

A Gathering of Spiders

There have long been whispers and rumors of a shadowy organization known as the Ebon Web. You've no doubt heard the stories as a child. Stories of Spiders coming in the dead of night to take you away for some nefarious purpose to never be seen again. Perhaps they were just spooky stories told around the campfire late at night used to entertain or frighten you. Regardless, I believe that some of the rumors and whispers might be based on some truth.

Recently in the Taldref Empire, a series of mysterious murders have occurred. In the city of Grisem, investigators were able to link these murders together.

- On Saturday night, the famous traveling bard, Elias Kayne, held a performance at the White Ram Amphitheater. This was a major event for Grisem as most of the city's rich and powerful were in attendance. Additionally, many of the common folk were celebrating outside the amphitheater with various games of drinking and concerts of their own.
- On Sunday afternoon, three victims were discovered in the basement of the White Ram Amphitheater. All three victims were found holding a small black token of a spider. One victim has been identified as Vaslin Malevai. Vaslin was well known among the citizens of the empire. First as a soldier winning honors for his many contributions to the empire's campaigns. Then as an adventurer, best known for removing the threat of pirates from the port city of Blood Mire. In retirement, he financed many adventuring parties to handle issues for local nobility. His loss will be felt for years to come.
- On Tuesday morning, three victims were found dead in their own homes each holding a small black token of a spider. Witnesses reported that the group of victims were last seen partying together at a local pub on Friday night near the White Ram Amphitheater.
- On Tuesday night, three more victims were found in a back alley near the White Ram Amphitheater. Each victim again found holding a small black token of a spider.
- Upon investigation of the work staff of the White Ram Amphitheater, it was discovered that a small portion of the extra help that was hired worked in the lower floors of the amphitheater on Saturday night. Interviews could not be conducted with those workers as they have disappeared.

This report and other research, leads me to believe that this nefarious organization does exist and quite possibly predates the founding of the Taldref Empire. I believe that this string of murders is the result of a misstep of the victims during the fabled Nox Auctum.

For those not aware, through the research of personal historical records, the Nox Auctum is a type of auction. I use the term auction lightly. If anything, it is more of a ceremony of respect. The auction seems to embrace corruption and nefarious means to select winners. While coin seems to be accepted it does not necessarily carry the same value as some other forms of currency. The currency that seems to go furthest is information, favors and service.

- In one excerpt, a woman simply known as Tracey describes her and two friends being blindfolded and escorted into a room that they were then locked in. An auctioneer could be heard auctioning an item called the Horn of the Grim Harvest. Bids were placed using paper slips that were slid under the door. As the auction continued, an usher would come visit the room to provide refreshments. It wasn't until later in the auction, that she realized that there was an encoded document in the room. Once decoded and shown to the usher she was allowed to know the highest bid and make a bid against it directly. It is unclear what she purchased or what her bid was.
- In another excerpt, a soldier who was a personal guard to Lord Basil Taldref shares the following. *“Lord Basil received a letter that bore the seal of a black spider. Once the letter was read by Lord Basil he gathered two of his most trusted and all three left immediately riding off into the darkness. He returned a week later with a large scroll and a number of books and a smile wider than the river.”* The following week Lord Basil's forces arrived and liberated the city of Vanne and then drove the enemy army back to the city of Ortenau where they defeated the fleeing force. Many scholars consider this the end of the Reunification Wars and the start of what we call the modern day Taldref Empire.
- Lastly, an excerpt from the ancient times of the Kingdom of Taladorn. In the excerpt, the writer describes serving a party in which a large string maze was set up to resemble a spider's web. Teams of three would compete to transverse the web to uncover challenges that they must solve to progress. The excerpt goes on to explain the winners received not only accolades but small black tokens of a spider.

I hope you have found this information helpful. If these murders were the results of a misstep at a Nox Auctum, I would hope you do not do the same. You could pay for it with your life.

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