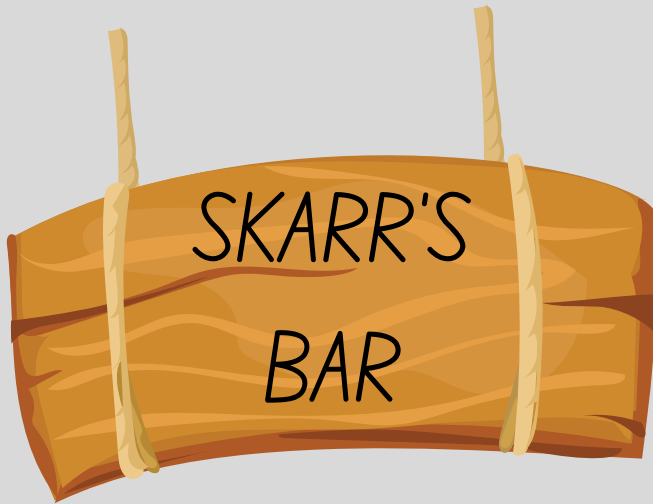




The Gnomish fellow sizes up Skarr, giving his mountain of muscle a once over. "A coffee maker, you say. Whatever for? Aren't you the new bar guy in town?"

Skarr grunts. "I am. But I want to open in the mornings as well. Serve coffee and... stuff."

The short fellow stares intently at Skarr, a little too intently for Skarr's liking. "Well, I do believe I have something available! How much are you looking to spend, my good sir?"

Palming his coin purse, Skarr grunts once more. This small endeavor is getting to be expensive. "How much for a good machine? Doesn't need to be top of the line. Just something reliable that won't break in a few months."

"I have just the thing!" The Gnomish fellow ducks into the back room for a moment. Boxes slide around; metal canisters clank about. And after a short time, he returns with a dolly cart carrying a crate almost as big as himself. "This baby ought to do you rather nicely! It's the Café Deluxe 1500. Not my best model, but a fine piece of machinery if I do say so myself! Comes with a five-year warranty, but if you want, I can up that to a twenty-year warranty."

Skarr looks over the image on the crate, his face contorted in displeasure. "And how much for the coffee?"

The gnome snaps his fingers, pointing at Skarr. "I just so happen to work with a distributor to get high quality grounds fresh each week. If you're interested in working out a deal, I can provide some for you for a discounted price."

"How much will all of this cost me?" Skarr asks, looming over the counter.

"For a fellow businessman, how does one valor for the machine and warranty sound? With ten hexes a week for the grounds? That sound fair to you, big guy?"

Skarr palms his coin purse once more, judging the worth of this individual based on his words and demeanor alone. "Fine," Skarr says with a boom, his voice rattling the windows.

With the man paid and delivery of the grounds arranged for later in the day, Skarr carries his purchase back to the bar. The market has picked up a little bit as the early birds make their purchases of the day's goods. Skarr marches past stalls that are shorter than he is, ignoring the sales pitches of people he could snap like twigs. At least the old Skarr could. New Skarr? That's a different story.

Once back at the bar, Skarr sets about putting the strange machine together. Seated right next to the ale casks, the coffee maker brightens the room with a touch of Gnomish invention. Now, to get it working.



"Put the filter... Then grind the... Fresh grounds in the something..." Skarr mumbles to himself as he pours over the instructions that came with the machine. After a few tries and a couple mistakes, Skarr manages to make a cup of coffee.

"Well now. Ain't that a sight?" Says a hoity voice from the doorway.

Skarr sips the scalding cup, turning to face the fool dumb enough to walk in when the bar is closed. There, with his large feathered hat and long furred coat, stands a fellow Skarr was hoped would return.

"D'Angelo. Bar's closed right now. If you want a drink, come back during open hours." Skarr sets the coffee down, stepping towards the mobster.

D'Angelo smiles a sick, toothy grin. "I'm not interested in whatever swill it is you serve. I'm here about my share of the profits."

Skarr glares down at the man, thunder rumbling in the distance as a storm cloud closes in on Summerton.

"What?" D'Angelo says with a smirk. "You've been open two days and we haven't discussed my fee. Did you really expect to operate in my town without paying your dues?"

Thunder crashes overhead, shaking the foundations of the 'Ton. "The only people getting paid by me are those that work here. And I don't recall hiring you."

D'Angelo laughs, something crossed between a hyena and a sociopath. "You might be all big and tough back in whatever cave you crawled out of. But in the civilized world, there is a pecking order to things." D'Angelo turns toward the door, looking over his shoulder to toss a final comment at Skarr. "One hundred hexes by weeks end. I'm sure you can come up with the coin, if you value your establishment. Ta-ta for now!"

A pitter patter of rain begins to fall outside, as Skarr's fingers twitch. Skarr asks himself, 'if push comes to shove, what will you do?'