

in the

**A**nnet Mahendru has just come on the phone, but she wonders aloud if her publicist is listening in on the call. She is.

"There's always a spy somewhere," she says and then laughs. "I feel at home."

No wonder. The actress stars as KGB triple agent Nina in the hit FX series *The Americans*. "I'm envious of her instincts," she says of her alter ego. "She gets her way because if she doesn't, she dies. So everything she says, every word could be the last."

Mahendru is equally tenacious. Originally, the actress was cast for only four episodes, but Nina lived on, appearing in twelve episodes of season one and starting the current, second season as a regular. "I guess I was so believable because I was fighting for my life [on the show]," she says.

The only child of an East Indian father and a Russian mother, Mahendru spent her formative years in Russia, Afghanistan and throughout Europe. "Every time we moved, I found comfort in going to a new place. I grew up thinking that was normal."

She lived in Afghanistan during the Cold War, the period in which *The Americans* is set. "My dad was a journalist during that time," she says. "He's very excited about the series, except when he sees me barely clothed."

As a result of her nomadic upbringing, Mahendru is fluent in Russian, German and English, and is conversational in French, Hindi and Farsi. She intended to become a diplomat, but she ultimately left a graduate global affairs program at New York University to pursue acting. "Through the power of film I can still speak to people from all over the world," she says.

Mahendru, who has also guested on NBC's *The Blacklist* and USA's *White Collar*, remains a life-long learner. She's studying the violin and can frequently be found in a dance studio. "I love to do things I've never done before," she explains. "That's my hobby." —Amy Amatangelo

**BIO PICK**

# Aye, Spy

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANTOINE VERGLAS; STYLING BY CHRISTINA TAYLOR/THE WALL GROUP; HAIR BY CHRISTOPHER MARRERO; MAKEUP BY ROBERT SESNEK/THE WALL GROUP USING CHANEL; DRESS BY NOVUS; PYRAMID STUDS AND RING BY MOCUM; RING BY GILLIAN STEINHARDT