



— Fifth Edition / 2024 —

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# THE RATIFICATION



*AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 4TH TO 6TH LEVEL*



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## AN ADVENTURE FOR CHARACTERS OF 4TH TO 6TH LEVEL

**T**HE RATIFICATION IS A FIFTH EDITION adventure for three to six characters of 4th to 6th level, optimized for a party of four 5th-level characters. A terrified fugitive has fled into the Temple of Saint Leopoldine seeking protection from a devil who holds a contract claiming their soul. The fiend cannot seize its prize by force while the temple's wards hold, but infernal law grants it the right to argue its claim before the saint's arbiter at sunset. In the hours before twilight, lesser devils are sure to begin probing the temple's wards, hoping to trespass its walls to destroy any documentation that might see the contract voided. Can the party defend the archives and argue for the fugitive before their soul is lost? This adventure takes place in the city of Dorran in the Cartosia campaign setting, but the names of people and places can be changed to place this adventure in any urban environment across a variety of campaign settings.

### BACKGROUND

Three centuries ago, the city of Dorran suffered under the predations of the pit fiend Narzijal, whose agents preyed upon the dying and the desperate. A young magistrate of a local church named Leopoldine made themselves a thorn in the devil's side, challenging infernal claims in mortal courts and voiding them through procedural defects, lapsed deadlines, and improper witnesses. Narzijal eventually consented to negotiate. The two struck the Leopoldian Accord: in exchange for Leopoldine's soul, Narzijal would never again seize a citizen of Dorran without first submitting the claim to formal arbitration on consecrated ground. Leopoldine surrendered himself willingly, and his remains were interred beneath the temple that now bears his name. The mosaic that marks the saint's resting place is the accord's seat. Any infernal claim heard above it must be argued in good faith, and any judgment rendered there is binding upon devil and mortal alike.

Decades ago, a Dorran merchant named Vlisvor Habornu faced ruin when his trading fleet was lost in a storm off the coast. Desperate to spare his family from poverty and his reputation from ruin, Vlisvor summoned a lesser devil of Narzijal's brood and signed a contract restoring his fortunes in exchange for the soul of his firstborn great-grandchild, to be collected upon their thirtieth birthday. He lived another four decades, never speaking of the bargain. His firstborn great-grandchild, a young sailor named Nehlad Habornu, drowned at twenty-two in the very waters that had once threatened the family's ruin. The devils, however, were not so easily denied.

Vilette Habornu, Vlisvor's second-eldest great-grandchild, was consecrated to Saint Leopoldine in infancy as is the custom for newborns of Dorran's faithful families, and has otherwise spent her thirtieth year as a glassblower of modest means in ignorance of the curse her great-grandfather

placed upon the line. Yesterday evening, an infernal courier delivered a sealed writ to her shop, naming her as the contract's subject and demanding her presence at the Temple of Saint Leopoldine at sundown the following day. Vilette fled to the temple at once. The clergy granted her sanctuary, but possessed not the legal expertise to mount a defense, and have put out a discreet call for any capable hands willing to assist.

The advocate dispatched to press the claim is Zirzeth, a chain devil with five centuries of contract arbitration to her name. Her case is not airtight: the original collection window expired with Nehlad's death, and the wealth promised to Vlisvor was drawn in part from the estate of a previously condemned soul. While the proceedings unfold, lesser devils probe the temple's wards in search of relevant documentation, hoping to destroy them before the defense can present its case.

### GETTING THE QUEST

Word of the temple's predicament travels quickly through Dorran's quieter circles. Whether through a trusted contact, a parish acquaintance, or a note pressed into the party's hands by a stranger, the party finds themselves summoned to the Temple of Saint Leopoldine in the late afternoon, where the clergy have put out a discreet call for any capable hands willing to assist. Sunset, and the formal commencement of the devil's claim, is perhaps three hours away.

The party is received inside a small office by Magistrate Shadah Bhammad (LG she/her human **priest**), the temple's presiding arbiter and the senior of two clergy currently in residence. She is a composed woman in her sixties, dressed in unadorned gray robes, and though her hands are steady, her voice suggests exhaustion. After thanking the party for coming, she explains the situation:

- A woman named Vilette Habornu came to the temple last night seeking sanctuary. She bore a sealed writ from the Hells naming her as the subject of an infernal contract, signed nearly seventy years ago by her great-grandfather Vlisvor in exchange for the restoration of his family's fortunes. The collection price was the soul of Vlisvor's firstborn great-grandchild upon their thirtieth birthday.
- The temple's wards, established by the Leopoldian Accord, prevent any devil from seizing a citizen of Dorran by force. They do not prevent a devil from formally pressing its claim before the saint's arbiter, however. A chain devil named Zirzeth has filed such a claim, and the proceedings will commence at sundown in the central hall.
- Shadah is not equipped to mount a defense on Vilette's behalf. The Accord requires that the case be argued in good faith, which means evidence must be produced, the contract examined, and arguments presented in the central hall. The temple's archives hold relevant documentation,

but locating, interpreting, and presenting it is work that no priest among the temple's staff can accomplish in the hours remaining.

- Shadah can feel the presence of the lesser devils that have been probing the temple's wards since Vilette's arrival, and the magistrate believes they intend to destroy any documentation that might void the contract before the defense can present its case. The wards are strained but holding; how long they will continue to hold against an assault is uncertain. The party may have to fend off intrusions while the defense is being prepared.

If the party agrees to help, Magistrate Shadah can offer access to blessed items kept in the temple's reliquary as compensation for their service. She then leads them to Vilette, and to acquaint them with their adversary.

**Vilette Habornu.** Vilette (NG she/her human **commoner**) is found in the temple's small southern shrine, where she has spent most of her day in unbroken prayer. She is a slight, soot-streaked woman with calloused hands, having come directly from her glassworks the previous evening with no time to gather her belongings. She knows nothing of the contract beyond the writ it contained, and is bewildered that her great-grandfather would have signed away her soul. Her father, a retired sailor who lives a day's travel north from the city, has not been informed of his daughter's predicament, and she does not wish to alarm him.

**Zirzeto.** The chain devil is permitted within the temple's central hall in the hours before the proceedings, though the wards prevent her from approaching the saint's mosaic until sundown. She can be found seated on one of the rear pews, idly running her clawed fingers along a sheaf of black vellum. She is not interested in genuine conversation, but will spare the party a few words if directly addressed—she expresses cold amusement at their involvement, assures them that her case is already won, and warns that any attempt to interfere with her by violence is a violation of the Accord. The temple's wards enforce this. Any character who attempts to attack Zirzeto before sundown is immediately stunned for 1 minute.

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## GENERAL FEATURES

The Temple of Saint Leopoldine is a single-story stone structure in Dorran's lower market district, distinguished from the buildings around it by its fortified outer walls and the modest cloister gardens that surround it. Worship has thinned over the past several decades, and the parish has dwindled to a handful of regular faithful.

**Ceilings, Walls, and Floors.** The temple is constructed of gray stone blocks, fortified at the perimeter. Exterior walls are two feet thick; interior walls are one foot thick. Ceilings reach 15 feet in the central hall and 10 feet in the smaller adjoining chambers.

**Doors.** Doors throughout the temple are made of heavy oak reinforced with bronze bands. They have AC 15 and 25 hit points. They are unlocked unless otherwise stated.

**Light.** During the day, sunlight floods through the temple's high windows and the open archways of the inner walkway. As sundown approaches, oil lamps mounted in wall sconces are lit throughout the interior to provide dim light.

**The Leopoldian Wards.** The temple is protected by ancient, invisible wards anchored to Saint Leopoldine's interred remains beneath the central mosaic. They prevent any citizen of Dorran from being directly assailed by infernal action while within, and prevent any soul claimed under contract from being collected before that claim has been heard before the saint's arbiter. The wards are presently strained by Zirzeto's presence and by the sustained pressure of her brood's attempts to breach them; lesser devils have been probing the perimeter throughout the day, and any successful breach will admit a small contingent into the temple before the wards reseal at that point. The wards cannot be fully restored before sundown.

**Other Clergy.** Aside from Magistrate Shadah, the temple is currently staffed by a single junior cleric, Halling Brung (NG he/him human **acolyte**). He is helpful but inexperienced, primarily occupied with parish duties and with preparing the central hall for the proceedings. He can hold a defensive position if necessary, but is not a capable combatant.

The following areas are keyed to the provided map of the Temple of Leopoldine:

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## I. FORTIFIED OUTER WALLS

Stone walls ring the temple grounds, set with squat planters and cloister gardens that buffer the temple from the bustle of the surrounding district. A gate at the northern approach admits the faithful into the courtyard. The walls

represent the outermost extent of the Leopoldian Wards, and lesser devils probing for breaches manifest first along this perimeter.

## 2. INNER WALKWAY

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A paved walkway encircles the temple proper, set between the outer wall and the temple's exterior face. Ornamental gardens fill the spaces between, and the walkway is open to the sky.

## 3. HEAD PRIEST'S CHAMBERS

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Magistrate Shadah's private quarters and workspace, furnished with a writing desk, a small altar, and a narrow cot. She is likely to be found here if not actively engaged with the party or attending the central hall. Magistrate Shadah initially receives the party in this room.

## 4. MEETING ROOMS

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Two small rooms occupy the west side of the central hall, each fitted with a table and several chairs and used for private consultations between clergy and parishioners. Either room is suitable for any private discussions the party may wish to conduct over the course of the afternoon.

## 5. THE MOSAIC

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The temple's central hall is dominated by a great floor mosaic depicting Saint Leopoldine in his magisterial robes, surrounded by a sunburst of golden tile. Two marble statues of armored knights stand at the mosaic's eastern and western edges, their helmed forms inclined inward and their gauntleted hands interlocked with one another, as though embracing the saint at their center.

The mosaic is the seat of the Leopoldian Accord. Any infernal claim heard at the temple must be argued in good faith above it, and any judgment rendered here is binding upon devil and mortal alike. Saint Leopoldine's remains are interred in a sealed crypt directly beneath. The mosaic radiates strong abjuration magic detectable by *detect magic*, and cannot be damaged or disturbed by any means short of a *wish* spell.

The knights depict Saint Leopoldine's two sworn protectors, who stood beside him during the negotiation of the Accord and pledged to guard its seat in death as in life. Each is inscribed at its base with the protector's name and the date of their oath.

## 6. COMMUNAL PRAYER

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Rows of plain wooden pews fill this space, and the eastern wall bears embroidered banners depicting episodes from the saint's life and martyrdom. The hall is presently empty save for Zirzethoth, who occupies a rear pew during the hours preceding the proceedings. The pews can be overturned to provide half cover during combat.

## 7. STUDY

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A small annexed chamber off the central hall serves as both reading room and archive. Shelves crowded with bound ledgers, scroll cases, and stacked correspondence line the walls; two reading desks stand near the center.

The archive contains decades of parish records, copies of contracts and writs witnessed at the temple, and correspondence between the temple and the secular and ecclesiastical courts of Dorran. The party's preparatory research takes place here (see *Defending the Case*).

***Treasure: Reliquary Cabinet.*** A locked cabinet in the room's western nook holds the temple's modest reliquary, opened by Magistrate Shadah as part of the party's compensation for their service. Its contents are detailed in the *Aftermath*.

## DEFENDING THE CASE

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The party has roughly three hours before sundown. The work proceeds in two phases. In *Discovery*, the party identifies and retrieves the documents relevant to Vilette's defense. In *Interpretation*, they parse those documents to develop arguments for the proceedings. Each phase is followed by a wave of infernal intrusion as Zirzethoth's devils probe the wards.

The contracts are sorted by the ledgers of the magistrate who witnessed them, and locating any specific document is a matter of knowing where to look rather than searching shelf by shelf. Three documents are relevant to Vilette's case:

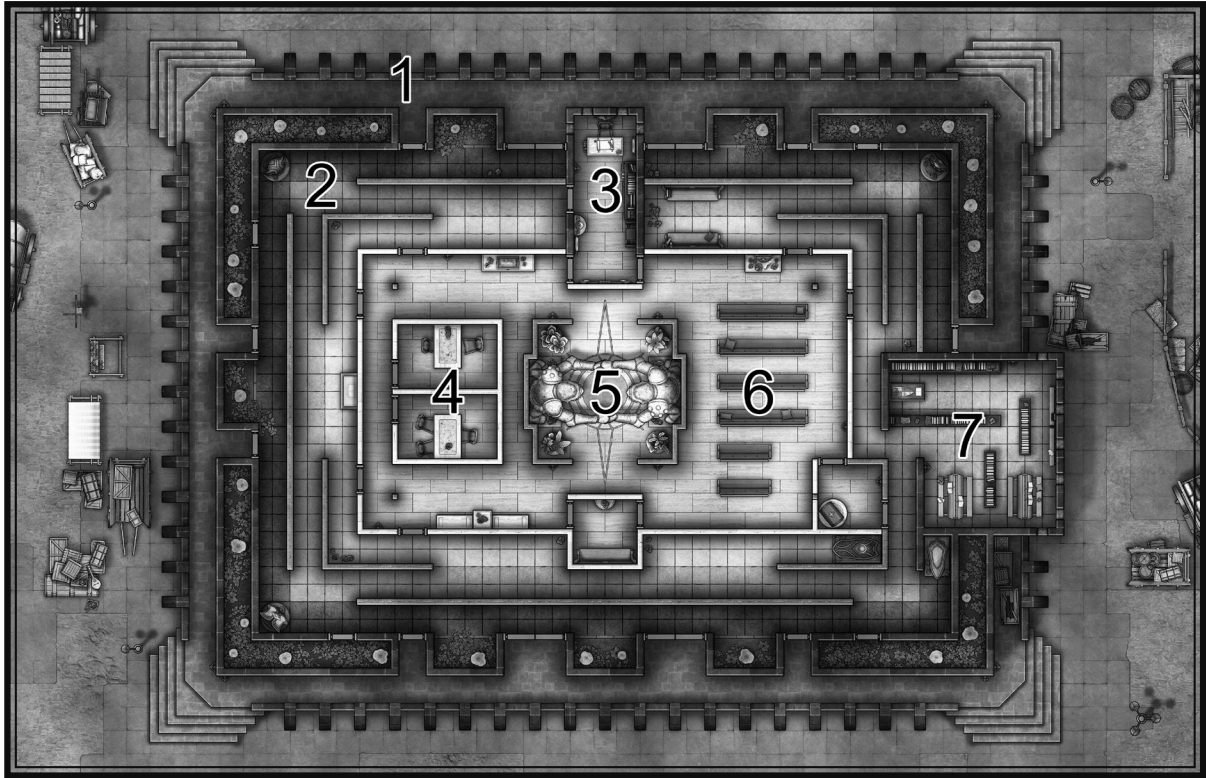
- ***The Original Contract*** signed by Vlisvor Habornu, filed among the witnessed writs of Magistrate Joren Halbrek, who served the temple seventy years ago.
- ***The Death Certificate*** of Nehlad Habornu, filed among the parish death records of Magistrate Mullinder Nol, the temple's previous arbiter. Nehlad was Vilette's elder cousin, who drowned at sea at the age of twenty-two; tracing the Habornu family line and identifying him as Vlisvor's true firstborn great-grandchild is a necessary step toward locating the certificate, as Magistrate Shadah is herself unaware of his existence.
- ***Vilette's Infant Consecration Record***, filed among the parish baptismal records of Magistrate Nol.

### PHASE I: DISCOVERY

To locate the documentation, the party must accumulate four successes before six failures. Each character may attempt one check per round; a round represents approximately fifteen minutes of focused searching. Suggested checks and DCs are listed below; the GM is encouraged to consider any reasonable approach proposed by the players, assigning DCs at their discretion.

- **Investigation (DC 12):** Working through the archive's catalogue and ledger system to locate filings by date or signatory.
- **History (DC 12):** Recognising the formats and conventions of decades-old Dorran legal records to narrow the search.

# THE TEMPLE



- **Religion (DC 14):** Identifying ecclesiastical documents such as consecration records and parish baptismal entries.
- **Perception (DC 15):** Spotting an out-of-place ledger or a document that has been deliberately misfiled.
- **Arcana (DC 16):** Recognising the infernal sigil that marks the original contract among the temple's witnessed writs.
- **Insight (DC 15):** Reasoning about which magistrate would have witnessed which kind of document, narrowing the search to a particular ledger.
- One of Magistrate Shadah or Halling Brung may grant one automatic success by recalling where their predecessors filed certain correspondence, if prompted by the party.

**Outcome.** The search ends upon the earlier of the party accumulating four successes or alternatively accumulating six failures. For every two failures the party accumulates, one of the three documents proves to be unrecoverable—either the party fails to identify it as a possibility in the first place, or the party becomes aware of its potential existence but is nevertheless unable to locate it. The GM determines which document is lost based on the nature of the failed checks where possible, or at random otherwise. For example, if the party accumulates four successes while also accumulating four failures, the search ends with the party having identified just a single document.

## FIRST WAVE: THE OUTER BREACH

In the immediate aftermath of the Discovery phase, as the party is interpreting what they've found, a wave of Zirzetoth's minions mount an assault. The wards shimmer and split along the eastern perimeter, and the lamps in the central hall sputter as a contingent of devils tears through the breach and manifests within the building.

**Encounter: First Wave.** Two **bearded devils** and three **imps** materialize within the eastern perimeter of the inner walkway (Area 2). The bearded devils engage any defenders directly, while the imps fly toward the archive (Area 7) in search of documentation to destroy. An imp that reaches the point in the archive where the relevant documents are present uses its action to set fire to the documents; one relevant document may be destroyed at the end of the imp's next turn unless the imp is slain, grappled, or driven more than 5 feet from the desk. The imps prioritise destruction over survival and will not flee.

The wards reseal upon the encounter's conclusion, repelling further intrusion until they are next strained. The party may take a short rest before continuing.

## PHASE 2: INTERPRETATION

With the surviving documents in hand, the party must now develop their arguments. Each retrieved document carries observations the players themselves may identify, supported by checks for characters who wish to dig deeper. The GM

should present the bulleted observations below to any character who examines a given document, and allow further checks to surface the underlying flaws.

**The Original Contract.** A bound sheaf of seventeen pages, sealed in dark wax bearing Narzijal's mark and signed in Vlisvor's increasingly unsteady hand. When a character examines the contract, share the following:

- The collection clause names "the firstborn great-grandchild of the signatory, upon their thirtieth year." No name is given; the language is generic.
- A later clause addresses transfer of claim "in the event of the subject's incapacity," but defines incapacity narrowly as "afflictions of body or mind that prevent the soul's transfer."
- The contract references a schedule appended as Exhibit C, listing the fortunes restored to Vlisvor's accounts and the various estates from which they were drawn. The rights to these estates are not clearly defined in the schedule.

A character who studies the transfer-of-claim language and makes a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check recognizes that the contract assumes the named subject will live to the collection date. Death is not addressed by the incapacity provision, and the contract provides no mechanism for the claim to pass to a sibling or cousin upon the named subject's earlier demise. This finding, combined with Nehlad's death certificate, supports an "Expired Collection Window" argument at the proceedings (see "The Ratification" section).

A character who studies Exhibit C and makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check recognizes one of the listed estates—the Sorrelfast holdings—as having belonged to a soul condemned and collected by Narzijal's brood some eighteen years prior to the contract's signing. The wealth Vlisvor received was not Narzijal's to give. This finding supports a "Material Misrepresentation" argument at the proceedings.

**The Death Certificate of Nehlad Habornu.** A single sheet recorded in Magistrate Nol's tidy hand, attesting to the drowning of Nehlad Habornu in his twenty-second year. Cross-referenced with the temple's family registry, it confirms Nehlad as Vlisvor's firstborn great-grandchild and the original named subject of the contract. The certificate is the keystone of the Expired Collection Window argument; without it, the Insight finding above is supposition.

**Vilette's Infant Consecration Record.** A short record of Vilette's consecration to Saint Leopoldine in her first year of life, witnessed by Magistrate Nol and signed by Vilette's parents. When a character examines the record, share the following:

- The consecration follows the standard form for newborns of Dorran's faithful families, pledging the child's soul to the saint's protection in life and in death.

- The witnessing language describes the consecration as "in perpetuity, prior to all subsequent claim, mortal or otherwise."

A character who reflects on the implications of the consecration and makes a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Religion) check recognizes that the consecration creates a binding prior claim under divine law: a soul already pledged cannot lawfully be the subject of a later infernal contract signed on its behalf. A character who makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check confirms that infernal contract law, while alien in its conventions, recognizes the precedence of prior consecration. Either finding supports a "Prior Claim" argument at the proceedings.

**Identifying Flaws Without Checks.** If a player works out a flaw from the bulleted observations alone—reasoning that the contract has no provision for the subject's death, for example, or recognising the implications of the consecration's "in perpetuity" language—they may prepare the corresponding argument without a check. The GM is encouraged to reward this kind of engagement.

**Magistrate Nol's Notes.** A character who searches the reading desks and makes a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check finds a slim folio of personal notes left behind by Magistrate Nol, who served as the temple's arbiter until her death four years ago. The folio contains her private misgivings about several of her predecessor's witnessed writs, including the Habornu contract, which she suspected was flawed but had no occasion to challenge during her

tenure. Her notes do not name specific flaws, but a character who reads the folio and circles back to any of the three documents gains advantage on the next check made to identify a flaw within it. The folio thus serves as a hint for any party stuck on a particular document.

## SECOND WAVE: THE INNER BREACH

The wards fail again as the rest of the brood surges forward into the temple. The breach manifests at the inner wall, and the devils that come through aim not only at the documents but at the embracing statues, whose vigil reinforces the wards.

**Encounter: Second Wave.** One **barbed devil** (a peer of Zirzeth's, assisting from outside the proceedings), and three **imps** breach the inner wall near the south end of the temple. The barbed devil engages the party directly while the imps split: two fly to the archive attempting to burn documents as in the first wave, and one races to the embracing statues, where it attempts to chip at the inscriptions with their claws.

Each statue has AC 17 and 30 hit points. If either statue is reduced to 0 hit points, the wards collapse entirely; Zirzeth is permitted to seize Vilette without a hearing the moment sundown arrives, and the party loses the case automatically.

The wards reseal upon the encounter's conclusion. Sundown arrives shortly after the last devil falls, and Magistrate Shadah summons the party to the central hall.

## THE RATIFICATION

At sundown, oil lamps are lit along the temple's high windows and Magistrate Shadah takes her position at the head of the saint's mosaic. Zirzeth advances to the mosaic's southern edge, the sheaf of black vellum unfolded in her hands. Vilette is placed under the magistrate's protection at the rear of the hall, accompanied by Halling Brung. The party stands at the mosaic's northern edge as the proceedings commence.

The hearing follows infernal protocol. Zirzeth presents her case first, reciting the terms of the contract and naming Vilette as the lawful subject of its collection. Each argument the party has prepared as part of Interpretation is then presented in turn, with one party member at a time acting as advocate for any given argument. The mosaic enforces the truthfulness of every word spoken above it, and the Accord compels both sides to argue in good faith. Open lies provoke a visible flicker in the mosaic's golden tile, and Magistrate Shadah will set aside any argument she perceives as such.

For each prepared flaw, one party member acts as advocate and makes a single check to carry the argument against Zirzeth's rebuttal. The advocate may choose any of the following:

- **Persuasion:** Appealing to the magistrate's reason and the spirit of the Accord.
- **Intimidation:** Cornering Zirzeth on the implications of her own argument.
- **Performance:** Holding the hall's attention through rhetorical force.

- **Skill of Interpretation:** A technical argument made on the document's own terms, using the skill associated with the flaw's identification in the Interpretation phase (Insight, Religion, Investigation, or Arcana).

After the advocate has chosen their skill, Zirzeth offers her rebuttal, and an opposed check is made. The advocate rolls their chosen check; Zirzeth rolls 1d20+3. The advocate's total must equal or exceed Zirzeth's roll.

**Zirzeth's Rebuttals.** For each argument, Zirzeth offers a counter—a procedural objection, an appeal to precedent, a reframing of the original signatory's intent. The mosaic ensures her good faith but does not blunt her cunning. The following rebuttals may be elaborated upon by the GM as appropriate.

- **Expired Collection Window.** Zirzeth contends that "firstborn great-grandchild" is a category and not a name, and that infernal precedent has long permitted such categorical claims to pass to the next eligible subject upon the original's death. She gestures dismissively to the contract's silence on the matter, calling it custom rather than oversight.
- **Prior Claim.** Zirzeth contends that the consecration of an infant is a matter of clerical custom rather than of binding obligation, and that a soul cannot be encumbered by a benediction to which it never consented. She calls Vilette's parents "well-meaning but unauthorized," and notes that infants make poor signatories.
- **Material Misrepresentation.** Zirzeth contends that the consideration was rendered in full and accepted without inspection, and that Narzihal's court is not in the practice of disclosing the provenance of every coin. She raises the doctrine of "caveat emptor" as it is understood in the Hells: a signatory who does not investigate the source of his fortune cannot later claim to have been deceived.

**Outcomes.** Magistrate Shadah weighs each argument as it is made and pronounces her judgment at the conclusion of the proceedings. The contract's fate is determined by the cumulative result:

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- **Two or more arguments carried.** The contract is voided. Zirzeth is compelled by the mosaic to depart, and the writ in her hand crumbles to ash as she crosses the temple's threshold. Vilette is freed.
- **One argument carried.** The contract is reduced rather than voided. Vilette owes a term of one year and one day's confinement to the Hells, after which the contract is permanently dissolved.
- **No arguments carried.** Zirzeth is permitted to seize Vilette and depart the temple with her soul. The party may pursue; the wards no longer constrain the devil nor the party.

**Confronting Zirzeth.** If the contract is not voided, the party may well wish to disregard the contract and attack Zirzeth following the proceedings, before she has a chance to leave

with Vilette. Neither Shadah nor the temple's wards prevent this from occurring once the ratification has resolved. Zirzeto is a **chain devil** with AC 19 and 100 hit points, representing a challenging fight for a party that may not have access to all of their resources following their earlier rebukes of devil intrusions. Zirzeto will fight until she is destroyed.

## AFTERMATH

In the case of full victory, Vilette is freed and the Habornu line is cleared of the contract. Magistrate Shadah opens the reliquary cabinet and grants the party its contents in gratitude: a *necklace of prayer beads* with three beads remaining (selected at the GM's discretion) and three *potions of superior healing*. Vilette returns to her glassworks, and in the weeks that follow sends each member of the party a piece of her finest work.

In the case of partial victory, Vilette must surrender herself to the Hells for a term of one year and one day, after which the contract is permanently dissolved. She departs in Zirzeto's custody. The reliquary's contents are still offered in recognition of the party's service.

If the party is defeated at the proceedings and chooses not to confront Zirzeto in combat, the chain devil departs the temple with Vilette in chains. Magistrate Shadah grants the reliquary's contents in recognition of the party's service regardless of outcome, though she does so with visible grief, and she does not soon forget Vilette's fate. Narzija's brood, emboldened by their success, are unlikely to be finished with Dorran for long.



## REFERENCES

This work includes material taken from the System Reference Document 5.1 (“SRD 5.1”) by Wizards of the Coast LLC and available at <https://dnd.wizards.com/resources/systems-reference-document>. The SRD 5.1 is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>.

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