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6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

The Best Book About Devil's Island And The Penal Colony In French Guiana!

By Bookworm

This is the best book about the penal colony in French Guiana in my opinion (another good one is, "Au Bagne", by Albert Londres, but that one has'nt been translated into English).

It's one of those books you can't put down before you've finished it. If you enjoyed, "Papillon", by Henri Charriere, then this book is for you.

This is the harrowing TRUE story of René Belbenoit's 15 years in the French penal colony. He describes the cruel conditions the convicts lived under in a very matter-of-fact way and mentions some of the incredible statistics, such as how half the convicts died within their first year in Guiana from malnutrition, diseases like malaria, leprosy etc.etc. He also describes his escape attempts and how he was punished with solitary confinement in a cell on Saint Joseph Island. We hear the stories of some of the famous convicts, and the perversity of the guards who enjoys to add to the convicts sufferings be dealing out unjust punishments. In fact, the guards are in many cases worse crooks than the convicts and they steal and swindle with the supplies which were meant for the convicts. We hear about hospitals without medicine, where the only treatment is a can of condensed milk.

Belbenoit finally succeeds in escaping after four unsuccessful attempts and ends up in the U.S.A. where he becomes a citizen.

He later writes a follow-up book called, "Hell On Trial", in which he expand on some aspects of the penal colony, which is also a great book.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Well worth a read

By Amazon Customer

Just to add a little more to Bookworm's excellent review, with the passage of time this book is likely to be difficult to obtain but it is worth hunting for.

Charriere has been criticized for writing in the first person (perhaps not his fault but rather than that of his agent/translator) but Belbenoit's story is all his own. As a bit of trivia they were both on the same shipment from France (Belbenoit being returned) but I don't know if they knew each other.

Another book covering this fascinating era is The Convict by Felix Milani.

Dry Guillotine was issued as "I escaped from Devil's Island" and made into a film of the same name by the Corman Brothers. It was brought out quickly to capitalize on the publicity for Papillion. The movie usually gets a grade Z in reviews but really it is not that bad!

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Senior Citizen Looks Back

By Ethard W. Van Stee

I am 73 years old. Sixty years ago I got a hold of this book and read it. I was born in 1936. It must have been shortly after its publication. I came from a conservative Christian background. I have been an atheist now for decades. I'm am not sure why my parents let me read this book. I am glad they did. I remember to this day that the book was riveting. I was always a non-conformist, even at 12-13, and so when my teacher assigned a book review I turned in my report on "I Escaped from Devil's Island." My teacher was so shocked that she contacted my parents. I don't know to this day what transpired at that meeting. I do know that my parents never censored my reading. I went on to a career in science and to earn four college degrees. In my retirement I am the author of six novels plus other books. Read on, my friends. Don't let anyone get in your way.

See all 3 customer reviews...

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