



The Killax Vendetta

by Christopher Allen

The dim candlelight in the cantina sparkled against the Klingon's long canines.

"Do not toy with me, Coll," Konav snarled, his powerful fingers closing on the other's thick worksuit. "I can supply the weapons you desire, but for no less than one quarter of your dilithium mine's output." He pulled the miner close. "I do not betray my Emperor cheaply."

Coll returned the Klingon's snarl. "Remove your hands, butcher." Coll was a subArnite, one of Arnos IV's two sentient races: the slender, crafty Arnites controlled the planet; the powerful subArnites dwelled under the surface, and labored in the planet's rich dilithium mines. A threat from a subArnite was not something to dismiss lightly; Konav released Coll's worksuit.

"We will need dilithium to stabilize our economy," Coll continued, "if we can overthrow the Arnite oligarchy."

"You will keep 75% of your precious crystals if your rebellion succeeds." Konav rested his elbows on the bar. "If the Arnites remain in control, the Klingon Empire will continue to confiscate *all* of the dilithium to power the Imperial Fleet. I think my offer a fair one."

Coll scratched his heavy brow. "It is not fair, but I should have expected little else from a Klingon. And it is all we have." He turned, his bulbous eyes glowing amber in the smoky room.

"Your terms are... acceptable, Captain Konav."

Konav smiled. "Very well. I return to the homeworld soon, to take command of a new vessel. I will procure your weapons at that time." He motioned for the cantina's keeper. "Romulan ale, to celebrate."

"No." Coll rose from the barstool and glared at the Klingon. "I have to do business with you. But I don't have to drink with you." He gathered his pack from the floor and headed for the exit. Konav laughed low in his throat and turned back to his drink.

"Leaving so soon, sub?"

Coll stopped short at the voice coming from the door of the cantina. It was a deep voice, and harsh like a razor grating metal. Someone stood in the doorway, silhouetted by the strobing blue streetneon beyond. Coll recognized the silhouette: the powerful build, the broad body armor, the knobby ridge across the skull — an Imperial Klingon.

But more than that, Coll noticed the Klingon's stature. Konav was a big Klingon, but whoever this was blocking his path dwarfed even the Klingon captain.

"I... am not, sir," Coll moved away from the door. He backed into a table where two slender Arnites were intent upon the sudden confrontation; they scattered, and Coll slid carefully into a vacated chair.

"I thought not." The Klingon whistled two sharp keens, then stepped to the bar. Behind him, a shadow rippled across the ground, pausing at the edge of the light, a barely-leashed savagery glittering in scarlet slitted eyes.

Konav sat bolt upright at the bar; he watched the gigantic Klingon glide out of the shadows, and his hand tensed on the glass. The smoke swirled away, candles threw soft light on his face, and Konav's thick brow knotted in disbelief.

"Not him," his lip quivered. "Not here..."

The strange Klingon wore standard battle armor, worn and deeply scarred, but with the addition of heavy armguards, inset with various studs and compartments, and a rakish armored mask cut low across his cheeks. An agonizer hung at his waist, and a curious circular blade, but Konav saw no disruptor or other sidearm. If this was who Konav suspected, then the legends were true.

Konav saw the Imperial blazon on the stranger's chestplate and hastily stood. He managed a salute, "Survive and Succeed."

One side of the stranger's mouth curled, a grim half-smile. "I shall, Captain." He did not return the salute.

Konav hurriedly gestured to the empty stool beside him. "Please, join me. It is not often that I encounter one of the Emperor's private guard, especially on so remote a tribute world as Arnos."

The giant's dark eyes flickered at Coll, then to the exit, and the lean shadow blocking it; then he sat.

"The Emperor has much at stake on this remote tribute world; I have come to see that his interests are not jeopardized."

Konav swallowed hard, turned swiftly to the barkeep. "Romulan ale here, dog; swiftly!"

Again the strange half-smile crossed the stranger's face. "You have expensive tastes, Captain. Romulan ale is as illegal in the Empire as it is in the Federation."

"I... yes, it is. Better we drink it than let the local vermin waste it all, eh?" Konav averted his eyes and downed the burning liquid in a gulp. Oh, Dark Fates, he prayed, let this not be *him*...

"Captain, do you know the sub at that table?" the stranger growled, thumbing toward Coll.

Konav furrowed his thick brows. "I have seen him here before," he said carefully. "What's your interest in him?"

"He foments a rebellion against the Empire which, if successful, would deprive the battlefleet in this district of the dilithium necessary to power their drives."

"You know what the penalty for rebellion is, do you not?"

Konav nodded, looking away. "Execution."

"Yes," the Klingon said with finality. "That is my interest in him."

Konav studied his empty glass. "What if the sub runs?"

The stranger flexed a heavily-gauntleted fist absently. "No creature is foolish enough to challenge a Hallan night-razor."

Konav's eyes darted to the door, saw a velvet shadow crouching catlike in the fog, and shuddered. He turned very slowly back to the Klingon at his side.

"Soldiers of high prestige are allowed predatory mascots, but only one has ever domesticated a nightrazor." Konav's lip trembled, "It is you."

"Killax the Executioner."

The giant slid from the bar. "It is, Captain Konav."

Konav's mouth dropped open as the hunter moved toward Coll. Coll slowly rose, a heavy mining pick in his hand. Konav slipped from the bar, and drew his communicator.

"*Dominator*, this is the Captain. . . I want a shock team down here, heavy firepower, and I want them now!!"

"My quarrel is not with you, Klingon," Coll warned softly, his arms rippling with tense muscle. "I have heard of you, Executioner. I know you disdain energy weapons of any sort. I warn you not to attack me. If you do, I will tender you no mercy."

The Executioner nodded once, then lunged at the thick muscled subArnite. Coll reacted with a powerful swing and Killax feinted backward, the lunge a calculated deception. Coll had overcommitted, and the Klingon reached past his heavy pick and gathered Coll's head between powerful arms. With a ferocity made the more terrifying by its cold precision, Killax drove his knee into Coll's spine. The subArnite dropped his pick and began scrabbling at the cordlike arms tightening around his neck. Fire glittered in Killax's black eyes as he lifted the miner into the air. Coll thrashed helplessly, his amber eyes ballooning; then Killax pressed his skull forward until the subArnite's neck snapped. The Executioner shook the body once, then let it drop to the floor.

"So, for the rebel," Killax whispered, staring darkly across the room at Konav. "Now for the traitor."

Konav drew his disruptor pistol. "I think not, butcher." He trained the sidearm on Killax. "Legends tell you are the deadliest Klingon alive, and that may well be. But legend also betrays your scruples against using an energy projector," he smiled wickedly. "And you cannot kill me from there."

"So you say," Killax replied, his voice low and cold. "You are a fleet soldier, trained with your pistol; I am a Hunter, trained to kill, and avoid being killed. It comes down to whether you can kill me before I can cross the three meters that separate us; whether you can shoot me before I reach you."

"Are the Dark Fates with you today, Captain?"

Konav saw the subtle movement at Killax's waist; too late, his fingers tightened on the disruptor trigger. The silver disc knifed across the cantina, burying itself in Konav's arm. He stumbled backward, wincing as he recognized the wicked blade: a Capellan kligat, as deadly at short range as a disruptor.

Killax kicked the dropped sidearm aside and jerked Konav up by his armored chestplate. Dark blood oozed around the kligat, smearing the Executioner. He snarled coldly. "Here is your ambition, Konav. Choke on it." He pressed a stud and a long blade sprung from a sheathing along Killax's right forearm. He lifted Konav's chestplate, and plunged the blade into his abdomen.

"Why... butcher...?" Blood wetted Konav's lips as he whispered the question. Again the vague half-smile curled Killax's mouth. Konav's wheezing breath faded, and Killax dropped the body to the floor.

"Throw down your weapons, mutineer."

Killax shifted his eyes to the murky corner of the cantina; there were three Klingon shocktroopers in heavy gear. His eyes shifted to the door; the nightrazor was still there. These must have beamed down, then.

"I am an Imperial; do not force bloodshed."

He saw the recognition dawn in their eyes, as it had in their Captain's. They knew him. "You are not faster than three disruptor rifles."

His black eyes turned cold again, "Do not challenge me."

"I ordered silence, Dark One. We are not above using these guns. You are an anachronism, Hunter, as outdated as..."

Killax dropped to one knee, fingering a second stud. He tucked into a roll across the cantina, brought his left arm around, and sprayed the shocktroopers with the disruptor cannon mounted on his wrist. Only one managed a burst in reply before the corruscating energy lanced through them, dissolving them into scarlet fires. The disruptor burst put a large hole in the ceiling.

Killax the Executioner rose; far a moment, his saturnine eyes flickered across the riddled cantina.

"So much for legends."

The distant half-smile tugged at his mouth; then he keened twice, and the fanged shadowcreature fell in at his side. The two vanished out into the strobelit night, swallowed by the shifting mists; gone.

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