



THE RATHMORE CHAOS
(Advance Reading Excerpt)
BY ADAM HOLT

Prologue

The black canyon stretched in front of me, one hundred yards from one frozen side to the other, a jaw ready to swallow me whole. The old Tully—the one that lived on Earth and tried to avoid homework—would never have dreamed of jumping this divide. The new Tully—the one that sneaks into space—could handle bigger problems, like leaping canyons. Also, the new me weighed 15 pounds on this alien world. Nothing beats low gravity. As long as I hit my first step, I would leap the canyon with no problem, which I did, and waited on the other side for the rest of our team. The stars above me winked their approval.

If it had not been for the Ascendant, we would never have made it this far. Their lies made the Earth so dangerous that I had to leave. I should probably thank the Ascendant for that. I had never been closer to finding my long lost friend than I was at that moment, watching the others leap the canyon on the way to our destination.

The Rathmore Chaos.

My oxygen levels read 90% — nice! — so I took a deep breath and watched several moons and planets bobbing across the horizon. I rubbed the backs of my scarred hands, which were supposedly my greatest weapon, but lately hadn't been reliable. I caught my reflection in my helmet visor--who was I really, this new me, this boy in a battle with a hostile alien race?

One jumper then another landed nearby, and as our final team member sailed across the canyon, a tremor knocked us to the ground. In the middle of the canyon a geyser erupted, spewing liquid water hundreds of feet into the air. The water transformed into chunks of ice in the frigid air. Oh, no. Up went the geyser and with it went my friend, her arms flailing wildly — a bird beating its wings against an airless, alien sky. The rest of us jumped to our feet and bounded after her, and I hoped like mad for one thing — that my powers would return before she landed in this land of ice as sharp as knives.

The phrase, Houston, we have a problem, comes to mind. In fact, Houston, we have about a thousand problems, but we're millions of miles

from you now. I can't explain this geyser disaster – or the ones that came after it – unless I back up a few weeks. You know, when the world still thought I was a teen runaway, not a dangerous space fugitive.

Let me pick up this story in a news studio, right after my first trip into space, and fill you in from there. We'll work our way back to this canyon eventually, and then we'll travel well beyond it to where I am now, in the Rathmore Chaos.

Happy New Year,
Tully Harper
January 1, 2071

**ASSASSIN SIGMA,
YOU HAVE RECEIVED YOUR ASSIGNMENT.
THIS IS OUR BEST CHANCE TO TAKE THE BOY.
ELIMINATE THE OTHERS IF YOU CAN.
REPORT WHEN THE MISSION IS COMPLETE.
WE ARE ASCENDANT. WE ALWAYS RISE.**

-GT

I. The Truth and the Lie

The bright lights of the news studio and one wild trip into space had clearly fried my brain. Otherwise, I would have noticed the figure who came alongside me as I was on my way back from the bathroom, the figure that knocked me into a dark storage room full of mops and moldy smells. He held something to my throat that glowed purple and felt cold. Then he locked the door and placed one finger over his lips.

“Shhhhh,” he said. “Do you want to live?”

This was the last in a long line of difficult questions that I had faced that morning. There were a number of people on stage at the news conference, but the press saved the tough questions for me. *Tully, in your own words, what happened?* My friends and I ran away from home. We stole a hovercar and camped in the Florida Everglades. Then Tabitha was abducted. Sunjay and I have seen her kidnappers’ faces, so our lives are in danger. *Do you have any idea where Tabitha might be now?* It’s the one thing I want to find out. *If Tabitha were listening right now, what would you say to her?* That she should have faith. We will find her, no matter what.

There was so much of the truth in the lies that it hurt to answer...

So did I want to live?

“Of course,” I said, “I want to find my friend. I don’t want to die in here.”

He tightened his grip. The edge of the knife felt like dry ice against my skin.

“Then why haven’t you left?” he said.

“Uh, because you just locked us in this storage room,” I said.

“Save your jokes for another day, Tully,” he said. “You have to disappear. *They* are coming.”

The way he said the word “they” didn’t make me think of the kidnappers that we told everyone about. The fake ones that Sunjay and I escaped. No, “they” made me think of something much larger and darker, a predator with the power to enslave the whole human race. It made me think of the Ascendant. But what did he know about it? He was probably just a crazy fan of my dad and the Harper Device who thought the world was coming to an end. Either way, he could be right.

“Thanks for your concern, Guy with a Knife, but I’m under police protection.”

He threw his head back and laughed. He took the knife off my throat, and that's when I got a better look at the blade. It had a familiar purple glow. There was an old television camera next to us, and with one flick of his wrist, he cut the entire thing into two pieces that clattered to the floor.

"Do you take me for a fool? Kidnapper in the Everglades? I know the truth. You just returned from space. The Ascendant captured your friend on the far side of the moon, but you escaped. Rumor has it that you managed to steal the Sacred and cut off Gallant Trackman's hand. He wasn't very pleased with the outcome of his conspiracy game. No, Tully, they are coming for you. You delayed them, but you and the Sacred are in danger."

He closed the blade. The light from under the door dimly lit our faces. I was speechless. His words silenced me more than any knife or black staff could have. The Sacred. No one else knew the true name of the Harper Device.

"Who are you?" I asked him.

"I am no longer a friend of the Lord Ascendant," he said. "That makes us friends."

"Friends don't threaten each other with knives," I said. "If we're friends, then tell me where Tabitha is."

"Stop your search," he said, dodging my question. "Do not seek her out. You are in enough danger as it is. The Ascendant have many eyes on Earth but very little power. Still, all it will take is for Gallant Trackman to find the right assassin."

"Which is what you are?"

"What I once was," he said, "and what I will no longer be. I would rather die than follow some orders, no matter what Trackman will do to me. Now I believe our time is up."

"No," I said. "Tell me where she is! You know. You must tell me."

He walked to the corner of the room and flipped open his alien switchblade again. Then he traced a perfect circle on the floor, and that portion of the floor fell away. Before he hopped into the hole and disappeared forever, he shook his head and said...

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AWAY TEAM BETA -
OUR ASSASSIN FAILED US.
PLEASE DEAL WITH HIM.
NO SIGN OF THE BOY.
RETURN TO SHADOW MODE
AND AWAIT FURTHER INSTRUCTION.
WE ARE ASCENDANT.
WE ALWAYS RISE.
-GT

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This ends the excerpt of The Rathmore Chaos.
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To follow Tully on his first trip into space, read
The Conspiracy Game,
available at [this link](#).

For updates: <http://facebook.com/theconspiracygame>.



About the author: Adam Holt left a perfectly good teaching job to write fiction. He graduated from Baylor University and makes his home in Houston, Texas.