

Letters from the Empty Train

120-minute plan | 4 players | No combat

An empty train arrives with letters addressed to people who have left town. Tonight its last carriage will be sent to the scrap yard.

Content notice: Private letters and regret; do not read invented intimate messages aloud without table agreement.

What is really happening

Retired conductor Ada left undelivered letters in the carriage's sorting drum. Its route bell animates the train to finish its round. Correct forwarding addresses let it rest; moving the drum into a public post office ends the journey but requires a new volunteer delivery round.

Prepare and play

Use your own rules or play without dice. State the goal, choose an approach, explain a reasonable cost and let the players decide. Plausible careful actions succeed; uncertain actions can succeed with delay, spent supplies or a favour owed. Evidence is always available through its described action. Each player creates an ordinary person with a useful skill, a reason to help, and an item. No character sheet, monster statistics or proprietary rulebook is needed.

Take 10 minutes to introduce characters, read the premise and discuss the content notice. Anyone may say "pause", pass on a description, or ask to move an uncomfortable moment offstage. Agree on no combat and on treating consequences as delay or repair, not permanent harm. Give one player the route map and another the time sheet.

Time plan

120-MINUTE PLAN

0-10: Opening agreement

10-20: Arrival

20-35: Records and tools

35-50: An independent trail

50-55: Break

55-75: The immediate problem

75-95: The final choice

95-110: Home and aftermath

110-120: Closing and epilogues

Follow both investigations; take the break before the immediate problem.

At 75 minutes, settle the immediate problem using a safe approach without another roll. At 95 minutes, finish the final method and begin the return.

With 10 minutes left, first secure the immediate goal: Carry the drum out by the marked passenger steps while the engine waits. Mark the immediate goal safe only once the people or resource are secured. Then, if no final method was used: Place the drum at the post office and recruit tomorrow's volunteer round. Mark the fallback method and read the cost ending. Give each character an epilogue; do not bypass the safety step.

4 PLAYERS

Keep the sorting carriage away from the scrap siding.

Two pairs take observation and action tasks. Resolve them in two short alternating turns.

Finish the unfinished delivery promise.

Work in two pairs, one following the method and the other preparing a fallback or record.

Arrival - 10 minutes

Place: Station platform

Read aloud

Steam curls from an engine with no driver. A letter slides under Joss's boot and stops exactly at the yellow line.

Run this scene

These are delayed deliveries, not predictions. A new volunteer round can finish delivery later. Begin with the concrete request in the premise. Ask each character why they care and give them one ordinary useful item. Read both public observations without requiring a roll. Explain that the marked routes are safe to investigate, and offer a choice of the records or the visible trail. Let the group appoint a map reader; do not use hidden travel rolls to block the first lead.

Choices

1. Visit Parcel office
2. Follow the trail to Signal cabin

If the group gets stuck

If conversation or a test fails, give the public card anyway. A clear sign points to Sorting carriage. A missing method can be found again at Turntable; no character skill is required.

People and evidence

Joss: Clear the platform before morning service Offers directions and ordinary transport for news of the outcome. Voice: Patient, concrete sentences; ask one practical question.

Timeline record: All postmarks are from the final week of Ada's route. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: These are delayed deliveries, not predictions.

Fallback instruction: Remove the drum to a staffed post office and the route bell falls silent. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: A new volunteer round can finish delivery later.

Records and tools - 15 minutes

Place: Parcel office

Read aloud

Pia keeps the envelopes face down. A forwarding register lies open beside a cup with two lipstick marks.

Run this scene

Correct addresses complete the route tonight. The sorting carriage holds the conductor. Put the method card and destination note on the table. Ask what the two objects suggest, then answer direct practical questions from their wording. The maker can trade tools for help carrying or recording them, but refusal never removes these public documents. The trail remains another route. A check, if your rules use one, changes the time or tidiness of the work rather than whether this evidence exists.

Choices

1. Proceed to Sorting carriage
2. Compare evidence at Signal cabin

If the group gets stuck

If conversation or a test fails, give the public card anyway. A clear sign points to Sorting carriage. A missing method can be found again at Turntable; no character skill is required.

People and evidence

Pia: Deliver letters without exposing private contents Lends supplies if a character helps carry or catalogue them. Public instructions remain available. Voice: Quick, exact words; point at tools while speaking.

Method diagram: The forwarding register matches old house numbers to new street names. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Correct addresses complete the route tonight.

Destination note: Maintenance slip: Ada is checking the fourth carriage. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: The sorting carriage holds the conductor.

An independent trail - 15 minutes

Place: Signal cabin

Read aloud

Ren lowers the red signal. The engine's route bell answers from somewhere inside the fourth carriage.

Run this scene

Visible tags independently locate the drum. A witness confirms the destination. Describe the physical trail before asking for a decision. The witness tells what they actually observed and admits what they did not see. If the group refuses conversation, the physical route supplies the destination. Let a character compare the timeline and another trace the map. For a divided group, take one short turn per side, then reunite at the meeting; do not add another travel encounter.

Choices

1. Proceed to Sorting carriage
2. Compare evidence at Parcel office

If the group gets stuck

If conversation or a test fails, give the public card anyway. A clear sign points to Sorting carriage. A missing method can be found again at Turntable; no character skill is required.

People and evidence

Ren: Keep the scrap crew from dismantling an active carriage Guides the party if they share a plan. If refused, points to the visible trail. Voice: Cautious, distinguish observation from assumption.

Physical trail: A trail of folded sorting tags leads to carriage four. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Visible tags independently locate the drum.

Witness statement: Ren saw Ada climb into the fourth carriage with the register. Give it: Ask any direct question, or read the witness's signed statement if conversation is refused. GM inference: A witness confirms the destination.

The immediate problem - 20 minutes

Place: Sorting carriage

Read aloud

Ada sits beside a turning drum of sealed letters. "I knew the houses," she says, "but people move."

Run this scene

Retired conductor Ada left undelivered letters in the carriage's sorting drum. Its route bell animates the train to finish its round. Correct forwarding addresses let it rest; moving the drum into a public post office ends the journey but requires a new volunteer delivery round. State the immediate stakes and offer both listed approaches. Before resolving action, ask who observes, who acts and who helps. Make any cost visible before a player accepts it. Avoid demanding a special ability or spell. When a plan fails, use the slower listed route and mark its time cost; people remain recoverable. Once the goal is safe, mark the immediate goal safe and continue. A refusal by the keeper cannot hide the marked safety instructions.

Choices

1. Hold the lock and move the selector to POST, then guide the carriage to the ramp.
2. Carry the drum out by the marked passenger steps while the engine waits.

If the group gets stuck

Carry the drum out by the marked passenger steps while the engine waits. Explain a five-minute delay before they accept it; mark the immediate goal safe when the people or resource are secured.

People and evidence

Ada: Make good on the letters she never delivered Explains both solutions when the party agrees to protect the immediate goal; the marked instructions are available regardless. Voice: Calm under pressure; admit the decision and its cost.

Safety marks: POST reaches the station ramp; YARD reaches scrap. Hold the turntable lock while moving the selector. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Protect the drum by changing the siding or carrying it to the ramp.

Encounter and party adaptation

Keep the sorting carriage away from the scrap siding.

A delay leaves less time for the final repair or decision. Explain costs before resolving an action.

Hold the lock and move the selector to POST, then guide the carriage to the ramp.

Carry the drum out by the marked passenger steps while the engine waits.

Two pairs take observation and action tasks. Resolve them in two short alternating turns.

Mark the immediate goal safe after either safe approach; a setback costs time, not access to the next scene.

The final choice - 20 minutes

Place: Turntable

Read aloud

The turntable is locked toward the scrap siding. A brass selector offers POST / LOOP / YARD.

Run this scene

Correct addresses complete the route tonight. Protect the drum by changing the siding or carrying it to the ramp. Reveal the method and fallback together. Ask the group which tradeoff it accepts and give every character a small contribution. Mark the complete method for the first choice or the fallback method for the second. A risky improvisation should inherit one of these outcomes after its cost is explained, rather than create a third unprepared lock. Keep the immediate goal safe. Return by the known marked route; no new location needs to be invented.

Choices

1. Use the forwarding register to label each bundle, then ring the route bell once.
2. Place the drum at the post office and recruit tomorrow's volunteer round.

If the group gets stuck

Place the drum at the post office and recruit tomorrow's volunteer round. Mark the fallback method, keep the immediate goal safe and read the cost ending. Do not repeat a failed test.

People and evidence

Pia: Deliver letters without exposing private contents Lends supplies if a character helps carry or catalogue them. Public instructions remain available. Voice: Quick, exact words; point at tools while speaking.

Ada: Make good on the letters she never delivered Explains both solutions when the party agrees to protect the immediate goal; the marked instructions are available regardless. Voice: Calm under pressure; admit the decision and its cost.

Method diagram: The forwarding register matches old house numbers to new street names. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Correct addresses complete the route tonight.

Fallback instruction: Remove the drum to a staffed post office and the route bell falls silent. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: A new volunteer round can finish delivery later.

Encounter and party adaptation

Finish the unfinished delivery promise.

The complete method preserves the planned service; the fallback preserves the immediate goal at a visible cost.

Use the forwarding register to label each bundle, then ring the route bell once.

Place the drum at the post office and recruit tomorrow's volunteer round.

Work in two pairs, one following the method and the other preparing a fallback or record.

Mark the complete method for the first approach or the fallback method for the second. Both allow return and an ending.

Home and aftermath - 15 minutes

Place: Station platform

Read aloud

The platform clock clicks toward morning. One final envelope rests on the bench where the conductor used to wait.

Run this scene

Choose a complete resolution or a resolution with a cost, then ask the group what happens next. Read the ending matching the selected outcome. Invite each character to add one ordinary detail to the aftermath, then ask the keeper for a concrete next action. Record who accepted the cost and which clues went unused. Spend the last few minutes on one enjoyable moment and one thing to change next time. Characters need not solve every optional inference to earn a resolved ending.

Choices

1. Describe who follows up tomorrow
2. Ask who helped whom and what it cost

If the group gets stuck

If no method was chosen, first confirm the immediate goal is safe, use the final fallback method and then read the cost ending. Record the unresolved work and give every character an epilogue.

People and evidence

Joss: Clear the platform before morning service Offers directions and ordinary transport for news of the outcome. Voice: Patient, concrete sentences; ask one practical question.

Ada: Make good on the letters she never delivered Explains both solutions when the party agrees to protect the immediate goal; the marked instructions are available regardless. Voice: Calm under pressure; admit the decision and its cost.

Endings

Complete resolution

The last bell rings once. The letters settle into their addressed bundles, and the empty train rests beside the platform.

First secure the immediate goal at Sorting carriage. Use final method A at Turntable before choosing this ending.

Resolution with a cost

The drum is safe on Pia's counter. The train rests, but the letters still need legs and time. Ada signs up for the first morning round.

First secure the immediate goal at Sorting carriage. Use final method B at Turntable before choosing this ending.

Use the forwarding register to label each bundle, then ring the route bell once remains for a later visit.

Handout answers

h-order: These are delayed deliveries, not predictions.

h-fallback: A new volunteer round can finish delivery later.

h-method: Correct addresses complete the route tonight.

h-note: The sorting carriage holds the conductor.

h-trail: Visible tags independently locate the drum.

h-witness: A witness confirms the destination.

h-safe: Protect the drum by changing the siding or carrying it to the ramp.

Clue reasoning

These are delayed deliveries, not predictions.: c-order

Proceed to Sorting carriage: c-note OR c-trail OR c-witness

Protect the drum by changing the siding or carrying it to the ramp.: c-safe / marked safety fallback

Finish the unfinished delivery promise.: c-method OR c-fallback

Map descriptions

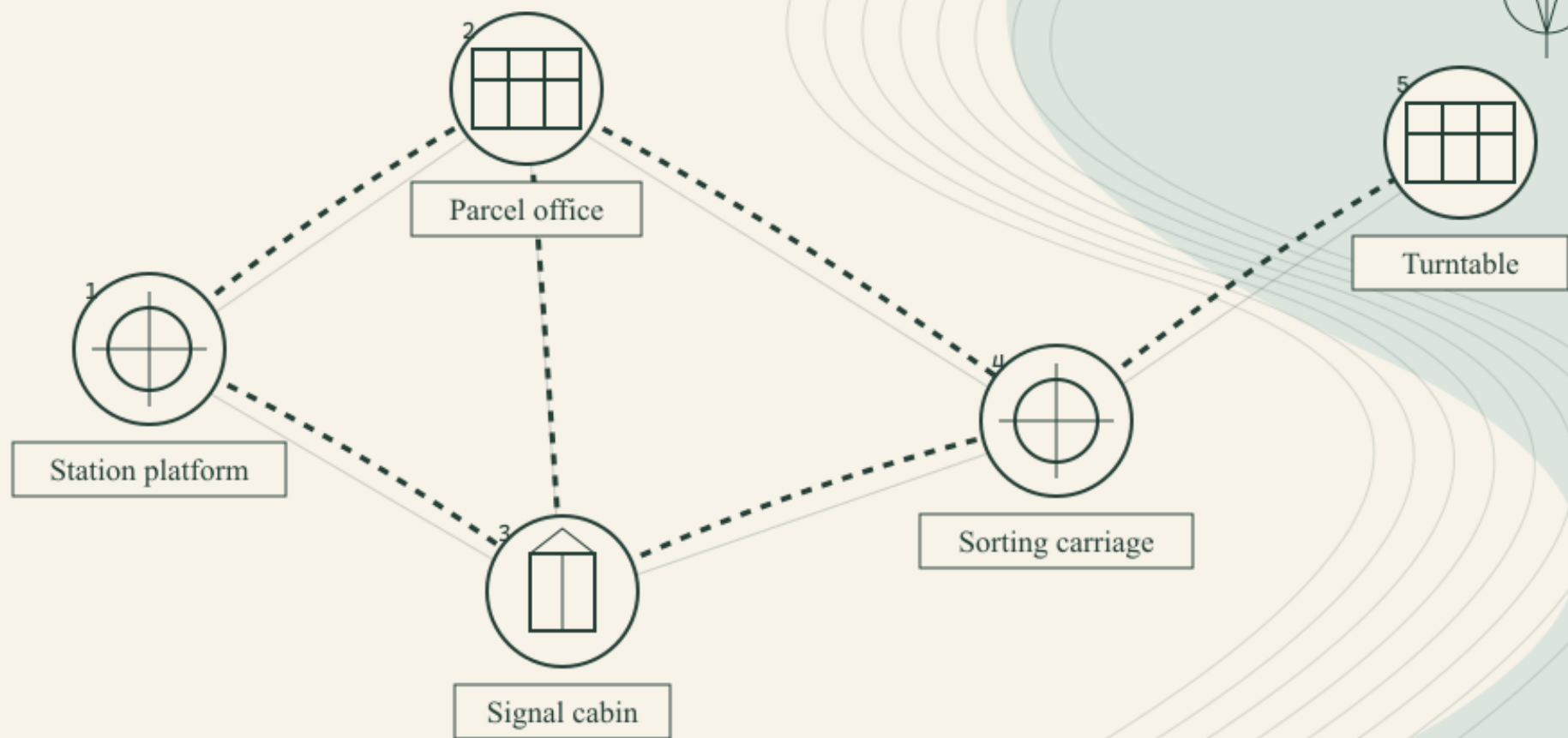
GM route atlas: Start at Station platform. Parcel office and Signal cabin are independent investigation routes; both connect to Sorting carriage, which leads to Turntable. All marked connections are bidirectional. Return uses the known route to Station platform.

Sorting carriage - approach plan: At Sorting carriage, the marked entrance reaches the immediate problem. Approach A: Hold the lock and move the selector to POST, then guide the carriage to the ramp. Approach B: Carry the drum out by the marked passenger steps while the engine waits. Both reach the

onward route. Layout is schematic, with no combat grid or movement scale.

Player route map: Public route map: Station platform connects to Parcel office and Signal cabin; either reaches Sorting carriage, then Turntable. Routes work in both directions. Retrace the route to return. No hidden information is marked.

GM route atlas

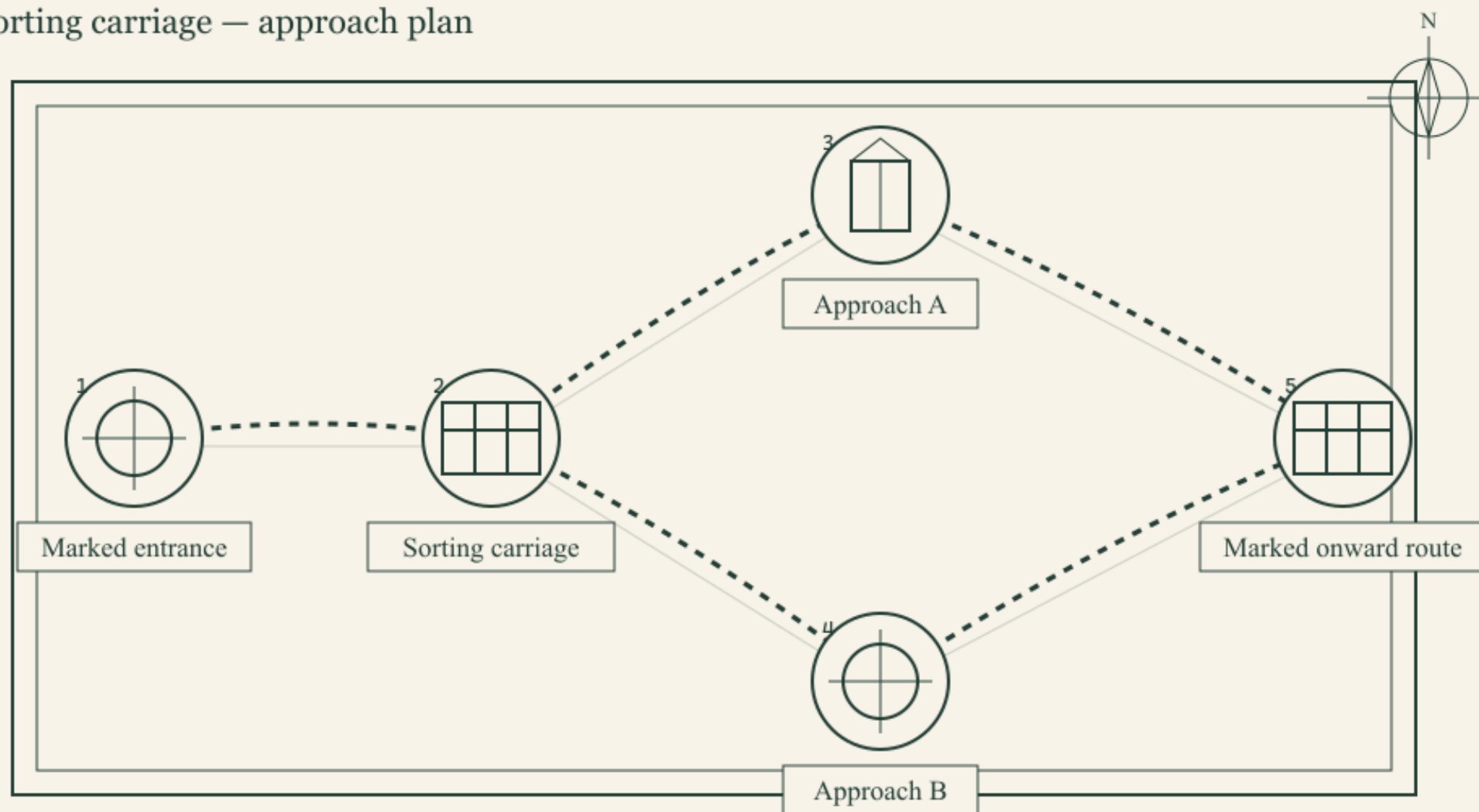


C-SAFE / immediate problem

C-METHOD or C-FALLBACK

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Sorting carriage — approach plan



Hold the lock and move the selector to POST, then guide the carriage to the ramp.
Carry the drum out by the marked passenger steps while the engine waits.

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