

PORNOGAMI

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Some years ago our extended family went on a Caribbean cruise; to amuse my grandchildren I did a Google search for “origami” (a hobby of mine) to get a collection of simple folding patterns that would be suitable for young children to do with me. I found a lot of possibilities, printed them, and took them on the cruise with a supply of origami paper. It was a big success—so much so that my son-in-law asked if he could take the set of patterns home (they live in Boston, we in Chicago) to continue working on them with my grandchildren; I obliged.

When I got home, I decided that I should keep such a set of easy patterns around to entertain my grandchildren and other youngsters when they visit us. So, I did the same Google search again and printed many of the same patterns. But the Google search algorithm is time-dependent (I’m a computer scientist, so this did not surprise me), meaning that done weeks apart, the same search terms will yield different web sites.

On my second “simple origami pattern” search, an intriguing web site came up that hadn’t been in the pre-cruise search: a web site advertising a book called “Pornogami”. That was too good to pass up; I had to investigate.

Looking at the site, I found what I guess is a pretty typical porno site—lots of teaser pictures and an invitation to give your credit number to see more. Also, there were directions for ordering “Pornogami” for \$20 plus shipping. I was loathe to give a credit card number to such a site, so as curious as I was, I went back to the work I was doing.

But I couldn’t get it out of my mind, so after a little while I decided to go back to the site and see if I had missed any way to order besides credit card. Aha! They took PayPal. But was still a problem: I have a PayPal account, but for reasons I no longer remember, it’s in my wife’s name, so I thought I better call her to explain what I was about to do because PayPal generates an email message to account holder. She didn’t answer her phone, so I said the hell with it and again returned to work.

It still nagged at me, though. So I went back to the web site and found the phone number, which I called; it was answered by a gruff fellow and from the background noise it sounded

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like he was in some kind of store (I can imagine what kind). When I asked about buying “Pornogami”, the unfriendly fellow told me order it on the web. I explained I didn’t want to use a credit card or PayPal, could I just send him a check. “How do I know your check is any good?” he demanded. I said I’d mail him a check, he could deposit it, and after it cleared send me the book. He said that was too much trouble: if I wanted the book, I’d have to order it online. Annoyed, I hung up, and went back to work, unwilling to order that way.

Of course, after a little while it was still nagging at me—I did want the damn book. So I went back to the web site and ordered it with PayPal, which is much safer than directly using a credit card. Then I called my wife to warn her of the email she would be getting shortly. No answer. I made a mental note to try calling her again in 5 minutes and I went back to work.

I got involved with departmental business and forgot to call my wife until several hours later. I tried her office line. No answer. I tried her cell phone. No answer. I knew her schedule, so I knew she was in her office; she must be on the phone. I tried again, letting the phone ring on and on. She has call-waiting, so I knew she’d see it was me calling and pick up.

Eventually, she answered, in a rush telling me that she could not talk to me just then because she was on the line with PayPal since somebody was buying pornography with our PayPal account. Things had escalated to the vice-presidential level at PayPal and my wife insisting that nobody, but *nobody* with our credit card would buy pornography. She told the V-P that if he didn’t cancel the charges (and hence the sale), she would cancel the credit card to which they were billed and then pursue PayPal with vigor. The V-P had just agreed to take some action for her, and she had to get back to him pronto.

“No, don’t do that—it was me!” I yelled. She was aghast and had to go back to the V-P and apologize, that indeed, it was her husband who was buying from a porno web site. She was embarrassed, to say the least, but was a pretty good sport about it, knowing my interest in origami.

The book arrived two weeks later, in a plain brown envelope. Addressed to my wife.

Postscript: It wasn’t worth it. The “book” was a pamphlet about 20 pages long with absurdly simple-minded patterns, of no interest to anybody who has even mastered a basic frog. Oh well.