

Chaotic the Balloon Cleric

By: IndigoRho

A trio of adventurers lurked outside the gates to a crumbling estate, each staring intensely towards their target. August—a black-and-white goat and the group's self-proclaimed leader—stood with a confident smile.

“This'll be the easiest gold we've ever made!” August proclaimed. “I can't believe no one else snagged the job before we could.”

“Their loss! I'll gladly get paid to break a bunch of mindless skeletons any day,” said Indi, a rather hefty midnight-blue cheetah. He was clad in a chainmail shirt that clung to his belly, a pair of heavy gauntlets covering both paws.

“Do we *really* need the gold?” Indi and August turned to the third member of their group. Chaotic was a gray raccoon with a purple bandana around his neck and oddly loose-fitting robes for someone so slim. “I'm sure we could find something a little less, um, physical?”

Indi snorted. “Afraid to take advantage of all that power *swelling* inside you?” He laughed as he poked Chaotic's flat middle, prompting a swift blush from the raccoon.

“O-of course not!” Chaotic insisted. “It's just really inconvenient to use my magic, especially with how reckless you two are.”

“Oh it's not that *big* of a deal, Chaotic,” August grinned. “I promise we'll be a bit more careful this time, you probably won't have to do much at all. Those are just some underpowered skeletons summoned by students from the local mage college on a dare, nothing major.”

Chaotic nodded in agreement. The job sure *sounded* easy enough.

“Though of course if we're gonna be safe we should definitely apply some buffs first.”

The short-lived relief Chaotic had felt vanished, and he frowned. Ugh, *alright*,” he relented.

Chaotic held out his staff and concentrated, envisioning the simple spells that would give him and his friends an edge in the coming brawl. First was defense to make the skeletons' strikes hurt less. The staff glowed and so did Indi and August. Meanwhile a faint hissing noise was coming from Chaotic's stomach.

As the spell was cast Chaotic's middle swelled, tightening his robe and peeking out for all to see. Chaotic was a balloon cleric, and the cost of casting spells was, well, inflating just like a balloon. Compared to other healer specialties his spells were a bit more potent, but blimping up wasn't exactly the safest thing for someone about to have pointy things swung at them, and if he overdid it he'd go boom. Most balloon clerics stuck to temples or hospitals for those reasons. Chaotic wasn't so lucky.

Two more buff spells were cast on the group, Chaotic's belly growing rounder and wider with each one. The white fur of the beach ball sized gut had a slight shine to it. As Chaotic inflated he'd gradually transform into an actual balloon as well, until he was hollow and squeaky. Already the raccoon was blushing.

Indi and August looked rejuvenated from the magical enhancement, and both teased Chaotic with a pat on the belly. They swore it was a good luck ritual, but Chaotic was certain it was just to make him aware of how inflated he was.

With their preparations complete the group headed through the broken gate and into the grounds of the estate, Indi and August taking the lead as they kept an eye out for any stray skeletons. The overgrowth concealed far more than they had expected, though.

When they reached the entrance to the ruined mansion itself August took one look at the darkness within and shook his head. “Hey Chaotic, why don't you use a detection spell to pinpoint where the skeletons are, it'll make things way easier.”

Chaotic sighed but didn't refuse, knowing August was right. Again the raccoon began to blimp up, the sheen spreading across his whole belly. He creaked faintly when he moved and felt noticeably lighter.

“Ok, looks like the skeletons are all gathered in one spot: the room just past this entrance. Twenty of them, as far as I can tell.” Chaotic was far more concerned with how round he'd already gotten than the number of enemies.

“See Chaotic, easy,” August said as he thumped the raccoon's middle with a hoof like it were a drum. Of course Indi followed suit.

As before Indi and August led the way, attacking the skeletons inside the estate almost immediately. Chaotic waddled in behind them, ready to provide support but hoping he didn't need to. The skeletons were rather pitiful—just as August had predicted—shambling around aimlessly and unorganized. Indi was busy punching them apart while August threw precise spells, ones that didn't cause him to turn into a silly balloon. Chaotic couldn't help but be a little bit jealous of that. If only his magical aptitude had been in something less...embarrassing.

Despite the relative ease of the fight, Chaotic was still forced to intervene at points. When Indi fell flat on his butt after a wild swing Chaotic threw up a barrier to protect him from a skeleton's kick. The belt of his robe snapped off as he bloated, limbs puffing up somewhat. August backed against a wall on accident and got surrounded, forcing Chaotic to push some skeletons away from him with a gust of wind. More swelling, the plastic sheen having replaced all his fur.

Though their foes were being whittled down steadily they were also clumping together more. Chaotic's barriers were becoming a greater necessity, and it was getting harder and harder for the expanding raccoon to simply stay away from enemies.

As Chaotic tried to back away from an advancing group of skeletons he was caught off-guard by his own near weightlessness, and stumbled forwards onto his huge inflated middle. Indi and August were too preoccupied to rush to his aid, so the raccoon was forced to rely on his own, frustrating spells for defense. A solid barrier formed around him, and while it stopped the skeletons from reaching him the cost was a loud hiss and a rush of air.

Chaotic's whole body creaked as he started blimping up, his inflated limbs sinking somewhat into his massive spherical middle. His cheeks swelled till his face was comically round. A balloon knot formed on the tip of his tail as it inflated and turned rigid. He lost his grip on his staff after his paws became puffed up, and the seams of his robe tore before it slid off completely.

The unlucky balloon cleric winced and blushed as his squeaky plastic hide pressed against the glowing walls of his barrier dome. As Chaotic filled every nook and cranny of the dome the built-up internal pressure hit him all at once, putting him into a daze that left a goofy grin on his face and made the rest of the battle a blissful blur.

Indi and August had been too distracted dealing with the last of the skeletons to notice what had happened. When they finally did, they both burst into laughter.

August strolled up to the dome and waved a hoof in front of Chaotic's face, chuckling when the raccoon didn't pay it any heed. “Looks like the balloon wonder accidentally locked himself up in a prison far too small for him. I bet the barrier would maintain itself for a few more hours if left alone.”

“He'd probably be miffed if we left him in there for that long,” Indi spoke the obvious. “Remember that unpopable bubble trap he got stuck in for two whole weeks? I swear he blushed so much he nearly turned red permanently before we found someone skilled enough to burst it!”

“Well a solid dome would be a lot more annoying to lug around than the bubble was, and fortunately even *I* can disenchant this thing.”

August took a step back and concentrated, a bolt of energy leaping from his staff to the dome. The dome flashed brightly and then shattered. Chaotic practically bounced out once freed, the raccoon's body mostly spherical. He wobbled about as the pressure daze subsided, puffy cheeks red from embarrassment. He tried over and over again to speak but couldn't think of a thing to say, letting out a single, woeful “meep”.

“See Chaotic, just as easy as I said!” August gave the balloon a playful push, causing Chaotic to flail and creak. “Now all we have to do is return to town, collect the reward, and try not to spend it all

at the inn.”

“W-wait, we're gonna wait until I've deflated, right?” Chaotic begged more than asked, fearful he already knew the answer.

“Now Chaotic, none of us want to linger around this place any longer than we have to,” August replied. “Maybe you'll get lucky and be a little deflated by the time we return! Just gotta prep you for transport first.”

Indi snickered and August retrieved a rope from his pack, tying one end around Chaotic's massive, bloated tail. Afterward he cast a simple levitation spell on the unfortunate raccoon, causing him to slowly rise up into the air; only August's grip on the rope's end prevented Chaotic from drifting up through a hole in the ceiling. Now he truly and fully resembled a balloon.

A considerable amount of shoving and force was required to push Chaotic's blimped up body through the old estate's entrance. As he bobbed about on the end of the rope he whimpered and complained, embarrassed beyond belief. All he could think about was everyone in town seeing him stuck as a balloon and teasing him. Flying up into the clouds almost seemed better. *Almost.*

“You guys are the worst!” Chaotic squeaked. He was answered with laughs.