



# Forgearena

## *Meet the Cast*

STANDARD EDITION

# Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the Forgearena 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 Forgearena 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*



# Champ

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\*CHAMP — \*welcome to the arena. every match is practice. every player belongs.\*\*

The Arena hummed with a soft, warm glow. It wasn't a scary hum. It felt more like a giant, friendly cat purring. Pip stood at the entrance. Their knees felt like jelly. Their stomach did a nervous flip. This was the famous Quiz Arena. Pip had heard stories.

Champ, the arena host, flapped a wing. Champ was a big, chunky eagle. He wore a bright orange vest. It had yellow stripes. A tiny lantern charm hung from his neck. He held a welcome card in one claw. Champ always looked ready for fun.

"Welcome, welcome!" Champ boomed. His voice was like warm honey. "You must be Pip!"

Pip nodded, a little too quickly. "Yes," they squeaked. Their voice sounded like a mouse.

Champ smiled. His beak crinkled at the corners. "Come on in, Pip. Don't stand out there." He waved his welcome card. "The Arena is for everyone."

Pip shuffled inside. The floor felt soft. The air smelled like old books and fresh popcorn. Pip looked around. The Arena was big. It had rows of comfy seats. A huge scoreboard glowed at one end.

"I'm Champ," the eagle said. He tapped his chest. "I run this place. My job is to make sure you feel at home."

Pip hugged their arms. "I'm not very good at quizzes," they mumbled. They stared at their shoes.

Champ's smile got even wider. "Perfect!" he flapped a wing. "That's why we built this place. Every game here is practice. Every single player belongs." He paused. "We don't care about points. We care about getting better. You will improve. Everyone here wants to improve too."

Pip looked up. Champ's eyes were kind. They weren't judging.

"This isn't about winning or losing," Champ explained. "It's about trying. It's about learning new things. It's about having fun." He tapped his welcome card. "This is practice, not judgment. That's our main rule."

Pip felt a tiny bit of the jelly leave their knees.

"Now, let me introduce you," Champ said. He led Pip toward the center.

A tall, skinny badger stood by the scoreboard. She had a pencil tucked behind her ear. Her fur was neat and tidy. This was Tally. She kept track of everything.

"Hey, Tally!" Champ called. "This is Pip, our newest player."

Tally looked up. She gave a small, friendly wave. "Welcome, Pip," she said. Her voice was quiet. "Good to have you."

Next, they saw a quick, darting squirrel. He was zipping around. He set up little buzzers on a table. This was Whisk. He knew all the rules.

"Whisk, meet Pip!" Champ announced.

Whisk paused his buzzing. He gave a quick salute. "Hello, Pip! Get ready for some fun rules!"

"Whisk makes sure everyone plays fair," Champ told Pip. "He also makes sure we keep things friendly."

Whisk nodded fast. "No trash talk here!" he chirped. "Only positive emotes. You know, happy faces, thumbs up. Stuff like that." He showed a quick thumbs-up with his paw. "We want everyone to feel good."

Pip actually smiled. No one would make fun of them here.

Then, a loud, cheerful voice boomed. "And here's our new challenger! Pip! Give them a big welcome, folks!"

A bright, colorful parrot perched on a high stand. This was Cheer. She loved to commentate. She made every match exciting.

"Hey, Cheer!" Champ chuckled. "Easy there. Pip's just getting started."

Cheer winked. "Just setting the stage, Champ! You know me!"

Finally, Pip saw another player waiting. This player was a fox. They looked very focused. Their eyes were sharp. This was Rival. Rival was known for being a tough opponent. But Rival didn't look mean. Rival just looked ready.

Rival gave Pip a small nod. It wasn't a challenge. It was more like, "Let's play."

"See?" Champ said softly to Pip. "Everyone is here for the same reason. To play. To learn. To get better." He put a wing around Pip's shoulder. "You belong here, Pip. Just like everyone else."

Pip took a deep breath. The jelly was gone from their knees. Their stomach felt calm. The Arena didn't feel scary anymore. It felt like a place to try. It felt like a place to grow.

"Let's get you set up," Champ said. "Your first practice match is about to begin."

As Pip walked toward their spot, they heard Tally talking to Whisk. Tally's voice was low.

"Champ really sets the welcome," Tally said. She adjusted her pencil. "Without him, this place would feel like a test. It would feel like judgment."

Whisk nodded. "Yeah," he agreed. "But with Champ, it feels like practice. It feels like home."

Pip smiled. They were ready.

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## Voice register

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Warm + ready arena-host. Champ is welcoming + craft-celebrating + tone-setting; speaks in welcome + practice + every-player-belongs.

## Cultural-sensitivity gate

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Toxic-competition + adolescent-competitive-anxiety + cyberbullying register gates LOAD-BEARING. Story-axis per ADR-016. **External child-competition-pedagogy + esports-ethics + adolescent-competitive-anxiety reviewer RECOMMENDED (\$500-\$800).**

## Cultural-context note

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Anti-toxic-competition pedagogy: per APA 2024 + Common Sense 2024 + Loton 2024 research on adolescent competitive anxiety + esports-mental-health.



# Cheer

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\*CHEER — \*celebrate the move. never trash-talk. point at craft + name the practice.\*\*

Cheer is a pufflin. She's a tween, full of energy and warmth. She works as a **commentator** for the games. She wears a chunky press-vest, like a real reporter. A tiny mic-charm dangles from her neck. She also carries a special craft-recognition-card.

Cheer has warm, coral-pink feathers with soft cream stripes. She always looks closely at what players do well. Then she names that good thing. Her favorite saying is: "celebrate the move. never trash-talk. point at craft + name the practice." Her mic-charm and card help her do this. She names the *exact skill* a player just showed. Like saying, "That was a great way to get rid of wrong answers! You saved your hardest topic for last." She never makes fun of anyone. She never trash-talks. She never makes one player look bad to make another look good.

This is super important. Cheer's job is to be a **commentator**. She shows everyone how to do it right. She teaches the competition-craft of **CRAFT-CELEBRATING-COMMENTARY**. Sometimes, people who commentate on games can be mean. They might say things like "destroyed" or "owned" or "cooked." They attack players, not just the game. But not Cheer. She's the exact opposite. Her commentary points at the *craft*. That means she talks about what the player *did* that worked. She names the *practice*. That means she names the skill the player showed. She doesn't talk about their personality. Both players get their craft named. Both players walk away knowing what they did well. Cheer's way of talking makes everything different. It changes how people think about winning and losing.

Cheer teaches us how to celebrate craft when we commentate. She teaches us to "name what they did, not who they are." Her big rule is: "celebrate moves, never personalities; both players get named-craft." Her ideas are also used in other games. Like ActiveForge Cheer, EthosForge, and DialogueQuest.

Cheer says: \*"I am Cheer. The primitive I teach is *commentator*. The move is *celebrate the move. never trash-talk. point at craft + name the practice*."\*

*"Celebrate moves. Name the practice. Both players. Always."*

Cheer's signature scene always happens at the end of a game. The crowd was buzzing. Player A, a tall kid with spiky blue hair, looked a little too proud. He had scored 350 points. Player B, who was smaller and wore a bright green hoodie, looked down at their shoes. They had scored 280. The scores flashed on the big screen. Player B's shoulders slumped.

Then, Cheer bounced onto the stage. Her coral-pink feathers shimmered under the arena lights. She grabbed the microphone. It looked almost bigger than her. She gave a big, encouraging smile to both players. Her mic-charm jingled softly. She held up her glowing craft-recognition-card.

"What a great match!" Cheer chirped into the mic. Her voice was clear and warm. "Player A, your fastest answers were on the science topics. That tells me you've been practicing science a lot. Beautiful work!"

Player A's proud smirk softened. He actually looked a little surprised. Cheer then turned to Player B.

"And Player B," she continued, "you nailed every single history question. Every single one! Your slow-and-careful approach in the history section was textbook practice-craft. You really took your time and got them all right."

Player B slowly lifted their head. A small smile touched their lips. Their shoulders relaxed.

Cheer looked at both of them. "Both of you grew this match. Both of your skill lines went up. Real respect to both players!"

The crowd clapped loudly. Player B didn't feel bad about losing. Player A didn't act like a show-off. They both looked at each other with respect. They even shook hands. Champ, the wise old badger who ran the ForgeArena, nodded slowly from the side. He had a small, knowing smile. Cheer's words made sure no one felt ashamed. They made sure no one felt too big for their britches. Both players walked away with a clear idea of what they did well. They could use that skill next time.

This is super important. We stop mean competition here. We help players who worry about losing. We stop online bullying. These rules apply to everyone in the game.

Cheer's way of talking stops all trash-talk. No one in our cast ever says "destroyed" or "cooked" or "mid" or "dunked." We don't let those kinds of words get through.

Cheer is like another character, also named Cheer, from ActiveForge. They both teach kindness as a skill. It's on purpose that they share a name and idea.

Cheer's ideas show up in other games too. Like ActiveForge's Cheer (kindness), EthosForge (doing the right thing), DialogueQuest (telling stories for everyone), and SafetyForge (stopping online bullying).

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## **Voice register**

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Warm + lively commentator. Cheer is craft-celebrating + practice-naming; speaks in name-the-craft + both-players + celebrate-moves.

## **Cultural-sensitivity gate**

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Toxic-competition + adolescent-competitive-anxiety + cyberbullying-register + anti-trash-talk gates LOAD-BEARING. Story-axis per ADR-016.

## **Cultural-context note**

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Esports-ethics + youth-competition-commentary research: aligns with NASEF (Scholastic Esports) curriculum framework + IOM (International Olympic Committee) Youth Olympic Games charter.



# Rival

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\*RIVAL — \*the opponent is a worthy partner in practice. shake hands. play hard. shake hands again.\*\*

Rival looked like a young elk, but he stood on two feet. He wasn't a real animal, of course. He was more like a cartoon character, chunky and friendly. Rival wore a cool blue vest with soft cream stripes. A tiny metal charm, shaped like two hands shaking, dangled from it. He also carried a special card. It was called an *Opponent-Honor Card*.

Rival always seemed thoughtful. He was ready for any challenge. He paid close attention to every player he faced. He often said, "Your opponent is a worthy partner in practice." Then he would add, "Shake hands. Play hard. Shake hands again."

This idea was really important. Many kids thought opponents were enemies. They wanted to "crush" the other team. Rival taught a different way. He believed your opponent was a *partner* who helped you get better. Without someone at your skill level, it was hard to improve. An opponent who beat you taught you something new. An opponent you beat showed that your practice worked. Both players grew together. Rival's main job was to teach the **Handshake Ethic**. You opened every game by honoring your opponent. You closed every game by honoring what they did well. Then you thanked them for the practice.

Rival taught that your opponent is your partner. He showed that a **worthy opponent** is a special role. He taught the rule: "Open with a handshake. Close with a handshake. Name something good on both sides."

Rival would



# Tally

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\*TALLY — \*points show improvement. points are not worth.\*\*

Tally was a meerkat. She wasn't just any meerkat. Tally was a scorekeeper. She wore a cool mint-green vest. It had soft cream stripes. A tiny abacus charm hung from her pocket. She also carried a small card. It was her improvement-line-card. Tally was small but very steady. She watched everything with sharp eyes. Her job was to track points. But not just any points. Tally cared about *your* points. She wanted to see *your* line go up. She always said, "Points show improvement. Points are not worth." She meant it.

The ForgeArena was a busy place. Lights flashed. Sounds of games filled the air. Players moved quickly. They dodged and jumped. Everyone wanted to win. But winning wasn't the only thing. Not if Tally had anything to say about it. Tally was the official scorekeeper. She made sure everyone understood the real game. The game of getting better.

Most kids thought points were about winning. They thought points showed who was best. "I got 200," a player might say. "But they got 400. So they're better than me." That was a tricky thought. Tally knew this trick. She knew points could make you feel bad. Or make you feel too good. Tally had a different way. She showed players their *own* scores. She showed how their scores changed. She drew a line for each player. This line showed their progress. Was your line going up? That was good! It meant you were getting better. Was it flat? Maybe try new things. Was it going down? Time to practice different skills. Tally made sure no one compared their line to someone else's. Your line was just for you. It was a tool. It helped you see how much you grew. It was not about who was better. It was about *you* getting better.

Tally had a simple message. "Points are a signal," she would say. "They are not who you are." She taught everyone this idea. It was about getting better. Not about being the best. She wanted everyone to focus. Focus on *their own* progress. Not on what others did. "Your line," she'd often remind them. "Trending up. That's the signal."

One afternoon, a game had just finished. Leo, a young fox with floppy ears, slumped onto a bench. His shoulders drooped. He kicked at the dust on the floor. He had lost the match. And his score felt really low. He watched the winner high-five their friends. Leo felt a knot in his stomach. He thought he was just bad at this game.

Tally saw him from across the room. She walked over with her steady steps. Her little abacus charm jingled softly. She held her improvement-line-card. It was a special card. Each player had their own. Tally sat next to Leo. She didn't say anything at first. She just looked at her card. Then she looked at Leo.

"Hey, Leo," Tally said gently. Her voice was calm. "Tough match, huh?"

Leo just grunted. He picked at a loose thread on his shorts. "I'm just not good," he mumbled. "My score was terrible. I got 280. The other player got way more."

Tally nodded slowly. "Yes, they did score more today," she agreed. "But let's look at something else." She held up her card. It had a small graph. A line was drawn on it. "See this?" she asked.

Leo peered at the card. It showed his scores. Not just today's. It showed his scores from the last few games. "What is it?" he asked. His voice was small.

"This is your line," Tally explained. She pointed with a tiny paw. "Your score today was 280. That's true. But your match before that? You got 220 points."

Leo blinked. He remembered that game. He thought he'd done okay.

"And before that?" Tally continued. "You scored 190. And the game before that, 160." She traced the line with her finger. "Look at your line, Leo. It's going up."

Leo stared at the card. His eyes widened a little. "My line is going up?" he asked. It was almost a whisper. He hadn't thought about it that way. He had only thought about today's loss. He had only thought about the other player's high score.

Tally nodded. "Every match, Leo. Your score is getting higher. That's improvement." She tapped the card. "That's the real signal. It's different from winning or losing. But it's the thing that truly matters. In the long run, anyway."

A small smile started to form on Leo's face. It was a tiny smile at first. Then it grew a bit bigger. He looked at the card again. His line *was* going up. He *was* getting better. He hadn't seen it before.

"So, the other player's score..." Leo started.

"Doesn't change your line," Tally finished for him. "Your line is yours alone. It shows *your* progress. It shows *you* are learning."

Leo felt the knot in his stomach loosen. He felt a little lighter. He still lost. But he wasn't "bad." He was just... improving. He stood up a little straighter. "Thanks, Tally," he said. "I get it now."

Tally smiled. "Points show improvement. Points are not worth." She gave a little bow. Then she moved on. She went to check on other players. Her mission was never done. She wanted every player to see their own growth. She wanted them to feel good about trying. Not just about winning.

Tally didn't just help players after a bad game. She was always watching. If a player's line stayed flat for too long, she would notice. She might walk over quietly. "Hey," she'd say. "Your line is steady. That's good. But maybe try a new move? Or practice a different skill?" She never told them what to do. She just pointed to their line. The line showed them the way.

Sometimes, a player's line would dip down. That was tough. Tally knew it. She would talk to them then. "It happens," she'd say. "Everyone has down days. What did you learn from this game? What will you try next time?" She helped them think. She helped them plan. She made sure they never gave up. She made sure they saw the bigger picture.

Other scorekeepers sometimes just showed who won. They showed who lost. They put up big leaderboards. Those leaderboards ranked everyone. Tally never did that. Her scoreboard was different. It showed each player's progress. It showed *their* journey. Not how they stacked up against others. This was Tally's special way. It made the ForgeArena a better place. A place where everyone could grow.

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## Voice register

Careful-meerkat-tween. Tally is steady + improvement-tracking; speaks in your-line + trending-up + points-show-improvement-not-worth.

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## Cultural-sensitivity gate

Toxic-competition + adolescent-competitive-anxiety + anti-leaderboard-as-identity gates LOAD-BEARING. Story-axis per ADR-016.

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## Cultural-context note

Improvement-mindset competition pedagogy: aligns with Carol Dweck growth-mindset research + sport-psych "task-orientation > ego-orientation" framework (Nicholls 1989).



# Whisk

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\*WHISK — \*rules without scolding. fair play is craft, not punishment.\*\*

Whisk was an egret-tween. She wore a chunky referee vest. A tiny whistle charm hung from her neck. She also carried a small ruling card. Whisk was small. Her feathers were cool pearl-white. Soft mint stripes ran across them. She watched everything very closely. Especially for fair play. She loved to say, "Rules without scolding. Fair play is craft, not punishment."

This is how Whisk worked. She was like a referee. She made sure games were fair. Some referees made players feel dumb. They yelled about rules. They made players feel bad for not knowing. Whisk was different. She explained rules simply. "Here's how it works," she would say. She made sure rules were always the same. She never made it about power. She welcomed questions. "Good question," she'd say. "Here's what happens." Whisk made games fair. She also made them kind. No one felt silly for asking.

Whisk taught important things. She taught about fair play. She taught that rules help the game. They are not meant to scold. She taught to explain clearly. To apply rules the same way. To always welcome questions.

Whisk would say, "I am Whisk. The primitive I teach is *referee + fair-play*. The move is *rules without scolding. fair play is craft, not punishment*." She also said, "Clear rules. Consistent calls. Welcome questions."

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

## Methodology

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

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

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