



## THE HUMBLE HAMSTER-BEE

Mrs D. was cultivating poppies when she first noticed them. The sun was shining, as it does, and the fountain playing in the strong light. The poppies were nodding in the slightest of breezes. And the bees, the bees were bumbling and buzzing and bouncing heavily from flower to flower, disappearing into snap-dragons and emerging again with some difficulty. The larger bees simply fell from flower to flower on the honeysuckle and buzzed loudly as their wings brushed against the petals and foliage.

Mrs D. watched the bees for a while then returned to her task. And then stopped to think: what very large bees these were! What extremely large bees... She looked back nervously; and then stood up quickly. For these were not large bees of the bumble variety but very large bees indeed. Of the hamster variety. Hamsterbees? Not a species known to science, as far as she could recall from her studies of apiarism. Perhaps these were a kind of wine-weasel?

Mrs D. walked up to the honeysuckle to have a closer look. Sure enough, although there were large numbers of bees of the normal, fat and heavy variety, with yellow stripes or with red bottoms and dusty enough to catch hay-fever; there were also four bees with huge bottoms, four paws and short pink tails.

“Oh hallo,” said one of the hamsterbees. “Like HamLabs™ BEES technology, then?”

Mrs D. recognised her old friend Haricot Bert as he crashed around the foliage, a pair of rather noisy wings strapped to his back.

“BEES technology?” she asked, hesitantly.

Bert sighed: “Humans know nothing still. BEES is HamLabs™ for Buzzing External Elevation System. Lets hamsters fly around greenery.”

“Oh,” said Mrs D. doubtfully. “Isn’t that rather dangerous? What happens if the wings stop working?”

Patty Perkins flew out from a bush, his jaws still working on some splendid leaves he had found. “Hamster technology not stop working,” he said scornfully. “Ever. Anyway, if it did, hamsters bounce.”

“Hamsters bounce,” confirmed a third hamster, a white one with grey shoulders. As if to prove it, this hamster flicked a small switch on his wrist: the wings stopped buzzing and ceased flapping and the hamster plummeted like a snowball to the grass. Hamsters bounce. “Ouch!” said the hamster.

“Broccoli Bill bounces,” agreed Patty Perkins, hovering in the air near Mrs D’s nose. “You met Broccoli Bill?” he asked politely.

“No,” said Mrs D, extending a hand for the somewhat shaken white hamster to sniff. “Charmed, I’m sure,” she added.

“Hamsters not like bouncing much,” moaned Broccoli Bill, cleaning his dented whiskers.

“Don’t the bees object to you stealing their nectar?” asked Mrs D, settling down on the garden-bench. Patty Perkins and Haricot Bert descended slowly to sit beside her and switched off the power-source of their BEES.

“What you think, we eat nectar?!” exclaimed Haricot Bert rudely. “You daft or what?”

“What Bert means,” Interrupted Patty Perkins, “Is pollen makes hamsters sneeze.”

“Aa-aaa-aaaa-choo!” came a noise from the bush, where Teddy Parker was still cruising as if a bee.

“Hamsters sneeze,” he confirmed. “Aaa-tish-ooooo!”

“Bless you,” said Mrs D. Haricot Bert had fallen asleep in her lap, so she turned to Patty. “So what

do you use the BEES for, then?"

"Hamsters use BEES technology to reach leaves," said Patty Perkins proudly. "Hamsters like leaves."

"Hamsters like leaves," agreed Broccoli Bill, crunching a large piece of greenery which he had bitten from one of Mrs D's favourite plants. Mrs D was aghast.

"Um," she said, "Maybe that's not such a good idea..."

"Why not good idea?" asked Patty anxiously. "Not dangerous is it?"

"Leaves not dangerous," said Teddy Parker, zooming BUZZZZZZ straight out of the bush and causing Mrs D's hair to blow in the breeze of his passing, before he sailed ZOOOOOMMMMM into a patch of carnations and settled down. Crunching and munching noises were soon heard.

"Well, not exactly dangerous," agreed Mrs D. "But sometimes people don't like having their gardens eaten up by fat hamsters, you know?"

Patty Perkins looked thoughtful. So thoughtful that Mrs D decided he must have fallen asleep. The sun continued shining. Haricot Bert woke up, and sailed off on his BEES for another snack. Broccoli Bill had broken his wings in the fall and was now sitting with a tiny screwdriver and an instruction manual, trying to put them to rights. Well, half a manual really, for, as he said sadly, "Hamsters like manuals".

All of a sudden, Patty Perkins came to life. "Mrs D not want hamsters to eat her plants," he observed in a glum voice. Mrs D stroked his head softly. "Well, not really," she said kindly, "Not if you can help it."

"Hamsters not help it," said Haricot Bert who had woken up again and was stretched up on his hind legs to grab a rather succulent leaf which was pointing in his direction.

"Bert!" commanded Patty Perkins in his best commanding voice, "BEHAVE<sup>©</sup>!"

Bert froze where he stretched, slowly came down and began polishing his nose furiously.

"BEHAVE<sup>©</sup>," said Patty in a satisfied tone. "Brand new technology from HamLabs<sup>TM</sup> - Biotechnical Encouragement for Hamsters to Act Very Excellently. You see -"

Mrs D stopped the enthusiastic hamster, worried that she might learn something which she was sure she really did not want to learn. Judging from Bert's reaction, BEHAVE was pretty powerful technology.

ZZZOOOOOMMMMM - Teddy Parker came flying back across the garden and careered into a bunch of flowers, scattering the smaller bees to the four winds. "Hamsters can fly!" he exclaimed, just as his wings clipped the branch of the cherry-tree and fell off. Mrs D closed her eyes, but heard the soft plop! as Teddy bounced. "Ouch!" said Teddy. "Hamsters bounce," noted Broccoli Bill, who had fixed his BEES and was now eating the rest of the instruction manual.

"Well, boys," said Mrs D finally. "I've got work to do. Just watch out for Moebius the cat - she likes watching bees..."

When Mrs D next looked round, the hamsters were feverishly strapping on their HamLabs<sup>TM</sup> wings and one by one they shot out of the garden, into the sky, far from danger and the dozing Moebius.

