

YELLOW JACKET

Sample Chapter

CHAPTER ONE

Lancio Ravera, a tall, slightly built, black-haired young pharmacist, camped alone one weekend in the California desert near Calico Ghost Town. He arose early Saturday morning, gazed to the east as the sun climbed above the sand-colored mountains, then fixed a breakfast of bacon, eggs, and coffee. When finished, he walked a few paces away from the fire to clean his dishes, but his right foot caved into the loose earth and got caught in a hole. A swarm of giant wasps flew out and attacked his leg. He tried fighting them off, but was stung repeatedly. Highly allergic to their venom, his leg began swelling immediately. After he pulled it out of the hole, Lancio limped to his tent and grabbed his EpiPen kit, which contained a syringe and needle filled with adrenalin. The wasps continued their bombardment with increasing tenacity until they enclosed his whole body. He swatted and slapped at the yellow and black insects, tried to protect his eyes. As he squashed some of the assailants, they emitted a strange odor that incited the other wasps to riot upon Lancio. In pain, swollen and gasping for breath, he snatched the syringe, injected the epinephrine into his thigh, staggered out of the tent, and headed for the entrance of a nearby cave in the side of Calico Mountain.

Hoping the blackness would hide him from the wasps, Lancio stumbled inside and hustled down a passageway. He could not see, but stuck out his arms and slammed his hands against the cave walls as he ran. The buzzing behind him grew louder and he turned his head. As he did, the earth beneath him gave way and he fell into a large mine, hitting his head on the sticky floor. He lost consciousness.

Slowly, he opened his eyes and struggled to move his head. Nothing happened. His head was one huge welt. He blinked several times, tried to adjust to the darkness. He had no idea how long he had been unconscious, but listened for sounds. The distant humming grew louder; he smelled a sickening sweet scent like rancid honey.

Flat on his back, he started to rise up, but could not. In shock, his breaths squeezed out in heavy puffs and he strained for sight. He lost the syringe in the fall and attempted to budge his legs, but could not. Then he rested, prayed, and pounded his legs. “C’mon, you mothers—move!”

After a half-hour or so, Lancio managed to turn onto his stomach, but his throat was so constricted he could barely breathe. Eyes still not adjusted to the darkness, he panicked and inched forward like a snake into a mound of sticky, sweet-smelling mire. He jabbed a hand into the pile of nectar and pulled back tacky fingers. Then stuck them into his mouth and collapsed.

A few minutes later, Lancio awoke, felt bigger and stronger. He glanced around the cavern. His eyesight shot through the darkness like a runaway meteor. He felt his hairy arms and legs. They were hard as railroad tracks. Leaping up, he hit his head on the ceiling of the giant cavern with such force, hundreds of brittle hives tumbled to the ground.

Hordes of wasps, yellow jackets, bees, and hornets shot into the mine and hovered around Lancio. The insects' eyes lined the area like thousands of searchlights. Lancio gazed into the reflections and saw that his black hair had turned blond, almost yellow. His arms and legs shot out in self-defense, performing perfect martial arts katas. The insects buzzed louder, but did not touch him. *Why didn't they attack? It was like they paid homage to him. Like he was their master.*