

# The Perpetual Loop

By Richie Church

*Thump. . . Thump. . . Thump. . .*

The slow rhythmic thumping sounded like a monstrous heartbeat in the ears of the young man running down the tunnel. The tunnel was gray stone. The walls, floor, and ceiling were extremely smooth, almost as if the stone had simply disappeared and left the straight tunnel that seemed to never end. The young man kept running along the never-ending tunnel on adrenaline as the heartbeat seemed to slowly gain on him. The heartbeat slowly became louder and louder until it sounded like it was right behind him. He panicked, trying to run faster he tripped and fell. He turned over in fright and everything went black.

He startled awake covered in cold sweat. Looking around he realized it was just a dream and that he was actually in a small, damp cell. It was dark, the only source of light was through the small openings in the thick iron door in front of him. The young man couldn't remember anything about himself, his name, his age, what he liked, all he knew was that he had to get out. "Hello?" he called standing by the door. "Shutup!" a gruff, mean voice answered. "Where am I?" he called to the voice. "I said be quiet!" the voice answered with a snarl, "or I will quiet you myself!" it finished threateningly. The young man sat in silence for a long time before drifting back into a slumber.

He was rudely awakened by a tall, hooded character in a long black robe hitting him in the back with a spear butt. "Oww!" he complained, "I'm up! I'm up!" he shouted trying to get up and avoid the blows. The hooded character led him out of the cell with a spearpoint at his back. As he walked down the long winding tunnels, he looked for any ways to escape, but there were no side paths or crevices he could go through. After walking for what felt like twenty minutes, he came to a large open cave. As the hooded figure paraded him to the middle of the room, he took note of his surroundings. The cave was extremely large with Colosseum-style seats wrapping almost all the way around with a break for a large throne with a path to its right side. The seats were filled with hundreds of hooded figures just like the one who brought him from his cell, silent and still. But his eyes were immediately drawn to the throne. On it sat the largest hooded figure of them all. It wore a crown made of pure gold, studded with all manner of gems. He saw out of the corner of his eye that his escort had exited and the door he came through was closed.

The hooded monarch in front of him spake, if you could call it that. It was more as if its words were slithering into his mind, sending chills up his spine.

*"Welcome, to the trials."*

"Trials for what? What did I do?" he answered.

*"You must pass the trials to be let free."*

"That wasn't my question."

A grinding sound began coming from behind him. He turned around and saw a large weapon rack coming out of the floor. It contained almost any medieval weapon you could think of, bows, lances, swords, axes, they were all there.

*"Take a weapon, you will need it."*

The young man walk over to the weapons and chose a broadsword and a dagger. He put the dagger in his belt and held the sword loosely at his side. "You still haven't told me what this is all about," he said

turning back to the throne. The weapon rack slid back into the ground as the wall on the left side of the throne began to pull inwards and rise up. A large tiger-like monster jumped out and began circling.

“Start!” the hooded monarch called, out loud instead of his normal way of speaking directly into the mind. The tiger circled the young man as he shifted the sword nervously in his hand. Without warning the tiger-like creature pounced! Almost instinctively as if he had done it a hundred times before, he leaped to the side, spun around, and brought the sword down hard right between the creature's head and shoulders, it fell over and melted away into nothingness.

There was a moment of silence before he said in shock, his voice almost a whisper, “How? How did I do that?” But he had no time to think, another creature came from the opening in the wall. This time it was a bear-like creature with extremely long claws and teeth. It charged, and he again took it down with brutal efficiency. *“I see you've fought these enough to be able to take them out just by instinct, let's mix it up a little this time shall we?”* “What?” The sound of the hooded monarch chuckling came into his head as a large, half-invisible creature phased through the wall near him. The young man tried to find a weak spot on the silhouette of the large creature. From the vague silhouette he was able to tell it was a giant butterfly, “Real inventive with these monsters aren't you.” he said with a bit of sarcasm. The creature floated there for a few seconds before rapidly accelerating towards the ground where the man was standing, he just barely manage to avoid being crushed. He quickly got up and stabbed his sword into the creature's back before it could get up. It didn't die right away though, it began thrashing as it died, throwing the man into the air in the process. He rolled as he hit the ground, managing to get away with only a few bruises. By the time he was up again the creature has melted away leaving only his sword. He quickly grabbed it and got ready for the next one.

“Well done.” the monarch congratulated him. *“You can still kill things easily I see, but let's see how you do on this.”* The ground began to shift around him, pillars slowly sprung up from the floor as the whole arena began to turn. The pillars finished rising, making a circular shape with the pillars at different heights allowing for one to carefully make it to the top by jumping between them. *“Make it to the top to continue.”* The young man slowly climbed onto the lowest pillar, trying not to fall over by the spinning of the arena.

After spending a long time slowly making his way up he finally reached the top. He collapsed on the top pillar feeling sick from both the spinning and the height. “Okay, I made it,” he said exhausted. “How much more of this torture do I have to go through?” *“Don't worry, you're two-thirds of the way done.”* The pillars began quickly retracting back into the floor. When they got to the bottom the man slowly picked himself back up and walked off the pillar he was on. Once he was off all the pillars disappeared, leaving large holes in the arena. He looked down the hole closest to him. “Better not fall into one of these,” he muttered to himself. *“You complained about my monsters not being inventive enough, what do you think of this?”* A couple of stones rolled out of the door by the throne. “Let me guess, a rock monster that will be impossible for me to kill.”

*“No, it's newly hatched Mantipedes. And they are hungry.”*

“What's a Manitpede?” the man said with a hint of worry in his voice.

*“You'll find out.”*

Cracks began running through the stones as strange creatures broke out of their shells. They had the head and arms of a mantis and the body of a centipede. They began rushing toward him weaving their way around holes. He took out the nearest one with his sword and started slowly backing away. If he wasn't careful he would be surrounded and cornered. Two more reached him, slashing at him with their claw arms. He pulled out his dagger and used it to block the attacks while using the sword to deal out blows. They were quite vicious for their size, one slashed out and got his shin as he tried to avoid another one's mandibles. He saw some trying to get him from behind and ran a short distance to give

himself room and time to take a look at the situation. He had already killed three of them, but still had another ten to deal with. He knew he couldn't take on more than three at once. He noticed two hanging back near the now destroyed eggs and began heading toward them. After swiftly dispatching them he lead the rest on a chase around the arena, only letting one or two get in close before slashing a couple of times and retreating again.

After killing the last creature the young man turned to the hooded monarch, "Am I almost done yet?" "Yes." The monarch pointed to the opening where all the creatures came from and said, "*Here is your way out.*" He stared blankly at the monarch for a few moments before noticing a small doorway to the right of the throne. *I must have missed it in all the action*, he thought. *That must be the actual way out and this is just a trick.* He started walking toward the passage on the left of the throne, but as soon as he thought he could make it he changed directions and dashed around the throne into the passageway on the other side. "Ha! I'm not falling for your tricks!" he called as he ran down the passageway. The voice monarch's chilling voice came into his head. "*You're right. You didn't fall for mine. You fell for your own.*" The young man stopped running as the voice continued. "*You made a deal with me long ago that if you could pass my trials I would give you everything you wanted. But every time you got to the last trial you would choose the same path. The wrong one. And now here you stand. Having failed the last challenge again. About to lose all memories and start again.*" He suddenly remembered everything.

"No! NO! I'm not going back!" he yelled running down the tunnel again.

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