

Children's Chapter-book cover, ages 9-12



# CharacterForge

## *Meet the Cast*

### Standard Edition

# Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 4 chapter books from the Characterforge 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 Characterforge cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 4 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*



# Beacon

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\*WANT / ENGINE — every well-built character has a *want* (desire / goal / longing) that drives them through the story. The want is the *engine* that creates narrative motion. Without a want, a character is static.\*

Ink met Beacon *one evening* — a soft evening, just after sunset, when the air had gone *warm-blue*.

Ink had been *trying to teach character want*. He had been at his writing-desk with a small group of students. He had been explaining — patiently, as he always does — that *every well-built character has a want*. The want, Ink had said, is *the engine of the character*. The character *wants something* and they *move toward it* and the moving-toward *is the story*. Without a want, the character has *no engine* and the story has *no motion*.

The students had nodded politely. They had not, Ink could see, *felt* the principle. They had been *taking notes* but they had not yet *seen* a character whose want was *visibly the entire character*.

Ink had stepped away from his writing-desk to *think outdoors*. The garden behind his small writing-cottage had been quiet. The sun had gone down. The first moths had come out — *the small soft-bodied moths that come at dusk*.

One of the moths had been *circling a small warm-light* — a small *firefly-style glow* hanging *just above eye-level* in the garden's center. The moth — a *moth-tween* with *pale tawny wings* and *bright dark eyes* — had been *walking-and-fluttering* toward the warm-light. She had been *almost reaching it*. But she had not been *quite* reaching it. The light was *moving slowly upward* as she approached. Every time the moth got *close*, the light moved *just a small distance further*. The moth kept *moving*. The light kept *moving away*. The motion was *constant*. The reaching was *never completed*.

Ink had watched for several minutes.

Then he had said: "*Excuse me.*"

The moth had paused. She had turned. She had said — in her small tawny moth-voice — "*Hello.*"

Ink had said: "*You are walking toward the light.*"

The moth had said: \*"*Yes. I have been doing this for as long as I can remember. I am always walking toward the light. The light is always just a little further. I think it is my whole purpose. My name is Beacon. The light is my want.*"\*

Ink had been *stunned*. He had thought: *this moth IS the principle*. The want — the warm-light — was *visibly the engine* of Beacon's motion. The reaching toward it was *Beacon's entire motion*. The fact that she *never quite reached it* was *what made her keep moving*. If she *reached* it, she would stop. The story would end. The fact that the want *receded* as she approached was *what kept the engine running*.

Ink had said: "*May I introduce you to my students?*"

Beacon had said: "*I cannot stop walking toward the light. But I can walk slowly. I can come with you to the cottage and let your students watch.*"

She had. She has been at the cottage ever since — *always walking toward her small warm-light* (which floats with her wherever she goes; it is, Ink has determined, *enchanted somehow*, though Beacon does not know how). The students see her in every CharacterForge lesson. She is always *walking-and-fluttering* toward the warm-light. The warm-light is always *just out of reach*. Her *whole posture* is *the leaning-toward*.

In Ink's introductory lesson on character want, he gestures at Beacon — who is, as always, *walking toward her small warm-light* — and says: \*"*This is Beacon. Her want is the warm-light. Watch her. She is always moving toward it. The want IS her motion. Without the want, she would stop. With the want, she has a story. Every well-built character has a want like this. The want is the engine. The reaching is the story.*"\*

The students always — *always* — find Beacon *immediately memorable*. They will, Ink has noticed, *remember her walking posture* long after they have forgotten any specific lesson. The posture *means* something to them. *The character has a want. The character is leaning-toward.*

When students draft their own characters, Ink asks them to *name the want first*. He gestures at Beacon. He says: "*What is your character's warm-light? The thing they are always walking toward? Without that, they have no engine. With it, they have a story.*"

Sometimes the students name *small, warm wants*: a character who wants to *find a lost pet*, a character who wants to *make her grandmother smile*, a character who wants to *finish the book she is reading*. Sometimes the wants are *big*: a character who wants to *save the kingdom*, a character who wants to *become known*. Either is fine, Ink says. *Big or small, the want is the engine*. What matters is that *the want is concrete* (Beacon's warm-light is *visible*) and that *the reaching is ongoing* (Beacon never *quite* reaches it).

Beacon nods. She walks. She is, as always, *leaning toward* her warm-light. She says — in her small tawny moth-voice — "*The want is the engine. The reaching is the story. I have been doing this all my life. I do not mind that the light is always just a little further. The walking is the point.*"

When students ask Ink whether finding a character's want is hard, Ink says — quoting Beacon — *"It is not hard. It is naming the warm-light. What does the character want? Name it concretely. They will lean toward it. The leaning is their engine. The story is their walk."*\*

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## Voice register

**Guidance (Beacon):** Small tawny moth-voice. Always walking-and-fluttering toward her small floating warm-light. Friends with Ink.

**Sample lines (Beacon):**

- "*The want is the engine. The reaching is the story.*"
- "*I have been walking toward the light for as long as I can remember.*"
- "*The walking is the point. The reaching is not.*"
- "*Without the want, I would stop. With the want, I have a story.*"

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## Arc across kits

- **Kit 1 — Anchor character (Ink introduces Beacon).** Full chapter.
- **Kit 2-4** — Recurring (character want exercises; naming the warm-light).
- **Kit 5-8** — Cameo (want and obstacle pairing — see Crouch).
- **Kit 9-12** — Fading (per Pattern-B fade).
- **Kit 13-16** — Off-page.

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## Relationships

- **Alliance:** Ink. Friends with Crouch, Eight, Click (Ink's inkwell-friend group).
- **Tension:** None — but pairs in deliberate dynamic with Crouch (want vs. fear; engine vs. brake).

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## Cultural-context note

The garden-at-dusk setting and the moth-following-a-light visual are deliberate gentle pastoral framings. Beacon's *enchanted warm-light* is a kid-friendly fantasy device. The character is rendered as an anthropomorphic moth-tween in the chunky-cartoon visual register. The chapter's pedagogical move — making the *want visible as a literal floating object* — is consistent with CharacterForge's hands-on visual register.



# Click

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\*VOICE / SIGNATURE — every well-built character has a distinctive voice (word-choice, sentence-length, rhythm, vocabulary, attitude) that makes them sound *only like themselves*. Voice is the character's signature.\*

Ink met Click *in the cottage's library on a rainy afternoon*.

The library — *small but well-stocked* — was Ink's favorite room in the cottage. He had been there reading, listening to the rain, when *a clear typewriter-clicking sound* had begun from the corner. Ink had not heard the sound before. He had looked up.

In the corner had been *a raven-tween in small librarian-glasses* sitting on a low cushion, *typing on a small portable typewriter*. The typewriter had been *making distinct percussive clicks*. The clicks had been *organized into rhythms*. Ink had listened. The rhythms had been *specific* — not random typing, but *patterned clicking with intentional cadence*.

Ink had said: "*Hello.*"

The raven had looked up. He had said — in a precise quiet raven-voice — "*Hello. I am Click. I am typing dialogue.*"

Ink had said: "*For whom?*"

Click had said: "*For different characters. Listen.*"

He had typed *a short line* on the typewriter. The clicks had been *warm and round* — *click-CLICK-click-CLICK-click*. Then he had typed *a second line*. The clicks had been *small and careful* — *click-pause-click-pause-click*. Then *a third line*. The clicks had been *in multiple rhythms at once* — *click-click-CLICK-click-pause-click-CLICK*.

Click had said: *"The first line was Beacon. The second was Crouch. The third was Eight. Same idea, different mouths, different feels. The typewriter sounds different for each character. The sound is the voice."*

Ink had been *stunned*. He had said: "*You can hear character voice as percussion.*"

Click had said: *"All voice is percussion, in a sense. Word-choice has a rhythm. Sentence-length has a beat. Vocabulary has a timbre. The percussive signature is the voice. When you read a well-crafted character's line, you can hear who is speaking even if their name is not on the page. That is voice-signature."*

Ink had said: "*Would you come to my classroom?*"

Click had said: "*I will bring the typewriter.*"

Click has been in the classroom ever since. He sits at his small cushion. He carries his portable typewriter. When Ink reads aloud a student's dialogue draft, Click *types it in real-time* and the typewriter *clicks the line's percussive signature*. If the line *sounds like Beacon*, Click's typewriter clicks *warm-and-round*. If the line *sounds like Crouch*, the typewriter clicks *small-and-careful*. If the line *does not sound like the character it is supposed to be* — if the writer has *missed the voice* — the typewriter *clicks at the wrong rhythm*. The students *hear* the mismatch immediately. Click does not have to explain it. The percussion does the explaining.

In Ink's lesson on character voice, he gestures at Click — who is, as always, *seated at his small cushion with the portable typewriter at the ready* — and says: *"This is Click. He types character dialogue. The typewriter sounds different for each character. Voice is percussion. Word-choice rhythm, sentence-length beat, vocabulary timbre — the percussive signature is the voice."*

He continues: *"Beacon's voice is warm and round. Crouch's voice is small and careful. Eight's voice is in multiple rhythms. You can hear each one. When you write a character's dialogue, ask yourself: does this sound like only this character? If yes, you have voice. If the line could be said by anyone in the story, you have not yet found the voice."*

The students, after hearing this lesson, often draft characters whose dialogue is *interchangeable* (any character could say it). Ink has them read the lines aloud while Click types. The typewriter's *wrong-rhythm clicks* show the students immediately. They revise. The voice gradually *settles* into something distinct.

Click types one final demonstration. He types Beacon: *click-CLICK-click-CLICK-click* (warm and round). He types Crouch: *click-pause-click-pause-click* (small and careful). He types Eight: *click-click-CLICK-click-pause-click-CLICK* (multi-rhythmic). The students hear it. The voices are *audibly distinct*.

When students ask Ink whether character voice is hard to write, Ink says — quoting Click — *"It is not hard. It is listening for the percussion. Read your character's lines aloud. Can you hear only this character in the rhythm? If yes, you have voice. If you cannot tell who is speaking from the line alone, the voice needs more signature."*\*

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## Voice register

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**Guidance (Click):** Precise, observant, fond of small distinctive rhythms. Raven-tween in librarian-glasses with portable typewriter. Friends with Ink.

**Sample lines (Click):**

- *"Same idea. Different mouth. Different feel."*
- *"Voice is percussion. Word-choice rhythm. Sentence-length beat. Vocabulary timbre. The signature is the voice."*
- *"Read your character's lines aloud. Can you hear only this character?"*
- *"If the line could be said by anyone in the story, you have not yet found the voice."*

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## Arc across kits

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- **Kit 1-3** — Cameo.
- **Kit 4** — **Anchor character**. Full chapter feature.
- **Kit 5-7** — Recurring (voice-signature exercises; dialogue revision).
- **Kit 8-10** — Cameo (voice-consistency feedback; mixed-cast scenes).
- **Kit 11-12** — Fading.
- **Kit 13-16** — Off-page.

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## Relationships

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- **Alliance:** Ink.
- **Tension:** None.

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## Cultural-context note

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The library-rainy-afternoon setting is a deliberate gentle indoor framing. Click is rendered as an anthropomorphic raven-tween in small librarian-glasses in the chunky-cartoon visual register. The typewriter-as-voice-percussion device is a deliberate kid-friendly mechanical metaphor that surfaces character voice as audibly distinct.



# Crouch

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\*FEAR / BRAKE — every well-built character has a *fear* that creates tension with their want. The fear is the *brake*. The interplay of want-and-fear creates *internal conflict*, which is \*the engine of character depth.\*\*

Ink met Crouch *in the corner of the cottage*, on a small wooden stool, *tucked-up tight* so that *only the tips of her quills* were visible.

This had been *autumn*, and the cottage had been *warming up* for the cold season — a small wood-fire in the hearth, the windows shut, the kitchen smelling of warm bread. Ink had been *moving through the cottage* checking on the corners for any small drafts. He had come around the side of the bookshelf and *almost stepped on* a small dark-quilled object on a stool. The object had *flinched*. The quills had *spread slightly* in a *protective gesture*. Then the object had *tucked* even tighter.

Ink had said: "*Excuse me. I did not see you.*"

A small voice had come from inside the quill-ball. The voice had said: "*That is all right. I am Crouch. I was hiding.*"

Ink had said: "*From what?*"

There had been a long pause. Then Crouch had said: "*From the wooden door.*"

Ink had looked around the cottage. There were *several wooden doors* — the front door, the back door, the door to the kitchen, the door to the small writing-room. He had said: "*Which wooden door?*"

Crouch had said, in her careful small voice: "*I do not know. It is in every scene. I see it in every room I am in. It is always there. I do not know what is behind it. I do not want to know. I tuck.*"

Ink had been *fascinated*. He had said: "*You are a hedgehog with a specific recurring fear-icon that you never investigate.*"

Crouch had said: "*Yes.*"

Ink had said: \*"*That makes you a deeply well-crafted character. The fear is named (the wooden door). The fear is recurring (it appears in every scene). The fear is unresolved (you never investigate it). This is exactly how character fear works in fiction. Would you come to my classroom and help me teach this?*"\*

Crouch had said: "*I would have to bring the wooden door with me.*"

Ink had said: "*That is fine.*"

Crouch had agreed. She has been in the classroom ever since. She sits on her small stool *in every CharacterForge lesson*. Behind her — *visible to the students, visible to her, visible to Ink* — is a *small painted wooden-door icon*. The icon does not change. It does not open. It does not reveal what is behind it. It is *always there*. Crouch is *always slightly tucked*. The pattern is *the lesson*.

In Ink's lesson on character fear, he gestures at Crouch — who is, as always, *slightly tucked on her stool with the wooden-door icon behind her* — and says: \*"*This is Crouch. She has a fear: the wooden door. She does not know what is behind it. She does not want to find out. The fear is named. It is visible in every scene. It is unresolved. This is how character fear works in stories. The fear is the brake on the character's motion.*"\*

He continues: \*"*Beacon — Crouch's friend — has a want (the warm-light). Crouch has a fear (the wooden door). A well-built character usually has both. The interplay between want and fear creates internal conflict. The character wants to do something. They fear an obstacle. The story is the character pushing through the fear toward the want. That tension is what makes a character feel real.*"\*

The students, after hearing this lesson, often draft characters who have *only a want* (and so feel flat) or *only a fear* (and so feel stuck). Ink works with them. He says: \*"*What does your character want? What do they fear? Both must be named. The story will live in the interaction.*"\*

Crouch nods. She does not look at the wooden-door icon. She never looks at the wooden-door icon. She says — in her small careful voice — *"The fear is the brake. Name it; the character has to push past it."*

When students ask Ink whether character fear is hard to write, Ink says — quoting Crouch — *"It is not hard. It is naming the brake. What does the character fear? Name it concretely. The reader will see the fear. The character will struggle with it. The struggle is the depth."*

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## Voice register

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**Guidance (Crouch):** Small, careful, deliberate. Tucked posture. The wooden-door icon is visibly behind her in every scene. Friends with Ink. Deliberate structural tension with Beacon (want-engine vs. fear-brake).

**Sample lines (Crouch):**

- *"The fear is the brake. Name it; the character has to push past it."*
- *"I do not know what is behind the wooden door. I do not want to find out."*
- *"Want and fear together create the internal conflict. The conflict is the depth."*
- *"A well-built character has both a want and a fear. Without one, they feel flat."*

## Arc across kits

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- **Kit 1** — Cameo.
- **Kit 2** — **Anchor character**. Full chapter feature.
- **Kit 3-5** — Recurring (fear-naming exercises; want-fear interplay).
- **Kit 6-9** — Cameo (advanced character-conflict scenarios).
- **Kit 10-12** — Fading.
- **Kit 13-16** — Off-page.

## Relationships

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- **Alliance:** Ink.
- **Tension:** Beacon (deliberate, structural — want vs. fear, engine vs. brake).

## Cultural-context note

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The cottage-corner setting and the hedgehog-tucking-posture are deliberate gentle pastoral framings. The wooden-door icon as recurring-unresolved-fear is a structural device that the chunky-cartoon visual register supports. The character is gender-coded female; the role is treated as gender-neutral.



# Eight

*CONTRADICTION / DEPTH — well-built characters contain contradictions (wanting opposing things; holding conflicting beliefs; being pulled in multiple directions). Contradictions make characters deep, not flat.*

Ink was a fountain pen. He was also a story coach. He helped characters in books come alive. But even Ink needed a vacation. This summer, he took a break. He walked along the rocky seashore. He loved to explore. Tiny creatures lived in the tide pools. He always found something interesting there.

He stopped at a really big tide pool. The water was clear. Small crabs scuttled on the bottom. Seaweed swayed gently. Then Ink saw something strange. A small octopus was right in the open. Most octopuses hide in cracks. They tuck themselves away. But not this one. This octopus was easy to see. Its eight arms were busy. They reached in eight different ways. Three arms stretched forward. They pointed toward the open ocean. Three other arms reached backward. They wanted to go to a safe crevice. Two arms were crossed tightly. They looked completely unsure.

Ink said, "You are pulled in many directions."

The octopus spoke in a small, bubbly voice. "I am Eight. I am always pulled in many directions. Three of my arms want to go forward. Three want to go back. Two are not sure. I move slowly. I think a lot. I do not regret this."

Ink's eyes got wide. He was amazed. "You are a perfect example of **character contradiction**," he said. "Most characters in stories want just one thing. But deep characters want two different things. These things pull against each other. The contradictions make them feel real. You have this contradiction built right into your body."

Eight said, "That is true. I am the contradiction. I always have been."

Ink asked, "Would you come to my classroom?"

Eight said, "I would have to bring my whole body. My arms will be reaching in eight different directions. The students will see this."

Ink smiled. "That is *exactly* what I want."

Eight agreed to come. He has been in Ink's classroom ever since. He sits at the front of the class. He stares at the floor. Sometimes he stares at the ceiling. His eight arms are always busy. They reach in eight different directions. The students watch him closely. They whisper to each other. "Look, his arms moved!" Sometimes the directions shift. Usually, it's three forward, three back. Two arms stay crossed. But sometimes it's two forward, four back. The two crossed arms are still there. Eight's feelings shift. His arms show everyone what's going on. The students understand it right away. They see his inner struggle.

Ink teaches about **character contradiction**. He points at Eight. Eight is always reaching. "This is Eight," Ink says. "He is the contradiction. Three of his arms want to go forward. Three want to go back. Two are not sure. He is *pulled* in different ways. Deep characters are like this. They want two different things at once. These things pull against each other. They have ideas that fight each other. These contradictions are not bad. They make characters real. They give them depth."

Ink continues. "Think about it. Beacon wants something. Crouch is afraid of something. Eight has a **contradiction**. A character with only one want is flat. Like a drawing on paper. A character with a want and a fear is better. Like a pop-up book. But a character with a want, a fear, *and* a contradiction? That's a real person. They feel alive. Real people do this all the time. They want to stay up late. But they also want to wake up early for a fun trip. They believe in being fair. But they also want revenge on someone who hurt them. They love someone. But they also feel annoyed by them. These contradictions make them deep. They make them interesting."

The students often didn't like this idea. They weren't sure about it. "But won't that make the character just seem weird?" one student asked. "Or like they don't make sense?" another added. Ink shook his head. "No," he said. "Being weird is random. A contradiction is a planned struggle. It's a good kind of fight inside them. A character who wants two things that pull against each other is not weird. They are *struggling*. Readers love a good struggle. They connect with it. They

understand it."

Eight slowly bobbed his head. Two of his arms shifted a little. He said in his bubbly octopus-voice, "Three forward. Three back. Two crossed. The contradiction is the depth. The pull is the character."

Students asked Ink if writing contradictions was hard. Ink quoted Eight. "It is not hard," he said. "It is adding a second want. Pick a second thing the character wants. Make it pull against the first. The two wants will struggle. This struggle will make the character feel real."

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## Voice register

**Guidance (Eight):** Thoughtful, multi-directional, fond of nuance. Eight arms reaching in conflicting directions (default: 3 forward / 3 back / 2 crossed). Friends with Ink.

**Sample lines (Eight):**

- "Three forward. Three back. Two crossed. The contradiction is the depth."
- "I am always pulled in multiple directions. I move slowly. I think a lot. I do not regret this."
- "Contradictions are not weaknesses. They are the depth."
- "Real people hold contradictions. So do well-built characters."

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## Arc across kits

- **Kit 1-2** — Cameo.
- **Kit 3** — **Anchor character**. Full chapter feature.
- **Kit 4-6** — Recurring (contradiction-naming exercises; multi-want characters).
- **Kit 7-9** — Cameo (deep-character scenarios; conflicting-belief exercises).
- **Kit 10-12** — Fading.
- **Kit 13-16** — Off-page.

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## Relationships

- **Alliance:** Ink.
- **Tension:** None — though Eight's *internal contradictions* are themselves a kind of tension.

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## Cultural-context note

The tide-pool seashore setting is a deliberate gentle pastoral framing. Eight is rendered as an anthropomorphic octopus-tween in the chunky-cartoon visual register. The eight-arms-in-eight-directions visual is a clear physical embodiment of the contradiction primitive.

# 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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