

Hi, Friends,

Ever being in the lovely position of choosing a name for a baby? Remember the baby name books, the pencilled shortlist in the back? The debate... would this have a nice way of being shortened... Is it too quirky... too conventional... does it go well with the surname... do the initials spell a rude word? It can be very hard to get it right and please everyone! Authors can go through similar throes when they are choosing names for characters and places. (Okay, not quite the same as naming a gorgeous baby, but full of pitfalls and love, all the same.)



I am currently working hard on the edit of Books 2 and 3 of The Peace Weaver trilogy, as yet untitled. And that's one of things that I'm chasing right now: titles, place names, character names... When I'm writing, if I'm stuck for a name I quite often put in a marker like 'XYZ', knowing that I will take the time in the editing to really search for the right one. That means I can go with the flow of the writing the first draft, but it leaves me a lot to do about names in the editing.

Of course, I've got a lot already in place from The Peace Weaver, that will carry through the whole trilogy, for example, the names of the heroines. 'Wren', a kind of 'wizard' in the story, is named for the bird most prized by the druids, and in Welsh it means both druid and wren. 'Aldrith', a true warrior princess, means 'good war' which is so right for her. It took days of research and thinking to find the right names, and it can make a lot of difference. Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind*, was originally named 'Poppy'. While that's a charming name, it is not right for the spikey, dramatic Scarlett, but you can see how Margaret Mitchell was associating the colour red with her heroine and was searching for the right tone. As a writer, you have to trust your gut. If it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't!

A name can say a great deal about a character, simply from the sound of it. For example, 'Carys', is a lovely name for the little girl in my trilogy, with a light rhythm and in Welsh it means 'love.' In contrast, 'Gault' is a good name for the tough warrior he is; a short punchy sound, and it means 'boar'. I think rhythm and sound influence the choices we all make about names.

There can be other factors for an author. For example, in my children's books, I try to choose something that is easy to read, like 'James' and 'Sam', the heroes of *Hurling Wiffie*, and 'Cob' in *The Boy Who Spoke Dragon*. And we gave Victoria a nick name, 'Plum' in *Princess Victoria's War* for the same reason. I usually avoid having more than one name beginning with the same letter. This hasn't been possible with the trilogy, because the cast is too big!

Where do writers look for their names? Everywhere and anywhere! Old place names can be a good source. We recently drove past a village called 'Warleggan' when we were in Cornwall; you can imagine Winston Graham's thoughts when he came across that, and used it for the name of his villain in the *Poldark* series. It's tempting to think that Tolkien might have come across Dunedin in New Zealand, and adapted to create the name 'Dunedain', a race of men in *Lord of the Rings*. I always get a warm feeling when I glimpse how another author might have done something like this.

Where you look for names can depend on the genre. For example, in Rowan, Leader of the Deer Kin, an animal story in the tradition of Watership Down, I made the decision that all the names had to be from plants as it was rooted in the natural world. That's when I came across 'Twayblade', which was the perfect name for a tough, sly character in the book. As a result of the name, I gave him double prongs on his horns which makes him even more formidable. It's not unusual for me to find that a name can give me a new dimension to a character.

The Peace Weaver trilogy is a Celtic fantasy, so I'm looking at Welsh, Irish and Anglo-Saxon for names, always checking their meaning or translating a phrase to create a name. For example, I took the Welsh words, 'Caer', a fort, and 'Draig', a dragon, to create the name of a stronghold, Caer Draig. I hope this approach gives the book some cultural depth and credibility.

Good luck with naming your babies, your pets and your home. Names are important!

PS. I am half-Welsh but sadly, do not speak the language so apologies for my mistakes.

PPS. The book is set in Wales, so using the language where I could is a mark of respect.

PPPS. Kids hate the name you gave them? Don't take it to heart, they'll have to be parents themselves to understand how hard you tried to get it right.

PPPPS You can always help them towards a cool nickname!

PPPPPS Or wait till they grow up and realise that now they are prime minister, the name you gave them is a doing better than 'Snot Face', the nickname of their teenage years!