



The Know-It-All: One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World

By A. J. Jacobs

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Part memoir and part education (or lack thereof), *The Know-It-All* chronicles NPR contributor A.J. Jacobs's hilarious, enlightening, and seemingly impossible quest to read the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from A to Z.

33,000 PAGES
44 MILLION WORDS
10 BILLION YEARS OF HISTORY
1 OBSESSED MAN

To fill the ever-widening gaps in his Ivy League education, A.J. Jacobs sets for himself the daunting task of reading all thirty-two volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. His wife, Julie, tells him it's a waste of time, his friends believe he is losing his mind, and his father, a brilliant attorney who had once attempted the same feat and quit somewhere around Borneo, is encouraging but unconvinced.

With self-deprecating wit and a disarming frankness, *The Know-It-All* recounts the unexpected and comically disruptive effects Operation Encyclopedia has on every part of Jacobs's life -- from his newly minted marriage to his complicated relationship with his father and the rest of his charmingly eccentric New York family to his day job as an editor at *Esquire*. Jacobs's project tests the outer limits of his stamina and forces him to explore the real meaning of intelligence as he endeavors to join Mensa, win a spot on *Jeopardy!*, and absorb 33,000 pages of learning. On his journey he stumbles upon some of the strangest, funniest, and most profound facts about every topic under the sun, all while battling fatigue, ridicule, and the paralyzing fear that attends his first real-life responsibility -- the impending birth of his first child.

The Know-It-All is an ingenious, mightily entertaining memoir of one man's intellect, neuroses, and obsessions, and a struggle between the all-consuming quest for factual knowledge and the undeniable gift of hard-won wisdom.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Imagine, the original Berserkers were "savage Norse soldiers" of the Middle Ages who went into battle stark naked! Or consider the Etruscan habit of writing in "boustrophedon style." Intrigued? Well, either hunker down with your own *Encyclopædia Britannica*, or buy *Esquire* editor Jacobs's memoir of the year he spent reading all 32 volumes of the 2002 edition—that's 33,000 pages with some 44 million words. Jacobs set out on this delightfully eccentric endeavor attempting to become the "smartest person in the world," although he agrees smart doesn't mean wise. Apart from the sheer pleasure of scaling a major intellectual mountain, Jacobs figured reading the encyclopedia from beginning to end would fill some gaps in his formal education and greatly increase his "quirkiness factor." Reading alphabetically through whole topics he never knew existed meant he'd accumulate huge quantities of trivia to insert into conversations with unsuspecting victims. As his wife shunned him and cocktail party guests edged away, Jacobs started testing his knowledge in a hilarious series of humiliating adventures: hobnobbing at Mensa meetings, shuffling off to chess houses, trying out for the American Crossword Puzzle Tournament, visiting his old prep school, even competing on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. Indeed, one of the book's strongest parts is its laugh-out-loud humor. Jacobs's ability to juxtapose his quirky, sardonic wit with oddball trivia make this one of the season's most unusual books.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School - When Jacobs, a pop-culture junkie and magazine editor, got a bee in his bonnet to read the entire abridged set of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* to stave off the decline of his recalled knowledge, his wife, family, and coworkers looked on with disbelief, amusement, and annoyance. They thought he'd give up on his quest, but fortunately he did not, for his recap manages to impart the joys of learning, along with a lot of laughs. The alphabetical arrangement of his book allows Jacobs to share highlights, many of which show his fixation on the morbid, the insane, and the grotesque in history. Cortés had syphilis. Descartes had a fetish for cross-eyed women. Throughout, the author digresses with anecdotes about such things as his trip to a Mensa meeting, his visit with Alex Trebek, and (mainly) his wife's attempts to get pregnant. While the pregnancy woes probably won't hold the same resonance with teens as with adults, they are all short, and soon there is another funny or gross item. As Jacobs wraps up, he leaves readers with the sense of satisfaction and wistfulness that often occurs when finishing a particularly satisfying book, only multiplied by the magnitude of what he has accomplished. This is a love note to human knowledge and the joys of obtaining it. - *Jamie Watson, Harford County Public Library, MD*

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

We're in looking glass territory here, as many reviewers spent as much time on *New York Times Book Review* Queenan's hack-job as they did on *Esquire* editor Jacobs's book. Reviews of reviews are always awkward, especially when they flock to the defense of a book as harmless as Jacobs's. Maybe *Know-It-All* isn't an intellectual treatise; but, then again, it isn't meant to be. Its pop culture-obsessed author clearly is out for some fun, often at his own expense. The alphabetical structure and wisecracking prose only underscore the playfulness of *The Know-It-All*, even if it gets certain factoids wrong. Which begs the question: what side of the "A" volume did Queenan wake up on? One must assume the backside.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Cora Gallien:

The book *The Know-It-All: One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World* can give more knowledge and information about everything you want. Why must we leave a very important thing like a book *The Know-It-All: One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World*? Several of you have a different opinion about e-book. But one aim in which book can give many data for us. It is absolutely right. Right now, try to closer along with your book. Knowledge or info that you take for that, you are able to give for each other; you could share all of these. Book *The Know-It-All: One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World* has simple shape however, you know: it has great and big function for you. You can search the enormous world by available and read a e-book. So it is very wonderful.

Belinda Kirwin:

The Know-It-All: One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World can be one of your basic books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary which could increase your knowledge in language, easy to understand, bit entertaining but still delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort to get every word into enjoyment arrangement in writing *The Know-It-All: One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World* yet doesn't forget the main stage, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource info that maybe you can be one among it. This great information could drawn you into brand new stage of crucial thinking.

Mary Kidd:

Do you one of the book lovers? If so, do you ever feeling doubt while you are in the book store? Aim to pick one book that you never know the inside because don't ascertain book by its cover may doesn't work is difficult job because you are scared that the inside maybe not while fantastic as in the outside appearance likes. Maybe you answer may be *The Know-It-All: One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World* why because the fantastic cover that make you consider about the content will not disappoint you actually. The inside or content will be fantastic as the outside or perhaps cover. Your reading sixth sense will directly assist you to pick up this book.

Joan James:

The book untitled *The Know-It-All: One Man's Humble Quest to Become the Smartest Person in the World* contain a lot of information on that. The writer explains her idea with easy means. The language is very clear and understandable all the people, so do not worry, you can easy to read it. The book was published by famous author. The author will take you in the new era of literary works. It is easy to read this book because you can keep reading your smart phone, or gadget, so you can read the book with anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can start their official web-site as well as order it. Have a nice go through.

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