



HAMSTERS HAVE NO ALIEN ARTEFACTS

“Well,” observed Patty Perkins very sadly, “This black day for HamLabs™ Inc” He slumped down on the sawdust and looked glum.

“Hamsters have black day,” agreed Haricot Bert, eyeing up Patty’s emergency supply of carrot tops, which Patty seemed to have forgotten in the depths of his despair. “Black day indeed. Hamsters lose appetite,” he added suggestively.

Patty sighed deeply. “Hamsters have no appetite. Hamsters lose all will to live.” Patty applied himself to cleaning his fur.

Bert sidled ever closer to the emergency supplies and tentatively snuffled after one of the carrots. Patty’s will to live was not quite extinguished; he bared his prodigious teeth. Bert innocently sniffed the air in quite a different direction.

“Hamsters find artefact of superior culture,” lamented Patty Perkins. “Hamsters no able to use artefact. Hamsters not so clever after all...”

Bert chose this moment, when Patty was cleaning the fur on his back assiduously, to borrow a few items from Patty’s larder. Patty did not notice.

“Hamsters have inferiority,” he muttered “Hamsters no good!”

“Hamsters have no food?” asked Broccoli Bill brightly, having just woken up. “What we do then?”

Patty Perkins shrugged his shoulders. Hamsters shoulders are not very broad, partly because of a total lack of any sense of responsibility, partly because they get in the way of pouches. Pouches are most important. Patty shrugged his pouches. “Dunno,” he muttered.

“Dunno or don’t care?” snapped Bill angrily. “What kind hamster are you, Mr Patty Perkins, that you give up so easily?” Broccoli Bill’s fur bristled and he looked really fierce for a moment: food was not something you didn’t care about.

Patty Perkins felt all defensive: “It all right for you, Mr Clever-Clogs. You not have to appear before the Committee and tell them how you failed. You the blue-eyed hamster for them after inventing the RoboCarpetDigger™. Oh yes, you the Smartypants of the Month, you the - “

Broccoli Bill was confused: the argument didn’t seem to be about snacks any more; luckily he came across an old and rather faded chocolate drop which had rolled from under the pilot’s exercise-wheel. And was soon too deeply engaged in excavating this interesting object to pay any attention to Patty’s accusations.

Bored with these discussions, Haricot Bert climbed into the pilot’s seat and flipped a few switches, idly turned a wheel here and there. The flying-saucer throbbed, then leaped into the air, revolved like a Catherine-Wheel about six feet off the ground, shot earthwards and then, blasting the leaves from the trees, climbed into the sky, leaving a sonic boom behind it.

Hurled to the lower side of the saucer by the force of acceleration, all three hamsters found themselves squashed up together.

“Who driving this thing anyway?” asked Haricot Bert, puzzled at fifteen thousand feet, once he had managed to disengage himself slightly from Patty’s capacious bottom.

“Thought you were,” replied Bill distractedly, for he had just spotted a pile of sunflower seeds, dislodged by the gravitational forces at work.

The saucer was climbing at an ever increasing rate and the air was growing thin. Far below, it was possible to see the curvature of the earth at the horizons.

“Me not driving,” said Bert, rather needlessly. “Patty driving - he got his front-paw on the accelerator.”

“Have not,” said Patty outraged.

“Have sot,” said Bert.

“Have so,” agreed Bill. “Look.”

Patty looked. Sure enough, jammed as he was in the furry pile, his paw had become caught on the accelerator. Hurriedly, he pulled it back. “Have not,” he said again. “You look, Mr Know-It-All!”

But there was no time for Broccoli Bill to look, for the saucer decelerated rapidly and then stalled, and, reversing in its flight, plummeted earthwards again, forcing all three hamsters to the top half of the saucer.

Almost energetically, Haricot Bert pulled himself to the controls, sat down, nibbled a rather interesting piece of Brussels Sprout, then wrestled the craft back into a level flight. Not a moment too soon: Bill and Patty had covered their eyes in anticipation of disaster, the ground being barely fifty feet below them..

“So what we do with those things, then?” asked the pilot as he dodged between the rooftops of the town. He jerked his thumb at the precious cargo.

“Throw them out,” said Patty. “Hamsters have no use for them. Can’t eat them, can’t pouch them, can’t sleep on them. No good for hamsters then”

“Throw them out,” agreed Bill. “The Committee no need to know. We say we no find them. We pretend never even saw them.”

Haricot Bert was appalled. He pulled the saucer up short among the chimney-pots. The two loose hamsters inside rattled against the front of the craft. “Oi!” protested Bill, “You not very good driver, Mr Haricot!”

Bert ignored the protest: “What you mean, Patty, we say we no find them? Hamsters no have fibs, hamsters have truth all time. Committee ask me, did we retrieve Alien Technology, the hamster from HamLabs™, he say: yes!”

Patty was annoyed. “Oh yes, Mr Tell-Tale Tit! You that kind of hamster! Get us all into trouble.” He cleaned his whiskers desperately. “Alien artefact too clever for us. Hamsters have trouble!” he moaned. “But at least we tell truth. Hamsters always tell truth to Committee,” said the worthiest hamster.

Broccoli Bill eyed Bert. “You ever been before the Committee?” he asked him. Bert shook his head. “Well,” said Bill, “You don’t know how angry Committee gets when HamLabs™ expedition fails. See these scars?” - he proudly showed Bert the scars on his left ear. Bert looked horrified. “Hamster has scars because told Committee that could not find End of Rainbow. Committee very upset. Committee particularly looking forward to Crock of Pumpkin Seeds.”

Haricot Bert paled visibly beneath his fur.

“Hamsters have second thoughts,” he gulped. “Hamsters throw them out.”

Unanimous agreement having been reached, Patty pulled back the roof of the saucer and the cargo was jettisoned. Two tins of baked beans and one of carrot soup smashed through the roof of a greenhouse. Followed by the tin-opener which had caused all the problems.

“There,” said Bill smugly. “Hamsters have no problems now.”

Patty Perkins agreed strongly: “HamLabs™ have all superior technology.”

