

Neurological Tick [0/10/25]

These alien symbiotes spread along with interstellar travel, and can be found on a plethora of worlds. While neurological Ticks are small, brightly colored bloodsucking insects that can successfully feed off of a remarkable range of lifeforms, it is however incorrect to call them 'parasites.' They're genuine symbionts: Neurological Ticks provide their hosts with a suspiciously-significant neurological boost, allowing the hosts to function at up to human levels of reasoning and understanding.

A Neurological Tick, once implanted, will usually live as long as its host; in the wild, they typically last on their own for about a year or so (they can live on most animal wastes, but only if there are no hosts available). Implanting these symbionts on fully-sentient creatures not only has no effect; the Tick will refuse to bite in the first place. There's just something about *people* that they find unappetizing.

Assuming that the host is a 'mere' animal (i.e., one with either the Domestic Animal or the Wild Animal meta-traits), up to three Ticks can be implanted. The first Neurological Tick replaces Hidebound with Unnatural Features/5, and

changes the Taboo Trait for Domestic and Wild Animals to Non-Iconographic. The second Tick removes Bestial from Wild Animals, and Social Stigma from Domestic Animals, sometimes replacing either with Stress Atavism: Mild. The third removes Cannot Speak, although Disturbing Voice is a common partial substitute. If the Tick-infested animal takes both disadvantages, the cost per level is reduced to 0/0/5; animals with the symbiotes also have been known to have Wounded as well, which reduces the cost to -5/-5/0. Other Disadvantages -- No Fine Manipulators or Short Lifespan come to mind -- are unaffected, but that's less of a problem in a TL9 or better society.

All of this assumes that there are no social consequences to having Neurological Ticks. Acquiring Enemies, poor Reputation, negative Social Status, and/or below-average Wealth in the process of getting a Neurological Tick would all be a relatively trivial exercise. On the other hand, some Galactic civilizations deliberately introduce Neurological Ticks into an alien ecosystem as a cheap alternative to uplifting promising species. It all depends.

It is obvious, of course, that Neurological Ticks are biological super-tech constructs left over from a previous epoch of galactic civilization. Only, nobody knows why they were invented, who created them (none of the

existing elder races out there will admit to constructing them), or whether there are any hidden risks involved. The obvious risks are, well, obvious: animals with Neurological Ticks have increased intelligence and reasoning capacity, not ethics or morality. If a Siberian tiger decides that there's nothing wrong with eating humans, then all the Ticks will do will be to make the tiger a reasoning, and terrifying, killing machine. Or the tiger could end up studying philosophy in a monastery and 'meditating' in the sun. It's up to the tiger -- which is the point, really. Or perhaps 'presumably.' The creators of the Neurological Tick are not around to be asked.

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