

TIM SWIFT
AND HIS AMAZING SHUTTLECOCK

by Carlton Shuttlecock X

Tim Swift had just gotten a birdie on his seventeenth hole. He and his best friend, Bub, were playing a quick round of Frisbee golf at the Swiftco Enterprises Rec Center. Tim liked to play a little 'bee now and then to relax. He'd been very busy inventing things lately and he needed to unwind a bit.

"O.K., smarty pants," Bub wisecracked, "watch this."

Bub walked back to the Amazing Frisbee Cart, which Tim had invented just two weeks earlier, and grabbed his favorite trash can. Normally Bub preferred to use a drinking fountain for this kind of shot, but on calm days like this one the trash can offered better control. Heaving the can over his shoulder and grabbing the the remote controls, he walked up to the tee.

"Better concentrate," Tim said succinctly.

The Frisbee they were aiming for was across the creek and between several trees. A par four, anyway.

Setting the trash can down on the tee, Bub stepped back and stared down the fairway. Though he and Tim were good buddies, they were also tough competitors and the winner of this game would be determined by this shot. Mentally, Bub mapped out the terrain. He memorized the curve of the creek, calculated the overhang of the trees and checked to see if there was the slightest breeze.

Satisfied, he stepped up to the tee, adjusted the controls and then sent the trash can flying. It was a beauty.

"Great shot!" yelled Tim as he turned his attention to the two good-looking girls walking toward them.

"Hi, Tim!" "Hi, Bub!" It was Tim's sister Sandy and her friend Phyllis. Phyllis was Tim's steady date. Sandy and Bub were good friends, too.

"Hi, sis. Hello, Phyllis. Bub's trying for a hole-in-one. Watch!"

"We just got the invitations to the Badminton Tournament! They came in today's mail," said Sandy.

"Great!" replied Tim.

"Arrrgh!!!" cried Bub.

Bub's trash can had veered off at the last instant and landed in the rough, just this side of the creek.

"Sheesh," said Bub, "I can't believe it! There goes my hole-in-one."

"Wow! You sure sliced that one, Bub," said Tim as he, Sandy and Phyllis came running over.

"Yeah, the wind must have caught it. Man, look at that mess! Garbage everywhere," Bub said dejectedly as he headed down to pick up the trash.

"Don't worry, we'll help you pick it up," said Sandy and Phyllis.

"Yeah, this should be fun!" joked Tim.

It was a perfect day for picking up trash and it didn't take long. The four young people just about had everything picked up when Sandy suddenly let out a loud scream.

"Tim! Bub! Come here, quickly!"

Laying face down on the ground at Sandy's feet was Mr. Greenjeans, the Swiftco Enterprises staff gardener. He was unconscious and his forehead was marked by a giant welt.

"Phyllis, call an ambulance and get Swiftco Security here right away!" said Tim, quickly taking command of the situation. Bub, take a look around. The person responsible for this may still be nearby."

"I'll find him if he's out there," replied Bub as he tore off through the bushes.

"Sandy, give me a hand with Mr. Greenjeans," said Tim.

"Is he O.K.?" asked Sandy.

"He's still alive."

As Mr. Greenjeans showed signs of regaining consciousness, Tim got up and looked around. "There's something strange here. Hmmm... look at that. It's a shuttlecock..."

Just then the medics arrived, followed quickly by members of Swiftco Security. "We'll take it from here, Tim," said the chief medic. Tim waved "O.K." and continued his intense search of the immediate area.

A short while later the sound of something rustling through the bushes attracted his attention. It was Bub.

"Didn't find anything except this empty dental floss container," said Bub as he bounced out from the brush, "but it could have come from my trash can. Oh, hi, Snitch."

Snitch Hinderman was Chief of Swiftco Security. He'd worked with Tim's father back in the old days. It was a "cruise" job then; it was even easier now.

"Uh, hi, Tim. Hi, Bub," said Snitch a little hesitantly as he walked out from behind a tree. "I received a report of a suspicious character being on the grounds. Been searching for him all afternoon with no luck."

"Well, it seems that we came pretty close to running into him ourselves," said Bub. "Somebody knocked out Mr. Greenjeans."

"That so?" said Snitch. "Maybe I'd better catch a ride with the medics to see what I can find out."

"Snitch, give me a call when Mr. Greenjeans is able to talk," said Tim.

"Sure thing, Tim."

"Come on, Bub. Let's take the Amazing Frisbee Cart and head back to the lab," said Tim as he stuck the shuttlecock into his pocket.

Halfway to the Lab Bub began to wonder what had become of Sandy and Phyllis.

The next morning Tim was hard at work in his Lab when the phone rang.

"I'll get it," said Bub as he entered the Lab with a couple of mugs of steaming hot cocoa. "It's Snitch. He says Mr. Greenjeans is well enough to talk now."

"O.K. Let's head on over," said Tim.

Snitch met Tim and Bub outside of Mr. Greenjeans' room.

"You guys wait out here. I'd like to visit with Mr. Greenjeans alone for a few minutes," said Tim.

"Sure," said Bub.

Tim didn't stay long. Mr. Greenjeans was in good spirits and was recovering nicely, considering.

Just as Tim was coming out of Mr. Greenjeans' room, Dr. Hal O. Peyno came up with a folder of X-rays. "I think you should see these, Tim," said the doctor.

"Hmmm," said Tim as he examined the negatives. Look at this, Bub. What do you think?"

Bub looked closely at the picture of the welt on Mr. Greenjeans' forehead. "It looks like someone's initials. It looks like it might be the letters 'D.V.' to me."

"Me too," said Tim. "What do you think, Snitch?"

"Uh, I really can't tell. Must be my glasses.," replied Snitch.

"What's 'D.V.' stand for?" asked Bub.

"It's my guess that 'D.V.' stands for Darth Vainer. His enemies call him 'Dart',," said Tim.

"What's Darth doing around here?" asked Snitch.

"That's a good question, Snitch," said Tim.

After a short pause Tim spoke up again. "I think I'd better get back to the Lab. Let me know if you find out anything, Snitch."

"Will do."

"Bub, have you seen Phyllis or Sandy?" asked Tim as he unlocked the door to the Lab. Bub just shook his head,

Once inside the Lab Tim headed straight for his workbench and began busying himself with some minor projects. Tim's engineering background had helped him develop methodical working habits which served him well during his frantic inventive periods, but now his work seemed haphazard, unfocused.

"Uh, Tim, are you alright?" asked Bub

"Yeah, I'm O.K. Here, let me show you something," Tim said as he walked over to a locked cabinet. Tim took two shuttlecocks from the cabinet and handed them to Bub. "What do you think?"

"Are these the wind resistant birdies that the Badminton Tourney Committee asked you to invent?" asked Bub.

"One of them is," replied Tim. "The other is an exact duplicate which somebody has gone to a great deal of trouble to make. Fortunately, the duplicate was made from an early design. My later models were much improved."

"Who would do such a thing?" asked Bub, "and why?"

"My guess is that Dart Vainer is mixed up in this somehow. Why? I don't know. But it could have something to do with the Badminton Tournament."

"You don't think Dart Vainer would try to rig the Tourney, do you?" asked Bub incredulously.

"If Dart's involved, anything is possible..."

POW!.... POW!.... POW!.... POW!

"What the...!" Bub hollered as he dived under a workbench.

POW!! POW!!..... POW!! POW!!

Tim had ducked behind the cabinet just in time to escape being pelted with some kind of mysterious little missiles. "Bub, are you O.K.?" yelled Tim.

POW!....POW!! POW!!

There was no response. “Oh no!” thought Tim, his best friend had been seriously hurt by an unknown assailant. Then he heard a soft sound. Gradually it got louder, and louder. It was Bub. Laughing.

“Hah, hah, hah. Chow, is that you?” Bub laughed.

“Chow?” Tim said to himself as he came out from behind the cabinet.

Chow Tinker, whose real name was Harvey, had been a chuck-wagon cook in the Southwest for many years. He had become acquainted with Tim and his father when they were working on atomic research near a ranch at which Chow was employed at the time. When the research crew left, Chow followed along. He’d been the company cook ever since.

“Humpin’ Hominy!” yelled Chow as he crawled out from under his serving cart. Looking a little sheepish. Chow said, “Guess my new-fangled popcorn popper don’t work so good.”

“Tim walked around to Chow and put his arm around him. “Well, Chow, this just proves that you’re still quite a hot-shot cook,” he joked, warmly. “Actually I think it’ll be much better if you remember to put the top on it,” said Tim with a little grin. Seeing Bub still rolling around on the floor laughing, Tim said to Chow, “We’d better throw some water on him before he laughs himself silly.”

“Popcorn! Can you believe it? We were attacked by popcorn!” said Bub, barely able to constrain his laughter.

“Bub, ol’ buddy, I think it’s time to warm up my favorite brandin’ iron... What in... Tim, Bub, look at that!” cried Chow as he pointed out the Laboratory window.

Streaking across the the company lot was a tornado. It was heading straight for the Lab.

“Quick! Under the benches!” yelled Tim.

No sooner had they jumped under the workbenches than did the tornado strike. There was a crashing of broken glass and then it was still.

“Everybody O.K.?” asked Tim.

“O.K. here,” said Chow.

“Same here,” said Bub.

Looking around the Laboratory Tim said, “Doesn’t look like there’s much damage.”

“My cart is exactly how I left it,” said Chow.

“Well, something sure put a hole in the window,” Bub cracked.

In the middle of the window was a neat little round hole. Lying on the floor below, not two feet from Chow’s cart, was a shuttlecock. This one was very similar to the one Tim had found next to Mr. Greenjeans.

Tim picked up the birdie and examined it carefully. As he turned it over a small wafer fell on the counter. Tim had invented them several months ago. They had become widely used for transporting information.

“I think someone has something to say to us,” said Tim as he placed the wafer on the special laser player.

“It’s in code,” Tim continued cryptically. “I’ll have to decode it. Shouldn’t take more than a few minutes.”

“How ‘bout some sandwiches?” suggested Chow.

“Good idea, Chow. I’ll help!” said Bub as he grabbed Chow’s cart and raced off toward the kitchen with Chow wobbling off in pursuit.

“Got it figured out yet?” Bub mumbled as he entered the Lab gobbling up the last of a triple-layer peanut butter sandwich.

“Just finished. Listen to this:

‘On an otherwise perfect day, a gale storm will blow your way
making it very difficult for you to play
and try as you might you’ll never win
for as a friend I have the wind
ha, ha, ha, ho, ho, ho, ha, ha, ha.

Take this as a challenge sent
and then try and try and try to invent
a birdie that you think will fly
against the wind. My, oh, my.
Tee, hee. Tee, hee. Tee, hee.

Controlling the weather, I think you’ll find
as this riddle you try to unwind
is less a science than an art.
Take it from one who’s as sharp as a dart.
See you soon. Wally.”

“Dart! The message is from Dart Vainer!” cried Bub.

“Seems to be,” replied Tim.

“What’s this wind and birdies business he’s talking about?” asked Bub.

“Look at these birdies,” said Tim as he placed the shuttlecock with the message next to Tim’s original birdie and the one he’d found next to Mr. Greenjeans.

“The birdie that flew through the window was accompanied by a gale force wind,” continued Tim breezily. “Mr. Greenjeans mentioned a gust of wind that stirred things up just before the birdie hit him...”

“You know, I thought that my trash can acted a little oddly that day out on the course,” said Bub.

“I think that Dart Vainer must have developed a miniature wind machine which he probably plans on using at the tourney to inconspicuously affect the birdies’ flight path. I bet he was testing it the day Mr. Greenjeans was hit,” said Tim.

“If he was testing it, he must have had some... Do you think that Snitch...?” Bub wondered aloud.

“That would explain why he was at the scene so quickly that day” said Tim. “Also, Snitch is the only person I know who refers to Dart Vainer as Darth.”

“That’s right! I remember that now,” said Bub, excitedly.

“Maybe we’d better have a talk with Snitch,” said Tim as he headed for the phone. “Hello, Security. Can I speak to Snitch, please. Oh, when? O.K. Thank you.”

“Snitch left this morning to go shopping and hasn’t been seen since,” Tim said to Bub as he hung up the phone.

“What do we do now?” asked Bub.

“Well, with the Badminton Tournament tomorrow morning, I think it’s time to stay up all night inventing a birdie that won’t be affected by Dart’s insidious wind machine,” said Tim as he gathered up his tools and some materials.

“I think I’ll try to find Sandy and Phyllis. After all, they are our partners in the tourney,” said Bub.

“Good idea,” said Tim absentmindedly. He was already halfway through a six-page equation. There would be no stopping him now. He was on a roll.

Tim was just stepping out of the Amazing Wind Tunnel when Bub walked into the Lab with a mug of hot tea and a plate of doughnuts.

“Rise and shine. Even whiz kids need junk food,” joked Bub as he gave Tim his breakfast. “How’d the inventing go?”

“For the most part, pretty good. I had to build a new Inverted Vector Sector Selector,” replied Tim as he took a bite out of one of the doughnuts and wondered why Chow hadn’t bought Hostess instead. “And the Replifloss machine needed some adjusting before I could construct my own portable wind machine,” he finished, holding up a badminton racquet.

“You mean to tell me that that racquet is a wind machine?” replied Bub, just slightly incredulous.

“I spent most of the night trying to figure out what kind of device Dart would be using. I think this is it,” Tim said as he placed the racquet in its designer case. “It’s inconspicuous. It’s practical. And who knows, it might sell. Anyway, once I had my own device I started work on improving my anti-breeze birdies. The Amazing Micro Mini Heat Resistant Tiles that I invented last summer came in handy. Wind tunnel tests indicated that the new tiles, combined with a new plastic that I developed last night, and a slight adjustment to the shuttlecock’s inherent angle-of-dangle which was determined by my new Vector Selector, have led to a fundamentally new shuttlecock which is practically impervious to wind and yet retains all the frivolous qualities of the original design which made the game so interesting.

“Amazing,” said Bub.

“Quite so,” said Tim. “But I’m afraid that this is one invention that will have to be tested in battle. I’m bringing my portable equipment kit and toothbrush,” he said as he put a black ball-point pen in his shirt pocket. He discretely placed the pen so that the “U.S. Government” inscription couldn’t be seen. “By the way, have you seen Phyllis and Sandy?”

“Yep. They’re going to meet us at the Tourney.”

“Great. Let’s go! I’m really looking forward to this tourney,” said Tim as only a famous inventor could.

It was a beautiful morning. The sun was shining and there was absolutely no breeze. Phyllis and Sandy were there, as were quite a few of Tim and Bub’s friends. It was shaping up to be a great day.

“I don’t see Chow,” said Tim after he scanned the crowd for the roly-poly face of his favorite cook.

“I think he’s baking something special for the Tournament,” said Bub.

“Great!” said Tim. I can hardly wait!”

Just then there was a commotion on the other side of the courts. Dart Vader and his partner had arrived.

“Let’s go see what’s going on,” Tim said to Bub.

“Well, if it isn’t our famous amazing inventor, Tim Swift, and his good buddy, Bub,” said Dart. “Lovely weather, isn’t it?”

“Couldn’t have asked for a better day,” answered Tim.

“Mr. Swift, I’d like you to meet my partner, Tootsie Morisaki,” Dart went on. “She and I have been practicing for some time now, so I don’t think I’m overstating our abilities when I say that I don’t see much competition out here today.”

“Everything is not always as it seems,” said Tim.

“A philosopher, an inventor, a gentleman; ah, the company we keep. Come, Tootsie, let’s prepare our... equipment,” said Dart as he cracked a crooked smile and turned away.

“Oooh! That man gives me the creeps!” said Sandy as she and Phyllis came walking up. “We’ve got your racquets.”

“Thanks, Sandy,” said Tim.

“What about your special racquet?” asked Bub.

“I intend to play fair, Bub. Hopefully my Amazing Shuttlecocks will perform the way they were supposed to and Dart will be forced to play fair, too.”

“Only time will tell,” said Bub, wondering whether his friend’s invention would save the day, as they had so many times before.

Overall the day progressed quite naturally and peacefully. Tim and Phyllis were one of the stronger teams and they had a good chance at first place. Bub and Sandy were getting ready to play Dart and Tootsie in the semi-finals.

“Bub, have you seen Chow?” asked Tim as Bub was stepping onto the court for his big game.

“No,” said Bub, “but I know he was expecting to be here by now.”

“I wonder what’s become of him.”

“Probably just another adventure like the one with the popcorn-popper,” said Bub.

“Yeah, you’re probably right,” said Tim.

Bub and Sandy were playing like they had never played before. They were up 7-0 before you could blink an eye. But then the tide turned. Slowly Dart and Tootsie came back. 1-7, 2-7, 3-7. The volleys were tremendous. Over and back, over and back; to the left, to the right. On it went. But Dart always scored the point. Tim was suspicious.

He got Bub to exchange birdies so that he could check the shuttlecock’s aerodynamic qualities and found that the sub-mini autogyros were shorting out, causing the pitch control to malfunction. By the time Tim had repaired the gyro Dart and Tootsie were leading 18-7. Bub and Sandy battled back but came up short as the game went to Dart’s team, 21-16.

It was up to Tim and Phyllis, now. Only they and Tim’s Amazing Breeze-proof shuttlecocks stood in the way of Dart Vainer’s tainted attempt at the Championship.

As it turned out the game was a breeze. For Tim and Phyllis, that is. Tim's wind-proof birdies worked like a charm. And the more Dart tried to control the birdie with his wind machine, the more he failed. It was a very frustrated Dart Vainer who watched helplessly from the other side of the net as Tim Swift humbled him.

Tim and Phyllis won, 21-5.

Just as Tim and Phyllis were scoring their final point, up wobbled Chow, covered head-to-foot with chocolate pudding.

"I thought you were making something to eat, not something to wear," joked Bub.

"Ha, ha, ha. Some joke," fumed Chow, only half seriously. "It just so happens that I was trying to make a pudding cake in the microwave. I must have cooked it too long because when I opened the door the cake exploded like a watermelon dropped from a five-story building. It is good pudding, though," he laughed as he licked his fingers.

As Chow was attracting all the attention, Dart was fuming. He paced back and forth, cursing Tootsie, cursing his racquet, cursing the weather and everything else, for that matter. Finally he got so mad he threw his racquet down, which was the wrong thing to do. For the second it hit the ground it triggered a giant twister which tore through the crowd. Bub looked up just in time to see the hair blow off of a ladies head.

"Hey, that's no lady, that's Snitch Hinderman!" cried out an extremely shocked Bub.

The crowd was aghast.

"Foul! Fraud! Tar and feather them!" screamed the crowd.

Then someone yelled, "Boy, that's mighty good pudding," which it was, and everybody forgot about Dart and Snitch and rushed over to get some of Chow's pudding from the pudding cake. Dart and Snitch were last seen calling for a cab.

Things were pretty festive. The Tourney had been a success; Dart had been foiled and Tim's Amazing Shuttlecock promised to keep the birdies flying and the Tourney going for years to come.

Phyllis and Bub and Sandy and Tim were feeling good.

"I can't wait 'til next year," said Sandy.

"Me, too," said Bub and Phyllis in unison.

"And next year I'll be on time," Chow chimed in.

They all laughed.