

The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August Study Guide

The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August by Claire North

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Contents

The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 – 16.....	5
Chapters 17 – 32.....	9
Chapters 33 – 48.....	14
Chapters 49 – 64.....	17
Chapters 65 – 82.....	21
Characters.....	26
Symbols and Symbolism.....	31
Settings.....	34
Themes and Motifs.....	37
Styles.....	42
Quotes.....	45



Plot Summary

Harry August is a kalachakra: a species of humans who live the same life over and over again returning to their point of birth after every time they die. The novel opens at the end of Harry's eleventh life when he was visited on his deathbed by a young girl, also a kalachakra, who came to warn Harry that the end of the world was coming and that it was getting faster.

Harry was born in the women's restroom at Berwick-upon-Tweed train station in the North East of England in 1918. His mother was a kitchen maid in the manor house of the Hulne family. She was raped by Rory Hulne and then fired when the family discovered she was pregnant. Harry's mother died during childbirth, so the Hulne family arranged for Harry to be adopted by their groundsman and his wife, Patrick and Harriet August. Harry's first life was largely uneventful as he did not yet know that he was a kalachakra. When Harry died at the end of his first life and discovered he had been reborn into his second life, it drove him to madness and he committed suicide at age 7. When this failed to end the cycle, Harry spent his third life travelling the globe studying the world's major religions, looking for answers which would explain his predicament.

In Harry's fourth life, he married a woman called Jenny. Harry's love for Jenny motivated him to tell her the truth about how he had been reincarnated and was now living the same life for the fourth time which meant he was able to predict the future. Jenny thought that Harry was mentally ill and he was taken to a psychiatric hospital and severely drugged. Harry was removed from the hospital by an American government agent called Franklin Phearson who noticed that Harry's predictions about the future were accurate and believed that Harry was sane. Phearson told Harry about an organization called the Cronus Club, founded by people who were said to live their lives over and over again.

Phearson tried to use Harry's knowledge of the future to change the course of history. Harry escaped and used the personal ads section of a newspaper to contact the Cronus Club and ask them to help him. Phearson recaptured Harry and began to torture him to get him to reveal what he knew about the future. A woman called Virginia from the Cronus Club visited Harry, helped him to commit suicide, and arranged to meet with him in his fifth life where she explained to him the history of the Cronus Club and admitted him as a member. She warned Harry never to reveal where and when he'd been born – his point of origin – because other kalachakra could use this information to kill him pre-birth and ensure that he is never reborn.

During Harry's sixth life he met another kalachakra called Vincent, who became a close friend. During Harry's twelfth life he sought to understand the deathbed warning that the world was ending which he had received in his eleventh life. He noticed technological advances that were happening at the wrong time in history and managed to track down the source of the problem to Soviet Russia, where he discovered that Vincent was altering the technological course of history. Vincent was trying to build a quantum mirror: a machine which would be capable of explaining everything in the universe. Harry



initially agreed to help him but had second thoughts when he discovered that Vincent had murdered other members of the Cronus Club. Vincent tried to erase Harry's memories and Harry committed suicide.

In Harry's next three lives, he still retained all of his earlier memories despite Vincent's ongoing attempts to erase them. Vincent believed he had been successful in erasing Harry's memories and therefore revealed information to Harry which Harry could use to stop Vincent bringing about the end of the world. During Harry's fifteenth life, after he saved Vincent from a radioactive accident, Vincent was touched by the strength of his friendship and told Harry things about his past that he had never told anyone else before. This gave Harry the information he needed to find Vincent's point of origin, kill him pre-birth, and ensure that he was never reborn, thus stopping Vincent bringing about the end of the world.



Chapters 1 – 16

Summary

In Chapter 1, Harry August was preparing to die in hospital at the age of 78, in his eleventh life, in the year 1996, when he was interrupted by a 7-year-old German girl. The girl had come to tell Harry that the world was ending. Harry asked her why that mattered and she replied that the end of the world was getting faster and that he must stop it.

In Chapter 2, Harry explained the story of his birth in 1918. His father was Rory Hulne, a wealthy landowner in North East England who raped Harry's mother while she was working as his kitchen maid. Harry's mother was fired when it became apparent she was pregnant and later gave birth to Harry in the women's restroom at Berwick train station. The Hulne family covered up the scandal by having Harry adopted by their grounds man, Patrick August, and his wife Harriet.

In Chapter 3, Harry discusses his discovery that he had been born again and would live a repeat of his life. In his second life, the discovery that he had been born again drove Harry to madness and he committed suicide at age 7.

In Chapter 4 Harry discusses the story of his third life, which followed his childhood suicide in his second life. In his third life, Harry started searching for answers which would explain what was happening to him. He discusses the fact that his adopted mother Harriet dies at roughly the same time in each of his lives. In his third life, having become accustomed to the way his own face looks in old age, Harry saw his biological father at Harriet's funeral and realized for the first time that he was adopted.

In Chapter 5, Harry described his first two times fighting in the Second World War.

In Chapter 6, Harry described his relationship with his wife Jenny from his fourth life. Jenny left Harry when he told her the truth about how many lives he'd had, which made Jenny think he was mentally ill. Harry was taken to a psychiatric hospital.

In Chapter 7, Harry tried to convince his psychiatrist that he was sane by saying he no longer believed he had been reincarnated. His psychiatrist disagreed and heavily drugged Harry. In Chapter 8, Jenny visited Harry while he was heavily drugged and Harry wasn't lucid enough to speak to her.

In Chapter 9, Harry described meeting Jenny again in his seventh life. He asked her to run away with him even though she was married to someone else.

Chapter 10 returns to Harry's fourth life, in which he was incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital as an adult. Harry was taken out of the hospital by an American named Franklin Phearson who was investigating the Cronus Club, a society of people who live their lives over and over again. Phearson noticed that Harry's so-called "madness"



corresponded to the truth of historical events, so he believed that Harry was sane and able to predict the future.

In Chapter 11, Harry explained that although kalachakra (also known as ouroborans) live their lives over and over again, they don't remember everything. Unlike most Kalachakra Harry does remember everything about his previous lives. Next, Harry recounts the time he tried to help Phearson, by telling him about historical events that hadn't happened yet, such as the end of the Soviet Union.

In Chapter 12, Harry discussed his various attempts to find an explanation for what was happening to him through the world's religions.

In Chapter 13, Phearson and Harry argued about whether or not Harry could provide Phearson with information that could help him change the future for the better. In Chapter 14, Harry escaped the house where Phearson was keeping him. In Chapter 15, Harry tried to get further away in his escape but Phearson captured him when he tried to buy bread in a nearby village. Before he was captured Harry managed to post two letters. In Chapter 16, Phearson drugged and tortured Harry to try to get him to give him more information about the events of the future.

Analysis

Chapter 1 introduces numerous mysteries for the reader including Harry's reference to the fact that he was living his eleventh life, which gives a clue that this story will involve some form of reincarnation although the nature of this is not yet revealed to the reader.

The German girl acts as the catalyst in the story by informing Harry that the end of the world is getting faster and that he must stop it from happening. This sets up Harry's goal in the novel which he will pursue until the final chapter.

When Harry explains the story of his birth in Chapter 2, it is sufficiently early in the novel for the reader to assume that this back story is simply part of Harry's characterization. By learning about the difficult circumstances of his birth, the reader gains greater understanding of Harry's feelings of isolation and difficulty fitting in. It is not until much later in the novel that it is revealed how important this information is for Harry's attempts to stop the world ending. Although the circumstances of his upbringing were tragic and difficult, they will eventually become his saving grace as they make it difficult for anyone to track down his exact place of birth.

Chapter 3 begins to explain the nature of Harry's reincarnations which were hinted at in the opening chapter. Rather than being reincarnated in the traditional sense of the term, in which someone's soul is reborn in a new body in a new time, Harry always returns to the same body and the same life at precisely the same moment.

Chapter 3 is infused with dark humor as Harry discusses in a detached and unemotional way the trauma of discovering his condition and the despair that drove him to suicide.



Describing an instance of a child committing suicide and describing it as “clichéd,” creates a jarring mix of tragedy and comedy which will continue throughout the novel.

In Chapter 4, it becomes apparent that Harry is not addressing a general reader in his narration but a specific person who he knows well. He writes about the beauty of the moors and regrets that the person he is addressing in his writing never got the chance to see the moors at their best. This makes it clear that the person who Harry is addressing is someone he cares about because he wished they could have witnessed something special with him. It will not be until the final chapter that it is revealed Harry is addressing Vincent. These early instances of fondness reveal that Harry still cared deeply for Vincent at the end of the novel, despite the terrible things that Vincent had done.

Chapter 5 introduces one of the central themes of the novel, which is how best to make a difference. Harry used his insights from his first time fighting in the Second World War to save the lives of his friends the second time around. During his second time fighting, he tried to amass knowledge which would help him to make even more of a difference the next time.

Chapter 6 introduces one of the tragedies at the heart of the novel: that kalachakra like Harry cannot form open and honest relationships with “linear” mortals because no one would believe them. The strength of Harry’s feelings for Jenny become important later in the novel when Harry must convince Vincent that he has forgotten all of the events of his previous lives.

Chapters 7 and 8 address some social issues surrounding the treatment of the mentally ill. The reader knows that Harry is not insane, so his treatment at the hands of the staff at the psychiatric hospital seems especially unfair as they are attempting to drug him out of a condition that he does not have. However, these chapters also reflect badly on the treatment of people who genuinely do have mental health problems. The lack of empathy and dignity afforded to the patients is shocking and unpleasant. The author contrasts the detached and unemotional tone of Harry’s language with the harrowing events in the hospital, which creates an uncomfortable dissonance.

When Harry meets Jenny again in Chapter 9 it is an important detail because it makes it clear to the reader that Harry continued to care about her even though he was now many lifetimes past their time together. When Vincent marries Jenny later in the novel, the reader knows from this chapter how devastating it is for Harry.

Harry’s first meeting with Franklin Phearson in Chapter 10 is an important turning point in the novel as it marks the first moment Harry ever met someone who believed that what was happening to him was possible.

Chapter 11 introduces the theme of historical events and whether or not the kalachakra can or should intervene to alter them. Phearson uses Harry because he believes he can prevent bad things happening in the world if he can find out what events occur in the future. However, Harry only knows what happened not why it happened so he can’t give



Phearson the level of detail he would need to actually do anything about it. This frustrates Phearson and his frustration will become a danger for Harry in later chapters.

Harry's escape from Phearson is an important turning point in the novel because it allows him to post the letter which will lead to his inclusion in the Cronus Club. Phearson's treatment of Harry foreshadows the way Harry will be treated by Vincent later in the novel. Both Phearson and Vincent are convinced of the need to act whereas Harry wishes to remain passive. Harry's attitude leads to him being tortured by both Vincent and Phearson when they refuse to accept Harry's decision not to help them.

Discussion Question 1

What techniques does the author use to build intrigue in Chapter 1?

Discussion Question 2

What are the downsides of the circumstances of Harry's birth? What are the upsides?

Discussion Question 3

What role does Franklin Phearson play in the novel? What effect does he have on Harry's life?

Vocabulary

cataclysm, shillings, crystallizing, hysteria, gorse, pretentious, mannerisms, perpetual, unorthodox, precipitate, luminescence, cartilage, tedious, aloofness, ungainly, clichéd, retrospective, loitering, captors, barbituates



Chapters 17 – 32

Summary

In Chapter 17, Harry repeated the mantra of the Cronus Club: “Complexity should be your excuse for inaction.” Harry recalled the first night he ever met Vincent Rankis in 1945 during Harry’s sixth life. Harry and Vincent discussed the paradox of time travel.

In Chapter 18, Harry described his torture at the hands of Phearson and his men during Harry’s fourth life. In Chapter 19, Harry revealed the contents of the two letters he had sent when he briefly escaped from Phearson. The first was a letter to his wife Jenny telling her that he loved her. The second letter was to a friend asking him to place two advertisements in the personal ads of the national newspapers for him. The ad was a message to the Cronus Club asking them to help him. In Chapter 20, Harry was broken by the torturers and agreed to tell them everything he knew about the future. A woman called Virginia from the Cronus Club came to visit him as a result of the ad he placed in the paper. Virginia arranged to meet him in a future life and gave him a pen knife which he used to commit suicide.

In Chapter 21, Harry recalled the childhood of his third life in which he knew for the first time who his biological father was.

In Chapter 22, Harry discussed his fifth life following his suicide to escape Phearson. As a form of therapy he wrote to his biological father claiming to have been a soldier who was tortured during the First World War. His father replied sympathetically.

In Chapter 23, Harry met up with Virginia during the Second World War in London and she took him to the London branch of the Cronus Club. In Chapter 24, Harry recounted the history of the Cronus Club and how it was founded and Virginia explained the rules of the club: contribute money to help other Kalachakra during the childhood years, don’t try to change temporal events, don’t harm another Kalachakra, and don’t reveal your place of origin to anyone.

In Chapter 25, Virginia told Harry the story of Victor Hoeness who caused what was known as a cataclysm. Hoeness altered temporal events by giving world leaders access to technology that hadn’t been invented yet, which led to the complete destruction of the planet in 1953. In Chapter 26, Virginia explained a process called The Forgetting which can be used to make sure that Kalachakra have no memories of their previous lives. It is also possible to make sure that a Kalachakra can never come back to life by aborting their next life before they gain consciousness.

In Chapter 27, Harry explained that he is mnemonic which means, unlike other Kalachakra, he can remember every detail of his previous lives with clarity. He returns to the moment in 1996, age 78 in his eleventh life, that the young German girl told him the end of the world was speeding up.



In Chapter 28, Harry recalled more of his early days with Vincent in Cambridge during his sixth life. During one of their discussions, Vincent referenced a scientific theory which would not be invented for another 30 years, leading Harry to conclude that Vincent was a Kalachakra. When Harry told Vincent that he was a member of the Cronus Club, Vincent punched him in the face.

In Chapter 29, during his twelfth life, Harry journeyed to London at just six years old to inform the members that he'd received a message at the end of his eleventh life that the end of the world was getting faster.

In Chapter 30, Harry recounted the story of a prostitute who had been murdered and his decision to murder the man who had killed her – Richard Lisle – during Harry's next life, before Lisle had a chance to commit the crime.

In Chapter 31, Harry shared his fear with Virginia that Vincent was the reason that the end of the world was getting faster. He decided to travel to the Soviet Union in order to investigate. In Chapter 32, Harry explained the techniques he used in his twelfth life to make sure he had enough money to investigate the end of the world whilst still keeping a low profile.

Analysis

When Harry and Vincent first meet in Chapter 17, they immediately begin the argument that will wage between them for the rest of the novel: whether the concept of time travel would allow a time traveler to change the course of the universe, or whether such an occurrence would result in the destruction of the universe. During these early interactions, neither Harry nor the reader is aware that Vincent is also Kalachakra, but there are clues in this chapter suggesting that this is the case, notably when Harry points out that Vincent is very forthright for an undergraduate and Vincent replies that he doesn't enjoy wasting his time on youth because there are so many things people are not permitted to do while they are under 30.

Because Vincent's characters is introduced so late in the novel, it obscures how important he will be to the development of the narrative in comparison to less important characters – such as Harry's biological and adoptive families – who are introduced early on but who never contribute anything important to events.

Harry's torture at the hands of Phearson continues to foreshadow what will later occur between Harry and Vincent. Phearson is careful to make sure that other people are responsible for torturing Harry, so that Phearson himself can be seen as Harry's savior and someone who wants to help him, rather than the person who is inflicting harm. Although Harry reveals lots of information about the future to Phearson during these chapters, there is no mention in the novel about what effect this had on events in this timeline. Although Vincent's attempts to alter the future and the past result in the end of the world, the consequences of Harry's actions in these chapters go unexplored.



The introduction of Virginia is a major plot point in the novel because it marks the moment that Harry discovers he is not alone and that there are others like him. In future, when he dies, he will be able to call upon other Kalachakra to lift him out of the tedium of his childhood and provide for him financially so that he will not have to undergo the same difficulties he has done in each of his earlier lives.

Chapter 21 raises an interesting philosophical question about how people would perceive the events of their own childhoods if they were able to live them again. Harry is able to go back to his own childhood and observe the man who was his biological father, having once already lived the same life thinking that his adopted family was his birth family. Harry can observe the actions of his father with the intellect of an adult, whilst living in the body of a child.

Chapter 22 explores Harry's character wound: his broken relationship with his birth father. He reaches out to him under a false name during his fifth life and is touched by the response that he receives. This leads the reader to believe that they may one day be able to have a positive relationship in one of Harry's future lives, but this hope is dashed in a later chapter when an aging Rory Hulne asks to see Harry and disappoints him with his deathbed request.

Chapters 23 and 24 finally reveal more information about the mysterious Cronus Club which has been referred to throughout the novel. The way Virginia describes the club makes it sound like a fun and supportive environment in which the members play games with each other by leaving clues throughout the centuries and take care of each other by intervening in each other's lives as children and making sure that everyone has enough money and support. However, this impression is undercut by a brief line at the start of Chapter 24 which suggests to the reader that the Cronus Club is not an entirely positive place: "The Cronus Club. You and I, we have fought such battles over this." This line also serves to remind the reader that Harry is addressing a particular person in his writing, although the reader does not yet know who is being addressed.

The fact that no one can remember who first founded the Cronus Club reminds the reader that, unlike Harry, most Kalachakra forget some of the details of their lives. This becomes important later in the novel when Harry convinces Vincent that he cannot remember the details of his previous lives.

Chapters 25 and 26 introduce events from the past, which will be repeated by Harry and Vincent in the future. Virginia establishes important information for the reader about the two methods that can be used to deal with a Kalachakra who breaks the rules of the Cronus Club: The Forgetting which means they lose all knowledge of their previous lives, or simply not being born which can only be achieved if another Kalachakra knows when and where you were born. This information becomes vital for Harry because his uncertain origins and the cover-up surrounding his birth and upbringing allow him to protect himself when Vincent begins murdering members of the Cronus Club.

The tale of Victor Hoeness is a cautionary warning to Harry and Vincent which they do not heed. Instead of learning from the failures of the past, they press on with their own



desires for the future heedless of what effect they might have. This reflects two of the central themes of the novel, responsibility and learning from the past. Harry knows what happened the last time a Kalachakra tried to speed up the technological progress of humankind, but presses on with his own interests because he doesn't think it is his responsibility to take care of others.

When Harry returns to the events of Chapter 1 during Chapter 27, the reader now has considerably more knowledge about the world of the novel and can view the events of Harry's eleventh death in a new light. The world is coming to an end faster than it should, implying that someone like Victor Hoeness is once again trying to change the course of history by abusing his powers as a Kalachakra. It is Harry's job to stop whoever is doing this, but at this stage neither Harry nor the reader knows who is responsible.

Chapter 28 reveals that Vincent is Kalachakra, differentiating him from Phearson who was a linear mortal hoping to exploit the Kalachakra. It is also revealed that Vincent is against the Cronus Club, when he hits Harry in the face for admitting that he was a member. Because this chapter immediately follows the chapters detailing what happened to Victor Hoeness (as well as the similarities between the Vincent and Victor's first names) it starts to become apparent that Vincent is in some way connected to the quickening of the end of the world.

Harry's decision in his twelfth life to investigate the end of the world and attempt to stop it from happening marks a change in his character. Rather than being passive and uninvolved in life, at this stage Harry adopts a passion which he will devote several of his future lives to pursuing. His character now has a sense of purpose which he has been lacking since his fourth life, when he was married to Jenny.

After Chapter 32, the pace of the novel picks up speed as Harry's quest becomes more and more clear. He must find Vincent and stop him from ending the world. At this stage, neither Harry nor the reader realizes that Harry is also implicated in the coming cataclysm.

Discussion Question 1

Why do the Cronus club believe that complexity should be an excuse for inaction? Do you agree with them?

Discussion Question 2

How is Vincent's character introduced? What is your first impression of him? How does this change?



Discussion Question 3

Why is the story of Victor Hoeness relevant to the events in the novel?

Vocabulary

psychotropic, hallucinogens, neurologist, immaterial, automaton, commotion, imperious, revelation, apathy, consciousness, mundane, belligerent, obelisk, crusade, inception, arbitrators, paradoxical, marginally, amalgamation, linear



Chapters 33 – 48

Summary

In Chapter 33, Harry travelled to East Germany to meet a scientist called Daniel van Thiel who had been credited with inventing something that should not have existed in the 1950s. He told Harry that the person who had behind all the advances in the Soviet Union was a scientist in Russia called Vitali Karpenko. In Chapter 34, Harry travelled to Russia.

In Chapter 35, Harry went to the Leningrad branch of the Cronus Club where a kalachakra called Olga gave him a lead which might help him find Vitali Karpenko. Olga explained that there were very few members left in their branch.

In Chapter 36, Harry blackmailed a Russian academic called Professor Gulakov to give him information about the whereabouts of Vitali Karpenko. He arranged to meet Gulakov at a train station and created a diversion to distract the security forces who were there waiting to intercept him. Gulakov told Harry he could find Vitali Karpenko at a place called Pietrok-112. Harry evaded the authorities and caught a train in the direction of Pietrok-112.

In Chapter 37, Harry wrote about his friend Akinleye, another kalachakra who had warned him against killing Richard Lisle, the man who murdered prostitutes. Akinleye didn't think it was worth Harry's efforts to stop one murderer when there was so much other suffering in the world. In Chapter 38, during Harry's ninth life, he travelled to London and murdered Richard Lisle before he'd had the chance to kill anyone.

In Chapter 39, Harry arrived at Pietrok-111 in Russia and managed to avoid the guards who were stationed there to look for him. In Chapter 40, Harry arrived at Pietrok-112 and convinced a guard he was an intelligence agent. The guard took him inside a military compound.

In Chapter 41, Harry looked back to the time he experimented with heroin with Akinleye. While they were all high, Akinleye's friend and maid – who was a linear mortal – killed herself by jumping off their boat.

In Chapter 42, Harry took a commander hostage inside the military compound at Pietrok-112. Harry demanded to see Vitali Karpenko. In Chapter 43, Vitali Karpenko arrived.

In Chapter 44, Harry revealed that Vitali Karpenko and Vincent Rankis were the same person and recounted a time in Cambridge during Harry's sixth life when he and Vincent went punting together on the river Cam. Harry recalled that Victor had very lofty scientific ambitions.



In Chapter 45, back at Pietrok-112, Vincent explained to Harry that he was trying to advance the scientific knowledge he had access to without disrupting the timeline.

In Chapter 46, Harry wrote about a letter he received in one of his lives from his biological father Rory Hulne. Hulne asked Harry for money because his family was poor now and couldn't afford to look after their manor house.

In Chapter 47, at Pietrok-112, Vincent told Harry he was planning to build a quantum mirror: a machine capable of explaining everything in the universe. In Chapter 48, Harry accused Vincent of trying to become a God.

Analysis

In Chapter 33, the cycle that occurred when Victor Hoeness interfered with temporal events starts again. Just as happened in Victor's time, someone has introduced technology into the timeline which should not yet have been invented. The graphic description of what happened to Hoeness as punishment for his crimes foreshadows these chapters, as concern grows about what can be done about whoever is responsible for altering events.

Harry's character has changed a lot since his earlier lives, which he devoted to finding ways to keep himself out of danger, especially during the Second World War. Harry's trip to East Germany and Russia marks an important change in his attitude: he is deliberately putting himself in harm's way because he believes his cause is important enough to risk his own life for. Harry has found meaning and purpose for the first time since his fourth life with Jenny, which ended in torture at the hands of Phearson and suicide as the only escape.

Harry's discussion with Olga at the Leningrad Cronus Club in Chapter 35 raises questions about responsibility. The Leningrad club is losing members because the Kalachakra from Russia are tired of living through so many wars and so much suffering. They prefer to leave the country at the end of the nineteenth century and avoid all of the tragedy that befell Russia in the twentieth century. The questions facing the Russian members of the Cronus Club reflect the questions Harry is facing when he meets Olga. Should he subject himself to suffering for the sake of his ideals, or should he give up on trying to save the world and resign himself to a content and peaceful life in which he doesn't make a difference?

Harry's treatment of the Russian academic Professor Gulakov shows a different side to Harry's decision to try to make a difference in this life. Although he is no longer avoiding trouble and has taken on a mission to save the world by accepting it is his responsibility to do so, this does not mean that he has become a saint who treats everyone well. He blackmails Professor Gulakov and puts him in a dangerous situation simply because he is of use to Harry. This coldness reflects how shut-off Harry's emotions have become since the tragedies which befell him in his fourth life when Jenny left him and he was tortured by Phearson.



Harry's involvement in the life of the murderer Richard Lisle further underscores his emotional detachment. The fact that Harry was willing and able to kill a human being in cold blood, before Lisle had committed any crimes, foreshadows Harry's willingness to murder Vincent, his best friend.

The tragedy that befell Akinleye's maid during the life in which she experimented with heroin will eventually motivate Akinleye to undergo a Forgetting later in the novel.

By juxtaposing Harry's trip to Pietrok-112 with stories from Harry and Vincent's early days together in Cambridge, the reader is reminded of the close bond that exists between the friends and the happy memories that their earlier life together was founded on. This reminder of their background is an important setup for the next Chapter, as it helps to explain Harry's motivation when he lets go of his reservations about Vincent's plan and agrees to help him build the quantum mirror.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the Leningrad branch of the Cronus Club struggle to keep members? If you were in their position, would you stay in Russia?

Discussion Question 2

Is it justifiable for Harry to kill Richard Lisle? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Vincent want to build a quantum mirror?

Vocabulary

bourgeois, apparatchik, semblance, pragmatism, coaxing, demise, psychosomatic, cultivated, lamenting, tsar, extortionate, remnants, emblem, pastoral, derided, insubordinate, levity, punt, comrade, berated



Chapters 49 – 64

Summary

In Chapter 49, Harry considered whether he should help Vincent build his quantum mirror and decided that he would.

In Chapter 50, Harry recounted meeting a kalachakra called Fidel Gussman who spent all of his lives fighting in different wars around the world.

In Chapter 51, Harry explained to Vincent that he wanted to help with the quantum mirror because he thought it would give a purpose to his life which he had been missing before. They worked together on the machine for 10 years. One night, Vincent revealed to Harry that he was a mnemonic – a kalachakra who can remember every detail of his earlier lives – but Harry did not reveal that he was one as well. Harry requested a holiday and travelled to Leningrad, where he discovered that the city's branch of the Cronus Club had been destroyed and Olga had been violently murdered.

In Chapter 52, Harry returned to Pietrok-112 and confronted Vincent about the destruction of the Leningrad Cronus Club. Vincent admitted he was responsible. Harry said he thought they should stop working on the quantum mirror, because it was destroying their souls and ending the world. Vincent asked him to think it over and Harry decided to escape.

In Chapter 53, Harry related the story of the time he was kidnapped by Argentinian bandits.

In Chapter 54, Vincent caught Harry as he tried to escape Pietrok-112. Vincent electrocuted Harry to prevent him from committing suicide. In Chapter 55, Vincent held Harry prisoner and threatened to torture him unless he revealed his place and time of birth. In Chapter 56, Harry was tortured. He convinced one of the security guards to bring him some rat poison so he could commit suicide without revealing his place of origin to Vincent. Vincent used an electronic device to make Harry undergo a Forgetting before he died.

In Chapter 57, Harry recounted the time Akinleye decided to undergo a Forgetting in order to recover from the guilt she felt about the death of her maid, and the difficult life she faced as an HIV positive heroin addict. Harry was with Akinleye when she went through the process.

In Chapter 58, Vincent checked to see if the Forgetting had worked on Harry. Harry mimicked the way Akinleye behaved after her Forgetting. Harry died.

In Chapter 59, Harry was born again in 1918 and began his thirteenth life with all of his memories still intact. Harry followed his usual routine of contacting the kalachakra Charity Hazelmere when he was six years old and arranging to meet her in the nearby



city of Newcastle, but she never arrived. Harry travelled alone to London and went to the Cronus Club, but it was no longer there.

In Chapter 60, due to the lack of financial support from the Cronus Club, six year old Harry was forced to return to his family home in Berwick. Later in this life, he began his research into what had become of the Cronus Club and in Chapter 61 he discovered that branches had disappeared all over the world. In Vienna, Harry found a letter from a kalachakra explaining what had happened: many kalachakra had been born in this life with no memory of their earlier lives, and others had never been born at all.

In Chapter 62, Harry became a criminal in order to keep a low profile and gain the network of contacts he would need in order to find Vincent. He met a kalachakra called Phillip Hopper who had no memory of his earlier lives, or of ever meeting Harry.

In Chapter 63, Harry travelled to Beijing in the hopes that their Cronus Club branch was still intact, because the difficult history of China in this period made the city less accessible than others. He met a teenage girl who explained to him that 80 per cent of the clubs members had either undergone a Forgetting or had been killed pre-birth, never to be reborn.

In Chapter 64, Harry recalled visiting Akinleye after her Forgetting. He told her he thought she was right to decide to forget the things she had done.

Analysis

When Harry met the Kalachakra Fidel Gussman, Fidel discussed the nature of life as a kalachakra and the excitement of living life as soldier permanently at war. Fidel had fought in all of the major wars which occurred during his lifespan, travelling to different warzones in different lives. He told Harry that he was never worried about altering the linear timeline because individual soldiers don't make a difference to any war, the things that make a difference are decisions made by people far away from the field of battle. The efforts of one soldier never altered the course of a war, Fidel argues. This reflects Harry's big conundrum in the novel: is it worth trying to save the world? Do any of his actions really have consequences? Should he do things for the sake of others even if he will never live to benefit from those actions himself?

Earlier in the novel, the actions of Vincent were foreshadowed by the actions of Franklin Phearson. Both men were depicted as contrasts to Harry. Whereas Harry was content to be passive in his life and not seek to have any impact beyond looking after his own welfare, both Vincent and Phearson were frustrated by these limitations and wanted to use the power of the kalachakra to do something bold and world-changing. Because the reader knows that Phearson's relationship with Harry ended in torture, the development of Vincent's plans echo those earlier scenes and build suspense that something dreadful is about to happen to Harry.

In Chapter 54, Harry's life begins to repeat the cycle from his fourth life when he was tortured by Phearson. However Harry learned from that experience that he could



escape through suicide, so uses that knowledge from his past life to his advantage here.

The events of Chapter 54, 55, and 56 are the most important incidents in the novel. It is during this time, when Vincent has Harry tortured, that Harry resolves to save the world and destroy Vincent. Whereas before this moment Harry and Vincent were friends who had heated disagreements about their worldviews, after these chapters they become bitter enemies bent on destroying each other before the other can interfere with their plans for the world.

Akinleye's life in which she dies from AIDS shows the downside of the passive approach to being a kalachakra. Although, like Harry, Akinleye sought to avoid having any impact on the world or making a difference, this doesn't mean that she was able to avoid suffering or regret. Her lack of compassion for her maid who died due to Akinleye's actions and the suffering Akinleye herself endured as a result of failing to take good care of her own body all combined to make this lifetime an especially traumatizing one for her. Despite her reluctance to do anything other than have a good time, Akinleye has lived a life so unpleasant that she wishes to erase all memories of her past lives in order to escape from this one. This shows the downside of being kalachakra whereby the mistakes made in one life can continue to haunt them for the rest of eternity.

Chapter 57 serves a dual purpose. It shows the opposite end of the spectrum to kalachakra who seek to make a difference to the linear timeline, by showing Akinleye who cared about nothing but her own pleasure, whilst also providing Harry with an experience which will save him from Vincent and help Harry to save the world. By witnessing the way Akinleye behaved after her own Forgetting, Harry was able to impersonate her in Chapter 58 after his Forgetting and convince Vincent that it had worked. Without this knowledge, Harry would not have been able to lay the trap which would eventually lead to Vincent's downfall.

In Chapter 59, Harry's life begins again with a sense of purpose he has never had before. He now has a mission in life - to stop Vincent – which he will pursue with all his time and energy. However this also the most lonely life-cycle that Harry has had to endure, since his second life when he first discovered he was doomed to live his life over and over again. Unlike with his previous lives, there will be no support available to him from other kalachakras. Harry is now utterly alone.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Fidel Gussman think his actions as a soldier don't make a difference in the world? Do you agree with him?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Harry decide to help Vincent to build the quantum mirror?



Discussion Question 3

In what ways are Vincent Rankis and Franklin Phearson similar? In what ways are they different?

Vocabulary

quantum, extrapolate, bequeathed, artifact, claptrap, productivity, abolish, tenets, larvae, Kalashnikov, innately, paralytic, diaphragm, myeloma, ravaged, faculties, aristocracy, foreknowledge, smugglers, pinnacle



Chapters 65 – 82

Summary

In Chapter 65, Harry was given the name of the Kalachakra who was the prime suspect for the forced Forgetting and the pre-birth murders. Harry travelled to South Africa to find Virginia, the kalachakra who had rescued Harry from Phearson and first introduced him to the Cronus Club. Virginia was the perpetrator and Harry forced her to undergo a Forgetting without revealing to her who he was.

In Chapter 66, Harry reflected on his thirteenth life which he dedicated to searching for Vincent with no success. Harry died in 2003, the longest he had ever lived. In his fourteenth life Harry got a scholarship to Cambridge and his biological grandmother criticized him for accepting it instead of continuing to work as a servant for her family.

In Chapter 67, during the Second World War of Harry's fourteenth life, Harry began to hear rumors of technology existing long before it should have been invented. In Chapter 68, after the war, Harry went to America which seemed to be the source of all the new technology. Scientists in America had received handwritten letters explaining technology that should not have been invented for many years. Whilst attending a party, Vincent introduced himself to Harry under a false name and Harry pretended he couldn't remember who Vincent was.

In Chapter 69, Harry recounted how the kalachakra Charity Hazelmere had tracked him down during his fourteenth life, providing him with another ally alongside Akinleye.

In Chapter 70, Harry and Vincent spoke to each other at the party and Harry pretended not to remember him. In Chapter 71, Harry concocted a fake life story about another Harry August who was adopted by a couple in Leeds who was the same age as Harry. The other Harry August was real, but was killed in car crash in 1938, allowing Harry to adopt his identity in an effort to keep Vincent from discovering his true point of origin. Vincent arranged to meet Harry for drinks and asked him to work for his company. Vincent asked where Harry was from and he told him Leeds. After several years of working together, Vincent invited Harry to attend a lavish party at his home. When Harry arrived, Vincent revealed to the assembled guests that he was getting married and introduced them to his bride-to-be: Jenny, Harry's wife from his fourth life. Harry pretended to be happy for them and that he couldn't remember Jenny. Later, he went outside and wept.

In Chapter 72, Harry decided that the fact he managed to control his emotions when Vincent married Jenny was evidence that Harry was dead inside. In Chapter 73, Harry tells the story of his adoptive father's death. He concludes that Patrick August was a real father to him and wishes he had told him so.



In Chapter 74, after several years of marriage to Vincent, Jenny asked Harry if he liked her and he replied that he had always liked her. Harry was diagnosed with the cancer which kills him in every life. He refused any further treatment and told Vincent that he had lived this life before and knew he would die. Vincent told him that he lived his life over again as well and asked Harry to agree to a medical procedure which would restore his memories of all his previous lives, but Harry knew it was really a tool to make him undergo a Forgetting. In Chapter 75, Harry pretended to trust Vincent, Vincent put the instrument of Forgetting on Harry, and Harry died.

In Chapter 76, Harry was born into his fifteenth life and still remembered everything about his previous lives. Charity took Harry away from Berwick and arranged for him to be adopted by Mr. and Mrs. August in Leeds. When Harry was 16, a 9 year old Vincent visited him to check that he was there.

In Chapter 77, during the Second World War of Harry's fifteenth life, Vincent was assigned as an officer to Harry's regiment.

In Chapter 78, Harry recounts that he killed the murderer Richard Lisle in each one of his lives, as a form of ritual. In the Second World War of Harry's fifteenth life, Vincent had Harry transferred to a unit for research scientists and employed him as an administrator for the unit. Because of this, Harry had access to all of Vincent's affairs and started trying to identify his place and time of birth. Vincent once again wrote letters to various scientists explaining discoveries which should not yet exist in linear time. Harry had the chance to intercept the letters but chose not to.

In Chapter 79, Harry carried on working for Vincent after the war and one day Vincent invited him on a trip to Switzerland. When they arrived at their destination, Harry discovered that Vincent had succeeded in building the quantum mirror.

In Chapter 80, Harry recalled an Indian mystic he met in his third life who had told him that all of creation exists inside each individual.

In Chapter 81, Harry secretly sabotaged the quantum mirror which caused a radioactive accident. Harry saved Vincent from being killed at the scene but both of them got radiation poisoning and knew that they would soon die. They had hospital beds next to each other as their symptoms got worse. Vincent thanked Harry for saving him and, still believing Harry cannot remember his past lives, Vincent told Harry about his childhood and where he grew up. Immediately after the revelation, Vincent used his machine to force Harry to undergo a Forgetting.

In Chapter 82, Harry pretended once again that the Forgetting was successful. Harry escaped from the hospital with the help of Akinleye. She took him to a hotel and he sat down to write the story that has been told in the book. He wrote it for Vincent so that Vincent would know that Harry had won. Harry knew Vincent's point of origin and in their next life, because Harry was older, Harry would kill Vincent pre-birth and make sure that he never lived again. As Vincent died of radiation poisoning, he would know that this death was final.



Analysis

In Chapter 65, Harry's involvement in the Cronus Club comes full circle when he forces Virginia to undergo a Forgetting. It was Virginia who first explained to Harry about the original cataclysm – caused by Victor Hoeness – and it was Virginia who gave Harry the advice to keep his point of origin a secret from everyone, a piece of advice that saved Harry's life when Virginia helped Vincent to wipe out 80 per cent of the Cronus Club's members. Harry takes the decision to remove Virginia's memories, even though it was her who rescued him from Phearson.

Harry has become a lot like Phearson at this point in the story. He is convinced that stopping Vincent is the right thing to do, just as Phearson was convinced that using the kalachakras to change the course of the future was the right thing to do. Phearson continued with his quest even when it involved causing physical harm to Harry and, likewise, Harry continued with his quest to stop Vincent even when it involved harming Virginia, the woman who saved him from Phearson.

In Chapter 66, now in his fourteenth life, Harry has experienced his childhood so many times that none of the people there who were once able to upset him hold any power over him anymore. Harry has zeal and a purpose in life now that makes his biological grandmother Constance's concerns seem laughable. This is a comment on the nature of history. Social norms and the dictates of etiquette inevitably become old-fashioned and seem preposterous when looked back on by a younger generation. Harry has the opportunity to return to a point in his life when a wealthy woman could plausibly criticize a poor young man for his decision to go to Cambridge University rather than work as her servant. Because Harry's mind is mature, and he knows how much society will change in his lifetime, he is able to laugh at Constance's behavior but he wonders how he would handle such pressures and criticisms if he really was only 18 years old.

Chapter 70 features one of the tensest moments in the novel when Vincent introduces himself to Harry for the first time since forcing him to undergo a Forgetting. This sparks a dangerous game of cat and mouse between Harry and Vincent in which Harry must hide the fact he can remember his past lives and Vincent must test whether Harry's memories have truly been destroyed. Vincent devises the ultimate test in Chapter 71, when he marries Jenny. Vincent knew that Jenny was the love of Harry's life, so by marrying her himself, he aims to force Harry to reveal that he can remember his earlier lives. Harry manages to hide his emotions when this occurs, meaning Vincent is now completely confident that Harry cannot remember anything. Although this is a success for Harry, it takes an emotional toll on him after which he feels as if he is dead inside. If all of his emotions are now gone, what is left for him other than his hatred of Vincent?

When Harry meets Vincent yet again in Chapter 76 it builds suspense for the conclusion of the novel. The title makes clear that the novel covers Harry's first fifteen lives and, now that he is on his fifteenth life, this proves that this time when he encounters Vincent the events that follow their encounter will be decisive.



Chapter 76 onwards is suffused with dramatic irony, as Vincent continues his actions under the knowledge that Harry can't remember anything, but Harry and the reader both know that Vincent is wrong. Slowly, Vincent starts to reveal things to Harry which will eventually lead to his downfall.

Harry's endless pursuit of and murder of Richard Lisle, which he recalled in Chapter 78, reflects the extent to which Harry has lost touch with his humanity. He ruthlessly murders a man who is yet to commit any crimes and repeats it ritualistically. The cold-blooded nature of this act makes it clear to the reader that Harry will be willing to harm Vincent, even though he is his best friend. The story of Richard Lisle relates to the novel's theme of Justice. Harry admits in relation to other people in his lives – Jenny, Patrick August, Rory Hulne – that their lives do not feature precisely the same incidents every time. Although there may be a lifetime in which Richard Lisle does not become a murderer, Harry doesn't give him the chance to live it. Having encountered him in lifetimes where Richard Lisle does kill, Harry takes the decision to prevent him from living his own life until his natural death, rather than attempting to sway him from the course of events that caused him to become a murderer.

In Chapter 79, Harry discovers that Vincent has been successful in building the quantum mirror, something the two men worked on side-by-side for more than 10 years in Pietrok-112. However, Harry's character has changed so much in this time that he feels no sense of satisfaction or wonder to see this scientific achievement reached. Instead, he remains entirely focused on stopping Vincent and getting his revenge. This shows that, although Harry professes to have become detached from his emotions, he is still driven by the emotions of anger, jealousy, and a desire for vengeance. Vincent's actions have been so unforgivable that they blind Harry to the enormity of his achievement, which he would have appreciated even if he had disagreed with it back in their days at Pietrok-112.

The revelation in Chapter 82 that Harry is addressing Vincent in the book is somewhat confusing, as many of the chapters have referred to Vincent by name in a way that suggests the reader wouldn't know who Vincent was, which makes little sense if the intended reader is Vincent himself. However, at this stage, Harry is dying of radiation poisoning and has taken a strong cocktail of painkillers, which could serve to explain any logical flaws in the narrative style.

Ironically, bearing in mind how badly he has treated him, it is Vincent's love of Harry that brings about his downfall. In his fifteenth life, Harry received no scientific training and was therefore useless to Vincent's plan to build the quantum mirror. However, Vincent's love of Harry meant that he continued to keep him nearby, even when he was convinced he had no memories and he served no useful function. Vincent's feelings for Harry are his fatal flaw. He is so touched by Harry's bravery when he saves him from the radioactive accident that he shares facts about his life with him which he has never shared with anyone else throughout all of his earlier lifetimes. This desire to acknowledge how important Harry is to him leads directly to his own destruction. Although Harry disavowed all of his own emotions in the pursuit of Vincent, it was the



intense emotional bond between them which ultimately brought events to their conclusion.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Harry think that the Beijing branch of the Cronus Club might have escaped the fate of the others?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Vincent marry Jenny?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Vincent still want Harry to be part of his life during the lives when Harry claims to have no scientific knowledge?

Vocabulary

ruthless, paranoid, launderer, deploy, flagrant, grimace, espionage, condensation, frantic, ideological, therapeutic, lordling, prophecy, dogsbody, cerebellum, mnemonic, ritualistic, enthusiast, omission, theologian



Characters

Harry August

Harry August is the central character/protagonist. Harry is a kalachakra - also known as an ouroboran – which means that he lives his life over and over again, starting back at his place of birth each time he dies in a previous life.

Harry's personality and worldview changes subtly with each of his life cycles but some of his lives have more importance for the events of the novel than others. His first life was largely uneventful because at this stage there was no way for Harry to know that he was a kalachakra. Harry's second life, in which he first discovered that he had been born back into a life he had already lived, caused him to descend into madness and commit suicide at age seven. Harry spent his third life searching for a religion which could explain what was happening to him, but didn't find any satisfactory answers.

One of the most significant of Harry's life cycles was his fourth life in which he confessed to his wife Jenny that he was living the same life over and over again and could, therefore, predict the future. This resulted in Jenny leaving him and Harry being incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital, where he was found by Franklin Phearson, an American government agent. Phearson changed the course of Harry's life when he told him about the Cronus Club.

Harry's meeting with Phearson is also significant for Harry's character development: the torture he undergoes at the hands of Phearson's men continues to affect him in later lives, leaving him with a form of post-traumatic stress which causes Harry to detach from his emotions (as demonstrated by his detached and unemotional repeated murder of Richard Lisle and his ability to act naturally when Vincent married Jenny). The traumatic events of his fourth life – including the torture and the end of his relationship with Jenny – continue to haunt Harry for the rest of the novel.

Although Harry's relationship with Jenny is an important part of the novel, Harry's most significant relationship is with Vincent Rankis. Vincent and Harry bond over their shared scientific interest in the nature and meaning of being kalachakra. Although the narrative is written by Harry at a moment when he has decided to murder Vincent, the narration is still suffused with warmth and admiration for his old friend.

During Harry's eleventh life he received a deathbed warning from a young German girl, another kalachakra, who told him that the world was ending. Initially Harry was unconcerned by this: the world will always end eventually. But the little girl told him that the end of the world was getting faster. This is the catalytic event in the novel which will change the course of Harry's lives. Before this incident, Harry was content to live a passive in life in which he didn't try to make a difference to the world. After this, Harry becomes committed to the goal of preventing the end of the world, which he pursues relentlessly until the end of the novel. In earlier lives, although Harry made no attempt to



make a difference in the world, he would use his knowledge of the future to take care of the people he cared about, such as his friends from his first life when he fought in the Second World War.

By the end of the novel, Harry is completely dedicated to making a difference in the world, but he has ceased to care about the individuals around him, passively allowing Jenny to marry another man, and then murdering his best friend. Harry's character arc shows him becoming a hero on a global scale, but a heartless villain on a personal level.

Vincent Rankis

Vincent Rankis is the novel's villain/antagonist and Harry's best friend. Vincent is a kalachakra, but unlike many kalachakra such as Fidel Gussman and Akinleye, he is not content to endlessly live out his lives never changing anything around him. Vincent is motivated by a desire for knowledge, which initially makes him seem like a sympathetic character. He does not want to remain passive but instead wishes to extend the amount of knowledge which exists in the world. However, because Vincent can live his life over and over again, it makes him callous and unsympathetic to the lives of others. Vincent thinks that events that occur after his own lifespan are irrelevant because they won't ever affect him, so he continues with his plans to build a quantum mirror even after Harry makes the argument that it will bring about the end of the world. Vincent's plan is so ambitious – building a machine which will be capable of understanding everything in the universe – that Harry accuses him of wanting to become a God.

Vincent is a similar character to Franklin Phearson in that both men wish to harness the power of the kalachakra to change the course of temporal events and both men resort to torturing Harry as part of their quests. Both men express regret about torturing Harry but both claim it is unavoidable and that Harry is forcing them to do it by refusing to cooperate. However Phearson is motivated by trying to do good in the world. However misguided he may be, he harms Harry for what he believes to be the greater good. Vincent's motivations are much more selfish: he isn't interested in gaining more knowledge so that he can help other people, he is interested in knowledge for knowledge's sake and doesn't care who he harms in its pursuit, killing and erasing the memories of 80 percent of kalachakras in the process.

Although Vincent appears to be entirely selfish and willing to harm anyone in his quest to build the quantum mirror, it is actually his intense emotional bond with Harry which brings about his downfall. Once Vincent believes he has confirmed that Harry's memories have been erased and believes he has confirmed Harry's point of origin, Harry is no longer a threat to the plan and, furthermore, is no longer someone who can help Vincent either. Despite this, Vincent makes sure to find Harry in each subsequent life because he wants to share his achievement with his old friend even after all that has happened between them. His inability to detach from these emotions, in the way that Harry is able to, leads to Vincent's destruction.



Franklin Phearson

Franklin Phearson is an American government agent and a linear mortal (as opposed to a kalachakra) who plays both an antagonistic and a catalytic role in the novel. Harry met Phearson during his fourth life. He is the first person during any of Harry's life cycles to believe that Harry is telling the truth when he says he can predict the future. Phearson's actions function as a catalyst in Harry's lives when he tells Harry about the Cronus Club, which inspires Harry to contact the club and leads to him being rescued from Phearson by Virginia. Phearson's treatment of Harry causes post-traumatic stress which continues to affect Harry throughout the rest of his lives.

As the novel progresses, Harry becomes more and more like Phearson. Once Harry becomes convinced that it is his responsibility to stop the world from ending he, like Phearson, justifies all of his actions as being for the greater good even when he must harm innocent people, for example when Harry blackmails Professor Gulakov in Russia.

Jenny

Jenny is the love interest in the novel. She is a linear mortal who was married to Harry during his fourth life. Harry's love for Jenny motivated him to tell her the truth about living the same life over and over again. Jenny thought Harry was mentally ill and he was incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital. None of Jenny's actions influence the course of events in the novel. Rather, it is the way Harry and Vincent feel about her which makes her a significant character. Harry confesses to Vincent that he still loved her several life cycles after they had been married which motivates Vincent to use Jenny as the ultimate test of whether Harry has really forgotten his earlier lives.

Akinleye

Akinleye is a kalachakra and one of Harry's allies in his fight against Vincent. Her character is used as a counterpoint to Vincent. Whereas Vincent is hell bent on changing the course of world history and making an impact, Akinleye is entirely passive and only interested in experiencing pleasure during her lives. However, Akinleye's dedication to pleasure does not allow her to avoid suffering. Due to the lack of care she shows for others and for her own body during one of her life cycles – in which her friend and maid committed suicide and Akinleye contracted HIV – Akinleye could not bear the consequences of her actions and underwent a Forgetting to escape from her sense of guilt.

Charity Hazelmere

Charity Hazelmere is a kalachakra and Harry's other ally against Vincent, along with Akinleye. Charity was the kalachakra responsible for taking care of Harry during his childhood years by arranging for him to be removed from his childhood home and given



enough money to support himself. When Charity fails to meet Harry during the early years of one of his life cycles, it is the first sign that something has gone terribly wrong and that the Cronus Club is no longer operating. Charity functions as a maternal figure for Harry, who has no real mother due to the death of his biological mother during childbirth and the death of his adoptive mother when he was still a child.

Virginia

Virginia is a kalachakra who rescued Harry from Phearson and introduced him to the Cronus Club. Virginia plays the role of mentor in the novel when she inducts Harry into the Cronus Club, tells him about the club's history, and makes sure he understands the rules which members must follow. Virginia gives Harry advice which saves his life when she warns him never to reveal his point of origin. Harry forces Virginia to undergo a Forgetting when he discovers she has been helping Vincent. When Harry commits this act of violence against his mentor it is further proof that he is willing to harm people he cares about for the sake of what he believes is the greater good.

The Hulne Family

The Hulne family are Harry's biological family. They are very wealthy and live in a manor house in North East England. Rory Hulne, Harry's biological father, raped a kitchen maid which resulted in Harry's birth and other members of the Hulne family came up with a plan to cover it up. Although the Hulnes were cruel and condescending to Harry, their attempts to obscure Harry's true origin allow him to evade Vincent.

Patrick and Harriet August

Patrick and Harriet August are Harry's adoptive parents. Harriet always dies when Harry is still a child so he never gets to know very much about her. During his later life cycles, Harry comes to realize that although he was adopted and Patrick didn't want to have him as a son, Patrick was the only real father he had ever had and had done a better job at being a father than Harry's biological father, Rory Hulne.

Fidel Gussman

Fidel Gussman is a kalachakra who Harry met in Afghanistan. Fidel spent all of his life cycles fighting in different wars because he enjoyed the excitement and the adrenaline rush. Fidel represents the theme of making a difference which runs throughout the novel. He argues that one soldier can never truly make a difference and therefore his involvement in different wars never changes any of the outcomes. This viewpoint is in stark contrast to Harry who believes that his own individual actions can halt the end of the world.

Richard Lisle

Richard Lisle is a linear mortal and a serial killer. Harry takes the decision to kill Richard Lisle in each of his subsequent lives before Lisle has the chance to commit any murders. His character reflects the theme of justice which runs throughout the book. The question remains whether there is a possible lifetime in which Richard Lisle wouldn't be a murderer and whether it is justifiable for Harry to execute him during lifetimes in which Richard Lisle has not committed any crimes.



Symbols and Symbolism

Quantum Mirror

The quantum mirror is a symbol for the destructive power of knowledge. Harry argues that by trying to build a machine which would be capable of explaining everything in the universe, Vincent is attempting to become a God. By pushing past human boundaries of knowledge, Harry and Vincent bring about the end of the world and it is not until Harry sabotages the quantum mirror that the world can be saved.

Cronus Club

The Cronus Club is a symbol of history, tradition, and learning the lessons of the past. In some cases, the things the Cronus Club stands for are useful: they share the story of Victor Hoeness as a cautionary warning for any kalachakra who have ambitions about changing the world. However, at other times, their focus on tradition and the past make them stagnant and unhelpful, unwilling to take any risks or try anything new. The Cronus Club symbolizes the fine line between learning the lessons of the past and taking risks which help build a better future.

Cambridge

Cambridge is a symbol of the positive aspects of learning. Here, Harry can engage in lively intellectual debate with Vincent and conduct scientific research which will help further his understanding of the nature and purpose of the kalachakra. It is also a symbol of nostalgia. Harry looks back on his time here with Vincent as the halcyon days of their friendship, before the quantum mirror caused a rift between them. All of Harry's fond memories and positive stories about Vincent happened at Cambridge. It is a symbol of lost innocence.

Newcastle

Newcastle is the major city in the North East of England, where Harry was born. Newcastle is a symbol of hope and optimism for new and exciting experiences as it serves as a gateway for Harry from his difficult upbringing in Berwick to his exciting life and membership in the Cronus Club in London. When Harry escapes from Berwick, he always does so via Newcastle where he meets with Charity Hazelmere and/or gets the train from Newcastle Central Station to London. Although Newcastle is a negative place in Harry's fourth life, as it is the location of the psychiatric hospital where he was forcibly drugged, it still stands as a symbol of a gateway to a new life even under these more negative circumstances: Harry is in Newcastle when he first meets Franklin Phearson and hears about the Cronus Club.



Psychiatric Hospitals / Asylums

Psychiatric hospitals and asylums in the novel symbolize despair and a lack of community. It is common for kalachakra in their second lives to end up in a psychiatric hospital or an asylum due to the mental anguish and confusion caused by discovering for the first time that they have been born again into the same life in the same time and place. After the mass Forgetting inflicted by Vincent and Virginia, a large number of kalachakra entered their second lives at the same time, overwhelming the few remaining kalachakra who retained their memories. There are not enough older kalachakra left to offer support during the difficult second life cycle meaning many end up in asylums and psychiatric hospitals, making the locations symbolic of a lack of community and a lack of relationships. When Jenny ends her marriage with Harry he is taken to a psychiatric hospital, once again symbolizing the lack of understanding relationships and connections.

Heroin

Heroin is used as a symbol of the dangers of hedonism, pleasure, and living the good life. Akinleye did not have any desire to use her status as a kalachakra to do good deeds or make a difference in the world, instead dedicating her life to nothing but the pursuit of pleasure. However, relentlessly pursuing pleasure did not allow Akinleye to avoid suffering: she became addicted to heroin which resulted in her contracting HIV and her friend and maid committing suicide. The lifetime in which Akinleye's pursuit of pleasure led to her becoming a heroin addict was so traumatizing for Akinleye that she underwent a Forgetting so that she could escape the guilt caused by the memories of her own hedonism.

War

War is a symbol of the futility of individual action. During all the times that Harry fought during the Second World War, with all the knowledge he had accumulated, he never once managed to take any actions that would alter the course or outcome of the war. The best he ever achieved was to warn a select handful of individuals of circumstances that would save their lives, as well as gaining knowledge which would allow Harry to avoid as much of the conflict as possible. This use of war as a symbol for the futility of individual action is returned to again in the chapter dealing with the kalachakra soldier Fidel Gussman, who fought in every war that occurred during his lifetime. He assured Harry that none of his actions ever altered history because the actions of individual soldiers never alter history, whether they're kalachakra or linear mortals. Gussman claims that it is the men in charge who make the decisions which affect wars and that soldiers themselves are incapable of making a difference.



The Forgetting

The Forgetting is a symbol the human experience. Unlike kalachakra, linear mortals are doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past because they are living their lives for the very first time, unaware of the centuries of knowledge that have been built up before them. When a kalachakra undergoes a Forgetting, they are reducing themselves to the condition of a linear mortal who has nothing but their own experiences to draw on when thinking about the nature of life. The Forgetting also represents the platitude that "ignorance is bliss". Although it is often enforced on kalachakra as punishment for wrongdoing, to a certain extent The Forgetting is actually an act of mercy or escape. Akinleye uses The Forgetting to escape from the guilt caused by her actions during her life as a heroin addict. Although Virginia is forced to undergo a Forgetting as punishment for working with Vincent, the fact that she can't remember her crimes releases her from having to come to terms with what she has done or feel guilty for her actions.

Pen Knife

The pen knife given to Harry by Virginia when she comes to rescue him from Franklin Phearson is a symbol of community, and membership in the Cronus Club. Although Harry uses the knife to commit suicide, which might make it a gruesome or harmful symbol in another context, the knife is actually a symbol of Harry being inducted into the Cronus Club and finally finding a place of community which he has lacked during his first four lives.

Rat Poison

The pen knife was a symbol of the community offered by the Cronus Club when it was given to Harry in order to aid him committing suicide. When rat poison is offered to him to commit suicide at Pietrok-112 it is depicted in a similar way: as a symbol of camaraderie and friendship. The rat poison is given to Harry by one of the guards at Pietrok-112 who fears that he too may one day end up being tortured by Vincent and his men. The guard takes pity on Harry and offers him an opportunity to escape, once again using the incongruous technique of having a method of suicide symbolize human friendship and community.



Settings

Berwick

Berwick, in the North East of England, is the Harry's hometown. This location is significant because it is the setting for all of Harry's childhoods where he must deal with his fraught relationships with his adoptive and biological families over and over again. This is an unhappy location for Harry, as it is marred by the tragic fate of his biological mother, the early death of his adoptive mother, and the cold, distant attitude of his biological family. Harry must guard the location of his birth at all costs in order to prevent Vincent killing him pre-birth.

Hulne House

Hulne House is the Manor House owned by the Hulnes, Harry's biological family. It is a location which causes great suffering to characters in the novel, most notably Harry's biological mother who was raped at Hulne House and then fired as a kitchen maid when the family discovered she was pregnant. In a later life, Rory Hulne asked Harry for money to save the house but Harry refused. In yet another life, Harry inherited the house and turned it into a rehabilitation center for people with mental illness, because he wanted the house to help people rather than hurt them.

Cambridge University

Cambridge University is the location where Harry first met Vincent. Harry looks back on his time at Cambridge with fondness because he enjoyed the intellectual stimulation of his friendship with Vincent. Retrospectively, the university is the place which gave birth to Vincent's desire to build a quantum mirror thus bringing about the end of the world.

North East England

The psychiatric hospital in Newcastle and the Manor House in Northumberland where Phearson held Harry prisoner are both negative locations which continue to haunt Harry for the rest of his lives. All of the locations in the North East of England (Newcastle, Berwick, and Northumberland) are associated with Harry's difficult childhood or the traumatic events of his fourth life, making the North East an area of sadness and tragedy from which Harry must escape. This is furthered by the danger which the North East presents to Harry's survival: if anyone discovers this is where Harry was born, they will be able to stop him from being born again.



London

London is the location Harry escapes to when he leaves the North East. It provides sanctuary to him: it is the first location where he encounters the Cronus Club and always the first destination he heads to when escaping his childhood in the North East. When Harry visits London in his thirteenth life he discovers that the Cronus Club there has been destroyed. When London fails to offer him his usual sanctuary this is symbolic of the fact that Harry is now alone and must act without any outside support.

Soviet Era Leningrad

Soviet Era Leningrad is a place that has been scarred by the brutal history of Russia in the 20th century. Because of this, the Leningrad branch of the Cronus Club struggles to keep members during this era, meaning that there are few people there to help Harry with his quest. The ones who stay behind do so to help kalachakra during their childhoods. It is a location associated with hardship and sacrifice.

Pietrok-112

Pietrok-112 is a military base in Soviet Russia where Vincent and Harry work together to build the quantum mirror. The location is a dark reflection of their time together in Cambridge, which was marked by hypothetical discussions and warm friendship. At Pietrok-112 the hypothetical becomes real and the friendship turns sour when Vincent tortures Harry.

Beijing

Due to how inaccessible China was to Westerners during much of the twentieth century, the Beijing branch of the Cronus Club has more members who survive Vincent's purge. Harry visits this locations as a last resort when he cannot find any other functioning Cronus Clubs.

America

America is the location Vincent uses to speed up technological innovation after his attempts to do so in Soviet Russia. America is depicted as a land of innovation but also as a land of greed. When the technological revolution occurs in America the people there are only interested in profit, rather than the long term consequences of their actions.

Switzerland

Switzerland is the location where Vincent succeeds in building the quantum mirror. Switzerland is presented as a secretive place where wealthy people can conduct illegal activities with the authorities interfering.



Themes and Motifs

Making a Difference

The central theme of the novel is Making a Difference and whether or not it is possible for a kalachakra or for any linear mortals to do so. Harry's first experiments with Making a Difference come during his third life when he uses the knowledge he gained during his first life to help save the lives of some of his friends during the Second World War. He also resolves to amass information which will help to keep him safe during the war during later life cycles, but he does not have any interest in attempting to change the course of history or the outcome of the war by intervening with his knowledge. It is not until Harry's fourth life, when he meets Franklin Phearson, that he becomes seriously involved with attempts to Make a Difference in the timeline of world events. This intervention is forced on Harry and it is Phearson who is motivated by his desire to Make a Difference in the world. Although Harry's lack of desire to change the world could seem callous to the reader, Phearson's character shows the other side of the coin. He is happy to cause pain and suffering in the moment to someone who he knows in an attempt to stop the pain and suffering of an unknown number of people in a manner which is not certain to work.

The motto of the Cronus Club is "Complexity should be your excuse for inaction" and this phrase carries the message of the theme of Making a Difference. The central question remains, is it worth putting in any effort into Making a Difference if you can't be certain what the results of your actions will be? The oft repeated question is whether a time traveler should attempt to execute Adolf Hitler to avoid the atrocity of the holocaust and the implied response from the club's motto is that this would be a waste of time because no one knows whether Hitler's death would prevent the holocaust or whether it would lead to even greater unknown suffering.

The two characters who take the theme of Making a Difference to its extremes are Vincent Rankis and Victor Hoeness both of whom use their knowledge as kalachakra to manipulate the course of world history by speeding up technological progress. In each case, their attempts at Making a Difference lead to the destruction of the world.

Harry's character arc shows a man content to live a passive life growing into a man who is obsessed with Making a Difference and changing the world. However, in the process of this change, Harry loses his sense of humanity and is no longer empathetic towards other people in his life. At the heart of the message of the novel is that large scale ambitions (like those of Vincent, Victor, and Phearson) have no meaning if they are detached from the desire to do good on a small scale individual level (such as the Augusts agreeing to adopt Harry). Although Harry eventually does Make a Difference by saving the world, by the time he has done this he has lost all of the emotional connections and relationships which gave his life meaning.



Responsibility

The question of Responsibility haunts all of the characters in the novel. The theme is introduced immediately in the first chapter in which Harry is informed that the world is coming to an end. Harry has the option of asking why this is his Responsibility, but chooses to take on the challenge as his own. When he reports to the Cronus Club that the world is coming to an end, members want to know why it should be their responsibility to do anything about it. The whole of Harry's life has been defined by the ability or inability of the characters around Harry to take responsibility for their actions. When Harry is born, his biological father Rory Hulne refuses to take responsibility for his son and it is left to other members of the Hulne family to take responsibility for the child and come up with a plan. The Hulnes then pass on the responsibility of raising Harry to Patrick and Harriet August who provide Harry with a support and love even though the child is not their responsibility.

The question of who is responsible for the quickening of the end of the world gives Harry a motivation and purpose in his twelfth life which he had been lacking in his previous life cycles. However, once Harry tracks down Vincent in Pietrok-112 he starts to fear that it is actually Harry himself who is responsible for the coming cataclysm. Despite his concerns, Harry ignores his sense of responsibility and allows his quest for knowledge and enthusiasm for science to override his concerns about what causes the end of the world. Although Harry has difficulty maintaining his sense of responsibility when it relates to the world at large, it is brought home to him on a personal level when he discovers that Vincent has destroyed the Leningrad branch of the Cronus Club. Although he could not imagine the level of destruction he was causing globally, Harry was viscerally affected by the violent death of Olga even though she only represented one individual. Once Vincent's wrongdoing becomes individualized for Harry he is once again able to take responsibility for the situation and restart his quest to stop Vincent from building the quantum mirror.

Akinleye's refusal to take responsibility for her actions from one life to the next motivates her to undergo a Forgetting when she finds that she cannot bear the weight of responsibility for what happened to her maid. When Virginia is found responsible for the forced Forgettings and the pre-birth murders she is punished in a way which means in future lifetimes she will not realize what she was responsible for and, therefore, won't be able to learn from her mistakes. Phearson is the character who most believes that he is a responsible person, but he is also the character he inflicts such severe harm on Harry that it continues to traumatize him centuries later.

Learning from the Past

Learning from the Past naturally becomes a central theme of the novel due to the nature of the premise in which some humans are able to live their lives over and over again. This gives kalachakra an opportunity to make different decisions based on their knowledge of how their decisions turned out during past lives. Harry's character is the



only character who successfully learns from the past. He gradually and strategically accrues knowledge throughout his many lifetimes which assist him in saving the world.

Whether or not characters are willing to learn the lessons of the past is one of the defining factors in whether or not they succeed with their life goals. Both Akinleye and Virginia are not able to learn from the mistakes of the past because both of them undergo a Forgetting, meaning they no longer remember any of the details of their past lives and can't use this knowledge to inform their decisions in the future. Virginia's Forgetting is enforced as a punishment for her crimes, proving that the kalachakra believe not being able to learn from the past is a kind of punishment. However this punishment is counterintuitive as it prevents Virginia from learning from her mistakes and correcting her flawed behavior. Virginia had already undergone a Forgetting once before, although neither Harry nor the reader are ever informed of why it occurred. The only detail that is revealed is that other kalachakra who know why Virginia had a Forgetting feel awkward and uncomfortable when she brings it up, implying that perhaps Virginia had done something dreadful and unforgivable in an earlier life. By denying her the opportunity to learn from her previous transgressions, the kalachakra ensure that Virginia is doomed to carry on causing harm to others in future lives with no knowledge that she has done so before. Akinleye, in contrast to Virginia, underwent her Forgetting voluntarily but the same questions still apply. If Akinleye is unable to remember the selfish behavior of her earlier lives, what will stop her repeating the same mistakes over and over again?

The character of Phearson flips this theme on its head because, rather than being interested in learning from the past, Phearson is obsessed with learning from the future. He believes he can stop the suffering of others by intervening with knowledge from the future but ironically fails to heed warnings from the past about the complexity of history.

The biggest lesson from the past featured in the novel is the story of Victor Hoeness, who caused the end of the world (referred to in the novel as a cataclysm) when he began to introduce technology in the linear timeline long before it should have been invented. Victor was horrifically tortured in retribution for his actions and was eventually killed pre-birth, ensuring that he could never be born again. The story of Victor should serve as a cautionary warning to Vincent, but he refuses to learn from history and, therefore, becomes a victim of the same fate as Victor.

Justice and Revenge

The theme of Justice and Revenge appears in the novel in relation to the question of how kalachakras should respond to crime and what the appropriate form of punishment should be. There is a fine line in the novel between the actions characters take in order to deliver Justice and those that are taken solely for the sake of Revenge.

For Harry personally, this theme is mainly tied up with his relationship with Richard Lisle, a man who murdered many women in London. During the first life cycle in which Harry encounters Lisle he attempts to deal with what happened through the usual



courses of justice: Harry gathers evidence and takes it to the police, but the police do not take him seriously and Lisle continues to murder women. As a result of this, Harry decides to take justice into his own hands and executes Lisle in the next life cycle in which he encounters him. The second time they meet, Harry realizes he is too late and that Lisle has already murdered someone. In order to prevent this happening again, Harry takes the decision to murder Lisle in his next life cycle before he's had a chance to commit any crimes. This blurs the lines of justice. Is it reasonable to punish someone for a crime they haven't yet committed? How can Harry be sure that every version of Lisle he encounters would definitely become a murderer?

In the world of the kalachakra, Justice and Revenge can be doled out in one of two ways: The Forgetting or pre-birth death, the first of which erases all memories of a kalachakra's previous life, the second of which prevents a kalachakra from ever being born again. In some circumstances the actions of the kalachakras can be seen as justice being served, such as when they took the decision to kill Victor Hoeness pre-birth to stop him from ending the world. However the torture they subjected Victor to as a child in order to discover his place of origin seems more like revenge for the harm he has caused. The kalachakra do not attempt reason or diplomacy with each other when there are disagreements, instead resorting to Forgettings and pre-birth murders. This leaves little opportunity for growth or change amongst their ranks. This is most obviously the case with Virginia who undergoes two Forgettings and is not made aware in either case what crimes she had committed in order to deserve such a punishment. As a result of this, although the kalachakra have succeeded in taking revenge against Virginia by removing her memories, they don't solve anything because she is not informed in her new lives what her crimes were and therefore has no opportunity to learn from the past and avoid committing the same crimes in the future.

Although Harry's pursuit of Vincent could be viewed as a pursuit of justice because Harry wants to hold Vincent accountable for causing the second cataclysm, it is really all about revenge. Harry doesn't take his quest to save the world seriously until after Vincent has tortured him. In his next life, Harry's quest is much more personal especially when Vincent marries Jenny. After this point, Harry is equally dedicated to getting his revenge against Vincent as he is for seeking justice over the cataclysm.

Guilt

Many of the characters, such as Akinleye and Harry, are haunted by guilt about their actions in their previous lives. On the other hand are characters such as Phearson, Vincent, and Rory Hulne who are notable for the lack of guilt they feel even though the actions they have taken are arguably much worse than anything Harry or Akinleye did.

The central example of a character being affected by guilt is Akinleye, who cannot live with the feelings of guilt she has as a result of her actions in one life and therefore takes the decision to undergo a Forgetting so that she will no longer feel guilty. This allows her to become a much more engaged and humanitarian kalachakra in her next lives, when she helps Harry in his quest to stop Vincent and she also becomes much more involved



in helping and supporting other kalachakra who are going through their first life cycle in which they are aware that they have been born again. In the case of Akinleye, guilt is presented as a hindrance which could prevent someone from living their life to the full. When Akinleye asks Harry if he thinks she was right to have a Forgetting, he says that he thinks she was.

Representing the opposite perspective on Guilt is Virginia, who is found guilty of forcing other kalachakra to undergo Forgettings and of murdering many of her fellow kalachakra pre-birth. Virginia's punishment for her crimes is to undergo a Forgetting because the kalachakras believe that not having access to memories of your past lives is a terrible thing to happen. However, as can be seen through the case of Akinleye, the Forgetting can also be seen as a pardon and an opportunity to escape guilt for previous actions. In this light, rather than being punished, Virginia is given the opportunity to carry on living her lives as if none of this had happened, never forced to address her feelings of guilt.

Harry suffers from intense guilt during his time at Pietrok-112 when he starts to suspect that he is himself partially responsible for the coming cataclysm. Harry's feelings of guilt do not crystallize until he attempts to visit the Leningrad branch of the Cronus Club and discovers that Vincent has destroyed it and murdered Harry's friend Olga. Harry uses his guilt as motivation to do the right thing when he returns to Pietrok-112 and refuses to do any more work on the quantum mirror. This is an example of guilt being a positive force which can change someone's behavior for the better. If Harry did not feel guilty about his role in helping Vincent build the quantum mirror then he would not have taken the actions which allowed him to stop Vincent and save the world. Because Harry has suffered such intense feelings of guilt over such a global and large scale issue, the attempts of his biological grandmother to make him feel guilty about something as trivial and irrelevant as accepting a scholarship to Cambridge do not affect him.



Styles

Point of View

The novel is written in the first person from the perspective of Harry August. The most significant element of the use of Point of View in the novel is that the narrative is being written by Harry as he is dying from radiation poisoning at the end of his fifteenth life and the story is being addressed to Vincent as a way of informing him that he has lost and that Harry will ensure that he is never born again after the end of this life. This use of Point of View adds drama and emotional resonance to the final chapter in which Harry pours out his feelings to Vincent, but raises numerous questions about the logic of the narrative which preceded this revelation. What, for example, is the reader to make of the revelation in Chapter 45 that the scientist Vitali Karpenko and Vincent Rankis are the same person? If the text is truly addressed to Vincent then this revelation is completely unnecessary as, surely, Vincent is already perfectly aware that it was him. Perhaps the best explanation for the inconsistencies in the use of Point of View in the novel is the fact that Harry's character is revealed to be writing all of this as he is dying of radiation poisoning and has, therefore, consumed vast quantities of morphine, which could justify any idiosyncrasies in the style of the narration.

The revelation that Harry is addressing Vincent also changes the emotional implications of the conclusion. Throughout his later lives, Harry was dedicated to destroying Vincent and appeared to have lost all emotional connection that he had previously had with his former best friend. Vincent, on the other hand, continued to care for Harry as evidenced by his desire to keep Harry near him even during life cycles when Harry couldn't be of any use to him. Vincent shows his love for Harry by revealing his point of origin. Not realizing that Harry will use this information to destroy him, Vincent wants to become closer to his friend by revealing his secrets. By writing about his own point of origin in the book and explaining his difficult upbringing to Vincent through the narration, Harry actually returns the sentiment. He shares his secrets, fears, and feelings with his best friend even as he takes the decision to destroy him. Without this use of Point of View, the reader would only witness Harry's revenge against Vincent and would assume that it was motivated by hatred. By writing the novel addressed to Vincent, Harry shows that there was still some love in his heart.

Language and Meaning

The book has a complicated structure due to the nature of its characters, all of whom progress through time over and over again. Certain historical events, such as England during the Second World War, are revisited in multiple life cycles but others, such as East Berlin during the Soviet Era, are only visited on one occasion. The most repeated event is Harry's childhood in Berwick which is referred to each time he begins a new life cycle. Broadly speaking, the chapters are divided into three different types. The first type are chapters which are relevant to the plotline of the cataclysm. The second type



are chapters which chart the story of Harry's fourth and fifth lives in detail. The third type are reflections from Harry about experiences and lessons from his other lives.

The chapters which tell the story of the cataclysm appear in chronological order beginning with Harry's discovery in Chapter 1 that the end of the world was getting faster, through his mission to Russia to discover who was responsible, his work with Vincent on the quantum mirror, and his attempts to track Vincent down and stop him from completing the project. These chapters form the backbone of the narrative and all of the other chapters are subplots in relation to this central plot, which features the protagonist in pursuit of a goal.

The chapters which details Harry's fourth and fifth lives also occur in chronological order in which he reveals to Jenny that he has been reincarnated, he is imprisoned in a psychiatric hospital, he is taken elsewhere by Franklin Phearson, he escapes and manages to alert the Cronus Club to his existence before he is recaptured, Virginia visits him and helps him to commit suicide, he is reborn into his fifth life, grows up and meets Virginia in London so that she can induct him as a member of the Cronus Club.

The third type of chapter – in which Harry shares recollections and memories from his lives which do not relate to the story of how he joined the Cronus Club or how he defeated Vincent – appear in non-chronological order. Examples of these chapters include meeting Fidel Gussman in Afghanistan and being kidnapped by bandits in Argentina. These chapters also serve to obscure how important Vincent is to the narrative because the first time he is introduced the chapter could be interpreted as one of these remembrances rather than part of the main plot.

Structure

After the events of his fourth life, in which he was tortured by Phearson's men, Harry began to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder which caused him to detach from his emotions. This is reflected in the language which Harry uses to describe the events of each of his life cycles. For example, when discussing the pain, confusion, and fear he felt during his second life, rather than show any sorrow or sympathy for his younger self, he wrote: "Naturally my reaction to being born again precisely where I had begun... induced its own rather clichéd madness in me." Harry is, at heart, a scientist and he falls back on observing things in a scientific manner during times of stress in order to try to minimize the emotional impact of what's happening to him. The starkest example of this comes when Harry is drugged against his will at a psychiatric hospital during his fourth life. Harry recalls that after one episode he "screamed and screamed and screamed until he strangled me and I didn't scream any more" and follows up this harrowing image by concluding "Naturally, by this point I'd lost track of time, and thus the diagnostic purpose of the exercise was rather left behind."

Another main feature of the language in the novel is the use of scientific, technical, and philosophical terminology which is employed most often during the conversations between Vincent and Harry. They discuss matters such as the "multiverse", "Newtonian



concepts”, “protons and neutrons”, and “logical extrapolation” for example. They are initially presented in an academic context making their conversations appear to be hypothetical and part of the process of learning, but when these discussions move to a secret fortified lab in Soviet Era Russia, the implications of this kind of language become more sinister.

The scientific language is contrasted with the language used in moments when Harry allows himself to reconnect to his emotions at which times he expresses himself with more descriptive and poetic language, for example when he writes of his regret that Vincent never got the chance to see the moors at their best: “There is a moment when the moor comes to life... we have missed those few precious hours of revelation. Instead, the skies have been the slate-grey of the stones beneath them”. This passage is especially poignant in retrospect as the reader now knows that Vincent and Harry will never get the chance to go to the moors again.



Quotes

Naturally my reaction to being born again precisely where I had begun – in the women's restroom of Berwick-upon-Tweed station, on New Year's Day 1919, with all the memories of my life that had gone before, induced its own rather clichéd madness in me.

-- Harry (chapter 3 paragraph 8)

Importance: Spoken by Harry during this narration, this line establishes for the first time the nature of the kalachakra and the premise of the novel. Although the reader knows Harry has already lived many lives, this is the moment when it is revealed he lives the same life over and over again. The quote also demonstrates Harry's tendency to detach from emotional situation and describe them unsympathetically, here calling his madness a cliché.

There is a moment when the moor comes to life. I wish you could see it, but somehow whenever I have been with you on our walks through the countryside, we have missed those few precious hours of revelation.

-- Harry (chapter 4 paragraph 1)

Importance: Spoken by Harry in the narration, these words are the first indication that Harry is addressing his tale to someone in particular rather than to the general reader. The line is particularly interesting in retrospect, as it demonstrates how much warmth and affection Harry still has for Vincent even at the moment he has decided to destroy him. The quote harks back to an earlier time in their friendship when things were simpler and they had yet to become enemies.

Are you God, Dr. August? Are you the only living creature that matters? Do you think, because you remember it, that your pain is bigger and more important? Do you think, because you experience it, that your life is the only life that gets counted? Do you?

-- Franklin Phearson (chapter 13 paragraph 20)

Importance: These words are spoken by Franklin Phearson and addressed to Harry, when Harry refuses to give Phearson the level of detailed information about the future that Phearson requires. The words will be echoed later in the novel when Harry accuses Vincent of wanting to become a God. When the words are echoed, it is proof to the reader that Harry is becoming more unsympathetic, more callous, and more like Phearson.

Complexity should be your excuse for inaction.

-- Harry (chapter 17 paragraph 1)

Importance: The motto of the Cronus Club is repeated in many forms throughout the novel. The argument is that because the world is so complex, and because it is impossible to predict the consequences of any one individual's actions, it is best for each person to resign themselves to doing nothing. Vincent hates the Cronus Club for



this attitude and Harry will also come to reject the teaching when he decides to take action to stop Vincent from bringing about the end of the world.”

Cronus Club. I am Harry August. On 26 April 1986 reactor four went into meltdown. Help me.

-- Harry (chapter 19 paragraph 8)

Importance: This is an ad placed in the personal ads section of a national newspaper by a colleague of Harry's. Harry sent the ad to his friend during his brief and unsuccessful attempt to escape from Phearson's manor house. The ad refers to the nuclear disaster which occurred at Chernobyl in 1986, long before the event had happened during Harry's fourth life. By accurately showing his knowledge of the future, Harry alerts the Cronus Club to his existence. After this message is delivered, Harry's life changes forever.

Don't tell yourself that just because you've been around a bit you're not in a terrible state. You are absolutely in a terrible state, Harry dear, and the silent, noble, number won't get you anywhere.

-- Virginia (chapter 20 paragraph 8)

Importance: Although Virginia will later be revealed to a villain in the story, when she first meets Harry she is a mentor who saves him from Phearson. She points out something to Harry which he never manages to admit to himself: that the torture he underwent at the hands of Phearson will cause post traumatic stress which will continue to haunt Harry for the rest of his lives. Although Virginia warns him not to do so, Harry never fully acknowledges in the narrative how damaging this events were for him.

A lot of our members are also born rather poor, so it helps to know that there is a society of mutually understanding individuals who can see that you get a decent pair of socks to wear and ensure that you don't have waste several tedious years of your life, every life, learning your ABC. It's not just the money... it's the companionship.

-- Virginia (chapter 24 paragraph 25)

Importance: Here Virginia explains to Harry the very essence of the Cronus Club, which is to provide community, sanctuary, and support to other kalachakra. Despite Vincent's feelings that the club is self-indulgent, lazy, and old-fashioned, this core message of their purpose shines through throughout the novel, especially in the aftermath of the mass Forgettings in which the few remaining kalachakra unite to support those who cannot remember who or what they are.

His complete lack of interest in my supposed status had cultivated a complete apathy towards it on my part too, and of all my colleagues he seemed the only one with the remotest interest in the unfashionably modern ideas with which I tormented 1940s academia.

-- Harry (chapter 28 paragraph 3)

Importance: Harry speaks these words in the narration, reflecting with nostalgia on the



early years of his friendship with Vincent and the refreshing nature of their friendship in the stuffy, traditional environs of Cambridge. This is one of the passages in the novel which raise questions about the revelation that Harry has been addressing Vincent throughout: leaving the reader to question why Harry refers to “his complete lack of interest” rather than “your complete lack of interest”. This quotation also gives an early clue that Vincent is also a kalachakra: unlike the other academics, he is happy to discuss ideas with Harry which were far ahead of their time for the 1940s.

We're just fucking soldiers. We kill some guys, they kill our guys, we kill their guys back – none of it fucking means anything, you know? Just numbers on a page, and only when the numbers get big enough do the fat cats who decide this shit sit down and go, 'Wow, let's make the decision we were always gonna have to make anyway.' I'm no threat to temporal events, partner.

-- Fidel Gussman (chapter 50 paragraph 33)

Importance: Fidel Gussman answers with these words when Harry asks him whether he worries that his involvement with all of the wars which occurred during his lifetime might affect the course of history. Gussman's beliefs reflect one of the core themes of the novel: making a difference. Gussman, like most kalachakra other than Harry and Vincent, believes that making a difference is impossible so he never worries about the potential consequences of his actions.

There is no 'after my death'."

-- Vincent (chapter 51 paragraph 45)

Importance: Vincent says this to Harry when Harry asks what the consequences of Vincent choosing to speed up the technological progress of history will be for the generations who will live after Vincent's death. It reveals the essential selfishness of Vincent's character and contrasts his character with Harry, who finds purpose in life by taking action to save the world for future generations even when he will not benefit from his actions himself.

I have told you all this, the passage of my life, as much to force myself to action as for your enlightenment. I know that in this I put myself entirely in your power, reveal every aspect of my being... To protect myself after this confession, I now have no choice but to destroy you utterly and the knowledge you have possessed of me. I force myself to action.

-- Harry (chapter 82 paragraph 36)

Importance: This confession from Harry to Vincent in the final chapter of the novel reveals that Harry still cares deeply for Vincent and worries that he will not be able to go through with his decision to kill Vincent pre-birth. Inaction has plagued Harry throughout his earlier lives so he must force himself into action in this instance by ensuring his own destruction if he doesn't act.

Or, more to the purpose, I could tell you very simply that it's something to do, something which might actually change the way I live. So damn everything else.



-- Harry (chapter 51 paragraph 6)

Importance: Harry uses these words to explain to Vincent why he changed his mind and agreed to help Vincent to build the quantum mirror. The quotation reveals the lack of meaning and purpose that have plagued Harry's life since his fourth life when he lost Jenny and was haunted by Phearson. Despite the potentially catastrophic consequences, Harry agrees to help build the quantum mirror because it will help ease the tedium of living the same life over and over again.