

STARRY NOVIY GOAT

THE ANNUAL LIST OF TROY-TRIVIA YOU WISH YOU DIDN'T KNOW

2005 ISSUE

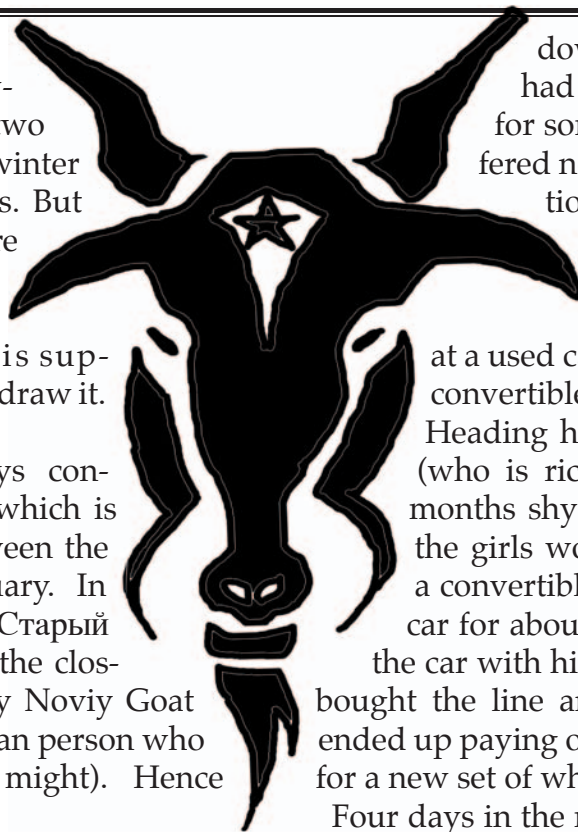
What's up with the goat, man? Common knowledge, Austin Powers, or some combination of the two states that Russians keep warm in winter by playing a rousing game of chess. But the Americans in Russia, what are they to do? My vote is for drawing goats. If you were wondering, the friendly looking beast to the right is supposed to be a goat. And yes, I did draw it. Okay...back to the vodka.

Actually, the winter holidays conclude with the 'Old New Year' which is celebrated during the night between the thirteenth and fourteenth of January. In Russian the holiday is called Старый Новый Год and, in my opinion, the closest English transcription is Starry Noviy Goat (with goat pronounced as a Russian person who doesn't speak English very well might). Hence the title.

Inspired by my parents annual attempt to inform friends and enemies alike of their goings-on the prior year, I thought I'd give it a whirl of my own this time. Hold on to your hat for some poor prose and riveting action intertwined in authentic Troy style.

In the wee morning hours of January 1, 2004, I headed to the airport bound for California and an action packed orchestra/choir tour. Two weeks of meandering took me from LAX to someplace in Vancouver, BC Canada where I forgot my garment bag with tuxedo (three weeks later it was returned). Along the way I discovered quite a bit about my seat mate, my then (and now) girlfriend of a month. Surprisingly, I broke no bones my first time on the ski-slopes. Mount Hood was great practice, especially since nobody mentioned the part about winding down the hill – straight on, baby.

Returning to my tenth semester at the University of Maryland, I decided to join other family members in the tradition of wrecking cars. On my way home from swing dance lessons one night I was pretty tired and dozed off at the wheel. Awakening to the sound of air bags deflating and my horn blaring non-stop, I slowed the remains of my car



down. An abandoned trailer had decided to jump into my lane for some reason. Fortunately, I suffered no injuries other than a disruption to my dream. My Hyundai Acc(id)ent, on the other hand, didn't fare so well.

A few weeks later I was at a used car lot and noticed a lovely red convertible for a quite reasonable price. Heading home to my youngest brother (who is rich and at the time was four months shy of 16), I convinced him that the girls would love him if only he had a convertible. Since I would only need a car for about six months, I offered to buy the car with him. As luck would have it, he bought the line and, after insurance money, I ended up paying only about five hundred bones for a new set of wheels.

Four days in the middle of March found me in sunny Cancun, Mexico. At the urging of a friend the prior August I had taken an internship with the Washington, DC branch of a staffing agency. Business went better than expected in 2003 and the boss treated all employees to an all expenses paid 'company event' South of the Border. While technically the invitation was exclusively for full time people, I had somehow endeared myself to my co-workers (all of whom were female) and they wanted me. Nice.

Glasses make a man distinguished, but who wants to be distinguished when it's raining? Over spring break I headed for the eye doc to watch small pieces of my cornea evaporate courtesy of a big honkin' laser. Not the most pleasant feeling in the world, but like bungee jumping, it's something that everybody should try once.

School finished and my attention turned to other areas of life. After 11 months of employment, I bid adieu to my harem at the staffing agency and devoted my time to tying up loose ends at my other job and buying junk deemed necessary for the primitive region of the world (central Europe) I'd be migrating to at the end of August.

Two days before the fourth of July I was put under for the first time. Several months before I had gotten a piece of artichoke stuck in between my teeth and when I went to the dentist to see if there was something really the matter with me, he advised wisdom teeth extraction. That coupled with only four remaining months of coverage under my dad's health insurance convinced me to inhale the sweet gas.

July and August passed frightfully quick and before I realized it, I was in the airport headed for London on my way to Moscow. I said my good-byes to the family, the girlfriend, and a few other stragglers that had come to see me off and hopped aboard my plane the evening of August 22. Less than 24 hours later I was settling into my hotel room in Moscow. My adventure had begun.

For two blissful weeks I visited the sights of Moscow and St. Petersburg while I was waiting for my documents to clear. Then I set off on the last leg of my journey to Kaliningrad, Russia. With only a slight hiccup at the airport (42 kilograms worth), I managed to arrive unscathed. As I walked off the first Russian plane I'd ever flown on into an open-air baggage claim area, a lady behind a small table looked at my passport and wrote the number down on a wrinkled sheet of paper. Impeccable security. Finding the man holding a sign with my name on it, I grabbed my bags and headed for town.

The next morning I was shown the way to the office by the director of the ESL school where I'd be teaching. Two or three minutes before we arrived she told me that I would be interviewing prospective students and placing them into the appropriate level. It is a bit difficult for an inexperienced teacher as myself to correctly place students, but without seeing any of the materials used in the different levels...? I decided to have fun and pin the tail on the donkey, so to speak. In most cases, the tail wound up somewhere near the ass.

Most of my students either study at one of the local universities or are working adults. Monday through Thursday I teach English from 4-10pm. Then on Friday evening and Saturday afternoon I run an informal meeting with the students for two hours where we discuss any and everything. These two sessions usually utilize some parallel translation practice of which the Bible is the text. In my remaining time I sleep, cook, clean house (or dirty house, depending on the perspective), read, and try to learn Russian. After three months it hit me that I

am a lazy bum and would return to the States with worse Russian abilities than when I left. So I enlisted some external enforcement in a Russian tutor.

A primary reason I settled on Kaliningrad for my home was the expectation of brutal winter weather. Apparently I slept through the geography lesson where the teacher covered the effect of coastal proximity on weather because there's no severe Russian frost here. Oh well, I've still had my share of weird weather. Three weeks after arriving I was greeted by an earthquake. Then a little over a month ago a huge cyclone swept through the area downing trees, billboards, and other such things. Although I haven't seen snow in over three weeks now, I'm still hoping for a blizzard!

One thing that has slacked tremendously since my arrival in the Motherland is the amount of time I spend with my horns. Ignoring the occasional week or two break, I've pretty much practiced the trumpet for fifteen years on a daily basis. This came to a grinding halt in mid-August. When I arrived in my flat a few weeks later, I whipped out the old horn and after making noise for less than five minutes had people banging on the ceiling and the floor. Not wanting to engender myself to my new neighbors too much, I closed the case semi-permanently. Near the end of November, a friend of a friend helped me gain access to a practice room at the local music college. Now if I can only wake up at 7 o'clock each morning I'll be set.

From the large earthquake to the small laser, the hard tire of the bigrig to the soft touch of my girlfriend, and the sandy beaches of Cancun to the perpetual mud of Kaliningrad, 2004 has been a year full of trials, fun, learning, and life for Troy Elliott. God has given me much this year and it is my prayer that He will bring a smile to your lips as you read about it. Take care for another year, and I'll send issue number two in another goat.

Troy Steffen Elliott assumes full responsibility for all information contained in this publication and its truth, or lack thereof.

His web site – <http://tselliott.name/> – contains relevant contact information and other factoids.

Happy New Year from the artists, layout designers, authors, typists, digital manipulators, and monkeys of Ttoille Productions.