

Tidying and Talons

*A dragon sanctuary cleanup simulation
LARP by Moss Bosch*

What vision comes to mind first when you picture a dragon sitting atop its hoard?

Is it a great beast guarding a tower of gold, or a tiny glimmering creature falling asleep in a stack of teacups? What do you think was the very first treasure that caught that dragon's eye - the spark of delight, the shining prize that activated their hoarding instincts?

Images of dragons and their hoards permeate the fantasy landscape in a range of forms. This is a game that draws on those images and associated tropes to create a communal, silly experience that might also help you entertain your kids while you get some cleaning done.

Key truths about the world of this game:

- *Dragons are powerful and intelligent creatures*, and like many such creatures, they start life rather small and wobbly and chaotic, with a tendency to act on impulse and explore their surroundings with a sometimes violent curiosity. In this respect, they have much in common with humans.
- *As dragons grow, they begin to develop the instinct to hoard*. They are drawn to gather, touch, play with, and sort small objects, especially those that have an interesting color, texture, or shine. As they grow bigger, their hoarding tastes specialize, commonly but not exclusively leading them to covet gold and gems in particular.
- *In the wild, dragon hatchlings are cared for by their parents* until they develop a strong enough hoarding instinct to leave their parents' cave and establish their own hoard in a separate cave.
- Due to predation by knights and habitat loss from expanding human kingdoms, *some dragon hatchlings are left abandoned* before they have fully developed the instincts necessary to survive in the wild. *Some of these hatchlings are raised by human caretakers* in dragon sanctuaries until they can be safely released to increase the wild population.

In this game, there are two types of player characters - if you are an adult who's trying to get some cleaning done, you are a **Dragon Caretaker**. If you are a child, you are a **Dragon Hatchling**. The gameplay goal for Dragon Caretakers is to keep each other company and look out for the safety of the Dragon Hatchlings while simultaneously trying to accomplish a cleaning task, or similar task of their choice - laundry, dishes, yard work, meal prep, etc. The gameplay goal for Dragon Hatchlings is to enjoy being a growing dragon - making cool dragon noises, gathering and sorting small shiny objects, and eating snacks with a high degree of drama and ferocity are all encouraged. If this premise sounds fun and you want to riff on it on your own, feel free to do so in whatever way works best for you! If you would like specific suggestions for how to embody young dragons and their caretakers, read on for more detailed gameplay guidance.

Game setup:

Determine what task or tasks each Dragon Caretaker plans to undertake, and gather any necessary materials for said tasks. If all players are in the same physical space, such as a house, yard, or apartment, check in about whether you'll be working on the same task together, or doing different tasks in parallel. If players are spread out across multiple spaces, use a group audio or video call to connect socially while you work on your disparate tasks.

Organize enrichment materials for the Dragon Hatchlings! Ideally, there should be at least one form of enrichment available in each gameplay space. If there are hatchlings at notably different stages of development sharing the same space, having more than one enrichment material may be helpful.

Explain gameplay rules/themes to Dragon Hatchling players based on levels of comprehension and interest. "I have a very special job for you - pretend to be a dragon!" might be enough information for one child, but be entirely too vague for another. You can choose to not introduce the concept to them at all and keep the dragon themes only as a conversation element between adults, or to emphasize very specific and important dragon tasks that you think will draw their focus.

Focusing on what Dragon Hatchling players *can* do (eat a snack while making loud dragon noises, draw a picture of their coolest dragon form, build a cave out of pillows or blocks, string beads into a beautiful necklace to add to their hoard, etc.) is likely to be more successful than focusing only on what they *can't* do (bite other players, start an actual fire, attempt to fly off of the roof, etc.) - the forbidden can be a powerful draw if it is not countered by a positive enticement of equal or greater power.

Suggested enrichment materials:

- *Very young hatchlings (limited mobility and vocalizations, highly curious, susceptible to choking hazards):*
 - Small quantities of materials designed to activate early hoard instincts, such as shiny, colorful, or interestingly textured objects. Very young Dragon Hatchlings can also be set extremely close to or carried by Dragon Caretakers, in which case visual (but not physical) access to cleaning tools, and/or their caretaker's voice and face, can also serve as forms of enrichment.
- *Young hatchlings (mobile, energetic, still developing dexterity, more varied vocalizations):*
 - Larger quantities of materials that can be held, sorted, and creatively manipulated to further develop the hoard instinct. Beads, scissors, and string, colorful patterned cards, or various assortments of interlocking blocks are all strong choices. If available, place a sheet or drawstring play mat underneath piles of materials that are easy to spill, throw, scatter, or roll to make for easier cleanup.
- *Nearly-fledged hatchlings (large, often highly dextrous, fluctuating energy, highly detailed vocalizations):*
 - Materials attuned to the more strongly developed hoard instincts of particular Dragon Hatchlings, such as a favorite snack, a book on a treasured theme, or a complex craft material.

Gameplay:

Once all necessary gameplay materials have been gathered, Dragon Hatchlings can enjoy their enrichment while Dragon Caretakers clean and talk shop. If a caretaker has to step out of the game temporarily or permanently, that's entirely understandable - working in a dragon sanctuary is complex work, and sometimes there are actual fires!

Possible topics of conversation among Dragon Caretakers:

- The type and quantity of food required by hatchlings at different stages of development, and the energy involved in procuring and preparing it.
- Particular personality traits of hatchlings, and theories about how those traits might serve or challenge them in the wild.
- Enrichment activities that have succeeded (or failed) in helping hatchlings develop important dragon skills like hunting, hoarding, breathing fire, and speaking in voices laden with strange riddles, ancient rhymes, or arcane secrets.
- Dragon habitat preservation policies, and courses of action sanctuary staff and community advocates are taking to try and improve those policies - imposing fines on knights for unauthorized slaying, designating cave-rich regions as sanctuary sites, supporting work in local communities that prioritize dragon coexistence, etc.

Ending gameplay:

The game ends when any combination of the following conditions are met:

- All of the Dragon Caretakers' planned tasks have been completed.
- All of the Dragon Caretakers have been pulled away from their planned tasks to put out various fires, and do not plan to return.
- The Dragon Hatchlings have all become bored with their enrichment materials and attempt to scatter and seek new entertainment, necessitating Dragon Caretaker intervention.

However the game ends, all Dragon Caretakers should congratulate themselves for a job well done, even if they did not accomplish everything they originally set out to do. Caretaking is hard work, and schedules at a dragon sanctuary often have to flex and adapt to respond to sudden changes or crises. All Dragon Hatchlings should congratulate themselves for being excellent dragons, regardless of the degree of chaos generated - all dragons know themselves to be excellent at all times, and they are invariably correct.

