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Reading Group Gold

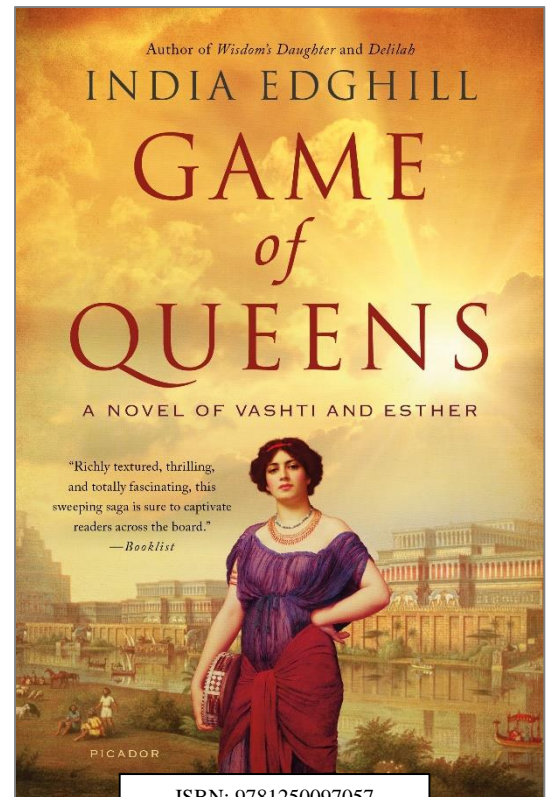
Game of Queens: *A Novel of Vashti and Esther* By India Edghill

ABOUT THE BOOK

For fans of *The Red Tent* and *The Dovekeepers*, India Edghill breathes new life into the biblical story of Vashti and Esther with her signature historical richness, epic scope, and sweeping romance.

You may know part of the story already, but you know only what history has passed along: the story of how Vashti, Queen of Queens, the most beautiful woman in all the empire, defied her husband the king, and so lost her crown. The story of how Ahasuerus, King of Kings, commanded that the most beautiful maidens be sent to his court so he might choose a new queen. And you may know how he set the queen's crown upon the head of the virtuous and beautiful Esther, and how Queen Esther herself defied both king and law to save her people from a deadly fate.

Game of Queens tells the part of this epic story that you don't know, in which two exceptional women—with the sage guidance of a loyal eunuch—take charge of their own fates. Amidst power and treachery, bravery and romance, honor and deception, *Game of Queens* celebrates Vashti and Esther, two of the most extraordinary heroines in all of history.



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QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Game of Queens* is told through multiple points of view—Daniel, Hegai, Vashti, and Esther. Why do you think Edgill employs this method and how did it affect your reading?
2. After Daniel helps save the life of Joakim’s wife, Susannah, he advises Joakim to allow Susannah to decide which type of veil to wear outside of their home. Arioch says that he hopes she will wear one made of a very thick cloth. What does he mean by this? Do you agree or disagree?
3. Do you think Arioch would approve of Daniel marrying Samamat after his death?
4. After Hegai’s castration, he is given opium, but he does not end up taking it. Why does he decide not to swallow the pills?
5. Hegai believes that the most important lesson Zebbani taught him was, “The body is nothing. Never give more than your body, Jasper. If your body is all they possess, they have no power over you.” How would you interpret this lesson and how does Hegai use this knowledge throughout the course of the novel?
6. When the Queen Mother, Amestris, sends a message to Vashti via Hegai that it is time for Vashti to become the king’s wife “in body as well as name,” Hegai thinks that the message carries a “second message, hidden, like a serpent coiled beneath a rock.” What could this secret message be?
7. Why do you think the Queen Mother encouraged Vashti and Ahasuerus to be mischievous, pull pranks, and act childish well up into their teens?
8. What does Esther mean when she tells us “Yes, until I was ten, I was valued for myself. And I was truly happy”?
9. Why do you think Esther feels such a connection with Star?
10. In what ways is Mordecai’s comment “Be glad you are not a queen, Hadassah, for they are never truly free,” illustrated in the novel?
11. While Esther says that she loathes the veil, she does praise it for its one virtue: anonymity, which allowed her to roam the city of Shushan. Do you think in modern times the veil allows some women to experience this kind of freedom?
12. When Esther reveals that she later had a palace jeweler carve a small hole into her “forty” ivory token so she could wear it around her neck and “take comfort from its smooth warmth,” the author reveals to us that Esther was chosen as Ahasuerus’s queen. Even though you were likely familiar with the story of Esther before reading the novel, did this take away any of the novel’s suspense for you? Why do you think the author chose to employ such direct foreshadowing?
13. What does this famous story teach us about the resilience of the Jewish people?

14. Why does Vashti decide to leave the palace? Do you think you would have done the same if you were in her shoes?
15. The last scene of the novel is given to Sama and Daniel, who are both thinking about Arioeh. Sama says that the stars have told her the same thing that Daniel’s dreams have told him about Arioeh, “that he’ll be waiting.” What do you make of the unusual relationship between these three?

Guide written by Kianoosh Hashemzadeh



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