

Prison Satire

The Red Spider

Regular readers of the Red Spider will be aware that quiz shows can perplex the most knowledgeable of POWs, especially those from the Lower Ormeau/Markets/Short Strand districts. (Remember Terry Clinton's claim that Christopher Columbus hailed from somewhere near Miami?)

This time Paddy Devenny does the honours. All the lads are out sunning themselves in the yard on the first (and only) day of summer. As usual, the radio was blaring away waiting for the daily quiz to begin. By the way, did you know that Paddy has a passing interest in South Africa and the victorious struggle against apartheid? Anyway, fingers on buzzers and the DJ asks: "For one point, who might wear a 'tutu'?" Paddy jumps up and blurts out: "An archbishop!" Another scandal rocks the clergy?

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Strange and disturbing reports of confused behaviour are being received almost daily from the Red Spider spies. Take the case of Anto Murray. He was weight training with Gerry McConville and, as ever, they were arguing about which exercises to do, trying to out-expert the expert. Or maybe they weren't able to figure out how to use the new multigym with its range of bars, pulleys, and fearsome contraptions. Finally, Anto said, 'Look, Gerry, see that apparatus over there? Use it right and you'll end up with arms like a stallion!'

Or Dan Hughes. Someone asked him what video was on. 'Some owl wildlife programme,' he replied. 'What's it about?' he was asked. Says Dan: 'The Tamil Tigers.' Or Cíarán Murray. He walked into the canteen where the lads were watching a music programme. 'What's the name of that show?' he asked. 'Larry Grogan's Golden Hour,' he was told. 'Oh,' said Cíarán, 'how long's that on for?' Or Eddie O'Connor (this is to be taken as a warning not to get out of bed and go straight into a political discussion) who left the lads in bewildered silence with his exasperated outburst: 'Look, you are only making problems out of mountainholes!'

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I suppose it was bound to happen sometime. One of the lads, writing to a supporter in Los Angeles, was listing his hobbies and interests. He told about learning Irish, studying, playing snooker and he added, 'there's nothing I like better than a bit of crack with the lads.' Three weeks later came the reply; 'Do you not realise that crack kills hundreds of young people every year and destroys the lives of thousands of others?'

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During a big search in Crumlin Road jail, one of the new lads was on full alert, staring out through a small gap in the side of his door, ready to report any suspicious activity to his comrades further down the wing. He saw dozens of screws milling about, some with sniffer dogs, trained to sniff out explosives. Then suddenly he noticed one screw holding the jail cat (whose job was to keep the rats at bay in the Victorian jail). Quick as a flash the new comrade informed the others about this sinister development, 'Hey lads! They've got a sniffer cat with them.'

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A film shown in H Block 8 recently was *Sleepless in Seattle*. Tomás Maguire and the other lads were following every soppy detail and many's a heart missed a beat when The Empire State Building appeared all lit up as a valentine heart. Tomás, to break the tear-jerking moment and engulfing silence, broke in: 'I remember that building when Hong Kong was hanging off the top of it!'

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Jimmy O'Reilly sent for the cooks. He had a growing list of complaints about the food and he paced the cell in high dudgeon, waiting for the show down. Through the grilles came the fat cook and the skinny cook (lean, mean, and hungry looking). Jimmy brought them into the big cell and went through his list: the Sellafield fish that even the seagulls rejected, the burgers that would make wonderful insoles, and the chicken legs that the lads could cut up to restring their banjos. Eventually, he came to the straw that broke the camel's back: 'We got vegetarian pasties last week and I opened one up,' he said, leaning forward. 'There was nothing except two peas in it.' 'Oh,' said the fat cook slowly, looking across at his mate, 'That's where those two peas went.'

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The things kids say or, surrealism is alive and well and living in the visiting room in Long Kesh. When one of the lads asked his five-year-old daughter what she wanted to be when she grew up, she replied, 'A car engine.'

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Talking of the visiting room in Long Kesh, the piped music they play there is picked by a screw who has developed a cruel sense of humour. As prisoners sit in the visiting boxes with their partners, two songs get played rather too often. They are: 'You're My Favourite Waste of Time' and 'Torn between Two Lovers.'

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A screw, on duty in H4, was stumped at why several of the most obvious answers to clues in his Daily Star crossword were clashing with 5 across. Its clue had read: 'Two people in first garden (4, 3, 3),' and had been the first one

he had solved. He eventually threw the paper on the table in frustration, at which point one of Ireland's finest picked it up. 'Ahem,' said our diplomatic comrade, 'I think "Bill and Ben" is wrong ...'

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One day two soul mates, Brendy Mulvenna and Tommy Loughlin, came in after a walk in the yard and sat down to eat their tea of burgers and chips. They both immediately noticed that the kitchen had also sent up tasty jam sponge cakes for everyone. There were two slices in front of them, one less than half the size of the other. They both eyed the large slice greedily as they performed the difficult task of eating their tea as quickly as possible while giving the appearance of relaxed indifference. Brendy Mul speared his last chip, put it in his mouth, pushed his plate away, and lifted up the large slice of cake in a movement so quick and effortless that Locky blinked and missed it.

Mul bit into the cake, his hand cupped beneath his chin and his eyes closed in ecstasy. 'You dirty, stinking rotter' (or words to that effect), said Locky. 'What? What's wrong?' said Mul, wide eyed and innocent. 'You greedy git! You took the biggest piece!' cried Locky. "Wha'?" Well, which one would you have taken?" asked Mul, offended. 'I would have taken the smallest piece,' said Locky proudly. 'Well then, what are you complaining about?' replied Mul.

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One of my Red Spider spies claims that, during a prison-yard discussion on the merits of the IRA's weaponry, one over-excited POW enthused: 'Here, do you see that Semtex ... it's dynamite!'