



Saving Nova: Book One

Luis Martinez

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Saving Nova is a character-driven science-fiction adventure.

Luis Martinez's engaging postapocalyptic novel *Saving Nova* kickstarts a new series with fascinating characters.

Over a century after a nuclear war all but wiped out humanity, small pockets of civilization eke out a living in the American Southwest. One town, Nova, helplessly monitors a dwindling supply of cattlemore. But scouts discover that this livestock species isn't dying out, it's migrating deeper into the outer deserts.

Four randomly selected teenagers journey outward on compass directions hoping to find salvation. Eighteen-year-old Sean Anders barely survives his journey, stumbling into the prospering High Heaven. He faces threats inside and out as he fights to survive—and for the survival of everyone back home in Nova.

Ample information is provided about the book's characters; they come in strong. The leader of High Heaven stands out with surprising depth and complexity. He was alive before the nuclear war and managed to swap out failing body parts with artificial ones to extend his lifespan to unnatural lengths. He has an equally artificially enhanced canine companion. His drive to protect his town, coupled with his tragic life story, results in a sympathetic and flawed leader.

Sean functions well as the protagonist, experiencing real growth and avoiding genre clichés such as being a chosen one or having special abilities. He begins the story close to death before the narrative jumps back to the time before the mayor sent the scouts out. Sean's relationships with his family and friends in Nova are capably fleshed out. His growth over time is grounded in excellent narrative cues, covering his education in Nova, his time spent in High Heaven, and his one-on-one training under the cyborg leader.

The story alternates between tense action sequences and quiet forays into select character backstories to great effect. Often the story pauses after a particularly dramatic moment to build up character dynamics and motivations. The alternating rise and fall keeps the story from becoming stale or too action oriented.

The dialogue functions with subtle humor and heart, with characters revealing themselves through their word choices and tone, though conversations are condensed and limited to a few speakers. Background action and scene changes complement the dialogue appropriately.

Bare-bones formatting works well with the narrative, making room for action sequences to unfold organically. Unusual concepts and terms are explained when needed; contextual clues keep details clear, such as around the different species and technologies in the wasteland.

Sean's journey is just beginning here. The book sets the stage for an epic adventure. The climax of the story finds him with new information, several burning questions, and a villain lurking out in the deserts. By the story's end, Sean's motivations are well established and lead into the next book with a tempting cliffhanger.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (November 28, 2018)

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