

STORM: How do you feel being regularly described as 'India's Tom Clancy/Frederick Forsyth/Robert Ludlum'? Do you find it annoying/patronising/complimentary?

DEVA: Now why would I find it patronising? All three of them are landmarks, absolutely iconic writers in what they write. It is flattering to be counted among these stalwarts. And anyone who reads them will note that they have very different and distinct voices.

STORM: How do you work on a book, and how long does it take you to complete a manuscript?

DEVA: I start with an idea that is put down as a one-page outline, then I go to a 10-page outline, which moves into a 25-page story format. Then I research. At this stage I re-check and validate the story line and then start writing it. I work a minimum of four hours a day, though I do sometimes go into those 12-hour writing trances also. For some years now I have ensured the book is ready for submission within 11-12 months. Overall, I follow a very disciplined and structured approach.

STORM: How much of your army and intelligence experience do you put into your thrillers?

DEVA: My army tenure has enabled me to impart a lot of realism to my books, however, barring the touch and feel, I do not use any intelligence that I may have gathered during



my army tenure. In fact I make it a point to use only information that exists in the public domain. To prevent any misuse of information, I even ensure that all weapon techniques used (for example, bomb-making) has some small but critical flaw left in it.

STORM: What's your strategy for the fourth book in the LASHKAR series?

DEVA: This is the last one of the series, so I bring together the whole story and highlight the final dimension of the problem of Islamic terror that we face today. Sorry, can't say more right now without giving away the (much-needed) suspense.

STORM: What aspirations do you have for the quartet once they are completed?

DEVA: I hope to see them hit the silver screen, of course!

STORM: Do you personally mentor aspiring writers? What are the main barriers to an individual making a success of his/her writing?

DEVA: My workshops and mentees are by invitation only since I need to ensure I am comfortable with the genre the person wants to write in and I am convinced about their dedication. I personally mentor each person, which is why I do not have more than three or four at any point in time.

The relationship is designed to ensure the mentee learns the process and gets started on the book pretty much straightaway. The obstacles for each person are different, but the most common one is time and discipline.

STORM: Why do you think writing stories is important, and what advice do you have for readers who secretly want to write?

DEVA: Each one of us is basically a story-teller and stories can help us learn and grow — from other's mistakes and experiences. For anyone wanting to write the only advice I can give is — just do it!

STORM: How does CANassist work and what experience in your own life inspired you to start it?

DEVA: CANassist is an India-specific organisation to help people resolve conflicts. I started it since I was tired of making profits and wanted to reach out and make a difference to the lives of people around me since my experiences had shown me that most problems can be dealt with if people are just able to talk to each other. I always wish I could give more time and energy to this — I find it extremely satisfying. ■

