

Punk_Noir_LDD_Beach_Docks_Village

PUNK_NOIR — Level Design Document

Zone Sequence: Beach · Docks · Fishing Village & Lighthouse

Game: Punk Noir

Level Codename: LVD_01_Arrival

Version: 1.0

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Engine: Unreal Engine 5 — Blueprints

1.0 Executive Summary

One-liner:

A three-zone arrival sequence that teaches the player how power is distributed in this city — through what the spaces let them do, not what the game tells them.

Core experience:

The player arrives at a colonised port city. They move from open exposure (Beach) through controlled machinery (Docks) to the only human-scale space left (Fishing Village). By the end of the sequence, the player understands the power structure spatially, without a single line of exposition. They are a stranger. The city has been claimed. The question the level poses is: by whom, and at what cost?

Tone reference:

Bloodborne's Old Yharnam — a place that was once inhabited by ordinary people, now repurposed by authority. Thieves' Landing from Red Dead Redemption — commerce and violence occupying the same geography.

Estimated playtime: 18–25 minutes (critical path) / 35–45 minutes (full exploration)

2.0 Design Goals & Restrictions

2.1 Restrictions

- Must serve as the opening zone — the player has basic movement, light attack, and dodge. No gadgets yet.

- No indoor spaces with loadscreens — all three zones are seamless.
- Must introduce: enemy patrol patterns, environmental hazards, first NPC interaction, and the parry window without a tutorial popup.
- Runtime on critical path must not exceed 25 minutes.

2.2 Design Goals

- **Express the theme spatially.** Colonisation, labour, and corruption should be readable in the architecture before the player talks to a single NPC.
- **Teach through failure, not instruction.** The parry window and dodge timing are learned by dying on the Beach, not by a prompt.
- **Give the player one moment of genuine power** in an otherwise hostile sequence — the Lighthouse roof, where the city is visible and briefly comprehensible.
- **Establish the Fishing Village as the only space the player is not surveilled.** This is where allies and secrets live.
- **Reward exploration without making it feel like a checklist.** Hidden paths should feel discovered, not found.

2.3 Narrative Context

Before this level: The player has just arrived by boat. No backstory delivered. The opening is silent — the boat docking, rain, distant lights.

After this level: The player has spoken to at least one Fishing Village NPC, learned that the lighthouse has been repurposed as a signal tower for the colonial administration, and has a reason to move inland.

Narrative zone reading (internal design language):

- Beach → *Father* zone: Water, exposure, the sea as colonial conduit. Authority arrived here.
- Docks → *Father/Mother* intersection: The machinery of administration meets commerce. Watched and transactional.
- Fishing Village → *Young/Ancients*: The original inhabitants. Below the colonial gaze. Secrets underground.

3.0 Player Metrics

Metric	Value	Notes
Player height (standing)	180 cm	Standard

Metric	Value	Notes
Player height (crouching)	100 cm	Used in Docks crawlspaces
Jump height	1.0–1.8 m	Dependent on run-up
Dash distance	3–6 m	Tap input
Dodge distance	3–5 m	Directional
Standard doorway	100 × 220 cm	Fishing Village doors are deliberately narrower (80 cm) — forces attention
Main path width	4.5 m	Docks main thoroughfare
Side path width	1.5–2.0 m	Alley routes through Village
Enemy patrol radius	8–12 m	Per patrol point
Enemy detection cone	70° FOV	Standard guard; narrows in rain

4.0 Zone-by-Zone Breakdown

ZONE 1 — THE BEACH

Design intent: Exposure. The player is in the open. There is no cover that isn't earned by moving through hostile space. The beach teaches dodge timing because there is nowhere to hide — the only correct response to being seen is movement.

Spatial structure:

- Linear entry from the boat dock, opening into a wide shallow bay
- Rocky outcroppings create natural cover nodes — but each one requires crossing open sand to reach
- Two patrol guards walk a fixed route along the tideline
- One stationary guard at the path leading inland — this is the first mandatory combat or bypass encounter

Key geometry decisions:

The tideline guards: Their patrol overlaps for 4 seconds at the centre point. A player who watches long enough discovers this window. A player who rushes gets caught in both patrol zones simultaneously. The level teaches patience by punishing aggression — consistent with the souls-lite design philosophy.

The rocks: Height variation is intentional. Low rocks provide crouch cover. High rocks can be climbed with a jump — and reveal that the Docks are visible from the top, giving the player early spatial context for where they're going. Not mandatory, not signposted.

The path guard: Cannot be bypassed without engaging. This is deliberate — the game's first parry opportunity. The guard's attack animation is slower than interior enemies. He is the tutorial the game never announces.

Environmental storytelling:

- Wrecked fishing nets — still in the water, not repaired. The fishing trade has stopped.
- Colonial administration flag on a pole at the path entry. First time the player sees the faction symbol.
- A small cairn of personal objects near the rocks — belongings of someone who left or was taken. No explanation given.

Encounter table:

Encounter	Type	Position	Notes
Tideline Patrol A	Guard · patrol	East tideline	2-point patrol route
Tideline Patrol B	Guard · patrol	West tideline	Route overlaps with A at centre
Path Sentry	Guard · stationary	Beach/Docks threshold	First parry tutorial; mandatory
Crab swarm hazard	Environmental	Rocks area (north)	Noise source; alerts guards if triggered

ZONE 2 — THE DOCKS

Design intent: Surveillance. The Docks are owned. Every sightline is contested. The player is moving through a space that was not built for them — wide loading corridors designed for cargo, not cover; elevated guard posts with angles the player can't reach yet; crane shadows that create pools of darkness worth remembering.

Spatial structure:

- Three parallel corridors: main thoroughfare (wide, watched), middle alley (medium, partially watched), and waterside maintenance path (narrow, mostly unlit)
- Two elevated guard towers at the far end — the player cannot fight their way through these directly with early-game loadout
- A locked warehouse (requires a key found in the Village) — seeds a return trip

- Crawlspace under Pier 3 connecting the main thoroughfare to the waterside path — discovered by crouching

Key geometry decisions:

Three parallel paths, one goal: The main thoroughfare is the obvious route and the most dangerous. The alley is the instinctive stealth route — but has a surprise patrol that punishes overconfidence. The waterside path requires finding the crawlspace and is genuinely safe, but empty of loot and NPCs. None of the three paths is objectively correct. The choice expresses the player's read of the space.

The guard towers: These are not clearable in Zone 2. They are present to establish a power asymmetry the player must navigate around, not through. Later in the game, when the player has tools to reach elevated positions, returning to these towers and seeing the same space from above is the reward.

The crane shadows: Three cranes cast hard shadows at night (day/night cycle active by this point). Moving through shadow reduces enemy detection range by 40%. The game never explains this — a player who notices the guards scanning less carefully in shadow learns by observation.

The locked warehouse: Visible through a window. Contains a corpse holding a document — lore about the administration's use of the lighthouse. Inaccessible until the Village. Seeds a reason to return.

Environmental storytelling:

- Cargo crates marked with both the colonial administration seal and a local guild mark — the same goods, claimed by two powers.
- A labour schedule pinned to the pier master's booth. The names on it are not administration names. The hours listed run from 4am to sunset.
- Bloodstain on the Pier 3 planking, not cleaned. Someone decided it wasn't worth cleaning.
- One guard eating alone, away from his post, looking at the sea. Small detail — not interactable — but he looks like someone who didn't choose to be here.

Encounter table:

Encounter	Type	Position	Notes
Main thoroughfare patrol	Guard × 2 · patrol	Thoroughfare	Overlapping patterns; 6s window
Alley ambush patrol	Guard × 1 · stationary	Mid-alley, in shadow	Surprise — breaks expected pattern
Tower guards	Guard × 2 · stationary	Towers, far end	Unkillable this run; establish asymmetry

Encounter	Type	Position	Notes
Pier 3 checkpoint	Guard × 1 · patrol	Near crawlspace entry	Can be bypassed via crawlspace
Night dog	Environmental · patrol	Waterside path	Noise alert only; don't engage

ZONE 3 — FISHING VILLAGE & LIGHTHOUSE

Design intent: Human scale. Everything in the Beach and Docks was built to process power and cargo. The Fishing Village is built for people — small doors, low ceilings, mismatched additions, the smell of actual cooking. The player's movement feels different here. Less surveilled. The streets are narrow not because of military design but because of how a real settlement grows.

The Lighthouse is the exception. It was built here but it does not belong here.

Spatial structure:

- Organic street layout — no grid; paths follow the coastline and then turn inland unpredictably
- Four interactable NPCs in ground-floor buildings (two give quests, two give lore; all four can be revisited)
- A central courtyard space — the original village square, now underused, a colonial notice board at its centre
- The Lighthouse: a linear vertical challenge accessible from the courtyard, five floors, roof payoff
- An underground entrance hidden beneath a trap door in the fishmonger's — access to the Ancients layer (locked for now; seeded for later)

Key geometry decisions:

Narrow streets as protection: The Village's irregular layout means guards can't patrol it efficiently. Two guards are present — but their routes are constantly interrupted by buildings they can't see around. The Village is not guard-free; it is ungovernable. That is the point.

The village square notice board: The colonial administration has posted public orders here. They are in a different language than the NPCs speak. Nobody is reading them. The square itself is empty during the day; the game's first safe rest point is a doorstep nearby, which is active from dusk.

The Lighthouse vertical:

- Floor 1: Storage (repurposed fishing equipment now mixing with signal equipment)

- Floor 2: Guard bunk room — two sleeping guards, one awake (night only: sleeping guards removed)
- Floor 3: Signal room — operating the colonial communication system. A device the player can interact with but not yet understand.
- Floor 4: Utility crawl — tight space, crouching required; bypasses Floor 3 guard position
- Roof: The payoff. Open. The entire coastline is visible. The Docks, the Beach, the sea. For the first time the player can see where they've been. A crow is perched on the railing. No game mechanic. It is simply there.

The fishmonger's trapdoor: Behind a false wall of crates. Requires nudging the crates (interact prompt, not obvious). Below: a short tunnel ending in a locked iron door. Locked. The key is not in this zone. First seed of the Ancients layer.

NPC placement:

NPC	Location	Function	Notes
The Mender	House 2, ground floor	Quest giver — wants the lighthouse key	Exposition on the lighthouse's original purpose
The Archivist	House 4, upper floor	Lore — knows the administration's history here	Only speaks at night
The Harbour Child	Courtyard (day only)	Points toward the locked warehouse	Doesn't explain why she knows
The Night Fisherman	Docks-Village threshold, dusk	Gives the crawlspace location if asked	Costs one coin

Environmental storytelling:

- Houses have two sets of objects: the family's originals and the administration's additions. The original objects are lower to the ground, older, more worn. The administration additions are uniform and recent.
- Fishing boats in the harbour — still here, still usable. But no one is using them. The nets from the Beach tell you why.
- The Lighthouse light itself: it rotates every 90 seconds. When it sweeps the Village, the residents go indoors. This happens whether the player is watching or not.
- On the Lighthouse roof: an old signal mirror, pre-colonial, pointing toward the sea. Someone put it there before the administration arrived. Someone kept it there after.

Encounter table:

Encounter	Type	Position	Notes
Village patrol A	Guard · patrol	Main street	Interrupted route; 12s safe window
Village patrol B	Guard · patrol	South alley	Rarely completes full route; distracted
Lighthouse Floor 2 guard	Guard · stationary	Floor 2 (night: absent)	First indoor combat space
Lighthouse Floor 3 guard	Guard · stationary	Signal room	Can be bypassed via Floor 4 crawl
Roof crow	Non-combat	Lighthouse roof	Environmental; no interaction

5.0 Level Flow & Pacing



Pacing intention:

- High → Medium → Low → Medium → Low
- The level deliberately ends on a low-intensity moment (the roof, the crow, the view). The player should leave Zone 3 with information and questions, not with adrenaline.
- The beach front-loads difficulty so the player arrives at the Village having already learned the parry and the dodge. They are competent by the time they need to talk to people.

6.0 Return Visit Design

This level is designed to reward revisiting:

Trigger	What becomes accessible
Village key obtained	Locked warehouse in Docks — lore document about lighthouse, corpse item
Ancients key obtained	Fishmonger's trapdoor — entry to underground layer
Lighthouse signal device understood	Floor 3 interaction unlocks; changes who arrives at the docks
Night cycle (dusk)	Archivist NPC becomes available; sleeping Lighthouse guards; rest point activates
Mender quest completed	New dialogue from all four Village NPCs; notice board changes

7.0 Art Direction Notes

Beach:

Low tide. Wet sand. The colour palette is grey and iron — no warmth. The colonial flag is the only deliberate colour accent (deep burgundy). Rain is present but light. The sound design carries more weather than the visuals.

Docks:

Industrial scale next to domestic scale. Wide planking, metal fittings, crane arms. The administration's additions are visually distinct from the original dock construction — newer material, different joinery, slightly wrong proportions for the space. The older structures sag. The new structures are rigid.

Fishing Village:

Warmer. Ochre and rust. Low light sources — oil lamps, not the administration's installed electrics. The administration's signage is the only thing in the village that is visually clean and maintained. Everything else is well-used.

Lighthouse:

Tall against a flat sky. The original structure is weathered stone. The administration has added metal cladding on the upper floors — you can see where the old material ends and the new begins. At the top, the original masonry is visible again. The crane at the top that raises the signal equipment was installed last and looks temporary.

8.0 Known Design Risks

Risk	Mitigation
Beach patrol overlap window too narrow	Extend to 6s minimum; playtest with first-time players
Crawlspace not discovered by players	Add one NPC hint (Night Fisherman costs a coin — makes it feel earned, not signposted)
Lighthouse ascent feels too linear	Floor 4 crawl bypass must be obvious from Floor 3 if the player is crouching — check sightlines
Village guards trivialised once parry is learned	Guards in Village use irregular timing — slightly off the rhythm established in Beach. Prevents pattern lock.
Roof payoff too quiet (players may not stay)	One ambient sound trigger on the roof — distant singing from the Village below, heard only from height

Punk Noir is in development. This LDD documents the design logic for the opening level sequence.

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