

# SARAHLAND

## In Her Debut Collection 'Sarahland,' Sam Cohen Reinvents Queer Myths and Tales

Exciting, intimidating, and overwhelming, Sam Cohen's *Sarahland* is a book that makes you happy because it exists.

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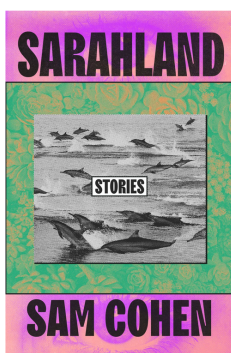


By Maria Loreto

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**Title:** Sarahland  
**Author:** Sam Cohen  
**Genre:** Literary Fiction, LGBTQIA+, Short Stories  
**Publisher:** Grand Central Publishing  
**Release Date:** March 9, 2021  
**Format:** Hardcover  
**Pages:** 208  
"Queer, dirty, insightful, and so funny" (Andrea Lawlor), this coyly revolutionary debut story collection imagines new origins and futures for its cast of unforgettable protagonists—almost all of whom are named Sarah.



In *Sarahland*, Sam Cohen brilliantly and often hilariously explores the ways in which traditional stories have failed us, both demanding and thrillingly providing for its cast of Sarahs new origin stories, new ways to love the planet and those inhabiting it, and new possibilities for life itself. In one story, a Jewish college Sarah passively consents to a form-life in pursuit of an MRS degree and is swept into a culture of normalized sexual violence. Another reveals a version of Sarah finding pleasure—and a new set of problems—by playing dead for a wealthy necrophiliac. A Buffy-loving Sarah uses fan fiction to work through romantic obsession. As the collection progresses, Cohen explodes this search for self, insisting that we have more to resist and repair than our own personal narratives. Readers witness as the ever-evolving "Sarah" gets recast: as a bible-era trans woman, an aging lesbian literally growing roots, a being who transcends the earth as we know it. While Cohen presents a world that will clearly someday end, "Sarah" will continue.

In each Sarah's refusal to adhere to a single narrative, she potentially builds a better home for us all, a place to live that demands no fixity of self, no plague of consumerism, no bodily compromise, a place called *Sarahland*.



Sam Cohen's *Sarahland* is a book that's difficult to articulate, perhaps because it's a book unlike anything else I've read before. It's queer, biblical, modern, epic — taking characters from childhood to teendom, to college life to middle-age, to both ancient and future times. It feels incredibly modern in its approach to form and topics yet timeless, like it could be read 50 years from now and it would remain as fresh and innovative as when it was written.

The stories in *Sarahland* have a clear progression, beginning with a set of more or less traditional stories that Cohen describes as **centered on the self**. The first story is "Sarahland," a riff on the movie *Heathers* and exploration of college life and the culture of women defined by their bodies, not knowing what to do with their multitudes, and their inability to fit in the norm. "Naked Furniture" is an expansion of this approach to college life, with dashes of Mary Gaitskill in its depiction of kink and sexuality. Midway through the book, the focus of the stories shift, encompassing a more global perspective. Stories get more queer and intertextual, referencing pop culture items like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Tegan and Sara, *The Craft* but also religious myths and tales, like Adam and Eve and Sarah and Hagar. The last stretch of the book is incredibly engrossing, growing more ambitious and expansive per word, providing women and non-binary people with voices that are particular and strange just because they're printed on the page.

The characters in *Sarahland* are, like queerness itself, in constant flux and change, constantly reevaluating and questioning their identities. They understand themselves through exploration, through reading copious amounts of queer literature, through exposing themselves to new experiences. These stories are sharp, intelligent, and hilarious — even when surprising you with their darkness.

When viewed as a whole, Cohen's collection is a unique, special experience, like being queer and speaking to a queer person for the first time in your life. Exciting, intimidating, and overwhelming, *Sarahland* is a book that makes you happy because it exists.

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