

## **The Elemental Conductors**

### **Chapter 1: The Trouble with Thunderstorms**

It's 12:00 am on a clear, crisp fall night, a steady cool breeze blows, lifting the red-orange colored leaves in the air in fantastic fashion in a way that might suggest they are putting on a performance for the numerous little lights above. As if in response these beautiful stars flicker and pulsate in the night sky as the moon shines down its pale light on Joshua Matthews, a strong somewhat muscular 24 year old man with short raven colored hair, bright hazel eyes, fair skin, and a light five o'clock shadow peppering the lower half of his face. He has an exceptional view of the dancing lights in the night sky from atop the utility pole he is currently repairing causing him to lose focus, distracting him from the task at hand as he stares up into the sky in admiration of the beauty above him. Joshua is a newly hired electrician working the nightshift for Cable Solutions Inc., an emergency electrical cable repair company in Eos city, a place where daily life requires a constant connection to an electrical source to run smoothly. Eos is a relatively big city with tall buildings, fast cars, big digital displays for advertisements, and slick high speed trains called light rails for mass public travel. All these things run on electricity, the cars are electric, the buildings internal systems operations drain electrical power, the digital displays consume the charge, and the light rails rely on electrical currents that are built into the tracks. Even money is tied to the power grid systems because physical money doesn't exist anymore, everything is bought with credit cards that rely on electricity to function properly.

Eos city only has one place of unconverted nature and that is Garden Park, a natural gem of vibrant grass and tall majestic oak trees, a place for those that want refuge from the cold steel of city life. Unfortunately the park seems to get smaller and smaller with each passing year as more commercial city buildings are built along the park's borders. In the center of this bustling electric metropolis is Ion, the heavily guarded power grid that powers the entire city feeding electricity into Eos and its many parts through the utility poles placed around and throughout the city so if even one of the power lines on the utility poles goes down it can cause havoc, this causes electricians to be on call at any time of day or night and so on this night the new guy has been called to fix one of those power lines. Noticing Joshua lost in thought his friend and coworker Tony Russo calls up to him from the company van parked below.

"Hey, what did I say about daydreaming while you're up there!" Tony chastises.

"Sorry Tony, I just got distracted by the stars." Joshua replies.

"Well you can't be doing that. It's dangerous up there so you need to stay focused!"

"I know, I know, you're right and it won't happen again."

Tony is a 25 year old man with an average build, dark brown hair, brown eyes, and slightly tan skin. He tends to have a generally gruff air about him though not necessarily mean or angry just tough, like someone who has been through a lot in his life and lived to tell about it. The two men have known each other for a long time and it was actually Tony that got Joshua this job so he is the one who is tasked with his training as well as keeping an eye on his distractible friend. The power lines on Bleaker Street that the pair are currently working on fixing were brought down by a raging lightning storm last night and since there were so many calls for downed utility poles at the time Cable Solutions Inc. has just gotten around to sending Joshua and Tony to assess the situation. Eos city does get thunderstorms from time to time but a lightning storm like to one last night was very unusual and comparing that to the beautifully peaceful scenery of tonight one might think it was just a feverous nightmare were it not for the downed power lines it left in its wake. As Joshua gets back to work under Tony's watchful supervision the flickering lights of the night sky begin to fade as dark storm clouds quickly roll in, transforming the once illuminated sky into a twisted and ominous black, almost as if a black hole had formed in the sky. Joshua and Tony can only look up in disbelief.

“What the hell?” Joshua says as he stares up into the sky confused.

“This cannot be good.” Tony remarks with a worried look on his face.

“Another storm at this hour? But the sky was clear just a minute ago.”

“I think it's time we call it a night Josh.”

Tony could tell something was very wrong as the clouds seemed to get even darker than they were before though he wasn't sure how that was even possible considering how dark they were already. As Tony looked up at Joshua, still high atop the utility pole, he noticed one of the clouds directly above Joshua start to light up with electricity and as if sensing what was about to happen he screams “Josh get down now!” but it was too late. All Joshua could do was turn his head toward his friend before the lightning strikes his very heart with a thunderous boom, the impact sending him crashing to the ground below as he lands with a massive thud. The last thing he sees is Tony running toward him as his vision fades to black.

The silence that had fallen over Joshua from the shock and the fall begins to fade as he starts to hear sounds all around him. Although the world is still dark because he has yet to open his eyes his consciousness begins to return as he hears the sound of machines beeping, people talking, and wheels rolling across the floor a short distance away. As he finally begins to open his eyes the light quickly floods in promptly blurring his vision but as his eyes adjust to the light he finds that he is indeed, as the sounds he was hearing indicated, in a hospital. Looking around the room at the various machines and tubes attached to him he can hear someone screaming “Nurse, Nurse he's awake!” Joshua could tell it was Tony, he knows that raspy voice all too well though Tony had hit an octave that he wasn't used to hearing being that Tony never really was an excitable man. Joshua turns his head to see Tony walking in through the doorway with a nurse

not far behind, greeting his friend with a smile Joshua tries to sit up but is quickly pushed back down by the pain that suddenly shoots through his body turning his smile into a look of pain. After Tony and the nurse, both now in the room, tell him to take it easy and rest, Joshua, not remembering the lightning or the fall begins to ask Tony about why he was in the hospital in the first place.

“What happened to me?” Joshua asks, his voice strained and horse.

“You really don’t remember? You were struck by lightning and then fell off the top of the utility pole we were fixing.” Tony responds, his voice back to its normal raspy tones.

“Wow, how did I survive that?”

“Don’t know but I’m sure as hell glad you did.”

“Yeah me too, besides what would you do with me?”

“Worry a lot less.”

The two men start to laugh before Joshua is interrupted by the pain again, telling Tony not to make him laugh because it hurt. Tony nods in compliance and takes a seat in the chair across from Joshua’s bed, standing or rather sitting guard over his injured buddy. Joshua takes this opportunity to get a good look at Tony and he can see that he looks exhausted so he decides to address this in his own special way.

“You know you look like hell.” Joshua comments with a slight smile on his face.

“That’s your fault you know and besides I’m still in better shape than you at the moment.” Tony fires back, full grin on his face.

“You stayed here all night didn’t you?”

“More like every night and you’re damn right I did.”

“What do you mean every night?”

“You were in a coma for over a month and I would see this man sitting on that chair and sleeping at your bedside every night since you came in.” The nurse interjects, still looking Joshua over and checking the machines he’s attached to.

“Wow really? Thanks bro.” Joshua says turning toward Tony.

“No thanks necessary. You know I wasn’t about to leave my brother here alone, we’re all we got.” Tony responds.

Though the two men had known each other before they started working together it goes much deeper than that. Joshua and Tony have known each other since they were boys, first meeting one another in a foster home that they shared at the tender ages of six and seven respectfully. Their foster mother Gina Ross was a functioning drunk and drug addict that managed to hide her addictions well enough to come across as a good foster mother to the children services case workers (that or they just didn't care) so she could take in children but the truth is she only did this for the hefty sum of money the government paid her for each child, money she would waste on her addictions. Their foster father Thomas Ross was an angry man that was quick to beat the boys at the slightest mistake or disobedient behavior but he was always sure to hit them where the marks and bruises could be covered up by pants and shirts so he wouldn't endanger the large checks they would get for fostering Joshua and Tony. With Tony being the older of the two he was protective of Joshua so he would be the one to take most of the beatings from their 'father' until he was thirteen and had enough of the abuse.

Tony had spilt some milk on the table but before he could even think to clean it up Thomas walked in and saw the mess, he started screaming at the top of his lungs causing Joshua to come downstairs to see what was going on only to see Thomas yelling at Tony and pointing to the milk spread across the table. Joshua had stepped in telling Thomas to calm down because it was just an accident and that they would clean it up, then in an unnecessary rage Thomas did something he had never done before, he punched Joshua dead in the face knocking him to the ground, he had always been careful to avoid their faces until now. Seeing this Tony flew into a rage himself and ended up beating Thomas into unconsciousness. Tony was tall for a thirteen year old so that coupled with the adrenaline pumping through his system at the time was enough to overpower Thomas and take him down, realizing what he had done he and Joshua agreed it was time for the two of them to leave and so they did, never stopping to look back. They had always been close but that day they truly became brothers and it's always been the two of them ever since.

Joshua's mind rings with Tony's words as he echoes them right back to him in conformation. Remembering their painful past the words "We're all we got" leave Joshua's lips in a calm tone as a smile forms on his face. He raises his hand towards Tony and forms a fist while Tony reciprocates with a fist of his own as the two connect in a form of silent communication. Joshua then decides now that the nurse has stopped poking and prodding at him and left he would take this opportunity to get some sleep while Tony sits in the chair across from him, watching over him.

It's midnight on the dot when Joshua awakens with an uncontrollable cough, rousing Tony in the process. "Hold on Josh I'll get you some water." Tony says as he grabs a cup and runs over to the water fountain just outside the room. As he rushes back in the room he spills a little bit of water on Joshua's exposed hand which surprisingly causes Joshua's coughing fit to stop but then he begins to feel something else. His whole right arm, the one the water was spilled on, starts to get hot and then begins to feel like it's on fire when suddenly a bolt of electricity

fly's from his fingertips and strikes the wall in front of him, leaving a huge, black, smoking burn mark on the spot of impact.

"What the hell was that!?" Tony shouts, dropping the whole cup of water on the floor.

"I, I have no idea!" Joshua responds, totally shocked by what just happened.

"Okay, Okay we'll figure this out but let's keep our voices down."

"Why? Shouldn't we tell the doctors about this?"

"Hell no! Do you think they will ever let you out of here if you tell them you're shooting lightning out of your fingertips?"

"Good point."

The pair gets to work on a story for the mark on the wall and makes sure to try and keep Joshua's arms covered but that is not proving to be easy because electricity is starting to run through his fingers again. Try as they might the electricity running through his fingers is burning through the sheets on his arms, causing them both to panic:

"You need to turn that off!" Tony demands.

"I don't know how!" Joshua counters, clutching his hands tightly together, left covering the right.

"Hey I can't see the lightning in your right hand when you hold your hands together like that so, uh, just keep doing that and we might get out of here in one piece after all."

"Alright but we need to leave quickly, I don't know if this is going to work for long."

Just then Joshua hears footsteps and the voice of a man saying that he needs to check on the patient in room 3B. He looks at the panel on the wall next to the door to see that 3B was his room so with a hushed "Damn it" under his breath he gestures to Tony to hide the burnt bed sheets before the doctor comes in, lucky the physician was reading Joshua's chart which kept him busy long enough for Tony to successfully hide the damaged sheets in a nearby trash can. The doctor greets the pair and asks Joshua how he's feeling:

"You've been through quite the ordeal, so how are you feeling? Any lingering pains?"  
The doctor asks.

"Nope, I'm feeling right as rain doctor." Joshua says nervously, quickly shifting his eyes to the wall behind the doctor where the burn mark is before shifting his eyes back to the man.

"Yeah, Josh is fine, in fact he was just talking about checking out of here right bro?"  
Tony interjects.

“Yes my brother is right, I feel fine and I really need to get back to work.” Joshua adds.

“I really think you should stay another night or two but if you really want to leave you need to sign the release forms. Wait here, I’ll go get them.” The doctor responds.

“No worries, we’ll be right here.” Joshua replies.

As the doctor walks out Joshua begins to get dressed in the clothes Tony brought for him but since his right hand was still coursing with electricity he had to get dressed with only one hand and his left hand was definitely not his dominant one. Tony couldn’t help but chuckle at him bouncing and fumbling around trying to get dressed with one hand sarcastically saying he would “Offer to help but, you know, your hand’s a livewire.” Now glaring at Tony, Joshua finally manages to get dressed after what seems like forever, just in time for the doctor to return to his room with exit papers in hand. Joshua quickly and sloppily signs them with his left hand, hiding his right hand behind him, and passes them back into the doctor’s hands before the pair rushes out the door, Joshua making sure to move his right hand in front of him as he passes the doctor to hide his hand from the physician’s sight. Rushing down the hall Joshua and Tony smile at each other happy that they were on their out of there and happy that they didn’t have to explain the mark on wall. The doctor on the other hand was still in the room making a few observations, he noticed the mark on the wall, the burnt bed sheets, and the fact that Joshua was hiding his right hand from him the whole time. “It looks like we have another one.” The doctor says to himself as he pulls out his phone and begins to make a call to someone.