

FILM

THE Thai-boxing, horse-riding maverick monk, whom filmmaker Mark Verkerk spent a year with, kicked him, literally, into meditating again. More importantly, Phra Khru Bah Neua Chai Kositto, also known as the Tiger Monk, taught the director of the documentary **Buddha's Lost Children** a strong lesson. "It was the first time I saw real compassion in action," says Verkerk of the monk who works with abandoned and impoverished children on the drug-infested Thai-Burmese border in the infamous Golden Triangle. "His approach is completely different to the way we in the west would try to tackle poverty. We look to material solutions and try to solve it with money or putting in electricity or water or something. He is trying to work on the hearts of the people themselves, trying to build strength within the shattered person. He even kept kicking me in the legs and saying, 'Come on, you should be meditating, you're looking worried'." It was a Dutch newspaper photograph, with only a caption of the beaming monk with the cross-legged children he cares for, that lured Verkerk. The film's executive producer, Pim van Collem, saw the photo, took it to Verkerk, flew to Thailand, scoured the jungle and found the charismatic monk. After months of cups of tea and getting their intentions translated, shooting began with the monk, who has looked after children for 15 years. "When he started, he was shot at, attacked and bombed by drug lords who were suspicious of him," Verkerk says from his home near Amsterdam. "But over the years he developed enough of a reputation that people leave him alone. He's the only Buddhist monk who's operating in that region. He's always been out on the border, pushing the frontier a bit." Verkerk in his film deliberately avoids the socio-political history in favour of focusing on the tough-love monk and his assistant, a white-robed nun who quit being a doctor to join him after she suffered a heart attack. The pair gather the emotionally wounded. Some are unable to speak, others the neglected children of drug addicts. The boys are transformed from scared little guys into vibrant youngsters. "It's to do with the humanity of the man himself. He's very ready to admit that he's not perfect or an idealised monk," Verkerk

says. THE Tiger Monk travels widely on horseback to dispense prayers, health care and education through his Golden Horse Temple, which has built an orphanage, school and clinic. Verkerk, who returned to show his subjects the film, says the monk's response was the best. "He was very moved by the film, then said he found a lot of it quite uncomfortable to watch. He said, 'Oh there I was in a bad mood, I shouldn't have done this.' But he was Buddhist about it. He said, 'This was the reality. This was what happened. It's useful for me to see this.'" **Buddha's Lost Children** is on general release. **Caption:** Emotional wounds: a scene from the film Buddha's Lost Children. **Illus:** Photo **Column:** Entertainment **Section:** AMUSE

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