



Life! Death! Prizes!

Stephen May

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Billy's mother is dead. He knows-because he reads about it in magazines-that people die every day in ways that are more random and tragic and stupid than hers, but for nineteen-year-old Billy and his little brother, Oscar, their mother's death in a bungled street robbery is the most random and tragic and stupid thing that could possibly have happened to them. Now Billy must be both mother and father to Oscar, and despite what his well-meaning aunt, the PTA mothers, social services, and Oscar's own prodigal father all think, he feels certain that he is the one for the job.

The boys' new world-where bedtimes are arbitrary, tidiness is optional, and healthy home-cooked meals pile up uneaten in the freezer-is built out of chaos and fierce love, but it's also a world that teeters perilously on its axis. As Billy's obsession with his mother's missing killer grows, he risks losing sight of the one thing that really matters: the only family he has left.

Life! Death! Prizes! Details

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From Reader Review Life! Death! Prizes! for online ebook

Dawn says

I knew this book wasn't something that I would usually read and I was pleasantly surprised that I did like it. It kept my interest throughout, I liked the main characters and I enjoyed the ending. I am interested in reading more from this author.

Geoff says

For what is probably my final galley of 2012 I read *Life Death! Prizes!* by Stephen May. I requested a copy of the book via NetGalley because the author lives in West Yorkshire, which I love! I received no compensation for the following response, which is my honest opinion.

This book just didn't inspire me. I thought the premise was a great idea and the title is brilliant, but overall I can't bring myself to rave about the book. Don't get me wrong, there are definitely great parts and a couple of times I found myself laughing out loud (see the end of this post), but overall I found the story a bit too much to take in and the writing a bit overworked in some spaces. I unquestionably enjoyed Stephen May's wit, but I just couldn't empathize or sympathize with the main character, Billy, until the final few pages of the novel and even then I'm not sure if it was for him or for his little brother Oscar.

There were two reasons for this – I felt that Billy's speech patterns fluctuated a lot and not necessarily in a predictable manner. For most of the book his speech was, what I felt to be, spot on, especially the slang and syntax, but there were times when it felt like he was using a much older person's language and not when you would think he would be doing this. The second reason, was May's writing style. It bothered me on a couple of occasions when May threw in a list of social media or drinks or most of his lists really. It felt like he was trying too hard to show he was 'hip' and 'up-to-date' with the lingo of the youth. But, there were a few times where he did this seamlessly and it was great and humorous, but those he didn't were more noticeable.

[Click here to continue reading on my blog The Oddness of Moving Things.](#)

Bernadine says

A really great read. Stephen May captures the heartache of a nineteen year old boy dealing with the murder of his mother and having to take care of his six year old brother beautifully. And while this novel could so easily have been a soppy tearjerker (alla the *Life!Death! Prizes!* magazines Billy reads) it is not thanks to the wonderful if bitter humour scattered throughout. Billy is in so many ways a typical young adult, sloppy, lazy, and self centered. The question posed by this novel is whether he can be more than he is? He is very intelligent, but will his circumstances allow him to reach any sort of potential he may have? A highly recommended read.

Karen Keane says

I only read this book as part of the Readers Group that I run, it's not really my type of book but I really enjoyed it. It was completely different, the story of a boy who is trying to bring up his young brother after their mother was killed. A really down to earth book that made me laugh and cry and I just loved the 2 main characters, Billy and Oscar.

Aruna says

Stepbrothers Billy and Oscar try to cope in the immediate aftermath of their mother's murder. Oscar is 6 and wise beyond his years, Billy is 19 and thrown into the role of father figure. Billy lives in denial, of his grief, his anger and his inexperience for a parental role, and bottles up his feelings by playing video games and reading trashy magazines. There's a dysfunctional family, a love interest, a menacing murderer and the threat of the brothers' being separated as well. I wasn't sure how it was all going to end, and I loved the resolution the author chose. Funny, quirky, sad, beautiful. Loved it.

Joanna says

Life, Death, Prizes: a thoroughly modern novel

At the end of 'Life, Death, Prizes' I cried. As the tears rolled out of me, over the final three hundred words, I realised that I'd been holding them in the balance since the story began.

This is a novel rich in pathos, which dances, quite delicately, on the edge of pain and joy. Billy - our grief-stricken unreliable narrator - talks such sense, makes us laugh, and has such a deep love for his dead mum and his kid brother that we, too, come to ignore the tragedy, as it is revealed by he who cannot see it himself. We go along with Billy in his obsessions and his delusions. We find ourselves charmed by his rants and taken in by his heroism, as he shares mundane and extraordinary events that happen in a world recently knocked off its axis. In this colourful patchwork of truth and untruth we also learn the aching backstory of his mother's teenage killer, Aidan Jebb - a tale so horrible that it cannot be true and yet, so possible that it probably is. Somewhere.

There is a stream of pure darkness running through this funny, touching story. The sadness of this tale is sown into every word of brilliant observational wit, social commentary and pop culture. As such, this reader found herself hurtling towards the finale in a never-quite-crying, never-quite-laughing state of perpetual unfolding. It is a well-crafted novel, which moves along with pace, builds in suspense and offers the reader many surprises. It is an emotional story. However, to rely on the cliché of the roller-coaster is to deny, entirely, the subtle art of May's storytelling - 'Life Death Prizes' is a thoroughly modern novel, straddling the distance between our fears and expectations of a world, which is as daft as it is dark, painted for us, superbly, in all of its richness.

There are moments of resonance in the story of Billy Smith, which quietly puncture memories in my own life and I feel sure that this will be true for all readers. This is, perhaps, the point. May creates a truthful moment of poise between the 'trauma porn' of the 'real-life' magazines and the surreal agony of Billy's own life, such that this piece of fiction weaves its way into our own memories of actual lives and real truths. And

somewhere, always, amidst it all, there is the sunshine, which thankfully prevails.

Billy's story comes to a page-turning emotional climax which had been building, in quiet unease, for over two hundred pages. I loved it.

Tim Roast says

"Life! Death! Prizes!" is a reference to those magazines like Take-a-Break that have competitions in them alongside sensationalist stories of life and death, e.g. a normally quiet father killing family with rifles, or in a huge fire or something, because of some debts he'd built up.

And these are the magazines that the lead character, 19-year-old Billy Smith, enjoys.

The book starts with death, a funeral, and almost ends in death too, which would have been an ultra sad ending to the novel - luckily though the author adds a late twist and there is a happy ending.

The book follows Billy after he has lost his mum who was killed by Aidan Jebb. It is now just him and his 6-year-old brother in a house, on their own and he doesn't cope all that well with the situation all the time. It doesn't help that Aidan Jebb, his mum's killer, seems to be following him about.

The book also takes satirical looks at the way society is in England, and wider in the world through Billy playing the computer game Empire, but mainly I think this book is about how those "Life! Death! Prizes!" can pollute your mind a little. At least that's what I got out of it.

The novel is a bit quirky, quite interesting and may be worth a look especially if you like society issues.

Judith Yeabsley says

The first half of this book was a man's book written for males and told through the eyes of the key character Billy a 19 y.o. male. It seemed to be a series of witty, cynical and satirical one liners strung together. Sort of like Nick Hornby but funny and not as depressing. Then the second half the humour was still there but became more background as the plot and the relationships develop. Billy's mother dies unexpectedly (she's a single mum) and he is left in charge of her debts and his 6 y.o. half brother. The relationship between the brothers is just so male in its dynamics but it is also heartbreakingly beautiful. As things spiral downwards Billy copes less but has more to take on board and the book gets better and better. Started off amused but detached and ended up loving it. Want to read his first novel.

Susan May says

'Life, Death, Prizes' went to the bottom of my 'to read' list—not really my cup of tea. It's a great gig reviewing books but the downside is that many times you receive books that are just not to your taste. The books that rock my world involve thrills, spills, psychopaths, and if you have a spare monster or ghost, I will take those as well.

Now the upside of being a book reviewer—besides the lovely, free unreleased books—is the same as the downside. Let's just say I am forced to read outside my comfort zone and, sometimes, I am pleasantly surprised. On occasions, I am absolutely blown away.

So, where does 'Life! Death! Prizes!' fall? If my voice sounds like an echo it's because I've been blown away to Kansas by this book. Not my usual fare but it proves a book well written, no matter what, is a good book.

Billy is a nineteen-year-old dealing with the emotions of, well, being a nineteen-year-old, and all the associated grottiness and self-consciousness. His Mother has died pointlessly in a recent bungled street robbery leaving him parent to his little brother Oscar. There are plenty of pedestrian books on kids whose Mother has died but author Stephen May has voiced Billy with uncommon clarity.

The two brother's home life becomes a blend of unscheduled lives, unsuitable film watching, and uneaten healthy food stacked in the freezer whilst they dine on takeaway. When well-meaning relatives, teachers and Government bodies question Billy's ability to care for his little brother he must add 'fighting the establishment' to his list of duties.

There is, also, the smouldering mystery of the missing killer's life, as Billy's paranoia of his whereabouts grows, and we are offered a glimpse into what makes a criminal. Events are not neat or expected and an extraordinary ending will literally take your breath away.

Whilst the tag for the book claims it is funny, bittersweet, unforgettable; a story of grief, resilience and brotherly love, that is not the whole story. It is probably the most intriguing book I've read in a long time. Put it at the very top of your 'to read' list.

Visit <http://anadventureinreading.blogspot....> for more reviews & author interviews.

Sam Still Reading says

Admit it. You saw the title of this book and now you're wondering what it's about. Where does the term 'prizes' fit in to a story about a grieving pair of brothers? Why are there exclamation marks?

Now, just for a moment, step aside from this masterful piece by Stephen May. Pretend you're in a doctor or dentist's surgery, at your grandmother's or browsing magazines at the newsagent's. Think about titles such as That's Life! and Take 5 in Australia; Pick Me Up or Take a Break in the UK. What do all these magazines have in common? That's right, stories of survival, death and the opportunity to win a cuckoo clock by doing puzzles. And that's what's happening in Billy's world...

Billy, whose point of view this story is told, has been an avid reader of these magazines since his mum died. You see, the way in which she died is worthy of an article in one of the Life! Death! Prizes! magazines – she was trying to stop a bag snatcher from stealing her Netbook when she was killed. And now Billy is left to look after his half-brother, Oscar. Aunt Toni is sniffing around and Dean, Oscar's absentee father is trying to make a comeback, but Billy knows that he can give Oscar what he needs – tuition in playing the RPG Empire and Super Maximum Explode washing machine rides.

You might think that you've read this kind of thing before, but I want to tell you: you haven't. May handles Billy's situation with brutal honesty, never sugar coating the bad – Billy drinks a bit, smokes the odd joint

and prefers takeaway to lasagne from the freezer. Billy's a flawed character, but May writes in such a way that you're sympathetic with his plight. Whether Billy's dealing with a hangover, trying to overrun the world as a RPG dictator, sneaking out to the supermarket while Oscar sleeps or trying to deal with his feelings for the attached Lucy, he's a real guy. His character just leaps off the page.

The setting is another thing that May nails – from the dreary boredom of suburbia to the slight desperation to enjoy life with a fixed grin at the Fun Junction, where Billy meets his mother's killer. This book will have you laughing, grimacing and cheering Billy on, as he ultimately tries his best to care for Oscar.

May's razor sharp wit and realistic view of life, especially of a young person grieving while trying to figure out where they fit in the world, is simply fantastic. I couldn't put this one down – to the point where I was reading while walking to find out what happened to Billy and Oscar.

<http://samstillreading.wordpress.com>

Ian Kirkpatrick says

Quite simply this is the best novel I have read over the last year. It almost has a will of its own, an insistency that demands that you keep reading it and will not let you stop until you breathlessly reach the end.

I'll readily admit that it's not always an easy journey. It can be raw, ragged and uncomfortable, but it has a tender and compassionate core that ultimately restores your faith in humanity.

In Billy Smith May has created an authentic and utterly believable character, emotionally flawed and occasionally almost psychotic. At the outset Billy is ill-equipped to deal with the care of Oscar, his younger brother, as they both try to come to terms with their Mother's murder. But Billy knows that Oscar is relying on him and that he needs to shape up, despite the fact that his own life isn't exactly working out.

May's observations have the precision of a surgeon's scalpel and the cast of characters he has assembled are sharply defined and truthfully rendered.

Many reviewers seem to want to compare May to other writers (Nick Hornby, David Nicholls, Kate Atkinson, Dave Eggers and even J.D. Salinger....and that's just on the inside cover of the book!). Personally I think he stands on his own as a major talent without the need for lazy comparisons.

I had wondered whether May could write another book which was as strong and self-assured as his debut "TAG". But this wonderful novel demonstrates that Stephen May is developing into a literary force to be reckoned with.

Bree T says

Billy is 19 years old when his mother is killed, a victim of a bungled street robbery. Taking a gap year before university, Billy is supposed to be living a carefree life. Now he has lost his mother, his father is non-existent and to top it off, Billy must now act as both mother and father to his six year old brother Oscar.

Billy means well and he's doing his best – he means to keep Oscar with him, they're a family and they only have each other now. But he knows it isn't going to be easy, especially with his mother's sister making noises about wanting custody, Oscar's absent-until-now biological father talking about spending time with Oscar, Oscar's teacher and the school principal questioning him and social services knocking on the door.

Billy begins to think that the best way to deal with things – the bills, the threats of custody hearings and concerns about Oscar's wellbeing, is to just ignore it all and it will all go away soon enough. But that method doesn't seem to be working very well and the stress begins to wear him down. It doesn't help that he sees the face of his mother's killer everywhere he goes, staring at him from across the street, approaching him in men's rooms. Obsessed with finding him and having him caught, Billy is beginning to let go of the things that are really important.

I received *Life! Death! Prizes!* in the mail for review and it didn't take me long to dive into this story. Billy is just a kid, only 19 and he has just lost his mother in a brutal, senseless way. He finds himself playing parent to his younger brother Oscar, struggling to get him up and to school each day, his homework done, fed and tucked up into bed each night and dealing with a bed-wetting problem. He seems to be attacked from all sides, with people who should be supporting him working against him and confronting him at every turn.

Whilst I understood that Billy wasn't ready for this responsibility and that it was wearing him down and that he wasn't particularly succeeding, he was coping the best way he knew how and he cared very deeply for Oscar. I felt that the way in which people went about trying to deal with the situation was extremely unhelpful for him – Oscar's biological father requesting access after the funeral, when he hadn't had anything to do with Oscar, was insensitive. Billy and Oscar's aunt could've worked with him, rather than choosing to stand back and watch him struggle before filing for custody. And the school situation, where Billy meets with one of the teaching staff who then begins to bandy around personality and mental disorders she predicts Oscar will begin to start showing signs of due to his living condition was just extremely unprofessional, unresearched and rude. It was hard not to feel such sympathy for Billy, he's in a hard place but he obviously wants what is left of his family to be together.

Adding to his stress, Billy keeps seeing the youth wanted for his mother's death everywhere. This person haunts him, as he has destroyed Billy's whole world and as yet, is going unpunished for the deed. Billy and Oscar are suffering but so far the accused is still out there, still living his life while Billy's mother is no longer living hers. He immerses himself in magazines that detail weird and wonderful happenings to people (hence the title, as he refers to them as *Life! Death! Prizes!* magazines because that's what the cover headlines say, in a nutshell), in trying to make sense of his mother's own utterly senseless death and their situation.

Life! Death! Prizes! is a very well written story on grief, love and family. On wanting to do what's right, even when you don't know how to go about it – and this is true for more characters than just Billy himself. There are many people in this book that are struggling to do the right thing, or thinking that they're doing the right thing, trying to do what is best even if at first it seems like they are not. It questions the dynamics and specifics of a family, the role of social services and the school in welfare and what is best for a young child in the face of a tragedy. Billy, whilst not perfect or anything close to resembling it, requires admiration. Sometimes you don't know what it is you really need until the decision is taken out of your hands and made for you.

Starr Gardinier says

“Life, Death, Prizes” went to the bottom of my ‘to read’ list—not really my cup of tea. It’s a great gig reviewing books, but the downside is that many times you receive books that are just not to your taste. The books that rock my world involve thrills, spills, psychopaths, and if you have a spare monster or ghost, I will take those as well.

Now the upside of being a book reviewer—besides the lovely, free unreleased books—is the same as the downside. And, sometimes, I am pleasantly surprised. On occasions, I am absolutely blown away. So, where does “Life, Death, Prizes” fall? If my voice sounds like an echo it’s because I’ve been blown away to Kansas by this book. It proves a book—well-written—no matter what, is a good book.

Billy is a nineteen-year-old dealing with the emotions of, well, being a nineteen-year-old, and all the associated grottiness and self-consciousness. His mother has died pointlessly in a recent bungled street robbery leaving him to parent his little brother Oscar. There are plenty of pedestrian books on kids whose mothers have died, but author Stephen May has voiced Billy with uncommon clarity.

The two brothers’ home lives become a blend of unscheduled lives, unsuitable film watching, and uneaten healthy food stacked in the freezer whilst they dine on takeaway. When well-meaning relatives, teachers, and Government bodies question Billy’s ability to care for his little brother, he must add “fighting the establishment” to his list of duties.

There is the smoldering mystery of the missing killer’s life, as Billy’s paranoia of his whereabouts grows, and we are offered a glimpse into what makes a criminal. Events are not neat or expected and an extraordinary ending will literally take your breath away. Whilst the tag for the book claims it is funny, bittersweet, unforgettable; a story of grief, resilience, and brotherly love, that is not the whole story. It is probably the most intriguing book I’ve read in a long time.

Put it at the very top of your ‘to read’ list.

Reviewed by Susan May <http://anadventureinreading.blogspot....> for Suspense Magazine

Jamie Bradway says

This one is a high three. Stephen May creates characters you care about and incorporates moments of profundity. That's more than I normally get. Billy Smith is a great voice.

The plot does stray and strain, however. Occasionally, one or other of the situation or the reaction to the situation tests my willingness to believe and it comes up short.

Dainy says

Full review on Reader's Dialogue: <http://readersdialogue.blogspot.com/2...>

Billy is so confused. That's what hit me right from the start. He tries so hard to put up a brave face, to act like he has all the answers. That beard - he forgets to shave and then ends up liking his beard. I think it serves a double purpose - it makes him feel more like an adult, but at the same time, it hides him from the world. When he finally shaves it, he feels different, and I got the impression that he felt naked, exposed. His face was once again discernible. And all along, he's trying to hide behind a facade, pretending to be someone and something he's not. With Lucy, he's not attracted to her so much as he is attracted to what she represents, and that is the confidence that he so utterly lacks. He knows one thing: he loves Oscar and wants to protect him. But he has no idea what that even means. He learns things along the way, sure, but Billy is really just an old adolescent.

That's something about the book that I found really interesting. In England, a nineteen-year-old can buy beer for kids. In England, a nineteen-year-old is seen as an adult. In America, some things that happen in the story would never be able to happen simply because of the difference in the way Americans versus the British see teenagers. It's really a question of what a kid is, what an adult is, when that change happens, and who has the right to say when it is. Aunt Toni obviously feels that Billy is not quite an adult yet, but Billy feels he is, and the courts don't dismiss him right off the bat, so they at least consider the option that he could be a responsible adult. That's part of why the book is sort-of New Adult, sort of just plain adult, because Billy acts like an adult but thinks like a teenager most of the time. I don't think the question is answered in the book, it's just an interesting thing to think about.

There's really a lot to think about in this book, and I'm not going to go through each point. It's a poignant look at family and responsibility, told with pathos and wit.

Katy Noyes says

Very good. Very sad - the needless death of the boys' mum. How the 19 year old copes, what happens to her killer. Billy is an interesting narrator - very honest about his slobiness, his obsessions, his feelings for his family. We also see insights into the life and mind (and eventual gruesome demise) of Aiden, Mrs Smith's murderer.

It's all very true-to-life, very council-estate modern soap opera story (as the title and magazines that Billy reads shows it is meant to be), and a refreshing read.

Glad it made the Costa shortlist.

Pop Bop says

When It's Good It's Very Good

Here's the thing - I didn't buy the characters, the premise is hard to swallow, substantial developments in the story are unrealistic, and on close reflection a lot of the plot doesn't make sense. But I admired and enjoyed the book anyway. There are bits - set scenes, throwaway lines, little moments of insight and honesty and authenticity - that are beautifully handled and nicely captured.

And as I think about it, there are many well loved or at least appreciated books that are carried by completely unconvincing characters or totally implausible story lines. This isn't supposed to be a "realistic" novel in the angry young man tradition. It isn't slice of life or kitchen sink drama. It isn't a sprawling epic or an historical

fiction or a classic bildungsroman. There are touches of all those styles, but mostly the novel provides an opportunity for the author to riff on all manner of contemporary issues, and to explore questions of family and identity and sibling love, through the eyes, mind, and heart of a character who is articulate, wise, flawed, young, and idealized in a way that only good fiction allows.

The book has variously been described as raw, funny, heartfelt, sad, comic, gritty, heartbreaking, confused, happy, bleak, wry and tender. It is all that. It is confessional, almost more like a journal or diary turned into a running narrative, and if you like the hero's voice and are interested in what he's interested in, (or if you just like tight, sharp word craft), I would think you would enjoy this a great deal.

Please note that I received a free copy of this book in exchange for a candid review. Apart from that I have no connection at all to either the author or the publisher of this book.

Lisa says

A very tragic story on all fronts. Parts were funny and parts were sad but in the end it all worked out.

Emily Wheeler says

This is a review of the book *Life! Death! Prizes!* by Stephen May. The novel follows the experiences of nineteen year old Billy Smith, who is faced with looking after his six year old brother Oscar after the sudden death of their mother. The book takes its name from those magazines which ask readers to contribute their stories to fill pages, which are not actually called *Life! Death! Prizes!* but they might as well be. Billy refers to these magazines as “trauma porn”, which I suppose they are, but he devours them nonetheless. Or perhaps he devours them because of that. I leave that open.

The book is a very realistic portrayal of a teenager caught in this situation, trying to convince his aunt, Oscar’s school, social services and the world in general that he is well and truly capable of looking after his brother. The reader is less convinced, with the evidence of inappropriate television habits, random bedtimes and Billy’s strategy of, when his mother’s cashcard finally runs out, of just not paying the bills because the electricity and gas companies wouldn’t dare disconnect them, going against his confidence. He does, however, mean well, and believe he is doing the right thing, and for that we can love him.

Without wanting to give too much away, the fact that the book is in first person from Billy’s POV is used very well in misdirection. His history of Aidan Jebb, the boy who killed their mother, is convincing, and there are times when we are not sure whether we are seeing reality or some drug-induced hallucination. Billy isn’t sure, either, so I appreciate that’s the point. There are a couple of places, though, where I’m still unsure whether the misdirection is deliberate or not. For example, the bit where Billy’s attempted girlfriend Lucy is reading AA Milne to Oscar, Billy considers that a poem like that telling the story of James James Morrison Morrison wouldn’t be tolerated today, as it’s about child abduction. The thing is, of course, that it’s not about that at all (it is James James Morrison Morrison’s mother who disappears, not the boy himself), which leaves me unsure about whether it’s Billy or the author who is making this mistake.

My other criticism is about the twist at the end, which I don’t want to go into in too much detail. However, I think I can say that I didn’t really feel convinced about Billy’s intentions. While that sort of thing is touched

on during the story as a whole, I didn't get enough sense of him heading in that direction. It felt a little contrived, like he was going through the motions rather than actually being in the state of mind to carry it out. Perhaps he was; perhaps that was the point and I missed it, but I got the impression that he was serious. I just didn't feel it.

Aside from that, it was a very touching book. The relationship between Billy and Oscar was heartwarming, and the lengths that he went to to try to keep things the way they were, much as they could be, was rather endearing. Sure, he didn't always make the right decisions, but he was trying, and that counts for something. Well written, funny and in some cases painfully honest, it is well worth a read for anyone looking for a contemporary story about family, hope and dreams.

Benjamin says

When Billy's mother is killed in a bungled street robbery, the now orphaned nineteen year old boy is determined to look after his six year old step-brother Oscar, despite the advice of his aunt and the reappearance on the scene of Oscar's natural father who belatedly wants to claim him. In his own way Billy, who is doing a gap year before going off to university, does his best, but is is enough, especially once Social Services become involved?

The most heartening aspect of *Life! Death! Prizes!* is Billy's one thought to care for Oscar, and he does all he can to make Oscar happy; and Oscar responds with obvious love for his older brother. There are some delightful episodes: after Billy has been encouraging Oscar to take more responsibility for their easy lifestyle and late nights Oscar responds "but Billy, I'm only six".

There is a darker side here too, plagued by thoughts of his mother's now hunted killer, the wayward Aidan Jebb, Billy gradually builds a picture of the youth, and frequently catches glimpses of him as if he is being stalked. But Billy's obsession is in danger of getting out of hand and looks to be heading for tragedy.

This is a delightful read, sometimes you may want to shake Billy and tell him to get it together, and you may not always approve of his free lifestyle, or perhaps more pointedly the free-living way his radical mother raised him, but he is all heart and full of good intentions, and has almost endless time and patience for Oscar. It's a lovely premise for a novel, the bothers' determination to stay together, and Stephen May makes of it a lively, imaginative and often funny account which while frequently touching is never in danger of getting mawkish.
