

2006/Jan JULIA GOLDING - Publishing News

This year has started well for former Foreign Office Second Secretary Julia Golding. Her debut novel *The Diamond of Drury Lane* (Egmont) has won the prestigious Ottakar's Children's Book Prize, and in March Oxford University Press [OUP] publishes *Secrets of the Sirens*, the first of a quartet Golding began three years ago when she was on maternity leave.

The Diamond of Drury Lane is a colourful, action-packed story set in 1790, in Richard Sheridan's Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, and comes in an equally colourful and rather sumptuous package which demands to be picked up and read. And, having won this prize, no doubt will be.

To explain its genesis, she talks first about her new series with OUP. "I had an idea for a fantasy quartet based around the idea of the four Greek elements. The series is very close to nature, so I wanted an organic theme running through it, with an element central to each of the stories. My children go to school immediately opposite OUP and I live close by, so I decided to send it there first, and I didn't send it anywhere else. It was at this point that I started getting advice from friends who are also writers, to the effect that, if I wanted to make this a career, I needed an agent."

Instead of looking for one, she sat down and wrote *The Diamond of Drury Lane*, the idea for which had come to her after studying for a doctorate in English romantic literature at Oxford, after she left the Foreign Office. Golding sent what she refers to as "the statutory first chapter" to Lucy Firth at David Higham on a Wednesday and three days later got a call saying that Firth wanted to see the rest. "Lucy sent it out to various publishing houses and Egmont picked it up. OUP felt they couldn't take it on because they had the other series." Is it odd, having two publishers? "No, it's huge fun from my point of view, I really enjoy working with both of them."

A lot of *Secrets of the Sirens* was written after she went back to work as a policy advisor on conflict and arms for Oxfam, lobbying at the UN. "I spent a lot of time sitting around at preparatory committees in New York, much of it in the underground coffee shop - which has no windows, no natural light - and weeks on end of that is enough to send you mad. I thought that the only

way to survive was to write, and I think I put a lot of open air in the book to compensate.” Now she’s back in Oxford, with windows writing full time and feeling very lucky.