

Episode 5 Sworn Duty Part 3

[Evening, the Cross Quarter]

Uriah hustled up the steps of the church of Saint Zamuel, adjusting his belt girdle and weaponry from swinging haphazardly as he approached the threshold of the huge bronze and wood double doors that granted entry to the front of the church. It had been several days since Isaac's dialogue with Simeon. There had been much to discuss about visions, emanations and the Anabaptist call of duty. Simeon met in private council with Uriah and Sarah and could speak directly to what he perceived as righteous intent for their son. What brought it on at this time and age remains a mystery to the Anabaptists but now, at the evening services, his inner Pneuma would help guide his path and the freshly pressed Elysian oils from Cathedral City would be a lamp unto his feet, driving his desires and ambitions for the cult.

Simeon stepped into the light of the two braziers that illuminated the doors of the temple with a flickering glow and waved Uriah up the steps. The two embraced briefly as Cross Quarter parishioners pushed past them on their way to and from evening prayers.

Simeon let Uriah in front of him as they followed a small crowd into the front doors past the vestibule. There was a pair of Elysians inside the doorway greeting everyone that came inside. A simple wooden stool and a sack full of salves and poultices filled in the space at the base of a plaster statue of a humanoid figure reaching up with both hands toward the heavens. Bushy metal wires symbolized the wheat and other tall grains that grew up between the figures legs. Uriah clumsily bumped into an older woman with his bulky stature.

“My elder, please forgive. Are you alright?”

“Oh, I’m quite alright, although I’m sure I could be much worse my Hand. Any more force put behind your frame may have spelled the end for me!”

Uriah huffed through his nose at the joke, “Perhaps not, elder. I find my constitution grows faint these past few days.”

“Well, your worst days perhaps rank among my best!” the elderly woman replied. She shuffled up to the Elysian and was helped to sit down onto the wooden stool where fresh blisters were cleaned and dressed with clean white cloth.

Uriah recognized the blisters from leather reins of a horse and plow during his time in the Provider fields that supplied crops to the city of Justitian. He spoke to the Elysian over the top of the crowd, “Make sure this woman and all these people are treated, even if it extends into the evening hours. Resupply if necessary.” He pulled several bills out of the leather pouch he had used to pay Isaac with and passed them over to the Elysian who bowed as they were pushed into his hand.

“Thank you, my Hand Uriah” said the Elysian.

In the last centuries, two currencies have established themselves: from Borca, the Chroniclers’ Draft spread to Pollen, Purgare, and Franka and superseded lots of local currencies. In Africa, Southern Hybrispania, and parts of the Balkhan, the African Dinar is held in high regard.

The massive gold coins are minted in Constantine; the issuance is under surveillance of the Bank of Commerce. Higher ranked Chroniclers, like Multithread from Episode 1, can print out as many Chronicler Drafts as they need and ruin the economy in one day. But they act responsibly. Perhaps to avoid leading their own brothers and sisters into temptation, the Draft Printers have a preset contingent. If it is used up, they must be reset by a higher-ranking Chronicler, a Streamer.

Simeon tapped Uriah’s shoulder to get his attention.

“What say we head inside; the ceremony is about to start and if we wait too long we’ll drown out the choir, eh?” he said with a wink in his eye.

Uriah licked his lips and nodded at Simeon. The old Orgiastic weaved a path for Uriah to follow inside the church and past the heavy timber pews.

The carpet was worn with ground-in mud outside the sanctuary’s inner chamber which lay behind the deus in the front. As the congregation was beginning to lift up their voice in song, they arrived next to a chamber door set into the stone. The chamber door had a large ringed handle that squeaked noisily as Simeon tugged on it with a strong arm. It rattled just the same as Uriah shut it behind him, but the choir had begun to hit their chorus.

A chant inside the chamber slowly replaced the choral voices from outside. It rose in pitch and seemed to punctuate every step of Uriah and Simeon as they moved closer to the source of the sound. Candlelight and the soft glow of incense bundles lit the dank room and drove the darkness to the corners of the masonry. The room was bare save the large metal candle stands and 2 small kegs on the ground among a circle of 5 people. They were all on standing in a circle around a man, his head bowed and hands clasped as if pleading to a divine presence. Uriah stopped short as a robed Elysian moved out of the way to reveal Isaac at the center, hands offered up in love. The sight of his son in submissive adoration made the mammoth Uriah well up briefly with pride.

“Did you think he would follow in the medicinal arts like Sarah?” whispered Simeon

“I had hoped so, but perhaps he will be a great leader of men like Amos,” Uriah replied.

“Or Uriah the Fierce” Simeon said with a smile before approaching the circle.

The chanting subsided upon Simeon and Uriah's approach and the circle opened so that Isaac could see his father and friend.

Uriah knelt down and clapped his son on the shoulder.

"Pray hard. Search with all of your might. Illuminate your mind in this safe place," he said with a flash of a grin on his broad face. He arose and stepped backward to the outer edge of the circle. Isaac nodded while keeping his eyes closed. His father's brief encouragement was all that was allowed during the ceremony to avoid any distracting feelings of family or want. He breathed in deeply, the cinnamon and floral incense beginning to fill his nostrils. He was ready.

[The sourcebooks have no real "canonical" explanation for their rituals and ceremonies that I've read. If you care to explore deeper in the lore, good on you! Tag me in a comment on my socials at the end of this episode. This is really just flavor text for Isaac, as the only real game mechanic for leveling up is XP given by a GM. Full disclosure, I run the game how I see fit for narrative purposes. You can go back and listen to Episode 0 A Primer for more details, and so since I'm running the campaign, there's no reason I can't use the milestone level up system. Big story events and character progression will be necessary to keep you listeners hooked and give good reason for my Degenesis player characters to stay alive.]

The chanting began again among the men as Isaac focused. A hand drum began beating along with the chant as the circle of men wove gutteral barks and grunts into the tapestry of the hymn.

Uriah felt under his breastplate for a patch of cloth Sarah had given him before he left in the late afternoon for the church. She had grabbed his arm as he headed up the trail from the house. She brought the cloth down with a clenched fist. Uriah tried to comfort

her but she pushed his arm away and paced backed to the house. Grief for a son whose innocence was about to be lost forever and in an unkindly way.

He unfolded the small, olive fabric with hand-frayed edgework and passed it to Simeon who uncorked a tiny leather costrel to douse the cloth. The viscous oil shone a golden hue even in the dim candlelight as it spread across its fibers.

Simeon took the damp cloth and folded it into a lengthy bandanna to tie around the crown of Isaac's head. The young initiate's blonde hair was gentled swept back and kept in place by the headband as the oversaturated bits of the cloth weeped thick drops of oil down Isaac's cheeks and nose.

Perat, Hiddekel, Gehon, and Pischon. According to legend, these rivers carried various valuable seeds, barks, and pips like cinnamon and coriander from the Garden of Eden.

The paradise fertilized the world.

Today, the Elysians gather spices and roots, press them, and extract an oily essence. Through several cleaning and compression processes, they increase the quality and finally mix the essences according to the ancient recipes to produce the four well-known and appreciated Elysian oils.

But there are also other blends on the market. The most notorious ones are Styx and Acheron, named after two rivers in the realm of the dead. They are mixed with Burn, a damnable abuse. No Anabaptist should be caught with these oils.

Isaac could feel a tingling on his forehead, then a burning. It felt like a white hot poker was being pressed into the space between his eyebrows and he winced at the pain. The

burning subsided quickly and gave way to a wave of euphoria as Isaac's mind's opened to the Pneuma...

Isaac breathed out slowly as he perceived the new visions set upon him. Great star constellations and plum colored galaxies swirled slowly in the sky above him. Thousands of tiny gossamer tendrils filled the midnight blue void of his mind like strands of cotton floating on a soft breeze. A blue orb dotted with brown and green spots floated past his head in a small orbit. It was suddenly struck by a black shower of iridescent sparks, making the blue-green orb's color fade to a charcoal gray.

The orb slowed and began drawing closer to Isaac's chest. He looked down and thought quickly about raising his hands to block its path, but something stopped him. All of his senses lit up as the orb approached and he could see his heartbeat and smell the sun. The touch of grain stalks rippling in the wind filled his ears. The orb was at his chest and he could feel the muscles in his arms giving off heat like he had before except this time, there was no nightmare, only a calling. The charcoal grays softened to slate and then dark moss colored as the orb passed through Isaac's chest.

Isaac opened his eyes and saw his hands reaching out for something that was no longer there. He had come back to himself, panting with exertion and soaked in sweat along his brow and chest. The group of Anabaptists looked equally tired; some squatted and the older members were in a kneeling or seated position, smoking herba and tobacco in spidery plumes.

Every muscle in Isaac's body felt engorged with blood as he closed his fists and flexed.

"The oils...did they do this?" he said between breaths.

The 5 other men roused and gathered around him smiling and laughing.

“Well well,” said Simeon, “4 hours and you’re finally awake.”

Isaac looked around at the candle stands, nearly burnt down to their baseplate with dwindling wicks.

“I only felt gone for a minute or so in my mind. The divine Pneuma and the festering Sepsis were revealed. Two sides of the same coin. I realize now the plague on the land can be purged with devotion from me.” Isaac said bewildered from the experience.

“...From us,” Uriah interjected. He knelt down to Isaac again, this time embracing his son fully in a hug. “Come and replenish yourself, the oils have been known to put lesser initiates in short comas.” Uriah helped the exhausted Isaac to his feet where the circle of men broke apart to individually congratulate the newly ordained Orgiastic.

After several mugs of wine and a handful of savory dried meat, Isaac felt less disoriented and dizzy. He could see his father, resplendent in his fur coat and shining Emissary’s Hand brooch, smiling at his fellow brothers in arms. They eventually all took their leave, leaving Simeon Uriah and Isaac alone in the chamber.

“The Perat oils from Cathedral City were pressed just last week,” Simeon said as they drained the last of their drinks. “Your father requested the most potent among the batch.”

Isaac looked at his father, a question on his face. “I knew you could handle it. Whatever comes from inquiries about your emanations, you can stand tall in the fact that you embraced the light and fertility of the land we’ve stewardship over. No one, not even the Baptist Council can take that from you,” Uriah said proudly. “Now, we must get some rest. You will have your first orders come the next sunrise.”

The trio dispersed silently from the chamber, up the row of pews, and back through the church lobby where the pair of Elysians were packing up the now empty sacks that had carried their medicines and sundries. Isaac stepped over the threshold of the Church of Saint Zamuel and breathed in deeply, taking the cool night air into his lungs already wishing that the rapture from the oils was in his mind again.

[Afternoon, the Cross Quarter]

The table inside Uriah and Sarah's house was set with several loaves of flatbread and roasted vegetables along with tall pitchers of waters that held down the corners of a curling piece of parchment. Uriah, Isaac, Simeon, Sarah, the confessional sentry, whose name was Brig, and another Orgiastic from the church, Rebecca, stood shoulder to shoulder, hunched over the parchment as Uriah and Sarah outlined the rough plan of a raid on the bakery. Bits of charcoal flaked off the nub as Uriah finished drawing a diagram of a pincer attack should anyone try to escape the bakery.

“...and here is the hidden exit that Zacchias told Brig about, right?” Sarah pointed out

“Right. He confessed after only three baptism . Perhaps his cause was not as rigid and unyielding as he suspected.” Brig the sentry replied with bravado. The other Orgiastics chuckled but Uriah kept his focus on the map. “It may still be a numbers advantage for them. Our force is formidable, but small. Simeon, did your Touched find anything else out about how many strong these Scions of Nihil are?”

[ROLL SCENARIO]

Uriah is a savvy Furor with many battles under his belt. He, Zamuel, and others survivors of the war campaigns on the Sepsis have hinged on having a good strategy and intel. This will be a PSY+Cunning roll (+2D from Uriah's “Allies” Background) to gauge how many foes they could expect based on their hurried intel collection.

Difficulty – There is no hard rule for this since I'm making it up so I will grant information based on the total number of successes rolled. See the full table on Echoes of Eschaton.wordpress.com

AN – 8D

6,5,5,5,5,4,4,3

Huzzah! I feel good about the party not being surprised with these rolls.

“Yes, my spies tell me they’re perhaps 30 strong, minus one Zacchias, perhaps.”

The number took Uriah aback as he scratched his coarse red sideburns. “30 antagonists, in such a small space? Not ideal, as we certainly can’t march on the bakery. It would give away our tactics and who knows who is the lookout deeper inside the bakery.”

Sarah spoke up again, disgust wavering in her voice. “Is Laika the Bitch’s pack of dogs a last resort?”

Uriah shook his head. “The last thing we need is involvement from the litigators in Uptown, let alone those shunned brothers in High Judge Laika’s pack. Besides, they’re always too involved investigating the petty crimes of the Cartel to care. No, we will have to be smarter than the heretics.

We’ll position a strike team outside the back bakery entrance for cleanup. Rebecca and Brig will have nets and swords to slow their escape. The rest of you will be on me as we storm the bakery. Simeon, is your Spitfire charged with a fuel cannister?”

“No, I’ll need to requisition one before we move.”

“Good, then do it. I will be on point to try and talk down any belligerent souls inside the bakery. When diplomacy fails, then there will be nothing left to do but God’s hardest work...”

Isaac gripped the hilt on his newly sharpened sword as he listened, his knuckles turning white. The entire morning since he awoke he was briefed on the raid mission and with a memory like a steel trap he absorbed every piece of information about his foes, the Scions of Nihil. He was buzzing with energy and hadn’t removed his olive headband since Simeon put it on the night before. Even Adina, who was staying with friends in the interior of the Cross Quarter, could see a difference in his face and demeanor.

“What was seen was for my eyes, and my eyes alone, dear sister,” he replied. Adina hung her head dejected as he spoke, but he lifted up her chin as he reminded her, “All the grace we know is from the divine Pneuma and His grace. Have faith.”

Adina met his steely eyed gaze with a smile, as she saw he was indeed...brave. Just like she’d always known him to be.

Uriah and Simeon concluded the meeting and the rest of the Anabaptists, save Uriah and his family, made their way to their assigned rendezvous spots across from Banding Hill to lay low make ready for the evening hours.