

X

**We have a request**

This is the last week of Vox's birthday month pledge drive. We're so close to our goal of adding 1,500 financial contributions by the end of April, support that helps keep Vox free year-round. Will you give today?

**Yes, I'll Give**

## Why everyone is in love with Benedict Cumberbatch

By Kelsey McKinney | [kelsey@vox.com](mailto:kelsey@vox.com) | Dec 3, 2014, 10:10am EST

Benedict Cumberbatch and some Cumberbabes | Eon Neal/Getty

Benedict Cumberbatch is everywhere.

He's on magazine covers, written up in celebrity profiles. He might be nominated for his first Oscar this year for playing the brilliant Alan Turing. He plays **Sherlock Holmes** in *Sherlock*. His version of the ice bucket challenge went mega-viral over the summer.

Women track his movements on Twitter under the hashtag **#Cumberwatch** and create cupcakes in his likeness. BuzzFeed even wrote an ode to **an umbrella he once carried**.

And yet he's probably best known to most Americans as the villain from the second **Star Trek** movie. If you know of him, it's probably from the internet — which makes him the first person who may attain mega-stardom thanks to the good people of Tumblr.

Here's everything you need to know about our impending celebrity overlord:

## 1. Who is Benedict Cumberbatch?

Benedict Cumberbatch is an actor, first and foremost. The son of two actors (**Wanda Ventham** and **Timothy Carlton**), he has sweeping auburn hair and a striking jawline that hits some people just the right way. It often seems like he's literally everywhere.

The **high-cheekboned actor** has been beloved by many denizens of the internet since his appearance on the British television show *Sherlock* in 2010. Before *Sherlock*, the actor had mostly appeared on stage. But the beloved Sherlock Holmes is a deeply British institution of a character. With his low rumble of a voice and snide sense of humor, **Cumberbatch** brought new life to the part.

"It's easy to forget the past — the present Sherlock, droll yet naive, is so wonderfully weird," Nancy DeWolf Smith wrote **for the Wall Street Journal** after the first season debuted in the US. (Aired on the BBC in the United Kingdom, the show appears — **after a considerable delay** — on PBS in the US.)

Cumberbatch won praise for his "piercing gray eyes and an appealingly playful arrogance ... that lives up to the verve and braininess of Mr. Moffat and Mr. Gatiss's writing," Mike Hale wrote in his **New York Times** review of the program.

So, yes, *Sherlock* is where the Cumberbatch obsession began. But it grew because of the man himself.

## 2. That's not his real name.



(Neilson Barnard/Getty)

It is! His full name is Benedict Timothy Carlton Cumberbatch.

## Really.

(And, yes, everybody's at least a *little* aware of how **ridiculously British** that name is.)

### 3. Why is he famous?

Though he's an excellent actor who's **won an Emmy** and appeared in some gigantic films (though often just via his voice), if you spend any time on Tumblr at all, you'd be forgiven for thinking Cumberbatch is famous mostly for his appearance and "sharp cheekbones."

Seriously. These are the top 5 "trademarks" from **Cumberbatch's IMDB page**:

Trade Mark (5)
Rich baritone voice
Piercing blue-green eyes
Sharp cheekbones
Often portrays posh upper-class figures
Usually plays highly-intelligent and gifted characters

(imdb.com)

Tumblr has dubbed him the boyfriend of **every internet user everywhere**. With that sharp bone structure and his narrowed gaze, it's easy to see why so many have taken to

him. There's also the matter of **his voice**, a soothing British hum that purrs along through his many roles, including as Smaug the dragon in the *Hobbit* films.

"I have boyfriends coming up to say, 'My girlfriend is obsessed with you,' and I say, 'I'm so sorry,'" Cumberbatch **told CTVnews**.

While he is certainly not the first male actor to be a superstar sex symbol, the level of excitement surrounding Cumberbatch — who is, remember, primarily known for a cult TV series, small parts in big movies, and his stage work — is unusual to say the least. He makes a **very unlikely heartthrob**.

#### 4. Does everyone like him?

Of course not. The world is full of **all sorts of people**, including plenty who don't enjoy Cumberbatch, despite what the internet would have you believe.

Those who don't like him tend to find his vaguely disaffected air off-putting and aloof. He tends to play chilly — perhaps even sociopathic — characters, rather than romantic leads. And that means plenty of people will always find him just a bit uncomfortable to watch.

Whole blogs (**here** and **here**) are devoted to intense dissections of hate for Cumberbatch, a man who, while talented, is by no means the most polarizing figure in Hollywood. As **one Tumblr user** wrote, "I dislike everyone's Cumberbatch is because he's extremely classist. and not just like 'Wow i'm rich, don't touch me peasant' classist, but it really dances on borderline racist at times."

Like the love for Cumberbatch, the hate for him is blind and furious.

#### 5. What big roles has he had?

Cumberbatch has joked in **The Guardian** that he is the king of, "big parts in small films, and small parts in big films." That's true, for the most part.

**Cumberbatch** started his career in the early 2000s appearing in bit parts in British television shows and movies, as well as performing onstage in London. His first major role was as Stephen Hawking in the 2004 biopic *Hawking*. In 2010, *Sherlock* premiered, and he won an Emmy for the role in 2014.

The "small parts in big films" part is true, too. He played the villain in *Star Trek Into Darkness*, for instance, and he played vital supporting parts in 2013's Oscar hopefuls *August: Osage County* and *12 Years a Slave*.

He is expected to snag an Oscar nomination for playing the lead role of the famous mathematician Alan Turing in the movie ***The Imitation Game***.

## 6. If he's famous on the internet, there must be memes about him, right?

You guessed it!

Cumberbatch **told Vulture** in November that his appearance "is something between an otter and something that people find vaguely attractive, or just an otter, which *is* vaguely attractive."

A whole meme, of course, has been created out of Benedict Cumberbatch and otters:



(<http://benedictvsotters.tumblr.com/>)

---

He also pops up **all of the time in gifs**, thanks to how "relatable" he is. This is simply Hollywood code for making mistakes in public. (See also: Jennifer Lawrence.) His fandom particularly loved this clip of him from the GQ Awards, drunkenly trying to accept the Actor of the Year Award:



## 7. What is his fandom called?

**The Cumberbitches.**

## 8. Really?

Really.

They also call themselves Cumberbunnies, Benaddicts, and Cumbercookies.

Cumberbatch himself has suggested that "Cumberbitches" might be a sexist name.

Instead, he recommended they call themselves the "Cumberbabes" or the

**"Cumbercollective."** The fandom has since adjusted.

## 9. How do they express their love for him?



(George Pimentel/Getty Images)

Reddit subforum r/Cumberbitches is full of **detailed descriptions** of how much the fandom loves the star. Here, they detail their deep, abiding love for "B.T. Cumberbatch's" abs, his face, and even his arms.

"I read up on him and was further charmed by his intelligence and intensity, his passion for and commitment to his craft, his (sometimes alarming) rambling unguardedness in interviews, his genuine affection and respect for his parents and his cultural heritage, his work on behalf of charities — especially arts education, his sense of humor (frequently self-deprecating) and ready acknowledgement of the absurdities of the industry, and, um ... his good manners and modesty and unpretentious silliness which is often followed in a split-second by complete and utter seriousness. I've met very few people in my life who seem so thoroughly alive and wide awake," said Reddit user **Catherinski**.

This user's out-pouring is fairly common on any site where **Cumberbatch fans** reside. They love him for his looks, sure, and also for his talent. But they also love him the way one loves a person they genuinely know and care for — for everything, the good and the bad. Reading lots of the posts makes it almost seem like Cumberbatch is an old friend who's somehow, quite inexplicably, become famous.

"Even if he looks like cross between an otter or a sloth, his is a uniquely attractive face with killer eyes, sharp cheekbones, and a smile to melt you. ...swoooon," Reddit user **FyEnaid** wrote.

And, of course, there's fan fiction. Chinese Cumberbabes have even **started writing gay fan fiction** about Sherlock and Watson, played on *Sherlock* by Martin Freeman.

## 10. Isn't he engaged?

He is! Benedict Cumberbatch **announced his engagement** to actress and theatre director Sophie Hunter in a really classy London Times announcement, much to the initial dismay of the fandom. But the fans quickly adjusted.

I hate that all these media outlets act as if all of **#BenedictCumberbatch** fans are upset over his engagement. Most of us are happy for him.

— RiSU ?? (@RisuStephon) November 23, 2014

Indeed, by now, the Cumbercollective is *very* happy for Mr. and future Mrs. Cumberbatch.

## 11. That sounds like a lot for anyone to handle. How does Cumberbatch take his fame?



(Target Presse Agentur GmbH/Getty)

The strange thing about **Benedict Cumberbatch**'s fame is that his fandom is so rampant and intense for an actor without a huge role. In 2012, shortly after the *Sherlock*

fandom began, Cumberbatch told the Telegraph that, "I remember being really quite scared at the Twitter thing. I literally did expect [someone in] a helicopter with a SWAT light to abseil down over my house. It was just, like, 'Whoa, the whole world is suddenly interested, and a bit obsessed.'" (Do Cumberbatch fans love him for saying words like "abseil" in interviews? Yes. Yes, they do.)

Since then, he has worried that he will become noteworthy not for his ability on the screen, but for his fans. "I sometimes worry about the currency surrounding the furor — the internet, the teens, I'm careful that it doesn't obscure other things that I care about. When somebody says I'm perfect for a role because it will get an audience, that immediately makes me go cold," he told **CTV news**.

That said, he does interact with his audience by doing Reddit AMA's and giving in-depth interviews. "I engage with it on my own terms, and people seem to really respond to that, because it's me being me," he **told Vulture**.

## 12. I'm in. What should I watch that he's in?

*The Imitation Game* might be the best place to start.

But if you're not in one of the handful of cities currently showing that film, you can get the full Cumberbatch experience in *Sherlock*. The first three seasons are on DVD and Blu-ray, and at only three episodes per season, they're easy to watch very quickly. He's already scheduled to **play Doctor Strange in 2016**.

Once you've seen them, you, too, might decide to devour absolutely everything the man has ever made. You'll be in good company.

## We're nearly there!

Since Vox launched in 2014, our audience has supported our mission in so many meaningful ways. More than 80,000 people have responded to requests to help with our reporting. Countless teachers have told us about how they're using our work in their classroom. And in the three years since we launched the Vox Contributions program, tens of thousands of people have chipped in to help keep our unique work free. We're aiming to add 1,500 financial contributions from readers by the end of April, and we're 87% of the way there. **If you, like us, believe that explanatory journalism is a public good, will you help us close the gap?**

One-Time	Monthly	Annual
----------	---------	--------

\$95/year

**\$120/year**

\$250/year \$350/year Other**Yes, I'll give \$120/year**

We accept credit card, Apple Pay, and Google Pay. You can also contribute via

