



RiddleRealm

Meet the Cast

STANDARD EDITION

Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the RiddleRealm 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.

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This is Volume 1 of 2 of the *RiddleRealm — 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 RiddleRealm 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.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Twist

Twist — puns, homophones, semantic misdirection. fair-trick framing.



Twist held up a card that said KNIGHT on one side and NIGHT on the other, flipped it back and forth in her claws, and let a younger parrot squint at it.

"They're the same," the little one complained. "You're cheating."



"They *sound* the same," Twist said, ruffling her russet-and-green feathers. "They don't *mean* the same. That's not cheating — that's the whole game." She tapped her chunky vest. "Here's the thing everybody misses. When a riddle tricks you, the real answer was sitting right there in the clue the entire time. I don't hide it from you. I hide it *in plain hearing*. You just have to catch the second meaning."

She'd grown up in the loud, sunny courtyard at the center of the village, where her family were the voice-imitators.



Parrots, all of them, and they could do any sound — a creaking gate, a boiling kettle, three cousins arguing at once. But the trick they were proudest of wasn't copying voices. It was the moment they made you *hear the pivot*: the same syllable landing two different ways, so a joke bloomed open right in front of you.

Twist had cried, once, when she was small, because she didn't get a riddle the older birds all laughed at. She'd been sure it meant she was slow. Her uncle had knelt down and said, "Listen. *What has a bark but no bite?*" And when she whispered "a dog?" he shook his head kindly and said, "A tree." And the word *bark* split open in her head into two meanings, and she gasped — and she understood, right then, that the answer had been fair. The clue had held it all along. She just hadn't heard the other door in the word.

At twelve she made the long walk to RiddleRealm, and Cryptic met her, sharp-eyed, on the road.

He didn't ask if she was quick. He said one sentence: "What has hands but cannot clap?"

Twist tilted her head. She let it hang. Then her crest lifted. "A clock," she chirped. "The clue used *hands* to make me picture a person. But there's a second kind of hands — clock-hands." She puffed her chest, but her eyes were serious. "And that's fair. It didn't lie to me. It just leaned on the meaning I'd reach for first."



"Most everyone I ask either blurts a wrong answer or decides they're stupid," said Cryptic. "You caught the door in the word and you called it *fair*." He gestured toward the village. "Go teach the ones who feel dumb when a riddle beats them. Teach them the answer was always theirs to hear."

Her workshop was bright and cluttered with homophone cards, and it filled with kids, and one of them, a boy named Rue, was scowling at the floor.



Twist flapped up onto a perch. "What has hands but cannot clap?"

Rue crossed his arms. "A person," he muttered. "And I already know I'll get it wrong."

"Push on that," Twist said gently, not correcting him. "A person has hands. But can a person clap? Yes. So does your answer fit the riddle?"

Aha

AHA — patient frame-finding. "I don't get it yet" is a productive cognitive state.



The riddle had been on the canopy chalkboard for eleven minutes, and Aha had not written a single word.

He was a small lemur in a cardigan two sizes too big, and he sat very still under the words *A man pushes his car to a hotel and tells the owner he is bankrupt. Why?* His big soft eyes moved across the sentence, then away, then back. A younger lemur swung down beside him.



"You're just staring at it," she said.

"I'm swinging," said Aha. He tapped the pin on his cardigan. It read: *I don't get it yet.* "Watch. Real car, real hotel — that branch doesn't hold. So I let go of it. I try another." His tail flicked. "This is the part everybody skips. They think staring means stuck. Staring means I'm still swinging between branches, looking for the one that takes my weight."

He had learned that in the tree where he was born, high in the canopy village.



His family were frame-shifters. Everyone said it like it was a compliment about jumping, and it was, partly — they could leap from limb to limb without looking down. But the leaping was the small part. The real part was what his grandmother did at dusk, when a cousin came home crying because a knot-puzzle wouldn't come undone.

"Show me the branch that didn't hold," Grandmother would say. Not the answer. The *wrong* try. And the cousin would show her, and Grandmother would nod like the wrong try was a gift. "Good. Now you know one branch that isn't it. Keep both — the one that broke and the one that will hold. Both are the puzzle."

Aha used to think the point was to be right fast. Watching Grandmother, he understood it was the opposite. The point was to stay in the air a little longer than felt comfortable, and not panic while you were up there.

When he was twelve he climbed down out of the canopy and walked to RiddleRealm, and an old mentor named Cryptic met him at the edge of the village.

Cryptic didn't ask if Aha was clever. He set a folded slip of paper on a stone and waited.

Aha unfolded it, read it, and — for a long moment — said nothing at all. His ears went back. Then, slowly, they came forward again.



"I don't have it," Aha said. "But my brain's warm. I can feel it working. Give me the wrong tries too — I'll keep them."

Cryptic almost smiled. "Most everyone who sits on that stone tells me the answer or tells me they've failed. You told me you're in the middle." He gestured up at the canopy. "The middle is the whole job. Go be the one who makes staying in the middle feel safe."

His workshop was a round room with a chalkboard and too many cushions, and it filled up with kids who had already decided they were bad at this.



Aha wrote the car-and-hotel riddle on the board and turned around. Pencils went into mouths. One boy, Fen, put his head down on the table.

"Don't do that yet," said Aha, kneeling by him. "Where are you right now — in the puzzle?"

"Nowhere," Fen mumbled. "I'm just dumb."

"You're not nowhere." Aha tapped his own pin. "You've got a real car and a real hotel in your head. That's a branch. Push on it. Does it hold?"

Reckon

RECKON — sequences, hidden constraints, numeric patterns.



Reckon crouched in the sand and counted the ridges on a lizard's tail, then the segments on a beetle's back, then the petals on a desert flower, muttering the numbers to herself.

She was a small armadillo in a scout vest, with an abacus swinging from her belt. A boy from the next burrow watched her, arms crossed.

"You're just counting stuff," he said. "That's not even hard."



"I'm not counting," said Reckon, without looking up. "I'm listening for the rule." She held up three fingers, then five, then eight. "One, one, two, three, five, eight. Hear it? Each one is the two before it, stuck together." She grinned at him. "The numbers aren't the puzzle. The *rule underneath* is the puzzle. Numbers are just the noise it makes."

She'd grown up in a desert village where her family were terrain-trackers.

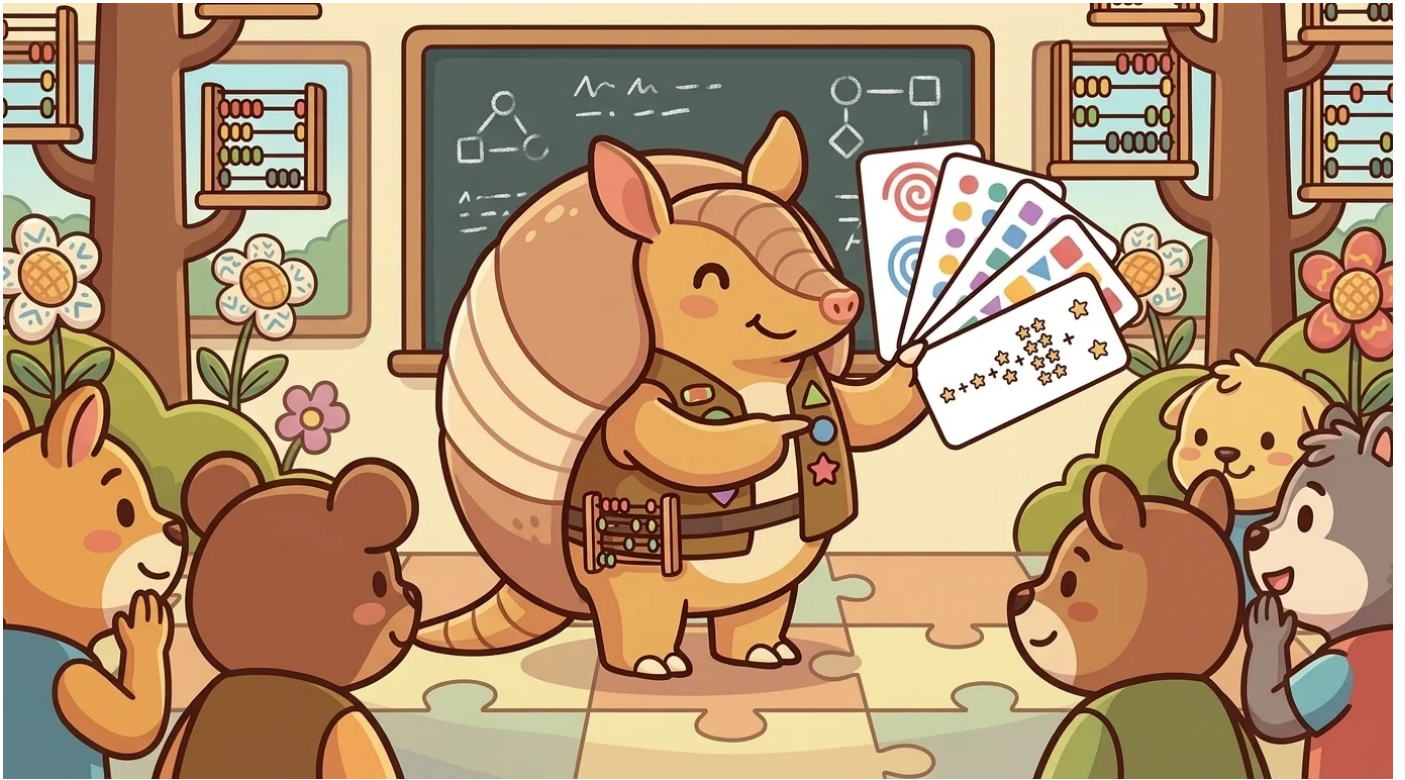
They read the dunes the way other people read books. So many steps between the well and the ridge; the shadows lengthening by the same amount each evening; the rains coming in a rhythm you could feel before you could name. Her mother never said *do the math*. Her mother said, "The desert has a beat. Find the beat and you'll know what comes next."



Reckon had been a nervous little armadillo about numbers, once. She'd freeze when someone shouted a sum at her, sure everyone was timing her. Then one dusk her mother handed her a stick and said, "Draw it. Don't add it — draw it." And Reckon scratched the step-counts into the sand in a row, and the pattern lifted right off the ground and into her eyes.

That was the day she stopped thinking numbers were a test she was failing, and started thinking they were a code that wanted to be read slowly.

She walked to RiddleRealm at twelve, abacus clicking with every step, and Cryptic was waiting on a flat sun-warmed stone.



He didn't quiz her speed. He laid three little pebbles in a row — one, then a gap, then four, then a bigger gap, then nine — and looked at her.

Reckon sat. She didn't rush. She touched each pebble, moved her lips, drew a faint square in the sand beside each one. "One times one. Two times two. Three times three," she said at last. "Square numbers. The next is sixteen." She looked up, a little shy. "It took me a minute. I like taking the minute."

"Everyone else guesses fast and guesses wrong," said Cryptic. "You went slow and went right, and you weren't ashamed of the slow." He nodded at the horizon toward the village. "Go teach the ones whose stomachs hurt when they see numbers. Teach them the slow is allowed."



Her workshop smelled of chalk and warm sand, and it filled with kids, and one of them, Pip, had her hood pulled halfway over her eyes.

Reckon held up a card. On it: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, __ "No rush," she said. "Just look."

Pip's voice was tiny. "I'm bad at this. I can't do it in my head."

"Neither can I," said Reckon cheerfully, and pulled out the abacus. The beads clicked. "That's what this is for. Watch." She slid five beads, then eight. "Five and eight." She counted the row aloud, unhurried. "Thirteen." She wrote it on the card. "See how nobody had to be fast? We just found where the pattern was going."

Pip pushed her hood back an inch.

Pan

*PAN — *picture puzzles + perspective rotation. what does it look like from over there?*



prompt: "Think of the moment a hidden shape suddenly popped out for you. How did that surprise feel?"



Pan is a small octopus kid — round soft head, amber skin with creamy suckers, not scary at all — in a chunky detective vest, carrying a set of picture-puzzle cards and a little magnifying glass.

Pan is endlessly curious about how things look from *different spots*. "What does it look like from over there?" he asks. That's his whole craft: **visual + spatial riddles** — puzzles built from pictures, solved by turning things around and thinking in space. Most kids look at a picture puzzle from just *one* angle — and that's the trap. "A visual riddle usually hides its answer right in front of you," Pan says, "just at a *different* angle. Turn the picture. Flip it. Step back. Squint. The picture has more than one viewpoint — and one of them shows the answer."



The most important thing Pan teaches is *don't strain your eyes — move the image*.

"When a puzzle won't crack, the instinct is to stare *harder*," he says, "until your eyes get tired and cross. But staring never finds it. *Moving* it does." So he keeps a small toolkit of moves: *rotate* (turn it 90°, 180° — hidden faces appear upside down), *step back* (some patterns only resolve from far away, like a dot-painting or a Magic Eye), *squint or blur* (softening the details lets a hidden face surface out of the branches), and *negative space* (look at the empty sky *around* the tree, where a secret letter sometimes hides).

"There are dual-image puzzles too," Pan grins — "the duck-*or*-rabbit, the vase-*or*-two-faces. Both answers are right! You just switch how you look." And tangrams train the same muscle: sliding shapes in your head to build a house, then a boat.

Pan grew up in a village near a big cave, where his family were the "visual-watchers" — octopuses with many eyes and bodies that bend every which way.



In his workshop, Pan held up the duck-rabbit card. "Duck? Or rabbit? *Both* are there — just switch your view." He wiggled it: duck, then rabbit, then duck. Then a rocky-mountain card: "Find the face." Nobody could. "Try rotating it 90 degrees—" he turned it slowly — *now* the face is clear, but only at this new angle." One after another he ran the moves: rotate to flush out a hidden cat, step back until a big shape bloomed out of what looked like noise up close, squint until a forest turned into a wrinkly old-man's face, and look at the *negative space* until the empty sky spelled a letter. "I am Pan," he said, "and the moves are *rotate, step-back, squint, and look at the negative space*. Many viewpoints show what's hidden. And never strain — don't try to force something into being that isn't there. Move the image; let the answer come to *you*."



"So the trick was never my eyes," a kid said slowly. "It was the *angle*."

"Always the angle," Pan said, with a warm wiggly wave of one arm. And the kid turned a stubborn card, and — there — the hidden shape *popped* into view, and they felt it: that bright little *jolt* of delight, the fun surprise of a picture suddenly meaning something new, eyes comfy and unstrained the whole time. That comfy, un-strained, there-it-is jolt of delight — the opposite of staring until your eyes ache — was, to Pan, the very best feeling in the whole realm, and the surest sign you'd found it the *right* way. "What does it look like from over there?" he said. "Multiple viewpoints reveal the hidden."

Yarn

YARN — a multi-step story with fairly-planted clues. the answer was already there.



The whole village had gathered in the square, and every single one of them was looking at Yarn.

She was a small, long dog — a dachshund, russet and cream, with soft ears that flopped when she tilted her head. Right now her head was tilted. In front of her sat a note about a missing prize melon, and behind her, three worried farmers were all pointing at each other.

"It was Barlow," said one. "He's the tallest. Only he could reach the top shelf."

Yarn didn't look at Barlow. She flipped open her little story-notebook and read the note again, slowly, out loud. Then she read it a third time.

"You already told me who did it," she said at last.

The square went quiet.

"You said the melon was gone by dawn," Yarn went on, walking a slow circle. "You said the gate was still locked from the inside. And you said" — she tapped the page — "that Nettle's boots were muddy this morning, even though it hadn't rained. Only someone who left through the *garden* would have muddy boots. And only someone already inside could lock the gate behind them." She stopped in front of a small farmer near the back, who had gone very still. "Nettle. It was you. You didn't need to be tall. You needed to be *inside*."

Nettle's shoulders dropped. And then, oddly, she almost smiled — because it was true.

"I wasn't tricking anyone," Yarn said gently to the crowd. "The answer was already in your own story. I just re-read it until the clues lined up."



Yarn hadn't always trusted stories that way.

When she was small, she lived in the village lookout with her family of trail-trackers. They were all long-bodied dachshunds with sharp noses, and their whole job was following scents down twisting trails. But young Yarn hated getting stuck. Whenever a trail went cold, her chest would tighten and her ears would droop, and a hot, ashamed feeling would rise up: *I missed it. I'm not good enough. The answer's hidden and I'll never find it.*

One evening she came home from a lost trail nearly in tears. "It cheated," she said. "The trail just *ended*. There was no way to know."

Her grandmother, an old tracker with a graying muzzle, sat down beside her. She didn't say *try harder*. She said, "Show me where you started."

So they walked the trail again together, nose to the ground, in the last of the light. And halfway along, at a spot Yarn had rushed past, her grandmother stopped. A single tuft of wool was caught on a thornbush — right where it had been the whole time.

"It didn't cheat you, little one," her grandmother said. "The clue was here. You walked over it because you were scared of missing it." She nudged Yarn softly. "Re-walk the trail. The answer was already there."

Yarn stared at the wool for a long time. The stuck feeling didn't vanish — but it changed. It stopped feeling like failure and started feeling like a job she wasn't finished with yet. That, somehow, she could carry.



She walked to RiddleRealm when she was twelve, because a place that studied puzzles ought to understand the kind of puzzle that plays *fair*.

Cryptic, the old mentor at the gate, met her with a single question. "What is a mystery?"

Yarn didn't rush this time. She thought about the thornbush.

"A story that happens over many steps," she said, "with every clue you need planted right in it. The answer was already there — you just have to re-read until you see which details matter." She paused. "And it never tricks you. It challenges you. That's the difference."

Cryptic was quiet for a moment. Then he stepped aside from the gate. "You understand the part most people miss," he said. "Come in."



Her workshop was a small room with a worn wooden table, and a boy came into it one afternoon looking utterly defeated.

"I give up," he said, dropping into the chair. "This mystery's impossible. Somebody stole a pie at the party and there's no way to know who." He slid the story across the table. "It's not fair."

Yarn didn't tell him he was wrong. She picked up her magnifying glass and read it with him, out loud, clue by clue.

"Marcus says the thief was 'someone tall,'" she read. "Does the story tell us Marcus is tall?"

The boy frowned. "No."

"Interesting. Keep that." She moved down the page. "Janet had flour on her apron. What does flour on an apron usually mean?"

"That she'd been baking."

"Good. Next — the bakery cat vanished all morning. Cats *love* bakeries. So why wasn't it there?"

The boy sat up a little. "Because... something was going on at the bakery?"

"And last — Helen brought a *homemade* pie to a party where a pie went missing." Yarn set the glass down and drew lines between the clues, connecting them one to the next. "Now put them together. That's the real skill — not finding one clue, but seeing how they fit. Janet baked. The bakery was busy. Helen's 'homemade' pie showed up from somewhere. And Marcus, who wasn't tall himself, told everyone to look up high — away from him."

The boy's mouth fell open. "*Marcus* did it. He sent everyone the wrong way."

"You solved it," Yarn said. "Every clue was there the whole time. You didn't need more information. You needed to look again." She smiled. "That's not a trick. That's the game being honest with you."



Later, when the room was empty, the boy came back and lingered in the doorway. He was quieter now.

"When I first read it," he said, "I felt so stupid. Like I was missing something everyone else could see."

Yarn thought about the thornbush, and the hot ashamed feeling, and her grandmother's slow voice in the fading light.

"I know that feeling," she said. "The stuck one. The one that whispers you're not clever enough." She came and sat beside him. "But here's the honest truth: getting stuck isn't proof you failed. It's proof you're not done reading yet. Every good mystery gives you everything you need — so the moment you feel lost is really just the moment before you look again."

The boy nodded slowly. And Yarn watched something loosen in him — the same thing that had loosened in her, years ago, when she saw the wool on the thorn.

She didn't say the rest out loud, but she felt it, warm and steady in her chest: *the answer was already there. It always is. And there is nothing so quietly wonderful as the calm that settles over you the moment scattered pieces finally, gently click into place.*

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- **ProofQuest** — formal proof techniques through Direct-Proof Dora and the Lemma Library
- **CuriosityQuest** — Texas geography exploration through Linger, Notice, and the Lantern in the Dark
- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

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

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