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Starter For Ten (English Edition)



Par David Nicholls
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Par David Nicholls : Starter For Ten (English Edition) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Starter For Ten (English Edition):

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe debut bestseller from the author of the phenomenally successfully ONE DAY and Man Booker longlisted US. STARTER FOR TEN is a comedy about love, class, growing-up and the all-important difference between knowledge and wisdom. It's 1985 and Brian Jackson has arrived at university with a burning ambition - to make it onto TV's foremost general knowledge quiz. But no sooner has he embarked on 'The Challenge' than he finds himself falling hopelessly in love with his teammate, the beautiful and charismatic would-be actress, Alice Harbinson. When Alice fails to fall for his slightly over-eager charms, Brian comes up with a foolproof plan to capture her heart once and for all. He's going to win the game, at any cost, because - after all - everyone knows that what a woman really wants from a man is a

comprehensive grasp of general knowledge . . . STARTER FOR TEN is a comedy about love, class, growing-up and the all-important difference between knowledge and wisdom. Are you up to the challenge of the funniest novel in years?

QUESTION: Stepson to Robert Dudley and onetime favorite of Elizabeth I, which nobleman led a poorly planned and unsuccessful revolt against the queen, and was subsequently executed in 1601?

ANSWER: Essex.

All young people worry about things, its a natural and inevitable part of growing up, and at the age of sixteen my greatest anxiety in life was that Id never again achieve anything as good, or pure, or noble, or true, as my O-level exam results. I didnt make a big deal about them at the time, of course; I didnt frame the certificates or anything weird like that, and I wont go into the actual grades here, because then it just gets competitive, but I definitely liked having them: qualifications. Sixteen years old, and the first time Id ever felt qualified for anything. Of course, all that was a long, long time ago. Im eighteen now, and I like to think Im a lot wiser and cooler about these things. So my A-levels are, comparatively, no big deal. Besides, the notion that you can somehow quantify intelligence by some ridiculous, antiquated system of written examinations is obviously specious. Having said that, they were Langley Street Comprehensive Schools best A-level results of 1985, the best for fifteen years in fact, three As and a B, thats nineteen points there, Ive said it now but I really, honestly dont believe thats particularly relevant, I just mention them in passing. And, anyway, compared to other qualities, like physical courage, or popularity, or good looks, or clear skin, or an active sex life, just knowing a whole load of stuff isnt actually that important. But like my dad used to say, the crucial thing about an education is the opportunity that it brings, the doors it opens, because otherwise knowledge, in and of itself, is a blind alley, especially from where Im sitting, here, on a late-September Wednesday afternoon, in a factory that makes toasters. Ive spent the holiday working in the dispatch department of Ashworth Electricals, which means Im responsible for putting the toasters in their boxes before theyre sent out to the retailers. Of course, there are only so many ways you can put a toaster in a box, so its been a pretty dull couple of months over all, but, on the plus side, its 1.85 an hour, which isnt bad, and as much toast as you can eat. As its my last day here, Ive been keeping an eye open for the surreptitious passing round of the good-bye card and the collection for the leaving present, and waiting to find out which pub were going to for farewell drinks, but its 6:15 now, so I think its probably safe to assume that everyones just gone home. Just as well, though, because I had other plans anyway, so I get my stuff, grab a handful of Bics and a roll of tape from the stationery cupboard, and head off to the pier, where Im meeting Spencer and Tone. At 2,360 yards, or 2.158 kilometers, Southend Pier is officially the longest pier in the world. This is probably a little bit too long, to be honest, especially when youre carrying a lot of lager. Weve got twelve large cans of Skol, sweet-and-sour pork balls, special fried rice and a portion of chips with curry sauce flavors from around the world but by the time we reach the end of the pier, the lagers are warm and the takeaways cold. As this is a special celebration Tones also had to lug his ghetto blaster, which is the size of a small wardrobe and, its fair to say, will probably never blast a ghetto, unless you count Shoeburyness. At the moment its playing Tones homemade compilation The Best of the Zep as we settle down on a bench at the end and watch as the sun sets majestically over the petrol refinery. Youre not going to turn into a wanker, are you? says Tone, opening a can of lager. What do you mean? He means youre not going to get all studenty on us, says Spencer. Well, I am a student. I mean, I will be, so . . . No, but I mean youre not going to get all twatty and up-your-own-arse and come home at Christmas in a gown, talking Latin and saying One does and One thinks and all that. Yeah, Tone, thats exactly what Im going to do. Well, dont. Because youre enough of a twat already without becoming even more of a twat. I get called twat a lot by Tone, either twat or gaylord, but the trick is to make a sort of linguistic adjustment, and try to think of it as a term of affection, in the same way as some couples say dear or darling. Tones just started a job in the warehouse in Currys, and is starting to develop a nice little sideline in knocked-off portable hi-fis, like the one were listening to now. Its his Led Zeppelin tape too; Tone likes to call himself a metallist, which sounds more vocational than rocker or heavy-metal fan. He dresses like a metallist too; lots of light blue denim, and long, flicked-back lustrous blond hair, like an effeminate Viking. Tones hair is actually the only effeminate thing about him. This is, after all, a man steeped in brutal violence. The mark of a successful evening out with Tone is that you get home without having had your head flushed down a toilet. Its Stairway to Heaven now. Do we have to listen to this fucking hippie bollocks, Tone? says Spencer. This is the Zep, Spence. I know its the Zep, Tone, thats why I want you to turn the fucking thing off. But the Zep rule. Why? Because you say they rule? No, because they were a massively influential and important band. Theyre singing about pixies, Tony. Its embarrassing. . . . Not pixies . . . Elves then, I say. Its not just pixies and elves, its Tolkien, its literature. . . . Tone loves that stuff; books with maps in the front, and cover illustrations of big, scary women

in chain mail underwear, holding broadswords, the kind of woman that, in an ideal world, hed marry. Which, in Southend, is actually a lot more feasible than youd think. Whats the difference between a pixie and an elf, anyway? asks Spencer. Dunno. Ask Jackson, hes the cunt with the qualifications. I dunno, Tone, I say. The guitar solo has kicked in and Spencers wincing now. Does it ever end or does it just go on and on and on and on. . . Its seven minutes, thirty-two seconds of pure genius. Pure torture, I say. Whys it always your choice, anyway? Because its my ghetto blaster which you nicked. Technically, it still belongs to Currys. Yeah, but I buy the batteries. . . No, you nick the batteries. Not these, I bought these. So how much were the batteries, then? One pound ninety-eight. So if I give you sixty-six pence, can we have something decent on? What, like Kate Bush? All right, then, Jackson, lets put some Kate Bush on then, all have a really good time listening to Kate Bush, all have a really, really good dance and a singalong to Kate Bush. . . And while Tone and I are bickering, Spencer leans over to the ghetto blaster, nonchalantly ejects The Best of the Zep, and skims it far out to sea. Tone shouts Oi! and throws his can of lager after him as they both run off down the pier. Its best not to get too involved in the fights. Tone tends to get a little bit out of control, possessed by the spirit of Odin or something, and if I get involved, it will inevitably end with Spencer sitting on my arms while Tone farts in my face, so I just sit very still, drink my lager and watch Tone trying to hoist Spencers legs over the pier railings. Even though its September, theres the beginning of a damp chill in the evening air, a sense of summer coming to an end, and Im glad I wore my army-surplus greatcoat. Ive always hated summer; the way the sun shines on the TV screen in the afternoons, and the relentless pressure to wear T-shirts and shorts. I hate T-shirt and shorts. If I were to stand outside a chemist in T-shirt and shorts, I guarantee some old dear would try and put a coin in the top of my head. No, what Im really looking forward to is the autumn, to kicking through leaves on the way to a lecture, talking excitedly about the metaphysical poets with a girl called Emily, or Katherine, or Franoise, or something, with black opaque woolly tights and a Louise Brooks bob, then going back to her tiny attic room and making love in front of her electric bar fire. Afterward well read T. S. Eliot aloud and drink fine vintage port out of tiny little glasses while listening to Miles Davis. Thats what I imagine its going to be like, anyway. The University Experience. I like the word experience. It makes it sound like a ride at Alton Towers. The fights over, and Tone is burning off his excess aggression by throwing sweet-and-sour pork balls at the seagulls. Spencer walks back, tucking his shirt in, sits down next to me and opens another can of lager. Spencer really has a way with a can of lager; watching him, you could almost imagine hes drinking from a martini glass. Spencers the person Ill miss the most. He isnt going to university, even though hes easily the cleverest person Ive ever met, as well as the best-looking, and the hardest, and the coolest. I wouldnt tell him any of that, of course, because it would sound a bit creepy, but theres no need, as he clearly knows it, anyway. He could have gone to university if hed really wanted to, but he fouled up his exams; not deliberately, as such, but everyone could see him doing it. He was at the desk next to me for the English set-text paper, and you could tell by the movements of his pen that he wasnt writing, he was drawing. For his Shakespeare question he drew The Merry Wives of Windsor, and for poetry he did a picture entitled Wilfred Owen Experiences the Horror of the Trenches at Firsthand. I kept trying to catch his eye, so I could give him a friendly Hey, come on, mate kind of look, but he just kept his head down, drawing away, and then after an hour he got up, and walked out, winking at me on the way; not a cocky wink, a slightly tearful, red-eyed wink, like a plucky Tommy on his way to the firing squad. After that, he just stopped coming in for exams. In private, the phrase nervous breakdown was mentioned a couple of times, but Spencers far too cool to have a nervous breakdown. Or, if he did, hed make the nervous breakdown seem cool. The way I see it, that whole Jack Kerouac, tortured existential thing is fine up to a point, but not if its going to interfere with your grades. So, what are you going to do, Spence? He narrows his eyes, looks at me. What do you mean, do? You know. Job-wise. Ive got a job. Spencers signing on, but also working cash-in-hand at the all-night petrol station on the A127. I know youve got a job. But in the future . . . Spencer looks out across the estuary, and I start to regret raising the subject. Your problem, Brian, my friend, is that you underestimate the appeal of life in an all-night petrol station. I get to eat as much confectionery as I want. Road atlases to read. Interesting fumes to inhale. Free wineglasses . . . He takes a long swig of lager, and looks for a way to change the subject. Reaching into his Harrington, he pulls out a cassette tape with a handwritten inlay card: I made this for you. So you can play it in front of your new university friends, trick them into thinking youve got taste. I take the tape, which has Bris College Compilation written down the spine in careful 3-D capitals. Spencers a brilliant artist. This is fantastic, Spencer, thanks, mate. . . All right, Jackson, its only a sixty-nine-pee tape from the market, no need to cry about it. He says that, but were both aware that a ninety-minute compilation tape represents a good three hours of work, more if youre going to

design an inlay card. Put it on, will you? Before the muppet comes back. I put the tape in, press play, and its Curtis Mayfield singing Move On Up. Spencer was a mod, but has moved on to vintage soul; Al Green, Gil Scott-Heron, that kind of thing. Spencers so cool he even likes jazz. Not just Sade and the Style Council, either; proper jazz, the irritating, boring stuff. We sit and listen for a while. Tones now trying to wheedle money out of the telescopes with the flick knife he bought on a school trip to Calais, and Spencer and I watch like the indulgent parents of a child with acute behavioral problems. So are you coming back at weekends? asks Spencer. I dont know. I expect so. Not every weekend. Make sure you do, though, wont you? Otherwise Ill just be stuck here on my own with Conan the Barbarian. . . . And Spencer nods toward Tone, whos now taking running jumps and drop-kicking the telescope. Shouldnt we make a toast or something? I say. Spencer curls his lip. A toast? What for? You know to the future or something? Spencer sighs, and taps his can against mine. To the future. Heres hoping your skin clears up. Piss off, Spencer, I say. Piss off, Brian, he says, but laughing. By the time were on to the last cans of lager, were pretty drunk, so we lie on our backs, not saying anything, just listening to the sea and Otis Redding singing Try a Little Tenderness, and on this clear late summer night, looking up at the stars, with my best mates either side of me, it feels as if real life is beginning at last, and that absolutely everything is possible. I want to be able to listen to recordings of piano sonatas and know whos playing. I want to go to classical concerts and know when youre meant to clap. I want to be able to get modern jazz without it all sounding like this terrible mistake, and I want to know who the Velvet Underground are exactly. I want to be fully engaged in the World of Ideas, I want to understand complex economics, and what people see in Bob Dylan. I want to possess radical but humane and well-informed political ideals, and I want to hold passionate but reasoned debates round wooden kitchen tables, saying things like Define your terms! and Your premise is patently specious! and then suddenly to discover that the suns come up and weve been talking all night. I want to use words like eponymous and solipsistic and utilitarian with confidence. I want to learn to appreciate fine wines, and exotic liqueurs, and single malts, and learn how to drink them without turning into a complete prat, and to eat strange and exotic foods, plovers eggs and lobster thermidor, things that sound barely edible, or that I cant pronounce. I want to make love to beautiful, sophisticated, intimidating women, during daylight or with the light on, even, and sober, and without fear, and I want to be able to speak many languages fluently, and maybe even a dead language or two, and to carry a small leather-bound notebook in which I jot incisive thoughts and observations, and the occasional line of verse. Most of all I want to read books; books thick as a brick, leather-bound books with incredibly thin paper and those purple ribbons to mark where you left off; cheap, dusty, secondhand books of collected verse, incredibly expensive, imported books of incomprehensible essays from foreign universities. At some point, Id like to have an original idea. And Id like to be fancied, or maybe loved, even, but Ill wait and see. And as for a job, Im not sure exactly what I want yet, but something that I dont despise, and that doesnt make me ill, and that means I dont have to worry about money all the time. And all of these are the things that a university education is going to give me. We finish off the lager, then things get out of hand. Tone throws my shoes into the sea, and I have to walk home in my socks. From the Hardcover edition. *Revue de presse* Starter for Ten is the debut of the year; a recommendation repeated by all who come in contact with it ... Trust us, you'll love it (Arena) Nicholls' portrayal of student affectations is accurate and funny ... clever and well-written (Independent) Brilliant... we would recommend it to anyone (Richard Madeley and Judy Finnigan) A funny, touching novel reminiscent of the classic film Gregory's Girl with an authentic 1980s backdrop (Sunday Mirror)