Gameplay Summary

Each battle begins with a statement of the criterium for Victory. This will typically involve moving all units to the Exit at the end of the map. On some occasions, prior intel will yield optional secondary objectives, such as rescuing civilians or destroying an enemy structure. Completion of the Victory Objective is all that is necessary to complete the level. There is also a statement of Failure criteria, which typically involves the death of Thorn or other Key Units (Units whose survival is necessitated by the narrative).

The map is made up of a grid of hexagons, with each hexagon indicating a type of terrain (Plains, Forest, Beach, City etc.). Each terrain type incurs a unique traversal cost to the unit's Energy Points, so the path chosen is of great tactical concern. Plains are flatlands crossed effortlessly by infantry while sandy Beaches take significant energy to march across. Forests offer cover, allowing units to move across it unseen by enemies, while Swamps threaten to forestall movement, leaving the unit more vulnerable to enemy attack.

Blacksands includes a dynamic weather system which has the potential to drastically change the conditions of the map. A rainstorm has the potential to rise the tide of the uncrossable Sea up over the Beach while it converts low-effort Plains terrain to high-effort Mud. During a thunderstorm, lightning could strike the Forest, catalyzing a blaze that spreads to adjacent tiles each turn.

Each unit has the option to move as far in a given direction as their Energy Points allow and, if an enemy or target is within range of their equipped weapon, launch an attack.

Each unit is equipped with one firearm and one melee weapon. If a unit should incur onto the same tile as an enemy (or vice versa), a Duel ensues during which the unit's movements are scripted and automatic while the player must focus on inputting a series of quicktime reflex events in order to guard, parry and subdue their opponent. Duels can sometimes yield unpredictable results and cost precious health, so until ammunition runs out, ranged combat is preferable.

Standard firearms such as pistols have a range of 1 Hexagon, rifles have a range of two Hexagons and unconventional weapons such as sniper-rifles or cannons could have a range of 4-6 Hexagons. The hitrate of a ranged attack is largely determined by the terrain the target is occupying. Forests and Cities offer superior protection from firearms, but can be leveled by arson or explosives.

On the first turn, much of the map is opaque with the "fog of war". The player is encouraged to proactively scout the area with their Telescope, which reveals a wider portion of the map around the unit's location, but they may also send their units toward the darkness, come what may.

There are two possible playstyles currently being explored in playtesting:

[What follows is a summary of gameplay as pertains to our initial design, referred to internally as Ruleset Saxony. As playtesting proceeds, this summary is liable to change and evolve as we iterate.]

The battle begins in the Player Phase, a turn during which the player seizes control of their combat units. The player inputs commands for each unit such as movement, attack and abilities.

After the Player phase is the Reckoning Phase, during which time dynamic weather and special events may occur. Any third-party units on the map, such as civilians, will move and act during this phase.

At the end of the Reckoning phase, the Enemy phase begins during which the Enemies move and act. During this phase Enemy reinforcements and ships may arrive unannounced.

After the Enemy phase, the next Round begins with the Player Phase and the Phases continuously proceed in this manner.

[End of Ruleset Saxony.]

[What follows is a summary of Ruleset Bavaria, an alternative design which will be explored in playtesting.]
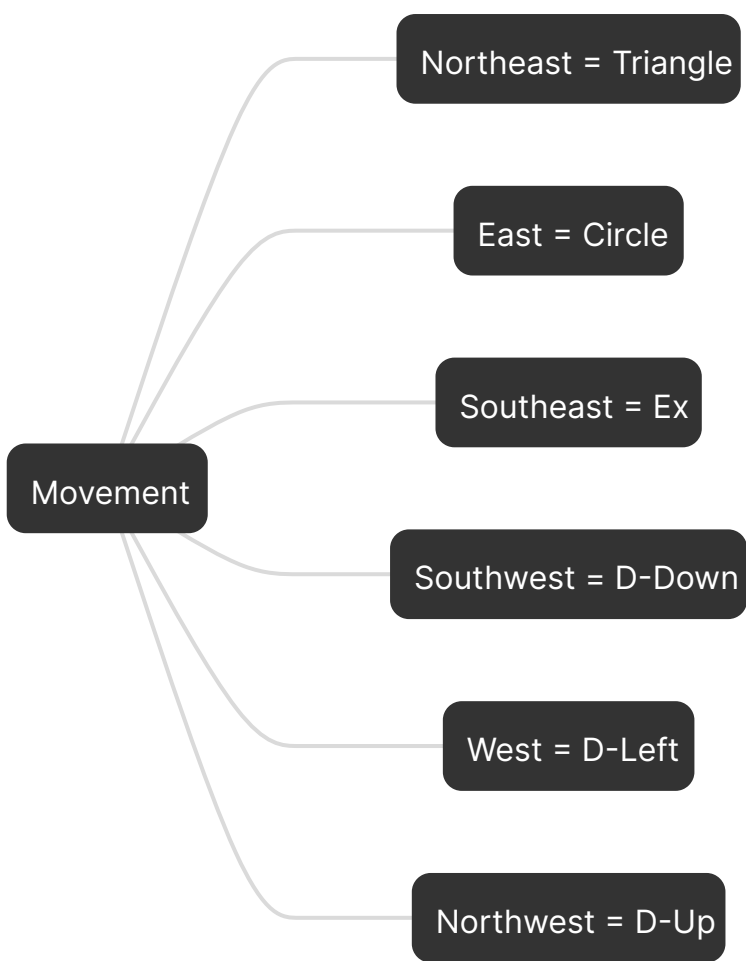
The Battle begins with the player able to begin moving and acting with their units. However, to compress time and create emergent tactical decisions, all actions occur in segmented time as in a classic Roguelike. For each single Movement (1 Hexagon) or action taken by the player, all other units are afforded a movement or action simultaneously. This means that enemies may move and act unpredictably as you move and act, raising the stakes of each action and inducing the tension of live combat. It also reduces the wait time of Enemy Phases. In this style, Weather and Special Events can occur at any moment.

[End of Ruleset Bavaria.]

Movement Style

Concept #1: Purchase Style
Movement is entered through "purchases" of adjacent hexes. Each hex around you has its price in EP and you must select one in order to move to it by "purchasing" it in EP. The advantage of this interface is that it encourages a thoughtful and frugal use of EP and does not rely on laborious or redundant cursor movement to identify a path. Movement is done one hex at a time, building tension throughout your turn as adjacent enemies/objects are given the opportunity to react to each step you take.

```
                    ┌──────────────────────┐
                ┌───│ Northeast = Triangle  │
                │   └──────────────────────┘
                │
                │   ┌──────────────────────┐
                ├───│    East = Circle      │
                │   └──────────────────────┘
                │
                │   ┌──────────────────────┐
                ├───│   Southeast = Ex      │
┌───────────┐   │   └──────────────────────┘
│ Movement  │───┤
└───────────┘   │   ┌──────────────────────┐
                ├───│ Southwest = D-Down    │
                │   └──────────────────────┘
                │
                │   ┌──────────────────────┐
                ├───│   West = D-Left       │
                │   └──────────────────────┘
                │
                │   ┌──────────────────────┐
                └───│  Northwest = D-Up     │
                    └──────────────────────┘
```

Concept #2: Freeroam Style
On a unit's Turn, the player is able to directly control character movement within the possible movement range using the left analog stick. The player walks the unit to the desired hex and uses dedicated button inputs to perform an action (launch an attack, use an item).

Duel (event)

A Duel can occur between two units with a sword equipped (or in some cases, a shovel). A Duel is a one-on-one fight between a soldier and a combatant. The enemy attacks with one of three types of sword attacks (Telegraphed to the player by their sword glowing one of three colors), and the player must press the appropriate button to parry the attack. High attacks are parried with Triangle, Mid attacks are parried with Circle and Low attacks are parried with Ex. A successful parry opens up the enemy to an attack which deals 1 damage. Attacking the enemy while his guard is not broken could very likely result in an enemy parry and attack which will cost you 1 HP. Duels typically continue to the death, but upon reducing the enemy to 1HP they may request mercy and offer themself up as a prisoner. Hardened, veteran pirates will not do this and you may not dispatch them non-lethally.

Ranged Attack

Unlike Duels, firefights deal damage determined by the roll of a D6 dice. A quicktime reflex event occurs each time a gun is fired. By pressing the corresponding button with exact timing, the player can ensure that their gun will not jam and add +1 to their dice roll. A firearm may be fired multiple times during an attack, but emptying the clip could result in the unit being vulnerable to counter-attack. What follows is a guide to D6 outcomes (per round fired) for standard firearms (DMG = damage):

Diceroll	Rifle	Pistol	Sniper
1	Miss	Miss	Miss
2	1DMG	1DMG	2DMG
3	2DMG	1DMG	2DMG
4	2DMG	2DMG	3DMG
5	2DMG	2DMG	4DMG
6	3DMG	2DMG	5DMG

Missing your quicktime event upon firing while rolling a 1 results in your gun jamming, meaning the weapon cannot be fired again until it is unjammed at an Energy Cost of 3.

Abilities

Abilities are distinct from Honors in that they are tied to a particular weapon and cannot be gained permanently by characters through Promotion. Each ability highlights the unique advantage (or disadvantage) of its Weapon. Some Weapons have multiple Abilities.

- Weapon

  - Ability
    - Description

- Rifle (Carabin)

  - [Stakeout](#)
    - Uses Energy Points to mark nearby Hexes for auto-attack. If a combatant enters that Hex before your next turn, they will immediately receive your attack.

- Sniper (Discarabin)

  - [Stakeout](#)
    - Uses Energy Points to mark nearby Hexes for auto-attack. If a combatant enters that Hex before your next turn, they will immediately receive your attack.
  - Delicate
    - This weapon is a delicate instrument and requires expert precision to operate. It cannot be wielded by a Partisan. Reloading costs 3AP, firing costs 4AP.

- Shotgun (Blunderbuss)

  - Spreadshot
    - This weapon fires a spread-shot. When attacking, select 2 adjacent Hexes as a target.
  - Delicate
    - This weapon is a delicate instrument and requires expert precision to operate. It cannot be wielded by a Partisan. Reloading costs 3AP, firing costs 4AP.

- Saber/Cutlass (Sabre/Coutela)

    - Duel
        - Ambush an enemy combatant by intruding onto their Hex. Complete a series of quicktime events to win a fight-to-the-death. Certain skilled swordsmen may be able to subdue and capture an opponent.

- Pistol (Pistolet)

    - Quick Draw
        - Like a certain legendary archaeologist, you have the chance to anti-climactically end a Duel before it even begins with a quick draw, even if you're the victim of a sneak attack.

- Shovel (Scofl)

    - Dig
        - This tool can Dig holes, altering the terrain you stand upon. (Create Trenches and Traps)
    - Faux-Duel
        - This weapon is not a sword, but in a pinch, you can make do. Defend yourself in a Duel, though your reaction time to quicktime events will be sluggish. Army shovels are lightweight and durable, but they're not designed to win duels.
    - Stun
        - Unlike a sword, this tool deals non-lethal damage and can incapacitate an enemy.

- Hammer (Mallet)

    - Build
        - This item can be used to build helpful structures. (Create Bridges and Ramps)
    - Stun
        - Unlike a sword, this tool deals non-lethal damage and can incapacitate an enemy.

Abilities are a key feature because they enable further Specialization even within a given Class (Sniper Scout vs. Knife Scout, Shovel Engineer vs. Hammer Engineer, Rifle Partisan vs. Pistol Partisan) increasing your Team's diversity without an overwhelmingly populated Class System.

Opportunities

Blacksands tells stories with level design. Where other tactical RPG levels merely include a couple of NPCs to speak with or a special enemy to recruit, Blacksands implements scripted events and branching pathways which enhance a level into an "Episode".

Episodes tell a story through scripted Opportunities. Opportunities are interactions within a level which involve making a choice that could completely change the landscape of the level.

Example:

Old Knife
Thorn leads what remains of the Unit to the agreed upon rendezvous point in Old Knife. As you flee from the beach where the invasion has begun, a mobile cannon unit has disembarked and is slowly but surely pursuing you

1. First Opportunity: Old Knife is burning. The elders have intentionally set flame to their own village. Why? It makes little sense to Thorn, but Sov explains: "They knew what was coming and they made the difficult choice to cut it off at the pass by any means necessary." Thorn looks at her quizzically, "What's coming?" "Something the gods feared." The huts and adobe houses are all overwhelmed by a roaring blaze. To make matters worse, pirates are in close pursuit of your Unit. The flames make it difficult for them to catch up to you, but there are people in those buildings! Will you stop to rescue the locals or will you fight your way to the South gate before enemy reinforcements arrive? `If you stay behind and rescue some locals, two young men will offer to join your cause, but if the pirates catch up with you they will re-capture The Man of The Earth.`

2. Second Opportunity: There is a surly old Gatekeeper manning the South gate. He is armerd with a sniper-rifle and grenades, and can hold out on his own for about 12 turns before being overwhelmed. If you make it to the South gate in time to rescue the Gatekeeper from a mob of pirates, he will plant TNT on the drawbridge, allowing you to destroy the mobile cannon detachment as they cross the drawbridge. `If you chose to rescue civilians early in the level, you will not make it in time to save the Gatekeeper, but you may be able to loot his sniper-rifle.`

3. Third Opportunity: There is an mining warehouse in Old Knife full of munitions and explosives. It is on fire. If you rescued the civilians, they will attempt to put out the fire. Around the tenth turn of the episode, if the fire is not quelled, the warehouse will explode, raining brick and mortar everywhere, damaging friend and foe alike. `If you manage to Raid the warehouse before it explodes, you can acquire extra ammunition, grenades and TNT. You can use the TNT to booby trap the pirate reinforcements, even if you could not save the Gatekeeper.`

Maneuvers

This is the first tutorial level of Blacksands. Before any sign of conflict appears, Thorn is training on the beach under the command of Commander Harlow.

> Thorne and her CO are practicing maneuvers at a beachside barracks. The player learns basic controls as Thorn, the main character. Thorn is a bit high-strung about being sent on patrol while her clan fights in the inland areas and says as much to Harlow. Shots ring out...

Teaches the player:

- How to move a unit
- How movement is limited by the terrain of each hex (Plains, Sand and Surf)
- How to use the TALK action
- How to use the WEAPON action (WEAPON > RIFLE + WEAPON > SWORD)

Units:

- Thorn
- Harlow (Officer)
- Amos
- Werner
- Gustavo
- 12x enlisted men

Enemies:
N/A

Civilians:
N/A

Opportunities:
N/A

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Enemies:
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Civilians:
N/A

Opportunities:
N/A

Red Harbor

> Red Harbor – Harlow and Thorn find a vagrant on the beach. He has seemingly tortured several animals and people to death, crucified them and is taking target practice on the beach. He surrenders and introduces himself as a Man of The Earth. The player can ask him why he's doing this and he replies that he was lonely and just wanted his friends to visit.

Teaches the player:

- How to use the CAPTURE action
- How to use the RESCUE action

Units:

- Thorn
- Harlow (Officer)
- Amos
- x8 enlisted men

Enemies:
N/A

Civilians:

- The Man of The Earth
  Opportunities:

1. You may optionally attempt to speak with The Man of The Earth, in which case you will ask him why he's killing animals on the beach and he will reply "I just wanted to see my friends again."

Tallow Beach

> Tallow Beach - Fog extends across the entire level. Massive ships appear beachside, drop drawbridges and disperse hundreds of armed pirates. The beach is hit with artillery fire and Harlow is killed. Amos and a detachment of alert riflemen join from a hospital looking for wounded. Thorn takes control and the first major battle of the game ensues.

Teaches the player:

- How to avoid negative terrain (Swamp, Mud)
- How to initiate DUEL (swordfight-to-the-death)
- How to use terrain to your advantage (Forest, City, Lighthouse)
- How to initiate FIRE-EXCHANGE (Attack with same weapon class)

Units:

- Thorn (Officer)
- Harlow (deceased)
- Amos
- x8 enlisted men (deceased)

Enemies:

- x7 Pirate thugs
- Pirate Captain
- Pirate Mobile Cannon Detachment (After turn 8)
- Pirate Battleschooner (After turn 8)

Civilians:

- The Man of The Earth

Opportunities:
TBD

Old Knife

> Old Knife - Thorn and her band flee to the village of Old Knife, looking for what's left of her command. Old Knife is an oil boomtown. When the player arrives the oil fields have been set ablaze along with the town. Bands of pirates are raiding the town and the player can decide to engage in combat or rescue people in buildings. If the player goes East or North enough, they will meet Sov, and her band of fighters. Sov is a scout and opens up stealth and distance combat actions. Her fighters have less health than the standard rifleman but increased accuracy and can conceal themselves for 2-3 turns.

```
*Gain scout class, gain Sov*
```

Teaches the player:

- How to enter buildings (to Raid or Rescue)
- How to recruit civilians
- How to EXAMINE areas

Units:

- Thorn (Officer)
- Sov
- Amos
- Arcadio (Engineer)

Enemies:

- x12 Pirate thugs
- Pirate Captain
- Pirate Mobile Cannon Detachment (After turn 10)

Civilians:

- The Man of The Earth
- Werner (recruitable)
- Gustavo (recruitable)

Opportunities:
TBD

Grace By Night

> Grace by Night – Sov explains that the town elders set the village on fire and killed themselves after the townspeople refused to fight. Night falls and Thorn and Sov hatch a plan to escape the town by night as the pirates overrun the level. Players can use the scout units to take out stragglers and use concealment to evade patrols and escape the city

Teaches the player:

- How to use stealth
- How to place explosives
- How to destroy structures
- How to build structures

Units:

- Thorn (Officer)
- Sov
- Arcadio (Engineer)
- Amos
- Recruits

Enemies:

- x18 Pirate thugs
- Pirate Captain
- Pirate Mobile Cannon Detachment

Civilians:

- The Man of The Earth
- The Gatekeeper

Opportunities:
TBD

Save Modes

Blacksands is a "Permadeath" Tactics game, meaning characters killed in Battle (with the exception of Thorn and Sov) are gone for good and must be replaced through recruitment or capture. That said, There are two Save Modes which can be selected at the start of the game

A Wrinkle In Time
The Battle Menu includes an option to restart the current battle from the beginning, undoing any recent deaths. Suggested for beginners of the genre.

Amor Fati
Autosave every turn. No option to restart a mission, and no turning back. Suggested for experienced tacticians.

Buildings

By approaching the hex at the front door of a building or improvised field dwelling (such as a barracks, armory, lighthouse or tent), you will be given the "Raid" action. By raiding a building, you will exhaust it of any available resources such as ammunition, medical supplies or key items. Buildings may be empty or there may be guards inside, in which case a tussle will occur inside (heard, but not seen) resulting in a minimal loss of health (Raids are always successful and never result in death for the player).

SCOPE

Using the SCOPE should feel like completing a scratch-off lottery ticket. At the start of a level, even if it is sunny out, enemy locations and equipment will be opaque to the player. By using the SCOPE to clarify a 4Hex radius around the character, enemy locations are "unlocked" with invigorating fanfare and, for enemies who are not Hidden, a visible range of movement and attack is revealed.

Certain types of "hidden" units can be detected by SCOPE, but only as an ominous "?". These hidden individuals should be given a wide berth, as their weapon and range are indeterminate. They could wield a sniper-rifle (4 range) or a cannon (5 range), but they could also just be a civilian in hiding or a decoy. Approach with caution and at your peril. The hidden entity will be revealed the moment they attack or are attacked.

The Spyglass (SPYGL), a modified SCOPE usable only by Scouts, has a range of 6Hexes.

Ships

On coastal battlefields, Naval Units can arrive to launch long-range attacks on the battlefield. Ships can occupy multiple Hexes and are typically only able to move 1Hex per turn, if at all. Ships are never fully hidden, even without use of the SCOPE they appear on the map as a "?". A cluster of "?" is obviously a large ship of some sort, though you will need to use the SCOPE to identify it's type and armament. Most ships are armed with a cannon with a range of 5 Hexes, so even when a ship appears far from shore it can be extremely dangerous. Avoid engaging with ships at all costs. Only a madman would try to take out an armed ship from land (though with the right equipment it might be possible...). Pirates cannot reliably shoot with standard firearms from a ship to land, so don't expect much resistance if you've confirmed there is no cannon.

-Schooner - Standard ship, 2×3 Hexes long. typically armed with one cannon and upwards of 10 AMMO. Can ferry up to 3 enemy pirates to land.

-Battleship - Elite ship, 3×5 Hexes long. Armed with 2 cannons and unlimited AMMO. Cannot dock on land.

-Carrier - Mobile infantry carrier, 3×4 Hexes long. No armament, but can ferry up to 6 enemy pirates or up to 2 mobile cannon units to land.

Mobile Cannon Unit

An extremely deadly deployment of 2 enemy pirates and one mobile cannon. The cannon itself is unmanned and requires 2 combatants to move and fire it, ideally Engineers. Reloading the cannon costs 6AP (collectively). Firing the cannon costs 5AP. Moving the cannon has a base cost of 4AP per Hex. 2 enemies Linked to the tank (moving in tandem with it) can expend 2AP each per movement (plus the AP cost of the terrain). As a result, Cannon Units are usually comprised of pirate Engineers with high EP and low HP. The Mobile Cannon Unit is a terror when approaching from a distance, but the high energy expenditure of manning the cannon leaves the Unit largely defenseless to close-quarters combat (if you can get close enough without being blown to bits...).

What follows is advanced Cannon knowledge that can be attained in-game by Talking to Whillis or Gyoo:

> Cannons roll effortlessly on Sand, Mud, Plains and City. Cannons are ill-equipped to enter Forests, but can traverse Mud, Sea or Ruins with a constructed bridge. A cannon cannot ascend or descend vertically without the assistance of a constructed ramp. Cannons cannot occupy elevated constructions such as Towers or Lighthouses.

Armed with this knowledge, an observant player can predict and even sabotage the likely path of a Mobile Cannon Unit.

Production

The demo must realize the following Unity scenes, at least

- BLACKSANDS "PRESS START" SCREEN
- MAIN MENU ("DEMO," "OPTIONS," "CREDITS")
- LEVEL D1 ([MANEUVERS](#))
- LEVEL D2 ([RED HARBOR](#))
- LEVEL D3 ([TALLOW BEACH](#))
- LEVEL D4 ([OLD KNIFE](#))
- "GAME OVER" SCREEN
- "THANKS FOR PLAYING!" SCREEN
    - PREVIEW OF BLACKSANDS
- CREDITS
- OPTIONS
- READ_ME

The following graphic elements must be created

- "MISSION COMPLETE" GRAPHIC
- PORTRAITS
    - THORN (YOUNG)
    - HARLOW
    - AMOS
    - SOV
    - THE MAN OF THE EARTH
    - GENERIC MASKED PIRATES
    - GENERIC PARTISANS
    - OLD KNIFE ELDERS
- HP/EP METER (CIRCULAR)
- WEAPON CLASS ICONS
    - SWORD/KNIFE
    - PISTOL/BLUNDERBUSS
    - RIFLE
    - SNIPER/BALLISTA
    - THROWABLE

- NO WEAPON
- ITEM CLASS ICONS
  - MEDKIT
  - BANDAGE
  - AMMO
  - SCOPE
- MAP
  - ILLUSTRATED MAP
  - GRID MAP
- TERRAIN ICONS
  - PLAINS
  - FOREST
  - SAND
  - SURF
  - SEA
  - SWAMP
  - MUD
  - CITY
- CURSOR
- ACTION MENU
- HEXAGON GRID
- CHARACTER SPRITES
- WEATHER ICONS
  - RAIN
  - TYPHOON
  - CYCLONE/TORNADO
  - FOG
  - FLAMES/SMOKE

The following audio elements must be produced:

- rainfall
- ocean shore waves
- forest birds/crickets/frogs
- gunfire
- painful shouts
- flames
- explosion (grenade, TNT)

- THORN
  - exclamations
    - "Aha!"
    - "No!"
    - "Yes!"
    - "Shit!"
    - "What's this?"
    - "I can't..."
  - commands
    - "Fire!"
    - "Move out!"
    - "Charge!"
    - "Medic!"
    - "Retreat!"
- PIRATES
  - grunting
  - "Get em!"
  - "Light em up!"
  - "Die!"
- Dialogue
- Music
  - Blacksands Theme song
  - Military training music (drumline)
  - Ominous Tune (Enter The Man of The Earth) / Supernatural Invasion
  - Battle Hymn (Tallow Beach)
    - Split into four voices, one for each unit
  - Inferno Hymn (Old Knife)
    - Split into four voices, one for each unit
  - Dark Decisions (Farewell Old Knife)
  - Thorn's Theme
    - Played on Thorn's signature instrument, Viola
  - Sov's Theme
    - Played on Sov's signature instrument, Piano
  - Black Sands, Red Harbour (Blacksands Ending Theme)