

# FATAL ATTRACTIONS UNMASKED

THE ANIMAL RIGHTS MOVEMENT INVADES  
MAINSTREAM NETWORK PROGRAMMING

AMBULANCE CHASING FOR CORPORATE PROFIT: THE HIDDEN STORY  
BEHIND TV'S MOST INACCURATE AND SENSATIONALIZED SERIES  
*FATAL ATTRACTIONS.*

*FATAL ATTRACTIONS* PURPORTS TO REVEAL THE PSYCHOLOGY AND MOTIVES  
OF PEOPLE WHO KEEP SO-CALLED "DANGEROUS" AND EXOTIC ANIMALS  
FOR PETS. IN THIS SITE WE TURN THE TABLES, AND EXPLORE THE  
PSYCHOLOGY OF THE MAKERS OF *FATAL ATTRACTIONS!*

DEAN RIPA'S EXPERIENCES ON SET WITH THE *FATAL ATTRACTIONS*  
PRODUCTION CREW REVEAL HOW THEY DISTORT TRUTH IN ORDER TO SUIT  
THEIR OWN PERSONAL AND POLITICAL AGENDAS, AND HOW ACCURACY HAS  
ALMOST NO PLACE IN THEIR FILMMAKING. THE AUTHOR IS THE DIRECTOR  
OF CAPE FEAR SERPENTARIUM, NORTH CAROLINA'S LARGEST REPTILE  
ZOO AND MUSEUM.

AND NOW, STAY TUNED FOR TELEVISION'S MOST UNNATURAL NATURE  
PROGRAM, *FATAL ATTRACTIONS*, ON *ANIMAL (RIGHTS) PLANET.*

# WHEN TELEVISION BITES THE HAND THAT FEEDS IT; THE BUSHMASTER BITE EPISODE ON *FATAL ATTRACTIONS*

BY DEAN RIPA

1.

What the TV ambulance chasers who turned up on my doorstep wanted, of course, was just the usual stuff. The contrite victim of snakebite, mind slow as molasses, chanting “lucky to be alive” while the drippy-eyed wife moans at how horrible an ordeal it all was, with the former agreeing to be gelded, and never to play with snakes again if God and Bill O’Reilly would just forgive him and let him live . . . It was this sloppy orgy the producers of *Fatal Attractions* had come to film. They were paying me a poor wage, I thought, for this maudlin descent, and for turning my entire Serpentarium into a TV set. The crowds of visitors – it was July, the height of the tourist season – were in the way of their lights and cameras, and the actors they had hired to play myself, wife and friends, stumbled anonymously among them. It was to be what television calls “a reenactment”. The hundreds of Serpentarium patrons would just have to go when the filming began; the filmmakers wanted the place all to themselves. It was clear pretty soon that what they were “reenacting” had little to do with my own accident, and nothing whatever to do with my real life. They were reenacting their own fantasies, and those they supposed their TV audience might share about snakes. My repeated coaching to try to bring them back to earth was greeted as an intrusion and not well taken. Well, I told them, these were scenes from *my life* they were fabricating; and I thought they ought to take as factual approach as possible. They didn’t, and were offended I should think so. I was meddling with art.

As the filming commenced it became apparent to all of us at the Serpentarium that the producers were not making a documentary at all, so much as a kind of statement. I was not exactly sure what that statement was. No doubt the editors would come in at the end and add their own statement to hers, further altering the contexts. Obviously there were

going to be things beyond my control. I was not familiar with the *Fatal Attractions* series, though once long ago I did a show for *Discovery*. I am not a TV viewer – I hold that as a last claim to mental integrity – and had never watched an entire episode. They were lucky on that point, else I would not have given them permission to film at Cape Fear Serpentarium.

The Serpentarium is one of those rare exhibits in the world that has all its own antivenoms for the snakes on display. We are the only source of many kinds of antivenom in North Carolina. We are capable of treating most any snake bite, and are proud of our level of knowledge on the subject, our self-reliance and expertise. We are called in frequently to local hospitals to give advice on snakebite treatment. On December 11th, 2009, the Serpentarium staff performed exemplarily to save my life from the bite of one of the world's deadliest snakes, the South American bushmaster. Our repeated rehearsals for such an eventuality had not been not in vain. Within 5 minutes of the bite, my wife and staff were already injecting the lifesaving antivenom into my bloodstream. I survived. Most victims do not. In a Costa Rican study, 4 out of 5 people bitten by bushmasters died. As Harry Greene notes, "Bushmaster bite is extremely serious. Till now most cases have ended in death or in some degree of disability. Yet accidents are so rare that we lack a clear picture of proper treatment." The efficiency of our actions on that nerve-wracking day were something few, if any, public zoos had ever matched. Few hospitals either. We had accomplished something rare and noteworthy. When the production company for *Animal Planet* phoned over from England, wanting to do a show on us, we were proud to tell our story. Our model might serve as an example to the medical world on how to treat bushmaster bite, and help save lives. But our story did not get told, something else did – something quite different from what really happened.

I was no stranger to the subject of snakebite treatment, having already self-treated myself in some 14 envenomings by viperid snakes. I had written papers on these bites, and presented them to the show director, Hayley K. Smith, but she seemed not very interested to read them; nor the 700 page, 3rd edition of the book I had written on bushmasters, with its more than 300 pages devoted to bushmaster bite. I thought it would benefit her to have some basic knowledge of the subject matter she had come to film. While no mention was made of my herpetological work (odd in a show purporting to be a biographical history), the filmmakers did, however, crib the medical photography from them, albeit only for their sensational effect. Strange narrative comments accompanied them. These images, laboriously assembled over 20 years and at much personal pain to myself, were not presented as medical illustrations, which they clearly were in the published texts. Instead, they were simply "pictures I had had my wife take" as records of my lucky escapes from death, apparently to show how "tough" I was. In short, they were trophies.

We ought to have gotten little hints from the director's attention to certain details, and her lack of attention to others. It became apparent early on that she was more interested in

the dramatic aspects of snakebite, than the factual ones. Her questions were about emotions, not methods. She seemed to be making a soap opera, not a documentary. When I corrected her about the various errors I observed her making during the film making, she glossed over them, claiming “artistic license.” She might well have been an artist, but the word *license* smacks of fabrication and I had always thought documentary filmmaking was intended, as the word implies, to *document* something, not as a vehicle for dramatic embellishments. Ms. Smith was being an *artiste*.

I felt early on that we were getting off on the wrong track, and this became more apparent during the 2-hour-long interview while she grilled me on camera. It seemed rather a psychological tour she was taking me on, than a search for real facts. She was more interested in my childhood emotions or the feelings I might have had nearly 50 years ago, than in my present life as the director of a famous Serpentarium. It was psychiatric brain picking; I kept expecting to hear the question, “why did you hate your father?” She was groping after possibilities, rather than actualities. She was looking for things she could use, *creatively* – things from the human mind. As those 2 hours wore on I sensed I would be falling into some sort of psychological trap if I were not careful with what I said. For though the woman clearly knew nothing whatever about her subject of snakes and snakebite, she did know how to fish for particular emotional responses from her victims on camera.

But it was her *expectations* about my accident that most irritated me. She wanted a show of remorse from me, for that thing we had been most proud to accomplish at the Serpentarium. She wanted tears of guilt for that shining moment of ours, when our years of preparedness and study had paid off. She wanted me to say I was *sorry* for having been snake bitten, and for making the people around me “suffer”, as she put it (note: this is a *Fatal Attractions* buzz word, recurring in every episode; people who keep exotic pets are making other people “suffer”, and of course, the pets are “suffering” too). My wife had suffered, my mother and father and sister had suffered. Through her clever, leading questioning, she was trying to wring from me sort of admission of wrong doing, first, for my negligence and carelessness, but most of all, from my choice of a career. It was these words she had come to capture on film. But her scheme wasn’t working out. She had found my blood, but where were my tears? I certainly wasn’t going to give them to her. I had had quite enough. If I was snake-bitten, I would be unrepentant about it! “No, not lucky to be alive,” I told the camera, “lucky to have been bitten!”

Their poor jaws were now quite dragging the floor. They must have thought they had stumbled onto a gold mine. Through clever cutting they could make this statement look any way they wanted!

“Why?” she asked finally.

“So that I could be on your show, obviously! It’s why you’re here, isn’t it?”

She hesitated. It was a little pie in her face. She clutched at her notes.

“Yes,” I said, giving her even more for her money, “lucky to have been bitten by such a big, deadly snake! It’s been a life long dream!”

Still stunned. Then, composing herself: “But you have made people *suffer!*”

“Who has suffered? Not you, Madame,” I said, “You have a vested interest in suffering, and a far more prurient interest in death than I have, flying half way across the world to chase my little ambulance! You need to look closer at your own *fatal attraction!* You and your audience of vultures feasting on blood and gore!”

I wasn’t hovering over *their* heart operations, car accidents, muggings, cancers, and other sundry misfortunes apt to strike them down in crowded London. Their spilled blood wasn’t *my* obsession! And yet my blood was theirs . . . how curious!

Ms. Smith smirked, withdrew a little on her chair, tucking in her skirt – perhaps feeling a little naked. The interview was finished.

I cannot swear to these being my exact words – at an interval of half a year that would be impossible – but they were a lot like that. None of that mattered, however; Ms. Smith could snip out all that bother. She had found the gold she needed. “*Not lucky to be alive, lucky to be bitten!*” I had barked at the camera. Here was absolute photographic proof of a truly *fatal attraction*, drenched not with the tears of shame and repentance she had come to film, but something much better, expressed with an almost orgasmic delight! For sheer shock value, it topped anything *Fatal Attractions* had ever done. My declaration even earned me a spot as their commercial spokesman for a few weeks and I got to see my image spilled all over the planet, twice every half hour, vomiting the insane litany, “*Who wouldn’t want to be bitten by one of the deadliest snakes in the world?*”

Now I felt I had quite blown up their cozy little conspiracy. With a man shouting at the camera that he *likes* being bitten by venomous snakes and enjoys near fatal shock, the producers had no place left to go, no stunt left to pull. How could they make me look worse than I already was? Where was the payoff in guilt for wrongdoing, in somebody who actually *liked* making himself “suffer”? And if he liked making himself “suffer”, would he stop short of making others “suffer” too? A dangerous fellow, obviously! A real menace to society – one that TV land ought to be afraid of.

Here is how menacing I appear to the public on an average day at Cape Fear Serpentarium (note the suffering school children):



*Dear Friends at the Cape Fear Serpentarium,*

*Thank you for taking the time to talk with us about the snakes and reptiles on display as we toured the Serpentarium. We all enjoyed learning about the different types of snakes and crocodiles. We look forward to coming back again soon!*

*With gratitude,  
Sandhills Science Club*

The beautiful woman holding the snake is my wife, Regina.

The rare hazards of what has proved till now a very satisfying, and lucrative life's work and career, were not enough for me to admit to any feelings of remorse for making these children happy (there have been more than a hundred-thousand others). And since the wife that I am "making suffer" is fond of eating and having a roof over her head, and all our income derives from snakes, and she love animals herself, she has been more than happy to "suffer" along with me. We might otherwise be suffering in the poor house (or working in the *Dollar Rama*, like somebody else I will soon describe). Remarking the fact that I am still living and Superman (Christopher Reeve), who merely rode horses, *is not* (but then, thousands of pizza delivery people are not either), I told the cameras how they had more chance of dying on the airplane ride back home, or of being sucked into the baggage wheel at the airport, than I did, safe and sound at my Serpentarium. Returning to their green and socialist England, they stood a greater chance of being run over by a double-decker bus than I did from my snakes. They didn't like that idea either, and deleted it on film to make room for their preaching about how people who worked with snakes were "lonely and starved for attention." For 35 years hunched over a desk in a dim room by myself, writing articles and books – and with months hiking in remote rainforests with only the mosquitos for company – and when I was feeling really outgoing, counting the scales and measuring the bones of preserved dead reptiles in dusty museums – I guess you could say I had known loneliness. But I didn't quite get how the "showing-off" part fit into all that.

I had briefly forgotten that editors shape personalities out of nothing, and create issues and controversies through omitting things that do not suit their hidden purposes. There is no honor out there in TV land. They were crafting me into the sort of "Charles Manson" character that would most advantage their steaming pyre. "The snakeman as psychological case" routine. Fine enough, I always preferred Charles Manson to Rupert Murdoch. Through the constant drumbeating of unnecessary war at *Fox News*, Rupert has helped murder millions of people while Charlie killed only a handful. And like Rupert, he didn't even have to show up.

With literally thousands of articles, books and films about Charles Manson on the market, you might say that Charlie is making a lot of people a lot of money. Sharon Tate did not die in vain! And so my daring exclamations about enjoying snakebite would prove profitable to the *Animal Planet*ers. Money was pouring into my pockets too. For the next months after the show premiered, my Serpentarium was so packed with people I could not keep enough tickets on hand. In my whole life I had never signed quite so many autographs.

*Death sells!*

Yet not all viewers were deceived by the dubious glamour of being on national television, and saw the show for the tawdry, insulting thing it was. This letter from Dr. David Board was unsolicited:

*“Dear Dean: I saw that awful so called ‘documentary’ that Animal Planet did on you. You just can't trust these kind of people. They are only interested in the ‘spectacle’, they don't have the intelligence to appreciate the substance of your work or who you are. Dealing with these people is impossible because they have an agenda but they can't understand yours. It is like trying to communicate what the color blue is to someone blind from birth!”*

I fully agreed, but with all the money coming in, I thought it unwise to complain about it to the network lest they “pull” the show and I lose my free advertising. Like Charles Manson, I needed the publicity. As Mick Jagger was prone to say, “The only thing worse than bad publicity is none at all.” And Salvador Dali: “I want people always to be talking about me, even if they have to say good things.”

If the filmmakers were blind, they were funny. Watching them at work was like watching a Fellini movie, full of clowns; only the clowns were the filmmakers, not the subjects. The actors they had hired to play us were people they had picked up ad hoc off the street. Physically, they did not even resemble us. The TV viewer will note from my interview that I have a goatee, and dark hair and eyes; but the man they picked to play me had blond hair and a smooth, beardless face; while the only one in the cast who did have a goatee played a friend of mine, Tom Chaudoin, who yet appears beardless on screen! So the viewer is confused from the onset. When I pointed this out, the *prima donna* director simply tossed her hair at me, and marched on.

She had a disturbing habit of pressing her extensive mammary glands (I am not kidding) against my body whenever she wanted me to sign any kind of release paper. And then her eyes would get big and she would sort of twirl her breath in my ear. Perhaps the erect cobras had become too much for her. Or perhaps that's how business deals are struck in Hollywood – or would be, if she could only get there. I was good practice for more important clients. She is lucky my wife never caught her, she might have thrown a mamba on her.

After the initial interview, I was given a new hat to wear, that of manipulating the snakes off-screen into dangerous positions so that the director and her camera men could take credit for getting what I suspect would later be called “difficult shots”, when back at the Oxford Films edit rooms. I was not being idle in between my wrangling, however, all the while observing and recording the director’s numerous sins against accuracy, and smiling like the Devil in anticipation of producing this article. Each time they chose the dark road of lies and exaggeration in favor of honesty and truth and integrity, I rubbed my hands. These were tabloid television reporters, remember, the lowest of the low.

The following is a point by point reconstruction of the visible, provable distortions in that single 20 minute program. I limit myself to 8 gross errors to avoid tiring your minds. There are at least twice that many, and I will pick the bones of some of those others ones, individually a little later on.

- 1) The film opens with an image of the Serpentarium sign taken at dawn. Narration: “Behind the wall of an ordinary building in downtown Wilmington, NC, lies Dean Ripa’s collection of the most dangerous snakes on the planet. . . .” The image fades into what look like spooky laboratory doors, black-lit from behind. Dr. Mengele would be proud of such doors! One expects a half-flayed corpse to come screaming out of the darkness. Fact: these doors do not belong to the Serpentarium. We have never seen these doors before. They do not even resemble our doors. I doubt these doors exist anywhere in our town. They look like stock footage from a horror movie. The actual Serpentarium doors are quite gay and light, as fits the historic district’s requirements, and hundreds of school children pass through them daily. The director is trying to set a certain kind of ominous tone, and prejudice the audience for the evil tale she is weaving.
- 2) In their reenactment, the filmmakers have me being bitten by the wrong species of snake. I was bitten by a South American bushmaster (*Lachesis muta*), not the blackheaded bushmaster (*Lachesis melanocephala*) which the filmmakers show as being responsible. The blackheaded bushmaster is endemic only to Costa Rica; but in the film they further misidentify it, calling it “the largest viper in *South America*.” Now, Costa Rica is not in South America. Moreover, these two snake species are taxonomically very different and found thousands of miles apart. It is like saying a man was attacked by a lion when it was really a tiger that did the job; a grizzly bear when it was a black bear; a white shark when it was a tiger shark, etc. The snakes look completely different too, one having a jet black head, the other having a pale orange head. Now all this is very important in context, because the antivenom I used to treat my bite (designed for the *Central American bushmaster*) is not specific to the *South American* species that



actually bit me. What could have been a very clever device for heightening suspense (no one had ever tried to treat a South American bushmaster bite with Central American antivenom) was ignored for no good reason, save the director was in a hurry. During the filming I tried repeatedly to get her to use the correct species of snake (I have an abundance of South American bushmasters on hand) but she pleaded “artistic license” and left off, rushing on to do the next sequence.

- 3) The bite did not occur on the exhibit floor as is portrayed on film. It occurred in the back stage area. No one is permitted in the back but employees. I was completely alone at the time, in an 8 x 12 ft room behind a closed, locked door. That fact was documented in the article by Mertens (2009), which the producers had seen, and from which they even cribbed their photographs. And this fact was repeatedly explained to them while on set. The producers failed to respond. Probably they did not want to have to reconstruct (or simulate) the back room area which had since been taken down to make way for new exhibits on the main floor. In short, they sacrificed truth for convenience. And how convenient for them too, when their attack-dog pundit Winston Card (a hired mouthpiece for the film company) shows up to accuse me of “showing off” when I was bitten. Who was I showing off to, all alone back there, God?
- 4) I did not “refuse” antivenom as is stated in the film. Rather, I *declined* to use antivenom in a case of envenoming not severe enough to warrant its use, and for fear of an allergic reaction following, owing to an acquired sensitivity to horse serum. This was a calm and reasonable decision based on medical evidence, not from “arrogance” or “machismo” and “wanton disregard for my own life” as the filmmakers imply through selectively editing my interview. All this is documented in my papers on the subject (Ripa 2000, 2005, 2006 etc.) which were presented to the filmmakers even before their production started. Thus, quite the opposite from what the filmmakers state, I was seeking to prolong my life, not take chances with it, by not taking the antivenom. Moreover, as it was my antivenom, I do not think I could very well “refuse” what was never “offered” to me, and what I myself had the power to have administered – or not – at anytime I chose to do.
- 5) On the basis of my purported “refusal” of antivenom, pundit Winston Card contradicts medical evidence and states in so many words that antivenom should always be taken in any venomous snakebite. To not do so would be dangerous or “arrogant” as he puts it. This is a dangerous

misstatement and hopefully will not be incorporated into anybody's medical protocol. Most snakebites *do not* require antivenom, which is itself dangerous to use. Perhaps an actor himself, Card is not much good playing the part of "herpetologist."

- 6) The photos of the snakebites do not match the bites described by the narrator. They have the sequence mixed up: wrong snakes, wrong time. This blunder seems hard to understand since they had the pertinent articles in their hands (Ripa 2006, and Mertens 2009). In those articles the bite photos are clearly identified with captions, and there is no doubt they saw them, since they themselves cut and pasted the photos from the articles into the film.
- 7) In the antivenom sequence they use the wrong size syringes to administer the antivenom. The 3 cc syringes they show could not contain the 20 cc contained in a single vial of antivenom, much less the 20 vials, or 200 cc, I received. This would have required almost 70 injections! I would have had no veins left, and would have been dead before the shots were finished! When I called this fact to the director's attention, and placed the correct, 20 cc syringes in her hands, she refused to change it. Moreover, in real life, a syringe was not even used to start the I.V. antivenom, but a catheter, into which the 20 cc syringe was loaded ten times (but not 70 times, as would have been the case with 3 cc syringes). But in the film there is no catheter, and the actress (who does not resemble my wife) seems administering the shots to my shoulder, as though they were intramuscular rather than the intravenous injections. Thus the very skillful and efficient administration of the antivenom as really occurred at the Serpentarium, is portrayed as though it were some sloppy attempt at failed first aid. "Artistic license," said Ms. Smith when I confronted her with these errors on set.
- 8) The "clock tower" sequence, where I am hearing the "death toll" at 5 o'clock occurred at the moment of the bite, not later while in the ambulance, as they have wrongly portrayed it in the film. This is clearly stated in Mertens (2009) and was so in the interview with director H. K. Smith. They obviously read or had opportunity to read that article, since they cribbed the photography from it, and many other details they could only have gotten from there. So the filmmakers have me (1) bitten by the wrong species of snake (2) on the exhibit floor when it was in the keeper's area (3) at the wrong time of day; (4) they mix up the bite photos; (5) they claim I "refused" antivenom in a case when antivenom was not necessary and even dangerous to use; (6) give false advice about medical treatment with regard to antivenom; (7) show dramatically smaller syringes than

would have been used in a snakebite treatment; (8) and give the Serpentarium a pair doors we have never seen before.

I have given you but eight examples. There are many more factual errors in that scant 20 minute program. My show is not exceptional. All the *Fatal Attractions* shows wear the same sad clothes. It would seem that when given a choice between telling a lie and telling the truth, *Fatal Attractions* almost always resorts to the more sensational, money making lie.

Not content to defame dead people, who cannot defend themselves – and live people like myself, who have been injured on the job – *Fatal Attractions* even lies about the animals. It pretends to know their thoughts, puts “words” in their mouths they never “said”, and tells of friendships they never had. The director of the Missouri Chimpanzee Sanctuary, Connie Casey, had this to say to Caroline Hawkins, executive producer of *Fatal Attractions*:

“Dear Caroline,

“I was just forwarded info about the upcoming segment of *Fatal Attractions* regarding Jeanne Rizzotto . . . In the memo it states that she says one chimp was going to AIDS research and the other put down . . . and that she knew Travis [Travis is the chimpanzee; ed.] . . . These are all LIES.

“No chimps born here would ever go to research and no chimp born here would be put down. That was Never said to her AND she Never knew Travis!!! I am requesting that you eliminate that statement with a retraction and you contact me (which maybe you should have researched these statements before putting them in print or film). If I do not hear from you, I will be contacting my attorney.

“Thanks, Connie Casey”

The complaints pour in, and from nearly every individual who has ever appeared on a *Fatal Attractions* show. Clearly the producers are out of touch with the people they make films about, and even more out of touch with reality. They are more interested in the creative aspects of filmmaking than in making real documentaries. They don’t check their facts, they just get an idea and rush out to put it on the air. But this is not how they portray themselves. They tell us they are making *scientific films* and this is even the name of their production company, *Oxford Scientific Films*. This is a poor camouflage. *Oxford Films* is no more scientific that the *National Inquirer*. Let’s look at the bizarre psychology guiding these “surprisingly human” ghouls who chase ambulances for profit. There are many serpents in the woodpile.

2.

One of the oldest tricks of propaganda television it is to hire pundits to trash the individuals you have selected as examples of undesirable tendencies. Animal Planet and Oxford Films have a grab-bag of ragtag personnel for that purpose. *Please welcome, Winston Card!*

(Applause)

Winston Card is the show's Talking Head. Whenever my talking head says something, Card's head pops up behind me, to selectively interpret what I have just said and pass judgment upon it. (Factually, Card wasn't even there in the room when I did my two hour interview; he might not even have been talking about me in particular; but slick editors know how to get around that.) Ostensibly, Card is there as the "authority" on the subject at hand; on the quiet, however, he is there to push the claims of the show producers, a means of giving voice to their own unexpressed opinions. Card's other function is to incite conflict in the hopes of creating *a controversy* over some non-issue the producers would like to see turned into something bigger than it is. As in, "here is a show discussing *important issues*." These "issues" may be nothing at all, and usually aren't – or weren't – until the cameras arrived to magnify and exaggerate some little bit of lint in some unsuspecting navel they want to make look deeper and darker than the world suspected. Card's job is to create the "controversy" that didn't exist before the cameras turned up – and if he can scare the public into believing in the urgency of his remarks, so much the better for the Network. They will ask him back next week.



Now that, by definition, is a *pundit*; but a *poseur-pundit* is a breed apart! A poseur-pundit is one who *claims* authority over a subject he is not really qualified to speak on. And this is Winston Card. He is a straw man, a fabrication; a clothes manikin for the producers' ideologies; they use him to sell the idea they want the public to hear – but he is not really qualified to impart the message. He almost never knows the people personally that he is talking about, and has made no direct study of human psychology. He advertises himself on screen as *a herpetologist*. On screen we see, "Winston Card: Herpetologist." Card, you will find, talks very little about reptiles but quite a lot more about people. There is a good reason for that. The true facts about Card's occupation are very, very different from herpetology. Winston Card works as a stock clerk in a dollar store in Toronto, Canada.

I will say it again in case that got by you. The man posing as "the herpetologist" on *Fatal Attractions* works as a stock clerk in a dollar store in Toronto, Canada! Some nights he stands in as a cab driver. He has no degree in herpetology!

It seems that once, long ago Winston Card did have some experience as a reptile keeper at a publicly funded American zoo, but either the zoo did not agree with him, or he did not agree with the zoo, and one or the other having indigestion, Card moved away from that industry and now works odd jobs in odd places.\* Perhaps no zoo or university now wants to hire him. I wouldn't know. In fact I hardly know Card – though he claims on screen to know me intimately! My inner thoughts, my motivations, all but what I had for breakfast in the morning. In fact I had never met Mister Card in person before the day of the filming, and even then, did more listening than talking. Yes, mostly – the reader will find this significant – I was the one asking *him* questions! One of the questions Card answered for me related to his present occupation. The “herpetologist/psychologist” pumping himself up on screen and casting aspersions on others is really the guy ringing up same-price items under a scanner at *Dollar Rama!*

How deeply Animal Planet must dredge for its “authorities”! Well, the truth is, *Fatal Attractions* doesn't pay all that well. And you couldn't get any self-respecting herpetologist to take the job. It would be too demeaning.

Thus the resentful and envious Winston Card, who failed in the zoo business, exacts his personal revenge on television by speaking out against those more successful than himself, a professional detractor sobbing his own wounds with the blood of others for his own egotistical advantage. With *Fatal Attractions*, fraud Card has found a way to fill a void in his life, address his personal grievances and enjoy a revenge for his own inability to make anything of himself in the zoological profession. The pay is better than at *Dollar Rama*, and he gets a free plane ticket to the filming site, and gets to put-on-the-dog as some sort of celebrity when he comes home. Nothing is more rewarding for a man who has fallen down in life, and seen his dreams collapse, than a chance to participate in the demolition of someone else who has been successful where he has failed. After such an emotional splurge, Winston must feel a lot better withering among the shelves he is stocking at *Dollar Rama*. I picture the poor man subvocalizing his own lines in the little mirrors above the sunglasses, praying for a new snakebite victim and the meager check (\$200) he gets for popping in and ratting out people he has never met before the day of the filming. Unfortunately for Winston, the show is not always centered on reptiles. Sometimes it focuses on big cats or even chimpanzees. As such, a “herpetologist” is not needed in

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\* Card is afflicted by delusions of grandeur, an illness common to impersonation disorders. He wants to appear as a herpetologist, though he is really a stock clerk. Once a long time ago Card worked as a reptile keeper at the Cincinnati Zoo, but since his PETA-style affiliations, irrational behavior and bogus claims, no smart zoo in America wants him on board. Sources at zoos claim he was impossible to work with, an egomaniac, and killed many animals through poor husbandry practices. He was always trying to accentuate the danger of any situation involving a reptile, and thus call attention to himself. Said one source: “At the time they [the zoo management] were not happy with his [Card's] antics. Unknown to them, Card was also living at the zoo for 4-5 months, having moved from his apartment. This seems to have been discovered. The vets didn't like him, the keepers didn't like him, the other curators knew he was a fraud, but at the time the zoo director was a CEO type (not an animal guy) so Card got away with faking his knowledge.”

every episode. Which just goes to show that the producers can lie just as well without him – a thought that must give the man at *Dollar Rama* the heebie-jeebies.

Snakes seem to give Card the heebie-jeebies too. I don't think I ever met a purported "herpetologist" who was more uncomfortable to be around snakes. Whenever the snakes were brought out on set he sneakily retreated to a place rather further back than the camera man, and made squeamish faces. A bad experience with snakes, perhaps, as a child? One sensed he had chosen herpetology by default, perhaps unable to get into crowded Ag-class back at school. Whatever the case, he was a most incurious fellow, and asked me only one single question while I toured him through the Serpentarium: "how much did all this cost?" He was quite broke himself, one of his reasons for doing the show.

Card is a recently converted Animal Rights promoter and his insider knowledge of the zoo business that "unfairly" disowned him makes him the perfect fink. Quoth Winston Card on the Animal (Rights) Planet PR site:

*"I discourage venomous reptile ownership of any kind. I consider this type of 'pet' ownership as extreme because not only does it put the owner at risk and everyone who comes in contact with the venomous reptile, but the risk also reverberates outward to the zoo community."*

And again in the New York Daily News (UK):

*"Exotic-animal ownership is a real problem and a show like Fatal Attractions can help spread the word to the masses."*

Like everything else about Card, these statements are false. Exotic animal ownership is not a "real problem," millions of people in America own them, while dogs, horses, and even honey bees kill ten times more people. The National Institute of Health does not even list animal husbandry, exotic or otherwise among the top ten most dangerous professions. Heading the list is Pizza Delivery Drivers! Death from exotic animal attack is so incredibly rare as to be exceeded even by such freak fatalities as "death from air pressure changes" and "death from constipation." In all of America, 151,000 people died last year from external causes, about 25,000 of them murdering each other with their own hands, and that many yet again committing suicide. Of that vast array only one or two were killed by a pet reptile (and bear in mind, there are millions of pet reptiles being kept!). This is unfortunate for the producers of *Fatal Attractions*. With no more than about one or two deaths per year from all exotic animals, they cannot even generate a whole season's worth of shows! As a consequence, they are forced to dig deep into the past, sometimes going back decades, to find the necessary fatalities that will be their "attractions." In the meantime, they supplement their programming with tales of survivors - one lives, one dies. Which will it be this week? But they don't want you to know the real statistics, nor does Card,

who is making a career for himself off his new notoriety. Like the self-inflating Card, they want you to believe snakes are a public health problem.

Sometimes, they even have to blame the death on an exotic animal when it was clearly not caused by an animal at all! As this article by Zuzana Kukol (REXANO website) shows:

*“Animal Planet’s press release further sensationalizes the exotic animal ownership by claiming that ‘one man was presumed eaten alive by one of his many monitor lizards.’ However, CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) doesn’t list any monitor lizard (or any reptile) related death in Delaware for the year 2002, which is when this incident supposedly happened.*

*“The owner likely died of unrelated causes, and the bite marks were most likely post mortem. Even humans resort to eating anything when self survival instinct kicks in. This incident seems to be exploited by Animal Planet without any consideration for the grieving family of this man. The first face transplant occurred to a French woman who was asleep, while her puppy got hungry and started chewing her face off. This is not an animal attack, just a feeding reaction of a hungry dog, or monitor lizard.*

*“This is not the first time in recent history that Animal Planet picks questionable subjects for their stories, and doesn’t research the facts behind the potentially false claims.”*

The “herpetologist” Card does not reveal these differences in death, postmortem, ruining whatever shed of integrity he might previously have had. Moreover, such an explanation would take valuable air time away from his preaching about “the growing problem.” Card is hoping you won’t ask questions, just accept what he has to say. He is the “expert.” Not because of anything he ever did in life, but because he managed to get on television.

Television grants its own “expert” status to any individual who happens stand before the camera, and since one television appearance leads to another, and as a lie told many times comes to have the ring of truth, so each succeeding appearance of such a person confirms his aura of “authority”, whether he really deserves it or not. Such poseurs often become television professionals, called on whenever a certain kind of bias is required. This is why you see so many of the same faces on television. Corporate TV is riddled with poseur-pundits because corporate TV is almost pure propaganda, designed to sway public opinion toward the goals of the sponsors and studios – the moneyed status quo. These goals are always several years ahead of the public’s TV-made reality. The opinions given for the public to have were concocted years before the public gets to share the opinions for themselves. Obviously they are not opinions, they are parrot-thoughts, implanted to shape and engineer the minds of the new feudal surfs of modern Empire. These fabrications have a single goal in mind – to cajole the individual into willingly surrendering his personal freedoms for the false security and dubious protection of the Nanny government controlled and directed by the corporations. The ultimate goal of indentured servitude of the masses, such as was seen during the middle-ages and is

practiced in the communist countries, has now come to America. The gradual dismantling of the American dream began first in the Media, which manipulates the thoughts, opinions and statements of the politicians just as it manipulates the thoughts, opinions and statements of the average person, meanwhile eating away at the hopes and dreams of all. Man's consent to be enslaved has been scripted for him by people he had never heard of, in cities distant from his own living room, in the remote halls of tall skyscrapers by hired mind-writers no more intelligent than himself, but who are simply paid to perform specific tasks whose ultimate goal they themselves do not necessarily understand. All have traded their own better minds for the mediocre mind of television. Poor Card, cage cleaner *cum* cab driver couldn't even find a first rate show to take him!

And so we see Winston Card, just one of many thousands of cards propped up by an industry based totally on deception. On the surface, Card plays the naysayer, the voice of sanity and reason. Factually, he is simply trying to endorse the preexisting opinions of those who pay his meager salary. In my interview on the show, whenever I make any sort of statement, before it can be qualified or explained here is Card leaping up like a yapping Chihuahua at my heels to counter it with sweeping statements from his psychological armchair. Card is always there to explain the motive that the person being interviewed is not allowed to explain for himself, so that Card can shout him down with his preaching.

The producers of *Fatal Attractions* prefer maligning dead people, when they can get them. The dead can't contradict them, can't sue them. They can make up anything they want about dead people. Unfortunately, there aren't enough corpses to work with. With only one or two deaths a year from exotic animal attack, what's a creative artist to do? This is where the scare tactics come in to make up for the factuality the show does not have. It ceases being a documentary, and becomes psychodrama instead – a tale of *human* rather than animal wretchedness. (“Surprisingly Human!” blurts the Animal Planet PR). Alexandra Hall, just one of many dead people *Fatal Attractions* has profited from defaming, is described as “delusional, lonely and desiring, seeking dangerous pets to fill a void in her life.” I knew Alexandra Hall. She was none of these things – no more than the 3,482 who died from drowning last year, were delusional, lonely and desiring, needing water to fill the voids in their lives. Alexandra was a very serious person who just happened to have an accident – one of 151,000 other people who died from various accidents that year. Her accident just happened to involve an exotic serpent, one of only two in America. Winston Card will tell you otherwise, though – his job depends on it. It's what the producers expect of him.

Alexandra should not feel slighted. Card fastens his tiny fangs into every heel democratically. From Card we learn of big egos, unhappy introverts, lonely people estranged from their families, ad nauseam. The victims on *Fatal Attractions* all have the same flaws, as though concocted by a writer who does not have much imagination when devising his characters. The writer seems to have seen the film “Willard” once upon a time in her



childhood, and decided in advance this is how all people who live animals must be. A clichéd writer obviously who could not write anything but B-movies. Card himself seems to have modeled himself on the “Willard” character, and derived all of his psychological expressions from it. Peering down into his Hollywood fantasy, he must have seen something revealing in himself that scared him. Or perhaps the single snakebite he received in his life so terrified him that he quit the profession, and is now salving his own cowardice through attacking others who are more brave. Card chants tirelessly the same stagnate, all-purpose verdict over and over again, week after week, sitting in judgment over other people’s lives. But these would seem to mirror Card’s own personality more than the people he describes – people in most cases, he has never met.

One word that does not find its way into Card’s descriptive vocabulary is “love.” Strangled by thoughts of his own ego, he appears unable even to conceive of individuals who devote their lives to wildlife for other reasons than his own. In Card’s vocabulary, the greatest biologists of the past centuries, from Francesco Redi to Charles Darwin to Ernst Meyer to Lawrence Klauber to Raymond Ditmars, would have qualified as mentally ill. Perhaps Card is the one who has the sickness. Unable to achieve greatness in his field, he demotes others, crusading to save himself from the obscurity he more nearly deserves.

Card bends over backwards to tell us that snake keepers are sick, even to the point of implicating himself in the sickness. He believes that everybody in the world is just like him, and if they are not, tries to fit them into his mold. Says Card when speaking of Joseph Slowinski, another man whom he did not know personally and has no right to impute motives of:

*“We’re [snake people] not very good at dealing with human conflict . . . . So if you’re placed in a situation with other biologists and there’s a lot of conflict going on, you’re probably not going to do well in that situation. Snakes don’t exhibit a lot of emotion and it’s not something you’re accustomed to dealing with.”*

Who is this mysterious “we” that Card is talking about? Is he saying that Slowinski couldn’t deal with people and so he got bit by a snake? Is he saying that people who keep snakes expect people to behave like snakes, and are all emotional doofs? Just what nonsense *is* Card saying? I doubt he even knows. Card is using the age-old trope that people who love animals can’t deal with people, “they are retreating into a world of their own,” etc. Baloney. Card is wrong, and *Fatal Attractions* is wrong. People who work with animals are usually better at dealing with people for it, through becoming more tolerant, understanding, and accepting of their differences. It is Card who has trouble dealing with people, and that is why he is no longer tolerated in the zoo community. Or he no longer tolerates them. He is an outcast through his own inability to adapt to other systems than his own, and wants to prove you have the same problem.

Here is Card in another episode, warning us about yet another purported victim of “ego”:

*“You tend to get interested in reptiles because they’re different. And it has a lot to do with your ego. It has more to do with ego than it does with your interest in the animal, that comes later. And then you tend to get obsessed with them and she [Alexandra Hall in this case] appeared to be on that path.”*

And in yet another episode, Card telling us about the pitfalls of “ego”.

*“My colleagues that I’ve worked with over the years, we are all unconventional by choice, I think. We have enormous egos and I’m big enough to admit that. An enormous ego, where we’re introverted but at the same time rigorous. We want to talk about the things we’re interested in, but really nothing else.”*

Clearly Card can talk about nothing else – himself, his ego. He can’t get it off his mind. I have an ego problem, you have an ego problem. Here is what he says about me in my segment on bushmaster bite:

*“We can sit here and say it has nothing to do with our egos and you might believe that . . . But quite often almost anyone who is interested in venomous snakes will choose to work with the most deadly and the largest venomous snakes they can get their hands on. What does that tell you?”*

It tells me that Card can’t get his mind off his own ego. It’s his defense mechanism for having so little to be proud of. For Card, an ego is wishful thinking, and he would like to share in mine. An all around expert on human behavior (in addition to the ways of snakes) Card pretends deep knowledge of the motives and inner workings of the mind, particularly of the people who keep exotic animals. It’s very simple for Card. Everybody is exactly like he is. They are all the mirrors of himself.

Card’s other buzz word is “obsession.” When we (reptile keepers) are not being merely egotistical, we are *obsessed*. Clearly Card is obsessed with this ego that is such a burden to him, and is troubled by it. The producers must have the same problem, for they love it when he talks this way. A survey of the narration of the *Fatal Attractions* series as a whole shows the word “obsession” repeated more times than there are commercials, with the word “ego” bringing up the rear! Who is writing the script? Obviously the same self-obsessed little mind, writing the same stale clichés, over and over again, squatting in some dark little editing room back in England, for whom people have ceased being human and are only pixels and sound bytes. Card’s mind fits his editor’s like a glove. She doesn’t even have to write his lines, he can mouth them ad lib.

Card has trouble with human relationships and wants to prove you do too.

*“But if he’s anything like me your animals can be more important to you than your human relationships. Absolutely. And it’s impossible to really explain to someone who doesn’t share that passion why that happens. We’re so completely fascinated by these animals.”*

Again the strange “we” as though he is identifying the whole world with himself. Psychologists have a term for this kind of behavior, it is called *projection*. It is common to paranoid schizophrenics.

Card’s goal, like those of his employers, is to try to turn people who work with or simply love wildlife into “psychological cases.” Card, the socialist who moved to Canada because he was uncomfortable with American freedom, or because it was too hard for him, has found a venue for venting his dissatisfactions abroad. It is not surprising that Marxist, undemocratic and monarchal Great Britain, which rules the Canada he fled to, should have embraced his illness and put it to work, helping to justify the English oppression of an elite group that has never yet forgiven the loss of its greatest and most profitable colony, America.

Winston Card is at heart a Statist, hawking the same old Marxist snake oil. *Listen to me and you will have a safer, more secure world! We must give up our freedoms, we must not be selfish – it’s our egos that are the problem, comrades, don’t you see?* Since he cannot really show that his ego-less existence will improve anything – the statistics do not verify his claims – he is in trouble from the start. This requires him to magnify isolated incidents all out of proportion, and grandstand on TV. The safer, more secure world he claims he is building for us will not be brought to pass because of him. However, if he makes himself conspicuous enough to the right people, yipping loudest and most, he just might find himself a comfortable sinecure as one of the many administrators of the promised Utopia. Safer for him, this brave new world, and enjoying a job security he never had at *Dollar Rama*. He is like a tick that has been pulled off the host, and is now out searching for a new parasitic existence sucking your tax dollars.

The script writer for *Fatal Attractions* has the same *obsession* with clichés as Card, and never tires of repeating them. The bitter, condemning, spinster-voiced narrator says: *“For many people snakes are the ultimate predator and one they chose to bring into their homes. But for some a line is crossed between predator and its prey. They believe their animal can satisfy an emotional need. Inevitably it means something or someone will suffer. What dangerous mix of delusion, loneliness and desire causes people to live their lives with animals that have the potential to kill?”*

What dangerous mix of delusion, loneliness and desire causes people to drive automobiles, killing 46,000 people every year in America? Electric appliances, killing 21,000. Prescription medicine, killing 106,000. Stairs, killing 1307. Even food, killing 744 from choking on it? And how deluded the mere pedestrian, minding his own business just walking along? 5,870 killed last year. *Inevitably*, living life means someone will *suffer!*

But *Fatal Attractions* is not in the business of calming your nerves with rational comparisons; it is not about putting things in their true perspective. It is in the business of terrifying you. It makes its money from inciting panic. Cars and electric toasters and prescription medicines just aren't scary enough. Being killed by a wild animal is. It's in the human wiring.

Mix the word "snakes" in with "delusion, loneliness, desire and suffering" and you have explosive imagery, good enough for the *Midnight Tattler*. But the terms themselves are false, devised entirely to support the fear tactics of the show. There are billions of snakes in the world and millions of owners of them. I am sure most of them would take offense at being called "delusional, lonely and desiring." And yet the acrid, condemning, spinster-voiced narrator they have hired to mouth their inanity, assures you this is exactly the case. And there may be one of this misfits living in your neighborhood, even right next door!

The narrator. What a voice this woman has! A voice full of glass and splinters, that fumes like acid and makes one bites one's nails. It is the voice of certain type of condemning personality everybody on this planet would like to see less of. Where did they find this woman, warding over a reform school? It is the voice of every child's dread; the voice of the evil stepsister in *Cinderella*; of Nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. As an actress she is masterful, producing the ominous, ironic effect she has been hired for. But the filmmakers' abusive intentions are too plainly seen, and their terror, vitiated.

What dangerous mix of delusion, loneliness and desire caused me to build one of the most successful tourist/educational attractions in North Carolina? What dangerous mix of delusion, loneliness and desire led me to write a widely quoted book on the subject? I ask these demented ambulance chasers, what *emotional need* have they satisfied through flying half way across the world in order take pictures of me, in order to ask me stupid questions they will then distort to suit their premise? What emotional need has their weak-minded audience to view such delusional material? What dangerous mix of delusion, loneliness and desire makes the mind-bombed script-writer of *Fatal Attractions* regurgitate this same banal material week after week? We know very well who. A delusional, lonely, and desiring woman who couldn't make it in Hollywood, who has poor people skills, who spends all her time locked up with a word processor, and who works for Oxford Films. I will not bother you with her name.

### 3.

Now the producers of *Fatal Attractions* have one goal to achieve first and before all others: to sell advertising. In this way I had strongly contributed – after all, I had just told them how lucky I felt to be bitten by a deadly snake. What more could they have asked for? That I go back there and do it again? I am sure they would have paid extra for that.

But it was in the way of their own bloodthirsty goals that they really hit pay dirt. The Queen's men – and women, in this case – have an even a higher goal as propagandists, and that is to instill a terror of all the creatures of Nature. Nothing less than tense suspense will keep wandering human eyes riveted to the screen through the nearly 5 minutes of commercials that occupy every 10 minutes of an American TV show. For this purpose they have managed to convert even poor catfishes into deadly monsters of the deep, so desperate are they for horrifying material (see *River Monsters* series, which features “man-size killer catfish” for its stars!). Comes on after that other terror they are pushing, *Finding Big Foot*.

Now if snakes are terrible enough, why not make the humans who work with them seem even more so? Off they go from Oxford Films, in search for these dangerous humans. To seek out among our American demographics the proof of a nation having strayed too far from having far too much freedom. The cold, acid, disdainful voice of the narrator, British actress Jana Sheldon, is working overtime to prove to you why the rascally Americans need more chains. The psychology of these forever *British* filmmakers (the TV Nature field is dominated by this expressly *socialist* mentality), a heavily fluoridated, long-since despotized people who have never known liberty, and who live in one of the world's most repressive cultures, with nearly as many cameras as people surveying them everywhere they go, is such that exhibitions of unauthorized freedom send their imprisoned blood pressure through the roof. Their purpose, then, here in America, is to bring back to England a certain telling proof that their repressive way of life is best, and safest, so that they will feel better about living in a human zoo. Like spies from another, gloomier world they are here to identify in our midst those potentially “dangerous individuals” who would do them cultural harm. To do this, they show people who do themselves harm, and others by proximity, and all the time reserving, unspoken, but there by implication, the idea that these “dangerous individuals” are harming the animals they keep too! In short, the animal keeper is a crackpot and not qualified to do what he is doing – hence his *accident* with the animal that bit him. Moreover, these animal keepers are “selfish!” Yes, by satisfying their own *personal* “obsessions” to keep and care for animals (as opposed to the better obsession of social responsibility), while flying along on their “ego-trip” they are likely also harming those animals in the process. The “animal cruelty” card – which is like the political “racism” card – forever lurking up their sleeve.

Why just look at these creature-keepers! So insane they even court death! They have a *fatal attraction* – one they just can't resist! Why won't they just sit at home and watch Nature television like the English do in their little cubicles above Hampstead Fair? You must understand that the British are already ten years ahead of us here in America. Smart Growth has been with them a long time and they already live in Smart Housing. Agenda 21 has already been proved on England.

An audience just barely smart enough to sit through the twenty minutes of commercials that occupy nearly every stupefying hour of an Animal (Rights) Planet show, will be the judge, jury and executioner of the upstart who spits in the producers' faces. The editors will make sure of that.

Now all of us know people who speak badly of others, but do not always come and say the bad thing they want heard. They turn their screws quietly, through vague suggestions and implications, building their secret case against the individual they want to malign and tear down. In television the target is not so much an individual (unless he is a famous political personality who is directly in the way of their corporate directorship), it is rather the *example* of that individual, whom they point to as the root of the evil thing they want to stamp out. To do this, they often pick simple ordinary people and overnight elevate them to the status of poster children – and then spend the rest of the show throwing darts at the poster. Icons are erected for two reasons: as markers to the desired trough intended for the cattle to feed from (showing them the “right way”), and/or to be demolished publicly, when it is the “wrong way” they want to show. The ruler comes down and the hands are slapped. In television it is all done very quickly, with flicker-light speed, and is over even before you recognize what trick has been pulled. The effect is subliminal, leaving you with *an impression*, however vague or general, resulting in a certain nameless desire at the point of purchase (“I want *that* kind of potato chip; but I can't say why!”), or in this case, a certain special but equally nameless dread or unease when presented with a certain idea or tendency they want squashed (“exotic animal keepers are sick”). Show a bad example, follow it with a negative comment or imagery, and presto – flash – commercial – the stake has been driven through the brain. Before the viewer-victim even he realizes he has been programmed (most never will) he already has been. This is the purpose of the endless previews of the upcoming shows; not so much to get you to watch the new programs they are pushing, but to use the opportunity to embed the subliminal messages they want heard; to make an ugly (or pleasing, if they want you to like it) association.

For example, in order to push a ban on the keeping of American Bull Dogs (“pit-bulls”) Animal Planet has created a show called *Pit-bulls and Parolees*. Now whether you watch the show or not, or only catch the hundreds of advertisements throughout the week, the result will be the same: you will soon come to associate pit-bulls with parolees and parolees are ex-criminals, are they not? Therefore you will soon come to view pit-bulls in an illicit light. *Criminals keep pit-bulls*. Repetition, juxtaposition and association, the age old method used by the gossip at the fence post.

Another name for this type of propaganda is predictive-programming. The viewer is being prepared in advance for when the ban on pit-bulls is pushed through the legislature. If the programmers have done their job well, once hearing of the ban you will accept it as right and just; indeed, you will likely be surprised to learn that there is not already such a

ban in place! This feeling of surprise is followed, summarily, by the feeling that, of course, there *should* be such a ban, it is long overdue, etc. “Pit-bulls are criminals because the people who own them are . . .” If the show had been blatantly called *Pit-bulls and Criminals*, the effect would have been muted, with the conscious mind instantly rejecting so overt and obvious an implantation. Dog owners would have complained, it would have been easily seen through. So they use the lighter word, *parolees*, implying that the keepers of pit-bulls are merely foolish, stupid, occasionally reckless girls and boys who are not, after all, hopeless cases (they are *trying* to obey the law!), but simply need some social guidance from stronger government regulations to help them along. Animal “Rights” Planet has some skillful manipulators on board, and what they lack in honesty and factuality they make up for in deviousness, writing plausible, though almost never factual, scenarios for their dumbed-down, mind-bombed, fluoride swigging, Global Warming believing, Big Foot loving public.

Animal Planet is overflowing with this kind of programming, inventing designer-prejudices to order; prepackaged opinions you can quote in the workplace without fear of censure, safely knowing you saw it on TV. The plan is to prejudice your mind against the keeping of any kinds of animals, even cats and dogs and gold fish. *They* want to be your only window into Nature . . . Experience *virtually!* Keep out of the woods, watch it on TV! That’s how they do it in Britain, where they already killed all the nature, and Agenda 21 is already old news. In the human hives of the future, there will be no place for pets. *That would be selfish.* A line that was used repeatedly in the late USSR propaganda. Stalin excoriating the people for their “selfishness”. *One must sacrifice for the cause, comrade!* When Russian communism fell the Marxists had to go somewhere; most ended up in environmentalism. Animal Rights is a haven for them (Hitler’s National Socialism invented the concept; it is essentially a branch of eugenics). Not a few of them work for Animal Planet television. All these people have one thing in common: they cannot think factually. And this is ultimately the reason they are attracted to socialist-utopian dogma. They are emotionalists, joiners, and attracted to hierarchy. And like Winston Card, they believe everybody should be just like they are.

Next among AP’s line up of faked reality shows is *Animal Hoarders*. Here again we are presented, all in one title, with the negative associations of a sick obsession combined with reckless evil selfishness. For what is *hoarding* but the miserly accumulation of objects and should animals be treated like objects to be *hoarded*? Obviously not. Animals are living feeling things and should be treated as such, and left to themselves as much as possible (besides they might carry salmonella!). When colliding with human expansion, they should be decently “put to sleep.” (I say put *Animal Planet* to sleep; turn it off!) *Animal Hoarders* focuses on those bleeding hearts in our society who take homeless cats and dogs into their homes and try to help them – preventing them from being put to sleep at the county pound. Many of these *hoarders* can scarcely afford food for themselves and are reduced to eating cat-food, but off they go anyway to the pet supply store with

their meager savings, to save the poor critter from its accidental birth at a *puppy mill* (another buzzword used in consort with *hoarding*.) Such kindly, self-effacing folks are rather rare – literally, one in a million (that is the actual figure) but on Animal (Rights) Planet they are not only selfish monsters, they are as common as pet shops, freaks of misplaced human kindness threatening to break into the fortifications of our safe lives and homes and meow us to death under little white trampling paws.

Now what is the city dog pound but a State sanctioned animal hoarding facility, save that they kill off the poor ex-pets periodically? “*Well, it’s only thanks to the PUPPY MILLS that we have these cruel places!*” blurts Animal Planet. “*Blame the PUPPY MILLS!*”

Now when is the last time you heard of dog breeder producing mongrel mutts for fun and profit?

Yet, what kind of dogs do you find in a dog pound?

Mutts.

Logic is not present at the TV table, nor is it expected by an audience accustomed to feeding on gibberish. It is all meant to be injected into your head at light-speed, faster than any critical thinking could occur. You have to have time to get to your refrigerators.

Let me ask you a serious question about survival. If you were a stray something-or-other, cat, dog, or rat-fink, would you rather be picked up by little old Mrs. Kindheart who lives with her house full of cats in the rotting Victorian mansion on the corner, or Mrs. Strongmouth at Animal Control? I’ll take my chances with Mrs. Kindheart, if you don’t mind. Mrs. Strongmouth will put me to sleep. Would you like to be put to sleep? Animals don’t like it either.

But on Animal (Rights) Planet (where Big Foot is now a full, recognized species with its own trumped up scientific name, on an equal footing with Grizzly Bears), even cat-loving little old ladies must be maligned to make the account sheets balance. Animal Rights is not about saving animals, it is about corporatism and social domination, of which Animal Planet is but a media strong-arm.

The armchair psychologists of the media have stopped at nothing to corrupt every facet of American life and turn it into a potential hotbed of danger waiting to break out and drag us down into a licentious hell. They would turn Aunt Bee into a terrorist (a secret pie hoarder, no doubt), if they could get away with it. Armed with digital cameras, the super-sleuths at Animal Planet rush out by plane, train, and on the backs of camels to infiltrate the lives of the public enemies of Agenda 21 – searching for that rare, one in a million



freak that they can make stand representative of anybody who is not conforming to their ideal of urban sterility and modern high density housing.

God forbid you should make a business from *breeding* animals (which, by the way, animals love to do, just as you enjoy breeding and having children and not being put to sleep by perverted Animal Rights zealots who believe death is better than life). For the breeders of animals are worse even than Mrs. Kindheart who at least has her poor “mental illness” for an excuse; worse indeed, for they are *profiteers* and Mrs. Kindheart’s meowing crew is only a symptom of animal fornication. *You*, the pet breeder, are being *selfish*, while *she* is simply disturbed – but neither one of you are quite right. Keeping is “hoarding” and breeding is “hoarding” with a dollar sign! Parrot Breeders become Parrot *Hoarders*, Reptile breeders become Reptile *Hoarders*, Frog Breeders become Frog *Hoarders* (I have yet to hear of a jelly fish hoarder). And so now we have a *snake mill* to go with our puppy mill, and a *tarantula mill*, and perhaps somewhere in the world, a *squid mill*! Yet there is a stage even more reprehensible, reserved for those who cross the line and actually gather their evil fruits straight out from under the Lord God’s tree – these are the TRAFFICKERS! The animal SMUGGLERS!

Sounds like animal *smotherers*. Conjures images of monkeys suffocating in suitcases. Very effective. Use words that sound like other words that have horrible underlying connotations. Manhattan school of negative-advertising. Edward Bernays would be proud.

In the jingoistic world of television, it is all about inventing a label for those you dislike, in order to justify slinging crap at them. All is fair treatment for a purported villain. Propaganda is an ancient tool, used successfully to cage and contain the half-literate common man since time immemorial. While anybody who can remember it is either aged or dead, the Madison Avenue propagandists of the 1930s well knew the value of the word *hoarder* (miser) from its similarity to the word *whore* (denoting filth and illicit sex), when the private banking interests that controlled (and still control) the Federal front men of our government, decided they wanted to steal the people’s gold away from them and give them nearly worthless paper currency in exchange. The term *Gold Hoarder* sprang instantly on the scene, to typify anybody who was holding out on the Federal shakedown. This word-weapon appeared in bold print simultaneously on the front pages of all the major newspapers in America (21 to be exact), that the International Banking Cartel also owned. All the news that fits the agenda. And now that same shadow government wants you to surrender your pets in trade for a nice little urban slum in a dawning wasp nest. Agenda 21.

Hence when I announced on camera to the *Fatal Attractions* minions of having bred several hundred bushmaster snakes over the years, and made a good living this way for myself and family, supplying these snakes to zoos and laboratories, the salivating producers

seized their chance. They sent in their guard dog, poseur-pundit Winston Card, to lament this clear symptom of “hoarding behavior”! In Card’s Animal Rights style lexicon, snakes are like drugs – once you start you’re hooked, and your whole house will soon be filling up with them. Says the narrator:

*“No one had successfully bred bushmasters in captivity. So Dean was determined to try, soon he was living with nearly 100 at home.”*

Cut to Card, self-projecting himself once again:

*“Most of us who started collecting reptiles when we were younger, might have started out with two or three snakes but it never stops there . . . .”*

The swindlers rub their hands. Through clever cutting they have demolished the meaning of my statement and masked it with their own. It never stops with one! And then suddenly one is on the dark road to Animal Hoarding!

The fact that I was building a successful business worth several million dollars (well exceeding their own show budget), leading to my owning a profitable educational facility (Cape Fear Serpentarium), had to be cut out, else they could not lump me in with the cat lady on the corner, whom they had already demolished in the previous show, *Animal Hoarders*. In fact, once Card got his dagger in, they cut straight to a commercial for *Animal Hoarders*, where the phrase was repeated ad nauseam. So here is Dean Ripa, another in an endless series of obsessed “animal hoarders” – a guy running a snake mill! Worse than that, a *venomous* snake mill! And here is their talking head, Card, the self-proclaimed “herpetologist” there to testify to it!

Now the fact of my having built a successful business from, literally, a handful of snake eggs, had to be left out to make their case stick. That my clients included the world’s major zoos and research laboratories, was another pothole. *Hoarders* are supposed to look poor, struggling and obsessive; not getting rich from it! Hoarders are of a certain dusty type. They have spider webs in their hair, poop on their shoes. They are not supposed to own facilities worth millions of dollars, attended by thousands of school children. Animal Planet contrives to make me look destitute in order to push their political agenda.

But with the snakes being *venomous*, now the producers move in for the kill. Their hired boy Card, hurls out the “ego” card he has all this time kept up his sleeve:

*“We can sit here and say it has nothing to do with our egos and you might believe that; but quite often almost anyone who is interested in venomous snakes will choose to work with the most deadly and the largest venomous snakes they can get their hands on! What does that tell you?”*

Could it be, Mister Card, that large snakes inspire greater awe, and that there are thrills in life that have nothing to do with the *self*, rather, with the forgetting of the *self*, but which you cannot manage to do, and so must project your own personal problems, your “ego” onto others? Could it be that a Serpentarium full of *tiny* serpents rather than large ones will be a *tiny* Serpentarium and attract only tiny numbers of visitor? Could it be that I am getting older and can’t see *tiny* things at my age? Could it be that I am writing a book about the species? Could it be that their venom sells for \$2500 per gram? Could it be that as living specimens they are worth thousands of dollars each? Could it be that the public wants to see “big deadly snakes” to support their own ego problems? Could it be Animal Planet is itself paying to see them and film them and make a show about them, just because they *are* “big and deadly?” Could it be any of these reasons?

No. It is because the owner of the Serpentarium is an egomaniac, and worse, *hoarder*! And worse than that, a deadly snake hoarder! And he is selfish! We know it because we saw it on TV! The man from the dollar store told us so! Says Card when describing my snakebite, which happened, as I have already described, when I was completely alone (this fact had already been reported in Mertens, 2009, and submitted earlier to the producers):

*“Some people’s need for attention is so strong that they are willing to ignore their own mortality to achieve that level of attention.”*

This man that I had never met before the film crew got there, and spent no more than half an hour talking with, has these deep and fascinating insights into what people do when they are by themselves, and the imaginary audiences they are performing before. Having seen evidence from Dean’s own lips that his snakes were becoming too many, and that he was faced with the choice of building a full-scale Serpentarium to house them all, “Nurse Ratched” chimes in with her shrill, superior and disdainful tone:

*“Dean wasn’t content with local copperheads and rattlesnakes. He wanted bigger, more dangerous pets! His secret obsession was spiraling out of control!”*

God, what language! Torn from the pages of pulp fiction! What was “spiraling out of control”, my bank account? The more snakes I bred, the more money I made. These snakes so “out of control” were not being born by accident, they were being produced deliberately, as a business, from which proceeds I supported my family, and paid taxes. In short, these snakes were very much in control! But that is not mentioned in *Fatal Attractions*. It might detract from the sense of horror. I might look less like one of the “hoarders” coming up next!

No doubt the producers will plead time constraints for all these important omissions of logic and sequence. Sort of like, “I’ve only got time to tell this one lie before I go to break. Sorry, so much has to be left out.”

Liars yes, but also *paid* liars. They have got to sell soap and coming episodes of *Animal Hoarders*, ten times to an hour.

As fast as the media can invent jingle-names for their poor victims, they stone them in the editing room. Next thing you know poor Mrs. Kindheart finds herself facing down Mrs. Strongmouth, and watches her feline babies being taken away from her on the same TV show that framed her. She learns about what filth and squalor she lives in, and how awful she is, and how she needs mental help. The corporate media has syndicated her shortcomings. The same corporate media *cartel* (in soft-speak called a *conglomerate*) that owns Animal (Rights) Planet. “There was poop everywhere on her floors!” bleats Mrs. Strongmouth. Yes, and there is poop also at Animal Planet – lots of it.

Viacom, Disney, AOL Time Warner, Sony, Universal, Bertelsmann and News Corp – take your pick which lies you want to hear: their boards are interlocking and interchangeable. And they have gobbled up any competition capable of revealing who and what they are. If you have the impression of worldwide trends of thought appearing spontaneously throughout the world, do not think it is Gaia at work. It is money. Money and agenda. It is completely orchestrated by the interlocking boards of directors that govern this the planet through manipulating popular opinion – a world mindset being farmed, nurtured and directed by a very few rich families and their foundations. Families, by the way, who profit from war and mass murder.

Television is God, religion, judge, jury, executioner all in one. Science is its captive, opinion its plaything. It is Molech feeding infants into a flickering fire. It answers to no one, plants its plague seeds and then moves on to the next field, the next brain. It takes no prisoners, and yet holds everyone hostage. And it is in every home, the new head of every family (put dad out on the doorstep with the cat), a raucous, chattering, self-satisfied thief holding a gun to the heads of all those careless enough to harbor it, a secret dictator that cannot be deposed.

Television is about rabble-rousing. You are at war with the middle-east because your friendly TV channel sent you there, and demanded the blood of the Board’s enemy. The politicians comply. They know better than to oppose them – they will be vilified, scandalized, defeated and de-elected on screen. The Media investors have war goods to sell you, war loans to make high interest, and yes, will even sell you the coffins to put your dead children in. While the kindly old cat lady who lives in the Victorian house on the corner is branded as a *selfish animal hoarder* on Animal (Rights) Planet, so are your young men and women turned into “heroes” to make their deaths more palatable, their murderous actions abroad seem more inevitable and necessary. Their young souls are stolen from them in exchange for cheap brass stripes to hang on their shoulders, tin tripe dangling from their breasts. Barbarians are glorified, and monsters like Obama and Bush lionized, while charitable and truly *selfless* personalities are turned into witches and stoned

to death (as recommended by that most abominable of all Judean tracts, *Leviticus*). This is Media. This is the Scapegoat Industry that holds your planet captive.

*Fatal Attractions* is about terror and promoting the greatest of all human terrors, that of being murdered in the jaws of a wild animal. And a horror that could be starting out in some innocent way, unnoticed, when little Tommy starts bringing home frogs and turtles from the patch of woods next door. “Beware, it never ends there,” rants the poseur-pundit. “He will graduate to snakes and then suddenly hundreds of snakes! He will become obsessed, hypnotized! – a little Dean Ripa hiding cobras in his attic! *Why, snakes are worse than heroin – it never stops with the first shot!*”

Of course there are some things you have to leave out when you want to burn your victim properly. Don’t mention how that one little snake or frog or turtle could turn into profitable business with a lot of expensive real-estate underneath it – your victim might not look so seedy while you are lighting the faggots, and the starry eyed mob who evidently loves his Serpentarium, might even come to his rescue before you fully defame him. Don’t mention that your victim is the author of a widely quoted scientific book on the subject you have not bothered to read before turning up on his doorstep begging for a photo shoot. No-o-o – portray Dean Ripa as that new species of think-tank invented monster, an “animal hoarder!” And his 10,000 sq ft, multi-story, Cape Fear Serpentarium, do not dignify it with the word “museum”, imply it is some sort of “hoarding facility.” Don’t mention that it is one of the most attended attractions in the State (ranking with the Battleship USS North Carolina) – cut that part out. Instead, get up at six o’clock in the morning before the crowds get there, and take pictures of the building’s empty façade, and then add a pair of spooky laboratory doors, taken from 1950s horror movies. Leave out the fact that it is prime real-estate in the gentrified Historic District (with strict architectural requirements), which supports a carriage ride, a trolley, and a historic tour. Don’t mention that it fronts the major access to the 20 million dollar River Walk, is surrounded on all sides by the most expensive restaurants in the State, is on the same street as the Children’s Museum (one block down), the Community Arts Center (half a block), the historic USO building, and four doors down from the oldest Masonic lodge in America. Don’t mention that it is itself situated on one of the State’s most historic sites, the 250 year old Wilmington Iron Works. All is fair in love and war and this is not love here, it is Animal Rights fighting a crusade against private ownership of “exotic animals.”

Don’t mention that zoos like mine provide a basic need for human beings to be near some element of the wilderness they are fast losing because the mentality that made *Fatal Attractions* is the same mentality that fled Nature to begin with, and then vilified Nature through tall-tale telling in books and newspapers and movies, and losers like Winston Card, in order to profit from a nature-frightened, dependent, urban slave estate.

Rather, point the people toward your victim-scapegoat and cut in imagery that is appalling. A deserted street blowing with trash at dawn after a million tourists have trampled by, can be made to look like the end of the world at 6 o'clock in the morning. And so the director got up early . . . Hayley K. Smith already knew what "artistic license" she would take.

Propagandists are not necessarily intelligent people, merely controlling and manipulative. Since they are not especially creative and not really thinkers they resort to parroting a variety of age old clichés. "People who keep snakes are hoarders, and as we all know, one drink (snake) leads to another!" Association: *addiction*. "People who keep snakes are on an ego trip, or doing it "to get attention." Association: *unstable, dangerous to others and himself*. In the larger sense, this tactic is intended to sterilize modern manhood and promote submission, vanity, weakness and "metro sexuality." The Network can sell more hair color that way. But that is not the real reason. A submissive, vain, metro-sexual male would be quite unsuccessful at wresting power away from an already reigning despot; whereas in Cambodia they exterminated their best minds; or, as in Biblical days, killed their male children, in modern America they simply neuter them with propaganda, and through the public fools system. Poor Winston, already quite effectively sterilized by his masters as he stocks shelves at *Dollar Rama*, is well aware of his position – and he doesn't like it one bit. But there is one way to rescue his crushed ego, and that is by being "the herpetologist" on *Fatal Attractions*. Now he can avenge himself against all the so-called "hoarders" out there in the world who are hoarding more money than he is, and hoarding some amount of fame and prestige while doing it. He becomes a professional killjoy, attacking anybody who lives the dreams he lost track of. Poor broke Winston must have been terribly jealous of me when he came to my gorgeous state-of-the-art Serpentarium – I had gone a lot farther in life than he had. And when he found himself standing in a room filled with more rare and expensive snakes than he had ever seen (for I gave him a backstage tour), the painful words choked out of him: "Boy, you've got a lot of money tied up here!" Yes, Winston, yes. More money in this one room than you will make working at *Dollar Rama* for the next decade. And more money to build or buy this Serpentarium than you will ever make spreading lies on *Fatal Attractions*. And all that made from the *hoarding* of snakes! Surely such a man as myself, must be very *arrogant*. Poor Winston. Can one blame him for trying to fight back?

Let's look at how far Winston Card is willing to bend the truth to salve his own failed dreams. Despite claiming the title of "herpetologist" he is even willing to contradict medical opinion about snakebite, in order to see his goal met.

Here is the dollar store herpetologist telling the audience that because I declined antivenom in some of my snake bites, I was simply pumping up my own ego, on a macho trip to see if I could survive:

*“You would have to be an incredibly arrogant individual to make the decision to not take antivenom when it’s readily available for a venomous snake bite.”*

With this incredible blunder, the salivating lap dog traps himself, showing how little worthy he is of his self-conferred title “herpetologist”. Card’s statement contradicts all medical evidence. Antivenom should not to be used wantonly in venomous bites, as any doctor will tell you. The bite should be severe enough to warrant it – if not, it should not be administered. I quote from *Snake Venom Poisoning* by Dr. Findlay Russell:

*“When an initial or tentative diagnosis of snake venom poisoning has been established, it must be determined whether or not antivenom is indicated. I do not advise the use of antivenom for minor envenomations. When at 30 minutes to 1 hour, the swelling is confined to the area of the bite; there are no paresthesias, fasciculations, ecchymoses, or bleb formations; there are no other symptoms than pain; and there are normal laboratory findings, it is not our practice to give antivenom. Such patients are observed for 4 hours, while others are put to bed overnight.”*

Antivenom is dangerous to use, and doctors know it. It can kill you as quickly as the snake venom (through causing anaphylaxis), promotes sensitivity to horse serum, thus making antivenom impossible to use later on. It also causes a severe serum sickness 3-5 days after its administration. The fraud Card, who is not a medical doctor, has with a few words spread all over America the bad advice that antivenom should be given in all snakebites. This is irresponsible to say the least. But the taste of blood is in the pundit’s mouth, and he forgets himself as he moves in for the attack.

Card’s burdensome ego must have felt very strong and powerful when he made that statement. Fortunately, the director was right on board with him, to edit out from my own interview the qualifying statement as to why I did not take the antivenom in the first place! *Because I feared a dangerous allergic reaction! Moreover, an increased sensitivity to horse serum later on, in case I should need antivenom again!*

This was made very clear to the director, Hayley K. Smith before filming. She (and producer, Anna Williams) were directed to one of my published, oft-cited articles on the subject of snakebite, *Six New Cases of Bushmaster Envenoming* (2000; 2005) where all this information was contained. Here the bites and their treatment were recounted in detail, as well as the actual reason for my not taking antivenom. But Winston Card and his supervisors at Oxford Films could not be troubled to read that paper, though they greedily took the photos of my snakebites directly from it.

Here is what that article says, and what they were presented prior to filming:

*“Suspecting that administration of antivenom at this stage would only complicate the picture of what clearly represented a form of shock, and to avoid confusing symptoms with a possible autopharmacological reaction to the horse serum (the unusual symptomatology of the previous bite had left this question unanswered), I refrained from using antivenom in this case and injected 50 mg diphenhydramine instead (frequent vomiting prevented retaining it orally).”*

End quote.

This material was supplied to Oxford Films producer Anna Williams and director Hayley K. Smith well before the production commenced. In fact, we know they read the paper, because they cribbed the photos from it. They even used it in their narration to selectively document the symptoms of the bite. In their grossly simplified words, “he became violently ill and in 40 minutes had no pulse.” In sum, they *read* the paper. But to prove their production agenda of “psychological unbalance” among keepers of exotic animals, they chose to ignore it. In the 2 hour long interview they did with me (cut down to about 3 minutes air time) I repeated this information. They edited those statements out. If they had not, fraud Card’s remarks would have been seen as unfounded *and medically dangerous advice!* They would have been forced to edit out Card’s rash statement.

One of the techniques used by propaganda artists is selective editing, simply taking things out of context and inventing new contexts to support their agenda. Suppose you were to say on camera, “I am going to cut your head off –” then CUT. And now the pundit remarks, “he is an extremely violent and dangerous person!” Seems perfectly justified, doesn’t it? After all, you have just heard the man say he is going to cut somebody’s head off – how much more violent can you get? But what you actually said was, “I am going to cut your head off if you don’t give me a taste of that ice-cream!” At which point the listener understands at once that the remark is made purely in fun. There are as many variations as there are sentences that can be manipulated. The art of propaganda is the art of altering the context.

The narration written for *Fatal Attractions* is deliberately crafted to convey a sense of isolation and illicitness about the Serpentarium – which is never even called a “Serpentarium” on film, rather a “private collection.” The standing-room-only crowds with which the film crew were forced to contend with in mid-July tourist season were carefully omitted, as were the feeding shows with more 300 people in attendance every day. The bus loads of school children are never seen, nor the snake petting area crammed with dozens of cub scouts and summer day-camp kids. The producers never let it look like anybody is having a good time – in fact they don’t even show anybody there at all! Nothing human may be allowed to penetrate, only doom and gloom, loneliness and horror. We see the same shots of the same bushmasters striking, over and over again, each looking more sinister than the last, followed by Winston Card’s tiresome moralizing about how sick these kinds of people are. Kooks are better portrayed as lonely, derelict individuals than as successful business men living in the hub of bustling activity in a chic downtown. Menace is made more frightening when it seems secret, arcane. So let’s put Dean Ripa in a lonely setting – a lonely haunted house on the hill.



“On this lonely street in Wilmington, NC, behind these ordinary walls,” (shots of horror movie doors) “are the most dangerous snakes in the world . . . .”

And yet it is all contradictory, so little have the writers researched their material, so little attention have they paid even to their own confusing statements. First the narrator says that the young man (myself) was hiding his snakes from everybody, even his mother and father (which is true), circa 1969; but then the narration reverses itself by saying he “went public” (their words) during the year 2001! As though I had been hiding my snakes for 32 years! What had I been doing for the previous three decades during which I undoubtedly handled snakes? Not in public, whatever it was. Because, as they say, I “went public” in 2001!

But look . . . Winston Card has just told us that my motive for keeping snakes is to “show off!” In his words, I am a man “craving attention!”

*“I think some people’s need for attention is so strong that they are willing to ignore their own mortality to achieve that level of attention.”*

And so we have a man both craving attention and yet somehow living in a closet at the same time, “going public” years after writing papers and even books on the subject, as well as operating a successful business, yet still somehow living in total secrecy!

So which is it, Oxford Films? Am I an attention-craving menace or a lonely, brooding secret menace, ala Norman Bates in *Psycho*? You can’t have both. Card’s store house of clichés are all interchangeable and can be used on any of the characters *Fatal Attractions* chooses to attack. Cut in pundit Winston Card with Joe Slowinski or Dean Ripa or Bill Haast or Ross Allen or any of a thousand other snake keepers, and it would be the same old-hat – Winston can fit his lips around any specimen. The audience won’t know any better – or so the sly producers think.

It gets even more farcical, for like everything else in *Fatal Attractions*, the statement “he went public in 2001” is itself false. More than a dozen newspapers and magazines had written articles about “Dean Ripa and snakes” prior to 1980, some dating back to when I was in high school in 1973. These articles were submitted to the producer during the production. I myself had been publishing articles on snakes since the 1980s. William S. Burroughs describes my snake hunting experiences in Africa in his novel, *The Western Lands* (1987; Viking Press). In 1994 I had already published *Confessions of a Gaboon Viper Lover*, in hardback (ed. Gary Indiana, Faber and Faber). By 1999 I had published the first and still only scientific book on the bushmaster snake, “The Bushmasters: Genus *Lachesis*; Morphology in Evolution and Behavior.” Somehow *Fatal Attractions* lost track of 32 years of my life, and all my books and papers in the process! And here is where they reveal just how lost they are: I was even featured in a Discovery TV show, *The*

*Ultimate Guide to Snakes*, that was also shown on *Animal Planet*! That was in 1997. The fools do not even know their own programming!

So where does “going public in year 2001” come in?

Because, my dears, if you are “going public” the implication is that *you have had something to hide!*

And why do people hide things? Because they are wrong or illegal or god knows what!

And so their intention is to represent the snake-keeper as a kind of dangerous, brooding phenomenon.

The lonely terror on a remote back street in a small southern town! The stuff of “Willard” and “Stanley” and “Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?”! My question is, whatever happened to *Animal Planet*? Answer: they merged with *The World Weekly News* and the *PETA* bulletin.

*Fatal Attractions* straddles both sides of the line of lies and truth, and picks which one will most serve its interests, without regard for facts and not even for its own continuity. It can't keep its own story straight. There is an air of schizophrenia about the show. So long as the terror tactics are served, they think their audience will be happy. They are confident, as the conman is confident, that the rubes out there in TV land will not notice the fast one that is being pulled on them. The commercial interruptions will mask their contempt for truth, and throw off any attempt at analysis. The producers shout the information they want heard, then duck back behind their advertisers. By the time you have come back to the show, you've forgotten what message they have already implanted in your head. Their attack mutt Card is so anxious to strike his knife home that he ignores medical advisements. He makes an incredible blunder, telling us that antivenom should be used with impunity, without discretion, in any venomous snake bite, without even assessing the worth of the treatment. For not to use antivenom, he says, would involve “arrogance and vanity!” The point is served, and served so quickly that reason and analysis with never catch up with it. The beer and tater-tots crowd will not know the difference. *Big Foot* is on next, after *Animal Hoarders*.

*Fatal Attractions* is an Animal Rights adjunct. It is propaganda, not education. It is not factual educational programming – it is Hollywood psychodrama with a British twist.

Ten minutes after the show ended, a little stunned after the bloodletting I had just seen, and regretting having foolishly let such horrible people into my home and workplace, I sat there in the dark contemplating the level of betrayal I had just witnessed.

Hayley K. Smith had a choice to make a film that reflected truth, and that did justice to the people who helped her. She did not take that road. More than once I risked my life on set to make sure she got the priceless shots she took home with her. Without that, she would have had nothing but some prosaic footage of snakes sleeping peacefully in cages. I set the snakes up for her, posed them, taunted them so that they would coil defensively, bite and show their fangs. I moved the lights and camera equipment around, for tight in shots, so that their crew would be in no danger. For the use of my facility, for making the snakes strike on cue so that it looked like they were striking at the actor who played me (when it was really *me* they were striking at, and the actor not even allowed in the room!) for, in short, putting *my life* in danger *for her movie*, she declared me on film a “show off” and an “egoist who craved attention.” Finally, she couldn’t resist reminding everyone about my “reckless behavior”, and how hell and death was surely waiting for me if I did not mend my rotten ways.

*“We’re talking about a snake that’s 9 -10 feet long,”* says the forever panicked Winston Card. *“That snake could possibly strike 2/3<sup>d</sup> the length of its body! . . . And I have consistently seen Dean get within a foot of these snakes! That kind of reckless behavior ultimately –”* pregnant pause, *“is probably going to end badly for him!”*

Cut to scenes of Dean Ripa “back at work again” after his accident, and taking terrible chances as usual, the fool! Only I am not really back “at work” as that claim, unless my work has changed to that of “snake-wrangler” for Oxford Films, for that is exactly what I was doing while those images were being taken. The snide narrator chimes in:

*“But Dean’s risk taking day’s where not yet over. Today Dean continues to work close and unprotected with his deadly snakes . . . .”*

This is how *Fatal Attractions* thanks the people who do the dirty work, the dangerous work, for them, while they, cowards like Winston Card, hide behind a screen.

I stuck my neck out for them.

They chopped it off.

The vipers bit savagely the hand that fed them.

THE END