

Invisible Ink

“This is one,” muttered Haricot Bert between pouches stuffed with sawdust and Brussels Sprout.

Patty Perkins stood on his hind legs and peered short-sightedly over the rim of the saucer. “You sure?” he asked suspiciously.

Bert snorted. “Course I’m sure. Hamsters have good eyesight.”

“You was sure last week when you said that Pet Shop was a Petrol Station. That almost had us in big trouble.”

Bert cleaned his whiskers thoroughly, then his hind paws. “Well, was accident. Some words very long. And didn’t have my SPECS¹ on.”

Patty humphed and peered out of the clear plastic of the saucer. “Looks more like ‘Stationery’ to me. Hamsters have Stations and they don’t look like this one. You sure?”

For answer, Bert grabbed the controls and, executing a triple Nutty, flipped the craft over twice before sliding it sideways through the open door of the shop, just as a customer was leaving.

“This is place we test the new technology,” he announced, parking the saucer on top of a high shelf, well out of sight of the shop-owner, who was busy chasing some naughty boys round the crisps-stand. The new technology was, of course, the CHOOCHOO². This was the very pinnacle of hamster inventiveness. Patty and Bert had been selected by the Great Pouched One to test it out at a railway station: if it worked, the Great Pouched One was going to take a tour of Europe.

Patty was peering at his new surroundings through a pair of binoculars. He shook his head. “This not right, Bert. No trains, no pigeons. Not station.”

Haricot Bert stuck his head into a pile of sawdust and rooted about for a while, gathering his thoughts and some emergency carrot-tops. At last he emerged.

“Well, not my fault. Said ‘Station’ above the door. Humans can’t spell. Hamsters always said so.”

“Well, we here now. Suppose we better try out other technologies.” Patty poked about in a pile of shiny metal instruments and tangled wires. At length he pulled out a grey box with two long arms coming out the side. “Let’s try DULLNESS³ on this human.”

“Hamsters have DULLNESS,” agreed Bert enthusiastically. Together the two hamsters heaved and puffed and trained the long metallic arms on the shop-owner who was standing behind the counter, red in the face but pleased at his emphatic victory over the naughty boys.

Almost immediately the rays hit him, the man’s eyes glazed over and he walked weakly into his back shop, sat down in an armchair and began to snore.

“Yo!” shouted the hamsters victoriously. “Hamsters have DULLNESS!” They slapped paws and settled down for a good snack.

After a few minutes, they opened up their saucer and crept down into the shop, making their way behind the counter. Just as they got there, the tiny bell which hung above the door jangled furiously and a man walked in.

¹ Super Pet Emporium Cognisance Satellite

² Calibrated High-Tech Object Organiser for Catapulting Hamsters Onto the Orient-Express

³ Device Used for Lulling Large Non-Hamsters into Exceptionally Sleepy State

“Quick!” whispered Patty urgently, “Pass me BRAINS⁴!”

“Hamsters have not got BRAINS” whispered back Bert. “Hamsters left it in the saucer!”

“You stupid hamster, what you do that for?” exclaimed Patty furiously.

“You said nothing about weapons!” squeaked Bert. His short little tail was wagging angrily. “Anyway why you not bring it, Mr Clever Pouches what knows everything? Why always me that forgets?!”

Haricot Bert gave Patty a good nip on the nose and the two hamsters were about to start a real fight when they heard a loud cough.

“Excuse me, I’m looking for a Valentine’s Day Card. Can you help?” The customer-man was leaning over the counter, peering down at the two hamsters who were making so much noise.

Patty Perkins was the first to recover.

“Hamsters have Valentine’s Day Card” he said nonchalantly. “How many you want?”

“Well, I was thinking of just one. For my wife,” he explained, blushing slightly, as if he might be suspected of having four or five more to buy.

“Hamsters always have ten or a dozen,” said Patty.

“Well, just one will do me, thanks. Now where do I find them?”

Patty looked about, frowning. He cleaned his whiskers for a moment. “You sure you want Valentine’s Card? Hamsters have all kinds of other things for wives and girlfriends.”

“Hamsters have girlfriends”, agreed Bert.

“No, no, a card will do nicely,” said the man pleasantly.

“Hamsters have inventions for girlfriends,” confided Patty. “You maybe want an Octocycle? Or a Perpetual Motion Washing-Up Bowl? All good things that girlfriends like.”

“No, no, just a card,” said the man agreeably.

“Hamsters have Underwater Ping-Pong Set,” offered Bert.

“Ssh!” said Patty loudly, “Humans not supposed to know about that. You daft? State secret,” he whispered to the man and winked.

“No, actually, I’d just like a card,” said the man.

Bert gave his fur a thorough going-over, then sat and polished his nose.

Patty brightened up at this. “How about Nose Polisher? Hamsters have noses and girlfriends like Nose Polishers.”

“No,” said the man firmly.

“Special Offer?” said Patty hopefully, “Buy one, get one free?”

“Look, do you have any Valentine’s Day Cards or not?” said the man. “Because, if you don’t, I’ll go somewhere else...”

“No, no,” said Patty anxiously, “Hamsters have lots of cards. Bert, show skinny gentleman where cards are.” Patty waved airily in the direction of some shelves.

Bert led the man over to a pile of plain cardboard. “Valentine’s Day Cards,” he announced. “Take your pick. All 100% guaranteed.”

The man looked at the pile of card and then looked at the small fat hamster. “But these don’t have any pictures or any writing...” he complained.

“Invisible Ink,” said Patty, who had followed them. “Special Import from Norwegian fjords.”

⁴ Brilliant Random Activator for Illuminating Nasty Surprises

The man looked doubtful. "Invisible Ink?" he asked. "But then my wife won't know what it is or who it's from."

Patty sighed. "Skinny humans know nothing?" he demanded. "Valentine's Day Cards not supposed to be signed."

"Y-yes," agreed the man, "I suppose so..."

"Well, hamsters go one better. Cards with no signature and no message."

"Hamsters have one better," confirmed Bert, taking a bite at some rather nice purple card.

"I see. And this Invisible Ink - can it be revealed at some later date?"

"Of course," said Patty scornfully, "You think hamsters daft? You use this ---" he searched around desperately --- "Ah!" Patty grabbed wildly at a bottle which happened to be on display nearby and thrust it at the man "This GLUE⁵ solution on it. Then your wife can read it."

The man sighed. "OK, I'll take it - the card and the - um - solution. How much?"

Bert and Patty looked at each other for a while. Human Economics was not something they had been taught at the Academy.

"£15,000," said Patty after a while.

"Ten chocolate drops," offered Bert.

"Well, I'm afraid I've left my box of chocolate drops at home. Will you take a cheque?"

"Hamster have cheques," confirmed Bert, worldly-wise and stuffing a huge wad of pink card into his pouches. For later use.

"You don't mind if I write it in Invisible Ink, then?" asked the man.

Patty said, "No problem."

"Hamsters have no problem."

So the man gave them a cheque with nothing written on it, gathered up his card (but left the bottle) and departed. At that very moment there was a tremendous yawn from the back-shop as the owner awoke, rubbed his eyes and stretched.

"Quick, scatter!" squeaked Patty. The two hamsters scampered at a very fast patter to their saucer and crouched trembling over the controls, ears out-stretched. When the next customer came in, their saucer executed a WIBBLE and a WOBBLE⁶ and wibble-wobbled out of the door at the speed of light and more.

⁵ Great Liquid for Un-Invisibling Anything

⁶ Wondrous Inverted (or Obverse) Blind Back-thrust for Leaving Extremely quickly;