

Samuel O. Leonard



Same Old Lion

And The Exposure
Of Stat Pad Arm

After Same Old Lion finally becomes a mediocre hero, the leader of his nation gives him a new Head Trainer whose coaching brings out the worst in his signature superpower, Stat Pad Arm. Same Old Lion must regain mastery of his Stat Pad Arm quickly. If not, he'll have no chance at safeguarding his nation's honor, glory and riches from enemy heroes.

SAME OLD LION AND THE EXPOSURE OF STAT PAD ARM

by Samuel O. Leonard

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ISBN: 978-1-64438-139-7

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.
2019

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Leonard, Samuel O.
Same Old Lion and The Exposure of Stat Pad Arm by Samuel
O. Leonard
FICTION/Superheroes | FICTION/Satire | HUMOR/General
Library of Congress Control Number: 2019912010

Chapter 1

Early in the year 1018 on a cloudy winter morning, Mrs. Drof tugs her azure fur robe closer to her petite frail frame as she stares out the window of her towering stone castle. When the rising sun breaks through the clouds for a moment, she fetches a pair of gargantuan, dark, jeweled sunglasses from her pocket and places them over her pale, heavily wrinkled face.

Turning from the window, she strolls slowly past the crackling torches, encrusted in jewels of every color, mounted on the walls of stone and pure platinum, until she reaches a large silver bucket in the corner of the room. With her arthritis-gnarled fingers, she reaches into the bucket for a bite-sized butterscotch candy and pops one into her mouth. Then, as a small, red-haired freckled fellow enters the room, she takes a seat on her sparkling pure platinum royal throne.

“Well done, Quincy Roberts,” says Mrs. Drof in a creaky voice that sounds as old as she looks. “Well done. You are making my decision to appoint you Master of Hero Development look wise. Because of your work, our nation can truly be proud of its hero.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Drof,” says Quincy Roberts. “It is an honor to serve you and to work with a hero like Same Old Lion.”

“These last two years have been average to above average for Hand Land with a modest amount of honor, glory and riches returning to our nation.”

“They have been average to above average.”

“And that’s not bad for Hand Land,” she says as she adjusts the platinum crown, covered in bright blue tanzanite and sapphire gemstones, atop her head. “Especially considering where we were just ten years ago. And though there is room for improvement with Same Old Lion, he is no longer the laughingstock among the heroes of the Nations of Freedom and Liberty. He is decent and that is all that I have ever wanted. Thank you for a job well done.”

“Mrs. Drof, I appreciate your kind words, but—.”

“We have little chaos and crime in the streets. The mood of the peasants is pleasant. I think they are quite content with the job that you, Sir James Decorum and Same Old Lion are doing.”

“But Mrs. Drof,” says Quincy Roberts in a raised voice. “We can do better for Hand Land.”

“Better? Our hero won nine of sixteen battles last year and the year before that. That’s why we are experiencing this mild prosperity.”

“Yes, Mrs. Drof, but the standards that I have, and that you have for Same Old Lion, are greater than that. Same Old Lion’s record of battling the best heroes has not been that good. I think he has the right superpowers to contend with those heroes thanks to my hard work.”

“Contend? Contend for what?”

“Contend with the best heroes in the Nations of Freedom and Liberty to win the Tournament of Superiority.”

SAME OLD LION AND THE EXPOSURE OF STAT PAD ARM

“But Same Old Lion rarely even *qualifies* for the Tournament of Superiority. It takes three or four wins in the Tournament of Superiority to win it and since he last won the tournament in 957, he’s only won one battle in the Tournament of Superiority. That was sixty-one years ago. As much as I’d love the honor, glory and riches that would come with such an accomplishment, surely there is no path for Same Old Lion to win it in the near future.”

Suddenly the door opens and a gigantic feline beast towering several times higher than Mrs. Drof and Quincy Roberts lumbers into the room on all four paws. A string of drool plops onto the floor in front of him, from a snout distorted by a prominent overbite and checkered with missing and discolored teeth. Brawny furry limbs jut out from the sleeves and the bottom of his bright blue skintight tunic while a large, misshapen and scraggly mess of a mane, a few shades darker than the rest of his golden-brown fur, bursts out of the top of it. As he rises up onto his hind legs and stretches out his arms, the front of his tunic reveals the letters “SOL” in bold silver font sprawled across the chest.

Once inside the room, he peers his heavily bagged eyes at Mrs. Drof and Quincy Roberts and sticks the palm of his right front paw out at them with his thumb sticking out to the side. Then, he turns his open paw toward his left until his thumb points straight down at the ground.

Extending their open hands outward, Mrs. Drof and Quincy Roberts reciprocate, performing the same thumbs down gesture to the enormous lion before them.

“Thank you for joining us, Same Old Lion,” says Mrs. Drof to the big cat. “Quincy Roberts believes it is in our best interest to make some changes with you.”

“Changes?” says Same Old Lion with his deep, uncomfortably throaty voice. “I mean, I’ve been a little bit above average the last couple of years, but if he thinks changes can bring us honor, glory and riches and can lead to me getting more sex from prettier women than I’m accustomed to, then I’m all for it.”

“Very well,” says Mrs. Drof. “Quincy. What do you have in mind?”

“Same Old Lion’s Head Trainer, Sir James Decorum,” says Quincy Roberts.

“Yes?”

“I believe that you should execute Sir James Decorum. Immediately.”

Mrs. Drof gasps and says, “but I *love* Sir James Decorum! Why do you continue to be so bent on executing him? This is the third year in a row.”

“It is, but I know of a man with a stellar reputation who has been creating quite a buzz in the Nations of Freedom and Liberty and has always been fascinated with Same Old Lion. He thinks he has what it takes to train Same Old Lion better than ever and get the best out of him.”

“Better than Sir James Decorum?”

“Yes.”

“Better than Fancy Dwayne?”

“Yes. Mrs. Drof, over the past two years I have acquired all the superpowers that Same Old Lion needs to succeed, but Sir James Decorum doesn’t know how to properly train Same

SAME OLD LION AND THE EXPOSURE OF STAT PAD ARM

Old Lion and make him into a superhero. You have spared no expense on superpowers to improve Same Old Lion. For example, his Stat Pad Arm. There was so much anticipation and hope when Same Old Lion first received that superpower. Remember when he first used that superpower to form a mammoth fireball in the palm of his paw and flung it at a nearly impossible speed at his foe? Were you not in awe?"

"I had never seen anything like it."

"And how much money have you spent just to keep King Roger The Good from sending Stat Pad Arm to another hero?"

"Oh dear. Too much to count."

"And you thought it would make Same Old Lion so much better, but all it has done is give us back to back years of being just barely above average as a nation."

Mrs. Drof turns to a picture on the wall of Sir James Decorum. A tear falls from under her large black royal sunglasses as she stares at it for a long moment.

"Mrs. Drof," says Quincy Roberts. "I swear to you that executing Sir James Decorum and bringing in a new Head Trainer for Same Old Lion will boost his performance, help keep the people in line, keep them hooked on Propaganda and make you happier, wealthier and more secure than ever."

"Same Old Lion," says Mrs. Drof. "What do you think?"

"Sir James Decorum?" says Same Old Lion. "I don't know. I really have a good time when he trains me and I always fight hard for him because he's a great leader with strong moral character. But when I look at my results in battle under his leadership, he's nothing special. He's just okay." Turning to Quincy Roberts, he raises an eyebrow and says, "I

just wonder about this new standard being set. If you're going to execute Sir James Decorum after he made me into an average to above average hero, then, unless I have a great Season Of Combat next year, you and Mrs. Drof will have to execute my next Head Trainer one year from today. That's your standard."

Sheepishly, Quincy Roberts turns his eyes to the floor and wipes his glistening forehead with the back of his hand.

"This new Head Trainer that you recommend," says Mrs. Drof to Quincy Roberts. "What is this fellow's name?"

"Bushy Beard," says Quincy Roberts.

"Bushy Beard?"

"Yes. He recently immigrated to Hand Land from New London. There he worked in the background with their hero, Flag Waver, and helped Flag Water to win the Tournament of Superiority and become a superhero many times in the last couple of decades. He can share his expertise with Same Old Lion."

"New London... Is that not where you're from?"

"Yes, Mrs. Drof. It's beautiful. There is so much wealth and prosperity there that you wouldn't believe it. I would like to replicate that here. In Hand Land. With Same Old Lion. And Bushy Beard. For you."

"And his intelligence?"

"Off the charts. He's a cannon scientist. In fact, he's so intelligent that he always keeps a quill pen in his ear."

SAME OLD LION AND THE EXPOSURE OF STAT PAD ARM

“In his ear?” says Mrs. Drof as she raises an intrigued eyebrow.

“Yes, a quill pen in his ear. That is, as you know, the mark of a true genius.”

“Indeed.” Then Mrs. Drof sighs and says, “as you wish. Execute Sir James Decorum and bring in Bushy Beard.”

“Finally!” says Quincy Roberts as he pumps his fist.

“But I’m warning you Quincy Roberts. If he fails and Same Old Lion fails and Stat Pad Arm fails, thereby causing our nation to take a step back instead of a step forward to more honor, more glory and more riches, the blame will not fall on me or Same Old Lion. It will fall squarely on you and Bushy Beard and the two of you will suffer the same fate as Sir James Decorum.”

Quincy Roberts cringes and sheepishly nods at Mrs. Drof before tiptoeing out of the room.

Chapter 2

The next day just before high noon, Sir James Decorum arrives at Mrs. Drof's stone castle with a smug frown scrunched underneath his graying mustache and the shine of the sun glistening off the top of his bald brown scalp. As he makes his way to the top of the castle, the royal trumpets blare, signaling a royal declaration is imminent. Soon more and more trumpets sound throughout Hand Land until everyone from the town to the prairie can hear. A couple of hours later, every peasant in the nation is assembled around the royal castle waiting to hear the big announcement.

Sir James Decorum sits in the royal outdoor court atop the castle overlooking the entire nation, along with Mrs. Drof, Quincy Roberts and Same Old Lion. As they wait for the last few peasants to arrive, Sir James Decorum leans over to Quincy Roberts and whispers, "I wonder what the big announcement will be. After a second consecutive average to above average Season Of Combat for Same Old Lion, perhaps Mrs. Drof will honor me with an award and things of that nature."

"Perhaps your reward lies over there," says Quincy Roberts while pointing in the direction of the trumpeters on the far side of the royal outdoor court. Just beside them stands a thirty-foot tall rectangular object draped in a black tarp.

Then he stands up and walks up to the edge of the royal outdoor court. Guards in bright blue armor stand shoulder to shoulder along the wall and Quincy Roberts taps one on the

shoulder to get him to step aside so that he can see the crowds gathered below. From the base of the castle one hundred feet beneath him to the edge of the horizon, every square inch is filled with peasants bundled up on the cool overcast afternoon waiting to hear the big announcement. Finally, Quincy Roberts motions for the trumpeters to blast one last toot from their horns and instantly the crowd grows silent.

“Citizens of Hand Land,” shouts Quincy Roberts to the crowd. He then pushes his right palm out toward the crowd and turns his thumb down. The crowd reciprocates with the same gesture. “We are four years into the second most prosperous era of our nation in the last sixty-one years. Three of the last four years we have been an above average nation. Twice our hero, Same Old Lion, has qualified for the Tournament of Superiority. Not since the time that Same Old Lion had the superpower of Berry Legs, have we experienced a time so great. And yet, we are just slightly above average. But I was not given the title of Master of Hero Development by Mrs. Drof so that Same Old Lion, and in turn we, would just be slightly above average. I was given this great responsibility to finally turn Same Old Lion from a hero into a superhero and to bring honor, glory and riches to Hand Land. As of today, we have not achieved that goal and changes must be made. There is one person to blame for the reason you do not have the same level of honor, glory and riches as places like New London and Cracked Bell. There is one person to blame for Same Old Lion’s status as a hero, but not a superhero. But as of this moment he will no longer stand in our way.”

Quincy Roberts points at Sir James Decorum and says, “Today I have brought you here to witness the execution of Sir James Decorum, Head Trainer of Same Old Lion.”

The guards remove the tarp from the large rectangular object to reveal a shiny silver guillotine. Sir James Decorum gasps while the peasants erupt in deafening cheers.

After allowing the peasants a moment to celebrate, Quincy Roberts holds up his hands to silence the crowd before saying, “Sir James Decorum. Do you have anything to say for yourself?”

Sir James Decorum looks wide-eyed at Mrs. Drof and says, “But Mrs. Drof. I thought you loved me and things of that nature.”

“I do,” says Mrs. Drof, “which is why your execution will be particularly painful for me to watch. But if Quincy Roberts says that someone else will be an upgrade over you, then I must trust his judgement and you must die.”

Sir James Decorum turns to Same Old Lion and says, “Same Old Lion. I improved your Stat Pad Arm. Think about how much damage it did late in battles when so many thought you would lose and you came back to win. Check the report! All of that was thanks to *our* work *together*. You can’t possibly go along with this.”

Same Old Lion shrugs from his monstrous seat and says, “It’s a business decision. You’re a nice man and you treat me with respect, but that lousy game plan you put together for me late in the Season of Combat against the lowly Stripe Cat embarrassed me and cost me a chance to go to the Tournament of Superiority. Check *that* report.”

Shouting once again so that all can hear him, Quincy Roberts says, “Mrs. Drof. Have you been swayed by the pleas of Sir James Decorum?”

SAME OLD LION AND THE EXPOSURE OF STAT PAD ARM

“No,” she says with a stone-faced mug. “Off with his head!”

The crowd rejoices at Mrs. Drof’s announcement as the guards grab hold of Sir James Decorum and rough him up.

“Listen. Just calm down a little bit, will you?” says Sir James Decorum without physically resisting. “Take it easy. Just calm down. How about a little decorum, okay?” Ignoring his pleas, each of the guards gets in a few shots to bloody Sir James Decorum before dragging him up the to the guillotine.

Finally, with his head locked in place and the blade ready to drop, Sir James Decorum shouts, “Without question this decision is hogwash and things of that nature. Negativity has always been here. It’s the first thing I noticed when I arrived in Hand Land and the last thing that I’ll remember about this place as I die. Check the report! Hand Land truly is the dungeon of doom!”

Mrs. Drof nods at the guards, they drop the blade and the guillotine slices Sir James Decorum’s head clean off his shoulders. As his blood pours into the streets below, the people of Hand Land dance and sing in total jubilation.

Same Old Lion leaps out of the castle into the crowds and is quickly lifted up by the peasants and carried down the streets. Along the way a handful of the moderately attractive women make their way to him. He scoops them up and places them on his massive lap to keep him company. The peasant children exclaim and point their thumbs down with their palms open as they get an up-close glimpse at their hero.

One peasant child asks, “are you going to bring honor, glory and riches to Hand Land?”

“Yes, I will,” says Same Old Lion, as he wipes away some drool from the corner of us mouth.

Yet another peasant child says, “are you excited to train with Bushy Beard?”

“I am,” says Same Old Lion. “Especially with that quill pen in his ear.”

Suddenly the crowd carrying Same Old Lion comes to a screeching halt. When Same Old Lion looks down in front of him, he sees a nasty bitter old woman standing before him in the street with a ghastly scowl on her face.

“Beware Bushy Beard,” she shouts. Then pointing her gnarled finger at Same Old Lion, she again says, “Beware Bushy Beard for he is not as perfect as he seems.”

After pausing for a moment to consider her comment, Same Old Lion growls at the nasty bitter old woman and swats her to the side with his mighty paw and the crowd resumes carrying their hero down the street.

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