



## LIKE PLASMONICS, ONLY SMALLER

“OK, give it laldy!”

‘Have given it laldy, stupid. It not working!’

“Course it working - you not give it enough laldy. Here, let me try!”

“Go ahead, Mr. Know-It-All, just see what -”

A bright white flash illuminated the darkened cupboard for a brief second.

“Ha! Who the Know-It-All now then, stupid? Look, I give it proper laldy!”

Another flash, this time blue, cast sudden shadows on the walls. Darkness fell back in. Then another flash, white again. And then - “Bang!”

“Brilliant, Mr. Know-It-All. Now look what you done. Too much laldy. Broken it. All my hard work.”

“No, not broken, just useless. Never worked in first place. Ow! Ow!”

There was the sound of a tussle, and some squealing.

The cupboard door was flung open.

“What’s all this noise,” said Mrs. Drummond a little severely. “I can’t hear myself think out here!”

There was a silence, broken only by a muttered “Not much to listen to anyway,” which Mrs. Drummond chose to ignore.

“Come on, out with you,” she ordered.

After a moment, the huge pile of sawdust and cotton-wool began to heave and move. One, then another, and then a third dishevelled hamster poked a pink nose out.

“I see,” said Mrs. Drummond. “It’s Broccoli Bill again, I might have known it. And who’s this - Haricot Bert? Can you two never stay out of trouble? What are you fighting about now?”

“Not fighting,” replied Haricot Bert, glaring short-sightedly at Bill. “We just pointing out the error of his ways. He broke perfectly good new HamLabs™ device.”

“Not perfectly good,” replied Broccoli Bill. “Was useless, just like Bert.”

“Oh!” Mrs. Drummond interrupted the argument. “And who’s this - I’ve not seen you before?”

The third hamster nodded in an offhand manner and proceeded to clean his ears thoroughly.

“That,” said Bert proudly, “Dr. P.H.Dee.”

“Dr. Dee?” said Mrs. Drummond doubtfully. “He looks very young to be a doctor.”

“Never too young to be doctor, missus,” said the young hamster equably.

“And the P.H.? “ asked Mrs. Drummond. “That would stand for - what? Peter? Philip? Pomegranate?”

The three hamsters snorted in unison. Broccoli Bill rolled over on his back, chortling.

“Skinny human know nothing ‘bout nothing,” said Dr. Dee.

“Told you they were all like this,” said Haricot Bert.

“Well,” said Mrs. Drummond, offended, “and I was just going to offer round some chocolate drops, but it seems that they will not be required!”

“Course,” said Broccoli Bill urbanely, “I just saying how bright and intelligent humans can be, despite appearances. How many chocolate drops are there?”

Mrs. Drummond sighed and fetched three and handed them out. There was a minute’s agreeable silence as the hamsters manoeuvred the drops around their pouches..

“P.H. stand for nothing. Goes with Doctor, and Dee,” explained Dr. Dee, rather thickly through

the chocolate drop.

“Ah,” said Mrs. Drummond. “I was afraid of that. Anyway,” she continued brightly, “what have you boys been up to now?”

“Oh, nothing you would understand, said Haricot Bert, airily waving a paw. “Too complicated.”

“Try me,” said Mrs. Drummond nicely.

“Go on, tell her, Dr. Dee,” urged Bill, in a rather gloating tone.

Dr. P.H.Deer swallowed his chocolate drop and cleared his throat. “Nanoplasmonics,” he said smugly.

There was a silence. Bert smirked unbecomingly.

“Nanoplasmonics,” repeated Mrs. Drummond.

“Like plasmonics,” confirmed Dr. Dee. “Only much smaller.” He sniggered quietly and winked back at Haricot Bert.

“So,” said Mrs. Drummond casually, “...to do with the wave oscillations of electrons on the surface of a metal?”

Broccoli Bill suddenly found that his fur needed a good clean. Haricot Bert curled into a ball. Dr. Dee gazed at the lady in blank astonishment.

“You know about nanoplasmonics?” he asked nervously.

“Oh, only about plasmonics,” she replied. “But I’d be most interested to hear about the nano stuff. What does it do exactly?”

Dr. Dee sucked his breath in long and hard. Finally he shook his head. “No can do,” he said, recovering his composure. “HamLabs™ secret technology, you understand.”

“M’m” agreed Broccoli Bill. “Quite right, Doctor. Skinny humans can’t be told. Can they, Bert?”

Bert muttered something from the depths of his fat stomach.

“On a need-to-know basis only,” said Bill. “Plasmonics very highly top secret, and nanoplasmonics top secreter than anything ever built before. Ever, in all the world.”

“But,” said Bert enthusiastically, uncurling again, “it make bright lights all over the place. Great in the dark!”

“Shh!” exclaimed Dr. Dee. “You give away all our industrial secrets!”

“Pooh!” said Bert. “Humans not know what to do with our secrets. Not very bright.”

“Not like our new lasers!” said Dr. Dee proudly. “Oh no! - not say that, no, no, no!”

“You and your big mouth,” muttered Broccoli Bill.

“Lasers?” asked Mrs. Drummond. “That’s very nice. What are you going to do with them?”

“Don’t know yet,” admitted Haricot Bert.

“But Stumpy Ballantyne got an idea,” said Dr. Dee.

“Stumpy Ballantyne?” exclaimed Mrs. Drummond. “Now there’s a name I haven’t heard for a long time. Let me see - he invented kissing, didn’t he?”

Dr. Dee nodded appreciatively. He turned to his two companions. “This human not as daft as what you said,” he pointed out.

“Not all the time,” said Bert graciously.

“What’s Stumpy’s idea, then?” asked Mrs. Drummond.

“Mice,” said Haricot Bert.

“Mice?”

“OK, hamsters have to spell it out, I suppose,” said Haricot Bert wearily. “Use nanoplasmonics to make machines to scare away nasty horrible mice.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Drummond, really pleased. “I’d like one of those machines, then.” She lowered her voice. “We’ve got a mouse in the kitchen.”

Haricot Bert tutted disapprovingly and had a chew on an old piece of carrot. Broccoli Bill shook his head and examined his short stubby tail.

Dr. P.H.Deer coughed and diplomatically changed the subject. “Stumpy Ballantyne invented KISS<sup>©</sup>ing. He did that so that the KISS<sup>©</sup>ee would give the KISS<sup>©</sup>er lots of chocolate drops.” He looked around the cupboard, interested suddenly in everything except Mrs. Drummond.

She who was overlooked sighed and went off to fetch some more chocolate drops. When she came back with the packet, she sniffed the air.

“Is something burning?” she asked, worried. “Can you smell smoke?”

There was a short pause. Then...

“Aaaargh!” exclaimed Broccoli Bill. “We on fire!”

Sure enough, the pile of sawdust and wool was smouldering. As the hamsters ran around in a blind panic, Mrs. Drummond scooped up the smoking ball, ran through to the kitchen and flung the whole thing out of the back door into the rain.

“There,” she said, coming back to the cupboard. “That was a nasty moment.”

Dr. P.H.Deer glared at her.

“What you done with nanoplasmonic device?” he demanded.

“Oh,” said Mrs. Drummond, slightly embarrassed. “I must have thrown it outside. Let me go and look.”

She came back a minute later holding a very small, slightly melted, wind-up torch. “Is this it?” she asked.

“Give it back,” commanded Haricot Bert sternly. “Humans don’t get to touch HamLabs<sup>TM</sup> devices! Ever!”

Mrs. Drummond handed it over and Dr. Deer fussed over it for a while. Then he looked up sadly.

“Broken,” he said in a low voice. “The nanowinder is squished and the laldy-generator all leaking. Have to start from scratch again.”

“Oh, I am sorry,” said Mrs. Drummond. “Is there anything I can do?”

“Thing irreplaceable,” said Broccoli Bill glumly. “But,” he added quickly, “you can give us a KISS<sup>©</sup>.”

Mrs. Drummond did so. After a few minutes, Dr. Deer plumped himself down on top of the broken device and fell asleep, pouches full. Broccoli Bill and Haricot Bert started to rebuild the Secret Research Facility, using fresh cotton-wool and sawdust and a good deal of chewing.

Mrs. Drummond tiptoed away. All was quiet again.

