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Book Review

The Venture

By Jeff Cox

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Reviewed by Fred Fry, Editor, *Journal of Small Business Strategy*

It may seem odd that I would personally review a book for JSBS, more odd that I would review a novel, and still more odd that it is eight years old. I recently found it while browsing the book store, read it, and decided that the book would be good for summer time reading for JSBS readers and perhaps even to discuss in an entrepreneurship club.

Jeff Cox manages to put virtually every entrepreneurial concept in the novel and even includes some drama and occasional sex to keep you interested. The book is, indeed, old; the characters occasionally step into a phone booth rather than getting out their cell phones. But if you overlook the few anachronistic happenings, the book really does bring concepts to life as the characters struggle from getting laid off from their company, forming their own business, and trying to create enough sales to keep the business afloat. Cox calls this a business novel, and that is probably appropriate. It clearly is a novel – and a pretty lightweight one at that. But it is an interesting one if for no other reason than to see how Cox weaves the concepts into the story.

The main character, Michael DeGabriel, leads a group of video production technicians who get downsized. They decide to start their own company in competition with their old company. Organizational politics get in the road of key sales opportunities, and the ragtag group almost falls completely apart before finding yet another idea and doing some bootstrap financing to stave off their creditors.

Michael's wife eventually also gets laid off from her executive job and gets suckered into joining a business run by a pretty obviously unscrupulous person. (Again, this is not the epitome of classic literature; it is a lightweight novel about entrepreneurship.) The evildoer has in mind capturing Michael's business by stealing software to run a virtual exercise bike. But she and her boss get their comeuppance through some clever software protection by one of the video techies.

All in all, *The Venture* was fun reading. It includes start-up issues, marketing, financing, partnerships gone awry, office romance, espionage, ethics, and a fair amount of sage advice by an older ex-executive who happens to show up at a bar at opportune times. It is what I call an airplane book. You can read it on a couple long flights, and it will make the flight go faster. But it also hooks you in so that you want to keep reading to find out either what the next plot twist is or just to see which entrepreneurial concept Cox cranks into the book.