

## 14 An idiomatic theme and variations

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### 1 Introduction

Fixed phrases and idiomatic expressions are highly characteristic of the English language, and so it comes as no surprise that they have been the focus of a wide range of linguistic enquiry, from the psychological to the pedagogical. Yet an interest in their form and function comes hand in hand with a curiosity as to how they are lexicalised, what leads to their stability as linguistic units, and to what degree they can tolerate alteration to their canonical form.

This paper presents a corpus-based study of *like a red rag to a bull*, taking as its starting point Sinclair's assertion that "'fixed phrases" are not in fact fixed' (1996: 83). None of the variations studied here are hypothetical, because '[h]owever plausible an invented example might be, it cannot be offered as a genuine instance of language in use' (Sinclair 1991: 4). The place for hypothesis is in predicting the kind of variation that might occur, and this can subsequently be tested out on a large text collection (Stubbs, this volume).

#### 1.1 Data selection

The canonical form of the idiom is composed of three main elements – the comparative *like*, the collocation *red rag*, and *bull*. The other components are the grammatical elements – the indefinite article (twice), and the preposition *to*. The data for this study was taken from the [Bank of English](#) corpus: all occurrences of the collocation *red rag*, plus *red* followed by *bull*, and *rag* followed by *bull*, specifying a maximum of five words in between for both. These are presented in the [Appendices](#). Duplicate examples were removed, as were collocations which displayed no connection with the idiom, such as *Red Bull* (a drink), and *Red Rag* (a magazine title which collocated exclusively with issue numbers and dates). A further search was carried out in an attempt to isolate wholly exploited forms of the idiom in which neither *red*, *rag*, or *bull* appeared. This was done by isolating the structural elements of the idiom, or 'collocational framework' (Sinclair & Renouf 1991). This further search – *like a [] to a []*, sorted by hand so that each gap (*[]*) contained a noun or a noun phrase – resulted in 56 concordance lines, none of which was an exploited form of the idiom, indicating that variations are grammatical as well as lexical.

The canonical form occurs 18 times (including reversed forms), mainly in British journalism, and is used in three main situational contexts – personal relationships (11), politics (5) and sport (2). The 47 variations display a more even distribution across text types with the formal written medium being preferred – popular journalism is practically excluded, and spoken examples are few and far between. British English is favoured, reflecting the composition of the corpus. The situations encountered are more varied, but fall into four main types: sport (11), leisure (2) and entertainment (1); politics (13) and dealings with the establishment (10); personal relationships (7); and health (3).

## 2 A theme: like a red rag to a bull

*Like a red rag to a bull* is a simile which is also known in its metaphorical guise, as simply a *red rag to a bull*. As metaphors are not constrained by truth conditions in the way that similes are, it will be seen that it is this metaphorical version which lends itself more to variation in the data studied. The simile will be treated here as the canonical version.

*Like a red rag to a bull* is defined variously as ‘an indication of incitement or provocation’ (Wilkinson [1993](#)), or as ‘a cause of great annoyance or anger’ (Flavell & Flavell [1993](#)). These definitions are in reality two sides of the same coin, and the meaning of the idiom must depend on whether the focus is to be on the *red rag* or on the *bull*’s reaction to it. A similar definition can be found in Moon ([1995](#)), alongside a further indication that there is an alternative form, *red flag before a bull* (my emphasis). The two forms are presented as standard alternants, the former appearing more commonly in British English, the latter in American English.

The sources mentioned above give a basic definition to an idiom which is based on real-world knowledge, i.e. that red angers bulls.<sup>i</sup> With the exception of Moon ([1995](#)), no mention is made of the fact that this idiom is frequently exploited in everyday language. The variations that occur will be outlined and explained below, showing how meaning is retained, or indeed added to, despite changes to the canonical form. *Red flag before a bull* will be treated as a variation to the canonical form.

### 2.1 The theme in context

An example of the canonical version in use is:

17:... actually it’s **like a red rag to a bull** and a lot of those people, as I’ve already said we# and are still no doubt really angry ([BrSpok<sup>ii</sup>](#))

This form can be reversed, a stylistic effect which does not actually change the meaning conveyed by the idiom. This is done when the source of provocation is mentioned after the anger that it causes rather than before it:

16: "People who say we sound like The Faces should keep their big mouths shut" spits Rich, ignoring my question and charging towards his pet hate topic **like a bull to a red rag**. ([BrMags](#))

In total, there are 15 occurrences of the canonical version, plus three examples displaying reversal. The remaining examples show differing degrees of variation, from pluralisation through to omission and/or substitution of the key component parts. Two examples, whose meaning is [literal](#), do not appear in the results below as they do not behave in the same way as the idiom variants. The rest of this paper will examine the changes encountered, starting with the least significant. It should however be noted that most of these variations occur not in isolation, but in combination.

### **3 Variation 1: Changes which do not significantly alter the idiom's meaning**

*Like a red rag to a bull* only occurs 15 times in its precise canonical form, all other examples displaying some degree of variation or exploitation. When the idiom is varied, its meaning is not substantially altered, although obviously if too many words are changed, allusions to it may be lost. Variation is a complex phenomenon which manifests itself in many different ways, and only those aspects encountered in the *red rag* data set will be mentioned here.<sup>iii</sup> *Red flag* is treated in this paper as a variant, and will be examined in section 5.

#### **3.1 Substitution of *like***

*Like* may be substituted by *as*, *just as*, *akin to*, or comparative adjective + *than*, all of which are found in the data. Substitution of this kind is not particularly common, occurring in only six of the concordance lines studied. It does not change the meaning of the idiom, but the variation, though small, interrupts the flow of the canonical version. As a consequence, the reader is more likely to be made aware of the wording rather than accepting the 'chunk' as a single unit of meaning.

31: In June 1804 he wrote to his son, telling him that nothing could be done. The letter was **as a red rag to a bull**. ([BrBooks](#))

#### **3.2 Indefinite, definite, and plural forms**

The changing of articles from indefinite to definite, and pluralisation (sometimes the cause of article variation) occurs ten times in 53 concordances. It appears to facilitate other types of variation, since it acts as a demetaphorising tool: by transforming the abstract forms of *a red rag* and *a bull* into the concrete *the red rag* and *the bull*, the idiom can be used to make a more forceful comparison with the person(s) or thing(s) to which

it refers. This happens when the author makes a conscientious effort to pin down these people or things to elements in the idiom. Plural forms are used when the topic is plural:

43: He recalls, with a chuckle, how Macdonald, ever the retiring wallflower, had threatened personally to score 10 in the replay, a boast which proved to be **a red rag to those Bulls**. ([Times](#))

In four of the six cases where there is a change from indefinite to definite, this is due to the formation of a possessive structure created around *bull* (see Section 4.3).

## 4 Variation 2: Variation by addition or subtraction

### 4.1 Subtraction of comparative

The omission of *like* was mentioned above (section 2) as significant in that it changes the simile into a metaphor. It indicates a choice made on the writer's part: rather than calling on the simile and making a fairly benign comparison, the metaphor is engaged. Things are no longer *like a red rag to a bull*; they **are a red rag to a bull**. This is a much more forceful comment on the writer/speaker's part.

28: **It's a red rag to a bull** when my son won't admit that he's wrong, because it's my own personal dirty washing in my face. ([BrBooks](#))

### 4.2 Addition of verb, and change of preposition

Sometimes the verb forms *waving* or *putting* are inserted into the idiom, an effect which emphasises the provocation, the *waving* of the *red rag*, rather than the anger caused by it. In these cases, the alternatives *in front of* (2), *for* (1) and *at* (1) are called upon to substitute the preposition *to*, to avoid unnaturalness in the language. The following example illustrates what happens when *to* is left unaltered:

10: The thought of making it harder on criminals and easier on the police is, to the council, **like waving a red rag to a bull** ([OzNews](#))

The transitive *wave 'x' to* is not commonly used in English, probably because of its proximity to *wave to*, to greet someone. The forms *wave 'x' at*, or *wave 'x' in front of*, are more frequent in the data. The idiom is extended by the addition of a verb in six examples (*wave* (1), *waving* (3), *putting* (2)). Variation of this kind serves to enforce the imagery being called upon by the use of the idiom, and, as has just been suggested, it also emphasises the provocative sense of the idiom by highlighting *red rag* (the source of provocation to the bull). Given that there are two complementary meanings assigned to the idiom, 'provocation' and 'anger', such an addition has a useful function and

implies that the writer wished to specify the intended meaning of a potentially ambiguous phrase.

### 4.3 Addition of qualifier

This kind of addition occurs in six of the concordance lines studied, and is used to specify what kind of *bull* is being referred to. But it has a further effect, that of personalising the *bull* or, more accurately, locating the idiom in the context. The qualities normally associated with *bull* are called upon, thus adding to the semantic colouring of the phrase. Four of the six examples which demonstrate this change create possessive structures, making the comparison definite and intentional rather than indefinite and conventional:

29: That word was **a red rag to Diane's bull** ([BrBooks](#))

Further qualification and exploitation of this part of the idiom will be discussed below in Section 5.2.

## 5 Variation 3: Changes to lexical items which can change the meaning of the idiom

### 5.1 'Red flag before a bull' as an alternant form of 'red rag to a bull'

The entry for *red rag to a bull* in Moon (1995) tells us that "[r]ag" is used more commonly in British English and "flag" is used more commonly in American English' (1995: 53).<sup>iv</sup> The substitution of words within one semantic class is a fairly common phenomenon in the lexical variation of idioms, and it is clear that *rag* and *flag* belong to the same semantic group. Homophonic variation, i.e. the substitution of similar-sounding words, is another commonly-occurring form of variation. Both of these elements have merged to create the alternative form [red flag to a bull](#). Yet the presence of *red flag* here is somewhat incongruous as it usually means *danger*, *stop* or the Communist flag (and by metonymy, Communism in general). There may be other less common meanings too, given *red's* various connotations (Gage 1993). The reason for the existence of the alternant is unknown; it may or may not have been intentional. If intentional, it was probably to create a clever juxtaposition of the expression *red flag*, and its various connotations, with the canonical form's connotations of provocation and anger. The concepts are hardly unrelated, but they are clearly separate, so mixing the two in a re-working of an old idiom is a means of saying both things at once. If the change was unintentional, caused perhaps by a slip of the tongue or of the pen, the effect is much the same.

## 5.2 Merging the senses of *red flag*

Sometimes the partnership between *red flag* and the canonical form breaks down, and the *warning/stop* or *Communist* meanings of *red flag* are used in combination with the *provocation of red rag*:

5: Scarf or no scarf, they seemed close in spirit to those first independent-minded Turkish women who took professions, thanks to the Ataturk reforms. Mucaram's scarf is **a red flag to many Kemalists**, a setback on the road West and possibly a signal pointing East. ([NPR](#))

Is this a provocation to the (bullish?) Kemalists, or is it a cause for alarm? Is it both? It can be argued that both meanings are present, and that examples such as this are intended to have a double meaning. Another example of such stylistic manipulation of the idiom is:

12. **RED FLAG TO A DRAGON**: sending the right signal to a pushier China. ([Econ](#))

The Communist *red flag* of China is brought to mind here, alongside *dragon*, the national symbol of China, which substitutes *bull*. The second part of the headline suggests provocation (*sending the right signal*) and that China is being forced to slow down – a stop sign from the West. This example also displays a high degree of homophonic similarity between *flag* and *dragon*, as well as clever word-play on *bull*. Word-play, and punning in particular, is probably the strongest motivation for varying canonical forms of idioms, as will be seen in 5.3.

## 5.3 Alteration and substitution of *bull*

This is the richest source of variation in this idiom, and the one which shows greatest invention. Low ([1988](#): 134) mentions that when an animal is evoked by an idiom, it is for its least desirable qualities. In the sort of variation described in 4.3, and in the further variation and exploitation yet to be discussed, the characteristics of the bull are being transferred onto the human subject by allusion. To illustrate some of these characteristics, i.e. *bull's* 'semantic prosody' (Louw [1993](#): 157), reference can be made to the collocations of [bull-like](#) that occur in the Bank of English as well as other idioms which call on *bull*, such as *take the bull by the horns*, *like a bull at a gate*, and *bull in a china shop*. Expressions such as *bull-like charges*, *bull-like in its power and muscle*, *bull-like and intimidating*, and *bull-like determination* clearly illustrate some of the qualities which are alluded to in the canonical form and which remain even when *bull* is altered or substituted.

Variation to *bull* ranges from the addition of qualifying adjectives...

30: But the damage had been done and it was **a red rag to the Unionist bull**.  
([BrBooks](#))

...to far more complex structures.

2: Banford proved he was more than fair game, wearing his baseball cap back to front with pride, a badge of manhood waved **like a red rag to the bull of his leery lad's club of a band**. ([Indy](#))

In fact, the idiom can even withstand truncation, as in this example from the football coverage in a British newspaper:

6: Those not in the team were expected to act as opposition and were handed red bibs by the coach Mick Hennigan; often the first notice they get they are not in the team. "As a player, it's not very nice at all," says his fellow striker Lee Chapman. Cantona was duly handed the bib. It was more **like a red rag**. "Eric tried not to show anything but you could tell he was hurting," Chapman recalls. ([Indy](#))

If the bib is the *red rag*, then by implication, Cantona must be the *bull*. This is no surprise – Cantona has a reputation for his outbursts of rage, and this is supported further by the fact that his is the highest-collocating proper name with the expression *see red* in the Bank of English.

*Bull* is substituted in 24 of 65 examples (data from both *red rag* and *red flag*), but a vestige of *bullishness* remains. This is transferred by association onto the human element, which is usually (though not exclusively) male. The comparison is not generally favourable, though neither is it offensive. The following example, from a rugby commentary, hints at primitive anger from *earthy* Melrose, contrasted with the *fee-paying school* (middle-class, rational) opposition. The *bull-like* bulk of the players may also be implied:

5: A cash investment in a club closely linked to a fee paying school was always going to be **a red rag to an earthy border side like Melrose** who duly rose to the bait and killed the contest early. ([Indy](#))

The substitution of bull is never arbitrary, and allows the *bullish* qualities to come to the fore, while at the same time clearly locating the idiom in the context. The basic meaning of the idiom is always retained, but substitution allows further information to be conveyed, such as the writer's attitudinal stance.

## 6 Coda

The collocation *red rag* shows great resistance to change and acts as a sort of linchpin for the idiom: *red* is the only colour which follows *like a* in the structure described in

1.1, and it collocates exclusively with *rag* (the collocation *red flag* never occurs in the structure *like a red flag to a bull*)

Furthermore *red rag* displays an extremely strong collocational preference for *bull*, which occurs in 36 of the 53 examples. *Red flag* does not behave in the same way; only 12 concordance lines out of 337 relate to the idiom. *Bull* occurs over 19,000 times in the Bank of English, but only 36 times with *red rag*. The idiom can withstand the alteration or removal of *bull* (because it is implied by *red rag* and the surrounding lexicogrammatical structure), but would break down without *red rag*. When *red flag* is used, a verb is required to disconnect the collocation from its more traditional significance as a danger sign.

By outlining the main types of alteration found in *like a red rag to a bull* this study supports the case for studying real language use, and illustrates, albeit on a small scale, the creativity of which language users are capable.

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## Notes

- <sup>i</sup> It is widely acknowledged that this assertion is not quite true: bulls are angered by anything being waved in front of them, red or otherwise.
- <sup>ii</sup> Numbers refer to line numbers in the appropriate Appendix. Bank of English corpus references are indicated at [Bank of English](#).
- <sup>iii</sup> For a full discussion, see Moon [1998](#): 124ff.
- <sup>iv</sup> This is supported by current data, but the American version is not as stable as CCDI suggests.

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## Appendices

### Red rag to a bull

1.indy Tour leader `on the road". It was the red rag that the Spanish bull needed. The temperature was  
2.indy pride, a badge of manhood waved like a red rag to the bull of his leery lad's club of a band. <p> And  
3.indy Seve, the sight of an American is like a red rag to a bull. He can't stand them. Plagued this year by  
4.indy p> Mention of the Forest of Bowland is a red rag to the rambblers' bull. More than a quarter of a century  
5.indy paying school was always going to be a red rag to an earthy border side like Melrose who duly rose to  
6.indy duly handed the bib. It was more like a red rag. `Eric tried not to show anything but you could tell he  
7.indy . `Oxford will see that and it will be a red rag to a bull. It's a different game, a one-off, and this  
8.indy 're born. But for some reason this is a red rag for some people. They say that you shouldn't try to test  
9.oznews holiday.<p> Good on you for waving the red rag in front of the bull," writes Mr Doyle. <p> We felt the  
10.oznews is, to the council, like waving a red rag to a bull. <p> It was strident in its criticism of video  
11.oznews them out entirely. <p> This is like a red rag to the Euro-sceptics who want the Minister to reject  
12.oznews Antigua and Barbuda, van Dyk waved a red rag to a bull with her announcement she was glad not to be  
13.oznews materials. <p> It was like waving a red rag at the bull; <p> he grabbed that pencil and took to the  
14.oznews correct it would be like putting a `red rag to a bull". <p> <b> PARNELL S </b> Unions vow mine  
15.oznews possibly do that' it's like waving a red rag to a bull - it means I have to have a go." <p> Her job  
16.brsmags his pet hate-topic like a bull to a red rag # We're influenced by music in general. Personally, I  
17.brspok . So the police actually it's like a red rag to a bull and a lot of those people as I've already said  
18.bbc general strike for May Day, it's like a red rag to a bull. South Korea officially celebrates Labour day  
19.bbc justification by the Japanese is like a red rag to a bull # even among the younger generation, who have  
20.guard at this kind of deal could represent a `red rag to a slightly parochial regulatory board" if BT had  
21.guard nuclear testing is the latest </h> red rag from a bullish Beijing. And Japan, for one, has had  
22.guard ends in Feltham they would be like a `red rag to a bull", Mr Shaw said. <p> Frances Crook, director of  
23.guardwith two goals in as many minutes. <p> A red rag to a bull is deemed a dangerous ploy; here, this  
24.brbooks at that moment of revelation. Like a red rag to a bull, it was. Jeremy nearly burst a blood vessel.  
25.brbooks . Of course the EOKA playboy was a red rag to Turkey. <p> More officers had come. The earlier  
26.brbooks wave of success, Acheson became a red rag to the red-baiters. <o> When asked about his  
27.brbooks hit back. To hit back is to hold up a red rag in front of an already enraged bull. Rarely does it  
28.brbooks -on-troubled-waters lady. <p> It's a red rag to a bull when my son won't admit that he's wrong,  
29.brbooks hick. `Incorrigible." That word was a red rag to Diane's bull. Although Tobes was not a juvenile when  
30.brbooks the damage had been done and it was a red rag to the Unionist bull. The Catholic Church was also a  
31.brbooks could be done. The letter was as a red rag to a bull. Cecil wrote to Sydney, pulling as hard as he  
32.brbooks and rage-blinded creators. Just as a red rag enrages a bull, quiet colours soothe. <p> The blue  
33.usbooks setting must have affected her like a red rag to a bull. She grabbed the nearest end of the table  
34.usbooks sight of my Federal uniform was as a red rag to a bull," Heiser recalled. Jenkins growled at the  
35.econ stay aloof from EMU, it is a federalist red rag. <p> That does not seem to matter to those planning for  
36.econ p> The idea of cross-company unions is a red rag to businessmen. They say it would open the door to

37.econ                   Meanwhile, Michael Heseltine, red rag to the true blues, is the biggest winner. <p> But, other  
38.times   `nigger" in the playground was like a red rag to a bull to me and then my dad was laughing at it on  
39.timesChain Pier in 1827, it would have been a red rag to Turner, who not only thought Constable inept at  
40.times   always be an irritant to Nato and is a red rag to the Americans. <p> Although the threat of nuclear war  
41.times   them a favour." Such comments are a red rag to BT. Vallance says that under the proposed powers, the  
42.times   lush quicker than a bull would spy a red rag. The vanity numberplate on his sports car read: DRUNKY.  
43.times   replay, a boast which proved to be a red rag to those Bulls. <p> Hill rode the wave of euphoria which  
44.times   at Vishakhapatnam, that may be like a red rag to a bull for Steve Tikolo and Maurice Odumbe, the  
45.times powerful that motivation will become. A red rag to the red rose, you might say. <p> Yet as the pressure  
46.times " and are drawn to them like bulls to a red rag. Green doors are, well, `green". <p> But brown, black  
47.today <p> This sort of information is like a red rag to a bull for the tobacco companies but it really needs  
48.today   tapping along to the music - another red rag to the purists - he would switch effortlessly from  
49.today   about car stickers. <p> IT IS like a red rag to a bull and, being a Taurean, I react accordingly  
50.sunnow hionable on Radio Two, then I'm like a red rag to a bull on Radio One!" Daniel, from Kincasslagh, hopes  
51.sunnow just didn't fancy her. That was like a red rag to a bull. She went berserk. Julie demanded, Who do you  
52.sunnow 're dealing with now!" It was like a red rag to a bull. And the next thing I knew I was doing my best  
53.sunnow you speak to your children it's like a red rag to a bull." Mike is now stuck in Bournemouth, Dorset,.

## Literal red rag

1.npr   yellow burning under the dark. Under the red rag, her hair came down on her neck in the frailest of  
2.today   his bulging belly. That scraggy bit of red rag knotted around his plump, whiskery-grey neck. <p>

## Red flag before a bull

1.brspok >put # <ZFO> putting a <ZF1> red <ZF0> red flag towards a bull <ZF1> or <ZF0> or <ZGY> into the United  
2.brspok the # churches. We don't want to put a red flag in front of # somebody. <ZGY>praying use your prayer  
3.newsci   cell is to the immune system what a red flag is to a bull. The more cells are activated, the sooner  
4.newsci   the same effect on scientists as a red flag does with bulls. So begins a new book by French author  
5.npr the Ataturk reforms. Mucaram's scarf is a red flag to many Kemalists, a setback on the road West and  
6.brbooks our presence may have the effect of a red flag held permanently before a bull. But equally, in the case  
7.usbooks   to pin a hem at 6 # 30 was to wave a red flag before a bull, but I slipped on the jumper and timidly  
8.usbooks   on Capitol Hill was akin to waving a red flag in front of a sizable bloc of conservative congressmen.)  
9.usbooks remain silent, realizing that I was a red flag before certain of these bulls. The vote, once taken,  
10.usbooks drocesses. It was this phrase, like a red flag waved at a bull, that finally caught the attention of  
11.usbooks ather staid colleagues `like waving a red flag in the face of a bull # 51 Hueper's main problem,  
12.econ   1980s shed so little light on it. <h> Red flag to a dragon: Sending the right signal to a pushier China

## Like a [] to a []

1.indy could only work if it clung to the text of Hamlet **like a baby to a mother's breast**. It is one  
2.usbooks utterly mine. And though I clung to my father **like a barnacle to a piling**, for many years I  
3.brbooks the vice-presidential nomination to him rather **like a bone to a dog**, except that Truman was  
4.brmags uestion and charging towards his pet hate-topic **like a bull to a red rag** # We're influenced  
5.brbooks lly can't imagine handing myself over to a man **like a cup to a teapot** so that he can pour  
6.brmags wing suit. It set Safire's pattern of returning **like a dog to a bone**, column after column, to  
7.guard the attack. <p> Russell has taken to captaincy **like a dollop of burnt sienna to a stretch of**  
8.brbooks she lay there, her damp body clinging to his, **like a drowning sailor to a piece of**  
9.today a chap who, to hesitant TV interrogators, is **like a glass of water to a man in the Sahara**.  
10.guard among us are black men," the 61-year-old says, **like a grandfather to a good, but simple**  
11.brmags the exponents of the latter take to the Ozrics **like a joyrider to a BMW convertible**,  
12.guard nywhere but the beach and eyes drop to your feet **like a magnet to a Coke can**. The ankle bone,  
13.brspok 01> I've had to <tc text=pause> stand up to him **like a man to a man** <F02> Mm. <M01> at times  
14.usbooks president's dissolution of parliament would be **like a match to a gunpowder keg**. The  
15.brbooks urope, a civilized place to which Ashkhabad is **like a minnow to a # a wash basin**. You must  
16.npr a craven lot. They cling to their opinion polls **like a miser to a buck**. So suddenly  
17.brmags right lights of the city, to which he's tempted **like a moth to a flame**, seeking redemption in  
18.guard team. Quinn is racing again this year, drawn **like a moth to a candle flame**. <p> All the  
19.brbooks . She seemed to be drawn to her reflection now **like a moth to a flame**. But in so doing, she  
20.brbooks the light around her that draws people to her **like a moth to a flame**. Anna blushed. `Well  
21.today the bright lights of west London drew Kharin **like a moth to a flame** he is no social  
22.today found he couldn't. <p> He was drawn back to her **like a moth to a lightbulb**. <p> It is very  
23.today rginia Ironside </b> <p> HE WAS, she said, drawn **like a moth to a light bulb**. That's how a  
24.today alliday said she kept returning to Rose and Fred **like a `moth to a flame"**. <p> On her first  
25.today replied: `I was low and vulnerable. <p> I was **like a moth to a flame**. The moth gets singed  
26.sunnow wrote it. Ms Sereny was attracted to Mary Bell **like a moth to a candle**, just as Lord  
27.usbooks in her imagery, but so are things that draw. **`Like a needle to a magnet"** she will be drawn  
28.usbooks wboy suit with woolly chaps and showed him off **like a performing monkey to a crowd of oil**  
29.guard tough little cookie who seems attracted to goal **like a pin to a magnet**. <p> Cole is expecting  
30.brbooks ate. I must cling to my career, such as it is, **like a rat to a sinking ship**.' So you're  
31.brmags Down tumbles into the violence-in-movies debate **like a raw carcass to a pack of starved**  
32.indy fired up. For Seve, the sight of an American is **like a red rag to a bull**. He can't stand  
33.brspok by public opinions. So the police actually it's **like a red rag to a bull** and a lot of those  
34.bbc by calling the general strike for May Day, it's **like a red rag to a bull**. South Korea  
35.bbc attempt at self-justification by the Japanese is **like a red rag to a bull** # even among the  
36.guard pers by other offenders in Feltham they would be **like a `red rag to a bull"**, Mr Shaw said. <p>  
37.brbooks as sealed it was at that moment of revelation. **like a red rag to a bull**, it was. Jeremy  
38.usbooks gnificent table setting must have affected her **like a red rag to a bull**. She grabbed the  
39.times ird. Being called `nigger" in the playground was **like a red rag to a bull** to me and then my

40.times the small ground at Vishakhapatnam, that may be **like a red rag to a bull** for Steve Tikolo and  
41.today search Campaign. <p> This sort of information is **like a red rag to a bull** for the tobacco  
42.today who has a gripe about car stickers. <p> IT IS **like a red rag to a bull** and, being a  
43.sunnaw if I'm not fashionable on Radio Two, then I'm **like a red rag to a bull** on Radio One!"  
44.sunnaw person, but he just didn't fancy her. That was **like a red rag to a bull**. She went berserk.  
45.newsci it's not Elvis you're dealing with now!" It was **like a red rag to a bull**. And the next thing  
46.sunnaw house won't let you speak to your children it's **like a red rag to a bull**." Mike is now stuck  
47.brsmags tter's field, but neither does it seem remotely **like a shrine to a fallen genius**. <p> Green-  
48.times ility". Sentiment, alas, is something or nothing **like a signal to a computer**, black or white,  
49.usbooks want out of CLIQUES # Cliques can be very much **like a silent but deadly virus to a**  
50.oznews into the vast space, breathtakingly beautiful, **like a silver lining to a diaphanous cloud**.  
51.times I indicated the room, `paying a tenner would be **like a silver cross to a vampire**." <p> I was  
52.newsci such systems melt from an ordered arrangement **like a solid to a disordered fluid state** like  
53.brsmags of Andalucia. Ronda, the most famous, clings **like a suicide threat to a shelf of rock**  
54.brbooks llis said to Arnold, clutching to him suddenly **like a survivor to a waterlogged plank**. <p>  
55.brbooks all. To draw nearer to this source is to come **like a thirsty man to a pool of cool, clean**  
56.today erly, I pushed up my speed. It stuck to the road **like a Tory minister to a Cabinet job**.

## Bull-like

1.indy Urged on by the crowd, he shrugged off McCall's bull-like charges with straight rights to the champion's  
2.indy arly prone to fall away in the face of Matautia's bull-like charges and his second try in the 58th minute  
3.indy , dotted with hummocks, is an oasis of quiet. The bull-like, uncompromising form of the blocks has a  
4.indy rown is back. Something good has happened to this bull-like political obsessive. His speech sang. It was  
5.brephem ty. A wine of great stature - when young it is bull-like in its power and muscle - reknowned for its  
6.brsmags home-made pin-ups to titilate Klimt's notorious bull-like sexual appetite. Instead it epitomises a  
7.guard in which the Wimbledon captain appeared to rush, bull-like, and butt Collymore's shoulder. <p> Whereas  
8.brbooks in that wide-open town; in that same year his bull-like body suddenly collapsed in New York; in 1939  
9.brbooks before, but still a natural sound, an animal, bull-like noise. It could be an animal. It could also be  
10.brbooks unched. He was too young yet to face up to the bull-like strength of his father - but the day was  
11.usbooks fidant. Madigan was a subtle man for all his # bull-like exterior; had Chance died as he'd originally  
12.usbooks d folded his arms. The # gesture made him look bull-like and intimidating; Fancy # wondered how many  
13.econ is 10.8 # jobs became his priority. <p> Short and bull-like, Mr Schroder is hard to say No to. He has  
14.econ <p> Mr Perez Balladares (known as 'Toro' for his bull-like features) was the campaign manager in 1989 for  
15.times till seems to be at peace with itself, under the bull-like rule of Chancellor Kohl. But Germany has the  
16.times ondon, Fri <p> Rollins may be best known for his bull-like stage presence and rasping, cathartic vocal  
17.times nd his journalism matched his physique. He had a bull-like determination and was almost impossible to  
18.times since the film. He looks so much less burly and bull-like in the flesh. Well, I can still look quite  
19.today lenger, too, hoping to torment and frustrate the bull-like Morrison before coming in for the kill later

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