



From top: The Tyger, computer with a Gilliam family photo, Walt Disney's Pinocchio, Catch-22, Heath Ledger, Rod Stewart and Terry (far right) and the Monty Python gang



**The prized possession you value above all others...** Our house in north London, which my wife Maggie and I bought 26 years ago. It was built in 1694 and I feel like the temporary custodian. I can't imagine living anywhere else.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...** I like the idea of launching myself off Mont Blanc on a hang-glider and floating over Europe all day.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** The computer. I spend up to seven hours a day on it. Even when I stop working, the screen saver plays a random slide show of my photos and I sit there reliving my life in slow motion.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** Catch-22 by Joseph Heller. I read it on a subway train in New York in 1961 and laughed so hard I fell off my seat. I loved its weird fatalism.

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...** It'd be pretty interesting to hang out with Colonel Gaddafi and see what he's up to.

**The way fame and fortune has changed you, for better and worse...** Life is easy because I have no debts so can afford my three children and pursue work I want to do. The downside is you get isolated and find it hard to understand everyone else's frustrations.

**The film you can watch time and time again...** Walt Disney's Pinocchio blew me away when I was eight. It has the most exquisitely detailed drawings. I saw it again 15 years ago and was amazed how it had held up.

**The person who has influenced you most...** Cartoonist Harvey Kurtzman. I was his assistant in the 60s and he taught me about satire and the craftsmanship of cartooning. Because of him I was able to free my mind and create crazy cartoons – like the big foot – that later became such emblems of Monty Python. Harvey was a godfather of Python.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** Pythagoras. I'd like to ask him if he really did invent everything he is credited with, or if, like many of us suspect, he got it all from Egypt.

**The piece of wisdom you'd pass on to a child...** When it comes to a job, have the courage to do what makes you happy.

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** Etymology. I'm intrigued by the origin of words and how they interconnect history. It's a challenging



My hand-painted sheepskin coat kickstarted my Monty Python friendships. They thought I was cool!

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

*We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's director and cartoonist Terry Gilliam*

subject for someone like me, who has a pitifully limited vocabulary.

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** A full-length sheepskin coat I bought in Turkey and hand-painted in 1964. I was wearing it when I first met Eric Idle and Terry Jones of Monty Python in the late 1960s. They were blown away by the coat and it kickstarted the friendship. They thought I was pretty cool because of that coat. I've no idea how I lost it.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** To find the energy and inspiration each day to be surprised in life.

**The poem that touches your soul...** I love the intensity of The Tyger by William Blake. It is so dark and reminds me that nature is waiting to devour us.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** Hollywood studios think I'm out of control, but I'm not. I'm very controlled. I like being an outsider and a rebel, but the image

makes it harder for me to get money for my films. The Baron Munchausen movie went completely over budget, but I can't take credit for that!

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** When I left the US to hitchhike around Europe aged 24 – the world opened up. There was no going home after that and I came to live in England as soon as I could.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd blow up the London Stock Exchange because the financial systems that drive the world are obscene.

**The song that means most to you...** Maggie May by Rod Stewart from 1971. Around this time, I met my wife who was doing make-up on Python and I associate it with her. Liking that song is also one of the few things we agree on!

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** I'm sorry but I have to be *indefinite* on this one. I am convinced everything good will suddenly disappear. I'm just grateful for little happy moments in each day and cannot classify any one time as *the* happiest.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** That's easy: when Heath Ledger died while filming The Imaginarium Of Doctor Parnassus in 2008. He was a close friend and a wonderful person.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** To film The Man Who Killed Don Quixote. I started 22 years ago but it keeps eluding me. Sheer pig-headedness drives me on.

**The order of service at your funeral...** I'm not sentimental and being dead means I'll be the lucky guy. It's over, finito. It's the living who'll be having a rough time, so I want music, dancing and laughter. And no Bibles in sight.

**The way you want to be remembered...** That I left the place a bit more interesting than before I arrived and that my cartooning got other people looking at this outrageous world with new eyes.

**The Plug...** Terry has his portrait painted in Fame In The Frame, Tuesday, 8.30pm, Sky Arts1. [www.sky.com/arts](http://www.sky.com/arts) ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Catch Helen Mirren in *The Debt* as an ex-Mossad agent.

Book tickets for *Sweeney Todd*, starring Michael Ball, at

Chichester Festival Theatre. And listen to *The Lost Notebooks*

Of Hank Williams, with unheard songs by the country legend



NEXT WEEK

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