

ASHES OF DOMINION

UX Design & UX Writing Specification

(Production-Ready, Designer-Facing Document)

1. UX DESIGN PHILOSOPHY & INTENT

1.1 Core UX Thesis

Ashes of Dominion does **not** aim to make the player feel powerful, correct, or central. The UX exists to make the player feel **embedded** inside unstable systems of authority.

The interface is not a helper. It is a **mediator** between the player and competing power structures.

If the UI ever feels neutral, the design has failed.

1.2 UX Goals (Non-Negotiable)

- Convey **authority pressure** through interaction, not text dumps.
- Make **choice legibility imperfect but understandable**.
- Ensure every system exposes **trade-offs before rewards**.
- Prevent players from achieving omniscience.

1.3 UX Anti-Goals

- No global alignment meters.
- No "good/evil" language.
- No omnipresent quest log clarity.
- No universal UI consistency across factions.

Consistency is sacrificed intentionally in favor of **ideological friction**.

2. PLAYER MENTAL MODEL

2.1 Expected Player Assumptions

Players assume:

- Factions behave like skill trees.
- Reputation equals reward.

- Information equals clarity.

2.2 Design Response

The UX deliberately **undermines** these assumptions:

- Faction involvement **narrows options** elsewhere.
- Information creates **new obligations**, not certainty.
- Visibility increases **exposure**, not safety.

The player learns systems by **suffering misinterpretation**, not tutorials.

3. INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE (HIGH LEVEL)

3.1 Primary UX Surfaces

- World Interaction Layer (diegetic prompts)
- Journal & Records (non-authoritative)
- Faction Interfaces (ideologically biased)
- World State Feedback (environmental, not UI-heavy)

There is **no single "truth screen"**.

4. CORE SYSTEM UX BREAKDOWN

4.1 FACTION AFFILIATION SYSTEM

UX Intent

Make allegiance feel **binding, uncomfortable, and asymmetrical**.

Entry Point

Faction contact occurs **in-world only**.

No menu-based faction joining.

Affiliation Confirmation

Affiliation is never confirmed with "Join / Accept".

Instead, it is confirmed through **irreversible action**.

Example UX Copy

- "Stand where you are. Speak no words." (*Doctrine of the Flame*)
- "Sign, or walk away unguarded." (*Civic Compact*)
- "You march now, or you don't return." (*Iron Dominion*)

No confirmation dialog.
Action = commitment.

4.1.1 Faction Status Visibility

Faction standing is **never numerical**.

Each faction provides:

- One biased status descriptor
- One implicit behavioral expectation

Example

Doctrine of the Flame Status:

"Observed"

Player interpretation is required.

4.2 QUEST & OBJECTIVE UX

UX Intent

Remove certainty. Preserve direction.

Quest Acquisition

- No global quest list
- Objectives recorded **after** partial completion

Journal Structure

The Journal is structured as **personal notes**, not system output.

Journal Entry Example

"They expect the offering by dusk. They did not say what happens if I don't return."

The system never resolves ambiguity for the player.

4.2.1 Objective States

Each objective exists in one of four states:

- Rumored
- Expected

- Acted Upon
- Consequences Observed

Only the last state provides feedback.

4.3 WORLD STATE FEEDBACK

UX Intent

Communicate consequence **without UI popups**.

Feedback Channels

- NPC behavior changes
- Environmental alterations
- Access restrictions
- Silent absences

Example

A Civic Compact-aligned town shows:

- Fewer guards
- More locked doors
- Increased whisper NPC audio

No tooltip explains this.

4.4 PLAYER CHOICE PRESENTATION

UX Intent

Make choices feel **incomplete, pressured, and biased**.

Dialogue UI Rules

- Options reflect **what the character would dare say**, not all possibilities.
- Some options are intentionally missing.

Example Dialogue Options

- "I will comply."
- "This is not my concern."

- *(No refusal option present)*

Silence is a design choice.

5. FACTION-SPECIFIC UX RULESETS

5.1 THE DOCTRINE OF THE FLAME

UX Characteristics

- Restricted menus
- High contrast, oppressive layouts
- Forced delays before confirmation

UX Writing Tone

- Absolute
- Judgmental
- Dehumanizing

Example System Message

"Your hesitation has been noted."

5.2 THE IRON DOMINION

UX Characteristics

- Grid-based layouts
- Clear hierarchy
- Brutally efficient information delivery

UX Writing Tone

- Directive
- Tactical
- Emotionless

Example System Message

"Resource allocation updated. Civilian impact pending."

5.3 THE CIVIC COMPACT

UX Characteristics

- Dense information layers
- Optional data reveals
- Hidden consequences

UX Writing Tone

- Polite
- Ambiguous
- Transactional

Example System Message

"This agreement benefits all current parties."

(Future parties not specified.)

6. FAILURE & NEGATIVE FEEDBACK UX

UX Intent

Failure is not instructional. It is **accusatory**.

No "Try Again" messaging.

Example Failure Copy

"You misunderstood what was required."

System does not explain how.

7. EDGE CASES & PRODUCTION RISKS

7.1 Designer Risk

Over-clarifying systems breaks thematic integrity.

7.2 UX Writing Risk

Neutral language undermines faction identity.

7.3 Player Risk

Some players will feel lost.

This is intentional.

8. HANDOFF NOTES FOR DESIGNERS

- UI inconsistency is **intentional**.
 - Friction is a feature, not a bug.
 - If a screen feels comfortable, remove information.
 - Never summarize consequences globally.
-

9. FINAL UX RULE

If the player ever feels certain, safe, or morally validated — the UX has failed.

The interface must always feel like it belongs to someone else.