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# Benedict Cumberbatch

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British actor

*Alternate titles: Benedict Timothy Carlton Cumberbatch*

Written by Lorraine Murray

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Benedict Cumberbatch

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**Born:** July 19, 1976 (age 46) • London • England

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**Benedict Cumberbatch**, in full **Benedict Timothy Carlton Cumberbatch**, (born July 19, 1976, London, England), acclaimed British motion-picture, theatre, and television actor known for his portrayals of intelligent, often upper-crust characters, for his deep resonant voice, and for his distinctive name. He gained widespread popularity as the modern Sherlock

Holmes in the television series *Sherlock* (2010– ) and subsequently garnered a succession of substantial roles in mainstream features.

## Early life and career

Cumberbatch was the son of two actors, Timothy Carlton (né Cumberbatch) and Wanda Ventham. He was educated at Brambletye school, in West Sussex, and Harrow School. As a student, he took part in school plays, taking roles in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (in which he played Titania, the queen of the fairies) and *As You Like It*. He took a year off between school and university, during which he taught English to Tibetan Buddhist monks in India. After his return to Great Britain, he studied drama at the University of Manchester and earned a master's degree in classical acting from the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art.
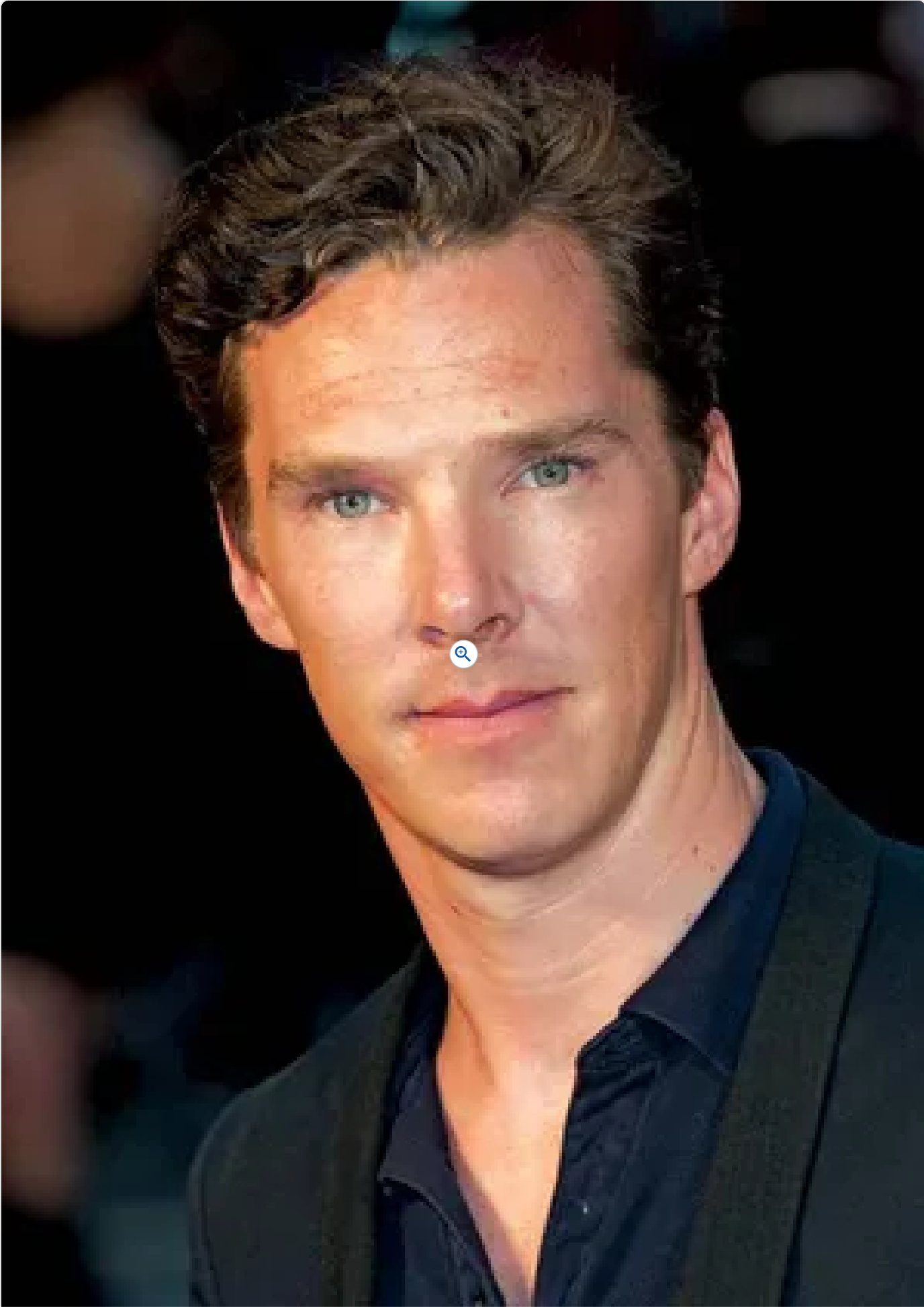
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At the start of his career, he used his father's stage name, Carlton, but, encouraged by a colleague, he began to appear under the family's original, unusual surname in order to attract greater professional attention. Cumberbatch's first work in the professional theatre was primarily Shakespearean, beginning with two repertory seasons with the New Shakespeare Company in London's Regent Park in 2001 and 2002. Over the next few years, he continued performing in London theatres, often in classics such as Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (2005; nominated for a Laurence Olivier Award for best supporting actor) and Eugène Ionesco's *Rhinoceros* (2007). He became a familiar face on television as well, playing supporting roles in series such as *Tipping the Velvet* and *Silent Witness* (both 2002), *Fortysomething* (2003), and *To the Ends of the Earth* (2005). In 2005 he was nominated for a BAFTA TV Award for best actor for his portrayal of physicist Stephen Hawking in the BBC television biopic *Hawking* (2004). Cumberbatch's first major film role was in *Amazing Grace* (2006), a historical treatment of politician William Wilberforce's antislavery efforts, in which Cumberbatch played Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger.

## Breakthrough as Sherlock Holmes

In 2010 he broke through to far greater popularity at home and abroad as Sherlock Holmes in the BBC television series *Sherlock*, based on the stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The adaptation placed the characters of the classic Victorian-era tales in 21st-century London and captured viewers' imaginations with its contemporary Holmes, who used nicotine patches (a nod to Conan Doyle's pipe-smoking Holmes) and was a self-described "high-functioning sociopath." Cumberbatch remained in the public eye with subsequent seasons of *Sherlock*, and in 2014 his performance in an episode of its third season won him an Emmy Award for outstanding actor in a miniseries or movie.

Cumberbatch starred in the 2011 Royal National Theatre adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, in which he alternated with actor Jonny Lee Miller in the roles of Victor Frankenstein and his creature. He earned rave reviews for his work and won several major theatrical awards, including the 2012 Olivier Award in Britain. He rounded out 2011 with roles in two high-profile films, Steven Spielberg's *War Horse* and a big-screen adaptation of author John le Carré's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*.
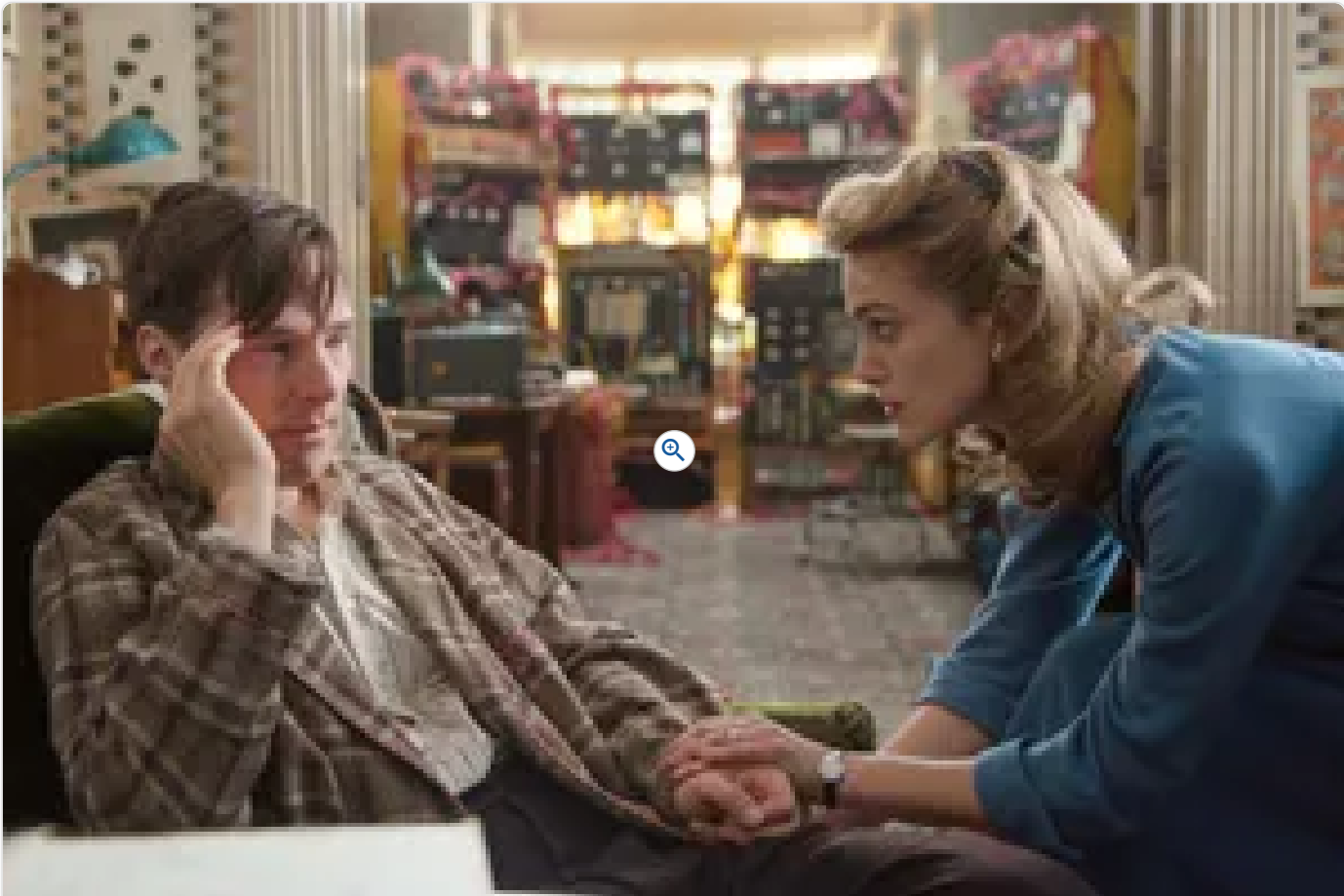
## From *Star Trek* to Alan Turing

**Benedict Cumberbatch**

Cumberbatch achieved a new level of fame as the villain Khan in the Hollywood blockbuster *Star Trek into Darkness* (2013). That same year he played WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in *The Fifth Estate*; a well-intentioned slave owner in *12 Years a Slave*, an adaptation of Solomon Northup's narrative (1853) of his life in captivity; and a hapless young man in *August: Osage County*, based on the play by Tracy Letts. He also lent his posh growl to the computer-animated dragon Smaug in *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* (2013), the second installment in director Peter Jackson's film trilogy of J.R.R. Tolkien's novel.

**Benedict Cumberbatch and Keira Knightley in *The Imitation Game***

In 2014 Cumberbatch starred as mathematician and logician Alan Turing in *The Imitation Game*, voiced an animated wolf in the comedy *Penguins of Madagascar*, and reprised his role as Smaug in *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies*. His turn as Turing earned him an Academy Award nomination for best actor. Cumberbatch returned to the stage as the titular Danish prince in a 2015 production of *Hamlet*. The entire run of the show, produced at the Barbican Centre, sold out a year in advance of the play's opening. Also in 2015 he appeared in the film *Black Mass* as a state senator (and brother of gangster Whitey Bulger).

## *Doctor Strange* and *The Grinch*



**Benedict Cumberbatch in *Doctor Strange***

Cumberbatch then starred in *Doctor Strange* (2016), portraying a Marvel Comics superhero. He reprised the role in *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017), *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), *Avengers: Endgame* (2019), *Spider-Man: No Way Home* (2021), and *Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness* (2022).

Cumberbatch returned to television in *A Child in Time* (2017), a movie adapted from Ian McEwan's novel of the same name about a father whose child goes missing, and *Patrick Melrose* (2018), a miniseries based on five novels by Edward St. Aubyn focusing on a self-destructive English gentleman as he reckons with his past. During this time Cumberbatch supplied his distinctive voice to the animated features *The Grinch* and *Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle* (both 2018), playing the eponymous curmudgeon and the villainous tiger Shere Khan, respectively.

Credits from 2019 included *Brexit*, a TV movie following the 2016 campaign to withdraw Britain from the European Union; *The Current War* (completed in 2017 and released two years later), about the contest between Thomas Edison and George

Westinghouse to determine which electrical system would power the United States; and the World War I drama *1917*, which was directed by Sam Mendes. Cumberbatch later portrayed a Cold War spy in *The Courier* (2020).

In 2021 he appeared in a number of films, including *The Mauritanian*, which was based on the memoir of a man held at the Guantánamo Bay detention camp for 14 years, and *The Electrical Life of Louis Wain*, a biopic about a British artist who was known for his anthropomorphic drawings of cats. However, his most notable performance that year was in Jane Campion's *The Power of the Dog*, a western about a rancher whose cruelty—especially toward his brother and the latter's wife—hides inner turmoil. For his work in the film, Cumberbatch received an Oscar nomination.

Cumberbatch was named a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2015.

*Lorraine Murray*

*The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica*

# Brad Pitt
American actor

*Alternate titles: William Bradley Pitt*

Written and fact-checked by The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica
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Brad Pitt

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**Born:** December 18, 1963 (age 59) • Shawnee • Oklahoma

**Founder:** Make It Right • Not on Our Watch

**Awards And Honors:** Golden Globe Award • Academy Award (2020) • Academy Award (2020): Actor in a Supporting Role • Academy Award (2014): Best Picture • Emmy Award (2014): Outstanding Television Movie • Golden Globe Award (2020): Best Supporting Actor in a Motion Picture • Golden Globe Award (1996): Best Supporting Actor in a Motion Picture                    *...(Show more)*

**Notable Family Members:** spouse Jennifer Aniston • spouse Angelina Jolie

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**Brad Pitt**, byname of **William Bradley Pitt**, (born December 18, 1963, Shawnee, Oklahoma, U.S.), American actor known for his portrayal of unconventional characters and for his good looks. After gaining attention for his role in *Thelma & Louise* (1991), Pitt channeled his magnetism as a leading man in such movies as *A River Runs Through It* (1992) and *Legends of the Fall* (1994) but avoided being typecast by assuming unorthodox roles in *12 Monkeys* (1995) and *Fight Club* (1999). Pitt won an Academy Award for his performance in *Once Upon a Time...in Hollywood* (2019).

## Early life and work

*Interview with the Vampire*

Pitt grew up in Springfield, Missouri, and attended (1983–87) the University of Missouri before dropping out just short of graduation to move to California and pursue an acting career. After playing minor television and movie roles, Pitt captured the public's attention as a charming scoundrel in the film *Thelma & Louise*. He followed up with such movies as *A River Runs Through It*, *Interview with the Vampire*, and *Legends of the Fall* (1994). Pitt then starred as a police detective in the gritty thriller *Se7en* (1995) and as a demented malcontent in the fantasy *12 Monkeys* (1995), for which he won a Golden Globe Award and was nominated for an Oscar.

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## Films from the late 1990s and beyond

Pitt deliberately played against type as Austrian mountain climber Heinrich Harrer in *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997), an Irish Republican Army terrorist in *The Devil's Own* (1997), a modern-day personification of death in *Meet Joe Black* (1998), and an underground boxer in *Fight Club* (1999). In 2000 Pitt married actress Jennifer Aniston. The following year he starred in *Ocean's Eleven*, a comedy caper about con artists. The film was a major success and led to the sequels *Ocean's Twelve* (2004) and *Ocean's Thirteen* (2007). In 2004 Pitt portrayed the Greek warrior Achilles in *Troy*.

The action comedy *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* (2005) paired Pitt with actress Angelina Jolie, with whom he became romantically involved. Pitt continued to lend his talents to films covering a wide range of subject matter, including *Babel* (2006), a film that traces the intersecting lives of characters from divergent backgrounds, and the period western *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* (2007). Pitt further demonstrated his versatility in 2008, portraying a dim-witted would-be blackmailer in

the Coen brothers' *Burn After Reading* and a man who ages backward in the poignant fantasy *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*. His chameleonic turn in the latter film earned him an Academy Award nomination for best actor.



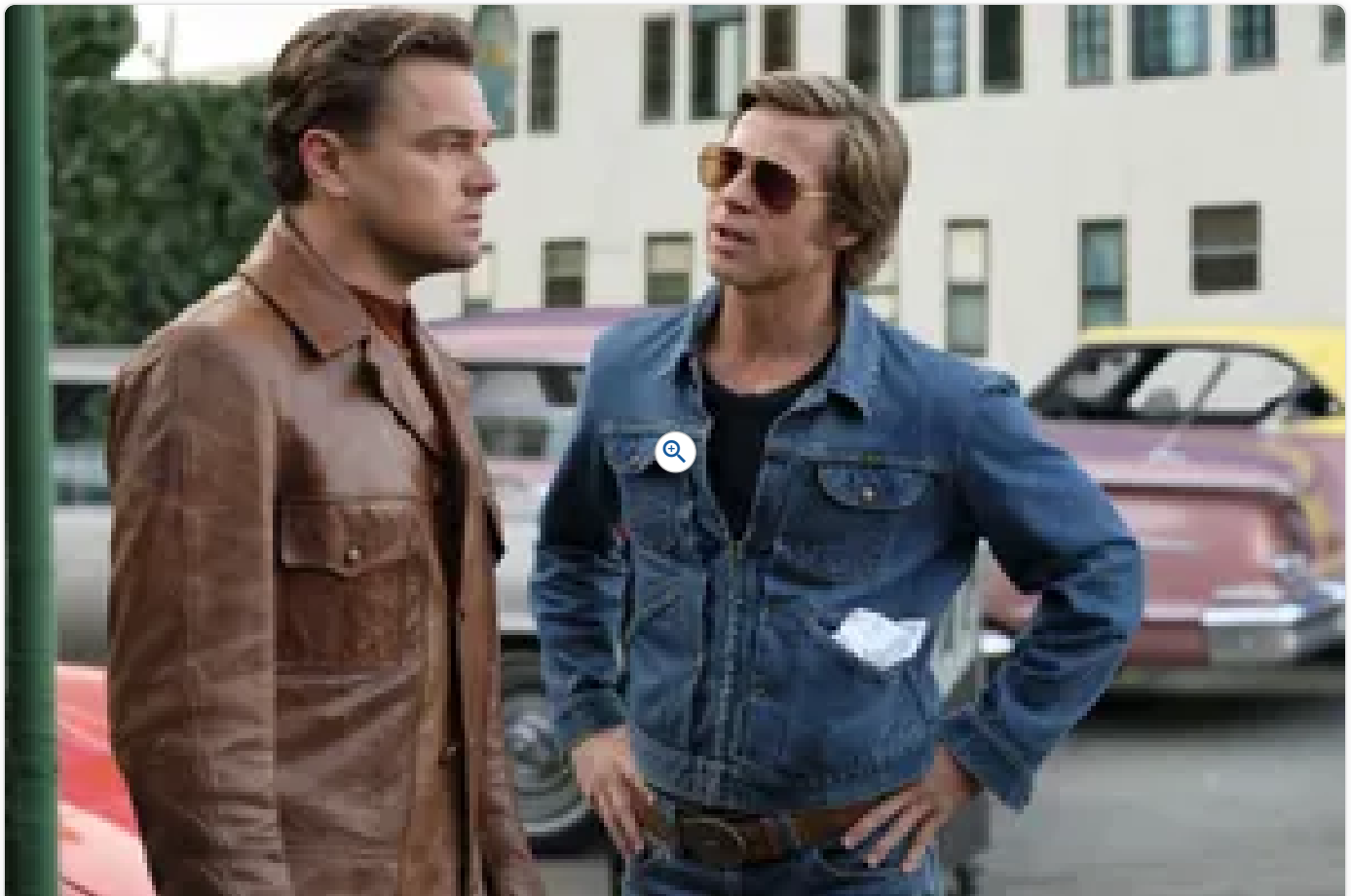**Brad Pitt in *Inglourious Basterds***

In 2009 Pitt starred in Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*, a World War II drama about a group of Jewish American soldiers trained to kill Nazis in German-occupied France. The following year Pitt provided the voice of the superhero rival of the titular villain in the animated film *Megamind*. In Terrence Malick's impressionistic drama *The Tree of Life* (2011), he played a domineering father in 1950s Texas. Pitt later scored another best actor Oscar nomination, for his performance as real-life general manager Billy Beane in the baseball drama *Moneyball* (2011). The film chronicles how Beane assembled successful teams with the Oakland Athletics by using statistics to acquire cheaper, less-well-known players. Pitt subsequently starred as a mob enforcer in the crime drama *Killing Them Softly* (2012) and as a former United Nations investigator fighting to contain a zombie pandemic in the thriller *World War Z* (2013).

Pitt had supporting roles in *12 Years a Slave* (2013)—which was based on the true story of Solomon Northup, a free person of colour who was kidnapped and sold into slavery in the mid-19th century—and in the crime drama *The Counselor* (2013). In *Fury* (2014) he played an American army sergeant commanding the remnants of a decimated battalion during the last days of World War II. The following year Pitt reteamed with Jolie, this time in *By the Sea*, a marital drama she also wrote and directed. He then portrayed a morally grounded former investment banker in the black comedy *The Big Short* (2015), about the 2008 financial crisis. In the World War II thriller *Allied* (2016), Pitt starred as a Canadian intelligence officer whose wife (Marion Cotillard) might be a German spy. In 2017 he portrayed a four-star general in *War Machine*, a military satire that was released on Netflix.

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*Once Upon a Time...in Hollywood*

Pitt later reteamed with Tarantino in *Once Upon a Time...in Hollywood* (2019), playing the stunt double of a washed-up actor (Leonardo DiCaprio) in 1969 Los Angeles. For his performance, Pitt earned both an Oscar and a Golden Globe Award for best supporting actor. Also in 2019 he starred as an astronaut searching the solar system for his missing father (played by Tommy Lee Jones) in the futuristic drama *Ad Astra*. Pitt's credits from 2022 include the action-romance *The Lost City*, in which he had a

memorable cameo, and *Bullet Train*, about a group of assassins on a high-speed train. That year he also costarred with Margot Robbie in Damien Chazelle's *Babylon*, a dramedy set in Hollywood during the 1920s.

In addition to acting, Pitt headed his own film-production company, Plan B Entertainment. The company partnered with several others to produce *12 Years a Slave*, and Pitt won an Academy Award for his producing role when that film was named best picture.

## Personal life and humanitarian causes

**Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt on the cover of *People* magazine with their new daughter, Shiloh**

Pitt's involvement with Jolie and his 2005 divorce from Aniston were intensely scrutinized by the tabloid press. In 2006 Pitt adopted Jolie's two children, Maddox and Zahara, whom she had adopted from Cambodia and Ethiopia, respectively. The couple had their first biological child, Shiloh, in May 2006. The next year they adopted a boy, Pax, from Vietnam, and in 2008 they added biological twins, Knox and Vivienne, to their family. Pitt and Jolie married in 2014, but two years later Jolie filed for divorce.

The couple often used their celebrity status as a platform for speaking out on behalf of a number of humanitarian causes. Pitt cofounded and was actively involved in Not on Our Watch, a campaign that directed resources to developing countries in crisis, notably the Sudanese province of Darfur. In 2006 he established the Make It Right Foundation, a multimillion-dollar project to construct environmentally friendly homes in New Orleans for people displaced by Hurricane Katrina. The undertaking attracted numerous high-profile architects, but it was plagued by construction issues that resulted in several legal disputes. Notably, in 2015 the foundation sued the wood supplier after a number of completed homes began rotting; the suit was settled out of court. Three years later homeowners filed a class-action lawsuit against the foundation, alleging poor construction; in 2022 Make It Right agreed to pay the plaintiffs $20.5 million.

Pitt was also interested in art, and in 2022 he exhibited a number of sculptures at a museum in Finland. His "brutally honest" works included a miniature house assembled from tree bark and tape.

> *The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica*

> *This article was most recently revised and updated by Amy Tikkanen.*