

Bombastic Snake

By: IndigoRho

August took another swig from his bottle of rum and sighed contently, a slight grin stuck on his face. It was late—later than the gray snake usually stayed out—but the night sky was beautiful and the weather comfortable. Besides, his friend Kai hadn't been in town in months and he wanted to catch up.

The blue-and-white koi dragon next to August was sipping from a much fuller bottle. "You always know how to treat me well whenever I sail back into port—even if you guzzle most of the gift yourself!"

"I'm sure you pillage way better booze than this out on the seas!" August countered in between swigs. He was well passed buzzed, but sober enough to maintain a coherent conversation. At least for a while longer.

"It's not pillaging! I'm a perfectly legal privateer!" Kai insisted with a laugh.

"Of course. We both know that pile of certificates in your quarters are legitimate, not a single forgery amongst them. And you've never had to bribe you way back into port *anywhere*."

Kai shrugged. "Don't listen to all the nasty rumors those greedy merchants spread about me. They're clearly mistaking me for another handsome koi dragon who keeps relieving them of their gold and turning them into helpless, airborne blimps."

The only reply from August was a laugh and another drink.

"But enough of my boring adventures at sea. How's the life of a fancy mage college professor treating you?"

"Still good, especially once I realized inflation is the best way to motivate a class. Puff a slacker up until they're a big creaking balloon and the others will perk up right away. Even better if the slacker can't handle the pressure and pops!" August made a sharp popping sound, mimicking an explosion with his claws. "Turns out few want to relive the embarrassment of bursting in front of their peers once they've been put back together."

"I know you too well August. You'd be popping them whenever possible even if it *wasn't* effective motivation. But on the topic of bursting, I happened to recently acquire something you're guaranteed to find interesting. Excels at making others swell."

Kai put down his bottle and pulled a wand from his coat. It looked scorched, the wood varying shades of black and gray. The handle was wrapped in cord, the tip of which was frayed.

August eyed the wand curiously, but didn't look all that impressed. "I can barely sense an ounce of magic from that thing, how good can it possibly be at inflating anything?"

"Trust me, it's far more powerful than it looks." Kai pointed the wand at August. "Boom."

The moment the word was said sparks flew from the wand's tip, only to bounce harmlessly off August's exposed chest. The snake had flinched at first, but soon burst into laughter. "Oh no, that *almost* tickled! I really hope you stole that, because otherwise you got swindled hard."

A warm tingling traveled through August's body, but he mistook it for the rum he'd been drinking. The very tip of his tail grew pale, and stubby, then frayed. It was beginning to look like the end of a rope—or a fuse. Gradually the rest of August's tail transformed until it was just one long fuse.

White and gray scales darkened, until nearly all of August's body was a solid, glossy black. Inebriated and with nothing but the stars and distant torches to provide light, August remained oblivious to what had occurred to him.

Kai didn't bother enlightening him.

"It's working perfectly fine. It just takes a moment to kick in," August said as he tucked the wand back into his coat.

As if on cue the tip of August's tail abruptly lit up, hissing loudly like a fuse. Even drunk he couldn't ignore it. He almost fell over backwards once he saw what his tail had become. Frantic

blowing and fanning and stomping failed to put out the flame.

Naturally the spark started to burn away August's fuse tail. As it did he felt a rising warmth in his belly, which was swelling like a balloon. He looked back and forth between his dwindling tail and his expanding middle, slowly connecting the two together as his head spun from the rum.

Fortunately Kai was eager and willing to explain everything that was happening to his friend. "Rum's always messed with your magic, so it's no wonder you thought my Sapper's Wand was a dud. The spell within is a bit complex but very well crafted. Transforms the target into a massive, living bomb. Great for blasting holes in fortress walls, or even sinking a ship with the right timing and aim." There was nothing but joy in Kai's voice, and the grin on his face was wider than ever. "Course it's not exactly easy to find volunteers willing to become bombs, though."

"You're turning me into a bomb!" Simply inflating would've been annoying, but nothing August hadn't endured—and enjoyed—plenty of times before. Even being threatened with bursting wouldn't have been a huge deal. But exploding—*actually* exploding—with enough force to leave a crater? The prospect made him sweat. Or perhaps that was just from the heat.

Only a couple minutes had passed since the fuse had been lit, but August was already fairly round. The seams of his pants had ripped apart. His open vest was holding together for the most part, but not for long. From the side he actually resembled a bomb, as his chest, back, and belly had swelled into a large orb. Walking wasn't impossible, but it was merely an awkward waddle at best.

August made a passing attempt to bring forth his own magic. It failed, the snake unable to concentrate thanks to the liquor in his system and strange sensation of the transformation spell afflicting him.

Over the persistent hissing August heard the sound of lapping waves nearby, and suddenly got an idea. He wobbled as swiftly as he could to the edge of the dock, trying his best to avoid tripping over himself. With a desperate grin he plunged the tip of his fuse tail into the water to douse it.

To August's dismay the flame endured, bubbles rising upward from where it was submerged. No matter how fiercely he dunked the fuse it refused to go out.

"Smart idea, but unfortunately futile," Kai said as he strolled over to the frustrated snake. "Nothing short of cutting the fuse off will stop your transformation, and even then it'd still require magic to truly turn you back. Of course if you *want* to be a big diffused bomb who constantly feels on the verge of going boom I'll gladly help you out—at a later date."

Kai pressed a palm against August's warm, bloated middle, which sunk in slightly. The snake's hide creaked as he did. August squirmed at the prodding, fearful he might explode prematurely if he was jostled too much.

"No need to be so jittery, August! I could bounce and roll you as roughly as possible and you wouldn't go off. There won't be a wonderful kaboom until that fuse reaches its end, and not a second sooner." Kai slapped one of August's sides as proof, not that the snake felt any less worried after.

"I guess I should probably explain *why* I needed you at your most volatile tonight—yes I have a reason beyond my own personal amusement! A certain...business rival happens to be docked nearby, and they've been a rather obnoxious thorn in my side lately. Luckily for me, their ship is about to sink after a mysterious 'accidental' explosion. You're the explosion, by the way."

"I—*mmmmph*—figured as much! Don't drag me into your dumb pirate feuds, be the bomb yourself!"

"But then I wouldn't be able to watch the fireworks~" Kai teased.

The pressure building within August was only getting worse. His limbs had started sinking into his body, swollen into domes with his puffy claws wiggling atop. He was as wide as he was tall, and so round his feet had lifted off the ground, effectively immobilizing him. Wobbling and creaking, August's middle was starting to glow faintly from the heat inside him.

A mere third of August's fuse tail remained.

With a gentle shove August was rolled onto his back, Kai spinning his protesting bomb into

position before rolling him further down the docks and towards the target. He kept a close eye on the fuse, excited to watch it shrink more and more but not eager to get caught in the inevitable explosion.

The pressure, heat, and rum had left August in a daze, the snake groaning and wiggling. Along with the creaks and hisses it was music to Kai's ears.

"Don't think you won't be getting a reward for so selflessly volunteering to help," Kai said cheerfully. "I'll make sure you get a Sapper's Wand of your own to terrorize underperforming students with. Though it'll have to get delivered *after* I've left port again. Don't want you acting rashly and trying to get revenge so soon!"

Finally beside the ship, Kai pushed his bomb into the water, August landing with a splash that drowned out his moans. He'd expanded to a ridiculous degree, claws and head barely visible jutting out of the black sphere that shone in the moonlight as it bobbed around. His momentum brought him right up against the hull of the ship.

Kai sprinted up the dock, throwing himself over a low wall to take cover. August's fuse tail sizzled away into nothing, and his eyes bulged out as he felt a tremendous spike in pressure.

A thunderous *boooooooooooooom!* rang out as August exploded. The ship was rocked violently, a large hole blown in its side that let water flood through. Almost immediately the crew was abandoning ship, leaping overboard as it listed to one side and sunk rapidly. Within minutes only a fraction of its center mast remained above the surface.

The explosion had been absolutely glorious--at least from Kai's point of view. Though he'd seen the wand in action a few times before, he swore August had been bigger than all the others, and definitely more powerful.

"Shame August isn't part of my crew—he'd make a fantastic full-time munition!" Kai bellowed at his own joke. Turning away from the singed sinking ship, the koi dragon walked off into the night, leaving before his presence was discovered.