

***Rating:** «« **out of** «««««*

Running Time: 97 min.

Ever thought *Groundhog Day* might work better as a horror feature? The filmmakers behind *Happy Death Day* certainly thought so, even referencing the previous movie and making some jokes along the way as if to acknowledge the noticeable similarities.

However, beyond a few little wrinkles, this feature doesn’t do a great deal with the concept. If anything, it leaves one with the distinct impression that it would have worked far better had it simply embraced the more humorous and absurd aspects of the story.

Tree Gelbman (Jessica Rothe) is a college student with an attitude problem. She’s arrogant and selfish, insulting many of the people she comes across on campus during her birthday. It all comes back to haunt her when she’s murdered by a threatening figure in a baby mask.

Believe it or not, the visage also appears to serve as the educational institute’s mascot. Presumably, someone on the school board thought it would make the perfect moniker for the institute. Anyway, I’m getting off track here. Tree finds herself forced to relive the day of her death over and over again. As events progress, she befriends student Carter Davis (Israel Broussard), who encourages her to investigate the potential suspects, identify her killer and put a stop to her own demise and the time loop.

As it turns out, there are inherent problems with adapting this concept for the horror genre. The tone is a little lighter than the typical scare feature, but it still wants to generate suspense and terror with its mystery killer. Some of the humor works at the midpoint, as the heroine finally begins to comprehend what a truly nightmarish scenario she is in. It sets up a few good gags that showcase the character’s sheer panic and exasperation. A curious and original complication also arises when the protagonist’s friends are knocked off and she must kill herself to reset events.

Yet from a story perspective, the movie doesn’t make a whole lot of sense. Tree attempts to evade death by taking alternate courses of action, hanging around different suspects, hiding and traveling to various places around the town. Yet somehow, she is always located and murdered. This requires almost superhuman amount of foresight on the part of the killer to consistently pull off the act day after day. There’s also a repetitiveness to the deaths that mute the tension, despite the alternating locales.

Other problems include the creaky dialogue. While it’s never explicitly stated, several of these characters appear to be either medical students, or perhaps biology or physics majors.

Yet the group don’t act anything like it. Instead, they behave like high school students, complete with cliques that value wardrobe and attack others based on their weight. I literally had to ask other critics around me why people with these majors would be this superficial and dimwitted.

It was suggested that they must have needed some of the characters involved to work at a hospital to justify a plot turn later in the movie. They’re probably right, but the bizarre actions witnessed raise plenty of questions throughout. Maybe it’s just a really, really bad school.

Ultimately, nothing much is explained about why the time loop is occurring, nor are reasons given for the strange behavior of the leads. And the climax does little to suppress the ludicrousness. *Happy Death Day* isn’t a complete disaster and features a couple of chuckles. Still, it’s hard to get involved in the plight of the characters when they aren’t relatable and don’t appear to be reacting to the situation in rational ways. In the end, this is unlikely to be an experience that anyone will want to revisit.

Visit: cinemastance.com

By Glenn Kay
For the Sun