

## Hamsters Have Branes

“Hamsters like Disney. Walter Disney very great hamster,” said a voice from the cupboard. This statement was almost immediately followed by the sound of cascading video boxes and the clunk as a rum bottle fell over.

“Clumsy Clot!” squeaked someone in the cupboard. “You short-sighted or what?”

“Not Clumsy Clot, Clever-Clogs-Know-It-All!” came the retort. “Boxes not here last time, Smartypants – humans very untidy!”

There was the sound of a tussle. Mrs D. realised that she had better intervene.

“Do I have important visitors from HamLabs Inc?” she asked loudly. “I wonder what marvellous inventions they have this year?”

The scuffling and squeaking in the cupboard stopped abruptly. Then, just as suddenly, there was the swift clattering of paws from behind the sofa; and a brown and furry hamster shot into view.

“Oh!” exclaimed Mrs D., genuinely startled, “What a surprise – I thought you were in the cupboard just now!”

The small fat hamster peered up at her, his whiskers twitching fiercely.

“HamLabs™ technology,” he confirmed. “Human watch this!” And with that and a severe pattering of feet, he shot back behind the sofa. Almost immediately, two hamsters burst out of the cupboard, falling over each other in their haste.

Mrs D. looked closely at them – one was white and grey – Broccoli Bill, to be sure; the other bore a remarkable resemblance to Haricot Bert who had just vanished behind the sofa.

“Human impressed, eh?” smirked Bert, sitting up on his ample bottom and cleaning his whiskers. “One moment, behind sofa. Next moment, coming out of untidy cupboard.”

“But that wasn’t you who –”, muttered Mrs D. “Surely, there’s another ...” Suspiciously, she peered down the back of the sofa. But there was no one to be seen at the foot of that dark chasm. When she looked back, both Bert and Bill were looking up at her in that sort of way which says “told you so and where are the yoghurt drops?”.

“All right then,” she said. “Just do that one more time and I’ll believe you.”

Broccoli Bill looked at Haricot Bert and Haricot Bert looked at Broccoli Bill. They shrugged their furry shoulders. Bert sauntered back into the cupboard and knocked over another pile of videos. Almost simultaneously, as an approaching train from a tunnel, something burst from behind the sofa and fetched up panting against the door. The door was on the opposite side of the room from the cupboard. That puffing train was that Haricot Bert once more.

Mrs D. was amazed. “I’m amazed,” she said to Bill. “How does he do it?”

“Branes,” said Broccoli Bill importantly.

“M’m,” Mrs D. considered carefully. “Yes, certainly, a good head on your shoulders would have a lot to do with it. And of course,” she added hastily, “Hamsters have good shoulders and lots of brains. I’ve always said so.”

“Not brains,” said Haricot Bert crossly, “Branes. New Hamlabs™ stuff. Where are the yoghurt drops, then?”

Mrs D. sighed and fetched the yoghurt drops. Bill and Bert stuffed their pouches intensely for several moments.

“May I ask, then,” asked Mrs D. cautiously when every last crumb of the yoghurt drops had been hoovered up, “What are branes?”

Haricot Bert looked pityingly at her. “What?!” he exclaimed, “Human not know? Humans no have pouches, humans no have big ears, humans no have branes, humans not much cop!”

Broccoli Bill was less direct. “Branes new invention,” he explained. “Make use of all eleven dimensions. Hamsters use branes in eleventh dimension, get from one place to another without being seen. Whoosh-whoosh!” he demonstrated with a grandiose sweep of his over-filled cheek-pouches. “Very nifty,” he concluded.

Mrs D. considered all of this gravely. “So,” she said slowly, “You move from this dimension, into another one, and then you come out of that dimension somewhere else? Is that it?”

Haricot Bert snorted. “Much more difficult,” he scoffed. “Very very very very difficult,” he added. He turned his attention to a large plant with rather succulent leaves, muttering “difficult difficult, very very” to himself.

“Very difficult,” confirmed Bill. “You almost right. Branes on either side of eleventh dimension. HamLabs™ have technology to wobble eleventh dimension and bring branes together. Poof! Whoof!” he demonstrated with his large pink ears. “Branes collide, hamsters cross empty space!”

“Need big pouches,” added Bert, rapidly filling his own.

“Remarkable,” agreed Mrs D., now completely mystified. “I didn’t realise hamsters were quite so advanced. More than just pretty faces.”

“Hamsters have pretty faces,” confirmed Bert. “Hamsters do all kinds things. Hamsters do unicycling. Hamsters do tap-dancing. Hamsters do bagpipes. Hamsters also brilliant at snooker,” he added. “Humans do snooker?”

“Er, yes,” said Mrs D. “Some humans have been known to play snooker. But,” she looked at the two fat hamsters doubtfully, “Don’t you need long arms to hold the snooker cue?”

At that, there came a voice from the cupboard, supposedly empty. “Hamsters no have cues. Hamsters use noses.”

There was a silence on the floor. Bill and Bert looked at each other. Bill bit Bert’s stubby tail and, staccato, Bert dashed back behind the sofa. And the very next instant, there he was, tumbling out of the cupboard, looking rather sheepish.

Mrs D. looked long and hard at Broccoli Bill, who was studiously polishing his nose, his tail, his fur, his pink ankles. Anything to avoid meeting her gaze.

“Bill,” she said at last, “How did Bert do that?”

“Mm?” asked Broccoli Bill, looking up innocently. “Bert do what? Bert do something? What that?”

“How did Bert’s voice come out of the cupboard when I saw him sitting beside you over here?”

Bill’s eyes were almost popping out of his head in desperation.

“Oh, effect of Branes technology,” he stuttered at last. “Warping fourth dimension. Branes rub against fourth dimension, time warps. Bit difficult for humans...”

Mrs D. looked even more closely at him.

“Or is there another hamster in this room?” she demanded.

“No no no no no!” muttered both the hamsters, shaking their heads violently. “All HamLabs™ stuff. No more hamsters.”

“Because,” said Mrs D. casually, “If there was another hamster, I’ve got some water-cress here, which I’m sure he’d like.”

Barely were the words out of her mouth than there was a sound as of hailstones hitting a tin roof and an out-of-focus projectile zipped out from behind the sofa, running so fast that it ran smack into the skirting board with a thud. While Haricot Bert still remained in

full view beside the cupboard. And Broccoli Bill cleaned his ears in despair. The third hamster stood on his hind paws.

“Hamsters like water-cress,” he stated eagerly.

“And this,” asked Mrs D., “This would be a hamster from which of several dimensions?”

“Me Riddle Dumble,” said the new hamster. “Me Bert’s long-lost twin brother.”

Mrs D. provided him with some water-cress, then raised her eyebrows at Bill and Bert. “It appears,” she said sternly, “That there is more to Branes technology than meets the eye?”

Broccoli Bill did not know what to do. He tied himself in a knot - or would have, if he had not been so fat - trying to clean parts of his fur that would seem impossible to reach.

Haricot Bert waved his paws airily. “Branes still very complicated. Even hamsters no understand. Not what seem. Lots of dimensions,” he confided. “Tricky things, lots of dimensions. Lots and lots and lots and lots,” he added. “Like yoghurt drops.”

“Long-lost brothers re-appear, that sort of thing?” enquired Mrs D.

“Branes rub together,” agreed Bert, shaking his head, “Tricky things happen.”

Riddle Dumble, who had by now pouched his water-cress, looked around eagerly.

“Hamsters have huge brains,” he boasted. “Bigger than buses.”

“Oh!” said Mrs D. rather surprised. “But hamsters heads aren’t very large. How does the huge brain fit in?”

“Hamsters keep most of brains in eighth dimension,” explained Riddle Dumble. “All tightly curled up like springs. Tip of iceberg in third dimension. Hamsters like water-cress,” he added, eagerly.

Broccoli Bill sat up suddenly. “Hamsters must go,” he advised Mrs D. “Eighth dimension passing close in three minutes.”

“Eighth and ninth and tenth,” nodded Riddle. “All coming soon.”

“Well, isn’t life like that,” mused Mrs D. “You get stuck in four dimensions for ages, then along come three others at once.”

Broccoli Bill looked at her, suspecting a joke at his expense.

“Hamsters visit other dimensions now,” he said stiffly. “Hamsters use branes. Hamsters go now. Goodbye.”

And with a pattering and a whoosh, Riddle Dumble, Broccoli Bill and Haricot Bert dashed over the floor and clambered heavily into the cupboard. There were a few squeaks, a crash of tumbling video cases, a glassy clunk – then, branes separated, and there was silence.