



What the fap is in your lunchbox?

Oliver Roberts witnesses the comings and goings of a porn store during peak hours

Illustration: Andy Mason

UNLESS you routinely frequent them yourself, you may be surprised, (and a little alarmed) to learn that an adult store's busiest hours are weekdays between 1pm and 3pm.

But when you think about it, it makes perfect sense. Even the most barefaced consumer of porn is unsettled by the thought of being caught right-handed purchasing or using it. So what better way to avoid detection and suspicion than by dashing into your local in broad daylight for a quick wank?

That's it. You've got a "lunch meeting". Or "an errand to run". In and out. No fuss. A little mess, sure, but you're back at your desk an hour later, and home for dinner a few hours after that. None of that skulking about under neon lights for you.

Shortly after the clock strikes one I've already counted four customers. They've come in for the movie, you see. There are two theatres, one for heteros and one for gays. You pay R40 to enter. It doesn't sound like much, but they dupe you into thinking you're paying for an hour when really it's something like 20 bucks a minute.

I haven't yet plucked up the courage to venture into the theatre (I'm waiting until it's fuller, or completely empty — I can't decide which is less sinister) so I loiter around the toy section. In fact, it's where I head to straight away. Sex toys suggest a joke, a laugh, a jaunty dildo or a strap-on cock bought for a gag. So I hang here for a bit, peering through the yellow DVD racks.

The men keep streaming in. The demographic seems to be white, mid-30s to 50s, all with a desperate, horny, embarrassed sheen in their eyes. There's a brief exchange at the counter when they hand their money over — one patron even says, "How are you?" — and then they either slink off behind the yellow

door marked "Hetero", or plunge down, down, down into the dark pulsing chasm of the gay theatre.

Apart from that, nobody says anything. It has to be the quietest shop I've ever been in. Initially you think, oh, this is quite nice actually, a little slice of peace and twisted tranquility, but then you hear fapping. At least I think I hear fapping but then I realise it's a staff member sweeping the store room. But it could be fapping. But what I do hear, twice or thrice — and this is unmistakable — are the spasmed cries of release coming from behind the theatre doors. In its context it's kind of a sad sound, a yelp of loneliness, despair even.

So I'm browsing the toys and suddenly they're not as funny as I thought. The sheer scope is astonishing, as are the unsettling lengths a horny human will go to, the nonsensical amounts he will spend, just to get himself off. And I say "he" because I understand dildos, I do.

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An artificial phallus has substance, weight, and could even offer vague companionship to the friendless female. What doesn't make sense is the Pocket Pussy. Or the Double Beaded Deep Throat Stroker (Experience the Ultimate Blowjob!). Or, from a company called Extreme Toyz, silicone renditions of three female orifices. "Travel Trio Set!" it says. "Free Moist Lubricant & Toy Cleaner!"

Travel set? Why? Why? Why not just save yourself R300 (plus the potential disrepute of being caught with such a thing) and use your clenched fist and the hotel porn channel instead? You could even charge it to your room, get the com-

pany to pay for your ejaculations.

More men arrive, as others, the satiated ones, emerge blinking from the gloomy theatres. There's no social exchange, no eye contact, as the masturbated exit the shop. They simply walk straight out the door, changed in some undetectable way. The new arrivals shuffle about, reluctant at first, vague, but once they realise and accept that everyone here is the same as them they stop caring and the self-consciousness evaporates.

The guy behind the counter is chewing a match stick. He probably hates porn. I ask him if they ever get women coming in here. He just laughs. He estimates they get 50 to 60 men in here per day, most of them during these peak hours.

While waiting for my moment to enter the theatre, I remember that this place is a 500m walk from where I used to work. Suddenly I have this horror that an old colleague of mine, some or other nameless guy I used to pass in the corridors, is going to come in and we're going to recognise each other. And here I am, studying a DVD of "Girl-Girl Face Farting".

That's when I do it. I walk over to the hetero theatre door, open it and go in. Smell of slow sweat and chlorine. There are some viewing booths. One of them is slightly ajar and there's a figure in there, watching the action. Three men waiting for a spare booth are transfixed by the slightly concealed action on the screen in front of them. It's an orgy. Tanned tits and nodding cocks going at it in full HD. The men next to me all have their hands in their pockets and they're standing a width apart, lit by a bawdy glow, waiting for their turn to fap, fap, fap as one.

Profoundly anxious about what might happen next, I make for the exit, and in a moment I'm back on the streets, out into the blinding light of the day. **LS**

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3

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