

Life of Pi



BACKGROUND INFO

AUTHOR BIO

Full Name: Yann Martel

Date of Birth: June 25, 1963

Place of Birth: Salamanca, Spain

Brief Life Story: Yann Martel was born in Spain to French-Canadian parents. Martel's father worked as a diplomat, and the family moved to Costa Rica, France, Mexico, and Canada during Martel's childhood. He grew up speaking both French and English. Martel studied philosophy at Trent University in Ontario, and later spent a year in India visiting religious sites and zoos. His first three books received little critical or popular attention, but with the publication of *Life of Pi* in 2001 Martel became internationally famous, and he was awarded the Man Booker Prize in 2002.

KEY FACTS

Full Title: *Life of Pi*

Genre: Fiction, Magical Realism

Setting: Pondicherry, India, the Pacific Ocean, Mexico, and Toronto, Canada

Climax: Pi finds land

Protagonist: Pi (Piscine Molitor Patel)

Antagonist: The hyena/French cook

Point of View: First person limited from both the "author" and the adult Pi

HISTORICAL AND LITERARY CONTEXT

Where Written: Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada

When Published: 2001

Literary Period: Contemporary Fiction

Related Literary Works: Martel's "magical realism" style was pioneered by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and the plot (struggle between man and beast at sea) resembles Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and Sea*. The idea for the book was heavily influenced by Moacyr Scliar's *Max and the Cats*, though Martel claims to have only read a review of this novel before writing *Life of Pi*. He gives credit to Scliar in the acknowledgements, thanking him for "the spark of life."

Related Historical Events: Most of *Life of Pi* takes place at sea, but the novel's initial setting is Pondicherry, India, during a

period of Indian history called "The Emergency," which lasted from 1975 to 1977. The Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had been found guilty of misconduct in her recent election campaign, but instead of resigning she declared a state of emergency. This effectively suspended all constitutional rights and gave Gandhi dictatorial power. While the Emergency was a time of political oppression and violence, India experienced much-needed economic stabilization and growth as well. Pondicherry is also a unique part of India because it was once a French colony (while most of India was ruled by Britain), so it has a diverse and unique culture where Pi could be exposed to Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam.

EXTRA CREDIT

Richard Parker. Martel got the name "Richard Parker" from Edgar Allan Poe's nautical novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. The name also appears in at least two other factual shipwreck accounts. Martel noticed the reoccurring "Richard Parkers" and felt that the name must be significant.

Zoo. The historical Pondicherry did have a zoo in 1977, but it lacked any tigers or anything larger than a deer.



PLOT OVERVIEW

A fictional **author** travels to India, and there he hears an extraordinary story from a man named **Francis Adirubasamy**. The author tracks down and interviews the story's subject, **Piscine Molitor Patel**, usually called Pi, in Canada. The author writes the rest of the narrative from Pi's point of view, occasionally interrupting to describe his interviews with the adult Pi.

Pi grows up in Pondicherry, India in the 1970s. He is named after a famous swimming pool in Paris. Pi's **father** is a zookeeper, and Pi and his brother **Ravi** are raised among exotic wild animals. Pi's tale frequently digresses to explain about zookeeping, animal territories, and boundaries. His father warns him of the danger of wild animals by making Pi watch a tiger eat a goat, but Pi also learns that "the most dangerous animal at a zoo is Man."

Pi is raised culturally Hindu, but his family is generally unreligious. As a youth Pi becomes devoutly Hindu and then converts to Christianity and Islam. He practices all three religions at once, despite the protests of his parents and the religious leaders. The "Emergency" brings political turmoil to India and Pi's parents decide to sell the zoo and move the family

to Canada. They board a Japanese cargo ship called the *Tsimtsum*, traveling with many of the zoo animals.

There is an explosion one night and the *Tsimtsum* starts sinking. Pi is awake at the time, and some sailors throw him into a lifeboat. The ship sinks, leaving no human survivors except for Pi. Pi sees a tiger, **Richard Parker**, and encourages him to climb aboard. Pi eventually finds himself on the lifeboat with a **zebra**, a **hyena**, and **Orange Juice** the orangutan. The hyena kills the zebra and eats it. The hyena then fights and kills Orange Juice. Pi notices that Richard Parker is still in the boat, hiding under a tarpaulin. Richard Parker kills the hyena, leaving Pi alone with the tiger.

Pi makes a raft for himself and finds supplies in the lifeboat, and he sets about marking his territory and “taming” Richard Parker using a whistle. Pi kills and eats fish and turtles, filters seawater, and collects rainwater. Pi and Richard Parker each occupy their own territory in the lifeboat and live peacefully, though they are constantly starving.

Pi loses track of time as months pass. He remembers episodes like seeing a whale, experiencing a lightning storm, and watching a ship pass by. Pi goes temporarily blind and hears a voice talking to him. At first he thinks it is Richard Parker, but then he realizes it is another **castaway** who is also blind. The two discuss food and then bring their boats together. The castaway attacks Pi, intending to kill and eat him. Richard Parker kills the castaway.

Later the boat comes to a mysterious **island** made entirely of algae and inhabited by thousands of meerkats. Pi and Richard Parker stay there for a while and recover their health. One day Pi finds a tree with human teeth as its fruit, and he realizes that the island is carnivorous. Pi decides to leave with Richard Parker. Finally the lifeboat washes up on a beach in Mexico. Richard Parker disappears into the jungle without looking back, and Pi is rescued by some villagers.

The last section is a transcript of an interview between Pi and two Japanese officials who are trying to figure out why the *Tsimtsum* sank. Pi tells them his story, but they don't believe him. He then tells them a second story, replacing the animals with humans – in this version Pi is on the lifeboat with a **French cook**, a **Chinese sailor**, and his own **mother**. The sailor dies and the cook eats his flesh. The cook later kills Pi's mother, and then Pi kills the cook. The officials are horrified, but they believe this story. They note that the hyena is the cook, the zebra is the sailor, Orange Juice is Pi's mother, and Richard Parker is Pi himself. Pi asks the officials which story they prefer, and they say the one with animals. In their final report they commend Pi for surviving at sea with a tiger.



CHARACTERS

Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi) – The novel's protagonist, **Pi** is born in Pondicherry, India and raised among wild animals, as his father is a zookeeper. Pi gets his unusual name from a famous swimming pool in Paris. He has a deep affinity with religion from a young age, and practices Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. Pi is the narrator for most of the novel, as he tells the story of his 227 days stranded in the Pacific Ocean. During his ordeal Pi finds an incredible resourcefulness and survival instinct within himself, but he also stoops to gruesome acts in his desperation. After his rescue in Mexico, Pi attends the University of Toronto, where he studies zoology and religion. He marries and has two children, and the **author** declares that Pi's story “has a happy ending.”

Richard Parker – A three-year-old male royal Bengal tiger who is **Pi's** companion on the lifeboat. Richard Parker was captured as a cub by a hunter named **Richard Parker**, but in the accompanying paperwork the tiger's name was switched with the hunter's. The tiger is the epitome of beauty, power, and danger, and he and Pi live in respective territories on the lifeboat. When they reach Mexico, Richard Parker disappears into the jungle without looking back. This “botched goodbye” pains Pi for the rest of his life. In Pi's second account of his ordeal Richard Parker is actually a part of Pi himself, and a representation of the violent things Pi had to do in order to survive.

The Author – A fictional Canadian author who resembles Yann Martel, the novel's real author. Like Martel, the “author” has also published two books and was inspired to write **Pi's** story while traveling in India. The author tracks down Pi and interviews him, and interrupts the narrative with “Author's Notes” explaining his sources and describing his interactions with the adult Pi.

Gita Patel – **Pi's** mother. Gita is raised a Hindu and had a Baptist education, but she is nonreligious as an adult and questions Pi's faith. Gita encourages Pi to read books as a youth. In Pi's first story Gita dies when the *Tsimtsum* sinks, but in his second story she takes the place of **Orange Juice** the orangutan. She protects Pi from the **French cook** for as long as she can, but she is eventually murdered, decapitated, and eaten by the cook.

Santosh Patel – **Pi's** father and the head of the Pondicherry Zoo. He once ran a hotel but then switched to zookeeping because of his love of animals. Santosh teaches Pi and **Ravi** his knowledge about zookeeping, but also to respect and fear wild animals. Santosh was raised a Hindu but is not religious, and he questions Pi's religious devotion.

Ravi Patel – Pi’s older brother, a boy who loves sports and teases Pi about his name and his religious devotion. Ravi ignores Pi and keeps sleeping on the night of the shipwreck.

Francis Adirubasamy – A friend of the Patel family who was a champion swimmer in his youth. Pi calls him **Mamaji**, which means “respected uncle,” and Mamaji teaches Pi to swim and to love the water. He is also responsible for Pi’s unusual name. Francis is the man who first tells Pi’s story to the **author** in India, promising that the tale is one to “make you believe in God.”

Satish Kumar (1) – Pi’s biology teacher at Petit Séminaire, his school in Pondicherry. Mr. Kumar is a polio survivor with a triangle-shaped body. He is a staunch atheist, and enjoys going to the Pondicherry Zoo to admire the wonders of nature. Mr. Kumar is an important influence on Pi and inspires him to study zoology later.

Satish Kumar (2) – A Muslim baker and Sufi mystic, this second Mr. Kumar teaches Pi about Islam and eventually converts him. Mr. Kumar goes to the zoo and praises God for the wonder of the animals.

The Hyena – An ugly, violent animal who is one of the lifeboat’s initial inhabitants. The hyena eats the **zebra**’s leg and then starts eating its insides while the zebra is still alive. The hyena later kills **Orange Juice**, but is killed and eaten by **Richard Parker**.

The Zebra – A male Grant’s zebra, a beautiful, exotic animal who breaks its leg jumping into the lifeboat. It suffers greatly at the **hyena**’s hands before finally dying.

Orange Juice – A peaceful, maternal orangutan who had given birth to two sons at the Pondicherry Zoo. She floats to the lifeboat on an island of bananas, and fights the **hyena** bravely before being killed.

Father Martin – A kind Christian priest who teaches Pi about Jesus and converts him.

Meena Patel – Pi’s wife, whom the author briefly meets.

Nikhil Patel – Pi’s son, who plays baseball.

Usha Patel – Pi’s daughter, who is shy but close with her father.

The Blind Castaway – A man whom Pi meets in the middle of the Pacific. The castaway is also blind and starving on a lifeboat. He has a French accent and is possibly the **cook** from the **Tsimtsum**. The castaway tries to kill and eat Pi, but he is killed by **Richard Parker**.

Tomohiro Okamoto – An official from the Maritime Department of the Japanese Ministry of Transport, Okamoto is sent to interview Pi in Mexico and investigate the sinking of the **Tsimtsum**. He is skeptical of Pi’s first (animal) story, but agrees that it is more compelling than the second story, and in his official report Okamoto praises Pi for surviving with a tiger.

Atsuro Chiba – Okamoto’s assistant, a naïve and bumbling official who exasperates Okamoto with his inexperience.

The French Cook – The human correspondent to the **hyena**. The cook is rude and violent, and he eats the **sailor** and kills Pi’s **mother**, but then lets himself be stabbed by Pi.

The Chinese Sailor – The human counterpart to the **zebra**. The sailor is young, beautiful, and speaks only Chinese. He breaks his leg and it becomes infected. The **cook** cuts off the leg and the sailor dies painfully.

Mrs. Gandhi – Indira Gandhi, the leader of India during the time when Pi lived in India.

Auntie Rohini – The sister of Pi’s **mother**, who encouraged Pi in his interest in Hinduism.



THEMES

In LitCharts each theme gets its own color and number. Our color-coded theme boxes make it easy to track where the themes occur throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, use the numbers instead.

1 SURVIVAL

Much of the action of *Life of Pi* consists of the struggle for survival against seemingly impossible odds. Pi is stranded on a lifeboat in the middle of the Pacific for 227 days, with only an adult Bengal tiger for company, so his ordeal involves not just avoiding starvation but also protecting himself from **Richard Parker**. Pi is soon forced to give up his lifelong pacifism and vegetarianism, as he has to kill and eat fish and turtles. In a similar vein **Orange Juice**, the peaceful orangutan, becomes violent when facing the **hyena**, and Richard Parker submits to being tamed because Pi gives him food. In this way Martel shows the extremes that living things will go to in order to survive, sometimes fundamentally changing their natures.

The struggle to survive also leads the characters to commit deeds of both great heroism and horrible gruesomeness. Pi finds an amazing resourcefulness and will to live within himself, and he resolves to live peacefully alongside Richard Parker instead of trying to kill the tiger. When he leaves the **algae island** Pi even waits for Richard Parker to return to the lifeboat before pushing off. The **French cook**, on the other hand, (who is either the hyena or the **blind castaway** Pi encounters later) sinks to murder and cannibalism in his attempts to survive. In Pi’s second version of the story, Richard Parker is an aspect of Pi’s own personality, which means that the tiger’s violence is actually a manifestation of a side of Pi’s soul that will do anything to keep living. From the start we know that Pi will survive his ordeal, as he is telling the tale as a happy adult, but

his constant struggle to stay alive and sane keeps up the tension throughout the book.

2 RELIGION AND FAITH

Francis Adirubasamy first presents **Pi**'s tale to the fictional **author** as "a story to make you believe in God," immediately introducing religion as a crucial theme. **Pi** is raised in a secular, culturally Hindu family, but as a boy he becomes more devoutly Hindu and then also converts to Christianity and Islam. He practices all of these religions at once despite the protests of his three religious leaders, who each assert that their religion contains the whole and exclusive truth. Instead of dwelling on divisive dogma, **Pi** focuses on the stories of his different faiths and their different pathways to God, and he reads a story of universal love in all three religions. In fact, it seems that faith and belief is more important to **Pi** than religious truth, as he also admires atheists for taking a stand in believing that the universe is a certain way. It is only agnostics that **Pi** dislikes, as they choose doubt as a way of life and never choose a "better story."

When he is stranded at sea, **Pi**'s faith is tested by his extreme struggles, but he also experiences the sublime in the grandiosity of his surroundings. All external obstacles are stripped away, leaving only an endless circle of sea and sky, and one day he rejoices over a powerful lightning storm as a "miracle." After his rescue **Pi** returns to the concept of faith again. He tells his interviewers two versions of his survival story (one with animals and one without) and then asks which one they prefer. The officials disbelieve the animal story, but they agree that it is the more compelling and memorable of the two. **Pi** responds with "so it goes with God," basically saying that he chooses to have religious faith because he finds a religious worldview more beautiful. The "facts" are unknowable concerning God's existence, so **Pi** chooses the story he likes better, which is the one involving God.

3 STORYTELLING

The nature of storytelling itself is threaded throughout *Life of Pi*, as the book is told in a complex way through several layers of narration. The real author writes in the first person as a fictional **author** similar to Yann Martel himself, and this author retells the story he heard from the adult **Pi** about **Pi**'s younger self. At the end, in a transcript of an interview which the author provides, the young **Pi** then retells an alternate story of how he survived his days at sea, giving a version of events with only human survivors instead of animals. The larger question raised by the novel's framework is then about the nature of truth in storytelling. **Pi** values atheism as much as religion, but he chooses to subscribe to three religions because of the truth and beauty he finds in their stories. He also possibly invents the animal version of his story as a way of finding more truth in his

ordeal – as well as staying sane by retelling his gruesome experience in a more beautiful way. The Japanese officials think **Pi**'s human story is the "true" one, but they both admit that the animal story is much more compelling and memorable. In the end Martel comes down clearly on the side of storytelling as its own truth. When actual events and realities are unknowable – like the existence of God, the reason the **Tsimtsum** sank, or just how **Pi** survived the Pacific for 227 days – we must choose the stories that seem the most true, beautiful, and moving, and make them our own.

4 BOUNDARIES

The situation of much of the novel is a contradiction between boundaries and freedom. **Pi** is surrounded by the boundless ocean and sky but is trapped in a tiny lifeboat, and within that lifeboat he has his own clear territory separate from **Richard Parker**. **Pi** marks his territory – the raft and the top of the tarpaulin – with his urine and "training whistle," and **Richard Parker** has his territory on the floor of the lifeboat. From the very start of his tale **Pi** muses on the nature of animal territories, especially regarding zoos, as his **father** is a zookeeper. **Pi** explains that animals love rituals and boundaries, and they don't mind being in a zoo as long as they accept that their enclosure is their territory. As a castaway at sea, **Pi** then uses his zoological knowledge to "tame" **Richard Parker**, presenting himself as the "alpha" of the lifeboat and keeping himself safe.

This idea of boundaries moves into the psychological realm with **Pi** himself, as he (possibly) creates the character of **Richard Parker** as a way of dealing with the darkness and bestiality within himself. By making his brutal actions belong to a totally different being, and not even a human being, **Pi** sets a clear boundary in his mind. **Richard Parker** disappears when **Pi** first crawls ashore, showing that the tiger (if he is fictional) was a part of **Pi** that existed only on the lifeboat, where he needed to do terrible things to survive. **Pi** is then able to move on with his life – he goes to school, gets married, and has children – because of that boundary between himself and **Richard Parker**. He kept himself sane and human by symbolically cutting off the animal part of his nature.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in red text throughout the Summary & Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE ALGAE ISLAND

Pi's time on the algae island is one of the strangest, most surreal sections of the book. **Pi** comes across an island made entirely of algae and inhabited by thousands of docile

meerkats. At first he thinks the place is a mirage or hallucination, but when he can actually stand on it he can't help believing in the island's existence. By day this island is a paradise, but Pi eventually learns that at night the algae turns acidic and deadly, devouring fish that swim nearby. Pi discovers a tree on the island with black and twisted "fruit" that turn out to be human teeth. He then comes to the awful realization that the island is carnivorous, and that it has eaten a human being before him.

THE TSIMTSUM

The island acts as a religious symbol for Pi's spiritual journey. In one sense it represents an easy, shallow kind of faith – it seems stable at first and promises worldly delights of food and comfort, but it has a treacherous underbelly. In another sense the island is a kind of "Garden of Eden," a place where Pi loses his innocence (whatever he had left after experiencing so much horror). The island seems like an Edenic paradise at first, where the meerkats are tame and peaceful, but upon discovering the "Forbidden Fruit" of the teeth-tree, Pi gains knowledge of the evil the island is capable of. He leaves the place of his own accord, both rejecting an easy, treacherous faith and refusing to live in a spoiled paradise.

fool's gold for the bright – reminded me of the three-toed sloth; and the three-toed sloth, such a beautiful example of the miracle of life, reminded me of God.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Religion and Faith, Boundaries
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 4

Don't we say, "There's no place like home"? That's certainly what animals feel. Animals are territorial. That is the key to their minds. Only a familiar territory will allow them to fulfill the two relentless imperatives of the wild: the avoidance of enemies and the getting of food and water. A biologically sound zoo enclosure – whether cage, pit, moated island, corral, terrarium, aviary or aquarium – is just another territory, peculiar only in its size and in its proximity to human territory.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Survival, Boundaries
- Theme Tracker code:



In the literature can be found legions of examples of animals that could escape but did not, or did and returned... But I don't insist. I don't mean to defend zoos. Close them all down if you want (and let us hope that what wildlife remains can survive in what is left of the natural world). I know zoos are no longer in people's good graces. Religion faces the same problem. Certain illusions about freedom plague them both.

The Pondicherry Zoo doesn't exist any more. Its pits are filled in, the cages torn down. I explore it now in the only place left for it, my memory.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Survival, Religion and Faith, Storytelling, Boundaries
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 7

It was my first clue that atheists are my brothers and sisters of a different faith, and every word they speak speaks faith. Like me, they go as far as the legs of reason will carry them – and then they leap.

I'll be honest about. It is not atheists who get stuck in my craw,



QUOTES

The color-coded boxes under each quote below make it easy to track the themes related to each quote. Each color corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

He took in my line of work with a widening of the eyes and a nodding of the head. It was time to go. I had my hand up, trying to catch my waiter's eye to get the bill.

Then the elderly man said, "I have a story that will make you believe in God."

- Speaker: The Author, Francis Adirubasamy
- Mentioned or related characters: Francis Adirubasamy
- Related themes: Religion and Faith, Storytelling
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 1

Sometimes I got my majors mixed up. A number of my fellow religious-studies students – muddled agnostics who didn't know which way was up, who were in the thrall of reason, that

but agnostics. Doubt is useful for a while. We must all pass through the garden of Gethsemane... But we must move on. To choose doubt as a philosophy of life is akin to choosing immobility as a means of transportation.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Religion and Faith
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 8

We commonly say in the trade that the most dangerous animal in a zoo is Man.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Survival
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 13

So you see, if you fall into a lion's pit, the reason the lion will tear you to pieces is not because it's hungry – be assured, zoo animals are amply fed – or because it's bloodthirsty, but because you've invaded its territory.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Boundaries
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 16

And so, when she first heard of Hare Krishnas, she didn't hear right. She heard "Hairless Christians", and that is what they were to her for many years. When I corrected her, I told her that in fact she was not so wrong; that Hindus, in their capacity for love, are indeed hairless Christians, just as Muslims, in the way they see God in everything, are bearded Hindus, and Christians, in their devotion to God, are hat-wearing Muslims.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Mentioned or related characters: Gita Patel
- Related themes: Religion and Faith, Boundaries
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 22

I can well imagine an atheist's last words... and the deathbed leap of faith. Whereas the agnostic, if he stays true to his reasonable self, if he stays beholden to dry, yeastless factuality, might try to explain the warm light bathing him by saying, "Possibly a f-f-failing oxygenation of the b-b-brain," and, to the very end, lack imagination and miss the better story.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Religion and Faith, Storytelling
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 23

The pandit spoke first. "Mr. Patel, Piscine's piety is admirable. In these troubled times it's good to see a boy so keen on God. We all agree on that." The imam and the priest nodded. "But he can't be a Hindu, a Christian and a Muslim. It's impossible. He must choose..."

"Hmmm, Piscine?" Mother nudged me. "How do you feel about the question?"

"Bapu Gandhi said, 'All religions are true.' I just want to love God," I blurted out, and looked down, red in the face.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi), Gita Patel
- Mentioned or related characters: Gita Patel, Santosh Patel
- Related themes: Religion and Faith, Boundaries
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 38

We left Manila and entered the Pacific. On our fourth day out, midway to Midway, we sank. The ship vanished into a pinprick hole on my map. A mountain collapsed before my eyes and disappeared beneath my feet. All around me was the vomit of a dyspeptic ship. I felt sick to my stomach. I felt shock. I felt a great emptiness within me, which then filled with silence.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Survival
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 45

I didn't have pity to spare for long for the zebra. When your own life is threatened, your sense of empathy is blunted by a terrible, selfish hunger for survival. It was sad that it was

suffering so much... but there was nothing I could do about it. I felt pity and then I moved on. This is not something I am proud of. I am sorry I was so callous about the matter. I have not forgotten that poor zebra and what it went through. Not a prayer goes by that I don't think of it.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Mentioned or related characters: The Zebra
- Related themes: Survival, Religion and Faith
- Theme Tracker code:

1 2

CHAPTER 49

To be afraid of this ridiculous dog when there was a tiger about was like being afraid of splinters when trees are falling down. I became very angry at the animal. "You ugly, foul creature," I muttered. The only reason I didn't stand up and beat it off the lifeboat with a stick was lack of strength and stick, not lack of heart. Did the hyena sense something of my mastery? Did it say to itself, "Super alpha is watching me – I better not move?" I don't know. At any rate, it didn't move.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Mentioned or related characters: Richard Parker , The Hyena
- Related themes: Survival, Boundaries
- Theme Tracker code:

1 4

CHAPTER 53

I was giving up. I would have given up – if a voice hadn't made itself heard in my heart. The voice said, "I will not die. I refuse it. I will make it through this nightmare. I will beat the odds, as great as they are. I have survived so far, miraculously. Now I will turn miracle into routine. The amazing will be seen every day. I will put in all the hard work necessary. Yes, so long as God is with me, I will not die. Amen."

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Survival, Religion and Faith
- Theme Tracker code:

1 2

CHAPTER 57

I had to tame him. It was at that moment that I realized this necessity. It was not a question of him or me, but of him *and* me. We were, literally and figuratively, in the same boat. We would live – or die – together...

But there's more to it. I will come clean. I will tell you a secret: a part of me was glad about Richard Parker. A part of me did not want Richard Parker to die at all, because if he died I would be left alone with despair, a foe even more formidable than a tiger. If I still had the will to live, it was thanks to Richard Parker... It's the plain truth: without Richard Parker, I wouldn't be alive today to tell you my story.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Mentioned or related characters: Richard Parker
- Related themes: Survival
- Theme Tracker code:

1

CHAPTER 61

You may be astonished that in such a short period of time I could go from weeping over the muffled killing of a flying fish to gleefully bludgeoning to death a dorado. I could explain it by arguing that profiting from a pitiful flying fish's navigational mistake made me shy and sorrowful, while the excitement of actively capturing a great dorado made me sanguinary and self-assured. But in point of fact the explanation lies elsewhere. It is simple and brutal: a person can get used to anything, even to killing.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Survival
- Theme Tracker code:

1

CHAPTER 65

Lord, to think I'm a strict vegetarian. To think that when I was a child I always shuddered when I snapped open a banana because it sounded to me like the breaking of an animal's neck. I descended to a level of savagery I never imagined possible.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Survival
- Theme Tracker code:

1

CHAPTER 74

Despair was a heavy blackness that let no light in or out. It was a hell beyond expression. I thank God it always passed. A school of fish appeared around the net or a knot cried out to be reknotted. Or I thought of my family, of how they were spared this terrible agony. The blackness would stir and eventually go

away, and God would remain, a shining point of light in my heart. I would go on loving.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Survival, Religion and Faith
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 78

Life on a lifeboat isn't much of a life. It is like an end game in chess, a game with few pieces. The elements couldn't be more simple, nor the stakes higher. Physically it is extraordinarily arduous, and morally it is killing... You get your happiness where you can. You reach a point where you're at the bottom of hell, yet you have your arms crossed and a smile on your face, and you feel you're the luckiest person on earth. Why? Because at your feet you have a tiny dead fish.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Survival, Religion and Faith
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 80

For two, perhaps three seconds, a terrific battle of minds for status and authority was waged between a boy and a tiger. He needed to make only the shortest of lunges to be on top of me. But I held my stare.

Richard Parker licked his nose, groaned and turned away. He angrily batted a flying fish. I had won...

From that day onwards I felt my mastery was no longer in question, and I began to spend progressively more time on the lifeboat... I was still scared of Richard Parker, but only when it was necessary. His simple presence no longer strained me. You can get used to anything – haven't I already said that? Isn't that what all survivors say?

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Mentioned or related characters: Richard Parker
- Related themes: Survival, Boundaries
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 82

It came as an unmistakable indication to me of how low I had sunk the day I noticed, with a pinching of the heart, that I ate

like an animal, that this noisy, frantic, unchewing wolfing-down of mine was exactly the way Richard Parker ate.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Mentioned or related characters: Richard Parker
- Related themes: Survival, Boundaries
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 85

I was dazed, thunderstruck – nearly in the true sense of the word. But not afraid.

“Praise be to Allah, Lord of All Worlds, the Compassionate, the Merciful, Ruler of Judgment Day!” I muttered. To Richard Parker I shouted, “Stop your trembling! This is miracle. This is an outbreak of divinity. This is... this is...” I could not find what it was, this thing so vast and fantastic... I remember that close encounter with electrocution and third-degree burns as one of the few times during my ordeal when I felt genuine happiness.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Mentioned or related characters: Richard Parker
- Related themes: Religion and Faith
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 90

I heard the merest clicking of claws against the bottom of the boat, no more than the sound of a pair of spectacles falling to the floor, and the next moment my dear brother shrieked in my face like I've never heard a man shriek before. He let go of me. This was the terrible cost of Richard Parker. He gave me life, my own, but at the expense of taking one. He ripped the flesh off the man's frame and cracked his bones. The smell of blood filled my nose. Something in me died then that has never come back to life.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Mentioned or related characters: Richard Parker, The French Cook
- Related themes: Survival, Boundaries
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 92

By the time morning came, my grim decision was taken. I preferred to set off and perish in search of my own kind than to live a lonely half-life of physical comfort and spiritual death on this murderous island.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Survival, Religion and Faith
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 93

High calls low and low calls high. I tell you, if you were in such dire straits as I was, you too would elevate your thoughts. The lower you are, the higher your mind will want to soar. It was natural that, bereft and desperate as I was, in the throes of unremitting suffering, I should turn to God.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Survival, Religion and Faith
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 94

I wept like a child. It was not because I was overcome at having survived my ordeal, though I was. Nor was it the presence of my brothers and sisters, though that too was very moving. I was weeping because Richard Parker had left me so unceremoniously. What a terrible thing it is to botch a farewell.

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Mentioned or related characters: Richard Parker
- Related themes: Survival, Storytelling
- Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 99

“If you stumble at mere believability, what are you living for? Isn’t love hard to believe?... Life is hard to believe, ask any scientist. God is hard to believe, ask any believer. What is your problem with hard to believe?”

“We’re just being reasonable.”

“So am I! I applied my reason at every moment... Nothing beats reason for keeping tigers away. But be excessively reasonable and you risk throwing out the universe with the bathwater.”

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi), Tomohiro Okamoto
- Mentioned or related characters: Tomohiro Okamoto
- Related themes: Religion and Faith, Storytelling
- Theme Tracker code:



“I know what you want. You want a story that won’t surprise you. That will confirm what you already know. That won’t make you see higher or further or differently. You want a flat story. An immobile story. You want dry, yeastless factuality... You want a story without animals.”

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Mentioned or related characters: Tomohiro Okamoto
- Related themes: Religion and Faith, Storytelling
- Theme Tracker code:



“His blood soothed my chapped hands. His heart was a struggle – all those tubes that connected it. I managed to get it out. It tasted delicious, far better than turtle. I ate his liver. I cut off great pieces of his flesh.

“He was such an evil man. Worse still, he met evil in me – selfishness, anger, ruthlessness. I must live with that. “Solitude began. I turned to God. I survived.”

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Mentioned or related characters: The French Cook
- Related themes: Survival, Religion and Faith, Storytelling
- Theme Tracker code:



“So tell me, since it makes no factual difference to you and you can’t prove the question either way, which story do you prefer? Which is the better story, the story with animals or the story without animals?”

Mr. Okamoto: “That’s an interesting question...”

Mr. Chiba: “The story with animals.”

Mr. Okamoto: “Yes. The story with animals is the better story.”

Pi Patel: “Thank you. And so it goes with God.”

- Speaker: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi), Tomohiro Okamoto, Atsuro Chiba
- Mentioned or related characters: Tomohiro Okamoto, Atsuro Chiba
- Related themes: Religion and Faith, Storytelling, Boundaries

•Theme Tracker code:



CHAPTER 100

As an aside, story of sole survivor, Mr. Piscine Molitor Patel, Indian citizen, is an astounding story of courage and endurance in the face of extraordinarily difficult and tragic circumstances. In the experience of this investigator, his story is unparalleled in the history of shipwrecks. Very few castaways can claim to have survived so long at sea as Mr. Patel, and none in the company of an adult Bengal tiger.

- Speaker: Tomohiro Okamoto
- Mentioned or related characters: Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi)
- Related themes: Survival, Storytelling
- Theme Tracker code:



SUMMARY & ANALYSIS

The color-coded boxes under "Analysis & Themes" below make it easy to track the themes throughout the work. Each color corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

An italicized section precedes Chapter 1. This section is written as if by Yann Martel himself, but it is actually part of the novel told by a fictional Canadian **author**. The author says that he had published two earlier books which were ignored, and he went to Bombay, India to clear his mind and try to write again. This was his second trip to India. He planned to find a quiet place to write his next novel, which was about Portugal in 1939.

With this Author's Note Martel immediately introduces the idea of using alternate stories to describe the same reality, an idea that will apply to religion and Pi's accounts of his survival. The fictional author is very similar to Martel himself, who was also Canadian, had previously published two unsuccessful novels, and went to India for inspiration.



The Portugal book quickly lost momentum and sputtered out. The **author** felt desperate and depressed, wondering what to do with his life next. He left Bombay and traveled to southern India, eventually arriving in the town of Pondicherry. Pondicherry had once been ruled by the French Empire (as opposed to most of the rest of India, which was ruled by Britain), but the town had gained its independence decades before.

In a local coffee house, the **author** met an old man named **Francis Adirubasamy**. Mr. Adirubasamy offered to tell the author a story "that will make you believe in God." The author accepted the challenge, and he took notes on Mr. Adirubasamy's story. The author then returned to Canada and found the protagonist of Mr. Adirubasamy's story, **Mr. Patel**. The author began visiting Mr. Patel and taking notes.

Mr. Patel showed the **author** old newspaper clippings about the events of the story, and also let him read his diary. Many months later, the author received a tape and report from the Japanese Ministry of Transport, confirming Mr. Patel's tale. The author agrees that it is "a story to make you believe in God." He says that he has written the novel in the first person, as through Mr. Patel's voice. He ends with some acknowledgements, including Mr. Patel and the novelist Maocyr Scliar, thanking him "for the spark of life."

The idea of storytelling itself is worked throughout the novel's complex framework. Martel is writing as a fictional version of himself, who is writing as an adult Pi remembering his youth. Pondicherry's uniqueness in India makes it an ideal setting for Pi's blending of religions and philosophies.



From the start Martel encourages us to suspend our disbelief and accept "the better story" over "dry, yeastless factuality" - ideas that will be threaded throughout the book. He is basically inventing a different origin story for Life of Pi, choosing a more interesting tale than the grueling, unexciting work of writing every day.



Francis Adirubasamy introduces the important theme of religion with his claim. After Life of Pi's success Martel was criticized for taking the idea (a castaway alone with a wild cat) from Scliar's book Max and the Cats, but Martel claimed that he had only read a review of Scliar's novel, not the novel itself. The two works are very different, and Scliar himself dropped his plagiarism accusations eventually.



CHAPTER 1

The novel's main text begins with the adult **Pi** speaking of his life after the story's main event. His suffering left him "sad and gloomy," but he continued his religious practices and zoological studies and slowly became happy again. He attended the University of Toronto and was a very good student. His religious studies thesis involved Isaac Luria's cosmogony theory, while his zoology thesis was about three-toed sloths.

Pi's brief mention of Isaac Luria introduces an important religious idea. Luria was a Kabbalist teacher whose theory of creation involved the concept of tzimtzum, which was basically that God contracted his infinite light in order to create the universe, hiding himself so that his creation might become independent of him. This concept will be important later, as the ship the Tsimtsum sinks, giving Pi "room" to create his own universe and independence.



Pi found studying sloths to be comforting because of their slow, calm lifestyles. Sloths are kept safe by being so slow and blending into the background. Pi found his two majors to be related, as the sloths would often remind him of God. Pi excelled at school and won many awards, and he is currently working, though he doesn't say where. He says that he loves Canada but misses India, and he especially misses someone named **Richard Parker**.

Martel frames Pi's ordeal by describing Pi both as a child and as an adult, not giving details of what happened in between but hinting at great suffering and the mysterious being of Richard Parker. Pi's unique philosophical blending of zoology and theology, science and religion, will be threaded throughout the novel.



Pi describes his initial recovery in Mexico after the events of the story. He was treated well at the hospital. He had anemia, dark urine, and his legs retained fluids and swelled. After a week he could walk again. The first time he turned on a faucet he fainted at the abundance of clean water. When he made it to Canada he went to an Indian restaurant, but was offended when the waiter criticized him for eating with his fingers.

Martel gives more hints about Pi's undescribed ordeal to build up suspense and draw the reader in. We wonder how Pi ended up in Mexico if he is from India, and what kind of memories of India he has that were trampled upon by the rude waiter.



CHAPTER 2

The narrative switches to the **author's** point of view, and he describes the adult **Pi** as a small, gray-haired, middle-aged man. He wears a winter coat in the fall and speaks quickly and expressively.

These sections remind us of the book's "nonfiction" framework and also introduce the adult Pi even as we learn the events of his youth.



CHAPTER 3

The story then continues in **Pi's** voice. He reflects on his name, which is **Piscine Molitor Patel**, and says that he was named after a swimming pool. Pi's parents did not like water, but they had a family friend who was a former champion swimmer. This man was named **Francis Adirubasamy**, but Pi called him **Mamaji**, which is similar to "uncle."

Martel immediately shows the connection between Francis Adirubasamy, the story's initiator, and Pi himself. Pi's unusual name also foreshadows his experiences with water – Piscine is the French word for "pool," and in English it means "relating to fish or fishes."



Mamaji and **Pi** became very close, and Mamaji taught Pi how to swim. Pi came to share Mamaji's love for the water and for the meditative practice of swimming. Pi's **father** never wanted to swim himself, but he came to idealize the world of swimming. Mamaji's favorite pool in the world was the Piscine Molitor in Paris, which was clear, pristine, and perfect. Pi got his name from this swimming pool.

Pi has not named himself "Pi" yet in the story, but is still technically "Piscine." Even at a young age Pi seems to have a slow, patient soul that finds swimming relaxing and peaceful. This looks forward to his religious devotion and contemplative inner life.



CHAPTER 4

Pi's **father** ran the Pondicherry Zoo, which was founded soon after Pondicherry entered the Union of India in 1954. Pi describes the wonders of the zoo and compares it to a hotel with especially uncooperative guests. As a child he felt like he was living in paradise, surrounded by such amazing animals. His daily schedule was marked by an alarm clock of lions roaring and the regular routines of other animals.

Pi's upbringing at the zoo is both an important part of his life and sets the stage for the events of the novel. Without his extensive knowledge of wild animal behavior Pi never could have survived as he does. Martel places the Patels in a historical setting, Pondicherry in the 1970s, but they still seem to exist in a unique universe.



Pi defends zoos against people who feel that animals in the wild are happier. He argues that in the wild, animals are at the mercy of many dangers, but in the zoo they have safety and security. He also argues against the idea of zoos as "prisons" – he says that animals prefer to have a set territory and rigid boundaries, so they will be happy if they accept the edges of their cages as their territory. He cites instances of animals who had the option of escaping, but refused to do so. Pi says that now both zoos and religion have fallen out of favor. The Pondicherry Zoo is shut down now.

These digressions are the adult Pi reminiscing, but also setting up the story of his ordeal. Pi here introduces the important idea of boundaries and animal territories. Animals, like humans, generally like comfort and ritual, so a good zoo provides a sense of order that they have no desire to escape from. In the wild, however, animals (and soon Pi) have to struggle constantly to maintain order in the midst of danger. Pi and Martel are clearly both fascinated with the intersection of religion and zoology, as Pi associates them here and will study both in college.



CHAPTER 5

Pi reflects further on his name and all the teasing he got as a child because of it. The other children called him "Pissing," which they took from "Piscine." Eventually Pi decided on a nickname, and when he moved to a new school he trained the teachers and his classmates to call him "Pi." In each class on the first day he wrote "Pi" on the chalkboard, as well as the first few digits of the number pi. The name stuck.

Pi then shows how similar humans are to animals, as he basically trains his teachers and classmates to accept his new name. Rote repetition and confidence are the most important elements of this "training." Pi's nickname refers to the number π , representing the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter. The number is irrational and unending, an interesting contrast to Pi's love of harmony and order.



CHAPTER 6

The **author** interrupts again to say that the adult Pi is an excellent cook, and he makes very spicy vegetarian food. The author has noted that Pi's kitchen is very well-stocked with spare canned goods, as if preparing for a disaster.

The author gives more hints of Pi's ordeal. Clearly Pi suffered great deprivation, as he now seems prepared for any calamity and has a special appreciation for food.



CHAPTER 7

The narrative returns to Pi's voice. Pi describes his biology teacher, **Mr. Satish Kumar**. Mr. Kumar was an atheist and an active Communist. He used to come to the zoo to watch the animals and wonder at the natural world. Pi, who had been religious since a young age, was at first shocked by Mr. Kumar's atheism, but soon they formed a deep bond. Pi respects atheists for choosing a certain worldview (one without a God), but he dislikes agnostics, as they must live in a constant state of doubt or indifference.

The Satish Kumars (there will be another) of Pi's life provide symmetry in their influence. Pi's digression on atheists and agnostics is very important –clearly he accepts that the existence of God is inherently unknowable, and so it takes faith to either affirm or deny it. When the truth is unknowable, we can only choose which story we find more beautiful. Pi prefers a worldview with God in it, but he respects those who do not. What he does not respect are those who refuse to choose, who linger in doubt. Pi respects those who choose a story.



CHAPTER 8

Pi relates the saying that “the most dangerous animal in a zoo is Man,” and describes different ways zoo visitors have tormented or injured the animals, sometimes in bizarre ways. Pi says that this saying (which was on a sign at the Pondicherry Zoo) was not quite true though. He says more dangerous than humans themselves is their tendency to anthropomorphize animals, giving them human feelings and motives.

Martel starts to show the animality in humans and the humanity in animals, as they will soon come together in Pi’s lifeboat. The human tendency to anthropomorphize (ascribe human traits to) animals refers back to Pi’s claim that zoos and religion have both “fallen out of favor” – people assume that animals desire freedom, just as humans think that religion constrains liberty.



One day **Pi’s father** decided to show Pi and his older brother **Ravi** about the dangers of wild animals. He took the boys to the Bengal tiger’s cage and fed the tiger a wild goat in front of them. The boys were traumatized by this sight, but their father continued by listing other ways even seemingly docile animals could hurt or kill them. Pi remembered this lesson forever and always recognized the “otherness” of wild animals.

While Pi loves animals (and will come to love religion) and Martel starts to blur the lines between human and animal, this traumatic scene serves as a constant reminder of the wildness and “otherness” of animals. Pi’s father’s choice of a tiger is especially pointed considering the rest of the novel.



CHAPTER 9

Pi describes the idea of “flight distance,” which is how far away a human can be before an animal runs away. An important part of zookeeping is reducing the flight distances of animals so that they are comfortable with humans nearby. Zookeepers can do this by providing good shelter, food and water, and personal attention. Pi says that his **father** was a natural zookeeper.

Pi expands on the ideas of territory and boundaries. The training of animals is basically a slow rearrangement of their territory, and in zoos the animals must accept humans living on adjacent territories to their own.



CHAPTER 10

Pi admits that there are still some animals who escape or try to escape from zoos. He says that this is usually the result of bad care or the animal experiencing sudden stress, especially if it feels that something is invading its territory. Pi curses the bad zookeepers whose animals want to escape, saying that they give all zoos a bad name.

Pi’s lament of bad zookeeping prefigures his lament of bad religious practitioners – bad zookeepers, like narrow-minded, hateful religious people, give zoology and religion bad names, making people think that both zoos and religion restrict freedom.



CHAPTER 11

Pi describes the case of a black leopard who escaped the Zurich Zoo and lived in the area undetected (with the whole city on alert) for ten weeks. Pi wonders that such a huge predator could live secretly for so long, and uses this to prove that animals are always just trying to fit into whatever environment they find themselves in. Pi thinks that cities are full of big wild animals, and references someone trying to find an animal in the Mexican jungle.

These anecdotes seem like simple digressions at first, but we will later see that Pi has been using them to buttress his argument the whole time – he will refer to the Zurich panther when trying to convince his interviewers of his story’s believability. Later it will become clear that Pi’s story really does result in a large animal living in the Mexican jungle.



CHAPTER 12

The **author** interrupts again to explain how the adult **Pi’s** tales are still interrupted by his own memories. The author says that “**Richard Parker** still preys” on Pi’s mind. The author made the mistake of telling Pi that he liked spicy food, so now Pi always serves him painfully hot food on his visits.

We still don’t know who Richard Parker is, but the novel’s end forces us to look back at scenes like this and see that Pi’s musings on zoology have been referencing Richard Parker the whole time, and reinforce the effect that Richard Parker has had on Pi.



CHAPTER 13

Pi expounds on the idea of territoriality in animals. He says that if you fall into a lion's pit, the lion will kill you not because it's hungry but because you have crossed its boundaries. Lions (like most animals) respect the territory of others as well as their own, which is how lion-tamers work. The lion-tamer enters the cage first, so the lions see that it is his territory. They are not afraid of him, but they know that he provides them with food and so they prefer to keep up the order of their group.

Pi's knowledge of taming dangerous beasts will take on a major role later. His ideas about animal-training center on boundaries and confidence in the trainer, and a "suspension of disbelief" in the lions themselves. The lions know they could easily overpower the trainer, but they accept his leadership because he provides food, security, and order.



Pi describes the concept of alpha animals (dominant leaders) and beta animals (the rest of the group). He says that most animal violence is the result of "social insecurity," or the animal not knowing whether they are alpha or beta. The lion-tamer reinforces his alpha status with the whistle and whip and a calm, forceful stare.

The other Greek letters (alpha, beta, and omega) used in the idea of animal-taming refer back to Pi's own nickname. Alpha, beta, and omega have ordered places within the alphabet, but pi is unending and irrational. Animals prefer clear boundaries and will take order over ambition.



CHAPTER 14

Pi says that the lowest animal, the "omega," has the most to gain by having a close relationship with the alpha. This is the lion that tamers will use for their special tricks, as the omega lion is willing to do more to increase its social standing. It is the same in zoos, where omega animals are the easiest to care for.

This foreshadows Pi's training of Richard Parker. Omega, as the last letter of the Greek alphabet, represents a harmonious and final ending, unlike Pi's namesake— π —or his "botched goodbye" with Richard Parker.



CHAPTER 15

The author returns to describe the adult Pi's house in Canada. He says the house is like "a temple," as it is filled with religious icons and objects. The author notes paintings, statues, books, and photographs pertaining to Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. Pi keeps a Bible on his bedside table.

Martel and Pi now shift from animal rituals to human religious rituals. The overlap of religion and zoology is again emphasized. Based on the contents of his house, Pi's religious beliefs seem muddled and unfocused.



CHAPTER 16

Pi's voice returns. He explains that he was raised a Hindu, mostly encouraged by his mother's sister Auntie Rohini. He grew up with Hindu rituals starting as an infant, and he immediately felt a closeness to the Hindu gods and stories. Pi describes all the sights, sounds, and smells he associates with Hinduism, and how he embraces the deeper Hindu philosophy of Brahman, the world soul.

As with his discussion of animals, Pi begins with the surface trappings of religion, associating Hinduism with its rituals and sensory effects. But Pi soon delves into the spirit beneath the ritual, as he finds a deep affinity with religion.



Pi describes the beautiful, pantheistic aspects of Hinduism, and how its followers seek to become liberated over the course of many lifetimes. He declares that he has always been and always will be a Hindu, and he sees his "place in the universe" through the Hindu schema. At the same time he does not cling to it as the only truth. He references a story about the god Krishna belonging to each of a group of milkmaids at once, and disappearing only when one would become possessive of him.

For Pi, religion will be about choosing "the better story" in a chaotic, unknowable universe. This begins to develop a major theme of the book, which is that religion (like stories, and through stories) is a way of ordering life and making it bearable. Unlike many religious practitioners, Pi tries to avoid being possessive of religious truth – already he accepts that truth can be relative.



CHAPTER 17

Pi describes his introduction to Christianity. When he was fourteen he was on a holiday in Munnar and he came across a church. Pi had never been inside a church before, and he stepped inside when he saw that the doors were open. Inside he met a priest named **Father Martin**. Pi expected to be kicked out for being a “heathen,” but Father Martin welcomed him into the clean, quiet space.

At first Pi starts with knowledge only of Christianity’s ritual and the self-righteousness of many of its practitioners. He is fortunate to meet Father Martin, a Christian who is kind, patient, and appreciates the love behind Christian dogma.



Pi began returning to visit **Father Martin**, and the priest told him the story of Jesus. Pi wondered at the strange psychology involved in Christ’s sacrifice, and he asked for other stories. Father Martin said that there is only one story in Christianity, and the whole basis of it is God’s love. Father Martin answered all of Pi’s questions with “love.” Pi compared this strange new religion to Hinduism’s fantastical tales, but he was moved by a God who would give up all power and glory.

Pi starts to learn that he too is looking for something deeper than ritual and tradition, and he finds different aspects of that thing – God, or universal love, or “a better story” – in Hinduism and Christianity. Only when Pi looks past his stereotypes of Christians does he see the similarities in the religions, and he asks us as readers to do the same.



After three days Pi found himself thinking constantly about Jesus. At first he was angry at the idea of him, but soon Pi decided to become a Christian himself. Just before his family left Munnar, Pi went to **Father Martin** and asked to become a Christian. Father Martin told Pi that he already was. Overjoyed, Pi went into the church and prayed, and then went off to thank Krishna for introducing him to Jesus.

The idea of boundaries returns here as Pi starts to blur the lines between different religions. Most people cling to one religion exclusively or no religion at all, but Pi starts to embrace three of them at once. He has shown that he accepts metaphysical truth as relative, so he chooses religions as a moving and beautiful way to view the universe.



CHAPTER 18

Less than a year later Pi converted to Islam as well. He was exploring the Muslim quarter of Pondicherry, and he admired the beautiful mosque. He went into a Muslim **baker’s** shop. The baker started a conversation with Pi but then excused himself to go pray. Pi was intrigued by the “callisthenic” prayer routine.

As with Christianity, Pi has only an outsider’s knowledge of Islam and so first sees the ritual without the faith’s essence. This is similar to the people who blithely assert that zoos are “prisons” for animals.



CHAPTER 19

Pi went back to see the **baker** and asked him about Islam. The baker described the religion, which Pi found elegant and beautifully simple. The baker taught Pi the Muslim prayer routine.

Instead of living with his stereotypes, though, Pi seeks to learn the essence of religion. He clearly finds another aspect of his God reflected in the Muslim worldview.



CHAPTER 20

Pi says that the baker was a Sufi, a Muslim mystic. His name was **Satish Kumar** – the same name as Pi’s atheistic biology teacher. Pi found this dichotomy fitting, as both men taught him about the way the world works. Pi started going back to (the Muslim) Mr. Kumar’s house, and they would pray together. One time as Pi biked home from one of these visits he felt a blissful closeness to God and universe. Pi says that the only other religious experience he had like that was as an adult in Toronto, when he saw the Virgin Mary among some falling snow.

The two Satish Kumars create a pleasing symmetry in their influence on Pi’s life, especially as they offer a harmonious duality in comparison to the unending π. The first Mr. Kumar inspires Pi to study zoology in college, while the second Mr. Kumar inspires him to study theology.



CHAPTER 21

The **author** sits in a café after talking with the adult **Pi**, and he thinks about their conversation. He notes Pi's words about "dry, yeastless factuality" and "the better story." The author feels that his own life seems mundane compared to Pi's. He considers Pi's religious philosophies, which value moral truth above intellectual truth, and elevate love above all else.

These two quoted phrases are some of the most important in the book, and they will be repeated again. "Dry, yeastless factuality" is the boring reality of doubt, the agnostic's universe (to Pi), while "the better story" is a reality brought to life through the imagination and faith.



CHAPTER 22

Pi goes back to narrating. He imagines an atheist's deathbed moments, and describes the atheist taking a final leap of faith. He then describes an agnostic clinging to his "dry, yeastless factuality," trying to scientifically explain the white light he sees and missing "the better story."

The phrases are immediately repeated to show their importance. The need to improve and order reality through storytelling (or religion) is a natural human instinct, and something similar even exists in animals – referring back to Pi's explanation of the "fiction" the lions live with in accepting their trainer as their alpha.



CHAPTER 23

Pi explains that he had kept his religious activities quiet, and his parents had no idea that he was now a Christian and Muslim as well. One day Pi was out with his parents enjoying the weather on a seaside esplanade when they were confronted (by coincidence) by Pi's imam, priest, and pandit, the religious leaders with whom Pi had been practicing his Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism.

Pi's parents are culturally Hindu but not personally religious, so even Pi's devout Hinduism is of his own doing. This scene is comic and almost silly in its coincidence, as Martel brings all the religious leaders together to bicker with each other.



Pi's parents were culturally Hindu, but they were secular in their personal lives, so they were surprised to suddenly find out how religious their son was. The priest, imam, and pandit were also all shocked to find that Pi was not just a Christian, Muslim, and Hindu, but in fact all three at once. They each protested that it was not possible to believe in all three religions simultaneously, and they argued with each other and demanded that Pi choose between them.

Just as the adult Pi heaps spices onto his food, so young Pi enriches his "dry, yeastless factuality" with the "spices" of religious stories and myths. The idea of boundaries returns, as each religious leader has his own "territory" and bristles when its edges threaten to overlap another's territory.



Pi became embarrassed and quoted Mahatma Gandhi, saying that "All religions are true" and explaining that he was just trying to love God. The religious leaders were embarrassed by this, and Pi's **father** took advantage of their silence to hurry the family off to get ice cream.

The religious leaders are each concerned with protecting the sole, exclusive truth, while Pi is more concerned with the beauty of each religion, and the different paths they take to loving God and others.



CHAPTER 24

After this episode **Pi's** brother **Ravi** would tease him mercilessly for his religious activities, suggesting that Pi also become Jewish so he could have more days of the week off for religious holidays.

Martel steps back to place Pi within the "real world," which takes a dim view of his religious activities, but Pi still seems to exist in his own "magical realist" universe.



CHAPTER 25

Pi reflects on how the episode with the religious leaders was symbolic of the problems with many religious practitioners. People become so concerned with exclusivity and defending God that they forget to love other humans. Pi declares that when people defend God with violence or anger they are misunderstanding religion. Pi himself had to avoid zealous people who tried to condemn him for practicing more than one faith at once.

Pi condemns narrow-minded, judgmental religious practitioners in a similar way that he condemns bad zookeepers – they give both their lifestyles a bad name. As an adult he starts to recognize that everyone constrains their “liberty” in some way, the question is just which worldview one chooses.



CHAPTER 26

A few days later Pi asked his parents if he could be baptized and buy a prayer rug. They were both flustered by this request, and they tried to distract Pi with books (including [Robinson Crusoe](#)). When he persisted, they tried to convince him to choose among his religions, or to take their route and reject all religion as “old-fashioned.”

Just like the religious leaders, Pi’s parents try to put boundaries on his worldview, making him choose one religion or none at all. Pi’s mother mentions [Robinson Crusoe](#), the famous shipwreck narrative that in many ways parallels Pi’s own story. In that novel, Crusoe too finds God in his isolation.



CHAPTER 27

That night Pi overheard his parents talking about his new faiths. They then discussed Mrs. Gandhi, the current prime minister, and lamented her “foolishness” which they hoped would soon pass. They wished aloud that Pi would get some more “normal” interests, but eventually they decided to indulge him, assuming religion was just a phase.

This part of the story is set in a period of political turmoil called “The Emergency,” when the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency for the country, effectively suspending all constitutional rights so that she would not be expelled from office for electoral fraud.



CHAPTER 28

Pi got his prayer rug and came to cherish it. He liked to pray on it in the back yard, surrounded by birds, and his family would watch him curiously. Soon afterward Pi was baptized as a Christian with his parents in attendance.

Pi’s parents relent to his religious devotion, assuming it is just a phase and he will get “normal” interests soon. His childhood will soon be anything but normal though.



CHAPTER 29

Pi explains the political climate of the time – the 1970s were a bad period in India, when **Mrs. Gandhi** suspended all constitutional rights to avoid being expelled from office. Pi was not affected by the political troubles at first, as his world consisted of the zoo’s daily routines, but soon Pi’s **father** came to worry about the zoo’s future.

Martel places the Patels in the political climate of the Emergency, but this mostly serves as a plot device to inspire the family’s cross-Pacific move. Pi continues to live in his contemplative world of animals and religion.



Eventually Pi’s parents decided that the zoo could not remain profitable in such a political climate, and they grew outraged at the government’s actions, which destroyed their hope for the “New India.” Finally they decided to move the family to Canada, which seemed an inherently foreign place to Pi and **Ravi**.

Pi has now become one of those animals being displaced from his “territory,” and he will experience all the chaos that comes with such a shift. In Pi’s world zoos are delicate things that cannot survive heavy-handed governments.



CHAPTER 30

The **author** interrupts again to describe his meeting with Pi’s wife, **Meena**. The author had been meeting visiting Pi for a while without ever hearing about a wife, so her existence first came as a shock to him. The author wonders at how protective Pi is of the things that are precious to him. The author wonders if Meena is the one who has been cooking so much spicy food, but then he confirms that Pi is the cook.

The same post-deprivation mindset that leads Pi to stock up on canned food also causes him to guard his family closely. The author returns to Pi’s spicy cooking, a reminder that Pi was once without food at all and so now has a special appreciation for it, and also referring back to Pi’s “spicing up” of “yeastless reality.”



CHAPTER 31

Pi describes the one time that both **Mr. Kumar 1** the atheist biology teacher met **Mr. Kumar 2** the Muslim baker. One day they met Pi at the zoo and Pi showed them the animals. They were both fascinated by the beautiful Grant's zebra, which neither had seen before. One Mr. Kumar praised the beauty of nature, while the other Mr. Kumar thanked God.

The Mr. Kumars come together in a symmetry that shows Pi's two great passions – zoology and religion – and how he is able to reconcile these two within his own personality. The two Mr. Kumars equally influence Pi.



CHAPTER 32

Pi explains the concept of zoomorphism, which is when animals see humans or members of another species as one of their own kind. He gives examples of the zoo's herd of rhinoceros and goats, and a mouse that lived peacefully among the vipers for a while. He says that sometimes dogs are used as foster mothers for lion cubs.

This is another important idea that points to Pi's ordeal with Richard Parker. The boundaries between animal species can be blurred more easily than the boundaries between territory or human religion.



Pi says that the animals are aware of the real truth – the lion cubs know that the dog isn't their real mother – but they embrace the “imaginary” relationship in order to maintain order in their life. They need such a comforting fiction to live happily, as otherwise the lion cubs would be terrified at being motherless.

Martel is making more connections between the animal world and human world – he sees this kind of zoomorphism as animals choosing “the better story” or having a kind of religious faith, one that makes their reality more pleasant.



CHAPTER 33

The **author** describes Pi showing him old family photos. There are pictures of Pi's wedding and his days growing up in Canada, but almost nothing from India. There are only four random photos, one containing the mysterious **Richard Parker**. None of the pictures have Pi's **mother** in them, and Pi says that he has started forgetting what his mother looks like.

Pi's ordeal has also involved the loss of all his belongings from India. This lack of proof for his backstory (especially in light of his later actions) calls Pi's reliability into question – all his stories of childhood might also be “spiced up.”



CHAPTER 34

Back in Pi's narrative, the family prepares to sail to Canada. Pi describes the huge hassle of selling off a whole zoo. It took a year to go through all the legal requirements, but the sales made enough money to fund the family's journey. They arranged for some of the animals to travel with them across the Pacific, where they would be delivered to American zoos.

Everything is now in place to set up Pi's unique journey. Pi contrasts the seeming freedom of a wild animal's existence with the great legal hassle of doing anything with it in the human sphere.



CHAPTER 35

Pi and his family left India on a Japanese cargo ship called the **Tsimtsum**, departing on June 21st, 1977. Pi describes his **mother's** sadness at leaving India, and how she tried to stock up Indian cigarettes (even though she didn't smoke), as she was so worried about entering a wholly unfamiliar territory.

We don't spend much time with Pi's family, but Gita's last actions are poignant and show a strong love for her homeland. The Tsimtsum appears now, as Pi is about to experience that “contraction” of God's presence.



CHAPTER 36

The **author** returns again. On one of his visits he meets **Pi's** two children, **Nikhil** and **Usha**. Again the author had no idea that Pi had children until he suddenly encounters them. Usha, who is four, is holding an orange cat in her arms and laughing. The author declares that Pi's story has "a happy ending."

Pi's orange cat is a clear reference to Richard Parker. Martel has shown Pi's happy childhood and happy adulthood, but now he will show the suffering that lies in between.



CHAPTER 37

Pi begins the narrative with the **Tsimtsum** sinking. Everything is chaotic, and Pi is alone in a lifeboat. He sees a Bengal tiger named **Richard Parker** swimming desperately and Pi encourages him on, addressing the tiger aloud and lamenting the loss of his parents and **Ravi**. Pi throws Richard Parker a lifebuoy and the tiger climbs aboard the lifeboat. Pi suddenly realizes the danger of sharing a tiny lifeboat with an adult tiger, and he tries to push Richard Parker away, but too late. Pi jumps overboard.

Martel abruptly changes the narrative's tone from one of contemplation and coming-of-age to this scene of total chaos. We finally see who Richard Parker is – a fully grown Bengal tiger. Martel will explore many ideas on Pi's lifeboat, but one of the strongest is the fierce will to survive found in all living things. Richard Parker is the first example of this as he swims to the lifeboat.



CHAPTER 38

Pi's story jumps back to before the shipwreck. They had been traveling peacefully, and Pi was enjoying the journey. They sank four days after they left the Philippines and entered the open Pacific. Pi describes that night – he is awakened by a noise, possibly an explosion. The rest of his family is asleep. Pi tries to wake **Ravi** to go explore the ship, but Ravi ignores him. Pi sets off on his own.

Pi is saved by mere chance and his family dies through no fault of their own. The reason for the Tsimtsum's sinking is never explained, but it is most important as a concept – Isaac Luria's "tzimtzum," where God withdraws to "make room" for creation, as God now withdraws from Pi.



Pi goes onto the main deck, where it is raining. He notices that the ship is listing hard on one side and making groaning sounds, and he realizes that something is wrong. Pi goes back inside, suddenly panicking. He tries to return to his family but the stairwell is flooded. He hears noises and then sees that the wild animals have escaped their cages and are running around, shrieking. Pi finally finds three crew members, but they only speak Chinese. They put a life jacket on him and throw him over the side of the ship.

Neither is it ever explained how the wild animals got out of their cages. The violent, chaotic act of the Tsimtsum's sinking becomes the turning point in Pi's life, throwing him from one universe into another. In a lesser sense, he is very suddenly made independent of his family and support network and forced to act as an adult to survive.



CHAPTER 39

Pi falls forty feet and lands on a half-unrolled tarpaulin covering a lifeboat that is hanging from the side of the ship. Pi looks up and sees a **Grant's zebra** jump gracefully after him. The zebra misses the tarpaulin and smashes into a bench on the lifeboat, crying out in distress. The lifeboat shakes at the impact and then falls into the water.

Pi's luck in surviving begins immediately, as he falls a huge distance but happens to land unharmed on a soft surface. The zebra is not so lucky, but it too survives, showing the extremely potent desire of living things to keep on living.



CHAPTER 40

The story moves forward, to the point just after **Pi** jumped overboard to escape **Richard Parker**. Pi clings to a fallen oar and then finds a lifebuoy. He climbs onto the buoy just as shark's fins slice through the water around him. Pi looks into the lifeboat and sees the **zebra**, but not Richard Parker. He jams the oar under the tarpaulin and hangs onto it, dangling off the edge of the lifeboat.

Pi's situation is almost ridiculously dangerous right now, as he is trapped between a tiger and sharks, alone on a stormy ocean. Martel has to use a lot of space describing Pi's situation in the lifeboat, as the details of Pi's setting now become overwhelmingly important to his survival.



Pi hangs there over the water and assesses his situation – he is alone in the middle of the Pacific, surrounded by sharks and an adult tiger. His adult self wonders why he didn't just let go of the oar and succumb to what seemed an inevitable death. Pi eventually slips the lifebuoy over himself, making his position more comfortable.

Pi's will to live overwhelms his reasoning, as his adult self recognizes just how logically hopeless his position was. Pi remains clinging to the oar, trying to keep himself separate from the lifeboat and out of Richard Parker's territory.



CHAPTER 41

Pi looks around for other survivors as the ship disappears beneath the waves. He is surrounded by wreckage, but can see no other humans. After a while Pi needs to change position, as he is getting sore and wants to be able to look for other lifeboats. He assumes that **Richard Parker** is hiding under the lifeboat's tarpaulin. Pi climbs atop the tarpaulin, expecting the tiger to attack him, but Richard Parker remains hidden.

The human loss of the Tsimtsum is enormous, but Pi has to focus on his own survival so much that his grief is delayed. He hopes for human companionship or rescue at first. The tarpaulin becomes an important boundary in the boat.



Pi notices that the **zebra** is still alive too, though its back leg is gruesomely broken. Pi admires the dying creature's beauty and wonders why **Richard Parker** hasn't killed it yet. Then a **hyena** appears from under the tarpaulin. Pi assumes that Richard Parker must have drowned, as a tiger and a hyena could not both be on the lifeboat together.

We later learn that this account is only one version of Pi's survival story, and in another version there are humans on the lifeboat with him instead of animals. This first account is so believable (and maybe factually true) because the wild animals act like wild animals, instead of as humans given animal identities.



Pi wonders how the **hyena** got aboard. He realizes that it was already in the lifeboat, and the crew members threw him down as bait for the hyena, hoping to clear the lifeboat for themselves. Pi is afraid of the hyena but less so than he was of **Richard Parker**. He decides he prefers the "upfront ferocity of a dog" to the silent, stealthy tiger. Dawn breaks and Pi is surrounded by an empty ocean.

Pi knows about animal territories and "alpha" animals from his upbringing at the zoo, so he immediately recognizes that two alpha predators – a tiger and a hyena – could not be peacefully sharing such a small space.



CHAPTER 42

Soon afterward an old orangutan named **Orange Juice** floats by on an island of bananas held together by netting. Orange Juice was a popular member of the Pondicherry Zoo and the mother of two male orangutans. Pi laments that such a gentle creature should experience so much pain, but he is glad to see her and invites her aboard. She climbs up and the bananas come loose, floating away, but Pi salvages the netting. Later he would curse the loss of the bananas, but the net would help him survive.

Orange Juice also shows miraculous luck and will in surviving, as she somehow escapes the sinking ship and finds a "lifeboat" of bananas. In Pi's "human version" of his story Orange Juice is replaced by Pi's own mother, and here we already see some similarities, as Orange Juice had given birth to two sons – like Pi and Ravi.



CHAPTER 43

Pi assures himself that someone knows about the sinking of the **Tsimtsum** and that rescuers will be arriving soon. He imagines being reunited with his family in only a few hours. The animals are quiet except for the whining **hyena**. Pi decides to make his spot as secure as he can, and he throws the net over the tarpaulin, creating a flimsy barrier between himself and the animals.

In such a small, cramped space as the lifeboat any kind of boundary is crucial. Pi has already explained how territorial animals are, and now he must basically create tiny zoo enclosures within the lifeboat to try and satisfy each animal and stay alive.



A few hours later the **hyena** starts acting strangely, running in frenzied laps around the **zebra**, barking, and looking out into the water. This goes on for a long time and **Pi** gets worried. Despite his fear **Pi** eventually grows bored and annoyed by the hyena's constant whining and running. He muses on how ugly hyenas are.

Pi has also already described how animals love routine and repetition. This abrupt change of setting and situation seems to have driven the hyena mad. It creates its own "order" by repeating the same act over and over again.



Pi remembers facts about hyenas – in packs they can kill even large, strong herd animals. They eat anything and everything, including their own kind during a feeding frenzy. Finally the **hyena** stops the running and vomits, and then wedges itself into a small space behind the **zebra**, where it stays for hours.

Pi tries to avoid anthropomorphizing animals, but the hyena seems like a crude, violent creature – in Pi's human version of his ordeal, the hyena is the foul-mouthed, selfish, and murderous French cook.



CHAPTER 44

The day passes slowly and **Pi** listens to the flies buzzing around on the boat. Evening comes and **Pi** grows afraid of the approaching night. In the dark he will be invisible to rescuers, and the animals might become active and aggressive. The night is moonless and cloudy, so when darkness falls it is total and overwhelming. **Pi** hears snarls from the **hyena** and barking from the **zebra**, and then he hears sounds from underneath the boat as well. He realizes that the "battle for life" is taking place in the ocean as well.

Pi has been thrown into a world totally devoid of humans but teeming with animal life. He sees the reflection of his own struggle to survive – even against his own hope and reasoning – in all the animals "battling for life" around him. Pi's father taught him about the violence in nature with the tiger-and-goat lesson, but now Pi is totally immersed in this world of savagery.



CHAPTER 45

Finally the sun rises, and with it **Pi's** hope returns. He feels sure that he will be rescued soon and he thinks of his family, but the horizon is empty. When he looks into the lifeboat **Pi** sees that the **hyena** has bitten off the **zebra's** broken leg. The zebra is still alive and grinding its teeth in pain. **Pi** feels anger and sadness on the beautiful creature's behalf, but then he drops these feelings to focus on his own survival.

Pi is still relatively naïve in clinging to hope of immediate rescue, but this naivety is being swiftly crushed by the violence taking place in the lifeboat. When the two Mr. Kumars visited the zoo it was the Grant's zebra that they marveled at, and now Pi sees that ideal of animal beauty and grace being defiled.



Pi starts to feel seasick and he changes position on his oar. He sees **Orange Juice** and crawls closer to look at her. She is clinging to the boat's gunnel and panting with seasickness. **Pi** can't help laughing at how human the orangutan looks in her position of discomfort.

Pi finds some comfort at first in Orange Juice's presence, as she is the most human-like of the animals in the lifeboat. Because of her appearance he is able to temporarily forget that she too is a wild animal.



Pi also marvels that the **hyena** hasn't attacked **Orange Juice**, and he muses on how these two species have never interacted in the wild, as they are usually separated by an ocean. He imagines a zoo enclosure where orangutans and hyenas live peacefully together. That afternoon a sea turtle bumps against the lifeboat. **Pi** tells it to go find a ship, and it disappears.

Connected with their extreme will to survive, Pi also starts to see how differently animals can act when thrown out of their natural environment. Pi himself must take advantage of this kind of zoomorphism in order to live peacefully with the other species.



CHAPTER 46

Night comes again and **Pi** sinks into despair. He notices that the water is full of mako sharks and other fish. **Orange Juice** also gazes out into the water, her expression mournful. She looks human again, but this time tragically so. Pi realizes that she is looking for her lost sons just as he has been searching for his family, and he grows more depressed.

Orange Juice's humanity is no longer comedic, but only emphasizes Pi's own tragic situation. He too is looking for his lost family, but he has been clinging to a foolish hope that the orangutan seems to have given up.



Suddenly the **hyena** attacks the **zebra** and pulls off a big piece of the its hide. The zebra kicks at the hyena but cannot stop it. The hyena slides into the zebra's wound and starts eating its insides while the zebra is still alive. **Orange Juice** lifts herself up and roars at the hyena, baring her teeth. The hyena cringes but then faces her and howls. The zebra snorts some blood overboard and sharks gather.

Just as with the tiger and goat, Pi again witnesses the savagery of wild animals when they are faced with danger or thrown out of their natural territories. Even Orange Juice the peaceful orangutan seems to suddenly lose her "humanity" and become a dangerous animal.



Orange Juice and the **hyena** keep bellowing, their cries growing louder and louder. Then the standoff suddenly ends and they both retreat. The sharks eventually swim away too, but the **zebra** suffers on. **Pi** is horrified by all this. He finally acknowledges that his family is probably dead, and he sinks into despair. He spends the night weeping as the hyena eats.

The zebra now shows the extreme, often unreasonable will to survive. It has no chance of outlasting this ordeal and must be in excruciating pain, but it keeps on breathing. All this savagery has extinguished Pi's fantasy of hope, and he accepts that he is totally alone.



CHAPTER 47

In the morning the **zebra** is still alive, though its insides are spilled half-eaten all around it. It finally dies around noon. A few hours later the tension between the **hyena** and **Orange Juice** grows again, and then the hyena attacks. Orange Juice thumps the hyena hard on the head, shocking and inspiring **Pi** with her spirit.

Pi assumed he knew Orange Juice's personality, but now he is reminded that she is a wild animal and so subject to instinct, and can be violent when provoked. Because these events might also be taking place with humans (as Pi's later story implies), it also shows how humans can become "wild" and dangerous when threatened.



Orange Juice is no match for the larger, predatory **hyena** though, and it bites her throat and then severs her head. **Pi** walks forward onto the lifeboat and sees her headless body with its arms outstretched like Christ on the cross. Weeping, Pi prepares for a fight to the death with the hyena, but then he suddenly sees **Richard Parker's** head underneath a bench. Pi goes back to the bow of the boat and collapses into a delirious sleep.

The image of Orange Juice's headless body is one of total horror, as the orangutan was a sympathetic animal and her final pose seems like a mockery of Pi's faith. He is totally alone now, seemingly robbed of companionship and religious comfort. Tellingly it is at that moment that Richard Parker appears – especially if the tiger is actually the brutal part of Pi's own soul.



CHAPTER 48

Pi tells the story of **Richard Parker's** origins. A panther had been killing people near Bangladesh, so the locals called in a professional hunter to capture or kill it. The hunter left a goat as bait, but instead of a panther it attracted two tigers, a mother and her cub. The hunter shot the mother with a tranquilizer dart and sent both mother and cub to the Pondicherry Zoo.

Richard Parker now starts to appear as a major character, as the other inhabitants of the lifeboat are swiftly dying off. He is a royal Bengal tiger, but not the same tiger that Pi watched kill the goat.



In the paperwork sent along with the tigers, the hunter's name, which was Richard Parker, got mixed up with the name the hunter gave to the cub, which was Thirsty (with the family name "None Given"). **Pi's father** was so amused by this that he officially kept the tiger cub's name as **Richard Parker**.

This amusing backstory is contrasted with the terrifying reality of Richard Parker's presence on the lifeboat. Martel found the name Richard Parker in several shipwreck narratives, and felt that the name must be significant.



CHAPTER 49

Back on the lifeboat **Pi** wakes up and accepts that **Richard Parker** really is present on the boat with him. He wonders at how such a huge animal stayed hidden for so long. Pi basically loses hope, as he knows he has no chance of surviving anymore. He decides to let the tiger kill him when it wants to, and in the meantime he wants to quench his raging thirst.

Pi has already presented the story of the panther in Zurich to set up Richard Parker's ability to stay undiscovered. Pi gains a kind of courage by accepting the hopelessness of his situation – he can take action now that he is no longer paralyzed by uncertainty.



Pi explores the lifeboat, looking for supplies. He notices that he is no longer afraid of the **hyena**, as it seems like a "ridiculous dog" when compared to **Richard Parker**. Pi now understands why the hyena had confined itself to such a small space, and had waited so long to kill the zebra – it didn't want to upset the tiger. Pi decides that Richard Parker must be sedated and seasick, or else he would have become active much earlier.

The hyena has been acting so strangely because it confined itself to a tiny territory, trying to avoid crossing into Richard Parker's territory and being killed. Richard Parker is under the tarpaulin, which acts as the main boundary within the lifeboat.



CHAPTER 50

Pi takes stock of the details of the lifeboat – it is twenty-six feet long and eight feet wide, painted white, and fitted with benches, oars, and oarlocks. **Richard Parker's** territory is under the tarpaulin on the boat's front half, while the **hyena** occupies the smashed back bench where the **zebra** fell. Pi himself is on the very tip of the bow. The boat's inside surfaces, the oars, lifejackets, and the lifebuoy are all orange, which seems like a "nice Hindu color" to Pi.

The lifeboat is the ultimate microcosm, a small, enclosed space that is now housing a boy and two dangerous predators. Every detail becomes incredibly important for Pi's survival. Pi is slightly comforted by the color orange, which is also the color of tigers (and of the adult Pi's housecat).



CHAPTER 51

Pi doesn't see any supplies at first, so he assumes they must be under the tarpaulin, in Richard Parker's "den." Pi feels the urgency of his thirst more than his fear of the tiger, so he unrolls the tarpaulin a little bit and looks underneath. Pi gets his first glimpse of Richard Parker's full size, and he shivers with awe and fear. He sees a lid on the bow's bench, and carefully opens it to find a locker full of supplies.

Much of the following sections concern the details of Pi's struggle for survival. He finds again and again that his will to live cannot be overcome by fear, as he braves the tiger's presence and enters his territory to look for water.



Pi is ecstatic to find many cans of water, and he greedily drinks a few of them. There are packages of biscuits as well, and he eats some even though they contain animal fat (he has always been a vegetarian). Pi then calculates his rations, and figures that he has enough food to last 93 days and enough water to last 124 days. He joyfully mumbles "thank you!" aloud.

It has only been a few days but already Pi is ecstatic at the most basic of human necessities – he has quickly gone into survival mode, like an animal in his constant quest for food and water. Pi's vegetarianism is one of the first civilized parts of himself he must give up.



CHAPTER 52

Pi gives a complete list of all the contents of the lifeboat. This includes anti-seasickness medicine, blankets, “solar stills,” flares, food and water, ropes, life jackets and oars, fishing paraphernalia, rain catchers, a knife, a notebook and pen, a bar of chocolate, a survival manual, and “1 God.” Pi eats some of the chocolate and falls asleep.

This list condenses many of the elements of the book, combining the necessities of survival, wild animals, and Pi’s religious faith. The contents of the locker seem like a huge windfall, and they give Pi some hope.

1 2

CHAPTER 53

When Pi wakes up he realizes he has to deal with the reality of **Richard Parker**. He recognizes his own inevitable death and starts to cry, but then something within himself steels itself for survival. He prays and promises not to die, realizing that he has a very strong instinct for staying alive. Pi starts constructing a raft so he can put some distance between himself and Richard Parker. He uses the oars, the lifebuoy, and life jackets. He has to enter the tiger’s den for the lifejackets, and does so.

Pi’s recognition of his own seemingly inevitable death gives him the freedom to act without fear of consequences, as his situation could not get any worse. Just as religious faith must often move outside of reason, so the will to live must also go against reason sometimes – Pi has no reasonable hope of surviving, but he decides to struggle on nonetheless.

1 4

Pi lashes his raft together with the rope, and as he works the **hyena** starts to whine and **Richard Parker** growls. Suddenly the tiger kills the hyena, who dies without a sound or a struggle. Richard Parker then turns and looks at Pi, who is struck by the tiger’s power, beauty, and grace. Richard Parker bares his teeth and prepares to attack, and at that moment a rat climbs up onto Pi’s head.

All the other elements have now been removed from the story, and only the boy, the tiger, and the Pacific remain. In Pi’s human version of the story, this scene involves Pi himself killing the French cook, leaving him totally alone on the lifeboat.

1 3

Richard Parker approaches Pi, who prepares for death, but the tiger is distracted by the softness of the tarpaulin and the rolling of the lifeboat. In this moment of hesitation Pi grabs the rat and throws it to the tiger. Richard Parker eats the rat and seems satisfied, and he turns back to devour the **hyena**. Pi notices some vomit on the boat floor and realizes that Richard Parker has indeed been seasick.

Pi keeps accepting his death and then being given reasons to hope. He gets the first inclination of how he will “tame” Richard Parker by throwing him the rat, and he learns that the tiger does have a weakness in seasickness.

1

Pi finishes his raft, ties it to the lifeboat with a rope, and steps onto it. It proves seaworthy, but Pi is floating just inches above several sharks. The raft gets pulled along by the lifeboat, and Pi continually checks his knots. It starts to rain and Pi uses the raincatchers to gather water. Night falls.

Pi has now created his own small territory. The raft is divided from Richard Parker and the sharks by the flimsiest of boundaries, but for now it is enough to save him.

1 4

CHAPTER 54

It rains all night and Pi stays on the raft, cold and wet and unable to sleep. He begins coming up with plans to kill **Richard Parker**. He considers pushing him off the lifeboat or attacking him, but rejects these as suicidal. He finally decides to wage a “war of attrition” and wait for the tiger to run out of food and water. Pi just needs to stay alive for this plan to work.

Pi is once again hoping against reason that he can survive, despite his earlier acceptance of death. His final plan will seem foolish in the light of day, though.

1

CHAPTER 55

Dawn breaks and it starts raining harder, but then it suddenly stops. Pi warms up and takes stock of his situation. He recognizes that his raft is too flimsy to last long. He thinks of his plan to outlast **Richard Parker**, but then remembers that tigers can drink salt water, and he realizes that if Richard Parker gets hungry he will just swim over to the raft and kill Pi.

In terms of survival instinct and brute strength, Pi has no chance against a wild animal. He must use his human resourcefulness and intelligence.



CHAPTER 56

Pi muses on fear, which now totally overwhelms him. His crippling terror overwhelms his reason and saps the energy from his body. The adult Pi comments on how fear is the “only true opponent” of life, and so we must constantly work to overcome it.

As a narrator, the adult Pi can muse on the fear that almost killed his younger self. Richard Parker is also just trying to survive – fear is the most dangerous thing in the lifeboat.



CHAPTER 57

Pi is cured of his hopelessness and terror by **Richard Parker** himself. The tiger seems sated with rainwater and **hyena**, and he looks at Pi and makes a strange sound. Surprised, Pi recognizes this sound as *prusten*, a very rare noise that tigers sometimes make to express friendliness and peaceful intentions. At that moment Pi decides to tame Richard Parker. He knows that he cannot kill the tiger, so he resolves to live peacefully with him.

As if in answer to Pi’s extreme fear, Richard Parker suddenly reveals that his intentions are benign for now. Martel continues to blur the lines between human and animal, as the tiger acts almost rationally in agreeing to live in peace on the lifeboat.



Pi admits that part of him is glad that **Richard Parker** is still alive, as he is a companion and a distraction from grief and insanity. Pi then remembers everything he has learned about taming wild animals. He takes a whistle from one of the life jackets and shouts across the water about the “greatest show on earth,” standing and blowing the whistle to show his alpha status. The tigers roars angrily at the sound but then he backs away and lies down in the bottom of the lifeboat.

Richard Parker is a constant danger to Pi, but he also saves Pi’s life with his very presence. Pi now has a reason to live – to tame Richard Parker and live peacefully with him – and a constant distraction from the loss of his family and his own total isolation. All of Pi’s earlier digressions about animal-training now become important.



CHAPTER 58

Pi reads the survival manual that he found in the locker. It advises him about what kinds of fish not to eat, to not drink urine, and that the horizon, when seen from near sea level, is only two and a half miles away. After reading it Pi resolves to continue with **Richard Parker’s** training regimen, to improve the raft, to build himself a shelter, and to stop hoping for rescue. He realizes that he is totally alone, and he weeps.

Pi now has work to keep him busy, which is his greatest defense against despair and loneliness. Pi decides to stop hoping to be rescued, as watching the horizon is just a waste of time and energy. He doesn’t know that he will soon be desperate enough to want to drink urine.



CHAPTER 59

Pi’s hunger and thirst overcome his depression, and he climbs onto the lifeboat. **Richard Parker** is under the tarpaulin. The lifeboat is rolling in a different direction now, which seems to have made the tiger seasick again – Pi makes a note of this. Pi watches several cockroaches, the last living things on the boat except for himself and Richard Parker, suddenly throw themselves overboard and get eaten by fish.

Martel again shows how the sheer will to survive can overcome fear, depression, and even reason. This seems contradicted by the cockroaches, however, who act as Pi is tempted to – to just give in and die instead of going about the wearying work of survival.



Pi smells urine and realizes that **Richard Parker** has marked his territory by urinating below the tarpaulin. Pi is comforted by this, as the tiger seems to have claimed only the floor of the boat. Pi eats and then drinks from a puddle of rainwater. He urinates into a beaker and notices how clear and appetizing it looks, but he resists drinking it. He splashes the urine over the tarpaulin to mark his own territory.

The contradictions of the setting are heightened in this scene. Pi is surrounded by the boundless sky and sea but is trapped on a tiny, enclosed territory within this expanse, and now the lifeboat itself has become divided into separate territories for boy and tiger.



Pi examines the solar still in the locker. He discovers that they are devices (consisting of a cone and a bag) that turn salt water into fresh water through evaporation and condensation. He ties them to ropes and floats them behind the boat. Then he improves his raft, carving an oar into a makeshift mast, hanging a blanket from it as a canopy, and adding an extra life jacket to the floor.

Despite his penchant for contemplation and self-awareness, Pi must now spend most of his time working just to stay alive. Pi has little faith in the solar stills at first, but they will soon be life-saving. After marking the boundaries of his territory as an animal would, Pi now makes it more comfortable.



Pi eats more rations, feeling hopeful and admiring the beauty of the sky and sea. **Richard Parker** appears and makes the prusten sound again. Pi hears a splash and looks down into the water, and he marvels at the abundance of sealife below him. Pi thinks of all the fish and other creatures as a bustling city. Night falls and he goes to sleep on the raft.

Pi was despairing of life just hours ago, but Richard Parker's peacefulness and Pi's own busyness have drastically improved his mood. By travelling so slowly and unobtrusively across the ocean, Pi sees the full range of sealife on his journey.



CHAPTER 60

Pi wakes up once in the night and is terrified by the sublimity of his surroundings, the vastness of the sea and sky. He realizes that his suffering is “taking place in a grand setting,” which makes it seem small and mundane. He prays and falls back asleep.

Pi already has a mind that tends towards religion and philosophy, and now he experiences the true terror and ecstasy of the “sublime” – a philosophical concept referring to an aesthetic greatness beyond all measure.



CHAPTER 61

The next day Pi wakes up feeling strong and rested. He cuts up his leather shoe and tries using it as bait on the fishing tackle, but he has no success. Despite his new hope Pi realizes that he needs to find food and water for **Richard Parker** soon, or he risks being killed. After a few hours of growing despair Pi climbs onto the lifeboat to look for bait. He finds himself staring straight into Richard Parker's eyes, but at that moment Pi is struck on the face by a flying fish.

The manmade tools Pi finds (like the solar stills) certainly help him survive, but he still must rely on nature and luck. The fishing tackle fails and he is only saved by a chance school of flying fish. Richard Parker's “prusten” feelings last only while he is being fed and watered.



A whole school of flying fish then leaps into and over the boat, some of them hitting **Richard Parker**. Pi throws fish to the tiger as a “treat” to help tame him. Pi realizes that the fish are being chased by dorados. Richard Parker eats his fill of flying fish. Pi gathers up some fish and tries to make himself kill one, but this is very difficult, as he has been a pacifist and vegetarian all his life.

Pi has been growing more animalistic in his actions (like using his urine to mark his territory) but he still clings to his humanity in many ways, the most notable being this unwillingness to kill another living thing even when he is starving. But in the end hunger wins out.



Pi finally wraps the flying fish in a blanket and breaks its neck, weeping. He feels that he has committed a great sin, but after the fish is dead Pi finds it easier to cut it up and use it for bait. He hooks a three-foot-long dorado, fights it, and brings it into the boat. He admires the fish's beautiful colors, and thanks Vishnu for "taking the form of a fish."

In Pi's "human version" of his story he has already killed and eaten the French cook by this point, and now is weeping over a flying fish. It may be that Pi projected his first kill onto a later date, or that he has so thoroughly cut off the "Richard Parker" side of his soul that the "Pi" side remains pacifistic and vegetarian.



Pi kills the dorado with a hatchet from the locker. He finds it much easier to kill for the second time, and he muses sadly on how quickly people can get used to things – even killing. Pi throws the dorado to **Richard Parker** and blows the whistle as the tiger eats, hoping to show that he is the alpha who provides food. Night comes again and Pi returns to his raft.

Pi's realization that he can quickly get used to anything is very important. In this way Martel gradually lowers Pi's humanity, as Pi gets used to new levels of savagery as his desperation grows. Pi uses the same repetition and confidence that he used to "train" his classmates to call him "Pi."



CHAPTER 62

Pi wakes up before sunrise and sees Richard Parker pacing around, growing thirsty. Pi checks the solar stills and is excited to see that they have actually produced fresh water, as he hadn't expected them to work. Pi drinks from one of the bags with relish. He returns to the lifeboat and gives Richard Parker some flying fish and a bucket of the new water. Pi blows the whistle as the tiger drinks. The day passes uneventfully, and Pi realizes that it has been a week since the **Tsimtsum** sank.

Pi's sense of time and the outside world quickly fades in his new universe of constant struggle. In the microcosm of the lifeboat and Pi's tenuous hold on life, the smallest relief – like a full bag of fresh water – seems like a miracle. Pi uses the whistle as his "lion-tamer's whip," teaching Richard Parker to associate the noise with Pi's alpha-ness.



CHAPTER 63

Pi lists other famous shipwreck survivors, and says that he ended up surviving 227 days at sea. He says that keeping a busy routine was the key to his survival. He lists his daily chores and activities, which included feeding himself and **Richard Parker**, praying, and keeping his raft and equipment properly functioning. Pi also spends hours just observing Richard Parker. Pi soon gives up looking for ships on the horizon, and he comes to forget the passing of time, which he says helps him to survive. This makes all his memories blur together, however.

The longest surviving castaway (at the time of Life of Pi's publication) is Poon Lim, a Chinese sailor who lived on a raft for 133 days. The book's following chapters are brief episodes that break up the monotony of Pi's ordeal. Even though he has a routine of repetitive acts, Pi is still constantly on the verge of death, as there is no "routine" way of procuring food and water, even though he and the tiger must regularly eat and drink.



CHAPTER 64

Pi's clothes eventually disintegrate from the sun and salt, and he gets salt-water boils on his skin from being constantly wet. These burst painfully and Pi often cannot find a comfortable position to lie in.

The repetition of the same clothes and the same uncomfortable positions is a negative part of Pi's routine. In his nakedness another divide is broken down between Pi and Richard Parker.



CHAPTER 65

Pi pores over the survival manual, trying to decipher its advice about navigation, but he knows nothing about stars or currents. Pi eventually gives up, recognizing that he has no way to propel or steer the lifeboat anyway. Later he would learn that he drifted along the "Pacific equatorial counter-current."

Pi wisely gives up trying to control the things beyond his power, like hoping for rescue or trying to steer the lifeboat. The only things he can control are his own daily acts of survival and sanity.



CHAPTER 66

Pi keeps fishing, often using a gaff that he finds in the locker. He pulls the fish aboard and then kills them with the hatchet. He has lost all qualms about touching sea life or killing living creatures. He improves at hunting, and starts using the net as a lure to attract more fish. Some days he catches more fish than he can eat, but often there is nothing to catch. He sometimes catches turtles as well – he finds it is easy to grab them but difficult to pull them aboard, as they are so big. Pi sadly compares his new level of “savagery” to his earlier lifestyle of vegetarianism.

Pi quickly adjusts to killing sealife with impunity in order to feed himself and Richard Parker. He has even moved quickly from being a vegetarian to eating raw meat whenever he can. Pi has lost some of his “civilized” humanity in this, but his resourcefulness and ability to adapt show a different kind of humanity.

1 4

CHAPTER 67

Pi observes the underside of his raft and finds algae, shrimp, and crabs living on it. He eats some of these, but only the crabs taste good. Barnacles grow on the lifeboat, and Pi sucks the fluid out of them on occasion. These small diverse creatures offer another distraction from his predicament.

Pi’s desperate hunger becomes the norm, and he will eat anything and everything without qualms. Any kind of distraction also becomes entertainment for him.

1

CHAPTER 68

Pi survives on very little sleep, and usually only gets about an hour at a time. **Richard Parker**, on the other hand, sleeps all the time in various favorite positions.

With these short chapters Martel recreates the blurring of time that Pi experiences, a monotony of suffering only occasionally interrupted.

1 3

CHAPTER 69

On some nights Pi thinks he sees light in the distance, and he sends up a flare, but nothing ever comes of it. He recognizes that the area he can see is only a five-mile circle, so he has little hope of being rescued in the vast Pacific. The flares always smell like cumin to Pi, and they make him dream of Pondicherry.

Pi puts all his hope into reaching land instead of looking for a ship. In the brain smells can be closely related to strong memories, so the flares (which smell of cumin, a spice often used in Indian food) conjure up Pi’s childhood at Pondicherry.

1

CHAPTER 70

One day Pi catches a hawksbill sea turtle. It is too large and unwieldy to deal with on the raft, so he has to pull it onto the tarpaulin of the lifeboat. **Richard Parker** growls but allows it. The survival manual had suggested that turtle blood was good to drink, so Pi goes about the gruesome and difficult business of butchering the turtle. He drinks all the turtle’s blood and throws the rest to Richard Parker. Pi decides that he needs to “carve out” more territory for himself and train Richard Parker to allow him on the lifeboat more often.

As Pi and Richard Parker move physically closer – with Pi deciding to live on the lifeboat more in case he should have to venture onto the tiger’s territory in rough weather – Martel emphasizes in another way that Pi becomes more animal-like in his constant quest for survival. He has quickly gone from weeping over a flying fish to drinking all the blood from a sea turtle.

1 4

CHAPTER 71

Pi presents a list of training suggestions for taming a wild animal at sea. He suggests using a sea anchor to make the lifeboat roll in the way that makes the animal (**Richard Parker**) seasick. Then one should blow a whistle furiously and stomp, and when the animal steps onto your new territory, blow the whistle more and makes the lifeboat roll. The animal will then associate its nausea with the sound of the whistle. Pi suggests making the boat roll until the animal is vomiting, but then to stop. He says to repeat this routine until the animal learns to retreat at the whistle.

The lifeboat now becomes a sort of zoo enclosure or tiger cage, and Pi adapts his training methods to this environment. The essentials of animal taming that he outlined before are still the same, though – he shows confidence and takes dominative action, and repeats the lesson over and over until the animal learns.



CHAPTER 72

Pi fashions a shield from a turtle shell to protect him during these training sessions. On his first attempt **Richard Parker** charges him and knocks him into the water. Terrified, Pi swims to the raft and stays there in shock for a whole day and night. Pi explains that the tiger didn't really want to kill him, as animals generally prefer to avoid violence. Pi tries this again four times, and each time Richard Parker knocks him into the water. On the fifth try Pi backs down at the right time, and then begins making the tiger seasick. After this Richard Parker never strikes him again.

This is the only real physical contact Pi makes with Richard Parker, and it is a reminder of the tiger's awesome power. Richard Parker at least respects Pi's boundaries even as he lashes out, for Pi can always retreat to his raft. Richard Parker is only fighting to defend his own territory – Pi is the one seeking to shift the boundaries between their respective domains.



CHAPTER 73

Pi longs for a book, particularly a book of scripture. He takes notes in the little diary, but soon they grow scattered and lose track of dates or time. He mostly writes about practical things like the weather and **Richard Parker's** activities.

We have briefly seen Pi's love of reading through the scene where his mother offers him books. Pi especially wants a story that is worth revisiting over and over, like a religious scripture.



CHAPTER 74

Pi practices his usual religious rituals, but he adapts them to his situation. He has solitary Mass without bread or a priest, prays to Allah without knowing where Mecca is, and uses turtle meat as *prasad*, a Hindu offering. These rituals give Pi comfort, but he still finds his faith sorely tested by his suffering. Sometimes he places himself within creation by labelling the sky "God's ear" or **Richard Parker** "God's cat." Pi still has to battle regularly with despair, but always his faith overcomes.

Pi has become more animal-like in his diet and territorialism, but he also shows a very human adaptability in transferring his religious practices to the lifeboat. The repetition of constantly seeking food and water is a source of stress, but the repetition of religious ritual is a comfort to Pi. He shows the same resilience in his faith as in his will to live.



CHAPTER 75

On a day he estimates as his **mother's** birthday, Pi sings "Happy Birthday" for her out loud.

This is another small, sad way that Pi clings to his humanity and the outside world.



CHAPTER 76

Pi also cleans up after **Richard Parker**, as living among his own feces could make the tiger sick. Richard Parker starts trying to hide his feces from Pi, which shows that he recognizes Pi as dominant. After Richard Parker defecates, Pi holds the feces in his hand, looks about scornfully, and blows the whistle to show that he is an alpha. The tiger gets nervous at this. Pi says that both he and Richard Parker become constipated because of their high-protein diet and dehydration, so they only defecate once a month.

This chapter is contrasted with the tragic humanity of the one preceding it. Here Pi is acting totally as a wild animal does, using feces to show his dominance and prove to Richard Parker that he is the lifeboat's alpha.



CHAPTER 77

Pi reduces his rations as the biscuits get low, and he is constantly hungry. He fantasizes about Indian food, and comes to view raw fish and turtles as great feasts and delicacies. When the biscuits run out he views anything and everything as food. In a moment of desperation Pi tries to eat **Richard Parker's** feces, but he can immediately tell that there is no nutrition in it. Soon Pi's body starts to deteriorate from starvation.

As Pi's levels of desperation grow, so does his humanity sink lower. The creatures he once refused to kill now bring him great joy to eat raw. Pi's attempt to eat Richard Parker's feces is a low point at the start of his state of starvation.



CHAPTER 78

Pi describes the many different forms the sky and sea would take. He feels that he is "perpetually at the center of a circle," as the shape of his setting never changes. His life divides into opposites, as light is too blinding and darkness is claustrophobic, the day is too hot and the night is too cold. Pi's emotions also swing between extreme boredom and great terror. Pi describes his life as "a game with few pieces," where the elements are simple but the stakes are high.

Martel now moves from the sordid to the sublime. Pi's life has become one of extremes also in his contradicting animality and spirituality. One moment he is trying to eat tiger feces, and the next he is contemplating the sublime. In an endgame of chess there are few pieces left, so every consecutive move becomes more important to losing or winning. The simplicity of Pi's life has become like a religious mystic living in a desert.



CHAPTER 79

Sharks swim by the lifeboat every day – makos, blue sharks, and whitetips. The first shark Pi catches is a four-foot mako. He grabs its tail as it is swimming by and pulls it aboard, and immediately throws it into **Richard Parker's** territory. Richard Parker starts striking the shark with his paws, and he accidentally gets bitten. This reminds Pi that the tiger can make mistakes, and it isn't a perfect creature. Richard Parker roars in pain and rips the shark apart. After that Pi kills the sharks himself when he catches them.

As usual, Pi describes the first time he did something different – like catching a shark – and after that this new method of surviving is subsumed into his routine. Richard Parker is not God, though Pi has been viewing him as almost infallible in his power and grace.



CHAPTER 80

One day a huge dorado jumps into the boat while chasing flying fish. **Pi** picks up the stunned fish, rejoicing, but **Richard Parker** sees the dorado in Pi's hands and goes into an attack position. Pi fears he is about to be killed, but he stares Richard Parker straight in the eyes fiercely. After a few seconds the tiger turns away, defeated, and Pi throws him part of the dorado. After that Pi starts spending more time on the lifeboat and feels less afraid of Richard Parker.

Once again Pi's acceptance of inevitable death leads him to take a rash action that ends up saving him. Richard Parker is an "omega" animal, like those Pi described in his earlier explanation of lion-taming. The tiger is naturally nervous and susceptible to manipulation by an alpha.



CHAPTER 81

Pi admits that his survival is hard to believe, but he explains how he maintained his dominance over **Richard Parker**. He was the tiger's main source of food and water, and Richard Parker was used to this kind of treatment at the zoo. But the only proof of Pi's story is that he lived to tell it.

Pi has already buttressed the validity of his story by explaining his childhood at the zoo and the different ways he knows to train animals, but now he admits that many people might doubt him about his surviving the Pacific with a tiger.



CHAPTER 82

Pi gathers extra water from rain and the solar stills in bags, and he worries constantly that the bags will break. He adds seawater to **Richard Parker's** water, but even so they both barely survive. Whenever Pi catches food he always gives the tiger most of it. In his hunger Pi starts eating his food while it is still alive, and one day he notices that he is wolfing down the meat in the same manner as Richard Parker.

The self-aware adult Pi commented on his young self's crippling fear, and now he notes the savagery he once descended to. Martel continues to blur the line between human and animal.



CHAPTER 83

One day a huge storm comes and the waves turn into mountains. **Pi** is forced to leave the raft for the lifeboat, and he unrolls the tarpaulin and gets under it, lying flat on the bench farthest from **Richard Parker**. He gradually closes the tarpaulin over both himself and the tiger, as the life boat rides the huge waves with steep inclines and declines. Waves crash onto the tarpaulin and pummel Pi's body. The storm lasts for a day and a night.

The storm breaks down the boundaries between Pi and Richard Parker when they are both forced to take refuge under the tarpaulin—the mighty power of uncaring nature forces the living beings together. Once again Pi chooses to avoid a more immediate danger over the lingering threat of the tiger.



At dawn the storm has subsided and **Pi** emerges. He notices that the raft has disappeared, leaving only two oars and a life jacket, and he is devastated by this. None of Pi's water bags split, and **Richard Parker** is disgruntled but alive. Pi mends the torn tarpaulin, and then bails the water out of the boat and finds his precious orange training whistle.

Despite Pi's best efforts and his survival equipment, he is still totally at the mercy of nature. The storm is without reason or mercy, and for Pi it is a great setback. The loss of the raft means that Pi must truly enforce his territory on the lifeboat.



CHAPTER 84

One day **Pi** hears a noise and water crashes down on him from above, though the sky is cloudless. Pi looks over the edge and sees a whale pass by. He stares directly into the whale's eye, and then the whale sinks back down to the depths. After this Pi would see more whales, but none came so close as the first. Pi imagines them talking about him to each other.

Many of these episodes deal with Pi's attempts to communicate or relate with the outside world. He imagines the whales talking about him and trying to help him, and their majestic size and rarity make them seem like holy messengers.



Pi sometimes sees dolphins, but he only sees six birds during his whole time at sea. Two are distant albatrosses, which seem “supernatural” to him. Pi catches a masked booby that lands on the boat. He skins it and eats every edible part of the bird. The presence of the birds never mean that land is nearby, though.

The birds also seem heavenly to Pi, especially as they have the potential to herald nearby land, though none of them do (perhaps offering a purposeful contrast to the dove in the story of Noah’s Arc). The booby loses all its “supernaturalness” when Pi catches and eats it, though—survival comes first.

1 2

CHAPTER 85

One day there is a thunderstorm and lightning strikes the water near the lifeboat. Pi grows ecstatic at the sight and praises God for this “miracle,” but **Richard Parker** covers trembling on the floor of the boat. Pi remembers this storm and his feeling of exalted wonder as one of his happiest moments at sea.

Pi accepts this lightning strike as a sign from God, an act of communication with the religion that seems to have forsaken him. Pi lives on the edge of death every day, so the lightning inspires wonder in him instead of fear.

2

CHAPTER 86

On another day a ship appears on the horizon and Pi shouts with joy, sure that he will be rescued. The ship is a huge tanker, and it rapidly approaches the lifeboat. Pi yells and tries to shoot off a flare, but the ship passes silently by, almost running over Pi on its way. Its loud engines drown out his voice, and soon it is gone, disappearing over the horizon. Afterward Pi professes his love for **Richard Parker** and promises to find land.

This is the most poignant failed communication of Pi’s journey. He is so close to rescue, but he cannot make himself seen or heard by the people on the tanker. Pi responds to this disappointment with renewed love for Richard Parker instead of a fresh bout of despair.

1

CHAPTER 87

Pi develops a method of slightly asphyxiating himself, which creates a pleasing sensation. He takes a piece of cloth (which he calls his “dream rag”), wets it with seawater, and drapes it over his face as he rests. He has strange thoughts and dreams in this state, and time seems to pass by more swiftly.

The dream rag is another incarnation of Pi’s penchant for storytelling and religious faith – choosing a pleasant fiction over a cruel, boring reality.

3

CHAPTER 88

One day the lifeboat drifts into a mass of floating trash. Pi picks out a corked, empty wine bottle. There is a refrigerator, but all the food inside is horribly rotten. Pi writes a message about his predicament, seals it in the bottle, and throws it back into the water.

This is another attempt at communication with the outside world, although a pretty hopeless one. Pi does get a sign from humanity, but it is only trash and waste.

3

CHAPTER 89

The constant sun and salt continues to wear down everything on the lifeboat, including Pi and **Richard Parker**. They both become skeletally thin, and Pi starts sleeping away most of the day, often using his dream rag. Pi writes in his diary, convinced that he and the tiger will both die soon. He touches Richard Parker for the first time when the tiger is lying motionless in a brief rainstorm. After his last diary entry, “I will die today,” Pi runs out of ink.

Pi’s writing in the diary is a kind of self-communication, or a message for some future third party, but he is thwarted in this as well by running out of ink. Even Pi’s powerful will to live and heroic resourcefulness cannot hold out forever.

1 3

CHAPTER 90

One day **Richard Parker** seems to go blind. **Pi** throws a dorado at him and it smacks into the tiger's face. Pi pities Richard Parker and again feels that the end is near. Two days later Pi himself goes blind. He suffers through heat and hunger, barely clinging to life. He feels that he has failed as a zookeeper, as he can no longer care for Richard Parker.

Richard Parker has been giving Pi a reason to live, as the tiger would die without Pi as a source of regularly consistent food and water. The blindness has come from extreme dehydration and malnutrition. Pi has little hope of surviving now.

1

Pi feels death approaching and he bids a vocal farewell to **Richard Parker**. He hears a voice answer him. Surprised, Pi begins a conversation with the voice, sure that he is going mad. Pi and the voice start discussing food, and while Pi longs for vegetable dishes the voice only talks about meat, beef and brains and dishes that Pi finds disgusting. Pi finally assumes that he is hearing Richard Parker's voice.

Pi has failed in any attempt to communicate with the outside world, and now it seems that in his loneliness he has gone mad and started talking to the tiger. These scenes dip into surrealism and magical realism, and it is unclear whether Pi is actually hearing the French castaway from the start, or whether the whole thing is a hallucination.

1 3

Pi asks **Richard Parker** if he has ever killed a man, and the voice says that he has killed a man and a woman. Pi then realizes that the voice has a French accent, which doesn't make sense because Richard Parker is an Indian tiger. The voice disappears for a while and Pi falls into a daze.

Richard Parker could not have killed any humans, as he was taken to the zoo as a cub. We will later learn that the French cook of the Tsimtsum, who takes the hyena's place in Pi's human story, did kill and eat a man and a woman though.

Pi wakes up and hears the voice again, and he realizes that it doesn't belong to **Richard Parker** at all, but instead to another **castaway**. Pi shouts out his own name and the man answers. The man says that he has no food either, and reveals that he too is blind. They both start weeping. Pi offers to tell the man a story, but the man says he has no use for it. Pi starts rowing his boat towards the castaway.

Considering the alternate story we hear at the novel's end, this scene is especially surreal. The castaway does seem to be the French cook, although in the human story Pi has already killed the cook by this point. Unlike Pi, the castaway rejects hearing a story to distract himself from reality.

1 3

The **castaway** finally asks for **Pi's** story, which is about a banana falling to the ground and making someone feel better. The man wants to trade with Pi, and offers his leather boot. He describes it in great detail but then admits that there is no boot after all, as he ate it long ago. In a fit of affection for his fellow man Pi paddles his boat towards the castaway's, and finally they join their boats with a rope.

Pi's "story" is hardly a story at all, but in his state the ideas of fresh fruit and genuine happiness seem like outlandish fantasies. Pi's conversation with the castaway rambles on and implies that both have gone mad, or else that Pi is hallucinating the whole thing – even within the context of the possibly-fictional animal story.

1 3

Pi embraces the **castaway**, but the man suddenly tries to kill Pi, threatening to eat his flesh. As soon as the man touches the floor of the boat, however, **Richard Parker** kills him. Pi is traumatized by the castaway's dying scream, and the "terrible cost" of Richard Parker, which was that Pi should live at the expense of another man's life. Pi says that something died in him then that has never come back.

This moment is especially poignant if Richard Parker is in fact an aspect of Pi himself. The "terrible cost" of indulging this bestial part of his soul is that he is willing to kill others to save his own life. If the human story is the true one, then this scene could be Pi declaring his guilt over the cook's death without actually naming the deed. The story could be one of Pi reliving his sublimated guilt.

1 3 4

CHAPTER 91

Pi climbs aboard the **castaway's** boat and finds some fish and turtle meat and a few biscuit crumbs. Pi weeps for the dead man and his tears clear out his eyes a little. He rinses his eyes with seawater and his vision returns. Pi immediately sees the butchered body of the castaway on the floor of the lifeboat. Pi confesses that he later used one of the castaway's arms as fishing bait, and that in a delirium of hunger he ate some of the man's flesh. Pi says that he still prays for the man's soul daily.

This is similar to a Biblical scene in which the Apostle Paul has scales fall from his eyes when he becomes a Christian. For Pi the "enlightenment" moment is much more horrible. Even in his animal story Pi admits to cannibalism, so if the animal story is a fiction it does little to absolve Pi of his moral devolution. The need to survive drives him completely.



CHAPTER 92

Pi describes an "exceptional botanical discovery" that he makes. One day the boat approaches a low-lying island covered with trees. Pi assumes that the island is a mirage, but he decides to enjoy it while he can. He examines the island and sees that it has no soil, but is made entirely of densely packed algae. The boat pushes against the **algae island** and Pi decides to test its reality. He puts his foot through the water and steps on solid ground.

Pi's time on the algae island is another surreal episode, and the most extended chapter of Pi's journey. The algae island becomes a complex and often opaque symbol, first appearing as a kind of paradise for Pi. In its very strangeness the island always seems unreal, despite its promise of food and shelter.



Pi finally believes that the **island** is not a hallucination, and he becomes delirious with joy. He eats some of the algae and finds that its inner tubes contain fresh water. Pi eats his fill and then drags himself to the nearest tree, as he is too weak to walk. Pi praises God. **Richard Parker** finally leaps from the lifeboat as well and disappears among the trees.

The algae island often symbolizes a kind of easy, shallow faith or easy survival that tempts Pi away from his journey, whether religious or simple fantasy. The island seems too good to be true at first, but then it rewards Pi with immediate gratification when he steps on firm ground.



Pi spends the day in bliss, but he returns to his "territory" on the lifeboat at night. Later **Richard Parker** returns to the lifeboat as well. Pi has a very restful sleep, and the next morning he feels stronger. Pi slowly relearns to walk, falling onto the soft algae and eating his fill of it. Days pass, and Pi and Richard Parker always spend the night on the lifeboat.

At first Pi (and perhaps Richard Parker as well) returns to the lifeboat at night out of habit, and to keep up his territory. Whether mirage, miracle, or warning, the island offers a welcome reprieve from Pi's struggle to survive.



Richard Parker returns to his former strength and speed, and Pi's fear of him returns when he bursts out of the trees one night. The tiger is still stopped by the sound of the whistle, however, and he leaps into the ocean and swims to his part of the lifeboat.

Richard Parker also has a chance to return to his former self, which brings new danger to Pi, as the tiger now has opportunities to feed and water himself without an alpha.



A few days later **Pi** decides to explore the **island**. It seems large and rises to about sixty feet at its highest point. It consists entirely of algae, with hundreds of evenly spaced ponds at its center. The island is inhabited by hundreds of thousands of meerkats. The meerkats are totally docile and unafraid of Pi. Pi makes his way through their crowds and examines one of the ponds, which seems bottomless.

The algae island keeps growing stranger and more surreal. Its details are so mysterious that it seems like it must be a hallucination or a made-up story, but at the same time Pi's attention to detail in describing this place suggests that it may be a reality.



The meerkats suddenly start diving into a nearby pond and pulling out large fish. The fish are already dead, but freshly so, and **Pi** is mystified by this. He takes a sip of the water and finds that it is fresh. The fish are ocean fish, so their deaths are explained by the fresh water, but Pi wonders how they got into the pond. He decides that the algae absorbs the salt from the seawater.

If the algae island is a symbol of a treacherous, shallow religious faith or mirage, then the meerkats are perhaps the followers who blindly buy into its promises. They take the material rewards of the island (the fish) and ignore its more sinister aspects, which we will see later.



Suddenly the meerkats all turn and **Pi** sees **Richard Parker** in the distance, killing hundreds of them at his leisure. They don't even run away, and the tiger kills far more than he could ever eat. The next morning Pi cleans the lifeboat of its human and animal remains.

After such a long period of starvation, the tiger's (or Pi's) hunting instinct runs wild. Pi cleans the lifeboat and makes it a nicer place to live, but he also removes any proof of his story's truth or the ordeals he has faced and things he has done to survive.

1 4

More days pass and **Pi** feels all his aches and pains easing. A storm hits the island while he is ashore, but the island absorbs all the waves with barely a tremor. Pi wonders at the unique ecosystem of the island, which contains no insects or any living creature except meerkats, and no plants except for the algae and the trees. Pi then discovers that the trees are actually part of the algae itself. Pi guesses that the island is not rooted to the earth, but is a huge free-floating organism.

As with Pi and Richard Parker on the lifeboat, the algae island also exists as a "game with few pieces," a total ecosystem made up only of algae and meerkats. The island easily weathers a storm like the one that nearly killed Pi before, and so it seems even more paradisaical and attractive as a kind of faith or refuge.

1

One day **Pi** is exploring the forest when he comes across **Richard Parker**. Afterwards he takes up the taming process again, and he soon trains the tiger to jump through a hoop of branches. Pi decides to stop spending the night on the boat, and he climbs into a tree to sleep.

Richard Parker has been Pi's constant companion and danger, the test of his faith, resourcefulness, and love, so it is a bad sign that on the island Pi is able to easily train the tiger to jump through hoops. There is something soul-crushing about this for him, as the wild tiger suddenly seems less wild.

4

Just as **Pi** makes his "bed" all the multitudes of meerkats abandon the plain and climb into the trees. They swarm over Pi, totally covering him. Then they all fall asleep too. The next morning they immediately return to the ground. Pi starts sleeping in the tree every night, using meerkats as a blanket and pillow.

The meerkats know about the island's sinister nature, but they (like Pi is tempted to) ignore this part and accept the instant gratification of the island's food, shelter, and comfort.

2

One night **Pi** wakes up and sees more dead fish floating up in one of the ponds, but none of the meerkats descend from the trees. Then the fish all disappear. Pi finds something sinister about the situation and wonders more about the nature of the island. He finds his answer days later, when he is exploring the forest.

Pi is tempted to stay on the island forever, but when he starts to notice something is amiss he chooses to seek the truth instead of purposefully blinding himself to the island's nature.

1 2

Pi finds a tree that seems to have fruit. He climbs it and picks one, noticing how light it is. He peels away its many layers, and the adult Pi interrupts to wish that he had never found that tree or examined its fruit too closely. Back in the story, Pi reaches the center of the fruit and finds that it is a human tooth. Horrified, he picks more fruit and finds that they are all teeth.

This is the "loss of innocence" moment for the algae island, and parallels the scene in the Biblical Garden of Eden. The island also seems like a paradise at first, but when Pi eats of the "forbidden fruit" he gains awful knowledge, and must leave the Garden.

2

Pi begins to understand the awful truth about the island, and he tests his theory that night. He drops one of the meerkats from the tree and watches it squeak in pain and immediately climb back up. Then Pi climbs down and touches his feet to the algae. He immediately experiences a burning pain.

Pi continues to seek the truth instead of giving in to the easier path and staying on the island. The meerkats (or the people they represent) clearly know about the island's dangerous nature, but they avoid it every night and continue to live in ease on the island.

1

Pi realizes that the **island** is carnivorous. The algae becomes acidic and deadly at night, digesting the ocean fish it has lured into its ponds. Pi realizes that some castaway before him had lived on this island, and it eventually devoured him or her, leaving only teeth behind. Pi feels angry and betrayed by the true nature of the seemingly paradisaical island.

The island comes together as a symbol of false faith or the temptations of giving into despair and fantasy. These two are related, as they both involve avoiding harsh reality to indulge in something evil but comfortable.

1 2

The next morning Pi resolves to leave the **algae island**. He would prefer to die searching for land and other humans instead of living a “half-life of physical comfort and spiritual death” on the carnivorous island. Pi fills the lifeboat with dead fish, meerkats, and algae, and he waits for **Richard Parker** to come aboard at night to before pushing off.

Pi is not against “bettering” reality through story or religious faith, but he still seeks the kernel of truth in reality, and then tries to make it more beautiful or moving—or even more true—in story. Pi chooses the hard but righteous path, refusing to give in to “spiritual death” and hallucinations of despair. Though he is depressed to return to his struggle, his exit from the algae island is a sign that he still has hope of returning to humanity and himself.

1 2 3 4

CHAPTER 93

Pi vaguely describes the rest of his ordeal, which is a constant trial of endurance and depression. In his suffering his mind turns to God and faith.

The climax of Pi’s ordeal comes suddenly and almost randomly, after this vague, dreamlike passage of time.

1 2 3

CHAPTER 94

One day the lifeboat washes ashore on a Mexican beach, but Pi is so weak that he can barely believe it or experience happiness. He guides the lifeboat through the breakers and then carefully lets himself down into the shallow surf.

Richard Parker leaps over his head and walks slowly and clumsily down the beach. Pi is sure that the tiger will at least look back and acknowledge him, but instead Richard Parker disappears into the jungle without a backward glance.

Pi’s salvation is anticlimactic, but fitting for the chaotic, meaningless movements of the ocean and fate. Pi has reached land at last, but he still has one last failure to communicate – Richard Parker leaves without saying goodbye. We realize how invested we are in Richard Parker as a character because this slight seems so tragic and callous, though it is also a reminder that the tiger is still a wild animal. (Though this scene might also be read as Pi’s animal will to survive, as embodied by Richard Parker, is no longer necessary once he reaches land).

1 3

Pi crawls ashore and sprawls in the sand, feeling totally alone now that even **Richard Parker** has left him forever. A few hours later some people find him and carry him away, speaking in a language Pi doesn’t understand. Pi starts to weep, not out of joy but because Richard Parker left him without saying goodbye.

Pi’s universe has consisted only of Richard Parker for so long that the tiger’s disappearance creates a stronger emotion in him than the rescue he has longed for for months. Even back in the world of humans, Pi is still unable to communicate with his rescuers.

1 3

Pi says that this “bungled goodbye” with **Richard Parker** has pained him all his life, and he wishes that he had at least thanked the tiger before the boat touched land. Pi says that things should conclude properly, and as an aside he asks the **author** to tell his tale in exactly one hundred chapters. Pi says that the one thing he hates about his nickname is that the number pi runs on forever. Without a conclusion one can never let go of a painful memory.

If Richard Parker is actually the animalistic, violent side of Pi’s nature, then the tiger’s abrupt disappearance shows how thoroughly Pi has cut off this side of his soul once he reaches civilization. Pi wants conclusions, and good stories provide conclusions, but life does not always do the same. Martel returns to the idea of symmetry and geometric harmony, as Pi’s nickname is contrasted with his story, which the author has indeed told in 100 chapters.

3 4

Pi's rescuers take him to their village and bathe and feed him, and the next day a police car takes him to a hospital. He speaks vaguely of the time following this rescue, where he was treated kindly by doctors and then sent to a foster home in Canada. From there he entered the University of Toronto. Pi offers his thanks to all the people who helped him and ends his tale.

The tiger's disappearance, though painful, shows that Richard Parker (if he is a part of Pi) only had to exist on the lifeboat, where Pi would do anything to survive. Now that he is back among civilization, Pi has a chance to become fully human again and achieve the "happy ending" that the author observed. Pi's "conclusion" comes about because of the disappearance of Richard Parker.



CHAPTER 95

The **author** returns to describe the nature of the next section. It is a transcript of a conversation between **Pi** and two officials from the Maritime Department of the Japanese Ministry of Transport. These officials, whose names were **Mr. Tomohiro Okamoto** and **Mr. Atsuro Chiba**, were in California on unrelated business when they were called to Mexico and instructed to interview the lone survivor of the **Tsimtsum**, to find out more about why the ship sank.

Martel steps abruptly out of the sad story we have grown invested in, and reminds us of the "nonfiction" framework of the novel. In this short final section Martel will question the idea of "truth" in storytelling and the impossibility of properly communicating an unknowable reality.



The officials misread the map as they were driving through Mexico, so they ended up lost and then their car broke down. They had more troubles finding a mechanic, and they finally reached their destination, Tomatlán, after travelling without sleep for forty-one hours. They then interviewed **Pi** in English and taped the conversation. The **author** has since received a copy of this tape and **Mr. Okamoto's** final report.

Okamoto is the senior official and the principal interviewer, while Chiba seems naïve and bumbling. Even though they barely appear, Martel still manages to give these characters some personality. Martel keeps up the fiction of his nonfiction reporting.



CHAPTER 96

The narrative now consists of verbatim segments of this interview, with the Japanese portions translated and in a different font. The interview begins, and **Mr. Okamoto** gives the date as February 19th, 1978. **Mr. Chiba** is a junior official, and Okamoto gives him advice in Japanese in between talking to **Pi**. They greet Pi and discuss their trip. The officials say that they had a nice trip, and Pi says that he had a horrible trip. Pi says he is hungry, and the officials give him a cookie. They ask him to tell his story.

Martel throws in more seemingly meaningless details to lend credibility and a journalistic feeling to his story. This is similar to Pi's intricate description of the algae island or his training of Richard Parker (if these were indeed a fiction made up by Pi, either purposefully or as a kind of subconscious self-protection). Pi already seems detached from his horrible ordeal and is almost making jokes about it.



CHAPTER 97

The chapter is only two words long: "The story."

We must assume Pi told the interviewers everything we have read about in Part Two.



CHAPTER 98

Okamoto and **Chiba** tell **Pi** that his story is interesting, but they express their disbelief to each other in Japanese. Pi asks for another cookie, and Chiba notes that Pi hasn't been eating the cookies but has been storing them under his bedsheet. Okamoto says to just humor him, and he tells Pi that they will be back in a few minutes.

Pi has reacted to his new "abundance" of food by stocking up in everything, as he is still in survival mode. The officials act like the religious agnostics whom Pi dislikes, demanding "dry, yeastless factuality" instead of Pi's fascinating but improbable story.



CHAPTER 99

The interviewers return and tell **Pi** that they don't believe his story. As an example of its impossibility, they claim that bananas don't float. Pi challenges this and pulls two bananas from under his bedsheet for them to test.

Okamoto fills the sink and puts the bananas in, and they do float. Okamoto responds to this by challenging the existence of the **algae island**.

Pi says that they don't believe in the **island** just because they haven't seen it, but **Okamoto** claims that it is "botanically impossible." **Chiba** interrupts that he has an uncle who is a botanist and bonsai master. Pi says that bonsai trees, "three-hundred-year-old trees that are two feet tall that you can carry in your arms," also must be fictional because they too seem botanically impossible.

Okamoto moves on, challenging **Pi** about **Richard Parker**. He says that no one has spotted a tiger in the area lately. Pi mentions the panther that escaped the Zurich Zoo. Okamoto says how unlikely it would be that Pi could have survived so long with such an "incredibly dangerous wild animal."

The interviewers start by nitpicking at details, which leads to some humorous scenes and Pi defending his story in its every aspect. Eventually they get around to the larger idea here, which is about learning to process and improve an unbearable reality through storytelling.



Pi cleverly turns Okamoto's criticism against him, and the inexperienced Chiba unwittingly helps Pi along. In his defense Pi now starts to refer to his story in a manner similar to a religious believer, defending the "unseen" against arguments of reason.



We now see that Pi's digressions and musings of Part One have not only foreshadowed his training of Richard Parker, but also acted as supports and precedents for the believability of his animal story.



Pi responds that animals are just as afraid of humans as we are of them. He gives more examples of wild animals living undetected in big cities, and says that the idea of finding a tiger in a jungle is laughable. Pi then questions the interviewers – he asks them how they live if they demand "believability" of everything. He asks if they believe in love or in God, as these things also seem improbable.

Chiba becomes distracted by **Pi's** responses and **Okamoto** berates him in Japanese, asking him to help with the situation. The officials finally give up challenging **Pi's** story and return to their real directive, which is finding out why the **Tsimtsum** sank.

Pi is unwilling to give up discussing his story, however, so **Okamoto** asks him about the blind **Frenchman** he met. Okamoto says that the cook aboard the **Tsimtsum** was also French. Pi asks the interviewers to explain the meerkat bones in the lifeboat, but the officials say that the bones are unidentifiable. They return to questions about the ship, and Pi reminds them that he lost his whole family in the shipwreck.

Pi repeats his phrasing from Part One almost exactly in describing the "laughability" of finding a tiger in a Mexican jungle, when so many wild animals effectively hide in big cities. Pi now expands his survival story to become a more obvious metaphor for religious faith and the power of fiction.



The ship's details seem unimportant to the story, but their very unimportance contributes to the religious metaphor – Pi's journey as a castaway is not professionally important to the officials, so they must make a personal decision in believing or disbelieving his story.



The reader has been totally invested in Pi's narrative up to this point, but now its implausibility suddenly becomes very likely. The meerkat bones are unidentifiable and Pi cleaned out the rest of the remains, so the truth about Pi's ordeal is basically unknowable and unprovable – just like the existence of God.



The officials are embarrassed by this, and **Pi** offers them cookies. He then asks them if they liked his story. The officials say that they did like it and that they will remember it for a long time, but they want to know what really happened. Pi offers to tell them “another story.” The officials ask him for facts, not a story, but Pi replies that life itself is always a story. He finally agrees to tell a believable story, to give in to “dry, yeastless factuality” and tell a story without exotic animals in it.

Pi pauses for a while and then begins a new account of his experience. In this second story, the four survivors on the lifeboat are Pi, his **mother** (who floated to safety on some bananas), the **French cook**, and a **Chinese sailor**. Pi describes the cook as greedy and cruel, and says that he immediately ate all the flies and the one rat on the boat. The sailor was young, exotic, and beautiful, but he spoke only Chinese and had broken his leg jumping into the lifeboat.

Pi’s mother tended to the wounded **sailor** but his broken leg got worse, growing black and bloated. The **cook** eventually convinced the others that they had to cut off the sailor’s leg to save his life. They held down the sailor while the cook sawed off the leg. The sailor remained calm and quiet throughout it all, and clung to life even after the ordeal.

This scene condenses many of the novel’s themes and is a kind of thesis statement for Martel. The officials admit that the animal story is more beautiful and compelling, but they are still wedded to “factuality.” Pi states Martel’s idea that true reality is inherently impossible to communicate, so any kind of “truth-telling” is in fact a story of some kind. The officials, like Pi’s agnostics, just want a story that they can pretend is totally practical and true.

1 2 3 4

We are suddenly pulled out of the world we had been sucked into and invested in – the lifeboat of animals – and made to question the truth of Pi’s story. Of course the whole novel is fiction, but within that fiction we as readers like to trust the story we are reading and temporarily accept it as reality, or at least as a vehicle of some emotional or aesthetic truth. The sudden unreliability of that truth then creates a very interesting effect, which Martel exploits.

1 3

This second story does indeed seem more believable, but Pi acts like he is making it up in the same way that he (possibly) did the first story. In this “human story,” Pi’s mother corresponds with Orange Juice, the sailor with the zebra, and the cook with the hyena.

1 3

The next day **Pi** went to throw the severed leg overboard, but the **cook** stopped him. He said the leg was for bait, and that “that was the whole point.” At this **Pi’s mother** realized that the cook tricked them into cutting off the **sailor’s** leg. The cook looked guilty but said that they needed food.

Pi’s mother screamed at the **cook** and then discovered that he had been stealing rations. Pi admitted that he ate some of the food too when the cook offered it to him. Pi’s mother turned away from him and Pi apologized, weeping. Two weeks had passed by that point.

The **sailor** died peacefully and the **cook** immediately butchered him, despite **Pi’s mother’s** protests. The cook used some of the flesh as bait and ate the rest. After that the cook occupied one end of the lifeboat and Pi and his mother occupied the other. They couldn’t ignore the cook, though, as he was the best at fishing and surviving. Pi and his mother refused to eat any of the sailor’s flesh, but they did eat the fish the cook caught, overcoming their vegetarianism.

Pi’s animal story remains believable because the animals in it did not act as anthropomorphized beasts, but as real wild animals might act in such a situation. The hyena seemed cruel, but in the reality of the animal story it was just obeying its instincts.

1 3

The whole of the human story is only the first part of the animal story, implying that the rest of Pi’s ordeal (after the cook’s death) might have consisted of the hallucinatory processing of horrible reality and the creation of a “better story,” perhaps as a means of survival in his isolation.

1 3

In this human story Pi himself is also less resourceful and strong. Pi steals rations that the cook offers him, and it is the cook who has all the good ideas about surviving, doing most of the fishing and work on the lifeboat. In both stories Pi has to give up his vegetarianism, but compared to his other sacrifices this is a small price to pay to survive. There is still a kind of territory division on the lifeboat even in the human version.

1 2 3 4

After a while **Pi** and his **mother** grew more friendly with the **cook**, as he helped them to survive. One day when they were all weak with hunger they tried to bring a turtle aboard and lost it because of Pi. The cook hit Pi, and Pi's mother hit the cook. She pushed Pi towards the raft and he jumped overboard. The two adults started to fight, and the cook killed Pi's mother with a knife as Pi watched from the raft. The cook cut off her head and threw it to Pi.

Orange Juice's death becomes all the more tragic in retrospect, and the human story is now far more horrible than the animal version, which is interesting as the humans are acting not so differently from the animals. Again Pi is a weak link on the lifeboat instead of the resourceful, adaptable "alpha" he was in the animal story.



The **cook** butchered **Pi's mother** and ate some of her flesh. Pi stayed on the raft for a day and a night, and neither he nor the cook spoke. Then Pi climbed aboard the lifeboat. The cook silently gave him a turtle to eat, and then Pi fought with the cook and killed him with the knife. Pi says that the cook seemed to give up, as he recognized that he had crossed a line, "even by his bestial standards."

This is the moment when Richard Parker appeared in the animal story, revealing himself as the violent side of Pi's soul that will do anything to survive. If the human story is the "true" one, then Pi dealt with the murder and cannibalism he committed by creating the alternate personality of the tiger, setting up a boundary within his soul to let the "Pi" part remain sane and human.



Pi cut up the **cook** and ate his heart, liver, and pieces of his flesh. He says the heart was delicious. Pi says that the cook was an evil man, but he met with evil in Pi himself. Of the rest of his journey Pi only says "Solitude began. I turned to God. I survived." There is a long silence, and Pi asks the officials if this second story is better and more believable.

Pi describes these horrors in an almost detached way, which seems to imply either that he is making up this human story or has decided to put all his faith in the animal story as a way of remaining sane. He explains the majority of the animal story – the time after the hyena's death – with just these three short phrases.



Okamoto and **Chiba** are horrified by this story, but they note the parallels between **Pi's** two tales – the **zebra** corresponds with the **Chinese sailor**, the **hyena** with the **cook**, **Orange Juice** with **Pi's mother**, and **Richard Parker** with Pi himself. Chiba asks Okamoto about the meerkats and the **algae island**, but Okamoto only says that he doesn't know what to think.

The officials (or Okamoto at least) now seem to recognize that this is no ordinary interview, but in fact a test of their own faith and beliefs about life. As readers, we are just as shocked as the interviewers are by this alternate account.



The officials ask **Pi** some technical questions about the nature of the **Tsimtsum's** sinking. Pi says that the crew was unfriendly and often drunk, but he can give little information to solve the mystery of the disaster. In the end the officials give up, recognizing that the truth is lost forever.

While they are processing these stories the officials turn to their actual assignment, which is finding out why the Tsimtsum sank. They conclude that the reason for its sinking is unknowable (just like the existence of God, and therefore God's contraction in order to create the world), so the truth of Pi's stories (and his self-discovery through his journey, his self-creation) becomes a personal matter now, and no longer part of their job.



Before the officials leave **Pi** asks them which of his two stories they preferred. He reminds them that neither story explains the sinking of the **Tsimtsum**, and neither really matters for the officials' business. **Okamoto** and **Chiba** both agree that the animal story is the "better story." Pi responds with "And so it goes with God," and then he starts to cry. The officials thank Pi and wish him well, promising to look out for **Richard Parker** on their drive. Pi gives them some cookies and the interview ends.

This final scene is the climax of the novel's themes, as Pi fully draws the parallel between his survival stories and his religious faith. Martel leaves it unclear which of Pi's accounts is the factual truth, but he comes down clearly on the side of storytelling as its own truth – the animal story is moving, challenging, and memorable, while the human story inspires only horror, so whatever the "dry, yeastless factuality" is, the animal story is "the better story." And for Pi, a universe with God in it is a better universe, no matter what the unknowable facts are.



CHAPTER 100

The **author** then gives **Okamoto's** report of the interview. Okamoto says that the **Tsimtsum** possibly sank because of an engine problem, but he admits that the cause of the shipwreck is unknowable. He then adds a personal note about **Pi**, saying that his ordeal at sea was unique and astonishing. He says that Pi's story is totally unparalleled, as few castaways have survived as long as he did, and none of them did so "in the company of an adult Bengal tiger."

This final report adds dimension and poignancy to Okamoto's character, as the official chooses to believe Pi's animal story as the "better" truth despite his natural skepticism, and so it is the animal version that is marked down in the official documents. Martel ends on this slightly hopeful note after crushing our perception of truth, suggesting that choosing "the better story" is just as important as finding out the facts of reality.



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