

Starbucks



General Ernie Starbucks struck an earnest pose as he faced the three men from the Singapore Sanka Syndicate. “Gentlemen,” he said, “what we have here is the next generation in über-profitable coffee production. I give you ... the state-of-the-art Electric Bean Juice Ionizer!” Starbucks paused for effect. When the three syndicate agents failed to react, he continued. “Just take a pound of ordinary unroasted coffee beans and put ’em in here,” he said, pointing to a flashing icon on the Coffee Input Console monitor. “Then turn the control to your desired coffee product, such as Colombian, French roast, Java or even cappuccino. Today I’m making Kona.” The General reached over to the Coffee Output Console and turned the dial on the front of the unit to *Kona*. “No longer will you need a pulping machine, a fermentation tank or even a coffee roaster. The Electric Bean Juice Ionizer does it all!” Starbucks turned one of the knobs on the Input Console and a harsh grinding sound emanated from the apparatus’s maw. He twisted the other knob and the screen lit up with a slightly out of focus animation of a steaming, dark liquid dripping into a coffee cup. The Output Console gurgled a bit, and then a real steaming cup of coffee materialized on top of the appliance as if by magic. Louie Ratbagger, the boss of the three, looked skeptical as he picked up the cup of freshly manufactured jitter juice. He sniffed, sipped it, then smirked. “Tastes a little like chicken,” he said. “Yeah, this’ll do just fine. Let’s take ’er, boys!” His two buddies pulled revolvers from their pants pockets (So they *weren’t* glad to see me after all, thought Ernie.) as Louie motioned for him to step away from the Ionizer. Then the three scoundrels wheeled the device out to their waiting car, loaded it, and sped off. But Fate has a way of evening the score sometimes. Louie was on a popular TV chat show demonstrating the Ratbagger Koffee Kiosk to, among others, Miss America, King Pulu of Upper Volta, the U.S. Attorney General, and the sextuplet Fleeer Family Gymnasts. He *meant* to turn the dial on the Coffee Output Console to Kona. Unfortunately, he turned it one notch farther – to Batrachotoxin. Meanwhile, mourn not for General Starbucks. Although the heist soured him on the coffee business for good, he later became fabulously wealthy by revolutionizing the hot tea industry.