

Arbor Day

A game about self-reflection and time loops

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Introduction

Today is April 24, 2020: National Arbor Day in the United States of America. Yesterday was *also* April 24, 2020. And the day before that. And the day before that...

You have angered the trees by disrespecting Arbor Day. As punishment, they have trapped you in a time loop. Now, Arbor Day is forever.

Arbor Day is a freeform live-action role-playing game about repeating the same day over and over again, recognizing patterns, and breaking cycles. It is inspired by feelings of déjà vu, [“What day is it today?”](#) by Emily VanDerWerff, and time travel films such as *Groundhog Day*, *About Time*, and *Palm Springs*.

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The Basics

- **Players:** 1
- **Materials:** A smartphone, MP3 player, or bluetooth alarm clock; a blank notebook, journal, or word processor document; a tree or houseplant with good listening skills.
- **Time to play:** 3-∞ days
- **Environment:** This game was written and playtested during the COVID-19 pandemic, and is designed to be played in quarantine or self-isolation.

Preparation

First, decide what you've done to disrespect Arbor Day. This could be directly related to the holiday (forgetting the date, failing to properly observe it, mocking it) or it could be something more abstract (letting a potted plant die, breaking branches off a tree, trampling a flower).

Next, choose a song and set it as a daily alarm. This is your **Anthem**, the signifier that a new loop has begun. By default, this is assumed to coincide with waking up in the morning, but the alarm can be set for any time you choose. Some suggestions for anthems:

- [What Day Is It?](#) By Laura Stratford
- [Arbor Day](#) By Let's Make a Music
- [I Got You Babe](#) By Sonny & Cher
- Any of the songs listed as inspirations for this year's Golden Cobra Challenge.

Finally, choose a blank notebook or journal, or create a new document in a word processor. This is your **Chronicle**, the means by which you will record your experiences with the loop. Your Chronicle is the only thing in the loop—other than yourself—that never resets, though you're not sure why.

Play

The first day of play is the simplest, because you don't have to do anything. This is your first time living through this day, and there's no reason to suspect you'll be living through it again.

On the second day of play, you begin to realize that you've experienced this day before. Using your **Chronicle**, keep track of the similarities between the first two days. What events occur on both days? These events can be vague (IE, going to work, watching TV) or specific (IE, seeing the same bird outside your window, stubbing your toe on the same piece of furniture).

Repeat this process on the third day of play.

At the end of the third day, consult your Chronicle and take note of the common events of all three days. This is your **Loop**.

On each subsequent day, monitor your Loop and continue taking notes in your Chronicle. What changes from day to day? What stays the same? Can you alter the events in your Loop? Do you want to?

The goal is to cultivate a greater understanding of yourself and your daily life. Try not to go out of your way to repeat actions—rather, let them reoccur naturally.

Breaking the Loop

At any point after the third day, you can choose to **Break your Loop**.

You Break your Loop by talking to a tree. Find a spot where you can sit comfortably and speak privately with the tree. Share the findings in your Chronicle, and talk about how playing made you feel. Finally, apologize for your transgressions against Arbor Day.

When you're finished, thank the tree for its time, and your Loop will end.

If you have no trees available, or no private spaces in which to converse with a tree, a houseplant or bush will function as an acceptable substitute.

Safety

Arbor Day is a game designed for solo play that intentionally blurs the boundaries of the “magic circle” between play and daily life. As such, self-care is not just a priority, it is mandatory. If at any point you find yourself growing uncomfortable, tired, or even just disinterested, you can choose to exit your Loop and end the game.