



# PATH OF PENITENCE

PLAYER QUICKSTART GUIDE

v 1.0



Player QuickStart Guide

**“THE PATH TO REDEMPTION IS A TREACHEROUS JOURNEY WALKED ALONE,  
EACH STEP RESONATING WITH THE SORROW OF A THOUSAND SINS.”**



## **CREDITS**

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**W**elcome hero! The **Path of Penitence** (PoP) is Bestiarum's unique 5e campaign system, a thrilling experience that thrusts you into the fallen world of Doaden, a dark fantasy setting full of deadly monsters, rabid beasts, devious cults, risen dead, demons, devils, and worse!

As you explore these shattered lands, you will uncover dark secrets and mysteries of the past. But be warned, your path will be full of danger. Not only must you learn to defend yourselves against the terrifying enemies that stalk this realm, but the world itself becomes a treacherous foe! Whether you are exploring an ancient tomb, sinister forest, dark mage's tower, or a cursed city long forgotten, tread carefully or you will quickly find your end!

This short guide contains all the information you need to jump right in and get started! Whether you are newly joining our dark world, or have been a long-time fan, we welcome you to the fallen world of Doaden and hope you enjoy your adventures ahead!

## THE PENITENTS

You and your Player Character (PC) take on the role of a **Penitent**, an unfortunate soul who has been convicted of crimes or sins against the Empire of Azerai. As punishment, you have been sentenced to 500 years of atonement, beginning your harrowing quest for redemption.

To pay off your sentence, you are forced to join the Penitent Crusade, the Empire's army of soldiers and knights dedicated to fighting

evil throughout the realm. Your party will form a band of unlikely heroes, starting as dregs of the Empire's lowest caste of criminals and rising to become heroes of the realm.



*"The only good cultist is a dead cultist." – Vozruk*

**Vozruk the Redeemer** is your commanding officer. He will assign you your missions for the Crusade. These missions typically take the form of short adventures, varying across the spectrum of dark fantasy stories. From horror to suspense, monster hunts to demonic exorcisms, paranormal investigations to hack-and-slashes dungeon runs, the dark tales of this world are truly endless. You never know what adventures lie ahead!

For each successful mission you complete, the number of years left of your atonement will be reduced and your rank in the Crusade will rise, allowing you to access supplies and

magical items, allies, and companions to help you on your future quests. Over the course of a campaign, your party's actions will change the course of the world forever.

## THE WORLD OF DOADEN

Once full of beauty and promise, Doaden is a fallen realm teetering on the brink of oblivion. Long ago the First Emperor, a man of iron will and determination, united the many banners of the world through ruthless conquest. The empire he forged, now called the Old Empire, fostered a golden age of prosperity, regional stability, and advancement in both the magical and worldly sciences.

**The Devastation.** Yet, at the height of the Old Empire's power, the unthinkable happened. The Demoncore, an arcane weapon said to harness the power of the sun itself, detonated in the imperial capital. A wave of flames and destruction erupted from its epicenter, consuming the world. Cities, towns, forests, and mountains burned away in moments.

In the wake of the explosion, Doaden was plunged into a new dark age, the survivors bereft of their collective knowledge of magic, science, and technology. The Old Empire was shattered into many nations once again, each struggling to survive in the annihilation. In the ages that followed, demons, monsters, and twisted abominations proliferated throughout the world, brought forth from hellish realms.

## THE EMPIRE OF AZERAI

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The remnants of the Old Empire survive today as the Empire of Azerai, a theocracy run by the Church. Life is hard. The Church of Azerai

demands utter obedience to its draconic laws and doctrines. Disobedience is punished harshly.

Common folk are routinely convicted of crimes and sentenced to a harsh life of penance. These convicted Penitents form an endless supply of laborers and militia for the Empire, their sentenced to serve for a few months to many years. The worst offenders receive a 500-year sentence, nearly impossible to repay in a single lifetime.

To atone for their crimes, Penitents are sent to harsh labor assignments all over the realm. In the Mines of Tartari, thousands dig for metals in dark and unstable tunnels filled with deadly gasses. In the Ambrosian Fields, lines of broken souls toil endlessly in vast grain farms, spreading Corpse Ash from dawn to dusk, a caustic fertilizer derived from burnt human remains. The variety of assignments is endless, and each is worse than the last.

## THE PENITENT CRUSADE

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The Crusade is the Empire's army of knights and soldiers dedicated to combatting evil in whatever form it takes. Yet the vast majority of its ranks are drawn from Penitent conscripts who have been forced into service to pay off their criminal sentences.

It is this organization that your PC will be joining on their own path to atonement. Though the Crusade is one of the deadliest assignments in the Empire, it repays years of atonement far quicker than any other duty.

**The Meatgrinder.** Little value is placed on the lives of Penitents. Their numbers are endless, and they are often unskilled and untrained. The Crusade uses them as cannon fodder,



deploying them on suicidal missions to lessen the risks towards more valuable soldiers.

Waves of Penitents are sent charging unarmed into battlefields to bog down enemy armies, sprinting through monster-infested lairs to bait out the horrors within, cracking open sealed tombs to trigger curses or traps, and many other unsavory tasks.

A Penitent's odds of survival are slim, but there is a chance they may rise within the ranks of the Crusade and redeem themselves. In the Crusade, prowess in battle and years served determine one's standing.

**Mark of Atonement.** There is no escaping a Penitent's fate. The Mark of Atonement is branded prominently on their skin, an unmistakable label that draws the scorn and derision of all and reminds them of their sins. The mark cannot be removed, but it slowly fades over time as their sins are paid. The Empire wields magical means to track these marks, rendering escape impossible.

**Husks.** Penitents who run from their duties are hunted down by Church interrogators. Once captured, they are thrown into torture chambers where horrific ceremonies are performed. The details are a well-guarded secret, but hushed rumors circulate of iron needles driven into the brain, anguished cries of victims, and robed zealots murmuring incantations in archaic tongues.

Though the details of these rituals are obscured, the outcome is well known. The individual returns as a Husk, a hollowed-out being, stripped of the essence that made them human. Husks retain their ability to speak and perform simple tasks from wielding weapons to simple smithing or labor, but behind their vacant eyes, one finds only emptiness. They are perfect slaves, incapable of independent thought and fully obedient to their master.



*A Penitent's mark slowly fades as they atone for their sins, though never entirely. There will always be some faint trace remaining, a reminder of their past.*

## FORGING YOUR PATH

Husks are a chilling reminder of what happens to those who defy the Empire. The Path of Penitence is fraught with danger and despair, but there is a chance – however slim – of redemption. It is best that your PC accepts their predicament and strives to make the best of the hand they've have been dealt.

Of course, we're speaking in character here. On a meta level, we understand that the grim world of Doaden and the plight of the Penitent might feel bleak or constraining at times. However, players and Game Masters are united in a common goal to tell a collective story. This means accepting the limitations of your characters' position and working within those bounds to create drama, tension, and ultimately, build a world in service to this greater narrative.

There will be plenty of space for you to develop your character's unique story, especially as they advance in rank within the crusade and begin to explore the world!

Let this understanding guide your next steps! In the following section, you will learn how to create your very own Penitent character.



## CREATING YOUR PENITENT

Create your character exactly the same as you would in a standard 5e game. But along the way, consider the following to engage with the system's unique narrative!

### 1. BACKSTORY: SINS & CRIMES

As part of your character's backstory, consider the sin or crime they were charged with, leading to their conviction. You can look at the **Sins & Crimes Table** to roll on or draw inspiration from to create your own! The crime does not affect your PC's skills or abilities but helps to deepen their backstory.

**Custom Crime.** The only requirement is that your crime has resulted in a 500-year sentence for your PC. It could be anything from stealing from a church or planning a rebellion against the Empire, practicing dark magic, or just being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The crime does not need to be extreme. The sentence may be far in excess of the typical punishment. For example, stealing a loaf of bread from the wrong lord, or annoying a judge, could lead to the 500-year sentence for your PC while someone else gets a few short months.

**Life of Penance.** Next, consider how these events have shaped your character. Were they truly guilty or not? Were they justly punished or a victim of an uncaring legal system?

How has it affected their life? Were they a prominent figure, brought low by sin, or perhaps a lowly individual ensnared by the machinations of the powerful?

What drove them to commit their crime, and how do they feel about it now? Are they remorseful, defiant, or perhaps a bit of both?

Answering just a few of these questions will go a long way to shape your character's personality and build an impactful journey on their path of penance.

**“Bad” Characters.** Some PCs might be condemned based solely on their identity. For example, a warlock’s use of dark magic may be all that is needed for the zealous Church to sentence them. The good news is that the Crusade does not discriminate. Regardless of your PC’s background, abilities, race, or gender, the Crusade will eagerly exploit their powers in the fight against evil. So, don’t shy away from your gifts — they may prove to be your greatest asset on the path to redemption.

Even a Penitent’s personality traits may be a benefit to them. If they are prone to violence, thieving, or other character defects, so long as they are now performing these acts in service to the Empire, they will be accepted.

**Oath of Penance.** Instead of committing a crime, your character may become a Penitent by freely taking the Oath of Penance. They may be zealous believers in the teachings of Azerai faith, punishing themselves out of guilt or remorse for past acts, or any other reason you can think of.

## 2. FANTASY RACES

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Doaden is dominated by humans. Fantasy races like dwarves and elves do exist, though typically residing in communities isolated from human settlements, so little is known about them within the Empire. While these races are unusual, they are not unheard of. In the vastness of this shattered world, there is space for anything and anyone to exist.

Thus, you may choose any fantasy race you wish when building your PC. But if you do, consider where they hail from, what their community looked like, and what brought them into contact with human civilization.

## 3. MAGIC

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In Doaden, the ability to cast magic does not stem from a pantheon or deity — it courses through the individual. To cast spells, your character does not have to be bound by a belief or subscribe to any particular deity.

However, for narrative purposes, you might give your PC a belief that reflects the world around them. For example, Azerai clerics or paladins may believe their abilities stem from their faith in the Church.

## 4. TAKING IT FURTHER

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That is all you need to know to start your journey as a Penitent! The following section, **Lore & History**, is an optional read, for those who wish to dig deeper into the world of Doaden and the various cultures and political structures of the Empire.

This information is not necessary to know, but it help you to understand the world and determine your character’s background and ethnicity more clearly. Remember, you can always invent your own material as well!



## SINS & CRIMES TABLE

Roll	Charge	Definition	Example
1	Heresy	Speaking doubt about the Azerai faith.	A scholar suggests the Grand Ecclesiarch's new law is brutal and not in the best interest of the people. He is taken by the Church and sentenced for heresy.
2	Cultism	Worshipping any religion other than the Azerai faith.	A small village in an old forest makes yearly sacrifices to a nature spirit they believe is responsible for good harvests. Their ritual is seen by a traveling priest, who summons the Crusade to purge their cultish beliefs.
3	Sedition	Taking up arms against or plotting to destabilize the Empire.	A group of farmers plot a coup to overthrow the corrupt lord of their land. Unfortunately, their plan is discovered, and soldiers are sent to quash the uprising. The few survivors are sentenced for sedition.
4	Contamination	Accessing tainted knowledge or artifacts without authorization.	A young scribe works as an archeologist, removing ancient relics from a buried temple site. She stumbles upon a worn tome and opens it, finding demonic spells written inside. She quickly closes it and hands it to her supervisor. He reports her in case her mind has been contaminated by evil.
5	Grand Murder	The unauthorized killing of a lord or member of the Church.	Bandits attempt to rob a traveler at knifepoint. Their actions escalate and they kill the traveler, who turns out to be a wandering Azerai priest. The bandits are rounded up and sentenced for grand murder.
6	Tithe Evasion	Failing to pay one's required annual tithe to the Empire.	A crafty merchant uses a 'creative' accounting method to reduce the taxes he owes to the Empire. His elaborate bookkeeping ruse is discovered by the imperial treasurers. He is promptly arrested and sentenced.



## LORE & HISTORY

This section is an optional read! The world of Doaden is vast and what is covered here is only a fraction of what might exist. You are free to create your own stories, backgrounds, and cultures both inside the Empire and out!

### FOUNDING OF THE AZERAI

The peace and stability of the Old Empire was an illusion built upon the veiled threat of destruction. After the empire's founding, the Cult of Azerai rose to power by spreading a new religion, worshipping the First Emperor as a god. They pledged their services to him in exchange for power and influence at court.

**The Demoncore.** In secret arcane vaults, Azerai mages built the Demoncore, gifting the weapon to the First Emperor. The weapon was used to secure the fealty of the empire's vassal nations by ensuring obliteration for any that stepped out of line. The operation and maintenance of the weapon remained a guarded secret known only to the Azerai's inner circles.

**The One Faith.** Over the generations, each successive emperor relied on the Azerai's knowledge, secrets, and guidance. The Azerai was quickly established as the empire's official religion and remained a dominant power until the fall of the Old Empire in the Devastation.



**The Empire of Azerai.** After the Devastation, the Church of Azerai founded the Empire of Azerai, or simply the Empire, in the western reaches of the once great power. The Church rules now as theocracy, controlling all laws and banning all other religions. Its dominion is marked by tyranny, oppression, and religious zealotry. Citizens must pledge utter obedience to the Church's teachings, which promises salvation from the darkness.

**Grand Ecclesiarch.** At the head of the church is the Grand Ecclesiarch, a sovereign granted absolute authority over the Empire through the ritual of ascension. Vitalinus is the current Grand Ecclesiarch. He sits the Malformed Throne, a twisted wreckage of molten metal once belonging to the First Emperor, salvaged from the epicenter of the Devastation.

## AZERAIN CULTURE

The Empire has five key regions: the Sunlit Citadel at its center, and four Diocese to the North, East, and South, and West. Each Diocese is overseen by bishops who hold power over areas of land, ensuring the local lords govern their people according to the Church's religious doctrines.

### SUNLIT CITADEL

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At the heart of the Empire lies the awe-inspiring Sunlit Citadel, the hub of the Church and seat of the Grand Ecclesiarch. The magnificent city is bathed perpetually in divine light. Choirs and sermons ring endlessly from the temples and churches that line its streets. Hammers ring tirelessly in the Grand Basilica,

where slaves forge sacred weapons and machines of war.

Majestic spires rise into the sky, casting long shadows over the rest of the Empire, a constant reminder of the Church's watchful eye and omnipresent authority. The Citadel is a place of unyielding faith, where religious doctrine permeates every aspect of life.

Despite the Church's oppressive nature, it acts as a nexus, uniting the varied cultures of the Empire in a shared faith. The Empire's citizenry forms a united front, enduring the evils of the world together and drawing strength from their collective resilience.

### WESTERN DIOCESE

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To the west are the once great kingdoms of Averlon and Frankonia, a people beholden to chivalric ideals and a heritage of honor and societal duty. Their lands are steeped in legends, from their great lochs to their rolling plains and mystic woods. Ancient castles dot the landscape, many now in ruin, their weathered stone halls whispering tales of knights and kings, valor, and treachery.

The folk here, often hailing from noble lineage, uphold their ancestral traditions with great pride, their festivals and tournaments providing rare moments of respite from their grim reality. Yet beneath the chivalric façade, the people bear the burden of their history.

Old feuds simmer beneath the surface, betrayals and bloodshed never quite forgotten, a roiling tension beneath a fading veneer. This is a place where honor is both a shield and a sword, wielded deftly in the intricate dance of power and survival.

## NORTHERN DIOCESE

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The rugged north is a frigid region of black forests and craggy mountains. The inhabitants are barbaric, their beliefs rooted in the olden ways. Shaman-led blood sacrifices and wild ceremonies dedicated to ancient earth spirits form a central pillar of their communal lives, a fact that draws derision from the Church.

The Empire begrudgingly tolerates their cultural differences, as their mighty warriors and stalwart fortresses, such as the bastion city of Stürmenburg, hold back the tides of raiders and rabid beastmen that constantly seek to invade the Empire's borders. It is said that some northerners carry the blood of giants, growing to be powerful warriors several heads taller than the average man.

## EASTERN DIOCESE

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The eastern lands were closest in proximity to the epicenter of the Demoncore's explosion and thus the most scarred. Eerie, desolate, and forsaken, their gnarled forests seem to whisper and move, and their eerie swamps glow with sepulchral lights. Travelers here become anxious and unsettled, the haunting sights evoking a primal sense of dread in all but the most well-adapted.

The regional capital, Vostograd, is one of the few safe bastions in the area, though even a short jaunt outside of its stone walls, one may find themselves beset upon by specters or cryptic horrors. Eastern folk are regarded warily by the rest of the Empire, known for their stoic resilience and uncanny knowledge of the arcane and the occult.

## SOUTHERN DIOCESE

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The temperate southern Empire is a vivid contrast to the gloomier climes elsewhere. Infused with an influx of foreign traders and explorers along its coastal cities, these territories hum with rhythm and energy, a vibrant palette unlike anywhere else.

Brightly colored cities like Solteres and Marinvall are adorned with resplendent mosaics and intricate filigree, proudly standing testament to the region's spirit. Bustling port cities are alive with trade and exploration, serving as a melting pot for the emissaries, merchants, and adventurers of distant lands.

But beneath the colorful bravura, dark secrets lurk. Shadowy syndicates rule the underworld, their influence seeping into every corner of society. The remnants of ancient cults persist, hiding in plain sight, their practices shrouded in mystery and dread. And at sea, smugglers and corsairs ply their trade along the coastline, attacking settlements and trafficking in forbidden relics and slaves.

## FURTHER CONTENT

Keep your eyes peeled for further Path of Penitence content! Bestiarum releases continuing support for the campaign system including class paths and special mechanics, backgrounds, cultures & ethnicities, campaign features, companions, and more!



# The Empire of Azerai



ELDPINES

CAIRN HILL

WYRDING WOODS

LOCH ELDHEIRN

MISTWOOD

THE REACH

WESTFIELD

THE FANGS

THE RIVENWEALD

JAGGED GULF

HOLLOW SEA

SPIRES OF ALLSTEIN

Nederskag

Harcort

Verden

Rivièrebourg

Jasterkeep

Castle Greythorn

Glumtown

New Heldon

Château Larmegris

Tideholm

Veilwind Hold

Bryxford

Dunkreik

The Bastilla

Marinvall

Ferresport

Castur River





Stürmenburg

ASHEN WASTES

Yongard

Krahensten

Cragspires

UMBER PINES

Ursfall

Black Fortress

Clemence

GNARWYLD

Gryza

SILVER GLEN

Straklova

Drzewostan

DEADMIRE

Sunlit Citadel

Sancta Aeterna

Blot

Moswel

Ledenhall

MOUNT TARTARI

ZLODRAN FOREST

Brzostov

Exilum

Vostograd

Dravost River

Esse

Port Oriander

AMBROSIAN FIELDS

Solteres

CHARION SEA

Port Velen

Halcyon

Carth

SHATTERED COAST

