READY OR NOT

THE COST OF CULTURE — USC Villard Museum

MISSION DESIGN & LORE DOCUMENT

Nationalist Terrorism, Cultural Heritage, and Level Design

Wilson Xhaflaire
Historian, Level Designer

Foreword

The Cost of Culture is a custom mod map built for *Ready or Not*, developed in Unreal Engine 5 and released on Nexus Mods. Before any blockout existed, this project started from a question about the base game itself: The Hand, one of *Ready or Not*'s antagonist factions, appears in only two of the game's story missions despite being one of its more developed pieces of background lore. I wanted to explore what a mission built specifically around the group's stated motivations, rather than around a generic hostage or active-shooter template, could look like.

This document is not a claim about any real organization. The Hand is a fictional faction created by VOID Interactive for *Ready or Not*. This mission is an unofficial, non-commercial fan project and is not affiliated with, endorsed by, or connected to VOID Interactive. Where this document references real historical events, it does so to explain the design reasoning behind the mission, not to draw a direct equivalence between a real tragedy and a piece of fiction.

On the Location: USC Villard Museum

The mission is set in a fictional university museum built for this project, the USC Villard Museum, modeled on the exhibition spaces and circulation of the USC Fisher Museum of Art. It hosts a temporary exhibition of Yemeni cultural artifacts at the time of the attack, the detail that the mission's plot turns on.

The Hand: Established In-Game Lore

The Hand's hand-print iconography as it appears in Ready or Not's world dressing.

In Ready or Not, The Hand (Arabic: اليد, transliterated Al-Yad) is presented as a Yemeni nationalist militant group, said to have been founded by a figure named Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr to oppose U.S. military involvement in Yemen. According to the game's background material, an in-fiction federal agency tracked the group for years before it established a covert domestic cell in Los Suños, the game's fictional American city, around 2015.

The faction's two confirmed appearances in the base game's story missions are:

Neon Tomb — a mass shooting at a nightclub, staged as retaliation for a U.S. airstrike on a Yemeni town tied to the group's leadership, said in-game to have killed civilians.

Relapse — a follow-up mission in which the player's SWAT unit thwarts an attempt by The Hand to free its captured leader.

Both missions frame the group primarily through the active-shooter and hostage-rescue template common to the rest of the game, with the group's stated politics delivered mostly through found documents and a recovered manifesto rather than through the mission structure itself.

A Narrative Gap: Design Opinion

The following is my own reading as a level designer, not a claim about the developers' intent.

My reading of The Hand is that the faction's writing outpaces its playable footprint. Two missions is not much room to develop a group whose backstory ties together foreign policy, retaliation, and a stated grievance about cultural and political sovereignty. Both existing missions also resolve into essentially the same beat: an active-shooter scene the player's team must end. Neither mission places the player inside a scenario shaped by what the group says it is fighting for, rather than the raw fact that it is willing to use force.

This is the design gap The Cost of Culture tries to fill: a mission where the group's stated ideology, and not only its willingness to use violence, decides the shape of the level.

Real-World Reference: The Bardo National Museum Attack, 2015

The Bardo National Museum, Tunis, Tunisia. Used for research reference.

To ground a fictional scenario about a nationalist group attacking a museum, I looked at a real precedent: the attack on the Bardo National Museum in Tunis, Tunisia, on 18 March 2015.

That afternoon, gunmen opened fire on tourists arriving by bus outside the museum, then moved inside and took hostages. Tunisian security forces ended the siege later that day. Reported death tolls vary slightly by source, generally between twenty-one and twenty-four people including the attackers, with dozens more wounded; most of the victims were foreign tourists. The Islamic State claimed responsibility, while Tunisian authorities attributed the attack to a local Al-Qaeda-linked splinter group, the Uqba ibn Nafi Brigade. The museum sits adjacent to Tunisia's parliament building, and officials have suggested the parliament, not the museum, may have been the original target. The Bardo is best known internationally for one of the world's largest collections of Roman-era mosaics.

The Bardo attack is a useful design reference for one reason in particular: it shows that a museum holding a nation's own cultural patrimony can become the target of ideologically motivated, mass-casualty violence, independent of the objects' monetary value. That is the real-world anchor for the fictional premise that follows, not an implication that the Bardo attackers, or any real group, shared The Hand's fictional backstory.

Design Rationale: From Reference to Premise

The Bardo case supplied a structural idea rather than a plot to copy: a museum can be attacked not for what its collection is worth on paper, but for what it represents. For The Hand, a fictional group built around Yemeni nationalism and resentment of foreign intervention, a plausible escalation is a target tied to Yemen's own cultural heritage, rather than a Western public space such as the nightclub already used in Neon Tomb.

That reasoning produced the mission's premise: a university museum exhibition of Yemeni antiquities, framed by the cell as objects that belong at home rather than in a foreign institution.

The scenario borrows the real Bardo attack's basic shape, an assault on a cultural site, a failed clean extraction, a resulting hostage situation, and rebuilds the motive around the fictional faction's own logic instead of a generic terrorist-attack template.

Mission Premise: The Cost of Culture (Fiction)

Everything below is fictional mission lore written for this project. It does not describe, endorse, or provide a plan for any real act of violence.

A Hand cell enters the USC Villard Museum during a exhibition of Yemeni cultural artifacts, intending to seize a set of pieces they present as heritage displaced by instability in Yemen, framing their planned theft in anti-colonial terms, a rhetorical position the mission depicts, not one this document endorses. The plan escalates immediately: guests and staff are killed as the cell moves through the galleries, making clear early on that this was never conceived as a bloodless heist.

The extraction fails. Unable to leave with the artifacts, the cell falls back to a second position: they take the surviving guests and staff hostage and rig the museum's key spaces with explosives. Their message to responders is simple and absolute: if the pieces cannot be recovered, no institution will be able to keep them either.

Mission Objectives

The mission's main objectives, as they appear in the in-game briefing, translate the premise above into the three overlapping pressures the player's SWAT unit has to manage at once:

- Bring Order to Chaos — clear and stabilize the museum floor by floor as the situation continues to escalate.
- Rescue All Civilians — locate and extract the surviving guests and staff held across the exhibition spaces.
- Defuse Bomb Threats — locate and disarm the explosive charges placed throughout the museum before they can be triggered.

None of these three objectives can be resolved in isolation: pushing toward hostages can walk the player into a charge, and rushing a charge can leave a hostage room unwatched. The floor plan, galleries, atriums, and a logistics and warehouse zone, is built to keep those three pressures in view of each other rather than letting the player clear the museum one problem at a time.

Design Intent & Next Steps

This premise is meant to support three specific design goals for the level:

Objective layering — hostage rescue and bomb disposal happening on the same floor at the same time, forcing the player to prioritize rather than clear rooms sequentially.

Readable escalation — the museum's own architecture should visibly show why an extraction plan built for a clean heist could unravel this badly.

A grounded antagonist — guard barks, found notes, and level dressing carry the cell's stated grievance without turning the mission into a lecture, in the same way I approached primary sources on Zemsty Nadszedł.

This document sits alongside the blockout, playtest notes, and full walkthrough on the mission's project page, which documents how these three goals were tested and adjusted during production.

Bibliography

Real-world sources on the Bardo National Museum attack

Human Rights Watch, “Tunisia: Deadly Attack on Museum-goers,” 18 March 2015.

BBC News, live coverage of the Bardo National Museum attack, 18 March 2015.

U.S. Department of State, statement on the attack at the National Bardo Museum, Tunis, 18 March 2015.

Wikipedia, “Bardo National Museum attack.”

Ready or Not lore sources

Ready or Not Wiki (Fandom), “The Hand.”

Ready or Not Wiki (Fandom), “Neon Tomb.”

Ready or Not Wiki (Fandom), “Ready or Not” (game overview and mission timeline).

Ready or Not, The Hand, and all related characters, missions, and lore are the property of VOID Interactive. This document and its accompanying mission, The Cost of Culture, are an unofficial, non-commercial fan project and are not affiliated with, endorsed by, or connected to VOID Interactive.