

THE HORUS HERESY®

John French

TALLARN: EXECUTIONER

The battle begins



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An exclusive extract



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The remakers of Tallarn arrived like driftwood carried on a breaking wave. A thousand ships tumbling into space from nowhere: first one, spinning end over end, then a second and then hundreds. They rolled in the starlight, ectoplasm melting from their black iron hulls. All were warships of the IV Legion, the Iron Warriors. They were not graceful galleons of war, but slab-hulled world breakers, armoured in pitted plates, their flanks and spines nests for guns and launch bays.

The Iron Blood arrived last, thrusters firing down the length of its hull as soon as it tasted real space. The great ship shook as it forced itself into a controlled arc of flight, its superstructure shuddering, engine vents glowing white with heat. It ploughed a path through its scattered fleet. Some of the smaller ships managed to regain enough control to move out of its path, but not all could escape.

The Purity of Fire spiralled into the Iron Blood's path. The great battle-barge's prow hit the torpedo destroyer like a hammer, and the smaller ship burst into ragged chunks, its plasma reactor rupturing in a sphere of blue-hot matter. The Iron Blood broke through the wreckage, its armour glowing briefly under the fire's touch. It slid to stillness and lay in the darkness, its engines dimming like the eyes of a tired man. Slowly the scattered ships formed around the Iron Blood.

Signals began to crawl amongst the ships, orders and demands for data beginning to flow. Order returned to the fleet. Sensors rolled across the void, searching, judging.

In the star-pricked sphere of space one star burned brighter than all the rest. At this range the naked eye saw it as a small glowing coin. Around that star its planets waited, unknowing of their future, sleeping peacefully in the cold wrapping of space.

Slowly, like a great beast rising from sleep, the fleet turned its prows towards the star and a thousand ships went to murder a civilisation.