

7 ½ deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle Discussion Questions

by Stuart Turton

Author Bio: (from Fantastic Fiction & Wikipedia)

Stuart Turton is a freelance travel journalist who has previously worked in Shanghai and Dubai. The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle is his debut novel. He is the winner of the Brighton and Hove Short Story Prize and was longlisted for the BBC Radio 4 Opening Lines competition. He lives in London with his wife.



In December 2020 it was announced that Netflix had bought the rights to a seven-part series adaptation of The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle.

Characters:

- **Doctor Sebastian Bell** – Has amnesia. Was attacked in the forest. Has a bump on the back of his head and knife slashes on his arms. Is a dope/Laudanum dealer.
- **Dr Richard (Dickie) Acker** – (60's) – Doctor.
- **Aiden Bishop** – Narrator. Relives the death of Evelyn Hardcastle in a new body each day for 8 days. Had a sister, Juliette.
- **Anna – (Annabelle Caulker)** – Girl in black. Was being chased in forest when a gunshot was heard. Second of the three participants trapped in the loop.
- **Madeline Aubert** – Evelyn Hardcastle's maid. Was with Evelyn in Paris.
- **Charlie Carver** – 19 years ago – Carver and an unknown accomplice murdered Thomas Hardcastle. Drowned the boy and stabbed him. Was scared off by Stanwin. Hanged for his crime.
- **Daniel Coleridge** – Professional gambler.
- **Roger Collins** – Butler. Hurt in an unprovoked altercation with the artist, Gregory Gold. Has a large number of old burn scars.
- **Charles Cunningham** – Lord Ravencourt's valet. Grew up at Blackheath with the Hardcastles. Raised by the Mrs. Drudge, the cook. Illegitimate Hardcastle?
- **Edward Dance** – Older gentleman who thinks old age is a form of weakness. Shrewd. Lawyer for the Hardcastle's. Works with Christopher Pettigrew and Phillip Sutcliffe. Being blackmailed by Stanwin.
- **Donald & Grace Davies** – Socialites. Siblings. Grace is dating Jim Rashton, who was in the army with Donald.
- **Jonathan Derby** – Socialite. Younger man. Millicent's son. Rapist.
- **Millicent Derby** – Older woman socialite. Lifelong friend of Helena Hardcastle. Great at ferreting out secrets. Dies of a heart attack.
- **Mrs. Drudge** – Cook. Has a split lip. Raised Charles Cunningham at the Hardcastle's request.

- **Gregory Gold** – Artist in residence. Commissioned to look after family paintings. Beats Collins with a fireplace poker.
- **Evelyn Hardcastle** – Hardcastle daughter. (Late 20's). Was 10 when Thomas died. Has lived in Paris for the 19 years since Thomas' death. She was supposed to be watching Thomas the day he died. Is to be married to Lord Ravencourt to save the family finances.
- **Lady Helena Hardcastle** – Lady of the Manor. Insists on having the party at Blackheath. Staying in the Manor. Apparently mad. Her revolvers are stolen.
- **Michael Hardcastle** – (24) – Hardcastle youngest son. Was 5 when Thomas died. He is currently studying at Cambridge.
- **Lord Peter Hardcastle** – Lord of the Manor. Staying in the gatehouse. In financial ruins.
- **Thomas Hardcastle** – Died 19 years ago. Was drowned and then stabbed. Thomas was 7-years old when he died. He was killed by Charlie Carver and an unknown accomplice.
- **Lucy Harper** – 1st maid – Nice. No one knows that she is Stanwin's daughter.
- **Commander Clifford Herrington** – Retired naval officer.
- **Felicity Maddox** – Friend of Evelyn's. Offered to help Evelyn in exchange for her signet ring. Con artist?
- **Alf Miller** – Stable master
- **Christopher Pettigrew, and Phillip Sutcliffe** – Hardcastle family lawyers with Edward Dance. Both men are being blackmailed by Stanwin.
- **Jim Rashton** – (27) – Police Officer. In love with Grace Davies. Was in the war with Donald Davies.
- **Lord Cecil Ravencourt** – (60's) – Friend of the Hardcastles. Very intelligent and extremely rich. Obese. Needs a valet to help him around the manor. Is to be married to Evelyn Hardcastle for a large brideprice.
- **Ted Stanwin** – Man who fought off Carver. Used to be a groundskeeper/servant before his elevation for helping to apprehend Thomas' murders. Everyone is afraid of him. Blackmailer.
- **Blackheath** – Hardcastle estate and manor. Nearest village is Abberly.

Day One: Sebastian Bell

Day Two: Roger Collins

Day Three: Donald Davies

Day Four: Lord Ravencourt

Day Five: Jonathan Derby

Day Six: Edward Dance

Day Seven: Jim Rashton

Day Eight: Daniel Coleridge/Gregory Gold

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not?
2. This book is titled The 7 ½ Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle. What does this title reference/mean? Does the title give anything away about the book? Does the title have more than one meaning?
3. What or who do you think are the deaths in The 7½ Deaths Of Evelyn Hardcastle? Where does the half death enter the narrative?
4. 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? Do you like that story telling device? Why or why not?
5. This story is written in first-person present where we experience everything as Aiden does. Did that work well for the story? Why or why not?
6. 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? 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?
7. Do you think the arranged marriage was intended as a way for Evelyn's parents to punish her for what happened to Thomas? Why or why not?
8. 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?
9. Who is the plague doctor? Is he a good or bad person? What makes you think that?
10. 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? How do you think Aiden was able to forgive her?
11. After the completion of her sentence, do you think Annabelle has become a different person in Anna? Has her Blackheath experience been enough recompense for her previous actions?
12. 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?
13. 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?
14. Aiden's personality changes with each new body/day. How much do you feel that your physical makeup affects your personality and actions?
15. What did Aiden learn from each new body he inhabited? 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?

16. 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 hiding?
17. Why did the plague doctor choose to have Anna and Daniel Coleridge in Evelyn's murder mystery prison? What do you think he meant by "Blackheath was built to break devils, not petty thieves?"
18. What is hell? Is it living the same life over and over for 30 years and forgetting who you were after each iteration? Or is it something else? Can rage and vengeance be a prison of a person's own making?
19. "How can you tell if a monster is fit to walk the world again? If they're truly redeemed and not just telling you what you want to hear? You give them a day without consequences and you watch to see what they do with it." (p371). What do you think about that statement? What else could you do?
20. Could Aiden have escaped without Anna? Could Anna have escaped without Aiden?
21. What happens next for Aiden and Anna?
22. Who was the most at fault in this book? The least?
23. Turton has written a second book. Will you read it?

References:

- DHH Literary Agency – <http://www.dhhliteraryagency.com/stuart-turton.html>
- Fantastic Fiction – <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/t/stuart-turton/>
- Novelist – <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.clevnet.org/novp/detail?vid=2&sid=f5f60c8b-2770-4df3-ba8d-c74afb6583b2%40sessionmgr103&bdata=JnNpdGU9bm92cC1saXZl#UI=10625596&db=neh>
- Reading Group Guides – <https://www.readinggroupguides.com/reviews/the-7-12-deaths-of-evelyn-hardcastle/guide>
- Wikipedia -- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stuart_Turton

Stuart Turton Books

Standalone Novels:

- The 7 1/2 Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle (2018)
 - The Devil and the Dark Water (2020)

If you liked The 7 1/2 Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle, try...

- Jack Glass – Adam Roberts
 - The Gentleman – Leo Forrest
 - Life After Death – Kate Atkinson
 - Man in the Empty Suit – Sean Ferrell
 - The Lake House – Kate Morton
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