

## ZOOMSTER and Other Top-Secret Weapons of Mass Destruction

There were, it has to be admitted, still some teething problems with the HamLabs Zoomster™ ray-gun -

“Teething problems?” said Broccoli Bill threateningly. “What you mean? - hamsters not have problem.”

“Yeah, what you mean, skinny one?” demanded Haricot Bert, showing his teeth, which were certainly impressive and not a problem.

There were, we were saying, some opportunities for registering a success in respect of the HamLabs Zoomster™ ray-gun -

“That better,” said Bill smugly, and returned to his carrot top.

“That better?” asked Bert uncertainly.

“Sure,” said Bill in a relaxed manner.

Haricot Bert studied his front paws in a puzzled way and then began to wash his ears thoroughly.

Perhaps our hamsters could explain the purpose of the new ray-gun?

Patty Perkins was eager to oblige. There was, after all, the promise of a chocolate drop. He'd not been mistaken. Hamsters have keen earsight.

“HamLabs Zoomster™ ray-gun latest in line of secret weapons,” began Patty proudly. He was immediately bitten on the tail by Broccoli Bill. “Ow!” he squeaked.

“Shhh!” hissed Broccoli Bill. “Secret weapon secret, stupid. Skinny beings not allowed hear.”

“But he asked,” said Patty, deeply worried. “He ask, hamsters know, hamsters tell. Hamster know all.”

Bill thought for a moment, then began cleaning himself vigorously. It was all very confusing.

Perhaps, sir, you could give us a demonstration of the Zoomster™? Then you won't have to give away trade-marked secrets?

“Sound good to me,” said Bert amiably, turning his attention to a half-eaten brussels sprout.

“Sound good to me,” admitted Bill, after some more thought.

Without further ado - apart from a short snooze, which had become suddenly necessary after the intellectual effort thus far expended - the three hamsters took us to a Secret Location (under the stairs) where their Secret Armoury lay (visible to almost none). Patty Perkins unhitched a mighty weapon from the rack and carelessly waved it in various directions. Nervously, and with scarcely a sound, Broccoli Bill and Haricot Bert dived under piles of cotton-wool and sawdust, squeaking: “Put down, stupid hamster, dangerous weapon!”

Accidentally, Patty pressed a button marked **ZAP™** on the Zoomster™. Immediately a blinding ray of bright light burst out of the nozzle, sped across the secret room and hit an empty exercise-ball squarely. The ball hurtled up in the air, span, sparks flying off like a wild Catherine Wheel, then fell back down -

- a tenth of its former size. It was like a ping-pong ball. There was a screeching noise. It was not from the ray-gun.

“Heh-heh,” chuckled Patty aiming the gun randomly in delight. “Zap! Zap! Pow!”. His companions, who had poked their noses out from their bomb-shelters, now dodged back in.

“Not Pow!” warned Haricot Bert earnestly.

After a few moments of this, Patty put the ray-gun back in the rack, next to the HamLabs Broccolator-Xtream-NG™ (which we're not allowed to talk about).

"What the biggest thing you can imagine?" asked Patty in an interested tone.

A sofa, we suggested?

"Pooh!" said Patty rudely. "Sofa tiny. What really, really big?"

A bus?

"No," came Broccoli Bill's muffled voice. It sounded very firm. "Not bus. We try bus last week, remember."

Patty Perkins clearly remembered. He put the ray-gun down gingerly and turned his attention to a yoghurt drop.

"Hamsters chased all round town," said Haricot Bert's sad voice. "Bus-driver and passengers very angry. Also very small. Find us in hamster hidey-holes."

Well, how about an elephant, we proposed?

There was a silence for a few minutes, broken only by mumbling and careful scratching.

"Elephant?" asked Haricot Bert. He sounded very nervous. "Bit big."

"Pooh!" countered Broccoli Bill decidedly. "Hamsters have Zoomster™. Hamsters not afraid of nothing big. Elephant it is."

And so it was that we went to the zoo, found the elephant, and - well, to cut a long story short, or a large story small: she's under the stairs now, slightly nonplussed. The hamsters have made her very comfortable indeed in her new home: cotton-wool, sawdust and all manner of drying vegetables.

"Pretty good nose," said Bill, gazing at their new friend admiringly.

"Hamsters have good noses," said Patty disdainfully.

"Not like that," pointed out Bert.

"You seen the HamLabs Megasnozzle™?" asked Patty. "Dead top secret, brand new - ow!"

There was a brief tussle between the three hamsters, as they debated issues of security. And we never found out what the new secret weapon could do.

In a moment of madness after his tail had been nipped by Bert, Broccoli Bill seized the Zoomster™ ray-gun, flipped two switches on the side and pointed it at Patty Perkins. Patty froze in mid-patter.

"No!!!" he cried in anguish.

Seeing red, Bill pressed the button marked **POW™**.

"POW!!!" went the weapon.

Patty remained the same size.

Broccoli Bill, however, is the size of a large lion, twice as annoyed and four times as hungry. Another van-load today of Mr Wright's reject fruit and vegetables has just turned up at the door. Must go.