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Speculative Fiction Book Review

Book Title	Aftan Whispers
Author	Phil Williams
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Stars	

It's no secret I'm a huge fan of fantasy author, Phil Williams. You can read my reviews of his Ordshaw series [here](#). That said, I'm new to his Estalia series. It has a post-apocalyptic, steam-punk setting but the Williams trademark of intensely vivid and credible characters remains.

Phil Williams is also a writer who knows how to tell a story filled to the brim with adventure, pace and tension. It does not let up. Yet none of the threats are contrived or forced. They develop out of two things; detailed and imaginative world building and the premise that authority controls everything in this world.

Deni is the prime protagonist, claiming knowledge of a secret that others consider to be too fanciful to be real. The clouds above the city of Metropolis can be parted and above them there is light and colour. She's befriended by Tyler, a roofer, whose curiosity and belief in the goodness of people drives him to support this damaged and potentially insane young woman.

They face an entire society that is hellbent on stopping them from disclosing the secret of the sky. A society which fabricates its 'false news' as real. Where have we heard that before eh? It's one of the reasons for loving this book as much as I did. There are so many parallels with our own world here. There are the devious, manipulative politicians who lie to the population so convincingly, so often and in such enormous ways that everyone believes them. The people are so wrapped up in the desperate search for survival that they don't question what they're told, they accept it blindly and rage against the doubting 'snowflakes'. Yet they live in a world which is slowly dying and no one is doing anything about it.

Another element of this story which intrigued me and made the story stand out, the moral ambiguity which pervades the decisions taken and dictates the actions of its characters. In this respect, Tyler is faced with encounters that shake his inherent belief in the goodness of people. Throughout the story he's let down, betrayed, witnessed those he loves, die. Slowly that faith is eroded. There is real darkness in this world and he is a spark likely to be extinguished at any moment. Yet, sometimes, that faith is rewarded. It's a wonderful balancing act we see throughout the story – where faith is challenged but only occasionally rewarded.

Aftan Whispers is yet more proof of the high quality of work produced by Phil Williams. This is such a different story to his Ordshaw series but it is equally as absorbing, exciting and imaginative. I strongly recommend it.