

COUNTERING CLOVIS

* A Short Story *

by

Æmilius (Emile M. Hobo)

3254 A.D. I don't know what to call it. It wasn't a particularly beautiful morning, but it was perfect if you wanted to get to work. The ground moist: it had rained that night, but not to the extent the dirt had turned into mud.

As I exited my den a drop of water rolled down from the tree in front of my door onto the top of my head. I looked up to whence it came from and the occasional sunlight that broke through minor cracks in the clouds as they passed by made the remaining drops of rain on the leaves of the tree sparkle.

I smiled.

I was a young king, only recently elected for the next four years to help the people. I never intended to be the kind of king whose name would go down in history books, but life had a mind of its own.

I could barely contain myself as Maura walked past me and smiled. My heart pounded, my muscles tensed, she was of such beauty that no eye can ever truly fully behold. "Hello, Giro," she said. The young lad that I was, I immediately walked with her, my tread marked by a light bounce as I danced around her, kissing her neck, cheek, and face everywhere I could.

"Can I take your purse?" I asked her and she replied, "It weighs but half a stone, can't you hold me instead?" She halted and I jolted... Forward to be exact. "Oo!" she exclaimed as I thrust my arms around her and kissed her firmly on the lips.

"Gi-ro!" A slightly panicky shout erupted through the morning air and my lips broke from Maura's. I looked up and behind me at the settlement's walls, their sides adorned with weapon stands, protected against the rain by a narrow roof.

The settlement of Elmtree wasn't a particularly large settlement, but we were a prolific community with people that cared for each other and nature around us. We preferred not to fight, but could if need be presented to us.

I ran to the great Elmtree wall that surrounded the settlement and up the stairs. Robar looked at me and pointed out into the forest. He was a young lad like me, but capable when it came to making locks and bolts and anything iron. Now he was on guard duty.

Out between the trees a vicious looking crowd approached, outnumbering our settlement two-to-one. Up front a battle-scarred man, approaching his thirties, but when you looked at him you wouldn't give him less than forty. The scars and wrinkles made for a genuinely frightening look.

“Giro!” the man exclaimed as he raised his sword and shield up high, “I stand before you and I challenge you and all of Elmtree! Join my army... Or die!”

Even the people down below could hear his vicious roar and rushed for their weapons. They rushed up the stairs to the top of the wall and stood beside me, looking out at the approaching army as more and more men and women joined the man that stood before me, surrounding our settlement.

“Who stand before me?” I asked.

“Hunters. Looters. The restless that wish to come to rest, but not until we’re rulers of all, with me as your overlord. I, Clovis, stand before you, descendant of Clovis the great, king of kings, and I say we will rule again! My family will rise and forge the whole of Globus into a unity, ruled by me and my descendants! And I ask you, will you stand... Or shall you bow? Join me or die!”

I am of my people. I was elected to serve them and to protect them. What was I about to do? We could fight and maybe take out half of their army. All of us would perish, but maybe the next settlement would be able to take them out, if they were to attack the next settlement. They might also retreat into the woods, rebuilding their ranks, establishing their weight over any of their opponents.

I had to let my people know, now was not the time.

I turned to face the people of my settlement. “As I stand before you I am yours as I hope you are mine. It’s not up to me to decide, but ask yourself this: what family will you enjoy, what life is there for you to live, if today we choose to stand instead of bow. I say we choose life and what opportunity life may present to us to live... And now, we bow.”

All of Elmtree had rushed to their arms, but now they put them back into the weapon stands. I couldn’t smile, for what had come onto us shouldn’t come onto anyone at any time during their lifetime, but I did bow my head to the people that chose me first, before I turned and bowed to Clovis. “I, Giro, king of Elmtree, bow to you Clovis, in name of myself and the people of Elmtree. I hope you accept my salute.”

Clovis grinned and looked around him. “I accept your salute and ask you to join our ranks with your subordinates. You’re still in charge of your regimen. Order them to follow me as we continue toward Directiron!” he shouted as he stored his sword in its sheath.

“Aye, I shall follow and the people of Elmtree with me.” I said and descended the stairs, treading carefully, followed by all of the guards and townspeople that had rushed to the stands.

As I stepped onto the fertile soil that formed the foundation of our settlement, I looked around me and addressed the sad desperate people of Elmtree, “We have no reason to stay here as it is. Grab your belongings as you see fit and make sure you’re able to defend yourself. We’re to travel to Directiron.”

Robar, always an able contender and a great fighter, looked at me, the only one in the settlement that seemed angry. “How can you bow to such a man?” he asked. “I stand with opportunity and right now, there is none.” I replied, “Stand with me, my friend, and follow Clovis. We don’t know yet where he will lead us and what opportunity will arise.”

Robar calmed down a little bit and shrugged. He turned around and opened the gates and Clovis and twenty of his men and women entered victoriously.

“Let us gather our things and we will follow.” I told him. Clovis looked at me and said, “We walk in one hour’s time or we will destroy your settlement if defiance be your part.”

I looked at him, quiet for a second, “I have but pause to consider what swiftness I may bring to the gathering of my belongings and my arms to support all of your needs, Clovis.” I turned to the people of Elmtree and shouted, “No more than one hour and we find ourselves outside the great Elmtree walls, ready to serve Clovis, king of kings!”

All of the people of Elmtree rushed to fill their bags and gather their weapons to join Clovis’ army. No more than half an hour later we stood in the central clearing of our settlement, looking around at the lush greens and the houses made of wood, clay, and straw that we had constructed as our own.

“We leave.” I said and we walked out Elmtree’s gate. Robar closed it behind us. “I hope you know what you’re doing, my king,” he said, speaking under his breath.

We marched out into the forest, following Clovis’ people, making our way around the trees of the forest, our feet cushioned by the moss and last autumn’s fallen leaves that lay all around, now mush due to the melting of winter snow. Spring had only briefly come upon us as war threatened to tear us apart.

We marched to the settlement Directiron, an ancient settlement that thrived on procuring the knowledge of the old world, partially reinventing their technologies as they found them and researched them, making use of what electricity they could generate.

They lived nearby a forest filled with trees that they used to use to make paper. The name of the trees had long been lost, so they just called them paper trees. They didn’t use them to make paper. There was so much paper around that there was no use in cutting down more trees to that effect. But the trees grow thus rapidly, that they make for ready burning material, used to boil water and generate electricity.

Most settlements chose to live off the land, but their calculators were thus strong that if we encountered a disease no man nor woman could counter through our natural sciences, they often could by letting the biochemical reactions evolve in their machines. They are a different kind of people, but always ready to serve with their knowledge and wisdom as found in ancient sophistic texts.

It wasn’t difficult to spot the rusty walls protecting Directiron as we made our way out the woods surrounding Elmtree. Many windmills had been worked into the top of their walls to supply the minimal electricity they needed on a daily basis.

People first encountering those walls feared the look of them, because the steel blades looked like they would cut you in half if you were to get stuck in them. The windmills were the only parts of the wall that wouldn’t rust, made out of some kind of bluish black metal. I understand they call it Titan.

When the guards spotted us walking out of the woods, it was as easy for them to see us as it was for us to see them. In their appearance they formed a stark contrast with the others living in Directiron: strong but slender, agile and merciless when it came to the fight, but they were vastly outnumbered.

The others living in Directiron, some scrawny, some fat, wouldn’t be able to back them up. It always amazed me how they through their lavish lifestyle managed to forget about their own health, while protecting everyone else’s.

Horns worked into the insides of the walls, invisible to those outside, bellowed.

The scrawny people of Directiron tended to be a bit faster in climbing the stairs, but in the end they huffed and they puffed as much as the bulgier ones. Panic struck, they looked out at us as we stood beside Clovis.

Clovis stepped forward. "People of Directiron! I have no interest in your technologies as I have interest in the metal that made them. We need weapons and unless you join my army and hand your precious metals to me, Clovis, descendant of king Clovis the conqueror, king of kings, and accept my rule, you will betray me and the punishment will be death! Accept my ruling and live... Or betray it and die! What say you?"

The men and women of Directiron looked at each other and the guards. They shrugged. "Okay. We surrender," said Opta, one of the guards. She hit a button and the gates to Directiron opened. Defeat marked the faces of the people of Directiron. Some of them knew me. Tears welled in their eyes as they turned away from me and descended the stairs.

Clovis stepped forward, but before he entered the city of Directiron, he turned around and looked at me. He smiled... A strange smile, as his eyes didn't sparkle and his face remained still. It seems like his face had a permanent sense of comfort to it, no matter how bad the things were he did. "Come, my friend and ally. Let's see what bounty lies ahead." I nodded slightly and stepped forward through the gates.

As we stepped through the gates, just for a second I could taste the metal of the walls through the air, but as we entered the splendor of nature and human ingenuity washed it away. All the machines were made of wood, their parts easily replaced. The boiling kettle they used for their steam machines was largely made of paper.

There was very little metal to any of it. Maybe a couple of nails here and there and the circuits of the calculators. The only real metal that stood out was that of the magnets, spun by the steam machine to generate electricity. Clovis had not heard of this.

"What's this? Where's my metal?" he raged. His eyes, hard as glass, teared up in anger, his pupils dialing in tight and contracted, as he turned toward Facil, Directiron's elder counselor. They didn't have a king here and he was but a frail figure. Facil staggered back, nearly falling to the ground as Clovis drew his sword, heaving it up high.

"Wait!" I shouted, stopping Clovis dead in his tracks. Clovis turned around slowly, looking at me, minor specks of foam accumulating in the corners of his mouth. "Dare you oppose me, Giro?" he asked. "Why oppose you if I can point you to all the metal you need, right here?" It didn't register with him at all. He turned back to Facil and grabbed him by his collar. "Where is it? Where is all your metal?" he shouted as he shook Facil. "Give it to me!"

I put my hand on Clovis' shoulder and said, "My friend, lest thine anger cloud thy better judgment, look around you." He looked at me for but a moment as he looked around him and spotted the settlement's walls. He let go. He only barely calmed down before he shouted, "Next time, don't play with me Facil! I will cut off your head!"

Facil looked at me and I shrugged a little. Facil smiled briefly. I'm not sure whether he was the first to get it, but something seemed to register with him as he immediately got up and raised his hand ever so slightly to calm the terrified people of Directiron.

Facil said, "As my friend Giro stands with you Clovis, so will I. I am sorry that I angered you. I but mean to get you what you need."

Clovis looked at him ever so briefly and laughed a loud staccato laugh, "Ha-ha-ha!" He swung his sword and cut it into a log stacked up against other logs at the wood working shop, ready to be cut and made into machines. The log was the biggest of all, impossible to cut in half with one blow, yet Clovis cut halfway through it. With a little effort, he retrieved his sword and stored it in its sheath.

He stepped forward putting his arms around Facil, hugging him to the extent that I was worried he might break every single bone in his body. He slightly let go and held Facil by his shoulders, looking at his face, examining it intently.

Facil looked at me, not knowing what to do for a second, and I smiled a crooked smile, slightly nodding in Clovis' direction. They were good with technology, but people skills always turned out to be a bit of a problem, especially when those they had to deal with were less than human.

Following my lead, Facil managed to crack an uncertain smile as he faced Clovis again. Clovis broke the broadest of grins. He let go. "We shall feast! Prepare the best of meals one can possibly imagine: swine and wine!" he said.

The people of Directiron stood hesitant, just for a second, but as Facil turned and made his way to the food depot, the rest followed. Men and women set up tables outside. The sun set slowly below the few clouds that still marked the sky and children gathered all of the candles from their homes to supply light as the evening's sky turned dark. The moon was nowhere to be seen.

As the meat roasted above the fires Clovis' army had drunk half of the wine already. It did seem to get them intoxicated, but not to the effect that they couldn't manage themselves.

The people of Elmtree and Directiron didn't indulge themselves as much in the wine and the women played with their children on their laps which seemed to shield them from Clovis' men to some extent. Clovis' men turned to their own women, sticking their noses into their bosoms and grabbing a fair hold of every bit of their arses they could grab.

An hour after midnight, the feast finally came to an end. "I say I'm satisfied, Facil. Your hospitality has no bounds and I thank you for that," said Clovis. Facil bowed ever so slightly.

Clovis looked at him with a mild grin. "It's good to know the metal of your walls stands ready in case we need it to make more weapons," he said. "When the time and as such the need comes, I will aid to swiftly deconstruct our walls and provide you with the means to melt the metal for your weaponry. Rest assured," Facil replied. "And rest I will," said Clovis and got up.

They laid out waterproof tarp to lie on beneath the straw roofs of Directiron's houses. The people of Elmtree gathered hay and found their way into barns and stables.

I also found myself a corner with Maura and together we lay ourselves to rest for the remainder of the night. I slept but lightly, with half open an eye, but for now it was sufficient. I was well satisfied with the food the people of Directiron had provided and could feel it replenish my muscles' reserves as energy gradually flowed back into my limbs until the morning came and I felt fully restored.

The people of Directiron gathered what they could carry and with us they left their settlement behind. Few tears were shed over the calculators being turned off, as such resigning their duty. Little time for weeping the cause, we marched.

One year we marched from settlement to settlement. Clovis advisors, terrified of the man himself, had come up with a strategic plan to take over all of the settlements of our lands, starting with the smaller ones, working up to the bigger ones as soon as sufficient troops had been mustered, joining Clovis' ranks.

We marched through forest and brazen desert, swamp and mountain range. Our endurance tested by the extremities of heat, cold, water, ice, fire, and wind. At the end of the year we reached the largest settlement we needed to persuade in order to have an army thus

large that all continents, all of globus, would bow to Clovis, king of kings, were they to join his ranks. It was at the settlement of Colossus, the biggest settlement known to man, that we stood to face our final test.

Colossus, a settlement built out of stone and drooping glaze, a kind of strange, brittle, almost fully transparent, watery looking stone, that would look like it melted a little if put upright for a century or so. Colossi would use it to fabricate houses that allowed you to both be sheltered from cold, heat, wind, rain, ice, and almost any kind of other weather, while allowing you to look outside.

As we walked out the dunes that separated the forest from Colossus, its settlement walls rose high up, five stories high, right in front of us, forming a perfect circle around it. From all sides of Colossus, guards rushed to where we stood, leaving few guards behind to see whether we wouldn't also try to attack them from behind.

A majestic figure only frail to the untrained eye, seemingly slender muscles with sinewy dexterity to them draped in cloth spun from caterpillar's chrysalis, rose up among the guards, climbing the stairs from below. One would expect a frail voice from such a slim figure, but instead a deep and roaring one erupted from Latha's lips. "Latha, Colossus' queen, demands he who confronts us, to make himself known," she bellowed.

As Clovis announced himself and his intentions, Robar approached me, a face marked by desperation, tear-filled eyes. "When they join us, civilization is lost, Giro. Was this your intent?" I looked at him — I'm certain I did so with a spark in my eye — and Giro's face turned from desperation to disgust.

He turned to walk and I lay my hand on his shoulder. "When they join us, my friend, civilization will be regained. Have you not witnessed the army we have around us? Have you not witnessed the masses that surround us to fight for the civilization we hold dear?"

Robar swept my hand off his shoulder and looked me in the eyes. "Sire, you have lost your senses, your wit, your sanity, and your way."

"I have lost all but my senses, my wit, my sanity, and my way, only for it to be regained when opportunity presents itself. Witness the gates open and our army joined by the last that seek to be free on this continent." Robar looked at me, his eyes questioning, and he turned to the gates that creaked as they opened.

Latha marched out with her people, intent on joining Clovis' ranks. Clovis turned to me and said, "What marvelous sight to behold, an army that will strike fear into Globus' hearts as I reign all of Globus, as the overlord to all. It's been only a year, but I remember you be first to join my ranks, and I will thank you for it with the riches, the splendors, the women, all that Globus has to offer as you see fit."

"I seek but one woman, Clovis, and she be already mine. Look around you at what army has gathered. Look around you and behold our strength. The army is forty-nine fold what you first presented at my gates," I said.

Clovis looked at me and at his fear struck administrators, who checked their books. Then he looked back at me again, "Am I not mistaken to assess the army now is fifty-fold the strength of my army as I presented it at your gates. Isn't that what the administration shows?"

"The total number of soldiers, yes, but only few be yours, relatively speaking to the army I have gathered," I said and Clovis looked at me in disbelief.

I drew my sword and roared, “Armies of the free world, behold the majority we are and the belief that freedom should at all times ring true. Clovis, who deems himself king of kings, overlord to all, descendant of the conqueror and tyrant king Clovis, seems to be vastly outnumbered. Draw your weapons and fight, for we shall stand to be free like we were never taken.”

Barely a moment passed and all the armies of all the settlements we had gathered to join what Clovis assumed to be his army drew their weapons and as I looked at Robar, certainty dawned on him, a fierce gaze struck me as he returned my sight, a grin nearly shred his face, and he turned and plunged his sword down into the soldier’s neck that stood right beside Clovis.

All of Clovis’ men and women ran. Swords hacked into their backs and stabbed through their hearts and heads, cut through their necks severing their heads from their torsos, sometimes hanging on by the slightest thread of skin as blood gushed out their bodies and oozed into the sands below them. In less than a minute all of Clovis’ soldiers were dead and Clovis, more dead than alive, lay on the ground, gasping.

“I doubt I’ll see you in the afterlife, Clovis, king of nought. Your soul be tainted as your face lay ever still, even when you were alive.” I said.

He gargled, blood filling his lungs, “What you see, I see not. A soul I have never found. I live as my senses, my whims, my follies, and my impulses dictate. I will never die.” Yet, he did and we, the many, returned to our settlements, only to realize that as we stood together, we would never be governed by the few.

THE END