A platoon of 30 soldiers or even a company of 100 soldiers can function well on the basis of close ties, with a minimum of formal discipline.

Let’s go up on the roof, it’s the perfect place for this last point. What a weird building, it looks like a walkie-talkie!

Yes, and that’s exactly what we call it.

You can’t run a division with thousands of soldiers the same way you run a platoon. And successful family businesses usually face a crisis when they grow larger and hire more personnel. If they can’t reinvent themselves, they go bust.

Have a listen, it’s fun.

Hello, Mr. Jones, I’m expecting the plumber while I’m out, can I leave my key with you?

Of course, Mrs. Pepperpot!

Who the hell are you?

I’m the marketing manager.

Since when?

About two years. And you, madam?

I’m your CEO.

Professor, how do you think Homo sapiens managed to cross the 150 threshold? How did we end up founding cities with tens of thousands of inhabitants and empires ruling hundreds of millions?

Thanks to fiction, of course!

Doctor Fiction!
Thanks, Prof! You were great! I’ll take this from here!

But..... well, I just wanted to say...

So..... what’s the secret?

The secret of success is mythology, right?

Large numbers of total strangers can cooperate successfully if they believe in the same myths!

Sapiens rule the world because they’re the only animals capable of creating and believing fictional stories.

Let me guess... I bet the professor showed you how animals use signals to describe all kinds of stuff. Am I right?

And as long as everyone believes in the same fictions, everyone follows the same rules.

He did, yes. A chimpanzee can say: “Watch out! There’s a lion!” or “Look, there’s a banana, let’s get it.”

That’s right! But we Sapiens don’t use language only to describe things that we see around us—we can also use language to invent stuff. Fictions!
A Sapiens can say "Look up there! There's a god above the clouds and he'll punish you if you don't do as I say."

And if you all believe in that story, then you'll all follow the same laws and rules, so you'll be able to cooperate effectively, even if you don't know each other.

That's something only Sapiens can do.

You could never convince a chimpanzee to give you a banana by promising him unlimited bananas in ape heaven.

No chimp would ever believe a story like that! Only Sapiens might believe it. And that's how we can cooperate with millions of strangers, whereas skeptical chimps can't.
All large-scale human cooperation depends on common myths that exist only in people's collective imagination. That's true of a prehistoric tribe...

...an ancient city...

...a medieval church...

...or a modern state...
Churches are based on common religious myths. Two Catholics who’ve never met might go on crusade together or pool funds to build a hospital because they both believe that God was incarnated in human flesh and allowed himself to be crucified to redeem our sins.

States are rooted in common national myths. A Welshman and an Englishman who’ve never met might risk their lives to save each other because they both believe in Great Britain.

Judicial systems are rooted in common legal myths. Two lawyers who’ve never met might work together to defend a complete stranger because they both believe in laws, justice, human rights—and the money paid out in fees.

Yet none of these things exists outside the stories that people invent and tell one another.

Cape Canaveral to Explorer 412. So? Have you found any gods, nations or human rights? Explorer 412 to Cape Canaveral: Not really....

What about justice and money? No.... but we have found a whole lot of hydrogen....

People easily get the idea that “primitive tribes” cement their social order by believing in imaginary spirits. Of course, of course... but we mustn’t anger the spirits of the stock market either, I’m sure you understand....