy feel to it even a decade earlier. No cosy mysteries here. The murders have always been macabre and dark, reflecting the stage magic and mystery of a bygone theatrical day.

This is a story of a missing girl where the abduction does not seem initially for ransom. As the investigation expands we see this might not be the first young woman taken but the facts surrounding each disappearance seem confused as each missing person left a note.

I loved the grasp of the teenage world; the crush young girls had for film stars and growing music scene like The Beatles. I also appreciated the social commentary that is bound up in the story regarding other social changes. Youth culture, gangs, women's roles, radio to TV and issue based awareness around sexuality, environment and class.

Linden

Ten years have passed since the last Magic Men mystery. Emma is no longer a police officer; she's married to Edgar, who is now Superintendent, and a mother of 3. Max is back--he married an American, and is just visiting Brighton. An important man's daughter is missing, and the police start to connect the case with some other disappearances of young women in the area. Then the kidnapping gets very personal, and everyone's help is needed to before it is too late.

Susan Johnson

Diablo would have preferred applause at his funeral just as he liked it in life but all he got was tears. The WWII special ops gang have gathered 10 years after the last book (now 1964) was concluded to pay their last respects to the old vaudevillian. And how things have changed. Edgar and Emma are married and have three children. He is now Police Superintendent in Brighton. Max has become a movie star in Hollywood and lives there with his movie star wife and two children. Ruby is the star of h

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As good as it seems on the surface, there is tension underneath. Emma is discovering being a wife and mother is not completely satisfying and she misses her police detective job. Both Max and Ruby are restless in their careers and looking for more challenges. As they all gather, girls start disappearing. When the daughter of a rich man goes missing, the search intensifies until someone famous is gone too and then a member of one of their own families is taken.

With nerves stretched thin, a minor riot between the mods and the rockers breaks out. I had never heard of this so I looked it up on Wikipedia. There were two groups in England. The mods were a scooter riding group who liked nice fashion and softer music. The rockers liked motorcycles and the Beatles. This made me smile but it was apparently a real problem.

The characters have really grown and evolved and this is, by far, my favorite book of the series. It can be read as a stand alone as the author does an excellent job of catching everybody up to date. Griffiths real strength, in my opinion, is her character development and she does not disappoint in this book. There is a delightful new, young female detective who makes her first appearance.

All in all, this is a delightful book and well worth the time spent reading it. When it was over I was slightly disappointed. I wanted to find out what was going to happen next and can't wait for the next book.