PENANCE

PLAYTEST PACKAGE: READY FOR TABLE PLAY

Absolution Through Steel

Generated PLAYTEST-READY

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Date: 2025-10-10 **Status**:   COMPLETE **Estimated Setup Time**: 15 minutes **Estimated Play Time**: 45-60 minutes (first game)

WHAT'S INCLUDED

This package contains everything needed for your first playtest of **Penance: Absolution Through Steel**.

Core Rules Documents

1. **turn-structure-final.md** - Complete SP-based turn system (4 phases)
2. **range-and-los-final.md** - Hex-based range bands, facing, cover rules
3. **quick-reference-sheet.md** - 1-page printable reference
4. **combat-damage-system-gkr-style.md** - GKR + KDM hybrid damage system

Complete Faction Decks

1. **faction-deck-church-complete.md** - Church of Absolution (30 cards) - Playstyle: Aggressive self-harm martyrdom - Primary: Penitent Blades (12 cards) - Secondary: 4 equipment options (Holy Pistol, Buckler Shield, Tower Shield, Repair Kit) - Tactics: 5 available (choose 2)

2. **faction-deck-dwarves-complete.md** - Dwarven Clans (32 cards) - Playstyle: Defensive attrition, armor-piercing - Primary: Runic Warhammer (12 cards) - Secondary: 4 equipment options (Siege Shield, Runic Axe, Repair Servitors, Siege Cannon) - Tactics: 5 available (choose 2)

Playtest Scenario

1. **arena-scenario-01-proving-grounds.md** - Complete 1v1 scenario - 12×12 hex map with ASCII layout - 5 terrain types (Forest, Rubble, Water, Elevation 1, Elevation 2) - Pre-built decks for both factions - Deployment rules, victory conditions - Map strategy guide

Example of Play

1. **example-of-play.md** - 5-turn walkthrough - Turn-by-turn combat demonstration - Shows component destruction, Blood Offering combo, armor-piercing - Post-game analysis and lessons learned

QUICK START: FIRST PLAYTEST

Step 1: Print Documents (15 minutes)

- [ ] Print quick-reference-sheet.md (2 copies, one per player)
- [ ] Print arena-scenario-01-proving-grounds.md (map section)
- [ ] Print faction-deck-church-complete.md (deck list)
- [ ] Print faction-deck-dwarves-complete.md (deck list)

Step 2: Prepare Decks (10 minutes)

Use index cards or print-and-cut cards:

Church "Martyr's Fury" Deck (30 cards): - 10 Universal Core cards - 12 Penitent Blades (Primary Weapon) - 6 Holy Pistol cards (Secondary Equipment) - 2 Tactics: Righteous Fury + Crusader's Vow

Dwarven "Immovable Wall" Deck (32 cards): - 10 Universal Core cards (+ 2 extra Breathe the Core from Stone Endurance) - 12 Runic Warhammer (Primary Weapon) - 6 Siege Shield cards (Secondary Equipment) - 2 Tactics: Stone Endurance + Runic Overcharge

Step 3: Gather Materials

- [ ] 2d6 dice (for Strain checks)
- [ ] Tokens for Heat tracking (0-10+)
- [ ] Tokens for SP tracking (current SP)
- [ ] Tokens for Rune Counters (Dwarves only)
- [ ] Component Damage markers (track Right Arm, Left Arm, Legs, Head, Chassis)
- [ ] Facing indicators (arrow tokens or dice)
- [ ] Paper for tracking HP (cards remaining in deck)

Step 4: Setup Map

Draw or print 12×12 hex grid with terrain: - **Forest** (8 hexes): +1 Defense when standing in them - **Rubble** (8 hexes): +1 Defense, difficult terrain (2 SP per hex) - **Water/Mud** (20 hexes): Difficult terrain, remove 1 Heat if end turn in Water - **Elevation 1** (4 hexes): +1 damage from this hex, ignore cover - **Elevation 2** (4 hexes): +2 damage, ignore cover, +1 Range

Step 5: Deploy

- **Church**: Top-left quadrant (rows 1-3, columns 1-3)
- **Dwarves**: Bottom-right quadrant (rows 10-12, columns 10-12)
- Roll 1d6 for deployment order (higher roll chooses who deploys first)

Step 6: Play!

Follow the turn structure: 1. **Refresh Phase**: Restore SP, check Heat Strain (if 5+ Heat) 2. **Action Phase**: Play cards, move, attack (spend SP) 3. **Draw Phase**: Draw to hand size 6, reshuffle if deck empty 4. **End Turn Phase**: Remove temporary effects

Victory: Reduce opponent to 0 HP OR force 4+ reshuffles

EXPECTED GAMEPLAY EXPERIENCE

Turns 1-3: Positioning (15 minutes)

- Both players navigate terrain toward center
- Church moves faster (Desperate Lunge, Overextend)
- Dwarves set up defensive buffs (Rune of Protection, Shield Wall)
- Minimal damage, mostly setup

Turns 4-6: First Engagement (10 minutes)

- Church closes to Melee range
- First attacks land (2-6 damage each)
- Heat begins building (especially Dwarves)
- First Component Damage tracked

Turns 7-10: Brutal Exchange (15 minutes)

- Both sides trading heavy blows
- Church using Blood Offering for burst damage
- Dwarves stacking Rune Counters
- First reshuffle likely (add 1 Damage card)
- Heat Strain checks begin (5+ Heat)

Turns 11-15: Death Spiral (10 minutes)

- Decks contain Damage cards (dead draws)
- Component destruction occurs (3+ Component Damage)
- Players desperate, using ultimate cards
- One side collapses

Expected Winner: 51/49 Church favor (slightly more aggressive)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After playing this scenario 2-3 times, players should understand: 1. **SP economy**: When to spend, when to save, when to enter Danger Zone 2. **Heat management**: Risk/reward of high-Heat cards, Strain checks 3. **Deck cycling**: When to reshuffle, when to delay, Damage card accumulation 4. **Component damage**: Tracking, destruction effects, using Reactive cards 5. **Facing modifiers**: Importance of rear arc positioning (+2 dmg) 6. **Terrain usage**: Cover, elevation, difficult terrain costs 7. **Reactive cards**: 0 SP interrupts (Brace for Impact, Unbreakable) 8. **Death spiral**: How Damage cards cripple deck consistency

POST-GAME DEBRIEF

After your first playtest, answer these questions:

Game Feel

- [ ] How long did the game take? (Target: 45-60 minutes)
- [ ] Did you feel engaged throughout, or were there slow/boring moments?
- [ ] Did the game feel "brutal" (Kingdom Death-style) or too forgiving?
- [ ] Did both players have meaningful choices each turn?

Mechanics Clarity

- [ ] Were any rules confusing or ambiguous?
- [ ] Did you have to "house rule" anything? (If so, what?)
- [ ] Were component destruction rules clear?
- [ ] Did Heat Strain checks occur? (5+ Heat)
- [ ] Did anyone reshuffle their deck? (Did Damage cards matter?)

Balance Observations

- [ ] Did armor-piercing (Dwarven Crushing Blow) feel oppressive?

- [ ] Did Church's burst damage (Blood Offering) feel fair?

- [ ] Did 32 HP (Dwarven Stone Endurance) make them too tanky?

- [ ] Did Reactive cards (0 SP) disrupt gameplay positively or negatively?

- [ ] Which faction felt stronger? (Church or Dwarves?)

Most/Least Useful Cards

- [ ] Which cards did you play most frequently?

- [ ] Which cards felt weak or situational?

- [ ] Did any cards feel mandatory (auto-include)?

- [ ] Did any cards feel useless (never played)?

Suggested Changes

- [ ] What would you change about the rules?

- [ ] What would you change about the factions?

- [ ] What would you change about the scenario/map?

- [ ] What additional rules/mechanics would you add?

NEXT STEPS AFTER PLAYTEST

Immediate Iteration (Same Session)

1. **Swap Tactics**: Try different Tactic combinations

2. **Swap Secondary Equipment**: Church uses Tower Shield, Dwarves use Siege Cannon

3. **Add Pilot Wounds**: Include Pilot Wound Decks for full brutality

4. **Component Tracking**: Track Component Damage by specific location (not pooled)

Future Playtests (New Sessions)

1. **Scenario #2**: Different map, different terrain, different victory conditions

2. **Third Faction**: Add Elven Verdant Covenant or The Ossuarium

3. **Campaign Mode**: Link scenarios together with pilot progression

4. **Boss Encounter**: Test Sister Vex, The Iron Saint (HP deck boss)

FILES SUMMARY

File	Purpose	Page Count	Status
turn-structure-final.md	4-phase turn system	3	Complete
range-and-los-final.md	Hex movement, facing, LOS	4	Complete
quick-reference-sheet.md	1-page printable reference	1	Complete
combat-damage-system-gkr-style.md	Damage resolution, component destruction	5	Complete
faction-deck-church-complete.md	Church faction deck (30 cards)	12	Complete
faction-deck-dwarves-complete.md	Dwarven faction deck (32 cards)	14	Complete
arena-scenario-01-proving-grounds.md	1v1 scenario with map	10	Complete
example-of-play.md	5-turn walkthrough	15	Complete

Total: 64 pages of playtest-ready content

DESIGN GOALS ACHIEVED

Core Mechanics

- [x] SP-based action economy (GKR-style)

- [x] Deck-as-HP (discard cards when damaged)

- [x] Component destruction (KDM-style brutality)

- [x] Heat/Strain system (risk/reward)

- [x] Facing modifiers (rear arc +2 dmg)

- [x] Reactive cards (0 SP interrupts)

- [x] Death spiral (Damage cards on reshuffle)

Faction Asymmetry

- [x] Church: Aggressive self-harm for burst damage

- [x] Dwarves: Defensive attrition with armor-piercing

- [x] Contrasting playstyles (offense vs defense)

- [x] Unique faction mechanics (Blood Offering vs Rune Counters)

Playtest Readiness

- [x] Complete rules (no "TBD" sections)

- [x] Pre-built decks (no deck construction required)

- [x] Scenario with map (ready to print)

- [x] Example of play (shows how rules work)

- [x] Quick reference sheet (table lookup)

KNOWN ISSUES / FUTURE WORK

Potential Balance Problems

1. **Blood Offering** may be too efficient (0 SP, +3 dmg, ignore 1 Armor)
2. **Component Destruction** may be too punishing (lose entire card type)
3. **Stone Endurance** (32 HP) may make Dwarves too tanky
4. **Armor-Piercing** may invalidate defensive builds

Missing Systems (Not Critical for Playtest)

1. Pilot Wound Decks (optional, adds complexity)
2. Campaign progression (pilot scars, loot, settlements)
3. Boss encounters (HP deck system)
4. Additional factions (Elves, Undead, Fae, etc.)

Documentation Gaps

1. No visual diagrams (all ASCII)
2. No printable card templates (index cards only)
3. No character sheets (track HP on paper)
4. No campaign rulebook

FEEDBACK CHANNELS

Please provide feedback via: - **GitHub Issues**: https://github.com/KeeberGoblin/penance/issues - **This Document**: Add comments to playtest markdown files - **Playtester Notes**: Fill out post-game debrief questions above

CREDITS

Design: AI-assisted design (Claude Code) **Inspiration**: - Kingdom Death: Monster (component destruction, brutality) - GKR: Heavy Hitters (deck-as-HP, SP economy) - MechWarrior (component targeting) - Into the Breach (positioning, facing)

Playtest Package Created: 2025-10-10 **Version**: 1.0

STATUS: READY FOR TABLE PLAY **NEXT MILESTONE**: First playtest feedback **TARGET**: 3-5 playtests, iterate based on feedback, publish rules v1.1