

The Project Gutenberg EBook of Holes, Incorporated, by L. Major Reynolds

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Title: Holes, Incorporated

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Illustrator: Hi Marx

Release Date: November 13, 2009 [EBook #30468]

Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HOLES, INCORPORATED ***

Produced by Greg Weeks, Stephen Blundell and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

It was getting so a person couldn't sleep nights anymore.

Would you like to see all hell break loose? Just make a few holes in nothing at all—push some steel beams through the holes—and then head for the hills. But first, read what happened to some people who really did it.

Holes
INCORPORATED

By L. Major Reynolds

THE red-headed secretary asked, "Names, please?"

"Ted Baker."

"Bill Stephens."

"To see H. Joshua Blair. We have an appointment."

"It's for three-thirty. We called up two weeks ago."

The secretary said, "Oh, yes. I have you on the list." She checked them off, studied them vaguely, asked, "What was it you wanted to see Mr. Blair about?"

Ted Baker held out the small steel box he was carrying. "About this."

"Ah—what is it?"

"It's a box."

"I can see that," the redhead snapped. "What is it for? What does it do?"

"It's for construction work. It makes holes."

The girl sighed. It was late in the day and she didn't care much, really. She snapped an intercom button. An inquiring voice rasped at her. She said, "A Mr. Baker and a Mr. Stephens to see you."

Evidently it was all right because she snapped off the button and

pointed to a door. "In there."

They went in the door and faced a desk large enough to play tennis on. The man behind the desk gave them a cordial snarl. "Well, what have you got on your mind? And don't take all day to tell me."

Ted extended the box. "This. We'd like to sell it to you."

"What is it? A bomb?"

"No, sir. It makes holes. It makes holes real quick."

Blair scowled at the box. "What the hell do I want of holes?"

Bill Stephens came forward with further explanation. "You see, sir, Ted and I are inventors. We make, well—things. We've been working on this invention in our basement and it seems to be a success."

"We don't quite know why it's a success," Ted said, "but it is."

"We'd like to demonstrate it for you."

"Well, go ahead and demonstrate."

Ted raised the box and aimed it horizontally at nothing in particular. He pressed a black button. There was an odd whirring noise. He took his hand off the button and lowered the box.

"What are you waiting for?" Blair growled.

"Nothing. That's it. I've made the hole."

"Are you two crazy? What kind of a fool trick—?"

Ted reached down and took a pencil off the desk. "May I borrow this?" Without waiting for permission, he put the pencil carefully into the place he'd pointed the box. Half the pencil disappeared. He took his hand away. The part of the pencil still in sight didn't come with it.

It stayed where it was, lying in thin air, horizontally, with no apparent support.

H. Joshua Blair goggled and turned three shades whiter. "Wha-wha-what the hell!"

"And now, if you'll try to move the pencil, the demonstration will be complete."

LIKE a man in a trance, Blair got up from his desk and grasped the pencil. It wouldn't move. He got red in the face and threw all his weight on it. It would neither pull nor push. It stayed where it was. Finally Blair backed away from the thing. He leaned on his desk and panted.

"You see," Ted said, "The hole goes into the fourth dimension. There's no other explanation. And the fourth dimension holds solidier than concrete."

Old Blair's head was spinning, but business instinct came quickly to his rescue. "What happens," he asked, "if something in the third dimension is in the way?"

"It gets out of the way," Bill said.

Ted demonstrated. He trained the box on the visible remains of the pencil. It vanished.

Blair said, "Well, I'll be damned!"

"We figure this will save you a lot of money in construction work," Bill said. "You can get along without riveters. You just have a man put

holes in girders with this and push the rivets through. You also make holes for the beam-ends, and your entire building will be anchored in the fourth dimension."

"Do it again," Blair said.

Ted made another hole and put another pencil into it. Blair grasped the pencil and applied leverage. The pencil snapped at the point it entered the next dimension but the broken end of the far piece was not to be seen.

Blair asked, "You say you two invented this gadget?"

"That's right," Bill said. "We've got a workshop in my basement. We invent in the evenings after we come home from work."

"What do you work at?"

"I read gas meters. He's a clerk in a supermarket."

"I suppose you want money for this thing."

"We'd like to sell it, yes, sir."

"How much do you want for it?"

"Well, we don't know. What's it worth to you?"

"Nothing probably. Leave it here a few days. I'll look it over and let you know."

"But—"

"And don't call me—I'll call you."

"But—"

"Leave your address and phone number with my secretary."

After Ted and Bill left, Blair yelled, "Get me Jake Steadman in the engineering department!" He didn't bother using the intercom, but his secretary heard him anyhow.

Ted and Bill went to work on an idea they had for the treatment of leather. You dipped your shoes in a solution and they lasted forever. The thing didn't work too well, however. It was full of bugs. They tried to eliminate the bugs and once in a while they thought of H. Joshua Blair.

"Don't you think it's about time he called us?" Ted asked.

"Don't be so impatient. He's a big man. He owns a big company. It takes time."

"He's had over a month."

"Relax. We'll hear from him."

ANOTHER week passed, and another, until one evening Ted came galloping into the workshop with news. "That big new addition to the City Hall! They're working on it! H. Joshua Blair Construction Company. A big sign says so!"

"Relax. You'll blow a tube."

"Relax hell! He's using our invention to put up the steel girders. Just like we suggested to him. Guys with boxes like ours making holes and putting in rivets!"

Bill stopped what he was doing. "He said he'd call us. Maybe he forgot. Maybe we better go see him."

They both knocked off work the next day and got to Blair's office at nine o'clock. The red-headed secretary said, "You'll have to make an appointment."

"Appointment hell!" Ted headed for the inner door. Bill followed him. They went into H. Joshua Blair's office to find him in conference with two vice-presidents. Ted said, "Mr. Blair, we came—"

"Who in the devil are you?"

"You remember us. Ted Baker and Bill Stephens. We came about our invention."

"What invention?"

"Our hole maker. You're using it on the City Hall addition."

Blair glowered. "Where'd you get the idea it was yours? Have you got any patents to show?"

"Well, no. We didn't—"

"I did! Fourteen good solid patents. You two better go peddle your groceries."

"Now look, Mr. Blair."

Blair raised his voice. "Throw these two bums out!"

Three huskies appeared as by magic to do Blair's bidding. As Ted and Bill landed on the sidewalk, one of the vice-presidents said, "Do you think that was smart, H. J.? They might cause trouble."

Blair snorted. "They haven't got a prayer. A meter reader and a grocery clerk!"

"We could have at least given them a few hundred."

"Not on your life. Never give a sucker an even break, Jim. Give them anything at all, we acknowledge their claim. That'd be stupid."

"Maybe you're right."

"Of course I'm right. It's business. Now about those other bids. By gad! We can run every contractor in town out of competition! They can't touch our prices!"

Out on the sidewalk, Bill and Ted sat mournfully looking up at the vast steel skeleton, held together literally by their own genius. Ted said, "We got a raw deal."

"Maybe we had it coming. We were pretty stupid."

"Anything we can do?"

"Doesn't look like it."

"Maybe the leather solution will turn out."

"Maybe." Bill looked wistfully up at the steel skeleton. "At even a cent a hole, we'd have done all right."

"Let's go home and get to work."

In the Mighty and Benevolent Kingdom of Szkazia, a minor reign of terror existed. The King, tired of complaints from his subjects, had just finished dressing down his Prime Minister. The Prime Minister was passing the abuse on to his Chief Scientist. "If something isn't done soon, I won't be responsible for your head, my friend. The King is in a rage."

The eyes of the Chief Scientist watered—partly from fear, and partly from nights and days spent in his laboratory beating out his brains on one idea after another.

"I'm doing my best, sire—"

"It's not good enough! These steel girders coming out of nowhere! Banging people in the head—whacking them in the stomach! Why it isn't safe to walk through the halls of the Administration Building. Even the bedrooms of the Executive Apartments are not safe! The other night the Director of Propaganda had just gone to bed—"

"I know of the incident," the Chief Scientist said hurriedly.

"Oh, you do? But you've done nothing about—"

"I've been working hard," the scientist said patiently, "and I think I have the solution. Give me another day."

"One day, then. After that—" The Prime Minister made a significant slicing motion with his finger.

THE Prime Minister chewed his fingernails and watched the clock. Sleep was out of the question with the King calling up every little while yelling for action. The Minister counted the hours and presented himself at the Royal Laboratories precisely twenty-four hours later. "Time's up," he snapped.

The Chief Scientist was wiping his face. There were new lines around his mouth. He indicated a small steel box. "I think I've got it," he said. "Come with me."

They went swiftly to the Administration Building. "This should be close enough. We depress this lever and—and hope."

"Well, do it—do it!"

The Chief Scientist pushed the lever on the steel box. A whirring sound came from within. All the steel girder ends in sight—all the nasty little rivets—disappeared. The Chief Scientist smiled and wiped his face again. "It worked," he said.

"Excellent. I'll see that you get a medal."

"Thank you," the Chief Scientist said sadly. That was the trouble with people nowadays. They either handed you a medal or your head.

TED and Bill stared sadly at the mess around the City Hall. Bill said, "It's a good thing it collapsed at night so nobody was killed, isn't it?"

"You said it. I'd have felt guilty if there'd been any casualties."

"What do you suppose went wrong?"

"You got me. What do you think they'll do to old Blair?"

"I don't know, but it looks pretty bad. They refused to let him out on bail."

"Serves him right. The way he treated us."

"You've got it wrong. He treated us swell. He did us a big favor. We could have been blamed for this."

Bill thought it over before saying, "I guess you're right. I hadn't looked at it that way."

"Let's go home and get to work on the leather solution."

So they did.

THE END

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