

The illustration depicts a massive, golden, metallic insect-like creature with large, dark, reflective eyes and a segmented body, emerging from a dark, honeycomb-patterned tunnel. In the foreground, three human silhouettes are shown in a dynamic, forward-leaning stance, each holding a long, thin object that appears to be a probe or a tool. The scene is lit with dramatic, low-key lighting, with a bright purple and blue glow emanating from behind the creature's head, creating a sense of tension and mystery.

# Hive Mind

## Part One

Written and Illustrated  
by Timothy J. Bradley

## **Publishing Credits**

Rachelle Cracchiolo, M.S.Ed., *Publisher*  
Conni Medina, M.A.Ed., *Editor in Chief*  
Nika Fabienke, Ed.D., *Content Director*  
Véronique Bos, *Creative Director*  
Shaun N. Bernadou, *Art Director*  
Seth Rogers, *Editor*  
Valerie Morales, *Associate Editor*  
Kevin Pham, *Graphic Designer*

## **Image Credits**

Illustrated by Timothy J. Bradley

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## CHAPTER ONE



# Mysterious Mail

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

*Leftover parts are never a good thing,* 13-year-old Sidney Jamison

thought. He touched the glossy case of his mom's new voxpod. It should have blinked to life with lights and sound. But nothing happened.

Curious about how the thing worked, he had taken it apart after his mom dozed off. He tried to put it back together before she needed it again. *That's not going to happen now*, he thought.

Sidney glanced around his messy room. 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 grounded with no intermaze access.

A pounding 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 scrambled for the front door.

Sidney had a long history of taking apart household appliances. He deconstructed everything from his nanobot to the hoverboard that was his ninth birthday present. Successfully putting these objects back together was a different story. He couldn’t help himself when he saw his mom’s brand-new voxpod. He needed to open the deep red shell to see how it worked. Getting it back together—not so easy.

Now, Sidney activated the door monitor to see who had rung the bell.

A small metal claw rose into view. “Postal Service, delivery for Sidney Jamison.”

“For me?” Sid pulled open the door to see a delivery robot that was the height of his chest.

A claw reached up and handed a translucent package to Sid. With a whir, the robot rolled back to the street, speeding off to its next delivery.

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