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Whether braving outer space for Guardians of the Galaxy, or the Hawaiian jungle for her latest blockbuster, Karen Gillan is taking over the world one movie at a time

Words Matt Glasby  
Photography Amanda Friedman  
Styling Tara Nichols  
Hair Bobby Eliot  
Make-up Coleen Campbell-Olwell





Since swapping Holyrood for Hollywood, and hanging out with Dr Who for hanging out with Doctor Strange, Karen Gillan's career has gone stratospheric. Chatting to her for more than 0.3 nanoseconds, it's easy to see why. Beneath that girl-next-door exterior – depending, obviously, on where you live – lies steely ambition, and she talks with an enthusiasm you could bottle and use as rocket fuel.

When typing up celebrity interviews, it's common to notice that a certain actor "laughs a lot". Of course they do. They're nervous. They want to be liked. And film journalists are often very, very funny. The process doesn't, however, normally require 15 minutes of find-and-replacing a delighted Scottish "squeeeeeeee" with the more prosaic "[laughs]".

We're here to talk *Jumanji* – hence the jungle setting – a remake of the 1995 Robin Williams flick, one of Gillan's top three films (the others are *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *A Clockwork Orange*, fact fans). "Yeah, that's pretty much all the films anyone ever needs to see," she says. "It was my favourite film when I was a kid and I even had a version of the board game, so I just couldn't believe it when I got the audition, I was like [*sharp intake of breath*]: 'They're remaking *Jumanji*?!' And I felt a little bit protective over it, but also really excited to see what they were going to do with it. I didn't expect to be in it!"

So how does *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle*, also starring The Rock, Jack Black and Kevin Hart, compare? >

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“Well, the whole concept has evolved a lot. It was a board game in the original and now it’s a computer game from the 1990s,” she says. “Also in the original, the world of *Jumanji* bled into the real world, whereas we’re getting sucked into *Jumanji*. So, everything we imagined *Jumanji* would be in the first one we get to see in this film, which I’m really excited about because I always used to imagine what it would be like to be in it.”

Gillan and co are the onscreen avatars of the four misfit teenagers playing the game. Her character, Ruby Roundhouse, is a “Lara Croft-style warrior/killer of men type” and the projection of Martha (Morgan Turner), “a nerdy, self-conscious, socially awkward high school girl”. But which is Gillan more like IRL? “Honestly, I’m Martha. I completely understand why I was cast in this role because I’m a pretty awkward person in general [laughs], but I keep getting cast in these kickass roles so I just honestly feel like it’s so close to my life.” So why does she get cast in those roles? “I don’t know, that’s something I’m trying to work out.” There goes that “squeeeeeeee” again. “It might be because I’m tall?”

Not that she was always quite so kickass on set. “We were shooting on Oahu in Hawaii, and it was amazing. I love Hawaii so much, I think it’s a magical place, but it’s very challenging to shoot in the deep jungle. There were mosquitoes everywhere, I was getting bitten left, right and centre!” Gillan, it transpires, is allergic. “My legs just got covered in these bites and they were so swollen. I’m sure they’re going to have to VFX them out or something.”

While she enjoyed watching “Jack Black playing the 16-year-old popular girl”, she’s still not used to being billed alongside – and sometimes ahead – of him. What?” she asks, incredulous at that last detail. “Ridiculous! Wrong! But I’ll take it.” Perhaps, we suggest, the famous “Karen Gillan” is, in fact, the avatar of the real Karen Gillan. “Yeah,” she laughs. “It’s getting a bit weird!”

In truth, it’s been getting a bit weird for a while now. This summer saw the soon-to-be 30-year-old returning as the vicious assassin Nebula in *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol.2*. Amid the cavalcade of starry space bantz, she cuts a surprisingly dignified figure – well, as



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dignified as you can be when painted blue and sparring with a wisecracking raccoon. At least she didn’t have to shave her head this time. “I did *not*!” she says, with gratitude. “I was 25 when I did that [for *Guardians I*]. Those are prime years when you want to look good so I’m happy to have my hair back.” She’s not the only one. “People would have their kids on set, they would introduce them to me and I’ve never seen kids look more terrified in my life. They hid behind shoulders. They recoiled!”

Nebula has proved so popular she’s been brought into the fold for 2018’s *Avengers: Infinity War*, which boasts >

From left: Gillan with her *Jumanji* co-stars The Rock, Kevin Hart and Jack Black







almost every famous actor under 40 in its cast. “I mean, I’m looking around and I’m like, ‘Oh my god!’ Everywhere you look is a superhero!” she says. “But they’re all doing normal mundane things like getting coffee.” There must have been a time when she’d have been happy just to be an extra on a production like this. “No, I would still be an extra,” she says. “In fact, I would love to do that. Maybe I just won’t wear the make-up and then no one will know.”

Since she first broke through in 2009, as Dr Who companion Amy Pond, Gillan has specialised in stories that are either escapist, or about wanting to escape. Perhaps that’s unsurprising for someone who left Inverness at 16 to study drama in Edinburgh, then – deep breath now – left Edinburgh for London, London for LA and LA for New York. “Yes, I’m in New York now!” she says. “I’m slowly working my way home!”

Not too fast, though, because she’s recently fallen head over heels for the Big Apple. “It’s the greatest city in the world,” she chirrups. “It’s definitely more my vibe than LA. I don’t know how to drive and I’m pale and Scottish, so I can’t really go out in the sun – LA’s not catered to me.

However, New York is just amazing and vibrant and full of life. And there are people from other professions unlike in Hollywood, which is so nice.”

Connoisseurs of Gillan’s early career might have seen her trying a few other professions herself in Channel 4’s short-lived *The Kevin Bishop Show*. One sketch featured her playing a saucy air hostess for a low-budget airline called Sleazyjet – “I am so sorry, that’s all I’ve got to say on that!” – while another had her playing the Julia Roberts role in *Pretty Woman 2*. Conceivably, the latter could actually happen. “Oh I don’t know about that,” she says. “I’m no Julia Roberts.” She’s certainly motivated enough. “I was really ambitious from a young age,” she admits. “I was maybe like 13 or 14 when I decided I was going to be an actress, and then I dug in because I focus on things then figure out ways to make them happen.”

After Stateside roles in 2014 indie horror *Oculus*, 2015 Oscar hopeful *The Big Short*, and this year’s thriller *The Circle*, starring Emma Watson and Tom Hanks, Gillan’s concentrating on writing and directing her own film. Originally titled *Tupperware*, and set in Inverness, it’s a dark proposition for such a sunny-seeming person. “It’s actually called *The Party’s Just Beginning* now,” she says. “I had to change it because Tupperware’s a brand >

Jacket by **Ulla Johnson** Next page:  
Turtleneck by **Where Mountains Meet** Top by **Chloé**  
Suede tan skirt by  
**Hensely**  
Earrings by  
**Jacque Aiche**



name [laughs], and they did *not* want their name on our film, which is understandable. It's about a girl dealing with the suicide of her best friend and so it's not the most uplifting of subject matters."

Despite the grimness of the material, she describes the process as "the best experience of my life ever. I loved it so much. It's just something I want to do more and more now. When I was a kid, before I decided that I wanted to be an actress, I had this video camera, which was my prize possession, and I was making horror films in my house and using my friends and parents as actors. If we go right back to the beginning that was everything to me, and I feel like I've finally like made

my way back to that, because it felt the same as making tiny films, just on a bigger scale."

Frankly, it's hard to imagine a much bigger scale than the one she's operating on: writing and directing her own film while saving the world as an Avenger. But Gillan, as ever, has her eye on the horizon, if not further. When talk turns to real-life space travel, she says, "Yeah, I'd love to try it. And they're Virgin flights aren't they? You think after doing this interview I could get a free ticket? If you could talk to Richie [Branson] and just let him know I'm up for it, that'd be great." So that's decided. "Yes, I'll go to space and then I'll come back and shoot *Pretty Woman 2*," she says with relish. And then she laughs. ■

# Buzz kills?

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