

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. Stars reflect the decisions of *BlueInk* reviewers and editors. *Booklist* is happy to bring this curated collection of the best in self-publishing for adults and youth to our audience.



Adult

My Darling Dorothy. By Jo Virden.

2016. 398p. Plain View, paper, \$14.95 (9780997430806).

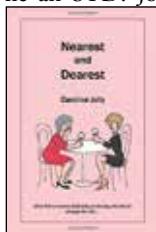
Inspired by genuine letters between the author's mother and two love interests during WWII, this historical romance offers an unusual peek at wartime reality at home and abroad. In 1936 Nebraska, Dorothy Ayers meets Jack "Smitty" Smith, "a dead ringer for Errol Flynn," at a dance. Over the next few years, Jack travels the country looking for employment and sending letters back to Dorothy. Dispirited and aimless, he turns to women and whiskey, while Dorothy becomes engaged to a farmer, who then joins the army and goes missing during the Bataan Death March. Will she give Smitty another chance? A framing story features a character discovering a stash of correspondence from the 1930s and '40s in her basement after her mother's death. The novel vividly re-creates its various settings, and while italicized passages presenting dreams and fantasies can be a little confusing, in tandem with the letters, they help vary the pace and reveal these well-realized characters. A compelling story that skillfully illuminates the chance and irony of war, this novel will hold particular appeal for fans of similar epistolary tales, such as Shaffer and Barrows' *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* (2008).

★ Nearest and Dearest. By Caroline Jolly.

2016. 241p. AuthorHouse, paper, \$19.76 (9781524630911).

This romantic comedy focuses on Effie McIver, a divorced woman prompted to dip back into the dating pool. Rom-com humor ensues. Invited over to "dud" date Oliver's home, for example, Effie has a close

call when his toilet won't flush. On the more serious side, good-looking Kenneth gives Effie an STD. Jolly writes about Effie's trials



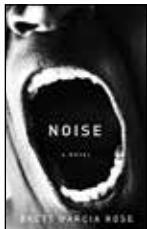
with verve, creating a well-rounded character prone to drinking too much and analytical to a fault. Her passion for sudoku puzzles speaks to her desire for an ordered universe, but love tends to upend those ideals.

She and her best friend talk through her life changes, and, as the story unwinds, Effie faces hard truths about herself and her family. Rich in complex family dynamics and insight into midlife sex and dating, the story is a winning entry to the genre. Note: the star designation is given here with the acknowledgement that spelling and punctuation errors (many missing commas) require attention.

★ Noise. By Brett Garcia Rose.

2014. 236p. Velocity, paper, \$9.99 (9780991549412).

This action-packed debut delivers a jet-fueled narrative centered on protagonist Leon, who is huge, tough, smart—and deaf. Violence was a daily part of life for Leon growing up in Africa, and his experiences continued



to inform his experience even after being adopted by an American family at age nine. As the book opens, a mysterious postcard has drawn Leon to the Big Apple in search of his adoptive older sister, who disappeared a decade earlier, and he quickly learns she'd fallen in with criminals and endured a horrific assault. Employing his brutal skills, he won't stop until he learns of her fate. Rose shows a fine facility for nuance, and the

novel has the ruthless speed and efficiency of Donald E. Westlake's Parker novels (written under the pseudonym Richard Stark). The conclusion might play better if it were more streamlined, but, even so, *Noise* is unquestionably a thrilling read. With grit and gravity, it delivers solid characterization and suspense. A promising debut.

★ Not Just a Game. By Doug Zipes.

2016. 309p. iUniverse, paper, \$19.99 (9781491790250).

Zipes' intriguing alternate-history novel takes readers back to the 1936 Berlin Olympics when Dietrich Becker, secretly a Jew, loses to legendary American track star Jesse Owens and faces Hitler's wrath. Thirty-six



years later, Becker's son, Adam, a coach for the Israelis, witnesses the massacre of Jewish athletes at the 1972 Munich Games. Years later, Adam's daughter, Kirsten, arrives at the 2016 Rio Games, intent on fighting for the gold—and unexpectedly facing danger from Nazism reborn. Zipes revisits conspiracy theories that Hitler's and Eva Braun's suicides were faked and that the couple escaped to Argentina, where the Nazi mission was then taken up by descendants, sympathizers, and assorted fanatics who plan to use the Rio Olympics to resurrect their treacherous dream. Zipes' narrative is engrossing and brisk, enhanced by careful research. Early chapters jump around in time, which can be disorienting, and some may also find the stage-setting chapters a little slow. But patience is well rewarded as the story heats up and powers to a stunning conclusion. Fans of alternate-history thrillers will find *Not Just a Game* an immensely satisfying read.

Part of the Family: Christadelphians, the Kindertransport, and Rescue from the Holocaust.

By Jason Hensley.

2016. 401p. illus. CreateSpace, paper, \$19.99 (9781532740534). 940.53.

The Christadelphians, a religious community numbering about 50,000, hold a strong affinity toward Jews, evidenced by the fact that they fostered some 250 children taken to England from Nazi-occupied territories in the years leading up to and during WWII as part of the Kindertransport. Principal of Christadelphian Heritage School in California, Hensley recounts the stories of more than a dozen of these children through interviews with survivors and their families, letters, documents, and extensive research in Christadelphian records. The Christadelphians who fostered Jewish children often did so at great personal sacrifice. Wartime conditions were challenging enough without another mouth to feed, and sometimes their participation put them at personal risk. Ursula Meyer's foster father, for example, stepped between her and a gun-wielding Home Guard sergeant who intended to shoot the 16-year-old German "spy." "You shoot me first," he said. Hensley weaves in wonderful details such as this one and also provides historical context, copious endnotes, more than 100 photos, pertinent maps, an extensive glossary, and a bibliography. Readers with an interest in WWII, the Holocaust, or religion will find this a revealing book.

★ Return of the Convict. By William Alan Thomas.

2016. 308p. Thomas, \$14.50 (9781519255082).

A (Philip K.) Dickian science-fiction novel, this visionary work is a fascinating, cerebral exploration into the meaning of freedom. The story is set in the year 2143 as the environmentally ravaged planet is ruled by the United World States, though a small band of American rebels is still trying to regain independence. Dominic Tessier, about to graduate from the Space Training Academy, is excited to finally get brain implants that will make him a full-fledged telepathic—a "transformed" man. Once a T-man, he will be linked telepathically to all other T-men and to the godlike computer behind the world government. But Tessier's life is upended when his parent clone, a convict who has been exiled on Mars for decades, aims to take over Tessier's body for his own benefit. This is a captivating, relentlessly paced novel with well-developed characters, a fascinating backstory, and richly described world building, but the story's most powerful aspect just may be its compelling underlying themes involving the sheer unpredictability



of existence. Recommend Thomas' smart, thought-provoking glimpse into the future to anyone who enjoys cerebral sci-fi.

Scarred: A Civil War Novel of Redemption.

By Michael Kenneth Smith.

2016. 180p. CreateSpace, paper, \$12.99 (9781530379743).

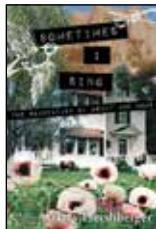
Smith's absorbing historical novel explores the violence and moral dilemmas of the Civil War. In 1908, young *New York World* reporter Chris Martin, looking for a prize-winning story, discovers Zach Harkin, a reclusive Tennessee gunsmith who was a heroic Union sharpshooter during the war. As Martin persuades Harkin to tell his story, readers learn that Harkin became emotionally damaged after killing a rebel soldier. Discharged and obsessed with making amends, he sets out to find the rebel's wife, only to be captured by a Confederate patrol and sent to Andersonville Prison. While the early scenes seem rushed, they provide the foundation for Harkin's adventures, which are conveyed in flashbacks. Smith's descriptions of rural southern life as the war burns to embers are superb and grow in intensity as the narrative follows deserters and murderous guerrilla bands who raid, rape, and rob struggling farmers and war-weary townspeople. These scenes bleed with reality, and the descriptions of Andersonville are so realistic that readers will cringe at what Union prisoners endured. This isn't a war novel but rather the story of Harkin's quest for redemption and closure—an engrossing, moving read.

★ Sometimes I Sing: The Renovation of Heart and Home.

By Mary Hershberger.

2016. 193p. Cottonwood, paper, \$14 (9780578180311). 690.

The restoration of a historic house rendered an eyesore after two decades of neglect and incongruous "improvements" provides the focus for this ambitious memoir. Hershberger, a divorced teacher in her 50s, ponies up the full asking price, \$92,000, and commits to countless months of stripping, sanding, tiling, and spackling. Along with the old paint and wallpaper, the author winds up stripping her soul as the story of the house morphs with her life story, one "almost too sad to write about." But write she does, about being raised Mennonite; about growing up with three mentally ill siblings, a bitterly angry mother, and a weak, ineffectual father; and about the search for authenticity in one's life. The result is a story as unconventional and idiosyncratic as the house that inspired it, one that touches on topics such as marriage, motherhood, feminism, sexuality, sacrifice, and survival. The author seasons her powerful yet graceful prose and haunting poetry with scripture, news clippings, and



famous quotations. For nontraditionalists whose tastes run toward the existential, *Sometimes I Sing* is not to be missed.

Walking on Water: A Path to Empowerment.

By Rea Nolan Martin.

2016. 170p. WiaWaka, paper, \$12.99 (9781532728204). 242.

Known for her visionary fiction, Martin wrote this engaging collection of nonfiction essays "to illuminate the path from personal victimhood to self-awareness and enablement." The pieces address such topics as faith, suffering, and awareness. In one, Martin discusses the differences between faith and belief, concluding that "belief is a product of the mind" whereas "faith is a product of the spirit." In another, Martin, whose teenage son was critically ill, reflects on that experience: "Suffering grabs time by the ankles and slows it down, forcing us to stop, stand our ground, look around, and take stock." Although the book's title refers to the biblical story of Jesus and Peter walking on water, Martin uses the tale as a metaphor; she writes from a nontraditional standpoint, noting that "Miracles spring from higher consciousness" and defining prayer as "intention," which is "focused thought." Delivered in a conversational style, with clear and descriptive language and messages sometimes highlighted with a white-on-black page (i.e., "Love stands outside of us and within us at the same time"), Martin's thought-provoking book provides a superb springboard for discussion of those everyday situations that prompt contemplation.

Youth

Little Big Sister.

By Amy B. McCoy.

2016. 139p. CreateSpace, paper, \$7.99 (9780692651414).

McCoy's middle-grade novel explores a young girl's relationship with her brother, who has autism, and her efforts to make her peers better understand those with special needs. Michael is 11 and his sister, Katie, is 9, but his autism often leads him to act much younger. Although his needs present obstacles for the family, Katie loves her brother, and it bothers her when others treat him rudely. So when Adam, also autistic, joins Katie's class and is mocked by classmates, Katie decides to take action; with friends, she prepares a presentation for her class that changes some minds and boosts her self-confidence. Through Katie's first-person narration, McCoy manages to teach a lesson while remaining engaging and avoiding didacticism. Katie is a relatable character: good-hearted and insightful but also someone who gets frustrated and anxious. The lists of her friends' characteristics, her frustrations, her fears, and the things she likes about herself at the end of each chapter will also entertain young readers. *Little Big Sister* is a gentle, winning story especially well-suited to classroom use.