

## The Nemesis Board

by Mia Sundby

"What's a Nemesis Board?"

The gentleman in front of the stall looked up, peering at her from underneath his straw hat. Figna gestured to the board in front of the stall, which proclaimed in big bold, cursive letters 'Nemesis Board'. He looked at the board, then back to her, and grinned.

"People come and put their names on the board, looking for a nemesis."

"A nemesis?" Figna repeated, amused.

"Yeah, a rival, an enemy."

"I know what a nemesis is," she muttered, examining the names on the board, "But how does it work?"

The young man leaned languidly out from the shade, adjusting his wooden pipe in his wiry beard. "Well, folk put their names on the board, talking about themselves a bit, what sort of rival they're looking for, and then someone else comes along and does the same and we either match 'em up or they pick a nemesis from the board themselves."

Figna narrowed her eyes, examining a slip of paper which proclaimed,

*'Yelmyar Thistlespring of Navaar, seeking someone to glare at from across a room. If things go well, might progress to insults and spitting at each other's feet.'* Another state, *'Morgana the Barbarian, looking for someone to wrestle in public. No broken bones, but a black eye or two every time we see each other goes a long way.'*

She pulled back, darting a glance over at the stallholder. She raised a brow.

"So it's speed dating but for enemies?"

The young man nodded, lighting his pipe. Miraculously, his straw hat did not catch on fire but it was a close thing. Shaking out the match, he said, "You'd be surprised how many of them just start dating."

Figna glanced back at the board.

*'Brog. Looking for a nemesis who isn't afraid to get dirty.'*

Her other brow rose. "Not that surprised."

The man chuckled, puffing on his pipe. After a moment, he looked up at her. "So, do you want one?"

She frowned. "One what?"

"A nemesis."

Figna scoffed. The whole idea was ridiculous. All these people were more or less hiring someone to hate --or at the very least forcing a relationship of mutual dislike. It seemed bizarre. Why would anyone want to create something like that? Sure, hatred was, really when you got down to it, just another form of passion. Sure, trading quips with someone sounded like it might be entertaining... And maybe a bit of rough-housing with someone who had signed on for that sort of thing could be fun.

Particularly if you ended up backed against a wall with their arms caging you in, both of your breathing ragged and hot, your dagger against their throat and theirs poised to your heart...

Figna held a hand out to the bearded man. "You got a paper and quill?"

The man chuckled, reaching behind him. "One rivalry coming right up..."