

Evaluation Sample

**PAUL III
OF
MONTREAL**

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Once that has been said, enjoy!

Introduction

The man behind the desk patiently listened to the report of his informant. His long hands, wrinkled by age, joined under an almost non-existent chin. For nearly an hour, he had listened calmly, intervening only to direct the flow of information coming to him and nodding regularly to encourage his interlocutor. What he was hearing displeased him. Several years of effort were about to vanish if he did not act quickly. Nevertheless, he displayed no emotion. He did not want to show his anger in front of a simple Knight. The news brought by his subordinate was worrisome. There had been a new leak and he would have to make bold decisions and take energetic measures to prevent a catastrophe.

Their adversaries seemed to be infiltrating themselves everywhere. Every week, new examples of their keen work reached him and he remained powerless to stop them. But this time it was different. This time, one of the organization's best-kept secrets was about to be exposed and made public. His face remained impassive, but his hands trembled slightly. He would have preferred to be alone, but he could not hurry his collaborator out without stirring up his curiosity. He knew that Boris had been waiting for this moment for a long time

and he did not want to concede too much ground to him. He made the effort to casually question him further.

“So, my dear Boris, you’re claiming that the press is on the brink of publishing an article on the progress of our protégé?”

“Yes my Prince. I have some contacts in the media and one of them let me know that one of his peers had been put on this trail and that he was preparing to uncover this mystery.”

“I thank you, in the name of the party and on my personal behalf. I have heard some rumors of this and we already have the situation in hand. However, I am content with you and satisfied to note your loyalty once more.”

“Oh my Prince, you know the veneration I have for you and my respect for the ideas you defend. My allegiance is unwavering and I’m ready to prove it over and over again if that is your wish.”

“Indeed. I have a small task for you. Although everything is under control, the party is concerned by the numerous disclosures that have recently taken place. Your mission will be to flush out the traitor lurking near our young player.”

The man paused. He had to ponder for a few seconds before setting irreversible procedures in motion. These new divulgations were forcing him to precipitate things and make sure his young asset would be ready as of this year. He had envisioned using him in the next world championship, but his initial plan—relying on secrecy and surprise—was already seriously compromised. He should have discussed it with the other Princes, but he had been convinced that they would have refused to hide a talent of this magnitude. However, he knew that now it was in the interests of the organization to

dispose of this time bomb.

At this point it seemed that he was likely to be discovered, and that, because of him, they could be splashed by scandal. He still firmly believed in his strategy, so he had to make sure that this approach remained the best. He turned again to Boris who was waiting patiently for his Majesty to condescend to address him.

“My dear Boris, I am entrusting you with the most significant mission of your career. You will join our young wonder’s team and consult with them on his progress. If they believe that he can be ready immediately, you will then draw up a plan that will allow him to play in the district championship in three months. However, it is important that they think it’s their idea, not mine. I will place you as head trainer and you will watch them closely. Do you understand?”

“Yes my Prince. I will carry out your orders to the letter and will show myself worthy of your confidence. Before coming here, I read the last report they prepared on his development. He’s moving faster than anticipated...”

“I know, I read it too,” the man interrupted with an air of annoyance. “Your mission is to corroborate their statements and proceed as I have directed. You can go now.”

Boris did not add anything, satisfied to leave, and performed the expected reverence. He was very happy with himself. Finally, he had brought information vital to the party, allowing him to consolidate his privileged position.

His Prince had seemed to take the news with indifference, but Boris knew better. Not that he had made a gesture or let slip an expression out of the ordinary, the behavior of the Prince was always carefully calculated not to give his opponents

any data for analyses. But he had seemed to listen attentively in spite of his bored attitude, where generally the Prince was so distracted that Boris had to repeat his sentences several times.

In the Prince's defense, it was true that the news Boris had previously brought was old and unimportant. This time, however, he had gotten some attention and the Prince had entrusted him with a specific mission that he intended to fulfill with all the zeal he was capable of. He already saw himself at the head of the trainers, preparing the action plan that would lead them to the final and definitive victory. He was perfectly aware that it was not going to be a piece of cake. The current trainers would not like having a player of such low rank as their immediate supervisor, but the backing of the party authorities would quiet them.

There was one thing that briefly disturbed Boris, though. That the Prince gave him the mandate of flushing out the spy and giving accurate status reports about the young Herbert did not pose a problem. But he did find it surprising that the Prince wished to make him the head trainer of the party's hope. Fortunately for him, Boris was not the kind of person to dwell on questions of that sort for very long. He flipped back to his initial impression that the Prince had recognized exceptional aptitudes in him, and that it was to these that he owed his assignment.

At last, his family would regain its due place. After his grandfather, who had founded the party, and his father, who had been one of its most influential Princes, he was approaching the throne in spite of his limited playing skills.

Boris Illitch Ptsine was the grandson of Piotr Illitch Ptsine.

The latter had been one of the founders of the Game Federation. Born towards the end of the twentieth century, he had been a very strong Chess player. Chess was the Game's ancestor. Leaving Russia, he began a professional career in the west that brought him to two consecutive world championships. Although he was defeated in both, his fame and great power came from a parallel path. When he was still a young man, a technological innovation allowed the creation—using holographic projectors—of a three-dimensional chessboard.

This new apparatus naturally made its entry into the chess arena, but was neglected for a long time by the players, who were traditionalists. Ptsine, on the other hand, was one of its enthusiastic defenders, and he promoted its use. He succeeded in gathering a sufficiently large number of followers to constitute an organization that would facilitate its dissemination. Soon they finalized a set of rules, adapted from those of chess, but independent.

Slowly but surely, the Game took off, and in less than ten years, it had almost supplanted its precursor. Only a few elders remained staunchly defending their position, generally old chess Masters who were not ready to make the effort to create a new place in the sun for themselves.

At that time, western society was moving towards an ever more leisurely life-style and, after the standard twenty-five-hour week became the norm, people spoke increasingly about work being optional. The people felt a pressing need to unite around a common theme for spending time and exchanging ideas. . The Game became this rallying concept. Soon, whole countries started to take an interest in the Game, as much to

follow the progression of other players as to play it. And so the Game replaced work, professional sports, which had become too violent, and many other social activities.

Gradually, the Game entered everyone's life and, as of the year 2009, the Game Federation counted on the support of close to half a billion players. It was a phenomenon without precedent in the history of humanity. Soon, this passion had spread to such an extent that the best players became the modern day heroes.

During the years of the spectacular rise in popularity of the Game, the world went through many significant political events, upsetting most of the old ways of living. The globalization of the market had brought spectacular technological developments that released the whole population from its previous nightmare of misery the world-over. The concept of Third World disappeared to the point that politics had abolished all borders.

The passion for the Game had not passed over the ruling class, and they became unconditional followers of the discipline. The two worlds overlapped. Whenever a renowned player would run for any political position, he could be assured of a comfortable majority. Eventually, this resulted in the heads of the Game occupying all the important positions; and the social model, which prevailed throughout the twenty-first century, became set in its foundations.

Soon the title of Master, Grand-Master or Prince of the Game represented more than an indication of a player's skill. It became a symbol of social success. The Game invaded politics, politics invaded the Game. The latter became a promotional tool for ideas and the federation was divided

into groups of influence, equipped with their champion and fighting for the supreme throne. Naturally, it also became a powerful economic engine.

The small town of Z, in old Saudi Arabia, which had, at the end of the twentieth century, approximately fifty thousand inhabitants, decided to found a University of the Game. The best prospects gathered from everywhere to perfect their education. The city was transformed into a noteworthy intellectual center, and afterward, became one of the most influential points on the planet. Hardly twenty years later, it boasted of more than three million inhabitants.

In 2017, the leaders of the Game Federation easily overthrew the governments and seized power. The people of the Earth, finally unified under the same banner, readily accepted the domination of the intellectual elite. This first government created the social structure that was to last for the next seventy-five years. The geography of the globe was divided up into two hundred districts; each represented by their local champion. The Princes of the Game—those having shown an exceptional and constant talent throughout their career—became the Ministers and advisers of the reigning Lord, the champion of the world.

This structure became the pride of the globe's inhabitants. They felt they had reached the perfect form of government. Finally, they had a tool to evaluate the competence of the ruling class and it replaced its members regularly and naturally. They had come a long way from the primitive societies based on physical force, violence, or birthright. They were even farther from those based on money, economic capacity, or popularity and charisma. It was now the reign of the mind. It

was humanity's finest hour!

This model was not without flaws however, and the siege of Geneva in 2089, which brought about the abdication of John II—the eleventh world champion—released the globe from a viper's nest of corruption.

Nevertheless, this system was a clear improvement on the preceding societies and paved the way for the current one. I will not insult you, faithful readers, by pointing out more recent historical facts. The idea here is to examine the lives of some of the main characters who marked the decline of that previous empire and the probable causes of its collapse. As an historian, I have based my work on the memoirs of some of those people. As a novelist, I have established a dramatic plot that will allow the readers to familiarize themselves with the realities of that time while enjoying—I hope—a good story.