



## To Sail a Darkling Sea

*John Ringo*

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BOOK II IN THE BLACK TIDE RISING SERIES FROM THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BEST-SELLING AUTHOR. Sequel to *Under a Graveyard Sky*. A family of survivors fights back against a zombie plague that has brought down civilization.

### A World Cloaked in Darkness

With human civilization annihilated by a biological zombie plague, a rag-tag fleet of yachts and freighters known as Wolf Squadron scours the Atlantic, searching for survivors. Within every abandoned liner and carrier lurks a potential horde, safety can *never* be taken for granted, and death and turning into one of the enemy is only a moment away.

### The Candle Flickers

Yet every ship and town holds the flickering hope of survivors. One and two from lifeboats, a dozen from a fishing village, a few hundred wrenched by fury and fire from a ship that once housed thousands...

### Light a Flame

Now Wolf Squadron must take on another massive challenge: clear the assault carrier *USS Iwo Jima* of infected before the trapped Marines and sailors succumb to starvation. If Wolf Squadron can accomplish that task, an even tougher trial waits: an apocalyptic battle to win a new dawn for humanity. The war for civilization begins as the boats of the Wolf Squadron become a beacon of hope on a Darkling Sea.

### To Sail a Darkling Sea Details

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Author : John Ringo

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## From Reader Review To Sail a Darkling Sea for online ebook

### Keith Lord says

This is a good not great book. With all the zombie books and tv shows out there this series tries to be unique in that it mostly takes place on the ocean instead of land. Ringo's books are quick fun reads that keep the stories moving. So this is an enjoyable easy read.

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### Kelly says

Hard to rate, numerically. A bunch of stuff I loved, a bunch of stuff I really didn't like.

#### Full Review:

In 'To Sail a Darkling Sea', the sequel to 'Under a Graveyard Sky', the Smith family continues doing what they do best: killing the infected and reclaiming the world, piece by bloody, zombie-ridden piece. As they recover ships and rescue survivors of the plague, Wolf Squadron becomes something more than a rag tag fleet of vessels. It becomes a machine (not well-oiled) representing the blood, sweat and tears required to raise a civilisation from the ground up. Or, in this case, from the ocean.

Stripped back, this book is about logistics and in that respect, it's a fantastic read. The aftermath of any apocalypse is likely to be messy. Zombie apocalypses in particular. Dead or undead, zombies have atrocious manners and little respect for personal hygiene. Any space left in their care is soon going to stink. They don't mind, but the survivors do...and not just because of the smell. Unsightly messes aside, rotting bodies will breed new and wonderful diseases. It would be a shame to survive one apocalypse only to succumb to the next super bug.

Steven John "Wolf" Smith already ran a tight ship (nautical cliches are a must for this one). He and his family – wife Stacey and daughters Faith and Sophia – began clearing ships and rescuing people just two weeks after disaster struck. But as the contingent grows, so does the need for order, and this is where 'To Sail a Darkling Sea' excels. The details. John Ringo covers everything from likely conditions for survival, for both the infected and the uninfected, patterns of behaviour, transition to the world after, and finding a job and a purpose within in the fleet. He examines politics and government, which are two entirely different things, economy and order, how to mesh civilian and military discipline, and how to raise children in a world that is not their own.

There is also the matter of the disease that caused the problems in the first place. There are plans for a cure, but plans take plans and those plans take plans. The world isn't going to save itself and organising more than four people can be like herding cats. Hence the introduction of military discipline.

I reveled in these details, particularly the careful instruction of guns and ammo with a meticulous breakdown of damage per weight – how many zombies they can kill with the ammo they are carrying. In a video game, the value of a weapon (and ammo) is generally determined by a DPS (damage per second) ratio as compared to what you are killing. It's the same principle, and the discussion of ammunition types is also fascinating. I'm a writer (and some time housewife). I don't own a gun. But I've been killing stuff for thirty odd years on my computer. I know the differences between 5.56mm and 12 gauge and in the face of a zombie apocalypse,

I'd be kissing a box of 12 gauge.

The structure of Wolf Squadron is fascinating. A place must be found for everyone they rescue. A fighting force needs support staff; cooks, cleaners, administrators and caregivers. The list is endless. Someone has to print up ration chits. Someone has to design them. They need mechanics and engineers. Mariners and pilots. I found it amusing that they had a surplus of solicitors.

The scale of the disaster is represented well, as are the problems of the reemergent civilisation. The military action is superlative. The zombie killing and clearing scenes are gripping. So, what's the problem with this book? The women. In particular, Faith and Sophia, 'Shewolf' and 'Seawolf'. The daughters of Steven Smith. They're thirteen and fifteen, respectively, and they are BADASS.

I had a lot of difficulty suspending disbelief here. I tried. I tried really hard. I more of a problem with Faith. As a caricature, she's kind of funny, but the author's love for her comes across as sycophantic at times. It made me uneasy. Faith is an idea, not a person. She does make for an entertaining read; I had images of 'Lollipop Chainsaw' in my head; young girls swearing and swinging weapons around, barely bothered by the gore splashing back at them. There is a playlist for every action and Faith could fire and reload in time to the music, whilst dancing. Neither Faith nor Sophia get seriously injured, however. Even after being 'dogpiled' by zombies. They handle the death of comrades and the aftermath of the apocalypse with grit and determination. They gain the respect of every man, even those more than four times their age. They are inducted as marines, without training and given rank, command and medals.

That their father let them carry on the way they did bothered me. He did respond to some of their antics with a combined father/commander talk, but then he turned around to smack down anyone who crossed his daughters' paths. That their mother apparently had no say bothered me more. Stacey Smith is conspicuously absent from this book. I understand she will get a chapter of her own in the print version. I doubt she will be upbraiding her daughters for their unruly behaviour, from flirting with men twice their age, swanning around in bikinis, drinking at thirteen and swearing like the proverbial sailors.

It's the end of the world and the old rules don't apply, obviously. But with Steve Smith paying so much attention to the other aspects of rebuilding a civilisation, I would think he'd be more protective of his children. Of their reputation and well-being, at least. If not their psyche.

In general, women are not flattered by this novel. I'm not a rampant feminist and I did appreciate the author's attempt, at times, to blur the line between the sexes, to insist women could be as BADASS as men. But did they have to wear bikinis while doing so? Did they have to enjoy having sex with four different men whilst being trapped in compartments for six months awaiting rescue? I think a lot of men would find these passages unflattering as well, as they indicate a guy can't keep it in his pants (or in hand) for more than a couple of weeks.

Then there is the container of Paris-original dresses that Faith nearly sacrifices her unit for, because she needs something to wear to the Marine Corps ball. She'll never get to prom, poor thing, because, you know, zombie apocalypse.

Stepping back, I can say 'this is a story' and leave it at that. It's the author's interpretation of events. His world, his rules. As a writer, I can appreciate that. But as a reader, I find it hard to enjoy a book that is constantly poking my more delicate sensibilities. Not sure, yet, if I am likely to read forward. There is a plan in place to reclaim the world and kick start our civilisation. I would like to see what happens next and I can hope John Ringo has a plan to mature the girls. But will I like it? Guess I'll have to wait and see.

Written for SFCrowsnest.

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### **Kevin Baker says**

*Darkling Sea* is, obviously, a transition book in a trilogy or longer series. It starts off where *Under a Graveyard Sky* leaves off, and ends just before another major plot opens. Surprise!

Because it's a middle book, no remarkable climax occurs in it. This isn't a bad thing, but it's the reason I gave it three stars and not four or five. I enjoyed it. It was a quick read, and, honestly, thinking about what to do during a Zombie Apocalypse is a mental exercise I find interesting. (Who knew that if you're dying of dehydration, it's better to give yourself a urine enema than trying to drink it?)

The new characters were fun, but one thing I was bothered by - we see Steve Smith, Faith and Sophia, but what the hell happened to Stacey? She's a non-entity in this book.

John Ringo addresses this in a Facebook post. Apparently she'll get a chapter of her own in the dead-tree edition.

The next book in the series comes out in E-ARC early next year.

Faster, John Ringo! Take my money!!

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### **Bridgette says**

I managed to make it past the page where a female sailor was referred to as a "split" but I gave up when it became clear that the only women worth anything in this book were teenagers who ignored men or women who "put out" to "relieve tension" for the men and then proceeded to get knocked up. Because of course what women will do with the world ending is spread their legs and birth more children into the horrors of the zombie apocalypse. Give me a freakin' break!?!?

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### **Mike Apgar says**

Meh. More of the same clichés and can I say I really find the Smith girls not at all believable. Lots of references to, I'm assuming, some online forum or community with the comments like ".45 because there is no .46" and 9mm vs .45 and a few (well, several) others. I mean I like guns and I like zombies but it gets old.

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### **Carolyn F. says**

#### **Audiobook**

Oh my gosh, this book just starts off offensive. There are a group of survivors in a room (by the way, most of the women being called a "split", not female or women - it's "here comes a split to save us", "the other room had one split"). And the single woman is told she better make rules about sex because it's happening whether she likes it or not. So if this were a room of guys, would the most feminine male just learn to love taking it up his "split"? I liked this series until this book. I don't know how much more I can take.

This beginning really upset me. Why did this book have to turn so misogynistic? The rest of the book wasn't as bad but there were moments that made me say out loud "Give me a break!". A woman is so excited to use a gun she has or pretends to have an orgasm. The many, many, many pregnant women who now appear to be solely responsible for the babies that were practically forced upon them - where are the guys? Are they going to be there for them when these babies are born? How are so many women going to work and raise their children?

I'm done with this series. I think we're seeing in this book how much the author left out of his own personality and preferences in his previous books and how much of his true feelings and beliefs are represented in this book. It seems that it could only get worse since this progression into classic and amplified chauvinism.

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### **Colin says**

I was looking forward to this book because I had enjoyed the first one last year. Unfortunately I read about an hour of this one and I am throwing it away in disgust. It's another misogynistic rant spewing a warped view of women as sex objects. I kind of like Ringo's writing when he sticks to purely military subjects. I don't like his political rants but I can stomach them to get to good action scenes. I just can't stand him though when he starts spewing his corrupted view of women and sex. It really turns my stomach. It's actually disturbing. If you find yourself agreeing with what I say here, then I'd say give Larry Correia a try. He writes awesome action scenes, is much more fun than Ringo, and he treats his female characters like they are people. I'd love to sit and have a beer with Larry. If I met Ringo in a bar, I'd probably punch him in the face.

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### **Bob Milne says**

If you enjoyed Under a Graveyard Sky, the first in the Black Tide Rising series, or are a fan of John Ringo's unique brand of military-driven science fiction, then odds are pretty good you're going to enjoy To Sail a Darkling Sea.

The zombies take something of a back seat in this second volume, which is probably a good thing, since zombies can wear a bit thin after a while. Instead, the focus is turned to the survivors, with some really interesting exploration of the conflicts that arise when civilians and military personnel are forced into close quarters, especially in a world where power and authority is very much in question.

I was pleased to see that the book at least addressed, even if it didn't outright resolve, some of my concerns from the first book. The stress and weight placed upon 13 year-old Faith's shoulders is touched upon, avoiding the breakdown I thought was imminent, and resolving it instead with a transition to military discipline. She is largely the star of this second volume, which is no less implausible than it was on the first book, but she's given room to grow and to earn the reader's respect. She's simultaneously set up as a teenage

sex symbol, and defended against characters who see her that way. What ultimately made that contrast work for me was the emphasis on the nightmares she experiences on the Alpha, with all the women who'd been raped and murdered trying to warn her of something, and how the spectre of those rapes continues to haunt her actions.

As for the promise of multinational intrigue, it's still just that - a promise - but we do learn a bit more about the three governments who still retain a measure of power. More interestingly, we get to explore the potential for a cure, and the power that brings with it in a world without borders. It's a valuable bargaining chip, and one that nations would quite literally go to war over. At the same time, Ringo makes us think long and hard about the logistics of post-apocalyptic survival - how you keep the equipment of war running, how you keep survivors fed, and how you manage all the little things like cleaning, cooking, laundry, and the rest.

Overall, this was a slower book than the first, and one I found got a bit repetitive by the end. It lacked some of the storytelling power of the first book, and got a little too involved in the military-driven elements for my tastes, but I recognize that's Ringo's niche within the genre, so I can hardly complain. It's still a well-written story, with some good, snappy dialogue, and a real flair for imbuing characters with distinct personalities. I liked the way Ringo brought the military and civilian worlds together, and thought the whole conflict between Faith, the Hollywood big shot who accosts her, and the Captain who would rather suck up to a celebrity than defend one of his soldiers, was exceptionally well played out.

Like the first volume, *To Sail a Darkling Sea* just stops, without the benefit of a climax to provide a sense of even temporary conclusion. There's a small resolution in the epilogue, but it's almost after-the-fact. The literary critic in me cringes at that betrayal of the traditional story arc, but the realist in me appreciates that Ringo didn't set up an arbitrary 'big' ending, just for the sake of ending on a bang.

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*Originally reviewed at [Beauty in Ruins](#)*

## **Koeur says**

<http://koeur.wordpress.com/2013/12/27...>

Review: Not a fan of the cover art. I don't think that design is going to attract many customers. Two argumentative quasi military types sends a negative message. Looks like two juveniles playing dress up.

I am going to start with some of the technical problems that I see in this book, some of it subjective in nature but perhaps relevant. The author pretty much begins the novel with firearm calibers and their effective stopping power on zombies. Faith (a 13 year old super zombie killer-yeah I know), iterates that the .556 is a Barbie gun and that shotguns and the .45 caliber are what stops a zombie. She goes on to give a ratio of bullets used to weight carried etc. I am a firm believer in ability to effectively and precisely put rounds downrange in a dynamic and not static, effort. Sydney Vail, a trauma surgeon wrote a great article where he stipulates that "stopping power" is really a marketing tool (and always has been) and that the information currently pedaled around is based on hype as well as flawed standardized testing. Stopping power, as defined by me and others is "a calibers stopping power is only effective when it hits a vital structure". This implies accuracy and precision with shot placement. I think the authors reasoning is flawed in that it takes 5 rounds of .556 to every one round of .45 to stop an entity. Faith also points out that the .556 is no good in CQB (close quarters combat) and therefore is useless in boarding ships versus the .45 handgun and the shotgun. I

have shot many 3 gun matches that require engaging multiple targets, while running, at close range (50 yds. or less). I use a CQB site rail that is affixed to the side of scope, and it is quite accurate and effective. Faith also describes how the 1911 is an antiquated pos while the HK tactical .45 is far superior due to its double stacking of rounds. While I agree with SF selection of this weapon due to it's durability, I think the Glock is a better choice for a lot of reasons I won't get into here. Back to the 1911 and it being the "titanic" versus the "more modern HK". In all my years competing at the highest level of practical shooting, have I seen anyone using an H&K USP .45 to compete with. There is a reason for this. They suck. Jamming is the least of this guns foibles. It is highly inaccurate once you get past 7 yards, it has a short site radius, crappy sites, bad balance, trigger pull is around 12 lbs. on double action and about 5 lbs. single action. I have shot both, and since I subscribe to ability and that effect on accuracy, I would say that the 1911 single stack is a very accurate and repeatable weapon. Since I translate accuracy into stopping power, this "Titanic" would be the better choice in any situation except perhaps shooting sharks underwater. My last firearm to focus on is Faith's use of the Saiga Shotgun. While the Saiga is a pretty cool idea (a shotgun based on the AK platform) it requires an incredible amount of work to get the gas opsys functioning properly. If you know an expert gunsmith that specifically works on Saigas' to get them to run (like Jim at Firebird Precision and maybe a couple of others in the USA), then you may well trash it or get your face eaten by zombies. Saigas have horrible build quality and the matches I have seen them NOT run are due to major malfunctions that take longer than 10 seconds to rectify. Gunsmiths will go through quite a few to get one running and at that point the client will have spent close to \$2k on modding. AND IT STILL WILL FAIL! In any situation the most reliable shotgun with a long tube is the pump. My choice would be the FNH Mark 1 Police.

I don't really want to get into how a 13 year old is a master zombie killer whom teaches marines CQB tactics and her ability to kill zombies with timed firearm bursts to her music of choice. Not sure how a marine (Janus) can tell that she is timing her bursts to music being that live fire is REALLY LOUD. She does all this while having a perfect soprano voice. Of course she does. Despite the huge suspension of disbelief about Faith and the author's take on firearms, I thought that the character development was superb. While the story-line tended to jump around from page to page, the premise of finding boats with survivors evoked the Darwin Elevator's intent. There is something magnetic about uncovering the unknown especially when there is booty to be had. While Faith is not believable as a character I found Sophia and Gunny engaging in all aspects.

There is some weird instances where Ms. Gowen, the only female in a group of trapped Marines, is pretty much required to be passed around in order to maintain discipline in a tense situation, because well, Marines need to F\*\*\*K or go crazy, right? She eventually comes around to liking threesomes, because there is not much else to do other than f\*\*\*K, and oh by the way, she's pregnant. Oh well. Jeez. Not sure if I am looking forward to the next in this series or just like watching a slo-motion train wreck. The fascination is there but the inner self-loathing that accompanies it might be stronger deterrent.

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### **Shannon Luchies says**

As several people have commented, this REALLY feels like a 'in between book.' Not a lot for plot progression, though stuff happens. This is the book where the roughly thrown together fleet of the first book actually gets organized and starts functioning kinda militarily. We also have the rescue of some actual military staff, which also starts pulling things together.

This book has several of the problems of the first novel:

I still suffer serious 'Suspension of disbelief' issues around EVERY planetary military AND government all failing every bio-terror training and falling to the virus. I'm almost hoping we will see a clever bit later in the series explaining there was a inside man, or something to explain this.

There continues to be a lack of likable characters. I'm sorry, but if EVERYONE in the series are various levels of dick it is very hard to give much of a damn about them. So far, I'm liking Faith, Sophia and the new kid, Olga. Other than that, not much.

Faith's possible mental issues are also not being dealt with, which concerns me. She's the primary weapons user and (spoiler!) a MARINE and she's maybe developing a split personality. And this doesn't WORRY anyone? Especially her mother and father? Oh come ON....

AND there's a couple of things I notice exclusive to this book that bugged me:

There are apparently NO gay or lesbian survivors of the zombies. At all. We had ONE gay couple in the first book, whom we can assume died. And that's it? Mind you, knowing Ringo's politics I'm not surprised exactly, but it's a bit depressing.

This book also hammers home repeatedly WOMEN ARE FOR MAKIN' BABIES! Over and over women do NOT do the major jobs, with rare exceptions, and are preggers. Now, I know it makes sense that there would be a uptick in pregnancies after a disaster, but Ringo repeats it over and over....

Ringo also continues his dislike of people who disagree with Republican-style thought. A former high ranking lawyer is not taking up her official rank because she would feel ethically obligated to object to steps being taken to KILL ZOMBIES. She appears to be a stand in for fluffy headed liberals, or something.

Anyway, not a 'go buy this book' recommend. Might be decent to grab from the library.

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### **Mr. Matt says**

I'm a sucker for a good zombie apocalypse story, but all too often they just really suck. With this book, the genre achieved a new level of general suckery. I finished the book as an exercise in morbid curiosity. It really couldn't be that bad, could it? Nope. It was that bad. It was really, really awful.

First, there is the author's portrayal of women. To be clear, I like women - a lot. Women make life more interesting and softer - and women just look really good. I also recognize that in literature we are not dealing with real people (generally speaking) we're dealing in archetypes - in fantasy. So, yeah, I don't have a problem with the women in my stories being a little unrealistic. That's pretty much how the men are treated too, I think, maybe. Ringo takes this to a whole new level of just complete insanity. Every woman in the book is basically a smoking hot sexpot. A mild case in point, Olga the rescued Ukrainian super model (yes, super model): "How's this look?" Olga said. She was wearing a U.S. Navy tank top and LBE with a bikini bottom and carrying her M4." And it just goes on and on like this! The women all are stacked and highly flirtatious - basically every 13 year old boy's fantasy. They are basically dudes with tits.

The misogyny reached a crescendo with Seaman Tonya Gowen. Gowen and some Marines are trapped in a

compartment with food & limited water while zombies clawed at the doorway. So after a couple of weeks of being trapped the Sergeant tells her that he can't hold the men back forever. To keep herself safe she had best, well, spread her favors around. Are you fucking kidding me?

Next is the ridiculous portrayal of Wolf's teenage daughters. At only 13 and 15 (or something like that) both are mature beyond their years and at several points male characters make comments like "Gee, the marriage age in Alabama is 14. When we liberate Alabama ..." Again, are you fucking kidding me? I felt the creepy male gaze when I was reading this crap. Beyond the creepy vein of pedophilia, the two teen girls are placed in completely insane positions. The youngest becomes a zombie killing machine, leading US Marines to clear towns and boats of the infected. There are literally moments where she is swarmed by infected and able to fight her way clear. Really? A 130 or so lb. 13 year old is able to fight her way out of a dog pile of crazed infected - without help?

Finally, we have the story itself. It was awful. I always wondered how bad zombie apocalypse literature could get. Now I know. The author managed to squeeze every bit of drama out of an endless tide of infected. Once the Wolf family got rolling there was zero drama. They marched methodically from success to success - liberating boat after boat and then town after town. They had no set backs. No one got killed (except one marginal character). And once the marines were rescued the story became more about troop logistics than actual zombie killing. Ringo basically made the Zombie Apocalypse boring. That's kind of a deal breaker.

One star out of five. I recommend reading this book only if you are truly interested in level setting against a truly terrible book to give you perspective on just how good a solid three star book is.

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### **Donald says**

I've read a lot of Mr Ringo's books, and generally I enjoy his work. This one, however, I just could not tolerate at all.

From reading other books by this author I already expected the walls of military jargon & gun porn as a given. This book seemed to amp up those traits to 11 though, and mixed with the stream of consciousness feeling as characters & locations shift about from paragraph to paragraph the book was already starting as a difficult read.

The nail in the coffin though, for me, was the purile treatment of the female characters. We have the fetishized 13 year old Amazon Goddess warrior girl who has the sensibilities of a much older woman while retaining a Warner Brothers cartoon zaniness. Her 15 year old sister obviously running around in her panties or sunbathing on the deck of a boat, the *No Tan Lines* huhr hurh geddit?? while submariners ogle her through their periscopes. Then there was the most egregious characterization, Seaman Tonya Gowen.

You see, Ms Gowen and 5 Marines were trapped in a compartment with food & limited water while zombies clawed at the doorway. So after a couple of weeks the Staff Sergeant lets her know that with one woman and 5 men, well he can't hold the men back forever because hey, guy's gotta f\*\*\* right? If she's going to PRANCE AROUND, as one does when you haven't bathed in two weeks at the end of civilization, he can't protect her forever.

Initially outraged at the idea that she's supposed to volunteer to be passed around, well don't worry it's not in any way rape because Ms Gowen discovers she LOVES group sex! Isn't that great? The zombie apocalypse

and rapists helped her find her inner whore.

This is about where I deleted the ebook with no regrets. I didn't hate the book because of it's juvenile caricatures of women, I didn't hate it for it's purile sensibilities & poor structure. I hated it because it promotes the notion that our armed servicemen are just moments away from raping anything that moves because they can't control themselves. The novel betrays any sense of honor, decency or discipline in the military for a Boys Will Be Boys mysandrist apologia.

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### **Grant says**

The zombie apocalypse continues as Wolf Squadron starts to get its act together and begins preparations to retake the mainlands . . . someday.

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### **Debrac2014 says**

Good story and characters! Now on to Gitmo!

Re-read! Just as good the second time!

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### **PirateSteve says**

Book number 2 in this series engages what a series book 2 need be doing.

Building on the story from book 1, the Smith family continues it's at sea rescue operations thus their forces grow as more and more survivors are found.

Their first attempts are made at clearing zombie infested towns, i.e. small Caribbean islands.

New, fun characters are added. New whole crews are put together as their flotilla increases in size.

The post zombie apocalypse world in it's early stages of development.

### **Book 1 Under a Graveyard Sky**

So when I came across this zombie apocalypse story that was set on the seas, I thought maybe I could give it a go.

Turned out to be good choice for me... I enjoyed it.

The story begins with an Aussie family(the Smiths, mom, dad, 2 teen daughters) living in the U.S. that are preppers.

Prepped for nuclear war or military invasion the Smiths did better than most when the zombie virus strikes. They fight their way through the beginning of the apocalypse long enough to get the family inoculated but quickly decide the zombie numbers are just to high on land.

So off we go on a seafaring zombie battling adventure.

Now I've not read any other zombie books to compare this with but I have seen some movies/tv.

For me this story brings the speed action of World War Z, the kinship of The Walking Dead and the sarcastic humor of Zombieland.

