

The Observatory's Lost Signal

120-minute plan | 4 players | No combat

An observatory receives a message from the wrong patch of sky. Its research partner believes the signal is a warning; the mirror technician suspects a reversed label.

Content notice: Falling glass and mistaken alarm; injuries remain offstage.

What is really happening

Technician Elva swapped two mirror labels while protecting a visitor from falling glass. The receiver now points at the neighboring hill station, whose maintenance message sounds ominous out of context. Correcting labels restores the agreed star survey; turning the receiver off prevents false reports but loses tonight's data.

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: Send the hill station a simple query and read its maintenance reply. Mark the immediate goal safe only once the people or resource are secured. Then, if no final method was used: Close the shutter and publish a dated correction with no survey claim. Mark the fallback method and read the cost ending. Give each character an epilogue; do not bypass the safety step.

4 PLAYERS

Verify the message's origin before Cal reports it as a warning.

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

Choose tonight's survey status.

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

Arrival - 10 minutes

Place: Observatory court

Read aloud

Cal reads "DO NOT OPEN BEFORE DAWN" from a narrow strip of paper. Above the court, the stars look entirely untroubled.

Run this scene

It originates locally, not from the stars. Pause the survey as a safe fallback. 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 Optics bench
2. Follow the trail to Hill terrace

If the group gets stuck

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

People and evidence

Cal: Publish only a signal whose origin is known Offers directions and ordinary transport for news of the outcome. Voice: Patient, concrete sentences; ask one practical question.

Timeline record: The message pauses exactly like the neighboring hill lamp. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: It originates locally, not from the stars.

Fallback instruction: Closing the receiver shutter prevents further mistaken reports. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Pause the survey as a safe fallback.

Records and tools - 15 minutes

Place: Optics bench

Read aloud

Jin lays two labels on the bench. One bears a crescent scratch that matches the opposite mirror.

Run this scene

Correcting the reversed labels restores the survey. The technician waits in the receiver room. 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 Receiver room
2. Compare evidence at Hill terrace

If the group gets stuck

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

People and evidence

Jin: Restore the mirror labels without losing a repair record 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 crescent scratch belongs on label A; the unmarked mirror is B. Lock the frame first. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Correcting the reversed labels restores the survey.

Destination note: Elva's repair board says RECEIVER ROOM, shutter watch. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: The technician waits in the receiver room.

An independent trail - 15 minutes

Place: Hill terrace

Read aloud

From the terrace, Sora can see a blinking lamp on the neighboring hill. It uses the same pause as the recorded signal.

Run this scene

A visible trail locates her. A witness provides 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 Receiver room
2. Compare evidence at Optics bench

If the group gets stuck

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

People and evidence

Sora: Confirm the hill station's maintenance message Guides the party if they share a plan. If refused, points to the visible trail. Voice: Cautious, distinguish observation from assumption.

Physical trail: Dropped label ties lead from the bench to the receiver door. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: A visible trail locates her.

Witness statement: Sora saw Elva enter the receiver room after catching the mirror. Give it: Ask any direct question, or read the witness's signed statement if conversation is refused. GM inference: A witness provides the destination.

The immediate problem - 20 minutes

Place: Receiver room

Read aloud

Elva keeps the receiver shutter half closed. A fresh bandage marks where she caught the loose mirror.

Run this scene

Technician Elva swapped two mirror labels while protecting a visitor from falling glass. The receiver now points at the neighboring hill station, whose maintenance message sounds ominous out of context. Correcting labels restores the agreed star survey; turning the receiver off prevents false reports but loses tonight's data. 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. Ask Sora to compare the hill lamp rhythm with the recording.
2. Send the hill station a simple query and read its maintenance reply.

If the group gets stuck

Send the hill station a simple query and read its maintenance reply. Explain a five-minute delay before they accept it; mark the immediate goal safe when the people or resource are secured.

People and evidence

Elva: Explain the emergency swap and finish the safe repair 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: Insert the safety pin before moving either label arm; the hill message means a box of parts opens at dawn. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Stabilize the frame and explain the local message.

Encounter and party adaptation

Verify the message's origin before Cal reports it as a warning.

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

Ask Sora to compare the hill lamp rhythm with the recording.

Send the hill station a simple query and read its maintenance reply.

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: Mirror gantry

Read aloud

The gantry has two mirrors labelled A and B. A safety pin sits between them, ready to hold the frame still.

Run this scene

Correcting the reversed labels restores the survey. Stabilize the frame and explain the local message. 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. Pin the frame, correct A and B, and resume the star survey.
2. Close the shutter and publish a dated correction with no survey claim.

If the group gets stuck

Close the shutter and publish a dated correction with no survey claim. Mark the fallback method, keep the immediate goal safe and read the cost ending. Do not repeat a failed test.

People and evidence

Jin: Restore the mirror labels without losing a repair record Lends supplies if a character helps carry or catalogue them. Public instructions remain available. Voice: Quick, exact words; point at tools while speaking.

Elva: Explain the emergency swap and finish the safe repair 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 crescent scratch belongs on label A; the unmarked mirror is B. Lock the frame first. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Correcting the reversed labels restores the survey.

Fallback instruction: Closing the receiver shutter prevents further mistaken reports. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Pause the survey as a safe fallback.

Encounter and party adaptation

Choose tonight's survey status.

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

Pin the frame, correct A and B, and resume the star survey.

Close the shutter and publish a dated correction with no survey claim.

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: Observatory court

Read aloud

The paper strip finally carries an origin beside its words. Cal sharpens a pencil before writing the corrected report.

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

Cal: Publish only a signal whose origin is known Offers directions and ordinary transport for news of the outcome. Voice: Patient, concrete sentences; ask one practical question.

Elva: Explain the emergency swap and finish the safe repair 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 receiver finds its intended patch of sky. Cal's report begins with a correction, and the hill station's parts remain safely boxed until dawn.

First secure the immediate goal at Receiver room. Use final method A at Mirror gantry before choosing this ending.

Resolution with a cost

The shutter closes. Tonight's data is lost, but a clear correction stops the false warning from travelling farther.

First secure the immediate goal at Receiver room. Use final method B at Mirror gantry before choosing this ending.

Pin the frame, correct A and B, and resume the star survey remains for a later visit.

Handout answers

h-order: It originates locally, not from the stars.

h-fallback: Pause the survey as a safe fallback.

h-method: Correcting the reversed labels restores the survey.

h-note: The technician waits in the receiver room.

h-trail: A visible trail locates her.

h-witness: A witness provides the destination.

h-safe: Stabilize the frame and explain the local message.

Clue reasoning

It originates locally, not from the stars.: c-order

Proceed to Receiver room: c-note OR c-trail OR c-witness

Stabilize the frame and explain the local message.: c-safe / marked safety fallback

Choose tonight's survey status.: c-method OR c-fallback

Map descriptions

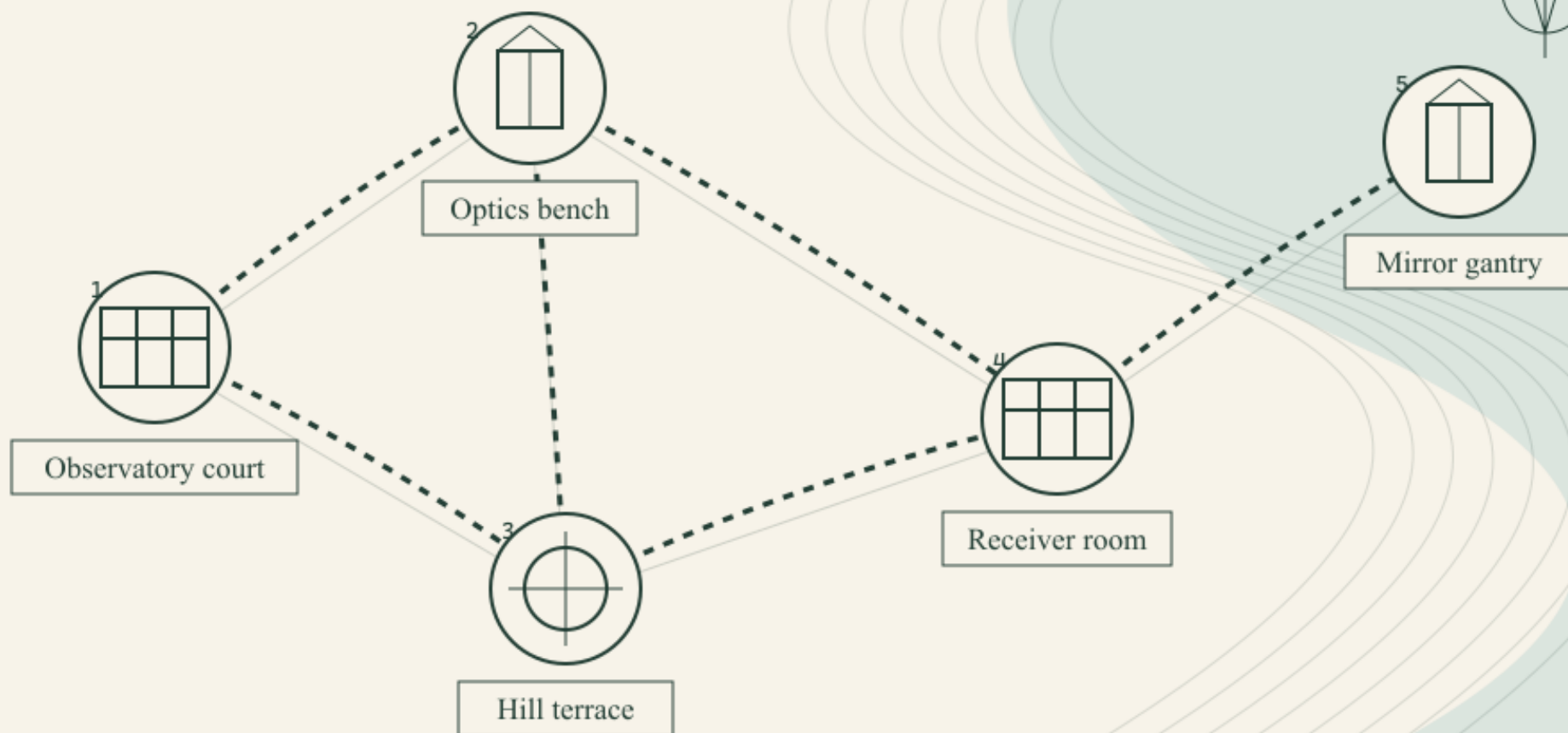
GM route atlas: Start at Observatory court. Optics bench and Hill terrace are independent investigation routes; both connect to Receiver room, which leads to Mirror gantry. All marked connections are bidirectional. Return uses the known route to Observatory court.

Receiver room - approach plan: At Receiver room, the marked entrance reaches the immediate problem. Approach A: Ask Sora to compare the hill lamp rhythm with the recording. Approach B: Send the hill station a simple query and read its maintenance reply. Both reach the onward route. Layout is schematic,

with no combat grid or movement scale.

Player route map: Public route map: Observatory court connects to Optics bench and Hill terrace; either reaches Receiver room, then Mirror gantry. Routes work in both directions. Retrace the route to return. No hidden information is marked.

GM route atlas

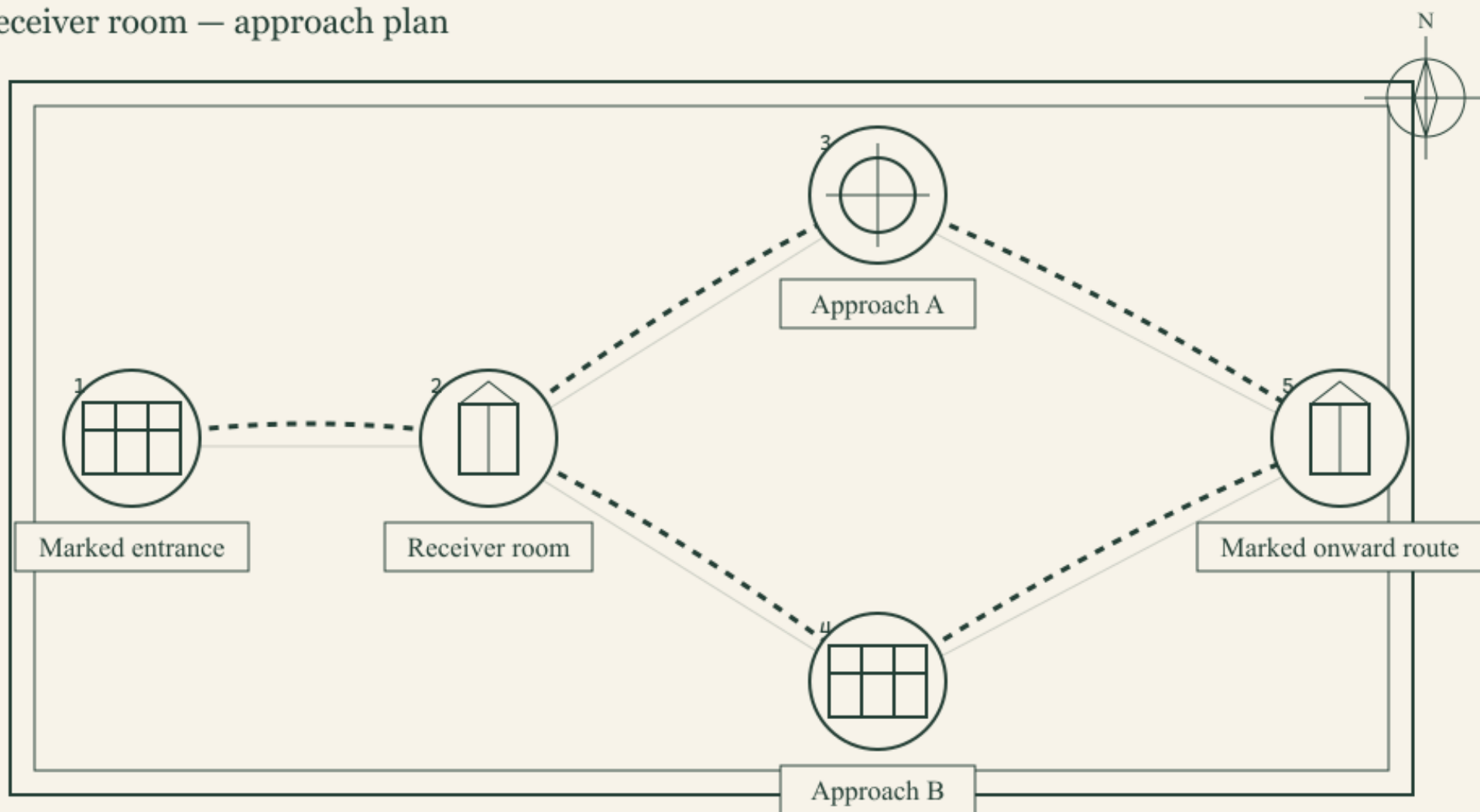


C-SAFE / immediate problem

C-METHOD or C-FALLBACK

GM ATLAS · CONNECTIONS ARE BIDIRECTIONAL · NOT TO SCALE · 1.0.0

Receiver room — approach plan



Ask Sora to compare the hill lamp rhythm with the recording.

Send the hill station a simple query and read its maintenance reply.

GM ATLAS · CONNECTIONS ARE BIDIRECTIONAL · NOT TO SCALE · 1.0.0