

★ Saha

Cho Nam-Joo

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The residents of an abandoned apartment complex eke out an outskirts living in Cho Nam-Joo's dystopian novel *Saha*.

Thirty years ago, Saha Estates was a bustling apartment community. Then a corporation bought out the nearby town and surrounding land, founded it as an independent nation, and made changes to the rules of the citizenship, leaving the residents by the wayside. By turns tolerated and ignored, they live without basic amenities, cobbling together a system for education, food, water, and even a resident's association. Life is difficult but bearable.

When a young woman is found dead in a nearby parking lot, authorities suspect foul play. They turn a convenient eye toward Saha, sending a ripple through the community. Like spokes on a wheel, the novel branches out into several directions, using the apartment complex as its center. With apartment numbers acting as entry points to each new life, the novel peers into the lives of several people and explores their relationships with other residents and with the corporation that is now a country. Jin-kyung, the sister of the missing murder suspect, is desperate to find her brother. Woomi, a survivor of an illness thought to be fatal, has a complicated relationship with the health care system. Granny Konnim is not a grandmother at all, but her skills and tenacity earned her the respect of others.

The novel becomes darker as it reveals the deeper social underpinnings that made Saha possible. It delves into the corporation's slow takeover, the quiet acceptance, and the unrest of those deemed unworthy. In this microcosm of society, inequalities and contradictions are inescapable. Yet this is no tragedy: it is a triumph of resilience and an indictment of societies that find value only in certain people.

Saha is a compelling, insightful novel of social commentary and revolution.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (November / December 2022)

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