

PLANET STORIES

STRANGE ADVENTURES ON OTHER WORLDS—
THE UNIVERSE OF FUTURE CENTURIES

20c

COLOSSUS OF CHAOS

BY
NELSON
BOND

FICTION HOUSE
MAGAZINES

ABERNATHY • BRACKETT
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PLANET STORIES

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A SMASHING PLANET NOVEL

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From the Void it came, born of lifeless space. It drew life from Terra itself, that it might slay those who peopled the earth.

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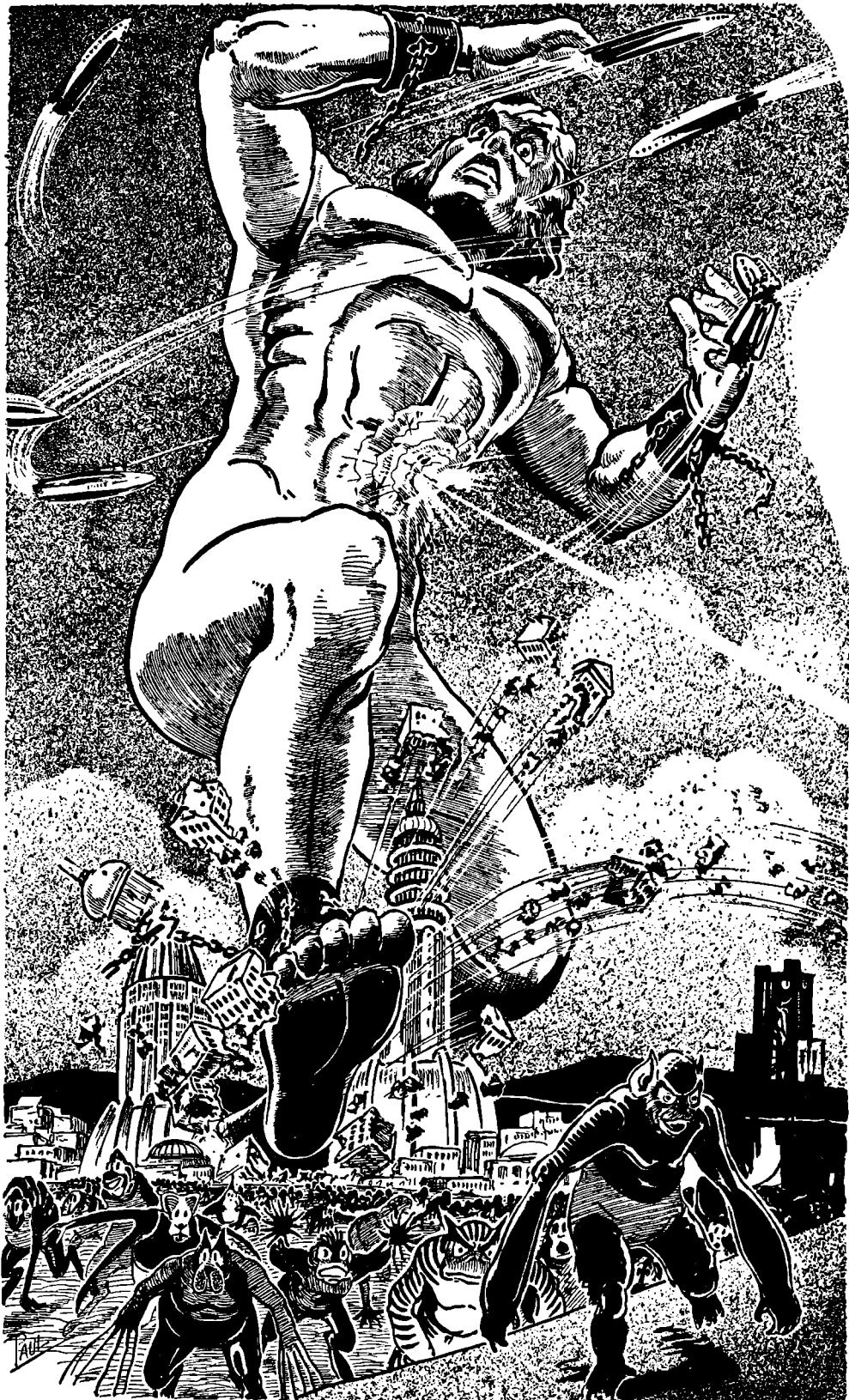
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Anger filled Colossus' face; he flailed with both arms.

Colossus of Chaos

By NELSON S. BOND

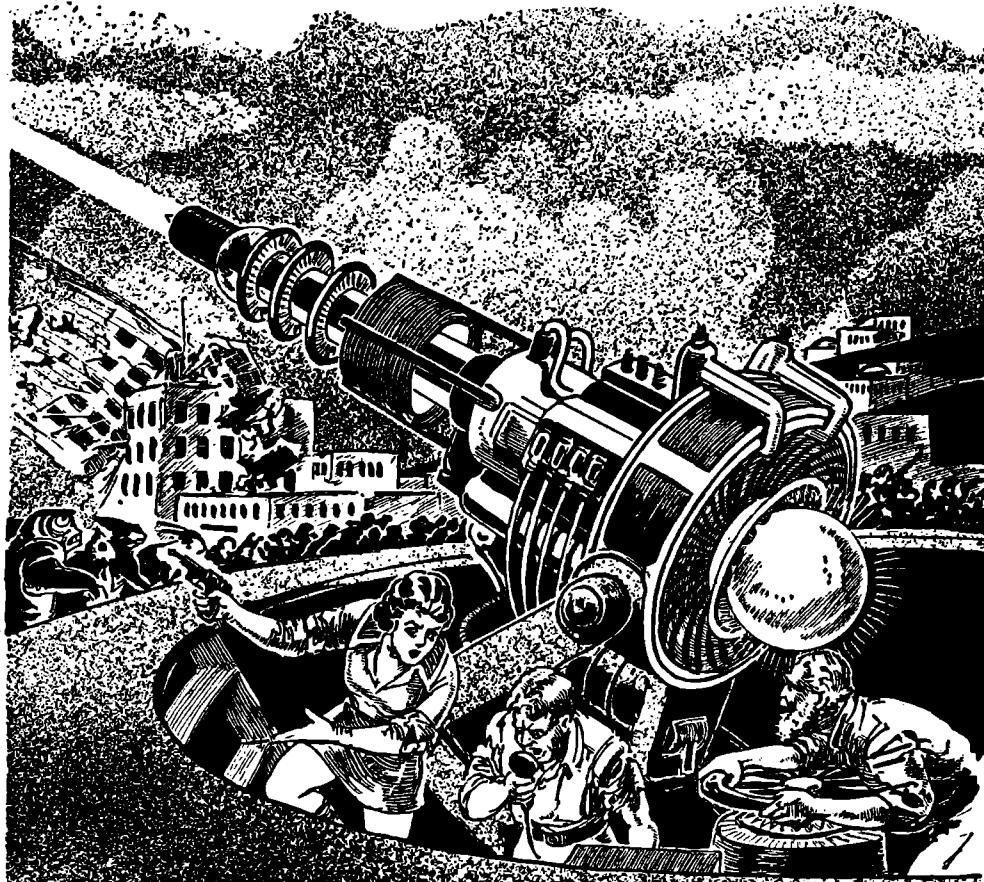
IT was the evil spawn of lifeless space, drifting aimlessly until IT's sinister birthing place should come. And finding that abode for life, IT grew, sucking energy from Terra itself—gathering strength for that time when all should flee before IT's malign wrath.

OUT of the darkness It came. Out of the grim, bleak, frore, incalculable depths of outer space, into the empire of light and warmth . . . and life.

It was like nothing known to Man. It was round, but not quite round; It was hard, but not altogether hard; It was

cold, but not cold with the terrible, utter iciness of things which come from Beyond. It was in motion but It did not move of Its own volition, for It was quiescent, insensate. It let Itself be carried by the vagrant and unpredictable whims of a kinetic universe, confident that in a day

Illustration by Paul



... or a century . . . or a thousand, thousand centuries . . . the fitful fingers of chance would find for It a bourne, a resting-place.

Out of the night It came . . . the endless, impenetrable night which spans the void between star and star. Out of one cosmos into another; out of oblivion into waking horror.

No eye beheld Its coming. None saw Its faint, thin, cool iridescence; no voice lifted to challenge Its arrival on the sixth satellite of the sixth solar planet. It dropped to earth unwatched, rolled a brief, sluggish way, then rested in a deep, soft, sandy pit.

A gray hoar-frost rimed Its surface as the warmth of a friendly orb dispelled the frightful chill of space; a pale mist rose from Its petroid carapace and trembled into the air like a wan and restless ghost.

It had found a home, a lair, a birthing-place. With a slow, ecstatic, burrowing motion It dug Itself still deeper into the nourishing sands. It had arrived. It grew. . . .

I

"A DANGEROUS place," said the heavy man with ominous deliberation. "A most dangerous place!" He raised his glass to his nostrils, passed it back and forth appreciatively, and rolled a single drop of the liqueur upon his tongue. A smile creased his full, red lips. "Excellent, my dear Captain!" he approved. "A most superior brandy. Allow me to congratulate you. Domrémy-Thol '98, I should judge?"

Captain Burke, skipper of the IPS space-cruiser *Gaea*, basked in the sunshine of his passenger's approbation.

He swirled the liquor in his frosted glass, glanced about the table with a self-satisfied complacency that was almost ludicrous. Then he nodded his head slowly, acknowledging the compliment bestowed upon his judgment in selecting the after-dinner liquor.

"Allow me," he corrected, "to congratulate you, sir, on a truly magnificent palate. You have named the exact vine and season. But . . . danger? You spoke of danger?"

The connoisseur glanced at the young

lady across the table and permitted his eyebrows to arch significantly.

"Perhaps it would be better to abandon the subject," he suggested. "After all, I do not wish to cause Miss Graham undue alarm—"

The girl laughed. She did not seem, noted young Dr. Roswell, occupant of another seat at the captain's table, the least bit perturbed by Grossman's shadowy hint of menace. On the contrary, her already vivid features assumed new color at the scent of danger. Her gray-green eyes brightened, a flush highlighted the natural golden beauty of her cheeks; she bent forward interestedly.

"Please, Mister Grossman . . . don't stop because of me. I want to learn everything I can about Titan. It's going to be my home from now on, you know. I'll learn sooner or later."

"Ye-e-es," acknowledged the heavy man grudgingly, "I suppose that is true. Your father is Commandant of the Space Patrol post at New Boston, isn't he? Hasn't he warned you of the dangers you face in coming to live with him?"

Again the girl laughed.

"Hardly! You see, he doesn't know I'm coming. He'd have conniption fits if he knew I were aboard the *Gaea*. He's a lamb, really, but terribly old-fashioned. 'Women belong on Earth,' you know . . . that sort of thing. He thinks I'm safe in a Terra boarding-school right now. If he *dreamed* I were less than an hour off Titan—well, I'm afraid he'd be pale violet with anger."

"And," reproved Grossman sternly, "rightly so. Your father is a wise man. Titan is no place for a girl of gentle breeding. It is a vile and treacherous pest-hole. It should never have been opened to Earth colonists!"

Rockingham Roswell coughed gently. The young savant was taller than any man present, and but for the conservative cut of his clothing might have looked his true weight, but he carried himself in such a way as to seem more fragile than he really was. His lean, close-shaven cheeks were pale, and his tow-colored hair was meticulously plastered to his scalp. He wore thick-lensed, tortoise-shell glasses which he removed and polished nervously as he spoke.

"In . . . er . . . in that case, Mister Grossman, it strikes me as a bit odd that you should . . . er . . . have established business headquarters on the satellite."

Grossman glanced sharply at the slender man, snapped impatiently, "A business man cannot always pick and choose his locations, Doctor Roswell. He must follow the path of empire as it leads. Since there are Earthmen on Titan, someone must serve them. It is an obligation which cannot be refused—"

"Er . . . quite!" acknowledged Roswell confusedly. "Job of work to be done . . . noble sacrifice . . . the white man's burden . . . all that sort of rot . . . what?"

Unaccountably, Grossman flushed. "If you are trying to imply, sir," he fumed, "that I have any ulterior motive in establishing a trading post on Titan—"

"Oh, gracious, no! Nothing of the sort. I wouldn't presume to question your . . . er . . . business acumen, Factor. I'm hardly the type, what?" Roswell smiled a faint, thin, apologetic smile. "I mean I . . . er . . . I really don't know much about this sort of thing . . . if you know what I mean. . . ."

CAPTAIN BURKE stared at the younger man impatiently. A space-man toughened in the crucible of action, he had little patience with such learned young fops as this passenger. His words were polite, as beffited the skipper of a luxury liner, but his tone was brushed with acid.

"If you don't mind, Doctor Roswell, Factor Grossman was about to tell us something about the hazards of Titan. Well, Mister Grossman?"

Grossman took another appreciative sip of his brandy, set down the tulip-glass, and steepled his fingers.

"Well, the perils of Titan fall into several classes. Geographic, physiological and racial. In the first place, it is a satellite approximately the size of Earth's moon . . . large enough to sustain life, but small enough to be influenced by the perturbations not only of its massive primary, which lies a scant seven hundred and sixty thousand miles away, but also

by the attractive forces of the Ring and Saturn's eight *other* satellites.

"Evidence of this is the peculiarity interwoven orbit trajectories of Titan and its nearest sister, Hyperion, which sometimes approach each other perilously close. Were Titan a sphere of pumaceous formation, like Luna, it would long since have burst into a million fragments under the impact of these conflicting forces. Fortunately, it is of a basaltic nature, and consequently reasonably stable.

"More immediately hazardous are what might be called the physiological dangers of Titan. These are multifold. To begin with, there is the so-called 'water' of the orb—"

"I've read about that," nodded Captain Burke gravely. "Not water at all, but—"

"But a deadly corrosive acid," finished the speaker, "yes! Happily, the 'seas' of Titan do not cover such a share of the planet's surface as do those of Earth; if they did, no life—either flora or fauna—would ever have developed upon the little world."

His heavy shoulders shivered.

"Still . . . imagine frothing, tide-swept lakes as large as Lake Erie or Victoria Nyanza splashing endlessly at shores until inch by inch and foot by foot those beaches are eroded, rotted, eaten away by the action of the fluid they contain! These are the 'oceans' of Titan. There are four of them, fed by subterranean sources we have not yet discovered. One day they will have completely devoured the parent planet, and Titan will cease to be."

"But that day, of course," interposed the girl, "is a long way off. Is this the only physiological danger?"

"There is one even *more* dreadful. The T-radiation."

"T-radiation? What is that?"

Grossman smiled mirthlessly.

"Were I able to tell you, I should be a greater physicist than any who have so far visited Titan. Dozens of the wisest have come, probed, pondered, analyzed . . . and left Titan none the wiser for their efforts. Frankly, they do not know! The very name 'T-radiation' is an admission of their failure. It is simply an abbreviation for 'Titan-radiation.' It is an electro-magnetic or radioactive emanation

lethal to humans . . . that is all they know about it."

Young Dr. Roswell wiped his spectacles carefully and interrupted, "But . . . er . . . but surely, Factor, these physicists were able to determine the wave-length of the radiation? Did that not tell them—?"

Grossman said bluntly, almost rudely, "The radiation lies in the Hertzian range, Doctor Roswell. Does that knowledge help you any? Perhaps now *you* can tell us why these rays are deadly?"

ROswell flushed and faltered into silence. The girl glanced curiously at Grossman.

"Hertzian range, Factor?"

"Electrical waves ranging between 1 m. and 1/10 c.m. in length, Miss Graham. Their place is between the so-called 'short waves' of radio transmission and the infra-red or heat waves. Their existence has been known, theoretically, for at least two hundred years. But man has never been able to find a reason, a place, or use for them. Nor have they been found to occur freely in nature elsewhere than on Titan."

"And," asked Captain Burke, "you say these waves are deadly to humans? But how, then, have our colonists managed to win and maintain a foothold—?"

"I should have said," admitted Grossman, "the waves are deadly to *unshielded* humans. Lead sheathing protects the wearer from harm; consequently men in bulgers are quite safe. And one of the first acts of the Solar Space Patrolmen, upon reaching Titan, was to project a series of leaden highways or avenues between the cities of the satellite. Upon these, and *only* upon these, may Earthmen travel unprotected by bulgers. To stray from one of these roadbeds means exposure to the T-radiation. And that, in turn, means death!"

Rockingham Roswell shuddered delicately. "Beastly!" he murmured. "Deuced unpleasant sort of place, what? But, I say . . . how about the natives? How did they manage to survive before our countrymen built those jolly old lead roadways?"

Grossman pursed his lips impatiently at the affected young scholar.

"They, Doctor Roswell," he said scorn-

fully, "are immune to the T-radiation. Certainly you are acquainted with the principles of selective breeding?"

"Selective—oh, yes! Survival of the fittest . . . all that fiddle-di-diddle? You mean the present Titanians *are* the present Titanians simply because they adapted their physiques to the surroundings, eh? Why, rather! That's clear enough. Still, if they can stand the radiation, I don't see why other humans—"

"Other *humans*!" Grossman laughed curtly. "My dear Doctor, it is obvious you have never seen a Titanian. Human, indeed! Why, it is the dissimilarity between the Titanians and ourselves which led me to name racial divergence as among the hazards of life on Titan."

"The creatures who rule Titan look less like humans than like those monsters deranged and alcoholic patients see in their dreams. For some reason—possibly because of this mysterious T-radiation—the denizens of the world have never bred true. Consequently, there is no way of foretelling what the child of any two parents may resemble . . . though one almost certain guess is that it will resemble neither parent."

"Bilateral symmetry is about the only constant human attribute to be found amongst the Titanians. That and a more or less rudimentary intelligence . . . an instinct which is more akin to animal cunning than to intellect."

"Some Titanians walk erect on their hind legs. Some crawl on all fours or squirm on their bellies. Some resemble the humanoid races of our planet, or Mars, or Venus. Others look like obscene jungle beasts, ghouls, fabulous monsters."

"I have seen Titanians whose leprous flesh covered bones have no counterpart in the human skeleton . . . others with no faces at all, as we know the meaning of the word . . . others who grope blindly along on tactile tentacles, 'seeing' with foot-long tongues, 'hearing' through their fingertips."

"Some there are who look like gigantic, crimson ants; others inch their way along the streets like hideous, mangled slugs; while yet again—astonishingly—you may chance upon a Titanian not only similar in appearance to Earthmen, but as clever and quick in thought as any terrestrial."

Grossman paused, nodding significantly. "These," he said, "are the most dangerous of all."

"And—" breathed Lynn Graham—"the nature of this danger, Mister Grossman? Attack, perhaps?"

"Attack!" The trading-post factor laughed brusquely, harshly. "A mild word for it. Extermination! The Titanians hate interlopers on their world—particularly Earthmen—with a smoldering, implacable hatred inconceivable to a civilized mind. Had they their will, they would hunt down every Earthman and slaughter him with the most horrible tortures their warped and twisted minds can devise.

"Your father, Miss Graham—" Grossman bent forward across the table to lend emphasis to his warning—"maintains a post on Titan by sufferance only. Because the natives have not the strength nor the weapons with which to rebel. But if ever the day dawns when they find such strength or weapons—" Grossman drew a deep breath and shook his head—"Then . . . Lord help all like us who dwell on Titan!"

II

*I*T had arrived. It had found a birth-ing-place. It grew. There in the lone, lorn silence, in the thawing warmth of the nourishing sands. It spawned accord-ing to its nature.

It made no sound save that of a thin, dry grating as Its shell-like covering stirred against the sides of the pit. But a change had come upon Its carapace. Its one-time stony surface now was mottled with yolk-y cloud; Its one-time opaque walls were now translucent with a jelly-like shimmering. And from within the egg came the bruit of liquid movement. Slow, groping move-ment of Life that would be free. Amorphous hands scraped and slithered at soft-enning, yielding walls. A single flake chipped and fell away from the gigantic shell. Another followed it. Another . . . and another.

A native of the planet, random-roam-ing, chanced upon the pit. His nostrils quivered with the scent of food. With greedy stealth he moved upon his prey.

And then:

And then the native witnessed the phe-nomenon. Wide-eyed with wonder he be-held the monstrous sight . . . the ultimate emergence of the Thing!

In his dull, brutelike brain there dawned a dreadful fear. A fear . . . and a great hope! On trembling limbs he fell back from the pit, all thoughts of food for-gotten, turned and scampered to the city whence he had come.

Meanwhile, the sprawling, raw and new-fledged Thing lay gasping in the sunlight, sucking strength from the depths of the nourishing soil. It was born. It grew. . . .

III

A STRAINED silence followed the factor's final words. A silence during which Lynn Graham's troubled gaze swept the table, searching reassurance—finding none—in the eyes of her dinner companions. A silence during which Dr. Rockingham Roswell fidgeted uneasily, re-moved his glasses, breathed upon them, polished them, and replaced them for the hundredth time.

It was Captain Burke who finally broke the spell. He cleared his throat and rose.

"Well, I must be getting along to the bridge. We'll be at New Boston space-port in a matter of minutes now. I suggest that you go to your staterooms, see that your luggage is in order, and prepare to disembark."

Dr. Roswell said hesitantly, "Er . . . Captain . . . just a moment. When . . . er . . . how soon does the *Gaea* return to Earth?"

"Return to Earth! But—" Captain Burke turned a blank, uncomprehending stare upon his questioner—"but you have not yet set foot on Titan!"

Dr. Roswell shuffled uncomfortably.

"I . . . er . . . I quite realize that, Captain. But I . . . er . . . have been reconsidering. In view of Mister Grossman's revelations, I . . . er . . . am not altogether certain it would be wise to pursue my investigations. . . ."

The space skipper's broad, flat features contracted into a grimace of disdain. Despite his company's instructions to main-tain at all times a respectful mien toward passengers, he permitted contempt to echo in his voice.

"You don't mean to say you are *afraid*, Doctor Roswell!"

The young man's cheeks flushed. He said, "I . . . er . . . should not put it quite that way, sir. However, I prefer not to expose myself to needless risks. The work I had intended to do on Titan is not sufficiently important to warrant—"

Grossman chuckled. The girl, Lynn Graham, looked at the embarrassed pedant almost pityingly. Captain Burke said, "I am afraid, Doctor Roswell, it will not be possible to return to Earth immediately. The *Gaea* is not returning to Earth."

"Not returning—"

"No. We are going on to Uranus to leave a cargo of food and medical supplies there. We will, however, stop back at Titan in three Solar Constant weeks. If—" The skipper's voice was openly ironic—"if you can endure the rigors of the satellite for that length of time, we will be glad to pick you up on our return trip."

"I . . . er . . . I suppose it would not be possible for me to ride with you to Uranus?"

"I'm sorry," said Burke decidedly. "The Uranus post is a military zone forbidden to civilian tourists. I cannot take you there."

"Then in that case," shrugged Roswell, "I must stay. But you *will* stop for me?"

"I'll stop for you. Meanwhile, you had better make arrangements to stay somewhere where you will be quite safe." Captain Burke's patience was quite exhausted. "Miss Graham can, perhaps, prevail upon her father to allow you to remain at the Space Patrol base."

The young doctor turned to the girl eagerly.

"Can you, Miss Graham? I would be *most* grateful—"

Lynn Graham nodded, her icy politeness more devastating than forthright scorn.

"Yes, Doctor Roswell, I am reasonably sure you can make such arrangements. I will ask Daddy as soon as we land. And now, gentlemen, if you will excuse me—"

She rose and left the dining-hall. Grossman, still chuckling, followed her example. He stopped at the doorway.

"Sorry I upset you, Roswell. But cheer up! Three weeks will pass swiftly. You'll be all right on Titan if you keep your

eye peeled and carry your Haemholtz at all times."

But his reassurance proved to be just the opposite. For the savant's lower jaw dropped; he quavered, "Haemholtz! Gracious . . . you mean I should carry a ray-pistol! Oh, mercy! I couldn't *think* of doing such a thing!"

And with a little bleat of dismay, he turned and ran toward his stateroom. The two men in the dining-hall watched him disappear. Then Grossman laughed aloud, and Captain Burke snorted.

"The younger generation! If that's the kind of men Earth is breeding nowadays, Lord help us all!"

DR. ROCKINGHAM ROSWELL pattered down the long, metal corridors of the *Gaea* to his A-deck suite. He fumbled near-sightedly at the vibro-lock and stumbled into his compartment. But once inside, the door securely bolted behind him, a change came over him. A change which would have astonished those who had a few moments before been amused at his timidity.

He removed his spectacles, casing them and thrusting them into an inside pocket. He then removed his coat. Oddly enough, rid of that closely-tailored garment, his shoulders looked considerably broader, his chest inches deeper. He drew a deep breath . . . much the same sort of breath as a sponge diver draws when he emerges from the hampering depths of the sea to the more accustomed world above . . . and called a name.

"Bud?"

A figure appeared from the plushy wallows of a divan, waved at the young professor companionably.

"Hi, Rocky! Beginnin' to wonder when you was comin' back. We're halfway to the cradle. What's the good word?"

"The good word," grinned his informant, "is that I've paved the way. Miss Graham is going to ask her father to let us stay at the Patrol base."

"Huh?" Mulligan looked baffled. "What's good about *that*? We could've stayed at the Patrol Base anyway. All you had to do was tell Colonel Graham who you were—"

His superior officer groaned in mock despair.

"Sometimes I wonder if that cranium of yours is good for anything but a hair-garden! Don't you see, Bud, that the whole scheme depends on our being *invited* to become guests at the Patrol base? Of course, we could present our credentials, walk directly from the *Gaea* to headquarters. But it would be a cold tip-off to Grossman that we are S.I.D. men.

"As it is, he hasn't got the faintest idea that 'Doctor Rockingham Roswell' and his 'valet' are members of the Solar Investigation Department. He thinks I'm a very badly rattled pedagogue, and you're a mealy-mouthed nonentity. And that is exactly what we want him to believe—until we get the goods on him."

"Then he *is* our man?"

"I'm practically certain of it now. He's as nervous as a cat. Flared up the moment I questioned his reasons for living on Titan. As factor of the New Boston trading-post he is in an ideal situation to stir up trouble amongst the Titanians. And that's precisely what he has been doing. We don't know exactly why—yet! —but it's quite clear that for some reason of his own he wants all Earthmen save himself to leave Titan."

"Gold, maybe?" suggested Bud. "Oil? *Ekalastron*?"

"No-o-o, I don't think so. The mineralogists would have detected the presence of any of those when they surveyed Titan. His reason is something deeper than that—Say! Wait a minute! I wonder if it possibly—?"

"Yeah?"

"No, I'm crazy! It couldn't be that. I happened to think of that T-radiation. But I don't believe even Grossman is enough of a scientist to have discovered what it is or how it can be used—if at all. Well, anyhow—"

"Anyhow, we're in at the Base. And Grossman doesn't suspect us. That's part of the job. So—the next move?"

"We circulate. We move around and ask questions and snoop and pry and investigate."

Mulligan grinned.

"In the good old Rocky Russell tradition, eh?"

"Who?"

"Rocky Russell, I said. Don't tell me you've forgot your real name, chum?"

Rocky Russell reached into an inside pocket, brought forth a pair of thick-lensed spectacles, hooked them over his ears. His voice lifted to a high, gentle, hesitant whine.

"Oh, mercy me!" he simpered. "Forgotten my . . . er . . . real name? But, of course not! I am Doctor Rockingham Roswell. And you are my valet, Ambrose."

Bud groaned.

"Gawd! All the names in creation, and I've got to be called 'Ambrose'!"

SO you're a doctor?" asked Colonel Graham. "That's fine. We can use another doctor on this post. Glad to have you stay with us, Doctor Roswell."

Several hours had passed since the *Gaea*'s landing on Titan. In that time, much had happened. Dr. Roswell and his "man" had made their adieux to a scornful Captain Burke and a highly amused Factor Grossman, removed their baggage from the cruiser, and accompanied Lynn Graham to the S.S.P. base a few miles outside the Titanian city of New Boston.

There they had witnessed the surprise meeting of the Commandant and his daughter. Lynn Graham had rightly guessed her father's reaction upon seeing her. She had erred in only one minor detail. She had expected him to turn "pale violet" with anger. The color he *actually* achieved was somewhere in the apoplectic spectrum between dull scarlet and turkey red.

His outraged bellows, replete with invocations to the deities of a dozen worlds and highly censorable, were audible for a good half mile. But eventually—when Lynn had pointed out that: (1) she could not return to the *Gaea*; (2) she didn't want to return to the *Gaea*, and (3) that she had no intention of returning to the *Gaea* even if she could—he calmed down a trifle. And in his brusque kiss of greeting was an affection hardly in keeping with the violence of his protestations.

It was then that Lynn had introduced Dr. Roswell and his valet, explaining their desire to stay at the base. Confused and bewildered, the commandant had agreed. And now the quartet were gathered in the colonel's private quarters. The colonel, in his own crisp way, was trying to be friendly.

"A doctor," he repeated. "That's good. We need the services of a good doctor around here."

Rocky smiled feebly.

"I . . . er . . . I'm afraid you don't understand, sir. I'm not an M.D., you know. I'm an . . . er . . . D.M."

"D.M.?" repeated Graham wonderingly. "What's that?"

"A Doctor," explained Rocky, "of Mythology. It's an archeological degree, rather than a medical one. I'm what . . . er . . . might be called a research student. I gather folk tales and ancient legends, study them, analyze them, and attempt to determine their underlying meanings." He beamed happily from behind his thick-lensed glasses. "A most fascinating hobby," he said. "Oh, goodness, yes . . . *most* fascinating!"

Colonel Graham stared at him incredulously.

"Legends! Folk tales! But why on earth—?"

Red of face, he spluttered into silence. Lynn tried to bridge the awkward moment.

"What Daddy means, Doctor Roswell, is—why do you hunt down these ancient fables? Does your work have any practical value?"

Rocky's eyebrows arched as if the query caused him a physical pain.

"Practical value! My dear young lady, of course not! It is purely a labor of love. Knowledge for the sake of pure knowledge. Er . . . *scientia gratia scientiarum*, you know . . . that sort of thing. Of course—" He shrugged—"once in a while the research of my learned colleagues does contribute a share to the understanding of man's more mundane pursuits, but such occasions are, I hasten to assure you, quite incidental—"

Colonel Graham had recovered his composure.

"Mythology, eh? Well, what sort of legends interest you, Doctor? Fairy tales? Ghost stories?"

"Well—no," said Rocky pedantically. "The tales of greatest interest are those of fabulous monsters . . . incredible beings endowed with fantastic powers or attributes. Such may be found in the mythologies of any race or clan. Not only on Earth, but on all the planets have we heard such stories. It is our delight to

track down these tales and unearth the germ of underlying truth which created them."

"YOU mean," queried the girl, "that behind each folk tale lies a true cause or event or—or creature?"

"Exactly. For instance—well, let me see—you are familiar with the Earthly legend of the phoenix, aren't you?"

"The bird which was supposed to have had a life-span of a thousand years, at the end of which time it threw itself into a blazing pyre, from the ashes of which it was reborn?"

"That," nodded Dr. Rocky, "is the legend. Quoted as you have told it, it made no sense to Earthmen for thousands of years. Until, in fact, the year 1987 A.D., when the first Martian expedition visited the desert planet. The members of this expedition were amazed to discover a *rara avis* upon Mars impervious to extremes of both heat and cold. A bird with an astonishing life-span in excess of a thousand Earthly years. In short . . . the archetype of the fabled phoenix!"

Colonel Graham looked interested in spite of himself.

"By Gad, that's right! The *tulalaroo* bird. Doesn't mind heat or cold, either one. Nests in ice or red-hot coals! That's rather interesting, Doctor. Any more such examples?"

"Scores! There is the fabled unicorn . . . a one-horned gazelle-like animal certainly not indigenous to Terra, yet it found its place in the 'unnatural natural history' of not one but a dozen races. Whence originated this record of a single horned creature we could not guess . . . until we discovered such a beast on Venus.

"The fabulous 'salamander' turned out to be a common asbestos-like lizard of Mercury. Aqueous Venus solved for us the problems of the mermaid, the sea serpent and the undine. On mighty Jupiter mythologists encountered the fire-breathing saurian which gave rise to the 'dragon' myth—"

"But, Doctor Roswell!" gasped the girl, "what does this mean? That once upon a time, countless centuries ago, beasts of this sort roamed Earth? Or—?"

Rocky shook his head soberly.

"We do not know, Miss Graham. There

are a number of equally valid possibilities. One is that which you have mentioned . . . that Earth was once host to all the types of animal life now to be found on its sister planets. Another is that aeons ago Earthmen—or the intellectual rulers of one of the other planets—knew the secret of spacetravel. The factual records of places visited, strange sights seen, would in the musty passage of time become mythology.

"Still another possibility—"

"Yes?"

"Well, it is . . . er . . . a theory recently advanced by an erudite scholar, but it has elements of fantasy which make it almost incredible. You are . . . er . . . familiar with the theories of Svante Arrhenius?"

Lynn frowned. "I remember the name faintly. Didn't he claim life traveled through the ether?"

"Yes. He put forward the concept that the life-germ is universally diffused, constantly emitted from all habitable worlds in the form of spores which traverse space for years or ages, the majority being ultimately destroyed by the flame of some blazing star, but some few finding a resting-place on bodies which have reached the habitable stage.

"My colleague has carried this theory a step forward, suggesting it is not only the fundamental life-germ which thus travels . . . but also individual and distinctive life-forms! He has suggested that from each and every world in every galaxy, occasionally there set forth into the void the spores or eggs of every highly developed life-form.

"Most of these never reach their destinations. Some do. And when these do, unwilling worlds play host to beasts of nightmare mien."

IV

A BABBLE from the street lifted Humboldt Grossman's eyes from shrewd perusal of his ledgers. He frowned, rose to investigate the tumult, then stood stock-still in his tracks, startled as the door of his private chamber burst open.

A stunted troll with four, gnarled, dan-

gling arms—a native Titanian—served as spokesman for the excited group.

"A marvel, Master!" he jabbered. "Behold, a marvel! It was found by one of us in the sand-pits north of the city, captured and brought to you immediately. See, O Master, its height, its bulk, its strength."

He stood aside and into the room a score of tugging natives hauled a bound and helpless creature.

Bound and helpless creature?

Bound . . . yes. With yards upon yards of tightly laced metal cord which even now stretched taut over bulging sinews. Helpless . . . perhaps. It stood quietly, struggling not, but in its very quiescence Factor Grossman found a swift, disturbing menace. It was still as flood-waters are still, ere, angered, they burst with fury the puny dams constraining them. It was motionless as powerful machines are motionless before, spurred to deed, they ravage all before them.

A creature it was. But such a creature. Humanoid in form . . . male . . . but dull of eye as a brain-fogged idiot. It was seven feet tall and half as broad of shoulder, heavy of thigh and iron-strong of bicep. A Hercules, an Atlas of a man.

Grossman stared at it strangely. Then he turned to his native visitors.

"It is a marvel, yes. A great man. But what has it to do with me?"

The spokesman cringed forward hopefully.

"It has power, O Master. You promised us vengeance and freedom when we found you one with strength to fight our cause."

Grossman's thick face mottled with disdain. "Fool!" he spat. "Do you call this creature power enough to wage a war? One halfwit giant against a well-armed garrison of humans? Take it away. This is not the power I asked for!"

The Titanian inched another step forward. "Wait, O Master!" he advised. "Wait and see what we have seen! For not yet do you understand. He is still growing!"

Grossman stared, his tiny, pig-like eyes bewildered.

"Growing? This giant—growing?"

"Yes, Master. He is as yet a babe!"

This monster is less than two hours old. . . .

V

THE gunner said, "This yere now four-headed animule jest sorta wriggleth its fur, like, an' presto! all of a sudden it ain't no beast a-tall, but a bird! Yessirree, jest as sure as I'm tellin' the gospel truth, it turned smack into a purple bird with six green wings an' a lavender tail—"

He stopped and aimed an accurate stream of Venusian *mekel*-juice at a hapless insect. The insect floundered helplessly. So did Rocky Russell—inwardly—with his desire to laugh out loud. But he restrained himself, nodding his head sagely as he jotted a transcript of the old trooper's narrative in his little black notebook.

At his side, Lynn Graham protested, "Oh, Gunner, but *really*! I mean you must be mistaken! Animals simply don't turn into birds and fly away—"

"This un did!" swore Gunner solemnly. "Hope to drop dead in my—I mean, cross my heart! An' that ain't all the curious sights I seen in my life, neither. If the Puffessor would like to hear another little story—"

"I'm sure," said Rocky primly, "it would be most interesting. But I hate to trouble you—"

"No trouble, Puffessor. No trouble a-tall. 'Course my throat is gettin' a mite dry-like from talkin' so much. I might could use a sip o' water . . . or mebbe a drap o' likker to sorta loosen my tongue—"

Rocky dug deep, and a coin passed between him and his informant. "Please allow me, Gunner. And many thanks. We'll have another little chat soon. I'm afraid I must be running along now, though."

Followed by his two companions, he climbed from the pill-box embrasure in which he had been interviewing the not-too-reliable old Patrolman.

TWO days had passed since "Dr. Roswell" and his aide had taken up residence in the Base. In that time, Rocky had wandered much, talked much, and learned much. Slowly he was beginning to gather that accumulation of facts which, he hoped

and believed, would ultimately bring the weight of the Law to bear on Factor Humboldt Grossman.

Exactly what Grossman's racket was, he still didn't know. But from various and sundry sources he had heard tales of the fat man's greed and cunning, his autocratic domination over a number of the lower-class Titanians. In his own small way, and to those rebels he had gathered about him, Humboldt Grossman was emperor of New Boston. It remained to be proven whether or not he could extend his control to embrace the whole of the satellite.

Emerging from the sunken gunnery pit, the trio found themselves upon one of the metal highways which criss-crossed the little world.

To their left lay the squat, grim rows of structures which comprised Fort Beausejour, the Solar Space Patrol base on Titan. Barracks, administration and ordnance headquarters, messhalls, dumps and depots mingled in gray heterogeneity behind a strong defense-in-depth calculated to withstand months of siege or any known form of military attack.

To their right, several miles distant at the far end of the highway, lay the city of New Boston. It was a strange city, a curious commingling of ancient and modern, savage and cultured, alien and civilized. It boasted two tremendous skyscrapers of ultramodern design constructed by Earth colonists, but about and around these, clustered like mud-daubers' nests, clung rows upon rows, thousands upon countless thousands, of tiny, dingy, one-story hovels . . . the dwellings of the natives.

It was into this city Rocky Russell's investigations now led him. He glanced at his wrist chronometer.

"Bless my soul! Very nearly time for my appointment with Factor Grossman. You are sure we can use a roller, Miss Graham?"

"Positive," answered the girl cheerfully. "I asked Daddy yesterday. You wait here; I'll get it and come back."

She moved away, giving the two S.I.D. men their first moment of privacy in hours. Bud Mulligan sighed and fumbled for a cigarette.

"So we're really gonna get to see Grossman at last? Good! How'd he sound when you audioed him for an interview?"

"Friendly enough," answered Rocky. "He said he was very busy, but he'd be glad to give me a few minutes."

"Did he know what you wanted?"

Rocky grinned a slow, lopsided grin. "Everybody on Titan knows by now," he drawled, "that there's a myth-chasing crackpot roaming loose. I'm Public Joke No. One. Which suits me just fine."

"Yeah," snorted Bud disgustedly, "but when this job's done, I'm gonna backtrack and do a little plain and fancy nose-punchin'! Like that old spacerat we talked to a few minutes ago—did you ever hear such lyin' in your life? A bird with purple wings an'—"

"Cheer up!" chuckled Rocky. "Gunner thought he was giving me the runaround, and for a generally unimaginative old codger he didn't do such a bad job of yarn spinning. He'd be surprised to learn, though, that his wild story is not half so fantastic as some of the honest tales I've heard since I began this masquerade."

Bud nodded grudgingly.

"That's true enough. An', boy, I really got to hand it to you. You talk that Doctor-o'-Mythology patter like you really *was* one. Sometimes you sound like you really believed in it yourself!"

"And the funny part of it is," said Rocky, "I almost *do*! As for talking the patter . . . well, no wonder! I studied comparative mythologies for three solid months under the best experts in the field before I undertook this job, Bud. I know more about hamadryads and demigods and winged horses than old man Bulfinch himself! Well—" He nodded significantly, and his voice lifted to the high-pitched tones of "Dr. Rockingham Roswell"—"here comes Lynn. Off we go!"

Bud shot a swift, appraising glance at him. "Oh-ho! So it's 'Lynn', now, eh?"

Fortunately, Rocky Russell did not have time to concoct an alibi for that slip of the tongue. Because the roller was drawing up beside them, Lynn was motioning them in. And in a few minutes they were on their way to New Boston.

"YOU understand," said Factor Grossman, "I have never *seen* this creature myself, Dr. Roswell. I am merely repeating the description given me by some of my friends."

Rocky nodded, busily jotting in his ubiquitous black notebook the facts just told him by the fat man. "A furry animal," he repeated, "with the netherparts of a horse and the torso of a human. Two curly black horns . . . cloven hoofs . . . is occasionally glimpsed in damp, woodland dells . . . excellent!"

He looked up, smiling. "Very interesting, sir. You have perhaps already noted the similarity between this . . . er . . . thing and the 'Centaur' of Greek mythology? Amazing, isn't it, that we should find the same . . . er . . . legendary monster on two worlds separated by so many millions of miles? Well, we must organize an expedition to search for this creature. Now, have you any other fables to add to my little collection?"

He poised his pencil expectantly, his eyes vaguely eager and excited.

"We-e-ell, let me see—" Grossman stroked a sleek, fleshy jaw—"I heard one the other day about—Yes? What is it, Grushl?"

A Titanian had pressed open the door of the factor's private office. He glanced at the guests nervously.

"If you please, sir—the Thing-that-Grows! It has broken its—"

"*That will do!*" Grossman's voice crackled like the snap of a bulldozer's whip. He rose hastily, bowed apology to his visitors. "If you will excuse me a moment—"

He strode to the door, propelled his underling out of sight and hearing. The three guests stared after him in astonishment.

"Well!" exclaimed Lynn Graham. "Whatever came over him so quickly? Why, he turned positively pale!"

"You're telling me?" grunted Bud. "He looked like he seen his grandmother's ghost . . . or his own. What did that guy say? 'Thing-that-Grows'? What would *that* be? And what would it break?"

"Shhh!" warned Rocky. "He's coming back . . . Ah, there Factor! Everything all right?"

ROSSMAN had been gone but a few seconds, but in that time a change had come over him. His eyes were dark with . . . Rocky could not tell just what. Excitement? Or fear? A thin film of perspiration overspread his cheeks, his forehead, his upper lip. He tried to put re-

assurance into his voice, but the effort didn't quite jell.

"Quite all right, Doctor. A little trouble with . . . with a small horticultural experiment we are conducting. But I'm afraid I must ask you to leave now. I have work to do."

Rocky said, "If I . . . er . . . can be of any help—?"

"No. Thank you very much, but this is work of an . . . er . . . experimental nature. Company business, you know." The Factor hustled them to the door. "We will meet again. Good afternoon."

And almost before they had stammered their confused farewells, he had waved to them and lumbered off.

"Well!" said Lynn. "I must say that's the quickest brush-off I ever got . . . if not the smoothest."

"Horticultural experiment," mused Rocky. "Mmm-hmmm! It's possible, of course, but . . . I wonder. Bud . . . er . . . I mean, Ambrose—"

"Yeah?" said Ambrose.

"I think I'll stay here in New Boston for a few more hours. I'd like to . . . er . . . study the native quarters. Perhaps you would be kind enough to escort Miss Graham back to the Fort?"

"Certainly," nodded Bud. "A pleasure. But—"

Lynn Graham had been staring from one to the other of the two men querulously. Now she declared herself. "Oh, no!" she stated flatly. "You don't get rid of *me* so easily as all that. Doctor Roswell—just what's going on here?"

Rocky fumbled for his glasses.

"Er . . . going on, Miss Graham? I don't understand—"

"Neither do I—which is just why I'm asking. First Grossman goes into a mild panic; now you two are acting like the masked strangers in Act Two. Not to mention the fact—" the girl pointed out shrewdly—"that for a few minutes you quite forgot to talk like a college professor . . . and addressed your alleged 'valet' as 'Bud'—"

Rocky did remove his glasses. But this time he did not breathe on them, wipe them, and replace them as was the habit of "Dr. Roswell." Instead, he shoved them out of sight, and grinned at the girl. When he spoke it was in his natural voice.

"All right, Miss Lynn," he said, "you

win. I pulled a boner. Now I might as well come clean. I am not Doctor Rockingham Roswell at all. My name is Russell . . . Rocky Russell . . . and I'm here on Titan to—"

But not at that moment did he tell Lynn Graham who he was, and his purpose on the satellite. For suddenly he paused in midsentence, his jaw dropping open, and his eyes widening to match.

"Lord!" he gasped. "Look . . . look at that!"

The others, too, had turned to determine the origin of the rumbling sound. Now they saw it. A tremendous motor-roller trundling down the main thoroughfare of New Boston. A heavy roller bearing a ponderous burden . . . a single, gigantic item. The appearance and purpose of this item was unmistakable, but its size . . .

"Manacles!" croaked Bud. "But . . . but who ever heard of manacles that size! *That Thing is twenty feet in circumference!*"

VI

HUMBOLDT GROSSMAN entered the cavern cautiously. It was dark in there, but not altogether dark. The ever-present luminescence of the chamber walls lent an eerie glow by which could be seen the giant figure huddled at the far end. There had been bonds upon the wrists and ankles of this figure, but now the frayed ends of snapped hawsers dangled loosely as the creature pawed fretfully at adamant walls and ceiling.

At sight of the monster, Grossman faltered, stunned. To the Titanian behind him he choked hoarsely, "He—he still grows!"

"Yes, Master. Already he must crouch to avoid being crushed by the cavern's roof. Each hour he grows faster. In a day . . . half a day . . . perhaps less . . . he will die in here if we do not let him out."

Grossman smiled. It was not a pleasant smile.

"Have no fear. Before that time, he will be outside—under my control!" He stepped forward into the cave. The creature's eyes turned questioningly toward this tiny mote of life which dared approach him thus, stretched forth a hand to crush the annoy-

ing insect. But from a curiously-shapen tube in the insect's claw leaped a lancet of flame. A gout of red agony that scorched and blistered his palm. The giant howled and pulled his hand away. Grossman smiled. Good! Who holds an adversary in fear of pain possesses a slave. Now, if only the creature were telepathic—"You!" he thought, his thought directed and intensified by the menavision unit in his helmet, "have you intelligence? Can you understand me?"

The giant's answer came back sluggishly. "I can . . . understand."

"That is well. Then listen to me, and mark well my words. I am Master here. Do you acknowledge that?"

The creature stirred restlessly. "Master? I accept no Master. I am Master of mine own will."

Grossman pressed the grip of his Haemholtz. A flash of livid lightning seared the subterranean chamber. Grossman challenged, "You defy the Master of the fire-that-bites?"

The giant cringed against the farthest wall. "Nay!" he conceded. "You are Master. I am your servant."

"It is well you understand. For there is work to be done. When it is accomplished, then you will be freed. Hear now, huge one, what is expected of you . . ."

VII

"MANACLES!" repeated Rocky Russell, "Manacles twenty feet in circumference! But that—that's impossible! Handcuffs for a normal six-foot man measure about six *inches* in circumference. Twenty foot manacles would be used on someone *two hundred and forty feet tall!*"

"Always assuming of course," Lynn pointed out, "that these gyves are to be used on a *man*. Which isn't very likely. Much more possible that they were constructed for some beast . . . some tremendous animal—"

"True," admitted Rocky. "But even so—imagine the size of that animal! Well, that settles it. Bud, I want you to take Miss Graham back to the fort immediately."

"And you?"

"I'm going to follow that roller."

"But there may be danger—"

"There undoubtedly is danger," replied

Rocky grimly, "directed at the Patrol . . . perhaps the whole of Titan. Those manacles are somehow associated with Grossman's secret. I've got to learn how. You can help best by racing back to Beausejour and warning Colonel Graham to be on guard against any eventuality. Keep your portable vocoder tuned to our private wavelength. If and when I learn anything important I'll send it on to you. O.Q.?"

Bud shrugged helplessly.

"You're the boss. But I'd rather stay here with you and—"

"Get going! Oh—when you reach the Base, take off the lid. Tell Colonel Graham who we are."

"And if it's not too much trouble," interrupted Lynn Graham, "would you mind telling me now?"

Rocky grinned at her, for the last time using Dr. Roswell's high whine, "Oh, mercy, Miss Graham, you mustn't be impatient. Ambrose will tell you as you ride."

"*Ambrose!*" fumed Bud. "Ambrose be damned—!" But he was talking to empty space. Rocky had already disappeared down the avenue after the gyve-laden roller.

Fortunately the roller, groaning under its ponderous burden, was not moving very fast. Rocky, though on foot, was able to keep it within sight without too obviously appearing to be following it. In the character of Dr. Rockingham Roswell, already known and amusing to the Titanians, he dawdled through the city five hundred yards or so in the wake of the burdened vehicle.

Through business streets he followed it, where eyes turned to follow its passage and furtive Titanians whispered to each other behind concealing palms, and—as the squalid little shops thinned out—into the suburban residential districts . . . finally quite out of the city proper.

Out here it was practically impossible to follow the truck without being noticed. Once the city's artificial foliage was left behind, the landscape of Titan's countryside stretched stark and severe so far as the eye could see . . . its drab, sandy monotony broken only by an occasional dune, its dull sameness embellished only by the silvery span of roadbed upon which humans must travel to live on Titan.

By dropping far behind the roller, Rocky was able to keep it in sight for a little while longer. But then his efforts came suddenly

to naught as the driver of the truck—a Titanian—swerved completely off the lead highway and began rolling across the barren desert toward a hummock outlined on the horizon some miles distant.

LACKING a bulger, Rocky was stopped cold. No way to follow, now. But he waited and watched a while longer to assure himself that the swollen rise of ground was the roller's destination, then strolled back into New Boston.

Here he sought the privacy of a 'fresher, and called Bud on the vocoder. Mulligan answered immediately.

"Yeah, Rocky? Everything all right?"

"Everything's all *wrong!* The confounded roller left the highway and plowed across the gray-and-nasty. Having no desire to be cooked into frizzled beef, I gave up the chase."

"That's tough, Chief. What do we do now?"

"I," said Rocky, "stay right here. You load a couple of bulgers in a roller and come charging back here as fast as you can. I *still* want to find out what Grossman's hiding in those hills that needs to be tied up with twenty-foot bands of forged steel."

"O.Q." said Bud. "Sit tight. I'll pick you up in three shakes."

"Make it two!"

"One," chuckled Bud. "I'm practically on my way now."

He was as good as his word. Rocky had only finished one cigarette when a blue S.S.P. roller came tearing up the highway from Fort Beausejour. Bud jumped out, bulger-clad and carrying a second protective suit for his comrade.

"Here you are, pal. Where do we go from here?"

"Out of town on the east highway. I'll show you. A hill rising out of—Hey, wait a minute! Who's driving this crate?"

Bud looked embarrassed.

"Oh—she is!"

"She?"

"Miss Graham. She—"

"—refused," chimed in Lynn Graham, "to be left out of it. Indeed I did. Captain Russell, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, deceiving us the way you did. When the Sergeant, here, told me who you *really* were, and what you were doing here, I almost *died* with excitement! And

to think that you, a Captain in the S.I.D., pretended to be a mythologist! It's the funniest thing—"

"Miss Graham," interrupted Rocky impatiently, "there is nothing at all amusing about the job we are engaged in. It is, moreover, no work in which a girl should be involved. You would oblige me by returning to the Fort on the first transport bus—"

"Oh, no! This is a Patrol roller, and I requisitioned it in my own name. Either I drive it or—" Stubbornly—"or it doesn't roll!"

"Very well, then. You may take us as far as the desert path. But there we leave you. And now, let's get going. We have wasted enough time as it is."

Rocky motioned Bud into the roller. A few seconds later they were speeding noiselessly out on the highway toward the spot where Rocky had seen the truck leave the road.

RUSSELL had been keeping an eye on his chronometer for the past little while, estimating the number of daylight minutes left to him. On this little satellite there was no such thing as dusk or twilight. At ninety million miles from Sol, there was little enough sunlight. Titan's main radiance came not from the Sun, but from its own parent planet which, a huge, shining platter in the sky, gathered up and reflected to its tiny satellite the thin illumination from afar . . . for all the world like a gigantic, reflecting mirror.

Titan revolved on its axis in fifteen hours, twenty-three minutes. Almost the whole of its day period had elapsed now. Shortly . . .

Yes, even as he studied out the problem, night came suddenly and completely to this part of Titan. It descended instantaneously, snuffing out the light as a finger presses the wick of a candle. Only the stars remained, glowing white in the rich, jet vastness of outer space.

The girl reached toward the dashboard instinctively, but Rocky's hand clasped about her wrist.

"No! Don't!"

"But—but I was only going to turn on the lights."

"I know. But you mustn't. We're get-

ting very close to the spot now. Can you see to drive without them?"

"Why, I—I guess so," said Lynn dubiously. She was surprised, herself, to learn that she could. "Why, yes! The road stands out like a dark ribbon against the sands on either side. Isn't that strange?"

"Not so strange at that," grunted Rocky. "I'm beginning to get an idea about the mysterious T-radiation of this planet. I may be completely wrong, of course, but so far my theory fits all the facts I've observed. There's something I would like to know, though. Grossman told us the soil killed humans. I wonder *how* they die?"

"I can answer that. Daddy told me the first day I was here. He was warning me against ever leaving the shielded areas . . . the Fort, the city, the roads. He said that if they wander onto the soil of Titan without protection, humans just shrivel up and crumble into dust like—like mummies!"

"Like mummies, eh!" grunted Rocky. He sounded quite well satisfied. "Mmm-hmm! Then *that* fits, too. Yes, I think I'm beginning to understand a lot of things . . . including the reason Factor Grossman would like to rid this little world of all competitors—"

"Well, don't keep secrets!" snapped Bud. "We'd like to know, too. What's it all about?"

"No time now. There's the hill out yonder. Pull up here, Miss Lynn. Here's where we leave you."

Lynn stopped the roller obediently. But as Bud and Rocky climbed out she asked, "What do you want me to do now? Can't I come with you?"

"No. You turn the roller around and wait here. We have no idea what we're going to buck up against. We may have to retreat—suddenly. If so, I'll fire three blasts on my Haemholtz. Two short, one long. If you see that signal, get ready to start moving. We'll come on the double-quick. But if we're being pursued too closely to make it—"

"Yes?"

"Then don't wait for us!" ordered Rocky.

"Head for the Base and bring the Patrolmen. Understand?"

"All but one thing," complained the girl. "Why not send for a platoon of Patrolmen right now? Why wait until it is too late?"

"Because," explained Rocky patiently, "despite our suspicions, we have as yet no actual *proof* that the factor is involved in anything shady. The Patrol is an organization sworn to maintain the Law, not to violate it, riding roughshod over the rights and privileges of citizens.

"When we are certain—as I fully expect we shall be shortly—that Grossman is implicated in some illegal scheme *then* we can call in the Patrol. But until that time—"

"Until that time," broke in an oily, taunting voice, you will play the part of quixotic fools, eh, my dear Doctor? But has it never occurred to you that by the time you get the proof you want . . . it may be too late to summon help?"

Rocky whirled, as did his two companions. From the side of the road, where they had lain in dark concealment behind a low escarpment, rose a circle of shadowy figures. The largest of these, a heavy man looming even greater in his protective bulger, approached them. In his left hand he held a flash; its rays glinted upon still another instrument in his right hand . . . the tube of a Haemholtz burner held steadily upon them. All recognized the newcomer's voice at once.

"Grossman!"

VIII

IN the gloom, Grossman's features could not be seen behind the quartzite view-pane of his bulger, but by the thick satisfaction in his voice, Rocky could guess the complacent smirk lingering on his over-red lips.

"Yes, my friends," he acknowledged, "Grossman. This is somewhat of a reversal, no? The one you came to apprehend has captured you. My dear Doctor Roswell, did you consider me a perfect fool? Did you not know the driver of my roller would report to me that you had followed him to this spot?"

Rocky said levelly, "Not 'Doctor Roswell,'" Grossman. My name is Russell. Captain Russell of the S.I.D. And it is my duty to advise you that you stand self-convicted of armed assault upon the persons of legal officers engaged in the performance of their duties. Anything you say may later be used against you."

Grossman laughed.

"My soul, Captain, you *are* a cool one! Not the same man at all as the learned doctor who was afraid of firearms! It is too bad you have blundered into this situation. I rather admire your effrontery. We could have been friends, I think."

"The question," said Rocky dryly, "is open to argument."

Lynn Graham bridled, "This is all very high-handed, Mister Grossman, and very mysterious. What is all this talk of 'capturing' someone? What do you intend to do with us?"

Grossman said soothingly, "Have no fear, Miss Graham, you will come to no harm. But I fear that for the present I shall be compelled to take you into—well, shall we call it, 'protective custody'? You see, I have—ah—*certain plans*. It would not do for these plans to be overthrown at the final moment. Therefore, I must request you to be my guests until I have succeeded in gaining my objective—"

"Which is," interrupted Rocky harshly, "complete control of Titan?"

"Exactly, Captain Russell."

"And its wealth."

"And its—" Grossman stopped abruptly, the tone of his voice altering. "Ah! Then you know?"

"Enough," said Russell. "Enough to warn you, Grossman, that it won't work. This isn't the first time, you know, that an individual has tried to discard interplanetary law and seize control of some rich plum. The penal colonies are full of ambitious men like yourself who thought they could defy the Space Control. But it won't work, Grossman. No man, or group of men, wields sufficient power to defeat the forces of justice and order—"

Grossman chuckled again, this time delightedly.

"You know a little, Captain—yes. But not enough! Titan will be mine—and soon!—because I have found an ally powerful enough to win me my demands. You doubt? Very well, you shall see for yourself. Come!"

He spun to his little coterie of followers, snapped commands in the strange, guttural tongue of Titan. The oddly assorted creatures, some humanoid in form, some frighteningly animalistic, formed a rough guard about Rocky and Bud. Grossman hesitated before Lynn.

"You have no protective suit? That is unfortunate. It would, of course, be fatal for you to accompany us across the sands without one. Yet I cannot permit you to go free—Grushl!"

"Yes, Master?"

"Take the girl to my office building in the city and keep her there until I come. She must not escape, nor may she communicate with any other humans. You understand?"

"Yes, Master."

"Very well. Take her away. And now, gentlemen, if you are quite ready—Forward, march!"

The Titanians behind Bud and Rocky prodded. Helpless in the face of vastly superior odds, the two S.I.D. men stumbled forward off the highway and across the rough desert, toward the hill dully gleaming a short distance away.

SEATED at the controls of the tiny roller, Lynn Graham was thinking furiously as she drove. Obviously there was no chance of escaping so long as that flabby-fleshed parody of manhood crouched behind her with a Haemholtz leveled on the small of her back. Yet somehow she must get away . . . get to the Fort and bring the Patrol . . .

Guile, that was her only chance. Take advantage of the slow-thinking Titanian's inferior mentality. She turned and smiled back over her shoulder.

"Have you ever been to the Patrol Base before?" she asked pleasantly.

Grushl answered mechanically, "Yes. Many times—" Then the implication of her words penetrated his brute brain. "Before? But we are not going to the Patrol Base."

"Maybe," retorted Lynn airily, "you're not, but I am. Just as fast as this roller will carry me."

Grushl's heavy brows gathered in perplexity.

"But, no! You are to drive to the office building, there await the Master."

Lynn laughed. "What nonsense! So long as I am the driver of this roller, I will take it where I wish."

"Then," said Grushl thoughtfully, "I will be forced to shoot you. You must not escape."

"But you can't do that," Lynn pointed

out shrewdly. "Factor Grossman said nothing about shooting me. He ordered that I was to be kept safely until he came."

"Yes," pondered the Titanian, "that is true. But I see no other way to—"

"I am afraid you will have to let me drive to Fort Beausejour. So long as I am driving, there is nothing you can do to prevent me taking the roller where I wish."

Grushl, who had been wrestling laboriously with the problem, now suddenly saw the light. His deepset eyes brightened. "Oh, no! There is another way!" he cried triumphantly. "I will drive the roller!"

"B-but—" cried Lynn.

"That is the solution. Stop the roller. You and I will change places. I will drive; you will move back here."

Obediently, Lynn drew the car to a halt, slipped from the driver's cubicle as the Titanian moved from the rear seat to take her place. Grushl smiled at her complacently. "You see?" he boasted. "It is really very simple. Now I can stop the roller wherever I wish. The Master will be obeyed." He reached for the controls laying his Haemholtz on the cushion beside him as he did so. That was what Lynn had been waiting for. In one sudden motion she leaned forward, scooped up the weapon.

"Sorry, Grushl!" she cried. "But it's you or me—"

She slashed the tube down hard upon the Titanian's scalp. Grushl groaned once, heavily—and sagged. His hands, falling away, dragged at the steering control-stick. In an instant the car jerked into convulsive motion, charged toward the edge of the road.

Lynn screamed and tugged at the door beside her. In a moment more she would have been carried out across the deadly sands without a shield of any sort. But just as the roller left the road, the girl threw herself through the door . . . fell sprawling on the edge of the roadbed.

The roller bounced out fifty . . . a hundred . . . two hundred yards into the desert-land . . . then stalled. It lay there, a dark form dimly outlined against the thin iridescence of the soil, a silent vehicle bearing a single, unconscious occupant.

Lynn Graham stared at it dolefully for a few moments. Then, because there was no use crying over spilt milk—or lost means

of transportation—she turned and hurried toward the city as quickly as possible . . . afoot.

AS they approached the hill in the darkness, the two S.I.D. men were aware of much activity going on around them. They heard the cries of foremen, the grunts of laborers, the chuff-chuff of old-fashioned combustion engines, and the high, shrill whining of a single high-powered atomotor.

Rocky glanced at the New Boston factor inquisitively.

"Mining, Grossman—already?"

Grossman chuckled.

"Mining, yes. But not for what you think. Before we mine for wealth, we must mine for power."

"Mine for power?"

"You shall see in a moment what I mean." Grossman motioned one of his native aides to him. "Ho, there! He is secure? The mighty one is shackled as I commanded?"

"Yes, O Master. He is bound wrist and ankle."

"Good! And the excavation?"

"Proceeds on schedule, Master. By dawn it should be finished."

"That is well. For if he still grows—"

"He does, O Master!"

"—dawn will be none too soon. The cavern will no longer hold him."

Bud whispered to his friend and superior, "Say, what goes on here? What are they talking about?"

"If I'm not greatly mistaken," answered Rocky, "the thing for which those manacles were made."

Vérification of his guess came almost immediately. Again their guards prodded them forward, and behind Grossman they entered a passageway dipping into the side of the hill. Through an ancient tunnel, damp and malodorous, they marched, debouching finally into a gigantic cavern . . . a huge bubble of emptiness blown into the solid rock in some forgotten geologic age of change.

And there at last before them stood . . .

No . . . it did not stand. There was no longer room for it to stand upright in an underground cavern whose roof was but three hundred feet high. It crouched. It knelt upon all fours like a great, mute beast; knelt and stared with dumbly ques-

tioning eyes at the tiny motes now entering its lair to look upon it.

It had been secured, as the Titanian had said, with great metal manacles, from the welded joints of which stretched mighty chains so huge that a man might walk upright through a single loop. Its wrists were also gyved, and a length of chain swung between the two.

But it made no effort to fight these bonds. It just crouched there in the strange semi-gloom, watching with pale-gleaming eyes the movements of its self-proclaimed Master.

Subconsciously Rocky Russell had been expecting just some such revelation as this. Even so, it was one case where realization of an idea far surpassed speculation. A gasp of sheer astonishment wrenched itself from his lips; he stared at the giant with shocked incredulity.

"Colossus!" he choked. "Lord—the Colossus himself, come to life! Grossman, where did you find this—?"

Grossman smiled urbanely.

"Not a bad name for him, Captain. Your brief period of masquerade as a mythologist apparently left some impression on you. Colossus—yes! But this time no brainless monster of brass. A living creature, intelligent and obedient to my commands. You, there!" He turned and addressed his slave, again utilizing the mena-visal unit. "You know your orders? You know what must be done?"

THE creature had telepathic power commensurate with its bulk. The mental answer came rolling into the brains of the Earthmen with almost audible force.

"I know my orders. I know what must be done."

"And who is Master? Whose will must be obeyed?"

This, thought Rocky with swift distaste, was sheer braggadocio, and typical of Grossman. It was not necessary to bludgeon a servile answer out of the gigantic captive. He had already proven his point.

But if the question had been intended to elicit a humble deference, it failed in its purpose. For the Colossus did not answer. Instead, it continued to stare down at its accoster mutely, speculatively. Almost, thought Rocky, defiantly.

"Well?" repeated Grossman. "Who is Master here?"

And this time, whipping a tube from his holster, he accompanied the question with a rapier-like lash of fire that swept across the Colossus' hurriedly upraised palm. For at sight of the gun, at the crackle of the heat-beam, the giant had begun to stammer a hasty answer—

"You, O Master! You are Master! You—"

And then, as suddenly as it had begun—it stopped! And over its features spread a strange, strained look. What that expression meant, Rocky could not guess. It seemed to mirror surprise. Vast, pleased surprise. The giant lifted the palm across which Grossman's ray had swept and studied it with sluggish interest. It drew a finger of its other hand across what should be a badly burned piece of flesh . . . and began smiling. It was an evil smile. There was no mirth in it. Just grim, savage exultation. And determination!

Then deliberately it reached forward—and attempted to grasp Grossman!

This time it was the Factor who fell back hurriedly. A cry burst from his lips, he pointed the Haemholtz at the giant and coldly, murderously, turned its ray to the maximum concentration. The air of the confined quarters seethed and crackled with blistering heat as the livid flame blasted its way to its target.

But the Colossus . . . laughed!

It was the first time human ears had ever heard a sound from that inhuman throat. Nor did those who heard it ever want to hear it again. From those great, gaping lips towering yards above them peeled a deep-pitched torrent like the simultaneous rolling of a thousand summer thunders. It was a sound to batter, blast and deafen the eardrums. Were it not for the bulgers in which they were clad, the Earthen would in that moment have been stricken with instantaneous deafness. As it was, Rocky's ears rang fearsomely with the vibrations of the Colossus' laughter, muted, as the sound was, through his helmet diaphragm.

And Grossman's flame . . . meant nothing. The Colossus ignored it as if it were a dancing sunbeam briefly flickering across his flesh. Again he stretched forth an avid, clutching hand . . .

Grossman screamed aloud in panic fear

... and ran! Into the narrow tunnel he darted, where that mighty hand could not follow and close about him. Through the tunnel, out and up from the depths of the underground cavern. Behind him ran the unguarded duo he had called his captives.

At the mouth of the tunnel, attracted by the tumult, were gathered a knot of Titanians. To these Grossman panted swift commands.

"The mouth of the tunnel . . . close and block it immediately. The Colossus has gone mad. And the excavation, stop working on it!"

"But, Master . . . it is almost finished!"

"All the worse! Fill it in again. He must not break free. He will destroy us all!" Grossman turned to Rocky and pawed at him beseechingly. "Russell, call the Base! Tell the Colonel to send men here . . . guns! This creature—"

RUSSELL said sternly, "Rather sudden change of heart, Grossman. A few short minutes ago the Colossus was your ally, the aide through whose efforts you were going to force the Patrol off Titan and gain sole possession for yourself."

"That doesn't matter now. I was ambitious . . . yes. I had dreams of being a king, an emperor. You know why, Russell. You are a clever man. You guessed the reason for the T-radiation. But I did not dream, when the egg was hatched two days ago, that its occupant would continue to grow . . . and grow . . . and GROW!" Grossman's voice rose hysterically. "It is a madness from space, come to kill us all. I thought at first I could use It, bend It to my will. It was afraid of flame. But now It has grown too large, Its flesh too thick, to mind such puny weapons. It is strong, Russell . . . inconceivably strong. It is practically invulnerable—"

Bud said, "But what you're doing ought to hold it in check. If you bury it alive . . . don't feed it . . ."

"Feed it!" Grossman laughed mirthlessly. "It doesn't *need* feeding! Don't you understand . . . it has never been fed a mouthful in its life!"

"Never been—!" Rocky stared at the shaking Factor. "But—but do you realize what that means? It does not eat—yet it continues to grow. From *somewhere* it

must be deriving the nourishment to gorge its cells. From somewhere—"

"Rocky!" Bud's voice interrupted him suddenly. It was a voice cracked with terror and strain. "Rocky—quick! We've got to get out of here! Look! The earth! Quaking—"

His warning was superfluous. All present had experienced the trembling at the same time, a violent, insistent rocking of the soil beneath their feet. Now gaunt Titanians, panic-stricken, were fleeing in all directions. Grossman had stumbled and fallen to his knees. Rocky bent over him, lifted him by main force and howled into his ear,

"A roller, Grossman! You must have a private roller somewhere around here! Where is it?"

"O-over there!" The Factor pointed uncertainly at a gray bulk dim in the gloom.

"Then come on!" snapped Rocky. "We've got to get to New Boston!"

"N-new Boston? The city? But—but why? We want to get to the Patrol Base—"

"New Boston," Rocky grated, "first. That's where you sent Lynn Graham—remember? Gad! I didn't think he could do it! But he is! Start this roller, Grossman, and let's get out of here—quick! Look! The Colossus—"

THE others stared, and a little whimper escaped Grossman's slack lips as he saw the final act of the drama which had begun with the trembling of the earth beneath them.

The thin iridescence of the hillside was seamed and cracked with a myriad of tiny black veins. The whole hummock quivered and trembled as though stricken with some petrologic ague. And then, suddenly, with a crash like that of rolling doom, the whole crown of the hill seemed to erupt explosively before them. Gigantic boulders ripped loose from ancient bedrock and raced wildly down tattered slopes. A myriad tiny fragments burst skyward, sifted down as a hail of deadly debris. There came the rending, tearing, grating sound of stone grinding against stone . . . cacophonous background for the cries of maddened Titanians, the screech of roller motors roaring into action, the moans of injured and dying natives. Then—

Then Colossus burst from the womb of the hampering earth! Rose to stand upright in the prison he had outgrown. He shook himself, and detritus scattered about the terrified watchers. He raised a great palm, and with demoniac deliberation brought it squarely down upon a tiny band of huddled and terrified natives. When he lifted his palm again . . . it dripped redly!

Rocky thrust the fumbling Grossman from the controls. "Move over! Let me at the stick—"

In a flash he had started the roller's motor, sent the speedster tearing headlong and recklessly across the broken desert flooring. Not a moment too soon. For the Colossus, having once shed blood, now swung into a literal orgy of savage destruction. Like a huge, brainless automaton he flailed the hillside about him clean of every moving thing . . . beating with gigantic, steel-hard fists at anything and everything he saw, until that thing lay like a flattened pulp upon the ground.

And all the while horrendous laughter peeled incessantly from his contorted lips. Laughter which carried to New Boston, miles away; even to the Patrol Base beyond the city. Laughter which struck terror into the hearts of listeners who did not know as yet—happily!—whence it came, or the awful fate which lay in store for them.

For Colossus wearied, now, of lingering in his pit. He placed a palm on either side of the chasm he had opened for his escape, and vaulted easily to the surface. The enormous manacles with which his captors had hoped to hold him dangled uselessly. The ground shuddered beneath him. Where his feet met earth they forced depressions. Colossus was drawing sustenance, now, at ever-increasing speed from the soil which fed his odd, unnatural appetite. Already he was taller than New Boston's highest building. More than a quarter mile he towered into the air. And still he grew . . .

IX

LYNN Graham, plodding at long and weary last into the outskirts of the city, wondered again—with the vague, dull incuriosity which was the only emotion of which her exhausted brain was capable—what had been the meaning of those sounds

she had heard from the desert wastes behind her a few hours ago.

It was all very mysterious . . . mysterious and alarming. First had come the wails. Not wails, really, but dreadful, ear-splitting howls like the bellowing of some monstrous beast. Then out of the darkness behind her had come hurtling a small roller. A madly ricochetting vehicle without lights. She had attempted to signal the driver . . . but in vain. As well try to hitch a ride on a runaway comet as on that speeding car.

And now? Now she was entering a city which ought to be asleep, but, instead, was seething with furious activity. Lights shone from the windows of buildings, shacks, stores. Crowds congregated at corners, huddled groups of frightened figures that looked astonishingly like mobs of refugees.

It was as though a mass-panic had seized the entire city. Earthmen gathered their families fearfully about them; Titanians scurried, slithered, hobbled in every direction in helter-skelter confusion. Vainly Lynn accosted passers-by in search of an explanation. Her queries were met with terror-numbed stares, with mumbles, with incomprehensible mouthings.

"We heard . . . Danger approaching . . . Someone said . . . Must leave the city . . . They told us . . . Giant beast . . . Death . . ."

Despairing of ever learning the truth from such informants, Lynn fought her way to a public audio booth. After a longer-than-usual wait, her call was put through. Over the selenoplate she stared into the worried eyes of her father.

A prayer of relief and gratitude escaped the Colonel as he recognized his caller.

"Lynn! Thank the Lord you're safe! I've been worried sick about you. And so has that young doctor—"

"Rocky? You mean he and Bud escaped? They're with you at the base?"

"Roswell—I mean *Russell*—is. Mulligan has gone out with the Fleet on scout patrol."

"F-fleet?" stammered Lynn. "Scout patrol? Daddy—what is this all about? I seem to be the only person on this world who doesn't know what's wrong—"

A VOICE at the other end of the wire said politely, "May I, sir?"—and Colonel Graham's face faded back to be replaced by the grave, sharp-lined fea-

tures of the young S.I.D. captain. "Lynn—" he began, and even in that tense moment Lynn Graham found time to wonder that he had dropped all pretense of formality—"Lynn, we are all in the gravest peril. Colossus has broken loose!"

"Co-colossus?"

"The *Thing* for which those manacles were forged. It turned out to be a giant humanoid. Bud and I saw it. It was more than a thousand feet tall when it escaped Grossman. Now it has more than doubled that height!"

Lynn gasped.

"But—but where is it?"

"After it broke from its underground cell it headed west. For almost seven hours it has been roaming the planet wildly and at will. It completely destroyed the mining-town of Hawesbury and the villages of Placer and Dry Ditch."

"But aren't we doing anything to stop it? It must be destroyed—"

"Three flights are out looking for it. Two haven't been able to contact it at all . . . the third is unreported. We fear that flight . . . found it!" Russell's voice was more sober than ever. "Lynn . . . our weapons seem to be useless against it. Its skin is incredibly tough, hard, resistant. Heat does not bother it, and our heaviest HE shells are like pebbles upon a hippo's hide."

"But there must be *some* way—"

"There has *got* to be some way," nodded Russell, "for if we don't find it . . . and soon . . . Titan will be a dead world, peopled by a single, monstrous entity. Now—" He abandoned explanations for a more immediate problem—"you stand tight. I'm coming to New Boston to get you."

"Oh, that's not necessary. I'll hire a transport."

"There's no such thing. The road between here and the city is and has been thronged with refugees for hours. I don't believe there's a commercial roller left in the city. Because, you see—"

"Yes?" pressed Lynn as he hesitated.

"Never mind. I'll be right there for you."

"You were going to tell me something, Rocky. What?"

"Well," said Rocky reluctantly, "I guess you'd better know. According to the seismograph, Colossus has almost completed

his circumambulation of Titan . . . and is on his way back toward New Boston. You must be very, very careful. And now, goodbye! See you later!"

The circuit faded, and he was gone. Lynn stood for a moment thinking swiftly. Then she decided. Better to *do* something than to just sit waiting . . . waiting . . . waiting . . . in a city gone mad with fear. She would start toward the Base *now*, meet Rocky on the way.

Having made her decision, she turned quickly and took her place in the jostling throng pressing southward . . .

ROCKY, moving north on the New Boston safeway, as he wormed his roller through the ever-thickening mass of panicky Titanians and terrified Earth colonists rushing to the safety of the Base was once again—for perhaps the hundredth time—trying to grasp that elusive half-thought which had lurked in the back of his brain ever since Colossus had broken free.

Something Grossman had said—Grossman who now cowered in a Patrol cell, far from the haughty, autocratic figure he had pretended to be—had brushed a spark in Rocky's mind. But now that spark had dulled, and Rocky could not recapture it. It had something to do with Colossus . . . it suggested some means of combating . . .

"*Damnation!*"

The hordes of refugees had been parting like a flesh sea before him ever since he left the Fort gates. But now the numbers were becoming so great that he could not move the roller through them except at a crawl. He realized this, and gave up the unequal struggle. He called an Earthman to him.

"Here, you—can you drive a roller?"

"Yes, indeed, sir!"

"Then take this back to Colonel Graham at the Fort. Tell him Captain Russell is going ahead on foot."

The colonist stared at him strikingly. "You—do you mean you're going back toward the city, sir? But you can't do that! It—it's suicide. They say a huge monster, ten miles tall, is coming to smash the city to pieces—"

Rocky said tightly, "Never mind that now. You give my message to the Commandant—*understand?*" And he climbed

from the car and forced his way against the tide, northward on foot.

It was as he was pressing along that he thought of Bud Mulligan, who had gone out with "B" flight in an effort to find and destroy—or at least delay—Colossus. Thinking of Bud reminded him that they wore on their persons the means of constant communication. The chances were greatly against Bud's being on the beam, but it was worth a try. He took the miniature vocoder from his breast pocket and activated it on the secret S.I.D. wavelength. Vastly to his surprise, he got an immediate reply.

"O.Q., chief! Where in Tophet have you been? I've been buzzing you for the past hour and a half!"

Rocky signaled back, "Where are you, Bud?"

"Look north," ordered Bud, "and east . . . about thirty thousand elevation. If you see five black dots in the sky, they ain't asterisks—they're us. Flight B, keeping an eye on the Mountain that Walks Like a Man."

"Then he—he's in sight?"

"How can you miss him? He's bigger than the landscape. Can't you see him yet?"

"No."

"Well, I'm afraid you will. He's heading your way now. Keep an eye on the horizon and—"

A sudden roar rose from the throngs swarming the safeway. It was a roar of fear, but deeper even than the note of fear was that of awe. Rocky, looking up from his vocoder swiftly, beheld two things simultaneously. First—the dawn of a new day. Saturn-rise, breaking swiftly, suddenly, over the horizon, brooming all shadows in its path immediately. And the second phenomenon—

COLOSSUS! Colossus rising over the horizon . . . ahead, then mighty neck, broad shoulders, naked torso . . . rising from the other side of the world like a vast, bestial nightmare. A tremendous Colossus whose head was so far above the veiled cloudlets of Titan that from time to time he was forced to bob and weave in order to avoid collision with the "rogues," those tiny bits of cosmic debris escaped from Saturn's Ring which besprin-

kle space in the neighborhood of the girdled planet.

"Rocky!" Bud was chattering on the vocoder. "Rocky, what's the matter. CX, Rocky Russell. CX, Rocky Russell . . . Are you all right, Rocky?"

Rocky answered slowly, "I'm all right, Bud. But I just saw him. We all just saw him. He—he's tremendous!"

"You're telling me? See them manacles? He's grown so big they've split in half . . . right up the back! They look like the only reason they're hanging on is because they're imbedded in his flesh! And his height . . . Whew! The navigator here just shot an estimate! Over six thousand feet, Rocky! Colossus is more than a mile high!"

Rocky said, "Keep on the beam, Bud, and don't mind if I don't answer you immediately. I'm fighting my way north on the safeway, hunting for Lynn. She's in New Boston—"

"New Boston!" Bud's voice was horror-stricken. "My Lord, no! She mustn't be, Rocky! That's where he's heading for right now. He can see it . . . he's got a glint in his eye . . . a blood-lust . . . Oh, great gods of space . . . Rocky!"

The voice died in a tiny wail.

Russell needed no explanation of his agonized words. For he, too, saw the climax of that frightful action. Colossus had climbed completely over the horizon, now. There was no doubt he had spotted the city. He seemed fascinated by its twin towers. Like a destructive child experimenting with some new toy he leaned over, gripped the spire of the nearest between a massive thumb and forefinger . . . and snapped it off!

From the shard of stone and metal wherein a few desperate fugitives had taken refuge dropped tiny motes, tumbling hundreds of feet to certain, dreadful doom! Rocky could not hear their screams . . . but he could imagine them. One of those black fragments *might* have been . . . *could* have been . . .

He shook his head doggedly. No! He must not think of such things! Lynn still lived. *Must* live!

Then another sound burst so close to him that for a moment his tense nerves shrieked in agony. A mighty hissing roar . . . the explosive blast of a rotor-gun going into action. Glancing to his right he found

himself beside the very gun-embrasure wherein yesterday—("Lord, only yesterday? Not a hundred thousand centuries ago?")—a jovial gunner had told "Dr. Rockingham Roswell" fabulously genial tales of monstrous beasts. Could either of them have guessed that today . . .

"Gunner!" he cried.

The old warrior glanced up, identified him amongst the hordes of refugees. "Oh, you, Puffessor! Come on! I'm short-handed here. Crew didn't make it afore the attack. If you're still lookin' for fab'lus monsters, here's y'r chance to git some fust-hand experience—"

Rocky needed no second invitation. A terrible rage was upon him, now. Futile to attempt to any longer buck the mob to New Boston still more than three miles away. If Lynn had been in the city, neither he nor any man could help her now. The only thing he could do was . . . avenge her . . .

He dropped into the pit, and swung instantly into action. "What do you need here? Oh—short a prime-loader, eh? All right, Gunner—" He spun toward the charge-rheo, jazzed its fill to max, slammed home the breech of the rotor, snapped, "O.Q. Charge set!"

"Range," said Gunner mechanically, "Fire!" The beam blasted away. Then, and only then, did the old fighter seem to realize what had happened. His leathery old face crinkled, and he stared at Rocky in bewilderment. "Hey, wait a minute! What's goin' on here? Puffessor, where did you ever learn to prime-load a Mallory rotor?"

"The same place," grunted Rocky, "you saw a purple bird with six green wings and a lavender tail! Stop loafing! Let's give that beast another bellyful. Charge set!"

"Range," said Gunner automatically, "Fire!" A slow grin overspread his face. "Comets! Looks like I pulled the wrong guy's leg, hey?"

BUT not long did Rocky work with the gun-crew. Came another buzz from Milligan, aloft. And this time the S.I.D. sergeant's news was worse than ever before.

"It's no good, Rocky. Neither the groundfire nor our aerial blasts are hav-

ing any effect on him. Heat-beams don't even make his muscles twitch, and as for physical ordnance—the shells don't even penetrate his hide."

Rocky cried, "But there has to be some way to stop him, Bud! He's practically on top of New Boston now. After that, he'll turn on the Patrol Base—"

"And crush us all out," conceded Bud dolefully, "like a bad kid stamping out an ant-heap. That's all we are to him. Just so many ants. No, there's only one way left. The Flight Leader has decided we've got to use ourselves as human shells, Rocky. Bullets won't harm him, but if we can smash these ships into some vulnerable spot . . . his eyes . . . perhaps we can kill him before we . . . we . . ."

"Wait!" cried Rocky. "Ants! That's it! Not ants—but *Antaeus*! Bud, listen carefully! Those craft are equipped with repulsor beams?"

"Why—why, yes, but—"

"Then contact your Flight Leader immediately. Tell him these are orders. As an S.I.D. agent it is your privilege to take over any command in case of urgency. I want the three ships of your flight to turn on their repulsor beams to maximum strength—and bear down on the Colossus!"

"B—but, Rocky—"

"Do as I say!"

"Y—yeah, sure. But if they don't lift him?"

"Don't be an ass! Repulsors are used to move asteroids from trade-lanes, aren't they? Colossus is huge, but no bigger than thousands of asteroids! They'll lift him off the face of this world!"

"And—and then?"

"Then we shall see," said Rocky grimly, "if I have saved us, or just given us a few minutes' grace. If I'm wrong, he'll fight his way free as soon as the repulsors wear down. But if I'm right—"

"Well?"

"I've got to be right! And now—get going!"

"Y—yessir!" gulped Bud obediently, and disconnected to contact the Flight Commander of the spacevessels.

Thus it was that a few moments later, as Rocky and Gunner lay in their pit watching hopefully, as the unceasing throngs continued to block the safeway, casting fearful looks back over their shoul-

ders as they fled from one doomed place to another, that the five ships gathered together momentarily . . . then separated . . . then converged on the Colossus in a narrow V—their prows invisibly pouring repulsor radiation at the gigantic creature.

The reaction of Colossus was the only thing which assured Rocky his plan was being carried out. For the repulsor radiation was colorless. But as the ships neared Colossus, he bent, momentarily, at the middle as if he had suffered a surprise thrust in the belly or groin. Then an expression of anger crossed his features.

The ships were coming in beneath the protection of a cloud-bank, but Colossus spotted them. He flailed a whiplike arm at them as a pettish child might sweep at bothersome flies . . . but to no avail. The speedy craft swirled away, but kept their prows pointed at his midriff.

Again Colossus struck at them, and

buildings . . . and when it withdrew a moment later, a yawning hole gaped where had been city streets . . . a hole partly filled with the crumbled masonry of the once-proud skyscrapers . . .

But Colossus staggered back one step . . . and another . . . and still another. Then one foot slipped into the air—and did not descend! After it went the other foot. And Colossus was off the ground! Off the ground and being pressed farther and farther out into space with every passing moment!

A great cheer . . . a cheer which had in it half a sob . . . rose from the safeway beside the gunnery-pit. Rocky Russell, glancing up at the hordes who had turned to behold this last-moment salvation, felt a moment of pain strike at his heart.

Saved! A world . . . and all these . . . saved. But the one most important person in this or any world . . .

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smashed one. Then a new idea struck him. Reaching above his head, by sheer force he tugged from a satellitic course about Titan a rogue rock of tremendous size. A rock which must have been every bit of fifteen hundred feet in diameter, a shard of matter hewn into a perfect sphere by long ages in the Rings of Saturn.

This he clutched and aimed at the space-craft. Let it be hurled upon them, Rocky knew, and in an instant every spark of life would be dashed from existence as the metal walls of the ships were beaten flat.

BUT the sphere was not hurled! It was the Colossus who gave way . . . not the ships! The cumulative pressure of the repulsor beams caused him to yield, bend, stagger! He tried to regain his balance with a lurching stride forward . . . and thus it was that the twin towers, pride of New Boston, were destroyed. Colossus' left foot descended crushingly upon the

And then he saw her! She had been fighting beside him in this very pit . . . weary, disheveled, eyes haggard . . . but still, to him, beautiful! And it could not have been mere coincidence that she saw him at the same moment. Their eyes met . . . and no longer was there need for words. Both knew what the other was thinking . . . both accepted the decisions of their hearts gladly. Without a word she turned and fled into the circle of his arms.

While up above, Bud Mulligan was signaling desperately, "Rocky! CX, Rocky Russell. Dammittahell, where are you? What do we do now? Our beams can't hold this mountain up here forever? What do you want us to—*Great guns of grief!*"

Colossus . . . dwindled! Like a tinfoil effigy held over a flame, his tremendous bulk began to slough away. It did not fall off in chunks or clots. There was no destruction of his flesh, not horrid streams of blood flowing from open wounds. Colossus simply . . . disappeared!

A mile-high roaring monster, pinned on invisible repulsor beams . . . then a half-mile creature screaming in panic . . . then a massive Thing a thousand . . . five hundred . . . fifty . . . five . . . two feet tall. Then a small, gray, shapeless wisp hanging like a shredded tatter in space . . . a sudden, silent puff of flame . . . then nothing . . .

So found its final resting place the Thing which came from afar. The Thing which, in accordance with the theories of a scientist It had never heard of, had journeyed through black space to spawn on a hospitable world.

So ended another of Nature's blind attempts to convey a life form from one galaxy to another. So ended—Colossus!

X

ATTERWARDS, Bud Mulligan said solemnly, "if you didn't see it very plain from where you was, I ain't going to explain what it looked like. It was . . . well, ugly. That's all. What I want to know is . . . how did you know it would dry up and crumble away if we could lift it off the ground, Rocky?"

Russell grinned. He said, "I suppose you'd be highly chagrined to learn it was really you who gave me the idea?"

"Me?"

"Yes. When you mentioned 'ants'. The word reminded me of a dim thought I had been trying all day to recapture, without success. It reminded me of—Antaeus."

"Aunty who?"

"Antaeus. You'll find his story in the folk-tales of our mother planet, Earth. Hercules, while engaged on his famous 'Labors' met this giant in mortal combat. Antaeus was a son of Mother Earth, and from her he derived his tremendous strength. Each time Hercules felled him, he grew larger. At last the hero discovered Antaeus' secret, and overcame him by lifting him completely above his head. Antaeus then dwindled . . . as did our own Colossus . . ."

"Comets!" gaped Bud. "That's exactly what happened? But why?"

"Because," explained his friend, "Colossus devoured not *food*, as we do—but *energy!* Raw, radiant energy. Titan not

only fed him . . . it gave him a *banquet!* The storage-battery which is this planet—"

"Eh?" interrupted Colonel Graham, startled. "What's that, Captain? Storage-battery?"

"Yes, Colonel. That is the secret of Titan, the secret Grossman learned and hoped to capitalize on after he had frightened or forced all other Earthmen . . . including the Space Patrol . . . off this globe.

"Titan is not simply a world . . . it is a gigantic storage-battery! It's 'acid seas' and 'metallic mountains' are a parallel of the simple voltaic cell. The mysterious 'T-radiation' is nothing more nor less than constantly reversing polarity on a gigantic scale. Humans are destroyed by it for the same reason they die in an electric chair. Titanians can endure it because they are endowed with the physical characteristic of being 'poor conductors.'

"Colossus *fed* on this steady stream of current, and in him electrical energy transmuted into matter. How, we do not know . . . nor will we ever, now . . . unless some day another of Colossus' race is cast by the tides of time upon the shores of one of our solar planets . . ."

"Which," whispered Bud, "God forbid! Well, it just goes to show you, everything happens for the best, doesn't it? I mean, if you hadn't masqueraded as a Doctor of Mythology so we could trap Grossman and shove him into clink, like he now is—"

"I might not have guessed," acknowledged Rocky, "the reason for Colossus' bulk. Yes, that's right. But speaking of myths—"

He turned to the girl.

"Oh, it's not *you* I want to ask, but your father. I would like to know, Colonel Graham . . . have I permission to track down one final 'myth' as 'Dr. Roswell' . . . and make her become 'Mrs.' Russell?"

Colonel Graham smiled. "Well, Captain—" he began.

But Bud interrupted him, groaning.

"Migawd, what a terrible pun! You had to stretch that one a mile, Rocky!"

It was then that Lynn Graham proved herself a suitable future wife in all respects. For she smiled gently, and:

"Well, why not, Bud?" she demanded. "According to the old adage . . . 'A myth is as good as a mile' . . ."