

So when make-up artist Charlotte Tilbury told me the synthetic pheromones found in certain perfumes were practically “guaranteed to make you more attractive”, a gauntlet was thrown down. Disclaimer: yes, Charlotte Tilbury’s new perfume, *Scent Of A Dream* (EDP, £49 for 30ml), features synthetic pheromones.

Testing the (fragrant) waters

That test involved me dousing myself in Tilbury’s debut perfume for five days. On day one, I soaked every inch of accessible skin – neck, chest, behind my knees – not even my ankles and thighs were spared. First impressions: it doesn’t smell like sex. Well, certainly not the sort of sex I’m used to. I only picked up notes of rose, jasmine, lemon and then some musk, which is a kind of warm and fuzzy sex smell, I guess. Sex with, say... a Ken doll.

Despite wearing my best ‘come-hither stare’ on the Tube, no one leaned in to nuzzle my neck. The office was a letdown, too. “What’s that smell?” one eloquent male colleague shouted across the office. “It’s like the loos on Brighton pier in here.” I sidled up to the three remaining men in the office. “Do I smell... attractive today?” One spat his coffee out. The others looked nervous but obligingly leant in. “It reminds me of...” There was a silence as one leant back in his chair in contemplation. “...My nan.” The others nodded in agreement.

Later, feeling brazen, I thrust my arm into the face of a stranger in a hotel lift. “What does my perfume remind you of?” I asked, as an image of Glenn Close and Michael Douglas going at it hammer and tongs in *Fatal Attraction* popped into my head. “It smells pretty,” he purred. The lift hit the ground floor. He looked back and smiled. Finally, we’re getting somewhere.

The science bit

You’re probably thinking, “Pheromones? What the...?” Okay, so see pheromones as like sexy airborne aphrodisiacs. We secrete them from our scalps, armpits and, er, groins in a barely detectable vapour trail that signals to others our readiness to mate. “Pheromones are only detectable when they interact with bacteria, like a tiny bit of sweat on the skin,” says Dr Nick Neave, an evolutionary psychologist at Northumbria University. “On picking up the pheromone scent, olfactory receptors in the nose activate unconscious parts of the brain



dealing with emotions and sex, making us feel more romantic.” (If you’ve ever found yourself inexplicably attracted to the guy in your spin class, this could explain a few things.)

Pheromones are seen to be so effective for finding love that not only are pheromone parties officially a thing (you sleep in a T-shirt for three nights, then pop it in a zip-lock bag for guests to sniff), but the first ‘mail odour’ dating service has arrived. (Similar shtick, except this time you’re sent a T-shirt to wear for three days and nights *without* deodorant, you send it back, and in return get multiple T-shirt samples. If you find one you like and they like you too, you’re matched via email.)

So it’s no surprise the perfume industry wants in; hence synthetic pheromones in scents. Tilbury built *Scent Of A Dream* on the jasmine-like scent of hedione, which scientists have discovered stimulates the hypothalamus, an area of the brain that releases sex hormones and kickstarts the libido. Another synthetic pheromone used in fragrance (including Tilbury’s) is Iso E Super, reminiscent of cedar ➤

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