

## LoveReading Reader reviews of Annihilation by Jeff VanderMeer Book One of The Southern Reach Trilogy

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.

**Jennifer Rainbow**

***Imaginative, compulsively readable and at times unnerving I loved this book it dragged me into it's weird world and wouldn't let go. A unusual book, an antidote to popular 'normal' fiction.***

*"It was a test of our curiosity and fascination which walked side by side with our fear," this quote from, the book, sums up my feelings despite the moments of unease I felt reading particular parts my curiosity compelled me to read on. I just had to see what was around the next corner.*

*I read this book within a day as I could not tear myself away. I found it enigmatic and unusual, I was curious and fascinated as to what "Area X" is, what's that moaning they hear at dusk? Why aren't they being told everything about the place? It's unusual because the characters are not given names but titles, this is because the book is the journal of the biologist of the group. We're not just told about this expedition but drawn into the mind of the biologist so that we can understand who she is; an interesting character. Area X itself seems like a unspoilt paradise, except it's not a paradise there's something unnerving about the place, the abandoned villages, the expeditions sent in again and again with no idea what they're getting into it. I don't want to say too much and spoil the book.*



*I loved this book for it's weirdness, I don't usually like sci-fi but I forgot about genre and I enjoyed this book for it's ideas and style, it's uniqueness.*

*I think this is one of those imaginative books you either understand (as much as you can) and love or don't get, which will explain some one-lined reviews on other websites.*

*I am always looking for a book to drag me into it's world, keep me there and show me things that nobody else has, something different that stands out against the numerous others books out there. An antidote to popular fiction. This is one of those books*

### **Victoria Emerson**

***I loved this book!***

***With its beautifully written prose, and dark and eerie setting I couldn't put it down.*** *It is a very, very interesting book. I'm sure it's not for everyone but I can't wait to read the next two books.*

### **Suzanne James**

***I don't often say this but I just couldn't put it down.***

***From the very beginning this had me hooked*** - so much so that I had ordered the second part of the trilogy before I was even half way through.

*I was instantly drawn into a world that was both familiar and different. The natural environment of Area X was beautifully described and yet an underlying menace seeped through that grew stronger as the central, unnamed, character explored it further. Seeing the world through her eyes the reader is immersed in her experience of Area X - we know no more than she does and the author doesn't give anything away. Our understanding of the strange phenomena around her and the history of the exploration of Area X is intrinsically linked with hers and when the book finishes you are left wanting more.*

You can follow Suzanne on Twitter: @suzanned

### **Russ Pasquill**

*A female team, consisting of a psychologist (the leader), surveyor, anthropologist and biologist (the narrator), begin a long hike from the boarder of a terrain of land known as Area-X to its base camp. Orders have been issued*

*by secret agency, Southern Reach. The teams objective is to collect data about Area-X.*

*After the first night a concrete staircase leading into the earth is discovered. The biologist enters and notices writing, made from plant material, inscribed down one wall. On inspection, the plant material explodes spores into her face, which she inhales.*

*The biologist soon notices slight changes within herself...*

*After the anthropologist's death, the teams dynamics deteriorate, with the abandonment of the psychologist and a display of mistrust from the surveyor towards the biologist.*

*What's really happening, past and present, in Area-X and what lurks in the underground stairwell?*

***This novel quickly creates an eerie, unnerving atmosphere in what appears to be a pleasant wild life park.***

*The Biologist is a well drawn character who's intriguing and as she tells you her reasons behind volunteering for the expedition, adds further depth. This is essential, as you're told nothing of the other character's backgrounds and there's minimal interaction between them, so you're given little insight into their personalities. Unfortunately, this causes a sever lack of concern for their welfare.*

*I expected more from this. The story's culmination left me feeling unperturbed despite the well maintained, unsettling theme, throughout.*

*Many things are left unexplained. Maybe the two forthcoming novels will deliver?*

### **Karen McIntosh**

*A group , including a biologist, a psychologist, an anthropologist and a surveyor, are sent to Area X to investigate what is happening beyond the Border. They find a strange tunnel/tower, hear weird sounds at night and see strange inexplicable phenomena. What is beyond the border? Who can they trust?*

***The story of what they find and who or what is behind it is interesting and I did enjoy the book.*** Nevertheless I don't feel compelled to get the next book in the trilogy and I found the story was stretched out a bit. To me it had the feeling of a short story rather than a full-sized novel.

## **Judith Griffith**

***An atmospheric read but doesn't quite develop as well as expected and leaves you unfulfilled at the end. But then it is the first of a trilogy!***

*Jeff VanderMeer's 'Annihilation' is the first book of his 'Southern Reach Trilogy'. It tells the story of the twelfth expedition to Area X, an uninhabited 'no go' zone that is being monitored by the Southern Reach agency. The chief narrator is a female unnamed biologist, who undertakes the expedition along with three other unnamed females who are known only by their roles - the psychologist, the surveyor and the anthropologist.*

*Needless to say, the expedition doesn't end well. The reader has to rely on the biologist's narrative of events, which may or may not be reliable. The other members of the expedition barely feature so their characters aren't developed, and some of the things that happen also feel a bit contrived, while other more interesting ones are mentioned then discarded.*

*'Annihilation' has the basis of a good story, but for me, doesn't develop as well as I expected. Given that it's the first book of the trilogy, then I would hope that many of the unexplored events and sights in the novel are explored/explained in the rest of the trilogy. To that end, I would like to read the rest of the trilogy to see how the whole story develops.*

You can follow Judith on Twitter: @gogrygbi

## **Ray Orgill**

*The story of four unnamed ladies; an anthropologist, a surveyor, a psychologist and a biologist, are sent on an expedition to a mysterious region known as Area X. We are not told where this area is and its boundaries are not defined but it appears to be full of an unknown danger and threat. It is far from the first expedition to Area X but all others seem to have ended in great tragedies and tragic deaths and surely this one will end in the same fashion. **This first book of The Southern Reach trilogy has all the makings of a cult series.***

## **Judith Smith**

***Totally compelling - I couldn't put it down.***

*So what is Area X, and why isn't anyone telling the truth about it, or don't they*

*really know? The nameless biologist leads the story and beautifully describes the desolation and strange fertility surrounding her in Area X. The deserted landscape, and the tunnel, or is it a tower? Totally compelling, I couldn't put it down.*

### **Jacki Moorcroft**

***A strangely compelling read which left me wanting to know what happened next, which is a good enough reason to now get books two & three!***

*Annihilation is the story of the 12th expedition into Area X. Told from the viewpoint of the Biologist, the story reveals her inner turmoils and search for answers to what caused the change in her husband who was on the previous expedition. Accompanied by a psychologist, an anthropologist and a surveyor the women are set the task of charting the area, taking samples and reporting back to Southern Reach in the hopes of understanding what happened in the environmental disaster area known as Area X. On arrival all seems normal but then an accident reveals that all they have been told is not necessarily the truth and strange things lurk in the area. A strangely compelling read as nothing is really explained and you are left wanting answers and to know what happened, which obviously means reading the next book. A quick read but leaves you feeling frustrated unless you bought the trilogy.*

You can follow Jacki on Twitter: @moorcoftj

### **Sarah Musk**

***An intriguing, mysterious book set in the mysterious Area X where some environmental disaster has occurred. A chilling read with images that are difficult to forget.***

*This is a mysterious, intriguing book. It seems very detached. The reader never knows the names of the characters and you feel very strongly you are an observer as the story unfolds. I felt strangely dispassionate throughout the book but I feel that was the intention of the author.*

*The four women, specialists in scientific fields, are sent to the mysterious Area X where some environmental disaster has occurred. One never finds out exactly what has occurred, although there are some slight hints. The expedition is haunted by clues as to what happened to the many previous expeditions and this adds to the feelings of dread and fear. It is up to the reader to decide how much*

*unfolding events are caused by hauntings, delusions, fear, psychology and real life monsters.*

*I found it a chilling read - a mixture of science-fiction and horror. The descriptions of the lush world the characters find themselves in is in total contrast with the sense of bleakness and isolation created by some terrible events which have caused unknown entities to rise up to challenge the natural order of our world. I won't forget this book - especially the visit to the lighthouse which is one of the most compelling and haunting episodes I have read in a book for a long time.*

### **Edel Waugh**

*This is book 1 in this series. There is a place called Area X . It is mostly avoided but still monitored closely but the authorities . It looks like a jungle in there and teams that were sent in to it in the past have not had a very successful outcome. This story begins with the 12th journey into this place . The crew are all women and the main narrator is an unnamed biologist . They have to take samples while there and give reports on what they find , but they are not long there before an unnerving feeling sets in and it is very eerie and dream like, or should I say nightmarish! Although they were told to a certain degree what to expect when they got there, it soon becomes apparent that they have no real idea what danger faces them and they are like innocent lambs to the slaughter. It also becomes difficult to know who to trust in her own team.*

***I really enjoyed this book as it has a dreamlike quality to it so you are constantly wondering what is going to happen next . We get glimpses into the past too which give us hints as to what the outcome could be like for this crew making it hard to put down as you want this crew to do well and get the hell out of there!***

<http://edelwaugh.blogspot.co.uk/2015/06/annihilation-by-jeff-vandermeer-review.html>

### **Clare Topping**

*The Biologist is one of a team of four, expedition number twelve into Area X. Once across the border her mission, along with that of her colleagues; psychologist, surveyor and anthropologist, is to map the area, keeping journals along the way. The team have been given minimal background information although they have seen interviews with those that had returned, from previous*

*forays beyond the barrier. It soon becomes obvious that all is not as was expected, neither are the team members. Danger can come from unexpected quarters.*

*This is the first in a trilogy about Area X, the only one I have so far read. The story is narrated via the journal of the Biologist. It is part thriller, part sci-fi or supernatural; difficult to characterise. The main protagonist, as is often the case, has her own hidden substory, and really the idea of something unknown or unknowable is not new and the ending is fairly predictable.*

*That said, **it is one of those books that became a page turner about halfway through.** However, there were many things left unanswered; part of me wonders if it is because the author hadn't thought up an answer. Maybe all will be revealed, or not, in the remaining two books. If pushed to give it a rating, it would probably be three stars. **For anyone into serious sci-fi then this is probably bland and perhaps slightly unoriginal. That said, I am considering reading the other two books...***

### **Teresa O'Halloran**

***A very weird book about a very weird and creepy place. At times I felt afraid to turn the page.***

*I'm not sure if this is science fiction or weird fiction, but weird fiction does appear to fit this book perfectly.*

*Just what happened in Area X? Well the truth is that after finishing this book I still don't know.*

*At first I was excited by this book and it started off very well. I felt I was going to be taken on a spellbinding tour of a strange area of land and learn things I didn't know before, but half way through the book began to drag and I didn't know what had happened in Area X or in fact what was going on right now. In short I was confused, and by the end of this book that fog of confusion hadn't cleared for me.*

*Will I go on to read Authority and Acceptance, the second and third books in this Southern Reach trilogy? I honestly don't know. I may well do - my curiosity has been peaked.*

### **Cyllene Griffiths**

***It's a while since I read a truly spooky sci-fi thriller but Jeff***

***VanderMeer's Annihilation definitely hits the spot. The first in the Southern Reach trilogy - be aware that you will have to get the next two if you read this one!***

*A team of five women are chosen to enter, record and map the mysterious and secretive Area X, a large and apparently unspoilt quarantined area on the US coast. Even before they arrive one of the women drops out and it isn't long before the remaining four start to feel the extraordinary effects of this remote place. None of the women are allowed to use their names. They are simply identified by their specialisms: the Biologist; the Psychologist; the Surveyor; and the Linguist. The Biologist tells the story through her journal, recalling her past when her husband, a member of a previous expedition, returned from Area X inexplicably changed and with little memory. The team soon realise their lack of specific instruction, vague purpose and poor tools and equipment are not going to be sufficient to cope with the potential dangers and terrors of Area X. But what is it that really lurks out in the reed beds, lighthouse, abandoned village and "tower", and will the Biologist's unbending scientific approach keep her from 'changing'?*

*The question of whether this is truly an 'alien' landscape or a reflection of normal lonely people battling the everyday world with metaphors of danger, insecurity and horror at every turn is one that continuously arises throughout the book. **This is not only thought provoking but truly a page turner with vivid and involving descriptions.** I think I would quite like to visit Area X!*

**Zarina de Ruiter**

***Annihilation has a promising premise, that's for sure, but there is such a thing as being too ambiguous and VanderMeer has, to me, unfortunately tipped too far into that direction.***

*For decades Area X has been abandoned by its original inhabitants because strange things happen there. Systematically government agency Southern Reach has been sending expeditions to uncover the secrets of Area X, but even if some of the people come back (and in many cases they don't), they seem altered and little of their reports make sense or is actually useful to help determine what's going on in Area X.*

*Annihilation tells the story of the latest expedition, which is made up of a psychologist, a surveyor, an anthropologist and the protagonist, a biologist. The four women within the 12th expedition are nameless, as Southern Reach*



*believes names would only distract from the mission, but watching the bizarre story unfold through the biologist's eyes the reader still gets a good sense of who these people are, even if some die within moments of entering Area X...*

*This is undoubtedly a well written novel that has an immense sense of place and tension rippling throughout the pages, but ye gods I was so confused! A mysterious underground tower made out of living organisms, a Crawler writing cryptic messages with poisonous flora, a smiling dolphin, and the biologists' disturbing connection to the previous expedition - I'm still not sure about half of the stuff that possibly happened. I do have some theories but don't think I can muster up the energy to read another two novels for the revelations, if they are to come at all.*

*Annihilation has a promising premise, that's for sure, but there is such a thing as being too ambiguous and VanderMeer has, to me, unfortunately tipped too far into that direction with the first installment in his Southern Reach trilogy.*

<http://www.pagetostagereviews.com>

## **Sarah Tiley**

### ***Read it and be surprised.***

*This is not something I would usually read, but pleased that I did, and I may even buy the next one in the trilogy.*

*It is unlike anything I have read before, as I am not a Sci-Fi fan, but this was very unusual, and a gripping tale.*

*I particularly enjoyed how more and more of what was known by the narrator was revealed as you journeyed through the book.*

*There are no answers – presumably so that you will follow the trilogy through to the end?*