



## Authority

*Jeff VanderMeer*

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**Authority** Jeff VanderMeer

**The bone-chilling, hair-raising second installment of the Southern Reach Trilogy**

After thirty years, the only human engagement with Area X--a seemingly malevolent landscape surrounded by an invisible border and mysteriously wiped clean of all signs of civilization--has been a series of expeditions overseen by a government agency so secret it has almost been forgotten: the Southern Reach. Following the tumultuous twelfth expedition chronicled in *Annihilation*, the agency is in complete disarray.

John Rodríguez (aka "Control") is the Southern Reach's newly appointed head. Working with a distrustful but desperate team, a series of frustrating interrogations, a cache of hidden notes, and hours of profoundly troubling video footage, Control begins to penetrate the secrets of Area X. But with each discovery he must confront disturbing truths about himself and the agency he's pledged to serve.

In *Authority*, the second volume of Jeff VanderMeer's Southern Reach trilogy, Area X's most disturbing questions are answered . . . but the answers are far from reassuring.

## Authority Details

Date : Published May 6th 2014 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux (first published May 2014)

ISBN : 9780374104108

Author : Jeff VanderMeer

Format : Paperback 341 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Horror, Fantasy

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## From Reader Review Authority for online ebook

### Bradley says

Honestly, I wanted to stay longer in Area X, not get relegated to an almost sterile administration building for most of the novel.

Control (the man, not the action) didn't even really begin to grow on me until well-past half-way mark. At least there were elements of spy-fiction, but in all honesty, the conflict in the novel was rather too light.

I know we're not supposed to have answers in this kind of novel. I don't really expect them. It's all about the journey and cultivating a sense of wonder as a reader, trying to figure out the rules for yourself, seeing if you can do any better than the poor characters actually having to live it. (So to speak.)

And yet, I had to wait until almost the very end to get that mere glance I was hoping for, and then it slipped beneath the water again.

Too little happened. Most of what teased me were the long conversations with Ghost Bird on the other side of an interrogation table, and I did look forward to each and every one of those, but it wasn't until Control had to leave the administration building that I started to gel with the novel, and that's a shame, because I actively started LIKING the novel at that point.

I'm partial to being thrown into the actual action, not just having a taste of squabbling coworkers making a hash of sending so many damn people into Area X.

If I were a more critical reader, not willing to give credit where credit is finally due, I might have said I didn't like this book. Most of it bored me.

Fortunately, I'm not a super critical reader. It did progress my understanding of Area X by way of the people on the outside, and even if they, also, are stumped, then at least they came by it honestly. Or dishonestly. Whatever. :)

Ghost Bird, even for being placed on a pedestal and turned into an Object Of Understanding by everyone else, still remained my favorite character in either novel.

Now, here's the tricky part: It's become painfully obvious to me that we're dealing with the themes of unconsciousness and Id (Annihilation) and consciousness and SuperEgo (Authority), both exploring the physical manifestation of the subconsciousness and how it rises out of the bog into consciousness. Annihilation was floating up, and Authority was sinking down. By extrapolation, Acceptance is going to be all about finding a workable balance, ending in EGO.

Of course, I'm already of the opinion that Ghost Bird already has a pretty good grasp on it, I'm just going to go out on a limb that the tale will be about someone else. Perhaps Control, but probably a third we haven't met.

Truly, the novel IS good if you analyze it. Too bad that it kinda fell flat in execution. Or perhaps that's my own SuperEgo being super critical because it knows, in a deeper sense, that super intellectualization is such a damn bore. :)

Am I right?

## Roblee says

The author, evidently paid by the word, tells a very long and atmospheric tale, approximately 200 pages overlong. An intriguing last few chapters and ending could stand alone as prelude to the final book.

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## Lyn says

The book begins with some delicious theatrical irony for the readers of Annihilation.

I put Annihilation, Jeff VanderMeek's 2014 environmental thriller, down with one hand while reaching for the sequel with the other.

Authority is in a different style and tone than was its predecessor. Whereas the first book was a surreal dystopian nightmare, told from the first-person perspective of The Biologist from a series of journal entries, this is broader in scope and more ambitious in design. VanderMeek has widened his lens and is capturing behind the scenes action from the administrative offices of the Southern Reach and giving us some background.

John "Control" Rodriguez is sent in to be the new director of the secret agency, whose purpose it is to investigate Area X, a region of seemingly bucolic verdancy that hides a malevolent heart. His first task is to interrogate The Biologist after her mission into Area X. But her strange reticence, accompanied by the thinly veiled hostility from the rest of the agency, leads Control to dig deeper into this decades old invasion. The border around Area X is like a DMZ, holding in check a menace that can only be guessed at.

I noticed subtle references to Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness in the first book and I see it again here. Conrad's mystical prose describes a journey into a hell on earth, man's bestial core and VanderMeek takes this theme and expands it to depict a natural calamity that is readying to break free and pounce. His inferno seems to be nature itself, looking to settle the score with corrupted and corrupting man.

A fitting continuance from Annihilation, VanderMeek's inspired and vibrant prose is again impressive and enthralling. This is a minimalistic and intense psychological thriller and here I go on to the third part.

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## Hannah says

My thoughts on this are, you guessed it, complicated. This follow-up to Annihilation (which I LOVED.) is a very different beast. Set shortly after the events of the first book, it is completely different in feeling and in genre. It does not take place in Area X but rather in the Southern Reach itself where a new director has been placed who will have to try and figure out what is really going on.

There is one thing I am absolutely sure of: Jeff VanderMeer is a genius. He has a way of writing that I find exciting and fresh and original and super brilliant. I adore the way he writes weird books where the weirdness is always grounded in what we know of the world he creates. The world he created here is

unsettling and just on the edge of ours; close enough to upset, far away enough to intrigue.

But there were lengthy parts of this book that I was bored to near tears. It felt much longer than it is and reading it often felt like a chore. I have a sneaking suspicion though: maybe that was the point; maybe I was supposed to be bored; maybe this was supposed to drag. Of course, I can never know for sure if that is the case – but then I don't think an author's intent is all that important when compared to what the reader gets out of it. This boredom feels intentional – it fits into the themes of bureaucracy and lack of autonomy. It is in direct contrast to what we know of Area X: which is untamed and unblemished by humanity – this feeling is mirrored in the sprawling, unfocussed, fascinating narrative voice of the first book. But this book is set outside of Area X, in the organization that is trying to contain whatever is happening; and doing this in an increasingly rigid way.

So yes, I do not even know what I make of this book. Again, Jeff VanderMeer keeps me at arm's length from the characters – who do not know who they are themselves (or if they are themselves even), but impresses me with his vivid language.

First sentence: "In Control's dream it is early morning, the sky deep blue with just a twinge of light."

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## Heidi The Hippie Reader says

The mystery of Area X continues with an FBI agent's entry into the Southern Reach. What's going on? Why can't anybody remember anything? Why is everyone so antagonistic? And why does everything smell bad?

Rarely have I been so disappointed with a book as I was with *Authority*. The first entry in this series is a gripping, psychedelic adventure that reads like a nature-gone-wild acid trip. This book, on the other hand, is like going to work with a punishing hangover. You don't know what's going on and everybody is pushing piles of paper at you.

*"A shadow had passed over the director's desk then. He'd been here before, or somewhere close, making these kinds of decisions before, and it had almost broken him, or broken through him. But he had no choice."* pg 18. On and on it goes. No answers, only confusion and bewilderment. I honestly thought, up until the very end, that something mega-cool was going to happen to make up for all of the so-so stuff that had happened so far. Unfortunately...

I also got super excited anytime Area X was mentioned, sort of like passing an old fling on your way to a funeral. Take this passage: *"But the truth did have a simple quality to it: About thirty-two years ago, along a remote southern stretch known by some as the "forgotten coast," an Event had occurred that began to transform the landscape and simultaneously caused an invisible border or wall to appear."* pg 35. Yes! And then we were immediately back into the boring office work/politics stuff.

*"You've heard of the Southern Reach?" He had, mostly through a couple of colleagues who had worked there at one time. Vague allusions, keeping to the cover story about environmental catastrophe. Rumors of a chain of command that was eccentric at best. Rumors of a significant variation, of there being more to the story. But, then, there always was. He didn't know, on hearing his mother say those words, whether he was excited or not."* pg 71. And that, my friends, is pretty much the whole book. Let me save you another 250 or so pages.

I exaggerate. A bit. It's just that I'm incredibly disappointed in the turn this story took. I suppose I'll read the last one in this series because I'm a completionist, but that is the only reason.

## Sheila says

2.5 stars (somewhere between "meh" and "I liked it").

This is a middle book and it shows. The last 20% of this book is great--full of action. But you have to slog through the first 80% to get there. Specifically, what I didn't care for:

- \* I couldn't connect with the narrator.
- \* Repetitive, slow-moving plot.
- \* Instead of answers about Area X (Lovecraftian monsters? Aliens? A parallel dimension?), this is a book about government conspiracy/bureaucracy.

What I wanted was to find out what was going on at Area X, so I'll definitely read the next book, and like I said, this does pick up at the end. There are some creepy hints dropped in this book, which I hope will be expanded upon. But this book lacks, in my mind, the fascination and horror of book 1.

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## Kai says

*"It is superstition. But it might be true."*

After the genius that was *Annihilation*, I couldn't wait to get my hands on *Authority*. *Annihilation* posed so many questions and left all of them unanswered. I hoped that its sequel would help offer some answers, but I already knew and feared that it wouldn't. So here we are, at the end of book II, none the wiser.

*Authority* was weird. It was a huge mess, weird people and situations all over the place without an explanation of what was going on. All we have on our side are few assumptions that may or may not be true. And the rest is confusion.

Plotwise, *Authority* could even be called boring. There really isn't much going on. The main character is supposed to make some light of the darkness but he keeps running into closed doors. No one really wants to tell him what's going on and the things he does find are super weird and also do not make any sense. The only intriguing parts of this novel were the meetings with the biologist, the main character from *Annihilation*. She is such an interesting character and the only one that seems to have clear motives, even though they might not always be obvious to the reader.

*Authority* kept me reading because I wanted answers. I think the reason this book works is that it's the second book in a trilogy. If it was the first one, I'm not sure it would have kept my interest.

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## Jeffrey Keeten says

**"In the black water with the sun shining at midnight, those fruit shall come ripe and in the darkness of that which is golden shall split open to reveal the revelation of the fatal softness in the earth."**

John A.K.A. Control has been made director of The Southern Reach Facility. The last director finagled her way onto the last expedition into Area X and has never been seen or heard from again. The assistant director doesn't only dislike him, but is working actively to undermine him. I've been in a similar circumstances before with a job. It is time consuming winning everybody over so that the work environment can settle into a new normal.

As it turns out Control doesn't have months to convince anyone of anything.

There is something wrong with the building...it smells like rotting honey.

Some of "the twelfth" expedition which were all women have returned, remembering next to nothing, scattered thoughts. Soon he is focused on The Biologist, the main character from *Annihilation*, whose answers are not...quite...right. There is blue sky in the amnesia that makes Control suspicious that she remembers more than she is letting on.

*"They were beginning to exist in some transitional space between interrogation and conversation, something for which he could not quite find a name."*

She is bemused by him.

He discovers notes by the original director about The Biologist that he hopes will offer some clarification, but they only create more questions.

*"Not a very good biologist. In a traditional sense. Empathic more toward environments than people. Forgets the reasons she went, who is paying her salary. But becomes embedded to an extraordinary extent. Would know Area X better than I do from almost the first moment sets foot there. Experience with similar settings. Self-sufficient. Unburdened. Connection through her husband. What would she be in Area X? A signal? A flare? Or invisible? **Exploit.**"*

Control has been resurrected from what should have been a career ending disastrous string of decisions on his last assigning. The type of judgment calls that haunts your career for the rest of your life. His mother, Severance, currently works for Central in some nebulous position deemed Classified. His grandfather also used to work for Central as well and filled Control's head with all kinds of platitudes.

*"So long as you don't tell people you don't know something, they'll probably think you know it."*

Gramps didn't pass along anything original, but as his situation becomes more and more tenuous Control finds his grandfather's voice in his head very reassuring.

**"Is your house in order?" the Voice asked. "Is it in order?"**

That voice is not grandfather, but his contact at Central. The entity that is supposed to be running interference for him at Central and buy him time to work his way through this puzzle. But why does he always feel so damn funny after talking to him?

Then there is the plant in his desk drawer; the plant that won't die. It is obviously from Area X. Somebody gave it a dead mouse to eat.

**Rabbits will do what rabbits do best, but what will Rabbits do best in Area X?**

And then there is Whitby talking about the terror, the terroir. The French word meaning *the set of special characteristics that the geography, geology and climate of a certain place possess and how it is interacting with plant genetics.*

### **Area X=TERROIR!**

Why don't we agitate it? Make it do something.

Will it bring him "closer to the truth about Area X, and even if the truth was a fucking maw, a fanged maw that stank like a cave full of putrefying corpses, that was still closer than he was now."

Control is opening that door that defies the first rule of every horror film...**DON'T OPEN THE DOOR.**

**Control would have been so much more focused if he'd had Dana Scully licking his face.**

This was such a surprise after reading book one. I was expecting to be up to my armpits in malicious people eating foliage, attempting to keep my brain from going completely Gonzo, and hopefully finding answers to some lingering questions about Area X. Jeff Vandermeer switches gears on us and puts us in the middle of an X-File with a Fox Mulder without the steadying influence of a Dana Scully. The suspense builds beautifully with many moments of...that was odd...until finally it reaches a crescendo with Control on the run not only from Area X, but also from the people at Central. And now I MUST read *Acceptance*.

ANNIHILATION review Book one of the Southern Reach Trilogy

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>

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## **Carmen says**

### **SPOILER-FREE REVIEW**

*"Imagine a situation, John, in which you are trying to contain something dangerous. But you suspect that containment is a losing game. That what you want to contain is escaping slowly, inexorably. That what seems impermeable is, in fact, over time, becoming very permeable. That the divide is more perforated than unperforated. And that whatever this thing is seems to want to destroy you but has no leader to negotiate with, no stated goals of any kind."*

Control, also known by his birth name: John Rodríguez, is CIA. The CIA have been concerned lately about what is going on at the Southern Reach, a special branch of government dedicated to investigating Area X, the mysterious and deadly portion of the United States that is surrounded by a shimmering, intangible border. Anything and anyone that passes that border is never seen again. They disappear, kill themselves, kill each other - or return. Return as empty husks of the people they once were: with no memories, no personalities, and no hope of a future.

After 30 years of trying to figure out what Area X is, what caused it, why it exists, how it exists - the government still has no answers. And there is blood on their hands. After the 1,500 people were killed when "the border" around Area X suddenly appeared three decades ago, the government has insisted on sending in expedition after expedition of scientists and experts into the festering, unknown vastness - the pristine,

uncontaminated wilderness that seems to be slowly expanding - that exists beyond "the border," with disastrous results. Quite often, everyone dies. And on the rare occasions someone comes back, death seems like a merciful option.

Called in by not only his job with the CIA, but by his powerhouse agent of a mother, Control is plunged into the fetid, putrid recesses of the Southern Reach.

And what he finds there is horrifying.

...

Things I Can Tell You Without Spoiling Anything:

1.) This is a strong horror entry. It could also be classified as science-fiction, but it is leaning heavily toward horror. Expect creepiness and growing horror.

*He had been standing there recognizing that there was a draft in the loft. He had been standing there without realizing that it wasn't a draft.*

*Someone was breathing, behind him.*

*Someone was breathing on his neck. The knowledge froze him, froze the cry of "Jesus fuck!" in his throat.*

*He turned with incredible slowness...*

2.) You MUST read Annihilation first. This is a sequel to Annihilation and NOT a stand-alone. This WILL NOT make any sense or pack the kind of sickening realization you are seeking if you do not read Annihilation first.

3.) Annihilation is a stronger and better novel than Authority. And, as an added bonus, Annihilation can stand on its own two feet. You can read Annihilation, be severely creeped out by it, let it rock you to your core, and then leave. There's no need to continue on in the rest of the trilogy if you don't want to. You can leave it there. It is a perfectly self-contained and wonderful novel on its own. Authority is NOT. You cannot read and enjoy Authority without having first read Annihilation. The book will not make sense to you.

Whereas Annihilation is primal, feral, taking place in the festering swamplands and filled with terrifying beasts that remain *just* out of your line of vision - Authority relies on the horror of this kind of merciless and relentless wilderness slowly creeping into an urban environment. It's very different. I like the small-scale, humid, murky, desperately insane feel of Annihilation better than the feel of an insidious force of plants, creatures, and mental breakdown invading an urban setting that is created in Authority. Both books are excellent - it's just a personal preference here.

4.) This book has humor. It is actually funny at points. I laughed out loud more than once. *This was shocking to me.* It was shocking because there is almost no humor at all in Annihilation. None. Which doesn't make Annihilation any less good - it's a horror/sci-fi after all (humor not necessarily needed). But I was surprised VanderMeer chose to include so much humor in this sequel. And it's *funny*. It's not as if VanderMeer is attempting to be funny - he actually *is* funny. Very surprising and refreshing.

*Grace was joining him at his request, to assist him in staring out at the swamp while they talked about Area X. Because he'd thought a change of setting - leaving the confines of the concrete coffin - might help soften her animosity. Before he realized just how truly hellish and prehistoric the landscape was, and thus now pre-hysterical as well. Look out upon this mosquito orgy, and warm to me, Grace.*

5.) Great, amazing, thorough character study of Control. Control is a fully-formed person. The reader gets to know him intimately. Every facet of him. It was astonishing. He's an asshole, but he's vulnerable. He's compassionate but he's ruthless. He's a CIA agent who is brutal - but also an empathetic person who feels

more than a weapon of the government should. His family life, his romantic life, his strengths, his weaknesses - it's AMAZING to me how much and how well VanderMeer crafted this character seeing as the book was also crafting and describing a horrific situation as well. It is brilliant. Rarely do I feel so familiar with a character as I did with Control.

6.) Great depiction of a realistic, fully realized Latino character. Control is Latino, but not: "Oh, this character is *latino*, look at his latino-ness, oh, message, blah blah blah." But neither does VanderMeer ignore or negate the realities of living as a Latino in the U.S.A. A perfect balance, in my opinion.

7.) Great vocabulary. I even had to look up two or three words and I am VERY well-read. Excellent - I love when books challenge me like this.

8.) VanderMeer is really a beautiful writer, in a way that escapes you at first glance. Of course, if you've already read *Annihilation*, you will have no doubt as to what I'm talking about in this regard. It might take a while to see the beauty in his writing, but after a while it is undeniable. That doesn't go away in *Authority*, although I do think *Annihilation* was more beautifully written.

9.) The paperback English version of this book is a thing of wonder. The front cover, inside covers, and title page are magnificent. I want to own a copy of this book. (All three in the trilogy make a gorgeous set.)

...

In summary, I can't talk about the plot too much without giving it all away. From my rating you can tell that I loved this book. I read it twice in 3 days. **Don't read it if you haven't read *Annihilation* first.**

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## Stuart says

Holy crap, this book was unbearable! I'm trying to think of something good to say about this book...and failing. It reminds me of an unholy blend of the final season of *Lost*, *The Blair Witch Project*, *Cloverfield*, *The Office*, and *Waiting for Godot*. Endless trivial descriptions of bureaucracy, oblique dead-end details, and an obstinate refusal to further the plot in any way, other than with fruitless clues. It seems that fans of *Annihilation* were enthralled by the ominous Lovcraftian horror of Area X and the unreliable narrator, but the real horror is the unreliable author who writes well and teases with no intention of delivering the goods.

I am a prodigious reader of SF&F, but I am not a fan of ambiguity or metaphor. I want a novel with compelling characters, fascinating world-building, and a propulsive storyline that makes we want to know more, but whatever Jeff VanderMeer was aiming for, it went straight over my head. This book smacks of *Serious Literature Filled with Deep Meaning that Average Joes cannot possibly grasp*. As I read for entertainment and to stimulate my imagination, I cannot go another step. I was hoping this book would provide some illumination of the events of *Annihilation*, but after getting to the 50% mark without the slightest clue, I cannot justify wasting any more precious reading time. People often say, just hang in there and the book will pay off at the end, but I would counter, why can't a story be interesting and exciting from the get-go? Is that too much to ask? Having read fairly widely, I'm pretty certain of what I will like or not, and this series is about as far from my tastes as I've encountered in a long time. My apologies to all the GR readers who loved this book, I respect your opinions and tastes and I hope you won't think less of me, but why torture myself anymore? I'm moving onto something else.

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## Fabian says

An important cardinal rule of trilogies is thoroughly broken with "Authority," Book 2 in the Southern Reach Trilogy. That which states that the second tome must build something out of the previous one, that its limits are expanded, that the adventure is transmogrified to its very apex (see, Star Wars episode 5, Godfather II, "Senor Vivo and the Coca Lord" in Louis de Bernieres' Latin American trilogy... heck, even Catching Fire was the better of all the Hunger Games books). "Authority" does none of this--it extinguishes the fire that was barely coming to light in book one. It's almost as if a happy camper, too content with what's transpired in the wilderness outside his home, pisses on the ashes of his very own creation.

Wow, man. Devastating news: VanderMeer only submerges into more murky waters a plot that's convoluted if barely there. Mysteries piled on top of mysteries--this is as thrilling (& I guess, as important, structurally) as drying cement.

Will I accept book 3, "Acceptance"? Probably not. I don't feel like venturing into terrain that's very promising but yields miserably little.

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## Carol. says

If *Annihilation* reminded me of Jeanette Winterson's writing, then *Authority* reminded me of Kafka, but not the interesting Kafka, one of the boring ones, which surely if I say which one, my dear friends are going to quickly assure me that I'm quite wrong and there is no way Kafka could ever be boring with such Big Ideas. So maybe I don't mean Kafka. Maybe I mean one of those other stodgy old writers from Advanced English who was clearly writing about the Human Condition in Big Fat Metaphors. Maybe *Moby Dick*. Is it safe to call *Moby Dick* boring? It also reminded me a little of Joseph Heller, in *Something Happened*, when, of course, nothing does happen. Or *Waiting for Godot*, only more like Waiting for Area X. Or maybe I'm thinking of that movie *Brazil*, which is what I always think of when I think of big, boring films about Meaning of Corporations. Which is probably not what *Brazil* is even about, but you'll never get me to watch it again, so it doesn't matter. In my mind, it's always about a faceless bureaucracy. Anyway, just think of some story from your memory of something that was well-done, full of Deep Meaning about the Human Condition, with a confused narrator, a whole lot of navel-gazing about Ineffectual Man, and you'll about have it.

*Authority* is clearly the next side to the prism that composes the Southern Reach Trilogy, but this installment is focused a new character, government official John Rodriguez. He's been transferred in as replacement of the missing Director of the Southern Reach. In keeping with the tradition of roles superseding names, John adopts a childhood moniker 'Control.' His arrival occurs shortly after the Biologist and her team have returned to the Reach (!) sans memories and missing the psychologist. As Control seeks to puzzle out the mystery of the Biologist and the Reach, he also faces inter-agency status conflicts, with antagonism from the Voice above as well as from below, in the form of Assistant Director Grace:

**“But Control preferred to think of her as neither patience nor grace. He preferred to think of her as an abstraction if not an obstruction. She had made him sit through an old orientation video about Area X, must have known it would be basic and out of date. She had already made clear that theirs would be a relationship based on animosity. From her side, at least.”**

Maybe the transfer is a plot to get rid of him. Maybe its a plot his mother has to advance his career. Maybe it's just the only job available to a man who compromised his cases. It is hard for both the reader and Control

to tell, and honestly, I don't know that I cared. He's not an anti-hero, just an everyday bureaucrat trying to do the best he can and survive complex corporate politics. And complex family politics. 'Control' is clearly an irony for a man who has none.

We experience the rotting-honey smell of the Reach (!) through the new eyes of Control, as he almost but-not-quite bonds with both the Biologist held in isolation and the ghost of the former Director (I'm not spoiling anything; I'm not being literal here, people. I think). If I enjoyed Craig Johnson's show-don't tell mysteries, this is pretty much the opposite; not a lot happens except in Control's head, with a few bizarre incidents spurring him onward.

But the writing! I love the writing, so vivid and clever and allegorical, except that almost every little bit is vivid and clever and allegorical so it really does need a bit of a driver to engage my emotions:

**“Before he'd arrived, Control had imagined himself flying free above the Southern Reach, swooping down from some remote perch to manage things. That wasn't going to happen. Already his wings were burning up and he felt more like some ponderous moaning creature trapped in the mire.”**

Remember the swamp creature from *Annihilation*? Of course you do! What does it mean? Is Area X is the Reach, and the Reach is Area X? Maybe. I don't know, and am not entirely sure I care. Enough navel-gazing, Control.

Much like *Zone One*, Colin Whitehead's brush with zombie Metaphorical Fiction, this book missing the five star despite truly excellent writing, purely out of personal taste and enjoyment. Well written, well-crafted, I read it because I'd like to see Vandermeer's gestalt, as well as know more about Area X. Onward!

Really, more a three-and-half star book, but no option for that here.

Review forevermore posted at <http://clsiewert.wordpress.com/2014/0...> where it can't be deleted for being off-topic

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## **Richard says**

I can't give this more than 2 stars because the center of the book drags along like a sacked brick. I tried and tried to get into it, but I couldn't remain interested.

It just doesn't need 200 pages to get across the idea of the Southern Reach. Relationships barely develop past the first meetings and the whole thing feels stuck. I guess this mirrors the feelings the main characters are supposed to be experiencing in the least fun way possible.

None of the little mysteries really go anywhere exciting, and the good stuff that happens is pretty random and not driven at all by the events that precede it. The main event near the end of the book could have just happened on page 50 and spared us the main part of the book.

Maybe I'm being harsh! There is another book on its way after all. It could all slot together and be a satisfying adventure story - but my interest is pretty dented.

*Annihilation*, was a fun, really short, little mystery that flew along. This book is work, and you don't get much in return. (yet?)

## Richard Derus says

Rating: 3.5\* of five

**The Publisher Says:** After thirty years, the only human engagement with Area X--a seemingly malevolent landscape surrounded by an invisible border and mysteriously wiped clean of all signs of civilization--has been a series of expeditions overseen by a government agency so secret it has almost been forgotten: the Southern Reach. Following the tumultuous twelfth expedition chronicled in *Annihilation*, the agency is in complete disarray.

John Rodrigues (aka "Control") is the Southern Reach's newly appointed head. Working with a distrustful but desperate team, a series of frustrating interrogations, a cache of hidden notes, and hours of profoundly troubling video footage, Control begins to penetrate the secrets of Area X. But with each discovery he must confront disturbing truths about himself and the agency he's pledged to serve.

In *Authority*, the second volume of Jeff VanderMeer's Southern Reach trilogy, Area X's most disturbing questions are answered . . . but the answers are far from reassuring.

**My Review:** We're not in Area X anymore, Toto, and therein the problem. Control, our PoV character, is hastily tossed together to provide a camera platform for the bureaucratic machinations and clandestine-agency wars.

It's so frustrating to read a good book that's encased in a less-good book. Like those canned hams from the 1960s, the meat is tasty but who put this weird spoodge all over it?

After much hither-and-thithering, not to mention an amazingly large amount of dithering for an executive, Control runs away from (almost) everything...and the ending makes up for most of the beginning. But really, editor, couldn't a few of those go-nowhere side trips have been pruned? (eg, Whitby's art project, Cheney's existence) It takes such a boatload of attention to track them.

I think the slightly different angle on the same basic story as *Annihilation* is simply not a strong enough framework to bear the expectations raised by it. The very fact that the main character is known to all and sundry as "Control" is perhaps the single most telling tiny clue: it feels as if Vandermeer wasn't terribly interested in him or in this angle on Area X. Still and all, the sheer...audacity, bravura, something in that family...of the series can't be denied or ignored. Thus a half-star higher rating than I felt the novel *qua* novel earned.

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## Timothy Urges says

The aftermath of *Annihilation* is dealt with in *Authority*. Questions are answered with questions. And minds are forced to open.

This book takes a very different direction from the first book. I thought I was going to be disappointed, but half way through and to the end I came to highly enjoy it. There is a lot of setup. Every little detail is significant.

Maybe I'm a masochist, but I enjoy the confusion.

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