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Weekly Wrap: Yakunin, Stunts and Sorcerers

By Unfair Observer

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This week, the earth shook with the monumental news that Vladimir Yakunin is trading his top job at the Russian Railways state monopoly for a seat in the upper chamber of the Russian parliament. You know Yakunin — the man who for a decade kept the Russian railway system firmly in the last century and who has featured in more anti-corruption investigations than all deputy prime minsters combined.

Yakunin made up for his perceived shortcomings with a penchant for Zimbabwe-style uniforms and, more importantly, defending so-called traditional Russian values, possibly with taxpayer money. He compared Uncle Sam to Genghis Khan and denounced the U.S.-inspired cult of money — somewhat strangely for a man who ran a vast business empire.

And now he's going. Elsewhere, a seat in the upper chamber would perhaps be a promotion, but not in Russia. Yakunin has fallen from grace; and there is only one explanation why. Good one, Obama. That's a severe blow by the global conspiracy, and who will stop Genghis' cult of money now?

This week also saw more bloodshed in Ukraine and more unaffordable luxury enjoyed by Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, but those are boring. Let's move on to the real news.

Submersible 2.0

Vladimir Putin has done it again. Every once in a while, his adventurous spirit gets the better of him and the president abandons his empire to do a crazy, impressive and sexy stunt. He rode horses bare-chested, dived to sunken ships in submersibles and scuba gear, shot darts at killer whales, flew fighter jets and led flocks of cranes in a hang glider.

This time, it was a submersible again — Putin and his trusty sidekick Dmitry Medvedev took one to dive to the seabed in the newly annexed Crimea to check out a Byzantine galley full of amphorae. Putin posed for photos, Medvedev took a selfie.

Sexy as the stunt was, it is also worrying — because this is the first time that the Leader has repeated himself. He cannot be running of ideas — not a man of his inventiveness and PR resources — which leaves two possibilities.

The president may have decided to repeat all his stunts for Crimea, which was, after all, part of a completely different country until last year. But this is a bad idea, because Crimeans have been watching Russian television religiously ever since 1991 — this was one of the main reasons it was annexed so easily in the first place. They know it all, Vladimir.

The other option is that Putin has decided to repeat all his stunts from the beginning. And this is much more heartening — if he is going back to square one, not only will we get more jets and killer whales, but perhaps he will also free television from state pressure like it was before he came to power and maybe he'll revert to democratic rhetoric again.

Hey, a man can dream.

Pluto Is Ours

Meanwhile in Vladivostok, subversive interplanetary propaganda was stopped.
The propaganda took the form of street graffiti reading "Earthlings, unite," complete with an upraised fist. The graffiti artists said it was to celebrate the New Horizons space probe reaching the (dwarf) planet Pluto.

Well, vigilant locals said it was extremism. Local authorities quickly destroyed the graffiti, which, they said, was done for political reasons, and not to promote science. An investigation was launched, and we can expect the deportation of the offenders from planet Earth in the near future.

You've got to admit it takes immense brainpower to find extremism in the "Earthlings unite" slogan. This may even be construed as confirming the theory — regularly advocated by the Unfair Observer — that the Earth is run by a shadow conspiracy of reptile aliens who want to keep their minions placated and docile. Now that Yakunin — the only man to stand up to the shadow puppet masters — is out of the picture, they seem to be running wild, losing all fear of God.

But there may be another explanation. A made-up piece of news about the Perm region

expanding their territory by claiming dibs on Pluto did the rounds recently. This would enable visa-free travel between Perm and Pluto, the fake report said.

But what if it wasn't fake?

Expect a war in space, then, because these Earthlings want Russia's Pluto!

Sorcerers & Liberals

And in the Altai region, a proper witch hunt took place. It was, however, a low-key, grassroots affair: Two local elderly ladies pegged their fellow babushka for an evil sorceress and hired a killer for 10,000 rubles ($150), to be paid from their pensions. Alas, the killer immediately ratted them out to police. The babushkas were detained, the witch remained at large.

What's amazing here is not the witch hunt, but the fact that it was stopped. Russia has indulged in banishing evil so much recently that it is amazing it does not have a state watchdog for the purpose — a Roswitchhunt would do nicely. Admittedly, the state mostly targets liberal witches that wreak havoc by fighting corruption and campaigning for honest elections, but surely regular witches are as dangerous as the liberal ones and must be stopped in the name of Orthodoxy with the same gusto as the global "oligarchate."

Yakunin, come back. It's all falling apart without you.

Unfair Observer is the pen name of a Russian journalist that The Moscow Times has invited to observe the most brain-dead weekly developments in Russia.

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