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Wanted: Leeches

By Kevin O'Flynn

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Bloodsuckers! Bloodsuckers! They attach themselves to the body politic and then suck out all the good before falling off sated and not much use for anything.

A leech, unlike a number of the future deputies in the Russian parliament, has a full mouth of teeth, 300 in its tripartite jaws and, judging by reports on corruption, come in a lot cheaper — all you need is $2 and then a leech will fill its gorge.

These other bloodsuckers also have some medical use. Russia has long retained an atavistic fondness for this black worm whose use goes back thousands of years to Ancient Egypt.

Leeches started to be used again in larger numbers in the 1980s all over the world, handy as they are useful in delicate operations when wounds need to be kept open.

A huge leech factory outside Moscow profits on the still strong faith in the less modern use — bleeding for little reason, etc. — of leeches and has even added to its line with a series of creams based on leeches.

With a name like vipleech.ru, one purveyor of insect bloodsuckers is playing on the connection between the corrupt political core and the famous beast although no one could be found to admit such a blatant link Wednesday.

The leeches cost 50 rubles (about $2) each or 45 rubles if you order 100 or more. If you do order some, then you will need a 3-liter jar, said Mikhail, VIP Leech go-to man on what to do with leeches, explaining that you just add water and put some paper on top with a rubber band "otherwise they can climb out."

The site emphasizes that leeches are like needles and Dmitry Medvedev, for one use only.

Leeches can survive a year without food so they make the perfect pet for the lackadaisical owner. I asked him whether I could have one for my sore ear, but he quite impressively told me to see a doctor first.

The black sharp-teethed worms come in three different sizes from

vipleech.ru, the largest coming in at 2 grams, although this is the weight before blood-gorging. One web site reports that with blood they can reach the size of an obese United Russia deputy, but they may have been joking.

An American site shows how much of a bargain VIP Leeches is by charging $8 a leech. It also has a useful FAQ section where it explains why leeches sometimes don't bite. If you are a cold-skinned old smoker wearing Chanel, you can jump in a pool of leeches and leave with all the pints of blood intact inside of you.

Its best answer is to the question of why some people were still reluctant to use leeches: "People are afraid of these creatures crawling on their body and biting them."

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