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Russian Cossacks Swing Sabres in 'World's Best Butcher' Competition

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Russian Cossacks have staged a mock execution contest in the Urals village of Markovka, population 82, over the weekend.

Six contestants, each wearing only army green cargo pants, took turns putting on a red hood with two holes cut for eyes and chopping pumpkins — instead of real human heads — placed over a tree stump.

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"Nothing of this sort has been held in the world," co-organizer Anatoly Potanin, whose brother reportedly runs a local military and historical re-enactment society, said in a video of the event published Wednesday.

The "World Executioners Tournament" was held in part because "there are no theaters, no

circus and no nightclubs" in the tiny village, Potanin wrote on YouTube. He boasted that aspiring butchers in other countries are already applying to take part in next year's events.

Fellow Urals Cossacks, however, have slammed the competition as "nonsense."

"There can't be any talk of butchers in the Cossacks: the Cossacks were warriors of God," Oleg Senenko, the ataman of a Cossack association near Yekaterinburg, told the regional Ura.ru news website.

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But Potanin defended the tournament, calling it a "parody" of real-life Cossack stunts performed on horseback.

"We're not chopping heads but gourds, after all," Potanin told Ura.ru.

Loyal to the tsars and the Orthodox Church, the Cossacks fought against the Bolsheviks on the losing side of the 1917 civil war. They were nearly wiped out in the subsequent decades, with hundreds of thousands killed by the Soviet regime.

The Cossacks have been revived in a number of patriotic organizations across Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

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