

MY LAST FRIENDS ON EARTH

Secrets of GLYKO

PART 1

A Lab Called GLYKO

"If you vow to never fight, then one day you won't fight to help the innocent or the old or the different, let alone everyday humans. It didn't take a Trikkian brain for me to figure that out."

—Andora Kaine, as quoted in Kayno's Secret Writings

ONCE UPON A TIME, A HUNDRED AND THREE YEARS IN THE FUTURE

I wake in darkness, before the alarm, locked in a bed-pod, a two-sided goo-mattress that surrounds and crushes my body, head-to-toe, front and back, with sensors beeping and buzzing. They'll keep buzzing and beeping until the alarm sounds, the bed-pod unlocks and the shell opens.

Until then, I can't move. Can't open my eyes. Can't scratch. Can't hardly breathe. Poison taste on my lips from the goo and poison thoughts race through my brain. Mostly all the bad things I've done. Or at least the good things I should've done but didn't.

It's hard being twelve and having no friends.

When I was three, my mom died. Taken away is the truth. My mom is Andora Kaine, one of the great human rebels *ever*. She attacked Trikkian military headquarters with her rebel team. No way the Trikkians would have captured her if I hadn't been born. Carrying a baby slowed her down. That baby was me. I'm the reason my mom got caught. If I think about what happened to her after she was captured...?

Can't think of that. Nope. No way. I think about how brave she was, though.

Think about it. Humans are not allowed to look in Trikkian eyes or touch the same food or ever talk back. Humans can't even talk to other humans. Those are the Trikkian rules. The sign outside the pod-room reminds us all: *You Are an Ugly, Small-Brained and Unwanted Human, so be Grateful.*

There are facts, too. Me? I can't smell us but Trikkans say humans stink like death, our eyes are dull, we carry a billion germs, we're weak-in-the-head and we're cruel to each other.

With all those rules and facts against us, my mom *still* fought. At least until Trikkans tracked us down in one of the tunnels.

I wish I was brave like she was.

Now I'm twelve, my skinny brown legs can climb up a *gargantuan* landfill in two seconds. But it's nine years too late to help my mom. You can't change things for a person once they're dead. You sure can't hug them, either. That's a scientific fact. It's not helpful to miss things you can't remember—like a mom you had when you were little.

I like the word *gargantuan*. I should use it more often.

These are thoughts I'm having in the dark, waiting for that alarm. An alarm I hate but it lets me breathe because it makes the pod lock open. I get scared the alarm won't go off at all and I'll be forgotten by U-Bots and trapped in this bed-pod forever. My legs would get even skinnier if I got trapped forever.

Truth is, I've heard almost every human on Earth is already gone. Making humans extinct was the reason Trikkans invaded in the first place. Even human orphans like me were only allowed to live so we could be shipped to GLYKO and studied with all these tests. Other than me, all the orphans are gone now.

I used to grit my teeth and obey all the tests here at GLYKO. All the needles, too, and run forever on treadmills and clean pee rooms and testing rooms. I could even deal with the cruel U-Bots that Trikkans scientists built to hate us and study us.

I could deal with *all that* because of Kayno. He's the only U-Bot who was ever good to me at GLYKO. Kayno, the only fun U-Bot ever. Not dancing or telling jokes fun. Just talking amazing stuff about the world. For all the bad, it's amazing.

Picture someone twice as tall as me, with a human face and human arms and hands with no hair and a smooth, silver helmet-head, a computer for a brain, a see-through yellow shield over his eyes, a silver-orange metal neck, and a pale blue jumpsuit. That's a U-Bot. That's Kayno. Handsome, actually. Gentle face. I draw him sometimes. I doodle stuff. Mostly faces. Speaking of faces, the other U-Bots are cruel. Supervisor Magok is the meanest. Trikkans scientists gave him a permanent snarl.

But now Kayno hates *me* and wants me dead, too.

I have to whisper this even though I'm talking in my head because U-Bots can figure out some of our thoughts by all the sensors they have on us. Kayno used to

like me a lot. In secret, when I was five, he taught me to read. If Trikkans or Magok found out? Kayno would've been terminated. *Killed*. Teaching a human to read is a death crime. Kayno taught me all about human history. Gave me paper to draw on. I found books in the landfills. Kayno told me everything Trikkans have done since they invaded.

When Trikkans arrived from Trikkandor, Tri-General Sephardyne and General Nezkabar were their two head military leaders, the ones in charge of the mission to make us extinct. Tri-General Sephardyne was first in power. General Nezkabar was his number one helper, but she was cruel, too. They were in command of Trikkandor's Human Extinction Mission—T-H-E-M. Yeah, *THEM*. That's what the mission is called. Or as my friend Gor used to whisper, even though we weren't supposed to talk, "THEM Trikkans is gonna kill us!"

Gor found that hysterical—another good word. Kayno did not. Then Gor got eaten or taken or something, so nothing was hysterical anymore. Not one bit.

I saw a live image of Tri-General Sephardyne once: all muscle and hair and furs. That's what I remember. And a voice as deep as outer space. I saw an image of General Nezkabar, too. She has steel smooth skin and gold eyes and all dressed in black and purple with hidden powers and a cape. Probably the best cape ever.

Kayno told me that even before my mom died and I was sent to GLYKO, General Nezkabar had started to *hate* Tri-General Sephardyne. Even though Sephardyne was terrible to all humans, Nezkabar believed he wasn't pushing hard enough to finish the extinction mission.

Ah, not true. We were running for our lives.

Nezkabar and Sephardyne had a death fight for absolute power on Earth. Sephardyne was the meanest Trikkans in history. He murdered his own son for having been saved by humans.

True story. Lousy dad.

Killed his son with a laser on Destiny Rock, right near the *Hammerzon* Mobile-City Spaceship, deadliest spaceship in the universe. You'd think a Tri-General killing his own son is as mean as a person can be, right? Nope. General Nezkabar's thoughts and bones and even her gold eyes are made of hate. Plus she has super powers and killing moods all combined like a bomb.

She won the death duel with Tri-General Sephardyne. The Tri-General's legs were destroyed by a metal beam that landed on them. Finished him off with her

silver and gold sword. She mounted what was left of him—his head and shoulders—in her museum for dead beings.

That's hate.

That victory made General Nezkabar supreme boss of the whole Trikkan military here on Earth and pushed THEM even harder and meaner.

Bad for humans.

Nezkabar can throw people into the air without touching them. I don't even know where they land. These are true stories Kayno told me.

Trikkans have almost finished the mission. For all I know, there's only maybe twenty-three humans left on Earth, or a thousand and twelve. I don't know. This is going on *outside* GLYKO lab right this second, and here I am, the last human at GLYKO, squished inside this bed-pod, waiting for the alarm to open the shell. I'm sick of the darkness.

With every orphan gone, I still believed Kayno on my side might mean he would protect me. Wrong. Kayno is a U-Bot and U-Bots are built to do whatever Trikkan scientists program them to do. And wht is that? Get tons of data from us GLYKO humans. Then get rid of us.

It was forty-two days ago when I found out Kayno never actually liked me. I was on the SR70 Hyper-Angles Simulation treadmill, gasping because I had no air left, and he yelled into my sweaty face and threatened to finish me for being a *pointless human*. Like I have a choice!

He was only being nice all these years to get data out of me. When I thought he cared, I told him *everything*. Even secrets about hating Supervisor Magok and missing my mom and how I could talk to Palimo. Palimo's an animal. Now he's using every word against me. This is what hurts when I wake up in the dark before the alarm. My stomach spins.

Betrayal.

That's how my head works in the darkness.

In the final history lesson I had with Kayno before I learned he hated me, he told me freaky things. He told me terrifying science had been figured out from all the human data collected here at GLYKO. He said everything is going to get mortally dangerous and blown up. I know what blown up means. *Kaboom*, right? I found out what *mortally* means. It means dead. Like all my orphan friends being dead isn't mortally dangerous enough. Kayno has smacked me seven times since then. Not that hard but not that soft. And cruel to me 124 times. Whenever I try to talk to him.

At that last history lesson, Kayno told me Trikkans watched us from their planet for *327,193 years* before they invaded us. Watched us! World War 3 on Earth was fought against machines built by other humans to follow our every move and know our thoughts. All that time, Trikkans were watching us from another galaxy! World War 4 was set off by an invisible, poisonous virus that made people die. I don't know why humans liked having these wars. I'm a human and I don't even like arguing. The five world wars don't include the thousands of little wars we've fought.

We had so many wars we had to number the main ones.

Trikkans say the *only thing* humans get better at is war.

Before those wars, Earth was known as the most *shimmering, beautiful* planet in two galaxies. Kayno told me that. But Trikkandor? They've been watching us for 327,193 years.

Maybe Kayno was lying, but I can't get that number out of my head. He said watching Earth was all started by the creator of Trikkandor, L. G. Tentaclus. What a name. That's who the Trikkans are clearing Earth for. Gives me shivers even trapped in a bed-pod. Nobody has ever seen L.G. Tentaclus but rumor has it his tentacles are so big they can reach from one galaxy to another, just to strangle another planet's dreams and suck out all its gas. I think about that, but not for too long or I can't breathe.

I can't breathe much right now in the bed-pod, either.

Kayno said L. G. Tentaclus decided in the middle of World War 5 that humans were so stupid and cruel there was no hope for us. That's why he sent two military spaceships the size of cities and filled with thousands of Trikkkan soldiers to Earth. Trikkkan soldiers who *look human*. Trikkkan soldiers to kill us off once and for all.

They've been doing their job. We're almost all dead, and I'm in a lab.

So yeah, we've been bad. But, but, *but...* before Kayno hated me, he told me a different secret. "You never heard this from me," he said. "Don't believe everything Trikkans teach. In those last wars, sincere and brave humans fought together for a better world. They fought for freedom, for their children to be safe. For a while, they were winning, too. Your mother rose up out of that struggle," he whispered.

I don't know now if Kayno was telling the truth or just getting me to talk. Human history confuses my brain. I know this part is true: humans do hurt each other for no good reason. They shoot arrows and yell swear words and hunt each other down. You say like twenty-seven wrong words and it can start a war. No wonder Trikkans don't let us talk.

It was after World War 5 with bombs as big as cities, viruses in the air and everything bad when Tentaculus and the Trikkans said, “That’s it, no more. It’s time for THEM. It’s time for the extinction mission.”

Trikkans flew over a hundred million miles to invade Earth. That was nineteen years and one quadrant ago. My mom was older than I am now when the invasion happened. Maybe fifteen or sixteen.

Trikkans landed in two gargantuan white spaceships—the *Hammerzon* and the *Skystalker*—a few thousand miles apart. Both were instant cities. Tens of thousands of Trikkans onboard. The *Hammerzon* was six miles long. *Hammerzon* means one massive hammer, swung by everybody. Kayno told me that. It also means a zone cleared of all garbage. We’re the garbage they’re clearing. The *Skystalker* was five and-a-bit miles long. Both ships had landing spikes *thirty miles* long pointing straight down. The spikes slammed into the Earth. *Kaboom*. That’s how the ships parked.

Those spikes split the ground all across the world, forming cracks and tunnels and earthquakes everywhere. Mountains broke into pieces and fell over causing millions of rockslides. Oceans got sucked into the Earth. I can’t tell you how many humans were wiped out right then. More than in all our wars. I was born later on in one of those tunnels. The extinction was supposed to take ten years but it’s been almost twice that. It’s hard to find every human. I’m twelve and I’m still alive.

That’s what I’m thinking when the pod alarm finally *pings* and squeals like a U-Bot is screaming in your ear. Shocks my ears more than usual. I can’t move but my heart beats like 112 times in a second.

With the alarm squealing, I feel the lock click open more than hear it. I have to wait another minute in darkness for the shell to open. Light through the crack. Real air. I suck it in, my lips pushing against the inside plastic.

You’d think I’d be relieved. Except for being able to breathe, not one bit.

Do you wanna know why?

2. THE LAST DAY

The alarm screeches. The shell opens. Kayno once said our bed-pods were like eggs hatching every morning. That was the old days, when twenty-one kids would wake up and squint out of their open bed-pod.

Now only me. I climb out even though my eyes haven't adjusted. I land on my feet and spit out flakes of goo.

I peek out the window. Dust. A round building in the distance. Can't see the zoo. Of all the orphans who used to be alive, Gor was my last best friend. Short and thick with rough black hair. He was brave and funny. He could make one eye move and the other one stay still. One morning, right after the alarm, even though we weren't allowed to talk, Gor leaned into me and whispered, "I can't take one more day of tests." His last words were, "Harlo, a lab is not for me. I need to pee in the woods for once and smell the trees."

Gor tried to escape GLYKO through the Woods of No Mercy, but the woods are full of killer creatures and go all the way around GLYKO like a thick, super high wall. Gor hoped I would go with him. I was scared. There is no escaping the Woods of No Mercy. The other orphans and I were on our way from the cafeteria to the main lab when we heard Gor cry out one time.

By that scream and the quickness of it all, I'd say the beasts living in the Woods of No Mercy are as big as Landfill 9D, or even Landfill16W. If that beast is one of the crossbreeds made by the scientists in World War 4, it could be anything. A Grizzly bear crossed with a killer shark. Who knows?

I don't want to think about Gor right now but at least he doesn't have to do the tests anymore. I've taken the tests for 3,107 straight days. I know everything about them, and they know everything about me. Trikkans would die of boredom if they had to be here everyday and give us these tests. That's why they built the U-Bots, to treat us bad and get *data* from us while they go around killing all the other humans on Earth.

Truth is, since I got to GLYKO when I was three, I haven't ever *seen* a Trikkkan. They don't come to the lab. But Kayno told me Trikkans look *identical* to humans—

exactly like me—except for, sometimes, different eye-colors. General Nezkabar has gold eyes. She can burn you by staring at you. Good reason to not make eye contact with a Trikkan. The other reason is we're not allowed to. Head down, eyes down, mouth shut.

So other than us being dirty and having invisible germs and boring eyes, we look the same. What chance do we have? If I confused a Trikkan with a human, I might at least look, right? Next second, I'd be screamed at and jabbed with a stick that could kill me.

Actually, I have seen the *one* Trikkan here at GLYKO: Crick. I'm not allowed to make eye contact but I peek. Because of battle injuries, Crick doesn't look one bit human. He's like a skeleton with skin, and tall as Kayno. He wears a thick black robe with a hood that covers his face in shadow. His brain was blown away in battle so he can't speak or remember anything.

Every day in the lab, he stares at this crumpled piece of paper from his robe pocket. I think it tells him which machine needs to be moved. Then he moves it. He creeps me out all day and then goes back to his hut at night like a half-skinned, starving animal in a nightmare. I will say this, though, I've seen him lift treadmills, body-scanner machines, blood-spinners, everything in the lab. He's strong like he's got magic.

Crick keeps a distance even from U-Bots, dark eyes sunk deep in his skull-head, underneath that hood. His teeth are all cracked and half-missing. They say he pulls skin off his cheek and eats it! That's why he has a hole there. So eating a human face might be natural for him. I don't want to find out if that's true.

The first alarm finally stops blaring. My eyes have adjusted. I look at the twenty-one bed-pods in this empty dorm. Makes me sad if I think about it. And guess what? I'm thinking about it.

So now, it's only me here at GLYKO, and U-Bots, Crick, and the hybrid animals in the zoo. I scratch the goo from my ears and blow more out of my nose. Least of my problems.

Facing Kayno, that's my problem. The way he's been pushing me, I could be a goner by lunch. By goner, I mean dead.

That's why I'm not relieved.