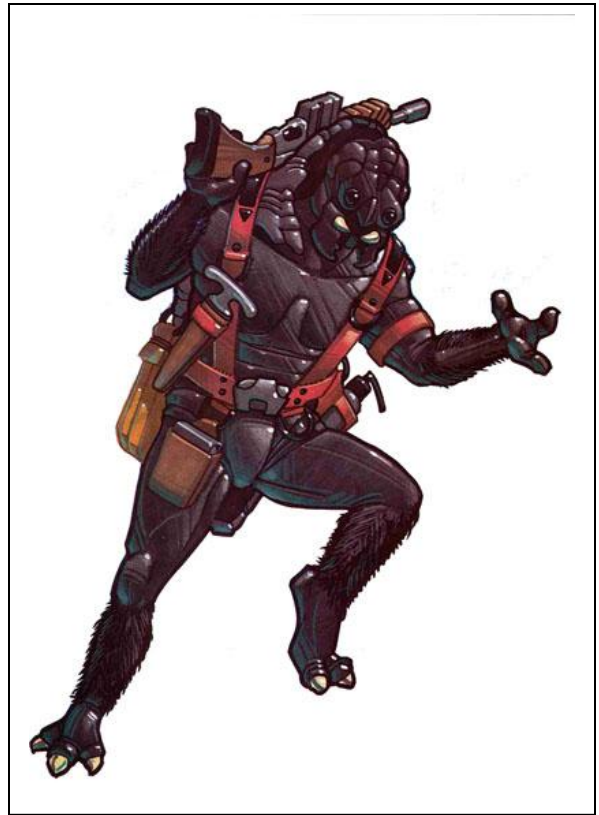


Kafers

Appearance

Kafers are two-meter tall, non-human bipeds native to an unknown region of space and are considered Externals. It is assumed they are from a system with a star larger, brighter, and hotter than Earth's sun, and considerably richer in ultraviolet radiation. Adaptations to the harsh conditions created by such a star are evident in the Kafer's physiology.

The backs of their torsos and heads are protected by a tough, horned carapace. A pattern of dark against silver mottling across the upper portions of their skull carapace has evolved as a method of regulating body temperature. Their eyes are small, heavily pigmented, and recessed beneath massive brow ridges. Those ridges are independently muscled and capable of considerable mobility and articulation. This trait evolved to protect Kafer vision under their bright star, and serves to make the Kafer face—to other Kafers, at least—quite expressive.



Kafers evolved on their homeworld as scavengers. The relatively naked appearance of the head is the result of natural selection at work, an adaptation allowing primitive Kafers to penetrate heavily-ribbed carcasses with their heads while feeding, and to disentangle themselves rapidly if threatened. Their mouths bear an impressive array of mandibles, hooks, needles, siphons, chelae, and other tools used to impale, tear, cut, shred, chew, suck, handle, and partially digest their food. These mouthparts are normally folded up and concealed from view inside a protective integument, and are extended only when eating. Most humans feel considerable revulsion at the sight of a Kafer feeding.

Kafer hands are equipped with three mutually opposing thumbs. They lack the strength of a human's grip but are surprisingly quick and dexterous for a creature with the Kafer's reputation for brute strength and stupidity. Kafers have been known to perform fine, delicate, and intricate operations with certain of their mouth parts as well.

The articulation of their joints is roughly similar to humans, although the relative shortness of their limbs gives them a heavy-bodied and stocky appearance. Their lower legs and lower arms are covered by short, coarse bristles. Their skin, where not covered by their carapace, is thick and tough, with colors shading from black and gray through various shades of brown or green.

Intelligence

The nature of Kafer intelligence has posed a serious problem for human xenobiologists attempting to understand their behavior. In combat, Kafers appear slow-witted, even stupid, at first. Numerous human observers have

reported that, in the first moments of a fire fight, their Kafer opponents appeared to mill about in confusion as if uncertain what to do, and that their officers could be seen moving among them, beating them or using something like a cattle prod or whip as if to get them moving.

Strangely, after only a few moments of combat (typically 1D6 combat turns), Kafers are transformed, becoming cunning, innovative, and deadly opponents. Kafer intelligence is dependent upon a biochemical analogue to adrenalin in humans. Introduced to the bloodstream in large amounts when danger threatens, this chemical enables Kafer brains to work at far greater efficiency than normal. The effects are maintained until the chemical breaks down, approximately 30 minutes after the stimulus ceases.

This singular fact of Kafer evolution has resulted in a new type of intelligence, known to humans as "short term intelligence". Basically, Kafers show an ability to think quickly as an emergency develops, which allows them to concentrate on day-to-day survival at a lower, almost instinctual level. With the advent of technology, this aspect of Kafer evolution has hampered their development in several ways. It makes them extremely dangerous opponents in combat, however, despite their initial apparent stupidity.

One result of their relatively low day-to-day intelligence lies in the typically high endurance of most Kafers. They are ruggedly built, tough, seemingly insensitive to pain, stoic, and able to keep going long after most humans would have collapsed.

Psychology

Kafer psychology has been shaped by their physiology. The fact that Kafers feel most alive and most aware when they are in danger, pain, or even at the brink of death has led them to develop a mind set which has certain points in common with at least one aspect of human existentialist philosophy. One Kafer encountered at the deep space research facility at Arcturus was found to have developed a fondness for Sartre, apparently because that existentialist writer's belief (as expressed in the book *The Wall*), revealed one point of overlap between Kafer experience and human philosophy: complete being is felt only when facing death.

This aspect of Kafer psychology explains their apparent fearlessness in combat: they are literally without fear! It also explains their evident confusion in attempts to understand human beings. Existentialist philosophy is common to all Kafers because they are made that way. It is possible that they are not able to conceive of any other way to be—a kind of philosophical tunnel vision brought on by the nature of the way they think. Existentialist philosophy is not common to all or most humans, and, in fact, the notion that someone is only able to feel completely alive at the moment he is dying is not a concept which most humans take seriously or allow to guide their lives.

Kafer Intelligence

The most striking feature of Kafer behavior noted by humans who have come in contact with them is the fact that they appear to be quite dull—even stupid—until stimulated by combat or other serious threat, by pain, or by the

blows of a Kafer officer. The change in Kafers observed during combat is striking: one moment they seem to be milling about in confusion, perhaps with their officers striking them with rods or whips, and the next moment they are transformed into cunning, keenly intelligent soldiers.

The dual nature of Kafer intelligence confused human observers long after the initial contacts with the race. The lesson proved to be a costly one, for time and time again, human troops confronting Kafers believed that they had caught the Kafers in total confusion, only to have the enemy fade away into the bush, then strike with deadly precision at the humans' weakest points.

In combat, Kafers are wily, crafty opponents. They may feign death, or hide themselves in imaginative and unlikely places. They seem able to identify human officers with uncanny precision and ease, even when the officers wear no rank and carry line troopers' weapons, and will spare no effort to kill those officers in order to sow confusion within human ranks. They are able to move over almost any type of ground quickly, silently, and seemingly invisibly. They show a terrifying ability to identify the weak points in a human defensive line and exploit them.

They recognize human bonds and use them, taking hostages in order to win a tactical advantage, and using human captives as shields. Though they seem not to understand concepts such as compassion or mercy, they have been known to play on these emotions in order to trick human forces. And they seem to have an almost superhuman grasp of small unit and individual tactics, which allows them to engage in flanking maneuvers, penetrate tightly knit human lines using camouflage or deception, and set up deadly crossfires, often with multiple back-up layers, so that a second hidden Kafer nest opens fire just as the human forces close in on or destroy the first.

The Physiochemical Basis For Kafer Intelligence

The dual nature of Kafer intelligence has a physiochemical cause. In their basic intelligence state, Kafers are indeed slow-witted and slow-thinking. Danger, pain, or the threat of imminent death boosts their intelligence almost instantaneously, however, resulting in a startling and dangerous transformation.

Danger causes in Kafers a chemical response analogous to the flow of adrenaline in humans. Instead of increasing strength or responses, however, the Kafer response stimulates thought processes. It is believed that the hormone involved acts as an enzymatic catalyst in the chemical reaction which transmits neural impulses.

In humans, nerve impulses travel from nerve cell to nerve cell across the synaptic gaps between them, through the release of acetylcholine or some other similar chemical transmitter at the synapse. In Kafers, the chemical transmitter involved works at one level of efficiency in the organism's basic state, and at a much higher level of efficiency in the presence of the Kafer adrenaline analogue. As a result, Kafer thought processes are both much faster and much "cleaner," crisper, sharper, and stronger when under the influence of the hormone. The secretion takes effect within a few moments of the initial stimulation. It lasts for at least 30 minutes after stimulation ceases.

Kafers tracking a fleeing human on foot will remain intelligent, able to bring considerable cunning and tracking expertise to bear on the hunt, until perhaps 30 minutes after they lose all trace of their quarry. At that time they revert to their basic intelligence level.

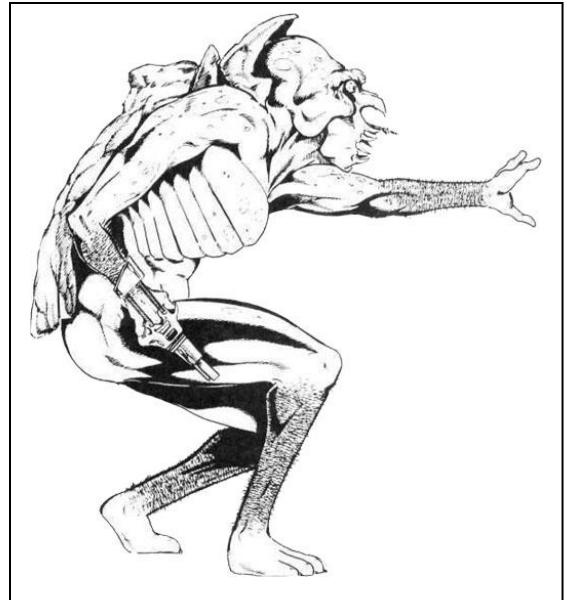
Intelligence: -4 to generate a normal Kafer. Add +3 for an officer and +4 for a professional or engineer.

As a Kafer advances in experience, they gradually get smarter. If they live long enough, they become officers, scientists and technicians. For every two base (i.e. non-enraged) levels a Kafer attains, they add 1 to the permanent, low-level Intelligence. They also subtract 1 from the Intelligence bonus they receive when enraged. This add to the base intelligence can never exceed 9.

Carapace Armor: A Kafer's tough carapace protects its torso as non-rigid armor - d6+1 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4 (En).

Racial Perks: All Kafers start with the following Perks: **Fortitude** and **Tough as Nails**.

Getting Smart: Combat and violence stimulate a Kafer to greater intelligence. This causes a shift in Intelligence. The Intelligence of a "Smart" Kafer can leap by as much as 10 points. This rage also causes an emotional rush, as the Kafer feels more alive and aware. This happens even in those who no longer experience Intelligence increases.



Variable Intelligence and Will: When running wild Kafers in combat, use the lower listed Intelligence for 1d6 turns, after which it increases by 1d10 per round until it reaches a total increase of 10. Also when a Kafer is enraged they add 1d6 per round up to a total increase of 6 to their Will score. This cascades down through Resistance Modifiers and Skills.

Attack Bonus: A Kafer that is enraged and Smart gets -2 step bonus to all attack skills.

Skill Bonus: In addition to the Intelligence boost, Kafers get a -1 step bonus to all skills when "smart".