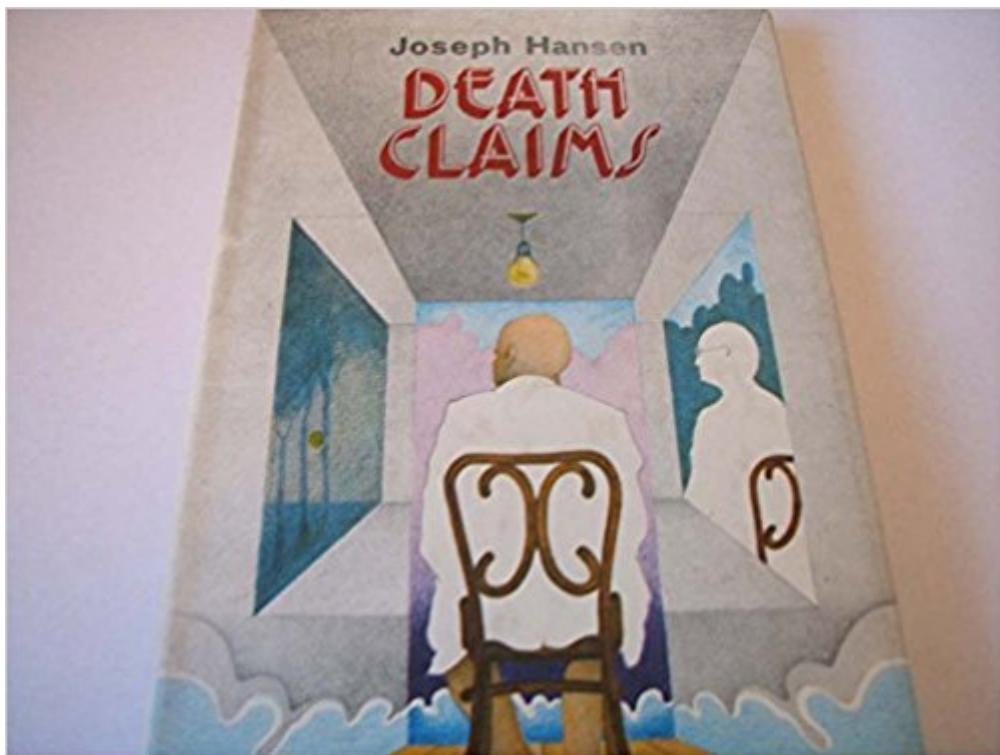


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# Death Claims



## Synopsis

This second book in Joseph Hansen's groundbreaking, critically acclaimed Dave Brandstetter mystery series finds Dave sifting through the elaborate lies surrounding the murder of John Oats, whose drugged body was found washed up on the beach. Left behind are April Stannard, John's lover, and his son Peter, who was the beneficiary of his life insurance policy. The trouble is, Peter is missing. Joseph Hansen is the author of more than 25 novels and is a renowned short story writer. The winner of the 1992 lifetime achievement award from the Private Eye Writers of America, Hansen is also the author of *A Smile in his Lifetime*, *Living Upstairs*, *Job's Year*, and *Bohannon's Country*. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If this Corvette-cool, drumskin-taut policier leaves you marveling at its incorporation of a totally rugged, sexy, openly gay sleuth into a style and milieu that reads deliciously like Chandler, Hemingway, and Jacqueline Susann all in bed together, then get this: Hansen wrote it not at the turn of this century--which has gay characters popping up in books and movies and on TV in all sorts of stereotype-busting ways--but, remarkably, in the 70s! Indeed, it was the second in what became Hansen's series of Southern California-set whodunits featuring insurance-claims investigator Dave Brandstetter, who is not without his own lost loves and private demons--and yet never without his cigarette, glass of whiskey (neat, of course), and enough terse, manly stoicism to make Steve McQueen look like Richard Simmons. The Brandstetter series has acquired something

of a cult following over the 30 years that Hansen developed it (Death Claims is the second title in its U.S. revival courtesy of Alyson Publications, although many more are currently in print by No Exit Press, available on 's U.K. link) and this slim, no-slack volume, which followed up *Fadeout*, the series debut, makes it delightfully clear why. Everything you could want in a gay-inflected murder mystery set in golden-haired SoCal in the Nixon years is here: A middle-aged rare-books dealer whose doped-up body is found washed up on the coast, his shrewish ex-wife, his lovely young bibliophile girlfriend, and his angelically beautiful and adoring actor son. Don't forget the imperiously queeny head of the local repertory theater; the confirmed-bachelor superstar of a TV western and the blind, Bible-thumping mother who rules his life; a seedy young hospital orderly who smuggles morphine to addicted patients; and a couple of small-time academics obsessed with the lost notebooks of Thomas Wolfe. Then there's Hansen's language, which falls brilliantly somewhere between homage to and spoof of his thriller-penning forebears, right from the first line--"Arena Blanca was right. The sand that bracketed the little bay was so white it hurt the eyes...gulls sheared a sky cheerful as new denim"--to curt, epigrammatic lines--"The dead are terrible. They won't help you at all. No matter how you loved them"--that can only be said with a cigarette propped out of the corner of one's mouth. In fact, the only thing you could call even remotely stereotypically gay about Hansen's prose (or, indeed, Brandstetter's point-of-view) is its obsession with interior design--but even that remains true to genre ("a wastebasket was alone there like a dwarf prince in a dungeon--royal-purple plastic embossed with gold fleur-de-lis..."). True, none of the supporting characters is really developed beyond colorful stock, and not every gear of the story clicks into place with the elegant exactitude and ever-increasing tension and claustrophobia of the technically perfect mystery novel. But who cares? Dave Brandstetter is too cool to be passed up. He's got a steady enough hand to take a drink with even the most sinister of suspects, he hangs out and talks about relationships with his suave Lothario dad, and he can be sensitive and tender with his longtime lesbian friend Madge without lapsing into total schmaltz. Oh, and of course he's haunted by the boy that got away. --Timothy Murphy --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Joseph Hansen is the author of more than 25 novels and is a renowned short story writer. The winner of the 1992 lifetime achievement award from the Private Eye Writers of America, Hansen is also the author of *A Smile in his Lifetime*, *Living Upstairs*, *Job's Year*, and *Bohannon's Country*. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

There are 13 mysteries in this series and they should be read in order to really enjoy the progression. Writing is spare and top notch. Set in California, they were written long enough ago that the settings have a "retro" feel but without the writing being dated. Also, if you are looking for salacious sex scenes masquerading as plot, this isn't the mystery series for you. Interesting mysteries, giving a glimpse of gay life and culture at a time when "Don't ask. Don't tell" could and did drive plot, when AIDS was "new" and Rock Hudson was still "straight"!

Bookseller John Oats has been found dead in the Pacific Ocean. The death has been ruled accidental, perhaps suicide. This explanation doesn't satisfy insurance claims investigator Dave Brandstetter. He comes to believe Oats was murdered for his considerable policy and sets out to find the culprit. Whodunit? Oats's elusive son? The closeted, all-American TV star? A washed up screenwriter? Or maybe even Oats young lover, a woman who took care of the man until his dying day? This is a beautifully written page turn, very smooth and very engaging. Brandstetter is no angst-torn hero despairing of the state of the world. He's a solid, mature professional out to do his job (though not without his own personal problems). Though the killer's identity should be obvious, Hansen weaves the story in such fashion that we are still surprised to find out who done it. If Hansen has a flaw as a writer, it might be his relentless need to describe all exteriors and interiors, even those that play a scant role in the story. The abundance of detail and description bogs the story down some. But not much. After all Hansen is doing his storyteller's duty to put the reader into the world he has created.

Dave Brandstetter, a claims investigator for Medallion Life Insurance Company, is checking into bookseller John Oat's 'death by misadventure.' The misadventure was a drowning that took place in the ocean. At night. During a rainstorm. After Oats decided to change his insurance policy so that his son wouldn't inherit. Yeah, it's a little suspicious, and it doesn't help that the son is now missing. Maybe this doesn't sound that thrilling (insurance claims? ), but Hansen, frequently compared to Hammett, Chandler and MacDonald, catches your attention from the first line: "Arena Blancas was right. The sand that bracketed the little bay was so white it hurt the eyes." And he never lets go, never wanders off track through an unexpectedly twisty tale of betrayal and murder. Hansen is that rarity, a brilliant stylist who actually has something to say. Sure, the message is unrelentingly liberal, but it is also tempered with commonsense and compassion. Most impressively, the man knows how to tell a good story. DEATH CLAIMS, book two in the Brandstetter series, is one of the best.

as a gift to my colleague, 5 star. good product with high quality. The good thing about this product is that I can now cut thin slices of my homemade fresh bread! helpful.

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