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Crouch author, hidden body

Blake Crouch, mystery novelist

By MATT EHLERS, Staff Writer

Blake Crouch is a long way from home, but North Carolina is never far from his fingers.

His first two crime-fiction novels, "Desert Places" and the just-released "Locked Doors," feature protagonist Andrew Thomas, a famous suspense novelist who in the beginning of his adventure lives on Lake Norman, north of Charlotte. As the books unfold, the action spreads across the state. "Locked Doors" culminates in and around Ocracoke Island.

Crouch, 26, graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill in December 2000 with an English degree. He'll appear Wednesday at The Regulator Bookshop in Durham. He spoke from Colorado, where he lives.

Q: How did a Statesville boy educated at UNC end up in Durango, Colo.?

A: My wife (and I) both went to UNC. I went before her. She graduated in May of 2003. We're big mountain lovers and backpackers, so we pretty much just picked it off a map. We knew we wanted to live in the Rockies. We did a little research and thought, "Durango looks really nice."

Q: Had you ever been to Durango?

A: Never.

Q: Was that scary?

A: It was scary, but it was also just a blast. I guess it would've been terrible if it had been a bad choice, but luckily it's an amazing town.

Q: Tell me where the idea came from for "Desert Places."

A: I had this idea in my head about this suspense writer, like me, but he's not quite Stephen King stature, but he's up there. He gets this crazy letter in his mailbox that says there's this body that's buried on his property, it's covered in blood. So I had that opening, but I wasn't sure where it went from there. At the same time that I was formulating this opening chapter, I was going through a scrapbook and I saw this picture I had taken back in the mid-'90s, when I'd been on a backpacking trip in Wyoming. It was of this very high and remote, bleak desert, with a little dirt road running off into the horizon. I got kind of thunderstruck, and that's where this guy is taken. He's taken by his crazy brother out into the middle of this lonely desert.

Q: How did you decide on a recurring character?

A: I really had no intention of writing a sequel. I thought, "Alright, I'm done. I want to move on to other things." And my editor said, "Are you sure you don't want to do a sequel?" And at first I thought, "No, I don't think I do." But I had a month away from the book and I really started missing these characters. And I started really wondering, "What's going to happen to this guy?" Because at the end of "Desert Places," there's a body count being attributed to him. He's been through psychological warfare with his brother. He's been broken down physically, emotionally, psychologically. And he's got nothing. He can't go home. He's hitched a ride with this family out of the desert. He's on the open road, doesn't know where he's going. I wanted to find out what happened. And I'm so glad I did. It's just so much fun being with these characters for another few years.

Q: Are there more Andrew Thomas books in the future?

A: Not in the imminent future. I'm working on something different right now. Somewhere through the writing of "Locked Doors," I started thinking of this as a trilogy. I may go back and see what happens after "Locked Doors" ends, but I'm not sure yet.

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