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Annihilation (Book Review)

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***Annihilation*, by Jeff VanderMeer**

Book Review by Krista Pohlmeier

Annihilation, the first book of the Southern Reach Trilogy by Jeff VanderMeer, follows the story of a biologist who travels into Area X – a place others have seen, but have never been able to understand. It has been quarantined off for decades, due to its impossibly hazardous terrain, strange creatures, and eerie quality, hence only those approved can cross the border. Our biologist, whose name has been stripped for the sake of objectivity during her exhibition, sets out to catalog and study the exotic species inhabiting Area X. She also travels with a psychologist – the appointed leader – and a surveyor and an anthropologist. Their first discovery, deep underground, is the strangest anomaly they encounter, and soon consumes the biologist in her quest to understand Area X. She craves to know what it used to be, what it has come to be, and why the eleven exhibitions before her failed to uncover the mystery. Yet the biologist's own life is full of mysteries and secrets, which slowly unfold through her journal entries while in Area X.

A suspenseful book, *Annihilation* catches one's attention with a powerful narrator and a fantastical world. The voice of the biologist is strong, creating a kinship between the main character and the reader, and her need to uncover the truth of Area X draws the reader in. Furthermore, VanderMeer's skill in writing is showcased through powerful scenic description that conjures a new world before the mind's eye. The reader becomes entranced, sharing the biologist's need to discover the unknown of Area X no matter the cost. However, the book creates more questions than it answers, ultimately leaving the reader confused. We are given thousands of possibilities as to what Area X could be, but by the end the reader feels as if they know less than they knew in the beginning.

All in all, *Annihilation* is a gripping book that keeps one reading long into the night. Those interested in science fiction with beautiful prose and magical scenery will be unable to put it down, while those with an interest in mystery will be pulled along by the story waiting to be uncovered from the very first pages of the book. This is reinforced by the strong main character, ultimately creating an all-around sensational reading experience. Paramount Pictures/Scott Rudin Productions has acquired movie rights, although no further information has been released yet.

Jeff VanderMeer is a well-known writer who has mastered many different genres. Not only has he won the BSFA Award for best nonfiction, but he has also won the World Fantasy Award three times along with numerous other nominations. He has taught writing from the Yale Writers' Conference to Shared Worlds, a science fiction/fantasy writing camp he co-founded at Wofford College. His wife, Ann VanderMeer, is also a published author who has worked with VanderMeer as a co-editor and –teacher on many of his best works.