

THE OBSERVER

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■ AND IN THIS CORNER

Learning some tricks of the trade

Let's say it's a Friday night. Now, you suspect that the safest thing to do is either rent a movie or watch basketball on TV and get wasted with your friends.

Of course, you could always pretend you have a life, which would necessarily mean some sort of interaction with members of the appropriate sex. At Notre Dame, this evidently concerns that hallowed high school tradition of the dance — the modern sexual game, which necessitates its own peculiar rules for both hopeful parties.

Matthew Apple

The first thing to do is, naturally, choose a potential partner. This need not concern those who already consider themselves a "couple," as they should know by now that couples have better things to do than hanging around pathetic dances. The key for guys is to make sure you never ask out a woman you know will reject you.

The most interesting way is to let friends match friends, which usually provides for amusing results for the devious matchmakers. However, this game-within-a-game has its own complicated series of rules. For now, let's assume that you have a date.

The next step is for the man to get a car, and for the woman to expect the guy to get a car. The woman undoubtedly realizes that a car is totally useless in South Bend, as the only places to go are sports bars and the Mall. But it allows the woman to determine the man's opinion of his own genitalia, as the relationship between reality and imagination are in a direct inverse proportion to the age, stereo system, and paint job of a car.

For the guys, a word about car stereo

music: do not, under any circumstance, play Green Day or Snoop Doggy Dog, or especially Led Zeppelin's Runes album. Get copies of Enya, Bjork, or anything else you'd never listen to otherwise.

Of course, you women know that the men only listen to certain groups for the express purpose of attempting to appear sympathetic, and the men know that the women know. Relax. As long as everyone maintains appearances, everything goes according to plan.

(Of course, if the guy shows up without a car and has the guts to still ask the woman out, the woman will know one of two things: either the guy's parents have no money, or he is a seething cauldron of unrelenting passion, or both. In the last two cases, the rules of the game obviously no longer apply.)

Okay; now you're in the car, now what? Well, you both know you can't show up to the social event on time. That would be definitely uncool. In a move of near-desperation (because he has no idea what else to do on a date), the man suggests a movie. The woman agrees, and suggests the Snite. This will allow her to further test the man's ability to bow before her every desire to get what they both know they want.

He reluctantly agrees and tries to be enthusiastic, and is rewarded when he realizes the Snite is instead of an artsy, real movie showing a mega-blockbuster such as, say, Braveheart.

It couldn't be better: he gets blood and gore and that amazingly American nationalistic feeling for another country without studying any history, and she gets drippy melodramatic romance scenes that would make the average man want to choke a dog but which she thinks will make the man more responsive to her needs as a woman.

What's more, the theater is packed with couples who look just like each other, with the women all dressed up and the men wearing t-shirts and ND baseball caps. Now, the important part of any movie date is knowing how to act like the other party expects you to act.

For women, this means sighing at the kissy kissy scenes, as if they can't imagine anything more romantic than a grubby aging Australian actor treating them like a French princess. This also means the women must show outward disapproval of the gory bits, or at least let out a few "icks" to allow the men next to them to feel all manly and protecting.

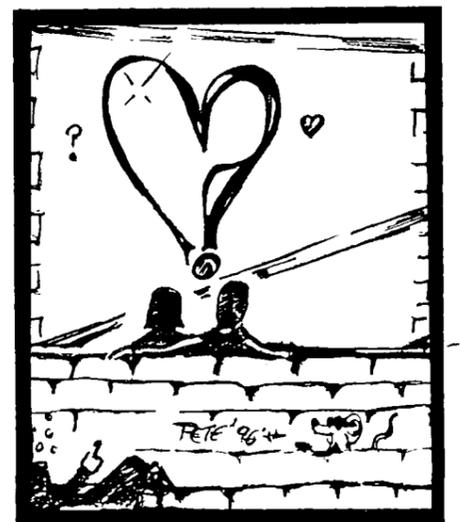
For the men, this means tolerating the kissy kissy stuff, maybe even using it as an excuse for physical contact by trying to get the women to lean their heads on the men's shoulders (a tried and true method, obviously).

During the bloody fight scenes, the men are required to bellow "cool" or "gross" (in the good sense), or even "awesome" if they get carried away, fully expecting the women to show some sort of revulsion. In fact, if a woman doesn't respond the expected way, or even appears to enjoy a good hack and slash, the man can generally assume her to be a tomboy or, heaven forbid, a dyke.

Remember, ladies, there's nothing more frightening to a guy than the prospect of a woman being his equal or better. Act appropriately and you will be rewarded with dog-like affection and the chance to act motherly.

In other words, this ritual requires a mutual application of shallowness. Additional tips for would-be sensitive men: during movie scenes of possible tragedy, cough instead of cry (don't worry; all the guys will be doing this, which, excepting the lack of cheap cigars and loafers, will make them sound like a room of grandfathers); and make sure to laugh at the hokey points in the movie which were designed for a laugh track.

Not laughing at these crucial moments will make it look like you're either not really watching the movie or you have a strange sense of humor (the former the woman knows anyway but pretends not to, and the latter will brand you with the indelible label of "weird.")



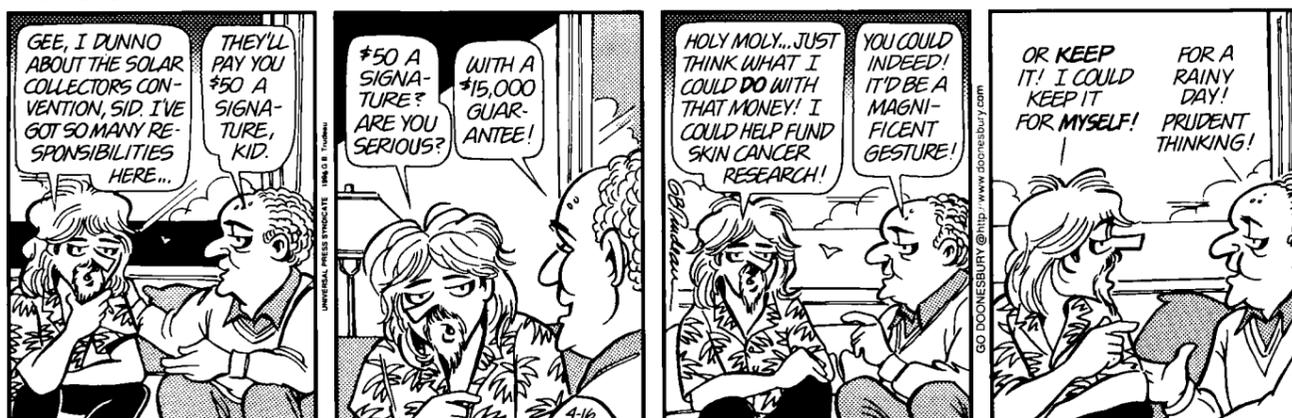
After the movie, make sure to vacate the theater immediately, as this will show the other party that you really only have them in mind and not the movie. You can then proceed to the dance, which will most likely be as lame as you all know it will be, or head directly to the room of the woman's choice. And after the brief conclusion of the sordid affair (which, as both parties are repressed Catholics in an even more repressive Catholic environment, will generally be a 5 minute slam session that both will think romantic), the man promises to call on Sunday, the woman believes him, and they both ignore each other from that point on, occasionally passing on a random sidewalk and averting their eyes or saying a noncommittal "hey."

Or, if in the event of mutual desire/need/masochism, the two decide to stick it out, after four years they turn into a somewhat happily married Mom and Dad. And to think, you won't even have to go see Sense and Sensibility, after all.

Matthew Apple is a creative writing graduate student at Notre Dame who thought TV Nation was the best show on television since Monty Python in early '70s. Your thoughts at matthew.t.apple.1@nd.edu or <http://www.nd.edu/~mapple>.

■ DOONESBURY

GARRY TRUDEAU



■ QUOTE OF THE DAY

"If you steal from one author, it's plagiarism; if you steal from many, it's research."

—Wilson Mizner