



THE MORGAN AFFAIR



J. S. Lyne.

The Morgan Affair.

*Written by J. S. Lyne,
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*Twinkle, twinkle little star,
How I wonder what you are.
Up above the world so high,
There's more to you than meets the
eye.....*

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CHAPTER 1. INTERVIEWS.

Captain Stephens felt unreasonably nervous as he sat in the plush seat of the appointed waiting room. Outwardly there was no sign of any distress; years of training had taught him to control any sign of weakness. He had sat and watched five others suffer similarly but now he was the last one sitting there and he began to notice things within the room. Ironically his eyes kept wandering back to the only item in the room which had emitted any sound, the intercom. It was a superb looking instrument but he had nearly laughed out loud at the disappointing tinny quality which it had reproduced when the other interviewees had been summoned to the inner sanctum. Six men for one command and they all looked to be quietly confident and competent.

There was another fascinating item in the room, a kind of executive toy. To the observer it consisted of a base plate on which was mounted two metallic circles made out of a channel section which contained and trapped a small metal ball which was cleverly, decoratively drilled. The whole thing was built out of high quality stainless steel and polished to a mirror finish. The metal ball travelled slowly round and round the vertical tracks for no apparent reason and gave the impression of "Moto Perpetuo." It took the Captain several minutes to figure out that it was a cleverly designed magnetic trick using powerful, tiny, concealed magnets within the stainless steel track and powered by a simple solar cell.

The rest of the decor was very tasteful and finished off with some exotic hybrid plants which had been originally developed in the vacuum and weightlessness of space with beautiful and spectacular results. Captain Michael Robert Stephens went over the questions he expected to be asked for the last time. He admitted to himself that he had not forgotten anything and finally stopped worrying and committed himself to the inevitable discomfort of the forthcoming interview.

He was jerked out of his thoughts by the tinny intercom which gently requested, "Captain Stephens, would you please be so kind as to step into the interview room?"

The Captain swallowed hard and gathered his thoughts, stood up and strode purposefully into the room. The designated interview room was quite stark in contrast to the waiting room. The walls were wood panelled and bare, the blinds on the windows were closed and there were no ornaments. In fact there was nothing to distract attention from the interviewing panel. There were five people sitting at the highly polished table in plush chairs with a single plain chair carefully placed at a uncomfortable distance and precisely in the centre of the main table. Each chair had a radio microphone discreetly fixed to it.

Captain Stephens smiled inwardly, continued his purposeful walk up to the chair and promptly picked it up and moved it three feet nearer the table and placed it slightly off centre.

Then, without waiting to be asked, he sat down, crossed his legs and looked directly into the eyes of the centre person in the interviewing panel.

Now it was their turn to look uncomfortable. In one simple movement he had broken their rigid, stranglehold on the interviewee and they were unsure what to do about it. The person in the centre recovered his composure very quickly.

"Please would you state your name so that our A.T.M. can identify you."

Captain Stephens desperately wanted to know what an A.T.M. was but instead, complied with the request.

"Captain Michael Robert Stephens."

"Thank you Captain. So that the interview is fair our A.T.M. will provide us all with a written transcript of the interview just as it happens."

The penny dropped. A.T.M. stood for 'Automatic Transcription Machine.' It was a neat job which identified each individual voice pattern and typed everything that was said, as it was said and by whom it was said. It even had a device which made it type in larger capitals if words were shouted, so it was important not to lose your temper and keep a level voice. The gentleman in the middle was not, an imposing man. He was of slight build, pale and grey haired. However there was nothing nondescript about his piercing blue eyes and cool self confidence. The only disappointment was his voice which had a reedy quality to it. Captain Stephens remembered the intercom and revised his opinion of its sound production which, on reflection, had, been perfect.

The gentleman spoke again. "I will start the interview by introducing the interviewing panel. On my far left is the Senior Personnel Advisor of the Crest Interplanetary Trading Company, Miss Charlotte Linaker."

Captain Stephens looked across and saw perfect features, blue eyes and dark hair tied back into a tidy business-like style and even though her attire was a little severe he was able to recognize a very beautiful, competent woman aged about thirty. They acknowledged each other with a nod.

"On my immediate left is Mr. Frederick Ford, the Operations Manager of C. I. T. C."

Captain Stephens looked at a man of about forty-five years old, smartly dressed but going a little grey around the temples.

Surprisingly he stood up and offered his hand.

"Pleased to meet you, Captain, I have followed your career with great interest."

Captain Stephens stood up and accepted the proffered hand. It was like iron. He got the immediate impression of a very straight hard business man who would be a bad man to cross.

"Thank you," he replied simply and sat down again.

"On my far right is Mr. Clive Twist, the Senior Officer of the Civil Astronautical Federation. He is a neutral observer and technical adviser to this panel."

This time it was the turn of Captain Stephens to be impressed. Clive Twist was well respected, even in military circles and in the past had performed with

great distinction as the Chief Test Pilot of the European Space Consortium, an extremely hazardous job in the early days.

“My pleasure, Sir,” replied Captain Stephens.

Clive Twist was a man of immense presence but had an air of modesty about him. “In your case my job should be relatively easy, Captain,” he replied.

“The gentleman on my immediate right is Lord Lamont, our major shareholder and financial adviser.”

That confused Captain Stephens, he did not know whether he should bow or curtsy. Sensing his confusion Lord Lamont stood up and shook hands. “Just call me George, Captain, it saves a lot of bother.”

“Thank you, “ replied the Captain, “But I think I will stick to ‘Sir’ at least until the end of the interview. They both smiled and sat down.

“It just remains for me to introduce myself. My full title is Sir Richard Crest and I am the Chairman of C.I.T.C. and of this panel. I am empowered to make any appointment I see fit, so may I wish you the best of luck and we will get down to business. We need another Captain very urgently.”

Captain Stephens was momentarily taken aback. This was the Grandson of the great Professor Peter Crest, the man who had revolutionized space travel. The British had made no impression at all on space travel for over one hundred years and had seemingly been content to let the Americans and Russians develop their rocketry.

Then on the eleventh of May 2061 the British suddenly leapt into space and left all other modes of Space flight obsolete. They had secretly constructed a non-rocket powered spacecraft. The breakthrough came when Professor Peter Crest had secretly isolated the poles of the magnet and learnt how to single-pole various metals. He had gone one step further and invented C.A.M.I.D. which was the abbreviation used for the ‘Concentration and Amplification of Magnetic Influence Device.’

With this device a metal object could be single-poled and its influence could be concentrated on other magnetic masses and the attraction caused could be amplified until there was a movement of the object towards the magnetic mass. By reversing the polarity the repulsion could cause movement to happen. Massive lumps of metal could be made to float in the air without stress or strain.

The British were quick to see the practical value of this to space travel. They fitted the device into an old submarine, made a few extra seals and took a few other precautions and promptly put it into orbit round the Earth. Once the device had been fitted, anything, no matter how big, could be made to float through the air by harnessing the attraction or repulsion of magnetism. The first genuine British spacecraft had been a beautiful flying saucer-type vehicle which had simply risen into orbit without any sign of outward propulsion.

It was a miracle. These vehicles did not have the breathtaking acceleration of the rockets, but, in truth, they did not need it. Their acceleration of about 0.4G. produced some phenomenal speeds after two or three days and nothing

was stressed. The device was still a great secret held only by the British. It was this man, Sir Richard Crest, who held the patents. This was playing in the big league.

The surprising offshoot of the invention was how little it cost to operate the craft. It was not necessary to have huge rocket pads; ordinary airports were quite adequate. In fact the extra-terrestrial submarine had started its historic voyage from a point ten miles South of Barrow-in-Furness in the middle of Morecambe Bay. It was obvious that the British had now cornered the market in the highly lucrative interplanetary trading which existed between the various colonies on the Moon, Mars and the Asteroid Belt.

Mining in the Asteroids resembled a modern day 'Gold Rush' with prospectors risking their all for fame and fortune. Some had made it really big, but others had simply disappeared and perished due to lack of supplies. However the Crest Interplanetary Trading Company had done much to relieve the situation and had transported huge amounts of merchandise to the Asteroids.

The Company had set up a trading post on Ceres, the largest of the Asteroids, and here they liased with the Americans and Russians who ran their own companies distributing the supplies with their conventional rockets which were more suitable for this work than the magnetic drive vessels.

"For the sake of the record would you care to give us a brief Curriculum Vitae?" asked Sir Richard.

"Of course.. I was born in the year two thousand and sixty seven, forty two years ago, on Moon Base Delta. My Father was an interplanetary pilot and my Mother a doctor. She served mainly on Moon Base Delta and sometimes as a ship's doctor whenever there was a large movement of personnel to other planetary bases. All my schooling was done in the College on Moon Base Delta and at the age of sixteen, I visited Earth for the first time and enrolled for training with the Western Alliance Space Patrol Corps.

At the age of twenty, I qualified as the youngest Interplanetary Commander ever commissioned. Although qualified, I served as First Officer for five years to gain experience, as is customary. Originally I served with Captain Hunter and later with Captain Steele, both very fine Officers. In twenty eighty-two I was given my first command, an armed escort vessel named *Ajax*. It had a crew of ten and for the next five years we did convoy duty in most sections of the known Solar System.

After this I was surprised and grateful to be given a brand new interplanetary frigate named *Vega*. I was given a roving commission to explore the Solar System beyond the Asteroids, which we did for a full five years. We were lucky enough to discover and map several sources of potential mining operations and charted several Jovian Moons which we did not know existed.

In addition we did an in-depth study on the Rings of Saturn. On my return I was promoted to a Galaxy Class Destroyer named *Orion*, a heavily-armed vessel. My commission then was to protect our interests in the Asteroid Belt.

After five years of this I resigned my commission and lectured at the Moon Base Delta College until applying for the appointment as Senior Captain in your Company, which is why I am here. Is there anything else you would like to know?"

At this point Clive Twist spoke. "Mr. Chairman, Captain Stephens is far too modest to put in all the details. His first appointment was with Captain Hunter in the frigate *Pegasus*. They were assigned to the transportation of prisoners and maintenance of discipline in the Martian penal colonies. In the year twenty ninety there was a break out of prisoners on board the *Pegasus*. The Captain and crew fought against overwhelming odds but were soon taken prisoners. Captain Hunter was killed outright.

It was a serious situation, a heavily-armed frigate in the hands of criminals. First Officer Stephens had been wounded, his head badly cut, he was suffering from concussion and had a broken arm, but he kept his cool and never gave up the struggle. He was able to access one of the wiring ducts and neutralize the C.A.M.I.D. control system and the Oxygen Plant. The crew sealed their cabin with tape as best they could, then the First Officer identified the wiring for the rear airlock and opened it a fraction. The air pressure quickly fell throughout the rest of the ship and the convicts soon collapsed due to the effects of the depressurisation. In fact thirty of the prisoners perished, which greatly upset Mr. Stephens at the time. After he had restored the air level and opened the door of their cabin, order was reinstated and the ship retaken.

In the original fighting a good deal of damage had been done to the navigation systems. However Mr. Stephens brought the ship back manually in spite of his injuries and was awarded a medal for outstanding bravery and devotion to duty.

In fact there have been several instances where people have benefited from the bravery and resourcefulness of Captain Stephens. One particular instance was the rescue of the survivors from the American rocket *Arizona* which was crippled by a freak explosion. *Ajax*, the accompanying escort vessel, quickly docked with the stricken rocket and sent a team across to rally the crew and passengers and to repair what damage they could. The vessel was capable of supporting life but was without engines.

Captain Stephens had the idea of extending his C.A.M.I.D. wiring to the hull of the other vessel. It worked and although under reduced power, he was able to bring both ships safely to their destination and thus invented what is now a standard rescue procedure.

Gentlemen, Captain Stephens is a master navigator and a superb engineer, in addition to being a first class Captain and pilot. "

"Thank you, Mr. Twist, " said Sir Richard. "Are there any questions for Captain Stephens, please?"

Charlotte Linaker raised her hand, was given the floor and addressed the Captain. "From what you have said you have been away in deep space for twenty years. According to my research six of the ten men from your original

command have stayed with you throughout this whole period. Do you feel that you deserve this kind of loyalty?"

"In the forces there are rules which give a captain almost God-like powers over his men. This creates two kinds of Captain, the 'Browbeaters' and the 'Motivators'. I like total reliability and efficiency but if you browbeat your crew the only things that will be followed are the rules, and that is not enough. You need total interdependence and trust to get the best out of your crew and you can only create this by motivation, leading by example and being totally fair. When you are in close proximity with each other for years on end this is the only kind of relationship you can have with a crew. Captain Hunter taught me this very early in my career.

Miss Linaker, you ask if I deserve this kind of loyalty? Well, I give it to my crew and I demand the same from them. Fortunately, their loyalty has always been freely given, for which I am most grateful. I trust this answers your question?"

She nodded her head and spoke again. "Again, according to my information, Captain, you are one of only four people who have served so long continuously in deep space. Other Officers show signs of psychological breakdown and distress, even after two or three years. Do you feel that you are simply well adjusted, or do you have misanthropic tendencies?"

"You must understand, Miss Linaker, that I was not born on the Earth. I was born on the Moon and that is my natural home. Living on a Moon base is very similar in most respects to being aboard a space vessel. So you could say that I have known little else. Space is my natural environment. I do not believe myself to be misanthropic. In truth, I do not like large crowds, but I do enjoy good company. "

"Mr. Chairman, may I ask a Question?" The request came from Fred Ford.

"Please do, " replied Sir Richard.

"Pardon me for being blunt, Captain, but you have been in charge of armed spacecraft for more than twenty years. Can you tell me what you expected to fire at, or, indeed, did you ever use your weaponry in anger?"

Captain Stephens stiffened visibly. There was an uncomfortable pause before he answered. "The operation is preventative rather than curative. The only time I have used weapons for real was in the incident Mr. Twist spoke of earlier. My commission was to guard against any malefactors who might come along. You never know what might be out there.

If ships fall into the wrong hands there is a good chance that piratical attacks could be made on our vessels, or worse, some revenge-seeking lunatic could run amok amongst the unarmed traders.

In addition to these situations there is still a certain amount of animosity between the East and the West. Both the Americans and the Russians would dearly like to get their hands on our C.A.M.I.D. system, so our presence stops certain people from getting unsavoury ideas. "

"Are you utterly convinced that your work was really necessary?". insisted Mr. Ford.

"Totally, Sir," retorted Captain Stephens in a voice that discouraged any further questioning along these lines.

The cultured voice of Lord Lamont broke the ice. "It seems to me, as an outsider, that a flawless career was ruined when you resigned your commission. Would you care to tell us the reasons why you turned your back on the service you served so well for so long? You were obviously Admiral-type material."

This was the crunch. This was the inevitable question he had been dreading. He flushed slightly and spoke with a calmness he did not feel. "I cannot see that my reasons can have any relevance to this application. All that I am prepared to say is that my reasons were personal and not disciplinary."

"That may be so," urged Lord Lamont, "but I am sure that my colleagues here would like to know them anyway."

"Even if I felt like discussing them, which I don't, I am not allowed to. I am still bound by the Official Secrets Act. "

"Your words only make me even more curious," mused Lord Lamont. "Is there any way round this, Mr. Chairman?"

"My Lord, I must first of all respect the feelings of Captain Stephens, but I do feel that the Official Secrets Act is not a problem in this case. All persons present here are cleared to the highest level. All I need to do is to switch off the A.T.M. while the point is discussed. I must be frank, Captain, I feel it has relevance."

Captain Stephens felt very uncomfortable, it was a sore point with him.

Clive Twist came to his rescue. "Gentlemen, if Captain Stephens is reluctant to tell his story, may I have your permission to speak with him in private?"

The Chairman asked if anybody had any objections and, since none were forthcoming, gave his approval.

Clive Twist and the Captain retired to a small anteroom.

"Captain, I know how you must feel. Firstly, you feel that if the truth is disclosed your chances of being offered this appointment are zero. I firmly believe that the opposite is true. Secondly, I know the full story from both sides and would be prepared to recite the facts on your behalf. Thirdly, I can do it in the room with your permission or out of the room without your permission. Fourthly, I would not do it at all unless I thought it was in your best interest. Now, what do you say?"

"I feel that I was made to look a bloody fool by the so called Authorities and I don't want to be made to look another today," fenced the Captain.

"Do you still stick with your story?" demanded Clive.

"Of course I do," insisted Stephens fiercely.

"Well then, let me tell it to them," urged Clive.

Captain Stephen's temper dissipated and he thought for a moment. "I'm sorry, but even after two years I am still very touchy about it. We'll go back and

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