

Go read this story about a bizarre harassment campaign by a group of ex-eBay employees

Back in June, authorities in Massachusetts announced they were charging six former eBay employees in connection with the strange harassment campaign of a couple who ran an e-commerce newsletter. The six had sent the couple, Ina and David Steiner, online threats and abuse, and mailed a bizarre collection of items including live insects and a bloody pig face mask, all for the newsletter's negative coverage of eBay, according to the US Attorney's Boston office.

David Streitfeld of *The New York Times* spoke with one of the six people charged, Veronica Zea, who said she plans to plead guilty— the charges include conspiring to commit cyberstalking and tamper with witnesses. If you thought the initial story was weird, buckle up, because this report is full of batshit details.

The Steiners received a book titled "Grief Diaries: Surviving the Loss of a Spouse" and a funeral wreath. They got fly larvae and live spiders and a box of cockroaches. Copies of the September issue of "Hustler: Barely Legal" touting "eye-popping 18-year-olds" arrived at the homes of neighbors with David Steiner's name on them.

The couple had their home address doxxed, had their car followed while driving around their neighborhood, had pizzas delivered at all hours— the plot even called for Zea and her

teammates to put a tracking device on the Steiners' car (which apparently never happened).

Prosecutors say the Global Security and Resiliency team, as the team of ex-eBay employees was known, planned to harass the Steiners secretly, then have eBay step in to put a stop to it. In this way, they figured, they could trick the Steiners into more positive coverage of the company. And, according to the *Times* account, the campaign against the couple was sanctioned by eBay's then-CEO Devin Wenig, a claim he denies: "I was just speaking off the cuff," he says.

The scheme they describe was both completely malevolent and remarkably inept – full of daft assumptions on the part of eBay about a plot that did not exist. It stands as a warning about how easily tech companies can feel aggrieved, and the mayhem that can ensue when they do. And it vividly shows how the internet makes people crazy, often without them ever realizing it.

Ah, aggrieved tech companies that don't know when to chill, of course.

The details in the *Times* piece– including a photo of the mild-mannered Steiners– are what really make the story; it almost reads like an outline for a movie (attn Netflix, you might want to get on this). Do yourself a favor and go check out Inside eBay's Cockroach Cult: The Ghastly Story of a Stalking Scandal in the *Times*. It's a great read about a wild tale.

<https://www.theverge.com/2020/9/26/21457487/go-read-this-ebay-stalking-harassment-new-york-times>