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Fairy-Tale Characters Celebrate Holidays in Belarus

By Lena Smirnova

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The newly created “fairytale map of Belarus and Russia” allows recognized fairytale characters to work together. **Lena Smirnova**

BELOVEZHSKAYA PUSHCHA, Belarus — When six Father Frosts from Russia and Belarus got together days before the New Year, naturally, they could not contain their celebration to a quiet evening by the fireplace in the Belarussian Father Frost's cozy residence. The old gentlemen frolicked, danced, hooted carols and vowed to beat Russian Post in its package delivery times.

Looking in from the outside, it appears that the Father Frosts have boundless energy, though some later did admit to getting tired like mere mortals and knowing no magic escape out of having to travel in the coach train cars with their clinking teacups and snoring regulars.

The fairy-tale characters get together several times each year. Birthdays and holidays are the usual occasions, but there are also sports battles during the World Fairy Tale Games, held

in Kirov in June. All these events help to promote the fairy-tale map of Russia and Belarus, which locates the birthplaces of folk characters and the physical residences where they greet their guests.

This particular holiday story began with the Belarussian Father Frost sending out invites to his colleagues to join him at his home in Belovezhskaya Pushcha park near the Belarus-Poland border.

Father Frost's grounds are located next to President Alexander Lukashenko's getaway residence so they are guarded not only by reindeer, but also military cordons. Frost's house itself is kept in such secret that select few — such as Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu — have been inside.

The festive complex was created 10 years ago and has since welcomed almost 1 million tourists.

The five other Father Frosts braved hours of traveling, successfully passed security checks and stepped onto the grounds together, just in time for the celebration of the century — the local Christmas tree had just turned 150 years old. The characters were also on an important mission to sign a document that would unite the Russian and Belarussian fairy-tale maps.

The Russian Father Frost came straight from his residence in Veliky Ustyug, his spare clothes packed in a large sports bag with the letters 'Russia' etched on the outside. He seemed jolly and well-rested, though fellow Frosts privately sighed about the difficulty of making such a long trek to Belarus.

It took Kysh-Babai, the traditional Father Frost from Tatarstan, two flights and a car ride to get there.

"Magicians do not get tired," he quickly assured The Moscow Times reporter. "Magicians always draw energy — though I hope this does not make us sound like vampires — from children's smiles."

Other characters who made the trek to Belovezhskaya Pushcha included the World Cossack Father Frost from Gatchina in Leningrad region, complete with his traditional weapons — saber and dagger — the Belarus-based great-grandfather of all Father Frosts, Zyuzya Po-Ozersky, who arrived in the company of a green demoness and a sombre man holding a wooden skeleton.

The festivities also included the youngest, and as he likes to remind female tourists, very single Father Frost Pakaine from Karelia.

"At each celebration, I carry out a form of casting. This is why I like taking photographs with girls. I am always looking for options," Pakaine said. "There was a situation in Yakutia where I overdid it and there were 'young,' 80-year-old babushkas running after me and yelling, 'You are single! We are ready to get married!' Now I am more careful."

Unfortunately for Pakaine, there were few female fairy tale characters who came to Belovezhskaya Pushcha this year and the ones who did tended to be married to his older

colleagues.

"It seems there were some conflicting events. Snegurochka from Kostroma is opening her residence right now, so she is busy ... Kikimora also has things to do," Pakaine justified thoughtfully.

"Being single is still good," he added. "I do not want to ruin the dream of other girls like many of our celebrities do. Let me be no one's, so everyone has some hope."

The reunion was not limited to the traditional New Year's personalities. Forest ruler Tsar Berendei got in a car at 5 a.m. in Pereslavl-Zalessky and got to the destination only by midnight. Meanwhile, the mighty Ilya Muromets from Murom and the clay pot boy Glinyshek from Kirov region braved the coach train car to get to Belovezhskaya Pushcha on time.

The ancient Zyuzya and Bolotnik, a swamp resident that never passes up an opportunity to dance, had an easier time getting to the celebration since they already live in Belarus.

For Zyuzya, this was a surprise appearance. It was the first time he attended a social event of this scale and he was anxious to stop rumors about his ill fate.

"Zyuzya didn't die! He lived, lives and will live. He is more alive than all the living," Zyuzya declared, repeating the lines traditionally spoken about the Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin.

The Soviet flashbacks did not end there. The Russian Father Frost cited revolutionary poet Vladimir Mayakovsky while his Cossack colleague described himself as a "children's patriotic hero" and was only too glad to repeat his patriotic message.

"The main goal of the Cossack Father Frost is not only to bring New Year and Christmas presents, but to promote spiritualism and patriotism among the young generations," he said.

The Cossack Father Frost is among those Father Frosts who are preparing to go to Sochi for the Winter Games to tell visitors about Russian fairy tales and traditions. The Belarussian Father Frost was also invited to join them.

And what do the Father Frosts do in their free evenings together after the big celebrations? According to Zyuzya, they become couch potatoes and do not even dream of doing anything as energy-consuming as playing chess or tennis.

"Just let us crawl over to the bed and fall asleep," Zyuzya said.

Ilya Muromets was more frank.

"We drink vodka," he said. "As per old Russian tradition, a goblet for each."

Some characters, however, still have after-work magic to do. Kysh-Babai brought the Tatar dessert Chak-Chak with him and asked the local Father Frost to deliver it to a girl from Vitebsk who had written him a letter. Kysh-Babai explained his rationale simply in that the package would reach the girl faster this way than through the notoriously slow Russian Post.

Now it's up to the Belarussian Father Frost to perform a New Year's miracle and prove his friend right.

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