

THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING SEQUEL TO *THE MAZE RUNNER*

THE SCORCH TRIALS

JAMES
DASHNER

ALSO BY JAMES DASHNER

The Maze Runner

The 13th Reality Series
The Journal of Curious Letters
The Hunt for Dark Infinity
The Blade of Shattered Hope

THE
SCORCH
TRIALS
JAMES
DASHNER

Delacorte Press

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For Wesley, Bryson, Kayla and Dallin. Best kids ever.

Contents

Cover

Other Books by This Author

Title Page

Copyright

Dedication

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

Chapter 29

Chapter 30

Chapter 31
Chapter 32
Chapter 33
Chapter 34
Chapter 35
Chapter 36
Chapter 37
Chapter 38
Chapter 39
Chapter 40
Chapter 41
Chapter 42
Chapter 43
Chapter 44
Chapter 45
Chapter 46
Chapter 47
Chapter 48
Chapter 49
Chapter 50
Chapter 51
Chapter 52
Chapter 53
Chapter 54
Chapter 55
Chapter 56
Chapter 57
Chapter 58
Chapter 59
Chapter 60
Chapter 61
Chapter 62
Chapter 63
Chapter 64
Chapter 65

Epilogue
Acknowledgments
About the Author
The Maze Runner Series

The Eye of Minds
Excerpt to Death Cure Teaser
Excerpt to *The Eye of Minds*

CHAPTER 1

She spoke to him before the world fell apart.

Hey, are you still asleep?

Thomas shifted in his bed, felt a darkness around him like air turned solid, pressing in. At first he panicked; his eyes snapped open as he imagined himself back in the Box—that horrible cube of cold metal that had delivered him to the Glade and the Maze. But there was a faint light, and lumps of dim shadow gradually emerged throughout the huge room. Bunk beds. Dressers. The soft breaths and gurgly snores of boys deep in slumber.

Relief filled him. He was safe now, rescued and delivered to this dormitory. No more worries. No more Grievors. No more death.

Tom?

A voice in his head. A girl's. Not audible, not visible. But he heard it all the same, though never could he have explained to anyone how it worked.

Exhaling a deep breath, he relaxed into his pillow, his razor-edged nerves settling down from that fleeting moment of terror. He spoke back, forming the words with his thoughts.

Teresa? What time is it?

No idea, she replied. But I can't sleep. I probably dozed for an hour or so. Maybe more. I was hoping you were awake to keep me company.

Thomas tried not to smile. Even though she wouldn't be able to see it, it would be embarrassing all the same. *Didn't give me much choice in the matter, did you? Kind of hard to sleep when someone's talking directly into your skull.*

Waa, waa. Go back to bed, then.

No. I'm good. He stared at the bottom of the bunk above him—featureless and darkly fuzzy in the shadow—where Minho was currently breathing like a guy with ungodly amounts of phlegm lodged in his throat. *What've you been thinking about?*

What do you think? Somehow she projected a jab of cynicism into the words. *I keep seeing Grievors. Their disgusting skin and blubber bodies, all those metal arms and spikes. It was way too close for comfort, Tom. How're we gonna get something like that out of our heads?*

Thomas knew what he thought. Those images would never leave—the Gladers would be haunted by the horrible things that had happened in the Maze for the rest of their lives. He figured that most if not all of them would have major psychological problems. Maybe even go completely nutso.

And above it all, he had one image burned into his memories as strongly as a branded mark from a searing hot iron. His friend Chuck, stabbed in the chest, bleeding, dying as Thomas held him.

Thomas knew he would *never* forget that. But what he said to Teresa was: *It'll go away. Just takes a little time, that's all.*

You're so full of it, she said.

I know. How ridiculous was it that he loved hearing her say something like that to him? That her sarcasm meant things were going to be okay? *You're an idiot,* he told himself, then hoped she didn't hear that thought.

I hate that they separated me from you guys, she said.

Thomas understood why they had, though. She was the only girl and the rest of the Gladers were teenage boys—a bunch of shanks they didn't trust yet. *Guess they were protecting you.*

Yeah. I guess. Melancholy seeped into his brain with her words, stuck to them like syrup. *But it sucks being alone after everything we went through.*

Where'd they take you, anyway? She sounded so sad that he almost wanted to get up and look for her, but he knew better.

Just on the other side of that big common room where we ate last night. It's a small room with a few bunks. I'm pretty sure they locked the door when they left.

See, told ya they wanted to protect you. Then he quickly added, *Not that you need protecting. I'd put my money on you against at least half these shanks.*

Only half?

Okay, three-quarters. Including me.

A long stretch of silence followed, though somehow Thomas could still sense her presence. He *felt* her. It was almost like how, even though he couldn't see Minho, he knew his friend lay only a few feet above him. And it wasn't just the snoring. When someone is close by, you just know it.

Despite all the memories of the last few weeks, Thomas was surprisingly calm, and soon sleep overpowered him once more. Darkness settled on his world, but she was there, next to him in so many ways. Almost ... touching.

He had no concept of time passing while in that state. Half asleep, half enjoying her presence and the thought that they'd been rescued from that horrible place. That they were safe, that he and Teresa could get to know each other all over again. That life could be good.

Blissful sleep. Hazy darkness. Warmth. A physical glow. Almost floating.

The world seemed to fade away. All became numb and sweet. And the darkness, somehow comforting. He slipped into a dream.

He's very young. Four, maybe? Five? Lying in a bed with blankets pulled to his chin.

A woman sits next to him, her hands folded in her lap. She has long brown hair, a face just beginning to show signs of age. Her eyes are sad. He knows this even though she's trying very hard to hide it with a smile.

He wants to say something, ask her a question. But he can't. He's not really here. Just witnessing it all from a place he doesn't quite understand. She begins to talk, a sound so simultaneously sweet and angry it disturbs him.

"I don't know why they chose you, but I do know this. You're special somehow. Never forget that. And never forget how much"—her voice cracks

and tears run down her face—“never forget how much I love you.”

The boy replies, but it’s not really Thomas speaking. Even though it *is* him. None of it makes sense. “Are you gonna be crazy like all those people on TV, Mommy? Like ... Daddy?”

The woman reaches out and runs her fingers through his hair. Woman? No, he can’t call her that. This is his mother. His ... mommy.

“Don’t you worry about that, honey,” she says. “You won’t be here to see it.”

Her smile has gone away.

Too fast the dream faded into blackness, leaving Thomas in a void with nothing but his thoughts. Had he seen another memory crawl up from the depths of his amnesia? Had he really seen his mom? There’d been something about his dad being crazy. The ache inside Thomas was deep and gnawing, and he tried to sink further into oblivion.

Later—how much later he had no idea—Teresa spoke to him again.

Tom, something’s wrong.

CHAPTER 2

That was how it started. He heard Teresa say those three words, but it seemed from far away, as if spoken down a long and cluttered tunnel. His slumber had become a viscous liquid, thick and sticky, trapping him. He became aware of himself, but realized he was removed from the world, entombed by exhaustion. He couldn't wake up.

Thomas!

She screamed it. A piercing rattle in his head. He felt the first trickle of fear, but it was more like a dream. He could only sleep. And they were safe now, nothing to worry about anymore. Yeah, it had to be a dream. Teresa was fine, they were all fine. He relaxed again, let himself drown in slumber.

Other sounds snuck their way into his consciousness. Thumps. The clang of metal against metal. Something shattering. Boys shouting. More like the echo of shouts, very distant, muted. Suddenly they became more like screams. Unearthly cries of anguish. But still distant. As if he'd been wrapped in a thick cocoon of dark velvet.

Finally something pricked the comfort of sleep. This wasn't right. Teresa had called for him, told him something was wrong! He fought the deep sleep that had consumed him, clawed at the heavy weight pinning him down.

Wake up! he yelled at himself. *Wake up!*

Then something disappeared from inside him. There one instant, gone the next. He felt as if a major organ had just been ripped from his body.

It had been her. She was gone.

Teresa! he screamed out with his mind. *Teresa! Are you there?*

But there was nothing, and he no longer felt that comforting sense of her closeness. He called her name again, then again, as he continued to struggle against the dark pull of sleep.

Finally, reality swept in, washed away the darkness. Engulfed in terror, Thomas opened his eyes and shot to a sitting position on his bed, scooted out until he got his feet under him and jumped up. Looked around.

Everything had gone crazy.

The other Gladers in the room were running around, shouting. And terrible, horrible, awful sounds filled the air, like the wretched squeals of animals being tortured. There was Frypan, pointing out a window, his face pale. Newt and Minho were running to the door. Winston, hands held up to his frightened, acne-plagued face like he'd just seen a flesh-eating zombie. Others stumbling over each other to look out the different windows, but keeping their distance from the glass. Achingly, Thomas realized he didn't even know most of the names of the twenty boys who'd survived the Maze, an odd

thought to have in the middle of all that chaos.

Something at the corner of his eye made him turn to look toward the wall. What he saw immediately wiped away any peace and safety he'd felt talking to Teresa in the night. Made him doubt such emotions could even exist in the same world in which he now stood.

Three feet from his bed, draped by colorful curtains, a window looked out into a bright, blinding light. The glass was broken, jagged shards leaning against crisscrossed steel bars. A man stood on the other side, gripping the bars with bloody hands. His eyes were wide and bloodshot, filled with madness. Sores and scars covered his thin, sun-burnt face. He had no hair, only diseased splotches of what looked like greenish moss. A vicious slit stretched across his right cheek; Thomas could see teeth through the raw, festering wound. Pink saliva dribbled in swaying lines from the man's chin.

"I'm a Crank!" the horror of a man yelled. "I'm a bloody Crank!"

And then he started screaming two words over and over and over, spit flying with every shriek.

"Kill me! Kill me! Kill me! ..."

CHAPTER 3

A hand slammed down on Thomas's shoulder from behind; he cried out and spun around to see Minho staring past him at the maniac screaming through the window.

"They're everywhere," Minho said. His voice had a gloom to it that perfectly matched how Thomas felt. It seemed as if everything they'd dared hope for the previous night had dissolved to nothing. "And there's no sign of those shanks who rescued us," he added.

Thomas had lived in fear and terror the past few weeks, but this was almost too much. To feel safe only to have that snatched away again. Shocking even himself, though, he quickly set aside that small part of him that wanted to jump back into his bed and bawl his eyes out. He pushed away the lingering ache of remembering his mom and the stuff about his dad and people going crazy. Thomas knew that someone had to take charge—they needed a plan if they were going to survive this, too.

"Have any of them gotten in yet?" he asked, a strange calm washing over him. "Do all the windows have these bars?"

Minho nodded toward one of the many lining the walls of the long rectangular room. "Yeah. It was too dark to notice them last night, especially with those stupid frilly curtains. But I'm sure glad for 'em."

Thomas looked at the Gladers around them, some running from window to window to get a look outside, others huddling in small groups. Everyone had a look of half disbelief, half terror. "Where's Newt?"

"Right here."

Thomas turned to see the older boy, not knowing how he'd missed him. "What's goin' on?"

"You think I have a bloody clue? Bunch of crazies want to eat us for breakfast, by the looks of it. We need to find another room, have a Gathering. All this noise is driving nails through my buggin' skull."

Thomas nodded absently; he agreed with the plan but hoped Newt and Minho would take care of it. He was eager to make contact with Teresa—he hoped her warning had just been part of a dream, a hallucination from the drug of deep and exhausted slumber. And that vision of his mom ...

His two friends moved away, calling out and waving their arms to collect Gladers. Thomas took a tremulous glance back at the shredded madman at the window, then looked away immediately, wishing he hadn't reminded his brain of the blood and torn flesh, the insane eyes, the hysterical screaming.

Kill me! Kill me! Kill me!

Thomas stumbled to the farthest wall, leaned heavily against it.

Teresa, he called out again with his mind. *Teresa. Can you hear me?*

He waited, closing his eyes to concentrate. Reaching out with invisible hands, trying to grasp some trace of her. Nothing. Not even a passing shadow or brush of feeling, much less a response.

Teresa, he said more urgently, clenching his teeth with the effort. *Where are you? What happened?*

Nothing. His heart seemed to slow until it almost stopped, and he felt like he'd swallowed a big hairy lump of cotton. Something had happened to her.

He opened his eyes to see the Gladers gathered around the green-painted door that led to the common area where they'd eaten pizza the night before. Minho was jerking on the round brass handle to no avail. Locked.

The only other door was to a shower and locker room, from which no other exits existed. There was that, and the windows. All with those metal bars. Thank goodness. Each one had raging lunatics screaming and yelling on the other side.

Even though worry ate at him like spilled acid in his veins, Thomas gave up momentarily on trying to contact Teresa and joined the other Gladers. Newt was having a go at the door, with the same useless result.

"It's locked," he muttered when he finally gave up, his arms falling weakly to his sides.

"Really, genius?" Minho said, his powerful arms folded and tensed, veins bulging all over the place. Thomas thought for a split second he could actually see the blood pumping through them. "No wonder you were named after Isaac Newton—such an amazing ability to think."

Newt wasn't in the mood. Or maybe he'd just learned long ago to ignore Minho's smart-aleck remarks. "Let's break this bloody handle off." He looked around as if he expected someone to give him a sledgehammer.

"I wish those shuck ... Cranks would shut up!" Minho yelled, turning to glower at the closest one, a woman who looked even more hideous than the first man Thomas had seen. A bleeding wound crossed her face, ending on the side of her head.

"Cranks?" Frypan repeated. The hairy cook had been silent until then, barely noticeable. Thomas thought he looked even more frightened than when they'd been about to battle the Griever to escape the Maze. Maybe this was worse. When they'd settled into bed last night, everything had seemed good and safe. Yeah, maybe this *was* worse, to have that suddenly taken away.

Minho pointed at the screaming, bloody woman. "That's what they keep calling themselves. Haven't you heard it?"

"I don't care if you call 'em pussy willows," Newt snapped. "Find me something to break through this stupid door!"

"Here," a shorter boy said, carrying a slender but solid fire extinguisher he'd taken off the wall—Thomas remembered seeing it earlier. Again, he felt guilty for not even knowing this kid's name.

Newt grabbed the red cylinder, ready to pile-drive the door handle. Thomas stood as close as he could, eager to see what was on the other side of the

door, though he had a very bad feeling that whatever it was, they weren't going to like it.

Newt lifted the extinguisher, then slammed it down on the round brass handle. The loud crack was accompanied by a deeper crunch, and it took only three more whacks before the entire unit of the handle crashed to the floor with a jangle of broken metal pieces. The door inched outward, cracked open just enough to show darkness on the other side.

Newt stood quietly, staring at that long, narrow gap of blackness as if he expected demons from the underworld to come flying through. Absently, he handed the extinguisher back to the boy who'd found it. "Let's go," he said. Thomas thought he heard the slightest quaver in his voice.

"Wait," Frypan called out. "We sure we wanna go out there? Maybe that door was locked for a reason."

Thomas couldn't help but agree; something felt wrong about this.

Minho stepped up to stand right next to Newt; he looked back at Frypan, then made eye contact with Thomas. "What else're we gonna do? Sit here and wait for those loonies to get in? Come on."

"Those freaks aren't breaking through the window bars anytime soon," Frypan retorted. "Let's just *think* for a second"

"Time for thinking's done," Minho said. He kicked out with his foot and the door swung completely open; if anything, it seemed to grow even darker on the other side. "Plus, you should've spoken up *before* we blasted the lock to bits, slinthead. Too late now."

"I hate when you're right," Frypan grumbled under his breath.

Thomas couldn't quit staring past the open door, into the pool of inky darkness. He felt a now-all-too-familiar clench of apprehension, knowing that something had to be wrong or the people who'd rescued them would've come for them a long time ago. But Minho and Newt were right—they had to go out there and find some answers.

"Shuck it," Minho said. "I'll go first."

Without waiting for a response he walked through the open door, his body vanishing in the gloom almost instantly. Newt gave Thomas a hesitant look, then followed. For some reason Thomas thought it should be up to him to go next, so he did.

Step by step, he left the dorm room and entered the darkness of the common area, hands reaching out in front of him.

The glow of light coming from behind didn't do much to illuminate things; he might as well have been walking with his eyes squeezed shut. And the place smelled. Horrible.

Minho yelped up ahead, then called back. "Whoa, be careful. Something ... weird's hanging from the ceiling."

Thomas heard a slight squeak or groan, something creaking. As if Minho had bumped into a low-hanging chandelier, sending it swaying back and forth. A grunt from Newt somewhere to the right was followed by the squeal of metal dragging across the floor.

“Table,” Newt announced. “Watch out for tables.”

Frypan spoke up behind Thomas. “Does anyone remember where the light switches were?”

“That’s where I’m heading,” Newt responded. “I swear I remember seeing a set of them somewhere over here.”

Thomas continued walking blindly forward. His eyes had adjusted a little; where before, everything had been a wall of blackness, now he could see traces of shadows against shadows. Yet something was off. He was still a little disoriented, but things seemed to be in places they shouldn’t be. It was almost as if—

“Bluh-huh-huh,” Minho groaned, a shudder of repulsion, like he’d just stepped in a pile of klunk. Another creaking sound cut through the room.

Before Thomas could ask what had happened, he bumped into something himself. Hard. Awkwardly shaped. The feel of cloth.

“Found it!” Newt shouted.

A few clicks were heard; then the room suddenly blazed with fluorescent lights, temporarily blinding Thomas. He stumbled away from the thing he’d bumped into, rubbing his eyes, ran into another stiff figure, sent it swaying away from him.

“Whoa!” Minho yelled.

Thomas squinted; his vision cleared. He forced himself to look at the scene of horror around him.

Throughout the large room, people hung from the ceiling—at least a dozen. They’d all been strung up by the neck, the ropes twisted and trenched into purple, bloated skin. The stiff bodies swung to and fro ever so slightly, pale pink tongues lolling out of their white-lipped mouths. All of them had eyes open, though glazed over with certain death. By the looks of it, they’d been that way for hours. Their clothes and some of their faces looked familiar.

Thomas dropped to his knees.

He knew these dead people.

They were the ones who’d rescued the Gladers. Just the day before.

CHAPTER 4

Thomas tried not to look at any of the dead bodies as he stood up. He half walked, half stumbled over to Newt, who was still by the bank of light switches, his terrified gaze darting between the corpses hanging throughout the room.

Minho joined them, swearing under his breath. Other Gladers were emerging from the dorm room, shouting as they realized what they were seeing; Thomas heard a couple of them throw up, gagging and spitting. He felt the sudden urge himself, but fought it. What had happened? How could everything be taken away from them so fast? His stomach tightened up as despair threatened to bowl him over.

Then he remembered Teresa.

Teresa! he called out with his mind. *Teresa!* Again and again, mentally screaming it with his eyes closed and jaw clenched. *Where are you!*

“Tommy,” Newt said, reaching out to squeeze his shoulder. “What’s bloody wrong with you?”

Thomas opened his eyes, realized he was doubled over, arms wrapped around his stomach. He slowly straightened, tried to push away the panic eating him inside. “What ... what do you think? Look around us.”

“Yeah, but you looked like you were in pain or something.”

“I’m fine—just trying to reach her in my mind. But I can’t.” He wasn’t fine. He hated reminding the others that he and Teresa could speak telepathically. And if all these people were dead ... “We’ve gotta find where they put her,” he blurted out, grasping urgently for a task to clear his mind. He scanned the room, trying his best not to focus on the corpses, looking for a door that might lead to her room. She’d said it was across the common area from where they’d all slept.

There. A yellow door with a brass handle.

“He’s right,” Minho said to the group. “Spread out, find her!”

“Might’ve already.” Thomas was on the move, surprised at how quickly he’d recovered his senses. He ran toward the door, dodging tables and bodies. She had to be in there, safe like they’d been. The door was closed; that was a good sign. Probably locked. Maybe she’d fallen into a deep sleep like him. That was why she’d been quiet, unresponsive.

He had almost reached the door when he remembered that they might need something to break into the room. “Someone grab that fire extinguisher!” he yelled over his shoulder. The smell in the common area was horrendous; he gagged as he sucked in a deep breath.

“Winston, go get it,” Minho ordered behind him.

Thomas reached the door first and tried the handle. It didn't budge, locked tight. Then he noticed a small, clear-plastic display hanging on the wall to the right, about five inches square. A sheet of paper had been slipped into the thin slot, several words typed on its surface.

Teresa Agnes. Group A, Subject A1.

The Betrayer.

Oddly, the thing that stood out the most to Thomas was Teresa's last name. Or at least, what appeared to be her last name. Agnes. He didn't know why, but it surprised him. Teresa Agnes. He couldn't think of anyone within the splotchy knowledge of history floating in his still-scarce memories who matched that name. He himself had been renamed after Thomas Edison, the great inventor. But Teresa Agnes? He'd never heard of her.

Of course, all their names were more of a joke than anything, probably a callous way for the Creators—WICKED or whoever had done this to them—to distance themselves from the *real* people they'd stolen from *real* mothers and fathers. Thomas couldn't wait until the day he learned what he'd been called at birth, what name lay stamped in the minds of his parents, whoever they were. Wherever they were.

The sketchy memories he'd initially regained from going through the Changing had made him think that he didn't have parents who loved him. That whoever they were, they didn't want him. That he'd been taken from horrible circumstances. But now he refused to believe it, especially after having dreamed about his mom during the night.

Minho snapped his fingers in front of Thomas's eyes. "Hello? Calling Thomas? Not a good time to daydream. Lots of dead bodies, smells like Frypan's pits. Wake up."

Thomas turned to him. "Sorry. Just thought it was weird that Teresa's last name was Agnes."

Minho clucked his tongue. "Who cares about *that*? What's this freakin' stuff about her being the Betrayer?"

"And what's 'Group A, Subject A1' mean?" This was Newt, who handed over the fire extinguisher to Thomas. "Anyway, your turn to break a buggin' door handle."

Thomas grabbed it, suddenly angry at himself for wasting even a few seconds thinking about the stupid label. Teresa was in there, and she needed their help. Trying not to be bothered by the word *betrayer*, he gripped the cylinder and slammed it against the brass knob. A jolt ran up his arms as the clang of metal against metal rang through the air. He'd felt it give a little, and two smashes later the handle fell off and the door popped open an inch or two.

Thomas threw the extinguisher to the side and grabbed the door, swung it all the way out. Itchy anticipation mixed with dread at what he might find. He was the first to step into the lighted room.

It was a smaller version of the boys' dorm, just four bunk beds, two dressers

and a closed door, presumably leading to another bathroom. All the beds were made up nicely except one, its blankets tossed to the side and a pillow hanging off the edge, the sheet rumped. But there was no sign of Teresa.

“Teresa!” Thomas called out, his throat straining with panic as he yelled.

The swirly, swooshing sound of a toilet flushing came through the closed door and a sudden relief burst through Thomas. It was so strong he almost had to sit down. She was here, she was safe. He steadied himself and started walking toward the bathroom, but Newt reached out and grabbed his arm.

“You’re used to living with a bunch of boys,” Newt said. “I don’t think it’s polite to go stomping into the bloody ladies’ room. Just wait till she comes out.”

“Then we need to get everybody in here and have a Gathering,” Minho added. “It doesn’t stink in here, and there aren’t any windows for Cranks to scream at us.”

Thomas hadn’t noticed the lack of windows until that moment, though it should’ve been the most obvious thing, considering the chaos of their own dorm room. Cranks. He’d almost forgotten.

“I wish she’d hurry up,” he murmured.

“I’ll get everyone over here,” Minho said; he turned and walked back into the common area.

Thomas stared at the bathroom door. Newt and Frypan and a few other Gladers pushed their way into the room and took seats on the beds, all of them leaning forward, elbows on knees, rubbing their hands together absently, the anxiety and worry evident in their body language.

Teresa? Thomas said in his mind. *Can you hear me? We’re waiting for you out here.*

No response. And he still felt that bubble of emptiness, as if her presence itself had been permanently taken away.

There was a click. The handle on the door to the bathroom turned; then the door opened, swinging toward Thomas. He stepped forward, ready to pull Teresa into a hug—he didn’t care who was there to see it. But the person who walked into the dorm room wasn’t Teresa. Thomas stopped midstride and almost tripped. Everything inside him seemed to fall.

It was a boy.

He wore the same kind of clothes they’d all been given the night before—clean pajamas with a button-up shirt and flannel pants, light blue. He had olive skin, and his dark hair was cut surprisingly short. The look of innocent surprise on his face was the only thing that prevented Thomas from grabbing the shank by the collar and shaking him until some answers came out.

“Who are you?” Thomas asked, not caring that the words sounded harsh.

“Who am I?” the boy responded, somewhat sarcastically. “Who are *you?*”

Newt had gotten back to his feet, actually standing even closer to the new guy than Thomas was. “Don’t bloody mess around. There are a lot more of us than there are of you. Tell us who you are.”

The boy folded his arms, a defiance coming over his whole body. “Fine. My