

Venom Flight

Alan E. Sutton

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Venom Flight is an adventure story filled with violence, sex, romance, and humor.

Alan E. Sutton's powerful adventure story, *Venom Flight*, trades between thrilling elements and wish-fulfilling world travels.

Vietnam veteran John Clarkson's life has been defined by personal setbacks. The latest comes during a security contract to protect mining interests in Chile goes awry when an unidentifiable spider bites him. He nearly dies, but—with the help of a local spiritual figure and mystical cure—he recovers and becomes nearly superhuman. As John heals, he works on mastering his unique abilities. His later journeys take him around the world, seducing women, gambling and winning big, and battling a series of increasingly bad people.

The part of the book that centers on John's transformation stands out; it is well-paced and thoughtfully developed. It takes him a believable amount of time, and plenty of hard work, to master his burgeoning powers and bodily changes. Increased sexual prowess is one side effect; this feels out of place among his other traits, especially as none of his many sexual encounters build upon his gift.

The Chilean locals who surround John early on are somewhat developed, and their interactions with John are dynamic. After John obtains his powers, though, the characters he encounters are bland and nearly interchangeable; they're present merely to fill roles, or to provide a chance for a sexual encounter or a fight sequence.

Once John leaves South America, the story falters. All of the conflicts he encounters are easily overcome. A hopeful subplot follows two escaped convicts and seems to set up a climactic showdown, but it wraps up too quickly. The second half of the book lacks tension, losing itself in a rote series of events that serves to build up John's wealth without clear reason. Nothing propels the story forward or builds upon the interesting premise set up by John's superhuman abilities.

The book trades between genres, with underdeveloped elements of romance, erotica, and adventure titles. The end result is a book that doesn't fully fit anywhere. Its erotic scenes are condensed and insubstantial, functioning only to highlight John's supposed prowess. John's one real romantic relationship vanishes midway through the book and then returns for a forced conclusion, but there's no emotional growth.

The first half of narrative unfolds in an engaging, steady third-person voice. Halfway through, John takes over as narrator; the shift is jarring. His subsequent thoughts and actions contradict his previous development. The two halves of the book feel like wholly different stories written by different writers.

The story initially balances tension with subtle humor well, but later sections are overloaded with over-the-top humor that breaks the fourth wall. Events that highlight John's potential development are condensed or skipped over, only quickly referenced after. Frequent run-on sentences make the text seem sloppy, as do misspelled words and incorrect word choices. These issues compound as the novel progresses.

An adventure story with the potential for real intrigue, *Venom Flight* is filled with violence, sex, romance, and humor.

JOHN M. MURRAY (August 28, 2018)

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