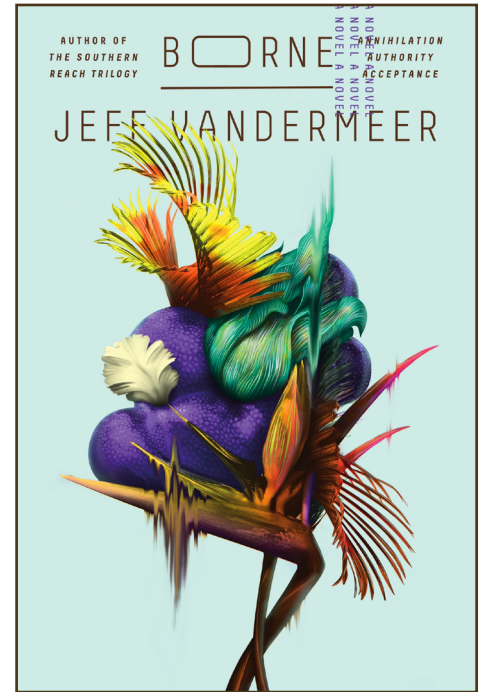


Reading Group Gold

Borne

A Novel

by Jeff VanderMeer



ISBN: 978-0-374-53765-4 / 368 pages

From the author of the *New York Times*–bestselling *Southern Reach Trilogy* comes a mind-blowing world in which biotech has run amok—and the future belongs to the salvaged. In *Borne*, Rachel and her lover, Wick, fight for their lives in a ruined city, where a massive bloodthirsty flying bear terrorizes the surviving population. When Rachel discovers a tiny green blob that exudes a strange charisma, she names the beautiful creature Borne and sets about teaching it the ways of their decimated world. Their friendship and their ensuing escapades illuminate the central dilemmas of our time: Does kindness make us vulnerable to danger? Will our tech creations become the creators? And who or what is driving our destiny?

This guide is designed to enrich your discussion of *Borne*. We hope that the following topics will enhance your reading group’s experience of this transformative novel.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. At the heart of the novel is an essential question: What does it mean to exist? How did you react as you watched Borne, Rachel, and Wick consider what distinguishes humans from other animals, and animals from plants, and organic creatures from biotech inventions? What does it take to be a person: Communication? Imagination? Love?

Reading Group Gold

2. How does Rachel's relationship with Borne compare to her relationship with Wick? Did you find yourself mostly trusting or mostly doubting Borne and Wick?
3. When we first meet Rachel, has she survived based on wits or luck, or because of another force altogether? What is your understanding of the Magician and her ability to fiercely resist Mord? What has kept Mord and his proxies from achieving total destruction?
4. How does gender affect the characters' roles? What is the effect of Rachel's decision to use male pronouns for Borne? What is the effect of a female narrator's voice on this storyline?
5. Eking out an existence in a desert, Rachel has intense memories of water, particularly her escape with her parents as refugees from rising seas. What purpose do these memories serve for her? How much control do you have over your own memories?
6. What is the difference between survival and salvage? If you were Wick, would you continue taking the nautilus pills? Would you want to survive under any circumstances?
7. The novel's title (which is the past participle of the verb "to bear") emphasizes the act of transmitting a creation. Rachel chose Borne's name because of a story Wick told her (page 17) about a Company project: "Wick had said, 'He was *born*, but I had *borne* him.'" How did the novel change your perception of the creation process? What makes Mord a god? Will the forces of creation and destruction (in Mord's world and yours) ever reach a balance?
8. Rachel tries to teach Borne through books. What does he teach her, and how does he do this without books?
9. Borne morphs into a telephone and calls Rachel. He lights up the sky as a fiery dragon-size slug. He decorates his apartment with "dead astronauts" to give the place pizzazz. How did he transform your view of the physical world?
10. As Rachel reads Borne's journal, which begins on page 189, she sees him struggle against his killing impulse while he tries to imitate her capacity for kindness. What does his experience say about basic instincts and whether they should be stifled or liberated?
11. In a podcast interview on CNET.com, Jeff VanderMeer observes that backdrops aren't necessarily inert; the watchful eyes of the foxes exemplify this. Look around your room right now. What are the most vibrant objects you see? If they could talk to you, what would they say?
Link to CNET.com interview: <https://www.cnet.com/news/cnet-book-club-episode-1-borne-by-jeff-vandermeer/>
12. Do you predict that any real-world versions of the Company and Mord will emerge in your lifetime? If so, are you optimistic about humanity's ability to stop them?

Reading Group Gold

13. The Magician resonates with Rachel, offering a path Rachel could have taken if she had been hungrier for power. Would you have made similar choices if you were in Rachel's situation?
14. How did the revelations in Wick's letter change your understanding of the novel? How would you answer some of the questions raised by the letter?
15. If you've read VanderMeer's trilogy, how do you think the Southern Reach team would fare in the Balcony Cliffs? What makes Jeff VanderMeer's fictional worlds so distinctive?

PRAISE FOR *BORNE*

"May be the most beautifully written, and believable, post-apocalyptic tale in recent memory."
—Elizabeth Hand, *Los Angeles Times*

"Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach Trilogy* was an ever-creeping map of the apocalypse; with *Borne* he continues his investigation into the malevolent grace of the world, and it's a thorough marvel." —Colson Whitehead

"*Borne*, the latest novel from New Weird author Jeff VanderMeer, is a story of loving self-sacrifice, hallucinatory beauty, and poisonous trust . . . Heady delights only add to the engrossing richness of *Borne*. The main attraction is a tale of mothers and monsters—and of how we make each other with our love." —Nisi Shawl, *The Washington Post*

"VanderMeer's apocalyptic vision, with its mix of absurdity, horror, and grace, can't be mistaken for that of anyone else. Inventive, engrossing, and heartbreaking, *Borne* finds [VanderMeer] at a high point of creative accomplishment." —Michael Berry, *San Francisco Chronicle*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeff VanderMeer is an award-winning novelist and editor. He is the author of the novella *The Strange Bird*, set in the world of *Borne*, and the *New York Times* bestselling *Southern Reach Trilogy: Annihilation, Authority, and Acceptance*, among other books. His novels have won the Nebula and Shirley Jackson Awards, and have been translated into thirty languages. VanderMeer grew up in the Fiji Islands and now lives in Tallahassee, Florida, with his wife. Visit www.jeffvandermeer.com for more information about the author.

Guide written by Amy Clements