



THE SEARCH FOR NINE PERFECT CATS

by Andy Looney

When I finally realized I needed to create *Cat Fluxx*, one of the most important design considerations I faced was the question of exactly which cats it would include.

It was easy to decide how many cats to include. The decision was driven in part by game design: since a typical Fluxx deck contains around 20 Keepers, and I'd need to Keeperize at least as many non-cat things as cats, that meant there should be approximately 10 cats in the game. Then the culture kicks in and makes it obvious that nine is the number of cats there should be, since, you know, cats have nine lives and all that.

OK, but then what? How to classify cats? It's easier than herding cats, but still not that obvious. Obviously, there are many different breeds, but most of the time we don't refer to cats by the breed, the way we do with dogs. Instead, we usually just focus on their fur color: black cat, white cat, gray cat, orange cat.

And that's when I learned something fascinating. Cats only come in two colors: black and orange. OK there's also a third color, white, but that's really the absence of either of the actual colors, i.e. colorless.

Why is that? Like so many things, it all comes down to the genes. Cat fur has just two genes that control color. Just as human hair only comes in a few shades, cat fur only comes in orange and black. All of the many unique looking cats we know are really just a mix of those two basic shades.

For example, one of our favorite color schemes is the tuxedo cat, sometimes called a cow cat, with a random pattern of black and white splotches. (The cat of my childhood, Mat, was this kind of cat, as was Toto, one of Kristin's favorites ever.)

Add in some orange splotches and you've got a calico cat, and if the orange and black overwhelm the white, then the cat becomes a tortoiseshell cat. And that's when we learned another interesting bit of genetic trivia: it is genetically impossible for both black and orange to occur in males (unless they have an extra X chromosome, which is very rare — 99.9% of these cats are female).

"But what about tabby cats?" I hear you asking. Tabbies are cats whose coat shows a pattern, such as stripes or spots, often with an M on their foreheads (which stands for magnificent). There are actually six different tabby patterns, and they can appear on cats of any color, so we included two different orange



tabbies: one with stripes and one with spots.

Interestingly, orange cats are male about 80% of the time because females are only orange if they have the orange gene on both of their X chromosomes.

Anyway, that brings us to 8 cats so far: Black, White, Gray, Tuxedo, Calico, Tortoiseshell, Striped (aka simply Orange) and Spotted. We just needed one more!

Not so fast, Gray Cat! How exactly did you get in here? We've already seen that you get a tuxedo cat when you add black to white... so, how do you get a gray cat?

Some call this color "blue," but that's not right either.

Well, it turns out there is a "muting" gene that can turn down the "volume" on any color of cat. So black turns to gray, or sometimes to brown... and if that brown is muted even further it becomes "fawn." Orange turns to "cream," and so torties and calicos that have been muted are called "blue creams." Most of the more exotic color names people have given to cat shades are really just a more typical shade, but with a muting gene.

OK, so back to the question of the 9th cat, and with it, the most interesting point of this article. There's one other gene that plays a role in cat colors... the "point" gene!

This gene basically causes cats to be albino. This is why all point cats (the most famous breed being Siamese) have blue eyes. But albinism doesn't work quite the same in cats as in humans. Fascinatingly, the albino gene only kicks in at a certain body temperature. Because body extremities are slightly cooler than the body core, point cats have normal coloring (of any color or pattern!) on their ears, noses, feet, and tail, but are albino (white) on their main body and face. And get this... if a point cat lives in a colder area, they will have more color than if they live in a warmer area!

So the Colorpoint cat finished off our set, but there are a few others we could have considered. For one thing, hairless cats exist. Also, there's the salt and pepper cat, which is when a black cat has vitiligo. As a kitten, he will be all black, but as he ages, he becomes mottled. It's fascinating, captain! Look it up!

Anyway, that's the parade of cats to expect, but what about the other stuff? Cat Food, The Human, the Cardboard Box ("If I fits, I sits!") and even a Dog (sorry, but many cats must deal with a dog in their household), not to mention a few win-preventing Creepers, like the Cone of Shame and the terrifying Vacuum Cleaner.

Cat Fluxx even has a few thematic new Actions and New Rules, such as The Zoomies, Testing Gravity, The Cat Distribution System, and Meow Hear This. Those are all fun, but the best might just be the Live Cat Bonus, which gives everyone an extra draw and play if an actual, live cat is the room where the game is being played. Suddenly everyone will be watching the cat's every move, hoping it won't leave the room!

Cat Fluxx has adorable artwork by Robin Sevakis, and since the game has 9 cats with 9 lives, we decided to release this product on 9/9! ★



Andy Looney

is the designer of Fluxx and almost every other game published by Looney Labs. He once worked for NASA and often goes to Burning Man. If you can beat him in a game of Homeworlds, he'll give you a medal. Andy loves cake, and Sentinel Comics.

