

And Then There Were None

by Agatha Christie · Language: EN

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Overview

And Then There Were None is Agatha Christie's masterpiece of suspense and the best-selling mystery novel of all time. The story begins with eight strangers, each invited to a remote, isolated island off the Devon coast under different pretexts. They are greeted by the butler and his wife, who are also new to the island, and soon discover that their mysterious host, U.N. Owen, is absent. After dinner, a recorded voice accuses each of them of a specific murder that they have gotten away with in the past. Terrified and trapped, they realize the killer must be among them, and as the guests begin to die one by one, following the pattern of a nursery rhyme about ten little soldier boys, paranoia and fear escalate.

The novel is a brilliant puzzle, a closed-circle murder mystery where the reader is challenged to deduce the identity of the killer before the final reveal. As the body count rises, the survivors turn on each other, revealing their guilt, secrets, and true natures. The narrative is tightly plotted, with each death mirroring a verse from the rhyme, and the tension is masterfully sustained until the very end. The book's significance lies not only in its ingenious plot but also in its exploration of justice, guilt, and the nature of punishment. The final twist, revealed in an epilogue, is considered one of the most shocking and satisfying in crime fiction, making the novel a timeless classic that has influenced countless mysteries and adaptations.

Key Takeaways

- The novel demonstrates that guilt and conscience can be as deadly as any external threat, as the characters are psychologically tormented by their past crimes.
- Christie's closed-circle setting creates a perfect environment for suspicion and paranoia, showing how quickly trust erodes when survival is at stake.
- The nursery rhyme 'Ten Little Soldier Boys' serves as a chilling blueprint for the murders, adding a layer of macabre inevitability to the plot.
- The book challenges the notion of legal justice, asking whether those who escape the law should face a different kind of retribution.
- The final solution reveals that the most unlikely person can be the mastermind, proving that appearances are often deceiving.
- The novel's structure, with its alternating perspectives and diary entries, keeps the reader guessing while providing clues that are fair but hidden in plain sight.

- The theme of 'an eye for an eye' is explored through the killer's twisted sense of morality, making the reader question the ethics of vigilante justice.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1

Eight strangers arrive at Soldier Island, each having received an invitation from a host they have never met. They are greeted by Mr. and Mrs. Rogers, the butler and cook, who are also new to the island. The guests include Vera Claythorne, a former governess; Philip Lombard, a soldier of fortune; Emily Brent, a strict spinster; Judge Wargrave, a retired judge; Dr. Armstrong, a physician; Anthony Marston, a reckless young man; and General Macarthur, a retired general. They settle into their rooms and notice a framed nursery rhyme about ten little soldier boys. At dinner, they discuss their host, U.N. Owen, and realize that the name is an alias for 'Unknown.'

Chapter 2

After dinner, a gramophone record plays a voice accusing each guest of a specific murder: Vera of killing her charge Cyril, Lombard of abandoning men in Africa, Miss Brent of dismissing her maid Beatrice, Wargrave of sentencing an innocent man, Armstrong of operating while drunk, Marston of killing two children in a car accident, Macarthur of sending his wife's lover to his death, and the Rogerses of murdering their former employer. The guests are stunned and deny the accusations, but the atmosphere turns hostile. They decide to leave the island the next morning, but the boat that brought them does not return. Anthony Marston, laughing at the situation, chokes on his drink and dies, poisoned.

Chapter 3

The remaining guests are shaken by Marston's death. Dr. Armstrong confirms it was cyanide poisoning, and they realize the killer is among them. They search the island but find no other inhabitants. Mrs. Rogers faints and is put to bed. The group gathers in the drawing room, and they notice that one of the ten soldier figurines on the table is broken. They begin to suspect each other, and the tension rises. General Macarthur, in particular, becomes withdrawn, believing he will not leave the island. The chapter ends with the group deciding to keep watch through the night, but they are unable to prevent the next death.

Chapter 4

In the morning, Mrs. Rogers is found dead in her sleep, apparently from an overdose of chloral hydrate. The doctor notes that she died in her sleep, and the death is ruled as natural, but the others know it is murder. They discover that the second soldier figurine is broken. The group becomes increasingly paranoid, and they search the island again, finding no trace of the killer. General Macarthur is found sitting alone on the beach, resigned to his fate. He tells Vera that he knows he will not survive, and that the killer is someone who has already been judged. Later,

Macarthur is found dead, struck on the head, and the third figurine is broken.

Chapter 5

The remaining guests are now convinced that the killer is following the nursery rhyme. They try to reason who among them could be the murderer. Judge Wargrave suggests that the killer must be someone who has a personal vendetta against all of them. They also discover that the invitations were all sent by different people, and that the names on the guest list are all connected to the deaths mentioned in the accusations. The tension escalates as they realize that the killer is methodical and patient. They decide to stay together, but the stress begins to take its toll. Rogers, the butler, is found dead in the woodshed, chopped with an axe, and the fourth figurine is broken.

Chapter 6

With Rogers dead, the group is now down to six. They are increasingly desperate and suspicious. Miss Brent becomes more religious, believing that the deaths are divine punishment. Vera begins to feel the psychological strain, and she and Lombard form a tentative alliance. They discover that the boatman who brought them to the island has not returned, and they are truly cut off. Dr. Armstrong and Judge Wargrave discuss the possibility that the killer is among them, and they try to piece together the clues. The atmosphere is thick with fear, and the characters begin to reveal more about their pasts, each trying to prove their innocence.

Chapter 7

The group is now down to five. Miss Brent is found dead in her room, with a hypodermic needle in her hand, and the fifth figurine is broken. The remaining guests are Wargrave, Armstrong, Lombard, Vera, and Blore (a former detective who had been invited under a false name). They realize that the killer is among them, and they become even more paranoid. They search the island again, but find nothing. The tension reaches a breaking point when they discover that Judge Wargrave has been shot in the head, apparently killed. The remaining four are now convinced that the killer is one of them, and they begin to turn on each other.

Chapter 8

With Wargrave dead, the group is down to four: Armstrong, Lombard, Vera, and Blore. They are exhausted and terrified. They decide to stay together, but the strain is too much. Armstrong goes missing, and they search the island, finding his body washed up on the shore. The sixth figurine is broken. The remaining three are now certain that the killer is among them. Blore is killed by a large marble clock thrown from a window, and the seventh figurine is broken. Vera and Lombard are the only ones left, and they turn on each other, each suspecting the other of being the killer.

Chapter 9

Vera and Lombard are the last two left. They are both exhausted and desperate. Vera accuses Lombard of being the killer, and he denies it. They hear a noise and go to investigate, and Vera

sees a figure that she believes is the killer. She picks up a gun and shoots Lombard, who falls dead. She then returns to the house, believing she is safe. She sees a noose hanging from the ceiling in her room, and she realizes that the killer is still alive. She is overwhelmed by guilt and fear, and she hangs herself. The chapter ends with the final soldier figurine broken, and the island is silent.

Epilogue

The police arrive on the island and find ten dead bodies. They are baffled by the case, as there is no sign of an outside killer. They piece together the events, but they cannot explain how the last few deaths occurred. The mystery is left unsolved until a confession is found in a bottle, written by Judge Wargrave. He reveals that he was the mastermind, and that he had planned the entire sequence of events to execute justice on those who had escaped the law. He had faked his own death, and he had manipulated the others into killing each other. He then committed suicide, ensuring that the final death would be his own. The confession explains every detail, and the case is closed.

Themes

- Justice and retribution
- Guilt and conscience
- Isolation and paranoia
- The nature of evil
- The inescapability of the past
- Moral hypocrisy

Notable Quotes

- "Ten little soldier boys went out to dine; One choked his little self and then there were nine." — The nursery rhyme that hangs in each guest's room and foreshadows the deaths.
- "In the midst of life, we are in death." — Said by Judge Wargrave after the first death, reflecting the suddenness of mortality.
- "I have a feeling that I'm not going to leave this island." — General MacArthur's resigned statement to Vera, indicating his acceptance of his fate.
- "The whole thing is fantastic. It's like a nightmare." — Vera Claythorne's expression of disbelief and horror as the deaths mount.
- "I'm not a murderer. I'm a judge." — Judge Wargrave's assertion when accused, highlighting his self-perceived role as an instrument of justice.
- "The truth is, I'm not a very nice person." — Philip Lombard's candid admission to Vera, revealing his morally ambiguous nature.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is *And Then There Were None* about?

And Then There Were None is a mystery novel about ten strangers invited to a remote island, where they are accused of past murders and killed one by one according to a nursery rhyme. The story follows their growing fear and suspicion as they try to identify the killer among them.

Is *And Then There Were None* worth reading?

Yes, it is widely considered Agatha Christie's masterpiece and one of the greatest mystery novels ever written. Its ingenious plot, psychological depth, and shocking twist make it a must-read for fans of the genre and anyone who enjoys a gripping, suspenseful story.

How does *And Then There Were None* end?

Spoiler: The last two survivors, Vera and Lombard, turn on each other; Vera shoots Lombard, then hangs herself. In the epilogue, a confession reveals that Judge Wargrave, who faked his own death, orchestrated all the murders to execute those who escaped justice, then killed himself.

Who should read *And Then There Were None*?

Fans of classic mystery and crime fiction, readers who enjoy psychological thrillers, and anyone who appreciates clever plotting and a satisfying twist. It is also a great introduction to Agatha Christie's work for new readers.

How long does it take to read *And Then There Were None*?

The book is about 264 pages long, and at an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, it takes roughly 4 to 5 hours to read. Most readers finish it in a few sittings due to its fast-paced, gripping narrative.