

FOREWORD

Like most kids I used to enjoy a good ghost story. Surely you can remember feeling your skin prickle to classics like *August Heat* and *The Monkey's Paw*. Of course, those were just stories. This fact made the unavoidable shivers of horror all the more delicious, for there was really nothing to be afraid of.

I still love to read, and I still enjoy a good bedtime story—partly because it's usually those last few minutes before I go to sleep that I can find a few quiet minutes to read. If this is the kind of reading you enjoy, then I recommend caution as you begin Don Zaidle's book, for this is not a bedtime story that will lull you to sleep. You will find it terrifying and disturbing in the best traditions of classic tales of horror. But with a chilling difference: Don Zaidle's things that go bump in the night (or at noon) are real, as are the screams of the victims and the sounds of breaking bones and rending flesh.

This book might not be the best reading matter for the dark, quiet hours—and you might use some discretion as to where you read it. Don sent me a copy of his manuscript on the eve of departure for an African safari, and I read much of it by flashlight with Africa's night sounds for accompaniment. Reading about close encounters with bears, cougars, and wolves while listening to hyenas and lions was not the proper recipe for dreamless sleep!

Over the past thirty years I have been fortunate to have spent a good deal of time in the wild country of literally all the continents, each of which has its own deadly denizens. In spite of the genuine threat posed by assorted nasties, I do not regard the wilds as particularly scary or threatening, although I've had my share of close encoun-

ters with some of Nature's toothier creatures. The first such episode was about 1965, on a hiking trip on the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico.

We had a bear come into camp early in the evening, and we drove it off by the approved method of banging on pans and "loud vocalizations" (about which, in due course, Mr. Zaidle will have more to say). Much later I awoke from a deep sleep to find the stars blotted out and a great weight on my chest. I was lucky; the bear had me pinned. The boy sleeping next to me was equally terrified but not so fortunate. He sat up and the bear swatted him back down, removing much of his scalp. It was a long night.

Since then I've had a number of other encounters with bears, but never another so terrifying. I've also had close encounters with all of Africa's dangerous game. Like everyone who has spent much time outdoors, I've got my share of snake stories and I've caught my share of insect-borne ailments. I've never dwelled on these things in my writing, and I'm not likely to start now. This for a couple of reasons. First, I don't go to Africa looking for a lion charge. Second, with the kind of writing I mostly do, it's part of my job to make people want to experience the outdoors—not scare them into staying home!

Still, bear encounters, lion charges, and other assorted wrecks have occurred and probably will again. If they do, I'll deal with them as part of the experience, but it's not my "thing" to dwell upon them or sensationalize them. I continue to believe that America's wild country (and suburbs!)—as well as Africa's bush—are much safer than most highways, and that the greatest danger to man is always man himself.

That's my philosophy, whether sound or not—but that doesn't mean we should ignore the other very real dangers that await the unwary. In this regard, I owe a debt to Don Zaidle and his *American Man-Killers*, for he offers an honest, well-researched wake-up call to me and to all of his readers. Nature is neither benevolent nor cruel—she simply *is*. Zaidle's message that her denizens bite is clearly one that needs broadcasting.

Zaidle is, of course, not the first author to dwell upon this unpleasant subject. My library holds several volumes

of grisly grizzly tales, and no collection of Africana is lacking in tales of man-eaters and hair-raising charges. As a boy I thrilled to Patterson's *Man-eaters of Tsavo* and Jim Corbett's tales of pursuing man-eating tigers and leopards. Fifteen years ago I had the privilege to edit Peter Capstick's *Maneaters*, a wonderfully scary book about the world's people-eaters—written, of course in classic Capstick prose.

Don Zaidle's *American Man-Killers* is a fitting addition to this genre and tradition, incorporating sound and detailed research with good—if downright scary—storytelling. It's a timely addition, too, for I fear we are heading into an Orwellian era when, indeed, some animals are more equal than others. Right now the predators are quickly becoming the most equal of animals.

I live in California, where much of Zaidle's well-documented cougar mayhem has taken place. I do not yet fear for my children in their backyard—but I fear for a vast-vanishing deer herd and must ponder what will happen when the fully protected predators run out of prey. Now the wolves are coming back as well. I think all of this is wonderful in that I want cougars, coyotes, wolves, and even grizzlies to have a place in my world—but today, under the myth that such animals are cute and cuddly, we have created an entire class of sacred cows out of the greatest predators that live in America's wilderness. These animals are all beautiful, but they are not cuddlesome. I'd like to think that at least some of those who think they are will read this book.

Realists will applaud *American Man-Killers*. Its explicit examples of predation upon humans clearly portray these messy, gory true-life encounters. While some of the images may be disturbing, they should not produce any lasting trauma. The nature Nazis, bunny huggers, fern fairies, and such will hate this book, for it suggests that those cute Teddy bears, adorable wolf pups, and "endangered" mountain lions might be more than mere harmless ornamentation in our ecosystem. The fanatics in these groups won't be impressed with Zaidle's research or logic; one can only hope it's they—and not their children—who jog unconcerned in cougar country and camp at will where

grizzlies roam. Perhaps, however, there will be some well-meaning but ill-informed souls who will read this book and ponder its contents—with the result, just perhaps, that these souls might wonder if we are going too far in creating sacred cows of our American man-killers.

Craig Boddington
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