

The *Strands Of Sorrow* Reader's Group Discussion Guide

by Rachel Mintel

Welcome to the Reader's Group Guide for John Ringo's fourth and final installment in the Black Tide Rising series, *Strands of Sorrow*. Wolf Squadron has taken Guantanamo and found the supplies necessary to make the vaccine. With the helicopters in play, Steve is officially ready to start clearing the land. Can Wolf Squadron save human civilization, or will it vanish from the earth?

1. Sophia is now a helo pilot, in high demand considering that helos are the lynchpin of Steve's plan to retake the land. Do you think it's okay for a 16 year-old to be a helo pilot? Is she too young, and do you think Steve's decision is influenced by the fact that she's his daughter?
2. The first mission of the novel is to get Blount Island up and going as a land base. If you were there, what would your first priority be? What supplies would you be looking for, and do you generally agree with Steve's strategy?
3. The three welcome videos for Wolf Squadron, which include Welcome to Wolf Squadron, the Cruise Liner Boarding video, and the London Research Institute video—are propaganda. Can propaganda have a useful purpose, or is it inherently negative? Do you think this propaganda specifically is useful for keeping survivors in line and giving them something to believe in?
4. Colonel Hamilton greets Lieutenant Simpson with, "Welcome to Wolf Squadron. Where better is always the enemy of good. So your good, Lieutenant, had better be very good indeed." What do you think this means?
5. One of the submarine crewmen recalls the clearing of the *Voyage Under Stars* and the state of the crew as the world fell apart, and the crewman says, "You can hear the hope start." Why is this important? Why is crew morale so important? Was the *Voyage Under Stars* a turning point in the series and in Wolf Squadron?
6. One of Faith and Sophia's repeated obstacles in their military career is the problem other enlisted and NCOs have with their age and qualifications. Do you understand their viewpoint? In this situation, do you agree with the military's call to have Faith and Sophia as officers?
7. Sanderson says one of the mottos for spec-ops is "we do a lot of things nobody should have to do because they're things that have to be done." Do you agree with this? Are there situations in our current world that could fit under this current motto?

8. When Faith had to count the warheads and they discovered ten missing, what first came to mind on where they would be? Were your suspicions proven correct?
9. Do you think Commodore Montana is right to now worry about the missing nukes in the post-Plague world? What kind of reaction would it merit in the pre-Plague world?
10. When Faith leaves the Marine Corps thanks to Downing, what do you think she's going to do? Do you understand the anger from the rest of the officers, including General Brice and Commodore Montana? How would you react in that situation, if you were in Faith's position? Do you think the punishment Downing is receiving is fair?
11. Faith and the chain of command decided to paint the tank and amtracks non-regulation as a test to gauge how former military would handle the post-Plague reality. Do you think this is a good litmus test? What other tests could be used to gauge the same thing?
12. Steve's plan to clear the United States makes him "the biggest mass murderer in history," according to himself. He plans to use gamma radiation to kill off massive amounts of infected. What moral implications could this have? Do you agree with his methods? What are the larger implications of his decision?
13. The decision to clear D.C. is primarily a symbolic decision. What will this mean for survivors? Do the pros outweigh the cons in this decision?
14. At the end of *Strands of Sorrow*, the U.S. military has just begun true clearing operations and really reinstating the government. What are the logical next steps for POTUS and the rest of the military?