

# The Maze Runner



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES DASHNER

One of six children, James Dashner was born and raised in a small town in Georgia. As a child, Dashner was an avid reader of sci-fi and fantasy novels and wrote some of his first stories on his parents' old typewriter. After studying accounting at Brigham Young University, Dashner worked briefly in finance before devoting his time to writing fiction. He achieved moderate success with his novels in *The Jimmy Fincher Saga* and *The 13th Reality* series, and Dashner then began work on *The Maze Runner*. His most popular book, *The Maze Runner* stayed on the *New York Times* Best Sellers list for weeks. As of 2015, he lives in the Rocky Mountains with his family.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Since *The Maze Runner* takes place in a distant, fictional future, the novel does not directly refer to any historical events. Instead, Dashner makes reference to a fictional environmental disaster that threatens to annihilate all life on Earth. As such, Dashner may be responding to recent natural disasters like the 2010 Haiti earthquake and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. The novel also questions the ethics of human experimentation, which recalls the United States' long history of performing secret experiments on people. For example, in the Guatemala Syphilis Experiment, the United States Public Health Services infected people in Guatemala with syphilis in order to test the effective of antibiotics. Possibly having this history in mind, Dashner depicts scientists experimenting on children for the supposed "greater good" of humanity.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

James Dashner lists Orson Scott Card's 1985 sci-fi novel *Ender's Game* as an influence for *The Maze Runner*. Like *Ender's Game*, *The Maze Runner* tells the story of adults raising exceptionally bright children in extremely brutal and dangerous environments in order to prepare them to save humanity from destruction. *The Maze Runner* also belongs to the recent post-apocalyptic trend in young adult fiction. In the dystopian society of *The Hunger Games*, the most popular and successful novel in this trend, teenagers are forced to compete in death matches. Like *The Hunger Games*, *The Maze Runner* follows the conventions of the trend by depicting heroic teenagers struggling with the challenges of adolescence while fighting to save the world from tyrannical adults. *The Maze Runner* is also the first in a series that includes the sequels *The Scorch Trials* and

*The Death Cure* along with the prequel *The Kill Order*.

### KEY FACTS

- Full Title: *The Maze Runner*
- When Written: 2006
- Where Written: USA
- When Published: 2009
- Literary Period: Young Adult Post-Apocalyptic Fiction
- Genre: Young Adult, Science Fiction
- Setting: The Glade and the Maze
- Climax: Thomas and other Gladers fight off the Grievers and find the exit to the Maze
- Antagonist: The Grievers and the Creators
- Point of View: Close Third-Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Blockbuster:** *The Maze Runner* was adapted into a 2014 film of the same name. The popularity of the film has ensured that the book's sequel, *The Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials*, will be made into a movie.

**Prequel:** For those interested in the events leading up to the story in *The Maze Runner*, Dashner wrote a prequel entitled *The Kill Order*, which tells the story of the sun flares that hit Earth and threatened to wipe out humanity.



## PLOT SUMMARY

In the dark of an elevator, a teenaged boy awakes with no memories other than that his name is Thomas. When the elevator comes to a halt, the doors open and Thomas finds himself surrounded by around fifty teenaged boys. Their leader, a boy in his late-teens named Alby, welcomes him to the **Glade**. Surrounded by extremely high stone walls covered in thick ivy, the Glade is a large square piece of land with a few wood and concrete buildings. In each of the surrounding four walls, there is a narrow opening.

Over the course of the next few days, Thomas learns that behind the walls is the **Maze** – a labyrinthine structure full of Grievers. Grievers are violent mechanical creatures that only come out at night. Since the openings to the Maze, what the Gladers call Doors, close at night, the Grievers cannot get into the Glade. During the day, a few of the boys, the Runners, navigate the Maze in order to find an exit. On the same day every month, the elevator brings a new male arrival. But on the

# Maze Runner Study Guide

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