
Tom Swift And His Aerial Warship

Victor Appleton

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Tom Swift And His Aerial Warship
or
The Naval Terror of the Seas

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CHAPTER I. TOM IS PUZZLED

"What's the matter, Tom? You look rather blue!"

"Blue! Say, Ned, I'd turn red, green, yellow, or any other color of the rainbow, if I thought it would help matters any."

"Whew!"

Ned Newton, the chum and companion of Tom Swift, gave vent to a whistle of surprise, as he gazed at the young fellow sitting opposite him, near a bench covered with strange-looking tools and machinery, while blueprints and drawings were scattered about.

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Ranged on the sides of the room were models of many queer craft, most of them flying machines of one sort or another, while through the open door that led into a large shed could be seen the outlines of a speedy monoplane.

"As bad as that, eh, Tom?" went on Ned. "I thought something was up when I first came in, but, if you'll excuse a second mention of the color scheme, I should say it was blue—decidedly blue. You look as though you had lost your last friend, and I want to assure you that if you do feel that way, it's dead wrong. There's myself, for one, and I'm sure Mr. Damon—"

"Bless my gasoline tank!" exclaimed Tom, with a laugh, in imitation of the gentleman Ned Newton had mentioned, "I know that! I'm not worrying over the loss of any friends."

"And there are Eradicate, and Koku, the giant, just to mention a couple of others," went on Ned, with a smile.

"That's enough!" exclaimed Tom. "It isn't that, I tell you."

"Well, what is it then? Here I go and get a half-holiday off from the bank, and just at the busiest time, too, to come and see you, and I find you in a brown study, looking as blue as indigo, and maybe you're all yellow inside from a bilious attack, for all I know."

"Quite a combination of colors," admitted Tom. "But it isn't what you think. It's just that I'm puzzled, Ned."

"Puzzled?" and Ned raised his eyebrows to indicate how surprised he was that anything should puzzle his friend.

"Yes, genuinely puzzled."

"Has anything gone wrong?" Ned asked. "No one is trying to take any of your pet inventions away from you, is there?"

"No, not exactly that, though it is about one of my inventions I am puzzled. I guess I haven't shown you my very latest; have I, Ned?"

"Well, I don't know, Tom. Time was when I could keep track of you and your inventions, but that was in your early days, when you started with a motorcycle and were glad enough to have a motorboat. But, since you've taken to aerial navigation and submarine work, not to mention one or two other lines of activity, I give up. I don't know where to look next, Tom, for something new."

"Well, this isn't so very new," went on the young inventor, for Tom Swift had designed and patented many new machines of the air, earth and water. "I'm just trying to work out some new problems in aerial navigation, Ned," he went on.

"I thought there weren't any more," spoke Ned, soberly enough.

"Come, now, none of that!" exclaimed Tom, with a laugh. "Why, the surface of aerial navigation has only been scratched. The science is far from being understood, or even made safe, not to say perfected, as water and land travel have been. There's lots of chance yet."

"And you're working on something new?" asked Ned, as he looked around the shop where he and Tom were sitting. As the young bank employee had said, he had come away from the institution that afternoon to have a little holiday with his chum, but Tom, seated in the midst of his inventions, seemed little inclined to jollity.

Through the open windows came the hum of distant machinery, for Tom Swift and his father were the heads of a company founded to manufacture and market their many inventions, and about their home were grouped several buildings. From a small plant the business had grown to be a great tree, under the direction of Tom and his father.

"Yes, I'm working on something new," admitted Tom, after a moment of silence.

"And, Ned," he went on, "there's no reason why you shouldn't see it. I've been keeping it a bit secret, until I had it a little further advanced, but I've got to a point now where I'm stuck, and perhaps it will do me good to talk to someone about it."

"Not to talk to me, though, I'm afraid. What I don't know about machinery, Tom, would fill a great many books. I don't see how I can help you," and Ned laughed.

"Well, perhaps you can, just the same, though you may not know a lot of technical things about machines. It sometimes helps me just to tell my troubles to a disinterested person, and hear him ask questions. I've got dad half distracted trying to solve the problem, so I've had to let up on him for a while. Come on out and see what you make of it."

"Sure, Tom, anything to oblige. If you want me to sit in front of your photo-telephone, and have my picture taken, I'm agreeable, even if you shoot off a flashlight at my ear. Or, if you want me to see how long I can stay under water without breathing I'll try that, too, provided you don't leave me under too long, lead the way—I'm agreeable as far as I'm able, old man."

"Oh, it isn't anything like that," Tom answered with a laugh. "I might as well give you a few hints, so you'll know what I'm driving at. Then I'll take you out and show it to you."

"What is it—air, earth or water?" asked Ned Newton, for he knew his chum's activities led along all three lines.

"This happens to be air."

"A new balloon?"

"Something like that. I call it my aerial warship, though."

"Aerial warship, Tom! That sounds rather dangerous!"

"It will be dangerous, too, if I can get it to work. That's what it's intended for."

"But a warship of the air!" cried Ned. "You can't mean it. A warship carries guns, mortars, bombs, and—"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Tom, "and I appreciate all that when I called my newest craft an aerial warship."

"But," objected Ned, "an aircraft that will carry big guns will be so large that—"

"Oh, mine is large enough," Tom broke in.

"Then it's finished!" cried Ned eagerly, for he was much interested in his chum's inventions.

"Well, not exactly," Tom said. "But what I was going to tell you was that all guns are not necessarily large. You can get big results with small guns and projectiles now, for high-powered explosives come in small packages. So it isn't altogether a question of carrying a certain amount of weight. Of course, an aerial warship will have to be big, for it will have to carry extra machinery to give it extra speed, and it will have to carry a certain armament, and a large crew will be needed. So, as I said, it will need to be large. But that problem isn't worrying me."

"Well, what is it, then?" asked Ned.

"It's the recoil," said Tom, with a gesture of despair.

"The recoil?" questioned Ned, wonderingly.

"Yes, from the guns, you know. I haven't been able to overcome that, and, until I do, I'm afraid my latest invention will be a failure."

Ned shook his head.

"I'm afraid I can't help you any," he said. "The only thing I know about recoils is connected with an old shotgun my father used to own."

"I took that once, when he didn't know it," Ned proceeded. "It was pretty heavily loaded, for the crows had been having fun in our cornfield, and dad had been shooting at them. This time I thought I'd take a chance."

"Well, I fired the gun. But it must have had a double charge in it and been rusted at that. All I know is that after I pulled the trigger I thought the end of the world had come. I heard a clap of thunder, and then I went flying over backward into a blackberry patch."

"That was the recoil," said Tom.

"The what?" asked Ned.

"The recoil. The recoil of the gun knocked you over."

"Oh, yes," observed Ned, rubbing his shoulder in a reflective sort of way. "I always thought it was something like that. But, at the time I put it down to an explosion, and let it go at that."

"No, it wasn't an explosion, properly speaking," said Tom. "You see, when powder explodes, in a gun, or otherwise, its force is exerted in all directions, up, down and every way."

"This went mostly backward—in my direction," said Ned ruefully.

"You only thought so," returned Tom. "Most of the power went out in front, to force out the shot. Part of it, of course, was exerted on the barrel of the gun—that was sideways—but the strength of the steel held it in. And part of the force went backward against your shoulder. That part was the recoil, and it is the recoil of the guns I figure on putting aboard my aerial warship that is giving me such trouble."

"Is that what makes you look so blue?" asked Ned.

"That's it. I can't seem to find a way by which to take up the recoil, and the force of it, from all the guns I want to carry, will just about tear my ship to pieces, I figure."

"Then you haven't actually tried it out yet?" asked Ned.

"Not the guns, no. I have the warship of the air nearly done, but I've worked out on paper the problem of the guns far enough so that I know I'm up against it. It can't be done, and an aerial warship without guns wouldn't be worth much, I'm afraid."

"I suppose not," agreed Ned. "And is it only the recoil that is bothering you?"

"Mostly. But come, take a look at my latest pet," and Tom arose to lead the way to another shed, a large one in the distance, toward which he waved his hand to indicate to his chum that there was housed the wonderful invention.

The two chums crossed the yard, threading their way through the various buildings, until they stood in front of the structure to which Tom had called attention.

"It's in here," he said. "I don't mind admitting that I'm quite proud of it, Ned; that is, proud as far as I've gone. But the gun business sure has me worried. I'm going to talk it off on you. Hello!" cried Tom suddenly, as he put a key in the complicated lock on the door, "someone has been in here. I wonder who it is?"

Ned was a little startled at the look on Tom's face and the sound of alarm in his chum's voice.

CHAPTER II. A FIRE ALARM

Tom Swift quickly opened the door of the big shed. It was built to house a dirigible balloon, or airship of some sort. Ned could easily tell that from his knowledge of Tom's previous inventions.

"Something wrong?" asked the young bank clerk.

"I don't know," returned Tom, and then as he looked inside the place, he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Koku?" he asked, as a veritable giant of a man came forward.

"Yes, master, it is only Koku and your father," spoke the big chap, with rather a strange accent.

"Oh, is my father here?" asked Tom. "I was wondering who had opened the door of this shed."

"Yes, Tom," responded the elder Swift, coming up to them, "I had a new idea in regard to some of those side guy wires, and I wanted to try it out. I brought Koku with me to use his strength on some of them."

"That's all right, Dad. Ned and I came out to wrestle with that recoil problem again. I want to try some guns on the craft soon, but—"

"You'd better not, Tom," warned his father. "It will never work, I tell you. You can't expect to take up quick-firing guns and bombs in an airship, and have them work properly. Better give it up."

"I never will. I'll make it work, Dad!"

"I don't believe you will, Tom. This time you have bitten off more than you can chew, to use a homely but expressive statement."

"Well, Dad, we'll see," began Tom easily. "There she is, Ned," he went on. "Now, if you'll come around here

But Tom never finished that sentence, for at that moment there came running into the airship shed an elderly, short, stout, fussy gentleman, followed by an aged colored man. Both of them seemed very much excited.

"Bless my socks, Tom!" cried the short, stout man. "There sure is trouble!"

"I should say So, Massa Tom!" added the colored man. "I done did prognosticate dat some day de combustibile material of which dat shed am composed would conflagrate—"

"What's the matter?" interrupted Tom, jumping forward. "Speak out! Eradicate! Mr. Damon, what is it?"

"The red shed!" cried the short little man. "The red shed, Tom

"It's on fire!" yelled the colored man.

"Great thunderclaps!" cried Tom. "Come on —everybody on the job!" he yelled. "Koku, pull the alarm! If that red shed goes—"

Instantly the place was in confusion. Tom and Ned, looking from a window of the hangar, saw a billow of black smoke roll across the yard. But already the private fire bell was clanging out its warning. And, while the work of fighting the flames is under way, I will halt the progress of this story long enough to give my new readers a little idea of who Tom Swift is, so they may read this book more intelligently. Those of you who have perused the previous volumes may skip this part.

Tom Swift, though rather young in years, was an inventor of note. His tastes and talents were developed along the line of machinery and locomotion. Motorcycles, automobiles, motorboats, submarine craft, and, latest of all, craft of the air, had occupied the attention of Tom Swift and his father for some years.

Mr. Swift was a widower, and lived with Tom, his only son, in the village of Shopton, New York State. Mrs. Baggert kept house for them, and an aged colored man, Eradicate Sampson, with his mule, Boomerang, did "odd jobs" about the Shopton home and factories.

Among Tom's friends was a Mr. Wakefield Damon, from a nearby village. Mr. Damon was always blessing something, from his hat to his shoes, a harmless sort of habit that seemed to afford him much comfort. Then there was Ned Newton, a boyhood chum of Tom's, who worked in the Shopton bank. I will just mention Mary Nestor, a young lady of Shopton, in whom Tom was more than ordinarily interested. I have spoken of Koku, the giant. He really was a giant of a man, of enormous strength, and was one of two whom Tom had brought with him from a strange land where Tom was held captive for a time. You may read about it in a book devoted to those adventures.

Tom took Koku into his service, somewhat to the dismay of Eradicate, who was desperately jealous. But poor Eradicate was getting old, and could not do as much as he thought he could. So, in a great measure, Koku replaced him, and Tom found much use for the giant's strength.

Tom had begun his inventive work when, some years before this story opens, he had bargained for Mr. Damon's motorcycle, after that machine had shot its owner into a tree. Mr. Damon was, naturally, perhaps, much disgusted, and sold the affair cheap. Tom repaired it, made some improvements, and, in the first volume of this series, entitled "Tom Swift and His Motorcycles," you may read of his rather thrilling adventures on his speedy road-steed.

From then on Tom had passed a busy life, making many machines and having some thrilling times with them. Just previous to the opening of this story Tom had made a peculiar instrument, described in the volume

entitled "Tom Swift and His Photo- Telephone." With that a person talking could not only see the features of the person with whom he was conversing, but, by means of a selenium plate and a sort of camera, a permanent picture could be taken of the person at either end of the wire.

By means of this invention Tom had been able to make a picture that had saved a fortune. But Tom did not stop there. With him to invent was as natural and necessary as breathing. He simply could not stop it. And so we find him now about to show to his chum, Ned Newton, his latest patent, an aerial warship, which, however, was not the success Tom had hoped for.

But just at present other matters than the warship were in Tom's mind. The red shed was on fire.

That mere statement might not mean anything special to the ordinary person, but to Tom, his father, and those who knew about his shops, it meant much.

"The red shed!" Tom cried. "We mustn't let that get the best of us! Everybody at work! Father, not you, though. You mustn't excite yourself!"

Even in the midst of the alarm Tom thought of his father, for the aged man had a weak heart, and had on one occasion nearly expired, being saved just in time by the arrival of a doctor, whom Tom brought to the scene after a wonderful race through the air.

"But, Tom, I can help," objected the aged inventor.

"Now, you just take care of yourself, Father!" Tom cried. "There are enough of us to look after this fire, I think."

"But, Tom, it—it's the red shed!" gasped Mr. Swift.

"I realize that, Dad. But it can't have much of a start yet. Is the alarm ringing, Koku?"

"Yes, Master," replied the giant, in correct but stilted English. "I have set the indicator to signal the alarm in every shop on the premises."

"That's right." Tom sprang toward the door. "Eradicate!" he called.

"Yais, sah! Heah I is!" answered the colored man. "I'll go git mah mule, Boomerang, right away, an' he—"

"Don't you bring Boomerang on the scene!" Tom yelled. "When I want that shed kicked apart I can do it better than by using a mule's heels. And you know you can't do a thing with Boomerang when he sees fire."

"Now dat's so, Massa Tom. But I could put blinkers on him, an'—"

"No, you let Boomerang stay where he is. Come on, Ned. We'll see what we can do. Mr. Damon—"

"Yes, Tom, I'm right here," answered the peculiar man, for he had come over from his home in Waterford to pay a visit to his friends, Tom and Mr. Swift. "I'll do anything I can to help you, Tom, bless my necktie!" he went on. "Only say the word!"

"We've got to get some of the stuff out of the place!" Tom cried. "We may be able to save it, but I can't take a chance on putting out the fire and letting some of the things in there go up in smoke. Come on!"

Those in the shed where was housed what Tom hoped would prove to be a successful aerial warship rushed to the open. From the other shops and buildings nearby were pouring men and boys, for the Swift plant employed a number of hands now.

Above the shouts and yells, above the crackle of flames, could be heard the clanging of the alarm bell, set ringing by Koku, who had pulled the signal in the airship shed. From there it had gone to every building in the plant, being relayed by the telephone operator, whose duty it was to look after that.

"My, you've got a big enough fire-fighting force, Tom!" cried Ned in his chum's ear.

"Yes, I guess we can master it, if it hasn't gotten the best of us. Say, it's going some, though!"

Tom pointed to where a shed, painted red—a sign of danger— could be seen partly enveloped in smoke, amid the black clouds of which shot out red tongues of flame.

"What have you got it painted red for?" Ned asked pantingly, as they ran on.

"Because—" Tom began, but the rest of the sentence was lost in a yell.

Tom had caught sight of Eradicate and the giant, Koku, unreeling from a central standpipe a long line of hose.

"Don't take that!" Tom cried. "Don't use that hose! Drop it!"

"What's the matter? Is it rotten?" Ned wanted to know.

"No, but if they pull it out the water will be turned on automatically."

"Well, isn't that what you want at a fire—water?" Ned demanded.

"Not at this fire," was Tom's answer. "There's a lot of calcium carbide in that red shed—that's why it's red—to warn the men of danger. You know what happens when water gets on carbide—there's an explosion, and there's enough carbide in that shed to send the whole works sky high.

"Drop that hose!" yelled Tom in louder tones. "Drop it, Rad— Koku! Do you want to kill us all!"

CHAPTER III. A DESPERATE BATTLE

Tom's tones and voice were so insistent that the giant and the colored man had no choice but to obey. They dropped the hose which, half unreeled, lay like some twisted snake in the grass. Had it been pulled out all the way the water would have spurted from the nozzle, for it was of the automatic variety, with which Tom had equipped all his plant.

"But what are you going to do, Tom, if you don't use water?" asked Ned, wonderingly.

"I don't know—yet, but I know water is the worst thing you can put on carbide," returned Tom. For all he spoke slowly his brain was working fast. Already, even now, he was planning how best to give battle to the flames.

It needed but an instant's thought on the part of Ned to make him understand that Tom was right. It would be well-nigh fatal to use water on carbide. Those of you who have bicycle lanterns, in which that not very

pleasant-smelling chemical is used, know that if a few drops of water are allowed to drip slowly on the gray crystals acetylene gas is generated, which makes a brilliant light. But, if the water drips too fast, the gas is generated too quickly, and an explosion results. In lamps, of course, and in lighting plants where carbide is used, there are automatic arrangements to prevent the water flowing too freely to the chemical. But Tom knew if the hose were turned on the fire in the red shed a great explosion would result, for some of the tins of carbide would be melted by the heat.

Yet the fire needed to be coped with. Already the flames were coming through the roof, and the windows and door were spouting red fire and volumes of smoke.

Several other employees of Tom's plant had made ready to unreel more hose, but the warning of the young inventor, shouted to Eradicate and Koku, had had its effect. Every man dropped the line he had begun to unreel.

"Ha! Massa Tom say drop de hose, but how yo' gwine t' squirt watah on a fire wifout a hose; answer me dat?" and Eradicate looked at Koku.

"Me no know," was the slow answer. "I guess Koku go pull shed down and stamp out fire."

"Huh! Maybe yo' could do dat in cannibal land, where yo' all come from," spoke Eradicate, "but yo' can't do dat heah! 'Sides, de red shed will blow up soon. Dere's suffin' else in dere except carbide, an' dat's gwine t' go up soon, dat's suah!"

"Maybe you get your strong man-mule, Boomerang," suggested Koku. "Nothing ever hurt him--explosion or nothing. He can kick shed all to pieces, and put out fire."

"Dat's what I wanted t' do, but Massa Tom say I cain't," explained the colored man. "Golly! Look at dat fire!"

Indeed the blaze was now assuming alarming proportions. The red shed, which was not a small structure, was blazing on all sides. About it stood the men from the various shops.

"Tom, you must do something," said Mr. Swift. "If the flames once reach that helmanite--"

"I know, Father. But that explosive is in double vacuum containers, and it will be safe for some time yet. Besides, it's in the cellar. It's the carbide I'm most worried about. We daren't use water."

"But something will have to be done!" exclaimed Mr. Damon. "Bless my red necktie, if we don't--"

"Better get back a way," suggested Tom. "Something may go off!"

His words of warning had their effect, and the whole circle moved back several paces.

"Is there anything of value in the shed?" asked Ned.

"I should say there was!" Tom answered. "I hoped we could get some of them out, but we can't now--until the fire dies down a bit, at any rate."

"Look, Tom! The pattern shop roof is catching!" shouted Mr. Swift, pointing to where a little spurt of flame showed on the roof of a distant building.

"It's from sparks!" Tom said.

"Any danger of using water there?" Ned wanted to know.

"No, use all you like! That's the only thing to do. Come on, you with the hose!" Tom yelled. "Save the other buildings!"

"But are you going to let the red shed burn?" asked Mr. Swift. "You know what it means, Tom."

"Yes, Father, I know. And I'm going to fight that fire in a new way. But we must save the other buildings, too. Play water on all the other sheds and structures!" ordered the young inventor. "I'll tackle this one myself. Oh, Ned!" he called.

"Yes," answered his chum. "What is it?"

"You take charge of protecting the place where the new aerial warship is stored. Will you? I can't afford to lose that."

"I'll look after it, Tom. No harm in using water there, though; is there?"

"Not if you don't use too much. Some of the woodwork isn't varnished yet, and I wouldn't want it to be wet. But do the best you can. Take Koku and Eradicate with you. They can't do any good here."

"Do you mean to say you're going to give up and let this burn?"

"Not a bit of it, Ned. But I have another plan I want to try. Lively now! The wind's changing, and it's blowing over toward my aerial warship shed. If that catches—"

Tom shook his head protestingly, and Ned set off on the run, calling to the colored man and the giant to get out another line of hose.

"I wonder what Tom is going to do?" mused Ned, as he neared the big shed he and the others had left on the alarm of fire.

Tom, himself, seemed in no doubt as to his procedure. With one look at the blazing red shed, as if to form an opinion as to how much longer it could burn without getting entirely beyond control, Tom set off on a run toward another large structure. Ned, glancing toward his chum, observed:

"The dirigible shed! I wonder what his game is? Surely that can't be in danger—it's too far off!"

Ned was right as to the last statement. The shed, where was housed a great dirigible balloon Tom had made, but which he seldom used of late, was sufficiently removed from the zone of fire to be out of danger.

Meanwhile several members of the fire-fighting force that had been summoned from the various shops by the alarm, had made an effort to save from the red shed some of the more valuable of the contents. There were some machines in there, as well as explosives and chemicals, in addition to the store of carbide.

But the fire was now too hot to enable much to be done in the way of salvage. One or two small things were carried out from a little addition to the main structure, and then the rescuers were driven back by the heat of the flames, as well as by the rolling clouds of black smoke.

"Keep away!" warned Mr. Swift. "It will explode soon. Keep back!"

"That's right!" added Mr. Damon. "Bless my powder-horn! We may all be going sky-high soon, and without aid from any of Tom Swift's aeroplanes, either."

Warned by the aged inventor, the throng of men began slowly moving away from the immediate neighborhood of the blazing shed. Though it may seem to the reader that some time has elapsed since the first sounding of the alarm, all that I have set down took place in a very short period—hardly three minutes elapsing since Tom and the others came rushing out of the aerial warship building.

Suddenly a cry arose from the crowd of men near the red shed. Ned, who stood ready with several lines of hose, in charge of Koku, Eradicate and others, to turn them on the airship shed, in case of need, looked in the direction of the excited throng.

The young bank clerk saw a strange sight. From the top of the dirigible balloon shed a long, black, cigar-shaped body arose, floating gradually upward. The very roof of the shed slid back out of the way, as Tom pressed the operating lever, and the dirigible was free to rise—as free as though it had been in an open field.

"He's going up!" cried Ned in surprise. "Making an ascent at a time like this, when he ought to stay here to fight the fire! What's gotten into Tom, I'd like to know? I wonder if he can be—"

Ned did not finish his half-formed sentence. A dreadful thought came into his mind. What if the sudden fire, and the threatened danger, as well as the prospective loss that confronted Tom, had affected his mind?

"It certainly looks so," mused Ned, as he saw the big balloon float free from the shed. There was no doubt but that Tom was in it. He could be seen standing within the pilot-house, operating the various wheels and levers that controlled the ship of the air.

"What can he be up to?" marveled Tom. "Is he going to run away from the fire?"

Koku, Eradicate and several others were attracted by the sight of the great dirigible, now a considerable distance up in the air. Certainly it looked as though Tom Swift were running away. Yet Ned knew his chum better than that.

Then, as they watched, Ned and the others saw the direction of the balloon change. She turned around in response to the influence of the rudders and propellers, and was headed straight for the blazing shed, but some distance above it.

"What can he be planning?" wondered Ned.

He did not have long to wait to find out.

An instant later Tom's plan was made clear to his chum. He saw Tom circling over the burning red shed, and then the bank clerk saw what looked like fine rain dropping from the lower part of the balloon straight into the flames.

"He can't be dousing water on from up above there," reasoned Ned. "Pouring water on carbide from a height is just as bad as spurting it on from a hose, though perhaps not so dangerous to the persons doing it. But it can't be—"

"By Jove!" suddenly exclaimed Ned, as he had a better view of what was going on. "It's sand, that's what it is! Tom is giving battle to the flames with sand from the ballast bags of the dirigible! Hurray? That's the ticket!"

Sand! The only thing safe to use in case of an explosive chemical fire.

"Fine for you. Tom Swift! Fine!"

CHAPTER IV. SUSPICIONS

High up aloft, over the blazing red shed, with its dangerous contents that any moment might explode, Tom Swift continued to hold his big dirigible balloon as near the flames as possible. And as he stood outside on the small deck in front of the pilot-house, where were located the various controls, the young inventor pulled the levers that emptied bag after bag of fine sand on the spouting flames that, already, were beginning to die down as a result of this effectual quenching.

"Tom's done the trick!" yelled Ned, paying little attention now to the big airship shed, since he saw that the danger was about over.

"Dhat's what he suah hab done!" agreed Eradicate. "Mah ole mule Boomerang couldn't 'a' done any better."

"Huh! Your mule afraid of fire," remarked Koku.

"What's dat? Mah mule afraid ob fire?" cried the colored man. "Look heah, yo' great, big, overgrewed specimen ob an equilateral quadruped, I'll hab yo' all understand dat when yo' all speaks dat way about a friend ob mine dat yo'—"

"That'll do, Rad!" broke in Ned, with a laugh. He knew that when Tom's helper grew excited on the subject of his mule there was no stopping him, and Boomerang was a point on which Eradicate and Koku were always arguing. "The fire is under control now."

"Yes, it seems to have gone visiting," observed Koku.

"Visiting?" queried Ned, in some surprise.

"Yes, that is, it is going out," went on Koku.

"Oh, I understand!" laughed Ned. "Yes, and I hope it doesn't pay us another visit soon. Oh, look at Tom, would you!" he cried, for the young aviator had swung his ship about over the flames, to bring another row of sand bags directly above a place where the fire was hottest.

Down showered more sand from the bags which Tom opened. No fire could long continue to blaze under that treatment. The supply of air was cut off, and without that no fire can exist. Water would have been worse than useless, because of the carbide, but the sand covered it up so that it was made perfectly harmless.

Moving slowly, the airship hovered over every part of the now slowly expiring flames, the burned opening in the roof of the shed making it possible for the sand to reach the spots where it was most needed. The flames died out in section after section, until no more could be seen—only clouds of black smoke.

"How is it now?" came Tom's voice, as he spoke from the deck of the balloon through a megaphone.

"Almost out," answered Mr. Damon. "A little more sand, Tom."

The eccentric man had caught up a piece of paper and, rolling it into a cone, made an improvised megaphone of that.

"Haven't much more sand left," was Tom's comment, as he sent down a last shower. "That will have to do. Hustle that carbide and other explosive stuff out of there now, while you have a chance."

"That's it!" cried Ned, who caught his chums meaning. "Come on, Koku. There's work for you."

"Me like work," answered the giant, stretching out his great arms.

The last of the sand had completely smothered the fire, and Tom, observing from aloft that his work was well done, moved away in the dirigible, sending it to a landing space some little distance away from the shed whence it had arisen. It was impossible to drop it back again through the roof of the hangar, as the balloon was of such bulk that even a little breeze would deflect it so that it could not be accurately anchored. But Tom had it under very good control, and soon it was being held down on the ground by some of his helpers.

As all the sand ballast had been allowed to run out Tom was obliged to open the gas-valves and let some of the lifting vapor escape, or he could not have descended.

"Come on, now!" cried the inventor, as he leaped from the deck of his sky craft. "Let's clean out the red shed. That fire is only smothered, and there may be sparks smoldering under that sand, which will burst into flame, if we're not careful. Let's get the explosives out of the way."

"Bless my insurance policy, yes," exclaimed Mr. Damon. "That was a fine move of yours."

"It was the only way I could think of to put out the fire," Tom replied. "I knew water was out of the question, and sand was the next thing."

"But I didn't know where to get any until I happened to think of the ballast bags of my dirigible. Then I knew, if I could get above the fire, I could do the trick. I had to fly pretty high, though, as the fire was hot, and I was afraid it might explode the gas bag and wreck me."

"You were taking a chance," remarked Ned.

"Oh, well, you have to take chances in this business," observed Tom, with a smile. "Now, then, let's finish this work."

The sand, falling from the ballast bags of the dirigible, had so effectually quenched the fire that it was soon cool enough to permit close approach. Koku, Tom and some of the men who best knew how to handle the explosives, were soon engaged in the work of salvage.

"I wish I could help you, Tom," said his aged father. "I don't seem able to do anything but stand here and look on," and he gazed about him rather sadly.

"Never you mind, Dad!" Tom exclaimed. "We'll get along all right now. You'd better go up to the house. Mr. Damon will go with you."

"Yes, of course!" exclaimed the odd man, catching a wink from Tom, who wanted his father not to get too excited on account of his weak heart. "Come along, Professor Swift. The danger is all over."

"All right," assented the aged inventor, with a look at the still smoking shed.

"And, Dad, when you haven't anything else to do," went on Tom, rather whimsically, "you might be thinking up some plan to take up the recoil of those guns on my aerial warship. I confess I'm clean stumped on that"

point."

"Your aerial warship will never be a success," declared Mr. Swift. "You might as well give that up, Tom."

"Don't you believe it, Dad!" cried Tom, with more of a jolly air of one chum toward another than as though the talk was between father and son. "You solve the recoil problem for me, and I'll take care of the rest, and make the air warship sail. But we've got something else to do just now. Lively, boys."

While Mr. Swift, taking Mr. Damon's arm, walked toward the house, Tom, Ned, Koku, and some of the workmen began carrying out the explosives which had so narrowly escaped the fire. With long hooks the men pulled the shed apart, where the side walls had partly been burned through. Tom maintained an efficient firefighting force at his works, and the men had the proper tools with which to work.

Soon large openings were made on three sides of the red shed, or rather, what was left of it, and through these the dangerous chemicals and carbide, in sheet-iron cans, were carried out to a place of safety. In a little while nothing remained but a heap of hot sand, some charred embers and certain material that had been burned.

"Much loss, Tom?" asked Ned, as they surveyed the ruins. They were both black and grimy, tired and dirty, but there was a great sense of satisfaction.

"Well, yes, there's more lost than I like to think of," answered Tom slowly, "but it would have been a heap sight worse if the stuff had gone up. Still, I can replace what I've lost, except a few models I kept in this place. I really oughtn't to have stored them here, but since I've been working on my new aerial warship I have sort of let other matters slide. I intended to make the red shed nothing but a storehouse for explosive chemicals, but I still had some of my plans and models in it when it caught."

"Only for the sand the whole place might have gone," said Ned in a low voice.

"Yes. It's lucky I had plenty of ballast aboard the dirigible. You see, I've been running it alone lately, and I had to take on plenty of sand to make up for the weight of the several passengers I usually carry. So I had plenty of stuff to shower down on the fire. I wonder how it started, anyhow? I must investigate this."

"Mr. Damon and Eradicate seem to have seen it first," remarked Ned.

"Yes. At least they gave the alarm. Guess I'll ask Eradicate how he happened to notice. Oh, I say, Rad!" Tom called to the colored man.

"Yais, sah, Massa Tom! I'se comin'!" the darky cried, as he finished piling up, at a safe distance from the fire, a number of cans of carbide.

"How'd you happen to see the red shed ablaze?" Tom asked.

"Why, it was jest dish yeah way, Massa Tom," began the colored man. "I had jest been feedin' mah mule, Boomerang. He were pow'ful hungry, Boomerang were, an', when I give him some oats, wif a carrot sliced up in 'em—no, hole on—did I gib him a carrot t'day, or was it yist'day?—I done fo'got. No, it were yist'day I done gib him de carrot, I 'member now, 'case—"

"Oh, never mind the carrot, or Boomerang, either, Rad!" broke in Tom, "I'm asking you about the fire."

"An' I'se tellin' yo', Massa Tom," declared Eradicate, with a rather reproachful look at his master. "But I wanted t' do it right an' proper. I were comin' from Boomerang's stable, an' I see suffin' red spoutin' up at one

corner ob de red shed. I knowed it were fire right away, an' I yelled."

"Yes, I heard you yell," Tom said. "But what I wanted to know is, did you see anyone near the red shed at the time?"

"No, Massa Tom, I done didn't."

"I wonder if Mr. Damon did? I must ask him," went on the young inventor. "Come, on, Ned, we'll go up to the house. Everything is all right here, I think. Whew! But that was some excitement. And I didn't show you my aerial warship after all! Nor have you settled that recoil problem for me."

"Time enough, I guess," responded Ned. "You sure did have a lucky escape, Tom."

"That's right. Well, Koku, what is it?" for the giant had approached, holding out something in his hand.

"Koku found this in red shed," went on the giant, holding out a round, blackened object. "Maybe him powder; go bang–bang!"

"Oh, you think it's something explosive, eh?" asked Tom, as he took the object from the giant.

"Koku no think much," was the answer. "Him look funny."

Tom did not speak for a moment. Then he cried:

"Look funny! I should say it did! See here, Ned, if this isn't suspicious I'll eat my hat!" and Tom beckoned excitedly to his chum, who had walked on a little in advance.

CHAPTER V. A QUEER STRANGER

What Tom Swift held in his hand looked like a small cannon ball, but it could not have been solid or the young aviator would not so easily have held it out at arm's length for his friend Ned Newton to look at.

"This puts a different face on it, Ned," Tom went on, as he turned the object over.

"Is that likely to go off?" the bank clerk asked, as he came to a halt a little distance from his friend.

"Go off? No, it's done all the damage it could, I guess."

"Damage? It looks to me as though it had suffered the most damage itself. What is it, one of your models? Looks like a bomb to me."

"And that's what it is, Ned."

"Not one of those you're going to use on your aerial warship, is it, Tom?"

"Not exactly. I never saw this before, but it's what started the fire in the red shed all right; I'm sure of that."

"Do you really mean it?" cried Ned.

"I sure do."

"Well, if that's the case, I wouldn't leave such dangerous things around where there are explosives, Tom."

"I didn't, Ned. I wouldn't have had this within a hundred miles of my shed, if I could have had my way. It's a fire bomb, and it was set to go off at a certain time. Only I think something went wrong, and the bomb started a fire ahead of time.

"If it had worked at night, when we were all asleep, we might not have put the fire out so easily. This sure is suspicious! I'm glad you found this, Koku."

Tom was carefully examining the bomb, as Ned had correctly named it. The bank clerk, now that he was assured by his chum that the object had done all the harm it could, approached closer.

What he saw was merely a hollow shell of iron, with a small opening in it, as though intended for a place through which to put a charge of explosives and a fuse.

"But there was no explosion, Tom," explained Ned.

"I know it," said Tom quietly. "It wasn't an explosive bomb. Smell that!"

He held the object under Ned's nose so suddenly that the young bank clerk jumped back.

"Oh, don't get nervous," laughed Tom. "It can't hurt you now. But what does that smell like?"

Ned sniffed, sniffed again, thought for a moment, and then sniffed a third time.

"Why," he said slowly, "I don't just know the name of it, but it's that funny stuff you mix up sometimes to put in the oxygen tanks when we go up in the rarefied atmosphere in the balloon or airship."

"Manganese and potash," spoke Tom. "That and two or three other things that form a chemical combination which goes off by itself of spontaneous combustion after a certain time. Only the person who put this bomb together didn't get the chemical mixture just right, and it went off ahead of time; for which we have to be duly thankful."

"Do you really think that, Tom?" cried Ned.

"I'm positive of it," was the quiet answer.

"Why—why—that would mean some one tried to set fire to the red shed, Tom!"

"They not only tried it, but did it," responded Tom, more coolly than seemed natural under the circumstances. "Only for the fact that the mixture went off before it was intended to, and found us all alert and ready—well, I don't like to think what might have happened," and Tom cast a look about at his group of buildings with their valuable contents.

"You mean some one purposely put that bomb in the red shed, Tom?"

"That's exactly what I mean. Some enemy, who wanted to do me an injury, planned this thing deliberately. He filled this steel shell with chemicals which, of themselves, after a certain time, would send out a hot tongue of flame through this hole," and Tom pointed to the opening in the round steel shell.

"He knew the fire would be practically unquenchable by ordinary means, and he counted on its soon eating its way into the carbide and other explosives. Only it didn't."

"Why, Tom!" cried Ned. "It was just like one of those alarm-clock dynamite bombs—set to go off at a certain time."

"Exactly," Tom said, "only this was more delicate, and, if it had worked properly, there wouldn't have been a vestige left to give us a clue. But the fire, thanks to the ballast sand in the dirigible, was put out in time. The fuse burned itself out, but I can tell by the smell that chemicals were in it. That's all, Koku," he went on to the giant who had stood waiting, not understanding all the talk between Tom and Ned. "I'll take care of this now."

"Bad man put it there?" asked the giant, who at least comprehended that something was wrong.

"Well, yes, I guess you could say it was a bad man," replied Tom.

"Ha! If Koku find bad man—bad for that man!" muttered the giant, as he clasped his two enormous hands together, as though they were already on the fellow who had tried to do Tom Swift such an injury.

"I wouldn't like to be that man, if Koku catches him," observed Ned. "Have you any idea who it could be, Tom?"

"Not the least. Of course I know I have enemies, Ned. Every successful inventor has persons who imagine he has stolen their ideas, whether he has ever seen them or not. It may have been one of those persons, or some half-mad crank, who was jealous. It would be impossible to say, Ned."

"It wouldn't be Andy Foger, would it?"

"No; I don't believe Andy has been in this neighborhood for some time. The last lesson we gave him sickened him, I guess."

"How about those diamond-makers, whose secret you discovered? They wouldn't be trying to get back at you, would they?"

Well, it's possible, Ned. But I don't imagine so. They seem to have been pretty well broken up. No, I don't believe it was the diamond-makers who put this fire bomb in the red shed. Their line of activities didn't include this branch. It takes a chemist to know just how to blend the things contained in the bomb, and even a good chemist is likely to fail—as this one did, as far as time went."

"What are you going to do about it?" Ned asked.

"I don't know," and Tom spoke slowly, "I hoped I was done with all that sort of thing," he went on; "fighting enemies whom I have never knowingly injured. But it seems they are still after me. Well, Ned, this gives us something to do, at all events."

"You mean trying to find out who these fellows are?"

"Yes; that is, if you are willing to help."

"Well, I guess I am!" cried the bank clerk with sparkling eyes. "I wouldn't ask anything better. We've been in things like this before, Tom, and we'll go in again—and win! I'll help you all I can. Now, let's see if we can

pick up any other clues. This is like old times!" and Ned laughed, for he, like Tom, enjoyed a good "fight," and one in which the odds were against them.

"We sure will have our hands full," declared the young inventor. "Trying to solve the problem of carrying guns on an aerial warship, and finding out who set this fire."

"Then you're not going to give up your aerial warship idea?"

"No, indeed!" Tom cried. "What made you think that?"

"Well, the way your father spoke—"

"Oh, dear old dad!" exclaimed Tom affectionately. "I don't want to argue with him, but he's dead wrong!"

"Then you are going to make a go of it?"

"I sure am, Ned! All I have to solve is the recoil proposition, and, as soon as we get straightened out from this fire, we'll tackle that problem again—you and I. But I sure would like to know who put this in my red shed," and Tom looked in a puzzled manner at the empty fire bomb he still held.

Tom paused, on his way to the house, to put the bomb in one of his offices.

"No use letting dad know about this," he went on. It would only be something else for him to worry about."

"That's right," agreed Ned.

By this time nearly all evidences of the fire, except for the blackened ruins of the shed, had been cleared away. High in the air hung a cloud of black smoke, caused by some chemicals that had burned harmlessly save for that pall. Tom Swift had indeed had a lucky escape.

The young inventor, finding his father quieted down and conversing easily with Mr. Damon, who was blessing everything he could think of, motioned to Ned to follow him out of the house again.

"We'll leave dad here," said Tom, "and do a little investigating on our own account. We'll look for clues while they're fresh."

But, it must be confessed, after Tom and Ned had spent the rest of that day in and about the burned shed, they were little wiser than when they started. They found the place where the fire bomb had evidently been placed, right inside the main entrance to the shed. Tom knew it had been there because there were peculiar marks on the charred wood, and a certain queer smell of chemicals that confirmed his belief.

"They put the bomb there to prevent anyone going in at the first alarm and saving anything," Tom said. "They didn't count on the roof burning through first, giving me a chance to use the sand. I made the roof of the red shed flimsy just on that account, so the force of the explosion if one ever came, would be mostly upward. You know the expanding gases, caused by an explosion or by rapid combustion, always do just as electricity does, seek the shortest and easiest route. In this case I made the roof the easiest route."

"A lucky provision," observed Ned.

That night Tom had to confess himself beaten, as far as finding clues was concerned. The empty fire bomb was the only one, and that seemed valueless.

Close questioning of the workmen failed to disclose anything. Tom was particularly anxious to discover if any mysterious strangers had been seen about the works. There was a strict rule about admitting them to the plant, however, and it could not be learned that this had been violated.

"Well, we'll just have to lay that aside for a while," Tom said the next day, when Ned again came to pay a visit. "Now, what do you say to tackling, with me, that recoil problem on the aerial warship?"

"I'm ready, if you are," Ned agreed, "though I know about as much of those things as a snake does about dancing. But I'm game."

The two friends walked out toward the shed where Tom's new craft was housed. As yet Ned had not seen it. On the way they saw Eradicate walking along, talking to himself, as he often did.

"I wonder what he has on his mind," remarked Ned musingly.

"Something does seem to be worrying him," agreed Tom.

As they neared the colored man, they could hear him saying:

"He suah did hab nerve, dat's what he did! De idea ob askin' me all dem questions, an' den wantin' t' know if I'd sell him!"

"What's that, Eradicate?" asked Tom.

"Oh, it's a man I met when I were comin' back from de ash dump," Eradicate explained. One of the colored man's duties was to cart ashes away from Tom's various shops, and dump them in a certain swampy lot. With an old ramshackle cart, and his mule, Boomerang, Eradicate did this task to perfection.

"A man—what sort of a man?" asked Tom, always ready to be suspicious of anything unusual.

"He were a queer man," went on the aged colored helper. "First he stopped me an' asted me fo' a ride. He was a dressed-up gen'man, too, an' I were suah s'prised at him wantin' t' set in mah ole ash cart," said Eradicate. "But I done was polite t' him, an' fixed a blanket so's he wouldn't git too dirty. Den he asted me ef I didn't wuk fo' yo', Massa Tom, an' of course I says as how I did. Den he asted me about de fire, an' how much damage it done, an' how we put it out. An' he end up by sayin' he'd laik t' buy mah mule, Boomerang, an' he wants t' come heah dis arternoon an' talk t' me about it."

"He does, eh?" cried Tom. "What sort of a man was he, Rad?"

"Well, a gen'man sort ob man, Massa Tom. Stranger t' me. I nebber seed him afo'. He suah was monstrous polite t' ole black Eradicate, an' he gib me a half-dollar, too, jest fo' a little ride. But I aint' gwine t' sell Boomerang, no indeedy, I ain't!" and Eradicate shook his gray, kinky head decidedly.

"Ned, there may be something in this!" said Tom, in an excited whisper to his chum. "I don't like the idea of a mysterious stranger questioning Eradicate!"

CHAPTER VI. THE AERIAL WARSHIP

Ned Newton looked at Tom questioningly. Then he glanced at the unsuspecting colored man, who was industriously polishing the half-dollar the mysterious stranger had given him.

"Rad, just exactly what sort of a man was this one you speak of?" asked Tom.

"Why, he were a gen'man—"

"Yes, I know that much. You've said it before. But was he an Englishman, an American—or—"

Tom paused and waited for an answer.

"I think he were a Frenchman," spoke Eradicate. "I done didn't see him eat no frogs' laigs, but he smoked a cigarette dat had a funny smell, and he suah was monstrous polite. He suah was a Frenchman. I think."

Tom and Ned laughed at Eradicate's description of the man, but Tom's face was soon grave again.

"Tell us more about him, Rad," he suggested. "Did he seem especially interested in the fire?"

"No, sah, Massa Tom, he seemed laik he was more special interested in mah mule, Boomerang. He done asted how long I had him, an' how much I wanted fo' him, an' how old he was."

"But every once in a while he put in some question about the fire, or about our shops, didn't he, Rad?" Tom wanted to know.

The colored man scratched his kinky head, and glanced with a queer look at Tom.

"How yo' all done guess dat?" he asked.

"Answer my question," insisted Tom.

"Yes, sah, he done did ask about yo', and de wuks, ebery now and den," Rad confessed. "But how yo' all knowed dat, Massa Tom, when I were a—tellin' yo' all about him astin' fo' mah mule, done gets me—dat's what it suah does."

"Never mind, Rad. He asked questions about the plant, that's all I want to know. But you didn't tell him much, did you?"

Eradicate looked reproachfully at his master.

"Yo' all done knows me bettah dan dat, Massa Tom," the old colored man said. "Yo' all know yo' done gib orders fo' nobody t' talk about yo' projections."

"Yes, I know I gave those orders," Tom said, with a smile, "but I want to make sure that they have been followed."

"Well, I done follered 'em, Massa Tom."

"Then you didn't tell this queer stranger, Frenchman, or whatever he is, much about my place?"

"I didn't tell him nuffin', sah. I done frowed dust in his eyes.

Ned uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Eradicate is speaking figuratively," Tom said, with a laugh.

"Dat's what I means," the colored man went on. "I done fooled him. When he asted me about de fire I said it didn't do no damage at all—in fack dat we'd rather hab de fire dan not hab it, 'case it done gib us a chance t' practice our hose drill."

"That's good," laughed Tom. "What else?"

"Well, he done sort ob hinted t' me ef we all knowed how de fire done start. I says as how we did, dat we done start it ouse'ves fo' practice, an dat we done expected it all along, an' were ready fo' it. Course I knows dat were a sort of fairy story, Massa Tom, but den dat cigarette—smokin' Frenchman didn't hab no right t' asted me so many questions, did he?"

"No, indeed, Rad. And I'm glad you didn't give him straight answers. So he's coming here later on, is he?"

"T' see ef I wants t' sell mah mule, Boomerang, yais, sah. I sort ob thought maybe you'd want t' hab a look at dat man, so I tole him t' come on. Course I doan't want t' sell Boomerang, but ef he was t' offer me a big lot ob money fo' him I'd take it."

"Of course," Tom answered. "Very well, Rad. You may go on now, and don't say anything to anyone about what you have told me."

"I won't, Massa Tom," promised the colored man, as he went off muttering to himself.

"Well, what do you make of it, Tom?" asked Ned of his chum, as they walked on toward the shed of the new, big aerial warship.

"I don't know just what to think, Ned. Of course things like this have happened before—persons trying to worm secrets out of Eradicate, or some of the other men."

"They never succeeded in getting much, I'm glad to say, but it always keeps me worried for fear something will happen," Tom concluded.

"But about this Frenchman?"

"Well, he must be a new one. And, now I come to think of it, I did hear some of the men speaking about a foreigner—a stranger—being around town last week. It was just a casual reference, and I paid little attention to it. Now it looks as though there might be something in it."

"Do you think he'll come to bargain with Eradicate about the mule?" Ned asked.

"Hardly. That was only talk to make Eradicate unsuspecting. The stranger, whoever he was, sized Rad up partly right. I surmised, when Rad said he asked a lot of questions about the mule, that was only to divert suspicion. and that he'd come back to the subject of the fire every chance he got."

"And you were right."

"Yes, so it seems. But I don't believe the fellow will come around here. It would be too risky. All the same, we'll be prepared for him. I'll just rig up one of my photo—telephone machines, so that, if he does come to have a talk with Rad, we can both see and hear him."

"That's great, Tom! But do you think this fellow had anything to do with the fire?"

"I don't know. He knew about it, of course. This isn't the first fire we've had in the works, and, though we always fight them ourselves, still news of it will leak out to the town. So he could easily have known about it. And he might be in with those who set it, for I firmly believe the fire was set by someone who has an object in injuring me."

"It's too bad!" declared Ned. "Seems as though they might let you alone, if they haven't gumption enough to invent things for themselves."

"Well, don't worry. Maybe it will come out all right," returned Tom. "Now, let's go and have a look at my aerial warship. I haven't shown it to you yet. Then we'll get ready for that mysterious Frenchman, if he comes—but I don't believe he will."

The young inventor unlocked the door of the shed where he kept his latest "pet," and at the sight which met his eyes Ned Newton uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Tom, what is it?" he cried in an awed voice.

"My aerial warship!" was the quiet answer.

Ned Newton gave vent to a long whistle, and then began a detailed examination of the wonderful craft he saw before him. That is, he made as detailed an examination as was possible under the circumstances, for it was a long time before the young bank clerk fully appreciated all Tom Swift had accomplished in building the Mars, which was the warlike name painted in red letters on the big gas container that tugged and swayed overhead.

"Tom, however did you do it?" gasped Ned at length.

"By hard work," was the modest reply. "I've been at this for a longer time than you'd suppose, working on it at odd moments. I had a lot of help, too, or I never could have done it. And now it is nearly all finished, as far as the ship itself is concerned. The only thing that bothers me is to provide for the recoil of the guns I want to carry. Maybe you can help me with that. Come on, now, I'll explain how the affair works, and what I hope to accomplish with it."

In brief Tom's aerial warship was a sort of German Zeppelin type of dirigible balloon, rising in the air by means of a gas container, or, rather, several of them, for the section for holding the lifting gas element was divided by bulkheads.

The chief difference between dirigible balloons and ordinary aeroplanes, as you all know, is that the former are lifted from the earth by a gas, such as hydrogen, which is lighter than air, while the aeroplane lifts itself by getting into motion, when broad, flat planes, or surfaces, hold it up, just as a flat stone is held up when you sail it through the air. The moment the stone, or aeroplane, loses its forward motion, it begins to fall.

This is not so with a dirigible balloon. It is held in the air by means of the lifting gas, and once so in the air can be sent in any direction by means of propellers and rudders.

Tom's aerial warship contained many new features. While it was as large as some of the war-type Zeppelins, it differed from them materially. But the details would be of more interest to a scientific builder of such things than to the ordinary reader, so I will not weary you with them.

Sufficient to say that Tom's craft consisted first of a great semi-rigid bag, or envelope, made of specially prepared oiled silk and aluminum, to hold the gas, which was manufactured on board. There were a number

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