

The Observatory's Lost Signal

120-minute plan · 4 players · Follow the evidence

An observatory receives "DO NOT OPEN BEFORE DAWN" from the wrong patch of sky. Cal is preparing a warning, while two mirror labels and a neighboring hill lamp suggest a testable explanation.

Content notice: An earlier falling-glass incident and a mistaken alarm. The injury remains offstage; all work takes place on guarded fictional service platforms.

GM overview

Run two evidence tracks on separate sheets: signal origin and mirror configuration. A recording plus the simultaneous hill-lamp observation establishes a local source; a recording plus the hill station's dispatch record independently supports the same inference. The crescent factory mark plus Elva's temporary repair record establishes which labels were reversed and why. A source correction is already valuable even if the optical repair cannot be completed tonight. Cal accepts a supported local-origin explanation and will publish a dated correction; he does not demand a repaired telescope first. Elva openly describes catching the loose frame and temporarily moving its labels. Players must pin the fictional frame before alignment, but technical skill and a hidden roll never substitute for the evidence. Checking intervals represent careful work, not a countdown that makes visitors unsafe. Four intervals support ordinary verification and repair; reconstruction consumes two extra intervals, making a paused survey a real short-game choice.

What is really happening

Elva swapped two mirror labels while protecting a visitor from falling glass. The receiver now points at the neighboring hill station. Its message concerns a box of replacement parts, not a celestial warning. Matching the local signal to the recording establishes the source; comparing the mirror marks with Elva's repair record establishes the reversed labels. Pinning the frame, correcting A and B, and resuming the survey restores the intended observation. Closing the shutter and publishing a correction preserves trust but loses tonight's survey.

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.

Cal reads a fresh paper strip: "DO NOT OPEN BEFORE DAWN." Beyond the court, the stars are quiet. On the neighboring hill, a lamp blinks twice, pauses, then holds a longer light. Elva keeps one hand on the receiver shutter. "Before we send a warning," she says, "please check where we are looking."

Time and preparation

120 minutes: Independent origin checks and the repair history

Opening agreement: 10 minutes

Separate observations from the draft warning: 20 minutes

Compare the live lamp and hill dispatch: 30 minutes

Reconstruct the emergency swap and pin the frame: 25 minutes

Choose a repaired survey or a dated correction: 25 minutes

Closure and debrief: 10 minutes

Visit the hill station to test the source through two independent paths and learn what the ominous wording means. Six intervals permit one reconstruction plus full repair; a deliberate pause still preserves a valuable verified correction.

Starting information: Discover cards in play

Starting state: Careful verification intervals = 6; Local signal origin established = false; Reversed labels established = false; Mirror frame held by service pin = false; Mirror labels corrected = false; Retained observations cross-checked = false

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

If the group gets stuck

The parts-delivery path reaches the hill station if the terrace footpath is blocked. Missing signal evidence can use the other origin pair, or a two-interval retained-record reconstruction. With only enough checking time to verify origin, pause-with-correction protects the finding while losing the survey. Hold-report is always available and keeps an unverified claim out of publication.

Observatory court

Read aloud: Cal has written WARNING at the top of a page but left the destination blank.

GM: Read the actual recorded strip on request. Cal pauses publication while the group checks it; neither urgency nor a skeptical tone destroys the evidence.

Choice: Separate the recorded message from its assumed origin

Ask: Which marks came from the receiver, and which direction was copied from labels?

Requires: Available. Reveal Receiver strip and timing marks

Result: Cal keeps the warning in draft while the source field is checked.

Optics bench

Read aloud: Jin turns a label over. A tiny crescent has been scratched beside the printed letter A.

GM: The physical marking card establishes factory identities and present labels. It does not explain the signal's meaning. Jin also holds retained impressions for a costly reconstruction.

Choice: Compare factory identities with present labels

Ask: Point to each physical mark and the label currently attached to it.

Requires: Available. Reveal Mirror mark comparison

Result: Jin records the crossed A and B labels without moving the frame.

Choice: Cross-check retained observation copies

Ask: Spend two intervals with Jin comparing the original strip, hill dispatch copy, and mirror impressions?

Requires: Available. Spend 2 Careful verification intervals. Retained observations cross-checked: true

Result: Jin documents the local transmission and the reversed identities from retained records; a missing handout remains missing.

Hill-view terrace

Read aloud: The hill lamp blinks twice, pauses, and holds a long light. The receiver strip advances at the same instant.

GM: The simultaneous observation is available without a long wait. Ask someone to tap the pattern while another points at the receiver strip; direct comparison matters more than recalling a code.

Choice: Compare the local lamp with the live receiver

Ask: Tap the pattern together, then watch the receiver during Sora's brief cover test.

Requires: Available. Reveal Simultaneous terrace observation

Result: The receiver pulses and pauses with the neighboring hill lamp.

Receiver room

Read aloud: A fresh bandage crosses Elva's knuckles. Beside the shutter, her board reads TEMPORARY LABELS: CHECK BEFORE SURVEY.

GM: Elva gives the repair board and explains the earlier safety response plainly. A verified correction may close the session here even if alignment is unfinished.

Choice: Read Elva's temporary change record

Ask: Separate the earlier safety response from the unfinished label check.

Requires: Available. Reveal Elva's temporary repair board

Result: Elva identifies exactly which labels she moved during the glass incident.

Choice: Explain the crossed labels from marks and repair history

Ask: Show Elva the factory identities and the documented temporary placement.

Requires: (Mirror mark comparison + Elva's temporary repair board or Retained observations cross-checked is true). Spend 1 Careful verification intervals. Reversed labels established: true

Result: The group identifies both the present mismatch and its emergency origin.

Choice: Publish the correction and resume the star survey

Ask: Reopen the corrected receiver while Cal records how the mistaken warning was resolved.

Requires: Local signal origin established is true and Mirror labels corrected is true.

Result: The receiver reaches its agreed star field, and Cal begins the report with a dated source correction.

Closure: A correction before the stars

Choice: Close the shutter and publish only the verified correction

Ask: Preserve the local-origin finding while accepting the loss of tonight's survey data.

Requires: Local signal origin established is true.

Result: Elva closes the shutter. Cal corrects the source without claiming a completed astronomical survey.

Closure: A true report without tonight's data

Guarded mirror gantry

Read aloud: The crescent-marked mirror carries label B. The service pin hangs exactly where both arms can be held still.

GM: Pinning is a separate player commitment before realignment. Correct A to the crescent-marked mirror and B to the unmarked one. The entire operation stays inside the rail and uses Elva's fictional mechanism.

Choice: Seat the service pin inside the guard rail

Ask: Give Elva one careful interval to hold both mirror arms before adjustment.

Requires: Available. Spend 1 Careful verification intervals. Mirror frame held by service pin: true

Result: The service pin holds both arms steady within the guarded work area.

Choice: Restore A to the crescent and B to the unmarked mirror

Ask: Use the verified source and repair explanation to correct the pinned configuration.

Requires: Local signal origin established is true and Reversed labels established is true and Mirror frame held by service pin is true. Spend 1 Careful verification intervals. Mirror labels corrected: true

Result: The labels match the physical mirrors and the intended survey direction is restored.

Hill station parts porch

Read aloud: Sora rests a hand on a box tagged OPEN AT DAWN. "The seal's binder needs the night to set," she says.

GM: Sora supplies the station's timestamped dispatch record. It independently explains the message without requiring players to decode the lamp. The box remains sealed; opening it proves nothing further.

Choice: Read the parts station's actual transmission

Ask: Compare timestamp, pulse sequence, wording, and the sealed box's label.

Requires: Available. Reveal Hill-station dispatch record

Result: Sora's dispatch identifies a maintenance message about the unopened parts box.

Connections and changing routes

Observatory court - Optics bench: Optics arcade. Available.

Observatory court - Hill-view terrace: Public viewing path. Available.

Optics bench - Receiver room: Instrument corridor. Available.

Hill-view terrace - Receiver room: Receiver stair. Available.

Hill-view terrace - Hill station parts porch: Public hill footpath. Available.

Hill station parts porch - Optics bench: Parts-delivery path. Available.

Receiver room - Guarded mirror gantry: Guarded service stair. Available.

Guarded mirror gantry - Hill-view terrace: Lower return stair. Available.

Cal - Survey reporter

Goal: Publish an identified signal and correct the draft warning.

Offers: The original strip, timestamps, and a dated correction.

Will not accept: Will not label a source celestial after local evidence contradicts it.

Voice: Reads the exact observation before offering an interpretation.

Jin - Optics assistant

Goal: Restore the labels without losing the emergency repair record.

Offers: Factory mark sheet and retained impressions for reconstruction.

Will not accept: Will not infer a source from labels alone.

Voice: Places one physical mark beside one documentary mark.

Sora - Hill station maintainer

Goal: Keep the replacement-parts message from becoming an alarm.

Offers: The dispatch record and a direct lamp comparison.

Will not accept: Keeps the parts box sealed until the stated time.

Voice: Explains the mundane object behind an ominous phrase.

Elva - Mirror technician

Goal: Explain the emergency swap and finish a safe correction.

Offers: Her repair board, shutter control, and the service pin.

Will not accept: No arm moves before the frame is pinned.

Voice: Admits the temporary change before discussing the fix.

Reasoning: The hill station sent the apparent warning

Independent time, pulse, and interruption evidence or an exact dispatch match locates the source on the neighboring hill.

Evidence combinations: Receiver strip and timing marks + Simultaneous terrace observation OR Receiver strip and timing marks + Hill-station dispatch record

Reasoning: An emergency temporary swap redirected the receiver

Physical factory identities show the present mismatch; Elva's dated change record explains the temporary reversed placement.

Evidence combinations: Mirror mark comparison + Elva's temporary repair board

Discovery card: Receiver strip and timing marks

Give only when revealed in play.

19:41 - two short pulses, pause, one long pulse; repeated twice. Text: DO NOT OPEN BEFORE DAWN.

Direction field copied from current mirror labels: A to survey field. No independent origin entered. Circle observation and interpretation in different colors.

Player task: Keep the actual message separate from the unverified direction field.

GM answer: The text and pulse timing are observations; the apparent celestial origin depends on labels that may be wrong.

Discovery card: Mirror mark comparison

Give only when revealed in play.

Factory sheet: crescent scratch identifies mirror A; unmarked mirror is B. Present gantry: crescent mirror carries label B; unmarked mirror carries label A. Mark the mismatch without moving an arm.

Player task: Compare physical identity with current labels before choosing a repair.

GM answer: The labels are reversed, but the sheet alone does not establish when or why they moved.

Discovery card: Simultaneous terrace observation

Give only when revealed in play.

Hill lamp at 19:41: two shorts, pause, one long, repeated twice. Receiver strip advances during exactly those pulses. When Sora covers the hill lamp briefly, the receiver strip pauses too. Stars remain visible throughout.

Player task: Tap the two patterns together and test whether their pauses track each other.

GM answer: The matched pattern and deliberate pause establish a local hill source independently of its message content.

Discovery card: Hill-station dispatch record

Give only when revealed in play.

19:41 maintenance transmission to parts receiver: DO NOT OPEN BEFORE DAWN. Subject: sealed replacement-parts box; binder cures overnight. Pulse sequence: two shorts, pause, one long, repeated twice. Sent by Sora. No astronomical alert issued.

Player task: Compare exact time, sequence, and wording with the observatory strip.

GM answer: The matching record provides an independent local-origin inference and explains the ordinary parts instruction.

Discovery card: Elva's temporary repair board

Give only when revealed in play.

18:55 visitor protected from loose glass; both arms held. Temporary labels moved while damaged ties replaced. A tag hung on unmarked mirror; B on crescent mirror. Check factory marks before survey. Service order: pin frame, correct label arms, reopen shutter.

Player task: Reconstruct the emergency change and arrange the safe correction steps.

GM answer: Together with the physical marks, this explains the reversal as an emergency temporary change and specifies pinning before correction.

State sheet

Careful verification intervals: 6 (resource, minimum 0, maximum 6)

Local signal origin established: false (knowledge)

Reversed labels established: false (knowledge)

Mirror frame held by service pin: false (flag)

Mirror labels corrected: false (flag)

Retained observations cross-checked: false (knowledge)

Event: Cal asks what can honestly go in the report

Trigger: Careful verification intervals at most 1

Read the verified flags aloud. Cal can publish a local-source correction without a survey, or hold an unverified report entirely.

At any place: Establish the local source with two observations

Combine the receiver strip with the simultaneous lamp test or dispatch record.

Requires: (Receiver strip and timing marks + Simultaneous terrace observation or Receiver strip and timing marks + Hill-station dispatch record or Retained observations cross-checked is true). Spend 1 Careful verification intervals. Local signal origin established: true

Cal records the neighboring hill station as the verified source and withdraws the celestial-warning interpretation.

At any place: Close the shutter and hold the unverified report

Suspend observing, retain the evidence, and tell readers that the source remains under review.

Requires: Available.

Elva closes the receiver and Cal withholds the warning. The records remain available for tomorrow's checks.

Ending: A correction before the stars

Requires: Local signal origin established is true and Mirror labels corrected is true

The observatory resumes its agreed star survey. Cal's report names the mistaken local source and the corrected labels before describing any new data.

Next: Who adds a source check to the next survey opening?

Ending: A true report without tonight's data

Requires: Local signal origin established is true

The shutter stays closed. The town receives an accurate correction about a local parts message, while tonight's star survey is honestly recorded as lost.

Next: Choose the witness for tomorrow's label check.

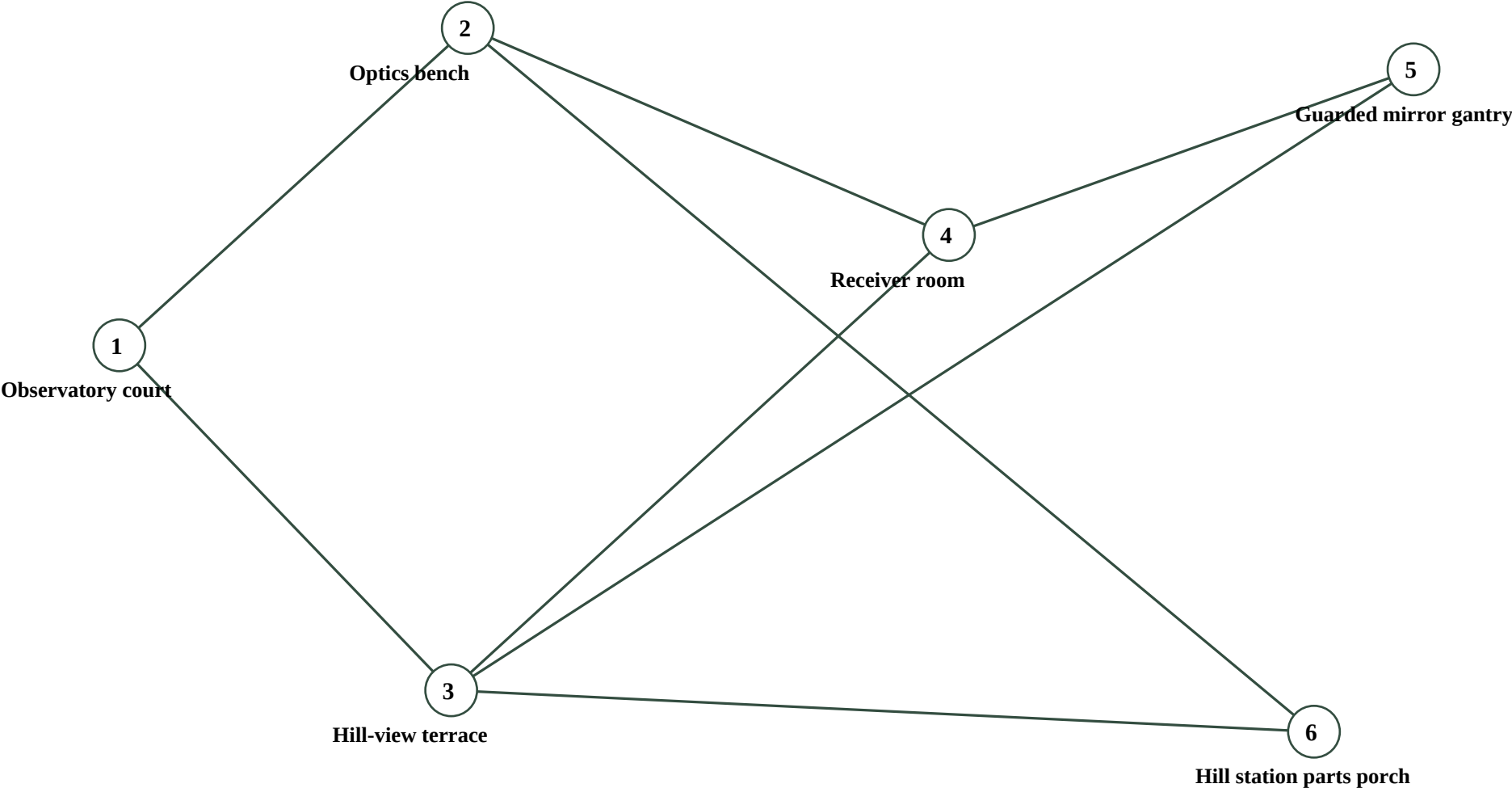
Ending: A quiet receiver and a question kept open

Requires: Available

No unsupported warning leaves the observatory. The shutter closes and the original evidence is preserved; the source and repair await verification.

Next: Which observation will Cal ask to see first tomorrow?

The Observatory's Lost Signal - GM decision map



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