

## Best-selling author Hart to talk about new thriller 'The Hush' in Greenville

### Paul Hyde

Greenville News USA TODAY NETWORK – SOUTH CAROLINA

Best-selling writer John Hart will visit Greenville on Saturday to talk about his new thriller, “The Hush,” set in the mysterious swampland of North Carolina.

Hart will discuss his new novel and sign books at 4 p.m. at Fiction Addiction, 1175 Woods Crossing Rd. No. 5.

In “The Hush” (St. Martin’s Press), Hart revisits a memorable character from his 2009 Edgar Award-winning best-seller “The Last Child.” Johnny Merrimon is now 23, a loner living in a 6,000-acre stretch of forbidding wilderness in North Carolina.

When Johnny’s rights to the land are questioned, he teams up with lawyer Jack Cross and embarks on journey where they’ll encounter an unscrupulous billionaire hunter, gruesome murders and ominous supernatural forces.

“The Hush” is rife with particularly Southern themes: the legacy of slavery, the power of greed and a contentious battle over land.

*The Greenville News* recently caught up with Hart.

The Greenville News: “The Hush” continues the story of Johnny Merrimon and Jack Cross from “The Last Child.”

With this novel, did you start by delving further into the characters or by devising the plot?

John Hart: I always start with the characters. If the characters are compelling, the plot will pretty much unfold itself.

The characters provide the emotional drivers for the action. I think my focus on character-driven plots is why my publishers like to describe me as a writer of literary thrillers.

One of my favorite authors, Pat Conroy, is the mark of a really good character-driven writer. I read “The Princes of Tides” many years ago.

If you asked me to tell you the plot, in honesty, I could barely give you the bare bones. But the characters remain as clear in my mind as if I read the novel yesterday.

Greenville News: “The Hush” is set 10 years after “The Last Child,” which was first published 10 years ago.

When did you start thinking about writing this sequel? How long has “The Hush” been in the making?

John Hart: When I finished “The Last Child,” I felt so pleased with it. Writing an adult thriller that revolved around boys was tough and risky. I took many chances and many things could have gone wrong, but I loved the way I left the story.

While the ending wasn’t exactly happy, it was certainly hopeful. In fact, “The Last Child” is the most

personal book I have ever written, and those boys have long felt a part of me. It's not coincidental that "Johnny" and "Jack" are both nicknames for John.

A few years after leaving the novel, or trying to, I had an epiphany: I could write a sequel as long as I set it far enough in the future. That was a great revelation, and it freed me to return to Raven County. I missed the boys, and wanted to see what kind of men they'd become.

Greenville News: "The Hush" takes place in a forbidding, mystical stretch of swampland with real-life roots. Would you tell us about the history behind Hush Arbor?

John Hart: As a North Carolinian, I always knew about the Great Dismal Swamp.

This swampland spans a vast area of North Carolina and Virginia between two bodies of water, the Albemarle Sound and the James River.

From the early 1700s to the 1860s, the Great Dismal Swamp was home to thousands of freed and escaped slaves. The conditions were harsh, but it was a safe haven for building a community. For more insight, read Harriet Beecher Stowe's second novel, "Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp."

Interestingly, many escaped slaves who lived in the swamps traded around the periphery with poor white locals. I loved the idea of two communities of outcasts growing closer over time.

Greenville News: "The Hush" is an interesting title for a novel. Why do you call it that?

John Hart: In the past, slaves who found their way to Christianity were rarely allowed to practice the religion freely.

Fearing reprisals, they worshiped secretly in the swamps and deep woods. Such gathering places were referred to as Hush Arbors or, at times, Brush Harbors.

A place called Hush Arbor first appeared in "The Last Child." In "The Hush," it is integral to the story.

Greenville News: "The Hush" is a mystery with elements of mysticism and magical realism. What inspired you to venture into the realm of the supernatural?

John Hart: In "The Last Child," I raised small questions that hinted at elements of mysticism. Such questions were incidental to the plot, and not all readers picked up on them. For me, however, the questions endured. I thought it might be time for some answers.

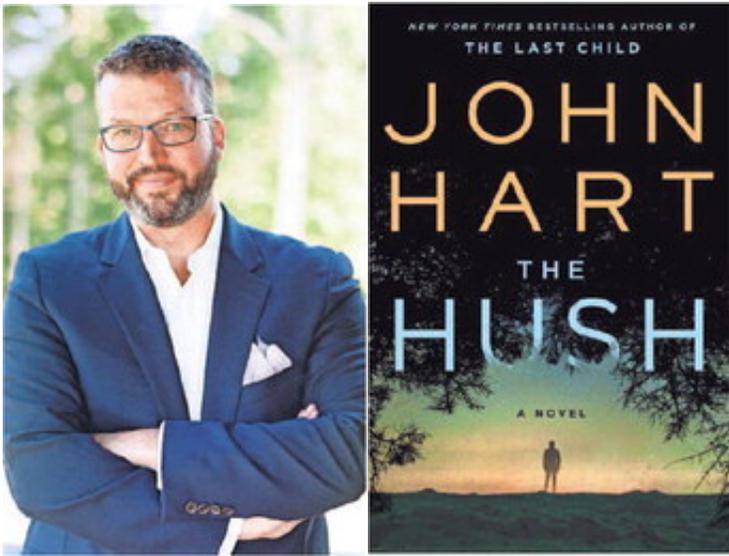
That meant melding a traditional thriller with elements of magical realism in the most powerful and satisfying way I possibly could.

The story takes place not only today, but also in the 1800s and during the Great Depression.

I've never before written such a book, and it was a heck of a journey. I hope readers enjoy the ride.

*Hart's appearance at Fiction Addiction is a ticketed event. A \$30 ticket admits one, guarantees a seat and includes a copy of "The Hush." A \$10 ticket is standing room only and can be redeemed for \$10 off merchandise purchased at the event. For more information, call Fiction Addiction at 864-6750540.*

*Paul Hyde covers education and everything else under the South Carolina sun. Follow him on Facebook and Twitter: @PaulHyde7.*



**Best-selling novelist John Hart will visit Greenville’s Fiction Addiction Saturday to talk about his new thriller, “The Hush.”** ASHLEY COX, ST. MARTIN’S PRESS/PROVIDED