

[HOME](#) > [EXECUTIVE LIFESTYLE](#)

MONSTER PORN: Amazon Cracks Down On America's Latest Sex Fantasy

Eric Spitznagel Dec 21, 2013, 7:00 AM



Mike Nudelman/Business Insider

Author Virginia Wade's fiction debut follows a group of women who embark on a week-long camping trip to Mt. Hood National Forest. There, in the shadow of Oregon's highest mountain, they are kidnapped and sexually assaulted by a mysterious woodland creature. "What the hell is that thing?" asks one protagonist.

"‘It's f---ing Bigfoot,’ hissed Shelly. ‘He's real, for f---'s sake.’ Horror filled her eyes. ‘With a huge c---.’"

The book, with the decidedly un-PG title "Cum For Bigfoot," is just the first of [16 fiction ebooks](#) that Wade (a pen name) has written about the legendary beast sometimes known as Sasquatch, each detailing a series of graphic and often violent sexual encounters between the apelike creature and his female human lovers. Wade has made an exceptional living writing these stories.



Virginia Wade's bigfoot erotica has been downloaded more than 100,000 times.

Amazon

It began in December of 2011. A stay-at-home mother from Parker, Colo., Wade had no ambition to be a published author and no real writing experience other than a few attempts at historical romance in the mid-90s. But then, she says, "I got this crazy idea for a story." So she sat down and wrote the entire book — more of a novella, at just 12,000 words — in a matter of weeks. She never even considered trying to sell it to a mainstream publisher. Instead, she went directly to Amazon's [Kindle Direct Publishing](#), an online

platform for self-publishing with a 70% royalty rate for authors. (The average royalty percentage for authors with mainstream publishers is between 8 and 15%.)

"Cum For Bigfoot" wasn't an overnight best-seller. "The first month, I think I made \$5," Wade admits. But over the course of 2012, the book was downloaded well over 100,000 times. "And that was just Amazon," she says. "That's not counting iTunes or Barnes & Noble or any of the other places that sell self-published books." With no marketing muscle, no bookstore tours or print reviews or any of the publicity that most top authors use to sell books, she started bringing in staggering profits. During her best months, she says, she netted \$30,000 or more. At worst, she'd bank around six grand — "nothing to complain about," she says.

She branched into other genres, penning ebooks like "[Taken By Pirates](#)" and "[Seduced By The Dark Lord](#)," but her "Cum For Bigfoot" series was the biggest money-maker. "I started cranking them out," she says. "If there was a market there for monster sex, I was gonna give it to them." She even brought in her family to help with the workload. "My dad, who's an English instructor, was my editor," Wade says. "My mom did the German translations" — including the equally popular "Komm für Bigfoot." "I even had my own 401k. It became a cottage industry."

The prose wouldn't win any fiction awards (a sample line: "From within the tufts of matted hair, the creature released a huge pale c--- that defied logic"), but her readers loved it, and their numbers seemed to be growing every day. "I was putting my daughter through college with the profits," Wade says. "I used to joke with her, 'Bigfoot smut is paying for your school.'"

Wade is hardly the only author who has made a mint writing about monsters and the women who love them (or at least submit to their sexual appetites). She's part of a burgeoning literary genre that's found a wide audience online: monster porn, otherwise known as "cryptozoological erotica," or as some of the authors prefer to call it, "erotic horror." Their self-published books feature mythical creatures of every possible variety, from minotaurs to mermen, cthulhus to leprechauns, extraterrestrials



Author Virginia Wade enlisted her family's help to meet the demand for her work. Courtesy of Virginia Wade

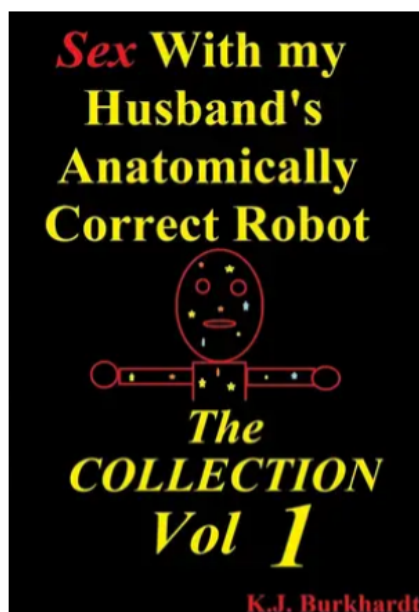
to cyclops, who become involved in sexual trysts, often non-consensual, with human lovers. They have titles that are often more silly than sexy — from "[Demons Love Ass](#)," part of Trisha Danes' "Beasts & Booty" collection, to "[Frankenstein's Bitch](#)" and "[Sex With My Husband's Anatomically Correct Robot](#)" — and the plots are never less than imaginative. A feline shapeshifter might be saved from a tree by a firefighter with a cat fetish (as in the ebook "[Out on a Limb](#)"), or a buxom cattle rancher might be abducted and kept enslaved "in a strange, perverted alien zoo" ("[Milked by the Aliens](#)").

It's easy to snicker, but somebody is buying these things. Authors of monster porn may not be notching sales to rival E.L. James or Amanda Hocking, the trailblazers of self-published erotica, but they're making more than enough to survive. That's especially remarkable given the low price tag on many of their books. "Amazon pays a royalty of 35 percent for books listed below \$2.99," says K.J. Burkhardt (a pen name), the 45-year-old author of "[Taken by the Tentacle Monsters](#)" and "[Bred to the Creature](#)." "For those listed at \$2.99 and over, I can claim 70 percent in royalty payments. But I didn't feel comfortable nor right in asking someone to pay \$2.99 for a five-to-seven-thousand-word short story." So instead, the majority of her titles are listed at 99 cents, the minimum allowed by Amazon. "Even with the small prices that I was asking," she says, "it doesn't take much imagination to guess that I was selling a lot of books to earn \$4,000 each month."

Then everything changed.

Attack of the Pitchfork Brigade

In October, the online news site The Kernel [published an incendiary story](#) called "An Epidemic of Filth," claiming that online bookstores like Amazon, Barnes & Noble, WHSmith, and others were selling self-published ebooks that featured "rape fantasies, incest porn and graphic descriptions of bestiality and child abuse." The story ignited a media firestorm in the U.K, with major news outlets like the Daily Mail, The Guardian, and the BBC reporting on the "[sales of sick ebooks](#)." Some U.K.-based ebook retailers responded with public apologies, and WHSmith went so far as to shut down its website altogether, releasing a statement saying that it would reopen "once all self-published eBooks have been removed and we are totally sure that there are no offending titles available." The response in the U.S. was somewhat more muted, but most of the retailers mentioned in the piece, including Amazon and Barnes & Noble, began quietly pulling hundreds of titles from their online shelves — an event Kobo coo Michael Tamblyn referred to last month as "[erotica-gate](#)."



The title pretty much says it all. [Amazon](#)

The crackdown was meant to target the obvious offenders — ebooks like "Daddy's Birthday Gang Bang" and others that fetishized incest and rape — but in their fervor to course-correct, the online bookstores started deleting, according to [The Digital Reader blog](#), "not just the questionable erotica but [also].... any e-books that might even hint at violating cultural norms." That included crypto-porn. Wade's sexy Sasquatch, not unlike the elusive hominid beast of legend, vanished without a

trace.

But it wasn't just Bigfoot who was herded into extinction. Wade says that 60% of her titles disappeared from Amazon and other online bookstores. "They started sending my books randomly back to draft mode" — where new ebooks are uploaded and edited before going on sale — "and I'd get an email from them saying, 'We found the following books in violation of our content guidelines,'" she recalls. "But they wouldn't tell me why. There were no specifics. It was a huge guessing game trying to figure out what the issue was."

She altered the titles of several volumes in her blockbuster series, from "Cum For Bigfoot" to "Moan For Bigfoot," and they were returned to Amazon's shelves, but now they're only seen by readers searching for them specifically. "They can still be found in the store," Wade says, "but it requires extra digging." Even more confusing, only some of her titles were flagged by Amazon, so while some books are listed as "Moan For Bigfoot," others remain "Cum For Bigfoot."

Burkhardt had a similar experience. "Amazon has been systematically banning just about every book I have listed with them," she says. As with Wade, she was told her books had violated content guidelines. "The guidelines are very vague," she says. "Reading

them implies any and all erotic pornography is prohibited, so I'm left to wonder exactly what erotica is allowed." "[Taken By the Monsters 4](#)," which Burkhardt first published with Amazon in July of 2012, disappeared from the site just a few weeks ago. "After 16 months, they have determined that it either no longer meets their guidelines or they didn't really look it over to begin with and just now caught it," she says.



There are plenty of fish in the sea. Mike Nudelman/Business Insider

Beauty and the Beast

Amazon declined to comment for this article. Its content guidelines state that the company doesn't accept "offensive depictions of graphic sexual acts." But works that contain precisely that, from de Sade's "[Justine](#)" and Pauline Réage's "[The Story of O](#)" to the recently released French bestseller "[The Victoria System](#)" by Éric Reinhardt (which contains the memorable line "My erection beat time in my underwear") are readily available.

To explain the policy, the site offers this unhelpful bit of advice: "What we deem offensive is probably about what you would expect." Vague as that may be, Amazon is within its legal rights to stock whatever books it chooses. "Bookstores are private enterprises, and are thus not required to sell every book that people ask them to sell," says Eugene Volokh, a professor of law at UCLA who specializes in First Amendment cases. "There is no law of which I'm aware that would require bookstores to sell a book that they disapprove of, whether or not we might think their judgments of disapproval are sound." Amazon makes the same point elsewhere in the content guidelines, when it notes, "We reserve the right to make judgments about whether content is appropriate and to choose not to offer it."



The ancient Greeks would approve.
Amazon

Burkhardt, who lives in Northern Virginia and writes as a hobby — she claims her day job is working as a personal protection specialist for a foreign ambassador — continued emailing Amazon with questions, and soon learned that the main objection was to her book's listing descriptions, which anybody pursuing the Amazon website could read. They were too graphic, she was told, and potentially offensive. Burkhardt wanted to compromise, but she worried that a less detailed

description would cause more trouble in the long run. "I want readers to know exactly what they are buying when they make a purchase," she says, "and not be surprised and offended later because I couldn't say the book contains explicit sex with monsters."

Her concern isn't unjustified. One can only imagine a "Fifty Shades of Grey" fan happening upon Burkhardt's ebook "[Taken by the Monsters](#)," and their horror upon reading about the vicious gang-rape of a woman by hirsute "humanoid" creatures in an abandoned building, which ends with them "filling her womb deep with [their] monster seed." A little spanking this isn't.

Author [Emerald Ice](#) (a pen name) — who lives in southern Illinois with her husband, a Catholic high school teacher — is less concerned about offending Amazon browsers than being overlooked by potential paying customers. The first three books in her [Alien Sex Slave Series](#) — "Alien Love Slave," "The Sex Arena," and "Alien Sex Cove" — were runaway hits, she says. At least until Amazon pulled them from distribution and requested changes, once again citing content guidelines. That's how "Alien Sex Slave" became "[Sidney's Alien Escapades](#)." "I hate it," she admits of the new title. "I came up with it because I was in a panic about the books disappearing." Her sales have since plummeted, and she isn't surprised. "If I was a reader searching for hot alien sex books, I wouldn't look twice at something called 'Sidney's Alien Escapades.'"

JESSI BOND

MONSTER BREEDING

MEGA BOX SET

BRED BY THE SASSUATCH

BRED BY THE DEMON

BRED BY THE WEST

BRED WITH THE BEAST ALL OUTER SPACE TEENAGE GANGBANG BREEDING WITH THE BEAST

Monster erotica is often purchased in series form. [Amazon](#)

Even so, she and other monster-sex authors are more than a little unsettled by the recent purge, which lumps their work in with ebooks depicting rape, incest and bestiality — unfairly they insist. The latter label is especially dangerous, says Xavier, who authored books like ["Cuckwolved"](#) and ["At the Mercy of the Boar God."](#) Although she considers bestiality "an egregious act of animal cruelty when it occurs in real life," she's not so sure it should be off-limits to writers. "If writers want to write about it, that's great for them, because plenty of people love reading about it." Then again, that doesn't mean she wants to be in any way associated with the genre. "It's a mediastorm waiting to happen," she says. "It's massively taboo — more so than incest, I think. It has the potential to be incredibly damaging to the whole image of erotic literature."

Wild Kingdom

Is crypto-smut the same thing as bestiality lit? It may seem like a fine distinction to the uninitiated, but for many authors, it's crucial. "Is a werewolf an animal? What about a minotaur?" asks Mark Coker, the founder and CEO of [Smashwords](#)—one of the few ebook self-publishing platforms that didn't clean house in October. "Where do you draw the line? Sex with beasts is a common theme in paranormal romance. Do dinosaurs need to be a protected class of animal? What about a Sasquatch? When are they real, when are they not, when can you have sex with them and when can you not?"



Satyrs are such notoriously passionate creatures, there's a whole disorder named for them. Mike Nudelman/Business Insider

And even in the cases when the creature is an animal (a giant squid, for instance) Xavier insists that the power dynamic is critical. "How can you commit animal cruelty when the monster is in control, is consenting, and is an intelligent being?" she points out. In the world of fantasy, a creature can be classified as a person, she says, even if it's not

a human person. "A barnyard animal is just an animal without the power of consent."

Modern crypto-porn has more in common with the myths of ancient Greece, many of which feature gods taking animal form — Zeus was famous for this move — and having their way with humans. "Just because he turns into a swan doesn't mean he's turned into an ordinary animal," Xavier points out. "He's still a god with his godly powers and intelligence, just in the form of a swan."

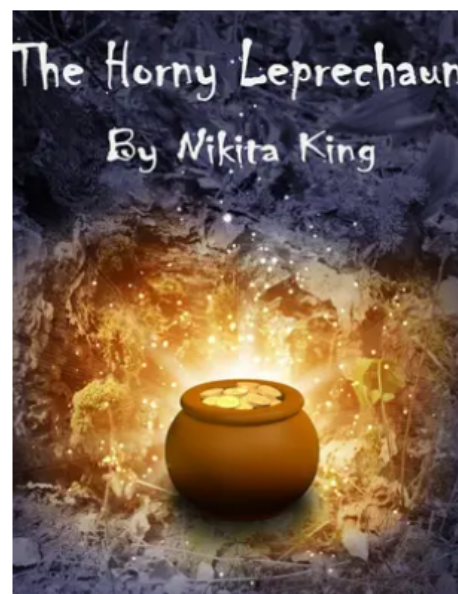
Smashwords, which gives authors 85% of net profit, regardless of their work's length, had its own issues with censorship last February, when PayPal threatened to deactivate the ebookstore's account if it didn't cease selling, according to a PayPal statement, "erotic fiction that contains bestiality, rape and incest."

Although Smashwords initially complied, especially with regard to incest and sex involving underage characters, Coker was never comfortable with PayPal's other objections. "Dubious consent is a really big theme in mainstream romance," he says. "Where do you draw the lines? In mainstream romance, the woman may not want to have sex, and the man forces himself on her, and later in the book they're smiling and happy. Look at *Gone With the Wind*, where Rhett is hauling Scarlett up the stairway and she's yelling 'No, no, no!' To what extent can financial institutions regulate what people are allowed to imagine in the safety of their own mind?"

PayPal and Smashwords reached a truce in mid-March. "PayPal's worst fear was always that their payment systems would be used for illegal underage erotica and illegal underage pornography," says Coker. "Once they learned of our prohibition against such content ... they gained the confidence they needed to lift the proposed restrictions."

The initial purge of erotica on Amazon may have passed, but according to several authors, their monster sex ebooks continue to disappear from virtual shelves on a regular basis. Given her initial success, Burkhardt says, "I was seriously considering quitting my job and taking up writing full time. I'm glad I decided to wait and see, because after Amazon started banning some of my titles, my sales dropped dramatically."

Her monthly profits from Amazon went from over \$2,000 in early 2013 to just \$400 last month. "I can't really complain," she concedes. "It's still a great supplemental income. But I can't help but wonder how much I would be making if I was allowed to publish with Amazon some of the stories they have since blocked or banned."



Everyone's after his lusty charms?
Amazon

Some of the genre's authors would like to give up on Amazon entirely, furious at the way they've been treated. But it's difficult to walk away from the world's largest online retailer, even if you're confident that you've got something readers want. "There is a growing audience for this type of literature," says Burkhardt. "And I wish Amazon could see that." Of course, authors could sell exclusively with Smashwords, which offers mostly unlimited creative freedom and a better cut of the profits. But the platform doesn't have nearly the reach. "Amazon is the big dog," says Emerald Ice. "They're well known, their books are easy to download. It's easy, and consumers want easy. Heck, I want easy. Smashwords is still kind of underground."

Another option is following the path forged by E.L. James, who started out writing "Twilight" fan-fiction under the pen name Snowqueens Icedragon before landing a major publisher and going on to earn something in the neighborhood of \$95 million. But as Emerald Ice learned, even with a track record of sales, books about monster sex are hard to place with an established imprint. "Nobody wants to touch the taboo risqué alien books," she says. "They're just too out-there, I guess. I tried a few publishers, and it was the fastest rejection I ever got in my life. Within two days, it was 'Thank you, no, no, this isn't what we're looking for! Please get this off my computer!'"

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We attempted to contact several publishers, asking if they'd ever been offered monster erotica. None of them responded. Literary agent Steven Axelrod, who represents [Amanda Hocking](#) — an author who made close to \$2 million with her self-published paranormal romances, including "[Hollowland](#)" and "[My Blood Approves](#)" — says he has "absolutely no knowledge of 'horror erotica.'" A representative from Valerie Hoskins Associates in London, the literary agency that reps E.L. James, was apparently so opposed to being included in a story about the genre that they responded to requests for comment with "We know nothing about self publishing or erotica." (You read it here first: "[Fifty Shades of Grey](#)" has absolutely nothing to do with self-publishing or erotica.)

Judging a Book by Its Cover

Xavier, who when not writing smut works as a user-interface designer, has taken a different tack. Rather than argue with Amazon over content guidelines, she's looked for ways to make her books less of a target. "At its core, Amazon is trying to clean up the presentation," she says. "I think that's a good thing, because it keeps all the erotica online and for sale."



Erotic ebooks often feature close encounters with alien species. Mike Nudelman/Business Insider

Ebooks featuring incest and rape tend to share a singular defining feature: sexually explicit and poorly produced covers. The way for monster erotica to survive, she thinks, is to "dress it up like fantasy." No more trashy illustrations. "My covers are pretty classy," she says. "It's all a facade, of course. My plots are depraved. They're definitely not for kids or grandmothers. But I put it in a glossy package, so it doesn't offend anybody who's just searching through Amazon."

Her book "[Alien Seed](#)" is a perfect example of this strategy. The cover looks like any mainstream romance novel, with the image of a reclining and scantily-clad model bathed in green light. But the image doesn't even hint at the content (sample: "I was either in some ridiculous ... dream or aboard an alien spaceship full of robotic tools capable of delivering epic orgasms").

"If you want to be a major player in this field," Xavier adds, "you need to act like one."



Many monster porn authors employ pen names. [Amazon](#)

Virginia Wade has a different plan. "Writing monster erotica has become a hostile work environment," she says. "I'm tired of the BS. It's just easier to write in a different genre and avoid the scrutiny." She hasn't written a monster sex ebook in months, and has instead focused her creative energies on books that don't involve hirsute creatures or kidnapped campers. Even if censorship weren't an issue, she's not sure if she has the inspiration for another sequel.

"I don't know where to go from here," she says with a sigh. "Each book was like another episode of a soap opera. I've already used the love triangle plotline. I've used the amnesia plotline. I've used the heroine-gives-birth-to-the-wrong-baby plotline, where the kid she had with Bigfoot turned out to be white instead of a little baby ape. I don't know where else I can take the Bigfoot fantasy. I'm out of crazy. I think I might be done."

She pauses, considering. "Well maybe one more," she concedes. "I have to finish up the series somehow. Give it a proper grand finale." She owes it to her longtime fans. Maybe something with genetically engineered Sasquatches, she thinks. Or just drop an A-bomb on Bigfoot and his love slaves and move on.

Fans of raunchy Bigfoot sex need not fear. Over the last few months, several self-published ebooks involving a certain hirsute sex machine have appeared in Amazon's Kindle store, with titles like "Boffing Bigfoot," "Savage Love," and the newly released "Bigfoot Did Me From Behind And I Liked It."

"There's a lot of human heads being pulled off, eating human flesh and EXPLICIT SEX between Bigfoot and JESSICA," raved one five-star reviewer of the latter title. "Overall a funny read."

Eric Spitznagel is a frequent contributor to Esquire, Playboy, Men's Health, Rolling Stone and the New York Times Magazine, among others. He lives in Chicago with his wife and son. Visit him at ericspitznagel.com.