

# TIBETAN MONKS GONE WILD



Once a year at the Rongwo Buddhist monastery, in the Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in China, the monks take care of the temple's walls and whitewash them with lime paint. This is a job assigned to the youngest monks under the orders of the Lamas. Once the task is completed, the monks can wage a water battle in the monastery's narrow streets. Two teams are formed before the monks start throwing buckets of lime paint at one another. It is late October and at 2,500m up in the mountains, the temperature is close to zero degree Celsius. It doesn't take long for the monks to get completely drenched in their red clothes.

This event is a way to lighten the pressure of everyday life as the young men live in very tough conditions at the monastery for years, starting before dawn with hours of prayers and religious chants.

Increasingly less families are willing to "offer" a son to the monasteries as the temptations of the modern world have become stronger than faith and the number of young novices has been going down year after year.

For once, the police that is normally everywhere and monitors everything with CCTV cameras lets the peaceful fight unfold in an area that saw many riots take place a few years ago: several hundred Tibetans protested the Chinese rule in the province after a local monk set himself on fire...



Early in the morning, the monks pray for hours in a very cold temple. Some teenage monks pray and sing so much that they nearly lose their voices...



After the morning prayers, the monks head to their huge kitchen to heat up water which will be mixed with lime paint on the temple walls.



The monks form a human chain all the way to the temple in order to bring the hot water there.



Bags of lime are mixed with hot water in a huge tank. The strongest monks stir the liquid with a giant oar.



Then, the monks spray the mix onto the temple walls to make it look white and new.



Once the task is completed, the battle starts in the streets of the monastery. Two teams are formed and the buckets are filled with water and a bit of lime.





The battle is a game of cat and mouse. When one monk believes that he has scored a point, there is always another one surprising him from behind.



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Two monks take a break during the battle to discuss a new strategy. One appears to be smarter than the other as he is not – yet – drenched in chalk water...



The battle is fierce but everybody keeps smiling – even the monks who got splashed.



The battle continues and the monks keep throwing water from their buckets at the right people!

The older monks are in charge of the strategy. Soon, as everybody has been splashed with the chalk water, it becomes difficult to guess who is in your team...





When a monk from the opposite team is held, all the monks will throw him onto the ground and pour buckets of water on him in an impressive brawl.



The monk is freed from the brawl only after he has been totally soaked and blinded.





It is hard to imagine that a few years ago, in this very place, a local monk set himself on fire to protest the Chinese repression...



The altitude, the racing and the cold weather have exhausted this young monk, who needs to take a break during the battle.



Even when the buckets have emptied, the monks find a new way to use them – but never with violence.



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After losing his bucket and being blinded by liquid, this monk has surrendered.



The opposite team has surrendered and left the temple. The winning team taunts them and loudly celebrates their victory.



The Lamas have whistled the end of the game. All the monks now have to go back to their quarters and dry their clothes.

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