Amber and the Amberites

Roger Zelazny

This seems a good place to talk about the characters in the Amber series and their evolving relationships, since a number of them put in appearances in this book. I am often asked about the order of their birth and their parentage—matters capable of causing considerable confusion.

There are all manner of apocryphal stories with respect to the founding of Amber as an offshoot of the Courts of Chaos, and the descent of its ruling family from Dworkin of Chaos and the sacred Unicorn. The extent to which this genealogical statement describes an authentic event is unclear, in that Dworkin was insane for many years and the Unicorn isn’t talking. Whatever the situation, Oberon, the immortal King of Amber, was referred to as “son of Dworkin” and also as “son of the Unicorn.”

Over the centuries Oberon married many times and also had many mistresses as well as numerous passing liaisons, leading to a large number of offspring as long-lived as himself. It has been speculated by Court philosophers that Henry of Navarre was an Earth-shadow of Oberon, and that the Court itself may well have cast particularly strong shadows into Merovingian times. (Consider Gregory of Tours’ History of the Franks.)

At any rate, there is a section in the third Amber novel, Sign of the Unicorn, where Oberon in his disguise as Ganelon asks Corwin to explain the succession, hoping better to understand his children’s obviously conflicting feelings on the matter. Corwin says:

“…Benedict is the eldest. His mother was Cymnea. She bore Dad two other sons, also—Osric and Finndo. Then—how does one put these things?—Faiella bore Eric. After that, Dad found some defect in his marriage with Cymnea and had it dissolved—ab initio, as they would say in my old shadow—from the beginning. Neat trick, that. But he was the king.”

“Didn’t that make all of them illegitimate?”

“Well, it left their status less certain. Osric and Finndo were more than a little irritated, as I understand it, but they died shortly thereafter. Benedict was either less irritated or more politic about the entire affair. He never raised a fuss. Dad then married Faiella.”

“And that made Eric legitimate?”

“It would have, if he had acknowledged Eric as his son. He treated him as if he were, but he never did anything formal in that regard. It involved the smoothing-over process with Cymnea’s family, which had become a bit stronger around that time.”

“Still, if he treated him as his own…”

“Ah! But he later did acknowledge Llewella formally. She was born out of wedlock, but he decided to recognize her, poor girl. All of Eric’s supporters hated her for its effect on his status. Anyway, Faiella was later to become my mother. I was born safely in wedlock, making me the first with a clean claim on the throne. Talk to one of the others and you may get a different line of reasoning, but those are the facts it will have to be based on…”

…

“Who is next? That is to say, if anything were to happen to you?”

I shook my head.

“It gets even more complicated there, now. Caine would have been next. With him dead, I see it as swinging over to Clarissa’s brood—the redheads. Bleys would have followed, then Brand.”

“Clarissa? What became of your mother?”

“She died in childbirth. Deirdre was the child. Dad did not remarry for many years after mother’s death. When he did, it was a redheaded wench from a far southern shadow. I never liked her. He began feeling the same way after a time and started fooling around again. They had one reconciliation after Llewella’s birth in Rebma, and Brand was the result. When they were finally divorced, he recognized Llewella to spite Clarissa. At least, that is what I think happened.”

“So you are not counting the ladies in the succession?”

There follows a somewhat sexist negative remark, as he was not getting along well with all of his sisters at that point, then he works it out the rest of the way:

“…Fiona would precede Bleys and Llewella would follow him. After Clarissa’s crowd, it would swing over to Julian, Gèrard, and Random, in that order. Excuse me—count Flora before Julian. The marriage data is even more involved, but no one will dispute the final order. Let it go at that.”

This has caused some confusion because in the fourth chapter of the first book—Nine Princes in Amber—Corwin had said of Random, as they were driving back to Amber, “…I realized, with that, that we shared common parents, which I suddenly knew was not the case with me and Eric…” Well, it was too the case with him and Eric, and it wasn’t the case with him and Random. Merlin had every right to wonder as he did (in Sign of Chaos) just how edited—either intentionally or unconsciously—his father’s tale might have been. I personally feel that because Corwin was still suffering from considerable amnesia and trauma at that point he indulged in some wishful thinking and actually believed it to be the case; i.e., he felt closer then to Random, who was helping him, and would rather be a half-brother than a full brother to Eric, whom he disliked.

Here is the proper listing of parents for various of the Amberites, and a few observations concerning the relationships. As I will explain shortly, however, it cannot be regarded as representing a proper chronological order:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| mother |  | offspring |
|  | | |
| Moins |  | Llewella |
|  | | |
| Rilga (aged more rapidly than many; retired to a Shrine of the Unicorn and spent her final years as something of a recluse) |  | Caine, Julian, Gérard |
|  | | |
| Paulette (high-strung; a suicide; possibly from our shadow Earth) |  | Random, Mirelle |
|  | | |
| Dybele (died in childbirth) |  | Flora |
|  | | |
| Lora (Oberon married her in another shadow while Rilga was still living at her shrine; different timestream, though; tricky to date) |  | Sand, Delwin |
|  | | |
| Kinta |  | Coral |
|  | | |
| Deela the Desacratrix (died leading her troops in battle) |  | Dalt |
|  | | |
| Harla (didn’t work out, and they separated by mutual consent; no record of divorce or annulment; no record of marriage either; peculiar, as Oberon did for a time refer to her as his wife) |  | None Known |
|  | | |

Questions of sequence do arise with respect to various Shadow-paradoxes to which Merlin refers later in the series when thinking upon the ease with which interpretations of birth precedence could be challenged. This has mainly to do with the fact that some of the Amberites were born in shadows possessed of radically different time-streams.

For the Amber board game, due out in mid-1988, I was asked to provide a list of colors, and of the several devices so far referred to as associated with many of the Amberites. These follow:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | | |
| Random | - | Orange, red, brown |
| Julian | - | White and black (Tree) |
| Caine | - | Black and green |
| Eric | - | Black and red |
| Benedict | - | Orange, yellow, brown |
| Corwin | - | Black and silver (Silver rose) |
| Gérard | - | Blue and gray (Bronze three-masted ship) |
| Bleys | - | Red and orange |
| Brand | - | Green |
| Rinaldo | - | Green (Phoenix) |
| Merlin | - | Gray and purple |
| Flora | - | Green and gray |
| Deirdre | - | Black and silver |
| Llewella | - | Gray, green, lavender |
| Fiona | - | Green, lavender, purple |
| Sand | - | Pale tan and dark brown |
| Delwin | - | Brown and black |
| Mirelle | - | Red and yellow |
| Dalt | - | Black and green (Lion rending Unicorn) |
| Osric | - | Silver and red |
| Finndo | - | Green and gold |

That provides something of a glimpse into the Family Album of Amber. Try now this variation where you get to flip through pages in your own order, letting the shadows fall where they may.

A Word from Zelazny

Zelazny likely didn’t keep a consistent record of every detail about his characters. When he dictated notes to Neil Randall for the Visual Guide to Castle Amber, he listed Delwin and Sand as Lora’s offspring as in the chart above. However, in the 1987 book Blood of Amber, the character Merlin says that Oberon’s bigamous marriage to Harla produced Delwin and Sand. Zelazny later verified Merlin’s account and suggested that the Visual Guide had it wrong[[1]](#footnote-1). Some other details in this 1988 chart also differ from a 1978 essay “The Great Amber Questionnaire,” where Zelazny declared Julian’s colors to be white and red, Fiona’s colors to be green and brown, and Llewella to be the daughter of “Moire’s younger sister, the late Lady Fraye.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Notes

This essay appears here under Zelazny’s manuscript title.

Henry of Navarre was King Henry IV of France, the inspiration for the character Oberon. Henry had six legitimate children with Marie de Médicis and at least eleven illegitimate children by four other women. Merovingian times refers to AD 500 to 750, when a Frankish dynasty founded by Clovis I reigned in Gaul and Germany. Gregory, bishop of Tours, born Georgius Florentius Gregorius, now Saint Gregory, wrote the Historia Francorum or History of the Franks during the sixth century AD. The Amber board game, due out in mid-1988 was developed by Eon Games but never released. The Amber Diceless Role-Playing Game, designed by Erick Wujcik, using similar information from Zelazny, came out in 1991.

1. Amberzine #3, April 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Hellride #3, 1978. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)