

# The War of Wits

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(Or "A Dog's Mealtime in the Space-Time Continuum")

By Tiger's Human Associate

For quite some time now, my little dog, Tiger, and I have engaged in a kind of daily discourse that, sadly, degenerates into something less than positive. You see, each afternoon, my normally sedate and contented little terrier suddenly becomes strangely demented, as though a ticklish spirit rekindles a minute flicker deep within, which inevitably explodes into a giggly wildfire that has only just been extinguished the previous day. I, of course, am the one who must put it out. Day after day after day.

It all sounds innocent enough, but our little doggie *bon mots* can become quite catty indeed. It starts at precisely four in the afternoon, when the slightest twinkle out of the corner of Tiger's brown eye tells me "It's on!". He moves neither his head nor his body, thus appearing to any casual observer to be the same calm, cool and collected canine he had been only moments earlier.

But the truth is Tiger's little body has been possessed by an entity entreating him to engage in endless endeavours to achieve his nefarious ends; that is, to be fed **early**. Naturally, as a responsible Human Associate, I must resist these wanton tendencies. And thus begins our quotidian intellectual tussle that goes to the very heart of human-canine perceptions of the universe. My contention: time is a constant, therefore no feeding shall occur before the appointed dinner time of five o'clock in the afternoon, just as it did the day before and the day before that.

Tiger's argument: a dog's digestive process is inextricably linked to Einstein's *General Theory of Relativity*, which, as Tiger is liable to tell you, holds that his position relative to a certain foody room in the house speeds the passage of time.

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The more he is pulled to that place, the hungrier he gets, thus making it necessary to feed my little pooch **NOW!** (If not, sooner.) Needless to say, Tiger's comprehension of Einstein's theory is woefully incomplete.

This is no mere academic spat, I assure you; the issue also speaks to questions of interspecies ethics, since Tiger uses all manner of skullduggery to dupe me into believing his little falsehoods. But it won't work, because I'm wise to his wily ways. Nevertheless, Tiger regularly embarks on his little parade of cons, as predictable as the dawn and all designed to get me to feed him **earlier** than five. I can assure you, however, they will never work!

And I also refuse to stoop to the level of using those same banal tricks to convince Tiger I am right. My superior argument will be proven at precisely 5 p.m. when Tiger is fed, thereby demonstrating my point that time is not relevant! Er, relative. And so, he engages in his diabolical disinformation drive!

## **Stage 1: The Nonchalant Approach**

After Tiger's disappointing decision to deceive his devoted Human Associate, he calmly rises from his chair, idly stretches and then yawns. He looks over at me and wags his tail lazily, a kind of doggie "howdy partner!" He casually jumps down, breezily stretches again, then looks back at me and gives another offhand tail wag, before he slowly meanders towards the Sacred Food Preparation Chamber - in human parlance, the kitchen. Clearly, the expectation is that I should follow and feed him immediately.

But already, I must defy him. I must retain my sense of right and wrong and stick to the rules of Humanhood. And one of

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the main rules is: "Feeding time is 5 p.m. No ifs, ands or barks." So, I remain seated.

When he realizes I'm not coming along, he stops and looks back at me, as though puzzled. Then, an uncertain tail wag. I'm still not moving and his tail sags. Only then does he decide a more direct approach is called for.

## **Stage 2: The Puppy Charm Offensive**

To encourage more enthusiastic participation from this Human Associate, Tiger resorts to dastardly doggie deceit. He is going to use all the puppy charm the 6-year-old terrier can muster to get me to get the job done sooner. So, his eyes light up and his tail starts an insistent spin-wagging.

I can practically hear Tchaikovsky's *The Russian Dance* playing in his little mind. But he can't fool me: the fact of the matter is, all hellhound is breaking loose before my very eyes, as he jumps up on my lap and tries to lick my face. Yes, yes, of course it's all very "cute", but it's also underhanded and it's wrong, for he's trying to use emotional whitemail to sway me. Thus, he has degenerated into a frenzy of whirling and woofing and snorting and snoofing, all aimed at coaxing me into the kitchen to concoct an early chow.

But I'm not falling for his pitiful attempts to control me! Not. At. All. I look at him sternly and say, "No, Tiger; it's not time yet. **No!**"

## **Stage 3: The 'Ya-Gotta-Be-Kiddin'-Me' Strategy**

With his tail drooping at the appropriately depressed angle, Tiger looks at me in disbelief. Oh, he understands me all right. You see, as a dog, Tiger is not **supposed** to comprehend

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human speech, but that is actually a lie perpetuated by innocent looking little pups also intent on getting their way. The reality is: Tiger knows 'no'. And he also knows, that when I say 'no', I mean 'no'. Particularly when he does a no-no. So, even though he pretends not to know 'no', I know what I know and my nose tells me that this little pup really does know 'no'.

And yet, he still insists on performing his little act, feigning ignorance. He looks at me incredulously; his Human Associate couldn't possibly actually *mean* 'no', could he? **Noooo!** he decides. And so, his tail rises and the eye twinkle lights up again. Of course, I know what he's up to. This time, he's going to try and convince me that he thought I had been just kidding about that earlier 'no' and that, as *misconstrued* humour, it technically doesn't count as a real 'no', caninely speaking. The tail is spin-wagging again, since he believes I've fallen for his little loophole ruse.

And once again, I have to correct that mistaken impression: "**No**, Tiger! I said it's not time yet."

## **Stage 4: The 'I'm-Very-Disappointed-In-You-Young-Man' Technique**

The prancing stops. The twinkle leaves his little brown eyes and Tiger turns away. He takes a step away from me, then stops to look back, to see if I really, *really* mean it. My severe and knotted eyebrows tell him that I do.

Then, with a slick, cleverly rehearsed smoothness that only comes after years of honing his canine communication skills, Tiger engages the "HDL". The "HDL" - the Hung Dog Look - is that ultimate expression of doggie disgust, whereby the tail, the head and the ears all droop simultaneously, creating the very picture of the classic Disconsolate Dog.

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Naturally, the HDL is laden with Meaning. In fact, there's so much Meaning, even a human could get it. The HDL communicates Tiger's bitter disappointment with me as a Human Associate. It also shows his doubt that we pitiful humans will ever rise above our current lowly station in life to assume our rightful place in Dogdom beside our canine masters. And, the HDL generally connotes just how cheesed off Tiger is with the entire food situation at that moment.

Tiger then turns and sadly wanders back to his chair, pausing to give me one last look of profound dismay just before he leaps up on to it. Then Tiger settles down. A deep sigh, also heavily laden with Meaning, is expressed.

## **Stage 5: The 'I'm-Just-Sitting-Here-Waiting-Patiently' Illusion**

On his chair, Tiger's head is down in a vain attempt to lull me into believing that he is now relaxed, even dozing. But appearances can be deceiving and this is precisely when this conniving canine is most active. For Tiger is **not** snoozing at all! Oh, no! He is **plotting!** Tiger is now at his most cunningly creative, for he is still conceiving of ways he can trick me into feeding him early and I must be very wary indeed, for a crafty dog is a dangerous dog.

Suddenly, Tiger's head is up, ears forward, looking down the hall towards the Sacred Food Preparation Chamber, er, that is, the kitchen. He attempts to be even more convincing by tilting his head one way, then the other, as though he's puzzling out some mysterious noise there. Tiger stands, earnestly on guard, nose aimed down the hall, waiting for an imaginary intruder to show the whites of his teeth. He gets down from his chair and with a quick glance up at me, takes a step.

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My instructions are clear: we Humans and Canines are to join forces and walk down the hall together in order to expel the forces of evil that have apparently invaded the kitchen. (Once there, of course, he will no doubt use the 'seeing as we're already here, I might as well get fed early' rationale to get his way, but I'm already two steps ahead of him on that score.)

He takes another step and looks back at me, but I remain steadfast. A tired look of resignation is registered and so, he sighs and returns to his chair, studiously avoiding eye contact with this miserable excuse for a Human Associate. Another Meaningful sigh and down goes the head. He realizes that I've seen through his ruse and that he lost this battle. But the war, he knows, *isn't* over yet!

## **Stage 6: The 'Watering-the-Dog' Wile**

It is precisely at this time that I have to be most alert, since a wily pup knows no boundaries and the next stage of his devilish deception is at hand. Suddenly, Tiger stands and looks at me anxiously. A hesitant tail wag. Even though deep down, I know it's merely a device to get me moving in the right direction, my conscience dictates that I treat Tiger's plea as real: "Wanna go pee?" I ask.

With a quick smile at the interspecies communications success, Tiger jumps off the chair and happily leads me down the hall. But once in the kitchen, his antics are exposed for the duplicitous charade they are, for Tiger stops at the spot where I normally place his food bowl and he watches with fading joy, as I continue past him to the back door to let him out. He does

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not go. I have taken him at his word and called his ruff. But he still gets no premature vittles.

He watches me return to the other room, apparently mystified I didn't fall for his sleight of paw and I can practically feel the cold radiating off his little shoulder. Tiger, with HDL fully engaged, follows and then walks past me on his way to his own chair. Up on the chair. Head down. Eyes on me ... waiting ... watching.

## **The Final Stage: 'Dances With Dogs'**

Time, having crept along at this petty pace for quite a few eons now, is finally about to cross the threshold marking that most delectable time of day - The Dinner Hour! But, just as I rise to go into the kitchen to feed him, the doorbell rings. Naturally, an urgent chorus of barks heralding the stranger at the door demands that I investigate forthwith. So, I open the door to find our neighbour's child has come to call.

"Well, hi, Kali! How are you today?"

"Fine, thanks! Can I take Tiger for a walk?" Tiger spin-wags his recognition of the sweet little girl.

"Oh, that's very kind of you to offer, dear, but he's just about to eat his dinner," I tell her.

"Oh, OK!" she says with a big grin and turns to scamper across the lawn back home. Curiously, she does not offer to come by later.

I close the door and at long last, acknowledge my little dog's moment of truth. Tiger looks up at me and I ask his favourite question: "Are you a hungry boy?"

Instantly, Tchaikovsky's *Russian Dance* strikes up again and, with spin-wagging velocity already at lift-off speed, the

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dancing dog leads me towards the Sacred Food Preparation Chamber. With a frenetic cacophony of whimpers and whines, Tiger watches as I prepare the holy chow. After I set it down, Tiger pounces on his food and, within mere minutes, the ceramic bowl, once brimming with goodies, has been meticulously licked to the point of almost losing its glaze. He then looks up at me expectantly.

"All done?" I ask rhetorically. "Wanna go pee?" In response, Tiger happily dances to the backdoor. He goes out and, after the necessary business of the afternoon is concluded, returns inside. Calm. Sedate. Relaxed. All is as it should be.

I glance at the kitchen clock and see it only reads 4:58 pm. I heave a sigh, for it has happened once again today. Standing on a chair to reach the wall clock, I silently curse its manufacturer and re-adjust the minute hand to reflect the actual hour. With the space-time continuum now correctly back on track, Tiger has returned to normal, the invading Spirit of Hilarity having been vanquished.

That is, until 4 pm tomorrow ... when the clocks will accelerate, the spirit will re-possess him and we shall again re-enact our human-canine War of Wits.