

ANDREW C. RAIFORD

VOID OF POWER

NEW GENERATION



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Published April 2020
by Indies United Publishing House, LLC

Cover art designed by Damonza.com

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ISBN: 978-1-64456-120-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020934810



INDIES UNITED PUBLISHING HOUSE, LLC

P.O. BOX 3071

QUINCY, IL 62305-3071

www.indiesunited.net

I dedicate this book to my late wife Teri who passed away in 2017 after a long battle with Mesothelioma. I'm sorry that you were not able to see the completion of this novel. May you rest in peace.

I also dedicate this book to my new bride, Beverly, who helped me put my life back together. With beautiful joy, you encouraged me to continue writing and volunteered to do first-pass edits before we turned it over to a professional.

Finally, I dedicate this book to my five children, Heather, Andrew, Hayley, Alex and Adam, whose gifts and talents inspired the writing of this book.

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PROLOGUE

The underground complex, with the direction of Dr. Frank Walsh, was completed only a few years before the beginning of the Cultural War. The war began when the divide between left and right political viewpoints reached the boiling point in the 2020's. Nobody remembered or really cared who starting shooting first, but by the time it was over, even fewer cared. It was over. The states remained polarized. The idea for the deeply buried facility sprang from the innovators working for a private west coast company known for its research into fusion propulsion and zero-point energy. Eighteen scientists, along with their families, were chosen out of thousands who applied for the project. They were sequestered in this marvel of technology for the sole purpose of discovering new sources of clean energy. Initially powered by a bus-sized nuclear reactor, the labs were self-sufficient, complete with workshops, hydroponics bays for food and access to fresh water from the Ogallala Aquifer. When the war began, the secret labs were spared the fate of the rest of the country.

The fighting spread to other countries and continents. No one was unaffected by the devastating destruction that left civilization temporarily in ruins. The underground facility, located in the Texas Panhandle, continued to function even after the war. Research went on, with few trustworthy entities left with which to share their successes. The researchers raised families who had families of their own. Children born into this elite community learned only from the gifted brilliant. Decades later the old nuclear reactor was taken offline and replaced with the very fusion generators they were sent there to perfect. New technologies sprang from the efforts of younger generations.

Life outside the complex was not only difficult but particularly dangerous. The Cultural Treaties signed after the war prohibited any Government official, agent or law enforcement officer from entering the vast wilderness known as the Void, which stretched from central Texas to the western border of Arizona. After decades, the Void became a place for roving bands of armed bandits. Honest well-armed, folks banded together in groups for safety, barely managing to keep the criminals at bay. The only law in the Void were local sheriffs, town militias, and Texas Rangers.

Sixty years after the war, the grandchildren of Frank Walsh would begin to turn the tide in the battle against the cartels and drug-runners. Our story begins with one of these *kids* passing through the settlement called Junction.

CHAPTER ONE

The Void

Alex Walsh began his day wearing a leather riding jacket that had not one bullet hole in it. His brother told him its pristine condition would be an eye-catcher the moment he rode into Junction on his motorcycle, but Alex did like his style. Wearing a hand-tooled leather gun belt, sporting twin .45 caliber automatics, he was possibly the best-dressed person in town. Laser-cut into the mahogany grips of these two-of-a-kind pistols were ominous grinning skulls, which solicited a torrent of tacky jokes from his siblings. Yet despite his well-dressed appearance, he rode a filthy, two-stroke dirt bike, that could be heard for blocks, onto the main drag. The gasping engine seemed to struggle under the weight of the rider and saddlebags as it rolled up to the Junction Trading Post on the corner of Main and 11th. Thumbing the kill switch, he was immediately surprised by the loudness of the silence. Wisdom and experience taught him to survey his surroundings even as he stooped to unbuckle his saddlebags. Familiar sights met his inspection; the saloon across the street was open for business, as was the grocery store next to it. A row of motorcycles outside the bar made him feel much better about coming into town for trade. These road-bikes were large American-made Harleys, not the fast crotch-rockets ridden by the men who had been hunting him for months. Being stalked in every settlement was growing old, but he shrugged off that emotion as he stepped onto the porch of his destination. After one last look around, he pulled hard on the heavy oak door of the Trading Post and entered. Pausing a moment, he allowed his eyes to adjust to the relative darkness of the mostly wooden structure.

Something wasn't right here. There was no activity in the otherwise bustling business. Silently he slid one of his automatics from its holster and brought it up to chest level. Why was it so quiet in here? Usually there were at least three or four patrons standing around trading war stories, but an empty store this late in the afternoon triggered an immediate defensive posture. Moving stealthily to the right, being careful to hug the right wall with a row of farm implements shielding him from sight, he tiptoed toward the rear of the Trading Post. An ancient cash register partially blocked his view of the well-lit back room. His gut instinct told him that someone was nearby. He raised his gun to eye level and began moving again when he felt the presence of someone standing directly behind him. Whirling around,

his hand was caught in what seemed a vice and his gun was stripped from his hand. He found himself standing toe to toe with the owner of the establishment.

The proprietor and feature attraction of the Junction Trading Post was famous for fifty-thousand square miles. If anyone with a rudimentary grasp of the English language described her to you, the odds of being mistaken about who stood before you would be low. Jennifer is five feet, twelve inches tall (she didn't like being known as a six-foot tall person) and the obvious product of many years of weight training. With the muscle mass to take nine out of ten men in a fair fight, yet graceful enough to walk like a ballerina, she turns heads everywhere she goes. The bartender across the way fondly refers to her as *a mountain of femininity*. The average male might secretly admit that he would like very much to touch this mountain, but at least in Junction, reason usually won over temptation. Her biceps alone deterred smart men from formulating the notion of unwanted physical contact. The unfortunate men who had not been blessed with an IQ greater than their age sometimes came to the erroneous conclusion that it was in their interest to give Jennifer a little tap on the butt. They remembered their lesson well as soon as they regained consciousness. Jennifer was indeed the pride of Junction.

When Alex laid eyes on her revealing tank top, he stammered and choked for a number of seconds before he could find his voice. Most of this was his inborn acting ability. She laughed as she grabbed him by the collar, pulling him close. "Take your time, honey. But when you're done choking, I might bite you, my tasty little critter." His face turned red as he blurted out, "Jennifer, dammit... you... you do this on purpose! One day I'm going to call child welfare on you! And give me back my gun!"

After she ceremoniously slipped his .45 auto into the holster, she vigorously messed up his hair with one hand, as she pinched his cheek in the clamp-like fingers of her other hand. "You just had a birthday, boy! Number 19 if I count right. You've been legal for over a year now and Child Protective Services doesn't give a rat's ass about you. But I got you now!" at which point she pinned his arms with a bear hug and planted kisses all over his face. As quickly as she pinned him helpless, she let go and said, "Now, what can I do for you, pinhead?"

"Pinhead?? Just moments ago, I was a tasty critter!"

She sighed. "Women are a mystery, lad. Hadn't your mama taught you that? Now, what do you have for me?" Moving to the back of the counter, she placed her chin on her hands and batted her long eyelashes in a caricature of flirtation.

With an exasperating sigh, he opened his saddlebags, keeping an eye on her just in case she did bite. He took a deep breath to compose himself while getting into character; then in his best rendition of a carney, he raised his hands.

"Prepare to be amazed ladies and... ladies." He reached into one of the satchels to remove item number one.

"From the near east...fresh cartons of cigarettes," he said as he ran the carton under his nose. Jennifer's eyes widened. He counted them out slowly. "Uno, dos, thres, quatro, cinco, Ssssssayssssssssssss, ssssseeee-EH-Tay," and set them on the counter.

"You tease me, pinhead, and I will hug you again."

"Please don't!" as he continued, "A case of 12-year-old single malt Scotch. The rest is in the usual hiding place."

Jennifer licked her lips.

"Four cases of .45ACP ammo!" He plopped one 50-round box of cartridges onto the counter with a solid thud. She casually looked away and pretended to yawn. She might be able to twist a person's head from their shoulders in two heartbeats, but she could be cute when she wanted to be.

"Eight cases of 9-millimeter ammo."

"Why do you always bring half as many .45 cartridges as you do 9-mil?" she asked while poking the box of .45 ammo.

"Because you only have to shoot them once with the forty-five."

"Silly. You know we always double-tap."

"That's true. But at least you don't have to quadruple-tap them."

He made a great show of reaching into the bags again.

"Two cases of grenades," he said as he gently set one down on the counter. For effect, he did his impression of an explosion as he formed a mushroom cloud with his hands. Jennifer smiled from ear to ear and fanned herself as if the temperature had gone up ten degrees. With the movement of a dancer, she snatched up the grenade and gently clipped it to the front of her tank top.

Alex stood staring at the spot she hung the grenade. Gently placing her finger under his chin, she raised his head so that they had eye contact again.

"Continue."

"One working District 14 Sheriff's department comDev, batteries included." He waited for a response, but all she could do was stare at the device in disbelief.

"And," he paused for effect, "a data key." He ran his free hand up and down the key, imitating one of the eye-candy tarts in the game shows. "Which," he said, accentuating the word with a pointed finger, "contains eight feature films, R Rated for those 18 years of age and older, which I am well past now." He moved his eyebrows up and down and pursed his lips in a ridiculous attempt at sexy.

"Go on! You, masher!" she squealed as she slapped his chest, knocking him back a foot or two. He needed a few seconds to regain his breath.

"And," he paused to beat a drum roll on the countertop as Jennifer rolled her eyes, "three seasons of Void Rangers starring Rock Givens and Sheila McPhearson." Jennifer took a shallow breath, shifted her weight slightly and put a hand on her hip. He knew he hit a home run.

"Aaaaaaand," he said, going through the entire tonal range. At this point he lost the game show voice and the rest came out fast and monotone. "A schematic of the LPR-63 plasma rifle carried by federal storm troopers."

He knew that would clinch the deal.

"NO WAY!!! Alex, where on earth do you get this stuff? I swear child, you and I, we need to go into business together! Mmmmmmmhmmm."

Her whole body was in fluid motion as she moved her head through a series of gyrations.

Alex gently tweaked her nose. "We are in business together, Jennifer. I give things to you and you give things to me. What a beautiful arrangement we have! It's a win/win."

She roughly snatched Alex's treasures from the countertop and hid them underneath. Grabbing him by the collar, she dragged him to the back room through a swinging door. He had no choice but to follow.

"Mr. C. J. delivered a few things that you are simply going to love. Skank!!" she screeched, "Get your skinny butt out front and mind the shop! And I better not be missing one cigarette from under that counter or I'll pull you inside out and feed you to the cat." A tiny man with a magnifying glass and LEDs attached to a headband poked his head up from behind a workbench. He stopped what he was doing, grabbed a sawed-off 12 gauge from the rack and slid past the two of them mumbling something about respect, or the lack thereof.

"Hi Alex," he said without even looking up.

"Hey, Skank. It's good to see you aga..." His words broke off as his jaw dropped. On a metal table in the center of the room were stacks of the latest in computer circuit boards, video cards, RAM chips, power units, CPUs and solid-state drives still in the manufacturer's boxes. He moved in slow motion around the table, taking in every detail of the things piled high. In a large backpack, he found an assortment of electronic parts. The thing was stuffed with both active and passive components, electromechanical devices and assemblies, as well as spools of copper wiring. Jennifer had hit the mother lode. There were monitors, keyboards and even several new flight helmets, the very ones the government recently distributed to helicopter pilots. These automatically sync to control panels and weapons grids.

Grabbing two of the helmets, three solid-state drives, a variety of circuit boards, video cards and CPUs, he began the process of stuffing them into a large duffel bag. Jennifer watched with great interest as he picked through the enormous stack of goodies. She understood well that

the electronic parts had a greater monetary value than grenades, booze, ammo, and cigarettes, but few Void dwellers had a use for electronic parts. What they wanted and needed most were grenades, booze, ammo, and cigarettes.

"May I have those glass rods in the corner?" he asked.

"What for? I was gonna toss'em!"

"They're pretty!"

Jennifer shrugged. "They're yours, weirdo."

It was his turn to grab her and plant a kiss on her cheek. "Thanks Jennifer! You're the best there is!"

"You do realize that I've killed men for less than that," she said slyly.

"I know. But they weren't hunky, full-fledged, tasty critters like me."

"Pinhead."

"Vixen."

She screeched out a laugh. "Would you like to join me for a drink across the street, sugar? I'd be happy to buy you a legal alcoholic beverage!"

"I'd love to, Jennifer, but if I don't get a move on, mom will be worried. You know how she is."

"I do. Now, if you're done shopping, let's get you on your way. I'll show you to the door, but don't go out till I tell you." She paused for a moment at the counter and ducked low to grab something from a shelf. When she stood up, Alex gawked. Cradled in her arms was an impressively large automatic rifle with a cluster of attachments: lasers, flashlight, bipod, tactical scope, foregrip, and a high-capacity drum-magazine. Alex doubted he could even hold that weapon to his shoulder for more than twenty seconds without physically giving out. She hefted it as if it were Styrofoam.

"Ummm, Jennifer? Are we expecting trouble today?"

"Truth be told, honey, a couple of men came in earlier asking about a rider wearing two automatics with skull grips. You're the only fool I know who wears two guns with skull grips. Come on, pinhead!! Comic book grips on your hardware? Anyway, I'd bet my beloved Blackie here that they saw you come in."

Other than the talent for getting out of trouble as fast as they got into it, Jennifer and Alex had another trait in common; they gave names to their weapons.

Jennifer stretched her neck to scan up and down the street while Alex checked the side window. It was no surprise to discover two men on the south side of the building waiting for someone to walk out the front door. Jennifer whispered loudly, "Check out the roof across the way - goggles and a baseball cap."

Jennifer and Alex watched the man on the roof for a few moments before Jennifer spoke. "Okay, here's the deal. The ugly one said that their boss just wants to talk, but he kept fingering his pistol, so I doubt that he

or his boss means you well. So, you just stroll out there, hop on that sorry excuse for a motorcycle, and take off. These men want you bad. Do not engage them in conversation as they can't possibly have anything of importance to say. Just leave. Anyone who follows you is mine. You can come back and get your stuff when it's safe." She gave him a peck on the cheek and said, "Now go!"

"Jennifer, don't take any chances on my account. Once I get moving, they'll never catch me."

Jennifer nodded. "I know, hon. I'm not worried about them catching you."

Alex slowly opened the large oak door, stepped outside, and walked casually to his bike. He took his sweet time to strap the empty saddlebags to the seat and even stopped to light a cigar. Watching from the window, Jennifer shook her head and whispered, "Pinhead! Get the hell out of here." Alex mounted the bike, was about to start the engine when the two men came out of hiding.

The dust-covered bums walked directly in front of Alex's bike as if they hadn't a care in the world. The ugly one on the right had only two or three good teeth in his mouth but still grinned as if he had won the lottery. The man on the left appeared scared out of his wits; the fingers of his right hand, wiggling inches above the old Beretta tucked in his belt.

"Hello there Mr. Skull Grips. You may not want to start that bike." Those were the last words that ever came out of his mouth. Bad guys usually think their prey is going to want to talk first and take serious action as a last resort, but Alex was never successful at being usual. He knew what to expect. He drew both automatics and before you could say "shoot now, words later," both men were on their backs in the street.

The man on the roof across the street stood up with a 9mm submachine gun and began spraying bullets everywhere. Alex dove for cover as lead hit the pavement behind him. Jennifer stepped boldly onto the street and brought the huge rifle to her shoulder. There was a deafening crack and reverberating echo as the projectile disintegrated the baseball cap and everything underneath it. Even Alex was amazed at what she could do with one shot from the .308 rifle.

He pulled himself off the pavement, shaking his head at Jennifer, who bowed like a prima-donna on stage with her weapon. "Jennifer, that rifle is just so..... you!"

They were both laughing when the sound of cranking engines could be heard a couple of blocks south on 11th street. Jennifer reacted quickly. "Alex GO! I will slow them down."

He was on the dirt bike and in an instant brought the engine to life. The two-stroke bike was not as worn out as he made people think it was when he drove into town. With a high-pitch bellow, accompanied by a cloud of dust and smoke, his bike shot out of the parking area and onto Main

Street. The dirt bike delivered robust acceleration as he sped off in the direction of the Interstate.

Anger covered Jennifer's face as she watched the desert vehicles roaring down the street in her direction. Pulling the pin on her newly acquired grenade, she tossed it into the middle of the street, then calmly stepped back into the Trading Post. Her timing was impeccable. Just as she slid behind the solid oak door, the grenade exploded beneath the first vehicle. The blast from the grenade in combination with the ruptured gas tank, was horrendous. Glass rocketed from window frames and showered the inside of the store. Skank slowly poked his head up from behind the counter with his mouth gaping.

"What was that?!"

"Oh relax, Skank, I think it was thunder; maybe we'll get some rain."

She had that crazy look on her face, which always frightened him.

The second vehicle, following a little too closely, had rear-ended the lead vehicle. A ball of flames engulfed both. Two men bailed out onto the pavement, desperately screaming as they attempted to shed their burning denim jackets. About the time they thought they were safe, they discovered Jennifer standing over them with a rifle. "Hello boys." The last thing they remembered was the butt of her rifle growing larger.

If the sounds of explosions and gunfire did not rouse the town, the reverberating dulcet tones of the large church bell did. This bell was not a call to worship, as was its purpose for hundreds of years past. Now it only rang as a call for citizens to arm themselves and stand ready to fight. Most citizens simply barricaded their homes and waited, but specially trained teams of men and women would move quickly to predetermined locations unless directed elsewhere by their communications device known as a comDev. The residents of Junction tend to take a grim outlook toward outsiders who disturb the peace, so you can imagine their concern when they learned that someone had engaged their town darling in a firefight.

Four desert-buggies appeared from the east in hot pursuit of Alex. Gunmen fired automatic weapons from the fast-moving vehicles. Jennifer mouthed a colorful metaphor as she watched them speed by. The crack of supersonic bullets whizzing by made Alex push his bike even faster. Ahead, a line of motorbikes blocked the bridge, which connected to the interstate highway. Fortunately for him, his bike was built for off-road. With a laugh, he turned west through the parking lot of the old hospital and headed straight toward a large hill outside of town. The loud desert machines tailed him at a distance of less than a quarter mile.

When his left mirror disappeared at the impact of a bullet, he began to wonder if he was going to make it. He was happy to see his bike was leaving a masking cloud of dust and dirt in his wake. Never slowing down, he climbed the hill like a madman and at the crest became airborne.

From the pursuers' point of view, judging by the speed he was moving and the fact that the bike did a backflip before disappearing behind the hill, they expected to find their prey splattered all over the opposite slope. In their minds, the chase was over. Three of the desert vehicles stopped while the lead car slowed and took the hill at a relatively safe speed. The pursuers were now treated to the surprise of their lives. Beyond the hill, kicking up dust and debris rose a vertical take-off fighter jet. Seeing this was disturbing enough, but any unsettling feeling they may have had was replaced quickly by terror once they realized the craft was armed with rockets.

The gunner's eyes went wide as a bright green dot moved across his chest. He looked up in time to see a missile coming straight at him. The remaining three vehicles turned to escape after witnessing the lead vehicle exploding into micro-fragments.

Even Alex was surprised at the results of his well-aimed missile. After a moment of shock and even disbelief, he whispered, "Holy guacamole, Adam. What did you give me?"

Alex screamed, "YES!" as a feeling of exultation flushed through his entire body at having escaped the trap. He turned his aircraft northward to the interstate. The group of bikes that had been blocking the bridge near Junction was already moving in his direction on the highway. He knew they wanted him bad. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say they wanted to destroy his aircraft. There was only one other like it in the Void, although they didn't know that.

Many motorcycles left over after the world-wide Cultural War were powerfully built road machines capable of reaching 200 mph. This was way too slow to even get close enough for a shot at Alex's aircraft, which was still hovering close to earth. It had two five-foot rotors inset into the wings and two smaller turbine blades set into the stabilizers, in addition to rocket boosters and jet engines. He could leave the ground and be perched over his pursuers a thousand feet in the air in five seconds. Not even a Federal attack copter could match that.

Alex, ever the risk-taking jokester, waited for the motorcycles to close the distance enough to raise their hopes of success, then took off like a shot. He was nearly out of sight before they could raise their guns. Transitioning from hover-mode to fixed wing flight, he accelerated to 300mph 30 feet off the pavement as he streaked west over Interstate Highway 10. Fearing a trap ahead, he gained altitude until he was safe from gunfire. From this panoramic view of Texas, he scanned the countryside for a nice tall mesa on which to set down and wait for darkness.

Today's narrow escape from such well-armed bandits was a little nerve-racking even by Alex's standards. Now that he was out of danger, he had to wonder how Jennifer fared with her opponents back in Junction. The

explosion that took place immediately after his escape from the Trading Post worried him a bit, but he still felt confident that Jennifer would have come out on top of any confrontation with criminals of that caliber. It was easy to feel just a little sorry for the souls who got on her bad side. Having lost her immediate family to drug and gun runners, she only had two speeds when it came to fighting bandits: maim and destroy.

Locating an isolated mesa that stood hundreds of feet over the rest of the country, he set down on the flat top. Alex surveyed the landscape in every direction before stretching out, boots on the console, to await darkness. The view was magnificent as the sun dropped slowly to the horizon. In the cooling temperatures, he took the time to enjoy an incredibly rare Honduran cigar and peruse a copy of the schematic that he had given Jennifer. When the sun finally dipped behind the hills, Alex activated his comDev.

"Com. Channel Jennifer. Scramble."

The com unit responded in its techno-voice: "Channel ready."

"Breaker! Breaker! One-nine for the Ballerina!"

The radio snapped to life. "This ain't channel nineteen, and you're not Smokey or the Bandit, pinhead."

"Sorry about that messy getaway, princess. Prepared for an incoming flight? I have groceries to pick up."

"We're doing a sweep of the town for remaining dirtbags. Hold off another twenty, then come on in, honey. I'll fill you in on what happened after your little escape and evade. I'm glad you're okay. Your mother would have my hide if I let anything happen to you."

Alex easily managed a night landing onto the roof of the Trading Post with the aid of Skank's solar powered LEDs outlining his personal parking spot. He wished that he could have landed here in the first place this afternoon to make his trade, but a daylight landing exposed not only himself and his craft but attracted too much attention. Jennifer and Skank loaded him up immediately. She gave Alex a hug and said, "I put something in there for your mom. Give her my love."

"Thanks, Jennifer! When do we plan on telling her about us?"

"Oh, get out of here, flirt! Remember, your mother. The gift," she laughed.

Alex produced his most impish grin and throttled up. When they were clear, he shot straight up into the air 300 feet and turned east.

A pair of binoculars held by someone in the shadows on top of the bar stayed with the aircraft as it flew away and was lost to sight. The darkness was broken as a dim LED screen revealed a text sent to an unknown location.

Alex put a good distance between his flyer and Junction before heading north toward home. Manipulating the controls resulted in his craft making the transition from hover-mode to fixed wing. The vertical takeoff rotor

covers closed in the same manner that a camera shutter opens and closes. He accelerated to 400mph as he let out a deep sigh of relief and relaxed his shoulders. The dark skies of the Texas hill country made the stars seem like they were within reach. Having the nose of his aircraft pointed homeward without a scratch on him always made him feel like he just lived the best day of his life.

Far on the eastern horizon, a bright flash broke the night. Judging that it must have come from Llano, he took in a view through his binoculars and saw nothing more than an afterglow. He shrugged his shoulders and kept going. Not his circus, not his monkeys. He would enjoy the relative safety of 25,000 feet altitude and breathe easy for a while until he began his descent.

After a relaxing flight, he took manual control of the craft as he approached his hidden home nestled in canyons of the Texas panhandle. It was the perfect location for a secret base of operations. Using night vision, he patrolled up and down the canyon for a mile in each direction to check for intruders before maneuvering to the cave entrance. The opening was covered with fake rock painted to match the colors of the cliff. It was impossible to detect from any angle. He activated the doors, then guided his aircraft into the large entryway. Coming to a stop, he took a deep breath, removed his helmet and exited the aircraft. Removing his gun belt, he hung it on a peg labeled "Roscoe and Mr. Blasty."

"Honey, I'm home!"

About the Author

Born in Houston, Texas, Andrew Raiford was raised in a family of seven brothers. Most of the action and adventure that dominated his young life sprang from the imaginations of the brothers Raiford. Since there was no limit to the stories they could create through their play-acting, it was not uncommon to have Daniel Boone not only be attacked by bears or red-coats, but also Nazis and/or extraterrestrial conquerors. Imaginative eight-year-olds care nothing for history.

During his young adult years, Andrew took on some very odd jobs to keep his young family fed. For two years he was a real cowboy who rode, roped, and pushed cattle on a large ranch nestled in the snow-capped mountains of northern California. After moving back to his home state of Texas he worked in the printing business as a journeyman pressman, and later in gun sales, and corporate security. He even worked in church ministry as a pastor for ten years during the period that he and his wife raised five talented children. Those offspring would later become the inspiration for Andrew's first novel, *Void of Power – New Generation*, which surprisingly contained no Nazis or extraterrestrial invaders.

Now residing in Liberty Hill, Texas, he spends most of his life behind a keyboard. His wife Beverly, retired from the insurance industry, is his first-line manuscript editor before they are sent to a professional. Andrew recently stated that of all he has accomplished in his lifetime, writing is the most therapeutic, relaxing, and satisfying.