

Zoom Chat Box—Week 12.1 (Tuesday)
VanderMeer, *Annihilation*, Chap 1-2

Drew Gillum : WHAT IS THE PSYCHOLOGIST UP TO

Alexis Voisard : Same Drew, I agree!!

Alspaugh, Cassidy : Who thinks the dolphin was the biologist's husband?

Tiffinnie Reed : Cassi, I thought that too, about the dolphin.

Yasel Rosado : Cassidy samee

Alspaugh, Cassidy : I just started Dawn and I love it.

Drew Gillum : oh my god what if the dolphin was her husband

Drew Gillum : aaaaah

yaseen : what could the spores be? They gave the biologist the ability to new senses and loosen the grip of the psychologist.

kylieking : I wondered the same thing since she was under hypnosis anymore

kylieking : for yaseen ^^

kylieking : wasn't*

Nicole Wallace : Two questions from the scene in chapter 2 when the Biologist is examining the specimens: 1) What are saprotrophic organisms? 2) The sample the anthropologist took, were they saying it looked like mutated human cells? I was a little confused by that part.

Jared Compaleo : In chapter 1, the characters encounter a boar that is charging them with looks of anguish on its face before it suddenly veers leftward. Does the uneasiness on the boar's face foreshadow the feelings that the characters have as they venture into the tower?

Amber Massie : I just can't stop thinking about it, what do each of you think the little black box measures? My initial thought was perhaps radiation levels?

Sarah Clouse : What does it mean that the biologist is the only one who sees the tower as a tower?

McKenzie Stefanoff : In chapter 1, the biologist mentions how they were given journals to write down their experiences, but they were not to talk to one another as it could skew their experience in Area X. With this in mind, considering the book is told from the point of view of the biologist, how much different do you think the book would be had it been told from the point of view of the anthropologist, surveyor, or psychologist? Do you think that our experience as the reader is being skewed because we are only being exposed to the experience from the biologist's point of view?

Responses to McKenzie's question

Drew Gillum : The psychologist would give too much away, the linguist isn't there

gracereibold : I thought it was perhaps that the reader might understand more about what's going on because of her area of expertise

Alspaugh, Cassidy : Because she is a the ghost bird.

Hannah : I thought it was her devotion to observation

Kendra Moran : because of her unique perspective of having her husband go on a previous expedition

Kendra Fields : maybe it's because we think of biologists as empirical/ unbiased, and therefore we just assume her account is scientific without her adding her biased into her observations.

Tiffinnie Reed : I think that she is 'non-emotional', so she has a very open/objective way of viewing things.

Tiffinnie Reed : maybe non-dramatic is a better way to say it

Sarah Clouse : She is also extremely curious about the environment

gracereibold : I think she compartmentalizes well

Alspaugh, Cassidy : It's hard to explain why she is the main character without talking about the later chapters.

brandon butler : Do you think the psychologist has a specific mission to find the creature that is writing on the wall?

Hannah : In ch. 1 they set up a variety of reasons why the team wasn't allowed to have certain tools, share with each other, or talk about their observation. They mention this is to "get rid of bias". Is this a real tactic in the scientific process? It seems like if you don't know what to observe, you'd have too much to observe, and may miss a lot?

Drew Gillum : Is the tower actually an "animal?" early on she describes it as a "gullet"

Paige Dunham : The sample she found that looked like human brain cells, does that imply that the ooze is brain matter from the anthropologist or just that it has human DNA?

kylieking : I kind of agree with Sarah. Why is it that she is the only one who calls it a tower?

Alspaugh, Cassidy : My question is, why is that we start off with four women for this expedition, while it seems (this is ahead the first two chapters) that most of the previous ones had more than four, and were all male? Do you think there is significance to this?

Responses to Cassidy's question

Drew Gillum : Possibly because men might be more prone towards violence?

Alspaugh, Cassidy : ^

Carissa Poehler : that was my thought too

Alspaugh, Cassidy : Because they spoke about a lot them turning on eachother.

Hannah : It reminds me of Stranger in a Strange Land where they use bio-essentialist arguments for setting up the teams. 1st as pairs of *only* married couples. Second as all males for "Stability"

Paige Dunham : Maybe they really don't know, they are just trying different formulas for this experiment, see how it goes with just women.

Alexis Voisard : Crazy that it took 10 expeditions for them to come to that realization

Alspaugh, Cassidy : Yeah, they aren't too cooperative in the end...

Carissa Poehler : My question is similar to Sarah's, what is the significance of the biologist and the tower? It seems like such a sensitive subject when someone calls it a tunnel

gracereibold : Like Jared, I was wondering about the bear in chapter 1. It is symbolic or a foreshadowing of what's to come?

Drew Gillum : Is the tower/tunnel distinction actually meaningful?

Tiffinnie Reed : I thought it interesting that the expedition only sent women? And who is it that 'sends' them on the expeditions? They don't seem to keep in contact, like if they really wanted to see what is going on in Area X, why don't they have an active form of communication? (unless there all ulterior motives to sending people to Area X)

Kendra Fields : I have been doing a lot of research about the imagery of the brain for another paper I am currently writing and how in the 60s there emerged the idea that the brain holds a person's humanity and life rather than the heart. I am curious to know if brain control is a feature of this novel genre, or just a part of this novel? Because if the brain means our humanity, then wouldn't being hypnotized by the psychologist comment how the other group members are already not very human?

Noah Berner : Why is there such a sense of mystery around how the expeditioners were introduced to their mission? They were informed of very little of what they were about to do. I imagine that it is for the drama of the story. There was also the description of what their journal entries were later on that makes me think that Area X may be more understood by the leaders of the town than is let on.

Kailani Sparrow : In the first chapter, they mentioned that the most sophisticated item they had was the glowing red rectangle metal thing. What do you think it might be measuring?

Alexis Voisard : The biologist frequently uses the word “pretend” in Chapter 2, and she uses it in reference to pretending to be a biologist as a child when she imagines the possibilities of the pool ecosystem that has formed in her backyard. I noticed her association of the pool with a level of trauma reminds me a lot of place histories we’ve discussed in this class. In what ways could pretending lead to success in navigating Area X? In a way I think the biologist had to “pretend” to invent a narrative of how the anthropologist died and concluding that the psychologist is up to something no good. Is pretending a useful framework to understand how organisms behave in Area X since there appears to be a strange connection with human behavior and language?

Paige Dunham : If the psychologist in this mission is so powerful with her ability to hypnotize, have all the expeditions had an "all powerful" psychologist who may have had their own agenda?

Kendra Moran : Same as Cassidy, I was wondering the significance of an all women crew. they have not acknowledged yet whether this is a coincidence or pre planned but I suspect it has significance.

Drew Gillum : that seems super sus

Austin Reedy : Who/what is using the the fungus to write on the wall of the tunnel... "Tower"?? The major questions I have I think will be answered later in the book. Also. I am curious if the husband really did die or if this is the government experimenting with Area X with members of the expedition team. So, to what others have said the husband being the dolphin, I can see that. I also thing expedition group 11 was hypnotized to return home by their psychologists as an experiment.

Kailani Sparrow : I’m getting on the bandwagon that the husband is the dolphin

Austin Reedy : Maybe Area X got into her husbands mind, and now recognizes her and knows her true intentions and that is why the spores helped her instead of hurt her.

Alspaugh, Cassidy : It was also hard not to keep thinking of Natalie Portman as I read this.

Hannah : ^Yes

Alexis Voisard : I do not like the backstory in the movie and felt it took so long to get area x lol

Hannah : I felt like just starting immersed in area X echoed their hypnotized entrance+shocking "reentry"

Drew Gillum : Maybe the others would be too likely to tell each other that they were experiencing things differently bc of the spores right away

Drew Gillum : relatable

Hannah : ^ Maybe. I also just wonder how they felt super confident in their perceptions of reality with so much information withheld and with the hypnotizing right away.

Tiffinnie Reed : It seems to be 'consuming', people don't come back from there, and if they do, they aren't the same.

Yasel Rosado : Something that caught my eye was the idea the surveyor brought to surface toward the end of chapter 2: whether the exhibition is some kind of reenactment. I remember reading at the beginning how the Southern Reach reassured them that they could live off the land which seems like a bad idea after reading the book. If this was some kind of reenactment, do you think the Southern Reach knows exactly what they're getting into?

Discussion of writing on the wall

Tiffinnie Reed : and it was legible to the women

Hannah : It reminded me of the movie "Arrival" with the linguists response to language from non-human sources.

Alexis Voisard : it's also interesting that the writing on the wall is a giant run on sentence that never ends, very similar to how this world is still creating itself and expanding

Tiffinnie Reed : good point Alexis

Drew Gillum : it sounds religious

Austin Reedy : ^^

Austin Reedy : Two pairs of boot of prints also...

Hannah : Is that image similar to the movie where she begins to flower?

Alexis Voisard : "what any man can bear" reminds me of a discussion earlier in the semester how humans cannot comprehend or imagine the life of a plant-like organism, or a flower in this instance, in terms of reacting to sunlight and obtaining sources, etc.

Yasel Rosado : Lovee how you picked up on that pattern, how many times she used "pretend"

Hannah : It kind of sounds like a pseudo-autoimmune response/hypothesis.

Discussion of scientific experiments/Area X as experiment

Tiffinnie Reed : experimenting with humans?

Hannah : Milligram's obedience study?

Hannah : Milgram*

Tom Rooney : Yes, Stanley Milgram's obedience study

Tiffinnie Reed : it's like a black hole?

Tom Rooney : Maybe it is like The Protomolecule in the tv show The Expanse

Drew Gillum : First of all, you shouldn't have two independent variables, having an all woman team and the psychologist

Tom Rooney : You can have two independent variables IF you are running lots and lots of replicates

Alexis Voisard : plus the training they're given seems to be contrary to the actual goal, but at the same time when they enter area x, the biologist comments "we knew everything...and we knew nothing"

Hannah : double. blind.?

Tiffinnie Reed : she lost the linguist before they got started

Drew Gillum : ok fine