

# **Papillon Study Guide**

## **Papillon by Henri Charrière**

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# Plot Summary

Henri Charriere, known as Papillion for his butterfly tattoo, is accused of murdering a "pimp and stool pigeon" and finds himself in court awaiting the trial. Despite his attorney's assurance that there is no real evidence, he is found guilty and sentenced to life in prison. Papillion is immediately faced with a decision. He has to almost immediately make a decision whether to appeal the sentence, Papillion decides that he will focus everything he has on escape rather than trying to get a new trial to have the sentence reversed or lessened, fearing that he would be sentenced to many years in prison regardless and would then be faced with the need to escape anyway. With the determination to escape and with some money stowed in a metal container carried in his intestine by way of his anus, Papillion begins his sentence.

Papillion soon finds the opportunity to make an escape but is double-crossed by a man named Jesus who sells him a leaky boat. Papillion soon makes the acquaintance of the first of many who give him advice and help on his way to his eventual freedom. Aided by a group of lepers, Papillion and his two companions make good their escape but are taken into custody in Venezuela. When Papillion has an opportunity to escape from this newest form of prison, he finds himself accepted by the Indians of the country. There, he is taken as "husband" by a woman and soon lives as a family with both this woman, Lali, and her younger sister. Both are pregnant by the time Papillion realizes that he will never have peace without going on to seek out revenge against those who wrongfully accused him. He is soon captured again and is taken back to prison where he is held in solitary for two years. At the end of that time, he immediately begins seeking a new opportunity for escape. He has a raft built and secrets it away for later assembly but is captured in the assembly process and sent again to solitary. An effort to save a young girl who is in danger of being attacked by sharks results in his sentence being commuted so that he serves only nineteen months of the eight years of this sentence.

In the relative freedom of the main prison, Papillion goes to great lengths to make himself appear crazy. From the island's asylum, he makes another attempt but is driven back by rough seas and his partner in this effort is killed. Papillion then discovers a place where he can hurl himself into the sea with a good possibility of being dragged to sea by the current. Armed with a makeshift raft of bags filled with coconuts, he does so and the first leg of his escape is successful. He finds himself eventually in Venezuela and there waits out a shorter sentence in a quest for freedom to live among these people.



# First Notebook, The Descent into Hell

## First Notebook, The Descent into Hell Summary and Analysis

The story opens in "The Assizes," with Papillion about to enter the courtroom for his trial. He is twenty-five but looks somewhat younger, is well-dressed and polite which prompts the jailers to allow him to walk around without handcuffs. Papillion notes that the star witness against him is a "walking tape recorder" named Polein. Papillion insists that he does not know Polein and holds to the idea that Polein was caught in some illegal action with the police agreeing to drop the charges against him in return for lies against Papillion—a claim supported by the fact that Polein is later arrested for drug trafficking. Papillion is accused of having murdered "a pimp and a stool pigeon" named Roland de Petit. Papillion is sentenced to life in prison at hard labor, escaping the death penalty because the jury apparently did not believe the murder to be premeditated.

In "The Conciergerie," Papillion knows that he will attempt escape. With this in mind, he discards the idea of an appeal, knowing he would still try to escape if he were given twenty years instead of life. He sends "consoling" messages by wire to his sister and wife and feels sympathy for his father. At the advice of fellow inmate, a man named Dega, Papillion gets a "plan," a tube about two and a half inches long that contains 5,600 francs. He shoves the tube, which is about "as thick as your thumb," up his anus where he lodges it in the colon. He is placed on suicide watch though he has no intention of killing himself, and spends all his time plotting how to escape and how to exact revenge against the prosecutors and witness once he's free.

Dega tells Papillion that he plans to pretend to be crazy in hopes of remaining in France rather than being transported to the bagne, a penal colony in Italy. In "The Jail in Caen," Papillion tells of the rules of this jail where he and the others are awaiting their trip to the bagne. Prisoners are confined to a small room but are not allowed to lie down during the day. They rise at six in the morning and Papillion spends the entire day pacing. He is involved in a fight in which he severely injures a trusty who is beating on Papillion and a prisoner named Julot. The trusty who takes his place is named Batton and he gives Papillion some small favors, including some extra food and allowing Papillion to communicate with another prisoner via "the telephone,"—a tapping on the bars in a rough alphabetical code—during Papillion's time in solitary.

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There are a great many blanks left for the reader to fill in during the opening chapters of this book. For example, it is noted that Papillion is accused of having murdered a "pimp," but there are no real details of the murder offered up. It is also noted that Papillion has "underworld" connections, but those are not explained. It seems likely that Papillion does know about the murders based on the fact that he describes de Petit as "a stool pigeon" and that his underworld friends applaud the fact that he does not tell

who the real murderer is. Dega's crimes, by contrast, are outlined more completely. He was arrested for bleaching bills and replacing the ink with larger increments.



# Second Notebook, En Route to the Bagne

## Second Notebook, En Route to the Bagne Summary and Analysis

In "Saint-Martin-De-Re," Papillion receives a note from Batton saying that he tries to "do as little harm as possible" in his role as trusty and that he has taken the job in an effort to shorten his time in jail. He also tells Papillion that the convoy to Saint-Martin-De-Re will leave in two days. Papillion says that it is a boring routine there with ten men per cell and all waiting for further transport. One day a man named Ignace Galgani tells Papillion that he has dysentery, that he does not believe he can continue to carry his "plan," and asks Papillion to carry it for him. Papillion initially plans to decline but the man says his "plan" is twenty-five thousand francs and Papillion agrees. Two men, Julot and Le Guittou, have escaped the bagne and are among Papillion's group. Papillion gains some information from them and more from a man who grew up at the bagne, the son of a prison guard, and is returning as a prisoner. Papillion tries to return Galgani's plan but he tells Papillion that it is a gift because he fears taking it back. Papillion learns that Galgani is afraid of a man named Mokrane and Papillion shows Mokrane a lancet that he has managed to purchase, telling the man that Galgani has Papillion's protection. Galgani agrees to take back his plan the following day but hides from Papillion.

In "Departure for the Bagne," the trip takes eighteen days and the stabbing of a man at night leads to several being taken from their cell into smaller spaces while one prisoner is whipped severely and several are burned with steam. During the trip, Papillion gathers all the information he can about their destination so that he will be better prepared to try an escape. In "Saint-Laurent-Du-Maroni," they arrive at the prison on the river Maroni. Papillion gives Galgani his "plan" back and Galgani gives Papillion a reward for having kept it safe. In the middle of the night, there is gun fire and Papillion learns that Julot has escaped. He says that in 1948, he encounters Julot living in Haiti. On November 21, 1933, with time passing, Papillion meets Joanes Clousiot who had been almost killed at the barber's in Saint-Martin. Now Clousiot is interested in Papillion's escape plan which includes taking guards by surprise and jumping the prison wall into the river, though he expands some on the idea.

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It is noted that, while in the Saint-Martin-De-Re, Papillion is one of eleven men in the same cell and there is only one of those who is not a member of what Papillion calls "the underground." Papillion has managed to procure a "lancet" that becomes an important part of his protection as the group prepares for the trip to the bagne. What is interesting about this is that he is able to get the weapon and that he does not get

caught with it. He says that they are frequently strip-searched but he apparently never gets caught with the weapon.



# The Third Notebook, The First Cavale

## The Third Notebook, The First Cavale Summary and Analysis

In "Escape from the Hospital," Papillion agrees to pay a man named Jesus to help him escape along with another prisoner named Clousiot though several others decide the plan is too risky and decline Papillion's offer to join them. They have one problem related to the guards and convince another younger man who has a very feminine appearance to seduce a guard. The young man, Maturette, agrees on the condition that they take him along. Clousiot breaks his leg jumping over the wall but they make it to the boat and leave with Jesus and another man. Papillion realizes that the boat is not sufficient to carry them to sea. They encounter a man named the Masked Breton who gives them directions to the Ile aux Pigeons, a leper's colony. In "The Ile Aux Pigeons," they buy a boat for much less than it is worth and are given food and supplies for the trip. They are also given very specific instructions on reaching the open sea. In "The Great Departure," they make their way to sea despite being shot at several times. Clousiot says that he left a note under his pillow indicating that he had "moved," and that he had not left a forwarding address. After days at sea and some foul weather, they reach Trinidad. In "Trinidad," the three are met with kindness by a family named Bowen but are told prisoners are not allowed to settle in the country. Clousiot is treated for the broken leg and remains in the hospital. Papillion and Maturette are free to walk around the town and do so on their first evening of freedom.

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Papillion is careful not to show his horror at the appearance of the lepers and they are careful not to touch him and do not allow him to touch anything that any of them might have contaminated. The man named Toussaint hands Papillion a bowl and Papillion sees that the man's finger has come off and stuck to the bowl. The man notices it too, says that it is yet "another" finger he has lost, and throws it into the fire. He assures Papillion that he has a dry form of the disease and that he is not contagious. It is interesting that Papillion goes to great lengths to reassure these people that he is not afraid of the disease; he drinks out of the bowl despite the finger incident.





# The Fourth Notebook, The First Cavale, Continued

## The Fourth Notebook, The First Cavale, Continued Summary and Analysis

In "Trinidad," Papillion and Maturette answer questions posed by the authorities, including their charges and whether they had injured anyone during their escape. They are told they must leave within eighteen days and that the country's navy will refit their boat. Mr. Bowen's daughter says that they will help gather the necessary supplies for the trip. Mr. Bowen makes some phone calls on their behalf, learning that Curacao will allow them to dock there for a few days to rest during their voyage, and that Columbia has no procedure for returning escapees because no one has ever made it that far. The three agree that will be their destination. Then Papillion learns that there are three other escaped convicts in Trinidad and that they have no way to leave. Papillion and the others are asked to take the three with them. Papillion agrees but asks to meet them first. In the jail, he learns that the ha'd all feared being in the boat on the sea. Papillion asks them to take a look at his boat before they decide.

In "New Departure," Papillion takes the three cons—identified as Leroux, Kargueret and Dufils—to see the boat. They agree to leave with him and Papillion says that the only rule is that they are not allowed to show signs of panic, no matter how afraid they became. There is a storm but they survive and then have to wait for a long time for wind so they can continue their journey. In "Curacao," they arrive at land but crash into rocks and barely make it to shore alive. They find a house and Papillion opens a bag of money, examines it to determine what country they are in, and leaves it intact. They then encounter a man, Dr. Naal, who has been told that Papillion stole the money. Dr. Naal calls the police who investigate and discover that the claims against Papillion are false. They are told that they will be detained and that they will be put aboard a ship headed out of the country. Papillion and Clousiot believe it to be a trick. A priest and a nun join Dr. Naal in his efforts to find a way to set Papillion and the others free without sending them out of the country to sea, and Dr. Naal buys a smuggler's boat for Papillion and the others. They find the boat is fully outfitted for their journey.

In "The Prison in Rio Hacha," Papillion and the others leave at daybreak but the three who recently joined the party want no part of a long crossing and ask to be put out on shore some distance away. Papilliion agrees and they do so but find they have no wind to begin moving away after they let the three out. They are overtaken by a launch and captured. They are held for more than a week and their capture has been "greatly romanticized" by the local media so that it appears Papillion and the others were a great threat to the population. Papillion and the others begin to suspect that they may not be allowed to leave at all. In "The Cavale from Rio Hacha," Papillion makes friends with a fellow prisoner named Antonio who plans an escape and agrees to take Papillion with



him. The others decline to follow, feeling the plan is too daring. Papillion is cut by the glass at the top of the wall but counts this a small price. He and Antonio escape and make their way out of the area, chewing a cocoa leaf that puts them into a drugged state in which they can overcome fatigue and hunger. Papillion's destination is an Indian territory called Guajira. They meet a man on the way who gives Papillion a dagger for protection.

In "The Indians," Papillion arrives at an Indian village and is severely bitten by a dog. He is then examined closely by a man who turns out to be a chief, Zato. The man then touches Papillion's shoulder, a sign that he is accepted, which prompts a young girl named Lali to wash out the dog bite and to claim him as her own. The Indians are amazed at Papillion's tattoos and Papillion goes to a great deal of trouble to trace his own tiger tattoo so that he can accurately duplicate it on the chief. Lali claims Papillion as her own and they move into a hut restored by the other Indians. Their communication is hampered but there is an old man who can communicate some with Papillion and he studies the language. One day Lali, fearing that Papillion is preparing to leave the village, brings her sister, Zoraima, to Papillion, hoping that Zoraima will please him so that he will not leave. Papillion at first ignores the sexual advances of the sister but eventually gives in. Zoraima is the first to conceive but Lali does later as Papillion is preparing to leave the village. Lali is a diver who catches oysters and retains a portion of the pearls found in oysters as her pay. During his stay, Papillion amasses a large bag of pearls, some five or six hundred, given to him by Lali. There is a formal farewell as Papillion leaves and he formally requests care for his two "wives," promising that he will one day return and that his spirit will return immediately if he dies.

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Papillion is told that the three other cons arrived with the information that their boat had sank but that he believes they sank their boat as an excuse to keep from leaving Trinidad. When Papillion learns the truth from the group, they say that a man had lied to them about his ability to sail so that they would go with him and that they had nearly drowned during the initial part of the voyage. When they had realized their situation, one of the men had killed the liar. They then ask Papillion what he would have done but he declines to say, insisting that he cannot judge without having been there. Papillion tells the men that he will take them with him in his boat, but denies their request that he drop them somewhere else along the shore. He says that the people of Trinidad have been kind to him and have trusted him, and that he will not betray their kindness in that way. This is an interesting point about Papillion's character. He himself says that after having escaped from the inhumane situation of the prison, he quickly regains his sense of human decency.

As Papillion is preparing to leave the Indian village, Lali asks why he will not stay. Papillion tells her of those who lied to put him in jail and asks what she would do if she had enemies of this kind. She admits that she would go as far as necessary to exact revenge. This seems to satisfy her so that she understands.



# Fifth Notebook, Return to Civilization

## Fifth Notebook, Return to Civilization Summary and Analysis

In "The Prison in Santa Marta," Papillion easily escapes the Indian territory and finds himself in the company of some nuns. The Mother Superior of the convent turns him in and he admits to the police who take him into custody that he is the prisoner who escaped Rio Hacha. He is held in the prison at Santa Marta for a period of time in a dungeon that floods during high tide and where rats, crabs and other pests are a serious problem. He learns that in Colombia, men are sentenced to either less than twenty years or death, but never life in prison. He makes friends with a fellow prisoner who helps get word to a man who arranges Papillion's return to the general population.

In "The Cavale at Santa Marta," Papillion arranges a convoluted plan for escape using money and pearls he was given by the Indians to pay for the aid and supplies he needs. The plan hinges on a rainy night and the rain never comes. In "Cavales at Barranquilla," Papillion and the others are moved to a prison called the "80, Calle Medellin, in Barranquilla." Papillion fears there will be less opportunity for escape here but knows he will try because he will have little opportunity if he is returned to the penal colonies at Guiana. Papillion creates another complicated plan that requires drugging a guard—accomplished by putting a sleeping draught in his coffee. The guard resists the sleep until moments before the changing of the guard and Papillion and Clousiot manage to climb up the wall but drop too far and both suffer broken bones making escape impossible. Papillion ingests picric acid which prompts jaundice in order to get transferred to the hospital but is not allowed to remain there. Another failed attempt occurs a short time later.

In "Return to the Bagne," Papillion and the others are returned to the French prison aboard the ship, Mana, and are treated for their injuries. In "The Cavale of the Cannibals," Papillion learns of another escape attempt that had gone horribly wrong and had resulted in several escapees eating at least two others. In "The Judgement," Papillion, Maturette and Clousiot are given two years in solitary confinement rather than the longer sentences recommended.

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Papillion is determined to escape and points out whenever he is captured that to punish him for trying to escape would be wrong because it is what every man would do in his position. An interesting point here is that he continues to be apparently successful at convincing at least some others of the logic of this argument. He also goes to great lengths to always point out that he has not committed any serious crimes in his escape attempts. One other point is that Papillion never argues his own innocence or the wrongful conviction, but does make the statement on several occasions that someone else should be willing to rehabilitate them.



# Sixth Notebook, The Iles Du Salut

## Sixth Notebook, The Iles Du Salut Summary and Analysis

In "The Arrival," Papillion determines the best way to deal with the mental challenges of solitary. He encounters the man named Dega who serves as clerk on the island and Galgani who now works for the postal service. The two show their support for Papillion and in "Solitary," smuggle in a coconut and cigarettes for him every day. He is not allowed to talk outright to anyone but shares a few murmured words with a man in an adjacent cell most days. Papillion hears a sweeping noise outside his cell and learns that the sweeper is willing to carry messages. Papillion receives condensed milk on the anniversary of his first year and a few months later, the smuggler gets caught. Papillion fakes amnesia so is not punished himself but later learns that the smuggler died from his beating. Without the coconut, he begins to lose more weight and is soon very weak. When the date of his release comes, he sees that Clousiot is near death and the man dies just days after their release.

In "Life at Royale," Papillion learns that life is relatively easy and filled with diversions. There is a complicated system of commerce so that most have money to spend and to gamble with. The warden, a man named Barrot but known as "Coco Sec," tells Papillion that based on their mutual friendship with Dega, Papillion will be allowed to remain at large on the island as long as he promises not to try an escape for the remainder of the warden's term in charge. Papillion agrees. As Papillion realizes the cons on the island do not want to be involved with any escape attempt, he tells the cons that they should have respect for those who do. Based on the advice of a fellow prisoners, Papillion never speaks of it to anyone but does hold to this as his ultimate goal.

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Papillion notes that the time in solitary is incredibly boring and invites the reader to skip over this section, if he chooses. However, he notes the need to include the details so that the reader can fully understand the situation. It seems that Papillion has nevertheless polished over the events so that it seems the time passes quickly and relatively painlessly for him, though this cannot be the case.

Papillion quickly learns that on Royale, he is in the minority with his continued plans for escape. He is told that he is not to talk about it at all to the others and does not at first understand why. When it is pointed out that the prisoners in this colony have a relatively easy life and that they enjoy that at the whim of the guard, he realizes that once the guards become angry over an escape or even an escape attempt, life for those remaining will become difficult. Papillion admits that he had never given that any real thought. It is during his discussion with the warden that he learns that a warden who is in charge when an escape occurs is punished as well. The warden loses pay and time

off. It is for this reason that the warden asks Papillion to forget any plans of escape until he has finished his term.



# Seventh Notebook, The Iles Du Salut, Continued

## Seventh Notebook, The Iles Du Salut, Continued Summary and Analysis

In "A Raft in a Tomb," Papillion begins working on his next escape plan. The new warden is in charge. Papillion helps a man who is frequently in debt which prompts him to agree to help Papillion by making a raft. Papillion then convinces two men to help him carry the pieces of the raft away to be hidden and recruits another, Matthieu Carbonieri, to help him and to join him in the escape. Papillion and Carbonieri bury most of the pieces for the raft in the corner of the garden and the rest in the cemetery in a recently-dug grave of Madame Privat. The raft will float by inserting a large number of coconuts and Papillion also works on how to hide the coconuts. He then learns that a man named Bebert Celier, known for his tendency to be a "stoolie," is watching the actions of his accomplices. Papillion is told he should kill the man but finds himself unable to either kill him or to order his death without proof. As Papillion and Carbonieri are putting the raft together for their escape, they are captured. Papillion is angry at himself for having not taken action against Celier and determines that he will kill him now. To avoid the death penalty, Papillion shows Celier his knife, prompting Celier's attack and Papillion, fully prepared for the attack, kills Celier. Papillion is sentenced to eight years in solitary confinement and is told that he escaped the death sentence because Celier managed to cut Papillion's arm before dying.

In "Second Solitary," Papillion goes into his second solitary with an attitude that he will survive though he plans to have no help other than bribing those who dish out food to give him the choicest pieces of meat and more vegetables than just broth. He also sets himself up to count off his time in six-month increments rather than days or hours as he had done during the first solitary confinement. After months, Papillion and the others are taken out of their cells, an event that never happens, and are examined by a doctor. They are then submitted to an inspection by the governor. Asked how he rates the environment, Papillion says it is "inhuman" because of the complete silence and the fact that prisoners are never allowed out of doors. After that, they are allowed to swim daily in a small pool blocked off so that sharks cannot get in. One day, Papillion hears screams and rushes to the water to see a young girl being pulled out to deeper water by a current. There are many sharks in the water, drawn near by the constant dumping of corpses—inmates who die by natural causes or by murder. Papillion dives in but the girl is scooped up by a boat before Papillion can reach her. Papillion feels it was wasted effort but is released a month later, the remainder of his sentence suspended after only nineteen months.

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Papillion has considered the possibility that his friends will be sentenced as accomplices if they are caught, and sets out from the beginning to protect them all. He tells the man who is building the raft that he is to say that Papillion threatened him and writes a letter to the man with that threat on paper so that he will have proof of the threat if caught or accused. He does similar planning for everyone so that others are not in danger of being punished for Papillion's desire to escape or even for their own roles in his escape plans.



# Eighth Notebook, The Return to Royale

## Eighth Notebook, The Return to Royale Summary and Analysis

In "The Buffaloes," Papillion says it seems like a miracle that he is returned to Royale after only nineteen months of his eight year sentence. Carbonieri is acquitted of his role in Papillion's escape attempt and is still at Royale when Papillion arrives. The warden, Prouillet, sends for Papillion soon after the release and tells him that he is to work with the buffaloes. He also tells Papillion that he must not attempt an escape for the next month as Prouillet is leaving in just three weeks. Papillion's new job is to lead a buffalo named Brutus to the sea, fill a large barrel with water, and return it to the top of the hill to be used in washing the sewage down a sluice.

In "Revolt At Saint-Joseph," Papillion notes his dismay at seeing so many of the prisoners who are simply accepting of their fate. He says that a "false sense of security" is one of the dangers of life in the prisons. One day three men come to him with a plan for a revolt. Papillion says their idea accomplishes nothing because they cannot possibly escape. They respond that the goal is nothing but revenge. Papillion agrees not to tell anyone of their plan but urges them to give it up. The three are one day simply moved to another of the penal colony islands, Saint Joseph, and Papillion is then moved to this island as well. One day Papillion hears gunshots and knows the revolt has occurred though the cons are killed before they can do much damage. For the death of one of the guards, the others tear through the various barracks, destroying everything that belongs to the cons. Papillion finally intervenes, suggesting to the warden that the incident should be considered a suicide pact in which the cons who were killed had determined to die and to take everyone they could with them. Since Papillion points out that further destruction of the cons' property could lead to a larger revolt, his assessment becomes a matter of fact and the situation slowly returns to normal.

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Papillion points out that there are "households" that include couples—two men living as "husband and wife." These are filled with drama that often leads to fights, often sparked by jealousy. Papillion is asked one day whether Maturette is his property. Papillion, having not seen Maturette since their simultaneous release from solitary, has no real idea of the man's current situation. He tells the questioner that he has never witnessed Maturette acting like anything but a man, and that Maturette is not his property but is his friend. He says that Maturette is free to make his own decisions but tells the man that if Maturette is forced or threatened into anything, Papillion will intervene on his behalf. This protection is typical of Papillion's character and of his caring for anyone who has stood by him.

Papillion notes that France has become filled with turmoil and that they hear many rumors as to the situation. There is something of a civil war going on and some hope





that the newcomers will take over the prison and set the prisoners free to become soldiers. Papillion says that these revolutionaries would not want the prisoners and that none of the prisoners would be prepared to take a long-term stand as a soldier.



# Ninth Notebook, Saint-Joseph

## Ninth Notebook, Saint-Joseph Summary and Analysis

In "Carbonieri's Death," Papillion's friend who helped secret the raft away for the failed escape attempt, Carbonieri, is killed in the washroom while he has his face soaped up. Papillion says that it is a rule of survival to have a knife close at hand at all times, especially at a moment of vulnerability such as in the washroom. In this case, Carbonieri had failed to do that and had died. Papillion goes with those taking Carbonieri's body to be dumped into the ocean. Papillion, knowing that sharks will eat the corpse, has the idea of tying Carbonieri's body to a very heavy rock with a wire so that the sharks perhaps will not get at the body until it sinks. The sharks attack the moment the body is dropped into the water and Papillion notes that Carbonieri's corpse is driven upward and completely out of the water. At one point, the sharks hit the boat and those in the boat fear for their lives as well. Back at the prison, Papillion finds that two of those responsible for Carbonieri's death have already been murdered in retaliation. The leader of that group calls Papillion and asks for a truce. Papillion agrees to a week-long truce but his mind is even more heavily set on escape.

In "The Madmen's Cavale," Papillion meets a man named Romeo Salvida who reveals his plan for an escape. Salvida plans to get a job as an orderly in the insane asylum and tells Papillion that there are barrels there that, lashed together, would serve as a raft. Papillion knows that he could never be assigned a job there and so convinces the guards and the doctors that he has gone crazy. He talks of the constant sounds of pumping, of black dots in his eyes that he can see when he is reading but that hide when he looks in the mirror, and of invisible tormentors. He and Salvida finally have all the arrangements in place but the seas are high on the night of their attempt and they are washed back into the rocks. Papillion loses sight of Salvida and decides that Salvida must have drowned, a supposition that is later confirmed. He makes his way back into the asylum and knows that it is time to end the charade. He tells the head of the infirmary that he does not understand why he is here and the episode is put down to a temporary psychotic break. Papillion is soon returned to the general population and becomes friendly with the doctor who had overseen his care. One day Papillion tells the doctor that he must die soon or escape and asks for a transfer to a more convenient location from which to mount another escape attempt. The doctor says that he understands and agrees to the transfer to Diable.

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There is a legend on the islands that no sharks will be seen in the area where corpses are dumped unless the bell rings. When the bell is tolled, announcing a death, the sharks appear. Papillion has discounted this as a myth until he sees it for himself. When the bell tolls, he sees no sharks. Within minutes, he sees dozens of fins in the water. Papillion's reaction to Carbonieri's death is profound. Like none of his other friends, this death touches him greatly. He is further horrified by the vicious shark attack and says



that, at that moment, his despair is so great that he could easily have been prompted to fall into the water to die as well. Later, he becomes more determined to escape, saying that he would not mind being eaten by sharks if he can do so during an escape, but does not want to die in the prison to be eaten by sharks in that way.



# Tenth Notebook, Diable

## Tenth Notebook, Diable Summary and Analysis

In "Dreyfus' Bench," the year is 1941. Papillion is now in Diable, the island from which he hopes to escape though he is warned that it is not possible because of the high seas. He feeds pigs two times each day and is free to do what he wants for the rest of the time. Papillion is thirty-five and knows that the children he fathered by his Indian wives are, by now, eight. Papillion focuses on an escape plan and comes to realize that there is a small horseshoe-shaped place in the rocks where the waves crash in and then rush back out to sea. Papillion believes that he can throw himself in the sea here, buoyed by a bag of coconuts, and be pulled out to sea. He tries it by throwing coconuts into the waves and discovers that the bags are washed back to shore just minutes later. He continues to study the waves and discovers that there are regularly larger waves and that this is the key to making his plan work. This larger wave is named by Papillion and his friend, Chang, the "Lisette," for the guard's child he had tried to save during his time in solitary. A man named Sylvain agrees to accompany Papillion and a newfound accomplice, Chang, helps with the arrangements. They set the date and wait.

In "The Cavale from Diable," Sylvain and Papillion start their trip with no problems. The sun is torture and they remain within sight of each other but Papillion notes that he is literally poached from the sun. They reach shore and Sylvain, though forewarned about the quicksand, leaves his raft and is quickly swallowed up, leaving Papillion alone.

"In the Bush," Papillion encounters a black man named Jean who helps him find the Chinese work camp where Chang's brother is. Papillion discovers that Chang's brother, known as Cuic-Cuic, has escaped but is nearby. In "Cuic-Cuic," Papillion is taken to his hiding place. The hiding place is surrounded by quicksand that moves and Cuic-Cuic has a pig that can find a clear path through each time. Cuic-Cuic says he knows where there is a boat but that he has not enough money to buy it. Papillion says he has the money and Cuic-Cuic says he will arrange for Papillion to see it. The two men plan to leave together. Cuic-Cuic has a good set up with plenty of food and safety because of the quicksand. Papillion agrees to buy the boat and the owner agrees to do some refitting and to provision the boat. Papillion learns that Cuic-Cuic had cut off the arm of a man named Van Hue and had agreed to feed him for the rest of the man's life. Van Hue now insists that he go with them and Papillion agrees. He allows Cuic-Cuic to also take the pig with him.

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Papillion includes a map and some information about the penal colony, though the information is widely scattered so that there is no single place with a comprehensive description. The place called Diable, or "Devil's Island," is chosen by Papillion as the place to mount yet another escape attempt because he believes it is the place with the



highest possibility of success. This is the northern island of the penal colony and is supposed to be the home for only political prisoners.

Papillion has no idea why Sylvain leaves his raft because they have been warned about the quicksand. He thinks that Sylvain, who had been shirtless at least for the final hours of the voyage, may have given in to heat stroke or have lost his senses to the tortures of the sea trip—more than two days holding onto a raft made of two large sacks filled with coconuts. Papillion tries to warn him to stay with the raft and tries to get to him but cannot. Papillion says that he does wish that he knows it is a selfish thought but his fear now is that he is alone in the bush without the support of his friend.

Papillion continues to distrust Cuic-Cuic for various reasons though the man seems to believe in Papillion. The problem seems to be at least in part because Papillion cannot decide whether Cuic-Cuic is honest or a good actor. The distrust is confounded when Papillion finds three corpses in a pit where Cuic-Cuic is making charcoal for sale. Though Cuic-Cuic explains the deaths, saying that they had been seeking him to return him to his prison camp, Papillion is not certain that is what really happened. In the end, he seems to realize that he has no real choice but to accept Cuic-Cuic as his companion on the next leg of his escape though he continues to have trust issues.



# Eleventh Notebook, Goodbye to the Bagne; Twelfth Notebook, Cavale from Georgetown

## Eleventh Notebook, Goodbye to the Bagne; Twelfth Notebook, Cavale from Georgetown Summary and Analysis

In "The Cavale with the Chinese," Papillion and the others begin their voyage on rough seas but are soon making good time. Several days out they encounter a dirigible and soon after the torpedo ship, Tarpon, which orders Papillion alongside. He refuses, saying their smaller boat will be broken to pieces and are ordered to travel in an direction indicated by the captain. A sailor joins them and takes over the navigation of the boat. Papillion knows that this escape attempt has been a success because since the onset of the war, no prisoners are being returned. His sole concern is that he will not be able to choose where he lives, but finds this a minor point. They arrive in Georgetown.

In the Twelfth Notebook, the escapees live in Georgetown but Papillion is soon tired of the constant brushes with police over his efforts to make a living. He and four others set out on yet another cavale. This time they survive a serious typhoon and arrive in a small channel near Venezuela. They tie up to what they believe is a buoy but is actually a mine while trying to make up their minds where to land. When they learn their mistake, they are taken in by the the people of Venezuela.

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Papillion sees the dirigible long before it spots him and when the ship begins dropping flags, Papillion does not understand the code. When the ship, the Tarpon, arrives, he discovers that they had believed Papillion's little boat to be survivors from a recently torpedoed ship. The war has played an important part in Papillion's eventual escape.



# Thirteenth Notebook, Venezuela

## Thirteenth Notebook, Venezuela Summary and Analysis

In "The Fishermen of Irapa," Papillion and the others are taken in by the poor people of the fishing village, Irapa. These people have little but share it willingly. Then Papillion learns that the police are on their way to take Papillion and the other cons into custody. They are taken to Guiria. In "The Bagne at El Dorado," Papillion and the others are unceremoniously taken to the prison at El Dorado. By sticking together, they discourage violence against their little group and one of them finds a diamond which leads to an enterprise of diamond searching, eventually providing the group with a stash of the stones. In "Freedom," Papillion decides that he does not want to object to the punishment but to live out whatever he has to in order to become a freed man without the law chasing after him. He calls it an "extraordinary" change in his character. Then Papillion learns that he is to be set free on the condition that he takes responsibility for a mentally and physically challenged man who adores Papillion. Papillion is to live in the rural area for one year and, based on good behavior, will then be free to do whatever he wants. He notes that he does so, that he marries and fathers a daughter, and that his life among the people of Venezuela is a good life.

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Papillion's change in his attitude is nothing more than an epiphany, the point at which Papillion comes of age and accepts that he has found a place he wants to be his home. Papillion ends his story by saying that time has passed and that he has many other stories to tell, and that he might tell them someday.



# Characters

## Henri Charriere

Also known as Papillion or "Papi" because a series of tattoos on his body include that of a butterfly, he is a member of the underground and is apparently a safecracker prior to his arrest. Papillion is accused of murdering a man he identifies as a "stoolie," or a police informant. Papillion claims to be innocent and apparently is applauded by his own people for not revealing the true killer. Papillion accepts his sentence with an immediate, consuming desire to escape it. He notes that even if he appeals his sentence and gets the term reduced, he would not want to remain in prison for even a shorter sentence such as twenty years. Sentenced to life, he has nothing left to do but put his efforts into escape. He does so with everything at his disposal. He has some money that he carries in his anus for many years. He makes friends and goes so far as to manipulate some people in order to execute his escape. He has a near-success in his first serious effort but is captured and eventually returns. Over the course of his sentence, Papillion suffers through an entire two-year sentence in solitary confinement for his failed escape and immediately begins to seek a plan for his next. Papillion manages to live with the Indians for seven months but cannot get past his desire for revenge against those who put him in prison. He leaves this safe haven though he later realizes his mistake. His escape attempts eventually brings him to Venezuela where he realizes that what he wants is to have his life of confinement behind him and sets out to achieve that with the same determination as he had sought to escape. He reaches this goal and is eventually freed to live with the people of Venezuela.

## Matthieu Carbonieri

The man Papillion chooses as the man to escape with him on Papillion's second try from Royale. Carbonieri is a gardener and agrees to hide the pieces of a raft in the garden though some of the pieces have to be hidden in a grave in the nearby cemetery. When Papillion and Carbonieri are discovered with the pieces literally in their hands, Papillion testifies that he had threatened Carbonieri and that the man had no choice but to help him or risk death, which results in Carbonieri's acquittal in the incident. Carbonieri is murdered while in the washhouse. Papillion notes that men who are washing up are taught to keep a knife at hand and that Carbonieri failed to do this, costing him his life. Corpses are thrown into the ocean and sharks come when the bell announcing a death is tolls, drawn by the promise of meat. Papillion, seeking to keep his friend from being eaten, ties a very heavy rock to the corpse and attaches it with wire in the hope that he will reach a great depth before the sharks can tear through. Papillion's thinking is not very clear but it seems that he simply hopes that he will not have to witness his friend being eaten. He notes that as soon as Carbonieri's body hits the water, several sharks attack and drive the body upward so that he seems to be "walking on water." The right forearm is torn off as Papillion and the others watch and the feeding frenzy almost causes one of the men to be pitched from the boat. There is





something about Carbonieri's death that greatly touches Papillion and he says that, in that moment, he comes close to committing suicide himself.

## Romeo Salvida

A man who tells Papillion of his escape plans and convinces Papillion to get himself assigned to the insane asylum so that the two can go together. Salvida's plan is to lash two barrels together as a raft. When the two men launch their barrels, the seas shove them back into the rocks and they lose sight of each other so that it becomes apparent to Papillion that Salvida has drowned. Papillion writes to the man's mother, telling her that he was far away at seas, fighting for his freedom, when he died.

## Bebert Celier

The man who betrays Papillion's second escape plan from the penal colony. Papillion is warned ahead of time that the man is about to betray him and it is recommended that he kill Celier, but Papillion says that he is not certain Celier is actually a "stoolie" and that he cannot justify killing the man on a hunch. When Celier does betray Papillion and the others involved in the plan, Papillion decides that he will kill him. Papillion shows Celier his knife, knowing that Celier will certainly attack if he feels threatened, and that is what happens, but Papillion kills Celier on the spot.

## Clousiot

The friend of Papillion who agrees to help him escape from the hospital. Clousiot goes with Papillion though he breaks his leg during the escape. The leg is set at one of their stops but Clousiot breaks it again in another escape attempt from another prison. When Clousiot, Papillion and Maturette are released from their two-year terms in solitary confinement, Clousiot has to be carried away on a stretcher. He tells Papillion that he is dying and does so several days later.

## Maturette

A young homosexual who agrees to help Papillion and Clousiot escape on the condition that he is also allowed to go with them. Maturette turns out to be an asset and Papillion notes that he is glad to have the young man along. Maturette is also sentenced to two years in solitary for his role in the escape and survives the time, as does Papillion.

## Roland de Petit

The man Papillion is accused of having murdered. He is described as a "pimp and a stool pigeon" Nothing is known about him other than this brief description and the fact



that Papillion apparently does know who really killed him but does not give up the real killer's identity.

## Zoraima

Lali's younger sister, Zoraima is "given" to Papillion when Lali fears that he is about to leave the tribe. Lali believes that Papillion is about to leave because she has not pleased him and hopes that Zoraima will please him. Papillion initially refuses Zoraima but eventually gives in to her overt advances and fathers a child by her.

## Lali

An Indian girl who is enamored with Papillion from the moment of their meeting. She washes out a dog bite as soon as the Indian chief indicates that Papillion is welcome into the fold and pushes other girls away, effectively claiming Papillion for her own. Lali is a diver who collects oysters with the pearls being used by the tribe for trade. She seems genuinely to care for Papillion and does whatever she believes necessary to try to keep him with her until he explains to her that he has enemies and that he must seek a way to exact revenge. Lali is pregnant when Papillion leaves the Indians.

## Polein

The "walking tape recorder" who is a witness in the prosecution against Papillion. It is noted that he apparently has no reason to lie about Papillion's role in the murder but that he is years later charged in a drug trafficking case which supports Papillion's insistence that Polein had been caught doing something and had been told that the charges would not be filed if he testified against Papillion.



## **Objects/Places**

### **The Conciergerie**

Where Papillion is held prior to his sentencing.

### **Paris**

Where Papillion is brought to trial.

### **The Plan**

The name given the tube carried by some prisoners (in their anuses), usually containing money to be used in the case of escape.

### **Guiana**

Where the French penal colonies are located.

### **Ile aux Pigeons**

The leper colony where Papillion and the others buy a boat and receive a great deal of help in their escape effort.

### **Trinidad**

Where Papillion and the others land after their escape and where Mr. Bowen and the authorities help them on their way.

### **Rio Hacha**

Where Papillion and the others are held and where he escapes with a fellow prisoner named Antonio.

### **The Grave of Madame Privat**

Where Papillion hides several of the pieces of his raft as he seeks to escape from the Isle Du Salut.



## **Diable**

Devil's Island, this is the place Papillion chooses for yet another escape attempt.

## **Lisette**

The name of a guard's child whom Papillion tries to rescue and the name he gives a particular wave he plans to use for his escape from Diable.

## **Irapa**

The Venezuelan village where Papillion and the others land on their final escape.

## **Cavale**

To "beat it" or leave in a hurry, especially as it relates to an escape from prison or police custody.



# Themes

## The Need for Freedom

Papillon is, upon his sentencing, immediately faced with the question of whether to file an appeal or to find a way to escape. He decides that he does not want to appeal because he will still have to serve some period of time. Papillon has decided from the very beginning that he does not want to remain in prison and that he will do anything to escape. This need to escape cannot be mistaken for a simple need for freedom, though the two are invariably tied together in Papillon's mind and in his actions. Toward this goal, Papillon spends a great deal of money and puts himself in danger repeatedly. His determination to escape is so important to him that at one point he manipulates a man into believing that they are friends so that the man will build him a raft. Papillon feels bad for the misconception but keeps his eye on the ultimate goal. Papillon is not the only one who is willing to take such great risks. Clousiot and Maturette are both willing to go on Papillon's first risky quest for freedom and others die for their efforts.

## The Inadequacies of Judgment

Papillon is very angry at having been sentenced to life in prison for a murder that he did not commit, and rightly so, but that attitude later comes full circle so that he has a better understanding of the reality of allowing humans to judge their peers. When Papillon is nearing an opportunity for escape for the second time, some of his friends come to believe that a man named Celier is watching them and that he may pose a risk for the escape plan. One of Papillon's friends suggests that they kill Celier and even offers to do the deed himself. Papillon finds that he is unable to either kill Celier or to order his death without adequate proof of his guilt. Later, he berates himself for having allowed emotion get in the way and admits that this same kind of emotion—with the scene being dictated by the attorneys—is likely at the heart of most of the courtroom proceedings, including his own. Papillon also focuses on the judgment of others when faced with extradition during his first escape attempt. When he points out that he and his friends committed no crimes in these foreign countries to which they have fled, he adds that someone should be willing to help with their rehabilitation and to give them another chance. Though there are individuals who do seem to instinctively trust them and want to help them, the governments involved as well as the police believe that justice will be served by returning the escapees to serve out the remainder of their sentences.

## Coming of Age

Papillon is a young man of twenty-five when he is sentenced to life in prison. He is young and brash though he is very self-possessed for his age. When Papillon is put in prison, he knows that he can depend on himself to accomplish whatever he needs to accomplish and spends all his time working on a way to escape. This need to escape



surpasses everything else and completely takes control of Papillion's life. There comes a point where he notes that many of the cons are willing to live their lives in apparent happiness in their situation. Papillion holds to his desire to escape above all else. Papillion determines to be satisfied only when confined to solitary so that there is no way he could have any opportunity to escape. Other than this, his entire life is caught up with the need to escape. When Papillion does manage a successful escape, he finds that he cannot live with the restrictions of this new society and so seeks to escape that. It is only after he has been shown some incredible kindnesses by the poor people of the coast of Venezuela that he comes to an epiphany—a simple decision to be happy with his new situation until he can change it to his own liking. The interesting point about this is that Papillion had been intolerant when others were simply satisfied with their situations. The difference is that Papillion's ultimate goal is of freedom and he has, in his opinion, put himself in a position to achieve that goal but is now willing to wait for it. This is evidence of a sense of maturity that he has not exhibited up to this point—he is willing to wait now.

# Style

## Perspective

The story is written in first person from Papillion's point of view. The perspective is greatly limited, both by the fact that the reader sees nothing outside his perspective and that he gives only limited information regarding the situation. For example, he presented the brief outlines of his trial but leaves the reader to figure out the majority of the details. This limitation adds a level of intrigue but also makes it more difficult for the reader to come to any real conclusions about many aspects of the story. For example, Papillion is captured after escaping from the prison at Rio Hacha and when he denies that he had escaped a year earlier, the guard points out that Papillion is missing the thumb from his left hand. This is the first time this has been mentioned and there are no explanations offered at all. Papillion then tells the guard that he had escaped only seven months earlier, not a year, indicating that he had not been denying the escape, only the timing. There are many aspects of foreshadowing. For example, when Papillion agrees to pay Jesus to help him escape, they do not shake hands. He notes that this is not a good beginning to their relationship and he is right. When he arrives at the convent, one of the sisters who accompanies him seems reluctant to wake the Mother Superior for permission for Papillion to stay the night. He says that he should have just taken that as his cue to leave the area, but that he does not and that this "fatal mistake" costs him seven years in jail. These instances of foreshadowing are possible because they are being written from a point in the future long after these events, meaning that Papillion has the ability to look back on the events with the full knowledge of what is to come. That he shares these with the reader often helps build suspense.

## Tone

The book is written in a sometimes convoluted tone that leaves the reader to determine some aspects of the story that are not stated outright. Some of these are given in clues while others are presented as fact, but not necessarily in an order meant to aid the reader. It seems that the purpose of the book is not to inform the reader as much as to serve as an outlet for Papillion's story. This seems to be the case and it is evident that the story is presented as an autobiographical story for Papillion and his trials during his prison term. The tone of the story is somewhat dark and depressing though Papillion retains an aura of hope and optimism of his potential for both survival and an escape to freedom. This hope is sometimes supplanted by hopelessness and despair. An example of this is the death of Papillion's friend who is murdered and then Papillion's witnessing of sharks devouring the corpse. Papillion also helps fellow prisoner escape but sees the man die. These points may be depressing to most readers, especially because the story is true. The story includes some words peculiar to the situation, such as cavale and "plan," and some sentences and phrases in other languages. There is a glossary in the book so that the reader can learn the words and the foreign words are sufficiently explained.



## Structure

The story is divided into twelve parts, titled "notebooks." Notebooks are each numbered and titled. The First Notebook is "The Descent into Hell" and details the trial leading to Papillon's life sentence in prison. The Third Notebook is "The First Cavale." Notebooks are generally divided into events or series of events. The first basically covers the trial and sentencing, focusing a great deal on his time in jail. The various notebooks appear in chronological order with occasional foreshadowing and historical background necessary to explain certain events. Each notebook is further divided into shorter sections. These are titled the name of the current or pending location. An interesting point about this method is that the Third Notebook ends in Trinidad and is titled "Trinidad." The Fourth Notebook takes up where the three men—Papillon, Clousiot and Maturette—are still in Trinidad and this section is also named "Trinidad." This is not overly confusing because the notebooks themselves are titled differently though the author sometimes uses the same titles with the word "continued" following. The exception to this subdivision occurs in the Twelfth Notebook when there is no subdivision title. This notebook is very short but the Eleventh Notebook is also very brief and it includes a subheading. There are no chapter references other than the notebook designation and the subdivision titles. For the purposes of this guide, the notebook numbers are used as the chapter numbers.





## Quotes

"It's none of my business whether you're guilty or innocent; my job is to use everything that's available against you: your bohemian life in Montmartre, the testimony extorted from the witnesses by the police, the testimony of the police themselves. With the disgusting swill the investigator has collected, I must make you seem so repulsive that the jury will cast you out of the society of men." First Notebook, The Assizes, p. 3.

"And those of my underworld friends who were in the courtroom applauded. They knew the truth about this murder and this was their way of showing they were proud of me for not squealing." First Notebook, The Assizes, p. 6.

"It was clear that our captures had been romanticized and that their role in it had been much amplified. It appeared that our arrest had saved all Columbia from a terrible threat." Fourth Notebook, The First Cavale Continued, p. 145.

"I must prove that I can be, that I am and will be, a normal person. Perhaps no better, but certainly no worse than the rest." Fifth Notebook, Return to Civilization, p. 204.

"You can skip these pages if you're bored. However, I feel obligated to describe as faithfully as possible my first impressions of my new cell and my reaction to those first hours of entombment." Sixth Notebook, The Iles Du Salut, p. 275.

"Live, live, live. Each time I was tempted to despair, I would repeat three times, 'As long as there's life, there's hope.'" Seventh Notebook, The Iles Du Salut, Continued, p. 363.

"The islands were dangerous because of the false sense of security we enjoyed. I suffered at the sight of all those people settled into their comfortable lives. Some waited for the end of their sentences, others just indulged their vices." Eighth Notebook, The Return to Royale, p. 384.

"Christ! It's no joke living with lunatics, and it's not very safe either. They shout and yell all night, and during the full moon it's even worse. When the moon agitates a lunatic, I don't know. But I've noticed it often." Eighth Notebook, Saint-Joseph, p. 435.

"All the other cavales were too carefully thought out, too well prepared; when all is said and done, the successful cavale will have been the stupidest: two sacks of coconuts and let the wind and sea take you!" Ninth Notebook, Diable, p. 469.

"Had they really been hunting Cuic-Cuic? Couldn't they just as easily have been hunting butterflies or deer?" Ninth Notebook, Diable, p. 501.

"No man is ruined forever. No matter what he's done, there comes a moment in his life when he can be saved, when he can be made into someone good and useful to the community." Thirteenth Notebook, Venezuela, p. 524.



"I have to confess to many more adventures between then and now, some of them successful, some failures, but always as a free man and a good citizen. Maybe some day I'll write them down, along with other interesting stories I didn't have room for in this book." Thirteenth Notebook, Venezuela, p. 544.



## Topics for Discussion

How does Papillion come to be sentenced to prison? What details are revealed throughout the course of the book about Papillion's life and the murder that sends him to jail? Describe Papillion based on what is revealed about him in the book.

Describe Papillion's arrival at the prison. Describe his time in solitary confinement. What is it about his personality and his connections that allow him to make it through the solitary confinement?

Describe, in detail, at least three attempts to escape prison. What is it that makes him eventually come to decide that he does not want to escape again?

Describe in detail Papillion's time with the Indians. Why does he leave? Could he have remained with the Indians? Support your answer.

What is the "plan?" The "cavale?" Diable? The Ile de Pigeons? How do each fit in with Papillion's time in prison and in his escapes?

Who is Clousiot? Maturette? Cuic-Cuic? Sylvain? Romeo Salvida? What are the fates of these men?

Describe how Papillion comes to accept his situation as a prisoner of Venezuela? How does this fit with the "coming of age" theme? What other themes are evident in this book?