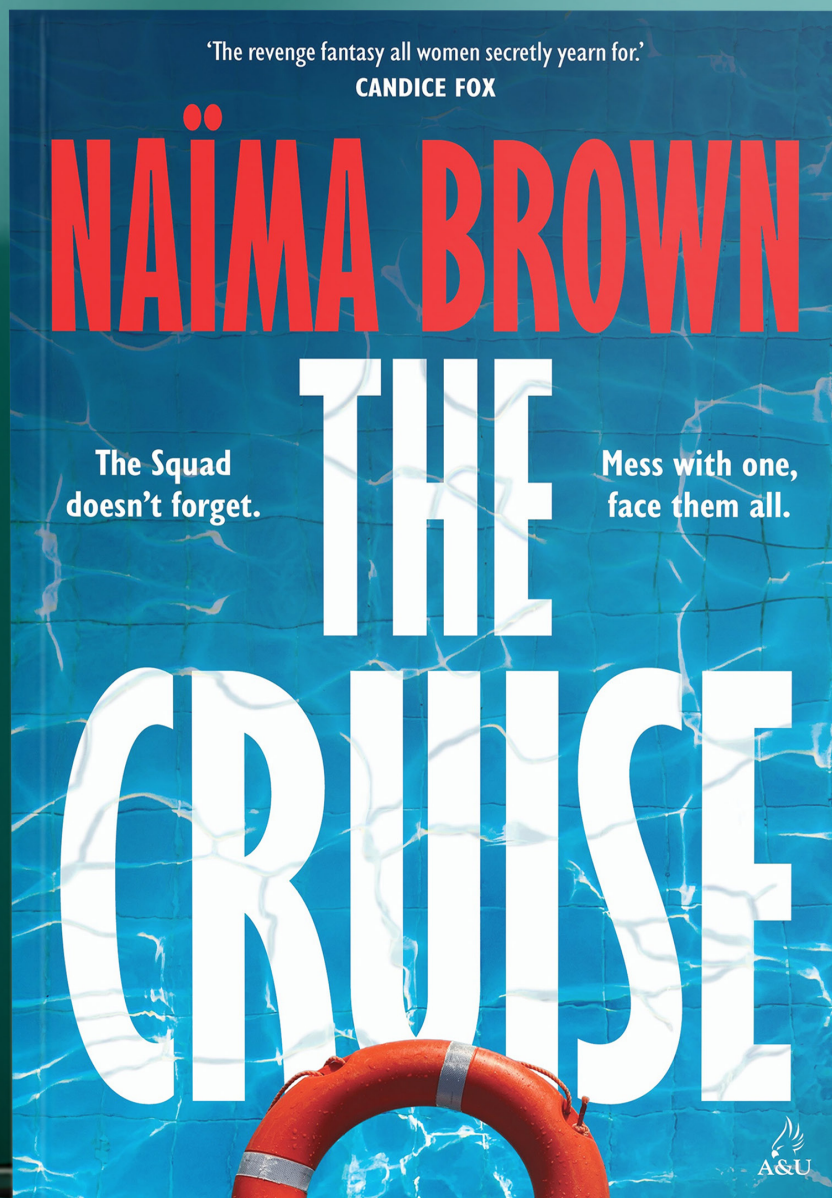




ALLEN & UNWIN

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BOOK CLUB NOTES
THE CRUISE



ABOUT THE BOOK

Can you tell us a little about your new novel *The Cruise*?

The Cruise is the revenge fantasy novel that every woman secretly wishes for: that her closest, most loyal group of female friends would do anything to take down the man who hurt her. *The Cruise* is the name of a reality show that takes place on a cruise ship (it's kind of *Survivor* meets *Love Island*—very battle of the sexes) and when our protagonist Bailey Collins sees that a very bad man from her past has applied to be a contestant, she decides to cast him and all of the female contestants from the Squad (a global group of women, all survivors of male violence, who have vowed to protect each other at all costs). *The Cruise* is revenge fantasy that sits squarely in the zeitgeist of not just women's lives right now, but women's sense of being fed up and—as in most things—deciding that they're just going to have to do it themselves. And by 'it', I mean holding horrible men to account.

How did the idea originate?

The Squad has been influenced by two things. Firstly, I work in women's media. I pay very close attention to women's lives and stories—and I think women have had enough. There is a palpable sense (and I think this goes beyond political divisions) that the system created by men, for men, does not make women and children safer. It doesn't protect us, it doesn't prioritise justice when we've been harmed—I could go on. And so I think the idea of a group of vigilante women isn't actually all that far-fetched. And the second thing is that I believe I'm lucky enough to have these women in my real life—but I've learned that many women don't, and they are desperate for it! At least in this series I can provide that.

The ultimate fantasy might be having a group of friends who will always have your back.

How do you find your own ride-or-die squad like the women in *The Cruise*?

Honestly, when I think about the women in my life—many of whom I've known since childhood—my heart just swells. I don't know how we found each other or how I got so damn lucky, because I know so many people feel squad-less. This is something I've

been hearing from women as *The Cruise* finds its way into the world, and I have this little dream I'm nurturing that these books, The Squad Series, actually help women find each other in the real world, help them find their squads. I wouldn't be here if it weren't for the women in my life.

Credit: Natalie Grono



You have a background in reality TV—how did that inform the writing of *The Cruise*?

In my years as a producer, I only worked on two seasons of reality television, but it left such a mark that I had to place not one, but two books in a reality television setting. This is for a few reasons. Chiefly, the very clear power dynamics; the line between the producers pulling the strings, and the talent who they're

trying to control and manipulate. There is just so much to work with. Additionally, I am drawn to the natural constraints that a competition or a production offers—the time limits, the closed set, the inbuilt parameters that dial up the pace and tension.

The Cruise has some horrible men but a few nice ones as well—was that important to you to balance it out?

Yes, absolutely, this was very intentional. There are so many men, many in my own life, who are allies, who understand that they are the ones who must stand up and fight the scourge of violence against women. There are so many men who are outraged by the horrible things bad men do. Not enough of them though. We need more. But the good ones deserve representation in The Squad Series.

Do you think there's something cathartic in reading and writing about revenge?

1000% yes. I kind of stumbled into writing *The Cruise* and The Squad Series. I had a very basic outline and idea, but it wasn't until I started writing that the backstories of all the Squad members started to surface inside of me. I think this is because I don't know any unscathed woman. Not one. There is a deep well of rage that I think we, as women, all have access to—and a deep sense of cynicism in a justice system that routinely lets us down. So, when I started to write about vengeance, about women taking justice into their own hands, it was so incredibly cathartic that I just had to write two more missions for The Squad Series (*The Honey Trap* and *The Mentor*).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you'd been part of Bailey's Squad would you have been with her all the way or would you have questioned her at any stage?
2. Naïma mentions the power dynamics of the producer role made fertile ground for a writer—how does the setting of the boat also play with the tension?
3. How does the dating show concept allow the author to explore not just power dynamics but men's attitudes to women?
4. Did you think it was wrong for Bailey to put Lauren in such a vulnerable position? Was the Squad's reaction to her challenging Bailey fair?
5. Did your opinion of any character change throughout the novel? Did any of their actions surprise you?
6. After the jet ski incident, do you think Bailey was right to forge ahead—and were others right to waver in their support?
7. What does the book suggest about the way reality TV turns relationships and conflict into entertainment?
8. Did you have any sympathy for any of the men in the story—why?
9. If Bailey had not had the opportunity to confront Eli do you think she would have recovered from her past? Would she have ended up with Lucas?
10. Should the Squad allow Lucas as an honorary member or should it remain a female-only crew?
11. Do you think what happened on *The Cruise* was cathartic for the other women as well as Bailey?
12. Were you satisfied with what happened to Eli?
13. Are there times you think Bailey went too far in her pursuit of revenge?
14. Do you think Bailey will now be able to move on from her past trauma?

JUST FOR FUN

1. Who would you cast in a screen adaptation of *The Cruise*?
2. If you could be friends with any character from the novel, who would it be and why?
3. If you were to be cast on any reality TV show—which would it be and why?
4. The Squad are the ideal friends. Who are some of your other favourite friendships in fiction?

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