

# The Trouble with Letting Sleeping Legends Lie

A RockKaiju Short Story

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Copyright: Robert V Aldrich, 2017

Published: 2018/02/02

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FROM THE MIND OF

**RVA**

The legend looked lost.

The giant lizard-like monster walked on massive hind-legs, its smaller forelegs almost like a human's arms. Its head was tremendously out of proportion with the rest of its green scaly body, almost half the size of the rest of its body combined. It had a snake-like tongue that slithered out as it turned this way and that in uneven, jerky movements like some parts of its body were simply faster than others.

Samatra watched the legend pace this way and that, looking a little like her mother when she was trying to figure out what she'd forgotten. Around the farm girl, sheep milled about. They had been initially unsettled by the legend, but quickly got over it when they remembered they had grass to eat. The sight of these giants wasn't common but it was hardly rare.

The green, big-headed behemoth started to walk away. Rather than disappear into the distant fields that stretched into the flat horizon, however, the lizard began to head towards town. "Oh, that's not good," Sam muttered. She swung her guitar behind her back and raced for the fence that separated the sheep from the cows on her family's farm. She leapt up onto the top beam and called "Allti!"

In the distance, almost out of sight, she saw the cows cloistered together near the edge of the farmland, where the river ran along the edge of their property. She saw her brother peek up from between the cows. "I saw it!" he yelled back.

"I'm going to tell mom and dad!" Sam called to him. She turned and ran along the fence, the narrow wooden beams easy for her to navigate. She reached the end of the fence at the pueblo farm house and she ran inside. "Did you see it?" she called to her mother.

Sam's mother was still watching through the window over the kitchen basin. "Yes, it's heading towards the village center." She turned to Sam. "Go fetch your father. He's in the workshop."

Sam darted through the earthen house rather than around it, ignoring her mother's sudden plea that she not do precisely that. She threw open the door to the shop of tools and half-completed projects. "Dad," she called. The big, burly man turned from wood he was working with. "A legend's heading into town."

He stood immediately and came rushing out with her. Sam and her father ran to the door, both ignoring her mother's protests that they were tracking mud and dust all over her good, clean floor. Sam pointed out the door and her father looked. He squinted and then sighed when he saw the giant beast. "That could be a problem," he muttered.

"Legends usually cause damage," Sam worried aloud.

"Legends don't cause anything deliberately; they're just indifferent to what they do," the giant of a man told her. "They'll walk through a building as readily as you or I might walk through a bush." He wiped his face, which caused sawdust to get caught in his beard. "Go ahead and round up the sheep. Tell Allti I'll help

him with the cattle. You run into town and see what happens. Maybe nothing but if there's a problem, we should help."

"Yes, dad," Sam concurred. She ran around the two-story pueblo and hopped back up onto the fence. The sheep were all conveniently gathered at the corner of the yard, bleating at her for leaving. She opened the fence to their pen and started to urge them in, but they stood their ground and called demandingly. The young girl sighed. "Fine," she acquiesced. She swung her guitar back around to the front and began to play.

The sheep responded immediately and settled down as Sam played a lullaby for the sheep. She glared, unamused at the modest flock. She got lost thinking about how soon they'd be ready to shear. She hated the process – the cutting, the washing, the cleaning, the dying – but while she would never harm a sheep, it was cathartic to think about taking sharp things to them. Plus she always got some new clothes out of it, so it was a worthwhile tradeoff.

Two more songs and she began to draw the sheep into the pen. She backed into the secured, half-covered pen and they followed her music. Once they were all corralled into the pen, she edged around the sides and locked the gate. She played a slow lullaby to leave them calm and then she dashed away at full sprint.

Her guitar paddling along against her back, Sam ran all the way from the farming plots through to the outskirts of town and into town-proper. The town itself was a host of wood buildings and larger pueblos which were cloistered together on the only geographical feature for miles; a large rocky hill. The slight upturn in the land formed a large, very broad hill. It was here that the central grouping of buildings made the heart of town and where the stores and other municipal structures were found. It was here that Sam tracked the legend.

She slowed when she saw it, utterly transfixed by the sight. She approached slowly, her jaw hanging open in disbelief. She joined the crowd of people who had also come to see what became of the legend. They all stared, just as she, utterly stunned at the sight.

The legend had fallen asleep atop Fearman's General Store.

The three-story wooden store was the pride of the town. Built from more wood than almost the rest of the town combined, it was an engineering and architectural marvel as far as the locals were concerned. It was made by the gathered effort of the whole town. It was the primary store of the town, housing most of their grocery and municipal needs. It also stored much of their winter supplies and even some of their crops.

And as of a few moments ago, it also held the legend, snoring atop its roof.

"Oh my word," Sam gawked. She looked around the crowd and saw her friend, Gash. The pudgy boy with thick glasses was standing at the front of the crowd, with the best vantage. Sam wormed her way through the crowd with a chorus of insincere apologies to find her way to him. "What happened?" she asked Gash when she finally permeated the membrane of curious onlookers.

He shook his head and just shrugged. "It wandered into town, like that one from last year. It looked around for a bit and then it just...just climbed on top of Fearman's." He gestured at the current situation, summed up by the lizard's quiet but audible snoring. Each inhale made the supports creak. Exhale softsnore of an exhale likewise caused a groan, threatening of the impending collapse.

"Why would it..." Sam asked in confused astonishment.

"I don't know," Gash answered with a shrug.

The legend turned a little, its giant head shifting in its sleep. A loud groan came from within the building and one of the third-story windows cracked loudly. "That's bad," Gash realized.

"Is anybody still in there?" Sam asked.

Gash shook his head. "Everybody ran out, but the winter supplies are still in there. And all the salt."

"All those saddles, too," Sam reasoned. The enormity of the store's importance slowly registered. "We've got to help them get the stuff out of there." The store groaned again, more window panes cracking.

"You really want to go in there?" Gash gestured. He took off his thick glasses and cleaned them on his grimy shirt. Sam saw him trying to clean the precious glass and snatched them from his hand. She cleaned them on her dress hem and handed them back to him. "We've got to get that thing off the roof top." The store groaned again. "Soon," he worried.

"Yeah," Sam agreed. "Got any ideas?" Gash, like the rest of the town, was completely silent.

Sam's father poured her a bowl of stew and sat it before her. He served Allti next, and then his wife. Last to eat, he sat down and began to wolf down the stew. "So nobody knows what to do about the legend," Sam reported as she stirred the stew to let it cool down.

"Are they determined to move it?" Sam's mother asked as she crumbled up some bread into the stew. She reached for some more and her husband took her hand and kissed it affectionately, making her blush.

"Well, they've got to," Sam asserted. "The whole place will collapse. Like, at any second."

"Have they gotten all the stuff out of the store?" Allti asked.

"No! Nobody wants to go in there when it collapse at any second," Sam marveled. "Besides, the place is packed with the winter supplies. It would take a whole day to empty it out."

"I told the magistrate," Sam's father chimed in an I-told-you-so tone between hungry bites. "I told him when Fearman first built the place. I told him. I told him we shouldn't rent that space from Fearman. I told him putting everything in that one building was a bad idea."

"Yeah, but this isn't Fearman's fault," Sam's mother argued. "Nobody knows what the legends will do. They're more unpredictable than the gods."

"Maybe, but we all knew something tragic would happen," her father asserted. "If it wasn't a legend, it would have been a fire, or a mud slide. Something."

"Maybe those drovers would come back and—" Allti started.

"Can we please not discuss hypothetical tragedies at the dinner table?" her mother groaned.

"Can we discuss them at the breakfast table?" her father teased with a grin. Her mother smacked him, making him snicker harder like a mischievous child.

Sam ate for a moment, but found herself too fixated on the problem at hand. She stirred her stew with the fork, leaning on her right hand. "But we've got to do something, right?" she repeated.

"Assuming Fearman's store is still standing in the morning, yes," her father told her, scooping more stew into his bowl.

"Bothering the legend is a poor idea," her mother insisted. "The building hasn't fallen."

"Yet," her father said. "The building hasn't fallen yet."

"We have to do something," Sam chimed in. "The longer it sleeps, the worse it will be, and legends can sleep for weeks."

Allti nodded in support. "Remember the peddler, said that legend in Oshtark woke up after being asleep for ten years? Most people had forgotten it was even there; they just thought it was a hill."

"We can't just let all the town's supplies get crushed," said Sam.

"Besides, that building was the effort of the whole town," her father concurred. "We can't just let all that work go to waste because some giant lizard decided to take a nap on the roof."

"A legend is hardly just a giant lizard," her mother argued. "The legends are like...like forces of nature, made manifest."

"Whatever," Sam's father dismissed. "We won't just let that beast destroy our town, even if it's one building at a time."

Sam smiled proudly at her father and settled in to eat dinner.

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The next morning, Sam walked through the field, guiding her sheep by the song of her guitar. She didn't play specific songs so much as weave from one song to the next, toying and experimenting with melodies and variations throughout the day. If she stopped playing for even a few moments, the sheep would begin to beg

for an encore. After that, they'd been demanding one. Playing for the whole day had become a thing Sam was not only grown accustomed to but did without thought or effort.

She stepped around the sheep with a bit of a dancer's flair, just trying to fight off the boredom of the open field. She turned towards her house and saw Gash closing the gate into the field. He waved and Sam waved back. She met him at the edge of the sheep who followed her across the field like the world's most cumbersome shadow. The sheep called at Gash, a few more friendly sheep butting his leg affectionately. "Hey, any news?" Sam asked.

Gash shook his head. "My father's trying to talk the magistrate into something reasonable." He scratched one of the ewe's behind the ear. "Doesn't look like anybody's interested in reason." They kept walking. In the distance one field over, Allti was wrestling a bull and losing decisively. Gash watched the scene for a moment. "Is Allti..." he began to ask, adjusting his glasses to make sure he was seeing the inanity correctly.

"Rambi's brother - the one with the tattoo - told Allti that he wrestles a cow every day," Sam explained to Gash. "I think he neglected to mention that he wrestles the calves. That or he means the milk cows. My idiot brother decided he wanted to not get pinned again and..." She just gestured at him as he flailed in tactically dubious ways as the big bull sat on him.

"I guess that's one way to do it," Gash shrugged. Never one for sports, the round boy kept walking and Sam kept up with him. The sheep continued to wander around as Sam played on. "I've got an idea," he ventured carefully. He kicked the dirt in the grassy field. "Dad says the magistrate and the sheriff won't go for it."

"Probably not," Sam agreed. "What's your idea?"

"I think we need to lure the legend off the roof, not try to move it," he explained as he looked up at the horizon. They were approaching the river that ran at the farthest end of her family property. "Waking it up, though, will take a lot of force and will probably anger it. So we need to provide force from a distance that we can then evacuate so that the legend will retaliate against."

"Retaliate?" Sam pondered.

"Yeah," Gash said quickly, getting enthusiastic just being able to share his plan. "So we need to construct a device that will hurl a heavy construct or maybe a boulder through the air and will strike the legend and will wake it up and if it's powerful enough, we can hurl it from outside the town and the legend will charge it and we can evacuate it and then the legend destroys it and maybe it then wanders off from there and doesn't go back to Fearman's!"

Sam didn't feel convinced. "Wait, so we have to...we have to throw a rock at the legend and then..." She stopped walking and playing and stood perfectly still, trying to reason her way through what Gash was suggesting. Gash started to repeat his plan but Sam held up her finger, determined to reason through it herself. Gash waited, practically able to see the connections made, one by one, across her face. "So...like a slingshot?"

"I was thinking a trebuchet, but yeah!" he agreed with a big smile.

Sam's face crinkled in confusion again. "A what?"

"Sam!" her mother called from the pueblo.

Sam turned and hollered "Yeah?" loud enough to make Gash wince, covering his ears.

"Go rescue your brother from the bull and then send him to help your father," she yelled across the great flat distance. "The men have a plan."

"Oh good," Sam sighed. She handed Gash her guitar and went bounding between the sheep to hop the fence into the cow field. Gash was left awkwardly holding the instrument. He looked passed it at the sheep who were all staring up at him expectantly. The round-faced boy stared back in growing fear then smiled nervously and did his best to play something.

Sam, her mother, Gash, and Gash's father, all stood with the other town's residents in a large crowd out of range of the catastrophe waiting to happen. Sam's lips sat firmly on the left of her mouth as she watched, unimpressed. Gash hung both his hands atop his head whenever he was unable to process what he was seeing. His father's jaw just hung open like the yokel the educated man had spent his whole life trying not to be. Sam's mother sighed with the patience only maternity can instill and waited to see which idiot got killed first.

The majority of the men in the village were tugging frantically on ropes tied to the sleeping legend.

Most of the ropes were pulling on the legend's right foot that was dangling over the side of the building. Easily a hundred men strong – including Allti and Sam's father - it was an exercise in futility as the army of men fought against the immovable object. Meanwhile, said immovable object continued to snore, lizard snout facing up. Periodically, its snake-like tongue would shimmy out and then disappear again behind its huge teeth. A giant drop of saliva was dripping from the corner of the legend's open mouth. Meanwhile, the men gave it their all, pulling frantically, furiously, and with all their combined might.

Sam finally sighed and asked, "How much longer are they going to be at this?"

"Until somebody gets hurt or the ropes break, dear," Sam's mother told her.

A loud snap made the whole crowd wince, followed by men screaming, "Keep pulling!" and a frantic reorganizing of hands and feet.

"Or both," Sam's mother sighed. She turned away and announced, "I'm getting some tea." She and several other of the women wandered off together. Their departure quickly prompted others in the crowd to splinter off and do the same.

Even Gash's father, the town apothecary, sighed and departed, saying, "I'll ready the medical treatments."

Gash and Sam were left with several of the other, older kids. "I think we should build the trebuchet," Gash told Sam.

"Is that even a real word?" Sam challenged Gash.

"What's that?" asked another boy from the village, a big bruiser named Halch. He shoved Gash to the ground. "Is that a—" Sam silenced him by clocking him across the jaw. The bigger boy fell to the ground and Sam stood over him with her fists curled tight. "Why you!" he shrieked and got to his feet. He was ready to attack when Sam's father stepped between them.

The giant man of more muscle than many of his steers shoved the boy hard. The barely-teen fell into the dirt and wasn't so quick to get up. "Be glad my daughter was so merciful. You don't push others, Halch," her father snapped at the bully. "Or you get pushed back."

Halch looked around for reinforcements, but saw only men dispersing. He quickly scrambled away, beating a fast retreat. Sam's father watched him run, then helped Gash up to his feet. "You okay, son?"

"Yeah," he lied, wiping a skinned palm on his pants. He was trying not to cry, Sam could see that. He wandered away without a word and Sam watched him go, worried.

"Poor boy," her father said. He rubbed his hands, trying to calm the rope burns on his palms. "He's too smart and not smart enough at the same time."

"Gash didn't do anything," Sam argued with her father.

"Exactly," her father informed her. "He never does, and this happens, again and again. If he knows he's going to get bullied, he should do something. Put on some muscle. Learn some wrestling. Something." He sighed as Gash disappeared through the door of his father's practice. "At least he's got you."

"Yeah," Sam agreed. It hit her and she looked incredulously at her father. "Wait, what do you mean 'got me'?" she called after him as they headed home.

With the songs of crickets and the occasional moo of the cows in the barn, Sam's family enjoyed the nighttime music of the farm over dinner. Sam was lost in thought, however. She dug her thumb into the lacquered tabletop, leaning on her left hand. Allti and her father were discussing the pulling of the legend and the varying degrees of how futile it proved to be. Both seemed convinced if they could muster just a few more hands. Sam's mother offered to help and the tender egos of men muddled some excuse as to why that would be a bad idea.

Tired of hearing the bravado, Sam asked, "So what are we going to try tomorrow?"

"The sheriff wants to detonate part of the building," Allti told her as he spooned more vegetables to cover his steak. "He thinks it would be better to lose some of the building than all of it."

"He knows that's a bad idea," her father insisted. He got up and went to the water pump to fill the table's pitcher. "The magistrate wants to try a loud noise."

"Your groaning today when you tried to move it wasn't loud enough?" her mother asked. She sat down the bowl she was dishing food from. "Why don't they just fire arrows at the beast? That would wake it up."

"Actually, that's kind of Gash's idea," Sam interjected.

"Arrows wouldn't be noticed by a legend," her father said as he returned to the table, filling his wife's glass. "And besides, we have maybe a few dozen bows in the whole town."

"Gash's idea was to build a—" Sam tried to work in.

"And all the arrows are stored in the store anyway," Allti added.

"We might could try a stampede," her father proposed. "Drive it right by the store," he explained with a vague gesture. "That might wake up the legend."

"Yeah, but how would we drive a stampede through town and not destroy the whole town?" Allti asked.

"And the rumble might very easily destroy the store as well," Sam's mother added.

"Gash wants to build a trebuchet," Sam called in quickly before she got interrupted again. Her family stopped all noise and motion to look at her with confused looks and total silence. Her father voicelessly sounded out what she'd said, as though trying to decide if it was even a real word. Her mother, likewise, seemed concerned her daughter had started talking in tongues. Allti just waited for more information, clearly used to being a step behind in any conversation.

"He does," Sam insisted. "It's like a catapult-thing but doesn't need flexible materials or something. He thinks we could build it and hit the legend and then..." She searched for the rest of the plan and couldn't recall any of it. "So yeah." She stirred her dinner. "I think we should do that."

Dinner continued with little of substance said after that.

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The next day, Sam sat atop one of the buildings in town with several of the village girls, watching a stampede plow through town. The whole village shook as if the ground itself was angry. The cows bellowed and moored as they rumbled by. A dusty breeze had been kicked up, but it was barely enough to stir the local streamers that hung from rooftops and windows.

"This is a piss-poor stampede," said Gladi, one of Sam's friends. The foul-mouthed tart hiked up her ankle-length dress and stood on the lip of the pueblo.

"Come on, you flimsy cowlicks!" she yelled at the men doing little more than driving the cows at a brisk trot. "Give 'em some leather!"

Armara was laying on the rooftop, a small bolero jacket bound up under her hair as she dozed. "I want to give you some leather, you hussy. Shut up."

"These morons can't drive a flipping stampede," Gladi yelled at the men. Several of the men on horses at the edge of the stampede yelled back at her, but their calls were lost in the din. That didn't stop Gladi from making obscene gestures at them.

Sam knelt along the low wall that lined the rooftop of the pueblo belonging to Fiern's family. Fiern was a small girl, a couple of years younger than Sam. She wore a dress not unlike Gladi's, but green and far more befitting her ladylike demeanor. Fiern was mostly content to just watch the cows go by, occasionally muttering, "Poor cows. I bet they're so confused."

"If they're anything like my sheep, who cares?" Sam grumbled. "Sheep are the most selfish, lazy little prigs in the world."

"I like sheep," Fiern told Sam with a self-conscious smile, nervously tapping the ends of her index fingers together.

"Hey, where's your guitar?" Gladi thought to ask, speaking loudly over the stampede. "You should play us something to drown out this chaos!" she yelled back at the stampede that failed to meet her approval.

"Do you have any idea how late I was up last night?" Armara griped from her pseudo-nap. "Can we skip the music and please keep it down?"

Sam watched the stampede go and glanced across the small town towards the apothecary's shop. She saw Gash and his father on the rooftop, watching the stampede. Gash was clearly showing his father some designs, the two talking through the different nuances of whatever it was he had designed. The rampaging cows were clearly less entertaining to the two intellectuals.

The cows began to thin, and finally the stampede passed entirely. The roadway through town was destroyed and property damage abounded, though nothing more considerable than broken pots and similar decorative pottery. After the tumult of the passing herd, the air was deafeningly quiet except for the slow, deep snores of the giant lizard that still slept soundly atop the store.

"Well that was worthwhile," Fiern offered, unimpressed. She looked across Sam at Gladi. "What was supposed to happen again?"

"Hell if I know," the walking temper grumbled. "At this point, I say we let the lizard stay. The building clearly isn't going to—"

The front pillar of the store snapped. The entire building bowed slightly father forward and was kept up only by the tense groaning of the remaining supports.

The four girls atop the rooftop released their collective breaths together. Even Armara had risen when she heard the pillar break. The four girls, along with much of the town's population atop the buildings all throughout the center of town,

watched the store, waiting for the inevitable tragedy. The closest that came was a few more of the front windows cracked and broke. From two windows, small but fast streams of stored grain began to pour through the broken glass like a waterfall trickling from a mountain lake.

Sam rubbed her face, grateful the entire storehouse hadn't collapsed. She looked at the other three girls, seeing their relief but also growing apprehension in the face of certainty. Sam looked across to the adjacent rooftop and saw Gash and his father, watching in horror as well. He looked across at her and, even across the distance, mirrored her growing worry.

Sam sat on the fence at the far southern rear of the farm, strumming her guitar. She was playing aimlessly as the sheep milled about her, drinking from the stream and eating the grass. "I wonder what they'll try next?" she asked some of the sheep. The few she'd spoken to looked up at her. "Are they going to try to tie the legend to draft animals?" she wondered. "Ooh, how about detonating the front of the store?" She groaned in disapproval.

Her music turned a little more vibrant and angry as she instinctively played a fight song the town usually reserved for sporting events. "I wish they'd just go ahead and listen to Gash. He's clearly got the right idea." One of the sheep bleated at her. "Well, I think he does," she insisted defiantly. "But nobody will listen to him," she observed. "Nobody's offered to help him." Her strumming slowed. "Even me," she slowly realized. Lost in guilt, she forgot her playing.

The sheep, one by one, turned their heads to her. After a moment, they began to crowd her, bleating up at her. Sam ignored them for a moment, lost in guilty thoughts. Unconsciously, she began playing again. She looked down at the sheep and said, "Eat up," as she rose to her feet. She stood atop the fence's top railing and began to walk slowly back towards her house. "We're turning in early. I got work to do."

The banging on the window of the apothecary's door sounded slightly urgent. Gash's father peeked around the blinds and saw Sam. Worried, he unlocked the door and opened it. "Samatra, is everything okay?"

"Yeah, sorry for coming over so late," she told him as she entered the store. Gash was climbing down the ladder from his loft bedroom. "Hey, Gash," she told him, giving her friend a little wave.

"What's got you here so late, child?" Gash's father asked her. "Is everything alright?" He grew worried. "Did something happen? Is it Allti? Again?"

"No, no, everything's fine," Sam quickly dissuaded. "I..just..." She looked straight at Gash. "I just got tired of waiting for this town to realize Gash had the right idea." The chubby boy pushed his glasses up his nose, stunned. "I think we should build your tray-boo...the tree bucket-thing."

"What about the rest of the town?" asked Gash.

Sam just shrugged, confidently indifferent. "What about them?"

"We need their permission...don't we?" he asked.

Again, Sam just shrugged. "Do we?" Gash was genuinely unsure. Even his father seemed unclear what the answer was. "If we do need their permission," Sam asserted, "then all we can do is say we're sorry. After we save the store." Her enthusiasm made Gash smile and he nodded.

Gash's father sighed slowly and headed towards the back of the store. "I'll get the tools."

"We put explosives here, here, and over there," the sheriff explained to the town magistrate as well as Sam's father and several of the other farmers in town. The lean man, the smallest of them, was pointing at spots along the pillars that were already bowing outward. "They'll blow away the pillars' bases and the front will come down. The legend will roll off and land here."

"And then what?" asked Sam's father, wiping his brow in the mid-morning heat. "If we wake it up, it may be in a foul temper. It may go on a rampage." The sheriff acknowledged that possibility and also the inability to do anything about it with the same nod.

"And what about damage done to the supplies?" asked the town magistrate, rubbing down his sweat-soaked hair. "What sort of losses are we probably looking at?"

Here, the sheriff grew pensive. "It's likely that we'll be looking at losing half the supplies. The rooftop will likely collapse along the spine." Sam's father's hands went to the top of his head as he tried to conceive of the scope of that loss. The magistrate, likewise, looked stunned at the prospect. "Better fifty percent than a hundred percent," said the sheriff, used to ugly math.

As the Sheriff fielded further questions from the other farmers, and the magistrate worried about retaining his position, Sam's father turned away in worry and happened to glance back towards the edge of town. What appeared at first glance to be a tree seemed too broad at the base. And also to not have been there ever before. He slowly walked towards the curiosity until he saw Sam and Gash before the small structure.

The two kids stepped back from their single night construction and marveled at all they'd accomplished. The trebuchet looked less like a genuine engine of war and more like a child's playground implement. A barrel full of ice sat opposite two barrels loaded with dense metal scrap. They were secured to a long, sturdy metal pole that was balanced atop a simple support structure.

"Will it hold?" Gash asked, gently touching the wooden supports. The wood groaned. "The supports look ready to give."

"They'll hold for at least a few more minutes," Sam said confidently before she turned towards the legend. "A few more minutes is all we need."

Gash ran around to the rear of the machine, where a pulley wheel held the secured ropes that had tugged down the ammunition, and thus elevated the counterbalance. He picked up a notepad and began to look over the assorted

numbers he'd jotted down, scribbled out, and re-written. He studied an anemometer on the trebuchet for a second, then checked the wind vane, all before he began to scribble further calculations.

Sam joined Gash's father by the adjacent wheel and asked, "What's he doing?"

"Calculations," he said. He glanced back at the two additional barrels full of ice. "We're not going to get many chances at this. That ice cost me a fortune. The fish oil you traded for it?" he told Sam. "That was all I had."

Sam winced apologetically. "Well, Gash is good with numbers. I'm sure we'll—"

"Dad, what's sixteen times nine?" Gash yelled frantically. Sam clamped her eyes shut as she tried to will away her growing cynicism.

"One-forty-four," Gash's father called calmly as he took off his glasses and cleaned them on his gray vest, less a ritual of care and more a familiar meditation in the face of mounting stress.

Gash folded the notebook and began double-checking measurements and angles on the machine. He started orientating himself this way and that, turning his shoulders and outstretched arms one way and his hips another, almost like he was in the middle of a dance with some imaginary partner. "I think..." he said slowly and uncertainly, much like he said everything. "It should be..." He opened his notebook and began refiguring the notes.

"Son, the ice is going to melt if we don't—" Gash's father began before Sam, growing irritated, just yanked down the handle.

The greatly improvised machine wheeled abruptly forward. The ropes released their hold and the heavy double-barrels on the front dropped suddenly, hurling the bucket of ice into the sky. There was a loud whistling as the barrel soared through the air. In the town and the adjacent farms, everyone stopped and watched curiously as the flying barrel coursed through a wide, dramatic arc.

"It's too low," Gash's father deduced just before the barrel soared right over the legend's head, narrowly missing by a few scant feet. The barrel and hard ice smashed against the rocky hill at the back of the store, shattering loud enough for the trio to hear it across the distance.

All Sam saw was how close of hit they'd managed, and spurred on by the childish love of explosions, she screamed eagerly. She did a celebratory dance including a bunch of vulgar hand gestures, then turned with a huge, toothy grin at Gash. "Let's load up another one!"

Gash and his father were staring at the girl, both slightly frightened. "She's crazy," said Gash's father.

"Little bit," Gash agreed.

The three quickly began to pull down the trebuchet, tugging on the sturdy ropes to reset the action. Once they'd readied it, Gash locked the handle and Sam and Gash's father cautiously released the rope. The weapon re-engaged,

they quickly rolled one of the two remaining ice barrels over and began the arduous task of racking the barrel into the pitchfork-like launching arm.

"Okay," Gash said, his brain engaging. He considered the multitude of possible variables that could affect the shot and decided to simply move the trebuchet back a dozen feet. "I think..." he said mostly to himself. The three pushed the wheeled siege machine back what they hoped was a good number of feet. This time, Gash ran to the handle and had to jump to reach it. He let his weight yank it down, freeing the assault load.

For the second time that morning, the entire town looked to the east and watched as the whistling barrel soared overhead. Every head in town turned on a swivel as they watched it sail right at the legend, only to strike the hill again. The target had been solid and should have hit the giant lizard right between the eyes had it not coursed right by the bluster of morning wind.

"Oh come on!" Sam yelled at the wind.

"It's fine," Gash's father told the two kids. "We quit aiming for the head; we aim for the center mass. Come on." He urged them into re-setting the trebuchet again. They tugged down the ropes to re-engage it, and then set the weapon ready. They rolled the final barrel of ice over to the throwing arm and loaded it in. "We need to turn it," Gash's father said, demonstrating with his hands turning counterclockwise. "Just a little."

"The wheels won't turn like that," Gash warned, panicking slightly at the now-obvious flaw in his hurried design.

"They don't need to," Sam said, setting her shoulder to the front supports of the machine. She pushed with all her farm muscle. The whole machine groaned like a tree ready to fall.

"Uh, Sam..." Gash warned in terror with a panicked swallow.

She ignored him and kept pushing. The wheels slowly dug into the sandy ground as she ground the front of the weapon into the dirt. Doing so caused the front to angle slightly, turning its aim just a bit while the whole weapon warped between the pressure and the weight of the pieces. "That's plenty," Gash's father lied confidently.

When Sam released her pressure against the weapon, it groaned again and the supports began to shake. "It's going to break!" Gash panicked. He and his father dove at the machine, trying in vain to hold the pieces to keep them from collapsing or even breaking entirely. Sam, desperate, dashed around the two and jumped at the handle, yanking it down in mid-leap. The ropes released and the weight dropped, the barrel of ice flung into the air. The force of the release plus the strain of the turn was too much and the entire machine crumbled into a heap of scrap. The whole machine fell apart on top of itself before Gash and his father's very eyes. But the barrel sailed on through the sky.

For the third time, everybody in the village watched from east to west as the whistling barrel of ice went soaring through the air. It coasted seemingly too high, only to curve back sharply and strike the legend dead-center in the stomach.

The giant lizard's eyes flared open in utter shock. It scrambled frantically, causing Fearman's store to creak and groan but somehow remain standing. The legend lifted its oversized head and looked around blearily, not seeing the source of the attack. With surprising agility given its size and the disproportionately huge head, the giant rolled off the store top.

The town sent up a cheer all at once as the legend tried to understand what was happening around it. In every field and atop every pueblo, the residents of the town collectively sent up a whoop of celebration. Likewise, Sam and Gash leapt up and down, cheering with exhilaration.

The scaly legend continued to check its surroundings defensively. It seemed more confused than scared. When it couldn't find the origin of its attack, it finally yawned with its huge gaping maw and trotted away a few steps. It surveyed the immediate area, seeing passed the town and the immediate pastures, then began to trot off, clearly too awake now to return to sleep.

The cheering continued.

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Mid-morning of the next day, Sam was leaning against the fence of her farm, playing her guitar. She was dallying with various chords, stringing together different songs in a whimsical progression. Behind her, Gash was walking along the top of the fence, his arms out wide as he tried to maintain his balance. He was mostly successful. "It's cool that they're reimbursing your dad for the trebuchet's materials," Sam said as she plucked away at the music that kept the sheep happily grazing.

"Yeah, the fish oil especially," Gash agreed. "That's half of dad's business some..." His balance started to give and, rather than risk the fall, he hopped off the fence instead. He turned back and saw Alti and Sam's father walking through the cow posture with two big pieces of wood under each arm. The cows were following Alti in mild confusion. "Glad the store can be repaired," Gash said, absently adjusting his thick glasses.

Sam checked and saw them going. "Yeah, me too," she said with a smile. She settled in to keep playing, saying errantly, "I sure hope that's the last problem we have with any legends."

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