

# Wonder Bread & Ecstasy: The Life and Death of Joey Stefano

*By Charles Isherwood*

The meteoric rise and sudden, dramatic fall of a young gay male porn star.

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## Wonder Bread & Ecstasy: The Life and Death of Joey Stefano Summary Details

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Amazon.com Review

Video pornography has been a staple of gay male culture for decades, but there is little written about the people who perform or produce this entertainment. Charles Isherwood has written a modern tragedy about the life and death of porn star Joey Stefano. After a rapid climb to the top, Stefano died of an overdose at age 26. Isherwood is a good reporter who holds no illusions about the porn industry. **Ecstasy and Wonder Bread** is both a hard-hitting exposé of an industry that uses people up and then spits them out and a sympathetic portrait of a young man whose desire for attention and fame was equaled only by his inability to say no.

From Publishers Weekly

Though it was ruled accidental, the drug-related death of 26-year-old gay porn star Joey Stefano<sup>ne</sup> Nicholas Iacona<sup>g</sup> garnered attention from the tabloid press and prompted a television talk-show host to ask whether the sex industry was to blame. Isherwood writes in defense of the industry, and as a partial response to the accusations traces Stefano's life through a stereotypically troubled upbringing in Pennsylvania that culminated in his sporadically successful careers in dancing, prostitution and Los Angeles's pornographic film industry. This last achievement was unheard of at the time, specifically because the young superstar was a "bottom"<sup>de</sup> defined by the author as "the passive performer in anal sex, the active one in oral"<sup>and</sup> and it was believed that gay audiences preferred "tops," or more "masculine" performers. Stefano's career peaked when he won the Best Actor AVN, the industry's equivalent to the Oscar, for his performance in *More of a Man*, but then his popularity faded. Coupled with this was his knowledge that he was HIV positive, and Stefano increasingly numbed himself with a variety of drugs including Ecstasy and Special K (ketamine). In his first book, Isherwood struggles to objectively report these events, providing a brief overview of the inner workings of the gay pornographic film business. This makes up somewhat for the lack of personal information on Stefano that would have enriched this account. Otherwise, much of the story is better suited to a feature-length article.

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