

**BOOKS-A-MILLION
EXCLUSIVE**

THE MAZE RUNNER TRILOGY

From bestselling author **JAMES DASHNER**



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THOMAS'S FIRST MEMORY OF THE FLARE

It had been five days since they'd locked Thomas up in the white room. On that fifth day, after trying his best to go through the routine he'd established—exercise, eat, think, repeat—he decided to lie down and sleep. Let his terrible new world wash away for a while. Exhausted, he faded quickly and images began to bloom in his mind.

Thomas is young—he can't tell how young exactly. He's curled up in a corner, knees pulled up to his chest, shivering with fright. His dad—the man who holds him, reads to him, kisses him on the cheek, hugs him, bathes him—is on a rampage, screaming hateful things and turning over furniture. His mom tries to stop him, but he pushes her away without even seeming to realize who she is. She stumbles, tries to regain her balance, then slams into the wall a few feet from Thomas.

Sobbing, she crawls to him, pulls him into her arms.

“Don’t worry, honey,” she whispers. “They’re coming to take him away. They’ll be here soon.”

“Who?” Thomas asks. His voice sounds so young, and it breaks his dreaming heart.

“The people who are going to take care of him,” she answers. “Remember, your daddy’s sick, very sick. This isn’t really him doing all of this. It’s the disease.”

Suddenly Dad spins around to face them, his face aflame with anger. “Disease? Did I just hear you say *disease*?” Each word comes out of his mouth like a poisoned dart, full of venom.

Mom shakes her head, hugs Thomas tighter to her body.

“Why don’t you just say it, woman,” Dad continues, taking a step toward them. His chest is lurching with his attempts to suck in breath, and his hands are clenched into tight fists. “The Flare. Tell the boy how it is. Tell him the truth. Your dad has the Flare, Thomas. It’s comin’ along real nicely.” Another step closer. “Your mom has it, too. Oh yes. Soon she’ll be chewing on her fingers and feeding you dirt for breakfast. Laughing hysterically while she breaks the windows and tries to cut you. She’ll be bat crazy, boy, just like your daddy.”

Another step closer. Thomas squeezes his eyes shut, hoping it’ll all go away. The dreaming part of him doesn’t want to see anymore, either. Wants it to end.

“Look at me, boy,” Dad says with a snarl. “Look at me when I’m talking to you.”

Thomas can’t help it. He always does as he’s told. His dad looks calm now in every way except one: those fists. Fingers and knuckles white.

“That’s good,” Dad says. “Good boy. Look at your daddy. Do I look crazy to you? Huh? *Do I*?” He shouts those last two words.

“No, sir,” Thomas says, surprised he can say it without shaking.

“Well, you’re wrong, then.” Dad’s face pinches with anger again.

“I’m crazy, boy. I’m a madman. I could eat both of you for dinner and love every bite.”

“Stop it!” Mom screams, a sound so loud it pierces Thomas’s eardrums painfully. “You stop it right now! I swear to God I’ll rip your heart out if you touch my son!”

Dad laughs. Not just a chuckle, either. His whole body shakes and he throws his head back as booming laughter pours from him, filling the house with its noise. Thomas has never heard something sound so *wrong* before. But the man keeps it up, laughing and laughing and laughing.

“Stop it!” Mom screams again. She repeats it over and over until finally Thomas can’t take it anymore and covers his ears.

Then the doorbell rings, barely loud enough to be heard. But both of his parents go silent. Dad looks in the direction of the front door, his face suddenly showing fear.

“They’re here to get you,” Mom says through a sob. “My sweet, the love of my life, they’re here to get you.”

Thomas woke up.