

Groundhog Day is about a man forced to repeat the same day over and over, but the reason WHY is never explained. What caused this timeloop to occur? We could try to theorise an answer, but it's the story behind this lack of answer that's actually more surprising.

It's safe to say that Groundhog Day is the definitive timeloop movie.

While there have been many others like Edge of Tomorrow aka Live Die Repeat: Edge of Tomorrow aka Live Die Repeat, they all stand in comparison to Groundhog Day.

In fact Groundhog Day wasn't the ONLY timeloop movie in 1993. 12:01 is about a man forced to repeat the same day over and over. While this was a TV movie that came out months after Groundhog Day, it's actually based on a short story from 20 years prior, which in turn got adapted for a short film in 1990 and adapted again in 1993 and OH NO I'M IN A LOOP! In fact the author of 12:01 tried to sue Groundhog Day for plagiarism which seems a bit unjustified, given the trapped-repeating-the-same-day concept has existed since the 1940s ["Doubled and Redoubled" by Malcolm Jameson (Unknown Magazine Feb 1941)] and has been a mainstay in Japanese media [Urusei Yatsura 2: Beautiful Dreamer (1984)] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Girl_Who_Leapt_Through_Time] well before any movie. Either way, the case never got very far and the matter was dropped, cementing Groundhog Day's place as THE timeloop movie all others get compared to.

[Happy Death Day] It's Groundhog Day but horror

[Edge of Tomorrow] It's Groundhog Day but sci-fi

[Mickey's Once Upon A Christmas] It's Groundhog Day but ducks

https://archive.org/details/Fantasy_Science_Fiction_v045n06_1973-12/page/n41/mode/2up
<https://fanac.org/timebinders/lupoff.html>

According to Danny Rubin, the writer of the movie, he took inspiration from The Vampire Lestat by Anne Rice and reflected on what effect immortality would actually have on a person. But if someone lived for a really long time, would the film have to start in the past, through to the present? Maybe into somekind of future town? At that point the focus becomes about the ever-changing environment rather than the human experience. So what if the environment could stay the same, but the person lives through it, over and over again? Bing! Now the film has changed into an existential study, from time travel to a time loop and just four days later [with 7 weeks of prep work], the script was written.

But for such a definitive timeloop movie, the WHY this is happening was left out. There's no sci-fi pod (Source Code), no magic stone (Dr Strange), no alien blood (Edge Of Tomorrow), no mysterious cave (Palm Springs), no Star Trek Next Generation. It just happens. In fact, Rubin's original script had the character Phil Connors "in medias res", aka in the middle of things, already adapted to life in the loop.

PHIL

What a day!

RITA

You listening to me, Connors? I put my neck on the line for you.

PHIL

Thanks.

RITA

You're gonna blow it.

PHIL

You always say that.

RITA

When? I've never said that. Now, will you move it?

Despite this, after Harold Ramis got attached to direct, he co-wrote with Rubin to add in an opening act.

[Clip 03 - "I told Danny Rubin I loved the fact..."]

This was to allow us as an audience to go through the emotional journey as a passenger, rather than an observer. We discover the situation with the main character from the very first loop.

[Clip 03 - "One of the biggest changes..."]

So the opening act was written to establish Phil as an self-centered and childish protagonist, someone who would be resistant to change. **The perfect prey for the timeloop.**

Emma Coats, a former Pixar storyboard artist, shared the Pixar Rules Of Storytelling which included:

Story basics #6: What is your character good at, comfortable with? Throw the polar opposite at them. Challenge them. How do they deal?

<https://twitter.com/lawnrocket/status/51816538738667522>

For Phil his biggest nightmare is being trapped with no consequences, because without consequences nothing changes so he is forced to change instead.

With the concept figured out and the opening act establishing the character, the only thing missing was what causes the timeloop. And it remained missing.

[Documentary: 2:58 - "One thing we thought was totally cool... never explained..."]

This is because it wasn't important.

As Danny Rubin explains, if the timeloop in Groundhog Day had a cause, then the story will become about the cause. **If it was a science experiment, the character will be focused on trying to repair it, or if it was a magical spell, the character would be trying to undo it.** By removing that plot point completely, it forces the character to focus on themselves. The unsolved mystery, without that distraction or contrivance, creates the existential crisis.

There was naturally some discussion on the cause of the timeloop, such as a magical clock maker or a crazy ex-girlfriend:

[Clip 01: 0:20 - "We had him with a disaffected lover... audience doesn't really need to know why"]

And that was that. Except it wasn't.

The studio put down an ultimatum. Add a scene that explains why this is happening or we won't green light the movie. People will not understand the film without an explanation.

This was crushing. "What do you want me to do," cried Rubin, "write a stupid Gypsy Curse scene?". Remember, this was one of the earliest movies to toy with a timeloop plot device so it was still a relatively new idea to audiences. It's understandable that such a high concept could potentially go over people's heads. But to explain why the timeloop was happening undermines everything. Groundhog Day was beginning to look at it's own shadow, forecasting a long bleak winter.

So they came up with an idea.

Rubin and Ramis would write a scene that explains everything, the WHY that the movie was missing. **And that WHY was a stupid Gypsy Curse scene:**

PHIL

Excuse me. Coming through. Ow! Nice hat, lady. Excuse me.

GYPSY

Hey! Why can't you wait in line like everybody else?

SON

Yeah, get to the back.

PHIL

I'm not like everybody else. I'm important.

Phil holds up a press pass.

PHIL (CONT'D)

See? Now, excuse me. I'm in a hurry.

SON

Curse him, Ma.

The Gypsy gazes defiantly at Phil.

GYPSY

Don't be in such a hurry that you don't get anywhere at all.

PHIL

What?

GYPSY

Go back, or I curse you!

PHIL

Right.

The glass door at the front opens and Phil pushes his way inside. The Gypsy gazes at Phil through the glass. Phil looks back. Their eyes lock. The moment builds. Then, very quickly and without fanfare, the Gypsy spits on the ground, then lifts her armpit at him. That's it.

This never made it into the movie of course. It was never even filmed. So how did they avoid the studio demands? Imagine a film schedule, where they line up all the scenes to be shot, not necessarily in chronological order. In fact this film is unique in that once they've shot a scene, they can quickly reset and repeat the sequence with only Phil changing his behaviour. Even the extras and cars moving in the same pattern. [Refer to the multiple instances of Phil walking down the street & meeting Ned] And the infamous Gypsy Curse scene gets placed... here. As the very last scene to be shot. So when the filming inevitably runs behind schedule, which it always does- Oh no! We ran out of time to film the gypsy curse scene, oh dear! Nevermind! And then just cut it from the film like it was never there. <https://www.thewrap.com/groundhog-day-25-gypsy-curse/>

And what was the result? Well the film was critically well received and was a modest box office hit sure, but it had deeper impact.

[spiritual]

The film managed to have a profound spiritual and philosophical response from pretty much every religion, even the non-religious. And it's this lack of WHY which allows it to be interpretive and resonate with so many people simultaneously. Was it God? Was it Karma? Was it in Phil's imagination caused by the concussion of that shovel that hit him at the beginning? **There is no answer and that's why I love this film.**

It can be tempting to overthink movies, why does Buzz Lightyear still act like an inanimate object around Andy if he doesn't believe he's a toy? How do Cars die? Is there a Car heaven? How does CatDog poop? But that isn't really important, so sometimes it's ok to just leave things completely unexplained.

Phil's worst day is no different to his best day. They all occurred under the exact same conditions like 100 days before and 100 days next. An eternal present, not too dissimilar to our current situation. The only difference is Phil, how he interprets the day and what he does with it. And that is more fun to watch over and over and over again.

<https://www.vulture.com/2017/03/danny-rubin-groundhog-day-musical.html> (gypsie)

<http://www.dannyrubin.com/articles.htm> (various interviews)

<http://dannyrubin.com/blogusgroundhogus/> (blog posts)