



# HOLES IN THE WORLD

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Fable

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## HOLES IN THE WORLD

By Andrew Paul Grell

“Amah, why are there holes in the world?”

“Whatever do you mean, BaoBao?”

“We walk on the world but then there are holes in it, some go down, some sideways, holes.”

“You mean like the yaodong cave we live in? Those are holes so we can have a place to live in peace. Would you rather live in a city, in a box, with everyone knowing what you say and do, and then they try to correct you if you do or say the wrong things? That’s why there are holes in the world, Bendan. Don’t you like our television, our beds, our stove to cook our meals, the little computer for your schoolwork?”

“Yes, Amah, but how did the holes in the world get here? Did dragons dig them?” Pangu was not afraid of dragons but he was always on the lookout for fresh dragon tracks in the yaodong.

“Pangu, my son, dragons do not create, they destroy. I will tell you the story of the holes in the world. But first, run and get your sister Chunhua. You are twins, she should know what you know.” The boy found his sister in the next yaodong having tea with a friend. Chunhua’s friend Biyu made her promise to tell her the secret her brother said his mother will share. The twins slid down the stone ramp, polished and smoothed by generations of the butts of children going from house cave to house cave.

“Pangu, Chunhua, I will tell you the story of the beginning of the world, with its holes and with its people. There are many versions of the story and the people have different names in different stories and with different tellers, but they are all the same story.

“So. Nuwa and Fuxi grew from the silt and the mites in the silt that trickled down from the surface of the world, through the cracks in the rocks holding up the world, to the bottom of the world. They were too big to climb up through the cracks, so they dug a hole going up. This was the first cave, the first hole in the world. They reached the surface and saw the sun and the trees. Nuwa and Fuxi were hungry, but Fuxi had forgotten to bring up his bow and arrows, so he climbed back down to get them. Nuwa was too hungry to wait for her brother and she walked to the trees to see if they had anything to eat. It looked to her like the bright-colored globes hanging from the trees could be eaten. She reached her arms up again and again but she could not reach the fruit. Then she couldn't find the hole she and her brother came up in, so she dug a new hole down to see if the ladder they climbed up on was still there. The second hole.

“Fuxi took his bow and climbed back up, but he could not find his sister or any animals to hunt. Then he saw the trees and their fruit. He pulled the ladder up from the first hole to pick the fruit from the tall trees.

Both children were waiving their hands wildly: “What will happen to Nuwa with no ladder?”

“Well, children, if there was already one ladder when they were born, there might be more! Now, Fuxi had the fruit; he ate it and it was delicious and gave him strength, but then he couldn't find Nuwa. But he did find Nuwa's hole. He dropped fruit down, one by one, in hopes that his sister would hear. She did, and she clambered back up to the world of light and food. They sat down to eat their first meal together, but a boar came and ate their fruit. Nuwa told Fuxi they should dig little holes in the big holes they used to climb toward the sky so they could store their fruit. And maybe store pieces of a boar if Fuxi could shoot a boar with his arrows. The third hole and the fourth hole, filled with fruit. Nuwa told her brother she thought she saw fire in the bottom of the world when they were born, so maybe they could bring up fire so that if they caught a boar, they could cook it. The twins took turns watching the boars from a distance; they noted that the boars would eat fallen fruit but would snort and paw the dirt when they saw the thick, black mushrooms at the base of some of the trees. Working together, always seeing each other so they would no longer get lost, they took the ladder and gathered more fruit. Some they ate, some they put in the new holes, and some they left in the grassy meadow, where they dug another hole to catch the boar. The fifth hole. Nuwa was the one who had seen the fire from where they were born, so she went down to get some while Fuxi waited for the boar.

Chunhua was worried now. “Amah, they have separated again, will they get into more trouble?”

“We will see, BaoBao. This is a story that can go in many directions. In this direction, Nuwa climbs back down to the bottom of the world, but now the fire has become closer. The bottom of the world was getting hotter,

and Nuwa did not know how she could carry fire. Then the fire gave an answer; the bottom of the ladder took some of the fire. So Nuwa took some of the arrows Fuxi had left behind and which were sad that they had nothing to do. She introduced the arrows to the fire, and just like the ladder, they took some of the fire. As fast as she could, Nuwa climbed back toward the world of light.”

This time Pangu was worried. “But Amha! Now the ladder is too short to reach the top!”

“Oh, you don’t have to worry about Nuwa. Let’s see what she does. Oh, yes. she was able to reach one of the holes she dug with her brother to store food. She threw one flaming arrow to the surface and so Fuxi knew his sister was safe. A funny tree with little purple fruits had thin branches that moved like Nuwa’s hair in the breeze, so he took one off the tree and held it at the top of the hole so that Nuwa could reach it; then they dug a hole and put more of the little purple fruit branches in it, followed by the fire. The sixth hole. Their first day being alive was so exciting and tiring that they fell into a deep sleep.”

“Won’t the fire burn out?” Pangu asked. “Will they have to go down to the bottom of the world to get more? Will they lose each other again?”

“Grapevines burn as slowly as they are flexible. Hope that in at least some versions of the story one of them thinks to add more vines!”

“When the world of night was kissed by the sun, they woke in the world of light, very hungry. Fuxi took his bow and Nuwa took her eyes to spot the boar. It was not a long wait. Nuwa saw two of the pink animals with curly tails approaching; one carrying something in its teeth.”

“Good morning, children. Allow me to introduce Li Ling, my sow sister. Please accept this gift of the black mushroom to break your fast.”

“Thank you, boar,” hungry Nuwa said. The mouths of the children exploded in ecstasy when they bit into the truffle.”

“Li Ling and I had an idea. We can marry and you can marry and then there will be more boars and sows and more people. Perhaps your children will hunt our children, or perhaps not. Perhaps your children will bring the fruit they don’t eat to our children and our children will bring the black mushroom to your children.”

“Did they get married, Amah,” both children shouted.”

“Oh, yes. The four of them had a wedding feast of grapes and mushrooms and danced and danced, then boar with his tusks and Fuxi with his arrow points each dug holes in the side of a hill for their new brides. The seventh and eighth holes. This is why we have pigs, this is why the world has holes, and this is why eight is the

luckiest number. What do you think, BaoBaos?”

Chunhua had a question. “Amah, can pigs really marry?”

The mother pointed to the back of the laodong where her husband was snoring. Well, BenDan, that is a good question to ask your father.”

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