

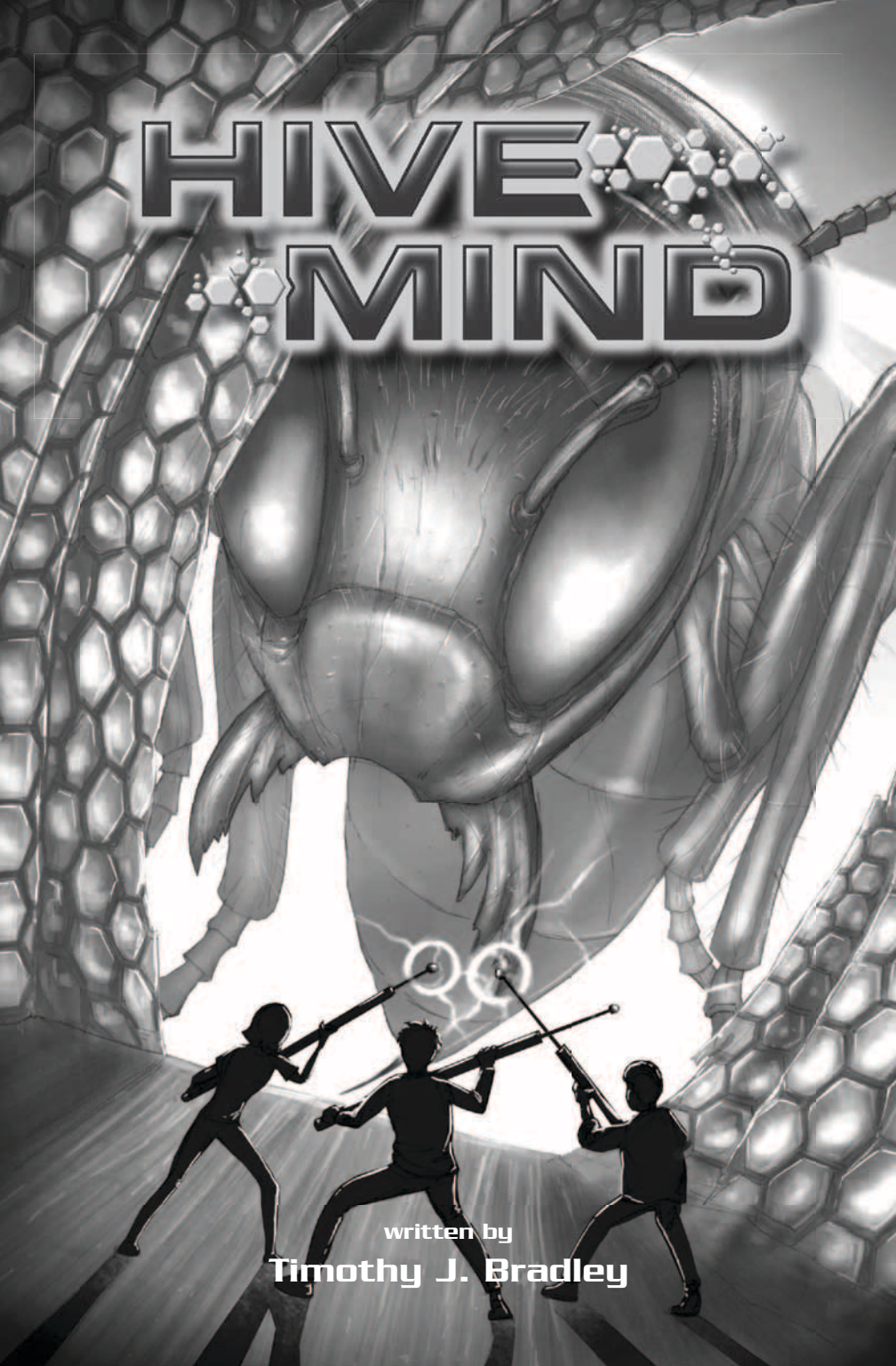


HIVE MIND

Timothy J. Bradley

**BOOK
01**

HIVE MIND

The background of the cover is a detailed illustration of a giant, metallic insect, possibly a centipede or a large beetle, with a segmented body and multiple pairs of legs. The insect's head is at the top, and its body extends downwards. The walls of the environment are also covered in a hexagonal, honeycomb-like pattern, suggesting a hive or a futuristic structure. The lighting is dramatic, with bright highlights on the insect's body and the walls, and deep shadows in the foreground where the characters are.

written by
Timothy J. Bradley

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or, if real, are used fictitiously.

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Summary: Thirteen-year-old Sidney Jamison is bored with school and getting in trouble for taking apart household appliances, but everything changes when he transfers to Sci Hi, where students play Zero-G dodgeball and work together to solve such real-world problems as colony collapse disorder.

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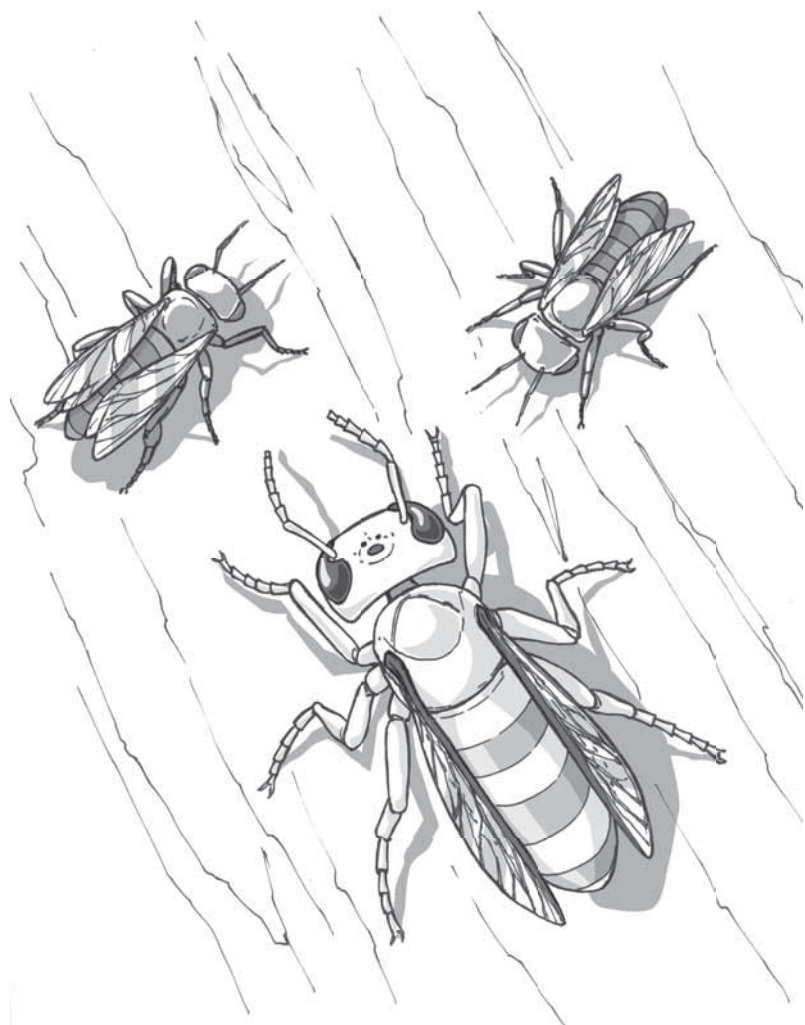
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HIVE MIND





Prologue

The intoxicating scent of prey led the hornet into the pine trees. It flew fiercely through the warm spring morning, driven forward by a gust of wind.

Drawing closer, the hornet landed on a nearby branch and studied its target. The beehive was buzzing with activity as workers came and went, carrying pollen from distant flowers. The bees had no idea they were being watched. Or that they were about to be slaughtered.

The hornet flew closer to the hive, its wings making a deep, raspy hum. It touched down at the entrance of the hive, scraping its chemical scent onto the edge of the nest. In a flash, the odor hit them, and the bees pivoted toward the hornet, antennae twitching in alarm. The hive was already coated with the smell of death. It would not survive another attack.



CHAPTER 1

A tiny screw, a metal bracket, and a mysterious pulsing wire taunted Sidney from his desk, which was littered with nanocircuits, a sonic welder, and other tools.

Leftover parts are never a good thing, thirteen-year-old Sidney Jamison thought. He pushed his dark, curly hair out of his eyes and touched the smooth, glossy case of his mom's new voxpod. It should have blinked to life with lights and sound, but nothing happened. He looked accusingly at the three "extra" parts sitting nearby.

Curious about how the thing worked, he had taken it apart last night after his mom dozed off. He had tried to put it back together before she needed to send another message on it. *That's not going to happen now*, he thought. *I'm doomed.*

Sidney glanced around his messy room. Clothes, manuals, and half-assembled projects were strewn everywhere. There were plenty of places to hide the voxpod until he could figure out the best way to break the news to

his mom without getting killed—or worse, grounded with no intermaze access.

A brisk knock at the door startled him. The door opened, and his mom stuck her head in. “Sidney, why are you still in your pajamas? We have to get moving, or—” She saw the half-assembled device on his desk. “Is that my *new voxpod*?!?!”

The doorbell rang and Sidney jumped up, relieved for the escape. “I’ll get it!” He squeezed past his mom and ran for the front door.

“I don’t understand why you can’t just take apart your own things....” his mom sputtered as she collected the voxpod pieces and strode into the bathroom to get ready for work. As he ran for the door, Sid could hear Housemate giving his mom the daily data download as the house’s digital brain set the shower temperature to her liking.

Sidney knew the punishment about to be dropped square on his head was only being postponed for lack of time. He had a long history of dismantling household appliances, from his nanobot to the autopilot on the hoverboard that was his ninth birthday present. His track record of successfully reassembling these objects was less impressive. But when he saw his mom’s brand-new voxpod, the idea of cracking open the deep red shell to see how it worked was irresistible. Sidney thought if he rooted it, he could get it to project 3-D holograms. He had visions of a hologram version of himself

studiously doing homework while the real Sid was outside exploring much more interesting stuff. But first things first: He had wanted to see *how* it could do that.

The outer case of the voxpod had popped open easily, and big letters had formed in the air over the device. **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO SERVICE THIS UNIT. RETURN TO THE MANUFACTURER FOR REPAIR OR THE UNIT'S WARRANTY WILL BE VOID.** Sid hadn't let the warning stop him. *They'll never know I even opened it up*, he had thought. He had been sure he could reassemble the little device. How hard could it be? Well, apparently harder than he had realized.

Now, Sidney activated the door monitor to see who had rung the bell. Nobody was visible, so he pressed the intercom button. "Hello? Who's there?"

A small metal claw rose into view and waved. "Origins: Postal Service. Delivery for Sidney Jamison."

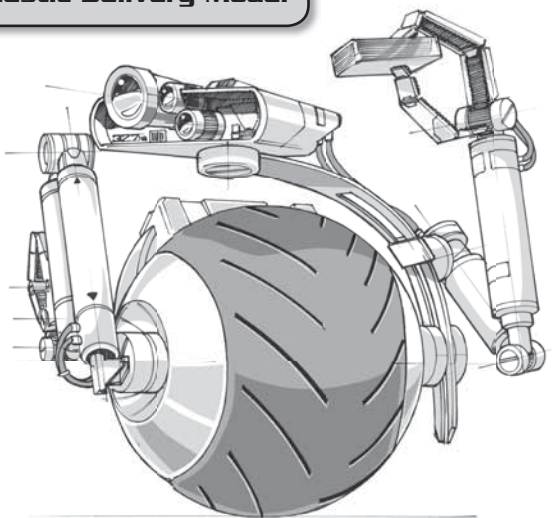
"For me?" Sid pulled open the door to see a delivery robot that came up to his chest. Several cameras and sensors were mounted on its small, flat head. The head was balanced on a fat wheel lined with deep treads.

One of the robot's three large eyes scanned Sidney's face. "Greetings, Sidney Jamison. Delivery for you." The rapid fabricator mounted behind the robot's head started rattling. Sid watched, fascinated. His house had its own fabricator,

but it was built into the framework, so he couldn't see how it worked. Ribbon cables and tubes connected a block of tiny nozzles to the robot. They moved quickly—sometimes together, sometimes separately—forming something on a tray behind the robot's head.

DING! When the fabricator finished its work, the tray rotated over the robot's head. A claw picked up the object and handed it to Sid. "Delivery complete, sir. Good-bye." And with that, the robot rolled back to the street, speeding off to its next delivery.

POSTAL BOT
Domestic Delivery Model



Sid looked at the translucent package in his hands. It was a flat box, about the size of a pack of playing cards, and

it seemed to be made of thousands of layers of thinly sliced plastic. He turned the object over in his hands. The back flap was sealed with a foil sticker embossed with an icon of an atom. Above the seal, the words **DO NOT OPEN!** were printed.

Sid slid back into the house, still studying his delivery. He held the thing up to the light but couldn't make out any kind of detail.

"Sidney, GET DRESSED!" His mom's voice interrupted his thoughts. He must have lost track of time because his mother was staring at him with her hands on her hips. "We are leaving in *five minutes!*"

He looked down and saw his sleep shirt was now frantically blinking an alert, reminding him he was late. Sidney ran to his room, grabbed a pullover and jeans, and gave the mysterious object to the room's mechorganizer hanging from a mount in the center of the ceiling. It scanned the object and tossed it haphazardly onto the nightstand by the bed, adding to the chaos of the room. Sidney rolled his eyes and wondered if they would ever make a mechorganizer that actually organized things. Then, he dressed quickly, pulled on his racer shoes, grabbed his school voxpod, and ran downstairs.

His mom was already at the front door, giving instructions for dinner to Housemate's swiveling camera eye. "And let's have a nice salad with that, please."

The living room display wall showed the dinner menu as House replied in a pleasant voice, “Of course, Ms. Jamison. Is there anything else for today?”

“I need the national stat report loaded in my datacube. And have the plans for a new voxpod downloaded from the store and replicated for me at my office, please. Same model as the previous. Transfer all contact and user data. Deduct the cost of the new voxpod from Sidney’s allowance account.”

“Yes, Ms. Jamison. Have a pleasant day.”

The hovercar’s autodriven worked with Navcom to shuffle cars around the freeway. Their car was headed for the school, slotted into a queue along tree-lined streets. Sid’s mom was still simmering about the voxpod during the drive to school. “You know, Sidney, gadgets like voxpods and macrowaves cost money. Just because we can download the infoplans and have them replicated at home doesn’t make them cheap.”

“Aw, mom. I just wanted to...”

“...see how it worked. I know, I know. We’ve had this conversation before.” She sighed and switched gears. “By the way, who was at the door this morning?”

“Just a digipack,” Sid said. “I’m not sure what it is. I didn’t have a chance to open it yet. Probably some kind of datatrash I’ll dump in the recycler.”

“Interesting,” his mom said. Sid didn’t see her grin as she set the windshield to its mirror setting and checked her makeup. “So, what’s going on at school today, kiddo?” she asked, pulling back her sandy blond hair. Her dark eyes regarded Sid with good humor. “Learning anything interesting?”

Sid rolled his eyes. “At Bleaker High? I wish. It’s like sinking my brain in quicksand. Every class is just repeating stuff we learned years ago, and no one else seems to care. It’s like they shut down their minds while they’re at school. I’m going crazy. I mean, am I the only person in that place who can think?”

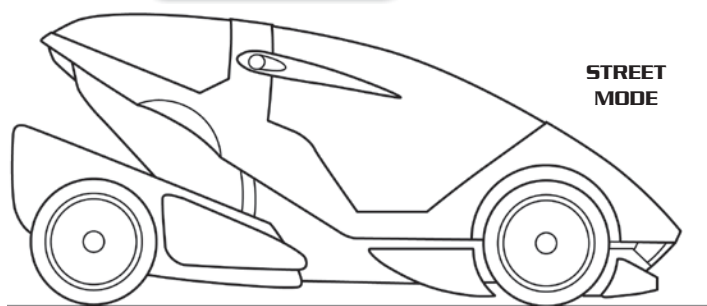
“Well, try not to let your brain get totally sucked into the quicksand. Things will change,” his mom replied.

For the rest of the drive, Sid gazed out the window as gray houses and green lawns passed in a blur below him. They floated alongside the Delaware River for a few minutes, and Sid watched the nanobots rebuilding the Commodore Barry Bridge. Several months earlier, city planners had dropped twelve tons of steel and concrete at one end of the bridge and set several billion nanobots loose with instructions for remaking the structure. The nanobots had been working steadily since. They “ate” the original bridge, breaking it down as they went and leaving behind a new, stronger version. Sid could see clumps of nanobots whirling halfway along the bridge. Five minutes later, the

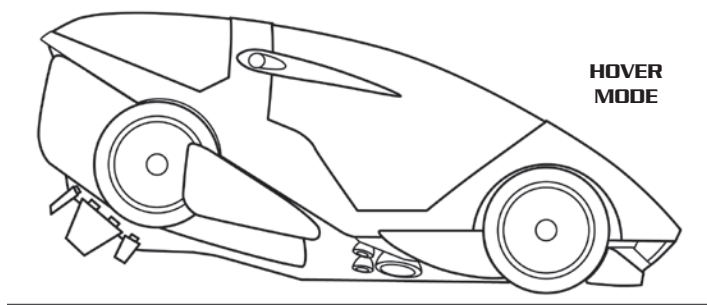
car's airflow deflectors retracted, its wheels lowered, and the car settled onto the ground at the drop-off point.

"Bye, Mom," Sid said as he got out of the car, grabbing his bag off the seat. It contained his school voxpod and his lunch, a tuna-salad sandwich. He had eaten tuna salad every day of school since first grade, and he wasn't tired of it yet. Tuna salad was awesome.

HOVERCAR



**STREET
MODE**



**HOVER
MODE**

The bell for homeroom rang as Sidney followed the other students up the drab stone steps to the tarnished metal doors

of Bleaker High School. Sid heard the school's attendance computer beep as it scanned the faces of the kids filing in past its position in the ceiling just beyond the doorway. The school was as gray and weathered as the teachers, who all looked as if they struggled to stay awake as they taught the same outdated, boring material to new students each year. By the time Sidney graduated, he expected the students would take on the same grayish pallor as the teachers.

The package waiting for him at home continued to nag at Sid's brain. **DO NOT OPEN!** it had said. *Weird*, he thought and felt the beginnings of the mental itch that came on whenever he was faced with a puzzle. He couldn't get the strange instructions out of his mind, and he could barely keep himself from skipping class and sprinting home to find out what it was.

By the time science class rolled around, Sidney wasn't paying attention when Ms. Dirge called on him. "Are you listening to me, Sidney?"

"Sorry, Ms. Dirge. I didn't hear the question," Sid replied, still distracted. Ms. Dirge was an epically boring teacher. The only interesting thing he knew about her was that her mood was always reflected by the color of her face. If she was pink, she had moved past annoyed and on to frustrated. If she turned red, she was not to be messed with. One student claimed he had even seen her turn maroon once, but Sidney wasn't sure if he believed it.