



# Lucan

A new drama for ITV

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# LUCAN

**Lucan** is a thrilling new two-part drama based on the life of flamboyant aristocrat, Lord Lucan, and written by award-winning writer, Jeff Pope.

Rory Kinnear (*Southcliffe*, *Loving Miss Hatto*, *Skyfall*) plays Lucan whilst Christopher Eccleston (*Song for Marion*, *Blackout*, *The Shadow Line*) takes the role of John Aspinall.

The drama tells the story of Lucan's exploits as a member of the infamous Clermont set and focuses on his marriage collapse to Veronica (Catherine McCormack), the Countess of Lucan.

With his marriage disintegrating, Lucan became obsessed with regaining custody of his children. Ultimately the drama reveals what happened on that fateful night in November 1974 when his children's nanny, Sandra Rivett (Leanne Best), was cruelly bludgeoned to death in the basement of the family's home in London's Lower Belgrave Street.

To this day Lucan is thought to have mistaken Sandra for his wife Veronica, whom he blamed for the fractures in his family life. His whereabouts and eventual fate have remained a mystery for nearly four decades, captivating and intriguing the public whose fascination with Lucan is undiminished.

The drama is inspired by and based upon the book, *The Gamblers*, written by author John Pearson who conducted exhaustive interviews with those most closely connected to Lucan at the time of Sandra's murder. Pearson gained unprecedented access to Lucan's friends and acquaintances from the Clermont Club who helped him try to piece together the Earl's movements on the evening of 7 November. Once the dreadful murder had taken place they speculate as how Lucan escaped the police search and as what may ultimately have been his fate.

Michael Gambon plays older Burke, Paul Freeman plays John Pearson, Rupert Evans plays Dominic Elwes, Jane Lapotaire plays Susie Maxwell Scott and Gemma Jones plays Lucan's mother Dowager Countess.

**Lucan** is an ITV Studios/GroupM Entertainment production for ITV.

**Foreword**  
**by Jeff Pope**  
**Writer and Executive Producer**

It took me completely by surprise when I realised recently that next year will be the 40th anniversary of the disappearance, in such mysterious circumstances, of the 7th Earl Of Lucan.

I was a teenager when it all happened, and remembered clearly the lurid headlines in the immediate aftermath. It was on the night of November 7th, 1974, that the body of the family's nanny, Sandra Rivett, was discovered by police in the basement of the Lucan house in Lower Belgrave Street in London's Mayfair.

Lucan's wife, Veronica, had burst into their local pub, the Plumber's Arms, with severe head injuries claiming that her estranged husband had just tried to kill her.

Lucan left London in a hurry that night, making his way to Lewes in Sussex for a late night visit to an old friend, Susan Maxwell-Scott. He claimed he was fearful that his wife, with whom he had recently fought - and lost - a bitter custody battle for their children, was going to frame him for the attack on her and the murder of nanny Sandra.

He left at 1.15am in the morning and has never been seen again. Or, at least, nobody has admitted to seeing him.

In my role as Head of Factual Drama for ITV the Lucan story had been in my thoughts many times over the years, but I'd never quite been able to commit to developing it as a drama. It always seemed to me that it would never rise above a simple re-telling of events, and I was extremely dubious about the notion that he was still alive and hiding away somewhere in southern Africa.

Then producer Francis Hopkinson brought me a book, *The Gamblers*, by John Pearson, which was ostensibly about the world of the Clermont Club, that Mecca for the super-rich which burned so brightly in the 60s and 70s.

As Pearson himself admitted in the preface to his book, whatever he'd set out to write had gradually been taken over by the Lucan mystery. He spoke to the missing Earl's old friends and associates, who clearly felt able to talk more freely with the passing of so much time. Finally, he came across a fascinating new theory.

Based on John's book, *Lucan*, a two part drama for ITV, contains two vital ingredients. Firstly it provides the context for the murder and attack at Lower Belgrave Street that night. It looks at the world he inhabited, and how the gamble of 'doing away' with your wife could be seen as an acceptable solution to a custody battle - so long as you were successful. Secondly, it suggests another possible answer to the riddle of what became of Lucan.

Dramatically, I decided John himself needed to be a character, so that we could switch back and forth between then and now as he pieces everything together and moves towards the startling conclusion.

It's important to underline that what John Pearson was told is only a theory, a version of events given to him by a dying woman. Could there be a ring of truth to it? Ultimately, that's for the audience to decide.



## **FRANCIS HOPKINSON EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

“Speculation, theories and myths have surrounded John Bingham, 7th Earl of Lucan for almost 40 years. Everyone knows the name Lucan and that he disappeared,” explains Francis Hopkinson. “But no-one really knows the story or that this was a tragedy that affected many more people.

“Some think Lord Lucan killed his wife, when it was their nanny who lost her life. Most people couldn’t tell you Sandra Rivett’s name. She has been forgotten. One of the important things we wanted to do was give her a presence.”

Executive producer Francis believes two-part drama Lucan may be award-winning writer Jeff Pope’s finest hour. “It’s a subject that has fascinated me and I mentioned it in passing to Jeff. And Jeff said, ‘I’ve always wanted to write about that.’”

“Jeff’s great skill is in finding a way which illuminates a story you thought you knew. A way of illustrating dramas that makes them fresh. He’s brilliant at finding a new angle, although this story is told slightly straighter because so many of the details have been forgotten.”

The drama is inspired by, and based on, the book *The Gamblers* by John Pearson, who met and interviewed friends and associates of Lucan. “Most of those people are now dead. So John Pearson was a crucial link and a great collaborator on this project.”

Lord Lucan’s wife Veronica, the Countess of Lucan, is still alive, as are the couple’s three children. Along with the descendants of murdered nanny Sandra Rivett, gaming club and zoo owner John Aspinall and others featured in the drama.

“We contacted all the immediate families when we went into production to let them know that it was happening and gave them the chance to talk to us. That included Lucan’s son, who wanted to clarify some things. But he didn’t object to the production.”

What was the aim of bringing this story to the screen?

“There’s a personal story about a marriage that has gone horribly wrong and it also tells us a lot about society at that time, along with the ramifications of what happened. These events have been consigned to a footnote in history. But the story tells you a lot about class and attitude in this country.”

The drama tells Lucan's story, including his marriage breakdown, the night he mistakenly murdered his children's nanny and what happened to him after he vanished.

"You see Lucan as a human being. We all have an image of him in our head. But there's no footage of him and I don't think there's any recording of him speaking so you just have the photographs of him standing, looking slightly sullen. But now you get a sense of him as a person. Someone who was a product of his time and class - and his attitudes reflected that."

"Lucan was caught up in a spiral of gambling and debt that probably affected the balance of his mind. The murder plan itself, let alone the idea of murdering someone, was crazy. I think he was probably on the edge when he did it. It wasn't cold and calculating; he was not in full possession of his faculties. To go through with his plan and to think he was going to get away with it was not the action of a sane man."

Adds Francis: "Lucan's luck had deserted him a long time before that night in 1974 when he mistakenly killed Sandra and then attacked his wife, Veronica. His plan was apparently that the body of his wife would never be discovered. In those days you could not prosecute for murder unless you had a body. So while he might have been suspected, he could never have been charged."

There are many theories about what happened to Lucan - some more far-fetched than others. "The idea that British racing driver and Formula One world champion Graham Hill flew him out to France on his private plane was one of the more fantastical ones. Another theory was that John Aspinall had fed Lucan to the lions in his zoo and I believe the police did go through the cages."

Aspinall's role in Lucan's disappearance has been the subject of much debate since 1974. "John Aspinall was a bit of a mischief-maker. He did give an interview where he implied he knew what had happened to his friend. He was an extraordinary man. He didn't think much of human beings, he thought animals were much more noble."

Rory Kinnear plays Lucan with Christopher Eccleston as John Aspinall.

"We wanted to cast the best actors possible and it only came together relatively late in the day. Rory actually didn't even read for Lucan. He came in for another part. But he's such a good actor and we felt he would be perfect for the role of Lucan, bringing an intelligence and understanding to the part which it required."

"Aspinall was trickier because you needed someone with a presence which would linger over the whole film. We needed someone with the presence and physicality that Chris brings, because he dominates all the proceedings he's in."

Recreating London in the 1970s for filming was tricky. Mayfair has changed irrevocably in the 40 years since. "It was difficult. But it wasn't impossible. You

couldn't recreate Mayfair and Belgravia now because it's all so smart. Looking back, what struck us about that 1970s was how grubby everything was. London was only cleaned up in the 1980s. So we wanted to try and recreate that grubby look."

"The trick with period is to be very light with it. I think the mistake people make is the smart car, perfectly shiny, driving slowly past. We really wanted the period not to dominate the drama. So we tried to touch it in as lightly as possible, which is somehow more evocative."

"It's a compelling and fascinating story with a real tragedy at its heart."

## CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES

### LORD LUCAN (Rory Kinnear)



John Bingham, 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Lucan, was known as 'Lucky' to his friends after winning £20,000 in a casino in Le Touquet. Born into an Anglo-Irish aristocratic family, his great-great grandfather gave the fateful order for the Charge of the Light Brigade, Lucan had the traditional upbringing of his class – Eton and the Guards. As a young man he was a glamorous figure: handsome, tall and sporting – he was even once considered as a contender to play James Bond. He married Veronica Duncan in 1963 and they had three children. Bored of life in the City, he became a professional gambler – at the Clermont Club – however, his luck deserted him and he was soon heavily in debt. This coupled with the breakdown of his marriage sent him into a spiral of anger and desperation. In 1973 he lost custody of his children, which put him on the path to the fateful night of Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> November 1974. He broke into the family home intending to kill his wife, but in the darkness killed the family nanny, Sandra Rivett, instead. After attacking his wife, Lucan went on the run and his whereabouts remains a mystery to this day.

### JOHN ASPINALL (Christopher Eccleston)



Socially speaking Aspinall emerged from 'nowhere', his father was a Maltese doctor called Robert Aspinall. However, as John later learnt, he was in fact the illegitimate son of a young Lieutenant who apparently 'seduced my mother under a tamarisk tree beside the banks of a stream in Naimital.' This unusual beginning gave Aspinall a lifelong distrust of authority and the norms of society. He became fascinated by gambling at Oxford, while failing his degree, and set himself up as a bookmaker. He began to run illegal Chemin de Fer parties in Mayfair but was arrested by the police. He challenged the law and won leading to the 1960 Gaming Act which effectively legalised casinos. This led to him setting up the famous Clermont Club, in Berkeley Square, with a membership taken from the highest echelons of the aristocracy including Lord Lucan. Aspinall made a fortune, when he sold the Clermont Club, which enabled him to follow his passion for wild animals and set up a famous private zoo at Howlett's in Kent. When Lucan disappeared Aspinall was a vocal supporter of his friend: "... if he came in the door now I would embrace him." Aspinall died in 2000 at the age of 74.

### **LADY LUCAN (Catherine McCormack)**



Veronica, nee Duncan, Lady Lucan was born into a middle class family but her early life was blighted by the death of her father when she was two. Veronica was introduced to Lord Lucan by her sister, Christina Shand-Kydd, in 1963. By all accounts the early years of marriage were happy and she had three children. However, life turned sour and Lucan's late night gambling habit became increasingly chronic and lost all the family money. He began to spend all his time at the Clermont Club and she became bitter and jealous. There were rumours about her mental health and Lucan's friends turned against her. In 1973 the marriage broke down and there was a bitter custody battle for the children, which Lucan lost. This set the scene for his ill-conceived plan to murder his wife, which ended in the death of the family nanny Sandra Rivett. After Lucan's disappearance, Veronica had a number of periods of illness and lost custody of her children to her sister. She still lives in Belgravia, a few hundred yards from the marital home, but is estranged from her family.

### **DOMINIC ELWES (Rupert Evans)**



Dominic Elwes was born into a Catholic aristocratic family. He was a society portrait painter, notorious playboy and joker to the Clermont set. After Lucan disappeared Elwes helped journalist James Fox with an article for The Sunday Times, which was unflattering to several members of the Clermont set – in particular Jimmy Goldsmith. Elwes found himself ostracised by his former friends and he committed suicide in 1975.

### **JOHN BURKE (older – Michael Gambon)**



A handsome Irishman John worked with Aspinall from the early days of his illegal gambling parties to become Financial Director of the Clermont Club in the '60s. Eventually he fell out with Aspinall and the two never spoke again. Burke died in 2011, aged 87.

### **JOHN PEARSON (Paul Freeman)**



John worked as a journalist at The Sunday Times for Ian Fleming on the Atticus column, which led to him writing the authorised biography of Fleming. He is author of a number of books, including the definitive biography of the Kray Twins, a biography of John Paul Getty, the Sitwells and the authorised biography of James Bond. In 2005 he published *The Gamblers*, the inside story of the Clermont Set, to critical acclaim. The Sunday Times said: "The disappearance of Lord Lucan defied explanation for more than 30 years until John Pearson."

**SUSIE MAXWELL-SCOTT (older – Jane Lapotaire)**



Susie was married to Ian Maxwell-Scott, Secretary to the Clermont Club, and privy to many of Aspinall's secrets. They had a long and happy marriage, with six children: "Marriage to a gambler like Ian was wonderful. For me it meant that I was never bored." On the night of Sandra Rivett's murder Lord Lucan visited the Maxwell-Scott's house in Sussex. Susie was the last person known to have seen Lucan before he disappeared.



## **RORY KINNEAR IS LORD LUCAN**

"All I knew was that he murdered the nanny and then disappeared," says Rory Kinnear.

Lord Lucan killed his children's nanny Sandra Rivett in November 1974, mistaking her for his wife Veronica, the Countess of Lucan.

He had planned to dispose of his wife's body so that it would never be found and he could win custody of their three children.

"No-one knew who Lord Lucan was before he murdered the nanny. He wasn't a cause celebre in the sense that he was a famous person.

"It was another case of a man trying to murder his wife, of which there are, sadly, all too many. And a lot of them remain unsolved.

"But the fact that he was a Lord and vanished has kept this in the headlines ever since, which must say something about our society.

"You also cannot forget the fact that a young woman was murdered for no good reason other than Lucan thought she was somebody else.

"That element of the tragedy should never be forgotten."

Rory was drawn to play the role of Lucan after reading both the script by award-winning writer Jeff Pope and *The Gamblers* by John Pearson, the book which inspired this two-part drama.

"More than anything, what attracted me to it was the domestic side of the story. To undercut the fragile glamour of gaming tables, bow ties, whisky and cocktail dresses.

"It might appear that all those involved had lives that were gilt-edged. But they all went home to different lives and to their true selves.

"In many ways it's really a sad story of the domestic breakdown of a marriage involving two entirely unsuitable people, as well as the mystery of what happened to Lucan."

Rory was on stage at the National Theatre playing Iago in *Othello* by night while filming Lucan by day.

"I had a shaved head and was clean shaven for Iago so wore a wig and moustache to play Lucan. It was the work of a million experts."

One of Lucan's female friends described him as a romantic figure - and he did attract women.

"I'm not sure how interested he was in women. People who knew him and that Mayfair set have spoken to me and women in particular say, 'They didn't pay you a second glance. They were just interested in the tables.'

"Lucan chose to be a professional gambler. It was a male dominated environment that they created for themselves. It's possible that was as a reaction to unhappy marriages or that their attitudes to women drew them together."

Ironically, Lord Lucan was known to his friends as "Lucky" after winning £20,000 in a single night playing the card game Chemin De Fer - Chemmy - in Le Touquet.

Having served in the Coldstream Guards and worked in merchant banking, John Bingham, 7th Earl of Lucan decided to earn his living on the gaming tables of London.

"His father was the Chief Opposition Whip in the House of Lords, a Labour peer, so it must have been quite horrifying for your son to say, 'I'm going to become a professional gambler.'

"It's not necessarily the most stable career you'd hope for. Particularly when you know they've got a large inheritance coming their way."

Explains Rory: "There are elements of Lucan that obviously were quite attractive. He was quite an eccentric character and individualistic, not caring too much for the herd or for what other people are doing.

"In some ways he wanted to stand out from the crowd. That never usually means your powers of empathy are that strong. But he did seem to be liked. He was quite funny, charming and dashing.

"It felt like he created a reactionary character, seemingly in rebellion - at least how I read it - to his much more liberal-minded, left-leaning parents."

His relationship with businessman, zoo owner and The Clermont Club gaming host John Aspinall (Christopher Eccleston) was crucial.

"Aspinall used people to his own ends pretty much throughout life, no matter who they were. But he maintained that if you were in his circle, one of his friends, he would fight to the death for you.

"He liked Lucan because he was a Lord and he lent an air of aristocratic glamour to his gaming club. And Lucan had money. Though he had less and less money as Aspinall took more and more of it. That's why Aspinall liked all those people. They had money to spend in his club.

“Some of these people lost millions at the table. It seems that when you have an amount of money where you don’t have to count it anymore, an attraction is to throw it away.

“We played the game of Chemmy and it’s idiotic. It’s so boringly simple and yet they would spend hour upon hour playing it. It’s just a game of chance. There’s no skill about it at all.

“The simplicity of the game probably makes it so addictive but it’s entirely fatalistic. There’s no way of orchestrating it or getting better at it. But it didn’t seem to stop them placing huge amounts.”

Lucan had rows of identical pin-striped suits hanging in his wardrobe at home.

“He was a creature of habit. He had the same thing at the club for lunch and dinner every day and played Chemmy for hours on end. There is a lack of imagination there. That sense of change being slightly feared.

“As an aristocrat you’re not necessarily forced to grow up, in terms of the wealth you have access to. There is something of the stunted little boy about him, who is desperate for love.

“Women did seem to want to love him or mother him. The one thing he probably did want or crave was a loving, supportive, maybe even maternal person in his life to say it was all right. And he didn’t get that in his marriage.”

The breakdown of that marriage to Veronica (Catherine McCormack) led to separation and a bitter custody battle over their children.

Ending in the terrible events on the night of November 7th 1974 when Sandra (Leanne Best) was bludgeoned to death in the darkened basement of the family home in London’s Lower Belgrave Street.

“These are only my opinions,” reflects Rory. “But I think Lucan got to an age where he wanted to be married like everyone else. And here was a woman whose sister was married to his best friend. He got on with his best friend’s wife, so why shouldn’t he get on with her?

“And I think they must have been happy at first. People say that she did seem quite fragile and so, to begin with, he was very protective of her.

“But as time went on I think the more unhappy he got, the more trapped he felt. As he spent large periods absent at the gaming club, the more removed from her he became and the more upset she felt.

“So this horrible cycle develops where he attempts to paint her as a hysterical neurotic and tries to remove her from his life.

“It does appear that his children were the only thing he got anything from emotionally in his life. He found great solace in the company of gambling and gambling men but there’s no emotional warmth.

“There might have been some from his wife at first but eventually it’s nothing but pain and agony. So how best to have them all to yourself? Encouraged by a bully like Aspinall who liked to manipulate people and be a puppeteer, whose attitudes to life, as well as to women, were essentially of the animal kingdom and pre-historic.

“By the time of the murder, Lucan was living on his own in a small flat having lost his children by court order and drinking. The mind pickles. So in some ways you can work out how he got to that point.

“Yet it seems an obvious question to ask, but why are your children so important to you that it’s better for their mother to be killed? Get into his mindset and you can work out the logic, however skewed it is.”

Does Rory think Lucan was evil?

“I don’t think anyone is pure evil. Nearly everyone does things with, in their minds, a full justification. And obviously it’s the justification which is wrong.

“But how do people get to a point of thinking like that? That the right thing to do, the best thing to do, is to murder your wife and get rid of her?

“If he’d killed Veronica and his plan has been executed perfectly, he would still have never recovered from that - when he ever regained some sort of sense of mental equilibrium.

“But to have killed the wrong person and then tried to kill his wife, and then she escapes?

“As an actor you have to empathise with your characters and sometimes you fall into feeling sympathy for them - but what he must have been going through that night, I can’t imagine. What must he have been thinking? It’s horrible.”

Adds Rory: “If divorce had, perhaps, been a little more socially acceptable, they should have just walked away from each other a long time before it ended so appallingly.

“If he had proper friends, rather than friends who wanted to protect their sense of superiority and glamour, who were annoyed with Lucan for bringing the tawdry

trivialities of domestic life into their high rolling circle - proper friends could have given him proper advice. People looking out for him and for her.

“Still people who knew Lucan talk about his wife with barely veiled contempt, as if in some ways it was her fault. You think, ‘Well no-one was really looking out for her, were they?’ She had a pretty tough time of it. And she is still alive.”

The second part of the drama highlights the aftermath of that bloody night and reveals what might have happened to Lucan, as divulged by his friends.

Lucan was officially declared dead in 1999 but his body has never been found and speculation continues about his fate and whether he is still alive.

“There are certain facts that are indisputable, both in terms of Lucan’s biography and in the lead up to the murder.

“Do you have a responsibility when you’re telling a story like this to try to get to the truth? Particularly in a story where everyone agrees you can’t really ever know the truth?

“There are an awful lot of things that are plausible and just a few things that are probable.

Rory’s screen credits include: *Skyfall*; *Southcliffe*; *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*; *Loving Miss Hatto*; *Five Days*.

## **CHRISTOPHER ECCLESTON IS JOHN ASPINALL**

Fortunes were lost at the London gaming tables run by John Aspinall.

“It’s very good for business to have a Lord in your casino, isn’t it? It’s reflective glory. Gets the punters in,” explains Christopher Eccleston.

“I think that’s the first reason John Aspinall associated himself with him.

“Lucan could bring him business. Lucan could bring him money. And Lucan could give him money because he was an obsessive gambler.

“Aspinall was from a middle class background and the people he was running with were aristocrats. So he attached himself to them.

“I think it’s quite possible that he resented them for their perceived superiority. And so he ripped them off and beat them at their own game. It could be seen as an act of class revenge.”

Aspinall - known as “Aspers” to his friends - was a gaming club host and zoo owner who ran The Clermont Club in London’s Mayfair.

He attracted high society to his tables and re-distributed their wealth, mostly to himself, via a card game called Chemin De Fer, known as Chemmy.

One gambler is said to have lost the equivalent of almost £4 million in today’s terms in one visit.

Aspers befriended many of those he was taking money from - including professional gambler Lucan - and they, in turn, became addicted to the club.

“What was he up to? He’s impossible to grasp. He was drenched in ambiguity,” says Christopher.

“Aspinall had a tremendous ego and a tremendous urge for power and control. He was out for himself. And people like that are impossible to pin down.

“He appeared to be very much at the centre of things but he was always a step outside, looking on. He was a puppet master, pulling all the strings and then cashing up at the end of the night.”

Lord Lucan sought out the enclosed and obsessive Mayfair gambling world as a refuge from real life and his increasing debts.

Christopher learned about the game of Chemmy as part of his research for the role of Aspinall.

"It was madness. Nine packs of cards go into the hat and there is no skill involved. It is entirely based on luck. So it is an addiction to chance.

"Gambling itself, as we know, is also addictive, along with the adrenaline. Plus the machismo of saying, 'I'm not scared of losing this money.'

"This is a very masculine boys' club environment. It seems as if they'd gone straight from public school into an extension of that. Which is what Aspinall cleverly provided.

"Lucan went to the club for lunch and for dinner and could, perhaps, hide there from who he really was."

As the drama shows, Aspinall encouraged Lucan in his bid to win custody of his children from his wife Veronica, the Countess of Lucan (Catherine McCormack).

With evidence the gaming club host was also a central figure in helping the peer vanish after Lucan had mistakenly murdered nanny Sandra Rivett (Leanne Best) and then tried to kill Veronica.

"Aspinall has a very perverse kind of morality. He exhorts the people in Lucan's circle to protect Lucan from the police and he couches that in terms of loyalty, friendship and the country going to the dogs.

"But playing him, you ask yourself whether there could have been another agenda here. What has Aspinall done to need control of these men?

How much did Christopher know about the Lucan story before this production?

"I was 10 in 1974 when he disappeared. I was familiar with the phrase 'Lord Lucan' as it was always applied to somebody who had gone missing. My dad would say, 'Where have you been Lord Lucan?'

"But aside from knowing that he was possibly on the run, that was it. I knew very little about the detail of the case.

"When I first heard about this I was a little bit sceptical. Until I read Jeff Pope's script, which has a real moral centre.

"You walk a very fine moral line in making entertainment out of this kind of tragedy. But the primary reason for him writing the script was to highlight the death of Sandra Rivett and the fact that was never given due prominence by the press.

"The drama also focuses on the tragedy of Veronica who was made a social pariah. So the moral centre of this, for me, is those two women. And I think Jeff has honoured that.

"A very important element of the drama is the characterisation of Sandra, who was the victim, and the secondary victim, who was Veronica.

"She stepped outside that circle and said to Lucan, 'You are gambling all our money away. We need to feed the children.' And was rounded on by men and women alike.

"I'm sure she did have her problems but that says a great deal more about them rather than her.

"Jeff is writing about the grey areas of human existence. He finds redeeming qualities in Lucan. It's clear that he loved his children deeply. But he also behaved abominably towards his wife.

"Rory Kinnear gives you a three dimensional characterisation in his portrayal of Lucan.

"There is a tragic quality to Lucan who was a product of his time. He was shaped by those chauvinistic, misogynistic views which surrounded him and had probably been re-inforced in him through his schooling.

"Jeff doesn't idealise Veronica, even though she is clearly a victim. He also attempts to understand Aspinall. It's all in the quality of the writing.

"I think it's predominantly an examination of misogyny at the heart of the, then, British establishment."

Aspinall used the money he made to fund his own sometimes eccentric lifestyle.

"He was buying wild animals and indulging his passion for them. It seems to me that his emotional life was possibly reserved for animals, rather than human beings.

"I don't think he ever felt cowed by any human being. So he sought it out with silverback gorillas and tigers.

"I wonder whether anything that was genuine about him was channelled entirely into animals? In other words, he could connect and love animals in a way that he could not human beings.

"He was an extraordinary self-creation and very astute about business. I think as he began to run the casinos he very cleverly realised that his interest in animals made him a character.

"So he made that kind of thing more pronounced and had tiger cubs roaming around.



“Aspinall created a persona which was animal loving, right-wing raconteur. He claimed to have some very extreme views. We have quotes from interviews he gave where he says some very harsh things.

“He spoke about genetic and racial superiority. Horrendous views. When you listen to him in interviews you think he’s mad or a buffoon. I’ve met people who met him who said he was very powerful and charismatic. I’m not sure I would feel that.

“But the curious thing is whether he actually believed in those views or whether it was a sales pitch to the aristocracy?

“The interesting thing about playing him is I’m not sure that he believed any of those things. I feel they were useful in creating a character.

“His job was to attract people to his casino. So rather than being a faceless casino owner he was a character.”

How did Christopher fare filming with animals, including having lunch with a chimp at the table and another with a monkey on his shoulder?

“I was very comfortable with the animals. It added a new dimension of unpredictability to the scenes we were playing. But fortunately they all behaved.”

The drama is inspired by and based on *The Gamblers*, a book written by John Pearson who met and interviewed those closely connected to Lucan before his disappearance.

Fans of the Salford-born actor know what a wide range of roles he can portray. Was going “posh” as Aspinall part of the appeal of playing this character?

“Yes it was. But I’ve used the accent a number of times, including in *Elizabeth* and on stage. So I can’t say the accent was the primary attraction.

“But certainly having done things like *Our Friends In The North*, to suddenly be at the centre of British aristocracy was interesting for me.”

He continues: “It was a lot of not particularly emotionally developed people in a bubble. A world of privilege and exclusivity.

“And it seems slightly mad. It’s excessive and without any redeeming features from what I can see.

“People do that, don’t they? People create little societies within society to keep society at bay.

“There is a fascination about this story now, even some 40 years later. It says a lot about how class is so deeply entrenched in us that we’re interested in this.

“Despite ourselves we are fascinated by this world and the people within it.”

Christopher’s screen credits include: *The Shadow Line*; *Thor: The Dark World*; *Lennon Naked*; *The Second Coming*; *Doctor Who*; *Cracker*; *Accused*; *Elizabeth*; *Our Friends In The North*.



## SYNOPSIS

### EPISODE 1

LUCAN dramatises the inside story of the infamous Clermont set and the events that led to suicide, murder and one of the most fascinating mysteries of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – the disappearance of Lord Lucan...

*London 2003: John Pearson, a distinguished and successful writer, is researching his new book, The Gamblers, about the Clermont Club – a notorious gambling club in the '60s and 70s. His investigation takes him to many of the now ageing members of the club but one element is dominating everything else..the story of John Bingham, 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Lucan.*

Pearson meets with John Burke, who tells him about the origins of the Clermont Club and John Aspinall...

Aspinall had been arrested for holding illegal gambling parties, but he took on the establishment resulting in gaming houses being made legal. In 1962 Aspinall set up his own temple to gambling – The Clermont Club, where he systematically worked through the inheritances of the English aristocracy as they gambled away their fortunes.

One of the men ruined by John Aspinall was his friend Lord Lucan.

The Clermont is a 'boys' club where Lucan felt comfortable and at home with fellow members, including Ian Maxwell-Scott, Dominic Elwes and Jimmy Goldsmith. However, his wife Veronica is not so happy about her husband never being at home with her and losing the family money. Relations become increasingly bitter between them, leading to a breakdown of the marriage.

*John Pearson turns to Susie Maxwell-Scott, widow of Ian, to get the inside story on Lucan's marriage...*

Aspinall advises Lucan to fight dirty to win back the custody of his children. Lucan tries to have Veronica committed to a psychiatric clinic, which she refuses to do. As the fight between them escalates Lucan resorts to taking the children from her by legal means. There follows a bitter battle in Court and Veronica succeeds in winning back custody of her children. The only condition being that Veronica hire a new nanny.. Sandra Rivett.

Broke, broken, angry and increasingly dependent on alcohol Lucan plots his next steps against Veronica. However, it is on a trip to Acapulco to celebrate Jimmy Goldsmith's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday that Aspinall challenges Lucan to take command of the situation. He must take the ultimate gamble to win back his children.

*Susie tells Pearson that she is convinced of Aspinall's involvement in what happened next but she refuses to talk to him further. It is left to Pearson's other enquiries to piece together what happened on the night of Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> November 1974.*

Lucan takes to spying on his former house on Lower Belgrave Street, noting all the comings and goings. On the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup> he establishes his alibi and breaks into his own house. In the dark basement kitchen, holding a piece of lead pipe, he lies in wait for his wife. When a woman enters he savagely beats her to death. Finally, he stops and goes upstairs. That's when he hears his wife's voice calling down and realises he has killed the wrong woman...



## EPISODE 2

When Lucan hears his wife, Veronica, coming down the stairs he attacks her, bringing the lead pipe down on her head, but she fights back. With the body of Sandra Rivett in the kitchen, Lucan tries to persuade his wife to commit suicide but she makes a run for it and alerts the police.

Lucan goes on the run and the first place he seeks refuge is with Susie Maxwell-Scott in Sussex. He lies to her about what has happened and writes two letters addressed to his brother-in-law William Shand Kydd. The next morning he drives away and is never seen again...

Aspinall is quick to call together Lucan's cronies from the Clermont Club and establish what has happened to their friend. He despatches Dominic Elwes to visit Veronica in hospital and ensure she does not say anything against her husband to the police. Elwes is shocked to see the injuries inflicted on her by Lucan.

A national manhunt is started for the fugitive Earl. They find his getaway car in Newhaven and comb the Sussex countryside. Lucan's various friends are questioned but close ranks and won't speak. Aspinall in particular makes it difficult for the police.

The case is put before a Coroner's Court to establish what happened to Sandra Rivett and Veronica testifies against her husband. Lucan is found guilty in absentia.

The story becomes a media sensation and puts the spotlight on the Clermont set, much to the irritation of Jimmy Goldsmith. Dominic Elwes helps The Sunday Times with a story about Lucan, but it backfires when the story becomes an expose of Lucan's circle. Elwes finds himself socially excluded by his former friends. Distraught and alienated, he commits suicide.

*John Pearson's enquiries seem to run into a dead end. He has exhausted all possible leads as to the fate of Lord Lucan and is faced with scrapping the whole project. Then fate intervenes when Susie Maxwell-Scott contacts him. She is dying and has decided it is time to tell the truth about what she believes happened...*

## Cast

Lord Lucan .....	Rory Kinnear
John Aspinall .....	Christopher Eccleston
Veronica Lucan .....	Catherine McCormack
Older John Burke .....	Michael Gambon
John Pearson .....	Paul Freeman
Older Susie Maxwell Scott.....	Jane Lapotaire
Ian Maxwell Scott .....	Alan Cox
Susie Maxwell Scott .....	Helen Bradbury
Dowager Countess .....	Gemma Jones
Lady Osborne .....	Ann Bell
Sandra Rivett .....	Leanne Best
Dominick Elwes .....	Rupert Evans
Jimmy Goldsmith.....	Alistair Petrie
John Burke.....	Rufus Wright
Susie Maxwell-Scott .....	Helen Bradbury
Annabel Birley .....	Annabel Mullion
Jane Hastings.....	Anna Walton
Charlie Benson .....	James Bradshaw
Ulrich .....	Aleksandar Mikic

## Production Credits

Executive Producer/writer .....	Jeff Pope
Executive Producer .....	Francis Hopkinson
Executive Producer for GroupM .....	Richard Foster
Producer.....	Chris Clough
Director .....	Adrian Shergold
Line Producer .....	Emily Russell
Production Designer.....	John Stevenson
Make-Up Designer .....	Angie Mudge
Costume Designer .....	Susannah Buxton
Editors .....	Tania Reddin, Lalit Goyal
Composer .....	Ben Bartlett
Casting Directors .....	Kate Rhodes James
Location Manager .....	Joel Holmes