simon fails five tests
Seth Cable

In order to enter the Cathedral, one must pass four tests. In order to leave the Cathedral, one must pass four tests. Not too very long ago, the tests for entry were the far more challenging ones. Since the Fragmenting, however, participation has waned, and so they now set a higher bar for disassociation.

In the first test, which Simon had passed, one is asked to reveal the flaws in their upbringing. Simon explained that he had always felt like an empty avatar, a vague and passionless name hung upon a screen through which others might view the world he inhabited.

In the second test, which Simon had also passed, one is asked to identify a weakness in their disposition. Simon explained that one time, upon returning from one of the lesser countries, and once more breathing the airs of the greatest nation in all the history of the Earth, he was filled with a paralyzing anxiety:

Over entering the border, as the guards were known to harass even citizens for sport. Over getting home safely, as transportation was infrequent, unreliable, and dangerous — and the roads in such disrepair.

Over sating his hunger, as foods were so very expensive, despite their thin flavors and the abundant surpluses everywhere.

Over completing his learning, as the schools had so little money, and the teachers were so few.

Over the health of his mother, as they could no longer afford for her protections. Over the safety of his neighbors, as so many had recently been taken.

In the third test, at which Simon had excelled beyond all expectation, one is asked to compose a prayer to the Saint least like themselves, for something that they truly do not want. Ever penitent, Simon held his hands aloft, stretched his fingers to the vaulted ceiling above, and cried aloud:

Brent the Unfairly Criticized, defender of the just and seeker of the Truth, advocate of Logic and Reason,

Give me the confidence to Just Ask Questions,

Give me the strength to speak for those who are mute,

To appropriate their tongues unto myself and offer my own words as theirs. Though I be alien to their minds and truest wishes,
Let me adorn myself in their symbols and walk as one of them. And through my consciousness and acceptance make them real.

In the fourth test, which Simon had not passed, one is asked merely to hold their breath for 48 seconds. However, though Simon's lungs gave out after just 35, it was recorded as 55, due to aforementioned trends in Cathedral attendance.

After an appropriate period of fasting and observation, Simon was permitted to enter the Cathedral grounds, where he took up residency in one of the innumerable and confining outer dormitories. On the fourth day following his entry, which was the first day of the Week of Slow Movement, a Solemnion was held in honor of Saint Talkbox. Thus did Simon finally take his first steps into the magnificent structure itself.

An almost interminable sequence of ushers separated out the entering throng according to their admittance date, with Simon and his cohort herded towards the highest and farthest corner of the Nave. There, after some struggle, Simon was able to squeeze himself in atop a low, cracked and bowed bench, little more than a rotting plank sagging between crumbling cinder blocks.

Although it took great strain to discern even the outlines of the illustrious figures gracing the Principle Sanctuary before them, the vibrant blue robes of the Ultima Lector easily distinguished him from the surrounding crowd of golden-cloaked potentates lumbering languidly about. Despite the distance, Simon swelled at his great fortune in that the vector from that Most Humbled of Men to his own eyes was entirely unobstructed by any of the myriad columns, banners, pikes, candelabras, bells, hanging prayers, suspended offerings, dangling effigies, and floating lanterns that larded the cavernous space above them.

In but a few short moments, the blaring entry music of the Orgolion abruptly ceased, subduing in turn the churning roar of the assembly. At the descending silence, the blue mote at the center of Simon's vision rose and approached the Lectorium. With arms outstretched, the Ultima Lector sang forth in a voice both abyssal and wavering. The words reverberated within Simon's chest and throat, amplified through the natural acoustics perfected by the ancient constructors.

The voice sang: *What is the difference between a puppy and a scorpion?*

And the thousands of voices responded: *You cannot fill a scorpion with puppies.*

Louder, the voice sang: *What is the difference between a baby and a scorpion?*

And louder, the thousands of voices replied: *People know when they've eaten a scorpion.*

Louder yet, the voice sang: *What is the difference between a child and a scorpion?*

And the thousands of voices cried forth: *No one will buy your stolen scorpion.*
Carried by the weight of the surging crescendo, the voice dropped two full octaves and boomed: What do you call a man who’s lost his home, his job, his family, and his money? And, bathed in ecstatic furor, every brick and stone set within that timeless structure trembled with the answering call: Anything you want to.

Immediately upon the final syllable, a tense and expectant silence radiated across the hundreds of rows of standing faithful, broken only a second later by the calm and reassuring tones of the Ultima Lector, his voice now thin and nearly whispering. “Anything you want to,” he repeated.

As Simon returned to his place in the sinking bench, his cheeks warmed and his heart raced. Here, finally, was the birth-promise of his parents realized, the path to true authentication, validation, and vengeance. “I deserve this,” he said, to the sleeping man beside him. “This time, I will never leave.”

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1 Although still popularly ascribed to Pseudo-Philateus, most specialists now agree that these devotional recitations were first composed by Robert Talbot, during his second imprisonment and exile.