

Into the Dragon's Den

By MelanieStar

Submitted: February 10, 2006

Updated: February 17, 2006

A small boy has stolen some very important blueprints from the Kingdom of Aquios, and the Queen wants them back. It's up to Nel and Albel to survive in an uncharted dragon nesting ground and retrieve the blueprints. AlbelNel

Provided by Fanart Central.

<http://www.fanart-central.net/stories/user/MelanieStar/27956/Into-Dragons-Den>

Chapter 1 - A Suicide Mission	2
Chapter 2 - Albel Nox	7
Chapter 3 - Venturing In	13
Chapter 4 - The First Dragon	17
Chapter 5 - The Second Encounter	23
Chapter 6 - "You're Unbelievable!"	29

1 - A Suicide Mission

Hi everybody! This story got some pretty good reviews on some of the other sites I've posted it on, so I figured, Why not share the love?! :P. Anyways, As you're soon to find out, I'm and AlbelxNel junkie and love to write about them! I hope you enjoy this story, as there is many more chapters to come!

Peace, MelanieStar

Chapter 1

A Suicide Mission

It's been 3 months since they had defeated Luther.

After his defeat, most of the party members had gone their separate ways, only to be called back together 3 months later by none other then, Clair.

Fayt, Maria, Sophia, Cliff, Mirage, and Nel all showed up for a meeting in the conference room shortly after word got out that they were needed in Arias. Albel had been called too, but naturally he didn't think he should grace them all with his presence.

Once they (excluding Albel) were all seated around the large table, Clair told them of the situation.

A small boy from the Kingdom of Aquios had run away from the castle a few days ago. He was just a normal child of 12 years, but before the boy had fled, he had stolen some blueprints for Aquios' backup weapon supply, as unlikely as it sounded.

-“But why would the kid steal those blueprints? I doubt he was old enough to realize what he had when he got his hands on them.” Fayt interrupted.

-“We did some research on this child's record once we got an idea of what he looked like from some of the villagers. His family does live in Aquarian territory and we located his home and family. He has two younger sisters and a mother, the father had died as a soldier in the war between Airyglyph and Aquios. After speaking with the mother for awhile, we could tell that she was very sick and that she was having a hard time finding food for her family.”

Clair sighed and closed her eyes. “We are to assume that the boy, Michael, stole the blueprints, thinking he could sell them elsewhere for a high sum of fol and get his mother help for her disease.” She opened her eyes and looked at each of the people who were sitting around the table. “I know that this isn't your problem, and I know that you're not obligated to help us but...” She glanced back at Cliff and Fayt. “I know what all of you are capable of, and I wouldn't put it past you to be able to find this boy and bring him back to us.”

The room went silent, for a minute, then Cliff broke the silence by punching his two hands together.

-“No problem-o! We'll find the kid for ya, don't sweat it.”

Clair looked to everyone else and saw that they were all smiling in agreement. Clair closed her eyes and smiled. *‘I knew I could count on these guys...’*

-“There's still one thing I don't understand Clair.” All heads turned to Nel.

-“What is it?”

-“Why do we need Albel the Wicked to come with us? It's not like we're trying to assassinate the kid or anything, and it shouldn't be that hard to track him down.” Nel stated and crossed her arms as if she had proven her point.

Sure the war between Airyglyph and Aquios was over, and Albel had proven to be a useful ally against Luther, but Nel still didn't like that man. He gave her the chills by just looking at her! No way was she

going to let him tag along and annoy her to death unless there was a damn good reason for it.

Clair smiled. "That question brings us to the second installment of this mess." Nel uncrossed her arms and waited for an explanation. "We got a report this morning that a civilian had spotted a small boy run into a uncharted cave off to the west of Airyglyph. I sent a few of our men into the cave to look for him, but they fled from it only an hour upon venturing in." Clair sighed and flicked a dew bangs out of her eyes. "They were all suffering from severe flesh wounds and had some terrible burns all over their bodies."

Sophia gasped. "You don't mean..."

-“Dragons.” Nel muttered more to herself than anyone else.

-“Yes, that's right. It seems that the cave is in fact a nesting ground for some dragons. That is why I wanted Albel Nox to accompany you. I'm sure he is much more experienced with dragons than the average soldier.”

Everyone sighed. Yes, this was indeed going to make things a lot more difficult.

-“So now we're not only trying to find the boy, Michael, who has the blueprints, but now we also need to protect him from the dragons that reside in that cave?” Mirage spoke up, stating the obvious.

-“Yeah, protect him unless he's already been reduced to a pile of--” Fayt said but cut off when Maria elbowed him in the side, whispering a harsh:

-“Don't even go there Fayt!”

Nel was still lost in the ranting of her own thoughts. *‘I guess this means we're going to have to bring Nox with us.’* She sighed. *‘Apris save me...’*

-“So,” Clair said loudly, once again gaining silence all around the table. “I have stationed two of our soldiers at each of the exits from the cave so if Michael gets out by himself, we’ll have him. I’ve also got a doctor at the entrance and each of the exits in case any of you need immediate healing.”

Everyone nodded and stood up after Clair. She saluted them and led them out of the conference room. Once outside, she led them all to a horse drawn carriage.

-“Tynane and Farleen will be transporting you all to the cave's entrance, please climb in.”

Fayt, Sophia, Mirage, Cliff, and Maria all got into the large carriage. Nel was about to climb in after Maria but Clair held her back.

-“Nel, I need you to go and get Albel Nox for me.”

Nel sighed. “Any why, may I ask, are you asking me to go get him by myself?”

-“Well, because you seem to be the only person among all your friends that stands up to him. You may not realize it, but Albel listens to you.” Nel snorted. “No, listen to me! He's never easy to convince about anything, but he does give in sometimes, and that's usually when you ask him.”

Nel closed her eyes in frustration. “Clair, you're asking me to go on a suicide mission.” she said calmly. Clair smiled.

-“It's not a suicide mission. I know he wouldn't hurt you...Don't look at me like that Nel! You've been on missions that were loads more dangerous than this! I'll even get a soldier to accompany you, and then he'll lead you and Albel to the cave. Okay?”

Nel glared at her friend. "No, it's not okay, but I'll do this anyways. You're gonna owe me big when I get back."

Clair smiled and patted Nel on the back. "Excuse me." she called and waved to a soldier who was standing nearby. He hurried over to her.

-“Yes ma'am?”

-“I'd like you to accompany Lady Nel to Airyglyph's headquarters to get Albel Nox. Once he is in your company, please escort them both to the dragon's nesting grounds we found this morning. That will be all.” Clair said and saluted the soldier.

-“Yes Lady Clair.” the soldier saluted.

Clair turned back to Nel and smiled. “Be careful, Nel.”

Nel gave her an uneasy look. “Easier said than done.” Nel then turned to the soldier and gave him an unenthusiastic wave. “C'mon you, let's get going.” She then turned around and started walking in the direction of what she thought was her doom.

-“Y-yes ma'am!” replied the rather confused soldier and quickly caught up to walk beside Nel.

Clair watched her go and sighed. *‘I know she'll be just fine. Albel won't let anything happen to her, I know he won't.’*

2 - Albel Nox

Chapter 2

Albel Nox

Nel didn't even bother trying to strike up a conversation with the soldier that walked alongside her all the way to Airyglyph. They hadn't run into very many monsters on the way to the castle, and when they had, Nel had ended up doing close to all of the fighting!

-“Some soldier you turned out to be.” she had spat at him once she landed on the ground from a finishing blow and swiftly placed her daggers back in her side pouch, a dead monster falling to the ground behind her, making her hair fly around her face in the gust of air that followed.

The soldier had instantly peaked out from behind his shield and tried to defend his pride, not that Nel was listening to his blubbering, her thoughts were elsewhere. *‘At least Albel is more useful in battle than this all-powerful-soldier-of-Aquios!...Waidamminute. He's the enemy! Well, not anymore really...but still! I can't loose my edge on him, or he'll probably slice me to shreds...’* She grimaced at the thought.

The two of them got to the Airyglyph castle and strolled in soon after, Nel getting more and more tense by the second. *‘Oh Apris, I don't want to be here...’*

-“Um, Lady Nel?”

She turned to see the soldier standing behind her. “Yeah, what now?” she asked, irritated. Nel had had quite enough of this man, and she wouldn't be too upset if he suddenly disappeared and reappeared on the moon.

-“I was just thinking, maybe I should stay here and wait for you...” he trailed off, seeing Nel turn on her

`Oh-my-gosh-you're-annoying-me' face. She sighed.

-“Yeah, okay. You stay here while I venture off into a hell hole to retrieve Satan himself and face off against certain death, sounds like a plan to me. Next time you get a bright idea, make sure the whole Kingdom hears what you've got to say.” Nel snapped and turned back around in a huff and took a step down the corridor before turning and facing the confused soldier once again. “And I order you to watch that pebble very closely, it looks like it's up to no good.” she added, pointing to a very small stone that was beside the soldier's shoe. Nel was having a crap day, you couldn't blame her for messing around with the soldier's brain a little...

The soldier looked blankly down at the little stone that was sitting innocently beside his boot. He then gave the pebble a fierce look and drew his sword with one swift motion, pointing it's tip at the stone.

Nel turned around again so the soldier couldn't see her chuckle to herself and started walking down the castle's corridor.

She turned the corner to go to the King's Throne Room and collided with someone. She gave out a startled gasp and almost fell backwards, luckily the person she had bumped into grabbed her wrist and stopped her from falling. The thing was, the hand was made of metal and it's fingers resembled claws.

Nel's head shot up and she came face-to-face with none other than Albel Nox. Both her and his eyes widened.

-“You!” they both exclaimed in unison and Albel quickly let go her wrist, as if it was poisonous.

-“What are you doing here?!” Nel exclaimed without thinking and instantly regretted it. Albel smirked.

-“I live here, fool. Unless you forgot that little fact.”

Nel glared at him. *'Oh how I hate your guts...'* "I know that. I came here to get you. You're coming on a mission with me so let's go." Nel muttered and turned to leave, only to be jerked back when Albel grabbed one end of her scarf, nearly choking her.

-“Slow down maggot. What did you say?”

Nel yanked her scarf out of his hand and adjusted it around her neck so it was loose again. “I said *'You-are-coming-on-a-mission-with-me-so-let's-go!'*” she spat out and started walking away from him again, only to be yanked back yet again as Albel pulled on her scarf.

-“That's what I thought you said. And why exactly do you think I would be going on a mission? With you none the less?”

Nel retrieved her scarf and quickly explained the situation to Albel, except she replaced the blueprints with an all powerful amulet so he wouldn't find out that he's actually helping her retrieve blueprints for weapons that might be used against him some day in the future. She knew that he'd eventually find out, but that wouldn't happen until they were knee deep in dragons and he wouldn't have any choice but to help her. *'Who's the fool now, eh?'* she thought to herself smugly.

When she was done, she saw that there was the smallest of smiles on his face.

-“Let me get this straight. You need *my* help to find some under aged, amulet stealing, little maggot, because of some little dragons that are standing in between you and him?”

Nel huffed and brushed her bangs out of her eyes. “Basically.”

Albel's smirk widened. “So, the Aquarian scum is calling for help from the enemy. How predictable.”

That was the end of the line.

-“Look here Nox,” Nel snapped impatiently, wiping the smile off Albel's face. “We are no longer enemies. And we're not asking your whole army for help, just you.” Albel snorted and crossed his arms over his chest. “Now you listen up and you listen good. I don't like you anymore then the dragons in this uncharted cave we gotta go into,” Albel muttered a “Likewise.” under his breath but Nel chose to ignore it. “But I still respect you as someone who I fought alongside against Luther 3 months ago, and I know that you understand dragons a lot better then I could ever hope to...” Albel looked her in the eyes, speechless. “I just want you to help me out this once, just this one, and then I'll make sure we stay as far apart from each other for as long as you want. Deal?”

Nel put out her right hand and gave him a determined look. Albel observed her for a moment before reaching out with his good hand and shaking hers.

-“Deal.”

Nel smiled in victory. They broke hands and simply looked at each other for a few moments before Nel spoke up .

-“We'd better get going. Fayt and the others won't wait forever. You ready?” Albel shrugged.

-“Yeah, let's go....maggot.” he added under his breath and walked past Nel and towards the castle entrance way. Nel smirked and followed after him, wondering if her soldier was still watching the suspicious pebble...

~X~

Albel and Nel walked to the castle entrance and stopped abruptly when the Aquarian soldier came into view. He was rolling around on the ground with his sword laying a little ways away from him. The soldier was thrashing around as if he was in a life threatening fight with some invisible foe.

Albel leaned in ever so slightly towards Nel. “What the hell is he doing?” he asked in an amused tone. Nel watched the soldier roll around some more and sighed.

-“He's fighting with a pebble.” she moaned in embarrassment and walked over to the stressed soldier. Albel smirked and followed after her, a single thought running through his mind: *‘Like soldier, like subordinate.’*

The soldier didn't see Nel coming and rolled towards her, fidgeting with the pebble that had found its way to the middle of his metal chest plate. Nel lifted her right foot and placed it down on the soldier's chest as he rolled under her foot. He stared up at her blankly as Nel leaned her elbow down on her right knee and stared right back at him.

Albel came up beside Nel so his feet were beside the soldier's head and stared down at him as Nel spoke.

-“What so you think you're doing exactly?” she asked and tried her best to keep a straight face. The soldier stuttered for words, thinking he was in some kind of trouble with his superior.

-“Well, uh...I was doing like you told me! I did watch that pebble, just like you ordered me to, and then it just attacked! I couldn't defend myself and it-”

-“Soldier, were talking about a pebble here, and as far as I know, they don't usually attack people.” Nel cut him off and Albel snickered.

-“But Lady Nel! The pebble, it-”

-“It's a *rock!* An *inanimate object!* It doesn't attack people, because *it can't!*” Nel snapped and picked the small rock up off the soldier's chest and threw it over her shoulder. “When I told you to watch the pebble, I was being sarcastic you big oaf. Can't you take a joke?!”

The soldier stared up at Nel for a few seconds before frowning. Apparently it took a few seconds to sink in. "That was not a very nice joke, Lady Nel." he said as she lifted her foot off his chest and backed up so he could stand up. Nel shrugged.

-“I didn't think you'd take me seriously enough to try to kill it.” Despite all her efforts not to, Nel smiled.

The soldier then noticed that Albel was standing beside him and quickly saluted.

-“A pleasure to meet you Mr. Albel Sir.” he said and Albel crossed his arms over his chest, turning away from the soldier.

-“Yeah, yeah. I've heard it all before. Let's just hurry up and get to the `dragon cave' of yours so we can find this blasted kid and I can get back to my own affairs.” he said in his `I-really-don't-like-you' voice.

-“Ye-yes! Of coarse! Right this way!” the soldier said hurriedly and ran over to retrieve his sword before walking away.

-“Let's go.” Nel said and followed after the soldier.

Albel just glared at their Aquarian backs for a moment before deciding that he should follow them.

3 - Venturing In

Chapter 3

Venturing In

“This is the cave Lady Nel.” the soldier said, pointing to a huge hole in the side of a rather high mountain. There were soldiers stationed all the over the area and Nel saw that there was a doctor's tent off to the right of the cave entrance. The only thing that was missing was...

-“Where's Fayt and all the others?” Nel asked a nearby soldier that was standing beside the doctor's tent.

-“All the others have already ventured off into the cave. They said that they didn't want to wait all day for you to get here with Sir Albel.” he stated after quickly saluted her and Albel, who was eyeing some papers on a table a little too closely in the distance.

-“Well that was stupid! The whole reason I went to get Nox here is because we could use his expertise with dragons! So why the hell did they leave without us?!” Nel exclaimed, trying very hard not to loose her cool.

-“It's just that they said that there were forks in the road after the entrance, and that they were going to split up into groups to cover more ground faster....a-and I guess they thought you and Sir Albel would be able to take your own path...” the soldier said quickly, hoping that his superior wouldn't lash out at him.

-“That's even more stupid then their first idea! Haven't they ever heard of strength in numbers?!” Nel exclaimed and put both her hands flat down on the top of her head in frustration. She then turned and shakily walked over to Albel.

He turned away from the table of papers and strange looking gadgets when Nel came up behind him, hands still on her head and an unreadable look on her face.

-“What's wrong, maggot?” he asked and she sighed, putting her hands down, not even noticing the slightest bit of concern that had leaked out in Albel's voice.

-“Everyone else left without us.” she said and placed her hands on her hips.

-“So what? They would've just held me back.” Albel said and shrugged.

-“Maybe so, but now they've all slit up to cover more ground and Apris knows what'll happen if any of them run into a dragon.”

Albel turned walked around Nel and started for he cave entrance. “Then I guess we'll just have to find that little brat with the amulet so all those fools can get out of there.”

Nel stared at his back as he walked away from her. *‘Did he sound concerned just then? Sure it was really slight but still...’*

Albel turned around and looked at her. “You've got two legs and heartbeat, so would you hurry up? Fool, I'll leave you behind!” he called to her and turned back around. Nel frowned.

‘Nope. It must of been my imagination.’ she thought as she quickly jogged to catch up with Albel, who had already made it to the entrance of the dark cave.

~X~

A soldier handed Nel an unlit torch as she followed Albel into the cave. They walked down the gravel path of the cave for a few meters before Albel stopped in front of her.

-“Light it now.” he ordered and waited with his back still to her. Nel frowned at his rudeness and quickly used her runology to cast a fire ball onto the torch, lighting it instantly. The minuscule light flooded over the cave walls and lit the ground in front of them as Nel moved to stand beside Albel.

-“So, it seems that this is why they slit up.” he said.

There were 3 passageways that were spread out over the cave walls, each leading in a different direction. Nel walked to the passage farthest to the right and kneeled down to read what was written in the dirt.

-“Fayt, Sophia, Maria...I guess that means those three went this way.”

Albel walked to the middle passageway and read the names on the ground. “Looks like that blonde gorilla and Mirage went this way aswell.”

Ignoring his choice of nicknames for Cliff, Nel stood up and walked around Albel and looked down the tunnel that had no names written on the soil in front of it.

“I guess this means we're going down this one.” she muttered and kneeled down again. Nel drew her dagger out of it's pouch and carved her name in the earth, then she wrote Albel's under hers. She stood up and placed her dagger back at her side. Albel walked up to her and made a move to take the torch from her hand, but Nel reacted quickly and pulled her hand out of his reach.

-“No way buddy, I'm gonna hold onto this.” she said and moved again as Albel made another grab for the torch..

-“Maggot, you'll probably drop it or set someone's clothes on fire. I don't trust you with that thing.” Albel growled and swiped at it again, but this time Nel caught his hand instead of moving.

-“Yeah, well I don't trust you at all.” Albel gave her a threatening look and bared a few teeth. “And don't try to intimidate me like some kind of dog, because it's never worked on me and it never will.” Nel said and let go of his hand.

-“I'll tear you to pieces for talking to me like that!” Albel said and cracked the knuckles in his right hand. Nel snorted.

-“No you won't. Without me around, you've got no fire power, and without that, you've got no light.” She then stepped over their earth drawn names and started to walk down the dark cave tunnel.

Albel glared at her back for a few long moments before sighing. “It looks as though I've lost my edge on her...” he muttered softly to himself and started following after her, picking up his pace to catch up to the light source.

Ahead of him, Nel smirked.

She had heard him.

4 - The First Dragon

Chapter 4

The First Dragon

They had been walking for nearly two uneventful hours now...

Nel and Albel walked down the dark tunnel in silence. Albel had caught up to walk next to Nel after grumbling a promise not to try to take the torch from her again.

Nel was trying to calm her nerves with every trick in the book as she walked next to Albel. Everything about that man unnerved her. The way he walked, talked, just about anything he did annoyed her. And yet, she had managed not to blow up in his face as of yet, how?

'I must have superpowers.' she thought as her eyes darted to Albel yet again, making sure he wasn't doing anything out of the ordinary.

Albel knew that Nel had been eyeing him continuously since they had ventured off into their own tunnel, and it was starting to bug him. He turned his head and looked at Nel, seeing her eyes dart away from him and look straight ahead of her.

-“Why do you keep looking at me, maggot?” Albel spat out and Nel stopped walking. Albel walked a few more steps and turned around, standing in front of her now.

Neither of them seemed to notice that they had entered another room in the cave that had two tunnels veering off in different directions.

-“Because I don't trust anything about you.” Nel said and crossed one of her arms across her middle (the other one was holding the torch). Albel sneered.

-“Well I don't trust you either, but you don't see me glancing at you every 10 seconds, do you?” he said.

-“So what if I-” Nel started to protest but Albel suddenly lunged forward and slapped his good hand over her mouth.

-“Shh!” he whispered harshly and quickly grabbed the torch out of Nel's unsuspecting hand. Nel started making some muffled noises of further protest but Albel quickly hushed her again. “Shut up and listen!” he whispered. Nel did.

They were standing at the very entrance of the small room. There were two tunnels leading off in different directions ahead of them. One was closer than the other so they could see down it clearly because of the torch's light, but the other tunnel wasn't nearly as well lit and wouldn't be unless they ventured closer. Not that they would though, considering the strange noise that was coming out of it.

‘What's that noise?...It sounds almost like breathing...’ Nel wondered.

Albel abruptly took his hand off Nel's mouth. “Do you hear that?” he asked in a whisper. Nel looked up at his face and saw that he looked a little uneasy.

-“Yeah, what is it?”

She watched Albel switch hands that was holding the torch so his claws were free.

-“I think we're about to meet our first dragon.” he said and lifted the torch up higher in the air, hoping to get more light into that corner tunnel without having to move any closer.

The light traveled up the far side of the cave's wall and hit the tunnel, lighting it. Nothing was there, but the noise hadn't disappeared.

-“Where is it?” Nel whispered to Albel, trying very hard not to sound as afraid as she was. Nel knew that she could probably beat the snot out of anything that came out of that tunnel, but she didn't like having to fight in the dark, seeing as she preferred being able to see her opponent and know what she was up against before just running into battle.

-“It's in there, it just doesn't want us to know that. It looks like as if it's getting ready to strike...” Albel trailed off, staring intently at the tunnel.

-“How can you tell? You can't even see what's in there.” Nel whispered. Albel smirked despite their current situation.

-“You can't see it? Look harder, this dragon has red eyes.”

Nel listened to Albel's words and squinted at the dark tunnel. She gasped silently. There was indeed two red eyed staring back at her, almost threateningly. Nel covered her mouth with one hand when she heard a low growl come from the tunnel.

-“Its coming.” Albel said grimly and flexed his claws.

-“What are you going to-” Nel stopped in mid sentence when a large scaly object leaped out of the darkness of the tunnel and plunged towards the two.

Albel swiftly turned around and wrapped his clawed arm around Nel's middle before jumping to the right. He landed and quickly jerked his head back around just in time to see the dragon's claws swipe at the very spot where they had been standing only seconds ago.

The dragon was big, very big. It almost filled half the cave they were in and had wings folded tight against its back. The dragon landed, making the ground shake beneath Albel and Nel's feet, and turned its head to look at the two humans in the corner. Its red eyed glowed against the light from the torch as the dragon smirked, its sharp teeth showing.

Despite her pride, Nel found herself latched onto Albel's arm, even after he had let go of her waist. *'How are we going to beat that thing?! It's just standing there and we're already practically boxed in!'* She was forced to let go of Albel's arm when he shoved the still lit torch into one of her hands.

-“When I tell you, I want you to use your Ice Daggers on it.”he said and he drew his katana out of its sheath.

-“But what are you going to-” Nel stuttered.

-“Make sure to aim for its head, that way if it freezes over, it won't be able to breath fire.” Albel added before charging at the dragon.

-“Wait, Albel!” Nel exclaimed and watched him dodge as the dragon swiped at him with its claws.

Nel watched from the sidelines as Albel slowly wore down the dragon. Attack after attack, Albel's breathing started to get a little more forced as he started to get tiered. *'I've got to end this soon...'* he thought as he jumped into the air, dodged the dragon's swiping claws, and landed on its back.

The dragon jerked its head this way and that, trying to get the human off its back. Albel grabbed hold of one of the dragon's wings to steady himself as he pulled his katana's sheath off his side. He hastily threw his sword to the ground and lunged at the back of the dragon's head. Albel punched the dragon on one side of its face, making it turn its head in that direction while he quickly moved to the opposite side and jammed his sheath into the dragon's mouth, grabbing it with his other hand when it came out the other side of the dragon's mouth.

Albel pulled the sheath towards him so it was jammed in at the back of the dragon's mouth, propping it open, and jerked both his arms sideways, making the dragon reluctantly turn as well.

-“Now! Aim your Ice Daggers for it's mouth!” Albel called to Nel as he forcefully held the dragon's head into position.

Nel had jammed the torch into a pile of rocks a few minutes ago so it was sticking up and still lighting the cave. She gave Albel a quick nod and focused her energy into her hands.

-“Move!” she exclaimed and took careful aim. She could see flames preparing to exit the dragon's mouth and quickly released her Ice Daggers.

Albel, upon recently hearing her demand, pulled his sheath out of the dragon's mouth. The dragon reacted to the sudden freeness and jerked it's head sharply, sending Albel flying off it's back and slamming into the cave wall before quickly turning back and releasing a heavy amount of fire from it's mouth towards Nel.

Nel, who was still emitting daggers of ice out of her hands, chanced a glance at Albel, who was on his knees and folded in two on the ground at the dragon's side, in obvious pain. *'I guess it's up to me now...'* she thought and tore her eyes away from Albel.

Fire and Ice met as the two elemental assaults collided. It was a pretty even match at first, but Nel put all she had into her spell, sending ice flowing through the flames and directly into the dragon's open mouth. The flames stopped but Nel continued sending ice at the dragon.

Albel, who had just managed to shakily stand up from the hard tunnel floor, saw what Nel was doing. Gathering up what little energy he had left, Albel ran over to Nel's side and grabbed both her hands firmly.

-“Stop it! You need to save your energy!” he exclaimed and Nel let the spell slide, stopping the flow of ice.

The dragon let out a few choking noises before its red eye rolled into its head and it fell to the ground, making the whole cave shake.

Nel's hands fell to her sides when Albel let go of them.

-“You fool, you need to save your energy for the rest of this cave!” Albel said and watched her carefully, debating on whether or not she was okay. Nel smirked and closed her eyes.

-“Just shut up, Albel...” she muttered before her knees gave out from underneath her. Albel reacted quickly and caught her before she hit the ground. He looked at her face and sighed.

-“The fool went and fainted on me...” he whispered, wondering what he should do next....

5 - The Second Encounter

Chapter 5

The Second Encounter

'What's going on...? Why does my head hurt?....'

Nel slowly opened her eyes. Albel's face was the first thing she saw, followed by the cave ceiling passing by above her. Albel looked down and noticed that she was awake, so he stopped walking and put her down. He had been carrying Nel with one hand around her back and one tucked under her folded knees (a.k.a: Bridal style.), with the ever lit torch in his hand that came out from under her knees.

-“It's about time you woke up! I've been carrying you for nearly half an hour!” he said with false anger. There were some strange things running through Albel's mind just then. They confused him, making him desperately want to cover them up.

He felt this pulling at the side of his mouth, almost as if it wanted to smile, that alone was very out of the ordinary for Albel the Wicked. He had to cross his arms over his chest tightly, because it felt as if they wanted to spring loose and hug Nel half to death. That's even more out of the ordinary than smiling! Biting his lip, he managed to keep all thoughts of being happy Nel was okay to himself... ***What the hell was going on!***

These were all things that Albel Nox would never think of doing, and he planned on keeping it that way. Why was he feeling this way all of a sudden? What was the cause? These were all questions Albel couldn't answer, or was afraid to.

Nel held onto her head with one hand, hoping it would ease the pounding of her temples.

-“Don't start with me now, Nox. I'm not in the mood for your smart comments.” she said quietly, although it sounded 10 times louder through her ears. Albel watched her frown and rub her temples in circular motions.

-“Are you okay?” he heard himself asking, trying to sound as uninterested as possible.

-“It feels like a million people are going to war in my head, but besides that, yeah, I'm okay.” Nel mumbled, sarcasm leaking into her voice.

-“Well, can't you just heal yourself?” Albel asked hesitantly. Nel shook her head..

-“No, I can only heal physical wounds. Even if I could heal this stupid headache, I'm running so low on energy that I'd probably pass out again afterwards.” Nel said and looked around for the first time since she'd woken up. “Where are we?” she asked, not recognizing the part of the cave they were standing in.

That's when Albel got a little more of his old self back. “Well, when you decided to have a little nap in the middle of nowhere, I decided that we needed to get out of that area quickly, whether you were asleep or not, in case that dragon had been defending a nest full of those little fire breathing maggots. So, I ended up having to carry you for the last half an hour. I was just lucky that I didn't run into anymore dragons.” he paused and uncrossed his arms before adding, “I blame you.”

Nel turned on him and put her hands on her hips, resuming a much used pose.

-“You blame me?! It wasn't my idea to faint and have you carry me all over the place! You're just blaming it on me to take the heat off yourself!” Nel accused loudly, instantly regretting it because of the pain that punched her in the head afterwards.

Albel opened his mouth to fight back but lost his motivation when he saw Nel holding the side of her head again.

-“Do you want to sit down for a minute before we keep going?” he asked, once again trying to keep the concern out of his voice, and failing.

Nel glanced at him abruptly. *‘There it is again! I could've sworn I heard concern in his voice.’*

Albel noticed her look and quickly covered up his previous statement. “Well you're no good to me in battle if you've got a headache, fool!” he said in his normal tone. Nel just looked at him before sitting down on the spot.

-“I guess you're right, but next time I could do without the name calling.” she muttered.

Albel crossed his arms over his chest and waited.

Albel waited for 10 minutes, standing beside Nel as she sat on the cold ground and breathed in deeply, trying to regain as much energy as possible in the time given. Neither of them knew what time it was, but they could guess that it was already night fall, judging by how it had recently gotten a lot colder than before.

Nel had grown hungry and tired but didn't want to say anything, for fear of angering *‘Albel the Wicked’*. Albel was tapping his fingers on his clawed arm, doing all he could to keep himself from complaining about how much time they were losing or how the kid they were looking for could already be out of the cave and miles away from them.

He looked down at the red head when he heard her stomach growl. Nel's cheeks went a light pink as she wrapped her arms around her middle, trying to drown out the noise. Her stomach rumbled again, and Nel hastily stood up.

-“Well, we should get going now. The sooner we find Michael, the sooner we can get out of here.” she said, pretending she hadn't heard anything. “You want me to carry the torch?”

Albel just looked at her. "Only an idiot wouldn't of heard your stomach. I know you're hungry so don't try to cover it up." Nel looked down at the ground, at a loss of words. "I'm hungry too, but there's not much we can do about it, now is there?" Albel continued on. Nel looked back up at him and nodded.

-“Anyway, like I was saying, my headache's almost gone and I know that I'd be able to help fight if any more dragons showed up, *and I'm positive more will*, so do you think we should keep going until we find somewhere to rest for the night?”

Albel nodded in agreement and handed over the torch, thinking it was a good idea to have both hands free for combat.

They walked down the tunnel for quite a long time. They hadn't had much choice in a change of direction because they hadn't seen any other tunnels besides the one they were walking down. After searching and not finding any suitable place to rest, they decided to just sit down in the middle of the tunnel to catch some z's.

They found a stray stick of wood on the way and lit the end of it, so now both Nel and Albel had a torch.

-“I'm going to go see if there's anything we need to watch out for up ahead.” Albel said as Nel plopped down on the cold ground. “You stay here, I'll be back in a minute.” Nel grumbled a “Okay” under her breath and watched Albel until all she could see was the light of his torch in the distance.

Nel sighed and put a hand on her stomach as it growled again.

-“I hear you loud and clear, but I can't help it. There's no food in this cave unless we eat a dragon...and I can only imagine what that would taste like.”

She waited for Albel to come back for nearly 10 minutes. Nel just sat there, in all her uncomfortableness,

and stared at the flame of her torch.

-“Nox had better come back...Now that I think about it, I wouldn't put it past him to just find the nearest exit from this cave and leave me in here.” Nel frowned and stood up. “I'd better go-” She stopped as she saw her torch flame flicker violently, as if someone had turned a fan on and off in an instant.

Nel slowly turned towards the direction her and Albel had originally come from. Another warm gust of foul smelling air hit her face and Nel came to realization of what she was dealing with.

A dragon.

She raised her torch higher in the air as she frantically fumbled for her dagger. A low growl sounded from in front of her and Nel just caught a glimpse of huge sharp teeth and red eyes before her torch went out, plunging her into sudden darkness.

Nel quickly dropped the burnt stick and assumed a defensive position with her dagger out in front of her. Not that it did any good though. The now almost invisible dragon swiped it's sharp claws at Nel, catching her off guard and sending her flying across the tunnel and smashing into the cave wall.

Nel cried out in pain and held onto her side as she fell to the ground. She had three decent sized slashes that ran from her left hand side all the way around to her belly. Nel blocked out the extreme pain and swiftly started to prepare a healing spell, but the dragon was on top of her before she could finish it. The dragon swiped down at her and Nel screamed in agony as its claws sliced her upper chest, like three overly large paper cuts.

~X~

Albel had been walking down the deserted tunnel for nearly 5 minutes now, and he hadn't seen anything that could pose as a threat.

-“I'd better get back, that fool will probably think I've abandoned her and come looking for me.” he mumbled and started walking back to where he had left Nel.

He walked until he could see Nel's torch burning brightly near the ground of the tunnel in the distance. The torch then shot up as Nel supposedly stood up, flickered a few times and raised up higher in the air, before abruptly going out.

Albel portrayed a confused look and continued walking towards where the flame had been. *‘Why would she put her torch out? That's just stupid...’*

A cry of pain caused him to speed up to a jog. He heard Nel scream in agony soon after and broke into an all out run, pulling his katana from its sheath with his hand. *‘She must of run into a dragon!’* he thought as the struggle scene came into view.

-“...Oh shoot....”

6 - "You're Unbelievable!"

Chapter 6

"You're Unbelievable!"

- "...Oh shoot..."

There was a sloppy line of blood leading over to the side of the tunnel, to where Nel was pinned down to the ground by a dragon's huge claws. Albel's eyes instantly darted to Nel's wounds and winced. He picked up speed slightly. *'This doesn't look good...'*

He saw the dragon lift one of its clawed paws while the other one continued to hold Nel down to the ground. Albel easily pinpointed the monster's weak spot on its lower neck from years of experience around dragons, and jumped into the air, kicking the dragon hard in the neck and sending it tumbling back down the tunnel and out of view.

Albel hastily kneeled down, dropped his katana, and put an arm around Nel's back and hoisted her up, looking at her wounds. Nel just stared up at him with readable thankfulness and pain all over her face.

- "Quickly, heal yourself before it comes back." Albel mumbled and glanced in the direction he had sent the dragon flying.

Nel shakily placed her hands on her chest and closed her eyes, concentrating. A pale light traced her cut flesh as she drew her hands away and the light stitched her skin back together with invisible thread. Albel watched her heal the huge cuts on her side in silence. He never got tired of seeing her do that, seeing as he couldn't do it himself.

Nel looked up at him when she was done healing her wounds and muttered a "Thanks" quietly.

Albel felt the urge to retort or put her down for not being able to take out the dragon by herself, but couldn't find the words to use, so he simply nodded and took his arm from around her back and shoved his torch into one of her hands.

-“Hold this, I've got a bone to pick with that dragon.” he muttered. Nel looked puzzled for a second before her eyes went wide.

-“Albel!” she exclaimed and hastily went for her dagger that was laying beside her. Albel's eyes widened slightly and he spun around, putting up his clawed hand in defense just in time to clash with the claws of a miffed dragon.

With one swift movement, Nel lunged at the dragon and drove her dagger into its eye, earning a yelp of extreme pain from her scaly friend. It backed up a few steps and opened it's mouth, getting ready to scorch Albel and Nel. But Albel was too fast for the dragon and grabbed his katana. He leaped to the dragon's side and swiftly delivered the final blow, chopping the dragon's head off in one fell swoop.

Silence fell over the scene until Albel sheathed his sword and Nel fell backwards to lean against the cave wall. She looked up as Albel walked over to her.

-“Thanks for helping me.” she said before having second thoughts. Albel just handed her back her dagger and said nothing. Nel stood and replaced her dagger in its pouch, looking distastefully at the dragon carcass. “You hungry for dragon?” she asked Albel, trying to sound funny, but only succeeding in sounding grossed out.

Albel snorted. “No. But it's all we've got to work with. The least we could do is cook it...” he motioned for the torch and started looking around on the ground once he had it in his clawed hand.

Nel waited for him to come back and eyed the dragon's head, having weird suspicions that it would spring back to life any second and flame torch her to death. Nel shook her head. *‘It's the lack of sleep. It's making me think weird thoughts.’*

Albel came back moments later with a pile of sticks and leaves in his normal arm. Nel noticed a very uncomfortable look on his face and that his `good' arm was shaking slightly. Albel sloppily dropped the twigs to the ground and kneeled over them, setting fire to the pile by adding the torch to it. When he kneeled over, that's when Nel saw it.

-“Albel! You're wounded!” she exclaimed and bent down beside his good arm to look over the damage. It looked like the dragon must of caught Albel off guard briefly when he was going in for the final blow. There was a huge slash that ran from Albel's shoulder down to his elbow, and it looked pretty bad.

Albel jerked his arm out of Nel's reach and snarled at her. “Don't touch me maggot! Just mind your own business!” he spat out at her and got up. He then drew his katana with his wounded arm and walked over to the dead dragon and proceeded to hack some decent sized pieces of meat off it, all the while wincing and biting his lip.

Nel frowned and got up as well. *‘He's like a little kid sometimes, scared of letting anyone look at his booboo...’* But Nel knew that this could easily be more than just a booboo is she didn't heal it soon. *‘It's not that I care about him or anything, it's just that he's stuck in here with me and I'd rather not be left alone in this cave...’* Nel quickly told herself as she started walking around the dead thing so she could get behind Albel.

Halfway around the dragon, Nel put her right hand behind her back and started up a healing spell. She peaked around the side of the carcass and saw Albel hacking away at the dragon's stomach with his sword. *‘He hasn't noticed me yet...’* Nel stealthily snuck around so she was standing right behind Albel and swiftly slapped her glowing right hand on Albel's arm, the spell instantly spreading over the gash and healing it. A wave of nausea washed over Nel's consciousness briefly, arguing with her for using so much of her energy in one shot.

Albel gasped in surprise and spun around with a start, in the motion of cutting Nel through the middle with his katana. Nel yelped in surprise and moved out of the way, just missing the sword that was out to get her.

Albel, just now realizing that it was Nel who had touched him, sheathed his sword and glared at her.

-“Worm, I told you not to touch me!” he growled and flexed his claws.

Nel, still shook up about the assault, frowned and put her hands on her hips. “I was just trying to help! Doesn't your arm feel better now that it's healed?!” she protested. Albel glanced at his arm as Nel continued her ranting. “You're unbelievable! I thought for sure you'd jump at the idea of me using up my energy to heal you! But nooooooo, instead you decide to go all solo and try to hack me in two!” Nel clenched her fists and looked up at Albel. “What the hell is wrong with you?!”

Albel looked away from her, hoping that he wouldn't have to say anything and that she's just calm down by herself.

No such luck.

Nel waited for him to say something, still ticked. “So what? Now you're not going to say anything? Or are you just too high and mighty to speak to scum like me?!”

Albel turned his head to look at her, anger present on his features. “Would you just shut up?! I'm sick of your ranting! I didn't know you were the one who was behind me, if I had, I wouldn't of attacked you. I just don't need some Aquarian worm healing me. I'm not some kid who needs to be taken care of all the time!”

Nel took all this in and looked at him with disbelief. “I don't believe it...” she muttered. “You're not even the slightest bit grateful.” She shook her head and sighed. “No, actually I do believe it. You've always been like this, ever since I met you. You're always inconsiderate and cold. I guess you could say I never really understood you, you're so much different then anyone else I've ever known...”

Nel slowly turned around and walked over to the fire that looked like it wanted to go out and sat down in a heap with her back against the cave wall.

Albel sighed and looked down at his healed arm again before picking up two sticks he had saved and

stabbing a piece of dragon meat onto each one before walking over to where Nel was sitting.

-“Here.” he said quietly and put a stick of meat out for her to take. Nel eyed Albel tiredly for a moment before taking the stick and leaning forward, holding the meat to the fire in hopes of cooking it somewhat.

Albel went and sat across from Nel on the other side of the fire and tried to cook his food as well. Every once and awhile he would look over to where Nel sat, but she would just stare at the fire, the flames reflecting off her violet eyes.

Albel couldn't take the silence. When it's quiet, ones mind has time to think, and for Albel, thinking could be very painful at times...and annoying.

There was this little voice in his head that kept telling him that he should apologize to Nel. Albel refused to listen to reason. *'It's the lack of sleep, it's making me get voices in my head.'* he thought. The little voice was very persistent, Albel would give it that much, but he still didn't understand why it wanted him to apologize so badly.

'She should be thanking me! I usually kill anybody who touches me in an instant!'

-***'Yeah, and you would of killed her if she hadn't moved!'***- said the little voice in his head that seemed to be getting bigger with every passing second.

'You just shut up! I don't need your nagging right now.'

-***'You're just upset because you know I'm right. She went to the trouble of healing you and you thank her by attempting murder! She's right, you are unbelievable!'***-

'I wouldn't of attacked her if I had known it was her and not some bad @\$@ monster! Jeez, you're making me sound like the bad guy here!'

- ***'That's because you are, dimwit!'***-

'Why you little-'

-“Um, ...Albel?”

Albel blinked a few times, just now realizing that Nel was sitting across from him and that he had been fighting with himself the whole time. *'I really need to get some rest...'*

-“Yeah, whaddaya want?” he muttered. Nel just pointed.

-“Your meat is on fire.” she said calmly and Albel looked down at his dinner.

The chunk of meat had now turned into a fire ball, the little stick slowly turning black. Apparently during the heated conversation with his other half, Albel had been paying close to no attention to his dinner.

-“Woah!” he exclaimed and jumped to his feet, still holding his homemade fire ball. Nel watched him as he frantically shook the stick of meat, trying to kill the flame. “Put it out!” he suddenly shouted and Nel, making her jump to her feet as well.

-“What? How?!”

-“Use your runo-whatcamacallit! Just *put it out!*”

-“But I'm running low on energy and-”

-“I said **PUT IT OUT!**” Albel yelled angrily as he juggled the burning hot stick, trying not to drop it.

Nel cursed in a very unladylike manner and quickly got a water spell going in her head. She let it loose, only she overdid it...majorly. The equivalent of a bucket of water poured itself over Albel's head, putting out the flaming meat wad, but soaking him in the process. Nel suppressed giggles as Albel looked at her from behind his dripping bangs of black and blonde hair.

-“Sorry.” Nel choked out and covered her mouth with one hand to stop herself from laughing.

Albel growled low but kept his anger in check. There wasn't really any use in getting mad at her, she'd just try to drown him again.

-*‘What goes around comes around.’*- the voice in his head chanted, annoying Albel even further.

-“I should hurt you, but I'm not going to.” Albel muttered and sat down close to the fire.

Nel looked down at him and noticed that he was shivering. Running a hand over her bare arm, Nel discovered that she had goosebumps as well. It had gotten a lot colder in the last hour and their only source of heat now was the little dying fire.

Gazing down at Albel as he eyed his hunk of blackened meat unhappily, Nel wondered how cold he really was. *‘I'm cold, but I'm dry. I can only imagine how cold he must be...’* Nel hesitantly walked over and sat down beside him. *‘I can't believe I'm doing this...’*

She put her stick of perfectly cooked meat out in front of Albel. He stared at it for a moment before shifting his gaze to Nel, then back to the meat.

-“What do you expect me to do with *that?*” he asked blankly. Nel sighed.

-“Yours is burnt, mine isn't. I'm going to share mine with you.” she said and handed it to him. Albel took it and looked at it like it was a rare and dangerous disease waiting to happen.

-“You expect me to *share* this with *you*?” he mocked and Nel rolled her eyes.

-“Well if you're going to be so touchy about it then just cut the meat in half so you'll have your own piece.

-“Good idea Zelpher. I see you're not a complete idiot, as I had thought.” Albel sneered and drew his katana. Nel frowned at his insult and watched him cut the meat straight down the middle and hand her back the piece with the stick.

-“Thanks.” Nel muttered and bit down on the wad. Surprisingly, it didn't taste too bad. Albel paused for a moment before eating some of his own.

They both finished off the last of their dinners and sat in silence. It was awkward, sitting so close to each other, alone, in a cave. Nel thought maybe it would be easier if she struck up a conversation with her ex-enemy.

She turned her head and looked at him, opened her mouth to talk, and every thing went pitch black.

-“Whoa!” she exclaimed when Albel disappeared into darkness as the fire burned out. Nel's reflexes took action before her brain could process what had happened and she reached out, grabbing hold of Albel's hand. His hand didn't react as her small fingers wrapped themselves around his.

Albel, who's eyes quickly adjusted to the dark so he could see again, looked over at Nel and saw the shocked look on her face.

-“What's wrong Zelpher, afraid of the dark?” he taunted. Nel looked up at him and swiftly let go of his hand, not being able to see the disappointment that flashed over his face, gone as fast as it had come.

-“No, it just caught me off guard, that's all.” she protested. Albel smirked.

-“Whatever you say.” He picked up his burnt stick that the meat used to be on (he had thrown it away) and poked the dead fire a few times. “So much for a heat supply.” he muttered.

-“What if I light it again?” Nel offered, even though she was in no condition to be using her runology.

-“It wouldn't last. All the wood's burned down to nothing.” Albel muttered and put his stick down and leaned back against the cave wall. Nel followed suit and leaned back as well.

It was going to be a long night...