

Flipping the mangled and marred map open Ammit's eyes raced across the page, a padded finger strolling down the marked pathway to land upon the place she now stood. A scarcely trodden path covered in leaves and other natural debris wound its way well beyond her view, disappearing into the darkness that loomed ahead. The Dark Forest seemed as valid a place as any to conceal something of value, but given the lack of life she found here she had to wonder just what, exactly, she was getting herself into. Rolling the map back up and tucking it into a leather pack attached to her side she would step forward, only to be halted by a voice to one side.

"I wouldn't go that way if I were you."

A purely reactive response, Ammit's arm flexed outwards as a streak of magic jettisoned from her fingertips towards the sound, the sparkling javelin whistling through the air at whoever- whatever- had addressed her. A low snarl would follow it, bubbling up from her chest as she would watch and- alarm mixing with surprise- the conjured weapon would be sent flying into another direction.

"Shoot now and ask questions later, mmm? It's not a trope I've written about yet, but perhaps it's common enough that I should consider it." A female voice, suave and collected. Ammit's muzzle would crinkle, attempting to make the figure out against the impending darkness. "And you would be...?" Her first instinct was that someone had followed her, attempting to take whatever the map led to. And yet, as the figure moved close enough to be easily visible, she knew immediately that that simply wasn't the case. The other female was adorned in a dark silk robe with gold embroidery, a book opened in one hand and a quill still glistening with ink in the other. No spy, no thief, but outside where she likely ought to have been? Completely. "Saphira. Retired mother and connoisseur of fine wines. And you?" Ammit would smirk, planting one hand to her hips. "No one of interest to you." She would halt, her eyes cutting back to the pathway this other female- this 'Saphira'- had warned her against going into. "...Ammit. Why shouldn't I go in here?" Saphira seemed amused, flicking the end of her quill to rid it of the ink still drooling down its tip before tucking it behind an ear. "This path goes through Black Umbra. It's a shorter way to get to Umbra's Throat, but you're more likely to get lost and hallucinate than to actually make it through." Ammit seemed skeptical, but it was hard to dent the firm tone Saphira spoke with. Furthermore, how did she seem to know where she was going? Clawed fingers would flex, suspicions growing as Saphira's eyes would roll. "Please tell me the hunters these days aren't all as suspicious as you? For Elder's sakes." Pointing to Ammit's pack, Saphira would begin. "The map you hold is a geocacher's map. They can be tricky to tell apart from a real one, but the lack of a fibrous binding indicates a cheap paper which is usually indicative of poor origins. It wasn't made for longevity. They typically come from common folk who like to conceal mundane items for the entertainment of others. This one leads you here, meaning one of two things: The original crafter of the map enjoys playing a twisted joke or they actually have something decent hiding here. As an artefact hunter I presume you focus more on the end of the path versus the start, so not being able to differentiate map types isn't unusual. Still, a map going directly through Black Umbra is asking for trouble and assuming that map doesn't stop nearby it's safe to assume the treasure isn't in Black Umbra but someplace

else. Umbra's Throat seems the most likely as Lover's Basin has too many visitors to keep something hidden safe for a prolonged period." With a pause, Saphira would gesture out behind where Ammit stood further down the outcropping of trees. "Another entrance down that way will take us where we need to go. Come on."

Ammit's jaw had metaphorically dropped, watching as Saphira strode past her towards this supposed entryway. Alarmed though she may have been, there was something fascinating about this other female that drove her to follow. Sure enough, after a brief walk, a new entryway rose above them: this one was lined with lanterns on rusty metal posts, swaying slowly against the breeze that whipped through the trees. It was eerie with a low fog clinging to the forest floor, but it was easy to see why this particular entryway would have been the more popular choice. Ammit strode forward- the first to encroach upon the path- before turning about and nodding to the other female. A quiet form of appreciation, though before departing she had to inquire once more: "Just who are you, really?" Saphira would smile, taking a finger and placing it to her head before moving it out and away from her temple in farewell. "Take care of yourself, Ammit." Without so much as an added word the robed female would take on her feral form and leap, ascending skywards and making her way towards- as far as Ammit could tell- Shengdao. Perhaps when she returned she might make some inquiries, but for now she had an artefact to find.

Saphira's guidance had been valid, and after having wandered down the pathway a short distance Ammit found herself back on the marked pathway which lead deeper into the brush. The pathway she'd entered on had long since disappeared, her new path unmarked and lit only by a spiraling bit of star magic that settled near her like an ethereal lantern. As she drew closer to the 'X' marked on the map she would move ahead more cautiously, wary of traps or any other hidden obstacle that might appear... and yet none did so. She made her way uninhibited, finally coming to a large quartz stone that jut forth from the earth like a pillar. At its base there appeared to be naught but natural debris and underbrush but an adventurer knew how to go about this: it was time to dig. Grabbing a trowel from her pack she would begin to sift through the soil, pushing pebble and root alike to the side as she awaited with baited breath to reveal something. Just as she prepared to find another location the metal trowel hit something hard, the sound of the metallic clang echoing through the trees. Setting the tool to the side she would reach in to pull out... a rock? Her brows would knit, rolling the thing over in her hands before recognition took hold: a familiar egg! She had seen a few pass through her intelligence circles but she'd yet to behold one up-close. It was warm and vibrating, something it obviously hadn't done during its time beneath the soil. So why now? As though to answer her unspoken question the vibrating ceased and it split down the middle. Ammit's brows would lift, too stunning- too curious- to drop the egg. First the tip of a toothy snout appeared followed by four limbs, its peculiar body tumbling out and into her arms. It looked up and rumbled low in its chest, eyes locked upon Ammit who would reach down to pat the small creature on the head, noting how it seemed to purr at her fingertips. With a faint grin across her lips, she would lean back to settle the little thing in her lap. She could get used to this, though one major question still tugged at the back of her brain: "...What the hell even are you?"