

The Devil's Library Episode 8 – “Annihilation” by Jeff VanderMeer

[Intro Music]

Pike

Hello and welcome to the Devil's Library. Where Satanists talk books. Um, today we have Leraje.

Leraje

Hail Satan.

Pike

Ligeia.

Ligeia

Hail Satan.

Pike

Lithos.

Lithos

Hail Satan.

Pike

And me that real crawler. It will all become clear soon. Um, we are talking about, um, Annihilation by Jeff Vandermeer. There is a film that apparently you shouldn't watch, but you should read the book. Uh, there will be spoilers. So please don't listen to this if you intend to read the book, but haven't yet.

It's not the sort of book where you can hear the spoilers and still enjoy it. I don't think the storey takes us to Area X, which I know, Area X. Chemical X, Person X. It sounds stupid, but there is stuff to take from this book. I think. Uh, we will talk about it.

We have a biologist whose husband was on one of expeditions to Area X and went missing. The area is supposedly a site of some kind of a, uh, natural disaster and is researched by the government. There's weird stuff happening there. Uh, one expedition just disappears. Members of another one commit suicide. Another one ends in everyone killing each other.

It's all very creepy. So the biologist husband disappears and now she is going on another expedition to Area X with only three other people.

Leraje

Yeah. So there's the biologist, the psychologist, the surveyor, uh, and, um, the anthropologist.

Ligeia

And there was supposed to be a linguist.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

And it's not there.

Leraje

But she chickened out.

Ligeia

Chicken.

Lithos
Very cunning move.

Leraje
Yeah.

Pike
Wow.

Leraje
In fact, you could say she's a cunning linguist.

Lithos
I, uh, left that one out and I didn't know who was going to come for that.

Leraje
Well, I'm happy to bring the tone down immediately. I was gonna say, what do we think about the fact that no one's got a name in this book?

Pike
Well, they are expendable, aren't they? That's what we're told.

Lithos
And the agency that, um. It's not explicitly said. It's the government they call the Southern Reach or something, aren't they?

Ligeia
Southern Reach? Yeah.

Lithos
They explicitly groom, for want of a better word, everyone for the expedition. So they are submitted to intensive training. There's a psychologist who does, uh, some really not nice things to them so that they, they will be obedient. And part of the whole thing is no names will ever be mentioned. So it's kind of like secret ops.

Pike
What I found was strange is considering how violent and dangerous the area is, they just send these random four people and they give them what is described the beginning of a book as basic weapons training. Although later in the book it becomes gruelling training. So uh, maybe it's gruelling but not very useful.

Leraje
Yeah. I think that is because they Southern Reach or who whoever Southern Reach are, they realise that it's pretty futile and pointless even giving them advanced kind of like weapons training. And it's easy to explain to them why they shouldn't have it. But they probably think to themselves, well they're going to come back kind of like weirdly soulless versions of themselves or copies of themselves or whatever the fuck they were.

So there's no point.

Ligeia
I mean that's one of the biggest points of this book as I understood is the limit of human knowledge. So maybe it's connected to the tools or gadgets of whatever they were given to use, which was almost nothing was the useless little box they had on their belt or somewhere the little black thing that was supposed to turn red if they were in danger.

And we learn at the end maybe if we can trust the psychologist that it never does because it's a gimmick. Yeah.

Lithos

It's just a box with a light on it.

Ligeia

Yeah. And it's connected to maybe how they don't have names and the biologist, the person who is the narrator. I uh, don't think she, she needs a name because I really liked how dry she was. Like you can't really read her that much like into her emotions. She's really not that type of person.

And I really loved how, how Jeff did it. I think it worked very well for this storey. Her relationship with her husband was kind of distant. Um. Yeah. Yeah. She was more excited about just looking at the living stuff in the pool or whatever. The, the little environments that she created or she found she was more excited about that than to talk to him.

I mhm. Mean that's kind of like interesting in itself. Right.

Leraje

She seemed to sort of like have this need for an almost total control over her immediate environment. She wanted, she didn't necessarily have it, but she wanted it. So she chose environments to study on her own terms. Like that thing with uh, the swimming pool when she was a kid and then later the rock pool environment.

That was things that she specifically chose. And it was quite fascinating for me to see her kind of like um. I'm not sure it was frustration but to put her in that environment where Area X, I mean where there's literally you've got no control over what happens at all and to see how she kind of like deals with that was quite interesting to me.

Lithos

There's also the thing which is talking about her past relationships and her past life. That very important conversation she has with the psychologist towards the end where the psychologist actually explicitly says to her, how much of what you remember do you know actually happened and how much were memories we implanted during the training process.

Um, because there was all that prep going on where the psychologist managed to control people in the expedition effectively by using a set of key phrases that would reduce their anger or that would cause them to agree to something. And she also says that part of that or strongly suggests that part of that was also kind of destroying or implanting fake memories.

Leraje

She also, or it was explained through her that she'd gained early on in the novel a, ah, kind of immunity to the psychologist's commands. So maybe she'd also gained an immunity to this to not being able to differentiate between a fake memory and a real memory. Who knows? Possible.

Lithos

Yeah, yeah, she mentioned that as well. And the immunity was largely, I think, down to the fact that she inhaled those spores early on.

Leraje

Yeah, yeah.

Lithos

Um, and that affected her.

Pike

Did you believe a psychologist when she said that? Because I took that as a psychologist. Essentially her. Because she was near death, she was bitter and she just said that. I felt she said that out of spite to just mess with the biologist's head. You didn't take it.

Ligeia

That's why I said I don't know if I can trust what she was saying because I didn't trust the psychologist at all. I don't know. Hiding everything. She was manipulative. Uh, maybe all of them were not in their right mind anymore. It's not really, you know, we can't really say in this book, which I love about this book.

It's, it's so not straightforward and it doesn't explain that much. I love it. So maybe, maybe she was also manipulated by something, somebody, the psychologist.

Lithos

Um, Yeah, I think the psychologist is completely untrustworthy.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Lithos

Because she essentially. She performed brainwashing.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Lithos

Before as a prep for the expedition and was not. And part of that brainwashing was she was not allowed to say anything about what it was about or what past expeditions had done. So yes, the word of the psychologist is entirely untrustworthy. Mhm.

Pike

Mm.

Leraje

But maybe even to herself as well. I mean, I think pike. What pike just said about at the end, the psychologist saying, oh yeah, we've implanted fake memories in you. And um, that it was bull. It could have been bullshit just for the psychologist to try and gain some semblance of power.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

And um, it seems to me that one of the biggest themes throughout this whole. The whole book was this kind of like, who controls the information? Who controls what's going on? Who knows what's going on and nobody does. And that includes us too.

Ligeia

Mhm.

Leraje

You know, none of the characters have names. Area X itself grows and um, expands in ways that are completely strange and baffling. We're not given any indication about how Area X came to be or exist or how it works. There's always this kind of like, lack of control on behalf of all of the characters and us, the reader too.

Ligeia

I have a question about that. Like if you compare the almost absolute will to control everything by the uh, southern reach, they want to control these people. And then you have the. The area itself which is completely indifferent. Yeah, it doesn't care, it seems like to me at least. And uh, the question I have for you, because I was thinking to myself, and I still don't know which one of these

extremes is more frightening to you, because it was very disturbing, both of them.

And it's so different.

Pike
Government control.

Ligeia
M. Yeah. Yes, the control. Yes.

Leraje
Yeah. I mean, at the end, I think, because it's something that we, you know, in real life people can, well, theoretically do something about, but we can't really do much about biology. You know, it's kind of like its own thing.

Pike
It starts off presenting area access as very unnatural and creepy. But then when you see it through the biologist's eyes, she analyses it using the language that she knows. You know, she talks. She goes back a lot to this idea of colonisation, I think. Oh yeah, Maybe implied that. She says at some point desolation colonises you.

Another time madness colonises you. And I think the idea was maybe that Area X is expanding because it colonises. Uh, and then you. I don't know. Did you feel like in time that it was becoming more. It was starting to feel more natural, weird.

Ligeia
But the environment.

Leraje
Mhm.

Lithos
Yeah, the environment. I saw that throughout. By the end I was thinking the message here was because it wasn't made clear how Area X came about. But I think there was a suggestion earlier on that there'd been rumours it was some kind of military experiment gone wrong or something. Um, and that it is essentially sort of a metaphor for no matter how much we fuck up, nature will win back.

Pike
Yeah.

Lithos
Um, and that we are just basically we are just poems in the greater scheme of nature. Nature will always win over. And it's one of the things I don't like about the film because they come completely change the storey and they made it. They explained how. How what they called in the film, I think the Shimmer came about and it was a.

Ah, meteor landed. So it was aliens.

Pike
Should we mention what the Shimmer was?

Lithos
Uh, it was basically the Shimmer was what they called Area X in the film. So in the film, they. They called it the Shimmer and there are very few similarities. And I, um. I always have a problem with bad movie adaptations and I do not understand why someone thought this book could be adapted into a movie.

Because a. The visuals, the bits where she explains what's going on and the weird creatures that is better left to your imagination.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Lithos
And the rest is all internal dialogue, which you can't do in a movie without wrecking the movie. So why did they bother making. I'm sorry, I've read. Critics thought a lot about the movie, but I just saw it way before I read this book when it was still on Netflix and just thought it was a nothing burger.

It was very pretty to look at. And having read the book now, which is in a completely different league to the movie, I would sort of reiterate what sort of was hinted at the start, which is, if you've read the book, don't bother watching the movie. If you've watched the movie, read the book.

Leraje
I mean, I think nothing burger is the right word for the movie. Definitely.
Yeah.

Lithos
It doesn't go anywhere.

Leraje
Very pretty, you know, CGI bear, whatever it was. It's pretty cool. But that's about it, really. But, you won't learn anything. You won't. I don't know, it just seemed. It seemed fairly pointless as a movie to me.

Lithos
And I like the fact that in the book they, you know, all. All that was mentioned about Area X coming about was rumours, so no one really knew. And at the end you're still left with, well, you don't know. Um. And I'm looking forward to reading the next few books in the. It's a quadrilogy now, isn't it?

Ligeia
It's not a trilogy. Yeah, I have all of them now because I really. I'm excited.

Leraje
M. I'm kind of hoping it doesn't get explained because I really like the idea of it being an absolute and total mystery, like a locked door mystery. So, I mean, I haven't started reading the other three yet, but, um, I hope it maintains that sense of baffling, you know, that it's almost impenetrable.

Pike
M. I got some feedback on the, uh. On, um, all four from a friend, but I'm not gonna tell you because I want to see what you.

Ligeia
Okay.

Pike
What you think of it yourselves.

Ligeia
Ah, are you planning to read all of them?

Pike
I don't know.

Ligeia
I'm asking. Maybe we can like have a follow up episode.

Pike
Okay.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Pike
Ah, if we decide to read us.

Ligeia
Maybe we can at some point.

Pike
But let's get back to the first book.

Lithos
Yeah, absolutely. Because it is um, it's quite, quite a dense read.

Pike
I'm going to throw out a theory.

Ligeia
Give it here.

Pike
No, it's just a small one. Um, you know when we said that the psychologist was maybe messing with her, there was one thing that the psychologist said that I did believe, which was when she was talking about the hypnosis that they experienced. They had to undergo hypnosis in order to pass through the, the barrier into Area X.

And apparently they had to undergo hypnosis because it's something so awful that they would, they could potentially go mad if they um, were not hypnotised. And uh, psychologists threatened to remove the veil to pull back the veil. And she said that the biologist might go crazy if she remember, she could actually remember what happened.

And I was thinking there was another part in the book, uh, where there was a description of stars in the sky. I don't remember it exactly but it made me think that what if all the normal aspects of Area X a part of the hypnotic uh, illusion. What if it's a brain rationalising what it's seeing but the weird things are the real things?

Lithos
Yeah, the star thing was. And that was towards the end when she was being taken over by the brightness. I think she called it Brightness within, where she said she looked up at the sky but did not recognise any kind of patterns in the stars that she had come across. So yeah, potentially even that was kind of like.

Leraje
Did she not recognise it because her humanness didn't recognise it? Or did she not recognise it because she changed so much and she didn't recognise Earth's basic.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Lithos
Or had she been staring into rock pools for too long?

Ligeia
I mean there are so many ways of, of like uh, looking at this. I was thinking I had also my theories. Now after this beautiful glorious one, mine is gonna sound like it's coming from me. So listen, I had this funny talk with, with um, my child. I'm like, listen, so I don't know, this book is so weird.

So, so my first not impression but like thought when I finished it was is this how animals see our world? Like they're able to understand a few things like imagine you are a pigeon, which is very easy for me, um.

Leraje

You know, not crow. Not a crow then, Ligeia?

Ligeia

It's a bird. So it doesn't really work with this, but, uh, in a way it was helping me to just like, look at it. Like, okay, the pigeons know there is air. They don't know it, but like, like they are still living. But also, do they, do they feel or sense the difference if they live in the countryside or when they come to London and the air is awful and there's like pavement and you know, it's different from grass.

Do they know? Do they remember? Is it confusing? Is it something like we are just so hard to adapt. We, we want to, we want to, as humans think that the intelligence is so high that we are able to adapt to anything. We are doing good, but we are far from being perfect and really intelligent and the nature is able to show us the middle finger very, very quickly.

Which I love that thought because we, we like to think that we are the top of the top and there is a God thinking that we are the creatures of, of his her making. And this book was like, you know what? Off. No.

Pike

No.

Leraje

There is a branch of science I can't remember, psychology, I think that I can't remember exactly what it's called. But that's the basic, the idea that as humans, all the science we've done, all the things we've proved, all the things we've experienced are always limited by our senses. So how we perceive things through, ah, sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste, all these things, there might be a whole universe out there that we're just completely unaware of because we don't have the sensory equipment to perceive it.

Ligeia

And not everybody is humble to think that. Sorry, Lithos.

Lithos

No, there is, there's even part of quantum theory that talks, um, about that kind of thing, which is where the very act of observing something changes it on, you know, you're sending photons towards things. So, so you're actually. The act of observation changes it. And I'm trying to remember, somewhere in the book there was something similar that kind of rang a bell with that idea.

There was a thing where the crawler, which you mentioned earlier, pike, which is a kind of central, it looks like a central organism that is almost controlling that environment, is conducting experiments on humans in the same way that humans conduct experiments on animals and nature.

Ligeia

Yes.

Lithos

So that it is kind of like looking at us like, you know, an unethical scientist would look at lab rats kind of thing, assimilate some of us, causes some of us to Commit suicide or commit acts of aggression on each other. It creates doppelgangers of some of them. And, uh, in the end, when she goes down, the biologist goes down and faces the thing and it kind of like goes right into her mind and causes, uh, untold agonies and then just chucks her out like, I'm bored now, you know?

And after that is not interested in her. It's kind of like I saw a big, uh, analogy there in the way that people would treat lab animals or things they thought not worthy of their regard for experimentation purposes. And it was kind of the reverse nature taking its own back. And that sort of is.

Yeah, lines up with what you've just said. Ligeia as well.

Ligeia

Yeah. Also like, the nature doesn't think that we are the best of the bestest and it just transforms and thrives. The world, as I understood, was thriving, was good, was doing well. Just because it wasn't working for us humans, it was changing those people. That doesn't mean it's. It's wrong. It was just surprising.

Like, m. Okay, I can grow moss now. Okay.

Lithos

With human faces in it.

Ligeia

Oh, yeah.

Pike

You find it quite lovable towards the end, the environment, when she kind of feels drawn to it, uh, especially towards the end, she starts to accept it. Did you feel any of it?

Ligeia

I did, yeah.

Leraje

No.

Pike

Oh, that's because you are the lighthouse keeper.

Ligeia

Pike. Yeah, good point.

Leraje

Um, you asked me this when we did The Haunting of Hill House. You said, yes. You said, would you stay in Hill House? And you were both, yes. And I was like, fucking no way.

Ligeia

So you wouldn't go into this? Uh, that was one of my questions, guys, for you. Like, would you consider. If you, if you had the chance to go to this area, would you, Would you, Would you go?

Leraje

I think a lot of it depends on what I'd know before.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

If we go on the basis that we'd know the same as everybody else before they went in, then I probably would. If I'd read her story before then. Fucking not a chance.

Lithos

Yeah, I definitely got the feeling towards the end that she kind of, uh, found a sense of peace with herself and that she was going, right, I'm just going to explore this, see how far I can go. I'm definitely not going back anymore.

Ligeia
Mhm.

Lithos
It is really good that this is so open to interpretation. And I do kind of like. I think it was you said, Leraje, that you hope the other books don't reveal too much. I kind of suspect what might be happening is there might be one where it's from the. The perspective of the sudden reach, but not much is explained.

One where it's, you know, you could do it from different perspectives and still not explain anything.

Ligeia
Mhm.

Lithos
It's great to have a book where you. It's just where your imagination can conjure up the visuals and the backstories and they all fit.

Pike
So you didn't feel cheated when you were not given answers at the end?

Leraje
No, not at all.

Ligeia
No. It was rewarding.

Ligeia
Right? Rewarded.

Lithos
Yeah. I'd rather. Rather have an open ending that leaves you thinking then I think when you really feel cheated is when everything's explained and it's kind of. Oh, uh. Is that all?

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
Ah, yeah.

Lithos
Like the ending of Lost.

Ligeia
Oh, God, no, no, no. And it was filled with these paradoxical, surprising, like, imagery. Like the words, you know, I think he was putting words like horrifying, um, what monster? Like a sluggish monster and glistening, uh, light or star in one sentence. So there was this horror and the beauty of it. I absolutely love it.

It's exactly how I see. Why do I love horror? Because I see the beauty of it. And putting these words in one sentence all the time, like I was paying attention. It was intentional and that's confusing. And it's like, so are we scared or is it beautiful? And can we not be both?

Pike
It was both.

Leraje
It was, it is.

Ligeia

And how. How awesome that is to create that with words.

Lithos

There was something almost in some descriptions. I'm going to mention a problematic name here. Oh, no, he was a massive dick and a racist. But there was something almost Lovecraftian about the grotesqueness of the horror descriptions. Uh, the unimaginableness, the fact that it will send you insane if you actually see the real thing.

That's, you know, straight out of Lovecraft kind of mythology. Um, but it was so much more than a Lovecraft mythology storey. There was a lot more to it. And there was no racism or bigotry.

Ligeia

Exactly. And no misanthropy and no monster. Actually, the monster was almost like it doesn't even necessarily need to be there. Is it. Do we know? Is she just, you know, transforming?

Lithos

Yeah, transforming and building an environment and experimenting with what walks in.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Lithos

Um, basically is how I saw it.

Pike

I had this batshit crazy theory at one point when I was reading that maybe, ah, they are inside an organism, that area X is an organism. Um, there are a few moments, uh, where they are going through the barrier. Sometimes the reference, I don't remember exact wording, but it suggested that they might have met some kind of a monster there.

Um, and maybe got. I don't know, I thought maybe it could get swallowed. When we go inside the tower, the tower is alive. Right. The walls are pulsating and it's, it's a living creature. There were some other moments where, for example, where the doppelgangers, uh, of the dead scientists appear. It's almost like cells replicating.

Ligeia

There was a lot of the DNA thingy.

Pike

Yeah. There was a lot of biological stuff in there.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Picking up on what you just said there, pike, about the barrier. No one, no human ever came back from Area X as I understood it.

Ligeia

Yep.

Leraje

Could they need to be dead to get into Area X? Could they be ghosts of themselves? Biological ghosts?

Lithos

I think the biologist posits that idea at some point when she's amusing that maybe I am dead or maybe I needed to be dead to come here.

Leraje

Because the only, the only beings that have ever got out is that one expedition and they weren't really them themselves and they only existed for a short time after they got out. Uh, that was my crazy theory that the barrier, crossing the barrier essentially kills them, or at least kills some part of them, and they kind of like they're still biologically present in Area X but also dead.

Which again is a very Lovecraftian idea.

Lithos

Yeah. That her husband who came back, the thing that posed as her husband that came back was completely different. When she read her husband's journal, he'd stayed there and he'd just gone travelling. So obviously what came back was a doppelganger which then could not live on the other side because he died of systemic cancer within a few months of coming out.

Um, so that whatever Area X creates once it goes back to the other side can't survive there. But then also the theory I think, uh, is sort of suggested that maybe it is part of it trying to expand is sending emissaries out to the other side to try and expand Area X to the other side.

Leraje

Doesn't somebody say at ah, one point that Area X is expanding? Not very fast, but the area of it is. Is growing?

Ligeia

Yes.

Lithos

I think the psychologist in, in a death throws says that. Or it might have been in one of the journals.

Ligeia

I think it was in the journals.

Pike

I think it was suggested that that's the main problem that some reach are concerned with is that it's. Yeah, the area is expanding.

Ligeia

It's getting bigger. Mhm, mhm.

Leraje

Why do you think they kept sending expeditions when it must have been fairly clear, you know, after the. I don't know, 15th or 16th expedition or whatever number we got up to that nobody was, was coming out and no information was really coming back. So, uh, maybe this is something that will get cleared up in the later.

Lithos

M. It could have been because they're government bastards. It could have been research, Secret Services.

Pike

But I wonder if they were also hoping to humanise it.

Leraje

Colonise it?

Pike

Yeah, colonise it backwards. Yes. Because, uh, Area X was absorbing these human traits. I mean, they were distorted, but it was still animals. What is it? Dolphin with a human eye. And the crawler was writing in our language, Biblical gibberish.

Leraje

Yeah, but it wasn't conscious, was it?

Ligeia

No. I m was thinking, was it just mimicking some fragments of what humans wrote or something? Like, was it just the projection of the people who were looking at it? Maybe it wasn't even really writing it. Was it just like what we're. You know what I mean?

Lithos

I think it was taking. Taking parts of. Of what it had assimilated from the humans it had assimilated from brain.

Ligeia

It didn't really make sense because it was just like, frack, frack structure.

Lithos

And, um, it, um, created something almost , uh, sounding like scripture.

Ligeia

You don't know. AI!

Lithos

Yeah, AI, scripture. If AI wrote the Bible, it almost.

Ligeia

Looks like it's, it's. It makes sense, but it actually doesn't make any sense. When you read it, it's like, okay, there is a sentence. Let's read the sentence. What? Then you go back like, nope, it.

Lithos

Sounds more profound than it is. It's kind of profile, struggling fruit and.

Ligeia

Like, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Lithos

Yes.

Pike

This was written in 2014. Right. So there are these prescient moments with like, you know, the, the nonsense text, uh, like, AI, there's another moment. Do you remember where they were talking about masks? It had a very co. Moment where she said, yeah. Oh, you think this mask will. Will protect you, but it will not.

Lithos

Of our southern reach. Something like MK Ultra? Is that their whole purpose? Like they are. It's actually a more of a military thing rather than trying to colonise the area, stop it expanding, and try and use it for nefarious purposes. I mean, that, that is what governments have tended to do with new stuff they discover.

You know, what's the first? Can we, can we use it to blow the. Out of people?

Leraje

Oh, uh, right. So like the Weyland Corporation in the Alien universe.

Pike

Yeah, it would make sense because then it would explain why they were not given names, why they were so expendable, why they were not sent as a big group or given decent security. Then there's a moment, I don't remember who, where they pick that up, but someone mentions something and there's not even a full sentence.

We just over here, the phrase remote viewing, which I think they were referring to 7 reach, rather than the monsters and the whole.

Lithos

The fact that they didn't bring any modern technology. Now, the excuse that was given is it doesn't work. However, later on, um, the psychologist or someone says that they did actually take video footage of some description, making it sound like it was really fucked up. Which, again, made me think that maybe modern technology did work, but they didn't want any evidence of what went on over there.

Brought back kind of thing.

Ligeia

Why do you think also they left all those diaries, though, those journals there? I understand sort of why they were giving them to these people, to make them think that this is important and they are coming back. But why were they just left there?

Lithos

I think everyone who left a diary in that place had found that place. And by the time, you know, they'd finished their diary or they'd written it, they knew they were going to die there. They were never coming back.

Ligeia

They just left it there because they knew. It's done.

Lithos

Yeah, it's, um, done. They're never coming out of there alive again.

Ligeia

So you think, like, those people actually were putting those on that hill?

Lithos

Yeah. The people who were there were leaving their journals because there was no way they were going to get them back. Because by that time, either they'd witnessed everyone slaughtering each other, they'd seen doppelgangers, they realised this was beyond anything they could comprehend and they were never going to get out of there.

So what do you do? Well, you leave your journal where all the other journals are. That's the way I saw it, anyway, you know, and they started getting. They started getting put there because it was a trap door, hidden, and they thought this is a safe place to put journals. That's my guess.

Leraje

It did have an air of kind of like a monument about it. Yes, yes. Right from the start, the biologist was kind of like, fairly obsessed with the. The lighthouse itself, as well as the tunnel, obviously.

Lithos

Yeah, yeah.

Leraje

The tower, as she calls it. Um, and it became clear that other members of other expeditions had also been kind of, like, distracted by what the lighthouse is and where it was and with a need to go to it. So I think everybody who is in Area X wanted to go there. So I think Lithos is right.

It's just somewhere that people naturally ended up. And then when they realised that their time was, like, up. They just wrote their thoughts and left their.

Ligeia
Interesting.

Leraje
Their journal in the. In the. The communal monument of other journals.

Lithos
The. The writing of the. Of the whole thing I found at the start, and this is just my personal thing, um, because I have a thing with writing style and some writers I find hard to get into their style. And I found the style at first really puzzling and hard to get into.

And then towards the end I was reading it really quickly because it was like quite a page turner. What the fuck's going on here? And I realised the reason it was written like that was that this was actually what she had written in four or five days at the top of the tower at the end.

So it was meant to be a disjointed, completely personal really, you know, going from this to that type journal. Just her, uh, putting her thoughts together.

Leraje
Yeah, it was like a series of diary entries. More than a kind of like constant narrative.

Lithos
Yeah. Because at the start I was thinking, oh, I'm not quite sure I like this style. And then as it went on, I thought, uh, oh, I'm getting what he's doing here. And towards the end it was like, oh, that was rather clever what you did there.

Leraje
So one of the things that I read, uh, in other people's reviews of this was the idea that one of the subtextual meanings of the book was the idea that our human relationship with the natural world is completely broken. And that Area X is a comment on that. Do you think that's a valid take?

Ligeia
Yes.

Lithos
Yep. It's certainly the main thing I took.

Ligeia
From it how, like, any of the five senses we have is just not enough. And you can't really. It's not. Not enough to use them all together. It's still not helping you to understand this new situation, this new world, whatever, and how I. I think the horror of this storey for me was also in this lack of, you know, the education we get, the science we.

We think is top. And. And, you know, we have gone so far with understanding everything and then you end up in a place like this as a scientist, as a person who should be really using all the knowledge that we as humans have. And it's not just one scientist. You know, they were trying to cover a few fields and it was for nothing.

I found that maybe the scariest to think about. Also very beautiful because it is very calming to me. Like, we don't have to be trying to conquer everything or let's just love this nature and see the beauty of. Of the bigness of it and understand that we are just creatures like any other animal and we should be, you know, taking care of it before it keeps.

Before it takes us and changes us. Like, you know, that is.

Leraje

That's also true, that idea that nature can bite back.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

I mean, uh, the linguist died essentially because the psychologist, I think, was trying to use the linguist to try and, uh. Sorry, not the linguist, the anthropologist.

Lithos

Yeah.

Leraje

To try and understand the uh, the words that the crawler was kind of like.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

I don't know, farting, excreting onto the walls of the. And you know, she died. But because of that and not because it wasn't. She didn't die because she was trying to understand it as a direct consequence, she died because the crawler basically, uh, didn't uh, let her go in the same way that she did the.

It did the biologist. M so this idea that nature is something that is essentially uncontrollable at the end of all analysis.

Lithos

Yeah, yeah. It's not just nature fighting back, but the idea that, um, nature is fighting back by going, well, I'm going to break the laws of nature that you think you've understood humans. Hold my beer. You think you're the boss dog here? My beer.

Ligeia

Questions and no, there is no answers. It's mostly about like really confronting the unknowable.

Lithos

M so maybe the, the fact that they left, that they weren't allowed to bring any modern instruments was because they actually literally didn't work. Again, that was a way of nature like that. Yeah, yeah.

Ligeia

Maybe they would be just, you know, wasting time trying to figure out how to use the phone or a PC or whatever, and they wanted them to just like walk around and actually go and explore.

Lithos

And the video they took was literally fucked up. Yeah, yeah.

Leraje

I mean, uh, everything that we have in terms of scientific equipment or video or audio recording devices, they're all just extensions of the senses that we already use.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

So if Area X is something that defies comprehension through use of our senses, it is therefore logical that it will defy understanding of the devices we use to extend our senses.

Pike

I thought also another way, another possible reason why they couldn't use, uh, that was floated somewhere in the book, was that we were Southern Reach, were worried about the Area X assimilating their technology somehow and using it and it becoming a weapon, which is, I guess, how the military think.

Lithos

Yes.

Ligeia

Yeah, I did not notice that. I don't know. Yeah, see, I should re read it again.

Lithos

Yeah, I think there was. That was mooted in the book Yes.

Leraje

I mean, she suggested so many different things. I mean, she even raised the possibility of it being supernatural Area X at one point on a couple of occasions.

Pike

But I like your theory much better.

Lithos

Which one out of the many ones?

Pike

The one that. The one that they just wouldn't work.

Lithos

Yeah, I mean, I can't imagine that the Crawler would really have much use for 5G mobile or video phone or anything. You know, it's like.

Leraje

Hello, uh, this is the Crawler here. I'm all out. Fresh brains.

Ligeia

I need you.

Leraje

Could you send another expedition, please?

Pike

This is the first person to declare themselves to be a Crawler today.

Ligeia

Yes.

Leraje

Yeah, that passage, um, when the. The crawler went into Invaded, took over, however you want to describe it, that was just brilliantly written, the whole bit.

Ligeia

Right. M m. That was intense. I liked it a lot. I read it few times.

Lithos

Yeah, there was some very interesting use of words in describing things as well. Some very unusual phrases used. That kind of. At first glance you're like, what, what does she mean? And then you kind of like, get the idea. Oh, right, okay.

Yeah. Because she's trying to describe something that is essentially indescribable by our language model.

By our language. You know, the whole thing is what she's trying to describe is not in any way describable because it is not anything we've ever come across.

Leraje

Yeah. Because again, we're limited by the senses that we have as humans and by.

Lithos

The vocabulary we use.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Oh, yeah. I think maybe that's why the linguist, uh, she was mentioned in the storey, like she was supposed to be there. We didn't need this information, but maybe we did, because I think it was actually telling us, you will not understand the words anyway. It's absolutely not necessary that this person is even going to be in the storey.

So that's what I thought. And also, guys, uh, so tell me, tunnel or a tower?

Lithos

I like the idea of the tower. The upside down tower. Tower that descends into Earth. Very satanic concept.

Ligeia

I love it.

Leraje

I thought of. I thought of it as a completely different thing. I thought of it as an oesophagus.

Lithos

Uh, yeah, so. So the bright door at the end was the arsehole?

Leraje

No, I thought they went in the arsehole! All right. And the bright door at the end could be the mouth.

Pike

I thought that was the barrier.

Leraje

Yeah, I think it probably was.

Lithos

Yeah. I think it was made quite clear. It was. And she couldn't. Not only did she not want to leave, but she couldn't because the Closer she got, the more the pain got bad.

Ligeia

It could, it could have been something, even something else. Like, you know, if it was a Mother Earth, that could be something else. And um, we could have been approaching her uterus. The pain was there and all that stuff. But you know, but I really like the tower. Like, why not? It can be a tower in the ground.

I loved it so much I had to ask you because like, tunnel is just boring. Now.

Pike

When I was reading about the tower, I was thinking somehow of, you know, Tarkovsky's, um, "Stalker".

Ligeia
I love that movie. Oh yes, yes.

Pike
Underground spaces.

Leraje
We'll talk more about that. Pike, talk more about that.

Pike
I don't know what else to say about it. Just that it was always in the background for me when I was reading that book. Uh, I guess, you know, the parallels are obvious. It's uh, some kind of an area that's ah, under some kind of military control, but nobody goes there, um, that has a life of its own.

And some kind of, for want of a better word, magic.

Leraje
It was almost a kind of like natural, um, liminal space. Uh, but not, not in that kind of like room or building way, in a much more biological way.

Ligeia
Yeah, it was. Now when you're saying it was just these marshlands and the wood and the tall grass and it was all just going into the sea, as if I remember correctly, it was on the edge of the sea and it was just like growing the marshland. That's, that's really liminal. And now you have that lighthouse there.

Pike
Oh no.

Leraje
That kind of like confused me or intrigued me. So they crossed the barrier in an inland way facing out towards the lighthouse and the sea.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
So there must be another barrier somewhere in the sea, in the ocean. Does that make sense if it's a space, if it's an enclosed space? M. Area X.

Ligeia
Isn't the sea the barrier?

Leraje
I don't think so. Because it said uh, it said part way that her husband had travelled by sea and gone to an island. M. Or was gonna go to an island. And several of them had walked up the coast and not found a way out.

Ligeia
M. I mean he said he wants to go, but we don't know if that was successful. M. Do we? Do we? I don't know.

Lithos
I don't think it can be understood as a, as a space in the sense of geographical space. Mhm. In. In the sense of occupying a space on the map other. Other than in, in the actual inverted commas. Real world. The world of um, sort of the MK Ultras or whatever, you know, the, um, the people are who sent them over, they, um, they might occupy a certain area on the map.

But I got the feeling that once inside, it's kind of like the space extends in all directions and you can't find an edge unless you find the portal out.

Leraje
Yeah, once you're in it, you're in it.

Lithos
Yeah.

Leraje
Yeah.

Lithos
And there's only so many ways in. And one of the ways out, potentially, is through the bottom of the tower, which he found. And the other way is the way they came in. But that, yeah, they are seeing on the other side. The, um, southern reach are seeing it as expanding potentially as an area on the map that you don't go into, but there's only a certain way in.

And once you're in, the area is a lot bigger because the rules of physics that we know no longer apply.

Leraje
That makes more sense. Yeah.

Pike
Yeah, I think that's right.

Ligeia
Why did you think the lighthouse had the barbed wire thingy or some kind.

Pike
Of danger coming from the water?

Ligeia
Cthulhu. There we go. Yeah. Not pigeons. I don't know. Okay. Yeah, we're back on Lovecraft. I feel better now.

Leraje
All right, let's. Let's do pitchforks. Pike?

Pike
I'll say six pitchforks out of ten. Um, I had some criticisms for it, um, that we didn't get to, but, um, I also enjoyed reading it as an. On the balance, I'm happy I read it.

Leraje
Okay, Ligeia?

Ligeia
For me, this was a nine. Really liked it. I loved that world.

Leraje
Okay. Lithos?

Lithos
I was going to give it a seven and a half. I liked it. I had some stylistic issues, but I want to read more because I suspect, uh, the follow ups might become better.

Leraje
And I will give it an eight, um, because I did very much enjoy it and I, as you all know, I'm a big fan of things that don't give easy answers or any answers.

Ligeia
Ligotti! Hello!

Leraje
Twin Peaks, David Lynch

Lithos
David.

Leraje
Yeah. Yeah, all of it.

Ligeia
You're there.

Leraje
Yeah.

Lithos
And there was found footage.

Leraje
It's a perfect book. Give it a 10, right?

Lithos
Yes. No, I think, honestly, I think I. I, uh, strongly suspect that, that once he's got. Now he's got the narrative styled out and the whole idea of that universe. I, uh, I'm looking forward to reading more.

Leraje
All right, so that was our take on Annihilation by Jeff Vandermeer. Next up, it's my choice. And what we're going to be reading next is Winter Tide by Ruthanna Emrys. So we've mentioned Lovecraft a few times in this episode and Winter Tide ties into Lovecraft a little bit. Um, if, dear listener, you want to read along with us, I would suggest refreshing your mind on The Dunwich Horror, which is one of Lovecraft's storeys. [Editors note - Leraje screwed up, he meant The Shadow Over Innsmouth, not The Dunwich Horror]

And, uh. Yeah. Anybody else got anything they want to say before we do hails?

Ligeia
Read the book.

Lithos
Oh, just. Yeah, read the book. And if you've. If you've seen the film.

Leraje
Oh, God, it's so much better than the movie.

Lithos
Read the book. Don't watch the film. I'm sorry. Don't I. This is personal. I've read what the critics have said about the film. It's dog. I'm sorry? It's CGI dog. They got some good actors, but it's absolute dogshit compared to the book.

Leraje
It's a very pretty bow on absolutely nothing at all.

Lithos
Yep.

Pike
I love it when we end on Lithos ranting.

Lithos
Yeah, it's. This time it wasn't a Catholic church. Miracles happen.

Ligeia
We have an exception.

Leraje
Okay. Until next time. Uh, I've been Leraje. Hail Satan.

Lithos
Um, I've been Lithos. Hail Satan.

Pike
Pike here. Hail Satan.

Ligeia
I'm Ligeia. Hail Satan.