

The Briar Club

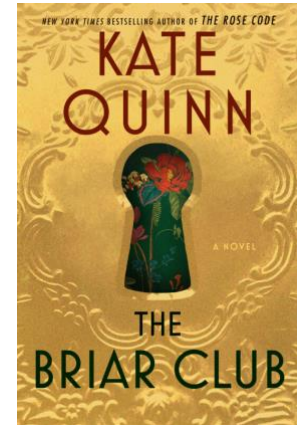
By Kate Quinn

Reviewed by: Cheri Li, 16

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At the height of the McCarthy's Red Scare in 1950, the Briarwood House contains a variety of all-female boarders, each with secrets of their own. The perceptive, sympathetic Grace March, who unites her messy array of neighbors during turbulent times in Washington, D.C. There is Fliss, an English housewife and mother with deep emotional struggles; snippy Arlene, propagator of McCarthy ideology; Bea, an ex-baseball star; and Nora, a young, pretty government worker. Adding onto the group are Reka Muller, an elderly Hungarian refugee, and Claire Hallet, full of cynicism and dreams for a better life. Amongst this unique group, who meet at Grace's room for weekly dinner, secrets are plentiful, and one day, it boils over when a someone is found violently murdered.



This book was a very enjoyable murder mystery/historical fiction, and the characters were well thought out, each contributing a unique narrative to the novel. The recount of tensions during McCarthy's Red Scare, post WWII, and the Vietnam War set a tense backdrop that only increases the suspense. Even though there are so many characters, Kate Quinn develops them pretty well, giving a chance for the reader to relate to and sympathize with each one. From Reka's eccentricities to Claire's strong will, the plot was incredibly character driven.

However, each chapter in this novel shifted perspectives from about 6-8 characters and made it harder to concentrate on one single storyline. It is hard to focus on one character, as there are many times jumps and not much of a central plot. I would say the main issue in this novel are the sheer amount of people, Quinn had a harder time making each character feel like a real person and not a perspective of history.

I would recommend this book for those 14 and up, as it is a longer book with mature themes, including gender roles, LGBTQ struggles, and violence. This book was extremely informative on the 1950s US, suitable for those looking to expand their knowledge of history. Overall, this was a great book to read, with wonderful storytelling, and it captured the essence of the McCarthy era extremely well.

Recommended Titles:

The Phoenix Crown by Kate Quinn

The Nightingale by Kristen Hannah

When We Had Wings by Ariel Lawhon