



Venom: The Secrets of Nature's Deadliest Weapon

Ronald Jenner , Eivind Undheim

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Venom brings readers face to face with some of the most dangerous creatures on the planet, including jellyfish, snakes, and wasps, as it uncovers the story of venom. The book explores how venom is used for predation, defense, competition, and communication by an incredible diversity of species. It examines the unique methods that these species have evolved to create and deliver their deadly toxins. The book traces venom back to its origin in early jellyfish and sea anemones, and reveals how venoms have evolved dozens of times independently all across the animal kingdom since that time. And finally, it examines the relationships between these dangerous creatures and humans. Humans have not only learned to live with them, but also to benefit from them: scientists increasingly are harnessing the power of venom to create new drugs, treatments, and anti-venoms.

Venom: The Secrets of Nature's Deadliest Weapon Details

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Melody says

I read this after completing a practical series on spider venom at university. I picked it up because I thought it might help with the assignment, and then decided that it was interesting enough to keep reading.

It was an interesting read for the most part, though I think they really missed the mark with their target audience. Some chapters were far too laden with unexplained jargon. If I hadn't just completed a course in biochemistry, I'd probably struggle with those chapters. Other parts were just downright entertaining and a pleasure for any audience to read. I particularly liked the section on antivenoms, you'll see what I mean when you get there.

Ultimately, it's clear that the book was written by two people, and each chapter cycles between being entertaining or detailing too much detailed chemistry.

Carissa says

This is a supremely interesting, incredibly educational book! There is so much that can be said about a subject such as venom (NOT to be confused with poison) and this book covers it all quite well: what it is, how it evolved, who is venomous (yes, including mosquitoes), the mechanisms, and the bad as well as the good (venom-derived drugs, for example). For the most part, it's an easy and fast read with only a few sections that do get a bit technical. Still, anyone with any interest in venom or any knowledge of science will enjoy and learn so much from Venom.

Nefertari says

Fantastic book on the power and intricate science of venom and venomous creatures. Like many people, I've winced at the sinister appearance in my own world of a copperhead snake, a black widow spider, a jellyfish on the beach. I've even been bitten by a black widow spider, but had no idea why I never suffered any adverse effects from it. This book gave me a few insights as to why.

While the book might do better to explain some of the more scientific terminology for the laymen who are ostensibly reading this, it does a grand job explaining what venom is composed of, how it's delivered to a target, and the enormous amount of energy the venomous animal expends in generating venom. These things - I'd never considered them!

I'm also astounded at the number of medications commonly used that owe something to the venom of different creatures. Low blood pressure medication, medication to prevent thrombosis, even medication for impotence!

Through a before and after picture, I've also learned why I will never get within ten feet of a slow loris.

Carmen says

Alas, your proximity to venomous creatures is virtually guaranteed in practically every inhabitable place on Earth, unless you've retreated to an Antarctic research station far away from the ocean's edge. Even if you are just pottering about in your kitchen or garden, venomous animals will be within only a few metres of you.

This is a book about venomous animals. I wouldn't recommend it to everyone.

DRAWBACKS:

- Pages and pages of chemistry and biology which is extremely technical and not watered down for the average person to digest. Jenner and Undheim don't simplify this enough for the layperson to enjoy and understand.
- Really disgusting full-color pictures of both disgusting creatures and the disgusting effects they can have on humans. If you don't think centipedes and marine bloodworms are fun to look at, this may not be for you. If you have problems seeing people's legs rotting off and faces swollen up painfully, this may not be for you.
- Some of the things (creatures and venom-effects) described in here are pretty bone-chilling and not for the faint of heart.
- Extensive talk about animals painfully killed for science. If you don't want to read about monkeys, cats, mice, rats and guinea pigs being subjected to the most horrendous and painful tortures, skip this.

BENEFITS:

- You will learn a lot.
- It is fascinating.
- Jenner and Undheim explore some things you'd never think of. They discuss the use of venoms in beauty products and cures (diabetes; trying to harness scorpion venom to give men erections; etc.). They berate and sneer at traditional methods of trying to deal with killers (for example, snakebite) while promoting science and medicine. They discuss evolution a lot and the biology of how different venomous species came to be and why. They discuss the use of painful venomous animals by tribes to initiate girls and boys into adulthood - very hard to read. They discuss Michael Smith, who had bees sting him all over his body and then rated the pain.

After receiving hundreds of stings that covered the remotest corners of his anatomy - including the back of his knee, behind his ear, as well as his nipple, scrotum and armpit - Smith concluded that the worst locations to be stung are your nostril, upper lip and penis shaft. Smith scored the pain at these sting sites as 9.0, 8.7 and 7.3, respectively...

- Very scientific and fact-oriented if you are in to that sort of thing. I know I put that in the drawback section, as I think it is not easily digestible, but this kind of not-watered-down scientific detail might appeal to a lot of

readers, as well.

- Jenner and Undheim, or at least one of them... LOL, has a good sense of humor. The book isn't a laugh-fest, but some little bits of humor are slipped in here and there. For example,

Instead, they regurgitate digestive enzymes to dissolve their immobilized prey, which they wrap tightly in a silken burrito of death, before ingesting it through their straw-like mouths.

Silken burrito of death! LOL

TL;DR - I can't recommend this to everyone, but it is enjoyable and informative. You might not want to read this while eating or if you are squeamish. Not for the fainthearted.