

On why people still love the adventures of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous characters Sherlock and Watson...

I think that he [Holmes] has always had an appeal. I think Conan Doyle's stories have travelled far and well before our invention... re-invention I should say and at the same time, I suppose, because we're a global village of social media, the fact that it's tech-savvy, that he's sociopathic and very much a flawed hero, a hero for others and for people who feel they're different. There's a big tie with the sway of youth who are connected to the internet now and then on top of that, what I get off of is that there's a generational aspect to the show: grandparents and grandchildren can sit there and enjoy it on Sunday night and that's my favourite idea of how the show is received really. But beyond that, it's still unfathomable as to how big it is.

On Sherlock's massive global appeal...

Somebody tweeted me that [British Prime Minister] David Cameron was asked on social media "can you get more episodes of Sherlock" and that was kind of amazing. It's fantastic. It's global this. I mean it's huge in Brazil and in just the most bizarre places.

On why women find his version of Sherlock Holmes so alluring...

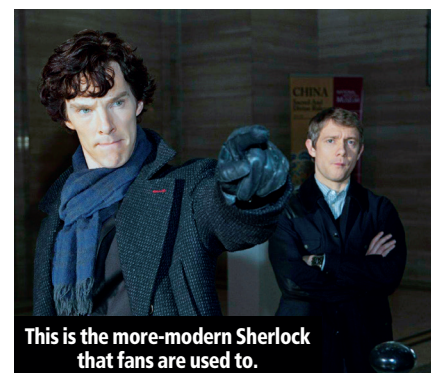
In the real world, women like men who are capable and men who are strong. And perversely sometimes, especially when it's not affecting them directly, they like men who are really direct, to the point of rudeness, because they imagine they can contain him – you know this thing that's somehow very strong and attractive could somehow be focused on them and that would be an amazing form of love or loving. Sherlock is volatile, so I don't think he would be a good partner, but I'm not a woman and I keep getting asked these questions [Laughs]... But I don't know what's the secret.

On one of the biggest challenges of playing Sherlock...

Speaking very fast. Cameras are a great thing for being introspective in front of, but speaking at the speed of thought is just troublesome. It's just a really hard thing to do.

On whether playing super-smart Sherlock has made Benedict feel smarter...

Because of the amount of work that's involved, I get sharper. I get sort of more aware of things, but no, sadly, I don't get smarter because I play people who are smarter than me. I wish that



This is the more-modern Sherlock that fans are used to.

were the case. I would've just insisted on really smart guys at school to play and then got straight As [Laughs], but it's a great exercise – mental and physical as well – to play him, so you always feel good. Apart from the hours being quite long, you feel alive to work.

On whether brainy is the new sexy...

I don't think it's the new sexy. I think it's always been the old sexy. It think it's always been attractive. I think we've always been pulled into heroes who are complex and not just sort of straight-forward brawn. We all like something that is good-looking, but at the same time, if it's backed up by a bit of intelligence and a sort of skill set and ability, then it's more attractive. Are we seeing more intelligent heroes than before? No, not necessarily. I think we've see some ridiculously intelligent heroes in the past. I mean [James] Bond for all his posturing is incredibly smart. Being smart is not always sexy – smart can be really ugly, intrusive, rude, vain. It can be very unattractive.

On whether quirky Sherlock has a mental condition, like autism...

No, I think that's a little bit dangerous because his peculiarities are because he has chosen them that way. I think that people with autism or Asperger's Syndrome, that's something you have to deal with in a very serious manner and to just stick that to the side of the characterisation is a little bit dangerous. It's belittling to the realities of what people have to go through with Asperger's and autism and it's a lazy diagnosis of the character to say, "Oh he's obviously on the [autism] spectrum." People can be different without being labelled as something specific.

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BY JARED ORLIN. PHOTOS: BBC.