

Opinion Mark Kennedy

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How to spot an undercover cop

Carole Cadwalladr



If the police must try covert action, could they please show more aptitude for the task?

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Oh dear, you have to feel sorry for the woman who thought she'd had a hot affair with Mark Stone, a dynamic eco-activist, G20 protester, occasional scaler of power stations and the proud possessor of both an earring and a ponytail, only to discover that he was actually a policeman. Or, to be precise, [PC Mark Kennedy](#), an undercover policeman who maintained his disguise for seven years in order to save Britain from the threat of annihilation by a rogue nuclear device.

No, sorry, that's not quite right. In order to save Britain from a bunch of vegans intent on world domination through the deliberate and flagrant consumption of soya-based products. Or something. The woman in question, "Anna", is reported to have said that she feels "violated". Yeah, yeah. We've all been there, love. A police officer is nothing. Call me when you meet someone with a deep and abiding love of "literature", which turns out, three months later, to include the terms "Wilbur" and "Smith". And only "Wilbur" and "Smith". Or the plight, suffered by a friend of mine, who met a handsome, human rights lawyer, champion sportsman, lover of the arts, the man of her dreams and only discovered the next day, at breakfast, that he was a TORY MP. Try that for violated. Or the Israeli woman who had sex with an Israeli man, then got him jailed for rape, after she discovered that he was an Arab Israeli. Hmm. Well, no, not that one obviously. That's just racism. Or, as they call it in Israel, "the law".

There were certain clues that Kennedy wasn't quite what he seemed. He had a car, which in hard-core environmentalist circles, is... what's the word? Oh yes, hypocritical. And he ate meat which, again, if you're posing as a vegetarian eco-anarchist is perhaps a little unusual. And then there was the interior design choice of his colleague, "Officer A". Her friend, Paul Chatterton, a Leeds University lecturer, says that what first alerted his suspicions was the Class War poster on her living room wall. "I always found it quite weird," he says. Real environmental activists have IKEA pebbles pictures too, apparently.

Still, this is positively James Bondian when you compare it to what happened to Philip Etienne and Martin Maynard, two policeman who went undercover in 2001 to conduct a £10,000 crack deal with a Birmingham yardie gang, but were unaccountably rumbled when the money they handed over turned out to be stamped with the words "West Midlands Police". Also their navy blue Ford Mondeo lacked a certain *je ne sais* drugs dealer.

And then there's Toby Kendall, who infiltrated the protest group, [Plane Stupid](#), dressed for the part in a keffiyah Palestinian scarf. Uncannily,

though, his fellow protesters smelled a rat; something about the way he accessorised it with a pair of Armani jeans. They started calling him "Agent Maverick" and fed him false information to see if it turned up in the *Evening Standard*. "Amazingly, it worked!" one of them reported. "We found Maverick's Achilles heel - the glaringly obvious."

But then, spying is not what it was. Over on [MI6's website](#), a homepage that has all the glamour and pizzazz of Basildon, they lure you in with the promise that "everyone can access our bicycle-to-work scheme and interest-free season ticket loan". Grippingly, though, they do have an "operational officer challenge" which will "test your ability to maintain a simple cover story". Your name is Stephanie Johnson. You're stationed in Transeuratania. You're a vegetarian. You studied geology at university and now work as a management consultant.

Then there are the questions, decided to sniff out only the brightest and the best. Such as: what's your favourite meal? A) Mushroom risotto. B) Duck a l'orange. C) Roasted vegetables with lamb. It's THE RISOTTO, MARK! THE RISOTTO!

But then, it seems hard to know why anybody would want to be a spy since the only point, surely, would be to be able to go down the pub, and say: "Actually, I'm a spy." Not that this stopped the only undercover police officer I've ever met, who announced his occupation within approximately 30 seconds of meeting him. He worked in male vice and part of his job involved sitting behind the two-way mirror in London's Green Park public lavatories. Yes, gentleman, give them a wave next time you're down there.

It caught my interest because the vicar in the village where I grew up was arrested for "importuning" in Green Park's lavatories, retired in disgrace and was never seen again. It's also close to where George Michael was arrested. And Gordon Ramsay, not that he was up to any funny stuff. Just some rugged heterosexual "naked horseplay".

Do we still employ undercover police officers to harass lonely homosexuals? Or do we only concentrate on the kinds of people who remember to turn off their lights and think that coal-burning power stations are a bit polluting? What next? People who want to save the whale? Who like cuddling kittens? Who think tuition fees are wrong? "Anna" has a point. We possibly should be feeling a little bit violated.

Don't be beastly to Jemima

Poor Jemima Khan. Her ongoing battle to turn herself from the lady-with-the-big-hair-and-startled-Bambi-eyes-who-sometimes-turns-up-in-*Hello!* to Jemima of South Kensington, champion of WikiLeaks, and comforter of investigative journalists everywhere, has received another blow. "A favour," she tweets. "Please email tim.walker@telegraph.co.uk and request that he refrain from always referring to me as 'Jemima Khan the socialite'." For accuracy, therefore, she shall henceforth be known here as "Jemima Khan, the daughter of billionaire financier Sir James Goldsmith and Lady Annabel Vane-Tempest-Stewart, granddaughter of the 8th Marquess of Londonderry, former wife of Imran Khan, and one-time consort of Hugh Grant." There now. All better.

- This is the archive of The Observer up until 21/04/2025. The Observer is now owned and operated by Tortoise Media.

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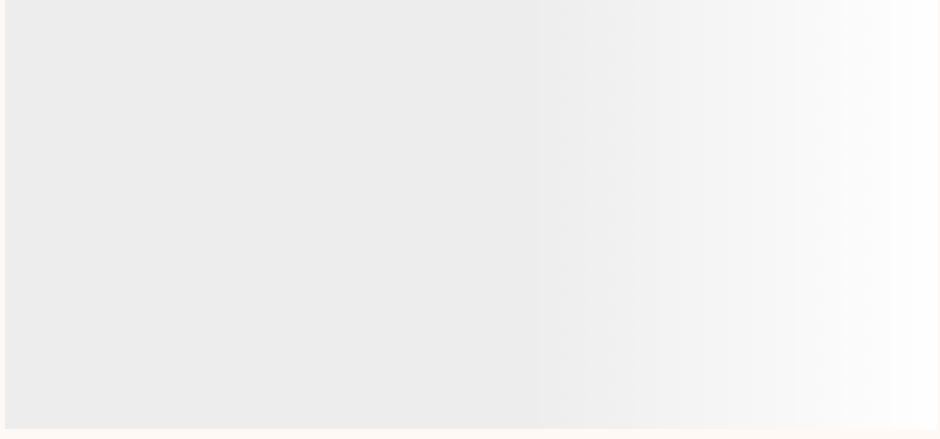
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