

December 11, 2005

Anti-Rape Condom, The

By CHRISTOPHER SHEA

The vagina dentata - a vagina with literal or figurative teeth - is a potent trope in South Asian mythology, urban legend, Freudian rumination and speculative fiction (the novel "Snow Crash," by Neal Stephenson, for example). But it took a step toward reality this August with the unveiling of the Rapex, a female "condom" lined with rows of plastic spikes on its inner surface.

The Rapex is the brainchild of Sonette Ehlers, a retired blood technician in South Africa who was moved by the country's outlandish rape rate, which is among the highest in the world. The device is designed to be inserted any time a woman feels she is in danger of sexual assault. Its spikes are fashioned to end an assault immediately by affixing the Rapex to the assaulter's penis, but also to cause only superficial damage. The Rapex would create physical evidence of the attack as well and, as Ehlers laid out a course of events for reporters at a news conference, send the offender to a hospital, where he would be promptly arrested.

Ehlers estimates that each Rapex would cost 50 to 60 cents - a pricey proposition in Africa for a nonreusable item. On a Web site, www.rapestop.net, she answers other frequently asked questions: How is it inserted and removed? In each case, with an applicator. Do you hate men? No. Won't it get some users killed? Many rapists kill anyway; you stand a better chance against a temporarily disabled man. (On this last point, some may find Ehlers a little blithe about the prospect of an enraged rapist.) In a phone interview, she said that she has found the Rapex prototype to be more comfortable than a tampon. But Chantel Cooper, director of the Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust, remains unimpressed. The Rapex, she said in an e-mail message, sends the retrograde message "that women should be responsible for their own safety."

[Copyright 2005 The New York Times Company](#) | [Home](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [XML](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Back to Top](#)