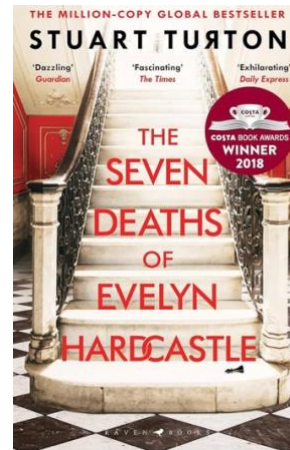


## **The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle**

**By Stuart Turton**



This novel won the Best First Novel at the 2018 Costa Book Awards, was No 1 on Saturday Times 2018 best seller list and No 5 on the Sunday Times best seller list 2018.

This was a long, arduous read for some of the group – not everyone finished it but one member actually read it twice to better understand the plot and interplay! The rest of us thought she deserved a medal! This review is longer than usual because of the various interpretations by group members all of which deserved space.

Aiden Bishop relives the same day eight times, each time inhabiting bodies of different guests to solve the murder of Evelyn Hardcastle at a mysterious manor house called Blackheath. He finds himself trapped in a supernatural loop, forced to relive the same day repeatedly, each day occupying the body of a different guest at Blackheath, a decaying manor in the English countryside where a masked ball takes place each night. He has to try and solve the murder of Evelyn Hardcastle who is destined to die at 11pm that night. If he fails to uncover the murder within the eight iterations, he will be reset and lose all memories of his previous attempts.

Some comments from members:

“I was intrigued by the premise of this book with its original take on the classic murder mystery. As I read, however, I found myself becoming increasingly disinterested. The dazzling pyrotechnics of the storytelling started to feel repetitive and tiresome and, feeling no emotional connection to any of the characters, I have to confess that I gave up well before the (500+ pages) end.”

“Fortunately, I managed to get an audio copy of this book and so I was able to read it quite quickly. However, I didn’t realise there was a list of the characters at the front of the library book, and I got very confused with the characters. This is not my sort of book, and I didn’t take much interest but wanted to know the outcome. After I had finished, I found the list of characters in the book and decided to read the book again to see if I could make more sense of it. I quite enjoyed the first half of the book but then lost interest as more and more unpleasant scenes unravelled. But I did persevere to the end again.

This is a very dark story like a bad dream on a loop that you can’t get off. The plot is very complicated and even though I read it twice I couldn’t tell you what really happened to Thomas. I thought the idea of retelling the story in different characters was a clever idea but for me it went on too much. Too many evil characters for my liking too many murders and evil doings. It might be clever writing, but no thank you not for me!”

“This book is an imaginative and challenging portrayal of thriller genre. We are introduced to Blackheath, a country pile in decay and decline, a class structure that is gradually crumbling away, changing the outlook of society.

We are challenged with the protagonist morphing from one character to another every day with the purpose of finding out what happens to Evelyn Hardcastle. This has the suggestion of the ancient pagan belief of Shamanism whereby an animal or ancient witch could shapeshift to another being.

As the book progresses, we learn of the secrets of the different characters. In the end, we find out the purpose of the house – the occupants paying for crimes committed. Aiden and Evelyn are released from Blackheath as a result of finding the murderer.”

“Before starting this book, I read the author’s note where he explains his inspiration for the story was Agatha Christie whose book were introduced to him by a neighbour when he was 8 years old. I started reading Agatha Christie at about the same age – my father used to borrow them from the library, and, like a Christie novel, many clues were not recognisable until the end – like the map and invitation before the story and the ongoing appearance of the chess piece. I loved this book, it pulled me in from the

start – the setting, the weather, the dilapidate hall, the masked ball, the characters and jumping through time and people – Groundhog Day meets Quantum leap! Keeping up with the characters was quite a challenge but added to the interest, not being able to distinguish between the good and bad guys until the very end. The final twist was brilliant. I would read this book again.”

“I wanted to make sense of the story from the time Sebastian Bell wakes up in the forest. I thought perhaps he had been drugged and kidnapped. When we are told about the child who had died many years before I thought perhaps, he was implicated and the purpose of gathering the guests was to find out who was guilty. I realised it was going to be difficult when Sebastian woke up in the body of Roger Collins! There were limited ways this could be explained – a nightmare? When it became clear this was not likely to be the case, I lost much interest in the story as it seemed to be slipping into the world of the supernatural or fantasy. I found it rather nightmarish when he woke up in the body of Lord Ravenscroft and his horror of being too fat to manage the stairs or get in and out of the bath unaided. He doesn't become another person; he just looks like them and is treated as the “other person”. How many other people are not in their “original” body? He has lost his memory so doesn't know who he really is – are the others the same? So many questions! If I woke up as someone else, would I co-operate and be that person? Seems unlikely. Is it rather like a computer game.....?”

“I thought the story was an interesting and slightly macabre concept.

I found the characters and setting to be old fashioned.

It was like an old fashioned 'who did it' or a Cluedo game.

Lots of different characters and 'hosts' and I sort of lost track to be honest and a little bit of my will to carry on with it!

It was quite a long read too which added to the angst of it but I did want to know how it would turn out and I thought the ending was good.

All in all, an OK book for me but too long winded and dragged on. Was complicated and hard to keep up with who was who.”

**Christine Wright**