

TV To Go: Did they or didn't they? Cheat, that is. Quiz puts Millionaire's 'Coughing Major' back in the hot seat



by Paul Simper

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IT WAS the great British game-show scandal of the 2000s. Former Army officer Charles Ingram — dubbed The Coughing Major — was found guilty, along with his wife Diana and another contestant, Tecwen Whittock, of cheating his way to the £1million jackpot on Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?

There's no need to use your 50/50 lifeline, phone a friend or ask the studio audience for guidance, the case was cut and dried. Or was it? Matthew Macfadyen, who plays the much-mocked former Army major in Quiz, a gripping and frequently hilarious new ITV drama that presents a very different version of events, admits he debated this back and forth with co-star Sian Clifford (Fleabag's sister) on a daily basis.



Hounded: Matthew Macfadyen and Sian Clifford play the Ingrams. Below, Michael Sheen as host Chris Tarrant

'In the early stages of the shoot Sian and I would come in every day and ask, "What do you think? Do you think they did it? Do you think they didn't?"' says Macfadyen. 'In a funny way, we were playing a bit of both and modulating it with director Stephen Frears as the story went on. We would do things that were slightly more ambiguous in one take and then less ambiguous in another.'



It makes for a skilfully balanced three-act story over three consecutive nights, echoing the game show's own 1998 ITV debut, when it was given an unheard-of seven nights in a row in a prime-time slot.

Written by James Graham, creator of TV dramas Coalition and Brexit: An Uncivil War, Quiz presents the Crown case for the prosecution, the 'audacious heist' and, finally, the case for the Ingrams' defence. It also explores the dangers of trial by media, the perils of how we now assimilate news and the British obsession with pub quizzes.

Those first two elements seem to be a Macfadyen calling card at present given he's riding high on the success of black comedy Succession, in which he plays scheming son-in-law Tom Wambsgans. As it charts the tumultuous, Murdoch-inspired fortunes of a US media dynasty, Succession is also an examination of fake news.

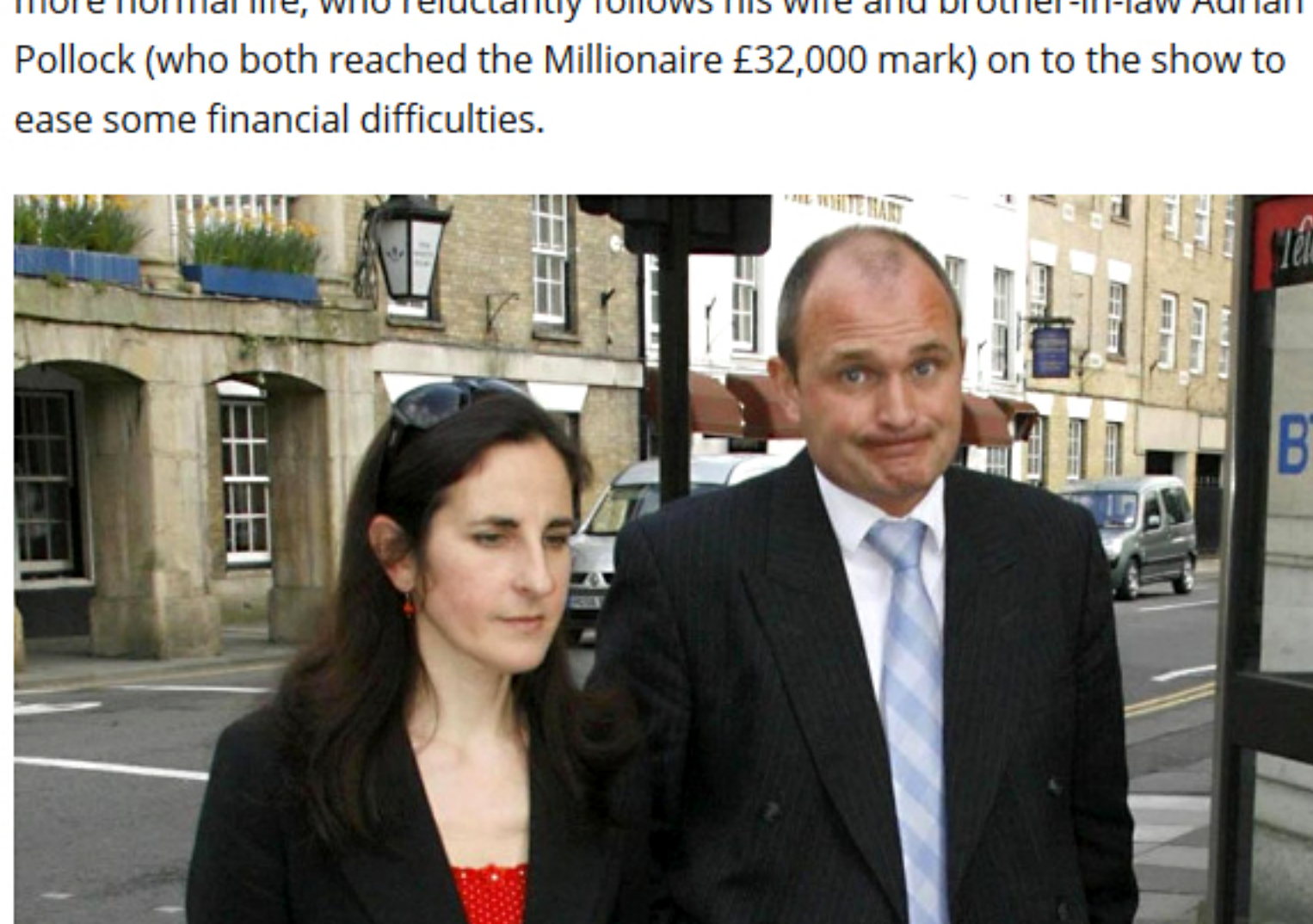


Top prize: MacFadyen and Clifford with the winning cheque

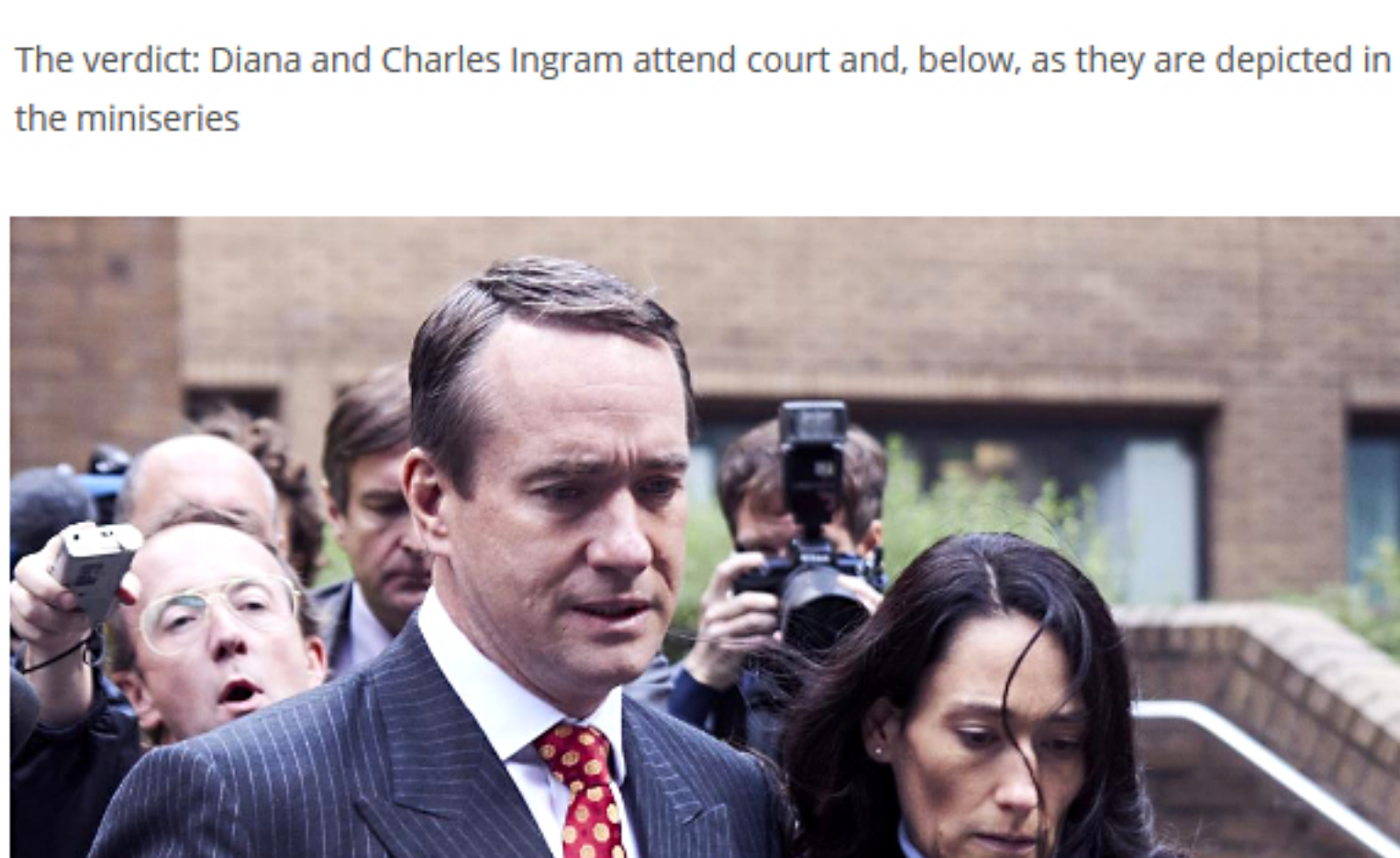
'It's a complete coincidence,' he laughs. 'I was shooting the end of Succession series two when I knew I was going to do this, and all I was thinking was that it was lovely and different. But it's so interesting in this day and age — the way we get our information and what spin is on it. There's this whole idea of perception and projection. The way the public project on to events which suit a certain narrative.'

The popular narrative when the Ingrams were convicted in 2003 (with a two-year suspended sentence) was that the major was a Tim Nice But Dim character and his wife a Lady Macbeth type. When they were hounded by the press and public, the assumption was that they had it coming to them.

Quiz paints a very different picture of Charles Ingram as a modest man, a peacekeeping soldier in Bosnia now desk-bound in order to give his family a more normal life, who reluctantly follows his wife and brother-in-law Adrian Pollock (who both reached the Millionaire £32,000 mark) on to the show to ease some financial difficulties.



The verdict: Diana and Charles Ingram attend court and, below, as they are depicted in the miniseries



But the Ingrams are not the only real-life characters portrayed in Quiz. Michael Sheen adds to his list of well-known public figures such as Brian Clough and Tony Blair by playing host Chris Tarrant.

'I sort of ended up forgetting what Tarrant really looks like,' says Macfadyen. 'He morphed into Michael in this hilarious wig.'

The actors met the Ingrams on the last day of filming but neither was moved to ask them whether they had actually cheated.

'I wasn't at all tempted to ask them,' laughs Macfadyen, who begins shooting series three of Succession this month.

'The more important question is whether or not they should have a criminal conviction,' says Clifford. 'What was funny was that they were huge Fleabag fans. Before I was even cast as Diana, Charles said he'd thought there was something about Claire in Fleabag that reminded him of his wife.'

Could Quiz prove a catalyst in helping the Ingrams' ongoing appeal to have their guilty verdict overturned?

'I don't know,' says Macfadyen. 'But I wish them all the best.'

And that's his final answer.