

The Zeus of Russian Insults

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June 02, 2011

The  Moscow Times

Отморозок: thug, lamebrain, druggie, weirdo

In the pantheon of contemporary Russian insults, отморозок is Zeus — the king of the bad guys. Like Zeus, отморозок is brutish and inhuman. But sometimes отморозок is like Zeus on drugs — weird, wacky and out of it.

Confused? Don't feel bad. Отморозок is a confusing word with lots of slangy meanings.

Отморозок, the adjective отморозенный and verb отморозиться are all derived from мороз (chill, frost) and морозиться (to become frozen). The prefix от adds the sense of an action done through and through. One armchair etymologist suggested that отморозок and отморозиться were originally used figuratively to mean someone whose humanity had been frozen solid, as in this example: Политические лидеры поседали и морально отморозились, юбки стали короче, насилие — беспощадней, ненависть — смертельней. (Political leaders went gray and became morally inert, skirts got shorter, violence became more merciless and hatred — more deadly.)

Today, the most common meaning of отморозок and its derivatives is a bullying monster — a thug who has no morals and whose brutality knows no bounds. This is worse than your average thug and close to the notion of a sociopath, as one fellow clarified on a blog: Я честный бандит, не отморозок. Детей, женщин и инвалидов не трогаю. (I'm an honest gangster, not a goon. I don't touch children, women or disabled people.)

You might hear the adjective or verb used in this sense, too: Иван совсем отморозился, убил за бутылку водки. (Ivan went berserk and killed someone over a bottle of vodka.) Иван буйствует, в натуре отмороженный. (Ivan is raising all hell. He's totally lost it.)

Отморозок and отмороженный can also be used to describe a drug addict who has lost his humanity and morality and would do anything for a fix. Он настолько отмороженный, что продал квартиру за наркотики и теперь бомжует. (He's so wacked out on drugs that he sold his apartment to support his habit and is now homeless.) Военный, защищающий родину, и отморозок, которому не хватает на дозу, оба совершают убийство, но они убивают по-разному. (A soldier defending his homeland and a druggie who doesn't have enough money for a fix both commit murder, but they kill in different ways.)

The third meaning is someone who is dimwitted, weird or wacko. This kind of отморозок crosses boundaries of normality but is not necessarily violent. For example, an article about a university student who called in false reports to the police every day for a week because, as she said, мне было скучно (I was bored) was titled: Отмороженная студентка скучает (A Weird Student Gets Bored).

Отморозиться is also used by the under-20 crowd to mean turning a deaf ear or pretending that you don't know you are being talked about. In my experience — and as I recall — this is a teenage specialty: Он говорит мне, “Девушка! Тут не курят!” А я отморозилась и продолжала курить. (He says to me, “Young lady! You can't smoke here!” But I made like I didn't hear him and kept on smoking.)

Finally, отморозиться can mean to break off relations. When a guy complained on a blog that a girl wouldn't even talk to him, a sympathetic soul wrote: Она хотя бы с тобой пообщалась, ну а потом просто отморозилась. (She might have at least talked to you for awhile and then let you down.)

You know, compared with these отморозки, Zeus is a prince of a guy.

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Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/06/02/the-zeus-of-russian-insults-a7387>