

Halloween Fish Story

Don't be a "Terminator" when it comes to caring for your fishy pets.

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"I'll be back." Don't be a fish "Terminator."

Our fishes deserve the best care we can give them. If you don't know something, ask, read, research.

"I'll be back," echoed through the fish room as the door didn't quite slam shut, but remained slightly ajar as doors tend to do when closed in haste. Among the piscine residents of the 55 gallon, the room's sole tank, electro-magnetic signals spread like a bad case of fin rot that the master of the tank was gone. They'd been given a brief reprieve. But he had only gone to discard a couple of fishy carcasses into the trash bin positioned in the alleyway adjacent to his fish room.

Ridding his fish room and its tank of belly up fishes had become something of a daily occurrence. But when he had first introduced fishes into his newly cycled 55 many months before, everything and everyone seemed to be getting on just fine. It had only been of late that this occasional fish assassin had become a first-rate piscine serial killer. But like most piscine serial killers, our man never intended to deliberately rack up an ever-escalating body count; in fact, he'd kind of backed into it almost by accident by cutting maintenance corners here and there – a little bit at a time. Multi-layered mistakes had been piled high atop one another.

Rather than correct the overstocking and water quality issues, this "Piscine Terminator" accepted and eventually justified the losses. "These guys are only a couple of bucks apiece, I'll just get some more at my local fish store."

Playing the diligent hobbyist to a tee at fish shows and aquarium club meetings, none were the wiser as to his fishkeeping ways. His true hobbyist self remained incognito – just the way he liked it. "Don't show weakness, let them think you're knowledgeable; don't ask too many questions ..."

He'd even gotten creative in disposing of the bodies. Late-night flips of the garbage disposal switch got rid of any evidence of lackadaisical husbandry. "Oh, just cleaning off a few last-minute dishes, honey." Or when nobody was looking, he'd slide open the rear patio door while pinching a still-wet caudal fin between his forefinger and thumb, and with a quick wrist snap one more airborne fertilizer packet would be on its way to an increasingly greener backyard garden. In fact, his wife, never much of green thumb but a dutiful plodder, couldn't put her finger on why her garden seemed to have taken off in recent months. She hadn't really altered anything at all in her gardening protocol, not an iota – but results don't lie – it must be her skill as a gardener. It had to be.

And there were other peculiar happenings afoot in the "Terminator" house of late, too. Housecats Hostility and Rancor had lost their appetites. They looked healthy but hardly seemed to touch their food bowls anymore. "Honey, maybe it's time to take the kitties in to the vet for a checkup, what do you think?"

"You know, Constance, I think you baby those two flea merchants. They look perfectly fine to me," huffed her sheepish husband, with his back turned, not wanting her to read his facial expressions too closely. And, boy oh boy, was she ever good at reading him like a book, when given half a chance. But not this time, not on this night.

And then there were the occasional dinner guests from the neighborhood who described a bit of a "fishy aftertaste" to the meatloaf, tacos, etc. On these occasions the missus turned beet-red while her hubby dabbed his forehead and quickly blurted out, "Scrabble anyone?"

Eventually a crisis of conscience got to the "Terminator." He began to institute weekly partial water changes; he began testing water parameters daily; he stopped overfeeding his tank, and when he did, any uneaten food was promptly removed; impulse buys ceased; he stopped replacing fish until his stocking levels were in the correct range for a tank of his size and he began to mine the fish knowledgeable all about him – old salts at the fish store and aquarium club offered their advice, various web-based resources like FishChannel.com helped get him up to speed and he became a regular subscriber to FAMA and AFI. Before long his 55 passed muster, and he began to dispense quality advice of his own to fellow hobbyists.

Presently, the fishes are happy; the garden is starting to return to its former scraggly self; the neighbors, albeit cautiously at first, are once again accepting of dinner invites (but they do try and bring a covered dish of their own); the cats are their

usual surly selves and the Terminator's dark fishkeeping past is deeply buried and hopefully behind him.

However, he is still stirred awake at times late at night by a sucking fish head descending from the ceiling above his bed. Perhaps it is a haunting for all his many months of lousy aquarium maintenance.

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