



# Starter for Ten: A Novel

By David Nicholls

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## Starter for Ten: A Novel By David Nicholls

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“Utterly charming . . . a big-hearted, flawless coming-of-age tale, as scary and funny as your yearbook picture.”

—*People* (\*\*\*\*/Critic’s Choice)

The year is 1985. Brian Jackson, a working-class kid on full scholarship, has started his first term at university. He has a dark secret—a long-held, burning ambition to appear on the wildly popular British TV quiz show *University Challenge*—and now, finally, it seems the dream is about to become reality. He’s made the school team, and they’ve completed the qualifying rounds and are limbering up for their first televised match. (And, what’s more, he’s fallen head over heels for one of his teammates, the beautiful, brainy, and intimidatingly posh Alice Harbinson.) Life seems perfect and triumph inevitable—but as his world opens up, Brian learns that a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing.

“Fresh, edgy and very funny . . . [Nicholls] has a talent for droll dialogue and a wonderful sense of the ridiculous.”

—*USA Today*

“Starter for Ten has that elusive Hornby-factor. . . . It’s wincingly funny . . . a prospect to savour.”

—*Arena*

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## Starter for Ten: A Novel By David Nicholls Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #861936 in Books
- Brand: Nicholls, David
- Published on: 2007-01-23
- Released on: 2007-01-23
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.50" h x .70" w x 4.80" l,
- Binding: Paperback
- 352 pages

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This entertaining first novel by an English television writer tells the story of Brian Jackson, an unworldly but affable college freshman whose main ambition in life is to compete on the BBC quiz show *University Challenge* (a *Jeopardy*-like game show in which schools compete against each other; in the U.K., the show is a national institution). Between securing one of the four coveted spots on his school's team for the show, Brian chases after two girls: Alice, a beautiful but aloof actress who is also on the squad, and Rebecca, an artsy intellectual who thinks Brian's ambition to be on the show is silly and bourgeois. A visit from Brian's hometown pal Spencer brings the class tensions roiling beneath the novel's surface to the fore, but Nicholls is more interested in comedy than pathos. Some of the humor is very British ("I'm sharing my house with a right pair of bloody Ruperts"), and Nicholls waxes overly nostalgic for his 1980s setting, but the writing is often sharp and funny (number four on Brian's list of New Year's resolutions: "Become lightly muscled"). Unexpected developments at the final *University Challenge* match bring the novel to a rather unlikely conclusion, but readers will root for hapless, engaging Brian as he struggles his way out of adolescence. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [Booklist](#)

**\*Starred Review\*** British scholarship student Brian Jackson has high hopes for his first term at university. He wants to go to classical-music concerts and know when to clap; conduct reasoned debates, saying things like, "Define your terms"; eat exotic foods that sound barely edible; and make love to sophisticated, intimidating women "during daylight or with the light on, even." Most of all, he wants to appear with his school team on the TV quiz show *University Challenge*, a desire born of fond memories of watching the program with his late father. Unfortunately a few things stand in his way--his humble background is no match for that of his posh peers, he is overly fond of gin and lager, and he is engaged in an ongoing medicated soap opera with his severely blemished skin. But Brian is nothing if not brave, and he throws himself into his quest for wider experience with abandon, landing a spot on the quiz team and falling head over heels for beautiful, wealthy Alice. In his first novel, which has all the hallmarks of a classic coming-of-age story, Nicholls creates one droll, perfect set piece after another. From Brian's James Brown-like dance moves to his excruciating encounter with Alice's naked parents, this is sublime and brilliant comedy. *Joanne Wilkinson*

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Review

'A bittersweet coming-of-age tale - A fine, funny book' HEAT

## Users Review

**From reader reviews:**

**Alan Castorena:**

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