

Book Review

Meeting date: Friday 9th May

The Devil and the Deep Water by Stuart Turton

About the Author

Stuart Turton (born 1980) is an English author and journalist. He has written three books. His debut novel "The Seven Deaths of Evelyn Hardcastle" (2018) won the Costa First Novel award and The Books are My Bag Readers award for Best Novel. A Sunday Times best seller, it sold 200 thousand copies across the UK alone, has been translated into over 30 languages.

The Devil and the Deep Water, his follow up novel, won the Books are My Bag readers award for fiction and was picked for the Sara Cox Radio 2 Book Club and the BBC2 Between the Covers Book Club.

Stuart's most recent novel, The Last Murder at the end of the World (2024), went to number one on the Sunday Times Bestseller list.

Stuart was born and raised in Widnes, England and was educated at University of Liverpool where he received a BA(Hons) in English and Philosophy. After graduating he spent a year working as a teacher in Shanghai, before becoming a technology journalist in London. He moved to Dubai to become a travel journalist, living there for three years until he returned to London to write his first novel. He is described as tall and lanky and lives with his wife in London.

Stuart writes detective/mystery/crime fiction that keeps you guessing!

About the Book

It's a horror/mystery novel set in 1634 on board an Indiaman ship. Samuel Pippes, the world's greatest detective, is being transported to Amsterdam to be tried for a crime he may, or may not, have committed. But no sooner is the Scardam out to sea than devilry begins to blight the voyage. Strange symbols appear on the sails, livestock are slaughtered, ominous whispers travel throughout the crowded decks...and then comes the first murder! With Pippes imprisoned in the depths of the ship, can his loyal bodyguard, Avent Hayes, solve the mystery before the ship descends into anarchy?

Lots of themes are raised in the book: the role of women, women's determination, slavery, navigational issues and roles on board a ship, power, fear, wealth and what motivates people to behave as they do.

It is a book of multiple layers of deception and even at the last minute there is a twist in the tale!

A bit of Holmes and Watson, a touch of Treasure Island but there's much more too: the lives of women at the time, the contemporary obsession with witchcraft and most of all the authentic stink, creak, superstition and slop of life on board an Indiaman, scary sailors and all! **Daily Mail**

Discussions and comments

The role of women:

The wife Sarah disliked her husband the Governor General. She was used by him, but she also used him. Giving in to him allowed her to have a life of her own. She was an important lady but also a healer. She was strong and capable; she helps lead the investigation and has a soft spot for Avent. She was able to don pheasant cloths and not be recognised!!

Krishna, his mistress was also used. She stayed with him at nights as he was afraid of the dark and being alone. She also needed him to get what she wanted.

The daughter was an inventor. She'd never been on a ship or anywhere except the confines of home really but was able to invent and create amazing things.

Isabelle. She was suspicious at first but ended up helping solve the mystery.

Life at Sea:

The book gave good descriptions of what life was like on board during a long eight months at sea. The perils of bad weather, pirates, mutiny and illness. A lot went on and was endured. Heading out to sea made the ships very vulnerable and the people on board too. We only learn about the successful voyages but how many didn't make it? They set off to sea without enough food to sustain the voyage of eight months which was madness.

Who has Power:

The Governor General did but he was a weak man. He hides away, wears a chest plate to protect himself and hates the dark.

The people who installed fear. They had the power to make people afraid and act in certain ways.

People with money had power. The wealth of the Dutch East Indian company gave them power.

'The Folly' symbolised power.

Krishna she was very money orientated. She was able to better herself and get herself in a strong position.

Comments and final thoughts:

The 'eighth' boat was a clever idea, but the island was too fantastical!

It kept you guessing as to who were the 'goodies' and the 'baddies'!

There was a feel-good ending.

The complexities of the story I liked. It was the curiosity that kept me reading.

Stuart is creating a fantasy but there is enough reality to keep us engaged. The 'Old Tom' fears would have been real; superstitions of the time were real and made people afraid.

Writing out a story board for this novel would have been very complicated!!

I only got halfway through it. I persevered but.. no! I didn't care who did it. I've read good historical books. I liked the mention of the East India company though and bought a book to find out more about it.

When I finished the book, I didn't know what I thought. Bits I engaged with. Too many references to the ship which were confusing and too many references to bodily functions for my liking! I

enjoyed the parts about the old town and how it was for women. Not a favourite and wouldn't have read if not a book club book.

I managed to finish it – an achievement! I like historical novels. It was a bit shallow i.e. the relationship between Sarah and Avent. I wouldn't read another of his books.

In terms of a who done it, an historical novel set on a ship I enjoyed it, it was clever. I wanted to get to the end and find out who did it, I also looked up more about the shipping company.

I thought it was clever. Read it quickly to find out who did it.

When i saw the book i thought it was going to be dark. The burning of the leper drew me in. A good start. I enjoyed reading about the characters. The descriptions of them and the ship were good. I got into it and enjoyed it. It made me smile. It was humorous in places. I thought it was a clever ending.

It wouldn't have been a book I would normally read but I enjoyed it. At the beginning of the book, it was quite hard to connect people. An Agatha Christie book on a ship! Intrigue, greed, oppression of women included plus descriptions of life on board. Quite a page turner!

I enjoyed the book. I wasn't sure I would when I started it, but it was an enjoyable mystery with an interesting plot and unexpected twists. A mix of historical fiction, mystery and horror. I liked the mix of characters and the relationships between them.

Super book. Kept my interest throughout and I didn't guess the plot. Brilliant descriptions. I was there with the lurching of the ship, the smells and fears. It was helpful to have the layout of the vessel and main characters at the front. Greed and ambition spreading fear and carnage. Revenge kills and suspicion reigns!

Scores:

9, 2, 6, 6, 7.5, 8, 8.5, 8, 8.

Overall, we gave it 7