

Seawrack's Name

The Urth list — 13 messages, 10 voices, 14 Mar 2009

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5358>

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b sharp — 14 Mar 2009, 20:54

I was reading the Short Sun and thinking that we are invited to figure out two things when we are first introduced to Seawrack.

One is her real name which is supposed to sound something like Seawrack. I did an archive search and could only find a 2000 post on the topic, from R. Borski, who (typically?) went overboard with name analysis I think and came up with an Irish seaweed called "screadhbhuidhe". This just isn't a satisfying answer for me. Not sure if my attempts are much better but, FWIW:

One guess I had is Sirenia. It came to me because Seawrack is described as having some green algae tint in her hair and this reminded me of the undines from BotNS. The undines were several times confused with manatees and Sirenia is the scientific order name for manatees. The Mother seems to invoke an Abaia-like presence. Of course this ties in with the siren and mermaid allusions which seem to tie all these characters together. Sirenia is an animal name anyway and perhaps this is partly why it was incomprehensible to Horn for a girl's name. Perhaps his mind changed it to the plant name Seawrack, as a name he could comprehend for her.

My other guess is "Shipwreck". It would qualify as wordplay meant to go directly between author and reader, somewhat by-passing the characters. I wondered if Wolfe might be hinting this her real name (or more likely her job title or duty or something) since it accurately describes her function as a Siren. She does seem embarrassed when Horn first tries to pronounce her name. Perhaps because of what she was supposed to do to Horn's ship? Horn couldn't see and match the silent w found in both words but we can. Moreover, shipwreck and seawrack also do sound quite alike.

-bsharp

John Smith — 14 Mar 2009, 22:49 · in reply to b sharp

The only similar-sounding name I can think of is Sycorax, the mother of Caliban in Shakespeare's Tempest. But that seems like a stretch.

Best wishes,

Jack

--- On Sat, 3/14/09, b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com> wrote:
From: b sharp <bsharporflat at hotmail.com>
Subject: (urth) Seawrack's Name
To: urth at urth.net
Date: Saturday, March 14, 2009, 4:54 PM
I was reading the Short Sun and thinking that we are invited

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James Wynn — 15 Mar 2009, 23:33 · in reply to John Smith

to figure out two things when we are first introduced to Seawrack. One is her real name which is supposed to sound something like Seawrack.

I've always presumed her actual name would be from the mythology of Japan, China, or Mongolia, due to her features: "sharp chin, very high cheekbones, and tilted eyes".

But then her hair is gold, her skin is fairest white, and her eyes are "midnight-blue". On the OTHER other hand, if she were built from the corpse of the pirate-woman Horn killed a couple days previously, it is no surprise she is so pale, but that would not explain her golden-green hair. (but there's that golden-green color again.

J

David Stockhoff — 16 Mar 2009, 14:23 · follows James Wynn

There is also the silkie, an Irish shape-changing fairy who is either seal or woman (I think).

It's nothing like seawrack, but then people often end up far from the original when they are forced to pick a native word to stand for a foreign one. (Technically a "calque," I believe, although that's usually a place name, like Leghorn.)

But I like bsharp's suggestion that Horn balked at Sirenia and went with Seawrack. Wolfe always follows the rules he invents.

Message: 1

Date: Sat, 14 Mar 2009 15:49:28 -0700 (PDT)
From: John Smith <jsmith2627 at att.net>
Subject: Re: (urth) Seawrack's Name
To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>
Message-ID: <675830.65030.qm at web180216.mail.gq1.yahoo.com>
Content-Type: text/plain; charset=iso-8859-1

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Jordon Flato — 16 Mar 2009, 17:26 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Hmmmm. I can't really get on board any of that. Although I can understand wanting to figure it out, as rarely is something laid before us like that without some purposful reasonance.

I assumed the word was in a language completely unfamiliar, and non-human. Seawrack being a bridge of sorts between to worlds, that of the mother and that of humanity. She is being passed from the mother, the non-human world, where she had a non-human name, into the world of humanity, where she has to have a human name.

Why would she have a name of the language of men? I can't imagine Horn having a hard time saying any of the words people have said here. He 'pronounces' an awfully lot of complicated nomenclature throughout his tale, so Serineia or other others don't strike me as holding any special difficulty.

An alien word though, in a tongue not related to the world of man, that would be tough. That also has resonance for me. Mirrors the false mother the Mother creates to speak to Horn. It has to approximate humanity to interact with Horn, and Horn has to 'approximate' Seawracks name to relate to Seawrack.

Son of Witz — 16 Mar 2009, 22:14 · follows Jordon Flato

-----Original Message-----

From: Jordon Flato [mailto:jordonflato at gmail.com]

Sent: Monday, March 16, 2009 10:26 AM

To: 'The Urth Mailing List'

Subject: Re: (urth) Seawrack's Name

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Yes, this jibes with me much more.

~witz

Matthew Groves — 16 Mar 2009, 23:53 · in reply to Jordon Flato

On Mon, Mar 16, 2009 at 12:26 PM, Jordon Flato <jordonflato at gmail.com> wrote:

I assumed the word was in a language completely unfamiliar, and non-human.

This is my assumption too. "Ph'nglui mglw'nafh C'thulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn."

Adam Thornton — 16 Mar 2009, 23:56 · in reply to Matthew Groves

On Mar 16, 2009, at 6:53 PM, Matthew Groves wrote:

On Mon, Mar 16, 2009 at 12:26 PM, Jordon Flato

<jordonflato at gmail.com> wrote:

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"Seawrack" sounds *sort of * like "Shoggoth" if you're drunk.

Adam

Jordon Flato — 17 Mar 2009, 00:04 · in reply to Adam Thornton

Oh my god. I think we just found the Evil Guest/Short Sun tie in.

On Mon, Mar 16, 2009 at 4:56 PM, Adam Thornton <adam at io.com> wrote:

On Mar 16, 2009, at 6:53 PM, Matthew Groves wrote:

On Mon, Mar 16, 2009 at 12:26 PM, Jordon Flato <jordonflato at gmail.com> wrote:

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Scott Wowra — 17 Mar 2009, 02:55 · follows Jordon Flato

My 2 cents:

Seawrack = Syrinx

Syrinx was a Naiad nymph who escaped a horny Pan through a transformation into reeds, which he cut off to make his pipes.

Names sound the same, the story connects to music as Horn is always hearing Seawrack singing, and Syrinx has the nymph quality to seduce males.

"Why would she have a name of the language of men? I can't imagine Horn having a hard time saying any >of the words people have said here."

That seems like cheating to me, something Mr. Wolfe doesn't do. Mr. Wolfe always leaves clues in his names, and I don't think that Seawrack is based off of something totally alien.

Stuart Hamm — 17 Mar 2009, 06:32 · in reply to Son of Witz

I'm in the middle of a very slow, hopefully thorough re-re-read of the SS series..I'll be hitting y'all up with sme thoughts & questions soon...but I agree I like the Syrex connesction but believe GW made it clear it was an unpronouncable word in a totally alien language..

~S~

???? Mobile — (415) 786-3624

???? Skype? stuart.hamm

myspace.com/stuhamm

? ??? stuarthamm.net

--- On Mon, 3/16/09, Son of Witz <sonofwitz at butcherbaker.org> wrote:

From: Son of Witz <sonofwitz at butcherbaker.org>

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To: "The Urth Mailing List" <urth at lists.urth.net>

Date: Monday, March 16, 2009, 3:14 PM

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James Wynn — 17 Mar 2009, 12:34 · in reply to Stuart Hamm

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For record, (although I like the choice of Syrinx on a lot of levels) a literal transcription and pronunciation of Syrinx's name would be "Surigx". Not all that different from the pronunciation of the name of the goddess Sphigx.

I doubt the name, whatever it is, was intended to be some made-up alien name. It's just not Wolfe's way.

J

Adam Thornton — 17 Mar 2009, 13:48 · in reply to James Wynn

On Mar 17, 2009, at 7:34 AM, James Wynn wrote:

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"Cybele" sounds vaguely like "Seawrack". I think the Magna Mater explanation is likely to be the right one.

Adam