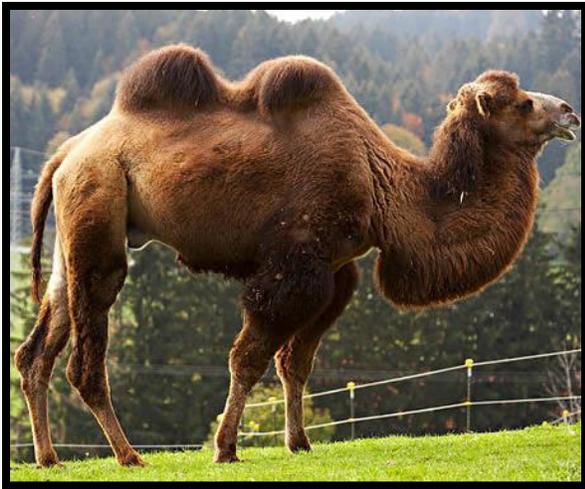


Fatal Attractions

A couple of things caught my interest this past week, reminding me how strange and uncertain the world can be. The first was the newspaper report of a 23 year-old woman in Decatur whose lifeless body was discovered after she was attacked and killed by her pet dogs. On the same day I read that horrible tale, I saw a patient who had been knocked down and bitten by her pit bulldog, sustaining significant and painful injuries. It got me to thinking....

I have three pet dogs, and I have to admit that I seem to love them. They are well-behaved indoor hounds: a Jack Russell, some exotic Maltese-Poodle mix, and a mongrel who's the most well-adjusted of the bunch. They are small; all three of them combined would weigh less than your average pit bull. They have their individual personalities and their special quirks, and for practical purposes, they have almost become members of the family. I can't imagine them wanting to attack me, but who knows? No matter how we cuddle, pamper and talk with them, in the end, animals are animals. So I did a little research.



It turns out that instances of pets injuring and even attacking their owners is quite common, and the number of deaths attributed to pets is—in my view, anyway—astounding. The internet is full of horror tales. E.g.: the May 2012 headline from a New Mexico newspaper: *Pit Bull Advocate Fatally Mauled By Beloved Pet*. Or the August 2011 story of a 32 year-old pregnant California woman attacked and killed by “her family’s pet bull” dog. Most of what you read about are pet-caused deaths. Routine attacks resulting in injuries rarely make the headlines.

Dogs are probably the worst offenders.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, 4.7 million Americans suffer dog bites each year. Of these 800,000 are severe enough to require medical care. About 16 people die every year as a result of dog attacks; the most vulnerable group being children between the ages of 5 and 9 years. Pitt bull-type dogs and Rottweilers are responsible for more than half the deaths.

But there are tragic tales of other types of “pets,” also: The woman killed by her pet black bear. The man strangled by his boa constrictor. Several accounts of owners killed or maimed by “pet” tigers, wolves, vipers, tigers, bulls, chimpanzees, etc. And there was the tragi-comic report from 2007 stating, “An Australian woman was killed by a pet camel given to her as a 60th birthday present after the animal apparently tried to have sex with her.” (The news report went on to say, “The family had intended giving the woman a llama or an alpaca for her birthday, but they were too expensive.”)

All this has made me a little leery of bedtime, seeing the dogs quietly asleep in their beds as I turn off the lights, never quite sure if I will survive the night.