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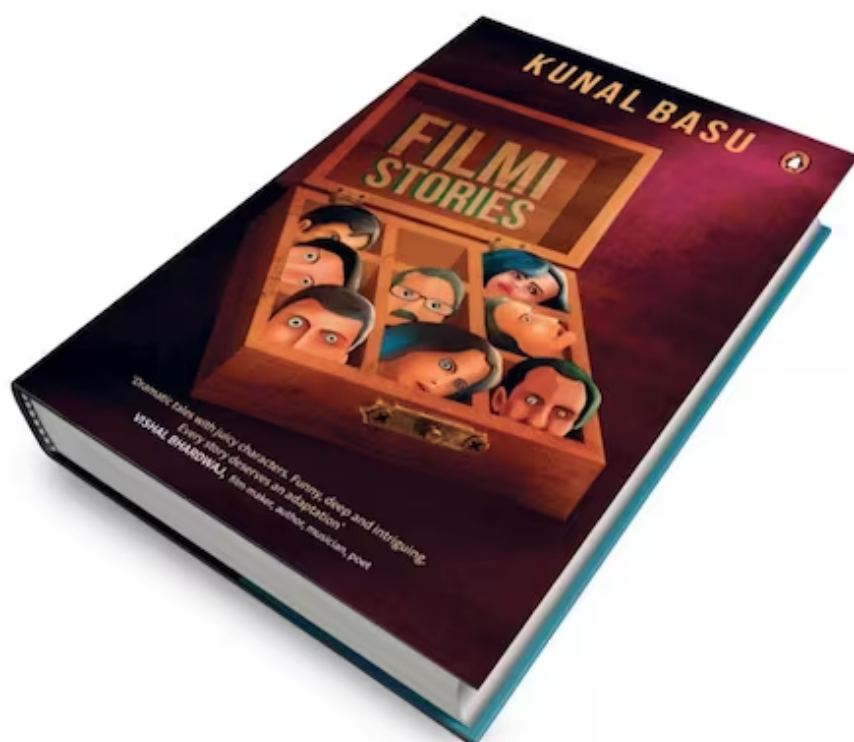
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Strap on your seatbelt, because Kunal Basu's 'Filmi Stories' is a racy and rollicking read

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'Filmi Stories' by Kunal Basu | Penguin Vintage | Rs 499 | 272 pages



Amit Dixit

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Filmi Stories was writer Kunal Basu's pandemic project. After all, what better way for a writer to allay the effects of cabin fever than to take up the pen. "In the fleeting spring of 2021, as the world was reeling from the pandemic, I thought to write a few stories to drive out the despair that was filling me up like smoke in a chimney stack," says Basu in the 'Prologue' to this short story collection. He dipped into his Havana cigar box, where he kept hastily scribbled notes brimming with story ideas, but that didn't do the trick. Inspiration manifested in unexpected and dramatic ways—during a game of Monopoly in one case—not unlike the stories themselves.

The eight stories in this collection have wild premises and plotlines. A corpse in a well-tailored suit is found on a beach in one. In another, the protagonist finds himself to be the sole passenger on an airplane flying from one deserted airport to another. Yup, very filmi. In the hands of a skilled storyteller with a fecund imagination like Basu, seemingly incongruous matter aligns harmoniously on the page, albeit with a dark twist.

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Take the first story—'OK TATA'—for instance, where Jaggi the trucker sets out to kill his wife's alleged lover. The lives of the truckers are drawn in striking detail, from the trucker-helper dynamic to the eateries that cater exclusively to them, the clear nights under the stars, the policemen "always thirsty for bribes", the dance bars they frequent (which is where Jaggi met his wife Jhimli) and bhukki,






“the opium powder that was a staple among truckers”. Basu writes, “You swallowed bhukki to stop feeling sad, stop feeling angry, stop missing home, stop feeling anything.” The denouement is as unexpected as it gets, and only Basu could have nailed it.

Basu defines the premise of the collection thus: “I have always considered film and fiction to be ungainly cousins, each trying its best to cover up the imperfection of the other. Might there be a third cousin? A kinder oneâ€œ” *Filmi Stories* is the answer to that question.




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