

Sorrel Nema: Adventure

A ready-to-play quest from NPC Recruiter

Quest Giver

Sorrel Nema · Goblin · Tavern Storyteller

Quest Hook

Sorrel asks the party to investigate a line from an old lament—a name that may point to a lost kin-comb—buried in a ruined barrow now threatened by a new farmer's plough; exhumation could anger ancestral spirits.

The Adventure

Title: Whistle of the Buried Lament

Summary

Sorrel Nema, a loquacious goblin tavern-storyteller, hires the party to investigate one line of an old lament she found carved in her story-board: a single name that may point to a lost kin-comb buried in a ruined barrow on the edge of a new farmer's field. The farmer plans to plough and destroy the barrow in two days. Exhumation could reunite a people's heirloom—but might anger ancestral spirits. The party must learn what the name means, decide whether (and how) to stop the ploughing, and deal with the barrow's living and dead defenses.

Situation

- Where: Sorrel's tavern (evening) / fields around a ruined barrow (day/time, supernatural interior).
- Time pressure: the farmer's crew starts ploughing at dawn two days from now. The party can work social angles, research overnight, or act immediately.
- Stakes: destroying the barrow means loss of the comb and deeper insult to ancestral spirits; forceful exhumation may unleash wrath. Safe retrieval and respectful reburial grants social and mystical rewards.

Objective

Primary: Locate the barrow, decipher the lament's place-name or name, and secure or recover the kin-comb—or otherwise resolve the barrow's fate before the plough reaches it.

Secondary: Protect the party and nearby villagers from spiritual backlash; gain Sorrel's story-favor and any heritage revealed by the object.

Scene 1 — The Story-Warmed Tavern (Gathering Threads)

Actionable steps

1. Roleplay/Hook: Sorrel greets the group with her peculiar whistle, then launches into the lament line—witty, dramatic, and precise. She offers payment and a promise of a tale for those who return the comb.
2. Investigate the lament: Examine Sorrel's story-board and inked runes; ask Sorrel for the exact wording; hear her catching memory of the name. Suggested actions: examine board, perform lore/history checks, and interview locals.

3. Gather intelligence: Visit villagers, the village elder, and the farmer (if desired). Learn when ploughing begins, the farmer's reason, any local superstitions, and any law/custom that governs burial mounds.

4. Optional research: Spend the night in the tavern or at the elder's, looking through local records and songs to match the lament line to a clan or artifact.

Suggested skill tasks (system-neutral)

- Decipher runes / lore: one Moderate success (or 2 small successes). Success reveals the name is likely a kin-name and hints at a comb as a clan's totem.
- Persuade/sweet-talk farmer's family or villagers: Easy–Moderate, reveals exact ploughing schedule and the farmer's stubbornness.
- Gather rumor / Performance (useful for Sorrel performing the lament in public to draw attention or sympathy): Easy; can sway villagers' feelings toward delaying ploughing.

Scene outcomes and payoffs

- Full success: You learn the barrow's location, the farmer's motivation, and a line linking the name to "Kin-Comb of Tharla" (or other) plus a local custom: a placation ritual that calms spirits.
- Partial success: You get location and plough schedule but no ritual. More risk inside the barrow.
- Failure: You have only vague directions and arrive late—farmer may already be near the site.

Scene 2 — Field Diplomacy and the Farmer's Dilemma (Delay, Deceive, or Direct)

Actionable steps

1. Approach the field (daylight). Observe new furrows and markers. The barrow is a low mound with scattered stones and a half-collapsed capstone. Farmer's workers may already be present.
2. Negotiate: Attempt to convince the farmer to delay or alter the ploughing. Options include paying them, legally contesting, staging a convincing ritual, pulling public sympathy, or sabotaging equipment.
3. Alternative: If negotiation fails, the group can: (A) stall the workers physically (block, stage protest), (B) bribe them, (C) quietly perform a sacral placation on the mound to buy time, or (D) begin a quick excavation to recover the comb before ploughing starts.

Suggested tasks and outcomes

- Persuasion/Authority: Moderate (workers/owner can be reasonable if shown a strong case).
- Deception/Performance (fake official-looking notice, or Sorrel's staged lament): Moderate; success delays ploughing for hours.
- Bribery/Trade-off: Immediate success if party has goods or coin.
- Quick excavation (physical): Hard—requires coordinated digging, clearing stones, and low light/space tactics. Time-limited; partial digs may damage artifacts if rushed.

Environmental complications

- The farmer may have hired a strong foreman (contest of Resolve): if the party pushes, the foreman may call the town watch.
- Weather: a sudden rainstorm could make ploughing impossible (good), or make digging treacherous (bad).
- A small boundary marker may carry a ward rune; disturbing it triggers a low-level supernatural alarm (wailing wind, restless crows).

Scene 3 — The Barrow's Breath (Exhumation and Ancestral Reckoning)

Actionable steps

1. Enter the barrow: low crawl through a short passage that opens to a dim chamber. Carved story-runes line the chamber walls; a chest or alcove holds a wrapped object (possible comb).
2. Read and respect: The runes respond to sound and story. Sorrel (or a skilled speaker) can recite or whistle the lament to calm wards.
3. Decision points: Retrieve the comb and leave, perform a placation ceremony before removal, or remove it forcibly.

4. If placation is chosen: follow ritual steps (sing/whistle, lay offerings, recite the lament in correct order). This soothes spirits and allows peaceful retrieval.
5. If forced or ritual botched: spirits manifest as echoes, poltergeist effects, or guardians (ancestral shades that test the intruders).

Challenge mechanics (system-neutral)

- Runes & ritual: requires 2 successes (Moderate) in Performance/Lore/Stewardship combined. Full success = peaceful retrieval and a blessing. Partial success = comb found but spirits aggrieved (minor haunt). Failure = active haunting/guardian encounter.
- Combat/Spirit test: implement as a contest: party must withstand three escalating spirit tests (Resolve, Wits, and Compassion). For each failed test, tangible cost (injury, cursed item, permanent minor effect like a rumble of memory).

A simple rune-puzzle (playable, no prep)

- There are three rune-slates A, B, C on the wall; three lament fragments are carved on Sorrel's board: "Name", "Comb", "Field".

Clue stones in the chamber read:

1. The Name sits left of the Comb.
2. The Field is not beside the Comb.
3. The Name is not on the edge.

- Solution: Order = B (Name), A (Comb), C (Field). If players voice the correct order and recite the lament with Sorrel's whistle cue, the slab opens peacefully. If they guess, treat as part of ritual attempts (see above).

Obstacles

- Time pressure: farmer's ploughing can arrive mid-retrieval.
- Social: a stubborn farmer, frightened villagers, or the town watch that favors property rights.
- Physical: collapsed stones, confined space, and trap-sockets that drop dust or trigger noisy alarms.
- Supernatural: ward runes that punish careless exhumation (wails, sleep, madness, poltergeist), and ancestral shade tests that evaluate honesty and respect.
- Moral: whether to remove a clan heirloom that may belong to more than one group, and whether Sorrel's personal motives are fully benevolent.

Meaningful Player Choices (and consequences)

1. Delay vs. Dig Now

- Delay (negotiate/ritual): safer retrieval, better relations, but higher chance farmer legally claims mound.
- Dig now (rushed exhumation): greater chance of damage to the artifact and angering spirits.

2. Retrieve the comb for Sorrel vs. leave it with the barrow

- Give to Sorrel: gains storyteller favor and information; local people may feel robbed.
- Leave in barrow (or rebury properly): earns villagers' trust and spiritual blessing, Sorrel disappointed but may be understanding.

3. Perform the placation ritual vs. use force

- Ritual: requires time and skill; reduces supernatural hostility and may grant a boon.
- Force: quicker, but invites haunting or curse and possibly combat.

4. Reveal full truth publicly vs. keep it secret

- Revealing: may attract attention, reward, or claim disputes.
- Keeping secret: safe for some, but Sorrel may be betrayed; loss of reputation or future favors.

NPC Motivations

- Sorrel Nema (hired): wants to reclaim a kin-comb to complete a lost tale and restore a lineage object to goblin memory. She is witty, loves drama, and sees stories as living things. She will press for retrieval but is sensitive to ancestral disrespect.

Roleplaying cues: begins every tale with her peculiar whistle; speaks quickly, punctuates with wry remarks; uses the

story-board to reconstruct memory.

- Farmer (new landowner): practical, needs fields to feed family; likely unaware of cultural cost. Motivated by livelihood and community pressure; can be persuaded by money, guilt, or authority.
- Village elder/local council: cautious, fears legal trouble, wants peace and stability. May mediate or obstruct depending on persuasion.
- Ancestral Spirits: guardians of the barrow. Motivations: preserve dignity, punish theft/disrespect, or reward remembrance.

Possible Endings (with immediate consequences and hooks)

1. Peaceful Retrieval and Return

- The party performs the ritual, retrieves the comb, returns it to Sorrel (or to the clan), and convinces farmer to place a marker and leave the barrow untouched.
- Consequences: Sorrel rewards generously (gold, story-favor). Village gratitude; the party gains a minor blessing (see Rewards). A new tale spreads of their honor—future favors and reputation boost.
- Hook: The comb bears runic memory that hints at a larger lost goblin lineage—new quest.

2. Respectful Reburial / Compromise

- The party negotiates a compromise: record and photograph the artifact, perform rites, and reburies the comb; farmer agrees to adjust the field or donate a small plot as memorial.
- Consequences: Moderate reward; strong ties to villagers; Sorrel writes a lament that becomes a traveling tale. Spiritual calm; potential long-term goodwill.
- Hook: Preservation reveals faint map hidden under the comb pointing to another ancestral site.

3. Forced Exhumation with Consequences

- The party digs fast and removes the comb without completing the ritual. Spirits are angered—small hauntings that plague the party, the village, or the comb itself. Ancestral shade may follow to demand restitution.
- Consequences: immediate conflict, wounds, or a curse requiring future atonement. Sorrel is thrilled by the comb but troubled by the consequences; her trust depends on party's actions afterward.
- Hook: A spirit now stalks the region; to lift the curse the party must return and complete a difficult atonement quest.

4. Destruction or Loss

- The farmer's plough or an accident destroys the barrow before the party can act. The comb is crushed or lost.
- Consequences: sorrow, anger, village resentment. Sorrel is heartbroken and may task the party to recover the story by other means (recover fragments of the lament from the farmer's field or from surviving elders).
- Hook: Scraps of the lament hint at a living descendant who holds the true kin-line—new social investigation quest.

Rewards

Material and immediate

- Gold/coin (Sorrel's payment): 2–4 standard pieces (adjust to campaign scale).
- The Kin-Comb (if retrieved): a finely carved comb with cultural resonance. Suggested mechanical boons (system-neutral, flavorful; GM pick one appropriate):
 - Storyteller's Comb: once per day, grants clarity of voice—temporary boost to any Performance/Influence attempt, or a +1 luck-like boon for social contests.
 - Memory-Braid: allows holder to recall one forgotten name or detail (usable once, permanent knowledge).
 - Minor ward: while the comb is carried respectfully, it muffles malevolent whispers—gives advantage on resisting confusion/fright.
- A small magical trinket if the GM wants a stronger reward (e.g., a bead that protects from one spirit attack).

Social and long-term

- Sorrel's favor: story-telling indebtedness—invites, safe haven in taverns she visits, and positive reputational push among rural

storytellers.

- Village gratitude: lowered prices, useful local contacts, future help.
- Knowledge reward: the comb and lament unlock a lore thread—possible lead to larger goblin-lineage mysteries.

Cues and Roleplay Bits for Sorrel

- Entrance: “(whistle) Hark! Sit, sit—your boots will like warm ale and your ears something older. I have a name that won’t stop tapping at my board.” (She whistles a short, plaintive trill before speaking.)
- Tone: mocking, theatrical, yet with small moments of tenderness when she speaks of ancestry.
- When pleased: taps beads on her torc; when worried: fingers stained with ink nervously trace rune-patterns.

Advice for Running This Quest (system-neutral arbitration)

- Use a three-tier success model for contested tasks: Full success, Partial (mixed), Failure. Tailor consequences and narrative color to each tier.
- Encourage roleplay: Sorrel’s whistle and recitations can provide in-game mechanical bonuses if used (e.g., +1 narrative boon) since she’s the specialist for ritualistic stories.
- Track time: explicitly count hours/dawns to maintain tension about the farmer’s plough.
- Let player choices have clear, visible consequences—hauntings, reputation shifts, or physical obstacles.
- If combat occurs with spirits, consider nonlethal alternatives (appeasement, returning items) to emphasize the cultural stakes.

Quick Encounters and Flavor Events (ready to drop in)

- The farmer’s foreman argues law: a social contest. Win: delay; lose: watch arrives.
- Midnight whisper: villagers hear soft drumming from the mound at night—if investigated, the party gains a hint about the ritual order.
- A crow steals a bead from Sorrel’s torc and drops it near the barrow—the bead fits into a niche and opens a secret compartment.

Final Notes

This quest is about stories as much as artifacts: choices affect how history is told and what consequences ripple outward. Sorrel isn’t merely a quest-giver—she is the living narrator whose whistle begins and ends the tale. Whether the party becomes the heroes in her next lament, the villains in a villager’s curse, or the quiet stewards of a memory is up to their choices.

Portrait prompt (for GM use)

An elegant goblin storyteller with olive-green skin, braided auburn hair, and a bright beaded torc at her throat. Slender, expressive face with quick, smiling eyes; patterned shawl draped over one shoulder, fingers stained with ink from carving story-runes; holds a small carved whistle and a thin wooden story-board, posture animated and inviting.