

Film director who attacked press ethics is jailed for fraud

David Brown

A corrupt film director who condemned the ethics of the press at the Leveson inquiry has been jailed for five years for running a large tax fraud.

Chris Atkins together with Christina Slater, a film producer and daughter of a distinguished diplomat, were key players in the plot to help wealthy investors avoid tax by investing in British movies. They used the film *Starsuckers*, which criticised the practices of tabloid journalists, fraudulently to claim government subsidies for the British film industry.

The case highlighted the ease with which corrupt film-makers and financiers have taken advantage of a scheme launched by Gordon Brown as chancellor in the 1997 budget. It has been described as the most widely exploited tax credit in British history.

Atkins, 40, who appeared at Southwark crown court under his full name, Christopher Walsh-Atkins, tried to use his appearance at the Leveson inquiry to reduce his sentence.

The son of teachers, he became a left-wing documentary-maker after attending public school and the University of Oxford. At the time of his arrest he was living in a £3.5 million house in Hampstead.

He said that he learnt how easy it was to obtain film tax credits after receiving £115,000 of taxpayers' money without any checks to make *Taking Liberties*, a Bafta-nominated attack on the Blair government that was released in 2007.

In a private email to a journalist he said: "I'm a known player who really should have been given a proper inquiry before they paid out. Beejits."

Atkins and Slater, who made a number of films together including *Taking Liberties*, created false invoices to exaggerate the cost of *Starsuckers* at £1.6 million.

They also conspired with a corrupt accountant, Terence Potter, 55, a fellow producer and former tax partner at Ernst & Young, who lives in Monaco. He needed a film to promote a scheme to help wealthy investors avoid

£2 million in tax. The scheme meant that for every £1 invested £2 could be written off from their income tax bills.

Atkins and Slater operated the fraud between 2007 and late 2010. In March 2010 they led a course at the Northern Lights film festival in which Slater talked about her "battle to keep him [Atkins] on the straight and narrow and out of jail".

They were arrested in 2012. While on bail awaiting trial Atkins continued to make documentaries for Channel 4 and the BBC.

Shane Collery, for the prosecution, told the court: "These defendants and others essentially created a web of lies to assist others not here to obtain tax relief to which they were not entitled."

The court heard that Atkins and Potter personally made £400,000 from a conspiracy that would have cost the taxman more than £2 million in subsidies and tax avoidance by investors.

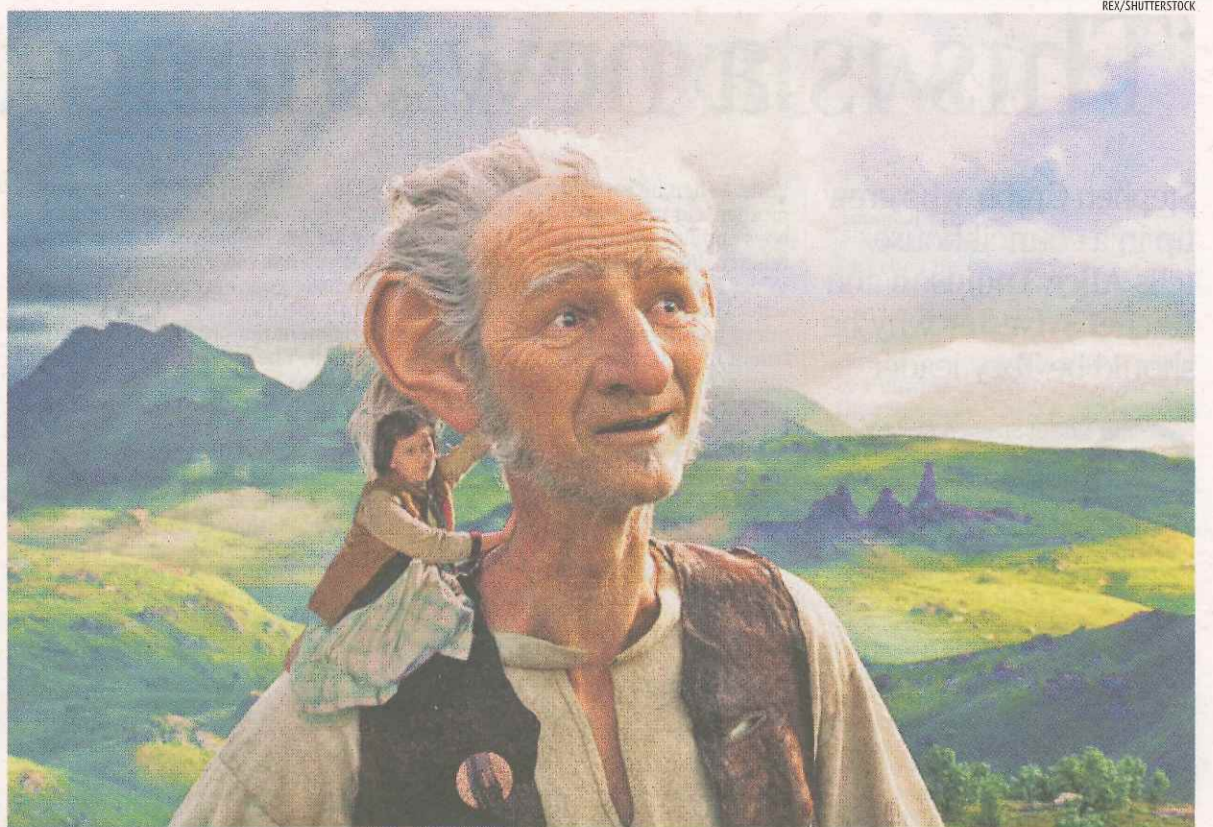
Simon Pentol, for Atkins, said that the motivation for making *Starsuckers* was "to make what he considered to be a noble and worthwhile film". Rupert Pardoe, for Slater, told the court: "The love of her life, other than her family, is making films."

Both were found guilty of two charges of conspiracy to cheat the public revenue and one of fraud relating to film tax relief, which they had denied.

Judge Martin Beddoe said that the film-makers were "intelligent and well-educated" and Slater came from a "privileged background". Her late father, Duncan, was a former high commissioner to Malaysia.

The judge said that he failed to see why Atkins was using his evidence to the Leveson inquiry in 2011 in an attempt to reduce his jail sentence. "I rather doubt, had it been known what you had been up to in the previous four years, you would have been asked to give evidence to the inquiry," he said. "I know that what you did say was at the time not accepted by some parties as accurate."

Slater was jailed for four years. She and Atkins were banned from being company directors for 12 years.



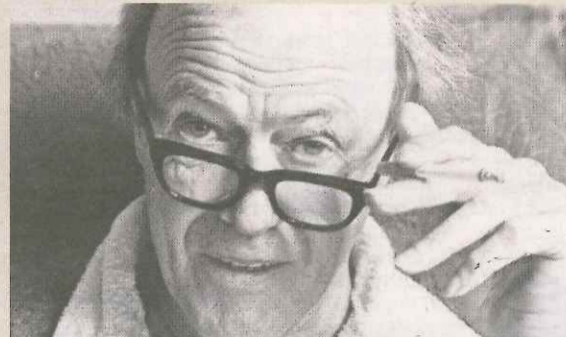
Something made up in translation

Readers may turn their noses up at his diet of "foosty feeshcumbers" but they can rest assured that he still "disna eat wee lassies" (Gabriella Bennett writes).

One of Roald Dahl's most beloved characters, the Big Friendly Giant, has learnt Scots in the hope of encouraging more children to adopt the language.

To celebrate the centenary of the author's birth, his bestselling children's book *The BFG* has been translated by a university lecturer known for doing the same to other literary favourites such as *Tintin*.

Released this week by Edinburgh publishers Black & White Publishing, *The GFG* tells the tale of Sophie, a young orphan plucked from her bed by The Guid Freendly Giant. They navigate the

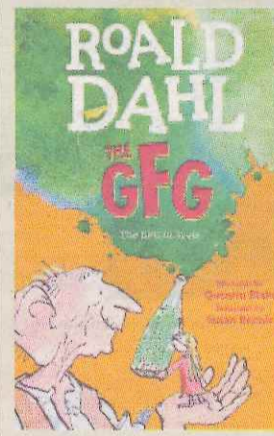


Land o Dwams, or land of dreams, and the creatures who live there, such as the gowkmaleeerie and the weariwig.

They eventually ensnare the giant's ghastly brethren, including the Buildsqueesher, Slaistermaister and Girslegorbler before living happily in a "fantoosh house" for the GFG and a "bonnie wee cottage" for Sophie.

She helps the giant to read after he asked "tae learn hoo tae speak guid Scots, an Sophy, wha luvud him like a faither, volunteered tae gie him his lessons hersel ilka day". The translation is by Susan Rennie, of the

The translation of Roald Dahl's *BFG* coincides with the film, starring Mark Rylance who made his professional debut at the Citizens Theatre, Glasgow



University of Glasgow, who is responsible for *The Derk Isle*, an acclaimed adaptation of *Tintin*.

Dr Rennie said *The BFG* was the most translated of Dahl's books, but also the trickiest with its 300 invented words — or gobblefunk — that the giants spoke.

She added: "As there are no Scots words for the likes of frobscottle and snozzcumber, I had to create a new language, which I've called guddlefank, a blend of the words guddle and fankle, which both mean 'mix up'."

"I've tried to use the same principles as Dahl when he created words like delumptious or wondercrump, starting with words children already know and changing the ending or blending them together to make something new but still understandable."

The release of Dr Rennie's book will coincide with the *BFG* film directed by Steven Spielberg, which opened in cinemas yesterday.

Tycoon is told to keep his distance

Marc Horne

A wealthy businessman who launched a controversial bid to ban ramblers has found himself being barred from part of his own estate.

Euan Snowie fought and lost a high-profile case to prevent walkers from entering the land surrounding Boquhan House, near Kippen, Stirlingshire, in 2008. However, Mr Snowie, 48, was ordered yesterday not to go within 200 metres of the mansion after he was accused of assaulting his 20-year-old daughter.

Mr Snowie, whose family waste disposal firm was sold for £40 million, had previously denied attacking Louise Snowie by pushing her repeatedly on her body and injuring her by striking her on the head. The incident is said to

have taken place at Boquhan House on June 14. After a hearing last month he was released on bail with a special condition that he should not "communicate with or contact" his daughter, who was living in Edinburgh.

However, yesterday Mr Snowie faced further allegations of pestering her by behaving in a threatening and abusive manner towards her last week, after she returned to the family home.

It is alleged that he followed her, swore at her, and made threatening remarks. It is further alleged that in doing so he breached the bail ban on contacting her.

He pleaded not guilty to both fresh charges at Stirling sheriff court.

George Pollock, solicitor-advocate, said that his client could live at another of his properties, in Bridge of Allan,

Stirlingshire, adding that although he would need to enter the electronically-gated Boquhan Estate to feed his animals, he could stay away from the main house.

Sheriff Wyllie Robertson agreed to re-release Mr Snowie on bail, allowing him to enter his estate on condition that he does not approach within 200 metres of Boquhan House itself.

He told him: "I think it's fair to say that you won't have come closer than today without being remanded in custody."

Sheriff Robertson said that it was "with considerable hesitation" that he was granting him his liberty, adding, "if any further matters come before the court it is likely you will be remanded in custody."

Mr Snowie was ordered to reappear in court on Tuesday.

Man charged over death of summer work student

A man has been charged following the death of a schoolboy in an industrial accident at an oil services company.

Michael McLean, 17, was found with a broken neck and punctured lungs at Denholm MacNamee, an industrial cleaning operator based in Inverurie, Aberdeenshire, in August last year.

He was taken to hospital where he was discovered to have irreparable damage to his spine and scans revealed that he had little brain activity. His family made the decision to turn off his life support machine after being told that he had no hope of surviving the accident.

The teenager, who was on his summer break from Kincorth Academy,

had been working alongside his father, Mark McLean, to earn money for driving lessons.

Mr McLean, 42, who was the company's first aider and tried to save his son, paid tribute to him afterwards and spoke of how he had signed up to the organ donor register.

Police launched an investigation with the Health and Safety Executive and yesterday revealed that a man had been charged. A spokeswoman said: "Police can confirm that a 21-year-old man has been charged in relation to an industrial incident which resulted in the death of Michael McLean."

A report has been submitted to the procurator fiscal for consideration.