

“I’m The Diva!”

Homoerotic werewolves, marrying Lindsay Lohan and dying in Gallipoli – actor Grant Bowler has been through the gauntlet! Interview by **Matthew Myers**.



DNA: You’ve starred in *Lost*, *True Blood* and now the sci-fi drama *Defiance*. What’s it like working with aliens?

Grant Bowler: [Laughs] I’ve been doing it all my life! You know, when I think about those shows you mention, I really feel happy and proud. *Lost* was an absolute joy and the cast of *True Blood* are my best mates forever. That show had everyone naked, camp and crazy 24 hours a day. *True Blood* was the most fun you could have with your pants off!

In *True Blood* you played Cooter the biker werewolf, and that show certainly had its camp, even homoerotic moments. Oh god yes, both gay and lesbian. I remember one scene where Brit Morgan and I were feeding on Steve Moyer and we were licking the blood off him and at some point our tongues met and we just started kissing. Then we were kind of dry-humping him as he lay there. Steve was barely able to contain his laughter and when they finally called cut, I looked up at Alan Ball, who was directing, and said “Alan was that too far?” He smiled and said, “I don’t know, let’s go further and see!” When Alan tells a story, whether it’s *Six Feet Under*, *American Beauty* or *True Blood*, it’s always a metaphor for society. I often see the vampires and werewolves in *True Blood* as a metaphor for the political position that the gay and lesbian community find themselves in, in the United States.

You’ve also been involved in a gay-themed movie? Yes, I did an indie called *I Do*, and it’s a positive film about gay marriage. It stars David W Ross and Alicia Witt. It’s about a gay man in New York City whose brother, who I play, dies and he gets left with his brother’s wife and kids. So he has to help bring up his niece and nephew, while also falling in love with a man. It’s a lovely little film. It’s very gentle and funny. I’m very passionate about these things and I work with an organisation called Lambda Legal; they’re the legal force behind same-sex marriage campaigning. I’m proud to be a celebrity spokesperson and advocate for them.

On *Ugly Betty* you starred with the beautiful Vanessa Williams, and that beach scene was very James Bond! It was deliberately James Bond. It was an homage and a send up at the same time. I thought it was fabulously camp. **You looked every bit as good as Daniel Craig in that scene. Are you aware many women and gay men think you’re hot?** Well thank you! Yes I realise that and I’ve always embraced both my gay and straight fans. It’s all good, and lovely when you’re appreciated like that. Being in my forties now, I’m just really glad that somebody wants to look!

If you were gay, who would you go for? I’d be hunting down Matthew McConaughey. It’s interesting because as a straight male I find myself a bit aggressive toward him, because he’s got such a phenomenal laconic Texan charm. I find myself challenged, in a straight way. But

if I were gay I'd go for him in a heartbeat, for exactly the same reason.

You played Richard Burton in the telemovie *Liz And Dick*, with Lindsay Lohan. What was that like? Hmm, that was a tough one [laughs]. I got a really good first-hand experience of what Richard Burton must have felt like. It was a tough shoot, but I don't want to place all of that at Lindsay's feet because, to be honest, what wasn't reported was that we didn't have many shoot days and she alone had 67 wardrobe changes. It was phenomenal, the work we had to get through. We were trying to reach thirty years of these people's lives and it was a massively ambitious project. Even with everything running perfectly, we would still have had a great amount of difficulty. So some of that reporting got a bit unfair at times.

Speaking of divas, who's yours? [Laughs] I've had my experience with divas, gay and straight! But I go old school and I'd have to say Diana Ross. She's a pure straight diva, but in that wonderful accessible, warm slightly motherly

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way. She's not a super-bitch diva. She does a great version of *I Will Survive*. What's always intrigued me about my gay mates is that they love a diva. They'd die for a diva! And of course being straight, I just look at them [divas] and it fills me with dread. With the potential that I could end up in that relationship... what's the saying that there can only be one diva in any relationship? I can tell you right now that I'm the diva in all of mine!

What's your porn name [your first pet and the street you grew up on]? It kind of sucks: Mandy Herbert. I feel like it's C-minus grade porn.

It's more like a drag name! [Laughs] Yeah, in fact I used to work in a drag bar, a million years ago when I was 18 and it was called Beat, in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley. There was one girl I'll never forget, Melinda, who was absolutely stunning. My mates from Brisbane, who were all redneck boys, would come in and be like oh my god, she's gorgeous! And I'd be like, yes she is!

One of your next ventures is the 2015 miniseries, *Gallipoli*. They reached out and asked if I wanted this role just as I was in the



Grant shirtless in *Outrageous Fortune*, shirtless in *True Blood*, shirtless in *Ugly Betty*. Grant with Lindsay Lohan in *Dick And Liz*.

process of reaching out to them, so it was absolutely wonderful. With the centenary coming up next year I wanted to be involved. I play a New Zealand lieutenant colonel called William Malone who was one of the heroes of the campaign.

As host of *The Amazing Race Australia*, you do a lot of travelling. What have been your favourite travel experiences? I loved Vietnam and Prague, and it was such a lovely opportunity to go to Cuba, which has been on my bucket list for a long time. It has such a great culture. I live in the United States and Americans can't go to Cuba, so that makes it just a bit more intriguing.

Do you feel emotional towards certain contestants, especially when they are eliminated? Oh goodness, yes. I find it very difficult eliminating them, especially when I know they are particularly invested. Sometimes they are exhausted and you can see that it's almost a relief and other times they think they can see it coming. But every now and again I have to eliminate a team that have no idea they've come in last. I always try and remind them that what they've done is extraordinary and that they should feel proud.

Your career has included many Australian television series. Is there any one that you are particularly fond of? I'll always love *Blue Heelers* because it gave me my start and it was such a lovely cast. I also have a soft spot for *Medivac* because Tony Cavanaugh's writing was so adventurous and I'm so happy I did that.

This is our grooming issue. Do you have any shaving tips? I notice that as I'm getting more ancient, I have to take a lot more care of my skin. I used to shave very quickly, but now I take care and use a pre-conditioner to soften my beard. I also use a really good moisturiser afterwards, and usually one with a sunblock. Dermalogica have a really good one that I use.

Would it be correct to say [TV series]

***Outrageous Fortune* was a turning point in your career?** Yes, probably more so internally than externally. I always knew what I was good at as an actor, but when I was younger I didn't have the look for what I was good at! I looked like a nice clean-cut good guy, and it wasn't until I got into my thirties, with enough wear on the tread, that I was finally allowed to do it. I connect with characters that create their own morality and choose their own definitions of right and wrong. It was the first time I was given full flight to go about that. *Outrageous Fortune* was probably the biggest single turning point for me as an actor.

What advice would you give to anyone wanting to break into acting? Two things. Firstly, patience is really important. I see so many people fall by the wayside because they want everything to happen now, and the other thing is that it needs to be a vocation rather than a profession. It needs to be something that you just have to do, rather than want to do. There are so many ups and downs and there has to be a reason to hold on. God, I'm sounding like a Diana Ross number!

Who has been the biggest influence on your career? I've had so many. Bryan Brown was one of the first people to encourage me to come to the States, and I'll always be grateful to him for that. Vanessa Williams has been a fantastic friend and sounding board in the industry, and Anna Paquin and Stephen Moyer from *True Blood* are two of my closest friends. They've all been massively influential to me.

Does Grant Bowler prefer jocks, boxers or freeballing? I prefer boxer briefs. I like the Bonds ones that are Pat Rafter's favourites!

More: *The Amazing Race Australia* airs on Channel Seven.