

# Introducing a New Cat

By Phil Maggitti



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Pet retailers are wellsprings of good advice when novice cat owners purchase that first kitten. They may not be so forthcoming, however, for kitten customers who already have a cat at home; yet they, too, are in need of advice.

## Forewarned is For Sure

The time to start planning for the new arrival, whom Stonewall will no doubt consider The Horrible, Unwelcome Guest (THUG), is before you find a poor shadow of a kitten hunched beneath your car in the garage; before some battered old tomcat starts hanging around the servants' entrance cadging a meal; or before you pass a pet store and decide you have to have one of those kittens in the window. In short, the time to get ready is now.

## We Hold These Truths

We begin with the following assumptions: Your present cat is de-sexed. Your present cat spends some or all of its time indoors. You own a carrier in which you transport your cat to the vet every time it sneezes. You have a spare litter pan. Your cat is currently vaccinated for Feline Calicivirus, Feline Herpes virus, Feline

Panleukopaenia, Feline Leukemia, Feline Chlamydia and FIV and any other syndrome for which there is a cc of prevention. If you cannot say yes to these assumptions, you should not say yes when a new cat crooks its finger at you beckoningly.

## Timing is Everything

Before you bring THUG home, you should prepare a room where he will spend some time in quarantine. Do not choose Stonewall's favorite sanctuary or resting-place for this function. The idea is to fit THUG into Stonewall's routine, not to make Stonewall feel dethroned.

The solitary-confinement approach is recommended on two counts. First, no one should introduce a new cat without first isolating it for a while, no matter what the feleuk test said. Second, a quarantine period allows THUG to take the measure of his new surroundings, before Stonewall takes the measure of him.

Until you are satisfied that THUG is not harbouring any contagions that did not show up at the vet inspection—that is, for ten days to two weeks—he should have no direct and prolonged contact with Stonewall. For the first few days they can exchange sniffs and resumes from either side of closed door.

## Opening Salvos

When you feel the time is right, and after you have clipped everyone's claws—put THUG into the cat carrier, open the door to his room, and allow Stonewall to come in and conduct a prescreening interview of fifteen or twenty minutes. Be sure to take up THUG's water bowl, food dish and litter pan first in case he is radioactive for some disease.

Brief, repeated visits like this help to foster the development of social-greeting behaviour. More than any other kind of interaction they enable cats to share accommodations peacefully.

Do not be discomfited by hissing, growling, back arching, signifying, or big-tail displays from one or both cats at first. And do not fret if Stonewall goes off his food, off to the farthest reaches of the house to sulk, or off to neighbour's back door for a day or two.

## Wheels Off

After no more than a fortnight you should be ready to take away the training wheels and allow Stonewall and THUG to try unfettered, but not unsupervised, contact. Bring Stonewall into the isolation ward for a visit, but this time do not confine THUG beforehand. Put Stonewall on the floor, retire to a neutral corner, and have a blanket, a broom, and a high-velocity water gun handy just in case. All should go well, but if the rare life-threatening fight erupts, separate the combatants, wrap one in the blanket and return him to accustomed place. Reinstate the brief visitations in a day or so and then attempt the free-range introduction several days after that. And do not expect miracles.

"It may well be," write British cat behaviorists Pete Neville, Bsc., and Claire Bessant, Bsc., "that you can only hope for a slightly distant but tolerant relationship between you and two (cats), not a loving, curl-up-by-the-fire-in-a-heap one." An armed truce, however, is better than armed combat.

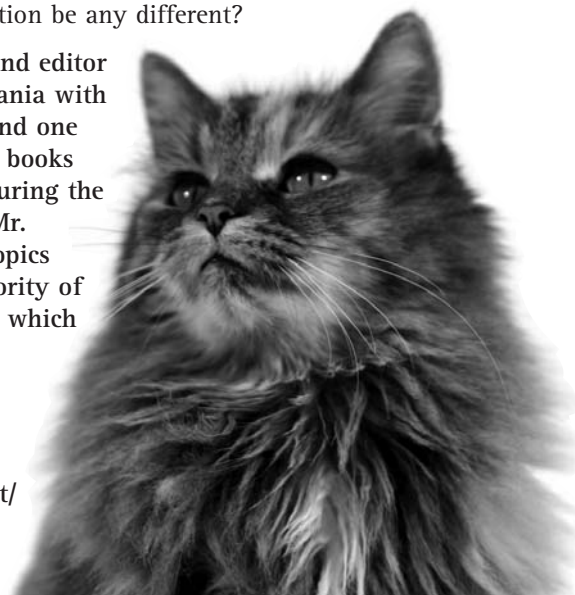
## The Bottom Lines

If Stonewall and THUG manage to occupy the same room on three of four successive days without trying to give one another a buzz cut, you can quit the room with confidence, but do not leave the house. You want to be around if peace does not prove transferable. You can help to ensure that peace is transferable by providing each cat with its own food dish, scratching post and litter pan. Cats, like most perpetual youngsters, do not like to share.

Finally, you should put yourself in your cat's place. How would you feel if your spouse, flatmate or whatever brought someone home one day without consulting you, then announced that that individual was going to be living in your house? An announcement of that kind in the human world is often followed by a visit from the SWAT team. Why should a cat's reaction be any different?

Phil Maggitti is a freelance writer and editor who lives in southeastern Pennsylvania with his wife, five cats, four pug dogs, and one Boston terrier. He has written eight books and nearly eight hundred articles during the last twenty-three years. Although Mr. Maggitti has written on a variety of topics for numerous publications, the majority of his work has explored the points at which the lives of animals and people intersect.

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