

The Great Tasmanian Growth War:
Or, ‘How to spend your day destroying the Outback’

7:45 a.m.

The Sun rose anew over the Australian outback, taking its place in the sky as the clouds sprawled far and wide around it.

Signs of a new day broke out across the landscape, the sounds of yells, the whining of passing engines and traffic filling the air—and ordinary day, by all rights.

Such was not the case to one small community, however.

The Bushrats, nestled and isolated well-beyond the grasp of the modern world, were awakening to a *special day*. Honor and nobility were their trademarks, their hallowed heritage unbroken for time unknown. All that was naturally hard to catch anywhere else, since they were only a few inches tall.

The diminutive tribe gathered at the morning’s break, shaded underneath a canopy of overgrown grass as their elder hobbled up before them. The sagely rodent cleared his throat, gaining the attention of the others—then raised both arms ‘high’ up to the heavens, regaling them with the age-old tale of their most cherished relic.

Their tongues bore a different language from the rest of the world, meaning only the young rats could truly know it (that no one of any decent size could have heard it in any language was rarely discussed). The tribe’s collective ears perked to hear the tale in its entirety, all of them completely riveted as the elder spoke on. And on. *And on.*

“Ughbana...soi...Gururush! Burra, gurrah ro ruronimaeshi! Toh meshy borrod fen abba fen! Mooki hun deduramoh...”

Translation: (*“Listen...hey...**shut up!** Our ancient metal of change has called us once again! A quarter-year has come and passed! The time of the harvest is nigh, and the metal demands to know whom shall wield its great power!”*)

A heavy pause settled over the area. The rumbling of a few throats clearing and the nervous shifting of paws were the only other sounds to be heard. Both of the elder’s ears drooped.

“Baghkash?”
(... “Anyone?”)

Usage of the metal could make the one bearing it grow many, *many* times larger for a period of time. Used wisely, the Bushrats could turn one of their own into a giant, one just big enough to go into the Big World and gather up enough food to last them until the next time its powers were needed.

Of course, the *true* powers, as well as just how big it could really make them had

never been unleashed before, as everyone was too afraid of how strong it made the user. Should one be poorly picked and decide to use that size selfishly or for violence, they would be truly “Fankshwed” (or “*screwed*”, in the Big Tongue). The Bushrats gladly toyed with the idea of being equals to the rest of the world, but none would dare test the limits of the mighty alloy’s deepest powers—until today.

At length, a single hand went up above the masses.

“Bahz? Dungha fewen durush?”

(“Bahz? You would be the one to do this?”)

“Doi! Do fuh...Nomeeni, huruhuru mos torungu bah!”

(“I am! I guess...Please, let me gather the crops this year, I’m not afraid!”)

“Wantaban! Dobun reshta manaf gon!”

(“Great! Then, let us recite the great prayer of victory!”)

All of them lowered their heads, then chanted:

“Vash goi narmanach!”

(“Don’t step on us later!”)

Bahz nodded in solemn agreement, then rose as they all stayed to the soil, kneeling. The young Bushrat’s light emerald fur stood on end, trying to hide his nervousness as he marched to and then past the elder. The aging one followed close, leaving the procession behind them.

The winds nudged each blade of grass, their collective shade dancing around as the two continued on in silence; at length they halted, inches away from the base of a rock centered around a clearing in the grass. At its topside rested their heralded treasure, the *metal of change*.

The bottle cap still retained its glossed orange color, its old luster intact, as though time had no hold over it. Bahz’s knees shook with a mixture of fear and anxiousness as the elder pushed him further along, until he ungraciously bumped into the rock face.

“Hufdah, fohdo tod!”

(“Reach, come on. Now is the time!”)

The youth nodded and, getting in one more gulp, reached for it—slowly.

His fingers brushed tentatively up against its contours, then pressed in.

Almost immediately it began: Bahz shuddered, as though some mighty current had just run right through him, leaving him blinking in confusion.

Then another shock followed, more noticeable than the last.

The elder stayed close by, craning his head out a bit in awe as Bahz began to change. An eerie glow flowed from the cap, consuming Bahz, until he felt himself swell upwards, starting to rise (even as his feet stayed to the ground). The top of the rock sank, lowering as he stared down in mute fascination.

Within moments he could see the entire top of the bottle cap. As he steadily grew he found he could grasp the entire thing with both hands, holding it as his own. The high canopy of the grass lowered as well, meeting his furred shoulders as he peaked head-first over it, now able to see the outside world in a whole new light—as in, he could see it at all.

The elder gazed up and up as Bahz grew bigger and bigger before him, now taller than any bushrat he'd seen in the last quarter-year—then twice as tall as that—then *twice that* as well. Up and up he grew, until he held the cap in one swelling hand. He was now larger than any of the huts in the village, standing a whopping foot and a half or so in size. Adorable to most, but a titan to those below that.

Down by Bahz's knees was the elder, who returned to reality with the whipping *swoosh* of the Bushrat's tail overhead. The old one let out a gasp, then stepped back as the backend of Bahz's paw grew threateningly nearer to him, as if to knock him over.

He fell to the side as it surged twice as big, its growth rumbling louder through the soil; Bahz was growing faster now, doubling up bigger, taller, his newfound weight making him teeter drunkenly. The three-foot giant of a rat shook his head, trying to regain his changing bearings, but he was unable to speak as the power raced through him. For all his fear he still clutched the cap tight, growing higher still.

The elder turned back around, coughing out some dust as he saw that the paw had grown right past him. Now it was the increasing sides of the young rat's paws that were now rolling over the turf towards him, and not the heel.

Those back in the village watched as Bahz towered past their horizon, '*oohing*' and '*ahhing*' as Bahz grew bigger, his form filling more and more of their view of the world, until he surged up to over five feet in height and blocked it completely.

Some gasped and stepped back at the sight of their once-small comrade. After all, knowing one of their own could expand was one thing, but seeing it was always quite another, entirely.

A single paw filled the once-great clearing, overturning even the sacred rock as it collided with and effortlessly toppled it with its growth. At six feet even the young Bushrat came to enough to finally unclench his hand. Doing so deactivated the bottle cap, which lost its glow and became otherwise as normal as ever.

Being about two-dozen times larger than even the biggest villagers, Bahz was indeed an impressive sight to all. At length the villagers glanced at each other, then back up, cheering in unison for their new harvester. Down below there seemed to almost be some kind of high-pitched noise coming from the grass, just audible enough to catch Bahz's attention (eventually). He glanced every which way, then remembered his newfound size and looked down to see his old homestead. He smiled, waving back down, then caught himself thinking about how one stomp alone could cover the whole village. Not that he would, of course. The idea was summarily and silently dismissed as he tried to whisper out a farewell to his tiny people.

"Tooboo gana mashtesh,"

(*"I'm off, everyone,"*) he muttered.

Those below grimaced as the volume of his voice hit; nonetheless they all waved up to their gigantic comrade as he stormed off.

The rest of the world was open to Bahz now, and he felt for once like a part of it. It was a good feeling, if a *little* scary at the same time. He lifted his arms, getting used to the extra bulk he was now carrying, and the slower time it took to move. In the same way he tested his legs, moved his tail around, and craned his head in a circle. Thankfully no one from the village noticed when he got dizzy. After a moment he shook it off and

proceeded to move on to some place with food. After all, that was it, that was he had to do with his new size boost—just fine some food. *Simple.*

Surely nothing would come of it, besides a swift victory...

8:30 a.m.

Out by the river's edge in a different locale was the oddly-stacked home of the Platypus Brothers, Timothy and Daniel. More homemade gadgets were strewn about their front yard than usual, which was a sign to those who knew them that they were deep in the throes of invention. To wit, a great burst of smoke from their garage loudly signaled that they'd just finished one.

A lone visitor stood just outside the plumes as they gradually dissipated, keen to see through them. Said figure happened to be Mr. Thickley, the industrious(ly pushy) kangaroo. A rather large koala made her way towards him after the fact, rubbing her head in poorly restrained anxiety.

"Does this sort'a thing usually happen around here, Mr. Thickley?"

"Aw, don't worry none, Miss Constance. Them-there boys know jus' what they're doin'. Ah'm sure everything's fine. We'll wait a sec out here, jus' the same, yeah?"

Seconds gathered into a minute as the saffron-furred kangaroo waited, his oversized neighbor waiting just behind him.

As soon as the silence came it was shattered as what appeared to be the top of an armchair tore through the roof of the Platypus Brothers' homestead; it grew until the armrests burst through both sides of the house, shearing them off as the entire place groaned and snapped. It soon halted, the huge chair jutting out from the inside of the now-wrecked house.

The koala and kangaroo exchanged looks, then glanced back to see the chair shrink back down as soon as it had grown. Mixed in with the sounds of clattering tiles and snapped timber were the coughs of the two brothers, who emerged at last, both of them thoroughly covered in soot.

"Perhapth a limiting agent on the thize reverthal would better behoove our efforths, Daniel," Timothy lisped.

"True, brother," Daniel wheezed. "The chemical formula for the devith ith in thtorage here at the houth, tho we can alter the potency later, ath we thee fit."

"But of courth."

They looked virtually identical for a moment as Timothy removed his glasses and rubbed the dust away. The other was readjusting his blue cap, in contrast to the bright orange hue of their bodies. Thickley wasted no time in materializing behind the two, his head dipped down to their level, a chipper morning phantom.

"Morn' you two! Ah take it you boys've got everything done n' ready then, eh?"

"All of the preparationth are done!" Timothy coughed, dusting off his overalls.

"We're ready when you are, Mr. Thickley. My brother and I were merely getting any potherbugth out of the thyth'tem firtht. Thall we?"

"Right, let's," Thickley agreed. "Thanks fer waitin', Miss Constance; we're off!"

"Oh, right!" the koala chirped.

With that the quartet sped off to Thickley's homestead, leaving behind the wreckage of the Platypus Brothers' home (which groaned, teetered for a moment, held firm—then quickly fell to the ground). In tow was a large cannon of some outlandish design, which wobbled precariously as they drove down the dirt paths of the Outback, towards its new destination.

Here and there, between a few road bumps and shakes, Daniel kept glancing back, looking the ray over in quiet puzzlement—he was sure he had heard something, yet the ray gun was securely in place...

8:50 a.m.

A solitary dirt path stitched through the plains, occupied by a single dingo, one who was so busy eyeing the ground that he failed to notice a truck making its way towards him. Both parties carried on, the dingo searching the ground for whatever reason as Thickley turned his head (and sight) off the road to the backseat to talk:

“You boys won’t regret this one bit! Why, this’ll revolutionize moving throughout the entire *ACK*—”

He stopped to yell with everyone else (the dingo included) as they all met one another. The vehicle veered off, nearly hitting a nearby tree trunk in the process. While the trunk did manage to miss the car, it had also grazed a protruding lever on the side of the cannon as they passed, nudging it. On they sped, either too panicked or hurried to stop and see how the wanderer had fared.

“Hey! Get off the road, ya maniacs!” the dingo yelled to the truck as it went over the horizon. “Well, they did *kind of* go off the road already,” he stopped to mutter, rubbing the back of his neck. “Well, *stay* on the road, then! See if I care. ‘Cause I don’t. See? Do you!? You better see!”

The echoes of the engine answered him, so he huffed and turned his attention back to the road as the dust cleared.

“Okay, let’s seeee...bottle caps, bottle caps. I know I saw some around here before. And nobody, but *nobody* beats ol’ Digeri Dingo to the chase when it comes to bottle caps. So, where are they?”

He continued on until he bumped directly into the backside of some bystander, then stumbled back indignantly.

“Gah! How many times am I gonna get interrupted here?” he growled, before actually looking at the other party.

A richly green-hued rat (one roughly his size or so) stared back, having just turned around from the surprise of being run into. His mouth dipped down, then hovered, as though the rat had just realized something and didn’t want to speak.

“Hey, no need to look so sorry,” Digeri laughed, nudging the rat on the shoulder with a balled fist. “I mean, you didn’t know just who exactly it was that was about to bump into you. So you weren’t paying attention, so what? I mean, the view here’s enough to...well, you know what I mean, eh, eh?”

Bahz sure didn’t. In fact, he couldn’t even make out a single word of the foreigner’s frantic babbling. Instead, he just grinned when he saw Digeri doing so first, in

hopes of not offending the native. That, and he was still trying to convince himself he was really as huge as this other individual was. That he was talking with an actual giant kept overwhelming the idea that he was now a giant, too.

“Great, see? We’re both fine!” Digeri chuckled. “Of course, I think my leg’s a *little* hurt, but hey, I’ll be fine.” He feigned injury as he stepped to the other side of the giant bushrat, already having set his eyes on the pristine bottle cap in the rat’s fist. “Oh...well, I guess it’s a little, *tiny bit* messed up now, thanks to you...oh, sorry, I didn’t mean it like that!”

Bahz just kept staring, his smile straining until it started to hurt. Digeri saw he had a patsy in the making, and went for the kill.

“Ooh, ouch! W-well, don’t worry about it. The injury’s nothing! But...well...say, maybe you could make it up to me...I mean, medical bills, us both having to walk to a hospital, yadda-yadda...if you wanna call everything even, you know, I could always...oh, say, take that measly bottle cap off your hands. I mean, you sure don’t need it, right?”

Naturally, Bahz kept smiling, even as his eyebrow arched higher.

“Great! Deal!”

In the blink of an eye the bottle cap vanished from Bahz’s hand (despite it being balled up tight), and Digeri was running off like mad.

“Good doin’ business with you! Thanks a lot, I feel better already! Hey, *whaddayaknowitsamiracleIcanrun—*”

Never having witnessed such greed-addled speed (or basic greed at all) in his life, Bahz was shocked when he blinked, then looked around to see not only the dingo gone, but the metal of change as well. His eyes widened as he searched the ground for a moment, until what had really happened sank in. Bahz’s panic redoubled as he ran off after the thief, already well into the distance.

He couldn’t go back without it! Everyone would kill him! Well, they wouldn’t have a prayer at his size—but it was the *principle* that mattered.

8:10 a.m.

“Taz, honey, wake up,” Mrs. Devil insisted, knocking with Mom levels of firmness on her son’s door.

“*Wa...Wah, phbbtht!*” came Taz’s sleepy reply.

“Oh, that excuse won’t work on me, Mister,” she warned, crossing her arms in such a way that Taz still knew she was doing it from his side of the closed door. A sharp whine came in reply. “Move that keister! You’ve got until nine to get out there and mow that lawn! Your father has to go out to that OJ drinking contest in Melbourne today, and I’m taking Molly to the Mall, so you have to clean up *and* watch your little brother! I’d better be making myself clear enough to walk through this door, young devil, alright?”

No response.

“Alright, then. See you later today, Taz! Take care, sweetie!”

“...*Wah, wah.*”

9:23 a.m.

“Digeri, you genius, you,” the dingo crooned as he trotted along.

After the turns he’d taken, there was no way that the silent rat in that Halloween getup would ever catch up with him now.

At length he wandered into a small clearing, swaddled on all sides by a cluster of shrubs and trees. At the far back end was a decent-sized waterfall, which flowed over a stone ledge that peered out over a pond below.

“Hey-hey, perfect! A good spot for a rest and a drink after all that exercise.”

He crept down into the pond, cooling off with a smug sigh. He paddled along the water’s surface until he came to the base of the waterfall, then stood back up to his midsection (the water was nearly as shallow as he).

“What a beauty!” he swooned, pinching the bottle cap on both sides and turning it over to see its bright luster. As if in response, a very tiny shock bit each finger, a light jolt running into his hand, then the remainder of his body. “Whoa! What the heck was that, just now?” Digeri squinted down as he held it, still too greedy to relinquish the cap. Another one ran through, though this time he wasn’t as shocked (literally). Instead, Digeri made a suspicious face, looking at it all the closer.

The sensation of water moving around him caught up to his brain, and he looked down to notice ripples spreading out all around. Yet he hadn’t been moving at all; in fact, he was still standing—only now, the water was up to his knees!

“What in the,” Digeri began, only to be cut off as he stretched up a few inches in height. The feeling stunned all senses, leaving only the warmed tingle as he grew another half-foot in size. His paws were the only things that remained submerged as more of him rose out of the pond, his growing toes clutching down into wet dirt.

Now nearly ten feet tall, and growing faster than before, Digeri couldn’t keep his balance, and fell down into what little water there still was below. The massive dingo watched in confused awe as he sat, his legs beginning to push out and away from him, the scenery of the clearing and its faunae dropping lower, lower, lower still as he grew bigger and bigger. Fifteen feet blew up to twenty, the height piling onto him as he continued to clutch the cap in one growing hand. Out his paws burst from the pond, digging the dirt and grass away as they grew through it. Likewise his head tapped against the surface of the stone base behind him, letting the waterfall trickle over his muzzle as he grew another five feet in size.

At thirty feet—and still sitting—the dingo felt his entire body curl in just so, as though the meager attempt of nature to contain him was only making the buildup inside of him *worse*. He had barely enough time to gulp before grit his teeth, just as the wave of growth hit him like a brick wall.

All signs of a clearing or even a waterfall disappeared as his growing head erupted clear through the limestone, showering rock, soil, and blades of grass up past the sudden spray of water. His neck followed suit as another *twenty feet* bulged through him, then his shoulders, then elbows as he grew past the fifty-foot tall mark (actually, it was

fifty feet lying down, as the growth surges killed any chances of getting back up).

The ground literally shook from the growth as he ballooned bigger still, the tremble deepening into a full-on quake of rising pressure and heat. Unable to do anything else, Digeri gave in and closed his eyes tight, surrendering to the idea it would all be over with at some point. In the interim he could feel the soil and progressively tinier trees and rocks parting as his growth shoved them aside.

He was well over sixty feet tall, and still growing larger by the second, putting everything into a jumble of panic and rumbling, bursting growth.

With one last push he felt his form swell again, before stopping altogether, leaving him prostrate on the turf. To his delayed relief, a big enough rock had passed him by when he was around sixty-five feet and had knocked his hand loose, enough to force it to loosen its grip on the bottle cap.

At length the idea struck Digeri that he wasn't getting any more gigantic; he opened one eye cautiously, then the other. All he could see was the sky above.

"I gotta say," he nervously huffed, "that was unexpected."

He raised a gigantic hand to his throat, feeling at it in fascination. Was that *his* voice? It was so incredibly deep now! The examining arm was so thick, too! So heavy! He moved it around a bit, flexed, then let it fall to the ground, just to see what it would do. Sure enough, the twenty-odd-foot-long arm smashed into the turf, pounding a small dent into it, sending a cloud of grit out in the process.

He felt the quake tickle underneath his increased mass, then smiled as he looked back up to the sky.

"Not bad...hey, not bad at all..."

Digeri hefted all of his tonnage into a sit, then managed after a few tries to stand up straight with his new weight.

"Oh, do I have a certain truck-drivin' jerk to go visit right about now..."

He turned back the way he came and scooped the tiny cap up, forgetting about the bushrat he'd stolen it from and stomped very intentionally off towards the one path he knew the truck could have taken. Sure, it was the same direction that six-foot half-pint rat was taking...but there was no way that runt was going to stop him now, so who cared if he ran into him again?

Every thundering step he took jarred the plains as Digeri went on his destructive way, grinning wide. Today was coming up aces, so far as he cared.

10:05 a.m.

Bahz grudgingly conceded to his need for oxygen as he stopped running and panted hard. He had been running for over half an hour, and still had caught no sign of the thief. He couldn't leave the metal of change behind—think of the disgrace! Even as a giant, he failed? Unacceptable! He'd never live it down—

A brief but noticeable tic pulsed through the ground, buzzing Bahz's feet, as though a vehicle had gone by. He looked up, but only saw the same scenery as before.

As he lowered his head, however, he noticed the rocks doing a little dance off the grass every few seconds, followed by a sound like distant thunder. The rocks *jumped*

now, and Bahz winced as unwanted realities attacked his damaged ego.

No language was needed to tell him what must have happened as the thunder drew closer, like an oncoming storm. The ominous effect was only heightened as a looming shadow consumed him; Bahz looked up to see not storm clouds, but rather the sight of the thief from before, well-above him. His eyes took their time in scaling all seventy-two vertical feet of tan and white fur, the top of which only registered as the underside of a muzzle that, as far as he guessed, was beaming wide.

“Gezzmonshrod!”

(It's best that you don't know)

Both vast paws loomed overhead as the colossal Digeri took another step forward, seeing neither Bahz nor the tree he had been under as the twenty-foot long, ten-foot wide digit crashed down.

Bahz uselessly brought his arms up—only to feel a rush of air and the light brush of fur resting right beside him.

A meek glance revealed nothing but tan all over, a wall of warm fur ending shy of his own rodent nose. Bahz reflexively froze as Digeri took a step with the other paw, the behemoth ignorant to the fact that the bushrat was wedged between two of the paw's toes. A crash in the distance signaled he had set the other paw down, and Bahz frantically squirmed as the paw he was now stuck in rose up like a theme park ride. The wind rushed past as he saw the outback rising and falling, unable to do much but watch through watering eyes as Digeri walked on.

On the plus side, Bahz had managed to find the thief. In a sense that, *unlike him*, remained pretty loose.

10:55 a.m.

Mrs. Devil made sure to check both ways before merging into traffic, although most of it had long passed. In the backseat was another Tasmanian devil, a preteen named Molly, who was too occupied with listening to her headphones to care about how her mother got her to the mall.

She was so occupied, in fact, that by the time she recognized the series of nearing quakes and looked up through the car window, there was only an extremely large foot *thooming* down beside them—and not another car or bus.

It wasn't just the gargantuan foot, either; it was the inclusion of a green-furred rat stuck tight between its massive toes. The poor rat stared at them, looking dumbfounded, before the other paw finally hit the ground. Both Molly and Mom could feel the vehicle lift, hold in the air for a moment, then crash back down to the road as the aftershock set shuddered down the way.

Molly's headphones blared on as she spied her mother's face in the rear view mirror, her mouth hanging, a mortified stare piercing the windshield as the foot peeled off to reveal a wrecked roadway. The steps' vibrations died seconds after, until all was quiet again. The merging into traffic continued, though the car did move a little funny for a moment or two. Neither one of them debated whether the car or the sudden road conditions were to blame.

Whether the shock was enough to faze Mrs. Devil or not was anyone's guess as she wordlessly drove, blinking every few seconds, her face unchanged.

11:01 a.m.

"Where'd he get to?" the king-sized Digeri wondered aloud, his voice a thick echoing boom that carried for roughly a hundred feet out in all directions.

He craned his head this way and that, too self-absorbed to bother noticing all the scurrying folks down below. His path had taken him right into the city, though the damages being done were nothing compared to the embarrassment Bahz was experiencing. If he could just find some way to shrink the thief back down, things wouldn't be so glum.

Or, at least, *outgrow* him.

His thoughts were interrupted as Digeri, looking to the side, thumped into a big scaly gut, then stumbled back.

"Watch it, pal!" he growled, then shrank back as the realization came along that he, a towering giant, had *still* just walked into someone. "Wait, what the—"

Looking ahead, he finally realized who the even larger giant was:

Axl Gator.

Rather, at present height, merely Axl's stomach.

All 130 feet of Axl turned towards him, the slightly vacant expression on his looming reptilian face unaltered.

"Ah," Digeri coughed, wide-eyed. "A...Axl!"

"Oh, sorry, wasn't looking, was I?" Axl chuckled stupidly, smiling down at the dingo. "Oh, hey, Digeri! Fancy having another giant around, hehe! D'you get big the same way I did?"

"Er, well, I," Digeri stammered, in shock. *Another giant? Here?*

"Oh, well, nevermind," Axl sighed, scratching his head. "Uh...by chance, you haven't seen Bull around here, have you? I kinda lost him a little earlier."

"Who?"

"D'aw, forget about it, I—" Axl laughed, before his long snout curled inwards, as though he were about to sneeze. "Ahaaah, hah, I—"

Digeri paused and watched as Axl held, *held*, held, then unleashed a powerful sneeze that blew his fur back momentarily, not doing much to relieve his initial surprise.

"Gesundheit?" Digeri numbly offered, still overtaken by shock.

As soon as the sneeze ended, Axel began to twitch all over.

"Guh, this keeps happening," the huge gator muttered, sniffing as his quaking body began to blow up even larger, swelling yard after yard (or meter after meter). Out his teardrop gut bulged, his haunches widening, his tail spearing out over the nearby buildings and citizens of the city. Digeri finally thought to step back as Axl's shadow began to spill over *even him*.

Up past 140 feet Axl grew, surging bigger and bigger, taller and taller, bulkier and bulkier with each moment that passed, past 150 feet...160 feet...180 feet...200 feet!

His legs shook as he huffed and swelled, his belly inflating out larger from the windows of numerous downtown buildings and lofts, scales stretching in either complaint or complete joy. Either way, those buildings felt the tremors right after.

The tortured cement crumbled and wheezed under relentlessly growing mass as the reptile grew and grew, the populace scattering wildly, some being swept up in the wave of scaly toe claws. Said feet surged loudly, crackling the broken pavement as they sank and sank into the streets, growing car-sized, then truck-sized, then van-sized. At 230 feet tall he finally stopped, teetering goofily in place, sniffing louder than ever.

“Whew! Hey, that one wasn’t as bad as the last time,” Axl chuckled, his head shaking the aftereffects of the growth spurt off.

Digeri was nowhere to be found now, having run off in a panic somewhere back around 190 feet.

“Okay, don’t panic,” Digeri loudly told himself, between the crashing *booms* of his own footfall. “If the truck-driving jerks you’re after didn’t see that huge gator, you’ll still look big and scary enough to get precious revenge! Just think positive!”

The huge dingo huffed out anxious-but-helpful advice to himself as he ran out of the city’s borders, out towards the dustier trails of the Outback— away from the enormously overgrown Axl.

But in all warranted curiosity, really, how’d that dopey lizard get so big?

9:35 a.m.

“Eureka!” Bull Gator shouted, the stocky crocodile jogging up to the wreckage by the river—likely, the ruins of what was previously a house. Axl Gator followed in suit, his taller figure slumping dejectedly.

“Gee, Bull, I know I may seem a bit smelly at times, but you don’t gotta say it.”

“What? No, no, you don’t reek, Axl...though, admittedly, a bath wouldn’t hurt either one of us right now...No, I mean, we’re *definitely* back on the trail of Taz, that shaggy brute. See this slump of once sturdily-manufactured wood-stuff? Demolished. It’s Taz, I’d bet my gold tooth on it.”

“D’uh, but Bull, you don’t have any gold tooth, far as I recollect,” Axl slowly interjected, lowering his trusty butterfly net as he put the words together.

“Hmm, true enough, dear Axl, I *did* bet it away already,” Bull sighed. “Still, Taz must be close enough, so keep on your guard. We’ll search the wreckage for signs of his tornado-prints, thereby learning the path he’s taken elsewhere.”

Axl nodded obediently, trailing along behind Bull as their scouring began.

Through various knickknacks and spring-bound gadgets there came a thump, drawing Bull’s attention.

“All well and good, Axl?” he called out. “Good, at least?”

Bull turned what was once a perfectly good corner, and saw for himself.

Axel had managed to trip up over a chemistry set of some sort on a desk. A great wave of violet-blue dust rose caked his reptilian form, coating him thoroughly as he struggled against its inherent superiority.

“Ugh, lousy dust,” Axl coughed, breathing in massive amounts of the sooty material. Looking around, he found a tiny memo pad note found next to him, aptly stuck onto a large glass beaker that read:

“Brother--reminder: Prevent inhalation of Byzantium Sapphire dust when mixed with Radiated Essence of Wombat. Exposure leads to same effects we’re using on the growth/shrink device, so no touchy. This means you. Especially you. And don’t you dare say you just tripped over it! No one’s that stupid!!”

All the love, Daniel

Axl gave up trying to read everything after “Brother” and shrugged it off, sneezing and inhaling more and more of the dusty compound while climbing back up. A hand went up to the throat, rubbing it tenderly.

“Blugh, need (*cough*) something to drink...”

With that, amidst the now spreading dust, both hands fumbled about the entire chemistry set’s remains in search of something to wash the dryness out from his mouth. With much elation Axl found something; unable to see terribly well, he downed every bit of the liquid in one infantile but satisfying *glug*.

Within seconds the dust cleared, the gator already moving on after having set down the vial, which was (of course) labeled “Essence of Wombat”--now (of course) quite empty.

“What was all that racket back there, Axl?” Bull asked, not bothering to look any further as his quest for Taz kept him engaged.

The noise of Axl’s throat trying to clear itself repeatedly answered.

“Mm, good enough. Come on, chum, we’re moving on. Guess we won’t find Taz like this after all.” Axl just coughed, nodded, and wheezed after his mentor, even as his stomach began to tingle strangely...

11:25 a.m.

With the bang of old pistons and a puff of smoke the vehicle ground out a last complaint, then stopped outside of Thickley’s homestead. The kangaroo bounded ahead of the others, who wound around to the back to unload the ray gun device.

In all the assumed excitement over the project, the group overlooked that the gun’s lever had earlier been knocked into the polar opposite of what he had been set to prior. Off the ramp and onto turf it rolled, the ray gun left sitting on the grass.

A nice assemblage of furniture was dragged out onto the lawn in front of the gun’s cylindrical turret, pushed into a tidy cluster of stuff. Timothy Platypus aligned the nozzle while Daniel took it upon himself to briefly investigate whatever suspicious noise it was he’d heard from Thickley’s truck along the way. Still, nothing.

“Awrighty, then, boys,” the kangaroo whooped, a furred finger pinching the edge of his hat and straightening it purposefully, “let’s get this goin’! I wanna be able t’get

movin' to..." the marsupial trailed off into nothing as the others nearby saw his face freeze in place. He was looking past them—more importantly, he was also looking *up*.

"Thomething wrong?" Daniel asked, before a slight tremble rippled through the earth below, leaving a tingle in their collective feet.

A confounding shadow spread over them, casting an eerie pseudo-twilight accompanying the increasing tics in the turf. Constance, Timothy and Daniel all turned around to source the odd penumbra, only to freeze in harmony at the sight of Digeri Dingo looming 72 feet over everything. There wasn't even a chance for anyone to comment upon the unlucky Bushrat wedged firmly in the dingo's monster-sized toes. They had noticed Digeri just fine, however—and he had certainly noticed them.

"Well, well," Digeri smarmily rumbled, glowering down at them. "Tried to hit and run back there with ol' Digeri, did ya? Well, I think not! I'm thinking, it's time for a little payback!"

After a brief chuckle his smile drooped.

"Er, no...*big* payback, I mean. Yeah! Real big payback! That's a...oh, hey, what's that thing down there?"

Digeri had been pointing at the now altered shrink ray, which the group looked back towards. Daniel gathered the nerve to answer first.

"A thize-changing ray gun, to...to make moving large objecths eathier," he explained, motioning to the ray gun.

Thickley nodded first, then was followed in kind.

Digeri's smile returned in full, mischievous force as the implications began to rattle and roll in his brain. Without hesitation the gigantic dingo scooped Thickley up in a free hand, while another hand grabbed the heavy ray gun with ease. Both were raised all the way up to Digeri's thickened chest fur, then faced towards one another.

"And here I thought I'd have fun with you when I was this big," Digeri snickered. "Wait'll you're even smaller! I'll...why, I'll...uh, say, how do you work this thing? Do you do this thing here, or..."

"Oh, no, see, you fidget with that little knob thing right there," Constance chirped, ever helpful.

"Ah, don't jus' up and tell 'im that, Constance!" Thickley groaned.

"Yeah, great, thanks," Digeri sneered.

On went the switch at last. Thickley trembled, his teeth grit and eyes widening steadily as the hum of the ray gun rose in pitch.

"Let's see you drive your stupid truck when you're ant-sized!" Digeri boomed.

All at once an orange light overtook the nozzle, coalescing into a tangerine beam that shot into the kangaroo, enveloping him. Thickley's form trembled with the oncoming change, then, as a moment of anxious silence set in, began to enlarge in the dingo's hand, forcing his mighty grip wider.

"Guh-HAH!" Thickley yelped, his hide stretching more and more.

"What the—" Digeri started, as the kangaroo ballooned so big that his massive hand couldn't hold him anymore.

The furry girth escaped the brim of its confines as Thickley, now surging up past ten feet in height, saw himself growing bigger and bigger. As the gasps increased, so did the kangaroo; Thickley visibly rippled as the beam poured on, then violently tripled in

size, his mass overtaking his attacker's arms in an instant, fitting snugly in Digeri's embrace rather than in just his hand. This also meant that said dingo was forced to inadvertently drop the ray gun (its beam still on) to the ground.

The beam free-fired as it bounced off of the dish atop Thickley's home, ironically leading its path precisely back to its original target. With that the power continued to flow into Thickley, and with a deep huff the kangaroo burst in size yet again, doubling to a whopping sixty feet in height!

Out his humble pouch grew, mashing into the thick fuzz of Digeri's stomach, pumping in and up, heaving along with the growing kangaroo as the beam forced more and more size into him. Up and up Thickley grew, bigger and bigger, another twenty feet...then another thirty feet...then *another forty feet* after that. 150 feet of massively growing marsupial towered over even Digeri, dwarfing him at over twice his height—and he was tremble-rippling *greater* than ever as the beam poured on, and on, and on.

"Now 'at's more like it!" Thickley gladly bellowed, rubbing his hands together, feeling their heft increase over one another as he surged up another fifty feet in size. "Who's gonna do what to who, now?"

The whole time he let Digeri watch with mounting panic. Had anyone noticed, Bahz (still wedged between Digeri's toes, of course) had the same look to him as well. Someone *else* had a power as great as that of his tribe's mighty changing stone? Another, aside from the god-lizard he'd seen back at the city? "*Gezzmonshrod*", *indeed!*

"Aw, c-come on, Thickley, I was just joking around, you know, fun n' stuff," Digeri laughed, forcing his knees not unbuckle as 180 feet of vengeful kangaroo inflated higher and wider to 210 feet, then 240 feet, then 280 feet, before he could even manage to finish gulping. Thickley was living up to his namesake as his entire house lowered to the kangaroo's midsection, then haunches, his feet swelling longer and heavier over the surrounding property, shoving trees back with a symphony of dry snaps. "You know I was just kidding around! Seriously, I was fooling! Right, guys?"

He hastily begged those below to back him up.

Yet Timothy, Daniel and Constance were engaged elsewhere; all of them stared up in transfixed stupor at the ever-growing colossus Thickley had billowed into, and was still growing past as he cleared 300 feet.

Finally, Daniel shook his head back to attention, and he ran over to and switched off the ray gun. With a sigh and the wiping of brows the ray gun device whirled to a slow, and the beam vanished, leaving Thickley at 320 feet tall, his huge paunch pushing intimidatingly against Digeri's muzzle.

House, truck, device and company all were simply little dots compared to Thickley, his enormous tan paws sinking into the yielding turf below him. Tail tips flickered, eyes narrowed and proverbial sleeves were rolled as the titanic kangaroo grabbed Digeri by the midsection and rudely hoisted him up. Being only about a quarter of his size, the dingo made much less of a challenge, in any sense.

"Really? Jokin', ya say?" the huge kangaroo snorted. "Well, reckon I like jokes too, ya know? Lessee if y'know this one, eh!?"

With that, Thickley slammed Digeri head-first to the ground, the shockwaves heaving everyone off their feet as the ground shook for a solid minute. "How's that 'fer a

laugh, mate? Didn't go over yer 'ead, did it?"

"Not...funny..." Digeri wheezed. There wasn't even time for the comparatively giant birds circling his head to tweet before he was hefted up again.

"Maybe ya jus' need t'hear it again, eh?"

11:05 a.m.

"Taz, Mom said you gotta get up! Come on!" Jake, Taz's little brother, fussed from his side of the bedroom door.

"Gwah, hee, phbbtht!"

"That's what you always say!" Jake muttered, giving the door a kick. "Mom's gonna yell at you, you know! Come on, get up already! You're missing all sorts of stuff! Come on, I can't pour my cereal without your help, Taz, so get up!"

No response.

10:10 a.m.

"Everything going alright, Axl?" Bull asked, finally taking the time to turn around to his lesser compatriot.

"Yeah, Bull, I just feel funny, is all," the tiny gator's partner grumbled.

"Hmm, well, come to think of it, or rather, *hear* of it, you do sound pretty bad. I'd suggest a good, solid sneeze to dislodge what ails you, Axl. Always works for me."

"Guh, okay, Bull, here goes."

There came a nodding, followed by a sharp jerk of the neck; Axl inhaled deep, quaked, then drew in a deeper breath after that, maintaining the ritualistic motions for a common sneeze. Bull watched on, tail flitting idly as time passed. No sound of thunder came, however, as Axl's reptilian maw hung open.

"Whew...nothin', Bull."

"Well, holding it all in won't help your recovery, Axl; I'd suggest relaxing until it all comes out—leaving you refreshed and up to our ever-present task of capturing Taz.."

With a turn Bull was off again, leaving Axl behind.

"Huh, h-okay, Buh-Bull...*huaaagh*—"

Despite the momentary distance, Bull Gator had no trouble hearing the gunshot "bang" of a sneeze as it finally tore out of said partner from behind.

"Goodness, you certainly relaxed, didn't you, Ax—AH!"

Bull gasped as a rumble emanated from Axl's entire being.

The quakes only became more feverish as the lanky gator trembled, then curled inwards from staggering tension. Waves of some kind of electricity fluxed, spread, and tingled all throughout him, until it coalesced in one mighty spurt deep inside.

"Bull, w-what's going o-on?" Axl warbled, unable to properly speak amidst such powerful undulations. "I feel...I fuh-feel..."

Bull was, admittedly, about as stupefied.

A sound akin to latex pulled tighter spoke for them both as Axl's stomach bulged out more, then more, all while they stared on. The yellow scales of his belly mystifyingly inflated outward as Axel's hands glided over them in fascination, feeling his own body swelling. All at once his teeth gnashed, his eyes lidded to slits, and he burst forth all over, expanding larger and wider as Bull gawked. There stood seven whole feet of Gator—no, wait, nine feet...ten feet...eleven feet...twelve feet...

"A-Axl, you seem to be hitting a long-delayed growth spurt...I uh, I think,"

Bull proffered, having no other fitting analysis to give.

"G-gee, Bull, I didn't t-think I had any more in m-me!"

Obviously untrue, both their assumptions were further invalidated as Axl suddenly *boomed* up to triple his height, his body heaving up to a cartoonish pause, leaving him a newly-inflated giant at 38 feet tall.

Down he thudded from the tremors of his own growth spurt, so that the gut mashed along the grass as it grew. Axl's gigantic snout tumbled right onto a flower patch, of all places, the impact casting a sizable pollen cloud over his eight foot-long head.

Bull turned a lighter shade of green as his partner snorted it all in, tensed, and sneezed again, *hard*.

This time it was instantaneous: up and up Axl surged, bursting all over as he ballooned to thicker and heavier size. His mashed belly wobbled and grew, bloating and stretching as it inflated along the ground. The tail widened madly about its base, capping the additional mass that flowed through Axl's back as it rose. 45 feet passed on to 53 feet, then 66 feet, until Axel could prop his growing self back up to a teetering stand. Already as big as the ruined house once suggested, Axl rose taller and wider, pitching forward for balance as he shuddered to 70 feet, pinwheeled his arms awkwardly, then blew up to 78 feet...84 feet...99 feet...

Both rutted haunches billowed out to ridiculous proportions, to compliment his inflating underside; the teardrop-gut he'd once possessed had now been thoroughly dwarfed by its smooth, humongous circumference. Bull could have lived on Axl as a mansion, where moments before he might have had a common house. Not that Bull was particularly in the market.

"Not to nitpick, Axl," Bull suggested, backing steadily away, "but you might consider stopping around now. Or, preferably, a minute earlier."

"*Guh-I c-can't suh-stop!*"

106 feet...114 feet...122 feet...On and on Axl grew, the land shrinking down around him with an eerie pseudo-realism. His shadow spilled out with each surging bulge, until at last there was a halt, followed by silence. 130 feet of reptile towered over Bull who, frankly, had already been a pipsqueak when Axl was normal-sized.

"There, I feel better," Axl happily puffed, sniffing. "Kinda makes one overlook what just happened, huh Bull?"

He had to look down over his expanded stomach to see him, blinking innocently.

"...Almost kinda, Axl," Bull muttered, staring up at a set of clawed toes reaching higher than his own hat brim. "*Almost.*"

12:20 p.m.

It was amazing: for nearly an entire hour Mr. Thickley, now quite enormous and in thorough control of the situation, had been humiliating Digeri Dingo with a series of tosses and twists, flings and flips, in a mock-rag doll fashion.

Throughout, the unnoticed Bahz had been trying to crawl out along Digeri's mountainous body, clinging in sheer terror to whatever follicles he could get purchase of. By now, in spite of the latest flip into the air, even with the world spinning around him in noxious repetition, the bushrat was closing in.

The bottle cap was still clenched somewhere in Digeri's hand, it had to be speck-sized or not. Being just small enough at six feet, Bahz closed his eyes and wriggled in through his accidental captor's grip. Eventually he got inside, tail and all, and there was no further sign of him as things proceeded on.

Meanwhile, Thickley caught Digeri once again, and held him tightly in place.

"That was pretty funny too, then, wasn't it, mate?" came a growl from the massive kangaroo. "Ah'm glad we could get together an' joke around like this!"

The onlookers down below had no choice but to do just that.

The Platypus Brothers were tinkering away with the ray gun, trying desperately to switch the incredibly-stuck lever back to '*shrink*' instead of '*grow*'. It wasn't working, but effort always spoke best of character. Constance was little help.

"Gracious, if'n Mr. Thickley isn't a big one," she muttered, having moved the couch and some recently found popcorn over to the yard from Thickley's house, allowing her to better enjoy such a rare show.

Her show revealed its next twist when, suddenly, a bright-emerald green bushrat exploded out from Digeri Dingo's closed hand. The twenty-foot tall rat crashed clumsily to the ground, then tore off like mad in any general direction other than here.

Everyone stopped, looking at the rat as it raced off. That it seemed to be growing bigger with each step was likely what widened Digeri's eyes.

"His...er, *my* bottle cap! No fair stealing it back!" he hollered, straining free.

Fueled by powerful greed and Thickley's shock, the dingo sprang to life, wrenching himself from the mega-marsupial's mighty grip. Off he ran after the bushrat, also disappearing into the distance.

"What the..." Thickley wondered aloud, scratching his very big head in curious wonder. "Ah, well, s'pose he's learned his lesson. Ah'll just get back to moving my things, and then we'll be off--"

He paused at the sight of his actual house, which was only the size of part of his foot now, and growled anew to see his favorite satellite dish knocked to the soil.

"Why, that mangy—he cost me my dish! Right, Ah'll settle this up proper, then!"

With that Thickley took one Herculean leap to the air, making it whistle as that much gigantic kangaroo sliced through it. Constance merely finished her popcorn, then rubbed her chin reflexively.

"An' here I thought Mr. Thickley was the one who knocked the dish over when he got so big," she thought aloud, shrugging. She also noticed the truck had been smashed to bits as well, and yawned loudly. "Movin' day certainly is somethin'!"

"Very not-good, brother," Timothy wheezed. "We need thomeone with the

thtrength of those two giants to unthtick thith thwitch.”

“True, brother, though neither of uth can afford to become gigantic enough to do tho, as we both need our thize and thmarth to work the ray devith properly. Tho who to chooth, then?”

They each turned to Constance, only to find her fast asleep on the couch.

“The’th perfect! Uh...you can wake her, brother,”

“No, no,” Daniel gulped nervously, “That’th alright, Timothy, you can do it.”

They kept staring at her as she slumbered, then both dejectedly sighed, “I’ll do it,” at the same time. Both fired the ray gun right at her, bracing for the consequences.

12:30 p.m.

Taz grumbled and finally slid out of bed, dragging a fluffed comforter behind him as it snagged his ankle. Jake was, of course, right outside in the hallway, arms folded.

“Finally! Taz, you’re gonna be in big trouble when I tell Mom how you slept in,” Jake sang, taking what revenge on his older brother he could as they went to the kitchen. “I’m gonna tell! I’m gonna tell her everything! You’ll be in big trouble, Taz! That’s what you get for not helping me get my cereal!”

With that, Taz turned from the kitchen cupboard with a jar of cookies, aimed squarely at Jake. The younger Tasmanian devil’s face went slack, eyes widening at the sight of such unbridled, sugary treasure. “Nevermind, Taz, I guess I won’t tell Mon *everything*,” he chirped as he ate. “But you still gotta help me later, okay? I can’t find my turtle Spike anywhere, an’ you know he’s my favorite pet!”

“Wuh-huh,” Taz yawned, going back down towards his room.

Snores could once again be heard minutes later.

12:43 p.m.

Now Axl had done it. Sure, clamping both hands over his snout was enough to stop another sneeze, but it had been done so close to *too late* that the gator’s body had still sprouted up another fifteen feet, leaving his 245-foot figure wedged snugly between two skyscrapers near the center of the city. This hurt his odds of finding Bull anywhere in the bustling (and currently panicked) metropolis beneath him.

“Ghmpth,” he grunted, waving *hellos* and *apologies* to those feeling below—ultimately waving back as the new choppers swarmed him like hungry flies.

1:14 p.m.

“Get back here with your bottle cap!” Digeri roared, trampling the outskirts of the city as their chase led them all the way back to the land of steel and cement.

Dingo feet pressed and demolished the avenues, buses, signs, and whatnot as they

slammed the Earth, leaving tons of uplifted soot and wreckage in his wake. The city would surely understand.

There was no way that Bahz was stopping, after hearing Digeri's wrathful roars. The now 72-foot tall bushrat ran on, creating an equally destructive path as the two chased on at equal size.

Digeri took a dive and caught Bahz, shoving both of them into a local park with a meteoric slam. The bushrat squirmed loose, however, and darted headlong into the front of an entire mall's façade.

Big enough to burst through the structure's front wall, Baez wormed his way through the mall's inner sanctum, just small enough at the same time to wriggle uncomfortably forward in a hunched position.

"T-tagoreed! Fuusha, fuusha!" he rumbled, elbow brushing columns and dusting against the higher walkways and escalators, his head and ears crushing the vaulted glass ceilings as he squirmed by.

("Pardon! S-sorry, s-sorry!")

All manner of shoppers fled in terror, especially when Digeri stumbled in after him, caught the rat's tail and destructively dragged him back towards the mall's main foyer. Before Bahz could fight back the bottle cap was already out of his paw, and back in that of his avaricious rival.

"Ah, back where you belong," Digeri sighed, gripping and squeezing the cap so tightly that the growth magic began to take effect. The dingo's whole form shook angrily, then swelled up from 72 feet to 140 feet instantly, nearly doubling his huge size in one thick, loud blast of size. Digeri sneered happily as he felt his head bash up into the shattering glass ceiling, warping snapping beams as he groaned and trembled, and burst out to 250 feet. His chest swelled down against the shoppers and signs and bags and displays beneath him, his arms crashing through the side stores and demolishing several legit great sales as he incessantly grew, and grew.

"Hah! C'mon, body, bigger! Get bigger!" Digeri commanded, relishing the thought of outgrowing Thickley enough to get some serious payback. And did his body ever obey: higher and higher Digeri blew up, 250 feet shooting up to 290 feet, then 330 feet, his rump and growing feet dragging craters through the parking lot as his rumbling hips boomed out against the interior walls of the struggling mall.

His massive muzzle mashed down, down over Bahz, who squiggled and strained to escape as Digeri's chin bulged onto his head, flattening his ears, crushing him into the cracking tile floor and bursting pipes, his weight ballooning nonstop overhead.

The colossus surged hotly to 350 feet, then 370 feet, then 420 feet, on and on, pushing his form deeper and deeper into the mall, but also further out of it. Digeri's back end quake-pumped out into the city area, consuming it in growing fluff as he kept bulging bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger.

Bahz reached blindly for the cap, but found it hard to reach as it was growing up and away in Digeri's expanding clutches. Yet on and on rolled Digeri's body, covering everyone nearby in warmed, thick weight as he surged out again, gaining more and more size in faster and faster intervals, his sides blowing the walls of the mall out as his swelling back muscles blew the glass ceiling apart.

Digeri's rumbling form emerged from the entire mall as it simply split around his size, the god-dingo loudly *booming* to 480 feet...490 feet...500 feet...

"Haha! Not even close to e-enough!" Digeri roared. "Gotta...get...BIGGER..."

Bahz watched in agony as the his captor pushed him into the cement, ballooning over a widening crater it as his fantastic weight escalated by the second.

520 feet...530 feet...540 feet...550 feet...

The majority of the mall's front end evaporated in waves of destruction as Digeri shook and swelled harder, *harder*, frantically bulging with raw, rising need.

"BIGGER!" Digeri ordered, straining gladly as he exploded even larger, his inherent selfishness starting to laser into a singular desire.

Axl Gator noticed something growing to massive size in the periphery, and craned his giant neck around the skyscrapers he was stuck in to spy the same dingo he'd talked with earlier. He was growing truly massive a few miles away, by the city's edge.

Digeri's figure shuddered larger, and larger, Axl watching as his rear and tail bulged over the farther-off office buildings, to 560 feet...

Then 570 feet, his building-sized paws crushing the streets and snatching light poles and telephone wires like nothing...

580 feet...590 feet...600 feet...

Boy, was he getting real, real big.

Axl sighed, looking himself over idly.

"Gee...maybe he's got the right idea, huh?"

Mr. Thickley touched down in the middle of the city with a reverberating *CRASH* (in only five jumps, no less), and found himself staring down at Axl Gator, who reached about up to Thickley's chest—just below his overgrown neck scarf. Or was it just a handkerchief?

"Heh, that was sure easy! Well, hey! Ah'll be finagled, then! What's gotten *you* so fired big, Axl?" the kangaroo wondered aloud, looking the reptile over quizzically.

"Sneezing," Axl sighed. "D'uh, wait...Gee, Thickley, what's gotten *you* so big? Er, uh, bigger? Did you sniff the same funny cloud?"

"Hmm? Ah, nah, mate. Ray gun," he answered, matter-of-factly.

At that Thickley eventually turned to see his target a few miles away, steadily rising above the very cityscape itself as he grew from *big* to *mountainous*.

Digeri's growth spurts rattled out through the city, getting so huge they even reached the two of them At 620 feet, Digeri was sinking down into the entire mall lot, the surrounding intersections, and the adjoining park. He brought his huge snout up, bit his lip, and ballooned noisily up to 650 feet...690 feet...

"Crikey!" Thickley gasped. "Now 'at's a problem..."

"BIIIGGGERRR!" Digeri god-boomed, his fur frizzling out furiously as the dingo erupted messily to 740 feet...

780 feet...

860 feet...

Down below, an increasingly minute Bahz sank deeper, still, matted against waves of over-hot, swelling, ruffling fur, regretting he had ever volunteered for any duty, ever...

1:13 p.m.

Mrs. Devil felt a *bit* better, safe inside the mall. A little more present, a little more real, even—back to the real world, the *true* world. That enormous, faintly familiar foot returned to her recollections, over and over, threatening her tenuous calm—but she persisted, just the same.

Molly, however, had relapsed into a boy-band addled daze upon sight of the music store, and was currently purchasing everything within it while her mother sought wisdom with a cup of coffee over in the food court. It nearly worked.

What appeared to be an enormous, half-naked green rat tore through the mall's interior, scrambling about in a wild panic, filling her periphery with thick plains of scented male fur. All she and a few onlookers could do was watch on from the 2nd story, observing the shoulders of the giant rat as its head brushed the ceiling. He took a hunched stoop in his efforts, cramped aplenty at his great size.

That was it—that was when Mrs. Devil recalled who the jumbo-sized rodent was.

“Didn’t I see him earlier? Wasn’t he a lot smaller then?”

She wondered the matter numbly, sipping her latte while everyone else ran for the stalls or leapt behind the restaurant booth counters with the hiding staff.

With that another giant arm shot through the gaping hole in the mall's front, down opposite the food court, grabbing and pulling on the rat's tail. The rat shouted something like *“Gezz-something-shrod”* over and over, before being hauled back out towards the front end of the mall's interior.

Given that all of this transpired in about the space of one minute, it was a touch sudden—some details were fuzzier than the walls of shifting muscle and fur.

Molly waltzed out from the music store moments later, listening to her renewed music. All that could be seen was a yawning chasm of dragged-out rubble. At that, she turned back around and returned to the womb-like safety of the music store. She would more than likely be staying there until her mother came by; seeing as to how Mrs. Devil was again found dumbstruck and glued to her chair, that was probably going to be a bit of a wait.

“Well, let’s...just hope that the rest of today will be a little more relaxing,” she stammered, before finally passing out. That was when the booming waves of dingo fur swelled forth to claim everything, blowing her and everyone else back with a rush of body heat and horrendous, volcanic growth.

1:25 p.m.

This was getting ugly.

An 864-foot tall, super-gigantic Digeri Dingo towered over nearly everything at this point. Each massive paw had swelled higher than most of the normal-sized buildings, each pad wider than a basketball court (across the sides). Trees were smaller than blades

of grass used to be to him, comparatively, and the news choppers that had jealously swarmed poor Axl had all flown higher still, just to get near Digeri's twitching ears.

"Better, much better!" the dingo laughed, before kissing the precious bottle cap. ***"Let's see you jerks try and do anything to me now!"***

"Uh...is he talking about us?" Axl asked, looking in confusion to Thickley.

"Er, uh, mostly me, unfortunately," the kangaroo sputtered, wringing with a finger the rim of his teal handkerchief like it was a collar. "Ah may have, well, exacerbated our situation a short while ago. Why don't you, uh, just let me get behind you here fer a minute, okay, Axl?"

Axl saw no problem with helping (a.k.a. being a giant shield).

"Sure, sounds like a solid deal to me!"

Now a bit under thrice Thickley's size, Digeri felt more than confident enough to stroll back towards Axl and company, a cocky little grin on his titanic face. Given how he was big enough to step over streets and their surrounding buildings, it didn't take long for Digeri to see Axl—and the kangaroo behind him.

Axl waved.

"Well, hey, fancy meeting you again, Axl!" the dingo laughed, each utterance more than enough to shake the city. ***"Say...that wouldn't be some cowardly little marsupial behind you, would it?"***

"Hey, hey, I resent the implications of cowardice that you...er, implied there, mate!" Thickley shot back, bounding out from behind the still-confused gator. "Now maybe yer bigger n'all get-out, but jus' th'same, I won't stand fer that kinda insult!"

"Well, if you won't stand, then you can try bouncing, right?"

"Eh?"

One big paw rested over Thickley, pressed him down hard—then, like some child's spring toy, let go, rocketing him up skyward.

"See? Now that's funny! HAH!" Digeri yelled, slapping his knee in a fit of laughter, before rolling back and forth with an earth-quaking rumble of force. Long-abandoned city structures and the like paid for it as the dingo's enormous form steamrolled everything nearby.

Rolling around so much began to kick up quite a storm of dust, which drifted lazily down the unflattened roads. Through the cloud Axl could be heard, snuffling and sniffing, welling up for a great, big sneeze as the dust entered his lungs...

2:10 p.m.

"Pleath, Mith Conthtanth, wake up! We need your newfound thize to help get uth to the thity!" Both Timothy and Daniel pleaded, shoving against the slumbering body of Constance the Koala bear—now 350 feet tall, and half as heavy as the moon.

"Our voitheth are too thmall, brother," Daniel interjected, wiping his brow and resting on the koala's fluffy gray backside.

"Tho it theemth," Timothy replied. "We've gotten ourthelvtthes in a big pickle."

Just then, a lone turtle wandered along the dirt path nearby. Timothy and Daniel looked at it, then at one another, nodding quietly.

“Perfect,” they both whispered, moving in tandem over to the ray gun.

The device’s lever was at least stuck in their favor as they pointed the ray device at the meandering turtle and activated it. A tangerine burst of light hit its mark and the background disappeared as the shocked turtle grew and grew, its shell swelling up into the sky as it cleared 10 feet...20 feet...

Its eyes darted all about as it watched the ground escape lower and lower, its rumbling legs bulging thicker as it shot higher into the air.

50 feet burst to 70, the creature already bigger than a house, before it shuddered up to 90 feet, then 120 feet. With a powerful tremor it boomed all the way to 145 feet tall, blowing dust clouds out from its massive feet as it wobbled in place.

“There, that’th enough for him to walk all of uth and the devith to the thity!”

“Thay, brother, won’t we have to take Conthtanth along, too? The’th too big for even the turtle to take at hith thize.”

Daniel stared back, then hummed. All the while the turtle looked itself over, blinking in silent incredulity at how big it had become.

“Right, we’ll jutht make him even bigger, then,” Daniel said, reactivating the ray gun. “Big enough to carry even her!”

Back on the ray gun went, the beam hammering the confused turtle and growing it *far* bigger. It blew up past 190 feet and trembled as its thick hide stretched loudly, then burst out to 270 feet. All sight of the top of its shell was lost as the brothers saw its underbelly and swelling plates fill their view. The puzzled creature nearly fell to its growing knees as it rocketed up to 420 feet, then 650 feet; it was there that they turned the device off at around 700 feet in height, and over 2,200 in length.

“There, better. Thay, do you think that turtle lookth at all familiar, brother?”

“Hmm...come to think of it, it doeth look like that one that liveth with Tath. But what he’th doing here, I dunno. Anyway, leth’th thally off. No thenth in thticking around longer than needed!”

Daniel nodded.

“Right!”

8:30 a.m.

“Stupid Taz, sleeping in so late,” Jake muttered as he tried to reach for the cupboard to get his cereal on his own. “All the morning cartoons are ending, and now I gotta let Spike out on my own, too. Stupid Taz, dumb, ol’ stupid...”

He trailed off, opening the back door without the cereal in tow. Out his faithful pet turtle Spike bounded, yapping feverishly, like an overactive dog would.

“Hey, buddy, ready to play?”

Louder yaps signaled “yes”.

Out across the yard flew various rubber balls (and a twig for good measure). The latter had a little too much ‘oomph’ to it and flew headlong over the fence. Spike somehow managed to vault over after it, snagging the twig in midair—and sailing right into the flatbed of a passing truck. Jake had been looking back at the house at the moment to catch the last cartoon through the sliding door, and didn’t realize what had happened.

“...Spike?” Jake eventually thought to ask, turning back. “Here, boy!”

Spike traveled on in the truck bed, next to a big, unwieldy device, unwittingly en route to Thickley’s homestead. Too confused to leave, stick trembling in maw, the turtle bunkered down for what would become one long ride.

1:30 p.m.

Axl could barely hold his sneeze any longer. There was so much dust in the air as a result of Digeri’s destructive shenanigans that it was impossible to not breathe any of it in. Things only got worse when Thickley finally came crashing to the ground, landing with such a smack that half of downtown vaulted up upon impact.

That only added more dust, and Axel redoubled his efforts to hold back what was building into the Queen of all sneezes.

Meanwhile, Thickley found himself being hefted up by a mountain of tan and white fur that soon terminated at Digeri’s face.

“Could this be the best day of my life?” the dingo asked, flicking Mr. Thickley’s nose. “I’m thinking yes!”

“Well, *technically*, the day isn’t over yet, ya see, so...”

“Hey, rhetorical question. Now, what to do with you, seeing as you’re my lesser? Should I stuff your head down that big old pouch? Swing you around by the tail? Mess with your stupid hat?”

“Nah, mate, not th’ hat! Have a heart, eh?”

Still, Axl held back the sneeze, even as it tickled his throat and burned in his lungs—until it finally died down, leaving him a chance to breathe. Now there was time to try twisting loose from the two buildings he was caught in between, thanks to a certain sizable belly. Even with the urge to sneeze abated, a *single tingle* raced through him, making Axl gulp fearfully.

“D’eh, uh-oh.”

Meanwhile, Bahz had managed to stand back up, freed from Digeri’s bulk; he hobbled back towards the colossal dingo, undaunted, determined to get the precious changing stone back. That this whole ordeal was his fault did factor in, too—but that sin could be wiped away, if he could just reclaim his treasure.

Step by cautious step brought Digeri ever closer (his backside was preferable), until Bahz was right behind and reaching up for a fistful of fur to scale. So long as he stayed distracted, Bahz could pull it off...

Poor Thickley felt less than stellar, though with each nauseating hurl the kangaroo got closer to reaching stellar elevations. Apparently, 320 some-odd feet of marsupial was quite throwable when the one doing the throwing was nearly 900 feet tall. Being that huge (and a bit power-drunk), Digeri couldn’t be blamed for not noticing as Bahz climbed back up towards the massive dingo’s hand.

The only problem was, when that hand was over a hundred feet in magnitude,

how could a tiny bottle cap be any longer visible?

With nothing left to do, Bahz took to feeling around contours and muscles, groping through the thick fuzz, desperately seeking the bottle cap. After all, contact and a little pressure was all that would be needed to activate it.

Like a weasel through a field of tall wheat he raced, trailing a part in the fur.

One sudden twist of Digeri's humongous arm, however, and Bahz found himself flung back up into the air, having to clutch what he could while the world spun one way, then another. Bahz clung tighter, both eyes shut; his mouth swung down for a muffled yell of distress, when something suddenly shot right into his gullet.

There was some momentary gagging as his eyes reopened in shock, and Bahz finally let go.

Sailing out into the air wasn't the Bushrat's primary concern, surprisingly, as twinges of new growth began to surge through his body, filling it with an electric rush of power. The bottle cap must have flown off of the dingo—and flown right into his throat!

All at once, both paws swelled in midair, thighs inflating in kind, growing thick and huge with additive muscle and mass. His tail flowed longer and longer, curling out from the base, which widened as if it meant to consume Bahz's entire backside, then doubled in size.

72 feet blew up into 88 feet, then 95 feet, the growth feeling awfully different with no ground to grow up against. His bulk expanded eagerly against the whipping wind, bulging back against it as he surged to 110 feet...120 feet...130 feet...140 feet...

All this happened as the freefall continued, his once beautifully-managed green fur tousled into a frenzy. Each hand clenched as it grew, the sheer pressure welling up inside of him forcing claws that normally stayed hidden all the way out on each fingertip. His toe claws emerged in similar fashion as he opened his eyes and saw the Earth reaching to reclaim him once more.

"T-togarabha—"

("Get out of the w—")

150 feet of rodent abruptly slammed the turf, shaking buildings, city folk and abandoned vehicles altogether. For titanic beings such as Digeri, Axl and Thickley, it was a barely noticeable tic. To wit, the bushrat was *still* growing behind them, and had so far escaped any notice on their part. On and on Bahz bulged, pumping and pouring bigger atop the metro area as he exploded in size, tripling his meager, 170-foot tall form on the spot. Bahz's head punched forth through an entire skyscraper, snapping it off of its base and letting it flop onto his thickening, fuzzy chest. Being a whole skyscraper, the building now lay heavy over Bahz, pinning all 510 feet of him to the ground—for a moment.

Still he grew bigger, the building's weight only succeeding in forcing his growth downwards instead of up. This made the bushrat grind the city streets and walkways down, down, his massive wriggling disrupting piping and crushing the subway system as his weight pancaked everything.

And then, of all things, Bahz did the unthinkable.

He gasped, then let out a single, accidental hiccup.

The miniscule bottle cap leapt somewhere inside of his body. Then it landed again, constituting new contact—which meant a second growth spurt, before his last one

was even done. The bushrat had never lived life in the banking or corporate world of the big folks, meaning he had no concept of compounding. But he was about to learn.

Everyone was about to learn, as the shaking within Bahz rose to points of sudden, alarming, *quaking* absurdity...

4:40 p.m.

Timothy, Daniel, and the 350-foot form of Constance the Koala Bear all arrived at the city, astride a 700-foot tall pet turtle, nearly half a mile long. Weirder things had happened today, to be fair. Case in point: most of the city had been razed half to the ground, from what looked like a nasty fight.

"Thith ith bad newth, brother of mine," Daniel began.

"Too true. Who knowth how giant they've gotten by now, or where they are?"

Spike boom-barked, already cowering as he looked up.

"Hmm...Thay, do you recall ever theeing a dark green thky before?" Timothy asked, patiently pointing due North.

"Can't thay I have. Why?"

Timothy pointed up. Way, way up.

The tip-top of an alligator's scaly foot could *almost* be seen from the bottom of the cloud line high up above them.

A single reptilian toe wiggled at last, and it was like seeing a hill or small mountain wobble decide it wanted to move a bit. The very apex of said toe vanished in the clouds, making them swirl and spiral around it.

Basically, they could see a foot. Covering the city. More than the city, in fact.

"Goodneth!" the both of them gawked. Daniel followed up.

"Well, we thertainly mithted much on our lengthy return trip."

"Indeed, brother. Too bad the ray gun ith no longer at out dithpothal."

Daniel nodded. Constance snored on, big as she was.

Spike barked, 'inching' backwards.

1:40 p.m.

Bahz shook from the rampaging force of his own spurts as his body ballooned, frantically heaving past 700 feet, then 800 feet, then 900 feet, finally putting him equal to Didgery's mighty size. Ten very ominous, rumbling seconds later, however, he surged to double that size—then double it *again*, all at once. Bahz grew so enormous that a single padded paw shoved out into Digeri's back, knocking him and Thickley over and pushing them along as it soared up bigger and bigger, shoveling the two smaller giants with ease.

"What!?" Digeri yelled, turning around enough to see the rat's emerald belly rise up past growing kneecaps, the skyscraper once posing such a weighty threat dwindling to a toy-like state. "Ooh, not you again!" the Dingo growled, fighting just to get his balance

as Bahz's foot rolled him farther through the devastation.

"Hah! Serves ya right!" Thickley laughed, though that made him all the more nauseous after all those flips he had been subjected to.

Each individual pad along the rat's foot rubbed along Digeri's sides, growing even larger still as the gargantuan bushrat passed 3,600-feet, lying down. Halting such a monumental growth surge was impossible though, as the metal of change remained stuck inside of Bahz, feeding him nonstop power as he hiccupped and swelled again...and again...and again...*and again*.

Overhead, the city rapidly vanished beneath Bahz as he stretched and shivered and billowed noisily past 4,100 feet, 4,600 feet, 5,000 feet, 5,400 feet...

Digeri pulled himself loose and fearlessly scaled his rival's foot, all the way up towards his kneecap. Traversing an ever-growing body proved challenging, however, as Bahz shuddered out another 500 feet, then another after that, putting Digeri back where he had climbed to moments before, over and over again.

"Gah, no fair!! Gimme that bottle cap! Or I'll-keep asking!!"

More dust kept coming Axl's way as he thrashed, caught up in Bahz's fervent overgrowth the same as the others. The gator turned this way and that in an attempt to keep from sneezing any more, as though turning away from the need to sneeze would save him for long. Frankly, with how much it had built up, it would ironically have been smarter for poor Axl to have a regular little sneeze and be done with it than expel the monstrosity welling up inside of him. Ripples traced along his stomach, the growth begging for some kind of release as it growled threateningly.

All Axl could do was sniffle loudly and hold it in. Thickley had finally rolled free of Bahz's warpath, and wandered drunkenly over to the reptile, shaking his head a little.

"Nasty way to get exercise, ya reckon?" he laughed, teetering some.

"Gee, are you alright?" Axl asked, sniffling more.

"Right fine, Axl. Takes more than a shaking up to frazzle Thickley, 'ere," the mega marsupial boasted, pointing a finger at him for indication.

"Duh, but I'm over here," the gator replied.

"Right, right," Thickley chuckled, turning to (hopefully) face Axl properly.

"Well, don' worry, 'cause the moment the Platypus Brothers get 'ere, they'll lemme use their ray gun again, and Ah'll get so big that Ah'll *step* on that Dingo!"

There was just enough of a pause to where the bushrat could move on his own again, freed from the tension of his own growth bursts. Granted, every single motion made how heavy he felt that morning laughable by comparison.

Bahz's 6,120-foot (1.15 miles) tall figure strained against gravity as he stood up tall in the background, blotting out the sky just by existing. To those who were looking, Digeri could be seen grasping around the rodent's immense midsection for any sign of the bottle cap, muttering stuff at random. Big as Digeri was, he might as well have been some annoying kitten, against the tremendous rat's size. Bahz simply plucked Digeri off of his fur and flung him into the horizon like a toy, letting him crash in a puff of smoke someplace else.

"Er...and what about him?" Axl asked, thumbing at the mega-sized bushrat.

“Oh, he seems alright,” Thickley mumbled, regarding Bahz as well. “I like ‘em.”
“D’eh, I mean, how’d he get so big?”

“Oh, that. Well, good question there, Axl. Think Ah’ll go ask ‘em.”

Thickley wandered casually over to Bahz, not fearful that something about seventeen times bigger than him might register as a threat. The kangaroo climbed up the nearest foot and stood as he cleared his throat for a proper dialogue.

“G’day there, mate!”

The underside of Bahz’s muzzle could barely be seen over his cliff-like chest and stomach. It swished back and forth, unable to tell where the noise was coming from. At length Bahz craned his gigantic head down to spy a tiny little thing there on his paw, chattering away in foreign tongues.

“Ah said, g’day! Say, How’d you get so fired big up there, anyhow? Seein’ as to how Ah’m looking to get bigger myself, I can’t help but be curious as to how you got so blamed big! Help a fellah out, eh?”

Bahz stared down, unsure how to understand the little kangaroo. That, and he wasn’t used to having to look *down* at anything before. He was so incredibly massive now, after all, it defied the entire experience of being a bushrat.

“Come on now, mate, don’ go hiding secrets from a pal!”

Still nothing. Well, there were some blinks.

“Alright, then, Ah’m gonna find out myself!”

With that, he bounded up and grabbed at Bahz’s loincloth, climbing steadily up towards the supergiant’s snout in the sky.

2:11 p.m.

“Lousy steal-backing rat,” Digeri moaned, gingerly sitting up inside the crater from his landing. “Could this be the *worst* day of my life?”

His magnified self-pity faltered as something smaller bumped his sides. Digeri deigned to look down, blinking in confusion.

“Huh,” he muttered. “A giant turtle? Waitamminute, that’s Taz’s pet, isn’t it? Spike? Er, his kid brother’s turtle? Ah, whatever. It’s that turtle.”

It was indeed Spike, only way, *way* bigger than ever before. Any day before today, it would have been more of a jawdropper.

On Spike’s shell were the Platypus Brothers, and that Koala Bear that worked at the same hotel that Taz did—only she was bigger, too. The group murmured in awe at the sight of the mega-sized dingo (Digeri just naturally assumed), slack-jawed and bulb-eyed...but they weren’t what Digeri lasered in on, from above.

It was tiny, but it was definitely what the dingo wanted to see—the ray gun!

“Ooh-hoo, mine!”

Digeri grinned as he pinched the far tinier ray gun between two careful fingers and hoisted it up towards his face. “Hey, great, awesome, thanks for the help, bye now.”

He muttered the rest quickly, scooting them all back with a massive mitt.

Though the switch was thrown, Digeri turned the turret back on itself, thusly

enlarging the ray gun to a more fitting size. The miniscule contraption blew up and up, surging with metallic creaks as it filled one hand, then both, blasting up bigger still.

Now able to hold it in both arms, Digeri sat it down between his colossal legs, and rubbed his greedy hands together in preparation.

“Just like I thought!” he boom-chuckled, turning the ray nozzle on himself. “That’s Game Over, for everyone else, haha! Let’s see you suckers *try* to see the end or the beginning of Digeri dingo, now!”

The tangerine beam burst against Digeri, who closed his eyes and began to violently shake, so much as to put the land in a quake around him.

And oh, did he grow bigger.

His furry body filled their skies as he doubled his height again, loudly pumping higher, surging in slow motion to 1,782 feet. His rump and heels cracked the earth, huge clouds gushing out as his fur bristled and his ears perked; the massive dingo snuggled the ray gun against his swelling chest as it fired on, blowing him up bigger again...and again! His shadow gulped more and more of the flatlands in an eerie darkness as the haze of the lower atmosphere faded his muzzle, then his shoulders.

All Spike could do was try to run, managing a slow jog as Digeri’s cascading form overtook everything, blowing small hills and boulders and flattening shrubs as he just kept growing and growing.

“BETTER!”

Digeri’s voice slammed down on the plains, rocking everything as he ponderously stood up, in a sense getting even taller to those below. With that, the mega-giant tore back off towards the city, thundering along the Outback, pocking it with countless deepening footprints, each stadium-sized from heel to toes.

“What jutht happened?” Timothy asked, still shaking from the after shock on Spike’s jogging body.

“Big trouble, methinkth,” Daniel answered. “We had betht make hathte!”

“Right!”

They all made double-time towards the city—which almost made Spike as fast as a snowball rolling down the world’s lamest declination.

2:30 p.m.

Axl had been watching Thickley try and persuade that super-huge bushrat to give him the secret to his super-growth—but so far, it was all a wash. The huge kangaroo motioned this way and that, rubbing his head and shrugging, throwing his arms up, what-have-you. Whatever Thickley had, the rat wasn’t having it.

It wasn’t long, however, before a great shadow spilled over Axel, then over the wreckage of the metropolis as it fell towards Thickley and Bahz.

With each booming step the shade grew darker, taller, more distinguishable. Every giant’s focus shifted back in its wake, accompanied by a few jaws going slack.

“Aw, great,” Thickley snorted. “Jus’ great.”

There stood Digeri, all 6,500 feet (1.23 miles) of him, glaring at his two rivals.

“Alright, round two! Part two! Whatever!” Digeri bellowed, raising the enlarged ray gun up and fussing with it to warm it up again. Naturally, he had outgrown the device by a decent margin, and hadn’t quite accounted for this moment. “All I gotta do is...nhf, g-get this stupid thing back on, and...”

It suddenly hummed to life, and he pointed it at himself with a grin.

“Right! Right, yeah! Here we groooooo—”

Thickley bounced in front of Digeri’s face just then; the dingo’s smile drooped as the beam connected not with him, but with Thickley. All Digeri got out was:

“*Oh, come on—*”

Thickley whooped as his form burst forth, quintupling his 350-foot stature in midair. His growth was so powerful that he didn’t land, so much as he grew *back down* instead, placing 1,750 feet of Thickley on top of a startled Digeri.

The ray gun fired heedlessly into a valley of fluffed kangaroo belly, making it grow more and more and more. Laying down facing Digeri, Thickley’s body ballooned and dragged over him, forcing him further down as the two threatened to become equals. 2,000 feet inflated to 2,200 feet...2,300 feet...2,400 feet...2,500 feet...2,600 feet...2,700 feet...2,800 feet...2,900 feet...3,000 feet...

Digeri shoved at the swelling belly, but it overtook even him as Thickley just kept on growing, too heavy to move off of the ray gun (or his dwindling rival).

The ruins of the downtown metro danced uneasily as the kangaroo bulge-bulge-bulged bigger, billowing in noisesome, warm waves, his paws plowing back down the destroyed streets, the heels starting to rise over what buildings still stood.

3,200 feet...3,300 feet...3,400 feet...3,500 feet...3,600 feet...3,700 feet...3,800 feet...3,900 feet...4,000 feet...4,100 feet...4,200 feet...

Thickley’s tail burst so wide that it looked like a whole other life form, swishing happily as he bulged larger and larger, knowingly lording his growth over the struggling, spluttering dingo beneath him.

“Yeah, howzat, mate?” Thickley laughed, mockingly luxuriating on Digeri.

4,400 feet...4,600 feet...4,800 feet...5,300 feet...

The city quaked as his booming spurts undulated through the turf. Even Bahz shook from it, larger though he momentarily was. Underneath the enlarging mass, Digeri managed to work his paw all the way over a tiny dot, which he fumbled with until the ray gun stopped firing.

At that, he was left with a 6,600-foot (1.25 miles) Mr. Thickley, who fixed his super-enlarged hat as he got back up and dusted the debris off.

“Well, now, everything’s all nice n’ even at last—with *me* at advantage! ‘At’s the best kinda *even*, I figure!” Thickley laughed, hoisting Digeri up and tossing him into and through the local highway system. Even flat to the firmament, Digeri’s muzzle still loomed above the tallest of the buildings by now—for the moment.

Up he went again as Thickley hefted him high overhead.

“Hey, mate,” he shouted over to Bahz, who parked his ears in a mix of curiosity and panic. “‘Ere, pal, you have some fun with ‘em!”

Digeri sailed over the city and right into Bahz, who remained unburdened by any comprehension of what he had been told. Into the rodent’s giant gut he crashed, forcing Bahz to gag and cough up the speck-sized bottle cap.

Back towards Thickley it went in reply, a tiny orange glint impossible for any of them to notice at their colossal sizes.

And yet, as Digeri brushed against Bahz while standing, the friction of fur on fur threw the ray gun's switch once more; it must have, because that same orange beam blasted loose once again in a thin streak of trouble.

Into the yonder it fired, managing to strike the bottle cap as it flew through the air. All at once the cap materialized—or really, *grew* into sight—then grew larger and larger still, flipping heavier and heavier on its way down.

At last it crashed down, already some 700 or 800 feet across. Yet it still continued to grow larger, tripling its size so frighteningly quick that the others stepped back in apprehensive wonder.

Now some 4,000 feet across, it rested, a monolithic bottle cap the likes of which the world had never seen before (I mean, why would it have ever?). Bahz, Thickley, Digeri and Axl all watched for a few seconds, before Digeri leapt at the cap in avaricious fervour, hands already in grabby-mode.

"Ah nah y'don't!"

Thickley grabbed Digeri's feet in time to keep him from touching, pulling him back with a titanic *thud*. Bahz was now fluent enough in *uh-oh* to understand, and immediately dog piled on Digeri (and Thickley) in support.

As the three of them rolled around, rampaging and bitterly arguing (Bahz just kind of babbled and hoped it helped), the remains of the city folk raced to safety as fast as possible. Buildings were just pebbles to the giants now, oncoming airplanes having to swerve far and wide to avoid hitting the sudden rises and falls of their bulk. Those onboard saw glimpses of a singular eye or a great earflap drifting by as the struggle ensued outside. Thankfully, the seatbelt signs had already been on.

The entire region had steadily sunk about 400 feet closer to sea level, and things literally weren't looking up. As their rolling continued the bottle cap glowed bright orange, quaked, and swelled another 2,000 feet in width. The trio plowed over the battered terrain, demolishing florae, faunae, and anything else worth notice underfur as the struggle escalated.

"Mine!" Digeri barked.

"No, mine!" Thickley yelled.

"Bah, forgweish!" Bahz yelled.

"Achoo!!!" sneezed Axl.

Everything stopped in terror at the sound. Not just the super-giants, but the world.

"Achoo! Achoo, Achoo, wa...wahoo!!!"

All eyes fearfully fell on the gargantuan gator, still wedged between the two remaining buildings by the belly, which was quaking worse and worse and worse.

"Achoo! Uh...uh...achoo! Achoo!!!"

The growth assaulted Axl in a terror, his reptilian paunch booming to absurd proportions, until finally blowing his makeshift prison apart. His neck was flung back, eyes wide as the force of the increase swelled him up and over more and more rubble.

The surreal serenade of stretching scales filled the air as 500 feet of gator twitched, strained, and exploded again and again his elbows sheared the cement off walkways and plowed storms of glass shards and drywall as buildings, street ways, and you-name-it were all demolished.

Axl's body's rampant growth escalated frantically as the others watched him shoot up another 100 feet, the base of Axl's neck ballooning as his belly inflated over everything, smothering it under warm reptilian mass. 600 feet grew into 840 feet, then 1,250 feet as he pitched forward, trembled, then *tripled* that!

"Huah-haaahhh--"

His booming toes curled as the surge kept unevenly worsening, his mass bulging further against the dirt and debris below with each spurt. His tail wavered and whipped, bloating monstrously as it sprouted away from the rumbling backside. Birds swerved mid-flight as the wall of green stretched up into their path, shoving them back, and back, and back, on and on.

3,750 feet of emerald bulk teetered as Axl attempted a full stand, his expanding girth rocking and wobbling as momentum forced it this way and that. Though he was still lesser-sized than the other three, they nonetheless stared in morbid fascination; their collective stares tilted up, and up, as Axl doubled his size—then doubled it once again—*then again*, until he had risen into a complete monster of a giant.

That means they saw him as he rumbled up past 6,000 feet...9,000 feet...16,000 feet! The giants could only 'inch' back as they witnessed a fellow creature erupt beyond their grandeur, getting more and more awesome and terrifying as time slowed down.

"WUH-HUAH-AH-CHOOOOOOO--"

Each of them seemed to shrink in comparison as Axl consumed more and more of the city, the teardrop base of his gut swelling beyond the bursting point (even by cartoon standards). 18,000 feet shook and wobbled angrily as Axl's vast toes crushed deeper down; yet his head punched higher towards the cloud banks as he closed his eyes and tightly, furiously *boooooomed* to 24,000 feet...Soon his stomach overtook their eye levels, rising higher and higher up as the base swelled out towards them, until the knees replaced that. At 30,000 feet the doom-trembling stopped, leaving Axl to sag with a slight huff of relief at his fantastic new size of 5.68 miles.

"H-how many times did he sneeze?" Digeri asked, one ear flopping down limp.

"Wasn't counting," replied Thickley.

"Gezzmonshrod!"

A stray airplane tickled the back of Axl's skull as it swerved, though he didn't feel it as a hand the size of a small neighborhood moved up to scratch it. Incalculable cloud banks drifted down over the planes of his vast red scarf, most sprinkling over the knot at the back, behind his titanic neck.

"Gee, guess I had a few allergies going," Axl muttered, sniffing.

The other three giants lingered down at the ultra-massive Gator's ankles a moment longer, before quickly snapping out of their trances. They looked at each other, shrugged in affable unison, then resumed wrestling for the immense bottle cap. After all, it remained the key to whoever would be the first to outgrow Axl, thus presumably

winning whatever it was they were supposed to be playing at. By all logic, only one prerogative made sense: *be the biggest—because.*

3:50 p.m.

...“And so, after these kind souls picked me up, we decided on coming here. Now, since I explained myself as you asked, could you answer my question?” Bull asked, staring intently at a well-dressed Boar. “About a more-recent transaction of yours?”

“Oh, sure, sure, I sold them that stuff a while ago,” Buddy Boar spoke, nodding as he swiveled incessantly in his office chair. Bull sat at the other end in a cheap fold-out chair, his fingers drumming the desk. Next to him were Timothy and Daniel, both of whom were keeping an eye on Spike’s gigantic eye as it watched them from outside the office window.

“Yeth, Bythanium Thapphire dutht is difficult to come by,” Timothy started, leaning forward. “Ith thpethial propertieth combined with Ethenth of Wombat can alter genetich on a thellular thcale. Thath’ why we needed it to finith the ray gun devith.”

Buddy just stared at them.

“...Do what?”

“The used your material as a required compound to build a ray gun that makes things smaller or bigger,” Bull interjected, adding “the same material that has left my partner Axl a giant after exposure. Now, I need proper assistance in the ongoing quest of retrieving Taz—that Shaggy Brute—and right now, that assistant is too big to do any good. Plus, he’s likely demolishing the city in accidental-but-spectacular fashion, I’d wager.”

Buddy just stared on.

“...Shaggy Brute?”

“...Taz. You know.”

“Oh, right, sure, gotcha. I can see how that makes sense. But hey, the deal’s long-done, so what do you want from me now?”

Daniel leapt up in his creaking chair.

“We need the betht winch you have, to unthtick a thtuck lever on the ray gun. If not, we cannot hope to thrink any of our ever-enlarging comradth down to normal.”

The Boar swiveled a little bit more, then shrugged dismissively.

“Feh. Not my problem, unless you’ve got some form of proper reimbursement.”

Bull grinned. “There happens to be a gold tooth in it for you if you do.”

“Really?” Buddy hummed, reflexively rubbing his chin. “Well heck, it’s a deal.”

2:00 p.m.

Taz awoke with a start, then looked around his room. Things had gotten awfully noisy all of a sudden. He trudged groggily over to his window and shut out the sounds of faint screaming and the crashing of buildings and such from the city. He waited, hearing nothing more, then nodded. Back he slid into the covers, and back he fell into sleep.

2:55 p.m.

Axl loomed high over everything, his gargantuan shadow flowing over rubble and dirt and noodle-roadways for miles (kilometers, sorry). Having just grown into the biggest creature on Earth, he couldn't be blamed for taking so long to recognize the sounds of struggle all the way down at his feet.

In actuality, Digeri's back had rolled into the side of his fantastically big foot, eventually cluing Axl to the trio grappling for the massive bottle cap. It being 6,000 feet of polished orange metal didn't faze Axl, who simply leaned over all the other giants, and checked his reflection thoughtfully.

"D'eh, I sure have put on some weight," Axl muttered, twisting his huge belly to and fro in the cap's reflection. "Not that I look all that bad, either, hehe."

The near-narcissism was cut short as Digeri lunged through the confusion below and landed on the cap, blocking Axl's view.

"Whoo-hoo! Mine!" yelled the Dingo, who hugged all of it tightly, as it was just about body-length. "Come to papa!"

Tingles visibly raced along his form as the other two challengers fearfully watched. In seconds the rumbling Digeri grew larger and larger, additive mass packing on as he billowed bigger, now 9,500 feet long, then 11,400 feet, then 15,700 feet!

"Yeah, haha! BIGGER!"

Digeri stood, pulling the monstrous cap up into a bear-hug as Bahz and Thickley leapt heavily up and down for it. Now standing at 18,000 feet in height, Digeri had become a touch difficult to reach, even for giants of their stature. Of course, someone was still about twice as big as even Digeri, and this time he had some words of his own.

"Come on, I was using that," Axl whined, grabbing Digeri up by his growing scruff as he continued to hug the metal of change tight. "Give it back!"

"Puh, no way," Digeri laughed, now 22,000 feet tall. "I'm never letting go of this sweetheart ever again! This time, I'm not...going t-to stop...GROWING!"

23,000 feet *boomed* to 26,000 feet, then 29,000 feet...

Lower and lower Digeri's paws grew, the growth pouring into the dingo until he amazingly bulged bigger than even Axl. The gator's gigantic hands rested on Digeri's shoulders as he grew taller and taller, so that Axl began to get pulled up instead by 34,500 feet of furry bulk, then 37,600 feet, then 45,000 feet (8.5 miles)!

The clouds parted awkwardly as Digeri's district-sized head pushed through, entire swaths of wrecked buildings crumbling and pinching between his expanding toes. The bottom curve of his heel ground the terrain flatter as it kept on surging, the terra quaking more and more as his growth reverberated through the world.

Now more than eight times larger than Thickley or Bahz, Digeri's paws swelled bigger than either the kangaroo or the Bushrat. Axl had to stand tip-toe to match him, before his hands finally let go—and found the edge of the bottle cap in Digeri's grip.

"Wuh-WHOAAAA-HOOHO!" Axl gasped, as a massive shock took hold.

The pair evened out as Axl surged up to 50,000 feet tall, a hair higher than Digeri, who messily blew up to 52,000 feet, before getting outdone again by Axl, who inflated to

54,000 feet, his stomach dragging slowly along the bottle cap with an audible squeak, forcing far more contact in the process. The metal lessened rapidly between them, it now once again becoming grab-sized as they each cleared the 60,000-foot tall mark (over 11.3 miles). Either of them could have laid down and covered nearly a third of the entire city!

“We’re gettin’ outclassed!” Thickley groaned, still hopping after the cap.

“Doi! Gon’ turubash!” Bahz shouted, pointing excitedly over at the growth ray, now buried under a few buildings. It was still blasting idly away, hitting nothing at its tilted angle.

“Hey, yeah! What luck!” Thickley whooped, creeping as cautiously as he could towards the device. It still being nearly 17 times smaller than he meant he had to be extra-careful when collecting it, then pointing the nozzle back down at itself. “Time for a lil’ adjustment, eh?”

On went the beam, irradiating and enlarging the growth gun so that it surged up and up to their scale. Soon it loomed over even them (just a bit, mind); with a calculating flick of the wrist, Thickley edged the nozzle back towards himself, allowing wave after wave of growth rays to soak into him.

Bahz watched on as his kangaroo compatriot’s form pulled in, *held*, then swelled up, the size escalating faster and faster by the second. Thickley’s tail snaked out longer and larger, thickening so much that, with a single playful swish, it had knocked the green bushrat over. Each paw surged nonstop, toes growing taller, cracking into the thin layer of cement below.

“As’ more like it, yeah? Haha!”

His already sizable belly ballooned until it heaved into the altered ray gun, pushing it back as it continued firing, making Thickley bigger and bigger still.

Bahz felt the mountain of fluff shove him aside as it bulged too large, the rat lessening into a pygmy giant in comparison as the marsupial’s haunches inflated through the downtown ruins, finishing the abandoned structures off without a thought.

Nearby cities could soon spy a trio of ever-increasing giants, their figures swallowing more and more of the sky as they shot up over the Outback. Still, bigger and bigger and bigger the kangaroo grew, growing into a whopping 23,800-foot tall behemoth of saffron fur, a vast white stomach and pouch looming over the ruins of the city.

Even the towering beam cannon became a toy yet again as its owner just kept growing ever more, now over 26,500 feet, then 30,000 feet, then 33,400 feet, on and on.

In the (relatively near) background, Axl and Digeri struggled on, caught in a growth deadlock, still big enough to loom over Thickley, though he was quickly catching up. The dingo and alligator jealously clasped the metal, it eerily managing to continue growing at intervals, so as not to never quite vanish from their collective grip.

Such was now the whole Outback’s dilemma as the pair had both broken the 60,000-foot tall mark (11.4 miles), and were only getting bigger quicker, and by greater leaps; in fact, they were steadily going from fighting in the background, to *being* the background.

Undaunted, Thickley kept firing away (he had no other good choice, seeing as to

how his paunch had swollen too big for his hands to reach the device), getting even larger and heavier as he cleared 45,000 feet himself (8.5 miles). Though still smaller, his feet remained naturally larger, and could have already competed with either Digeri or Axl's increasingly immense crushers.

At length Bahz got back to a stand and worked his way along the ever-enlarging colossus Thickley had become, feeling the wall of warmed fur as it pushed out endlessly in his grasp, stretching and expanding so much that all he could do was hold on tight. On the bizarre climb went, until his path finally intersected with the beam, and Bahz felt himself instantly bursting up in size.

So, Bahz was growing.

Thickley was growing, Digeri was growing, and Axl was growing.

All at once, and all nonstop.

Being even closer to the beam, the bushrat had little trouble in catching up to Thickley, who had blown up into a massive, 65,000-foot super-giant. Being the closest to the beam made Bahz's growing body nudge the beam up bit by bit, until the bulk rolled too hard into it and shoved it over, shutting the beam off as it lay dormant. Both he and Thickley looked at the gun, then at one another, then finally back over at the 70,000-foot (13.3 mile) tall monsters, still grappling for the enormous bottle cap.

All players were in the same rough size range; were this a game, the majority of the Outback and the neighboring cities were their stage, with entire mountain ranges only managing to reach their shins, at best. Things had escalated so badly, that the silent consensus between them was immediate, and firm.

Within seconds all eight hands were groping at the bottle cap, which responded by surging out another 10,000 feet in overall size, as if to accommodate them all.

The plains shook, the clouds crept back, and the skies darkened. But it was all in good fun. It was the kind of fun nobody else had asked for, but that didn't matter. Only one thing mattered in the whole world, at this moment.

The Great Tasmanian Growth War had begun.

5:25 p.m.

Taz muttered something or other from underneath his covers, before a great quake shook the house to its core. Directly outside of his window (had he bothered to just lift his head and look) was the very tip of a *single follicle* of hair, scraping delicately against his windowpane, the rest of it alone wider than the majority of the house as it tapered towards its far-off base.

Attached to it was Bahz's paw, cratering the ground all the way beyond the neighborhood, then the highway, near the ruins of the city; it was now dozens of miles long from heel to toe, earthly testament to a bushrat standing 320 miles tall.

Next to him were three other figures, each almost equally vast. Since the view from the ground gave little more than the arching of ever-growing feet that hazed into the

skies, all the real action was now taking place far, far beyond the clouds. Magnificent banks of cotton submissively cuddled about four pairs of mountain-dwarfing toes as the ultra-massive giants moved back and forth, still growing larger and larger, locked for yet another hour in an unending growth war.

Taz, however, just snored on, the house consistently missed by each cataclysmic, world-shaking footfall. All taz's hand did in reply was thump the alarm's snooze button.

3:40 p.m.

Mrs. Devil finally got up from her place on the food court's floor at the newly-destroyed mall and hobbled over to the music store to go grab Molly. The area was dead quiet (aside from the muzak playing from a determined speaker), punctuating the insane carnage that lingered around them.

Hopefully that huge rat had gone far, far away by now. She bought a whole coffee fair and square, that was the least life could do for her, in reply.

A tremble tore through her feet, and Mrs. Devil grudgingly raised her head to the ceiling windows to see nothing but a green sky over everything.

It was the same green she'd noted the giant rat being. Well, not that this meant it was the same size anymore; that much was clear. She had thought what she saw before fairly constituted *gigantic*, but this...was an unwanted clarification.

"He's certainly...grown some," she sighed, turned around, and crawled back into her spot in the food court, remaining under her table.

"Now, where was I?" she asked herself, before passing out once again.

4:03 p.m.

"This's perfect," Bull Gator said, in agreement with himself. "We'll take it!"

By *it*, Bull had been referring to the winch needed to unstick the lever of the ray gun. Timothy and Daniel had made sure to pick the biggest one possible, as they had seen Digeri enlarge the machine first hand, earlier on-; this all presumed that it hadn't gotten any bigger yet, but there was no point in worrying about the unknowable.

"I'll send you the tooth in payment later," Bull grinned, turning away from Buddy Boar as they all loaded it onto Spike's gigantic backside, alongside the enormous Constance—who was still asleep.

"Fine, fine," Buddy answered, throwing Bull a soda bottle. "Take this as well, would ya? I'm marketing a new line of soft drinks, and my company's also been making the containers! Help me out by spreading the word a little, eh?"

"Sure thing!" Bull yelled, as Spike reared up.

He checked the bottle, which bore a goofy image of Buddy on the label, smiling wide and winking. Bull shrugged, then tried some as they all sallied off towards the city. It honestly wasn't bad. It wasn't amazing, but it was free.

4:10 p.m.

The growth race (as it had been dubbed a few pages back) had really taken off. Bahz, Digeri, Axl, and Thickley clung to the ever-growing bottle cap, which doggedly grew with them as they fought.

The problem was, no one was even close to big enough to break up the ruckus anymore, since the quartet had grown relentlessly huge in the last twenty minutes or so, but in the most even way possible, meaning no one could gain enough of an advantage to pull ahead.

Now past the 100,000-foot (roughly 19 mile) mark in height, each advancing or retreating step they took left massive imprints in the Outback. The little city they had started in was now a scattering of ash and broken construct, left sitting as a speck behind them, forgotten and annihilated (until next week's episode).

"Let go!" Digeri yelled, billowing up another 7,000 feet.

"No way! You'll just use it to get bigger an' the rest of us!" Thickley replied.

"I was still using it!" Axl fussed, surging up another 13,000 feet.

"*M...m...mine! Mine!*" Bahz roared, alerting the others to him in shock.

"Well, hey! He spoke something," Thickley muttered, staring on. "Good on ya, mate! Fine pronunciation, there!"

Bahz sheepishly smiled at Thickley as he power-shrugged, his ever-growing hands clenching the cap tight.

In no time at all they had doubled their collective heights, surging up by miles rather than feet; over 230,000 feet (43 miles) tall, and still growing bigger and faster, they stomped to and fro in their struggle, each paw pouring along the dwindling world below. Paws that would take buses several minutes to navigate swelled clear through bashed-out mountains as their heads pushed higher and taller and larger and bigger, rocketing up through the lower atmospheres. The Outback rapidly vanished, replaced by the four billowing gods and their entertainingly petty squabble.

4:55 p.m.

Timothy, Daniel, Bull, and Constance entered what used to be the city lines, astride Spike's huge shell. They moved quietly through the debris of the wrecked metropolis, the sight of Axl's ridiculously vast toe constituting their entire world above as its claw grew endlessly in the periphery, a size-increasing kind of clock that they were racing against (on a turtle, no less). Each checked the destruction with their own mixed reactions, until one by one they faced forward, then adopted the same expression.

"Whoppers," Bull muttered, as Timothy and Daniel nodded.

"Should have figured," Daniel muttered.

Up ahead—or rather, up and up, *way up* ahead of them, loomed the awesome figure of the ray gun, now some 7,000 feet tall. Its base receded into the desolation on the

ground, as its sheer weight must have been fantastic at this point.

“Now what?” Timothy wondered. “How do any of uth reach thuch a tall monththrothity, let alone operate it?”

“It appearth’ we thall have to employ all the thize we have,” Daniel replied, motioning towards Spike and the ever-snoozing Constance. “Now, if we could jutht get Mith Conthtanth awaken...”

“Not to worry, gents,” Bull intruded, “I, in my Taz-hunting prime, have picked up more than just a way or two to take care of slumbering beasts...”

“Should we tell Conthtanth he called her that?” Timothy whispered to Daniel.

“Now, this’ll take some precision and care,” the pygmy gator continued, walking the perimeter of Spike’s mammoth shell, over to the sleeping giantess. “Despite tracking through harsh terrains after bestial foes, I find it imperative that one still maintain one’s dignity, and overall sense of tact and composure. Professionalism at all costs! Now...”

The Brothers Platypus (Platypi?) watched as Bull straightened himself up, cleared his throat, welled up, and aimed his chest full of air at Constance’s colossal ear.

“Miss Constance, dinner time,” the gator calmly and quietly spoke into her ear.

“Odd, I wath exthpecting something a bit more ironic...” Daniel muttered.

“Ironically, brother dear...nope,” Timothy sighed, massaging his temples.

Constance groaned softly, her eyes fluttering awake as Bull slid from her furry cheek to her chest, then leapt off onto the shell as she reared up.

“Mornin’ all,” she yawned, stretching a bit. She looked down. “Goodness! What’re y’all doin’ down there n’all? You’re all so smallish an’ cute!” she giggled, tilting her head to look at them. “What in the world did I miss?”

5:02 p.m.

Even with the giants they had on hand, reaching the lever proved a task. Constance balanced precariously on Spik’s colossal shell, her arms raised up high. On Constance’s palms were the Platypus Brothers, manning the large winch, which had been twisted around in her hands to match the position of the tilted device’s lever, with Bull sitting cozily—waist-high, in fact—in the koala’s fluff, ready to pass along orders.

“*And...pull!*” Bull roared.

The winch mechanically nudged the titanically heavy lever.

Bull yelled again, and the same thing happened, over and over, until the lever actually managed to creep down just a little bit towards them. It wasn’t enough to activate a reversal of the growth ray, but it was a start.

That the four god-like hyper-giants grew more and more colossal in the background didn’t help much—well, actually, it *did* help Bull to yell with more feeling. After all, he easily noticed Axl in the distance, his one toe claw alone filling the horizon as he grew mercilessly over everything below. An ominous stretching noise rose from said toe as suddenly doubled its already tremendous size, swelling and groaning over the paper-thin ruins and the measly Outback that surrounded it.

“Did...did they jutht *double* in thize?” Timothy sputtered, trying not to stare too much at a paw foot big enough to fill a handful of lakes by its lonesome.

“Focus, gents! Just pull!” Bull roared again, making even Constance wince a bit.

5:00 p.m.

The four titans pulled on the monstrously huge bottle cap, it still rather humble-sized compared to them, like four individuals pulling at each side of a small poker table. Thickley grew in time with Digeri, who grew taller and bigger and wider along with Bahz, who shuddered up larger beside Axl, the gator towering at a staggering size of 549,120 feet (104 miles).

His foot rumbled and rolled bigger over the terrain, his soles bulging into the shrinking crust and cracking plates as he tingled and ballooned *awesomely* bigger, surging up another 90,000 feet in size.

Of course, Digeri just responded by getting larger than Axl, his furred chest booming up...and up...and up...until he towered over the other three, laughing smugly as he finally pulled ahead. He lowered his city-sized head to watch the others sink further, and he chanted for more power, feeling more size flow through his stretching bulk.

“Whoo, come on, bigger!” the Dingo ordered, tingling viciously as his feet swallowed miles and miles of desert, then rivers and mountains and valleys as he swelled up even more, and more still, then *more* after that, leaving him a staggering 1,145,760 feet (217 miles) tall. At this new size, he was big enough to start sliding off of Tasmania itself, and growing steadily towards the rest of Australia!

“Aw, no fair!” Thickley groaned, although he was growing just as big as the other three. “How come you get to be bigger, when all’a us’re grabbing the bottle cap? I oughta–GHG!”

With that Thickley rumbled worse than ever before, then exploded to such mammoth-size that his chest screamed bigger into Digeri’s, rolling softly and rubbing deeper into him as he kept increasing without stop. His spurt granted far more size as his kangaroo neck thumped against even Digeri’s head, then the tip of his chest, then the bottom of his chest, on and on.

“There, now, at’s a might better!” Thickley happily bellowed, standing 1,718,640 feet (325 miles tall).

His tail flowed out over the Outback, surging and sprouting longer and thicker and fatter as it snaked over the land. His massive belly expanded tight into Axl’s, which had boomed out bigger, as well.

“Hee, that tickles!” Axl laughed.

But by the time Thickley could look back down, he realized that he and Digeri and Bahz were all staring at Axl’s chest, then the tip of his burgeoning, scaled stomach as he suddenly shivered and screamed up another million feet, then *another* million after! Clouds that once looked down on the world and its problems now struggled to reach beyond the arcing underside of Axl’s toe claws. His toes were in the upper stratosphere, meaning a weather balloon would have struggled to make it past, and his knees were all the way up somewhere in the mesosphere—they could have caught falling meteors!

Entire cities could have been rebuilt not just on his scales, but even in the

canyon-like spaces *between* them. Axl wasn't just big anymore—he was a living state. A big one, at that. A *country*, even, if one was generous enough.

There stood a monolithic, 3,088,800-foot (585 mile) tall monster alligator, with a belly to match. A strata-rearranging sigh tumbled out of Axl as he felt himself increase so dramatically, getting so big, so heavy and huge, his senses overwhelmed by unending power. Were he to lie down, he could've easily bridged the gap between entire cities over Australia itself. The other three stared up in horror (as well as a bit of temporary envy). But, like all great wars, the biggest moments were still only breaks.

Then, of course, it was Bahz's turn. Probably.

A good twenty or so minutes had passed by this time; Bahz had grown along with everyone, but was clearly the smallest now, after the others' massive spurts. Last rarely being the least, the emerald bushrat flashed an impatient grin of sorts, knowing he was about to be left the biggest.

A horrendous *rumble* within the rat's body said he was right.

5:10 p.m.

"Just a little more! Almost!"

Bull yelled up at the Platypus Brothers, who were still tugging away at the lever, it having slowly moved down towards the shrinking side of the switch. At long last there was a loud, metallic *snap* from the machine as the lever sank to the opposing side, now leaving it stuck in reverse.

"We got it!" Timothy whooped, as the ray gun began to glow anew at its tip, facing the ultra-giants, easily targeting them via their endless growth.

The ray blasted out for miles on end, well into the periphery, soaking into the 'nearest' object—Digeri's lower toe. Nothing seemed to happen at first. Then, as their mouths all dropped lower, Digeri grew *bigger*.

Then bigger, still.

And BIGGER, STILL.

In seconds he was even larger than the others around him, it seemed, leaving him the biggest of all by a gross margin. His toe, already consuming the background, simply grew closer to them, rumbling over everything as the individual fur strands grew into detail overhead, beyond the clouds.

"I...don't underhtand..." Daniel muttered, watching the dingo soar higher into the heavens, his laughter much too big to even comprehend down on Earth.

"No, no, it *ith* making him think," Timothy answered. "But their growth *ith* becoming tho *fatht* and powerful that even the beam jutht thlowth them down a bit."

Everyone paused, letting the ray blast on with its nearly impotent effect. Right after that another RUMBLE grew, and they helplessly watched Thickley grow larger than Digeri, their feet colliding bigger and warmer over the crumbling country.

Then Axl grew even larger than the two of them, ballooning loudly as he rubber-stretched higher into space.

After that, they saw the green bushrat('s toes) tremble and burst so much bigger than all the others that he suddenly had to *BOOM* down on a bent knee to keep grabbing

the bottle cap. His billowing green hands covered most of it as it grew yet again to keep in their clutches, Bahz's thumb and fingers swelling so big that they still bullied the other giants' hands back.

To those below, the crashes and quakes said enough.

"And it theemth they are getting bigger fathter, indeed. And the beam can only hit one at a time, allowing the otherth time to continue enlarging..."

Bull snorted. "Well, there has to be something we can do to stop this lunacy! Look at them, they're each bigger than Tasmania, at those sizes! And it's only g-getting wuh-woooooorse!"

By now the entire hemisphere was shuddering, as the god-rat expanded over them all, bigger and heavier, faster and more frantic, huffing uncontrollably as he exploded into something even the old Tasmanian folklore couldn't imagine.

Whatever gods the Bushrats had—Bahz was a god, *to them*.

And he was *godd*ing a whole lot more.

5:50 p.m.

All the group could do was watch the toes of the others consume the land, from sea to sea, the growing foursome now having had nearly a whole hour to grow unchecked, leaving them tremendously vast.

Still, the four heedlessly clutched the bottle cap, it currently measuring at about 1,800 miles in total area, leaving it hovering terrifyingly over all of Australia. The four behemoths had growth-slid off of the whole continent, and were now in a lethal tug-of-war with it as their feet slammed the oceans.

It had taken some work, given how humongous Bahz was, but each of them had finally evened out at roughly 13,728,000 feet (2,600 miles) tall, making them each larger than the continent.

Still they grew, the shrink ray having been alternated at each toe by the band down under, yet every foot had swollen up into space and out into the waters, flooding the borders as their ludicrous weight displaced unthinkable volumes. Then they boomed bigger and bigger still, spreading out as more water gushed in, and so on.

Around that point they all shook their collective heads, shoulders slumping in synced defeat as the idea hit that the world was soon going to be crushed by a gator, a dingo, a kangaroo and a rat graduated into reality.

And after that...well, it was best not to think about it—rather, there was no real point in thinking about it. Earth would be gone by nightfall, with how fast they were enlarging.

The beam fired on uselessly, since there was no real way to shut it off now; and they weren't bonkers enough to throw the switch back to 'grow', at this point.

As they moped, the world submissively lessened under the foursome; Bahz's bulk inflated exponentially, his muscles beginning to press out as the rampant power surges built up within, making his rodent teeth clatter. Digeri was gaining a surprising physique, his chest endlessly pushing and rolling and puffing out bigger and bigger and bigger in

front of him, as if hell-bent on escaping his frame through raw expansion. A wild smile had etched itself over his tan-hued muzzle, his fur bristling in pleasure as he felt himself gorge on ever-increasing strength, his body growth-rubbing against Mr. Thickley's.

Thickley couldn't help but mellow smoothly as the power surged into the sublime, smiling back at the other three as they smiled at him.

Each of them began to fall into an intoxicating lull as they roared another 560 miles taller, then another 890 miles, then another 1,100 miles, the Earth starting to churn and crack beneath their swelling bodies as they consumed more and more of the hemisphere itself.

"Hehe, this's great," Axl hummed over to Thickley, as they both felt their bellies press tighter, swelling and ballooning together with a subdued squeak of friction. Thickley nodded, as did Digeri and Bahz.

"Heh, you said it, amigo," Digeri sighed, his ears flicking idly. "What were we even fighting about, again?"

"Tai furroden burugh," Bahz answered, making the dingo give out a little nod.

"Yeah, what he said. You know, brother, I'm sorry we didn't get this huge sooner. I mean, it's a cartoon, who cares what happens?"

The others nodded, bursting out of control, bodies rumbling with too much size.

"Yeah, ah reckon next Saturday, it'll all blow over. Might as well enjoy."

"Exactly," Digeri laughed. "At any rate, I'm never letting this thing go, ever."

"I hear 'at, mate," Thickley agreed. "Share 'an share alike, right?"

At those words, some primal recess in the abyss of Digeri's being snapped.

"*Sh...sh...share!?*" he groaned, rolling the word in his enormous mouth as if it were a great, bit, burning chunk of wrong. "*Share!? No way! I can't share anything! What am I doing?*"

The tug was brutal and merciless, pulling the 2,000-mile long bottle cap back from the others, who all blinked in return, then melted into the same kind of greedy expressions as before.

A chorus of *mine*, and *no, it's mine* and the immortal *gimme* rang out, echoing like Doomsday over the Outback. By now, most of the world they knew of was shrouded eerily in an unnatural penumbra, all from the shadows of their four biggest residents. In a few more minutes, they'd be too big to do any residing, at all...

6:00 p.m.

Having finally come to once again, Mrs. Devil had gathered enough nerve to storm across the food court of the now shattered mall, making her way with newfound resolve towards the music store. Molly was still inside, listening away to her cassettes as a lone cashier stood by in silence, in the deeper stages of shock.

"Ma'am, store closes at eight." the young giraffe attendant muttered, barely even looking at her as she passed.

“Haha. Okay. Thanks.”

She tapped Molly on the shoulder, and her daughter in turn removed her earphones, looking solemn.

“Mom, seriously. Can’t I just get another hour or two?”

Mrs. Devil twitched.

6:20 p.m.

“Welp, it was a good shot,” Bull chuckled, though no one else seemed in the mood. “Best we can hope for is to throw that machine back into growth mode, step into the beam, and enjoy the ride.”

Timothy answered just before Daniel could.

“It’s a winch, we can’t make it put something back up after pulling it down...”

“I was joking, friend,” Bull sighed. He wasn’t. The thought of him actually being taller than Axl for once had struck his poor brain more than once.

“Well, maybe we aren’t aiming the thing rightly,” Constance mentioned from below, still holding them up. “They’re all growin’ and growin’ without the ray gun, so some other thing must be feedin’ ‘em up so big.”

“A great point, Mith Conthtanth, though ultimately moot.” Daniel replied, looking up towards the tall turret of the ray gun. “None of us can reach the top now, even with all our thize combined, pluth no one can aim it anywhere elth...”

They were lowered down, down, returning to Spike’s colossal head.

Constance slid off of the turtle’s back, thudding heavily onto the turf, and padded off to start collecting skyscrapers.

“What’s she doing, you think, boys?” Bull asked.

Timothy and Daniel quietly watched.

In a short while Constance returned, holding about six or seven buildings up as though they were firewood logs. She began to stack them atop Spike’s shell, making a makeshift set of stairs that she began to scale, teetering more so the higher she climbed. Even with Spike’s huge size she was still much smaller than the vast ray gun; with the stairs added, however, she was getting surprisingly close to reaching the lever.

“We really should’ve thought of that, brother dear,” Timothy muttered to Daniel.

“Should’ve but didn’t, what can you do.”

Bull, still atop Constance’s fluffy koala shoulder, just watched as she got closer and closer, her fingers grazing the bottom tip of the turret, inching it in another direction as the beam blasted on.

“But wait,” Bull wondered, “what direction should we even aim for?”

“Let’s up an’ trust luck, mister Bull,” the giantess chirped back.

The little gator shrugged, then nodded his barely visible consent to her.

“In the face of all this humbling size and insanity...heh, shoot.”

With each nudge, the ray edged closer and closer to the middle of the circle of super-hyper-giants, firing blind. The movement troubled the already-precarious arrangement of buildings, however, and they quickly gave way. Constance tumbled with Bull, landing harmlessly onto Spike’s massive shell. The beam poured on, left entirely in

the unseen hands of fate, striking who-knows-what up in the looking distance.

6:25 p.m.

Something was wrong with the bottle cap.

Amidst all the pulling and avarice-laden dialogue, the four contenders in the Great Growth War were all starting to feel...well...*funny*. A new kind of energy resonated from the metal of change, and was flowing out into them.

What they didn't (and couldn't) know was that the beam from the ray gun so far down below had finally hit the bottle cap, it being in the middle of them all. At once each of them tingled anew, they having all evened out at a staggering, mind-rattling size of 27,984,000 feet (5,300 miles), leaving each of them over half the size of the entire planet. With a final, gushing shudder, Axl, Thickley, Digeri and Bahz swelled up past the entire globe, booming into space as their bulk rolled into each other, billowing past 9,000 miles!

The growth escalated into a last, groaning, glowing blast of pure power, before the planet-sized gods shook even harder, strained bigger, and erupted to 15,000 miles, then 44,000, the moon bouncing off of Axl's ever-bigger muzzle, the poor Earth tucking warm and dark under their swelling soles!

Their bodies screamed larger, bloating beyond 60,000 miles (316,800,000 feet)...

Er...no, wait, make that 223,450,000 feet...171,680,000 feet...99,200,000 feet...49,870,000 feet...

"Hey! W-what's going on?" Digeri asked, looking all over as he and the other three all felt themselves beginning to shrink. The metal of change was shrinking with them as well, as they slipped down to half their heights, then half of that, faster and faster. Thickley just blinked, humming a bit dejectedly to himself.

"Dunno, but it looks like the fun's over, mate."

Axl was still tugging, not really paying much if any attention to the situation.

"Y'think they'll all be a bit sore at us, fer all this?" Thickley pondered.

"Eh, not if we're still at least a bit bigger, in the end," Digeri figured.

Bahz, however, was grinning all over.

8:50 p.m.

Bahz marched on towards the same humble patch of grass that served as his home—his entire world, before today. Still, it seemed so much smaller now as he gazed down at it, literally and figuratively. But especially literally.

Once again at 6 feet in size he sat down and sighed happily, watching the dusk fade into nighttime as the other villagers all came running out of the village to gather around his far larger body. The tiny little elder bushrat hobbled up to him, poking

playfully at his gigantic paw with a cane. Not having the metal of change anywhere to be seen on him distressed the elder, but like he was really going to upset such a huge creature by raising a stink.

“Shukuruu Bahz, foindah arot harabash?”

“So, tell us, Bahz, how did your food-hunting go?”

Bahz smiled, giving them a couple of pears and a bunch of grapes. That was it.

“Er...resguti torrentah moi.”

“Er...I see there isn't much here...”

Bahz grinned wider, showing them a tiny, bushrat-sized ray gun. He carefully set it down beside everyone, aimed the teeny turret over at the fruit and fired a very brief blast into it. The tribe hollered in shock as the pear enlarged, blowing up and up, growing it to nearly Bahz's size.

The other villagers stepped back, then ran away from the growing food. But the moment it halted they all ran back to feast happily. A few of the male bushrat villagers peered up at Bahz, then greedily over at the growth machine. The math was simple and easy to see forming, even from up there.

“Tootament, karack theree, Bahz?”

“Can we see that device sometime, Bahz?”

Bahz casually grabbed the gun and hoisted it up to his chest.

He flicked the gun back on, blasting himself and making his body grow bigger, and bigger, and bigger, rising up to over 25 feet, so that he loomed higher than ever over the terrified villagers. His feet came dangerously close to the village borders as his chest swelled up, up, up, higher and higher, his tail thudding the dusty ground as he smiled.

“Mine,” he said.

7:10 p.m.

After everyone had stopped shrinking past the 7,000-foot tall mark, it was clear that the extremely big foursome were still in charge. Digeri, of all present, had actually been totally correct. They couldn't be shrunk any smaller, seeing as to how the angle of the ray gun was still stuck facing up, and Constance's pile of buildings had collapsed. Once back down to size, relatively speaking, Digeri immediately made for the gun, as if to switch it back and make himself bigger at once.

“Bigness, here I come again!” he laughed, lunging for the lever of the gun.

“I don' think so, fellah!” Thickley roared, holding the Dingo back. “You still owe me fer me satellite! C'mere!”

“Unhand me! I want that ray gun, fair and square!”

As they fought each other, Bahz nodded thankfully at the group, thousands of feet below him. He obligingly helped turn the ray gun on itself, shrinking it down to normal, and then letting the Platypus Brothers take it and blast the giants all the way back down.

“Tughaddat tat,” Bahz happily rumbled, his tail swishing overhead.

The bottle cap dwindled smaller and smaller as Axl held onto it, blinking curiously as he and the others shrank at last back down to normal. At once, Bahz rushed over and bear-hugged both the brothers tight. He whispered something into Timothy and

then Daniel's ears, before pulling back with a pleading smile and clasped hands.

"What's he saying?" Bull yelled, as he walked over.

"Well, we only theek a bit of Buthrat, but..." Daniel began.

"He want the ray gun, after we're done with it."

Bull tilted his head quizzically as he made his way back over to Axl, who waved goofily to him.

"Why would he want it?" Bull asked, looking back over his shoulder.

9:35 p.m.

Night had finally settled in for one of the weirdest days the Outback had ever seen. Timothy, Daniel, Constance, Thickley, Bull, Axl, and even Digeri were all seated together at a local Diner, one that hadn't actually been destroyed by the growth war earlier on. As it turned out, when your toes are so big that there's observable space between them, some things could luck out and remain standing.

"Ah still can't believe you aren't sore about everthin' there, mate," Thickley laughed, slapping Digeri on the back as he sat next to him.

"You kidding?" Digeri laughed back, showing the kangaroo his newly re-stolen orange bottle cap. "My day's been made. Sure, it doesn't seem to make me bigger anymore, after it got blasted, but it's still mine now—and that's what really matters."

"Yeah, reckon you're right...I think...maybe. Hmm."

"Wait a minute," Bull started, leaning past Axl on his seat to look at the cap. He looked at it, then patted down his vest and pulled out the bottle of Buddy Boar's soda. He looked them both over, then gasped. "Aha! That bottle cap's a match with the bottle cap on Buddy's brand of soda."

Timothy gladly fielded that one.

"Well, we did get thome of our shipmentth of Bythanium Thapphire dust through Buddy, tho perhaps he had thome get into the paint he wath painting hith bottle capth with...or thomething like that."

There was a pause as the explanation soaked in.

"Well, good enough for me," Thickley huffed, tired.

"Yeah, I mean, whatever works," Digeri muttered, as a round of drinks slid over the bar towards him and Thickley. Meanwhile, Axl had been grimacing a bit, after tasting his chocolate shake. Bull of course took immediate notice.

"Something bad in the food there, Axl?"

"Er, it's the shake, I think, Bull."

"More of a strawberry type, are we?"

"D'eh, nah. I think I'm allergic to something in th...th..." the gator began, welling up as the others all began to go wide-eyed around him. Before any fair reaction time could pass a great, big, blasting sneeze tore through Axl, immediately *booming* his

form out bigger with an explosive burst of size, ramming his rubbery scales tight against every booth, every chair, every table, every body, pushing the whole cast flat against the diner's creaking, snapping windows. His muzzle filled the kitchen and smothered the cooks, the huge gator's tongue sticking out as he sniffled

"Guh."

Bull did his best to shrug casually beside Timothy, all of them crushed in against the cracking interior walls as Axl's girth pressed tighter.

"Well, I guess we *kind of* overlooked Axl's newfound ability, in all the confusion," Bull muttered, his reptilian snout squeezing tighter along Axl's growing body with a low squeak. The others just muttered at random, until Axl's newly-grown snout dipped its way into the shake containers at the back of the kitchen, spilling it all over his nostrils and forcing him to sneeze over, and over, and *over*...

"*WAHCHU-WU-WUHAAAAACHOOOOOOOOHOOO!*"

The diner bulged out, and out, snapping and popping, the glass shattering out as the whole building erupted, and Axl gator detonated over the grounds, the lot, the streets, the blocks, the city, the hills, *the cities*...

8:40 p.m.

Taz was awoken by the pounding of his mother's balled fist against the door to his room. On it went, until finally Taz got up grudgingly from the bed, crept his way over to the door, and opened it.

"Taz, honey, good job on the yard. You sleep in tonight, as a reward, mister."

She pecked him on the forehead, then patted his cheek and hobbled off to her room, sore from having walked the entire way back home from the ruined city. Taz blinked, then watched Molly dance by the hallway in front of Jake, who was playing with Spike, his re-shrunken pet turtle. Well, in truth, he was *trying* to play with him. The turtle just rolled around, half-dead from sleeping so hard after all his unseen exertion from before.

"Come on, boy, you act like you've been walking across the whole Outback!"

Jake kept prodding idly at Spike.

At length, Taz just shrugged it all off and closed the door to his room, trudging his way back to bed. Right outside of his window, the indentation of a 40-mile long paw print had managed to flatten everything under it, including Taz's lawn, just outside his home. It had been flattened just right, enough to make it look like he'd done a good job—or any job, at all. It'd been a pretty uneventful day, despite all the stupid interruptions that had woken him up time and again. Such was the trouble in Taz's life, though. He himself would probably never know about all that had happened, about the whole *Great Growth War* deal, or those involved being his close friends, or anything of the sort. Meh.

But enough about Taz.