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THE NEW TOM SWIFT INVENTION SERIES

# Tom Swift And The Paradox Planet

By Victor Appleton II

Following a life-changing event, the world is taken by surprise when the report comes through that a planet in our own solar system suddenly disappeared from its orbit. Traditional means of scanning the sky can't locate it, so the Government asks Tom Swift to investigate.

An unmanned probe designed to look for any mass out there fails to find the wayward planet before it mysteriously disappears. And, when a second, more capable probe is suddenly grabbed and flung out of its path, Tom knows that he must go see what is out there.

A totally new type of ship will be designed and built. Nothing he has available can make the trip and do the things he wants or needs to do. But another surprise is in store when something even larger than the missing planet appears and starts hurtling in toward a possible impact with the Earth.

What is suddenly hurtling on a collision course? Can Tom find a way to deflect it before even a near miss might mean massive devastation on our planet? Will the world governments insist that he destroy it with a nuclear warhead?

And, can he find out who is responsible for it all?

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This book is dedicated to the men and women who design, build, launch and watch over all the satellites, rovers and planetary voyagers out there. We now know more about some of our neighboring planet than ever before, and perhaps a little more about our own fragile rock in space. And, thanks to LLL for the characters I stole!

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At that moment, the unseen accomplice walked up behind Tom and shot him in the back of the head. *page 24*

# Tom Swift and the Planet Paradox

## FOREWORD

Even before the International Astronomical Union downgraded our ninth planet, Pluto, to the status of a mere “dwarf planet,” Tom Swift already could have told them that.

Having visited several of the other planets, his studies of the bodies in our solar system had indicated that Pluto might not contain enough actual solid rock to keep its qualification. Just too much of it seems to be ice of various compositions.

A lot of this had been put into the backs of people’s minds during the period leading up to this story.

This is just another of the mysteries that astronomers have noticed in recent years. From the Shoemaker-Levy 9 comet collisions into Jupiter to the disappearance then reappearance of the Great Red Spot on that same planet’s surface to the discovery of the tiny, almost unnoticed quasi satellite/asteroid/moon of Cruithne and its wildly fluctuating path around the Earth. And, have you heard about the discovery of a distant galaxy shaped like a boomerang?

So, nothing should be too surprising.

Unless it includes the complete and sudden disappearance of an entire solar body, leaving no trace.

What a curious universe this is in which we live.

*Victor Appleton II*

## CHAPTER 1 /

### ALL GOOD THINGS...

"COLOR ME surprised, Tom," the dark-haired young man standing next to Tom Swift, inventor and scientist, said in a stage whisper. "You actually did it! You and Bash got engaged!"

Four young adults stood on the deck behind the Swift house having pictures taken by a local photographer. Tom turned away from his new fiancé, having just given her a tender kiss, and whispered back, "Take a look next to Bash, Bud. Sandy's eyes are saying that you're next, chum."

Photos finally finished, Tom and Bashalli Prandit turned to face the crowd of over thirty family and friends, Tom could hear his best friend—the man who would be his best man in less than a year—gulp. Squeezing Bashalli's icy fingers, he smiled.

Tom knew that his sister, Sandra Swift—one year his junior and who had been dating Bud Barclay for the past four years—was not only deeply in love with the athlete and pilot, she already had her ideal wedding dress picked out and had placed a sizable deposit on it the year before when Tom and Bashalli hadn't yet discussed anything more serious than a boyfriend/girlfriend arrangement.

Now, here they stood at a party Tom's mother and father, Anne and Damon, were giving them to mark the official announcement of their engagement.

Bashalli and her father, mother and older brother Moshan had moved to Shopton, New York, more than a decade earlier from their native Pakistan. Quickly becoming more Americanized as she entered her teens, Bashalli's parents had held out hope for many years that they might arrange a traditional marriage for her, but realized that she had fallen so deeply in love with the famous, young inventor within the first few months after they had met more than two years earlier, they had readily given her their blessings to marry Tom when he asked for her hand.

And, she and Sandy Swift were so close they were practically sisters within the first few weeks Bashalli and Tom had begun dating. Early on, Sandy had confided in her new friend that they would officially be

family some day.

As he and Bashalli walked through the crowd to the smiles and good wishes of everyone gathered in the Swift's spacious back yard, they both noticed the tears of joy in the eyes of both his and her mother. Squeezing her hand again, he said out of the side of his mouth, "I absolutely love you, Bash, but the first chance I get, I'm going to invent something to unfreeze those your icicle fingers of yours."

She squeezed his hand tightly. "That will not be necessary, Thomas, as I have such a thing already. You!"

"Can we get out of these fancy clothes soon?" he asked her. "You know how I hate wearing a tie and jacket in the summer. I'm about to sweat myself into a coma!"

Although she was very proud of her dress, the one she and Sandy had shopped for and worried over for two full weeks, Bashalli readily accepted the idea that she and Tom should change into more comfortable clothing before the early evening buffet dinner came out.

After what seemed like hours, but had been little more than twenty more minutes, they excused themselves and changed.

By the following Monday, things were mostly back to normal and Tom drove into work with his father. They parted in the Administration parking lot with Damon heading upstairs to the spacious office he and Tom often shared, and Tom heading for a meeting with Dianne Duquesne and her team of propulsion engineers.

"I'm not sure, Tom," she told him after he made a brief presentation about changes he would like to investigate. "That little Y-4 engine of yours is, as I once heard in a movie, 'practically perfect in every way!' Why downsize it by half its displacement when it's already a midget dynamo? You making a go-kart for hamsters?"

"Good question. I probably should have mentioned that we—Swift Enterprises that is—have been approached by a brand new motorcycle company out in California. They want to build a high-performance, very low fuel consumption, hybrid cycle and think that a tiny version of the Y-4 would be perfect for turning the electrical generator they will use as the main power source."

The head of Propulsion Engineering nodded, contemplating what it all might mean. She brightened and asked, "Do you mean they won't be

using the engine to actually drive the motorcycle?"

"That's right. It will run entirely on electricity with a trio of our newest low-profile lithium-antimony batteries providing about sixty miles of travel before the engine kicks in and begins charging them while providing enough electricity to continue powering the bike. If we get things right for them, one gallon of gasoline will get a driver more than one hundred ninety miles at freeway speeds."

Dianne turned to her team and posed a few quiet questions. A minute later she turned back to her young boss. "If you don't mind, I'd like to try something a bit different. It will be just as small but will have better torque to turn a high-output generator."

Tom looked at her with curiosity spread across his face. "And?"

"And," she said giving him a smile, "I think we can name that engine in just six cylinders, not twelve!"

She went on to explain that her thoughts were leaning toward a Y-2 engine, simplifying it greatly while retaining individual cylinder size. Like the original it would be built to resemble an inverted letter "Y" with each of the arms containing—in this case—a two-cylinder set. The idea behind the radical design was that at least one piston would be in its 'power stroke' at any given time. This meant that no flywheel was necessary to keep the engine turning over, even at slow idle speeds. It also meant that there was always near-full torque—the turning force—coming through the crankshaft.

"Can you give us three weeks?" she asked. "For a working prototype, I mean."

Tom smiled.

"Ah. I see," she said. "You were going to give us four, weren't you?"

Now, Tom blushed slightly. Then, he nodded.

"Actually, I was going to ask if you could get me anything in six weeks. I'll gladly take it in three!"

By the time Tom left Propulsion and got to the large office he and his father shared, Damon had just returned from a quick meeting at the Swift Construction Company several miles away from Enterprises—the four-mile-square research and invention facility located on the south

side of Shopton and near the large body of water that was Lake Carlopa. All to be found in upstate New York, Shopton, it had been the home of many generations of Swifts over the previous century-plus. Enterprises was criss-crossed by eight lengthy runways and taxiways, with a central cluster of building that would fill many city blocks, and it was one of the most widely known companies in the world. The names of both Damon and Tom Swift were recognized at the same high level by the general public as the most famous movie stars and politicians of the day.

And, they were both generally held in higher regard than either of the aforementioned types of people as well!

"Greetings, Son," his father called out from behind his computer. "Can Dianne and her folks get going on that little engine project?" Damon had been the one to take the initial request from BlancMoto out in San Jose. He quickly realized that Tom, with his recent successes in small and very powerful gasoline engines, would be the one to handle any possible development. Yet he maintained an avid interest in anything his son might be working on, so he was naturally curious.

"She and they can. They thought I was a little loopy at first until they understood the whole hybrid aspect. Now, it looks like they'll go like gangbusters on it!"

"That's good news. Well, now to change the subject, I've accepted an invitation on both our behalf's to take part in observing a demonstration of a new low-orbit rocket design the government is looking into."

"Is this so we can bid on the project?"

Damon shook his head. "Already awarded a few years ago. Things have progressed awfully slow and this first test launch is crucial to the ongoing project."

Tom was shocked. "Are they asking us to help a competitor?"

"Not really. You see, the rocket design has been under development at a small college in Connecticut for over four years. It's been a class project for seniors involved in their high-altitude studies program. And, while it has been a learning platform, it is also a full-fledged Government contract and Uncle Sam is requesting some results. Their junior Congressman, a Representative Theo Emerson, has asked that

you and I drop by day after tomorrow to watch preparations and then stay the following day for an early morning launch. One of the students suggested your name."

He filled Tom in on the few particulars he knew before Tom happily agreed to the trip.

"Of course, your new fiancé may take exception to you leaving her alone for forty-eight hours, you know," Damon teased Tom. "Perhaps, you ought to ask her permission." He winked at his son.

When Tom called Bashalli a few minutes later she agreed that she would miss him, but it would be nice for Tom and his father to be together. "Besides. I need to spend some time helping Sandra strategize on getting Budworth to propose."

Tom contemplated giving his best friend a heads up about that, but grinned to himself and thought, *Who am I to stand in the way of true love, and his discomfort!*

Father and son made the trip to the city of New Haven in one of Swift Enterprises' Toads—officially known as the SE-11 Commuter, but given that nickname by Bud Barclay upon seeing the first test version. Two above-wing-mounted jet engines and a squat, underslung cockpit gave it the appearance, from the front, of being a giant amphibian.

They shook hands with the man in charge of the program.

"Very nice to meet the two of you. I'm Daffid Cym Cluyethe and, yes that is a wonderful mouthful of Welsh name. Please call me Dave. And this rag-tag mob is my senior class and the ones responsible for finally getting the design built and ready for this test. I hope we won't let you two down."

"Nonsense, Dave," Damon stated. "If we've learned anything from our many rocket launchings it is that even a failure teaches anybody willing to learn."

"Can we see the rocket, sir?" Tom inquired.

"Absolutely. We have it under wraps in our main storage building at the edge of the campus. Let me introduce you to these people and we'll all head over there." He lowered his voice, "I have the sneaking suspicion that they will all explode if they don't get to show you everything. I hope you don't mind the enthusiasm of unbridled youth."