



STYLE

THE SUNDAY TIMES

10 DECEMBER 2017

STAR GIRL

HOW DOCTOR WHO'S
KAREN GILLAN
BECAME
HOLLYWOOD'S
NEW ACTION
HERO

SHOP
THE
SALES
YOUR
ULTIMATE
GUIDE TO
THE BEST
FASHION
BUYS

'We view ambition in a slightly negative way'

KAREN GILLAN HAS MADE THE LEAP FROM DOCTOR WHO ASSISTANT TO LEADING THIS YEAR'S CHRISTMAS BLOCKBUSTER JUMANJI. SCARLETT CURTIS MEETS HER TO FIND OUT HOW THE GIRL FROM THE HIGHLANDS QUIETLY BECAME A STAR

THE WORLD HAS ALWAYS BEEN SCEPTICAL OF AN AMBITIOUS WOMAN. SHE IS SEEN AS SUSPECT in her motives, aggressive in her approach and, frankly, just a little unappealing. Karen Gillan is ambitious. The 30-year-old Scottish actress rose to fame in 2010 as Amy Pond, the fiery-haired companion to Matt Smith's Doctor Who. Since hanging up her keys to the Tardis, she has fronted an American TV series, appeared in an Oscar-winning film and landed leading roles in three Hollywood franchises. From *The Big Short* to *Guardians of the Galaxy* to *Avengers: Infinity War*, Gillan's IMDB page reads like a mildly pretentious 15-year-old's list of favourite films, and shows her to be one of the most successful British actresses to make the leap across the pond. So, yes, Karen Gillan is ambitious. She's ambitious and talented, and also softly spoken, very Scottish and has a mildly unhealthy knitwear addiction.

"I do think in the UK we're in danger of viewing ambition in a slightly negative way," Gillan says when we sit down for breakfast at a trendy hotel in downtown New York. "In Los Angeles, people kind of

celebrate that, and that's one thing that I like about it." She moved to LA in 2012, after three series of *Doctor Who*. "I was 24. I literally had a suitcase, nowhere to live, didn't know anyone. I moved into this horrible little apartment, which ended up getting burgled. It was mental," she says.

Gillan has stayed Stateside ever since and recently moved to New York, where she lives by herself. "I was in LA for four years, and then I was, like, 'This isn't really my vibe.' I didn't even know how to drive, and the weather doesn't do well for me considering I'm ginger and pale and sunburn easily."

This Christmas, she stars in *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*, a sequel to the 1995 classic, alongside Nick Jonas, Jack Black, Kevin Hart and Dwayne "the Rock" Johnson. Of her co-stars, she says Jonas is "really nice, kind of chilled out and gentle", while Johnson is "basically going to run the world one day. He's just the most motivational, nicest person I've ever come across. You express any kind of insecurity about anything and he's, like, 'You can do it', and then you're just filled with the knowledge that you can do it." Filming took place in the jungles of Hawaii, which meant 30-degree heat and a lot of mosquitoes. "It was a good laugh," she says. "I mean, running away from imaginary animals is always fun. *Doctor Who* was the perfect training ground. I know how to look scared of things that aren't there."

Who fans will be pleased to know that Amy and the Doctor remain steadfast companions: "Matt is one of my best friends. I don't see him as much as I'd like to, just because we're in different countries, but we speak all the time." As a lifelong Whovian myself (yes, that's a thing), the opportunity for me to ask Amy Pond for her thoughts on the first female Doctor feels too good to be true. The former companion's enthusiasm is genuine: "I'm so excited! Jodie Whittaker is an amazing actress. I think she is going to do wonders with the role and I'm just excited for



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Photographs Kerry Hallihan Styling Amy Mach

everyone to realise that a female can absolutely play it — it never should have been a question, ever.”

Our breakfast takes place the week of the initial Weinstein revelations, and Gillan counts herself lucky never to have been the victim of anything similar. “I’m just fortunate not to have found myself in a situation like any of these women,” she says. “I never encountered him. I’m so pleased that everybody’s speaking up. The worst thing is to keep this under the radar. The industry is still male-dominated, for sure.” She later says: “I think people instantly think competition if two girls are, you know, vaguely similar. It’s just not like that.”

In 2010, when Amy Pond dared to wear a short-skirted police uniform, it sent the Who-niverse into a frenzy of criticism over whether or not the reveal of Gillan’s thigh area was empowering or



From top With Jack Black, Kevin Hart and Dwayne Johnson in *Jumanji*; and with Matt Smith in *Doctor Who*



objectifying. “I was the same age as the character,” she says, “and I was, like, ‘I want this to represent a real girl of this age’, hence having control of the costumes, which were, apparently, too revealing.” While she’s impressively level-headed when talking about incidents such as “skirt-gate”, ultimately experiences such as this one have

nudged the self-confessed control freak behind the camera. In 2015, Gillan wrote and directed two shorts, and next year will see the release of her first feature film, *The Party’s Just Beginning*.

“I started with this whole acting thing because I was given a video camera by my parents when I was a kid, and I started making horror movies around the house. I would always kill my dad,” she says with a laugh, “which seems really unhealthy, but we have a brilliant relationship. We’d get tomato sauce and everything for blood — it was hilarious. I need to find those... That kind of got me into acting, but now I feel I’m finally returning to what got me started in the first place, and I love it so much.”

An only child, born and raised in the Scottish Highlands, Gillan now finds herself on a plane every week, travelling for work. “It’s fun,” she says, “but I don’t think I could sustain this.” Her golden rule is eight hours’ sleep every night: “I don’t go under eight hours for anyone or anything, so I’ve said this to my agents. There have been times when they’ve been, like, ‘Can you just?’ and I’m, like, ‘No, I need to maintain this rule.’” The other golden rule is that she won’t talk about her private life, though she has said in the past that the prospect of high-octane American-style dating terrifies her.

Gillan has conquered LA and I leave our breakfast pretty certain she’ll have the city that never sleeps wrapped around her finger within a few months. Though the ultimate goal is to move back home:

“One day I want to have a castle in Scotland,” she laughs. “Well, I say ‘castle’, but maybe just a large, old house.” Her accent hasn’t changed, her skin remains gloriously pale and her hair is as naturally ginger as the first day she stepped into the Tardis. If the full scope of her success comes as a shock, I have a small suspicion she planned it that way. ■

Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle is in cinemas from December 20

BBC

A FEMALE CAN
ABSOLUTELY
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WHO — IT NEVER
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THIS PAGE BLOUSE, £720, GIORGIO ARMANI. COATED TROUSERS, £530, 3.1 PHILLIP LIM. BRA, GILLAN’S OWN. OPPOSITE IVORY WOOL AND SATIN JACKET, £1,760, AND TROUSERS, £920, LANVIN. TOP, GILLAN’S OWN. HAIR BRIAN BUENAVENTURA AT MANAGEMENT + ARTISTS. MAKE-UP DOTTI AT STATEMENT ARTISTS USING MV ORGANIC SKINCARE AND KJAER WEISS MAKE-UP AND ARTIST BRUSHES. NAILS RICA ROMAIN AT LMC WORLDWIDE USING DIOR DIORIFIC VERNIS IN GRENAT FROM CHRISTMAS LOOK 2017 AND CAPTURE TOTALE HAND CREAM. PRODUCTION SAVVY

