Stuart Turton – Q&A

**What inspired you to write The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle?**

I started reading Agatha Christie novels when I was eight. I’d devour them one after another when I should have been outdoors making friends and being less weird. When I was 21 I decided to have a crack at writing one myself. It was rubbish.

I had a little think about what I’d done wrong and realised Christie books were great because she always had great idea at the centre of them. I didn’t have anything. Being 21 and convinced of my own genius, I was certain I’d come up with something awesome in a week, or a month tops. Ten years later, I was on a flight to Qatar when my head drifted back to that Agatha Christie-mystery I wanted to write. Somehow Groundhog Day and Quantum Leap had congealed over the top of it. I got my laptop out and dashed off 2,000 terrible words, and that was the start.

**When did you first develop a passion for writing?**

A children’s author whose name I, sadly, can’t remember came into my school when I was a kid. She described the power of being a writer; how anything you could imagine was possible, whether that was dropping bullies into a pit of scorpions (her words!), or finding lost civilisations on the moon. She was so passionate that when I got home I wrote a little story. I gave it to my family to read and then I edited it endlessly, even though it was only a paragraph long. That was my first writing hit, and I’ve been addicted ever since. I’ve never dropped any of my characters into a pit of scorpions, though. It’s on my to-do list.

**What is your writing process?**

I travel a lot, so I tend to write on trains, planes and in airport lounges. My best stuff comes in the

morning and evening, while everything in the middle of the day is utter rubbish. Honestly, I might as well smack my head against the keyboard for all the sense I’ll make. I tend to use that time to edit whatever I wrote the day before. I’m not a fan of goals. Writing’s stressful enough, as it is, without putting artificial word counts on what I’m doing. If it’s good, I keep doing it. If it’s bad, I stop and play my guitar until my brain unknots itself – then I try again. Some days I play A LOT of guitar.

**How did you develop the characters in The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle?**

I used the bodies as pacing as much as plot, so their various ages, physical health and relative

intelligences were used to speed up or slow down the story at various points. For example, early in the book, I needed somebody to run around the house getting in scrapes, so I invented a character who was young, fit, and very stupid. He’d been preceded by a banker who was overweight, but extremely clever. Basically, every time the protagonist got a new body, I wanted it to be as different from the last one, as possible, and have challenges built in he had to overcome. As for keeping track of them, it’s amazing what you can do with the world’s largest supply of post-it notes, a vast spreadsheet, and separate notebooks for each character, detailing their motivations, habits, and peculiarities.

**The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle is your debut novel. What are your favourite debut novels?**

The God of Small Things is my favourite novel ever, and just so happens to be a debut, so this was a very easy question.

**Who are your favourite crime novelists?**

I love Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, and I’ve obviously got to give Agatha Christie the nod otherwise she’ll rise up from her grave and haunt me in an incredibly tricksy way.

**Aiden Bishop wakes up each day as a different Blackheath party guest. If you could relive the same day eight times, but through the eyes of eight different people, who would they be and why?**

Urgh, I can’t imagine anything worse than living the same day over and over again. I get bored of M&Ms halfway through the bag. I’m the most restless person on the planet, which is probably why I made my Groundhog Day loop so resoundingly miserable. I’ll pass, thanks.

**What advice would you give to emerging writers?**

Depends what they’re emerging from. If it’s a sewer, I’d suggest taking a shower immediately; if it’s a swimming pool, they should definitely hit the sauna. Jokes aside, my only advice to anybody who’s writing anything is to make sure you finish the damn thing. It’s the easiest thing in the world starting a project – but finishing might be the hardest.