

Fabian Story

"Time, there is never enough, despite the fact that it is infinite," Fabian lectured the small gathering of eager students before him. They were all adults, they had to be in order to be accepted to the school of wizardry in Zondaras Cloud City, but they were new to the concepts of using magic. He had taught them the most basics of spells, ones that could not harm others or cause damage to their surroundings.

The aging man, now in his late sixties, wished he had more time to practice his own magic, but he had an obligation to Novus to develop magic users to shape the future of the world, and defend against the many different threats surfacing across it.

"Is there a way to use magic to slow down time, or even travel through it?" Asked Isen, a young woman and one of his brightest students.

"Not that has been discovered, and I hope it never does. Many have attempted it since magic was introduced by the Maelstrom, most of them were never to be seen again." Fabian answered in a wise and gravelly voice, stroking his thick salt and pepper beard with his hand. "Although other discoveries have been made during the attempts. But that is not the lesson to be learned today. Instead, you must gain a greater understanding of the timing of your words, and of the space between them."

"I speak my words just fine, tell us more about these findings." Responded a thin, arrogant, nobles son in a whiny, petulant voice. Fabian despised instructing Thrax, an egotistical narcissist of a man, but had no choice but to follow Zondara's decision to keep him at the school. Zondara had created the floating city, and the school. He had no need for funding, but he seemed to enjoy having people of influence indebted to him.

"You may speak fine, young Lord," Fabian said disdainfully, "But spellcasting is another matter entirely. Thus far you have only learned minor cantrips, simple tricks anyone in tune with minor magic could do. You need to learn how each of the styles of magic require these subtle differences before you can dare to attempt anything beyond the simple flashes of light and snippets of sound you've been practicing since you came here."

Fabian was about to continue with his lecture, but stopped short when he sensed a severe disruption in the flow of magic he was used to feeling. Over the last forty years he had developed an awareness of the streams of magic that flowed and ebbed invisibly across the world. It was what drew him to becoming a wizard in the first place, and astounded many of his peers. Right now something seemed very wrong with it, however, as the slow and gentle waves of magic he was used to sensing were now moving extremely fast and erratic, towards one location instead of all directions.

One of the students began to talk, but was quickly silenced by the raised hand and a subtle gesture from the instructor.

Fabian darted across the room, his dark lavender robes swirling about him as he made his way to the window. The tower they were in was on the edge of the city in the sky, and could see down to the tops of the towering mountains far below.

Some intense force was at work on the top of those mountains, the likes of which Fabian had never seen. He could only relate them to the historic recordings he had read about, of the

coming of the Maelstrom just over a century ago. Could this be a second storm? Was Novus to be torn apart completely this time?

"What is it Master?" the young woman asked, her voice shaking with fear as sounds of thunder reverberated around the room.

"I don't know, but I'm going to find out," Fabian said, turning his back to the window while fishing components from one of many hidden pockets in his robe. He pulled out a small vial of bone powder and a tiny crystal. "I want you each to go down to the main floor, wait for my return before leaving the castle."

"And miss all of the fun?" Whined Thrax, placing his hands on his hips in a defiant stance. "I don't think so. This might actually make being here worthwhile."

"We could be another set of eyes to help you." said Isen, stepping beside Thrax.

The other students spoke amongst themselves, and decided to follow their masters direction. Fabian hadn't listened to any of it, focused instead on creating a magical portal in front of him. An archway of crackling energy formed out of nowhere as the bone dust and small crystal vanished from his hands.

The room around Fabian remained the same, but within the arch of flowing magic, an expanse of rocky land surrounded by mountains could be seen. Fabian grabbed his favored staff from its stand a few feet away, and then bounded through the portal he had created.

One second he was in the tower of the castle, the next he was on a relatively flat section of rock on top of a tall mountain. It was an area he had been to many times before, and creating a dimensional door like the one he just did required for him to be familiar with the area he placed it in. He was not used to the intense, fierce wind around him, stronger than any mountain gusts he had been exposed to before. Hard grains of sand and rock swirled through the air, scraping exposed skin and forcing him to squint his eyes. His attention was drawn to another mountain peak, only a few hundred yards away, where the snow-covered peak was beginning to crack apart.

Fabian was knocked forward from behind by Thrax, the young man had ran through the portal at full speed. Right behind him came Isen, a bit more cautiously. They both immediately crouched and tried to defend themselves against the biting sands. The elder wizard was about to direct them back through the portal when the mountain across from them shattered into thousands of pieces, throwing rock, ice, and trees in all directions. Some came hurtling towards their own area, pieces of boulders as large as a horse.

The students ducked just as one such boulder flew right through the portal behind them, and in the dimensional door they could see the wall of the tower shatter apart from the force of the projectile before the gateway suddenly disappeared.

Fabian began a series of circular motions with one hand, and used his staff to do likewise with the other. A dome began forming around them, comprised of a light blue energy swirling with unreadable glyphs and symbols. The stinging sand and rock reflected harmlessly off the magical shield. The larger rocks slammed into the transparent force field with tremendous force, cracking apart into dozens of pieces and falling to the ground at the base of it.

"I told you to..." Fabian began to scold them, but lost his voice when he saw a stream of water flow over them, towards the crumbling mountain. All three of them stared across to the

crumbling mountain, where the water was travelling. The upper part of the mountain never did fall, however, instead taking on the shape of a gargantuan face. Multiple holes in the stony face suddenly lit up with fire, as did the large opening that appeared like a huge, stony mouth. The top of the mountain face was covered in a thick, mossy grass from which several mountain rocks still jutted out. As more and more of the mountain crumbled around it, an unfathomably giant elemental beast stepped out from it, with two immense arms and a body of writhing tentacles comprised of dirt and stone. The wind seemed attracted to the elemental being, swirling towards and around the creature with a force powerful enough to keep anything from getting near it, except for the flowing river of water that gathered along its right flank and back area. The water that had already collected from other streams of water was larger than a mountain lake, swirling vehemently and defying gravity on the body of the behemoth.

When the full body of the massive elemental was done shedding the mountain covering, it stood almost 2,000 feet tall, and about half as wide. One of its arms glowed with an intense heat, with a large ball of flame engulfed by its hand. Fabian was in utter shock, he had expected some kind of disturbance, but nothing of this magnitude. Thrax was now sitting on the rock behind him, knees clutched to his chest and his face pure white with fear. Isen stood bravely, her face locked into stunned, yet stoic, expression, waiting to see what her mentor advised.

The giant Elemental turned its unblinking, fiery stare towards the glowing dome encasing the trio of humans before lurching forward with surprising speed for such an enormous being. Fabian had no course of action, trapped as they were on a small clearing of this mountain. His focus was still on the magical shield, which he kept in place as the powerful winds intensified from the approach of the mountainous form.

“Do you recall the anti-falling spell from your training?” Fabian yelled, barely audible over the storm-like winds and the footsteps of the Elemental.

The students nodded in unison as Fabian pulled two feathers he had sewn into his sleeve, always ready for an emergency when living in the floating city.

“Run, as fast as you can off the nearest clear edge. There’s no other way!” He said, beads of sweat forming on his forehead.

“What about you?” Isen gasped, “We can’t...”

“You can, you will. Now!” Fabian shouted, including a subtle magical inflection that reinforced the demand.

Isen nodded, mouthing a silent “Thank you” before turning around. Thrax needed no such encouragement to leave the older wizard, already a few steps ahead of Isen with the feather in hand and issuing the words of the simple spell.

The Elemental was only a hundred feet away now, extending earthy arm towards the glowing dome. The winds grew more intense, small rocks and boulders swirling about the creature like a whirring defense mechanism. Fabian glanced back, and saw that his two students had leaped off the cliff, their minor spells had worked and they were floating, if a bit erratically from the unnatural winds, down and away from the creature. Fabian regretted looking the moment he turned his attention back to the Elemental, as he saw one of its giant stone covered tentacles whip around the mountainside. A tremendous crashing sound, along with the brief scream of Thrax before his body was slammed into the hard rock face. The tentacle pulled back within Fabian’s view, and he caught a glimpse of blood and bones mixed into its rocky surface. From

the clumps of hair on one of the bloody rocks, he could tell there was no way Thrax would have survived that blow.

Feeling no other option was available to him; Fabien cancelled his protective shield and rushed the pronunciations to a magical spear, one of the only non-elemental magical attack spells that might be able to harm the creature. He knew the effort was almost pointless given the creatures' size and composition, but it was all he had.

The Elemental inhaled deeply for a moment, and then exhaled a gout of flame larger than any fireball Fabian had ever been witness to. He had already nearly completed his spell, and to cancel it now would not help in any way, so he let it fly forth. The magical spear, comprised of blue energy and white light, flew straight towards the Elementals mouth at a speed faster than any man could throw. When it struck the flames the spear dissipated into a million specs of light, unable to fly through the magic of the Elementals flames. It did serve a purpose, though, as it completely cancelled out the fire, leaving the Elementals rocky, gaping map void of any flame.

The Elemental pushed its torso and head forward instead, demolishing more of the mountain as it enveloped Fabian with its huge mouth, full of rows of stalagmite and stalactite shaped teeth. Fabian tumbled into the stony maw, suffering broken bones and scrapes from the forceful impact as he was jostled through them. He felt gravity shift as the Elemental tipped its head back, and a pool of water in the cavernous mouth sloshed him down the dark shaft of its stony esophagus.

A minute later, he was on a small mound of mossy soil, floating in a pool of foul smelling black liquid. The acidic fluid reminded him of the acrid swamps of the Abandoned Wastelands in mid-Eastern Novus. Fabian had no idea what this creature was, or how the world would be able to stop it, but he knew he had to find a way out immediately. He was able to pull out his vial of bone powder, and his last small crystal, to supplement his favorite spell. This was the spell he had discovered when he was attempting to experiment with time travel, and one he had never shared with anyone else. It had taken over a thousand attempts to make it work, often through experimentation with small animals and birds to see if they could make the jump through the magical gateway without being injured or killed.

The digestive waters sloshed around, splashing Fabian's robe and causing him to reflexively step back. His foot dipped into the water with a hiss and sudden burning smoke coming from the bottom of his boot. Fabian stamped and scraped his boot on the brown moss, but in doing so, he accidentally dropped the crystal. It bounced into the water, disappearing below the surface instantly.

Fabian had never cast the spell without the crystal before, at least not on himself. The spell always had some kind of side effect on his test subjects before he began using the small crystals in the casting. The side effects of not using one could be devastating, it could distort time or cause permanent damage to him...

The world shook around Fabian again, disrupting the lightning fast thoughts going through his head about what to do. The scream of a woman drew his eyes upwards, and before he could react, he saw the broken, bloody body of Isen plummeting down. Her eyes met his for a second, full of fear and terror, before she fell into the black liquid. Just like the crystal, she disappeared right away, a series of bubbles and steam rising up in her wake.

Fabian almost lost his balance again; he quickly slapped his face to draw his focus back, and then began casting his spell. Within a few seconds, with his hasty incantations and throwing of bone dust, a portal appeared in front of him. He could see the base of the Great Tree of Zondura, a popular spot for him to visit in the city. The Elemental must have shifted again, but before Fabian could fall or be splashed by the water, he jumped head first into the portal. The shifting of the mass beneath him caused extra momentum, launching him directly into the base of the Great Tree, and the top of his skull smashed against the ancient wood. The world went black around him.

The old man rose from the base of the Great Tree, rubbing his temple with a grimace. Pain coursed through his body, from a dozen bruises and scrapes, and bones that felt broken or sprained, but he knew not why. The city around him was familiar, as was the Great Tree, but he had no concept of how he had arrived there. The memory of a special spell lingered in his head, but beyond that he could not recall anything about who he was or why he was here. A man screamed in his head, suddenly silenced by a sickening thud. A woman's eyes bored into his soul, as if blaming him for something, before she also screamed violently, ending in a garbled drowning sound.

"Fabian, is that you?" A young lad, no more than seven years of age, shouted at the old wizard. "We haven't seen you around here in weeks! Did you hear about the Mountain Monster that destroyed the mining city at the base of the mountains... then just disappeared into the earth! That thing was HUGE, we could see it from the city wall... all the way up here!"

Fabian... that sounded familiar, but did not bring any memories back to the injured man.

"No lad, sorry I did not...", he replied quietly. He turned away, limping towards the city buildings in the distance. Not knowing who he was, or why he was here, or what he was supposed to be doing, Fabian began a journey of self-discovery, and world re-discovery, accompanied only by the memories of the screaming pair that haunted his head. And one word kept repeating in his head as he envisioned the mountain monster the boy had described... Isenthax.