

Children's tales with touch of local magic

Sprite Sisters: Magic at Drysdale's School

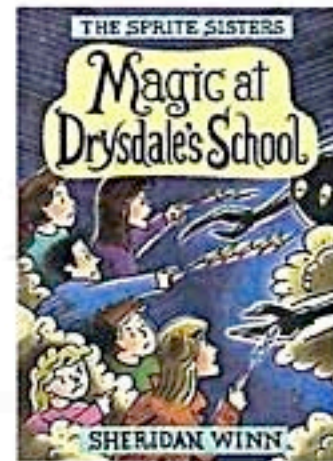
Sheridan Winn

www.sheridanwinn.com, £7.99

Trevor Heaton

Back in the day, one of the marks of a band that had finally 'made it' was to be 'big in Japan'. Well, the equivalent for children's book series must be 'big in Germany' these days, if Norwich author Sheridan Winn is anything to go by.

Her popular Sprite Series novels have notched up a very impressive 270,000 sales in that country, on top of their success in the UK. Launched in 2007, the seven titles in the North Norfolk-set series tell the



story of the siblings Flame, Marina, Ash and Ariel who have magical powers based on the old elements Fire, Water, Earth and Air.

Following on from Book Six, *The Boy With Hawk-like Eyes*, the story continues the girls' interection with the mysterious Zak. He has used his dark magic to summon a terrifying invasion to Sprite Towers - but also saved the sisters from harm. He has made them wary, but Marina finds herself drawn to him, especially when she is cast opposite Zak in a school production of *The Tempest*. And what is the meaning of a mysterious magpie which is taking an interest in the magical quartet?

Of course, writing about magic and

children is nothing new (and I'm thinking of Jill Murphy's charming *Worst Witch* books here as much as you-know-who) but Sheridan has carved out a successful niche with this engaging series. Writing for the different age groups involved is a lot harder than it looks, but she takes it in her stride with page-turning ease. The great cover from illustrator husband Chris helps makes an attractive package.

This could be the last in this series, but the author is already busy writing *Boudicca's Daughters*, a 'Young Adult' contemporary psychological drama with an historical twist, set in Breckland.

Sheridan will launch the new Sprite Sisters title in Jarrold's book department on Thursday (5.30-7pm), free admission.

Books seen from a child's-eye view have been all the rage for the last few years, with *Room* and *The Curious Incident...*

both gathering many plaudits. This latest, the debut from Bulawayo, is deserving of similar success. Told in two parts by Darling, a Zimbabwean immigrant to America - before and after leaving her homeland - it conveys the blunt realities of life on two continents. From guava-stealing child of a shanty town to American teen, Darling navigates the insecure and often contradictory landscape of the modern migrant, taking the reader with her. Despite its tough subject matter, this is a very readable tale, thanks to some excellent writing and its central character: a likeable heroine in a difficult world.

Sarah Warwick

