The Great Amber Questionnaire

Roger Zelazny

1. Can secondary characters, for example Lord Rein, use Trumps to contact the people depicted thereon? Are the minor lords represented in the Minor Arcana?

RZ: Yes, secondary characters can use the Trumps.

1. What are Julian’s colors? Fiona’s?

RZ: Julian: White and red. Fiona: Green and brown.

1. Exactly how many brothers and sisters were there before Osric and Finndo?

RZ: I have to leave this one open, but there were at least two others.

1. What is the technological level of Amber; why does it seem semi-medieval? Does electricity work in Amber? Along the same lines, why are there no apparent steam-powered devices (weapons or engines), nor devices run on compressed air or its like?

RZ: Technological level: Yes, on steam-powered devices. But they have never figured in the narrative. [No, on electricity, just as we use it. It may be possible, but has never been employed, with variant units of conductance, resistance, etc. Must be classified as unknown at this point.]

1. What exactly are the powers of the redheads; what are their relative strengths and weaknesses in relation especially to each other?

RZ: The redheads have greater natural abilities with magic, just as some people have perfect pitch. Brand and Fiona were about equal in ability, till Brand gained extra powers through his dealings with Chaos. Bleys was lazier and did not work to develop his to the extent Brand and Fiona did.

1. Do Shadow-Ambers have Shadow-Patterns and, by the same token, Shadow-Princes with any capabilities over Shadow?

RZ: Yes, there are Shadow Ambers with Shadow Patterns, but these are imperfect and the powers of the Shadow Amberites, while real, are also imperfect and are limited to only a few adjacent shadows.

1. How close can you drive a car to Amber? How close could you bring, say, a nuclear-powered submarine?

RZ: A car coming from a high tech shadow could be driven to within a few kilometers of Kolvir, its performance falling off as it approached. ⁠—The matter of a nuclear-powered submarine has not yet arisen, but the electrical components of the power system and missile systems would fail. There is also the matter of the point of penetration from Shadow into the world of Amber. The car bearing Corwin and Random in the first book would have begun failing much sooner had it shifted in at a point farther from Amber. Things carry their own physical laws⁠—from their points of origin⁠—with them, briefly, before the physical laws of Amber swamp them. [Ditto, and vice versa, for magical laws, in certain places.] You can’t shift in upon Amber itself, though.

1. To what extent is Moire a Shadow of Oberon, and the nobility of Rebma a reflection of the royal family?

RZ: No, no reflection of the Amberites in Rebma. Only the cities, not the people, are mirrored. Rebma is populated by a sea race which settled in it ages before.

1. Does the blood of Amberites affect secondary Patterns? Are there more Patterns in actual existence than those in the Primal, in Amber, Rebma, Tir-na Nog’th, and in the Jewel? How does the three-dimensional Jewel-Pattern compare with the other two-dimensional ones? Are all possible “Patterns” contained in the three dimensions vs. the laid-out two-dimensional versions?

RZ: No, the blood of Amberites does not affect secondary Patterns. Only the primal one. The Patterns given in the series are the only ones known until book five, when Corwin uses the Jewel to create a second primal Pattern. Two such cannot exist in the same universe, though, and a new order of existence is split off as a result. Each 2-D version is slightly different, though effective. The Jewel is the matrix.

1. Corwin says at one point that there is a story behind Grayswandir. What is this story? What is the magical nature of Grayswandir? Of Bleys’ sword? Both these blades carry portions of the Pattern upon them; why, how, when, where, and like that? What is the effect? What is the magic, if any, of Julian’s armor?

RZ: I will have to reserve the answers to all these questions concerning the magical weapons, against the possibility of another book in which they might figure.

1. The creatures out of Shadow that chased Random into Nine Princes in Amber... To what degree do these creatures shift Shadow around the will of the Family? (Random returns to the john, and Flora’s maid goes to answer the door).
2. Can one manipulate Shadow without having to move?

RZ: [re 11 & 12] Not in Amber itself, but in most other places, small probabilities can be manipulated within the environment of one having power over Shadow. This is limited, however, as it is much more fatiguing than simply passing through Shadow oneself. If two persons were trying it for conflicting ends, it would be more of a conflict of ingenuity than one of will, and more direct means would generally be employed.

1. To what degree is language a function of Shadow⁠—as one travels through Shadow, do you “know” the primary language of that Shadow?

RZ: The primary language of a Shadow world is not always known to the Amberites, though they generally include a particular language with which they are familiar⁠—or some variation thereof⁠—in their mental specifications, when seeking something in Shadow.

1. Magic: to what degree does it work? As opposed to the manipulation of Shadow by the Family, and alteration of probabilities.

RZ: Magic works particularly well within the world of Amber and its adjacent shadows. Kolvir itself bears an intentional dampening effect for magic, though, laid upon it by Oberon, to close that avenue for assassination attempts. It is not entirely effective, however, and small effects can be produced.

1. Who is Llewella’s mother?

RZ: Moire’s younger sister, the late lady Fraye.

1. Why does it run that Moire is green, Llewella is green, but neither Martin nor Vialle seem to be? How is this generalized to all Rebmans?

RZ: See #8. A separate sea race.

1. Whose body is in the glass serpent at Brand’s tower?

RZ: Some unfortunate person who got too close.

1. What happened to Corwin’s original Avalon? Why, in the infinity of Shadows, does it not still exist?

RZ: It was destroyed. Only its imperfect image can now be found.

1. Sending things through Shadow, and summoning them out of it: twice Grayswandir is summoned through; the Butterfly is sent back to Cabra, birds of desire fly, once an arrow of desire is shot. How does this compare with the creation of Corwin’s bird of his blood (if there is comparison)?

RZ: They are all similar magical feats, bearing their own rules within them as they pass through Shadow.

1. Pursuit: when Corwin is fleeing Julian, he says that Julian “or a Shadow of him” will continue to follow. Just how far do things like that extend? What degree of congruence?

RZ: He is saying that Julian might follow him or arrange for a shadow pursuer. Even a non-Amberite can follow one with power over Shadow if he is sufficiently quick and tenacious. There is a brief “wake” behind a Shadow-traveler which leaves the way open for a little while. Amberites are sensitive to it and can track one of their fellows more readily. ⁠—“Julian’s shadow” would not be pursuing as a matter of course. Julian could produce this state of affairs with sufficient effort, along the lines suggested in #11 and #12.

1. On p. 26 in Sign of the Unicorn: is Random pulling the rock out of a nearby Shadow to smear the glass snake, or is he moving the whole mess to a Shadow where it is more likely to happen?

RZ: Even Random doesn’t know for sure.

1. Some Chaos creatures float when dead, some burn. Why?

RZ: The guardians in the tower and the creatures pursuing Random in the first book do not harken from the Courts themselves. They are mere tools, but tools from a place in Shadow where the inhabitants possess the ability to traverse Shadow to some degree. Only natives of the Courts burn when injured⁠—actually a quick means of healing lesser wounds. Had Random died in the tower, his body would have floated, also. It was a property of the place, not the persons.

1. How was Brand being held in the tower? Chained to the wall seemed to be enough, but that seems insufficient in view of his powers.

RZ: Again, properties of the place. It was selected as his prison because it blocked most of his magical abilities. ⁠—Also, though, he was placed under a spell before being transported there, and his food and water were drugged.

1. Is Dworkin really mad, or is it all an act?

RZ: Dworkin was partly mad⁠—a condition reflecting the damaged Pattern itself.

1. What type of ships make up the merchant fleet and military fleet of Amber? What nature of armament?

RZ: I want to pass on this one, too, for the same reason as in #10.

1. How does one set up defenses outside one’s own Shadow?⁠—along the lines of the defenses around Amber set up by Eric which prevented Flora from walking to Amber, and inconvenienced Corwin and Random in Nine Princes.

RZ: Magic, basically acting as a circle on a polar graph about the point to be defended. One could Trump through, as if it were not there, if someone would cooperate. Otherwise, it must be penetrated, physically or magically⁠—involving the taking of some risks.

1. How many people (or troops) can move through Trump contact? As riders and their mounts were brought through. Is it significantly more effort?

RZ: A great number. As many as can be passed through while two persons maintain contact⁠—in which they are limited only by mental fatigue.

1. Is anyone you know of working on a Concordance of the Amber books?

RZ: Not to my knowledge.

1. There is a copy of the Jewel of Judgment in Rebma. What powers are inherent in that jewel? Can it be attuned by walking the Pattern with it? Can it be used to control weather in Rebma?

RZ: There is no copy of the Jewel in Rebma. It preceded Amber itself in existence and is not reflected.

Notes

Ken St. Andre, creator of the first Amber role-playing game and editor of Hellride, wrote Zelazny to ask him a series of questions about Amber. “This questionnaire will show you that the players are not taking this game or your creation of Amber lightly... I don’t know if you will answer all of these, but some of them are obviously more important than others. Questions 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 19, 20, 21, 23, 26, 27!!! seem the most vital to me.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Zelazny responded, noting, “this seems to cover everything.”[[2]](#footnote-2) An edited version of the questions and answers appeared as “The Great Amber Questionnaire” in Hellride #3, published January 28, 1978. Reproduced here are St. Andre’s unedited questions and Zelazny’s answers, taken from their archived correspondence.

Zelazny answered these questions in the year after he completed The Courts of Chaos. Some of his answers (Julian’s and Fiona’s colors; Llewella’s mother) contradict statements in later essays (“Amber and the Amberites,” The Visual Guide to Castle Amber) and in the Merlin novels. This implies that he did not keep notes but replied upon memory to keep the details of Amber straight.

1. Letter from Ken St. Andre to Roger Zelazny, January 13, 1978. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Letter from Roger Zelazny to Ken St. Andre, January 21, 1978. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)