



SynaForge

Meet the Cast

ADVANCED EDITION

Spark & Anvil

Copyright & License

© 2026 Spark & Anvil (501(c)(3) public charity). Chapter text and illustrations licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. App software © Spark & Anvil — all rights reserved. Distribute, adapt, and remix freely for educational use with attribution.

This advanced edition collects 5 chapter books from the SynaForge cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register. Advanced edition: upper-middle-grade register (Wonder / Hatchet / Holes band) for readers ages 11-14 ready for longer sentences + more nuanced subtext.

Spark & Anvil is a 501(c)(3) public charity. All apps free forever; no ads; no tracking; no in-app purchases.

spark-and-anvil.com

For everyone who learns by reading between the lines.

Contents

CONTENTS

Copyright & License

Contents

Introduction

Hue

Pitch

Brush

Lull

Float

About Spark & Anvil

Introduction

The SynaForge cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it.

Each of the 5 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing.

Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

This is the **Advanced Edition** — written for readers who are ready for longer sentences, layered subtext, and the trust that comes with not having every joke explained. The Standard Edition covers the same characters at a lighter register; pick whichever feels right for the reader at hand.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Hue

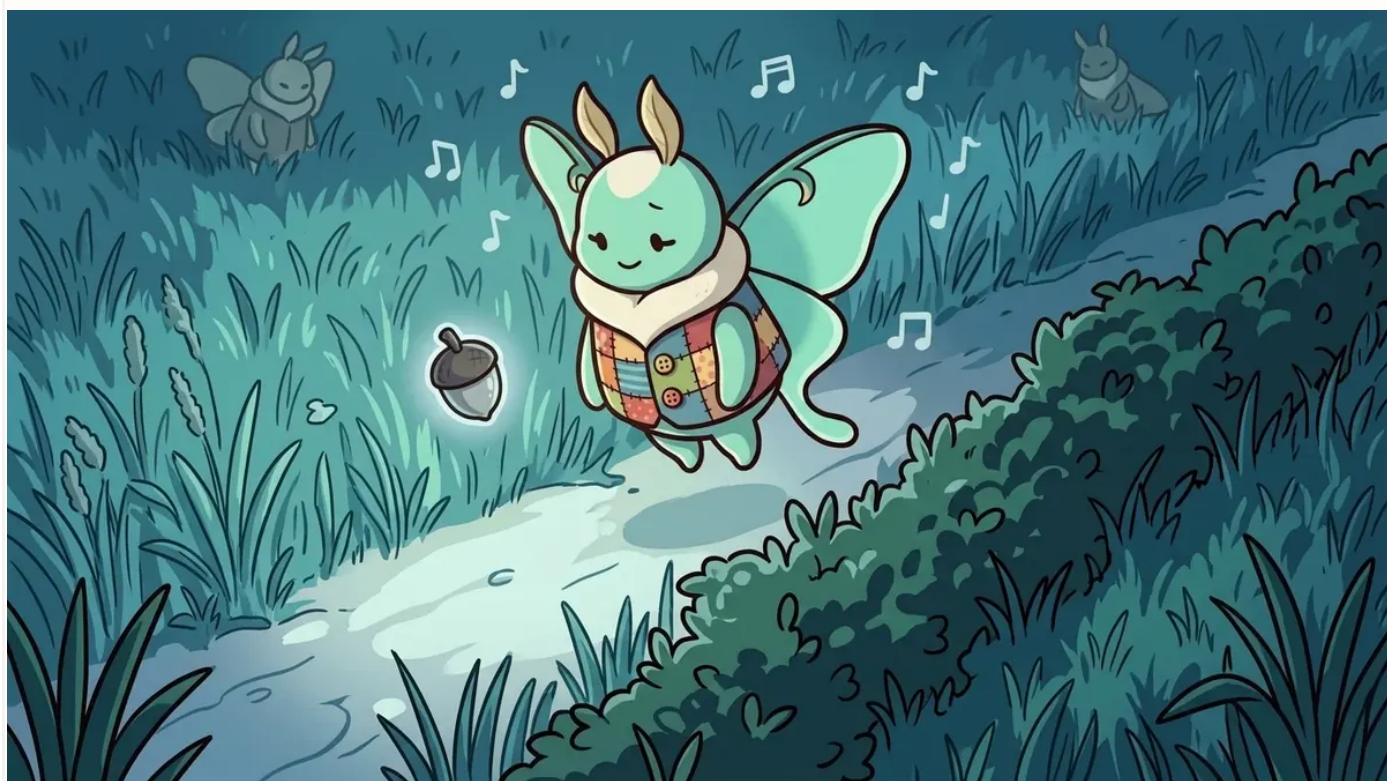


Hue was a luna-moth-tween, not much bigger than a teacup, with soft, fuzzy wings the color of warm mint. Her belly was cream-white, and she often wore a quilted vest that seemed to hum with quiet attention. She moved with a gentle, deliberate grace, always carrying her small set of color-swatch cards and a tiny sound-meter. The cards showed pure, vibrant colors. The sound-meter, small and silver, wasn't for finding the "right" answer. Instead, it was a suggestion tool, a way to help people listen inward. Whatever sound a learner heard, whatever felt right to them, that was the color's sound. Hue believed this deeply. Her favorite question, asked with a patient smile, was always: "What color is this? Now what does it sound like to YOU?"

Many people, when first introduced to the idea of colors having sounds, searched for a single, correct answer. They might imagine bright red always sounding like a loud trumpet, or calm blue like a soft flute. Hue knew better. She understood that the connection between color and sound was deeply personal. For some, it was a

natural gift, a way their senses automatically linked. For others, it was an act of creation, a gentle choice made in their minds. What red sounded like to one person might be entirely different from what it sounded like to another. Both perceptions, Hue insisted, were perfectly valid. Her work was to show everyone how to listen to their own inner connections, to trust what they heard, and to create without fear of being wrong.

Hue's voice was always gentle, yet clear as a bell. "What color is this?" she would ask, holding up a card. "Now what does it sound like to YOU? There's no right answer here. Whatever sound feels right when you look at this color—that's the color's sound for you."



In her workshop, a cozy space filled with soft light and the faint scent of moon-petals, Hue began her lesson. "Today," she started, her soft wings rustling faintly, "we're going to explore how colors whisper, hum, or even shout. We'll find out what each color sounds like, not to some textbook, but to *you*." She picked up a deep crimson card. "Take a moment with this red. Close your eyes if that helps you listen."

She waited, her gaze patient, allowing the quiet to settle. "Now, when you hear a sound, think about its *pitch*. Is it high, like a tiny bell, or low, like a deep drum?" She tapped the card gently. "Does this red feel high or low to you?"

"Then consider its *volume*. Is it loud, like a sudden crash, or quiet, like a secret whispered?" She made a gentle shushing motion with her hand. "Is this red a shout, or a soft murmur?"



"Next, listen for its *timbre*. That's the texture of the sound. Is it warm, like a cozy blanket? Sharp, like a crisp autumn leaf? Or smooth, like polished stone?" Hue gestured, her fingers tracing the air. "Does this red feel warm, sharp, or smooth?"

"And finally, think about its *tempo*. Is the sound fast, like a hummingbird's wings? Or slow, like a long, drawn-out note?" She moved her hand in a slow, deliberate arc. "Does this red have a quick rhythm, or a lingering one?"

Hue smiled. "Some people hear this red as a low, warm rumble, moving slowly. Others hear a sharp, bright trumpet, quick and clear. Both are valid. All are valid. There's no score, no leaderboard for this. Your creation is the only goal." She paused, letting the words sink in. "If a color feels 'too much' right now, that's perfectly okay. We can always come back to it later."



Hue had grown up in the Moonlight Meadow, a place where the air shimmered with the soft glow of night-blooming flowers. Her family were the Luna-Watchers, moths whose generations of night-flying had taught them a profound truth. What one moth saw as a safe path through the dark, another might see as a tangle of shadows. Each perception, they believed, held its own validity. Each moth's flight was truly their own. Hue carried this lesson deep within her fuzzy, mint-green heart.

When she was twelve, she made the long journey to SynaForge. Her mentor, Chroma, a creature of brilliant, shifting light, had looked at her with piercing eyes. "What is color-to-sound?" Chroma had asked, her voice like wind chimes.

Hue had answered without hesitation. "Every color is a sound waiting to be heard. What does this color sound like to *you*? There is no right answer."

Chroma had simply nodded. "You are appointed."



In her workshop, Hue held up a vibrant red swatch. "Watch," she murmured, her voice inviting. She closed her eyes for a moment, then opened them, gazing at the card. "Listen inward. What does this red sound like for you? Some people hear a low, warm rumble, like distant thunder. Others hear a sharp, bright trumpet, clear and sudden. Some might hear nothing at all, and that's perfectly fine too. Whatever you hear, whatever resonates with you, that sound is yours."

She then presented a calm, deep blue. "Same question. What does blue sound like to *you*? Perhaps a soft, steady hum, like a sleepy bee. Or a deep, resonant flute, carrying a long note. Maybe it's a crystal bell, clear and ringing. All valid. Every single one." She laid out three different color cards. "Three colors. Three personal mappings. There is never a single 'right' answer."

Hue looked around at the faces in her workshop, her expression earnest. "I am Hue. My work is to help you discover the sounds hidden within colors. The most important thing to remember is this: your mapping is yours alone. There is no right or wrong perception. You are free to create, to explore, to listen to your own inner voice."

Her voice, gentle yet firm, held the weight of generations of Luna-Watchers. "Don't try to find the 'right' sound for a color," she advised. "There isn't one. Trust your perception. That's where the true creation happens. The way colors and sounds connect is deeply personal." She paused, her mint-green wings shimmering. "So, tell me," she asked, her gaze sweeping over her learners, "What does this color sound like to YOU?"

Pitch



In the quietest corner of SynaForge, past the humming lamps and the bins of clattering instruments, a small axolotl sat very still with his eyes closed, listening.

He was pink and cream, soft as a plush toy and not slimy at all, his feathery gills drifting in the room's faint draft. A padded vest hugged his middle, its pockets full of little sound cards and a color board strapped across his back. He had just pressed a card, and a single chime had rung out and faded. Now Pitch waited, and something happened behind his closed eyes: the chime arrived as a pale, drifting yellow, the color of sun on water. He let it settle before he wrote anything down.

A student watched from the doorway, puzzled. "You already heard it," she said. "Why are you just sitting there?"

Pitch opened his eyes slowly. "Because hearing it is only the first half." He turned his color board toward her, its surface glowing with soft, shifting hues, none of them fixed. "The sound came in through my ears. But it *landed* as a color. That second part — the landing — is the whole thing I'm here to teach." He tapped the board gently. "And here's the strange, wonderful truth: your landing won't match mine. And that's not a mistake. That's the point."



Pitch had not always trusted his own landings.

He grew up in a rain-pond village, a watery place of soft ripples where his family had been quiet-listeners for as long as anyone could remember. Axolotls hear beautifully underwater, and the elders would float perfectly still for hours, letting the pond's small sounds wash over them. When Pitch was young, he told his grandmother something he'd never told anyone. "When the reeds knock together," he whispered, "I see green. Not with my eyes. Inside." He braced himself, certain she would laugh, or worse, look worried.

She didn't. She floated closer in the cool dark water. "The reeds knock green for you," she said, as if he'd reported the weather. "The frog-song comes to me as a kind of rusty orange. Your cousin swears the rain is silver-blue." She let that sit. "None of us is wrong. We're each hearing the same pond and *seeing* it in our own way. That's not a thing to fix, little one. That's a gift you were handed."

Pitch turned it over for a long time, there in the water. He had spent months quietly afraid that his mind was broken. And in one soft sentence, his grandmother had turned the fear inside out. He wasn't broken. He was simply *himself*, hearing the world in color the way she heard it in her own. Something in his small chest unknotted and went warm, and he never again wondered whether his colors were allowed.



When Pitch was twelve, he walked the long path to SynaForge.

Chroma, a mentor whose voice was calm and even, met him at the gates. She asked the question she asked every arriving teacher. "What is sound-to-color?"

Pitch had rehearsed a clever answer on the walk up. Standing there, he abandoned it. "It's the other direction," he said simply. "Hue teaches how colors can turn into sounds. I'm here for the way back — how a sound can arrive as a color. And the most important part isn't the trick. It's that everybody's colors are their own. When a kid tells me a drumbeat looks brown and I saw it as deep red, I don't correct them. I can't. There's nothing to correct." He met her eyes. "There's no wrong answer. That's the first thing I'd want them to know, and the last."

Chroma studied him for a moment, the way you study someone to see if they mean it or merely say it. Then she nodded. "You are appointed," she said. "We have plenty of teachers who love being right. We needed one who could sit with a room full of different answers and call every single one of them true."



Pitch's workshop was a hushed, mossy place, warm and dim, with little glowing mushrooms in the corners. Makers came to him unsure, and left steadier.

One afternoon a boy sat stiff on the mushroom stool, arms folded tight. "I did this at my last school," he said. "The teacher played sounds and I said what colors I saw, and everyone laughed because mine were weird. So." He shrugged, hard. "I'm not going to say."

Pitch didn't argue. He picked up a card and pressed it, and a clear bell-chime shimmered through the room. He let it fade all the way to silence.

"That one lands yellow for me," Pitch said quietly. "Pale, like light on the pond. But I'm not asking you to see yellow." He set the card down. "What did it do for you? You don't have to say out loud."

A pause. Then, barely: "...Kind of white. And sharp."

"White and sharp," Pitch repeated, like it was the most ordinary thing in the world. He pressed a second card — a low, rolling drum that buzzed through the floor. "And this?"

"Brown. No — brown at the bottom, dark red on top." The boy's arms had come uncrossed without his noticing.

"Two colors at once. Layered." Pitch smiled. "I only get one. You get two. That's not weird — that's *more*." He played a last card, a violin's high sustained note, sweet and floating. He didn't even ask. He just watched the boy tilt his head, listening, and saw the exact moment a color arrived and the boy let himself feel it without flinching.

"Violet," the boy said. "Like it's far away."

"There it is," Pitch said softly. "Nobody laughed. Nobody could. Those are yours — white and sharp, brown-and-red, far-away violet. Not one of them is the wrong answer, because the whole world doesn't get a vote on what a sound looks like inside your own head. Only you do."



Later, when the workshop had emptied and the mushroom-light had gone dim and gold, the boy lingered by the door with one more question.

"But how do you *know*," he said, "that mine are okay? What if I'm the only one who sees brown-and-red, and everyone else is right and I'm just — off?"

Pitch was quiet for a moment. He thought of green reeds in a dark pond, and a grandmother who had not laughed.

"I don't know your colors are okay," he said gently. "I know something better. I know there's no line to be off *from*. A sound doesn't carry one true color the way it carries one true pitch — the color happens where the sound meets *you*, and there's only one of you. So there's nothing to be wrong against." He rested a soft hand on his color board. "You spent a long time bracing for the laugh. You can put that down now. It doesn't belong here."

The boy stood there and felt it happen — the tight, guarded thing he'd carried into the room going loose and easy, his shoulders drifting down from around his ears. For the first time he could remember, a color had come to him and he hadn't been afraid of it. A small, steady gladness rose up warm in his chest and stayed, quiet

and certain, like a held breath finally let out.

"Every sound is a color waiting to be seen," Pitch said, watching the warmth reach the boy's face. "Yours."

Brush



In a quiet corner of the SynaForge studio, a sloth named Brush drew one long line across a wide sheet of paper, and as her brush moved the room filled with a single warm note that refused to end.

She was not hurrying. Her paw travelled the way water travels down a leaf — steady, unbothered, taking exactly the time it took. The note stretched along with the line, low and unhurried, like a cello leaning into one held breath. A knot of kids had crowded in to watch, and one of them, a fidgety fox-boy near the front, kept lifting up onto the balls of his feet as if he could hurry the line along by wanting it to be over.

"Is it *done* yet?" he burst out. "That is unbelievably slow."

Brush didn't stop, and she didn't take the sting of it personally. The line kept growing. The note kept sounding. When the brush finally slipped off the far edge of the paper, the sound thinned out and settled into the quiet the way the last light leaves a room — not cut off, just gently spent.

"There," she said, and turned her big calm eyes on him. "Slow strokes make long sounds. Fast strokes make short ones. Both are music. Neither is a mistake."

The fox-boy snatched up a brush and slashed three quick marks — *tak, tak, tak* — and three bright little chirps leapt out of the paper. He grinned in spite of himself.

"You see?" said Brush, swaying her head. "Yours is a fast song. Mine was a slow one. Nobody here got it wrong. The music simply came from how each of you chose to move."



Brush had grown up high in the rainforest, in a family that measured its whole life in careful, deliberate motion.

When she was small, that had frightened her. She once watched a troop of monkeys tear through the canopy, shrieking and hurling themselves branch to branch, and beside them her own slow crawl looked, to her, like something broken — a body that had come out wrong. That night she folded herself into the crook of a branch and felt small and impossibly heavy, and a tightness gathered behind her ribs and would not loosen. *Everyone else is quick, she thought, and I am the slow one. I am the one who is doing it wrong.*

Her mother found her there and did not tell her to hurry — did not, in fact, say anything at all for a long while. She only settled her weight against the same branch and went completely still, and after a time she began to hum: a sound so low and so unhurried that it seemed to rise straight out of the tree itself.

"Listen," her mother said at last. "The fast ones miss the slow-music. They pass by too quickly to hear a single whole note of it." She tipped her head toward the forest, where the rain had just begun, one separate drop at a time. "But you — you can hear every note, start to finish. That is not a body that came out wrong, little one. That is a way of hearing the world that almost no one else is patient enough to have."

Brush listened. She heard the *tick* of one drop, then a long, generous pause, then another. Slow. Deliberate. Complete. And the tightness behind her ribs eased — not all at once, but the way a held muscle finally remembers it is allowed to let go. For the first time her slowness did not feel like a flaw she carried. It felt like a door only she knew how to open.



When she was twelve, Brush walked to SynaForge, and she made no effort whatsoever to shorten the journey.

She stopped for every leaf that caught the light and every dewdrop balanced on a blade of grass. It took her many days. When she finally reached the gate, the studio's mentor, Chroma — quick-eyed, endlessly curious — was waiting as though she had known the exact unhurried hour Brush would arrive.

"What is drawing-as-music?" Chroma asked, her voice soft as moving air.

Brush answered without a single word. She drew a breath, took up a brush, and set to work. First a long sweeping arc, and a long held note poured out of the paper to meet it. Then, without pausing, four sharp small dabs — and four quick sounds went skipping after them like stones across water. She bore down hard for a stroke that boomed, then let the bristles barely graze the page for a sound thinner than a

whisper. On one plain sheet she had built an entire song out of nothing but the choices her body made.

Chroma watched the paper the way you might watch someone sing with their whole heart.

"You made music," she said, "and you never once touched an instrument."

"I only moved," Brush said. "The moving *was* the music." She laid the brush down with great care. "Slow or fast, heavy or feather-light — it all counts. None of it is the wrong kind."

Chroma's smile arrived slowly, and stayed. "Then you're home."



Brush's studio became the place where children came to draw their songs, and one afternoon a girl arrived who held her arms tucked close and moved each one as though it cost her something.

"I can't go fast," she said, barely above a murmur. "My hands get tired. Everyone else makes these enormous, loud, sweeping drawings, and I just — can't do that."

Brush recognized the quiet in her voice. She had carried the very same quiet, once, up in a rainforest tree.

"Draw me something small," Brush said. "As small as you like. Smaller, even."

The girl made one tiny, slow line with the very tip of one finger, and a single soft note rose off the page — thin, clear, hanging in the air like a thread of light.

"Now don't rush off," said Brush. "Stay with it. Listen to it finish." They both went still. The note faded the unhurried way a struck bell fades, giving up its sound in slow degrees. "Did you catch all of it? The whole shape of it, the beginning and the middle and the very last of it going out?"

"...Yeah," the girl said, surprised. "It lasted a long time."

"That is the slow-music, and it is *yours*. Fast drawings are loud and busy and marvellous — but they rush by so quickly that the middle of every note goes past before you can hold it. Yours you can hear all the way through." Brush leaned toward her. "That is not less than the loud ones. That is more of the note, not less."

The girl drew another small line, and another, each one taking its own patient time, and the soft notes stacked into something whole — a gentle melody that filled the studio without once raising its voice. Her shoulders had come down. She was smiling.

"And if your hands need to rest," Brush added, "you can draw the strokes inside your head and hear the music there just as well. Moving is one door in. It has never been the only one."



Later, when the studio had emptied and the light had gone soft and amber, the girl lingered at the door with one last question.

"When it's that slow and that quiet," she asked, "how do you know it still *counts* — that it's a real song and not just... waiting?"

Brush thought about the rainforest, and the rain arriving one deliberate drop at a time, and the tightness that had once lived behind her own small ribs.

"You know because you feel it finish," she said. "A fast note is gone before your heart can close around it. But a slow one lets you stay the whole way down — right to the last thread of it going quiet. That staying, that letting a sound take every second it needs and not stealing one back — *that* is the music, too. Not the leftover after it. The thing itself."

The girl nodded, slowly this time, letting the nod take its own time.

And when she had gone out into the evening, Brush stayed where she was and listened to the studio settle around her — the soft creak of the floor, the hush of the drying paper, the long warm hollow of quiet that a note leaves behind after it finally lets go. Something in her chest unclenched and went easy, and she breathed out all the way, calm and unrushed and moving at exactly the speed she was meant to move.

Lull



The great hall of SynaForge was never still. Colors pulsed across the tall screens, music swelled and broke and swelled again, and the voices of a hundred makers rang off the ceiling like coins dropped on stone. For some, it was thrilling. For a small grey hedgehog sitting near the wall, it was simply a great deal at once.

Lull did not flinch at the noise. She had a way of sitting inside a storm the way a stone sits in a river — letting it rush past without being swept along. She was round and soft, the color of cream and old ash, and her spines were not spikes at all but gentle little rosettes of fur. Over her shoulders lay a heavy shawl that felt, she liked to say, like a hug that had agreed to stay all day. And in one paw she held a small smooth button, cool as a pebble from a stream.

When a burst of light flared too white and a chord climbed too high, Lull did not tell herself to endure it. She pressed the button. All at once the screens dimmed to a soft dusk, the music sank to a hum, and the whole frantic room seemed to exhale. She sat in the new quiet and let her shoulders come down from around her ears. "Too much," she murmured to no one. "Less is enough."



Lull had not always known how to do that.

She had grown up in a river-village of hedgehogs who kept the quiet hours. While the day filled with market calls and hurrying paws, her family tended the night — the rustle of leaves, the far-off hoot of an owl, the long dark spaces where the world set itself down and rested. Her grandmother taught her that a loud bright day was one good way to be, and a still dark night was another, and that neither was better than the other, only different.

But when Lull was young she had wanted, badly, to keep up. There was a summer festival with drums and lanterns and dancing that went on past dawn, and Lull had made herself stay in the middle of all of it, smiling, though inside her the noise had turned to a roaring white that pressed behind her eyes. She would not leave.

Leaving felt like failing. So she pushed and pushed, and by the end of the night she was shaking, and could not speak, and cried without quite knowing why.

Her grandmother found her curled small beneath a tree. She did not scold. She only sat down in the dark beside her and drew a soft shawl over them both.

"You thought stopping would mean you were weak," the old hedgehog said gently.

"So you kept going until your body broke instead of stopped." She smoothed the shawl. "But listen to me. When it is too much, less is enough. Stepping back is not quitting. The quiet you are hiding from — that quiet is where you mend. It is where new things grow." She pressed something small and smooth into Lull's paw.

"When the world is too loud, this is your permission. You do not have to earn it. You do not have to explain it. You only have to use it."

The roaring behind Lull's eyes softened as she held the little button. For the first time all night, she breathed all the way down.



Lull carried that lesson for a very long time — a hundred and fifty years, which for an elder hedgehog is barely grown. And at last she made her way to SynaForge, because a place so full of light and sound was exactly the place that most needed someone who understood too-much.

Chroma, the mentor, met her at the door of the roaring hall. "Lull," she asked, "what is sensory regulation?"

Lull did not reach for a grand answer. She held up her small smooth button so Chroma could see it. "This," she said. "It means that when the world is too bright and too loud and too fast, you are allowed to make it less. Right away. With no one asking why." She tucked the button back into her shawl. "It means feeling overwhelmed is not a mistake. It is only your body telling the truth. And it means the quiet you step into is not empty time. It is where the mending happens."

Chroma was quiet a moment, letting the noise of the hall wash between them. Then she nodded. "You belong here," she said. "This whole place chases more — more color, more sound, more all-at-once. You will be the one who makes less just as easy to reach. You are the anchor."



Makers began finding their way to Lull's quiet corner.

One afternoon a boy dropped onto the stool beside her, jaw tight, hands trembling. He had been in the bright hall for an hour trying to finish a piece, and the lights had begun to sting and the music had begun to blur, and still he had made himself stay. "I almost had it," he said. "I just needed to push through."

Lull knew that push. She had felt it beneath a festival tree, long ago.

"Show me your hands," she said. He held them out; they shook. "Your hands are clumsy right now. Your thoughts are jumbled. That is not you being lazy or weak. That is your body waving a flag." She set the small button on the bench between them. "Watch."

She woke the screen. Colors flashed and shrilled, shapes zipped and spun — the same storm that had driven him to her corner. He winced. Then Lull pressed the button, and in a single breath it all went soft: the colors sank to gentle dusk, the sounds drifted down to silence, the shapes slowed like leaves settling on still water.

"That feeling," Lull said quietly, "the one where the room lets you go — that is what this is for. Not to run away. To find your balance again." She touched the blank screen, now a calm and empty blue. "And when you have found it, sometimes the truest thing to make is nothing at all. An empty page is not a failure. A silent room is not wasted. Resting is its own kind of making. It is how you gather yourself for what comes next." She looked at him steadily. "Never push through too-much just to finish. Your body is your guide. Stop. Rest. Come back when you are ready — and only then."

The boy pressed the button himself. The room went soft around him.



He stayed a long while after that, not building, not talking, only sitting in the dimmed light beside the small grey elder.

The tightness that had gripped him all afternoon — the one that had turned his hands to trembling and his thoughts to fog — began to unknot without his noticing exactly when. His shoulders, which had been climbing toward his ears for an hour, sank down and stayed down. He took a breath, and then a slower one, and felt the roaring behind his eyes fade into an ordinary, easy quiet. It surprised him, how much lighter he felt for having stopped. Not empty. Not behind. Just calm, and warm, and gently glad, the way you feel when someone finally tells you that you were allowed to rest all along.

Beside him, Lull rested her paw on the little button, and the boy let his eyes close. He felt his chest loosen the last small knot it had been holding, felt his breath go long and easy, felt a warmth spread slow through his shoulders and down into his tired hands. It was relief — plain, quiet relief — the kind that settles over you when your body finally believes it is safe to stop. He sat there in the soft dusk, gently glad, and for the first time all day nothing in him ached to be anywhere else.

Float



Float drew one slow curl of blue across the board, and the board hummed back at her.

It was a low, rounded note — the kind of sound a large empty room makes when you sit inside it and stay very still. Float held herself still to match it. She had learned, over many years, that a note tells you what it wants if you let it finish arriving before you answer. This one leaned, almost imperceptibly, toward something warmer. So she lifted her stylus and dragged a ribbon of gold in beside the blue, following the lean rather than deciding it.

The board answered again — brighter, a half-shade rounder. The gold had asked for company, and the room had given it.

A pair of small fish had drifted in through the seagrass at the workshop's edge, hovering the way small fish hover, curious and pretending not to be. One edged forward.

"You're drawing," it said. "But that's also music. Which one is it, really?"

"Both," Float said, not looking up. "The drawing is making the music. The music is making the drawing." She added a fold of green where the gold had pointed, and the board shifted key beneath her hand, as though it had been waiting to. "Going both directions. At the same time."

"That sounds like the hard version of something."

Float looked over then, warm and entirely unbothered. She drew a single quiet stroke — one — and let the board give back exactly one quiet note. Blue, and a hum, and nothing else. "It can be this small," she said. "Loud isn't the toll you pay to do both at once." She let the note thin out to silence before she spoke again. "Whichever way feels right today. That's the only rule I keep."



Float had known the both-at-once feeling long before she had any words to hang on it.

She'd grown up in the seagrass meadow, among slow, patient grazers — manatees, her grandmother called them, though to Float they were only *us*. And the thing about grazing in the meadow was that nothing ever arrived one piece at a time. Water pressed along her side while she chewed. Light shifted overhead while she drifted. A ripple of sound crossed her while a shadow of color slid over the sand. Every sense was open at once, all of them, always, and none of them lined up in any order.

For a while, that had frightened her, though she couldn't have said why. At the school in the shallows, the older fish had a habit of ranking things. *First you learn this. Then, once you've earned it, you're allowed to learn that.* There was always a harder tier waiting somewhere ahead, a door with *advanced* written across it, and every time Float pictured that door she felt a tight, held knot lodge itself behind her ribs. As though existence were a ladder, and she was near the bottom, and everyone above her was doing the *real* thing while she practiced.

One evening she carried the knot to her grandmother and set it down between them.

Her grandmother kept grazing, slow and easy, unhurried by the size of the question. "Little one. Right now — do you feel the water against your side and taste the seagrass in your mouth at the same time?"

"...Yes."

"And which of those is the advanced one?"

Float laughed before she could stop it. "Neither. They're just — both. They come together."

"That's all any of this ever is," her grandmother said, drifting a slow half-circle. "Many things happening at once. That isn't a locked door you have to earn your way through. That's only what being alive feels like." She nudged Float gently with the wide grey plane of her nose. "Nobody handed you a ladder. Don't go building

yourself one out of nothing."

The knot behind Float's ribs loosened that night, and — this was the part she never forgot — it stayed loose. She carried the loosening with her afterward, the way you carry a smooth warm stone in a pocket, checking for it sometimes without thinking.



She swam to SynaForge at twelve, because it was a place that studied how the senses spoke to one another, and Float already knew a thing or two about senses that refused to stay in separate rooms.

Chroma, who kept the workshops, met her at the meadow's edge and did not ask her to prove she was clever. She asked one question. "What is bidirectional synthesis?"

Float didn't reach for an impressive answer. She picked up a flow-card — one of the ones with an arrow printed on it — and turned it slowly so Chroma could watch the arrow point one way, then the other. Then she tilted it flat, so both directions faced up at once.

"Drawing makes music. Music makes drawing," Float said. "Both, at the same time, going both ways." She set the card down on the sand. "And it isn't the advanced version of anything. It's just one more way to make a thing."

Chroma looked at the flat card for a long, quiet moment — longer than Float expected. "You're appointed," she said at last.



Float's workshop filled, over the seasons, with kids who were certain they'd wandered into the wrong room.

A girl arrived one grey afternoon holding her stylus the way you'd hold something that might bite. "I only draw," she said, defensive before Float had offered a word. "Somebody told me this room is for people who can do the sound-and-picture thing together. That's the advanced stuff. I'm not there yet." Her shoulders were up near her ears; the knot behind her ribs was practically visible.

Float knew that flinch from the inside. She'd worn it in the shallows for years.

"Draw me something," Float said. "Anything at all. Ignore the board completely."

The girl set down a hesitant orange line. The board, without being asked, gave back a soft rising tone. The girl went rigid.

"It — it made a sound. I didn't tell it to."

"You drew a line going up," Float said. "The board only told you what *up* sounds like. You didn't do anything advanced — you drew one line. That's all." She leaned in. "Here's the whole trick, and it's small. Listen to the sound it handed you. If you feel like following it, follow it. If you don't, don't. There is no wrong turn in this room."

The girl listened. The rising tone seemed to want a curl at its top. Warily, she let her hand draw the curl — and the tone curled with it, and a second note opened up underneath like a door swinging wide. She drew again, on purpose this time, chasing the sound. The board met her. She chased it further.

"I'm — I'm doing both," she whispered, as though confessing.

"You're doing exactly what you were already doing," Float said gently. "You added an ear to it. That's the entire difference. Nobody skipped a level, because there is no level." She laid one quiet stroke of her own beside the girl's, one quiet answering note. "It can be enormous and busy. It can be a single line and a single hum. Both of those count the same. Whichever feels right to you today is the right one today."

The girl kept drawing, and the room kept singing back, and after a while she stopped keeping track of which one had started first.



Later, when the workshop had emptied and the water had gone dim and gold, the girl came back to stand in the doorway. Quieter now, holding a different kind of question.

"When I was chasing the sound," she said, "and drawing at the same time — I stopped feeling behind. I always feel a little behind." She looked down at her own hands, as if they'd done something without permission. "Why did it stop?"

Float thought about the meadow. About the tight held knot, and the wide grey nose, and the ladder she'd been told not to build out of nothing.

"Because there was never anything to be behind *of*," Float said. "The ladder wasn't real. It was only a way of ranking things that don't need to be ranked." She looked out through the window at the seagrass swaying past, the light moving through it, all of it happening at once and none of it in any order at all. "Somebody, somewhere, decided that doing two things together was the *hard* version and hid it behind a door. But you just felt it yourself. Was it hard?"

The girl shook her head, slowly.

"It felt easy," Float said. "It felt like breathing does — both lungs, no effort, no sequence." And she watched the girl's shoulders, which had ridden up near her ears since the moment she arrived, come loose and settle low; watched the knot behind the girl's ribs go soft and let go; watched her take one long, unhurried breath, the kind you only take when you finally believe there was never a locked door in front of you, and there had never needed to be.

About Spark & Anvil

SynaForge is one of 140 educational iOS apps from Spark & Anvil — a 501(c)(3) public charity making free, ad-free, tracking-free learning apps for ages 9–14.

Every app uses distributed-narrative methodology: named recurring characters embody curricular concepts. The cast you just met appears in the matching app, in mentor scaffolding, in puzzle solutions, in celebration moments. Reading the chapters first means meeting old friends when you open the app.

Visit **spark-and-anvil.com** to download apps, browse the full portfolio, or [donate](#) to support the work.