

Room to Read Book Group – July report by Annie Clouston

This month we discussed ***The Archivist*** by V S Nelson. We all disliked it intensely, so much so, that only the person who suggested it finished it. Mostly we all make an effort, even if the book isn't our cup of tea, to finish it. However, in this case, waves of revulsion seem to have come over us all, disabling our commitment to do the right thing by book group standards. This was a first! I went way beyond my adopted rule for naff books, ie, if I'm not getting anything from it by page 100 minus my chronological age I give up, by struggling through 90 pages.

So why did we take against it unanimously? Written apparently for the Young Adult age-group, it is in the horror/fantasy genre, its rationale perhaps to grasp the taboo subject of death and explore the nature of mortality and the possibility of immortality. I have cribbed from its own blurb:

"There is no God waiting for you in paradise. No afterlife where friendships severed by death are reformed and families reunited. There is only the Aether, a dimension of insatiable hunger that will possess you no matter the life you led."

The book has a mystifying format, which takes a while to fathom, first written in one voice – that of a waif-like creature with an abusive boyfriend who has rapacious designs on her under-age sister, and then in the voice of the Archivist, with whom she makes an unholy alliance. At times it is violent and almost always tasteless. Searching for something positive to say about it proved fruitless.

There could be no good reason to recommend this book to anyone, so we rated it no stars on that score and only one/five for book group discussion. We hope for a more edifying experience in August with ***If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things*** by Jon McGregor.