

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week it's the turn of actress *Olivia Williams*

The prized possession you value above all others... A ruby ring given to me by my husband [actor and playwright Rhashan Stone] to celebrate the birth of our first daughter Esme Ruby, now 12. It's the only object he has from his mother, who died when he was 11. It's beyond monetary value to me.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Reading the script for *The Matrix* in the 1990s and saying, 'What is this incomprehensible hogwash?'

The temptation you wish you could resist... Interrupting. When something occurs to me, I can't help blurting it out.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... *The Sellout* by Paul Beatty, which I read as a Man Booker judge. I connected with his dark, dark humour.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd attend a Masonic meeting to find out what they get up to with their rolled-up trouser legs. I'd publish the names of members who fail to declare a conflict of interest with their profession.



Right: John Cleese in *Fawlty Towers*. Above right: the *Plants vs Zombies* video game. Far right: horse riding in the Cévennes mountains in France

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Injustice, from corporate malpractice to queue-jumping in Tesco.

The person who has influenced you most... The theatre director Declan Donnellan. If there's ever a moment when I think I'm being a bit marvellous, he'll cut it.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... J Robert Oppenheimer, the atomic physicist. I recently did the TV drama *Manhattan* about the making of the atomic bomb. I realised he'd be fascinating about everything from the Hindu scripture *The Bhagavad Gita* to the bombing of Hiroshima.

The song that means most to you... *Ne Me Quitte Pas* by Nina Simone. I love its melancholy and drama.

The film you can watch time and time again... *Fawlty Towers* always wins.

The piece of wisdom you'd pass on to a child... Consider how the other person is feeling before you speak.



The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... The video game *Plants vs Zombies*. It's an inconsequential release for my competitive side.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... Moths ate a Persian rug my father gave me. If you're a moth, do not cross my path.

The poem that touches your soul... Shakespeare's *Sonnet 29*. It verbalises jealous despond, soaring joy and transformative love – and how quickly I can move between them.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... Occasionally people think I'm Olivia Colman. But I wish to encourage that.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Kevin Costner casting me in his 1997 film *The Postman*. I'd just decided to give up acting and retrain as a lawyer.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Don't let the b*****ds get you down. Don't be one of the b*****ds.



'My biggest regret is reading the script for *The Matrix* and saying, "What is this incomprehensible hogwash?"'

TV show, through a door and I'd appear on stage to play Helena in Peter Brook's 1970 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. After dinner with a group of unconscionable luvvies, I'd dance dirty flamenco 'til dawn.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Climbing Mont Sainte-Victoire in the South of France with friends on New Year's Day this year. Despite a hangover and whingeing, everyone submitted to euphoria at the top.

The saddest time that shook your world... The death of my father in 2013. Many illnesses spanning 14 years meant all his diverse pleasures were taken away from him one by one. When his surgeon finally banned him from eating peas he lamented, 'No peas for the wicked?' Watching him broke my heart and his spirit. But now he rests in peas.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... That I didn't play any of Shakespeare's trousered heroines. There's no hope now. Who's ever heard of a 48-year-old Viola?

The order of service at your funeral... I'd come in to Purcell's Funeral March For Queen Mary and exit to Lose Yourself by Eminem. Scatter me near Karl Marx in Highgate cemetery.

The way you want to be remembered... The friend who always listened and never interrupted.

The Plug... Watch *The Halcyon* on the ITV Hub and *Manhattan* on Amazon. My next film, *Victoria And Abdul*, will be in cinemas in September. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

The unending quest that drives you on... To hear the word 'Action'. It means I'm about to start acting, which I love and pays the bills.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd smuggle out Michelangelo's study of the Libyan Sibyl for the Sistine Chapel from *The Met* in New York. I particularly love her big toe and the angle of her face.

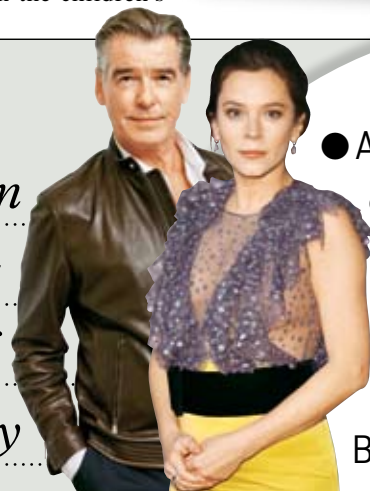
The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I'd watch the dawn in the English countryside and walk barefoot in dewy grass to pick an orange from a tree. Then I'd ride a chestnut horse to a river in the Cévennes mountains in France to meet Rhashan and our daughters,

Esme and Roxana, nine, and friends. We'd go out in rowing boats and swim and catch fish and eat them with gallons of pale rosé. Later, I'd wander in a market in the Middle East selling Persian rugs and Iznik ceramics and sip mint tea and eat sweetmeats. I'd go into a mysterious shop where I'd be led, like Mr Benn in the children's



PS...

Pierce Brosnan and Anna Friel's crime drama I.T. hits cinemas on Friday. Bush's new album Black And White Rainbows is out the same day. And Imelda Staunton opens in Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf? at London's Harold Pinter Theatre on Thursday



NEXT WEEK

- Another batch of riddles and brain-teasers in new 8-page section Puzzle Extra
- The easy way to rustle up authentic Spanish food
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings