Mushroom pickers urged to avoid foraging books on Amazon that appear to be written by AI

'Life or Death:' AI-Generated Mushroom Foraging Books Are All Over Amazon

AI-generated content seems to be getting more and more popular as time goes on and the technology progresses. In some cases this content is even sold, as the article goes on to list that AI-generated books are becoming more commonplace on Amazon. These books can essentially be seen as cashgrabs or ways to scam customers out of their money for books that are not very well written. However, the financial hit customers might take from these purchases are not the biggest threat these AI-generated books pose. AI-generated cookbooks and identification guides for mushrooms aimed at beginners could get people following the advice of the book killed.

There is an inherent risk when it comes to foraging and/or eating mushrooms. Not only are many mushroom species toxic to humans, these toxic species of mushrooms can look eerily similar to edible species of mushrooms. One example given in the article is death cap mushrooms and wood mushrooms, two species that may look identical to those without foraging or mycology experience but while the latter is edible, the former is quite deadly. The problem here with these AI-generated mycology-centered books is not just a hypothetical; the article mentions that one book for instance recommends tasting as a factor in identifying mushrooms, which should never be the case.

But how do we know that this is an issue of AI, and not just the work of amateur mycologists and/or foragers? While it doesn't seem like anyone has owned up to using AI to write these books and publish them on Amazon, there are many clues that point to these books being the work of AI. For starters, AI detection software run on these books have reported back that several sections of the books are likely written by AI such as ChatGPT. Furthermore, something that stands out are the authors of these books. Several of the authors attached to these books seem to have put out an astonishing number of books in the span of just a few months. Despite that, these authors seem to have no other online presence and their author info either lacks any credentials that might certify them as an expert on these topics, or are provably false. Oh, and AI detection programs run on the authors images have come back as likely AI generated as well.

The article concludes by mentioning that Amazon has been alerted to the presence of these books and is looking into it. These books are particularly heinous in my opinion because they seem to be geared towards beginners, people who might not know what the potential risks of mushroom foraging are or to be suspicious of authors with a lack of credentials in the field; experts in this area build their knowledge over the course of years. Plus, the proliferation of low-quality AI-generated books might make it harder to find well-written and well-researched books made by humans. While this article focuses on AI-generated mushroom foraging/identifying books, I wouldn't doubt there are AI-generated books for other fields that might cause problems for unknowing readers. There might be a time in the future where AI can help with mushroom identification through advancements in Image Classification, but it is not yet the time for AI-generated content such as this.