

The *Under A Graveyard Sky* Reader's Group Discussion Guide

by Rachel Mintel

Welcome to the Reader's Group Guide for John Ringo's first installment in the Black Tide Rising series, *Under A Graveyard Sky*. The Black Tide Rising series, *Under A Graveyard Sky*, *To Sail A Darkling Sea*, *Islands of Rage and Hope*, and *Strands of Sorrow*, takes place during a man-made worldwide collapse caused by bioterrorism. The Smith family is prepared. They take to the Atlantic to avoid the chaos and discover other refugees, banding together to keep humanity alive.

1. *Under A Graveyard Sky* begins with John Smith receiving a coded text from his brother Tom. In your family, do you have "code words" that you use with each other? Do you have contingency plans that you'd use in an emergency?
2. All the Smith family members have unique talents that make them well equipped for the zombie apocalypse. What skills are the most useful in that kind of scenario, and what skills do you have that you could use in an emergency?
3. Tim Shull, the amateur synthetic biologist who discovered dual expression in the novel, is shocked and angered by the way his discovery is used to create the H7 virus. Do you think advancements in synthetic biology ("genetic engineering") will do more harm than good in the world? Do you think the government should regulate something like that, and if so, how?
4. Tom and his security team have to extract the virus from infected primates in order to create the vaccine, and the only infected primates are humans—and one infected human spine and brain can create eight vaccines. Is the sacrifice of countless infected human lives worth the outcome? Even though the humans are "zombies," they're still alive, so do you think it counts as murder?
5. When Faith delivers mail in the bank building, she overhears all of the different rumors on why the H7 virus exists and who is behind it—even including ridiculous theories that it's a ploy by the DOD, the Republicans, the Democrats, or even Greenpeace. Is Ringo critiquing the "blame game" that tends to appear whenever there's a wide-scale emergency, causing people to create rumors and general panic? What are some ways the general public can combat this?
6. Steve says a prayer during a burial at sea, and tells Faith that it "sort of shows that we're still civilized or something." Is it important to try to and maintain civilization and order during an emergency, or does it only matter to do what it takes to survive?
7. Steve talks with Stacey about how they need to do more than survive, they need to win, and he specifically says, "I will not bow." That kind of courage is rare but

important. Are there any circumstances where you, or someone you know has demonstrated that kind of courage? What were they?

8. Steve, Sophia, and other members of the crew set up the beginnings of a working organizational government after rescuing Mike. Why do you think Steve chose this point to gather everyone and decide that some sort of constitution needed to be in place? In his shoes, would you do the same? What kind of rules and laws would you establish?
9. When Steve finds two recently widowed survivors on a boat, Gilbert and Stella, Gilbert becomes defensive when Steve mentions that Stella is pregnant, and Steve says “what happens in the compartment stays in the compartment . . . Humans adjust to the incredible. That’s what survivors do.” In these terms, what actions are excusable in these kinds of situations? What kind of actions aren’t excusable? How are the lines drawn between right and wrong in these kinds of situations?
10. While clearing the cruise ship, Faith begins using Trixie the teddy bear as a way to compartmentalize the horrors she’s being exposed to. What kind of coping mechanisms have you seen in people to handle difficult situations?
11. By the end of *Under A Graveyard Sky*, the Wolf Squadron has rescued 400 people in total. Do you think they’re making the right decision to work with the U.S. military? What are some potential negatives that could accompany the red tape involved with the military?
12. *Under A Graveyard Sky* tends to have the running theme of the difference between surviving and living. What kind of lessons can be taken from this, even outside of a zombie apocalypse scenario?