



## IRISH OSCAR PLOT SPOILERS

Despite all the hoopla around the successful Oscar run by **Cillian Murphy** in *Oppenheimer* and Element Pictures' *Poor Things*, the delirious hacks have managed to remain undistracted by inconvenient plot spoilers, such as the fight for long-suffering Irish performers to be given contracts on a par with UK and US actors working in Ireland on the very same productions backed by the taxpayer. The campaign, fronted by **Gerry O'Brien's** Equity union, just happens to be a cause that is strongly supported by one

Cillian Murphy.

Nor did anyone raise the impending Labour Court appeals relating to recent Workplace Relations Commission (WRC)

findings against big producer Metropolitan Films International Ltd in favour of around 30 members of bolshy **John Arkins's** Irish Film Workers Association. The total awards made against **Morgan O'Sullivan's** Metropolitan approached €½m and relate to the employment status of crew members who, O'Sullivan's company insisted, were never employed by it but rather by temporary so-called special purpose vehicles.

Interestingly, it's has been **Torlach Denihan's** Audiovisual Ireland division of Ibec, rather than **Susan Kirby's** Screen Producers Ireland, that has been representing Irish producers at the WRC. Coincidentally, Audiovisual Ireland is chaired by the one recent Oscar nominee,

**Andrew Lowe** of Element.

Denihan was straight out of the blocks following the Oscars with a plea for yet another escalation of the Section 481 tax breaks because the Brits have announced they will ramp up film and TV 'incentives' to a bumper 40% of spend: "We want to look closely at what the British have announced... At the end of the day, if the numbers stack up, that's where productions will go – either north of the border or across the sea."



Cillian Murphy

This is what former arts minister **John O'Donoghue** once referred to as a "Dutch auction" between countries.

And perhaps Lowe might have a quiet word with Denihan and advise him that *Conversations with Friends* was mostly filmed north of the border and *Poor Things* was filmed in Budapest exactly because that's how "the numbers stacked up" – long before the UK announced its planned giveaway.

*NO SURPRISE* to see well-connected former *VIP Publishing* boss *Vicki Notaro* attracting some high-level plugs for her upcoming debut novel, *Reality Check*. These include the likes of fellow Penguin imprint author *Paul Howard* ("Absolutely hilarious") and *Sarah 'Aisling' Breen* ("Escapism at its finest"). *Breen* is formerly of *Stellar* magazine, part of the *VIP* stable.

*Reality Check* readers will encounter *Portia Daniels*, who "has the perfect man (hot TV producer *Jason*), perfect apartment (in *Lower Manhattan*)" etc, etc – at least until "*Jason* drops a bombshell". You get the picture.

The least surprising plugger for *Reality Check* is surely from *Notaro's* pal and fellow Penguin scribbler *Marian Keyes*, whom *Notaro* has described as: "My beloved, my absolute favourite, the *Queen of Ireland*... I love her and I always will."

The admiration is mutual and *Keyes*, who is busy promoting her own new buke, *My Favourite Mistake*, has given *Reality Check* the thumbs-up, announcing: "I horsed through it!"



## WRECKING BALLS-UP

### BARRY CONNELL'S

short-priced ante-post favourite for Cheltenham's Arkle Chase, *Marine Nationale*, was ruled out of Cheltenham following his flop at the Dublin Racing Festival last month. Of course, he also has *William Munny* – "the best bumper horse in Ireland" – but left the horse at home last week, earmarking him for the Punchestown Festival.

While the latter horse's regular amateur rider, **Finn Maguire**, has been impressive when aboard *William Munny*, the same could not be said of his ride on **Luke Comer's** *Eskimo Komet* at Dundalk earlier this month.

Maguire was one of 12 riders suspended for allowing the **Paul Mulligan**-trained *Wrecking*

*Ball Paul* (Mulligan being a crane driver as well as training in his spare time) an unassailable lead in the Peter K 'Hits the Big 50' qualified riders race at Dundalk.

Owned by the Crane Crew Syndicate (all the members have worked together on the redevelopment of St James's Hospital), there were jubilant scenes when the horse passed the post 15 lengths to the good of the **Harry Swan**-ridden favourite, *Riyami*.

*Wrecking Ball Paul* led from the start and pulled well clear of the chasing pack, led initially by **Aine O'Connor** on *Dark Voyager*. O'Connor is the co-ordinator of Horse Racing Ireland's equip department (which aims to attract new people to horseracing and breeding) and was recently to the forefront of the agency's jockey



Barry Connell

coach qualification courses. It looks like all 12 riders could do with some intensive jockey tuition from the newly qualified coaches.

When interviewed by the stewards, O'Connor said she knew the winner was a long way clear but her mount "got unbalanced and could not go any

faster". Swan stated that he had ridden his horse to instructions but, knowing the leader was so far in front, had "shouted to the other riders to close the gap".

The stewards found the riders to be in breach of the riding rules but all concerned have appealed the decision.

*THE IRISH* Horseracing Regulatory Board and the British Horseracing Authority (BHA) recently joined forces in an anti-doping initiative. Citing "out-of-competition testing" as a critical component of any strategy, tests will be performed through joint operations in Ireland and Britain.

One area sure to attract attention is the cost to taxpayers, given that Irish personnel will be conducting tests across the Irish Sea. The first action here saw 120 Irish horses entered for the Cheltenham festival tested in 14 training premises last month.

Presumably, the partnership will be less controversial than the BHA's debacle at Southwell racecourse this month, when Irish jockey *Kieran O'Neill* was wrongly deemed to have failed a saliva and sweat drug test, resulting in him forfeiting all his booked rides. The subsequent urine test returned negative, allowing O'Neill to return to action the following day.

## MULLINS'S ROUGH DIAMOND

While **Patrick Mullins's** victory aboard *Jasmine De Vaux* provided his father, **Willie**, with his 100th Cheltenham success, his faith in *Ashroe Diamond* in the Mares Hurdle proved to be misplaced.

Before the meeting, a bullish Patrick declared that "no mare had yet beaten her over hurdles", adding that "I'm counting on *Ashroe* to prove a diamond in the Mare's Hurdle".

Racing in the colours of Blue Bloods Racing, a syndicate of 134 members of An Garda Síochána, the mare started as second favourite.

Having led at the fourth hurdle, *Ashroe Diamond* weakened quickly and was pulled up, leaving the hapless Blue Bloods rather red-faced.

The horse was subsequently drug tested, confirming that nothing untoward had occurred.

Her stable companion, *Lossiemouth*, went on to a comfortable victory and was greeted in the winner's enclosure by her minted owner, **Rich Ricci**, where once again his flowing mane, rather than flamboyant suits, was the talk of those gathered around the enclosure.