

Out of the Past

By Robert S.P. Lee

“So, what’s the deal, man? We good or what?” His lips were moving, but my mind was on to the next thought.

“Doesn’t matter now does it?” My hands, cool from sweat, red from being clenched, felt the beaded grip of a Sig Sauer .38 in my Knicks jacket pocket.

“Fuck yeah it matters, and matters right now *patna!* Money’s on the line, feelin’ me? That always matters and if you and me ain’t copasetic, then this thick-neck muthafucka right here’s gonna have to put yo wife and kids six-feet beyond yo ass, now won’t he?” The midget bitch nig in plaid Sean Johns and hot pink Chuck Taylors paced back and forth like some amphetamine-fed lion in a very small cage.

The ‘muthafucka’ he was chirping about was his bodyguard Jedda. First step to tryin’ to front like Deeh-Deeh, runnin’ with Africans. A pitch-black Nigerian, milk-fed with blood diamonds and human growth hormones, Jedda’s teeth shined as he smiled at me. Funny, a brother that black would fuck up his white, white teeth with gold caps over the fronts.

“Are we cool?” He kept on, bouncing in place like a prize fighter.

God-da was part two of the trio. He had my wife and kid under the scope of a sniper rifle five feet over to his right. We were in the empty house across the street from my crib. The kid was Jojo Devaugh - kid brother of Darius ‘Deeh-Deeh’ Devaugh, a cool kid from Chi-town that ran the crew I was with years back. I cracked safes and broke hearts, but that was nine years ago, and my life had settled. Running wild, pounding concrete under black-booted feet lost its flavor when Deeh-Deeh caught it in the back of the head from a security guard playing Bruce Willis on a cold Chi-town night, nine years prior to this day.

The five of us were cruising the area. Deeh-Deeh was making mental notes about the Commerce Bank on the corner of Howard & Keeler. The Denon was kicking Jeff Redd out two sets of Panasonic 5 by 6’s inside the doors of Deeh-Deeh’s 1970 brick-red Plymouth ‘Cuda hardtop. I had shotgun. Menda, Tyrone, Kemmon were in the back seat. Tyrone was tight about that and made it known as we sat at the light, two lanes across from the front of the bank, but fuck ‘em. I needed the leg room. He was 5’6’, I was 6’2’. Shit’s simple math, whiny bitch.

“We done with this lookin’ over the bank shit yet or not? Tired of being smacked between these two Af-ri-cans like some jacked-up Oreo.” Tyrone, light-skinned, made the mistake of greeting the two Nigerians like, ‘Hey, what’s up my nig--’ Didn’t exactly get to finish that statement when they had him hemmed up against the wall, shotties buried under his chin, and him shitting bricks.

“You need to relax back there, Tyrone. Scope the road out, take in the traffic, get a feel for the flow of shit. You the driver, take an interest. Shit, you gonna act like this, I’ll get my little brother Jojo to drive. Little man can ride his bike without as much bitchin’ as you do.”

Tyrone, pouting, sucking on his teeth, started to take notice of the area, craning his neck. “Best place for the getaway ride would be on the grass corner a block over. Ya’ld have to straight hoof it to the bank’s alley entrance.” Folding his arms and pouting.

“Whud do you mean, man? Why we got to have da car that far?” Kemmon asked in a mixed accent of European dominance and American bastard.

Tyrone spit out a short sigh, “Yeah muthafucka, damn! If yo ass ain’t noticed, there’s a rover come truckin’ his yellow ‘n blue hoo-ride every half hour.” Looking down at his watch; “Take a look ‘cause here he come now.” The light changed and we pulled into a nearby 7/11, furthest from any lot cams. A minute later, a Rent-a-cop drove by the front of the bank. “Probably does the same drive at night.” Tyrone may’ve been a pain, but he knew his shit.

“What about the ride, Tyrone? We leave it on some corner for a week, shit could get the tires slashed, or busted up. What then?” Deeh-Deeh was fully turned, leaning.

“Don’t sweat that shit, man.” Jeff Redd faded out, some commercials came on, then the next song came; Eric B & Rakim, “Let The Rhythm Hit’ Em”. “You know I’m a have the ride hooked, word up. Interior’ll look like ass, but the trunk and everything else will be tiptop. We got a week for this, which will give me time to base up both that and the secondary. I got this, G. I got this,” patting his puffed-up chest.

“Takin’ your word on that Tyrone. Don’t be talkin’ all big and shit and then fuck it up.”

“I. Got. This!” Tyrone had a smirk on his face that made Deeh-Deeh laugh.

He was still smiling as he put the ‘Cuda in reverse. “Alright man, take your word. Yo, Anton,” smacking me with the back of his hand against my chest, “let’s get back to my Granmama crib. The specs of the safe and the alarm system should have gotten there from my contact by now. I’m jake with the alarm, but the safe be all on you, Cool Breeze. Work them magic fingers. We out.” He shifted into drive, leaning the nose into traffic. The low groan of the Black Moses was talking about finding his woman cheating on him, and his drive to Phoenix. The rumble of the ‘Cuda blended with the radio as the car slid into moving traffic.

“Granmama, did the package I told you ‘bout come? Mmm, what that you cooking?” Deeh-Deeh’s grandmother lived in a two-story ranch in the town over from Commerce. Deeh-Deeh operated out the basement, modifying it with exits just in case. Tyrone flopped into a tan loveseat where Jojo was sitting, playing GameBoy. Menda & Kemmon sat down at the dining nook, speaking African. Deeh-Deeh eyed Tyrone until he took notice.

“Sorry Mrs. Devaugh,” straightening himself.

Mrs. Devaugh paid him no mind.

“It’s laid out on the table downstairs, Darius. I’m making hot ribs with a nice green salad, with black-eyed peas and rice.” Deeh’s grandmother was cool.

“Granmama be hookin’ it up! Word is bond. C’mon fellas, we’ll hit that food after we go over the details.” Deeh-Deeh pointed toward the basement door near the spare bedroom.

“Can I come, Darius?” Jojo perked his ears, tearing his attention away from the pea-green colored GameBoy screen.

“Nah little man. This big boy stuff, you be just bored. Hey, it’s 3 o’clock. Better get the tube on channel five. Power Rangers on.” You never saw a kid jet so quickly to the TV on wheels in the living room corner. He was there, pliers in hand, flicking the stations to five. He plopped down, waiting.

“Jojo, what I tell you about flicking the channels? You know I got to get a new knob.”

“Sorry Granma.”

“Don’t sweat that television too much. I hit you off with a new one. I got you on that. Always got your back, Grams.” Deeh-Deeh kissed Mrs. Devaugh on the cheek as she leaned in for it.

“I know, baby. Grandma will always hold you down. Now, get yourself downstairs. You’ve business to handle.”

We tick-tock’ed through the details, then sat down to dine on Mrs. Devaughn’s feast. On point wouldn’t even come close to describing the meal. Afterwards we all split into our own small groups. The Africans who would play crowd control sat with Jojo in front of the TV, watching reruns of *Spenser: For Hire*. They thought Avery Brooks was the fucking man.

Tyrone had a thing for phone sex and stayed in the basement with his plastic-preserved *Black Tail* mags and Aloe-Vera lotion.

I sat out front on the closed-in stoop, chewing on mint-flavored jelly babies, chasing them with Jolt. Deeh-Deeh pushed open the rusted screen door from the inside of the house, carrying a Birch root beer. He pulled up a wicker chair.

“Sup Anton?”

“Chillin’”

“Ah, I feel ya. Damn, nice out here tonight. Grew up on this block, Anton. Used to chase tail block over. Fly chick named Mona, used to call her Moni Mon n’ shit. Girlie was a teardrop with light skin and green eyes. Hips like, *damn!* She loved my red Kangol and black bomber jacket. A smooth line or two and I was tappin’ that in my boy’s brother’s place. Damn, she was sweet.” He took a pull from his Birch, I filled my mouth with Jolt, tossing mint jellies in.

“This is the last run, Anton. With this, I can gut this house, put cash in some savings for Jojo so he can have a leg up. Not sayin’ he got to go schoolin’ an’ shit, because that ain’t for everyone, but I’d like to give him that option. I can tell you this ‘cause you the only one of my peeps that plays it straight. Other crews I had, muthafuckas’d get greedy and cause static, but you keep steady. I have to keep the others cool, but not you. It’s why I want to ask you something.”

“What, Deeh?”

“After this, I want to keep in touch. The others can go to the four winds, but you, I want you to keep in distance. Friends are hard to come by patna, and I consider you that. Lookin’ over Jojo, and Granmama gettin’ old, a brother got to have someone he can trust. To hold him and his fams down. Watch all our backs. Figure you a drifter,

nothing holding you to one place, you wouldn't mind." A '92 Acura with tinted windows and five stars roared by, banging twelves and a tube, rocking "Freddy's Dead".

"I got no place special to be after the job, and I like Mrs. DeVaughn and little Jojo. I can hang for a minute, though if the feeling comes, I'ma be out. Like the sun at my face, wind at my back. Poppa was a rollin', and I'm the same."

"True dat, true dat. Thanks, man."

Weeks after the shit went down. I got wind on the vine that the po-po was sweating Mrs. DeVaughn hard. She played it well, not breaking once. I took that time, washed Deeh-Deeh's cut through a Swiss bank account. After it was clean, I set up the trust for Jojo, sending Mrs. Devaughn a plain note with a message she'd only know. Something she and Deeh had used before.

Then, I was ghost.

I was done, the crew split from then, but Jojo just wouldn't let go. He grew into his own sociopath, created a crew of half-lifers – guys that did dime shit and had no brains for the complex work – and thought himself Deeh-Deeh re-incarnate. I felt the silencer screw into the extended barrel, and tighten. Jojo had Godda on the snipe, playing at Tom Berenger. A real jerkoff walks around at night with DMC Gazelles, attempting to snipe with them on.

"So, you down with this, or what? There's cash-money in it for all us, kno'm'sayin'? That safe ain't shit to you, Cool Breeze. My brother used to spin tales of the magic-type shit yo ass used to pull, Anton. Cain't tell me you lost that after all this time?" He wanted to do a Fed bank in Sussex to prove to the movers and breakers that he had what Deeh-Deeh had, and could take his place in the center ring.

I squeezed the grip, finger around trigger. Stupid for a bodyguard not to have his toolie out in his hand when his boss is threatening a man's fams.

Three shots scorched a hole through the blue nylon outer lining of my coat.

Godda dropped the rifle, his brains a Pollock against the wall.

Jedda's gold-capped fronts burst out the back of his skull, flying off near the twitching body of Godda. He made a loud thud as his body knocked over tables and lamps, pulling down tablecloths as he reached for them.

Jojo was busy with a muffled scream as my foot covered his mouth and the through-n-through of his right shoulder bled out.

"You know, Jojo. I wasn't going to kill you, for Deeh-Deeh's memory 'cause he was my boy 'n' all. But you coming along, trying to mess up my ideal life...well, I just can't have that. Ya could have stayed in your so-so Diddy world, fronting like real G's n'shit, but no. Dimestore punk bitches who run around in tight pants, pink-colored Chuck Taylors and plaid shirts, having Kanye dreams of preppy ghetto fabulousness, gotsta prove they balls is real by upgrading to more complex things. Well, little nig..." I grabbed the sofa pillow away from Jedda's hand,

“...man’s got to know his limitations.”

Piff Piff.

Robert S.P. Lee, writer, pulp fiction publisher, illustrator, editor, etc. has worn more hats than Wilt Chamberlain. He currently pursues his illustrator roots. With his attention span, he may well be the next centerfold for Playgirl