

# Gnomish Coffee

There's coffee, and then there's coffee grown on magical mountains, and then there's carefully-engineered coffee meticulously grown on magical mountains by Gnomes. Their tinkers, engineers, alchemists, and craftsmen practically live on the stuff, of course; so naturally Gnomes have been selectively cultivating coffee plants ever since the first Gnome had her first cup from a passing trader. Gnomes tend coffee plantations the way some species tend vineyards.

How does it taste? Close to perfect. Thousands of years' worth of systematic breeding has produced a bean that is flavorful, stimulating, and remarkably pleasant-tasting; and the Gnomes are not overly extortionate when it comes to selling it to other species. They **do**, however, subject the beans to certain magical procedures that make it impossible for anybody else to grow new coffee plants from said beans -- and that absolutely includes repair, plant, and/or temporal-based spells. The Gnomes will sell you the beans, but they absolutely won't sell you the *plants*.

And there's the job right there, isn't it? There are people out there who absolutely must have the things refused them, whether or not it's really cost-effective to get them; some of them don't even really like coffee\*, but by all the gods they're not going to let Gnomes tell them what to do. They may have more money than sense, but they have a lot of money. Enough to pay for top-shelf mercenary smuggling work.

The good news is, Gnomes don't take *personally* attempts to smuggle out untreated coffee cherries (well-behaved smuggling teams often can talk their way out of trouble, particularly if there's another little freelance job that needs doing). The bad news is, Gnomes think that it's **fun** to play with the smugglers; the job of countering smuggling operations is traditionally given to retired Gnomish spies and adventurers who find retirement boring. They have highly unreasonable access to official and unofficial Gnomish resources when it comes to breaking up a smuggling scheme, too. Even ridiculous access, at times.

But you **can** smuggle out Gnomish coffee cherries. As long as you come up with a sufficiently clever bit of misdirection, put yourself at some personal risk of at least embarrassment, and never ever ever ever ever **ever** stoop to violence (although self-defense against bandits and

whatnot is usually all right). The Gnomes know perfectly well that their magical mountains do have a significant effect on the flavor; shrubs grown from smuggled-out coffee cherries simply don't produce *quite* the same beans. But that's a problem for the people paying for the smuggling. The Gnomes don't really care -- and neither should the hired smuggling teams, honestly. Assuming the team got paid ahead of time, without having to guarantee results. If the team didn't get paid ahead of time, the Gnomes don't really care about that, either.

\*The ones who are exceptionally fanatical about coffee itself often find it simpler to move to Gnomish territory and buy into a plantation. Gnomes don't care if non-Gnomes are involved in the process, as long as Gnomish levels of dedication and competence are maintained.

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