

The Ora

Tamie never thought she would be going on adventures where the danger was greater than the safety. She never thought she would go places where the death rate was higher than the survivor rate. All she wanted to be was a Marine Biologist, well a shark biologist, or more widely known as an Ichthyologist. She wanted to specifically study sharks, but instead, she found herself tangled in adventures, double crossings, spies, and danger. What could she expect, she herself was a spy. ‘One of the best’, they told her. Gazing out into the water of the Atlantic ocean, Tamie took a breath, her blond curly hair blowing all around, windy days like this one were nightmares, she dreaded having to stand in the shower with globs of conditioner in her hair trying to brush out the tangles. Oh, the problems she wished were her biggest, wishing the problem of the never tamed hair was her biggest, but no, she was up to her eyebrows in problems, problems that were bigger than just her. “TED, GET DOWN HERE WE GOT A BRIEFIN’ FOR YA!” Tamie dropped her head, her code name, TED, was the initials of her full name, Tamphanie Ezmerelda Drake, “YA, I’M COMIN’.” “On to my next death-defying mission.” She muttered, she stepped off the railing of the boat, her brown boots clunking on the deck, she grabbed the holsters and pocket she usually wore on her thighs, one holster on each side, and the pocket crossing across the holster on her right to give a place to hide small valuables on the inside of her thigh. “What’s happenin’ Cap’em?” JAW looked up from the papers he was studying on the table that occupied most of the lower deck area, well the area you could see. “We have just received a tip that two kids have come in contact with the Ora.” “What?” Tamie looked into JAW’s eyes, searching for any trace of a lie. The Ora was a myth. Said to hold power to connect one’s mind to anything. From what Tamie had heard, if you had the Ora, all you had to do was stretch your mind out to whatever you wanted, and you learned

Commented [CS1]: hmm

Commented [CS2]: My question already is...so what kind of adventures *did* she plan to go on? Go places means she’s a part of some kind of organization that does stuff. The death rate higher than the survivor rate makes it sound like a reality TV show.

Commented [CS3]: I don’t think you need to spoon feed us, unless this is the way the character talks.

Commented [CS4]: What?????

Commented [CS5]: I can relate! haha

Commented [CS6]: This is a very long sentence

Commented [CS7]: Girl needs to learn that curly hair plus a brush is a no no

Commented [CS8]: Fun name

Commented [CS9]: Huh. She super doesn’t trust this dude. Though he’s got a nifty acronym for a name too, so I’d assume they’re in the same organization? What does she suspect him of to think he’d fabricate this particular lie?

things. Things nobody knew, things you didn't want to know, things people didn't want you to know. It was the ultimate weapon, if the enemy had that kind of power, they would know all the secrets of the world, all the loopholes, all the missing pieces in the big picture. "No. that can't be true. The Ora. It's a myth, not real, just a fairy tale." Tamie slammed her fist on the table. "And besides, if it is real –" "It is," Tamie rolled her eyes, "Legend says it was broken up into pieces, different aspects of the Ora lost, you'd have to find those pieces first and put it together." JAW looked quizzically at her, "You know much about this topic, hm?" "I went through the same training as you did, and I like learning things, research, especially when I'm the one doing the research in the field." JAW sighed, "Yes, we all know about your obsession with sharks, I have no doubt you have researched all of them, you probably know everything there is to know so you're looking for more." "I do not know everything! Haven't you heard the saying, there is always someone who's better than you?" "I've heard there is always someone worse than you." "Ah shut yer cod holes, you two!" OOO pushed himself off the back wall, "I've heard it both ways." In appearance, OOO, or has Tamie and JAW liked to call him, double O, which morphed into Dopleo, was the exact opposite of Tamie, he had jet black straight hair, where she had blonde curly hair, he was tall, so compared to him, she was short. His eyes were star blue, while her eyes were two different colors, her left being a chuck hazel, and her right was a serene, not that she looked up an eye color chart to come to this conclusion or anything. But even though he spent as much time as Tamie did on the open ocean right underneath the sun, his complexion was a pale, pasty color, and she had a beautiful brown tan.

"Who'd we get the tip from?" Dopleo's voice drew Tamie's thoughts back to the predicament they were in. "I don't know, but the source said they were seen exiting a building with a bulk – a spherical bulk under one of their shirts." "Oh my gosh." Tamie sighed leaning back, "So when

Commented [CS10]: How does this point specifically to The Ora? I mean, they might have been stealing a basketball.

you say they came in contact, you mean they had something that *could* be *related* to the Ora, and when I say related, I use that as a loose term, for all we know it could have been a **lego death star under the kid's shirt!**" Dopleo looked up, confused, "Ya, but why would a kid exit a building with a lego death star under their shirt?" "I'm not saying it IS a lego death star, I'm just saying, it could be anything." JAW looked at Tamie annoyed, "You think we didn't look into that? We got readings on the energy coming off what the kids are smuggling, it is like nothing we have ever seen before." JAW looked directly at Tamie, a twinkle in his eyes, **his left eye started** to drift to drift ever so slightly to the left. Tamie narrowed her eyes, if she hadn't been trained so well, Tamie wouldn't have picked up that he was lying. Not a complete lie, there was some truth in what he said. "So, what's the plan stan?" Dopleo asked, with his hands on his hips looking down at JAW, "His name's not stan." Tamie smirked at Dopleo, "You don't know that." Dopleo shot back, "Bold of you to assume I don't not know that!" Dopleo looked confused, "What?" JAW stood, "Nevermind you two, knock it off, I have a mission for you."

Commented [CS11]: That is much better than a basketball, I'll give you that.

Commented [CS12]: Woah, is this like a magical thing?

Things we like:

- The first line is very telling about the character. "Tamie never thought she would be going on adventures where the danger was greater than the safety."
- The idea of a couple kids coming in contact with the Ora first was exciting.
- Tamphanie Exmerelda Drake is kind of a cool name.
- Kind of love that one of the characters' code names is OOO and if this is not fodder for lots of amazing jokes then I will be vastly disappointed. **Okay but also how is the nickname for that "Double O" . . . there are three Os. . . which maybe is the joke?**
- I like the idea of this core group of spies who are nerdy/snarky with each other.

Things that might need a second look:

- We're told a lot about who the character is instead of shown who they are/what they're doing.
- I wanted more description of the main character's surroundings (the boat she's on, the room with the map in it, etc.).
- I wondered why this organization is hunting for the Ora if everyone believes it's a myth.

- My first and foremost question: for what age group is this written? Because that will change how I critique it dramatically. The characters seem to be adults, but it has a very young MGish feel to it. **Knowing the audience will also affect how I interact with it as a reader. For a middle grade novel, a code name that's made up of your initials is fine. For an adult novel, if your adult spies have code names that match their initials, I'm going to be questioning how good they actually are at spying. Doesn't seem like a wise decision.**
- General thought: if you're going to have a non-scene opener, you know like where the character is sort of explaining something rather than the character being in the middle of a situation where they are *doing* something, it has to be pretty compelling--like The Raven Boys has an awesome watch-for-this-train-wreck-it's-coming kind of an opening that sets the tone for the whole series. This one was a little jarring because it makes me think one thing about the character (that all she wants is to be safe and be an Ichthyologist, madame of sharks!) but then within a few lines it says "oh, but she's actually a spy...a really really good spy" which was a little bit of a disconnect for me.
- This is actually just a PSA: If you have curly hair, DO NOT USE A BRUSH ON IT. Thank you. This is the real reason Tamie's spy curls were all frizzy.
- Formatting. Please use Times New Roman, 12pt font, double spaced, with normal paragraphing. Otherwise it's a super headache to read, and, for an agent or editor who is deciding to read or not to read something, I would assume little things can tip the decision? **YESSSSSS!!!! Honestly when I've worked acquisitions, there are two main reasons we ignore/reject manuscripts that aren't formatted correctly. 1) There are usually instructions regarding formatting on our submissions guidelines pages, and those not being followed lead us to draw conclusions regarding how easy or hard you'll be to work with. Following instructions matters. 2) Unfortunately, publishing is a business, and time is money. The more time an editor has to put into editing format, the more it costs us to produce, the less likely we'll pick it up.**
- Very difficult to follow who is talking? Due to formatting?
- Reader response: She really doesn't trust this JAW guy. If your first reaction with another member of your team when they give you a report is to look for evidence of lying...not a great relationship. Especially among spies. I wondered what exactly he'd done or what she suspected him of to jump straight to lying.
- Not sure I entirely understand what the Ora is or why Tamie is so keyed into it and seems to know everything about it if it's just, like, a kid's story. If I was a hard core spy and I heard something that I thought was a legend surface, I think my first reaction would be to *laugh*. Oh they found Sauron and his new ring possessed a small child? Cool cool cool. Okay that's not a legend. Some kids reported they found the Kraken and it ate their puppy? I'm only reacting this way because I don't have context and grounding in the world enough to know what "legend" means to these characters.
- Actually I'm going to talk a little more about grounding and world building. The idea of the Ora and a legend coming to life and cool magic powers gives me awesome Indiana Jones vibes. But, because this story starts with very little detail about what kind of world it is (is it contemporary/historical like Indiana Jones? Is this an Urban Fantasy with demons and stuff? Or is it completely secondary world?) who the characters are and what they do...I mean it's a little hard to follow. Getting your reader to get excited about something means they have to understand as much as the characters do, and it seems like these guys have a lot more information than I do, so it's hard to get excited about

following them to the Ora. Why would kids sneaking something spherical out of building point to the Ora specifically? The energy readings...? Is this something that came up unexpectedly like Godzilla? Is this something they've been searching for for a long time so they know it when they see the signs? They're spies, so...who is paying them and why would their boss be interested in this information? Is it something Tamie has been eye-rolling over for years and is now having to confront the fact that this thing she didn't believe in is real? I'd recommend looking at a book or movie that would be a good comp title for your book (I don't know what you're trying to accomplish specifically or I'd give you a recommendation!!) and see how the book lays the groundwork to allow readers to feel like they know what they're reading before introducing some of the core conflict.