

The Groundhog Forever

Henry Hoke

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In Henry Hoke's novel *The Groundhog Forever*, characters search for answers to questions both trivial and existential.

Two film students in early twenty-first-century Manhattan find themselves trapped in a time loop, repeating the same day over and over. It's a scenario that echoes the film *Groundhog Day*; the star of that film, Bill Murray, happens to make a guest appearance at their class's viewing of the movie, a process that repeats itself daily.

Around this framework, the students, Sam and Anna (called Thing 1 and Thing 2 because of their matching hair-swoops), spend their endless cycle of April 27ths experimenting, changing their decisions and movements each day. They follow Murray as he leaves the class; they create a plan to confront Thing 1's ex-girlfriend. After the novelty of minor adjustments has worn off, a traumatic event prompts them to reflect on mortality and the September 11, 2001, attacks, which they call "the long bad day."

The book is not bound to comedy like the film it's inspired by; its freer structure allows for deeper explorations of the ramifications of a time-loop scenario. Written in a style that veers from quirky weirdness to deep contemplation, the book takes a daring, experimental approach, incorporating poetic verses and making extensive use of blank spaces. While these methods sometimes tread close to preciousness, they succeed in revealing, by layers, the emotional resonance of the characters. The book delivers a literal, convincing message about the value of living in the present and making the most of every day: "We're all immortal, as far as we will ever know, and at some point we don't get to find out what happens next."

Unique and universal, *The Groundhog Forever* is a wild narrative ride: inquiring, intriguing, idiosyncratic, and entertaining.

PETER DABBENE (March / April 2021)

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