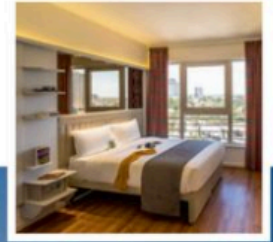


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Kiran Shah

# The Kenya-born actor and stuntman

**K**iran Shah or 'Little Kiran' as he's known, grew up in Kenya. After moving to England as a teenager, Shah began to develop an interest in show business and stunt work and in 1973 at 17, Shah auditioned to join a theatre company. Three years later he had his breakthrough and worked on his first film 'Candleshoe', starring David Niven and Jodie Foster. During his career, Shah has acted as a stuntman in films such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Superman*. We chat to him about his achievements.



### Q. What was it like growing up in Kenya?

**A.** It was great growing up in Kenya. I lived in Nagara, Nairobi. My father had a shop near Shan Cinema called Kiran Variety House and I used to catch a school bus by the cinema and travel to Mapaka every day. I remember at the weekends we would spend time on Saturdays helping my father at his shop and most Sunday afternoons we would spend time with my uncle's family. We would go out in one car, there were about 10 of us with the kids sitting on the adult's lap. We would go to Wilson Airport, Nairobi Dam and Nairobi National Park to see the wildlife, Fourteen Falls, etc. It was in Kenya that I first started dreaming of being an actor, it started with me mimicking my uncle and copying his mannerisms, the other shopkeepers would always stop me and ask me to do my impression. Luckily when my uncle found out he found it funny.

**Q. How did you first get into acting and stunt work?**

**A.** In 1976 after seeing an advertisement in a magazine, I got into a film called 'Candle-shoe' as a stand-in for an actress. This film provided my big break in more ways than one. While on location in a dress with a long black wig, I was approached by the stunt coordinator Bob Anderson. As I

looked like a girl from the back, he thought I would be perfect for doing stunts for a girl and of course I said yes. From then on, my stunt life started. This film proved lucky for me as I also got my big break in acting from it. In (the UK's) Pinewood Studios while on a lunch break, a producer called John Dark approached me and asked me to meet his director Kevin Connor. They talked to me about a small acting part for a character called Bolum for the film 'The People That Time Forgot'. I got my first part and haven't looked back since.

### Q. What is your most memorable and favourite role to date?

**A.** I have had so many memorable roles and I have loved them for different reasons. In 'Superman', I was a scale stunt flying double for Christopher Reeves whenever Superman was flying in the distance – some of the time this was me. There is a scene in 'Raiders of the Lost Ark' where I played the character Abu and John Ray-Davis. It was amazing to have a part in such an iconic scene. The 1982 'Dark Crystal' changed my career; this was the first time I played creature characters. I had a starring role in Ridley Scott's film 'Legend' playing Blunder, it was fun working with Tom Cruise, Mia Sara, Tim Curry and the rest

of the cast. In *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, I played character Gineaabrik, the steedick to Tilda Swinton's character the White Witch. I loved this partnership and thought it looked great on screen. I worked on trilogies 'The Lord of the Rings' and 'The Hobbit' and I really enjoyed working on both of these trilogies and the cast and crew were fantastic. Peter Jackson was really good to work with and there was a nice family atmosphere on set. On 'The Lord of the Rings', I ended up being the scale double and scale stunt double for all five hobbits for whoever was leading the scene. I was acting double, in other words, I had to replicate what the hobbits did in front of the camera. I had to watch the monitor and study them to replicate them. In all three of the Hobbit films, I was Martin Freeman's Bilbo scale and scale stunt double and also played Goblin Scribe. More recently, I have been working on all the new *Star Wars* films playing various creature characters. Working with Neal Scanlan and his team has been fantastic. I also currently hold two Guinness World Records, the smallest stunt man in the world and the smallest wing walker in the world.

### Q. Do you consider being a stunt man dangerous? Are there times when things have gone wrong?

**A.** Stunt people are not daredevils. We do not take unnecessary risks and safety is always the first thing but sometimes the stunt can go wrong and people get hurt. It is very rare to get life threatening injuries. On 'The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King' – while I was rehearsing the last big battle scene – I was double riding a horse in front of Miranda Otto's character Eowyn, her stunt double and I (as Billy Boyd's character Pippin). We did a few runs in the



**NARNIA** ▲  
Shah portrayed Gineaabrik in the movie

paddock and the horse bolted but we finally got the horse under control. We did one last run and the horse bolted again and suddenly he bucked and started bolting and I flew over the hand of the stuntwoman and landed badly on the muddy ground and fractured my back. I was taken by helicopter to Wellington Hospital. I stayed in the hospital for about three days and when I came out, I was in a brace and walking with crutches. It took me three months to recover and I had to stay in New Zealand for those three months but Peter Jackson's production team looked after me very well.

**Q. Any words for inspiring stunt men and women?**

**A.** Three things: always work hard, play hard and be safe. Enjoy what you do and keep fit.

### STUNT WORK

Shah has been a stunt man for 43 years

