



Canis Major

Jay Nichols

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After seventeen-year-old Russell Whitford confronts and kills a rabid dog, he seeks to prevent the news from reaching the dog's owner, whose hair-trigger temper is well-known in the small town of Riley, Alabama. Russell can count on silence from two of the three witnesses who watched him hack Hector Graham's Bloodhound to death, but the third, Michael O'Brien, isn't like the other two. His allegiance isn't as fixed as Russell would like it to be.

When the Centers for Disease Control arrive in town, and dogs begin running away, and gun shots start ringing out in the dead of night, Russell's summer goes from bad to worse. All he wants to do is play his piano and guitar, maybe walk his dog every now and then, not have the weight of the universe hoisted upon his shoulders.

Canis Major Details

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Lorena says

I struggled with this one.. It had some interesting concepts but too much unnecessary detail ruined it for me. The amount of character interalization in the book was a bit off putting. I just couldn't get into the book and really connect with it and the whole hacking the dog up turned my stomach.

Dani says

This was a hard book to get through. I could really see what the author was trying to get at, and what he was trying to do, but it just didn't work for me. Like the modern classics, this book is less about the stuff that happens and more about the struggles of life and being a human being in those events that happen. However, a majority of the book is internal and within the characters' heads. I've seen good authors who can *show* their point without actually telling it, allowing the reader to infer and make their own revelations. For example, in John Steinbeck's East of Eden, the reader can see and feel so much, without directly being told what to feel. However, because so much of this book was internal, the reader too often heard or was told everything. Nichols lacks the subtlety to show instead of just telling.

Also, while I said this book is about the struggles of life and living, it really only focuses on one main emotion: self-hate. The book lacks dynamics. I read and read, analyzing and feeling the characters and picking up on motifs and themes, until it occurred to me that everyone just hates themselves. Each action is powered by their own self-loathing. They try to blame it on others, or the town, or the situation, but everyone just hates themselves. Is it too bleak? No, it's too flat. The author tries to make the characters complex, but it isn't fully evolved.

To anyone thinking about reading this book, it's certainly worth a shot. As I mentioned, this book would work best for those familiar with the style of illustrating life, emotions, and struggles, and would not do well for those who like only easy and lighter reads that focus more on adventures and outward actions.

Cate says

This is a debut novel from this Author and a good start to a promising career. However, this is anything but a light and easy read and those readers who like their literature served up in this manner may not want to take on its 500+ pages. Longer books are my thing, and so I took it on and was glad I did.

One thing that the reader will immediately notice when reading this book is that it is not so much about events that happen, but more about the struggle of being human when those events happen, and happen they will; because the majority of the book takes place within its characters heads. This leads to there being very little development of the characters as the reader is inhabiting their thoughts, but this worked for me. I liked the way the Author puts the reader in the position of an observer to everything the characters were hearing or being told; however, the downside of this style of writing for me was that it left very little to my imagination. I would have preferred a bit more subtlety on the part of the Author in regards to their showing me events rather than just telling me. One thing the Author does well is bringing to the front of the work the emotion that links all their characters together; out of all the struggles of life and living they go through, their connection is an all encompassing self-hate which fuels their actions. It is a rather bleak outlook and, leads to

the inevitable result that none of the people encountered in the book are willing to take responsibility for their actions, and blame it on their environment, other people or the situation they find themselves in. However, this is part of the book and, in my opinion, without this it would have been flat and a trial to get through. I kept hoping that the characters would find some way to overcome their self-loathing and accept things without having to place blame.

As a debut novel, there is a lot of improvement that can be made; evolving the characters more would be a start and not making them too complex that the reader is lost. Also maybe trying a different perspective would have made the book more readable. As it stands though, I thoroughly enjoyed this book, it was something different and a brave start to the Authors writing career.

I would recommend this book to anyone who is looking to dip their toe in the world of new Authors, or is looking for a book that will make them think. I will be looking for more from this Author.

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