

Intellectual games open to all

When the prelude to Richard Strauss' *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* began playing at Minsk's Palace of Children and Youth, all those present stood. It is the theme tune of the *What? Where? When?* game, the championship of which was recently hosted by the Belarusian capital

By Yevgeny Grudanov

Over thirty years ago, Moscow host Vladimir Voroshilov invented a TV show entitled *What? Where? When?* Since then, much has changed, except the rules: a team of six (known as experts) must answer a question in just sixty seconds. Over time, the programme became so popular that a sport variant was launched. Now, the event is open to anyone, with answers written down rather than given verbally. Belarus has so many people keen to train their intellect that several hundred teams exist; each city, even small district centres, has its own clubs.

Many intellectual tournaments are organised annually, both regional and international. However, a national championship is always exciting, gathering about 200

of Belarus' top experts. Interestingly, the invention of a team's name is an art in itself. The geographical principle (as in football) is disregarded, since a single city can have dozens of teams and there are thousands of them globally. Much thought is required to be original. For example, Minsk's regional championship features the *Animate Aero-Sleigh*, the *Angry Squirrels* and *Kefir Fungi*.

Questions for *What? Where? When?* are devised as cryptic riddles, requiring the application of logic, as well as general knowledge; it's not just what you know, but how quickly you can combine your various branches of knowledge. Naturally, questions are asked in quick succession, squeezing contestants' brains like oranges! It's easy to become overwhelmed with names and events, be-



Many Belarusian cities have their own *What? Where? When?* clubs, uniting amateurs in solving questions

ing bombarded with sixty questions. Afterwards, teams can relax and wait for the results. This year, *Khunta*, from Minsk, took first place, while Mogilev's *Jokers* came second and Minsk's *Mid-2* was placed third.

In fact, every year, Dz-

erzhinsk (near Minsk) hosts an intellectual marathon lasting 24 hours; questions are asked without any significant break. Contestants answer thousands of riddles on paper and drink litres of coffee; the sixty questions of the TV show pale in comparison.

All games in the Republic are organised by the Belarusian League of Intellectual Teams: named 'Club of the Year' at the *What? Where? When?* World Championship a few years ago. The game is so popular in Belarus and in other post-Soviet states, yet

is hardly known elsewhere. However, the situation is likely soon to change, since American ABC TV Channel recently bought the rights to make its own version of the game. We hope its path to wider recognition will be short.

Artistic 'balloon modelling' as art

"When I speak about balloon-design, I'm sometimes overwhelmed with emotions," admits Irina Tkatchevich. "It's a whole world! It's difficult to believe but, due to balloons, several people have become famous — even registered in the Guinness Book of World Records."

By Gennady Andreev

People who create figures from balloons, as Irina does, are called 'twisters' — transforming long balloons ('sausages') into the most amazing models. In the evening, after work, she arms herself with a pump and several dozen balloons, to bring her fantasies to life. You might think that only flowers or poodles are possible, but the sky is the limit. "It's like a construction kit, only more flexible," explains Irina.

"*Thumbelina* is one of my favourite works; it even won a contest of dresses," notes Irina, showing me a colourful image on her mobile phone screen. At first sight, it looks rather like a flower. Only on looking carefully, do I see a boy, girl, mole and beetle intertwined, creating a

'dress': the heroes of Hans Christian Andersen's fairytale.

"Such works are spectacular and always arouse interest among spectators," Irina smiles. "I've already sent a letter to Belarusian designer Sasha Varlamov, suggesting that we cooperate. These air-inflated dresses could be demonstrated before any fashion show, immediately drawing the audience in."

Among the photos Irina shows me is that of a green, cylindrical hat — one of her first works. Around seven years ago, she saw works by American aero-designers, which caught her eye and changed her ideas regarding contemporary art. Irina bought some 'how to' guides from abroad and practised for hours. As a result, her air-inflated 'sausages' began to appear as true works of balloon art.



Ms. Tkatchevich's aerial fantasies

Since then, Irina has created over 100 compositions, with many winning international contests. Her greatest, and biggest, work is a 4m tall clown on a bicycle, which took first prize at a festival in Italy.

"I haven't yet reached world championship level," notes Irina. "I attended a festival in Belgium where I saw a model of two football players with a huge net; it won a place in the Guinness Book of World Records for the number of balloons used and for its height. My record still lies ahead!"

Rare bird observed in the city

By Olga Belova

Ornithologists register pygmy-owl in Minsk — the smallest owl in Europe

A rare bird species, registered in the Red Book, has been seen during winter observations by APB-BirdLife

Belarus members. In winter, small singing birds tend to approach urban areas, as do owls, although these are rarely seen in the city.

The pygmy owl is the smallest owl in Europe, weighing less than 100g. It hunts mice and smaller birds and, in winter, stores food in the

hollows of tree trunks. It can confidently attack birds larger than itself, such as woodpeckers and blackbirds (the skeletons of which are found in its store). In fact, it is one of the most successful hunters among owls and, if predators of any size threaten its nest, it will bravely fight them off.

Direct and friendly contacts established

Delegation of Belarusian university rectors and pro-rectors visit Switzerland

Belarusians have been gaining acquaintance with the experience of leading Swiss institutions of higher education in the spheres of science, humanities and technical studies. Direct contacts are being established between our two countries' universities, with student exchange programmes set up alongside university research.

The delegation visited the Swiss National Foundation and

held talks with the State Secretary for Swiss Education and Research, Mauro Dell'Ambrogio, and with the Secretary General of the Swiss Rectors' Conference, Mathias Stauffacher. Our rectors and pro-rectors also visited the universities of Fribourg and Bern, in addition to the Federal Higher Technical School in Zurich. Over 50 books on the history of Belarus, in addition to reference books and various teaching aids in Belarusian, were donated to the Eastern Europe Library at the University of Bern.

Hotel carrying you to Kiev



By Irina Bokova

By 2012, tourists arriving in Pripjat Polesie will be able to stay in an unusual hotel — the first of its kind in the country... floating on the River Strumen, in the Zhitkovichi District

The view from the hotel windows will be constantly changing, since the hotel will cruise along the Pripjat River, pulled by a special tug-boat. Guests will be able to travel all the way from Pinsk to Mozyr and perhaps onto Kiev, explains Turovshchina JSC — the organisation supervising the project.

"We plan to float the hotel on May 1st," notes Vladimir Fitsner,

the Head of Turovshchina JSC's Tourism Department. "Its metal case was welded at Pinsk Shipyard; the blockhouse is ready and, soon, windows will be added. The one storey hotel will be able to accommodate 15 guests, in one and two berth cabins, boasting every possible amenity, even a kitchen. It's likely that hunters will be the most frequent guests. All that's needed now are special quays along the route."

The floating hotel isn't the only interesting site soon to appear in Pripjat Polesie, as a boat station is being built in Turov and a nature museum is being founded in Lyaskovichi.