

THE WEEK

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WRITERS' WORLD

The Indian whodunit has come of age, what with military thrillers and Mughal detectives

By Mandira Nayar
Photo: Robert Vinod

Each time a bomb goes off anywhere or a journalist taps out a terror copy, New Delhi-based Mukul Deva receives an

alert on his computer. Then Deva collects more about the lead—the kind of device used, the modus operandi and the message. All this research is part of his project to pen the perfect fictitious terrorist plot. "It took me four months of research and eight spreadsheets of plotted timelines to plan the plot which stretches across 12 time zones," says Deva, currently projected by HarperCollins as India's only military action writer.

The authenticity of the plot comes from Deva's 15 years with the Sikh Light Infantry, especially his stint in Sri Lanka, where a 10-year-old girl shot his colleague dead. His first book, *Lashkar*, is part of a four-book series by HarperCollins. The second—*Salim Must Die*—is scheduled for a January 2009 release and is his most ambitious plot yet. It is a thriller on the complicated web of oil-funded terrorism. He says the assault rifle has killed the most, more than any new-fangled killing machine. "It is easily available in North-West Frontier Province in Pakistan and is cheaper than a pizza," he says.

Deva is high among the fast increasing tribe of Indian writers who have dared to venture into the rather disturbing world of murderers, terrorists and psychopaths. "It has to be practical," says Deva. "In an action thriller you are not creating an alternate reality. Everything has to be meticulously planned. Even the weapon has to be perfect. In the Army, years of research go into choosing a weapon. There is a reason why you chose one over the other."

Until recently, Indians had left this genre to the likes of Tom Clancy, Robert Ludlum, David Baldacci, Frederick Forsyth and Dan Brown and their webs of subterfuge, ruthless killing, global conspiracies and hi-tech gadgets. Deva has used the same techniques to create a detailed plot guaranteed to terrify the reader. "It is a scary book," he says with a wicked smile.