

damn fine pi

a café location for any roleplaying game setting

Damn Fine Pi is a café located near a university, complete with staff and patrons, designed to be customized to your needs and dropped into any setting or genre. There are no system-specific crunchy bits and many details have been left open for you to develop so that the location meshes completely with your setting and becomes your own.

All You Can Eat Damn Fine Pi was opened by Stan Spoto, an alumni of the local university, and quickly became a landmark in the community. Students go there to hang out and study, businessmen use it as a convenient meeting spot, retirees gather to talk about politics and sports, and connoisseurs of coffee, tea, and quality baked goods actually go there to sample the fare. The building itself was originally a men's clothing shop, and over the years has been repeatedly remodeled and served a wide variety of businesses, none of which lasted particularly long. The building sat empty for a few years, until Damn Fine Pi moved in.

There is no map included with this setting, by design. First, it's not intended as a combat location. This should be a safe place where non-combat encounters occur. Friendly discussion. Social gatherings. Dirty deals. Second, a café isn't a very difficult layout to design. A large open area with a counter, and a bunch of tables and chairs. A small area with merchandise for sale. A small kitchen area for doing dishes. A storage room. Rest rooms. A back door. The size and layout of the café should be customized to suit its role in your setting. Is it a quiet, intimate place on a side street? A large, bustling place right next to the Student Union or on the corner of a significant intersection?

The décor should also be personalized to suit, and that's definitely not something reflected on a map. Are the counters wood, marble, press board laminate? A material common to the area, or something rare and exotic? Are the chairs wooden, metal, plastic? Tile floor or painted concrete? Is the place brightly lit, or dim and moody? Lots of windows, or more closed in? How about the color scheme? Classy or brassy? Is the art thematic to a subject, adherent to a particular school, or eclectic? Prints of classics, or originals be local artists? All things to consider.

There are a number of people who can be found inside Damn Fine Pi at any given time, including staff and regular customers.

DEAN KING is friendly and charismatic. The owner likes him because he upsells a lot, getting customers to buy more than they might have intended. He's a natural born salesman, and **Staff** uses that ability outside the store as well to get people to do things they might not want to do, mostly for his benefit. While Dean comes across as a good guy, on the inside he's a self-serving scumbag. Most people only learn this too late. If he learns something about the player characters he will leverage that, from getting them to do favors for him to selling them out.

ROSIE CRICHTON will bend over backward to make customers happy, and with all good intentions tends to get involved in the personal lives of customers and co-workers. She really just wants to help on every level, and is good at getting other people involved in charitable events, fund raisers, or just helping out other people in need. If someone needs help and the player characters have the ability to do so, she will petition them on the other person's behalf. Rosie does have a small dark side; to finance her efforts she will sometimes steal, justifying to herself that she's serving the greater good and that the ends justify the means.

ANTHONY NUREYEV is a philosophy major, and offers unsolicited advice. The upside is that his intentions are good and the advice he offers is very insightful and helpful. The downside is that he's a bit clingy and long-winded and will figuratively suck the life out of you. He really just wants to belong, so he attempts to make himself not only useful but indispensable and will try to insert himself into the player character group, or any other group, inviting himself along to social gathering, adventures, or any other place he can.

LINDSEY OLIVER is a mousy thing who wants to be a writer. She agrees with everyone and doesn't seem to have any opinions of her own. This leads her into relationships with mentally, verbally, and emotionally abusive people. Dean King openly manipulates her and uses her as a doormat. As a writer, she's an accomplished plagiarist who thus far hasn't been caught.

STAN SPOTO is the owner of Damn Fine Pi. He's helpful to the point of self-destruction, hiring employees no other sane person would, making donations to causes that he can't afford, agreeing to let the player characters use his café for dangerous things. He knows Rosie Crichton steals from him, and looks the other way as long as he thinks she's funneling the money into her causes. He knows Dean King is a jerk, and keeps him employed at Damn Fine Pi so he can keep an eye on him. He worries about Lindsey Oliver and is constantly trying to set her up with Anthony Nureyev, because he thinks they'd be good for each other.





LEWIS NOVAK is retired, although no one seems sure from what. He only says “businessman” and changes the subject. He’s in Damn Fine Pi every day, chatting up the staff and other regulars, reading the newspaper or reading a book. While he won’t talk about himself, he’ll ask other patrons (including the player characters) about themselves, including where they’re from, what they do for a living, their marital status, and so on. He remembers these things, and will greet them by name and ask after their spouse, kids, and how things are going at their job. He’s well-informed about sports and politics. If the player characters are smart, they’ll realize he’s a good source of information about staff, patrons, and current events.

GEORGIA WEISS is a History professor at the University who is often sitting with Lewis Novak, discussing politics, sports, or a book. She’s always got a Go board and stones with her, and will play anyone who challenges her and offer to teach anyone who asks about the game. She’s popular with the students, who will seek her out to ask her for help with classwork as well as personal issues.

MELLON SUMMERS is a police officer who patrols the area near the University campus and acts as liaison with the campus police. He sits in Damn Fine Pi to do paperwork, and the staff give him free coffee. He is polite and professional, but rebuffs any attempts to get chatty by pointing out that he’s on duty and has a lot of reports to complete. He will come over and insert himself into any conversation about illegal activity, he will respond to any violence or threats of violence, and he will do his job to keep the peace. Lewis Novak does not like him, probably because Summers won’t give up any personal information.

LEE YAO is a businessman on the go. He’s well dressed and in a hurry. He’ll show up at random points throughout the day with a client or business contact or talking on his mobile phone, order something to go and leave. He never speaks to the staff other than to give his order, never speaks to other patrons, but never stops talking to his phone or the person or persons he’s with. This character should turn out to be the guy the player characters are looking for, right under their nose, whether he’s a witness, a contact, a good guy or the bad guy. He should just seem like “color” for the café and probably even annoying, but otherwise not really noteworthy.

GORDON MORAN rents a table for the price of a cup of coffee and works on his laptop for four to six hour stretches. He doesn’t talk a lot, but he’s friendly and polite if a bit distracted. Unlike Lee Yao, who won’t let anyone distract him from his mission, people leave Gordon alone because he looks busy and no one wants to interrupt. He’s telecommuting or freelancing, or some combination of both. He’s writing and formatting documents,

working on spreadsheets, writing code, designing web pages, a wide variety of things. He’s plugged into a headset listening to music, or texting, but he’s always working.

While Damn Fine Pi was created to be a calm, non-combat location, that doesn’t mean that exciting things can’t happen and that occasional eruptions of violence won’t occur. After all, where there are player characters there tend to be fights of some kind.

Plot Hooks

The following are some plot hooks, some based on true stories and actual experiences, to liven things up when your regularly scheduled adventure hits a lull.

BOMB THREAT: Someone keeps calling in bomb threats to the shop. Stan has to take it seriously, which means evacuating and losing business, calling the police and attracting negative media attention that hurts business. Just because no bomb has ever been found doesn’t mean it won’t happen one of these times, when people fail to take it seriously and don’t leave the premises. The player characters will get roped into helping figure out the identity of the bomber. It could be one of their enemies, or it could just be a distraction to keep them away from their real mission. They could accidentally leave something inside during an evacuation, or be kept out of the building during a police sweep, causing them to miss an important meeting.

ROBBERY: Being a mostly cash business makes Damn Fine Pi a good target for robbery. That’s one of the reasons Stan likes having Officer Summers hang out there. That won’t deter the desperate, drugaddled or deranged, however. What happens when someone tries to rob the place while the player characters are there, or if one of the staff or regular customers gets taken hostage?

MOST WANTED: Federal Marshals come in and advise the staff that they’ve traced a wanted fugitive to the area by tracking his computer usage and wifi signal. They believe he may come into the shop to use the wifi provided there, and would like the staff to contact them if he does. While the Marshals would like this kept low-key, one of the regulars gets curious and someone on staff lets it slip.

THE THING IN THE STOREROOM: A number of businesses occupied the building prior to Damn Fine Pi taking over the space, and the evidence of these can be found in the storage areas and crawl spaces of the building. This leads to all kinds of adventure opportunities. Maybe there’s something valuable. Maybe there’s a map, or a journal with clues to a lost treasure. Maybe there are clues to an old, unsolved crime.

You can tweak this location to make it fit into any setting or genre. Below are some suggestions.

FANTASY: A coffee shop around a college of magic makes a nice change of pace from the stereotypical tavern environment. It's a much more civilized place than those rowdy drinking establishments, so it's a good place to meet when you don't want a fight to break out. The sign outside would be a gilded "pi" symbol. Bored nobles hang out and swap stories, merchants review their accounting scrolls and hold business meetings, young wizards gather to blow off steam after a tough day of studying arcane arts. Change the staff into non-humans and alter their names appropriately. I'm betting it's an elven establishment, because where the dwarves are the masters of ale and mead, I see the elves as the types to enjoy a really good cup of coffee.

HISTORICAL: The symbol for pi goes back to 1707, and math nerds have been making painfully obvious "pie" jokes ever since. It's a Greek symbol, so you could easily fudge fact—I mean, develop an alternate history—so that the concept goes back to at least ancient Greece. Alter the names and race of the staff appropriately, and decorate the place in period fashion (or not; it depends on what kind of historical game you're running here). The name of the café itself can be tweaked to fit the vernacular; "Jolly Good Pi" in Victorian England, for instance.

HORROR: The name of the café is already a *Twin Peaks* joke. Surely the students and faculty of Miskatonic U. and similar institutions need a coffee shop to hang out in, decorated in reproductions (or are they?) of primitive artifacts and framed illustrations from obscure books. Vampires don't drink...coffee...but they need to be as trendy as anyone else. Make a member of the staff a ghost or other horror monster type.

ESPIONAGE: Good spies need safe, neutral locations to meet with their contacts and fellow agents. They also need places where they can feel at home, possibly known by sight or even by name (real or fake) by the staff but otherwise anonymous. Using the café to serve as "holy ground" for such meetings offers the opportunity for other types of characters, as well as clues, to be introduced.

SUPERS: The site of superheroes, in full costume, sitting in a coffee shop late at night comes straight from *The Tick*. Whether they're chilling after a big night on patrol, or sitting around bored waiting for something to happen, it's a place to hang. A lot of superhero types have science origins, are scientists themselves or are at least ties to scientists, and scientists hang out at universities, right? A lot of good, true square-jawed heroes don't drink, so a café beats a bar. A lot of "Iron Age" heroes do drink, so it's a good place to try to stay on the wagon. Besides, avengers of the night need the caffeine boost to stay awake and alert until the sun rises.

SCIENCE FICTION: The *U.S.S. Enterprise*, in the Next Generation era, had a bar on board. Why not a café on a starship? Why not a café on a space station? There will certainly be universities and institutions of higher learning in the future, so a college hangout works. Make a member of the staff an alien, serve exotic coffees grown on other worlds, or similar beverages from alien cultures.



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