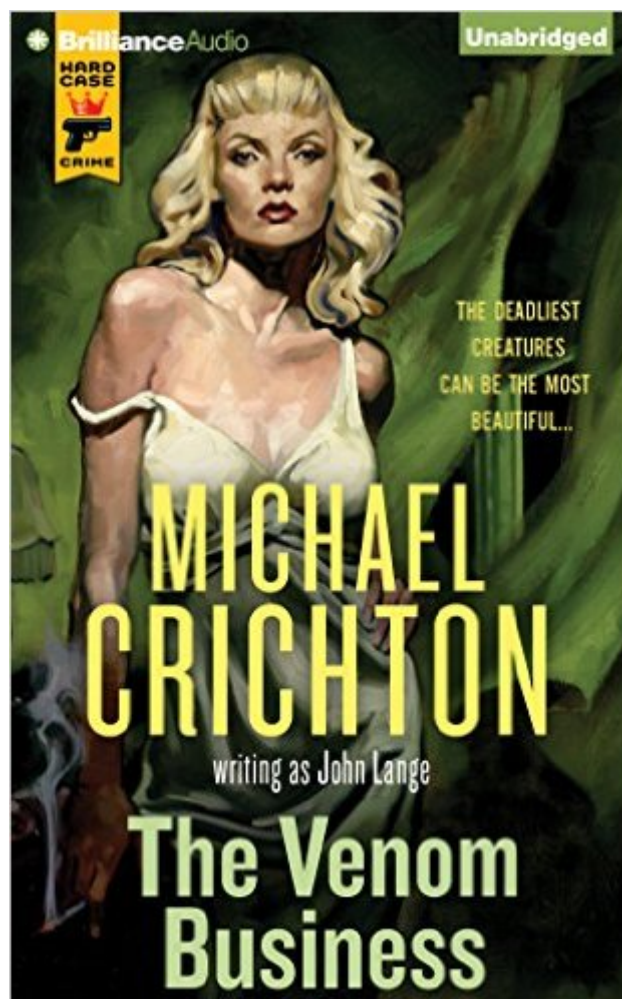


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The Venom Business



Synopsis

As an expert handler of venomous snakes and a smuggler of rare artifacts, Charles Reynaud is accustomed to danger. So the job of body-guarding an old acquaintance about to come into a fortune shouldn't make him break a sweat. But when the attempts on the man's life nearly get Reynaud killed, he's left wondering: is he the killers' real target?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

John Lange was one of the early pen names of Michael Crichton, best known for *The Andromeda Strain* and *Jurassic Park*. While enrolled at Harvard Medical School, Crichton began publishing a number of novels. *Venom Business* is one of a number of Crichton's early novels that have recently been re-released. These early novels compare to many of the bookstand pulp/adventure/crime novels that could be found in the late sixties and early seventies and these books should be read in that context. This one, however, was disappointing. While the beginning was promising with the meeting of Charles Reynaud and Jane Mitchell in the Yucatan where Reynaud is a famed exotic snake hunter. It is later revealed that he uses the transportation of the venous snakes as a cover for smuggling artifacts from Mexico and Central America. The book proceeds from there and is way too lengthy and slow as it details Reynaud being hired as a bodyguard and then the subject of a brutal plot. It was difficult to care about the characters and as a reader I was not invested in the story. All in all, not worth spending much time on, but an interesting start to a widely successful literary career.

I love Michael Crichton, but this is by far his most boring book. It took me forever to read, and I fell

asleep reading it more than once. The plot is very convoluted for such an anti-climactic ending. Characters' backstories too complex. You don't feel anyone has evolved as a character at the end. Not very much "venom" or snakes or action in this "venom business". Great early attempt by an eventual master, but this book leaves a lot to be desired. Disappointed.

The Venom Business begins interestingly enough but rapidly bogs down in mysterious plots and sub-plots. The characters are not believable, situations are unrealistic, and dialog is clumsy. I have enjoyed most of Crichton's books, but not this one.

Great fast-paced story with an interesting twist at the end. One of the early Michael Crichton novels written under the John Lange pseudonym, this one has a typical hero in these early novels -- a self-assured man of action with a quick wit and a James Bond-like ability to bed women at will. Great read and should keep you guessing just what the big picture is till the very end.

As a Michael Crichton fan, I was intrigued to come across the books he wrote during the 1960's under the pen name John Lange. The first one I found was "Zero Cool", a fast and fun homage to "The Maltese Falcon." Then Lange's "Grave Descend." Didn't love that one as much, but I was willing to give the next one on my local library's shelves a try: "The Venom Business." It got off to a promising start -- Charles Raynaud as a mysterious smuggler of venomous reptiles (and other contraband), an exotic Mexican locale, a brave and brainy femme fatale. And then the story dropped straight into an abyss: characters so over the top obnoxious they're only silly, plot swings that would give James Bond whiplash, and misogyny masquerading as sexiness. Crichton wrote the John Lange books while he was still a medical student. He is said to have chosen a target audience of airline passengers whose only entertainment choices in that pre-electronic era were his books or the in-flight movie. In the case of "The Venom Business," passengers would have been wise to choose the movie.

The Good: I love a mystery that keeps me baffled all the way through and The Venom Business did just that. The real trick here is Lange/Crichton kept me entertained even while I was utterly confused. Hard-boiled, noir-ish novels aren't my thing at all, but I just couldn't help wanting to know what was going on and who was really pulling the strings here. Things were wrapped up tightly on each other, each revelation giving just enough to suck me in further. **The Bad:** There were so many unlikeable characters in this book. Albeit purposely unlikeable, but still just a struggle to even read

without wondering why someone hadn't just killed the entire lot of them yet.

This is the fifth Hard Case Crime John Lange/Michael Crichton reissue that I've read and the only one I had a hard time finishing. WHAT I ENJOYED: I liked the first half of the book - it set up a complicated plot with great potential. Sadly, this plot fizzled out by the end. I liked the description of the crazy sexual mores of the early 70's and the wacky clothing and hip language. Totally dated and cringeworthy these days. I liked that this was Crichton's first attempt at a long-form novel, although the author drove the car off the road at the end. WHAT I DISLIKED: The characters were almost all unlikeable - I cared not a whit what happened to them. The story meandered and I wanted to chuck the book across the room out of frustration. I found Crichton's sex scenes to be really awful - I felt embarrassed for the author. A book for Crichton completists only.

This is one of a series Crichton wrote while he was in Med school.... kind of "James Bond"ish..... dashing dude gets the chicks kind of story.... I think men would appreciate it more than the ladies.

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