

The Ledger of Hidden Fortunes

Nicky Drayden

From set *Ravnica Allegiance*

Date: The 15th of Dhazo

Location: Clover Heights

Summary of Tithe Collection Proceedings:

Of the 360 names listed on the tithing register:

- 259 citizens paid the requisite 30% of their salaries in full
- 87 citizens submitted partial payments with debt promises (See Debt Ledger for details)
- 13 citizens optioned for public flogging and indentured servitude
- 1 citizen refused outright to pay—as per requisite, their assets will be seized, along with those of their extended family members, to be redistributed pending absolutions

Total Weekly Tithings:

- 21,890 zinos in minted coinage
- 7,503 zinos in debt promises
- 4,401 zinos in forfeited property (See estimated valuations in notes below)

Property Item 1: Qty 3 – Coin chains, silver. Valued at 69 zinos

Property Item 2: Qty 1 – Orzhov charm, lapis lazuli with crystal sunburst. Valued at 155 zinos

Property Item 3: Qty 7 – Thrull face masks, gold plated. Valued at 109 zinos

It's my third full week as a certified tithe taker, and despite my father's assurances, it hasn't gotten any easier. Today was especially bad, so I'm writing about it here in my ledger. No one ever reads through all these notes anyway, and I can jot down my feelings whenever I want, and nobody will be the wiser.

Today was my first refusal. The citizen in question tried to argue with me that the new thirty-percent requisite tithing was too much. It used to be ten percent, he said, as far back as he could remember. I gently explained that it *was* still ten percent—the first ten percent going toward defense and war management, the second ten percent going to social services and infrastructure, and the final ten percent going to Orzhova to compensate the Obzedat and the Oligarchs for their valuable time, but he didn't want to hear that. I presented him with the opportunity to make up the other twenty percent in debt promises if he needed to, but then he started cursing the guild, saying that our guildmasters had better get their greedy hands out of his pockets before he did something about it.

I could overlook his agitation and swearing, but I couldn't ignore a blatant threat against the Obzedat. As I moved to subdue him, his eyes twitched like those of a rabid bat. He charged me, his bare hands beating against my gold-plated armor until the metal turned red with his blood. I dealt him a forearm to the temple and then used my staff to sweep his feet from underneath him. He fell back and hit the dirt, his breathing heavy and hard. He locked eyes with me, like the punishment that was about to befall him was all my fault.

He's the one who refused to pay. I was just doing my job.

Date: The 24th of Dhazo

Location: Prosperity Estates

Summary of Tithe Collection Proceedings:

Of the 292 names listed on the tithing register:

- 120 citizens paid the requisite 30% of their salaries in full
- 127 citizens submitted partial payments with debt promises (See Debt Ledger for details)
- 37 citizens optioned for public flogging and indentured servitude
- 8 citizens refused outright to pay—as per requisite, their assets will be seized, along with those of their extended family members, to be redistributed pending absolutions

Total Weekly Tithings:

- 6,890 zinos in minted coinage
- 37,503 zinos in debt promises
- 8,143 zinos in forfeited property (See estimated valuations in notes below)

Property Item 1: Qty 3 – Brass knuckles, spiked. Valued at 37 zinos

Property Item 2: Qty 12 – Small censers, silver with gold trim. Valued at 155 zinos

Property Item 3: Qty 1 – Communications earpiece, Dimir, enchanted. Valued at 109 zinos

Today, after dinner, I presented my father with the money I'd skimmed from the tithes. Nearly five hundred zinos. I could practically see the gold reflecting in his wide, glassy eyes. He wiped away a tear before it fell, then he pulled me into a tight embrace.

“Two-hundred fifteen zinos more than last week! That's my girl!” he said to me, pinching my ear. I felt proud to contribute to my family's diminishing coffers. It's been rough going lately, even before Orzhova's tithing hike.

A few years ago, a string of bad investments had obliterated much of Father's inheritance. He went to our ancestor spirits in hopes of obtaining a loan from the massive fortunes they'd clung to after death. Admitting failure wrecked him, and we would all have to suffer through our ancestors' contemptuous stares whenever they visited us for Absolutions Day or the Eve of Reckoning. But what Father came back home with was worse than being saddled with debt. He'd returned home with the truth: there was no family fortune. Our ancestors' wealth had been heavily tied into the coffers of the Ghost Council, and when the Ghost Council bit the dust, their money went, too. Our ancestor spirits had been keeping up pretenses of their affluence this whole time, when in reality, they *only* had a few million zinos to their names and couldn't bear to part with any of it.



Ministrant of Obligation | Art by: Bastien L. Deharme

I was resentful, but Father understood better than I did. Keeping up appearances was both important and expensive for us as well. We didn't dare employ less than three servants, for fear of word getting back to the Oligarchs. As a pontiff, Father only associated with them on occasion, but standing in the shadows of Oligarchs was a privilege many aspired to. We couldn't risk having our social standing downgraded, so everyone in our family chipped in. Tithe taking is my contribution.

"I knew you had it in you," Father said, stuffing the money into one of his deep pockets. "Didn't I tell you it'd get easier?"

Pinch a zino here, pinch one there. Fudge the ledgers. All the tithe takers do it.

Only I couldn't. I know it was the whole reason Father pushed me into the profession. *An honest day's work for an honest day's skimming* he'd say with a laugh. But taking people's money didn't bring me joy, even if our family needed it, because all those families out there had so much less than we did. So I got a second job assisting a fleshmage. Making thrulls isn't the most glamorous line of work, but it pays well, and I'm good at it. If my parents ever find out, I'll never hear the end of it—how flesh magic is beneath our station, and if the spirits in our family ever found out gods help us all.

Half of what I earn each week, I give to my father. I use the other half to assist citizens who fall short on their tithes. I can't help many, but in my heart, I hope there are more tithe takers out there doing the same.

Date: The 11th of Prahz

Location: Oligarch's Row, South

Summary of Tithe Collection Proceedings:

Of the 402 names listed on the tithing register:

- 34 citizens paid the requisite 40% of their salaries in full
- 339 citizens submitted partial payments with debt promises (See Debt Ledger for details)

- 34 citizens optioned for public flogging and indentured servitude
- 29 citizens refused outright to pay—as per requisite, their assets will be seized, along with those of their extended family members, to be redistributed pending absolutions

Total Weekly Tithings:

- 1,890 zinos in minted coinage
- 68,667 zinos in debt promises
- 22,852 zinos in forfeited property (See estimated valuations in notes below)

Property Item 1: Qty 4 – Cluestones, enchanted. Valued at 67 zinos

Property Item 2: Qty 2 – Sigils, tainted. Valued at 55 zinos

Property Item 3: Qty 12 – Quart of human blood, pasteurized. Valued at 109 zinos

Father came home in a foul mood today, another one of his get-rich-quick schemes gone wrong. Terribly wrong from the look of his leg, now a mangled twist of blue-gray thrull flesh. I tried to get close enough to work my flesh magic on it without him noticing, but he'd fumed and stomped all over the house. The thrull's gold faceplate attached to the bottom of his foot pounded against the stone floor so hard that it toppled the porcelain dolls in Mother's curio. Father cursed the Selesnya Conclave, calling them a bunch of bran eating, leaf wearing, brainwashed zealots, and saying he'll bring the guild down single handedly for what they did to him. All the while, copper zibs kept falling from the holes in his pockets. From his rantings, I gleaned there was an Izzet machine and wurms involved. It sounded interesting, but I didn't pry.

It's better to avoid him when he's in one of his moods.

Something interesting *did* happen working for Fleshmage Jarek today. I was busy rendering a corpse, when I heard him in the reckoning room.

"Quiet," he said. "Your pleas are useless now."

A woman begged for her life, which was nothing new. All borrowers did that. But then she said, "I've got information about a vulnerability at Vitu-Ghazi. I just need to check in with my handler, and I'll be compensated justly. Then I can clear all my debts!"

Beyond curious, I let the flesh I was working with drop into a heap and nearly knocked over a stack of kneecaps as I rushed to the door. When I peeked inside the reckoning room, I saw a woman dressed in fine Selesnyan robes, the gauzy material barely a whisper against her skin. Her movements were rash and harsh, though, and caught me by surprise. When I was younger, I knew in my heart that I wanted to join Selesnya. I'd wanted to study their ways and embrace the power of "the gift." Father shut that down before the idea had a chance to take root, so I didn't get to learn much about them, but I did know one thing—no Selesnyan would dare get caught up into debt with the Orzhov Syndicate. I could only conclude she was a spy. Dimir, most likely.

Jarek had no pity for her, and he called upon the runes lurking in the shadowy corners of the reckoning room. Magic struck out from his fingertips, black tendrils of smoke that were ephemeral at first, but then sharpened into daggers. He flayed the borrower from head to toe, and as soon as Jarek made the final cut, the spirit drifted free toward the ceiling. Before it could escape, he bound it to a tome with another set of spells, and then ordered the spirit to queue along the wall with the others he'd harvested today. A baker's dozen. Busy times.

When he called for me, I counted to five, then ran in like I hadn't been snooping at the door. I dragged the corpse out of the reckoning room, undressed it, and then cleansed it with fragrant oils that would halt decomposition. I consulted my diagrams, figuring out the shapes I needed to carve from the flesh.

We'd gotten an order for a treasury thrull. Creating a six-ton beast is a tricky puzzle to put together, and usually required no less than forty humanoid bodies, but I'd taught myself to do it in thirty-three. The trick is to *measure twice, cast once* not a big secret, but you'd be amazed at how many mages just start invoking magic without any planning. I could make a whole 'nother thrull out of the flesh scraps they leave behind.

But as I started to draw my outlines on the body with a charcoal stick, my eyes kept flicking over to the Selesnyan robes folded nicely in the middle of the floor.



Camaraderie | Art by: Sidharth Chaturvedi

I prayed to my ancestor spirits for the rogue thought to go away.

One of the thrull imps I'd assembled today mewed, its eyes darting from me to the robes and back, like it knew what I was thinking.

"I really shouldn't " I said back to it. It'd be improper to take the robes. They belonged to Orzhova now, just another bit of forfeited property to log into a ledger:

Property Item 12,542: Qty 1 – Robes, Selesnyan, silk. Valued at 68 zinos

No one would miss them. I shoved the robes into my satchel.

Maybe I'm not so bad at skimming after all.

Reading back over that entry, I realize it made my dad sound awful, but he's wonderful in all the ways that count. During our times of plenty, he often contributed to the arts, commissioning the stained-glass portraits of our ancestors that hung in our dining hall windows. He'd invested in several small businesses, including one that manufactured a keyrune generator, which changed the security scene of Ravnica. And Father has the patience of a saint with me. In my younger days, I'd had a bit of a rebellious streak still trying to figure out who I was and where I belonged. I'd dyed my hair every color of the rainbow (except green, of course Father would never allow *that* color in his house), and he didn't bat an eye, just paraded me through our basilica while my mother cowered ten steps behind

us, too embarrassed to be seen by the ladies in her social circles. I was small under the bulk of those intimidating basilica arches, but walking next to Father, with that smile he had on his face, I felt like a giant. He's supported me in every way imaginable, which is why I'm willing to deny this one part of myself for him.

But through him, I've been able to see the good that fills our guild, and Orzhov is enough for me.

Date: The 26th of Prahz

Location: Penance Place

Summary of Tithe Collection Proceedings:

Tithe taking has been temporarily suspended due to rioting. Reinforcement soldiers from the Tenth District are being sent to help pacify the situation.

Well, I had the afternoon off unexpectedly, and I'm not looking forward to going back tomorrow. The citizens aren't happy about another tithing hike so soon, and I'm getting tired of scrubbing blood from all the nooks and crannies in my armor.

Father went off to meet with a dock boss about a potential investment, and my mother was at her social club, so I thought I'd have the house all to myself for the day.

It wasn't long before my thoughts circled back to the Selesnyan robes hidden under my mattress. I went to try them on, just to see how they felt. They fit so well, and compared to the armor I'd grown used to, it was like wearing clouds. I imagined leaf filigree running down my arms, hair pulled up and bound with a twirling vine, berries and flowers pinned in there just so. I capered into the living room and bowed before Mother's stately curio, pretending it was Vitu-Ghazi. I danced like I was the wind bristling through the world tree's leaves—like I was free from seizing the assets people had worked themselves to the bone for, and free from seizing their *actual* bones.

Then the front door slammed shut. My father was home and judging by the swampy stench he'd brought back with him, I knew it wasn't going to be pretty. I tried to get free of those treacherous robes, but the ties in the back were knotted tightly. Left without options, I pressed into the shadows, watching as he stormed about, ranting over how he'd nearly been squashed by a crate of whisky. He tore off his wet cloak which had all sorts of flotsam clinging to the black wool.

"Miri!" he called for me, voice loud, like he thought I was still in my room. "Miri! Come here."

Then his eyes finally adjusted to the dim lighting, and he saw me.

I'd never seen him so mad. His voice shook the rafters, sending bits of dust raining down upon me. Wearing Selesnyan robes in his house? I'd be disowned. So I scrambled for an excuse, any excuse.

"I came across some information, Father, a tip that Vitu-Ghazi has a vulnerability." I swallowed down the lump in my throat. "I'm going undercover to see if I can find it, and if I do, we can exploit it and have all of Selesnya begging us for mercy!"

"Where did you get this information?" he grated at me, eyes still slit. "This doesn't sound like an assignment for a tithe taker. I'm going to speak with your commander."

I grabbed his shirt, still sopping wet, realizing I'd have to come clean about practicing flesh magic. "The assignment didn't come from my commander. I heard the information from a spy with my own two ears."

"But from where?"

“The spy was pleading for her life, right before her spirit was taken. I’ve been working for a fleshmage in my spare time.”

His scowl didn’t ease. Instead of helping my cause, I’d just defied him twice over. If I was going to win my father’s trust back, I really needed to sell it.

“Father, do you honestly think I’d wear these confounded rags if I didn’t think this tip could bless us with unfathomable wealth? I’ve seen how you and Mother have struggled, forgoing your own happiness to bolster mine. The moment I heard about Selesnya’s vulnerability, all I could think about was how I could use it to bolster Orzhov’s prosperity. The tithe takers have trained me in intimidation and combat. You’ve taught me how to manipulate the system for our family’s gain. Please. Let me do this.”

His eyes eased. His posture went from one tensed muscle to arms spread wide, ready for an embrace.

I’d planted the seed of fortune in his mind, and when he looked at me in those robes, he no longer saw a traitor, but an apt successor who would restore our family’s wealth.

I am not sure which look scares me more.

Date: The 7th of Mokosh

Location: Initiates’ Compound

I’m *here* ! Selesnyan orientation.

And I’ve got a proper journal now, made of twice-blessed palm leaf paper with little yellow flowers pressed into the pulp. The pages are brittle and too thick to turn properly, and in some spots, it seems like it’s actively repelling my ink but it’s beautiful, and it’s mine, and I no longer have to hide it. In fact, the elders actively encourage the journaling of our feelings whenever the need strikes.



Plains | Art by: James Paick

Our class is three hundred initiates strong. Danika, Caz, and Vasil are in my assigned developmental pod. Caz and Vasil are unguilded. Danika had worked as an Azorius arrester, but after the carnage of the Udzec riot and the following crackdowns, she had a nervous breakdown and decided she needed a

change of scenery. Our developmental pod is connected to four others, forming a support branch, and those branches connect to enrichment trunks, and then there was something about a root system, but I'd tuned the elder out by then, because as if on cue, the odor from all three hundred of our collective armpits started to shout obscenities at my nose.

We'd cleansed ourselves in a warm bath of berries and oils before changing back into our freshly washed robes. It smelled heavenly at the time, but those botanicals apparently did nothing to counteract the sweat and stench generated in our moist spots. One of the initiates had the gall to raise his hand to complain.

The elder had called the smell a part of our "natural aura" and promised we'd soon get used to it.

Danika passed a small vial around our pod, and we each pressed a dab of fragrant oil below our noses, then sat back and listened intently to the prayer instructions.

Date: The 12th of Mokosh

Location: Conclave Assembly

I almost feel bad for writing this, but I already miss home. Sure, the Orzhov Syndicate has its issues, but our hygiene is impeccable, and our paper doesn't spontaneously crumble into pieces if you look at it too hard. And never in my life have I appreciated money as much as I do now. For example, yesterday, when I found out we were being called to attend our first Collective Blessing, I instantly knew that I had to show up in something more dazzling than my stolen robes. After nearly a week of solid wear, they were starting to look shabby, but there's no clothier within walking distance of the initiates' compound, just a couple of seamstresses who make robes out of their homes.

I found the exact robes I wanted, though, beautiful flowing silks embroidered with leaves in threaded gold. My wallet practically jumped out of my pocket when I saw them. Her work was magnificent. Celestial. I couldn't help but think of how profitable her business could be with the help of a good investor. She could buy out the debt contracts of a half-dozen borrowers and have them do all the sewing. She could triple her profits in the first year alone, expand her brand, purchase a vendor spot on Tin Street, woo more investors, then

But that is not the Selesnyan way. To make matters worse, the seamstress would only trade the robes for a copper tea kettle or bandu-filed pruning shears. I figured a tea kettle would be easier, since I had no idea of what bandu-filed pruning shears were. I went to a metalsmith who wanted four pairs of knitted socks for the tea kettle. The only knitter nearby wanted three pounds of white wolf fur. (I didn't dare inquire what it was to be used for.) I found a wolf-rider who was infirmed and wanted his pup walked in trade. I walked the wolf (*sooo* not a pup). Gave the fur to the knitter and the socks to the metalsmith. I was really getting the hang of bartering, though I'd spent nearly my entire morning running errands instead of studying, and let me tell you, my personal aura was *ripe*.

So I cleansed myself before I went to back to the seamstress, because I knew I wouldn't have time before the Collective Blessings assembly to do it. Then I knocked on her door, and when she answered, I held the kettle out to her, nice and polished, unable to contain the proud smirk on my face. "I would like to barter this for those robes, please."

She smiled the kindest smile and said, "But what use would I have for *two* tea kettles?" And from inside her home, I heard a kettle whistling, traded to her by some other customer not twenty minutes prior. My head ached. My heart did, too.

When I reconvened with my pod, Danika saw my frustration and leant me a shawl that completely changed the look of my robes. We were late to Blessings, so we sat in back where the shaman wouldn't

notice us. We grew restless after the third hour of chanting and started passing notes on palm leaf paper. I asked if she'd go to Vitu-Ghazi with me tomorrow. She seemed to be settling into the Conclave faster than I was, and I could use her support. She agreed, and when our note disintegrated into a pile of pulp when she handed it back to me, we could barely contain our laughter.

I knew the chances of me finding Vitu-Ghazi's vulnerability were slim. I knew disappointment awaited my father. We may never claim back our fortune, but at least I'll be able to tell him I made an effort. And maybe with his birthday coming up, he'd soon forget all about this silly plan. In the Syndicate, birthdays are celebrated with coin necklaces, and every year, the Oligarchs who Father spends so much of his time trying to impress will douse him in wealth. The necklaces are mere trinkets to the Oligarchs, of course, but their generosity could keep our family afloat for months, maybe even a year.

Back when I was a kid, and when birthday money was just fun money, I'd help him cut the coins from the string and stack them into piles. He'd donate half to the church, as is mandated, but the other half he'd spend at the dromad races, his chance to turn that seeming pittance into a fortune. He always took me with him. I'd sit on his lap, though I'd fall off every time he stood in a flurry of emotions—either thanking the spirits for a winning pick or cursing them for a losing one. There was a lot more of the latter.

Every year, he would head home with empty pockets and a big grin stretched across his face, saying how he was *that close* to winning it all, and how one day there would be nothing I could ask for that he wouldn't be able to give me, and then he'd pinch my ear and gasp at how he'd found one last coin tucked behind it.

Ugh. This Blessings assembly is running into its fourth hour. My butt cheeks have fallen asleep. Gods, I miss home right now.

Date: The 13th of Mokosh

Location: Initiates' Compound

Today we learned a growth spell. My podmates all seem to have found "the gift" and were able to conjure seeds into healthy plants. Me, I just spent my time praying to the ancestor spirits for something to happen, *anything* to happen, before the elder came back from his meditations and saw my sad terracotta pot filled with nothing but dirt.

"Have you tried the Chant of Vitu-Ghazi?" Vasil asked me, a concerned bend on his brow.

I shook my head. I spent all of yesterday morning chasing down that tea kettle, so I didn't get a chance to practice. Vasil walked me through the chant, and when I tried it myself, I could see something wriggling beneath the dirt, but the seeds never sprouted. I dug them up and held them in my palm. The plump white seeds had shriveled and turned brown.

"Don't worry," said Caz, pressing new seeds into the pot. "The seed spark invocation is foolproof." He nudged me. "They don't teach it to initiates because it's so simple, they wouldn't bother learning the chants." Then Caz twirled his fingers in a spiral, gathered an orb of green, pulsing magic into his hand, and sprinkled it into his pot. His succulent plant doubled in size.

I tried doing the same, and when I sprinkled my dirt, three sprouts emerged. For a brief moment, I was ecstatic, but then they withered, just as the seeds had.

When my pod ran out of ideas, some of the people in our support branch tried to help. When those ideas failed, I got advice from one of the initiates in our enrichment trunk who had placed out of en-

chantment lessons. But nothing worked, and the elder was due back any moment. I wondered if I'd touched too many dead things to ever make something grow.

Danika wouldn't give up on me though. She worked with me on my chants, right until the elder was upon us, then at the last possible second, she switched her pot with mine.

"Nice work," the elder said to me, pinching the leaves to test their suppleness. "Very nice." Then he moved onto Danika and frowned at her wilted sprouts. "The gift will find you eventually," he said. "But I'd like you to spend the rest of the evening in remedial meditation."

Later, I asked her why she would do that for me. She said she knew how much I wanted to visit Vitu-Ghazi today, and if we couldn't go together, at least I'd be able to go alone. I didn't know what to say. I was simply bowled over by her generosity and sacrifice, and the kindness of everyone who'd tried to help me.

So I went to the Guildhall all by myself, and when I stood before it, I marveled at the massive world tree. Seeing it in person was bittersweet. It was so perfect, so serene, and the organic architecture swirling around it looked more like it was made from wisps of smoke than stone. But I knew tomorrow I'd be heading home empty-handed and would face my father's disappointment. All those feelings washed away when something buzzed against my thigh. I reached down and found a pocket in my robe. I hadn't noticed it before. Actually, I'm sure it hadn't been there. As I slipped my hand inside, threads of dispelled magic drifted away. The pocket suddenly felt heavy and pulled my robes down on one side.

I made sure no one was watching, then pulled the item out. It was an artifact Selesnyan. It pulsed in my hand, and when I raised it up to Vitu-Ghazi, a shocking truth was revealed. The great tree had been restored after an attack from some Izzet magelord, but it seemed those mendings were superficial. Beneath the bark, I could see how fragile the world tree was, stress fractures running through its branches, hidden support struts barely able to take the weight. One well-targeted attack could bring the whole structure down, this time for good.

This artifact would be worth *millions* to Orzhov. Tens of millions. Maybe more. Our family would be pulled out of despair, and the pride my father would have for me would shine as brightly as the sun.

Date: The 14th of Mokosh

Location: My Bedroom

Yesterday evening, I rushed home all the way from the Conclave, eager to tell my father what I discovered. I busted through the door, sweating and heaving. Before I could open my mouth, my father took one look at the mess I was and called the servants to draw me a bath with fragrant soaps, to fetch me something decent to wear, and to make me a proper Orzhovian meal. Only then would he hear the news I'd brought him. He sent a page for my mother to fetch her from her social club. When she got home, she fawned all over me, picking the sticks and berry stems from my hair like a momma wolf preening her pup's fur.

"I've missed you, Miri," she said, and for the first time, my name was like a song off her lips. Any embarrassment she'd felt toward me was gone. "The house hasn't been the same without you. Your father's been insufferable, bragging to anyone and everyone about how brave his daughter is."

The smell of beef tips and gravy wafted up. After a week of eating bran flakes and dried fruit, I was practically salivating all over myself. It drew my attention, but my mother's hand pulled my chin back so I faced her.

"I know that your trip to Selesnya was just a ruse. You've had that guild in your heart since you were a child. A mother always knows. Just tell your father you found this." She hands me an artifact—a delicate crown of gold, radiating a soft white light. "Tell him you pilfered it from the halls of Vitu-Ghazi. Make up a wonderful story, and it will sate his fancies of fortune for now."

When she said that, I couldn't wait for an even bigger reveal at dinner. The ancestor spirits even joined us, sulking over the delicious spread that they knew we couldn't afford. I told my story, and my father hung on my every word. He laughed when I mentioned the awful paper and my morning spent bartering. My mother smiled, a crinkle of pride at the corner of her eyes. It was then I saw how much wealth my family already had. Not by the coins in our pockets, but the love we had for each other in our hearts. I thought of the friends I'd made at the Conclave, too. Of the deep connections we'd made in so little time. Connections I'm not quite ready to give up on.

When I got to the part about Vitu-Ghazi, something unexpected came out. I didn't tell them about the vulnerability, and that our family was destined to share a true fortune. Instead I presented my father with the artifact my mother had given me.

"The Crown of Convergence? Miri, this is worth thousands!" my father bellowed, and as he pulled me in for a hug, my mother and I shared a conspiratorial grin.



Crown of Convergence | Art by: Jen Page

"I did it for you, Father. I wanted for you to be proud."

"Oh, Miri. I've always been proud," he said. "And there's no fortune in this world that could tip the scales against the love I have for you."

This will be the last entry in my Selesnyan journal. I don't want my father to ever stumble upon it, though I doubt the paper will last more than a few months in storage, especially with the way my tears are turning the pages to mush.

Date: The 29th of Mokosh

Location: Oligarch's Row, North

Summary of Tithe Collection Proceedings:

Of the 614 names listed on the tithing register:

- 551 citizens paid the requisite 18% of their salaries in full
- 65 citizens submitted partial payments with debt promises (See Debt Ledger for details)
- 5 citizens optioned for public flogging and indentured servitude
- 0 citizens refused outright to pay

Total Weekly Tithings:

- 68,417 zinos in minted coinage
- 3,670 zinos in debt promises
- 2,852 zinos in forfeited property (See estimated valuations in notes below)

Property Item 1: Qty 3 – Runes, enchanted. Valued at 67 zinos

Property Item 2: Qty 1 – Sigil, very tainted. Valued at 75 zinos

Property Item 3: Qty 12 – Flagon of bat guano. Valued at 205 zinos

I'm back at work, and things are better now. Fortunately, I missed the worst of the revolt, and calm has reclaimed the streets now that the Syndicate has agreed on a very reasonable tithing of eighteen percent. I haven't had to wash blood from my armor in over a month.

Father's birthday was last week. As expected, he brought home a small fortune in coin necklaces, but he said the best present was the gift I'd given him.

"It's an enchanted money tree," I said as I presented him with the terracotta pot. He looked down at the sapling and frowned. He was about to scream something about not allowing anything green inside our home, but then I reached into the soil and retrieved a gold coin.

His eyes brightened.

"I skimmed it from forfeited property yesterday," I said. "It produces one coin every night."

Ever since then, my father has dutifully tended to that tree—watering it, making sure it gets enough sun, and even talking to it when he thinks no one is listening. And every night, after my father has fallen to sleep, and before I slip off to secretly work flesh magic until the wee hours of the morning, I place a gold coin in the soil for him to find.

Having that bit of greenery in our home fills me with serenity and with hope. Right now, it's just a sapling that he's allowed into our lives, but soon it will be ready to spread its roots beyond its pot, and eventually, so will I.