

((Note: The following sections are not canon to the RP. This section takes place during [chapter 51](#).)

After finding Axle, Akil and Juna, everyone had to leave the white dragon at the lake's woods because he was about to go into his berserk phase. Juna had given Atlas and Akil the mission of finding someone named Luco to help with the horde's training. Everyone else was teleported to the desert where they met with the rest of the Vulture Horde. Juna gave the horde a training mission, which was to find her brother, Mekarth. She had the horde lined up from small to big so that she could count them into 5 groups. Though Garin was not a member of this horde, he insisted on being in this session so that he could get the experience needed for the Shadow Wind war. Once Juna was done sorting everyone into groups, she then yelled, "Everyone with the number five, you are responsible for feeding everyone tonight. Group One, you are to go to the north side of the section. Group Two, you are to go to the east; Three to the south, and Four to the west. Once you get to your location, your mission is to find Mekarth and capture him. The first group that brings him back to me will get their pick of food tonight first, and trust me, you will want to be first. Now go and wait till I say go. Rules: no tracking or teleporting. If you are caught cheating, your group will not eat tonight. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes ma'am," everybody answered.

Everyone went to their respective groups and gathered at the location they were assigned. Group 5 went out to hunt in the meantime. After all of Group 1 were at the northern part of the sector, they waited patiently for Juna to let them start, but they were also eyeing Garin strangely as if he was something that did not belong here. The halfling knew he was a stranger to them, so he thought to make his first impression good to make them less wary. He smiled and greeted, "Hi I'm Garin, Atlas's friend."

The electric ember mixed dragon telepathically told his comrades, *'Be nice to him, everyone. He may be our enemy, but as long as the Shadow Wind dragons are here, we cannot hurt humans.'*

The magma dragon replied, *'Right you are, but we should not get close to him either. Keep our hearts to ourselves.'* Everyone decided to hold back their racism for Garin for now and forced a smile on their faces. The iustia dragon and the cassares were still wary of him, but they hid their feelings behind straight faces.

The electric ember responded to the halfling with a fake smile, "Hello Garin, I'm Udiya. It's nice to see a...good halfling. The horde would be glad to have you with us."

Garin beamed, "Sweet! Maybe some of us will become friends as we fight together. I would love that."

"So would we," said a gray dragoness.

Then Garin they should be coming up with a strategy to win while they wait for Juna's call. He asked, "So

anybody got a plan on how we're going to win this?"

"Umm..." hummed some of the dragons as they all tried to think of an idea. They wanted to be able to find Mekarth while keeping the halfling away from them, so that they would not warm up to him and forget the horde's quest.

Soon, one of the leaf pygmies came up with something and suggested, "How about we all go our different ways and find Mekarth by ourselves? Once one of us finds him, we use telepathy to tell one or two others where to meet them, so that we can catch him together." The horde liked this plan as they thought this was perfect.

They wanted to go along with it, but Garin had a more efficient idea in mind. He questioned, "But wouldn't it be better if we went into groups of three, so that we can catch Mekarth faster instead of having to wait? That way the other teams won't have more time to get him first." The horde stayed quiet, feeling down when the halfling poked a hole into the leaf's idea.

Fortunately for them, the leaf pygmy was quick to reason why his idea worked. He said, "Well halfling, er I mean Garin, I think my idea will work better. You see? The more spread out we all are, the more ground we can cover by the sector and we'll be able to find Mekarth faster. Can you see the picture now?"

Before the halfling could reply, a gray dragoness quickly interjected in an attempt to make this idea the only solution. She smile and beamed, "Oh that's a great idea! We should all go with it!"

Garin still disagreed with the leaf's idea as he could see a flaw in it. If the dragons from the other teams saw one of the Group 1 teammates standing somewhere, wouldn't they hide and wait until the Group 1 dragons joined up and moved to Mekarth, so that they can follow them and snatch away the black dragon at the right moment? Before he could object, another dragon interrupted him, "I agree! Nowe's a genius!" The rest of the team, except for the halfling, all voiced the same opinion of the plan.

Garin thought that they were all being too hasty with the idea without even thinking about it first, which seemed a bit strange. Despite the massive support for Nowe, the boy will not let himself be unheard until he voiced his concern. Raising his voice to be louder than the chorus of agreements, Garin shouted, "Guys!" The horde stopped speaking and looked to him. Now with their attention on him, the boy began to asked, "Aren't we all worried that-"

Once again, he was interrupted by someone else. This time by Juna who cuts this meeting short by roaring from the air, "BEGIN!"

The magma dragon said, "No time to lose, the game's started. We must hurry!" The horde began to move out and rush into the sector.

"Wait guys," Garin tried to stop them, but everyone just kept on going. Then they all separated and went different ways to search, some going inside the buildings, some going past them, some going left and some going right. The halfling sighed in defeat; it looks like they were set with Nowe's plan after all and he himself would have to go along with it, too. Garin spread his wings and flew off to look for Mekarth.

((**Note:** This section takes place during [Chapter 53](#).)

A little while later, Garin is still searching and has not found any sign of Juna's brother yet. The boy continued to fly through the city sector, looking for which building looked like it has a great hiding place. He did not have the dragons' sense of smell, so the only thing he could rely on was his sight. As he flew over the roof of one of the buildings, Garin saw a trio of dragons behind a royal blue dragoness. The spring dragoness in the trio blew out a breath of pink pollen at the royal blue. The royal blue began to stagger in a groggy way before she fell over on her side asleep. The halfling was stunned by what he just witnessed; did they actually attack another member of their horde? He wondered why they did that. But to find out, he needed to hide himself as they would see and smell a witness that was him. Garin went in through the glass-less window of the top floor of a tall office building replica behind him. From the room he entered, he peeked over the window's bottom and listened in on the dragons. A muscular brute dragon said to his red and spring teammates, "And another one goes down. Let's keep looking for dragons in the other teams to put down." Then the trio began to walk away, leaving the royal blue to sleep out in the sun.

Garin knew that whatever these three dragons were planning was going to be bad news to his team. He needed to warn them about this quickly before his teammates get knocked out. He decided to talk to Udiya through telepathy. He pictured the dark navy blue ember in mind and told him, *'Udiya, you're not going to believe this. I just saw three dragons putting someone from another team to sleep. I even heard that big purple dragon among them just tell his friends to do the same to the other opponents. That includes us!'*

Udiya replied, *'You did? So I'm not the only one to witness an attack, because I just saw a pair of cassares attack and knock out a green dragon. I guess the three you saw must have been their teammates.'*

'Probably,' said the halfling. *'But then again maybe not, I think the other groups must be trying to attack each other to reduce the competition. We should defend ourselves at all times.'* It seems like the game has gotten harder now that the opponent teams were fighting each other. He hoped that he does not get hurt during the whole time.

Udiya agreed, *'You're right, I'll go tell this to the others now.'* Then they ended their telepathy. Garin looked out both ways and above to make sure that no one was in sight. Once the brute and his cohorts

walked out of sight, the halfling left through the window and flew away to resume his search. But now he was also keeping alert for any danger from the opposing teams, making sure that no one was out to ambush him.

((**Note:** The following sections are almost canon to the RP. This section takes place during [chapter 54](#).)

So far things have been good to Garin on his end; no encounters from his opponents and no one has found Mekarth yet. The training is still on, which means there is still time to win. The halfling was pretty lucky and he hoped that things would continue this way. He found a multi-storied replica that resembled an apartment building for dragons with a big sign named in an unknown language. Perhaps the black dragon was in there. Garin entered through the one of the glass-less windows and got into an empty room. Well for the most part, it was devoid of furniture. The only thing, or person, inside was a canopy dragon just sitting there. The canopy immediately turned his head to Garin and was quiet for a second before saying, "You're that halfling from today."

"Yeah, I am," confirmed the boy. The canopy was not the only one to recognize somebody else as the halfling himself felt a bit of familiarity with him like he has seen him today. To be certain, he asked, "Hey, are you from Group 1?"

"I am," confirmed the canopy.

Garin smiled in relief and said, "Great, I'm glad you're not from another group or else I might have been in trouble."

"Mm-hmm," the canopy hummed nonchalantly.

Then the halfling asked, "So what are you doing just sitting here like that? Aren't you supposed to be finding Mekarth."

"I already did," answered the canopy. "I'm just waiting for a few teammates I know to come over."

Garin felt his chest jump with excitement; victory was nearly within their grasp. Group 1 could very well be the winners in this game. They just needed to avoid the other groups stealing Mekarth after capturing him, while finding Juna. The boy suggested, "Well why don't we make this faster by you and me working together to catch Mekarth? I have advance techniques in all kinds of destruction magic. Then we wait for our teammates to get here so that they can carry him. What do you say?"

The canopy stayed silent in thought and his eyes looked to the ground. After a few seconds, he looked back and replied, "Alright fine, we'll do it your way. Come, I'll show you where he is." He walked to the

window and jumped out. He hovered and turned to face the halfling, waiting for him to follow suit. Garin leapt out as well and hovered to the canopy, who immediately flew down to the window two stories below the room they were once in. The halfling followed him down and they both went into the next room. They walked into the hallway through the door and saw the very black dragon they were looking for. They both eyed Mekarth like he just found the best prize.

Garin grinned, "Alright, we won. Now let's-" His triumph fell when he quickly noticed the other dragons in this room: Kekul, a spring, a kai and a honeycomb pygmy. There was also a cassare dragoness and a female geode, both of them unconscious. He was disappointed to know that his group had been beaten to the black dragon first. And it looks like a fight has been going on too as he can see the wounds on everyone except for the honeycomb. He muttered under his breath, "Damn it!" Though there were opponent present, that does not mean that Garin was going to give up so easily. He telepathically told Udiya and a few other teammates where Mekarth was, so that he would be there to snatch the black away from the others in case he and the canopy fail. His summoned teammates would work with the canopy's to retrieve Mekarth. The halfling told his teammate, "We can still get Mekarth, let's take out the others first." The Group 1 members charged at the opposing dragons. Garin charged up his mana to get ready to cast one of his spells. The canopy dragon made a rush towards Mekarth as he roared, pumping up his adrenaline needed to go fast and strong.

Then Mekarth jumped quickly and landed hard, which cracked the whole floor like a glass pane. Both Garin and the canopy immediately halted their man and rush. Everyone was stunned by the powerful stomp that the black did on the floor. Mekarth said weakly, "I would highly suggest stopping right where you are at. This floor will break at any sudden movements; even the slightest weight shift will break it. Let me ask this: who here knows what this whole training was for?" It was evident that he had nothing left to fight with. The other group(s) here must have exhausted and hurt him this badly.

The spring dragon guessed, "To learn how to use teamwork to find somebody and nab them?"

The kai dragon added, "While learning the section's layout?" The honeycomb could only listen to the others' guesses and waited to see if they were correct. Somehow, he had a feeling that his teammates were not right at all and the training's lesson may have been more complicated than they think. But who know?

Mekarth shook his head. "You are partly right, but wrong at the same time. Who here, minus me, fought another one and incapacitated them?"

The spring was unsure of his answer as guessed, "Er...does Jewel count?" He did paralyze her when he and the kai just came in, but there was never a battle between them.

But the kai told his comrade, "You didn't even fight her, Bron. You were going for Mekarth, but you blew your breath at her."

Kekul spoke up for everyone, "I think it's safe to say that none of us did. We tried to, but we never got to succeed. We were fighting over you, just to catch you before the other groups do. You know? Just so that we could win."

Mekarth shook his head and said, "This was never about winning." Then he coughed up a bit of blood as the black flames started to melt the honey quick patch off his body. Everyone in the room was disturbed by the sight of him coughing blood. "This was about whether or not you and your team got greedy, to see if you would stay in the group you were assign to or if you would cross team to form a new team," the black said as blood started to leak from his mouth a bit and his breathing quickens. Garin and the horde quietly disagreed with the Shadow Wind dragon's accusation. Sure they were greedy, but it was obvious to them that they all would have stayed in their groups and not betray each other. After all, they were working to win for the team. So no matter which dragon gets the black first, the team they were in wins. No use in betrayal when the whole group will just benefit. "Whether or not you would fight anyone around you and mindlessly follow orders," Mekarth said as he rose his foot that he cracked the ground with. "Sink or swim training you could call it, whether or not you could think outside the box a bit." He brought his foot down hard and shattered the floor. Everyone was startled by the sudden collapse of the floor beneath them, but they quickly spread their wings and hovered, so that they would not hit the floor beneath the one they were standing on. The only horde members who fell were the unconscious females. Mekarth picked up his pace with his falling to get to the door before the ceiling collapse and blocked up the bottom floor.

The canopy dragon shouted, "He's getting away!" He was the first to fly to one of the windows after the black. Garin saw the others following him; they too were going to chase for Mekarth and no one was going to stop until they win. The halfling did not bother with the chase as he thought something wrong was going on with the black dragon and he did not want to ruin his health any further.

The honeycomb pygmy quickly flew to the window sill and scowled at the others. He stopped them before they could continue to attack Mekarth. He told them, "That's enough! We can't keep fighting him, he's hurt! He needs help not more pain. He'll die if Hewey doesn't get to him soon."

As the chasers hovered, Kekul asked, "So where is he?"

The pygmy said, "He should be on his way, I told him to come here and heal Mekarth because it looks like something bad was happening to him."

"Something bad?" asked Garin. Did someone wound the black before any of the horde members here got to him? Or maybe he was suffering some kind of illness? Whatever it was, it must be pretty bad that this pygmy had to call for the healer's help.

The honeycomb said, "I don't know what it is, but I'm going to check on him now to make sure that he's still alright." Then he flew up back to the second floor and went out through the glass-less window. Everyone followed him out the same way and they all landed outside. There, they saw Hewey trying to

heal the collapse Mekartha as desperately as he can. They went up to the two dragons, concerned about the black's condition. The pygmy asked, "How is he, Hewey?"

"Looking terrible it seems," answered the healer. "What did you guys do to him?"

The pygmy answered, "Nothing, he was already hurt when we tried to catch him. Our fight over him just made his wounds worse."

Hewey gave the others a disapproving look and said, "Seriously, guys?"

Kekul defended, "Hey it's not like we were trying to kill him. We just thought him being hurt would make him easier to catch."

Hewey let out a sigh and said, "What will Juna think about this? We need to tell her about her brother now." Despite the healing spells cast, the wounds did not close, but the bleeding did stop. Hewey became even more worried as he wondered why his magic didn't work the way he wanted to. He asked, "What's going on? Why didn't his wounds close? My magic is supposed to fix this." Even the others were surprised by this; it was unbelievable to them.

Nobody could explain why Mekartha was unable to heal, but maybe a bee could. The honeycomb picked up one of his bees and asked, "Buzz, did you see anyone else in that room when you found Mekartha?" The bee answered back in its own body language.

The dragons looked at the pygmy. Garin found it strange how a dragon, most of all a honeycomb pygmy, could understand an insect so perfectly well. The halfling asked, "What did he say?"

The pygmy answered, "He said he 'no'."

Bron sighed, "Great, now how are we supposed to find the dragon who did this to him? They'll know why Mekartha can't heal."

The pygmy asked, "Well do you know anybody who can use black flames?"

The others shook their heads as they said, "Nope." "Not me." "Can't say I recall anybody with that ability."

The pygmy shook his head and said, "Great...so I guess there's nothing we can do." While they waited for Kekul and Juna to get back, Bron blew out his sleep pollen at Garin and the canopy dragon. The halfling grunted in displeasure as he was bombarded with gust of pollen blowing all over him. Then instantly, both he and his teammate both started to feel very tired. Their eyelids drooped and their legs were losing balance. In the next second, their eyes were closed and they fell over asleep.

(**Note:** This section takes place during [chapter 55](#).)

Garin's consciousness began to return. His body regained movement as his arms began to stir. Soon, his blue eyes opened as well, which stung at first as he saw his vision blurry. But they quickly cleared up and he noticed that the sky has darkened since Bron tranquilized them. It was now dark blue with a few stars starting to shine with the white and orange light of the sun sitting on the horizon. Twilight was here and it was in the process of truly becoming night. The halfling wondered how long he had been sleeping and if the game was still going on. He formed a telepathic connection with Udiya and asked, *'Hey Udiya, has anyone captured Mekarth yet?'*

The electric ember answered, *'No, not yet. But we're not going to capture him anymore.'*

'Why not?' asked Garin. This was the objective of the training, is it not? So why is his team not going to bother with Mekarth anymore?

Udiya told him, *'Because Mekarth has been afflicted with a curse and it is unsuitable to be used in this training session. So he's been changed with a human we know nothing about. Our new task is to capture this human and bring it- I mean him or her to Juna.'*

Garin figures that makes sense since there was no need to fight a wounded dragon with a deadly curse inflicted on him. It would not only make things easy, but also put his life at risk if he did not get emergency treatment. He replied to Udiya, *'Okay, got it.'* As soon as he ended the telepathy, he heard the canopy dragon waking up by the sound of his movements in getting up. The halfling updated him on the objective, "Hey buddy, Udiya just told me that we're not going to capture Mekarth anymore. We have to catch a human instead."

The canopy looked at him and asked, "For real? What kind of human are we looking for?"

Garin shook his head, answering, "I don't know, but we just have to go look for them." He spread his wings to take off into the air. The canopy flew after him. The halfling decided not to check the building that Mekarth was in as the human being in the same place would be too easy. As they flew, Garin caught a glimpse of Juna through the window in one of the rooms of another building in front of the one that Mekarth was in. The boy suddenly got an idea on how they would win. He told the canopy dragon, "Hang on, I just saw Juna."

The two stopped and hovered as the dragon asked, "Yes? What about it?"

Garin told him, "Let's land on one of the roofs and I'll talk about it." They flew down to the roof of a hardware store and landed there. The boy suggested, "I was thinking that we should go to the building

Juna is in and ambush whoever has the human. That way we can steal the person from them and bring them to Juna to win."

The canopy smiled deviously at the plan and said, "What a clever little halfling you are. Alright let's do it!"

The halfling told him, "Follow me, we're going in where Juna can't see us." He thought that if Juna saw them, got to know their scents and noticed them staying nearby, then she might suspect them of cheating, though she made no rule against that. They flew over to the back of the building and went down to the double doors. The canopy opened them and they went inside, where he began to use his nose to sniff out Juna's scent. Garin made his life easier by saying, "I think I saw her on the top floor. We should look for some stairs and check there." They searched for the stairs and found them at the end of the hallway.

There, they took them up to the next floor as the canopy began to notice her scent tracks. "I can smell her," he said.

Garin was content to know that they were getting close to her. "Good, keep following that smell."

After getting up the next set of stairs, they made it to the third floor, where the scent was at its strongest. The dragon murmured to the halfling, "You're right, she is on this floor."

The boy smiled and boasted quietly, "What can I say? I got a good eye. Anyway, let's stay close to the stairs and away from her, so that she doesn't smell us." They went a few feet away from the stairs and began to wait for the winning dragon to show up. It was not too long until they heard rushing a yelp from downstairs. Someone was here and maybe they had another dragon attacking them.

After some more seconds, the canopy picked up a scent and apprised, "Someone's coming." The two began to wait for the dragon to show up. The canopy's front body and legs lowered with his behind raised, looking as if he was getting ready to attack. Garin was also readying himself as he raised his magic energy in preparation for a spell. Within moments, they saw an orange dragoness with feathery wings coming up the stairs to the top floor with a man wearing robes. Immediately, the canopy dragon charged at her and knocked to the floor. He took the human from her and smirked, saying, "Thanks for the human! I was waiting for someone to show up so that I can take it from them. Looks like my group will win." He turned and began to walk to the room where Juna is at.

The phoenix dragoness got back to her feet and was about to attack when Garin cast his dark magic to make black tendrils appear from the ground. They grabbed her limbs to pull down, trying to stop her from reclaiming the human. "No!" she shouted, knowing that her team was going to lose thanks to this halfling ambusher.

The canopy dragon entered the room that Juna was in. The phoenix dragoness struggled to free herself

of the dark tendrils, but Garin kept his spell in control to keep its grip on her. After a few seconds, the canopy came out of the room and went back to his comrade. He told him with a triumphant smirk, "Looks like Juna has declared us the winners."

Garin smiled and cheered, "Alright!" Looks like he and his would get to eat first. The boy would be sure to take some food for Ohimia to give and perhaps take some for Atlas and Akil should they return from the mission earlier than anticipated.

The dragoness bared her teeth angrily and growled, "You cheaters! You don't deserve a win!"

Then a cassare dragonet came up the stairs and asked, "Has somebody won yet?"

Garin turned to him and answered, "Oh yes, Group 1 did."

The cassare looked at the floor with a disappointed frown and cursed, "Darn it!"