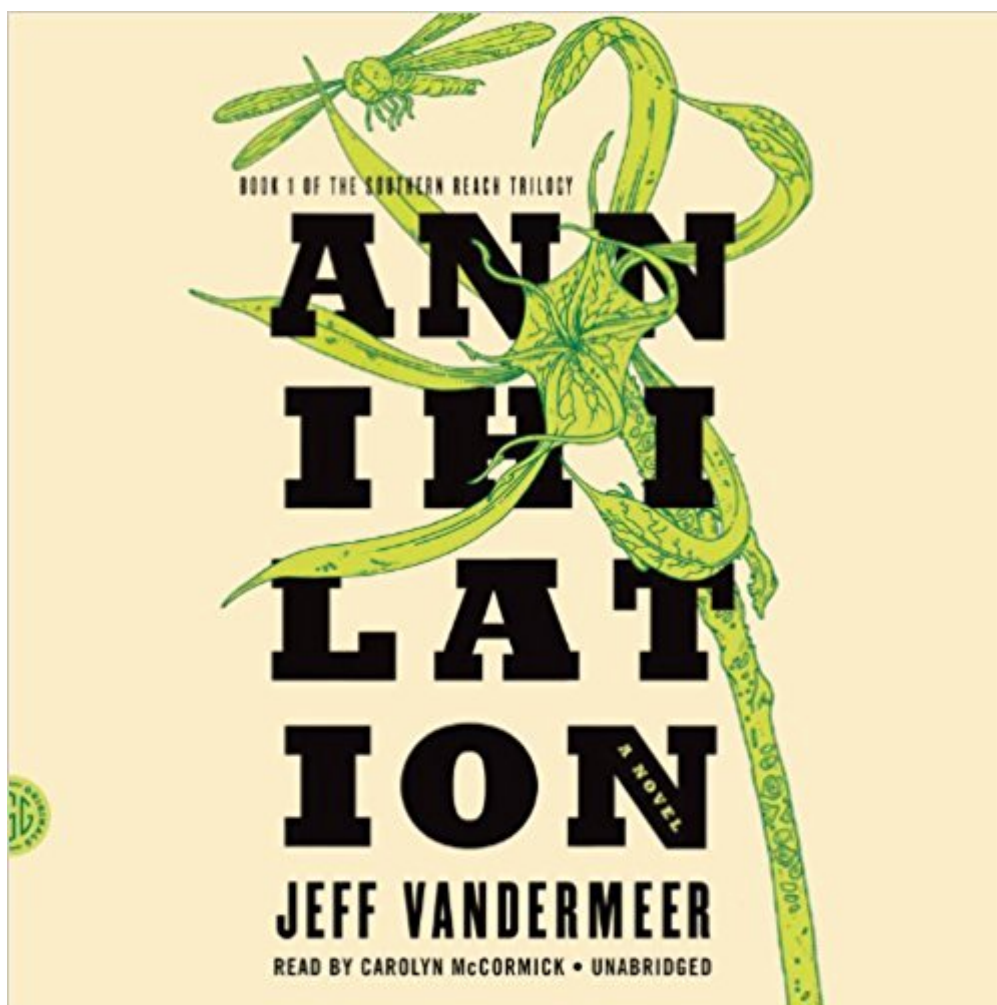


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Annihilation (Southern Reach Trilogy, Book 1)



Synopsis

[Read by Carolyn McCormick] If J. J. Abrams, Margaret Atwood, and Alan Weisman collaborated on a novel . . . it might be this awesome. -- Area X has been cut off from the rest of the continent for decades. Nature has reclaimed the last vestiges of human civilization. The first expedition returned with reports of a pristine, Edenic landscape; all the members of the second expedition committed suicide; the third expedition died in a hail of gunfire as its members turned on one another; the members of the eleventh expedition returned as shadows of their former selves, and within months of their return, all had died of aggressive cancer. -- This is the twelfth expedition. -- Their group is made up of four women: an anthropologist, a surveyor, a psychologist--the de facto leader--and a biologist, who is our narrator. Their mission is to map the terrain and collect specimens; to record all their observations, scientific and otherwise, of their surroundings and of one another; and, above all, to avoid being contaminated by Area X itself. -- They arrive expecting the unexpected, and Area X delivers--they discover a massive topographic anomaly and life-forms that surpass understanding--but it's the surprises that came across the border with them and the secrets the expedition members are keeping from one another that change everything.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An Best Book of the Month, February 2014: There is a comfort in familiarity, a foundation from which to definitively identify and label. But Jeff VanderMeer is not interested in putting his readers at ease. With *Annihilation*--the first volume of *The Southern Reach Trilogy*--he carefully creates a

yearning for answers, then boldly denies them, reminding us that being too eager to know too much can be dangerous. The story follows an expedition of four women who are known only by their professions: the Psychologist, the Surveyor, the Anthropologist, and the Biologist--nameless pawns tasked with exploring, discovering, and (hopefully) delivering data about a portentous coastal territory called Area X. We are a bit like fifth members of that team (perhaps "the Reader"), learning at the same pace, guided by the observations of our narrator, the Biologist. Still the context remains blurry as VanderMeer twists each discovery into a deeper mystery. Through potent description and unrelenting tension, he achieves a level of emotional manipulation that should appeal to anyone who embraced the paranormal phenomena and maddening uncertainties of *Lost*. --Robin A. Rothman --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Starred Review An expedition of four women is sent into an unknown region called Area X, beyond the borders of humanity: a psychologist, a surveyor, an anthropologist, and our narrator, a biologist. The purpose of the mission is to collect data about Area X and report back to the government, the Southern Reach, but circumstances begin to change when the group discovers a tower (or tunnel) that was previously unmarked on the map. Inside the structure, strange writing scrawls across the walls, and a spiral staircase descends downward, beckoning the members to follow. Previous expeditions ended badly, with group members disappearing or returning as shells of their former selves, but little is known about what actually occurred on those trips to Area X. A gripping fantasy thriller, *Annihilation* is thoroughly suspenseful. In a manner similar to H. G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), VanderMeer weaves together an otherworldly tale of the supernatural and the half-human. Delightfully, this page-turner is the first in a trilogy. --Heather Paulson --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I never expected to see Lovecraft bearded in his own fetid, brain-melting den. A modern day "Mountains of Madness" that would give the old master nightmares...This is a deftly-written descent into madness (or revelation) that reads better, I think when viewed as story where overt "answers" are provided obliquely and the psychology of the narrator's journey through inner and outer landscapes is the focus. Broader explanations to the mysteries set up in this book will undoubtedly arrive in its sequels, but as a stand-alone, this book mirrors and rivals the classic "Mountains of Madness" in its explication of dimly viewed horrors and the unhinging of a mind. The typical character arcs and third act revelations are tempered, and I can see why some readers would feel let down or adrift. However, close readers will appreciate the novel's ability to juggle literary

elements with aplomb: the increasingly unreliable narrator that surprisingly becomes -more- reliable as she descends further into madness/otherness, the careful sidestepping of story elements that would place it in a specific time or place (giving the novel a frustrating, exhilarating timelessness), the interweaving of the narrator's self-revelations with landscape descriptions that ooze one into the other with disconcerting effortlessness. The merging of ecosystems, if you will. The lacks of disclosure that frustrate readers seeking more overt, acrobatic thrills are the very elements that left me feeling unable to look away, thrilled, and deeply disconcerted. Much like seeing an insect crawl by can inspire phantom skin itches, this book had me scratching from page one. And while the larger scenario surrounding the narrator's adventures receives (to my mind) ample explanation in the book's final pages for close readers, I look forward to the subsequent novels, hoping that they don't break the spell of this timeless, biologically infused, strange fruit of a novel.

This story has a lot of promise...it is the first in the Southern Reach trilogy, and it begins (as what I later gather to be a series of journal entries), with a group of four women-a biologist-the protagonist, a psychologist, a surveyor, and an anthropologist who have been chosen by the Southern Reach and its HQ Central to embark on an expedition through a strange border into Area X. A seemingly pristine wilderness, with a very strange history, and an invisible border surrounding it. They are the 12th expedition to journey into Area X...This novel reads quickly as they enter Area X, explore a strange topographical anomaly, and as their group begins to deteriorate. I wasn't entirely sure what was going on a lot of the time. I wish there had been a map prefacing the story so I could've pictured a rough outline of Area X. I thought the characters behaved strangely-they just didn't react to certain things the way you'd think...Um, I've read the trilogy in its entirety and I can't fully recommend it...however, I give this book 4 stars because it was an interesting concept and it's also the best one in the series-even if that's just because it leaves room to hope it'll answer some questions and get progressively better.

If you're okay with new stuff and want to read something that is not very mainstream but also not too out-there, this is a great starting point. Annihilation is a good book (and the cover art is fantastic too). It's like the television series Lost meets the book House of Leaves meets the books series Wool Omnibus meets Jurassic Park (but without the dinosaurs) meets Roadside Picnic. This is only the first book in a series--a trilogy, I know--but I really really liked it. And people who have reviewed this book either really love it or hate it. There are some inbetweeners, naturally, but from what I've gathered, it seems people are not happy when everything is not laid out and explained to them. And

this book does not do that. Jeff VanderMeer even has the narrator ask a ton of questions, only to sort of answer maybe a few. I think that's what makes this first entry in the series so amazing. We don't get character names (we get a biologist, psychologist, surveyor, husband, etc), we don't get to know everything (a-la third person omniscient narrator, this is told in the first person) and we just really don't know what exactly is going on all the time. What this does, is allow the reader, really, to create more story and imagery than the author intended. And it's sort of like that idea of off-screen violence in film: where what's really happening is probably not as bad as what you are imagining--your imagination is making it worse. And Jeff VanderMeer plays with this notion brilliantly. It's wonderful (though a bit too wordy at times). Not only was I intrigued the entire time (though some bits with the husband/flashback did drag bit), I probably read this book more quickly than I usually read other books. I felt dread and I felt lost--and that, I thought, was incredible. I like this book also because it reminded me of House of Leaves, which I still have not completed (I know, I know), but the tower/tunnel sequences reminded me of the labyrinth/staircase sequences in House of Leaves. Anxiety-filled dread and claustrophobia galore! I want to say there are some flaws in this book and certainly, there are (read the other reviews to find out what these are), but overall, for what Jeff was able to achieve in so few (or many!!!) words, bravo. And if you have the time, read the author's Reddit AMA and also read-up a little (if you have the time, again) on the backstory of the series and how this all came to be. It's actually quite interesting--and I'm always for someone who is trying to do something different--that hasn't been done before, you know? 'Cause, why not?

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