

The **SHAOLIN**

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THE WAY OF "NO WAY!"

A KUNG FU GRIPPING TALE
OF MARTIAL LAW

by **ANDREW VACHSS**
and **GEOF DARROW**

TIME FACTOR

A THRILLING TALE
OF JURASSIC JUSTICE

by **MICHAEL A. BLACK**



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NOW I get it," Valentino said. "You're always a step ahead, boss. That's exactly what the Noir Boys would do."

"You mean those punks who run around in trenchcoats and fedoras?" the Indian sneered. "I never thought they'd have the *cojones* to leave that little ville of theirs. What do they call it, again?"

"The Mean Streets," the blob answered. "That's part of their thing, 'walking the mean streets,' see?"

"I know them!" Ironhead said, excitedly. "They're the guys who put out that newspaper, right, boss? The one you read to me?"

"The *Foggy Blog*," the blob confirmed. "That's the one that comes here. Their other one, *Networkers News*, that's only

distributed on their own turf."

"So you got word—"

"Uh huh," the blob said, nodding at Valentino. "We know the Noir Boys never fight; they only write. So what more would you expect from twits like that? I guess they thought the pen was mightier than the sword."

"That's what that newspaper guy who called me Noble Savage thought, too," the Indian said, grimly.

"Yeah. Well, see, what they found is that *their* pen ain't no sword. Sooner or later, you got to stop the talk and start the walk."

"Yeah!" Ironhead threw in, recognizing his cue.

"The best thing about the Noir Boys is that they're so predictable. Instead of rolling on us, they go hire themselves a 'hit man.'"

"This Shaolin Cowboy?" Valentino said.

"Jeeze!" the blob sneered. "Do I have to use one-syllable words with you dolts? Anyway, when I heard they'd pooled all their money to hire this guy to take us out, I made *plans*, see? You wouldn't expect a man who makes his living by making other people dead to just waltz in here and take on our whole mob by himself, right?"

"So you figure he's bringing a gang?"

"No, you dunce. Everyone knows the Shaolin Cowboy always works alone.

I figure he's getting ready to go all Pearl Harbor on us," the blob said, touching another of his tattoos. "Sneak attacks are the worst. Who wants to spend all your time looking over your shoulder?"

"Fat chance of you ever doing that," the Indian thought to himself.

"So I came up with a stroke of genius," the blob congratulated himself. "Instead of wondering when he's going to make his move, what we do is hire him ourselves, get it? I sent him a message"—pointing to a high perch on which

several pigeons roosted, a small cylinder fastened to the right talon of each one—"offering him three times his regular price to do a job for me. And I got an answer right back," he said, opening a tiny roll of parchment and holding it in place with his fingernails for all to read:

PAY FIRST

"I sent him back the okay. Told him the loot's right here, waiting for him. And it is . . . sitting right there, in fact." The others turned in the direction indicated, and saw an owl's-eye-maple table piled with gold ingots, silver coins, assorted gems, and a number of certificates clearly marked "Series EEK Bonds." The table itself was surrounded by a shallow moat teeming with alligators so ravenous that they occasionally leaped out of the water and snapped at empty air. Circling the moat was a fence of wires carrying such an overload of instant-death electricity that it crackled blue fire.

"I get it," Valentino said, admiringly. "He has to come here *first*."

"Ah. The light dawns," the blob answered, his voice even slimier than usual as his tongue dripped caustic acid.

"And then we tell him the job is to take out the Noir Boys! Man, that's beautiful!"

The blob shook his head in dismay.



The Shaolin Cowboy.