

Julie E. Czerneda, writing about her new release, *Species Imperative #1 - Survival*.

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There's pizza and beer. Laundry and wet boots. Students, tourists, and media hounds. A large blue alien with sequins along his brow ridges. At least one spy. At least one friend. A terrifying threat to all who live within a vast sweep of settled space. A bureaucracy stubbornly protecting its tiny corner of life. All intruding on this season's salmon run, as if to annoy an otherwise peaceful biologist named Mackenzie Connor.

Mac, for short. Poor Mac. Her world is a not-too-far future Earth, now part of a thriving Interstellar Union of intelligent species that interest her not at all. Unfortunately for Mac, her particular knowledge of evolution and migrating species is of great interest to Brymn, a rather unusual member of the Dhryn species. Because of Brymn, Mac will find herself not only away from home, in the midst of a mystery with implications far beyond humanity, but cut off from everything she knows and loves. Poor Mac.

I've been waiting to write this story for such a long time. I had research to do, several years' worth, in fact, and that part's still underway. I had skills to develop and confidence to gain. It isn't every day a writer tackles biological issues on a cosmic scale. Or third person, for that matter. And, most of all, I needed to "find" my viewpoint character, Mac. In the *Species Imperative* trilogy, I'm looking at the impact of biological drives across civilizations and species, over time as well as space. It was crucial to find one voice who could not only carry such a tale, but make it come alive. Now, I have.

Oh, Mac isn't a superhero. She isn't about to single-handedly save the universe or even her corner of it. She's an honest, dedicated scientist; a decent human being who gets caught up in something much larger than most will ever face. It's her personal focus, her courage in caring for what is near her, for what she can grasp, that tells this story. She's not a power. She's -- I think of her as an intersection of ideas, ideas that must ultimately determine the survival of more than any individual species.

For the real question I'm asking in this story isn't: 'can humanity survive?'

It's 'to survive, must we be alone?'

I'd like to say I know the answer, but I don't. I'm in the midst of writing book #2 now, *Migration* (May 05), and doing plot notes for the finale, book #3, *Regeneration* (May 06). I'm still at the point where I have several possible directions to take the story. Some are darker than others, some shocking, and some I probably won't see until finishing *Migration*. That's often how I write, expanding the possibilities to a certain stage, then finding they narrow down of their own accord as choices are made by the characters. My choices, yes. But for *Species Imperative*, in a very real sense, they will be Mac's. A character like this is a gift for an author. I hope she will be that for you, too.