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In this wry, judiciously balanced, and thoroughly engaging book, Galya Diment explores the complicated and fascinating relationship between Vladimir Nabokov and his Cornell colleague Marc Szeftel who, in the estimate of many, served as the prototype for the gentle protagonist of the novel *Pnin*. She offers astute comments on Nabokov's fictional process in creating Timogey Pnin and addresses hotly debated questions and long-standing riddles in *Pnin* and its history. Between the two of them, Nabokov and Szeftel embodied much of the complexity and variety of the Russian postrevolution emigre experience in Europe and the United States. Drawing on previously unpublished letters and diaries as well as on interview with family, friends, and colleagues, Diment illuminates a fascinating cultural terrain. *Pniniad*--the epic of *Pnin*--begins with Szeftel's early life in Russia and ends with his years in Seattle at the University of Washington, turning pivotally upon the time in Szeftel's and Nabokov's lives intersected at Cornell. Nabokov apparantly was both amused by and admiring of the innocence of his historian friend. Szeftel's feelings towards Nabokov were also mixed, raning from intense disappointment over rebuffed attempts to collaborate with Nabokov to persistent envy of Nabokov's success and an increasing wistfulness over his own sense of failure.

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