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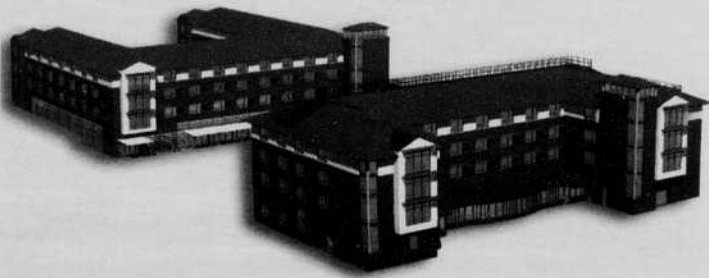


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Lichty: Is it true love or a publicity stunt?

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swirling around these two haven't dissipated. So, I'll save you the trouble and let you know what I know, and then you can decide for yourselves if this is a classic case of Hollywood-style true love or a crazy, out of control publicity stunt.

You probably know by now that Tom Cruise, 42, has been dating Katie Holmes, who's a whopping 16 years his junior. (For those non-math whizzes, that means she's 26). These two first stepped out in Rome in late April and made their presence known to the world with help from their magnetic lips. The shocking PDA-packed romance caught everyone off guard as reporters scrambled to Italy to get the scoop of these normally incredibly tight-lipped (romantically speaking, that is) individuals. Holmes had just ended her five-year relationship, which included a one-year engagement to "American Pie" actor Chris Klein in February. Cruise and his former, Penelope Cruz, split early last year.

So, that's what's known. But there is so much that is unknown, which is really what makes this story interesting.

Immediately following their Roman holiday, the press began their speculations. How did they meet? Why didn't we see this

coming? Truth be told, many did see it coming. Sources tell gossip magazine Us Weekly that those close to Cruise had been expecting him to start dating a young up-and-coming starlet to reach a younger fan base, but just who was yet unknown. Us Weekly claims that the actor, via his publicist, "put feelers out to a bunch of girls he was interested in dating." First on the list? No, not the "extraordinary" Holmes, but rather "Dark Angel" beauty Jessica Alba. Also on the list was the way-too-svelte Lindsay Lohan (what?!), but she was deemed "too wild and immature." Another, Kate Bosworth, was also reported to be on the list, but she was able to resist his "feelers." So where was Holmes on the list? The slightly-offensive number five. Her publicist calls this story "outrageous and untrue." Of course.

When asked in Rome how they met, Cruise was tight-lipped, saying it was just between them, but that it was incredibly romantic. The truth? His rep called her rep, and they had a meeting. How sweet. But then he did lay on the classic Cruise charm by taking her on a sushi date. While most of us would head to the nearest Japanese restaurant, Cruise instead whisked the young actress away on a private jet and had

their sushi date thousands of feet off of the ground. All right, so what girl wouldn't fall for that?

Now the rumors are rampant that Cruise will make Holmes bride No. 3 (he was previously wed to Mimi Rogers in 1987 and Nicole Kidman in 1990, with whom he has two children, Isabella, 12, and Connor, 10, both of whom Holmes has reportedly met). Us Weekly's latest issue screams they're "Getting Married!" although their story inside fails to provide any information to back up this claim. They also report that these two have begun cohabiting, but People dismisses the story, claiming that a source close to the actress says she hasn't moved in — yet. People also says that Holmes has not yet converted from her Catholic upbringing into the more controversial Scientology, a religion of which Cruise is a strong, outspoken supporter, although she has been seen stopping by a tutoring center that the church supports.

The next few months will show the cynical public just how much these two really do love each other. With hope, it will last longer than their promotions for their upcoming summer blockbusters, "War of the Worlds" for Cruise, and "Batman Begins" for Holmes. But we'll see.

amylichty@dailyemerald.com

“So, that's what's known. But there is so much that is unknown, which is really what makes this story interesting.”

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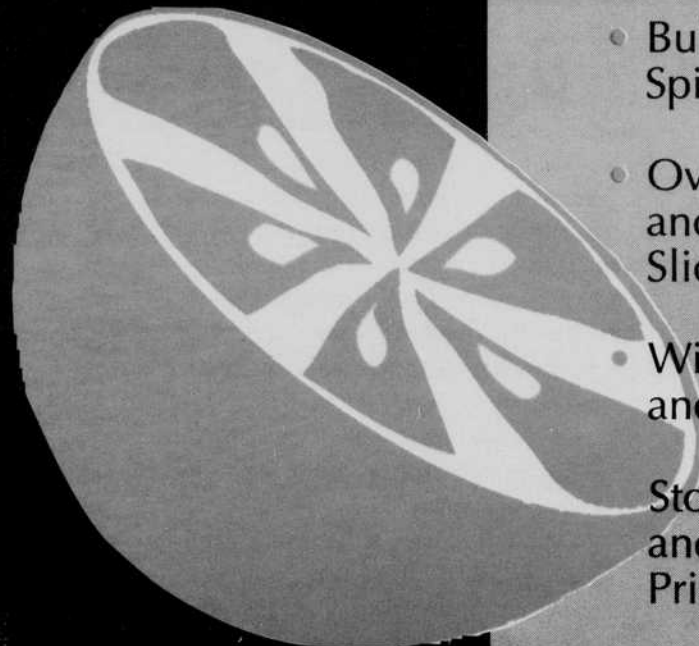
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