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Fresh Meat: *Assassins* by Mukul Deva

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***Assassins* by Mukul Deva is an international thriller that jumps between London and India and follows Ravinder Singh Gill as he tries to stop a high-profile double assassination (available July 14, 2015).**

The Sisters of Benazir are out for revenge. The London based political activists want payback for the murder of the politician Benazir Basheer. They hire Leon Binder, a high-priced assassin who always gets the job done, to take care of the trio of men they believe were responsible for the untimely demise of the popular but divisive figure, at Rawalpindi. Pervaiz Masharrat, the former military dictator, Abid Zardosi, the current prime minister, and Beitullah Mehsud, the commander, at the time, of the Pakistani Taliban.

Mehsud doesn't last long, though it's unclear if it is Binder or the Americans who have brought his life to an end with a well-aimed missile. The action, and there is plenty of it, rolls from India to London, back to India. The number of characters is overwhelming for me, though they are well drawn. I haven't met that many people in my entire life. It doesn't remain a problem for long though, as people are dispatched with great glee by the author **Mukul Deva**, either point blank at the end of a gun or after a period of torture. There's just the right amount of grisly in the narrative.

Nothing, of course, ever goes smoothly or to plan, in life or fiction, especially when you are planning international hits. Double dealing comes from every corner and the Sisters of Benazir prove they are not shy of dishing out some rough justice when they think funds, meant for their fiendish plots, are siphoned off in a grubby sort of off-shore manner. Pain and retribution are swift, proving that if you're going to watch out for any set of people in this book, it is certainly the sisters. They don't, however, have things always go their way:

Leon was halfway to her when he spotted her pursuers. They were fifty feet away, which is why he'd missed them earlier, but closing fast now. There were two of them, both in their mid-thirties. The shorter one was bulkier, but both were swarthy, with slicked back hair.

Like Puerto Rican pimps.

Or cops playing undercover.

Leon could make out they were either trailing Fatima or tracking her.

Amateurs. Should know better than to stare at their mark.

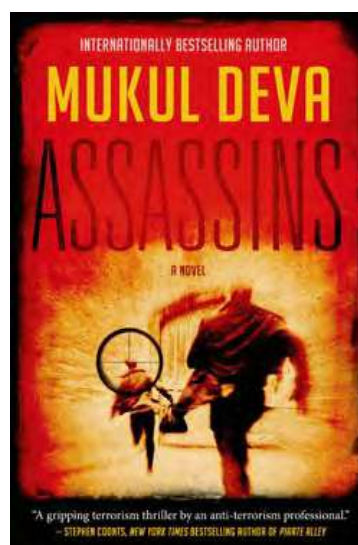
Without breaking stride Leon continued past Fatima. Once past the two men he circled back.

By now the duo had split up and were moving to outflank Fatima. Leon kept a steady pace behind them, mingling with passing groups of people to ensure he did not stand out. He realized both men had eyes for no-one other than Fatima.

Has she brought them with her or led them here?

Leon pondered that.

Is she the bait or the target?



India's National Intelligence Agency, the NAI and Britain's MI6 get together and decide they need others involved if they are going to keep after Binder, never mind apprehend him before he manages to fulfill his multi-million dollar contract. Suresh Kurup, head of the NAI and Sir Edward Kingsley, director of MI6 lobby for Ravinder Singh Gill to go after Binder, before it is too late. Kingsley, Gill, and Binder may sound like a New York advertising company, but the three of them were former classmates at London's Imperial College and even shared an apartment together. It doesn't get much closer. Gill and Binder were particularly close and share a history of women, intrigue, death, and demons. Just the right recipe for a book with a name like *Assassins*.

The writing is sharp and the action very busy, but the strength of the characters stops the story from getting swamped in the detail. Gill's anger with Binder clearly clouds his usual clarity of judgment and adds to the intrigue which is built up nicely by the author as the bombs get loaded and the guns get cocked, by a whole range of both men and women. All good, bad, ugly and some certainly in-between.

Ravinder was unable to sleep though emotionally drained and physically exhausted. This was the first time he had been alone since morning and he welcomed the solitude. For the first time he was able to put away the mask, not worry about being strong for anyone and allow himself to feel. His grief and pain begged for release, yet lay trapped inside, like a piece of meat trapped in the windpipe, choking him. Ravinder wanted to cry but could not.

The tension builds up nicely and swings to and fro as Binder closes on his prey. Those behind him, particularly Ravinder, are never more than one step here and there. The climax, when it comes fast and thick is, quite appropriately, at a cricket match, though you won't find any ball tampering here.

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Dirk Robertson is a Scots thriller writer, currently in Virginia where he is promoting literacy and art projects for young gang members. When not writing, *tweeting*, or blogging on the *Mystery Writers of America* website, he designs and knits clothes and handbags from recycled rubbish.

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