

The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August – Catherine Webb

With a world in chaos after the end of World War One, our protagonist opens his new born eyes takes his first look at the world, but it is a sight he will see again, and again.

The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August, by Catherine Webb, begins in a toilet in a train station in Berwick-Upon-Tweed – and by the end of the printed pages presented to you between two covers, you're none the wiser as to if the story will ever end.

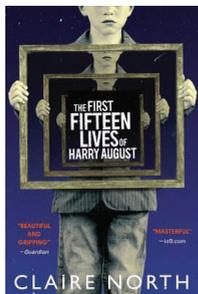
Harry finds himself, after his death, being born again in that same toilet in Berwick train station. He learns that he has been born again and that he is an Ouroboros – someone who lives in cycles of life, destruction, and death.

As he struggles living with his second life he falls into sadness and lunacy. The memories of his previous life haunt him and leave him with knowledge years beyond his new age. Soon though, he begins to understand how he can use this to his advantage.

All good protagonists need a nemesis though – and Harry's comes in the shape of Vincent, another Ouroboros, but one who is hell bent on viewing and controlling the universe like a god and wants to achieve this with the production of a Quantum Mirror:

Harry, supported by the Cronus Club – a secret society of those who live reincarnated lives –, and Vincent play a game of cat and mouse through repeated centuries as Harry tries desperately to find out when Vincent was born so that he can ensure that he is never conceived, and in doing so save the world.

To call this a story about time-travel would be to massively undersell Webb's writing and storytelling ability. This novel would likely fit into science-fiction, and if you're not familiar with this genre then this extremely readable and fast paced book is a perfect introduction. This book is what Groundhog Day could have been if it had stretched over whole lifetimes.



The End of the World Running Club – Adrian J Walker

I've only briefly been to Edinburgh once, however; I am going again this year but during the festival. Reading opening pages of the Edinburgh based novel, The End of the World Running Club has, I think, prepared me for the onslaught of what a mid-August Edinburgh during the Fringe may be.

Edgar Hill is approaching middle age, and carrying all the excess weight that the last few years of marriage and kids he didn't want has given him, when he and his family find themselves trapped in a basement after thousands of asteroids hit the Western Hemisphere.

Once rescued from the basement by a depleted army, the family are taken to barracks where they are fed and clothed and they meet other survivors. As the community grows, and the radios stay silent, thoughts of rescue become distant and they start to prepare for a long stay.

Edgar is out gathering food with a few people when a surprise mission to evacuate as many survivors as possible arrive and take his family, and the rest of them, down to Cornwall where they will be shipped to South Africa.

Having his family in a helicopter flying across a now desolate UK unsurprisingly sharpens Edgar's mind and his family suddenly become his priority. Yet with no hope of hitching a ride on another helicopter, or finding a car that can navigate the broken motorways, Edgar is faced with possible the greatest challenge of his life – jogging...all the way to Cornwall.

This apocalyptic drama is compelling and burns brightly from start to finish, with an intriguing central cast of survivors and some very well written minor characters who keep their epic run more interesting than it sounds.

