



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

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UCF Alumni Book Club

The 7½ Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle by Stuart Turton

Book Discussion Guide

Book Description

The Rules of Blackheath

Evelyn Hardcastle will be murdered at 11:00 p.m.

There are eight days, and eight witnesses for you to inhabit.

We will only let you escape once you tell us the name of the killer.

Understood? Then let's begin...

Evelyn Hardcastle will die. Every day until Aiden Bishop can identify her killer and break the cycle. But every time the day begins again, Aiden wakes up in the body of a different guest. And some of his hosts are more helpful than others.

About the Author

Stuart is the author of a high-concept crime novel and lives in London with his amazing wife and little girl, and drinks lots of tea.

What else?

When he left university he went travelling for three months and stayed away for five years. Every time his parents asked when he'd be back he told them next week, and meant it.

Stuart is not to be trusted. In the nicest possible way.

He's got a degree in English and Philosophy, which makes him excellent at arguing and terrible at choosing degrees. Having trained for no particular career, he has dabbled in most of them. He stocked shelves in a Darwin bookshop, taught English in Shanghai, worked for a technology magazine in London, wrote travel articles in Dubai, and now he's a freelance journalist. None of this was planned, he just kept getting lost on his way to other places.

He likes a chat. He likes books. He likes people who write books and people who read books. He doesn't know how to write a biography, so should probably stop before we start talking about his dreams or something. It was lovely to meet you, though.

Stuart's debut novel, *The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*, was published in 2018 by Bloomsbury and his second, *The Devil and the Dark Water*, in October 2020.

Bio from [DHH literary agency](#).

Characters:

Major characters:

- **Day 1:** Sebastian Bell: Medical Doctor
- **Day 2 (Repeat):** Roger Collins: Butler at Blackheath House, With A Burnt Face
- **Day 3 (Repeat):** Donald Davies: Brother to Grace Davies
- **Day 4:** Lord Cecil Ravencourt: Banker
- **Day 5:** Jonathan Derby: Son to Millicent Derby
- **Day 6:** Edward Dance: Lawyer
- **Day 7:** Jim Rashton: Police Officer (Referred to As Constable)
- **Day 8:** Gregory Gold: Artist in Residence
- Anna: Who Has Been Presumably Murdered
- Daniel Coleridge: The 'Samaritan', A Professional Gambler
- Dr. Richard "Dickie" Acker: Medical Doctor
- Ted Stanwin: Blackmailer in His Fifties
- Michael Hardcastle: Brother to Evelyn And Thomas Hardcastle, Friend Of Sebastian
- The Plague Doctor
- Evelyn Hardcastle: Sister to Thomas And Michael Hardcastle
- Charles Cunningham: Valet to Lord Ravencourt

Minor Characters:

- Lucy Harper: First Maid
- Thomas Hardcastle: Brother to Evelyn And Michael Hardcastle
- Charlie Carver: Groundskeeper (Relationship W/Helena)
- Helena Hardcastle: Peter Hardcastle's Wife and Mother Of Evelyn, Thomas, And Michael Hardcastle
- Madeline Aubert: Evelyn Hardcastle's French Maid (Evelyn In Disguise)
- Mrs. Drudge: Long-Time Cook at Blackheath House
- Millicent Derby: Mother of Jonathan Derby
- Clifford Herrington: Naval Officer (Retired)
- Peter Hardcastle: Helena's Husband
- Phillip Sutcliffe: Lawyer
- Christopher Pettigrew: Lawyer
- Alf Miller: Long-Time Stable Master
- Grace Davies: Sister to Donald Davies

Reading Group Guide Q's from Book & Additional Questions

Story POV

- What do you think about the story choice written in first-person present where we experience everything as Aiden does?

Characters

- Let's talk over the eight hosts that Aiden inhabits.
 - How did each experience with the host bring him closer to solving the murder?
 - Is there a host that was your favorite?
 - The least?
 - Which one was the most helpful?
 - The least helpful?
- No character is ever what they first appear, something Aiden remarks on a few times throughout the novel.
 - Who was your favorite character, and why did they resonate with you particularly?
 - Which character undergoes the biggest transformation, and were there any characters you started off liking or loathing and changed your opinion about?
- Was there one host who felt more important, or can you see how each character, despite their vices, provided something crucial to the story?
- Did you trust Anna at first? Why or why not?
- Annabelle Caulker, or Anna, is unmasked as someone very different from whom Aiden believes her to be.
 - What do you feel she did to deserve her time in Blackheath, and how do you think Aiden was able to forgive her?
- What did you think about the revelations about who Anna really was, Annabel Caulker?
 - Why was Aiden so determined to still help her despite knowing she killed his sister?
 - Do you think she really has changed?
- Did you believe that Aiden was talking to his future self with Daniel Coleridge or did you not trust Daniel?
 - In what ways did he sabotage Aiden's plans?
- What did you think about Charles Cunnigham (valet)?
 - Why do you think he wasn't a host for Aiden?

- The author said that the character most interesting to write and the host he feels Aiden truly flourishes is Lord Cecil Ravencourt. Do you agree?

Plague Doctor

- Why do you think the plague doctor took such an interest in helping Aiden?
 - Who do you think he and the Silver Tear really were; were they prison guards in a futuristic prison or something else?
 - Why do they wear those costumes?
- Why do you think the Plague Doctor wears that particular costume, and how does it affect his relationship with Aiden?
 - Is the Plague Doctor really the good man that the voice in Aiden's head claims he is?
- Why did the plague doctor choose to have Anna and Daniel in Evelyn's murder mystery prison?
 - What do you think he meant by "Blackheath was built to break devils, not petty thieves?"

Story

- Through all the hosts, there's still a murder mystery.
 - Did you suspect Evelyn's brother Michael or you were surprised at that development?
 - What about the fact the real Evelyn was in hiding?
- What about the revelation that Evelyn killed her brother Thomas?
 - How would everyone's lives been different if Charlie Carver didn't take the blame?
- We don't know much about Aiden's backstory.
 - What do you think he was like before entering Blackheath?
 - Why do you think the author chose not to go too much into his backstory?
- There were many puzzle pieces and characters, did you feel there were any loose hanging threads that were never solved?
- What happens next for Aiden and Anna?
- Do you feel there was an overall theme to the book?

Questions from the book Reading Group Guide

- What or who do you think are the deaths in *The 7½ Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle*? Where does the half death enter the narrative?
- *The 7½ Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle* begins in a typically linear way, then shoots off in many different directions.
 - How did the different narratives and perspectives enrich the story?
- The mystery and escape in *Blackheath* is set up like a puzzle, and the reader plays along with Aiden as he puts the solution together.
 - Were there any pieces you couldn't find a place for?
- Aiden Bishop has a backstory that readers will never know in full; however, what we do know is there is plenty of revenge, cruelty and questionable intentions wrapped up in who he was and why he entered *Blackheath*.
 - With what you know about him, would you call him a hero?
 - Why or why not?
- As Aiden switched from host to host, his protection against their memories and personalities waned until he was feeling their lust, their disgust or their impatience.
 - What characteristics do you feel are solely Aiden's?
 - Outside of *Blackheath*, what sort of man do you think he is?
- Were there any tactics Aiden didn't think of that could have solved the mystery of who killed Evelyn Hardcastle?
 - If you were in his shoes, or hosts, what would you have done differently?
- The construct of *Blackheath* as a prison feels like something from the future, but do you feel this sort of punishment (and possible redemption) could one day be considered a viable solution for criminals?
 - What do you feel the advantages are, and in what ways could this be considered even more cruel than a standard incarceration sentence?
- What recurring symbols or themes did you see throughout the book, and what role do you think they played in the story or Aiden's escape from *Blackheath*?
- If you knew someone you loved had a devastating secret, would you choose to find out what it was or love them for who they've become?
 - If you knew you did something terrible, would you want to remember or live with that shadow for the rest of your life?

Additional Questions:

- Overall thoughts on the book?
- What did you think of the pacing?
- Thoughts on the number of characters?
- Who would you cast in the movie?
- Did you think that the book was a period piece? More of a dystopian novel?

Resources

Discussion Questions

<https://bookclubchat.com/books/book-club-questions-for-the-7-%C2%BD-deaths-of-evelyn-hardcastle-by-stuart-turton/>

Author Interview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9-hCXXJ2X0>