

## Alligator and Dog

I woke.

My right hand jumped up above the covers and hovered in the air over me, a green, grey, black, and tan alligator, nervous, retreating, but attacking, caught between ideas, the master of attack, but cautious about its own existence. It started to attack, drew back, started forward, stopped.

My left hand was a black and brown and white dog. The animals smelled each other from several feet away. They were both cautious, assessing, hunger first or safety?

The alligator, usually bold beyond all reason, smelled something, saw something about the dog that urged caution. This dog was not the alligator's normal prey, that the alligator would catch unaware and overwhelm before any defense could be mustered, though it had many characteristics of good eating, seemed firm, and of a convenient size.

The dog was aware of the alligator and could not be taken by surprise. It was big enough and bold enough that it might attack the alligator and successfully reduce it to food. The alligator didn't regret not attacking before the dog was aware its presence. The alligator existed only right now. Right now had a sense of caution to it, perhaps of retreat.

The dog stood in sunshine and watched, looked carefully over its surroundings, to know where it could gallop to, sure there was room to retreat if need be. The dog might decide the morning was too bright and beautiful to fight, if the alligator decided to attack. Nothing spoiled early morning faster than being caught between something that stopped retreat and a seriously-attacking alligator.

I promised Laura I would cook a wheat-sprout omelette for breakfast. Working late last night on a story and then sleeping late put me right up against the breakfast clock, so I'd better stir. I put the hand puppets aside for now, well-separated, lest one take close proximity as a reason to attack the other. "Don't want you to get all tore up." Figured I could say it like that. Dogs or alligators neither one pay a lot of attention to grammar.

I said, "We can continue this later, maybe when grandson KKJ gets here. We edit the story for less tension and remove the idea of a meal for the winner of conflict out of respect for the sensitivity of a two-year old, two and a half by now."

I'm not sure what rules say about what can be told to KKJ and what can't. I'll talk to Amanda. She's my grandson's mother, my daughter, Laura's daughter, final arbiter of what comes to her child and what doesn't. She knows a lot about being a sensitive kid. She isn't here, yet. They aren't here yet, her and Kinnickinnick. They're on their way.

When she was a kid, even much older than KKJ, just a little tension and danger in stories got into her dreams big time, She needed all the rest of us in our family to screen possible reading materials for her to avoid nightmares. She's still very sensitive.

I cooked wheat-sprout omelette, with eggs, winter wheat I sprouted, soy sauce, brewer's yeast, a little bit of salt mixed with ground, dried vegetables, cheese melted on top. We ate that for breakfast.

The sun shone in the front windows too brightly, reflected from the hardwood floor. We flinched from the brightness until Laura pulled the blinds closed. I don't like to exclude sunshine, but it was too bright.

"Sprouted wheat omelette is always popular at this table," I said.

Laura took a bite and said, "Just the right amount of everything."

"Way it comes out, I think, there's many softer stories around, will entertain and educate him as much, why take any chances and tell him stories that might spook him? But maybe you'd like to watch the alligator and the dog tangle."

"I'll just have some of this omelette and avoid all fights. I'm kind of sensitive, too."

When they arrived, I talked to Amanda about it, just touch down and go on to something else. I've already made the required decision.

Amanda said, "He knows what dead looks like, anyway. He saw a dead cow out at the farm. What's a dead cow look like, Kinnickinnick?"

Kinnickinnick scrunched up his shoulders, tilted his head, lolled his tongue out, rolled his eyes all catty-wampus, a well-done imitation of a dead cow, we all thought. He liked our appreciation.

When I picked up the puppets again, I said, "You guys are friends. Not so much as an unfriendly growl, now. That's the way it's going to be, because I'm the guy who decides. You can ask Laura to do rougher plays, but I don't think you'll get anywhere with her. She's even more against dog-eat-alligator stories and alligator-eat-dog stories than I am."

They were good about it and went along with everything I said. They were relieved not to have to do the tough-guy

routine right now. Now they stopped to think about it, they were never hungry anyway. Why risk everything to play a role of fierce predator if you're not even hungry?