

Vagina Dentata and the Annihilation of Rape

Hyena

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Rape has been violating women since the dawn of humanity. Even before that, evolutionarily. Our Great Ape relations – chimpanzees and gorillas – are rapists, and approximately 50% of orangutans are the result of rape. Gang rape, war rape, prison rape, date rape, serial rape, spousal rape, incestuous rape... hundreds of millions of females have been terrified, humiliated, injured and scarred.

Rape has to be halted, but how? Is there a transhumanist remedy? A technological solution?

The “Rape Capital of the World” is currently South Africa, with a University of South Africa study estimating 2,777 rapes per day, for a total of 1 million a year. The South African Law Commission asserts the figure is considerably higher: 1.69 million per year. Journalist, rapesurvivor, and anti-rape activist Charlene Smith claims that a South African woman is raped every 26 seconds; 40% of the victims are children, and 65% are gang-raped, aka “jackrolled.” Human Rights Watch reports that 28% of South African males has admitted to sexual assault, in this nation where 16.9% of the adult population is HIV/AIDS infected.

To combat this atrocity, the citizenry invented two retaliatory devices. A “killer tampon“, developed by 72-year-old Jaap Haumann in 2000, sports a guillotine blade attached to a hollow cylinder that, if sprung, decapitates any intruding penile head. Haumann estimated that 1 million women would arm their crotches with his contraption, but he was ridiculed in the media and sales never materialized.

“Rape-aXe” was next. Unveiled in 2005 by medical technician Dr. Sonnet Ehlers, this simple latex sheath transforms the female orifice into a shark-like vagina dentata. 25 razor sharp barbs, facing inward, serve as a “rape trap” that painfully hooks the penetrator. The snared assailant, claims Dr. Ehlers, “cannot pee or walk when it is on, and if he tries to remove it, it will clasp even tighter.” The vengeful fangs can only be removed surgically, a procedure that would alert police and imprison therapist.

The munching mechanism costs only 1 rand (14 cents) and its potential was carefully researched – Dr. Ehlers consulted engineers, gynecologists, psychologists, and convicted rapists to determine its effectiveness. She sold her car and house to mass-produce the dick-chewing device and she reportedly distributed 30,000, for free, at the 2010 World Cup venues. Despite her efforts, South African women aren’t all chomping at the bit to purchase her product. Instead – like Haumann – Dr. Ehlers was chewed up by pundits, especially women.

Charlene Smith fretted that Rape-aXe, “is vengeful, horrible, and disgusting. The woman who invented this needs help.” Another critic – a rape victim who was stabbed twice – insisted that Rape-aXe, “will increase the danger to women... the government must not allow this to go on sale.” I contacted Dr. Ehlers in late January 2010 to inquire about her sales volume, but I never received a response.

Dr. Ehlers presents, in my opinion, solid justification for her wiener-ripper. “It will help identify attackers and secure conviction,” she tells the Johannesburg Star. “A medieval deed deserves a medieval consequence,” she explains on her website, that lists numerous letters of support and endorsement. Unfortunately, the product’s primary weakness is that it only provides past-the-threshold protection. The assailant is incapacitated only after a woman has been:

1. Terrified
2. Physically Assaulted (rape victims are often beaten)
3. Stripped of her Clothes
4. Penetrated

The security that Rape-aXe provides is similar to shooting intruders in your home. Isn’t it far better to deny them interior access? Anyone with morbid imagination can visualize numerous situations in which Rape-aXe’s “security” backfires, due to the equation of “violence begetting more violence.” The same flaw exists in Haumann’s penectomy tool, and in “FemDefense,” a similar, Swedish design that features a sharp pin sticking out of a tube, waiting to puncture the glans.

It is interesting to note how defense against rape – or any physical assault – mimics strategies in animal behavior. The 15th century chastity belt resembles the hard-bodied protection of the armadillo, pangolin, snail, turtle, and mollusks like oyster and clam. The advice to “never walk alone” has been obeyed for epochs by ungulate herds. Pepper spray and mace owe a debt to skunks and the bombardier beetle (stink bug), as does the “Horberg Device” – an appliance the Rape-aXe website refers to, that expels a “crude odor.” Tasers, now available to resemble cellphones, impersonate the cruel jolt of a scorpion or wasp. FemDefense, Rape-aXe, and the Haumann device are sharply linked to porcupines and sea urchins.

There’s even a modern equivalent to the “invisibility” defense employed by squid and octopi that expel ink, and insects and reptiles that utilize camouflage. Michelle Leslie, a 25-year-old Australian model, was convicted of drug possession in Indonesia (two ecstasy tablets) and tossed into a prison for three months. After observing that another woman was regularly taken out of her cell for forced sex with the guards, Ms. Leslie donned the shroud-like Muslim burqa, and was summarily ignored.

Transhumanists need to devise self-defense mechanisms that transcend these techniques employed by lower life forms, and sci-fi offers some options. Snow Crash, by Neal Stephenson, presents a vagina dentata that narcotizes trespassers with a tiny hypodermic needle. If women installed this, the dismantling of it could be regarded as part of the foreplay process, like removing the last item of clothing. Female groins could also be implanted with micro-spray guns that have incapacitating fumes, similar to the gas Russians used to overpower Chechen militants in the 2002 Moscow theater-hostage crises. These solutions, however, are only slightly better than Rape-aXe, because the weaponry would inspire counter-weaponry.

Star Trek and Superman offer stronger resistance possibilities. If the “deflector shield” that protected the Starship Enterprise is scaled down for the human form, a bubble of security would be attained. The “Man of Steel” is equally invulnerable with his dense Kryptonian body and “force field” surrounding his flesh. Neither of these improvements is forecast for the near future, however.

What we can employ for safety, immediately or in the next decade, are the strategies below:

Already universally employed in airports, smart cameras could be installed, unobtrusively, in numerous public areas. Capable of analyzing what they observe, they set off alarms if they witness behavior that is programmed as “unsafe.” Micro-sensors (additionally equipped with auditory and olfactory abilities) could also be installed on anyone’s body, to record hostile behavior directed at them. The bionic eyeball “eyeborg”, utilized by Terminator and Canadian filmmaker Rob Spence, could serve as a safety enhancing “third eye.”

Obviously, employment of these options would result in drastically diminished privacy in public spaces. But that's only a danger while there are institutions in existence capable of acting like a “Big Brother.”

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