

## BLOWBACK

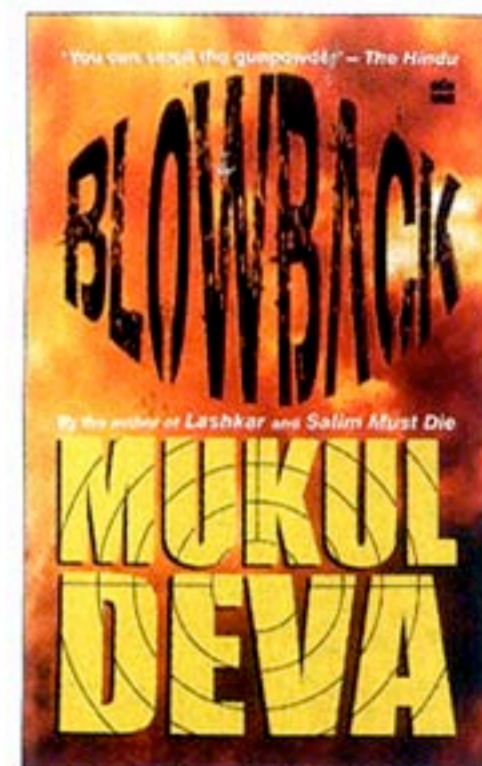
Mukul Deva  
HarperCollins, Rs. 199

So, the good news; India finally has a writer of international calibre in the genre of military fiction. Mukul Deva, the author of many other critically acclaimed novels such as *Lashkar* and *Salim Must Die*, takes the reader on a worryingly realistic journey through the murky world of espionage and terrorism, based in the Indian context. His writing style is top notch; there's enough detail and perspective on each page for the reader to *feel* what's going on in the

story, without becoming overwhelming or dry; and his background in the armed forces makes him the perfect candidate to describe the nuts and bolts of conflict. Take this description of the *Reaper*, for example:

*At the same time, several hundred miles to the northwest, an MQ-9 Reaper UAV sliced through the cold, dark night, unseen and unheard, and closed in on the unsuspecting target below.*

*Unlike the lightweight MQ-1B Predator, the Reaper is a weapons system and not just an individual drone. Initially called Predator B, it was finally renamed the MQ-9 Reaper, the 'M' to signify it's 'multi-role' designation,*



*900-horsepower turboprop engine, a Reaper can carry 1814 kilograms of fuel and 1701 kilograms of weaponry. Its arsenal is a mix of laser guided bombs and missiles, typically fourteen Hellfire missiles, as against the two Hellfire missiles that a Predator drone can carry.*

The story is similar to those by other writers in this genre; terrorism, a plot to sow destruction, intelligence agencies in a battle to protect the innocent, and through it all, the story of a man and a woman in love. What sets it apart from others, and makes it an especially compelling read for an Indian is the utter realism of the story; descriptions of places and roads match the reality as seen from a car window; (*After crossing Ring Road he would go past the old Chanakya Theatre till he hit the T-junction at Ashoka Hotel. There he would swing right and continue straight ahead to Sansad Marg after crossing Race Course Road*). More than that, the ease with which Deva combines well known fact with popular fiction makes for a fantastic read; the story is tight and gripping, leaving you with a feeling of 'this could really, really happen, and I pray that it doesn't'. All in all, a thoroughly enjoyable read.

Rating: \*\*\*

*and the 'Q' to imply an unmanned aircraft system. Each Reaper system consists of four individual Reaper drones operated by different flight teams. Weighing 2223 kilograms and powered by a*