THE LAST RIDERS • SERIES COMPANION

The Crooked Flame: Book Club & Reader Discussion Guide

For book clubs, buddy reads, and thoughtful readers • By Alfred Wayson • thelastriders.com

A Note from Alfred Wayson: *The Last Riders* was written to explore a question rarely asked in epic dragon fantasy: What happens when the magical bond is treated as an agreement between equals rather than an act of mastery? Thank you for bringing Wren, Zane, and the sanctuary into your reading group. Use these ten questions to spark deep discussion.

1. The Ethics of The Asking In Veyrith, no bond can exist without consent. A rider must ask, wait in silence, and unconditionally honor refusal.	**2. Hearth as Resistance** Wren is a baker's apprentice. Morning sourdough, warmth, and daily labor ground this story in human endurance.	**3. The Erasure of History** Two hundred years of institutional decree claiming dragons were mythical madness. How truth survives in embers.

Part I: World, Lore & The Sacred Rule of Consent

Q1 **The Law of the Asking:** In most dragon fantasy, bondings are forged by destiny, egg-claiming, or rider dominance. In *The Last Riders*, a rider must ask, wait, and accept refusal without complaint. How does centering consent shift the moral foundation of the entire narrative?

Q2 **The Historical Lie:** For two centuries, the kingdom of Veyrith decreed that dragons were merely fables invented by madmen. Why was the erasure of dragon history so essential to the Order's consolidation of power, and how do ordinary citizens handle the cracking of this consensus?

Q3 **The Flour Dust & The Sword:** Wren begins the story with flour in her hair and dough under her fingernails. How does her background in domestic, restorative craftsmanship contrast with characters raised purely for martial or institutional duty?

Q4 **Sensory Language of the Mark:** Wren's wrist mark does not speak in words; it communicates through physical temperature shifts (cold spots) and rhythmic vibrations (the steady hum). How did this tactile language change your experience of their connection?

Q5 **The Mechanics of the Sanctuary:** Rook approaches dragons through clockwork, balanced weight, and repairs, while Kestrel thinks in patrols and security perimeters. Which character's worldview resonated most with how you would adapt to living in exile?

Part II: Character Motives, Sacrifice & Consequence

Q6 **Garret's Protective Silence:** Wren's father kept the truth of her mark hidden for thirteen years to protect her from the Wardens, but this choice left her blind when danger arrived. Was Da justified in his silence, or did protection become its own form of confinement?

Q7 **The Test of Refusal:** In Chapter 14, an encounter hinges on walking away the moment a dragon signals reluctance. In a culture that celebrates taking what one wants, why is respecting a boundary presented as the ultimate test of courage?

Q8 **The Order's Perspective:** Warden Caelen justifies his actions as the preservation of peace against chaotic beasts. Do you view the Wardens as tyrannical villains, or as products of a bureaucratic fear that lost its conscience?

Q9 **The Point of No Return:** When Wren chooses to stand between Zane and the Wardens at the river crossing, she closes the door on her old life forever. At what moment do you think her quiet obedience transformed into active conviction?

Q10 **The Gathering Storm:** Because all five books in the series are written, every clue in *The Crooked Flame* was laid with the finale in mind. What questions do you most want answered as the story moves to the coast in Book 2, *The Signal Fire*?

Hearth & Oven Book Club Menu	Atmosphere & Pairing Ideas
• **Da's Sourdough Morning Rolls:** Serve warm with whipped salted butter and raw honey (recipe in the Sanctuary Field Guide). • **Sanctuary Cinnamon Oat Cakes:** Dense, spiced oat cakes baked on a stone pan. • **Hearth Cider:** Spiced warm apple cider with a cinnamon stick and orange peel.	• **Soundtrack:** Low acoustic cello, fingerpicked lute, or ambient hearth crackling. • **The Asking Icebreaker:** Ask each member: *"If you discovered your wrist mark tomorrow, would you hide it to keep your daily life, or run toward the mountains?"*

Continue The Journey in Book 2: The Signal Fire
Wren, Zane, and the sanctuary survivors flee east to the fog-shrouded fishing village of Landing. Get the free companion Field Guide and bakery recipes at **thelastriders.com/bonus**. Pre-order Book 2 or order paperbacks for your group at **thelastriders.com**.