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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DUMBWAITER \*\*\*



# **Dumbwaiter**

**By JAMES STAMERS**

**Illustrated by DILLON**

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***Antimony IX divers can't be seen, of course ... but  
don't have anything in mind when one of them is around you!***

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The man ahead of me had a dragon in his baggage. So the Lamavic boys confiscated it. Lamavic—Livestock, Animal, Mineral and Vegetable, International Customs—does not like to find dragons curled up in a thermos. And since this antipathy was a two-way exchange, the Lamavic inspectors at Philadelphia International were singed and heated all ways by the time they got to me. I knew them well.

"Mr. Sol Jones?"

"That's right," I said, watching the would-be dragon smuggler being marched away. A very amateur job. I could have told him. There are only two ways to smuggle a dragon nowadays.

"Any livestock to declare, Mr. Jones?"

"I have no livestock on my person or in my baggage, nor am I accompanied by any material prohibited article," I said carefully, for I saw they were recording.

The little pink, bald inspector with a charred collar looked at his colleague.

"Anything known?"

His colleague looked down at me from six feet of splendid physique, smiled unpleasantly, and flipped the big black record book.

"Sol Jones," he read, "'Lamavic four-star offender. Galactic registration: six to tenth power: 763918. Five foot ten inches, Earth scale. Blue eyes, hair variable and usually nondescript brown, ear lobes and cranial....' You're not disputing identity, Mr. Jones?"

"Oh, no. That's me."

"I see. 'Irrevocable Galactic citizenship for services to family of Supreme President Xgol in matter of asteroid fungus, subsequent Senatorial amnesty confirmed, previous sentences therefore omitted. Lamavic offenses thereafter include no indictable evidence but total twenty-four minor fines for introducing prohibited livestock onto various planets. Suspected complicity in Lamavic cases One through Seventy-six as follows: mobile sands, crystal thinkers, recording turtle, operatic fish, giant mastodon.' Mr. Jones, you seem to have given us trouble before."

"Before what?"

"Before this—er—"

"That," I said, "is an Unconstitutional remark. I am giving no trouble. I have made a full declaration. I demand the rights of a Galactic citizen."

He apologized, as he had to. This merely made both inspectors angry, but they were going to search me anyway. I knew that. Certainly I am a smuggler, and I had in fact a little present for my girl Florence—a wedding present, I hoped—but they would never find it. This time I really had them fooled, and I intended to extract maximum pleasure from watching their labors.

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I saw the Lamavic records once. The next leading offender has only two stars and he's out on Ceres in the penal colony. My four stars denote that I disapprove of all these rules prohibiting the carrying of livestock from one planet to another. Other people extend the Galactic Empire; I extend my Galactic credit. You want an amusing extraterrestrial pet to while away the two-hour work week, I can provide one. Of course, this pet business was overdone in the early days when any space-hopper could bring little foreign monsters back to the wife and kiddies. Any weird thing could come in and did.

"You are aware, Mr. Jones, that you have declared that you are not trying to bring in any prohibited life-form, whether animal, mineral, vegetable, or any or all of these?"

"I am," I said.

"You are further aware of the penalties for a false declaration?"

"In my case, I believe I could count on thirty years' invigorating work on a penal planet."

"You could, Mr. Jones. You certainly could."

"Well, I've made my declaration."

"Will you step this way?"

Very polite in Philadelphia Spaceport. I followed the inspectors into the screening cubicles. There was a nasty looking device in the corner.

"I thought those things were illegal," I said.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Jones, you are, as you know, quite right. We may not employ a telepath

instrument on any unconvicted person."

They looked sorry, but I wasn't. A telepath would have told them immediately where I had Florence's pet, and all about it. I smiled at them. They paid no attention, took my passport and began turning up the Lamavic manual on Antimony IX, Livestock of, Prohibited Forms. I had just come from there and so had Florence's little diver, which I had brought as a happy surprise. I sat down. The two inspectors looked as if they were going to say something, then continued flipping pages of their manual.

"Here it is—Antimony IX."

One of them read out the prohibitions and the other tried to watch me and the reflex counter behind me at the same time—a crude instrument which should be used, in my professional view, only to determine a person's capacities for playing poker with success.

"Ants-water, babblers, bunces, candelabra plants, catchem-fellers, Cythia Majoris, divers, dunces, dimple-images, drakes, dunking dogs, dogs-savage, dogs-water, dogs-not-otherwise-provided-for, unspec., elephants-miniature, fish-any...."

They went on. Antimony IX is teeming with life and almost every specimen is prohibited on other planets. We had passed the divers, anyway. I smiled and gave the reflex counter a strong jerk just as the smaller inspector was saying "Mammoths." They looked at me in silence.

"Funny man," one said, and they went on reading.

"Okay," the large inspector said at last. "We'll examine him for everything."

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For the next three hours, they took blood specimens to see if I had microscopic livestock hidden there, they X-rayed me and my baggage, fluoroscoped everything again, put the baggage through an irritator life-indexer, investigated my orifices in detail with a variety of instruments, took skin scrapings in case I was wearing a false layer, and the only thing they found was my dark glasses.

"Why don't you wear modern contact lenses?"

"It's none of your business," I said, "but these old-style spectacles have liquid lenses."

There was a flurry and they sent away for analysis a small drop from one of the lenses. There were no signs of prohibited life in the liquid.

"I could have told you that," I said. "It's dicyanin, a vegetable extract. Diminishes the glare."

I put the glasses on my nose and hooked on the earpieces. The effect was medieval, but I could see the little diver now. I could also see disturbing evidence of the inspectors' mental condition. A useful little device invented by Dr. W. J. Kilner (1847-1920) for the study of the human aura in sickness and health. After a little practice, which I was not going to allow the Lamavic inspectors, the retina became sufficiently sensitive to see the micro-wave aura when you looked through the dicyanin screen. As was true of most of these psi pioneers at that time, nothing was done to further Kilner's work when he died. I noticed, without surprise, that the inspectors had a mental field of very limited extent and that the little diver had survived the journey nicely.

"Can I go now?" I asked.

"This time, Mr. Jones."

When I left, the repair staff was building a new inspection barrier to replace the parts the dragon had got. Such an amateur performance! Leave smuggling to professionals and we'd have Lamavic disbanded from boredom in ten years. I nearly slipped on the fine silica dioxide which had fused in the air when the dragon got annoyed. Nasty, dangerous pets.

The one for Florence was the only contraband I was carrying this trip, which was purely pleasure. She was waiting for me in her apartment, tall, golden, luscious, and all mine. She thought I was in import-export, which in a sense was true.

"I've missed you so much, Sol," she said, twining herself on me and the couch like a Venusian water-nymph. "Did you bring me a present?"

I lay back and let her kiss me.

"Of course I did. A small but very valuable present."

I let her kiss me again.

"Not—a Jupiter diamond, Sol?"

"Much rarer than that, and more useful."

"Oh. Useful."

"Something to help you in the house when we're married, honey. Now, don't pout so prettily, or I'll never get around to showing you."

My homecoming was not developing quite as I planned, but I put this down to womanly, if not exactly maidenly, quirks. When she found out what I had brought her, I was sure she would be all over me again. I put on my dark glasses so that I could see where the diver was.

"Would you like a drink, honey?" I asked.

"I don't mind," she said sulkily.

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I looked at the diver, concentrated hard on the thought of a bottle from the cabinet, two glasses and a pitcher of ice from the kitchen. He went revolving through the air obediently and the items came floating out neatly. Florence nearly shattered the windows with her screams.

"Now calm down, honey," I said, catching her. "Calm down. It's just a little present I brought you."

The bottle, glasses and pitcher dropped gently onto the table beside us.

"See?" I said. "Service at a thought. Remote control. The end of housework. Kiss me."

She didn't.

"You mean you did that, Sol?"

"Not me, exactly. I've brought you a little baby diver, honey, all the way from Antimony IX, just for you. There isn't another one on Earth. In fact, I doubt if there's another one outside Antimony IX. I had a lot of trouble securing this rare and valuable present for you."

"I don't like it. It gives me the creeps."

"Honey," I said carefully, "this is a little baby. It couldn't hurt a mouse. It's about six inches in diameter, and all it is doing is to teleport what you want it to teleport."

"Then why can't I see it?"

"If you could see it, I wouldn't have been allowed to bring it for you, honey, because a whole row of nasty-minded Solar Civil Servants would have seen it too, and they would have taken it from your own sweet Sol."

"They can have it."

"Honey, this is a *rare* and *valuable* pet! It will *do* things for you."

"So you think I need something done for me. Well! I'm glad you came right out and said this before we were married!"

The following series of "but—but—" from me and irrelevance from Florence occupied an hour, but hardly mentioned the diver. Eventually I got her back into my arms.

My urges for Florence were strictly biological, though intense. There were little chances for intellectual exchanges between us, but I was more interested in the broad probabilities of her as a woman. I could go commune with wild and exotic intelligences on foreign planets any time I had the fare. As a woman, Florence was what I wanted.

"Back on Antimony IX," I explained carefully, "life is fierce and rugged. So, to keep from being eaten, these little divers evolved themselves into little minds with no bodies at all, and they feed off solar radiation. Now, honey, minds are not made of the same stuff brains are made of, good solid tissue and gray matter and neural cortex—"

"Don't be dirty, Sol."

"There is nothing dirty about the body, honey. Minds are invisible but detectable in the micro-wavelengths on any sensitive counter, and look like little glass eggs when you can see them—as I can, by using these glasses. In fact, your diver is over by the window now. But, having evolved this far, they came across a little difficulty and couldn't evolve any further. So there they are, handy little minds for teleporting whatever you want moved, and reading other people's thoughts."

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She gasped. "Did you say reading other people's thoughts?"

"Certainly," I said. "As a matter of fact, that's what stopped the divers from evolving further. If they brush against any thinking creature, they pick up whatever thought is in the creature's conscious mind. But they also pick up the subliminal activity, if you follow me—and down at that level of a mind such as man's, his thoughts are not only the present unconscious thoughts but also a good slice of what is to him still the future. It's one of those space-time differences. The divers are not really on the same space-time reference as the physical world, but that makes them all the more useful, because our minds aren't either."

"Did you say reading other people's thoughts, like a telepath?" she persisted.

"Exactly like a telepath, or any other class of psi. We're really living on a much wider scale than we're conscious of, but our mind only tracks down one point in time-space in a straight line, which happens to fit our bodies. Our subliminal mind is way out in every direction, including time—and when you pick up fragments of this consciously, you're a psi, that's all. So the divers got thoroughly confused—that's what it amounts to—and never evolved any further. So you see, honey, it's all perfectly natural."

"I think you're just dirty."

"Eh?"

"Everyone *hates* telepaths. You know that."

"I don't."

"Oh, you go wandering all over the Galaxy—but my friends—what could I say to my friends if they learned I had something like a telepath in the apartment?"

"It's only a baby diver, I keep telling you, honey. And anyway, you'll be able to tell what they're really thinking about you."

Florence looked thoughtful. "And what they've been doing?"

"Sometimes they will do what they think they'll do. And sometimes they don't make it. But it's what their subliminal plans to have happen, yes."

She kissed me. "I think it's a lovely present, Sol."

She snuggled up to me and I concentrated on bringing the diver over to her. I thought I'd read her, just for a joke, and see what she had in mind. I took a close look.

"What's the matter, Sol?"

"Oh, honey! You beautiful creature!"

"This is nice—but what made you say that?"

"I just got the diver to show me your mind, and bits of the next two weeks you have in mind. It's going to be a lovely, lovely vacation."

She blushed very violently and got angry. "You had no right to look at what I was thinking, Sol!"

"It wasn't what you were thinking so much as what you will be thinking, honey. I figure in it quite well."

"I won't have it, Sol! Do you hear me? I think spying on people is detestable!"

"I thought you liked the idea of tagging your friends?"

"That's different. Either we go somewhere without that whatever-it-is, or you can marry someone else. I don't mind having it around after we're married, but not before, Sol. Do you understand?"

I was already reaching for the video yellow pages.

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I turned on the television-wall in the apartment before we left and instructed the diver to stay around and watch it. They are very curious creatures, inquisitive, always chasing new ideas, and I thought that should hold the diver happily for several days. Meanwhile, I had booked adjoining rooms at the Asteroid-Central.

The Asteroid-Central advertised in the video yellow pages that it practiced the Most Rigid Discrimination—meaning no telepaths, clairvoyants, clairaudients or psychometrists. Life was hard on a psi outside Government circles. But life was much harder on the rest of the world seeking secluded privacy and discretion. The Asteroid-Central was so discreet, you could hardly see where you were going. Dim lights, elegant figures passing in the gloom, singing perfumes of the gentlest kind, and "Guaranteed Psi-Free" on every bedroom door.

I was humming idly in my room, with one eye on the communicating door through which, were she but true to her own mind, Florence would shortly come, and I turned on the television-wall only to see how less fortunate people were spending their leisure. An idle and most regrettable gesture.

There was a quiz-game on International Channel 462, dull and just finishing. All the contestants seemed to know all the answers. In fact, the man who won the trip around the Rings of Saturn, did so by answering the question before the Martian quiz-master had really finished reading it out. When the winner turned sharply on the other contestants and knocked them down, yelling, "So that's what you think of my mother, is it?" the wall was blacked out and we were taken straight to the Solar Party Convention.

The nominee this decade was human. He seemed to be speaking on his aims, his pure record and altruistic intentions. The stereo cameras looked over the heads of the delegates. Starting in the row by the main aisle, each delegate shot to his feet and started booing and jeering. It rippled down the rows like a falling pack of cards, each delegate in turn after the man in front of him, and each row picking up where the back of the previous row left off. It was as if someone were passing a galvanizing brush along the heads of the delegates, row by row.

Or as if a diver were refreshing the delegates with a clear picture of their nominee's mind.

I groaned and called Florence.

"Look," I said when she came. "That damned pet has followed the program back to the cameras from your apartment, and there he is lousing up the Convention."

"I vote Earth," she told me indifferently.

"That isn't the point, honey. I'll have to bring the diver here, and quickly."

"You do that, Sol. I'll be at home when you get rid of it."

By the time the diver picked up my thoughts and came flickering into the room through the walls,

Florence had left.

I felt the diver off the back of my head, made my thoughts as kindly as possible, and went downstairs to the largest, longest bar.

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The evening passed profitably because I was invited to join a threesome of crooks at cards. With the aid of the little diver, I was able to shorten the odds to a pleasant margin in my favor. But this was doing nothing about Florence. A not altogether funny remark about teleporting the cards did, however, suggest the answer.

After the transaction was over, I sent the diver off to a friend on the faculty of Luke University, where they had a long history of psi investigation and where the diver could be guaranteed to be kept busy rolling dice and such. This was easy to fix by a video call. There had been times in the past when certain services to the Extra-terrestrial Zoology and Botanical Tanks had made me discreetly popular with the faculty, and anyway they thought I was doing them a favor. They promised to keep the little diver busy for an indefinite period.

I reported to Florence, and after a certain amount of feminine shall-I-shan't-I, she came back to the Asteroid-Central.

This time I did not turn on the television-wall. I lay still. I said nothing. I hardly thought at all. And after several years compressed themselves into every minute, my own true honey, Florence, slid open the communicating door and came into the room.

She walked shyly toward me, hiding modestly within a floating nightgown as opaque as a very clear soap bubble.

I stood up, held out my arms and she came toward me, smiling—and stopped to pick up something on the carpet.

"Ooo, Sol! Look! A Jupiter diamond!"

She held up the largest and most expensive diamond I have ever seen.

I was just going to claim credit for this little gift when another appeared, and another, and a long line marching over the carpet like an ant trail. They came floating in under the door.

Now love is for vacations, and between my own sweet Florence and a diamond mine there is no comparison. I put on my dicyanin glasses and saw the baby diver was back and at work teleporting. I said so, but this time there were no hysterics from Florence.

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"I was just thinking of him," she said, "and wishing you had brought me a Jupiter diamond instead."

"Well, honey, it looks as if you've got both."

I watched her scrambling on the carpet, gathering handfuls of diamonds and not in the least interested in me.

On Antimony IX, the little divers switched from one space-time point to another simultaneously, and the baby diver had come back from the Solar Party Convention the same way. I thought of it and it came; Florence had just thought of it and here it was. But now it seemed to be flitting lightly from Earth to Jupiter and back with diamonds, so perhaps there was no interplanetary distance to a mind.

This had a future. I could see myself with a winter and a summer planet of my own, even happily paying Earth, Solar and Galactic taxes.

"Well, honey, don't you worry," I said. "You don't like divers, so I'll take it back and give you something else. Just leave it to Sol."

"Take your foot off that diamond, Sol Jones! You gave me this dear little diver and he's mine!"

---

She sat back on her heels and thought. The evidence of her thinking immediately came trickling through the door—Venusian opals set in a gold bracelet half a pound heavy, Martian sleet furs, spider-web stockings, platinum belts. The room was beginning to look like a video fashion center, a Galactic merchandise mart. And after Florence put on a coat and opened the door, her ideas began to get bigger.

"This is fun!" she cried, teleporting like mad. "Why, I can have anything in the Galaxy just by thinking about it!"

"Now, honey, think of the benefits to humanity! This is too big to be used for personal gain. This should be dedicated—"

"This is dedicated to me, Sol Jones, so just you keep your fingers off it. Why, the cute little thing—look, he's been out to Saturn for me!"

I made a decision. Think wide and grand, Sol Jones, I said. Sacrifice yourself for the greater good.

"Florence, honey, you know I love you. Will you marry me?"

That stopped her. "You mean it, Sol?"

"Of course."

"It's not just because of this diver?"

"Why, honey, how could you think such a thing? If I'd never brought it in for you, I'd still want to marry you."

"You never said so before," she said. "But okay. If you do it now. Right now, Sol Jones."

So the merchandise stopped coming in while we plugged into the video and participated in a moving and legal ceremony. The marriage service was expensive, but after all we could teleport in a few thousand credit blanks from the Solar Treasury. Immediately after we had switched off, we did so.

"Are you sure you married me for myself, Sol?"

"I swear it, honey. No other thought entered my head. Just you."

I made a few notes while Florence planned the house we would have, furnished with rare materials from anywhere. I thought one of the medium asteroids would do for a base for Sol Jones Intragalactic Transport. I could see it all, vast warehouses and immediate delivery of anything from anywhere. I wondered if there was a limit to the diver's capacity, so Florence desired an encyclopedia and in it came, floating through the doorway.

"It says," she read, "not much is known about Antimony IX divers because none have ever been known to leave their planet."

"They probably need the stimulus of an educated mind," I said. "Anyway, this one can get diamonds from Jupiter and so on, and that's what matters."

---

I kissed the wife of the President of Sol Jones Intragalactic and was interrupted by discreet tapping on the door. The manager of the Asteroid-Central beamed at us.

"Excuse," he said. "But we understand you have just been married, Mr. and Mrs. Jones."

"Irrevocably," I said.

"Felicitations. The Asteroid-Central will be sending up complimentary euphorics. There is just a small point, Mr. Jones. We notice you have a large selection of valuable gifts for the bride."

He looked round the room and smiled at the piles of stuff Florence had thought of.

"Of course," he went on, "we trust your stay will be pleasant and perhaps you will let us know if you will be wanting anything else."

"I expect we will, but we'll let you know," I said.



"Thank you, Mr. Jones. It is merely that we noticed you had emptied every showcase on the ground floor and, a few moments ago, teleported the credit contents of the bar up here. Not of importance, really; it is all charged on your bill."

"You saw it and didn't stop it?" I yelled.

"Oh, no, Mr. Jones. We always make an exception for Antimony IX divers. Limited creatures, really, but good for our business. We get about one a month—smuggled in, you know. But the upkeep proves too expensive. Some women do shop without more than a passing thought, don't they?"

I saw what he meant, but Mrs. Sol Jones took it very philosophically.

"Never mind, Sol—you have me."

"Or vice versa, honey," I said.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DUMBWAITER \*\*\*

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