

# Q&A: Samit Basu

## 2023 Six-Week Workshop Instructor



Tell us about your most recent book, *The City Inside*! And who is your favorite character from it?

*The City Inside* is a novel set in a near-future Delhi, a world facing multiple-choice apocalypses, where two young people try to find a way to overcome the permanent surveillance and distraction around them and become the people they need to be to not just survive, but resist. A lot of it is set in the world of future influencers, called Flowstars — the main protagonist, Joey, is a Reality Controller, a sort of producer/manager/programmer for the multi-directional livestream of a problematic celebrity. She's also my favourite character, because she's drawn from some of the best people I know, who manage to retain their empathy and overall excellence inside systems that constantly try to subvert and erase them.

Where do you gather writerly inspiration from?

Everywhere! Life, the news, fiction in every medium. *The City Inside* was drawn from the world around me, the news, speculative futurism (both fictional and non-fictional), and people I've encountered throughout my life.

You have experience navigating the world of publishing across several countries. What lessons or tools do you think you've gained in publishing for both an Indian and a worldwide audience?

Yes, several countries, and not just publishing, other media as well. I think every medium, every genre, every culture you work in teaches you lessons not just in craft, but in life — they're all about engaging with conformities, expectations and styles in craft, career, and beyond. I've been writing for a living for two decades now, and started just out of college. Very broadly speaking, the primary lesson is in finding that intersection of what you'd like to do, and what the specific settings of production in any medium or country will allow or encourage.

Tell us about your work outside of novel writing! What inspires you to create in multiple genres, and do you have any projects you'd like to talk about in particular?

I've been working on novels exclusively since 2020, and enjoying that thoroughly, because, while multitasking and shapeshifting are fun, they're also quite burnout-inducing if all the spaces you're working in are chaotic — and all creative fields are. Apart from adult SFF novels, I've worked in film and TV in Bollywood as a writer and once as a co-director, in comics as a writer and editor, in children's books, and as a journalist and columnist. I see genre quite differently from the way it's seen both in the US/Canada/UK and Japan — I see it more as a descriptor of work rather than a separate entity, if that makes sense? Part of this is because I read and watch across genres, and part of it is because each culture approaches genre differently. Definitions are always fluid and often exhausting — if they are used to exclude work and people instead of include them. The project I'm most excited about right now is my upcoming novel, *The Jinn-Bot of Shantiport*, which is out from Tordotcom in October 2023.

What are you most looking forward to as a first-time Clarion West instructor?

Everything! When I first heard about Clarion West, I was already on the publishing treadmill. I think it was either after my first novel or second, and at that point I was on a multi-book deal with Penguin India and every year was packed. I remember wishing I'd heard about it before, because then I'd have applied to go and learn. So to get to be an instructor after many more years is both a privilege and an absolute pleasure.

Who were/are your writing mentors?

I didn't have any, alas — I wish I did! Writer communities aren't a thing in India, or at least weren't then, and while I made many writer friends after publishing, they were mostly litfic writers until I started publishing in the West. So my early-career writing mentors were ... books, I guess. I've certainly learned a lot about both writing and publishing from many wonderful writer friends, but I don't know if "mentor" is the right way to describe them.

## Are there any up-and-coming Indian speculative fiction writers that you'd like to shout out/recommend to readers?

Many! I feel like there's around a hundred South Asian writers between subcontinent-dwellers and the diaspora whose work I am excited by, so I'm going to constrain it to novelists whose work is out soon or was out recently in the US. Lavanya Lakshminarayan, whose *The Ten Percent Thief* is out now. I also don't know whether Indrapramit Das (Clarion West graduate, novella out in June), S. B. Divya, Saad Z. Hossein, Tasha Suri or Vaishnavi Patel should be described as up-and-coming or already-up-there, but all of them. Coming soon, Vajra Chandrasekera, Kritika H. Rao, Tanvi Berwah, Prashanth Srivatsa.

## Any words of wisdom for the incoming class to Clarion West?

Yes. Approach all writing-related advice with caution, including this sentence.

## How can people best stay connected to hear updates about your work?

I'm on all the problematic platforms as samitbasu.

## Anything else we missed that you'd like to share?

I never have a good answer for this! I'm just delighted and excited to join the Clarion West community, and really looking forward to the workshop.

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Samit Basu is the author of several novels, most recently *The City Inside* (Tordotcom, 2022). He's been publishing fantasy and SF novels in India since 2003 (*The Simoqin Prophecies*, Penguin India). His U.S. debut was in 2013 (*Turbulence*, Titan Books). Samit has also co-written/directed a film for Netflix, written comics and children's books across a range of genres, and published nonfiction as a journalist and columnist. He lives in Delhi and on the internet, and is on social media at @samitbasu.