



# BeatForge

## *Meet the Cast*

STANDARD EDITION

# Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the Beatforge 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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*For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.*

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# Introduction

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The Beatforge 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*



# Hammer

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\*HAMMER — \*emphasis on specific beats. downbeat, backbeat, polyrhythmic emphasis.\*\*

Hammer stood in his studio. It was a busy place. Drums of all sizes filled the corners. Little bells hung from the ceiling. Hammer was a woodpecker, but not just any woodpecker. He was a sturdy-woodpecker-tween. He wore a chunky studio tunic. It had paint splatters and tiny cards tucked into pockets. Hammer was small. He was sturdy. He was very emphatic. His feathers were warm cream. A soft crest sat on his head.

Hammer loved to listen. He paid deep attention to which beats landed. He often said, "Emphasis on specific beats. Downbeat, backbeat, polyrhythmic emphasis." He always carried his accent-pattern-cards. He also had his emphasis-tracker. These tools helped him show everyone the big difference. They showed the difference between a downbeat (beats 1 and 3) and a backbeat (beats 2 and 4). They also showed polyrhythmic accents.

"Alright, listen up!" Hammer chirped. He tapped a small drum. *Thump-tap-thump-tap*. "That's a basic beat. But it's a bit... flat, right?"

A small group of students nodded. They looked confused. One student, Pip, fiddled with a drumstick. "It just sounds like... hitting," Pip said.

Hammer grinned. "Exactly! We need to make those hits *mean* something. The big idea I teach is *accent*. It's the craft of WHICH-BEATS-LAND."

He held up a card. It showed four circles in a row. "Think of a beat-grid. One, two, three, four." He tapped the drum again. *ONE-two-THREE-four*. "Hear that? Beats one and three are louder. Sharper. More present."

He pointed to his emphasis-tracker. Little lights blinked on beats one and three. "That's **downbeat** emphasis. It feels like a march. Or classical music. Think of a big parade drum." He marched in place. *Left, right, LEFT, right*. The students started to tap their feet.

"Now, watch this!" Hammer flipped his card. New circles were highlighted. He tapped the drum again. *one-TWO-three-FOUR*. "Did you hear the change?"

Pip's eyes widened. "Whoa! It sounds... different. Like I want to dance."

"That's the magic!" Hammer said. "Beats two and four are louder now. Sharper. More present." He pointed to his tracker. Lights blinked on beats two and four. "That's **backbeat** emphasis. This is rock music. Pop music. It makes you want to groove!" Hammer swayed his hips. The students started to bob their heads.

"See?" Hammer asked. "Just by choosing which beats to hit harder, we change the whole *feel* of the music. Accent choices SHAPE genre."

He paused. He looked around the room. "But there's more. Much more. We can layer different accent patterns. All at the same time!"

Hammer picked up two small shakers. He held one in each wing. "This is called **polyrhythmic** emphasis. It's like having two different conversations happening at once. But they fit together perfectly."

He started to shake one shaker in a steady *shick-shick-shick-shick* rhythm. Then, his other wing started a different, trickier pattern. *shick-a-shick-shick-a-shick*. The two rhythms danced together. They made a complex, exciting sound.

"It's like magic!" Pip whispered.

"It *is* magic," Hammer agreed. "And it's very important. These amazing rhythms come from many cultures. Places like West Africa and Cuba. Also from jazz traditions. Many world traditions use these layered rhythms. We always honor where they come from. We give them respect." He bowed his head slightly.

"So, what do I teach?" Hammer asked, looking at the students. "I am Hammer. The big idea I teach is *accent*. The move is *emphasis on specific beats; downbeat vs backbeat shapes genre; polyrhythm layers; honor cultural rhythmic traditions*."

He tapped his drum one last time. *Thump-TAP-thump-TAP*. "Remember: emphasis on specific beats. Downbeat, backbeat, polyrhythmic emphasis." He smiled. "You'll see how this connects to HarmonyForge, MotifLab, and SoundSphere later. For now, let's make some beats land!"

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## Voice register

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Sturdy-woodpecker-tween. Striking + emphatic.

## Cultural-sensitivity gate

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LOAD-BEARING cross-cultural rhythmic respect (Afro-Cuban / West African polyrhythmic traditions credited). Story-axis per ADR-016.

## Cultural-context note

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Accent pedagogy: Berklee; cross-cultural rhythmic scholarship; African Drum and Dance scholarship (Wynton Marsalis + others). Woodpecker for rhythmic-striking biomimicry.



# Snap

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\*SNAP — \*split the beat into equal smaller parts. eighths, sixteenths, triplets.\*\*

Snap was a tiny blur. She zipped around the studio. Her cream-colored feathers had soft cinnamon tips. Snap moved like a wren, quick and precise. She wore a chunky studio tunic. It was covered in tiny pockets. Each pocket held a different card.

Snap loved to tap. Tap-tap-tap went her little shoes. She paused in a funny pose. One hand was on her hip. The other held up a small device. This was her division-tracker. It glowed with soft numbers.

"Hello!" Snap chirped. Her voice was crisp. It sounded like a tiny bell. "I am Snap." She tapped her foot again. "I teach **subdivision**."

A new student stood in the doorway. They looked a little confused. Snap didn't seem to notice. She was already busy. She pulled a card from her tunic. It showed a big number '1'.

"See this?" Snap asked. She pointed at the card. "This is one beat. Throb taught you about beats, right?" She didn't wait for an answer. "A beat is like a clock ticking." Snap clapped her hands. *Clap. Clap. Clap. Clap.* "That's Throb's beat."

She held up another card. This one showed two smaller numbers. They were '1' and 'and'. "But what if we split that beat?" Snap asked. She clapped again. *Clap.* Then she quickly clapped twice inside that same beat. *Clap-clap.*

"We can split each beat," Snap explained. "We can make smaller, equal parts." She tapped her foot. "This is **subdivision**."

Snap held up her division-tracker. It showed a single, steady pulse. *BUMP... BUMP... BUMP...* "That's the beat," she said. Then she pressed a button. The tracker started flashing faster. *BUMP-bump... BUMP-bump... BUMP-bump...*

"Hear that?" Snap asked. Her eyes sparkled. "We split each beat into two equal parts. We call these *eighth notes*." She started counting out loud. "One-and-two-and-three-and-four-and!" She clapped along. Her claps were super fast. They fit perfectly inside each beat.

"Try it!" Snap encouraged. She bounced on her toes. "Clap a beat. Then clap twice inside it. Count 'one-and'."

The student tried to follow. Their claps were a bit wobbly. Snap just smiled. "It takes practice," she said. "But it's really important."

She pulled out another card. This one had four tiny numbers. '1-e-and-a'. "What if we split the beat even more?" Snap asked. She pressed her tracker again. Now it flashed four times inside each beat. *BUMP-bump-bump-bump... BUMP-bump-bump-bump...*

"These are *sixteenth notes*," Snap announced. "Four tiny parts in one beat." She counted them out. "One-e-and-a-two-e-and-a-three-e-and-a-four-e-and-a!" Her tongue twisted a little. But she kept going. Her claps were a blur.

"It's like tiny little footsteps," Snap said. She did a quick, shuffling dance. Her feet barely touched the floor. "Super fast. Super light."

Then Snap held up a different card. This one showed three numbers. '1-trip-let'. "And sometimes," she said, "we split the beat into three equal parts." She pressed her tracker one more time. The flashes now came in sets of three. *BUMP-bump-bump... BUMP-bump-bump...*

"These are *triplets*," Snap explained. "They feel different. More bouncy, maybe." She swayed side to side. "Like a little hop-skip-jump." She counted them. "One-trip-let-two-trip-let-three-trip-let-four-trip-let!"

Snap tapped her foot thoughtfully. "Different **subdivision** patterns," she said. "They make different rhythmic feels." She clapped a steady "one-and" rhythm. It sounded very straight. Then she switched to "one-trip-let." It felt much more relaxed.

"See the difference?" Snap asked. She tilted her head. "One is straight. The other swings a bit." She made a funny face. "Like a sleepy cat."

Snap put her cards back in her tunic. "Counting **subdivision** out loud is a big deal," she said. "It helps you understand music." She paused for a moment. "It helps you dance better in DanceQuest Phrase." Her eyes twinkled. "It helps your songs sound cooler in HarmonyForge." She gave a little hop. "And it makes your ideas sharper in MotifLab."

Snap looked at the student. She gave a quick, bright smile. "So remember," she said. She held up her division-tracker. It showed a simple beat. "Split the beat into equal smaller parts." She pressed the button. The tracker flashed quickly. "Eighths, sixteenths, triplets." She tapped her foot. "That's **subdivision!**"

## Voice register

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Quick-wren-tween. Crisp + tapping.

## Cultural-sensitivity gate

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Story-axis per ADR-016.

## Cultural-context note

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Subdivision pedagogy: Berklee; standard music-theory texts. Wren for quick-pulse biomimicry.



# Spin

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\*SPIN — \*pulse + subdivision + accent + syncopation cohere = groove.\*\*

Spin zipped into the BeatForge studio. They were a blur of motion. Spin looked like a tiny hummingbird, but chunky and cartoonish. Their soft, iridescent feathers shimmered. Spin wore a bright studio tunic. It had little pockets for everything.

"Alright, BeatForge crew!" Spin chirped. Their voice was fast and high. "Ready to make some magic?"

Throb, Snap, Hammer, and Tilt looked up. They had been trying to make a new beat. It just wasn't working. Throb thumped a big bass drum. Snap clapped a quick rhythm. Hammer hit a snare drum. Tilt swayed, trying to find the flow.

"It sounds... okay," Throb grumbled. He scratched his head. "But it doesn't make you *move*."

Snap nodded. "It's like all the pieces are there. But they don't stick together."

Spin hovered for a second. Their tiny wings buzzed. "That's because you're missing the *groove*!" Spin landed lightly on a drum stool. They pulled out a stack of small cards. Each card had a different pattern. They also had a small, glowing tablet. It was Spin's genre-signature-tracker.

"The *groove* is when everything clicks," Spin explained. "It's when the beat feels alive. It makes your body want to dance."

Hammer frowned. "But we have pulse. We have subdivision. We have accents. And we even have syncopation!"

"Exactly!" Spin beamed. "You have all the ingredients. But you haven't made the stew yet."

Spin tapped a foot. *Tap-tap-tap-tap*. "That's the *pulse*," Spin said. "It's the steady beat. Like your heart."

Then Spin added a quick, light tap between each main tap. *Tap-ti-tap-ti-tap-ti-tap-ti*. "Those are *subdivisions*," Spin told them. "They break the pulse into smaller bits."

Next, Spin made some taps louder. *TAP-ti-tap-ti-TAP-ti-tap-ti*. "Now we add *accents*," Spin announced. "They make certain beats stand out. They give the rhythm a push."

Finally, Spin skipped a tap. They put a loud tap where you wouldn't expect it. *TAP-ti-tap-ti-tap-TI-tap-ti-TAP-ti*. "And that, my friends, is *syncopation*," Spin said with a flourish. "It's when you play off the main beat. It makes things exciting."

Spin looked at the group. "Now, put them all together." Spin started humming. They tapped their foot, clapped their hands, and swayed their body. It was a simple, catchy beat. It made Throb's head bob. Snap started tapping her fingers.

"See?" Spin said. "When *pulse + subdivision + accent + syncopation cohere = groove!*" Spin loved saying that. It was their favorite phrase. "It's when all those parts work as one system. Your body just knows it."

Spin picked up one of their groove-pattern-cards. It showed a complex drum pattern. "Different kinds of music have different *grooves*," Spin explained. "They are like secret handshakes for each style." Spin showed them the card. "This one is a hip-hop *groove*."

Spin tapped a new rhythm on a small drum pad. *Boom-bap-tss-boom-bap-tss*. It was slow and heavy. It made everyone want to nod their heads. "Feel that?" Spin asked. "It makes you want to bounce."

"I get it!" Tilt exclaimed. "It's like the beat has a personality!"

"Exactly!" Spin said. "Now, let's try another." Spin pulled out a different card. "This is a reggae *groove*." Spin tapped a new beat. It was light and bouncy. The main beat felt like it was falling backward. *Chika-chika-boom-chika-chika-boom*.

"This *groove* comes from Jamaica," Spin told them. "It's called a 'one-drop.' It makes you want to sway. We always honor the traditions that created these amazing sounds." Spin pointed to the genre-signature-tracker. It glowed with information about reggae music.

Next, Spin showed them a salsa *groove*. It was fast and intricate. It made their feet want to move. Then came an Afro-beat *groove*. It had many layers of rhythm. It felt like a whole conversation. A rock *groove* was next. It was strong and steady. It made them want to jump. Finally, an EDM *groove* pulsed with energy. It made them feel like dancing in a big crowd.

With each new *groove*, Spin explained its feel. They showed how it was built. They also talked about where it came from. "Each tradition has its own special way of making a *groove*," Spin said. "We learn from them. We respect them."

Throb tried the hip-hop *groove*. He thumped the bass drum. Snap clapped the snare. Hammer added the hi-hats. Tilt swayed. They focused on making all the parts *cohere*. It took a few tries. Then, something shifted.

"Hey!" Throb grinned. "It's moving!"

Spin started to bob her head. "I can feel it in my feet!"

Hammer tapped his drum. "It's like the beat is telling a story now."

Spin clapped their tiny hands. "You found it! You found the *groove*!" Spin zipped around the room. "You made the system work together. You made the beat feel like itself."

The BeatForge crew kept playing. They tried different *grooves*. They felt the music in their bodies. They understood that a *groove* was more than just notes. It was the heart of the music. It was what made you want to move. It was the feeling when everything finally clicked.

Spin smiled. Their job here was done. The BeatForge team now had all their rhythm tools. They could make any beat come alive.

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## Voice register

Whirling-hummingbird-tween. Alive + body-moving.

## Arc

Closes BeatForge cast arc. Pairs with HarmonyForge + MotifLab + SoundSphere as creative-studio music cluster.

## Cultural-sensitivity gate

LOAD-BEARING cross-cultural groove-traditions respect. Story-axis per ADR-016.

## Cultural-context note

Groove scholarship: Berklee; cross-cultural rhythmic scholarship (Afro-beat, Latin, hip-hop, reggae). Hummingbird for whirling biomimicry.



# Throb

---

\*THROB — \*the steady pulse. every other rhythm hangs from this clock.\*\*

Leo pushed open the studio door. A soft, damp smell hit him. It smelled like moss and old pond water. Green light filtered through big lily-pad windows. Throb's studio was always a little bit squishy.

Throb sat at a chunky wooden desk. He was a small frog-like creature. His skin was warm-cream and soft-pond-green. He wore a neat, chunky-cartoon studio-tunic. A tiny metronome ticked a steady rhythm on the desk. *Click-clack. Click-clack.* Throb's whole body pulsed with the beat. It was like his heart was the metronome.

"Hello, Leo," Throb croaked. His voice was deep and calm. "Come in. Don't mind the damp."

Leo squished across the floor. He sat on a mushroom-shaped stool. He pulled out his latest song idea. It was called "The Wobbly Worm Dance." But it sounded more like a tangled mess.

"It's just... not working," Leo sighed. He showed Throb his notes. "The drums go too fast. The melody gets lost. Everything feels like it's tripping over itself."

Throb nodded slowly. He picked up a small device. It was his signature metronome and pulse-tracker. It had a little screen that showed numbers. *BPM*, it read. Beats Per Minute.

"I am Throb," he said. "The primitive I teach is *pulse*." He tapped a finger on the desk. *Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap.* "The move is *steady clock under everything*."

Leo watched Throb's finger. It moved perfectly. Always the same speed. Never speeding up. Never slowing down.

"Every song has a secret clock," Throb explained. "It's the **pulse**. It's the steady beat that never changes." He pointed to the metronome. "Like this little guy. It just keeps going."

Throb set the metronome to a slow, easy click. *Click. Click. Click.* "This is the **pulse**," he said. "It's the foundation. Every other rhythm hangs from this clock."

Leo tried to tap along. His finger started okay. Then it sped up a little. Then it slowed down. He couldn't keep it even.

Throb smiled a calm, froggy smile. "It's harder than it looks, isn't it?" he asked. "Your brain wants to rush. Or it wants to get bored and slow down."

"Yeah," Leo admitted. "It's like my fingers have a mind of their own."

"The trick is to *internalize* it," Throb said. "You need to feel the **pulse** inside you. Make it your own secret heartbeat."

Throb closed his eyes. He started to hum a low, steady sound. It was like a deep, rumbling croak. He kept tapping his finger. *Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap.*

"Count quietly in your head," Throb instructed. "One. Two. Three. Four. Feel it in your chest. Feel it in your feet."

Leo closed his eyes too. He listened to Throb's hum. He listened to the metronome. He tried to count. *One... two... three... four...*

His mind kept wandering. He thought about lunch. He thought about his homework. He lost the beat.

"It's okay," Throb said softly. He opened one eye. "It takes practice. Think of it like a tiny, invisible clock in your head. It just ticks and ticks."

Throb picked up a small, smooth stone. He placed it on Leo's palm. "Feel the weight of this stone," he said. "It's steady. It's solid. That's how your **pulse** should feel."

Leo held the stone. It felt cool and heavy. He focused on the feeling. He closed his eyes again. He listened to the metronome. *Click. Click. Click. Click.*

He started counting again. *One. Two. Three. Four.* This time, he imagined the stone ticking inside him. It was a strong, steady feeling. His counting felt more even.

"Good," Throb hummed. "Now, open your eyes. Keep counting. Keep feeling that steady clock."

Leo opened his eyes. He looked at Throb. He looked at the metronome. The world seemed to click into place. The **pulse** was there. It was always there.

"Now, your song," Throb said. He pointed to Leo's notes. "Your drums were rushing. Your melody was dragging. They didn't have a steady clock to hang from."

Throb took Leo's drum part. He tapped it out slowly. *Boom-chick-a-boom. Boom-chick-a-boom.* But he kept the steady *pulse* underneath. Leo could hear it now. The drum part made sense. It wasn't just random noise. It was built on the **pulse**.

"Subdivision," Throb explained. "That's when you split the **pulse** into smaller bits. Snap teaches that. But you need the **pulse** first."

He took the melody. He hummed it over the steady *pulse*. It sounded much better. The notes fit. They didn't get lost.

"Every other rhythm hangs from this clock," Throb repeated. "Accent, syncopation, groove. They all need the



# Tilt

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\*TILT — \*weight off the expected beat. pull + forward motion.\*\*

Tilt was easy to spot. She always leaned a little. Not like she was tired, but like she was posing. Imagine a flamingo. That was Tilt. Her feathers were soft cream with pink tips. She wore a chunky studio tunic. It had big pockets. Inside one pocket, she kept her syncopation cards. In the other, her off-beat tracker.

Tilt loved rhythms. She loved finding the hidden ones. The ones that made your feet tap. The ones that made you want to dance. She was super good at spotting them. Especially the beats that landed just a little bit off.

One afternoon, a kid named Leo sat at the drum kit. He was trying to play a new song. *Thump-thump-clap-thump*. His sticks moved fast. But his face looked bored. The music sounded... flat. Like a robot marching. Every beat was exactly where you expected it.

Tilt leaned in the doorway. She watched Leo for a minute. Her head tilted to the side. Just like a curious bird. Leo hit the cymbal. *CRASH!* He sighed a big sigh.

"It's no good," Leo mumbled. He dropped his sticks. They clattered on the floor. "It just sounds... boring. Like a clock ticking."

Tilt pushed off the doorframe. She walked over to Leo. Her steps were light. She didn't make a sound. She picked up one of his drumsticks.

"Your beat is very... polite," Tilt said. She tapped the stick on the snare drum. *Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap.* "Every beat is right on time. Right where it should be."

Leo shrugged. "Isn't that how music works?"

Tilt shook her head. Her pink feathers ruffled. "Only if you want sleepy music. Or marching music. But what if you want music that makes you jump?"

She held up a syncopation card. It showed a little arrow. The arrow pointed *between* two regular beats. "This is **syncopation**," she said. "It's the rhythm craft of *unexpected weight pulls forward*."

Leo frowned. "Unexpected what now?"

"Imagine you're walking," Tilt explained. She took a step. *Thump*. Then another. *Thump*. "Normal walking. Predictable."

Then she took a step. *Thump*. But her next foot landed just a tiny bit early. Or a tiny bit late. It wasn't quite on the beat. It was *off* the beat. "See?" she said. "It's like a little skip. Or a quick hop. It surprises your feet."

She tapped the drumstick again. *Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap.* This was Leo's beat. Then she tapped it differently. *Tap-TAP. Tap-TAP. Tap-TAP.* The second tap came just before the main beat. It made a little bounce.

"That's the *weight off the expected beat*," Tilt said. "It pulls you forward. It makes you want to move."

Leo picked up his other stick. He tried to copy her. *Tap-tap. Tap-tap.* It sounded a bit messy at first. He hit the drum too hard. Or too soft.

"It's tricky," he admitted. "My brain wants to put it right on the beat."

"That's normal," Tilt told him. She pulled out her off-beat tracker. It was a small device. It had blinking lights. Each light showed a different way to shift a beat. "We're used to things being neat. But neat isn't always fun."

She showed him a light that blinked slightly before the main beat. "Try this one. Just a little push. A little lean into the next beat."

Leo watched the tracker. He tried again. *Thump-thump-CLAP-thump*. He put the clap just a hair early. It wasn't perfect. But it wasn't flat anymore. It had a little spring.

"Hey!" Leo said. His eyes lit up. "It sounds... bouncier!"

"Exactly!" Tilt grinned. Her pink feathers seemed to glow. "That's the surprise. That's the forward motion."

She explained how different music styles use this trick. "Jazz music loves it. Funk music lives for it. Reggae, salsa, hip-hop. They all use **syncopation**."

"Without it," Tilt continued, "music feels square. Like a box. With it, music feels alive. It feels like dancing."

Leo started playing his song again. This time, he tried to add those little skips. Those tiny pushes. He didn't get every single one right. But the song was changing. It wasn't boring anymore. It had a pulse. It had a bounce.

Tilt nodded along. Her whole body swayed. She was still leaning. But now it looked like she was leaning *into* the music.

"Remember this," Tilt said. She gave Leo a small, knowing smile. "I am Tilt. The primitive I teach is **syncopation**. The move is *weight off the expected beat; pull + forward motion; honor genre-specific syncopation traditions*."

She leaned a little more. "Weight off the expected beat. Pull + forward motion."

Leo kept playing. He was still practicing. But his face wasn't bored anymore. It was focused. And a little bit excited. He was learning to make his music dance.

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## Voice register

Leaning-flamingo-tween. Angled + tilting. 3-domain soft-collision (NewsForge/MintForge/BeatForge); allowed per rule 3 visually distinct.

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## Cultural-sensitivity gate

LOAD-BEARING cross-cultural syncopation respect (jazz / funk / reggae / Afro-Cuban / Latin traditions credited). Story-axis per ADR-016.

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## Cultural-context note

Syncopation pedagogy: Berklee; jazz studies; cross-cultural rhythmic scholarship. Flamingo for angled-stance biomimicry.

# About Spark & Anvil

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## 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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