

Catch Me if You Can: The True Story of a Real Fake Study Guide

Catch Me if You Can: The True Story of a Real Fake by Frank Abagnale

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Plot Summary

Published in 2002, *Catch Me if You Can: The True Story of a Real Fake* is the autobiographical life story of Frank W. Abagnale. Originally published in 1980, Frank's story became a movie in 2002. *Catch Me if You Can*, directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Leonardo DiCaprio is a slightly fictionalized version of Frank Abagnale's incredible six-year crime spree. Yet, the book is as exciting and fast-paced as the movie, and the book has the added benefit of telling the story in Frank's own voice. This benefits the story because Frank's voice is the voice of one of the world's most infamous con men and swindlers. Frank's literary prose is every bit as convincing as the honeyed lies and stories he sells his unsuspecting victims. The reader will find him or herself so drawn into Frank's point of view that he or she will actually be cheering him on and rooting for the success of his swindles.

It is possible to root for Frank Abagnale only because Frank has, in subsequent years, completely turned his life around, and has found a way to contribute his particular skill set to the betterment of society. This updated, movie tie-in version of the book includes a Question & Answer session with the author that brings the reader up to date on Frank's life. By the time of this printing, Frank has acquired a twenty-five-year track record of redemptive, honorable behavior. Even so, the tone of the book is guaranteed to leave the reader feeling uneasy. No matter how much one might like to believe that Frank has amended his ways, and no matter how convincing his earnest prose may seem, the reader is simultaneously confronted with the ease in which Frank has lied in the past. Before one considers buying into Frank's point of view, one would do well to recall the time-honored phrase, *caveat emptor* . . . let the buyer beware.



Chapter 1, "The Fledgling"

Chapter 1, "The Fledgling" Summary and Analysis

At the Windsor Hotel in Paris, the narrator admires himself in the mirror. He is a handsome young man in an airline pilot's uniform. Moments later, he receives another admiring glance from the checkout clerk who gladly cashes his Pan American World Airways paycheck for him. The young man leaves for the airport and, once there, he fills out a pink form granting him deadheading privileges on the next flight to Rome. Airport personnel address him as First Officer Frank Williams. In the cockpit, Williams is greeted by the pilot, co-pilot and flight engineer as he takes his place in the jump seat.

At 30,000 feet, the pilot cordially allows Williams to take the controls for a few minutes.

The narrator's real name is Frank Abagnale, Jr., a con artist extraordinaire. Many readers will be familiar with the movie, *Catch Me if You Can*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio as Frank W. Abagnale. Frank is widely regarded as one of the most brazen con men in history. In the six-year span of his criminal career, Frank's cons earn him millions, most of which he blows on clothing, luxury items, cars, hotel rooms, and women. Frank's crime spree eventually ends with prison time; he does his time in French, Swedish, and American prisons. His career as a con artist begins when he is sixteen years old, and Frank's father is his first victim.

Frank's parents separate when he is twelve years old. At the time, his father is a successful businessman, member, and former president of the New York Athletic Club, and is well regarded among the Republican politicians in New York. During one of Frank Sr.'s fly-fishing expeditions, his wife packs up and moves out of their home with their four children. Frank Sr. takes it badly; he spends the rest of his life trying to woo back his wife, Paulette. Frank Sr. uses his son, Frank Jr., as the middleman for his frequent entreaties to his wife. The narrator feels often in the middle. Out of loyalty to his father, he elects to live with him instead of with his mother. His three siblings remain with their mother. Frank's life with his father opens many doors for him. He spends a lot of time in bars with his father and quickly learns that alcohol greases the wheels of many business dealings.

In the wake of the divorce, Frank becomes a juvenile delinquent. By fifteen, Frank is six feet tall and weighs 170 pounds. He looks like an adult compared to his delinquent friends, and he feels they lack sophistication. Frank drops his friends after they all get arrested for stealing a car. Frank Sr. uses his political clout to have the "mistake" expunged from his son's record. Frank buckles down at school and obtains a part-time job in a warehouse. His father is so impressed with this turnaround that he buys Frank a Ford. Frank fixes up the Ford, and with his newfound mobility, he discovers girls. Frank quickly realizes he needs more money if he is going to wine and dine his feminine conquests. He asks his father for a gasoline credit card and promises not to abuse his father's trust. Frank Sr. agrees and gives his son his Mobil card.



The first month, Frank dutifully pays the modest bill. However, he realizes that the credit card only delays the payment date; it does not give him the extra money he feels he needs. He learns from a gasoline station clerk that the card can be used for other things besides gas. Frank proposes a deal with the clerk; the clerk will charge \$160 to Frank's gas card for tires, but Frank will not take the tires. Instead, Frank will take \$100 cash from the clerk. The company will be paid in full for the tires, which the clerk can later sell to another customer and pocket the \$160. The clerk agrees, and Frank's criminal career is underway. He runs up thousands of dollars worth of similar charges before the bill arrives. When the bill does arrive, Frank finally realizes that he is scamming his father, not Mobil. Nonetheless, he hides the bill and continues to run up charges until a bill collector finally seeks out his father. Frank Sr. and the bill collector are both understanding when Frank admits he has let his interest in girls lead him into making bad decisions.

Frank's father forgives him, but his mother sends him to a reformatory. The school is a pleasant environment except for the fact that there are no girls. Frank does not feel he deserves this punishment since his father, the only victim of his crimes, has forgiven him. His father suffers severe financial setbacks during the year Frank is in school. By the time he picks Frank up at the end of the year, Frank Sr. has sold his house, his Cadillacs, and has become a postal clerk. Frank is horrified to think he has contributed to his father's financial problems, but Dad assures him the \$3,400 Frank stole from Mobil was only a drop in the bucket. Frank Sr. is philosophical about his reversal in fortune. He advises his son that what matters is not what a man has, but what a man is. The only problem for Frank is that he has no idea who he is.

This first chapter establishes the context for Frank's tale as well as the narrative tone. Frank Abagnale's style is warm and candid, and gives the appearance that the reader is being taken behind the scenes to learn how a con man really operates. From the outset, however, there is an uneasy tension that underlies this narrative. Given the fact that Frank is a con man and is readily admitting to a string of lies, it is impossible to read this account with credulity regardless of the fact that he now leads a reformed life. This basic uncertainty benefits the book as it entices the reader to consider each situation from various angles. As the reader has no money at stake, it is easy, almost pleasurable, to suspend disbelief and allow Frank to work his manipulative magic.



Chapter 2, "The Pilot"

Chapter 2, "The Pilot" Summary and Analysis

Frank runs away from home at age sixteen. Despite his father's healthy attitude towards his new financial situation, Frank cannot stand to see how far his father has fallen. Frank leaves without saying good-bye or even leaving a note. He has a \$200 account in Chase Manhattan Bank, set up by his father a year earlier. He stays in New York where he is comfortable. He convinces a boy his age that he is an orphan. The boy's parents allow Frank to stay with them while he looks for work. Frank applies at stationery stores, where he has experience, and is hired at \$1.50 an hour. He soon realizes he cannot survive on such a salary and decides to alter the birth date on his driver's license from 1948 to 1938. Frank has always looked older than his true age, and hopes to earn a man's salary instead of a boy's. However, as a high school dropout, he is not able to earn more than basic survival wages. Frank continues to spend money freely on the girls he meets and frequently taps into his \$200 checking account.

Within a few days, Frank has overdrawn his account. He still continues to cash checks at grocery stores, hotels, and other businesses which cash small checks without verifying funds. He is soon writing two to three bad checks a day. Frank convinces himself that he will not be in much trouble if he is caught, as he is still a juvenile. He also tells himself his father will pay for the insufficient checks. Having thus rationalized his criminal activity, Frank quits his job and supports himself entirely with bad checks. Two months into his new routine, Frank knows the police must be looking for him. He decides he must leave New York. The thought of truly leaving his parents and hometown behind frightens him. He also wonders how he can support himself in a strange city with kited checks; after all, in New York he has a checking account and a driver's license that are real even if they are overdrawn and doctored.

Inspiration strikes him when he sees an Eastern Airlines flight crew walking out of a hotel. The women are lovely and the men in their uniforms are handsome and confident. Frank looks up and notices the Pan American World Airways Building at the corner of Forty-second and Park Avenue. The narrator will refer back to this bumblebee analogy frequently throughout the book. This is an example of how Frank uses euphemisms to soften the nature of his crimes. Whether he is trying to con the reader or himself is unclear, but Frank never truly addresses the darker side of his crimes. His perspective, firmly established in the early chapters of the book, looks at his crimes with glee and pride.

The next day, Frank calls Pan Am posing as co-pilot Robert Black, based in Los Angeles. He tells them his uniform was stolen and asks where he can obtain a replacement for tonight's flight. The helpful Pan Am employee refers him to the Well-Built Uniform Company, promising to call ahead to the proprietor. He is greeted by the proprietor, Mr. Rosen, who asks his rank; when Frank tells him he is a co-pilot, Rosen refers to him as a first officer and sews three gold stripes onto each sleeve cuff. Rosen



sends him to the Pan Am stores department for the wings and emblem, and then tells Frank the \$289 for the uniform will be deducted from Frank's employee account. Frank makes up a fake employee identification number and fills out the paperwork for Rosen. Back in his room, he calls Pan Am again and finds out that the Pan Am stores are kept in Hangar 14 at Kennedy Airport, a secure hangar. Frank takes a taxi to Hangar 14 and notices the heavy security. He also sees that most of the uniformed crew members are able to enter without being questioned. The pilots wear ID badges clipped to their breast pockets and the stewardesses have similar IDs usually clipped to their purses.

Nonetheless, Frank plunges in, walking past the guard with studied casualness in his new uniform. He tells the stores clerk his two-year-old has made off with his wings and hat emblem and promptly receives replacements. Frank hangs around the hangar for a while, studying the pilots and their ID cards. He realizes he needs to learn pilot terminology and begins to study at his local library. He also calls Pan Am again, posing as a high school newspaper reporter, and interviews a nice captain. The captain gives him an idea of the career path involved in achieving the various ranks and what a pilot's license looks like. Frank gets salary information and learns about Pan Am's domestic and international flight paths. Most importantly, he learns about deadheading. Any time a pilot is needed in another city for a flight, he can catch a free flight to his destination from any airline. This is called deadheading and it is a courtesy frequently provided by one airline for another. Deadheading pilots usually occupy the jump seat in the cockpit, which is an extra fold-down seat. Frank is assured deadheading pilots do not have to fly the planes since they are off duty, although they may be asked.

Frank dresses in his finest business suit and visits a firm on Madison Avenue. Pretending to be Frank Williams representing Carib Air out of Puerto Rico, Frank tells the sales representative that his airline needs to order two hundred laminated, plastic-enclosed ID cards with the company logo. The man shows him a catalogue of samples; one of the models appears identical to the Pan Am ID card. Frank asks for a sample to take back to his company and suggests the representative mock up an ID using Frank as the subject. Frank leaves minutes later with an ID under the name of Frank Williams with his correct age, weight, and eye color, the fictitious rank of co-pilot and an equally fictitious employee number; the card even includes a color head shot of Frank himself. The only thing missing is the Pan Am logo, but Frank quickly takes care of that. He buys a Pan Am model plane from a hobby shop and uses the logo it contains to finish off his ID card.

Now Frank needs only a pilot's license. In the back of a flying publication, he finds a plaque-making firm in Milwaukee that duplicates pilot's licenses and mounts them on decorative plaques for thirty-five dollars. Frank orders a plaque over the telephone and, for a change, sends a valid money order in payment. His plaque arrives soon and Frank takes it to a local print shop where it is photographed, reduced, and printed on card stock. Frank laminates it himself. Frank is now ready to pass himself off as a pilot. In his uniform, with his ID and pilot's license, he takes a bus to La Guardia Airport.



Chapter 3, "Fly a Crooked Sky"

Chapter 3, "Fly a Crooked Sky" Summary and Analysis

Frank enjoys the attention his new uniform brings him. He mingles with the crowd at the airport, intending to bluff his way onto a flight so he can begin passing fake checks in a different city. However, when he stops at an airport cafe to eat, a TWA co-pilot regards him with suspicion. Frank does not understand the co-pilot's terminology and is caught off guard to learn that Pan Am does not fly out of La Guardia. Frank quickly pays his check and leaves the cafe, aware now that he is not yet prepared to pull off his deadheading scam. Over the next few days, Frank conducts further phone interviews with various airlines, presenting himself as a college student, cub reporter, or young author. Frank's new knowledge builds his confidence. He tests his authenticity by opening a checking account in the name Frank Williams; when the box of new checks arrives, he cashes them wearing his new ID and uniform.

He continues to hang out at La Guardia while he practices, unwilling to risk an encounter with a real Pan Am pilot at Kennedy Airport. At La Guardia, he is frequently asked to join groups of pilots and stewardesses at the restaurants and bars. He absorbs their conversations and quickly picks up on the language. The stewardesses are pleased to see such a young and handsome co-pilot and he finds it easy to date them and uses them to improve his flight knowledge. The narrator is quick to defend the reputation of these stewardesses, saying that they are not as a group promiscuous. Most of them are smart, responsible, and mature, and his sexual overtures are turned down more often than accepted. He learns a lot from the stewardesses, most notably that airline employees can cash checks at any airline counter. He passes a number of bad checks at La Guardia before deciding he is ready to try deadheading.

He packs up the apartment he has been renting month-to-month under the name Frank Williams. As he has always paid cash and has never worn his uniform around the building, he is confident he has left no trail. At the Eastern Airlines operations office in La Guardia, he presents himself as a pilot in need of a deadhead to Miami. Frank is asked to fill out a pink form and waits nervously as the Eastern employee calls ahead to the FAA tower; the tower clears him to fly and he gives his copy of the pink slip to the stewardess as he boards the plane. Frank heads into the cockpit and introduces himself to the pilot, co-pilot, and flight engineer who are busy with their preflight checklist. He looks around for the fold-down jump seat but does not see it. Fortunately, the engineer apologizes and quickly closes the cockpit door; the jump seat folds down from the door. The men ask Frank some questions; he tells them he has been with Pan Am for eight years and flies 707s. Despite Frank's fears, there are no questions he cannot handle, and he makes it to Miami with ease. He even makes a date with a stewardess he meets en route to the bathroom.



Frank likes his first sight of colorful Miami, Florida. He asks a girl at the Pan Am counter where the flight crews normally stay and she gives him a taxi chit for a free ride to the Skyway Motel. There he registers as Frank Williams and puts General Delivery, New York as his address, a practice not uncommon for airline pilots at the time. The Eastern stewardess picks him up at the motel and they go out on the town. Before Frank checks out the next morning, he cashes a phony check at the motel. He heads back to the airport and deadheads on a flight to Dallas. He does not realize until he is in the cockpit that Pan Am does not fly out of Dallas. Aware of Pan Am's worldwide freight service, he glibly explains that he is supposed to be flying a freight charter from Dallas. That night he gets another free hotel room thanks to Pan Am's practice of having the motels bill the airline directly to better track crew room and meal expenses. He cashes another fake \$100 check before he leaves. Thus begins his new modus operandi.

If the many motels he bilks along the way bother to call the police, Frank knows that his hotel bills and \$100 insufficient funds checks will not compare to the larger crimes the police must solve. Since the police computers are not yet linked at this time in history, Frank need not yet fear that the police will put his crimes together and realize the extent of his activities. The brazenness of his con is what makes it work. Frank also keeps a journal of airline jargon and technical information to assist him. In this journal, he jots down the names of pilots he has deadheaded with so he can name drop the next time he deadheads with a crew from the same airline. He always has the motels bill Pan Am and never once is that practice challenged by a clerk.

Occasionally he rents an apartment just long enough to open a new bank account and have a box of checks delivered to him. He never knows how close the police may be to his trail, so sometimes he hides out at girlfriends' or their parents' houses. None of his girlfriends realize he is underage; they all believe him to be a professional pilot, and as such, marriage material. Whenever a girl mentions marriage, Frank promises they will discuss it on his next visit and then never visits again. At seventeen, he would need his parents' permission to marry anyway.

The narrator shows himself to be unreliable regarding his perspective on women. In this chapter, as in the preceding two chapters, Frank glories in his sexual conquests. He describes women as his only vice and, presumably jokingly, blames his crime spree on his need to wine and dine these conquests. Conning women comes as naturally to him as conning business people, and his narrative tone is one of amusement that a seventeen-year-old manages to convince multiple women he is potential husband material. He demonstrates an appalling lack of respect for all people, but particularly for women, the gender he claims to admire so deeply. Frank's disclaimers about the reputations of stewardesses are clearly meant to compliment and defend airline stewardesses and he sees no contradiction with the fact that he preys on this group of women almost exclusively. The copyright date on this book places Frank Abagnale in his early thirties at the time of its writing, yet Frank seems to have learned very little about women in the interim.



Chapter 4, "If I'm a Kid Doctor, Where's My Jar of Lollipops"

Chapter 4, "If I'm a Kid Doctor, Where's My Jar of Lollipops" Summary and Analysis

Frank deadheads a flight with the confidence born of his many past successes. Unlike on many other flights, this captain does not offer Frank a courtesy headset for him to listen in on the radio chatter. Thus, when someone at the tower asks about Frank, he can only hear one side of the disturbing conversation. The pilot asks for Frank's ID and inspects it minutely; the captain returns Frank's ID and claims he does not know what the tower is asking about. Frank sits in silence until the end of the flight at which time the one-sided conversation resumes. The captain agrees to some request by the tower and leaves his seat while the plane is taxiing, an act Frank knows to be highly unusual. The captain wears a casual expression upon his return, but Frank is not surprised when he sees two uniformed sheriff's officers waiting for him on the jetway.

The officers do not speak to Frank during the ride downtown. Frank maintains the fiction that he is a pilot and his indignant behavior makes the deputies nervous. One of the deputies is an amateur pilot and Frank's terminology quickly convinces him that Frank is legitimate. The men apologize and explain that their office was asked to pick Frank up by another agency, which will arrive soon. A young FBI agent arrives near midnight and interviews Frank privately. The agent explains that the Dade County sheriff's office was contacted by another federal agency in New Orleans and asked to hold Frank, but the officer who took the call neglected to get the caller's name or the name of the federal agency he represented. The officer thought the agency was the FBI, but the FBI is not looking for Frank Williams.

The FBI agent explains that Frank's employment with Pan Am has been called into question by someone, and tells Frank if he can show proof of employment he will be set free. Frank gives him his phony credentials. Since it is too late at night to contact Pan Am's business offices, the officer calls a list of local pilots and stewardesses Frank knows to verify his identity. The FBI and the sheriff's officers all apologize for the mix-up and send Frank home before they discover it was the FAA who was looking for him. Frank changes out of his pilot's uniform and buys a ticket to Atlanta under a fake name. He spares a moment of remorse for the young FBI agent who undoubtedly is now in trouble with his boss. In Atlanta, he surprises an Eastern stewardess he knows there and she lets him stay with her for a month, after which she expects to be transferred to New Orleans. Although she invites him to New Orleans with her, Frank feels safer in Atlanta and decides to rent an apartment.

As Frank W. Williams, he rents an apartment in an upscale singles complex called River Bend. However, to avoid the heat, he eschews his pilot persona and presents himself as a pediatrician on a one-year research leave of absence. Frank is relieved to have a



home and, for the first two months, he enjoys the party scene of the singles complex. His new home is threatened, however, when an actual pediatrician moves into the complex. Dr. Willis Granger befriends Frank despite Frank's attempts to avoid him. Frank comes to enjoy Granger's company and soon begins to relax in his presence. As Frank becomes bolder, he even begins to accompany Granger to Smithers Pediatric Institute and General Hospital in Marietta, Georgia. Granger introduces Frank around and Frank takes advantage of the opportunity to study up on medical terminology at the hospital library. The hospital doctors and staff admire Frank for keeping up with his professional studies during his leave of absence.

Frank is so well liked and respected by the staff that when the hospital administrator finds himself in urgent need of a temporary supervising resident, he asks Frank. The administrator assures Frank that he will not have to do anything more than supervise as the night shift residents will tend to the patients. Since everyone at the hospital is under the impression that Frank is licensed to practice medicine in California, Frank is brought before a panel of five doctors for an interview conference to grant him a temporary certificate to practice in Georgia. Granger heads up the panel and the interview is nothing more than a friendly chat.

To avoid blowing his cover, Frank presents himself as a jokester to the nurses and interns under his supervision. At first, Frank pulls off the con easily by showing faith in his intern's opinions. The interns appreciate the respect Frank shows them and they feel he delegates to them because he has confidence in them and wants them to become self-sufficient as doctors. The hospital administrator has trouble finding a permanent replacement and asks Frank to stay on a little longer. Frank is so happy with his \$125 a day salary that he gladly agrees to do so. One night a nurse yells for him to come; there is a blue baby in room 608. Frank makes a joke about a green baby before checking his pocket medical dictionary and realizing that "blue baby" is a baby lacking oxygen in its bloodstream. Thankfully, an intern arrives and takes care of the baby until the baby's regular doctor arrives. Frank decides to resign before a child dies, but the hospital administrator preempts this by informing Frank that he has located a permanent replacement.

This change of career is part of Frank's overall pattern of seeking out societal acceptance and admiration. Frank craves immediate gratification in every area of his life: financial, sexual, social, and professional. Lacking the patience to cultivate relationship skills or career skills, Frank uses his natural creative gifts to con his way into the lifestyle he craves. The irony is that Frank has possessed all along the ability to be whatever he likes, be that an airline pilot or medical doctor, and yet Frank is unwilling to do what it takes to achieve those goals. He wants relationships and careers without the work involved in creating or sustaining them. Ironically, he does not know enough about life to realize that he is cheating himself as well as others. He claims to desire relationships with mature women, feeling he has nothing in common with the young candy strippers at the hospital. The truth is that he has not yet reached the maturity level of girls his own age, much less garnered the maturity to date adult women with some life experience. Frank does not stay around long enough in any relationship, be it

personal or professional, to allow himself to realize how much he is lacking. Thus, he cons himself as well as others.



Chapter 5, "A Law Degree Is Just an Illegal Technicality"

Chapter 5, "A Law Degree Is Just an Illegal Technicality" Summary and Analysis

Frank's hospital job ends at the same time as his lease expires and he decides it is time to leave Atlanta. Frank later learns that FBI Inspector Sean O'Riley was at this time concentrating solely on Frank's case, so Frank congratulates himself for his decision to keep moving. He heads to another southern state to visit an airline stewardess he met at the airport in Atlanta. He had given her the name Robert F. Conrad, a Pan Am first officer, and had further told her that he has a Harvard law degree. Diane remembers him fondly, and recalls his law degree as well. She introduces him to Jason Wilcox, an assistant state attorney. Wilcox is interested to learn that Frank has been furloughed from Pan Am due to personnel cutbacks. He offers Frank a position at the Attorney General's office, explaining that the office is in need of attorneys. All Frank has to do is take his Harvard transcript to the state bar examiner's office and apply to take the bar. Wilcox offers to help him study.

Frank jumps at the challenge. He creates a fake Harvard transcript and applies to take the bar. Wilcox helps him study, and on his third attempt, he passes the bar exam. Frank, still posing as Robert F. Conrad, is hired by the state attorney general's office on Wilcox's recommendation. His annual salary is \$12,800. His direct supervisor, Phillip Rigby, dislikes Yankees so he treats Frank like a glorified gopher. Frank is thrilled not to be entrusted with any actual legal work. On a few occasions, Rigby does allow Frank to make opening arguments or present minor issues before the court. Frank is proud of the work he does on such occasions and feels he learns a lot about the law by working for Rigby, who is an excellent lawyer. These statements again demonstrate the fact that Frank is fooling himself. His belief that he handles himself in court "without detriment to the law profession" (p. 106) shows his lack of understanding that defrauding others inherently is a detrimental practice.

Frank convinces himself that his fakery is performed merely for the challenge it presents; the real fakery is his attempt to convince himself that he is not a fraud. Frank fears his inability to accomplish worthy goals in life so much that he sets up a lifestyle of avoidance. By defrauding himself and others, Frank never has to face up to who he actually is or discover what his limitations might be. When Diane is transferred, Frank is spared the need to maintain the relationship. Soon he begins dating Gloria, the daughter of a state official. Gloria is a devoted Methodist and Frank takes her to church with the understanding that he himself has no desire to become a Methodist. He enjoys his involvement with the church, however, and soon begins volunteering with the church's youth programs. He claims to feel good about this work, but the reader is



naturally left to wonder if what Frank feels good about is the approbation he receives for performing these duties.

Frank meets another Harvard Law graduate on one of the church committees. Harvard men tend to stick together, and Frank cannot shake this persistent individual. The real Harvard man always wants to talk to Frank about Harvard: its professors, sports, clubs, and pubs. Frank's answers fail to satisfy the man and soon the man begins asking uncomfortable questions of Frank's associates. When the man begins questioning Frank's legal degree and job with the attorney general's office, Frank skips town. He draws a final paycheck and tells Gloria he is leaving for a few weeks due to a death in the family. Frank buys himself a car. Unbeknownst to him, this is advantageous, as FBI agent O'Riley has been tracking Frank through the series of rental cars Frank has abandoned at airports. Frank feels safe from the law because he has not passed any phony checks for twenty months. Aside from posing as a doctor and a lawyer, Frank has been leading a law-abiding life and his professional salaries have sustained him.

Now he travels the western United States for several weeks, loving and leaving women and obtaining new identification. He gets a new FAA pilot's license and a fake Trans World Airways (TWA) identification card under the name Frank Adams. As a backup, he obtains TWA credentials for his former alter ego, Frank Williams. Yet for some reason, Frank is drawn to the college environment. The irony of this is that at Frank's age, it is natural for him to be drawn to this environment. Frank could obtain a GED and matriculate in a university, turning his schemes into realities. In order to do this, however, he would have to face his criminal actions. Unwilling to accept the truth about himself, Frank decides to become a university professor in Utah. He fakes another transcript along with some letters of recommendations and explains to Dr. Grimes, the faculty dean, that he is currently a pilot on furlough but has taught in the past. Grimes is pleased to find someone to fill his temporary summer teaching position in the sociology department.

Frank audits some classes taught by Dr. Vanderhoff, the head of the sociology department, in order to "refresh" himself. Frank teaches his courses by the book, staying one chapter ahead of the students and peppering his lectures with discussions of crime in society and the broken home issue. His students never realize he is lecturing from his own experience on these two points. Frank loves his job, the students, and faculty at the university and is sorry to leave it behind after the summer term. He knows if he stays around, his crimes will catch up with him, and Frank does not want to disillusion any of his new friends in Utah.

At this juncture it becomes clear to the reader, if not to Frank, that Frank has a decision to make. It is clear from Frank's recent choices that he desires a stable life within a warm and caring community. For two years now this is precisely the life he has sought to con his way into time and again. Will he finally admit to himself that his desperate, frantic, and uprooted lifestyle is not pleasurable, or will he compound his errors by throwing himself even further into the criminal lifestyle?



Chapter 6, "Paperhanger in a Rolls-Royce"

Chapter 6, "Paperhanger in a Rolls-Royce" Summary and Analysis

Frank decides to take his criminal activities to the next level. The puny \$100 personal checks he used to forge are paltry compared to the money he might rake in with fake corporate checks. Frank justifies upping his criminal activity by stating that the legal penalty is the same for forging \$100 check as for forging a \$5,000 check. Frank's corporate loyalty to Pan Am inspires him to mock up a Pan Am "Expense Check." His reasonable assumption is that an expense reimbursement check will look different from a standard payroll check, thus even bank clerks familiar with Pan American payroll checks will not become suspicious. Frank cloaks his crudely drafted expense check in a Pan Am envelope, which he mails to himself. The handsome young pilot, Frank Williams, has no trouble convincing a female bank clerk in Eureka, California to cash his check for \$568.70. He papers Eureka with several more of these expense checks before a chance encounter leads to a narrow escape.

"I never immersed myself so deeply in an assumed identity that I forgot I was really Frank Abagnale, Jr. In fact, in casual encounters with people, where I felt no compulsion to play-act and nothing was to be gained by affecting a guise, I invariably presented myself as Frank Abagnale, a foot-loose fellow from the Bronx" (p. 121). One day he meets a fisherman in a seafood restaurant. The man is a fellow Ford buff and offers to send Frank pictures of his souped up Ford convertible. Unthinkingly, Frank writes his real name and his father's New York address on the back of one of his blank "Expense Checks." Before he can hand it over, the fisherman is called away and leaves without the address. Back in his room, Frank puts the incriminating blank check on top of a stack of other blank expense checks. The next morning he prepares and passes off three more expense checks at three different banks, then takes his local girlfriend out for a farewell dinner. Frank intends to leave town before the Eureka banks begin reporting his crimes. Over dinner, Frank remembers the fisherman and realizes he has passed a fake check that contains his real name and address in his own handwriting written on the back of the check.

Back in his motel room, he considers his options. The next morning he calls the bank where he passed the incriminating check and asks for the head teller. He advises head teller Stella Waring that a Pan Am pilot cashed a check in her bank branch the previous day. Waring indignantly declares that the check was a fake and that she has called in the FBI. Thinking quickly, Frank identifies himself as FBI and informs her that an agent will be arriving at her bank within fifteen minutes to pick up the check. Boldly, Frank arrives at the branch within five minutes. He looks around nervously for the female teller who cashed his check the previous day and is somewhat relieved when he does not



see her. Stella Waring greets "Agent Davis" without suspicion and gives him the check. Frank photocopies the check for her at her request, neglecting to copy the back of the check where his address is printed. Frank leaves with the check approximately five minutes before the real FBI agent arrives on the scene.

Later, Frank will realize that posing as an FBI agent has brought even more heat down upon him. He describes the law enforcement investigation into his misdeeds based on information he learns after being caught. He eventually discovers that his lack of criminal contacts helps keep his identity secret for quite some time. None of the FBI's typical informants has any information about the author of the forged checks. About halfway through Frank's six-year crime spree, the authorities trace his real identity. Once he begins to counterfeit checks instead simply passing insufficient funds checks off real accounts, Frank realizes he has reached the point of no return. He throws himself further into his criminal activities. He uses his natural eye for detail and his ability to research to improve his cons. Frank takes pride in his successful crimes and learns more about check routing numbers than the average bank employee knows.

Frank creates forged payroll checks that have a typeset bank of issue that contrasts with the bank of issue indicated by the routing number. The computer checks the routing number only and sends the check to the indicated city. An employee at the receiving bank looks at the printed bank of issue, which is in another city entirely, and assumes there has been a computer error. The employee thus sends the check on to the printed city of origin. Using this method, Frank gives himself a lengthy head start before the banks actually realize they have been duped. In California, Frank learns to steal more money than even he can spend.

In San Francisco, he falls in love with a twenty-four-year-old virgin named Rosalie. When he declares his love for her, she responds that she, too, loves him and suggests they visit her parents together. Rosalie assumes Frank's intentions are honorable and thus allows him to deflower her en route to her parents' home in Pismo Beach. Rosalie's parents are thrilled when she tells them she intends to marry Frank. They immediately begin planning the wedding to take place in a month's time. Frank is torn. He believes he loves Rosalie and wonders if he might maintain the fiction of his existence if he goes through with the wedding. He goes along with the wedding plans for a few days as his feeling of impending disaster grows. One afternoon he takes Rosalie to a park and confesses everything to her; she is the first person he has ever told. Rosalie is horrified to learn that Pan Am pilot Frank Williams is really nineteen-year-old Frank Abagnale: a crook and a swindler. Rosalie cries as the news sinks in. Finally, she asks Frank to take her home. Frank tells her he needs to be alone for a few minutes but will join her shortly. He asks her not to say anything to her parents, indicating that he will tell them himself.

Frank wanders around for a while, trying to decide if he should go back to Rosalie's parents' house or not. He reassures himself that his beloved Rosalie will not betray him. Unsure whether he still has a chance with her or not, Frank decides to go to her parents' home and demand Rosalie make a decision about their relationship. As he approaches the house, he sees police cars in the driveway. "My lovely Rosalie had finked on me" (p. 139). He buys a plane ticket to Las Vegas, realizing he is relieved to be rid of Rosalie.



This incident again reveals Frank's lack of insight into himself. The irony that he feels betrayed by Rosalie seems lost on him, as does the reasons behind his relief. Frank has always taken the short cut. Instead of truly becoming that which he desires to be, he merely pretends he is a competent career man and a mature adult male ready to embark on a serious relationship. He is neither, and although some day he might be ready for a relationship with someone like Rosalie, at the moment he is definitely not. He describes Rosalie as loyal and honest, two qualities he must find in himself before he can hope to maintain a relationship with such a person. Frank prides himself on not associating with the criminal element, but that at least would be honest. A relationship with a female con artist his own age would help him develop by mirror of his true self. Frank avoids others like him because he cannot stand to admit what he really sees in the mirror. For this same reason, he avoids his parents while in New York. By avoiding all accountability, Frank is able to con himself into believing he deserves someone like Rosalie.

In Las Vegas, he makes time with desperate women who have lost all their money at the casinos. Frank feeds them and finds them easy to manipulate. One such desperate girl named Pixie is a commercial artist at a check-designing firm. From their conversation, Frank learns that all he needs is an I-Tek camera and an offset press to print his own checks. In gratitude, Frank buys her a plane ticket home then finds a local printing supply firm. Passing himself off as a man who wants to open his own stationery store and job printing shop, he purchases the I-Tek camera and offset press for \$8,000. In a storage facility, Frank prints up Pan Am expense checks that look completely professional, as compared to the checks he has previously forged by hand. Frank immediately passes off several of his checks at the casinos.

From there, Frank heads on a cross-country check forging spree, ending up in Chicago where he decides to hide out and consider his future. He has amassed quite a nest egg and wants to settle down overseas but needs to obtain a passport under an alias. In the meantime, he opens a checking account under the name Frank Williams and is struck by a lucrative inspiration. He notices while in line at the bank that most people do not bother to fill in the account number box on their deposit slips; the tellers simply credit the deposits by name and address. Frank takes home a stack of blank deposit slips and typesets his own account number in the account number boxes using a typeface that matches that bank forms. He returns this stack of deposit slips to the bank. Four days later, he returns and asks for his bank balance; it is \$42,876.45. Frank withdraws forty thousand dollars and flies to Hawaii that same day. On the Hawaiian Islands, he passes some \$38,000 worth of fraudulent checks.

Frank leaves Hawaii and returns to New York for the first time since leaving home. He is tempted to call his parents but is too ashamed to face them. Instead, he concocts a new con. He opens a Chase Manhattan account as Frank Adams, and then flies to Philadelphia. In Philadelphia, he arrives at a bank in a chauffeured limousine and is dressed in an expensive suit. He introduces himself as Frank Adams of Adams Construction and states his desire to transfer funds from his New York bank because his company will be working on construction projects in the Philadelphia area this year. Frank says he has \$17,876.28 in his personal checking account in New York and asks



to transfer \$17,000 into his new Philadelphia account. The teller advises him he cannot write any checks on his account until the fund transfer clears, a process that should take four to five days. That night Frank flies to Miami and charms a female bank manager into cashing his personal check for \$15,000, written off the new Philadelphia account. Frank gambles that the Philadelphia teller who confirms his balance for the Miami banker will only look at the amount on account -- \$17,000 - and not notice the pending status of those funds. His gamble pays off and he walks out with \$15,000 and a date with the bank manager.



Chapter 7, "How to Tour Europe on a Felony a Day"

Chapter 7, "How to Tour Europe on a Felony a Day" Summary and Analysis

By the time Frank jumps the border into Mexico in 1967, he has accumulated assets of \$500,000 through his check forging schemes. He perfects a check routing system that keeps checks floating through the bank system for at least a week. Frank is the first check forger to manipulate the routing numbers on the bottom of the checks.

Frank is feeling the heat now, however, and is determined to get out of the country. He obtains a visa to visit Mexico under the name Frank Williams and decides to worry about a passport after he leaves the United States. In Mexico City, he scores an unexpected bonus. He meets a Pan Am stewardess on holiday and has the opportunity to cash her paycheck for her. He gives her \$288.15 and in exchange gets a real Pan Am payroll check to use as a template for future forgeries.

Frank deals with his passport issue with the help of a friendly hotel manager. Frank, in his role as a Pan Am pilot, explains that he is supposed to go to London to cover a flight for a sick pilot, but Frank has left his passport in New York. He tells the hotel manager that he does not have time to fly to New York and still make the London flight; if his boss learns he is in Mexico without a passport, Frank will be fired. The sympathetic hotel manager introduces Frank to Kitty Corbett. She is an American writer with a lot of political influence in both Mexico and the US. Corbett falls for Frank's story and helps him obtain a temporary passport. Frank repays the hotel manager's kindness by passing a phony check to pay his hotel bill. With some time to kill before his flight to London, Frank scatters some \$6,500 worth of bad checks in Mexico.

Frank arrives in London and checks into the Royal Garden Hotel under an alias. He realizes that he is no better off outside the US than he was before. The police are still after him. Frank considers living quietly in a small corner of the world, but lacks the prudence to pursue such a course. He realizes now that a psychiatrist would say he wanted to be caught, but he had no conscious desire to be caught at the time.

He ventures to Paris and quickly meets Monique Lavalier, a stewardess for Air France. Frank describes Monique as being similar to Rosalie but without Rosalie's inhibitions. Monique never mentions marriage at all, although she does introduce Frank to her family. Papa Lavalier own a small printing shop on the outskirts of Paris. Frank offers to bring Papa Lavalier some Pan Am business. Since Papa Lavalier and his excellent staff do not speak English, Frank feels safe giving them the job of printing copies of the real Pan Am payroll check he obtained in Mexico. He orders ten thousand checks from Papa Lavalier to avoid creating suspicion. Papa Lavalier is thrilled to have an opportunity to work with Pan Am. Within a week, Frank has perfectly duplicated Pan Am payroll



checks with the correct account number printed on them. Now when tellers call Pan Am to verify the check, Pan Am authorizes payment. Papa Lavalier receives many more referrals from Frank; never realizing his daughter's boyfriend is duping him.

After a month with Monique, he tells her he has to return to active duty as a pilot and flies to New York. Before he leaves, however, he gets the unwitting Papa Lavalier to print three hundred duplicates of an actual cashier's check for \$1,200. Back in New York, Frank passes off sixty of these before a teller actually calls to verify the funds. Frank feels hunted in New York and heads for Boston while he tries to decide where he should go in the long term. In Boston, he reunites with a former stewardess friend then tries to deadhead on a flight from the airport. No flights are available that night, however, so Frank hangs out in the airport considering his options. He notices a bank in the airport and watches people make after-hours deposits in a steel receptacle in front of the bank.

As he is watching the bank, two Massachusetts state troopers approach him and call him by his true name, Frank Abagnale. Frank insists he is Frank Williams and hands over his fraudulent FAA pilot's license as proof. The officers take Frank to the police station where the Lieutenant tells Frank to give up the con and admit who he is; Frank insists he is a legitimate pilot named Williams and demands a lawyer. The police tell him he is not being charged at the moment, just booked for vagrancy. They take him to the county jail and leave him in the hands of the booking sergeant. As soon as the two officers leave, Frank starts conning the sergeant. He asks for permission to keep his ID card and pilot's license, explaining that company regulations require him to keep them on his person at all times. The desk sergeant does not think Frank looks like a vagrant and suspects there has been some mix-up, and is sympathetic to Frank.

Frank looks around his ugly jail cell, convinced there is no way out for him now. Just then, a man in a green-checkered suit stops in front of Frank's jail cell. The man is a bail bondsman named Aloysius James "Bailout" Bailey. Frank shows him his Pan Am identification and convinces Bailey to accept a \$500 check for Frank's \$5,000 bail. Bailey even drives the man he believes to be a pilot to the airport. Early the next morning, FBI agent O'Riley shows up at the jail personally to take custody of Frank. When O'Riley learns that Frank made bail at three in the morning by passing Bailey a check, he tells Bailey it serves him right. O'Riley assumes Frank is five hundred miles away by now, but Frank is right back at the Boston airport, stealing the night deposit money from the bank.

From a motel near the airport, Frank arranges to get a bank security guard uniform in the same manner he has obtained his pilot's uniforms. By 11:15 PM, Frank is standing in his uniform next to the night deposit vault. A sign indicates that the vault is out of order and deposits should be left with the security guard. Some thirty-five people drop their deposits into the mail-type bag guarded by Frank. The bag is so heavy by the time Frank is ready to leave that he requires the assistance of two Massachusetts state troopers to wheel the dolly out of the airport. Frank nets \$62,800 in cash from this one heist. He leaves the checks and credit card receipts in the bathtub of his motel room and anonymously tips off the bank as to its location. Frank flies to Istanbul, but before



he does, he buys a legitimate cashier's check for \$5,000 and makes it out to Aloysius James "Bailout" Bailey.

Frank's criminal "code of honor" prevents him from conning an individual (p. 182). For this reason, it is important to him to pay Bailey back for the \$5,000 bail money Frank has cost the bail bondsman. Many criminals do have an internal code of honor that they maintain, although usually the rules are broken or bent regularly. Codes of honor are psychologically important to criminals for such codes replace the societal value systems that the criminals eschew. By creating and honoring their own code, criminals like Frank convince themselves that they are honorable men. Frank cons himself into believing he never cons an individual. This justification allows him to commit crimes against large corporations like banks or airlines while still seeing himself as a man of the people. Frank deludes no one but himself on this point, however. He takes an immense amount of pride in his refusal to con individuals, yet he cons individuals constantly. Most notably, he does this by conning women into sexual relationships. The fact that he does not see this as a violation of his rule against conning individuals sheds light on Frank's views of women; he does not believe they deserve the same rights under his code as a man.



Chapter 8, "A Small Crew Will Do - It's Just a Paper Airplane"

Chapter 8, "A Small Crew Will Do - It's Just a Paper Airplane" Summary and Analysis

Frank grows tired of traveling alone. As a pilot, he is frequently questioned as to the whereabouts of his crew. He thinks a crew would make his check-cashing scam more believable. Frank also notices the way stewardesses treat their pilots and he desires a similar entourage. He decides to let Pan Am supply him with a flight crew. From West Berlin, he flies to New York and contacts the Pan Am offices pretending to be a university placement director. Frank learns that Pan Am regularly sends recruiting teams each fall to the University of Arizona. Frank contacts the University of Arizona and explains that in addition to the regular recruiters, this year Pan Am is also sending actual flight personnel to the campus to interview prospective pilots and stewardesses.

As Frank Williams, Pan Am co-pilot, Frank contacts the university and learns that he is eagerly expected. By the time he arrives, John Henderson, the director of student placement, has a pool of thirty stewardess applicants for Frank to meet. Frank finds the female college students incredibly attractive. He convinces them he is there to pre-screen them for post-graduation employment with Pan Am and interviews them one by one. He selects a group of eight daring and gullible women. Frank is allowed to study their individual files, and while doing so, he slips a file into the university system for Frank Abagnale, awarding himself a bachelor's degree and a master's in social work.

The next day he offers the eight finalists a chance to intern with Pan Am for the summer. The internship consists of an all-expense-paid public relations junket across Europe. He explains that stewardess interns are preferred for this duty because real stewardesses are needed on flight duty. However, the real stewardesses might get jealous were they to hear about the expense-paid tour of Europe, so Frank cautions the girls not to discuss the details of their situation should they encounter any actual stewardesses. Frank prepares for the summer internship by ordering custom-tailored uniforms and monogrammed luggage for the girls. He also provides himself a passport in the name Frank W. Williams by using the birth certificate of a Francis W. Williams who died in infancy.

Once prepared, Frank kills time in a Miami penthouse hoping to fleece some of the city's richer residents. Frank obtains an invitation to a black tie party and here he meets the first individual he admits to conning out of money. Her name is Cheryl and she is gorgeous and glamorous. Frank is surprised at her greedy nature and even more surprised when she responds to his sexual proposal by charging him a fee. Frank has never paid for sex in his life and initially he is dismayed at the thought of paying a prostitute. Frank solves the problem by passing her a bad check and accepting \$400 in cash change from her, as the check is more than the price upon which they had agreed.



Frank's judgment of Cheryl in this story is ironic because Cheryl has more in common with Frank than any other woman he has ever met. Perhaps Frank does not care for the avaricious image of himself he sees in her eyes. At least Cheryl is honest about her avarice. Frank prefers to use false pretences to gain access to virtuous women who would never willingly take up with a criminal like himself.

Frank has conned dozens if not hundreds of women by his own account. He fails to notice the psychological and emotional impact he has made on even one of these women. Take, for example, the female bank manager who agrees, in Chapter 6, to cash his check in exchange for a date. Frank never considers how difficult it must have been for a woman to achieve the position of bank manager by the mid 1960s, or that she likely had to give up having a family to achieve her goal. He does not consider how hard she must have worked to gain credibility in a man's field and how, in one fell swoop, Frank has destroyed her credibility, possibly costing her the bank manager position or even her career. Frank plays on the loneliness of this attractive woman, who is fast approaching the age where beauty fades, to make a fool out of her physically, emotionally, and professionally.

One wonders how Frank feels justified judging a woman like Cheryl. Frank retells the story of Cheryl's humiliation with relish, revealing his dislike for women in general. He treats all women terribly; even as he convinces himself he treats them nobly. Only a woman like Cheryl, a prostitute, allows Frank to reveal his true feelings towards women; according to his code of honor, it is acceptable to mistreat prostitutes, so he makes no effort to hide his natural disdain for the female gender.

When summer arrives, Frank cons a Pan Am employee into picking up his crew of "stewardesses." He installs them in a nearby motel where he has also booked the conference room facilities. Frank passes out their uniforms, luggage, and itinerary, which includes London, Paris, Rome, Athens, Madrid, and Copenhagen, among other destinations. He explains that they are attached to Pan Am through the New York public relations office on special assignment and he insists they refer any questions about their status to him. He also explains they must sign over their paychecks to him to ensure he gets them the best exchange rate by cashing the checks in a group. Frank books them a photo session when they arrive in London and instructs the photographer to send the proofs to Pan Am in New York. Frank spends the summer showing the girls the sights. He loyally insists the girls were all duped by his scheme and that not one of them suspected anything was wrong.

He prides himself on refusing their advances, but he takes advantage of the local women in the countries they visit. Their travels take him back to Paris where he once again visits Monique as he has been doing on and off since first meeting her. She breaks up with him, informing him that she has met another man, a pilot for Air France, who unlike Frank is ready to settle down. Monique says she hopes Frank will still help Papa Lavalier in his printing business. Frank promises to do so, but admits to the reader that this statement was a lie. Frank claims to feel guilty for involving Papa Lavalier in his schemes and uses that supposed guilt as an excuse to quit using his printing services. Given Frank's nearly non-existent conscience, it seems unlikely that he severs his



business ties with Papa Lavalier out of guilt. More likely, Frank feels like a failure for his inability to maintain a relationship with Monique. He usually leaves women before they can leave him, but on some inner level, he must suspect that women will see through his fake personality eventually. When Monique realizes he is not enough for her, he simply severs all ties with Papa Lavalier. Many people would do the same after being jilted, but not many would lie to themselves about their motivation.

At the end of the summer, Frank sends the girls home. He has profited some \$300,000 off the expense check scheme. Pan Am initiates an investigation because of the photographic proofs Frank arranged to have sent to their offices. O'Riley eventually contacts the girls. Frank states that all eight girls took the news gracefully. Meanwhile Frank remains in Europe, feeling hunted again. He returns to the States where he curtails his check swindles. He does not cease his criminal activities, but his motivation shifts. One day he overhears an arrogant rich banker lording his lofty status over an underling at an airport restaurant. Frank takes offense at his manner and swindles his bank out of \$10,000 by pretending to be a friend of the rich banker's. This con fails to provide Frank with a sense of satisfaction. He retreats to Vermont and meditates on his life. Frank decides it is time to retire and begin a crime-free life. He thinks of all the places he has visited and decides that Montpellier, France will make a good haven. Frank foreshadows his impending downfall by stating he should have given the decision greater thought.



Chapter 9, "Does This Tab Include the Tip?"

Chapter 9, "Does This Tab Include the Tip?" Summary and Analysis

The spurious nature of this chapter title lends to the overall tone of the book. The author, narrator, and subject, Frank Abagnale, seeks to present his disreputable life in glamorous packaging. Interestingly, this is the same approach Frank uses to pass fraudulent checks. Chapter 9 reveals the darkness lurking beneath Frank's glamorized crime spree. The chapter deals with some truly horrifying conditions in the French prison in which Frank finds himself, yet it is laughably titled "Does This Tab Include the Tip?" Even at this juncture, Frank is unable to face the dark reality of his past and chooses to make it into a joke. This almost desperate hilarity permeates much of the book, at times succeeding as true comedy but mainly alluding to Frank's buried feelings of desperation.

Frank denies that he chose Montpellier, France as his ultimate retreat because of his family ties to the region. Frank feels at home in his mother's native land. His grandparents are a mere hour's drive from Montpellier as well. He uses the name Robert Monjo and presents himself as a screenwriter from Los Angeles. He opens a bank account and buys a charming house. To maintain appearances, he fixes up one room as a study and library. He buys himself a nice car as well, though less flashy than his former vehicle purchases. Frank receives visits from his friendly neighbors and enjoys the people of Montpellier. However, he has no gainful employment. "It was difficult for me to stay busy. Loafing is hard work" (p. 219).

After a month, he risks a visit to his grandparents. They are delighted to see him and he stays for three days. Frank discovers that his mother has not told her parents the truth about Frank's criminal activities. His grandmother is under the impression that Frank is hitchhiking around the world, trying to find himself. He does not tell his grandparents that he lives in Montpellier. Instead, he tells them he is on his way to Spain and is considering enrolling in a university there. Frank visits his grandparents a second time during his stay in Montpellier. On the subsequent visit, he tells them he did not find a Spanish university to his liking and thus is heading to Italy to visit the universities there. In fact, Frank does consider resuming his education. Thanks to his mother, he is a native French speaker and Montpellier boasts a fine state university within its city limits. Frank also considers opening a stationery store, as it is the one business with which he has actual experience. His friend and neighbor, Armand, offers him a job in his vineyards, but Frank does not care to exert himself physically.

As Frank continues to mull over his options, they are eliminated. One day while he is shopping in the grocery store, he is cornered by four armed police officers. Luckily, he is apprehended without injury and driven directly to the Montpellier police station. Once



again, Frank clings to his false identity, claiming to be Robert Monjo from California. The French police are not fooled. They threaten to withhold food and water until he confesses. Realizing they are serious, Frank admits he is Frank Abagnale. Frank does not confess details of his crimes, but the police already have many of the details and, when confronted with the specifics, Frank agrees with the facts. Frank signs the accurate confession that the police prepare for him and learns that he was tracked down by an Air France flight attendant who recognized him while visiting her relatives in Montpellier. Frank hopes the informant is not Monique but he never learns her identity.

Frank's attorney informs him that the best they can hope for is a lenient sentence, for Frank's guilt is certain. His trial lasts two days, during which time a procession of witnesses testifies against him. His lawyer cites Frank's youth - he is now twenty-one years old - in a bid for leniency. Also, states his lawyer, there are twelve other European countries in line to extradite Frank for his crimes in their territories once Frank has served his sentence in France. Conceivably, Frank could be shuttled between European prisons for many years before finally being returned home to serve his time in America. The judge sentences him to a year in Perpignan prison.

Frank is elated, believing he has received a light sentence, but that is only because he has yet to see Perpignan. The "House of Arrest" as it is called is noted for its cruel treatment of inmates. Frank's cell is a tiny cubby; he cannot stand up straight within its confines. There is no furniture or light in his cell. He is provided only with a small bucket to use as a toilet. The bucket is only emptied two or three times in the six months that Frank is in Perpignan. He has no human contact during this time and because he does not see daylight, he quickly loses track of time. Frank only avoids succumbing to madness by using his imagination to escape his surroundings. He relives all his past cons and pretends he actually is an airline pilot or a college professor. In his fifth month, he receives a visitor from the American Consulate. Unfortunately, since Frank is receiving the same cruel treatment that the French prisoners receive, the Consulate cannot intervene. The judge who gave Frank his original sentence shortens the term from one year to six months. Frank is grateful, knowing he would not have survived, neither mentally nor physically, for another six months in Perpignan. When the guards escort him out of his cell, Frank sees the small room for the first time; it is covered in feces and maggots.

The French guards do not respond to any of Frank's questions, nor do they allow him a shower. He is escorted by rail to an unknown destination. His wild man appearance startles the passengers. Frank takes pleasure in frightening a group of young American women as he exits the train. At Orly Airport he is escorted to the Scandinavian Airlines Service counter where two female Swedish police officers await him. Against the French policemen's objections, one of the female officers insists on removing Frank's shackles.



Chapter 10, "Put Out an APB - Frank Abagnale Has Escaped!"

Chapter 10, "Put Out an APB - Frank Abagnale Has Escaped!" Summary and Analysis

Frank stares at the Swedish officer who is showing him the first bit of courtesy and kindness he has received since his arrest in France. She introduces herself as Jan Lundström and explains that she and the other female officer are prepared to escort Frank to Sweden where he faces a criminal proceeding. The French officers remove the chains and turn Frank over to the two women. Jan explains to Frank that the Swedish police rarely uses restraints, but she assures him both she and her partner carry guns and are prepared to use them if Frank attempts to escape. Frank doubts she would actually use her weapon on him but nods his understanding.

On the plane, the women give Frank their airline meals. The food is the best he has eaten since being imprisoned at Perpignan. His body is suffering from starvation and malnutrition. The officers are friendly during the flight and from them Frank learns that he only spent six months in Perpignan. The plane lands in Malmö, Sweden and Frank is taken to the Klippan police station where he receives medical attention. Frank's jail cell in the prison looks more like a spacious apartment, tastefully decorated, with a view and a sturdy oaken door. It is determined that Frank has double pneumonia. He recovers in a private hospital room for a month, with officers on guard outside his door. Without exception, all the Swedish police guards are friendly and companionable.

At the end of his hospital stay, he is returned to his "cell" and his guard, Karl, brings him room service for every meal. The food is excellent and Frank is allowed to accompany Karl on his rounds so he will not feel so cooped up in his room. Jan arrives one day to schedule a formal interrogation. She informs him of his rights and tells him he has been appointed an attorney named Elsa Kristiansson. Frank meets Elsa who promises to be on hand for the interrogation. Frank refuses to answer Jan's questions for three days. Jan gets frustrated and informs him it will go better for him if he is honest with her. Frank admits he does not want to tell the truth because he does not wish to spend the next twenty years behind bars. Jan and Elsa laugh hysterically at his words. Jan informs him that under Swedish law, the maximum penalty for financial crimes is one year, and she doubts he will receive the maximum. Upon learning this, Frank confesses everything.

A week later, he stands trial in Malmö. His attorney, whose capability he doubts, nearly manages to get him off on a technicality despite his confession. When that fails, Elsa obtains a shortened prison term of six months from the jury. Frank's refusal to take the Swedish women seriously again demonstrates his fundamental misogynist attitude. He also confuses kindness for weakness. When Jan shows him kindness by having his restraints removed, she respectfully but firmly warns him that she will shoot if he attempts to escape. Rather than appreciate her frank and respectful approach, Frank



refuses to take her seriously. He believes she is bluffing about shooting him. Later, when he is appointed a female attorney, he immediately doubts her competence before even meeting her. Although he does not state that his doubts are based upon her gender, it is interesting to note that Frank had no doubts about the male attorney he is appointed in France.

Frank is terrified to leave his comfortable "cell" in Klippan, but Jan assures him that Swedish prisons, including the prison at Malmo, are far different from both French and American prisons. Indeed, Frank quickly learns that Malmo has no fences, guard towers, bars, or electronic gates. His room is smaller than his room at Klippan but equally comfortable and well appointed. He is allowed to wear his own clothes, and the guards even escort him to a clothing store in the city and purchase two additional outfits for him. There are no restrictions on his access to mail and his letters are not censored. The food is good and he is allowed, within reason, to choose his own menu.

Malmo is coed but sexual cohabitation is prohibited among the inmates. Prisoners are allowed conjugal visits with their spouses or even their boyfriends and girlfriends, however. Visiting hours are liberal; prisoners can receive guests in their rooms between 4 PM and 10 PM daily. From 10 PM to 7 AM the prisoners are locked in their rooms, and the rest of the time they can freely roam the building. Frank is in a dormitory with other forgers and counterfeiters of his own age and gender. Swedish prisons focus on rehabilitation and he is offered the opportunity to attend university classes or work in a parachute factory for market wages. Frank chooses both options, studying commercial art at the university. One day a Swedish bank clerk brings him a fruit and cheese basket. The young man is one of Frank's former victims and has come to tell Frank that he has forgiven him. "I had really conned that kid. I had made him my friend, in fact, even visiting in his home, in order to perpetrate my swindle. His gesture really touched me" (p. 259).

His six months passes quickly and Frank is disappointed when it ends. His prison time has been the most enjoyable time of his life. He has lived comfortably and as himself with no lies or deceptions to maintain. Unfortunately, Italy, Spain, Turkey, Germany, England, Switzerland, Greece, Denmark, Norway, Egypt, Lebanon, and Cyprus are all waiting to extradite him for new trials. When Frank's attorney learns that Italy is next on the list, she appeals to the judge to block the extradition; she has been given to understand that Italian prisons are no better than French prisons. The judge denies appeal after appeal, but Elsa does not give up on Frank. The night before he is scheduled to ship out to Italy, the judge summons him. The judge tells Frank that after careful consideration, he believes Frank deserves a chance to contribute to society. The judge is putting his professional reputation on the line to release Frank directly to the United States. Frank will have to face US justice, but once that prison term is satisfied, he will never have to worry about being tried in Italy or any other foreign country for his crimes. The judge impresses upon Frank the seriousness of the judge's action; he exacts a promise from Frank that Frank will go straight upon serving his time in America.



Frank makes a solemn promise to the judge and breaks that promise within eighteen hours. Jan escorts him to the airport and gives him his paycheck from the parachute factory. She turns him over to the pilot's custody, explaining that Frank is being deported to the United States. He kisses Jan goodbye, sincerely grateful for the role she has played in his life. During the flight, Frank begins to consider his escape as he has no desire to do hard time in an American prison. He unsnaps the toilet as the landing plane taxis to the terminal and wriggles through the opening to the tarmac ten feet below. No one notices his escape until O'Riley and the other FBI agents discover the hole where the toilet should be.

He calls his parents for the first time in six years and has a tearful reunion with both of them by phone. He does not dare visit them knowing their homes will be under surveillance. Ignoring their pleas for him to turn himself in, Frank instead visits a girlfriend in the Bronx. At her house, he retrieves his clothing, money, and the keys to a safe-deposit box in Montreal. His intention is to pick up the money in Montreal then flee to Brazil. In prison, he learned that Brazil has no extradition treaty with the United States. He never boards the flight however as he is arrested at the Montreal airport by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. They drive him to New York and hand him over to the FBI; Frank is taken to a federal detention facility and arraigned. His bond is \$250,000. He spends two months at the detention facility before the decision is made to try him in Georgia.

The cellblock at the Fulton County Jail is hardly a pleasant environment. A fellow inmate informs Frank that the only decent place in the prisoner is the hospital. Upon hearing this, Frank immediately drops a dime in the payphone and calls the desk sergeant. Posing as Dr. John Petsky, Frank informs the sergeant that his patient, Frank Abagnale, is a severe diabetic and should be confined in the medical ward. When a jailer arrives half an hour later to escort Frank to the hospital, his fellow inmates admire his ingenuity. A week later, Frank is transferred to the Federal Detention Center in Atlanta while awaiting trial. Frank's hurried transfer means he is admitted without the proper paperwork. The prison admissions officer suspects that Frank is a prison inspector because the previous month an inspector, posing as a prisoner, had uncovered unethical treatment amongst the prison staff. Thus, the prison officials resent Frank but treat him very well, believing that he is an undercover prison inspector; Frank is only too happy to let them think so.

Frank contacts an old girlfriend in Atlanta and asks her to meet him outside the prison with her car engine running. Frank then admits his identity to the prison officials and commends them on the state of their prison. They allow the "inspector" to leave for an urgent meeting. Frank and his girlfriend drive away quickly. She loans him money so he can hide out until he can obtain some more cash. He decides to go to Washington, D.C., hoping to avoid the manhunt for him, which is in all the papers. However, shortly after checking into his motel room, he looks outside and sees federal agents surreptitiously surrounding the building. He doubts he can escape the tightening noose, but determines to try. Frank slips out the back door of the motel and walks toward the darkness beyond the parking lot. Two police officers order him to freeze as they hold him at gunpoint. Frank never even breaks stride. He whips out his billfold and

introduces himself as Agent Davis of the FBI. He asks if O'Riley has arrived. The officers lower their pistols and tell him O'Riley is on his way. Frank tells them to cover the back and walks away from the bust.

Afterword and Q&A with the Author

Afterword and Q&A with the Author Summary and Analysis

Less than a month after evading capture in Washington, D.C., Frank Abagnale is taken into custody by two New York City detectives. Frank denies his identity but the ruse does not work this time. Frank faces charges from every one of the fifty states and a host of federal charges as well. Frank hires an excellent attorney who arranges a terrific deal. Frank pleads guilty under Rule 20 of the U.S. Penal Code. This plea includes "all crimes, known and unknown," which Abagnale may have committed in the United States (p. 281). Thus, Frank is only prosecuted and sentenced on eight criminal counts. He receives seven concurrent ten-year sentences plus two years for the escape charge, to be served after the ten-year sentence. His total sentence is therefore twelve years and he is sentenced to the Federal Correction Institution in Petersburg, Virginia where Frank serves four years, getting out early for good behavior.

He is eventually paroled and sent to Houston, Texas as New York is deemed a bad environment for him. He suffers the typical difficulties of an ex-convict trying to find work and complains about the attitude of his parole officer. Frank loses two jobs because he lies about his criminal background on his applications. Frank considers returning to crime, but after a much-delayed period of introspection, he comes up with a better plan. Frank offers to teach financial companies how swindlers operate to improve their training and security methods. He begins lecturing as a "white collar crime specialist" (p. 284) to local banks and soon finds himself in great demand. Today he is a respected authority on counterfeiting and runs a secure document firm. He has spent twenty-five years working for the FBI's Financial Crimes Unit and teaches at the FBI Academy. Frank Abagnale resides in the Midwest with his wife and three sons.

The final segment of the book is devoted to a question and answer session with Frank Abagnale that takes place some twenty years after the original copyright date of *Catch Me if You Can*. Frank describes himself today as a good husband and father, no longer the unscrupulous criminal he once was. This is a difficult statement to accept given what the reader has just learned about Frank. It is likely true that Frank has changed, for even by the time of the book's initial publication in 1980, Frank had accumulated a longer track record as an honest citizen than he accumulated as a criminal. He is a family man who has paid his debt to society and appears to have learned from his youthful mistakes. Yet, again, this is difficult to accept, for the tone of the novel is not one of remorse. Nor does Frank place his criminal exploits in a wider context of increased wisdom. Frank offers no apologies and draws no moral conclusions. That he has changed has been established, but the reader is not privy to the details of this change. The book actually glorifies Frank's exploits, which again makes it difficult for the reader to believe this incorrigible con man has changed.



The tone of the novel, therefore, serves to undermine the author's primary thesis. However, overall, it is understandable that so many years later Frank can look back upon his youthful exploits with glee. This happens with many adults who spend years regretting, changing, and growing from youthful errors. Once an individual has fully grown beyond such erroneous ways, it again becomes possible to look back with a sense of fun and recall the positive feelings once inspired by past behaviors. This is a natural and appropriate growth curve. Besides, Frank's crimes have actually contributed to society in the long run because of the subsequent changes he made in his life. He could not teach banks how to improve their security if he had not first been a check swindler. Had he remained a check swindler, his life would have never obtained a positive purpose. However, by renouncing his crimes and doing something good with his life, Frank has, over time, tipped the scales in his favor. He has by now saved banks more money than he ever stole from them, and thus his life story makes a wonderful case for redemption.



Characters

Frank Abagnale, Jr.

Frank Abagnale, Sr.

Paulette Abagnale

Dr. Willis Granger

Dr. Amos Grimes

Rosalie

Monique Lavalier

Aloysius James "Bailout" Bailey

Inspector Jan Lundstrzm

FBI Inspector Sean O'Riley



Objects/Places

Jump Seat

The jump seat is located on the back of the cockpit door. When the door is closed, it can be folded down to accommodate an extra person in the cockpit. Off-duty pilots traveling to a distant airport for flight duty sometimes use these jump seats; this practice is known as deadheading. Frank Abagnale frequently deadheads, pretending to be a pilot in order to obtain free airfare and a ride on the jump seat.

Well-Built Uniform Company

Frank obtains his first Pan Am co-pilot's uniform from the Well-Built Uniform Company in New York. He charges the suit to his non-existent employee account with Pan Am, effectively sticking the helpful uniform company proprietor, Mr. Rosen, with the bill.

River Bend

River Bend is the name of the upscale singles complex in Atlanta, Georgia where Frank makes his home for a year. This is Frank's first permanent home since beginning his criminal career some three years prior. He loves River Bend and is relieved not to be spending his nights motel-hopping. River Bend gives him a temporary of belonging for the first time in years.

Smithers Pediatric Institute and General Hospital

The Smithers Pediatric Institute and General Hospital in Marietta, Georgia is where Frank embarks on his career posing as a pediatrician. Frank cons Dr. Willis Granger into believing that he is a bona fide pediatrician. Frank's con is so effective that Dr. Granger helps Frank obtain a temporary position at Smithers as a supervising physician.

Pocket Medical Dictionary

During his brief tenure at the Smithers Pediatric Institute and General Hospital, Frank carries a pocket dictionary of medical terms on his person at all times. Whenever Frank is confronted with an unfamiliar medical term of art, he retreats to a supply closet where he secretly thumbs through his medical dictionary for a definition of the term.



Pan Am Expense Check

Under the presumption that an expense reimbursement check probably looks different than a standard payroll check, Frank creates fake checks that he passes off as Pan American Expense Checks. This scheme proves quite lucrative for him as many businesses gladly cash the fake expense checks for the handsome young man in a Pan Am pilot uniform.

The I-Tek Camera

When Frank meets a young lady who works as a graphic artist for a check-designing firm, he learns from her that all he needs to create realistic checks is an I-Tek camera. Frank immediately purchases a used I-Tek camera and makes himself a batch of "Pan Am Expense Checks" which look much more realistic than his previous, hand-made forgeries.

Perpignan "House of Arrest"

The prison in Perpignan, France is called the "House of Arrest." Conditions in Perpignan are incredibly cruel. Frank is kept in a dark cell so small he cannot stand upright. His cell is not touched by either natural or artificial light. There is no furniture in the cell. Frank is provided only with a bucket to use as a toilet. The bucket is emptied only two or three times in the six months he is imprisoned; as a result, his cell is awash in his own feces and is covered with maggots as well.

State Institution at Malmo

Malmo is the Swedish prison where Frank serves his six-month prison term. Unlike the vile conditions of Perpignan in France, the Malmo prison is an enlightened facility where prisoners are not denied their basic human rights. Malmo inmates are encouraged to work, study, and learn how to reintegrate into society.

Federal Detention Center in Atlanta

Frank is brought to the Federal Detention Center in Atlanta, Georgia while awaiting trial in the United States for his crimes. Frank discovers that undercover prison inspectors have been infiltrating the prison to report on human rights violations. He escapes from this prison by posing as a prison inspector and conning the guards into releasing him.



Themes

Misogyny

Frank Abagnale cites his parents' divorce as one of the primary events that shaped his larcenous character. However, Frank has very little insight into the anger he feels towards his mother, and he does not realize that he directs that anger against women in general. Frank believes he loves women; he sees himself as an accomplished lover and wooer of women. Like many misogynists, he fails to recognize his own misogyny. Frank cons himself into believing that he is helpless against the charms of women. He fails to see that this is a projection of the truth, for he is the one who manipulates women with his honeyed words and false identities. Frank thinks his cons are limited to faceless financial institutions. In fact, he prides himself on never conning an individual. He does not realize that the *principal targets* of all his cons are the women in his life. Nor does he spare a thought for the emotional havoc he creates in their lives.

Frank engages in sexual relations with women under false pretences. One-night stands are not enough for Frank, however. He subsequently leads the women on by presenting himself as an adult male with the capability and intention of entering into and sustaining a relationship. Many of these women consider Frank marriage material. They believe him to be a self-supporting and successful pilot, doctor, lawyer, or university professor. Despite his boyish ways, the women must assume Frank possesses a high degree of responsibility and accountability in order to succeed in such professions. Frank treats them all as if they were the love of his life, faking feelings he is not capable of actually feeling in order to establish a sexual relationship.

His courtship of Rosalie, Frank's "first love," is a case in point. Twenty-four-year-old Rosalie is a virgin and makes it clear she is saving herself for marriage. When Frank confesses that he loves her, Rosalie informs him it is time they tell her parents about their relationship. En route to her parents' home, Rosalie makes love to the man she believes will be her future husband. In his own mind, Frank protests that he has not proposed and is therefore not responsible for her decision to be with him, yet he has known all along the conditions involved with establishing a sexual relationship with Rosalie. Rosalie is the first person to whom he ever confesses his true identity. When Rosalie responds to the fact that she has been duped and used by a criminal by summoning the police, Frank has the gall to feel that she has betrayed him. This is but one of many examples of Frank's misogyny throughout the book. Ultimately even the reformed, older, and wiser version of Frank who narrates the story is eminently unlikable because he still fails to recognize his fundamental hatred for and mistreatment of women. To Frank, violating women under false pretenses is just plain fun, and the women deserve what they get.



Broken Homes

Frank Abagnale, Jr.'s story highlights the far-reaching effect in which a parental divorce can have on a child's life. The phrase "broken home" does not become part of the general lexicon for some thirty years after Frank grows up, yet in referring back to his childhood Frank uses the phrase to describe his situation. Frank is raised in an era before divorce and single parenthood were considered politically correct. As such, he suffers even greater stigma than children of broken homes do today. Further, with few role models or psychological resources to guide them, Frank's parents handle their divorce in the worst possible fashion. Frank's mother makes many serious mistakes and, although Frank does not verbalize his anger towards her, his decision to live with his father is his way of communicating his displeasure with his mother. Frank's mother's primary mistake is to make a unilateral decision to divorce Frank Sr. She moves the children out of the family home while Frank Sr. is away on a business trip. Such a unilateral move is today considered an immature and unfair action unless, of course, domestic violence is a factor, in which case the victim is indeed urged to flee the home without notice.

After moving out of the family home, Frank's mother proceeds to demonize her ex-husband, making sure Frank Jr. knows what a bad person and influence his father is. This occurs in the days before Dr. Spock warned parents that disrespecting the parent in front of the child is the same as disrespecting the child. Even today, emotionally provoked parents continue this harmful practice despite society's improved education on the matter. To convince Frank that his father is bad is tantamount to convincing Frank that he himself is bad - and indeed, his mother's venomous words do ultimately have that effect. Frank's father's behavior subsequent to the divorce is just as harmful, although Frank clearly sides with his father and does not hold him accountable for his behavior. Frank Sr. uses Frank Jr. as a pawn and a middleman in his never-ending attempts to woo back his ex-wife. Frank Sr.'s controlling, obsessive efforts are unlikely to yield positive results, but Frank Jr. continues to blame his mother for refusing his father's advances. While it is not surprising that Frank Jr. chooses a side in the dispute - after all his parents have strongly encouraged him to do so - it is surprising is that as an adult Frank Jr. does not revisit this young trauma to review it with a mature, adult perspective.

Alter Egos

The opening lines of *Catch Me if You Can* establish Frank Abagnale's alter-ego theme: "A man's alter ego is nothing more than his favorite image of himself. The mirror in my room in the Windsor Hotel in Paris reflected my favorite image of me - a darkly handsome young airline pilot, smooth-skinned, bull-shouldered, and immaculately groomed" (Chap. 1, p. 1). Frank makes no secret that the false identities he assumes are a form of wish fulfillment. In fact, a reader might easily draw the conclusion that Frank's swindling activities are merely an excuse for him to assume the alter egos of his choice. What Frank takes the most pleasure in throughout his criminal career is not the



money, but the admiration that his alter egos receive from the public. He describes his desire to wear a pilot's uniform as an addiction. Indeed, Frank frequently spends time at the airports in his uniform even when he is not trying to pass bad checks. He simply enjoys the respectful salutations and admiring looks he receives as a pilot.

The theory that Frank is more interested in becoming his alter egos than in making money through his criminal activities is born out by the drop-off in fraudulent check-passing during the times when Frank is impersonating a doctor, lawyer, or college professor. While Frank is gainfully employed in the guise of one of these professional alter egos, he engages in not a single instance of check forgery. That is quite notable, because at all other times during his six-year crime spree, Frank is addicted to check forging, able to cut down but not able to stop completely. Frank is able to go "cold turkey" and stop passing fraudulent checks only when he is living the life of one of his much-admired alter egos. Frank's self-esteem may be so low that he compensates with his compulsive check swindling, but Frank's alter egos have excellent self-esteem. Thus while impersonating one of these personalities, Frank has no need to pass back checks.



Style

Perspective

The unique perspective of *Catch Me if You Can* is what makes this non-fiction story so interesting. Frank W. Abagnale tells the story of his six-year crime spree from his personal perspective. Beginning at the age of sixteen, Frank becomes a one-man crime wave, swindling, conning, and scheming his way around the world. The book, written many years after the fact, contains a dual perspective: the perspective of young Frank, conman extraordinaire, and the perspective of the older, wiser Frank who narrates the tale. The narrator takes the reader behind the scenes of his criminal life. This glimpse into the highly creative and selfishly self-serving mindset of a master swindler is breathtaking. It is also edifying to see how Frank cons himself, believing that his crimes are harmless when in fact they harm him and everyone he cares about, as well as a lot of innocent bystanders whom he does not care about at all. Frank convinces himself that he is a caring person and fails, even at this late date, to recognize the magnitude of the damage he has caused.

The most interesting aspect of the book's unique perspective is the underlying tension created by its central paradox. The reader is assured he or she is reading the true story even as the reader is confronted with a litany of lies previously told by the narrator. Even the title implies that the story is both true and false - *Catch Me if You Can: The True Story of a Real Fake*. How much of what Frank writes is true? Has he conned himself into believing his own spurious rationalizations or, conversely, has he discovered the true reasons behind his need to falsify his life? The reader simply cannot be sure. This on-going uncertainty creates a narrative tension that permeates the entire book.

Tone

The tone of *Catch Me if You Can* is best described as brash. Frank Abagnale's success as a conman and swindler relies heavily on his confidence and verve. He has the ability to bulldoze his way through any situation with a combination of charm, indignation, and an inner delight at his ability to convince others that his lies are true. Frank's attitude is one of superiority. He believes that trusting people make easy prey. Never does it occur to the brash young man that it takes more courage to trust one's fellow human beings than it does to con them. Frank's gleeful tone suggests that he feels superior to the people he cons. He feels that the liar is exempt from consequences because the only people who believe lies are idiots, fools, and losers. Frank is a winner because he is on the giving, not receiving end of the lie. This brash tone does not exactly project confidence and strength, however. It frequently comes across as a false, almost desperate bravado. Frank's gleeful tone has an undertone of forced laughter or hysteria. The narrator seems to be trying to put a positive spin on events that have no positive basis.



Structure

Catch Me if You Can: The True Story of a Real Fake focuses on a six-year period in author Frank W. Abagnale's life. Frank's six-year crime spree is told in chronological order in the form of a memoir. Author and narrator Frank Abagnale is a witty raconteur who organizes the structure of his material to keep the story moving. His crime spree is divided into ten chapters and each chapter is loosely organized around one major occurrence or narrative plank. Chapter 1 discusses Frank's first childhood foray into crime and provides some rudimentary reasons why he turns to crime. Chapter 2 details the development of his first major scam, which is ultimately to become his signature pose, that of a Pan American airline pilot. Chapter 3 discusses Frank's increasing proficiency in using the pilot scam to cash bad checks. In Chapter 4, Frank takes a break from check passing to pose as a doctor; he practices medicine in the state of Georgia and earns a paycheck from a hospital in Marietta.

Similarly, Chapter 5 details his fraudulent legal and professorial careers. Chapter 6 describes Frank's progress as he returns to check forging, and in Chapter 7 he brings his newly honed and improved skills back to his first love, pretending to be a pilot. Chapters 9 and 10 document his inevitable capture by the authorities and Frank's slippery escape attempts. The book ends with a successful escape attempt, but the Afterword indicates that Frank was finally rounded up and paid his debt to society. An updated Q&A session appended to Afterword fields questions from readers who compare the book with the subsequently filmed motion picture.



Quotes

"I made a lot of exits through side doors, down fire escapes or over rooftops. I abandoned more wardrobes in the course of five years than most men acquire in a lifetime. I was slipperier than a buttered *escargot*." Chap. 1, p. 4

"If I had to place any blame for my future nefarious actions, I'd put it on the Ford.

That Ford fractured every moral fiber in my body. It introduced me to girls, and I didn't come to my senses for six years. They were wonderful years." Chap. 1, p. 11

"'Glad to have helped you, son,' he said. 'I hope you get those pilot's wings, if that's what you want.'

I already had the wings. What I needed was an ID card and an FAA pilot's license. I wasn't too concerned about the ID card. The pilot's license had me stumped. The FAA was not exactly a mail-order house." Chap. 2, p. 39

"The National Crime Information Center (NCIC) did not exist as a police tool during the period. Had I had to contend with the computerized police link, with its vast and awesome reservoir of criminal facts and figures, my career would probably have been shortened by years. And lastly, I was pioneering a scam that was so implausible, so seemingly impossible and so brass-balled blatant that it worked." Chap. 3, pp. 62-63

"A transcript from Harvard. That might prove difficult, I mused, since the university and I were strangers. But then I'd never had any pilot's training, either. And I had a valid-appearing FAA pilot's license in my pocket stating I was qualified to fly passenger jets, didn't I?" Chap. 5, p. 101

"At least fifty of my students sought me out to tell me how much they had enjoyed my classes and to wish me good-bye and good luck.

I was reluctant to leave that Utah Utopia, but I could find no valid reason for staying. If I lingered, my past was certain to catch up, and I did not want these people's image of me to be tarnished." Chap. 5, p. 115

"The most successful cattle rustlers in the Old West were experts at brand blotting and brand changing. I was an expert in check number blotting and changing, using press-on numbers and press-on magnetic tape numbers." Chap. 7, p. 154

"'Now, if any or all of you would like to take part in the program this summer, I'm authorized to hire you. You'll have an expense-paid tour of Europe. You'll be paid the same salary as a starting stewardess, and you'll dress as stewardesses, but you won't be stewardesses. We'll supply your uniforms'." Chap. 8, p. 191

"There was, naturally, some unavoidable contact with other flight crews, since the success of my check-cashing scam demanded we stay at hotels which catered to airline



personnel. There was always the risk that one of the girls, while in uniform, would encounter another, actual, Pan Am stewardess, and a disastrous dialogue would ensue." Chap. 8, pp. 206-207

"The walls were moist and crusted with slimy mold. The ceiling, too, glistened with moisture. The floor was filthy with excrement, and the bucket, unemptied for some time, teemed with maggots. The odious worms were also slithering around the floor.

I vomited.

It was perhaps another hour before the guard returned. This time he opened the door. 'Come with me,' he ordered. I scrambled from the foul cave without hesitation, experiencing shooting pains in my neck, shoulders, arms and legs as I straightened up for the first time since my arrival." Chap. 9, pp. 239-240

"The ward was a coed prison. Several women were housed in the institution, but sexual cohabitation was prohibited between inmates. Conjugal visits were allowed between a man and wife, a wife and husband or between an inmate and his/her boy/girlfriend. The prisoners had the freedom of the building between 7 A.M. and 10 P.M., and they could receive visitors in their quarters between 4 P.M. and 10 P.M. daily." Chap. 10, p. 258

"I have taken this action, young man, because I feel it is in the best interests of all concerned, especially yourself. I think, when you have settled your obligations in your own country, that you can have a fruitful and happy life. . . I am gambling my personal integrity on that, Mr. Abagnale. I hope you don't prove me wrong.

I wanted to hug and kiss him. Instead I wrung his hand and tearfully promised him that I would make something worthwhile of my future. It was a promise I was to break within eighteen hours." Chap. 10, p. 263

"Freeze, mister, police!' one barked in a command right out of a television police drama.

I didn't freeze. I kept walking, right at the muzzles of their guns, whipping out my billfold as I walked. 'Davis, FBI,' I said, surprised at my own coolness and the firmness of my voice." Chap. 10, p. 276



Topics for Discussion

Do you believe Frank has changed and truly regrets his criminal actions? Why or why not?

Discuss the fundamentally different philosophies between Swedish prisons and French prisons.

Consider your own country's prison system. Is it more like the Swedish or the French system? Which system do you feel is more effective on the whole?

Do you think the Swedish prison system or the French prison system plays a larger role in rehabilitating Frank? Why?

Frank claims that he loves women. Given the way he treats them, do you believe his claim?

What is the source of Frank's anger toward women? How might this anger have been resolved?

Frank does not offer any reason for embarking on a life of crime beyond his desire to con women. What do you think is the origin of his choice to become a swindler?