

# THE TALE OF A BENIGN DICTATOR

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Once upon a time there was a very dedicated and able man. He noticed that all his family and all his friends, and all the folks whom he didn't know, but who were all around him in his daily activities, were extremely inefficient in their interactions. Their brutishness, ignorance, and petty bickering did not in themselves bother him – he figured that how they wanted to live was none of his business. What did bother him was the belief that it was precisely these attributes of his countrymen that made life hard and bitter for all of them – including those he loved.

He decided to take responsibility for instituting order and efficiency into the culture. He found that he had to break quite a few eggs (and heads) to effect that particular omelet – BUT after an initial somewhat bloody adjustment to his ascension, the Country flourished and prospered under his wise control. For the most part – about 90% – the folks were extremely pleased to follow his orders and suggestions.

And about those broken eggs – after the first year of his control there was almost no one who died in the country because they threatened him, the Boss.

After successfully seizing control of his own country, he found he had a sizable army, and soon he began to receive plans and suggestions that he take his control to other countries. Of course the planners and suggesters were always very flattering to the Boss, and always made it clear that they had only the good of the other countries at heart. But just as he had been troubled by the brutishness, ignorance, and petty bickering among his own people, as the new Boss of his country, he quickly became aware that nations themselves acted in a similar way with other nations. He was nobody's fool, and he easily saw through the flattery of the warmongers who sought him out. He made it appear that he took such plots under consideration. In this way he was able to keep abreast of such international intrigue.

Due to his growing popularity, he was in a very few years firmly in control of his country. Once secure in his power, he then made his response to the frequent invitations of empire – they were in two pronouncements. The first became known as the Neutrality Laws: “No nation that is not at peace both within its own borders and with all other nations will be considered for any binding agreements.” And the second pronouncement dramatically slowed the number of intriguers who sought his ear: “If anyone is caught destabilizing the peace of any country, even with the intention of becoming a citizen through eventual annexation, he will be treated as if he were already a citizen, and punished for disturbing the peace.”

The Country was involved in only one war under the Boss. The rulers of a larger and more populous neighbor coveted the natural resources within the Country. They launched a sneak attack and caused much damage and hardship – before they were crushed and made into a slave state. They remained a slave state until all the damage was repaired and all the families who had suffered losses were recompensed according to the Unconscionable Formula.

The Boss had lost his beautiful bride and young son to the war with the Enemy. In spite of his personal emotions he knew he had to find a just formula of recompense such that his people would feel that their honor was intact and that the Enemy was appropriately punished. He let his personal outrage guide him to the formula while giving him satisfying vengeance. The Unconscionable Formula was the result

of a vicious psychological tactic used by the Boss on the ruling families of the Enemy. He would have the whole of a family of a particularly despised instigator of the war brought before him. He watched their behavior, noting who in the family showed the maximum affection for whom. He had all the leading families of the Enemy similarly brought before him, one by one. He threatened them; he had them threatened. He told them that just as he had lost loved ones, so would they lose loved ones. From each family he selected two of the most beloved, and announced to the families that at an unnamed date in the near future, those so chosen would be tortured to death in full view of the rest of their family.

His reputation for ruthlessness to his enemies struck terror into the hearts of those leading families of the Enemy. He then had some of his men act as money-seeking deal-makers. They represented themselves as in a position of trust, such that for a fee they could save those condemned to death. Each of the families independently arrived at an amount for which they were willing to ransom their loved ones. These amounts were taken and averaged up to a figure with which the Boss was satisfied.

This was the number that the Boss used to determine the reparations the Enemy would have to pay to each family in the country who had lost someone to the war. The methods used to arrive at the figure and the figure itself were made public to the Country and the Enemy alike. The very few detractors made much of the underhanded methods the Boss had used to arrive at the figure – they were the ones who called it the Unconscionable Formula. The Boss adopted the title himself, and thereafter it was so known.

Towards the end of its 28<sup>th</sup> year as a slave state, the Enemy had paid off all the reparations. Their country had so evolved and prospered during that period that they enthusiastically sued to become annexed to the Country. And they celebrated for a full month after the Country voted in favor of the annexation.

The method of the “vote” was not as we know it. The Boss had years ago instituted a countrywide polling apparatus so that he could stay aware of what the people wanted. He still made the ultimate decisions, but he was very attentive to the desires of his people. (Yet another criticism of him was that he was unnecessarily ruthless in his punishment of any who tried to pervert the polling apparatus for their own benefit – but under the Boss, the polls did remain accurate representations of the people's wishes.)

As all men, good and bad do, the Boss eventually died. He had left the reins of power in the hands of his eldest living son. The Boss had also left an elaborate structure of departments headed by trusted councilors to whom he allowed limited powers to act without his approval of every decision. The transition was smooth, and the country continued to prosper. It wasn't until the third succession after the Boss's death that the Country changed. There had been a faction of families of the old Enemy that had secretly plotted revenge on the Country for the shame they felt in their defeat at the hands of the Boss. They had successfully, through patience and the cultivation of the greed of others, arrived at a position where they had one of their own in the Boss's seat of power. From that point on things in the Country changed for the worse.

Councilors became appointed not for their ability to efficiently predict and handle problems for the good of the people, but for their ability to devise means to increase revenue for the ruling family. The polls changed from a guiding voice of the will of the people to a mechanism for identifying and culling trouble makers from any positions of power in their communities. The people became discontented, but soon learned to keep their discontent to themselves.

In another fifty years or so, the Country's neighbors – grown tired of the Country's new aggressive nature, united and defeated it in a bloody war.

The memory of the Boss is still revered in the hearts of the people of the Country, but all they seem to be able to do, is to hope that their next ruler will be as enlightened as the Boss. It hasn't happened yet....

I hear you say, “So, what's the point of this story?” The point is two-fold: First, that it is always powerful dedicated men with a vision, who are able to seize control over a people; second, that no matter how benign that powerful man is, there is no way to be certain that those who later slip into his seat will themselves be benign. In fact, it is inevitable that sooner or later some SOB will assume the same power that our hero had. At that point there is no easy means for the people to shed themselves of such a one.