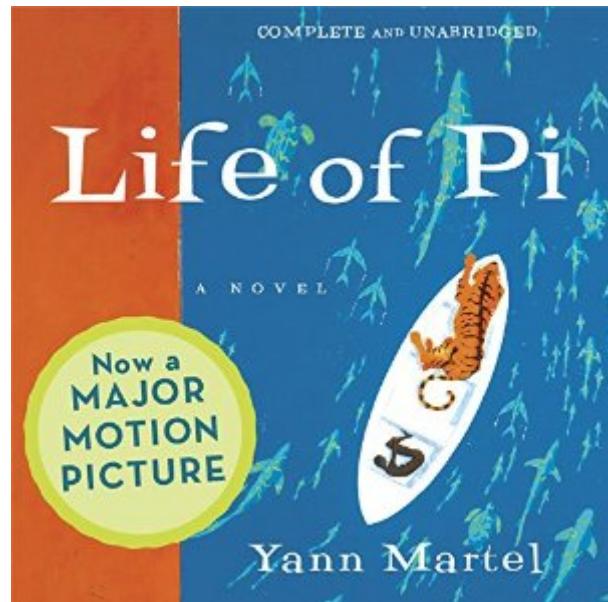


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# Life Of Pi



## **Synopsis**

The son of a zookeeper, Pi Patel has an encyclopedic knowledge of animal behavior and a fervent love of stories. When Pi is sixteen, his family emigrates from India to North America aboard a Japanese cargo ship, along with their zoo animals bound for new homes. The ship sinks. Pi finds himself alone in a lifeboat, his only companions a hyena, an orangutan, a wounded zebra, and Richard Parker, a 450-pound Bengal tiger. Soon the tiger has dispatched all but Pi, whose fear, knowledge, and cunning allow him to coexist with Richard Parker for 227 days while lost at sea. When they finally reach the coast of Mexico, Richard Parker flees to the jungle, never to be seen again. The Japanese authorities who interrogate Pi refuse to believe his story and press him to tell them "the truth." After hours of coercion, Pi tells a second story, a story much less fantastical, much more conventional--but is it more true?

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

With over 1250 reviews already registered for LIFE OF PI, I first thought there could be nothing more to say about this marvelous novel. But after scanning the most recent 100 reviews, I began to wonder what book many of those reviewers had read. Had I relied on 98 of those reviews, I would have expected a far different book than the one I actually read. Let's begin with what LIFE OF PI isn't. It's not a Man against Nature survival story. It's not a story about zoos or wild animals or animal husbandry. It's not ROBINSON CRUSOE or SWISS FAMILY ROBINSON. It's not a literary version of CASTAWAY or OPEN WATER, and it's not a "triumph against all odds, happily ever

after" rescue story. To classify it as such would be like classifying THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA as a story about a poor fisherman or MOBY DICK as a sea story. Or THE TRIAL as a courtroom drama, THE PLAGUE as a story of an epidemic, HEART OF DARKNESS as a story about slavery, or ANIMAL FARM as an animal adventure. Martel's story line is already well-known: a fifteen-year-old boy, the son of a zookeeper in Pondicherry, India survives a shipwreck several days out of Manila. He is the lone human survivor, but his lifeboat is occupied by a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker, an injured zebra, a hyena, and an orangutan. In relatively short order and true Darwinian fashion, their numbers are reduced to just two: the boy Piscene Molitor Patel, and the tiger, Richard Parker. By dint of his zoo exposure and a fortuitously positioned tarpaulin, Pi (as he is called) manages to establish his own territory on the lifeboat and even gains alpha dominance over Richard Parker.

I passed this book up perhaps dozens of times in the bookstore, before finally relenting. From the description on the back of the dust jacket, it just did not seem like a story that would interest me. Plus, several of the review snippets on the book -- essentially praising the author for making a book with such a spare story into a great novel -- seemed to me a little like damning with faint praise. As it turns out, I was half right. I didn't like the story very much. Well, actually, I very much liked the first hundred pages or so, which took place on land and described our protagonist; a young Indian son-of-a-zookeeper. But I found the story thereafter that took place at sea to be a little too slowly paced for my tastes. And some of the gore -- particularly the detailed discussion of the butchering of various sea fish and animals -- was too repetitive and, well, gross. But, it turns out, the story of a boy on a boat with a tiger is not really what the novel is "about" at all. Instead, it's a novel that uses its backstory to ask a straightforward question: Do we need stories and fables to believe in God? (SPOILERS follow.) At the end of this novel, we are confronted squarely with enduring questions about the limits of faith. How can we believe in God when a wonderful, kind, vegan, pious boy endures tragedy for no good reason? How can that boy continue to believe in God when he witnesses, first hand, how human nature emerges in its cruellest form as 4 castaways on a life boat essentially turn into animals in less than 24 hours. How can he believe in God when he watches helplessly as his mother is brutally murdered for no discernable reason?

That Pi is the nickname of the main character and narrator of this tale is only the first little tidbit to digest in this delicious smorgasbord of a novel. Pi the number, you see, goes on to infinity, so Pi the person, it can be reasonably assumed, does the same. But there's so much more than this, it's

almost impossible to get your mind around it. As everybody already knows, the plot has to do with Pi, a sixteen-year old Indian boy who practices three religions, and who gets shipwrecked in the Pacific Ocean on the way to Canada with his emigrant family. He is the sole human survivor, but unfortunately--or fortunately as it turns out--not the sole survivor. On the lifeboat with him are a 450 pound tiger and several other animals, and within a day or so, a 450 pound tiger. The bulk of the novel has to do with the story of his survival, not only from the catastrophic wreck, but from the almost surreal horror of being confined in a ridiculously small space with one of the most dangerous animals on the earth. For the rich thematic nature of this novel come into bloom, this aspect of the story must be entirely believable, and I'm here to tell you, it is. This is no Tom Robbins nonsense in which all living things get along simply because they are too cool for reality, this is nail-bitingly realistic, and nothing is left out. In fact, if you're in this for the pure adventure of it, you can't do much better. Young Pi has a lot of things to think about. First, there is the fact that his family has suddenly disappeared forever. Then, there is the food and water problem. Finally, there is, well, the tiger problem. Should he try to kill it? How? With a knife, a rope, a flare gun? What if he only wounds it? Can he make it go away? Can he somehow live with it?

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