

Hot this month Tyra Banks, royal Windsor, cat camps, country music outlaws

American Airlines 

# American Way

MAY 2018

THE NEW  
CHARMS OF OLD  
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*Opera's  
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FLIPS THE  
SCRIPT IN BERLIN

*In Dogs  
We Trust*  
CANINES TEAM  
UP WITH  
VETERANS

# MARVEL-OUSS!

*Karen Gillan*  
*turns it up*  
*in Avengers:*  
*Infinity War*

*Plus*  
JAPAN'S  
CUTEST  
MASCOTS

# GREAT

Acting, singing, writing,  
making fun of people  
choking on horseradish—  
is there anything  
**Karen Gillan** can't do?

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Photography **ERIC RAY DAVIDSON**

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# SCOOT





# AS KAREN GILLAN

swans in to the Tam O'Shanter, L.A.'s oldest Scottish-themed restaurant, she conjures a glitzy 1940s Hollywood starlet: burnt sienna hair, oversized sunglasses, lithe frame wrapped in a Vince Camuto faux leopard-skin coat. Yet, despite having leading roles in two of the largest-grossing films of the past year, no one has turned around to gawk. For now, Gillan likes it that way.

In fact, the 30-year-old Scottish-born actress—who is also wearing ripped black jeans, black leather sneakers and a striped Kooples T-shirt—considers herself more geek than glam. As we talk over lunch in this ersatz version of a pub from her homeland, she gushes about her favorite horror movies, admits she's terrible at telling stories on late-night talk shows and reveals the thing that distinguishes her acting career so far: a knack for bumping into other actors during shoots.

When the waiter comes over to take our order, I tell Gillan that lunch is on us, and she deadpans, "In that case, I'll have their oldest whisky," before revealing that she actually cannot stand the stuff. "I keep wanting to be the girl who drinks whisky because she's so cool, the girl who asks for it 'peaty,'" she says, flattening the 'e' with her broad Scottish accent, "but I don't know what that means, and I don't like the taste of it, so I'm failing at that." She does, however, order a sizeable plate of brisket, which she tackles with zeal.

Geeky or not, Gillan is killing it on screen. Last month, she reprised her *Guardians of the Galaxy* role of Nebula, the bald, blue-skinned assassin, in *Avengers: Infinity War*. She won't reveal much about the film, only that "it's going to be a cinematic event!" She laughs and adds, "I actually came up with that myself." She's kidding, but there are a number of people out there who have been anticipating the film's April 27 release in the way one might look forward to an iced tea while crawling through a desert. Yet, despite the enormous fuss surrounding the so-called Marvel

Cinematic Universe, Gillan does not get mobbed walking down the street, in large part because studio makeup teams spend many hours making her look unrecognizable—which, again, suits her fine.

"I don't know how I would cope if I couldn't just go get a coffee," she says. "Some of the actors I work with, they can't do that anymore."

While Gillan is free to roam the coffee shops of Los Angeles and New York—she has split her time between the two cities since moving to the U.S. a few years ago—it's a very different story in her native Britain. She shot to stardom there in 2010, when she was cast opposite Matt Smith on the sci-fi series *Doctor Who*. "In the U.K., it's mainstream," she says of the BBC show that first aired in 1963. "It's part >

Left: Dress: Galvan;  
Gloves: Syren

Previous spread:  
Suit: Bash; Sweater:  
Valentino; Pins:  
Swarovski

In *Avengers: Infinity War*, Gillan's tormented assassin Nebula (below) is on a collision course with her adopted father, Thanos (James Brolin), and several Marvel superheroes, following her intergalactic run-ins with Star-Lord (Chris Pratt) and adopted sister Gamora (Zoe Saldana) in the first two *Guardians of the Galaxy* installments





of our culture, a national institution.” It was a mammoth role to land at age 21, and it took some getting used to. “You’re instantly known, you’re getting followed into nightclubs,” she recalls. “I was, like, ‘What is happening?’”

**C**elebrity couldn’t have come as a complete shock to Gillan. She began thinking about acting as a career from the age of 10, doing school theater productions in the small Scottish Highland city of Inverness, and shooting horror movies on a home video camera, including one in which she kills her own father. “We have a very healthy relationship,” she assures me, “despite murdering him in my art.”

Encouraged by her parents (Mom worked in a grocery store, Dad in a center for people

with learning disabilities), by 15 she had an agent and was auditioning for professional roles. At 18, she dropped out of Italia Conti, the prestigious London performing arts academy, after being cast in an episode of the TV drama *Rebus*. She then honed her comic chops on the racy sketch comedy series *The Kevin Bishop Show* (suggested YouTube viewing: her sendup of Katy Perry’s “I Kissed a Girl”).

In the five years since she departed *Doctor Who*, Gillan has scored a succession of increasingly high-profile roles—top billing in the 2013 horror film *Oculus*, a recurring part in the *Guardians of the Galaxy* series, an inspired turn in the short-lived U.S. sitcom *Selfie* and appearing as Martha Kaply/Ruby Roundhouse in the ensemble box-office smash *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*.

While Gillan’s height (5’11”) has come in handy for action roles, she suspects it also may



## FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

Super Heroes are helping to battle cancer

The Super Heroes of Marvel Studios' *Avengers: Infinity War* have joined forces with Stand Up To Cancer (SU2C) and American Airlines in the battle against the disease.

Images of the Avengers, alongside SU2C researchers and American Airlines team members who have fought cancer, will appear on the exterior of an American Airlines plane flying routes between New York City and Los Angeles from now until the end of September. In addition, members of the Super Hero team—including Chris Hemsworth (Thor), Scarlett Johansson (Black Widow), Chris Evans (Captain America), Chadwick Boseman (Black Panther) and more—will appear in public service announcements encouraging donations to SU2C. Funding helps to further life-saving research on new treatments and therapies. For every dollar donated to SU2C, American Airlines AAdvantage® members will receive 10 American Airlines AAdvantage® miles with a minimum \$25 donation. [standuptocancer.org/americanairlines](http://standuptocancer.org/americanairlines)

have lost her parts because she towered over the leading man. "I've met actors and they've gone, 'Oh, for God's sake!' when they see me, like they know they're going to spend all their time on a box." As a kid, she felt pretty gawky, she says, and hunched over a lot so she wouldn't stand out. She also was teased for having red hair, but has since learned to accept who she is: "Embrace the tall! Embrace the ginger! That's what I say!"

Another thing that made Gillan stand out as a kid was her ambition, which did not go down well with the more begrudging residents of Inverness, where the local version of tall poppy syndrome finds expression in the term "getting too big for your boots." "Some people would be like, 'Oh, she's very ambitious,' like it's a negative thing," she says. Since moving to America, she has found people to be a lot less nitpicky about her professional aspirations. "I was like, 'Ah, the shackles are off!'"

Gillan, for her part, insists she generally feels closer to her former self—the gangly nerd who watched horror films "almost exclusively"—than to the Hollywood movie star she's become. "I did not anticipate that I would be doing so many action sequences and playing these roles—which is great—but it's not really my forte," she says. "But now I feel like it is, and I don't know how that happened!"

"She's kind of a unicorn," says Jake Kasdan, who directed Gillan in *Jumanji*. "The character she plays in the movie—an awkward teenage girl who finds herself in the body of an action heroine—Karen can legitimately, credibly, do both parts of it. She probably relates more closely to the teenage character, but she's got the chops to be the action star, too. I think she's one of a kind." And while we're on the subject of versatility: Gillan also has a lovely singing voice (more YouTube viewing: her >

Above: Dress: Valentino; Earrings: vintage

Stylist: Erica Cloud  
Hair: Bobby Eliot  
Makeup: Beau Nelson



Sweater: Valentino;  
Skirt: Valentino; Shoes:  
Casadei; Earring: DVF

surprisingly moving karaoke version of Sia's "Chandelier" from *Selfie*).

As if all that wasn't enough, she also wrote, directed and starred in her own indie feature—*The Party's Just Beginning*—currently making the rounds at festivals. A dark comedy-drama about a young woman dealing with the suicide of her best friend, the film was shot over three weeks and could hardly be further—in both spirit and budget—from the sci-fi blockbusters that have catapulted her into the big time. "It was madness," she says of the film's tight shooting schedule, "but I loved the whole experience so much that now I want to direct more. I've been bitten by the bug."

Gillan is aware that her filmmaking ambitions, as a woman, benefit from the groundwork laid by others, and she hopes to play a part in improving things further. "It feels like there's change in the air, and it's exciting," she says, "not only to be given opportunities as a female filmmaker, but also to see other females looking at what I'm doing and then saying that they're going to start making films. It's contagious in the best possible way." She stops herself, laughs and adds, "I mean, to be fair, these women haven't seen my movie yet. Once they do, they will not be saying this."

**T**hough it's easy to imagine Gillan getting stuck in a superhero universe of infinite sequels (an untitled 2019 *Avengers* movie is already filming and a third *Guardians of the Galaxy* is coming in 2020), she insists she isn't worried. "There's the element of choice within what you're doing. And the Marvel stuff isn't going to last forever. Even though I love doing it, I want to have variety in my life and career." Eventually, she'd like to create a production company, "some form of umbrella for other filmmakers," she says, "when I've stopped running around kicking people's butts."

Just then, I find myself gasping on an over-ambitious dollop of horseradish, which amuses Gillan to no end. "You've got to be careful with that!" she hoots. "Are you not used to strong horseradish?" She makes a serious face, proposes I drink a glass of milk, then starts laughing again.

For someone who finds humor in pretty much everything, Gillan is shaping up to be an oddly somber filmmaker. *The Party's Just Beginning* has its bleak moments, but it's the feel-good film of the year compared to the short she made a few years ago, *Conventional*, in which she plays a fading horror film vamp with a grotesque lip-job. "I'm sure a therapist would have a field >

***“Embrace the tall! Embrace the ginger! That’s what I say.”***





Dress: Celine:  
Tights: Beverly  
Hills; Shoes:  
Sophia Webster



Dress: Nina Ricci;  
Tights: Beverly Hills;  
Shoes: Stella Luna;  
Earrings: Sachin & Babi

## **“What’s it for if you don’t have people to share it with?”**

day,” she says. “Here’s the thing, and this has been the same for as long as I’ve been alive: I am the cheeriest, most upbeat person, but everything I create is dark, and I don’t know why. Even if I try to draw something, it’s terrifying.” She puts this fact down to her lifelong preoccupation with horror. “I don’t want to make things that I wouldn’t like,” she says.

This line of thought leads Gillan to the subject of what she has achieved in her career so far, and the conclusion seems to be that she hasn’t come close—yet, anyway—to fulfilling her childhood ambitions, one of which is “to play the female equivalent of Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*.” She would also like to create a work—a film, maybe, or something else—that could be described as “a masterpiece.”

The masterpiece might still be forthcoming, but moving to New York did at least tick one of Gillan’s childhood dreams off the list. “Honestly, this is ridiculous,” she says, leaning in. “I grew up watching *Friends* in the top of Scotland, in the bitter cold, and I was like, ‘That’s gonna be my life: sipping coffee on a cool-looking couch with a giant mug.’ We never had giant mugs where I grew up.” She pauses and adds, “I still need to get some friends, but I will do that, and then I’ll have my dream life.”

Gillan is laughing as she says this, but a moment later, she seems to seriously contemplate the reality of a life without friends. “What’s any of it for if you don’t have people to share it with?” she says. “I mean, you’re just going to be, like, a lonely successful person, which sounds really depressing.” I wait for a punch line, but it doesn’t come.

As our lunch draws to a close, Gillan—who admits to having been “terrified” by press interviews early in her career—provides a quick rundown of her performance: “I got the brisket, told a few anecdotes, so that’s good.” She goes on to congratulate me for not dying during the horseradish incident, then herself for refraining from using the phrase “in the pipeline” while discussing future projects. The check arrives as Gillan is standing to leave, and she grows somber again. “I just assumed it’d be free because I’m Scottish,” she says. “But no.” **AW**