



Brainiac: Adventures in the Curious, Competitive, Compulsive World of Trivia Buffs

Ken Jennings

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One day back in 2003, Ken Jennings and his college buddy Earl did what hundreds of thousands of people had done before: they auditioned for Jeopardy! Two years, 75 games, 2,642 correct answers, and over \$2.5 million in winnings later, Ken Jennings emerged as trivia's undisputed king. *Brainiac* traces his rise from anonymous computer programmer to nerd folk icon. But along the way, it also explores his newly conquered kingdom: the world of trivia itself.

Jennings had always been minutiae-mad, poring over almanacs and TV Guide listings at an age when most kids are still watching Elmo and putting beans up their nose. But trivia, he has found, is centuries older than his childhood obsession with it. Whisking us from the coffeehouses of seventeenth-century London to the Internet age, Jennings chronicles the ups and downs of the trivia fad: the quiz book explosion of the Jazz Age; the rise, fall, and rise again of TV quiz shows; the nostalgic campus trivia of the 1960s; and the 1980s, when Trivial Pursuit® again made it fashionable to be a know-it-all.

Jennings also investigates the shadowy demimonde of today's trivia subculture, guiding us on a tour of trivia hotspots across America. He goes head-to-head with the blowhards and diehards of the college quiz-bowl circuit, the slightly soused faithful of the Boston pub trivia scene, and the raucous participants in the annual Q&A marathon in Stevens Point, Wisconsin, "The World's Largest Trivia Contest." And, of course, he takes us behind the scenes of his improbable 75-game run on Jeopardy!

But above all, *Brainiac* is a love letter to the useless fact. What marsupial has fingerprints that are indistinguishable from human ones?* What planet has a crater on it named after Laura Ingalls Wilder?** What comedian had the misfortune to be born with the name "Albert Einstein"?*** Jennings also ponders questions that are a little more philosophical: What separates trivia from meaningless facts? Is being good at trivia a mark of intelligence? And is trivia just a waste of time, or does it serve some not-so-trivial purpose after all?

Uproarious, silly, engaging, and erudite, this book is an irresistible celebration of nostalgia, curiosity, and nerdy obsession—in a word, trivia.

* **The koala**

** **Venus**

*** **Albert Brooks**

From the Hardcover edition.

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