



HIVE MIND

Timothy J. Bradley

BOOK
01

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.

To purchase *Hive Mind*,
visit tcmbooks.com/HiveMind.

© 2014 Argosy Press

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in an information retrieval system in any form or by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, taping, and recording, without prior written permission from the publisher.

First paperback edition

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number TK

ISBN 978-1-4807-2188-3 (paperback)

ISBN 978-1-4333-8787-6 (eBook)



Argosy Press

5301 Oceanus Drive

Huntington Beach, California 92649



CHAPTER 6

With the sun up, it was time for Sidney, Penny, and Hari to start exploring their first live hive. A small electric vehicle towed a portable miniaturizer from the flying lab out to the hive. Dr. Sharp and Verge, one of his assistants, went first. The students followed. Sid watched as the beam projector was fired and a cloud of mist enfolded Hari and Penny. He could just make out the shrinking forms of his two friends for a moment before they seemed to disappear. The mist cleared, and then he was next on the platform.

Sid barely had time to worry if he was ready when the technician fired up the miniaturizer. When the mist cleared, he was looking at the tech's shoes, which were now the size of houses.

“Come along! Quickly! The miniaturizer platform must be cleared before the next students can be reduced.” Dr. Sharp was waving them toward the microshelter. Once all the students were inside, the professor made sure everyone was strapped to the padded floor. He then signaled they were ready to be moved by flashing a series of

lights. At their tiny size, his voice couldn't be heard by the assistants' normal-sized ears. When the tech detected the tiny green lights flashing on the outside of the microshelter, he gingerly lifted the box. To the micro-students inside, it felt as if the room were rocketing upward. They shrieked as the room tossed and turned. After a few brief seconds, the microshelter was fastened securely to the tree where the nest was located.

Dr. Sharp called out, "You may now unbuckle your safety harness and stand. We're going to get right to work. The coolsuits and equipment have already been reduced. You'll find them in the lockers against the wall. Put them on, and then Verge will spray you with a pheromone that will make you smell like a bee—well, at least to other bees. Smoke is being pumped into the hive, so the bees should be calm and docile. But don't worry, it won't have any lasting effect on the bees."

Once they were dressed, the students lined up to be sprayed.

"How do you know this stuff works?" Sid asked Verge when it was his turn.

"We located the queen and took a sample of the chemicals she normally secretes into the hive," Verge said. "Then, we mixed up a batch for ourselves. We'll all be royalty today," he said with a wink. He patted a cylinder standing beside him. "I tested it earlier, and the

bees accepted it. Nothing to worry about. Okay, helmet on, please.”

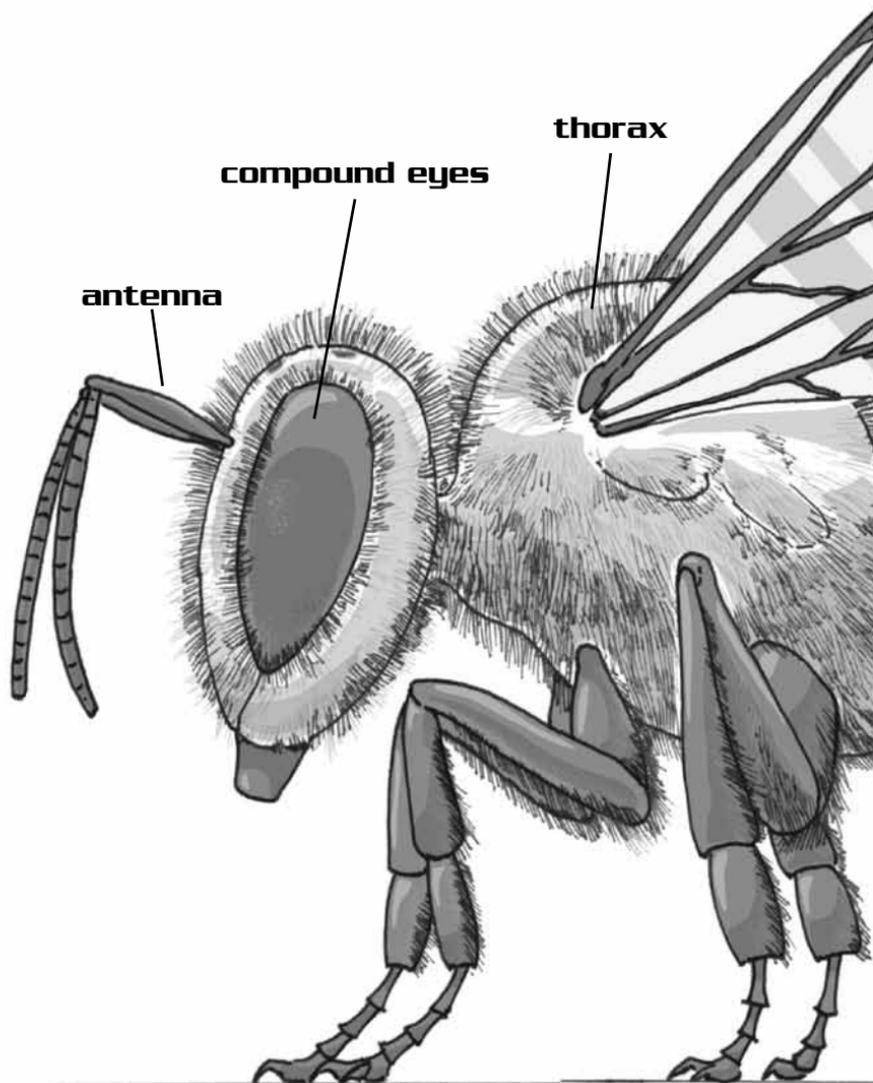
Once Sid was sprayed, he joined the other students standing around the entrance to the hive.

“All right! Here we go. Take your time, and try not to make any sudden moves,” Dr. Sharp advised. “The bees you see will be in a somewhat sedated state, but try not to startle them. You have the shock prods so you can give the bees a mild shock if they get too curious. At this voltage, no harm will be done, but the bees will be startled enough to move away.” Dr. Sharp activated his shock prod. The small metal ball on the end lit up with a halo of static electricity. He climbed up into the hive. Verge went next.

The students stood watching uncertainly until Penny said, “I don’t know about you, but I’m dying to see what it’s like in there! We’ll be surrounded by thousands of live bees!” She ducked inside the hive and glanced back at Sid and Hari. “C’mon, don’t just stand there!”

Hari started toward the hive and pulled Sid along.

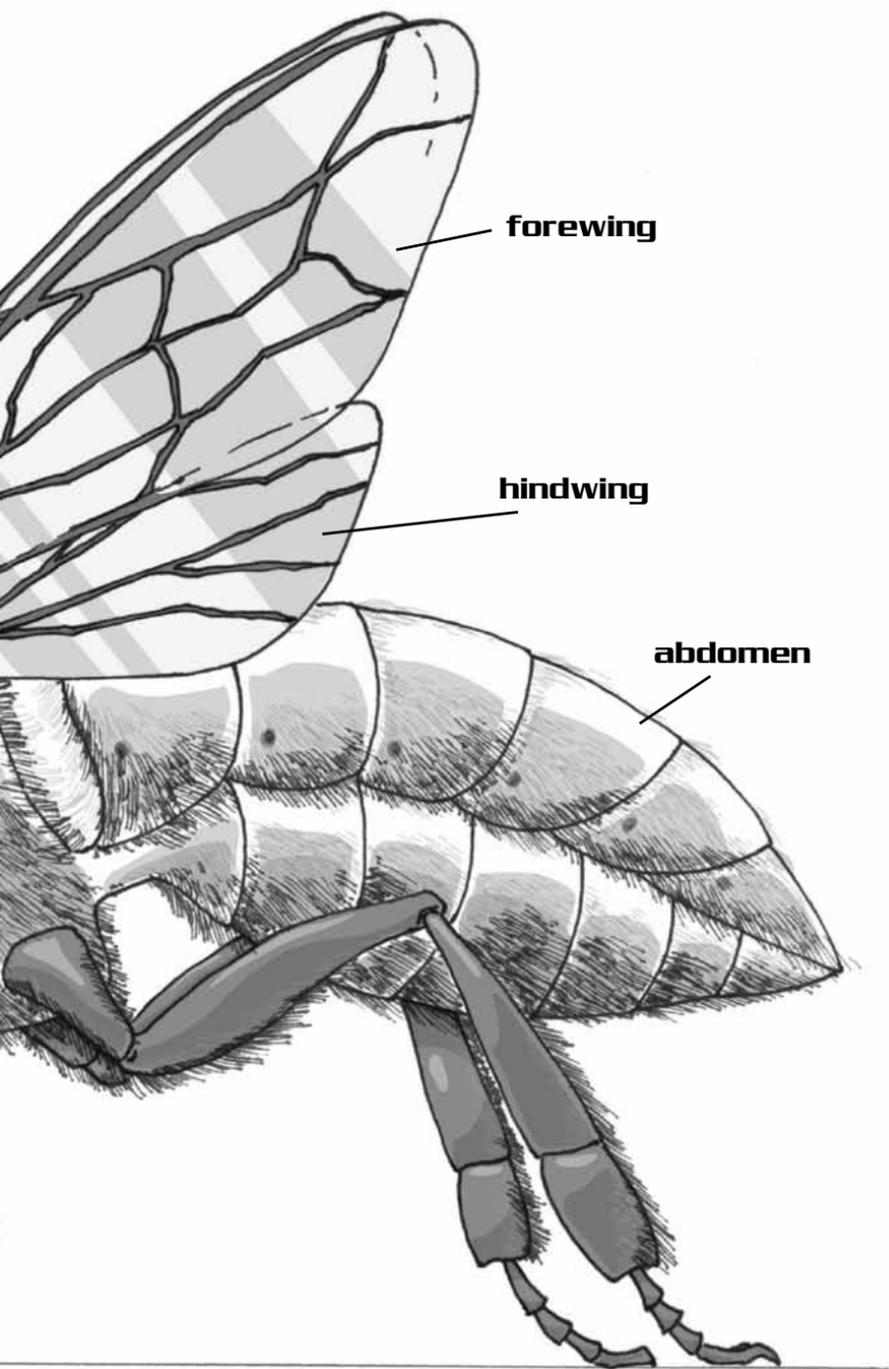
As Sid poked his head into the hive interior, his helmet light came on. Dozens of lights bounced in the shadows of the cells as the class spread out to explore. The dark silhouettes of the bees could be seen on the walls. Most were resting quietly in the haze of the smoke. Some were moving hesitantly. One came near Sid, touching him briefly with



antenna

compound eyes

thorax



forewing

hindwing

abdomen

its antenna as it moved past.

Startled, Sid jerked back, slamming into the wall of the hive. Expecting the bee to sting him, he grabbed the shock prod from his belt and activated it. But the bee only stopped for a moment, regarding him with its unreadable compound eyes before continuing on its way.

After that first relatively uneventful contact, Sid felt more at ease moving through the hive. The bees didn't seem to take the slightest notice of him with his much smaller size and the queen's familiar scent.

"Sid, what's taking you so long?" Hari called from up ahead. "Are you all right?"

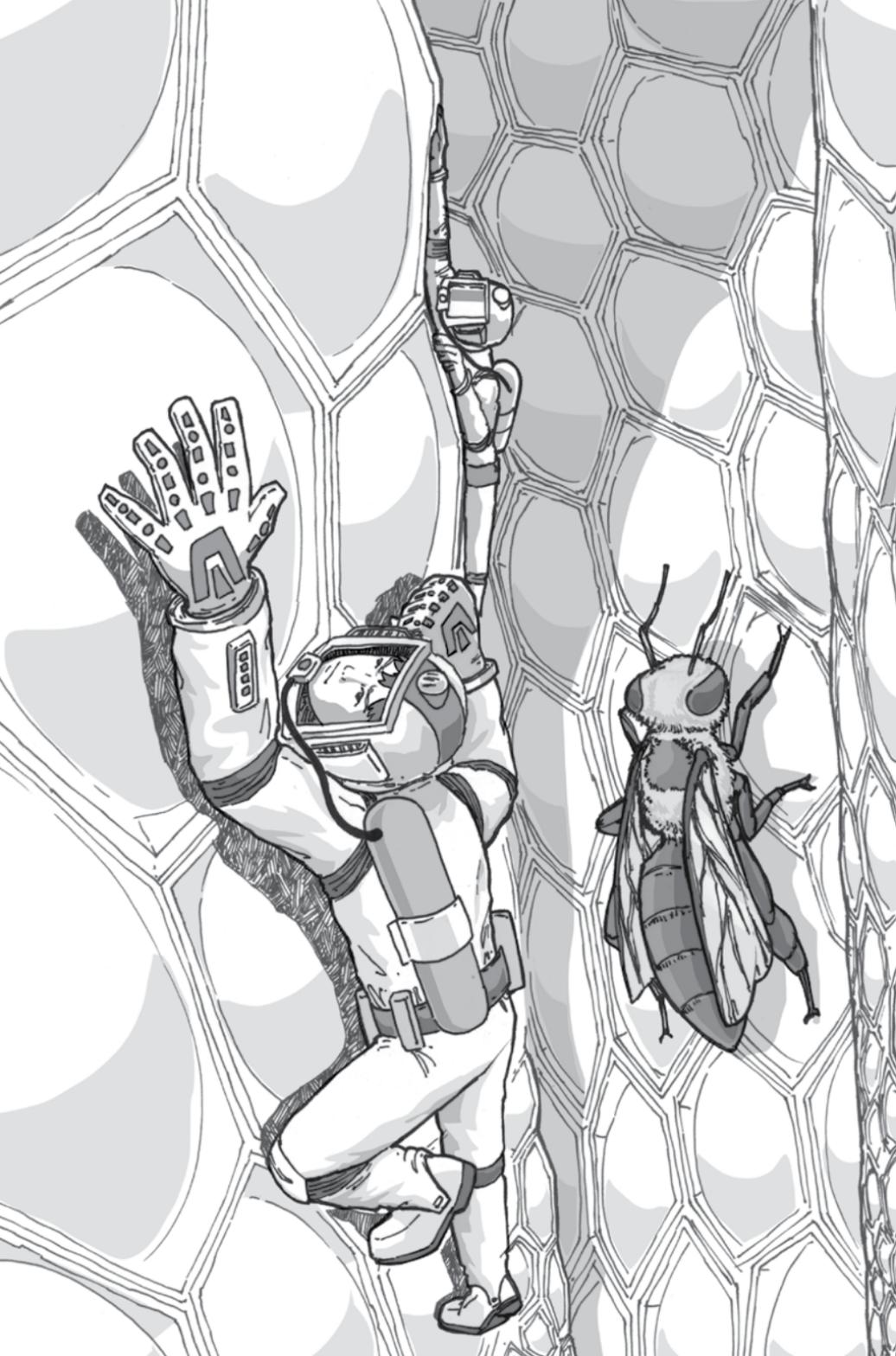
"I'm fine," he replied. "Right behind you."

The cells built into the walls of the hive made for easy climbing. There were plenty of secure footholds.

This hive is amazing, Sid thought. How could they build something like this without plans? They can't even talk to each other. After his sting when he was younger, Sidney had always been afraid of bees. But now that he could study them more closely, he was able to keep a lid on his fear and focus on how amazing and interesting the bees really were.

Sid looked up and saw he was approaching the ledge where Penny had stopped. She waved.

"Good to see you, slowpokes," Penny said as Sid and



Hari reached the ledge.

“Very funny,” Hari said. “Enough climbing for me.” He cast his helmet light into the dark.

“Me, too,” Sid panted. “I must be *really* out of shape.”

“Guess we can stop climbing and start exploring what’s right here,” Penny said. She set out along the ledge, starting a visual check of the bees that were hanging on to the walls. Hari and Sid followed her.

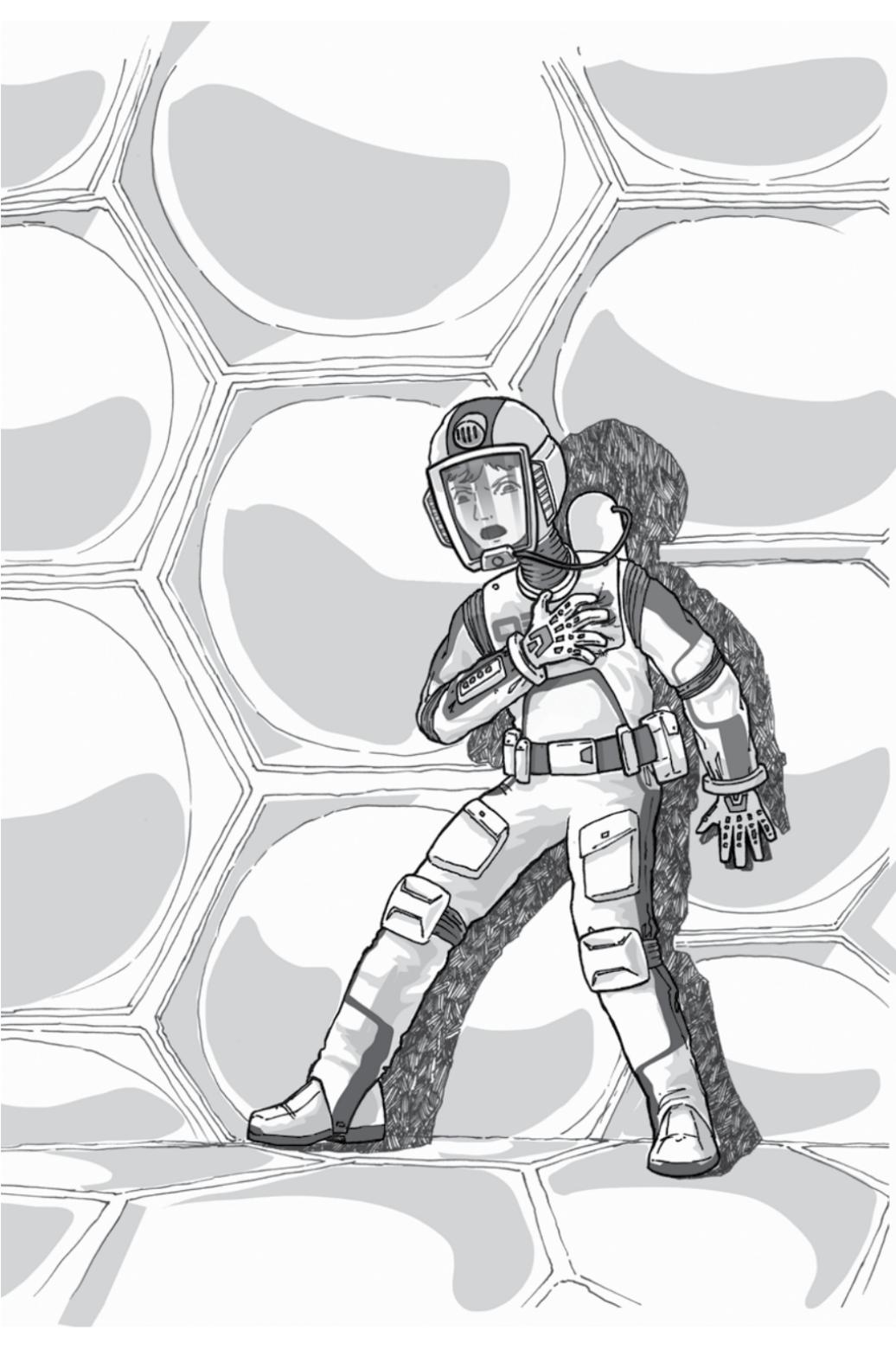
“I’m not seeing mites,” Hari said. “That seems kind of strange. We saw so many of them in the dead hive we studied in Sci Hi, remember?”

“Yeah. You’re right,” Sid said. He turned up the cooling system for his suit. Beads of sweat were rolling down his neck. He was breathing hard. It felt as if he were still climbing vertically, but now he was simply walking along a flat shelf jutting out from the hive wall. He glanced over at Hari, but he didn’t seem to be struggling.

“Hari, Sid, can you guys shine your lights inside this cell? I want to see if there are any mites on the larvae,” Penny asked.

“Sure,” Hari said as he joined her.

Sid started to move, too, but he was struck suddenly with a wave of dizziness. His stomach rolled unpleasantly. Struggling to keep his balance, he grabbed a cell in the



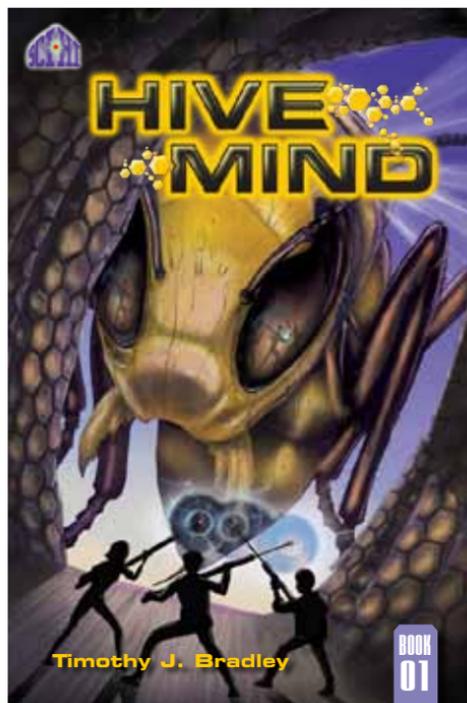
wall and tried to stop himself from falling off the ledge. A red light started blinking inside his suit helmet, and the faceplate lit up with an infographic of the coolsuit's systems. The breathing unit was failing!

Sid tried to call out to Hari and Penny, but he was panting too hard to get out the words.

He felt panic start to invade his mind. He knew he had to get outside and take the helmet off immediately. But when Sidney tried to move, he had trouble commanding his legs. Instead of walking, all he could do was sink down to his knees and lean back against the hive wall.

Penny watched him sink to the ground. "Sid, what is it? What's wrong? Have you...have you been *stung*? Hari, help me! Something's wrong with Sid!"

"Heh—heh— help..." he groaned weakly.



Available October 2013.

**Order it today at
www.tcmbooks.com/HiveMind**