

August's Adventure in Kuya's Library

By: IndigoRho

Shadows danced in the torchlight as two mages walked down a long corridor. IN the lead was a robed luxray, bottles swaying from his belt. A gray lion was behind him dressed in a vest, his gaze drifting from one thing to another.

"I'm glad you accepted my invitation, August," the luxray said. "At times I get so distracted with my research and experiments I forget to simply relax and socialize some!"

"Well it's always a pleasure to visit, Kuya," the lion replied. "You've got a wonderful place—I can't think of any mage in the region who *isn't* envious of it!"

Kuya chuckled, beaming with pride about the statement he knew perfectly well. "Ha! Well, I try."

The pair reached a set of double doors at the corridor's end.

"August, I've got an experiment to monitor real quick, so I hope you don't mind waiting in my library while I attend to it."

Kuya pushed open the doors and strolled inside. As August followed he gasped in awe. The library was a magnificent, multistory marvel. Tall shelves covered with tomes and scrolls lined every all, in addition to numerous ones arranged in aisles. Large windows kept the room well-lit, though August spotted plenty of candles waiting to provide light to late-night research sessions. He hadn't seen a library as massive outside of a college campus.

"I'm sure I'll find plenty to do while you're gone," August said, still taking in the room's grandeur.

Kuya appeared rather delighted by his friend's reaction. "Wonderful! I'll try not to take too long, but have fun."

August barely registered the doors closing behind him.

The lion's own personal library was so...so *meager* in comparison. August could have spent weeks locked inside Kuya's without ever growing bored, but he had no idea where to even start at the moment. Rather than stand around looking stupefied, he decided to follow his instincts.

A nearby podium held a book on display that was already open. August guessed it was something Kuya had been recently reading, and curiosity prompted him to take a closer look. One page was dominated by an elaborate sketch of plants surrounded by an aura. The other was clearly an incantation of some sort.

"For drawing in and condensing ambient mana for useful absorption," August mumbled as he read part of the page aloud. "I guess that could come in handy. Sounds like a simple mana potion would work just as well."

Doubts regarding the spell's effectiveness aside, August was still interested enough to test it out. He concentrated on the tome and repeated the incantation clear and concise. The words glowed while August waited for something to happen.

Misty tendrils of blue mana started to form in the air, snaking their way from all corners of the library towards August. The lion watched them, increasingly surprised by the number being manifested. Either the spell's scope was greater than he'd thought or there was merely a lot of mana lingering around the library. Knowing Kuya, August guessed it was a little of both.

Eventually the mana trails reached August and began to enter his mouth. The turn of events wasn't unexpected, so the lion happily accepted the streams of mana. They had a chill, minty taste, cooling his throat and stomach on the way down. Initially the flow was slow, like taking a sip, but the sheer number of them gradually started to have an effect.

August's flat middle began puffing up, much to his amusement. He wobbled the small pot belly he was growing. His vest and shirt stretched dutifully, never getting the least bit tight thanks to earlier enchantments. Expansion—both willing and unwilling—was a common enough occurrence in August's

life that the mage tended to prepare for its inevitability.

The lion's belly resembled a sizable beach ball by the time the incantation in the book ceased glowing. August sighed in delight as he felt the pool of mana swirling within him, as light as air and incredibly energizing. With his newly obtained reserves to tap into he could have unleashed a flurry of spells and not felt exhausted.

"No wonder Kuya's able to do so much magical experimentation, he's probably got loads of spells like that one to help out," August said, turning towards a large portrait of the luxray on the wall. "He's certainly never lacking in disposable mana."

The life-size portrait depicted Kuya grinning, the mage almost completely spherical and faintly glowing. He was likely filled to the brim with magic, and capable of swelling even bigger if he so wished. It was a wonder to August as to why Kuya wasn't *always* so big. Turning his attention away from the portrait, the lion was unable to see its eyes shifting ever-so-slightly.

Investigating the book hadn't taken much time, so August continued exploring, idly tapping his inflated middle as he did.

There were more open tomes—not to mention the countless closed ones on shelves—but there were also a fair number of magical artifacts on display. They all seemed to ooze mana, which August found himself suddenly craving. Though he didn't *need* any additional mana, the desire to be full of the stuff was quickly winning out over common sense.

The bloated lion hadn't quite gotten used to his temporary girth, and as he gleefully wandered the library he accidentally knocked a dark blue crystal ball right off its pedestal with his gut. He felt the bump, looking down just in time to see the crystal ball hit the ground, followed by the muffled sound of crunching glass. Thankfully it didn't shatter into pieces, but the long crack marring its surface was plainly visible, even from a distance.

A look of guilty horror came upon August's face, quickly turning to confusion as a sparkling blue mist began to spew from the crack on the crystal ball. The mist rapidly grew into a cloud, enveloping August as he backed a couple feet into an aisle of bookshelves. An enticing aroma teased his nostrils, the lion recognizing it as that of pure mana. No longer afraid, he took in a deep breath, and let the mana flow into him. The cloud took it as an invitation.

August's cheeks puffed slightly as the cloud of mana from the crystal ball aggressively started to fill him. His middle rapidly ballooned out, wobbling from the force. The lion looked euphoric, greedily welcoming the onslaught of mana. His vest struggled to keep up with his rate of expansion, his blimping belly actually managing to push out from beneath it.

Faint hissing and the creaking of stretched hide echoed throughout the library as August inflated. His gut was unwieldy, and he likely would have struggled to waddle had he been at all inclined to move away from his feast. Soon his bloated sides were pressing up against the shelves on either side of him, wedging him firmly down the aisle.

August wiggled as his belly fought for more space, pushing harder and harder into books and shelves. There was a slight increase in pressure, but the lion realized his middle was bound to win out in the end.

The bookcases on either side of the inflating lion screeched as they were slowly pushed away. Their weight could not match August's belly, and the one on his left was eventually tipped over. August's gut had reached the floor, and the space he gained from the toppling bookcase allowed him to roll atop it as his limbs started puffing up with mana as well.

The initial cloud of mana was gone, but there was still a steady flow seeping from the crystal ball and into August. The bloated lion wobbled as the falling bookcase crashed into another, creating a sluggish chain reaction that seemed to inevitably doom a long line. On August's right the last bookshelf he was leaning against teetered ominously but remained standing, in part due to the lion unintentionally gripping the shelves as he rose on his balloon belly.

The mana stream slowed to a trickle then a few puffs, then stopped completely. August couldn't

decide if he should be thankful or disappointed.

"They sure manage to fit a lotta magic in these things," August chuckled to himself as he rocked back and forth, far too blimped up to move on his own.

In the distance the large double doors opened once more, steady steps announcing the obvious return of Kuya long before the luxray actually came into view.

August blushed sheepishly and let out a nervous laugh. "Oh, uh, h-hey Kuya. I kind of bumped something over on accident and then, well, fwoomp!"

Kuya didn't look surprised or angry or even bemused. He looked...satisfied. "That was certainly an unexpected development in the experiment, but it sped it up considerably so I can't really complain."

"What experiment?"

"The capacity test experiment, of course!" Kuya said with a grin. "I've seen how large you can become under the right circumstances, and wanted to know if that applied to mana, too. Adequate mana storage is *very* important for my work, but my current apprentices have been rather lacking in capacity. I do believe you'll be worth at least two of them with practice, maybe even more!"

The immobile lion as confused. "G-Good joke, Kuya. I can't say I'm too eager to be a mana bottle at the moment, but if I change my mind—"

"Oh that's what they all say to begin with. And often a few weeks in." Kuya gave August a few pats on the belly, prompting wisps of blue mana to flee the lion's mouth. "Hmm, can't have any leaks now, can we! I'll just get all that precious mana sealed so it doesn't just drift away."

Kuya placed both palms on August and cast a quick spell. Curious, August attempted to use magic of his own, only to discover it was impossible. Deflating himself by casting spells left and right was now no longer an option.

"Kuya you can't just perform experiments on people and hold them hostage after!" August insisted. "I should've known you had ulterior motives for inviting me here!"

The luxray smiled and gave an innocent shrug. "Sure it may *look* like I left a bunch of alluring artifacts and incantations out in the open that would all turn you into a mana blimp if used, but that's just an honest coincidence. I definitely didn't make you use them, I just neglected to mention they could be addicting. And then you gorged on so much of it you wrecked a decent chunk of my valuable library! Lucky for you, I'm incredibly generous and willing to forgive the expensive property damage in exchange for you working here until you've managed to pay it all off."

August was left speechless. Even if he were somehow able to escape, Kuya had him in a bind. A surprising amount of thought had gone into turning him into a living mana bottle.

"I'll take that silence and scowl as proof you agree with me." Kuya snickered. "Hmm, since you got a bit bigger than expected I'll have to drain a little of that mana just to get you free of the aisle! Thankfully every corridor and doorway has been designed to be wide enough for individuals of your circumference, so you'll get to remain big and round for the duration of your apprenticeship."

Another spell was cast, and August's body started to give off a blue glow. Kuya simply opened his mouth and guided a stream of the aura in. August felt himself deflate some, while his friend's middle swelled in response.

Just like August, Kuya's clothing was more than capable of stretching to fit him. Buttons were slightly strained and his belt expanded with ease. Soon he was sporting a sizable belly, a wide strip of light blue fur exposed.

Kuya had to resist the temptation to glut on the entirety of the mana stored within August, stopping while the lion was still round enough to roll. He promised himself he'd find another source of mana to finish his meal after he'd gotten August properly settled in.

"Mmm, you own innate magic has blended with the stored mana, creating an exceptionally potent mixture!" Kuya said with excitement. "I really should have recruited you much earlier."

"It's not really recruitment if I've got no say in the matter," August grumbled as he was rolled out of the aisle and towards the library entrance. He hadn't realized before that their size was perfect for

handling someone as inflated as he was. At least he wouldn't get stuck everywhere while enduring his new "apprenticeship".

Kuya continued to gloat and chat about future experiments as he rolled his prize away, always seeming to add a week or three to August's sentence. The mana-stuffed lion was getting increasingly worried that by the time he finally reached his destination, his apprenticeship with Kuya would be outright permanent...