

the sad, strange world of ADULT FILMS MADE BY CHILDREN

The film I'm watching certainly isn't going to win any Academy Awards. The camera work is shoddy, the lighting is dismal, the pacing is clumsy, and the plotline nonexistent. There are no credits, and the only "label" on the video is a tattered strip of masking tape onto which is scrawled *TICKLE MI CULO* in thick black crayon. The action is straight hetero porn: just two dimly perceived brown adult bodies humping sweatily on what appears to be the dirt floor of a jungle shack. The woman performs fellatio briefly on her partner, but he does not reciprocate with cunnilingus. The couple's screams and exclamations are uttered in Spanish. Immediately after the male money-shoots all over his friend's olive-hued face, the screen goes blank.

The only thing that distinguishes this film from the seeming millions of other pornographic features made yearly is that it was scripted, directed, and filmed by a four-year-old boy. Although the video is barely 18 minutes long, bootlegged copies of it are reportedly selling for over 100 dollars on the Internet. And there are reportedly *thousands* more videos just like it—adult films starring adult actors using adult genitals—but filmed by youngsters imprisoned in "porn camps" hidden deep within Brazil's rain forests.

"This is the most difficult criminal case I've ever had to investigate," says Alberto Luis Sanchez Villareal, a police detective in São Paulo, Brazil. A portly, greasy, rumpled little man with sour breath and a twinkle in his eye, Villareal has been assigned the daunting task of dismantling a lucrative underground film industry in which homeless children are kidnapped on Brazil's city streets, shipped up the Amazon, and forced to create pornographic films "from scratch" under dreary conditions. "The main misconception I'm fighting, from both a criminal standpoint and a public-relations standpoint," Villareal says, "is that this is kiddie porn. Truly, I wish that it *was* kiddie porn, because it'd be much easier to bring these bastards to justice. But children are involved in every phase of film production, EXCEPT they're not involved in the sex scenes as participants. So it's not really kiddie porn—it's BY-kiddie porn."

Brazil's by-kiddie porn industry involves millions of dollars, thousands of films, and hundreds of children in a Pyramid of Oppression atop which sit the fat-cat entrepreneurs who exploit human suffering for profit. Up in the porn camps, armed guards patrol self-contained jungle villages devoted to producing erotic adult feature films. Slaving away in sweltering, *Apocalypse Now*-style jungle-river compounds, children are herded together and taught the art of film making in a most inauspicious setting. Kids as young as three years old are shouting "Cut!" and "That's a wrap!" with the finesse of seasoned Hollywood professionals. An entire film is typically scripted, rehearsed, shot, and transferred to video in the course of a morning, leaving the whole afternoon for the children to do the village's menial labor.

"What makes this phenomenon almost impossible to eliminate," Villareal continues, interrupting my train of thought, "is that they're operating under the jungle's protective cover. These 'film sets' are merely temporary campgrounds. If they hear that the *federales* are coming, they can just break camp and go further up the river. It's hard to keep chasing them. The logistics are wrong."

"The logistics are wrong?"
"What are you—*deaf*?"
Villareal says it'll be difficult to prosecute the films' producers on child-pornography charges because it's a stretch to argue that the children are being used sexually.

"It's a legal quandary. We can nail them on child-slavery charges, but it'd be hard to make a kiddie-porn beef stick."

"A kiddie-porn beefstick?"
"Huh?"
"What's a kiddie-porn beefstick?"
"No, no—I meant it'd be hard to make kiddie-porn *charges* stick."

"Oh."
"All right?"
"Yeah, OK, I guess."
Since things got tense, I left.



brazilian police chase a sinister sex ring into the jungle

"**THERE'S SO MUCH INJUSTICE** in the world already," says Linda Mulgrew-Christy, chairperson of children's-rights organization Save the Damn Children, "so when you hear about something like these by-kiddie porn films, well, that's the straw that breaks the camel's back. That's when you realize it's time to get involved on all three levels—personal, community, and spiritual." Mulgrew-Christy's organization boasts that it's devoted to

"fighting child abuse with the ferocity of a child abuser."

"It's inconceivable that in this day and age, something like these by-kiddie porn films could happen," she says, leaning back in a really nice vinyl comfy chair. "We need to stop it, and we need to stop it now."

"I agree. How do you propose to do that?"
She leans back and her eyes assume a faraway glaze. "Oh—well...hmm...I really hadn't considered *that*."

Instead of answering my question, she pops in a CD featuring a female folk singer



Scenes from Brazilian underground porno films that feature adults but were scripted and directed by children. L-R: Money shot in *Mas Leche, Mi Mama...blurry humping scene in Amazon, Tu Es Mi Corazon...penis approaches ass in Tickle Mi Culo...urinating vagina in Panocha a Pestosa.*

decrying the horrors of child abuse in a manner that some would consider unnecessarily graphic. "When a child has no innocence, what does it have?" Mulgrew-Christy asks me, her piercing eyes fixed on an imaginary dot on my forehead.

"Its body?" I offer.
"You took the words right out of my mouth," she says, winking.

I ask her why she got involved in helping to protect children from sexual and financial exploitation. "As long as one child somewhere is unhappy," she says, "I'm unhappy."

"I would think you'd be unhappy a lot."
"Exactly," she says.

"Children are involved in every phase of film production, EXCEPT they're not involved in the sex scenes as participants. So it's not really kiddie porn—it's BY-kiddie porn."

"**CHILDREN BRING AN ENERGY** and magic to pornography that adults simply don't have," says Ray Lee Bernstein, webmaster of ByKiddiePorn.com, a site devoted to the by-kiddie porn phenomenon. "They bring a fresh, bright vision to adult cinema. These kids are writing amazingly well-paced scripts. Since kids tend to be short, they come up with some interesting camera angles. It's refreshing to see how much talent was laying dormant amid homeless street waifs from São Paulo." Bernstein is a former film critic for the *Missoula Messenger* who was forced to leave that paper under dark whispers of scandal. He is one among a growing number of critics who find artistic merit in the by-kiddie films. He mentions the canon of the legendary "Mario," a six-year-old Brazilian boy whose films such as *Amazon, Tu Es Mi Corazon* and *Mas Leche, Mi Mama* have received critical acclaim from such unlikely sources as *The New York Times*, *Variety*, and *PDXS*. "Mario deserves the appellation of *auteur*," Bernstein says. "His films

MY RIVER GUIDE JULIO steers me up the evil demon Amazon which spares no man. Our boat skims beneath the banana trees. We're up in the lair of the angry mosquito. Up in the land of muddy water and hot, still air. The land of wild, scary jungle cats with big teeth. Poisonous snakes, too.

By greasing a few palms and calling in a few favors, I was able to arrange a meeting with Augusto Hector Del Fuego, the so-called "Pimp Daddy of By-Kiddie Porn." Del Fuego has allegedly made over 30 million dollars by overseeing a web of by-kiddie-porn camps in the Brazilian outback. For all his power, though, I am unimpressed when I finally meet him in a small, poorly ventilated shack along the Amazon. He is a fat man. A charmless man. A man who emits a sharp, foul odor.

"The kids are so much cheaper to use," Del Fuego explains. "For starters, they're little. They don't eat as much as an adult, and you can fit more

of them into a bamboo hut. It doesn't really take much to teach them to push the RECORD button on a camera. All things considered, the overhead is preferable when using children. The kids help the bottom line. Do the math, Einstein—kids are simply more cost-effective. It's not a moral issue—it's a financial issue."

"But it IS a moral issue," I insist.
He stares at me with cold slits of eyes. "Do you know I could have you killed right now?"

I feel stymied by the heat. Intimidated by his armed guards. Scared of encountering cheetahs and leopards in the underbrush. Worried about giant mosquitos and what diseases they might carry. Terrified of finding a tarantula in my sleeping bag.

So I refuse to answer his question and ask Julio to get the boat ready.

I quietly leave Del Fuego's haunts, happy to be alive. Happy to be headed back to the city. Happy I'm not a small Brazilian child.

THE UNIVERSE SCREAMS out about this injustice. We need to save the children. We need to save the children. WE NEED TO SAVE THE CHILDREN. How many times do I need to say it? If we can save one child—just one little fuzzy canary of a child—it'll all be worth it.

The events of 9/11/01 brought us all a little closer together. It even brought us closer to the Amazon rain forest, where children suffer unimaginable indignities while filming pornographic features. We all need to keep our kids safe and ignorant about sex for as long as we can. There's plenty we can do. You can do something. I can do something. We can all do something. Together, we can *do* something.

If we can stop one more by-kiddie porn film from being made, one day we can look down at our OWN kids with confidence and say, "Nobody will ever kidnap YOU and take you up to the Amazon jungle where you'll be forced to make porno films starring adult actors. No-sirree, Bob!"



Photos at bottom, from page left: Group of child porn-film makers after a grueling jungle photo shoot; children relax after a long day of filming; "Mario," widely considered to be "the Hitchcock of By-Kiddie Porn"; the Santiago Brothers, also known as "The Wayans Brothers of Brazilian Ass Films."