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JAMES DASHNER

THE
DEATH
CURE

THE
MAZE
RUNNER
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The Maze Runner

The Scorch Trials

The 13th Reality series

The Journal of Curious Letters

The Hunt for Dark Infinity

The Blade of Shattered Hope

THE
DEATH
CURE
JAMES
DASHNER

Delacorte Press

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dashner, James.

The death cure / James Dashner. — 1st ed.

p. cm.

Sequel to: The Scorch trials.

Summary: As the third Trial draws to a close, Thomas and some of his cohorts manage to escape from WICKED, their memories having been restored, only to face new dangers as WICKED claims to be trying to protect the human race from the deadly FLARE virus.

eISBN: 978-0-375-89612-5 [1. Survival—Fiction. 2. Science fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.D2587De 2011

[Fic]—dc23

2011022236

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v3.1_r5

This book is for my mom—
the best human to ever live.

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CHAPTER 1

It was the smell that began to drive Thomas slightly mad.

Not being alone for over three weeks. Not the white walls, ceiling and floor. Not the lack of windows or the fact that they never turned off the lights. None of that. They'd taken his watch; they fed him the exact same meal three times a day—slab of ham, mashed potatoes, raw carrots, slice of bread, water—never spoke to him, never allowed anyone else in the room. No books, no movies, no games.

Complete isolation. For over three weeks now, though he'd begun to doubt his tracking of time—which was based purely on instinct. He tried to best guess when night had fallen, made sure he only slept what felt like normal hours. The meals helped, though they didn't seem to come regularly. As if he was meant to feel disoriented.

Alone. In a padded room devoid of color—the only exceptions a small, almost-hidden stainless-steel toilet in the corner and an old wooden desk that Thomas had no use for. Alone in an unbearable silence, with unlimited time to think about the disease rooted inside him: the Flare, that silent, creeping virus that slowly took away everything that made a person human.

None of this drove him crazy.

But he stank, and for some reason that set his nerves on a sharp wire, cutting into the solid block of his sanity. They didn't let him shower or bathe, hadn't provided him with a change of clothes since he'd arrived or anything to clean his body with. A simple rag would've helped; he could dip it in the water they gave him to drink and clean his face at least. But he had nothing, only the dirty clothes he'd been wearing when they locked him away. Not even bedding—he slept all curled up, his butt wedged in the corner of the room, arms folded, trying to hug some warmth into himself, often shivering.

He didn't know why the stench of his own body was the thing that scared him the most. Perhaps that in itself was a sign that he'd lost it. But for some reason his deteriorating hygiene pushed against his mind, causing horrific

thoughts. Like he was rotting, decomposing, his insides turning as rancid as his outside felt.

That was what worried him, as irrational as it seemed. He had plenty of food and just enough water to quench his thirst; he got plenty of rest, and he exercised as best he could in the small room, often running in place for hours. Logic told him that being filthy had nothing to do with the strength of your heart or the functioning of your lungs. All the same, his mind was beginning to believe that his unceasing stench represented death rushing in, about to swallow him whole.

Those dark thoughts, in turn, were starting to make him wonder if Teresa hadn't been lying after all that last time they'd spoken, when she'd said it was too late for Thomas and insisted that he'd succumbed to the Flare rapidly, had become crazy and violent. That he'd *already* lost his sanity before coming to this awful place. Even Brenda had warned him that things were about to get bad. Maybe they'd both been right.

And underneath all that was the worry for his friends. What had happened to them? Where were they? What was the Flare doing to their minds? After everything they'd been subjected to, was this how it was all going to end?

The rage crept in. Like a shivering rat looking for a spot of warmth, a crumb of food. And with every passing day came an increasing anger so intense that Thomas sometimes caught himself shaking uncontrollably before he reeled the fury back in and pocketed it. He didn't want it to go away for good; he only wanted to store it and let it build. Wait for the right time, the right place, to unleash it. WICKED had done all this to him. WICKED had taken his life and those of his friends and were using them for whatever purposes they deemed necessary. No matter the consequences.

And for that, they would pay. Thomas swore this to himself a thousand times a day.

All these things went through his mind as he sat, back against the wall, facing the door—and the ugly wooden desk in front of it—in what he guessed was the late morning of his twenty-second day as a captive in the white room. He always did this—after eating breakfast, after exercising. Hoping against hope that the door would open—actually *open*, all the way—the whole door, not just the little slot on the bottom through which they slid his meals.

He'd already tried countless times to get the door open himself. And the desk drawers were empty, nothing there but the smell of mildew and cedar. He looked every morning, just in case something might've magically appeared while he slept. Those things happened sometimes when you were dealing with WICKED.

And so he sat, staring at that door. Waiting. White walls and silence. The smell of his own body. Left to think about his friends—Minho, Newt, Frypan, the other few Gladers still alive. Brenda and Jorge, who'd vanished from sight after their rescue on the giant Berg. Harriet and Sonya, the other girls from Group B, Aris. About Brenda and her warning to him after he'd woken up in the white room the first time. How had she spoken in his mind? Was she on his side or not?

But most of all, he thought about Teresa. He couldn't get her out of his head, even though he hated her a little more with every passing moment. Her last words to him had been *WICKED is god*, and right or wrong, to Thomas she'd come to represent all the terrible things that had happened. Every time he thought of her, rage boiled inside him.

Maybe all that anger was the last string tethering him to sanity as he waited.

Eat. Sleep. Exercise. Thirst for revenge. That was what he did for three more days. Alone.

On the twenty-sixth day, the door opened.

CHAPTER 2

Thomas had imagined it happening, countless times. What he would do, what he would say. How he'd rush forward and tackle anyone who came in, make a run for it, flee, escape. But those thoughts were almost for amusement more than anything. He knew that WICKED wouldn't let something like that happen. No, he'd need to plan out every detail before he made his move.

When it *did* happen—when that door popped open with a slight puffing sound and began to swing wide—Thomas was surprised at his own reaction: he did nothing. Something told him an invisible barrier had appeared between him and the desk—like back in the dorms after the Maze. The time for action hadn't arrived. Not yet.

He felt only the slightest hint of surprise when the Rat Man walked in—the guy who'd told the Gladers about the last trial they'd been forced on, through the Scorch. Same long nose, same weasel-like eyes; that greasy hair, combed over an obvious bald spot that took up half his head. Same ridiculous white suit. He looked paler than the last time Thomas had seen him, though, and he was holding a thick folder filled with dozens of crinkled and messily stacked papers in the crook of one elbow and dragging a straight-backed chair.

“Good morning, Thomas,” he said with a stiff nod. Without waiting for a response, he pulled the door shut, set the chair behind the desk and took a seat. He placed the folder in front of him, opened it and started flipping through the pages. When he found what he'd been looking for he stopped and rested his hands on top. Then he flashed a pathetic grin, his eyes settling on Thomas.

When Thomas finally spoke, he realized that he hadn't done so in weeks, and his voice came out like a croak. “It'll only be a good morning if you let me out.”

Not even a flicker of change passed over the man's expression. “Yes, yes, I know. No need to worry—you're going to be hearing plenty of positive

news today. Trust me.”

Thomas thought about that, ashamed that he let it lift his hopes, even for a second. He should know better by now. “*Positive* news? Didn’t you choose us because you thought we were intelligent?”

Rat Man remained silent for several seconds before he responded. “Intelligent, yes. Among more important reasons.” He paused and studied Thomas before continuing. “Do you think we *enjoy* all this? You think we *enjoy* watching you suffer? It’s all been for a purpose, and very soon it will make sense to you.” The intensity of his voice had built until he’d practically shouted that last word, his face now red.

“Whoa,” Thomas said, feeling bolder by the minute. “Slim it nice and calm there, old fella. You look three steps away from a heart attack.” It felt good to let such words flow out of him.

The man stood from his chair and leaned forward on the desk. The veins in his neck bulged in taut cords. He slowly sat back down, took several deep breaths. “You would think that almost four weeks in this white box might humble a boy. But you seem more arrogant than ever.”

“So are you going to tell me that I’m not crazy, then? Don’t have the Flare, never did?” Thomas couldn’t help himself. The anger was rising in him until he felt like he was going to explode. But he forced a calmness into his voice. “That’s what kept me sane through all this—deep down I know you lied to Teresa, that this is just another one of your tests. So where do I go next? Gonna send me to the shuck moon? Make me swim across the ocean in my undies?” He smiled for effect.

The Rat Man had been staring at Thomas with blank eyes throughout his rant. “Are you finished?”

“No, I’m not finished.” He’d been waiting for an opportunity to speak for days and days, but now that it had finally come, his mind went empty. He’d forgotten all the scenarios he’d played out in his mind. “I ... want you to tell me everything. Now.”

“Oh, Thomas.” The Rat Man said it quietly, as if delivering sad news to a small child. “We didn’t lie to you. You *do* have the Flare.”

Thomas was taken aback; a chill cut through the heat of his rage. Was Rat Man lying even now? he wondered. But he shrugged, as if the news were something he’d suspected all along. “Well, I haven’t started going crazy yet.” At a certain point—after all that time crossing the Scorch, being with

Brenda, surrounded by Cranks—he'd come to terms with the fact that he'd catch the virus eventually. But he told himself that for now he was still okay. Still sane. And that was all that mattered at the moment.

Rat Man sighed. "You don't understand. You don't understand what I came in here to tell you."

"Why would I believe a word that comes out of your mouth? How could you possibly expect me to?"

Thomas realized that he'd stood up, though he had no memory of doing so. His chest lurched with heavy breaths. He had to get control of himself. Rat Man's stare was cold, his eyes black pits. Regardless of whether this man was lying to him, Thomas knew he was going to have to hear him out if he ever wanted to leave this white room. He forced his breathing to slow. He waited.

After several seconds of silence, his visitor continued. "I know we've lied to you. Often. We've done some awful things to you and your friends. But it was all part of a plan that you not only agreed to, but helped set in place. We've had to take it all a little farther than we'd hoped in the beginning—there's no doubt about that. However, everything has stayed true to the spirit of what the Creators envisioned—what *you* envisioned in their place after they were ... purged."

Thomas slowly shook his head; he knew he'd been involved with these people once, somehow, but the concept of putting anyone through what he'd gone through was incomprehensible. "You didn't answer me. How can you possibly expect me to believe anything you say?" He recalled more than he let on, of course. Though the window to his past was caked with grime, revealing little more than splotchy glimpses, he knew he'd worked with WICKED. He knew Teresa had, too, and that they'd helped create the Maze. There'd been other flashes of memory.

"Because, Thomas, there's no value in keeping you in the dark," Rat Man said. "Not anymore."

Thomas felt a sudden weariness, as if all the strength had seeped out of him, leaving him with nothing. He sank to the floor with a heavy sigh. He shook his head. "I don't even know what that means." What was the point of even having a conversation when words couldn't be trusted?

Rat Man kept talking, but his tone changed; it became less detached and clinical and more professorial. "You are obviously well aware that we have

a horrible disease eating the minds of humans worldwide. Everything we've done up till now has been calculated for one purpose and one purpose only: to analyze your brain patterns and build a blueprint from them. The goal is to use this blueprint to develop a cure for the Flare. The lives lost, the pain and suffering—you knew the stakes when this began. We all did. It was all done to ensure the survival of the human race. And we're very close. Very, very close."

Memories had come back to Thomas on several occasions. The Changing, the dreams he'd had since, fleeting glimpses here and there, like quick lightning strikes in his mind. And right now, listening to the white-suited man talk, it felt as if he were standing on a cliff and all the answers were just about to float up from the depths for him to see in their entirety. The urge to grasp those answers was almost too strong to keep at bay.

But he was still wary. He knew he'd been a part of it all, had helped design the Maze, had taken over after the original Creators died and kept the program going with new recruits. "I remember enough to be ashamed of myself," he admitted. "But living through this kind of abuse is a lot different than planning it. It's just not right."

Rat Man scratched his nose, shifted in his seat. Something Thomas said had gotten to him. "We'll see what you think at the end of today, Thomas. We shall see. But let me ask you this—are you telling me that the lives of a few aren't worth losing to save countless more?" Again, the man spoke with passion, leaning forward. "It's a very old axiom, but do you believe the end can justify the means? When there's no choice left?"

Thomas only stared. It was a question that had no good response.

The Rat Man might have smiled, but it looked more like he was sneering. "Just remember that at one time you believed it did, Thomas." He started to collect his papers as if to go but didn't move. "I'm here to tell you that everything is set and our data is almost complete. We're on the cusp of something great. Once we have the blueprint, you can go boo-hoo with your friends all you want about how *unfair* we've been."

Thomas wanted to cut the man with harsh words. But he held back. "How does torturing us lead to this blueprint you're talking about? What could sending a bunch of unwilling teenagers to terrible places, watching some of them die—what could that possibly have to do with finding a cure for some disease?"

“It has everything in the *world* to do with it.” Rat Man sighed heavily. “Boy, soon you’ll remember everything, and I have a feeling you’re going to regret a lot. In the meantime, there’s something you need to know—it might even bring you back to your senses.”

“And what’s that?” Thomas really had no idea what the man would say.

His visitor stood up, smoothed the wrinkles out of his pants and adjusted his coat. Then he clasped his hands behind his back. “The Flare virus lives in every part of your body, yet it has no effect on you, nor will it ever. You’re a member of an extremely rare group of people. You’re *immune* to the Flare.”

Thomas swallowed, speechless.

“On the outside, in the streets, they call people like you Munies,” Rat Man continued. “And they really, really hate you.”