

“Don’t make this harder than it has to be.” Ryze said menacingly. His rune marks flared softly as he prepared himself for the inevitable struggle.

The Shurima Chieftain’s eyes flashed proudly. “You know the power that I wield. Do you truly believe yourself to be a threat?” She raised the cloth-wrapped World Rune in her hand and scoffed at Ryze, looking him up and down.

“The great Rune Mage,” she said, her voice dripping with sarcasm. “We were told you would come, despite our responsible use of the World Rune. Why is it you think yourself so much more capable of controlling it than us?”

“I am *not* capable.” The Rune Mage responded. “No one, not even myself can be trusted with such power.”

The chieftain scowled at him and turned away, her great, hooded cloak obscuring the motion of her hands. Ryze felt the power surge before it erupted, and cast an arcing bolt of energy toward his enemy.

The cloak burst into fragments, revealing empty space where she had stood.

Ryze barely had time to register his surprise before he was hit by a wall of force that only a World Rune could produce. Like an unstoppable tide, it swept him up in intangible currents and slammed him against the stone wall. Force continued to flow against him, his clothing and beard flapping in an impossible breeze that he could not feel.

As he struggled against the current, the chieftain materialized again. Power crackled around her, stirring the edges of her clothing and illuminating her strong figure. When she spoke again, her voice was distorted and augmented with a power that Ryze knew all too well.

“You fool.” She said with a sneer. “Your power is a shallow derivative of what I wield. In what world can a mere student defeat a master?” As she spoke, she raised the uncovered World Rune. It gathered power at her command, wreathing her hand in roaring blue flame.

Ryze fought madly against the current, and could not contain a scream of surprise, when without warning, the world turned to gold.

It happened so suddenly that Ryze had to go over it again in his mind. The sound of cascading chimes accompanied a blinding flash of light, and his enemy stood there like a shining golden statue. Her arms were raised as though summoning power, but the world rune in her hand now released only a calm, gentle flame.

Ryze shook his head and blinked, trying to silence the bells in his head, but they were only growing louder. No, not louder... *Nearer*. He stood hurriedly, the force current having dissipated, and rushed toward the Rune.

The chimes were impossibly near now, and he could hear ethereal whispering mingled with them. He ignored it, sprinting for the Rune. He reached madly for it, ignoring the blue flame, and...

His hand pushed harmlessly into a voluminous white... mane? He recoiled and prepared for battle, but the new arrival just stood there. Its body was... *puffy*, with a weightlessness that caused a kind of

bobbing motion, as if submerged in water. Small golden sprites chimed and danced around it, seemingly oblivious to the world.

As Ryze considered his options, the thing moved. It bobbed serenely to the side and turned toward the World Rune. Then, it flapped its mane toward the fire, causing it to gutter and fail. That shouldn't have been possible...

Ryze was about to protest, when it turned back to him and gestured grandly, pointing from the rune, to him.

"You're giving it to me?" Ryze asked suspiciously.

A nod, and a cacophony of chimes.

"What are you?" Ryze asked, his eyes narrowing.

Discordant chimes, agitated sprites, and a ringing shake of the head. It pointed back and forth between Ryze and the World Rune again.

Ryze shrugged inwardly and stepped forward with intense caution, his eyes never leaving the strange being until he was forced to turn and grab the Rune. It slipped easily from the frozen gold fingers, and the sprites suddenly began chiming agitatedly.

Ryze spun around, ready for battle, but as his eyes came to rest on the being, it simply bowed grandly and played a note on a strange horn that it carried.

Then, as abruptly as it has appeared, it curled in on itself and flitted away with impossible speed.

A non-musical chime clicked at its absence, and Ryze heard a moan behind him. The room was no longer golden. He left before things escalated again.

Over the years since that experience, Ryze has devoted a good deal of time to exploring the possible identities of the strange, celestial creature.

Numerous accounts over the centuries described its unexpected arrival in dire circumstance, and it was credited with saving Runeterra from some of the most potentially world-ending calamities in history.

As his understanding grew, Ryze promised himself that should they meet again, he would take some time to communicate more with the creature – This Caretaker, The one they called 'Bard.'