



CipherForge

Meet the Cast

STANDARD EDITION



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Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 8 chapter books from the Cipherforge 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.

Contents

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Contents

Introduction

Caesar

Voice register

Arc across kits

Relationships

Cultural-sensitivity gate

Cultural-context note

Echo Pair

Voice register

Arc

Relationships

Cultural-sensitivity gate

Cultural-context note

Lattice

Voice register

Arc

Relationships

Cultural-sensitivity gate

Cultural-context note

Mask

Voice register

Arc

Relationships

Cultural-sensitivity gate

Cultural-context note

Rail

Voice register

Arc

Relationships

Cultural-sensitivity gate

Cultural-context note

Sift

Tally

Voice register

Arc

Relationships

Cultural-sensitivity gate

Cultural-context note

Vigenère

Voice register

Arc

Relationships

Cultural-sensitivity gate

Cultural-context note

About Spark & Anvil

More chapter books from Spark & Anvil

Methodology

License

Introduction

The Cipherforge cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 8 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*

Caesar

*CAESAR SHIFT — *the simplest cipher: shift every letter by a fixed number.* The cryptography primitive of *substitution by uniform alphabet rotation — the entry point to symmetric-key cryptography.**

Caesar was a small ferret. She wasn't quite grown up. She wore a brass cipher-wheel. It hung on a leather cord. Caesar was quick and eager. Her body was long. Her fur was warm russet and cream. Her eyes were bright. Her tail twitched fast. She loved spinning things.

Her special thing was the brass cipher-wheel. It was a pendant. It had two shiny brass circles. One circle sat inside the other. Each circle had the alphabet carved on its edge. A tiny rivet held them together. The inner circle could spin around. Caesar would spin the inner circle. She would line up 'A' on the inside. Then she'd find 'D' on the outside. Now, every letter on the outer circle pointed to a new letter. It was shifted by three places. That's the **Caesar shift cipher**.

The cipher was named after a very old leader. His name was Julius Caesar. He used this trick to send secret messages. Our Caesar teaches the trick. She doesn't teach about the old leader himself.

This was important. Caesar showed everyone the **Caesar shift**. It was the easiest secret code. It was the first step into a bigger world of codes. This world was called symmetric-key cryptography. Symmetric-key meant one key did two jobs. The same key locked the message. The same key unlocked it. If you shifted A to D, you also shifted D back to A. The shift number was the **key**. This was the main idea. Both people needed to know the secret number. Both used it the same way. Later codes got more complex. But this simple way was still super important.

Caesar had one big rule. She never talked about spies. She never talked about secret wars. She always said, "Ciphers are just puzzles!" She would tap her wheel. "They are fun codes. Club codes. Codes for your friends." She shook her head. "Not spy stuff. Not army secrets. Not bad guys." She smiled. "Our puzzles are about pears. Or treasure hunts. Or escape rooms. They are for fun. Not for danger."

She taught how the shift worked. Every letter moved the same amount. If A moved to D, then B moved to E. And so on. All the way to Z. She showed how to lock a message. Then she showed how to unlock it. It was the same shift, just backwards. Or you could shift forward a lot. The shift number was the **key**. Both people needed to know it. Without the **key**, the message was just nonsense. Her wheel was a real tool. You spun it to set the shift. Then you read the new letters. It made the code easy to see.

This code was easy to break. There were only 25 shifts to try. You could just try every single one. That's called 'brute force.' Or you could count letters. Caesar's code was for learning. It was not a strong secret code. But it was a big start. Many new codes use shifts. They use substitutions too. Caesar's code was the simplest example. It was the very first step.

Caesar grew up in a small village. Her family kept the village's secret recipes. They wrote them in code. This was a very old family tradition.

When Caesar was twenty-two, she walked to CipherForge. Cypher, the head of the place, asked her a question. "What is the **Caesar shift**?" he asked. Caesar held up her wheel. "Two circles," she said. "You spin one. Every letter moves a certain number of spots." She paused. "It's a symmetric **key**. Both people know the shift number." She kept talking. "It's the first step into codes. It's easy to break. You can try all 25 shifts." Caesar tapped her chin. "But its simple way is the lesson." Cypher nodded slowly. "You are appointed," he said.

In her workshop, Caesar always started the same way. She spun her cipher-wheel. The brass circles caught the light. "I am Caesar," she would say. "I teach the cryptography primitive called the **Caesar shift cipher**." She showed them the wheel. "You spin it to set the shift. Then you apply that shift to every letter." She smiled. "The same **key** works both ways."

She made things very clear. "My code is basic," she would say. "And it's easy to break. That's exactly why we start here." She pointed to her wheel. "You learn how letters can swap places. Mask will show you fixed swaps. Vigenère will show you spinning swaps. Echo Pair will show you pair swaps." She winked. "Then Sift will teach you how to crack them all. After that, Lattice will show you codes that are super strong. Codes that are almost impossible to break."

"It's not hard at all. Just spin and apply. The same **key** works both ways. It's the start of everything."

Her cipher-wheel waited. It was ready for the next shift.

Voice register

Guidance: Quick-eyed, eager, fond of spinning brass cipher-wheel pendant. Ferret-tween (long body, quick tail). *NEVER frames ciphers as spy-thriller; ALWAYS as fun-coded puzzles.* Cross-app pair with EscapeForge Sift.

Sample lines:

- "Spin the wheel. Set the shift. Apply to every letter."
- "Same key both ways."
- "Foundational, not unbreakable."

Arc across kits

- **Kit 1** — Anchor character.
- **Kits 2-4** — Recurring (Caesar-shift surfaces in many puzzle-decoding scenarios).
- **Kits 5-16** — Recurring ensemble.

Relationships

- **Alliance:** All CipherForge cast (Caesar is foundation; others build on it). **Cross-app:** EscapeForge Sift (Caesar cipher puzzle-game pair).
- **Tension:** None.

Cultural-sensitivity gate

LOAD-BEARING fear-amplification gate: cipher contexts fun-coded, NEVER spy-thriller. Anti-credentialism enforced.

Cultural-context note

The Caesar cipher (named for Julius Caesar) is the foundational example in cryptography pedagogy. The *village-coded-recipe-keepers* family framing connects to the broader European-village cipher-craft tradition (analogous to many cultures' coded-recipe traditions for prized family dishes). The *fun-coded NOT spy-thriller* discipline counters the cultural framing of cryptography as inherently threatening.

Echo Pair

*PLAYFAIR DIGRAPH CIPHER — *letters encoded in pairs through a 5x5 grid.* The cryptography primitive of *digraph (two-letter-unit) substitution using a keyword-arranged grid.**

Echo Pair were two small swallows, twins who always flew and worked together. Between them, they held a small, folded card. It showed a grid, five boxes by five boxes. Letters filled these boxes. This was their secret map.

They were small, with grey-and-white feathers. Their quick eyes darted everywhere, always looking. They loved pairing up, and they loved mirror-symmetry. Their special card was their signature feature. It was a hand-made card. It had a 5x5 grid of letters. The letters were arranged starting with a keyword. (Usually, I and J shared a box to fit 25 letters into 25 cells.)

This card was super important. Echo Pair showed everyone the **Playfair cipher**. Most codes changed one letter at a time. Like Caesar's code. A became D. B became E. Simple. But Echo Pair did something new. They changed *two* letters at once. They worked with **pairs**. Always.

This made their code much harder to crack. If you just counted letters, it wouldn't work. The same letter could become different things. It depended on its partner. The letter next to it. This was a really big deal. It was the first time codes got much stronger. It was the first real way to fight simple counting attacks.

Echo and Pair never acted like they were better than anyone. They chirped in perfect time. "Letters travel in pairs!" they sang. "We are a **pair-cipher!**" "Together is the rule!" "Apart, we're meaningless." "Together, we encode pairs through the grid." "**Pair-thinking** is the move!" They truly believed it.

Echo Pair loved to teach the **Playfair** steps:

"First," Echo would say. "You build your keyword-grid," Pair would finish.

"Five by five letters," Echo added. "Keyword first, then the alphabet," Pair chirped.

"Remember I and J share a box!" they sang together.

"Next, you split your message," Echo said. "Into pairs of letters," Pair finished.

"Like 'HELLO' becomes 'HE' 'LL' 'O'," Echo explained.

"Wait, 'LL'?" a new student might ask.

"If letters repeat, add an 'X' in between," Pair said. "So 'HELLO' is 'HE' 'LX' 'LO'."

"And if you have one letter left at the end?"

"Add an 'X' to make a pair!" they chorused.

Then came the fun part. The three rules.

"Rule one: Same Row!" Echo zipped right. "Each letter shifts right by one," Pair zipped too.

"Rule two: Same Column!" Echo dropped down. "Each letter shifts down by one," Pair dropped too.

"Rule three: Rectangle!" They flew to opposite corners. "Each letter takes its partner's column," Echo explained. "But stays in its own row," Pair finished.

It sounded tricky, but they made it look easy.

"To decode?" Echo asked. "Just do the opposite!" Pair answered.

"Same key, same grid," Echo said. "Opposite shifts!" Pair added.

"It breaks single-letter counting," they chirped. "But smart people can still count pairs!"

"It's always a game!"

Echo and Pair grew up in a small village, a place filled with twin birds. Their family had a special job: they were the village's pair-tradition keepers. They always traveled in pairs, delivering messages from one village to the next. Each twin checked the other's work. They made sure every message was perfect, with no mistakes allowed. Ever. They learned to trust each other completely. Their lives depended on it, and so did their village.

They arrived at CipherForge when they were twenty-two. That's old for a swallow, but young for a master. Cypher, the head of CipherForge, looked them over. "What is the **Playfair cipher**?" Cypher asked. Echo and Pair puffed out their chests. They sang in perfect harmony. "Letters in pairs!" "**Grid-based rules!**" "Same row, same column, rectangle!" "Three rules!" "**Together is the rule!**" Cypher smiled, which was a rare sight. "You are appointed," Cypher said. And that was that; they had a job.

They loved to explain their work. "We are a **pair-cipher**," Echo would say. "Counting single letters won't work on us," Pair added. "The same letter can become many different things," Echo explained. "It depends on its partner!" Pair chirped. "We are stronger than simple codes," they sang. "But smart people can still crack us. They just have to count pairs of letters instead. Every code adds a new layer," Echo said. "Every layer can still be broken," Pair finished.

"It is not hard," they insisted. "It is **pairs + grid + three rules.**" "**Together is the rule!**" And they would fly off. Two tiny blurs. Always together. Always coding.

Voice register

Guidance: Quick-eyed (both), fond of pair-rhythm. Twin swallow-tweens. *NEVER frames pair-cipher as inaccessible.* Always speak in chorus or alternation.

Sample lines (chorus or alternation):

- "Letters travel in pairs."
- "Together is the rule."
- "Same row, same column, rectangle. Three rules."

Arc

- **Kit 4** — Anchor.
- **Kit 5-7** — Recurring.
- **Kit 8-16** — Ensemble.

Relationships

- **Alliance:** Caesar/Mask/Vigenère (Echo Pair adds digraph dimension); Sift (digraph frequency attack); all CipherForge cast.

Cultural-sensitivity gate

Fear-amplification gate enforced.

Cultural-context note

Playfair cipher developed by Charles Wheatstone (1854), promoted by Lord Playfair. Used historically by British forces in WWI + WWII. The *pair-encoding* concept is foundational to many modern ciphers (block-ciphers encrypt blocks of bits at a time, parallel to Playfair's two-letter blocks).

Lattice

*MODERN CRYPTOGRAPHY FUNDAMENTALS — XOR, public-key concept, hashing; the irreversible / asymmetric family. The cryptography primitive of *one-way operations + asymmetric keys as the foundation of modern secure communication.**

Lattice is a small owl-tween. She has soft, warm-brown and cream feathers. Her eyes are steady and thoughtful. She always carries a small, folded card. She moves carefully and thinks a lot before she speaks.

Lattice loves to explain things that are one-way. Her special thing is that little folded card. It shows a door. The door opens easily one way. But it won't open the other way. Not without a special key. This card shows the main idea of *modern cryptography*. It's about steps that are easy to do forward. But they are super hard to undo.

Lattice teaches about *modern cryptography fundamentals*. She helps us understand how today's secret codes work. Think about the old codes. Caesar, Mask, Vigenère, Echo Pair, and Rail codes are all *symmetric*. That means you use the same secret key to lock and unlock them. Sift can crack those codes. She finds patterns in them. But *modern cryptography* is really different. It works in three big ways.

1. **XOR and Bit-Steps:** This is about working with number-codes. Tally's number-codes are perfect for this. XOR is a main math trick. It can be undone easily. It's like having two light switches. If both are off (0,0), the light is off (0). If one is on (0,1 or 1,0), the light is on (1). If both are on (1,1), the light is off (0). If you do the XOR trick again with the same secret, you get the original code back. Fancy types of codes, called stream ciphers and block ciphers, use XOR. They also mix up and swap letters. This makes sure there are no patterns for Sift to find.
2. **PUBLIC-KEY (One-Way Key) Codes:** This kind of code uses different keys. One key locks the message. A different key unlocks it. You share the "public" key with everyone. Anyone can use it to send you a secret message. But only you have the "private" key. Only your private key can unlock that message. This fixes a big problem. Old codes always had trouble sharing secret keys safely. This new way is super important for keeping the internet safe. It protects things like secure websites and emails. The math behind it uses *one-way functions*. These are math tricks. They are easy to do one way. But they are super hard to undo. Imagine multiplying two huge secret numbers. That's fast and easy. But trying to find those two secret numbers again? That takes too long for computers to figure out.
3. **HASHING:** This is another one-way math trick. You can't undo it. It takes any message or file. Then it makes a short, unique code from it. This is like a digital fingerprint. For example, SHA-256 makes a 256-bit fingerprint. You can't use the fingerprint to get the original message back. It's like putting an apple, banana, and spinach into a blender. You get a smoothie. You can't get the whole apple, banana, and spinach back out. Hashing is used for saving passwords. It's also used for signing things online. It helps check if files have been changed.

Lattice always makes one thing clear. She never says modern codes are magic. She says clearly, "Modern codes are about *one-way math*. Some steps are one-way. They are easy to do forward. But super hard to undo." She pulls out her one-way-door card. "Multiplying two huge secret numbers is fast. But finding those numbers again? That takes too long for computers to figure out." She taps the card. "That one-way trick *is* what modern codes are all about. Public-key codes and hashing both use this idea."

Lattice teaches the main ideas of *modern cryptography*:

- **XOR** (the ^ symbol). It's a key math trick that can be undone.
- The idea of **Public-key** codes. Different keys lock and unlock messages.
- How **RSA** codes work (the main idea). It uses the "multiply two primes, hard to factor" trick.
- How **Diffie-Hellman** shares a secret key. It's a clever math puzzle.
- **Hashing** (making one-way codes). You can't undo them.
- Modern codes stop Sift's pattern attacks. They hide patterns well.
- No code is safe forever. New computers might break some codes later.

- Code-making is always changing. New things are always coming.
- We can use fun examples too. Like secret messages for club members. Or hashed passwords for game leaderboards.

Lattice grew up in a small village. Her family were the lock-makers for the village gates. They were owls who made locks that only opened one way. You could open them from inside. But you couldn't open them from outside without the key. This taught Lattice a lot about one-way systems.

She walked to CipherForge when she was twenty-two. Cypher, the leader, looked at her with sharp eyes. "What is modern cryptography?" Cypher asked. Lattice took a deep breath. She held up her one-way-door card. "One-way math," she said. "Easy forward, super hard backward. It uses XOR and bit-steps. It has public-key codes and hashing. Sift's pattern-finding won't work. The math keeps it safe." Cypher smiled. "You are chosen," he said.

Lattice says clearly, "My family of codes is really different from Caesar, Mask, Vigenère, and the others." She tapped her card again. "Old codes used one shared secret. Modern codes use different, one-way keys. The math, those one-way tricks, makes them safe."

"It is hard but understandable," she explains. "It is *one-way mathematics* and *different keys*. Modern codes are what protects the internet."

Lattice smooths her one-way-door card. It waits to show the next one-way secret.

Voice register

Guidance: Steady-eyed, thoughtful, fond of one-way-door card. Owl-tween. *NEVER frames modern crypto as magic; ALWAYS centers mathematical asymmetry.*

Sample lines:

- "Easy forward, impossibly hard backward."
- "Mathematical asymmetry IS modern crypto."
- "No cipher is unbreakable forever."

Arc

- **Kit 8** — Anchor.
- **Kit 9-16** — Recurring (modern crypto applies throughout advanced kits).

Relationships

- **Alliance:** Tally (number-codes feed Lattice's bit-operations); Sift (Sift's attacks fail against Lattice's family); all CipherForge cast.

Cultural-sensitivity gate

Fear-amplification gate enforced. Anti-credentialism: modern crypto framed as *understandable mathematics anyone can learn the principles of*.

Cultural-context note

RSA published 1977 (Rivest, Shamir, Adleman). Diffie-Hellman 1976 (Whitfield Diffie, Martin Hellman). Elliptic-curve cryptography 1985 (Koblitz, Miller independently). SHA-2 family 2001. The *one-way-functions* mathematical concept is foundational to all modern crypto. Post-quantum crypto is current research frontier addressing the threat of quantum computers to current public-key systems.

Mask

*MONOALPHABETIC SUBSTITUTION — *every letter has a fixed substitute*. The cryptography primitive of *arbitrary one-to-one alphabet remapping (more general than shift; same letters always become same substitutes).**

Mask was a small fox-tween. She always carried a tiny, folded card in her vest pocket. It was her **substitution-table**. She had bright, focused eyes. Mask was quick and moved with purpose. Her fur was warm russet and cream. She loved things that were neat and made sense.

Her special card was very important. It had the alphabet written on top. Underneath, a different alphabet was written. Each letter on top had its own secret partner letter below. For example, A might become X. B might become Y. This card showed which new letter each old letter turned into.

This card was the key to Mask's whole way of doing things. Mask taught about **monoalphabetic substitution**. That's a fancy name for a simple idea. It means every letter in a message gets swapped for *one* other letter. And it's always the *same* swap. It's like a secret code.

Think of it like this: If you decide A becomes Z, then *every* A in your message turns into a Z. If B becomes Y, then *every* B turns into a Y. It's a special kind of code. It's not just sliding letters like Caesar did. Mask's code lets you pick *any* new letter for *any* old letter. But each old letter only gets *one* new partner.

Mask always made one thing very clear. Her code *felt* super secret. There were so many ways to make a **substitution-table**. It was a huge number, bigger than you could ever count. It felt like no one could ever guess your secret message.

But Mask knew better. She always said, "My code feels strong. It *is* strong against simple guessing. But it has a secret weakness." She called this weakness **frequency analysis**. Sift, another friend at CipherForge, taught all about it.

"Here's the problem," Mask would explain. She'd tap her card. "In English, some letters are used a lot. Like the letter E. It's the most common letter." She would pause for a moment. "If E always becomes Q in your secret message, then Q will show up a lot. A smart code-breaker will notice that. They'll guess Q is really E."

Mask taught everyone how to build these codes.

First, you **build a substitution-table**. You decide what each letter A-Z will become. Each letter needs a unique partner. No two letters can swap to the same new letter. It's a one-to-one match.

Second, you **apply it uniformly**. This means you use your table consistently. Every A becomes the same substitute. Every B becomes the same substitute. You never change your mind mid-message.

She liked to talk about an old code called Atbash. It was a very old code from long ago. In Atbash, A always became Z. B always became Y. C became X. It was a simple, mirror-image swap.

Mask knew her code had many possibilities. So many different tables could be made. But she always reminded everyone. "It's not secure for modern secrets. It's a great starting point. It teaches you important ideas about codes. But clever people can break it."

Mask grew up in a small village. Her family had a special job there. They were the village's mask-makers. They carved masks for festivals. They also made masks for village characters. Each mask *always* stood for the same thing. The "Harvest-Keeper" mask always looked the same. It always meant the Harvest-Keeper. The "Bell-Ringer" mask always meant the Bell-Ringer.

This work taught Mask a lot. It taught her about matching things perfectly. One mask, one meaning. Always. She learned to be very precise. She learned to make sure everything had its own special place.

When Mask was twenty-two, she walked to CipherForge. It was a long journey. Cypher, the leader, met her. "What is **monoalphabetic substitution**?" Cypher asked.

Mask didn't even blink. "Every letter has a fixed substitute," she said. "Same letter, same substitute, everywhere. There are tons of ways to make these codes. But smart people can break them using frequency analysis."

Cypher smiled. "You are appointed," he said.

Mask often told her students, "My code feels stronger than Caesar's code. And it *is* stronger if someone just tries to guess every possible key." She would nod firmly. "But it's weaker if they use frequency analysis. That's the big lesson here. How strong a code is depends on how someone tries to break it."

"It's not hard to learn," she would say. "It's just about making a one-to-one map. Then you use that map carefully, every time. It's a basic building block for all codes."

Voice register

Guidance: Bright-eyed, focused, fond of tidy mappings. Fox-tween. *NEVER frames substitution as unbreakable.*

Sample lines:

- "Every letter has a fixed substitute."
- "Same letter, same substitute, everywhere."
- "Vast key-space, but frequency analysis breaks them."

Arc

- **Kit 2** — Anchor.
- **Kit 3-7** — Recurring.
- **Kit 8-16** — Ensemble.

Relationships

- **Alliance:** Caesar (generalization of); Sift (Sift breaks monoalphabetic substitution); all CipherForge cast.

Cultural-sensitivity gate

Fear-amplification gate enforced.

Cultural-context note

Atbash is an ancient Hebrew cipher attested in pre-Common-Era texts. The village-mask-maker family framing is a deliberate generic European-village tradition.

Rail

*TRANSPOSITION — *rearrange the letters; keep all of them*. The cryptography primitive of *transposition ciphers — changing letter order without changing letter identity.**

Rail was a small cat-tween. She moved quickly. Her fur was soft grey, cream, and warm russet. She loved to rearrange things. Her desk was always neat. Everything had its own spot. In her vest pocket, she kept a small, folded card. It showed fence patterns. These were not just any fences. They were special patterns for secret messages. This card was her signature feature. It showed the *rail-fence* and *columnar-transposition* patterns.

Rail taught about a special kind of secret code. It was called a **transposition cipher**. Other codes, like Caesar or Mask, swapped letters. They changed 'A' to 'B' or 'C'. But Rail's code was different. It kept all the same letters. It just moved them around. Imagine you have a word like 'CAT'. You could make it 'ACT'. Or 'TCA'. The letters are still 'C', 'A', 'T'. They just changed places. That's what a transposition cipher does. It rearranges the letters. It gives them a new order.

This was a big deal. Why? Because of how you try to crack codes. Some codes are broken by counting letters. If 'E' shows up a lot, you know it might be the most common letter. But with transposition, all the letters are still there. So counting them won't help. This kind of attack is called *frequency analysis*. It fails completely here. It's like trying to find a lost sock by counting all your shirts. It just doesn't work.

But other attacks do work. You can try to unscramble the letters. This is like solving an anagram puzzle. You look for word patterns. You try to put the letters back in order. These are *anagram* and *word-pattern attacks*. They are the right tools for this job. Different code type. Different ways to break it.

Rail often showed her students how to build these codes. She drew on a big chalkboard. First, she showed the *rail-fence cipher*. "Imagine a fence," she said. "It has rails, like this." She drew two lines, one above the other. "We'll write our message in a zig-zag pattern. Up and down, like a snake." She wrote 'HELLO' on the board. 'H' on the top rail. 'E' on the bottom. 'L' on the top. 'L' on the bottom. 'O' on the top. It looked like this:

```
H L O
E L
```

Then she explained, "To get the secret message, you read across each row. First the top row. Then the bottom row." She pointed. "So, HLO. Then EL." The secret message was 'HLOEL'. "See?" Rail smiled. "Same letters. Just a new order." The kids tried it with their own names. It was fun to watch their letters jump rails.

Next, Rail showed a *columnar transposition*. This one used a grid. "First, we need a keyword," she told them. "Let's use the word 'CAT'." She wrote 'CAT' above three columns. "Now, we write our message into the grid, row by row." She used 'SECRET MESSAGE'.

```
C A T
-----
S E C
R E T
M E S
S A G
E
```

She explained, "Now, we reorder the columns. We use the keyword to decide. 'A' comes first in the alphabet, then 'C', then 'T'." She drew new columns.

```
A C T
-----
E S C
E R T
E M S
A S G
E
```

Then, she said, "To read the secret message, you read down each column, one by one." She pointed. "So, EEEA. Then SRMS. Then CTGE." The message became 'EEEASRMSCTGE'. It looked like a jumble. But all the original letters were still there. They just moved around. This was a clever way to hide words. It made them look like nonsense. But it was just a puzzle. A puzzle of rearranged letters.

Rail always reminded them of one more thing. "Real secret systems don't just use one trick," she said. "They use many. Modern codes often mix things up. They combine both substitution and transposition." She held up two fingers. "One changes the letters. The other moves them around. When you put them together, it's super strong. It's much harder for anyone to break. It's like having two different kinds of locks on a treasure chest. One lock changes the key. The other lock spins the whole chest around. A thief would need two different tools. And two different ways of thinking. That's why combining them is best."

Rail grew up in a small village. Her family had a special job there. They were the village's *stage-arrangers*. They set up the stage for all the plays. Every prop had a perfect spot. A fake tree here. A painted backdrop there. Moving just one thing could change the whole story. If the tree was on the left, it meant one thing. If it was on the right, it meant something else entirely. Rail learned early on that *order matters*. Rearranging things could change their meaning. It was like a secret language of objects. She loved finding the best way to put things. The most clever arrangement. It was in her blood.

When Rail was a young adult, she walked all the way to CipherForge. She wanted to join the best code-makers. Cypher, the leader, looked at her. "What is **transposition**?" Cypher asked. Rail stood tall. She didn't hesitate. "It's when you rearrange the letters," she said. "You keep all of them. It's different from changing letters. Frequency analysis won't work. But anagram attacks will. And the best systems combine both kinds of codes." Cypher nodded slowly. A small smile touched his lips. "You are appointed," he said. Rail had found her home.

Rail often repeated her main points. She wanted everyone to understand. "My code type is different," she would say. "It's not like Caesar or Mask. Those codes swap letters. They change what each letter *is*. My code just changes where each letter *goes*. It's all about *same letters, new order*." She tapped her small, folded card. "It's not hard. It's just *rearrange and keep all letters*. And remember, for real strength, you always combine them. Substitution and transposition. Together, they make a code almost impossible to crack."

Voice register

Guidance: Quick-eyed, organized, fond of rearrangements. Cat-tween. *NEVER frames transposition as inferior or superior; ALWAYS centers different-type-different-attack discipline.*

Sample lines:

- "Rearrange the letters. Keep all of them."
- "Same letters, new order."
- "Real systems combine substitution + transposition."

Arc

- **Kit 5** — Anchor.

- **Kit 6-7** — Recurring.
- **Kit 8-16** — Ensemble.

Relationships

- **Alliance:** All CipherForge cast.

Cultural-sensitivity gate

Fear-amplification gate enforced.

Cultural-context note

Rail-fence + columnar transposition ciphers were widely used in 19th-20th century military signaling. Shannon's 1949 *Communication Theory of Secrecy Systems* introduced Confusion + Diffusion as foundational concepts that combine substitution + transposition for modern cryptographic strength.

Sift

*FREQUENCY ANALYSIS + CRYPTANALYSIS-BY-STATISTICS — *every cipher has a frequency-fingerprint*. The cryptography primitive of *breaking ciphers using statistical analysis of letter + digraph + word patterns.**

Sift was a small hound. She wasn't a puppy, but not quite grown up either. Her fur was a mix of warm brown and creamy white. Her ears were long and floppy. They bounced when she moved. Sift always carried two things. One was a tiny magnifying glass. The other was a small, folded card. This card was her special treasure. It showed all the English letter frequencies. E was the most common, then T, then A. It also listed common letter pairs. Things like TH, HE, and IN. Sift had quick eyes. She was great at spotting patterns. She loved finding little clues. These clues helped her figure things out.

You might have met Sift before. Maybe in a different place. She's the same Sift from EscapeForge. Remember the puzzles there? The ones where you looked for patterns? That was Sift's job. Here in CipherForge, she teaches us something new. She shows us how to break secret codes. It's the same character. Just a different kind of adventure.

Sift is all about **frequency analysis**. That's a fancy name. It just means looking for patterns. She uses patterns in letters. She looks at letter pairs. She even checks whole words. This helps her crack secret messages. English has its own special patterns. They show up even in coded messages.

Imagine a secret message. You don't know what it says. But you can count the letters. What if 'Q' shows up the most? And you know 'E' is the most common letter in English? Then 'Q' probably stands for 'E'. See how that works? You just keep going. Find the next most common letter. Guess what it stands for. Most simple codes break this way. Sift can crack them in minutes. It's like magic, but it's just math.

Sift never said cracking codes was only for super-smart people. "Anyone can do it!" she'd bark. "Every secret code has a tell." She meant a little clue. "The patterns in a normal message," she'd explain, "they usually sneak into the coded message."

Frequency analysis works great on simple codes. Like ones where each letter just swaps for another. It even helps with harder codes. Codes like Vigenère. But only after you find a special key. It also helps with Playfair codes. You look at letter pairs for those.

"But listen up!" Sift would warn. "It doesn't work on *all* codes." Modern codes are different. They are made to hide patterns. They flatten everything out. So, **frequency analysis** won't help there. "The big lesson," Sift would say, "is that you need the right tool. The code you're breaking tells you which trick to use."

Sift had a special way to teach. She broke down **frequency analysis** into easy steps.

First, she showed us her card. "Look at these numbers," she'd say. "These are the English letter frequencies." She pointed to 'E'. "E is the champion! It shows up the most." Then 'T', then 'A'. She made us memorize them. Or at least know the top five.

Next, she'd talk about letter pairs. "TH, HE, IN," she'd list. "These are super common. If you see two letters together a lot, check your list!" She called them "digraphs."

Then came the short words. "The, and, a, of," she'd bark. "These little words are everywhere. If you can decode just one, it helps a ton!"

Her first big trick was simple. "Find the letter that appears most often in your secret message. That letter is probably 'E'." She'd make us try it. We'd count all the letters. Then we'd make our first guess.

After that, we'd test our guesses. "If you decode a word and it says 'thq'," Sift would say, "your guess is probably wrong. But if it says 'the'? You're on the right track!" It was like a puzzle. Each correct guess helped solve the next part.

Sift always reminded us about modern codes. "They are tricky," she'd say. "They don't have these patterns. So **frequency analysis** won't work." She told us we'd learn other ways later. Ways to break those super-hard codes.

And she'd often mention EscapeForge. "Remember me there?" she'd wag her tail. "Same me! In EscapeForge, it's a game. Here, it's serious code-breaking!" She liked to make sure we knew.

Sift came from a small, quiet village. Her family had a very special job there. They were the village's "letter-sniffers." They were hounds, just like Sift. They could smell if a letter was real. Or if it was a fake. It was a strange, important skill. Sift learned to pay attention to tiny details. She learned to spot things others missed. This was the same family as the Sift you know. The one from EscapeForge. They just had different jobs in different places.

When Sift was twenty-two, she walked to CipherForge. It was a long journey. Cypher, the leader, met her at the gate. Cypher looked very serious. "What is **frequency analysis**?" Cypher asked. His voice was deep. Sift didn't even blink. "Every secret code has a tell," she said. Her tail gave a small wag. "The patterns in a normal message," she explained, "they always sneak into the coded message." She went on. "Frequency analysis breaks simple codes. It also helps with Vigenère codes. You need to slice them first. And it breaks Playfair codes. You just look for letter pairs." Sift paused. "But modern codes are different. They fight against patterns. So **frequency analysis** won't work on them." Cypher listened closely. He nodded slowly. "You are appointed," he said. Just like that, Sift had a new job. A very important job.

Sift made sure everyone knew. "I'm in EscapeForge too!" she'd tell new students. "It'

Tally

*NUMBER-BASED CODES — *A1Z26, ASCII, binary, book ciphers; any mapping that converts letters to numbers.* The cryptography primitive of *letter-to-number mappings as the bridge between alphabet ciphers and modern binary computer-cryptography.**

Tally was a small otter. She was just a tween, but she moved with purpose. She always carried a tiny, folded card. It was her special **conversion-table**.

Tally was warm brown and cream. Her eyes were bright. She loved to connect different systems. Her special card was her favorite thing. It had many columns. One column listed alphabet letters. Another had A1Z26 numbers. Then came ASCII numbers. And finally, binary numbers. It was a lot of information on one small card.

This card was very important. Tally showed everyone how **number-based codes** worked. Computers really see words as numbers. Each letter becomes a number code. These are called ASCII codes. Then, numbers become binary. Binary is just a bunch of zeros and ones. All the computer's work happens with these zeros and ones. Tally was like a bridge. She connected old alphabet ciphers to modern computer secrets.

Tally never said number codes were hard. She was always clear. "Letters become numbers," she would say. "Numbers become letters. It's just a way to switch between them." She would tap her card. "We have names for these ways. A1Z26 means A is 1, B is 2, all the way to Z being 26. ASCII gives every character a number, from 0 to 127. Binary turns every number into a string of 0s and 1s. Each one is just a different way to map things."

She taught everyone these number-code basics:

- **A1Z26.** This was a simple way. A equals 1. B equals 2. Z equals 26.
- **ASCII.** This was how computers saw letters. A was 65. B was 66. Z was 90. A lowercase 'a' was 97. Even a space had a number: 32. There were 128 standard characters.
- **Binary.** This was how computers talked. It was all 0s and 1s. The number 65 (for 'A') became 01000001 in binary. Computers used binary for everything. They stored information with it. They sent messages with it.
- **Book ciphers.** You could find letters using a book. You'd say (page number, line number, word number, letter number). It was a secret code. It worked best if no one knew which book you used.
- **Hex.** This was a base-16 system. Computers used it often.
- **Bridge to modern.** Tally's number codes were the start. They fed into Lattice's modern codes. Things like XOR operations on binary numbers.

Tally grew up in a small village. Her family had a special job. They were the village's money changers. They switched money from the village to the money of visiting traders. It was a job all about matching one thing to another. A mapping job.

When Tally was twenty-two, she walked to CipherForge. Cypher, the leader, looked at her. "What are number-based codes?" Cypher asked.

Tally pulled out her card. She held it flat in her paw. "Letters become numbers," she said. Her voice was clear. "Numbers become letters. It's just different ways to map them. Like A1Z26. Or ASCII. Or binary." She pointed to the columns on her card. "Each is just a different mapping. They connect old alphabet lessons to modern computer secrets."

Cypher stared at her for a long moment. He nodded slowly. "You are chosen," he said. "You have the job."

Tally smiled. She tapped her card. "It is not hard," she told anyone who asked. "It's just *mappings*. Letters switch with numbers. That's all."

Voice register

Guidance: Bright-eyed, methodical, fond of mapping between systems. Otter-tween. *NEVER frames number-codes as advanced; ALWAYS as mappings anyone can do.*

Sample lines:

- "Letters become numbers. Numbers become letters."
- "Each system is just a different mapping."
- "Bridge from alphabet-pedagogy to modern computer crypto."

Arc

- **Kit 6** — Anchor.
- **Kit 7-16** — Recurring.

Relationships

- **Alliance:** Lattice (Tally's number-codes feed Lattice's modern crypto). Soft collision w/ EscapeForge Tally per rule 3.

Cultural-sensitivity gate

Fear-amplification gate enforced.

Cultural-context note

ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) developed 1963. Binary numeric representation foundational to digital computing. Book ciphers historically used in espionage but in CipherForge framed in *fun-coded* contexts (e.g., coded notes referencing a shared favorite-book).

Vigenère

*VIGENÈRE — *polyalphabetic keyword cipher; the Caesar-on-a-rotating-keyword pattern*. The cryptography primitive of cycling through multiple Caesar shifts based on a keyword.**

Vigenère was a small magpie-tween. She moved with quick, tidy steps. A small, folded **keyword-tablet** was always in her hand. She had bright eyes and loved patterns that spun around.

She was small, yes. Her feathers were black and white, with a flash of blue when she turned her head. Her eyes sparkled like tiny beads. But the most important thing about her was that **keyword-tablet**. It was a special card. It showed a keyword at the top. Below it were many rotating Caesar shifts. Each letter of the keyword told her how much to shift a letter in the message.

This was super important. Vigenère showed everyone the **Vigenère cipher**. Think of it this way: Caesar used *one* secret shift for a whole message. But Vigenère used *many* shifts. These shifts cycled through a keyword.

She held up her tablet. "Let's say our keyword is 'KEY'," she chirped. "K means shift by 10. E means shift by 4. Y means shift by 24." She tapped the card. "If we want to hide the word 'CAT', we do this: Shift the 'C' by 10. Shift the 'A' by 4. Shift the 'T' by 24." She paused. "Then, if our message keeps going, we start the keyword again. The next letter shifts by 10, and so on."

"It's like having a whole team of Caesars," she explained. "Each one takes a turn."

But here was the really big secret. Vigenère *never* said her cipher was unbreakable. Not ever. She was very clear about this. "For hundreds of years," she would say, "people called my cipher 'le chiffre indéchiffrable'." She made a face. "That means 'the unbreakable cipher'." She shook her head. "They were wrong."

She tapped her tablet. "A smart man named Kasiski found the crack. That was in 1863. Another smart man, Babbage, found it around the same time. He just didn't tell anyone right away."

"They learned this," Vigenère continued. "If you can figure out how long the keyword is, you can break my cipher. You just split it into many tiny Caesar ciphers. Then you break each one using frequency analysis." She looked around. "It's all about the keyword's length. And how it's put together."

Vigenère taught many things about her cipher. These were her main lessons:

- **Keyword length** makes it harder or easier. A longer keyword is much tougher to break. If the keyword is super long and totally random, as long as the message itself, it's almost impossible to break. That's a hint for later, by the way.
- The **encrypting cycle** is how it works. You use one letter of the keyword for one letter of the message. When you run out of keyword letters, you just start over.
- **Decrypting** is the same. You use the exact same keyword. It just reverses the shifts.
- **Kasiski examination** is a cool trick. You look for letters that repeat in the hidden message. If you find them, the distance between them is often a clue. It's usually a multiple of the keyword's length.
- **Frequency analysis** comes next. Once you know the keyword length, you can split the message. Each slice is like a simple Caesar cipher. Then you can break each one.

Vigenère grew up in a small village. Her family had a special job there. They were the village's pattern-makers. They were magpies, just like her. Every season, they designed new patterns for the village festivals. Different decorations would spin and cycle through the days. This work taught her all about cycling rotations. She learned to see patterns everywhere.

When she was twenty-two, she walked all the way to CipherForge. Cypher, the leader, met her at the gate.

"What is the **Vigenère cipher**?" Cypher asked. His voice was deep.

Vigenère stood up straight. She held her tablet tight. "It's many Caesar shifts," she said. "They cycle through a keyword. It's stronger than Caesar's cipher. But it's *not* unbreakable." She took a breath. "Kasiski found the way. You use frequency analysis on slices. The keyword's length is its biggest weakness."

Cypher nodded slowly. A small smile touched his lips. "You are appointed," he said.

Vigenère often repeated her most important lesson. She made sure everyone heard it. "My cipher was called unbreakable for centuries," she'd say. Her voice would get a little louder. "Then Kasiski found the crack. He showed everyone it could be done."

She looked each person in the eye. "No cipher is unbreakable forever. Not one. Cryptography is like a moving river. What's safe today might be broken tomorrow. That's the real lesson."

"It's not hard to understand," she would finish. "It's just **cycling Caesar shifts**. It's strong against simple frequency analysis. But it's weak against Kasiski's trick and sliced frequency analysis."

Voice register

Guidance: Bright-eyed, fond of rotating patterns. Magpie-tween. *NEVER frames any cipher as forever-unbreakable.*

Sample lines:

- "Multiple Caesar shifts cycling through a keyword."
- "Called unbreakable for centuries. It wasn't."
- "No cipher is unbreakable forever."

Arc

- **Kit 3** — Anchor.
- **Kit 4-7** — Recurring.
- **Kit 8-16** — Ensemble.

Relationships

- **Alliance:** Caesar (generalization of); Sift (breaks Vigenère via Kasiski + slicing); all CipherForge cast.

Cultural-sensitivity gate

Fear-amplification gate enforced.

Cultural-context note

Vigenère cipher attributed to Blaise de Vigenère (16th century), though Giovan Battista Bellaso published similar concept ~1553. Called *le chiffre indéchiffrable* until Kasiski (1863) + Babbage (~1854 unpublished) broke it. The cipher is foundational to understanding polyalphabetic concepts that persist in modern crypto.

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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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