

KLINGGONS



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KLINGONS PD20M: THE EMPIRE OF STEEL

The Imperial Race in the Star Fleet Universe

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KLINGONS PD20M: KOPEC'S DUTY

The battle alarm woke Lieutenant Kopec from his restless sleep. Instantly awake, he swung out of his bunk and thrust his feet through the legs of his duty uniform and into his boots even as his eyes flashed to the display on the wall of his quarters. The display told the story — an enemy ship was in the area and the watch officer had called the ship's company to combat stations.

A quick glance across the compartment showed that Lieutenant Kelshenk was not present. Kopec remembered his roommate being on the third watch in Engineering. By the time his mind had processed all of this, Kopec was pulling on his shirt and reaching for his officer's sash. Even in an alert, officers must properly present themselves before the crew. There was respect, and morale, to keep up.

Exiting his quarters, Kopec noted two other officers in the corridor, one headed aft toward the shuttle bay, the other already diving into the gravity tube to the next deck down. Kopec followed him, knowing that it had to be Lieutenant Kolarn who was in charge of the starboard phaser compartment. Kopec exited the gravity tube hard on Kolarn's heels and turned in the opposite direction, heading for the port phasers.

Arriving at his duty station, Kopec noted the Slirdarian Marine guard posted outside the open hatch. That armored door was closed most of the time, but had been opened by the watch crew to allow the rest of the crew to reach their battle stations. The hulking Marine snapped to attention as Kopec ran past him, slapping the stock of his disruptor rifle. Kopec noted that the bayonet was fixed to the muzzle, something done only when the ship was at combat stations. Kopec had been on the *Pitiless* for three years now, and had climbed his way up to a prized post in command of three of the ship's phasers. He had eight crewmen working for him, two or three of them being on duty at any given time. But this was combat stations, and everyone would be here.

They had better be. His crew held the record for getting their station manned, and he wouldn't give that up.

He entered the compartment and turned right toward his station, scanning the seats as he entered. Two of the gunners were already strapped in, as was one of the technicians and Bakten, the petty officer who was the senior gunner. Kopec's quarters were closer to the compartment than any of his other crewmen, and he knew they would all be here in another ten seconds. Bakten looked up at him as he sat down and reported: "Enemy ship is a Federation light cruiser, 53 kilikams away, on the starboard bow. No targets as yet." This was as it should be. The watch officer had called combat stations in plenty of time.

"Very well," Kopec responded, adjusting his panel to show the overall situation on his main screen. He felt, rather than heard, Slishpok, his technical petty officer, flop into the seat to his left. Hilidarians, being large quadrupedal lizards, always spun the standard-issue combat chairs around backwards, pushed them forward against the stops, and laid on them rather than sat in them.

Folik-ten, the Cromarg technician for the #6 waist phaser, was already briefing Slishpok, as Kopec knew he would. Folik-ten had been on duty this shift, and was occupying the technical petty officer's station before the alarm sounded. Kopec didn't waste time thinking about it, but he instinctively knew that once Bakten had determined the distance to the enemy was far enough to not be an immediate threat, Folik-ten had abandoned the petty officer's station and moved to his own chair and strapped in.

Folik-ten's briefing was short, but loud and clear enough for everyone to hear. "Capacitors full. Number seven on backup gyros. Alert to twitch on number four cooling readout." Everyone absorbed the information. With capacitors full, the phasers could be fired instantly. The gyro on the #7 waist phaser had burned out yesterday and was still waiting on replacement, but with the backup and reserve gyros available it was unlikely to be an issue. The cooling system on the #4 wing phaser was stable but the sensors that reported its status were balky and often showed a problem that didn't exist.

Kopec only grunted when Bakten tapped him on the arm and handed him a phaser pistol. The small weapon, less powerful than the disruptor pistols carried on planetary landing missions, was intended to provide Kopec with a last measure of control over the crew in his compartment. Only he and Bakten had such weapons, although several more were locked in a safe below and between their stations.

Moktar, the last of the gunners, arrived wet and out of breath but in proper uniform; obviously he had been in the showers when the alarm sounded. *There will be time to make sport of this later*, Kopec thought to himself. Kopec now had all four of his Klingon gunners in position, and the last two technicians, a Dunkar named Spurl and another Cromarg, Devik-zan, scrambled into the compartment only seconds later. Kopec wondered for a split second why the Marine guard had not closed the hatch when he remembered that Cadet Kvin had been assigned to the compartment for this cycle. The cadet must at least be in sight running up the corridor or the Marine would have sealed them in by now. Kvin was a good boy but so very young, four years Kopec's junior. The cadet was in his final year

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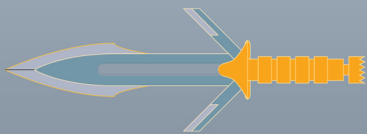
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