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OF

PANOPTICRITIA

OR

THE SLOWEST WAY TO SLAY A DRAGON

The dread serpent PANOPTICRITIA (literally “*the all-seeing decider*” in the common tongue) has been on a downward spiral since she retired from raining death on the cities of Men.

It seems that her mind and body aren’t what they used to be. Are her cacophonous nighttime babblings a boast to the surrounding mountains and valleys—a kind of esoteric stotting to frighten away curious wizards—or a sign of senility? Is her trembling tail an unwinding of nerves many years due, or a sign of muscular atrophy? Does the droop of her jowls tellingly favor one side? These are the questions that haunt you, her entourage of disheveled royalty, lost knights and anthropomorphic magical items.

You’ve thought seriously about leaving. Could you slip into the blindspots of her narrowing vision, and then slip away? Would she even miss you? Would you miss her?

REQUIREMENTS

You’ll need 6-8 players. Everyone will need the latest version of the [Zoom](#) desktop client, a mic, and a webcam (optional for the player of Panopticitria). Everyone should be cool with having their voice recorded and potentially used in future play sessions.

The game should take about 80-90 minutes. 15-20 doing miscellaneous out of character stuff, and ~60-70 for the play session itself. Play is iterated over multiple sessions.

PREMISE AND SETUP

This is a slice-of-life fantasy game dealing with themes of senility, physical frailty, abandonment, and elder care (or abuse). The game’s tone can be humorous, poignant, playful, dark, or just plain absurd. I would expect a typical session to be several, if not all, of these. Make sure everyone’s cool with that.

During play, one person portrays an aging dragon, Panopticitria, while all others inhabit characters from her motley entourage. There is no commitment for all players to attend every session, and **as players drop, the dragon’s mental and physical state will decay in a way that changes the fiction.**

Panopticitria’s player should host and locally record every session ([enable here](#)). The host should be sure to enable the Zoom option that [splits the recording so that each player’s audio is a separate file](#) **before** starting the call ([Zoom Client > Settings > Recording](#)).

To begin, gather all players in a Zoom call. Everyone should review the character roles and select one. After this, proceed to the Scenes and Framing section and start playing out the session.

ROLES

You should try to speak as your character as much as possible (instead of saying “My character starts dusting off the table”, say “This table’s dirty as fuck, I’m going to clean up a bit!”) Expressive gesturing and simple props are encouraged, but not required.

[UNIQUE] PANOPTICRITIA, *eldritch dragon of legend*: You are a fading old dragon. Your decadence has left you incredibly dependent on various arcane treasures and members of your dubiously-willing “makeshift family” (who you’re actually very fond of).

- ★ *Wand of Echoes*: This artifact creates illusory effigies of the departed that repeat their actions, forever mementoizing them. During each play session, you can play any departed player’s audio back by opening the recorded file and sharing your sound (Share screen > Advanced > Music or Computer

Audio Only). Start the playback at the beginning of the session and let its cringey ambience haunt the game. Talk to the echoes. Make *others* talk to them. React to any out of character commentary as if it's the character talking. OPTIONALLY, load the recording files into free soundboard software between sessions (something online like Blerp or Peal; or EXP Soundboard for desktop use). Cut them up into words or phrases. When you play, share the program's audio and use the soundboard to become a nostalgia DJ. Create a sad puppet show. Craft an idealized living memory of the person. Forget that it's just a memory.

- ★ *Annihilation*: It's your party! *When you leave, the game—and your life—is over.*¹

[UNIQUE] THE WAND OF CONTINUITY, *magical artifact*: You are a time-bending sentient magic wand bound to the dragon's essence. Your ability to keep the chronoverse intact is important, and you know it. Be high and mighty. Look down your nose (handle?) at other player characters.

- ★ *Tense As Fuck*: Twice each scene, you may change the tense of a statement that a non-dragon player just made, altering time itself as a result. "I washed my hands for dinner," could become "I'm washing my hands for dinner" (which might relocate their character to the kitchen sink) or "I'm going to wash my hands for dinner" (which would return their hands to the dirty state they were in before they washed them). When you want to do this, say "You mean, [altered statement]."
- ★ *Chronomancy*: You and Panopticitria jointly choose the order of scenes each session. *After you leave, scenes are chosen randomly. Additionally, the Princesses and Knights who were formerly kept in evergreen youth by your magic begin to age.*

[UNIQUE] THE CAVE SYMBIOTE, *the extensible draconic nervous system*: You are a symbiotic organism that lives inside the dragon's body. Dragons have poor eyesight and mediocre memory, but mutations caused by your presence—like the extra pairs of functional eyes that have grown all over her carapace—have significantly improved Panopticitria's ability to predate humans and other dragons.

- ★ *Power of Suggestion*: You can communicate directly with the dragon herself through a kind of telepathy and she often listens, unsure if your psychic subvocalizations are her own thoughts. You use this ability to urge your host towards behaviors that fulfil your inscrutable biological needs. Once per scene, make a cryptic suggestion to Panopticitria ("Ask for raw meat", "Change the channel to something violent", "Do something that raises your blood pressure"). Only the dragon can hear this. PANOPTICRITIA: You should obey the symbiote's suggestions, though how exactly you go about interpreting them is up to you.
- ★ *All-Seeing Eye*: You may describe things in the dragon's environment to her. Also, whenever a character says something to indicate they're performing some action ("I'll go get dinner ready"), you may describe that action and the minutia associated with it ("Sir Cook is burning the pot roast, and it looks like the stove is on fire.").
- ★ *Universal Communicator*: You generate a psychic field which allows everyone in the entourage to communicate with Panopticitria as if they spoke dragon, which they most certainly do not. *After you leave, Panopticitria will have trouble understanding the other characters. Additionally, her own language, which is laced with riddles and archaic references in its native form, will become incomprehensible to them.* PANOPTICRITIA: You must now do one of the following whenever you communicate: (A) Liberally insert nonsensical or inappropriately-used words into your speech. OR (B) Speak only in sentences composed of rearranged words from your favorite poetry. If doing the latter, take poetry from any written source, like [this site](#). Use [this tool](#) to scramble its words. Speak fluidly, using intonation and mannerisms appropriate for what you're trying to express, but

¹ If the player of Panopticitria leaves before everyone else does, anyone still playing may ditch their current character and take on the role of the dragon.

use only pieces of what is generated—in whatever order you’d like—to communicate. When people react with confusion, be fervent in your attempts to make yourself understood. Repeat phrases often.

[ONE or TWO PLAYERS] THE PRINCESSES, *cherished pets and maybe more*: You are abducted royalty (not specifically gendered), or whatever passes for rulership in one of the various (not necessarily monarchic) nations of the world. Because all dragons absorb human feelings through “emotional osmosis,” some of your better qualities have rubbed off on the decidedly brash and temperamental Panopticitria.

- ★ *Hierarchy*: You may give commands to the knights, and they’re obliged to obey (however grudgingly).
- ★ *Anchor*: Send a private message to Panopticitria at the beginning of the first session describing your particular emotional focus (like “I help the dragon control her temper,” or “I keep the dragon motivated and out of the clutches of depressed apathy.”). *After you leave, you stop providing emotional support.*

[TWO or THREE PLAYERS] THE KNIGHTS, *unwitting keepers of home and hearth*: You are a knight who was dispatched to recover one of the many princesses the dragon abducted. You failed, and were abducted yourself. You and the other knights hate each other because your nations are at war (mostly due to dragon-wrought scarcity), but you have formed a truce to survive. As a knight, you are oathsworn as the bearer of some necessary task—Sir Garbage Collector, Sir Shit-Shoveler, Dame Pipe-Fixer—and you take it very seriously.

- ★ *Somebody’s Gotta Do It*: Your job banter can make things happen (“Oh shit, I just busted the main water line!” sets things up for the cave to become flooded, which should totally change the current scene’s direction). *After you leave, the group loses whatever service you provided: shit piles up, pipes break, food goes uncooked.*

SCENES AND FRAMING

Try to include one of each of these four scenes in every session. 10 in-game years pass between every session. If the Wand of Continuity is present, they assist Panopticitria in choosing scene order. Everyone has a hand in *framing* scenes (that is, everyone gets to establish some details about the situation before stepping into character). When framing, no player may contradict things established by another. When playing out a scene, just talk to each other. Maybe talk about the task at hand (if any). Let the play prompts inspire your roleplay.

(1) Dinner Table (20 minutes) This scene should be set in some common dining area where everyone has gathered. To frame this scene, everyone types a short sentence into Chat that reveals some detail about the meal or related minutia (“It’s a beans and rice night”, “Smoke is billowing out of the kitchen”). Contribute details in the order the characters are listed on the “ROLES” page. Play prompts: *Smalltalk, bad manners, smells/odors, family matters, pests, games (board, tabletop roleplaying, magical).*

(2) Upkeep Scene (15 minutes): Dragons need baths. To frame this scene, Panopticitria starts things off by suggesting some (preferably humiliating) task that the other characters must perform for her. Everyone else adds juicy details. As her faculties leave her, these scenes should become more focused around daily self-care tasks (washing, helping her eat an afternoon meal, having forced conversations to try to keep her mind sharp). Play prompts: *Hygiene, motor skills, loss of control, hard conversations, repetition/rote action.*

(3) Recreational Time (15 minutes): It's time to unwind, and everyone is gonna watch what Panopticitria wants to watch. Panopticitria: share your screen and pull up Youtube. Watch the screen. Comment, talk amongst each other, throw popcorn. No real framing is necessary.

(4) Dreamworld (15-20 minutes): Panopticitria is asleep and dreaming. All the other characters appear in her dreams. This is a chance to play your characters in a wildly different capacity, since the dream isn't real. To frame this scene, everyone types a short sentence into Chat that adds a detail to the dreamworld ("We're all in a courtroom", "We're sitting down to dinner"). Contribute details in the order the characters are listed on the "ROLES" page, **skipping over Panopticitria** (she gets no input). Play prompts: *fear, fantasy, metamorphosis, the future, elsewheres, funny voices, memories.*

Note: After the Wand of Continuity has left, scenes are randomly selected by the non-dragon players (roll a [four-sided dice](#)). Repeating scene types is fine and expected—without Continuity, time runs together—but still play out four total scenes per session. The players must select the scene type randomly, and they must also **keep the selected scene type secret from the dragon's player** (Ask Panopticitria's player to go grab a snack or turn off their headset until you've finished). Non-dragon players are totally responsible for scene framing henceforth. This facilitates confusing situations like Panopticitria not being able to tell if she's dreaming or awake.

THE DEATH SPIRAL

A wyrm is nothing without her entourage.

Between games, or even *during* games if they so wish, players can leave unannounced.

If a player decides to come back, reinstate them into their role, but keep any consequences that their departure has had on the game's narrative. If a princess who helps Panopticitria deal with her anger issues leaves for a couple sessions, they might return to knights patching holes in the drywall.

When the entire entourage has deserted you, Panopticitria, do one more lonely session by yourself. Record it. Don't frame any scenes. Instead, just speak your thoughts in a stream of consciousness manner. Do you curse your companions for abandoning you?

Maybe you can no longer speak. Maybe your lizard brain has been fully and completely addled by the loss of your friends or caretakers or whatever they were to you. If you have no words, record your sighs, grunts, groans, trills, or any noises that you can muster. Record ten minutes of you sobbing into the mic if that's what you want to do.

Send the audio to your friends and discuss the game.

Eventually, forget you played.