



Deadly Arts: A Shane Hadley Mystery

Ken Brigham

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Deadly Arts is a complicated mystery centered on a mysterious crime.

In Ken Brigham's mystery *Deadly Arts*, a perplexing situation comes to the attention of a legendary former police detective.

The death of a Nashville artist Bechman Fitzwallington appears to be attributable to his old age. But something doesn't seem right to Detective Hardy Seltzer. The dead artist had no friends and many enemies; his shabby home is inconsistent with his lucrative art sales. He was also found naked in bed with his bedding folded beside him—inconsistent with a death from natural causes.

Detective Seltzer seeks the advice of his friend, former police detective Shane Hadley, a paraplegic whose career was cut short by a stray bullet. Unsure of whether he even has a case, Hadley's obsession with the puzzling circumstances drives his search for clues. As the story unfolds, secrets, old wounds, and shady motives come to light. The value and interest in the deceased man's art skyrockets; suspicious strangers arrive into town; and Hadley raises the ire of the people he questions.

The story opens with an intruder entering the artist's home, intent on humiliating him. Details are revealed at a skilled pace, sparking questions: Who was the intruder? Was the artist dead or alive at the time of their arrival, or did the intruder's actions cause Fitzwallington's death? If the artist was murdered, who did it? Seltzer and Hadley, even before they know about the intruder, are troubled by doubts, and threats against Hadley and his wife confirm their suspicions of foul play.

The book's odd character names—including SalomeMe, Blythe Fortune, and Damian Saturn—are intrusive, while the similarity of Hardy and Hadley's names risks causing confusion. But the story excels in drawing the nuanced relationships between characters: those between husbands and wives, friends and lovers, and business associates. Its characters keep secrets and overlook or are irritated by one another's foibles.

Contrary to stereotypes, former detective Hadley is an Oxford-educated man with a taste for fine sherry. Overemphasis on these qualities sometimes wears thin; Hadley drinks sherry in nearly every scene, becoming something of a caricature. His British affections are pompous and sometimes interfere with the storytelling. Excessive details are a further impediment: where one descriptor might suffice, there are sometimes three instead.

As Hadley obsesses over scarce clues, the story wavers. His reputed ace sleuthing doesn't prevent him from making blunders, and his investigation benefits from coincidences and lucky breaks, including when it comes to his wife's research. The book's incorporation of scientific findings is more credible, as is its handling of pathology and DNA.

Near the end, a rush of clues comes forth, resulting in clever twists, though the book's end is inclusive. *Deadly Arts* is a complicated mystery centered on a mysterious crime.

WENDY HINMAN (May 1, 2020)

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