

TANTRA

"Pilot"

Prestige Draft – Restraint Pass

Written by Tan Dhingra
empire@tan.wiki

Tan.D

COLD OPEN

INT. NATREL HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Early light. FABIAN NATREL, 74, cardigan, reading glasses pushed up into his hair, is at the stove doing something to eggs that does not need three pans. PENELOPE, 24, sits at the counter in a McGill hoodie, laptop open, highlighting a printed paper like it owes her money.

FABIAN

You didn't sleep.

PENELOPE

I slept.

FABIAN

You slept the way I sleep at the dentist. Technically unconscious. Spiritually gripping the armrests.

Penelope doesn't look up. Fabian slides a plate in front of her anyway.

PENELOPE

Committee meets at nine. If Dr. Aldous asks me one more question like he already knows I don't know the answer --

FABIAN

You'll know the answer. You've known the answer since you were six. You corrected the pediatrician.

PENELOPE

She was wrong about the dosage.

FABIAN

She was. That's not my point.

A beat. It lands somewhere real -- she almost smiles, catches herself, goes back to the paper. He watches her a second too long, like he's memorizing her, which we won't understand the weight of until later.

FABIAN (CONT'D)

Your mother used to do this. The night-before thing. Reread everything at two a.m. like the material's going to change if she stares at it hard enough.

PENELOPE

(not looking up, gentler than she)
(means to be)

Did it work for her?

FABIAN

She was the smartest person I ever met. So. Draw your own conclusions.

He checks his watch -- an old habit, more nervous than practical.

FABIAN (CONT'D)

I have to go deal with something at the office.

PENELOPE

The software company.

FABIAN

(a half-beat too fast)

The software company.

PENELOPE

(still reading)

Thirty years and I've never seen a single piece of software.

FABIAN

That's how you know it's good software. Nobody notices it.

He kisses the top of her head on his way out -- she lets him, barely. He gets to the door, pauses, like there's something he wants to say and doesn't.

FABIAN (CONT'D)

Penelope.

PENELOPE

(still reading)

Mm.

FABIAN

Nothing. Go get your A.

He's gone. She doesn't look up until the door shuts -- and then she does, just for a second, like she noticed something in his voice she doesn't have time to think about right now. CODY, 12, thunders down the stairs half-dressed for school, grabs a piece of toast off Fabian's abandoned plate.

CODY

Is Dad gone already?

PENELOPE

Software company emergency.

CODY

(deadpan, older than his years)

There's no such thing as a software emergency. I've seen his computer. He has one tab open and it's solitaire.

PENELOPE

(already halfway out the door, not)

(missing a beat)

No. I'm worse. I have office hours.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. TANTRA HOLDINGS - WAREHOUSE DISTRICT, MONTREAL - CONTINUOUS

An unmarked industrial building. Fabian pulls up, sits in the car a second, exhales like a man putting on a costume, and goes in.

INT. TANTRA HOLDINGS - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

He passes a wall of production stills -- tasteful, artfully shot, decades of them, dated design giving way to newer. A framed industry award between two photos: GOLDEN PEACH, BEST DIRECTION, 1998. A real, long-running production company, not a punchline. WALT VOSS, 61, falls into step beside him with a tablet.

WALT

Subscriptions are up eleven percent since we put the back catalog behind the paywall. Barnabe wants a meeting about the AI thing.

FABIAN

Tell Barnabe the AI thing is not happening.

WALT

Tell him yourself. He only believes bad news from you.

Fabian manages a tired laugh. Checks his watch again -- through his office door ahead, Marcy's photo is barely visible on his desk. A woman who isn't here anymore. He stops in front of it a beat longer than the joke a moment ago would suggest.

FABIAN

(quiet, mostly to himself)

Thirty years I've been getting away with it.

WALT

Getting away with running a successful company?

FABIAN

Getting away with not telling them.

He goes into his office. Door closes on the two of them mid-conversation -- we don't get the rest of it. Cut to black on Walt's face, which has gone still in a way we'll understand later.

END OF COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

INT. MCGILL - BIOLOGY DEPARTMENT - DAY

Penelope, sharper and more composed than this morning, fields a question from DR. ALDOUS in front of her committee. Beside her, TASHA REYES, 25, another grad student, watches with the specific resentment of someone who studies just as hard and never gets asked the follow-up question.

DR. ALDOUS

And the mechanism by which that
mutation propagates?

PENELOPE

Horizontal gene transfer, most
likely via plasmid exchange --
though I'd want to sequence the
flanking regions before I said that
with my whole chest.

A ripple of laughter. Dr. Aldous almost smiles, which for
him is basically a standing ovation.

TASHA

(under her breath, to Penelope)
Show-off.

PENELOPE

(not even looking at her)
Accurate show-off.

The committee is dismissed. Penelope allows herself exactly
one second of quiet satisfaction before packing up. In the
hallway, ZOE (24, put-together, scrolling) and LEO (23,
holding a coffee like it personally wronged him) are
waiting.

ZOE

Well?

PENELOPE

Fine.

ZOE

"Fine" is what you say when it went
perfectly and you refuse to enjoy
it.

PENELOPE

It went fine.

Penelope's phone buzzes. She glances at it -- WALT VOSS, an
unfamiliar name -- and silences it without answering, mid-
stride, not thinking twice.

ZOE

Who's that?

PENELOPE

No idea. Probably a survey.

They keep walking. The phone buzzes again behind them, and this time we hold on it a beat longer than we should.

INT. NATREL HOUSE - CODY'S ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Cody is sprawled on the floor surrounded by a half-built model rocket kit, instructions ignored, doing it his own way. Penelope leans in the doorway, backpack still on.

PENELOPE

You're supposed to do step four before step seven.

CODY

Step four is boring. Step seven has the part that looks like it could actually explode.

PENELOPE

(coming in, sitting on the floor)
(across from him despite her nice)
(pants)

That's how you lose a finger, Cody.

CODY

Dad let me use the glue gun unsupervised.

PENELOPE

Dad thinks 'unsupervised' is a parenting style.

She picks up a piece, turns it over, hands it back to him already knowing where it goes. This is clearly a rhythm they have -- her fixing his messes without making him feel small for making them.

CODY

(not looking up)
Do you think Mom would've been good at this? The rocket stuff?

A small, unexpected question. Penelope pauses -- she doesn't have an easy answer, and doesn't fake one.

PENELOPE

I think she would've read the instructions twice and then still done it her own way. Same as you.

CODY

(pleased, trying not to show it)
That's a weird thing to be proud of.

PENELOPE

Runs in the family, apparently.

Her phone buzzes -- a text from a study group she ignores instantly, more interested in this than in being anywhere else right now. It's a good moment. We'll want to remember it later.

INT. NATREL HOUSE - KITCHEN - LATER

Penelope walks in to find BEATRICE, 47, standing very still at the counter, phone in hand, in a way that's wrong before a single word is said. Beatrice is not performing anything right now. That's what makes it terrifying.

BEATRICE

Penelope.

PENELOPE

(already knowing, somehow, before)
(she's told)

What.

Beatrice doesn't soften it, doesn't perform grief for effect -- she just says it plainly, because she doesn't know how to do it any other way, and that plainness is its own kind of devastating.

BEATRICE

Your father collapsed at his office an hour ago. I need you to sit down.

We don't cut away from Penelope's face. We stay on it -- no music sting, no punchline, just a person absorbing the worst sentence of her life in real time.

Upstairs, a door opens. CODY appears on the landing, rocket piece still in hand, having heard something in the silence that scared him more than words would have.

CODY

Penelope?

Penelope looks up at him. For a second she's not a sister, she's the only adult in the room who's going to have to say this out loud. She goes to the stairs.

PENELOPE

(barely holding it together, for)
(his sake more than hers)

Hey. Come here. Come sit with me a second.

He comes down slowly, already knowing from her voice. She sits on the bottom step and pulls him in before she says anything else. Beatrice stands apart, in the doorway, watching a scene she doesn't know how to enter.

CUT TO BLACK.

ACT TWO

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A small, quiet funeral. Penelope and Cody stand close together, not performing their grief for anyone. Beatrice stands slightly apart, veiled, unreadable -- genuinely unclear whether she's grieving or calculating, and the show lets both be true. Zoe and Leo stand a respectful distance back, having come to support Penelope without quite knowing how.

WALT VOSS delivers a short, plain eulogy -- no theatrics, just a man who genuinely liked his friend.

WALT

Fabian used to say the secret to a good life was doing one thing so well that people forgave you for everything else you were bad at. He was terrible with a screwdriver. Worse with a calendar. But he was good -- genuinely good -- at building things that took care of people. I was lucky enough to watch him do it for twenty-six years.

Penelope hears this and something shifts in her face -- the first hint that the father she's mourning might be bigger, and stranger, than the one she knew.

After the service, Beatrice pulls Penelope aside, voice low enough that Cody can't hear.

BEATRICE

Whatever your father put in that will, I'd think very carefully before you act on it.

PENELOPE

(exhausted, not in the mood)
We buried him twenty minutes ago, Beatrice.

BEATRICE

Which is exactly why I'm telling you now, while you still have the option of being reasonable about it. I've already spoken to a lawyer.

PENELOPE

At the funeral?

BEATRICE

He was invited anyway.

Penelope stares at her -- this is the first real declaration of war, delivered at a graveside, and Beatrice doesn't even have the decency to look uncomfortable about the timing.

PENELOPE

Noted.

She walks away before Beatrice can say anything else. Walt approaches Penelope afterward, careful, like he's about to hand her something heavier than a folder.

WALT

Penelope. I worked with your father for twenty-six years. I'm so sorry.

PENELOPE

(numb, polite)

Thank you for coming.

WALT

There's something he wanted you to have. When you're ready. No rush.

He hands her an envelope. She takes it the way you take something you don't yet know is going to change your life -- absently, distracted, already looking past him for Cody.

INT. NATREL HOUSE - PENELOPE'S ROOM - NIGHT

Penelope, alone, finally opens the envelope. Inside: a handwritten letter, and a legal document -- a transfer of ownership. She reads. Her face changes twice -- first confusion, then something that looks almost like betrayal.

PENELOPE

(reading, half under her breath)

"...the software company was never..."

She stops. Rereads it. Looks at a photo on her desk -- her and Fabian, years younger, at some school event, him beaming like she'd hung the moon.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

(quiet, to no one)

What did you do.

EXT. TANTRA HOLDINGS - DAY

Penelope stands outside the same unmarked building from the cold open, now understanding exactly what it is. Zoe and Leo flank her, having insisted on coming, neither one quite braced for it either.

LEO

So to be clear. Your dad's
"software company" --

PENELOPE

Yes.

LEO

Was a --

PENELOPE

Yes, Leo.

LEO

I just feel like one of us should
say the word out loud before we
walk into the building.

ZOE

(genuinely, not a joke)

Are you okay?

Penelope doesn't answer. She goes in.

INT. TANTRA HOLDINGS - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

A modest reception area -- framed industry awards, a wall
calendar, nothing lurid. A receptionist, DENISE, 50s, looks
up, clocks who Penelope must be, and goes soft in a way that
catches Penelope off guard.

DENISE

You have his eyes. I'm so sorry,
honey.

Penelope doesn't know what to do with that kind of
tenderness from a total stranger. Zoe squeezes her arm. Walt
appears from a side door before it gets any more
overwhelming.

WALT

Penelope. I wasn't sure you'd come
so soon.

PENELOPE

I wasn't sure either.

INT. TANTRA HOLDINGS - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Same hallway from the cold open -- the wall of stills, decades of a real, functioning production company. Tasteful, a little dated in places, clearly run by people who took it seriously as a business rather than a joke. As they walk, Walt narrates like a man giving a tour he never expected to give.

WALT

Legal's down that hall. Accounting and royalties past that. Forty-one people on payroll, most of them here longer than I have been. Don't open the door marked Archive without warning. It's mostly boxes. Some of it's him.

Through an open door: a LEGAL ASSOCIATE, 30s, on the phone, flipping through a contract binder. It looks, deliberately, like any mid-sized company on a bad Tuesday.

LEO

(quietly, to Zoe)

I thought there'd be more...

ZOE

More what?

LEO

I don't know. Fog machines.

ZOE

It's a business, Leo, not a music video.

Walt overhears, allows himself a small smile -- the first sign he might actually like these two.

WALT

I know this is a lot.

PENELOPE

He hid an entire company from me for twenty-four years.

WALT

He hid it from everyone. That was sort of the point.

PENELOPE

Why me? Why not Beatrice, why not
--

WALT

(carefully)

Because he trusted you to actually
run something. He didn't trust
anyone else in this family with
that. Including, if I'm honest,
himself, some days.

That lands somewhere real. Before Penelope can sit with it,
BARNABE PAQUET, 35, comes around the corner at speed, mid-
crisis, phone in hand.

BARNABE

Walt -- Walt, we have a problem, a
real one, not a Tuesday one --

He stops short, seeing Penelope. A beat where he actually
clocks who she is.

BARNABE (CONT'D)

You're her. The daughter.

PENELOPE

Penelope.

BARNABE

Barnabe. I ran creative for your
father for eleven years. I am
extremely sorry for your loss and I
need you to understand a company is
currently on fire.

PENELOPE

What kind of fire.

BARNABE

Someone used an AI tool to generate
five minutes of content starring
one of our performers who was not
there, did not consent, and is
currently in my office threatening
to sue us for something we didn't
even make.

A beat. He looks almost as wounded as angry.

BARNABE (CONT'D)

Eleven years I've spent on this company's lighting. Its actual craft. And they stole her face and lit it like they didn't care if anyone was even looking at her.

PENELOPE

(quiet, catching the real thing)
(underneath it)

You're not talking about the lighting.

BARNABE

(a beat -- thrown that she caught)
(it)

No. I'm not.

Penelope doesn't have a joke ready for that. For once, she doesn't reach for one.

BARNABE (CONT'D)

Welcome to the business your father spent thirty years protecting people from. On a day when I would have preferred you had more time to arrive slowly.

INT. TANTRA HOLDINGS - LEGAL OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A cramped, paper-heavy office. MARGUERITE OSEI, 40s, Tantra's in-house counsel, doesn't look up from her screen as they pile in.

MARGUERITE

If you're here about Renata Okoye, I already know what you're going to ask me, and the answer is our standard takedown language, which is not going to satisfy her, because it didn't satisfy the last four people it happened to.

PENELOPE

The last four people?

MARGUERITE

(finally looking up, unimpressed)
(and not unkind about it)

Your father knew this was coming
for two years. He kept saying he'd
get ahead of it. He bought a kayak
instead.

PENELOPE

A kayak.

MARGUERITE

It's in the archive room. Never
touched water. Some men process the
things they're avoiding by buying
equipment for a life they're not
living.

That lands on Penelope harder than she expected -- another
small piece of the father she didn't fully know.

PENELOPE

What would 'ahead of it' have
looked like?

MARGUERITE

(surprised by the question,)
(recalculating who she's talking to)

A real consent and likeness policy.
Something with teeth. Something we
could point to instead of
apologizing after the fact.

PENELOPE

Can you draft something like that
by tonight?

MARGUERITE

(a beat -- this is not the answer)
(she expected either)

I could draft a start.

PENELOPE

Start. Now. I'll deal with Renata.

Marguerite watches her go, something recalibrating behind
her eyes -- maybe this one's different.

EXT. TANTRA HOLDINGS - LOADING DOCK - CONTINUOUS

Zoe and Leo, given nothing to do, have wandered outside. Zoe's already got her phone out, framing a shot of the building's unmarked exterior.

ZOE

No logo. No colors. Not one piece of branding that isn't legally required. Like they're embarrassed of a company that's clearly good at what it does.

LEO

Maybe they're embarrassed because it's a porn company.

ZOE

(already past that objection)
Confidence is the product, Leo.
It's always been the product.

LEO

Does Penelope know you're doing this?

ZOE

Penelope's a little busy right now. I'm just having thoughts. Loudly. In her direction, eventually.

Leo watches her work, then looks back up at the building, oddly moved by it in a way he doesn't have words for yet -- a small seed for something we'll come back to later in the season.

ACT THREE**INT. TANTRA HOLDINGS - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY**

RENATA OKOYE, mid-30s, a performer, composed but furious, sits across from Penelope, Walt, and Barnabe.

RENATA

I have spent nine years building a name I control. Someone used my face without asking, and your legal team's first move was to tell me to wait and see. Lovely phrase. It's what companies say while they decide whether you're expensive.

WALT

(carefully)

Renata, I want you to know that's not going to be our position going forward --

RENATA

You said something very similar to me eighteen months ago, Walt. Forgive me if I want to hear it from someone new.

A silence. Fair point, and everyone in the room knows it. Penelope leans forward.

PENELOPE

(quiet, taking this in properly)

That's -- no. That's not going to be our answer.

WALT

(gently, testing her)

Penelope, this isn't your area --

PENELOPE

It's biology. Consent, chain of custody, informed authorization -- I've spent six years being told I overprepare for things nobody asked me to prepare for. I would like, for once, for that to be useful.

She turns back to Renata, and for the first time in the episode, she sounds like someone who might actually be good at this.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

I want to see the takedown notice you already sent, the platform's response, and every contract my father had you sign. Tonight, in that order. If this happened to you, it's happened to other people here, and I would rather find that out from us than from a headline.

Renata studies her -- this wasn't the answer she expected either.

RENATA

Your father used to say something like that.

PENELOPE

(a small, unexpected ache)
Did he.

RENATA

Word for word, actually. It was annoying then, too.

A flicker of something between them -- not resolved, not friends yet, but real.

PENELOPE

I also want to put something in writing. A real likeness and consent policy, not boilerplate. My father apparently talked about doing this for two years. I'd rather not take two years.

RENATA

(careful, not ready to fully)
(believe it yet)
And if it's just words on a page?

PENELOPE

Then you'll have every right to walk in here in six months and remind me I said this in front of witnesses.

Barnabe, silent until now, actually looks impressed. Renata gives the smallest possible nod -- not trust, exactly, but the beginning of a willingness to find out.

RENATA

Six months. I'm writing it down.

She gathers her things and goes. The second the door closes, Barnabe exhales like he's been holding his breath for an hour.

BARNABE

That went considerably better than I expected.

PENELOPE

(still a little stunned herself)

So did I.

INT. TANTRA HOLDINGS - PENELOPE'S NEW OFFICE - NIGHT

Later. Penelope alone at what was her father's desk, going through files by lamplight. She opens a drawer and finds an old flip calendar, the kind with a page for every day, long since stopped being turned. She flips to a page. A date is circled in red pen. No note. No explanation. She stares at it a long moment, then sets it face-down and keeps working -- not now.

Zoe pokes her head in.

ZOE

You've been in here four hours.

PENELOPE

There's a lot I don't know.

ZOE

(sitting on the edge of the desk)

For what it's worth -- Dad didn't leave you a joke. He left you the one thing he actually built. That's not nothing.

PENELOPE

(looking at the framed photo,
(almost clinical)

I keep trying to make this make sense. Like if I just find the right document, the right explanation, it'll stop feeling like --

She stops herself.

ZOE

Like what?

PENELOPE

(a beat, then retreating into)
(practicality)

Nothing. I have four hours of contracts left.

ZOE

(gently, not pushing)

Okay.

That's it. She doesn't push, and Penelope doesn't cry, exactly, but lets herself feel it for one full, unhurried beat before the folder closes again -- longer than the show has let her feel anything yet.

INT. NATREL HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Penelope comes home late, exhausted in a way that's more than physical. Beatrice is at the counter, still in her funeral clothes, a glass of wine untouched in front of her -- the first time we've seen her look genuinely lost rather than composed.

BEATRICE

You went to the office. Today, of all days.

PENELOPE

(too tired to fight, but not)
(backing down either)

Someone had to.

BEATRICE

I could have handled it.

PENELOPE

He didn't leave it to you,
Beatrice.

That lands harder than Penelope means it to. Beatrice's composure slips for exactly one second -- something raw underneath the ice, gone as fast as it appeared.

BEATRICE

(quiet, almost to herself)

No. He didn't.

She takes her wine and leaves the room without another word. It's the closest thing to vulnerability we've seen from her, and Penelope, despite everything, looks a little unsettled by it rather than triumphant.

Upstairs, a door creaks. Cody, in pajamas, having clearly been listening from the landing, comes down and sits next to Penelope at the counter without a word. She puts an arm around him. Neither of them says anything for a moment -- they don't need to.

CODY

(finally, quietly)

Is it true? What people are saying
at school about Dad's company?

Penelope freezes. The question she's been dreading, arriving faster than she wanted.

PENELOPE

(choosing honesty, carefully)

What are people saying?

CODY

Tyler's brother said it's a --

PENELOPE

(cutting in gently, not unkindly)

Okay. We're going to talk about
this. Properly. Just not tonight.
Deal?

Cody studies her, clearly unsatisfied but willing to let it go for now.

CODY

Deal. But I'm holding you to it.

PENELOPE
(a tired, real smile)
I'd expect nothing less.

EXT. TANTRA HOLDINGS - NIGHT

Penelope steps outside, looks back up at the building -- no neon sign, no spectacle, just a quiet industrial building that happens to hold everything her father never told her. Walt is waiting by her car.

WALT
First day done.

PENELOPE
Barely.

WALT
He'd be proud of you. For what it's worth.

PENELOPE
(dry, but not unkind)
You didn't know that until today either.

WALT
No. But I've been right about him for twenty-six years. I'll take the bet.

She gets in her car. Sits a second. Looks at her phone -- Cody's name, a text: "when are you coming home. also is dad's company actually a porn thing, tyler's older brother said --"

Penelope closes her eyes. Exhales. This is going to be a whole thing.

PENELOPE
(to herself, almost a laugh)
Yeah. Okay.

She starts the car.

FADE OUT.

TAG

INT. NATREL HOUSE - CODY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Cody, supposedly asleep, is instead on his phone under the covers, the glow lighting his face. He's typed "Tantra Holdings Montreal" into a search bar and is staring at the results, thumb hovering, not quite brave enough to tap through yet.

A beat. He closes the phone. Opens it again. This is clearly not over.

FADE OUT.

END OF PILOT