



Acceptance

Jeff VanderMeer

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It is winter in Area X, the mysterious wilderness that has defied explanation for thirty years, rebuffing expedition after expedition, refusing to reveal its secrets. As Area X expands, the agency tasked with investigating and overseeing it—the Southern Reach—has collapsed on itself in confusion. Now one last, desperate team crosses the border, determined to reach a remote island that may hold the answers they've been seeking. If they fail, the outer world is in peril.

Meanwhile, *Acceptance* tunnels ever deeper into the circumstances surrounding the creation of Area X—what initiated this unnatural upheaval? Among the many who have tried, who has gotten close to understanding Area X—and who may have been corrupted by it?

In this last installment of Jeff VanderMeer's Southern Reach trilogy, the mysteries of Area X may be solved, but their consequences and implications are no less profound—or terrifying.

Acceptance Details

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From Reader Review Acceptance for online ebook

Caro M. says

Wow, this book. Wow, this series. I know it will haunt me for a while now and I will have to read something of completely different genre, because I will try and compare any other sci-fi or fantasy book to it through some period of time. And it will win. Because the language was gorgeous and the world was hypnotic and Biologist/Ghost Bird wormed in deep into my brain like that Saul's sliver of light. I guess this whole story had this effect on me.

Acceptance was as good as **Annihilation** was, while it was different, more versatile. Seemingly less trippy, while even more trippy and crazy. It answered all questions and even those unanswered were OK as they remained unanswered. I never wanted books to give 100% explanations, it often only ruins the fun. This time the comparison with *Solaris* came to mind, in a good way of course. Would this sound as a blasphemy if I said this was in some way stronger than *Solaris*?

Comparing to movies **Beyond the Black Rainbow** comes to mind, somehow.

I feel like rereading the whole thing now to be honest. I can't process right now. Would love to discuss.

Carol. says

From my blog: <https://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2014/...>

Once again, Vandermeer astonishes me with evocative, symbolic language:

“The fifth morning I rose from the grass and dirt and sand, the brightness had gathered to form a hushed second skin over me, that skin cracking from my opening eyes like the slightest, the briefest, touch of an impossibly thin later of ice. I could hear the fracturing of its melting as if it came from miles and years away.”

And once again, Area X takes center stage in the last book of The Southern Reach Trilogy. The narrative switches between Ghost Bird and Control, last met in Authority; Saul, the lighthouse keeper; the psychologist Gloria, and perhaps one or two others that slip in. The narrative is done well enough that the separate voices do not feel disjointed, but I warn you: pay attention to chapter titles, as they say who is speaking. The story also flows back and forth in time, filling in the stories of people introduced, backgrounds and events alluded to but never explained. The insight into characterization provides more interest than in it did in the first two books; thankfully so, as the plotting explodes, much like a cell line on the upswing of reproduction (apparently a recent TED talk on angiogenesis is leaking in).

“You note again not just the musculature of this woman but the fact that she’s willing to complicate even the simple business of stating her name. “

As the capstone to a trilogy, it has mixed success. I understand a number of the metaphors and plot connections being made, but I wasn't sure the gestalt was worth the effort. Yet as I randomly flipped back through the book looking for sections that had stood out (unsurprisingly, I had lost my sticky-note), I was caught again into reading long passages, first hooked by the writing and then pulled deeper by glimpsing hints to the puzzle of Area X.

But here's the thing: there were also long passages that made me quite sleepy, and, as usual, I have a number of other non-book things at that periphery of my consciousness, peeping for attention. If I would have loved this, it may have been worth a re-read to better understanding of the genesis of Area X and the relationship the characters have with it. But it isn't, not right now. Still, the writing is something special, as well as the concept, and I can always get behind a good environmental message. I recommend it, with the caveats that you are wide awake and in the mood for ambiguity and metaphor.

"I can't go down there,' Whitby says, in such a final way that he must be thinking that in the descent he would no longer be Whitby. The hollows of his face, even in that vibrant, late-summer light, make him look haunted by a memory he hasn't had yet."

Melki says

Area X was looking at her through dead eyes. Area X was analyzing her from all sides. It made her feel like an outline created by the regard bearing down on her, one that moved only because the regard moved with her, held her constituent atoms together in a coherent shape. And yet the eyes upon her felt familiar.

I'm not sure why none of these books have captured me like Annihilation. There was just something about those four nameless female scientists that held me rapt and it has not been repeated in the other titles.

Vandermeer has conjured a beautifully lush yet deadly landscape, teeming with wildlife both real and imaginary. Unfortunately, the characters are not quite as full of life and frankly, they leave me cold. In this volume, I *did* enjoy the scenes shared by Gloria and Saul, the lighthouse keeper, but the others, even Ghost Bird and Control, bored me.

There are a few moments of suspense and dread here, and questions are answered, but by that time I had stopped caring. If I knew then what I know now, I'd have stopped at the end of the first book.

Jennifer says

I'm not sure why, but everything kind of fell apart for me on this one (and, looking over the reviews, I'm clearly in the minority on that.) The only story that was truly compelling to me was the Lightkeeper's. Otherwise it just felt like a race to wrap up different story threads and tie it with a bow. When you step back, not a whole lot of anything actually HAPPENS in this book. People walk around. Thoughts are processed. We flash back to the past. People marvel at Area X's oddness. They see an oddity. They process their thoughts about that oddity. They walk around some more. After the breath of fresh air of the first book and the deepening of the mystery in the second, this third book just left me disappointed.

Claudia Putnam says

Bumping to 4 because the writing really is terrific. And because I'm still thinking about it, and about some of the comments on this review, below. Thanks all!

Spoiler alert... I'm not hiding this review, but I'm giving something away. Don't read if you don't want to know anything in advance.

Actually, I don't have much to say. Basically, (this is the spoiler) Earth is being terraformed (whatever-formed, really) by an alien organism to prepare the way for colonization by aliens who have probably already destroyed themselves. How we know this latter part (how the organism might, and therefore why it's bothering) is not quite clear. Many things remain unclear in this book, such as WTF Lowry is really up to (initially I didn't understand why the Science and Seance people were given carte blanche to explore Area X before it even was Area X... but apparently this was Central's doing, somehow, but how they knew to investigate Area X at that time is unclear. It seems the organism was released by something one of these Science and Seance (maybe it's Seance and Science) weirdos did, but how it fit with Central, or what role Control's mother played and might still be playing, whether or not the organism is conscious of humans--some say it's oblivious, but if so what was the point of making copies?--are not explicated.

I kind of think that given the destruction of the aliens--in Area X, the lights are on, but no one's home--the organism WAS actually terraforming Earth. IE, making it a healthy environment once again, which sometimes has meant transforming humans. To what seems unclear. Initially some of the transformations seem to have been science experiments on the organism's part. Or you could say, it's a virus and the mutations it caused weren't always highly adaptive. I was kind of disappointed that the biologist (another spoiler) got transformed into this wild leviathan creature. It seemed a stretch from what she'd been (yeah, she was observant, and she liked the ocean, but tidal pools, not the tides). I thought the real story would have been her successful copy as a human being. That hadn't happened before.

Eventually some humans learn how to live as both human and Area X. I think. I guess that was what Lowry was looking for, but again, it isn't clear.

So this is my beef...what was the point of not making it clear? I had the sense that the author, too, had no idea what Area X was, until maybe the very end. So some of the confusion feels like his. We go around in circles--maybe it's alien, maybe it's environmental catastrophe, maybe it's whatever. But there are no real scientific discussions about it in any of the books, no sense that anyone is working together to solve the problem. It's true that all data from Area X is by def corrupted, but there didn't seem to be any real effort to do anything with any information other than frown in puzzlement over it.

No one who has any good ideas is ever willing to share them with anyone else. I can't believe that the response would be so passive. That no one tried dropping a bomb on the place, just to see (seems like what we would do). Maybe the "boundary" prevented this. Maybe they did try. Maybe all the fight tableaux were invasion attempts. It's fuzzy in my mind.

So, again, my beef. Don't substitute vagueness for mystery. Don't use mystery alone as the source of tension and the driver of plot.

At least in this final book we get multiple characters interacting with one another, or if not interacting, we get multiple POVs. We had a little interaction in Annihilation, but mainly we were in the biologist's head. In Authority (not sure that was the best title), we were stuck in Control's head, which was pretty useless. Here we get varying perspectives, which help a great deal.

So, I still don't understand:

-Why of all places the organism would land inside a beacon lens

- What tipped off the authorities that something weird was going on, before the organism was released
- What exactly the Director saw in the biologist to begin with
- Or why the biologist was so attached to her husband, for that matter
- What Lowry wanted to do or not do
- What the dynamics inside Central were, and between Central and the Southern Reach
- What Grace had going on with Central
- What was going on with Control's mother
- What happened to the rest of the world... I kind of had the feeling that the Southern Reach was the last refuge rather than the vanguard
- Whether in the end this might be good for Earth

Mostly thinking out loud. At the sentence level, this was a gorgeous book. And I really appreciate the publisher's decision to release them all within months of one another, priced to sell. :)

Tobin Elliott says

So that's it? That's all we get?

I wish I had known. I wouldn't have wasted my time.

With this frustrating final book in the trilogy, I alternated between anger (because VanderMeer continued to stuff the pages with useless, time-wasting back stories), and annoyance (because the story wasn't going anywhere for the most part), with frequent side-trips into unadulterated boredom. There were large swaths of narrative that my eyes slid over but my brain couldn't get the gumption up to care about.

I'm entirely sick of novels that are trumpeted as the next evolution in horror, or the logical offspring to this author or that author...novels where the author has some talent (and VanderMeer does, when he tries), and some imagination (as VanderMeer also does), but, through the course of the story, not only does NOT bring it home, but steadfastly refuses to, instead choosing to deepen the mystery instead of attempting to clear the cobwebs.

Let me be clear: When you finish this novel, you will have gained very few answers to all the questions set up in the first two novels. But you will be treated to pages and pages and pages and pages of backstory, of telling versus showing, of annoying second-person point of view, and not much else.

I'm actually a fairly willing reader. I understand that there's times when an author wants to scatter clues and let the reader figure some stuff out. I'm a fan of that. It makes the reader feel like they're part of the story. But when you drop a single, ambiguous clue about once every hundred pages? No.

If you want to be left scratching your head, knowing far more about the characters than is needed, and knowing far less about the mysteries of Area X than you wanted, go ahead, read the books. But if you want a satisfying conclusion to a story, seriously, go read something else. This is not the trilogy you're looking for.

Carmen says

NO SPOILERS. NO TE PREOCUPES.

Bodies could be beacons, too, Saul knew. A lighthouse was a fixed beacon for a fixed purpose; a person was a moving one. But people still emanated light in their way, still shone across the miles as a warning, an invitation, or even just a static signal. People opened up so they became a brightness, or they went dark. They turned their light inward sometimes, so you couldn't see it, because they had no other choice.

The final exploration of Area X. After the catastrophic and horrifying events that took place in Authority, this ragtag group of individuals is not really an expedition, but a patchwork mash-up of survivors trying to make sense of the feral, mysterious, blossoming explosion of nature called Area X.

To recap: Area X is a large area of coast and swampland in Florida that is completely cut-off from humanity. Vines grow over everything, the ocean teems with fish, and the land is overflowing with an abundance of animals - some familiar, and some never seen before by human eyes. When the border went up, 30 years ago - 1,500 people died (or were never seen again and assumed dead) as they were consumed by this sudden apparition of wilderness. Now, the government has been sending in expeditions composed of teams of scientists in a desperate attempt to understand what's going on.

Those expeditions have been massive failures. The teams either kill themselves, kill each other, disappear, or come back - as personality-less, hollow shells of their former selves. One notable expedition came back riddled with cancer - all of them died within 6 months of coming back.

No one knows how anyone returns - they just appear, disoriented and confused.

...

This book is, I believe, the weakest of the trilogy. Annihilation is the strongest. You can read Annihilation and enjoy it, love it, and never read the other two books. It can stand on its own two feet. But if you want answers (like I did) you will continue reading - because Annihilation sure leaves you with a lot of questions.

That being said, I still think Acceptance deserves five stars.

...

The writing is gorgeous.

She had panicked for a second as the water pressed in on her, evoked her own drowning. But then something had turned on, or had come back, and raging against her own death, she had exulted in the sensation of the sea, welcomed having to fight her way to the surface - bursting through such a joyful hysteria of biomass - as a sort of proof that she was not ---, that she was some new thing that could, wanting to survive, cast out her fear of drowning belonging to another.

--- = character's name x-ed out so no spoilers

Look at this. *bursting through such a joyful hysteria of biomass.* I mean, that is just exquisite. And the book is brimming with wonderful amazing sentences and paragraphs that you can get lost in.

I read the book twice: I read it, and then turned to page 1 immediately to read it again. Half of this was because it was so beautiful, half of it was because there are a lot of complex things going on in this book that need a second reading to really coalesce in your mind.

...

This book is a horror story. Not 'horror' as in Stephen King, buckets of blood and possessed cars and stuff. (Not dissing him, I'm a King fan - but it's a different kind of scary). Horror as in slow, creeping insanity, doppelgängers, hearing strange noises in the kitchen at night, etc. etc. etc. There's no villain, there's no tangible enemy of any kind. That's what makes it so frightening. Some of the stupider characters in the book just can't seem to grasp that you can't fight Area X with guns and bullets - in fact, you can't fight it at all. It's as pointless as raging against the ocean or the sky.

Z had walked into the light to find Y staring at her with fear, with suspicion, and she had smiled at Y, had told her not to be afraid. Not to be afraid. Why be afraid of what you could not prevent? Did not want to prevent. Were they not evidence of survival? Were they not evidence of some kind? Both of them. There was nothing to warn anyone about. The world went on, even as it fell apart, changed irrevocably, became something strange and different.

*Z and Y used in place of actual character names.

...

It's also science-fiction. I've heard it described as "cli-fi," as in science fiction with a slant on "we're destroying our planet," a la Paolo Bacigalupi, but I hate this term. It makes a reader think that this is going to be preachy or self-righteous and that is not at all what this trilogy is like. It is fun, exciting, and edge-of-your-seat reading. I didn't find it the least bit sanctimonious. So read on with no fear! Except, perhaps, the fear that comes with reading any horror novel.

...

Some of the reasons I think this is the weakest entry in the trilogy:

We are in a lot of people's heads. Four different 'main characters' in this one, and we get all their points of view. Three in third-person and one in second-person (which is fun. I like second-person when it's done well). However, being involved in so many different POVs is adding a bit of complexity to an already very complex book. This is one reason I suggest reading it twice.

Another thing is that the first half of the book is not that exciting, not that 'scary.' VanderMeer doesn't really start delivering the blows until page 193. From then on it's a faster-paced freefall into awesomeness, but you do have to get through that first half to reach this. IT'S WORTH IT. And the first half is not a slog - far from it. VanderMeer's writing is beautiful and you are also, by this point, familiar with - and curious about - the characters so that you are interested in seeing them and getting to know them better. But still, fair warning. Don't get fed up with the lack of 'action' and quit early.

...

There's some great twists in here, and I was happy with the way everything turned up. Even though VanderMeer is not super-explicit, I feel like I have a pretty firm understanding of Area X and what it does after closing this book. People who need a very direct, pat explanation and everything spelled out for them ARE NOT going to be happy or satisfied with this trilogy. However, if you want an amazing trilogy with beautiful writing, fascinating and mysterious concepts, OMG-OMG-OMG horror that will have you riveted - this is the trilogy for you.

You are still there for a moment, looking out over the sea toward the lighthouse and the beautiful awful brightness of the world.

Before you are nowhere.

Before you are everywhere.

P.S. VanderMeer also - throughout the whole trilogy does a GREAT and AMAZING job of making characters of all different types: black, white, Latino, Asian, gay, hetero, bisexual - without making it seem glaring. He does this so seamlessly, so effortlessly, that the reader just falls into this. So many authors try to make "diverse characters" but end up drawing so much attention to their "diverseness" that it's distracting and annoying. "Look at this character. He's Indian. He's eating chapati. Did I mention he's Indian? He says, "Namaste" in this one scene. BECAUSE HE'S INDIAN." I hate this. Authors who do this are missing the whole entire point of making a 'diverse' cast of characters. The idea is not to hammer home how wonderful you are and how progressive you are for having non-white, or non-heterosexual characters - it's to make having non-white and non-heterosexual characters just a normal part of life. Not questioned, not commented upon to excess, not overanalyzed - just existing. VanderMeer pulls this off *perfectly*. So does Michael J. Martínez, whose *The Daedalus Incident* I also highly recommend.

P.P.S. People closest to nature already tend to survive and even thrive in Area X, unlike people who are wrapped up in cities and humanity and bureaucracy and taking showers and stuff. LOL But seriously, this is why (view spoiler)

P.P.P.S. Strong women. If you enjoy strong women and female characters who are strong but NOT Mary-Sues, this is the trilogy for you. Multi-faceted, a mixture of goodness and malice, playing both the heroes of the piece and the villains, VanderMeer is wonderful in this regard.

Will Chin says

That's it? Well, I must admit, I feel a little hoodwinked.

Acceptance is a noticeably better book than *Authority*, but that is not saying a lot, considering that the second book in the series is dreadful in every sense of the word. Just when you thought that the middle chapter of a trilogy cannot get any more weighted down, *Authority* showed up to prove us all wrong. Every page towards the end felt like a sucker punch to the guts, and it took great determination to pick up the next and final book in the series.

Thankfully, in *Acceptance*, the book is divided into three story lines: The Lighthouse Keeper's, the Director's and Control's (or Ghost Bird's). The good thing is that because you spend 2/3 of the time away from Control, the worst character in the book, you are less bothered by how mind-numbingly bad his character is. He continues to wallow in his thoughts and being slightly out of touch with the situation at hand, and he's in a constant state of denial. To think that we spent a whole book with the guy, I do wonder how I pulled through till the end.

The Lighthouse Keeper and the Director both have fairly interesting stories to tell, although they both sort of dissolve into underwhelming fuzz towards the end. They provide an interesting perspective to the creation of Area X, as well as the Director's motivations up until her death in book one.

The problem, however, is that Area X as a character (and yes, it is a character) does not progress forward in the plot. Instead, through the Lighthouse Keeper and the Director's story lines, Area X actually develops BACKWARDS. Essentially, you learn nothing new about Area X beyond the chronological point established in book one. *Acceptance* does reveal answers to some lingering questions, yes, but it doesn't move the plot FORWARD. Perhaps this is Vandermeer's way of preserving some of the mysteries, but place in better hands, Area X could have been so much more. Arthur C Clarke did a masterful job with his work on the *Odyssey* series, especially *2010: Odyssey Two*. In there, he provides answers/closures to the mysteries established in book one, and yet leave enough doors open for more mysteries to come. Vandermeer's

closures here are sloppy at best, almost amateurish. If you hated the way LOST gathered the loose ends and threw it at your face back in 2010, you are really going to hate the way Vandermeer chooses to end his yarn here.

Also, Area X is supposed to be at the forefront of the story. In Annihilation, it was the main character, and the humans were essentially sacrificial lambs to the overarching mystery. They didn't even have names to begin with! In books two and three, however, Area X is in the backseat while the human characters are put at the forefront. There's nothing wrong with that provided that the human characters are good, and that we can relate to them on some level. However, none of the characters end up being anything more like caricatures. They are constantly questioning themselves and wallowing in their own sense of self-doubt and misery, like characters from a Murakami book, and they don't ever snap out of it even after the trilogy ends. Halfway through the second book, I started to miss the creepiness of Area X, and I wanted to go back to the "tower". I didn't want to stay at Southern Reach anymore, and the characters weren't interesting enough for me to want to stick around at the party.

Overall, the Southern Reach trilogy has been an overwhelming disappointment. Book one was the perfect set up for a series, with enough mysteries to keep the readers guessing. If you intend on reading the series, pick up the first book, read it from cover to cover, then ask yourself if you are comfortable with not knowing any concrete answers. The answers provided in Acceptance aren't terrible per se, but the execution of the story is the series' Achilles' Heel. Again, Vandermeer pulled a LOST here, with the perfect set up and an unsatisfying ending. I'm not sure what the other reviewers on Goodreads read, but I certainly did not read the same book as everyone else.

Lyn says

The face of someone watching Mulholland Drive for the first time.

For me, I was mesmerized by the first two books in the trilogy, entranced by VanderMeer's writing like watching a cool street magician. But the bubble burst here and I blinked and came back to the world, realizing that while it was entertaining and fun to watch, the performance art was only just that.

Taking themes, styles and inspiration from JG Ballard, Jack Finney, and Eugène Ionesco, Jeff VanderMeer has crafted an extraordinarily original story of environmental and biological concerns.

Magic realism and inventive allegory abounds and VanderMeer demonstrates not only his great talent but also his deft ability to form an impressionistic vision of environmentalism.

For speculative fiction literati.

Jeffrey Keeten says

"Writing, for me, is like trying to restart an engine that has rested for years, silent and rusting, in an empty lot--choked with water and dirt, infiltrated by ants and spiders and cockroaches. Vines and weeds shoved into it and sprouting out of it. A kind of coughing splutter, an eruption of leaves and dust, a voice that sounds a little like mine but is not the same as it was before; I use my actual voice

rarely enough.”

There is this need for people trapped in Area X to write about what they see. They want to try and make sense of what they are experiencing. They don't. They can't understand, but maybe by leaving the squiggles of their thoughts trapped in a notebook they can give someone else a key to the lock they could not find.

”Perhaps so many journals had piled up in the lighthouse because on some level most came, in time, to recognize the futility of language. Not just in Area X but against the rightness of the lived-in moment, the instant of touch, of connection, for which words were such a sorrowful disappointment, so inadequate an expression of both the finite and infinite.”

It is the perfect invasion. It is an unknowable entity that is undefinable. A sector of slithering, watchful creatures that all seem interdependent. It would be like every known living plant, or creature, and even those that are unknown suddenly being able to communicate on a cellular level. They would be working in tandem to remake the world in a new image. Humans can't remain humans. They must evolve to be something more useful. We are conquerors after all and those that wish to rule could never be part of the whole.

”Even as he knew the words came from him, had always come from him, and were being emitted soundlessly from his mouth. And that he had been speaking already for a very long time, and that each word had been unraveling his brain a little more, a little more, even as each word also offered relief from the pressure in his skull. While what lay below waiting for his mind to peel away entirely. A blinding white light, a plant with leaves that formed a rough circle, a splinter that was not a splinter.”

Our minds, our precious minds that placed us on the top of the food chain prove to be useless.

There are monstrous flowers. There are sea serpents that would have nestled nicely within the gray matter of H. P. Lovecraft. There is a crawler who is a scrawler of dangerous verses with the one arm that still retains a nerve coupling to the dying remains of an old mind.

Lovecraft...H. P.

”Where lies the strangling fruit that came from the hand of the sinner I shall bring forth the seeds of the dead.”

What we want are answer, right? That is what we do. The science and math that we cram into our heads is there to make more sense of the world we don't know, but the answer lies in the title of book three...**ACCEPTANCE**. Difficult isn't it? Movies are all about the brilliant scientist, the brave warrior, or the dipshit that accidentally stumbles on a solution. One of them always saves us. The fact of the matter is that in this case to understand means becoming part of Area X. **Assimilate or assimilate, no dying allowed.** There are useful parts of all of us to contribute to Area X.

If it wants the world it will just take it.

”It acts a bit like an organism, like skin with a million greedy mouths instead of cells or pores. And the question isn't what it is but is the motive. Think of Area X as a murderer we're trying to catch.”

Someone is still trying to apply their minds to this problem as if there is something catchable.

It reminds me of the movie *Evolution* which is definitely a B movie, but it is one of my favorite B movies. The unconventional heroes are dealing with an organism from outer space that is adapting millions of years of evolution in mere hours. As it grows exponentially the government wants to nuke it but the scientists from the local community college know that a nuke is nothing but a release of energy and the organism will only feed on it and grow faster. So attacking Area X with what we feel are our most powerful weapons would be a mistake.

Now there are going to be people disappointed in this series. They will have made it through the first two books, bought the **I Survived Area X** t-shirt (of course they really didn't), and are looking forward to having all their questions answered, but Jeff Vandermeer is doing something very delicate here. This is a fragile egg of an idea to present to his readership. He is presenting the theory that there are things that are unknowable. I've read most of his books and these three books have some of the most dynamic, lush prose I've ever experienced in a Vandermeer book. The puzzling mind must be gagged and chained and tossed in a corner so that the rest of the brain can embrace the psychedelics of what we can't know, but what we can experience.

I will conclude with a quote from Kingsley Amis who was talking about another book I read recently, but it certainly applies as equally well to this trilogy. **The books are "actually quite good if you stop worrying about what's going on"**.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Bradley says

Really 3.5 stars

I'm already tired of my previous argument that the first book was the unconscious and the second was the superego. There's no where else for this book to go except a healthy balance: Hence the name, Acceptance. My argument is too trite and obvious.

So, instead, I'll move on to how this novel either succeeds or doesn't as an actual novel meant to entertain us.

I had issues with the previous novel which did get much better once the Authority crumbled, and this novel takes place entirely in Area X, which I very much prefer. The place is a character, after all, and it had been filled with so many delicious developments that it was a shame to just get a dry point-by-point debriefing. I wanted to be plopped right back into the action, to revel in the gorging fruit and flame, and enjoy that unbearable lightness of being.

Well, as the argument goes, we've got a compromise.

The book is chock-full of good reveals, but unlike the first novel, the timing on them weren't quite as good. The first novel had an excellent horror aesthetic, rising and falling between intellectualism, memory, and being absolutely confronted by the Id becoming externalized, backing off and rushing forward like the tide.

This novel is stuffed full of characters like Saul the Lighthouse Keeper, living out his last days before the great change to the Area, (which I liked a lot), Grace the original psychologist and the director of the Southern Reach, her past and her current new self, Control, and (thank goodness,) Ghost Bird. All of them do

their part to fill in the gaps we've been missing, and there's a lot of gaps that had to be filled, but that's the purpose of Ego. It's here to make sense of things that can't be quantified, just like Area X.

Here's your first warning about spoilers, people.

I really WANT to talk about the reveals. They're fun and worthwhile. I want to have a nice long discussion about them with people who like (view spoiler) But I won't, out of respect for those who still want to be surprised. Because, let's face it, if you've gotten this far, you're RELYING on the surprises to keep you going, because the plot is kinda unreliable and organic, which fits the theme, of course, but if you're looking for something to actually HAPPEN, or for the Area to finally be Provoked, as was hinted at earlier, then you'll be disappointed.

Can a novel be carried entirely by its reveals? No. Can they be entirely carried by only a few of the characters, who, like cancer victims, must find in themselves a reason to carry on despite everything that has happened? Maybe. It always depends on how the story spins out and what kind of things we can pull away from the tale, as readers.

Some people are going to take away a lot more from this novel than me. I loved the ideas. I'll rank this novel very high as an idea novel, rather than one that is written well. What really pains me is the hints that Mr. VanderMeer IS a very talented writer, full of great aesthetics and a great sense of timing, which, unfortunately, he declined to pull out for the readers in the second and third novels. (It's not quite as bad, in the third novel. My interest was held much more in it than in the second.)

I just feel as if the novel could have been great with a bit more plot-push or a complete submersion back into the weird. Either way, we bring it back to the characters, or we bring it Fully into Area X as character.

sigh Apparently, I have to Accept that the Area (the Id) and the scheming people (superego) must make up a third, ultimately less satisfying character.

Sure. It might be healthy to integrate the two, and it is a mark of character growth, whether it is within Us, as readers, or the peeps we are reading about, but let me ask the important question:

"Don't we, as readers, read for the conflicts, and not the resolution?"

It's where the action is. It's what puts us at the edges of our seats. Acceptance means the loss of conflict. Great for living life, but not so great for the readers of an obviously excellent setup and prolonged execution of an idea story that happened to have truly fascinating and well-drawn characters. It has so much potential. It's really reaching for the stars. I love that about it. I just wish I hadn't felt cheated at the end. We're still sitting on the fence. Neither Id nor Superego are going to win this one. It is ongoing, forever.

sigh Happiness and adjustment, in this case, is very off-putting and creepy, especially if you're eventually going to (view spoiler).

(And don't argue with me about the thousands of great examples in Horror that leave us without happy endings. This is a one-off of those. This is an unhappy ending posing as a well-thought-out exposition and persuasive argument telling us that it's actually a happy ending. Or it's the ultimate argument, taken to extremes, of "Life must go on".)

I really want to like the novels, people. I really do. There's a lot going on that I appreciate with my brain and it's turtles all the way down. It's my heart that rebels.

On the other hand, I'm totally open to comments and discussions on this one. It deserves a lot more than just

this.

Mike says

I am afraid to report that I found the final installment of The Southern Reach Trilogy to be a disappointment and let down. After really enjoying the first two books in this series, Annihilation and Authority this verdict pains me. VanderMeer succeeded in creating this weird, amazing world populated by fascinating characters. But all the promise and potential of the first two books were squandered, in my opinion, by Acceptance's ending.

Spoilers for the series and this book follow, so be wary.

The first two books were told from one point of view, the Biologist and Control respectively. This allows VanderMeer to establish a very specific atmosphere for each of these books: a strange, alien, yet seemingly pristine, natural environmental for Annihilation and a byzantine bureaucratic labyrinth that Control must get control of in Authority. Acceptance, in a departure from this pattern, provided multiple points of view. To a degree this is good. I got to see some past events in the Director's and Lighthouse Keeper's lives before Area X manifested and before the events of Annihilation. I found the character of the Director and the Lighthouse keeper to be quite interesting and enjoyable. However, this shattering of the narrative prevented a definitive ambience from being established. As a result I did not feel as immersed in this book as the previous books.

But my biggest problem with this book is the lack a closure for the majority of the characters. I can certainly understand the choices to leave the fates of Control and the Biologist ambiguous at the end of the first two books. But when this book ends, we do not know the fate of Control (or what his new form is or what was in the shining light), what befell earth/Area X (not to mention Lowry and Southern Reach) as Ghostbird and Gloria pick their way through a transformed landscape, what the final fate of the transformed lighthouse keeper, and why Area X was so interested in the Director's memories. I was left expecting some sort of closure for these character arcs but never got it.

I really liked how VanderMeer constructed Area X. It was the very definition of alien, lacking a common ground for humans to interact with it. I think the nature of Area X vis a vis humanity was aptly summer up by Saul the lighthouse keeper.

Saul: That fish down there sure is frightened of you.

Gloria: Huh? It just doesn't know me. If it knew me, that fish would shake my hand.

Saul: I don't think there's anything you could say to convince it of that. And there are all kinds of ways you could hurt it without meaning to.

And that is Area X encapsulated. Humanity is the fish that Area X is unable to communicate with and it is indeed hurting us as it tried to communicate and make sense of Earth. In fact I thought the nature Area X was pretty darn nifty: a sort of biological Von Neumann Probes from a dead world that it tries to recreate. And humans (among everything else) is just raw material for it to sculpt as it sees fit.

There is a lot of love about this book. I loved the Lighthouse Keeper character and his relationship with Gloria. I thought it was awesome what the biologist turned into, but would have liked a lot more about her instead of her just being a near mindless force of nature. I liked the personal journey of the Director and her maneuverings against Lowry (which was a character I would have loved to have gotten to know better). The Seance and Science Brigade was very intriguing but woefully underdeveloped.

Had this book merely been the third installment of a four (or more) book series this would have been a solid four star book. But because this is (as far as I am aware) the end of the line, the lack of closure and resolution really rankled me. If you are going to make me care so much about the characters in the story, at least do my the courtesy of telling me what befalls them.

Kaora says

For those of you like me who loved Annihilation and struggled with Authority, you will be happy to know that this book is more like Annihilation than Authority. We are back in Area-X with Ghost Bird and Control, although there are multiple view points alternating through this book that also bring us back to the history of Area-X.

The thing that I adore most about these books is the writing. The haunting metaphors that set the tone for this mind-fuck of a novel. The pacing was perfect, and the book drew me in from the first page and did not let go, something I struggled with amidst the politics of Authority.

The characters can be a bit confusing, especially since many of them have given up their prior names and go by nicknames. Such as Biologist, The Director or Control, although they may be referred to as their other names on occasion.

This is not a book that you can speed read, since you will miss some important details, and not get the full effect of the amazing writing.

While it doesn't answer all the questions posed in the first two books, I do feel like many of the important ones are answered, and I love it when details that seem insignificant come back in a big way. Chekhov's guns in disguise, just waiting to go off. It makes me want to go back and re-read the entire series, so I can discover elements I never noticed before.

While everything isn't tied up in a neat little package, Vandermeer allows us to draw our own conclusions from the end, a fitting finish for this trilogy and one that will keep you thinking about this book hours after you close it.

Highly recommended for fans of weird Science Fiction or weird in general.

Cross posted at: Kaora's Corner

Heidi The Hippie Reader says

Acceptance answers any lingering questions that the reader may have concerning Area X. I found it much more satisfying than the second entry. But, I don't think that either the second or third book approached the brilliance of the first.

Beyond the revelations about Area X, this book also explains some of the relationships between characters. *"Sometimes.. other people gave you their light, and could seem to flicker, to be hardly visible at all, if no one took care of them. Because they'd given you too much and had nothing left for themselves."* pg 60.

The reader discovers some major surprises. I won't say anything else because... no spoilers!

Jeff VanderMeer's descriptive passages are beautiful, something that all three books shared: *"Soon after the storm, the trail they followed wound back to the sea along a slope of staggered hills running parallel to the water. The wet ground, the memory of those dark rivulets, made the newly seeded soil seem almost mirthful. Ahead lay the green outline of the island, illumined by the dark gold light of late afternoon."* pg 108.

And Area X is as mysterious as ever: *"In the lengthening silence and solitude, Area X sometimes would reveal itself in unexpected ways."* pg 178. And also: *"Never has a setting been so able to live without the souls traversing it."* pg 241.

I am glad that I took the time to read all three books. I think that VanderMeer's entire concept of Area X is brilliant.

The series as a whole is strange but wonderful. Admittedly, the second book is the weakest and I barely made it through it. But, in hindsight, it fills in some blanks that contribute to the bigger picture.

Recommended for readers who like their science fiction with a large side of horror/suspense.

Richard says

There's a paragraph or two in Acceptance that perfectly sums up my feelings about this trilogy (So much so that I had to look it up!). The key line is - "The allure of the island lay in its negation of why". The author is talking about how humans constantly need to have a purpose, constantly need to find the why behind something and neglect to just accept the `what` of something.

Its so apt, because its exactly what happened to these books. Area X is summoned up in all its glory in the first book. Things just are - it feels like there is meaning behind it all, but its opaque and weird. Its fascinating!

But then.... along plopped Authority and to a large degree Acceptance too. Both books don't expand on the amazing world building of Annihilation. Its all backstory. Dreary characters discovering pointless things about themselves and their co-workers/mothers/lighthouse keepers/past expedition members. All plot mechanics - all focused on the why and how rather than the what. Everyone's backstory explored to the point of pain.

Maybe thats intentional, and largely its about humans ineffectiveness in the face of something so alien, but I found it the most tedious way to deal with this fascinating subject.

There's occasionally a connection made that I think i'm supposed to see as a revelation (Lowry's identity, Controls mum, etc etc), but to me, it came off as cheap and totally perfunctory to the point of the book (the amazing bio-horror of Area X, the thing we cannot understand).

Maybe it was just weighted too heavily towards the characters. I just never cared or clicked with any of them. And to be fair, Acceptance does have a handful of pages of great Area X stuff, but it was nowhere near enough in a 350 page book.

Its possible I have entirely misunderstood what this is all about, so i'll be hungrily reading all your (mostly positive it seems!) reviews on here to try to discover what I missed.

Also - the covers are among the most beautiful covers i've ever seen.
