

THE FLOATING ISLES OF AVEA

WINGS  
OF THE  
WYLD

Rebecca Rouillard



TWIXT BOOKS

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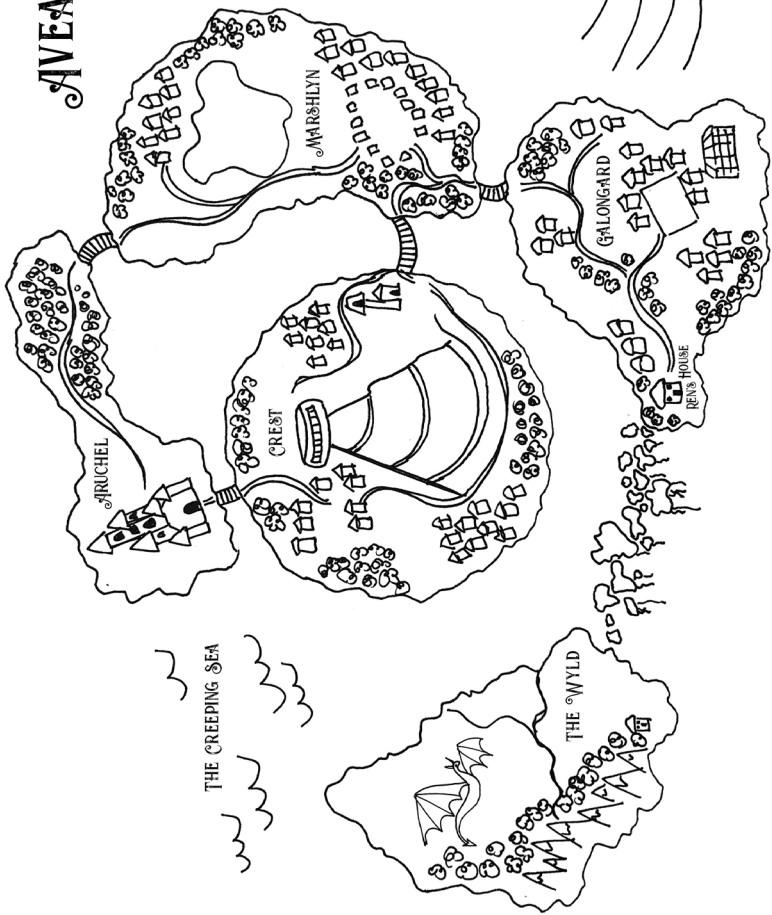
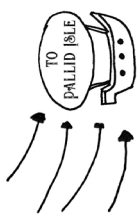
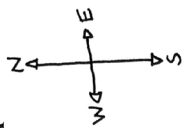
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Cover design and illustrations by Rebecca Rouillard

*For Paul, Emma & Daniel*  
*(and Magnus – a truly excellent cat)*

# AVEA



## THE AVEA CODE OF CHIVALRY

Go with the Flow.

Be brave, kind and truthful.

Defend Avea from anyone who would harm her.



## **The Flow**

Ren Breezewing was woken by the distant cry of a wild wyvern. The sun was glimmering on her face through a canopy of leaves and the air smelled of fresh-cut lentalgrass. For a moment she didn't know where she was but then she remembered: she was in the wyvern tree, in her back garden on Galongard Island, and it was the day of the Aruchel Entrance Trials.

The treehouse wasn't much more than a wooden platform, fixed in the broad fork of the tree, but the floor was decorated with a painting of a wyvern: head of a dragon, two legs like a bird and great wings of stretched membrane, extended in flight. Ren traced the peeling blood-red paint with her fingers.

"Morning, little Renlet." Her sister Kite leaned

over, her hair dangling in Ren's face. "Feeling brave?"

Kite had the same untidy dark hair and freckles as Ren. She was taller but only because Ren hadn't had her growth spurt yet.

"Definitely," Ren said, trying to sound confident.

From the first time she'd seen a wyvern and heard its wild, high-pitched cry, Ren had known that she would do *anything* to fly on one—even put herself through the Aruchel Trials.

Aruchel was the exclusive School of Chivalry where the bravest children of Avea learned to fly and trained for the chance to become knights, like Zir August—the headteacher. A lithe-lizard of nervousness scuttled down Ren's spine. If she didn't pass the test, then her dream of flying a wyvern would be over. She let the lithe-lizard of nervousness grow, unfurl powerful wings and transform into a fearless creature inside her.

"You've got nothing to worry about, Renlet," Kite said, sitting back and tucking her hair behind her ears.

"Really?"

“Of course,” Kite grinned. “You’re *my* sister, aren’t you?”

Kite had been accepted to Aruchel four years earlier—the first student from Galongard in ten years, and there had only been a few others since then. Most of the students came from Crest or Marshlyn. Not many Galongard children aspired to fly wyverns or be knights, but Kite had always dreamed of adventure. Now, she went off to school on Aruchel Island each day in her purple flight suit and returned home in the evening with stories of soaring over the floating isles of Avea. Ren lived for those stories.

Kite grabbed Ren by the shoulders, a serious look on her face. “There’s one important thing you still need to do to prepare for the entrance trials...”

“What is it?” Ren asked. The planning of the trials was always a closely guarded secret, and they were different every year, so there was not much anyone could do to *prepare*.

“Flying practice, of course,” Kite announced. She grabbed Ren and started tickling her.

Ren screamed and giggled at the same time. “Kite,

stop it, I'm going." She wriggled out of her blankets on the treehouse floor and scrambled onto the flying branch—being careful not to squash a small semble snail on the edge of the platform. "Watch out, Bernard," she told him.

"You haven't actually named the semble snails, have you?" Kite rolled her eyes.

"Yes," Ren said. "That's Bernard with the wiggly line on his shell."

"Ready?" Kite asked.

Ren held on for dear life as Kite began to jump on the branch behind her, bouncing her up and down. Ren had been pretending this particular branch was a wyvern since she was little. It was her favourite place to sit, watch and listen to all the creatures that scurried and fluttered around the garden when Kite wasn't around to frighten them off.

"Hail, Zir Renlet the Tiny but Valiant!" Kite shouted and gave a particularly enthusiastic jump.

Ren lost her grip, slid to one side and dangled upside down for a moment before dropping her legs down and letting go. Fortunately, it wasn't a big drop.

“Zir Ren the Valiant,” she repeated to herself—liking the sound of it.

“Come on, Renlet,” Kite said, as she swung down from the tree. “Breakfast time.”

Their small mossy, mushroom-shaped house was at the farthest end of Galongard and looked out over the Wyld, the only uninhabited island of Avea and home of the wild wyverns. As Ren pushed through a dense patch of lynberry bushes and cirrus plants, she spotted a crimson, bird-like shape, coasting and wheeling in the sky. She grinned, feeling the last tiny dragonwing of worry flutter away on the breeze. She was going to fly—just like Kite. No one could look down on you on the back of a wyvern.

“Morning Ren,” her dad said, giving her a hug as she came in from the garden. “How was your sleepover?”

Dad was tall like Kite, with knobbly elbows and knees, and dark hair peppered with grey that stuck up in all directions. He was wearing a stripy dressing gown, a frilly apron and had a spatula in one hand.

“Kite bounced me right out of the wyvern tree.”

“Kite, you should be more careful.” Dad said,

putting a plate of fluffy cloud buns and a glass of hibiscus cordial in front of Ren. “You two are going to break that branch one day.”

Dad considered the wyvern tree a close friend. He was still hoping Ren would inherit his Flow gift: green fingers. Kite hadn’t. Ren loved to watch the semble snails and the ruffleworms and the darting dragonwings, but she hadn’t felt the urge to make friends with any plants.

“It’s not the bouncing you should be worried about,” Kite said. “It’s the infestation of semble snails. She’s given them all names and I caught her reading them a story in the wyvern tree the other day.”

Ren blushed. “Shut up Kite.”

“And you’re not going to believe this,” Kite went on. “A whole crowd of snails had gathered around her—like they were actually *listening* to the story.”

“At least *they* listen to me,” Ren muttered.

Ren’s Mum gave her a hug too. “I hope there isn’t a snail in your pocket today—no snails at the breakfast table.” Mum was nearly as tall as Dad, but neater and less knobbly, and she was wearing a crisp green

suit. Unlike Dad, she had friends who were actual humans. Most people on Galongard were farmers or craftspeople, but Mum was one of the few who left each morning to work for the Council of Knights in a grand sandstone building on Crest—the central island.

Ren drizzled her cloud buns with chocolate, sprinkled them with lynberries and stabbed one with her fork—the cloud bun didn't stand a chance against Zir Ren the Valiant. If Falco herself, the notorious Crestfallen Queen, broke down their door and stole Ren's breakfast—Ren would stand up to her and demand her cloud buns back. She would show Falco. But she ate another bun quickly anyway—it would be a shame to waste them on exiles.

Kite launched into a story about her latest adventure, sneaking into the skyweed farm. “And there I was, hanging *underneath* Galongard in a jungle of skyweed, damp and shadowy, a flimsy net the *only thing* saving me from plummeting to a watery grave in the Creeping Sea, half a mile below...” Kite paused dramatically.

Dad went pale, shoved a bun into his mouth whole, then went red and nearly choked on it.

Mum hit Dad on the back. “Kite, what were you thinking...” she started to say.

“It was actually perfectly safe.” Kite held up her hands to reassure them. “The net was extremely well secured, and the holes were so tiny—I couldn’t have fitted through them, even if I wanted to. There was no real danger.” The Flow had gifted Kite with a way with words—she was a born storyteller and she could always talk her way out of trouble. Ren did not have this gift. If she were in trouble, she’d be more likely to blush and forget how to talk altogether.

“You’re lucky no one caught you.” Mum said, “If you want to be a knight, you have to learn to follow the rules.”

“Maybe I don’t want to be a knight, sounds boring,” Kite muttered, only loud enough for Ren to hear.

Ren grinned at her sister. She hadn’t discovered what her Flow gift was yet, but she hoped it was going to be something good. The Flow had been known to give some pretty random gifts: Mum had

perfect timing—she always knew exactly what the time was without looking at a clock. And Dad talked to plants.

When Ren’s cloud buns had been thoroughly vanquished, she went up to her room and put on her *Save the Avean Ruffleworm* t-shirt and her favourite green jumpsuit. Magnus, the family arucat, was curled up on her wyvern bedcover. She sat on the bed and gave him a tickle under his furry chin. As she bent over to tie her shoelaces, her stomach squirmed like it was full of Avean ruffleworms. Perhaps she shouldn’t have eaten such a big breakfast. Perhaps she wasn’t as brave as Kite. Perhaps she was never going to fly on a wyvern.

She gave herself a shake. It wasn’t like she was going to have to *talk* the wyvern into flying with her. “I’m Zir Ren the Valiant,” she told Magnus. “Defender of the Avean ruffleworms. Protector of the crickle-caterpillars. Guardian of the semble snails. I am going to pass.”



## The Aruchel Entrance Trial

“Attention applicants.”

One hundred eleven-year-olds shushed each other and shuffled to face the intimidating red-brick towers of Aruchel. A knight with short, white hair and a fierce expression, wearing a silver flight suit, stood in front of them—Zir August, the headteacher. One of the school wyverns wheeled around the tallest tower and then disappeared into a dark archway near the top. Ren’s eyes flew after it eagerly—in a few months that could be *her* wyvern.

“Today you face a trial of your character and your courage,” said Zir August.

Ren’s best friend, Morgan, grabbed her hand and squealed. She was taller than Ren, with dark skin and a sunburst of hair. Her aunt was Zir Gwendolyn, Leader

of the Council of Knights and Flight Commander of Avea, but everyone would've loved Morgan anyway, even if she wasn't from such an important family.

Ren's other best friend, Arum, looked a bit green—as though he'd also eaten too many cloud buns. Arum was as short as Ren, with light wispy hair and large ears that stuck straight out like handles. He was only doing the trials because Ren and Morgan were, and it looked like he was regretting it. Arum was clever and kind, but he wasn't good with heights—an unfortunate problem for someone who lived on a hovering island.

“Follow me.” Zir August turned, her crimson cloak whipping around her like a wyvern wing and led them away from the school into the dense woodland that filled the rest of Aruchel Island. As she walked, Ren listened to the ancient hush of the forest—so different to the cheerful bustling of her garden. But the same golden threads—the paths, rituals and lifespans of the creatures who lived there—flowed through all the islands of Avea, like music. Ren let it flow through her.

The ruffleworms in Ren's stomach started to squirm again. She was *Zir Ren the Valiant*, she reminded herself. She could do this. *Go with the Flow*.

Zir August led them through the redwood forest, until the trees thinned and eventually there was nothing left between them and the horizon—they were at the very edge of Aruchel Island. There were two posts planted in the ground, like a gateway to the void. The excited chattering died away.

“This way.” Zir August announced, and she disappeared over the edge between the posts.

Ren leaned forward to watch her climbing down a rough wooden ladder. When she turned around to look at the others, Morgan and Arum's faces reflected her own apprehension. This went against the first rule they'd all learned as soon as they could walk and talk: *stay away from the edge*. Some of the other children were already walking away through the forest, shaking their heads. Morgan stepped forwards and even though Ren wasn't scared of heights, it took everything in her to follow, turn around and start climbing down the ladder—trying

to concentrate on the rough texture of the wood beneath her fingers and not the terrifying half-mile drop to the Creeping Sea below. The ladder curved down beneath the island and Ren was relieved when it ended just below on a broad stone ledge.

She'd never been this close to the edge of everything. She'd looked down from the rickety bridges that connected the islands of course, but there had always been a handrail between her and the drop. Here there was nothing to prevent her from falling.

Ren looked down the line of children, their backs pressed to the wall of rock, and realised that less than half of the original applicants had made it down the ladder and the trial hadn't even properly begun yet.

"Wisdom, honour, courage. All of these are important for Aruchel students, but particularly for those special few who will, with the help of the Flow, go on to become knights and defend Avea from the Crestfallen," Zir August said.

In that moment, Ren desperately wanted to become a knight. She could see the same desire

shining in Morgan's eyes, and even in Arum's.

"One at a time," Zir August continued, "you will step forward and state one personal attribute you have to offer Aruchel School. This doesn't have to be your Flow gift, but something that qualifies you to be a knight, to set an example and lead your peers. And then, to demonstrate your courage, you will jump off the edge. The knights will catch you and return you to Aruchel and you will have passed the test."

*Zir August wanted them to jump off the edge of the island?* Ren could see a few knights on wyverns beneath them—but they were so far away they looked like a swarm of tiny darting dragonwings. Ren was still trying to process it all when Morgan squeezed her hand whispered, "Good luck," and stepped up to the edge.

"My name is Morgan Glendower, I am a wayfinder—and I will never lead the people of Avea in the wrong direction."

Morgan had known what her Flow gift was since she was little—she'd always been a wayfinder. That was why her Mum let her wander the islands freely—

she could always find the quickest route home and she never got lost.

Zir August nodded, Morgan took a deep breath and stepped off the edge. There was a collective gasp, and everyone craned forward to watch Morgan fall. She gave a high-pitched scream that transformed into a whoop of excitement as she plummeted, and then there was a knight on a wyvern—a red blur—diving towards her. Ren held her breath until Morgan was safely seated on the wyvern behind the knight, holding on with one arm and waving at them with the other. Then a dozen hands went up.

A tall girl stepped forwards and, with a horrible jolt, Ren recognised her. A few years ago, on the way home from the market, she had knocked Ren over and pushed her face in the mud, just because she'd got in her way.

“I am Juniper Bay, and I can breathe underwater so I will be essential for all water-related emergencies.” She lifted her arms above her head, posed for a moment, and then did a spectacular swallow dive off the edge.

Ren thought she saw Zir August roll her eyes.

Zir August had said that it didn't have to be your Flow gift, but everyone seemed to be talking about theirs.

"I can see sound."

"I can turn my head round all the way to the back."

"I can survive sub-zero temperatures."

One by one the applicants said their piece and leaped into the void.

Ren had no Flow gift, and she couldn't think of a single thing to say. She wanted to *show* how brave she was—not talk about it.

A few children were climbing back up the ladder and the line waiting to jump was getting shorter.

If she knew what her Flow gift was, then she would *know* what it was that made her special. The teachers at school always said, "You must be *Kite's* sister," like that was the most important thing about her. And, right now, that's all she was—Kite's little sister.

Kite had always been talkative, but *her* Flow gift came in properly when she was about ten, a year

younger than Ren. What was wrong with *her*? She wasn't afraid to jump, she couldn't wait to fly on a wyvern, but there was just one little obstacle getting in her way. Ren herself.

Arum nudged her, "Do you mind if I go first?"

She shook her head.

Arum stepped forward, white and sweating. "Arum Springhaven. I may not be the tallest adversary against the Crestfallen," he began.

Ren smiled, in spite of herself.

"And I don't have a Flow gift yet, but I do have extensive knowledge of the sky-ship technology used by the Crestfallen." He began to explain the sky-ship engine in excruciating detail, but Zir August interrupted him.

"That's fine, thank you Arum."

Arum took a deep breath, clenched his fists, shut both of his eyes, and toppled forward over the edge.

Ren watched him fall and be swept up and away by a wyvern. Arum didn't have his Flow gift yet but even *he* had passed the Aruchel entrance exam.

She was the only one left.

Zir August looked at her. “Come on then, speak up.”

Ren opened her mouth and closed it again. *Say something...anything*, she told herself. But there were no words in her head, only a desperate hopeless longing.

“I...um...I...”

Zir August looked at her for a long moment, then she turned away.

“Wait,” Ren called—still not knowing what she was going to say.

“I’m sorry, you had your chance.” Zir August said. “The trials are finished.”