

Scuba Bloat

By: IndigoRho

On a tiny island in a vast ocean, a lone black-and-white lion stood in the sand, taking in the view. August's personal shuttle shone in the sun, taking up a considerable portion of the island despite not being large itself. Few clouds floated in the bright blue sky, allowing a mostly unobstructed view of the massive gas giant the watery moon orbited. While the moon's archipelagos and oceans were wonderful on their own, the true treasure lay beneath the oceans.

Ruins and shipwrecks dotted the bottom of the ocean. In the distant past the moon had been a bustling center of activity, but now it was a forgotten backwater. As such, plenty of valuable salvage remained ripe for the picking—as long as you had the right equipment.

August wore a yellow and gray bodysuit that showed off his lean form. An advanced gill tank was strapped to his back, capable of filtering water to produce oxygen and allowing the lion to stay under for far longer than if he were using traditional air tanks. Other gasses could be created as well, though August doubted he'd ever have use for such a feature. After a final check of his equipment August waded into the ocean, hopeful of finding treasure.

The water was crystal clear, and August couldn't help but admire his surroundings as he casually swam along the bottom. Flourishing reefs, colorful fish, intricate shells, towering kelp—the moon was just so much livelier under the seas. Fortunately a camera in his goggles provided plenty of mementos of the trip. Of course his primary reason for being there wasn't to sightsee, but to salvage. Straight ahead and further down was the wreck of something large, likely a freighter based on the fuzzy images from his orbital scans. If he were lucky the cargo had survived the sinking.

As the lion continued onward a school of large fish darted in his direction. They paid August no heed, the fins of some brushing the surface of his bodysuit. One was slower to react, though, and slammed right into the gill tank. August wobbled in the water on impact, silently cursing as he worked to steady himself. The display for his tank flickered momentarily but didn't report any issues, a fact August was thankful for. However, the small screen on the tank itself no longer read one hundred percent oxygen—there was helium as well, and a lot of it.

Heart racing from the close encounter, August didn't even notice that his breather was pumping gas into him at a faster rate, and acclimated to it. Blissfully unaware of the potential trouble he was in, August dove further.

The lion's flat stomach abruptly began to swell, steadily turning into a small yellow dome. Once August's middle had grown to the size of a beach ball it finally started to interfere with his swimming. The larger surface area created more drag, while the helium within him attempted to pull him upwards. August shrugged the changes off as merely him being a little tired from swimming.

August's bodysuit stretched with ease along with his hide, a result of its expandex material designed to literally be one size fits all. There would be no tightness to warn August, though at least he wasn't at risk of bursting out of the suit.

The faint outline of the submerged freighter was just barely visible by the time August could no longer ignore his inflation. When the lion stopped swimming to decide on his approach he immediately started rising, much to his surprise. He looked around for signs of an underwater current, or even another animal unintentionally pulling him. A balloon belly was the last thing he expected.

August placed both paws on his round gut and felt it swelling. There were very few ways for him to inflate while underwater, and the lion certainly hadn't felt anything sting him; the gill tank malfunctioning was the only likely culprit.

Still blimping up, August frantically tried to analyze the tank remotely, unable to physically reach it thanks to his growing middle. No matter how many checks he ran the tank insisted everything was operating smoothly. Removing his breather wasn't an option since he needed *some* air to survive, so his best bet was to resurface and find a way to deflate. Treasure forgotten, August swiftly began to

swim upwards.

Swimming was increasingly awkward for the inflating lion, though every puff from the breather made him more buoyant. He struggled to maintain control as his chest and waist merged with his spherical belly, limbs puffing up as well. A nervous look came upon August's face, the lion having previously planned on removing the breather once he was close enough to the surface. Now he'd keep inflating until the gill tank was out of the water.

Though August was rising far faster than he would have if he'd just been swimming, the surface still seemed too far away. The strap of the gill tank was just as stretchy as his bodysuit, digging slightly into his bloated middle. His limbs were puffy and rigid, getting enveloped by his massive body inch-by-inch as the seconds passed. His cheeks had become orbs that pushed into his snout and locked the breather in place.

No creaking could be heard underwater, but August could *feel* his hide vibrating slightly as it was stretched taut. He'd inflated often in the past—and actually tended to enjoy it when he was in control—so the sensation of getting huge wasn't new at least. August mainly worried about expanding so much he burst.

The ocean's surface was in sight. August was mostly spherical, his head and paws sunk into his balloon of a body. The considerable internal pressure built up within him was almost overwhelming, occasionally sending him into a daze that he'd have to fight to escape. He only needed to hold out for a few seconds more, then the inflation would finally end.

With a splash August broke the surface, the lion letting out a relieved sigh as he felt the gill tank stop pumping him up automatically. The relief was unfortunately short lived. Rather than bob on the ocean he continued rising, more of a blimp than a beach ball. He looked down in confusion and let out an unexpectedly high-pitched whimper. Only then did he realize he'd been filling with helium the entire time.

August flailed and wobbled in midair, watching the waves get further and further. He couldn't believe just how bad his luck had been—or that the tank would even have an option for helium. With the breather wedged in place and August's paws puffy and useless, there was little the lion could do. He frowned as best he could and gave up on struggling, grumbling some. As the lion balloon floated up into the air he found a single positive aspect to the situation: the view was unbeatable.