I did it for the money. Or in this case, the Æmber.

Used to be, a spider-writer could get by in one of the great citadels of the Sentinel Plains selling story-sheets to the nobles and ghost-writing stage plays for the local thespians’ guild. Used to be a lot of things a spider could do in this world that can’t be done anymore. “Know your role,” the Sanctum enforcers say—as if weaving webs and catching flies could lead to a satisfying life.

Which is not to say that their laws matter. As of late, with the Æmber-drought in the region, no one has time for leisure activities like reading or watching plays anymore. It’s all “Archons, Archons, Archons” and “Vaults, Vaults, Vaults,” anywhere and everywhere, all around the clock.

Just hoping for a sliver of Æmber to fall their way.

The dream, of course, is to be recruited to an archon’s team and compete in the great contest for the right to open a Vault. Do well in a match, and the archon is bound by convention to reward you with a bit of treasure. Such dreams are beyond the reach of a lowly (former) spider-writer, and seeing as how I don’t particularly care for the taste of bugs, I was forced to take matters into my own hands.

_Inka the Spider_  
_Spy-for-Hire_  
_Observation. Surveillance. Scouting Reports._  
_Negotiable Rates_  
_No Assassinations_
You laugh, but one thing I’ve learned is this: the archons are competitive, especially when it comes to Æmber, and there’s little they won’t do to gain an edge. Including hiring a spider to spy on the competition.

I set up shop, a small treehouse office in Cobweb Grove on the outskirts of the Lesser Uncanny Forest. I sent out my cyber-card through the remarkable network of the faerie technicians. And the archons came. Because they wanted—needed—to win.

As you might imagine, spiders have a distinct set of talents that makes us particularly adept as spies. We are good at creeping in corners and lurking in crevices. We can sit for hours high in the shadows of a room, innocuous, silently watching. We are masters at biding our time.

What set me apart from the common spy, however, was my background. At the end of any surveillance, you have to write a report, and I had spent my entire life honing my writerly craft. Many of my regular archon clients came to value these reports for their detail, their insight, and their strategic implications. My spider star, such as it was, began to rise again.

Forgive me if I occasionally embellished or exaggerated a detail here or there. The heart of the storyteller is a hard thing to squash, but I never told an out-and-out lie. That the archons kept coming back for more, and from farther and farther out on the Crucible, tells me my words had value.

Over time, I started working a clause into many of my negotiations: the right to publish, after a cycle had passed, an archive of all the scouting reports I had put together during that cycle. These reports would then become common knowledge for all archons who cared enough to study them, deepening their understanding of the contest and enriching the competition. A worthy goal, right?

This scroll, then, is the first of my archives.

Let me weave you a tale…