Annihilation by Jeff Vandermeer

So in my latest attempt to further break Goodread's recommendation algorithm, I decided to read *Annihilation*, partially because it doesn't fit particularly neatly into any category, but also because I love the narrative trope of nature reclaiming that which man thought they had dominated long ago. I like it especially when mixed with science fiction-ish weirdness.

The story is narrated by an unnamed biologist whose husband was one of the casualties from the last expedition into Area X. The rest of her expedition also consists of women without names, a psychologist, a surveyor, and a geologist. There's mention of a linguist who did not make it over the border, an event none of them remember. As they progress in their explorations, they find a structure that was not mentioned in their briefings (despite its nearness to their base camp) and that things are clearly not as they should be in this patch of wilderness. Nothing and no one there is what they initially appear to be in Area X.

The biologist's muted state of mind is the first thing that I noticed while reading this. Her mourning and regrets regarding what happened to her husband results in a blanket of numbness over her interactions with the rest of her expedition, especially through the first part of the book. Later on it becomes increasingly clear how much she misses him and how much she wants to have a lasting connection to her memory of him rather than the shell that Area X spat out.

For all of how short this book was, there are a lot of machinations going on in the space between the words. The government organization that sends explorers into Area X has been covering up exactly how many people they've sent in and haven't heard anything back from. The psychologist has an agenda that may or may not be in everyone's best interests. The surveyor is understandably jumpy about the lack of details and then there's the wilderness itself. I cannot overstate how much of a character Area X is. It is a shifty character, fluctuating between untamed wilderness and alien invader and it gets very scary very quickly when I realized how fast it could move from one state to the other.

I loved the creepy factor involved in *Annihilation*. It was like wearing an incredibly itchy pair of tights, you might ignore it for a bit but then you move and they are the very itchy tights again and they are all over your legs and you are stuck with them. I loved the shock I felt at the scenes in the lighthouse and the tower and the heavy weight of anticipation that the story dropped on the narrator. The only criticism I can think of is that sometimes the narrator seems a little too remote and lost in her thoughts, but then I remember that there's a wilderness that eats people and that made up for all of it for me. I cannot wait for the sequel to come out.