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04/04/2024

CW 463

Movie Review: Happy Death Day

Stars: 4/5

Happy Death Day, put simply, is a horror-lite spin on Groundhog Day in which our protagonist, Tree, is stuck in a time loop of getting murdered on her birthday. The movies starts in a fashion typical to timeloop movies, where Tree completes one loop, wakes up with confusion and continues on her day assuming she just had a weird dream only to be similarly murdered, and spends the remaining loops trying to circumvent the inevitable murders and solve the mystery of who is killing her. While she eventually identifies the masked killer responsible for all her previous murders, even after she “solves” the crime she still dies and ends up in another loop. It is only then that she realizes that her roommate was the one orchestrating all of the murders, and the suspicious cupcake that she gave Tree for her birthday was poisoned all along. The movies ends with Tree killing the roommate and sparking a relationship with the boy who helped her find the killer.

All in all, Happy Death Day was a very campy and enjoyable thriller/mystery. First and foremost, it was a very modern take on the core concept of Groundhog Day, with a clearly communicated motivation for why the audience should care about the timeloop. After the initial loop sequence played out, the manner in which the killer obscured his face combined with the near-instant transition from death to Tree waking up gave two mysteries for both Tree and the audience to want to solve. Then, as more loops proceeded, we got to see more of Tree’s personality, which, being a sassy college-aged character that delivered comedic quip after quip, felt both relatable and entertaining to watch. The humor was especially effective as Tree’s annoyance began to grow each time she woke up, again a very relatable phenomena for college students!

The movie also avoided the common pitfall that plagued others with the same looping mechanics, with each iteration feeling like clear progress was made – either based on character growth or literal progress towards solving the crime. I never once felt bored watching the movie, with the looping mechanic even heightening my interest at points. As we neared the climax, my anticipation for uncovering more essential clues and discovering the identity of the killer heightened. Then when the final death happened, and Tree woke up still in the loop even though she supposedly killed the killer, I felt like a successful plot-twist had actually got me.

While the movie was very enjoyable, it was clear that was the purpose of the film. It’s why I gave it a 4/5 – it served it purpose, and was well worth my watch, but it was by no means a “masterpiece.” While Groundhog Day was genre-defining, this was just genre-following, but I am very happy I with how I spent the hour and a half it took to watch it. All in all – it’s a very good movie I’d recommend for any group looking for a non-gorey campy murder mystery!