

The background of the entire page is a vibrant, high-resolution photograph of a tropical jungle. In the foreground, a river flows through a dense forest, with white water rapids and a small waterfall cascading over rocks. The river is surrounded by lush green vegetation, including ferns and moss-covered rocks. In the background, the river winds through a deep valley, flanked by steep, forested hills. The sky is visible at the top, showing a bright blue color with scattered white clouds. The overall atmosphere is one of a wild, untouched natural world.

THE ROD OF LIFE

AFTER CROSSING THROUGH A BARREN LAND, A STONE ROD TRAPS THE ADVENTURERS IN A TIME LOOP.
WILL THEY BE ABLE TO SOLVE THE MYSTERY BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE?

AN ADVENTURE FOR 5TH EDITION

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THE ROD OF LIFE



hen one of the party members dies, it sets off the very first time loop. The adventurers find themselves disoriented and with a strange feeling of déjà vu as the adventurer who just died is suddenly alive again.

THIS ADVENTURE IS FOR...

- Level 3 characters
- A party of 3-5 players
- A single session (< 4 hours)

THE SETUP

All players should roll a **CON** saving throw. After you know all of the results, set the **DC** so that only 1 character (or as close to 1 as possible in case of a tie) passes the check. Only those which pass the check will remember the following (all others are unconscious), the rest will have no memory of the event. In case of more than 1, select the highest roll as the main character described below.

This large living orb with tentacles coming out of it opens its gaping maw and engulfs you in its mouth. You hear three things in quick succession: the sound of your bones breaking, your last gasp of air, and as your hand releases the rod you hear it hit the ground and shatter. Before you completely go unconscious, you lose feeling in your feet, then legs, then midsection as your body seems to disintegrate to dust and the dust is pulled outside of the creature's mouth.

The following paragraph is read at the start of each reset.

The next sound you hear is <other character's name> say to you, "Hey, what's that in your hand?" You look down at a stone rod you just fished out of the rubble, a moment you feel like you've lived before. The rod is **moist to the touch*** and has a small protrusion two-thirds of the way up, forming a joint. There is an etching of a small waterfall plunging into a small pool at the joint.

LOCATION: ROD & MURAL ROOM



The Stone Rod

THE SECRET BACKSTORY

Almost 200 years ago, the goddess of peace, Eldath, turned a broken divining rod into a stone rod, the *Rod of Life*. **Her symbol was etched into the joint.** It was gifted to a group of human nomadic traders who facilitated a truce between warring cities. The rod was placed into the ground and a well sprung into existence.

For miles around, the rod converted a dusty, desolate piece of land into a lush environment of rich farmland, large trees, and a new river. Like the Egyptians and the Nile, the community prospered for many generations, until 40 or so years ago when a rebellious teenager changed everything.

Tormand did not believe the stories told of how the world he knew came to be. He wanted to prove that the adults were lying, so he stole the rod in the middle of the night, fleeing into the nearby mountain caves to hide out for a while before returning. Unfortunately, a group of goblin bandits had taken over that cave and captured him.

He was kept in a cage, unaware of the effects of his actions. In the town, without the rod, the water stopped flowing within hours. The ground dried, the vegetation died, and within a year the town was abandoned, left to the wind and the sand. After he managed to escape 3 years later, he ran back to learn the fate of the town and of his grave mistake.

Ashamed, he swore to make it right and ran back to the cave to find the rod which was unceremoniously discarded by the goblins. He managed to get his hands on it, but at the same time an arrow found purchase in his back. Instead of dying, his body was turned to dust and his spirit was drawn into the rod itself.

Using the innate magic of the rod, Tormand attempts to compel any human who touches the rod to right his wrong, but he can only do so by resetting time if they stray from his goal. **The rod has only one cycle, 8 resets total, before all of its magic is lost.**

EACH RESET OF THE TIME LOOP...

- *1. Rod is moist to the touch, wielder feels normal.
2. Rod is damp to the touch, wielder feels normal.
3. Rod feels like stone, wielder feels thirsty.
4. Rod seems to steal moisture, wielder's throat is scratchy and dry.
5. Rod seems to steal moisture, wielder has an unquenchable thirst and dry throat.
6. Rod is dry and small cracks form, wielder has an unquenchable thirst and dry throat.
7. Rod is dry and chunks can be broken off by hand, wielder's throat is so dry they cannot speak.
8. Rod is incredible dry and brittle, wielder cannot speak and suffers a level of fatigue.

LOCATIONS

ROD & MURAL ROOM

The walls are covered in faded and damaged murals depicting a lush and prosperous landscape full of trees, vegetation, and happiness.

Read the following only at the start of the adventure:

The group heard a rumor, "There was a secret cave near the dusty barrens that is rumored to contain the key to lifelong prosperity." Naturally, you set off to find this cave and retrieve this fortune. You all crossed through a dusty, barren land with a dry river bed in the distance, a few rocks, and sparing vegetation. It was rough going, but as you closed in on the surrounded small mountains you found the cave. This room was an alcove just inside the entrance.

There is nothing familiar about the murals or the place it depicts; it looks nothing like the land they crossed through to get to these caves. There is no writing on the walls and there are some rough rocks against one of the walls.

While the mural is not meant to be informative, if the party later needs further clues, the only visible water in the murals is the river and a well. The well has a large area cleared out around it and has prominence in the murals when visible. This is a great clue if they ask about a waterfall (there is none).

With the exception of the first time loop at the start of the adventure, everyone who is conscious when the reset occurs will remember everything that happened in previous loops they were conscious for when triggered. The rod turns all those in the party to dust and sucks the dust into itself within 2 seconds of resetting.

PRISON CAGE

As you enter the room, the most prominent feature is a large, rusted cage, similar to a bird cage but human sized. Its door is open and there are a few scraps of deteriorating fabric gathered on the floor of the cage. Unlit old torches are within sconces on the wall.

Within the scraps of cloth is a tattered journal. The first and last sets of pages are too brittle and worn to read. The inner pages that aren't damaged can be read and reveal the following:

- I don't think they are going to let me go. Nor are they going to eat me. So little food.
- It was just a prank. I'm so hungry. I haven't seen the sun in... I don't know how many days.
- I'm losing my mind. they are toying with me, but there are less and less of them.
- Today is the day. I'm getting out of here. Will anyone recognize me?

Upon closer inspection (**DC 15 Perception Check**) there are doodles on some pages that resemble the rod's shape.

TRIGGERS FOR A TIME LOOP RESET

The time loop triggers whenever Tormand senses the wielder is very clearly not working towards his goal or after ~1 hour. **Time loop resets should be used not as a punishment, but as a way to inform the players about the correct course of action.**

Only memories are intact after a reset. All physical changes are reset. Here are some example triggers:

- Wielder is knocked unconscious or killed
- The rod has been abandoned
- The rod has shattered or been destroyed
- More than an hour has passed (party is idle)

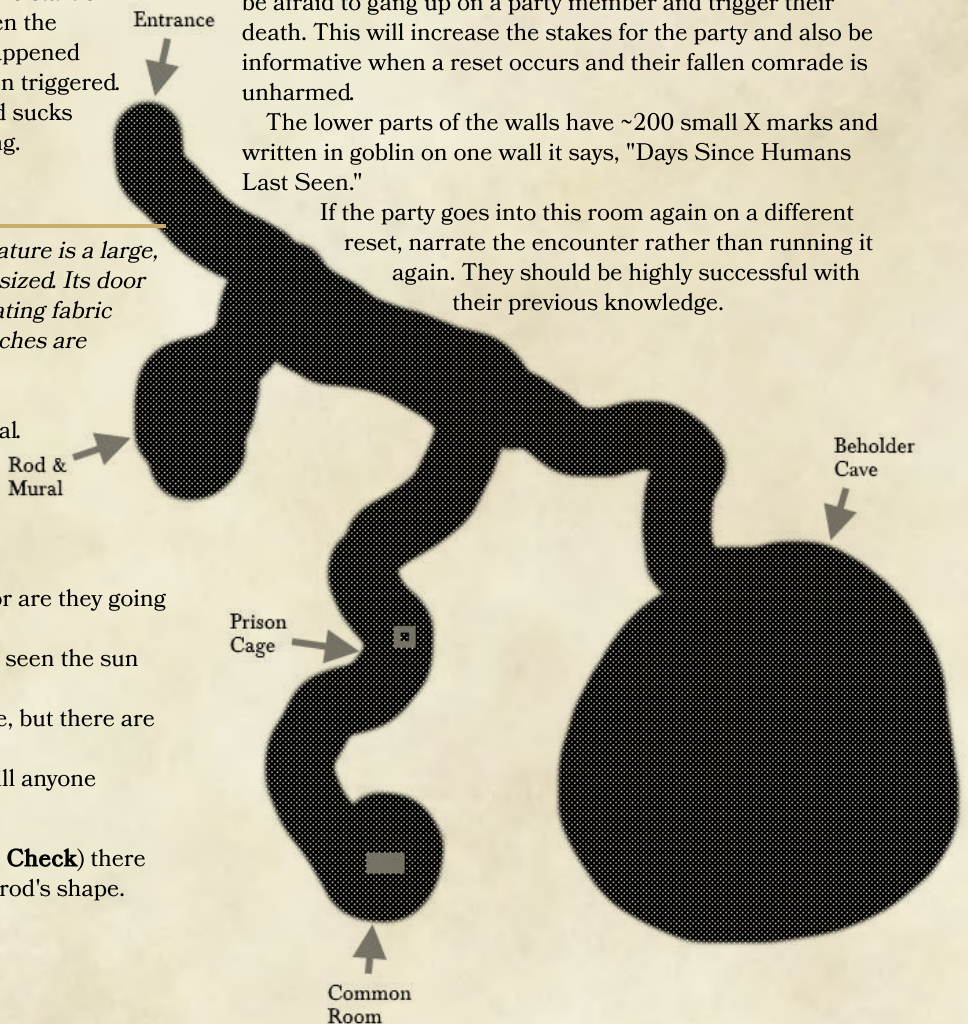
COMMON ROOM

This former dining room and sleeping quarters contains a few rusted cots, collapsed chairs, and one large table littered with holes from termite damage, yet is surprisingly still holding. A few piles of smaller bones are collected around the room.

Exploring the space causes **3-5 Shadows (MM 269)** to form. They will not leave the room and are very hostile. Don't be afraid to gang up on a party member and trigger their death. This will increase the stakes for the party and also be informative when a reset occurs and their fallen comrade is unharmed.

The lower parts of the walls have ~200 small X marks and written in goblin on one wall it says, "Days Since Humans Last Seen."

If the party goes into this room again on a different reset, narrate the encounter rather than running it again. They should be highly successful with their previous knowledge.



BEHOLDER CAVE

Before the rod has been returned:

The tunnel opens into a very large cavern, stalactites dangling from the ceiling. In the room is a large round creature, hovering a few inches above the cavern floor. There are tentacles protruding from its body and it looks intently at you with its large eye and a grinning, toothy smile. "Welcome, have you come to join my army?"

Before the rod has been returned, the **Beholder (MM 28)** is capable of speaking broken common. It is happy to toy with the adventurers as it does not consider them a threat. It will defend itself, but will not initiate combat beyond threatening and provoking the party.

The Beholder is aware of the rod, but does not like it nor its creator, the goddess Eldath. It has no in-game effect on it and he does not fear it. He's happy to share the name of the goddess with the party. They need a **DC 10 Religion check** to identify that she is the goddess of peace. If succeeding at **DC 15 or higher**, they also know that her symbol is a waterfall falling into a small pool.

The Beholder is here to raise or lure an army of the undead, for future conquests. He's happy to share this information as well. It should also act as a clue since the beholder does not look undead himself, courtesy of a reverse magic effect of the rod being separated from its resting place in the well.

The main purpose of this room is to convince the rod's wielder that it was not just their imagination, that this creature does exist and that they do remember dying in its mouth. Combat is of course an option, but the beholder should focus on the wielder in an effort to quickly trigger a reset.

TOWN LOCATIONS

THE GRAVEYARD

Few tombstones remain standing upright in this abandoned graveyard. Most have had their inscriptions removed by years of sand and wind. There is one that seems newer than the rest and stands about half the height of a human.

This is Tormand's tombstone, though there is nothing buried here. "My Beloved Tormand" is etched at the top. The inscription reads, "All is forgiven. May you find your way home." There is nothing else to discover here.

After the rod has been returned:

The tunnel opens into a very large cavern, stalactites dangling from the ceiling. In the room is a large round creature, hovering a few inches above the cavern floor. The stench of decay and rot emanate from its round body. There are tentacles protruding from its body with eyes fixed on its ends, but it does not seem to notice you as it slowly ambles about the large cavern.

After the rod has been replaced, it is now a **Beholder Zombie (MM 316)** in the cavern. However, it does not have *Undead Fortitude* and the damage on both its *Enervation Ray* and *Disintegration Ray* is halved. It cannot communicate and it will attack as soon as the party is spotted.

This is an optional fight and there is no treasure to be won here, it is simply a moral choice whether to destroy this monster and meant to better define the party's overall goals and sense of responsibility.

EXITING THE CAVE

The adventurers will eventually need to exit the cave. Scanning the barren landscape they can spot a few stones that are awkwardly jutting out of the ground in one direction, and then a very flat area with some other strange stones in the other direction. These are **The Graveyard** and **The Well**, respectively.

THE WELL

This crumbling well wall has been reduced to only 3 stacked stones high. Only the stone ring remains and the dark emptiness down inside the well.

The well is dry and a very long way down (120 feet). Inside the well, just below the stone and cut out of the dirt itself is a place where the rod fits perfectly. When the rod is put back into place, the wielder (as well as the person who puts it back if not the wielder) becomes catatonic for 6 seconds as they experience Tormand's memories.

The opening vision should be a woman calling out his name and Tormand (player's point-of-view) replying, "Coming Mom!"

The second vision should be Tormand standing with teenage friends, expressing his rebellious nature and disbelief in the tales about the rod.

The rest of the visions should briefly tell the story of the theft, his capture, his escape, and his death.

Finally, all negative effects on the wielder are removed as the world around them springs to life. The well starts filling with water, irrigation lines from the river start filling and flowing toward it. Trees sprout and grow in minutes. Within an hour, nature has returned and the land is a young version of the murals in the cave.

NPCs

SHADOWS — MONSTER MANUAL PG 269

BEHOLDER — MONSTER MANUAL PG 28

ZOMBIE BEHOLDER — MONSTER MANUAL PG 316

No *Undead Fortitude*, all damaging rays do half damage.

SUMMARY OF CLUES

- Paintings and murals of a prosperous land featuring the well prominently.
- Ragged journal of the captured Tormand revealing a prank and his escape.
- The Beholder's aversion to the rod, saying it is an artifact of Eldath, goddess of peace.
- The Beholder referring to an army of the undead, yet not being undead himself.
- The stone rod with a small protrusion and the image of a waterfall plunging into a small pool etched into it at the join.
- Tombstone of Tormand, "All is forgiven. May you find your way home."
- The rod in the shape of a divining stick.
- Every reset the wielder gets thirstier and dried out and the rod goes from being moist to the touch to dusty and brittle.
- The Common Room has lots of X's marked along the lower parts of the walls (~200) and written in Goblin, "Days Since Humans Last Seen".
- The rumor that brought them here: "There was a secret cave near the dusty barrens that is rumored to contain the key to lifelong prosperity."

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Solar

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Solar

Large celestial, lawful good

Armor Class 21
Hit Points 243 (18d10 + (Con * Level))
Speed 50 ft., fly 150 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	22 (+6)	26 (+8)	25 (+7)	25 (+7)	30 (+10)

Saving Throws Int +14, Wis +14, Cha +17
Skills Perception +14
Damage Resistances radiant; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Damage Immunities necrotic, poison
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, poisoned
Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 24
Languages all, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge 21 (33,000 XP)

Angelic Weapons. The solar's weapon attacks are magical. When the solar hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 6d8 radiant damage (included in the attack).

THANK YOU FOR DOWNLOADING THIS
ADVENTURE! I HOPE YOU AND YOUR PLAYERS
ENJOYED IT.

- Mario Lurig, Author