

ANDREA MONTICUE

MEMORY

AND
METAPHOR

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SAMPLE EDITION

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KRS Zephyr
about 5 light-years from Rigil Kentaurus
9 Telefmina, 1382

SHARON MANDERS WOKE UP SCREAMING. Then stopped because she couldn't remember why she was screaming. It hadn't been much of a scream. Mostly it was just the thought of a scream, as very little sound had left her dry, raspy throat. She also didn't remember being in bed, but she was.

Sharon tried to remember going to bed, and discovered that she couldn't remember much of anything at all. She opened her eyes with a squinting, fluttering, almost painful motion. The room was dimly lit from some light coming from outside her field of vision. She could also see what looked like LEDs, and hear the soft humming of electronic equipment.

All of this went through her mind in mere moments before the lights came on, causing her to close her eyes tearfully.

She heard the sound of a door opening and sensed that somebody entered the room.

“Simmons!” a man said with a sound of total surprise.

Sharon cracked her eyelids open and tried to sit up. That is to say, she sent the signals from her brain to her spinal cord to start the process of sitting up, but nothing happened. It was difficult to tell where her body stopped and the rest of the universe started, as if her entire body was parathetic and unresponsive.

The man was about thirty, clean-shaven and had short, neat hair. He looked horrified, paused only a moment and then became very busy studying medical instruments and mumbling to himself.

Hospital. I'm in a hospital. Something happened. Am I paralyzed?

She could see an IV bottle of clear fluid connected to her arm. The words on the label were too small to read.

Sharon made another effort to sit up and her muscles tried dutifully to respond, but this only brought on dizziness, pain, and a reaction from the man.

He said something in an accent that was so foreign that Sharon didn't immediately understand, but concluded that it was something like, “No. Don't try to sit up.”

“Good idea,” she mouthed, but it sounded hoarse, dry, and unrecognizable, so she sucked on her tongue to generate saliva. She wanted to examine her head with her hand, but her arm felt like molten lead, and responded by going in random directions. She let it fall back down.

“Simmons,” the man held a light in front of her face. “Follow the light with just your eyes.”

Sharon still didn't quite understand the words, but the gesture and intent was obvious. She understood by the cadence and patterns that the man was calling her *Simmons*.

Who is Simmons, and why is he calling me that?

Her name was Sharon Manders, though at the moment she felt lucky to remember that much, because the rest of her life was a vast darkness. She concentrated on following the light.

“Good,” the man said, though it sounded more like “goot”. A name patch on his well-pressed shirt read *Bradford, MD*. “Listen to me carefully, Simmons,” he continued. “You had a nasty head wound and brain trauma. Do you remember being injured?”

Though she could tell the man was speaking some form of English, it was like listening to somebody with an extreme regional accent like Creole or Appalachian. Sharon parsed out what she did understand and filled in the gaps as if it was a verbal crossword puzzle. She tried to say “No”, but her tongue still felt huge and as if it was upholstered with sandpaper. She tried to shake her head, but only managed a minor tremble.

Dr. Bradford mumbled some more, then produced a cup and a spoon. He offered her a spoonful of ice chips. “Here, let these sit on your tongue.”

The ice melted in her mouth, lubricating her tongue and throat. It felt marvelous.

She swallowed the cold fluid and her larynx no longer felt like a gravel road.

“No,” she finally whispered.

“Your EPU died,” Dr. Bradford said as if it should mean something. “You’ll have to make do without until we can grow you another.”

Sharon could feel the spot in her head that had been damaged. It was numb. Or more accurately: it was more numb than the rest of her body.

“Simmons, this is important. You’ve been in a coma for twenty-three days. Your body will take some time to recover. Don’t try to move yet. Get your equilibrium back.”

Sharon wanted to tell Dr. Bradford that she wasn’t Simmons and that, beyond that, she couldn’t tell him who else she was.

Did the head wound have something to do with why I woke up screaming?

"What do you remember?" the doctor asked.

While pondering questions of memory, Sharon's mind made wild associations between faces, places and events that seemed fantastical, she realized that her eyes were closed and she'd fallen asleep. The dreams hinted at a past life in which she did important things.

She lay there, listening to gentle electronic beeps and the occasional muffled sounds of human speech coming from beyond a door while sorting out the dream images.

As she opened her eyes, the room lights came on dimly. With great effort, she carefully rolled onto her side. While this was a vast improvement over her previous attempt at fine motor function, there was still a sense that her body and brain were learning to cooperate again. She had to concentrate on one movement at a time. When she finally succeeded, she saw that she was the lone occupant of a long, narrow room with half a dozen empty hospital beds.

It was a medical room, but beyond that she had no idea where she was. There were no windows. She was looking at a handle-less door. There was some writing on the wall, but it was too small, and the room was too dark to read it.

The door opened by sliding sideways into the wall. Dr. Bradford walked in, causing the room lights to brighten.

"Good evening, Simmons," he said with a forced smile and his strange accent. "Glad to see you're back among the living." He started mumbling to himself again.

Sharon made a successful attempt to find something akin to a voice. "Uh ... hi. I'm not Simmons."

Bradford continued mumbling for a few seconds then looked directly at Sharon's face. "I beg your pardon?"

Sharon spoke again, this time doing her best to duplicate Bradford's drifted vowels and mutated consonants. "Hee. Uhm net Zeemuhns."

After a few moments of awkward silence, he said, "Well, then. That will certainly come as a surprise to everybody else." He pulled up a chair. "Who are you then?"

Sharon was overcome with the feeling that she had said the wrong thing — that she should have kept quiet about her identity.

But why?

"Sharon Manders. Was there an accident? Maybe we were mistaken for each other."

Bradford chewed his lip, mumbled some more, folded his right arm across his chest and rubbed his jaw with his left hand. "Not unless you and Specialist Carol Simmons have identical DNA."

Sharon struggled to figure out what all this meant, and her brain was too sluggish to give concrete responses.

Bradford looked worried about something. "What year is this?"

Sharon had no idea, but numbers seemed to form in her consciousness. "Thirteen?"

Bradford kept a straight face. "Thirteen what?"

Sharon shook her head. "I dun' know," she said with a puff of breath.

"What else do you remember?"

Sharon tried to remember anything. Her mother. Her job. The president.

She asked, "Who's the president?"

"The president of what?"

Sharon almost said the name of something ... a country. She closed her eyes trying to conjure up images of important things.

* * *

Sharon ran, swam, and even jumped rope while singing some inane rhyme. She mastered one physical skill and moved to another. She threw a ball, performed some archery, and rode a horse. Her body was remembering how to do all these things. The year was nineteen —
Then she woke up.

* * *

In an undisclosed location on a planet several light-years from the *KRS Zephyr*'s current location, five people met in a concrete room. Their activities were known to only a few in the highest of offices on their home worlds. Due to the nature of their business, their EPU's had been permanently disabled with a combination of pharmaceuticals and electroshock. They were so worried about being spied upon that they didn't use electrical power from the city, but generated it locally.

"The attack on the Kentauran naval vessel went according to plan," a man with an angular face said. "The personnel swap went off perfectly, and the explosion occurred exactly on cue."

"Excellent," said a sandy haired woman. "How long did it take them to repair their ship?"

"Not long," the angle-faced man said. "Their crews are well trained. According to our asset on the ship, they were operational inside two standard hours. But it gave us just enough time to ascertain the nature and degree of the damage. The bait ship was able to evade capture and return to its base."

The sandy-haired woman turned to another person she knew only as Giatrós. She didn't even know the person's gender, but decided to use male pronouns in reference to him. The sandy-haired woman wondered if he was a woman disguised as an effeminate man, but one condition he had placed on his cooperation in this project is that there would be no inquiries into his personal life. That hadn't stopped the sandy-haired

woman from trying, but her queries turned up very little. Giatrós always looked worried that somebody was going to figure out his darkest secrets and broadcast them on the ‘Nets.

“Well, Giatrós. Would you call this a success?”

Giatrós inclined his head. “Yes. I believe you have that which you desired.”

What he didn’t say was that it came at the cost of not only a human life, but also of one of his assets.

These people have no idea how much work goes into creating an asset, he thought. Which had to be completely destroyed after one use in order to hide the evidence. They are barbarians of the worst sort.

The sandy-haired woman turned to the fifth person in the room, a young man of about 20 standard years, and asked, “Is your project on schedule?”

“Yes. It’ll be ready before it’s needed. I only need to perform some stress tests.”

“Good,” the sandy-haired woman said. “The target date is coming up. The entire population of Kentaurus celebrates like frat boys during their new year’s Solstice. We launch in fifty-one standard hours. Get back to work.”

As the others filed out of the room, the sandy-haired woman sat in contemplation. She could sense victory, and it would be hers if she didn’t rush it. The Kentauran Republic was the oldest government in the sector — and had the largest military by far. Going against it head-to-head was a fool’s errand, but as long as it existed, it remained a threat to the existence of her own way of life. Recruiting the disenfranchised among the Kentaurans produced limited and untrustworthy results. Creating assets for attacking the Kentauran infrastructure held far greater promise.

* * *

As Sharon opened her eyes, the room lights came up to half strength.

How did they do that?

The room was empty, and some of the machines had been turned off. She felt stiff and needed to stretch. The numbness she had felt earlier had been replaced with a feeling of being bruised all over. She put her arms slowly over her head and extended them surrendering to the stretch reflex. She felt the blood rushing into her extremities and, when she finished, she felt surprisingly better. She was also starving. No doubt the intravenous fluids supplied all of her nutritional needs, but they did nothing to fill the void in her stomach.

After evaluating her condition and situation, she decided to try to sit up again, and in a long drawn out process of remembering how her body was supposed to behave, she managed to roll over on her side and push herself upright. That's when she discovered she was in a green hospital gown and that she was attached to a catheter.

When she thought about it, neither of these revelations surprised her. What did surprise her, however, is that there was a band of thin, tough fabric around her waist which was attached at the other end to the bed by a narrow cable that looked like steel. The cable was just long enough for her to stand up and walk around the bed ... if she managed to stand up.

She explored her injuries, running her hands over her head and torso. Most of the wounds had healed sufficiently that they were no longer covered in bandages or held together with stitches or staples or glue or whatever they had used, but they were still quite tender.

She sat there for about five minutes before Dr. Bradford walked through the door, followed by another man who looked to be about thirty years old, wearing what looked like a military uniform.

“Welcome back, Simmons!” the new man said in the same accent as Dr. Bradford. “We’ve missed you, and we’re glad to have you back in the world of the living. The electronics department hasn’t been the same without you.”

Sharon smiled, thought briefly about standing up and then abandoned the idea. She wasn’t that strong nor coordinated yet, nor was she dressed for visitors, and the catheter and cable prevented much movement.

“Good to see you sitting up, Simmons,” Bradford said. “You’re making remarkable progress.”

Sharon studied the new man’s face, trying to remember it. He was obviously important, but also a complete stranger.

“Thank you,” she managed to say. “It’s good to be back. I think.” She held up the cable and looked questioningly at Bradford. “Why am I tied to the bed?”

“That’s just a precaution,” Bradford said. “Captain’s orders. We need to make sure you’re secure.”

Before Sharon could respond to this, the new man said in an earnest voice that demanded to be listened to, “Simmons, do you remember who I am?”

Sharon’s heart beat faster, and some machine made a warning sound: *This was important!* The man also wore a nametag which read PUŠKARIĆ. While Dr. Bradford wore a single shoulder epaulette with two stripes, Puškarić had none. A pin on his collar showed some animal — a centaur? — a stylized seven-pointed star surrounded by a laurel, and the letters KRN. None of this meant anything to Sharon.

“I’m sorry,” she shook her head in defeat. “But I really have no idea.”

“That’s okay” Puškarić said. “Dr. Bradford tells me that you literally came back from the dead, and the process isn’t quite complete.”

The three of them regarded each other awkwardly, the two men wearing forced smiles.

"The electronics bay hasn't been the same without you, Simmons," Puškarić repeated. "I've had to take all my ire out on McKenzie, and he's feeling a bit brow-beaten."

Their weird accent was becoming easier to understand, but Sharon still had to do some mental translating.

She had no idea what to say or do. These strangers obviously assumed some intimacy with her, and expected her to know how to behave. Panic rose in her gut and she struggled to contain it. Whatever the issues were, she did not want to embarrass herself further in front of these people.

She smiled and improvised. "I'll be back on my feet ASAP, sir."

The two men exchanged a conspiratorial smile and Sharon wondered what she'd said wrong.

"If you'll excuse us," Bradford said, "my patient and I have some work to do."

Puškarić made congenial noises and departed with expressions of "get well soon!".

When he left, Bradford mumbled some more, as if he were engaging in some private conversation with somebody else while looking at her.

Bradford came to some conclusion and said, "Lesson one, lass. You don't call a chief petty officer 'sir'. He's Chief Puškarić." He pronounced it *PUSHK-ar-itch*. "Do you understand?"

Sharon realized that they expected her to conduct herself like a fellow military person. She nodded and made a feeble attempt at saluting him.

Bradford tsked, took her right arm and placed it and her hand in the correct position for a proper salute. "Thus. Done crisply."

"Thanks. Em ... Do I call *you* sir?"

"I'm an officer, so yes." Bradford looked disappointed. "Do you have any idea whatsoever where you are, lass?"

"None at all."

Bradford pulled up the chair and sat so that his face was level with Sharon's. His eyes showed signs of distress. "Do you still think your name is Sharon?"

She just shrugged, worried that any other response would get her into some kind of trouble.

"Do you remember anything at all?" he asked.

Sharon did her best to pull up some memory, any memory, from the dark fog that was her past. "Nothing."

There was more of the infernal mumbling from Bradford, which was getting annoying. Then, "You might be back on your feet ASAP, but unless you can get your memories back — all of them — you won't be going back to work."

Sharon nodded and looked Bradford in the eyes. "I understand."

"Good!" Bradford brightened. "Do you think you're ready for some physical therapy?"

Sharon held up the cable locking her to the bed.

"I'm sure we can let you loose for as much exercise as you can stand." Dr. Bradford said, addressing an invisible person, "Corpsman, bring the key to this contraption."

* * *

Much later, Dr. Bradford reported to Souza in the captain's quarters. "She doesn't remember anything. She doesn't know she's on a spaceship. She doesn't have any inkling of what quantum electronics is. She doesn't even remember her military training."

"Well," Souza responded, swallowing a mouthful of coffee. "That won't do. But considering that we all thought she was

dead, this is an improvement. And nothing at all about the explosion?”

“No. And, if I may, she was never quite dead. She always had brainstem activity after the injury. I was ready to pull the plug on her, though. Her mental recovery is nothing short of miraculous. I see several papers in the making here.”

“Any idea what caused it? The recovery, I mean.”

“Maybe,” Bradford said cautiously. “There’s a problem. Simmons thinks she’s someone else. There is another identity replacing the Simmons one. An identity who calls herself Sharon Manders.”

Souza raised her eyebrows and regarded the ship’s surgeon in silence for five seconds. “A spy?”

Bradford shook his head. It was not surprising that a career military person would immediately suspect a spy, and considering everything else, it was not a huge leap even for the most dedicated optimist. It would certainly tie up all the loose ends.

“Psychology isn’t my specialty and while I won’t rule anything out, my best guess is that it’s simply some kind of psychotic break.”

“Then why are we having this conversation?”

“Because there are aspects which just don’t add up. Even with severe brain trauma, complete and permanent memory loss is rare. You mentioned spies, for example. There have been cases of spies who, through pharmaceuticals and conditioning, had their personalities subsumed by their cover identity, and then awakened as a sleeper agent by some stimulus. This could be the case with Simmons, but even the subsumed personality would also have been damaged by the brain trauma. Thing is, there was no higher brain function at all. I was prepared to let Simmons die. Nothing of any personality, native or otherwise, should have survived.”

“But?”

“Where did the Sharon Manders personality come from? The patient was only just this side of official brain death. Her heart and lungs were working on their own, but that was all. Even if the brain had healed itself — a condition without precedence — it would have been a blank slate. There have been cases where patients have suffered brain trauma to the point where they are mentally like babies, though otherwise healthy. They have to be taught from scratch — just like babies. In Simmons’ case, it was like somebody deleted the old personality and wrote a new one. There is no known method for doing that, and no ethics panel in the Tau Ceti Alliance would authorize such an experiment.”

Souza looked concerned. “So, you’re saying that it would take an unknown technology to create a foreign personality in a host brain.” She thought about this for a moment then asked, “Have you done a census search for this Sharon Manders?”

“Yes, to no avail, I’m afraid.”

“Doctor, we have to proceed with caution. We’ll assume that this Manders personality is untrustworthy. Do not let her have access to any ship’s systems, is that clear?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Keep her secured, and keep me posted on her condition and anything that looks suspicious.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

* * *

A wolf walked into Sharon’s hospital room.

Actually, it was a wolf-man, and Sharon wondered if it was real, or if her meds had something to do with the apparition.

The wolf-man wore a corpsman’s scrubs with the *Zephyr* logo and a name tag which displayed the word BARISCHK. Sharon’s second thought was that this was some sort of costume,

but the details were incredibly fine. She was so startled by the appearance that she only belatedly realized that the wolf-man was giving her an object: A hand mirror. The wolf's visage somehow managed a doggy grin and a playful wink. Sharon took the mirror and murmured, "Thank you. That's very considerate," though her thoughts were along the lines of, *just when you think you have this universe figured out ...* The wolf-man turned and left without a word, tail wagging.

Further thoughts of the wolf-man were lost as Sharon caught sight of herself in the mirror. The woman who looked back was completely unrecognizable. Of indeterminate age somewhere between twenty and forty, she had stubby light brown hair that was just growing in, and a fresh, wicked scar running along her left coronal suture. Beyond that, the shallow set to the eyes, the high cheek bones, the light-brown skin, the pointed chin, the detached earlobes, the full nose, the brown irises, the almond shape of the eyes — she looked like one of those composite photographs used to show what people would look like after all the races of humanity finally mixed together.

Everything looked wrong, though Sharon could not have said what should have been right.

How do I know what a coronal suture is?

"Who are you?" Sharon asked the woman in the mirror.

The door opened and yet another stranger walked in. He looked entirely human, and a bit Nordic. He appeared to be about thirty years old and dressed in a slightly different uniform than the Navy personnel.

"Specialist Simmons, I'm told that you won't remember me. I'm Marine Lieutenant Folke Berg. We are all concerned for your health and I was wondering if you would do something for me." Without waiting for a reply, he handed her a slim sheet of translucent flexible plastic with words on it. It was apparently some kind of computer display and interface. "Read that out loud."

Sharon cleared her throat and took a breath, wondering if she should have saluted the lieutenant. “Although he was a poet ...”

“No, wait,” the Lieutenant interrupted. “Read it like you normally would, in your own voice. I know you’re making an effort to be understood, but that’s neither necessary nor desired with this exercise. Please continue.”

Sharon started over, speaking in a natural, unforced manner.

When she was done, she looked at Berg for further instructions. He was, of course, mumbling to himself.

What was it with all the mumbling? Was it some cultural norm she hadn’t learned? Or was everybody here afflicted with some neurosis?

Berg looked confused. “Read it again.”

Sharon complied, and the results did not seem to clear up anything for either of them.

“Thank you, Specialist Simmons,” the lieutenant said, taking the plastic. “Good day.”

And with that, Berg was gone.

* * *

Lieutenant Berg’s orders were simultaneously simple and broad: *Assume that the patient in Sick Bay 1021 is not Specialist Simmons. Find out who she is.*

According to every biometric he could think of, there was no physical difference between Carol Simmons and the patient. DNA as well as mitochondrial DNA markers all matched. Fingerprints and retinal scans also matched. *Everything* matched.

The voice analysis, however, did not. There was no record in the entire Navy of anybody with that voiceprint. When the ship stopped at Kentaurus, he could access a wider range of databases. According to navy records, Simmons was born and raised in the Alemanni Province, but there was no way her current voice patterns matched the heavily accented patois of

commingled English, Spanish, and German associated with that region. In fact, he was certain that her accent was not found anywhere on Kentaurus, her home planet, and there was a huge collection of regional accents there. The patient's accent was flatter, with very little emphasis. Berg was anxious to access other databases to find out just where the accent came from. Could Simmons be such a good voice actress that she was faking? The computer analysis said no. Although he had seen some extremely good performances by impressionists and voice artists who seemed to be able to do anything with their voices, the human voice was the sum of many things.

One of the more curious aspects of Simmons' speech was the pronunciation of the word "*dear*" with a single syllable *dir*, like the animal. Anybody else on the ship, regardless of their native language accent, would have pronounced it with two syllables, *dee-ahr*.

Feeling like he needed to talk this out with somebody, Berg activated a program he hadn't used in years.

"How may I help you?" the genderless, computer-generated voice asked.

"Have you accessed all the information on the case?" Berg asked.

"Yes. It's very curious."

"Do you think Patient 1021 set the bomb?"

"It's very probable. There is a decided lack of suspects, but that doesn't make Patient 1021 guilty. While there are several crewmembers who have the means to construct such a bomb, I cannot identify anybody else who had the opportunity. Nor can I identify a motive."

Berg sighed. The computer was reflecting Berg's own thoughts. "Could Patient 1021 be a sleeper agent?"

"The life of Patient 1021 is well documented, and she has never shown any interest in radical politics, or any other kind

of politics. The only suspicious anomaly are the missing hours on Maheux. While this is alarming, the time frame seems insufficient.”

This was no help. Berg had already been over all these facts in detail. He terminated the program then said, “Word process activate,” under his breath, which Sharon would have mistaken for incoherent mumbling. His EPU responded with a small red light in the upper right of his visual field. “Open report Status of Patient 1021.” He summarized his findings, cleaned up the grammatical and voice-to-text errors, and then concluded, “Append. The patient is emphasis not emphasis Carol Simmons. Even if she were intentionally trying to hide her voiceprint identity, the analysis would have discovered it. Carol Simmons could not have created this voiceprint. Stop.”

Berg thought carefully about his next words. “Continue. Paragraph. Dr. Bradford, CMO, has expressed different hypotheses on what may have happened. First, the patient is exhibiting an emergent personality which has never before existed. This is consistent with her lack of memory about anything prior to the explosion. When asked what the genesis of this emergent personality may be, he conjectured that it might have originated in a book or vid series which the patient identified with as a young girl. Paragraph.

“Second, we may be seeing a latent personality which existed prior to the one we know as Carol Simmons. Dr. Bradford has outlined medical procedures involving pharmacological and cognitive treatments in which one personality can be made dormant, and another overlaid, but he emphasizes that it is beyond his sphere of knowledge. The natural fear is that the latent, and now dominant personality could be a malevolent one. Stop.” Berg thought for a second, then added, “Insert. Dr. Bradford was quick to emphasize that overlaying a personality with another one is always temporary.

There has never been a case where one pre-existing personality has permanently replaced another. Additionally, there wasn't enough time to accomplish this."

Berg became silent with thought, resting his head on his hands and his elbows on the desk. After a minute or two he addressed the EPU again. "New task. Perform media search for references to personality disorders associated with faulty EPU's." His EPU flashed the light to indicate that it had understood and accepted the task.

"New Task. Perform media search for any reference in any language on any planet for the name Sharon Manders or any derivation of that name." The light flashed again.

"New Task. Append to report Status of Patient 1021. Cue video record ..." he checked his notes, "1021 dash 17 dash 42. Begin at time marker one hour, forty-three minutes. Play."

Berg's visual field was replaced with the view from the security camera in Sharon's room. It showed her examining her face in a mirror. She touched her nose, her eyebrows, and her chin. After fifteen seconds, the enhanced audio pick-up clearly recorded her words.

"Who are you?"

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANDREA MONTICUE is an aircraft technician who has crawled around inside of the B2, corporate jets, and puddle jumpers. She figures this makes her an expert on starships.

She and her wife live on the west coast of the North American Continent, enjoying redwoods, scuba, archery, bicycling, skateboarding, coffee, reading, and dogs.

Find out more about Andrea at *Memoirs of an Earthling* (memoirsofanearthling.blog).

*CIVILIZATION FELL.
IT ROSE.
AT SOME POINT, PEOPLE BUILT STARSHIPS.*

A millennium after the Earth was abandoned to climate change and resource depletion, Sharon Manders wakes up in a body that used to belong to somebody else, and some say she was a terrorist.

She has no idea how she could be digging for Pleistocene bones in Africa one day, and crewing on a starship the next. That was just before she met the wolfman, the elf, and the sex robot.

Struggling with distressingly unreliable memories, the expectations of her host body's family and crewmates, future shock, and accusations of treason, Sharon goes on the lam to come face to face with terrorists, giant bugs, drug cartels, AIs, and lawyers.

All things considered,
she'd rather be back in 21st Century California.

Andrea is an aircraft technician living on the West Coast. When she's not doing science fiction, she enjoys scuba, archery, bicycling, science and languages. You can find out more at her blog, *Memoirs of an Earthling*.