



BOOK REVIEW

Book Title	The City Screams
Author	Phil Williams
Date	March 2019
Stars	

As an author of urban fantasy, I rate Phil Williams alongside Holly Black. It is their ability as a writer to conjure out of a world which is everyday normal, a setting which is not only frightening but “believably unlikely”. The Ordshaw stories does this brilliantly by turning an English city into a place where supernatural and mystical elements exist in the shadows.

In *The City Screams*, the same effect is created in Tokyo. This novella goes one step further, it successfully leaves us feeling alienated as we follow the misadventures of Tova Nokes. It achieves this disturbing sense of isolation by describing what it’s like to be in a culturally diverse city, on your own and as a deaf person. It is truly frightening, without the monsters!

A large part of the first act plunges us into a world without sound and a very different language. Tova has won a competition to try an experimental approach to restore her hearing but she’s on her own because she wants to establish her independence.

Her resilience endears you to her. (That and her wonderfully eccentric fashion sense!) Tova will face enormous challenges as she encounters Ki and Mei, two Yōsei, the Japanese equivalent of fairies. Poor Tova is pursued by members of the Obake Police – whose job appears to be to prevent any contact between the two races. There’s also the international branch of the UK’s Ministry of Environmental Energy to contend with as well.

Tova’s surgery has left her accessing the sounds of the supernatural world, particularly the terrible screams and sounds of torture from the city itself. Those sounds are not what others want her to hear either. Like a pinball, she rebounds from one threat to another as she tries to make sense of her silent world where she has no one she can trust.

I loved this story. Though I confess to feeling a little frustrated at the lack of some explanation at the end, a factor that is necessitated by events continuing in the next book in the series. I’m pleased this is not the end of Tova, like Pax in the first two books, Phil Williams writes intriguing female characters that demand respect. They are not kick-ass versions of Scarlett Johansson, they are normal women placed in jeopardy who survive by their sharp wits and bloody-mindedness. They fit perfectly into a setting where everything appears normal, except for those fleeting images at the edge of your vision, the rustle in the branches and the strange footprints in the mud.

The truly original element of this story is the use of a deaf protagonist, it raises the tension but also defines an environment most of us take for granted. Silence becomes the biggest threat and next to it, that inability to hear what dangers may be right behind you.