

Nation-Maker

1.

Over six hundred generations before Tatchook and nearly two thousand miles further north-west, another leader emerged. Yan-Ho was taller than average, broad shouldered and with a bearing that demanded respect, even at an early age. No one ever saw him riled but all were grateful to avoid the experience.

Yan-Ho's father, Yan-Ree had led their small band across a narrow bridge between two oceans. No one knew what to expect ahead. All knew what lay behind. Pressure from other bands threatened to leave their territory devoid of food sources. The trend was relentless. He knew they would keep coming. Their numbers and pressure of starvation made that inescapable. Only a venture into the unknown could save his clan.

They found some game along the way, not enough to sustain them through the coming winter. With growing fear and no alternative, they pressed on. After three days, the dry land widened. The ocean on the left was replaced by an intimidating low mountain of ice. Still, the widening land area encouraged them. Game became more plentiful and they noticed that summer sun made edible plants and berries sprout.

Excitement grew as they explored this virgin territory. A variety of new animals lived here. Most astounding were giant woolly mammoths, far larger than anything they had ever seen, heard of, or even dreamed about. Although they had seen signs of other human migration over the narrow passage, the valley they camped in appeared uninhabited. Still, scouts were posted while the group built a camp beside a river half a day's walk from its mouth. Gathering food for the winter was easy here, especially when the river filled with fish coming to spawn in late summer.

The winter was bitterly cold with heavy snowfalls. Everyone huddled together in their furs, infants and children in the center, adults pressed against them on the outside. Each day the search for firewood became more difficult. Too late, they realized the need to store more during the warm months. Before the cold finally relented, they simply stayed in their furs, day and night, munching on diminishing food supplies. Starving mothers lost two babies. An old man died.

As weather became manageable, life returned to the camp. Men scavenged for wood, fires were lit, spirits revived. Hunts resumed and soon there was fresh meat. Yan-Ree did not share the clan's excitement. He knew what they had found others would too. He addressed the issue with his elders.

"We must not be blinded by the fortune we find here. Others will come. We will be forced to fight for our territory or move on."

An elder asked what he thought should be done.

"First, we will find a way to cross this river and move to a defensible location. One scout will return to the narrow passage and warn us if others arrive. I want to send two men to explore what lies ahead. Perhaps we will keep moving if the land improves."

"Can we spare two hunters when we already lack the number we should have?"

"You are right. I will send my son who is not ready to hunt and Yan-Hen, who is too old. Youth and strength with the wisdom of years."

2.

Spring floods made the river impossible to cross. A natural barrier which would relent in summer. The two explorers first walked to its mouth, then back-tracked up river. Late in the second day, they came to an abrupt stop in front of a wall of ice which disgorged the river from its base.

"Crossing looks hopeless," the old man offered.

Yan-Ho's youthful spirit was not so easily thwarted. The wall was steep but not a cliff. At places, large blocks of ice had sloughed off. Not far from the river, they found a depression in the ice which might allow them to scramble up.

Yan-Hen was skeptical. "Even if we get up, how will we get down again on the other side? And if we do get down, we will be stranded over there."

Yan-Ho laughed. "You let the years dim your courage, Yan-Hen. If we can't get down on the other side, we can come back here. The river will be crossable during the warm season."

"Why not wait for that?"

"It would leave us no time for exploring."

Yan-Hen shrugged as Yan-Ho started up. *Young rush in where sensible men fear to tread.* Yet he was bound to follow. It was a hard climb. Often, they slipped backward on the ice. In places, Yan-Ho had to chip footholds with his stone knife. As they made progress, Yan-Hen pitched in with the chipping. He hoped they wouldn't need to descend back down this path. It would be a bumpy slide down to say the least.

Two hours later they found themselves on a gentle slope. Looking back, they could see far across the land, almost to their camp. The opposite direction was a different

matter. All they could see was ice stretching to the limit of their vision. Yan-Ho's hope of a narrow ice barrier was dashed.

"We need to get off this ice soon. My feet are freezing."

"You're right Yan-Hen. Let's cross where the river comes out and find a way down."

Crossing the river was easy. Finding a way down was not. They walked for an hour along the edge. Yan-Hen worried. Yan-Ho cajoled him on. Almost ready to give up and return in order to get off the ice before dark, they finally came to an area where the wall shallowed out.

"How can we keep from sliding too fast and breaking legs at the bottom?"

Yan-Ho studied the slope. Then he took two spears from the pack strapped on his back. He grasped them at their heads.

"We can press these into the ice to slow our slide."

Yan-Hen shook his head in resignation and pulled two spears out of his own pack. Yan-Ho went first. Lying on his stomach, he dug the spear tips into the ice just enough to keep his descent rate under control. Yan-Hen watched until he reached the bottom. *It works*. He followed suit and soon they stood laughing on dry ground.

"That was fun!"

"It will seem more like fun when my feet warm up."

A fire soon made that a reality too. They ate and slept not far from the ice wall, both satisfied with the day's outcome.

In the morning, they travelled down river. Adjacent to the camp, they shouted to attract attention. Yan-Ree appeared.

"How did you cross?"

"When we reached the ice wall, we found a way to climb the ice and cross above."

"What did you see?"

"The ice goes on forever. On this side the land looks the same and it continues as far as we could see."

"Any signs of other people?"

"Not yet."

"Good. Find out how far it goes."

They started out in the direction of the sun low in the sky. Travel here was relatively easy. Once they came across a small group of the giant woolly mammoths, not enough to

be called a herd. They left a wide berth as they skirted around them. It was difficult to predict how fast they could run. Neither man wanted to find out. Early in the afternoon, they stopped to create a fire for the night. The days were still short but noticeably longer each day. They roasted pieces of meat over the flames and discussed their progress.

“We barely kept the ice in sight today. Should we move further from it tomorrow?”

The older man responded, “It would seem wise to follow the ice edge at least for days so we learn what it does.”

“I agree. That would let my father know how far the band can travel if others come.”

“Then we should find the ocean again and travel back along it.”

“That’s a good plan. It will also tell us if others live here.”

They pressed on for eight days. On the fourth they spotted smoke far off to the right. They were not alone. Now the terrain became more mountainous. It seemed a good time to turn toward the ocean. They had no idea how far away it was at this point. In fact, it took six days to reach it. Along the way, it became apparent that there was now a range of mountains on their left. More exploration would be needed later to determine if they could be crossed.

The next day they saw smoke again.

“People here prefer to live close to the ocean,” Yan-Hen said quietly.

“The food must be more abundant. We need to remain unseen.”

They travelled cautiously, yet at one point they couldn’t resist creeping close to a camp. It contained a group smaller than their own. Laughter and occasional singing indicate it was a carefree existence. Yan-Ho wondered how long that would last.

They pressed on. With the sun beginning its descent, the ocean finally came in view. It seemed prudent to stay in the trees rather than risk exposure on the open beach. Yet, as they skirted a rock outcrop, they suddenly came face to face with two warriors. It was impossible to tell who was most shocked. Both pairs raised spears. They paused, each not wanting to strike a blow that could trigger their own death.

Yan-Ho’s height and size proved particularly intimidating. A long minute passed in silence with all poised to fling a spear. Then Yan-Ho slowly raised his free hand, palm up, in a universal sign of peace. At the same time, he lowered his spear. The two men watched for a moment before lowering their spears. Yan-Hen followed suit. Yan-Ho tried conversation.

“Greetings. I am Yan-Ho. This is Yan-Hen.”

“Chemanook and Remsek,” their spokesman responded.

"We come from a small band camped across the river."

"Our camp is that way," Chemanook pointed.

"We passed it earlier. Are there other camps in this area?"

"One. Many days away. We keep to our own hunting areas."

"That is wise. My father says others will come just as we have. Maybe too many for even this wide land."

"Our leader thinks it will come to pass also."

"Your band is small. Our band is small. Both can be beaten in battle alone. Together we would be stronger."

"Yes."

"Tell your leader we wish to live in peace with your people. Tell him we would like to meet when the river rests again."

"Her."

"What?"

"Her. Our leader is a woman."

Yan-Ho nodded. "We go in peace. Good hunting."

The pairs edged past each other. Then Yan-Ho bravely turned his back and strode away. Yan-Hen followed, keeping a wary eye on the other two, who stood staring at them. Later, Yan-Hen rebuked his young partner.

"You were foolhardy to show them your back. It made an easy target"

"We must show the faith of our convictions if they are to trust our word."

Yan-Hen wondered how long his big friend would live with that approach as they trudged along.

3.

It took eight days to reach their river, five more to the ice bank. They camped at the foot of the slope used earlier. It looked like a formidable climb. At dawn, they found out how formidable. It took all morning to chip foot holds all the way up the steeply sloped surface. Hands and feet freezing cold, they stumbled across above the river. The descent was harder on this side, at times bruising, often treacherous.

Late in the afternoon, they got a fire burning and began to thaw out. In the morning, they started the two-day trek home. Everyone in camp turned out to welcome them, excited to hear their news. Yan-Ree insisted they report to the elders first.

The questions began after Yan-Ho finished his lengthy description of their journey.

"This band you ran into, are they stronger or weaker than us?"

"About the same but there's no need to fight them."

An elder shook his head, "The day will come. Better to take them by surprise if we still can."

Another asked, "Why did they not attack you?"

"We were each two, both shocked by the sudden encounter. Also, we are taller than them. They must have thought it better not to fight. We thought so too."

"How could you avoid it?"

"After a pause, I gave them the gesture of friendship and we all lowered our spears. We talked briefly and found out there is one other camp on their side of the river. Then we walked away."

Yan-Hen spoke up for the first time, "Yan-Ho is much braver than I. He simply turned his back on them and strode off."

"More foolish, perhaps, and lucky not to have a spear in his back."

"It was important to show trust," Yan-Ho retorted, "If we can build an alliance with them, our combined strength will better protect us when the others come."

One of the elders gave a derisive grunt. Yan-Ree silenced him. "My son's idea has merit if it can be accomplished."

"I told them we would talk with their leader when the river rests."

* * *

Two days later, Yan-Ree spoke privately with his son.

"It is time for you to join the hunt. In my mind, you passed the rites into manhood by your journey. Yan-Hen told me there were many times when he would turn back if you had not kept on."

"Thank you, father, I will do you honor."

"I know you will my son. The spirits tell me you will soon lead our clan. My days of leadership are numbered. You must show our elders your wisdom as well as courage."

"They seem to be against joining forces with other camps. Am I wrong to pursue that?"

“No, I believe you are right. You must convince them of that.”

* * *

Quick and strong, it was obvious that Yan-Ho was born to hunt. And to the discomfort of their leader, to lead as well. Wisely, he deferred to the leader, determined to carry out instructions regardless of whether he agreed with them or not. The hunt was successful and Yan-Ree received a good report on his son.

On their second hunt, they stumbled across an enormous male mammoth alone in a small clearing. It didn't detect them behind it and probably wouldn't have cared anyway. The leader signaled that they should circle around well clear of the beast. Yan-Ho hesitated.

“If we could kill him, he would feed the camp for weeks.”

“How could we ever kill that monster?”

“I have an idea. Will you let me test it? The rest of you should take shelter behind trees.”

The leader stared at Yan-Ho. *Perhaps he will save my leadership by getting himself killed.* “I will not stand in your way; however, my team shall bear witness that I recommend against it.”

Yan-Ho waited until everyone was behind trees. Then he silently approached the mammoth from behind, spear raised. As he reached the hind legs, he suddenly drove the spear into the beast's neck. Angered, it swung in the direction of the spear. Yan-Ho ducked behind to the other side and kept out of its sight.

The mammoth tried to shake off the spear for a few moments, then stood still. Yan-Ho took his second spear and drove it into the left side of its neck. Again, he ducked behind the enraged animal. This time he decided to run behind a tree to see what would happen next.

The bewildered beast tossed its head back and forth to rid itself of the spears. They held fast. Blood trickled out. The movement only aggravated its wounds. After a while it stopped and stood still again. Yan-Ho crept out and drove a third spear into its neck. The beast roared and turned in a tight circle. It caught sight of Yan-Ho running away and charged.

Yan-Ho dodged between two closely spaced trees. The animal hit them with a resounding thud that almost toppled them. Beast and man stared at each other. Neither moved. The trees were too dense here for the mammoth to penetrate. Blood poured from the third wound in spurts. Yan-Ho decided it must have cut an artery. They continued to stare at each other. Yan-Ho could see it weaken. Its eyes began to glaze.

“We will praise you, mighty animal, for feeding our people for many days. Your tusks will stand in a position of honor to remind us of your greatness.”

The mammoth continued to stare at him. Did it understand its new role, he wondered? Its legs buckled slightly, it dropped to its knees and slowly keeled over. A band of awestruck hunters crept forward cautiously to be sure it was dead. Even in death, its size intimidated them. Their leader recognized Yan-Ho would now be talked about for generations to come. He congratulated him.

“What should we do with it now, Yan-Ho?”

“Whatever you bid, Che-san. Perhaps it would be wise to surround it with three fires to protect it from scavengers.”

Che-san directed three men to build fires.

“We will need many from camp to carry the meet back. Do you want me to go get them?”

“No, you stay here and help us protect him.” He sent another. “Our three fire-builders will watch for approaching animals. If mammoths come, we will have to run for cover. Anything else we can drive away. That leaves three of us to begin on the beast.”

“I promised we would use it wisely and treat it with reverence.”

“I heard you—and agree.”

By the time an excited band from camp arrived, the top side of the animal was skinned. They gasped at its size and more than one glanced admiringly at Yan-Ho. Many stone knives now set to work. Soon large pieces of meat were skewered on carrying poles and the first party set off for camp. One warrior accompanied them to drive off predators. It would take many trips.

A scout reported seeing two cougars prowling nearby, obviously afraid to come closer because of the men and fires. Further off, a wolf howled. The unusual kill attracted all manner of predator. The men and women worked relentlessly on the animal, salvaging everything edible. When there was nothing left but bones on the top side, Yan-Ho organized a team to grasp the legs and roll it over. He insisted they skin the animal from the top down on this side. He wanted the pelt removed in one very large piece.

By the time they finished butchering and hauling meat, dusk approached. They rolled the enormous hide around a sturdy pole and with two men on each end, set off for home. Yan-Ho said he would return with a team to recover the tusks in the morning. Che-san nodded.

The fires were dying down when they left. Gingerly, the cougars approached to feast on entrails and scraps. Wolves watched from a distance. There was a well-established

pecking order. Once satisfied, the cougars departed, and the wolves moved in to gnaw on bones and whatever scraps were left. Smaller creatures would follow them.

When Yan-Ho returned with his men, little remained other than the massive tusks. It took two men to carry each one and they had to spell each other off frequently. As Yan-Ho had promised the mammoth, the tusks soon stood framing the entrance to Yan-Ree's lodge.

4.

"With one blow, you have established yourself as a leader to be reckoned with, my son."

"I didn't think of it that way. It was an opportunity to find a good new source of food."

"The best leaders bring about changes that benefit future generations of our people."

"The mammoth can be that if not too many hunters are killed by them."

The old man uttered a short laugh. "You gave them the method to succeed. Others will now find ways to improve on it but that would not happen without your start."

"We can soon cross the river. Will you allow me to meet in peace with the other camp?"

"I will order it and I will select men to go with you who will follow your instructions."

"Thank you, father."

* * *

The moon made a full journey through its phases before Yan-Ho's party of four could cross the river. He assumed correctly that they had not moved their camp. Plentiful food made that unnecessary. Two carried the mammoth hide, now scraped on the inside and trimmed, as a peace offering.

Yan-Ho led the party to a ridge overlooking the camp and stopped in plain view.

"Chemanook! Remsek!" he shouted.

The camp came alive. Warriors with spears raised formed a line between them.

"We come in peace."

Chemanoonk appeared, said a few words to the men, then approached Yan-Ho. The warriors remained wary, some scanned the area for signs of other intruders.

"Greetings, Chemanoonk, I come as promised to speak with your leader. We bring a gift for her."

"I will take you to her. You must leave your weapons with us while you are here."

Yan-Ho handed over his spears and a knife. His men appeared reluctant but followed suit when he assured them they would be safe. Chemanoonk led the visitors to the largest lodge in camp. As they neared it, a tall striking woman emerged. Yan-Ho estimated she was less than a hand's width shorter than he. They stared at each other.

Finally, Yan-Ho stammered, "We bring you a gift from the camp across the river."

Her eyes widened as the men rolled out the giant hide.

"Did you find it dead?"

"No, actually I killed it."

"You killed a mammoth? I don't believe you."

"It can be done. Believe what you will, we hope you will find it useful."

"You must be hungry." She turned to one of the gaping onlookers, "Bring our guests food." Turning back, "Why don't we sit on your gift and talk," with a laugh that was music in Yan-Ho's ears.

"Chemanoonk told me about you. I thought he exaggerated your size, but he didn't. Are many in your camp as tall as you?"

"No. Like you, I look over everyone in camp."

She smiled. "He said you thought we should join forces."

"Yes. It would make us both better able to protect our hunting grounds."

"Will your clan cross the river?"

"My father wants to do that in order to find a more defensible location."

"Do you agree?"

"It makes sense to move the camp across. However, I believe we should post a guard at the narrow passage to deal with newcomers."

"Deal?"

"I favor offering them an opportunity to join us. Only the brave set off across the unknown passage. The important thing is to prevent word of this land reaching back across the passage."

She laughed, "You are as wise as you are large. If our camps are to live in peace, we should exchange some men and women."

He laughed in turn, "You are as wise as you are beautiful. Chemanool failed to tell me your name."

"Maila, Yan-Ho. What do you propose we do next?"

He thought for a moment. "All though there are differences, our tongues are similar enough to understand each other. Why don't we have all our people come together for a feast? As a sign of friendship, all spears would be thrust into the ground."

"There is a wide beach on our side where the river meets the ocean. Let us meet there when the moon is next full."

They continued to discuss details for what would become a two-day feast. Yan-Ho had mixed feelings when his party left. He felt intoxicated by Maila. She seldom left his thoughts on the journey home. For her part, Maila felt it remarkable that the two of them were unique in this land. *It draws us to each other. Or is there a more powerful attraction forming?* Later, she fell asleep imagining his arms around her.

Both camps approached the feast with some concern. None had experienced this type of coming together before. It took trust in the words of Yan-Ho and Maila to bolster their fortitude and generate enthusiasm. Each clan prepared foods they prized most. Maila sent a party to a mud-flat beach to harvest clams and oysters a day ahead of the event.

The gathering was gradual, a few from each side, then a few more and so on until both camps were in attendance. Maila and Yan-Ho led the first groups to lend confidence to their followers. Soon small bonfires were lit, cooking and eating began. Gradually relaxation settled in, signs of camaraderie emerged as they exchanged stories. As dusk approached, Maila led their clan in one of their favorite songs. Yan-Ho's camp responded. Darkness found them sleeping around the fires with an intermingled guard posted.

In the morning, Yan-Ho and Maila stood side by side on a knoll to address them all. Yan-Ho began.

"I wish to thank Maila for bringing our camps together. We are all better and stronger for it. Maila and I are pledged to continue to bring us together. I will ask for volunteers from our camp to live with hers, men and women."

Maila joined in, "And I will do the same. We will share our ways and learn from each other. As one strong group, we will protect this wonderful land we have discovered."

People looking up admired the couple. More than one pictured them living together and hoped it would come to pass. Yan-Ree shared their thought and added to it a feeling that he could now turn clan leadership to his son. In effect, he had already assumed that

position over the last two days. People separated to return to their camps with many fond farewells. The first potlatch on the new continent was a huge success.

5.

The exchange served two purposes. It cemented the bonds between camps and provided protection against inbreeding. The first was immediately apparent, the second unconsciously fortuitous. During the summer months, the Yan camp was moved across the river to a location which minimized infringement on the others hunting territory. Yan-Ree formally passed leadership to his son with full approval of the elders.

Yan-Ho and Maila's infatuation with each other blossomed into courtship and before Fall they were united. A lodge in each camp allowed them to move back and forth in a manner that prevented either group to feel short-changed. As a means of cementing ties, they declared that everyone should be considered Mai-Yan people. A nation was born.

Two warriors from each camp were sent back to the narrow passage to warn of newcomers. They were replaced on each full moon. When people arrived, they were permitted to pass. One guard was dispatched to warn the expanding clan while the others remained hidden. Newcomers were intercepted by a band large enough to overpower them and led to Yan-Ho or Maila. They were invited to join the Mai-Yan nation and told they would not be allowed to return across the narrow passage. Everyone chose to join after witnessing the prosperity of the camp.

As the weather turned colder, Yan-Ho took a band of warriors to the third camp. He made it clear that they came in peace even though his band was obviously able to defend themselves. Their leader rejected his invitation to join forces. It appeared to Yan-Ho that they were less well-fed than his people. Perhaps the hunting was less profitable in this area and there was no evidence of berries or land that could provide root food.

Winter proved harsher than any could remember. As it dragged on, Yan-Ho thought often of the third camp. From what he saw earlier, they could be in serious trouble.

"Maila, I think we should send them any food we can spare."

"Perhaps that would convince them of the value of joining us. I'll gather the food."

Yan-Ho organized a party of volunteers to brave the cold and snow on what would become a rescue mission. He was right. Starvation had set in. The big man coming to rescue them could easily have appeared a god sent by the great spirits. When Spring finally arrived, they agreed to join the growing nation.

To avoid squabbles and in-fighting, Yan-Ho and Maila established a policy where disputes were brought to them to be adjudicated. Population growth convinced them to send patrols southward to explore mountains and valleys in search of new camp locations. Reports back held promise. In the coming years, new camps were created in a southerly direction. That was not all that was created. Maila gave birth to two sons and two daughters. All four appeared on track to grow to the abnormal height of their parents.

An annual potlatch repeated the first on the last full moon of summer. People came from every camp to celebrate. As the couple's years mounted, they became revered. While the general welfare of the clan was due in large part to their leadership, Yan-Ho took every opportunity to stress that all men and women contributed equally. A root gatherer was as important as a stone chipper or a hunt leader. He praised each discovery and encouraged people to look for improvements.

On some things he remained a stern taskmaster. One day, he found a rotting mammoth carcass with only the choicest parts removed, along with its tusks. Hunt leaders from all camps were summoned to the stinking carcass.

"We do not kill these magnificent animals for sport. They give their lives to feed us and for that they demand our respect. The time will come soon enough when their numbers will force us to depend more on other animals. We must not rush that day by this sort of thing. I will not ask who is responsible for this. Instead, smell deeply this stench and let it remind you all of your responsibility in future."

It would be hard to tell whether the aroma or implied threat in his words had more effect. He and Maila continued to stress the importance of conserving food sources. They knew the need to expand southward would now be driven more by this than the newcomers trickling in.