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HUGE STAR: Kiran Shah (Image: @ Kit Shah HCK-Photography)

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Meet Kiran Shah: The world's smallest stuntman and one of biggest stars of fantasy cinema

Kiran Shah tells film critic Andy Lea about the challenges of AI, his fantasy career and his new festive horror *There's Something In Barn*.

By **Andy Lea**, Film Editor

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He has been shot at by stormtroopers, thrown from a horse in Middle Earth and threw himself off the top of a ship's mast while battling Charlton Heston's Sherlock Holmes. Now actor and stuntman Kiran Shah is facing his biggest challenge yet – AI.

PRIVACY

The 4ft 1in star, also known as Little Kiran, plays the lead elf in new festive comedy horror *There's Something In The Barn*.

This Christmas, the film is competing for festive viewers with *Wonka*, where Hugh Grant was digitally shrunk to play an Oompa Loompa.



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HAMMER TIME: Kiran plays an angry elf in *There's Something In The Barn* (Image: Vertigo Films)

And Shah fears there could be fewer roles for little people in fantasy films as AI technology makes it cheaper and easier to reduce taller Hollywood stars to dwarven and elvish proportions.

"That's going to happen, " says the 67-year-old. "At the moment it's very expensive, but people are trying it out now,"

"It's going to put a lot of people out of work."

But Kiran, who is in the Guinness Book Of Records the world's shortest stuntman, has managed to stay ahead of the curve since he broke into the film industry in the 1970s.





HOBBIT FORMING: Kiran went on double for all the hobbits for Peter Jackson (Image: Kiran Shah collection)

Born in Nairobi, he moved to London with his family at the age of 12 and was studying mime at the Red Buddha Theatre Company when he decided to try to get into movies.

One of his earliest jobs was as a scale double for Christopher Reeves in the 1978 hit Superman. Whenever we see Superman flying in the distance, that's a young Kiran in the famous outfit.

"In the last couple of days of the shoot, they were playing around with blue screen, and I thought "they won't need me anymore'.

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Indiana Jones poisoned dates in Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981). Then he broke into creature work by playing a variety of characters in The Dark Crystal (1982).

And it wasn't just fantasy films that needed his daredevil skills. Sherlock Holmes fans may recognise him as Tonga alongside Charlton Heston in The Crucifer Of Blood. In the 1991 film, he stole a march on Tom Cruise (who he starred alongside in 1985's Legend) by acting and performing his own stunts.

He says the most memorable day on that film involved jumping into a freezing River Thames from the mast of a tall ship. "I can't swim," he admits, "but I know I won't sink".

But he attributes his break to narrowly missing out on playing R2-D2 in the first Star Wars movie. After a successful screen test with a prototype of the bleeping droid, he was told that Kenny Baker, who had left the production, had decided to return.





EWOK: Kiran preparing for one of his many Star Wars roles (Image: Kiran Shan collection)

But to make up for the disappointment, the casting director set him up with an agent and work began to flood in. He went on to play a robot, an Ewok and perform stunts in Return Of The Jedi. When the sci-fi franchise rebooted with 2015's The Force Awakens, Kiran returned and went onto star in all five subsequent sequels and spin-offs.

"Without that first Star Wars, I don't know what I would be doing," he says.

When Peter Jackson cast Elijah Wood as diminutive adventurer Frodo Baggins in his Lord Of The Rings trilogy, he called on the talented mimic to double for Wood in wide shots.

So Kiran began studying the way Wood moved so he could seamlessly step in. Jackson was so impressed, he asked him to repeat the feat with all five of the film's main Hobbits in all three films.

"I was an acting double not just a double," he says. "You have to look like them, copy their

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"It was the last month of the last pickup from the very last fight in the last Lord Of The Rings film, The Return Of The King," he says.

"I was double riding the horse and fighting. In rehearsals the horse bolted three or four times.

"The riding stunt double said we should call it quits. I said, 'one more'. And that was one more too many. I came off and broke my back".

After three months in a brace, Kiran was back to work. He says he gets recognised the most for as Ginarrbrik, Tilda Swinton's evil sidekick in 2005's The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe.





SIDEKICK: Kiran Shah as Ginnabrik in The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe (Image: Buena Vista)

"That was a really big part and I wasn't wearing a heavy prosthetic", he says.

And it was that role which landed him the lead role in There's Something In The Barn.

In the new movie, Kiran plays "a barn elf", a dangerous creature taken from Scandinavian mythology. When an American family moves to a mountainous village in Norway they ignore local folklore about

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LEAD ELF: Kiran in There's Something In The Barn (Image: Vertigo Films)

"It was such a funny script, I loved it" he says. "It's funny how I got the part too. It was late 2021 and the director of photography's wife was watching The Lion, Witch And The Wardrobe on TV. She called him in from the kitchen and said 'I think you've got your little guy'".

PRIVACY

Kiran has raised awareness of issues facing little people with a speaking tour of Kenya. But even though AI may be a threat, he thinks things are looking up for little actors.

He attributes a change in attitude to director Terry Gilliam, who cast little people as leads in his 1981 fantasy *Time Bandits*.

"That didn't happen before and I do give him credit for that," he says.

"And there are a lot more opportunities for little people now. You just need to look at what Warwick Davis, Deep Roy and Peter Dinklage are doing".

"They can be doctors, accountants or anything. Why not use little people?"

There's Something In The Barn is available to stream now on all major digital platforms.

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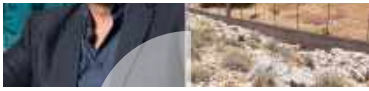


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