

Twisted Fate

RetroInferno

A young human man found himself petrified...

An outright reptilian giant stared at him with a sparkle in her emerald green eyes.

“This one thinks he is cute!” she said with a happy hiss, sticking out her tongue to form a cute little blep. She then moved her muzzle closer to his position on the elevated platform. “Why, the human would hardly take up any room in the warpack, Sibyl! What exactly is the matter with that?”

Sibyl crossed her arms as she towered over the human. “Is it not obvious, Rinka? Something that is like a hatchling would be a liability, whether they be human or not.”

“This one just needs a mech.” said the man, scratching his head. “That is how he intends to support his warpack.”

Sibyl let out a more venomous hiss. “Ah, so the human actually speaks our tongue! However, this one still finds it hard to believe that the battlemaster approved of this.”

“This one thinks she did...” Rinka replied, nodding. “The battlemaster actually wanted him in our unit specifically, at least from what Rinka can recall. She made the unit transfer request.”

Sibyl’s face scrunched up. “What? That makes no sense. The battlemaster fought against humans during the conquest of their homeworld, did she not?”

Rinka cocked her head to the side. “Maybe the battlemaster has grown to respect them ever since we absorbed their kind into the collective...?”

“Even if that is the case, Sibyl still does not understand why she would ever want humans in her warpack at all.” She paused to shake her head. “Especially if he takes the place of a proper rynar. Then again, this one has not seen the new mechanized infantry in action, so perhaps she should reserve her judgment if the battlemaster knows best...”

The human spent some time staring at the reptilian women in silence. Rinka’s red scales strongly contrasted against Sibyl’s cyan ones, not to mention the differences in personalities. This couldn’t

be better demonstrated with the crooked smile on Rinka's muzzle and Sibyl's blank stare with her half-lidded orange eyes. However, they both wore tight black jumpsuits that clung to their cold-blooded bodies, only exposing their hands and digitigrade feet beyond their heads.

"So what is the human just standing there for?" Sibyl asked, lowering a hand toward the platform. "If it is the will of the battlemaster, then this one will carry him to one of the old rust buckets at the very least. He could prove to be useful, despite Sibyl's doubts."

He glanced at Sibyl's open palm, which was big enough to hold him entirely. "Oh. Well... this one has been told that he is piloting one of the newer models! Not one of the old trolleys."

Rinka beamed up before lowering an open palm as well. "Yap, yap! Can this one carry him instead?"

The man then found himself sandwiched between the two women as they competed for his attention. "Uh... have either Rinka or Sibyl been trained to handle humans?"

"Technically, no." Rinka said with a frown. "However, she has seen others do it! She promises to be extra gentle and careful!"

Sibyl sneered. "But this one is not as careless or clumsy as Rinka."

Rinka gave the other woman a menacing glare. "Hey! At least this one tries to treat humans like any other member of the collective!"

"He is still safer in Sibyl's hands." replied the woman in question, narrowing her eyes. "Rinka can be too eager at times."

Before the human could protest, Sibyl carefully tried to pick him up. Rinka interrupted by pushing her hand away and lowering her other one in front of him with her clawed fingers fully extended.

"Just let the human choose!" Rinka said, baring her fangs. "Because this one doubts he wants to go with someone like Sibyl!"

"What would make Rinka say that?" Sibyl asked, giving her the side eye.

Rinka let out a low hiss. "Sibyl kept calling him useless and questioning his worth just moments ago. She is... abrasive... and smelly."

Sibyl chortled at her words. "This one does not believe humans are useless! They make for excellent hand warmers, hence why Sibyl even wants to carry or hold one for herself!"

"Ah... so she just wants to use humans for their body heat." Rinka replied, making a chirp. "So selfish."

The human eventually held up his hands. "Sisters in arms, we are falling behind schedule with this nonsense! It does not matter who carries this one, just as long as we arrive on time."

"Stay out of this." Sibyl said, letting out a huff.

Rinka puffed hot air from her flaring nostrils. "He speaks sense. This is just getting silly."

Sibyl sighed. "Then why does Rinka argue to begin with?"

She crossed her arms. "Because Rinka does not want Sibyl to mistreat or mishandle him!"

"It is not like Sibyl is going to wishbone him or anything..." she replied, snickering at her own words. "Probably."

Suddenly, a far larger rynar woman stomped on the ground behind them. Both Sibyl and Rinka's tails shot up since the larger rynar easily towered over them both by a head or two. Nothing but heavy combat armor covered her from head to toe, only exposing her golden eyes behind an orange visor. The larger woman also huffed and puffed like a raging bull as she spoke to them.

"Bah... and to think these two had the audacity to call humans hatchlings when they act like hatchlings themselves!"

Both women had their eyes go wide upon recognizing her voice.

"B-battlemaster Ishtar!" Rinka said, straightening her posture.

Even Sibyl stiffened up with her tail slumping down. "Our... apologies for the delay, battlemaster."

Ishtar practically growled in return. “She saw exactly why the delay occurred. Do not fret. The warpack always needs new blood to clean the latrines and scrub the floors if they prove to be... incompetent.”

Rinka blinked several times. “Rinka was... distracted.”

Sibyl nodded. “Yes, Rinka’s claim rings true. The delay was her fault.”

“Sibyl carries just as much blame!” Rinka replied, letting out a grunt.

“Rinka and Sibyl should consider themselves dismissed...” Ishtar said, giving them both a death stare. “They shall both be disciplined for their insolence at a later time. The battlemaster is too busy to deal with such immaturity when we might have a crisis for the collective on our hands soon!”

Rinka looked at the ground in shame while Sibyl closed her eyes. Each woman gradually exited the room with their tails slumping toward the floor, their clawed feet making light clicks and clacks against the hard ground with each step they took.

Ishtar then directed her attention to the human on the elevated platform. Her stern demeanor quickly changed to one with eyes full of concern. “They... did not hurt the cadet, did they?”

The human sighed and shook his head. “This one is fine, mom.”

“Battlemaster Ishtar.” she said, narrowing her eyes. “Do not call her mom! Especially not around the others...”

Blood flushed his face a bit. “Sorry...”

Ishtar shook her head. “It will take some getting used to. Even though this one’s heart conflicts with her mind, she must treat her son like any other cadet.”

“Is that why she transferred him to her own unit?” he asked, looking up into her golden eyes.

Ishtar avoided his gaze. “He is... safer under Ishtar’s watch and command. Nothing more. Few are wiser or more experienced than this one when it comes to matters of warcraft. But enough idle

chatter! Let Ishtar do what those borderline hatchlings failed to do, because if she wants something done properly, she needs to do it herself!”

With that, Ishtar lowered her hand to the elevated platform. The metal gauntlet and its open palm provided plenty of room with some to spare. Unlike with the other rynar, the human cadet didn’t even hesitate to climb into Ishtar’s open palm, treating it like it was second nature before grabbing onto her clawed thumb for some more support.

Ishtar’s fingers curled then around him as she brought him to her chest. “Bah. Some things never change, do they?”

“But this one is not so little anymore...” said the cadet, glancing at her fingers.

Ishtar chortled. “He will always be little to Ishtar, for better or worse.”

He sighed. “This one cannot argue with that.”

“Indeed!” Ishtar replied, cracking a rare smile.

Ishtar then made her way through the military base. She passed by other rynar in her warpack, who worked on cleaning or tinkering their war gear. Erestal glowed a bright orange from both the power packs in their plasma weaponry and from the refined crystals embedded into their white armor like glass, giving it distinct orange highlights. The rynar gave Ishtar weird looks at most as she carried the human with one hand, and others gave her a salute by holding a clawed fist over their hearts.

In response, Ishtar saluted with a clenched fist of her own.

Eventually, Battlemaster Ishtar arrived at the vehicle bay. The rynar equivalent of dual infantry transports and infantry fighting vehicles remained docked across the area. She ignored them all in favor of approaching a formation of mechs adjoining them, which remained lined up like a platoon.

The glossy, white mechs immediately caught the cadet’s attention.

“Woah...”

Each one stood on two metal feet. They all had plasma rifles or cannons for arms, pure warmachines overall. Every mech also had a central cockpit with plenty of armor plating and tertiary weapon systems such as conventional machine guns. The black and white paint alongside the crestal orange highlights perfectly matched the usual rynar combat armor color scheme. All the mechs also retained a vaguely draconic appearance, but at only about seventeen meters tall, most rynar still stood about a head or so above them, if only to shoot over their mechanical heads.

“Quite an improvement to the first generation, is it not?” Ishtar asked, looking at the assembled mechs with a sense of pride. “Every one of these new ‘Drakes’ should put a decent human pilot on par with a rynar warrior, if not better! The collective might need as much as possible with loyal humans to boot if things deteriorate furthermore...”

The cadet winced. “Did... something happen while this one was training?”

Ishtar tilted her head to the side. “Did they not tell the cadet for one reason or another? Ishtar knows they restrict the flow of information to many humans for... security reasons.”

He shook his head. “Is it the sissach again?”

“Worse.” she said, sighing. “A skirmish against a UTO warfleet led to the deployment of our new nuclear weapons to devastating effect. We might have a great war on our hands very soon since the UTO is shocked and assembling their naval forces en masse.”

The cadet imitated her earlier salute by holding a clenched fist in front of his heart. “Then this one will not let his battlemaster down, no matter how dire the situation gets!”

Ishtar raised the visor on her helmet. The fierce battlemaster and her stern gaze vanished for just a moment, replaced with something far more affectionate and motherly. She caressed the cadet with a clawed thumb, looking at him with almost watery eyes. “Battlemaster Ishtar is so... proud of Suko. She did not expect him to follow her in her footsteps, especially when he is only a human!”

Suko blushed a bit. “Ishtar saved his life as a hatchling before treating him like her own flesh and blood. The least he can do is make her proud!”

She closed her eyes, smiling at his words. “But Suko is really Ishtar’s hatchling! Do not try to tell her otherwise.”

“But... she cannot protect him forever.” he said, gazing at the mechs. “Not like the others.”

Ishtar let out a sigh, clutching him between her fingers. “This is true, unfortunately. Ishtar is getting... older... and there are many threats to the collective. Privateers and pirates, resistance groups on Earth, even other rynar... they all also pose a threat to little Suko.” She paused to gesture at the many mechs before their eyes. “But these warmachines? They might as well be equalizers for Suko’s kind.”

Suko shuddered a bit as Ishtar carefully placed him inside a drake’s cockpit. “Perhaps...”

Training from the digital simulations kicked in as Suko pressed a button, resulting in an audible click as the cockpit began to seal him inside with a light hiss. A heads-up display also appeared inside the interior. A combination of cameras and monitors allowed him to see the outside world with his foster mother at the front and center afterward.

Ishtar smirked and nodded at his mech. “Good! Many rynar might see humans as inferior, but do know this. The collective is built on mutual support and trust like we are all kin. Serve the collective well, and it will serve Suko in return. Protect the boys and girls in our warpack and they will protect Suko whenever he is not inside his mech. Almost all rynar return the favor when possible!”

Suko didn’t say anything at first. Instead, he saluted her with his mech, holding an arm over the central cockpit.

Ishtar beamed up again. “Ah... that is Ishtar’s boy!”

Suko’s heart swelled as he smiled. His mech almost matched the battlemaster in appearance, complete with a diamond patch shaped like a simple reptilian eye on the shoulder pauldron... the typical emblem symbolizing the Rynar Collective. It glowed a bright orange alongside the other erestal highlights. For he was officially a rynar auxiliary... looking nothing like his foster mother but wanting to be just like the battlemaster herself one day.