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Down River by John Hart - Reviewed by Judi Morrel

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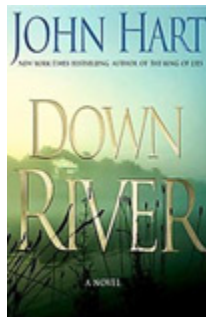
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Recommended Readings



Down River

by John Hart

Reviewed by Judi Morrel

Each year the Mystery Writers of America bestows an Edgar (as in Edgar Allen Poe) Award for the best mystery novel of the year, and in 2008 John Hart's second novel, *Down River*, won that award. Rife with evocative descriptions, water and river imagery, and exquisitely flawed characters, this book demonstrates that a fast-paced, excellently plotted mystery can be fine literature as well.

Set in North Carolina, the novel revolves around a prodigal son character, Adam Chase, who has returned to the Chase family homestead, Red River Farm, following a five-year exile in New York City, self-imposed after he was narrowly acquitted of murder. His return was precipitated by a puzzling phone call from a childhood pal, asking Adam to come home. When Adam arrives in Rowan County, NC, he finds that his pal is missing, his family is on the verge of imploding, his ex-lover Robin, a local policewoman, is still hurting emotionally from his flight to NYC, and most townspeople still believe he "got away with one" five years earlier.

As people are attacked, fires are deliberately set, and dead bodies appear, suspicion falls on Adam. With emotions already running high in the county over the building of a nuclear power plant and Adam's father's refusal to sell land for it, tensions threaten to blow the region sky high.

The twisting plot includes several surprises along the way, revealing old family secrets, resolving some things and leaving some things unresolved, and thoroughly entertaining the reader.

- Judi Morrel is associate professor of mathematics and associate dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Butler University