

The 'country's first military thriller writer' Mukul Deva is in town today on the first halt of his whistle-stop tour for the launch of his new book *Salim Must Die* and some conversation with Mita Kapur. JUHI SHAH engages him in some cross-fire to learn that

Mukul MUST write

YOUR website calls *Salim Must Die* 'a frighteningly plausible sequel' to your last book *Lashkar*. Tell us a bit about it.

Salim Must Die takes up the story from where *Lashkar* leaves it off and then deals with yet another (totally different) aspect of terrorism. Also, it (unlike *Lashkar*) has an international setting where the story moves over 10-12 different countries. Because of this, constructing the plot was a huge exercise and involved months of research and meticulous plotting. It's called 'frighteningly plausible' because it deals with the terror threats that lie ahead of us—threats that are VERY real and will become a reality if we do not wake up to them and take action right away.

And the two sequels that you are planning?

The third book in this series (*The Dust Will Never Settle*) is slated for release in January 2010 and the last (*Tanzim*) should be out in January 2011. Each of these deals with other aspects of terrorism that could not be tackled in earlier books due to paucity of space and the vastness of the subject. They also carry ahead Iqbal, Col Anbu and Force 22—all three of whom are very real, lovable characters. It has been my endeavour to use my personal experience in counter-terrorism and try and act as an early warning... in addition to providing the adrenaline rush that every action thriller must do...no?

Why launch in Jaipur?

My heart and my publisher HarperCollins guided me here (*smiles*). I love Rajasthan and have spent some wonderful years of my life here. You will also see a lot of different things that will happen during this series, because Karthika VK at Harper and I are very clear that—since the books are different from what any other Indian writer has attempted so far and so topical—we shall be doing many things differently, including going to those smaller cities that others shy away from.

From short stories, DIY self-help books and coffee table books to military thrillers, your writing career has had quite a trajectory! What makes you switch form, time after time?

My writing, I guess, is a reflection of the times we live in and of course my personal evolution as a person. I guess they also are a window to the rather eclectic mind which I am



blessed with (*smiles*). For the time being, however, I shall be sticking to military action thrillers.

Where do you draw the line between real life experiences and fiction?

That I leave to the reader to decide. I have tried my level best to ensure the reader is hard-pressed to differentiate between the two. Suspense, you see? (*laughs*). This series is based on hardcore, and not-so-pleasant reality. However, there are large elements of fiction woven into the stories for the drama and adrenaline rush required.

Six books out, one under publication and four on the anvil—you sure don't suffer from the writer's block! What is your secret?

I am very particular about managing my time and ensuring I write every day. Perhaps, it's easy for me since writing is a huge catharsis for me. Also of course, the gods are being very kind to me at this point in my life—the words just don't seem to stop. Literary viagra or what?!