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THE NEW TOM SWIFT INVENTION SERIES

Tom Swift And The Galaxy Ghosts

By Victor Appleton II

While testing a new spaceship capable of traveling between the physical layers of 3-dimensional space, Tom and Bud stumble onto an unbelievable sight: a dark hole that is tossing matter back out rather than sucking it in.

Things begin to get strange when they get a visual contact with something that all their instruments say isn't there!

The strangeness goes further when the apparition appears inside their ship, beckoning them to follow. But, follow to where? To what? Some exciting new discovery? The truth behind the backward-running black hole?

Their doom?

When Tom decides that safety must take precedence over investigation their ship breaks down in the one way Tom never planned, and for which he has no spare or way to repair.

Without warning, the black hole reverses direction and begins drawing them in. Can they get the *Galactic Traveller* working before it is too late?

This book is dedicated to the person who hurried through writing the original, the other person who padded it out and made it incredibly horrible, and the third man who refused to allow it to continue by simply ignoring it and starting fresh. But—and you have to admit it is a stretch to do a “Tom” book that doesn't have an invention or location in its name—it *is* an interesting title. So, here's a shot at resurrecting it, **in title only!**

Tom Swift and the Galaxy Ghosts

FOREWORD

Before you shake an angry fist at the sky and proclaim that this is an abomination to the ethos of Tom Swift, I beg you for just a moment of understanding.

As the Tom Jr. series was winding down, even though we all know that none of us wanted it to end, very little care and attention was going into the final manuscripts. The writing may have been on the wall, but it wasn't making it to the printed page.

In taking a title from a book that probably should have received early termination, I am hoping to provide a story that might have been had this been earlier in the series.

With the deepest respect to our kindly "professor," Scott Dickerson and his very enjoyable substitute in the original order, *Quantum Telesphere*, I have been pondering the loss of this old one, even with the addition of another title.

So, give this story a chance. As I say, it is my humble attempt to resurrect the title, just not the story. That original story is best left laying next to the road, in some damp literary ditch, where it may break down into its component words and float free so that others may use them. It is recycling at its best.

I've set my book in the world of my other novels and not the Tom Jr. world—there is no Phyllis... it's Bashalli, and Mr. and Mrs. Swift are Damon and Anne, not Tom Sr. and Mary.

No mater what version of Tom stars in it: Long live Tom Swift!

T. Edward Fox



As the power reached its peak, a shaft of incredibly orange light shot out...
and a spiral hole in space appeared!

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CHAPTER I

URGENT SUMMONS

EVERYONE admitted that it had been one of the most low key and enjoyable weddings and receptions they had been to. To the new married couple, the four hours following the ceremonies were just a blur. When they finally left for their honeymoon, both were exhausted.

Tom's best man and best friend, Bud Barclay, and Bashalli's maid of honor and Tom's younger sister, Sandy, drove them to Swift Enterprises and then flew the couple down to New York's Kennedy International in one of the Swift SE-11 commuter jets—nicknamed the Toad by Bud for its appearance from the front, its two jet engines were mounted above the wing and underslung body giving the appearance of bulging eyes.

Bashalli's parents had begged the couple to allow them to make all of the honeymoon arrangements. While Bashalli had been hesitant, Tom felt that it was an important step in securing the absolute trust of her parents. In the end, and after having a private and stern warning talk with her father, she had agreed to it.

To both their delights, the two-week trip included a week on the Hawaii'n island of Maui with an additional week in Japan.

By the time they returned to Shopton, they were ready to settle down and move into the house Tom had purchased in an established neighborhood on the far side of Enterprises from his parent's home. It was a little closer to Enterprises and a bit farther away from her parents' home, but they believed that they wanted some level of privacy. The new house provided that.

Although sporting four bedrooms, they had agreed, practically immediately upon becoming engaged, that they wanted to put off starting a family for several years, possibly even ten, so that they might enjoy as much time together as possible.

The Monday after their return, Bashalli went back to her job with a local advertising agency, where she was their chief graphic designer

and artist-in-residence, and Tom headed back to Swift Enterprises—the four-mile-square facility his father had started almost nine years earlier—with at least a half dozen inventions that had come to him while on their honeymoon.

Walking up to the desk outside of the office he frequently shared with his father, a tall, slender and well-dressed man rose and came around to shake Tom's hand. "Welcome back, Tom," he said. "I absolutely loved your wedding. Thank you for letting me bring my aunt Illoquacia with me. We had a wonderful time."

"Thank you, Trent," he told the man who was the executive assistant and personal secretary to his father. Mumford Trent had been working for Tom's father, Damon Swift, for many years and was considered to be so well organized that many of the things he did seemed to either be anticipated or the result of some form of magic.

The only fault that Tom had ever found in the man was his steadfast refusal to accept being addressed by his first name. It was not, as Tom had discovered several years earlier, that he disliked his own name, it was the case that Trent felt—deeply believed—that his position required a level of professionalism that precluded familiarities such as first names... At least, his own.

After acknowledging the man's greeting, Tom walked into the spacious office that held both desks for its two occupants as well as a set of six overstuffed and comfortable leather chairs arranged around a low table for conferences, plus an entire wall of shelves devoted to scale models of many of the inventions of both father and son.

"Greeting to you, Son," his father called out from behind his computer screen. "You've made me lose a bet with your mother. She said you'd be back right on time and I told her you would stay away at least a couple of extra days. Perhaps, even a week."

"I guess Mom knows me best," Tom replied, favoring his father with a wide grin. "Did I miss anything?"

"First things first. Did you and Bashalli have a good honeymoon?"

Tom nodded and told his father about the different places they went and the things they saw.

"You may want to check with your mother on this, but I seem to

remember that honeymoons are about a lot more than 'going places' and having great meals. What I meant was did you and your lovely bride find that blissful moment when you realized that all the butterflies and nerves and reservations either or both of you had just disappeared, and that you knew with absolute certainty that you two were meant to be together?"

Tom looked at this father, wide-eyed. "Gee, Dad. How did you know?" He and Bashalli had been lying in each other's arms on the second night of their trip when that realization had hit him. When he asked her about it, she smiled and told him that it was about time.

"I knew it from about five seconds after the ceremony, Tom. Leave it to the man to lag behind," she had teased.

Damon Swift looked at his son. "Honestly, Tom. From your almost shocked reaction you'd think that your mother and I weren't married these twenty-two years. Of course I know all about it. Hit me like a sack of potatoes right between the eyes about a day after the wedding. I think it took me that long to get my breath back."

They talked for a few more moments, sharing something they had been unable to prior to Tom's marriage, before getting down to company business.

"What did I miss?" Tom inquired. "Did you ever get that two-man fish delivered?"

He referred to a miniature submarine, powered by one of Tom's small atomic power pods, that Mr. Swift had been designing several months earlier when Tom was trying to figure out why Pluto had suddenly disappeared, and then left its orbit. Built to resemble a very large sunfish—adult sunfish routinely grew to more than half a ton and very large in size—it swam like a fish using its tail and fins, and presented a SONAR reflection of a living fish. This was made possible by a new coating Mr. Swift had created that gave the outside of the sub very little reflection of signals while acting as a giant sensor membrane for detecting everything from schools of fish to other submersibles.

"It left here two days ago. We popped it into one of the cargo pods in the Super Queen and delivered it to the Australian Navy yesterday. Say," Mr. Swift said snapping his fingers. "That reminds me that I am

supposed to call their Admiralty offices tomorrow."

Tom grinned. "So, that would be today at some point, right?"

His father nodded. "Right. Let me see... I will be calling to their Potts Point facility in Sydney and that is plus fifteen hours from us at this time of year. So, I need to call them at six tonight!" He sat back. "I guess the old brain isn't doing too bad when it comes to mental math. Uh... that is right, isn't it, Tom?"

Tom laughed. "Of course it is! But, I do have a question for you. Why did they choose to go that route instead of buying several of our *SeaSpears*?" The *SeaSpear* had originally been developed for a top secret British project, but now were actively being used by several countries to patrol their territorial waters. Whether used unmanned with an extended-use battery pack or manned, they were sleek, fast and could overcome or defeat anything they encountered underwater. Like Tom's air drones, *SeaSpears* used a variety of countermeasures to overcome wayward or enemy craft.

"They want the subs to remain underwater for up to three weeks at a time and have enough room for the pilots to stand up and stretch."

At sixteen feet long and eleven feet high, the inside of Mr. Swift's fish submarine was built on two levels. In the upper nose was the pilot's position where he would lay face down and maneuver the craft. Directly below that was the sleeping position—shared by both occupants but one-at-a-time—and the aft before the bulkhead that separated the power and drive room was a floor-to-ceiling space.

"They are going to test it for a week and then we will bring it back for any retrofitting necessary. And," he looked at Tom, "I'm going to ask that you and Bud take it out for a one or two-day cruise to give your opinions as well."

"Well, Dad," Tom told him, "I've got nothing on my plate for at least a couple of weeks. Just stuff Bash wants me to do around the new house. And, that evidently starts with repainting the living room. It's not quite the right shade of eggshell, I guess."

They both laughed. It was something Mr. Swift had gotten used to over the years and now Tom was finding out about.

The call to Australia did not go well. Once Damon identified himself

and was transferred to Vice Admiral Sir Clive Digby-Collins the Navy man began the conversation with, "What the bloody hell do you think your at, Swift? We no sooner got that clumsy-looking contraption in the water than our men rode it straight to the bottom of the bay. What have you got to say about that?"

Damon looked over at Tom who was still in the office working at his own computer. Mr. Swift was using the speaker phone so Tom had heard everything.

"First, do I address you as Sir Clive or Vice Admiral?"

"What? Who gives a— oh... alright. Just call me Admiral. So what have you got to say?"

"For starters, I need to have you transmit the files from the sub's data recorder. It is located in an ejectable buoy in case of emergencies. If your two men didn't manually eject it, that recorder will still be in the tail section under a door marked 'MDR.' That's for Mechanical Data Recorder. Do you have access to that, Admiral?"

The man on the other end of the call placed his hand over the receiver and both Tom and Damon could hear his yelling to get the attention of someone. He came back on a minute later. "I've just sent my aide, Lieutenant Hoges, to go open that thing up. But while he's gone can you tell me what in the bloody hell possessed you to built that sub to look like a god-awful fish?"

In spite of the situation, Damon laughed. "Sir. That design came from your own Naval Purchasing Department. I have the specifications sitting in front of me and they not only include a detailed description, including spelling out that this is to look like a sunfish, they included a photograph of one to make certain we understood the request."

He offered to send an electronic version of the entire file, but the Admiral declined.

"Okay. My man just ran in with something that looks like a pack of ciggies. That it?"

"Well, if you mean a pack of cigarettes, then yes. It is about that size and shape. If you will pull the rubber boot off one end it will expose a flip-out connector that should plug into your computer. Once it is

attached a light will come on in the middle of the top side of the recorder. Assuming it is green, press it and it will be sent directly to me. If it is yellow, I'll need to have you do something else. If it is red, then you'll have to send it to us."

"Well, it's green. Press it, you say?"

"Yes."

Two minutes later the entire download came through. Tom moved over to sit on his father's desk and they looked through the recorded data. Less than thirty seconds later Tom pointed at one of the lines.

"Uh, Admiral?" Mr. Swift said. "I can see exactly why the sub sank like it did. Whoever was inside did not seal the upper hatch. It is not automatic—as highlighted in the operator's guide—and shows no indication of being manually activated."

"Bloody hell!" the Admiral grouched. "Look. I'm sorry to have jumped on you like that. Let me look into this whole fish thing and get back to you. In the meantime, can we continue testing. That is, assuming I can get the drongos to dry her up and clean everything."

"I'm guessing that drongos is not a term of endearment. But the answer is no. In order to make things as accessible as possible, and with the knowledge that we would be getting it back next week to make some changes, several panels were not included. The electronics are wet and you could have a fire."

He offered to have the cargo jet—still at the Sydney airport—send over the trailer and to bring it back to the U.S. as soon as that day. The Admiral agreed and promised to have his Navy team read and re-read the manual several times in the coming week or more that it might take to put the sub back to rights.

"Drongos," Mr. Swift chuckled. "You have to love their colorful language."

* * * * *

When the new submarine arrived back at Fearing Island—the former scrub grass-covered island off the coast of Georgia that the Swifts leased for exclusive use as a rocket and submarine base—Tom had made plans to take Bud and Sandy along with Bashalli to turn

the upcoming test with a little fun. Of course, the girls would not be coming down with Tom and Bud when they took the sub out, but Sandy had developed an interest in SCUBA diving and both she and her new sister-in-law had recently completed their open water dive certification.

The waters around Fearing were teeming with life and a natural shelf just thirty feet down extended out more than three hundred feet all around, perfect for fish spotting and other diving activities.

While Tom flew the girls over in his Toad, Bud came along behind in one of Tom's one-man helicopters, the *Wasp*. Featuring more of a flying disc than a set of blades overhead, it had been designed to provide the Navy and Coast Guard with a search and rescue helo that could be stowed in a folded position and had a longer range than current multi-crew helos.

Tom also planned to try out a new technique of swapping crewmen from the new sub while out at sea. It not only would mean the sub could go out on extended missions, it might even result in the sale of a few of the *Wasp* helicopters.

The four arrived in the middle of the afternoon and Tom immediately went off to inspect the sub.

After getting the ladies settled into their rooms—he had turned bright red when Bashalli reminded him that she no longer required a room of her own; she and Tom would be sleeping together—he joined Tom.

When he explained his near-gaffe, Tom laughed at him. “You do realize that Sandy is going to grab onto that in a death-like grip and remind you that you, too, could be single-rooming it if you would just hurry up and propose and marry the girl?”

Bud nodded. He and Sandy had been dating for over four years, more than Tom and Bashalli, and yet Bud had not “popped the question,” in spite of all of the hints and outright suggestions from Sandy for more than two years.

“I’m working on getting up the nerve, skipper. Really I am. So,” he said changing the subject, “what are you finding out with our little TunaSub here?”

He grinned at Tom. Bud's ability to almost instantly give most of Tom's inventions a nickname that stuck like glue was known all over Swift Enterprises and their sister facility, the old Swift Construction Company.

Tom groaned. “Is that all one word?”

“Yep. Even down to the capital S in sub!”