

Readings:

Excerpt: Chapter 6 of *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner

Newt stepped forward and dug his hands into the thick ivy, spreading several vines away from the wall to reveal a dust-frosted window, a square about two feet wide. It was dark at the moment, as if it had been painted black.

“What’re we looking for?” Thomas whispered.

“Hold your undies, boy. One’ll be comin’ along soon enough.”

A minute passed, then two. Several more. Thomas fidgeted on his feet, wondering how Newt could stand there, perfectly patient and still, staring into nothing but darkness.

Then it changed.

Glimmers of an eerie light shone through the window; it cast a wavering spectrum of colors on Newt’s body and face, as if he stood next to a lighted swimming pool. Thomas grew perfectly still, squinting, trying to make out what was on the other side. A thick lump grew in his throat. What is that? he thought.

“Out there’s the Maze,” Newt whispered, eyes wide as if in a trance. “Everything we do—our whole life, Greenie—revolves around the Maze. Every lovin’ second of every lovin’ day we spend in honor of the Maze, tryin’ to solve somethin’ that’s not shown us it has a bloody solution, ya know? And we want to show ya why it’s not to be messed with. Show ya why them buggin’ walls close shut every night. Show ya why you should never, never find your butt out there.”

Newt stepped back, still holding on to the ivy vines. He gestured for Thomas to take his place and look through the window.

Thomas did, leaning forward until his nose touched the cool surface of the glass. It took a second for his eyes to focus on the moving object on the other side, to look past the grime and dust and see what Newt wanted him to see. And when he did, he felt his breath catch in his throat, like an icy wind had blown down there and frozen the air solid.

A large, bulbous creature the size of a cow but with no distinct shape twisted and seethed along the ground in the corridor outside. It climbed the opposite wall, then leaped at the thick-glassed window with a loud thump. Thomas shrieked before he could stop himself, jerked away from the window—but the thing bounced backward, leaving the glass undamaged.

Thomas sucked in two huge breaths and leaned in once again. It was too dark to make out clearly, but odd lights flashed from an unknown source, revealing blurs of silver spikes and glistening flesh. Wicked instrument-tipped appendages protruded from its body like arms: a saw blade, a set of shears, long rods whose purpose could only be guessed.

The creature was a horrific mix of animal and machine, and seemed to realize it was being observed, seemed to know what lay inside the walls of the Glade, seemed to want to get inside and feast on human flesh. Thomas felt an icy terror blossom in his chest, expand like a tumor, making it hard to breathe. Even with the memory wipe, he felt sure he’d never seen something so truly awful.

He stepped back, the courage he'd felt the previous evening melting away.

"What is that thing?" he asked. Something shivered in his gut, and he wondered if he'd ever be able to eat again.

"Grievors, we call 'em," Newt answered. "Nasty bugger, eh? Just be glad the Grievors only come out at night. Be thankful for these walls."

Thomas swallowed, wondering how he could ever go out there. His desire to become a Runner had taken a major blow. But he had to do it. Somehow he knew he had to do it. It was such an odd thing to feel, especially after what he'd just seen.

Newt looked at the window absently. "Now you know what bloody lurks in the Maze, my friend. Now you know this isn't joke time. You've been sent to the Glade, Greenie, and we'll be expectin' ya to survive and help us do what we've been sent here to do."

"And what's that?" Thomas asked, even though he was terrified to hear the answer.

Newt turned to look him dead in the eye. The first traces of dawn had crept up on them, and Thomas could see every detail of Newt's face, his skin tight, his brow creased.

"Find our way out, Greenie," Newt said. "Solve the buggin' Maze and find our way home."

Excerpt: Chapter 1 – ‘Minho,’ in *The Maze Cutter* by James Dashner

The Orphan stood straight and rigid behind the parapet of the fortress wall, his rifle resting upon his shoulder, its barrel aimed at the cloudy sky. As he had for the last eleven years, he stared at the endless fields that served as a waterless moat around his homeland. It was a dead land, all life and vegetation killed with poison so that nothing might obstruct the view of the Orphans. The waste lay dull and gray, like a cemetery without tombstones, as vast as the ocean.

The Orphan had no name.

Thirty feet away, to the north, stood another statue with no name, her shoulders square, her head shaved, her body sheathed in an artillery suit. A literal human missile. To the south, thirty feet away, there was another Orphan. This one didn't stand, however. This one sat upon a turret of metal, a machine of such firepower that it could destroy the entire wall upon which it rested. That Orphan had no name.

This was what they'd been told their whole lives, anyway. From the day they were born, taken from mothers who had the Flare. Although he obviously couldn't remember it, the Orphan knew that he'd been tested over and over, in every way imaginable, to make sure that he, too, was not infected. Even so, he'd been quarantined for five years, along with others like him, growing, learning, training. Then more tests. These, he remembered, although the day the results came in were a bit foggy. Not that it mattered. Those results had come in negative. Otherwise, he wouldn't exist. He'd have been thrown in the same pits as his mother, burned for one hundred days.

The Orphan's name was Minho, even though the Orphan had no name.

He couldn't tell anyone, of course. Not once in his lifetime had another person called him Minho. Even now, thinking of it, he felt a chill of fright that someone might know, that someone could read his mind, that the Grief Bearers would be informed that he'd blasphemed his calling in life by giving himself a name. The punishment was not in doubt, and it would be swift. There'd be no trial. So it had to remain a secret. No one could ever know. But his fingers gripped the rifle tightly and his lips pressed together and he breathed a little heavier, holding on to this one thing.

His name was Minho.

Despite the best efforts of the Remnant Nation, whispers abounded amongst the Orphans about the days when the Flare spread across the earth and devastated the human race. No one could possibly determine which stories were true and which were mere legends. Like all things, most of them probably lay somewhere in the middle. The tales of WICKED, tales of Cranks, tales of cures, tales of heroism and villainy. Tales about the Maze and those who escaped it. Most of it was a muddy blur on a window, impossible to decipher shapes that made sense. But there was one story that stood above the rest, and from that tale of undaunted bravery, Minho had chosen his secret name.

In his mind, he looked exactly like Minho of the mythical Gladers, thought like him, talked like him, dreamt like him. Fought like him. In his heart, he was worthy of the title.

Minho.

But, courage or not, it had to remain a secret until things changed.

A horn's deep, baritone growl sounded from the closest watchtower, sweeping away the silence and making Minho's jaw tremble from the brassy vibration rumbling through the air. His musings vanished, replaced with the alertness his training had mastered. He shifted his feet, bent his knees, knelt against the low wall of the parapet, his rifle locked into position on the top edge. Taking his breaths according to the litany of calm he'd been taught since the age of five, he peered into the distant, flat fields, waiting for what had prompted the warning from the watchtower.

Several minutes passed. Nothing but mud and dirt and rotted vegetation for miles.

Patience. No one had patience like the Orphans."

"A figure appeared on the horizon. It approached rapidly, and it wasn't long before Minho could see enough to know. A person, on a horse, galloping closer and closer. A man, dressed in rags, unarmed, hair blowing all over the place like a mad pit of skinny snakes. The man rode the horse in a beeline, coming directly toward the spot beneath Minho's position. When the stranger came within a half kilometer, he slowed his animal to a trot, and then to a walk, and then stopped altogether, about eighty meters away. The man held his hands up, surely knowing the extreme weaponry that was aimed at him, and shouted.

"I'm not infected! I've been tested, quarantined myself for six months! No symptoms! Please! I swear it! I'll stay here until you can see that I'm not sick!"

"Minho listened to the man's words, though they didn't matter. They didn't matter in the least. Like most everything else under the reign of the Remnant Nation, the outcome of this scenario had already been determined. The Flare was their devil, the Cure their God. He readied himself, knowing he didn't have the courage to disobey protocol, not yet, not for a long time to come.

"Please!" the man pleaded. "I'm as clean—"

A single shot rang out, its fierce jolt of sound echoing in all directions.

The stranger, a small wisp of smoke leaking from the new hole in his head, slumped off the horse and fell into the mud with a wet splat. Minho breathed in the smell of gunpowder, feeling pride at the accuracy of his aim. Feeling regret that it had been needed.

The Orphan stood back up, came to attention, positioned the rifle on his shoulder, as he had done faithfully for eleven years.

The Orphan had no name.

Excerpt: Chapter Six — ‘Isaac,’ in *The Maze Cutter* by James Dashner

A city. A real city, all broken glass and cement and wood and metal, each element dully reflecting the sunshine with a tired and lifeless lethargy. Although Isaac had never seen such a place alive and bustling, he could tell that it was dead all the same. Where once humans had roamed and ruled, nature was conquering its way back in. The closer they got to shore, the more trees and plants and vines he saw in places where they didn't seem to belong.

“This was Los Angeles,” Kletter said. “I mean, still is, I guess. City of Dead Angels.”

“They stood on a trash-strewn road, as cracked and worn as the pier. Abandoned chunks of metal and glass with four wheels—sometimes more, sometimes less—lay scattered like thrown toys wherever you looked. Cars. Trucks. Motorcycles. Bicycles. Isaac’s parents and grandparents had described the old world to him ad nauseam, but that didn’t lessen the impact of seeing it for real. Spectacular.

Buildings spiked the area, growing bigger and broader and taller the farther away from the beach they stood. All of them bore marks of abandonment, destruction, erosion, decay—countless broken windows, charred remains of fire, vegetation growing in places it had no business growing. In the distance, towered a majestic cluster of the main part of the city, impossible structures loomed over the land, their tips almost touching the...

“Skyscrapers,” Isaac said. “Those are skyscrapers.” It must’ve sounded dumb, but awe filled him top to bottom.

Ms. Cowan, Old Man Frypan, even Wilhelm and Alvarez—the two members of Congress who’d been convinced to come—were just as taken aback as the youngsters, mouths open but speechless.

Isaac glanced at his friends, enjoyed seeing their wonder.”

Sadina and Trish, arm in arm, rotated in a slow circle, taking in the sights. Miyoko stared at one building in particular—a massive thing that looked like the arm of a god—as if she were determined to analyze each and every structure, one by one. Dominic stood inches from her, his eyes darting to all kinds of places, perhaps worried he might miss something grand. The west-siders who’d joined them, and become honorary east-siders in Isaac’s opinion—Carson, Jackie, and Lacey—were no different in their awe. Carson in particular, giant of a man that he was, seemed to shrink into a wide-eyed child, given a room-full of toys. Jackie, absently running a hand down the length of her long braid of hair, also turned in a circle, trying to take in everything at once. Lacey, the shortest one of the bunch, had her arms folded in defiance, as if she refused to believe the city around them was actually real.

“This is insane,” Trish whispered. “I can’t believe my own eyeballs.”

Dominic replied, “I can’t believe your own eyeballs, either. Wow.”

“How did a place like this even function?” Jackie asked. “All the people . . . I mean, I can’t even imagine the logistics of . . .” Her voice trailed off.

Miyoko held her arms up to the sky then let them flop back down. “Our grandparents held back on us. This is way cooler than I ever imagined.

Old Man Frypan perked up at that. “It’s not like we were livin’ the good life. The world had already gone to Hell in a bucket when we were kids. It wasn’t like we wanted to sit around the fire and talk about the good ole days. The good ole days shat the bed long before I shat my first diaper.”

Kletter let out a motherly sigh as if Dominic had made a fart joke. “I think we’d all be blown away if we could’ve seen it before the Flare. Imagine all those places filled with light, the air with music and car horns, people walking shoulder to shoulder, eating and laughing. I’d give my left foot for time travel.”

Her conjuring of the past just made the present that much quieter and more empty. Besides the birds, besides the distant susurrations of the ocean, besides the rustle of wind in the tree leaves, the city was a tomb.

“Are there any... people here?” Miyoko asked.”

Cranks, Isaac thought. She meant Cranks.

Kletter sighed again; maybe that was just how the woman breathed. “We don’t really know what happened here. A lot of flood damage, a lot of bones, a lot of nothing. But no people. They all died or left, I guess, decades ago. It’s why my people set up camp on top of a mountain nearby. Seemed like we had the whole place to ourselves. Although it’s not much of a place. You go to some cities, they actually have things like grocery stores and hospitals up and running. At least that’s what we hear. That’s not for us.”

“What is for you?” Alvarez asked, a quiet fellow who hardly ever spoke.”

Kletter cut him a glare that made Isaac think the man had said something wrong. “Sadina. All of you. Why in Earth’s name do you think I just went through hell and back to get you people here? And . . .” She cut off abruptly and looked away. They all knew what she didn’t have to say. She’d killed her own friends, associates, whomever they’d been, to accomplish the task of getting here with residents of the island in tow.

“Never mind,” she finally said. “You all came by your own choice. You’ll understand a lot more once we get to the Villa. It’s about two days’ hike from here.”

Isaac and his friends spent a moment exchanging glances. No one said a word, but eyes attempted to communicate things, although Isaac wasn’t quite sure what. The air had taken on an ominous, heavy feel, as if they’d been so preoccupied with getting off the ocean that the prospect of what awaited them had only just now occurred. That was, of course, far from the truth. Isaac had spent many sleepless nights wondering about the old world and the many terrors that resided there. And now, there was here.

Ms. Cowan spoke up. “We’ve spent our whole lives hearing about what happens to people who caught the Flare. Cranks, whatever you wanna call them. Do we have to worry about people like that leaping out of these dark buildings? Coming out of the sewers? Jumping out of trees?”

Those questions gave Isaac a shiver that started at his feet and shimmied itself all the way up to his shoulders. But he was glad someone finally put a voice to his fears. He wasn’t the only one who looked at Old Man Frypan, his face a mask of mystery. What must he be thinking, the only one in their company who’d had the pleasure of hanging out with Cranks?

Kletter wearily shook her head. “You all think I’m a wealth of knowledge, don’t you? I know maybe ten percent more about the world than you do, if that. But as far as I do know, in this city at least, Cranks are a thing of the past. I’ve never seen one. Not a single one.”

“So we’re safe,” Dominic declared.

That made Kletter bark a laugh that echoed off the decayed walls of the closest buildings, and she went on laughing for a solid five seconds. Then the smile swept right off her face like she’d wiped it with a rag.

“You’re not safe, boy,” she said. “You’re never gonna be safe again. Now let’s get walking.”

Excerpt: Chapter Nine – ‘Minho,’ in *The Maze Cutter* by James Dashner

“The Orphan had devoured the food—beef, potatoes, beans, corn, cinnamon bread—offering only grunts and nods or shakes of the head as she talked his ear off, barely touching her own food. She’d lived alone for years since her husband died, and before that they’d lived most of their adult lives alone, loving each other and tilling the land, hunting the forests for game. This only added to the fairy-tale nature of the whole thing, but the Orphan mostly concentrated on shoving more food down his throat.”

“And now, here they were. The Orphan, tilted over on the couch, too stuffed to move, and Roxy sitting all prim and proper on her chair. Not for the first time, he wondered why he’d trusted her so much, so quickly—especially in a world drenched with mistrust and sorrow. He didn’t know for certain, but his heart told him that he’d had no choice. That he’d reached the end of his rope. Kind of like a boy named Kit...

“You ready to tell me your name yet?” she asked him.

He gave her a quizzical look.

“I’ve asked you several times since you arrived, and, well . . . Don’t take this the wrong way—you seem like a very nice young man—but you make lots of sounds and most of them aren’t words. Now, I don’t expect you to do a whole lot of talkin’ the way you stumbled into my yard barely alive and skinny as a toothpick, but I would at least like to know your name.”

The Orphan forced himself to sit up straight on the couch, wincing a little as the movement squeezed his full stomach. “I have a long way to go. All the way to Alaska.”

Roxy nodded approvingly. “Not quite what I asked, but thank you for finally telling me something about yourself.” She paused, nodding to herself. “Alaska, huh? May I ask why?”

Trust only went so far, no matter how much food was offered. “I’m sorry, miss, but I can’t do that. I just need to get up there. I know it’s a long, long way.”

“Roxy, please. You will only call me Roxy—none of this ‘miss’ business, ya hear me?”

The Orphan merely nodded.

After a weighty sigh, she continued. “Listen to me, carefully. I have been alone and sad and scared of the world for what seems like an entire lifetime since my husband died. He was a good man, a wonderful man, and I miss him so much my heart feels like a beating wound. You came here because you’re supposed to come here. I know it like I know I have two feet and nine toes—don’t ask. You need to go to Alaska? Well, son, I have a powerful, working truck and thirty gallons of fuel and plenty of things to carry food and water. There ain’t no buses or trains so you’re gonna have to do with this old lady as your partner. This old lady and her truck.”

The Orphan blinked. The Orphan didn’t know what to say. The Orphan knew that he would accept her offer but could only manage a nod.

“Splendid. But first you gotta tell me your name, son. We won’t survive very long if I don’t even know your damn name.”

A few seconds passed, but only a few.

“My name is Minhó.”

“Now that’s more like it!” She slapped her leg. “Now tell me something about your past life—I don’t care what, just a tidbit—and then we’ll think about what we need to do. Come on, now, don’t be shy. Just one itsy-bitsy thing about the man named Minhó.”

This woman was strange and used a lot of words and he really liked her. “I . . . was trained to be a guard on a wall. I’d . . . kill people if they came too close. And once, I saved a boy from getting murdered.”

Roxy blinked. “That’s very interesting. Not quite what I expected, honestly. Which is all the better—man, are we gonna have some doozy conversations around the old campfire.” She stood up. “Alright, Minhó. Let’s get packin’ shall we? That truck is itchin’ for a road trip.”

Excerpt: Chapter One — ‘Alexandra,’ in *The Maze Cutter* by James Dashner

Bad things come in threes. That was a philosophy as old as time. And they were three, the Godhead—Evolved; thoughts faster than a lifetime of words spoken at once; machine-like control of the senses, the physiology, the chemicals, the endorphins, all of it; the mental capacity of a universe to suck in all light and knowledge. They had Evolved, of that there could be no doubt. But she—yes, she—was beyond them, beyond the both of them combined. This, Alexandra knew. But for now, they were three.

Her mind flashed, memories upon memories, all in an instant. The Flare and its many variants, building minds to fix the unfixable. Maybe it had all served a purpose, millennia of terrifying trinities, preparing the human race for what had arisen, what had come into being to eradicate terror itself, by any means necessary.

The Godhead.

Hell, it worked for her.

“Goddess Romanov?”

Dammit. She’d hoped for more time, more time-wasting. She turned away from the beauties of her city and faced the man who’d spoken her name. A tall, gangly fellow, he always reminded her of a walking tree branch, the fact that his joints didn’t crack and pop and splinter with every step a small shock to her subconscious.

“What’s going on, Flint?” The man’s name wasn’t Flint, but she called him that for the sole reason that she wanted to. He seemed . . . lessened by it, and that was okay. Ideal, even.

There’s a kink in the rotation of pilgrims.” His voice was like the spill of raw ore from a wheelbarrow. “I have the exact numbers here, but by morning we’ll be off by at least eight percent in every part of the city. Everything will be thrown off.”

Alexandra studied him, used the training she'd received in the Flaring discipline. Every tick of his muscles, every shift of his eyes, every movement, no matter how subtle, fed into the hyper-function of her thought processes. He was avoiding what he really came here to say.

“Spit it out, Flint. What the hell happened?”

He drooped a slow blink, let out a sigh of resignation, realizing how futile it was to hide his emotions behind what was—to her—a see-through mask. “Seven pilgrims were killed at the dye pools. It was done with . . . violence.”

“Violence?”

“Immense violence.” He'd been slowly raising his clipboard and charts, readying to share data. But now he dropped it to his side. “Four men. Two women. One child. A boy. They were—”

“Hollowed,” she said. “They were hollowed, weren't they?”

His face had paled a bit. “Yes, Goddess.”

Excerpt: Chapter Three — ‘Isaac,’ in *The Maze Cutter* by James Dashner

Isaac’s friends reacted the same way to the approaching ship as he had. Quietly, somberly. Isaac sank to the rocky ledge and sat down, dangling his legs over the side of the cliff. Of course he had ideas of what a large seagoing vessel looked like—the aging and dying generations of the island had done a good job of passing down the ways and walks of life in the old world. But hearing the description of a shark and bumping into one while diving for clams were too vastly different experiences.

He felt a chilling fear, mostly of the unknown.

The boat was big, probably twenty meters long and half as much wide. Although originally painted white and filled with chrome railings, the thing looked as far from brand new as Old Man Frypan. The entire vessel was filthy, paint half gone to scratches and collisions, patches of rust everywhere. Most of the windows had been cracked or busted to shreds, teeth of glass clinging to their roots in some places. Altogether it looked like it had floated its way through several wars, hurricanes, and hailstorms.

Who was on that ship? Who had blown that ominous horn?

No one spoke for several minutes as it approached, ever so slowly, propelled by nothing but waves. Isaac had a feeling that the answers to both his questions were about to be answered. Finally, Trish broke the silence.

“There’s something on the back deck. Lots of somethings.” The pronouncement had a foreboding tone to it, as if she knew exactly what it was but didn’t want to say.

“Yeah,” Sadina added. “It looks like . . .”

One tiny word came out of Dominic’s mouth, but it said more than the others.

“Oh.”

Isaac had to stand up to see what they were talking about. He did, barely maintaining his balance with a little help from Jackie, who grabbed his upper arm.

“Not a good time to go jumping, big fella,” she said. “Or falling.”

“Thanks,” Isaac replied absentmindedly, straining his eyes past the sunshine and sparkling glare from the water to see what the “somethings” were. It didn’t take long to make out. At first he saw lumpy, oblong shapes, then noticed clothes, hair, hands. Bodies lay scattered across the deck, eight or nine of them. The ship was too far away to determine their condition.

“Maybe they’re asleep,” Dominic whispered.”

The suggestion was so ludicrous yet full of innocent hope that Isaac almost hugged the guy. No one wanted that ship to bump into their island while full of dead people. It was a horrifying thought on a hundred levels. Not the least of which was remembering the old virus that had driven their grandparents here. Who knew if their descendants were also immune? They’d heard stories all their life, but most of them assumed the Flare was something they’d never have to worry about. Not for a few more generations, anyway.

“Someone blew that horn,” Miyoko said. “They can’t all be dead.”

“Maybe it’s on a timer,” Trish suggested. “Or goes off automatically when it gets a certain distance from land.”

No one responded and no one needed to. There was at least one living person on that boat, and they all knew it.

Sadina cleared her throat and then spoke, more rattled than Isaac had ever seen her. “I don’t know which is worse. People dead or people alive.”

“What do you mean?” Dominic asked.

She gave him a sharp look that Isaac didn’t think he deserved.

“What do you think? A boat full of dead people can’t possibly be a good thing. But if some of them are alive, who knows what they have that might hurt us? Weapons we’ve never even heard of, diseases we’ve never been exposed to . . . I don’t know. But look at that thing. There’s no way it’s some kind of rescue ship—and even if it were, I don’t think we want to be rescued!”

“What do we do?” Isaac asked. “It’s definitely going to hit the cliff. Or twist sideways and float along the peninsula until it runs up on the beaches.”

“I’ll tell you what we do,” Dominic replied. “We run our guts out getting back to town and we tell the Congress that we have some visitors. Some dead ones and maybe live ones.”

It might’ve been the most reasonable thing he’d ever said.

Excerpt: Chapter Three — ‘Alexandra,’ in *The Maze Cutter* by James Dashner

As usual, a crowd of pilgrims had gathered at the fortified entrance to the caverns below. An ominous crowd, to be sure. Some were naked, with slashes upon their backs, wounds they’d received of their own choosing. Others were dressed in the robes of their religion, its coarse wool the color of old mustard. A few even dressed in the false furs of the Grieving, their foreheads surgically adorned with two spikes on either side, slanted toward the sky like the horns of a beast.

A shudder ran through Alexandra’s body. These people disgusted her, made her feel an illness that her very own disease could never match. And yet, by all accounts, they were free of lower virus strains that took away all rationality. Many, many tests had proven so. They followed their order with mostly normal brain functions, strived to walk the pathway of the Maze by their own free will and choice. She felt that the definition of insanity needed to be updated. Quite literally. She made a mental note to pursue the matter with whomever and wherever dictionaries were maintained. But one thing Alexandra knew for certain:

She was not insane.

The Maze pilgrims spotted the Evolutionary Guard well after the guards had spotted the pilgrims. It was always this way, which is why they’d been chosen as her protectors. The Godhead wasn’t any safer from these fanatics than other people, perhaps even less so. By the time the wailing and the singing and the mad rush to touch a member of the Godhead erupted in a chaotic flurry, the guards were in perfect position. As always, their orders were to avoid seriously injuring the people unless no other alternative presented itself.

The filthy, sweaty, bloody bodies pressed in from all directions, their wild shouts and wails concussing the dawn air until it all blended into one nightmarish shriek. But no one got close. The guards maneuvered perfectly, utilizing their Launch Beams when necessary. The electric buzz of the Beams, the ozone smell, always served as a comfort to Alexandra. She was a member of the Godhead, and no one—friend, foe, or worshipper—could ever bring her harm.

Excerpt: Prologue — ‘Thomas,’ in *The Maze Cutter* by James Dashner

Thomas sat upon his favorite ledge on his favorite cliff, looking out at the vastness, the forever, the endless void of the ocean. The air was clean and fresh, bitten with the tang of fish and the sweetness of decomposing life. Small wisps of spray tickled his skin, cool against the heat of the sun directly overhead. He closed his eyes, blanking out the horizons that daunted him, made him feel as if he’d been stranded on the moon. Mars. Another galaxy. Heaven. Hell. What did it matter? He shifted on the jutting edge of rock to get more comfortable, his legs dangling over the roar and splash of depthless water, black-blue, as far away from the world as he could fathom.

Of course, that was a good thing. Right? Yes, it was. But escaping disease, madness, and death did nothing to replace the sadness at what had been lost. Which brought him back to the journal.

He opened his eyes and picked up the warped, tattered, muddied book from where he'd set it earlier, atop a single shelf of sandstone that appeared as if it had been sculpted by time's chisel to house a sacred artifact. Sacred. Artifact. That sounded about right.

He opened the book in his lap, casually but with care, and flipped through its many pages, every last one of them filled top to bottom with the scrawling penmanship of a child. The slant of the words, the urgency of the ink—pressed and dark with increasingly thicker strokes—the size of the letters... Each passing page visually represented what the actual content revealed in heartbreaking starkness—his best friend descending into utter, complete, savage madness. The journal ended with about thirty empty pages. The last one to contain writing had only one word, its letters filling the entire space, scrawled with violence: *PLEASE*.”

Man, Newt, Thomas thought. Wasn't it bad enough? Wasn't the end the peak of our awfulness? Why in the hell did you have to let this book exist... Why?”

Excerpt: Chapter Eleven — ‘Jackie,’ in *The Maze Cutter* by James Dashner

She saw her friends. There was no doubt.

Isaac and Sadina.

Jackie and the others were running now. All of them, even Old Man Frypan—though he was lagging behind; he yelled at Jackie to keep going when she turned around to wait for him. Miyoko was beside her, Dominic, too, Lacey right on their heels. Ms. Cowan was just ahead, shockingly fast. The other council members kept up for the most part; Carson's long legs almost spirited him to the front of the pack. But not quite. Trish led the sprint, her speed like a four-legged animal, her movement almost a blur.

The river splashed and roared to the right. A cloud went in front of the sun, which was almost to the horizon, casting an eerie pall over the hilly land. The bridge ahead grew bigger with each step, yet still seemed impossibly far away. Too far away.

Isaac and Sadina stood at the west entrance to the twisted structure, two others nearby. A woman was on the bridge, maybe a third of the way coming from the east. And something had just fallen into the river, barely making a splash—it was probably a piece of steel that had jarred loose.

Jackie knew they'd be noticed soon, despite the sounds of the river and the wind, the distractions of the open land and the twilight sky. She didn't know what they were going to do once they got there, although they outnumbered the people who'd taken their friends.

She ran. The others ran.

Up ahead, the man next to Sadina turned and looked at them.