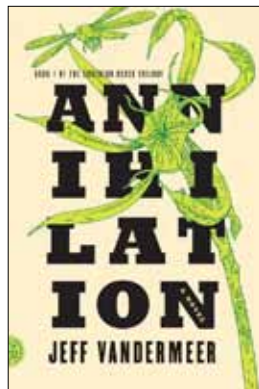


Reading Group Gold

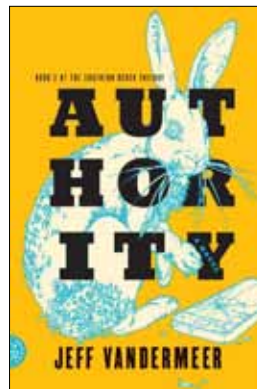
The Southern Reach Trilogy

Annihilation Authority Acceptance

Jeff VanderMeer



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208 pages



ISBN: 978-0-374-10410-8
352 pages



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In Jeff VanderMeer's haunting Southern Reach trilogy, an American wilderness has become a shadowland, concealed by the government for more than thirty years. An environmental disaster zone, Area X is home to strange biological forces that have begun gathering strength. The secret agency known as the Southern Reach has sent in eleven expeditions to discover the truth about Area X, but each team succumbed to violence or illness. Our story begins as a twelfth group is attempting to succeed where all others have failed. Comprised of four women, the team includes a psychologist (the de facto leader), a surveyor, an anthropologist, and a biologist. Their mission is to map the terrain and collect specimens; to record their observations, scientific and otherwise, of their surroundings and of one another; and, above all, to avoid being contaminated by Area X itself. But those who venture across the border bring their own secret histories, creating a world where trust is a fool's game.

This guide is designed to enrich your discussion. We hope that the following questions will enhance your journey into Area X.

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QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION FOR *ANNIHILATION*

1. What were your initial theories about the psychologist's motives and the whereabouts of the anthropologist? How did the ways they approached the expedition compare to the approaches of the surveyor and the biologist?
2. Did you envision the core of Area X as a tower or a tunnel? In your mind, is it a living creature or a product of engineering?
3. How did you interpret the phrases that emerged in Area X? Did you read them as prophecies? Poetry? Delusions?
4. Was the biologist's introverted, analytical temperament an asset or a hindrance on the expedition? How did the experiences of her youth—particularly her study of the neglected, dazzling swimming pool—prepare her for this fieldwork?
5. As the biologist recalled her husband and his role in the eleventh expedition as a medic, what did you discover about her vulnerabilities and about the strength of their relationship?
6. Are there any real-world figures today who take on a role like the Crawler's—a producer of words who controls an audience? What is the source of the Crawler's power?
7. What do you predict for book 2, *Authority*?

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION FOR *AUTHORITY*

1. What motivates Control (John Rodriguez)? How is he transformed by his interviews with the biologist?
2. What makes the Southern Reach so skilled at manipulation? Who are the most fragile team members? Which ones excel at deception?
3. How is Control affected by the legacies of his parents?
4. Discuss the evocative imagery that permeates the novel. How are the threats from the organic world woven with technological threats?
5. What gives the Voice the power to intimidate? What does it take to topple power in Area X?
6. What enables Grace to balance loyalty with wisdom and instinct? What makes her a survivor?

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7. As the waves churn in the final scene, where do you think the characters will emerge in the next book?

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION FOR *ACCEPTANCE*

1. How did it feel to begin the novel by reading through the eyes of a character, as the author narrates the scene using the second-person “you”?
2. How did your perception of Saul shift throughout your encounters with him? What does his relationship with Charlie tell us about his capacity for love?
3. As Ghost Bird confronts her authentic self, what does the novel say about the nature of identity? To what extent do we all contend with disguises, if not doppelgängers?
4. What did you predict regarding the aims of the Séance & Science Brigade and the intentions of Henry and Suzanne?
5. The closing letter includes the line “acceptance moves past denial.” Ultimately, what realities were the most difficult for Gloria to accept? What does her story say about the power of the mind’s eye?
6. Discuss the significance of the three novels’ titles: *Annihilation*, *Authority*, and *Acceptance*. What does the complete story line tell us about the inevitability of these phases? How have they been experienced in the history of humanity?
7. Jeff VanderMeer’s Southern Reach concept has led him to be compared to a variety of luminaries from around the globe, from H. G. Wells to H. P. Lovecraft and Jorge Luis Borges. How does Area X compare to other imagined worlds you have explored through fiction? How does it enhance your experience of VanderMeer’s other books?

PRAISE FOR THE SOUTHERN REACH TRILOGY

“Brilliant . . . Using evocative descriptions . . . , masterful psychological insight, and intellectual observations both profound and disturbing—calling Lovecraft to mind and Borges—VanderMeer unfolds a tale as satisfying as it is richly imagined.” —*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“A gripping fantasy thriller, *Annihilation* is thoroughly suspenseful. In a manner similar to H. G. Wells’s in *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.” —*Booklist* (starred review)

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“Original and beautiful, maddening and magnificent.” —Warren Ellis

“After their high-risk expedition disintegrates, it’s every scientist for herself in this wonderfully creepy blend of horror and science fiction . . . VanderMeer is an expert fearmonger, but his strongest suit, what makes his novel a standout, is his depiction of the biologist . . . Speculative fiction at its most transfixing.” —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“A tense and chilling psychological thriller about an unraveling expedition and the strangeness within us. A little Kubrick, a lot Lovecraft, the novel builds with an unbearable tension and a claustrophobic dread that linger long afterward. I loved it.” —Lauren Beukes, author of *The Shining Girls*

“*Authority* isn’t a book that just picks up where the last one left off. Instead, it’s packed full of new pleasures, not only new characters and settings but whole new kinds of writing. If *Annihilation* is an expedition novel painted with a thick coat of weird, then *Authority* is a spy novel given the same dark lacquer . . . Which makes me desperate to know what the third book is going to be like—whether it will be some mixture of the two, *Jurassic Park* meets James Bond, or some third thing entirely.” —Robin Sloan, author of *Mr. Penumbra’s 24-Hour Bookstore*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff VanderMeer is an award-winning novelist and editor. His fiction has been translated into twenty languages and has appeared in the Library of America’s *American Fantastic Tales* and in multiple year’s-best anthologies. He writes nonfiction for *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times Book Review*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Guardian*, among others. He grew up in the Fiji Islands and now lives in Tallahassee, Florida, with his wife. Visit www.jeffvandermeer.com for more information.

Guide written by Amy Clements