

## The Miniature Sun

By: Indi

Runes and geometric shapes covered the floor, the walls, and much of the ceiling in the room. From a glance the drawings looked chaotic, but in reality great care had been put into their positioning. August had made sure of that. The lean, gray-and-white lion hurried around the room, making the final preparations for his grand ritual. Like most mages, August was always searching for ways to increase his power and knowledge. For months he'd studied tomes and scrolls on harnessing the sun to fuel spells, gradually becoming obsessed with finding a way to create his own. It'd be smaller than the one up in the sky, of course, but in theory it would still contain an immense amount of power. *If* the ritual worked.

At long last he felt confident enough to begin. August recited a long, droning incantation from heart, each line causing more and more runes to glow. Mana was surging into the room, converging on the very center of the ritual. The tiniest speck of yellow light manifested in the air, growing with each passing second. It was working, the ritual was working!

With increased vigor August continued the spell, grinning widely as he felt the gentle heat coming from the orange-yellow orb. It was bright, oh so bright, but he could still look at and admire it. By the time he'd spoken the last word, the orb had grown to be half a foot in diameter. The runes ceased glowing, their lines faded. In the center of the room a miniature star was rotating. August had done it.

"Yes!" the lion cheered, jumping for joy. He approached the star with a degree of caution, circling it and looking for any issues. "Seems to be stable; no explosions. I can *feel* the mana pulsing from it, too. Not as warm as I'd feared." He hovered his paws over it, inching closer and closer, until finally he was touching the surface. "Like sticking my paws into warm water. Which means I can already attempt the second phase of my experiment."

Creating a miniature star alone was an impressive accomplishment, something that could've served as a passable legacy for any mage. But August wanted more. He wanted to become a legendary mage, not merely a famous one. And for that he'd need to harness the power of his creation.

"Time to see what a star tastes like," August said with glee. He opened his mouth wide and slid the star into it. A firm swallow sent it down his throat and into his stomach, filling his belly with warmth. The lion twitched as he felt the heat and mana throughout his body. "Oh, this is good, this is *really* good! Just like dipping into a hot spring. Like I've guzzled a keg or three of mana potions."

The mage raised an arm, the gray bangle on it glowing. With a thought he created a ghostly paw in the air, then two more, then three more. With barely any effort at all he made a dozen of the paws, making them swoop around the room with ease. He didn't feel like he'd used any mana at all in their creation. His grin widened.

While August was celebrating his success, something was happening. His whole middle puffed up like a balloon in a matter of seconds. He winced as he felt his pants grow uncomfortably tight. But when he looked down he only expressed confusion, not panic.

"Oh, that's odd." There was a faint squeakiness to his voice. "Of course! My wonderful little star must be venting heat and helium." August was still swelling outwards. He quickly cast an enchantment on his clothing so they would stretch, alleviating the discomfort. "Not exactly ideal." He pressed against his puffed up sides with his paws, forcing a small blast of warm air out his mouth. "I might be in danger of popping like a balloon if I keep growing like one. But this mana...I've never tasted anything as potent or delicious before. All power has

drawbacks, and the risks are well worth the rewards already.”

August closed his eyes and smiled, letting the mana from the star seep into him. He'd already expanded enough that his body had rounded out some. He looked thrice as big as usual, matching the girth his peers were better known for. But it wasn't just his middle swelling. His arms and legs felt puffier, filled with warmth. His face had gotten rounder, especially his cheeks.

Concern for his uncontrolled expansion was fleeting though. In fact, August was rather starting to enjoy being bigger. Good things were always better bigger, weren't they? Monuments, spells, feasts, palaces. So why not mages and lions?

The swelling wasn't slowing at all, and August was swiftly taking on a spherical shape. His arms and legs swelled into domes, while the new extreme curvature of his growing body lifted his footpaws right off the floor. He wobbled from side-to-side, no longer capable of moving on his own. Some doubt crept in, but August found himself an expert in shrugging off any worries related to his inflation.

“Walking is overrated when I can just create an endless number of magical paws to move me everywhere!” August boasted. He called forth the ones he'd created earlier. They swarmed around him, each grabbing a hold of his stretched out sash. With ease the mage lifted and turned himself around, setting himself back down again with a gentle bounce. The sensation of so many paws pressing into his increasingly-taut hide proved far more enjoyable than expected. He set them to idly rub and prod his ballooning body.

“Everything feels better when I'm bigger. Why would I ever want to deflate?” He mumbled to himself. “With the resources at my command I'll never be in actual danger of popping. Barriers...expandable armor...fortitude spells. Arrows and blades will bounce right off my new imposing form. Spells will fizzle into nothingness. My foes will mistake me for a fragile balloon when in reality I'm a fierce star!” He let out a high-pitched bellow.

August's body slowly gained an orange glow, faint at first but growing brighter and brighter as he blimped up. Just another display of his new power. Now he could be the literal star of any gathering, impossible to ignore. Parties would need to be planned with his immense size in mind, wide open spaces for him to roll or float through as he discussed magical matters. And considering few mages in the land would be able to compare to his power, he *would* be getting invited to countless events from now on.

But there wasn't just heat within the blimpy lion, there was helium as well. Enough had built within him to make him lighter than air, and he gently lifted up. August practically cackled as he slowly floated higher, his ghostly paws making frequent adjustments to ensure he didn't spin wildly. More than ever he felt like an actual star.

“Amazing, absolutely amazing! Who could've guessed the ideal form for a mage was a sphere? I'll never return to that lean shape I languished in before!” August felt the pressure of heat and helium pressing against every inch of his round body, stretching his hide and swelling him further. Sporadic creaks were echoing from him, his body struggling to keep up with his incredible power. “Ha! I may be a star, but I'm not going supernova anytime soon!” August declared. “All I need to do is cast a simple spell and I'll be unpopable. Making my hide stretchy? Or perhaps just a barrier to contain the energies within? Either would work.”

After a moment of thought, August decided to enchant his hide just as he had his clothing. Instantly the internal pressure that'd been teasing him faded, causing him to frown. He was about to consider undoing the spell when he realized he was ballooning out more rapidly than ever. The lion's paws and head weren't sinking in any, though. He was simply growing bigger. A lot bigger.

“Oh, now that my hide is elastic there's nothing holding down my expansion!” August squeaked with glee. “With enough spells my size will only be limited by the power of the

star...if there even *is* a limit to it.”

The mage was more ecstatic than ever. He looked all around, watching as the room began to feel smaller and smaller. It'd been spacious to the old him, the *tiny* him. When his middle pressed against the floor and ceiling simultaneously he laughed. Suddenly he could feel himself spreading through the room, filling it up. The pressure returned some, only enhancing his elation. He swelled into shelves and desks, over chairs and scattered tomes. As pointed edges threatened his beautiful blimpy form he used spells to reinforce the durability of his hide. Instead of being burst, he crushed and enveloped everything in his way.

There was a moment when August finally swelled against every side of the room, filling even the corners, squeezed into a rectangular shape rather than his new natural round. The pressure sent him into a daze, the mage mumbling over and over about how huge he wanted to get. The room was nothing compared to the inflating lion. Walls warped and the ceiling cracked. He grinned as he felt his body beating the room, snapping timbers and crumbling stone.

Everything gave way at once. August was released from his daze as he ballooned right out of his lab, debris bouncing off his hide. His sides slammed into the walls of other rooms, knocking them out with ease. His home collapsed around him, exposing the swelling lion to the night sky. With no roof left to contain him, August floated upward.

The land was lit up by August's glow, which increased the more he blimped. August dwarfed even the largest dragon, and yet he still didn't feel big enough. Being a mere mage wasn't important anymore. His legacy was upward now.

“A powerful mage just ends up in history books and bard tales. Maybe as the name of a spell or two if they're lucky. Why settle for that when I can be on every star chart in the land! The whole world will know me, they'll see me any time they look in the sky.” August's high-pitched laughter was almost maniacal. “August: the Mage Star! I'll be in paintings, in poems, in stories of every sort! The tides will bend to my whim! Rituals will be created based off my position in the sky! I'll be worshiped!”

August's ego was growing along with him, all thoughts devoted merely to his assumed glory. Higher and higher he went, swelling to the size of a town, then a city, then a mountain. He could see the curve of the planet, his belief in being the perfect shape only reinforced. He imagined the commotion his ascension was causing down below. They were seeing history, the lucky first to witness his glorious rise!

At last the massive mage floated into space, falling into a stable orbit around the planet. He swelled for a while longer, becoming a proper moon—though a rather bright one thanks to his persistent glow. When the swelling eventually stopped August was disappointed. At that point he wouldn't have been truly satisfied at any size, eager to be bigger than anything else. But he guessed he'd be awe inspiring enough.

Looking upon the world he'd left behind, August beamed with pride. And to think, just a short while before he'd merely been interested in having a bit of extra mana. Thankfully fate had presented him with a spectacular, spherical opportunity, one he'd never give up.