

**GUARDS
GONE
WILD!**

by
Loh Teck Yong

Table of Contents

A Beginning	1
And Moving On ...	5
Mall With The Miyagi Component	11
Worst Pep Talk Ever	13
Public Consumption of Nachos	19
10-13	25
Dead-End and Disappointment	37
Showdown!	45
The Department Store Where I Was Mostly A Villain	53
Checkpoint	55
Children Are People Too	61
Pervert!	65
Excuses, Excuses	69
Knifer	75

Aftermath	81
Tricks Of The Trade	91
What You See Is What You Get	95
Merry-Go-Round	103
The 24-Hour Marathon	113
Random Ramblings	127
Do You Like Me?	131
Letter To Mom	137
The Big Row	139
No-Show	147
Pandemonium At The Park	153
Kidnapped	161
Kaidan	169
Haunted School	173
The Corridor	179
Night Rider	185
Interview With A Security Guard	191

10-13

It took less than a second.

One moment the NYPD patrol officer was minding his own business, a dark blob of navy blue trudging sedately through the multi-coloured throng of a New York City crowd. And the next...

BANG!

The officer's body dropped to the stone-cold pavement in an instant, like a marionette with all its strings cut. The customary hubbub of a New York City street washed back over the scene almost immediately. But for the body, the shot might never have happened.

His partner, still upright, grappled frantically for his radio. One tug. Two tugs. It was free. He started screaming.

'We have an officer down! Officer down! 10-13 on West 112th Street and Broadway! I repeat! 10-13 on West 112th Street and Broadway!'

.....

10-13. The New York Police Department's radio code for 'officer needs assistance'.

My own 10-13 was far less dramatic.

The inciting incident started off with something so routine, something handled so frequently by mall security guards without any repercussions, that I never saw it coming. Besides, there were only the two of them at first. Too old to be in school during the day, but too young to have much real work experience. No kind of threat to an industry veteran like myself. Or so I thought.

So when I saw the two boys drifting around the main lobby with their little tin can, asking shoppers to hand over their cash to God and church, I made the approach on my own. It may come as a surprise to some readers, but nearly all shopping malls in Singapore have rules against soliciting donations. After all, mall tenants have to pay hefty monthly rental fees for the right to ask shoppers to part with their money, so management naturally gets upset when they see amateurs doing it for free.

The first few moments of contact were textbook.¹ First, I smiled. Ruefully. Like I was saying *I really don't want to do this but I kinda have to*. Then, still smiling, I explained our mall's policies

¹ Or would have been, if security guards had proper textbooks for their classes.

against soliciting donations and asked them to stop whatever they were doing. To sweeten the deal, I offered an alternative.

‘Over there, the walkway by the main road. That is outside our control. If you ask for donations there, we can’t stop you,’ I pointed out helpfully.

They murmured ‘oh yeah’, turned their backs on me and continued shaking their tin can at mall shoppers. Well, I couldn’t have that. I moved to face them again and repeated my advice, which was roughly when things began to take a turn for the worse. The pair were now insisting that they knew my ‘boss’, even though they couldn’t give me a name or job designation, and that they had permission to solicit donations for their church. I noted down the name—xxx Faith xxx Church² —printed on their tin. And what I did next was also textbook. I radioed my supervisor for advice.

No, he informed me. No such group had been given permission to solicit donations at our mall.

This was the point where things started to escalate. One of the boys, the bigger and heavier of the two, made an attempt to grab my walkie-talkie from me. A lunge in my direction with one hand stretched out, like an overeager handshake. I twisted my body away and kept one hand protectively on my walkie-talkie, the way a TV cop might palm a sidearm in his belt holster.

2 Naturally, the name printed on the delinquents’ donation tins didn’t look like the address of a porno website. I’m using ‘xxx’ here to avoid making up a fake name that happens to be the same as that of an existing or future church. Defamation lawsuits can get expensive in Singapore.

The heavyweight's partner stepped between us and held out his arm—a preventative measure, to check the advance of his stronger and heavier partner, and perhaps a mollifying one, as though he was a school teacher trying to calm an unruly student. *Now, now, please settle down.* But it had the opposite effect on me, because his sleeve rode up as he extended his arm and I saw them. The Chinese words tattooed on his forearm. A Chinese poem.

Admittedly, a Chinese poem tattooed on one's forearm could mean any number of things. A fashion statement. A display of appreciation for Chinese literature. Or a drunken tourist with too much time and money to spend. But this poem was inked on the arm of a Singaporean youth who was trying to keep it hidden under long sleeves while he moved about in public. Unlikely to be a fashion statement, then, or a sign of his fondness for the literary arts. And not only had he ignored my advice to conduct his business away from mall premises, he'd also lied to me about knowing some vague 'boss' figure and about having permission to solicit donations. And he was rolling with an aggressive partner who'd just tried to snatch a walkie-talkie from an on-duty security guard in broad daylight. So I assumed the worst. A four-letter word: Gang.

Be that as it might, I still had a job to do. I repeated my advice. Without a smile this time, and rather more firmly. The heavyweight who'd tried to grab my walkie-talkie looked ready for another round, but his tattooed partner seemed bored and like he might be getting tired of my repeated requests. He abruptly turned and left, taking his partner with him. And that's the end

of it, I thought.

I radioed the supervisor and informed him of my success. His response, however, seemed odd to me at the time.

‘Good! Now go back to FCC and rest!’

Well, an order was an order, and rest was rest. So without wondering why I’d been ordered to rest inside the air-conditioned Fire Command Center (FCC) during my main lobby deployment, I made a beeline for the rear of the mall.

And I worked there happily ever after.

Or I probably would have if Miyagi, our resident pseudo-philosopher, hadn’t also been taking his break inside the FCC. He glanced at me, still standing in the doorway, and demanded to know what I was doing here before my deployment was over. Naturally, I told him I’d come by on the supervisor’s instruction. And, naturally, being the jerk that he was, Miyagi saw fit to countermand the supervisor’s instructions and issue me fresh ones.

‘Now I am ordering you to get out! Go back and look at the car park sign and tell me how many parking lot inside!’ The electronic sign board that displayed the availability of parking spaces was located out front of the mall, so I reluctantly returned to the main lobby and went for my recce patrol.

But I should have stayed where I was.

Because the moment I exited the main lobby and took a right turn past the shops, I was spotted by the pair of suspected gang members. And this time, they had backup. Two other teenagers, loitering with them and chatting up some girls outside

the sidewalk cafe. Since they were just shooting the breeze and not soliciting donations, I let them be and continued with my recce patrol. Or at least I tried to. Because when the heavyweight who'd tried to grab my walkie-talkie earlier spotted me, he probably thought I was there to break up their little party. Or maybe he was just eager to go another round with me now that two had become four. And so, while flanked securely by his band of brothers and from a safe distance away, he started screaming defiance.

'Hey, boy, come on over so I can knock off your glasses! If I see you here again, I will whack you!'

I ignored the abuse and trudged on with the aim of completing my objective: carry out Miyagi's orders and then return to the safety and comfort of our office. But this, sadly, was not to be. Even as I neared the display board, the four delinquents were cutting through the crowd like sharks heading towards their prey. Me. When they got within speaking distance, the tattooed youth and unlikely poet demanded to know why I was still hanging around. I told him politely that, as an employee of the mall, I had every right to be around. Then I sidled away from them, hoping my body language would make it clear that this conversation was over. And because I was also a realistic person, I radioed for backup even as I was stepping away. My 10-13.

And in the end it did save me. Just not in the way fans of Hollywood action thrillers might expect.

You see, I didn't get away from the delinquents. Because I didn't run. Because I'd thought it might be unseemly for a

uniformed security guard to run from a bunch of young thugs. So I just strolled away in a leisurely fashion while I radioed for backup. Like this was the sort of trivial routine matter I dealt with all the time. *S/O to Control. Faulty light bulb in corridor. Over. S/O to Control. Wet floor in main lobby. Over.*

Trouble was, this move made it all too easy for them to close in, surrounding me in a semi-circle and hampering my movement in a way that'd place me well within the range of incoming strikes from my four hostile opponents if things were to go that far or get that bad. Luckily for me, they chose to open hostilities by delivering a scolding in full view of passers-by and the employees of the shops facing the street. Tough street kids turning the tables on the Establishment. That was probably how they saw it. And given the titters from the four or five Ah Lians the boys had been chatting to, as well as the unconcealed smiles on the faces of some spectating shop employees, others in the audience probably saw it that way too.

Fortunately I didn't have to endure this humiliation for long. Halfway through their scolding, and before they could deliver on their unspoken promise to inflict physical harm, my backup arrived in the form of two wheezing senior citizens in security guard uniforms. And so the unlikely poet said:

'Eh, old man lah. Let's go.'

And they dashed away to the other side of the road.

It made sense, in a warped sort of way. Street honour, you see. If they had beaten me, a healthy young man who was also an authority figure, they would have looked like heroes. At least in

the eyes of their fellow gang members and the obviously underage girls they were trying to impress. But hitting two grandpas who came to my rescue? That would have made them look weak. I suppose even gangsters have standards.

Slightly out of breath, my supervisor repeated his advice. Go back to the Fire Command Center. And I didn't hesitate. When I returned to the air-conditioned office, Miyagi was still relaxing in the same position. Hadn't he heard my 10-13 via the walkie-talkie sets in the room? Why wasn't he reviewing the CCTV footage and taking notes like he was supposed to? And why were unfit senior citizens dispatched as my backup when Miyagi, someone close to my age, was available? For someone who would reprimand us if we failed to report even a single faulty light bulb, he looked remarkably relaxed given that one of his colleagues had just been threatened by delinquents. Maybe he was just too dense to understand what was going on. Or maybe his priorities were just messed up.

I snapped. Without giving him the opportunity to kick me out of the FCC again, I tore into him. I screamed and ranted and demanded to see the CCTV footage of my encounter. It seemed to have shocked Miyagi, having a hitherto loyal and obedient trooper turn on him like that, because he complied with my 'request' without fuss. After some complicated fiddling with electronic thingies³, I could see my close encounter with gangland Singapore replaying on TV. Once I was satisfied that the faces of my would-be assailants were clearly visible on screen, I turned

³ *I am really bad with technology.*

my mind to the next thing on my list.

Writing reports. One for the mall, and another for the police.

But my supervisor beat me to the first one. Maybe he thought I was too traumatised by my experience to write a coherent report. Or maybe he assumed I couldn't write.⁴ Either way, I didn't care. As far as I was concerned, getting my story straight in front of the police officers was far more important. It was then that I received my second shock of the day, courtesy of an in-house supervisor who outranked the agency guards at the mall.

'This one is your personal problem, so you go make the police report on your own after work.'

To my credit, I didn't throw a howling fit like I did with Miyagi. I don't know if I was just too tired after dealing with both the delinquents and my incompetent colleague, or if my steel-trap mind had managed to rein in my raging emotions, but I somehow managed to accept his advice with equanimity. I did not scream at him in order to draw his attention to the fact that this unpleasantness had happened while I was enforcing mall regulations in my official capacity as a security guard. I did not throw my walkie-talkie at him and demand that he reconsider his thoughtless remark about this incident being my 'personal

4 Most guards I worked with had no problem writing one-liners in the occurrence books like 'S/O xxx returned from patrol at 1300 and All In Order' or stringing together short sentences to form a coherent picture of an incident taking place. From time to time, though, I did come across guards who had trouble with even that standard of writing.

problem'. Instead I said, fine. Okay. I will go make a police report after work.

I can't remember who, exactly, but someone—the agency supervisor, maybe— assured me that management would take action once they'd received the report of this incident the following morning. So I felt a little better.

Making a report at my Neighbourhood Police Center took close to two hours. The officer who interviewed me helpfully repeated his questions over and over again to filter out inconsistencies and non-salient points from my report. Finally, both of us thought good enough and I left the Center. Although I'd done all I could, I couldn't help feeling unsatisfied. I supposed I'd imagined a more serious interview. In the mall's Fire Command Center, maybe, and perhaps after management had invited the police over to view the CCTV footage, with a pair of interested officers inspecting the flickering images and asking serious questions.

We can't see the tattoo on screen, could you tell us what Chinese characters they were?

Did they use any gang slogans while they were engaging you?

Did they use any names or numbers to refer to themselves or their group?

Have you seen them around the mall before today?

But no, this was a 'personal problem', and so I had to be satisfied with some vague promise of nonspecific action to be taken by mall management after they read through a report written by a third party.

As I made my way home, I had a feeling that what happened the following day would decide my future at the mall.