



A
STORY
BY **BILL
COTTER**

THE

TAMDOOR

ILLUSTRATED BY
**RON
REGÉ JR.**



Maryellen John lay along the backseat of her parents' chuggy, decrepit 2000 Nissan Altima, stiff with boredom, trying to unlock the rear driver's-side door

with her toe. If she succeeded, she just might open it and let herself be sucked out onto the highway and get crushed by a cement truck or something. That would serve her mother right for taking back her iPad just as Maryellen was getting the hang of Drop it in the Hole, a habit-forming game based on the Hole, a geological novelty in Texas to which she and her parents were presently traveling.

Maryellen wondered what it would be like to fall in the Hole. Maryellen wondered what the Hole was, which was the same thing everyone else on the planet was wondering. How deep was it? What was at the bottom? Would more Holes open up elsewhere in the world? What if a Hole opened in the sea? Would all the water in the world drain away, leaving trillions of gasping fishes flopping around in vast, open valleys of yuck? And what if her parents fell in—would Maryellen feel sad? Yes, but less sad for her mother.

Maryellen still didn't understand what had happened between her parents; all she knew was that everything had been fine and then nothing was. The house became a clenched mouth of straining fury. She thought it might have something to do with money and other people. In any case, Maryellen was on her father's side. Maryellen always voted for the underdog, and her father seemed to be trailing quite a bit in whatever this rageous contest was that her parents were engaged in.

After a good half-hour's effort, Maryellen gave up trying to unlock the door. She began to kick it instead.

Ingrid John, her mother, who had reclaimed the iPad in order

to work that day's *New York Times* sudoku puzzle, Difficult, looked over her shoulder just long enough to say, "Stop that, please."

"No!" shouted Maryellen, kicking more rapidly, the soles of her Mary Janes producing a *depdepdepdep* that made Ingrid's sinuses ache. How Ingrid envied her little girl. How Ingrid would like to recline her seat, scream, and kick out the windshield. That's how she felt about the stupid concession stand. According to *bighole.com*, 150 vendors, mostly selling food, had already gathered there, surrounding the almost perfectly round 310-yard-wide geological void like kittens at a food dish. And now the John family were to be number 151. The last space. There would be no more.

They'd be there in a few hours. It would take them a day or so to set up their food truck, which David, Ingrid's husband, had named Hole Holes. David had mortgaged their house, bought a second-hand roach coach, decorated it from top to bottom with Hindu deities, outfitted it with a vast deep-fat fryer, a big Hobart mixer, and a genuine clay tandoor purchased at the liquidation sale of a floundered Indian restaurant; and dragged everything, including his family and a camper, off to live at the edge of a plumbless hole that had spontaneously opened up in the middle of the million-acre Kirkless Ranch in West Texas, swallowing a cashiered pumpjack, a section of barbed-wire fencing, and a cowboy named Ernesto.

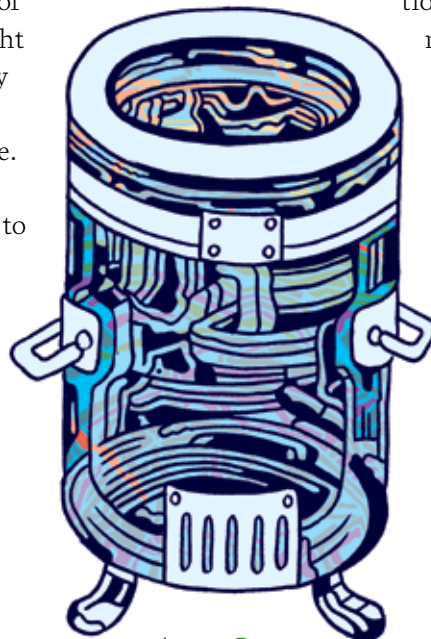
Solution Incorrect, said the *New York Times* sudoku puzzle, Difficult.

"Damn it," said Ingrid.

"Dollar!" shouted Maryellen.

"Wrong again?" said David, gripping the steering wheel and squinting at the straight, endless West Texas highway.

Ingrid loosed a puffy, staccato sigh that signaled she had indeed lost. Losing at sudoku made her feel minimal and stupid. Ingrid wondered if Megan played sudoku. Megan, a chef David had once



worked for, years before his marriage to Ingrid, had been entirely unknown to Ingrid until one night when David suddenly leapt out of a dead sleep to a standing position on the bed, and, through his habit of talkative somnambulism, pronounced his unrequited lust for this Megan, whom he went on to describe as a wine-haired bombshell who always had her fingers in her mouth, tasting sauces. After that, Megan, this historical figment, strode continually through the Johns' marriage, inciting arguments and silences and ugly midnight departures.

Later, Ingrid befriended Link, the chef at Suttling House, the Johns' Evanston, Illinois restaurant. Link grew to become the only person Ingrid had to talk to about Megan, this clot in her marriage. One night after closing, talking turned into fucking.

"So why play?" said David. "At least try Medium. Or Easy."

"I don't know. I just—"

"I know, I know, don't say it."

"I just don't understand why this whole thing is so attractive to you, David."

David began to giggle like a ninth-grader full of pot.

"That was punny!"

"Dam—"

"Dollar!" shouted Maryellen. "Another dollar for me!"

"I didn't say *it*, though, Maryellen, *did* I, so no dollar," said Ingrid.

"Two dollars!"

"Maryellen, please shut up," said David.

"She's going to fall in, I know," said Ingrid.

"No she won't. There's a fence. You can't get by without a pass and a guard. You saw the website."

"People get through all the time. And leap to their deaths."

This was true. The Hole had attracted many suicides in its six-month existence.

"Don't worry. She won't fall in. Will you, Maryellen?"

"Not if you give me the iPad back."

Ingrid handed it over.

"It'll be fine, Ingrid. We'll make a big pile of money, then sell the lease."

"You know what I think?" said Ingrid, going through the glove compartment, where she was sure she had stashed her copy of *Utterly Undoable Sudoku #41*. "I think you have a problem with women."

"What?"

"The Hole." Ingrid glanced over at her daughter, who was busy playing SodaMonger on the iPad, then whispered: "Men want to go see it and put things in it. They want to own it and control it. I think you want some fresh hole, David."

"Fresh? *I* want fresh? Look who's talking!"

David had caught Ingrid and Link screwing on the floor of Suttling House's coatroom one night after hours. Upon this discovery, David, in a gesture of jealous despair, had tried to eat the live fugu in the tank by the restaurant's entrance. But he was unable to catch the cunning animal, and was eventually chaperoned by policemen to Farritz, a private Evanston psychiatric facility. After a few weeks, David, on a cocktail of Sardonkin, Contentidol, Phalitax, and Bistec, was discharged to his impenitent wife and hysterical daughter. The release of Ingrid's jittery and delicate husband brought fresh resentments: Ingrid because she felt she'd cant her husband's mental balance if she got too mad at him; David because he knew this and hated being thought too fragile to engage. Meanwhile, the names Link and Megan rolled silently though the house, David and Ingrid carefully hopping over them when they approached, and blowing them off course when they threatened to collide.

The Hole fascinated everyone. People traveled to the ranch, forty miles from the nearest human settlement, to peer into the black of the Hole. Vendors at the Hole did well, especially the roach coaches. Many, many people came to see the Hole, and they brought cameras and money and appetites.

The Kirkless Ranch was officially in charge of the Hole, as it was on (in) private property, where the owners enjoyed full mineral estate. The Kirklesses controlled everything, including the number and nature of vendors. They had auctioned off most

spots, some going for as much as a hundred thousand dollars. A few spots were awarded by lottery. This was how David and Ingrid John got theirs.

Suttling House had not been doing well. David had never done well with anything, but especially not with restaurants. But he persevered. When he was twenty-two, five years before he met Ingrid, David had gotten knocked prone by the bosom, cheekbones, and culinary skills of a chef named Megan Persoiles, who'd hired him as sous-chef for her restaurant, Massialot, and had just as quickly fired him for making a pass at her. Ever since, David had tried to become as successful a restaurateur as Megan was so that she would fall in love with him. But David was not that good. His restaurants tanked, one after another. Most people endure one business failure, perhaps two, and then return to retail or accounting or fraud or what have you. But David, for all his shortcomings, was good at finding investors, and so had been able to commit five sensational business failures in a row. By the time he opened Suttling House, he had pretty much reaped every potential investor in Evanston. Suttling House was his last chance.

Then the Hole opened up.

When the Johns received the letter confirming their lottery win, Ingrid suggested they sell their spot. They were sitting at the kitchen table when the letter came. David was fresh out of Farritz and the Hole was still big news. If they were lucky, Ingrid thought, they could walk away with a small fortune. Small fortunes could fix a lot of things, possibly even ailing marriages.

"I'll bet you can sell it for a couple hundred grand," she said, throwing fistfuls of hundred-dollar bills around in her head.

"Sell it?" David said. "No way we're selling it. We're going there. To get rich and famous."

Ingrid stared at David. A giant vacuum nozzle entered

her head and sucked up all the hundreds.

"What are you going to vend?" said Ingrid, her tiny riser of hope that all might be well after all now crushed.

"Doughnut holes!"

"Funny."

"Serious."

"Right."

"Yep."

"Doughnut holes. C'mon."

"For people to eat, or throw in the Hole, you know, for luck."

"You're nuts."

"Plus chicken tikka masala," said David.

The sudden appearance of the Hole dislocated virtually every form of rational inquiry, from geology to philosophy to cosmogony to eschatology to economy to garbology to ufology. The ones most worked up were the geologists, who screamed theories at one another and mashed their foreheads into stone walls. The ones least in crisis were those scholars of the department of eschatology dealing with hell. The Hellists simply nodded to each other in grave certainty (and not without a bit of self-congratulation) that the end of the world was *obviously* nigh, and that it was going to hurt.

All attempts at measuring the depth of the Hole had met with failure. Objects tossed in disappeared forever. Sonar and laser and various beams shot down the Hole simply diffused, from all the dust,

after a few miles. Sensors lowered into

the void broke their cables at

about fourteen miles—

twice the depth of the

deepest manmade

hole. At that depth

the atmosphere

in the Hole was

still air, the walls

still sheer rock, the

temperature about

190°F. The diameter and



circularity remained the same all the way down.

Jerry “Mercy Me” Kincannon, the first and only chthononaut, was lowered into the Hole on a cable reinforced with Madagascar orb-spider silk. At eight miles, it broke, sending Jerry toward the center of the Earth and the cable bungeeing back to the surface. But it hadn’t actually broken; the end had clearly been cut. This pleased the Hellists.

Jerry’s last meal had been chicken tikka masala and Hole Holes.

Back in Evanston, Suttling House, to the Johns’ great surprise, started to come together. It was now under the management of Orisse LeClaire, a chef they’d hired before they left for Texas. She looked like Lena Olin as Ingrid imagined Lena Olin had looked at seventeen. At first Ingrid was sure that David had hired this slice of Belgian cheese-cake as a vicarious bodiment of Megan, but Ingrid was beginning to feel that David had, perhaps, simply hired who he thought was the best person for the job.

Orisse had added to the menu a basic but perfect steak *au poivre*, a two-bean cassoulet with lamb sausage, and David’s chicken tikka masala, the recipe for which David had finagled from the owner of the best Indian stall at Heathrow Airport. And doughnut holes. For the first time in its short history, reservations were required to dine at Suttling House.

And Hole Holes was starting to do well too. Within six months the Johns had grossed nearly \$200,000, mostly from doughnut holes. Every day the Brink’s truck would circle the entire bustling perimeter, collecting all the cash and receipts from the vendors. When Ingrid noticed that their bag of cash was as big as anyone else’s, she became begrudgingly pleased. Slowly, she began to feel tiny flakes of resentment toward her husband crack off and float away. Between longueurs of anger, Ingrid and David occasionally smiled, and even kissed once, a self-conscious buss over the Hobart. Ingrid declined an invitation from the manager of Ques-caisje?, three doors to the east, to join him in a toke

of hash and a quick screw, something she would have strongly considered a year before.

From the very beginning, the Hole (for reasons the Hellists attributed to the infectious clouds of decadence, greed, and gluttony emerging from it) had attracted increasingly tony restaurateurs. The first vendor had not been a restaurateur but a flintknapper; the second guy sold bottled water and Lone Star longnecks out of a pair of Igloo coolers perched on the tailgate of his pickup; the third was a *raspado* vendor; and the fourth was a mobile franchise of the forward-thinking Lillocq, a Gault-Millau-17 restaurant near Marseille whose owner was wellknown for gambling, travel, risky business ventures, and hypermania. He was the Bugsy Siegel of West Texas.

Of the original three vendors, only the flintknapper remained, selling arrowheads at ten bucks apiece and repelling aggressive six-digit offers from Russians and Bahrainis to buy out his space. Lillocq persisted in a state of constant profit, working haute sorcery on local game, dairy, vegetables, and Gulf seafood. Even though there were plenty of ordinary vendors—most of whose spaces had been acquired by lottery, like Hole Holes—the Hole quickly became a Parnassus not just for scientists and doomsayers, but for wealthy gourmands, restaurant critics, foodie tourists, and culinary spies.

And oenophiles. Early on, a woman, Jolene Taft, had bought Lot 44 to set up Alcool 13%, the Hole’s only wine coach. She brought along two of her uncles to help out, as well as her only daughter, ten-year-old Mindy. Of the 151 vendors, the wine coach, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, was the most profitable of all, with a first-year gross of nearly \$3 million. Part of its success rose from the publicity surrounding an extraordinary act of superstitious excess: a Russian apartment-building manager of more-than-modest means walked up and purchased the most expensive bottle in Alcool’s cellar—a 1945 Romanée-Conti with uninterrupted provenance and ullage to the cork—and, without notice or ceremony, lobbed the \$80,000 bottle over the fifteen-foot

Hurricane fence and into the Hole. It was rumored that he'd then driven to Athens, Ohio, and bought a Powerball ticket worth \$90 million, though the truth was that he'd merely returned to St. Petersburg \$80,000 poorer, and resumed apartment managing.

Jolene had screamed and fainted at the sight of the valuable bottle tumbling in its trajectory, but she quickly found that her love of wine did not exceed her desire for money, and so was not compunct in selling other rare and costly bottles that no one but the Hole would drink. Her daughter, Mindy, loved the thrill and flagrant naughtiness of big spenders flaunting in the name of idolatry.

One afternoon, when a mournful Upper East Sider named Sue Penning bought a '99 Muller-Scharzhof Riesling, sneaked past the Hole's gatekeeper, Brody Kremer, and jumped into the Hole with her bottle, Mindy, who had been watching, screamed and ran off into the scrub oak until she came up against the perimeter fence, where she sat crying, thinking of the mournful woman's yellow and blue skirt as it came up over her head as she fell.

Mindy stood up and followed the perimeter fence for nearly an hour until she happened to come across another girl, the first person near her age that she'd seen there. The girl was busy attending to a tiny ranch made of kebab skewers in whose one corral could be found three sturdy horny toads.

"What're you gonna do with those?" said Mindy.

"I'm gonna take them home to live in the tub."

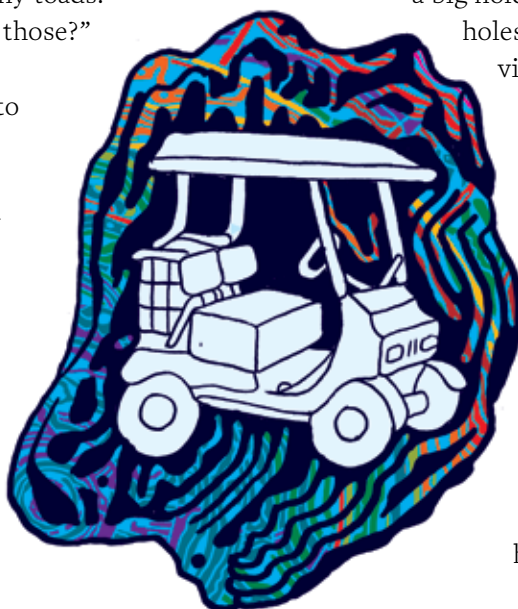
"Where do you live?"

"Right there, see that gingerbread house?"

"What do you sell?"

"My parents sell doughnut holes and stuff."

"Oh, that's you? Those're good. You should come over to my house. I have a mansion."



The next day, more holes opened up. One appeared in the geographic center of the Caucasus (235 yards across); another in the Northern Territory, Australia, about 150 miles north-northeast of Alice Springs (688 yards across); and another in the interior of French Guiana, only five miles from the coast (41 yards across). There were also hundreds of reports of smaller holes—a foot across or less—opening up in basements and driveways and landing strips and battlefields and World Heritage sites.

Most newsworthy was the four-and-a-half-mile-across hole that yawned open in Finland, swallowing up part of the town of Kemijärvi and many of its 8,300 residents.

The US Geological Survey estimated that in that one day, .00000001 percent of the Earth's surface was punctured—that was the word employed, *punctured*, in all its laughable imprecision—by forces that it said *had* to be geologic in nature.

After that, new holes appeared every day, all over the world, sometimes claiming villages, sometimes city blocks, sometimes just sand dunes or Antarctic coal or windy steppe. At least the seas weren't draining away; for whatever reason, holes were a landlubberly phenomenon. But this was cold comfort to a reducing world: it was clear that eventually everyone on the planet would either disappear into a big hole, or become marooned between holes. Fewer and fewer people came to visit the premier Hole.

Maryellen spent as much time as she could at Mindy's. Maryellen was glad for Mindy because Maryellen had gotten lonely, and none of her old friends wanted to come out and visit.

After the first year at the Hole, Maryellen's parents had sold the camper and built

their little gingerbread house on a small leased lot only a few yards away from their business. Late one night, Maryellen slipped out of the window in her room and began to jog around to the other side of the Hole, where Alcool 13% was, taking care to stay out of the bright cones of the many streetlights. Finally, out of breath, Maryellen snuck up to Mindy's house—a huge New Orleans-style double-gallery painted deep purple—and tossed a few caliche pebbles up at Mindy's window. Presently Mindy emerged through a side door, a Burgundy bottle in one hand.

"C'mon," said Mindy. "I know where to get in."

"In what?"

"C'mon!"

"Is that full?"

"Come. On!"

The two girls ran. After a few minutes, Mindy stopped. She crouched down next to one wall of Arcimboldo, which had just gotten its second Michelin star and was doing well in spite of the paucity of customers, and motioned for Maryellen to crouch down beside her.

"It's right there," said Mindy. "See? Where it's bent up a little? We can get under."

"Under the fence? No way!"

"Way."

"We'll fall in! It goes to hell!"

"We won't fall in, and my great-uncle says it probably only goes to the Moho discontinuity, about thirty miles down."

"No!"

"So stay here, I don't care. I'll drink this by myself."

Mindy began to sneak toward the fence.

"Wait!" Maryellen hissed.

Mindy ignored her. She reached the brightly lit fence, lay down in the dirt, and worked her skinny body through a breach just large enough for a ten-year-old.

Maryellen raced up and crawled through too.

Mindy walked right up to the Hole and sat down, her feet dangling in the void, as though she were perched on the edge of a swimming pool, stirring

the water with her toes. Maryellen could hardly see her; the fence was floodlit, but it was nearly dark at the Hole. A few yards away was a stone memorial to poor Jerry Kincannon, the only person to die exploring the Hole.

Maryellen looked up. Here came Brody Kremer. His job was to slowly circle the walkway outside the fence in a golf cart, looking for trouble and nipping at vermouth. There was no way he'd be able to see Mindy, but he'd see Maryellen for sure if she stayed where she was. So she got down on all fours and began to crawl slowly toward her friend. When she reached the edge, she peered over. Just black. With surgical care, she sat on the edge like Mindy. The lip was sharp and uniform, and cut into the backs of her knees.

"Just imagine you're sitting on a normal chair," said Mindy. "You've never just fallen off a chair onto the floor, right? Unless somebody pushed you?"

"Yeah, I guess."

"Okay? Good. Hold this bottle."

"Don't even fake-push me, Melinda Lacey Taft."

"I won't! God!"

Mindy reached inside her overalls and came up with a corkscrew and two plastic wineglasses. She gave the glasses to Maryellen and took the bottle back. And with a grace that suggested Mindy had opened bottles before, she pulled the cork.

"Want me to smell it?" said Maryellen.

"No, that's for losers who don't know anything. Hold those out."

Mindy poured both glasses about a third full, and took one.

"This cost three hundred dollars. My mom'll murder me if she finds out I took it. Swirl it around."

"I thought they just did that on TV."

"No, that's real. Now sniff the wine. Really stick your nose in there."

"It smells burny. And kind of like Lucky Charms."

"Now hold it up to the light."

The act of twisting a half turn caused Maryellen's bottom to shift a quarter inch toward the Hole. She screamed a short, powerful chirp, flailed, and spilled her wine in the dirt.

“Omigod! Omigod!” said Maryellen, backing up from the Hole.

“Jerk! We’re gonna be in so much effing trouble if Brody catches us!”

“Omigod!”

“Shh! Now come back, it’s cool, be cool, Maryellen.”

Maryellen slowly returned. Mindy refilled her glass.

“Okay?”

“Yeah.”

“Now. Drink a little, but don’t swallow. Let it warm up in your mouth—that’s when all the flavors come out. Then swallow when it starts to burn. See? What’s it taste like?”

“It doesn’t taste like grapes.”

“It should taste like cherries and tobacco and wet stones and pitch and ... wait ... uh, I think violets. Or, wait, figs. No. I forget.”

“It makes me pucker.”

“That’s something in the wine.”

“No duh.”

“So do you like it?”

“I guess.”

“Here’s some more. We’ll drink it all and throw the bottle and glasses in the Hole.”

“We shouldn’t throw anything in there, that’s what my mommy says.”

“Well, your mommy doesn’t have all the facts.”

“What facts?”

“We’re all gonna have to leave soon.”

“Why?”

“Trash.”

“Huh?”

“That’s what they decided to use the Hole for. All the trash in the world, including nuclear bombs.”

“So why would we have to leave?”

“You really think people wanna eat and smell old garbage at the same time?”

“Can I have some more?”

“Don’t drink it too fast or

you’ll get alcoholism.”

“I feel tingly, like my head’s falling asleep.”

“Then you’re doing it right.”

“It feels nice.”

Mindy and Maryellen lay back in the dirt.

“You know that the devil cut Jerry Kincannon’s cord, right?” said Maryellen, hoping to impress her older friend with her knowledge of the world of adult tragedy.

“No, he probably cut it himself.”

“But they said no one could cut through that cord, so it must have been the devil, who can cut anything he wants to.”

“He probably saw something that made him go crazy, like huge white bugs or something. That’s all that happened.”

The perimeter lights shut down. It was one in the morning. Above, the stars slowly resolved. It was easy to imagine them as holes too, poking through the walls of the universe into something even bigger, something bright, someplace where Jerry Kincannon could live in happiness.

“Look, I can pour it right in my mouth,” said Mindy, holding the bottle with both hands.

But Maryellen was asleep.

The reportage of worldwide hole news had fallen upon the shoulders of one man, a Louisianan named Harry Bell, whose gruff Morgan City drawl now sputtered from an old AM/FM radio high on a shelf inside Hole Holes, where Ingrid was mincing garlic and ginger in one corner, and David was standing over a scorched saucepan on a wavery flame at the old gas stove. The Johns were making a chicken tikka masala for Den Pinchbeck, the flintknapper, who had lately lost his family when a hole opened up in nearby Rosewild. Ingrid, who wanted to make the dish special somehow, recalled the scene in *GoodFellas* where a character sliced garlic with a razor blade into very thin slices, thereby more thoroughly investing the cooking oil with garlickiness. While Harry Bell reported that



5 percent of the planet was now officially pocked with supernatural cavities, and that thirty-two million people had gone missing, Ingrid honed and stropped her knife until the slivers of garlic fell in delicate, virtually transparent ovals.

David, who felt that the commercially prepared ghee they usually used wasn't quite nutty enough to pique a proper masala, stood over the old stove clarifying a few ounces of butter for Den's meal. Once he had skimmed off the last of the milk solids, he heated up the clarified butter in a cast-iron skillet. Ingrid looked at her husband, who gave a nod, then scraped in her palette of sliced, see-through garlic. They leaned over the skillet, and together waited the few exquisite seconds until it was time to put in the ginger.

Brody Kremer gave the Johns a ride over to Den's place, but Den wasn't there. His camper was gone, as were his collection of potted succulents and his bag of raw flint. All that remained was the low range of tiny flint chips that formed a rampart around where his folding chair used to be.

Late summer, early evening, a cool breeze picking up, the tandoor just about the right temperature, David loaded it up with skewered, boneless chunks of nilgai rump meat—chickens had lately been impossible to come by—while Mindy and Maryellen fried thirty-one doughnut holes that they planned to assemble into a pyramid, douse in powdered sugar, top with a candle, and present to Ingrid for her birthday, her thirty-first, and third at the Hole. Three vendors had closed up in the past week—Arcimboldo, Fahrah's Kebab Outpost, and Quescaisje? (oh, how the the owner had begged, for three years, on his knees, for just one night with Ingrid)—and now there were only ten of the original 151 left. Alcool 13% still had good connections and access to a private plane, and so they always had great bottles ready to be bought and pitched into the Genuine Original Hole by hysterical persons with increasingly desperate needs to

sate the devil, or whatever it was that had perforated the Earth with now billions of holes, one of them nearly 400 miles across, and another 300 yarder only a quarter mile from the Johns' home. But most Hole businesses had closed up quite a while ago for lack of ingredients, or customers, or both. The infrastructure—the bank, medical center, security, plumbing—had mostly all collapsed, and electricity was intermittent. The Johns needed very little—onions, garlic, spices, rice, ginger, meat, butter, yogurt, flour, sugar, oil, water, a few herbs—but even this modest cupboard was becoming more and more difficult to fill.

The nilgai meat came out of the tandoor. David mixed it into his Heathrow Airport masala and cooked it for a bit over the open fire behind the house. In the distance a hollow, sucking *hoomf* sounded, the bawl of a new hole being born. A quarter of the Earth's surface was now welled with them. An ingenious nuclear-powered machine had been invented in Korea that was able to crawl down into small holes, a yard or so across, and return after a deep plumbing. One had traveled 2,992 miles, reporting uniform circularity and diameter the whole way down—a geological impossibility: magmatic guts should have percolated and overcome the machine. Whatever death the Earth faced, it was a consummate, antiscientific, ineluctable one, and soon to come.

David served nilgai tikka masala to his wife and daughter, and to Mindy and her mother and the remaining great-uncle (the other had disappeared a year before). Jolene opened two bottles of '89 Haut-Brion, and poured healthy glasses for the adults, and thimblefuls for the girls. David and Ingrid, sitting back-to-back to keep warm against the growing chill, ate the Indian stew and drank the good wine. Jolene tossed a comforter over the couple and said, "No naughtiness now," while David and Ingrid giggled underneath. Jolene began to sing "Happy Birthday" as Maryellen and Mindy came out with the doughnut-hole cake. They had found a single candle

somewhere. Ingrid lifted up an edge of the comforter to see. The mesa wind picked up, cool and aggressive, but the candle didn't go out. **LP**

