

So after many years of hearing about *Groundhog Day* (1993), I finally watched it for this assignment and I must say, it is one of those films that delivers its existential message in a creative and entertaining manner. The unique thing about analyzing this film as a digital media student (while at the time of writing, having to attend a course in storytelling and video production) are the angles in which I can interpret the who/what/when/where/why of this film's choices in characters/scenes/mood/etc.

To start off, since the discussion is about Interactive Fiction, I strongly feel that *Groundhog Day* is the quintessential, text-book example of how to demonstrate what an IF is and how it plays. Regarding the latter, the time-loop that Phil goes through (which is 95% of the film), presents a game-like "reset" for the player to engage in for every time one reaches an ending they do not like. In fact, the film MADE it the objective to show Phil reliving the same day over and over, with him gradually learning his mistakes (i.e. what NOT to do to properly woo a colleague into your graces) because what else could he do? Over time, Phil learned that he had to become a better person, as in not being a misanthrope (people-hating), self-indulging, mean-spirited individual by helping those around him, learning to be versatile and most of all, discovering that these traits would lead him to a happy life, the "true" ending that finally broke the time-loop at the film's conclusion.

With that said, the game-like elements are the resets, along with the interactions that Phil has with the townspeople. Like with typical IF games, whatever Phil says or does to someone, affects the outcome with them; that's how the movie went: it showed various scenarios with the same people but with different endings. As far as puzzles go, I didn't really notice any; the general rule of thumb was that Phil needed to remember what he said that led to an unfavorable ending and when the day repeats

in that moment, he would know what exactly he should say. Similarly, since the story is about a repetitive cycle of (almost similar) events, viewers don't really need much observation to get the general idea of the plot.

This game 100% could work as an IF. The biggest issue with it are the options: what can be put? Is there a limit for what the player can allow Phil to do. In the film, we only see a limited number of scenarios that play after Phil goes about his day. But according to sources, it would've hypothetically taken Phil MANY MANY years of repeating days for him to be good at memorizing people's identities, where events happen at a moment, being good at playing the piano, etc. So creatively speaking, an IF could have many, many paths for Phil to journey on. I could easily see the IF being an interactive sort of style; however, the only condition is that the player must always visit the same (integral, not limited to only) locations. The player could control Phil's responses to what other people say to him (and the other way around) like in the mainly dialogue-based *Firewatch* game. As for the action itself, the player can control Phil's interacting with objects (i.e. stealing money, committing crimes, killing oneself). This particular level of interactivity allows for more freedom for the player and adds to the replay value of witnessing how the day's events and outcome changes given the different approach to how Phil spends his day.

Breaking down *Groundhog Day* as a 3-act structure (for those who look past the film's intentionally repetitive scenes) is easy. This is how I would break it down:

- Act I - Before the time-loop where we are introduced to Phil and his character, which leads to the conflict.
- Act II - The time-loop and the experiences we see Phil go through: the denial of his strange position, his hedonism without anything to stop him, his depression that causes him

to take out his life after not being able to escape this curse (all contribute to the rising action), and lastly, Phil's acceptance of seeing what he should do to fix himself given the power that he reluctantly has (the falling action).

- Act III - The shift we see of Phil using the time-loop to his beneficial use: helping himself and those around him in the name of hospitality, authenticity and charisma, all which lead to Phil becoming a more complete person. This is also the path that leads him to successfully win a relationship with his colleague (as opposed to persuading her that he is cursed). Ultimately, the resolution is seen as for the first and only time, Phil is happy with his result despite his life repeating over and over.

Regarding cinematic techniques, I feel that Groundhog Day mainly takes full advantage of reusing the same scenes and dialogue (for the scenes and characters that are introduced at least before they change to a different path). To what extent the filmmakers used any different lighting, camerawork, sound and set designs mainly depended on what happened after an event takes place. Should a scene that previously called for a eye-level shot between 2 characters (i.e. Phil and his colleague having a romantic dinner) in one day may call for a different, over-the-shoulder shot for another (for Phil's intimate and humble portrayal). The sounds, likewise, change per different action Phil commits (one day, Phil embraces/hugs a man, the next day, he punches him). Lighting and stage-wise, since in certain parts of the film a jump-cut is used to effectively show the same scene without going through the unnecessary parts again (i.e. when Phil tries 3-4 times to say the right thing to his colleague for romance), the same backgrounds are used; emphasis is more on dialogue and music.

All in all, Groundhog Day has a very powerful message and does it cleverly as if it was an IF. What does bother me are some of its flaws like: how come we aren't able to see Phil's background change as his clock hits 6 AM and the day resets? How is it that Phil couldn't simply escape the town in the opposite direction since a storm prevented him from heading back home? How did the divine power that was behind this time-loop go about to ensure Phil had to do specific things to break the cycle? While my group's IF project isn't as complex as the film, at least ONE of these aforementioned ideas could be implemented. The fact that we couldn't see Phil's day reset in the grand scheme of things wasn't important in the storytelling. In our story, the transitions (as long as they point toward the story's paths and pacing) could be similarly not shown prominently or with less emphasis.