

The Banquet's Empty Seat

120-minute plan · 4 players · Follow the evidence

Place cards have been moved at a five-seat civic supper. Four guests have practical seating needs, and a fifth setting seems to belong to someone nobody invited.

Content notice: Social awkwardness and access needs. Treat every guest's stated need as ordinary and credible; no character must justify a personal condition.

GM overview

Draw five adjacent chair boxes numbered 1 through 5 from the serving door to the window. Put movable name slips for Daro, Ilen, Omi, Nessa, and CREW beside them. The room survey says the chime is audible at 1-2, the centerpiece is at 3, and useful daylight reaches only 5. Reply slips say Nessa needs daylight; Daro needs an end seat away from the centerpiece; Ilen needs the chime; Omi must sit beside Ilen and cannot take the door chair. Therefore Nessa takes 5, Daro takes 1, Ilen takes 2, Omi takes 3, leaving 4 for the crew. The authorizing memo plus Pem's lift record establish why the fifth setting exists and why cards moved; neither implies a snub. Have players explain one dependency each rather than guessing a complete permutation. A plausible equivalent accommodation, such as moving the drawing lamp, should use the quiet-meal ending with an explicit change, not silently rewrite the fixed room evidence.

What is really happening

A spilled jug made steward Pem lift the place cards without preserving their order. The fifth setting was always a rotating meal place for the delivery crew, not an omitted guest. The room's fixed features and the guests' reply slips yield one workable arrangement: Daro at 1, Ilen at 2, Omi at 3, the crew place at 4, and Nessa at 5. Publicly correcting the preparation record restores a formal supper; seating by practical needs without speeches makes a quieter meal while the record waits.

Opening agreement and read-aloud

Agree on subjects to soften or skip. Each player names an ordinary skill and a reason to help. Evidence does not require a successful roll; uncertainty changes time, cost or obligations.

Five bowls steam at a long table. Four guests stand beside a stack of damp place cards. At the fifth setting, someone has written CREW in pencil. Pem looks from the cards to the waiting soup. "I can put names down," they say, "but I would rather put them in the right places."

Time and preparation

120 minutes: Practical needs and an honest welcome

Opening agreement: 10 minutes

Hear requests and map the room: 25 minutes

Investigate the fifth setting and spill: 25 minutes

Test the arrangement with the guests: 30 minutes

Write a welcome the evidence supports: 20 minutes

Closure and debrief: 10 minutes

Give each player one requirement to defend and one record to question. The longer game allows a witnessed re-survey or an accommodation redesign, while a quiet meal remains preferable if the guests do not want a public explanation.

Starting information: Discover cards in play

Starting state: Table-setting intervals = 6; All four needs accommodated = false; Fifth setting explained = false;

Preparation record corrected = false; Witnessed re-survey complete = false

With 4 players: share the roles of mapper, evidence keeper, speaker and timekeeper.

If the group gets stuck

At the window recess, re-survey costs two intervals and recovers missing observational knowledge with direct witnesses. If no consistent fixed plan is available, shared-service changes the meal format openly, reserves crew food, and leaves the banquet arrangement unresolved.

Supper foyer

Read aloud: Nobody sits. Omi has turned a name card over so the blank side faces the room.

GM: Read the reply slips as guest requests, not embarrassing revelations. The players are asked to solve the arrangement, not adjudicate whether needs are valid.

Choice: Read the guests' practical requests

Ask: Give every request equal standing and make four movable name slips.

Requires: Available. Reveal Four guest reply slips

Result: The group records each need without asking guests to defend it.

Five-chair table

Read aloud: A service chime sounds at the door end. At the other end, a square of daylight falls on a drawing board.

GM: Lay out five chair boxes. Announce the fixed positions clearly. Players may manipulate slips freely; mark the accommodation only once they explain every request.

Choice: Number the five physical chairs

Ask: Mark the chime, centerpiece, doorway, and actual patch of drawing light.

Requires: Available. Reveal Five-chair room survey

Result: The table map distinguishes fixed room features from movable name cards.

Choice: Test a complete seating arrangement

Ask: Place all five slips and explain how each of the four guest requests is met.

Requires: (Five-chair room survey + Four guest reply slips or Witnessed re-survey complete is true). Spend 1 Table-setting intervals. All four needs accommodated: true

Result: Daro takes 1, Ilen 2, Omi 3, the rotating crew place 4, and Nessa 5.

GM: If a proposed arrangement misses a need, point to that exact request and let the group move slips again; only record this action when all constraints are met.

Choice: Begin a quiet meal and defer the speeches

Ask: Use the workable seating now and put the unresolved preparation record on tomorrow's list.

Requires: All four needs accommodated is true.

Result: Soup is served where each guest can use their place; the formal announcement waits.

Closure: Good soup before good speeches

Pantry hatch

Read aloud: A delivery worker checks a small box beside "first bowl," then goes back to unloading.

GM: The authorizing memo explains the rotating crew place without assigning it to an absent dignitary. The crew can eat later at the hatch if a buffet is chosen.

Choice: Check why five meals were authorized

Ask: Compare the invited count with the separately authorized crew bowl.

Requires: Available. Reveal Authorized meal count

Result: The kitchen confirms a rotating meal place was planned from the start.

Linen alcove

Read aloud: Five dry rectangles mark where cards once rested on the wet cloth. Pem has saved the runner rather than hiding it.

GM: Pem's lift record documents the spill and arbitrary stacking order. It cannot tell the group the final seating; that still needs the room and replies.

Choice: Reconstruct the spill and card lifting

Ask: Which order did Pem preserve, and which order was lost?

Requires: Available. Reveal Pem's linen record

Result: Pem identifies the practical mistake without claiming to remember the seating order.

Choice: Explain the fifth setting from two records

Ask: Combine the authorized meal count with Pem's recorded sequence.

Requires: (Authorized meal count + Pem's linen record or Witnessed re-survey complete is true). Fifth setting explained: true

Result: The fifth bowl is recognized as the original crew commitment, and the card movement as spill cleanup.

Window recess

Read aloud: Nessa tests a pencil line in the light. From here the service chime is barely audible.

GM: A witnessed re-survey costs two intervals and checks all needs directly with the guests. It reconstructs missing observational knowledge without inventing a lost card.

Choice: Repeat the survey with guests and kitchen witnesses

Ask: Spend two intervals directly checking requests, physical positions, and the retained crew authorization?

Requires: Available. Spend 2 Table-setting intervals. Witnessed re-survey complete: true

Result: The guests and kitchen confirm the constraints and original crew meal in a new signed note.

Host's notice stand

Read aloud: The host's speech begins with "Every place was prepared for a reason." The next line is still blank.

GM: The group may make an accurate formal announcement only after correcting the fifth-setting record. A quiet supper can begin with practical seating and a promise to correct paperwork later.

Choice: Correct the supper's preparation record

Ask: Name the spill, the accommodation plan, and the rotating crew place without inventing an absent guest.
Requires: All four needs accommodated is true and Fifth setting explained is true. Spend 1 Table-setting intervals. Preparation record corrected: true
Result: Pem signs the corrected record and leaves the crew place visible on the supper plan.

Choice: Open with the accurate welcome

Ask: Read the corrected arrangement and invite everyone to the places prepared for them.
Requires: All four needs accommodated is true and Preparation record corrected is true.
Result: The welcome names practical care and crew hospitality instead of an invented seating controversy.
Closure: A place prepared for each need

Connections and changing routes

Supper foyer - Five-chair table: Guest entrance. Available.
Supper foyer - Pantry hatch: Serving passage. Available.
Pantry hatch - Linen alcove: Work corridor. Available.
Linen alcove - Five-chair table: Runner passage. Available.
Five-chair table - Window recess: Window end. Available.
Five-chair table - Host's notice stand: Host end. Available.
Linen alcove - Host's notice stand: Back-of-house door. Available.
Window recess - Host's notice stand: Quiet wall walk. Available.

Ilen - Guest coordinating service

Goal: Hear the chime without interrupting every course.
Offers: A clear seating request and help checking adjacency.
Will not accept: A promise to shout later is not the requested quiet accommodation.
Voice: Explains the chime's function in one sentence.

Omi - Guest and interpreter

Goal: Sit beside Ilen away from the busy doorway.
Offers: Movable name slips and a patient restatement of all requests.
Will not accept: Will not take chair 1 just to make the arrangement look tidy.
Voice: Repeats a request in simpler words without changing it.

Nessa - Guest making the supper sketch

Goal: Work where the remaining daylight reaches.
Offers: A drawing that documents the agreed setting.
Will not accept: Needs actual light, not a ceremonial window-facing title.
Voice: Demonstrates by drawing one visible line.

Pem - Supper steward

Goal: Correct the spill's consequences and keep crew meals visible.

Offers: The wet runner, preparation memo, and a quiet-meal alternative.

Will not accept: Will not pretend the crew place belongs to an invented absent guest.

Voice: Admits the exact action taken, then asks what to fix.

Reasoning: Every stated need fits one five-chair arrangement

The room supplies physical constraints and the slips supply personal requirements; combining them fixes four guests and leaves chair 4 for crew.

Evidence combinations: Five-chair room survey + Four guest reply slips

Reasoning: The crew place was planned before the spill

Independent authorization and a dated preparation sequence establish the fifth setting's purpose and the cause of the moved cards.

Evidence combinations: Authorized meal count + Pem's linen record

Discovery card: Five-chair room survey

Give only when revealed in play.

Chairs 1-5 run from serving door to window. Service chime audible at 1 and 2. Centerpiece stands beside 3.

End seats are 1 and 5. Useful drawing light reaches only 5. Draw five adjacent boxes before placing names.

Player task: Build a physical constraint map; adjacent means consecutive chair numbers.

GM answer: Fixed room features translate the reply slips into a unique arrangement.

Discovery card: Four guest reply slips

Give only when revealed in play.

Ilen: please seat me where I hear the chime. Omi: beside Ilen, but away from the door chair. Nessa: at the drawing light. Daro: an end seat away from the centerpiece. Fifth name slip is blank except CREW.

Player task: Place the name slips, then explain one person's need at a time.

GM answer: Together with the room: Daro 1, Ilen 2, Omi 3, CREW 4, Nessa 5. Daro is a guest represented by the reply, not an additional negotiating party.

Discovery card: Authorized meal count

Give only when revealed in play.

Prepare four invited guest bowls and one rotating delivery-crew bowl. Five settings authorized before invitations were returned. Crew members trade the fifth place between courses; keep it labelled CREW. Signed host and kitchen.

Player task: Distinguish a planned shared place from an apparently forgotten guest.

GM answer: The fifth setting predates the replies and was intentionally reserved for the delivery crew.

Discovery card: Pem's linen record

Give only when revealed in play.

18:02 jug spilled across runner. 18:03 all five place cards lifted into one stack, nearest hand first. Original left-to-right order not copied. 18:05 dry runner fitted. CREW card was already among the five before the spill.

Player task: Order the physical preparation events and identify what the record cannot recover.

GM answer: The cards moved because of a spill; the crew place was not added to replace or exclude a guest. The record does not solve seating by itself.

State sheet

Table-setting intervals: 6 (resource, minimum 0, maximum 6)

All four needs accommodated: false (knowledge)

Fifth setting explained: false (knowledge)

Preparation record corrected: false (flag)

Witnessed re-survey complete: false (knowledge)

Event: The kitchen offers the next course

Trigger: Table-setting intervals at most 1

Pem asks whether to serve the verified arrangement, begin quietly, or switch to flexible service. The soup can wait for that decision.

At any place: Offer flexible service from the hatch

Suspend fixed seating, ask guests where they are comfortable, and reserve a crew meal explicitly.

Requires: Available.

The formal arrangement is postponed. Guests choose comfortable places and the kitchen keeps a separate crew portion.

Ending: A place prepared for each need

Requires: All four needs accommodated is true and Preparation record corrected is true

The supper opens with accurate welcomes and workable places. The delivery crew's rotating chair becomes part of the invitation record.

Next: What does Nessa include in the sketch to show the crew belongs?

Ending: Good soup before good speeches

Requires: All four needs accommodated is true

Everyone's practical needs are met and the meal begins quietly. Pem's preparation record remains a clearly assigned job for tomorrow.

Next: Who helps Pem complete that correction after the dishes are cleared?

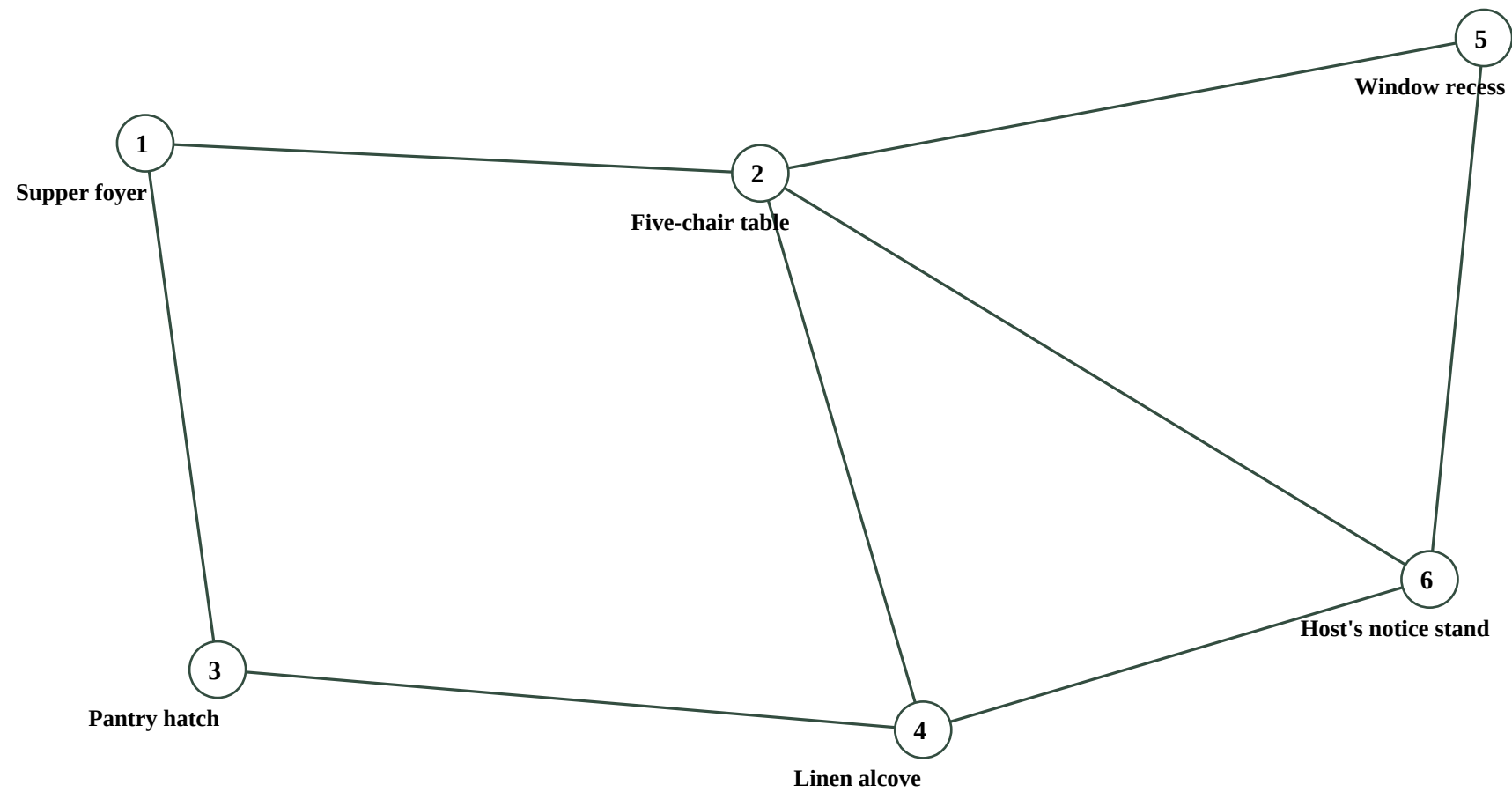
Ending: The supper leaves its seating plan

Requires: Available

Fixed places give way to flexible service. Guests choose where they can eat comfortably, and a crew portion is protected; the formal banquet is postponed.

Next: Which room change would make the next supper easier to arrange?

The Banquet's Empty Seat - GM decision map



Dashed paths need conditions. Read Connections and changing routes for costs and direction.