

12. Roach Baiting

John liked hanging out in the Starbucks near his apartment because mostly people his age patronized it. He knew all the regulars, so he couldn't help but notice the attractive, serious, twenty-something who sat at a table next to him. She sipped her cappuccino for a few minutes until a ringtone distracted her. She opened her purse and pulled out a small metal tablet that she unfolded into a mat the size of a dinner napkin and laid on the table. Her face lit up from the tablet's glow. She swept her hand over the tablet and said, crisply, "I told you, Phil, I need to take a break from us. Don't call me again." A man's voice tried to say something, but she smacked the tablet and his voice gave way to a dial tone.

Obviously irritated, she started tapping and swishing her hand across the tablet. John couldn't see what was happening, but the lighting on her face kept changing, as though from a computer screen. Finally, his curiosity got the better of him and he leaned over toward her table. When he got close enough, he could see that the woman's hand controlled holographic objects that she could move from one spot to another and manipulate in the tablet. With a wave of her hand, she opened what looked like an address book and spoke to it. "Open, Phil Gossett." The book fell open and pages turned on their own. "Delete entry, Phil Gossett." The image of the open page burst into flame and disappeared in a puff of holographic smoke.

"Whoa!" said John. "What is that?"

The woman looked up and noticed him for the first time. She smiled. "Oh, it's this new IEB-Pad I got last week. Pretty, cool, huh?"

"How does it work? I'm sorry, I'm John. Do you mind if I sit here?"

"No, that's fine. I'm Sylvia. I have to go pretty soon, but I have a few minutes."

John pulled up a chair and was soon playing with the gesture-and-voice-activated ultra-thin holographic computer. At one point, while browsing one of John's favorite gaming sites, she said, "Watch this. Command: Block Ads!" All the advertisements blinked off and only the web content remained.

John nodded delightedly. "Now that's more like it. I can't stand ads. They make me puke."

An hour later, Sylvia excused herself from the group that had gathered around her table. She folded up the IEB-Pad, tucked it into her purse, and left. In her car, she checked off "Starbucks" from a list taped to her windshield visor, and said to her IEB-Pad, "more bait distributed." Ten minutes later, while she sat in another coffee shop, her IEB-Pad rang. "I told you, Phil, I need to take a break from us. Don't call me again."