

The Magnet Drive

The Magnet Drive appears to be two regular magnets, lashed together positive pole to positive pole via a liberal use of titanium wire wrapped in an intricate and bizarre pattern. The two ends of the titanium wire are soldered to alligator clips; when these two clips are attached to a flattened aluminum tube filled with carbon suspended in glycerin, the flat side of the tube opposite the magnets produces thrust. Two decorative refrigerator magnets generate enough thrust to put a quadcopter drone in the air; a no-fooling interplanetary cruiser probably wouldn't need magnets that were larger than, say, a microwave oven. Just to add to the fun, there's no power source. The item just works. It also generates a field at high enough speeds (at least one-half c) that apparently has never heard of the lightspeed barrier.

Yes, the Magnet Drive violates multiple physical laws as 21st Century Earth science knows them. That was why the relevant Galactic authority arranged for a saucer equipped with the Drive to 'crash' in Roswell in 1947. The Magnet Drive makes perfect sense, when one has an understanding of the laws of nature that dwarfs that of an Atomic Age physicist -- but trying to explain the principles

of the Drive to an Earth scientist is like trying to explain a lemon-powered battery to a Bronze Age savage. Introducing a Magnet Drive to a developing culture has the twin results of encouraging the rapid growth of manned space exploration, at the cost of virtually everything else, including the further development of physics. This invariably has made integrating emergent cultures easier; if a species proved hostile, its accumulated war fleets could be destroyed swiftly and easily, allowing the Galactics to swoop in and institute whatever changes they saw fit.

Earth is one of those places where the standard plan didn't quite work. The saucer crashed on schedule, but the researcher investigating the Magnet Drive flat-out refused to believe in it, despite the fact that it worked. He destroyed the Drive, all of his notes, and every scrap of documentation. And apparently even the Galactics can get into ruts, because their response was to crash an identical saucer in the *exact same place* in 1951.

By then the nascent black ops operation that is now known as Project CRICKET TURTLEDOVE had started to get suspicious of the first saucer anyway; absent a magic space drive, they had had plenty of time to look over the rest of the crash debris and Project researchers had come

to the surprisingly correct conclusion that the 'spacecraft' was an elaborate mockup. Having a duplicate show up four years later merely confirmed it. This time the Project sanitized the site from the beginning, and carefully examined everything **except** the Magnet Drive. They were careful not to destroy the drive itself, which apparently kept the Galactics from realizing that the second saucer didn't work, either. At least, no new saucers have crashed.

And that has been the state of play for the last sixty years. The Project still doesn't understand what the Magnet Drive does; it can't let the rest of the planet know about it lest it wreck Earth's entire scientific infrastructure; and it doesn't dare make larger ones because *that may be exactly what the Galactics want Earth to do*. Project CRICKET TURTLEDOVE instead carefully makes small versions of the Drive, which are then presented to researchers who are voluntarily and permanently isolated from the rest of the scientific community. It's the physics equivalent of a biosafety protective-suit lab, and the methodology seems to have been successful.

Except, alas, for the mockup of the Magnet Drive that got lost in a car crash last week. Tracking that down -- and sanitizing the site of inconvenient rumors -- will be the province of a group of specialists. Yes, they'll get black

suits and sunglasses. No, they won't get mind-erasing gadgets. Honestly, usually using lawyers, guns, and/or money functions perfectly well when it comes to fixing these little problems. Why mess with what works?

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