

# Otus the Head Cat - One of a kind

*EDITOR'S NOTE: J. Michael Storey is a copy editor for the Democrat.*

By J. MICHAEL STOREY

Otus is the head cat in our house.

Just ask him. He's not the biggest — Gizmo is. And he's not the pushiest — Frodo is. But he was there first, and in catdom, tenure is all.

Grendel the Border Collie was around before all of them, but, after all, she's only a dog and is tolerated (albeit affectionately) by all three.

Otus joined the family Easter of '75, at the tender age of six weeks — the last unchosen snippet from a litter that included four full-blooded siamese kittens, one all-black domestic shorthair, and Otus — black and white mix. Perhaps it was Otus' seal-point Siamese mother that gave him his unique personality, or maybe it was his daddy — a cat of mystery, who dropped by one night and vanished with the morn. But there is a definite engaging quality about Otus that at times is manifested in various ways.

He enjoys himself immensely.

One of his favorite pastimes is "Otus the Vulture".

Gizmo and Frodo are 15 pound yellow tabbies, and inseperable

brothers. They'll be cavorting about the house playing cattaq under the watchful eye of Otus the Vulture. He'll be perched atop the refrigerator, ali hunkered, awaiting the proper moment to swoop and strike. The tabbies will go tumbling by all fur and legs absorbed in their play, and down will come Otus, talons flashing. With blinding speed, he'll select one as his victim, execute a surgically calculated playful swat, and disappear in a blur of black and white. Gizmo and Frodo will scatter to collect their wits, wondering what hit them.

By then, Otus will be back on the frig, playing sphinx.

Otus the Sphinx is a cat of enigma. Composed, tail wrapped snugly beneath, whimsical look of bemusement on his face. Otus will pick a favorite spot on the couch or chair and contemplate deep cat thoughts for hours on end. An occasional obligatory yawn may escape, but mostly he just sits and watches. Call his name while he's Otus the Sphinx and he'll look at you as if saying "It'd better be important."

But don't think Otus is all show. He earns his Tender Vittles as well. When circumstance calls for it, Otus'

primitive instincts take over and he becomes Otus the Watchcat.

There are various ominous times when Otus the Watchcat comes forth to protect his hearth and home. When killer squirrels are massing outside the den window, when rabid sparrows threaten to overrun the feeder or when (heaven forbid) a strange cat wanders across the yard, Otus the Watchcat springs into action.

Ears flat against his powerful neck, his tail a flicking mirage, muscles poised for action, Otus will dash from window to window emitting strange guttural noises. He'll look at me in amazement that I can sit passively there in my chair reading a book while a Giant Killer Squirrel lurks but three feet outside the window.

I remain calm, because I know Otus will take care of the situation — and he always does. The beast outside always flees in terror, and Otus, his job well done, will parade twice around the house, head held high, tail at full mast, accepting the accolades of unseen admiring multitudes.

Otus also will not let Gizmo and Frodo forget that he is allowed to go outside from time to time and they

are not. As last of the litter, Otus the Patroller learned the ways of the world early and the tabbies went straight from mom to the house. Not that Otus has anything special to do or see outside, but once or twice a week he likes to check his territory for new smells and such. That's how we acquired Gizmo and Frodo.

When we first moved to the new house, Otus the Patroller was unsure of just where his territory was, and went out one of those first days and didn't come back. After a week we got the tabbies. Two days later, a bedraggled and thinner Otus the Patroller returned from the wars, carrying beneath his skin an air rifle pellet to remember his adventure by. He carries his trophy still (the vet says it won't hurt).

Otus the Head Cat has many moods, but perhaps his most endearing is when he condescends to allow his ears to be scratched. He'll tumble into my lap already purring and spend five minutes searching for just the right spot upon which to plop. Having selected his position, he'll make himself comfortable and look up expectantly as if to say, "I'm ready now — go ahead."

While I'm rubbing, he'll slowly drift off into Cat Nirvana.