

NOTES FROM: *Zero K*, by Don DeLillo

SUMMARY: Literary fiction doesn't get nearly the same level of attention as it did even a few years ago, but Don DeLillo is one of the grand masters of the genre and this is one of my favorite books of his. It's also about two of my favorite topics: staring down Death and embracing Life.

Zero K is a shorter novel about a man named Jeffrey Lockhart, whose father, Ross, a billionaire in his sixties, is the main investor in this secret compound way out in the desert, where they work to cryogenically preserve rich people for a future time when medical science can save them and bring them back to life.

Jeff is...less than enthusiastic about the aims and purposes of this secret compound, distrusts his father, and fears for the well-being (physical, mental, spiritual) of Ross's wife, Artis, who is set to go under the ice for the foreseeable future.

Against all this, Jeff is committed to experiencing "the mingled astonishments of our time, here, on earth" while balancing, on the one hand, the horrors of the world and, on the other, the "absurd good news" of being alive at all. I *loved* virtually everything about this book and I wish it were as long as DeLillo's other classic, *Underworld*!

"The earth is the guiding principle. Return to the earth, emerge from the earth."

"It's a moment never to be thought of except when it's in the process of unfolding."

"I liked reading books that nearly killed me."

"We can measure our time in seconds."

"What's the point of living if we don't die at the end of it?"

"She made me see myself, briefly, as the person who was standing here being looked at."

"You die as someone with a certain name and with all the history and memory and mystery gathered in that person and that name. But do you wake up with all of that intact? Is it simply a long night's sleep?"

"They would come and take her. They would wheel her into an elevator and take her down to one of the so-called numbered levels. She would die, chemically prompted, in a subzero vault, in a highly precise medical procedure guided by mass delusion, by superstition and arrogance and self-deception."

"Either way she dies, I thought. At home, in bed, husband and stepson and friends at her side. Or here, in this regimental outpost, where everything happens somewhere else."

“I’m someone who’s supposed to be me.”

“These jobs were swallowed up by the words that described them. The job title was the job.”

“But are you anyone without others?”

“Half the world is redoing its kitchens, the other half is starving.”

“The defining element of life is that it ends.”

“When do you stop being who you are?”

“Ready to die does not mean willing to disappear.”

“How do we stand with others when the things that separate us are imposed at birth, when the separation haunts us and follows us day and night?”

“All the voice commands and hyper-connections that allow you to become disembodied.”

“I told him that what was gathering could well be a kind of psychological pandemic.”

“There’s no end to not knowing. And no end to not living forever.”

“I wanted to hear what Ben-Ezra had described, the oceanic sound of people living and thinking and talking, billions, everywhere, waiting for trains, marching to war, licking food off their fingers. Or simply being who they are. The world hum.”

“There was the question of who they were, everything that had gone before, the inexpressibly dense experience of a man or woman alive on the earth.”

“The mingled astonishments of our lives, here, on earth.”

When does utilitarian become totalitarian?

“The only here is where I am. But where is here. And why just here and nowhere else.”

“Am I someone or is just the words themselves that make me think I’m someone.”

“I don’t want what people are supposed to want.”

“We are born without choosing to be. Should we have to die in the same manner?”

“Isn’t it a human glory to refuse to accept a certain fate?”

“Artis belonged here, Ross did not.”