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Hoover hopes to suck readers into mystery

Huntersville resident Terry Hoover admits to being a part of a local conspiracy.

She's a member of the Carolina Conspiracy, a group of local mystery writers, who, in their words, "make a scene at literary events" such as book signings and library appearances.

Hoover has been writing for more than 20 years, namely for local publications such as Carolina Bride and Lake Norman Magazine. In recent years, she's taken up fiction writing. She classifies herself as a Southern mystery writer and has recently landed a book deal with Gale/Five Star Publishing.



Huntersville's Terry Hoover is already at work on her sequel novel.

In January, Hoover and Gale/Five Star will release *Double Dead*. Although the first of Hoover's novels to be published by a major publishing company, *Double Dead* is actually the second in her Steve Harlan series. Although it was never published, the prequel to *Double Dead* received some critical acclaim and awarded her a Malice Domestic unpublished author's grant, in turn providing her the means to author *Double Dead*.

The novel is set in a time and place that many living in these parts may not have — pardon the pun — a clue about: Charlotte, North Carolina — circa 1961. "At that time, Charlotte was all Southern," says Hoover, a bona fide native North Carolinian.

Hoover grew up in Charlotte's east side. Writing *Double Dead* allowed for her to revisit her past. "It brings me back to the Charlotte I remember," says Hoover.

The Charlotte Hoover remembers as a young girl was not the bustling metropolis sprawled of today. Rather, it was an up-and-coming, mid-size city with hopeful aspirations. It was growing, but was still managing to maintain its grassroots charm. "(For the setting), I wanted a Southern location and a Southern mindset," says Hoover. "I also wanted a town about that size."

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Hoover finds Southerners to be unique in their mannerisms and outlooks on life. Southerners are open and interested in people,” she says. “They’re always looking for points of connection. When we meet someone, we want to know all about them,” she says.

She uses this classic Southern trait as a basis for developing many of her characters. Steve Harlan, the novel’s first-person narrator and central character, is a private eye somewhat down on his luck, having recently lost his newspaper career as well as his wife. “He’s a private eye with an attitude and a family to feed,” says Hoover. “He can investigate all day long and then come home and have a barbecue with his neighbors.” Hoover says Harlan’s domestic life makes him somewhat unconventional in that many private eyes are written as “hard-boiled loaners.”

The novel also makes somewhat of a social statement. “How quickly we are to condemn those who are wealthy and famous,” says Hoover.

The plot centers on the murder of a prominent banker’s mistress. Harlan works to dig up evidence in order to discern the banker’s innocence in the case. “This was inspired by an actual case,” says Hoover.

The novel’s first chapter, available online at hoovermysteries.com, ends with a nerve-jolting twist. “My goal was to hit you right in the middle,” she says.

As a mystery/suspense writer, Hoover works hard to embed twists and turns throughout her manuscript in order to keep her readers interested. “When someone says to you, ‘I stayed up until 2 a.m. reading your work,’ that’s the ultimate compliment,” she says.

Hoover says she is often asked where her story ideas come from. “Little bits and pieces of information float around in your mind,” she says. “And eventually they come together.”

The majority of the characters Hoover creates are men based on individuals with whom she’s come in contact throughout her life. Many of the secondary characters are profiled after her neighbors. “If I base (my characters) on real people, it makes it more real for me,” she says.

She writes about men because of the heroism she admires in them. “Men who go to work every day and come home to their families are heroes,” says Hoover.

She based Harlan’s character on the life of her greatest hero, her husband, Harry. “He’s my biggest cheerleader,” says Hoover. Harry Hoover’s work in public relations has really helped her get her work as a professional novelist off the ground. Hoover says publishing a novel is no small feat. She compares it to winning American Idol, “except there’s more competition.”

She remembers the stack of rejection letters she acquired while attempting to publish Double Dead’s prequel. She hopes that if Double Dead receives notoriety, perhaps she can have the prequel published as well as its sequel that she is currently writing.

Gale/Five Star focuses most of its sales efforts to libraries. Hoover says this is a great place to build a fan base. She plans to promote the novel through bookstore and library appearances, some of those independently and others with the Carolina Conspiracy.

With Double Dead, Hoover hopes to accrue a notable fan base. “I want to build a reader base so I can continue,” she says.

Where her first published work takes her remains — well — a mystery. But she already has an idea of where she would like to go should success come her way. “The ultimate goal would be to turn out one novel a year,” she says. “That would be the ultimate and lovely goal.”

— Darlene Schaefer

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