



It was eerie, silent, full of echoes. And all slightly troubling. The room was entirely bare. Not a stick of furniture. No shelves piled high with the necessities of life. No boxes protecting the carpet from dust. No carpet even. No crates of cards. No folders or glue or scissors or sellotape. No curtains. Just nothing.

Nothing except for a garish green box, about two feet wide on each side, standing in the middle of the floor.

Mrs D stopped in the doorway, hardly daring to breathe. She peered round the back of the door, just in case. But there was only more nothing.

The green box in the middle of the floor had a small flashing light on the side. It was flashing blue. Underneath the light was a small panel of buttons. She stepped over to the box gingerly and bent down. The control panel had five small buttons on it, each marked with an odd symbol. In the top left-hand corner of the panel was the word 'HAMLABS™' in silvery letters. Mrs D straightened up again. Slowly. Behind her, she had heard a sort of tittering noise, followed by a muffled snort.

"HamLabs™ strike again!" exclaimed a small voice. "Nuther triumph for hamster brains."

"Yo!" squeaked another small voice. "Hamsters have awesome techno-wotsit!"

Without turning round, Mrs D asked: "Is that Bill and Bert?"

"Wrong!" squeaked one of the voices shrilly. "Me no Bill, he no Bert!"

"Me not Bert, he no Bill!" said the other voice. "Skinny human know nothing!"

Again, there was the sound of lively giggling.

Mrs D turned around. She saw Broccoli Bill and Haricot Bert rolling about on the floor, evidently overcome by their own joke. "Me no Bill," snorted Bert, "he no Bert!" Wild hiccups of laughter consumed them both.

Mrs D tapped her foot, waiting for the mirth to die down. It took a while. When all was quiet once more, apart from Bert's wheezing as he remembered some part of the joke, she asked: "Have you done something with all my stuff?"

"Wot stuff?" asked Bill innocently.

"Yeah," echoed Bert, "wot stuff you talking about, Missus? There's no stuff here. Can you see stuff, Bill?"

"No," sniggered Bill, "there's no stuff that us hamsters can see."

At that, the two fat hamsters fell on their sides again, gasping for breath. Mrs D's patience suddenly ran out. She picked them both up by the scruff of their necks and held them about a foot away from her face. Their little legs kicked wildly.

"Help murder put hamsters down!" wailed Bill. "This wicked oppression by human race! Not fair!"

"I'm not putting you down," said Mrs D, "until you tell me where all my stuff is. And all my furniture as well, come to that."

"OK, OK," gasped Bert at last. "Hamsters tell everything."

Mrs D. put them down on the floor, where they lay gasping and whining for quite some time.

"So?" she asked after this had gone on for a while. "Or do I have to pick you up again?"

"No no no!" squealed Bill anxiously. "It a HamLabs™ SpaceSaver®."

"What is?"

"That," he replied, pointing at the green box.

"What does it do?" demanded Mrs D.

“It save space,” said Bill. “What stupid human think it do?” he muttered quite audibly.

“Stounding hamster technology,” added Bert. “Again.”

“We show you,” said Bill busily. “Now - you stand back”

Mrs D stepped back.

“Further,” warned Bill, “unless you want be hurted.”

Mrs D noticed that Bert was already hiding beyond the door, paws over his eyes. Hurriedly, she stepped back as far as the door.

Bill pressed some of the buttons on the side of the box and then ran very quickly for cover. The blue light turned red and winked several times. Then it turned steady green.

There was an enormous roaring sound, as if a jumbo-jet had landed in the study. Mrs D closed her eyes tightly. Things whooshed and clattered round about her. At length all fell silent. She opened her eyes. Everything was back in the study again. Paper, cards, pens, boxes of this and that, curtains, carpets, even the furniture. It looked just as tidy as ever.

“Whooh!” shouted Bert. “Good one, Bill!” The two hamsters high-fived and danced a little jig. “It work!” exclaimed Bill. “HamLabs™ do it again!”

“Are you saying,” asked Mrs D slowly, “that all of my stuff was in that small green box. And all the furniture too?”

“Course we say that,” scoffed Bert. “It a SpaceSaver©, dummy!”

“You want see it in action?” asked Bill eagerly.

Mrs D wasn’t too sure about that, but the hamsters did it anyway. Bill pressed a few more buttons, the red light flashed, everyone stood back. Then the red light turned blue and – everything in the room was sucked up into a huge vortex, before vanishing into the green box with a great crash. Then all was silent again.

“H’m,” said Mrs D quietly.

“Skinny human impressed, huh!” said Bert confidently.

“Green, too,” said Bill.

Mrs D was interested. “You mean it doesn’t use much energy?”

Bill snorted. “No, it green.” He pointed. “Green, human.”

“HamLabs™ boffins working on bigger model,” said Bert.

“Really?” said Mrs D.

“Yeah, it tidy entire Universe if you want it to.”

“Space-saver,” said Bill happily. “All those messy planets and galaxies and stuff. Space-dust. Black holes. Anything you like. Squashed up into small green box. Hamsters is Masters of Universe now.”

“Masters is Hamsters of the Universe,” agreed Bert.

“Is that wise?” asked Mrs D. It didn’t sound like a very good idea.

“Pooh!” said Bert dismissively. “HamLabs™ technology safe as houses.” To demonstrate how safe things were, he ran his paws over the controls. “Nothing ever go wrong,” he confirmed.

“Bert!” whispered Bill nervously, backing away hurriedly. “Bert, you press the restart button!”

“The what?” said Bert, looking confused, staring at the control panel.

The red light started winking.

“Oops,” muttered Bert. “Where that cancel button?” He jabbed at several buttons in swift succession.

The red light stopped flashing.

“Bert!” squeaked Bill desperately.

It was too late. The blue light came on, there was a great roar. Bert vanished.

“Ooooh!” wailed Bill.

“What’s happened to Bert?” said Mrs D anxiously. “Has he gone into the SpaceSaver[©]? Can we get him out again?”

Bill dashed to the controls, chattering to himself. “Quick, quick!” He poked at several buttons. A bright white light came on, steady. A buzzer sounded, loudly. Bill and Mrs D were frozen to the spot, mesmerised by the light.

A huge bang filled the room. Objects of all sorts started flying past Mrs D’s ears. She threw herself to the floor. The table sailed over her, followed by dozens of boxes, full of important treasures. Then a set of shelves, and folders, sewing-machines, boxes of cards. It seemed to go on for ever. But at last a silence descended, interrupted only by the odd fluttering of stray papers and documents floating to the floor.

Mrs D opened her eyes and sat up carefully. The room was full again. The carpet was heaped up in a corner, but otherwise everything was more or less as it should be. Worried, she looked round for the hamsters. Bill was struggling to pull himself out from underneath a box full of wrapping paper. And above her was Bert, hanging on by his front paws from the lampshade. Mrs D reached up and plucked him to safety.

Everyone sat around quietly for a few minutes, catching their breath.

“Well,” said Bill, after a while. “Emergency button work all right, then, Bert. Impressive, eh?”

“HamLabs[™] triumph again,” gasped Bert, looking a little ruffled, but otherwise unharmed.

“Better stash everything away again,” said Bill, looking round critically. “All a bit messy here. Hamsters switch on SpaceSaver[©] again.”

“Oh no,” said Mrs D. “That’s not going to happen. Just take that thing away from my house.”

“But, missus,” protested Bill. “HamLabs –”

“But nothing,” interrupted Mrs D firmly. “You can go and save someone’s else’s space. Just not mine.”

Bill looked glum. Bert shrugged.

“Luddite,” he said. Then he produced a tiny box, not much more than a centimetre in any direction. He held it in his front paws. He stared at Mrs D balefully for several seconds. Then, very deliberately, he pressed a couple of buttons on the side of the box. A small red light showed and then – the large SpaceSaver spun into the air, then vanished into the tiny box. Nodding sternly at Mrs D, Bert tapped on the controls one more time, and popped the box into his pouch.

“Hamsters have SpaceSaverSaver[©],” he mumbled pointedly, if a little muffled.

