



BROWSE

 **Richard E. Grant**

Andrew M. Butler

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Richard E. Grant

Andrew M. Butler (bio)

In the late 1990s, *Doctor Who* had a vocal worldwide audience large enough to support multimedia spin-offs, a monthly magazine and conventions. The BBC, a public service broadcaster, was happy to continue to make residual sales through videos, DVDs and other licensing

without spending money to produce new episodes. Aside from the television movie, when the format did return it was often for other purposes, sometimes in sketch shows, but also to deliver audiences to other projects – the charity telethons *Comic Relief* and *BBC Children in Need* and the fledgling BBC website. So it was that Richard E. Grant played the Doctor in two different incarnations in non-canonical but BBC-broadcast adventures, ‘Doctor Who and the Curse of Fatal Death’ (12 Mar 1999) and ‘Scream of the Shalka’ (13 Nov–16 Dec 2003). Both look back to the classic format and anticipate some of the changes made for the rebooted series.

Born in Swaziland, Grant came to prominence as the eponymous tragic, flawed, would-be thespian in the cult film, *Withnail & I* (Robinson UK 1987), alongside Paul McGann. His Southern African background gave his accent a kind of old-fashioned English, post-Second World War flavour, and he had found a niche as a character actor in films such as *Hudson Hawk* (Lehmann US 1991) and *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (Coppola US 1992), as well as the central role in Peter Capaldi’s Oscar-winning short *Franz Kafka’s It’s a Wonderful Life* (UK 1993). His casting on the back of *Withnail* tended to encourage a more histrionic style.

The four-episode ‘The Curse of Fatal Death’ was a spoof written by future showrunner Steven Moffat for *Comic Relief*, with a new Doctor (Rowan Atkinson), companion Emma (Julia Sawalha) and arch nemesis Master (Jonathan Pryce). Somewhat carnivalesque in tone, there are timey-wimey struggles between the two Time Lords, Dalek attacks, fart gags (the Master **[End Page 240]** repeatedly falls into a pit of excrement, an alien species communicates through flatulence), suggestions that the Doctor is going to retire to live with Emma and jokes made at the expense of the series. But the Doctor is wounded and returns played by Grant, cocksure, vain, convinced of his sexual prowess, licking a mirrored image of himself and kissing Emma on the lips. Barely 90 seconds later, this incarnation is killed, returning as a much shyer figure played by Jim Broadbent, then Hugh Grant and finally Joanna Lumley. The adult material is infantilising, although it anticipates the more sexualised

central figure of the reboot as well as the flatulence of the Slitheen first shown in 'Aliens of London' (16 Apr 2005), and anticipates plot devices of 'The Day of the Doctor'. The parody is affectionate but veers toward the silly.

While 'Curse' was a one-off, the Flash animation 'Scream of the Shalka' was intended to continue with Grant as the ninth Doctor. The BBC Cult website had already championed the original series, hosting some primitive animations such as 'Death Comes to Time' (12 Jul 2001, 14 Feb–3 May 2002), 'Real Time' (2 Aug–5 Sep 2002) and 'Shada' (2 May–6 Jun 2003), and now had ambitious plans for the programme's 40th anniversary. They were commissioned to produce a number of four-episode story-arcs, animated by Cosgrove-Hall, but this was reduced to a webcast one-off six-part adventure, capable of being watched on the slower downloads than we have today. They wanted the Doctor's character to develop during the run and suggested that a companion has been killed – meanwhile, in the eighth Doctor books, Gallifrey had been destroyed in an earlier version of what would become the Time Wars. Paul Cornell from the Virgin New Adventures wrote the scripts, clearly inspired by Pertwee–Baker era Earth-based adventures, and owing a debt to *Quatermass II* (UK 22 Oct–26 Nov 1955). Meteorites strike the Earth and the first two people on the scene are killed by an unseen menace. Meanwhile, the Doctor (Grant) arrives in – has been sent to – a quiet Lancastrian town and senses something is wrong. The alien Shalka want to re-engineer...

television episode, gave more to fans than a chance to see McGann's Doctor again, with better hair and a slightly different outfit. It also provided them with a frisson of delight as the Doctor named his companions: all were from the Big Finish Eighth Doctor audio adventures. Speculation immediately began to fly: did this BBC-approved shout-out, broadcast online in a short webisode, mean the audios were canonical?

Somehow it seems appropriate that questions of canonicity should dog the Doctor whose very longevity relies on extracanonial media.

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2715 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218
+1 (410) 516-6989
muse@press.jhu.edu



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