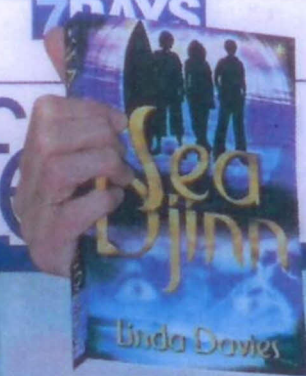


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Life mimics art for author

Dubai-based writer gets her inspiration from daily routines in the UAE rather than international intrigue

You'd think being captured by two boats filled with gun-wielding sailors would have ignited the flames of imagination in fiction writer Linda Davies.

But it's a wander down the public beach in Umm Suqeim or a trip to the city's Park N Shop that are more likely to inspire the Dubai-based children's author.

Linda, a British investment banker turned wordsmith, has just launched her third book in a series of five about Djinn - which means Genie in Arabic.

The author, who always knew she wanted to be a writer but went into a more conventional career to save up some money, had already written a large chunk of her first book about a child whose parents are kidnapped at sea before giving up the Big Smoke and moving to Dubai. And it was a case of life mimicking art during a sailing trip when she first arrived.

"We bought this boat and were doing an overnight passage to test it without the kids. We were heading to this island owned by the UAE but occupied, unbeknown to

us, by the Iranians. They did what they occasionally do - see someone sailing in international waters and thought 'lets go and lasso them', she explains.

"We were in international waters but that counts for nothing when you've got two gunboats full of armed sailors and we were kept prisoner for two weeks."

Kept in good conditions, Linda says she was physically well. But mentally it was tough, because she had no idea how long she'd be in captivity for.

"If you knew it was going to be only two weeks you could kind of teach yourself to handle it. But when you don't know, and you think it could be months or years it's very hard to deal with."

"The irony is, I'd already written 150 pages of it and the theme is the kidnap at sea of one of the hero's parents - that

one act is the catalyst for the entire book. I'd already written that and then we got kidnapped at sea!" Rather than using this experience for inspiration for her books - 'Sea Djinn', 'Fire Djinn' and the newly released 'Storm Djinn' - Linda says her brain shut down while in prison. In fact, it's normal day-to-day activities which provide her with the best material.

"I got inspired for 'Sea Djinn' walking down the public beach

in Umm Suqeim. I found a shell that had a really intricate pattern and thought 'what if this were a map and I were a young boy finding this? I'd want to go to the hidden place shown in the map', she says.

"I set scenes around Dubai too, a lot of the action takes place around Umm Suqeim, Jumeirah and the Fisherman's Village in the shadow of the

Burj Al Arab and in the desert.

"I find the whole region really inspiring and I love writing about my locale - Park N Shop's in there too! Children love being able to visualise action taking place in places they know."

Linda's latest offering 'Storm Djinn', follows Finn, a surfer and student at the Jumeirah Academy of Music, and his pals in the age-old battle between good and evil among the Djinn who live in a mystical parallel world to the UAE. And the author has a top-notch testing panel for her books with three children aged five, nine and 11. "My husband reads the drafts aloud to the kids and I watch their reactions and if they looked distracted or disinterested I will change things but they kept begging for more."

Linda often goes into local schools to give talks and to read aloud to the students as the books are aimed at a broad spectrum of abilities, from a well read eight year old, up to teenagers. She even has some adult fans too.

"Kids are a rewarding audience. I

go into schools and give talks a lot and love it. They're so enthusiastic and when you get kids enjoying books it's so lovely. I think it's inspiring for kids to meet someone who writes for a living and can show them how to enjoy it outside the classroom."

As an author though, children can be a much harsher audience than adults. Linda already has a series of popular adult books.

"I need to tell a cracking story, even more so with kids as their attention span isn't as long, so you need to hook them in quicker and also compete against computer games. "I think of myself as a storyteller and I need to make them want to read on, accompanied by characters they care about," she says. "I really want the books to be translated into Arabic, which is one of my goals. Especially so local kids can enjoy the books, because there's little relevant to read at that age in Arabic and then get other international translations."

The Djinn books are available at Magrudy's priced at dhs56

