



The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August

Claire North

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Some stories cannot be told in just one lifetime. Harry August is on his deathbed. Again.

No matter what he does or the decisions he makes, when death comes, Harry always returns to where he began, a child with all the knowledge of a life he has already lived a dozen times before. Nothing ever changes.

Until now.

As Harry nears the end of his eleventh life, a little girl appears at his bedside. "I nearly missed you, Doctor August," she says. "I need to send a message."

This is the story of what Harry does next, and what he did before, and how he tries to save a past he cannot change and a future he cannot allow.

The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August Details

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Author : Claire North

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From Reader Review The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August for online ebook

Craig Allen says

1.5 stars. Never have I ever been so happy to finish a book. Reading this one was an absolute chore, but I just couldn't quit because I hate quitting books. And I wanted to see how it ended, so I guess I did care to an extent. It dragged on and on and on and so much history stuff and rambling. I thought it was this terrible book, a cure for insomnia, until I got on here and saw all the 5 star reviews. Maybe it was just not my cup of tea. I will say it picked up in the last 30% or so and the first 20% was good, but the middle was a big bore. It's the story of a type of person that lives their lives over and over after their death, no matter how they die, and what happens when someone in the group attempts to change the world, which is a big no-no. A great idea for a story, but really rambled too much for me. Kind of like this review. :) Definitely not recommended for anyone that has any sort of A-D-D.

Bob Milne says

There's at least one book each year that strives to be the next big mainstream/genre crossover . . . one book that tries to achieve a sort of mainstream literary respectability, while still managing to resonate with genre fans. More often than not, those crossovers don't work, and just end up disappointing one group, while alienating the other. As such, I'm always a bit reluctant to give those books a read, but read them I do, hoping that, this time, there really is a crossover success in the making.

With that said, I am pleased to declare that *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August* is indeed the first crossover success of the year. Whoever Claire North really is, she (or he) demonstrates a flair for literary magic here, coupled with an honest love for the genre.

At its roots, this is a hard science fiction novel, one that deals with the complexities and paradoxes of time travel, as well as the intellectual and political drivers of scientific progress. In different hands it could have been dense and dry, boring to some, and bewildering to others. Fortunately, Claire North is able to easily convey such lofty concepts and explore them in a conversational manner. There is a definite 'geek' factor to the conversations between Harry and Vincent, which are often as amusing as they are fascinating, but the discussion never goes over the head of mainstream readers. It's a smart book, but one that tries very hard not to boast about its own intelligence.

On the surface, this is a mainstream novel about one man's journey (okay, journeys) through life. It's a story of love, loss, triumph, sorrow. In fact, there's an almost Dickensian feel to the story of Harry's birth, his complicated parentage, and his ever-changing idea of family. For, you see, no matter how long or short his life, Harry is reborn to the same parents, in the exact same situation, every time . . . but with the memories of all his past lives. Everything else about him changes - who he loves, what he does, how he dies - but he always begins the same way. There's a sad inevitability to his life, in that no matter what he does he will always die to begin again, but there's also a wondrous sort of potential in how he chooses to live each new life.

Just beneath that literary surface, nurtured by those genre roots, is the heart of the story. As we quickly learn, Harry is not alone in his cycle of rebirth and remembrance. In fact, there's a legendary/mythical Chronus Club that has arisen over the centuries to bring them all together, an informal group that's as much about playing elaborate games as it is about maintaining the temporal status quo. While members are free to dabble

with possibilities and experiment with new experiences, there are key events that must be allowed to proceed as they always have before. That means no assassinating Hitler before he comes to power, no preventing JFK's assassination, and no interference in the fate of the Twin Towers. Of course, when you're talking about immortals, reborn with lifetimes of memories, it's no surprise that one or two should be tempted to break the rules . . . which brings us to Vincent.

Without spoiling too much, Vincent is a man much like Harry, except he's not content with merely living one life after another. He's begun advancing technological progress across the globe, picking up where he left off with each new life, bringing progress to mankind faster and faster, with an eye towards becoming something more than just physically immortal. Burdened with the knowledge that Vincent's efforts are hastening the end of the world, bringing it closer each and every time, Harry takes it upon himself to interfere. It is their complex relationship that ultimately drives the narrative, keeping the reader engaged, and providing the true emotional and intellectual heart of the story. Here are two men who understand each other better than anybody alive, who share so many of the same hopes and dreams, and who have been friends, allies, adversaries, and mortal enemies, depending upon the life lived.

It's the strength of Harry as character that keeps us engaged, and his strength as a narrator that keeps us from getting lost in the sometimes scattered recollections of his lives. Just as importantly for a book involving time travel and resurrection, there's genuine tension to the story, and honest surprises along the way. Even the final confrontation is perfect, tying up all fifteen lives in a manner that not only makes sense, but which is as ingenious as the story demands. All said, *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August* is an exceptionally well-written novel, one that flows quickly and easily in spite of the lofty ideals sometimes being explored, and which offers something of substance for all readers, no matter how their shelves may lean.

Originally reviewed at Beauty in Ruins

Brendon Schrodinger says

Read the blurb and you are going to think like I did. Hasn't 'Groundhog Day' and Ken Grimwood's *Replay* finished this genre? It's a great premise, but more of a novelty. But then I thought that going into the recent film 'About Time' which charmed my pants off (nothing to do with a goofy red-headed protagonist with the ability to travel through time, no siree).

Surely this novelty situation has been done by now.

Well maybe *now* it has, because after reading this novel I sure as hell know it certainly wasn't before.

While the premise is not fresh, Claire explores the implications of the scenario to the extreme. She pushes this mini-genre to it's absolute limits. She explores this scenario with an intelligence and inventiveness that astounds.

Take any good SF story that creates an interesting premise and after you finish it you daydream about the situation and think 'wouldn't it be cool if they did this' or 'maybe if the author went in this direction they could have explored this aspect a little more'. I dread to think that I cannot do that with this book. Claire has managed to delve into any possible imagination and with the unique style of the premise has been able to present all of these possible ideas. Yes you can attribute some of this potential to the genre, but Claire sure brings the ideas and milks the potentials to the nth degree.

I also admire the writing in other ways. Firstly there is science in here. And even projected near-future

science. And while it is obvious that Claire is not a scientist and the real concepts were not explained too scientifically, the author managed to tread the line of having science in a story that was entirely credible to a scientist. There was no showing off. There were no inconsistencies. There was no injecting random scientific jargon. This is how non-scientific SF should be written.

Another aspect that I admire is that the author did not fall into a most obvious trap. And this is probably one that is spoilerific so I won't name it. But suffice it to say that most authors of lesser talent would have fallen into that trap so hard and undermined the whole beauty of this book. Indeed had this book been a television show or a comic book that hole would have been fallen into most definitely.

So while it may not have the nostalgia and the charm of the other takes on this concept, it certainly makes up for it in inventiveness and the extreme pushing of all ideas and concepts that eventuate from this situation.

Luffy says

This is a book that draws inspiration from both Groundhog Day and an episode of X-Files whose name escapes me for now. Harry August is a tough negociator. Whenever Harry relives a section of his life he tries hard to do his best to improve his lot. Yes, the main character relives his childhood and does his best to make amends to change his past experiences.

I thought the premise was something slightly stale that needed to be addressed to make more of an impact. But I forget that this book is very much beloved by the Goodreads reviewing community. Maybe I've this reaction because I recently watched Source Code, a sci fi movie with the same flaws as this book.

The reason I'm not delving into the fabric itself of the story is that you can't go into details in this case without getting spoilery. Also, I'm a bit puzzled as to why I didn't like this book as much as others. Before I forget, the book Dark Matter too is a similar, vaguely so, but the impression is imprinted enough to get a tired, cliched, deja vu feeling. This book is subpar IMHO, and though 3 stars is nothing to sneer at, the story doesn't warrant a greater score.

Mangrii says

4,5 / 5

Harry August se ve obligado a vivir una y otra vez su vida tras la muerte, pero conservando todos los recuerdos de sus anteriores existencias cada vez que vuelve a nacer. Todo cambia al final de la decimoprimerá vida, cuando una niña acude a su lecho de muerte alertándolo de que el mundo se acaba cada vez más rápido de lo que debería hacerlo. Así, Harry dedicará sus próximas vidas a intentar investigar y detener el proceso que amenaza con el apocalipsis de la Tierra apresuradamente, adelantando los acontecimientos en la historia tal y como la conocemos.

Claire North (también conocida como Kate Griffin o Catherin Webb) nos presenta un relato de ciencia ficción compuesto por la superposición de las diversas vidas del protagonista de forma no lineal, dosificando la información y dotando la lectura de una constante intriga. Utiliza para ello un narrador en primera persona encarnado por Harry August, relatando en forma de memorias una historia llena de detalles que rompe la secuencia lineal de su vida. El libro consta de capítulos cortos que no suelen exceder las 5 o 6 páginas con

una escritura cuidada y un ritmo que hace que la obra sea ligera y muy amena. North combina de forma muy eficiente la paradoja temporal que supone su mundo, la historia del s.XX por la que nos lleva las vidas de Harry August y una temática thriller en el último tercio de la historia .

Si algo es crucial y llama la atención del libro es la paradoja temporal que supone el amasijo de vidas y posibilidades que puede suponer el desarrollo de una vida en la misma época histórica una y otra vez. Puede sonar confuso tanto salto en el tiempo hacia delante, tantos episodios entremezclados de diferentes vidas, pero para nada lo es, North tiene la habilidad de introducir estos detalles de forma escalona y sencilla de seguir permitiendo engarzar los acontecimientos con ritmo constante. Es interesante el planteamiento de North, por muchos cambios que se lleguen a introducir en la historia, ciertos grandes eventos siempre se mantienen de una forma u otra, la historia se mueve por ciclos inmutables.

Los personajes es otro de los puntos fuertes del libro. Interesantes, bien descritos, con personalidades dibujadas y bien construidas, ya que la autora se toma su tiempo para desarrollar a sus protagonistas a través de las historias que narra Harry de sus vidas. Una novela muy sólida e interesante, que muestra como los pequeños cambios pueden afectar a la vida de un hombre, que explora la importancia de las acciones de cada persona en el devenir de los hechos y que compone una serie de historia paralelas de lo más absorbentes. Prepárate para recorrer varios episodios conocidos de la historia en busca de un enemigo no identificado que ha puesto en peligro el futuro de la Tierra. Quince vidas dan mucho por contar, pero a mí no me hubiera importado tener que conocer unas cuantas más.

Reseña en el blog: <https://boywithletters.blogspot.com/2...>

Khanh, first of her name, mother of bunnies says

“This thing you carry inside you, I don’t know what it is. I don’t know where you got it. But Harry, the past is the past. You are alive today. That is all that matters. You must remember, because it is who you are, but as it is who you are, you must never, ever regret. To regret your past is to regret your soul.”

This book is incredible. And I have Mike to ~~blame~~ thank.

Of course, it doesn't hurt that I keep picturing the main character as Eddie Redmayne.

Anyone who knows me will know that this is not my typical reading material at all. I like speed. Action. A fast-paced plot. I hate conspiracies. I don't do drama. Above all else **I fucking hated *Groundhog Day***. I don't want to have to think (I already read the news and think plenty of work), for my reading, I want to be *entertained*. In that sense, this book should have been the antithesis of anything I would ever enjoy.

I was so wrong, so blissfully, gleefully wrong.

What a wonderful book. What a marvelous piece of literature. The hype is real.

This book is about a man who has to relive his life over and over and over, seemingly without end. That is my version of hell. Like most people, I suffer from the ailment of overthinking. I tend to overanalyze my life, I sometimes wished I had another life. I can't think of anything more horrendous than having to relive one's life over and over again. I suppose the prospect might be fun for some, if one is born with a silver spoon in

one's mouth. But what if one were born into hardship? Imagine, say, a child born into the depths of poverty in Africa. There is only so much upward mobility that's possible for such a person. With few exceptions, it is difficult to change one's path in life.

Imagine knowing what's going to happen, and unable to prevent it. All the tragedies, all the needless deaths that have occurred since one's birth. It's enough to drive a person mad.

To relive one's life is nightmarish indeed.

This book explores that concept with exceptional depth and reality. The writing is beautiful. Evocative without being purple-prosey in the slightest. To take a few words from J.K. Rowling, **the author of this book did things with words I've never seen before.** It's magical. She manages to verbalize the concept of a single word, spinning it into a paragraph without making it seem utterly unnecessarily verbose.

Euphoria is, I believe, the term they use to describe the sensation, and upon experience I found it to be an entirely useless definition, as it relies on comparatives that are not apt to the situation. A happiness beyond compare, a contentment beyond understanding, a bliss, a travelling, a freeing of the mind from the flesh—these are all, in their ways, an appropriate description of the process, but they mean nothing, for no recollection can re-create them and no substitute mimic them.

This book doesn't deal with the issue of depression as much as it deals with the issue of existentialism, and in many ways, they're the same.

“I know now that there is something dead inside me though I cannot remember exactly when it died.”

The despair of existence, the fact that one has to relive life after life, finding meaning in each, and then losing it. Making impossible decisions knowing the consequences. Losing loved ones over and over again.

My loss of faith was not revelatory, nor intensely distressing. It was a prolonged growth of resignation, one which the events of my life had only reinforced, until I was forced to conclude that any conversations I had with a deity were entirely one way.

Now to the negatives. The writing aside, **this book moves at the pace of a snail with a broken leg** (I know that snails don't have legs, but isn't that the cutest imagery ever?). Here, have a cartoon.

Nevertheless, the writing more than makes up for the slow pacing.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

\$2.99 Kindle sale, July 29, 2018. 4.5 stars. Harry August lives his life, over and over and over. His memory gradually returns to him when he's a toddler in each life. The first time his prior memories reawaken, in his second life, he thinks he's insane and ends up committing suicide when he's only about seven, only to find himself starting all over again in a third life. Since clearly the suicide route doesn't solve his problem, he gets down to the business of trying to figure out how to best live his ~~life~~ lives.

One of the beauties of Harry's repeated lives is that it lets us explore how many different directions this type of time travel could go, and all the wrinkles that would develop: How much can you gamble on sure things and get away with it? Do you look for the same person to love each time? Do you try to assassinate Hitler or save JFK? Would it work? Should you even try?

In his fourth life Harry tries sharing his secret with others and ends up tangling with people who want to use his knowledge of future events for their own purposes. The one good thing that comes out of this process is that he discovers that there are others like him. They call themselves the Kalachakra, which is a Buddhist wheel of time concept:

or Ouroborans, after the snake eating its own tail:

The Kalachakra have formed secret clubs and try to help each other out, especially during their difficult early childhood years. Club members can (very slowly) pass questions back and forth through time: a young person will give a message to another member when he's old, so that when he is born again he can in turn pass the message to another member who is at the end of her life--and vice versa. And so future connects to past, older to younger. Like any society, they have their rules -- which include not doing anything that will drastically change the future. But someone, somewhere, is breaking the rules, and the message is passed down the line from the future: "The world is ending, sooner and sooner. And we don't know why."

The first half of the novel is more of an exploration of the ramifications of this type of life, but it takes an interesting turn in the second half, into kind of a multi-life espionage thriller, as Harry tries to find out the reasons for this looming global catastrophe. But his involvement leads to more trouble than he could have imagined, and there's an extremely tense and exciting cat-and-mouse hunt in the later chapters that kept me up far too late.

It's interesting that the premise here is so similar to *Life After Life*--it even takes place roughly during the same time period in the early to late 1900's---except that in this book we have the *Groundhog Day* aspect of no loss of memory with rebirth. This book isn't as "literary" as *Life After Life* and I'm sure that many readers won't like it nearly as well as that one. But this novel did have a fair amount of unexpected depth that was welcome, and -- despite a number of plot weaknesses -- I just had so much more fun reading this book than the much bleaker (and far more repetitive) *Life After Life*.

The plot weaknesses are somewhat spoilerish, so read at your own risk:(view spoiler)

These last two plot elements definitely struck me as more convenient than plausible.

4 1/2 stars. I keep thinking that logically this is closer to a four star book than a fiver, but it just captured my imagination and reading it gave me a lot of joy. So I'm rounding up, just because I want to.

Content advisory: Frequent violence (including torture, murder and attempted murder) and a fair number of F-bombs. Lots of amoral and immoral characters.

Rachel says

I'm clearly missing something here (look at all the rave reviews!), but man, it was such a chore to get through this. At one point, the author used the term "glacial sluggishness" to describe something-or-other, and that strikes me as the perfect description for the pace and action in this book. I actually was loving it at the start, but it kept dragging on and on and on and growing more and more tedious as it continued. I felt like I was always a step behind on the science and logic (not sure if this is the book's fault for not explaining things thoroughly enough or mine for not having a very scientific brain). Harry is possibly the least compelling main character I've ever read. Imagine living for centuries and never developing an ounce of personality--incredible in its own way. Ugh. I was tired of reading it, and now I'm tired of reviewing it.

Iulia says

I went in expecting to love this book. The premise is definitely mysterious and intriguing, and the first chapter sets up the story beautifully, with just enough vagueness to keep you interested. However, I ended up just mildly enjoying it, thus the 3 star rating.

Harry August is a "kalachakra", a person who relives their life from birth to death multiple times, while keeping the memories and knowledge gathered during their previous lives. There are some other kalachakras in the world, most of them organized under a secret society. We get from the title that Harry August lives at least fifteen lives, which makes him over a thousand years old (even though all those years are spent in the 20th century)

(view spoiler)

The main drawback of this book is that it is very slow-paced. The first half, which I understand was important from a character development point of view, was however pretty boring. Once the action started, it was a bit cliché and predictable. I kept expecting a twist which I never got. Furthermore, what probably contributed significantly to my lack of enthusiasm was that the setting and the time period are already not my favorite.

On the plus side, both Harry and Vincent are well-developed characters, and their relationship is the highlight of this novel. There is also a philosophical dimension which arises from the immortality of the kalachakras, especially in the context of a fixed time period. What is the purpose of these people? Do they live in a universe where there is an infinity of alternate realities and they are simply able to access the memories of their counterparts from other realities? If so, do the universes where they mess everything up are destroyed after their death? If there is an infinite number of universes, what does it matter if a few are destroyed? These questions, while confusing, are definitely thought provoking.

This book is definitely well written and decently thought out, especially since it features time travel, whose ramifications and complexity are notoriously hard to get right. The characters are well developed and interesting, and if you don't mind the slow pace, you might be in for a treat. I would have honestly preferred to see something similar but without the "living the same life over and over again" dimension. While interesting in its own right, this setup is very limited and can easily get repetitive.

Alienor ✕ French Frowner ✕ says

As much as it pains me to say, **The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August and me have to part ways at 51% for now.** Look, I like this book enough to give it another chance someday (understand : during long, loooong vacations) but as it is, **there's only so much tediousness I can take.**

And oh gosh, **I can't believe how dull this story is, given the amazing concept and interesting premise.** That seemed so cool, okay? And sometimes it is, and I cannot turn the pages fast enough. Other times, though, I just want to wail to express my frustration. Forget the blurb which promises you an exciting, fast-paced journey because that couldn't be further from what The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August is about : indeed it reads more like a character study, and that's okay, I mean, I do like those sometimes, but for that I need to believe in the main character's complexity.

The problem is, I don't. *I can't.* Which leads me to : How can a century-old man be so tame and insipid is beyond me. Also, I have a thing : if a character is tortured and I can't be bothered to care, it means that **there's really something off about the characterization.** Because *Hello*, I am not a sociopath.

Although I loved the first chapters, which hooked me instantly and made me think that I had found a gem, **all the excitement I could feel has been watered down along the very much long way.**

See you someday, Harry, when you grow a personality (and go to the point, damn it!). For now, it just won't do.

For more of my reviews, please visit:

Maria Angelica says

Esse livro é absolutamente fantástico. A narrativa que o Harry nos leva para descrever a sequencia de eventos que culminam no final do livro é super inteligente e divertida. A primeira metade do livro é usada principalmente para nos situar em como funciona o esquema das vidas do Harry e mostrar quem ele é. A outra metade é para resolver o conflito principal do livro que é proposto logo no início: o mundo está acabando e o Harry precisa ajudar a salva-lo.

Eu adorei seguir o Harry por todas as suas primeiras quinze vidas e o seguiria por muitas mais ainda. Na verdade essa seria a única reclamação que eu teria desse livro. Que eu queria ter visto mais da vida do Harry, pq ele é um ótimo personagem. Ele nunca fazia a mesma coisa em cada uma das suas vidas e sempre me surpreendia com as suas atitudes e forma de lidar com o mundo que sempre permanecia o mesmo enquanto ele estava a todo tempo evoluindo.

Muito me impressiona quando eu lembro que a autora desse livro tinha 16 anos quando começou a escreve-lo. Existe uma maturidade na sua escrita que você normalmente não esperaria de alguém da sua idade. É impressionante como ela trata com naturalidade sobre assuntos que ela só terá conhecimento pessoal em algumas décadas. Isso traz um grau elevado de credibilidade para o personagem à medida que as suas vidas vão passando.

Esse livro é para quem está procurando algo diferente, inteligente e divertido.

Emily (Books with Emily Fox) says

I'm a little torn as to how to review this book. Obviously, I liked it since I gave it 4 stars. I even think this would be a great movie!

I love the premise and I really wasn't expecting this.

This Sci-Fi/Thriller really intrigued me but at the same time, some parts were a bit slow. It makes sense if you think that we're literally talking about 15 lives though. A lot will happen but the back and forth was a bit much sometimes.

Overall I totally recommend it if the summary interests you!

****SMALL SPOILER **** (not really in my opinion but just in case...)

I was a little disappointed that there was so many other kalachakra, anyone else?

Bradley says

I'm almost speechless.

This is one hell of a nonlinear exploration of a repeated life, as can be deduced from the title, but it's also a lot more. It's also a lot better, too.

I loved the premise from the get go. All Groundhog Day but stretched for a whole lifetime, and Harry isn't alone. There are others with effective immortality sharing info through repeated but changeable timelines, allowing for a linear continuation of a setting that can be changed with every single revision.

Claire North did an absolutely fantastic job exploring all the ramifications and rules of the existence, but more importantly, she spun a fantastic tale of exploration and intrigue, revenge, and implacable willpower.

Whatever might have begun as a rather humdrum initial character quickly became one of the most fascinating and deep character studies I've had the pleasure to read in quite some time. More importantly, I didn't even have to stew over it, because the writing was as clear as crystal despite the inherent risk of an inherently complex tale falling apart due to being told out of order.

Of course, this was an absolutely fantastic novel. It didn't fall apart at all. More importantly, it sucked me right in even as I wanted to be a part of the premise and the world and DO things there.

For a long while, there were no distractions that I had to focus on exclusively, and I liked that aspect.

Later on, this changed entirely, and it was smart and intense. The later development was very warm, with an extremely sympathetic and likeable villain. I was pretty amazed that it took several lifetimes to finally wrap up satisfactorily, and it truly did satisfy.

This was a serious piece of literature. I'm surprised and kinda shocked that it didn't make the Hugo list last year. If I had this lifetime to do over, I'd make sure everyone knew this was a serious contender and make

sure people knew it was a shoe-in. As it is, I'm pretty sure this novel will stand the test of time, and if there is any justice in the world, people will still be mimicking or talking about it 20 years from now.

Yes. It is that good.

Truly excellent depth and exploration of both story and character, and a premise that is superior to almost any time travel tale I've ever read. I got done with the Lives of Tao series not too long ago, and I really wanted to compare the two because they were close in time and subject, but after reflection, I have to say that this novel is superior in style and seriousness. The other was just plain fun. This one made me believe.

Q2 says

Hot damn.

Good God.

This book was fan-tas-tic.

I read it through NetGalley before it was published. I finished it in one and a half days and as I type this, my husband is reading it. What began as me-forcing-him to sit down and read it turned into voluntary enslavement within the first few pages.

The main character of this book is clearly--Harry August. He is one of a few people on our Earth who live their lives over and over again. They call themselves kalachakras or ouraboras. (I can't check my spelling on that one because, as I said, the husband is currently absorbed.) What I thought might be a book about his lives, and the lives of others like him, quickly becomes an intricate action/drama story. Someone, sometime is changing history for the worse and it's up to Harry to figure out how to discover what's going on and put a stop to it.

North does an amazing job of writing Harry as a believable, immensely likable protagonist; he grows up poor, sort of orphaned, in England. As Harry globe trots and literally lives 'different' lives, North's imagery of each person and place only adds to the richness of this crazy story. I haven't read a book quite like this, with this premise and this sort of forward-momentum. I'm so glad someone had this idea and had the talent to execute it well.

I leave you with an excerpt from the publisher's web site:

"No matter what he does or the decisions he makes, when death comes, Harry always returns to where he began, a child with all the knowledge of a life he has already lived a dozen times before. Nothing ever changes.

Until now.

As Harry nears the end of his eleventh life, a little girl appears at his bedside. 'I nearly missed you, Doctor August,' she says. 'I need to send a message. It has come down from child to adult, child to adult, passed back through generations from a thousand years forward in time. The message is that the world is ending, and we cannot prevent it. So now it's up to you.' "

Vrinda Pendred says

WARNING: There are 'spoilers' in this review.

This is possibly the dullerest book I've ever read. I suppose that deserves credit of some sort. Like 'The House of the Seven Gables', the author excelled at making me feel so claustrophobic and trapped in a realm of endless tedium that I related to the narrator's disgust with life after suffering through just fifty pages. That's not the mark of a good story, though.

The 'plot', if you will (and if I sound like I'm speaking in a pretentious pony way, it's because I've been infected by the style in which this narrative was composed...ahem):

Harry (the narrator) is one of many who live their natural life, only to find that following death, they are reborn in the same life, to start all over again. Most people with this condition (it's never clearly explained why some people have it or how it came about, and the author didn't seem concerned with thinking about this) can't remember details of their previous lives when they're reborn. Yet they remember that they lived again, and that they're doing everything all over again. They bemoan this problem many times.

Harry is one of the rare few who remember 'everything'. He is labelled a 'mnemonic'. Apparently he needs to be killed for this, because he could take knowledge from the end of his life and apply it to the beginning of his next life, thus altering the course of events. Why does this fail so spectacularly as a plot device? Because they also repeat ad infinitum that no matter what you do in each successive life, 'you cannot change anything'. It even says it on the back of the book as part of the synopsis. Yet the whole 'plot' revolves around the fear of things changing. Apparently it's dangerous.

In fact, after pointless fatalistic monologues about how no matter what you do, you can never actually change what's meant to happen...there are complaints that so many of these 'ourobourans' (the reborn) don't understand that 'it's not a good idea to kill Hitler' because of the repercussions of changing history. Um...?

Another mnemonic is a 'friend' and 'enemy' named Vincent, who has a forgetting device (which isn't thought through at all). It doesn't work on Harry, and yet Harry is still scared of it. And although Vincent is meant to remember 'everything' (cue dramatic music), he often forgets he's met Harry in previous lives. Vincent says he's inventing a machine called a 'quantum mirror' that will allow you to realise you're actually God. I'm not kidding, that's how it's 'explained'. There's no visual description. There's no science. There's no philosophical insight. There's no...ANYTHING. I must have read that section ten times before I was willing to accept that the author didn't bother to think this idea through. It isn't even an idea; it's an idea of an idea.

A lot of other reviewers here said the science and philosophy went over their heads. No, it didn't. The ideas presented in this book are actually very basic; the author rehashed a bundle of clichéd pop-science without much original insight. The reason these concepts confused other reviewers is that they're so badly 'explained' it's clear the author herself doesn't know what she's talking about. They didn't relate to anything else that was going on, either.

And what else WAS going on, exactly? Tirade after endless boring pointless mind-numbing agonising soul-destroying pretentious tirade about things like communism - as if ANY of this is new and interesting and insightful in 2015. Harry has the ability to live again and again, and yet this is what he does with his time? Seriously? He never thought to do something more with his time, and he never got so gut-wrenchingly bored to tears with the repetition and monotony that he lost his mind? It isn't plausible in the slightest; no one

would handle such a situation in this manner.

There is also zero characterisation in this book. Even the narrator - I can't tell you a thing about him. He's the most soulless character ever thought up. I've read critical theory textbooks with more personality. He has all this time to think and grow and develop as a human being and he does none of that. He just stands in dreary stuffy rooms drinking whiskey and speculating that life is meaningless. At one point, he says he loved a woman named Jenny and she put him in an institution because she thought he was mad when he told her he knew the future. She's never mentioned again for 300 pages. Finally, it turns out she's married to Vincent. Harry says he's heartbroken, and...I've pretty much worded it the way the book did. That's as deep as it gets. He says he was so in love with her, and then moves on and that's the end of another potential idea of a storyline. Is that meant to be emotion? I also found it incredible that every character happened to be brilliant at quantum physics. Isn't that convenient?

Everyone was an elitist middle-class snob, as well, and utterly pretentious. I wanted to hit every one of them. And there were a lot of them to want to hit, because there was a new character in every single chapter – none but Vincent was never seen again in future chapters. There was no one to hold onto. And when I say chapters, I mean segments of 1-3 pages. That's how long every chapter was, and they all went nowhere. They just dropped off into nothing. Turn the page - scene over - characters gone - why did I read it?

What bothers me most is that this book was promoted as a time travel story. It's NOT A TIME TRAVEL STORY. He repeats his life over and over again. He's not jumping back and forth through time. Yet the author decided to write it as if he did, so you had no idea what was going on. Back and forth, back and forth - the only reason I can think of for her doing this is to disguise the fact that NOTHING HAPPENED. Put it out of order, keep readers guessing if there might be a story, after all! (There wasn't.)

The premise was good. She could have shown the key events in life one, had him die, then shown him reborn, had him be surprised, shown the key events in life two, shown him changing as a person because of it, shown him learning the secrets of his parentage, etc. as a slow mystery; each life, he could have learned more about himself and his roots. We could have seen him having a breakdown at some point, going nuts, before he decided to use the time for something worthwhile, and...oh yeah, that's 'Groundhog Day'. Sorry, all you endorsers on the back of the book - this book ISN'T 'totally original', after all.

Another point is that I had to keep reminding myself the narrator was meant to be a man. He sounded so like a woman, it really threw me when he randomly said he was in love with Jenny. I thought, wow, I didn't get the impression this was a lesbian, at all, and - ohhhh, right, yes, it's a man. I didn't get that impression, either.

And finally - who gives themselves a pen name and then immediately on the inside front cover of the book puts a colour photo of themselves, with the blurb, 'Claire North is the pen name of...', followed by their real name, where they live and what they do as a day job? And then lists their personal interests as things like 'urban magic' and 'graffiti-spotting'? Did I mention this book was pretentious and elitist?

I also have to note that it speaks volumes that all the fans who take the time to comment on my review are hostile, nasty and think it's appropriate to make personal attacks on me without having met me. THAT is why I'm deleting such comments - not because my OPINIONS are 'wrong' or I'm 'too stupid to know how to read' (honestly, someone has thought it okay to say that). Those are the types of people driven to defend this novel - just another reason I HATE this book.

To sum up: I remember a line in 'Catcher in the Rye' when Holden says the sign of a really good book is when you finish it and want to pick up the phone and give the author a call, just to talk. If Claire North called me, I would hang up.

Jenny says

Wow, whatever I was expecting, it definitely wasn't this. It's historical, it's science fictional, it's a spy novel, it's a long episode of DW sans the time & space travel, it's a spiteful letter of twisted friendships and vengeance. WHAT DOESN'T HAPPEN IN THIS BOOK?!

Matthew Quann says

...fifteen reasons to read *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August*

- 1. The Book (or, the short review).** It is a fun, fast paced, endlessly readable novel.
- 2. The Premise.** You live, you die, and that's the end of the road. Except, that's not quite it for the Ouroborans, who live, die, and are reborn to relive their lives. Think of the Ouroborans as those whose lives end at their beginning.
- 3. The Lead Character.** Harry August is compelling, relatable, and a guy I loved to root for throughout the entire read. Despite being an 800-year-old being, he's surprisingly down to earth and still trying to figure out *best stoner voice* *what does it all mean, man?*
- 4. The Other Characters.** The supporting cast of Harry's unique family, the other Ouroborans, and even the minor characters are brought to life by North's deft hand.
- 5. The Villain** Or should I say antagonist? His motivations are not entirely dastardly and, indeed, offer a thoughtful counterpoint to Harry's philosophy. Instead of this character being a mustache-twirling cliché, he's a well thought out foil.
- 6. The Similarities** I found this had touches of Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks* and Atkinson's *Life After Life*, though only insofar as they both deal with reincarnation. I understand that another buzz novel of 2016, *Dark Matter*, also deals with alternate timelines and questionable decisions. I do plan on reading *Dark Matter*, but this book nicely sated my hunger for the alternate timeline genre (which I'm sure I just made up).
- 7. The Differences** There's something unique about this story, and I think its individuality is due to the titular character. There's concepts that may sound similar, but Harry August's journey is different enough that I never felt as if I were retreading old ground. Think of the aforementioned books like a hotdog: the bun may be the same, but the meat and condiments are unique to each hotbook/bookdog.
- 8. The New Twist on a Timeless (eh? eh?) Genre.** You know how some time travel stories play loose and fast with their rules? Not so in North's novel. She establishes rules that are strictly upheld throughout the entire read. There's no *deus ex machina*, no heretofore-unknown aspect of time travel. She sticks to her guns and delivers a take on the genre that feels fresh.
- 9. The World Tour.** This novel moves from England to the furthest reaches of Russia, spends some time in China before hitching a ride to America. I mean, a guy can't live endless lives and not travel a bit, amirite?
- 10. The Short Chapters.** There's something very bingeable about short chapters. I was studying for a massive surgical exam during a lot of my reading, but I was always able to read a chapter or two before drifting off to sleep. When I was finally able to sit down this weekend, I couldn't help but read *just one more*

chapter.

11. The Heartfelt Story. It's so easy for science fiction and fantasy novels to put their cool concepts in the front of the story and have the character work suffer. Hey, I like those novels too! But North delivers both compelling character work and character-motivated plot alongside great concepts.

12. The Lack of Laser Beams. By that I mean, this is a pretty grounded sci-fi. The high concept stuff deals more with extrapolation of theories in physics (which I confess to knowing very little about) than *Star Wars*-esque battles.

13. The Combat. You'll find no swordfights, no gunplay, and only passing physical violence. *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August* plays more with subterfuge, science, romance, and torture than it ever does typical action-fare.

14. The Multiple Genres. I got to thinking after I finished the book: in which mind box would I place it? It certainly has a sci-fi premise, but it also works as a character study. But then I get to thinking about the progress of science versus human cost, the rivalry of two powerful men, the straight-up spy sections and I find it difficult to categorize. Luckily, it all melds together like the disparate ingredients in a good stew.

15. The Writing? North (a pseudonym) is a great writer. I loved her turns of phrases, her believable dialogue, and the way she could bring a scene to life with lively exposition. Though I was never sent to a dictionary, I never felt as if I were reading a novel that was too simple. The pacing was phenomenal, and North has a way of dropping you off the edge of a cliff at a chapter's end, only to reveal your safety harness at the last moment in the next chapter. It is a pleasure to read a novel that is not only fun, but a piece of well-constructed writing.

There you have it...

Dan Schwent says

Harry August is a kalachakra, a man who is reborn at the same point in time over and over with his memories intact. When a little girl warns Harry on his eleventh death bed that the end of the world is coming sooner with each cycle, Harry goes on the offensive. Can he stop the end of the world, even with the help of the Cronus Club?

I got this from Netgalley.

I love a bit of timey-wimey and this book has it in spades. Remember the movie *Groundhog Day* where Bill Murray experiences the same day over and over? Now, imagine the day is a lifetime and there are other people experiencing it as well. That's pretty much the plot.

I'm going to get my gripe out of the way first. The book moves at a glacial pace, mostly due to the constant digressions. The publisher's blurb makes it sound like the world is in jeopardy immediately. Not so. I was 30% of the way through the book by the time the little girl showed up.

That being said, this is a very compelling book. It deals with classic time travel themes like not messing with the past and weighty topics like how our experiences make us who we are. Harry's not the most interesting character I've ever read about but he lives some interesting lives.

Once the little girl finally shows up to warn Harry during his eleventh life, everything is kicked up a notch and Harry's lives finally have a greater purpose. Harry being reborn as himself in the same point in history every time reminds me of reading the same Choose Your Own Adventure book over and over without being able to keep your thumb at the previous choice so you can go back. "Maybe if I run away at age six, everything will turn out okay..."

Kalachakras at the beginning of their life cycles handing off info to kalachakras at the end of theirs was a novel way of passing info back in time, even though the information could taint the timeline.

At the end of the day, I'm not really sure how to go about rating this. I loved the concepts and the writing was very good but Harry wasn't a very compelling lead. The endless digressions were a little annoying. I guess I'll give it the traditional safety rating of three stars.

Lindsey Rey says

WOW WOW WOW! Absolutely LOVED this! My mind is spinning right now.

Regan says

Very very Clever! The first half was pretty solid but after that halfway point it took a turn to AWESOME.
