

## The *To Sail A Darkling Sea* Reader's Group Discussion Guide

by Rachel Mintel

Welcome to the Reader's Group Guide for John Ringo's second installment in the Black Tide Rising series, *To Sail A Darkling Sea*. At the beginning of this novel, the Smiths and Wolf Squadron have saved around 400 survivors, and continue to be a volunteer search and rescue organization.

1. Steve was promoted to captain in the Navy, and Sophia was promoted to acting ensign third class. Is this the right decision for the current CNO to make? While this gives Steve legal authority in his role of commodore of Wolf Squadron, it also restricts him. Are the tradeoffs worth it, or would Wolf Squadron have been better off if Steve wasn't granted captancy?
2. Faith and the Marines insist on holding a Marine Corps Ball. Is this a tactical decision to keep morale up? Is it worth it? Why do you think the rest of the officers agreed on holding it?
3. Faith, now a lieutenant in the Marines, is helping to head up a crew to clear parts of the land. It's a tough adjustment for Faith to be leading rather than to be directly in the fray. Do you think she serves her role better as a leader or a clearance specialist?
4. The clearance of the cruise ship *Voyage Under Stars* is continually brought up, especially by Faith. While clearing zombies doesn't bother her, finding the uninfected dead families in the rooms haunts her. Why do you think this is the hardest for her to handle? Do you think this is why Steve and the other officers put her in a leadership position?
5. In his novels, Ringo focuses on the details and logistics of the operations. Do you like the realism this provides? Is it like the lists in Homeric poetry?
6. After Faith found the shipping container full of dresses and also assaulted a Hollywood executive, Steve had to dress her down rather harshly—not as father and daughter, but a superior officer dressing down a subordinate. Was this overly harsh or completely necessary? Who do you agree with?
7. Before crossing the Atlantic, Steve wants more boats so they have a larger clearing footprint. Is this smart, or will it make it harder to organize everything? Isham manages all paperwork and organizational tasks as the chief of staff; is all the paperwork necessary? What are the merits of paperwork in this situation?
8. The opening quote of chapter 21 says that successful commanders that are facing an enemy in a position that was strong materially or naturally never attack directly. What are the merits of a direct attack versus an indirect attack?

9. The sergeant major is hell-bent on bringing some discipline to Sophia's crew. Is this necessary? What were some possible outcomes if the sergeant major didn't come along, as glimpsed in the clearance mission in chapter 21? As the sergeant major tells Sophia, she is technically responsible for Anarchy's death, as his commanding officer. Do you agree?
10. Through Thomas Walker, readers are able to get an inside glimpse into the processing system Wolf Squadron uses. Does it make sense? Are there any additions you would make if you were in charge of it?
11. If Wolf Squadron rescued you, what job would you want to work in? Is it a good idea to have all new workers clean compartments before they can move up in the ranks?
12. At the end of *To Sail A Darkling Sea*, many of the military officers (including Sophia and Faith) receive promotions, awards, and badges before Wolf Squadron attempts to cross the Atlantic. According to Steve, this is to increase morale among the members. Why do intangible promotions, awards, and badges motivate so well?