

THE RULE of NAMES

Ursula K. Le Guin

of him and Palani was the *Queenie's* sail vanishing in the direction of the nearest island westward.

The villagers thought they would never stop talking about it, how Goody Guld's nephew Birt had lost his mind and sailed off with the schoolmistress on the very same day that the peddler Blackbeard disappeared without a trace, leaving all his feathers and beads behind. But they did stop talking about it, three days later. They had other things to talk about, when Mr. Underhill finally came out of his cave.

Mr. Underhill had decided that since his truename was no longer a secret, he might as well drop his disguise. Walking was a lot harder than flying, and besides, it was a long, long time since he had had a real meal.

Reading Check

1. What kind of work does Mr. Underhill do on Sattins Island?
2. Why are there no books on Sattins Island?
3. When are the children allowed to keep their truenames?
4. Why has the Sealord of Pendor come to Sattins Island?
5. What is Mr. Underhill's true identity?

For Study and Discussion

Analyzing and Interpreting the Story

1. By the end of this story we know that Yevaud, the powerful dragon, came to Sattins Island disguised as Mr. Underhill. **a.** What does Mr. Underhill keep hidden in his cave? **b.** Why does Blackbeard, the Sealord of Pendor, come to Sattins Island?

2. Mr. Underhill does not seem to be much of an opponent for Blackbeard. How do they differ in appearance?

3. According to the magical Rule of Names, if you say someone's "truename," you can gain control over that person. **a.** How does Blackbeard plan to conquer Mr. Underhill? **b.** Why doesn't his plan work?

4. The author doesn't tell you directly what happened to Blackbeard. Find the passage toward the end of the story that reveals what became of the handsome stranger.

5**a.** According to Blackbeard, what do dragons eat? **b.** At the end of the story, Birt runs away with Palani, the schoolteacher. Why do you think he does this?

6**a.** After destroying Blackbeard, why does Mr. Underhill decide to drop his disguise? **b.** What do you think this decision will mean for the people living on Sattins Island?

7. Perhaps you've heard the saying: "There's an exception to every rule." How does this saying apply to the story?

Literary Elements

Noting Techniques That Create Suspense

Ursula Le Guin gains interest and creates suspense by dropping clues about what is going to happen. This technique is called **foreshadowing**.

For example, the opening paragraph of this story describes Mr. Underhill breathing a "double puff of steam" and showing "snow-white teeth." These clues hint that he is a dragon. You get another hint of his true nature when you are told that "the minute spent watching Palani and the children had made him very hungry." Later you learn that a dragon eats maidens. Can you find other clues that foreshadow Mr. Underhill's identity?