Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Luke Warfield is Back

Gary Phillips · Wednesday, July 9th, 2014

When I was a teenager growing up in South Central in the ’70s, there was a type of paperback novel you couldn’t find at B. Dalton or Martindale’s. Instead, you found these books on the spinner rack in drugstores like Thrifty’s, on newsstands, and even in grocery stores – at least in the Ralph’s we shopped at on Figueroa and Vernon. These were titles like *Eldorado Red, Trick Baby,* and *Death for Hire*. This was crime fiction with black protagonists and antiheroes published by the L.A.-based, white-owned Holloway House whose specialty, in their words, was being “The world’s largest publisher of black experience paperbacks.”

Though it should be noted such fare had been published by mainstream New York houses like Clarence Cooper, Jr.’s 1960 book *The Scene* and 1957’s *Corner Boy* by Herbert Simmons.

Chronicled in those works was not the black experience my librarian mother had introduced me to in the pages of Langston Hughes and Anne Perry, but it did reflect an undercurrent arising out of the tumult of Black Power and the Civil Rights struggle. The energy that came out of those movements, the desire to take it to the Man, such sentiment fueled in part the stories of Donald Goines (*Eldorado Red*) and his Holloway House cohorts Roland Jefferson (*The Secret Below 103rd Street*), Robert Beck (aka Iceberg Slim – *Trick Baby, Airtight Willie and Me,* etc.), Joe Nazel (the *Iceman* series) and Roosevelt Mallory who penned four novels about black “Hitmaster” Joe Radcliff. Like the white Mack Bolan, the Executioner, he specialized in wiping out Mafiosa. Except in Radcliff’s case, a Vietnam vet like Bolan (and most other paperback vigilantes in that era) it was knocking off hoods for pay for other underworld types.

Riffing on the aforementioned, flash forward to Luke Warfield, the Essex Man who first made the scene in the recent ebook novella *10 Seconds to Death.* Set today as it deals with a nefarious scheme by a one percenter, it also acknowledges its spinner-rack roots. On the surface Warfield is a venture capitalist who runs Essex, Ltd. His outfit invests in the community; he dates busty starlets and big-brained rocket scientists; he is a digital age Jay Gatsby as there are many questions about the source of his money. This 21st century man of mystery is part Shaft and part Batman sans the costume.

Warfield (who in his cover art by Carlos Valenzuela consciously rocks a torn shirt motif inspired by the James Bama covers for the ‘70s Bantam reprints of the 1930s pulp hero Doc Savage) returns now in a six-part serial on radiuslit.org, “Murder by Remote Control.” Part 4 is up now and the previous installments can easily be accessed on the site as well. It’s free and hopefully you’ll find the read entertaining.

Portions of this article originally ran in a previous piece by the writer on the criminalelement.com site on March 14, 2013, "Black Pulp Fiction: Yesterday and Today." Please visit Gary's site for more of his work at: www.gdphillips.com.

Image: Book cover art by Carlos Valenzuela

This entry was posted on Wednesday, July 9th, 2014 at 2:30 pm and is filed under Fiction
You can follow any responses to this entry through the Comments (RSS) feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.