



## HAMSTERS HAVE TIME-TRAVEL THING

“Surprise!” Something furry poked its head out of the teapot and the lid clattered off. Mrs D screamed and hurriedly put the teapot down. Whatever it was vanished back inside.

“Oi !” squeaked a grumpy voice from the depths of the teapot. “Watch it, skinny human! You almost drop us on ground. What you think we made of?”

Mrs D collected herself and peered gingerly inside the teapot. Four beady eyes glared out at her, amid a tangle of whiskers and fur. She breathed a sigh of relief.

“Ah, it’s you boys again,” she said. “You gave me a fright.”

“Course we gave you fright,” grumbled Broccoli Bill as he hoisted himself, puffing and panting, over the rim of the pot. “That whole point. It Halloween.”

There was an urgent whisper from below him. Bill looked back down inside the teapot, balanced very precariously. “What you say, Know-all?”

Haricot Bert’s head appeared. “Said it not Halloween,” he repeated in a low voice, looking nervously at Mrs D. “It Valentine.”

“Pooh!” said Bill airily. “Halloween, Valloween, what the difference? Skinny human shouldn’t drop teapots with hamsters inside. Health and Safety law. Very dangerous.” He glared at Mrs D. She stared back at the hamster, saying nothing. At length, Bill plopped on to the table and busied himself with cleaning his fur. Bert then emerged, eyes bulging with the effort as he hauled himself upwards.

“Happy Valentine, missus,” he said, breathing deeply.

“Well, thank you very much,” replied Mrs D. “And likewise to you, I’m sure. Can I give you a fright too?”

Haricot Bert shook his head very quickly, several times. “No, no, no, no frights, not ever. Hamsters not like frights. That stupid Bill’s fault, he got it wrong.”

“Who you calling stupid, bran-brains?” hissed Bill, sitting up belligerently. “Clot.” He chattered his teeth.

Mrs D intervened swiftly. “So, boys, would you like a chocolate drop? I’ve got a couple in the kitchen. Bought them specially for today.”

The two hamsters conceded that they might like a chocolate drop. When Mrs D returned with the treats, the pair of them were sitting on the table, surrounded by a pile of jumbled cotton-wool and carrot-tops, which they were busily sorting out.

“Must eat before before afters,” explained Bert. “Mum said.”

“Mergency rations” mumbled Bill through bulging pouches. “But plenty room for chocolate,” he added, indistinctly.

There was a pause of a few minutes while everyone settled down to a late breakfast. At length, Broccoli Bill sat up suddenly and cocked his head.

“Sound like postie’s arrived,” he suggested.

Mrs D looked at the clock, surprised. “It’s a bit early – I didn’t hear anything,” she said.

Broccoli Bill and Haricot Bert looked at each other and smirked.

“You go find out what postie brought, skinny human,” advised Bill, nodding his head vigorously. He winked largely at Bert, who buried his head in a rather grubby pile of cotton-wool and guffawed.

Mrs D looked at them suspiciously and went to the front door. Sure enough, there was a small parcel lying there. It had no stamp on it, and it had one entire corner missing. It looked like it had been chewed by small teeth. In very bad handwriting, it was addressed to “Missus S. Human” and it

purported to have been sent from “Hamazon.co.uk”. She shook it cautiously. There was a slight rattling sound. She took it back to the kitchen.

“Ooh, what that?” asked Bert innocently.

“Look like pretty good DVD to me,” observed Bill, snorting.

“Pretty good DVD, that right!” wheezed Haricot Bert.

Mrs D unwrapped the parcel. It was a DVD of sorts. There was a garish photo on the front, a hamster looking like a cross between Clark Gable and a sea-urchin. In big shiny letters across the top, it said: “*Pooper*”.

“Pooper?” muttered Mrs D to herself.

“Ooh!” exclaimed Bill, “that one ace DVD you got there, missus. Best film of the year.”

Mrs D looked at the hamsters suspiciously. “Best film of the year? I’ve never heard of it. And I watch *Film 2013* every week.”

“Pooh,” said Haricot Bert dismissively. “What they know? Listen, this film come from the HamLabs™ studios. What that film director, Bill?”

“Only Riddle Dumble, Bert,” replied Bill.

“Only Riddle Dumble, skinny human,” confirmed Bert.

Mrs D thought it would be impolite to question this statement.

“Made greatest film ever,” said Bill. “You heard of it?”

Mrs D denied it.

“What it called, Bert?” asked Bill.

“It called *Butch Has a Day with the Sunflower Kid*. Gritty western. Starring Butch van Rimbaud and Sunflower Sid.”

“Imaginative casting,” said Mrs D dubiously. She peered closely at the blurb on the back. “What’s this one about, then?” she asked, after failing to read the scrawl of spidery writing.

“It time-travel thing,” said Bill. “Young hamster need to go forwards in time and do stuff. Backwards too. Meet self.” He nodded several times thoughtfully. “And sideways,” he added.

“Masterpiece,” sighed Haricot Bert. “Classy acting – who star, Bill?”

“Only Gordon Bleu and Patty Perkins, Bert. Look, skinny human, Gordon Bleu on cover there. Special photo-shoot. Make-up artists, the lot. Gordon’s granny not recognise him. Look like – whatsisname, Bert?”

“Clark Gable?” asked Mrs D.

“Not Clark Gable, idiot! No, he look like Joseph Cotten,” said Bert, whose knowledge of the cinema seemed extensive. “Cotten-wool named after him. Handsomest hamster what ever lived.”

“Except for Gordon Bleu,” murmured Broccoli Bill. “At least that what Gordon Bleu says.” At this, both hamsters fell about laughing. It took a while for them to calm down.

“So,” said Mrs D after a suitable pause, “this time-travel film. Lots of special effects, are there?”

Haricot Bert stopped giggling very suddenly and sat up. “Special effects, missus? You dimwit or what? Hamsters no need special effects. Hamster have time-travel thing already.”

“Long time ago,” confirmed Broccoli Bill. “Years and years. Melvyn Thickett make it so.”

“Yea,” said Bert. “Melvyn Thickett the most ingeniouesest hamster ever. HamLabs™ greatest inventor. He make time-machine. It called – what it called, Bill?”

“It called TRAM®. Time Repeat Activating Machine. Get in TRAM®, eat carrot, back and forwards a few times, end up in the past, the future, anytime you want.”

Mrs D raised her eyebrows.

“Riddle send Gordon Bleu back into last week,” advised Bill. “Last week don’t want him, so send him forward again.” Again, both hamsters fell about, hooting and laughing and wiping tears from their eyes.

“Gordon now in next century,” gasped Bert. “They pushed him in, slammed door!”

“Pressed button, *adios*, Gordon!” shouted Bill. “Now he waiting for next TRAM<sup>©</sup> back!”

It was all too much for them again. The two hamsters collapsed into their respective piles of sawdust, hiccupping and wheezing. Mrs D shrugged her shoulders.

“So this DVD,” she asked, waving it at arm’s length, “it’s more of a documentary, then? Not a Sci-Fi film?”

Broccoli Bill paused long enough to consider the question. He looked blankly at Haricot Bert. Bert looked back.

“That right,” said Bill carefully. “It one of those – what you said.” He began to examine the fur on his back very closely.

“So why all the make-up?” asked Mrs D. “And the slicked-down fur?”

“That what we do in HamLabs<sup>™</sup> films,” advised Haricot Bert.

“You humans know nothing?” grumbled Bill. “You going watch film or just complain, or what?”

“Just as soon as I’ve cleared the breakfast things,” sighed Mrs D.

“We go sit in front of TV, then,” said Bert. “Hurry up!”

“You got any popcorn?” demanded Broccoli Bill. “Big film. Hamsters hungry.”

