

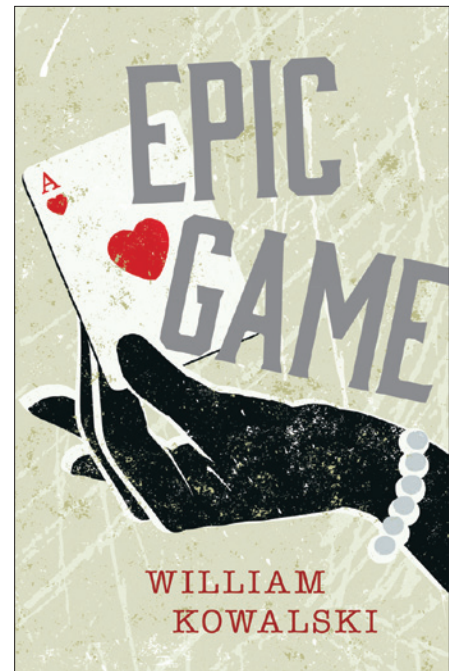
# READING GUIDE

## RAPID READS



### EPIC GAME WILLIAM KOWALSKI

Reading level: 2.2  
Interest level: Adult  
Themes: female character, online poker,  
unconventional family  
978-1-4598-1049-5 PB



#### Summary

Like her father, Katherine Thomas is a poker player. Unlike her dad, *she's* really good at it. She grew up surrounded by his poker friends, watching and learning. Rather than live with her mother, Kat preferred to be with her father, where rules didn't apply and where she could direct her days as she chose. Her mother had expectations, rules and a totally suburban approach to raising a kid. As a result of her unstable, sometimes-broke and sometimes-flush upbringing, Kat has internalized the idea that she should rely on no one but herself, and avoids any relationship that would require work, sacrifice and, most frightening of all, trust.

When Kat plays, she typically plays online—and she plays to win. Unlike her father, Kat is sensible with her money, putting half of her earnings away so she'll never be caught out, as her father so often was. Her next goal? A major Las Vegas poker tournament. The winning purse is one million dollars, and Kat is determined to make it hers, because then she will be set for life. She misses her father terribly, having lost him six years prior to a stabbing incident over a poker game. She feels like he is still nearby, though, watching over his little girl. Having lost her father, Kat is even more reticent to love again.

An email from lawyer Andrew Molton changes Kat's life. At his request, she returns to her hometown, which she has assiduously avoided since her father's death. During their meeting she learns that her best friend, Josie, has chosen to end her own life rather than die of the late-stage cancer she had been diagnosed with...and she has asked Kat to take care of her ten-year-old son David until his father can come from England to collect him.

Furious that in her final act Josie has thwarted her quiet, relationship-avoidant life, Kat goes to Molton's house to pick up David. David turns out to be a bright, quirky boy who shares Kat's interest (although not her strength) in poker. For the few weeks she is responsible for David, Kat unplugs—and experiences “real life” for what feels like the first time. While together, Kat finds herself growing close to this funny little kid, enjoying his company more than she ever expected. Suddenly her life trajectory is called into question: why is she spending her days sitting in front of a computer, trying to win money? Who's she going to share it with? What's it all for?

By the time David's father, Charlie, has freed himself from pressing business and travelled



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overseas to pick up his boy, Kat is quite fond of the child, and quite at odds with the way she's spending her life. It only complicates things when she feels a mutual attraction with Charlie and he asks her to travel to London so that she may visit him and David.

Charlie and David head for England, and Kat heads for Vegas. The stakes are huge: she's competing with 2000 other poker players for the \$1M pot. Four days of intense poker-playing ensue, leaving Kat tired, on edge and feeling like it's an empty way to spend her time. Due to her incredible skill, clear understanding of human psychology and a little bit of luck, Kat wins the tournament and walks away with her one million dollars.

Exhausted and oddly let down once the whole affair is over, Kat calls David to tell him she won the tournament. He is elated, and puts Charlie on the line. Charlie invites Kat to England again, and she agrees. Kat for the first time ever lets her heart—and not her head—lead the way.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What makes Katherine Thomas such a compelling and strong character? What makes her so relatable?
2. When the reader first meets Kat, we learn that she relies on no one but herself. How is this adaptive? How is it maladaptive? What can you say about Kat's determined social stance, given that more than half of America now lives alone?
3. Raised by a one-time-teacher who allowed poker to overtake and ultimately destroy his life, Kat is careful to keep a tight rein on her ego, her spending and her interpersonal relationships. Explain how children who are raised in certain ways sometimes go the opposite direction of their parents.
4. Describe the tension at the end of the second chapter. Who wants what? What is standing in Kat's way?
5. Kat is the kind of person to rip off bandages quickly, as she says in Andrew Molton's office (ch. 3). Make a character map of Kat, including her values, personality characteristics and background/history. Add to it as you read *Epic Game*.
6. Kat doesn't like sudden turns in life's road. Why does she so badly need to be in control?
7. As you see it, why does Kat idealize "rolling in dough" early in the story (ch. 4)? Why does she feel it is so important to make money and be rich?
8. In *Epic Game*, we see a bias against voluntary singlehood. One example in chapter 4 is when Kat has an imaginary conversation with Josie, where Josie "accuses" her of only wanting to look out for herself, and of thinking that no one is good enough. In reality, however, some people are beginning to speak up for singles, saying that singlehood should be treated as just as acceptable a choice as marriage. What is your thinking about the "couples bias" so present in our world?
9. David is an uncommon, quirky kid. Just the way he eats his pancakes in chapter 6 makes his character shine brightly. Find more examples of this kind of rich characterization in *Epic Game*.



# RAPID READS



10. Kat says that “in poker, money comes and money goes all the time. Doesn’t matter how many zeroes are on the end. If you get attached to it, you start making bad decisions” (ch. 7). Can you make the case for this adage in the context of interpersonal relationships? That we should guard against attachment in order to avoid making bad decisions?
11. Kat becomes very concerned in chapter 9 that she is following in her father’s shoes—and is potentially becoming addicted to poker. With a group or on paper, share what you know about gaming and gambling addiction. What makes gaming and gambling addiction so difficult to walk away from?
12. In chapter 12, at the breakfast buffet, Kat reflects that she has some anger issues. Do you agree? On some level, couldn’t it be said that we all do?
13. Kat makes an interesting point when she reflects on the way the newspaper attributed her success to her lucky dress and called attention to the fact that she is a woman (ch. 13). Talk about the way we take power and intelligence away from women just in the words we use about them.
14. Describe how Kat’s character develops and changes through the book.
15. What questions do you have after the book ends? What would you like to know about how things turn out? What would you like to ask Kat?



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