

Merit of English Section

Senior Division

Name of Winner : Lau Yin Pok

Name of School : Pui Ching Middle School

Book Title : The Maze Runner

Author : James Dashner

Publisher : Delacorte Press

Darkness, stale air, mechanical grinding. Welcome to the Maze.

We join our protagonist in the world of The Maze Runner. Stuck in a moving metal box with no prior memory on how he got into the box, or even his life before the box, with the sole personal memory being that his name is Thomas.

One minute, two minutes, three minutes. After what Thomas approximates as thirty minutes, the box stops with a shudder, faint voices can be heard above him, a line of white appears, and soon he is stepping onto a lowered rope and being hoisted up.

He has arrived in his new home, the Glade, a home to forty or so teenage boys. Who have developed themselves as a small society, with weekly supplies from the ‘creators’ of the glade and a new boy sent up every month, all sent from the box. They have roles such as builders and farmers, with strict rules to preserve order, a local dialect of expressions and phrases such as ‘shank’ or ‘klunk’, and even a council of ‘keepers’.

All of this revolving around the Maze, no place a glader would voluntarily step foot into due to the roaming ‘Grievors’ and how the walls close at dusk and change patterns, sealing all within to face a gruesome death. Ironic that such a place of death would be the only place the gladers can search for salvation, a possible way to escape from their prison.

A group of elite gladers form a team of ‘runners’, to scour the maze every day for a possible way out and to document the pattern changes of the maze, the only hope for the gladers to ever escape.

Conflicts arise as soon as Thomas arrives in the Maze, the first ever girl arrives in the glade a day after Thomas, bearing the message that she will be the last one to arrive and the box stops bringing up supplies.

This brings us to the first theme of the book, the preservation of law and order. After Ben attempted to murder Thomas, he is exiled to certain death in the Maze as he violated one of the rules in the glade, to not harm your fellows. However, the number one rule in the glade is that under no circumstances should a non-runner go into the Maze, which Thomas breaks in order to

save fellow gladers Minho and Alby before they are caught outside the glade at night, becoming the first glader to survive a full night in the Maze. The gladers prioritize law and order above all things, as stated in the book law and order tells everyone what roles they are meant to fulfill, as having nothing to do allows the mind to wander, becoming depressed over their situation and eventually giving up. The rules and orders are also strictly enforced as without order, the glade would easily fall into anarchy, if people don't make it back to the glade before the Glade, no search party is assembled, as the gladers put, 'no use wasting more lives'.

However this inflexibility of rules sacrifices choices. In real life, orders cannot be inflexible, say you spot a person getting robbed on the other side of the road, having to jaywalk to stop the crime should be the last thing on your mind. As was Thomas's thinking, he saw that he could possibly help others in need and took it, seeing the worth of possibly saving lives as more important than rigid rules or even his own safety, and in the end it paid off, he was able to save two people and became a runner. Allowing the gladers to reevaluate their system and decide that some leeway needs to be given for action to take place.

Through trials and tribulations, Thomas and the fellow gladers discover the exit to the maze and arrange the patterns of the Maze changing and discover the code to exit the maze. The catch? The way out is to go directly through where the griever are with only crudely fashioned knives and spears as weapons and uncertainty if the world outside is still worth it or even if any of them will survive to tell the tale. However, staying in the glade will only result in the death of them all so the gladers that elect to leave steady themselves, to face the trials ahead.

Throughout the book we can frame the gladers as being challenged by what can only be perceived as 'gods'. Faced with insurmountable odds such as killer griever, a gigantic maze that seemed to be unsolvable, and no prior knowledge on where they are or even who they are. Despite this, the gladers have never given in, the first gladers managed to organize the resources in the glade and formed a society in an orderly fashion, even after witnessing some of their own

fall after misadventures and the fruitlessness of the Maze search, they still cling to hope and sanity, never falling into despair.

To know that life throws curveballs in our way is nothing new, but to be able to stand in defiance to everything is a whole other thing entirely. The gladers were involuntarily given a situation that they had to deal with and they took it in stride, fueled by the fact that a puzzle, albeit a big one, is given to them, there must be a solution to it. Allowing them to defy the seemingly impossible and strive for betterment.

In the end the gladers do manage to escape the clutches of the Maze, although with diminished numbers, more than half of them were slaughtered by the griever at the last battle, with a last act of cruelty committed by the 'creators', the murder of Chuck, the kid who only wanted to get home. It is revealed that they are part of a plan to solve a world crisis, to cure a plague called 'the flare' that has spread after solar flares rendered Earth inhospitable.

Is the preservation of humanity worth the sacrifice of the few? Does it justify the acts of the 'creators' if their intentions were to save the rest of humanity? To treat the gladers as nothing more than lab rats, exposing them to situations that are more fitting to horror film segments, all in the name of saving humanity by analyzing their brains during such events and loss.

It shows humanity's unnerving determination to come up with ways to solve problems, no matter the morality or methods to do so, after all the sacrifice of one self for the good of many has long been a virtue that is praised. However we should not be forcing people to participate in things that they did not volunteer for, no matter if it is for the sake of humanity, after all we only praise these acts of incredible self-sacrifice because they are voluntary, to willingly give up everything they have for a cause they believe in.

