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# Armed to the Teeth

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*Травматика: traumatic or nonlethal weapon, slang*

On their resumes, translators and interpreters list their education, experience and particular areas of expertise. I think it would also be useful to list areas of incompetence — subjects the translator knows nothing about, wouldn't know how to research and moreover, couldn't care less about. For me, that's weaponry.

Potential clients: If you have a text that involves any kind of weapon, do not hire me. Unless, of course, you want a Monty Python sketch.

But living in Moscow where half the news stories involve some kind of mayhem, usually with weapons, even I have to figure out a term or two.

Take the recent wedding party that drove down Tverskaya Ulitsa toward the Kremlin shooting guns into the air in a curious tradition of newlywed joie de vivre. One headline read: Какая свадьба без нагана! I get the first part: What's a wedding without ... but fall apart on the last

word. Наган, it turns out, is a handgun made by the Belgian company Nagant that was used in the pre-revolutionary Russian army.

Of course, the headline doesn't mean that the wedding party was shooting off antique guns. Like so many Russian headlines, this one is a punning allusion — in this case, to the title of a popular late Soviet-era song, Какая песня без баяна (What's a song without an accordion). This is supposed to be a rhetorical question, although my response would be: A song without an accordion is a really good song.

But I digress. Russian divides weapons into огнестрельное оружие (firearms) and холодное оружие (melee weapons — that is, weaponry that doesn't fire a projectile). English speakers and texts don't use the latter term much. They tend to be more specific, saying, for example, that the assailant was armed with a knife or blunt weapon.

Even for a dolt like me, Russian handguns are pretty easy to understand and translate, since most of the terms and guns are imports: пистолет (pistol), револьвер (revolver), маузер (Mauser), кольт (Colt). The slang term for all this is пушка (literally "canon"). Он открывает ящик своего стола и вынимает пушку крупного калибра (He opens his desk drawer and takes out a large caliber piece).

Long-barreled guns required some research and resulted in a revelation. Ружьё is a smoothbore shotgun. Винтовка is a rifle, so called because the barrel is rifled — cut with helical grooves to make the bullet spin and hit its target more accurately. Винтовка follows the same derivational pattern. Винт is a screw, and винтовой is helical. Cool, huh? Did everyone know this but me?

Today Russia is famous for its wide variety of травматические оружия (traumatic or nonlethal weapons), slangily called травматика. These are considered defensive weapons that harm but don't kill. However, I gather that if used at close range by an idiot who is drunk out of his mind, grievous bodily harm may occur. I also gather that they are a Russian thing because this newspaper always adds a descriptive translation: "a traumatic gun that shoots rubber bullets or gas-fired pellets." The classic газовой пистолет (gas pistol) just sprays gas.

In any case, my advice to the newly married: Consider the ridiculous American tradition of tying a bunch of empty tin cans to the car bumpers. It's totally senseless, makes a lot of noise, and, best of all, you won't spend your honeymoon in his and hers jail cells.

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