THE FUSION OF MEMORY

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THE SECOND NOVELLA
FROM THE UNIVERSE OF
GENETIC MEMORY

KRAKÓW 2025

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For my readers —

I dedicate this book to all those who are fascinated by the mysteries of memory and the traces of this fictional human history. Your curiosity and amazement are the real motivation for telling stories like this.

To fully appreciate the depth of this adventure, I recommend that you first read

GENETIC MEMORY – BOOK 1 – OMNIS *and the* ***First Novella.***

That is where the great adventure begins, the echoes of which continue to resonate throughout these pages. May this spin-off captivate you as much as your first steps into the world of

GENETIC MEMORY.

CHAPTER 1

The fire crackled softly in the silence of the night. Its flames cast restless shadows across Varek's gaunt, thoughtful face. He sat alone at the edge of the small camp, his arms wrapped around his drawn-up knees, staring blankly into the glowing embers. The others were already asleep—exhausted from another day of aimless wandering through the endless, inhospitable wilderness.

He turned away from the fire. His gaze wandered over the sleeping figures who had gathered around the smoldering remains of their campfire. Corven lay curled up under his tattered cloak, his face relaxed in sleep. Miraleth had settled down away from the others, as always cautious, always alert even in her dreams. Kessa murmured softly to herself—probably dreaming of home again.

Fifteen subcycles had passed since they had separated from Yelari's group. Fifteen subcycles of hope, failure, and the slow realization that they might have made a mistake. Of the original twelve who had set out, only ten remained. Delian had died of an infection; his body had succumbed to the primitive environment. Kevon had been killed by a predator—they had found only traces of blood and torn clothing.

The great water they had dreamed of was different. Or rather, it was not what they had expected. They were strangers in a world they did not understand and which clearly did not want them.

Varek pulled his thin coat tighter around his shoulders. The nights were getting colder, and their clothes had long since fallen apart. His hands were covered in calluses, his skin tanned like leather from constant exposure to the sun and wind. He had become a different person—primitive circumstances had carved the once**-**educated security expert into a rough survivalist.

In the distance, an animal howled, a plaintive sound that cut through the silence and echoed in the mountains. Varek knew these sounds all too well by now. It wasn't a predator—just a lone herbivore calling for its herd. Still, the sound left him unsettled. It reminded him of how lost they were out here too.

He heard quiet footsteps behind him, but he didn't turn around. After subcycles, he recognized the gait—cautious and deliberate. Thymon sat down silently beside him in the grass. The engineer had been one of the quiet ones, even earlier, on the ship. A man who thought more than he spoke, observed more than he acted. His dark eyes reflected the fire, and Varek saw something in them that made him sit up and take notice.

"You can't sleep," Varek observed, without taking his eyes off the fire.

"Neither can you." Thymon's voice was hoarse from the nighttime cold. "But it's not because of the cold or the hard ground."

Varek turned his face toward him. "Then what?"

"I'm thinking about something. Something I should have mentioned a long time ago." Thymon hesitated, as if weighing his words carefully. "It's just... I didn't want to get anyone's hopes up. And I don't want to do that now either..."

"Hopes?" Varek laughed bitterly. "We have no hopes left, Thymon. All we have left is survival."

"Maybe not." There was something in Thymon's eyes—a spark that almost looked like passion. "The black box," he said quietly. "From the ship. I think it might have survived."

Varek stared at him in disbelief. "You're talking about the black box? After all this time? After all these subcycles we've been..."

"I know it sounds crazy. But listen to me." Thymon leaned forward, his voice becoming more urgent. "You don't know the technology as well as I do. The Astral'thyss had a redundant recording system. The main black box was located in the central hull, right next to the energy core. When it exploded..."

"It was vaporized. We both know that."

"Yes, but there was a backup unit." Thymon's eyes lit up. "In the rear sector, Deck 7, Section 4. It was actually only designed for emergency landings and was supposed to activate automatically in the event of critical system failures. Most of the crew didn't even know it existed."

Varek felt something tighten in his chest—a mixture of hope and fear of further disappointment. "And you're only telling me this now? Do you think it survived the explosion?"

"It's possible. The backup box was made of nyxium-alloy steel, triple-armored. It was designed to survive even the complete loss of the ship." Thymon paused. "When the self-destruct was activated, the system should

have automatically activated the backup box. It's smaller, more robustly built. If anything could have survived the explosion..."

He left the sentence unfinished, but Varek understood. The implications were overwhelming.

Varek was silent for a long time. The fire continued to crackle between them, casting dancing shadows on their faces. Around them, the others slept, unaware of the conversation that could change their fate.

"Why are you telling me this now?" Varek finally asked, his voice barely more than a whisper.

"Because I thought it was a fantasy. Because the probability is minimal." Thymon stared into the flames. "Because I've seen too many of us die of broken hearts and lost dreams."

"And now?"

"We're all slowly dying out here. One by one." Thymon's voice was calm, but there was a new determination in his eyes. "What do we have to lose? If I'm right and the box has survived..."

"Then what?" Varek turned to him. "Even if it exists, even if we find it—what could be in it? Flight data? Sensor readings? Navigation logs? None of that will get us home."

"The emergency beacon," Thymon replied immediately. "The backup box was connected to the emergency communication system. Standard protocol for survival situations. If it were functional, we could..."

"By the stars." Varek sat up, his fatigue suddenly gone. "You mean we could send a distress signal?"

"Theoretically, yes. The range would be very limited—perhaps a few light days. But if rescue ships are patrolling this system, if our people are still searching for us..."

The two men fell silent and let the implications of this possibility sink in. In the distance, the animal howled again, but this time it sounded different—no longer like a lament, but almost like a cry of hope.

"We should go back," Varek whispered, as if he couldn't believe the words himself. "To the crash site."

"That would be... dangerous." Thymon gazed out into the darkness. "The First Ones could still be there. We saw their smoke columns when we left subcycles ago."

"Then we'll have to be careful." Varek stood up, his decision made. "But we'll go. We have to."

Thymon also stood up. "The others won't be thrilled. It means giving up everything we've built here."

Varek looked at the meager camp. "What have we built, Thymon? A few huts made of branches? Traps for small animals? That's no life—it's just a slow death."

"What if the box is destroyed? What if we go for nothing?"

"Then at least we die trying to do something." Varek's voice was firm, but not without pain. "But at least we die as who we were."

The quiet humming of the SACM-Lite broke the morning silence like a reminder of a bygone world. Varek held the small device in his hands and looked at the holographic display, which showed only 3% energy remaining. The bluish light of the interface seemed almost unreal in the natural surroundings—a relic from a time that now seemed like a dream to him.

He sat a little apart from the others, who were eating their meager breakfast—dried berries that Kessa had gathered the day before and the last remains of a rodent they had killed two days ago. The routine of survival had reduced their conversations to the bare essentials. But today was different. Today they had a plan, and that changed everything.

Thymon approached him and watched as Varek activated the SACM. The holographic interface flickered on, barely visible in the morning light. The familiar symbols and menus appeared, but they seemed paler than before, as if the technology's life force were about to expire.

"The next synchronization is in nineteen days," Varek muttered as he scrolled through the stored data. His fingers moved deftly across the hologram controls, even though he hadn't used them in subcycles. "Yelari's SACM will then be ready to receive for one hour."

"What are you going to tell her?" Thymon asked quietly.

Varek hesitated. He had asked himself that question all night long. What could he say? That they had made a mistake? That their proud search for a new home had ended in a desperate grasp at straws? That he, who had

been so convinced of the purity of their mission, now doubted everything about it?

"The truth," he finally replied. "That we're going back to the crash site. That we're going to look for the black box. That we... that we may have been wrong."

"Are you questioning our decision?"

Varek glanced over at the others. Corven and Miraleth sat together, sharing a portion of the meager meal. Their faces had grown gaunt, but not hopeless. They had survived; they had endured. But was that enough?

"I doubt everything," he admitted. "The decision to leave her. The meaning of our search. But not who we are. Not our identity."

"And what if she tries to dissuade us? What if she says we should come back to them?"

"Then we'll go anyway." Varek's voice was firm, but not without pain. "We've made our decision, Thymon. We can't go back to her... to her new family."

He began to compose a message. The words came with difficulty, each sentence a small defeat, an admission that they might not be as strong as they had believed.

Yelari,

We're still alive. At least ten of us are. The journey was... more difficult than expected. We found the great water, but it wasn't what we hoped for. The water is salty and undrinkable. We're returning to the landing site. Searching for the ship's black box. A possible way to send a distress signal. If this message is my last, know that our decision was the right one. We remain what we were, and perhaps there is still another way home.

Varek.

He read the message several times, changed words, deleted sentences, rewrote them. It was more difficult than he had thought. How do you explain to an old friend that you might have made a mistake without losing face?

"Saved," he finally muttered and deactivated the device. "She'll receive it in nineteen days."

The others had finished their breakfast and were waiting for him. They already knew what was going on—Thymon had explained everything to them during the night while Varek was still pondering the message. Nine hardened faces, marked by subcycles of deprivation, but not yet broken. There was something in their eyes that had been missing for a long time—purpose.

Kessa, one of the two women in the group, stepped forward. Her brown hair was tied back in a practical bun, her face tanned by the sun. "How far is it to the landing site?"

"According to my calculations, ninety, maybe a hundred days' march," replied Varek. "If we take the direct route and don't have to make any major detours."

"And the First Ones?" It was Corven, whose voice still had the formal tone of a protocol officer, even though they had been living like savages for subcycles.

"We'll be careful. Move at night, stay hidden during the day. Avoid their territories wherever possible." Varek looked around. "It's not impossible."

Jorik, a burly security guard, laughed bitterly. "Not impossible. That's the best we've heard in subcycles."

But despite the gallows humor, there was something in everyone's eyes that had been missing for a long time—a goal. A reason to fight, even if the chances were slim.

Miraleth spoke up. "What if the box doesn't exist? What if Thymon is wrong?"

"Then we're no worse off than we are now," replied Varek. "At least we will have tried to change our fate."

"And what if it exists but is damaged?"

"Then we'll try to repair it. Thymon is an engineer—if anyone can do it, he can."

Thymon nodded, although Varek could see how heavily this responsibility weighed on him. "I'll do my best. But you have to understand—even if everything goes perfectly, the chances of anyone hearing us are slim."

"A small chance is better than none at all," Kessa said firmly.

They packed up their few belongings. Primitive spears, whose tips they had laboriously hammered out of metal fragments from their old equipment. Hand-woven ropes made from plant fibers. Flint and tinder, carefully stored in waterproof bags made from animal skins. A few tools they had fashioned from stones and bones. The remnants of a civilization that had once traveled the stars, reduced to Stone Age tools. It was a humbling sight, but also a testament to their adaptability.

Varek slung his backpack—actually just a piece of fur sewn together—over his shoulder and took one last look at the camp that had served as their refuge for subcycles. Here they had learned to survive. Here they had learned what it meant to be truly lost. But here they had also learned that they were stronger than they had believed.

"Ready?" he asked the group.

Nine faces nodded. Nine people who had decided they would rather die fighting than live in surrender. The march began at sunrise, their shadows long on the damp moss. Behind them lay an abandoned camp, ahead of them a path into the past. And perhaps, just perhaps, a path into the future.

The sun was already high in the sky, but beneath the dense canopy of the ancient forest, it was perpetually twilight. The ten survivors moved like shadows between the massive tree trunks, their footsteps muffled by the soft forest floor, which consisted of centuries-old leaves and rotting branches.

Ninety days had passed since their departure, and the group had become accustomed to the rhythm of traveling in secret. They spoke only in whispers, communicating mainly through gestures and glances. Any sound could betray them, any false step could mean their end.

During the day, they rested in hidden caves or under dense undergrowth, huddled together like animals hiding from predators. At night, they continued their march, navigating by the stars and faint memories of land-

marks they had passed so long ago. It was an arduous, dangerous journey, but they made progress.

Varek led the small column, his senses sharpened by subcycles of survival. Behind him followed Thymon, who carried a homemade map on a piece of tree bark. Then Kessa and Corven, Miraleth and the others—all alert, all ready to fight or flee.

Their faces were gaunt, but determined nonetheless. Hunger was their constant companion—they lived off whatever they could find along the way. Berries, roots, occasionally a small animal they could hunt down. But hope kept them going.

"There," whispered Kessa, pointing to a clearing in the distance. "That could be it."

Varek followed her gaze and felt his heart contract. The trees stood in a perfect circle around a circular clearing—just as he remembered it. The Astral'thyss had landed there. Their repulsors had swept away the undergrowth in a circle with a diameter of one hundred meters when they first touched down. There, where everything had begun and ended.

The group instinctively ducked deeper into the undergrowth. From here, they could see the clearing without being seen themselves. The terrain had changed—grass and young trees were growing where the metal hull of their ship had once stood. Nature was beginning to reclaim the area. It had begun to heal the wounds that their arrival had inflicted.

"I can see the crater," murmured Thymon, pointing to a slight depression in the center of the clearing. "That must be where the explosion occurred."

Varek studied the terrain with the eyes of a soldier. No movement, no columns of smoke, no visible signs of habitation. But he knew from painful experience that this meant nothing. The First Ones were masters of camouflage, patient hunters who could wait motionless for hours.

"Do you see any tracks?" he asked Corven, who had previously worked as a scout.

Corven stared intently at the clearing. "Hard to say from this distance. But the grass is trampled in some places. Could be from animals... or something else."

"We'll wait until dark," Varek decided after much deliberation. "Then we'll all go in together. If we find anything, we'll need every hand to recover it."

"All of us?" Miraleth sounded surprised. "Isn't that too risky?"

"Splitting up is riskier," replied Varek. "If they discover us, we have a better chance of fighting together. And if we have to flee, we'll stay together."

The hours until sunset dragged on endlessly. They shared their last water supplies from their homemade water bags and mechanically chewed on dried roots that tasted bitter but gave them energy. Everyone was lost in their own thoughts, but they were all thinking the same thing: What would they find? And would they return alive?

Thymon took out his primitive tools and checked them one last time. A stone knife he had sharpened himself. A lever made from a bent piece of metal. Primitive instruments for a high-tech task.

"If we find the box," he murmured, "I may need some time to open it. The armor is strong, and my tools are... limited."

"You'll get the time," Varek promised.

When darkness finally fell and the moon appeared as a narrow crescent in the sky, Varek stood up. "Stay together. No unnecessary noise. When I give the signal, run back into the forest."

The ten survivors rose like a single shadow. They had their weapons ready—primitive spears and knives, but deadly in skilled hands. They crept out into the night together, a chain of shadows moving silently through the undergrowth. The moon provided little light, which helped them remain undetected, but at the same time made the search more difficult. Every step was calculated and every movement carefully considered. They reached the edge of the clearing and waited. Listening for suspicious noises. The howling of a distant animal. The rustling of leaves in the wind. But nothing that indicated human presence.

Varek gave the signal, and they moved forward.

Meter by meter, they worked their way toward the center. The ground beneath their feet changed—from soft forest soil to hardened earth. This was where the heat of the explosion had been, melting the earth into a glassy layer, although grass was now growing through the cracks.

In the middle, they found a deep hollow—all that remained of their mighty ship. A crater, almost completely overgrown with vegetation.

"Here," whispered Thymon, kneeling at the edge of the hollow. "If the backup box survived, it's somewhere around here. Or it was thrown clear."

They split up and began digging systematically. Ten pairs of hands felt their way through earth and ash, searching for any remnants of their technology. The work was laborious—they had to be quiet.

The minutes passed agonizingly slowly. Then they turned into hours.

Thymon dug deeper than the others, following his technical intuition. If the box had survived, it would have to be in the center of the crater, where the damage had been most contained.

"Something," he suddenly whispered.

The others gathered around him. He had found something hard, something artificial. With their bare hands, they dug it out—a piece of twisted metal, no bigger than a head.

"Part of the outer hull," Thymon muttered disappointedly. "Nothing important."

They dug further. Found more metal debris, charred cables, fragments of unidentifiable components. The remains of their proud ship, scattered and meaningless.

Hour after hour, they searched. They dug deeper holes, feeling every square inch. Their hands were bloody, their knees scraped raw, but they kept going. This was their last chance, their only hope.

But there was nothing there. Only ashes, charred metal fragments, and the cold earth of a strange world.

"Nothing," Thymon finally whispered, his voice breaking with disappointment. "Everything has been destroyed. Everything."

He sank to his knees, staring into the hole they had dug. His theory had been wrong. The backup box had not survived the explosion. They had come for nothing, had put themselves in danger for nothing.

Varek stared into the darkness of the hollow they had dug. Their last hope lay in ruins, just like their ship and just like their dreams. Fifteen subcycles of waiting, of deprivation, of slow attrition—all for nothing.

"We're leaving," he said quietly. "It's over."

The others rose heavily. Their clothes were dirty, their faces smeared with earth. They looked like grave robbers returning empty-handed from their night's work.

But when they turned to leave, they all froze as if on an invisible command.

They were surrounded.

Dark figures rose from the grass surrounding the entire clearing. Not twenty or thirty—at least fifty, maybe more. The First Ones had waited, patient as predators, motionless for hours, until their prey had completely fallen into the trap. A perfectly coordinated ambush.

The moonlight glinted off primitive weapons—spears with stone tips, clubs made of bone and wood, sharp flint knives. The First Ones stood upright, their muscular bodies tense like bowstrings, ready to attack.

The ten survivors instinctively huddled together, forming a small circle in the middle of the clearing. They stood back to back, their primitive weapons raised, but hopelessly outnumbered.

Varek dropped his knife, slowly raised his hands, his heart pounding in his chest. It was a gesture of surrender, but also of reason. Fighting was pointless—they were outnumbered five to one.

Around him, the others did the same. Kessa breathed heavily, her eyes wide with fear. Thymon muttered something to himself—perhaps a prayer, perhaps just curses. Corven and Miraleth stood side by side, their faces pale.

They were trapped, with no hope of escape, no hope of rescue. The First Ones closed the circle, but they did not attack. They just waited. Observed. As if they had all the time in the world.

In the silence of the night, surrounded by a sea of enemies, empty-handed and broken in spirit, Varek realized the bitter truth: the last flame of their hope had been extinguished.

They had lost everything. Their technology, their civilization, their dreams of returning home. And tonight they would lose their lives too, here on this alien world that had never accepted them as its own.

The circle of hostile figures waited silently in the darkness. And the ten last survivors of the Astral'thyss waited with them—for a fate they could no longer influence.