

# Annihilation (2018)

Rated R. Running time: 1hours 55 min.

Our content ratings: Violence 5; Language 3; Sex/Nudity 1.

Our star rating (1-5): 4

*My heart is in anguish within me,  
the terrors of death have fallen upon me.  
Fear and trembling come upon me,  
and horror overwhelms me.  
And I say, "O that I had wings like a dove!  
I would fly away and be at rest;  
truly, I would flee far away*

*Psalm 55:4-7*



All members of the team of soldiers are women, but not all will return from their expedition. (c) Paramount Pictures

Director Alex Garland and his co-writer Jeff VanderMeer's sci-fi film is not a faith-based work, so the team facing the unknown would not have thought of turning to the Psalms in their extreme distress. However, they probably would have identified with the psalmist's feelings and his desire for flight. You will too if you watch it.

Combining sci-fi and horror, this tale of an American team sent into a contaminated area of Florida swampland to find out what happened to an earlier military expedition that did not return will remind some viewers of *Alien*, in regard to what happens inside the bodies of the victims of a mysterious alien menace that crashed in an area dominated by a light house three years earlier, creating a zone called "the shimmer." Inside this zone native plants and animals mutate into dangerous species that prove deadly to any human crossing paths with them.

The film is noteworthy, not just for its creative special effects, but also in that the team is exclusively female and mixed racially, consisting of biology professor Lena (Natalie Portman) and four others expert in their fields. Lena's husband Kane is the only member of the lost team that had managed to return alive, so she has a special stake in the second expedition. His life is threatened by whatever happened to him in the shimmer, so she hopes to be able to figure out the cause and save his life. What transpires during the women's journey and eventual arrival (for some of them) at the lighthouse will send her into such a traumatic state of mind that will keep you riveted to the screen.

Not for the faint-hearted, the mostly female cast ought not to put off adventure-loving young men, who will come to admire the courage and resourcefulness of the women and the nonstop action and suspense. The director of *Ex Machina* has given us a film that, like Stanley Kubrick's *2001: Space Odyssey* will challenge us to find its meaning and thus haunt us enough to return to the screen to watch it again. I am still uncertain about its meaning.

*This review with a set of discussion questions will be in the May issue of Visual Parables.*