



Survival

Julie E. Czerneda

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Herself a biologist, Julie E. Czerneda has earned a reputation in science fiction circles for her ability to create beautifully crafted, imaginative, yet believably realized alien races. In *Survival*, the first novel in her new series, *Species Imperative*, she draws upon this talent to build races, characters, and a universe which will draw readers into a magnificent tale of interstellar intrigue, as an Earth scientist is caught up in a terrifying interspecies conflict. Senior co-administrator of the Norcoast Salmon Research Facility, Dr. Mackenzie Connor, Mac to her friends and colleagues, was a trained biologist, whose work had definitely become her life. And working at Norcoast Base, set in an ideal location just where the Tannu River sped down the west side of the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Coast was the perfect situation for Mac. She and fellow scientist Dr. Emily Mamani were just settling in to monitor this year's salmon runs when their research was interrupted by the unprecedented arrival of Brymn, the first member of the alien race known as the Ohrym to ever set foot on Earth.

Brymn was an archaeologist, and much of his research had focused on a region of space known as the Chasm, a part of the universe that was literally dead, all of its worlds empty of any life-forms, though traces existed of the civilizations that must once have flourished in the region. Brymn had sought out Mac because she was a biologist -- a discipline strictly forbidden among his own people -- and he felt that through her expertise she might be able to help him discover what had created the Chasm. But Mac had little interest in alien races and in studies that ranged beyond Earth, and as politely as she was capable of, she tried to make it clear that she was unwilling to abandon her own work.

However, the decision was soon taken out of her hands when a mysterious and devastating attack on the Base resulted in the abduction of Emily, and forced Mac to flee for her life with Brymn and the Earth special agents who were escorting him. Suddenly, it appeared that Earth itself might be under attack by the legendary race the Ohrym called the Ro, the beings they thought might be the destructive force behind the Chasm. Cut off from everything and everyone she knew, Mac found herself in grave danger and charged with the responsibility of learning everything she could that might possibly aid Earth in protecting the human race from extinction...

Survival Details

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From Reader Review Survival for online ebook

Efka says

When I have read the description of "Survival", I thought that there is some potential and promise. Sadly, that wasn't the case. Sure, the idea and plot are not bad, but the execution is. I've been bought by promises of "beautifully crafted, imaginative, yet believably realized alien races" - and did not find any of those three mentioned above. Maybe, and I mean *maybe*, they are beautifully crafted, but that's it. And the whole book is.. I'm not sure what word best describes my personal feelings towards it, it's not disappointment, nor it is excitement or other synonyms, so i guess that "It's bleak, but ok" would have to do.

The plot is quite predictable and not very imaginative, with lots of cliches and stereotypes, and slow paceing rarely gets into my good books, so, unsurprisingly, it didn't happen. As I wrote in one of status updates', it took half of the book to finish the excessively long prologue (Yeah, we get it - salmon migration patterns **are** important, but could we please move on?), and still much didn't happen later. At the moment, I'm not sure if I want to continue this series, and it means I have doubts if it really is a goodread.

An "OK" kind of book is worth 2 stars, and I agree with it. Maybe, had it been x-out-of-10 rating system, I'd have given 5/10, but it is two stars as it is.

Laura Fredriksen says

Some hard sci-fi that takes a good focus on Biology instead of the usual (physics). I was happy to see this alternate path. The alien characters were also great.

Jim Mcclanahan says

I'm not quite halfway into this book and I'm becoming impatient. If Czerneda is really a biologist, she should know that a King salmon and a Chinook salmon are one and the same. She doesn't. She should also have enough interdisciplinary good manners not to refer to anthropologists as "pot hunters". Aside from that, her characters are one dimensional and stereotyped unduly. Sorry, I've been out of graduate school 40 years and have no wish to revisit the perky milieu of dedicated post-grad work (which is contrived and unreal anyway).

Hopefully, the story itself will unfold to an extent that will help me enjoy this.

Okay. Finished it. Although some elements of the story were interesting, overall, I found it to be ponderous. I figured out what would be the outcome a little more than halfway through. Which had me wondering to myself: how come the characters in the novel didn't come to the same conclusions. Now I am faced with the prospect of reading two more lengthy novels (the next one in hand) with similarly glacial progesess of the story line. Oh, and all the criticisms earlier of the characters and the dodgy science are still true for me. I'll have to give careful thought to whether I will continue the series or not. Mind you, the first novel wasn't awful, just not as good as I might wish.

Kirsten says

This book was wonderful; though, at times, it seemed to lose its way, and, then, at the end, it seemed to want to rush its way through the climax. I so wanted to give it 4 stars, but I really can't.

I loved the first third. Thrilling and fascinating. But, then, we went through what I think of as the "lost" section. Not bad writing, but there were all these sections where I just felt I couldn't keep track. And, then, at the end, she seemed to find her way but she rushed it.

Also, I'm really not quite sure I know what happened at the end. What was the final form of the Dhry? What did it have to do with the Chasm? It was just so rushed. What happened? Will I have to pick up the next book to have it explained?

Well, I guess I will do just that. Seems a kind of cruel way to get me to do that. But I'll only do it if I can get it at the library. I'm sure not going to let her profit by it.

Callan Fromm says

Excellent stuff.

I picked *Survival* up on the recommendation of my uncle, a science fiction author and scholar. I went in with high expectations, and I was not disappointed at all-- in fact, I found myself happily surprised by Czerneda's talent for characterisation, pacing, and plot. Mac, the protagonist, is well-written and refreshingly multifaceted. I do think she could have done without the romance part of the plot (I was genuinely excited about the prospect of a realistically-portrayed ace protagonist-- we need a few more of those), but it's minor enough that I'm happy to focus on the other aspects of the novel.

Of all the aspects of *Survival* that drew me in, however, it's the science. Czerneda has a strong grasp of biology and really knows how to integrate it with her storytelling, setting, and characterisations. I won't go into too much detail so to avoid spoilers, but she does a lovely job of tying Mac's specialisation into past events and foreshadowed happenings.

The big revelation at the climax is telegraphed fairly clearly if you know where to look, and the ending seemed a bit abrupt and odd, given the world-shaking information Mac and her allies have obtained, but it doesn't take away from the fact that *Survival* was, overall, an engrossing and enjoyable read that I had difficulty putting down.

Dmitry says

I tried to like this novel. After comparing my thoughts with other reviews im certain the storyline is anything but "intense" as some ladies of a certain age seem to find it.

It starts well enough with science which kids today likely know from BBC nature programs. The migration

of the salmon, the energy cycle, the futuristic bureaucratic conservation efforts. There is some mention of a mysterious nano-trawling machine engineered by one of the intrepid biologists.

Then it quickly descends into pointless babble for a hundred pages - fancy that our protagonist is a socially inept researcher with no love life. The alien characters are cutouts too, distinguished only by their clueless nature and additional limbs. Their only redeeming feature is the alien companions' intriguing anti-science society, though I'm sure this will interest young scientists more than budding philosophers.

Again, the reviews suggested a level of sophistication in world-building similar to Sheri S. Tepper, but really its of the less immersive variety to eclectic sf readers. The biology is believable, but it has no awe factor.

Three stars for a great (and possibly original) galactic threat though, and generally solid future building.

David Fuller says

A strong background in science doesn't necessarily make for good science fiction.

But as Julie E. Czerneda shows, it doesn't hurt, either.

Czerneda, a former biologist, lives in Ontario. One of her previous novels, *In the Company of Others*, won the 2002 Prix Aurora, Canada's equivalent of the Hugo.

In *Survival*, Czerneda draws on her experience as a researcher in animal communication to create a complex galaxy of precarious interspecies alliances. Though the alien characters are few, interpreting their actions is crucial to the plot.

Take Brynn, for example. He is a Dhryn, a species that forbids the study of biology and communicates occasionally in infrasound, too low-pitched for humans to hear. His human ally, Dr. Mackenzie Connor, isn't always sure what he means.

Connor, or "Mac," is a biologist studying salmon on the Pacific Coast. When Brynn and his human handler, government agent Nikolai Trojanowski, barge into her restricted wildlife zone, Mac is obliged to collaborate with him in researching an inexplicable series of extinctions.

A strange, unidentified species is dissolving ecosystems on a planetary scale for its own consumption. If unchecked, planets in the Interspecies Union, including human worlds, will be threatened.

The mystery deepens when an attempt is made on Mac's life. She survives, but her closest friend Emily is abducted.

Though terrified, Mac recreates what she believes are snippets of the kidnappers' language. Trojanowski and Brynn identify them as Ro, a race that may be behind the extinctions.

Czerneda adds depth to her story without bogging down the reader in unnecessary detail. For example, when we learn that the Ro terrorize the Dhryn as infants, we don't learn why — Brynn himself doesn't know. As Mac discovers more about both species, her biologist's curiosity competes with her desire to help Brynn. Czerneda's experience as a biologist shows, and she manages the tricky balance between science and fiction. Mass extinction isn't just a dry concept when it's wedded to the possibility of galactic genocide.

And rather than present readers with the latest version of doom and gloom, Czerneda frames it as a mystery filled with strong characters, humour and surprises. People — whether human or alien — aren't always what they seem.

One example is Emily. Before her disappearance, she teases Mac about her ignorance of the rest of the galaxy. "Unlike you, Mac, I know what it takes to travel to and from this ball of dirt. I know the questions to ask and where to get answers."

Later, as Mac comes to rely more on Brynn and Trojanowski for protection, she wonders: was Emily really

trying to warn her?

Survival ends on a cliffhanger that is delicious in its chaos. If its forthcoming conclusion, Migration, is as good, don't expect Czerneda to return to her day job anytime soon.

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Elana says

There was cyberpunk. There is steampunk. And there should be biopunk. I loved the alien biology in this book so much that I forgive the annoying protagonist, whose most distinguishing feature is her hair. I also forgive the disjunction between biology and psychology (surely aliens should be, well, alien). I even forgive the slow plot development at the beginning compensated by the breakneck speed at the end. In another book, these would be serious flaws but I'm so happy with the biological inventiveness (based on real knowledge) of the author that I am willing to overlook all of them. Now I am looking forward to the sequel.

Aniko Carmean says

The kitchen at my office has a paperback lending library. One lunch hour, I ran across SURVIVAL: Species Imperative #1 by Julie E. Czerneda. As a girl whose full maiden name included no less than three instances of the letter "z," I have a fondness for any "z" names. I also have a fondness for science fiction, so I snagged SURVIVAL and brought it with me on vacation to Kaua'i.

Kaua'i is known as the "Garden Isle," and is bright with beauty and multiple ecosystems teeming with colorful varieties of life: plant, bird, fish - even the sand was variegated. SURVIVAL has a strong theme of ecological conservation which resonated with my experience of Kaua'i. The book opens with Mac petitioning the Wilderness Trust to continue her salmon research in zone designated for protection against human contamination of the environment. Mac is a character I instantly liked: an intelligent, stubborn, and focused woman who has to borrow the shoes she wears to her petition meeting. I settled comfortably into my beach-side lounger as Mac and her fellow-researcher and friend, Emily, started their data capture of the salmon run. Two of us were in for a surprise when an alien of the species Dhrym ruined the data capture by swimming upstream in direct violation of the no contamination protocols. Mac responded by throwing a rock at their visitor as he swam, then pushed his diplomatic escort into the water in irritation with the loss of data and the possibility their incursion would cause problems at her next Trust review. The rowdy campiness ends when Mac reads a missive from the Ministry of Extra-Sol Human Affairs. It details a Category Zeta threat - a world destroyer.

Sitting in an ecological paradise, the idea of a world-destroying threat really hit me hard. The potential fate of Earth in Czerneda's SURVIVAL is summed up by the refrain "then the mouths began to drink," and Czerneda effectively ratchets up the fear and tension in mini-chapters describing other planets that have already been destroyed. The horror is offset by humor, especially around the interactions of Mac and the Dhrym visitor, Bhrym. The culture of the Dhrym is fascinating. I love it that they use a pictographs outside of their dwellings to indicate anything from mood, to the acceptable topics to discuss at a dinner. I love their love of names, and was titillated by the mention of granthu, the ceremony in which a Dhrym acquires extra names. Czerneda shines in building culture, but she outdoes herself in coming up with the most unique and complex set of biological metamorphoses I've seen in any science fiction.

I read *SURVIVAL* on a beach, but it is by no means a "beach read." *SURVIVAL* is the first in a series, and closes with the decidedly un-beach-read question: What do you do when a species' natural evolution becomes a threat to other planets? Some, including someone close to Mac, answer with attempted genocide. Bhrym's answer is to give his own life. Mac, the tough and shoe-borrowing salmon-researcher, answers with her own understated transformation and growth.

SURVIVAL is science fiction driven by potent imagination, and infused with the sort of moral quandaries that make the genre what it is.

David says

Survival is the first book in the "Species Imperative" series. It is science fiction centering around biology, which I, at least, haven't seen much of. It follows Dr. Macenzie Connor, a salmon researcher on Earth in the far future--far enough that "transect" technology exists, allowing instantaneous travel between the stars (but not within solar systems), which in turn allows for the existence of the Interspecies Union.

One day Mac is visited by a member of a somewhat obscure species, and before long it is made obvious that the visit is all business and no pleasure. People near the Chasm, a region of the universe mysteriously devoid of life for as long as anyone can remember, are disappearing. Mac just may hold the key to finding out why...

My thoughts: While Czerneda is clearly talented at weaving together her story, several of her (or her editor's, possibly) stylistic choices distracted me. For instance, her main character's "thoughts," set in italics, are almost always (but not always) composed in third-person. Awkward.

Such things aside, the writing moves at a pretty good pace; the 580-page book is a quick read. However, upon reflection at the end of the book, I noted that not as much had happened as I was hoping. While there are twists, many are highly predictable. To cap it off, the ending does not so much leave open to the reader an invitation to read the next book in the series--instead it demands it. This book is very, very obviously "just the beginning."

As a result, I'd only recommend *Survival* if you really like sci-fi, want a biological tilt rather than more common fare, and are ready to commit to a multiple-book endeavor. I haven't acquired the second book in the series, so I can't advise much further. That said, I do hope the rest of the series adds much more to the interesting universe (and storyline) Czerneda has begun to craft with *Survival*.

piranha says

I read this first when it originally came out, and after such a long time I had barely any memory of it other than that I generally like Julie Czerneda as an author, and the book takes place in my general bailiwick, though a bit north from where I live. I seemed to recall that I had liked the trilogy.

Alas it has not aged well for me. It rubbed me wrong pretty much immediately with a casual statement in which King and Chinook Salmon are listed as different species by a salmon researcher. They're not; they're just different local names for *Oncorhynchus tshawytscha* (I'm not a salmon researcher, but I've written software for salmon aquaculture; I know a fair bit more about salmon than the titular expert in this book.)

That is a tiny little detail, but it throws the research Czerneda put into the salmon aspect of the books into question. Well, not that it matters, because there actually is no more science here than in an elementary introduction on salmon. Mac spends much more time fiddling with her voluminous hair than she spends talking or thinking about salmon science.

Worse is that the entire premise, that of a Dhrynn, an alien from a race generally not given to contact with other species, comes to Earth specifically to see our protagonist, Mackenzie "Mac" Connor, in order to speak to her about her research which might be helpful to solving questions related to his archaeological work on the unexplained death of several civilizations in a region of the universe called the "Chasm". Mac doesn't care. Wow. I didn't even remember this, but really, she couldn't care less. About aliens, about the death of entire civilizations, and about a new danger, that of the shadowy abductions of aliens on various planets, and the concern about this from governmental sources which have aided the Dhrynn in his pursuit of talking to Mac -- he even has an official government minder. But no, Mac only cares that her immediate research on the current salmon run is being disrupted. Okay, so she cares a little about the Dhrynn's minder, because she seems to be emotionally about 15, and Nikolai is hot.

The romance aspects are purple and cringe-worthily embarrassing.

The original setting is established well (though it's not an actual location; there's no Tannu River flowing into Hecate Strait); Mac is a senior co-administrator of a research station, and her concentration on her own research, her interactions with fellow scientists and grad students as well as with the wilderness trust representative of the area, who doesn't want the research station there at all, are quite realistic to anyone who has ever worked in biological research. I started out finding her quite well drawn and sympathetic, and I was totally onboard with her initial grumpiness about having her research disrupted. But that sympathy got lost fairly quickly because her interactions with the Dhrynn were just stupid. She didn't even really care *why* he had sought her out (which would have been her own research; who wouldn't care about that?), and she instantly broke a serious confidence by spilling what he had told her to her research pal and bestie Emily. That got downplayed by the Dhrynn himself, but I thought it was unethical (and considering what happened afterwards, a seriously bad idea).

Mac is, to my eyes, the kind of narrow-minded scientist that I find seriously aggravating in real life, and it frankly makes no sense that she gets sought out at all for the tasks that lie ahead. I can think of any number of people who'd be more qualified; I've met some of them. Not only does Mac not give a fuck about aliens, or any research not her own (if that), but she's also not interested in travelling off-planet, nor is she particularly nimble in thinking outside the box in general. And guess what happens, as soon as we lovingly have the remote and wild British Columbian Coast setting displayed for us in all its researchy glory? Emily gets abducted by invisible foes, and Mac has to flee for her life, travel off-planet, and possibly save the human race.

For the entire rest of the book I was torn between thinking Mac utterly incompetent, and her doing the occasionally really smart thing -- I loved her exploration of the Dhrynn food (or is it?) provided for her. She never asked any of the many questions who could have helped her along (still not interested enough?), and it just frustrated me. Not like the Dhrynn were easy to talk with, mind, with their taboos about discussing biology, but Mac didn't strike me as interested enough to even try. She was embroiled in mostly retarded emotions instead. I would have preferred a lot more scientific exploration instead, even if grumpy and reluctant.

Her friendship with Emily also looked dysfunctional to me. Most of what we saw about Emily before she got abducted was her pushing Mac into being more like Emily, and outright humiliating Mac in front of others,

especially in front of hot Nikolai -- what a friend! But Mac holds on to that friendship, just like apparently she held on to the guy Sam she loved in her youth, who travelled off-planet without her, whom she hasn't forgotten, and who's left her with nothing but an aversion to new love and travel off-planet -- oh, and her hair, which she isn't cutting because of him. I think we're supposed to find that dedication praiseworthy; but I just find it pathological.

The second part of the book is differently interesting (and more interesting from an sfnal point of view) because hey, new worlds and aliens. Mac also does something really smart when introduced to a Dhryn progenitor, which isn't just smart for the situation, but also very smart in terms of what it means from a writerly point of view.

This does not, alien-wise, live up even remotely to CJ Cherryh or Sheri S Tepper. I was disappointed, but I think the trilogy gets better as it progresses. I could have done without the romance entirely, or if we must have romance, let's have one between two adults, not an adult and a blushing 15-year old ingenue?

Trisha says

Finished this read just a few minutes ago and am ready to move onto book #2. For now I shall reflect briefly on what I just read. At first I did think it was moving a bit slow, 'cause it was only by about page 122 that the real "dramatic" action started. There was a lot of lead-up to that, but I didn't much mind reading about it 'cause the setting at Norcoast was interesting to read about. The description made me wish I could visit. :)

The plot in this story did send me in directions I wasn't expecting, and there were unexpected events too (such as what occurred on the Dhryn home world, and what happened with Brynn in the end) that kept surprising me. It's clear by the end of the book that the story has only just begun. I was really sad about Brynn's fate. :(Poor little puffer fish Dhryn!

The scene where the Ro attack the Dhryn home world was pretty dramatic, and I can definitely imagine it on the big screen, though I fear that fake-looking CGI would ruin the real potential of the scene to be truly epic. I like the fact that Czerneda's aliens are really and truly alien, not basically humans with slightly pointy eyebrows and ears (I'm looking at you, Star Trek), and that their worlds can be so dramatically different. For e.g., the Dhryn home world where they find an entire ocean to be inconvenient so decide to move it to their side of the world and underground. I loved how the Progenitor was housed underground. And it's pretty amazing how they designed their planet to be "collapsible". I am also very far from a biologist but even so the idea of how they destroyed all moons/other parts of their system to avoid trouble with the Ro was quite horrifying to me. But it was just common sense to them.

Anyway, I find Czerneda's world pretty fascinating and I think she's done a good job of making things unique. Now it's time to read on and find out what happens next!

Paula S. Jordan says

It was stunning!

As a former biologist, Czerneda interleaves her intense storylines and characterizations – both Human and

not – so deftly with the underlying science that you get it all at once. In descriptions of a Canadian coastal wilderness the beauty and the ecological interdependencies are inseparable. With her alien species – and there are many of them – their ingenious, scrupulously logical design is revealed in detail as their resulting behaviors move the story forward. The plotline both rises from and vividly illustrates the imperatives of a species' innate survival strategies.

The science **lives** on every page.

Best of all are the insights that her scientist-characters provide into the minds, lives and insatiable curiosity of the research analyst. Think science is a life spent staring at the same little bits of nothing down a microscope? Think again. It's a life spent teasing out the secrets of unimaginable worlds.

This is hard science fiction in the grand NEW sense: The science and the human aspects of story interwoven perfectly.

Mark says

Imagine you're at a diplomatic dinner. One of the foreign delegates comes up to you and says "Hello. I'm an archaeologist. I can help in your fight against terrorism if you put me together with a salmon biologist. But I refuse to tell you how this might be helpful." Consequently you put significant security resources at his disposal.

The foundation of this book is that scenario making sense.

Oh, but what about the characterization. The main character deals with colleagues by throwing things at them and punching them. Of course, those people skills means she is the project leader. She is also not interested in romantic relationships. Of course, that means she falls for the first new man she meets. She is also a biologist. Of course, that means she almost never has any interest in biology. She is also terrified about leaving Earth. Of course, that means she spends half of the book off of Earth. If that isn't good characterization, what could you call it? (Hint: bad characterization.)

But the book also has amazing science technology. Like nanobots that can put your DNA signature into your bones and liver. Probably they also have the amazing ability to put your dental signature into your teeth and your fingerprint signature into your fingers. Amazing.

I'm skipping over dozens of other nonsensical problems. I don't remember ever reading a book that doesn't make sense in such a wide variety of ways.

Angela says

Picoreview: good work by Ms. Czerneda as always, and boy do I want to be her when it comes to writing SF. I do, however, have some nitpicks.

The two biggest nitpicks are things that I saw mentioned in reader comments on Amazon.com, and with

which I agree. One is that the ending is kind of abrupt, and the other is how Ms. Czerneda kept showing us the thoughts of Mac, her protagonist. She italicized them--as many writers do--but she also had a lot of them in past tense. This was rather distracting! As a reader, I'm conditioned to thinking of italicized thoughts as simply dialogue that's thought rather than spoken. The greater problem, too, was that her treatment of this was not consistent. Occasionally Mac's italicized thoughts were actually in present tense, which is what one would expect!

This is not like Ms. Czerneda, either; it doesn't happen in any of her other works. So I have to wonder what happened--if this was her fault or the fault of her copyeditor.

There are other quibbles I have with the story, but these are lesser ones... things like "so what was the point of taking this particular scientist and putting her in the thick of things? Why are her skills so crucial?" However, I'm willing to cut slack on this specifically because this is the first of a series--and unlike her previous series, which are genuine trilogies in which each book is a standalone story, this looks like it's going to be one big story. So I can deal with not having all the questions answered yet.

And, all this said, I did definitely enjoy the story. Mac was a likeable reluctant heroine, and I found her distinct lack of interest in affairs off Earth a bit of a refreshing switch--in fact, up until the story really gets underway, she hasn't even ever left the planet. This isn't something I'm accustomed to seeing in SF novels I read. :)

I really liked Brymn, who was the latest in Ms. Czerneda's colorful array of alien characters. And I sniffled at his eventual fate at the end of the book. Speaking of which, the ending definitely did pull a surprising fast one, because I just *was not* expecting that Brymn's race was actually responsible for the death and destruction! She did an extremely good job of making you THINK that the race that seems to be the bad guys are in fact trying to *stop* what's going on--and once that's revealed, there's also a good sense that even though Brymn's race is causing all these things, it's not because they're evil. They just have an extremely dangerous biological imperative going on, and the leaders of the Dhrynn have been hiding their own history from their people. You get some small heads-up that this is coming, what with the reader finding out that among the Dhrynn, biology and archaeology and even medicine--disciplines that would let the race at large have a clearer understanding of what's going on--are forbidden practices.

Nice little touches of technology all throughout the book, too.

All in all, though not up to the standards of *A Thousand Words for Stranger*, a very fun read. Definitely looking forward to Book 2 hitting paperback.
