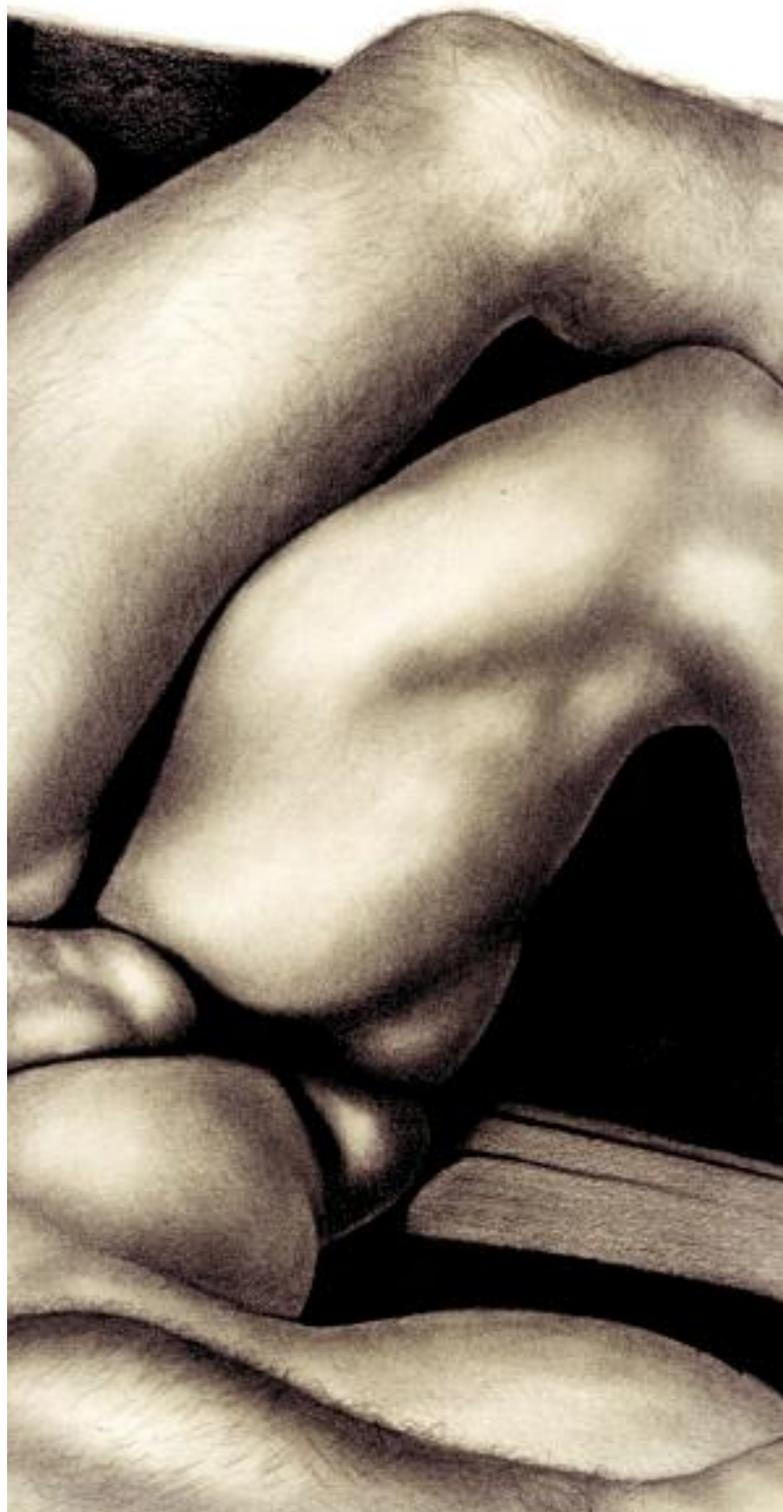


# BARE ESSENTIALS

AS WORLD AIDS DAY APPROACHES, HAYDON BRIDGE RECONSIDERS THE CONTROVERSY THAT JUST WON'T GO AWAY – BAREBACK PORN.



**"THE FILTHIEST CUM-HUNGRY PIGS IN 90 MINUTES OF BRITISH BAREBACK ACTION!", "12 YOUNG TWINKS TAKE BAREBACK COCK UP THE ARSE AND EAT SPUNK!", "DON'T PULL OUT, MAN - SHOOT IT INSIDE ME!" WE'RE GETTING USED TO BLURBS LIKE THIS. IN RECENT MONTHS, SALES OF BAREBACK GAY PORN HAVE BEGUN TO EXCEED THE SAFER SEX VARIETY THAT'S BEEN STANDARD SINCE THE LATE 80S. IT'S EASY TO FORGET THAT, BACK THEN, ALMOST NOBODY IN HIS RIGHT MIND WOULD ALLOW AN UNRUBBERED COCK ANYWHERE NEAR HIS ARSEHOLE. EVEN TWO YEARS AGO, WHEN QX ASKED "DO BAREBACK FILMS ENCOURAGE UNSAFE SEX?" AND CAME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT PROBABLY THEY DIDN'T, WE GOT ANGRY LETTERS. "WE ARE INVITING BACK ANOTHER AIDS PANDEMIC!" WARNED ONE READER. BUT NOW WE MUST FACE THE PROSPECT THAT BB FILMS ARE HERE TO STAY.**



In 2005, one producer predicted with eerie accuracy, "Most gay porn will be bareback by the end of next year." Sure enough, in 2007, an estimated 60 per cent of the Dutch-based Eurocreme's output is BB. Even in some UK shops BB stock is rapidly creeping past the 30 per cent mark. So does this imply that what we all really, really want is unsafe sex? Not by any means. On the contrary, health authorities and the adult film industry are deeply concerned about recent developments, which suggest that safeguards designed to protect BB performers are breaking down.

Generally well-regulated and responsible, the adult film industry has been hit by AIDS on rare occasions and always in other countries. But finally, and perhaps inevitably, the problem has landed on our doorstep. In October it was revealed that a British porn actor working for a British studio had unknowingly infected three other performers with HIV. QXMEN has also learned of an even more disturbing case in which an actor aware of his HIV+ status was able to continue working in BB porn and infect at least one other partner. Already the adult industry has begun to mobilise against this apparent disregard for human life. Visitors to the Sportlads site, who click on "Bareback", are directed to a mocked-up DVD cover for a phoney BB movie called Dangerous Barebacking. The blurb yells, "See our models get HIV for your entertainment!" Steve, who's run the Sportlads site for four years, demands, "Would you buy this film?" He says he wants to draw attention to the fact that "Barebacking is not safe even if you have a certificate." This is a reference to the three-month anti-body test in use throughout the mainstream British adult industry. Without proof that he's been HIV- for three months, a performer can't work BB either in the UK or abroad. But now it appears that regulations are being flouted. Are we inviting back another AIDS pandemic?

As with all scares, rumours count for nothing, only facts. The one irrefutable fact is that AIDS is an incurable disease and that there's little prospect of a cure in the foreseeable future. We've had this information for around 25 years. Everyone should be in absolutely no doubt that it can take only one BB fuck to pass on the HIV virus. Perhaps barebacking, with its daredevil connotations, should be re-named suicide bumming. But of course this isn't going to happen because BB could also stand for "big bucks." There's a lot of money to be made from the generally older audience who hanker after the so-called Golden Age of condom-free gay porn. Yes, there's no two ways about it – it was sexier. Now the fantasy of once again sliding sheathless into a bubble butt has become a fetish. But do gay men have unsafe sex because it happens in porn? That's one of the "facts" that wouldn't stand up in court.

The annual number of new HIV diagnoses in the UK has held steady for two years at around 7,500. In 2005, the most recent year for which figures are available, 2,356 of these seroconversions came about through gay sex. Although this is the highest gay tally since the dark days of the 80s, it's the view of the Health Protection Agency that the big increase in the number of gay men getting tested must be taken into consideration. "We're unaware of any relationship between watching bareback porn and engaging in unprotected sex," states Lisa Power, Head of Policy at the Terrence Higgins Trust. But supposing one gay man became HIV+ allegedly because he was influenced to have unsafe sex by a BB movie? Wouldn't this be enough to ban BB porn? Frankly no. The alternative – unregulated porn made more enticing by the fact that it's illegal – is unacceptable. It would also be unethical. The British Board of Film Classification, which issues R18 certificates to consensual, non-violent porn, is legally required to make no distinctions between homo product and its hetero equivalent, which is famously anti-condom. "I don't like the thought of censorship, particularly that which discriminates against gay men," declares GMFA's Matthew Hodson.

At the moment the adult industry is behaving responsibly in alerting consumers to the perils of BB sex. QXMEN reviews BB movies, but we always add our own health warnings. In London's Soho, some shops apply warning stickers to the BB porn somewhat randomly. But at Prowler Soho, we found BB titles racked separately and no DVD without the label, "Warning. Contains bareback sex. The producer and distributor present this movie only as a fantasy."

The biggest concern at present is for BB performers, who should not be expected to run the risk of wrecking their lives just so that we can have a wank. It's no surprise that the studio and performers involved in the recent seroconversion scandal refused to talk to QXMEN. There's a very real chance that at least one of these people will be charged with Grievous Bodily Harm. Their studio should also be slapped with an injunction to prevent it from profiting from films that exploit GBH. And until the no longer effective three month rule is reviewed, and much more stringent regulations put in place, porn lovers should take a lesson from the Latin phrase book. Caveat emptor!