

Self-Published Books Showcase

These books are recommended by *BlueInk Review*, a fee-based review service devoted exclusively to self-published books. Every other month, *BlueInk* will compile a list of their favorites for *Booklist*, as a service to librarians hoping to incorporate self-published work into their collections. *BlueInk* was founded by Patti Thorn, former book review editor of Denver's *Rocky Mountain News*, and Patricia Moosbrugger, a literary agent who represents several best-selling authors. The company delivers professional, unbiased reviews of self-published books written by critics drawn largely from major mainstream publications and by editors from prominent publishing houses. *Booklist* is happy to bring this curated collection of the best in self-publishing for adults and youth to our audience.

from



Adult

★ **After the Wind: 1996 Everest Tragedy, One Survivor's Story.** By Lou Kasischke.

2014. 311p. illus. Good Heart, \$25 (9781940877006). 796.5220954.

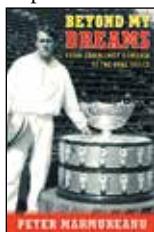
Mountaineer Kasischke survived Everest's worst climbing tragedy on May 10, 1996, by honoring a promise he'd made to his wife, Sandy: "Live a story you can tell." After recklessly climbing a South American mountain in extreme weather, Kasischke tackled Everest two years later, and, with daylight retreating and facing an encroaching snowstorm, he decided not to follow his team leader to Everest's summit and almost certain death. *After the Wind* describes the climbing tragedy Jon Krakauer detailed in his 1997 blockbuster *Into Thin Air*, but does so from a very different perspective. Kasischke's pivotal decision came after meeting a fellow climber coming down the mountain who warned of the dangers of getting caught in the open after dark. "I can climb to the top of Everest," Kasischke's inner voice told him. "But this is not the day." His thoughtful account of the tragedy delivers both an edge-of-your-seat adventure and a kind of dual love story, about both Kasischke's dedication to his wife and his passion for climbing. Those new to the Everest story, as well as anyone hooked on Krakauer's account, will find Kasischke's version an engrossing read. Both *Into Thin Air* and *After the Wind* provided the basis for the Universal Studios film *Everest*, which opened September 18. Kasischke served as a consultant on the film.

★ **Beyond My Dreams.** By Peter Marmureanu.

2014. 392p. iUniverse, paper, \$25.95 (9781491745397). 796.342.

In this engaging autobiography, Mar-

mureanu shares his unlikely rise from an impoverished early life in communist Romania to membership in the worldwide tennis elite. Born in 1941, Marmureanu had a difficult childhood in a country crushed under the harrowing rule of Nicolae Ceausescu. At age 10, he took a job as a ball boy at a Bucharest sports complex, earning just 20 cents a day. The barefoot boy was pounding balls against a wall with a stringless wooden paddle when an elderly club member, recognizing potential, gave him a quality racquet, money for tennis shoes, and encouragement. By age 18, Marmureanu had become the country's number-two player, competing on center court at a Davis Cup match. (He later coached Chris Evert Lloyd and Martina Navratilova.) He was forced to be a courier of top-secret documents for Romania's counterintelligence before plotting his harrowing defection to America. Deeply interesting and informative, his story is blended with crisply drawn images of people and settings, and intertwines the author's palpable fears with the occasional light touch. The result is a riveting read.

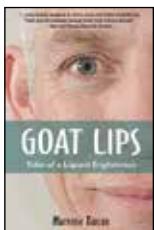


★ **Goat Lips: Tales of a Lapsed Englishman.**

By Matthew Taylor.

2014. Merry Dissonance, paper, \$14.95 (9781939919021). 818.

Storyteller, humorist, and actor Taylor offers an autobiographical collection of short pieces that zigzag between humorous tales of youthful indiscretion and slices of life that move readers in unexpected ways. Taylor's amusement at life's absurdities is highlighted in the story that inspired the title, which recounts the time



Taylor tried out for the part of the lips of a goat for a national Miller Lite commercial. The author revels in the preposterousness of the situation: After acing the local Denver competition, his lips have to compete against those in L.A. and New York. "My heart sank," he writes. "The goat lips in L.A. were sure to be beautiful. And as for the New York goat lips, well, they would all be classically trained." Happily, he gets the part, and Taylor wraps up his collection where it began, describing the making of the commercial and how he had to practice his three-word dialogue with a voice coach. There are no missteps in these stories. Witty, poignant, and entertaining, they fully embrace the idea embodied in those three words: "Life is good."

Heaven's Flower.

By Dawn Anna.

2013. 39p. illus. Xulon, \$23 (9781628714876).

Anna wrote this allegory to comfort the bereaved—a state she knows too well. In 1999, her daughter, Lauren Townsend, was gunned down with other students at Columbine High School in Colorado. Her faith-based illustrated novel begins as an aging gardener is ready to rest, content she has done all she can to nourish her garden. But then she spots a new plant trying to take hold in a tough patch, and she nurtures "Heaven's Flower" until a terrible hailstorm destroys it, leaving her grief-stricken. The gardener is ultimately rewarded when the plant sends up a multitude of new blooms, confirming her belief in life and love. Anna chose the picture-book format so readers would not be overburdened with text. The illustrations are lovingly rendered, and *Heaven's Flower* is, fittingly, a columbine. While the gardener metaphor is rather overt, and the illustrations sometimes repetitive, the author's efforts are so heartfelt and personal that any reader is sure to find comfort in her poignant words about loss: "Heaven's Flower was not gone but, instead, reborn in countless others, who would carry on her spirit."

Hooked.

By Allen Wolf.

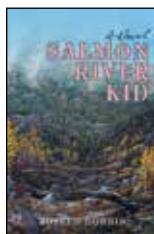
2015. 238p. Morning Star, paper, \$14.99 (9780692274279).

Screenwriter Wolf's enjoyable debut novel focuses on Shawn, a 24-year-old, highly functioning autistic computer programmer for an online dating service. He also contends with synesthesia, a condition that, in his case, gives sounds to colors. Shawn yearns to find his soul mate, but his quest is hampered by his social awkwardness, frequently mistaken for rudeness. When he meets Violet, a prostitute whom he believes is an actress, he feels that he has found someone whose "colors sound right to me." But this unlikely couple must confront complications as the story unwinds. Turning the conventions of contemporary romance on its stilettoes, Wolf has swapped out the sassy, fashion-obsessed female protagonist for an autistic male who reads jokes from index cards. Adapted from Wolf's award-winning screenplay, the novel features snappy dialogue and humorous, well-staged scenes. At times, that cinematic flavor doesn't translate as well to prose, particularly in the backstory. Nevertheless, Shawn's innocence and optimism are compelling, making for a sweet, entertaining romantic comedy that will appeal to any reader who enjoys a blend of quirky characters, humor, and drama.

★ Salmon River Kid. By Joseph Dorris.

2014. 388p. iUniverse, paper, \$22.95 (9781491721308).

This adventure novel—the third in a series—continues the story of 15-year-old Samuel



Chambers and his father, Charles, as they search for gold in the Idaho Territory in 1872. Samuel and Charles originally joined the gold rush hoping to make enough money to return to their struggling farm in Iowa. But each season has

brought daunting challenges, and their dreams are dashed when their small cache of gold is stolen. As Samuel transitions from boy to man, even falling in love, he begins to weigh his dream of finding gold against his longing to see his mother again. The story offers a rich, authentic portrayal of the Old West, and Dorris, who spent his youth exploring the Idaho backcountry, captures the uneasy relationship between the settlers and the Idaho Sheepstealer Indians, as well as dramatizing the blatant prejudice against the Chinese. He also details the process of cleaving gold from its source, with plenty of lighthearted moments interspersed throughout. Adults and teens alike will not only appreciate Samuel's escapades in this immensely entertaining novel, but they will also develop new respect for the hardy souls who persevered in this harsh land.

YA: *A good choice for teens who like historical fiction set in the West and who may have come to know the genre through the recent movie version of True Grit.*

★ Sleeping to Death. By G. D. Baum.

2015. 260p. CreateSpace, paper, \$11.95 (9781494744328).

This second in Baum's series of hard-boiled crime novels featuring Lock Tourmaline, a former New Jersey cop and martial-arts-master-turned-freelance-bodyguard. As the story begins, Tourmaline's client, who runs a Korean drug ring, tasks him with uncovering who killed her brother in prison. Eventually, Tourmaline wonders if his client is playing him.

Along the way, he deals with an ex-wife and a sex tape in which she's featured, complications with a girlfriend and girlfriend-to-be, and issues with his martial-arts mentor, who is on his deathbed. Baum's writing is clean and breezy, offering just enough description so readers can imagine the skeleton of a scene's setting. The story's dialogue has the deliberate pacing of Hammett or Chandler in the beginning. As the novel progresses, though, the dialogue becomes almost staccato in nature, like a verbal ping-pong match. Incredibly, the narrative picks up even more speed as it nears the climax. In all, it's such fun that if you haven't read *Point and Shoot*, the first in the series, you'll want to seek it out and get onboard at the beginning of this exhilarating ride.

The Stranger Box. By Pamela Cuming.

2014. 414p. CreateSpace, paper, \$14.99 (9781500955825).

Set largely in and around New York City in the years leading up to 9/11, this debut novel effectively blends psychological horror with a coming-of-age plot. When Eden, almost 16, was born, her biological mother essentially abandoned her. Adopted and abused by a family eventually torn apart by tragedy, Eden finds herself homeless—and hopeless. Looking for a safe place to sleep in the tunnels beneath New York City, Eden is kidnapped by a delusional psychopath who calls himself the Dark Angel. She lives underground as this man's queen until eventually finding the inner strength to escape and attempt to track down her mother. This utterly unpredictable story is an undeniable page-turner. The author incorporates a wide variety of narrative elements (voodoo, Buddhism, abandonment, abuse) that lead readers to a virtual precipice at novel's end. The writing style is intelligent, insightful, and intimate; Eden's painful rebirth is both heartrending and heartwarming, and the ending, while a risky move on the author's part, makes for a powerful conclusion. Readers will find this story unique, intense—and more than a little disturbing.

YA: *The teen hero and the dramatic story will draw YA readers of psychological suspense and horror.*

Youth

Dogs Don't Talk.

By Nancy May.

2015. 220p. iUniverse, paper, \$15.95 (9781491756669). Gr. 9–12.

In May's entertaining young-adult novel, 16-year-old Benjamin dreams of attaining three things: a "reasonably hot" girlfriend, respect from his fellow wrestlers, and more attention from his mother. Just finished with his sophomore year, Ben is feeling lonely and wondering why he can't get a girlfriend. Is it his overly round head? The fact that he likes to play chess and is slightly geeky? Ben's relationship with his mother is strained due to the attention she gives his autistic brother, Johnny, as well as the family dog. Ben's deep but conflicted relationship with Johnny is handled with grace and humor, sensitively portraying Ben's simultaneous shame and love for his brother. With a central character who is reminiscent of Holden Caulfield and fast-moving dialogue that delivers both laughter and serious, touching moments, this is a funny, warmhearted, and engaging story. Readers may be a bit disappointed by the ending, which leaves a dangling thread. If May isn't working on a sequel—and tying up that last thread—she certainly should be. We'll be waiting.

★ The Tale of Tumeleng. By Ryke Leigh Douglas.

2014. 54p. Xlibris, paper, \$31.99 (9781499049527). Gr. 2–4.

Douglas' fine picture book relates the story of a young African elephant named Tumeleng. While elephants are commonly depicted in children's literature, such famous characters as Barbar and Elmer are whimsical literary conceits first and elephants second. By contrast,

Douglas manages to make Tumeleng immensely appealing while preserving her animal nature. The book begins with Jabari, a male elephant, defending the herd from hyenas. When Jabari's daughter Tumeleng is born, the young calf tries to keep up with the herd as they move to a new water hole. Tumeleng's mother guides her, and Douglas captures Tumeleng's place in the herd perfectly: she is cared for but must also learn quickly so that she doesn't slow the herd. Douglas' prose is gentle and evocative, without ever ringing a false note. The illustrations are finely wrought, with realistic-looking elephants easily discernible from one another, and the visuals carry a sense of excitement throughout Tumeleng's adventures. Children will enjoy this fictional glimpse into the lives of these majestic creatures. Note: the star designation is offered with the understanding that minor copy-editing issues remain in need of attention.