

iHAMSTERS

“So,” began Teddy Parker, before falling off his wheel with a thump and a skitter. He slid across the floor and fetched up against the laptop. “Oof ! So, humans interested in Internet?”

“Oh yes,” said Mrs. D. “It’s fascinating, isn’t it - all those shopping sites and blogs and things.”

“Hamsters made Internet,” advised the fat brown hamster nonchalantly.

“Really?” replied Mrs. D., a little dubious. “All of it?”

“Course we did, stupid,” affirmed Broccoli Bill, who had been contemplating a large carrot-top. “You think it just came from nothing, or what?”

“Well...” began Mrs. D. uncertainly.

“Humans, eh, Teddy?” scoffed Bill. “Skinny, useless, and know nothing.” He wrapped his jaws around the carrot and mumbled something else which no one could understand. He repeated it twice, for clarification.

“Broccoli Bill, he say there huge hamster-wheel at North Pole, it powers Internet,” said Teddy. He looked

puzzled for a moment, and chewed distractedly on a left-over piece of apple.

“Well, that’s as may be,” said Mrs. D. “But you can’t say that hamsters made all the pages that appear on the web - there’s millions of them, aren’t there?”

“Billions,” said Teddy airily. “Lot of hard work. We work all night. And we have to keep Google up to date too.”

“No rest for the wicked,” yawned Haricot Bert, stretching himself and emerging from a pile of sawdust and cotton-wool. “What all noise about?”

“Human know nothing about Internet,” explained Teddy, shaking his head sadly. “Was just explaining about Google,” he added.

“Good old Google,” nodded Bert. “Knew him when smaller.”

“Google’s a hamster?” asked Mrs. D. much astonished. Haricot Bert sat up and cleaned his ears. “You right,” he muttered to Teddy. “Humans know nothing. Course Google a hamster - how else you think Google know everything there is to know?”

Mrs. D. thought she would change the subject. “I saw some lovely videos of mice and rats on *You Tube* last week,” she said.

There was an icy silence, broken at length by Broccoli Bill, whose teeth began to chitter. “Mice and rats?” he hissed.

“And hamsters, of course,” added the human quickly. “Lots and lots of videos of hamsters.”

Bill was not to be diverted. “There no mice or rats on Internet,” he said flatly. He cleaned his tail energetically. “But I saw them,” protested Mrs. D. “They were doing all kinds of things with obstacle courses and biscuits. They looked very clever.”

At this, all three hamsters broke into tinny laughter and rolled around on their backs. “Oh, oh, oh!” they squeaked. “Human think she saw mice and rats, oh, oh, oh!”

Broccoli Bill choked on his carrot, and coughed it out, spluttering.

At length, they calmed down. “What skinny human really saw was hamsters,” explained Teddy in a patronising tone. “Hamsters do all the things on Internet.”

“Well, I did see a very nice hamster hoovering up a line of food,” agreed the human. “But the mice and rats were -”

“Stop. Right. There.” broke in Broccoli Bill warningly. He placed himself on top of the laptop’s keyboard, his fat little bottom pressing a whole variety of keys. He

stood up on his hind legs, and peered short-sightedly upwards “No mice or rats allowed on Internet. Videos are of hamsters dressed up as mice.”

“Ah,” said Mrs. D., now understanding. “Of course. Well, I confess I was completely taken it - their disguises were very good, you know.”

“Course they were, dimwit,” said Bill, placated. “Hamsters master of disguise. Hamsters take lot of trouble with Internet.”

“Variety the spice of life,” stated Teddy Parker a little beside the point.

“Hamsters cannot live on sunflower seeds alone,” advised Haricot Bert, tucking in to a Brazil nut.

There was a long pause. Bill vacated the keyboard and spent the next few minutes cleaning the fur on his back. Mrs. D. deleted the hundreds of extra letters that his bottom had typed onto her email to New Zealand.

“You got *Second Life* yet?” asked Teddy Parker at length.

“*Second Life*?” asked Mrs. D. “No, what’s that?”

“Humans still in first life,” sniggered Bert through his apple-core. “Get a life!” The other hamsters chuckled. Bert reversed into the mound of cotton-wool and waggled about with his bottom. There was another movement and Patty Perkins emerged bleary-eyed.

“What going on?” he enquired.

“Human want to know about *Second Life*,” said Bert idly.

Instantly, Patty dashed about on the keyboard and mouse-pad and in seconds a new web-page appeared on the screen. Mrs. D. peered at it closely.

“Alternate world,” explained Patty. “You want to meet some real cool guys?”

Mrs. D. did not wish to offend, so she nodded agreeably. Patty Perkins paid no attention anyway. He pressed a few more keys and brought up a page of animated characters - fine-chiselled, cool faces, men in wraparound dark glasses, broad-shouldered youths on huge motor-bikes, admired by short-haired babes in leather jackets and tight-fitting jeans.

“This the *Shadow Chasers*,” announced Patty. The other hamsters crept closer to the screen and pressed their little noses up against it. “That ‘Black Wolf’,” he indicated one of the pictures, “he leader of the pack. Cold, calculating and strong. And that ‘Arrowfax’ - given incredible magical powers at birth.”

“And that one there,” interrupted Teddy enthusiastically, “that ‘Warlord’, majestic leader of an invincible army.

“‘Warlord’ a wimp,” muttered Broccoli Bill. “Took beating from ‘Grey Shadow’ last week.”

“Did not,” squeaked Teddy.

“Did too,” countered Bill. “Got his tail bitten.”

“Never did,” said Teddy outraged.

“I did too!”

Patty Perkins chipped in. “Black Wolf’ can thrash them all,” he announced.

Outraged, the other hamsters turned on Patty. “Black Wolf?” they shrieked. “He couldn’t thrash piece of cauliflower!”

The discussion quickly degenerated into a squabbling heap of small hamsters, biting and nipping and squirming all over Mrs. D’s laptop. Gingerly, she pulled the writhing mass apart, and placed each hamster in tall-sided plastic boxes that lay scattered about the floor. For good measure, she tossed a yoghurt-drop into each box. The gang soon calmed down.

“Is that you, then, on *Second Life*?” she asked at length.

“Me ‘Warlord,’” said Teddy Parker proudly from the bottom of his container.

“Him wimp,” stated Broccoli Bill baldly. “Me ‘Grey Shadow’ - greatest warrior in all of the Dread Valley of Am-herst, legendary territory of fabled *Shadow Chasers*”

Patty Perkins ran about excitedly at the bottom of his box. “Me ‘Black Wolf,’” he boasted. “Black Wolf’ the sneakiest warrior of them all. Devastate all other warriors in single combat. Even ‘Arrowfax’. Specially ‘Warlord.’”

The noise level rose again. Mrs. D. kicked the sides of the boxes in desperation, The small fat hamsters quietened down instantly and sat washing their ears.

“This *Second Life*,” she speculated, “seems to be full of handsome and desperate characters?”

“Nothing but,” agreed Teddy. “No mice or rats, though. Just warriors and heroes. No humans either.”

“Like *You Tube*, then?”

“Dimwit,” sighed Broccoli Bill. “*You Tube* not full of heroes. It full of real-life hamsters. Very clever and skilful ones.”

“And some in disguise?”

“Loads in disguise.”

“Well,” said Mrs. D. “that Internet certainly is packed with wonderful and interesting things. I’m glad we got broadband.”

“Hamsters invented broadband,” noted Haricot Bert in a casual sort of way.

“Internet greatest thing since yoghurt-drops,” added Broccoli Bill, in case there was any doubt.

“*Second Life* full of yoghurt drops,” remembered Teddy Parker.

“Can’t eat them,” muttered Bill sadly. “Not real.”