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Romanov Scion Looking for Love

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Tsar Nicholas II's great-great-nephew Francis Mathew is starring in the Ukrainian version of "The Bachelor." **Sergei Yushkov**

KIEV, Ukraine — He is a descendant of Russia's last tsar — and has lived in the jungle, starred in Bollywood movies and trained as a stuntman.

Now Scottish photographer Francis Mathew is in a new adventure: finding a bride on a reality TV show in Ukraine.

Mathew, the great-great-nephew of Nicholas II, is the star of the second season of Ukraine's version of the popular U.S. show "The Bachelor" — in which an unmarried man picks a fiancee through a series of dates and romantic getaways.

"I've been very lucky in life, but very unlucky in love," the 33-year-old, who comes across as a romantic behind bad-boy looks, told The Associated Press.

"I am actually ready for a proper relationship, I have been for a couple of years," he said. "I am pretty fussy when it comes to choosing a long-term girlfriend, it's very difficult to find someone to be compatible with."

As many as 16,000 young women from across Ukraine and beyond auditioned to compete for the heart of "a prince" — as Mathew is billed by the show's producers, even though he has no royal title.

Twenty-five contestants were selected for the show, also called "The Bachelor" in Ukrainian, and some have gotten into shouting matches and even fights over who gets to spend more time with him, according to the STB Channel, which is set to air the show in March.

The 12 episodes, which are currently being filmed in Ukraine, Finland, Sri Lanka and elsewhere, entail romantic dinners, a helicopter ride and Mathew taking on a 350-kilogram bull as a matador. Mathew speaks little Ukrainian or Russian, so both he and the contestants wear earpieces and rely on simultaneous translation. He hopes the project will help him reconnect with his Slavic roots.

Mathew admits that the show, in which he eliminates women one by one based on their date performance until he proposes to one of the two finalists, may be provocative.

"Honestly, the concept is crazy, absolutely crazy," Mathew said. "You have to be of a certain mindset to enter a contest like that, I think it takes courage."

But he says he has met attractive and interesting women on the show and hopes to fall in love.

"Love works in very mysterious ways," Mathew said. "It does come from the most random places sometimes, the most unexpected places, so why not TV?"

The odds of finding true love, however, appear to be against Mathew. His predecessor on the show, a Ukrainian-American ballroom dancer, split with his newfound fiancee shortly after it ended last summer. Only one of the 15 seasons of "The Bachelor" in the United States resulted in marriage.

Mathew is the son of Princess Olga Andreevna Romanov, 61, whose father, Prince Andrei Alexandrovich, was the nephew of Nicholas II, Russia's last tsar. Nicholas II was assassinated by the Bolsheviks shortly after the 1917 Revolution together with his wife and children. Mathew's grandfather was able to escape and settled in Britain.

Born in London and raised in Scotland, Mathew decided against going to university and chose to become a stuntman instead. He spent more than five years studying martial arts and other sports, while working in landscape gardening to pay for his living.

Stunt acting "was my childhood dream," Mathew said. "I was always a very adventurous child. ... I climbed every building I could jump off. I used to do crazy things."

But the training ended after he badly injured his ankle on a trampoline and Mathew found a new passion in photography. He photographed jungle animals while living in a mud hut in Cameroon and spent more than three years in India working as a fashion photographer. While in India he also played villains in Bollywood movies and starred in commercials, including for chewing gum and an airline company.

Mathew says he has been in love before, but his lifestyle prevented him from settling down. His most romantic relationship, incidentally, was with a Ukrainian girl.

"Whenever I've met somebody who I either fall in love with or have a great connection with, either she is leaving or I am leaving," he said.

This time he is hoping for a happy ending.

"I am not in love at this point, but there is definitely potential to fall in love," he said. "Have I kissed a girl? You have to watch and find out."

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