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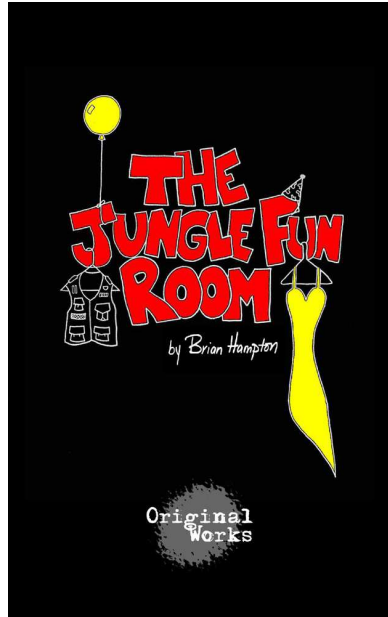
Bad Panda

© Megan Gogherty

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The Jungle Fun Room by Brian Hampton

Synopsis: The struggling actors of Jungle Fun Birthday Parties are preparing for Maddie's sixth birthday at the New York City Zoo. For Screg, Shelly, and Eve, it's just another day at work until Trevor, an eager new worker arrives, followed by Hillary Parker, the birthday girl's Oscar-winning mom. The result? A hilarious and emotional face-to-face with the past, present, and future—and a birthday party none of them will ever forget.

Cast Size: 2 Males, 3 Females

“keeps the laughs coming from start to finish.”

—Time Out New York

BAD PANDA

By Megan Gogerty

Bad Panda was first produced on October 13, 2012 by Iron Crow Theatre, Baltimore, MD, Steven J. Satta-Fleming, Artistic Director. The production was directed by Joseph W. Ritsch, with sets by Joseph W. Ritsch, costumes by Rebecca Eastman, lighting by Todd Mion and sound design by Joseph W. Ritsch. The cast was as follows:

GWO GWO: David Brasington

MARION: Katie O. Solomon

CHESTER: Adam Cooley

CHARACTERS

2M, 1 W

GWO GWO	(M)	A panda.
MARION	(W)	A panda.
CHESTER	(M)	A crocodile.

SETTING

An outdoor, free-roaming private animal reserve. It's a tranquil, lovely space. The set should be flexible, containing rocks and trees to climb on and to hide behind, and at different points suggesting these locales: a small decorative pond, a cave, and lots of bamboo.

COSTUMES

The wonderful thing about theatre is the animal characters don't have to look exactly like animals; it's enough to simply suggest their animal-ness. I encourage the designer to be creative. These characters are definitely animals, not humans, so they have to climb and move and feel very comfortable in whatever they're wearing and also not look exactly human when they do those things. And we should probably be able to see their faces. If I were producing this play tomorrow in my backyard with no money, I would put the actors in t-shirts that said "PANDA" and "CROCODILE," and let the audience fill in the details.

PAUSES AND PUNCTUATION

An ellipsis (...) means the speaker trails off. A sentence interrupted by an em-dash (–) means the speaker breaks off suddenly or is cut off by another. A pause is a longer ellipsis. A beat is a silence with a button on the end; a bounce. A shift is a new idea or tactic.

SCENE TITLES

I think it would be nice to display these at the beginning of each scene – projections, maybe, or placards on the side of the stage, or in some other surprising, delightful way.

BAD PANDA

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE: MARION AND GWO GWO EMBRACE THEIR NATURE

(Marion, a panda, is giving birth. Gwo Gwo, another panda, stands between her legs, ready to play catch.)

GWO GWO: Push! Push, Marion!

MARION: I'm pushing!

GWO GWO: You're pushing!

MARION: Do you see it? Is it coming?

GWO GWO: I see the head! I see the ears!

MARION: How many ears?

GWO GWO: Two! Two whole ones!

MARION: I'm still pushing!

GWO GWO: Here it comes! The body! It's enormous!
It's a giant, it's a boulder, it's a log!

MARION: My baby!

GWO GWO: He's coming! He's coming!

MARION: It's a she!

GWO GWO: She's coming! She's coming! She's HERE!

(Marion collapses to the ground. Gwo Gwo holds up, not a baby, but a child's ball. He yells to the sky.)

GWO GWO (cont.): I am the proudest papa bear in the history of the world!

(Marion, from the ground, lifts her fists in victory to the sky.)

MARION: I am a mother! I am a mother!

(She sits up.)

GWO GWO: And then I take the baby and quick dunk it in the pond to wash off the juice.

MARION: Go! Go!

(He dunks the ball in a small, decorative pond several times.)

MARION (cont.): And I do my exercises!

(She does a series of quick calisthenics.)

GWO GWO: And then I bring the baby back to you and we both blow on it for several seconds.

(They huff and puff at the ball.)

GWO GWO (cont.): Then what?

MARION: Then...that's it. We get something to eat.

(They clap each other on the back.)

MARION (cont.): How's that?

GWO GWO: Really good. I think that was our best time ever.

MARION: You think so?

GWO GWO: Can you imagine? A baby? A new age! Glorious future!

(He holds the ball aloft, tenderly. Marion gets up and grabs it a little roughly out of his arms.)

MARION: Our baby will be the best baby of all the babies! Whoo!

(She throws the ball up into the air really high. It crashes to the ground, uncaught. Little pause.)

GWO GWO & MARION: *(Accidentally speaking at the same time.)* So.

(They laugh nervously. Little pause.)

MARION (cont.): We said we were going to practice all the parts.

GWO GWO: Yes, we did.

MARION: So should we? Practice?

GWO GWO: Oh. Um. Which part?

MARION: You know. The first part.

GWO GWO: (*Stalling.*) You look fat. You're gaining weight.

MARION: You sly thing! What a sweet thing to say.

GWO GWO: I can really tell in your face.

MARION: You should see my backside!

GWO GWO: Whoah! Shake that fat thing! You look wonderful. This place really agrees with you.

MARION: Does that mean you want to practice?

(*Gwo Gwo stalls.*)

MARION (cont.): We don't have to practice. We could talk it through some more.

GWO GWO: No, we should definitely practice. Mating season starts tomorrow, we want to be ready. No more talking. Time for action!

MARION: Okay!

GWO GWO: Great.

MARION: Good.

GWO GWO: Here I go.

MARION: All aboard.

(*Pause. Nobody moves.*)

GWO GWO: Maybe we should go through the reasons again.

MARION: Good idea.

GWO GWO: Reason one. We are the last two pandas on earth and we must propagate the species.

MARION: Reason two. You are a boy panda and I am a girl panda and boy and girl pandas are supposed to have babies.

GWO GWO: Reason three. Didn't we have a third reason?

MARION: Reason three. Because my mother did it, and her mother did it, and now I have to do it, whether I want to or not.

GWO GWO: Reason four. Because we must make more pandas. I think we're just restating reasons one and two. Reason five. Because we are good pandas.

MARION: Reason six. Because you want to have a baby with me.

(Little pause.)

MARION (cont.): Do you want to have a baby with me?

GWO GWO: The world needs babies... We must have a baby. This year. This season.

MARION: Okay then.

GWO GWO: Okay.

MARION: All aboard.

(Gwo Gwo screws his courage to the sticking place. He mounts Marion. He stands there. Marion waits expectantly. Minutes go by.)

MARION (cont.): Do something.

GWO GWO: I'm trying.

(More waiting.)

MARION: My back hurts. Do something.

GWO GWO: I'm trying, don't yell at me.

MARION: DO SOMETHING!

(Gwo Gwo lets out a roar of frustration and stumbles off away from Marion.)

GWO GWO: Stop yelling at me! My job is really hard! I have to concentrate, and you yelling, it gives me anxiety!

MARION: How do you think I feel? Standing there waiting for something to come flying at me! I thought you knew how to do this.

GWO GWO: How should I know? I've never mated before, at least not successfully or I don't think I have or if I have I didn't know I was doing it so how can I be held responsible? This is a lot of responsibility!

MARION: Don't get excited.

GWO GWO: And I can't do it when I get all jumbled!

MARION: You're right, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have yelled.

GWO GWO: You think I don't want to do it right? I'm trying! And I know I'm letting you down, not just you, but everyone. I'm letting everyone down right now! The whole species! It's too much pressure, Marion!

MARION: Okay. Let's take a breath.

GWO GWO: I just, I hate it. I hate being a panda!

(This pronouncement drops like a stone. Gwo Gwo immediately regrets it. Moments pass.)

GWO GWO (cont.): *(Quietly.)* I didn't mean that.

MARION: Oh. *(Pause.)* 'Cause I'm a panda.

GWO GWO: I know.

MARION: What's wrong with being a panda? *(Pause.)*
I'm a great panda.

GWO GWO: You're the best panda in the world.

MARION: That's right. Way better than you.

GWO GWO: You're right. I'm sorry.

MARION: It's our first mating season. Now is not the time to panic.

GWO GWO: Don't be mad. I was just nervous. Put your head in my lap.

(She does. He curls around her.)

GWO GWO (cont.): We pandas have to stick together. That's our only chance.

(A log raises its head, revealing two eyes. It's not a log at all, but CHESTER, a crocodile. He is behind a rock and unseen by Marion and Gwo Gwo. He listens.)

MARION: Maybe we shouldn't bother.

GWO GWO: We have to. It's what nature intends.

MARION: You don't even like me.

GWO GWO: I like you very much, Marion.

MARION: Thank you. That's not what I meant.

GWO GWO: Don't be sad. You know what we forgot? Rituals.

MARION: Rituals?

GWO GWO: Mating rituals. That's why we're having trouble. We haven't done the right rituals to get us in the mood.

MARION: What are the rituals?

GWO GWO: I don't know. You'll have to make them up.

MARION: *(Flattered.)* Me?

GWO GWO: Of course you. You're going to be the mama bear. And anyway, you're the best at making up games, and rituals are like games.

MARION: Okay then. (*Beat.*) I like you, too, you know.

GWO GWO: Thank you.

MARION: Maybe we should take a break. Clear our heads. Think happy thoughts.

GWO GWO: I'll go exploring. And you can stay here and rest up for mating season. (*Beat.*) How long do you think we've been here? A few weeks? A month?

MARION: (*Shrugs.*) I'm glad you're my mate. I wouldn't want anyone else, even if.

GWO GWO: Even if.

SCENE TWO: ANOTHER ANIMAL

(Gwo Gwo is out exploring. He moves aside a clump of weeds. Behind it is Chester.)

GWO GWO: Oh!

(He takes a few steps back. Approaches again. Pushes the weeds back. Chester's still there, cool as a cucumber.)

GWO GWO (cont.): Hi. I didn't see you there.

(Chester moves out of the weeds. Doesn't take his eyes off Gwo Gwo.)

GWO GWO (cont.): Hi.

CHESTER: *(Draws out the word.)* Hi....

GWO GWO: You're not from the mountain.

CHESTER: Say again?

GWO GWO: The mountain. You never lived on the mountain. Did you?

CHESTER: I don't do mountains.

GWO GWO: What do you do?

CHESTER: Swamps.

GWO GWO: Ah. That's different from a mountain.

(Chester nods his head slowly.)

GWO GWO (cont.): I'm a panda bear. My name is Gwo Gwo. What's yours?

CHESTER: Chester.

GWO GWO: Nice to meet you. You're an alligator.

CHESTER: I'm not an alligator.

GWO GWO: Sorry.

CHESTER: Alligator, from the Spanish word, el Lagarto. Translation: The Lizard. Do I look like a lizard to you?

GWO GWO: So sorry.

CHESTER: I'm a crocodile. Alligator. (*Makes scoffing noise.*) Can an alligator do this?

(*He darts to and fro in a crocodile-ish fashion.*)

GWO GWO: Maybe.

CHESTER: Wrong. They can't.

GWO GWO: Okay.

CHESTER: You wanna wrestle?

GWO GWO: Me? No. Pandas are nonviolent.

CHESTER: What a shame.

GWO GWO: Yeah...

CHESTER: Do I make you nervous?

GWO GWO: Yes.

CHESTER: Good. You should be nervous. I'm an apex predator. Know what that means?

GWO GWO: What?

CHESTER: I eat things. Animals. One day they're your friend, the next day they're my breakfast.

(Gwo Gwo giggles nervously.)

CHESTER (cont.): Don't believe me?

GWO GWO: Oh, I believe you.

CHESTER: Who's the other one?

GWO GWO: Who? Oh, Marion? That's Marion. That's my mate. Kind of. My new mate. This will be our first time. We weren't mates when we were on the mountain, but now we're here at this place, and she's the only girl panda and I'm the only boy panda, and all the other pandas... well. There are no other pandas. Any more. We're the last ones. The only survivors. So we're going to mate. We decided. It should be interesting.

CHESTER: You a virgin?

GWO GWO: What? Oh. No. Yes, I mean. Have I ever mated before? No. This will be my first time. Both of our first times, actually. So no. Yes. First time.

CHESTER: How will you know if you're doing it right?

GWO GWO: We've been practicing.

CHESTER: With each other?

GWO GWO: Kind of. Talking it through, mostly.

CHESTER: Well, that's your problem right there. You can't talk and do it. You just gotta do it. You gotta...
(leans in close) get wild.

(Gwo Gwo giggles again.)

CHESTER (cont.): You know where I live?

(Gwo Gwo shakes his head.)

CHESTER (cont.): What a shame. There's a cave east of here. Follow the river. Maybe you'll get lucky. You're interesting, panda bear. Most animals, they see me coming, they run away. Not you, though. What are you, stupid?

GWO GWO: A little.

CHESTER: Aren't you scared of me?

GWO GWO: A little. Not really. Maybe because I'm bigger than you.

CHESTER: Maybe. Maybe you think you can take me.

GWO GWO: Maybe.

CHESTER: Good luck with your mating season. Hope you figure out what goes where.

GWO GWO: Thanks. Do you know where we are? (*Beat.*) I don't know where we are. I was on the mountain. Then something bad happened. Now I'm here. One of my theories is maybe we didn't go anywhere, but maybe the mountain got up and left. But that doesn't make any sense. You don't know where the mountain is, do you?

CHESTER: There are no mountains. There're some dunes on the south end, but you're probably better off where they put you.

GWO GWO: They? Who's They?

CHESTER: Just...you know. The general They. The Royal They.

GWO GWO: The Royal They? What do They want? Are They bad?

CHESTER: Tell you what. You eat bamboo?

GWO GWO: Yes.

CHESTER: There's a lot of bamboo trees, where you live?

GWO GWO: Oh, yes. Lots.

CHESTER: Rip 'em up. Uproot 'em. Tramp 'em all down. Destroy them. See what happens.

GWO GWO: But that's our food! We'll starve!

(Chester shrugs.)

GWO GWO (cont.): Is there something wrong with it?

Chester: *(Laughs.)* Just see what happens. See ya, panda bear.

GWO GWO: See you later, allig- *(Off Chester's look.)*
Crocodile.

(Chester exits. Gwo Gwo watches him go.)

**SCENE THREE: MARION PREPARES;
GWO GWO EXPERIMENTS**

(Marion dances. Gwo Gwo watches her.)

MARION: So first I shake my bottom to the north. Then I shake my bottom to the south. Then I point to the moon with a dramatic gesture, like this. Then I make crooning noises, like this. Croon! Croon! Then I kiss the ground and make a snow angel.

GWO GWO: There's no snow.

MARION: Hmm. A dirt angel. That'll work, don't you think? And then, while I sit here and contemplate the shadow of the snow angel – dirt angel – you bring me all the bamboo you can carry. I have to eat and eat and eat. That way I'll stretch my stomach to make room for the baby.

GWO GWO: These are good rituals. What should I do next?

MARION: Oh, that part's easy. Imagine yourself mounting me. Over and over.

(Beat.)

GWO GWO: I met a crocodile... He seems like a very dangerous character. You should stay away from him.

MARION: That's okay. I'm not scared of any stinky ol' crocodile.

(Gwo Gwo gets up to inspect some bamboo trees.)

GWO GWO: This stuff tastes normal to you, right?

MARION: The bamboo? It's delicious.

GWO GWO: Huh.

(He starts yanking out some of the younger trees by the roots.)

MARION: Gwo Gwo! What are you doing?

GWO GWO: It's an experiment.

MARION: Well stop it! You want another famine?

(Pause. Gwo Gwo sits down. Another pause.)

GWO GWO: Did you know crocodiles live in swamps?
This one doesn't. This one lives by the river. Can you
imagine that? So many bugs and sticky things.

MARION: It sounds terrible.

GWO GWO: He challenged me to a fight.

MARION: Oh, no! You didn't, did you?

GWO GWO: No. I explained to him pandas were nonvio-
lent.

MARION: Good work. You should stay away from the
river, Gwo Gwo. Mother always said rivers are unsafe.
And you shouldn't get in fights with crocodiles.

GWO GWO: No, you're right. That's very wise.

**SCENE FOUR: GWO GWO EXPERIMENTS
SOME MORE**

(The river. Chester suns himself on a rock. Gwo Gwo enters.)

GWO GWO: Let's fight.

(Chester moves off the rock, contemplates him.)

GWO GWO (cont.): Come on. I'm serious. I can take you. I'm fast. I can climb things. I have these thumbs. I can do things with them. I'm bigger than you. I weigh more. I can take you. I ripped up some bamboo trees. Nothing's happened yet.

CHESTER: Just wait.

(Beat.)

GWO GWO: I used to fight all the time, you know. On the mountain. I had a boyhood friend. His name was Nan Nan. He's dead now. The Dark Day. It was a terrible catastrophe. All the pandas died. What's it like to be you?

CHESTER: Awesome.

GWO GWO: Have you ever mated before?

CHESTER: Oh, sure, love 'em and leave 'em. Apex predator. They tremble when I'm around.

GWO GWO: Is that true?

(Beat.)

GWO GWO (cont.): Are we going to fight, or what? I could take you. I'm not afraid of you. I'm strong. You don't scare me. I want to fight.

(Chester saunters over. Stretches out his finger. Traces a line down Gwo Gwo's belly.)

CHESTER: Okay. Let's fight.

(Neither of them move. An eternity. Then they spring at each other.)

SCENE FIVE: MATING SEASON BEGINS

(Gwo Gwo and Marion do it.)

MARION: Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go!

(They collapse.)

MARION (cont.): Ooh. That's a good one. I think this one's a keeper. I can feel it. Little bits of you joining up with little bits of me. I'm all hot inside, did you feel it? I know this is going to be the time that makes my baby. I never wanted babies before, but I don't know. It seems like the right thing to do, right? We're doing the right thing. This is what pandas do. And when she gets here I won't be lonely anymore. Ooh! I wanna birth her right this second! You think it'll hurt? I don't think it'll hurt. Why would it hurt? Pain comes from bad things, not babies.

GWO GWO: You should rest.

MARION: What's wrong with your ear?

GWO GWO: I hurt it.

MARION: Is that a bite mark?

GWO GWO: It's nothing.

MARION: You wanna do it again?

GWO GWO: I thought you said that one was a keeper.

MARION: It's only the first day in our three-day window. Might as well be on the safe side. You know why they call it mating season, don'cha? 'Cause that's when we mate. Arr, matey! All aboard!

(She grabs him, tries to position him appropriately. It doesn't work.)

GWO GWO: I'm a little distracted.

MARION: Well, get un-distracted.

GWO GWO: How?

MARION: I don't know. Think about how much fun the baby will be, and how cute I'll look when I'm holding her. Here. Concentrate. Imagine. When I have my baby, I'm going to carry her on my back and feed her berries and bamboo. She'll roll around in the grass with me, and I will teach her all kinds of things. I'll tell her anything she wants to know, and I won't keep secrets. And even if she's a boy, I'll still love her. I'll grow her up to be a strong independent panda. And the two of us will be together, romping and tromping for the rest of our lives! Our problems will be over. All we need is a baby, Gwo Gwo. That is all we need.

SCENE SIX: MATING SEASON CONTINUES

(Gwo Gwo and Chester do it.)

GWO GWO: Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go!

(They collapse post-coitus.)

CHESTER: Bad panda.

GWO GWO: Good crocodile.

CHESTER: It's my animal magnetism. You can't help yourself.

GWO GWO: You're incredible. I had no idea it could be this way. When Marion and I do it... Well. It's more cordial, for one thing.

CHESTER: I don't do cordial.

GWO GWO: Yeah, I know. You bit me.

CHESTER: What can I say? Top of the food chain, baby.

GWO GWO: Do you like girl crocodiles?

CHESTER: Females are weak. Always twittering around, whimpering, gazing wistfully at butterflies.

GWO GWO: Marion's not like that. Do you like Marion?

CHESTER: She's too grabby.

GWO GWO: Marion once punched me in the stomach. She meant it affectionately, but it really hurt. You don't like butterflies?

CHESTER: Well –

GWO GWO: I like butterflies. I'm not weak.

CHESTER: Everyone likes butterflies. I was making a broader point about...oh, never mind.

GWO GWO: You like me, though.

CHESTER: You pandas are something else.

GWO GWO: Does that mean you like me? I can't tell.

CHESTER: Do you like me?

GWO GWO: I think you're the coolest, strongest, most indestructible animal I have ever had the privilege to know.

CHESTER: Yeah, okay. I do then.

GWO GWO: Really? What do you like about me?

CHESTER: I don't know. I liked you since I first saw you. Weeks ago. I like the way you climb a tree. I like the way you curl up in a ball.

GWO GWO: We do that when we're scared.

CHESTER: And you're making a baby. That's... interesting. I'd never seen anyone like you two before. Pandas.

GWO GWO: I'd never seen anyone like you before, either.

CHESTER: How convenient.

(Beat.)

GWO GWO: We're both boys.

CHESTER: Astounding, your power of observation.

(Beat.)

GWO GWO: I feel very close to you. I feel I've been waiting my whole life for you.

CHESTER: Let's not get ahead of ourselves.

GWO GWO: Why wait? Don't you feel that way?

CHESTER: You pandas. You don't kid around.

GWO GWO: We're endangered. We don't have time.

(Chester reaches out and strokes Gwo Gwo's face.)

CHESTER: Yes. I feel that way.

(Gwo Gwo nods, sighs a big, yummy sigh.)

GWO GWO: Well, see ya. *(Gets up to go.)*

CHESTER: What? Where are you going?

GWO GWO: I've got to go. I shouldn't be here. I'm supposed to be making a baby right now.

CHESTER: Just like that? What happened to ‘waiting your whole life’?

GWO GWO: I have to mate.

CHESTER: Just like that? Why’d you make me say all that stuff then?

GWO GWO: What do you mean?

CHESTER: Right. Good luck with the wife and kiddies, just leave the money on the dresser.

GWO GWO: What does that mean?

CHESTER: It means nothing, apparently. You gonna tell her about me?

GWO GWO: Of course not. It would only upset her. It’s mating season. I shouldn’t have distractions.

CHESTER: I see. A distraction.

GWO GWO: It’s been good for her, I think, since we came here. She’s really plumped out these past few weeks.

CHESTER: Well, la dee da. I’m a torpedo in the water, so la dee da for me.

GWO GWO: Are you mad? I have to go. It’s not you, it’s me.

CHESTER: (*Mocking.*) Oh, it’s not you It’s me. I’ve been going through some changes right now. I need some time, I need some space. I was just experimenting! Don’t make me throw up.

GWO GWO: Are you mad?

CHESTER: Mad? I'm thrilled. You're doing me a favor, actually. I didn't know how to break it off without crushing you, you're so fragile and endangered.

GWO GWO: I'll be back in two days. I just have to go make this baby real quick.

(Beat.)

GWO GWO (cont.): You are mad. You don't seem to understand. It's mating season.

CHESTER: You've said that, like, a thousand times.

GWO GWO: Yeah, it's important. We're the last of our breed, Chester. If we don't do it, that's it. I need to concentrate. I don't see why you're taking this so personally. It was fun –

CHESTER: It wasn't fun. It was savage and blistering and bloodthirsty and wild. I ached from the back of my throat all the way down to my tail for you. I screamed for you. I bled for you. It was dangerous and upsetting and wild and mad. You domesticated animal. The one thing it never was is fun.

(Silence.)

GWO GWO: It'd be different if she already had a baby.

CHESTER: Then get her a baby already! I could do it if I wanted. How hard is it to get her a stupid baby?

GWO GWO: It's very hard, thank you very much!

(Chester snorts contemptuously.)

GWO GWO (cont.): What do you care anyway? You're an apex predator, love 'em and leave 'em.

CHESTER: I have feelings, you stupid dumb bear.

GWO GWO: I'm not really a bear, you know. You're the stupid one. Stupid.

CHESTER: Stupidity and crocodiles are mutually exclusive.

GWO GWO: Yeah, right. Crocodile. Cold-blooded predator. El Lagarto, reptilius, whatever.

CHESTER: Crocodylus. From the Greek "krokodeilos," meaning "pebble worm."

(Gwo Gwo laughs.)

GWO GWO: 'Pebble worm.' Ha!

CHESTER: I have a lineage that is over 240 million years old.

(Gwo Gwo laughs more.)

CHESTER (cont.): At least my kind knows how to survive!

(Gwo Gwo stops laughing, stung.)

GWO GWO: This was a mistake. *(Turns to go.)*

CHESTER: You wanna know who took you from the mountain? (*Beat.*) Sometimes They sneak up on an animal and then stab it. And They take it, and wrap it up in a sheet, and carry it to the Lab. You can see it from the far side of the river, if the water's high. And when animals go in there, they don't ever come out.

GWO GWO: How do you know this?

CHESTER: I'm smarter than you.

GWO GWO: So... They're not good, is what you're saying.

(*Chester shrugs. Pause.*)

GWO GWO: I'd better warn Marion. Don't be mad.

CHESTER: Ho, ho! Mad? Impossible. I give you this piece of information, this thing that you've been dying to know, and the first thing you think of is Marion. Mad? Mad? Why would I be mad?

GWO GWO: Wait. Does that mean you are mad? Or not mad? You have to admit, you are...cold-blooded. You can't take anything seriously.

CHESTER: My heart has four chambers! How many does yours have? I bet not as many as mine. I bet your heart just has one. And Marion's already in it. (*Beat.*) I sort of like you, you know. You think I'm a killer. (*Correction.*) Predator. There's a difference. I kill to live. And, okay, maybe I get some enjoyment out of it, but sue me, it's my nature. At least I don't go around sucking bamboo all day —

GWO GWO: Chester. My heart has two chambers.

(Gwo Gwo strokes Chester's snout. It's a genuine love moment. Chester reaches up and strokes Gwo Gwo's belly. Gwo Gwo picks up Chester in his arms. It's a powerful picture.)

(Marion enters, upset.)

GWO GWO (cont.): Marion? What are you doing here?
How did you find me? Is everything okay?

MARION: I'm not pregnant. And you're a bad, bad panda.

SCENE SEVEN: CHESTER TAKES INITIATIVE

(Evening time at Chester's place. Marion sits dully, staring out. Gwo Gwo tries to comfort her.)

GWO GWO: Don't worry, Marion. We have two more days.

(No response from Marion.)

GWO GWO (cont.): It was my fault. I was doing it wrong, I wasn't following the plan. But I told him. I said, Marion's my mate, and we're going to have a baby no matter what. That's what I said. What is was, see, is he was giving me pointers. That's good, right? You'll see. Come tomorrow morning, I'll be on top of you before you know what hit you. Wholehearted. Okay, Marion? Okay?

(No response.)

GWO GWO (cont.): Listen. Marion. I found out something about this place. Remember the bad bug from the Dark Day, when all the pandas died? The bad bug that bites you and then you fall through the earth to the other side? That's part of it. It bites you – or stabs you, maybe. We need to be careful.

(Chester enters, with bamboo. He gives it to them.)

CHESTER: Here.

GWO GWO: Are you hungry, Marion? No? *(To Chester.)* Thanks anyway.

CHESTER: *(Softly, to Gwo Gwo.)* How does she know she's not pregnant? It's only been a day.

GWO GWO: She knows. A mother knows.

(Chester eyes Marion from afar.)

CHESTER: Stay here tonight.

GWO GWO: Chester. I have Marion with me.

CHESTER: So? You both stay here.

GWO GWO: Marion is not going to want to sleep in your slimy wet alligator cave. Excuse me, crocodile. *(Off Chester's look.)* What is it?

CHESTER: I don't think...it's a good idea...for her to be where she usually...can be found.

GWO GWO: What does that mean?

CHESTER: Oh, for pity's sake. Hide. Hide. I'm telling you to hide.

GWO GWO: Why? *(Beat. Recognition.)* The Royal They. You think They're going to stab her and drag her away in a sheet?

CHESTER: Your ability to detect nuance is staggering.

GWO GWO: What could They want with Marion? It's mating season. We're trying to make a baby.

CHESTER: Maybe They don't want her to make a baby.

GWO GWO: But we have to. If we don't make a baby panda, then... (*Beat.*) But that's cruel. How do you know this?

CHESTER: It's a hunch.

GWO GWO: What does that mean? Instinct? Crocodile instinct for danger –

CHESTER: I just know! I know them. The moss smells different when They're around. The birds stop singing when They've been by. I just know. Now for this plan to work, you gotta get out of here. It's too suspicious, both of you hanging around.

GWO GWO: Where should I go?

CHESTER: Get some rations. Stuff from the pond that will make her feel at home.

(Gwo Gwo springs into action.)

GWO GWO : Okay! Everybody just stay calm! Marion, I'm gonna go — I'm gonna go. I'm gonna get some things. I want you to stay here with Chester. Okay? Do you hear me? I'll be right back with your things, so just stay here! In the cave. Out of sight. Chester? Okay. We're gonna get through this.

(Gwo Gwo exits. Beat. Chester and Marion eye each other balefully.)

CHESTER: Good. We're alone. (*Saunters over to Marion.*) I understand you're in a bit of a pickle. Mating season, you can't conceive, your mate is clearly not interested in you. It's rough going for ol' Marion, isn't it?

MARION: What do you want?

CHESTER: Ah, ah! Wrong question. The question is not what does Chester want, the question is, what can Chester do for you?

(Marion sighs, like she has to do an unpleasant chore after a very long day, and stands. She wraps a paw around Chester's snout.)

CHESTER (CONT.): Hey!

MARION: Listen, reptile. I could kick your ass up and down this river. So let's get something straight. Gwo Gwo is my mate. Mine. He's the boy panda and I'm the girl panda and we are going to make a baby if it kills us. You seem like a real friendly crocodile. But pandas and crocodiles aren't supposed to be friendly, are they? It's unnatural. And you come in here, turning my mate's head when I am trying get him to focus. I don't appreciate it. It makes a hard job harder. So here's what you're going to do. You are going to back off. Disappear for a few days. Just until I get what I need out of that sorry excuse for a panda. And if you cross me on this score, don't doubt that I could kill you if I want.

CHESTER: Look, you're never gonna get a baby that way!

(She lets him go. He rubs his snout.)

MARION: What do you mean?

CHESTER: Ow.

MARION: What do you mean I'm never gonna get a baby that way?

CHESTER: You bruised my snout. You big bully.

MARION: Crocodile, you better –

CHESTER: The only way you're having a baby is if They let you.

MARION: They who? Who's They?

CHESTER: C'mon, Marion. You're not that dumb.

(Beat.)

MARION (cont.): Oh. *(Another beat.)* Oh. So I need Their permission? Their approval?

CHESTER: Something like that.

MARION: How do I do that?

CHESTER: Oh, you want my help all of a sudden? I thought you were going to kick my ass down the river. Which, by the way, you totally could not do. But sure, I could help you. If I wanted.

MARION: Why would you want to?

CHESTER: What an excellent question, Marion. I don't really. But let me put it to you this way. You want a baby. I want Gwo Gwo.

(Pause.)

MARION: We can deal.

CHESTER: See that? Common ground. That's called negotiation.

MARION: What do I have to do?

CHESTER: You know the west hill? Start walking. Climb that hill. About half way up, you'll start to feel sick inside. Your head will swim and your knees will get shaky. You'll be seized with a strong desire to turn around and go the other way. Ignore that feeling. Keep walking. When you reach the top of the hill...

MARION: What?

CHESTER: You'll have Their attention.

MARION: Then what?

CHESTER: Then nothing. State your case. See what happens.

MARION: Then I get a baby.

CHESTER: Then everybody gets what they want. Even Gwo Gwo.

MARION: You know a lot about this place.

CHESTER: Panda bear, I'm a crocodile. I've forgotten more than you'll ever know.

(Gwo Gwo enters, arms filled with bamboo and his toy ball.)

GWO GWO: Here I am! I've returned, safe and sound.
What's going on?

MARION: We're getting to know one another.

GWO GWO: Oh. That's good. Is it good?

MARION: (*Turns to go.*) Good enough for me.

GWO GWO: Marion, where are you going? Don't go
back to the pond, it's not safe.

MARION: You can't tell me what to do.

GWO GWO: But wait! Look, Marion. I got us some ra-
tions, and guess what I found floating in the pond.
(*Holds up the ball.*)

MARION: Is it a baby?

GWO GWO: No.

MARION: Then who cares? (*She exits.*)

GWO GWO: (*To Chester*) What did you do?

CHESTER: Hey, she threatened me! I keep forgetting
she's a bear.

GWO GWO: Not a real bear, a panda bear. It's - never
mind. I'd better go after her.

CHESTER: Let her go.

GWO GWO: No, it's not safe. Sometimes They take an
animal and stab it, you said.

CHESTER: Well.

GWO GWO: When I was at the pond. You know the bamboo trees I ripped up? Somebody planted some new ones. A whole bunch. Three months' worth of growth. Explain that.

(Chester opens his mouth to speak. Bang! The sound of a gun offstage.)

GWO GWO: Marion!

(He sprints off after the sound, Chester close behind.)

GWO GWO (cont.): Marion? Marion?

CHESTER: It's okay.

GWO GWO: What do you mean, it's okay? That sound. She could be hurt, she could be lying somewhere bleeding.

Chester: She's fine. They just took her.

GWO GWO: Oh, no, Marion. Why? She never did anything wrong to anybody! Why would they do that? What do they want? Maybe they tried to take her and she escaped -

CHESTER: She went to Them. She sought Them out. She wanted a baby.

GWO GWO: But that's crazy! She would never go to Them for a baby. Pandas make a baby during mating season, everybody knows that. *(Shift.)* What did you tell her?

CHESTER: Nothing.

GWO GWO: You said something to her. You told her to go to Them.

CHESTER: I just said, (*mumbles.*)

GWO GWO: Come again?

CHESTER: I told her, she's never going to make a baby that way.

GWO GWO: Through mating? What other way is there?

CHESTER: I don't know. Maybe They don't want you to mate. I mean, who knows what They want with you pandas? Sometimes the animals are sick when they get here. I didn't mention that before but it's true. Maybe Marion was sick, you don't know.

GWO GWO: She wasn't sick.

CHESTER: Well. I told her to...ask Their permission. (*Off Gwo Gwo's look.*) Hey, pal, you weren't giving her a baby, so I stepped up. I did you a favor. It's not like they're going to kill her. I mean, probably not.

GWO GWO: Ho, oh! Probably not! Probably!

CHESTER: I don't see what you're getting so mad about.

GWO GWO: You took my mate away! During mating season! What kind of cruel creature are you? My mate is lost, and you stand there...! That's cruel, Chester! I should've known. Crocodiles are known for their cruelty.

CHESTER: Actually, we're known for our tears.

GWO GWO: Oh, Marion. (*A wail.*) Marion!

CHESTER: So it's true. You like her better than me. Figures.

GWO GWO: You don't understand, you stupid animal. We're the only ones left. Don't you get it? It got very dark. The sky turned peculiar. And there was wind. Like the whole sky wanted to be someplace else. There was trembling. Of the ground. Of everything. There was a noise far away – a dark noise. And I ran. And the other animals, some of them were wild faces and some of them were frozen, dead. And then I couldn't run anymore, so I found a tree and started to climb. Because that's what you do, that's what my mother taught me, if there's danger on the ground and you can't run then you hide, find the tallest tree and climb far away. And that's when I felt the bite. The bad bug. I fell out of the tree. But I didn't hit the ground. I passed through it, deep into the earth, all the way down to the other side. And then I woke up. And everything was different. There was a pond and all the bamboo I could eat. All the others, they all died. Except for me. And Marion. And now she's gone. And I'm alone. And the worst thing that could happen has happened.

CHESTER: Oh.

GWO GWO: (*A sudden yell.*) I hate, hate, hate being a panda! I hate feeling this way, I hate losing everything! I'm running, I'm always running down the mountainside, I hate it, I hate it!

(Beat.)

CHESTER: It's not so bad at the Lab. She might like it. They check your teeth and poke you with things. And you sleep a lot.

GWO GWO: You said animals go to the Lab and they don't come back.

CHESTER: I lied. Sometimes they come back, but it takes a while. It depends on your teeth, I guess. I thought I was helping. Don't you see? Either They'll make a baby for her, which will take months, or They'll tell her, No baby for you, and send her back. Either way, you're off the hook. You're free!

GWO GWO: They can't make a baby for her. Only we can make a baby. Pandas.

CHESTER: You'd be surprised. They make a lot of crazy stuff.

GWO GWO: It wouldn't be a real panda.

CHESTER: Sure, it would. That's real bamboo, isn't it? They made that.

GWO GWO: They did?

CHESTER: It's delicious. Or so I've heard. Yuck.

GWO GWO: So... What am I supposed to do? Wait?

CHESTER: Now who's the stupid one? We're free! You can do what you like!

GWO GWO: She could be gone months, you said. I'm all alone. Pandas are supposed to mate. How can I be a good panda if I can't do that? If there's no girl panda... I'm nothing. You wouldn't understand.

CHESTER: No, I get it. You're alone. (*Beat.*) I think you're failing to see the opportunity here.

GWO GWO: What opportunity?

CHESTER: How do you know what a panda is, or does? Who says? Maybe a panda is an animal that tromps about in the sun all day and then takes a nap afterwards. I mean it. If you're the only panda, who's to tell you different? Think of something else to do.

GWO GWO: Like what?

CHESTER: Let me propose an alternative. You could be with me. All the time. We could be together. You know. Palling around and making trouble. And. You could watch me swim. Sometimes. You could...let me catch a fish for you. I could catch it in my jaws and then deposit it at your feet. And I could watch you climb a tree. And watch you move your thumbs around. I love your thumbs. And we could wrestle. And you could teach me things, and I could tell you about the things only reptiles know. I've been waiting my whole life for you. We could be like a family, the two of us. And we could be happy. Don't you think so? It's not so bad, is it? With me?

GWO GWO: So I could...do anything. I could be anything I want. I could be a crocodile?

CHESTER: Well. Sure you could. If you wanted. You'd be a great crocodile. We'd be two crocodiles, on the loose.

GWO GWO: I don't have to be a panda anymore if I don't want. Who's to tell me different? I bet it's fun to be a crocodile.

CHESTER: It's not all that exciting. But it's pretty exciting.

GWO GWO: I can do anything I want. I'm free.

CHESTER: Free. With me.

GWO GWO: But you lied to me. You tried to scare me.
(*Beat.*) Let's stay at your place. I'm tired of the pond.