

Introduction to *Species Imperative #1: Survival*
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The production of ebooks took a nose-dive as companies were being bought, taken apart, reimagined, failed and were reborn. One result was that this introduction, and the ebook mss for Survival essentially sat on a virtual shelf then faded away, as if data can do that. There is an ebook now, but it's come from DAW via Penguin, as will my others and they have been going straight from the files without asking for these introductions. I did enjoy writing them. I'm glad to finally share this one with you - Julie, 2010

Welcome to the Palm Digital Media edition of my first major hardcover release! While you aren't holding a hardcover book, you are holding everything one means to an author: responsibility, respect, and really large amounts of fear. My future success as an author, and my editor's faith in me, is directly tied to the quality of this particular story. That's a good deal of responsibility to add to asking you, dear reader, to spend more for your latest dose of Czerneda. It had better be worth your hard-earned loot. Respect? Oh, here's hoping. Hardcovers being what they are, there should be a bit more physical shelf space for this one in stores, a few more reviewers I must trust to keep some of the plot secret, and definitely more critics. Fear? I'm reaching further than ever with this book, widening the scope while tightening the focus, setting up a story that will take three books to complete, three books laced with responsibility and hoping for respect. Oh, there's a quiver or two involved in all that, believe me.

However, this introduction, exclusive to your edition of this book, isn't about my highly emotional state as I write it. (Although I'm sure that has its humorous aspect which I'll appreciate more once *Survival* is finally with readers.) This is my opportunity to share with you something about this book and those that follow. Don't worry. I won't spoil the story. I've a horror of that. I'll do my best to add a little something extra, just for you.

Characters. A great starting point for a story. Not that I did, mind you. The beginning of *Species Imperative* was a question I asked myself long ago: imagine a future in which a variety of intelligent space-faring species interact. What if one of those species begins to act according to an innate biological drive, an irresistible imperative that was incompatible with the survival of the rest? Or even of itself? My underlying thought was that we have instincts and needs that suit living on a planet. Nothing promises all of those will be assets to us in space or on other worlds. As a particular troublesome and powerful drive to consider, I chose migration, having seen first hand the power of that drive on captive birds and fish. Being fascinated by salmon, and the concept of how their individual populations are related to their movement upstream to reproduce, I decided upon them as the reflection on Earth of my otherworldly conundrum. To do so, I needed a character who knew about salmon. Aha!

I had a question, and a career, or at least an expertise, for one character. I needed more. Characters, to me, are the part of the writing process when a thought experiment becomes storytelling, when you realize who would be affected, who might be the ideal viewpoint, and who could engage your heart and mind for three or more years.

That is the time commitment I knew I would make to this story. While a reader might take an evening, perhaps a week, to read the events here, my mind is deep inside these characters far longer. I have to want to be there, enough to sit in this chair for months, missing time with my family and the rest of the world.

It would have been less scary making that commitment if I'd planned to tell this story from several viewpoints. After all, if I grew tired of character A, I could spend time with character B or C instead. Today a woman, tomorrow a man, the next day, who knows? What fun! But I decided this particular story, because it deals with such a huge framework and idea, had to be told intimately, through one set of eyes, from start to end.

I wound up stuck at 'start.' I had the themes and major action points of the story in mind. I had a deadline to meet. I'd even done extensive research for years on the science that would inform my speculations on migration and its evolution. But I didn't have a main character. Not an inkling. I think I was afraid to start writing whoever it would be, in case I didn't like him or her. Or it.

Our daughter came to my rescue. We were lying on the carpet late one afternoon, watching something on TV involving curious renovations, when I mentioned having trouble with names for my characters. It was better than admitting I was stuck.

She said "Mackenzie" without hesitation.

I lost track of the renovations. I was astonished by the variety of meanings that came to mind with the name. A famous prime minister, an in-joke from "Due South," the longest river in Canada, the Arctic Ocean. How perfect.

Mackenzie would be a salmon researcher on the west coast of Canada.

The name shaped a person as well. I thought of a woman, capable and self-motivated, professional yet curious, a loner in some ways. Determined. Feisty. Kind. Stubborn. Creative. She'd prefer to be called 'Mac.' She cared about her work and politely ignored everything and anything outside it, from aliens to dress lengths.

I liked her.

Meanwhile, the phone was ringing -- our daughter's friends, eager to set up the night's plans. I drew a question mark beside Mac's name on my notepad. Friends matter. Mac had to have one, constant and true. Emily. A foil in every sense. Both scientists, both driven by questions. But Emily would be the extrovert, to Mac's reticence. Brash, to Mac's care. A risk-taker, to Mac's caution. Perhaps in some sense shadow, to Mac's light.

I could hear their voices now, see Em shaking her head, see Mac scowl then laugh.

I literally began writing *Survival* at that moment, with the opening lines from what became Chapter 2. Emily's voice, Mac's reaction.

Species Imperative, its three books, tells a story of events which span light years and worlds, that threaten the survival of an interstellar civilization and individual species, but is at its heart, a story told through Mac. Showing her growth in understanding allows me to keep those immense consequences personal. Best of all, using her involvement makes the choices ahead, hers and others, poignant and difficult in ways that affect me as a writer. (I began muttering "Poor Mac" to myself in apology.) I hope they affect you, too.

From a moment's curiosity to a question I continue to ask. From years of collecting research about living things, to the creation of a character who lives for me.

I give you Dr. Mackenzie Connor.

Enjoy.