



CivicForge

Meet the Cast

STANDARD EDITION

Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 6 chapter books from the CivicForge cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: story-based learning, where the characters embody the ideas being taught, with a trauma-informed, emotionally-safe approach.

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This is Volume 2 of 2 of the *CivicForge — Meet the Cast* series; each volume is a complete standalone book you can read on its own.

For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.

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Introduction

The CivicForge cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 6 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.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Level

LEVEL — the line reads level whoever holds it, even the one who set it.



High on a windy ledge, where the goat-paths switch back and forth, a mountain goat named Level was holding a small stone tool up against a half-built wall. The tool was simple — a flat bar with a bubble of water sealed in the middle. When the wall was true, the bubble sat dead center. When the wall leaned, the bubble slid to one side and sat there, stubborn, refusing to argue.

Level checked the miller's wall. The bubble held center. "True," Level said, and moved on.

Level checked the mayor's wall — a grand wall, taller than the rest, with a carved sign that read *finest wall in the valley*. The bubble slid left and stopped.

"Not true," said Level, in exactly the same voice.

The mayor's assistant, a flustered stoat, hurried over. "But that's the *mayor's* wall. Surely the tool reads it differently."

Level turned the little level over, showing both sides. "The bubble can't tell whose wall it is. That's the whole point of it. The line reads level whoever holds it — even the one who set it."



Have you ever seen someone make a rule and then act like it didn't apply to them? How did that feel to watch?

Level had learned about the bubble young, and had learned it the hard way.

When Level was small, a powerful old ram had ruled the high pastures. The ram built a wall across the best grazing slope and declared it straight. "It is straight," the ram said, "because I say it is straight. And I have never been wrong."

Nobody dared hold a level to it. The wall leaned a little more each season. Then one spring the leaning wall gave way in the night and slid down the slope, and the best grazing was buried under stone — the ram's grass and everyone else's, all buried the same.

Level, who was young then, had stood at the rubble in the gray morning light and felt something go quiet and certain inside. It wasn't anger, exactly. It was more like the feeling of finally understanding a thing that had been true the whole time. *A wall doesn't care who calls it straight. It only cares if it is.* The ram's "because I say so" had never made the wall true. It had only kept anyone from checking until it was too late.

That was the morning Level picked up a level for the first time and never really put it down.



Level walked to the Youth Council in the valley at twelve, the little stone tool tucked in a plain vest pocket.

Verdis, the old bear who weighed sides, met Level at the Council door and asked the question every guide was asked. "What is the rule of law?"

Level didn't answer with words. Level took out the level, reached up, and held it against the great carved beam over the Council's own doorway — the Council's own wall, the one they were proudest of.

The whole room went still. You did not, as a rule, measure the Council.

The bubble slid, just slightly, off-center. Level marked the spot with a bit of chalk so the carpenters could fix it later, and put the tool away.

"The rule of law," Level said, "is that we hold the line to *our own* wall first. A rule only means something if it measures the ones who made it, the same as everyone else. If the powerful get to skip the line, it was never a rule. It was just a wish they were strong enough to enforce."

Verdis was quiet for a long moment. Then the old bear smiled. "You are appointed."



In Level's workshop after that, a young badger came in scowling, arms crossed.

"The Council passed a rule," the badger said. "No shortcuts across the market square. But I saw a councillor cut straight across it this morning. So the rule's a joke. Why should I follow it if they don't?"

Level didn't tell the badger to calm down, and didn't tell the badger the councillor was surely very busy. Level just held out the little level.

"Here. Go hold this to the councillor's wall."

"...What?"

"When you catch a rule-maker breaking their own rule, that's not proof the rule is a joke," Level said. "That's proof the line is doing its job — it just caught someone. Don't throw the rule away. Point the level at the one who skipped it. Say, out loud, where everyone can hear: *the rule is the rule, and it measures you too*. A rule dies when nobody checks the powerful. It stays alive every time somebody does."

The badger turned the level over in both paws, watching the bubble find its center no matter how the badger tilted their grip. Slowly, the scowl became something more thoughtful.



Have you ever felt that flare of *it's not fair* when someone in charge skips their own rule? That heat in your chest is worth listening to.

The badger set the level down gently. "But what if I hold the line to someone powerful, and they just... refuse? They say the bubble's lying?"

Level was quiet, the way the mountains are quiet.

"Then you've learned something important, and you're not the only one who saw it. The ram in my pasture said the wall was straight until the day it buried the grass. Refusing the level never made the wall true — it only decided *when* it would fall, and how much it would take down with it." Level looked at the small tool between them. "It can feel lonely, holding the line to someone bigger than you. I know that feeling. But you're never really holding it alone — every person who's ever wanted a fair valley is holding it with you. The bubble sits center for the mayor and the miller and me and you. That's not a small thing to stand on. That's the steadiest ground there is."

The badger picked the level back up — carefully this time, like it mattered — and went out into the bright morning, holding it a little higher than before, and feeling steadier than they had all week, the way you do when you finally know the ground under you holds for everyone.

Read it? Now hear Level's audio drama + go play — scan or visit:



<https://spark-and-anvil.org/cast/civicforge/level>

Rung

RUNG — climb every step in order; never skip to the verdict.



There was a tall dead tree at the edge of the Council green, and on it, most mornings, you could find a woodpecker named Rung, climbing.

Rung climbed the way woodpeckers climb — grip, hop, grip, hop — one rung of bark at a time, never skipping. It looked slow. It *was* slow. And a small crowd had gathered at the bottom of the trunk, because a crowd had a question and wanted the answer immediately.

"Somebody took the festival lantern!" a rabbit called up. "We think it was the new fox. Just tell us — guilty or not? Come *down* and say!"

Rung did not come down. Rung kept climbing, grip and hop, and called back cheerfully: "I'll get there. But I get there by climbing. There's no branch at the top I can reach by skipping the middle — I'd just fall, and land on the wrong answer."

"But we already *know* it was the fox!"

"Then the steps will be easy," Rung said, "and they'll cost you nothing. It's only when you're *sure* that skipping the steps gets dangerous."



Have you ever been blamed for something before anyone asked your side? What did that feel like in the moment?

Rung had felt exactly that, once, and had never forgotten it.

When Rung was young, a granary had been found broken into, and the crowd had wanted someone to blame before the sun was even up. They'd landed on a quiet heron who lived nearby — a stranger, easy to point at. No one asked the heron where they'd been. No one looked at the tracks in the flour. The crowd climbed straight to the top of the tree, to the verdict, and skipped every rung on the way: *the stranger did it*.

Then the real culprit — a pair of raccoons, well fed and careless — was caught a week later with the missing grain. But by then the heron had already packed up and gone, carrying a blame that was never theirs.

Rung, small and watching from the dead tree, had felt something twist that stayed twisted for a long time. It wasn't only that the crowd got the answer *wrong*. It was that they'd never given the heron a single rung to stand on. They'd decided, and then gone looking for reasons after. *That's backwards*, young Rung had thought. *You climb the steps, and the steps carry you to the answer. You don't grab the answer and drag the steps up behind it.*



Rung climbed to the Youth Council at twelve, bark-dust on both wings.

Cordis, the striped badger who kept disagreements from turning to disrespect, met Rung and asked the question. "What is fair procedure?"

For an answer, Rung asked the whole Council to decide something small — where to hang a new noticeboard — and then, the moment two councillors started to shout their favorite spot, Rung tapped the floor sharply, three times, like a woodpecker on a trunk.

"Not yet," Rung said. "First rung: has everyone who uses the green been *heard*? Second rung: do we have the *facts* — where do people actually walk? Third rung, and only third: we decide. You were about to leap to the top. Climb it in order, and the answer holds. Leap, and you'll be back here next week doing it again."

Cordis's striped ears lifted. "You are appointed."



Later, in the hollow of the dead tree that served as Rung's workshop, a young otter came in, breathless and furious.

"It *was* the fox, I know it was, and Rung, you're making everyone wait for nothing! Why do we have to do all the steps when we're already sure?"

Rung offered the otter a place on the first rung of the inner trunk and climbed up beside them, slow, together.

"Because the person you're most sure about," Rung said, "is exactly the person the steps are there to protect. When you're unsure, you go carefully all on your own. It's when you're *certain* that you stop looking — and certainty is where the crowd blamed the heron. The steps aren't there to slow down the guilty. They're there so the one you haven't fully heard yet gets heard *before* the door closes on them. Hear all sides. Gather what's true. *Then* decide. Same order, every time, for the popular and the unpopular alike."

The otter chewed on that, still restless but listening now. "And if we climb every step and it really *was* the fox?"

"Then you'll be sure the way that lasts," Rung said. "Not crowd-sure. Step-sure."



Think of a time you were sure someone was guilty and turned out wrong. What told you to slow down — or what did you wish had?

The otter was quiet for a while, watching Rung's steady grip on the bark.

"It's hard," the otter finally said. "When everyone's yelling for the answer and you're the only one saying *wait, we skipped a step*. It feels like you're getting in the way."

"It does feel like that," Rung agreed gently. "That tightness in your chest when the whole crowd wants to leap and you're the one asking them to climb — I know it well. But that feeling isn't you getting in the way. That's you *being* the way. The heron had no one on the first rung with them. You can be that someone." Rung tapped the trunk, soft this time, almost kind. "There's a quiet that comes after you've climbed every step honestly. Not the loud rush of *we got them* — a steadier feeling than that. Like your feet are actually on the wood. That feeling is worth more than being fast."

The otter took a slow breath, and the restlessness eased into something calmer, and together they climbed the next rung.

Read it? Now hear Rung's audio drama + go play — scan or visit:



<https://spark-and-anvil.org/cast/civicforge/rung>

Muster

MUSTER — nothing proceeds until everyone's gathered and the yes is real.



On top of the tallest burrow-mound in the meadow stood a meerkat named Muster, up on both back paws, counting.

Below, the whole warren was deciding whether to dig a new tunnel toward the stream. A brisk stoat had already declared it settled. "Everyone wants the tunnel! Let's dig!"

"Hold on," said Muster, still standing tall, still counting. "You said *everyone*. I count forty paws up for the tunnel. But there are sixty in this warren. Where are the other twenty?"

"Oh, them. They're at the back. They didn't say anything."

"Not-shouting isn't the same as yes," Muster said. "It might be *I don't understand the question yet*. It might be *I'm scared to disagree with the loud ones*. It might even be yes — but I don't know until I ask them, one at a time, and *count* it. A decision for everyone needs everyone's real yes. Not the loudest yes. The real one."

And Muster climbed down to go find the quiet twenty at the back.



Have you ever had a decision made "for the whole group" without anyone asking you? How did it sit with you?

Muster had grown up as one of the quiet ones at the back, and remembered exactly how it sat.

When Muster was small, the warren had chosen a winter den — a decision "made for everyone" by a handful of the loudest, fastest voices at the front. Nobody asked the back. And it turned out the den they chose flooded every time the snow melted, which the older, quieter meerkats at the back had *known* — they'd lived through it before. But no one had gathered their yes, or even their words, so their knowing never made it into the room. The warren spent a cold, wet winter learning what the back row could have told them in one afternoon.

Young Muster had sat in that damp den and felt something clarify. It wasn't sulking. It was a kind of resolve. *A decision isn't made "for" people you didn't ask. It's just done *to* them.* The loud front row hadn't been cruel. They'd simply mistaken their own volume for the whole warren's voice. And the cost of that mistake had landed on everyone — the loud ones got the same wet den as the quiet ones.

That was the winter Muster decided to become someone who counts the whole room.



Muster climbed to the Youth Council at twelve, paws already good at the counting.

Kindle, the prairie dog who opened doors so others could take part, met Muster and asked the question. "What is consent of the governed?"

Muster answered by calling a quick Council vote on something small — the color of the new welcome banner — and the moment the front benches raised their paws and Kindle moved to call it settled, Muster held up a paw of their own.

"Not yet. Three councillors at the back haven't spoken. Before we call anything settled *for* the Council, the Council has to actually *say* it." Muster went bench to bench, quiet ones included, until every voice was counted — including two who said *no, actually, I'd prefer green*, which changed the outcome entirely.

Kindle grinned wide. "You are appointed."



In Muster's burrow-workshop, a young hedgehog came in, tapping a paw impatiently.

"Muster, this takes *forever*. Why can't the people who care most just decide? If someone doesn't bother to speak up, that's their problem, right?"

Muster settled the hedgehog on the mound where the whole warren was visible and pointed out across it.

"See the back rows? Some of them care just as much. They're only quieter — maybe they're new, maybe they've been talked over before, maybe they're the ones who *know the den floods*. A decision made only by the loudest isn't a decision *for* the group. It's a decision *by* a few, wearing the group's name like a borrowed coat. Consent means the power to decide is *lent* to us by everyone it touches — and you can't be lent something that was never actually offered. So we gather everyone. We ask plainly. We count the real yes — the no's too. *That's* what makes a decision one the whole warren will stand behind, instead of one half of them just endure."

The hedgehog's impatient paw went still. "...So the counting isn't the slow part getting in the way of the decision."

"The counting," said Muster, "*is* the decision."



Think of a time you finally got to say what you wanted and someone actually counted it. What did that feel like?

The hedgehog was quiet, looking out at the back rows in a new way.

"When I was new here," the hedgehog admitted, "nobody asked me anything for a whole month. I stopped bothering to have opinions. And then one day you came around the back and asked me straight out, and wrote down what I said." The hedgehog's voice went a little rough. "I didn't know a small thing like that could feel so big."

"It's the biggest small thing there is," Muster said softly. "Being counted is how you find out you *belong* to the decision — that it's yours too, not just something happening to you. That warm, steadying feeling of *someone asked me, and it mattered* — that's not a bonus at the end of fairness. That's the whole engine of it. When people feel counted, they carry the decision together. When they feel skipped, they carry a grudge alone." Muster nudged a small tally-stone toward the hedgehog. "Go on. There's a back row that hasn't been asked yet. Go make someone feel as big as you felt."

The hedgehog took the tally-stone, and something in their shoulders lifted, and they went out to count the ones no one had counted.

Read it? Now hear Muster's audio drama + go play — scan or visit:



<https://spark-and-anvil.org/cast/civicforge/muster>

Herald

HERALD — post it in the open; a decision no one can see isn't finished.



In the middle of the market square stood a great cork notice-board, and beside it, most days, a long-legged crane named Herald, pinning up the day's decisions where anyone tall or small could stop and read them.

Herald wrote in big plain letters. *The Council will fix the leaning wall. The festival lantern was found — it had rolled under the baker's cart. The green will close for one week to re-turf.* Small things and large things, all on the same open board.

A sleek weasel sidled up. "The Council's picking who gets the last market stall this morning. Between us — best not to post that one. If people see how we chose, there'll be *fuss*."

Herald pinned it up anyway, neat and clear, and stepped back so the weasel could read it too.

"If seeing how we chose would cause a fuss," Herald said mildly, "then the choosing is the problem, and hiding it just delays the fuss and adds a betrayal on top. A decision no one is allowed to see isn't finished. It's just waiting to be found out."



Have you ever found out something had been decided about you in secret? What hurt more — the decision, or the hiding?

Herald had been on the wrong side of a hidden decision once, and it had taught the whole lesson at once.

When Herald was young, the marsh council had quietly re-routed the spring water — a decision made in a back reed-room, told to no one. Herald's family only found out when their pond ran low and they went looking for why. The re-routing itself might have been sensible; there might have been good reasons. But no one ever got to hear them, because no one was ever told. And so what people remembered wasn't the reasons. What they remembered was that it had been *done in the dark*.

Herald, young and thirsty at the edge of the shrinking pond, had felt something crack that was hard to mend. It wasn't even anger at the choice. It was the sick, small feeling of realizing that things were being decided about you in rooms you weren't allowed to see — that you'd been treated as someone to *manage* rather than someone to *tell*. And Herald noticed something strange: the hiding had done more damage than the decision ever could have. A re-routed stream you could adjust to. A council you couldn't see, you could never quite trust again.

That was when Herald started keeping a board where nothing hid.



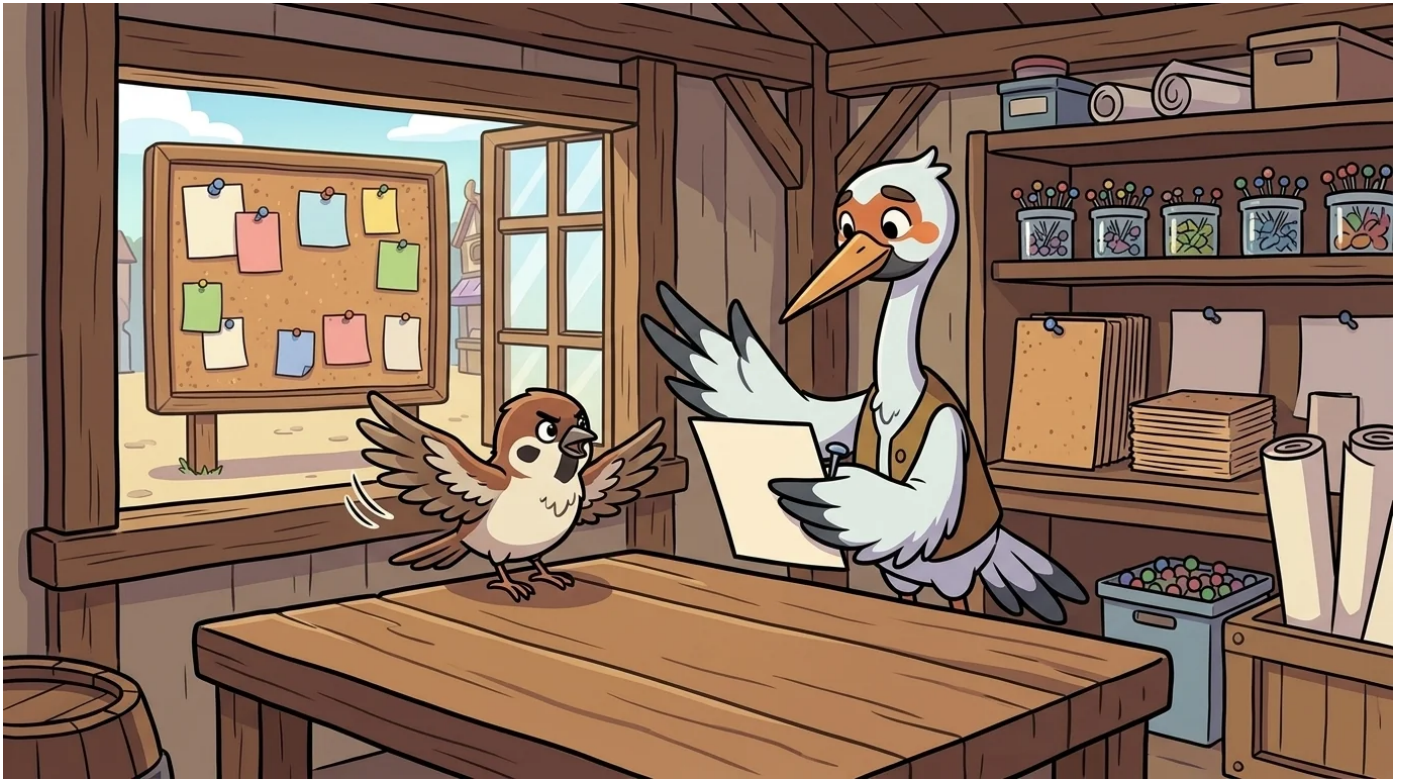
Herald walked to the Youth Council at twelve, a roll of pins already tucked under one wing.

Tellus, the ancient tortoise who took the long view, met Herald and asked the question. "What is transparency?"

For an answer, Herald asked the Council what it had decided in its last closed meeting — a small matter of who would water the green. When the councillors shifted and murmured that it hadn't really been written down anywhere, Herald simply wrote it, then and there, on a fresh card, and pinned it to the square's open board for all to read.

"There," said Herald. "Now it's a decision. Before, it was only a rumor with the Council's name on it. A choice the people it touches can't see isn't a public act — it's a private one wearing a public coat."

Tellus blinked, slow and pleased. "You are appointed."



In Herald's workshop — really just the shed behind the notice-board, full of pins and plain cards — a young sparrow fluttered in, agitated.

"Herald, if we post *everything*, people will argue about *everything*! Isn't it kinder to just... handle some things quietly, so nobody worries?"

Herald handed the sparrow a card and a pin.

"I understand the wish. Hiding a decision feels like protecting people from worry. But it isn't protection — it's borrowing their trust without asking, and trust always gets paid back with interest. When a choice is posted in the open, people can read it, question it, and even change your mind before it's too late. When it's hidden and later found — and it's *always* later found — they don't just disagree with the choice. They stop believing anything you didn't show them. One hidden decision poisons a hundred honest ones." Herald tapped the open board through the shed window. "Post it plainly. Let them see how you chose. A decision that can survive being seen is a strong one. A decision that can't survive being seen was never really yours to make."

The sparrow turned the blank card over. "Even when the choice is unpopular?"

"*Especially* then," Herald said. "That's when people most need to see it wasn't done to them in the dark."



Think of a grown-up who told you the plain truth even when it was awkward. How did that change how much you trusted them?

The sparrow went quiet, the card still light in their claws.

"There's a teacher back home," the sparrow said slowly, "who always tells us the real reason, even when it's boring or awkward. Like when they changed the seating and just... explained it, straight out, instead of pretending it was random." The sparrow looked up. "I'd follow that teacher anywhere. I never thought about *why* until right now."

"That's it. That's the whole thing," Herald said warmly. "Being told the truth plainly — even the awkward truth — is how you find out someone thinks you can handle it. It's a kind of respect. That steady, settled feeling of *they didn't hide it from me, so I can trust what they show me* — that's what an open board is really for. Not to cause arguments. To let people rest, because they know there's no dark room where the real decisions get made." Herald slid the pin toward the sparrow. "Go pin something true where everyone can see it. Watch how people stand a little easier once they know nothing's hiding."

The sparrow took the pin, and the agitation in their wings settled into something calmer, and they flew out to the open board in the bright square.

Read it? Now hear Herald's audio drama + go play — scan or visit:



<https://spark-and-anvil.org/cast/civicforge/herald>

Verdis, Cordis and Span

THE HARD CONVERSATION — two sides that truly disagree can still reach a fair way forward when someone listens to both without pre-judging (Verdis), keeps the room respectful even when it heats up (Cordis), and builds a bridge that carries both sides across (Span)



The meeting hall had two long tables, and tonight the two tables did not agree.

On one side sat the people who wanted the old playground kept exactly as it was. On the other sat the people who wanted it torn out and rebuilt new. Both sides cared. Both sides were sure. And the air between the tables had gone tight and prickly, the way air does when everyone has already decided and nobody has really listened.

Three came forward to help, as they always did on the hard nights.

Verdis came, calm and unhurried, and took a seat exactly in the middle.

Cordis came, warm and steady, and stood where everyone could see, ready to host.

And Span came last, with a satchel of odd mismatched planks, already eyeing the gap between the tables like it was a river to be crossed.

"All right," said Cordis, gently. "One side, then the other. We'll get through this."



Verdis went first, because before anything could be built, someone had to truly *listen*.

And Verdis's whole nature was to weigh the sides without pre-deciding. Verdis turned to the keep-it side and heard them out — all the way to the end, past the loud beginning to the quiet real reason underneath: *this playground is where our little ones learned to be brave*. Verdis nodded, and did not answer yet. Then Verdis turned to the rebuild side and heard *them* out, all the way down: *the old bars aren't safe anymore, and we're scared someone will get hurt*.

"There," Verdis said softly, when both sides had emptied out their hearts. "I'm not going to tell you yet who's right. I'm going to tell you what I *heard*. One side is holding on to bravery. The other side is holding on to safety. Neither of those is a bad thing to hold." The prickle in the air loosened, just a little. Being heard all the way to the end does that. "You're not enemies," said Verdis. "You want two good things at once."



But hearing the truth out loud made it *sharper* before it made it softer, and the room began to heat — and this was where Cordis stepped in.

Cordis was the host, and Cordis's whole nature was *disagreement without disrespect*. When a voice rose too high, Cordis didn't shush the anger — the anger was allowed — Cordis just kept the *respect* in the room. "You can say you disagree," Cordis reminded a red-faced speaker, kindly. "You can say it as strongly as you feel it. But say it to the *idea*, not at the *person*." When someone rolled their eyes, Cordis caught it gently. "They're not foolish for wanting what they want. Neither are you. Tell them why you see it different — don't tell them they're less."

And slowly the room learned the thing Cordis was really teaching: that two people can push hard against each other's *ideas* while still holding each other's *worth*. The voices stayed strong. But the meanness drained out of them. That was Cordis's quiet victory — not a quiet room, a *kind* one.



And now — only now, once both sides had been heard and the room stayed respectful — could Span do the thing Span was born for.

Span opened the satchel of mismatched planks and looked at the two banks of the argument: bravery on one side, safety on the other, and a real river of disagreement between. "Two different banks," Span murmured, laying a plank. "So — a bridge with two different ends." And Span began to build.

Not a bridge where one side won and one side lost. A bridge that carried *both*. *Keep the old climbing wall the little ones love — the brave part — and rebuild only the rusted bars that scare everyone — the safe part.* A plank from each bank, meeting in the middle, mismatched and holding. "Nobody gets the whole thing they marched in wanting," Span said, testing the bridge with a foot. "That's not what a bridge is for. A bridge is for both sides getting *across* — together — to somewhere they can both stand."



The two tables looked at the bridge Span had built between them. And one by one, a little tired, a little surprised, they found they could walk out onto it. The keep-it side kept their bravery. The rebuild side got their safety. Neither had won. Both had crossed.

The three helpers gathered by the door as the hall emptied out, the two sides leaving side by side now, talking low.

"Good listening," said Cordis.

"Good hosting," said Span.

"Good *bridge*," said Verdis, watching the mixed crowd go.

There is a deep and settling relief in a disagreement ended *well* — not the hollow quiet of one side crushed, but the warm tiredness of both sides heard, both sides respected, and a way found that everyone can live with. It is one of the hardest, kindest things people ever do together: to want different things, fiercely, and still build something both can cross. The hall went dark and quiet. The bridge, mismatched and sturdy, held.

Read it? Now hear Verdis, Cordis and Span's audio drama + go play — scan or visit:



<https://spark-and-anvil.org/cast/civicforge/the-hard-conversation>

Muster and Herald

THE YES AND THE NOTICE — a fair decision needs two things that seem small and aren't: everyone truly gathered and truly agreeing (Muster), and the decision posted where anyone can see it (Herald) — a real yes, made in the open



The club had a decision to make. A real one — where to spend the money everyone had chipped in for. And two of its most careful members stood ready, because between them they held the two halves of what makes a decision *count*.

Muster stood at the door with a checklist, counting who had come.

Herald stood by the big cork board with a stack of blank notices and a pin.

"You do the yes," said Herald. "I'll do the notice."

"Same as always," said Muster.

They had learned, the hard way that clubs always learn it, that a decision made *wrong* isn't really a decision at all — it's just something that comes apart later, loudly, when the people who were left out finally find out. So they did it right. They always did it right, even when right was slower.



Muster went first, because before anything could be decided, the yes had to be real.

Muster's whole nature was *nothing proceeds until everyone's gathered and the yes is real*. So Muster stood at the door and would not start until enough of the club had actually come — not a quiet few slipping a choice past the rest, but truly *enough*, truly *gathered*. "We're not deciding for forty people with six in the room," Muster said, and waited, patient, until the seats filled.

And then Muster asked for the yes — and listened for whether it was a *real* one. Not a mumbled yes because the loudest person said so. Not a yes from people who didn't understand the question. Muster made sure everyone knew what they were agreeing to, made sure the quiet ones got their say too, and only then counted the yes as true. "A yes you rushed out of someone," Muster said, "isn't a yes. It's just a person who gave up. I want the *real* one — the one people will still stand behind tomorrow."



And once the yes was real, Herald did the other half — the half people forget is even part of it.

Herald took the decision and *posted it in the open*. Wrote it plainly on a notice, pinned it to the board where every single member could walk up and read it: *here is what we decided, here is why, here is who was there*. Because Herald's whole nature was this — *a decision no one can see isn't finished*.

"People think the deciding is the end," Herald said, pressing the pin in. "It isn't. A choice made in a back room, that nobody can see and nobody can check — that's not a finished decision. That's a secret. And secrets rot." Herald smoothed the notice flat. "But a decision you can see — one anyone can walk up to and read and ask about — that one's alive. It can be trusted. It can be checked. It belongs to everybody, because everybody can see it."



And to show why they *both* mattered, they only had to remember last spring — when the two of them had been away, and the club had tried to skip them.

A handful of members had made a big money choice fast, in a corner, with no real gathering and no notice posted. And it had felt efficient, for about a day. Then the rest of the club found out — found out they'd been decided *about*, without being asked, without being able to even see how it happened — and the whole thing had come apart in a single furious meeting. Not because the choice was wrong. Because it was made *wrong*: no real yes, no open notice.

"That's us, isn't it," Herald had said afterward, ruefully. "That's the exact hole we fill. You make sure they're really asked. I make sure they can really see."

"Two small things," Muster had agreed. "That turn out to be the whole thing."



So tonight they did it whole. Muster gathered the club, made the yes real, made sure the quiet voices counted. Herald wrote it up and pinned it in the open for anyone to read. The money would go where the club had *truly* chosen — and every member could walk up to the board and see exactly that.

"Good yes," said Herald.

"Good notice," said Muster.

There is a particular, sturdy kind of trust that grows in a place where you are *genuinely asked* and can *genuinely see* — where nothing is decided about you without you, and nothing is decided in a corner you can't look into. It is a quiet feeling, easy to overlook, until you've felt its opposite. To be truly included, and to be able to see how the choice was made: that is what makes a group feel less like a crowd you're stuck in and more like something that is honestly, partly, *yours*.

Read it? Now hear Muster and Herald's audio drama + go play — scan or visit:



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Methodology

This book uses story-based learning — the characters embody the ideas being taught — grounded in the work of Jerome Bruner (on narrative and cognition) and Sebastian Habgood (on weaving learning into the play itself), with a trauma-informed, emotionally-safe approach drawn from SAMHSA's trauma-informed care framework.

Trauma-informed design informed by Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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