

SEE SPOT SWIM

Written by Karen Randall, Pub in The Daphnian Jan 1990

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(Or Guess Who's Coming to Dinner)

By: Karen Randall, BAS

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When I was young and naïve, (18 months ago) I started my first marine aquarium. After an impatient wait for my tank to mature with the help of three damsels, I set out to buy my first "real" fish.

I had a self imposed limit of \$20.00 per fish to keep the possible losses from being a financial disaster, but that still left me with quite a few options. I browsed through several stores before I found THE fish.

It was love at first sight. Little did I guess the consequences of my impetuous love affair. There in a corner of a large tank was an adorable one inch long beauty. He was sparkling white with black spots and enormous eyes. He hovered slightly over the bottom, head tilted downward, and waved his pectoral fins rhythmically, looking for all the world like an exotic fan dancer. When he realized that I was looking at him, he spun around and hid behind a large clam shell. Curiosity soon got the better of him, and he poked his head out and rested on one spotted fin as he checked me out.

He had it all, looks, personality plus, and the right price tag, \$19.95! He was soon glowering at me through the side of a plastic bag.

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Those of you who are marine hobbyists are already aware of the enormity of my mistake. For those of you fresh water only folk, "Spot" is a panther grouper, *Cromileptes altivelis*.

At home, installed in my new tank, Spot seemed a model citizen. If anything, he was overly retiring, and as I added fish to the tank, he would allow them to bully him. If they really upset him, he would turn dark all over, and retreat under his clam shell to sulk.

There was only one problem with Spot. He grew ... and grew ... and grew. By this time, I had read enough about panther groupers to know that he wasn't going to stop growing any time soon, and that sooner or later, his buddies were going to start looking like tasty snacks. I knew he was not right for my community tank, I knew I should get rid of him, but I kept putting it off. After all, he rally was cute.

Then he played his trump card. We went away on vacation, and the whole time we were gone Spot refused to eat. By the time we got back, the girl who was looking after all our beasts was frantic. She was sure he was dying of some mysterious disease. I went down stairs expecting the worst. One look at me, and he came flying to the front of the tank begging for supper. Now how could anyone turn their back on loyalty like that?

In the end, the inevitable happened. Spot got his own tank. I have to say, he was a perfect gentleman right up to the day he got his own apartment. He never touched a tank mate even though the scallops and shrimp he ate for dinner every day were bigger than some of them.

Actually, Spot has become even more of a pet now that he lives alone. He wiggles like a puppy when I pass his tank, and now that he has made his point, will occasionally deign to accept food from other people. He also fills the role held by oscars in many fish families ... that of piscine garbage disposal.

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Last but not least, Spot is a great conversation starter. My husband is always startling guests by saying, "Want to meet the fish that lives under our stairs?" or, "We're growing this one to eating size." So don't be surprised by an invitation some day to dinner at the Randall's. Menu? Pan fried grouper of course!

(Only kidding , Spot!)