

# SACRED GROUND

CHRIS TOWNDROW

VALERICAIN PRESS



Copyright © 2012 by Chris Towndrow

Valericain Press  
Richmond, London, UK  
[www.valericainpress.co.uk](http://www.valericainpress.co.uk)

Sacred Ground– 2024 edition.

Amazon Paperback ISBN : 978-1-7293305-4-8  
eBook ISBN : 978-1-9168916-7-8  
Paperback ISBN : 978-1-9168916-6-1

Publisher's Note: This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are a product of the author's imagination. Locales and public names are sometimes used for atmospheric purposes. Any resemblance to actual people, living or dead, or to businesses, companies, events, institutions, or locales is completely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed or transmitted in any form or by any means, without prior written permission. No generative artificial intelligence (AI) was used in the writing of this work. The author expressly prohibits any entity from using this publication for purposes of training AI technologies to generate text, including without limitation technologies that are capable of generating works in the same style or genre as this publication. The author reserves all rights to license uses of this work for generative AI training and development of machine learning language models.

# End Of A Life

‘I could get my sidearm and end it all now. It’s so close. The locker’s just behind me.’

Rakkell turned his head indolently until his gaze fell upon the three grey floor-standing cabinets. The rightmost door glared at him.

‘But you can see it. That’s the problem.’

He faced forwards again.

‘You can see it. I could... I could say goodbye and not let you see it. I could say goodbye and then do it.’

The silent face eyed him unchangingly.

‘If I could say goodbye. You’re days and days away, and I can’t say goodbye. I...’

His mind dried up.

Lazy eyes took in the dimly lit and expansive cabin. The two exquisite images on the beige wall, their haunting beauty enhanced by the subdued atmosphere. “Sunrise Through Mist Over Keljan City” took on a menacing air; the tower tips of the urban jungle were as needles sunk treacherously in a creamy deep-pile carpet. “Tryn From Tryn Station” was a smothering sphere, the planet’s intangible gaseous bulk reaching ever outwards to suppress the sun’s rays which foolishly sought to cascade past its askance northern polar rim.

The scenes were lessons in majesty, the photographs the epitome of perfection, the frames nothing more and nothing less than symbiotic partners for their contents and the environs.

Trappings of a Captaincy, individuality for an anonymous room.

The bed was cold and empty, the stark whiteness of the sheets not wanting to offer refuge from the truth. The bed was simple, large and perfectly sprung. There were mornings (or afternoons or evenings, depending on the shift pattern)

when it acted like a gravity well, holding him fast, cocooned, comfortable. Duty was a necessary wrench away from almost foetal contentment and a mind that wandered across open plains and not down well-trodden roads and alleyways.

Through the half-open closet door, a poorly hangered Fleet tunic was a dark form with a glinting eye, the lapel insignia catching the light from the recessed ceiling emitter and arrowing it across to the far wall like a fine sepia laser.

His gaze followed the ray's path to where it impinged on the thick square window pane, then continued beyond, unchallenged, into infinity.

He stood unsteadily and went to the aperture, naked feet feeling the cool mottled carpet.

He peered into endlessness.

*Only light can survive out there.*

Yet it had been home, more or less, for what seemed like forever. Not in a bad way. In a good way, he supposed.

*The only way.*

*No more, apparently.*

Those who'd never seen deep space conjured inadequate images of emptiness. First-timers had their notions of blackness evaporated; their concept of cold, bleak, nothing shattered. Yes, interplanetary space was alien, holo-images were amazing, a cold night on a deserted hilltop seemed quiet.

They were an inferior substitute. Laughable.

Sometimes he'd go to the Observation Deck and banish all light from the room, trying to make its warm safety an extension of the inhospitable universe without, trying to feel lost.

It, too, was laughable. More than once, he'd laughed at it. Actually laughed, unamused.

It was a blackness without surface, an all-encompassing and utterly intangible void. The fullness of three dimensions didn't do it justice. It was everywhere and everything because it *was* everything.

And nothing.

Galaxies were specks. Planets within galaxies were specks inside specks. Colonies teeming with life were fractions of fractions of the specks inside specks.

Home was wherever his feet were, and he and his home were a nothingth of a speck.

He was entirely valuable and wholly insignificant.

The struggle was vital, daily, all-consuming and completely irrelevant.

He sighed.

The stars weren't moving; the ship was stationary. Sometimes, when you were moving at a decent enough speed, there would be something amidst the nothing

to catch your attention. Occasionally it was good enough for a gasp or a reflective moment.

That was when you felt least like a speck. Or at least lucky to be a speck, witnessing the beauty.

Not now.

His mind churned.

*I love this job.*

The locker eyed him ceaselessly. The vivid silver-grey door handle was calling.

The mute face across the room remained impassive.

He sighed. ‘So what now if not this? If you were here, you’d tell me. But we’d fight. I never see you, and we’d fight. You’d say I was drunk and not worth bothering with—all talk and not myself. Then I’d say I *was* myself and go to the locker to prove it.’

He took two steps to where the laser pistol lay concealed.

‘See? And tell me why not. Peace is death. Peace is nothing for me. What else? What else do I do? What else *can* I do? I’m Rakkell, shining star of the Fleet! Got a tough job? Get Rakkell—he’s the one. He’s dedicated. He knows where his place is. A quiet life? Never. Betray a colleague and get thrown out? Speak up and tell the truth? Not Rakkell. Now peace? Live and breathe the Fleet, then take it all away? Go home, be nobody, do nothing, see nothing, experience nothing. How?’

He ran a few skewed steps forwards and asked her face, his hands wide, pleading. ‘How?!’

There was no answer. He sat down hard on the chair and winced. The half-empty glass on the desk reached for his hand, and then moved away.

A single red word

RECORDING

beamed from the terminal screen.

‘How to be nothing?’

He ran a hand through his short blonde hair, pressed his palm briefly against his skull. The jarring had given impetus to the brewing headache. He rested his elbow on the desk, closed his eyes, shook his head gently.

‘If only you were here to tell me. But we didn’t choose that. Perhaps... perhaps...’

A tinny bleep issued into the room.

*Door.*

He closed his eyes. *Not now.*

He looked down at what state he was in.

*Acceptable.*

‘Yes.’

The last thing he needed was a female form—a very appealing female form—but when the door slid back, that’s what he got. It would be one of those evenings.

It had already been one of those evenings.

He took a breath to try and clear his head, muster the best sobriety he could. ‘Piya.’

She noted the glass on the desk. ‘We are standing down from Alert. The whole fleet.’

‘As a show of... solitude, I suppose.’

‘Just thought I’d let you know.’

‘You could have called.’

‘I was passing. I’ll leave you to....’ She thought better of insinuation. ‘Night.’

‘Yes.’ Yet his thoughts were elsewhere.

The door slid open to receive her.

He stood. ‘Piya?’

She stopped mid-stride. ‘Yes?’

‘If this really is peace, what will you do?’

‘Celebrate.’

‘I mean, after.’

‘I don’t know. Why?’

‘Oh, nothing.’

After an awkward pause, she half-shrugged and smiled. ‘Night.’

‘Hmm. Night.’

The door closed, and Rakkell was enveloped in silence again.

He heaved a half-drunk self-piteous sigh that was too familiar of late. Only to himself. Couldn’t let this get out amongst the crew.

He pursed his lips.

*If this is peace. If. And if not?*

His head hurt. Still, a tiny voice of reason was there in the murk. It pulled his stubborn frame into action as if sleepwalking.

He went to the desk and hit a key on the terminal.

OUTGOING MESSAGE DELETED.

The pretty face vanished to a point and was gone.

Captain Rakkell Irr stretched his weary back and went to the window. He had a momentary desire to step outside, breathe deeply of the crisp air in the clear infinity and lighten his dull senses. To walk without stinting as if in a vast garden, to bound unconfined through the stars, to drink in... what was it?

Freedom.

But not freedom from travails. Not freedom from aggression. Freedom from himself.

He glanced at the now-blank terminal.

'I'm not nothing yet,' he said to the room, returning his attention to the transparent portal. 'But you may wish you'd been here.'

## About the author



Chris Towndrow has been a writer since 1991. He began writing science fiction, inspired by Isaac Asimov, Iain M Banks, and numerous film and TV canons. After a few years spent creating screenplays, in 2004 he moved into playwriting and has had several productions professionally performed.

His first published novel was 2012's space opera "Sacred Ground". He then focussed on "hard" sci-fi, and the Enna Dacourt pentalogy was completed in 2023.

He has always drawn inspiration from the big screen, and 2019's quirky romantic comedy "Tow Away Zone" owes much to the Coen Brothers' work. This book spawned two sequels in what became the "Sunrise trilogy".

His first historical fiction novel, "Signs Of Life", was published by Valericain Press in 2023.

Chris now returns to his passion for writing accessible humour and will largely focus on romantic comedy novels. The first of these, "Floored", arrives on 4th April 2024, under the pen name Chrissie Harrison.



Chris lives on the outskirts of London with his family and works as a video editor and producer. He is a member of the UK Society of Authors.

Visit his website at: [www.christowndrow.co.uk](http://www.christowndrow.co.uk)

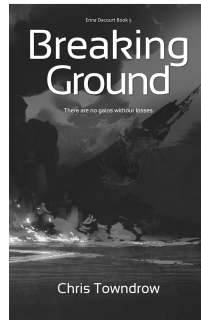
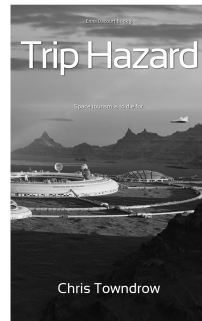
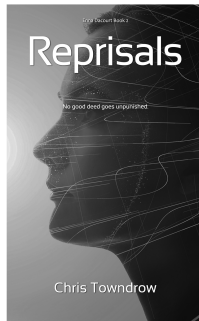
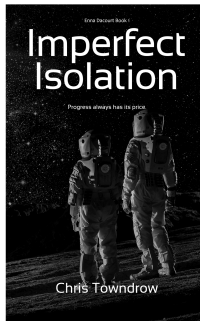
Twitter / X: [twitter.com/TowndrowBooks](https://twitter.com/TowndrowBooks)

Instagram: [instagram.com/towndrowbooks](https://www.instagram.com/towndrowbooks)

YouTube: <https://youtube.com/@ValericainPress>

If you have enjoyed this book, please do leave an online review. An indie author's ability to generate valuable sales is enhanced by the reviews of kind readers.

## Also by the author

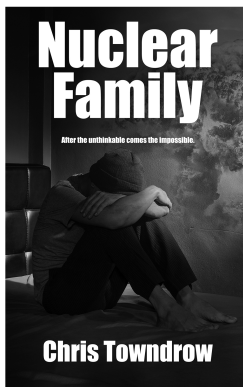


It's 2069. Mankind has settled on the Moon and Mars.

SpaceFleet's Lieutenant Enna Dacourt is thrust into a series of adventures, battling corporate greed, hired thugs and shadowy figures.

Armed with wisecracking wit, inner steel and the support of newly-found colleagues, Enna strives to outwit those who threaten her, her family, and her way of life.

Find the books on [Amazon](#).



Mother. Father. Daughter. Son.  
Their own private nuclear shelter.  
They have survived the war.  
Now, all they have to do is cope with each other.

**A post-apocalyptic drama of family, love, secrets and survival.**

Find the book on [Amazon](#).