



Speculative Fiction Book Review

Book Title	Kept From Cages
Author	Phil Williams
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Stars	

‘Kept From Cages’ is Phil Williams’ latest novel from his Ordshaw series and retains all of his usual fast-paced action, vivid (and often eccentric) characters and a plot which veers around like a drunk driver. It is also a story which extends well beyond Ordshaw – taking in Norway, Louisiana and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The concepts and premise of his Ordshaw stories remain here but widen out considerably. Just like he did with *The City Screams*, where his supernatural elements exist in Japan, they have been let loose on the whole world now. Strange, awful and bloody events happen across the globe and no one has made the connection, not until Agent Sean Tasker from the Ministry of Environmental Energy realises a whistle-blower may have been alerting people to something huge, before he was murdered.

This is a fantastic story for many reasons. Top of my list is the way the mystery unfolds. It’s done slowly, no mean achievement when the action never lets up, because no one can make sense of what’s happening. The plot is a jigsaw puzzle, where different people own all the pieces. Even at the end, at least where I thought the end was, the mystery continued to unfold to set us up for the next part of the story. But that final twist – you do not see it coming!

Next on the list, the people. Phil has this ability to create weird people for whom there should be little or no sympathy. In his *Under Ordshaw* trilogy I present, as evidence, the psychotic Fae, Lettie. In this story we get Katryzna, equally as unbalanced and unpredictable but a useful woman to have at your side in a fight! Compare her against the well-observed Zip, the little girl who becomes the central character of the story. Vulnerable, frightened and yet capable of immense power – yet still very much a child. I loved the camaraderie of Reece and his CutJaw “family” who get caught up in the events, where jazz music means so much and where the southern states’ family values are everything.

World building, even in urban fantasy, is demanding. Phil displays his writing expertise by capturing all of his locations so well while, at the same time, making them feel ‘other worldly’. The Louisiana swamps are claustrophobic, the Congolese jungles humid and frightening, England should appear normal in comparison, yet it isn’t. He takes normal and twists it into something you recognise – but wish you didn’t!

A wonderful, exciting page-turner of a book, it lifts the Ordshaw series into a new league and leaves you wondering where it’s going to take you next. Get this book!!