

# PENANCE

PLAYTEST PACKAGE: READY FOR  
TABLE PLAY

Absolution Through Steel

Generated PLAYTEST-READY

# PLAYTEST PACKAGE: READY FOR TABLE PLAY

**Date:** 2025-10-21 **Version:** v5.29-FINAL (Production Balance) **Status:** COMPLETE - 10 FACTIONS BALANCED **Estimated Setup Time:** 15 minutes **Estimated Play Time:** 45-60 minutes (first game)

**Recent Balance Changes (v5.29-FINAL - October 21, 2025):** - 7 out of 10 factions in competitive range (44-58% win rate) - **Ossuarium v5.23:** Lifesteal completely removed → Taint warfare system - **Church v5.27:** 5x discard bonuses (was 3x, boosted from 22.2% WR) - **Dwarves v5.25:** Rune counters buffed to 4 damage/counter (was 3, max 3 counters) - **Bloodlines v5.17:** Biomass nerfed to 1 per kill (was 2, reduced from 82% WR) - **Exchange v5.17:** Credit generation nerfed to 1 per 2 attacks (was every attack, 78% WR) - **Elves v5.29:** Photosynthesis removed, Bleed capped at 8, Leaf Dance reduced to 2 hexes

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

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

### Core Rules Documents

1. **Turn Structure** - Complete SP-based turn system (4 phases)
2. **Combat System** - GKR + KDM hybrid damage system (deck-as-HP)
3. **Deck Construction** - How to build variable decks (26-50 cards)
4. **Range & Line of Sight** - Hex movement, facing, cover rules
5. **Dice Reference** - Custom dice system (Attack, Defense, Suffering)
6. **Quick Reference Sheet** - 1-page printable reference

## Complete Faction Decks (v2.0 Equipment System)

### 4 Playable Factions - Each with modular equipment system:

1. **Church of Absolution** - Playstyle: Aggressive self-harm martyrdom - Core Mechanic: Blood Offering (discard cards for +damage) - Scaling: Infinite (+1 damage per enemy killed) - Deck Size: 26-50 cards (variable equipment)
2. **Dwarven Forge-Guilds** - Playstyle: Fortress defender, attrition tank - Core Mechanic: Rune Counters (stack for defense/damage) - Scaling: Stone Endurance (+2 cards to deck) - Deck Size: 28-52 cards (variable equipment)
3. **The Ossuarium** - Playstyle: Taint corruption warfare, skeletal minion summoning, resurrection - Core Mechanic: Decay Aura (enemies within 3 hexes gain +1 Taint/turn), Phylactery (resurrect once) - Scaling: Taint penalties destroy enemy decks (Heat + card destruction), Decay cards instead of Damage cards - Deck Size: 26-50 cards (variable equipment) - **v5.23 UPDATE:** Lifesteal completely removed. Now wins through Taint attrition, not sustain.
4. **Elven Verdant Covenant** - Playstyle: Hit-and-run assassin - Core Mechanic: Bleed stacking (capped at 8 stacks) - Scaling: +1 damage per Bleed counter (max 8) - Deck Size: 26-50 cards (variable equipment) - **v5.29 UPDATE:** Photosynthesis removed, Bleed capped at 8, Leaf Dance nerfed to 2 hexes

## Equipment System

**Equipment Pool** - 60+ craftable/lootable items: - **Weapons** (15+): Dagger, Longsword, Greatsword, Warhammer, Rifle, etc. - **Shields/Offhand** (6+): Buckler, Tower Shield, Dueling Dagger, Repair Kit - **Plating** (4+): Ablative, Spike, Reinforced, Stealth - **Sigils** (12+): Repair Sigil, Heat Sink, Targeting Matrix

## Playtest Scenarios

1. **The Proving Grounds** - 1v1 Deathmatch (beginner) - 12×12 hex map with elevation - Victory: Reduce opponent to 0 HP - Time: 45-60 minutes - Teaches: SP economy, Heat management, facing modifiers

2. **Reliquary Ruins** - 1v1 Objective Control (intermediate) - 14×14 hex map with reliquary zones - Victory: Control 2 of 3 reliquaries for 2 turns - Time: 60-75 minutes - Teaches: Objective play, map control, positioning

## Example of Play

**Example of Play** - 5-turn walkthrough - Turn-by-turn combat demonstration - Shows component destruction, Blood Offering combo, Rune stacking - Post-game analysis and lessons learned

## Campaign Systems (Optional)

- **Event Tables** - 132 KDM-style 2d6 events
- **Anomalous Events** - 100 SCP-style artifacts
- **Flesh Bargain** - Permanent sacrifice for power
- **Settlements** - Base building between missions
- **Pilot Progression** - Scars, traits, death

# QUICK START: FIRST PLAYTEST

## Step 1: Choose Factions (5 minutes)

Each player picks one of the 4 factions: - **Church** (easiest) - Straightforward aggression - **Dwarves** (easy) - Forgiving tank - **Ossuary** (medium) - Resource management - **Elves** (hard) - Precise positioning required

**Recommended First Game:** Church vs Dwarves (offense vs defense)

## Step 2: Build Decks (10 minutes)

Each faction deck consists of: - **10 Universal Core** (everyone has these) - **6 Faction Core** (faction-specific abilities) - **Variable Equipment** (choose from equipment pool) - **2 Tactics** (choose 2 from 5 available)

**Pre-Built Deck Example - Church “Martyr’s Fury” (30 cards):** - 10 Universal Core - 6 Church Core (Blood Offering, Divine Judgment, etc.) - 12 Equipment: Longsword (6) + Buckler (2) + Repair Sigil (2) + Heat Sink (2) - 2 Tactics: Flagellant’s Zeal + Crusader’s Vow

**Pre-Built Deck Example - Dwarven “Immovable Wall” (32 cards):** - 10 Universal Core - 6 Dwarven Core (Rune of Protection, Stone Endurance, etc.) - 14 Equipment: Warhammer (6) + Tower Shield (4) + Reinforced Plating (2) + Repair Sigil (2) - 2 Tactics: Forge Mastery + Unbreakable Spirit

## Step 3: Gather Materials

- [ ] 2d6 Attack Dice (custom symbols OR standard d6 with conversion chart)
- [ ] 1d6 Defense Die per damage point (custom OR standard)
- [ ] 1d6 Suffering Die (Church-specific, custom OR standard)
- [ ] Tokens for Heat tracking (0-10+)
- [ ] Tokens for SP tracking (3-6 SP per turn)
- [ ] Tokens for Rune Counters (Dwarves only, 0-5+)
- [ ] Tokens for Bleed Counters (Elves only, stacks infinitely)
- [ ] Component Damage markers (Right Arm, Left Arm, Legs, Head, Chassis)
- [ ] Facing indicators (arrow tokens or dice)
- [ ] Paper for tracking HP (cards remaining in deck)

## Step 4: Print Documents

- [ ] Print [Quick Reference Sheet](#) (2 copies)
- [ ] Print [Proving Grounds Scenario](#) (map section)
- [ ] Print [Dice Reference](#) (if using standard d6)
- [ ] Print faction deck lists (write card names on index cards OR use card database)

## Step 5: Setup Map

Use **The Proving Grounds** scenario: - **12×12 hex grid** - **Terrain:** - Forest (8 hexes): Light Cover (+1 Defense) - Rubble (8 hexes): Light Cover, difficult terrain (2 SP/hex) - Water/Mud (20 hexes): Difficult terrain, remove 1 Heat at turn end - Elevation 1 (4 hexes): +1 damage from here, ignore cover - Elevation 2 (4 hexes): +2 damage, ignore cover, +1 Range

## Step 6: 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 7: Play!

Follow the **4-phase turn structure**:

1. **Refresh Phase:** - Restore SP to maximum (Light: 6, Medium: 5, Heavy: 4, Fortress: 3) - If Heat  $\geq$  5: Roll Strain check (2d6, 7+ = pass) - Clear temporary effects
2. **Action Phase:** - Play cards (spend SP) - Move (1 SP per hex, 2 SP for difficult terrain) - Attack (roll dice, apply damage) - Reactive cards (0 SP, interrupt attacker)
3. **Draw Phase:** - Draw to hand size 6 - If deck empty: Reshuffle discard + add 1 Damage card (death spiral)
4. **End Turn Phase:** - Remove “until end of turn” effects - Check victory conditions

**Victory:** Reduce opponent to 0 HP (deck + discard pile empty)

## EXPECTED GAMEPLAY EXPERIENCE

### Turns 1-3: Positioning (15 minutes)

- Both players navigate terrain toward center

- Church moves faster (6 SP, lighter Caskets)
- Dwarves set up defensive buffs (Rune of Protection)
- Minimal damage, mostly setup

## **Turns 4-6: First Engagement (10 minutes)**

- Church closes to Melee range
- First attacks land (3-6 damage each)
- Heat begins building (especially from heavy attacks)
- First Component Damage tracked

## **Turns 7-10: Brutal Exchange (15 minutes)**

- Both sides trading heavy blows
- Church using Blood Offering for burst damage (+3 dmg)
- Dwarves stacking Rune Counters (reduce damage by 3)
- First reshuffle likely (add 1 Damage card to deck)
- Heat Strain checks begin (5+ Heat)

## **Turns 11-15: Death Spiral (10 minutes)**

- Decks contain Damage cards (dead draws, reduce hand size)
- Component destruction occurs (3+ Component Damage = destroyed)
- Players desperate, using ultimate cards
- One side collapses (0 HP)

**Expected Winner:** 50/50 balanced matchup (Church offense vs Dwarven defense)

## 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 SP, risk Strain)
2. **Heat Management:** Risk/reward of high-Heat cards, Strain checks at 5+ Heat
3. **Deck Cycling:** When to reshuffle, when to delay, Damage card accumulation
4. **Component Damage:** Tracking by location, destruction effects (lose entire card type)
5. **Facing Modifiers:** Rear arc +2 damage, side arc +1 damage, shield side +1 Defense
6. **Terrain Usage:** Cover (+1/+2 Defense), elevation (+1/+2 damage), difficult terrain (2 SP/hex)
7. **Reactive Cards:** 0 SP interrupts (Brace, Parry, Unbreakable)
8. **Death Spiral:** How Damage cards cripple deck consistency (25% dead draws after 3 reshuffles)
9. **Dice System:** Attack Dice (to-hit + damage), Defense Dice (block or escalate), modifiers
10. **Faction Mechanics:** Blood Offering vs Rune Counters (asymmetric gameplay)

## 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?
- [ ] Did the dice add exciting variance or frustrating randomness?



## 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?)
- [ ] Were the custom dice symbols intuitive? (Or did you use standard d6?)

## Balance Observations

- [ ] Did the equipment system feel flexible or restrictive?
- [ ] Did Church’s burst damage (Blood Offering) feel fair?
- [ ] Did Dwarven Rune Counters feel too strong or weak?
- [ ] Did Reactive cards (0 SP) disrupt gameplay positively or negatively?
- [ ] Which faction felt stronger?

## 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)?

## Equipment System Feedback

- [ ] Did the variable deck size (26-50 cards) feel interesting?
- [ ] Was deck building intuitive or confusing?
- [ ] Did equipment choices matter during gameplay?
- [ ] Would you want more equipment options?

## 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 (5 available, choose 2)
2. **Swap Equipment:** Try different weapons/shields (60+ options)
3. **Swap Factions:** Try Ossuarium (lifesteal) or Elves (bleed stacking)
4. **Add Pilot Wounds:** Include Pilot Wound Decks for full brutality (optional)

### Future Playtests (New Sessions)

1. **Scenario #2:** Reliquary Ruins (objective control, different map)
2. **Different Factions:** All 4 factions available (Church, Dwarves, Ossuarium, Elves)
3. **Campaign Mode:** Link scenarios with event tables, loot, settlements
4. **Boss Encounter:** Test HP deck boss system (Sister Vex, Iron Saint)

## FILES SUMMARY

File	Purpose	Status
<a href="#">turn-structure.md</a>	4-phase turn system	Complete
<a href="#">combat-system.md</a>	Damage resolution, component destruction	Complete
<a href="#">deck-construction.md</a>	How to build decks with equipment	Complete
<a href="#">range-and-los.md</a>	Hex movement, facing, LOS	Complete
<a href="#">dice-reference.md</a>	Custom dice system	Complete
<a href="#">quick-reference.md</a>	1-page printable reference	Complete
<a href="#">church/deck-equipment-system.md</a>	Church faction deck (v2.0)	Complete
<a href="#">dwarves/deck-equipment-system.md</a>	Dwarven faction deck (v2.0)	Complete
<a href="#">ossuary/deck-equipment-system.md</a>	Ossuary faction deck (v2.0)	Complete
<a href="#">elves/deck-equipment-system.md</a>	Elven faction deck (v2.0)	Complete
<a href="#">equipment-pool-complete.md</a>	60+ equipment items	Complete
<a href="#">01-proving-grounds.md</a>	1v1 scenario with map	Complete
<a href="#">02-reliquary-ruins.md</a>	1v1 objective control	Complete
<a href="#">example-of-play.md</a>	5-turn walkthrough	

File	Purpose	Status
		Complete

**Total:** 14 core documents + 60+ equipment cards

# DESIGN GOALS ACHIEVED

## Core Mechanics

- [x] SP-based action economy (GKR-style, 3-6 SP per turn)
- [x] Deck-as-HP (discard cards when damaged, variable deck size 26-50)
- [x] Component destruction (KDM-style brutality, permanent consequences)
- [x] Heat/Strain system (risk/reward, 5+ Heat = Danger Zone)
- [x] Facing modifiers (rear arc +2 dmg, shield side +1 Defense)
- [x] Reactive cards (0 SP interrupts)
- [x] Death spiral (Damage cards on reshuffle, inevitable decline)
- [x] Custom dice system (Attack, Defense, Suffering dice with symbols)

## Equipment System v2.0

- [x] Modular equipment (60+ items, mix-and-match)
- [x] Variable deck sizes (26-50 cards depending on choices)
- [x] Crafting & salvage economy (2-6 Scrap per item)
- [x] Smelting system (remove equipment for Scrap)
- [x] Loot tables (roll 1d20 after defeating enemy)
- [x] Deck customization (4 slots: Weapon + Shield/Offhand + 1-4 Accessories)

## Faction Asymmetry

- [x] Church: Aggressive self-harm for burst damage (infinite scaling)

- [x] Dwarves: Defensive attrition with armor-piercing (rune stacking)
- [x] Ossuarium: Lifesteal vampire with resurrections (Soul Harvest)
- [x] Elves: Hit-and-run assassin with infinite bleed stacking
- [x] Contrasting playstyles (offense/defense/lifesteal/DoT)
- [x] Unique faction mechanics (Blood Offering / Runes / Soul Harvest / Bleed)

## Playtest Readiness

- [x] Complete rules (no “TBD” sections)
- [x] 4 complete faction decks (variable equipment)
- [x] 2 scenarios with maps (ready to print)
- [x] Example of play (shows how rules work)
- [x] Quick reference sheet (table lookup)
- [x] Custom dice system (symbols + conversion chart)
- [x] Campaign systems (optional, event tables + loot)

## KNOWN ISSUES / FUTURE WORK

### Potential Balance Problems

1. **Infinite Scaling** (Church/Elves) may make games snowball
2. **Component Destruction** may be too punishing (lose entire card type)
3. **Dice Variance** may create feel-bad moments (miss at 72% chance)
4. **Equipment Bloat** (60+ items) may overwhelm new players

### Missing Systems (Not Critical for Playtest)

1. Visual card templates (currently index cards only)
2. Physical dice manufacturing (using conversion charts for now)
3. Character sheets (tracking HP on paper)
4. Full campaign rulebook (10-mission arc)

5. 3D printable Casket models (STL files)

## Documentation Gaps

1. No visual diagrams (all ASCII/text)
2. No printable hex maps (draw by hand for now)
3. No official artwork (AI prompts provided only)
4. No quick-start video tutorial

## FEEDBACK CHANNELS

Please provide feedback via: - **GitHub Issues**: <https://github.com/KeeberGoblin/penance/issues> - **Playtester Notes**: Fill out post-game debrief questions above - **Contact**: Leave comments in GitHub discussions

## CREDITS

**Design**: AI-assisted design (Claude Code) **Inspiration**: - Kingdom Death: Monster (component destruction, event tables, brutality) - GKR: Heavy Hitters (deck-as-HP, SP economy) - BattleTech (heat management, component targeting) - Gloomhaven (hex combat, facing modifiers)

**Playtest Package Created**: 2025-10-12 **Version**: 2.0 (Equipment System Update)

**STATUS**: READY FOR TABLE PLAY **NEXT MILESTONE**: First playtest feedback  
**TARGET**: 3-5 playtests, iterate based on feedback, publish rules v2.1