A captured UCM soldier in a dark, futuristic environment, looking distressed. The soldier is wearing a helmet and armor, and is being held by a large, dark, mechanical figure. The background is a dark, blue, hazy space with some faint lights. The entire scene is framed by a dark, hexagonal pattern with glowing blue lines and dots, resembling a circuit board or a digital interface.

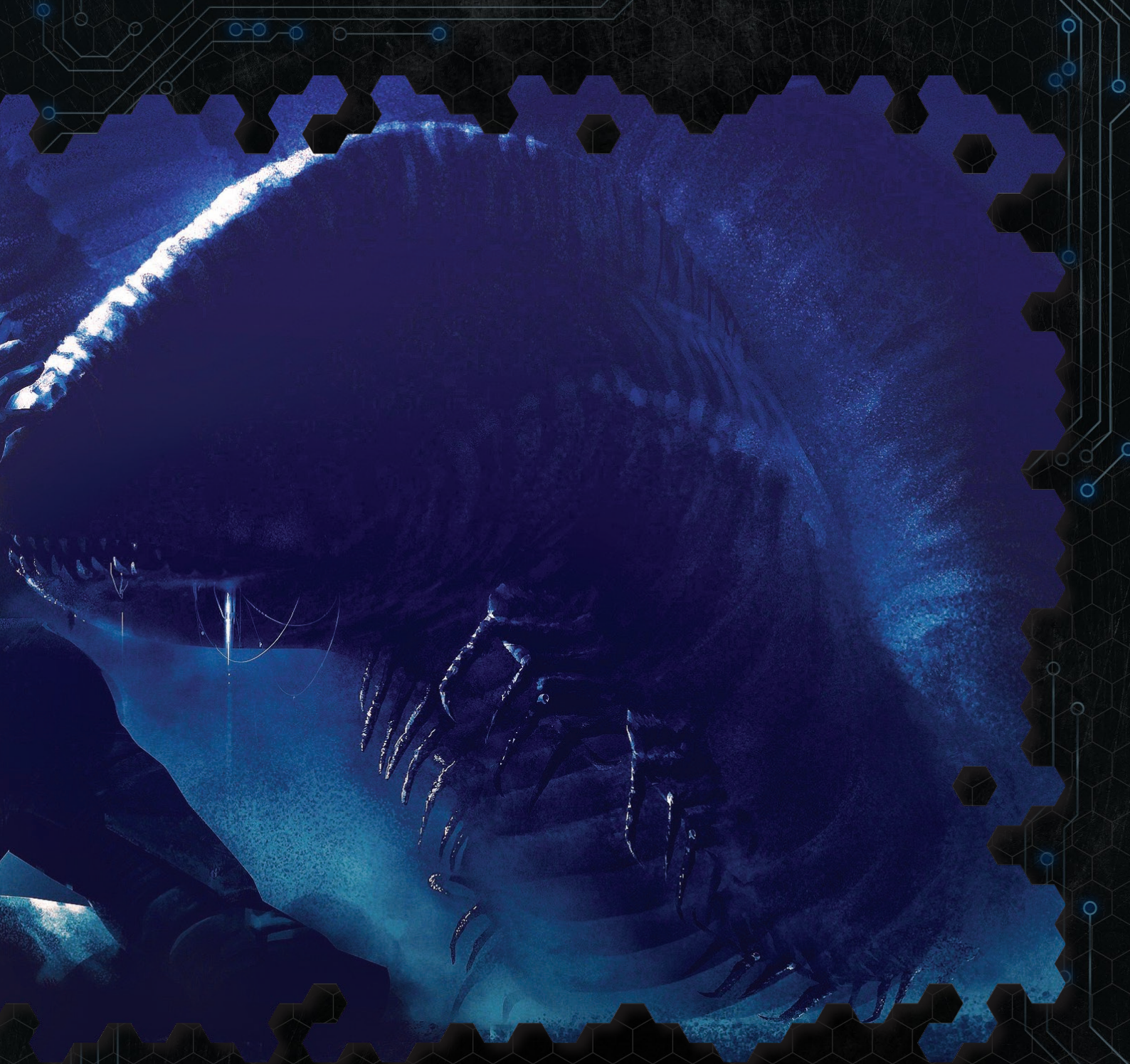
The captured UCM soldier lay, horrified at what was about to happen to him. He had heard stories that the Scourge assimilated their foes, gaining the host's body completely. No-one knew how, the only stories told from the few survivors who had managed to flee spoke of their victims crying out in anguish, screaming in agony as they lost their body to a new host.

Whilst he had been trained to keep his composure in the face of his enemy, knowing what was about to happen to him made Julius wretch. He had to find an escape, but how? The ship he was on was extremely dark and cold with no clear doorways to escape from.

"Damn it all to hell! I will not die here, I...I, can't." Julius groaned in frustration. He was more annoyed that he got himself captured to begin with. "It would have been better if I had just been shot and killed, anything other than this."

Standing on his feet, Julius moved around the large circular room, feeling the walls for any buttons which might open a door. The Scourge had a very strange way of constructing ships, Julius thought. It was nothing like the simple yet effective design of the colony's vessels. Cold and minimalistic, it appeared eerie to Julius.

Julius could hear screams coming from the other end of the room. Were there more captured soldiers here? Moving in the direction of the screaming, Julius saw parts of the wall retract, revealing a circular



passage. Seeing this as his opportunity to escape, Julius began to run towards the gap, his freedom and his life his once more.

A rush of cold air touched with a foul odour pushed Julius backwards and he fell, landing hard. Looking at the gap, Julius could hear something approaching, the creature didn't have footsteps but Julius could hear the floor creaking beneath its weight. Slithering into view, a large worm-like creature pushed its way through the gap and into the room. The bulk of the worm filled most of the circular gap and Julius thought that the gap wasn't a doorway after all, but a passageway for whatever that creature was.

The worm's mouth was salivating and was covered in little talons running down its soft underbelly. Never before had Julius seen anything like this, he had heard tales of the Scourge but nothing compared to what horror was before him. Shuffling away slowly, he raised a hand towards the worm, almost pleading with it.

Whimpering to himself, Julius continued to back away from the creature, who seemed content to watch him inquisitively. He heard a clunk as his armour hit the wall of the room, unable to back away any further. Sobbing now in complete futility, Julius realised there was no escape as he watched the worm approach him, baring its sharp teeth.

Julius screamed as the worm lunged forwards towards him, maw open. It was over in a matter of seconds, the worm moving through a different passageway to its next meal, the room left completely empty and devoid of any trace of Julius.

# SCOURGE

The Scourge are neuro-parasitic lifeforms which can utterly dominate an unfortunate host, bending its life to their will. They thrive on the conquest and absorption of other races, their very mode of existence as potent a threat as their formidable armies. They are the galaxy's ultimate predators.

Their breathtaking assimilation of the central planets, including Earth itself, has made them the primary threat to the very existence of mankind. Although generally on the defensive during the Reconquest, their deadly counter-offensive proves they will seize any opportunity for attack.

Their constructs are as aggressive as they are shockingly lethal, but violent death at the hands of their potent weaponry is nothing compared to the dread of being taken alive.

## PURE SCOURGE

Outside a host, a Scourge isn't much to look at: wispy, boneless creatures, frail in the extreme. Indeed, their bodies are hard to identify amongst the myriad swirling tendrils of extremities.

A Scourge can survive for its full lifespan without a host. In all likelihood, they evolved independently from hosts and only presented neuro-parasitic abilities late in their development. Once beyond the larval stage, it becomes impossible for a Scourge to take a host at all, and must henceforth live as a pathetic, fragile creature for the remainder of its existence. A drive for physical improvement ultimately led the Scourge to find strength in the bodies of other races.

Pure Scourge are obviously unsuited for the battlefield - in gravity beyond 0.5G, a Scourge can't even move outside a liquid. However, they may fight if melded permanently to one of their constructs, suspended in a nutrient, tar-like gel. Intelligence suggests they find life within a host body vastly preferable to being melded into a machine, a fate that awaits only those Scourge unable to find a living host. This has led to an insatiable desire to find fresh hosts, a factor which must be at the root of their unquenchable thirst to conquer all free lifeforms.



## TAKING A HOST

To live with any degree of potency, a Scourge must take a carbon-based host early in its life. Espionage within their dreaded breeding hives has shed some light on the process. The Scourge larvae first enters the host through the ear canal, burrowing through soft tissues and worming its way into the brain and - later - the spinal cord, resulting in copious fluid discharge. The host remains fully conscious, so attendants can monitor the parasite's progress. As the Scourge takes control, the levels of unendurable agony escalate to such an extent it would end its own suffering if not restrained. This is only the first stage - it takes weeks and in some cases months for the Scourge to gain full control of the host, all the while under monumental anguish.

Externally, hosts retain their normal physical characteristics in the early stages. Internally, the Scourge will have fully developed into a gelatinous web, bound to the host's nervous system. Fortunately, the Scourge must learn to use its new body, being poorly coordinated for months, making it impossible to use these human-looking newborns as infiltrators.

In a fairly short time, external tells emerge. A heightened thirst and constant sweating are the first visible signs. Curiously, hosts lose the ability to produce pigmentation, becoming increasingly pallid, the eyes eventually turning a sickly red. Their thirst and perspiration eventually reaches a stage where they routinely drink the blood of the fallen, comrades and enemies alike. As the Scourge grows older still, Resistance soldiers have even noticed a new process happening to human hosts. The host's skin splits apart as calcified black ridges cut through the flesh, as if the Scourge itself is growing too large for the body to support.

The Scourge freezes the host's aging process, but not its own, although it can live for several centuries. When the Scourge eventually begins to die, the host becomes increasingly erratic and jerky, as the parasite's iron grip deteriorates. When the Scourge dies, the host follows, wracked by agonised insanity. Such late-stage behaviour has no place aboard a warship – they are typically euthanized before they can unbalance the running of the ship. Since late-stage Scourge become raging, psychopathic killing machines, they are lethal close-combat troops when gathered in specialised squads – the stuff of nightmares.

Tragically, any attempt to remove the Scourge results in the death of the host and the parasite. Horrifically, a measure of the human consciousness survives underneath, an existence of perpetual suffering ending only in death. As the Scourge slowly dies, the host's wracked psyche breaks through, hence the behaviour exhibited in late-stagers.

Scourge communicate inaudibly with complex, highly modulated multi-spectra waves. This can be interfered with, although only on the same level as broadcasting loud noise to stop audible communications - impractical en-mass. Early attempts in the field have caused great discomfort to UCM troops nearby, limiting the usefulness of such technologies. In any case, recent events illustrate that a human Scourge has full command of language and can talk if it deigns to. This has only happened once in almost two centuries and few expect such events to be common - the Scourge evidently view humans as little more than cattle.

Recently the Scourge have attempted accelerated vat-growth of human hosts, as supply has slowed to a trickle of captured Resistance fighters. The Scourge seemingly regard humans as virtually perfect hosts, especially in human-created environments. Their attempts apparently have a poor success rate, with mountains of deformed corpses seen burning outside such facilities. If the enemy ever perfects this process on an industrial scale, mankind's armies would be hopelessly overrun.



*UCM digital scan of captured Scourge/human Warrior.*



## OCCUPATION

Scourge occupation has been a living nightmare for the Resistance fighters who remain. The Scourge ceaselessly hunt these poor souls, whose capture would swell the ranks of the enemy. Being taken alive is their greatest fear - all carry cyanide capsules, should they be taken.

As for the non-human inhabitants of the Cradle Worlds, whole species have been absorbed into the Scourge hegemony. Most notably, some of the most terrifying beasts from Shangri-La's moons - Helen and Persephone - have been bred en-mass for parasite implantation by the Scourge, who clearly value savagery above most other factors in a host.

There are dozens if not hundreds of species in service to the Scourge, with few that they deem unworthy of implantation, even if simply for experimenting. Although it would seem that the bonding process isn't as all-encompassing as first assumed, given that there are still thousands of species of fauna on Scourge-occupied worlds that have never been seen with Scourge hosts. Many would suppose that the Scourge have deemed these species not conducive to their existence, but UCM researchers have noted that there are plenty of highly dangerous species that should make perfect hosts, yet are notably absent from their ranks. They conclude with hope that the Scourge aren't able to absorb every life form for unknown reasons, rather than the other result - that there are a great many more Scourge that haven't been unveiled yet.

Ominously, the Scourge may be able to access a measure of the host's memories - a highly efficient mode of conquest, since a ready-made environment exists amongst the host's former possessions. Indeed, entire captured orbital installations captured have been re-purposed or used rather than scuttled, being more efficient than building new ones.

Therefore, the Scourge not only absorb the bodies, but also the technology, knowledge and power base of the vanquished, explaining the sophistication evident in Scourge technology. As the Scourge conquer, they only become more potent - the Galaxy's apex predator.

The Scourge have been fully exploiting captured planets, often augmenting and expanding them with their own, sinisterly organic-looking structures. For this reason the Scourge launch planetary assaults against their targets with the effort to retain as much infrastructure as possible. It is far easier to occupy and then live in a city that has functioning industry and systems already in place to be modified rather than entirely rebuilt.

Once present on a world, the Scourge entirely take over production facilities, running their hosts industrial centres 24 hours a day. After the destruction of military forces, the remainder of the civilian population is left relatively unharmed, as future hosts for the Scourge.

One practice of note is the construction of Seeds, surface-built vessels sent among the stars to seek new worlds to conquer. These vessels have been seen constructed on various Cradle Worlds as well as Earth, for the Scourge to send out large parties into the unknown, to find new hosts to capture.

## LEADERSHIP

A priority objective of Reconquest Phase 1 was to identify the Scourge leadership mechanism. With the involvement of the Shaltari and PHR in the conflict, UCM intelligence gathering failed until very recently. In the build-up to the Battle for Earth, the activities of Scourge super-dreadnoughts were analysed, confirming they were the nexus of staggering volumes of communiqués to lesser forces, on the ground and in orbit. The current thinking is that whatever passes for Scourge leadership lives aboard these mighty, rarely-seen vessels.

Although the physical nature of a leadership caste is still unknown - the effect of removing it from play is. The first wave of UCM ships was able to destroy the Scourge super-dreadnought dubbed Dark Puppeteer, suffering grievous losses. The result was an uncoordinated response to the invasion that followed, allowing the UCM to gain a foothold on the surface.

Further information has also emerged. Previously, it was thought Scourge had no distinct characters within their society. Most believed them drones, devoid of ambition or individuality. However, undeniable behavioural differences have been observed. These may be Scourge within hosts or melded into constructs, suggesting this character comes from the parasite itself.

This led to the conclusion that while all Scourge work towards the good of their race and embrace self-sacrifice, they do have separate sentience. Often, those prominently displaying such traits are in leadership roles, perhaps the greatest thinkers of their race. Naval Intelligence certainly believes so, observing that individual Scourge ships behave differently. This led to continuing the practice of naming Scourge vessels - a tool for recognition and thus prediction of their behaviour.





## ARMIES

Scourge armies are vast, formidable entities, exceeding the fighting manpower of the UCM. A crucial difference until very recently was that human soldiers had to volunteer, while Scourge unwaveringly serve their race until death in whatever capacity is required of them.

The bulk of Scourge combat troops are human hosts assimilated after the Scourge invasion over 160 years ago. The hosts originally used to invade the Cradle Worlds, the so called Lizard Warriors, are mostly dead. No new examples have been sighted, indicating that species has been completely exhausted. Other alien bioforms, such as the dreaded Destroyers, Screamers and Razorworms are bred specifically as hosts, since their sheer lethality is considered too sublime to be allowed to reach full extinction. New species from the Cradle Worlds have already been assimilated, including the winged horrors known as Vampires. Other, outlandish hosts have been sighted by boarding parties on Scourge ships, suggesting use where a

non-human physiology would be better suited.

Scourge armies also make use of a wide range of fiendishly organic-looking, deadly war machines. Lethally swift grav-tanks such as the Hunter, Slayer and Executor, walkers like the skittering Prowlers and Stalkers. More outlandish constructs exist, such as the towering Annihilator or looming Desolator. Finally – and most terribly – the awe-inspiring Behemoths, such as the Dictator and the Overlord. These colossi are masters of the battlefield, only recently challenged by the UCM's Anvil battalions.

All of these vehicles contain a pure Scourge “pilot”, melded to the vehicle in a permanent communion of gelatinous flesh and armoured plate. Such an existence is apparently inferior to taking a host, lending an extra dose of viciousness to these bio-organic horrors.

## FLEETS

Scourge naval power is vast; thousands upon thousands of ships ranging from silent infiltrators to vast super-dreadnoughts – the largest ships ever encountered by mankind. It remains to be seen whether the UCM's colossal shipbuilding efforts are enough to overcome the fleets that conquered eight whole systems in a matter of days.

Scourge fleets are ever-shifting entities, making it difficult for strategists to discern enemy shipping patterns. In general, the aliens keep a heavy garrison in conquered systems, ensuring a hard, bloody fight whenever a new front is opened. As defenders (although their assault on Ferrum changed this dynamic), the Scourge never commit too many ships to one theatre, leaving another wholly undefended. This gives humanity a chance in this war, as despite the growing pace of production, Scourge vessels still outnumber those of the UCMF by approximately 50%.

This garrison is proportionate to the importance of the conquered world - as such, Earth was thought impregnable throughout the Reconquest. However, the recent and mysterious disappearance of fully half of Earth's

garrison fleet provided a window for attack, which the UCM took. There is no knowing when or if the rest of the enemy strength will return; a huge gamble for mankind. If it does, the losses will be catastrophic.

The location of the Scourge birthworld is unknown. Many believe it no longer exists, that the aliens only subsist through the subjugation of other races. What is known is that full sized Scourge starships are not manufactured anywhere in known space. While repair facilities exist above the Cradle Worlds (usually modified human ones), no shipyards have been sighted. The location of the Scourge fleet's home port remains a mystery the Office of Naval Intelligence is pursuing vigorously.

Consequently, the Scourge certainly have territories beyond the Cradle Worlds and Earth. Current hopes are these are not vast, as the aliens have been unable to bring enough ships to Olympus or Ferrum to win a decisive victory. Their reinforcements during the first climactic battles there were siphoned off from the garrison fleets of other known systems, especially Earth. It seems the Scourge must operate with what they have. However, this gives the Admiralty little solace - Scourge naval forces comfortably outnumber humanity's Battlefleets.







## SCOURGE GROUND FORCES

The Scourge are masters of planetary invasion - their entire system is geared towards it. Their dropships are strictly one-way transports, deploying from low orbit in freefall and only capable of sustained flight at relatively low altitudes. Sinister grav-tanks deploy from these peculiar craft in seconds, reaching the combat zone faster than those of all other races, save the Shaltari. Their weapons are short ranged, but spectacularly destructive. Their entire ethos demands lightning speed, intense shock and merciless aggression. The Scourge do not know retreat - they either conquer, or die trying.

Scourge vehicles are instantly recognisable, disturbing to look upon and invariably sinister. Their sleek, predatory forms have become waking nightmares to the forces of humanity. Scourge construction methods are only vaguely understood, although knowledge grows with every engagement.

Despite their appearance, Scourge vehicles aren't organic in the strictest sense. Their seamless, organic forms suggest parts may be "grown" in some hideous amalgam of machine and biology. Vehicles of a particular design are mostly identical, a characteristic unlikely in any living entity. However, biological compounds are rife in the composite bodies. The technology certainly provides a well armoured shell, virtually impervious to small arms fire, exceeding Colonial equivalents in strength to weight ratio.

Scourge vehicles have a living pure Scourge pilot, suspended within the depths of the machine in a tar-like nutrient soup. This frail, wispy creature is permanently bonded to the machine, lending its movements an unsettlingly organic quality. The pilots view the world through a series of bizarre scanners, resembling rows of baleful eyes. Often brightly coloured, these instruments presumably provide excellent field vision. These ocular systems form an optical network, providing a sense of the surroundings across multiple spectra to a far greater extent than the vehicle's biological Scourge counter-parts - a small consolation for the vehicle-bound Scourge, whose lives are seemingly worth much less than other Scourge.

Many Scourge vehicles sinisterly float in a manner popularly known as anti-grav. More accurately, it appears to be a kind of mass-phobic drive, functioning only when close to a dense body. Theoretically, Scourge aircraft stay aloft in a similar manner, although power

consumption must increase exponentially with altitude, given limited flight times. Dropships descend in freefall, only activating their drives near ground level. Grav-tanks, which hover only a few feet up, can remain active for days without refuelling.

Scourge firepower is as devastating as it is horrific. Their weapons are optimised for terrible slaughter at short range. The speed and aggression of Scourge attacks brings these nightmares into range quickly, where the only means of survival may be frantic retreat.

The bulk of Scourge anti-armour firepower comes in the form of plasma weaponry. Each plasma bolt contains a solid core, around which a ball of super-energetic white-blue plasma is held. On contact, its vast, writhing energies are dissipated into the target, causing horrific damage. Thankfully, the range of these fearsome weapons is limited by the ability of the core to contain the plasma. This is offset by the ability to defeat all known active countermeasures, since the core is shielded by its shell of burning energy. Plasma weapons come in many sizes, from the infantry-sized Pulse Rifle, to the erratic and devastating Plasma Hoses, and the ubiquitous vehicle-mounted Plasma Cannons, in sizes from medium battle tank all the way to the colossal Behemoths.

The Scourge also make great use of arc weaponry. Totally dissimilar to plasma weapons, these project crackling tendrils of energetic ions. These latch onto isolated solid objects (such as aircraft) with great ease, making them far more accurate anti-air than most AA weapons. Utilising wickedly sharp darts as anchor points, the Electroweb Caster is a variant arc weapon, which greatly improves its accuracy against ground targets. Alternatively the ions can be spread over vast areas, such as with the Ion Storm Generator, causing indiscriminate desolation to anything touched by its lethal tendrils.

In a different vein entirely to the baffling high-tech weapons usually seen, the Scourge also make use of a simple pressure hose known as the Acid Streamer. It projects a noxious, acidic liquid, dissolving biological matter to sludge on contact. Once on the ground, the vile liquid quickly evaporates into a deadly miasma, asphyxiating anything living. This nightmarish weapon sees extensive use in building clearance, similarly to the flamethrowers, albeit with even more repulsive results.



## TANKS

Sinister, gliding grav-tanks generally make up the vanguard and first wave of Scourge armoured assaults. The most common anti-tank type is the Hunter, fast and deadly at close range. The anti-air Reaper is also based on the Hunter chassis.

The heavier-framed Slayer also exists, boasting twice the firepower of the Hunter and a small transport capacity for terrifying Razorworms. A variant known as the Tormentor replaces the Slayer's twin plasma cannons with an Acid Streamer, making it one of the most feared anti-infantry units on the battlefield.

The standard Scourge APC – the Invader – is also a grav-tank of sorts, although slightly slower and completely unarmed. The threat the Invader poses is in its contents: 15 Scourge Warriors, or worse.

## INFANTRY

Captured human hosts make up the bulk of Scourge infantry, known as Warriors. They continue to make use of structures and systems created by humanity, making them particularly effective usurpers. They are just as easily killed as ordinary men however, albeit with a somewhat higher pain threshold. They occasionally wield human weapons, although are generally equipped with Plasma Rifles.

Warriors reaching the end of their natural lives are known as Aged Ones and are famous for unbridled savagery in close combat, as the insane, buried psyche of the host begins to re-assert itself.

Other assimilated species are occasionally seen, some more sinister than others. These are known by the general term of living weapons and are often bred specifically as hosts by the Scourge, who for one reason or another decided not to let them go extinct. Usually, they choose species with unique abilities and uses. The terrifying Razorworms are 50ft long, merciless predators; able to clear structures with ease, eviscerating all within. The hulking Destroyers are physically powerful, able to carry far heavier weapons than human hosts. This species has an equivalent of Aged Ones – known as Eviscerators – possibly the most feared close combat troops in existence.

Larger hosts also exist, such as the winged Vampires. These horrors ride into battle clinging to Scourge dropships. Once detached, they latch onto enemy fliers and fill them with molten plasma, much the like ground-based Prowlers do. The enormous Screamer towers over the largest battle tanks, suggesting size is no barrier to Scourge dominance over a host.



## WALKERS

By far the most common Scourge walker is the tiny but deadly Prowler, a skittering little nightmare that injects molten plasma into armoured vehicles, immolating the crew. Its cousin the Raptor is less effective against vehicles, but has more range and can strike at infantry cowering inside buildings.

As the Scourge found themselves on the defensive during the Reconquest, tougher but slower walker-type constructs started to appear with increasing frequency. These were more capable of holding ground and withstanding bombardment than lighter grav-tanks. The Stalker is an anti-tank variant, just as dangerous as the Hunter but twice as tough. The Ravager is an AA variant, offering twice the range of the Reaper, making it more appropriate for defensive actions.

Some of the largest walkers (besides Behemoths) are those based on the Oppressor chassis. This crab-like monstrosity packs considerable anti-tank firepower, lethal cutting claws and the ability to fulfil a command role. An

unusual variant – the Subjugator – projects a high-gravity field around itself, which only affects enemy units, slowing them to a crawl or downing aircraft. A third variant known as the Eradicator is one of the most dangerous AA units encountered, a fact heightened by its use of active camouflage in ambushes.

## TRANSITION HYBRIDS

Perhaps the most unusual construct in the Scourge arsenal is the Annihilator: a towering artillery piece armed with the massive, area-effect Plasma Bombard. Its bizarreness lies in its dual nature as a walker and a flier. On land, its spindly front legs hold the construct in a firing position. If it needs to relocate, the legs fold into the hull and the Annihilator can fly to a new vantage. Its variant, the Obliterator, replaces the plasma bombard with a Furnace Laser, a miniaturised version of the cannons found on Scourge starships. While it requires line of sight to the target, this weapon offers extreme range – a rare commodity for the Scourge.





## DROPSHIPS

The most common Scourge dropship is the Marauder: an anti-grav, freefall insertion, medium dropship. The Marauder can carry three medium grav-tanks, or two heavy grav-tanks or APCs. Armed with a Plasma Hose, it can also fulfil a light anti-armour role once its cargo is unleashed.

A much extended, outlandishly vertical construct is the Despoiler heavy dropship, featuring triple the transport capacity of the Marauder. It can also be armed with a pair of Plasma Cannons, making it one of the most offensively capable of all heavy dropships.

Although all Scourge fliers are faster than their UCM equivalents, the Intruder light dropship is the quickest of all. Much like the UCM's Raven, it is generally used for troop insertions ahead of enemy lines. It is also the only aircraft that

deploys the smallest Scourge vehicles, its speed of delivery enhancing the scouting qualities of these units.

Several specialist dropships are also employed by the Scourge. The Harbinger is the most common of these and is designed to carry walkers, since the Marauder can only carry grav-tanks. It may carry three Stalkers or Ravagers or a single heavy walker, such as the Oppressor. Befitting the toughness of its cargo, the Harbinger is also better armoured than the Marauder and better armed, with Plasma Bombs for ground attack and optional AA capability. The Raider is probably the rarest of Scourge dropships, since it only carries large living weapons, such as the Screamer. The Raider is a threat in its own right though – armed with a pair of Acid Hoses, it can liquidate enemy infantry with ease.

## AIRCRAFT

Scourge armies often feature a high percentage of airborne threats, given their penchant for aggression. Gunships such as the anti-tank Ravager fit into this mindset perfectly. A rarer, outlandish variant known as the Corruptor also exists. This literally fires Razorworm pods into structures, seeding them with lethal killing machines.

Smaller aerial units with offensive weapons are also very common in Scourge forces. The Minder is uniquely defensive in nature – deployed in wide formations by light dropships, these floating horrors fulfil a similar role to barrage balloons of old, threatening an enemy aircraft that dares fly too close. A more offensive variant, the Monitor, packs a pair of Shard Cannons for anti-infantry and light vehicle use. However, the Monitor may also self-destruct, making it lethal against heavy armour, illustrating the willingness of individual Scourge to die for the species.

Although not gunships in the traditional sense, some of the largest Scourge fliers are also highly dangerous to ground forces. The Desolator is one of the most sinister command units available to the Scourge. Its only weapon generates an ion storm over a massive area, causing indiscriminate damage to friend and foe alike. Although harmless in itself, its variant, the Overseer, carries a generator which boosts the performance of all nearby plasma weapons. Since these are the Scourge's staple killing machines, the destruction of Overseers is always a priority for those fighting them.

By far the most common Scourge fighter is the Corsair. While small and poorly armoured, it carries a massively powerful Plasma Cannon – frankly overkill against aerial targets. However, this also makes the Corsair far more effective at ground attack than other light fighters; just as powerful as a main battle tank, in fact. Swarms of Corsairs attend every major Scourge operation – a constant, predatory threat for their enemies.





## BEHEMOTHS

The first alien Behemoths encountered by humanity were those of the Scourge, during their initial invasions. While the largest walkers used by man at the time – the imposing Juggernauts – fulfilled exploratory or strategic roles, these Scourge monstrosities were optimised for frontline combat. Besides the terrible physical damage they could inflict, the psychological impact is hard to overestimate, especially given how these things do their killing.

Like all Scourge constructs, their Behemoths are disturbingly organic in appearance and outlandish in form, often featuring large numbers of legs and tentacles for motive power. During the invasion, they were instrumental in breaking mankind's few intact tank brigades. Famously, one of the alien's most formidable engines was responsible for the breaking of the shield around the Whitehouse, and its subsequent demolition.

Scourge war engines differ from human ones in various other ways, such as their mode of deployment. While functionally similar in effect to the Drop Harness, Scourge engines feature internal, short-burn anti-grav systems, allowing them to arrest their own freefall in complete silence until the legs slam down, cracking the concrete beneath them. This sight alone is enough to make even a hardened Praetorian run in fear.

A particular mystery is number of crew, and how that works. It was previously understood that other Scourge vehicles were “piloted” by a single pure Scourge, melded to the machine for life. However, analysis of wrecks suggest that Behemoths contain multiple parasites. Whether there is a hierarchy or some form of gestalt consciousness is unknown. If the former, existence must be miserable for those lower in the hierarchy, doomed to be forever part of a being you are subservient to – perhaps a taste of their own medicine. Research suggests this to be the case, as there tends to be one primary Scourge that has expanded its nervous system into every part of the Behemoth, and many others living in smaller parts, completely overwhelmed by the “leader”, shrivelling in size and complexity. Since this revelation, UCM scientists have gone back to question their research on other Scourge vehicles, and whether there could be multiple Scourge parasites bonded together. Indeed, some have questioned whether a pure Scourge could use another Scourge as a host, forcing the existing resident into a subservient position and causing a human host to live longer.

More Scourge Behemoths have been involved in the Battle for Earth than the entire Reconquest, suggesting that these are precious assets reserved for the most important of battlefields. Two distinct size categories are frequently encountered, however, as the Battle for Earth rages on, few doubt that new horrors will be unleashed to defend the planet.



## LIGHT

These Behemoths more than a passing resemblance to the smaller Oppressor, although they upgrade to walking on eight legs instead of six. Though still fast, this makes the Scourge Light Behemoth somewhat slower than the many-limbed Heavy. However, they offer the excellent load-bearing capabilities needed to carry powerful weaponry into battle. The two most common variants seen so far during the Battle for Earth are the Persecutor and the Punisher.

The Persecutor class is geared towards killing other Behemoths. Armed exclusively with short-ranged, high-energy plasma weaponry, it requires aggression for maximum effectiveness. Its shoulder-mounted Heavy Plasma Cannons are potent enough, but the real threat comes from the underslung Plasma Destructor – the most powerful weapon of its type yet encountered on the ground. It actually requires the walker's two front legs to direct and support it. The energy burst on impact produces a large blast, enough to turn multiple smaller targets to glass in an instant.

The Punisher however is unleashed by the aliens when they do not care to discriminate between structures and the troops hiding within. Its primary armament is the tail-mounted Quake Bombard, a weapon capable of shaking any nearby building to its foundations in seconds. It also features two bloated front legs with hive-like structures, containing a range of munitions; either explosive pods or worm pods. The latter contain Razorworms, allowing the Punisher to seed a structure with these living weapons. Together, these factors make the Punisher a terrifying prospect for infantry to face in urban combat.

## HEAVY

Scourge Heavy Behemoths are enormous, tentacled monstrosities, reckoned by many to be the most terrifying thing a soldier can face on the battlefield. Unlike most other Behemoths, these can and do target individual, lowly infantrymen (usually beneath the notice of such massive war engines). Each of the thing's eight tentacle "legs" ends in a splayed cluster of smaller tentacles, in turn ended by fine filaments.

These filaments can extend to considerable lengths, reaching into buildings and plucking those hiding within out and to their deaths, either flung into the air or ripped to fleshy pieces. The psychological effect of witnessing a Scourge Behemoth attack is unparalleled – many UCM Legionnaires have voluntarily put themselves forward for a court martial for

desertion after seeing their squad mates torn apart, the fine filaments worming their way into eyes, ears and mouths before tearing the screaming soldier apart from within.

Any one of these tentacle arms can be a threat to regular armoured units as well – they easily have enough strength in them to grab and hurl a main battle tank hundreds of yards. When faced with another Behemoth, they are even powerful enough to rip chunks from them, enveloping them like an octopus does prey. Another benefit of these unusual legs is the sheer speed they grant – given its colossal size, efficient motion means it can easily and fluidly outpace a grav-tank!

However, these are just the auxiliary weapons of the Scourge Heavy. The primary, ranged weapons vary, with two prominent classes frequently seen on the battlefield.

The Tyrant is the most frequently encountered Scourge Heavy, optimised for an anti-Behemoth role. Its secondary armament is four, arm-mounted Heavy Plasma Cannons; enormous versions of those found on Scourge grav-tanks. Its primary armament is the Energy Cyclone Projector, offering effectively infinite rage and huge killing potential. The weapon's only real downside is its unstable nature, leading to an inconsistent rate of fire. This is an inevitable result of its design, since it focuses pure, unregulated energy discharge directly from the engine's fusion core.

The Dictator class is better suited to engaging smaller targets, tanks in particular. The Dictator is unusual in that it features exclusively electric-based weaponry, like a giant version of the Stalker. This makes it lethal to flesh and electronic systems alike, although fairly harmless to inanimate objects, such as structures. This is actually deliberate and gives the Dictator a terrifying, non-battlefield role. After a Scourge conquest, these Behemoths prowl the streets, exterminating functional tech and beating hearts while leaving buildings intact. In total, the Dictator packs four arm-mounted Arc Lances and one core-mounted Arc Maw. These weapons fire many more shots than the Tyrant, and in strafing arcs, frying whole columns of tanks with coruscating death.

