

## CHAPTER ONE



### AGAINST THE INFINITE STORM

**T**he never-ending sandstorm that plagued the western desert of the North American Sector loomed in the distance. Vibrating sand churned in plumes that rose to the clouds. It was likely a few days away from hitting them if it moved in their direction. No one could ever say which way or how fast the permanent storm would roam, but it was closer than usual.

Eos and his sister, Maxima, were walking towards the sandstorm to explore the North Dunes—an area where they could sometimes find relics of the old society. Eos explored it as often as he could. It was the most adventure the desert confined siblings could get, and Maxima often went with her older brother to make sure he didn't venture off too far.

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The staccato of thunder within the storm masked the roar of sand being hurled to the sky.

*Huurrr. Kadooom! Huurrr.*

The wall of dark gray-brown blocked out the sun and flashed with an ominous orange each time lightning struck inside.

Eos raised an arm covered in thin beige fabric and pointed to the northwest. “I’ve never seen those before.” He referred to the metallic structures peaking from dunes two miles away. “The storm must have uncovered them. Let’s go check it out.”

Maxima pulled the top of a desert shawl from around her neck and tucked her chin under it, holding it between her lips as she thought. The fabric hid a scar where her lip had once been split. It was a raised white line that separated her lower lip into two distinctly colored sections and slashed her top lip with a thin streak. “We’ll be cutting it close getting back. We’re already seven miles from the complex. We have to work tonight.”

“Well...let’s be fast in getting there then,” Eos said and quickened his pace. It had rained hard for the first time in months the night before. The one-hundred-degree heat and the beating sun had made short work of drying up the sand.

Maxima sighed with exasperation and brushed her long, raven black hair from her face as she took quick, careful steps to keep up with her brother. “You didn’t listen,” she said.

“I did listen. I’m still considering what you said.” He smiled playfully at Maxima as he stomped forward. “I imagine I’ll have made up my mind on what to do about it by the time we reach those juts,” he referred to the metallic structures—old-world buildings that peaked out briefly from drowning in the desert. The winds had to favor moving a dune the right way, and even then, the building could be covered again in a matter of days.

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Maxima rolled her eyes but smirked from under her shawl at her brother's uncontrollable desire to explore. They were near enough that she could make out enormous silos now. Coned roofs topped three tilted and off-kilter, fifty-meter-wide cylinders. Two remained mostly buried in sand, but the one nearest them was uncovered. The roof of it was deteriorated and full of missing sections.

"Wow..." Eos let out excitedly when he saw the scale of the silos.

A movement of black in the shadows of the silo ahead caught Maxima's eye.

"Eos, something moved out there," she cautioned. "We should go back."

"I don't see anything." Eos squinted through the blowing sand that was beginning to kick up. "We're already here; come on." He gestured for her to follow.

Maxima looked again in shadows of the silo but saw nothing.

The tilted metal structure had a spiral of stairs around one half and a caged ladder that went straight up the other. The siblings climbed the metal stairs, but Maxima kept looking down where she had seen something move. She bit down on her shawl harder.

When they reached the top, they saw that sections of the balcony were missing, preventing them from walking around the full circumference of the roof. Large gaps of the metal sheet roof were rusted away, leaving the sand filled cavity inside partially exposed.

Eos and Maxima sat at the edge of the railing, staring into the infinite sandstorm, mesmerized. It kept a distance that was threatening, but not yet dangerous. There was only the *huurrr* of the storm and *crackle-boom* of thunder. Eos pulled out a silver coin

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from his pocket and held it up with his right arm. Black, like the ink of a tattoo, covered his right arm. It darkened his entire hand and crawled up his forearm in wild crashing waves that branched from one another. This strange mark had always been with him and, on occasion, it caused a wild urge to reach for answers beyond his grasp. He turned the coin over, holding the tiny piece of metal before the never-ending wall of the sandstorm. An ancient language circled the face of a man on one side of the coin. The other showed a soaring bird, whose wings streaked to the edge of the coin as if it was flying at incredible speed.

“Maxima, you know my book about old coins?”

She nodded. It was a rare reward from their employer, General Braxton, for their tireless work. Though, it was more of a concession to Eos’ constant requests than a gift.

“The first one or the new one?” she asked.

Eos continued, “The new one. I finished it last night. Dad’s coin wasn’t in it. Nothing.”

“There are more books out there. There has to be a book that will tell you what it is.”

“I don’t remember, but I can feel...like a half memory. I know dad gave this to me. I just need to find out where it’s from.”

“Next year you’ll have to ask for another book about old coins.”

Eos gritted his teeth. “No. That’ll take too long. At this rate, I may never learn what I want to. This...” He spun the coin against the backdrop of the sandstorm. “...It’s the key to knowing who they are and where they are...if they still are.” He admitted the last part with sadness in his voice. “I have to do something else. We can’t just keep using our powers every night like slaves. We have to do something drastic and soon or we’ll be stuck like this forever,

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and then we'll never know why we have abilities that no one else in the world does."

Maxima shook her head. "How about instead of *soon* and *drastic* we do something *planned* and *smart*?"

"Fine let's plan something smart—*very soon* and make sure it's drastic," Eos shot back.

*Clink. Clink. Clunk.*

Someone was climbing up the stairs.

Maxima looked over the railing and scanned for the source of the noise. A bearded man covered in dirt and sweat was making his way up the stairs.

Maxima glared at Eos. "*I told you* I saw something move."

Eos looked around frantically, already planning for an escape route if needed. The railed balcony was missing a section that would allow them to get to the ladder on the other side. The approaching stranger had them trapped. Then, Eos and Maxima found themselves looking through the large missing section of roof to the daylight on the other end. The sand filled silo was still pooled with water from rain the day before.

A grim voice growled from halfway up the stairs. It was less than friendly. "What are you doing up there? Stay right where you are."

Maxima's face went white. Eos pointed at the light coming through the opposite hole in the roof and urged her towards the only alternate route, "Go through to the ladder. I'll distract him so that you can get to the other side."

Eos could feel his heart beating all the way down in his feet. *They were supposed to be alone this far out in the desert...so who...?*

A graying, bearded man, wrapped in dark, loose-fitting desert clothes, climbed up the last stair. He had binoculars around his

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neck and a canteen at his waist. His bloodshot eyes met Eos' just as Maxima disappeared inside the silo.

"I said wait!" The man sprinted at Eos, seeing that Maxima was going inside.

Eos stepped between the man and the opening in the roof.

"Who are you?"

"Girl, get back here," the man called into the sand-filled cavity. He turned to Eos and marched toward the opening.

Eos threw himself in front of it and glared, clenching his father's coin.

"Don't be stupid, boy. You—" The man stopped and noticed the shine of silver in Eos' hand. He grinned a dirty, rotted smile. "That's a nice piece of silver. Why don't you let me see it?"

He shot out towards Eos' hand, but Eos wrenched his arm back into the silo, out of reach.

The man's sweaty fist wrapped around Eos' shirt, and he yanked Eos towards him, still reaching for the silver.

Eos shoved him away, but the man did not lose his hold.

*Thud.* The man slammed Eos against the roof, his weight bowing the thin metal, and the edge of the opening cutting into Eos' back.

The man snarled at him, but then a strange look crossed his face as if realizing something.

"Where'd ya get that coin?"

"Ughh," Eos grunted, struggling as the roof cut into his back more. "It's mine. Back off."

The man's eyes went wild. His pupils bounced around as if processing. "I highly doubt that." The sour stench of the unbathed man pressed against him curled Eos' nostrils. The man slammed Eos against the metal again. "That's a..." He squinted.

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“Hyperborea coin you got there. Ain’t no way that belongs to you. Best let me take it off your hands.”

The man reached so that his body leaned into the silo with Eos’ arm. The cloth around his chest stretched and pulled down as he reached, revealing a tattoo near his clavicle of two snakeheads. In the scuffle, Eos couldn’t quite make out what it was.

For a moment, Eos thought the man was serious. It was a strange word that he had never heard before—*Hyperborea*. It only took him a second’s thought to realize the man was spouting gibberish to try and steal precious metal. He was a desert wanderer who saw the opportunity to steal something of value. He probably saw his next meal in Eos’ hand, but Eos wanted to believe for a split second that the made-up word meant something.

“Agggh! Get off me, you rot mouth thief.” Eos provoked the man as the pain cutting into his back was getting worse. They both rolled and teetered dangerously close to falling into the silo.

“Eos!” Maxima’s cry broke his concentration from the struggle. “The sand’s wet. I can’t get my feet out,” she said with panic.

“Hold on, Maxima. I’m coming. Arrgh.” Eos grimaced as he fought.

The man’s fingers were now struggling to pry open Eos’. He was bigger, stronger, and winning. Eos wouldn’t be able to keep hold of his dad’s silver piece much longer.

Maxima’s voice echoed from inside again. “My ankles are under. I’m sinking! There’s nothing I can reach.”

The urgency in his sister’s voice gave him the power to yank away with all his might.

Eos rolled off the roof so that the man had his back to the opening now, but he still had hold of Eos’ fingers.

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“Stop struggling, kid.”

The man lurched for Eos again, but this time, Eos reacted out of instinct.

There was a crimson glow that came from his blackened right hand. A neon vapor escaped from his fingertips until a small, pea-sized sphere of red energy burst to life in his open hand! This was the power that he and his sister alone possessed. It was a power beyond human ability.

Without thinking, without hesitation, Eos thrust the churning red sphere into the man’s chest.

There was a crackling explosion where the energy met the man, and the man went flying backward. He was torn back into the silo, but his grip on Eos’ hand had been strong. The man screamed out and pulled Eos in with him.

The grip broke, but not before raking Eos’ fingers open.

The man flew violently inside.

The silver coin, highlighted by the fading red light, spun high in the air and then fell somewhere in the silo.

Eos was left on his stomach, halfway fallen inside the cavern. There was a heave in his belly at the thought of losing the coin. He scanned desperately for any sight of it.

*There!*

He saw light hitting the round edge of the coin stuck partially in the sand ten feet away. He pulled himself further in with a singular thought. *He must get back his father’s coin.* His hands squished into coarse, wet sand until his feet were barely hanging on to the balcony outside.

He reached until he thought his shoulder would come out of its socket. He had to get the coin.



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His arms plunged deeper into the sand trap. Still, he stretched—willing his arm to be longer.

It was no use. Eos couldn't reach, and his supporting wrist was submerged. But he couldn't will himself to stop reaching.

“Eos!” Maxima screamed. “My waist. It's up to my waist.”

Eos looked between the gleam of silver almost entirely under sand and the silhouette of his sister's upper body on the other end. He shrieked internally and pounded his fist into the sand as he resolved to give up on the coin.

“Maxima, I'm going to get you out.” Eos' mind shifted to the task of saving his sister. He had little time, but how could he do it? As his mind raced, Eos put a finger to his left cheekbone and rubbed a scar that began near his temple and fell down his cheekbone an inch. It ended in an outward curve that faintly resembled a dagger.

“Oh, no...” she cried.

“Maxima, can you see the man?”

Maxima bit down hard on her scarf and then said with fright shaking her voice, “Yes, but he's not awake. I'm still sinking—but I have an idea.”

“I'm going to get you out,” Eos reassured her. “What's your idea?”

Maxima breathed deeply, trying to coax herself to be calm. She laced her fingers together and turned them outward so that her knuckles popped as she thought intently. “I need you to make a hole at the base of the silo—as big as you possibly can.”

“A hole?”

“Yes, it will drain the sand out through the bottom.”

Eos understood and sprinted down the metal stairs without another word, his feet slamming into rusted planks. He didn't look

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to see where his feet were landing. There was only the desperation to save his sister.

When he reached the last step, Eos backed away from the silo and began to form another sphere of red energy. It swirled in his hand as it swelled to life with an electric sound of humming and static popping. The storm echoed the sound behind him. He focused so that this sphere was larger than the instinctual one that had formed during his fight atop the roof. It was taking minutes to develop.

*Faster. Come on, faster.* Every second he took, Maxima sank deeper.

He could hear Maxima calling to him from above but couldn't make out what she was saying. It only made him work harder.

Finally, he finished his creation and hurled the red sphere into the slanted wall at the base of the silo.

*Boom!*

The metal blew apart, and a large hole let out a rushing torrent of muddy sand mixture.

Eos ran out of the way to avoid being swept up in the river of sand.

The silo had emptied, and Maxima crawled out of the hole Eos had made, shaking. She pulled herself out and fell onto dry sand at Eos' feet. He helped his traumatized sister sit up.

Maxima punched Eos in the shin.

"Ow!" Eos jumped.

"I said we should have turned back." Maxima got up. She put her arms around Eos and hid her face in his shoulder as she breathed heavily.

Eos held his sister apologetically but worriedly scanned the outpour for the man. "Maxima did you see the man in there?"

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Maxima murmured, “He was face down and went under right away.”

Eos relaxed. The man was nowhere to be seen.

Then he remembered the coin and threw himself into the muddy sand. He dug his hands into the pile and began scooping handfuls of sand behind him without pausing.

“Dad’s coin. It went in.” Eos said, continuing to dig.

Maxima bent down to help him, but after a short while looked up. Eos wasn’t stopping, but she could see the amount that had poured out of the silo wasn’t searchable if they had all year to try finding the coin. It was a mountain of sand that would soon become one with the desert.

Eos was furiously working as if he could somehow find their mom and dad if he found the coin, but Maxima put a hand on his back and whispered, “I’m sorry, Eos. It’s gone.” He slowed his pawing at the sand and saw what Maxima had—the vastness of the search area.

“No.” He said through gritted teeth. “No.” He punched the sand. He punched again. And again. He continued until his knuckles were bleeding and he resigned himself with slumped shoulders. “I lost it...it was all I had.”

“I know, Eos. I know.” Maxima comforted him as best she could.

A blind rage overtook Eos as time stopped existing around him. There was only white in his vision and tension in his skull.

“We have to get back to the complex. We have work tonight.” Maxima reasoned with him.

“I’m sick of working for Braxton. I’m...I’m...” he choked out the words.

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When Eos stopped seething and regained his awareness of the world around him, the silo was a spec against the storm behind the siblings. There was only Eos, Maxima, the wall of black storm filled with electric orange, and an empty pocket.

Eos reach into his empty pocket one last time, knowing his only connection to validating who he was and where he came from...was gone.

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The large industrial building Eos and Maxima called home was an old United States manufacturing plant. It stood tall and resilient—far enough south from the path of the sandstorm that it was at little risk of being buried. It was removed from civilization and expanded by many levels on the western wing for Eos and Maxima’s permanent assignment.

Maxima went inside first, but Eos lingered. He stared toward the North Dunes, where he knew his coin now lay with the remains of the old world. They were already late to return from their exploration and so he reluctantly went inside to join his sister.

He saw that Glenn had already passed out for the night. Their guardian was unprepared when he took the siblings on, and his way of adapting over the years had been imperfect. He lay peacefully snoring on the couch with empty bottles of whiskey on the floor around him—his usual state after returning from a night out with his friend from a nearby desert colony, Shaun Dunn.

On the small kitchenette stove, aromas of carrots, potatoes, and beef bathed in gravy diffused through the air until they reached Eos. He sniffed and closed his eyes while imagining the tastes, even though he knew Glenn had only rehydrated the military supplies.

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He considered sitting at the dinner table, but Maxima summoned him. Her voice traveled down a long corridor, and so he went.

Eos entered the complex's main room. The door slammed shut behind him, causing an echo that bolted throughout the ten-story room.

In front of him towered a monster of a machine that spanned the entire height of the room and descended for a good depth more. It was a spiral of metal; a beast ever twisted.

“Are you ready Eos?”

“Ready,” he mumbled and kicked his foot at the floor with his hands tucked deep into his pockets.

After grumbling, Eos slid a leg back into a firm stance and swirled his hands around an imaginary pocket of air. He started slowly, but his intensity increased. Drips of sweat fell from his brow, and his hands continued molding some invisible sphere until static filled the air.

Faster and faster—eventually, the motion reached a climax with a mighty crackling that resulted in a crimson ball of bright energy forming in his hands, and he bent it to his will.

Eos mentally prepared himself for the rest of the job as he toyed with the strong churning light; tossing it from hand to hand and making the vibrant sphere grow in size, but tonight focus would not come. As he worked on his creation, his mind was on his father—a faceless memory that he caught glimpses of in the reflection of spiraled metal before him.

There and then gone. Eos searched the red shimmers but could only catch the images of his imagination as they disappeared. The face, like the coin, was lost.

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Eos released his energy into the machine with a familiar thrust. It disappeared between the spaces of the spiraling metal shell. The thing creaked and moaned, resisting what it was meant to do.

On the other side, the energy came out, and Maxima caught it with a grunt. She too toyed with it and eventually injected her sapphire energy. The energies did not mix—they formed marbled, churning layers.

She pushed forward more hesitantly, though with a great deal more grace and poise than her brother and released the energy back through the machine. This time it was more than double the size it had been, and the intense red mingled with the blue.

After hours of performing the nightly ritual, the two separate energies acted as one and engulfed the large metal column. It was passed back and forth through the machine, growing in size and power each time. During each pass, it tugged at the twisting structure until a tremendous mechanical groan began.

The great machine was set in motion.

The contraption rotated quickly. A plasma-like sheet of energy encompassed the metal's surface and was moving with speed and elegance; back and forth like the ebb and flow of the moon manipulating the ocean. The ceremony continued until there was a wave of red and blue that circled the spiraling metal, giving it life.

Every surge of red hypnotized Eos further until he was no longer aware of his surroundings. There was only strobing crimson that imposed on him until he felt small and too light. He was missing the weight of his father's coin.

*"Why? Have you forgotten us?"* A voice screamed out from within the machine. It was the voice of his father! The face became clearer so that he could almost make out some features...almost...but then a wave of blue washed it away.

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“No. I didn’t.” Eos whispered.

His fists tightened as he grew scared and angry.

*“You have forsaken your mother and I. You could not hold on to even a single coin!”* The voice wailed, and the face appeared again like a mirage. The words were not his father’s. If Eos hadn’t needed the validation of the vision, he would have recognized the thoughts were his own...but tonight he needed to believe. So, he fed his fears in the machine.

“I had to—for Maxima.” He yelled into the overwhelming noise. His body began to shake, and he unconsciously fed the machine more and more energy until it was spilling from his hands to the shadowed glimpses of his father.

*“Now you will never find your way. You are lost.”* His father’s ghostly image faded, and so did his voice.

“Wait!” Eos cried out into the vortex. “I’ll find you. Come back!”

His mind went white and his vision blurred until he was no longer in control of himself. His energy flowed freely from his body, trying to recreate the ghost that had faded back into the machine.

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Glenn awoke to an overwhelming noise coming through the walls. He got up from the bed and felt a ringing through his skull. He stumbled across the room, through the minefield of previously enjoyed bottles, and stroked his beard stubble groggily.

“I would have had a fewer drinks last night if I would’ve known those two were going to give me this headache,” he mumbled to

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himself as he looked over at the dinner table across the room that was still lit by a dim overhead light.

“Oh, and I see it’s too much trouble to actually eat the food I slaved to make for them,” he rattled on to himself. “One of the greatest minds on the continent is reduced to babysitting and maintenance.” He rolled his eyes and dragged his fingers down his cheekbones.

The small analog clock on his bedside table read 2 *A.M.*

Glenn, not missing a chance to complain, muttered on to himself about the time as he went down the hallway to check on Eos and Maxima and the horrible grinding sounds that were causing him such pain.

Two thick strands of his strawberry blonde hair refused to stay slicked back with the rest, and he brushed them out of his weathered hazel eyes. He pushed open the door to the generator room. Oh yes, he thought, another great wonder provided by the North American Sector government. The room’s *sound-proofing* abilities left much to be desired. Though, he knew he was still better off in the military controlled North American Sector than in the Asian and European Sectors...probably.

As he moved through the doorway, he shouted into the vortex of noise. “Eos, what are you doing? It’s two in the morning!” But Eos wasn’t listening. His stare was a trance locked onto the generator, and crimson light poured from his hands in a way Glenn had never seen before.

Maxima had stopped feeding the machine and was already shouting, trying to get Eos’ attention.

Eos was rigid as if possessed. No words could get through to him.



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Glenn glanced at *his* machine: the source of the racquet. An energy veil surrounded it that looked like lava. His jaw dropped. Without hesitation, he ran in a faltering dash and tackled Eos, breaking Eos' concentration and bringing the machine to a halt as the energy became motionless. The shroud of red fell towards the floor but dissipated into vapor as it crashed down.

Glenn's throbbing head, which he held in his hand, finally had a few peaceful seconds, but Eos didn't let the silence live long. He stood up completely exhausted and now exasperated. "What was that Glenn? You just interrupted the whole night's work!"

"Are you serious?" Glenn exclaimed outraged, "Look at it!" His voice fell to a whimper, "Look at it."

Eos stared at the motionless machine. Every inch of spiraled metal was now steaming; the entirety of the monster glowed. There were even spots where the metal had liquefied and began to drip.

Glenn sunk on his knees. "Look at it. You trying to kill my baby? What were you thinking?" He struck his forehead with an open palm. "It can't handle being used for that long. More importantly—I can't handle that. If I started repairs on it now, I wouldn't be done for weeks! It's too hot to touch as it is," his eyes watered in sorrow exaggerated by his impaired state.

"Eos wasn't himself...he didn't mean..." Maxima said as she made her way over.

Eos' legs were numb and his body weak. He felt hollow. A pain broke through all the excitement and penetrated his conscious. The black, twisting pattern marked his arm and cursed it with pain when he exerted himself. Tonight, he had gone far beyond his ability. A burning sensation had been growing in his arm, and it culminated as the effects of adrenaline faded. With nothing to mask the feeling, his bone felt as if it was set ablaze.

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Maxima apologized while avoiding Glenn's eyes. "We're so sorry. At least we'll have a few nights of rest from all of tonight's work." She offered hesitantly and then nudged Eos to remind him to apologize.

Eos looked distant and shaky. If he could have spoken, Glenn did not let him.

"Oh, you won't be doing work tomorrow or even next week," Glenn thrust his thumb into his chest while kneeling dejectedly on the ground, "but I sure will."

Suddenly, Eos waivered and fell over limply. His head dropped into Glenn's unready arms as he prevented an uncontrolled collision with the floor.

Maxima was immediately at Eos' side.

"No, it's happening again."

"What's happening again?" Glenn gestured frantically to the unconscious body in his lap.

"He's passed out like this a few times before, but it's been happening more often." Maxima's words trembled as she realized, "He shouldn't have pushed himself so hard." She steadied her emotions and held her older brother, cradling his head of dark hair.

"Should I do something?" Glenn ran his fingers through his hair.

"No, I can heal him. Somehow my energy helps. Go get some sleep, Glenn."

"I think I'll do that. Tomorrow's gonna be a nightmare." He staggered back to his bed talking to himself and complaining about the work they had caused him. Despite his self-pity, he worried about Eos ...and about having to report the destruction of the North American Sector's lead power source. As he opened the door, he caught himself looking back at Eos on the floor.

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Glenn threw his head back. “They’ve turned me into a bleeding-heart mother.” He went back to Eos and Maxima. “Help me get him up, and we’ll carry him to his bed.” As they did, he said under his breath, “Lucky I don’t drop him on his head for what he did to my machine.” After his rough words and a clumsy carry to his bedroom, Glenn set Eos down gently in his bed.

Maxima then held her hands out over Eos, letting small amounts of energy drip from her fingertips to his body, which absorbed it readily. She had learned this in her desperation when Eos fell two times ago.

Glenn left Maxima tending to Eos in the dark. A soft blue glow illuminated Eos’ bronze skin in an aura of security and healing.

This time was worse Maxima thought. Eos slipped further away than ever before.

They were left in a sea of darkness—held at bay only by Maxima’s sapphire light.