



What Nice Teeth, Fox Said to the Sharks

Michael H. Levin *Thursday, September 17, 2015 - 2:56pm*

I was dreaming away on our back deck in Menemsha when the first drops arched over the railing. The grandsons — Caden (6.5) and Ben-O (3.5) — had been happily squirting each other with new green Shark guns on the lawn below, shrieking and giggling as they scurried to reload from a bucket supplied by their Dad.

Then, silence.

“We challenge you!” Caden’s voice floated up, attempting menace.

“Come a little closer,” I replied invitingly, acting out the Fox in *Runaway Pancake*, one of his standbys. “I can’t hear you.”

Another giggle. The conspirators approached. This gave me time to fill a pitcher and take up a position by the rail. The deployment was favorable. I was 10 feet above them. Their neon squirters had less upward range.

Showing no mercy, I splooshed them twice, remaining dry as a bone. As I returned with a new pitcher, there were whispers behind the dog barrier at the top of the deck stairs. Infiltration! They had switched tactics and now crouched in ambush there.

“Now?” whispered a voice. “Now!” hissed the other.

1/10/16

Another sploosh sent them lawnwards, pell-mell. There was a hushed conference beyond the butterfly bushes below.

“Come down!” Caden called. “This is no fair.”

“Can I use the hose?” asked the Fox.

Another conference.

“Sure,” the two voices finally answered, one after the other.

So began the campaign’s second phase. I was counting on the nozzle-gun on the hose coiled downstairs. But to the enemy’s delight, that hose was not connected. Worse, the nozzle-gun was nowhere to be found. I was shot multiple times as I scrambled to hook up the hose, notwithstanding their 20-yard runs to reload from the lawn.

But now I did not have to reload. Neither the Russian sage in the herb garden, nor the surrounding hydrangeas, would protect them. They ran, reconnoitered and hunkered down, almost dropping their guns from laughter, popping up to shoot wildly. Then Ben-O sprang his ultimate weapon. Stepping from cover, he dropped his shark gun and planted his feet, palms forward, shouting: “Force Field!”

“No, Ben!” shrieked Caden between laughing fits. “That won’t work. It’s for comic books.”

It might have worked, but not against Fox the Merciless.

Through herbs that received a bonus drenching, under the dripping deck stairs, out to the puddled parking space by our wood-pile — for another half-hour fierce combat continued. The Shark Force realized it could keep a steady stream coming. One squirted while the other hustled to recharge.

The Fox looped out more hose, gaining angles to sploosh both of them at once. They adjusted their tactics, splitting to opposite ends of the herb garden, beyond the reach of a thumb-spray. But the end seemed near. Their bucket was nearly empty.

Then Caden saw an opening. This, after all, was the kid who proudly told strangers he was “a contrarian” because he didn’t root for the Redskins, and the bedtime reader who learned the word “negotiate” in kindergarten.

“Hey, Baba,” he said after emptying his gun. “Look at all the dust on your car. Can we wash it with our Sharks?”

So the battle ended as battles should, with a productive negotiation. In fact, that was what Caden said next: “How much will you pay us? Can we negotiate?”

So the battle ended as battles should, with a productive negotiation. In fact, that was what Caden said next: “How much will you pay us? Can we negotiate?”

We parleyed. Caden coached Ben, who thought a dime was a fortune. The price turned out to be a quarter each. We shook on it. Their Dad — who witnessed the battle like a military observer, declining to help either side — refilled the bucket and hauled it over.

At three skinny squirts per refill, the Sharks took quite a while to drip dust from the car. They were panting from reload runs when the last bumper corner was squirted. Then Caden noticed something.

“Hey,” he said. “Look at all the dust on the tires. Can we wash them for more?”

1/10/16

We discussed how it's best to ask before you start. Caden got this but was downcast at the outcome. Ben-O, who'd made a gazillion reload runs already, thought skipping the tires was fine. The Fox decided to pay them an extra nickel each, for their effort.

The afternoon sun was still shining when they finished and we went off to get fish for dinner. Then Ben-O and Caden reloaded. The Shark and the Fox and the Russian sage: Waterloo!!!