Pi Patel, affectionately known as Pi, grows up in Pondicherry, India, named after a Parisian swimming pool by his swimming enthusiast uncle, Mamaji. Pi's childhood is a blend of curiosity and introspection, marked by his fascination with religion and zoology. His name, often mispronounced as "Pissing," becomes a source of ridicule, prompting him to adopt the mathematical symbol "Pi" as his nickname. This change signifies his desire for identity and acceptance, setting the stage for his journey of self-discovery and survival.

Pi's father runs the Pondicherry Zoo, a vibrant ecosystem where Pi learns about the intricacies of animal behavior and the responsibilities of zookeeping. The zoo, with its diverse inhabitants, becomes a classroom for Pi, teaching him about the natural world and the dangers of anthropomorphizing animals. His father's lessons emphasize the importance of understanding animals' true nature, a knowledge that later becomes crucial for Pi's survival. The zoo's unique pairings, like a rhinoceros and a goat, reflect the unexpected bonds that can form in the animal kingdom.

Pi's spiritual journey is marked by his simultaneous practice of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, much to the bewilderment of his family and local religious leaders. He finds beauty and truth in each faith, believing they all lead to God. This exploration culminates in a humorous yet tense encounter on the Pondicherry esplanade, where religious leaders confront Pi's parents about his unconventional practices. Pi's devotion transcends traditional boundaries, showcasing his open-mindedness and quest for spiritual understanding.

Political unrest in India prompts Pi's father to sell the zoo and move the family to Canada, seeking a better future. The zoo's animals are sold to various zoos worldwide, and the family embarks on their journey aboard the Tsimtsum, a Japanese cargo ship. Pi is torn between excitement and apprehension, leaving behind a land rich with memories. This departure marks a new chapter filled with uncertainty and hope, setting the stage for the life-altering events that follow.

The Tsimtsum sinks in the Pacific Ocean, leaving Pi stranded on a lifeboat with a zebra, a hyena, an orangutan, and a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. The shipwreck is a traumatic event, thrusting Pi into a harsh reality where survival becomes paramount. The lifeboat becomes a microcosm of life and death, with the animals' interactions reflecting nature's brutal laws. Pi's knowledge of animal behavior and his faith become vital as he navigates this perilous situation, clinging to hope and the will to survive.

Stranded with Richard Parker, Pi faces the brutal realities of survival. As resources dwindle, his struggle becomes a test of endurance and morality. He battles fear and hunger, devising plans to coexist with the tiger. The lifeboat becomes a stage for a grim dance of life and death, where Pi's faith and ingenuity are his only allies. The ocean's harshness and the tiger's presence force Pi to confront his humanity, leading to choices that blur the lines between man and beast.

Pi discovers a mysterious floating island teeming with meerkats and lush vegetation. Initially, it seems a sanctuary, providing food and fresh water. However, the island harbors a dark secret: it is carnivorous, digesting anything that remains on it overnight. This revelation shatters Pi's hope of a safe haven, forcing him to leave. The experience underscores the theme of illusion versus reality, as Pi learns that not everything that appears to be salvation is truly safe.

To survive, Pi must assert dominance over Richard Parker. Through calculated actions, including the use of a whistle and strategic feeding, Pi establishes himself as the alpha. This relationship becomes a delicate balance of fear and respect, with Pi's survival hinging on his ability to maintain control. The process of taming the tiger reflects Pi's inner journey, as he learns to master his fears and assert his will to live.

After 227 days at sea, Pi and Richard Parker reach the shores of Mexico. As Pi collapses on the beach, Richard Parker disappears into the jungle without a backward glance. This abrupt farewell leaves Pi with a sense of incompleteness, highlighting the profound bond formed between them. The tiger's departure symbolizes the end of Pi's ordeal and the beginning of a new chapter, yet it also underscores the transient nature of their relationship and the unresolved emotions Pi carries forward.