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E. J. Carnell.
 Dr. W. A. Gibson.
 H. K. Hanson.
 F. Pragnell.
 H. Warnes.

EDITOR: Douglas W. F. Mayer.

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FOREWORD.

With this issue, the third of the first three experimental issues, the publication of AMATEUR SCIENCE STORIES must, we regret, come to an end. The experiment has been an interesting one of all concerned. Tyro-authors have had an opportunity of seeing their cherished work published, and readers have been able to enjoy well-written stories which, for some reason or other, were not quite suitable for the professional magazines.

The chief reason for its discontinuance is that we have not a sufficient supply of material. The seven stories in the three issues were all written by three people. This was largely due to the high standard upon which we have insisted, which scared off many amateur authors, and which secured the rejection of much of the material that was submitted. But AMATEUR SCIENCE STORIES has served its purpose by encouraging those who did crash its pages, and we are pleased to record that William F. Temple who, as "Temple Williams" wrote "Mr. Craddock's Life-Line" for our first issue, has had one of his stories published in the current issue of TALES OF WONDER.

If, in the future, amateur authors again awake to life, the magazine will be resurrected. Meanwhile, we invite all amateur authors to continue to submit their stories, and should any of them be of sufficient merit, they will be published in the forthcoming printed issues of TOMORROW.

It remains only for us to extend our sincerest thanks to those who have supported the magazine during its brief existence, whether by writing, subscribing, selecting or publishing, and to remind everyone that there is now a much better, regular, British science-fiction magazine - TALES OF WONDER.

MY FIRST SPACE-SHIP. (MAGNA ENIGMA).

by

Eric G. Williams.

(With apologies to H.G. Wells' story "My First Aeroplane. (A laudic Magna)")

My first space-ship! What vivid memories of joyous youth and hurtling speed that recalls!

Far back it was in the days of Railroads and Steam-boats that I purchased the dear old Magna Enigma (Great Puzzle). She was the first of her spit-fire type, straight from the foundries of some obscure but ingenious firm; small, lean; a veritable shell of leashed energy; proud, and with a will of her own. Yes, in many ways she was fitted and matched to the dashing spirit that filled my very chest in those days; and her first performance showed, I suppose, that fiery instability that she held in common with her owner. Indeed, the resemblance between owner and machine went further than the spiritual indications, it was said that she resembled me in the sleekness of her outlines, in the sharpness of her prow, in the far-off gaze of her two forward ports. I am proud of those comparisons, often drawn though they were in a spirit of levity, for I recognise in them subtle compliments to the wonderful form and strength of my Magna Enigma. Character and nobility showed in every line of her splendid shape; she was in a word - Perfect.

I purchased her on the credit system, through a travelling agent. Dear mother knew nothing of the transaction until the day of delivery. Then when I broke the news to her of my desperate resolve - the tears! the pleading! the dire prophesies! Ah no! women are always doubtful of their man's prowess, and mothers anxious about their sons. But I prevailed as I usually do when my mind is made up, and we travelled by tube to the Croydon Space Drome.

It is curious the affinity that sometimes exists between man and man; how sometimes when you meet a person for the first time you instantly become firm friends, whereas, another you instinctively dislike. More curious still, I think, is the sensation I experienced when I was confronted for the first time with the gleaming contours of the Magna Enigma. A thrill convulsed my body. Some say that the blood drained from my face, and that I shook and made as though to run away. Such were my emotions that I do not doubt that those curious symptoms showed themselves. Such, I say, was this inexplicable bond, that soon the silvery walls of the Magna Enigma were gleaming back a score of curious faces that had collected round my shivering shape.

My mother (bless her dear conventional mind) misinterpreted this unaccountable hesitation on my part, and advised me not to go up if I felt incapable of controlling the thing. Several people round about must have also taken fear as the cause of my paleness and perspiration, for they began to laugh secretly, and chatter about the ground giving people cold feet.

Rage almost uncontrollable bubbled up within me, (it has always been the way of us Popplegates to blaze up at the least thing) and casting off my mother's detaining hand, I threw myself through the circular air-lock and into the narrow control room. I had there to constrain myself by a terrific concentration of will from firing off the tubes at once - an act that would have devastated the hangars behind me, and killed my poor proud mother, together with myself, of course.

I sat there shivering with rage.

A face with a braided peaked cap atop, peered in through one of the forward ports, and signalled me to come out. I stabbed my finger upwards fiercely, and shook my head with decision. The face disappeared for a minute, then came back with a pair of hands holding up a piece of paper inscribed as follows: "Are you officially registered as capable to pilot this space-ship?"

I nodded my head even though I had no license, and jabbed my finger up insistently. The face bobbed down again only to reappear with another note: "Turn on the radio and listen for the starting signal."

From my readings of booklets I knew just where to locate the wireless switch, so I punched the little knob home. A noise like a gigantic clock ticking came through, and in a minute a voice speaking; "Magna Enigma, now raising your take-off runners to firing angle." My view at this moment of the distant horizon sank lower and vanished below the circles of the forward portholes.

"You are now at forty-five degrees. When you hear the signal, let her go!" I waited tensely for this signal, whatever it might be, and when a high whine started in the receiver, I pulled the ignition trigger full over.

What happened next is perhaps unique in the annals of space flight. I was lifted clear out of my seat and thrown heavily against the ceiling. As I sprawled there I had a fragmentary view through one of the port holes of the Drome field shrinking and tipping obliquely to the right. Then again I was crashing across the room back amongst the buttons of the control table. Plungers snapped in and I lifted all asprawl onto the left wall, then the right, whacking backwards and forwards in that narrow space of delicate machinery. Only the wonderful control I exercised over my flying limbs saved the machinery from damage. Up and down, back and forward, I cannoned as with each successive flight I pushed in new buttons. The Magna Enigma, the willful hussy that she was, had already challenged my ownership.

This went on for some time, then summoning all my will-power, I claved at the main ignition trigger and pulled it off. Shaking with the terrific punishment I had taken I dragged myself into the pilots chair, and felt my battered limbs. As I was doing this, my eyes fell upon the gravity altimeter. I stopped my carefully testing and stared, - 1000 miles up!!! - and still going!

My God! what a situation! I smile now at the horror which griped me then. It is forgivable. Even the bravest of us know fear, and who was it who said; "A brave man is not one who does not know fear, but who knows fear and conquers it." I conquered that paralyzing fear.

I went to one of the port-holes and stared down. Dear old Earth, that is the one and only view I have had of you from Space, (I never seem to get the time to go up now.) but that memory is imperishable. A huge looming sphere darkened over most of its surface; a faint rosy light clinging to one edge and the absolute black of night to the other. Two greenish ice caps with long thin streamers branching off into the faintly visible American Continent; a faint wash of grey-blue disappearing into the darkness of the East. You were a fairy picture framed in the pearl of the Sun's Corona, set about with diamond stars. Enough to inspire the poetic Popplegate strain in me.

I turned away at last with a sigh, for that sphere seemed almost unobtainable in its remoteness. Fond faces came to me. No! thought I, I will get back. What would mother do without me? Determined thus, I sat down before the complex button panel, and set everything at "off". I would proceed button by button until I knew just how to control this ship of mine.

The first button I pushed dropped steel plates down over the port-holes with a tremendous clash. The second put out the electric lights, and plunged me into complete - absolute - darkness. My blind stabbing fingers prodded amongst the tiers of buttons with fantastic results.

A low rumble came from behind the rear partition as though a motor generator had commenced to "turn over"; the floor started a slow turning until in a few minutes it became the ceiling. Another quick stab from an inverted position, loosed off the rear tubes, and there I was stuck to the rear wall with the acceleration.

Things multiplied by the square.

The room was soon revolving at a colossal speed with myself catapulting in dizzy spirals from wall to wall. All sets of tubes were now apparently firing in alternate phases, so that mixed up with my whirling was a sudden thrusting from front wall to rear wall and back again.

The window shields were crashing up and down every time I landed amongst the controls, shaving my limbs upon their guillotine edges, and coming near at times to decapitating me. Another apparatus was now making itself felt in the sudden increase of the room temperature to near boiling point, then in a sudden drop to zero regions where water condensed like rain on my spectacles. The effect of this fluctuation was to give me a severe attack of influenza five hours later.

The noise was terrific from the madly accelerating and decelerating engines. Everything howled. A little machine set in the coiling, gave forth a high-pitched whine, and a thousand crackling, popping, electric sparks. It speedily built up such a spark gap, that the air stunk with ozone. Its action of keeping out some of the more dangerous short-waves had become so efficient that the ultra-short-wave wireless, which I had left switched on during the whole of my flight, only gave out a prolonged shriek of static.

Amongst all this bedlam, my wiry frame went here and there, head first, legs first, smashing and thumping amongst the bars and buttons and wires of this frenzied ship; a ship lost in the uncharted expanses of Space and Worlds.

I was long past thinking at all coherently, when everything stopped - except the spinning motion of the room. The window shutters stuck half up and half down; the tubes stopped firing; the ozone generator gave one pop and ceased; the electric lights, which had been flashing spasmodically, went out with finality; the temperature stayed where it was; the wireless stopped abruptly; the mysterious motor which had commenced the cabin revolving went silent with a short downward moan - but, as I say, the movement went on.

Quick to recover, I clutched at the back of the pilot chair as I spun past, and fixed my feet amongst some machinery on the roof. For a space I hung there gathering my strength.

What a fantastic figure I must have cut hanging upside-down there in the stabbing light from the sun which revolved in dizzy circles outside! In the little room I hung with my feet on the ceiling and my hands at floor level, breathing harshly in an atmosphere acid with ozone, and sickening with the smell of scorched rubber. I seized on this latter smell when I fully recovered, and with characteristic speedy deduction, saw that this sudden cessation in action was because of a failure in power. Somewhere the battery circuit had shorted or completely broken. Here in this case, I would be able to apply my knowledge of space-ships (diligently pieced together from the booklets of the time) and place my hand immediately on the battery circuit, and repair the damage.

I attempted to walk around the cabin to the wall above me, and found that there was no difficulty attached to it. Now I understood why all the walls, except the front and rear, of the cabin were in the form of one continuous curve; centrifugal force, my friends, centrifugal force! Simple, is it not? Yet devilishly wierd at first experience. I believe this system is out of use now, and magnetised floors and boots substituted. Thus, you may leave an old man behind in technical advance, but in spirit and courage you will never recapture the heights of those pioneer days when men were men and ships were ships.

My Magna Enigma was small, a tenth the size of your modern floating hotels, yet I am willing to wager that with my hands to her controls she could have out-manoeuvred any of the crack specials of today. At the time I am telling of, she was shearing space at the staggering speed of twenty miles per second, a speed still good today. However, no doubt you are eager to learn how I brought my gallant ship to safety, so I will dilate no longer.

I presently found the damaged wire, and after a little scraping and twisting, managed to push it into place. Instantly all the confusion began again; the noise, the acceleration, the ozone, the heat and cold, the lights, shutters, everything for a moment was a buzzing clattering roaring scream, but by jerking away my hand I disconnected the circuit and all subsided.

I picked myself up from the far corner of the room, and before

connecting the circuit again, pushed in all the buttons. I put the wire right, then firmly strapped myself into the pilot seat. This time there would be no mishaps.

Ia went one button - a well judged shot, - the lights went on. Another considered button, and the shutters slammed back - I shouted. The nose of the ship seemed to be in the act of striking the blinding surface of the moon. In front of me, spinning madly, stretched the towering needles of a smashed up world. One seemed to be on the point of piercing the forward port-hole. I could see every pebble on the scintillating slopes.

Crash! went all the buttons together in a frantic last minute effort to escape transfixion. Nothing seemed to happen, except that the ozone apparatus started shooting six-inch sparks into the room, and the temperature dropped to somewhere near absolute zero. In my cold blooded way I perceived that I had fallen foul of an optical misjudgment due to the super clarity of vision in space. What was probably thousands of miles away, appeared to be just outside the window.

Once again I started calmly with all the buttons in, and attempted to master this runaway ship. (Never will I admit defeat at the hands of a machine.) Patiently I tried the various buttons and levers. Certain combinations produced strange effects. Once, by pushing two red buttons at the same time, my ship turned completely round so that I found myself staring out into black star-dotted space, but, of course, still rushing towards the moon only now hind-first. Rushing, unless I could discover the right set of buttons, to certain destruction. This knowledge, however, only served to quicken the action of my normally fast thinking brain, and to speed the action of my fingers. Already I had the forward retarding tubes firing; I now had to find the set of tubes which would serve to swing the ship away into a tangent to the moon's surface.

By jove! These things take a long time to write down, but actually it was only a matter of ten minutes before I saw that the peaks were slanting away, and another two before I was slicing between two giant mountain peaks and roaring over a tremendous level area of pock-holed rock.

Before I knew what or where things were, I had swept over the towers and domes of the Mere Imbrium Mining Station, covering them in a scorching cloud of exhaust gas, then up I went in a near vertical ascent. Things seemed to get out of control again, and I swept down in a huge arc within two feet of the main pit tower, blanketing everything in a pink-red glow of scintillating particles. Things were definitely out of control. I was up and round again in a complete circle, this time actually driving down past the pit tower, scraping the ground, then up again.

Sweat stood out in great beads on my forehead as I tugged at the fixed set of buttons.

Down again roaring and blasting. Exhaust gas blew down bolting figures in space-suits; scattered a slag heap. I felt sick with the effects of the continued circling. Round and round in a fifty mile circle, always coming down through that confounded mining station.

At last on my fiftieth circumnavigation I had a fleeting glimpse of another space ship rising from the surface in pursuit of me.

Still determined not to be mastered, I banged and thumped at the obstinate controls. One knob ground in, and I zoomed off just missing the other ship. The wireless squealed at me.

"Keep outa my way, you saphead!"

"Something wrong with my tubes." I shouted in explanation.

"By God! I'll mace ycr chubes if you come that fool trick again. Set a straight course. I'll pick you up with chains. Get to itsnappy!"

I report this impudent command in its fulness to indicate what kind of a ruffian I had to deal with; a person no more capable of

understanding defects in machinery than the Moon itself.

Furiously I battled this mad machine - and conquered. I forced those buttons back into their sockets, and switched on the correct opposing set. Straight as a die I flashed for the other ship, but he was too quick and he missed me by an inch.

I heard him swear across the ether, then he came blustering out again.

"Try and scare me would you? You crazy, yellow livered skunk. Try some of your own medicine!"

The fool made some juggling manœuvre with his cumbersome ship, and finished up just above the Magna Enigma.

"Hold on sonny," he bawled, and dropped his vessel right across my bows missing me by about two inches. As he passed he gave a blast on his tubes and panted up my windows with grey gas. Back he came again and stationed himself just ahead of me. His rear tubes swamped my game little ship in white-hot gas, raising the temperature of my control room to boiling point. I sizzled.

"Get away you blithering fool!" I shouted at him.

"Still fresh, hey?" he screamed back. "Here's some more."

He flashed on before me and disappeared into blackness. For perhaps five minutes I stared into the blankness, then I saw him as an expanding ring of phosphorescent white rushing straight head-on at me. In a second I seemed to be staring into the jaws of death fashioned in the shape of a sharp steel prow, two gleaming port-holes, and a face peering out at me. Then in a mighty flurry of exhaust gas the image passed and I was staring out into the black space.

"Want any more, or shall I take you in?"

"Thank you." I said coolly, "But I'll take her in myself."

I punched at the control board, but the tube buttons produced no results. My little ship was exhausted. I had emptied her life blood from her in my headlong race between earth and moon; her fuel tanks were empty. A derelict of space. This spirited ship was dead.

"Well, why don't you move, smarty?" came that blustering voice.

I sat silent.

"Oh, you aint gonna talk? Perhaps a few more tricks might help some. Ever seen a Popemoff spiral with yourself as the axis?"

"I am helpless." I ground out at last. "My fuel tanks are empty. If I had a little power left I might show you a few tactics, as it is you can continue with your play undisturbed."

"That's the best news I've heard for years." returned the wireless heartily. "Perhaps after all the rushing about you've done, you wouldn't object to a straight run home?"

He brought his ship alongside, and working from the airlock in a space-suit, chained my ship to the ugly bulk of his black freighter. He wanted to come into my ship, but I just ignored his tappings and pointings. I had that much pride left.

Well, there's not much left to tell. I don't think my arrival at the mining station like a chained captive, and the ensuing fuss and roughness by the miners would interest the reader. And I don't think it deserving of lengthy mention all the insults about my intelligence and powers of observation when they found placed in a drawer beneath the control board, the I.C.'s "Details of Regulation Control Board as Standardised by the Interplanetary Council." These things serve only to detract from the main story which is my tremendous struggle and triumph over the Magna Enigma.

Just one protest I will make. Is it true Democracy when because of a boyish escapade, a fellow has his space-ship confiscated?

THE END.