

Plan Bee

The defendant steps onto the elevated platform looking defeated. His name is Alan Bradfield. The date is August 14, 2042, and the time is 3:00 PM.

The judge asks what motivated the defendant to develop the bee genocide weapon—a blunt but accurate name—along with how he did it. The defendant immediately corrects her, claiming they weren't originally meant to kill bees off.

“I built them to eradicate non-ecologically essential disease carrying insects. Keeping the population safe was my intention.” His words come out as a whimper.

The audience roars upon hearing this. Some cries can be heard in all the incoherent screaming. One woman's voice rises above the rest in a harrowing shriek: “Why did you kill 89% of all the bees in the United States then?”

It takes the judge a minute to settle the crowd down again. Alan looks stressed—*is* stressed—but continues on, trying to calm himself down as he speaks.

He explains that he started the IDE Project after he witnessed malaria kill thousands when he was stationed in South Africa five years ago. He wanted to stop the carriers from reaching innocents, claiming lives, and devastating every family and community they touched. Using light, durable carbon fiber, he finally constructed his IDE design last year. They were solar-charged robots that were slightly smaller than normal bees, but twice as fast, elegantly designed to blend into ecosystems and act like normal bugs. While active, they were programmed to look for carrier mosquitos using ultrasonic sensors to detect and kill them.

The judge interrupts, curious about what IDE stands for. Alan winces as if he hopes that wouldn't be brought up, right before muttering something unintelligible. After being asked once again, he says it louder.

“Identify, Detect, Exterminate.”

The room goes silent. A recess is called.

When the recess ends and everyone reconvenes in the trial room, Alan Bradfield finds that his palms are sweatier than they'd been before. He feels extremely uncomfortable in his suit and tie as he walks back up to the platform. The increased stress comes from a resoundingly bitter pill he swallowed during recess: he is going to jail. It's a certainty. The only matter subject to doubt is the length of his sentence, which he's trying to reduce—with the way this trial has been going, he's fairly certain he can say goodbye to that.

All because of those damn bees. If he doesn't already hate those disgusting murder bugs before, he definitely does now. After what they did to—

His train of thought is interrupted by the judge coming back to the room. She sits down and casts him a look devoid of empathy, which makes his stomach lurch. He doesn't even feel human anymore. She gives the plaintiff a curt nod. He's a chubby guy in a fancy suit that doesn't seem like it can hold all of him in.

“Thank you, your honor. So if I may start, the defendant previously stated that his motivation to launch the IDE Project started when he was stationed in South Africa, and that his intention was to kill non-critical mosquitos, but he failed to state the reason his robots malfunctioned. Or should I say, *malfunctioned*.” His sausage-like fingers curl, forming air quotes around the word.

Alan tenses up. Please don't say it, don't bring him up.

“Five years ago, Alan Bradfield's son Johnathan died from an allergic reaction from a bee sting.” The ensuing gasps from the crowd make fear jolt up Alan's spine. He begins physically trembling, which no doubt casts him in an even worse light. Why does everything have to go wrong?

“This could mean that the accident on the bee population may have not been an accident at all. I have reason to believe it was premeditated at worst, extremely negligent at best.”

“No, that wasn’t related!” Alan tries to interject, but the judge silences him immediately.

The plaintiff continues. “When the military intercepted the rogue robots, they discovered that they’re NeuroLinked to Alan’s cognition. They…”

Alan stops listening. He doesn’t need to be told about how he screwed up, not when it’s been haunting him night and day. He never planned to kill the bees, but he does know how the IDEs malfunctioned. He originally programmed them to only kill mosquitos, but the way he programmed them was with a neuro-programming software called NeuroLink, which enables users to control computers with thoughts alone. Using a headset, Alan would simply think of what he wanted his robots to do, and no matter how vague or abstract his thoughts were, the NeuroLink software translated them into actionable instructions. The downside to such flexibility, of course, was its high potential for misinterpreting certain thoughts—*intrusive thoughts*—as requests. It simply had no filter, and Alan wasn’t sure he had the level of mental stability needed to keep thoughts of his little boy out of his head.

Bees are important, but dammit, they killed my boy.

“Do you have any response to this?” The judge asks, snapping Alan back into reality.

It doesn’t surprise him that everyone’s being cold towards him. He killed 89% of all bees in the United States, after all.

All he could say was no, and this time, he didn’t even try to mask the sense of defeat that consumed him.

The judge clears her throat. “Based on the claims and evidence presented today, I have come to a decision.”

Alan looks at the ceiling of the courthouse when it finally dawns on him. He needs to stop blaming others for what happened to him. No, what he *did*—to himself, to everyone in this room, and to society at large. He was the one who decided to be lazy and not program the IDEs independently. He was the one who was too careless to own an EpiPen knowing he had a son with extreme allergies. He was the one who held Johnathan as he went into anaphylactic shock, feeling not only helpless, but also complicit in his death.

He straightens his posture, deciding that he isn't going to blame others anymore. He will accept whatever sentence he gets with grace.

“Mr. Alan Bradfield, for the crime of endangering a species vital to our survival, you are found guilty and are sentenced to life in prison.”

Alan looks at the judge, feeling no malice or hate towards her, and simply nods. He will redeem himself somehow.

Six months of crippling boredom and bland prison sludge later, Alan is back on trial. So much for a life sentence. He stands before the judge again, feeling slightly sick in the stomach at the prospect of getting his life back. He'll find a way—*if* the judge thinks his idea is good enough to merit forgiveness.

The judge casts him an even harsher look than before, as if she's a goddess passing judgment on a mere mortal for attempting to defy her sentence. Her cold, relentless gaze makes Alan shiver.

The trial blurs by. Alan fades in and out of consciousness, allowing his neural autopilot to take over at times. Whenever he zones back in, he makes mental notes of the highlights of his plea, along with the judge's reactions to them.

“I could spend the rest of my life in jail, which would be a fitting punishment for my crimes. But the underlying purpose of jail is to rehabilitate, and what I’m about to propose is the Hail Mary of rehabilitation.”

Her anger intensifies. His idea had better be good.

“As we all know, the IDEs have been captured and locked up by the government. The country is hemorrhaging money trying to reverse the damage I did. The cost of developing new robotic pollination systems is simply too exorbitant, and those bee importation contracts have all been falling through because other countries don’t want to become us.”

The glimmer of anger in her eyes stays, but it doesn’t intensify. It plateaus.

“I propose bringing the IDEs back to life.”

Pure murderous rage.

“Hear me out—I’ll use NeuroLink to reprogram them to pollinate everything. Why build a new system from scratch when one already exists? I’ll undergo psychological counseling to make sure I don’t mess up again. You can even *drug* me if you want. They may have killed the bees, but the past is in the past. They can *become* the bees and not only fill the gap they’ve created, but also work at ten, even twenty, times the efficiency of a standard bee.”

Alan expects the judge to launch out of her seat and claw his throat out, but the anger in her eyes is replaced by a glimmer of hope. The realization that Alan’s proposal, as far-fetched as it was, was actually feasible. Or feasible enough given how dire the alternatives were.

The silence in the courtroom is deafening. Eons go by. Finally, the judge speaks.

“Deal. Now go bee our savior.”