

Yo, Tyranía

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PART ONE

1. The Land

Far beneath the snow-capped Alpine peaks, under the nurturing clouds, lies a fertile dale of resplendent blue and luxuriant green. There the tenants till the rich soil just as their ancestors did, happily reaping its generous harvest. Thanks to such bounty the people also find time for arts and learning and sublime cultural pursuits. It is a valley of contentment blessed as no other place on Earth.

But our story is about Tyrania.

Tyrania is about two miles straight up. It was carved out of a bleak gray mountainside thirty-three thousand years ago by a tribe of frantic, desperate Neanderthals.

The Neanderthals were a subspecies of homo sapiens whose evolutionary clock was about to go “*sproing.*” They had a very small cranial capacity and wore stupid expressions, and whenever they tried to count their fingers they’d roar in inarticulate frustration.

This particular tribe was headed by a brave, oversized warrior named Foo-DUM. He was later to be revered as the Father of Tyrania. While most national folklores often confer

such honorary titles, in his case it was literally true. Foo-DUM's mammoth ego would not permit other males in his tribe to mate. Thus all Tyranians were descended from him and they were all cousins. Which goes a long way to explaining Tyrania.

Through endurance and mostly dumb luck the tribe had survived its centuries-long trek from the central Asian plains to the valley of Central Europe, which they called "*Bluub*." But one day during grazing season, as the tribesmen wallowed in the cool virgin fields, munching on crabgrass and edelweiss, they encountered a tribe of Cro-Magnons.

The Cro-Magnons were the new kids on the continent. They were very smart and could make tools and fire and a lot of magical things. This day they were just foraging, but the incursion was enough to send the Neanderthals fleeing in terror.

The lead scout of the Neanderthals, a dimwit (even for Neanderthals) named Zhorz, pointed to an ascending mountain passage as a route of escape. A skeptical Foo-DUM, out of options himself, followed the advice of Zhorz, and led his tribe up the winding, tortuous path. But when evening fell it brought a dense fog that engulfed the tribe. When the fog finally lifted, they were hopelessly lost.

To ward off the cold they sought shelter in whatever crevices they could chisel out of the mountainside. Foo-DUM became so enraged at Zhorz that he decided to use Zhorz's skull to bang out his own headquarters. Why he failed to use the rocks at his disposal tells us much about why you do not have any Neanderthals as your neighbors. (I know, I know, but they're not *really* Neanderthals.)

In the ensuing years the tribe managed to survive by drinking "*muub*," the snow runoff; and hunting "*fuub*," the local beasts that

are a furry hybrid of mountain cat and goat. They also found sustenance in the mysterious gourds that grew in the dank shadows, like inflated mushrooms, called “*guuh*.”

While the Tyranians’ monosyllabism demonstrates a clear link between cranial capacity and vocabulary, the Tyranians did not find their limited lexicon a problem. Rather than wasting time on grammar and syntax the Tyranians learned how to adapt to the difficult conditions. This was a good thing, because one day the Ice Age came, wiping out the less fortified and enterprising valley dwellers (whom the Tyranians derisively called “*gitschmatz*”). For centuries thereafter the Tyranians were thrust into total isolation up in their mountain asylum.

So they multiplied, though not at a very fast rate.

Eventually the ice retreated from the valley and new *gitschmatz* returned, who were even more refined. Occasionally one of them would wander too far from his or her tribe and be captured by Tyranian kidnapers. These poor neo-Europeans were involuntarily drafted into the Tyranian gene pool in hopes that they might inject some intelligence, not to mention some of that silky blonde hair.

Over the millennia this produced a Tyranian society that was proud and self-supporting, thought not very progressive. As Modern Civilization churned below them, Tyrania remained untouched by most of its advances. This includes many things you and I take for granted, like industry and democracy and toilet paper. But for twenty thousand years nothing could penetrate the dense isolation high above the timberline that was Tyrania.

Farms and villages blossomed beneath them, fading and wilting as nomadic clans moved on.

The Roman legions came, saw, and conquered. Then they too disappeared.

The Huns overran everything, and then burnt themselves out.

Feudal vassals and serfs succeeded them, and then they all went to the Crusades or died of this plague or that.

Eventually the Renaissance happened, but Tyranians were still unknown to modern civilization, save for a glimpse of the Tyranian castle that sneaked into the background of a painting by the famous Flemish artist Hieronymus Bosch. Art historians think the glint in the mountain is the Gate of Heaven, but they are wrong.

Throughout the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Counter Reformation, the Inquisition, the Persecution of the Huguenots, and the Great Awakening, nothing touched the sublime paganism that compelled the Tyranians to sacrifice a *fuub* on the vernal equinox by squashing it under a boulder, since fire was too good to waste.

The tyrants of the 19th and 20th centuries splattered the countryside with the blood of patriots but Tyrania was unfazed by all the ruckus. All the Tyranians knew of the World Wars were of the silver birds that would fly in strange formations under the castle and through the billowing clouds, leaving deep roars that would echo through the cliffs and scatter the local eagles.

But there were forces even Tyrania could not resist. One of them was unleashed by the inventor Vladimir Zworykin; the other was spawned by Mrs. Flora Dora Gibson of Morristown, New Jersey.