

Sad singletons can rejoice, now that **Japanese technology** has mastered the art of seduction.

When girl beeps boy



There are few sadder places than a singles' bar. A singles' salad bar, maybe. But one doesn't come across those very often. "Can I tempt you with a small lettuce, my dear?" isn't really as enticing as "How about a white wine spritzer,

darlin'?" Unless you're trying to pull a caterpillar or an aphid. Even there, though, the whole thing smacks terribly of desperation. One of the reasons I muse thus was that I found myself in a Maida Vale "meat market" last week, courtesy of a newspaper that needed to photograph me manifestly failing to pull. I've never found this to be a problem, so they got lots of convincing shots. How different it might have been, however, had I had access to the latest in courtship technology: the Lovegety.

Possibly you've heard of one of these. Invented in — where else? — Japan, a Lovegety is basically an adolescent Tamagotchi, aimed at "men wanting to meet women and women wanting to meet men". About the size of a medium egg, the thing comes in male and female versions, and is programmable. Currently, there are just three modes: Talk, Karaoke, and Get2. As I understand it, these correspond to: "Can we have a conversation?", "How about we make sweet music together?" and "I am absolutely gagging for it". When two oppositely-sexed Lovegetys set to compatible mode come within 15 feet of one another, they beep and flash a green light.

Thereafter, their respective owners let nature takes its course. Of course, when, later this year, Lovegetys eventually reach the UK, the problem faced by whoever first buys one will be the same as that faced, presumably, by the first person who bought a fax machine: it's of limited use until a second person buys one. But if Japan is anything to go by, it shouldn't take too long for sales to take off. Then, as Lovegetys become increasingly popular, I can see them having a considerable impact on our lives.

At the moment, dating is a rather inexact science, like finding a decent plumber or a reputable car mechanic. But to know, with a single "Beep!", that you are within just a few feet of a potential soulmate will be an enormous confidence booster. Even people who routinely buy internet magazines will be in with at least

a chance, however slim. Naturally, the technology needs to be refined somewhat before it becomes really useful; but this, I'm told, is already in the pipeline. The range, for instance, is being increased to 100 feet, and the three basic modes are being supplemented by a number of others. Pretty soon, you should be able to buy a Lovegety into which you can tick off all sorts of variables, rather like one of those Dateline questionnaires. So, for example, a be-singled man will instruct his male Lovegety to home in on a female Lovegety: (a) into clubbing; (b) likes keeping fit; and (c) has an understanding attitude to beer guts. For her part, the woman will be able to specify a male Lovegety who is (a) a strong, romantic type; (b) a non-smoker; and (c) has own hair and teeth. Proximity is all that's then needed. And even if the man and woman themselves don't "click", they can at least leave their compatible Lovegetys alone together in a drawer and let them get on with it.

Thanks to the Lovegety, marriage bureaux and introduction agencies will go out of business. Who needs to pay upwards of £1000 for a pair-off when a

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\$29.95 device can do exactly the same job? The singles' bar will be rendered redundant, too. What's the point in gathering together in the one location to advertise the fact that you're sad and available when you can do it absolutely anywhere, such as the top deck of a bus or on the Tube?

And all those dreary blues ballads — "Mah woman gone done me wrong" and other, similar caterwauling — will be consigned to the dustbin of history. Technology will ensure that man will no longer be able to get himself into such a ridiculous situation in the first place.

I can see this thing completely transforming male/female relationships. Provided the batteries don't go flat too quickly.

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