

From top: The Silver Sands of Morar, a small plane, Ganesh, Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*, baked Alaska, Professor Brian Cox, *In Search of the Miraculous* by Peter Ouspensky, champagne and Fulton Mackay

The prized possession you value above all others... A little statue of Ganesh, the Hindu elephant god. I've had it for about ten years and it travels everywhere with me. It's a talisman that helps knock down obstacles in life.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... About 15 years ago I was disparaging about another actor to a woman and told her he was no good for a certain role. She then told me that they were engaged! It was a very uncomfortable moment and I apologised, but the damage was done.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I would need a day of calmness. I'd watch the sun come up on the east coast of Scotland, then have a massage on a beach in Hawaii. My wife Nicole and our children, Orson, 11, and Torin, eight, would join me for a play in the surf. We'd have lunch in the Tarn region of the South of France with Alan and Margaret, my grown-up children from my first marriage, then walk it off with a stroll along the Silver Sands of Morar in Scotland. I'd end the day watching the sunset in Tahiti while sharing a bottle of champagne with Nicole.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Sweets and desserts, especially big puddings like baked Alaska. I'm 66 and diabetic, so I have to be very careful about my sugar intake.

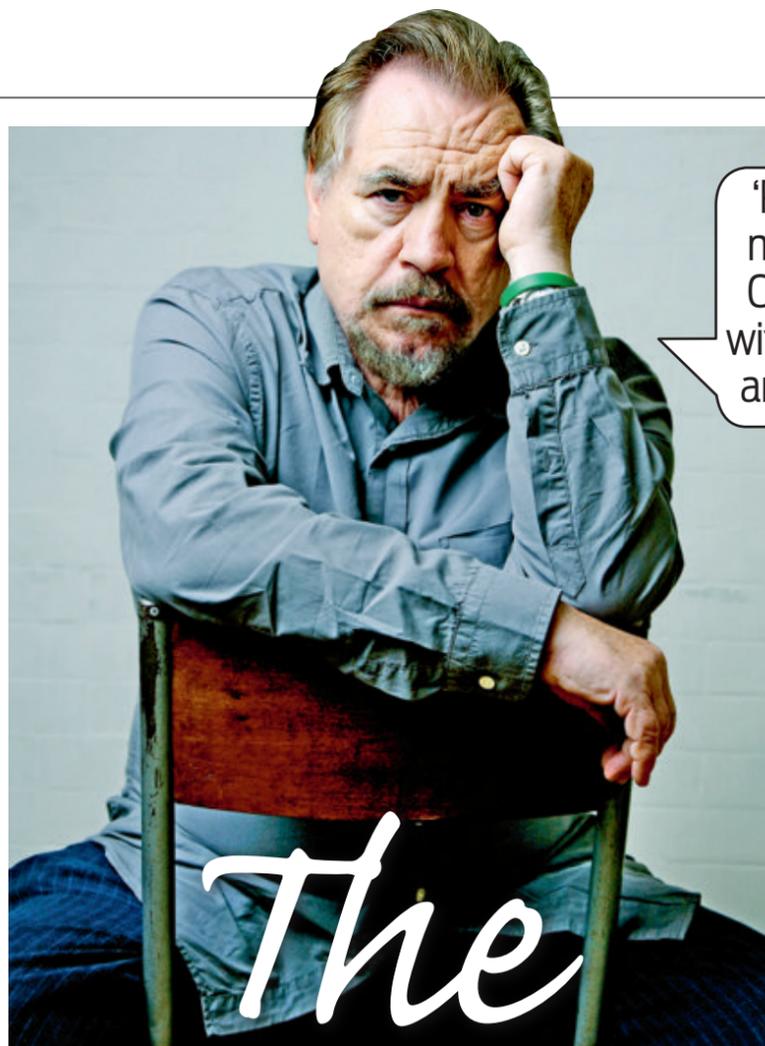
The book that holds an everlasting resonance... *In Search of the Miraculous* by Russian writer Peter Ouspensky. It teaches you how to live in the moment.

The priority activity if you were the invisible man for a day... I'd go inside a totally private Tibetan monastery to observe how the monks live and worship. Hopefully, I'd come away with some special knowledge about life.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... People who presume things really irritate me because their damn presumptions are usually wrong.

The film you can watch time and time again... *On the Waterfront* with Marlon Brando from 1954. It's about one man's struggle against the odds and his courage to stand up to the bad guys.

The person who has influenced you most... Fulton Mackay. Most people knew him as Mr Mackay from *Porridge*, but I met him in my teens and he became my mentor. He was a man of great compassion. In 1987 I pressed the button at his cremation to send him on his way.



'People always confuse me with Professor Brian Cox – if I could get away with it I'd impersonate him and steal all his royalties'

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's actor Brian Cox

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... I'd get Jesus, Mohammed and Buddha together and tell them to sort out all the confusion they've caused!

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Always say your prayers – but not necessarily to a god. Vocalising your wishes helps them come true.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Sudoku puzzles. I love the logic and some days I'll do five.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... A pile of letters to me from John Gielgud and Ralph Richardson. I gave them to my agent to photocopy in the 80s but a cleaner threw them away. I was gutted.

The unending quest that drives you on... Trying to make sense of it all.

The poem that touches your soul... I Am by the 19th-century English poet John Clare. He went mad and wrote it in an asylum. It's incredibly moving.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm Professor Brian Cox! It happens all the time and last year I even got a letter from Sebastian Coe asking me to carry the Olympic torch through Manchester because of my 'connections to the city'. They soon apologised for getting the wrong Brian Cox.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... My father, Charles, dying from pancreatic cancer when I was eight. He was only 51 and my mother subsequently had several nervous breakdowns. I was left on my own at an age when a child shouldn't be expected to deal with things.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I would impersonate that other Brian Cox and steal all his royalties!

The song that means most to you... You Are My Sunshine by Ricky Nelson. It conjures up moments from my childhood of my parents singing it to me, and I've sung it to my own children.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... It brings me great happiness when the word 'Wrap!' is shouted out on a film or TV production.

The saddest time that shook your world... My father's death. It was thought right that I was spared the pain of his funeral because I was so young, but I regret not going.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... I'd love to fly a small plane. Just me, up in the clouds.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Don't become attached to things because they'll drag you down.

The order of service at your funeral... I'd like something theatrical with songs and readings that reflect my life.

The way you want to be remembered... He always gave everything his best.

The Plug... Brian Cox appears in *The Weir* at London's Donmar Warehouse from 18 April. Barclay's Front Row £10 tickets are available from 8 April. Visit www.donmarwarehouse.com.

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Bond co-stars Judi Dench and Ben Whishaw reunite in *Peter And Alice* at London's Noël Coward Theatre. Jim Carrey returns in *The Incredible Burt Wonderstone* – in cinemas from Friday. And David Bowie's first album in a decade, *The Next Day*, is out Monday



NEXT WEEK

- James Nesbitt takes a charming road trip round his native Ireland
- Jamie Oliver rustles up easy Italian
- Never grown your own tomatoes? Let Monty Don show you how
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings guide