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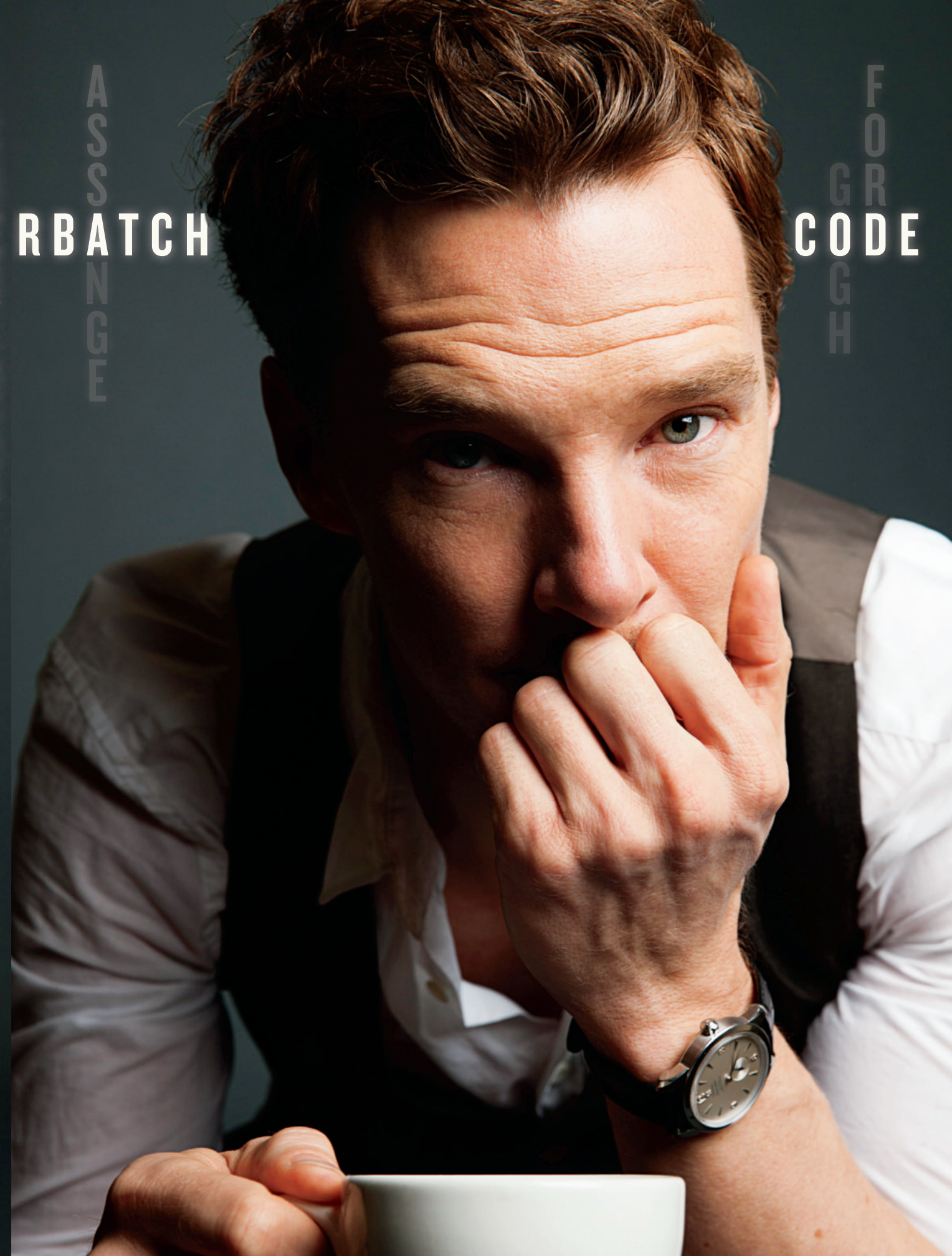
CUMBERBATCH

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CODE

THE MAN!
THE MEME!
THE GALAXY'S
HOTTEST GEEK!
BRITAIN'S
CUMBERSTUD
CONQUERS
THE COLONIES—
AND OSCAR
MAY BE NEXT

By Gillian Telling
Photographs by
JAKE
CHESSUM



What's in a name? Not so very long ago, Benedict Cumberbatch was best known for his moniker, which is endlessly fun to say and hard to squash onto a marquee. But by last year the 38-year-old Englishman had become a global sensation: starring in four major movies (12 Years a Slave, August: Osage County, Star Trek into Darkness and The Fifth Estate), voicing the dragon Smaug in the Hobbit films and becoming a geek icon thanks to his title turn in the British TV series Sherlock. Now, he's garnering Oscar buzz for his role as a mathematician-war hero in The Imitation Game. But what the self-effacing Londoner never saw coming was the whole sex-symbol-whose-fans-call-themselves-Cumberbitches thing. In China they call him "Curly," and in Japan they wait by the thousands for a glimpse of him at the airport. "It's surreal," he says. "But I want to be doing this in 30 years. This is just a moment. Hopefully not the moment." PEOPLE caught the 'Batch in New York City to decipher why he melts hearts worldwide (maybe it's those glacial blue eyes).

He's a classy Brit—who does a mean Chewbacca.
Does Judi Dench know who Jar Jar

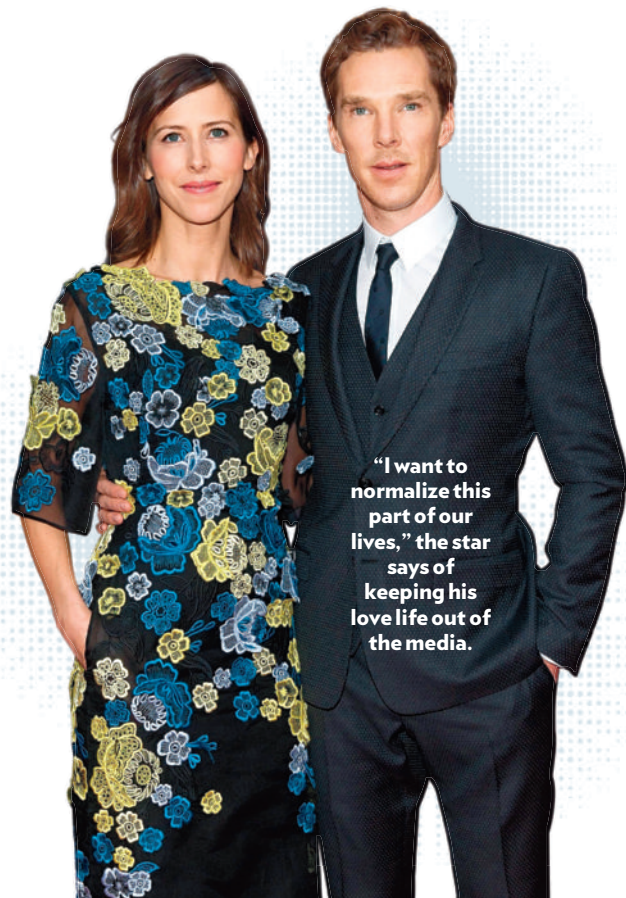
Binks is? We think not. Not only does Cumberbatch charm the media with nerdy impressions of Star Wars aliens, the star recently imitated a host of Hollywood legends, including Jack Nicholson and Michael Caine, in a viral video promoting Game. "Everyone asked, 'How long did you take to rehearse that?'" he says. "I went, 'What, you really thought I would rehearse that? I was just having fun.' I failed miserably on Christopher Walken, though." The son of actors Timothy Carlton and Wanda Ventham says his ear for accents came from his days at Harrow, his posh British boarding school, when he and his friends would imitate people. "The schoolmaster said, 'Let's control this and give him some lines, people to work with and a stage, because he's disrupting class.'" So, he was a young ham then? "I think I still am," he says.

He actually likes doing homework.
In Game, to play Alan Turing, who cracked Nazi codes during WWII and was persecuted for being gay, Cumberbatch tried cramming. "He was a brilliant scientific and philosophical mind," says the actor. "I tried to understand as much of the science and math as I possibly could." He dug as deep playing a

MEET HIS FIANCEE!

SOPHIE HUNTER STOLE HIS HEART (AND BROKE MILLIONS OF OTHERS)

An Oxford-educated playwright, director and actress, Hunter appeared in the '04 movie *Vanity Fair* with Reese Witherspoon. She met Cumberbatch on the set of the '09 film *Burlesque Fairytale*, and the pair announced their engagement on Nov. 5 after a year of dating. How did the star know Hunter, who grew up in London and Edinburgh, was the perfect Cumberbatch? "She's just really cool," he says.



"I want to normalize this part of our lives," the star says of keeping his love life out of the media.

A GENIUS FOR PLAYING SMARTIES

STEPHEN HAWKING *Hawking*, 2004
Before Eddie Redmayne, Cumberbatch played the scientist in a BBC-TV movie.

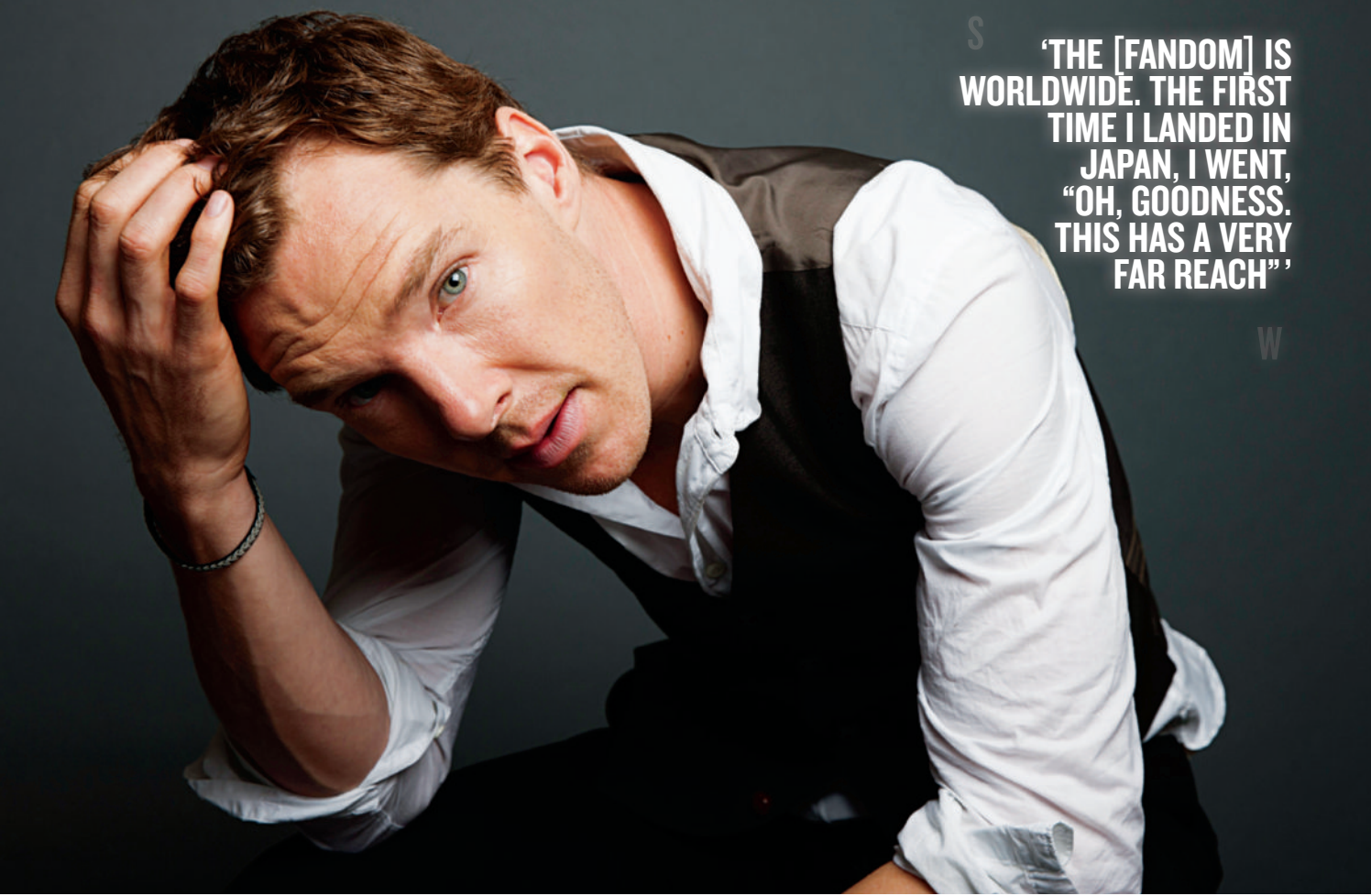
VINCENT VAN GOGH
Van Gogh: Painted with Words, 2010
"It's a complimentary problem to have," he says of being typecast as brilliant.

SHERLOCK HOLMES *Sherlock*, 2010–Present
"I memorize them painstakingly," he says of Holmes's rapid-fire deductions.

JULIAN ASSANGE *The Fifth Estate*, 2013
"I'd like to play the guy next door as well as the remarkable characters," he says.

ALAN TURING *The Imitation Game*, 2014
"Scientifically and socially," he says of Turing, "he's as outstanding as Darwin."

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: BBC; ALAN PEELER/BBC; ROBERT VIGLASKY/HARTSWOOD FILMS/IFBS; FRANK CONNOR/DREAMWORKS; JACK ENGLISH/THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY; D. DIPASUPUL/FILMAGIC; GROOMER: JORDAN LONG; STYLIST: MICHAEL NASH; SHIRT: ALLSAINTS; INSET: DREAMWORKS ANIMATION LLC

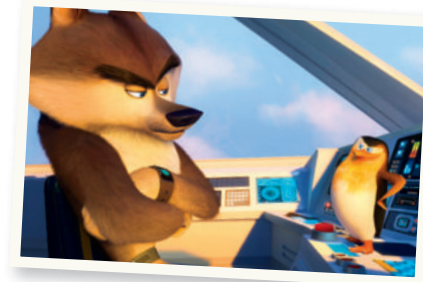


'THE [FANDOM] IS WORLDWIDE. THE FIRST TIME I LANDED IN JAPAN, I WENT, "OH, GOODNESS. THIS HAS A VERY FAR REACH"'

"regular American guy" in *August: Osage County*. "I was in Oklahoma for five weeks and spoke with that accent the whole time," he says. "There I was in Weeze's cafe, Bartlesville, Okla., thinking, 'No one's going to know me here!' And some guy goes, 'Don't you play Sherlock Holmes?' I was so busted."

His dream night out is staying in.
"I'm a homebody," he says. "I love to stay in at night, light a fire, have a whiskey and watch a movie or read a good book. People forget about books. They're always just turning on the television, but reading a good book is the most nourishing thing you can do." On down days, "I love just taking a brisk walk in the park. And hiking, just getting away in nature. You get some perspective and see the world as it really is. Which is, we're a species, on a planet."

He doesn't mind all the name jokes.
"It's pretty funny and flattering," he says of fans calling themselves "Cum-



He voices a secret-agent wolf in *The Penguins of Madagascar*.

berbitches." Still, he thinks it's a bit played out. "Come on, give yourselves some more power as women, and don't just call yourselves bitches!" he says. "I know they're smart and savvy and just having fun, but the name is getting out there. So how about 'Cumbercomes'? 'CumberCollective'? 'Cumberfans'?"

He's truly, madly, deeply in Brit-love.
He recently got engaged to theater director and actress Sophie Hunter. How does she handle his fangirls? "She's proud of my work, she's proud of me, and she

loves me. That's the bottom line, isn't it? That's one of the reasons it's a good fit. It could be a really difficult thing, but she's just so in command of it." Is a family next? "I've got to go very coy on that one," he says with a grin. "Very silent."

He's not letting it go to his head.
"It's a weird transition," he admits, of becoming a six-syllable household name. "I'm used to observing, and now I'm the one being observed. But the trick is to not be self-conscious and go about your normal day." Still, it can't be all bad when Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie become pals, right? "They sat me next to them at the Oscar awards, and I was chatting with them and thinking, 'Am I really sitting next to these two now? That's amazing.'" Cumberbatch, who now has to wear his "armor" when he goes out (a hat and sunglasses), passes by an elderly security guard who quietly says, "You're a wonderful actor." "That's very surreal," Cumberbatch says. "But also very lovely." ●