

# Ryndaria

## Trezi's Story

Test Writing – First Battle

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Dhenir pointed out a group of thick black creatures up ahead, marching up the path toward the tree-tower of the Nemus wizards. They were still too far away for Trezl to tell just what they were. They were built like ogres; taller than elves and nearly as wide as they were tall. Their skin looked rough and solid, like rock or some sort of exoskeleton. Their arms and legs were easily as thick as Trezl's waste. Trezl shuddered at the thought of being struck by one of the creatures.

Dhenir motioned for his students to pursue the enemies and prepare for battle. Trezl gripped his staff tightly and quickened his pace to keep up with his master and the rest of the group. If fast and quiet, they would have surprise on their side to strike quickly and keep the beasts off balance.

As the large black creatures passed under a lower hanging tree branch, Trezl saw movement over the heads of the beasts. Two elves, outfit in the chain-mail of the Nemus elves' elite guardian troop, lay hidden upon the branch preparing to spring a trap on the unsuspecting raiders. A brief glance at Dhenir confirmed the teacher had seen it too. Dhenir gave a slight point up with his sword to alert the rest of the group and then began stalking forward, nearly at a run.

Trezl was certain the ambushing elves did not see Trezl and his companions coming up the path, and his group was still too far away to be of immediate help to the guardians' ensuing melee. Trezl could only hope the soldiers would be able to hold their own against four of the massive monsters until the group could get there.

As soon as the black, rock-like creatures were directly beneath the hiding elves, the ambush was sprung. The elves jumped down from the branch to each side of the group of monsters. The guardians were holding on to a thick, large net that opened up wide over the group of beasts. The net would have no hope of containing their obvious strength, but it looked like it confused and slowed them enough to give the elves an opportunity for a quick victory.

Trezl stared in awe at the grace the elves showed as they jumped down. They skillfully held the heavy net taut as they landed, both landing with their feet on the ground. Even though their skill and dexterity was unmatched, the jump down was at least fifteen feet. The elves were slightly off balance as they landed, let go of the net, and drew their weapons. Trezl let out a groan of concern as he noticed the net ensnared only three of the rock monsters.

The next moment felt like an eternity as he watched the uncovered beast turn on its nearest attacker. The elf fortunately saw the swing coming and instinctively raised his weapon, a long slender sword, up to deflect the blow. Even squared up against the creature

and completely balanced, the elf would have had little chance to block or deflect the swing of the monster's tree-trunk of an arm. The momentum of the swing pushed right through the feeble defense of the elf, slamming the unprepared guardian directly in the chest. The force from the crushing hit lifted the elf into the air, throwing him like a rag-doll into the base of a nearby tree. The elf lay slumped against the tree. If he was not already dead, he soon would be as the rocky looking monster marched in for the kill.

From his position, the other guardian could not see the missed net on the fourth monster. Upon drawing his weapon, he proceeded to strike out at his nearest foe. Constrained by the net, the creature was unable to defend itself from the guardian elf's attacks. Trezl could hear the loud clang as steel hit the hard stone skin of the monster. The guardian redoubled his efforts, trying to chip away at the arm and leg joints of the creature, seeking out a weakness. He was running out of time, as the monster was already beginning to stretch and rip the ropes of the net.

The thrown guardian collected his wits in time to see another swing coming in. He rolled out to the side as the black arm swung down, sending bark flying out from the tree the elf had been resting against moments before. The elf used the momentum of the roll to spring back to his feet, sword ready. He sidestepped back behind the monster and slashed with all his might at the creature's shoulder. The sword connected solidly, and bits of rock broke away and fell to the ground, revealing nothing but more rock underneath.

This creature was some sort of magical beast made of the hard, black stone. As Trezl looked on he wondered if it was a denizen of the elemental realm or the terrible creation of some powerful dark wizard. The two elves were frantically chipping away at the creatures, but were doing little to slow them down. If there were many more of these things in the city, the elven defense forces would be hard pressed to stop them.

Trezl and his friends continued to rush in, nearly in range to help their two compatriots. Two of the constructs showed some signs of wear by the assault of the two elves, but the net that originally entangled three of them was now tattered and trampled.

Free of the netting, one of the undamaged monsters moved in toward the first guardian. Trezl looked on in horror and tried to yell out a warning as the creature approached the still sluggish elf from behind. A giant black foot kicked out, straight at the elf's back.

The blow nearly bent the poor elf in half from behind. His lifeless body slumped to the ground. The first elf guardian dead, the two attackers turned to the lone remaining elf.

Closing in on the battle, Dhenir commanded his students to attack and charged in to the fray, sword held out before him. His students followed suit, fanning out to the left and right just as they had trained. Dhenir charged in straight, cutting off the lead creature before it could attack the remaining guardian.

Sembaar and Ao came in from Dhenir's left to cut off the second charging enemy. Sembaar, lacking the dexterity and finesse of the average elven warrior, led with his shield, crashing into the midsection of the huge beast. Though the creature was hundreds of pounds of solid rock, Sembaar's attack was aimed and timed just right to send it rocking backward.

Sembaar and Ao had practiced the maneuver dozens of times before, and that practice paid off. Ao immediately followed up the Sembaar's shield charge by raising his wand up and conjuring a magical blast of energy. Red light flew from the wand and slammed directly into the upper torso of the monster. Large chunks of rock exploded from the creature's chest as it stumbled and fell backward with a crash. The crash thundered around them, and the elves could feel the ground tremor as the creature hit the ground.

Not to be outdone by their companions, Ralhin and Trezl rushed in from Dhenir's right toward the remaining elven guardian and his two pursuers. Ralhin led, his long thin blade hungry for an opening in the defenses of the first foe it could find. It was not disappointed.

Steel stabbed into the back of the closest construct's leg, near what could be considered a knee. The creature's leg buckled, forcing it to kneel on the ground, clamping Ralhin's blade tight. Ralhin tried without success to pull the sword back out as the weight of the construct held it fast.

Trezl whispered softly, gripping the wooden staff he held in his right hand. The elven wizard called out the magical energies stored within. The green gem set in the top of the staff glowed bright. A series of small orbs of bright green light shot out from the gem, each slamming into the back of the head of the rock golem. The force of the attack caused the creature to pitch forward.

Ralhin saw an opportunity and jumped up, planting his feet onto the back of the construct. As he landed, he gripped his sword with both hands. The elf used every bit of strength he had, pulling the hilt while using his legs to press down on the creature's back. With one final push of his legs, the sword slid out of the rocky leg and Ralhin jumped backward. He let the momentum carry him. Planting both feet beneath him and sliding back a step, he stopped just short of colliding into Trezl.

Determined to finish the job before the creature could get back up, Ralhin stalked back in. Another barrage of green orbs flew over his shoulder, keeping the creature from regaining its balance.

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An unnatural shriek boomed over head. The elves all hesitated as they anticipated a new foe entering the fray.

"Back!" Dhenir shouted, recognizing the sound of the new assailant. He sprang back and rolled away from the lumbering stone creature he was currently engaged with.

The other elves glanced in the direction of the roaring above them. Fighting through the shock of what they saw, Trezl and his friends attempted to get out of the way of the incoming attack.

The source of the fires consuming the forest was now clear. Trezl had only seen pictures of dragons, but he was positive this was one of the deadly beasts. Smaller than the ancient dragons of legend, the monster appeared slightly larger than a full sized horse. There was no mistaking the reptilian nature of the creature, with its blood red scales, leathery crimson wings, and horned nose. The dragon swooped quickly down from the sky directly toward the fight between the elves and their rock foes.

The dragon's roaring stopped abruptly as it opened its mouth and inhaled deeply. Trezl remembered his studies of the creatures and understood what would come next. He only hoped he and his companions would be out of the way of the coming blast.

The trajectory of the dragon brought it down and just over the heads of the large stone creatures. Flame burst from the red lizard's mouth, engulfing the black constructs and swirling out around them.

Ao and Trezl were back away away from the initial force of the blaze. Trezl was forced to take a step back and turn his face away from the intense bright flames. The heat radiated out toward him, burning at his exposed skin.

Dhenir's leap backward helped him escape the brunt of the flames. The concussive force of the blast forced him off balance, and he landed flat on the ground, face down.

Ralhin spun to his right, diving backward as flame surrounded him. He flew out of the fire, seemingly unhurt, completing his spinning dive and somersaulting back into a standing position. His sword stuck straight up out of the ground behind him. He turned around, pulled the sword up and readied himself to move back in.

The fire and smoke of the dragon's breath rolled and rose up, dissipating into the air. Small flames danced along the ground, refusing to go out. Fresh smoke billowed up and filled the small path. The archway the elven guardians had jumped down from lit up in a fiery blaze. The black rock shells of the constructs glowed red from the intense heat of the blast, though the behemoths showed no signs of slowing.

Trezi noticed, in front of him, the second elf guardian did not escape the dragon's attack. The elf's lifeless body lay at the feet of one of the rock creatures. Trezi spun his head to the left, attempting to fully assess the situation. He was concerned that Sembaar had not emerged from the flames.

Trezi saw his friend crouched low to the ground, holding what was left of his shield over his head. The silver disk was no longer recognizable. It was bent and warped, melted from the intense heat of the dragon's flame. The elven markings that previously adorned the front of the shield were gone. Sembaar crouched unmoving, his body stiff and still holding the shield above him. The metallic shield, obviously still hot and smoking from the blast, rested flat against Sembaar's forearm, burning the skin beneath.

Trezi cried out, "Sembaar!" Concern and panic set in. At best, his friend was terribly injured and at worst he was already dead.

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Seeing the obsidian constructs turn toward Sembaar, Dhenir sprung into action. Three of the brutish rock creatures closed in on Sembaar, as he sat frozen on the ground.

Dhenir's sword was named Truce. It was a weapon of peace, forged by the last dwarven king and enchanted by the greatest elven wizard of the previous age. The sword was designed to bring the peoples of Ryndaria together, and many who saw the sword assumed it was ceremonial. Few witnessed what it was capable of when used to protect.

The old elf charged in and around Sembaar, cutting off the advancing monsters. He held Truce low to his right, pointing out and back. As he passed by the first construct, he forcefully swiped his sword up and left across his body. Trezi would not have believed what happened next if he had not seen it with his own eyes.

A thin line appeared along the midsection of the rock golem. The creature's momentum carried it forward as it split in two and fell headlong. The massive beast tumbled to the ground, its upper half rolling away from its lower, and it moved no more.

"Engage!" Dhenir screamed back at his students, shaking them from their collective stupor. Trezi found himself with his mouth hanging open in awe at the pure power of his teacher and that wondrous sword. He regained his composure in time to see Ralhin dodge out of the way of a large swing by the fourth construct.

Ao ran forward and dropped to his knees next to Sembaar. His visible sigh of relief let Trezi know Sembaar was still alive. Ao stayed focused on his wounded friend, trusting his friends and teacher to keep the attacking rock creatures away.

Dhenir pressed offensively at the two lumbering rock creatures to his left. Animated by some dark magic, the constructs refused to slow down. Each swing came as powerful and deadly as the one before it. The old elven soldier worked furiously; spinning, dodging, and parrying as Truce sought any opening in the defenses of the brutes.

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Ralhin and Trezl settled into a familiar routine as they worked to overcome the remaining golem. Ralhin had trained as a "rhythm fencer" since he childhood. His movements flowed like a dance as his sword rang out against the stone hide of the creature, creating a song. Ralhin twisted, bowed and leaped around his enemy, an unwitting partner in the dance.

Trezl was no dancer, but he worked and trained as Ralhin's partner long enough to learn to keep a beat. The two elves worked together to keep the creature spinning and tripping over itself as it tried to keep up with Ralhin's lead. Trezl's magical blasts distracted and stung the beast, sending chunks of rock splintering away. Ralhin searched with his sword for joints and other weaknesses to bring the golem down.

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A second screech from above reminded the elves of the greater threat in the sky. The dragon had turned around and was coming back for a second pass. Trezl could tell from this new angle the dragon was not alone. A rider sat on the dragon's back, clad in black metal armor.

Dhenir looked over his right shoulder and called out a single elven syllable. The sound grew and changed as it rose up among the tree tops. Abruptly it stopped, and a great rushing wind forced its way through the leaves and branches of the trees above, crashing against the dragon head on, knocking it back.

The dragon contorted backward from the force of the wind and fell from the sky. It twisted and rolled, hitting the ground on its side with a sickening crash. The dragon let out a blood curdling scream as it raised up and threw its rider forward to the ground. It landed on one of its wings, and the wing now hung low, broken and dragging along the ground. Terrified and angry, the red beast sought out revenge on the elves responsible for the blinding pain.

Trezl turned to focus on the furious lizard coming toward him. He called out to the plants of the forest for defense as he rapped his staff on the ground quickly four times. Vines and branches heeded his call, rising up from the forest floor, wrapping themselves around the limbs of the approaching dragon. More and more plant life came forth, rising up the dragon's legs and onto its back, pulling it down to the ground and holding it tight. The spell worked, though Trezl understood it would not slow the beast for long.

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Dhenir's move paid off, downing the dragon before it could incinerate the elves, but it was not without cost. The gambit forced Dhenir to take his attention off the two obsidian golems he worked so hard to keep from Sembaar and Ao. He saw the swing in his peripheral vision, and braced himself for the impact.

Dhenir then realized the swing was not for him, and terror gripped him. Ao was exposed and unable to defend himself from the giant fist of stone. The old master tried to cry out and warn Ao, but it was too late.

Dhenir turned and looked on in amazement as Sembaar's heavy melted shield moved into the path of the behemoth's swing. Sembaar's block wasn't able to fully deflect the heavy blow of the stone creature, but he saved Ao's life in that instant. The shield slid partially in between Ao and the rock golem. The force of the hit sent the shield flying from Sembaar's injured arm. The golem's follow through clipped Ao in the back of the shoulder, sending the healer tumbling several feet.

Relieved his student was still alive, Dhenir wasted no time. The golem pushed too hard and lowered its defenses against the deadly elven master. Truce flashed down and back up, severing the golem's attacking arm above the elbow. Dhenir completed his upward swing with a twist to his left in time to parry another heavy blow from the second creature.

The one-armed golem turned its attention on Dhenir, and Dhenir answered, again keeping both of the eight foot tall creatures occupied.

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Trezi sent a new volley of green orbs at the nearest construct as Ralhin continued to dance and strike. The ground around the beast was littered with chunks and bits of rock that were once part of the creature. The massive animated rock turned and swung, disregarding the attacks, feeling no pain.

Off to his right, Trezi saw the dragon's black rider stand. The rider, outfit in armor of dark, black metal plates, turned toward the elves as he rose and drew his sword from its sheath on his back. He held the long, heavy blade with both hands as he moved to join the melee. Behind the rider, Trezi saw the dragon stretch and push, ripping away the entangling vines.

Alarmed by the new foe, Dhenir shuffled two steps back and to his right, drawing the two constructs with him, closer to Ralhin and Trezi. "Rotate and switch," he alerted his students.

Ralhin readied for his master's next move. He took half a step back, putting nothing between Dhenir and the remaining golem.

The intense training regiment Dhenir put his students through paid off once again. Ralhin's opening gave Dhenir all the teacher needed. In one smooth motion, Dhenir darted toward the exposed side of the creature. The elf leapt into the air, crossing the behemoth's backside, as Truce flashed to the right. The sword sliced through the creature at the shoulder, separating the head and most of the left shoulder from the rest of the golem's body.

Dhenir landed solidly, Truce still out to the right. He turned to face the long blade of the dragon rider.

Ralhin completed the switch by rushing in at the remaining two rock creatures, dancing between them. He completed the movement behind them, piercing each with two quick jabs of his sword. Each turned in toward the new attacker, attempting to grab Ralhin as he passed. The creatures nearly collided as they came up empty.

Their backs exposed, Trezl took advantage of the clear shot before him. Trezl flipped his staff from his right hand over to his left as he called out the memorized incantation. He grabbed the staff with his left hand and leaned the staff forward. An arc of electrical energy blasted from the gem set in the top of the enchanted staff. The bolt slammed the upper back of one of the black monsters. Chunks of rock and gravel flew into the air as most of the right shoulder of the creature blew apart.

Trezl mistimed the blast, sending it earlier than he should have, breaking Ralhin's rhythm. The force sent the golem lurching forward as it brought its left hand around toward Ralhin. Trezl's partner failed to complete the twisting turn that would have taken him out of the creature's reach.

While there was little behind the swing, the heavy arm connected solidly, disrupting Ralhin's rhythm and sending him reeling backward. The swordsman winced as he balanced himself and started back in toward the two golems.

Ralhin danced in at the golems with a fury. Both monsters showed signs of wear. They moved considerably slower and unbalanced. Various debris was everywhere as the elves slowly picked the animated stone creature to pieces. Ralhin's sword, long and razor thin, looked as sharp as new as it danced with its master, continually nicking and slicing the rock apart.

Trezl listened to the song of sword on stone, preparing the timing of his next attack. The sword hit its mark with a long grinding note, and Trezl saw it momentarily protrude out the right golem's back, just inside the already shattered shoulder.

Trezi followed up perfectly with a volley of green orbs, directed right where the sword had been just a single beat earlier. The orbs connected, blowing a hole in what remained of the creature's torso. The monster fell to the ground to the spot Ralhin had just been, his dance already sending him clear of the tumbling mound of rock.

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Dhenir and the black armored rider continued to lock weapons, each looking for an opening in the other's defenses. Dhenir knew he did not have much time. If he did not make a move soon, the dragon would soon be upon him. The old soldier quickened his pace, swinging his sword wildly. Dhenir allowed his movements to look as if there were holes where none really were, tempting the rider to take the bait and make a mistake of his own.

The rider was experienced enough to stay composed against the elven master. Time was on his side, and he refused to fall for the feints. He kept his sword out in front, defensively. It would not be long before his dragon would join the fray.

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Ralhin and Trezi continued to focus on the final obsidian golem. The creature slowed significantly and its balance was thrown off. It rocked and shifted from side to side with each massive swing of its remaining arm.

Ralhin danced with perfect rhythm, using the swings and stomps of his opponent to accentuate his song. The monster seemed locked into the dance, unable to escape. Each swing of Ralhin's sword and blast of Trezi's magic sent more chunks of rock falling to the ground.

Ralhin moved into a crouch, bringing his long, razor blade down low. His feet tapped as he lightly bounced backward and forward, quickening the tempo. The brute swung its thick arm across, trying to time the attack with the movement of the elf, but Ralhin was ready. The dance halted abruptly and the elf stopped just outside the reach of the deadly swing.

The golem's side was exposed, and Ralhin took advantage. His sword flashed up under the behemoth's arm for several quick strikes into the creature's side. Trezi timed his next volley of orbs to coincide with his partner's attacks, and all connected simultaneously. The ensuing explosion caught the elves completely by surprise.

Instead of crumbling and falling to the ground like the others, the animated stone exploded from within, sending hundreds of pounds of large black rock hurtling in every direction. Completely unprepared, Trezi and Ralhin took the full force of the blow. The two elves shot backward to the ground, pelted with chunks flying rock.

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Dhenir felt rock and sand slamming him in the back. The force of the explosion forced him to take a step forward to brace himself. The black rider took a similar half step backward, steadying against the force of the explosion. The two warriors continued their duel undeterred.

Dhenir glanced over to see the last of the roots begin to tear as the dragon arched its back and pushed up with its legs. The foliage fell completely away, and the dragon, full of pain and rage, looked for its prey.

The furious lizard started to inhale, filling its lungs with air. It prepared to unleash its fiery breath upon its enemies. The elven master could feel the air moving around him. There was nowhere for the elf to hide, and he was certain the blast would reach his helpless students. The black rider stood firm and made no attempt to move out of the way of the dragon's attack.

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"Get up, get up, get up!" Trezl could hear himself yelling the words, but his body refused to immediately obey the commands of his mouth. He lay stunned upon the ground, willing himself to shake off the shock of the blast.

Small pieces of rock rained down on him from above. Trezl could see Ralhin off to one side, rocking on the ground to pick himself up. He heard his master yelling, though it sounded far away.

Trezl looked for his teacher. He saw the dragon first. Its crimson, horned head held high, it finished inhaling. Sparks of flame flickered in the back of the beast's mouth. Trezl felt it looking right at him, full of hate and anger. The lizard brought its head down low and extended its neck out toward the elves. The fiery breath streamed out of its mouth and nose, surging forward.

Trezl moved with instinct. There was no time to think or even feel fear. The young elven wizard raised his hand and called out to the elemental energies around him with all his strength. He held his hand up, palm out toward Dhenir and the fiery blast coming toward them.

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A large wall of thick ice materialized in front of the dragon's flaming breath, blocking it from overtaking Dhenir and the black rider. The orange and red of the flames shined through the translucent sheet of frozen water, but the wall held.

The rider was caught by surprise. Certain that flame would soon overcome him, he relaxed for a brief instant. Dhenir did not let it go to waste. With a quick strike from Truce, the elven master felled his opponent and turned toward the blast of fire.

The thick ice cracked and splintered as the flames of the dragon's breath beat against it. Solid immediately transformed into gas from the intense heat, and the air filled with a thick fog of steam. The fire stopped, and Dhenir could barely make out the shape of the dragon through the haze of smoke and steam.

"Retreat, now!" Dhenir called to his pupils as he backed away from what was left of Trezl's defensive wall of ice.

Ralhin finished standing and ran over to where Ao crouched over Sembaar's injured body. After quickly sheathing his sword, the elf hunkered down and helped Ao pick up their unconscious friend. Each elf took one of Sembaar's arms and draped it over his shoulders. They then half dragged, half carried their friend away from the battle.

Trezl scrambled as quickly as he could to his feet, grabbed his staff from the ground next to him, and rushed over to help in the retreat. Dhenir ran right past his students and motioned for them to follow him. The elves would need to find a place to hide quickly, and their options were limited.

A dragon's roar screeched out from behind them. A second shriek answered from above.

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