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**Response to:**

**Annihilation**

(Alex Garland)

For the last week of our STS class, we watched and discussed Alex Garland’s movie “Annihilation”, a [science fiction](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_fiction) [horror film](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horror_film) based on Jeff Vander Meer’s novel of the same name. The story was about a group of female scientists, who went on a mission to discover the secrets of the “Shimmer”, a mysterious quarantined zone caused by some alien body crashing into the lighthouse, gradually expanding and increasing its boundaries. The authorities had organized many expeditions before, but nobody managed to come back, except for Kane, who returned with lost memory and multiple organ failures. In the first scene, we saw Lena, Kane’s wife and the only survivor of this final mission, being interrogated by an officer at US government’s Area X facility.

Kane was taken away by some soldiers on the way to hospital, and was put in intensive care at some unknown place. There, Lena met Dr. Ventress, a psychologist who prepared a new scientific expedition into the Shimmer, with Lena and three other women: physicist Josie Radek, [geomorphologist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geomorphology) Cassie Sheppard (Cass), and paramedic Anya Thorensen. Lena herself was a cellular biology professor at John Hopkins University, who also worked as a soldier for the US army previously.

After arriving in the Shimmer, the women lost all connection from the outer world, and also experienced hypnotism. They found many strange things in the Shimmer area, including several types of flowers growing on same specie plant and an alligator with shark’s teeth. The shimmer seemed to trigger mutations among creatures of different species, something impossible in the world outside the Shimmer zone. Josie studied these mutations, and inferred that the Shimmer functions as a [prism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prism) for [DNA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DNA), distorting and transforming everything that falls within its boundaries, including the expedition members' own bodies.

The idea of Shimmer acting as prism, I found it really interesting. When white light passes through prism, it refracts and disperses into rainbow-colored lights. Just like the white light is a combination of all colors, DNA is a combination of genes (in other words, characteristic features), unique for all species. The Shimmer separates these genes, which are then scattered among the beings of different species, making new combinations. The visual expression of this prism effect, whether it is different colors of flowers on same plant, or Lena’s blood test showing the cells separating into multiple-colored bodies after coming in contact with the Shimmer, all this made the whole phenomenon beautiful to watch and easy to understand.

One thing I did not really like was how the movie presented sacrificing one’s life, to save the others, as some sort of self-destructive behavior, and emphasized on this idea again and again. This all started with Sheppard telling Lena that people joined this ‘suicidal’ mission because either they had lost someone precious, or life was cruel to them in some other way. At that point, I thought that at least Kane and Ventress put their lives on line, solely for the sake of helping the world. But later, we learnt that Kane was also struggling emotionally because he found out that Lena was cheating on him with her coworker Dan, and Ventress was actually a cancer patient who was dying soon anyways. I could not understand what message they were trying to convey, by showing that things like humanity, loyalty or selflessness do not exist, and people take the risk to help others just because they lose their own reason and happiness to live.