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Noses know the score

romone perfumes try to send out that 'come hither' smell

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BY JENNIFER WILLIS

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Dating in Portland is hard. The “rules” here — if there are any — are different. It’s easy to make friends and find kayaking and rock climbing buddies, but when it comes to love, I’ve been decidedly unlucky.



In a not-very-scientific experiment, the pheromone scent Only Me didn't summon any babes, but it did make a 4-month-old baby pretty happy.

KATIE HARTLEY / TRIBUNE PHOTO

I'd heard about pheromone perfumes and, hoping to boost my chances, decided to give them a try.

A pheromone is a natural chemical scent given off by animals and insects to influence the behavior of others. Pheromone perfumes use human pheromones — or plant-based or synthetic pheromones — to help the wearer attract potential romantic partners.

I called my friend Sorcha and made an appointment with Gary Knapp, who runs Crimson Phoenix out of his Southeast Portland apartment.

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WestLinn Tidings

He's been making and selling pheromone perfumes for more than 15 years, and has more than 200 scents in his inventory.

"Our sense of smell bypasses the conscious thought process," Knapp explains. "When we smell a pheromone scent signal given off by the opposite sex, or even in some cases the same sex, our body automatically responds by going into an elevated state of arousal" — which translates into attraction and flirtation.

I admitted my skepticism while Knapp pulled out several dozen fragrance bottles for us to sample.

The action of natural phero-mones has been well-documented, but the scientific jury still is out on the effectiveness of pheromone perfumes.

Knapp opened a bottle and asked me to take a sniff. I didn't really smell anything, but I suddenly felt warm. My face flushed red, and I could feel my heart pounding. When Sorcha sniffed at the bottle, her pupils dilated and her voice and shoulders relaxed.

"That's raw male phero-mone," Knapp told us. "Smelling is believing."

These raw pheromones, which Knapp buys from sources using plant-based scent factors, are added to a wide range of fragrances to give the perfumes an extra kick.

They have been developed to target men or women. There also are unisex pheromones to attract both sexes.

But pheromone perfumes aren't just for singles. Some of Knapp's most loyal customers are couples who use unisex scents to enhance their romantic encounters, and the perfumes are used by everyone from salespeople to bartenders to attract customers and create a relaxed, friendly environment.

Knapp's Crimson Phoenix perfumes come in 1/8-ounce bottles that sell for \$30 to \$50 each. As with any other perfume, select a few fragrances you like, then test them on your skin to see how they mingle with your natural scent.

Knapp helped me pick out a light, Oriental scent called Only Me. Sorcha chose Witch, because "it smells like the '60s." Knapp added an extra dose of female pheromone to each, and we were on our way.

We also stopped by Moonshadow on Southeast Hawthorne Boulevard to sample its more limited selection of pheromone fragrances. Sorcha and I both chose a small bottle of amber-scented Caliph's Beloved for \$6.

It was time to put the perfume to the test.

Where the books are

I'd been warned away from hanging out at the coffee shop: Coffee aroma can have a neutralizing effect on pheromones. So I headed for one of my regular hangouts: Powell's City of Books.

But first I got some advice from Beaverton resident Marsha Neill. Several years ago, she received a bottle of Realm Women pheromone perfume as a birthday gift from her husband, Rene.

"He liked it," she laughs. "It smelled good on me."

What really impressed her was getting hit on by other men when she was wearing the perfume, even when she wasn't feeling or looking her best. "You know, that frumpy going-to-the-grocery-store-in-your-pajamas kind of thing. But I got picked up on by a very good-looking guy."

"Position yourself where there are single guys," Neill suggested. "They'll

notice.”

I walked into Powell’s one snowy Saturday, and dabbed Only Me behind my ears and on each wrist. I had my friend Terri with me in case things got out of hand, but I needn’t have worried.

Following Neill’s advice, I searched high and low for clutches of testosterone. The store was filled with women, young children and couples. I wondered if I should retitle my quest “Where the Boys Are Not.”

I found the highest concentration of men sans partners in the Outdoor Sports aisle. I slowly wove my way between them, pretending to browse books on firearms and survival skills, but there weren’t any takers. Perhaps I would have had better luck if I’d been wearing deer musk or a pair of antlers.

In other parts of the store, I did notice a lot more lingering glances than I’m used to. As I strolled through the stacks, leaving a promising scent trail, Terri observed that almost every man looked up as I passed by, but I’d moved on before anyone could approach.

Maybe next time I should stay put and allow the pheromone perfume to spin its web of attraction around me.

I caught the attention of several women, even though I was wearing a fragrance designed to attract men.

One of the Powell’s managers asked me out twice in the space of five minutes, but only because he had an idea of what I was up to.

But one bookstore visitor was absolutely smitten with me: a 4-month-old baby girl. She lit up like a Christmas tree when she caught sight — err, scent — of me.

Otherwise, the scent-experiment was a bust.

Time to tally

Deconstructing the day at Saint Cupcake, I had to admit the setting had not been ideal — people at Powell’s are looking for books, not dates. I might have had more success across the street at Spartacus.

Sorcha didn’t fare any better with her Witch perfume. She likes how it smells but hasn’t gotten any extra attention.

Caliph’s Beloved, however, yielded more promising results, and for a fraction of the price. Wearing this scent, Sorcha got hit on at an Irish pub, and a blind dinner date asked me for an immediate second meeting.

I also wore Caliph’s Beloved to the Fez Ballroom and had a drop-dead gorgeous 20-year-old slip me his phone number.

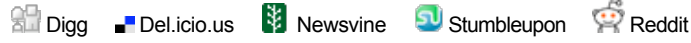
I’ve given Only Me a few more tries — at the climbing gym, the grocery store, even at the coffee shop. I’ve waved my wrist beneath the noses of some male friends, looking for a reaction. I smell pretty, but I haven’t exactly had men falling at my feet.

“The mind is the greatest aphrodisiac of all,” Knapp says. Sometimes just the self-confidence imbued by wearing a pheromone perfume can have a greater impact than the scent factor itself.

Since I feel more myself when wearing the sweet spice of Caliph’s Beloved, maybe that’s the difference.

Regardless, I still don’t have a date for Valentine’s Day. Body heat heightens the effect of pheromones, so maybe I’ll dab on some pheromone perfume and

head back to the Fez. I might not score any dates, but at least I'll smell nice.



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