

# Business Porn

BY PAULINA BORSOOK

► “SILICON STARFISH! HOW A GANG OF zanies at e-Starfish thought out of the box to revolutionize all known universes and changed, well, everything forever using the Internet and beat out the Fortune 500 fuddy-duddies who remind us of our fathers and now we can stick our tongues out at whom we choose and date a better class of female.”

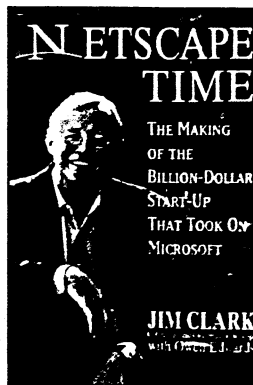
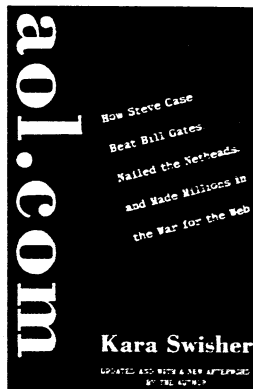
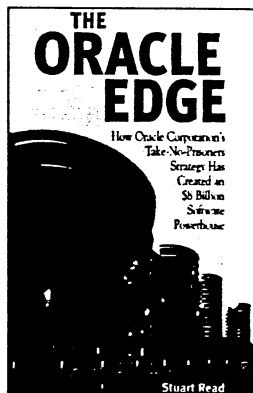
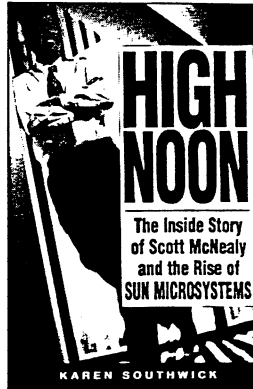
– Vanity Book Press, 2000

No, you can't actually buy this imaginary book, but you can buy a whole bunch of real ones just like it. They all belong to a genre I call business porn. Just to name a few from the last year or two: *AOL.com: How Steve Case Beat Bill Gates, Nailed the Netheads and Made Millions in the War for the Web*; *Speeding the Net: The Inside Story of Netscape and How It Challenged Microsoft*; *Silicon Sky: How One Small Startup Went Over the Top to Beat the Big Boys in Satellite Heaven*; and *How the Web Was Won: The Inside Story of How Bill Gates And His Band of Internet Idealists Transformed a Software Empire* (not to be confused with the same author's *Gates: How Microsoft's Mogul Reinvented an Industry – and Made Himself the Richest Man in America*).

Business porn, particularly of the dot-com variety, is as formulaic as any other kind of porn. Connoisseurs are presumed to have an addiction to endless repetitions of the same narratives, but these variations on a theme have to be done just right, the ritualized details conforming to the conventions of each particular subgenre.

Consider Harlequin Romances (emotion porn). In the hypothetical *Love's Heaving Bosom*, the woman is plucky and in the right situation, wanton, and the guy is always cruelly

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handsome, something cold yet sensual about the mouth. The fantasy is that the tracking, seducing and marrying of His Woman is the most important leitmotif in his existence. In men's fiction (action-thriller porn), say, *Delta Force Recon Hunter Team Trident*, weaponry, fitness regimes and male bonding, even between rogue warriors or worthy rivals, is described in loving detail. There, the fantasy involves the notion that the secret services, armed forces and law enforcement agencies routinely recruit and train the smartest, most elite males on the planet, and that their technology is the coolest and never requires the services of a sysadmin.

In business porn, as with any porn, there are lots of statements of “I performed this action and then they had this response” and “I asserted this and then they came right back at me.” But the fetishizing details of business porn have to do with hiring, firing, shipping beta and broken deals, and not with body parts or fluids. There remains, though, much flirtation, foreplay, and in some cases, near-rape (by competitors or partners or investors), which nonetheless all gratifyingly leads to the thrilling climax. (I! P! O!) And there's even the classic porn script of the mouse no one desires, who when unleashed becomes the seductress that everyone wants (in a venture capital kind of way), or the little guy who turns into a dynamo and pleases the institutional investor crowd.

For the important thing about business porn, as with any porn, is that it depicts worlds where the heroes and heroines get what they want, and readers get off, every time, to the kind of stories they want. How little these narratives resemble how most people actually live and work, even within high tech, can never be the point. People read porn for pleasure and escape, and to imagine how hot they, too, could be. ■