



Interview with Damaría Sergovina,
or The Day The Dragons Arrived

You know I can't stand those hearings, so don't ask me again!
No, really, I don't like them.

Fine, fine! Go and ask your questions!

You know who I am. Yes, got it. My name is Damaria Sergovina of the Technocracy, glaciologist and paleontologist, specialized on dragons, their biology, society, culture. Yes, oh, they do have a quite fascinating society, very strict hierarchy depending on their sizes and bodily strength. Indeed, physical strength is very important for them, the Elder ones don't settle their disputes with their magicks, but their physical dominance. I have seen them once in such a struggle, one of the Elder ones we call Magicus fought against a Succurus. We have reliable eyewitnesses about both dragons being supreme magick users, one offensive, the other supportive, and they fought claw against claw, teeth against tooth. It was incredible! My guards urged me to leave, told me the dracokins and smaller dragons were gathering and about to attack us, but I just had to see it! Too bad my camera was broken, both Elders can create electromagnetic pulses almost constantly. We are yet not sure how they do it, but we guess it's has something to do with their synaptic powers and their general ability to use magics... What do you mean you are not interested in the dragons? They are so... oh, yes, you wanted to learn about me and not about the dragons.

I am Damaria... oh, come on! Personal informations, as you wish. I was brought into this world on the twenty second day of Secundus 20 AD, Ante Draconis. My father was Artjom Sergovina, starred chef in the best restaurants of Colony Beta Quarto, the fourth major colony on this, the second continent.

Well, it is the second for us, so get over it! Anyway, he left me, my mother, Leeora Sergovina, née Amario and my brother Leontis Sergovina in the year 5 AD, invited back to the main colony, a great honor, but one my mother didn't wanted to

share, she loved the rural beauty of the landscape of our adopted homeland.

What do you mean, it's not rural anymore? Have you seen those untamed mountains and the wild woods around it? Sure, we have hollowed out the mountain to build our colony, but that was about everything we did, the rest was left untouched. Safe for the roads. And the giant hole in the side of the mountain for the airport. Yes, I was about to mention the ventilation shafts, but those are camouflaged to blend in to the landscape. Besides, there's no other colony around in dozens of miles! Safe for the odd group of Genetives, but those are friendly and quite interesting objects for anthropological studies. Did you know they eschew every bit of modern technology? I have seen them, their garbs are so... native and primal! That behavior is also the reason why we called them Genetives in the first place, they are the base, the genesis.

Anyway, we lived well and good, my mother's light Limuno art pieces were sought after by high leaders of every major colony, some were bought by the chiefs of New Konstantine City, I have heard. Not that those dieselheads could really appreciate virtuosity of her skills.

But enough of my family, you wanted to know more about me. I have seen you roll your eyes as I talked about my mother, so don't shake your head now, I might be easy to confuse, but have you seen those butterflies in the mountains? So beautiful and vibrant! Just kidding.

I always had a bright mind, finished basic school with eight, went to high school and finished that with thirteen and got my first degree in general paleontology with fourteen. Meteorology, hydrology, geography and geology with sixteen and went on to the interdisciplinary study of glaciology, doing

my doctorate with nineteen. As I said, I am a clever girl and a very quick learner. Just a single look into the skies is enough for me to tell you how the weather will be.

What? Why do you say one doesn't need a degree in meteorology for that?

Learning from watching and experience? I did exactly the same! Reading the books, understanding the greater picture, that's what I call learning, not just going out into the wilderness and looking at the sky and waiting for something to happen. You can read so much in the shape of the clouds, what the exact forms mean.

Ignoramus...

So, what do you want to know now? I have told you everything about my career, there's nothing else to say, that's basically my curriculum vitae. And some more bits of information, granted. A lot more, yes, yes.

My field studies? No, they aren't really important. Just digging around in the mountains, getting all dirty and cold. Nothing more.

Really, I found nothing worth mentioning.

I am not going to answer further questions about my studies, that's confidential.

How..? Who told you about this field trip? Who told you about the Polar tour?

Oh, right, the academy's records, obviously.

Well, to cut it short, it was a disaster. Not a literal bad star, it just went very wrong very fast.

No, there are no further details, the expedition has lost many people. Thirty three per cent survived, four out of twelve. Though, we six didn't came back in one piece, almost every one has lost some part of his body to third and fourth degrees of frostbite. I was lucky and lost the outer two toes of my left foot and the two upper digits of the auricular finger of my right hand. Gyttá Hallursdóttir lost both ears and her tail. Michael Karcizy has not a single finger left, both hands only sport thumbs now. The only good thing is, the Technocracy is very advanced in terms of artificial appendages. But I have to say, that ceramic finger was very hard to get used to.

Sure, I could have had it covered in fur, even had it the first few weeks, but it just looked and felt wrong.

Okay, right, the Polar expedition. As I said, it was a mess... not from the beginning, no, it started great! I have never been on a ship before, so stepping on deck of the [i]Utopia[/i] was a unique and thrilling experience. A lovely trimaran, three hundred feet long, seventy five wide, ten feet draught and twenty five knots top speed.

Oh, indeed, our ships are in general ten per cent faster than your cumbersome smoke belchers.

We were sent out to a two year tour, just after I have finished my degree in glaciology. Before we made it to the North Pole, some of my esteemed colleagues wanted to stop near an active vulcano in the Mare Magnus. We had to stay a half mile away

from it, lava was flowing into the sea and let me tell you, that sound and sight at night is incredible. The ocean was glowing red and orange, boiling and hissing. A simpler mind might call it unbelievable, but trust me, it was real, though surreal. We spend two days there, our vulcanologist, Michael Karcizy, explained us everything he could tell from the distance, the temperatures, why the water wasn't turning instantly to steam and just vanish... it's all about the amount of water, you know? There was just too much to dissipate any time soon.

Anyway, we continued our journey, the two oceanologists, Gytta Hallursdottir and Ares Sigursson, spend most of their time in the starboard outrigger of the [i]Utopia[/i], having set up most of their equipment there. The bottom half of the outrigger was made from armored glass, I visited them once and was torn between the feeling of diving into the deep sea and the knowledge to be perfectly safe, a great sight and combination of emotions, I can tell you!

Yes, I like to tell you many things, right! But my friends and colleagues deserve it! They have tried to explain the world, find out why we are here and so different! Not only our cultures, but also the many, different races. I mean, look at me, I am a *Pardalis* like my mother, my father was a *Felis*, similar, but still different and yet, we all thrive next to each other and evolved, then don't forget our feral cousins.

Good, okay, just my part... even when I had my fingers, all ten back then, in many experiments.

The closer we got to the Polar region, the darker the skies got. Like every seafarer our captain could read the latitude from the length of the day. Living up there is a challenge in itself, the

days are short, it's an almost perpetual night up there, and actually down in the south as well.

Temperatures dropped with every mile we covered and we could only leave the warmth and shelter of the ship in our parkas, just the captain, an Ursus named Manirak, joined us every now and then to smoke his stinking cigars, wearing only a light sweater! Arctic dwellers, they are so... annoying with their resistance! But as soon as it gets warmer they complain louder than we equatorial dwellers when getting into the cold. They can't take off their pelts, though, while we can dress up more.

It took us twenty days to travel from the vulcano up into the north, twenty days before we saw the first icebergs. Another day later and the prows of the [i]Utopia[/i] were plowing through the ice shield. Everything groaned and cracked and it felt and sounded like the ship was breaking apart within minutes. The skipper remained calm and told us to relax, that his ship was made of sterner stuff. I had read about the tolerances and knew he was right, but my myelencephalon was certain we would all drown.

What? Oh, yes, the part of the brain controlling reflexes. You could call it my subconsciousness, if you want.

Where was I? Ah, right, the polar regions. They were special, really special. I have had seen them only on pictures and animations until then, but to see them with my own eyes, stunning! Not only from the cold, but the bleakness of the landscape. A blue-tinted blackness, not a single cloud in the sky, but literally millions of stars. Fengári and Mwezi, our moons, were waxing.

After a day we hit pack ice. Manirak told us could go further,

but that would put the ship in danger. We decided to bring to anchor and continue. No, not on foot, silly, on hovercraft! But I wished we'd gone on foot, those machines are so noisy, even inside the insulated cabin and through the earplugs and headphones. But they could travel across ice and snow and water without much of a difference in ride discomfort. I wished our technicians would finish their anti graviton engines, they would make traveling over long distances easier and spine friendlier.

Still, we rode for a half day, before we finally reached the main islands, the second step on our journey to the center of the Northern Pole. Setting up base camp was an easy thing, the hovercrafts had crew compartments. That first night on the untamed, uncivilized and uninhabited continent was one to remember on the deathbed.

The skies lit up with ejected matter from Ilios and hit the magnetosphere of Gaia and interact with atomic oxygen and nitrogen and interact, add energy...

You don't care about it, right? For you dieselhead the sky lights are just that, lights from your silly gods, right?

Intangible!

Anyway, the Aurora Borealis suddenly lit the heavens, glowing in a pale blue Rays Arc and Corona, the center seemed to be the exact magnetic pole.

Yes, it's only a guess, something interfered with our long range communications and GPS systems.

We sat there for an hour and just admired the shimmering and growing lights, not knowing what danger was coming to us. A heavy blizzard hit us a half hour later, coming from the sea in

our backs. We should have reacted when the first gusts of wind hit us, but we were mesmerized. It hit us, hit us hard, smashed the windows of one of our hovercrafts and froze the sleeping crew within minutes, they were torn to shreds. We were lucky, having set up in the lee of a snow drift and just ended buried and frozen over. It took the crew of the [i]Utopia[/i] three days to find us and dig us out, by that time we were all suffering from severe hypothermia and frostbite. That's the story. Satisfied?

What do you mean, you don't believe it? We have credible witnesses, all our reports match up, everyone agreed on that! It was a tragedy and we should have been better prepared, taken more care of the weather.

No, I won't say more.

You heard me the first time, your ears are huge enough.

No.

How...? Nobody every said anything about it! Nobody besides us should know about it! That's by no means a confession! You're putting words in my maw! This hearing is over, I won't say any more.

I am leaving, now!

Didn't you hear me? You should really clean your...

STOP! Not there! NO!

I will tell the legates about this!

Okay, okay, I'll tell you what you want to hear, just never do it again, never!

We didn't stop at the edge of the island, but rode in deeper into the uncharted lands. The thing about the Aurora was the truth, just like the blizzard, but it didn't come from the sea, it blocked our path by coming from the front. Our vehicles were sturdy enough to withstand such conditions, I just suffered from sea sickness.

The journey to the center of the pole, the blizzard and Northern Lights took us two days of constant driving. Two crafts with six people, four scientists, one driver and a guard each. I was in the same truck as Michael Karcizy and the oceanologists, the driver was Micha Langran and the guardsman a friendly but even more out-of-place fennec lady named Carla Yidrin.

The two non-scientists swapped seats in the driver's seat, and still could only sit there for an hour in a row, spending the rest chatting with us or just sleeping. The ride was tough, I had more than once the feeling we'd tip over or that our windshield, as reinforced as it was, would just break, spray us with lethal shards of glass and plastics and then with the hail of ice building on the front. Nobody really wanted to get out, but it

had to be done, every halt also saw one of us getting out to clean up the front screen. Despite my thick garments I came back chilled to the bones. One time a shard of ice cut through my thick mitten, the glove underneath and into my finger... that is the reason for that white digit on my left hand. On the second day I stepped onto an icicle and that cost me the toes. I was lucky we had spare garments in the cabin of the hovercraft, without it, I'd have fared a lot worse.

And before you say a word, I was about to continue right now! Just wanted you to get all the names and incidents right!

The weather got worse by the hour. On the second day we could barely see the lights of the truck ahead and even the guidance and radar systems were of little help. Ares Sigursson went missing as he had to clean the wind screen. He went out and never returned. We couldn't mount a full rescue mission, the weather was just too bad, but we did our best, yet... we never found him again.

Moral was as low as it could ever be, we didn't really wanted to go on anymore, yet... something called out like a Siren's song. Winter Solstice, as constant as our climate and days are, was close, as we were close to the center of the pole.

Then, on the second day of our journey the blue-lit cloud cover broke, revealing the most intense Aurora I have ever seen and heard about. It was almost as bright as day, a day on the lower latitudes, mind you, just blue.

Temperature gauges plummeted to unheard temperatures, they

said it was close to the freezing point of oxygen. At first we thought of a misreading, but as the powerful, heated engines of our vehicles froze, we knew it for certain, we were in deepest trouble. The doors were frozen shut, fuel pipes were clogged with slush... even the cooling fans had turned to ice, as ironical as it is.

What, it isn't?

All we could do now was to wait and gather as much knowledge as we could about this inhospitable land and send it back once we linked up with some sort of comm-system.

An hour away from the middle of the longest night all our electronic systems went haywire. The last thing I heard from the other truck was a scream of pain, their driver had artificial hearing and seeing... after that, all he had was a fried brain...

Due to nostalgia I always carry a paper notebook and wrote down as many of our gathered information the others and I could recall. It was only a drop, but at least something.

With all our timepieces shut down, we could only guess, but we were sure that on the exact minute of the middle of the longest night of the year it happened...

Sorry for the outbreak, I just...

Yes, I'm getting a hold of myself, just a minute, and a drink, please.

Thank you... this is the hardest part, and one I wouldn't believe if I hadn't been there in the front row!

I have been there as the dragons invaded our planet.

The Northern Lights flared up intensely, cold light bathed the cabin of our truck, diffused by the ice coating the windows, but still bright enough to blind.

It lasted a long time, at least it felt like it, then it was snuffed out, total darkness encompassed us.

We barely dared to breathe, let alone talk.

Dread clutched my heart and still does when I think back to those moments.

The ground started to shake, not from an earthquake, the vulcanologist assured us, but the tread of something very, very large and heavy. Those steps were enough to not only break the ice off the front screen but also the front screen itself. Too stunned to seal the crack, Micha just stared out into the darkness.

Something flashed up ahead, a fiery explosion! The other hovercraft was gone! For all those lives lost in that instant, it also gave us the first glimpse of what to come... it was towering, at least a thousand feet tall and four times as long. Eyes of the purest white imaginable gazed at us, bored into our skulls and very souls. Nobody could move, blink or even breathe.

Simple, gentle Micha saved us. A scream of utter terror tore from his throat and didn't wanted to end until he died from panic brought us back to senses. Carla pulled him from the driver's seat and gunned the engine. It roared once, only to splutter into silence. She screamed, like we all did, and hit the ignition again and again until the powerful fans sprung back to

life. The air cushion inflated and the trusty fennec lady drove us to safety. I can't remember much more what happened after, only that I awoke below deck on the [i]Utopia[/i], wrapped up in warming blankets, the ship pitching and yawing.

Manirak has found the hovercraft on the edge of the ice shield, way off course, and only by chance. He was already on the way back to port, too afraid to wait for us to return.

That's all, I have to say and can say about the first day of our end...