



# Half Lives

*Sara Grant*

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Present day: Icie is a typical high school teenager - until disaster strikes and her parents send her to find shelter inside a mountain near Las Vegas.

The future: Beckett lives on The Mountain - a sacred place devoted to the Great I AM. He must soon become the leader of his people. But Beckett is forced to break one of the sacred laws, and when the Great I AM does not strike him down, Beckett finds himself starting to question his beliefs.

As Beckett investigates The Mountain's history, Icie's story is revealed - along with the terrifying truth of what lies at the heart of The Mountain.

Sara Grant's HALF LIVES is a dystopian chronicle of the journeys of two unlikely heroes in their race against time to save future generations.

## Half Lives Details

Date : Published May 2nd 2013 by Indigo (first published January 1st 2013)

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Author : Sara Grant

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## **From Reader Review Half Lives for online ebook**

### **Chrissy says**

Not all dystopian YA is created equal. Here, I think, the author has some basic pieces: spunky young woman (check), apocalyptic events (check), knowledge that some aspect of humanity survives into the future (check) but.... it never comes together. The novel alternates between a present narrator suddenly jarred out of her privileged existence by the apocalypse and a future which is not nearly as clearly articulated although it seems like future society is based on weird amalgams of 20th century teenage culture -- think emojis, made up words and high school cliques. Ugh, it comes off as annoying more than original. The final third of the novel is just unrelentingly grim without any compelling characters to hold onto. I finished this but just barely.

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### **Lectus says**

What a great summary the inside fold of hard copy has. As always, it didn't live up to it.

I didn't see the point of showing the close-to-sisterhood friendship between Icie and Lola during the first three pages if Grant ditched said best friend right away.

Oh! Wait. As always, something this traumatic would keep Icie from "getting attached." Right.

Icie... the weird names in YA keep being creative...

I hadn't gotten my liking around Icie yet when the next chapter is the POV of Beckett and friends.

Back to Icie; new POV: Harper. Back to Icie, then Beckett, and then a new character: Greta.

At this point, I am not connecting to anybody. I don't like any of the characters enough to endure the jumps between the present (Icie) and the future (the other POVs).

Actually, the present is not bad but the characters of the future drag the book down.

Why keep reading it if I already know (from the future characters) that the virus destroyed everything? All is left is reading how Icie made it to the bunker, but she is kind of annoying. She made a new "friend" on her way there and she is "do not get attached." Right. Because that is exactly what people think when they are in danger; specially teenagers.

Everything is superficial. DNF! DNF! DNF! DNF!

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### **Stella Chen says**

**Thank you HBG Canada for providing an ARC of Half Lives!**

When my sister forwarded an email to me with the books available from HBG this summer, I almost didn't pick this book. Just by reading the first 70% of the description, I was already in the "Oh-no-not-another-post-apocalyptic-novel-in-which-a-secret-was-discovered" mood. But praise the writing gods (and Sara Grant), this story has more to it than just that. It skips forward in generations and also tells the story of a future cult. Now, that is the kind of kick I was waiting for. What's even better was Ms. Grant's choice of not simply writing a story from the future perspective, because then, another dystopian story would have been born. **The concept of this book is new and adventurous, not to mention the cross-generation storytelling was well executed.**

Thanks to Sara, the present and the future can finally live in harmony! (And no Fire Nation jokes in the comments please.)(view spoiler)

When a story involves a future religious cult, one would perceive that as a serious matter - and it is. But kudos to Sara Grant for bringing in humour in her story. I mean, come on, the leader of this religious group is a teenage boy. He has bound to make some mistakes, right? I think my favourite aspect of this book has to do with the misinterpretations of Icie's story. Her story has been misunderstood by those in the future and when the reader first arrive at the future perspective, expect to be a little confused. Their words have evolved and the thing we once knew can be unknown to them. **So when they all begin to chant: "Whatever! Whatever! Whatever!" don't put down the book and walk away. That disjointed feeling is the beauty of this book.**

I'm still undecided as to which perspective I enjoyed more. Both had their pros and cons, and both had moments where I can and can't connect with. These present day characters are not who I usually connect to but I thought they were written very realistically. I feel like the jokes they tell and their view on life is pretty close to those of real teens. The character in the future are more of the voices I am accustomed to; these characters appear a lot in other post-apocalyptic novels, so they are a bit clichéd. But because the plot was so interesting, these characters didn't bother me.

So overall, this book was unexpected, humorous and thought-provoking.

I will link the article Sara Grant speaks of in the Author's Note right here. It is the inspiration to this book and I think it's a neat read.

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### **acuriouslibrarian says**

This book was kind of depressing :(

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### **Amy says**

Goodreads says this book has 256 pages. My copy has 383. Hmmmm.

I finally finished this book. The chapters about the survivors were fairly good until the end. The rest were awful and the ending was abrupt and meaningless. I'm glad it, like the rest of the world in the story, is over.

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## Mandy says

To be quite honest, I'm not even sure what this book is supposed to be about. It failed to engage me before one of the main plot points was even introduced. On the other hand, it made me feel a lot better about DNF-ing books, because life is too short for boring books. So, uh, thanks?

So this book alternates between two narrators, one of which I've completely forgotten. The other is named Icie. Luckily, it's not a diminutive for frozen water, but it's still a pretty bad name. And even though it may be realistic, I.could.not. with all the social media references in her present-day storyline.

As for the storyline featuring the character who I've forgotten: I did derive amusement from this weird cult leader person. (I think. The boredom and deliberate vagueness does not help my retention of details.) But only because I kept reading his name -- the Great I AM -- as the Great Will.I.Am, which is also how I presume Will.I.Am addresses himself.

*I received my free copy from Little, Brown. I received no compensation for writing this review -- obviously, since I don't say very nice things about the book.*

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## Leah Sattler says

Oh my.

Dear Goodreads managers, please make a 'no star' button. Please.

I didn't finish the book. I mean, idk, It'a probably just me, but a white-haired dreadhead who makes up words like freepy and crupid just didn't catch my attention. It's probably just me.

So I got until like the second chapter before the cheesy quotes started. And when I say cheesy, I mean right up there with cheddar and mozzarella.

So, naturally, I skipped to the end.

**\*SPOILER\*** (But you will want to know this if you ever intend to read it)

He commits suicide.

I think I've said enough. My work here is done. I've made my point, and if these simple facts aren't enough for you to put the darn book down, then go ahead, because I don't think ANYTHING will.

Have fun.

*\*wailing in the distance\**

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## **Katherine says**

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By the end of the book I didn't like either side. Icie was supposed to be portrayed as a hero who saved Chaske and all the boys t

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## **Linsey Kinsey-Lindh says**

Great idea for a book. Amazing idea. Had SO much potential.

Tried really hard to like it but had to put it down after page 18. I think she was trying too hard to connect the past and the future with an annoying teenager making up her own words and catchphrases. She completely lost me when the girls in the future were called cheerleaders and the guys rockstars. Why? Just...why?

Dystopia indeed. I feel bad for those kids stuck with the idiotic protagonist's lingual eccentricities. Poor bastards.

Maybe something was lost in the fact that I didn't/couldn't finish it. Maybe they're only going off her journal or something. I just wasn't going to keep putting myself through hell to find out.

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## **Justin says**

<http://librarianaut.com/2013/04/27/bo...>

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## **Noor Haj-Ali says**

It looked like the writer was trying to be serious but the book is a big joke..

I reached page 96 and stopped.. the writing is so poor, I could at least stand it in "present" but the future parts were so stupid, it felt like reading a children's book , he went up the mountain.. he came down the mountain, Becket enjoyed walking .

the title must be "Becket and Friends"

and the names are stupid, and the idea is stupid, the characters are stupid, the plot is stupid... this is a stupid book...

And the "just sayings" and "whatever" , "Facebook" "cheer captain" etc.. was that supposed to be creative? because it really annoyed me .

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## **Jessica says**

Very interesting, intriguing and satirical in my opinion. The story is told in two storylines, alternating the chapters between "present day" and "the future."

"Present day" follows the story of four teenagers that band together in a nuclear waste bunker in the mountains near Las Vegas after a terrorist attack that released a deadly virus left most people dead.

"The future" follows, again, mainly four people, but this is how civilization has ended up. We have three people from the village they call "Forreal" and an outsider named Greta whose tribe of nomads just settled in what is now called Vega.

I literally could not put this book down - you know how the story ends for the present day people, the future is proof of that. But the thing that draws you in is HOW the present turned into this weird society of people who worship the great I AM. Their funny "just sayings," the facebookes they complete in order to make a rite of passage, the "whatevers" and how their songs of worship actually were popular rock songs in the present day. These people took all sorts of things that we experience in our own daily lives and then twisted them around. It's strange to think about - the end of the world and all you have to keep going is words and sayings that don't provide the context that they used to.

The author brings up the subject of nuclear power and its inevitable toxic waste. This makes you really think - a powerful thing for a YA book

*"don't hold on to hate.  
accept your fate.  
we had time.  
(not so much time.)  
all you got is time.  
til it's gone.*

*"i learned that surviving isn't all it's cracked up to be. if you survive, you've got to live with the guilt, and that's more difficult than looking someone in the eye and pulling the trigger. trust me. i've done both. killing takes a twitch of the finger. absolution takes several lifetimes."*

This book is featured on my Top 20 list for 2013 on my blog.

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### **Kimberly Francisco says**

I cried twice, which I think means this is an automatic five star.

Full review: <http://www.stackedbooks.org/2013/06/h...>

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### **Sarah says**

I wanted to like *Half Lives* more than I did. Grant's novel is told from points in time, the present day and the future. These two time periods are connected, though we aren't told how and the hints throughout the novel are weak, at best. The present day story, even when Grant loses focus, is mostly fine. I did like the way she deals with the problems of death and the choices people make in order to survive. If her loss of focus was the only problem, I probably would've enjoyed the book more. Unfortunately, it's the future characters who drag

the book down.

Grant tries to set up a future world that is interesting and connected to the past in ways I feel like we should figure out as we read the alternating chapters, but it doesn't work. Instead of just focusing on one character for the present and one for the future, she bounces around between characters -- we can tell them apart because the future chapters have a different font and each chapter's title includes the name of the character who narrates it. Among other things, *Half Lives* suffer from an over abundance of characters who I just don't care about. There's also annoying jargon that the future characters use that should be hints to the connection to the past, but you just have to guess, as it's never fully explained.

We do get, right near the end, a thrown together explanation of how the past and future connect. It's subtle, which is nice, but it's too little too late. There was really only one character who I cared about and I didn't even realize it until the character died. I felt I was meant to be emotionally invested in the romantic relationships between some of the characters, and the characters collective and individual needs to survive, but there just wasn't enough of emotional connection for me.

The one saving grace is that it doesn't appear to be a series, because the book ends without cliff hangers (aside from all the unanswered questions about what/who caused the outbreak and how the society of the future developed, but I don't really care to know). It's basically a self-contained story. If you're starved for dystopia, read it. Otherwise, pass.

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### **Angelique Minnaar says**

As it has been quite a while since I last read an apocalyptic story, I was looking forward to reading "Half Lives" by Sara Grant.

Two stories told simultaneously, but set in two different eras, the reader alternates chapters from one timeline to the other. This technique allows clues to be revealed, slowly expanding the reader's understanding of how the future evolved. Some readers may find it difficult to follow the dual stories, but I enjoyed the change in pace. This modern update on the fascinating hypothesis of how society could revert after a catastrophic event is well written. As the survivors are young, inexperienced teenagers, the society that 'evolves', is limited in their views and understanding.

The first story (Isis timeline) is set in the early 21st century. A bio-terrorist attack releases a virus that kills most of the human population. Isis, nicknamed Ici, is the key to the future. The story revolves around her escape to a secluded bunker near Vegas. Along the way Ici meets Marissa, Tate & Chaske. The four of them lock themselves in the underground bunker to await the passing of the infection. The seclusion takes its toll on each teen in a different way, forcing Ici to deal with her fears & desires. She is forced to kill to survive, to accept death as part of the new beginning, to overcome the guilt that she has survived, while everyone she knew & loved, died, and finally, to set down the rules for a new society.

The second story (Forreal timeline) is set in the future, hundreds of years later. This story is actually broken into multiple stories for each main character. As I started reading, I wondered why the people called themselves cheer leaders & rock stars; why they were born with deformities; & how the society had come to worship the way they did. As I read further into the Isis timeline, it all started to come together, showing how the past has influenced the future.

The Forreal characters are:

a) Beckett, Ici's descendant, born with the eternity symbol denoting his connection to the great I AM. He battles to accept his position of leadership and responsibility, especially after meeting Greta, who he falls in love with. He, like Ici, has to overcome his fears to lead his people to peace.



- b) Harper wandered onto the mountain as a child. Taken in by the village, but not quite fitting in, she loves Beckett. Her jealousy at seeing Beckett kissing Greta, causes her to lie about an impending terrorist attack. She has to accept her role as friend & advisor only to Beckett, & help him stop the start of a new war.
- c) Finch is the antagonist of the story, craving the power & admiration given to Beckett. He has spent his whole life patrolling the mountain, wanting to fight the terrorists. (The bogeymen of past stories, turned from humans, into monsters, to explain why the world was destroyed.) Harper's story of seeing terrorists, allows him to banish Beckett & to seize control of the village. He leads them into battle, attacking Vega during the night.
- d) Greta is a descendant of another group of survivors, whose family have come to Vega to begin a new life. She is exploring the mountain when she meets Beckett. Brought up as the next leader, but also not wanting to take on the responsibility, she falls in love with Beckett. She is forced to choose between saving Beckett or her family from Finch's mad attack.

In the end both Beckett & Ici realise that it is their strength & decisions that ultimately make the future.

I found the writing style easy to read. The story was gripping, although sad, especially as so many people die. The change in writing style between timelines, allowed me to feel the differences in life more acutely. Sara Grant's descriptive narrative was sufficient for my imagination to create a visual scene for each timeline. I liked how Sara Grant warped our modern technology into rudimentary representations. Our Facebook, with its smiley faces, that is a modern way of communication; becomes an etched piece of bark, representing the reaching of adulthood. Teenager phrases of rebellion and songs become everyday greetings & prayers. With the higher power guiding them called the great I AM. At one point in the Isis timeline, Ici etches her initials onto trees. Isis Anne Murrey (IAM), & I realised she is the great I AM. Yet she was just a girl who lost everything but still found a way to survive and start a new society. When Beckett discovers her diary, telling the true events that led to Forreal's creation, he has to decide whether to reveal the truth or allow his family to continue believing in I AM. The acceptance of their fates is quite clear in the telling of each character's story. The psychological differences, that are so innately human, are well portrayed. I found the characters believable & well portrayed, although I would have preferred some of the minor characters to have been a little more fleshed out.

I felt overall that this story is encouraging, allowing the reader to see that no matter how hard life appears, we hold unfathomable depths of strength that will allow mankind to survive, no matter the odds. I recommend Half Lives to anyone who enjoys Fantasy/Sci Fi or a thought provoking read. I give Half Lives an 8/10 rating. I look forward to reading more of Sara Grant's books.

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