



# TrailForge

*Meet the Cast*

STANDARD EDITION

# Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the Trailforge 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 Trailforge 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*



# Listen

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\*LISTEN — \*this trail isn't mine; it was here first.\*\*

Listen was a coyote-tween. Their fur was soft and sandy. Their ears always tipped forward. They listened to everything. Not just sounds. They listened to the ground itself. The wind through the leaves. The old, old trees. Listen wore a chunky tunic. It had abstract shapes woven into it. They carried small cards. These were their "leave-no-trace" cards. They also had a "land-respect tracker." It was a little notebook.

Today, Listen was hiking with Pip and Leo. The sun was warm. Birds sang in the branches. The trail wound up a gentle hill.

"Ugh, this trail is so boring," Pip grumbled. Pip kicked at a loose rock. The rock tumbled down the slope. It bounced once. Then it vanished into the bushes below.

Listen's ears twitched. They stopped walking. They looked at the empty spot where the rock had been.

"Hey, what's up?" Leo asked. He was already a few steps ahead.

Listen pointed a paw at the small hole. "That rock was part of the trail."

"So?" Pip shrugged. "It's just a rock. There are millions of rocks."

"But it held the path together," Listen said softly. Their voice was quiet. But it made Pip and Leo stop. "Now the dirt might wash away. The trail could get wider."

Pip rolled their eyes. "It's just a little rock."

Listen pulled out a small card. It showed a picture of a path. The path had a line drawn around it. "Travel and camp on durable surfaces," Listen read. "That means staying on the path. And not messing with it."

"Who made up these rules?" Pip asked. They sounded annoyed.

"The land did," Listen replied. "And people who have walked here for a very long time." Listen looked at the path. "This trail isn't mine. It was here first."

They started walking again. Listen moved carefully. Their paws barely disturbed the dust. Leo tried to walk like Listen. Pip still shuffled a bit.

Soon, they came to a bend. A bright red wrapper lay on the ground. It was shiny. It looked very out of place.

"Someone dropped their candy," Leo said. He reached for it.

"Wait," Listen said. They bent down. They picked up the wrapper. They held it up. "This is another rule." They showed a different card. This one had a trash can on it. "Dispose of waste properly."

"Oh, I was going to pick it up!" Leo protested.

"It's okay," Listen said. They put the wrapper in a small pouch on their tunic. "It's easy to forget. But even small things add up."

Pip snorted. "Who cares about one wrapper?"

"The animals care," Listen said. "They might try to eat it. Or it just stays here. For hundreds of years."

They walked on. The trail led them through a patch of wildflowers. They were purple and yellow. They smelled sweet.

"Ooh, pretty!" Pip said. They reached out. They snapped off a purple flower. They held it up. "Look!"

Listen's ears flattened a tiny bit. "Please don't do that, Pip."

Pip frowned. "Why not? It's just one flower."

Listen pulled out another card. It showed a hand reaching for a flower. But the hand stopped. "Leave what you find," Listen read. "Everything here belongs here. Even one flower."

"But I wanted to keep it," Pip mumbled. They looked at the flower. It already looked a



# Shelter

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\*SHELTER — \*three walls. wind, cold-ground, rain.\*\*

"Brrr," Pip shivered, rubbing their arms hard. A damp chill seeped into their bones. "It's getting really cold out here. My nose feels like an ice cube."

Shelter didn't even look up. They were on their knees, poking at a patch of ground with a stick. Their small, furry face was scrunched in deep thought. A chunky outdoor tunic covered their warm-cream-with-soft-fawn-fur. It looked very cozy.

"Cold isn't the *real* problem," Shelter mumbled, mostly to themselves. "Not yet. Cold is just a symptom."

Pip frowned. "A symptom of what? What *is* the problem then?"

Shelter finally looked up. Their bright, keen eyes scanned the area, moving quickly from the tall pines to a rocky outcrop. "Three walls," they said, like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

Pip just blinked. "Walls? We're in the middle of the Whispering Woods. There aren't any walls."

Shelter pulled out a stack of small, colorful cards from a pouch on their belt. These were their *shelter-design-cards*. On one side, a tiny drawing of a problem. On the other, a list of solutions.

"First wall," Shelter explained, holding up a card with a picture of wind blowing hard. "The **wind**."

"Wind?" Pip hugged themselves tighter. "Yeah, it's pretty breezy. It keeps whistling through the trees."

"Wind steals your warmth," Shelter said. Their voice was serious. "It blows it right off your body,



# Tend

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\*TEND — \*water first, then warmth, then food.\*\*

Tend, the tortoise-tween, sat on a mossy log. Their chunky shell looked like a small backpack. It was a warm cream color. Soft green moss marks covered it. Tend wore a sturdy outdoor tunic. They pulled out a stack of small cards. Each card had a picture and a few words. This was Tend's priority-order-tracker.

"Alright," Tend mumbled to themselves. They tapped the top card. It showed a big, clear water droplet. "Water first."

A squirrel chattered loudly from a nearby tree. Tend looked up. "Yes, even for you, little guy," they said. "Water is super important."

Tend always thought about survival. Not in a scary way. More like a puzzle. A very important puzzle. They knew the rule of 3s by heart. It was a simple way to remember things.

You can last 3 minutes without air. (Usually not a problem outdoors.)

You can last 3 hours without warmth in cold places. (Hypothermia is sneaky.)

You can last 3 days without water. (This one is big.)

You can last 3 weeks without food. (Not fun, but you won't die fast.)

Tend liked to practice. They imagined different problems. What if they got lost? What if it started raining hard? What if they were super hungry?

"Body first," Tend always said. "Always, always, body first."

Pip came crashing through the bushes. "Tend! I'm so glad I found you!" Pip gasped. They were holding a half-eaten berry. "I'm starving! And I think these berries are super rare!"

Tend slowly blinked. They looked at Pip. Pip's face was a little red. Their hair was messy.

"Starving?" Tend asked. Their voice was calm. "Are you thirsty, Pip?"

Pip waved a hand. "Nah, not really. Just hungry. I saw these bright red berries. They look amazing! Are they edible?"

Tend took a deep breath. This was a classic mistake. "Pip," they said gently. "What's the first rule?"

Pip thought for a second. "Uh... don't talk to strangers?"

Tend shook their head. "No. The **survival priority-order** rule."

Pip squinted. "Oh! Right! Water first, then warmth, then food!"

"Exactly," Tend said. "So, are you sure you're not thirsty?"

Pip actually stopped. They licked their lips. "Well, now that you mention it... my throat is a little dry."

"See?" Tend pointed to a small stream nearby. "Water is always first. Your body needs it most."

Pip walked to the stream. They cupped their hands. They drank deeply. "Wow," Pip said. "That really hit the spot."

"Good," Tend said. "Now, about those berries." Tend looked at the bright red fruit. "Do you know what kind they are?"

Pip shrugged. "Nope! But they look yummy!"

"Looks can be tricky," Tend warned. "Many pretty plants are not good for you. Some can make you very sick."

"Oh," Pip said. Their face fell. "So I shouldn't eat them?"

"Not unless you are 100% sure," Tend explained. "Plant ID is important. But it comes after other things."

"Like water?" Pip asked.

"Yes," Tend confirmed. "And warmth. If it were cold, staying warm would be next."

Tend pulled out another card. This one showed a person wrapped in a blanket. "Hypothermia is serious. You can get very cold, very fast."

"I guess I never thought about it like that," Pip admitted. "I just think about food."

"Food is important, of course," Tend said. "But your body can go a long time without it. Weeks, even."

"Weeks?" Pip's eyes widened. "Really?"

"Really," Tend nodded. "Think about the rule of 3s



# Watch

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\*WATCH — \*sky-as-conversation-already-happening. notice the moment it changes.\*\*

Watch was a young falcon. They had warm, cream-colored feathers. Their soft amber eyes were always looking up. Watch wore a sturdy outdoor tunic. It had pockets for their special tools.

One pocket held a stack of small cloud-pattern cards. The other held a weather-signal tracker. Watch used these to understand the sky. They knew what the clouds meant. They could tell when the wind would change. They felt the air pressure drop. They even watched how animals acted.

Watch was small. But they noticed everything. Especially about the sky.

"The sky is always talking," Watch liked to say. "It's like a conversation already happening. You just have to notice the moment it changes."

This was Watch's big lesson. It was all about *weather reading*. It was the outdoor skill of knowing what the sky was saying. The sky never surprised Watch. It always gave clues.

Imagine a day with fluffy white clouds. These are called *cumulus* clouds. They look like cotton balls. Watch would watch them closely. If those fluffy clouds started to grow tall, that was a sign. They would get bigger and bigger. They would turn dark. That meant a thunderstorm was coming. Watch would know it long before anyone else.

The wind also gave clues. Maybe it was blowing gently from the east. Then, all of a sudden, it would shift. It would blow hard from the west. A quick change like that meant a new weather front was on its way. Watch would feel it. They would see the leaves rustle differently.

Sometimes, you could even feel the air itself. Watch called this *barometric awareness*. The air pressure might drop. Your ears might pop a little. The air could feel heavy and still. These were all signs that the weather was about to change. It meant a storm was brewing.

Animals were great helpers too. Watch watched the birds. They would fly low to the ground before a storm. Insects would get very quiet. They would hide. Animals seemed to know things before humans did. Watch paid attention to them.

Watch's main rule was simple: *WATCH* continuously. Keep your eyes open. Notice the *MOMENT* things change. Then, *ACT EARLY*.

One afternoon, Watch was sitting by the river. Their friend, Pip, was trying to catch fish. Pip was humming a happy tune. The sun was warm. The sky looked clear.

"Pip," Watch said softly. Their amber eyes scanned the horizon.

"Hmm?" Pip mumbled. They were focused on their fishing line.

"The *cumulus* clouds are building," Watch said. "They're getting taller."

Pip glanced up. "They just look like big, fluffy clouds to me. Perfect for a sunny day."

Watch shook their head. "They're growing vertically. See how they're puffing up? That means they're collecting moisture. They'll be thunderheads soon."

A few minutes later, a small breeze picked up. It blew from a different direction than before. Pip didn't notice. They were still humming.

"Did you feel that?" Watch asked. "The wind just shifted. That's another sign."

Pip shrugged. "Just a breeze."

Watch sighed. They pulled out their cloud cards. They showed Pip a card with tall, dark clouds. "This is what those fluffy clouds are turning into. Soon."

Then Watch pulled out their weather-signal tracker. It was a small, round device. A tiny needle inside it dipped slightly. "And the air pressure is dropping," Watch explained. "The sky is really talking now."

Pip finally looked concerned. "Really? But it's so sunny!"

"The sky is always talking," Watch repeated. "You just have to listen. Or, well, watch."

Watch quickly packed up their things. They put away their cloud cards and tracker. "We should find shelter," they said. "Soon."

Pip hesitated. "But my fish!"

"Your fish will be fine," Watch said. "But we won't if we stay out here."

Just as they reached the edge of the forest, a low rumble echoed. A dark cloud, much bigger than before, rolled across the sky. Then, a few fat raindrops splattered on the leaves.

Pip's eyes went wide. "Whoa! You were right!"

Watch just nodded. "The sky told us. We just had to notice."

Watch teaches everyone these important lessons:

- How to tell different cloud types apart.
- How to spot a wind shift.
- How to feel changes in air pressure.
- How to read animal behavior for weather clues.
- And most importantly, how to *act early* when the sky talks.

Watch says: *"I am Watch. The primitive I teach is weather reading. The move is sky is already talking; notice the change; act early."*

*"Sky-as-conversation-already-happening. Notice the moment it changes."*

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## Voice register

Perceptive-falcon-tween (they/them). Sky-scanning + attentive.

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## Cultural-sensitivity gate

Story-axis per ADR-016.

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## Cultural-context note

Weather-reading pedagogy: traditional + modern weather-prediction; outdoor-safety scholarship. Falcon for sky-watching biomimicry.



# Way

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\*WAY — \*stop. look. find one thing you know. now you have a starting point.\*\*

Way was a careful kid. They had soft, warm-cream feathers. Their charcoal tips looked like smudges. Way wore a chunky outdoor tunic. It had big pockets. They always carried a small stack of landmark cards. An orientation tracker hung from their belt. Way was small and steady. They watched everything.

Way loved to say, "Stop. Look. Find one thing you know. Now you have a starting point." It was their favorite phrase.

One sunny afternoon, Way was walking. They followed a winding path. The path led deep into the Whispering Woods. Way hummed a quiet tune. Their eyes scanned the trees. They noticed a broken branch. They saw a patch of bright green moss. Way knew these woods well.

Suddenly, a frantic voice broke the quiet. "Way! Oh, Way, I'm lost!"

It was Pip. Pip was a whirlwind of energy. Today, Pip looked like a crumpled leaf. Their hair was messy. Their clothes were covered in twigs. Pip spun in a circle. They looked up at the sky. They looked down at their feet. They looked everywhere but where they were going.

"I don't know where I am!" Pip cried. "Everything looks the same! The trees, the bushes, the dirt! It's all just... green and brown!"

Way stopped. They tilted their head. Pip was truly flustered. Way watched Pip for a moment. Pip was about to run off in a random direction.

"Stop," Way

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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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