

THE MAZE RUNNER
BY JAMES DASHNER

CHAPTER 1

He began his new life standing up, surrounded by cold darkness and stale, dusty air.

Metal ground against metal; a lurching shudder shook the floor beneath him. He fell down at the sudden movement and shuffled backward on his hands and feet, drops of sweat beading on his forehead despite the cool air. His back struck a hard metal wall; he slid along it until he hit the corner of the room. Sinking to the floor, he pulled his legs up tight against his body, hoping his eyes would soon adjust to the darkness.

With another jolt, the room jerked upward like an old lift in a mine shaft.

Harsh sounds of chains and pulleys, like the workings of an ancient steel factory, echoed through the room, bouncing off the walls with a hollow, tinny whine. The lightless elevator swayed back and forth as it ascended, turning the boy's stomach sour with nausea; a smell like burnt oil invaded his senses, making him feel worse. He wanted to cry, but no tears came; he could only sit there, alone, waiting.

My name is Thomas, he thought.
That ... that was the only thing he could remember about his life.

He didn't understand how this could be possible. His mind functioned without flaw, trying to calculate his surroundings and predicament. Knowledge flooded his thoughts, facts and images, memories and details of the world and how it works. He pictured snow on trees, running down a leaf-strewn road, eating a hamburger, the moon casting a pale glow on a grassy meadow, swimming in a lake, a busy city square with hundreds of people bustling about their business.

And yet he didn't know where he came from, or how he'd gotten inside the dark lift, or who his parents were. He didn't even know his last name. Images of people flashed across his mind, but there was no recognition, their faces replaced with haunted smears of color. He couldn't think of one person he knew, or recall a single conversation.

The room continued its ascent, swaying; Thomas grew immune to the ceaseless rattling of the chains that pulled him upward. A long time passed. Minutes stretched into hours, although it was impossible to know for sure because every second seemed an eternity. No. He was smarter than that. Trusting his instincts, he knew he'd been moving for roughly half an hour.

Strangely enough, he felt his fear whisked away like a swarm of gnats caught in the wind, replaced by an intense curiosity. He wanted to know where he was and what was happening.

With a groan and then a clonk, the rising room halted; the sudden change jolted Thomas from his huddled position and threw him across the hard floor. As he scrambled to his feet, he felt the room sway less and less until it finally stilled. Everything fell silent.

A minute passed. Two. He looked in every direction but saw only darkness; he felt along the walls again, searching for a way out. But there was nothing, only the cool metal. He groaned in frustration; his echo amplified through the air, like the haunted moan of death. It faded, and silence returned. He screamed, called for help, pounded on the walls with his fists.

Nothing.
Thomas backed into the corner once again, folded his arms and shivered, and the fear returned. He felt a worrying shudder in his chest, as if his heart wanted to escape, to flee his body.

"Someone ... help ... me!" he screamed; each word ripped his throat raw.

A loud clank rang out above him and he sucked in a startled breath as he looked up. A straight line of light appeared across the ceiling of the room, and Thomas watched as it expanded. A heavy grating sound revealed double sliding doors being forced open. After so long in darkness, the light stabbed his eyes; he looked away, covering his face with both hands. He heard noises above—voices—and fear squeezed his chest.

"Look at that shank."

"How old is he?"

"Looks like a klunk in a T-shirt."

"You're the klunk, shuck-face."

"Dude, it smells like feet down there!"

"Hope you enjoyed the one-way trip, Greenie."

"Ain't no ticket back, bro."

Thomas was hit with a wave of confusion, blistered with panic. The voices were odd, tinged with echo; some of the words were completely foreign—others felt familiar. He willed his eyes to adjust as he squinted toward the light and those speaking. At first he could see only shifting shadows, but they soon turned into the shapes of bodies—people bending over the hole in the ceiling, looking down at him, pointing.

65

And then, as if the lens of a camera had sharpened its focus, the faces cleared. They were boys, all of them—some young, some older. Thomas didn't know what he'd expected, but seeing those faces puzzled him. They were just teenagers. Kids. Some of his fear melted away, but not enough to calm his racing heart.

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Someone lowered a rope from above, the end of it tied into a big loop. Thomas hesitated, then stepped into it with his right foot and clutched the rope as he was yanked toward the sky. Hands reached down, lots of hands, grabbing him by his clothes, pulling him up. The world seemed to spin, a swirling mist of faces and color and light. A storm of emotions wrenched his gut, twisted and pulled; he wanted to scream, cry, throw up. The chorus of voices had grown silent, but someone spoke as they yanked him over the sharp edge of the dark box. And Thomas knew he'd never forget the words.

75

"Nice to meet ya, shank," the boy said. "Welcome to the Glade."

QUESTIONS: CHOOSE THE CORRECT ANSWER

1) Where is Thomas when the story begins?

- A) In a forest
- B) In an elevator
- C) In a car
- D) In a small house

2) How long does Thomas think he has been moving in the elevator?

- A) A few minutes
- B) Half an hour
- C) Two hours
- D) All day

3) Who does Thomas see above him after the doors open?

- A) Girls and boys
- B) Adults in uniforms
- C) Boys of different ages
- D) Animals

4) Where does the boy say Thomas has arrived?

- A) The Forest
- B) The Maze
- C) The Glade
- D) The City

CHAPTER 2

The helping hands didn't stop swarming around him until Thomas stood up straight and had the dust brushed from his shirt and pants. Still dazzled by the light, he staggered a bit. He was consumed with curiosity but still felt too ill to look closely at his surroundings. His new companions said nothing as he swiveled his head around, trying to take it all in.

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As he rotated in a slow circle, the other kids snickered and stared; some reached out and poked him with a finger. There had to be at least fifty of them, their clothes smudged and sweaty as if they'd been hard at work, all shapes and sizes and races, their hair of varying lengths. Thomas suddenly felt dizzy, his eyes flickering between the boys and the bizarre place in which he'd found himself.

10

They stood in a vast courtyard several times the size of a football field, surrounded by four enormous walls made of gray stone and covered in spots with thick ivy. The walls had to be hundreds of feet high and formed a perfect square around them, each side split in the exact middle by an opening as tall as the walls themselves that, from what Thomas could see, led to passages and long corridors beyond.

15

"Look at the Greenbean," a scratchy voice said; Thomas couldn't see who it came from. "Gonna break his shuck neck checkin' out the new digs." Several boys laughed. "Shut your hole, Gally," a deeper voice responded.

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Thomas focused back in on the dozens of strangers around him. He knew he must look out of it—he felt like he'd been drugged. A tall kid with blond hair and a square jaw sniffed at him, his face devoid of expression. A short, pudgy boy fidgeted back and forth on his feet, looking up at Thomas with wide eyes. A thick, heavily muscled Asian kid folded his arms as he studied Thomas, his tight shirtsleeves rolled up to show off his biceps. A dark-skinned boy frowned—the same one who'd welcomed him. Countless others stared.

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"Where am I?" Thomas asked, surprised at hearing his voice for the first time in his salvageable memory. It didn't sound quite right—higher than he would've imagined.

"Nowhere good." This came from the dark-skinned boy. "Just slim yourself nice and calm."

"Which Keeper he gonna get?" someone shouted from the back of the crowd.

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"I told ya, shuck-face," a shrill voice responded. "He's a klunk, so he'll be a Slopper—no doubt about it." The kid giggled like he'd just said the funniest thing in history.

Thomas once again felt a pressing ache of confusion—hearing so many words and phrases that didn't make sense. Shank. Shuck. Keeper. Slopper. They popped out of the boys' mouths so naturally it seemed odd for him not to understand. It was as if his memory loss had stolen a chunk of his language—it was disorienting.

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Different emotions battled for dominance in his mind and heart. Confusion. Curiosity. Panic. Fear. But laced through it all was the dark feeling of utter hopelessness, like the world had ended for him, had been wiped from his memory and replaced with something awful. He wanted to run and hide from these people.

40 The scratchy-voiced boy was talking. “—even do that much, bet my liver on it.” Thomas still couldn’t see his face.

“I said shut your holes!” the dark boy yelled. “Keep yapping and next break’ll be cut in half!”

45 That must be their leader, Thomas realized. Hating how everyone gawked at him, he concentrated on studying the place the boy had called the Glade.

The floor of the courtyard looked like it was made of huge stone blocks, many of them cracked and filled with long grasses and weeds. An odd, dilapidated wooden building near one of the corners of the square contrasted greatly with the gray stone. A few trees surrounded it, their roots like gnarled hands digging into the rock floor for food. Another corner of the compound held gardens—from where he was standing Thomas recognized corn, tomato plants, fruit trees.

50 Across the courtyard from there stood wooden pens holding sheep and pigs and cows. A large grove of trees filled the final corner; the closest ones looked crippled and close to dying. The sky overhead was cloudless and blue, but Thomas could see no sign of the sun despite the brightness of the day. The creeping shadows of the walls didn’t reveal the time or direction—it could be early morning or late afternoon. As he breathed in deeply, trying to settle his nerves, a mixture of smells bombarded him. Freshly turned dirt, manure, pine, something rotten and something sweet. Somehow he knew that these were the smells of a farm.

55 Thomas looked back at his captors, feeling awkward but desperate to ask questions. Captors, he thought. Then, Why did that word pop into my head? He scanned their faces, taking in each expression, judging them. One boy’s eyes, flared with hatred, stopped him cold. He looked so angry, Thomas wouldn’t have been surprised if the kid came at him with a knife. He had black hair, and when they made eye contact, the boy shook his head and turned away, walking toward a greasy iron pole with a wooden bench next to it. A multicolored flag hung limply at the top of the pole, no wind to reveal its pattern.

60 Shaken, Thomas stared at the boy’s back until he turned and took a seat. Thomas quickly looked away.

65 Suddenly the leader of the group—perhaps he was seventeen—took a step forward. He wore normal clothes: black T-shirt, jeans, tennis shoes, a digital watch. For some reason the clothing here surprised Thomas; it seemed like everyone should be wearing something more menacing—like prison garb. The dark-skinned boy had short-cropped hair, his face clean shaven. But other than the permanent scowl, there was nothing scary about him at all.

70 “It’s a long story, shank,” the boy said. “Piece by piece, you’ll learn—I’ll be takin’ you on the Tour tomorrow. Till then ... just don’t break anything.” He held a hand out. “Name’s Alby.” He waited, clearly wanting to shake hands.

75 Thomas refused. Some instinct took over his actions and without saying anything he turned away from Alby and walked to a nearby tree, where he plopped down to sit with his back against the rough bark. Panic swelled inside him once again, almost too much to bear. But he took a deep breath and forced himself to try to accept the situation. Just go with it, he thought. You won’t figure out anything if you give in to fear.

80 “Then tell me,” Thomas called out, struggling to keep his voice even. “Tell me the long story.”

85 Alby glanced at the friends closest to him, rolling his eyes, and Thomas studied the crowd again. His original estimate had been close—there were probably fifty to sixty of them, ranging from boys in their midteens to young adults like Alby, who seemed to be one of the oldest. At that moment, Thomas realized with a sickening lurch that he had no idea how old he was. His heart sank at the thought—he was so lost he didn’t even know his own age.

“Seriously,” he said, giving up on the show of courage. “Where am I?”

90 Alby walked over to him and sat down cross-legged; the crowd of boys followed and packed in behind. Heads popped up here and there, kids leaning in every direction to get a better look.

“If you ain’t scared,” Alby said, “you ain’t human. Act any different and I’d throw you off the Cliff because it’d mean you’re a psycho.”

“The Cliff?” Thomas asked, blood draining from his face.

95 “Shuck it,” Alby said, rubbing his eyes. “Ain’t no way to start these conversations, you get me? We don’t kill shanks like you here, I promise. Just try and avoid being killed, survive, whatever.”

He paused, and Thomas realized his face must’ve whitened even more when he heard that last part.

“Man,” Alby said, then ran his hands over his short hair as he let out a long sigh. “I ain’t good at this— you’re the first Greenbean since Nick was killed.”

100 Thomas’s eyes widened, and another boy stepped up and playfully slapped Alby across the head. “Wait for the bloody Tour, Alby,” he said, his voice thick with an odd accent. “Kid’s gonna have a buggin’ heart attack, nothin’ even been heard yet.” He bent down and

105 extended his hand toward Thomas. "Name's Newt, Greenie, and we'd all be right cheery if ya'd forgive our klunk-for-brains new leader, here."

Thomas reached out and shook the boy's hand—he seemed a lot nicer than Alby. Newt was taller than Alby too, but looked to be a year or so younger. His hair was blond and cut long, cascading over his Tshirt. Veins stuck out of his muscled arms.

110 "Pipe it, shuck-face," Alby grunted, pulling Newt down to sit next to him. "At least he can understand half my words." There were a few scattered laughs, and then everyone gathered behind Alby and Newt, packing in even tighter, waiting to hear what they said.

Alby spread his arms out, palms up. "This place is called the Glade, all right? It's where we live, where we eat, where we sleep—we call ourselves the Gladers. That's all you—"

115 "Who sent me here?" Thomas demanded, fear finally giving way to anger. "How'd—"

But Alby's hand shot out before he could finish, grabbing Thomas by the shirt as he leaned forward on his knees. "Get up, shank, get up!" Alby stood, pulling Thomas with him.

120 Thomas finally got his feet under him, scared all over again. He backed against the tree, trying to get away from Alby, who stayed right in his face.

"No interruptions, boy!" Alby shouted. "Whacker, if we told you everything, you'd die on the spot, right after you klunked your pants. Baggers'd drag you off, and you ain't no good to us then, are ya?"

125 "I don't even know what you're talking about," Thomas said slowly, shocked at how steady his voice sounded.

Newt reached out and grabbed Alby by the shoulders. "Alby, lay off a bit. You're hurtin' more than helpin', ya know?"

Alby let go of Thomas's shirt and stepped back, his chest heaving with breaths. "Ain't got time to be nice, Greenbean. Old life's over, new life's begun. Learn the rules quick, listen, don't talk. You get me?"

130 Thomas looked over at Newt, hoping for help. Everything inside him churned and hurt; the tears that had yet to come burned his eyes. Newt nodded. "Greenie, you get him, right?" He nodded again.

Thomas fumed, wanted to punch somebody. But he simply said, "Yeah."

135 "Good that," Alby said. "First Day. That's what today is for you, shank. Night's comin', Runners'll be back soon. The Box came late today, ain't got time for the Tour. Tomorrow morning, right after the wakeup." He turned toward Newt. "Get him a bed, get him to sleep."

"Good that," Newt said.

140 Alby's eyes returned to Thomas, narrowing. "A few weeks, you'll be happy, shank. You'll be happy and helpin'. None of us knew jack on First Day, you neither. New life begins tomorrow." Alby turned and pushed his way through the crowd, then headed for the slanted wooden building in the corner. Most of the kids wandered away then, each one giving Thomas a lingering look before they walked off.

145 Thomas folded his arms, closed his eyes, took a deep breath. Emptiness ate away at his insides, quickly replaced by a sadness that hurt his heart. It was all too much—where was he? What was this place? Was it some kind of prison? If so, why had he been sent here, and for how long? The language was odd, and none of the boys seemed to care whether he lived or died. Tears threatened again to fill his eyes, but he refused to let them come.

150 "What did I do?" he whispered, not really meaning for anyone to hear him. "What did I do—why'd they send me here?"

Newt clapped him on the shoulder. "Greenie, what you're feelin', we've all felt it. We've all had First Day, come out of that dark box. Things are bad, they are, and they'll get much worse for ya soon, that's the truth. But down the road a piece, you'll be fightin' true and good. I can tell you're not a bloody sissy." "Is this a prison?" Thomas asked; he dug in the darkness of his thoughts, trying to find

155 a crack to his past.

"Done asked four questions, haven't ya?" Newt replied. "No good answers for ya, not yet, anyway. Best be quiet now, accept the change—morn comes tomorrow."

160 Thomas said nothing, his head sunk, his eyes staring at the cracked, rocky ground. A line of small-leafed weeds ran along the edge of one of the stone blocks, tiny yellow flowers peeping through as if searching for the sun, long disappeared behind the enormous walls of the Glade.

"Chuck'll be a good fit for ya," Newt said. "Wee little fat shank, but nice sap when all's said and done. Stay here, I'll be back."

165 Newt had barely finished his sentence when a sudden, piercing scream ripped through the air. High and shrill, the barely human shriek echoed across the stone courtyard; every kid in sight turned to look toward the source. Thomas felt his blood turn to icy slush as he realized that the horrible sound came from the wooden building.

170 Even Newt had jumped as if startled, his forehead creasing in concern.

"Shuck it," he said. "Can't the bloody Med-jacks handle that boy for ten minutes without needin' my help?" He shook his head and lightly kicked Thomas on the foot. "Find Chuckie, tell him he's in charge of your sleepin' arrangements." And then he turned and headed in the direction of the building, running.

- 175 Thomas slid down the rough face of the tree until he sat on the ground again; he shrank back against the bark and closed his eyes, wishing he could wake up from this terrible, terrible dream.

QUESTIONS: The following statements are either true or false. Tick [✓] the correct option, then justify it using rods as they appear in the text. Both parts are required for [1 mark]

1) The walls surrounding the courtyard were covered with ivy in some places.

☐	TRUE
☐	FALSE

Justification:
.....

2) Thomas found the words "Shank" and "Shuck" easy to understand.

☐	TRUE
☐	FALSE

Justification:
.....

3) The boy with black hair and angry eyes approached Thomas with a knife.

☐	TRUE
☐	FALSE

Justification:
.....

4) Alby mentioned that Thomas would be given a "Tour" of the place the next day.

☐	TRUE
☐	FALSE

Justification:
.....

CHAPTER 9

An odd moment of complete silence hung over the Glade. It was as if a supernatural wind had swept through the place and sucked out all sound. Newt had read the message aloud for those who couldn't see the paper, but instead of erupting in confusion, the Gladers all stood dumbfounded.

- 5 Thomas would've expected shouts and questions, arguments. But no one said a word; all eyes were glued to the girl, now lying there as if asleep, her chest rising and falling with shallow breaths. Contrary to their original conclusion, she was very much alive.

- 10 Newt stood, and Thomas hoped for an explanation, a voice of reason, a calming presence. But all he did was crumple the note in his fist, veins popping from his skin as he squeezed it, and Thomas's heart sank. He wasn't sure why, but the situation made him very uneasy.

Alby cupped his hands around his mouth. "Med-jacks!"

- 15 Thomas wondered what that word meant—he knew he'd heard it before—but then he was abruptly knocked aside. Two older boys were pushing their way through the crowd—one was tall with a buzz cut, his nose the size of a fat lemon. The other was short and actually had gray hair already conquering the black on the sides of his head. Thomas could only hope they'd make some sense of everything.

- 20 "So what do we do with her?" the taller one asked, his voice much higher pitched than Thomas expected.
"How should I know?" Alby said. "You two shanks are the Med-jacks—figure it out."

Med-jacks, Thomas repeated in his head, a light going off. *They must be the closest thing they have to doctors.* The short one was already on the ground, kneeling beside the girl, feeling for her pulse and leaning over to listen to her heartbeat.

- 25 "Who said Clint had first shot at her?" someone yelled from the crowd. There were several barks of laughter. "I'm next!"

How can they joke around? Thomas thought. The girl's half dead. He felt sick inside.

- 30 Alby's eyes narrowed; his mouth pulled into a tight grin that didn't look like it had anything to do with humor. "If anybody touches this girl," Alby said, "you're gonna spend the night sleepin' with the Grievors in the Maze. Banished, no questions." He paused, turning in a slow circle as if he wanted every person to see his face. "Ain't nobody better touch her! Nobody!"

It was the first time Thomas had actually liked hearing something come out of Alby's mouth.

35 The short guy who'd been referred to as a Med-jack—*Clint*, if the spectator had been correct—stood up from his examination. "She seems fine. Breathing okay, normal heartbeat. Though it's a bit slow. Your guess is as good as mine, but I'd say she's in a coma. Jeff, let's take her to the Homestead."

40 His partner, Jeff, stepped over to grab her by the arms while Clint took hold of her feet. Thomas wished he could do more than watch—with every passing second, he doubted more and more that what he'd said earlier was true. She *did* seem familiar; he felt a connection to her, though it was impossible to grasp in his mind. The idea made him nervous, and he looked around, as if someone might've heard his thoughts.

45 "On the count of three," Jeff, the taller Med-jack, was saying, his tall frame looking ridiculous bent in half, like a praying mantis. "One ... two ... three!"

They lifted her with a quick jerk, almost throwing her up in the air—she was obviously a lot lighter than they'd thought—and Thomas almost shouted at them to be more careful.

50 "Guess we'll have to see what she does," Jeff said to no one in particular. "We can feed her soupy stuff if she doesn't wake up soon." "Just watch her closely," Newt said. "Must be something special about her or they wouldn't have sent her here."

55 Thomas's gut clenched. He knew that he and the girl were connected somehow. They'd come a day apart, she seemed familiar, he had a consuming urge to become a Runner despite learning so many terrible things.... What did it all mean?

Alby leaned over to look in her face once more before they carried her off. "Put her next to Ben's room, and keep a watch on her day and night. Nothin' better happen without me knowing about it. I don't care if she talks in her sleep or takes a klunk—you come tell me."

60 "Yeah," Jeff muttered; then he and Clint shuffled off to the Homestead, the girl's body bouncing as they went, and the other Gladers finally started to talk about it, scattering as theories bubbled through the air.

65 Thomas watched all this in mute contemplation. This strange connection he felt wasn't his alone. The not-so-veiled accusations thrown at him only a few minutes before proved that the others suspected something, too, but what? He was already completely confused—being blamed for things only made him feel worse. As if reading his thoughts, Alby walked over and grabbed him by the shoulder.

"You ain't never seen her before?" he asked.

70 Thomas hesitated before he answered. "Not ... no, not that I remember." He hoped his shaky voice didn't betray his doubts. What if he did know her somehow? What would that mean?

"You're sure?" Newt prodded, standing right behind Alby.

75 "I ... no, I don't think so. Why are you grilling me like this?" All Thomas wanted right then was for night to fall, so he could be alone, go to sleep.

Alby shook his head, then turned back to Newt, releasing his grip on Thomas's shoulder. "Something's whacked. Call a Gathering."

80 He said it quietly enough that Thomas didn't think anyone else heard, but it sounded ominous. Then the leader and Newt walked off, and Thomas was relieved to see Chuck coming his way.

"Chuck, what's a Gathering?"

He looked proud to know the answer. "It's when the Keepers meet—they only call one when something weird or terrible happens."

85 "Well, I guess today fits both of those categories pretty well." Thomas's stomach rumbled, interrupting his thoughts. "I didn't finish my breakfast—can we get something somewhere? I'm starving."

Chuck looked up at him, his eyebrows raised. "Seeing that chick wig out made you hungry? You must be more psycho than I thought."

90 Thomas sighed. "Just get me some food."

95 The kitchen was small but had everything one needed to make a hearty meal. A big oven, a microwave, a dishwasher, a couple of tables. It seemed old and run-down but clean. Seeing the appliances and the familiar layout made Thomas feel as if memories—real, solid memories—were right on the edge of his mind. But again, the essential parts were missing—names, faces, places, events. It was maddening.

"Take a seat," Chuck said. "I'll get you something—but I swear this is the last time. Just be glad Frypan isn't around—he hates it when we raid his fridge."

100 Thomas was relieved they were alone. As Chuck fumbled about with dishes and things from the fridge, Thomas pulled out a wooden chair from a small plastic table and sat down. "This is crazy. How can this be for real? Somebody sent us here. Somebody evil."

Chuck paused. "Quit complaining. Just accept it and don't think about it."

105 "Yeah, right." Thomas looked out a window. This seemed a good time to bring up one of the million questions bouncing through his brain. "So where does the electricity come from?"

"Who cares? I'll take it."

What a surprise, Thomas thought. No answer.

110 Chuck brought two plates with sandwiches and carrots over to the table. The bread was thick and white, the carrots a sparkling, bright orange. Thomas's stomach begged him to hurry; he picked up his sandwich and started devouring it.

"Oh, man," he mumbled with a full mouth. "At least the food is good."

115 Thomas was able to eat the rest of his meal without another word from Chuck. And he was lucky that the kid didn't feel like talking, because despite the complete weirdness of everything that had happened within Thomas's known reach of memory, he felt calm again. His stomach full, his energy replenished, his mind thankful for a few moments of silence, he decided that from then on he'd quit whining and deal with things.

120 After his last bite, Thomas sat back in his chair. "So, Chuck," he said as he wiped his mouth with a napkin. "What do I have to do to become a Runner?"

"Not that again." Chuck looked up from his plate, where he'd been picking at the crumbs. He let out a low, gurgly burp that made Thomas cringe.

"Alby said I'd start my trials soon with the different Keepers. So, when do I get a shot with the Runners?" Thomas waited patiently to get some sort of actual information from Chuck.

125 Chuck rolled his eyes dramatically, leaving no doubt as to how stupid an idea he thought that would be.

"They should be back in a few hours. Why don't you ask them?"

130 Thomas ignored the sarcasm, digging deeper. "What do they do when they get back every night? What's up with the concrete building?"

"Maps. They meet right when they get back, before they forget anything."

Maps? Thomas was confused. "But if they're trying to make a map, don't they have paper to write on while they're out there?" Maps. This intrigued him more than anything else he'd heard in a while. It was the first thing suggesting a potential solution to their predicament.

135 "Of course they do, but there's still stuff they need to talk about and discuss and analyze and all that klunk. Plus"—the boy rolled his eyes—"they spend most of their time running, not writing. That's why they're called Runners."

140 Thomas thought about the Runners and the maps. Could the Maze really be so massively huge that even after two years they still hadn't found a way out? It seemed impossible. But then, he remembered what Alby said about the moving walls. What if all of them were sentenced to live here until they died?

Sentenced. The word made him feel a rush of panic, and the spark of hope the meal had brought him fizzled with a silent hiss.

145 "Chuck, what if we're all criminals? I mean—what if we're murderers or something?"

"Huh?" Chuck looked up at him as if he were a crazy person. "Where did that happy thought come from?"

150 "Think about it. Our memories are wiped. We live inside a place that seems to have no way out, surrounded by bloodthirsty monster-guards. Doesn't that sound like a prison to you?" As he said it out loud, it sounded more and more possible. Nausea trickled into his chest.

"I'm probably twelve years old, dude." Chuck pointed to his chest. "At the most, thirteen. You really think I did something that would send me to prison for the rest of my life?"

155 "I don't care what you did or didn't do. Either way, you *have* been sent to a prison. Does this seem like a vacation to you?" *Oh, man*, Thomas thought. *Please let me be wrong.*

160 Chuck thought for a moment. "I don't know. It's better than—"

"Yeah, I know, living in pile of klunk." Thomas stood up and pushed his chair back under the table. He liked Chuck, but trying to have an intelligent conversation with him was impossible. Not to mention frustrating and irritating. "Go make yourself another sandwich—I'm going exploring. See ya tonight."

165 He stepped out of the kitchen and into the courtyard before Chuck could offer to join him. The Glade had gone back to business as usual—people working the jobs, the doors of the Box closed, sun shining down. Any signs of a crazed girl bearing notes of doom had disappeared.

170 Having had his tour cut short, he decided to take a walk around the Glade on his own and get a better look and feel for the place. He headed out for the northeast corner, toward the big rows of tall green cornstalks that looked ready to harvest. There was other stuff, too: tomatoes, lettuce, peas, a lot more that Thomas didn't recognize.

175 He took a deep breath, loving the fresh whiff of dirt and growing plants. He was almost positive the smell would bring back some sort of pleasant memory, but nothing came. As he got closer, he saw that several boys were weeding and picking in the small fields. One waved at him with a smile. An actual smile.

Maybe this place won't be so bad after all, Thomas thought. *Not everyone here could be a jerk*. He took another deep breath of the pleasant air and pulled himself out of his thoughts—there was a lot more he wanted to see.

180 Next was the southeast corner, where shabbily built wooden fences held in several cows, goats, sheep, and pigs. No horses, though. *That sucks*, Thomas thought. *Riders* would definitely be faster than *Runners*. As he approached, he figured he must've dealt with animals in his life before the Glade. Their smell, their sound—they seemed very familiar to him.

185 The smell wasn't quite as nice as the crops, but still, he imagined it could've been a lot worse. As he explored the area, he realized more and more how well the Gladers kept up the place, how clean it was. He was impressed by how organized they must be, how hard they all must work. He could only imagine how truly horrific a place like this could be if everyone went lazy and stupid.

Finally, he made it to the southwest quarter, near the forest.

190 He was approaching the sparse, skeletal trees in front of the denser woods when he was startled by a blur of movement at his feet, followed by a hurried set of clacking sounds. He looked down just in time to see the sun flash off something metallic—a toy rat—scurrying past him and toward the small forest. The thing was already ten feet away by the time he realized it wasn't a rat at all—it was more like a lizard, with at least six legs scuttling the long silver torso along.

195 A beetle blade. *It's how they watch us*, Alby had said.

He caught a gleam of red light sweeping the ground in front of the creature as if it came from its eyes. Logic told him it had to be his mind playing tricks on him, but he swore he saw the word *WICKED* scrawled down its rounded back in large green letters. Something so strange had to be investigated.

200 Thomas sprinted after the scurrying spy, and in a matter of seconds he entered the thick copse of trees and the world became dark.

QUESTIONS: Answer the following questions:

1) Where did Clint and Jeff take the girl? (Line 1-40)

2) What did Alby tell the Med-jacks to do after putting her next to Ben's room? (Line 41-60)

3) What is a Gathering, according to Chuck? (Line 76-85)

4) What else did Thomas see in the northeast corner of the Glade? (Line 165-175)