**Disaster at Phall**

**Horus Heresy AU**

**Ultima Segmentum**

**Phall System**

**007M31**

**Captain Manneus Drath**

The translation of the *Implacable* in the Phall System was violent. Manneus was not ejected from his command seat, but it was a very near-thing.

“Report,” he barked to his officers once the alarms stopped blaring and it was evident they had survived the crossing from the Warp to the real universe.

“All the squadron has survived the transit Lord,” a feat which was miraculous given that they had just crossed a warp storm. “We are ordered to take Formation Alpha-Theta by the *Iron Blood*. Attack Force Primaris under Warsmith Golg is already striking the heart of the Imperial Fists Fleet.”

The hololith updated in two seconds and projected its results, giving them a true sea of green and red warships. Manneus Drath felt his two hearts beat faster. Veteran of countless void operations, it was still a rare event for him or any Iron Warrior to see so many starships locked in a fight to the death.

It could hardly get better...and yet it did, for the enemies they fought today were the bastard sons of Dorn, the mongrel-termites of the Seventh. Annihilating them in the name of the Warmaster and Lord Perturabo was going to be a joy and an honour.

“Give me a solution for our Nova cannon!” They were at optimum to use the terrible and dreaded main weapon of the Apocalypse-class. One shot would shatter the Fists’ formation, he was sure of it!

But his tactical officer shook his head negatively.

“I’m afraid Warsmith Golg has attacked too quickly, Lord. If we fire the Nova cannon, we will destroy our own Grand Cruisers.”

Manneus tightened his fists but poured all the iron-cold patience of experience he had on the flames of his heart.

“Divert all available power to the engines and decrease the power to the shields by one-third. We must engage the enemy with our lances in twenty-three, no twenty-two minutes.”

It was incredibly frustrating. The *Implacable* was a mighty Apocalypse-class battleship, one of the first great battleships of the Fourth to have left the shipyards of Mars and started the conquest of the galaxy. The battleship was near one hundred and ninety-years old and veteran of three hundred-plus space battles. Unfortunately, while its lance batteries were formidable, the engines and speed overhauls had been delayed and delayed again in the last decades. It had been scheduled to take place after the Sak’trada Deep Campaign, but the Rebellion of Olympia had caused another delay and after Isstvan Mars was not exactly a safe harbour for an Iron Warrior warship.

“My Lord, there is something strange concerning the Imperial Fist formation,” intervened one of his Lieutenants as the hololith updated again.

Manneus fixed the image before frowning. The Imperial Fist Fleet, which until now had been in the process of being thoroughly smashed apart, was now reforming in a sort of elegant spiral.

“They have abandoned their stupid orb formation, Lord!”

Manneus for a second was inclined to agree. But then as he replayed the steps of the last actions, he began to feel something unpleasant in his neck and two hearts.

“They have tricked us,” he announced. “Commander Golg has struck too swiftly and...”

The image shifted again and now the error of the Trident Commander was evident: the twenty-four Grand Cruisers and the Battle-Barges of the first wave had been wounded and were now avoided by the nimble escorts and Battlecruisers of the Seventh Legion. Erasmus Golg was far from defeated, but his warships had accumulated too much acceleration and were now in the process of striking nothing. The distance between the vanguard of the Iron Fleet and the main body was getting more and more important by the second, and now the strike cruisers of the Fists were surrounding them, exploiting each and every weakness.

“Signal the *Steel Resolution*. Warsmith Falk must slow down or we are going to be divided and destroyed one by one!”

But there was no answer from their hail of the 126th Grand Company Commander, whose battleship appeared to take heavy damage from two Imperial Fists’ Battle Barges. And more bad news were coming through.

“*Calibos* is Code Omega.” It meant Warsmith Dargron of the 5th Grand Battalion was dead. There were going to be holes in the entire command structure of the Fourth and promotion opportunities...

“*Ares*, Code Omega. *Phobos*, Code Omega. *Deimos*, Code Omega. *Magister*, Code Omega.”

“Lances pointed on sector 1-10-1,” he commanded, trying to not think about the loss of firepower three macro-bombardment ships and one battlecruiser represented. “Reduce engines power output to seventy percent. Switch back the power to the void shields, priority Alpha on the prow and the first bridge.”

There were flashes and fluctuation in the emissions of the strike cruiser approaching his battleship.

“And prepare to repel boarders,” he continued in a dark tone.

“*Iron Reign*, Code Omega. *Destruction*, Code Omega. *Eternal Guardian*, Code Omega. *Uranium Blast*, Code Omega.”

Drath threw one of his data-slates away in disgust. What in the name of the Primarch was happening? The Implacable lance batteries were missing eight out of ten shots, the torpedoes of their frigate escorts were not detonating and dozens of capital ships were exploding right and left.

“By the ashes of Olympia, what is wrong with our damned ships today?” The Captain sworn to the 16th Grand Company growled.

“The Seventh seems to have a new signal-scrambler,” replied one of his Lieutenants. “And their ships are crammed with vortex warheads.”

Of course, trust the Seventh to requisition all the supplies the Iron Warriors had been denied during the Great Crusade. At this instant, Manneus felt only hate and loathing towards these yellow-armoured weaklings who got every armour and support they wished while the Fourth was denied reinforcements and recognition in their Compliances.

“An enemy Battleship is on a collision course with us,” informed him the auspex-master. “Ship identified as the *Guardian of Courage*...”

Manneus smirked as he recognised the name: it was an Emperor-class recently commissioned by the Seventh. How kind of them to bring this warship here; with its loss the Imperial Fists would be humiliated like they deserved.

But this battleship was causing them too much damage. Five destroyers and frigates were disappeared like in spectacular explosions and the strike cruiser *Thunder of Zeus* vented air and debris trying to intercept the enemy.

The *Implacable* and the *Guardian of Courage* began to duel, with Manneus command rapidly taking the advantage. But with each second, a litany of Code Omega was arriving, and four each Imperial Fist ship destroyed there were four or five Iron Warriors crippled or mortally wounded.

“Lord, the *Iron Blood* is under attack!” Had it been possible, the blood of Captain Manneus Drath would have frozen. But he was an Astartes and he began to bark new orders. The flagship had to be protected. Anything else was secondary compared to the protection of the Primarch. “Captain Vort, reports a great number of boarders on several bridges...”

At last he saw the trap on the hololith. There were over fifty ships teleporting or sending troops by drop pods against the Gloriana flagship of the Fourth Legion.

“Lord, we can’t disengage to help the flagship without presenting our rear to the Fist Battleship...”

“Then annihilate it, for the Primarch!”

He shouldn’t have roared like this. But he didn’t care, they were his subordinates, they fought and died at his pleasure. He refused to utter the words but the battle was developing extremely badly now.

Golg and his vanguard were literally unable to intervene, slaughtered one by one by the swifter Fist strike cruisers. The Contrador was still fighting, but over two-thirds of its command, Grand Cruisers and Battle Barges, all, were gone.

The macro-bombardment battleships and the fleet carriers were severely damaged or ravaged by internal and external explosions. The escorts were dying by two and three every minute. And the Implacable began to bleed too, as it pounded the new Emperor-class to oblivion.

“Compartment 6-C opened to the void and condemned.”

“We have lost two dorsal turrets!”

“There is minor plasma damage on a secondary conduit! Zone secured, but we will lose zero-point-four power for the next two minutes...”

“Void shields to thirty percent...”

“My Lord, you have command of the 16th Grand Company!”

His orders paused at the news. He was only the fifth in command of the Grand Company...

“The *Dreadnaught*?” Surely it was an error. Warsmith Ajaxos and his entire command aboard the Victory-class battleship could not be dead like this...

“It has just been cut in half, Lord. The *Relentless* and the *Punishment* are gone and the *Killing Field* has lost all its communications. You are in command!”

“Tell the squadrons to turn on formation Delta-Iron,” it was a defensive formation, but at that moment it was clear the all-risk offensive had failed.

“Acknowledged,” and then the destruction count continued to rise. “Contrador, Code Omega.”

Erasmus Golg was dead. Manneus fortunately had never liked the brute. But his twenty-four capital ships command would have been useful, because they were getting hammered, here! Three cruisers had joined the Guardian of Courage and they were like manoeuvring like ants around an armoured soldier...and their bite was dangerous.

Below the Implacable, the heavy cruiser *Trident* died without a single escape pod launching under the fire of two strike cruisers.

“Tell the *Star Killer* to take the place of the Trident!” He needed more cruisers to defend his rear and this one seemed ready.

“The *Stark Killer* is acknowledging...”

Manneus Drath was opening his mouth to order a new volley on this annoying Fist battleship when the *Architect of War* blew up without warning. Millions of tons of adamantium, ceramite, plasteel crewed by thousands of the best warriors of the galaxy, lost forever.

“Lord, the *Iron Blood* destroyed the *Architect of War*!”

By the Warmaster, the Seventh bastards had taken control of several lance batteries of the flagship and had returned them against the Iron Warriors.

The bastards.

Manneus for a second didn’t know what to do. Against any other warship, destroying it would have been the logical option, but it was the Iron Blood! The very flagship of their Legion and the Primarch was commanding it!

“Prepare a counter-border party!”

PAIN.

PAIN.

PAIN.

What was happening? He felt pain. The bridge was intact...where did the pain come from?

It was like his two hearts had broken. It was like the galaxy had frozen cold. A large silhouette was lying on the ground, yellow-gold armours standing over it...

The Primarch...NO, NO, NO...

A voice was broadcast on every frequency. Manneus had never heard it before today, but he would remember it and would dream forever to punch it, to do anything and prove it false.

“This is Captain Amandus Tyr of the Imperial Fists Legion. Warriors of the Fourth Legion, your Primarch is dead! Now surrender or share his fate!”

Manneus fixed the hololith, his brain unable to understand. Perturabo couldn’t be dead. The Lord of Iron couldn’t die. It was just impossible.

*I’m sure the Iron Hands thought the same thing about Ferrus Magnus*, the treacherous thought came like a whisper in head.

“Void shields to six percent!”

The announcement forced him out of shock. The *Iron Blood* was now firing its great batteries against the warships of the Fourth. The flagship was lost. And the Imperial Fists ships, instead of being trapped, were now free to beat in a classical hammer-and-anvil attack the great Battle-Barges of the Iron Warriors.

It was not a battle anymore. It was an execution. All the Captains and Warsmiths were suffering.

They were broken.

The iron had broken.

“*Defiance*, Code Omega. *Heracles*, Code Omega. *Octavian*, Code Omega. *Fortress*, Code Omega.”

“Take us out of here,” Manneus ordered, his nerves screaming in agony. “Take us out of here! New course on a 3-3-6 bearing, maximum acceleration!”

The *Implacable* roared and new alerts blared as the hated Seventh took his battleship for target practise. The slowness of the Apocalypse-class may have saved them in the end. They had only to hold for four minutes to make their warp translation. But as he saw the torrent or torpedoes coming for them, Manneus was remembered that ‘simple’ was not a synonym to ‘easy’.

“Warsmith Harkor, in his quality of Trident Warsmith, is taking command of the fleet, my Lord.”

Harkor? Ah yes, Forrix had to be lost, since he was aboard the Iron Blood. Berossus too. And as the Contrador was gone and Golg dead...

By the ashes of Olympia, how many Warsmiths had they lost in this battle?

There were less than one and hundred fifty warships still fighting, and they had begun the battle with four hundred. They were hunted mercilessly by the very enemy they had been supposed to butcher in a single attack.

*So this is how defeat tastes like*.

“Get us out of here. Tell the Navigator to prepare to guide us for an emergency warp-journey. Verify the Geller fields have not suffered.”

The *Implacable* slowly fled the Phall System, abandoning many dead and crippled warships. By design or by luck, the Imperial Fists didn’t concentrate on it at first, preferring to hunt the smaller escorts and cruisers.

Manneus wanted to mock the enemy Admiral for this stupid choice, but it was logical in a way. With the Warp in tumult, a rapid barrage had far more chance to cripple the Geller fields and warp engines of a strike cruiser than those of a great battleship. It also diminished the flexibility of the decimated Fourth Legion, for Warsmiths had proportionally few fast cruisers in their squadrons.

“Translation in 10...5...3...2...1, translation!”

The *Implacable* disappeared in the Warp.

The Fourth Legion had lost the Battle of Phall.