ESCAPE PROTOCOL

LEVEL DESIGN DOCUMENT

Field	Detail
Designer	Sarthak Bankar
Genre	Action-Adventure / Stealth
Type	Blockout
Tools	AGLS, Blueprint Visual Scripting
Iterations	6+
Playtests	12+
Version	Final
Engine	Unreal Engine 5.7

1. LEVEL CONCEPT

A military officer is trapped inside a prison overtaken by a mafia gang attempting to free their boss. All exits are blocked. The only way out is the helicopter extraction point on Tower 1. The player must navigate through four towers, a hostile courtyard, and escalating enemy presence — managing limited resources and making real-time decisions under pressure.
The level is designed around one core promise: every major decision belongs to the player. Stealth and combat are equally valid at every encounter. Exploration is rewarded but never required. The environment guides without instructing.

2. DESIGN PILLARS

Pillar 1 — Player Agency Every major encounter and traversal section supports both stealth and combat. The player is never forced into a single approach. Both paths are challenging, both are valid, both lead to the same destination.

Pillar 2 — Environment as Teacher No waypoints. No mini maps. The environment communicates through lighting, spatial design, and prop placement. The player learns through observation and action, not instruction.

Pillar 3 — Deliberate Escalation Intensity builds across all six beats — introducing mechanics one at a time, layering complexity only after the player has demonstrated understanding. The player is never overwhelmed before they are ready.

Pillar 4 — Exploration Has Value Optional routes reward players with better weapons and tactical information. Players who push straight through still progress. Curiosity is rewarded, never required.

Pillar 5 — Narrative Through Space No cutscenes. No forced dialogue. The story is told through readable notes, proximity-triggered monologues, environmental lighting, and spatial context. The player uncovers the situation at their own pace.

3. PLAYER FANTASY

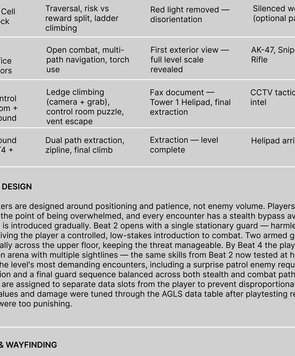
The player should feel like a tactical military officer — calm under pressure, resourceful, and always one decision ahead of the chaos around them. Not a superhero. Not helpless. Someone who reads a room, makes a call, and lives with the consequences.

4. LEVEL LAYOUT

Macro Structure
Escape Protocol is organised around four towers — T1, T2, T3, T4 — connected by bridges, with an open central courtyard between them. The prison sits in a remote canyon, completely isolated.

Tower	Role	Position
Tower 1	Extraction — Helipad	Top Right
Tower 2	Start — Interior, Cell Block	Top Left
Tower 3	Mid — Office Floors, Control Room	Bottom Left
Tower 4	Late — Exterior Climb, Zipline	Bottom Right

Connections
- T2 → T3 via bridge (Beat 3 exit)
- T3 → Ground via slant drop (Beat 5)
- Ground → T4 via courtyard (Beat 6)
- T4 → T1 via dual ziplines (Beat 6 climax)



5. PLAYER FLOW

Macro Flow
Tower 2 (Start) → Tower 3 (Mid) → Ground Level (Courtyard) → Tower 4 → Tower 1 (Extraction)
The macro flow is linear — one clear direction toward the helipad. The micro flow within each tower is non-linear — multiple routes, optional paths, and player-driven exploration exist at every level.
Flow Principles
- Forward momentum is always clear even when the exact route is not
- Dead ends are never punishing — they contain rewards or narrative content
- Point-of-no-return moments are deliberate and clearly communicated
- The player is never lost at the macro level, only uncertain at the micro level

6. BEAT SHEET

Beat	Location	Mechanics	Narrative	Reward	Intensity
1	T1 Floors	Movement onboarding walk, run, jump, ledge grab, torch, crouch, crawl	Silent setup — collapsed entrance, red light notice board	Direction lead	Low
2	T2 Floors+ Interiors	Stealth takedown, first combat, weapon storage	First note — mafia siege, stay quiet	Ammo, firearms, practice area	Low → Medium
3	T2 Cell Block	Traversal, risk vs reward split, ladder climbing	Red light removed — disorientation	Silenced weapon (optional path)	Medium
4	T3 Office Floors	Open combat, multi-path navigation, torch use	First exterior view — full level scale revealed	AK-47, Sniper Rifle	Medium → High
5	T3 Control Room + Ground	Ledge climbing (camera + grab), control room puzzle, vent escape	Fax document — Tower 1 Helipad, final extraction	CCTV tactical intel	High
6	Ground + T4 + T1	Dual path extraction, zipline, final climb	Extraction — level complete	Helipad arrival	High

7. ENCOUNTER DESIGN

Combat encounters are designed around positioning and patience, not enemy volume. Players are never outnumbered to the point of being overwhelmed, and every encounter has a stealth bypass available.
Enemy presence is introduced gradually. Beat 2 opens with a single stationary guard — harmless until approached — giving the player a controlled, low-stakes introduction to combat. Two armed gunmen follow, separated vertically across the upper floor, keeping the threat manageable. By Beat 4 the player faces multiple guards in an open arena with multiple sightlines — the same skills from Beat 2 now tested at higher intensity. Beat 6 delivers the level's most demanding encounters, including a surprise patrol enemy requiring an immediate decision and a final guard sequence balanced across both stealth and combat paths.
Enemy weapons are assigned to separate data slots from the player to prevent disproportionate damage output. Health values and damage were tuned through the AGLS data table after playtesting revealed default enemy settings were too punishing.

8. NAVIGATION & WAYFINDING

Primary Navigation System — Red Emergency Light
Red light is the level's core navigation tool. Players follow it instinctively without being told to. It is present at every key decision point and transition throughout the level.
The rule is established explicitly in Beat 1 — a notice board reads: "Follow red light for emergency exit." From that point the system operates silently.

Deliberate Navigation Disruption
In Beat 3 the red light is intentionally removed. The player experiences genuine disorientation — tight spaces, no clear direction, unfamiliar routes. When red light reappears, the psychological relief confirms how fully the player had internalised the navigation system.

Exterior Orientation — Tower Labels
All four towers are labelled with large exterior signage visible from ground level and across the courtyard. Playtesting revealed players could not identify towers from outside despite the fax document referencing Tower Labels were added and orientation problems resolved immediately.

Secondary Wayfinding Tools
- CCTV monitors in Beat 5 show escape platforms ahead — rewarding curious players with tactical advance knowledge
- Proximity monologues provide directional and narrative context at key transitions
- Lighting contrast between indoor red emergency light and outdoor natural daylight maintains clear spatial orientation between interior and exterior spaces

9. SPATIAL PACING

The level deliberately alternates between tight and open spaces across all six beats to control tension and player emotion.
Tower 2 opens with narrow corridors and low ceilings — building claustrophobic pressure early and limiting the player's options. Beat 3 pushes this further with a dark, disorienting cell block that removes the red light entirely, forcing the player to navigate uncertainty without their primary guide.
Beat 4 breaks the tension. A bridge connecting the towers delivers the first full exterior view — open sky, canyon surroundings, and all four towers visible simultaneously. After the compression of Beats 1 through 3, this moment functions as both a visual reward and a spatial orientation reset.
The central courtyard in Beat 6 is intentionally the largest space in the entire level. After five beats of tight interiors, open ground feels simultaneously liberating and exposed — exactly the emotional tension required for the final push toward extraction.

10. REWARD STRUCTURE

All rewards are optional. Players who explore gain advantages — better weapons, tactical information — but players who push straight through still complete the level. Stealth players find suppressors. Combat players find rifles. Every reward reinforces the playstyle the player has already chosen rather than pushing them toward a new one.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL STORYTELLING

No cutscenes. No forced stops. The story is told entirely through readable notes, fax documents, proximity monologues, and the environment itself — collapsed structures, debris, and siege damage communicate the prison's state without a single line of exposition. Players who engage with the environment get the full story. Players who push forward still understand their objective. The fax document in Beat 5 is the narrative turning point — up to that moment the player was surviving on instinct, after reading it they have a clear destination and a sense of urgency.

12. LIGHTING DESIGN

Red emergency lighting serves as both atmosphere and navigation throughout all interior spaces. Outdoors, natural canyon daylight creates immediate contrast — the player always knows whether they are inside or outside. Subtle red cues mark optional reward locations for attentive players without making them obvious. Beat 3 removes red light entirely, using darkness as a deliberate tension mechanic rather than a technical limitation.

13. TRAVERSAL DESIGN

Every traversal mechanic is introduced in Beat 1 through environmental design — each one required to progress, each encountered before it becomes critical later. Ledge climbing complexity increases deliberately across the level. Beats 1 through 4 use linear sequences — up, down, left, right. Beat 5 places ledges directly opposite each other, requiring simultaneous camera movement and grab input. Players who had built instinct through earlier beats navigated this naturally without a single prompt.

14. TECHNICAL NOTES

Built in Unreal Engine 5.7 using AGLS by LongmireLocomotion for all locomotion and animation systems. All interactive logic, triggered sequences, and monologue systems were built using Blueprint Visual Scripting. AGLS does not include a native health pickup system. Rather than engineering a workaround, encounters were restructured so skilled players would rarely lose health — reducing enemy numbers, simplifying combat sequences, and shifting design focus toward traversal and spatial clarity. This constraint produced a cleaner, more intentional encounter structure than the original design intended.