

The Last Light Below



Dungeon Master's edition

A crack has opened across Cairn Hill, exposing steps beneath a stone lintel. Through the gap, buried lamps flash three short strokes, a pause, and three more.

OPENING READ-ALoud

A pale seam runs across the hillside, wide enough to expose a flight of stone steps. Lamps flicker far below it: three flashes, darkness, three flashes. Beside a wagon, a woman tightens the straps on an empty stretcher. Dust puffs from the opening. Then a voice rises through the crack, thin but clear: "The beam's moving again."

Credits

Adventure and publication credit: bandolek.

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Rules basis: D&D fifth edition, SRD 5.1, using the 2014 rules. The rescue clock, constructs, special equipment procedures, lens controls, and accomplishment awards are homebrew created for this adventure.

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Overview

A hillside has split open above an abandoned observatory. Its buried lamps are flashing a distress signal, and six members of a survey team remain underground. The instrument they awakened can locate the beacon of a missing expedition—but its failing gravity lens is pulling the lower galleries apart.

The characters must bring the surveyors out, establish how the observatory works, and decide what its last observation is worth.

System: D&D fifth edition, SRD 5.1, using the 2014 rules.

Party: Four 3rd-level characters.

Playing time: Approximately 3-4 hours.

Structure: Six encounters combining rescue, exploration, negotiation, and a potentially violent finale. Two encounters contain constructs that can be fought, deceived, disabled, or avoided.

Primary objective: Recover the six surveyors.

Secondary choices: Preserve the observatory, recover its final observation, or destroy the dangerous lens.

Tone: Buried wonder, practical courage, strained loyalties, and visible danger.

Content considerations: Entrapment, falling debris, injured people, unstable heights, and missing relatives. None of the starting injuries require graphic description.

All characters, places, and organizations in this adventure are original. The adventure assumes no surrounding campaign history. Its unusual machinery, rescue procedures, clock, and construct statistics are explicitly homebrew.

DM Introduction

The observatory beneath Cairn Hill was built to compare distant beacon signals through a gravity lens: an instrument that bends light along calibrated paths. Astronomer Sera Venn restarted it after recognizing the signature of a beacon carried by her missing brother's expedition. The beacon is still transmitting from an isolated ledge eight miles north, but Sera connected the instrument before securing its damaged cradle. The unsecured lens now shifts its own weight through the building, tearing braces loose and making people and objects briefly lighter. The earthquake-like disturbances are mechanical consequences of that mistake, not an awakening monster or an intentional trap.

Rescue leader Mara Quill has brought the characters to the newly exposed entrance because six surveyors remain below and her small surface crew cannot safely enter the failing structure. Jori is pinned at the entrance, Tovin is sheltering in the workshop, Iven is trapped behind fallen archive furniture, Pell is stranded in the hoist cage, and Sera is tending the injured observer Ena in the lower

vestibule. Mara wants all six brought out immediately. Sera wants that too, but believes a final observation could give her brother's expedition a precise rescue destination. Neither woman is concealing malicious intentions. Their conflict concerns which endangered people they can responsibly help.

The likely descent takes the characters through the entrance rescue and workshop, into the archive, past the damaged hoist, and down to Sera and the lens chamber. The archive, the machine's own controls, and Sera each provide independent ways to learn the shutdown procedure. The hoist offers a second route between levels, and rescuing its operator can make evacuation substantially easier. Two small maintenance constructs defend the archive's calibration equipment, while two larger wardens protect the lens chamber. These are four individual machines, with no replacements or reinforcements; correct maintenance procedures can prevent either fight.

Without intervention, the lens eventually ruptures and collapses its chamber, while Pell's cage falls earlier unless secured. The rest of the observatory remains accessible, allowing a later rescue of survivors rather than erasing everyone underground. The characters can safely shut down the lens by closing its shutter, holding its bleed valve open, and engaging its cradle. They can instead destroy it, or first conduct a dangerous three-round observation that records the expedition beacon's location. A successful shutdown genuinely secures the site. Recovering the observation creates an optional future rescue; it never causes another automatic failure or cancels the victory won here.

At a Glance

QUESTION	ANSWER
Who hires the characters?	Mara Quill, a professional rescue leader acting for the Cairn Survey Cooperative.
Why are the characters needed?	Mara has two surface attendants, no spare underground team, and six missing surveyors.
What caused the crisis?	Sera powered the lens while its cradle was unsecured.
What is the clock?	Eight ten-minute segments, beginning when the characters enter U1.
What makes the clock advance?	Actual fictional time below ground; starting the final observation also adds ten minutes once.
What stops the clock?	Holding the bleed valve while the shutter is closed pauses it; engaging the cradle then stops it permanently. Destroying the lens also stops it.
How many opponents exist?	Two archive skitters and two lens wardens.

QUESTION	ANSWER
What information is essential?	The roster of six people; both vertical routes; the safe shutdown sequence.
Can the characters leave?	Yes. The clock continues unless the machine is paused or stopped.
Is a rest assumed?	No. The adventure is balanced for a reasonably rested party without a short rest.
What is the maximum listed reward?	300 gp in cooperative payments plus 60 gp of authorized salvage, all for the party.
Does the missing expedition have to be pursued?	No. Its possible rescue is a separate decision.

First-Session Guide

Before play, make four decisions.

1. **Choose the party's connection.** They may be hired rescuers, nearby travelers with useful skills, or adventurers known to the cooperative. All receive the same contract.
2. **Set the injury description.** Ask whether restrained people and falls should be described directly or kept brief.
3. **Prepare a visible eight-segment track.** Explain that it measures fictional time underground, not minutes spent talking at the table.
4. **Place the six names where everyone can see them.** A checked name means that person has reached the surface, not merely been found.

Open at the hillside. Give the characters the contract, roster, and supplied equipment without an extended hiring negotiation. Mara can answer immediate questions while her attendants fit packs and inspect ropes.

The first rescue teaches the adventure's basic language: visible danger, useful equipment, several workable approaches, and a cost for delay. Do not conceal how the beam holds Jori. Let the players solve a physical situation before introducing the larger machine.

Give the archive diagram as soon as it is legitimately found. Players should have enough time to understand the final choice before reaching Sera. If they bypass the archive, the lens controls remain readable and Sera can explain the procedure.

The finale should resolve the party's chosen objective. If the characters arrive determined to shut everything down, allow their preparation to make that achievable. Sera's request is an argument they may reject, not an instruction to prolong the adventure.

Hook

A crack has opened across Cairn Hill, exposing steps beneath a stone lintel. Through the gap, buried lamps flash three short strokes, a pause, and three more.

Mara Quill meets the characters beside a wagon of blankets and climbing gear.

"Six below. One lens making the hill shake. I can pay you to bring them out, and I can tell you exactly who you're looking for."

She offers **200 gp for a complete rescue accounting**, with **40 gp paid now** and **160 gp after the expedition**. The cooperative also pays **10 gp for each surveyor delivered alive to the surface**, up to **60 gp**, and **40 gp for a readable final beacon record**. These payments are for the whole party.

A complete accounting identifies the fate or last verified position of all six surveyors and honestly reports the condition of the lens. The base payment does not require every rescue to succeed. Mara refuses to turn an honest loss into a financial punishment.

The cooperative's rescue chest contains the full **300 gp** potentially owed. Mara controls its key. Its money comes from members' pooled emergency dues.

She supplies two 50-foot rescue ropes, two harnesses, four pitons, a hammer, a crowbar, a hooded lantern with six hours of oil, and a folding stretcher. These are loaned equipment, not additional treasure.

Stakes

The characters can change five things that remain changed after they leave.

- **The six surveyors' survival and injuries.** Locating a person is useful; getting them to the surface is the actual rescue.
- **The observatory's survival.** Safe shutdown preserves it. Breaking the lens ends the immediate danger but destroys its unique optical element.
- **The expedition's location.** A completed final observation supplies a precise bearing, distance, and recognizable landing site.
- **The cooperative's future.** An intact observatory could support careful research. A ruined chamber becomes a sealed, documented hazard.
- **Trust between Mara and Sera.** Honest disclosure and shared decisions can preserve their working relationship even if Sera loses the observation.

The adventure does not assume that all six surveyors must be saved for the story to continue. An abandoned cage, a delayed evacuation, or a collapsed lens chamber produces specific people and problems to account for.

The missing expedition is not waiting behind another door in this site. The lens can locate its beacon, not rescue its members. Its signal indicates that someone recently operated the beacon; it does not certify the whole expedition's health.

What the Characters Know at the Entrance

Mara freely provides the following.

- Six surveyors entered that morning.
- The first strong tremor occurred about twenty minutes before the characters arrived.
- The distress lamps began immediately afterward.
- Sera believes the buried instrument has detected a missing expedition.
- The surveyors brought no explosives and were not expecting hostile creatures.
- The existing stair should connect all three occupied levels.
- A freight hoist is shown on the cooperative's partial survey.

Mara does not know the shutdown sequence, the location of individual surveyors, or the exact time remaining. The visible clock is a table tool representing measurable signs of deterioration, not knowledge she pretends to possess.

Factions

The Cairn Survey Cooperative

Representative: Mara Quill.

Goal: Recover its people, document the danger, and prevent further casualties.

Leverage: Rescue funds, equipment, professional credibility, and control of future authorized access.

Fear: That excitement over a discovery will turn preventable injuries into deaths.

The cooperative is a small association of surveyors, instrument makers, and route assessors. It can afford this rescue because its members maintain a dedicated emergency fund. It cannot casually finance an army or replace the observatory.

Mara accepts destruction of the lens when necessary. She strongly prefers safe shutdown if the characters can explain a credible procedure. She does not demand demolition simply to win an argument with Sera.

Observable response: Each surveyor reaching the surface receives immediate care. Mara updates her roster, asks what remains below, and offers specific help.

Consequence of betrayal: Deliberately false accounting or concealed theft ends cooperative support. Honest disagreement over the lens does not.

Sera's Beacon Search

Representative: Sera Venn.

Goal: Locate the expedition carrying her brother Orin's beacon.

Leverage: Knowledge of the instrument, the beacon signature, and the final observation settings.

Fear: That a survivable rescue opportunity will be discarded because it is inconvenient.

Sera's search is a personal effort supported by several expedition families. She has no armed followers here. She cannot offer additional immediate payment beyond the cooperative's authorized record fee.

She accepts that restarting the machine was a serious mistake. Under pressure, she initially explains what she hoped to achieve before admitting how quickly she acted. A direct question receives a direct answer: she energized the lens before locking its cradle.

Observable response: If the party secures the surveyors first, Sera helps without bargaining for the observation. If the characters propose a safe final reading, she supplies settings and obeys an agreed abort condition.

Consequence of refusal: She grieves and argues once, then leaves. She does not secretly reactivate a stopped machine.

The Observatory's Custodial System

Representatives: Two archive skitters and two lens wardens.

Goal: Preserve calibrated equipment and keep unauthorized hands away from energized controls.

Leverage: Access denial and limited physical force.

Limitation: Literal instructions, damaged coordination, and no strategic intelligence.

This is an operating institution's residue, not a society of fully conversational beings. Its machines recognize maintenance tokens, stowed instruments, and specific control states.

The archive skitters protect loose calibration equipment. The lens wardens protect the energized lens. Their instructions are different; pacifying one pair does not automatically control the other.

Observable response: Their lenses change color before they attack. Successful maintenance procedures visibly place them in standby.

Permanent state: Disabled or destroyed machines remain disabled or destroyed. No new units appear.

People to Bring Home

Jori Bell, route surveyor

STARTING LOCATION: U1, beneath the beam

CONDITION: Pinned, otherwise stable

CAN MOVE UNAIDED?: Yes after release, at speed 20 feet

USEFUL KNOWLEDGE: Knows the workshop is occupied and the stair is continuous.

Tovin Rusk, instrument fitter

STARTING LOCATION: U2, supply alcove

CONDITION: Dislocated shoulder already supported

CAN MOVE UNAIDED?: Yes, speed 30 feet

USEFUL KNOWLEDGE: Recognizes maintenance tokens and the rescue reel.

Iven Darr, archivist

STARTING LOCATION: M2, behind the fallen cabinet

CONDITION: Bruised and trapped

CAN MOVE UNAIDED?: Yes after release, speed 30 feet

USEFUL KNOWLEDGE: Can identify the shutdown diagram.

Pell Fen, hoist operator

STARTING LOCATION: M3, inside the cage

CONDITION: Unhurt, stranded

CAN MOVE UNAIDED?: Yes after reaching a landing

USEFUL KNOWLEDGE: Knows how to secure and operate the hoist.

Sera Venn, astronomer

STARTING LOCATION: L1

CONDITION: Unhurt, exhausted

CAN MOVE UNAIDED?: Yes, speed 30 feet

USEFUL KNOWLEDGE: Knows the shutdown and final observation procedures.

Ena Sol, observer

STARTING LOCATION: L1, on a folded coat

CONDITION: Sprained ankle, no mortal wound

CAN MOVE UNAIDED?: Speed 10 feet; speed 20 with one helper

USEFUL KNOWLEDGE: Saw which controls Sera left unsecured.

All six begin alive. Each has a maximum of 7 hit points. Jori begins at 5/7 hit points, Ena at 4/7, and Tovin, Iven, Pell, and Sera at 7/7. Jori and Ena therefore have actual lost hit points that healing can restore. Their movement penalties are scenario conditions removed by the qualifying healing below; restoring hit points does not free either trapped surveyor.

If combat statistics become necessary, use the **Surveyor** homebrew profile in **Rules Reference**. Healing that restores at least 1 hit point removes Ena's movement penalty and Jori's post-rescue movement penalty. Healing does not remove the beam pinning Jori or the furniture trapping Iven.

Mara Quill

Mara wears a red scarf tied close to her neck so it cannot catch on equipment. She checks knots while speaking.

Immediate want: A reliable rescue plan with names attached to it.

Fear: Sending another team into a situation nobody understands.

Voice: Short statements followed by practical questions: "Who's carrying Ena? Which way are you bringing her?"

Offers: The full contract, loaned equipment, surface care, and two attendants who can receive evacuees at the entrance.

Knows: The survey's purpose, all six people, and Sera's connection to the missing expedition.

Does not hide: She already knew Sera hoped to find the beacon. She did not authorize restarting unstable machinery.

Mara remains at the surface because somebody must manage returning casualties, the rescue chest, and the attendants. If the party needs her below after stopping the lens, she enters freely. Before then, she will accompany a specific short carry to U1 if one attendant remains outside; she does not become a combat companion.

Sera Venn

Sera's sleeves are rolled unevenly. Graphite marks cover one thumb, and she keeps checking the same small brass watch.

Immediate want: Get Ena moving, then ask for one final observation.

Fear: Having to tell the expedition families that she destroyed their only usable lead.

Voice: Precise until emotion breaks through: "Three readings. I need three. After that, you can close it."

Offers: Full technical cooperation, the beacon settings, and permission to take the listed salvage.

Knows: The lens sequence and the record drawer's operation.

Initially avoids saying: She heard the cradle alarm and continued long enough to confirm the beacon signature.

Help earns candor. Threats make her terse, not violent. A promise to investigate the last known expedition route matters emotionally but is never a mechanical prerequisite to her cooperation.

The Other Surveyors

Jori wants the party to secure the beam before pulling. He names structural features as if introducing acquaintances: "That ugly bracket's still doing its job." He can describe both stair flights once freed.

Tovin wants his tools and people carried out in that order only if the people can already walk. He jokes when frightened, then becomes embarrassed by the joke. He can identify the skitters' blue maintenance response.

Iven wants his annotated diagram preserved. He whispers while searching for words, then delivers a complete sentence at surprising volume. He knows the archive's order but not the expedition beacon settings.

Pell wants a second rope on the cage before anyone touches its brake. He speaks in load estimates. After the five-minute travel repair and rigging, he can operate the winch from U3 while separate U3 tenders manage the backup lines. A stationary secured cage is safe to board but is not yet a working hoist. He refuses to overload it.

Ena wants Sera to stop deciding alone. She speaks gently but names the disputed fact: "You said the cradle could wait." She can confirm the sequence without needing the archive document.

None of these people attacks the party over an argument. They can refuse an obviously unsafe carry, ask for an explanation, or offer a better technique.

Running Time and Pressure

Table-Time Budget

The site contains more detail than the group needs to discuss aloud. Use the procedures when a choice depends on them.

PORTION	TYPICAL TABLE TIME	TYPICAL FICTIONAL TIME
Opening, contract, equipment	10 minutes	Before the clock starts
Scene 1: Entrance rescue	15-20 minutes	5-10 minutes
Scene 2: Workshop preparation	15-20 minutes	5-10 minutes
Scene 3: Archive and skitters	25-35 minutes	10-15 minutes
Scene 4: Hoist rescue	20-30 minutes	5-10 minutes
Scene 5: Sera and Ena	20-25 minutes	5-10 minutes
Scene 6: Lens decision	35-45 minutes	1-10 minutes, plus observation surcharge if chosen
Evacuation and aftermath	15-20 minutes	5-10 minutes
Deliberation allowance	15-25 minutes	Charge only when characters are actually deliberating in danger

A focused group can finish near three hours. Groups that fight both construct pairs and debate the observation extensively approach four hours.

The Visible Rescue Clock

Homebrew procedure: Draw eight boxes. Each box represents ten minutes of fictional time after the first character enters U1. Keep a separate remainder of 0-9 minutes.

Mark time for actual work, searching, travel, and in-character delays. Do not charge a player ten minutes because they asked the DM to clarify a map.

- A listed five-minute task adds five minutes.
- Combat uses its actual rounds. Ten rounds equal one minute.
- A brief exchange of a few sentences does not automatically cost five minutes.
- Starting the final observation adds **ten minutes once**, immediately.
- No other action adds an entire segment unless its procedure says so.
- A safe shutdown or destruction ends the clock permanently.

Announce every completed segment with a concrete sign. At segment 2, dust falls through the stairwell. At segment 4, loose objects slide toward the lens chamber. At segment 6, the hoist gives a sharp metallic report. At segment 7, the distress lamps become a continuous white glow.

The characters can recognize that the situation is deteriorating. A character examining the lamps or feeling the rhythmic tremors for one minute understands approximately how close the next threshold is; no check is needed.

Threshold Effects

COMPLETED SEGMENTS	PERSISTENT CHANGE
0-3	The site is unstable but all listed routes remain open.
4	The middle stair flight becomes debris-strewn. Its movement cost doubles until cleared. Clearing it takes two creatures five minutes. The hoist is unaffected.
6	An unsecured hoist cage drops to L3. Apply the cage-drop procedure in Scene 4. A secured cage does not drop.
7	The lens chamber's surge occurs every round instead of every second round while initiative is being tracked.
8	Begin the three-round rupture countdown in Scene 6.

Crossing a threshold never retroactively repeats its effect. Clearing the stair remains useful. A dropped cage does not return to M3. Stopping the lens prevents all thresholds not already reached.

Pausing the Clock

With the shutter closed, a creature can hold the bleed valve open. This pauses the clock at its exact current value.

In initiative, holding it requires that creature's action each turn and remaining at the bleed control. Outside initiative, the creature must continuously use both hands and cannot perform another task. There is no arbitrary endurance limit during this adventure.

Releasing the valve closes it immediately and resumes the clock. The pause does not erase elapsed time, restore the cage, remove debris, or cancel an already completed collapse.

During the three-round rupture countdown, a correctly held bleed valve pauses the countdown at its current round. Engaging the cradle then cancels it permanently. Destroying the lens also cancels it, after resolving the break pulse.

Travel and Evacuation Time

Use tactical distances when seconds matter. Otherwise, these complete route allowances include opening doors, checking a landing, and moving ordinary equipment.

- Between adjacent chambers on one level: **one minute**.
- Between adjacent levels by the western stair: **two minutes**, or **four minutes** across the debris-strewn middle flight.
- Between adjacent levels by a secured hoist: **two minutes**, including boarding and unloading.
- From U1 to the surface: **two minutes**.
- Escorting Ena without healing doubles these allowances unless she is carried on the stretcher.
- A stretcher with two bearers uses the normal allowances.
- An unencumbered character hurrying alone may halve these times, rounded up, but cannot conduct a careful inspection along the way.

Do not add these allowances to tactical movement already counted for the same journey.

Useful Optional Cuts

Shorten workshop play: Tovin has already gathered the tokens and reel. Locating them takes no search time. The players still choose what to carry and whether to escort him.

Shorten the archive confrontation: If a character presents a maintenance token before disturbing the instruments, the skitters enter standby immediately. Iven and the diagram remain a meaningful rescue and discovery.

Shorten the hoist sequence: Pell has already threaded the safety eye. One character on the M3 landing can secure it

with a supplied rope in one minute. This preserves the choice to repair the hoist or simply extract Pell.

Combine final preparations: Sera explains the sequence while the party arranges Ena's evacuation. Charge the longer task, not both.

Avoid a second fight: Once the shutter closes, the wardens' maintenance test becomes available. Characters who discovered the procedure can shut them down while continuing the lens work.

Do not remove Pell from the roster because his encounter was shortened. Do not place Iven safely upstairs because the party skipped the archive. An optional cut changes the time spent presenting a situation, not its unearned outcome.

Locations

The observatory has three occupied levels connected by a western stair and an eastern freight-hoist shaft. Each level has three chambers. The main chamber on the lower level contains the lens.

The site's dimensions, anchors, openings, and route lengths are defined in **Map Specifications**. That section is authoritative wherever tactical positioning matters.

S0: Hillside Rescue Station

A wagon, rescue chest, canvas awning, and two attendants occupy firm ground outside the crack. The entrance stair is narrow enough that the attendants cannot carry the stretcher abreast; its hinged poles allow a normal two-person carry.

The surface is never swallowed by the lens collapse. Minor tremors loosen dust near the opening, but the rescue station remains a safe destination.

People: Mara and attendants Cale and Miri.

Services: Blankets, water, wound cleaning, roster updates, and receipt of equipment.

Exit: The road leads away from Cairn Hill without another encounter.

U1: Entry Hall

The exposed stair enters a small hall with a fallen crossbeam. Jori lies beside its eastern end. A cracked but readable wall plaque shows a stair symbol to the north and a freight-cage symbol to the east.

The beam blocks the direct route to the workshop but leaves a narrow southern bypass. Rescuing Jori is therefore not a mandatory toll for proceeding; leaving him has an explicit human cost.

Discoveries: Jori can identify the continuing stair. Scrapes in the southern bypass show Tovin's passage.

Pressure: Unsecured attempts to move the beam can worsen Jori's injury.

Return state: Once propped or moved, the beam stays where the characters put it.

U2: Workshop

Brass frames, folded canvas, and a rack of measuring rods fill the workshop. Tovin shelters in the northwest alcove. The useful supplies lie on a waist-high bench.

The workshop contains maintenance tokens, a rescue reel, and two removable starspindles. Its lamps and tool labels are readable without a check.

Discoveries: A simple diagram explains that the blue face of a token requests maintenance standby. A warning distinguishes archive tools from lens controls.

Pressure: Taking everything costs time and occupies hands; there is no hidden punishment for selecting useful equipment.

Return state: Removed supplies remain removed. Tovin leaves if given a safe route and an escort plan.

U3: Upper Hoist Landing

A hand-operated winch stands beside the shaft. The cage begins at M3, twenty feet below this landing. Its upper suspension is frayed; the fixed safety eyes are sound.

The landing's east-side service ladder connects all three levels. It offers an independent route even if the cage is unusable.

Discoveries: A stamped plate gives the cage's load limit. Looking down reveals Pell if he remains in the cage.

Pressure: Operating the winch before securing the cage can trigger its drop.

Return state: A repaired, secured, dropped, or abandoned cage keeps that state.

M1: Middle Stair Landing

This landing faces the archive corridor. A thin line of graphite on the wall marks the surveyors' intended return route. The stair continues down to L1.

At clock segment 4, fallen plaster and stone litter the stair flight between M1 and L1. The landing itself remains passable.

Discoveries: Iven's voice can be heard from the archive unless he has already left. A person listening at the lower stair can hear Ena coughing in L1.

Pressure: The stair debris delays a carry but does not seal the route.

Return state: Cleared debris does not fall again.

M2: Archive

A fallen cabinet divides the northern part of the room. Iven is behind it, with access to a wall tube containing the shutdown diagram. Two archive skitters begin beside the calibration trays.

The skitters are not guarding Iven. They interpret moving loose instruments without maintenance authorization as theft or contamination.

Discoveries: The shutdown diagram, a readable maintenance inscription, and old observation logs.

Pressure: Careless handling activates the skitters. Repeated rummaging consumes clock time.

Return state: A moved cabinet stays moved. Standby skitters remain in standby unless deliberately reactivated at their recessed switches.

M3: Middle Hoist Landing

The cage begins level with this landing but is separated from it by a two-foot sill gap. Its gate is shut. Pell can reach the gate but cannot safely release the brake from inside.

A sound safety eye on the landing provides an obvious place to secure a rope. The shaft's ladder is reachable without entering the cage.

Discoveries: Pell knows the cage can be secured, emptied, and then used.

Pressure: Segment 6 drops an unsecured cage.

Return state: Pell may be on the landing, elsewhere with an escort, or inside the dropped cage at L3.

L1: Lower Vestibule

Sera and Ena begin here, west of the lens chamber. Ena's injured ankle rests on a folded coat. The lens chamber's door stands open unless someone closes it.

An etched instruction strip beside the doorway depicts shutter, valve, and cradle symbols. The text is sufficient to reconstruct the safe shutdown sequence.

Discoveries: Sera's account, Ena's corroboration, and the control strip.

Pressure: The observation argument costs time only if the characters actually stop to debate it.

Return state: Evacuated people do not reappear. An abandoned coat and Sera's chalk marks remain.

L2: Lens Chamber

A suspended optical assembly occupies the center of the chamber. Three controls stand around it: a western shutter wheel, a southeastern bleed lever, and a southwestern cradle pedal and locking bar.

The recorder is a separate cabinet against the north wall. Two lens wardens begin in marked recesses. Their patrols stay within this room.

Discoveries: Control labels, live beacon settings, and immediate feedback from every control.

Pressure: Gravity surges, the wardens, and the visible clock.

Return state: A stopped lens stays stopped. Broken optics remain broken. After rupture, the chamber becomes rubble with accessible rescue voids.

L3: Lower Hoist Landing

The shaft ends in a buffered well surrounded by a stable landing. A dropped cage comes to rest here. The lens chamber connects through a short western corridor.

The well buffers prevent an endless fall; they do not make the drop harmless.

Discoveries: Anyone on the landing can reach the cage gate after a drop.

Pressure: If the lens chamber collapses, its eastern doorway blocks, but the shaft ladder still leads upward.

Return state: The cage may remain here permanently if its winch is not repaired.

Map Specifications

These specifications define two useful maps: a three-level floor plan and a vertical route diagram. Each has a DM view and a separate player-safe view. No additional tactical map is required.

All coordinates are in feet. North is increasing negative y; east is increasing x. Rectangles list west, north, east, south boundaries. Floors are at elevations **0 feet**, **-20 feet**, and **-40 feet**. The hillside station is at **+20 feet**.

Room boundaries describe interior floor space. Walls lie outside those boundaries. Openings interrupt walls where listed. Unlisted walls are solid stone.

Map 1: Three-Level Observatory Plan

Scale: One square equals 5 feet.

Display: Three aligned panels, one per level. Coordinates repeat between panels; the level key distinguishes them.

Grid extent per panel: x = -5 to 95; y = -5 to 55.

North: Up the page.

Authoritative Room and Route Table

FEATURE	COORDINATES OR ENDPOINTS	ELEVATION	GEOMETRY AND ACCESS
U1 / M1 / L1 western chambers	Rectangle (0,20)-(20,40)	0 / -20 / -40	Each is 20 × 20 feet. Northern stair openings and eastern corridor opening remain usable.
U2 workshop	Rectangle (30,20)-(60,40)	0	30 × 20 feet.
M2 archive	Rectangle (30,20)-(60,40)	-20	30 × 20 feet.
L2 lens chamber	Rectangle (30,10)-(60,50)	-40	30 × 40 feet.

FEATURE	COORDINATES OR ENDPOINTS	ELEVATION	GEOMETRY AND ACCESS
U3 / M3 / L3 hoist chambers	Rectangle (70,20)-(90,40)	0 / -20 / -40	Each is 20 × 20 feet, including the shaft opening and surrounding landing.
Western horizontal corridors	Rectangle (20,25)-(30,35), on each level	Respective floor	10 feet long, 10 feet wide.
Eastern horizontal corridors	Rectangle (60,25)-(70,35), on each level	Respective floor	10 feet long, 10 feet wide.
Western corridor doorways	x = 20 and 30, y = 25-35	Respective floor	10-foot openings; open sliding doors at the central-room ends.
Eastern corridor doorways	x = 60 and 70, y = 25-35	Respective floor	10-foot openings; open sliding doors at the central-room ends.
Western stair enclosure	Rectangle (0,-5)-(10,20)	Between levels	Two 5-foot-wide switchback flights and a turning landing.
Stair chamber opening	y = 20, x = 0-10	Each western chamber	One 5-foot lane ascends; the other descends. No door.
Stair flights	Two parallel flight footprints: (0,0)-(5,20) and (5,0)-(10,20)	Each 20-foot level change	Each flight has 25 feet of movement length and changes elevation 10 feet.
Stair turning landing	Rectangle (0,-5)-(10,0)	Halfway between floors	10 feet of turning movement; total route between floor landings is 60 feet.
Surface connection	Same stair construction, S0 to U1	+20 to 0	60 feet of movement; exits onto firm hillside.
Hoist shaft opening	Rectangle (75,25)-(85,35)	Continuous, 0 to -40	10 × 10 feet. Guardrails surround the opening except at the west loading gate.

FEATURE	COORDINATES OR ENDPOINTS	ELEVATION	GEOMETRY AND ACCESS
Hoist cage	Rectangle (75,25)-(85,35)	Initially -20	Full 10 × 10-foot platform; four Medium occupants maximum, subject to load limit.
Hoist loading gate	x = 75, y = 25-35	Each landing	Reached across a 2-foot hinged sill plate when the cage is level.
Hoist landing walkways	All U3/M3/L3 floor outside shaft rectangle	Respective floor	Minimum width 5 feet; west approach is 5 feet wide.
Fixed service ladder	Vertical line at (87.5,30)	0 to -40	On east wall; reached by the north or south landing walkway.
Winch	Rectangle (80, 20)-(85,25), U3 only	0	Occupies one 5-foot square; operator stands immediately west.
Safety eyes	Points (72.5,22.5), (72.5,37.5)	Each hoist landing	Flush fixtures; do not obstruct floor space.

The switchback stair is a continuous stacked stairwell. Its up and down lanes exchange direction at successive landings. The two flights and turning landing together cost 60 feet of movement for a 20-foot elevation change; do not measure the projected footprint as a shorter travel route.

The hoist chamber contains enough surrounding floor for a character to walk from its west corridor to the east ladder without stepping across the shaft. The cage fills the shaft when present; the two-foot sill gap is bridged by a hinged plate, not an additional gap in the room dimensions.

Authoritative Obstacle and Anchor Table

An anchor is the center of a 5-foot square unless a larger footprint is listed.

KEY	FEATURE	POSITION OR FOOTPRINT	EFFECT
U1	Fallen beam	Rectangle (10,25)-(15,35)	Blocks two squares. Provides half cover.
U1	Jori	Anchor (17.5,32.5)	Adjacent to the beam's east side; does not overlap its footprint.
U1	Southern bypass	y = 35-40, x = 10-20	Clear 5-foot lane around beam.

KEY	FEATURE	POSITION OR FOOTPRINT	EFFECT
U2	Supply bench	Rectangle (40,20)-(50,25)	Solid furniture, half cover.
U2	Tovin	Anchor (32.5,22.5)	Clear square northwest of bench.
U2	Tool rack	Rectangle (55,35)-(60,40)	One occupied furniture square.
M2	Fallen cabinet	Rectangle (40,20)-(45,30)	Blocks two squares; half cover.
M2	Iven	Anchor (47.5,22.5)	Clear space east of cabinet.
M2	Diagram tube	Point (50,20) on north wall	Reachable from Iven's square or its eastern neighbor.
M2	Calibration trays	Rectangle (50,35)-(60,40)	Furniture; half cover.
M2	Skitter A	Anchor (47.5,32.5)	Small creature in a clear square.
M2	Skitter B	Anchor (57.5,32.5)	Small creature in a clear square.
M3	Pell	Anchor (77.5,27.5), cage	Inside cage, not on landing.
L1	Ena	Anchor (12.5,32.5)	Her folded coat occupies her square only.
L1	Sera	Anchor (12.5,27.5)	Beside Ena; clear path to east exit.
L2	Lens housing	Rectangle (40,25)-(50,35)	Solid 10 × 10-foot obstacle. Blocks movement and sight through it; full cover.
L2	Shutter control, S	Anchor (32.5,17.5)	Operator square; fixture on west wall.
L2	Cradle control, C	Anchor (32.5,42.5)	Operator square; fixture on west wall.
L2	Bleed control, B	Anchor (57.5,42.5)	Operator square; fixture on east wall.
L2	Recorder, R	Rectangle (45,10)-(50,15)	Cabinet; operator may stand at (47.5,17.5). Half cover.

KEY	FEATURE	POSITION OR FOOTPRINT	EFFECT
L2	West warden	Anchor (37.5,22.5)	Medium creature in a clear square.
L2	East warden	Anchor (52.5,37.5)	Medium creature in a clear square.
L2	Observation operator	Anchor (47.5,17.5)	Same clear square used to operate recorder.
L2	West exit approach	x = 30-40, y = 25-35	Clear 10-foot-wide band west of lens.
L2	East exit approach	x = 50-60, y = 25-35	Clear 10-foot-wide band east of lens.

All creature anchors accommodate their entire space without overlapping furniture, walls, or the lens housing. Large creatures cannot occupy the 5-foot operator squares without squeezing into an adjacent available area; adjudicate their squeezing using the normal SRD rules.

There is a continuous clear route around all four sides of the lens housing. The north route between the shutter and recorder is unobstructed. The south route between cradle and bleed controls is unobstructed and measures 25 feet between operator-square centers.

From the shutter operator square to the cradle operator square is 25 feet along the western clear lane. From the recorder operator square to either exit corridor entrance requires no more than 30 feet around the housing. A speed-30 character can therefore reach an exit from the recorder using ordinary movement on their next turn.

The chamber contains no hidden pits, invisible walls, or secret passages.

Map 2: Vertical Route Diagram

This diagram communicates relationships, elevations, and evacuation routes. It is not a second source of tactical dimensions.

The rendered map sheets below provide this route network; the coordinate tables remain the tactical reference.

Each horizontal connection is the corresponding 10-foot corridor in Map 1. Each vertical stair connection is 60 feet of movement. Each hoist or ladder connection changes elevation by 20 feet.

Collapse boundary: A lens rupture affects L2 and blocks its two central-room doorways at x = 30 and x = 60. It does not collapse L1, L3, the western stair, or the hoist shaft. The two sides remain independently connected to the surface.

DM and Player Views

DM floor plan: Include room keys, obstacle footprints, all starting anchors, control letters, shaft boundaries, the collapse boundary, and threshold notes.

Player floor plan: Include visible room outlines, corridors, stairs, shaft, guardrails, furniture, and the lens housing. Remove people, construct positions, threshold effects, collapse markings, control-solution letters, and rescue annotations. Controls may be shown as unlabeled visible fixtures. Reveal room panels as explored; the player-safe drawing does not itself mean the characters know every room.

DM vertical diagram: Include elevations, route times, clock-4 stair debris, clock-6 cage drop, and the L2 collapse boundary.

Player vertical diagram: Show levels, stairs, hoist, and elevations. Remove threshold events, occupant locations, and collapse predictions. Supply it when Jori, Pell, or the survey sketch makes the route network known.

Map Asset Briefs

The following map assets are delivered with this module as 300 ppi PNG sheets with SVG masters.

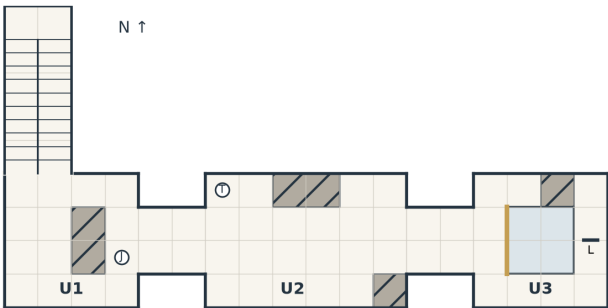
ASSET	STABLE PATH	AUDIENCE AND PLACEMENT	PRINT SPECIFICATION
Three-level floor plan, DM	assets/maps/l ast-light-obse rvatory-dm.p ng	Private; beside this section	Portrait US Letter, 300 ppi, three aligned panels; readable 5-foot grid and keyed legend.
Three-level floor plan, player	assets/maps/l ast-light-obse rvatory-player .png	Player-safe; detachable map sheet	Same geometry and dimensions, with the removals listed above.
Vertical route diagram, DM	assets/maps/l ast-light-secti on-dm.png	Private; facing the clock reference	Portrait, 7 × 9-inch live area, high-contrast route lines.
Vertical route diagram, player	assets/maps/l ast-light-secti on-player.png	Player-safe; deliver after route discovery	Same topology; no occupants, thresholds, or collapse boundary.

Use pale stone, charcoal boundaries, muted brass controls, and restrained blue light. Color may reinforce meaning but must not carry essential information. Labels and scale should remain readable in grayscale. Decorative rubble must not close an otherwise open route or occupy an unlisted square.

DM Map Sheets

THE LAST LIGHT BELOW

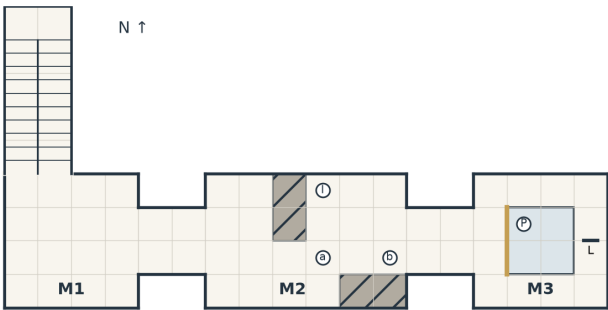
Observatory floor plans | DM ONLY - starting state



UPPER
0 ft

U1 Entry hall
U2 Workshop
U3 Hoist landing

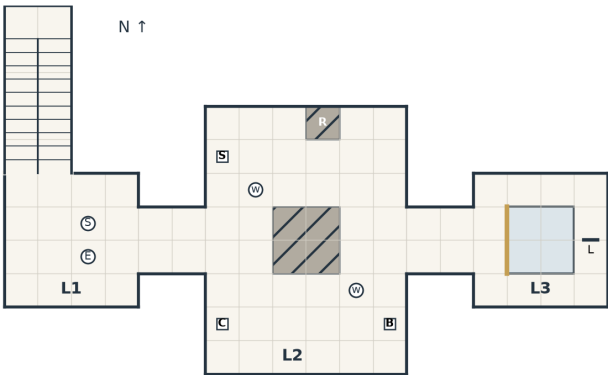
J Jori
T Tovin



MIDDLE
-20 ft

M1 Stair landing
M2 Archive
M3 Hoist landing

I Iven / P Pell
a, b Skitters



LOWER
-40 ft

L1 Vestibule
L2 Lens chamber
L3 Hoist landing

E Ena / S Sera
w Wardens
S Shutter
C Cradle
B Bleed / R Recorder

GRID: 5 FEET | NORTH UP | L = SERVICE LADDER

Stairs: 60 ft movement per level. Hoist/ladder: 20 ft vertical per level. Surface is 20 ft above U1.

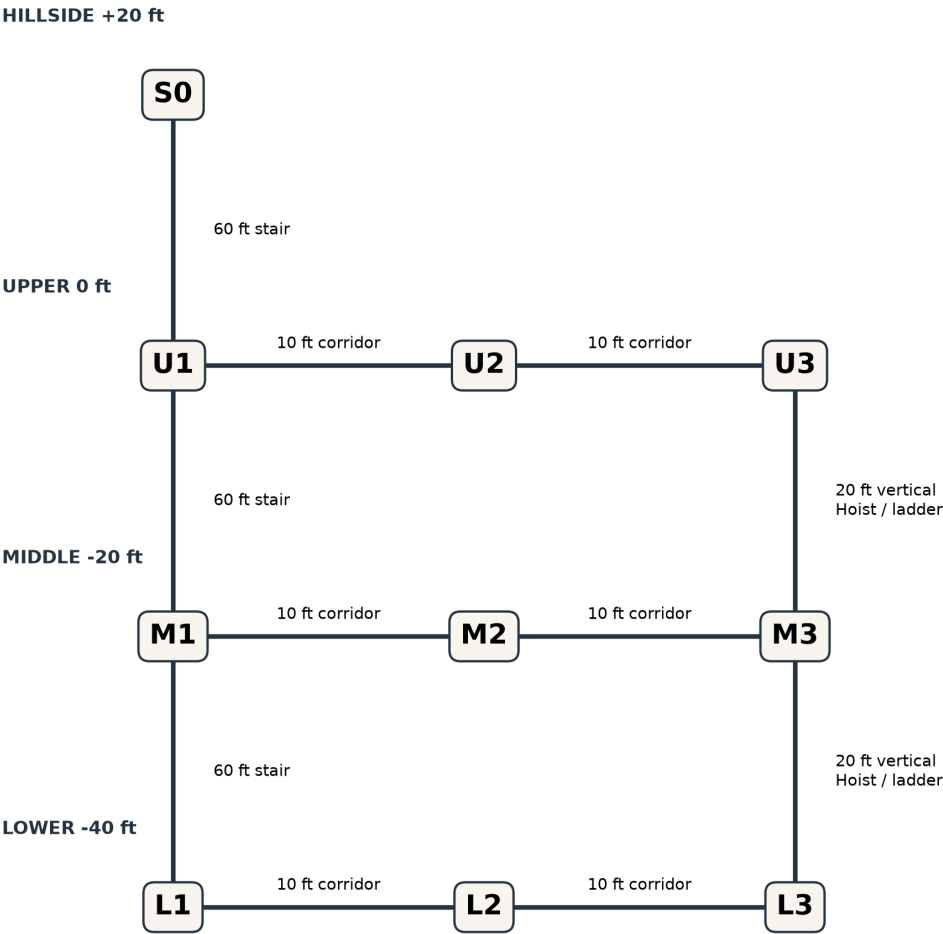
DM: rupture affects L2 only; both doorway openings close. Clock 4: middle stair debris. Clock 6: unsecured cage drops.

Map key: use the keyed location descriptions on the following pages.

The Last Light Below

THE LAST LIGHT BELOW

Routes and elevations | DM ONLY



SCHEMATIC - not to tactical scale. Horizontal labels measure the connecting corridors only.
Complete route allowances: 1 minute between adjacent rooms; 2 minutes between levels.
Stair flights and turning landings cost 60 feet of movement per level change.
Clock 4: the middle stair route costs double until cleared.
Clock 6: an unsecured cage drops from M3 to L3.
Rupture: L2 and its two doorways collapse; L1 and L3 retain separate routes to the surface.

Map key: use the keyed location descriptions on the following pages.

Encounter Matrix

1. The Beam and the Voice LOCATION: U1 MAIN CHALLENGE: Release Jori without worsening his injury EXACT OPPOSITION: No hostile creatures ESSENTIAL GAIN: First survivor; route information ALTERNATE APPROACH: Brace and lever, coordinated lift, magic, or bypass
2. Tools for People LOCATION: U2 MAIN CHALLENGE: Prepare efficiently and escort Tovin EXACT OPPOSITION: No hostile creatures ESSENTIAL GAIN: Tokens, reel, equipment choices ALTERNATE APPROACH: Take obvious supplies immediately; leave salvage
3. The Archive That Objects LOCATION: M2 MAIN CHALLENGE: Free Iven and retrieve the diagram EXACT OPPOSITION: Two archive skitters, A and B ESSENTIAL GAIN: Shutdown instructions ALTERNATE APPROACH: Maintenance token, stow loose instruments, distract, or fight
4. A Cage on One Cable LOCATION: U3/M3/L3 MAIN CHALLENGE: Secure the cage and recover Pell EXACT OPPOSITION: No hostile creatures ESSENTIAL GAIN: Second evacuation route ALTERNATE APPROACH: Safety rope, ladder transfer, flight, or lower rescue after drop
5. One More Reading LOCATION: L1 MAIN CHALLENGE: Resolve Sera's request and move Ena EXACT OPPOSITION: No hostile creatures ESSENTIAL GAIN: Truth, settings, informed choice ALTERNATE APPROACH: Refuse, bargain, delegate, or bypass conversation
6. The Last Light

LOCATION: L2
MAIN CHALLENGE: Stop the lens, optionally save its record
EXACT OPPOSITION: Two lens wardens, west and east
ESSENTIAL GAIN: Final site state and possible beacon record
ALTERNATE APPROACH: Shutdown, maintenance standby, observation, destruction, retreat

Four opponents exist in total. Neither a retreat nor a return visit replenishes them.

Scenes

Scene 1: Beneath the Split Hill

Runtime: 15-20 minutes.

Objective: Free Jori and establish a safe entrance route.

Stakes: An unsecured beam can injure him further; abandoning him leaves a person trapped beside the only surface stair.

Arrival condition: Use the opening description below only while Jori remains pinned. If he has been freed, describe the beam in its recorded position and any equipment left supporting it. If the party initially bypassed him and returns, retain all prior injuries and failed support attempts.

READ-ALoud
A timber lies across the tiled floor, one end wedged beneath a broken bracket. A man's boot protrudes from behind it. His hands grip a survey pole laid across his chest. Along the southern wall, a narrow strip of floor remains clear, and fresh scrapes lead through it toward an open doorway.

DM Prompt: Jori can point to the bracket and explain which end moved during the last tremor.

Encounter 1: The Beam and the Voice

Location: U1.

Trigger: The characters enter or approach Jori.

Opposition: None.

Immediate pressure: The beam is stable until somebody shifts it without support. The lens clock begins when the first character enters U1.

What is evident

Jori is pinned by the beam's eastern edge at his boot and trouser leg. His leg is compressed but not crushed. The broken bracket still supports most of the load. Pulling him sideways without lifting the edge would worsen the injury.

The southern bypass is visibly clear. A Small or Medium creature can walk through it without squeezing. The party can reach the workshop or stair while leaving Jori in place.

What examination reveals

A character spending one minute examining the load identifies two sound support points: the bracket and a low stone curb beside the beam. No check is needed.

A successful **DC 11 Intelligence (Investigation)** check identifies a quicker lever position, reducing the brace-and-lever method below from five minutes to one minute. Failure consumes that one minute and reveals that the first proposed lever angle is unsafe. It does not move the beam.

Jori knows that Tovin reached the workshop and that the northern stair continues downward. He has not seen the other four surveyors since the tremor.

Rescue procedures

Choose a credible method.

1. **Brace and lever:** Use the crowbar or a strong pole and a solid wedge. Two characters work for five minutes, or one minute after the successful Investigation check above. No further check is required once the support points are identified. The beam moves far enough for Jori to withdraw.

2. **Coordinated lift:** Two characters use their actions together; one makes a **DC 13 Strength (Athletics)** check with advantage from the other's assistance. A success frees Jori in one round. A failure leaves the beam in place. Repeating without first adding a brace causes the beam to slip: Jori takes **1d4 bludgeoning damage**, and the attempt still fails.

3. **Secure rope lift:** A rope around the beam and the intact bracket allows two workers to free him in five minutes without a check. The rope remains under load until the beam is lowered or propped.

4. **Magic:** An effect that can move or lift the required load works according to its stated limits. The lifted edge requires support equivalent to approximately **200 pounds**, although the whole beam weighs much more. Teleporting Jori directly out also works if the spell can target him.

5. **Break the pinning edge:** The damaged wooden edge has **AC 12, 10 hit points**, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Damaging it without first bracing the beam causes one slip as above when it breaks. Bracing first prevents the slip.

A character can stabilize the beam with the crowbar as an action, holding it continuously. While held, failed lifts do not cause a slip. The holder cannot assist the lift simultaneously.

Escalation

The clock does not inflict automatic damage on Jori at intermediate thresholds. The beam creaks and sheds dust, but its existing support remains sound. This preserves a real decision to return with tools.

If Jori falls to 0 hit points, use the surveyor rules. He does not die merely because a rescue check failed.

After release

Jori can walk at speed 20 feet. He can reach the surface with an escort or follow a clearly explained, cleared route alone. If sent alone through U1's entrance stair, he reaches Mara after four minutes.

He offers his survey pole as a probe but asks that it be returned. It has no unusual mechanical benefit beyond being a 10-foot pole.

Success: Jori is free, the entrance is understood, and the party knows the workshop and lower stair are accessible.

Fail-forward: The party can leave him supported and proceed for tools, or abandon him temporarily. Record the beam state, Jori's hit points, and any load-bearing equipment.

Transition: Tovin's scrape marks lead east to U2. Jori's description and the wall plaque identify the northern stair to M1. Neither lead depends on a successful check.

Scene 2: The Workshop's Choices

Runtime: 15-20 minutes.

Objective: Recover Tovin, choose equipment, and learn how maintenance authorization works.

Stakes: Time spent collecting salvage competes with rescue time; useful tools can reduce later risks.

Arrival condition: If Tovin has already left, omit his presence and describe his chalk arrow pointing toward U1. If equipment was removed, name only what remains. Do not restore the tokens, reel, or starspindles on a later visit.

READ-ALoud

Brass frames crowd a bench beneath a row of blue glass lamps. A man with one arm bound against his chest sits beside an open cupboard. Three palm-sized disks hang from hooks above him. Across the room, a compact rope drum rests beneath a sign showing a person being lowered through a hatch.

DM Prompt: Tovin offers to identify the useful equipment while someone checks his shoulder.

Encounter 2: Tools for People

Location: U2.

Trigger: The characters enter the workshop or call to Tovin.

Opposition: None.

Immediate pressure: Tovin is ready to leave, but he does not know whether Jori's route is clear.

What is evident

The disks, rope drum, and hand tools are ordinary physical objects. Nothing attacks someone who picks them up. The bench's blue-painted instruction strip is readable in Common.

Tovin's arm is supported. He does not need a successful Medicine check to become mobile. A character can spend one minute adjusting the sling; doing so earns his trust but confers no additional combat benefit.

The equipment choice

The obvious useful equipment can be collected in **one minute**:

- **Three maintenance tokens**, each showing blue on one side and amber on the other.
- **One rescue reel**, containing its own 50-foot line.
- **One waxed tool wrap**, containing a screwdriver, small pliers, and a grease pencil.

The tool wrap is cooperative property with no listed treasure value. It can operate the constructs' recessed standby switches after they have been safely reached.

Two removable starspindles are fitted inside a bench frame. Recovering both takes **five minutes** with the tool wrap, or **ten minutes** using improvised tools. They are authorized salvage worth **20 gp each**. They are not needed for any rescue or control procedure.

Searching every drawer takes another **five minutes** and finds only old invoices, broken fittings, and personal effects. Tell the players this is a broad search with uncertain value before they commit.

Maintenance instruction

The bench strip reads:

PLAYER TEXT

Blue presented: maintenance requested. Loose calibration pieces returned: maintenance accepted.
Amber presented: resume assigned work. Lens wardens answer the chamber's shutter state.

Tovin explains that a token must be displayed deliberately within a machine's sight. Merely carrying one does nothing. He knows the archive skitters should pause for blue, but warns that the larger lens wardens follow a separate safety test.

This is actionable knowledge, not a complete answer to the final encounter.

Packing and carrying

The rescue reel weighs **8 pounds**. Each starspindle weighs **3 pounds**. The tool wrap weighs **2 pounds**. Each token weighs less than 1 pound.

A character carrying the folding stretcher in both hands cannot also climb the service ladder without securing or passing it. The stretcher folds to a 5-foot bundle and can be tied to a rope for hauling.

Use normal carrying-capacity rules for characters. The special load limits of the reel and hoist apply independently.

A useful negotiation

Tovin asks that the party take the reel even if it leaves the valuable spindles. He offers to carry the tool wrap in his good hand and to guide freed people from U1 to the surface.

He will escort Jori if both are mobile. This frees the adventurers to continue. They take **four minutes** from U1 to S0 because of Jori's pace. Once they reach the surface, mark both rescued.

If sent to escort someone deeper in the site, Tovin refuses to cross an unsecured hoist or enter a room with active hostile constructs. He is helpful, not expendable.

Failure and alternatives

There is no mandatory skill check here. The challenge is deciding what preparation is worth the time.

If the party skips U2 entirely, it can still pacify the archive skitters by restoring instruments, secure the hoist with supplied rope, and stop the lens through its visible controls.

If the tokens are lost or destroyed, no route becomes inaccessible.

Success: Tovin has an evacuation plan, the characters select equipment, and they understand that the machines respond to maintenance behavior.

Fail-forward: Leaving without the tools increases the work required elsewhere but does not block progress. Tovin remains at the bench until given a safe route or until the lens stops; afterward he makes his own way to U1.

Transition: The western stair leads to M1 and the archive. The eastern corridor leads to U3, where the cage can be inspected from above. Tovin knows both routes and can point them out directly.

Scene 3: The Archive Keeps Its Order

Runtime: 25-35 minutes.

Objective: Free Iven and obtain the shutdown diagram.

Stakes: Disturbing calibrated equipment activates the skitters; a rushed rescue can leave the party ignorant of the easiest shutdown.

Arrival condition: Iven's opener applies only while he remains behind the cabinet. Standby or destroyed skitters should be described accordingly. If the cabinet has moved, use its recorded position and preserve the clear route.

READ-ALoud

A cabinet lies on its side beneath a wall of narrow document tubes. Beyond it, a raised hand taps twice against the stone. Two brass devices stand beside shallow trays of glass rings. Their jointed legs remain still, but their small blue lenses turn toward the doorway.

DM Prompt: Iven asks the characters to avoid the glass trays and pass him something he can use as a lever.

Encounter 3: The Archive That Objects

Location: M2, approached from M1 or M3.

Trigger: Entering the room reveals the skitters. Hostilities begin only under the conditions below.

Opposition: Exactly two archive skitters, identified as A and B. Use their complete homebrew statistics in **Rules Reference**.

Starting positions: Use the authoritative anchor table.

Objective: Recover Iven and the diagram; defeating the skitters is optional.

What is evident

The cabinet blocks Iven's shortest route, but he is not crushed beneath it. The southern aisle is open. He cannot reach it because a bent shelf pins the loose fabric of his coat to the wall behind the cabinet.

The skitters watch the trays rather than Iven. Each displays a blue lens until an activation trigger occurs.

A text strip on the tray frame states: "Return rings to nests before maintenance."

Activation triggers

The skitters turn amber, click three times, and allow one round for correction when a creature:

- removes a glass ring from its tray;
- overturns a tray;
- attacks a skitter;
- forces the cabinet against the trays.

If the disturbance is corrected during that warning round, they return to blue. Otherwise roll initiative. They do not attack merely because someone enters, helps Iven, or retrieves the document tube.

An attack against a skitter ends the warning immediately for both.

Freeing Iven

Several methods work.

- **Cut the coat:** A character reaching Iven's square can cut the trapped cloth as an action. The route around the cabinet's south and east sides is clear. Iven loses a coat, not a body part.
- **Move the cabinet carefully:** Two creatures spend five minutes levering it away from the wall. No check is required.
- **Fast lift:** One creature makes a **DC 12 Strength (Athletics)** check with another assisting. Success takes one round. Failure leaves it in place; failure by 5 or more pushes it against a tray and triggers the warning.

- **Pass a tool:** Iven can cut himself free in one minute if given a blade or suitable cutting tool. Throwing one carelessly requires a **DC 10 Dexterity** check; failure drops it within the cabinet footprint, where it can be recovered from the southern side as an action.

Iven's voice and visible hand mean locating him never requires a search roll.

Pacifying the skitters

A character can use either maintenance route.

1. Token route: Display a blue maintenance token within 15 feet of both skitters and use an action to request maintenance. If no creature is currently damaging a tray, both enter standby. If already hostile, they first spend their next turns returning loose rings; they then enter standby unless attacked again.

2. Order route: Put any displaced rings back in their fitted nests and close both tray lids. This takes two actions, one per tray. No check is required if the character can reach the tray. At the end of the second action, both skitters enter standby.

A skitter adjacent to a creature restoring a ring does not make an opportunity attack against that creature during that movement. This exception is part of its homebrew maintenance behavior.

If a creature displays the amber token face after standby, the skitters resume their archive assignment. That does not make them hostile unless a disturbance remains.

Combat procedure

The skitters try to force intruders away from the trays. They target a creature carrying a ring first, then a creature damaging them, then the nearest creature within the southern half of the room.

They use their clamp attacks rather than grappling or dragging. They do not climb onto unconscious creatures or attack a fallen target.

The cabinet and trays provide half cover where the line of attack crosses them. Their footprints remain obstacles.

At **5 hit points or fewer**, a skitter retreats to the nearest tray and takes the Dodge action while clicking. It does not pursue beyond M2. If both tray lids close, it accepts standby even after being damaged.

There are no reinforcements. If A escapes a melee and later reengages, use A's existing hit points.

The shutdown diagram

Iven can pull the document tube from the wall while still trapped. He passes it out if asked. The party can therefore obtain the diagram without first winning a fight or moving the cabinet.

Give Handout: The Cradle Diagram at that point.

The diagram names three steps:

1. Close the shutter.

2. Hold the bleed valve open.
3. Engage the cradle.

It also shows that the shutter must remain open for a new observation.

A character examining the old logs for five minutes learns that the original observers always secured the cradle before powering the lens. No check is needed. This supports the diagnosis of the current failure but is not required to operate the controls.

A **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation)** check made during that examination identifies the recorder's removable leaf format. Success lets the character recognize a completed record immediately in Scene 6. Failure finds a damaged example instead; the live recorder's indicator still provides the necessary confirmation later.

Success: Iven is free, the shutdown diagram is obtained, and any skitters are recorded as standby, destroyed, or still active.

Fail-forward: The characters can take the diagram from Iven while leaving his rescue unfinished, retreat through either corridor, or bypass the archive. Sera and the control labels provide independent shutdown information.

Transition: Iven knows Pell went toward M3. Pell's calls are audible from the eastern corridor if he remains stranded. The western landing's lower stair leads toward Ena's cough in L1.

Scene 4: The Suspended Cage

Runtime: 20-30 minutes.

Objective: Recover Pell and choose whether to secure the hoist as an evacuation route.

Stakes: An unsecured cage drops at clock segment 6; careless winch use can trigger the drop earlier.

Arrival condition: The following opener assumes the cage remains at M3 with Pell inside. If it has dropped, use the replacement below. If Pell is already out, describe the cage's recorded elevation and any securing lines.

READ-ALoud

A freight cage hangs level with the landing, its gate shut across a narrow gap. Inside, a man holds both hands against the frame without moving his feet. One cable above him has separated into shining strands. A heavy iron eye is fixed into the landing beside the gate.

After a drop, replace the opener with:

READ-ALoud

The shaft is empty at this landing. A torn cable hangs against the far wall, and a ladder descends beside it. From below comes the scrape of metal against stone. An iron safety eye remains fixed beside the open loading gate.

DM Prompt: If Pell is conscious and still in danger, he asks for a safety line before anyone operates the winch.

Encounter 4: A Cage on One Cable

Location: M3, with relevant equipment at U3 and the possible landing at L3.

Trigger: Approaching the hoist or reaching clock segment 6.

Opposition: None.

Starting condition: Cage at M3, Pell inside, safety line unsecured, sill plate folded against the landing.

What is evident

The frayed cable is unsafe. The safety eye is solid. The fixed ladder runs down the east wall and can be reached around the shaft's north or south side.

The cage is large enough for four Medium creatures but has a payload limit of **800 pounds** for occupants and gear. The empty cage weighs **300 pounds**, so a supporting safety line must hold cage weight plus payload, up to **1,100 pounds** total. Its emergency safety line must be attached separately.

A stamped plate displays that load limit. Pell repeats it if the characters propose an overloaded carry.

Secure the cage

A character on the M3 landing can thread a rope through the cage's frame eye and the landing eye.

• **Careful method:** Two minutes, no check.

• **Fast method:** One action and a **DC 12 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand)** check. Failure leaves the knot unsecured; the character can see that it has not seated. Failure does not itself drop the cage.

• **Rescue reel:** Attach its line and engage its brake in one minute, no check.

A secured line prevents the segment-6 drop, provided the total load supported by that line is within its own capacity. The loaned rescue ropes each support **600 pounds** under this adventure's homebrew equipment procedure. The rescue reel supports **500 pounds**. Pell and his worn equipment weigh **180 pounds**.

For loads above one line's capacity, use two lines with the load shared. Two correctly attached loaned ropes share up to 1,100 pounds equally (550 pounds each), supporting the empty cage and its full 800-pound payload. One rope permits only 300 pounds of payload; the rescue reel permits only 200 pounds. Pell alone in the cage totals 480 pounds. The cage's own 800-pound payload limit does not increase. Landing eyes and frame eyes each withstand 1,200 pounds under this homebrew rescue procedure.

Extract Pell without repairing the hoist

Once secured, lower the sill plate and open the gate. Each takes an action. Pell crosses in one round. No check is required.

Without securing the cage, opening the gate and crossing requires a **DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics)** check from Pell, who has a +0 modifier. On a failure he slips against the frame, triggering the cage drop. A character holding a tether to Pell can prevent his personal fall if the tether is already secured to a sound anchor.

A creature using flight, teleportation, or a suitable lifting spell can remove Pell without touching the gate. Apply the ability's actual limits. The cage does not become safe merely because Pell leaves it.

Make the hoist usable

After Pell is on a landing, he can direct two workers through a **five-minute repair** at U3. They transfer the load to the intact hauling line and lock out the frayed suspension.

No check is required with the tool wrap or equivalent hand tools. With improvised tools, the repair takes ten minutes.

A repaired hoist still needs moving backup suspension for a loaded trip. The stationary tie to a landing cannot travel with the cage. During the five-minute repair, workers rig each required 50-foot rescue rope from a cage frame eye up through a U3 safety eye and around its smooth snubbing post. Forty feet of vertical travel plus five feet for knots and wraps fits each rope. Keep the existing landing tie until the repaired main line and the new backup lines are taut; only then release that tie.

One worker at U3 tends each backup rope, paying it out slowly on descent and taking up slack on ascent, with at least three wraps around its post. This is an engineered friction belay: no Strength check or worker carrying capacity is used, but the rope capacity still includes the cage's 300 pounds. A separate worker operates the winch. Use one rope for payloads up to 300 pounds and two for heavier loads up to 800; count all passengers and their gear. Freed surveyors can perform these stationary jobs. Tenders stop and lock their lines before anyone boards or unloads. If a tender releases a line, the winch operator stops immediately and another worker locks the line before movement resumes. No repairs or new cable parts are required beyond the stated tools and ropes. The 50-foot rescue reel can substitute for one belayed line only on trips with payload at most 200 pounds; do not sum unequal reel and rope capacities to raise that limit.

Operating the winch takes one creature's continuous work. A trip between adjacent floors takes two minutes including loading and unloading. The cage can carry four Medium creatures only if their combined weight stays within 800 pounds.

Pell can operate from U3. A second control rope allows a rider to signal stop but does not let the cage propel itself.

The ladder route

The ladder is sound. Climbing uses normal climbing movement: each foot costs one extra foot of movement unless a feature says otherwise. No check is required with both hands available and no immediate disturbance.

A climber carrying an unsecured person must succeed on a **DC 12 Strength (Athletics)** check for each 20-foot level change. Failure means no progress and requires a second attempt; failure by 5 or more causes a slip. A secured safety rope catches the climber after 5 feet with no damage. Without one, resolve the remaining fall normally.

A person secured to a hauling line can be raised by two helpers in two minutes per level, without a check, if the line and anchors support the load.

Cage-drop procedure

The cage drops if:

- the clock reaches segment 6 while it remains unsecured; or
- someone operates the U3 winch before securing or repairing it; or
- the unsecured crossing attempt fails.

The cage falls **20 feet**, from M3 to L3, and strikes its buffers.

Every creature inside makes a **DC 12 Dexterity saving throw**, taking **2d6 bludgeoning damage** on a failure or half as much on a success. A creature tethered to a fixed landing remains at the tether's catch point instead and takes no cage-drop damage.

The cage comes to rest at L3. It does not fall again. Its gate jams.

Opening the jammed gate takes five minutes with a crowbar, or one action with a successful **DC 13 Strength (Athletics)** check. A failed check leaves it jammed and costs the action; after three failures, the characters may still use the five-minute method.

Pell uses the surveyor profile. If reduced to 0 hit points, he is unconscious but stable unless a player-facing event specifically causes further damage. His later rescue remains possible.

Unexpected interventions

A character may cut the frayed cable after securing the cage. This removes the early-drop trigger from accidental winch use but does not make the cage mobile. The five-minute repair remains necessary.

Jamming a piton into the sill without attaching a line does not secure a platform carrying up to 800 pounds of payload plus its own 300 pounds. Pell explains this before the attempt. A properly placed rigid beam that visibly spans the loading structure can secure the cage; fitting one from available workshop timber takes five minutes.

Success: Pell reaches a landing or the surface, and the hoist's exact state is recorded.

Fail-forward: A dropped cage moves the rescue to L3. The ladder and western stair remain open. The party can abandon the cage and still reach every occupied level.

Transition: The western stair or shaft ladder reaches L1 or L3. Pell reports that Sera and Ena went toward the lower

vestibule. If the cage is repaired, it becomes a practical route for Ena's stretcher.

Scene 5: The Astronomer's Request

Runtime: 20-25 minutes.

Objective: Learn the full cause, arrange Ena's evacuation, and choose an initial plan for the lens.

Stakes: Sera's hoped-for rescue competes with current risk; the party needs an informed choice, not a forced agreement.

Arrival condition: Use the opener only while Sera and Ena remain in L1 and the lens is energized with its shutter open. If the shutter is closed or the lens has been shut down, replace its final two sentences with: "Steady lamplight falls through the eastern doorway. The coat lies still." After deliberate destruction, instead use: "The coat lies still. Beyond the eastern doorway, broken glass glints around a dark frame." After rupture, use: "The coat lies still. Rubble seals the eastern doorway." If Ena has left, remove her coat and describe any chalk notes left behind. If Sera is at the recorder or has evacuated, do not place her back here.

READ-ALoud

A woman sits against the wall with one boot unlaced and her ankle resting on a folded coat. Beside her, another woman writes three symbols in chalk: a closed fan, an open valve, and a locked ring. White light spills through the eastern doorway. With each pulse, the loose end of the coat lifts from the floor.

DM Prompt: Ena asks for help standing. Sera puts down the chalk and explains what she turned on.

Encounter 5: One More Reading

Location: L1.

Trigger: Meeting Sera and Ena, or examining the doorway instruction strip if they are absent.

Opposition: None.

Immediate pressure: The clock continues during extended in-character discussion. Brief clarification of the procedure is free.

The complete account

Sera gives the following information without requiring a Persuasion check.

- She recognized her brother's expedition beacon among the old instrument's presets.
- She powered the lens before locking its cradle.
- The cradle alarm sounded before the first large tremor.
- She continued long enough to confirm that the beacon had been operated recently.
- She left the chamber to help Ena when a loose fitting struck Ena's ankle.

- She can stop the machine now if the controls can be reached.

- A new observation needs three consecutive rounds of operation with the shutter open.

- Starting that observation pushes the machine closer to failure.

She does not know how many members of the missing expedition remain alive. The instrument measures the beacon's location and recent signaling, not individual life signs.

Ena confirms the order of events. If the party accuses Sera of intentionally trapping the team, Ena rejects that claim: "She made the wrong choice. She didn't want this."

The independent control clue

The instruction strip beside the L2 doorway is visible and readable:

PLAYER TEXT

For an unsettled lens: close the shutter; maintain the bleed; seat the cradle. Keep the bleed held until the cradle ring shows green. An observation requires an open shutter.

A character can understand this in one minute without a check. The archive diagram is helpful but unnecessary here.

A character proficient with appropriate artisan's tools can recognize that the controls are deliberately separated so one operator cannot casually energize and secure everything without assistance. No roll is needed for that observation.

Sera's proposal

She asks for three rounds at the recorder after the party has arranged the current team's escape. Her proposed plan is:

1. Remove Ena from the lower level.
2. Put one character near the shutter and another near the cradle.
3. Let Sera operate the recorder for three rounds.
4. Close the shutter immediately after the record indicator turns white.
5. Hold the bleed and engage the cradle.

She agrees that the party may abort for any reason. If the players want a fixed condition, she accepts: "Abort if the rupture countdown begins, someone falls unconscious, or the shutter operator calls it."

This is a proposal, not a required script. A character can operate the recorder instead.

Negotiation without a compulsory roll

Use arguments and concrete preparations first.

- **"People out first."** Sera agrees and helps carry Ena.
- **"We are shutting it down now."** She asks once whether they understand the lost lead, then cooperates.
- **"We will try if there is enough time."** She accepts a clear abort condition.
- **"You must leave the controls to us."** She gives the settings and stays in L1 or joins the evacuation.
- **"Pay us more."** She has no additional reward money. She can offer her personal help on a later expedition, without making that a binding adventure requirement.
- **"We will destroy it."** She argues for safe shutdown if the controls remain usable. If destruction is the party's decision, she moves away and does not interfere.

If a player wants to change her emotional response rather than her essential cooperation, a **DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion)** check can persuade her that the decision preserves a real future possibility. Failure means she remains upset; it does not turn her into an enemy.

Threatening Ena or lying about rescued people damages trust and may make Sera refuse optional help. She still explains how to stop the danger.

Moving Ena

Ena can move at speed 10 feet alone, speed 20 with one helper, or at the normal evacuation allowance on the stretcher with two bearers.

Any magical healing that restores at least 1 hit point removes her movement penalty. A **DC 12 Wisdom (Medicine)** check made over five minutes produces a firm splint, raising her unaided speed to 20 feet. Failure uses the time but causes no damage; she can still be helped or carried.

Sera can be one bearer. Iven or Tovin can be another if already free and present. Do not teleport a previously evacuated NPC back underground to fill that role.

If the party bypasses this scene

The party may enter L2 from L3 without meeting Sera. The lens controls display their own instructions. The recorder accepts a manual operator.

Sera and Ena remain in L1 until approached, the lens stops, or the clock reaches segment 7. At segment 7, Sera begins helping Ena up the western stair. Use their actual movement allowance. If the party later reaches L1, the coat is gone and chalk marks remain.

This self-evacuation does not instantly mark them rescued. They must traverse the route, including any uncleared stair debris.

Success: The party knows the cause and procedures, Ena has a real evacuation plan, and the lens objective is explicit.

Fail-forward: Disagreement can end with immediate shutdown, destruction, or retreat. Sera's disappointment does not block the controls.

Transition: The open eastern doorway leads directly to L2. The instruction strip and Sera's settings tell the party what can be attempted there. Escorting Ena instead leads toward the western stair or secured hoist.

Scene 6: The Chamber of Borrowed Weight

Runtime: 35-45 minutes.

Objective: Resolve the lens safely enough to leave, optionally preserving its final observation.

Stakes: The observatory, the beacon record, and anyone still in the chamber are at risk.

Arrival condition: The opener assumes an energized lens, open shutter, and both wardens present. Omit destroyed or departed machines. If the shutter is closed while the lens remains energized, use the shutter-closed replacement below. For a stopped lens, select the safe shutdown, deliberate destruction, or rupture replacement that matches the recorded state. Omit any recorder cabinet removed or destroyed during play. Never narrate renewed pulses after shutdown.

READ-ALoud

A glass-ringed machine hangs inside a square brass frame. Dust rises beneath it, settles, then rises again. Three wall controls stand around the room, each beneath a simple symbol. A cabinet against the far wall holds a strip of pale material behind glass. Two waist-high brass figures turn their lenses toward the entrance.

Shutter closed, still energized:

READ-ALoud

A narrow seam of white light edges the closed shutter. The brass frame remains suspended above the floor. Three wall controls surround it, and the recorder cabinet stands against the north wall.

DM adjustment: Add moving dust only if gravity surges remain active; with the bleed correctly held open, describe it lying still. Mention only surviving wardens.

Safe shutdown replacement:

READ-ALoud

The glass rings rest inside their brass cradle. Dust lies still around the frame. A green line shows beneath the western locking bar, and the room's lamps burn with an even light. The recorder cabinet stands against the north wall.

Deliberate destruction replacement:

READ-ALoud

Broken glass lies around the brass frame. The instrument is dark, and dust rests motionless on the floor. The wall controls remain beside a machine that can no longer answer them.

Rupture replacement, viewed from L1 or L3:

READ-ALoud

Rubble fills the doorway from floor to lintel. Dust lies across the nearest stones. The passage on this side of the collapse remains open behind you.

DM adjustment: There is no entrance into L2 until the rubble is cleared by the return-visit procedure. Do not place characters inside the collapsed room merely to deliver narration.

DM Prompt: While the chamber remains accessible, the nearest control's label is readable from the doorway. The characters can choose their positions before touching the machinery.

Encounter 6: The Last Light

Location: L2.

Trigger: Entering the chamber while the lens remains energized.

Opposition: Exactly two lens wardens, identified as west and east, unless already disabled or destroyed.

Starting positions: Use the authoritative anchor table.

Other pressure: Gravity surges and the rescue clock.

Possible objectives: Safe shutdown, final observation followed by shutdown, deliberate destruction, record retrieval, or escape.

The Initial State

At the start of the adventure:

- Shutter **open**.
- Bleed valve **closed**.
- Cradle **unseated**.
- Observation **not started**.
- Recorder leaf **blank**.
- West and east wardens **active but not yet hostile**.
- Lens **energized**.

Write changed states beside these entries. A character's retreat does not reset them.

The lens housing is a solid obstacle. Characters operate it from the listed stations. Nobody must climb onto the central frame.

The Wardens' Warning

The wardens issue a flat warning when someone first enters:

"Lens unsettled. Authorized maintenance only."

They become hostile if a creature:

- touches the recorder while the shutter is open;
- attacks the lens housing or a warden;
- opens the bleed while the shutter is open;
- passes a warden while visibly carrying a removed lens component.

Closing the shutter does not provoke them. Reading labels, moving around the room, and touching the cradle control do not provoke them.

If a warden becomes hostile, roll initiative for both wardens, all involved characters, and any participating NPC. An observer who remains in L1 need not join initiative unless they enter or perform a timed action.

Gravity Surge

Homebrew hazard.

While the lens is energized and the shutter is open, a surge occurs at initiative count 20, losing ties:

- normally on **every second round**, beginning with round 2;
- at clock segment 7 or later, **every round**.

If no initiative is otherwise needed, begin it when somebody starts an observation, tampers with an unsafe control, or remains in the room undertaking a timed dangerous task. Do not apply repeated surge damage during ordinary descriptive inspection before a risky action.

Warning: Dust lifts and the lens emits a rising note immediately before each surge.

Affected creatures: Creatures standing on the L2 floor. Flying or levitating creatures are not affected by the floor's abrupt movement, though they remain exposed to attacks.

Save and consequence: Each affected creature makes a **DC 12 Dexterity saving throw**. On a failure, it takes **1d4 bludgeoning damage** and falls prone. On a success, it takes no damage and remains standing.

A creature using one hand to hold a fixed rail or wall control has advantage on the save. Doing so occupies that hand but requires no action. The bleed operator uses both hands and automatically succeeds while correctly holding the valve with the shutter closed; the surge is suppressed in that state anyway.

The surge never moves a creature into the lens, through a wall, or into the shaft. Its only mechanical effects are the listed damage and prone condition.

Closing the shutter suppresses surges immediately. Reopening it resumes the existing schedule; it does not

grant two fresh safe rounds. Safe shutdown or destruction ends surges permanently.

Safe Shutdown

The control labels, archive diagram, and Sera's explanation all communicate the same sequence.

1. Close the Shutter

At **S**, use an action to turn the wheel closed.

No check is required. The shutter remains closed until deliberately reopened with another action at **S**.

Feedback: The chamber darkens to a thin white seam. The lifting dust falls. The shutter indicator turns blue.

Effect: Gravity surges stop. A new observation cannot proceed. The rescue clock continues.

2. Hold the Bleed

At **B**, use an action to pull and hold the lever while the shutter is closed.

No check is required. The operator must remain at **B**, use both hands, and spend their action each turn to maintain it.

Feedback: A steady hiss replaces the uneven humming. A narrow gauge falls into a blue band.

Effect: The rescue clock and any rupture countdown pause. They do not reset. The valve springs closed immediately if released.

A rope or object can replace the operator only if it supplies a steady controlled pull without bending the lever. Rigging that restraint takes **two actions** with rope and a fixed wall eye at **B**. No check is required. Once rigged, it holds until cut, released, or deliberately removed.

The wall eye is part of the control fixture and occupies no additional floor square. The restraint does not cross a walking lane.

3. Engage the Cradle

At **C**, use an action to depress the pedal and pull the locking bar while the shutter is closed and the bleed is held.

No check is required.

Feedback: The frame settles with a single heavy click. The cradle indicator turns green.

Effect: The lens shuts down permanently. The clock ends. The bleed can be released. The wardens enter standby at the end of the current turn unless a creature is actively damaging them.

One operator can complete the shutdown alone by closing **S**, rigging **B** for two actions, and moving to **C**. Multiple operators can complete it faster. The distances in the geometry table permit these routes without crossing the lens housing.

Incorrect or Partial Operations

Bleed opened with shutter open: The operator sees the gauge jump red, then takes **1d6 force damage**. The lever springs closed. No saving throw applies because the operator is in direct contact with the discharge. This also triggers warden hostility. The failed operation does not advance the clock beyond the time spent.

Cradle attempted before the correct conditions: The bar refuses to seat and its indicator flashes the missing shutter or bleed symbol. The action is spent; there is no damage. This gives useful feedback without secretly completing the step.

Shutter reopened while bleed held: The bleed snaps closed, the restraint if any goes slack, and the shutter opens. Nobody takes damage. The clock and surges resume. Reestablishing a rigged hold requires one action at **B**.

Operator knocked away: The bleed closes unless rigged. Record the clock's exact resumed value.

Control damaged: Each control has **AC 15, 12 hit points**, immunity to poison and psychic damage. At 0 hit points it becomes inoperable in its current state. Repair takes ten minutes with the workshop tools and a **DC 12 Intelligence check**; success restores function, failure consumes the time and requires replacement parts from **U2** for a further automatic ten-minute repair. Destroying the lens remains an alternative.

These rules apply equally to player improvisations and accidental damage. The wardens do not attack controls.

Maintenance Standby for the Wardens

The wardens accept maintenance only when the shutter is closed.

A character can then use an action within 15 feet of a warden to display a blue token and say "maintenance." Both wardens that can see the token enter standby immediately.

Without a token, a character adjacent to a warden can use an action to press its recessed blue switch with a narrow tool. While the shutter is closed, the warden permits that approach and enters standby. Each warden requires its own action.

If the shutter reopens before shutdown, standby wardens reactivate at the beginning of the following round. They retain their current hit points and resume their warning unless an observation or another hostility trigger is already occurring.

Once the cradle seats and the lens stops, the wardens remain in standby. Presenting amber can reactivate their ordinary guarding function later, but cannot restart the lens.

Conducting the Final Observation

The final observation is optional. Explain its cost before the characters commit.

Requirements

- Lens energized.
- Shutter open.
- Recorder accessible.
- Beacon settings known from Sera or entered from the recorder's labeled preset.
- Three consecutive rounds of operation.

The recorder's preset is marked "**Venn Expedition / northern beacon.**" A character who has not spoken to Sera can identify it by spending one minute reading the labels. No check is required.

Starting the observation

At R, an operator uses an action to select the preset and begin.

Immediately add **ten minutes to the rescue clock**, once for this adventure. This represents the instrument's surge in instability, not ten minutes of actual waiting. Announce any crossed threshold.

That action counts as **round 1** of the observation.

Maintaining the observation

The same or another operator at R must use an action on each of the next two consecutive rounds. An operator may change without penalty if somebody is at the controls in time.

At the end of the third required action, the recorder indicator turns white and the leaf becomes a completed beacon record.

No skill check is required. The challenge is maintaining access while managing the wardens, surges, and clock.

Interrupted observation

If a required action is missed or the shutter closes, the observation resets to zero completed rounds. A new attempt still requires three consecutive actions, but the ten-minute surcharge is **not charged again**.

A partially exposed leaf has no usable location. It can be reused until the lens is stopped or destroyed.

What the observation reveals

The completed record gives:

- bearing: north by northeast from Cairn Hill;
- distance: eight miles;
- destination: a shelf below the split summit of the Grey Teeth;
- landing feature: a pale stone arch visible from the southern approach;
- signal: three manually repeated distress groups within the last hour.

It does not reveal the route's hazards or guarantee survivors.

Recovering the Record

At R, use one action to open the recorder drawer and one action to release and remove the leaf.

These actions can be taken by different creatures. The drawer stays open once opened.

A completed leaf remains readable after safe shutdown or destruction if removed first. If still inside during deliberate destruction, it survives unless the recorder is damaged by a separate attack. The break pulse does not damage objects.

A rupture destroys any leaf still inside L2. A removed leaf survives if its carrier and possessions are recovered normally.

The recorder cabinet has **AC 13, 10 hit points**. Breaking it allows the leaf to be pulled out as an action, but an attack that reduces it to 0 hit points requires a **DC 10 Dexterity saving throw** by the leaf's would-be retriever when they remove it; on a failure the fractured cover tears the leaf and makes it unreadable. Opening the drawer normally has no such risk.

Deliberate Destruction

The lens housing has **AC 13, 24 hit points**, immunity to poison and psychic damage, and no other damage resistance. Attacks target exposed supports and glass rings.

When reduced to 0 hit points, the lens breaks immediately.

Break pulse: Every creature in L2 makes a **DC 12 Dexterity saving throw**, taking **2d6 force damage** on a failure or half as much on a success. Full cover behind the solid lens housing does not protect against the pulse, which fills the chamber. A creature entirely outside L2 is unaffected.

Afterward: The clock ends, surges cease, and the wardens enter standby at the end of the current turn. The chamber remains structurally usable; deliberate breakage releases the stored strain before a full rupture.

The pulse occurs once. Additional attacks against the wreckage cause no further discharge.

A character inspecting the housing for one minute sees the marked sacrificial supports and understands that breaking them will release a room-wide pulse. No check is needed. Sera can provide the same warning.

Destroying the lens is therefore a credible emergency solution, with a known injury risk and a permanent loss of the instrument.

Warden Combat

The wardens use the complete statistics in **Rules Reference**.

Target priority: A creature damaging the lens; then the current recorder operator; then a creature attacking a warden. They do not strike merely to punish someone fleeing.

Tactics: One warden approaches the recorder operator by the north lane while the other blocks the nearest clear approach. They do not share squares, pass through the lens housing, or gain unlisted reach.

Movement: They remain inside L2. A creature who reaches L1 or L3 is not pursued.

Morale: At 8 hit points or fewer, a warden retreats toward its starting recess and takes the Dodge action unless someone is actively damaging the lens. It still accepts maintenance and shutdown conditions.

Surrender equivalent: Standby. The machines have no pride to overcome.

No reinforcements: A warden disabled here never appears elsewhere as a new attacker. If the party retreats and returns, use each warden's current hit points, position, and state.

Rupture Countdown

At clock segment 8, announce:

"The white seam widens. Three deep knocks sound inside the frame, evenly spaced. The floor is beginning to separate around it."

Begin a three-round countdown. The characters understand that the room is about to fail.

- **Round 1:** Cracks spread. All routes remain open.
- **Round 2:** Small fragments fall. All routes remain open. The recorder can still be removed.
- **End of round 3:** L2 ruptures unless the clock has been paused or stopped.

Holding the bleed with the shutter closed pauses this countdown. Engaging the cradle stops it. Destroying the lens substitutes the smaller break pulse and prevents collapse.

At rupture

Every creature remaining in L2 makes a **DC 13 Dexterity saving throw**, taking **4d6 bludgeoning damage** on a failure or half as much on a success. Afterward, all surviving creatures there are prone and restrained beneath rubble.

L2's west and east doorway openings become blocked. The lens, controls, recorder, and any record left inside are destroyed. Both wardens are destroyed.

The western and eastern rescue routes outside L2 remain intact.

A restrained survivor can use an action to attempt a **DC 12 Strength (Athletics)** check, freeing themselves on a success. Failure causes no additional damage. A creature outside can clear a rescue opening with two workers in **twenty minutes**, freeing one accessible survivor; additional survivors in the same rubble pocket take five minutes each.

There are air spaces sufficient for **eight hours**. The collapse causes no repeated damage merely because time passes. Unconscious survivors use the stated NPC or normal

player-character rules.

A freed character can crawl to the nearer former doorway through rubble in five minutes. The room cannot be used as a through route until a full excavation, requiring days, is completed.

Success: The lens is stopped or destroyed, and any desired record is recovered.

Fail-forward: The party can flee through either exit, leave the site dangerous, or return after rupture to rescue trapped survivors. Their choice produces the corresponding ending.

Transition: Evacuate by the western stair or eastern shaft, using their recorded states. Return to S0 for roster accounting and payment.

Rules Reference

The following creatures and equipment are homebrew for this adventure. They are designed for four 3rd-level characters using the SRD 5.1 rules.

Archive Skitter

Small construct, unaligned

Armor Class: 13, brass shell

Hit Points: 11

Speed: 30 feet, climb 20 feet

8 (−1)

DEX: 14 (+2)

CON: 12 (+1)

INT: 3 (−4)

WIS: 10 (+0)

CHA: 3 (−4)

Saving Throws: Dexterity +4

Damage Immunities: Poison

Condition Immunities: Charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses: Darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 10

Languages: Understands Common maintenance commands; cannot speak

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Construct Nature. The skitter does not require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Archive Assignment. It does not voluntarily leave M2. It prioritizes displaced calibration rings and accepts the standby procedures in Encounter 3.

Clamp. Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 feet, one target. **Hit:** 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Skittering Withdrawal. As a bonus action, the skitter moves up to 10 feet without provoking opportunity attacks. It can use this feature only toward a calibration tray or its original position.

Reactions: None beyond normal opportunity attacks, subject to its maintenance exception.

Morale: At 5 hit points or fewer, retreats and Dodges as described in Encounter 3.

A destroyed skitter yields scrap, not a usable autonomous companion. Its shell contains no valuable gems. The adventure assigns no additional sale value to its remains.

Lens Warden

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class: 14, plated frame

Hit Points: 27

Speed: 25 feet

14 (+2)
DEX: 10 (+0)
CON: 14 (+2)
INT: 4 (−3)
WIS: 12 (+1)
CHA: 4 (−3)

Saving Throws: Strength +4, Constitution +4

Damage Immunities: Poison

Condition Immunities: Charmed, frightened, poisoned

Senses: Darkvision 60 feet, passive Perception 11

Languages: Understands Common; speaks fixed Common warnings

Proficiency Bonus: +2

Construct Nature. The warden does not require air, food, drink, or sleep.

Grounded Frame. The warden automatically succeeds on saving throws against the lens chamber's gravity surge. This protection does not apply to other effects.

Custodial Limit. The warden does not voluntarily leave L2. It accepts maintenance and shutdown conditions exactly as stated in Encounter 6.

Baton. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 feet, one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Repulsion Tap, Recharge 5-6. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 feet, one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) force damage, and the target must succeed on a **DC 12 Strength saving throw** or be pushed 5 feet directly away from the warden. The push stops before a solid obstacle or another creature. The warden will not use this action if the only resulting

destination would be outside L2.

Reactions: Normal opportunity attacks only.

Morale: At 8 hit points or fewer, retreats and Dodges unless the lens is being damaged.

Its baton is integrated into its forearm. Removing it produces an ordinary metal club with no force effect or resale value beyond incidental scrap. It cannot be used as a magic item.

Surveyor

Medium humanoid, any nonhostile alignment

Armor Class: 10

Hit Points: 7 maximum; Jori starts at 5, Ena at 4, all other surveyors at 7

Speed: 30 feet, modified by listed injuries

10 (+0)
DEX: 10 (+0)
CON: 10 (+0)
INT: 12 (+1)
WIS: 11 (+0)
CHA: 10 (+0)

Skills: One appropriate professional skill +3; this does not grant an unlisted rescue success.

Senses: Passive Perception 10

Languages: Common

Improvised Tool. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 feet, one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

Surveyors Dodge, Disengage, help with a clearly safe task, or escape. They do not add six reliable attacks to the party's combat action economy.

NPC rescue convention, homebrew: A surveyor reduced to 0 hit points by an environmental accident becomes unconscious and stable. Further damage causes death saving throw failures as normal, and massive damage can still kill. Hostile constructs do not attack unconscious surveyors.

This convention keeps a failed rescue attempt from silently killing a named person while preserving the consequences of abandonment in continuing danger.

Party Fit and Scaling

For the intended four-character party, the archive fight has two enemies with 11 hit points each and modest single attacks. The finale has two enemies with 27 hit points each, plus a low-damage hazard that the party can suppress through an action at the shutter.

The enemies do not have multiattack, paralysis, area damage, or attacks against unconscious characters. The dangerous damage spikes come from clearly warned destruction, falling, or rupture.

A party that fights both pairs should spend meaningful resources but does not need a short rest. The finale's primary solutions can end hostility quickly.

Three 3rd-level characters: Keep both skitters but reduce each to 8 hit points. Use only the west warden, with 22 hit points; the east recess contains a visibly inert frame that never activates. Observation remains three rounds. All rescue and control DCs remain unchanged.

Five 3rd-level characters: Keep the same four opponent identities and positions. Increase each skitter to 14 hit points and each warden to 34 hit points. Do not add reinforcements or increase surge damage.

Four 2nd-level characters: Use the three-character adjustment, reduce surge damage to 1, and reduce the deliberate break pulse to 1d6. Make the rupture warning four rounds. This remains a hazardous rescue; do not conceal the danger.

Four 4th-level characters: Use the five-character hit points. The characters' stronger abilities should make rescues easier. Do not add anti-flight fields, teleportation restrictions, or hidden wards.

Resting and Unusual Abilities

A short rest takes one hour under the SRD rules and therefore advances six clock segments if the lens remains active and unpaused. Tell the players this before they commit. A character holding or rigging the bleed can make a rest possible, but the party has already earned control of the immediate crisis.

Flight bypasses the ladder and cage transfer. It does not carry more weight than the effect allows.

Teleportation can extract pinned or stranded people if its targeting and destination requirements are met. It does not need to "solve" the beam or cage first.

Divination can reveal useful information consistent with the spell. There is no special interference. Learning the correct shutdown order early is a valid advantage.

A familiar or similar small helper may carry a token, deliver a light line, or inspect a label. Operating a control still requires the physical capacity described by the effect and the control's procedure.

Mage hand can carry light equipment and manipulate suitable objects within the spell's limits. It cannot supply the two-handed sustained force of the bleed lever or lift the beam's 200-pound supported edge. It can deliver a rope end or remove an already released recorder leaf if within its weight limit.

Items and Equipment

Item: Rescue Reel

Appearance: A brass drum with a folding handle, a black brake lever, and a red mark on its last five feet of line.

Quantity: One.

Starting owner: Cairn Survey Cooperative, which authorizes the party to keep it as salvage after the rescue.

Location: U2.

Value: 20 gp.

Weight: 8 pounds.

Rules: Homebrew mundane equipment; no attunement or charges.

The reel contains **50 feet of line** and supports a total suspended load of **500 pounds** when attached to a sound anchor.

Attaching it to an accessible eye or beam and engaging the brake takes **one minute**, or **two actions** when time is tracked in rounds. No check is needed if the anchor is sound and reachable.

While braked, the line holds its current length. Releasing or reengaging the brake takes an action. A creature using an action to turn the handle can raise or lower a load of up to 250 pounds by 5 feet. Two creatures working together can move a load of 251-500 pounds by 5 feet, each using an action.

The reel cannot raise the loaded freight cage by itself; its purpose there is to secure Pell's occupied platform against a drop while the main machinery carries the cage's weight.

The line has **AC 11**, **5 hit points**, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Cutting it releases the load. Overloading it does not fail invisibly: the brake slips audibly, lowering the load 5 feet per round until the load is reduced or another support is added. If no lower support exists, the load eventually reaches the line's end; continued overload then breaks it.

The reel provides no bonus to attacks, climbing speed, or checks unrelated to a secured line. Repacking the line takes five minutes. It can be used repeatedly without magical recovery.

Item: Maintenance Tokens

Appearance: Three palm-sized brass disks, blue enamel on one face and amber on the other.

Quantity: Three.

Location: U2.

Owner: Cooperative equipment; return them after use.

Value: No listed reward value.

Rules: Homebrew mundane authorization devices.

Displaying a token deliberately requires an action when initiative matters. Its effect depends on the specific machine and conditions described in Encounters 3 and 6.

The tokens do not charm creatures, operate at a distance beyond the stated 15 feet, unlock doors, or command unrelated constructs. They have no charges. A token can be used by anyone who understands which face to show.

A destroyed or lost token does not disable the other two. No token is consumed by maintenance use.

Item: Starspindles

Appearance: Two thumb-length brass axles nested in clear glass sleeves.

Quantity: Two.

Location: U2 bench frame.

Owner: Cooperative, with salvage permission granted by Mara or Sera.

Value: 20 gp each; 40 gp total.

Weight: 3 pounds each.

These are valuable precision components, not magic items. They have no activated effect, attunement requirement, charges, or recovery procedure.

Removing both safely takes five minutes with proper tools. Breaking their glass sleeves destroys their sale value but causes no magical explosion.

They are unrelated to the active lens cradle. Removing them does not worsen the clock or prevent shutdown.

Item: Beacon Record

Appearance: A pale flexible leaf bearing dark intersecting curves and a small white completion square.

Quantity: One possible completed record.

Location: Created in L2's recorder.

Owner: Cooperative survey record; the party may retain a copy after delivery.

Payment: 40 gp upon delivery of a readable completed leaf.

Other sale value: None assigned.

The leaf is mundane recorded information. It has no activation, charges, attunement, or magical tracking effect.

A completed leaf gives the destination described in Scene 6. A blank or interrupted leaf does not. Copying a readable leaf takes ten minutes with paper and ink and preserves all useful information.

The cooperative pays the record fee once, regardless of the number of copies.

Rewards and Follow-Up

Reward Ledger

All payments and salvage values are **for the party**, not per character.

Contract advance SOURCE AND OWNER: Cooperative rescue chest QUANTITY/VALUE: 40 gp ACCESS CONDITION: Accept the rescue ACCOUNTING NOTE: Included in the 200 gp base contract.
Contract balance SOURCE AND OWNER: Cooperative rescue chest QUANTITY/VALUE: 160 gp ACCESS CONDITION: Return an honest accounting of all six surveyors and the lens ACCOUNTING NOTE: Paid even after an honest partial failure.
Survivor bonus SOURCE AND OWNER: Cooperative rescue chest QUANTITY/VALUE: 10 gp per surveyor, maximum 60 gp ACCESS CONDITION: Surveyor reaches S0 alive ACCOUNTING NOTE: Each of the six counts once.
Beacon-record fee SOURCE AND OWNER: Cooperative rescue chest QUANTITY/VALUE: 40 gp ACCESS CONDITION: Deliver a readable completed final record ACCOUNTING NOTE: Paid once; copies add no payment.
Starspindles SOURCE AND OWNER: U2, cooperative salvage QUANTITY/VALUE: Two at 20 gp each; 40 gp total ACCESS CONDITION: Remove intact with authorization ACCOUNTING NOTE: Independent of lens outcome.
Rescue reel SOURCE AND OWNER: U2, cooperative salvage QUANTITY/VALUE: One worth 20 gp ACCESS CONDITION: Recover and keep after rescue ACCOUNTING NOTE: Functional equipment or sale value, not both simultaneously.

Maximum cooperative payment: $40 + 160 + 60 + 40 = 300$ gp.

Maximum authorized salvage value: $40 + 20 = 60$ gp.

Maximum listed combined value: 360 gp.

The 40 gp advance is not added again to the 200 gp contract. The rescue reel's value is not extra money if the party keeps it.

Loaned ropes, stretcher, lantern, harnesses, pitons, hammer, crowbar, tokens, and tool wrap should be returned. Mara does not bill the party for equipment honestly lost while saving someone. Deliberate theft is a relationship issue, not hidden treasure.

No cash is hidden inside the constructs or lens. Ordinary debris can be salvaged later by the cooperative but is not another adventuring reward.

Payment Disputes

Mara asks for names and facts. A survivor's testimony, a recovered personal item, a described inaccessible position, or direct inspection can establish an honest accounting.

If a person remains trapped and reachable, Mara first asks whether the party can continue the rescue now that the lens is stopped. She does not withhold the balance merely to coerce dangerous unpaid labor. The contract's practical purpose is reliable information.

If the party knowingly lies about someone's death or conceals a reachable survivor to finish early, Mara can delay the disputed balance while investigating. State the specific disputed claim rather than turning every imperfect rescue into suspicion.

Sera cannot cancel payment because the party declined the observation. Mara cannot cancel the record fee because she disliked the risk, provided the leaf is delivered as agreed.

Accomplishment Rewards

For groups using milestone advancement, this adventure can constitute one meaningful milestone toward 4th level. It need not automatically grant an entire level if the surrounding campaign uses a slower pace.

For groups using experience points, use this **homebrew accomplishment award** instead of adding creature XP:

- 100 XP per surveyor delivered alive to S0, maximum 600 XP.
- 400 XP for permanently ending the lens danger, by shutdown or destruction.
- 200 XP for resolving the archive's opposition, through maintenance, avoidance that secures the objective, or combat.
- 200 XP for resolving the lens wardens, through maintenance, shutdown, destruction of the wardens, or a successful operation that avoids them.
- 200 XP for recovering the completed beacon record.

Maximum: 1,600 XP for the party, or 400 XP each for four characters.

Do not award the construct accomplishments twice for fighting machines after already placing them in standby. Noncombat resolutions earn the same listed award.

Resolution Paths

Everyone Out, Lens Safely Shut Down

The cradle is seated, the shutter closed, and the lens inert. The observatory remains structurally accessible except for damage already recorded. The wardens are in standby unless destroyed. The archive skitters retain their individual states.

All rescued surveyors receive care at S0. Ena and Jori recover from their scenario injuries over several days if not healed sooner.

Mara is satisfied that the party solved the actual danger. Sera may be disappointed if no observation was made, but she helps document the safe restart requirements. She does not restart the lens after the characters leave.

Possessions: The cooperative owns the observatory records and machinery; the party receives the listed payments and authorized salvage.

Future access: The cooperative offers supervised access after structural repairs. Safe shutdown remains a victory. Any later research is cautious, voluntary work.

The Record Saved and the Lens Shut Down

Apply the safe-shutdown outcome, and add the completed beacon record.

Sera copies the location and asks whether the party wishes to discuss a separate rescue of the missing expedition. She does not assume acceptance. Mara wants proper weather information, climbing equipment, and a second team before anyone departs.

The record points to the Grey Teeth ledge eight miles north by northeast. The pale arch provides a recognizable approach feature. The signal's recent operation gives hope but no certainty.

Payment: Add the 40 gp record fee once.

Relationship: Sera is deeply grateful, especially if the party enforced an abort condition and still succeeded. Mara respects a controlled operation that did not abandon current casualties.

Future danger: No new observatory crisis occurs automatically. The next decision belongs to the characters.

The Lens Deliberately Destroyed

The break pulse resolves, the clock ends, and the chamber remains traversable. The instrument cannot be repaired with local tools; replacing its unique optical element would be a major future undertaking.

The wardens enter standby unless destroyed. The recorder and a completed leaf can survive if they were not independently damaged.

Sera accepts responsibility for making destruction necessary. She may mourn the lost instrument, but she does not blame the characters for choosing a warned emergency measure.

Payment: The base contract and survivor bonuses remain available. The record fee depends only on whether a readable completed leaf is delivered.

Future access: The cooperative removes loose valuables, documents the wreckage, and closes the chamber to casual visitors. The rest of the site can be explored later without gravity surges.

The Party Leaves Before Stopping the Lens

The clock continues. Apply segment 6 to the cage if still unsecured and segment 8 to L2.

People outside L2 are not automatically killed by its collapse. Resolve their actual positions.

- Jori remains pinned if never freed.
- Tovin stays in U2 until the lens stops, then attempts the route to U1.
- Iven remains trapped until cut or freed.
- Pell experiences the cage drop if still inside an unsecured cage.
- Sera begins helping Ena up the western stair at segment 7 if they remain in L1.
- Anyone deliberately left inside L2 faces rupture.

The party can return. Mara offers surface treatment and asks for the last verified locations. She does not pretend that the abandoned objective was completed.

Payment: Honest accounting can still earn the base contract. Bonuses depend on actual survivors reaching S0. No record fee is paid for an uncompleted or destroyed leaf.

Future task: A follow-up rescue uses the recorded site damage and surviving people. It does not reset the adventure.

Rupture with Survivors Trapped

L2 is rubble. Its two doorways are blocked, and the lens, controls, recorder, and wardens are destroyed. Both vertical escape systems outside L2 remain available in their previous states.

Survivors beneath rubble have the escape and excavation options in Scene 6. Their air pockets last eight hours. Mara's attendants can help with excavation after the immediate machine danger ends, providing labor rather than instant success.

The cooperative's priorities become locating voices, opening rescue pockets, and accounting for possessions. A record already removed may still be recovered with its

carrier.

Consequences: The site is permanently diminished, but a late rescue can still save lives. The party's decisions determine who is reachable, what information survived, and how long recovery takes.

Partial Rescue with an Intact Site

If the lens is stopped while one or more surveyors remain trapped elsewhere, the party has removed the time pressure but not finished the rescue.

The beam, cabinet, cage, and injuries retain their states. The characters can now take careful methods, bring Mara below, use more helpers, or rest.

This outcome should feel like a substantial success followed by practical completion. Do not invent a new clock to keep the original pressure artificially alive.

Return Visits

Use the campaign-state ledger below before describing a return.

An intact, shut-down observatory contains still air and steady lamps. The machine does not pulse. The cradle's green indicator remains visible.

A deliberately broken lens is inert wreckage. Broken supports and glass remain where recorded. The chamber has no residual attack hazard.

A ruptured chamber is blocked rubble. The western stair and eastern shaft remain separate routes; characters cannot walk through L2 as though it were intact.

A repaired hoist stays repaired. A cage at L3 stays there until moved. Securing ropes remain attached unless someone removed them. Evacuated surveyors are at the surface or receiving care elsewhere, not restored to their starting anchors.

The beacon record's status is one of: blank, partial and unusable, completed in recorder, removed and readable, copied, or destroyed. Never treat an interrupted observation as a complete clue on a later visit.

Campaign-State Ledger

Use one line per person and machine. This is a practical record, not an additional rules system.

People

Jori
Tovin
Iven
Pell
Sera
Ena

Site

STATE	RECORD
Clock	___ completed segments + ___ minutes
Clock paused?	No / bleed held / bleed rigged
Middle stair debris	Not fallen / present / cleared
U1 beam	Original / held / propped / moved / broken
M2 cabinet	Original / moved; Iven's coat cut?
Cage	M3 / U3 / L3 / between levels
Cage safety	Unsecured / one line / two lines / other support
Hoist repair	Unrepaired / repaired
Shutter	Open / closed / damaged in stated position
Bleed	Closed / held / rigged / damaged
Cradle	Unseated / seated / damaged
Lens	Energized / safely stopped / deliberately broken / ruptured
Observation surcharge	Not charged / charged once
Observation progress	0 / 1 / 2 / complete
Recorder drawer	Closed / open / broken
Leaf	Blank / partial / completed inside / removed / copied / destroyed
Skitter A	Location, hit points, active/standby/destroyed
Skitter B	Location, hit points, active/standby/destroyed
West warden	Location, hit points, active/standby/destroyed
East warden	Location, hit points, active/standby/destroyed

Relationships and Accounting

Record:

- which decision the party made about the observation;
- what Sera and Mara were told;
- whether any rescue claim remains disputed;
- advance already paid;
- survivor bonuses earned;
- record fee earned;
- salvage recovered;
- loaned equipment returned or lost;

- whether anyone accepted a separate expedition discussion.

This prevents a later conversation from turning a proposal into an accepted quest.

Handouts

Each handout is separate. Distribution instructions are outside its player-facing text.

DM Distribution Guide

These instructions are private. Detach or share each player page separately only after its acquisition point.

Mara's Rescue Roster - Distribution: Give at S0 before entry. The roster contains only facts Mara knows.

Workshop Maintenance Strip - Distribution: Give when the characters read the U2 bench strip or Tovin explains it. Do not include the archive's shutdown diagram with this handout.

The Cradle Diagram - Distribution: Give when Iven passes out the document or a character retrieves its tube in M2. This sheet contains the shutdown sequence but not the expedition destination.

Hoist Load Plate - Distribution: Give when the hoist plate is read at U3, M3, or L3, or when Pell explains its instructions.

Sera's Observation Settings - Distribution: Give only when Sera provides the settings or the characters read the recorder's preset in L2. It reveals the procedure, not the completed location.

The Beacon Record - Distribution: Give only after a completed leaf is retrieved or a readable copy is made. Do not supply it for a partial observation.

A Note from the Rescue Wagon - Distribution: Give after the party completes its accounting. Fill only the established facts; do not prewrite an outcome.

Handout: Mara's Rescue Roster

Cairn Survey Cooperative - Missing Below

Jori Bell - route surveyor. Carries a long measuring pole.

Tovin Rusk - instrument fitter. Broad leather tool apron.

Iven Darr - archivist. Ink-stained cuffs, green coat.

Pell Fen - hoist operator. Red cord tied around his wrist.

Sera Venn - astronomer. Brass watch, graphite-stained hands.

Ena Sol - observer. Blue scarf, field notebook.

Bring each person to the hillside wagon if possible. If someone cannot be moved, record the exact place and what prevents the rescue.

Payment for the party: 200 gold total, including 40 paid in advance. Ten additional gold for each person brought out alive. Forty additional gold for a readable final beacon record.

- Mara Quill

Handout: Workshop Maintenance Strip

MAINTENANCE TOKENS

Blue presented: maintenance requested.

Loose calibration pieces returned: maintenance accepted.

Amber presented: resume assigned work.

Keep trays closed while moving equipment.

Lens wardens answer the chamber's shutter state.

Handout: The Cradle Diagram

FOR AN UNSETTLED LENS

1 - SHUTTER CLOSED

Close the western shutter wheel. Confirm the blue indicator.

2 - BLEED MAINTAINED

Pull and hold the bleed lever. Keep the gauge in its blue band.

3 - CRADLE SEATED

While the bleed remains held, depress the cradle pedal and pull its locking bar. Confirm the green indicator.

Release the bleed only after the cradle shows green.

Observation note: A new observation requires an open shutter. Closing the shutter interrupts an unfinished reading.

Warning: Opening the bleed against an open shutter causes a local discharge.

Handout: Hoist Load Plate

FREIGHT CAGE

Maximum payload: 800 pounds, including equipment. Empty cage: 300 pounds. Safety suspension must support both.

Maximum occupancy: four persons.

Secure an independent safety line before boarding a damaged cage. Each loaned rope supports 600 pounds; use two shared ropes for a full payload. During travel, tend backup ropes from the upper landing snubbing posts; a stationary landing tie cannot move with the cage.

Do not operate the winch against a frayed suspension.

The eastern service ladder remains available when the cage is out of use.

Handout: Sera's Observation Settings

Preset: Venn Expedition / Northern Beacon

Shutter open.

Start the recorder and maintain the reading through three consecutive intervals. A white square confirms completion.

Closing the shutter or leaving an interval unattended breaks the reading. An incomplete leaf can be exposed again.

Once complete, open the drawer and release the leaf before removing it.

Sera's note: "Stop if the chamber begins its final failure. The record is not worth another person."

Handout: The Beacon Record

NORTHERN BEACON - POSITION RESOLVED

Bearing from Cairn Hill: north by northeast.

Distance: eight miles.

The signal originates on a shelf below the split summit of the Grey Teeth. A pale stone arch marks the shelf's southern approach.

Three manually repeated distress groups were received within the preceding hour.

The instrument confirms position and recent operation. It does not report the number or condition of people at the beacon.

Handout: A Note from the Rescue Wagon

Cairn Hill Rescue

Returned alive: _____

Others accounted for: _____

The observatory was left: _____

Beacon record received: yes / no

Contract balance paid: _____

Survivor bonuses paid: _____

Record fee paid: _____

Authorized salvage retained: _____

The cooperative thanks those who went below and returned with the truth.

- Mara Quill

Quick Reference Sheets

Rescue Methods

PROBLEM	RELIABLE METHOD	FAST OR RISKY METHOD	FAILURE CONSEQUENCE
Jori's beam	Two workers, brace and lever, five minutes (one after DC 11 Investigation)	DC 13 Athletics with help	No movement; repeated unbraced failure causes 1d4 damage
Iven's coat	Reach him and cut cloth, one action	Fast cabinet lift, DC 12 Athletics	No movement; failure by 5 triggers skitter warning
Cage safety	Rope attachment, two minutes	DC 12 Sleight of Hand, one action	Knot visibly unsecured
Pell's exit	Secure cage, plate and gate, then cross	Unsecured DC 12 Acrobatics	Cage drop
Hoist repair	Two workers, tools, five minutes	Improvised tools, ten minutes	No roll; time cost
Ena's ankle	Healing, helper, or stretcher	DC 12 Medicine, five minutes	No improvement; no damage
Rubble rescue	Two workers, twenty minutes	Trapped survivor DC 12 Athletics each action	No progress; no repeated damage

Lens Control Reference

ACTION	REQUIREMENT	COST	RESULT
Close shutter	At S	One action	Stops surges; clock continues
Open shutter	At S	One action	Allows observation; surges resume
Hold bleed	At B, shutter closed	Action each turn, both hands	Pauses clock and rupture countdown
Rig bleed	At B, shutter closed, rope	Two actions	Holds valve without operator
Seat cradle	At C, shutter closed, bleed held	One action	Permanent safe shutdown
Start observation	At R, shutter open	One action; +10 clock minutes once	Observation round 1

ACTION	REQUIREMENT	COST	RESULT
Continue observation	At R, uninterrupted	One action on each of next two rounds	Complete record
Open recorder	At R	One action	Drawer stays open
Remove released leaf	At R, drawer open	One action	Record carried
Break lens	Reduce AC 13, 24 hp housing to 0	Attacks	2d6 pulse, DC 12 half; danger ends

Evidence Reference

ESSENTIAL CONCLUSION	FIRST ROUTE	INDEPENDENT ROUTE	FURTHER CONFIRMATION
Six people are missing	Mara's roster	Surveyors name colleagues	Personal effects and direct sightings
Both vertical routes connect levels	Wall plaque and Jori	Pell and shaft inspection	Player route diagram after discovery
Sera caused the instability by omitting the cradle	Sera's admission	Ena's account	Archive logs and unsecured live cradle
Safe shutdown order	Archive diagram	L1 instruction strip	Control labels and Sera
Observation needs open shutter and three rounds	Sera's settings	Recorder labels	Immediate progress indicators
Destruction ends the danger with a pulse	Sera	Sacrificial-support warning	One-minute housing inspection
Completed record is usable	White indicator	Readable destination text	Iven's format knowledge

No single failed roll removes an essential conclusion.

Before the Finale

Confirm the following at the table.

- Which surveyors are physically out, and which are merely free?
- Is the cage secured, repaired, dropped, or unused?
- Is the middle stair clear?
- Who carries the maintenance tokens and rescue reel?
- What is the exact clock value?
- Are the characters trying to observe, shut down, destroy, or escape?

- Who is at S, B, C, and R?
- Which constructs remain active, and at what hit points?
- What abort condition, if any, has the party agreed to?

Ask for positions only when they matter. The controls are not a hidden puzzle once their instructions are known.

Preparation Checklist

- Read the DM Introduction and all six encounter procedures.
- Mark the six starting surveyor locations.
- Prepare the eight-segment clock and minute remainder.
- Keep the authoritative geometry table beside the lens procedure.
- Separate the seven handouts by acquisition point.
- Choose the intended party scaling before placing opponents.
- Record that there are two skitters and two wardens at normal scaling.
- Decide how directly to describe injuries and falls.
- Place loaned equipment and salvage on separate lists.
- Keep the three final lens outcomes visible: safe shutdown, deliberate break, rupture.
- Use return-state narration whenever the party revisits a room.
- After play, reconcile people, machine states, payments, and any accepted follow-up.

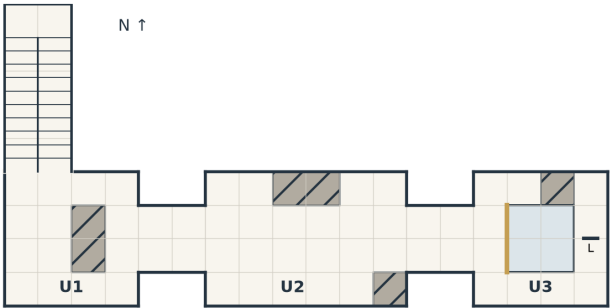
Player Map Sheets

Share the appropriate sheet only when the party knows its layout. Cover unexplored rooms when needed. These sheets omit DM positions and hidden mechanics.

The Last Light Below

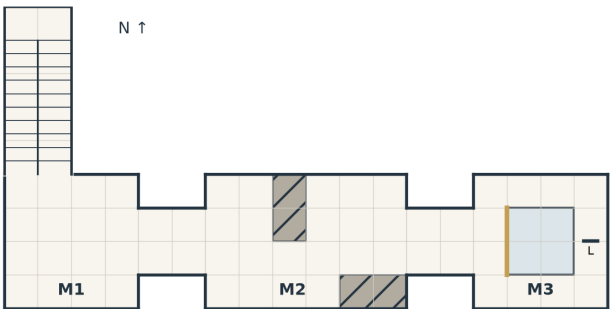
THE LAST LIGHT BELOW

Observatory floor plans | PLAYER MAP - reveal rooms as explored



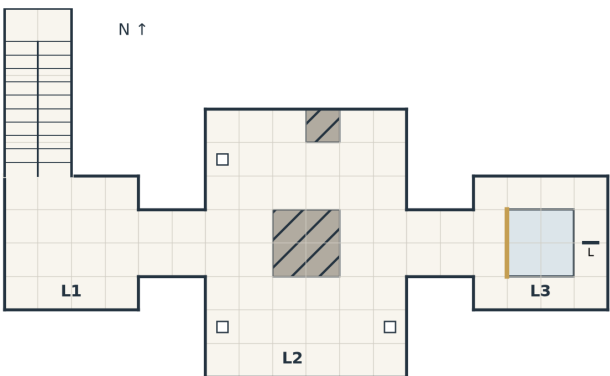
UPPER 0 ft

- U1 Entry hall
- U2 Workshop
- U3 Hoist landing



MIDDLE -20 ft

- M1 Stair landing
- M2 Archive
- M3 Hoist landing



LOWER -40 ft

- L1 Vestibule
- L2 Lens chamber
- L3 Hoist landing

GRID: 5 FEET | NORTH UP | L = SERVICE LADDER

Stairs: 60 ft movement per level. Hoist/ladder: 20 ft vertical per level. Surface is 20 ft above U1.

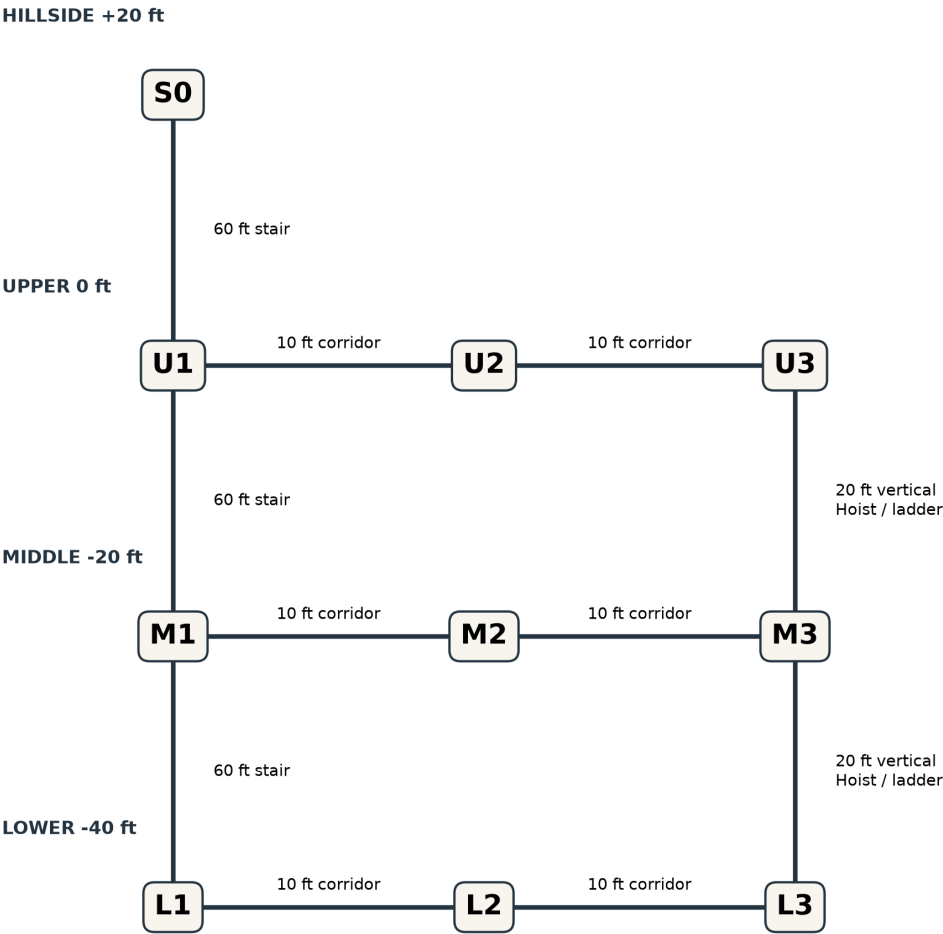
This plan records visible architecture. It does not reveal occupants, machine instructions, or future hazards.

Map key: use the keyed location descriptions on the following pages.

The Last Light Below

THE LAST LIGHT BELOW

Routes and elevations | PLAYER MAP



SCHEMATIC - not to tactical scale. Horizontal labels measure the connecting corridors only.
Complete route allowances: 1 minute between adjacent rooms; 2 minutes between levels.
Stair flights and turning landings cost 60 feet of movement per level change.
Share this map after Jori, Pell, or the survey sketch establishes the route network.

Map key: use the keyed location descriptions on the following pages.

Session Notes

Decisions, discoveries, and the next adventure.

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