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Bugs the Least of Porn Producers' Problems

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By Carl Schreck / The Moscow Times

LUKHOVITSY, Moscow Region -- Light spanking may be a cliché in adult movies, but when Alexei gave his wife, Yulia, a mid-coital swat on the rear at a woodsy campsite on a recent evening, he was just being helpful.

The mosquitoes, after all, are brutal at the fenced-in cluster of cabins just off the highway to Ryazan, where the married couple was copulating on patchy terrain.

The bloodsuckers were everywhere, buzzing around in a frantic search for human skin. In a pinch, they'll bore through dress socks, though that tactic was largely superfluous on the outdoor set of porn producer Sergei Loginov's latest film. There was plenty of exposed flesh to go around, including Yulia's bare behind.

"They're terrible," Yulia said of the mosquitoes after she and Alexei wrapped up their session. "When you're naked, they'll bite you everywhere. It's especially bad for the men."

Yulia and Alexei, with a combined 11 years in the porn business, were among 15 actors who arrived on a recent Tuesday at the campsite on the outskirts of Lukhovitsy, a town best-known for its MiG fighter production facility and its -- ahem -- cucumbers.

Filming in the city would require a lot less bug repellent, of course. But Loginov knows the owner of the campsite and adjacent shashlyk stand, so accommodations were essentially free of charge. He is also fond of ad-hoc alfresco shoots, in which actors spend a few days barbecuing, drinking and having sex for the camera.

But all of that is secondary for Loginov, who was once convicted on pornography charges.

"First and foremost, the farther away from Moscow the better," Loginov said. "I've already had cops break down my door while I was filming in Moscow. I don't need that."



Michael Eckels / MT

A man grilling shashlik while Loginov and his associates shoot a soft-core scene for an adult film at a fenced-in woodsy campsite in the Moscow region. Loginov is one of a handful of adult film producers in Russia trying to run a legal business, although

Loginov, 38, is one of a handful of adult film producers in Russia trying to run a legal business, although he says he has yet to turn a profit.

"I've just about broken even, and I hope profits will come the longer the films stay on the market and keep selling," said Loginov, whose full-time job is publishing the weekly classifieds newspaper *Rabota v Moskve*. He places want ads for prospective porn actors in the paper.

While a few small-time porn producers are trying to break into a domestic market flooded with pirated films from the United States and Europe, many others prefer to stay off the authorities' radar screens, selling raw footage under the table to studios in the West.

Because of a vague pornography law that both moral crusaders and porn peddlers alike deride, hardcore film producers operate in a strange legal purgatory.



Alexander Belenky / MT

Pryanishnikov has built a pornography empire over the course of eight years by churning out low-budget Russian-themed films and distributing foreign-made films.

The law also fails to define what constitutes pornography -- the equivalent to criminalizing drugs but not specifying which drugs are illegal, Loginov said. "Without any definitions, you could make a pretty good case that alcohol and nicotine should be included in that list," he said, dragging on a cheap Yava cigarette.

Pornography producers trying to operate legally say they won't go near necrophilia or bestiality, and, under the law, a person convicted of production or distribution of child pornography faces up to eight years in prison.

Numerous bills in recent years have been proposed in the State Duma to clear up the ambiguities, but all have been shot down.

Last month, the nationalist Rodina party offered legislation that would define pornography as

Since 1997, the only provision in the Criminal Code regulating pornography states that anyone convicted of "illegal" production or distribution of pornography can be sentenced to up to two years in prison. The language, however, implies that there are avenues for legal production and distribution, a loophole that porn producers have used, with varying degrees of success, to legitimize their craft.

A Moscow court convicted Loginov in April 2004 of illegal distribution of pornographic films and handed him a one-year suspended sentence. Sergei Pryanishnikov, the country's only porn producer running a business remotely resembling larger Western studios, has narrowly escaped the cross hairs of police and prosecutors on numerous occasions. One criminal investigation dragged on for six years and put him behind bars for two months before it was dropped.

"images -- television and radio programs -- whose primary content consists of a vulgar realistic portrayal of sexual relations and that are intended to spark lusty passion."

During a heated Duma discussion over the bill, United Russia Deputy Oleg Morozov called pornography "no less serious a crime than xenophobia and extremism," NTV television reported. But he said unless the legislation could be effectively enforced, "there is no reason ... to pass a law that will not work."

Communist Deputy Nikolai Kondratyenko weighed in to express dismay over a shampoo commercial in which a man tells a woman she looks "so sexy."

"Tell me, how can a Russian Orthodox person or a Muslim or a grandmother or grandfather explain to their grandchildren what 'sexy' means?" Kondratyenko said, NTV reported.

The Rodina bill was subsequently scrapped.

At a roundtable discussion last week, the country's No. 2 culture official, Pavel Pozhigailo, announced the formation of a working group to battle the spread of pornography.

Asked after the meeting whether adults should be allowed to purchase and watch films such as Pryanishnikov's, Pozhigailo said they should not. "But I must reiterate that I, as a father of three children, am giving only my personal opinion," he said.

City Duma Deputy Lyudmila Stebenkova, one of Moscow's most vocal anti-pornography activists, called Pryanishnikov's films "criminal" and said they should be banned.

State Duma Deputy Yelena Drapenko, however, said: "First of all we need to focus on the mass media. For the time being, I think we should not go after those who make home videos."

There are other seemingly confusing aspects to the legality of pornographic films.

According to research conducted last year by the Russian adult-video web site Adultreview.ru, only four studios in Russia have produced hard-core movies that have received the Federal Culture Agency's stamp of approval as "erotic films" -- including the films with the not-so-subtle titles "Super Perverted Girls 2" and "Vocational School Girls in the Torture Chamber."

At the same time, Loginov has registered more than 50 films through various studios since 2003, while Pryanishnikov's SP-Company has more than 100 registered films.

Anyone with an eye for contradictions could ask why Loginov and Pryanishnikov have been brought



Michael Eckels / MT

Loginov and two associates filming and snapping photographs for a movie and a magazine, both financed by Loginov.

up on pornography charges.

State approval for hard-core films is obtained by sleight of hand, said Oleg Golduyev, head of the Moscow-based studio Yaros-Film, which specializes in soft-core pornography.

"All you have to do is give a soft-core version of the film to the culture ministry to get it licensed, and then you release the hard-core version for sale," said Golduyev, who attended Loginov's shoot.

Perhaps no one has exploited the haziness of Russia's pornography law more successfully than Pryanishnikov, whose flair for scandal and repeated run-ins with authorities have earned him the nickname The Russian Larry Flynt. Flynt founded Hustler magazine.

In an interview in his cluttered office just around the corner from the St. Petersburg police headquarters, Pryanishnikov, 49, said a single principle guided his business: "Whatever is not forbidden is allowed."

Over the course of eight years, Pryanishnikov has built a pornography empire by churning out low-budget Russian-themed films -- he prefers to call them "hard erotica" -- and distributing foreign-made films.

Pryanishnikov said sales of domestic films and titles from some of the world's biggest studios distributed by his SP-Company reach \$2 million annually.

"But you have to remember that 80 percent of the market consists of pirated copies," the burly, bearded adult filmmaker said.

He said piracy costs his company \$50 million to \$100 million per year.

In terms of domestically produced adult videos, Pryanishnikov is unrivaled by any other authorized filmmaker. Pryanishnikov said SP-Company releases two or three films per month, each shot on budgets of \$10,000 to \$15,000.

While Pryanishnikov's films are decidedly low-budget compared to Western pornographic films, they are decidedly big-budget by Russian standards.

Back in the Lukhovitsy woods, Loginov said he had set aside \$8,000 for the two-day shoot and expected to gather enough material for at least three films, maybe five. Unlike Pryanishnikov, whose studio dubs soundtracks with often incongruous moaning, Loginov saves money by using live sound and minimal post-production.

Loginov prides himself on squeezing every last ounce of libido from his actors. "We're going to be filming 24 hours a day," he said.



Michael Eckels / MT

The actors, who were required to submit HIV tests before the shoot, received \$150 to \$200 for a day's work of softcore scenes, while those who agree to hardcore got \$250 to \$300, Loginov said.

Yulia, who was pregnant but not showing, said she could make at least \$1,000 per month in pornography, with the best money -- \$400 to \$500 per day -- coming from foreign studios who farm out work to Russian producers.

"But we don't just do it for the money," she said. "We like it."

Loginov spraying mosquito repellent on an actor during a break in filming. The insects proved a nuisance on the set.

Alexei, her husband, said his career was winding down after eight years and that he had decided to focus more on a music production studio he owns.

"Porn is now more of a hobby for me," he said.

Alexei said his parents knew of his film career and had accepted it, even if they did not like it. Yulia said her parents had no clue she had appeared in films with titles such as "Big Black Lil' Pink 2" and "Lil' Lezzy Prospects 4," nor that she became well-acquainted on-screen with Italian porn legend Rocco Siffredi in the 2005 film "Rocco Ravishes Russia."

"I've only told my closest friends," Yulia said. "They were shocked at first, but now they're fine with it."

Some of the women at Loginov's shoot were concerned about anonymity, especially with a cameraman collecting stock footage for a weekly sex-themed program on TNT television.

Katya, Maria and Olga all said they were students at local universities and that they did not want their faces to be photographed, fearing friends and relatives would stumble across the pictures.

"You can take pictures of everything from the neck down," said Olga, 19.

Olga and Maria, 18, said they started making adult films together, but that they only did soft-core scenes. Katya, 21, said she did hard-core scenes and that she would like to continue starring even after finishing college.

"If my looks hold up, I could keep doing this until I'm 60," she said.

All three said their biggest fear was that their boyfriends might accidentally watch one of their films.

Maria said she had a backup plan. "I'll just say, 'That's not me. She sure does look like me, but it's not me.'"

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