THE DOG STARS

*a novel by Peter Heller*

Or *a book that really isn't for everyone*. Maybe a bit bold of a statement, but that's not to say I'm a better reader than you or anything - it's just that there are and will be people who won't like this book. Especially if you have similar book taste as I do and don't like to go off the beaten path. On the other hand, before I really get started on the review itself: even though you may not be totally into it right now, definitely at least give it a peek.

The plot, the writing style, everything, has a bit of that philosophical and melancholic feel to it. You won't find a single direct speech in the whole book - not as we know it, anyway. No quotation marks. So even though it may seem like bullshit to you now... believe me, it's something completely different when you read it. You said to yourself, "How do I know what he's saying and what he's thinking?" Bingo, guys. I have no idea if that was the intention, but if you read with that thought in mind, it adds another level to the story. And what is it about?

In a devastated landscape, long abandoned by normal life, lives Hig. Only Hig. And Jasper, an old and loyal dog, the best copilot that ever lived. And there's Bangley. Unlike Hig, he's ruthless and cold-blooded. At least most of the time. Then there's Beast, a little Cessna plane, even older than Jasper, but just as loyal. Then mostly no one within a few miles. Silence, desolation, dead landscape. Just the four of them, the stars and memories.

And so it's been nine years since most of humanity survived a flu epidemic and subsequent blood disorder. But both Hig and Bangley know there are still survivors roaming the earth. Families with blood disorders, for example, isolated in one place, who Hig sometimes helps. Or unwelcome visitors, crossing the perimeter is usually the last thing they'll ever do. Or the voice from nearby Grand Junction Airport. A voice that once came from the control tower, and then fell silent. That was nine years ago.

But Hig still thinks of it from time to time. What would have happened if he hadn't come back then, but kept going? Who would he have found? Would he have found him at all? And is it too late for him to find out?

I kept seeing the book in my local library for weeks, maybe months, before I borrowed it. I was intrigued by the cover - oh come on, hush - and the annotation, and the first few lines I allowed myself to read. However, it's so different from my usual reading that I kept hesitating. Thank you, universe, for kicking me into renting it! Because it's a total blast.

I understand that not everyone is comfortable with this style of writing, I really do. Not only do you not find direct speech, but the plot itself is interspersed with random memories, images - not directly in the sense of those well-known windows into the past, but rather they are really memories. Thoughts. Estimates. Images.

It's a story from a world where the goal is to survive - even though it doesn't really matter anymore. What's tomorrow? No one knows. There is no cluttered diary full of events, there are no obligations, there are no laws, there is no system as we knew it. But at the same time, this is a story of hope, the kind that awakens from a long slumber, the kind that forces us to survive in order to know the unknowable and see the unseen...

...and it's not just hope, but the whole book. And that is why - perhaps more than ever - I heartily recommend this unusual work!